

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: MOVING FROM THE ARCHIVE:
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND
“AUTHENTICITY” IN COMMEDIA
DELL’ARTE PERFORMANCE

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This dissertation examines the multiple definitions of “Commedia dell’Arte” in historiography and contemporary performance, analyzing potentials and problematics behind attempts to understand “historical” Commedia dell’Arte and to (re)construct contemporary Commedia using what Franklin J. Hildy calls an “applied theater history” approach. Employing archival historiography, literary analysis, art historical techniques, practical dramaturgy, Practice-as-Research, and qualitative research, I describe different realities of Commedia dell’Arte performance from history and contemporary practice, including ways in which “mistakes” or “appropriations” in the form have become included within its present identities.

Chapter One describes the status of the field, problems, and approaches to identifying what Commedia dell’Arte “is” today based upon autoethnography and interview material from contemporary practitioners, whose competing approaches inform the ongoing conversation. Chapter Two traces the history of the form known

as “Commedia dell’Arte” from its origins to contemporary pedagogy with special attention given to appropriations, evolutions, distortions, and efforts at reproduction. In Chapter Three, I narrow the focus to a specific case-study—a recent production of the classic scenario *Il Cavadente (The Tooth-Puller)* from the Commedia dell’Arte repertoire—with special attention to the problematics of translating, interpreting, and reconstructing historical sources as dramatic literary content. Chapter Four describes an art-historical approach to assessing, analyzing, and utilizing iconography from Commedia dell’Arte’s history, while Chapter Five describes a specific attempt to design the visual world for a contemporary production of *The Tooth-Puller* with reference to competing goals of faithfulness to the tradition and availability for artistic innovation. Chapter Six employs Practice-as-Research (and what I advocate as Research-as-Practice) to embody reimagined characters based on the Commedia archive. Chapter Seven utilizes participant interviews and audience surveys to reflect upon Ole Miss Theatre & Film’s production of *The Tooth-Puller*, the final (though always fluid) script of which is included as Appendix A. This concluding chapter also reflects, through the voices of contemporary teachers and practitioners, on the nature of Commedia dell’Arte and its place in current actor training and theatrical innovation.

While the field of Commedia practitioners today is divided between those who prescribe an “authentic” system for “historical” Commedia and those who freely declare that “Commedia doesn’t exist” in any knowable form, this dissertation models a middle way of interacting faithfully and rigorously with extant data from the past in order to freely create a continuation of the Commedia tradition for the future.

MOVING FROM THE ARCHIVE:
HISTORIOGRAPHY AND “AUTHENTICITY”
IN COMMEDIA DELL’ARTE PERFORMANCE

by

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Preface

This project was born out of a desire to make Commedia dell'Arte in a manner that is both faithful to the tradition and innovative as a living art form. Within circles of Commedia dell'Arte practitioners, those words—"faithful," "tradition," "innovative," "living," "art," and "form"—can be landmines. In fact, even the term "Commedia dell'Arte" (or "*commedia dell'arte*" or a few other formats) can be contentious.¹

"Commedia dell'Arte doesn't exist," some experts today say. Then they charge money for workshops on Commedia dell'Arte. What they mean is that we do not know exactly how sixteenth-century performers made their audiences laugh, so we are free to find new ways to amuse an audience today. Commedia is living, not dead, and anyone who teaches codified rules has at worst made them up in an act of pedagogical fraud or is at best mummifying a living theatre through a process of aesthetic euthanasia.

"Commedia dell'Arte is like this," other experts demonstrate. Then, in a longer workshop, they demonstrate exceptions, pointing out that Commedia dell'Arte is found all over the world across five centuries and is never just *one* way. What they mean is that they have studied sources and tried experiments, and through their interpretations they have created their own working system about how Commedia dell'Arte functioned before and can function today. Commedia is part of a tradition

¹See Chapters One and Two below for my discussion of the term and my reasonings in rendering it "Commedia dell'Arte," unitalicized, with a capital "C" and "A."

that grows from the past, and it is necessary to respect and understand the past in a disciplined way if one wishes to join the tradition by slapping the label “Commedia dell’Arte” on one’s own work.

To the performer or teacher looking for answers, these diametrically opposed responses might engender more confusion than clarification, more caution than confidence.

This dissertation seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship and practice to serve the performer, student, teacher, or director who does not want a prescribed set of rules or mechanical “steps” but who also feels lost by the notion that the Commedia dell’Arte tradition is irrecoverable today. Theatre is about freedom, and, since Commedia dell’Arte is theatre, artists should create, explore, experiment, and invent. However, this project is built on the belief that informed freedom is preferable to ignorant freedom. We cannot and will not know exactly how Commedia “was” or “should be” done; nevertheless, there are ample surviving sources that provide both grounding and guideposts to help us make something called “Commedia dell’Arte” today.

The project is for those who understand that easy answers are often false and that prescribed methods can be confining. It is also for those who respect the heritage of Commedia dell’Arte enough to try to find out what that heritage is if they want to claim to be a part of it.

As will be discussed in more detail and with more academic rigor below, there are already books full of simple exercises that prescribe a Commedia style, but their authors do not explain how they arrived at their conclusions or what historical or

methodological justifications substantiate their systems. Other books include rigorous history with ample footnotes about who wrote what contract when and where a certain company performed, but they do not address what Commedia dell'Arte looks like on stage or how one can create one's own work.

My approach seeks to combine history and practice. It provides suggestions for a method that is both historically reliable and theatrical relevant. If we want to understand theatre history through living performance, then the question is really quite simple:

How do we evaluate, analyze, and implement sources from Commedia dell'Arte's past in order to make our own contribution to Commedia dell'Arte's future?

This question has been on my mind for two decades as a student, practitioner, and scholar of Commedia dell'Arte. The search has led me to the feet of living maestros, to the pages of dirty old books, and ultimately to stages around the world as a performer, director, and playwright who seeks to know the tradition of Commedia's past in order to entertain audiences today.

Dedication

To the artist-entrepreneurs of old who convinced the West that theatre is a profession;
And to future artists who will create a Commedia that the world has never seen before
and yet has always known...

Acknowledgements

This dissertation, as all endeavors, is but a cobbling together of generosities, favors, and lessons handed on graciously from the earliest innovators of masked comedy all the way to my current dissertation committee. The latter are to be thanked for their encouragement, guidance, and faith in this project. Deserving of special thanks are Dr. Federica Deigan, whose generous assistance greatly enriched the translation work in Chapter Three, and my dissertation chair, Dr. Franklin J. Hildy, whose own passion for “applied theater history” made both my doctoral education and this project possible, as will be seen through his frequent appearances in my footnotes.

On the archival side, I am indebted to the hardworking librarians, archivists, donors, and sponsors of the Folger Shakespeare Library, British National Archives, London Metropolitan Archives, British Library, British Museum, Garrick Club (especially Moira Goff and Marcus Risdell), and London Theatre Museum, as well as the library systems at The University of Maryland—College Park and The University of Mississippi.

On the performance side, I owe a debt to thousands of practitioners, creators, students, and audience members around the world. I am especially grateful to those who sacrificed their own time to participate in surveys and interviews, with special thanks to *Ars Comica/Teatro del Vicolo/Lo Stage Internazionale di Commedia dell’Arte* (Antonio Fava and Dina Buccino), The Funny School of Good Acting/The Commedia Company (Christopher Bayes and Virginia Scott), *Il Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori* (Sara Sartori), Faction of

Fools Theatre Company (Paul Reisman, Lindsey D. Snyder, Toby Mulford, and Rachel Spicknall Mulford), Accademia dell'Arte (Scott McGehee, Giangiacomo Colli, Fabio Mangolini, Robert Shryock, and Monica Cappaci), Study in Italy (Suzanne Branciforte, Kiara Pipino, and Lavina Hart), and Ole Miss Theatre (especially supervising faculty and staff members Michael Barnett, Jared Spears, Jordan Smith, Brandon Craggs, Felipe Macias, Jonathan Lee, Carey Hanson, Donna Buckley, Max Doolittle, Dex Edwards, Jeffrey Hannah, Sara Tomaszewski, Ed Neilson, and Harrison Witt), which supported and produced the version of *The Tooth-Puller* discussed below. (The full creative team is credited in Appendix A and referenced throughout in their interview material.)

This research was also supported in part by funding from my doctoral program at The University of Maryland in the form of graduate assistantships, graduate travel funding, and a James F. Harris Arts and Humanities Visionary Scholarship award. Generous support was further provided by my current academic home at The University of Mississippi in the form of two different Summer Research Grants, departmental travel funding, course releases, and a College of Liberal Arts New Scholar Award.

Most of all, I am and will remain especially grateful to my students and colleagues, those in classrooms at The University of Maryland and The University of Mississippi, as well as the countless artists I have encountered in studios with *Lo Stage Internazionale di Commedia dell'Arte*, Faction of Fools Theatre Company, and other venues throughout the world.

Special thanks to Routledge and The Shakespeare Theatre Company for permission to reprint portions of my materials previously published in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte* and *Asides: A Publication of The Shakespeare Theatre Company*. My dissertation committee and Graduate Director have approved the inclusion of these materials and further endorse that I made “substantial contributions to the relevant aspects of the jointly authored work” included in this dissertation.²

²Pre-published materials comprise less than 1% of the current dissertation project.

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Chapter 1: Another Book on Commedia?³

1.1 War of the Commediants

During the heyday of the Yahoo! Group “commediadellarte,” conflict would break out every few months between one side dubbed “Commedia anarchists” and those on the other side whose work the anarchists disparaged as “museum-piece theatre.” The “anarchists” proudly wore their title, jumping on Scott McGehee’s assertion that “what animates the comic subversion in the commedia is the anarchistic impulse of radical humanism,”⁴ and leading to the conclusion that it is the *spirit* of the early Commediants that one should emulate and not the confines of their 400-and-counting-year-old art.

The “museum-piece” faction was less content with their moniker, especially during a heated discussion in July of 2012. One traditionalist argued that “if we didn’t have that ‘museum-piece’ basis that (most) of us were first introduced to the

³For the last century, there has been considerable variation in how English speakers type the now-customary name for “The Italian Comedy.” The convention for most of the twentieth century retained the foreign quality of the words by italicizing them (*commedia dell’arte*). English speakers for years have shortened this to its first word only, a convention that is meaningless in Italian, where “*commedia*” is not a technical term and, thus, where the abbreviate *CdA* is more common. (See Barry Grantham, *Playing Commedia: A Training Guide to Commedia Techniques* [Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001], 5 n. 1.) Olly Crick and Judith Chaffee, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte* (New York: Routledge, 2015) standardized “Commedia dell’Arte” as the norm in which the words are not seen as foreign-borrowed but rather, now in English, function as a proper noun and therefore are rendered in capitalized and un-italicized form. I employ this convention, using lowercase or italicized words only where they appear as such in quotations or where they are used with direct reference to the Italian language from which they have been coopted.

⁴Scott McGehee, “Power/subversion/commedia,” June 20, 2010, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2322>.

Arte with, we wouldn't have reached our individual views and approaches to CdA,"⁵ implying that somehow the "museum-piece" is the obvious entryway to the *real* Commedia dell'Arte, but once artists have learned those (allegedly) objective basics, they can move on to develop their own unique approach. As another traditionalist maintained, "I believe that it is necessary to understand and hopefully master the basics of a complex art form such as Commedia before attempting to change its principles."⁶

Kate Meehan, Managing Director of La Fenice Austin, seemed to follow this path in defending her company's work as "traditional" (with reference to character, mask, and style) while also noting that much of her company's subject matter is ripped from today's headlines and that their shows most frequently play in crowded bars—a setting seemingly far from the realm of museums.⁷ France Crum took, perhaps, the most unyieldingly traditional approach, insisting that "the pieces themselves are part of theatre history both in the past and hopefully for the future" and that all that was necessary to update for a modern audience were new, post-Stanislavski expectations about "character arc," but not a change in style itself.⁸ This

⁵TJ Corbett, "Re: [Commedia Dell'Arte] Re: Masked Lovers," July 17, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2843>.

⁶JamesL, "Re: Masked Lovers," July 13, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2821>.

⁷Kate Meehan, "Re: Masked Lovers," July 18, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2845>.

⁸Frances Crum, "Re: Masked Lovers," July 16, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2840>.

and other sentiments from the traditionalists and the historians rattled at least one anarchist:

You have to be careful not to become a classic Dotore' [sic] with you [sic] must bes and have to bes and can't bes. Please, we have so little idea of what once was. It is our job today to make theater for our audience today.

Museum pieces are a good exercise and if you want to make them your Life's work, bless you, but don't tell me what has to be in my work....

That is just lame and yes boringly academic.⁹

This heated multi-week thread began over a seemingly innocuous two-sentence post: "I've been noticing in recent productions I've seen that it's growing common to have the Lovers wear comical masks similar to the Zanni. Anyone have opinions about this?"¹⁰

Predictably, people did have opinions. I had been known in the group as more of a traditionalist, so I surprised several people (and occasioned some strong rebukes from former allies) by noting that in Faction of Fools' recent production *Hamlecchino: Clown Prince of Denmark* we had created something akin to a noble mask or neutral mask¹¹ for the innamorata Ophelia, which I felt served the play even

⁹Jeff, "Re: Masked Lovers," July 16, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2834>.

¹⁰Talia Felix, "Masked Lovers," June 28, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2804>.

¹¹On the original "noble mask" of Dasté and now more prevalent "neutral mask" of Lecoq and Sartori, see Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body (Le Corps poétique): Teaching Creative Theatre*, trans. David Bradby (Actes Sud-Papiers, 1997. English edition, New York: Routledge, 2002), 5, 36-45. In the summer of 2017, I was able to view several of Amleto Sartori's original neutral masks and to speak

though it was a departure from traditional conventions. I phrased my stance as a pragmatic Artistic Director: “In part, I think I’m tired of post-show conversations revolving around, ‘Why weren’t the women masked?’ with no better answer than, ‘Cause that’s how Commedia does it.’”¹²

This dissertation focuses on the problematic issue of “how Commedia does it.” What can we know historically? How can we innovate today? What cultural constructions are at play when an “expert” claims to demonstrate “authentic” or “historical” Commedia dell’Arte? How do we create new works that are as vibrant and original as the ones that began this movement in sixteenth-century Italy? What are necessary and sufficient conditions for a new work of art to be classified as a work of “Commedia dell’Arte”?

The anarchist insists “don’t tell me what has to be in my work” and points out that, if there are “rules” for Commedia, they were generated *a posteriori*—as was the very term “*commedia dell’arte*.” The traditionalist maintains that for the words “Commedia dell’Arte” to mean anything at all today, they must describe a genre that can be recognizably situated within a describable historical tradition.

I used to advocate strongly for the latter position, expecting that someone justify why their work (which they are entitled to make however they like) would suitably be labeled “Commedia dell’Arte.” However, the more I study, the more I

with his granddaughter Sara Sartori at *Il Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori*.

¹²Matthew R. Wilson, “Re: Masked Lovers,” June 29, 2012, available at <https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/commediadellarte/conversations/messages/2806>.

come to question what the words themselves have ever really meant. I have come to see Commedia dell'Arte as a very large tree planted in the Italian Renaissance. Its roots reach deep through the traditions of medieval players, Byzantine mimes, and Greco-Roman comic playwrights.¹³ Its trunk, however, is short, giving way very quickly to branches that spread far and wide, across the continents and through the centuries. Many of those branches bear little resemblance to one another, and yet something connects them to the same trunk. This dissertation seeks to identify aspects of connection between the branches and the trunk and to provide a template for anyone who wants to grow new branches today.

1.2 Research Questions and Scope of Study

The primary research question for this study is, “How can we assess, analyze, and implement historiographic sources from Commedia dell’Arte’s past to inspire the creation of new works that continue the style of Commedia dell’Arte today?” This project encompasses both practical dramaturgy and what Franklin J. Hildy has dubbed “applied theater history: the use of knowledge gained from the examination of the theater of past eras to create new theater forms.”¹⁴

It also wrestles with issues of “authenticity,” “tradition,” and “historicity” in contemporary constructions of Commedia dell’Arte as cultural capital: what are the Maestros teaching, and what is at stake in assessing whether masked physical comedy

¹³To be discussed in Chapter Two below.

¹⁴Franklin J. Hildy, “European Theatre Scene,” in *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*, eds. Bruce R. Smith and Katherine Rowe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1:78.

today is or is not a part of the “Commedia dell’Arte” tradition? This work culminates in a case study wherein I, along with a cast and design team comprised entirely of undergraduate theatre students, call upon our historical scholarship and participant-research to breathe life into a new work of Commedia dell’Arte made from old bones: *The Tooth-Puller* (or *Il Cavadente*) produced by The University of Mississippi Department of Theatre Arts in February 2017. This practical experiment in “moving from the archive” combines historiographic, theoretical, qualitative, and performative models, as outlined more fully below. It also concludes with a real-life case study in “Art-Based Research” or “Practice-as-Research.”¹⁵

1.3 Justification

This project is an outgrowth of my own experiences with Commedia handbooks, Maestros, enthusiasts, and critics as well as my own artistic-scholarly projects as a graduate student, performer/director/writer, and teacher. It also serves a need to clarify the status of the field within the community and to provide a possible roadmap for future work in helping theatre scholars and artists understand one another.

As the examples from the Commedia dell’Arte Yahoo! Group illustrate, practitioners within the field can easily be divided by differing opinions about what, exactly, Commedia dell’Arte is and how best to continue its tradition. In my years of

¹⁵Cf. the dissertation approach outlined by Tawnya D. Smith, “Shall I Hide an Art-Based Study within a Recognized Qualitative Framework? Negotiating the Spaces between Research Traditions at a Research University,” in *Art as Research: Opportunities and Challenges*, ed. Shaun McNiff (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 197: “I take an eclectic approach that draws upon various art-based methods.... In this case, art-based methods work together to tell stories of individual and collective experience.”

study and conversation with experts from around the world, I have noticed that one chief cause of disagreement is the slippage between defining Commedia dell'Arte as a movement within theatre history and defining it as a style of performance still practiced today. We are not having the same conversation when we conflate what Commedia “was,” “is,” and “can be.” Even within historical study, as seen in Chapter Two, confusion can arise by not clearly identifying what Commedia “was *at such-and-such time and in such-and-such place*,” for the answers will differ depending on the decade and the city. Nevertheless, early trends in Commedia scholarship and continuing habits in Commedia practice frequently err by lumping the entire history into a single, monolithic entity, thereby creating a construct of a past that never existed.

This dissertation aims to address some of this confusion and to clarify, not only the status of the field, but also the methods by which we have the conversation. It also attempts to link historical study, qualitative survey, and contemporary practice—a multidisciplinary challenge that is not often attempted but, in this case, is both useful and warranted.

In order to avoid falling into the trap of generalization myself, the practical component of this research frequently returns to a solitary case study in reimagining a particular work from the historical Commedia, without attempting to speak for all Commedia from all time. This is not a universal model for how to create new Commedia plays, but rather a unique example of one endeavor.

The endeavor focuses on a Spring 2017 production of *The Tooth-Puller* which was jointly devised by myself and undergraduate performers and designers based on

historical inspiration. This particular *scenario* is of note because it is preserved in both the Scala publication from Venice in 1611 and the Casamarciano collection from Naples in the seventeenth centuries.¹⁶ This dual remembrance attests the story's popularity across multiple companies and several decades (if not centuries) and allows comparison about how the story was treated in both the northern and southern traditions.

A number of different experiences lead toward my qualifications in writing a dissertation that attempts to bridge gaps between scholarship and practice in Commedia dell'Arte. During my time as Artistic Director of the Helen Hayes Award-winning Faction of Fools Theatre Company, *The Washington Post* described my work saying,

Wilson, talking in an empty classroom at the University of Maryland (where he's pursuing a PhD), is pretty brainy about his low business. He's studied and taught abroad with Italian master Antonio Fava, and contributed program notes for 'Servant' at the Shakespeare Theatre Company. He'll happily tell you about commedia's masks, archetypal characters and physical shtick as survival tools of newly professional performers barnstorming across strange lands in the 1500s.¹⁷

¹⁶See Tim Fitzpatrick, *The Relationship of Oral and Literate Performance Processes in the Commedia dell'Arte: Beyond the Improvisation/Memorisation Divide* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1995), 185-215; and Richard Andrews, ed. and trans., *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008), 70. More on this in Chapter Three.

¹⁷Nelson Pressley, "Commedia dell'Arte Craze Hits D.C. Theaters after Boom on Broadway," *The Washington Post*, 11 May 2012, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/commedia-dellarte-craze-hits-dc-theaters-after-boom-on-broadway/2012/05/10/gIQA0gQIU_story.html?tid=a_inl.

The Post further noted in a later profile, “For Wilson, whose lively eyes and dangerous smile give him a terrific clown’s face, knockabout comedy is serious business.”¹⁸

This dissertation seeks to connect that “serious business” to the “knockabout comedy,” and vice versa. Through a prism of historical, qualitative, theoretical, and performative (Practice-as-Research) approaches, I hope to illuminate aspects of the process that have gone unnoticed by researchers or artists who view the work through only one lens.

This project synthesizes years of archival, theoretical, and qualitative research conducted during my PhD course work and in creating to two upper-level classes on “Commedia dell’Arte in History and Performance” for The University of Maryland (THEAT 399G, fall 2013) and The University of Mississippi (THEA 324, fall 2016). It combines this scholarly research with years of teaching and performing Commedia dell’Arte, including studying with Antonio Fava in Italy in 2001-2002, teaching at his *Stage Internazionale di Commedia dell’Arte* every summer from 2004 to 2009, touring the world with my own *The Great One-Man Commedia Epic* since 2004, serving as Founding Artistic Director of Faction of Fools Theatre company 2009-2015, and conducting countless workshops and residencies in Commedia dell’Arte for primary and secondary schools, community groups, undergraduate and graduate training programs, professional theatres, and scholarly organizations across Europe

¹⁸idem, “One Clown, Two Openings: Actor/Director Juggles His Own Commedia and a Hit Farce,” *The Washington Post*, 26 November 2014, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/theater-dance/one-clown-two-openings-matthew-wilson-juggles-his-own-commedia-and-a-hit-farce/2014/11/26/fc24f4ea-740e-11e4-9c9f-a37e29e80cd5_story.html?utm_term=.953fc9b417b6.

and North America. It also draws upon my personal investment in conversations about Commedia dell'Arte's legacy and future as the International Coordinator of SAT's annual worldwide Commedia dell'Arte Day¹⁹ and a frequent participant in conferences and online communities devoted to the field.

It furthermore draws upon research and creative work conducted for my previous publications—the Charles MacArthur Award-nominated play *A Commedia Christmas Carol* (Playscripts, 2013) and two chapters (one co-authored with Franklin J. Hildy) in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte* (Routledge, 2015)—as well as additional ongoing research at The Folger Shakespeare Library and archival research conducted in London in the fall of 2014 at The National Archives, London Metropolitan Archives, British Library, British Museum, Garrick Club, and London Theatre Museum.

My hope is that this multidisciplinary approach advances the conversation through a synthesis of methods, provides an example of how additional studies in “moving from the archive” may be attempted, and gives grounding to my future work as a scholar and performer seeking to bridge the gap between the *academia* and the *arte*.

1.4 Reviewing the Sources

This literature review focuses on five distinct aspects of previous research and writing on Commedia dell'Arte: (1) Primary sources and major discussions of

¹⁹See Luciano Brogi, “About Us,” trans. Matthew R. Wilson *et al.*, *Giornata Mondiale della Commedia dell'Arte*, <https://www.commediadellarteday.org/about.asp?lin=eng> (accessed 1 February 2018).

primary sources from historical Commedia dell'Arte, (2) Nineteenth- & twentieth-century history and historiography of Commedia dell'Arte, (3) Contemporary manuals or "how-to" books about Commedia dell'Arte, (4) Recent historical studies, and (5) Practice-as-Research approaches.

1.4.1 Primary Sources and Discussions of Primary Sources for Historical CdA

The majority of key data in assessing historical Commedia dell'Arte are non-literary sources. Some are written accounts of witnesses or performers, but many are artifacts or iconographic data, which require their own methods and models for interpretation.

Non-literary sources may include legal documents, financial records, letters, or journal entries. These sorts of concrete data provide a basis for many recent historians, as discussed under heading four (4) below. They may originate from within a Commedia troupe as part of their internal records in ledgers or calendars, or they may be an outsider's account preserved in a diary or letter.

Literary sources include existing dramatic literature, such as the more complete *scenari* and even (if handled with care) plays by Machiavelli, Goldoni, or Molière.²⁰ The line between literary and non-literary may become blurred, as is the

²⁰While plays by these authors may shed some light on Commedia dell'Arte, purists could insist that none of these writers were technically producing works of Commedia dell'Arte, which were originally improvised by the actors around a *scenario*. Machiavelli is engaged in *commedia erudita* prior to the advent of the *comici*'s "perfect comedy," and Goldoni and Molière both wrote scripts with an aim to reform their national theatres. Methodology for this project's qualitative data will be discussed at the end of this chapter under "Theoretical Framework," as well as in Chapters Five through Seven, but I will anticipate that discussion here to note that nearly all of the practitioners surveyed or interviewed for this project answered that they "strongly agree" or "agree" that a production utilizing a script by one of these playwrights might aptly be called "a Commedia dell'Arte play."

case of Massimiliano Troiano's description of a performance that took place at Trausnitz Castle in February of 1568, a description so rich with detail that it not only relates his experience as an audience member but also captures aspects of the performance more fully than many of the extant *scenari* are able.²¹

The *scenari* themselves are tricky sources, confounding the line between "literary" and "non-literary." Roughly 800-1000 *scenari* are extant (discussed in Chapter Three below), and most are unpublished, hand-written manuscripts, housed in libraries and archives in Italy.²² Trickier still are floating references to *lazzi*, which are written into "literary" pieces but are almost entirely meaningless without being fleshed out in some performative way, as we will see in Practice-as-Research approaches below (Chapter Six).

Material objects, in the form of artifacts or architecture, also provide data for the historian. Masks and mask-making are important components of both the art and the industry of Commedia dell'Arte, and, while contemporary mask-makers can share information from their own practice/research, there are masks from the Golden Age of Commedia extant in museums.²³ The intricate leather work they reveal explains

²¹The entire description is reproduced in Giacomo Oreglia, *The Commedia dell'Arte*, trans. Lovett F. Edwards (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), 4-10. See also Ronald W. Vince, *Renaissance Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 44. In 1576, Prince William commissioned frescoes in memory of this performance which are still extant in the so-called "Fool's staircase," discussed later in this chapter.

²²Vince, *Renaissance Theatre*, 45, claims that over 1000 *scenari* are extant. However, Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 218 n. 3, puts the figure at around 800. The two largest and most important collections are the Scala and Casamarciano collections, which take the focus of my Chapter Three. For a list of additional collections of *scenari*, see Vince, *Renaissance Theatre*, 45-46, and Oreglia, 17-19.

²³See for example, the image of a leather Pulcinella mask from ca. 1700, housed at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England and available online "Early Pantomime," Victoria and

why two members of Maphio's eight-person troupe were cobblers: they had the technological expertise to make leather masks. Neither cobblers nor actors were particularly powerful or influential people in sixteenth-century Italy. The mask, then, is a concrete artifact in the "History from Below," which tells part of the story of these traditional artisans.²⁴

Another easily ignored "document" exists in the realm of theatre architecture. For much of the past two centuries, Commedia has been either romanticized or denigrated as "street theatre." However, for the most famous troupes, there are no historical records of outdoor performances at piazzas. Rather, they performed in court theatres, meeting halls (*stanze*), or even purpose-built theatres such as the Palais-Royal. By studying the extant theatrical spaces, we can learn more about actual theatrical practices of Commedia troupes without generically dismissing them as street theatre. Two particularly famous venues still exist. One is the *Teatrino della Baldracca*, a generic *stanza* hall, which is now a library in Florence but was

Albert Museum website, 2016, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/e/early-pantomime/> (accessed 5 March February 2018).

²⁴The term "History from Below" was coined by E.P. Thompson in a 1966 article within *The Times Literary Supplement*. Thompson, like other British Marxists, wanted to reverse trends in historiography that privilege so-called "great men" or official records of events as perceived and framed by elite voices within society. Instead, this "people's history" approach asks what life was like for the majority who lived "below" the official record. See Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in Twentieth-Century History and Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 33-39.

Writing a history from below is difficult, however, because subaltern groups are less likely to leave records of their involvement in history. While ancient history has been dominated by written sources comprising official records and monumental buildings, many contemporary archaeologists champion artifact over text precisely because a simple material object or residential dwelling can tell the story of a "regular person" whose life was not accounted in official records. In this way, artifacts such as Commedia dell'Arte masks attest the lives of craftspersons and the trade of artisans in ways that the "official" written records might overlook. See, for example, William G. Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5-6.

once a venue that hosted Flaminio Scala, Francesco and Isabella Andreini, and Pier Maria Cecchini.²⁵ Performers recalled the bawdy and raucous crowds in this location, and one can imagine how the open room would be converted for theatrical use.²⁶

Another important venue is the purpose-built *Teatro all'antica*, which Duke Vespasiano Gonzaga Colonna commissioned in 1588 as a resident home for a Commedia dell'Arte company.²⁷ The close association with the Duke indicates the degree of prestige that this troupe would have enjoyed, and the particulars of the design shed light on Commedia staging practices. The stage once held a fixed scene by Scamozzi, following the pattern for a "comic scene" as laid out by Serlio.²⁸ That a Commedia company would perform in a venue associated with Serlio and Scamozzi (who completed *Teatro Olimpico* after Palladio's death) indicates the close associations between Commedia dell'Arte, on the one hand, and Academic theatre or *commedia erudita*, on the other (more on this in Chapter Two). Furthermore, the

²⁵Michael Anderson, "The Changing Scene: Plays and Playhouses in the Italian Renaissance," in *European Theatre Performance Practice: 1580-1750*, edited by Robert Henke and M.A. Katritzky (New York: Routledge, 2016). [Bookshelf Online]. Retrieved from <https://online.vitalsource.com/#/books/9781351938327/>.

²⁶Letters from 1618 concerning the Baldracca speak of "continual chaos and noise in the theatre" and "the continual din of the Florentine youth," and Scala himself had to "request the people to leave the stage clear," as quoted in Robert Henke, "Toward Reconstructing the Audiences of the *Commedia dell'Arte*," in *European Theatre Performance Practice: 1580-1750*, edited by Robert Henke and M.A. Katritzky (New York: Routledge, 2016), [Bookshelf Online], retrieved from <https://online.vitalsource.com/#/books/9781351938327/>, with reference to Claudia Burattellii, Domenica Landolfi, and Anna Zinanni, eds., *Comici dell'Arte: Corrispondenze*, 2 vols (Florence: Le Lettere, 1993), 508, 505, and 513.

²⁷Stanley V. Longman, "A Renaissance Anomaly: A *Commedia dell'Arte* Troupe in Residence at the Court Theatre at Sabbioneta," in *Commedia dell'Arte Performance: Contexts and Contents*, Theatre Symposium: A Journal of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, vol. 1 (Tuscaloosa, AL: Southeastern Theatre Conference and University of Alabama Press, 1993), 57-65, describes the situation and speculates persuasively that the troupe in question may have been the *Accesi*.

²⁸The fixed scene currently on stage and viewable by the public is a modern reconstruction which differs in several aspects from Scamozzi's original designs, which are extant.

urban exteriors and entryways of the fixed scene shed light on staging practices for the *scenari* that usually take place on a city street with the possibility of two or three “houses.” (Commedia stages and staging will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Five below).

Additionally, the realm of Commedia iconography (described in Chapter Four) includes not only images but also artifacts that reflect more about audience awareness or cultural fashion than anything about theatrical practice. During the eighteenth century, German porcelain makers popularized figures of Commedia characters such as Harlequin, Columbine, and Pantalone. Numerous such pieces have been preserved in museums and private collections, and while they tell us very little about Commedia practice—they depict generic figures and, for the most part, come from a period *after* the Golden Age of touring—they speak to the breadth and depth with which these characters were assimilated into popular culture, so that even the realm of knick-knacks was infiltrated by Commedia.²⁹ This infiltration of Commedia characters into popular material culture impacted how early historians would imagine Renaissance Commedia, and these images continue to dominate contemporary Commedia productions as designers are unfortunately more influenced by colorful, extant, late sources than by more sparse and less evocative data from earlier periods.

Commedia dell’Arte captured the imagination of artists from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, as seen in the above porcelains but also in the work of Watteau,

²⁹See for example the German Meissen porcelain Commedia dell’Arte figurines by JJ Kandler dating from around 1740-43 and available online at “Early Pantomime,” Victoria and Albert Museum website, 2016, <http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/e/early-pantomime/> (accessed 5 March February 2018). See also Lynne Lawner, *Harlequin on the Moon: Commedia dell’Arte and the Visual Arts* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998);

Tiepolo, Picasso, and more. Each image is evidence of something, but it is not always easy to determine what it is evidence of. As will be discussed below (in Chapter Four), Thomas Heck and M.A. Katritzky advocate an art historical approach that seeks to understand a specific piece within its own context and as the material work of its own creator before upholding the image as data about historical theatrical practices. While this might seem obvious when looking at a Picasso, the same caveats are important in examining sixteenth- and seventeenth-century iconography, such as the 1576 frescoes in the “Fool’s staircase” at Trausnitz Castle, the many etchings from the 1580s and 1590s collected in the *Recueil Fossard*, or the engravings of Jacques Callot from the 1620s.³⁰ The Trausnitz frescoes are some of the earliest extant images, including evocative color depictions of the Venetian Magnifico and his Zanni as well as a few clever *lazzi*. They stem from the 1568 performance mentioned above, but nonetheless differ from the written description in several details.³¹ The *Recueil Fossard* collection features a greater variety, including an etching of “Zany” doing a handstand and a few depictions of Arlecchino in his irregularly patched costume before it was aestheticized into the famous diamond pattern of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Callot images, on the other hand, are the most often reproduced but seemingly less reliable.³²

³⁰Vince, *Renaissance Theatre*, 50-52.

³¹Franklin J. Hildy and Matthew R. Wilson, “Stages and Staging Practices in Early Commedia dell’Arte,” in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte*, edited by Olly Crick and Judith Chaffee (New York: Routledge, 2015), 234-35.

³²*ibid.*, 232-33.

Chapter Four below will focus on the history of interpretation behind key images, including cases of misunderstandings or confusions that have been written into the theatrical record. Chapter Five will continue this discussion with an eye toward theatrical design.

1.4.2 19th- and 20th-Century History and Historiography

The average person seeking information about Commedia dell'Arte today might pick up any one of a number of histories written between 1860 and 1970 chiefly in France, England, the United States, and Italy. Part of this dissertation seeks to critique those histories on three counts: (1) They treat Commedia as a fixed entity rather than a developing and varied art form. (2) They utilize iconographic data as though it constitutes documentary evidence about theatre practice rather than existing as works of art that must first be understood, art historically, in their own right. (3) They are unduly influenced by popular conceptions of Commedia characters or style from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and read these later developments back into a history of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theatre practices.³³

Major works from this grouping include those by Maurice Sand (published in French in 1860, English 1915), Winifred Smith (1912), Pierre Louis Duchartre (French 1924, English 1929), Giacomo Oreglia (Italian 1961, English 1964), and two

³³See Chapter Four below as well as Matthew R. Wilson, "Speechless Spectacles: Commedia Pantomime in the 18th & 19th Centuries," in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Olly Crick and Judith Chaffee (New York: Routledge, 2015), 361-62.

works by Allardyce Nicoll (*Masks, Mimes, and Miracles* 1931, *The World of Harlequin* 1963).³⁴

Duchartre's work typifies the model utilized by the other twentieth-century historians. The book opens with a description of Commedia dell'Arte, its origins and historical performance practices, and the troupes that made Commedia famous—especially in Italy and France during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. What follows are illustrated chapters devoted to the most famous characters or “masques” of Commedia dell'Arte, including a description of the character traits, as well as a discussion of the most famous performers associated with each character. The work, like most of those mentioned above, lacks footnotes or extensive citations and fails to explain how conclusions were reached. Duchartre also provides scant information about the provenance of most of his illustrations, many of which remain otherwise lost to history and are now fixed (sometimes erroneously?) in the contemporary conversation thanks only to Duchartre. As Thomas Heck notes, “The numerous illustrations are listed, but without sufficient detail to enable one to locate the originals.”³⁵

³⁴The most dominate works in French, Italian, and English are Maurice Sand, *The History of the Harlequinade* (London: Martin Secker, 1915); Winifred Smith, *The Commedia dell'Arte* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964. Reprint. New York: Arno Press, 1980); Pierre Louis Duchartre, *The Italian Comedy*, trans. Randolph T. Weaver (George G. Harrap & Co, 1929. Reprint. New York: Dover Publications, 1966); Allardyce Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes, and Miracles: Studies in Popular Theatre* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931. Reprint. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1963) and idem, *The World of Harlequin: A Critical Study of the Commedia dell'Arte* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963. Reprint, 2010); Giacomo Oreglia, *The Commedia dell'Arte*, trans. Lovett F. Edwards (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964).

³⁵Thomas F. Heck, *Commedia dell'Arte: A Guide to the Primary and Secondary Literature* (New York: Garland, 1988), 62.

Still, Duchartre's work has been influential and warrants an appraisal higher than Allardyce Nicoll's apt opinion of Sand's 1860 *Masques et bouffons*:

not very important in itself, but it certainly has significance as a symbol. Romantically conceived and introducing many demonstrably false suppositions, it yet marked the beginning of a new movement in the CdA's history—an attempt to survey the development of this theatre and to assess its value.³⁶

This dissertation aims to continue that movement but to do so with a greater critical focus and with an eye toward examining not only how the early history of Commedia was misunderstood but also how those misunderstandings have led to changes and even innovations in the continuing practice of Commedia dell'Arte.

1.4.3 Contemporary Manuals or “How-To” Books about Commedia dell'Arte

Just as the movement to publish comprehensive histories of Commedia dell'Arte began to whither (Oreglia's 1964 monograph is the last in the line of works described above), a new method of publishing about Commedia dell'Arte in the late twentieth century began to focus on “how to” models by notable practitioners of the reborn style. Some of these are works by preeminent Maestros such as Jacques Lecoq, Amleto and Donato Sartori, and Antonio Fava.³⁷ Lecoq's influence upon late

³⁶Quoted in Heck, *Commedia dell'Arte: A Guide to the Primary and Secondary Literature*, 54.

³⁷Jacques Lecoq, *The Moving Body (Le Corps poétique): Teaching Creative Theatre*, trans. David Bradby (Actes Sud-Papiers, 1997. English edition, New York: Routledge, 2002); Donato Sartori and Bruno Lanata, eds., *Arte della maschera nella Commedia dell'Arte* (Firenze: La casa Usher, 1983). Antonio Fava's monograph was originally published in Italian as *La maschera comica nella commedia dell'arte: disciplina d'attore, universalità e continuità dell'improvvisa, poetica della sopravvivenza* (Colledara, Italia: Andromeda Editrice, 1999). It has been translated into several world

twentieth-century movement pedagogy is unparalleled, but his interests and training extend far beyond Commedia dell'Arte.³⁸ The Sartoris and Fava are both renowned mask-makers and Commedia specialists, but Fava is also an actor, director, and instructor of Commedia in performance, whereas Amleto and Donato Sartori were visual artists whose varied interests included theatrical mask-making. Several of Fava's students have gone on to write their own books, including John Rudlin, who wrote the first popular manual in English (now rivaled by Barry Grantham's work) and Fabrizio Paladin, who teaches and publishes in Italy.

The contrast between Fava's book and those by Rudlin and Grantham is notable. Fava's work is highly analytical and impassioned—less a history of Commedia than a manifesto on its meaning. Much of the work is about the themes, logic, and dramaturgy of Commedia dell'Arte, with very few pages devoted to

languages including two English editions: idem, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte: Actor Training, Improvisation, and the Poetics of Survival*, trans. Thomas Simpson, ed. Francesco Zimei (Reggio-Emilia, Italy: ArsComica, 2004) and idem, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte: Actor Training, Improvisation, and the Poetics of Survival*, trans. Thomas Simpson, ed. Francesco Zimei (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007). Fava has also produced numerous DVDs, the most recent and comprehensive of which is idem, *Commedia by Fava: The Commedia dell'Arte Step by Step*, DVD (Reggio-Emilia, Italia: ArsComica, 2006). Several of Fava's former pupils have written their own books, among which are John Rudlin, *Commedia dell'Arte: An Actor's Handbook* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and Fabrizio Paladin, *Il teatro e la maschera: Arlecchino, Pantalone e compagnia alla scoperta dell'illusione ottica della maschera-viso e la natura dell'improvvisazione* (Firenze: L'Autore Libri, 2008). More recent English-language manuals are Barry Grantham, *Playing Commedia: A Training Guide to Commedia Techniques* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001) and idem, *Commedia Plays: Scenarios, Scripts, Lazzi* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2006).

³⁸Students of Lecoq in the 1970s, describe his curriculum as culminating in Commedia dell'Arte as the height of the style and skills that he taught. It was considered an advanced and capstone unit of study. Eventually *École Jacques Lecoq* altered its curriculum in a pattern that would later be recapitulated by the Dell'Arte School in Blue Lake, CA, and *Accademia dell'Arte* in Arezzo, Italy. All three schools no longer focus on Commedia *qua* Commedia as a culminating performance style but rather now employ Commedia as an introductory exercise designed to provide grounding in performance techniques and dramaturgical skills which students are later encouraged to use to create their own works, undefined and unlimited by the "rules" of previous genres. See Lecoq, 108. I am also indebted to Ronald East, "TOU BOUGE (Revisited): Transformation in Jacques Lecoq's Commedia Pedagogy from 1970 to 1990," paper presented at *Passing on the Commedia dell'Arte Tradition*, 18 February 2012, at Glendon College, Toronto; and Scott McGehee, interview by author, 22 June 2017, Accademia dell'Arte, Arezzo, Italy. More on this in Chapter Seven below.

instructions regarding how to perform specific character types. Fava believes that the details of posture, movement, and performance are best taught in person, whereas a book may address larger directorial, thematic, or historical issues. Rudlin and Grantham's manuals, by contrast, contain lengthy descriptions of how to perform walks and gestures, as well as numerous exercises designed to help students practice particular characters—at least as far as the author understands them.³⁹

Books like these offer insights about how twentieth-century theatre practitioners viewed and transmitted their own work, including their thoughts on what “authentic” *Commedia dell'Arte* is. Like the histories mentioned above, however, many of these manuals are not self-consciously critical about their own historiography, lacking a strong justification for why a particular approach is more “historical” even while constructing an “authenticity” for the point of view being presented.⁴⁰ This dissertation aims to examine some of the claims of current pedagogies to ascertain sources behind them, which will be done both through interrogating the works themselves and through interviewing the living authors and pupils of various methods.

³⁹These kinds of manuals are an irritant to the so-called “anarchist” faction who insist that the authors are canonizing “made up” ideas with no way to connect contemporary movement to the sparse, extant historical details we have about the theatre that became known as “*Commedia dell'Arte*.” As Fabio Mangolini insisted, “If you find someone who says, ‘Zanni moves like this,’ shoot him with a bazooka” (interview by author, 20 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy).

⁴⁰By way of comparison, consider the contrast between “authenticity” and “sincerity” in John L. Jackson, Jr., *Real Black: Adventures in Racial Sincerity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

1.4.4 Recent Historical Studies

While nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians of Commedia tended to attempt sweeping histories of the tradition, more recent scholarship has focused on particular, narrow facets of the history, especially through examining non-literary written sources such as legal documents and financial records. These prove invaluable to the Marxist historian because they document what Marx called “an *actual* economic fact.”⁴¹ Theatre historian Virginia Scott’s *The Commedia dell’Arte in Paris, 1644-1697* utilizes a Marxist approach that allows her to trace the interrelationship between Molière’s company and Fiorilli’s by means of their economic exchanges.⁴² Relying on similar concrete data about social relations and transactions, historians such as Siro Ferrone and Robert Henke have been able to focus on the business of Italian Commedia: how and where the troupes toured, how and why they constituted themselves along certain lines.⁴³ For Henke, some of the most important documents are the notarized contract and subsequent letters of Ser Maphio’s troupe in Padua from 1545 to 1548.⁴⁴ They form a case study as an early

⁴¹Karl Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844,” trans. Martin Milligan, in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd edition, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 653.

⁴²Virginia Scott, *The Commedia dell’Arte in Paris, 1644-1697* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990).

⁴³Siro Ferrone, *Attori, Mercanti, Corsari: La Commedia Dell’arte in Europa Tra Cinque E Seicento* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1993) and Robert Henke, “Border Crossing in the *Commedia dell’Arte*,” in *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), 19-34.

⁴⁴In addition to Henke’s chapter on the Maphio documents in *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’Arte*, see also Vince, *Renaissance Theatre*, 44, 46-49. Henke’s work on the dialectic between improvisation and written materials is heavily reliant on Tim Fitzpatrick, *The Relationship of Oral and Literate Performance Processes in the Commedia dell’Arte: Beyond the Improvisation/Memorisation Divide* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1995).

example of a company of actors conducting their work as a business. Also relying heavily on the concept of “exchange” and Ferrone’s work on mercantilism is Erith Jaffe-Berg’s 2015 *Commedia dell’Arte and the Mediterranean*.⁴⁵ These texts all view Commedia as an international business of trade rather than through the poetic, romanticized lens that the earlier historians preferred.

A number of other recent dissertations and monographs have analyzed Commedia dell’Arte’s influence in the early twentieth-century theatre of France, Germany, Russia, and the United States,⁴⁶ as well as the interactions between the tradition of Commedia dell’Arte and contemporary popular culture, art, and silent film.⁴⁷ These works, like my analysis of the porcelain figures above, situate Commedia’s present—and reconstructions of its past—within the fluctuating realm of recent popular culture. By viewing Commedia with greater historical rigor, a clearer reliance on collection and analysis of primary source data, and a wider understanding of cultural exchange, the more recent works note short-comings in the earliest

⁴⁵Erith Jaffe-Berg, *Commedia dell’Arte and the Mediterranean: Charting Journeys and Mapping “Others”* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2015).

⁴⁶For example, J. Douglas Clayton, *Pierrot in Petrograd: The Commedia dell’Arte/Balagan in Twentieth-century Russian Theatre and Drama* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993); Jane R. Lube, “*Commedia dell’Arte*” *Elements in Some German Twentieth-Century Dramas* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1973); Ronnie Ferguson, “Venues and Staging in Ruzante’s Theatre: A Practitioner’s Experience,” in *The Renaissance Theatre: Texts, Performance, Design*, vol. 1, ed. Christopher Cairns (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), 146-59; Martin Burgess Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell’Arte and the Modern Imagination* (Revised edition. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); and Annette Lust, *From the Greek Mimes to Marcel Marceau and Beyond: Mimes, Actors, Pierrots, and Clowns: A Chronicle of the Many Visages of Mime in the Theatre* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2000).

⁴⁷See the previously-cited work by Lawner and by Burgess and Swan, as well as David Madden, *Harlequin’s stick, Charlie’s Cane: A Comparative Study of Commedia dell’Arte and Silent Slapstick Comedy* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1975).

historiography and aid in shaping how Commedia's story can be more accurately told today.

1.4.5 Practice-as-Research Approaches

Commedia's story is still being told, and Commedia (or something being given that name) is still being performed—more widely than ever before in its history.⁴⁸

Practitioners around the world are engaged in the pursuit of putting research like this on its feet, not only to see what Commedia intellectually means, but also to explore how it moves and what it feels like. As Tawnya D. Smith succinctly describes, “Art-based methods help me to tell a part of the story that would be difficult to tell without the arts.”⁴⁹ Qualitative approaches and a Practice-as-Research philosophy provide methods for bringing this experiential data to bear with regard

⁴⁸I have attributed the recent popularity of Commedia to the boom in what I call “Post-Naturalistic” theatre. Living on this side of Stanislavski, we must always continue to appreciate the importance of psychological motivation and what director Aaron Posner calls “the actually-actually” of circumstance. However, as film and television proved themselves to be more capable of delivering products of aesthetic realism, theatres and theatre audiences in the late twentieth century began to turn to more spectacular modes of live performance (exactly as Meyerhold describes the reaction to realism in the early twentieth century). Acts like The Blue Man Group, De La Guarda, and Cirque du Soleil began to outpace realism at the box office, and puppetry, mask, and non-realistic theatre styles led even to Broadway hits and flops like *The Lion King* and *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, respectively. It was within this amiable climate that Faction of Fools was able to flourish in Washington, DC, alongside other “non-traditional” theatres that were actually founded on very traditional inspiration (for example, Taffety Punk's Elizabethan and Jacobean mindset, dog & pony's artist-deviser model, Happenstance's *fin de siècle* aesthetic, and Pointless's Avant-Guarde mission). By the 2000s, even film and television, which had so powerfully coopted realism, began to incorporate aspects of non-realistic theatre. The film *Chicago* and the television series *Glee* brought musical theatre back to mainstream popular entertainment, and TV shows from *The Office* and *Modern Family* all the way to the Netflix drama *House of Cards* began to “break the fourth wall” through direct address as a common convention that had not been so routinely used on screen since early slapstick films or the days of Vaudeville-inspired television variety shows.

⁴⁹Tanya D. Smith, 197.

even to historiographic questions, for example how *lazzi* function, how improvisation can interact with a fixed *scenario*, and how the masks can come alive in movement. This work relies on phenomenological approaches to anthropology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's notion of the "incarnate subject,"⁵⁰ and investigations into how embodied knowledge is passed from one subject to another.⁵¹

In the performing arts, Practice-as-Research (or "PaR") relies on two premises: "that (1) 'creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs' and (2) 'creative practice can lead to specialized research insights.'"⁵² This dissertation interacts with both principles. First, the creation of a new play itself becomes a test case for both the production process and the performance outcome (described especially in Chapters Five and Seven and in Appendix A). The audience itself contributes to a "detectable research output" in confirming whether or not our old form had been understandable and entertaining to them. This feedback is clear in the moment but also described in the audience survey portion of Chapter Seven's qualitative research approach.

Secondly, the play-making process raises and, perhaps, answers certain questions about the craft, including how actors interact, what details are taken for

⁵⁰Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, (New York: Routledge, 1962), 46.

⁵¹I have been particularly influenced by the following case studies in ethnographic participation-as-research: Greg Downey, *Learning Capoeira: Lessons in Cunning from an Afro-Brazilian Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Julie Taylor, *Paper Tangos* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); and Katherine J. Hagedorn, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

⁵²H. Smith and R. Dean, *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 9, quoted in Shaun May, *Rethinking Practice as Research and the Cognitive Turn* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), 4.

granted by the *scenario*, and how the *lazzi* function. In the last five years, a wave of new books has theorized the opportunities and limitations of a Practice-as-Research approach in theatre research, so this process will be aided by methodologies that continue to grow more rigorous.⁵³ These questions and further PaR theories form the introduction to Chapter Six.

1.5 Theory and Methodology

The theoretical framework for this project explores the problematics and possibilities of “moving from the archive” through an applied theatre history approach that determines how to identify, assess, analyze, and implement historical, archival materials to reconstruct a performance repertoire in new theatrical creations. I not only employ a Practice-as-Research model, but I will also, ultimately, advocate a Research-as-Practice approach to the continuation of the Commedia tradition.

This study interacts with historiography, art history, performance studies, and ethnographic qualitative research. The qualitative research is based on three subject groups (see Appendix B for sample surveys and descriptions):

Phase I: Surveys & Interviews with active practitioners of Commedia dell’Arte. This material includes data from 26 international professional practitioners, cataloged in online surveys, emails, and

⁵³For example, Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt, *Practice As Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Robin Nelson, *Practice As Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter, *Mapping Landscapes for Performance As Research: Scholarly Acts and Creative Cartographies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

over 25 hours of recorded, in-person semi-structured interviews, as well as materials drawn from classrooms, theatres, and workshops in both Italy and the United States.⁵⁴ In-person interviews were conducted with workshop leaders at training centers I was able to visit, as well as with attendees of the summer “Faculty Symposium” hosted by Accademia dell’Arte in Arezzo, Italy. Online surveys were solicited through the Association of Theatre Movement Educators (ATME) listserv and the listserv of the annual worldwide Commedia dell’Arte Day.

Phase II: Audience Surveys from viewers of Ole Miss Theatre’s *The Tooth-Puller* designed to gauge their responses to a form of theatre that most of them had never seen before. This material includes 782 online surveys from six sections of THEA 201: “Appreciation of

⁵⁴For methodological training in qualitative research, including surveys and interviews, I am indebted to Dr. Laurie Frederik’s course ANTH 688O/THET 608E: “Performance & Ethnography” taken at the University of Maryland in the fall of 2011. In that course, I was particularly influenced by the embodied participant-observations approaches discussed above and further in Chapter Six below.

Theatre”⁵⁵ as well as 48 paper surveys filled out by general audience members after the show.⁵⁶

Phase III: Participant Surveys & Interviews with the creative team of *The Tooth-Puller* including production members, designers, and performers. This material includes 16 interviews providing over 12 hours of digitally recorded material and 2 email correspondences.⁵⁷

⁵⁵THEA 201: “Appreciation of Theatre” is a hybrid course that meets once weekly and has regular online instruction and assessment. It satisfies the Fine Arts general elective requirement for the College of Liberal Arts, and its syllabus requires attendance at all Theatre Arts mainstage performances during the semester. For the spring of 2017, six sections were offered. Dr. Matthew Shifflett taught Sections One, Five, and Six with a total enrollment of 546 students. Dr. AnnMarie Saunders’s Sections Two, Three, and Four comprised a total of 657 students. Online surveys for this project were offered to students through Blackboard with the incentive of a small number of extra credit points for completing the entire survey. Completion rates for all students in Dr. Shifflett’s sections were 399 out of 546 (73.1%), and completion rates for all Dr. Saunders’s students were 383 out of 657 (58.3%); however, not all of the 1203 students registered for the course actually picked up their reserved tickets. According to departmental box office records, 1049 tickets were physically distributed to the THEA 201 population. A total of 782 surveys were initiated, although two were thrown out because they only answered the first of nine questions. Calculating a total of 780 online surveys from 1049 redeemed tickets, the completion rate for the actual audience population from this group is 74.36%. This survey group, including its status as “compelled” viewers of the production, will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

⁵⁶Beyond the tickets dedicated to students from THEA 201 (see the note above), 376 additional tickets were recorded for other audience members; however, the Chair of Theatre Arts who tracks attendance at all mainstage shows indicated that several of the 376 tickets would be duplicates. There were 88 student tickets purchased beyond those allocated to THEA 201, but roughly 25-30% of the 88 are likely duplicates. Most would have been purchased by THEA 201 students who had lost their original ticket or who, failing to attend their own ticketed performance, ended up purchasing a second ticket for a later performance. A few additional duplications from this pool of 88 could come from Theatre Arts majors who utilized a comp ticket (147 of the 376 tickets were comps for Theatre Arts majors, departmental faculty, university administrators, and prospective students) and purchased a student ticket to see the show again. Additionally, 130 general (non-“series”) tickets were purchased over the run of the show; however, several of these would be duplicates because family members of the creative team tend to see shows more than once, and some attended this particular show repeatedly because it changed through improvisation and audience interaction. Accounting for duplicate attendance and no-shows (especially among the 147 complimentary ticket-holders), our best guess is that 280-300 general audience members attended, which would yield a paper survey completion rate of 16.0-17.1%. As discussed again in Chapter Seven, it is worth noting that at least half of these responses likely came from audience members who were friends or family members of the creative team.

⁵⁷Only two members of the student creative team were unavailable for comment: stage manager Summerlin LaCour and assistant stage manager/dramaturg Mary Kate Halpin. Qualitative research data from student responses primarily appear in Chapters Five through Seven. Credits for the

Interview and survey results are peppered throughout the dissertation, including the perspectives from contemporary practitioners in the conversation about the status of the field. The audience surveys and participant interviews form the core of Chapters Five through Seven which use *The Tooth-Puller* as an example of Practice-as-Research and “Research-as-Practice.”

full creative team of the project are found on the first page of Appendix A, prior to the “final” script for the production.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Commedia

One aim of this project is to unite the sometimes disparate worlds of academia and entertainment, of scholarship and practice. This chapter on the history of Commedia dell'Arte is structured with this approach in mind, considering especially the confusions that arise by failing to understand the relationship (or moments lacking thereof) between the two.

While most historians of theatre have some background in theatrical practice, sometimes historical scholarship suffers from a lack of specific understanding. For example, one prevalent conversation in twentieth-century Commedia historiography concerns Arlecchino's status as a "little devil" and the so-called vestigial horn that appears as a bump in the forehead of his mask, a seeming remnant of the devil horn from his presumed origin story.⁵⁸ This has led more romantic writers to delve into the relationship between trickster servants and trickster demons, as well as the cultural psychology of the underworld or the misfit.⁵⁹

⁵⁸For example, Carlo Boso is quoted (uncritically) as saying "The wen on Arlecchino's mask represents a devil's horn, like the little points above the eye on Pantalone's mask," in David Wiles, *The Masks of Menander: Sign and Meaning in Greek and Roman Performance* (New York : Cambridge University Press, 1991), 126. For now, we will leave aside the fact that many of these masks are themselves products of the twentieth century, as Sara Sartori pointed to me in an interview where she noted that her grandfather "invented" the modern image of the Arlecchino mask.

⁵⁹I toyed with these same connections several years ago in a paper about Harlequin and trickster types in American theatre, "Harlequin in America: Keeping His Name, Losing His Place," a paper presented at the Comparative Drama Conference, 26 March 2011, Los Angeles, CA. I have since accepted that my work on that project glossed over certain elements of theatrical history in order to justify thematic or literary connections that seemed exciting.

It must however be remembered that the relationship between Arlecchino and the underworld or the dark arts is not purely a twentieth-century historiographic concoction. English theatre-makers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dabbled with "Harlequin Sorcerer" or "Harlequin Dr. Faustus" characters that allowed the possibility of connecting their own version of the Harlequin trickster to opportunities for magic, demonology, and playful dalliances with the forbidden dark side. These innovations likely played a role in how Arlecchino was viewed in later reconstructions. More

The approach is enticing to those who view Commedia characters as archetypes and want to knit them into larger cultural concepts. Scott McGehee, however, has challenged the unspoken premise of that enterprise, which is the recourse to a “Jungian archetype.” Discussing the commonplace and casual usage of the term “archetype” as synonymous with “character” in Commedia, McGehee says, “I find that idea an incredibly conservative and even reactionary idea,” noting that early Commedia, by contrast, was neither “conservative” nor “reactionary.” He continues philosophically, “My question to any acting teacher was, ‘Why do you think there’s [such a thing as] an archetype?’” Rather than beg that question and rarefy hegemonic structures into cultural categories, McGehee prefers to see the characters as “social types, typically based on some form of power.”⁶⁰

on these productions below, but see especially Christa Knellwolf King, *Faustus and the Promises of the New Science, c. 1580-1730* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 176-81. Select primary sources include Edward Ravenscroft, *Scaramouch a Philosopher, Harlequin a School-Boy, Bravo, Merchant, and Magician. A Comedy After the Italian manner. Acted at the Theatre Royal* (London: Printed for Robert Sellers [etc.], 1677), available at http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqi:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft_id=xri:ilcs:ft:drama:Z000114098:0; John Rich, *A Dramatick Entertainment, Call'd The Necromancer: or, Harlequin, Doctor Faustus. As perform'd at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. The sixth edition. To which is prefix'd, a short account of Doctor Faustus; and how he came to be reputed a magician.* (London : printed, and sold by T. Wood, and at the Theatre Royal, 1724); *An exact description of the two fam'd entertainments of Harlequin Doctor Faustus; with the grand masque of the heathen deities: and The Necromancer, or Harlequin Doctor Faustus. As now perform'd, in grotesque characters, at both theatres. Containing the particular tricks incidents, songs, dances, alterations, and additions, throughout both performances. Regularly adjusted into distinct scenes. With the names of the persons of both dramas* (London: T. Payne, [1724?]); and Mr. (Lewis) Theobald, *A Dramatick Entertainment, call'd Harlequin a Sorcerer: With the Loves of Pluto and Proserpine. As Perform'd at the Theatre Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields* (London: Printed and Sold by T. Wood [etc.], 1725), available at http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri:pqi:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:ilcs-us&rft_id=xri:ilcs:ft:drama:Z000125950:0.

⁶⁰Scott McGehee, interview by author, 22 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy. As a trained economist, McGehee further unpacked the social (i.e., economic) dimensions of Commedia in “Philosophy of Art and Performance,” a seminar given at the Summer Faculty Symposium, 22 June 2017, at Accademia dell’Arte, Arezzo, Italy. See also idem, “The Pre-eminence of the Actor in Renaissance Context: Subverting the Social Order,” in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte*, edited by Olly Crick and Judith Chaffee (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9-17.

Remembering that characters are “social types” invites a “history from below” perspective toward both the real-life servants on whom the characters were based and the struggling artists and artisans whose work metaphorically exploded in the cultural sphere years after being produced through the actual sweat of their human brows. As contemporary historians focus real-life people of the Early Modern period, a clear understanding arises of their lives in a climate with rampant disease, low standards of sanitation and hygiene, and challenges obtaining adequate nutrition. Bearing these details in mind, the bump or so-called vestigial “devil’s horn” on Arlecchino forehead is more easily interpreted as a simple facial blemish, which explains why similar marks are seen on other characters as well and not uniquely on Arlecchino’s mask.

Focusing also on the craft of mask-making, Antonio Fava has further noted that, to the leather artisan, formations such as these warts and blemishes serve to give the mask greater durability. One of the most difficult things to do with leather is to shape large patches into a smooth form. Instead, the ridges, furrows, bulbous characteristics, and pockmarks that give high-end leather masks their sophisticated detail are also structural tricks of the mask-maker, judiciously used to help the mask retain its shape as it comes off the matrix and maintain its durability through its lifetime.⁶¹

Had twentieth-century historians focused more on the trade secrets of leather artisans, they would have been less likely to embrace an explanation from cultural psychology, and the Arlecchino-devil perception may not color so many

⁶¹Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell’Arte*, 9-10, where he also says of the devil horn hypothesis, “This theory, proposed by many scholars and certainly evocative, can be accepted as an addition to the tradition but not as the definitive explanation;” also idem, interview by author, 12 April 2017, Oxford, MS.

conversations about the mask and character today. This is but one example of the ways in which understandings of practice can and should inform historical scholarship.

The relationship must also flow the other direction. Many theatre-makers value historical data, but often only so far as it inspires them. They may not be interested in the accuracy of details as much as their evocative or provocative effects. Some willfully ignore history, arguing that it has nothing to do with their contemporary work or that their own creativity could be limited by interacting with ideas from others. Nearly half of the student artists I interviewed concerning their work on *The Tooth-Puller* (Chapters Five through Seven below) articulated this belief in interviews and stated that history was not that important to them because they were more interested in finding their own voice in the characters. Without contradicting them, I noted to myself that each of the students expressing this perspective had, in fact, borrowed heavily from my course lectures, materials I had presented them to read or view, and other research they had done to complete their final written project. In each student's performance, I could have pointed out physical traits that were drawn from versions of character walks we had done in class or postures taken from iconographic data that I knew had been part of their research. I could have noted personality traits present in their performances that had been lifted from various sources (some of them, to my mind, inaccurate, yet still influential in the student's portrayal). I saw these things in their work and knew from the outside that they had been far more influenced by historiographic sources than they themselves had noticed or acknowledged. This, of course, is the case for many artists.

Just as history and historiography have had an impact on contemporary Commedia, this dissertation emphasizes ways in which contemporary performance has an impact on history. Commedia is, in a sense, remade with each retelling of the story and each reconstruction of its style. Every artist's contribution, regardless of its aesthetic "value" or its historical "accuracy," becomes a part of the tradition, at least for the audience who views it. Such is the case with classroom lectures, workshop lessons, student experiments, and professional productions alike. Anyone who views these will add that experience to their own (often limited) data set of what "Commedia dell'Arte" is, meaning that each of us who teaches or practices Commedia is part of creating the history and defining the tradition.⁶² Someone doing so without awareness is inadvertently reshaping what historical Commedia dell'Arte means, even as they affirm that historical Commedia dell'Arte is not important to their process.

Bearing these things in mind, the retelling of Commedia's history in this chapter aims to continue the conversation between practice and scholarship with a focus on how "Commedia" and its associates have been defined, used, remembered, appropriated, reformed, expanded, misunderstood, and reinvented all the way up to performances being made now—performances that even today continue to reconstruct what Commedia is.

⁶²See, in Chapter Seven, my discussion of the post-show audience surveys from *The Tooth-Puller* where viewers who previously had no experience or limited preconceptions about Commedia dell'Arte are asked to characterize the style based solely on what they gleaned from this one performance.

2.1 What is “Commedia dell’Arte”?

“If we are to make plays of Commedia dell’Arte, we shall want to make them well,” insists the fictional Placida, a leading actress depicted in Carlo Goldoni’s play *The Comic Theatre*.⁶³ Her sentiment seems obvious enough, but—like Commedia itself—it merits a second look.

This passage from 1750 is often cited as the first appearance of the term “Commedia dell’Arte.”⁶⁴ Though the tradition of Commedia had begun on the Italian peninsula around 200 years earlier, it was previously known by other names: *commedia all’improvviso* (“The Improvised Theatre”), *commedia a soggetto* (“Theatre on a Subject/Theme”), *commedia a braccia* (“Off-the-Cuff Theatre”), *commedia degli zanni* or *commedia zannesca* (“Theatre of the Zanni” or “The Zanni-esque Theatre,” with reference to bumbling servants called “Zanni,” from whom we get the English word “zany”), *commedia di gratiani* (with reference to Graziano, a Dottore character), *commedia mercenaria* (“Mercenary Theatre”), *commedia d’istrioni* (“Theatre of the [Over-]Actors”), “The Theatre of Masks,” or—more widely in Europe—simply, “The Italian Comedy.”⁶⁵ It is first in Goldoni that we find this new

⁶³Placida to Orazio in Act 1, Scene 2 of Carlo Goldoni, *Il teatro comico*, edited by Gianfranco Folena, Letture italiane Einaudi (Mursia: Milano, 1969), 7, translation mine: *Se facciamo le Commedie dell’Arte, vogliamo star bene. Il mondo è annoiato di veder sempre le cose istesse, di sentir sempre le parole medesime, e gli uditori sanno cosa deve dir l’Arlecchino, prima ch’egli apra la bocca.* The text is available at http://www.letteraturaitaliana.net/pdf/Volume_7/t172.pdf.

⁶⁴For example, M. A. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell’Arte 1560-1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 20.

⁶⁵See Henke, *Performance and Literature*, 5-6; Kenneth and Laura Richards, “Commedia dell’arte,” in *A History of Italian Theatre*, eds. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 102; Oreglia, 1; Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes, and Miracles*, 216; Oscar G. Brockett and Franklin J. Hildy, *History of the Theatre*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, 2008), 172; and Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell’Arte*, 25.

and lasting name for the art form: *Commedia dell'Arte*, which is best translated into English as *Theatre of the Professional* (with “Arte” denoting “skill, technique, craft, or profession”). Ironically, Goldoni, whose name is forever linked with the *Commedia*, coined the phrase to describe a style of theatre of which he was critical. No wonder then that conversations today are still confused about what *Commedia* was, where it came from, what it should be, or where it is going.

2.2 Where Commedia Came From

“I sentence you to read all 500 pages of Jacques Derrida’s *On Grammatology*!” my college Shakespeare professor once bellowed at a student who kept inquiring about “origins.” I will avoid incurring that punishment here and note that no simple, clear, persuasive history of the origins of *Commedia dell'Arte* has been written—primarily because the origins of *Commedia dell'Arte* are not simple or clear, although unpersuasive historiography pretends that they are.

As with other Renaissance ideas, *Commedia dell'Arte* is the likely result of (1) ancient Greco-Roman concepts that survived in some vestigial form, (2) Western Medieval developments, (3) cultural exchange with Eastern Mediterranean societies, many of whom also had their own remembrances of the Greco-Roman world, (4) Renaissance “rediscoveries” of the ancients with varying degrees of accuracy, and (5) Early Modern innovations.

The following then have all been identified as possible influences on the development of Commedia dell'Arte in the sixteenth century:⁶⁶

Roman Atellan farce (1st century BCE – 2nd century CE),

Roman mime (1st century BCE – 5th century CE),

Byzantine popular mime performance (5th – 8th centuries),

Medieval jugglers and traveling players (5th – 16th centuries),

Early Modern market and festival culture (12th – 17th centuries),

Court masques (14th – 17th centuries),

Renaissance rediscoveries of Plautus and Terrence (15th century), and

Theatre Academies and *commedia erudita* (14th – 17th centuries).

Unscrupulous histories (the bulk of what one encounters by typing “Commedia dell'Arte” into an Internet search engine) are quick to map one-to-one correspondences between any of these and the Golden Age of Commedia, but no unbroken line can be drawn from, for example, the societies of Atellan farce all the way to the tours of the early *commedianti* some 1500 years later.⁶⁷

Some similarities are striking enough to warrant consideration. For example, the character Il Capitano seems remarkably like Plautus' *miles gloriosus*, which, by the sixteenth century, had been recirculated to such an extent that a learned

⁶⁶See Duchartre, 24-29; Brockett and Hildy, 155; Nicoll, *Masks, Mimes, and Miracles*, 214-15; and Oreglia, 1-3.

⁶⁷Cf. Paul Monaghan, “Aristocratic Archeology: Greco-Roman Roots,” in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 195: “The notion that an ‘unbroken line’ links ancient Roman comic performance forms and the Commedia dell'Arte has been largely discarded in recent decades due to a lack of evidence. But debate continues to rage over the degree to which the ‘improvised’ ancient mimes and Atellan farces, and the ‘fully scripted’ third- and second-century BC comedies of Plautus and Terence, provided the structural and stylistic foundations of the Commedia dell'Arte.”

comedian might easily be struck with inspiration for his own *fanfarone* personage after encountering the subject in a reprint of Plautus or in one of the popular Italian-language stagings of Roman comedies.⁶⁸ In terms of visual aesthetic, the Atellan figures of the masked buffoons Maccus and Dossenus bare such resemblance to early masks of Pulcinella that one might imagine a Renaissance mask-maker drawing inspiration from a recovered depiction of Maccus the same way that Michelangelo designed his figures based on studies of excavated Roman copies of Greek statuary.

On the other hand, perhaps social types did not need to be uncovered from history but could simply be discovered anew in everyday life. Plautus's *miles gloriosus* is a caricature of the Roman troops stationed across the empire—young men whose bodies were trained more than their minds, who believed their homelands to be superior to the districts they were sent to occupy, and whose ego was based on the strength of their unit more than their individual valor. A resident of Southern Italy could easily see the same vapidty, vanity, and bluster among the young Spanish troops that occupied the kingdom of Naples following the primacy of Carlos V, meaning that the concept of Il Capitano does not need Plautus at all.⁶⁹ As for Maccus and Pulcinella: a gluttonous, simpleminded character with a bulbous hooked nose and

⁶⁸See Edwin Duerr, *The Length and Depth of Acting* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1962), 90, on fifteenth-century printings of Plautus and reproductions of his work, especially at Ferrara from 1486 to 1502.

⁶⁹The immediate correspondence of Il Capitano with the military situation throughout the Italian peninsula in the sixteenth century also helps to explain why the character, so famously attested in early sources, disappeared from the active tradition by the late seventeenth century once the political and military situation had changed. Goldoni and Gozzi, for example, do not use him, and later traditions of “the four masks” (seen from Goldoni all the way to Boso) always focus on two masters and two servants, with Il Capitano missing or seen as an occasional add-on. (Fava’s scheme, which seeks to describe the sixteenth-century situation, has the four types: Servants, Ole Men, Lovers, and the Captain.)

a fat belly is hardly unique enough to require a specific historical antecedent. A trip to the local tavern would provide sufficient inspiration.⁷⁰

However, several aspects of early Commedia dell'Arte show concrete connections with the kind of theatrical developments occasioned by Early Modern rediscoveries of ancient theatre practices. In the early fourteenth century, writers in the Italian peninsula began to experiment with new theatrical scripts based on Roman styles. Around 1315, Albertino Mussato penned the first Renaissance tragedy, a Latin text in Senecan form with Christian subject matter.⁷¹ By the end of the last decade of the century, Antonio Laschi penned *Achilles*, the first new tragedy with both classical form and subject matter, and Pier Paolo Vergerio's *Paulus* became the first new Latin comedy of the Renaissance. While it is likely that none of these scripts were performed, they represent the start of a new interest in Greco-Roman artforms and the practice of theatre in general.⁷²

The *commedia erudita* came to fashion over a century later when writers began to use ancient forms and influences to engage in telling their own stories in their own languages and to stage these projects both as an academic experiment and

⁷⁰I unpack these concepts further in Matthew R. Wilson, "Make 'Em Laugh: Common Ground in Comic Characters," *In Plain Sight: TEDxUM Talk*, 31 October 2015, The University of Mississippi, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PZFcl3MfgEQ>. For some practitioners, as discussed in Chapter Six below, it is more important to find these contemporary human types than to study historical practice.

⁷¹The Benedictine nun Hrosvitha of Gandersheim (c.935-c.1000) accomplished a similar project with her *Dulcitus* three and a half centuries earlier without the same recognition.

⁷²Duerr, 89-90; Brockett and Hildy, 155. For a thorough history of Greco-Roman rediscoveries and *erudita* experiments in England, see Antoni Nicholas Zalewski Sadlak, *Harlequin Comes to England: The Early Evidence of the Commedia dell'Arte in England and the Formulation of English Harlequinades and Pantomimes* (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 1999), 44-48.

as a form of current entertainment. (This phenomenon is an example of the “applied theater history” method that underlies my project.⁷³) In 1508, Lodovico Ariosto’s *La Cassaria* (*The Casket*), a vernacular comedy with a Roman plotline but contemporary setting, was performed at court in Ferrara, which, under Duke Ercole d’Este I, had sponsored influential productions of Roman comedies since 1486.⁷⁴ Five years after Ariosto’s new play, Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena’s *La Calandria* combined Roman comic elements with contemporary ones. The first vernacular tragedy of the Renaissance—Giangiorgio Trissino’s *Sofonisba* (1515)—followed Greek rather than Latin conventions, although Seneca’s influence would continue to be seen throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Although more famous for his political treatise *Il Principe* (*The Prince*), Niccolò Machiavelli also contributed to the development of theatre with his 1518 vernacular comedy *La Mandragola* (*The Mandrake*). Machiavelli continued experiments with Roman comedy but also created a new plot based on contemporary social types. The play reveals the complexities of origins and influences that can be seen in sixteenth-century theatre from the Italian city-states. While it grows out of an environment of academic rediscovery and *erudita* experimentation, it is also, in Brockett and Hildy’s words, “similar in tone to a medieval farce.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, it prefigures many aspects of theatre that would become mainstays of emerging

⁷³Hildy, “European Theatre Scene,” in 1:78. See my discussion in Chapter One above.

⁷⁴Duerr, 90.

⁷⁵Brockett and Hildy, 155. See also Pasquale Stoppelli, *La Mandragola: storia e filologia, con l’edizione critica del testo secondo il Laurenziano Redi 129* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2005), 49-51.

Commedia dell'Arte, which is why Faction of Fools chose to stage a Commedia dell'Arte version of the play as our first production in residence at Gallaudet University.⁷⁶

Much like *The Mandrake*, Commedia can be seen as the product of *commedia erudita* comingled with “indigenous comic talent,” as both Kathleen M. Lea and Franklin J. Hildy have pointed out.⁷⁷ Hildy further emphasizes that Commedia grew up, not only alongside new scripts penned in an *erudita* style but also next to new theatre buildings that were themselves a mixture of Greco-Roman inspiration and Renaissance innovation: Ser Maphio’s troupe was in Rome in 1549, a few months after the opening of the San Biagio theatre; by 1567 Commedia companies performed in both a court theatre and a converted home theatre in Mantua; the *Baldracca* was built in Florence in 1576, possibly to entice the *Gelosi* company to remain; and the *Teatro all’antica* was opened in 1590 with a Commedia troupe that was intended to play there in regular residencies.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Most of the characters were easy and obvious translations from Machiavelli to Commedia, the mischievous mother Sostrata being the one exception, which will be discussed further below in relation to *The Tooth-Puller*’s Pasquella. A video trailer, photos, and PR materials of the production are archived at <http://factionoffools.org/mandrake>. The production received mixed reviews, such as Brett Abelman, “*The Mandrake* is Undone Despite being Well-Done,” *DCist*, 21 September 2011, available at http://dcist.com/2011/09/it_should_be_a_recipe.php; and Nelson Pressley, “Faction of Fools’ ‘Mandrake’: More Smart Than Funny,” *The Washington Post*, 25 September 2011, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/faction-of-fools-mandrake-more-smart-than-funny/2011/09/21/gIQAU6INxK_story.html?utm_term=.1c103da67fe1.

⁷⁷Kathleen M. Lea, *Italian Popular Comedy: A Study in the Commedia dell’Arte, 1560-1620, with Special Reference to the English Stage*, Reprint (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), v.1: 228, quoted in Hildy and Wilson, 230.

⁷⁸Hildy and Wilson, 230-232, with reference to Eugene J. Johnson, “The Architecture of Italian Theatres around the Time of William Shakespeare,” *Shakespeare Studies* 33 (2005), 33, 26-28, and 35; Lea, 1:162; and Longman, 60, respectively.

While the emergence of Commedia can be linked to the development of *commedia erudita* and academic experiments with theatre texts and theatre architecture, Tim Fitzpatrick has pointed out that “attempts to find antecedents in the *commedia erudita* or in Roman farces are missing the point that [Commedia’s] peculiarity lies not in its style as a theatrical product, but in the particular theatrical processes which set it apart from such possible antecedents.”⁷⁹ What Fitzpatrick and, later, Robert Henke emphasize is the oral culture of Commedia dell’Arte as an improvised structure, a technique which smacks of Renaissance innovation of medieval theatrical techniques used by traveling players and *jongleurs*. Although Commedia itself is marked in part by professional contracts, most clearly demonstrated in the 25 February 1545 act of association of Ser Maphio’s company,⁸⁰ nevertheless, Commedia dell’Arte—the so-called Theatre of the Professional—did not create professional acting *ex nihilo*.

The Italian peninsula saw other professional actors prior to the clear data on Commedia dell’Arte that emerges in the 1560s: Giangiorgio Alione (1460-1521), Angelo Beolco or “Il Ruzante” (1502-42), Andrea Calmo (1509?-71), and Giglio

⁷⁹Tim Fitzpatrick, *The Relationship of Oral and Literate Performance Processes in the Commedia dell’Arte: Beyond the Improvisation/Memorisation Divide* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 1995), 4.

⁸⁰On 25 February 1545, “a date of almost mythical proportions in *commedia dell’arte*” (Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 37), Ser Maphio (Zanini) and seven other actors from Padua, Venice, and Treviso incorporated themselves as a “*fraternalcompagnia*” (“fraternal company”) through a signed act of association at the *Archivio Notarile* of Padua. In the document, the performers agree to play together from Easter 1545 through Carnival 1546, laying out responsibilities and concessions, including a non-compete clause against independent performance, provisions for sickness, prohibition against gambling among themselves, use of common cash funds, details of a planned journey, agreement to buy a horse for transport, etc. The contract is translated in Oreglia, 140-43.

The annual Commedia dell’Arte Day is held every February 25th, in commemoration of this contract as a figurative “birthday (observed)” of Commedia and of modern professional theatre.

Giancarli (died before 1561).⁸¹ According to Joseph Kennard, these early professional performers form “the connecting link between the learned and the popular theatre,” facilitating “the natural passage from the literary comedy of the classic type to the Commedia dell’Arte.”⁸² Beolco in particular, through his character Il Ruzante, seems to prefigure in the 1520s the kind of material that would make Commedia dell’Arte popular—especially in servant and soldier social types such as the Zanni and Il Capitano.⁸³ Also, his use of vernacular and local dialects lays the ground for the sort of oral performance structure that Fitzpatrick and Henke note is unique in Golden Age Commedia dell’Arte.

Whatever the “origins” or proportions of influences, Commedia dell’Arte, emerging in the late 1530s and fully documented by the late 1560s, combines Greco-Roman comic forms, medieval farce and traveling players, mask culture from both popular festivals and court celebrations, rediscoveries of theatre architecture, and a model of professionalism based on late medieval players as well as Early Modern guilds. It also, from its earliest appearances, displays a Renaissance spirit of travel

⁸¹Oreglia, 3.

⁸²Joseph Spencer Kennard, *Masks and Marionettes* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935), 21.

⁸³*ibid.*, 18-20. See also Angelo Beolco, “Ruzzante Returns from the Wars [*Il Reduce*],” trans. Angela Ingold and Theodore Hoffman, in *The Servant of Two Masters and Other Italian Classics*, edited by Eric Bentley (New York: Applause Theatre Books, 1986), 59-77. Christopher Bayes and Steven Epp, who have found critical and commercial success in current versions of Molière and Goldoni plays, are currently focused on a new four-person (two actors and two musicians) production of Ruzante materials. Bayes notes, “To figure out how that guy’s writing works, it’s so weird, it’s untranslatable. You have to kind of reinvent slang,” adding, “some of it’s math and some of it’s pure chaos” (interview by author, 11 February 2018, The Funny School of Good Acting, Brooklyn, NY).

and exchange, which over the next two centuries would spread Italian theatre conventions throughout Europe.

2.3 The “Golden Age” of Commedia dell’Arte

The Paduan 1545 contract indicates that Commedia was born for the road with clear provisions about how its company members would organize and tour their shows. For the next century, there is ample documentation of major tour stops in Venice, Verona, Padua, Mantua, Ferrara, Bologna, Florence, Turin, Genova, Rome, and Naples.⁸⁴ However, by the 1560s, Commedia companies had also entered all the major countries in Western and Northern Europe, including the famously documented 1568 wedding performance at Bavaria’s Trausnitz Castle discussed in Chapter One.

Already in 1538, we find documentation of the company of “Mutio, *italiano de la Comedia*” touring to Spain and Pierre de la Oultre’s company performing morality plays and farces in France. Three different contracts from Paris detail the 1544 tour of Giovanni-Antonio Roman (Valfeniere) and his troupe comprised of six Italian “*joueurs*” and three French players.⁸⁵ As the decades progressed, trans-national tours were driven by a need to do business in larger population centers like Paris, Madrid, or London or, especially, in less saturated markets such as Lyon, Seville, and Norwich. Tours at a remove from the Papal States may also have been intended to ease pressures from the Roman Catholic Church’s efforts to solidify

⁸⁴Henke, 11.

⁸⁵Katritzky, *The Art of the Commedia*, 37.

power in the face of the Reformation.⁸⁶ Furthermore, tours abroad were attractive because they allowed Italian artists to enjoy cultural capital as foreign taste-makers. As Italian *comici* spread Commedia's conventions throughout Europe, so theatre-makers in other countries offered their own contributions to the Commedia tradition through theatrical appropriation, hybridization, and transmutation.

Commedia dell'Arte arrived on the English stage before Shakespeare did. As early as 1566 (when Shakespeare was two years old) the Lord Chamberlain describes a group of Italian players performing in Norwich. Meanwhile the Revels Accounts describe Italian actors at Windsor and Reading during the 1573-74 season, almost two decades before Shakespeare would begin his professional play writing career. In 1577 Drusiano Martinelli was granted permission to play in England. Another major visit occurred in 1602 when Flaminio Curtesse's troupe played before Queen Elizabeth.⁸⁷ These few records indicate only the most prominent, official visits by Italian troupes, while less notable tours likely occurred undocumented. Louis B. Wright has described how Shakespeare's clown Will Kemp may have had occasion to meet and even trade professional secrets with touring Italian *comici*, one example of

⁸⁶Dario Fo has long argued this, despite the fact that the Catholic Church continued to hold sway in other European cities such as Paris: "*È risaputo che sul finire del XVI secolo, causa l'intensificarsi della repressione messa in atto dalla Controriforma, le compagnie di teatro italiane furono costrette a una vera e propria diaspora: centinaia di comici con le loro famiglie emigrarono in tutta Europa, comprese Germania, Francia e Inghilterra,*" according to Dario Fo, "*Il Messaggio di Dario Fo,*" 2010 *Giornata della Commedia dell'Arte*, available at http://factionoffools.org/includes/Dario_Fo_Italiano.pdf.

⁸⁷Kenneth McKee, foreword to *Scenarios of the Commedia dell'arte: Flaminio Scala's Il Teatro delle favole rappresentative*, trans. and ed. Henry F. Salerno (New York: New York University Press, 1967), xvii.

possible exchange between the Italian Comedy and native English clowning.⁸⁸

Shakespeare's writing is indebted to Italian forms, which he applied and appropriated to his own ends.⁸⁹ For example, in the famous "Seven Ages of Man" speech from *As You Like It*, Shakespeare employs Commedia types for three of the five ages between infancy and oblivion: the "lover," the "soldier," and explicitly "the lean and slippered pantaloon," named after the Venetian Pantalone.⁹⁰

Before Commedia first landed in England, it had already been to Spain. After the 1538 tours of Mutio, records indicate that established Commedia troupes played in Toledo, Seville, Valladolid, and Valencia. Beginning in 1574, Alberto Naselli (Zan Ganassa) played successfully for several years, paving the way for other performers such as Drusiano and Tristano Martinelli and for developments in *Siglo de Oro* theatre.⁹¹ Just as in Italy, Commedia players were influential in the development of theatre buildings, in this case the classic Spanish corral theatres.⁹²

Meanwhile, as French theatre makers were experimenting with new styles of theatre architecture, Commedia dell'Arte companies also arrived in France to fill new

⁸⁸Louis B. Wright, "Will Kemp and the Commedia Dell'Arte," *Modern Language Notes* 41, no. 8 (1926): 516-520.

⁸⁹Leo Salinger, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 77.

⁹⁰Interestingly, the "schoolboy" would also be associated with Commedia in works by Edward Ravenscroft a few decades later (see below). The "justice" could be paired, anachronistically, with Gozzi's depictions of Tartaglia.

⁹¹McKee, xvii; and Nancy L. D'Antuono, "Commedia dell'Arte and the Spanish Golden Age Theatre," in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Ollie Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 239-44.

⁹²Hildy and Wilson, 232, with reference to Melveena McKendrick, *Theatre in Spain, 1490-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 48.

stages. Both Italian itinerants and local French performers were already pioneering their professional theatre models and proto-Commedia styles by the 1530s, and, in the case of Giovanni-Antonio Roman's 1544 tour, Italian and French actors collaborated directly. Through subsequent decades, Italian actors found success in France, circulating among and with French theatre-makers. Records indicate that the star troupe *I Gelosi*, which featured Francesco and Isabella Andreini (Capitano Spavento and Isabella), as well as Flaminio Scala (Flavio), appeared at court on numerous occasions between 1571 and their disassociation in 1604, the year of Isabella Andreini's death. Alberto Naselli (Zan Ganassa)'s troupe had also played Paris in the late 1500s, and the *Accesi* and *Fedeli* both appeared in the early 1600s.⁹³ Major tours by Italian players are referenced in 1613-18, 1621, 1625, 1639, and 1644.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, local French actors such as Robert Guérin (Gros-Guillaume), Hugues Guéru (Gaultier-Garguille), and Henri LeGrand (Turlupin) found acclaim on tour and at home in the Hôtel de Bourgogne performing both tragic roles and comic characters similar to the Commedia style.⁹⁵

In 1639, Giuseppe Bianchi (Capitano Spezzaferro)'s troupe played in Paris with the famous Tiberio Fiorilli (Scaramouche) and the scenic designer Giacomo Torelli. By 1644, Fiorilli and company were well-known visitors to Paris, joined by Domenico Locatelli (Trivellino) in 1653.⁹⁶ During this decade they regularly

⁹³Oreglia, 144.

⁹⁴McKee, xvii.

⁹⁵All three actors used other stage names for their tragic performances. See Brockett and Hildy, 182. More on Guérin's Gros-Guillaume in Chapter Four below.

⁹⁶Oreglia, 144.

appeared at the Petit-Bourbon theatre, and in 1658 Molière's company received permission to share the theatre with the Italian players. A few years later, both companies moved to the Palais-Royal, where they received a government subsidy and shared the performance venue on alternate days.⁹⁷ In 1661 Giuseppe Domenico Biancolelli (Arlecchino), known as "Dominique" to the Parisians, brought the Italian troupe back again to Paris, and, in 1664, the Italian players were honored as *Comédiens du Roi de la troupe italienne*.⁹⁸

The influence of the Commedia players on Molière, the father of French comedy has been amply noted.⁹⁹ The eighteenth-century critic Du Tralage remarked that Molière "held Scaramouch in great esteem for his natural acting. He often went to see him play, and Scaramouch was the model which Molière followed in training the best actors of his troupe."¹⁰⁰ Not everyone, however, was impressed by the relationship Molière had with the Italian actors. A portrait by Vermeulen of Scaramouche bears the French inscription, "He was Molière's master; his own was

⁹⁷Wadsworth, 82.

⁹⁸This favor would last only until they were expelled over controversy in 1697. Nineteen years later, Riccoboni would be called to reestablish the Italian company.

⁹⁹See, for example, Philip A. Wadsworth, *Molière and the Italian Theatrical Tradition* (United States: French Literature Publications Company, 1977), 8, 15, 20-22; Stephen Knapper, "The Master and the Mirror: Scaramouche and Molière," in *The Cambridge Companion to Molière*, ed. David Bradby and Andrew Calder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 39-40, 44-45; J. Ellen Gainor, "Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin)," in *The Norton Anthology of Drama*, shorter edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2010), 510; Duchartre, 99; Paul C. Castagano, *The Early Commedia dell'Arte, 1550-1621: The Mannerist Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 108. Richard Andrews, "Arte Dialogue Structures in the Comedies of Molière," in *The Commedia dell'Arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*, ed. Christopher Cairns (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 152; and Scott, *The Commedia dell'Arte in Paris*, 157, 176-79, 202.

¹⁰⁰Quoted in Duchartre, 23. See also *ibid.*, 247

nature.”¹⁰¹ A harsher critic by the name of Le Boulanger de Chalussay wrote a thinly veiled attack in the 1670 comedy *Élomire ou les Médecins vengés*. (“Élomire” is an anagram for “Molière.”) He writes,

For instance, Elomire desired to perfect himself in the art of making people laugh. How did the sly fellow accomplish this bold plan? He went to see Scaramouche night and morning, and stood, mirror in hand, before the great man; nor was there a posture or grimace that this great pupil of the greatest buffoons did not perform in a hundred different ways.¹⁰²

The frontispiece by Weyen depicts this scene, with comic effect. On the left is “*Scaramouche enseignant*,” with his recognizable black mustache and floppy hat. On the right is “*Élomire étudiant*.” Élomire awkwardly attempts to capture Scaramouche’s countenance, checking his progress in a hand mirror. Meanwhile, Scaramouche brandishes an eel-skin whip with which to correct his student.¹⁰³

Molière’s indebtedness to the Italian *commediants* “is not so much a question of Molière’s utilizing specific sources as it is of his acquiring professional skills and a stockpile of time-tested comic materials.”¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, what Vermeulen lampoons in Molière’s act of appropriation is a microcosm for frequent developments around Europe in the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries: other artists observed the

¹⁰¹Duchartre, 23.

¹⁰²Quoted in Duchartre, 247.

¹⁰³Knapper, 37-39.

¹⁰⁴Wadsworth, ix.

successes of Italian *comici* and modeled aspects of their own theatre into Commedia's likeness, an exchange that would also end up changing the nature of Commedia dell'Arte.

2.4 Carlo Goldoni & Rumors of Commedia's "Death"¹⁰⁵

By the mid-eighteenth-century, Italians like Goldoni lamented that their own native theatre paled in comparison to their European rivals, whose national dramatic traditions had blossomed after, ironically, taking root in soil fertilized by earlier Italian tours. By contrast, the fixed routines of Commedia in Italy appeared to be resistant to innovation. As Goldoni himself mourns,

It was with pain I saw that the nation which was acquainted with the dramatic art before every other in modern times, was deficient in something essential. I could not conceive how Italy had in this respect grown negligent, vulgar, and degenerated. I passionately desired to see my country rise to the level of others, and I vowed to endeavor to contribute to it.¹⁰⁶

For Goldoni, Commedia was part of the problem. In *Il teatro comico*, Goldoni's mouthpiece Placida describes the situation:

¹⁰⁵Some portions of this section are taken, with permission of the Shakespeare Theatre Company, from Matthew R. Wilson, "A Well-Made Comedy: The Legacy of Commedia dell'Arte & Carlo Goldoni," *Asides: A Publication of the Shakespeare Theatre Company* 5 (2011-2012): 14-16.

¹⁰⁶Carlo Goldoni, *Memoirs*, translated by John Black, with an essay by William D. Howells (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co, 1877), 68-69, quoted in Mike Griffin, "Goldoni and Gozzi: Reformers with Separate Agendas," in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 329.

The world is bored with always seeing the same things, with always hearing the same words, and the audiences know what Arlecchino ought to say before he even opens his mouth.¹⁰⁷

To Goldoni, this “professional theatre” had grown stale and commercial, marked by predictable improvisations, hackneyed knockabouts, and ubiquitous scatological humor.

Goldoni responded with a self-described mission of “reform,” a project which he details in his *Memoirs*. In his view, although Commedia had helped to birth the modern theatre, it was high time for the Italian stage to grow up. The Venetian lawyer-turned-playwright planned to lead this painful maturation himself, waging war on three fronts.

First, Goldoni worked with renowned Commedia actors of his day, whose careers had been built on improvisation, but he dared to give them scripts, insisting as Shakespeare had done 150 years earlier that the actors “speak no more than is set down for them.” Detractors claimed that the playwright was squelching creative fire, but literarily-minded audiences agreed that Goldoni’s poetry and crafted narratives were an improvement over improvised texts.

In his scripts, then, Goldoni attempted to shift the theatrical style from “farces” to “comedies of character.” In his view, the farce was built on theatrical conventions—tired gags and worn-out shells of types named Arlecchino, Brighella, the Doctor, and Pantalone. These stock characters had once been unique creations by

¹⁰⁷Goldoni, *Il teatro comico*, 7 (Act 1, Scene 2), translation mine: *Il mondo è annoiato di veder sempre le cose istesse, di sentir sempre le parole medesime, e gli uditori sanno cosa deve dir l'Arlecchino, prima ch'egli apra la bocca.*

innovative actors, but after two centuries of use the old types were verging on cliché. Goldoni hoped that a new “comedy of character”—“with a more noble and interesting comic humor”¹⁰⁸—would revive the theatre with a sense of realism and particularity drawn from modern, middle-class life: merchants, courtiers, waiters, porters, and the like—*real* people presented not as types but as individuals.

The last and most controversial of Goldoni’s reforms was a slap to the very face of Italian culture: he began to require that his actors perform without their venerated leather masks. Commedia—the so-called “Comedy of Masks”—had flourished based on a system of character masks, and the material culture of the leather mask was a source of Italian popular pride, even outside of the realm of theatre. In some cases, the public responded with rage, and Goldoni describes being accosted by people who accused him of killing their culture by daring to present unmasked comic actors.¹⁰⁹ Goldoni, however, saw himself as a harbinger of the future, insisting that modern, realistic theatre required a nuance, a pliability, and a life that the mask would not allow: “The actor must, in our days, possess a soul; and the soul under a mask is like a fire under ashes.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸Goldoni, *Memoirs*, 315.

¹⁰⁹For example, the gentleman at a Bolognese pub railing about “the magnificent author, who has suppressed masks and ruined comedy!” (*ibid.*, 289) or Goldoni’s general summation, “The amateurs of the old comedy, on seeing the rapid progress of the new, declared everywhere that it was unworthy of an Italian to give a blow to a species of comedy in which Italy had attained great distinction, and which no other nation had ever yet been able to imitate. But what made the greatest impression on the discontented was the suppression of masks, which my system appeared to threaten. It was said that these personages had for two centuries been the amusement of Italy, and that it ought not to be deprived of a species of comic diversion which it had created and so well supported” (311).

¹¹⁰*ibid.*, 314.

Ironically, Goldoni is held in some circles as a great patron of Commedia (and his *Servant* would become a focal point of Commedia's "return" in the twentieth century), while others from his lifetime until now contend that he "killed" the Commedia dell'Arte through his reforms.¹¹¹ Rumors of Commedia's death, however, were exaggerated, as the characters would live on in popular culture. Pulcinella, for example, retained a consistent place in the performance culture of southern Italy,¹¹² and the entire host of characters, as well as their theatrical conventions would continue to influence theatrical development in foreign lands. Just as Shakespeare was taken for granted in eighteenth-century England, only to return—larger than ever—to the world stage thanks to critics in Germany, so Commedia dell'Arte, largely ignored on late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italian stages, would emerge again as a vital part of twentieth-century reactions to realism thanks to artists in Russia, France, Ireland, and elsewhere.

2.5 Where Commedia Went¹¹³

Of special interest to this study are the ways in which Commedia dell'Arte circulated, both influencing other modes of theatre and being influenced by them.

¹¹¹Goldoni's rival Carlo Gozzi will be discussed at the end of this chapter and at the beginning of Chapter Three.

¹¹²See Antonio Fava, "Official Recognition of Pulcinella: The One Who Saved the Commedia from Extinction by Securing Its Continuity to the Present Day," in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 108-13, as well as Laura Richards, "*Un Pulcinella Antico e Moderno: Antonio Petito and the Traditions of the Commedia dell'Arte in Nineteenth-Century Naples*," in *The Commedia dell'Arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo*, ed. Christopher Cairns (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 277-95.

¹¹³Portions of this section are taken, with the permission of Routledge, from Matthew R. Wilson, "Speechless Spectacles: Commedia Pantomime in the 18th & 19th Centuries," in *The*

These circulations cannot easily be documented through literary texts because Commedia plays, as such, were not written down. Nevertheless, the diverse types of extant witnesses indicate a passage of what Louise George Clubb has called “theatergrams,” that is portions of tropes, *topoi*, or techniques that pass through the modes of theatrical practice that inspired and took inspiration from each other.¹¹⁴

2.5.1 Appropriations of Commedia dell’Arte in France & England

The Commedia dell’Arte that was born in mid-sixteenth-century tours throughout the Italian peninsula made its way through Western and Northern Europe by the early 1570s. These tours continued throughout the “Golden Age” of Commedia dell’Arte, as Italian players became some of Europe’s most celebrated theatre artists. The tropes and techniques of these Italian players became familiar to local audiences and were appropriated by theatre artists as part of a larger European exchange of theatergrams. From the early decades of transnational Italian tours, then, Commedia materials made their way into the theatrical life of other countries where they were not merely imitated but were also appropriated, amalgamated, and transformed.

In some cases, the resultant appropriation merged with local theatrical traditions. For example, Kemp may have taken aspects of Italian Commedia and incorporated them into the already vibrant tradition of English clowning, and Molière

Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 353-363.

¹¹⁴Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6; see also Robert Henke, “Border Crossing in the *Commedia dell’Arte*,” 19.

blended Commedia concepts with traditional French farce or new forms like the “comedy ballet.” In many cases, the Commedia characters were translated into different, local types, but sometimes the characters retained their traditional names—albeit in Gallicized or Anglicized versions. Molière specifically utilized the Commedia names Pierrot and Scapin (from the Italian Scapino). Meanwhile, around the same time in England, Edward Ravenscroft gave the Franco-Italianate characters an English twist with his play *Scaramouch a Philosopher, Harlequin a School-Boy, Bravo, Merchant, and Magician; A Comedy after the Italian Manner* published in 1677. Ravenscroft was the first English playwright to place these characters in an English setting and to give them additional characteristics such as “philosopher” or “school-boy” beyond their traditional social roles. Aphra Behn’s 1687 *The Emperor of the Moon* employs the Commedia characters Scaramouch and Harlequin as traditional servants but continues to show the evolution of the characters, by way of France, into the farcical dancing jesters that will populate the later stages. The association between Commedia dell’Arte characters and dancing is further seen in the fact that dancing master Thomas Jevon performed the role of Harlequin both in Behn’s farce and in William Mountfort’s c.1686 *The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus*.¹¹⁵ Although the character names remained, the specialties necessary to perform them had begun to change. The traditional roles of Arlecchino and Scaramuccia had been made famous by Italian comic improvisers such as Martinelli and Fiorilli, and the Italian style influenced English and French clowns like Kemp

¹¹⁵Marc Martinez, “The Tricks of Lun: Mimesis and Mimicry in John Rich’s Performance and Conception of Pantomimes,” *Theatre History Studies* 29 (2009): 151.

and Molière; however, in the translation of Arlecchino to Harlequin and Scaramuccia to Scaramouch, French and English traditions in the late 1700s began to dedicate these leading comic roles not to renowned clowns but to virtuosic dancers. The shift from Renaissance Commedia dell'Arte to eighteenth-century pantomime was underway.

2.5.2 History Meets Necessity: The French Rebirth of Pantomime

By the mid-to-late seventeenth century, Commedia's characters were solidified in popular culture. Meanwhile, even legitimate theatres began to see a greater emphasis on music and dance. Operas and operettas became popular, as did the "ballet comedies" that Louis XIV had conscripted from Molière and Jean-Baptiste Lully.¹¹⁶ The stage was set for the creation of a new genre, and pantomime was developed by theatre practitioners who both looked to the past for inspiration and found contemporary solutions to obstacles in their own time.

Ancient inspiration contributed to eighteenth-century pantomime in another example of Hildy's "applied theater history," that is "the use of knowledge gained from the examination of the theater of past eras to create new theater forms."¹¹⁷ The

¹¹⁶The numerous and foundational relationships between opera and Commedia dell'Arte are only touched on in the present study. For further discussion of Commedia and early music/opera, see Anne MacNeil, *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte in the Late Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Nina Treadwell, *Music and Wonder at the Medici Court: The 1589 Interludes for La pellegrina* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2008); Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *The Secular Commedia: Comic Mimesis in Late Eighteenth-Century Music*, edited by Mary Ann Smart and Richard Taruskin (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); and Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of Commedia dell'Arte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

¹¹⁷Hildy, "European Theatre Scene," 1:78.

new theatre form in this case used concepts gleaned from Roman pantomime in which masked performers enacted stories through dance, embodying a variety of characters from history or mythology. The performers did not speak dialogue and often utilized full-face masks without mouth openings. These dance-theatre pieces were set to music, frequently with the pantomimic artist himself wearing bells or cymbals, playing pipes, or stomping his feet. He was also frequently accompanied by other musicians, including solo or choral singers.¹¹⁸ Eighteenth-century historiographers did not fully understand the Roman pantomime, but they nonetheless cited this ancient tradition as the source of their new, contemporary pantomime. In 1728, dancing master John Weaver published *The History of the Mimes and Pantomimes* in which he not only provided “an Historical Account of Several Performers in Dancing” dating back to Roman times, but also added “a List of Modern Entertainments That Have Been Exhibited on the English Stage, either in Imitation of the Ancient Pantomimes, or after the Manner of the Modern Italians.”¹¹⁹

This “modern” phenomenon of the early 1700s, however, was not merely a work of historical fancy. It also solved present-day problems for the French performers who first developed the pantomime style. By 1700, two theatre companies held duopolistic control over all Parisian theatre: the Opéra, which had been formed from Lully’s Royal Academy of Music and Dance, and the Comédie

¹¹⁸Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 370, 378-85; see also Ronald W. Vince, *Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historiographical Handbook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 79.

¹¹⁹John Weaver, *The History of the Mimes and Pantomimes* (London: printed for J. Roberts, and A. Dod Weaver, 1728).

Française, created by a royal decree that joined the late Molière's company with that of the Bourgogne.¹²⁰ Officially, no other performers were permitted to stage theatrical productions; however, enterprising artists—as they always do—found ways to skirt these prohibitions. By exploiting ambiguities in the definition of “theatre,” rival companies staged operas and fairground performers began to specialize in dance theatre that was wordless or sung. In short, pantomime developed in France as a tactic for unlicensed artists to claim that, because they did not utilize spoken dialogue, restrictions covering “theatre” should not apply to them.

While French fairground performers were using the pantomime to subvert the Parisian duopoly, a similar theatrical duopoly existed in London, as two royal patents were held by the companies of William Davenant and Thomas Killigrew. Ironically, by the end of the 1710s pantomime would be so popular in London that it would be regularly staged by London's royal patent companies alongside the legitimate fair that they were licensed to produce.

2.5.3 Pantomime in 18th-century England

The French fairground performers who reinvented the pantomime in Paris brought their balletic brand of Commedia dell'Arte to the “night scenes” they performed in London in the early 1700s. Within a few years, these performances were being copied by the dancing masters at the two London patent companies.¹²¹

¹²⁰Brockett and Hildy, 195.

¹²¹Laurence Senelick, “pantomime, English,” in *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 837.

Weaver's *The Cheats; or, The Tavern Bilkers* appropriated the Franco-Italianate Commedia characters and the fairground style to an English setting. In his own words the piece was, "The first Entertainment that appeared on the English Stage, where the Representation and Story was carried on by Dancing, Action and Motion only, was performed in Grotesque Characters, after the manner of the Modern Italians, such as Harlequin, Scaramouch, &c."¹²²

As the pantomime developed in England, it exploited the dynamic opposites between high art and low comedy. On 24 January 1717, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, John Rich staged his *Amadis; or the Loves of Harlequin and Columbine*, which was the first known play to combine "the mythological, operatic part with the grotesque, mute harlequinade."¹²³ The "mythological part" had been present in the Roman pantomimes of old and was also a common feature of Early Modern court masques. The comedic counterpoint was provided by the Commedia dell'Arte characters whose unassuming knockabouts were juxtaposed with high classicism. Weaver was conscious of this juxtaposition in his *The Loves of Mars and Venus*, which he later claimed was "an Attempt in Imitation of the ancient Pantomimes, and the first of that kind that has appeared since the Time of the Roman Empire."¹²⁴

As the pantomime continued to develop in the early 1700s, the dancing Commedia characters found themselves further carried away into mythological, classical, and romantic plotlines. At Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields (and, later,

¹²²Weaver.

¹²³Martinez, 157

¹²⁴Weaver.

Covent Garden), these epic stories were told through the aid of the latest scenic technology. Scenic spectacle had previously been utilized to significant effect by Commedia troupes in Italy and France,¹²⁵ but the pretense of magic and mythology allowed for even more spectacular effects in the eighteenth century. The 1723-24 season saw rival productions of Commedia-based pantomime *Faust* stories, with Harlequin himself cast in the role of Dr. Faustus, his now-familiar diamond costume still visible underneath the scholar's robe. Both productions took advantage of numerous, impressive scene changes involving magical forests, ancient palaces, the mouth of hell, and a "Poetical Heaven." Meanwhile, the Commedia characters Harlequin, Scaramouch, Punch, and Pierrot mixed with a cast that included "heathen deities," angels, demons, and even a Dragon.

At Lincoln's Inn Fields, the title character in *Harlequin Doctor Faustus* was played by Company Manager John Rich. Rich's Harlequin character became known as "Lun," evidence that the term "Harlequin" had begun to describe a character type rather than the name of the character himself. Rich's antics were later eulogized by David Garrick:

When Lun appear'd, with matchless art and whim,
He gave pow'r of speech to ev'ry limb;
Tho mask'd and mute, convey'd his quick intent,
And told in frolic gestures all he meant.¹²⁶

¹²⁵Virginia Scott, "*Junon descend du Ciel sur un Poulet d'Inde*: Spectacle in the Commedia dell'Arte in Paris in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Commedia dell'Arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 180.

¹²⁶Harry William Pedicord and Frederick Louis Bergmann, eds., *The Plays of David Garrick, Vol. 1* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1980), 405.

Despite Garrick's affection for Rich, he was at best ambivalent toward pantomime, as is clear from his own "anti-pantomime" *Harlequin's Invasion; Or, A Christmas Gambol*, which premiered at Drury Lane in 1759.¹²⁷ By the end of the eighteenth century, English critics complained that the artistry seen in Rich's early pantomimes had been replaced entirely by scenic spectacle and senseless choral numbers. The epic or dramatic counterpoint present in the earliest English pantomimes had been lost, and the subject matters moved from mythology and classicism to adventure and fairytale.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, pantomime in England continued to lose touch with its Commedia roots, as the white-faced Clown took center stage, relegating Harlequin, Columbine, and Pantaloon to supporting roles. The most famous Clown and the "father of modern clowning" was Joseph Grimaldi, the star performer in Thomas Dibdin's *Harlequin and Mother Goose; Or, the Golden Egg*, which premiered at Drury Lane in 1806 and affirmed a new trajectory for pantomime away from its Commedia origins and toward the holiday frolics that would be reborn in the twentieth-century British "panto."¹²⁸

¹²⁷John O'Brien, *Harlequin Britain: Pantomime and Entertainment, 1690-1760* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 219-31; and Brent Douglas Chesley, *The Faces of Harlequin in Eighteenth-Century English Pantomime* (Ph.D. diss, University of Notre Dame, 1987), 83-134.

¹²⁸Andrew McConnell Stott, *The Pantomime Life of Joseph Grimaldi* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2009), xv, 325-43.

2.5.4 Commedia Crosses the Ocean

One cannot say for sure when Harlequin arrived in America; however, Eola Willis's expansive *The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century* contains the earliest documentation. Records indicate that two Commedia-esque productions—an afterpiece entitled *The Dance of the Two Pierrots* and a full-length play called *The Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch*—were played in Charleston in February of 1735.¹²⁹ Interestingly, George Odell's exhaustive *Annals of the New York Stage* identifies one of the earliest productions in New York City as *The Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch, Or The Spaniard Trick'd*. This piece, according to an advertisement in *New York Weekly Journal*, played on Greenwich Street at Holt's Long Room 12 February 1739, just four years after the similarly titled Harlequinade was documented down south in Charleston. More tantalizing still is the evidence, cited by both Willis and Odell, that Mr. Holt—proprietor of the New York City venue—had moved to New York from Charleston. It seems likely the Holt was familiar with the Charleston production of 1735 and that the New York City performance in 1739 was a remount of the same play or, at least, a reinvention inspired by it.¹³⁰

¹²⁹Eola Willis, *The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century* (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1933. Reissued, 1968), 16. See also George C.D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), available through North American Theatre Online [online database], 1:19.

¹³⁰Odell, 1:21, follows Willis in asserting that Holt had been in Charleston and in speculating that the piece performed in New York may have been the same one or at least inspired by the version seen in Charleston four years earlier. Adding additional intrigue: The Folger Shakespeare Library holds a first edition octavo of G. Downing, *The Tricks of Harlequin: Or, the Spaniard Outwitted. A Pantomime Entertainment: As It Is Perform'd by Mr. Rivers's Company of Comedians. Being the Comic Part ... of Perseus and Andromeda* (Derby: printed in the year, 1739), which at least represents an English pantomime similar to the one(s) performed in Charleston and New York and may in fact be the same piece.

However, while the native English pantomime would rule the British stage (and box office) for much of the eighteenth century, there is little evidence that native American pantomimes received as much success. The 1739 notice for *The Adventures of Harlequin and Scaramouch, Or The Spaniard Trick'd* at Holt's Long Room in New York may provide a clue as to why. According to the advertisement in the *New York Weekly Journal*, the play boasted perspective scenery of "the most noted Cities and remarkable Places both of Europe and America."¹³¹ Perspective scenery and high-tech "transformations" were the audience-pleasing special effects of the eighteenth century. While Italian court theatres utilized high-tech stage machinery since the early 1600s, professional theatres in London were not outfitted for spectacular scene changes until after the Restoration. This theatre technology did not arrive in the colonies for another century or more. Although the advertisement boasts of impressive perspective scenery, the production values were likely quite modest when compared to contemporaneous productions in England.

Brooks McNamara, in *The American Playhouse in the Eighteenth Century*, devotes specific attention to the venue known as "Holt's Long Room," which he concludes was simply "the long room of the residence of Stephen De Lancey."¹³² The venue had previously been advertised as a ballroom for dances.¹³³ What then would be the technical support for a theatrical production? McNamara concludes,

¹³¹The advertisement is reprinted in Odell, *Vol. 1*.

¹³²Brooks McNamara, *The American Playhouse in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 7.

¹³³Odell, 1:21.

“At best, it is likely that the room was adapted to include a raised, curtained stage with a simple backdrop and wings.”¹³⁴ Not until the 1760s, with theatres such as Chapel Street and John Street in New York and Southwark Theatre in Philadelphia, were American playhouses fitted with the English “groove system” for rapid scene shifts that could match the scale of what London audiences had enjoyed decades earlier.¹³⁵

By 1795, Baltimore was able to produce a spectacle show comparable to the tradition of the early English pantomimes. *Harlequin’s Invasion; or the Taylor without a Head*¹³⁶ was advertised with reveals and transformations of set pieces and promised to feature the “much admired dying and Skeleton Scenes” from a previous production of *Harlequin Skeleton*.¹³⁷ That same year, Philadelphia’s Chestnut Street Theatre hosted what appears to be the American premiere of the spectacular *Harlequin Doctor Faustus*, seventy-two years after the first London pantomime by this title.¹³⁸

¹³⁴McNamara, 7.

¹³⁵*ibid.*, 50-53.

¹³⁶Possibly a remount or adaptation of a piece that David Garrick had made famous in England thirty-six years earlier. See Chesley, 83-134.

¹³⁷Susan L. Porter, *With an Air of Debonair: Musical Theatre in America 1785-1815* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 147.

¹³⁸The performance is recorded in John R. Wolcott, *American Theatre Companies, 1749-1887* (Greenwood Press, New York, NY, 1986), available through North American Theatre Online [online database], 186. This is the earliest documentation I have found of the play being performed in America. The two productions mentioned above premiered in London in 1723 and 1724. In 1766, a third version was created in England by Samuel Arnold (Porter, 547 n.37). The American production, performed by Wignell and company at Chestnut Street in 1795, may have been a remount or an adaptation of one of these three English versions.

When American stage technology finally caught up with the spectacle harlequinade, pantomimes began to leave Harlequin behind. The 1787 premiere of *Don Juan* in London launched the epoch of the “grand pantomime,” which focused on heroic or fairytale themes rather than Commedia dell’Arte characters.¹³⁹ The so-called “comic pantomimes” centering upon Harlequin would remain popular in England until the late nineteenth-century, but interest in full-length Harlequin plays began to wane in American by the early 1800s.¹⁴⁰ There had been few successful attempts to create a full-length, “American” harlequinade.¹⁴¹ Instead, Harlequin was routinely confined to entr’actes, afterpieces, and circus entertainment.¹⁴²

One of America’s most famous Harlequins of this ilk also claimed to be its first, native professional actor. In 1785, John Durang danced his way into Lewis

¹³⁹Porter, 42.

¹⁴⁰Senelick, “pantomime, English,” 838, describes the late nineteenth-century dusk of harlequinades in the English panto. Porter, 42, notes their decline in America around the turn of the nineteenth century.

¹⁴¹The 1739 New York production advertised a setting of “the most noted Cities and remarkable Places both of Europe and America” in an attempt to assimilate the European form to a New World setting. Similarly, a 12 November 1799 production by the Old American Company in Hartford included an afterpiece “Pantomime of Music, Dialogue and Song” entitled *Harlequin in Harford, or, the Touchstone of Truth*, which was advertised as including a view of Hartford State House and a view of the city of Hartford “taken on the water near William’s wharf” (Porter, 79). This production featured John Durang as Scaramouch to Hallam’s Touchstone (Lynn Matluck Brooks, “Pantomimes, Harlequinades, and Melodramas,” *York County Heritage Trust*, <http://yorkheritage.org/johndurang/?p=76>). Nevertheless, there is scant evidence of American companies producing full-length, native Harlequinades along the lines of what Weaver and Rich began to do in London as early as 1716. The work of George L. Fox provides a notable exception, which I will discuss below.

¹⁴²Porter, 42. Most of the major harlequinades of the late 1700 and early 1800 were at circuses like Lailson’s New Circus on Greenwich Street in 1798 (Odell, *Vol. 2*, 32), Kotzebue’s circus (*ibid.*, 89-91), and Rickett’s Circus, which featured the famous American Harlequin John Durang. For the development of the clown and harlequinade aspects of later nineteenth-century circuses, see Mark Cosdon, *The Hanlon Brothers: From Daredevil Acrobatics to Spectacle Pantomime, 1833-1931* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 68.

Hallam, Jr.'s Old American Company, where he played supporting roles but also made a name for himself through dances and Harlequinades. His fame became so great that his entr'acte performances were advertised alongside the legitimate headlining titles. At first, Durang played Scaramouch to Hallam's Harlequin in the company's pantomimes, but he was later hired as the chief Harlequin for Rickett's Circus on tour through the eastern United States and Canada, a trip which he describes with panache in his *Memoirs*.¹⁴³ Durang's circus Harlequinades featured dances, acrobatics, slapstick, and equestrian routines—common fare for an early nineteenth-century Harlequin. The character had evolved since Martinelli's Arlecchino, and he was known for his iconic white hat, black mask, colorful diamond-patterned jumpsuit, and magic bat, all of which are evident in Durang's watercolor self-portrait of himself in the Harlequin role.

As in England, Harlequin and his compatriots continued to be re-appropriated in the nineteenth century. The white-faced Clown, popularized by Grimaldi, also appeared on American stages, especially in Christmas-time fairytales. The most famous American clown was George "Laff" Fox, whose 1867 *Humpty Dumpty* became the first pantomime to have "a full evening to itself" on the New York stage.¹⁴⁴ In evocative photos and line drawings from the production, Fox's white-

¹⁴³This period comprises a full section of Durang's three-part *Memoir*, with tales of adventure and misadventure with the equestrian troupe and the soldiers they frequently encountered. See John Durang, *The Memoir of John Durang: American Actor 1785-1816*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Pittsburg: Published for the Historical Society of York County and for the American Society for Theatre Research by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1966).

¹⁴⁴Laurence Senelick, *The Age & Stage of George L. Fox, 1825-1877* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1999), 138.

faced Clown outwits the aged Pantaloon while Harlequin and Columbine dance romantically.

The rising popularity of white-faced Clowns corresponds also to the period of blackface minstrel performers, and, not surprisingly, the Harlequin character—depicted with a black mask since his birth as Arlecchino in the late sixteenth century—found his way into a few minstrel shows in the US and England. Even prior to the advent of the American minstrel show, two British pantomimes, *Harlequin Mungo; or Peep into the Tower* (1789) and *Furibond, or Harlequin Negro* (1807) featured an enslaved black man who was magically transformed into a Harlequin and participated in the customary slapstick, chase sequences, and eventual happy endings on his way to marrying Columbine. An 1819 lithograph entitled “Four and Twenty Hobby Horses” includes a figure whose dress and “magic bat” are pure Harlequin but whose face appears not to be masked, but rather blacked, with exaggerated eyes and lips resembling a caricatured blackface performer. In 1836, British performers imported the now-famous American character Jim Crow and fused him with the Harlequinade tradition in *Cowardy, Cowardy, Custard; or Harlequin Jim Crow and the Magic Mustard Pot*.¹⁴⁵

While minstrel shows and fairytale clowning are at a far remove from Renaissance Commedia dell’Arte, they nevertheless became part of the cultural field in which Commedia dell’Arte characters existed in the nineteenth century. In George

¹⁴⁵Henry Louis Gates, *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the “Racial” Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 53-60; see also O’Brien, 117-37.

Fox's *Humpty Dumpty*, Harlequin traveled via railroad throughout the American Old West, a great distance from Arlecchino's Parisian origins.

2.6 "Neo-Commedia dell'Arte": Reconstruction, Continuation, or Reinvention?

An understanding of the history of pantomime helps to explain the twentieth-century revival movements that Giulia Filacanapa has dubbed "Neo-Commedia dell'Arte."¹⁴⁶ Although historians and practitioners of the 1900s described their approaches with reference to their Renaissance forebears, the work they produced was heavily influenced by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pantomime. For example, Edward Gordon Craig is remembered for helping to bring the Commedia aesthetic back to the modern stage, and yet Craig's landmark *The Mask of Love* (1901) employed "a chorus of Pierrots as unwilling marionettes manipulated by another chorus of Harlequins"¹⁴⁷ in a way that bears little relationship to Scala but makes sense as a modernist continuation of the poetic pantomime aesthetic. Similarly, the Harlequins popularized by Picasso and the Pierrots made famous by Meyerhold or the French film *Les Enfants du Paradis* (1945) all represent a Commedia dell'Arte style that is more nineteenth- than sixteenth-century.

¹⁴⁶A phrase I first heard from Giulia Filacanapa, "Giovanni Poli's Neo Commedia dell'Arte: An Example of Renaissance *La commedia des Zanni*," a paper presented at *Passing on the Commedia dell'Arte Tradition*, 18 February 2012, at Glendon College, Toronto.

¹⁴⁷James Fisher, "Commedia Iconography in the Theatrical Art of Edward Gordon Craig," in *The Commedia dell'Arte from the Renaissance to Dario Fo* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 255.

The History of the Harlequinade (1915) was the title given to the English translation of Maurice Sand's *Masques et bouffons* (1860). The work was one of the first major histories of Commedia dell'Arte and certainly one of the first to appear in English. It is no mistake that the English edition was sold as a history not of "Commedia dell'Arte" but rather of "Harlequinades." In many respects, Sand's book—and most early twentieth-century historiography of Commedia—claimed to understand the Renaissance history but retained significant assumptions drawn from the familiar pantomime aesthetic. Meanwhile, twentieth-century neo-Commedia dell'Arte performance was more intent on appropriating inspiration from the Commedia tradition than on reconstructing its "original practices."

Just as Commedia spawned a fad of porcelain figures in the eighteenth century, so its iconography flourished again in early twentieth-century popular imagination as modernist artists revolted against the "unnecessary truths" of realism.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the Harlequins painted by Picasso more closely resembled Durang's nineteenth-century self-portraits than the *Recueil Fossard* images of early Arlecchino. Meyerhold first learned of Pierrot through the circus, and Craig fell in love with Commedia thanks to seaside open-air performers.¹⁴⁹ Even as Craig revitalized the historical study of Commedia with his journal *The Mask*, his own productions bore little resemblance to those of early *comici*.

¹⁴⁸Russian symbolist poet Valery Bryusov, quoted in C. Moody, "Vsevolod Meyerhold and the 'Commedia dell'arte'," *Modern Language Review* 73, no. 4 (Oct 1978): 859. On other appropriations of Commedia as response to realism, see Martin Burgess Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell'Arte and the Modern Imagination* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 7.

¹⁴⁹With an English music hall background similar to today's Barry Grantham, Craig said that such variety performers were "the sole remaining link connecting us with that stupendous achievement of the sixteenth century known as the Commedia dell'Arte," quoted in Fisher, 254.

What Meyerhold and Craig saw in Commedia was a chance to revitalize their own art by challenging realism through aesthetics that pre-date realism. Meyerhold describes,

The public comes to the theatre to see the art of man, but what art is there in walking about the stage as oneself? The public expects invention, playacting and skill. But what it gets is either life or slavish imitation of life. Surely the art of man on the stage consists of shedding all traces of environment, carefully choosing a mask, donning a decorative costume, and showing off one's brilliant tricks to the public—now as a dancer, now as the intrigant at some masquerade, now as the fool of old Italian comedy, now as a juggler.¹⁵⁰

Having trained under Stanislavski, Meyerhold found a freshness in dusty old works of Commedia, saying “If you examine the dog-eared pages of old scenarios such as Flaminio Scala’s anthology, you will discover the magical power of the mask.”¹⁵¹

Despite his affinity for the masks of Commedia, Meyerhold was also influenced by Futurism and the burgeoning emphasis on the director’s conceptual voice. He insisted that his plays must speak to the present moment:

A play is simply the excuse for the revelation of its theme on the level at which that revelation may appear vital today.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰Meyerhold’s 1912 essay “The Fairground Booth,” quoted in Green & Swan, 79.

¹⁵¹*ibid.*, 87.

¹⁵²Quoted in Oscar G. Brockett and Robert Findlay, *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama since the Late Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1991), 182.

Substitute “Commedia dell’Arte” for “a play,” and the above sentence could serve as a mission statement for most artists actively making Commedia today.

Whether or not twentieth-century theatre makers intended to reconstruct “authentic” Commedia dell’Arte, their work with its tradition would shape the way current practitioners and teachers understand what Commedia is. Meyerhold’s pupil Yevgeny Vakhtangov blended Stanislavski’s “inner belief” and Meyerhold’s heightened style into the concept of “theatrical belief.” He also agreed that a director is charged to “contemporize” the script by funneling it through the current time and the current venue to speak directly to the specific audience before it.¹⁵³ In this way, Vakhtangov would agree with the “spirit” of the original *commedianti* whose improvisations tailored each performance to each specific audience, venue, town, and moment. Nevertheless, Vakhtangov’s influential production of Commedia material diverged significantly from the “form” or the original practices.

The 1922 production of Gozzi’s *Turandot* has been hailed as a “true masterpiece” and “a memorial to Vakhtangov’s genius,” and, in 1962, on the fortieth anniversary of his death, it was recreated by the theatre that now bears his name.¹⁵⁴ Though the production twice wowed twentieth-century audiences, its cubist set by Nivinsky, blend of traditional and contemporary costumes, and modernist aesthetic created a far different impression from what Gozzi’s original production might have. Nevertheless, it followed the spirit of Gozzi’s own Commedia work, which was itself a cultural hybrid.

¹⁵³Brocket and Findlay, 188.

¹⁵⁴*ibid.*, 190-91.

A few decades later, a play by Gozzi's nemesis Goldoni was restaged by Piccolo Teatro di Milano in a production that has been continuously mounted and toured worldwide ever since. Although Goldoni used the term "*commedia dell'arte*" critically and had been accused of killing Commedia through his reforms, twentieth-century theatre thoroughly fused Goldoni into the core of the tradition. Giorgio Strehler's production of *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters* is unparalleled in its influence on current Commedia practice, in part because so much that has become accepted as "traditional" Commedia was, in fact, invented for this production.¹⁵⁵ The play premiere in 1947, the same year that Strehler and Paolo Grassi co-founded Piccolo Teatro as both a theatre and a training center. Piccolo Teatro became the first *teatro stabile* or government-subsidized company in Italy, but in 1968 Strehler, unwilling to continue working in establishment theatre, resigned to continue a prolific career in political and Brechtian theatre across Europe.¹⁵⁶ This comingling of activism, Brechtian theory, and Commedia style is common in the twentieth century and also seen heavily in the works of Noble Prize-winner Dario Fo, his partner Franca Rina, and groups like the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

Strehler's *Servant*, however, was not overtly political, nor was it as acutely marked by the sorts of modernist aesthetics seen in Craig, Meyerhold, or

¹⁵⁵A point emphasized by Giangiacomo Colli, "Commedia dell'Arte," a seminar given at the Summer Faculty Symposium, 20 June 2017, at Accademia dell'Arte, Arezzo, Italy; *idem*, interview by author, 21 June 2017, Arezzo; and Fabio Mangolini, interview by author, 20 June 2017, Arezzo. Colli's father (director Giacomo Colli) taught Ferruccio Soleri, the actor who succeeded Marcello Moretti in the title role of this production.

¹⁵⁶Brockett and Findlay, 340, 427, 454, and 463. See also Joseph Farrell, "Actors, Authors and Directors," in *A History of Italian Theatre*, ed. Joseph Farrell and Paolo Puppa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 274.

Vakhtangov's work. It was just "traditional" enough to be seen as "authentic" and "historical," even though its practices were made up by the company with inspiration drawn here and there from sources like Tristano Martinelli's 1601 *Compositions de rhétorique*.

The Piccolo Teatro training center would unite actor Marcello Moretti, mask-maker Amleto Sartori, and a young Jacques Lecoq as movement instructor, igniting the driving forces behind Commedia performance, Commedia design, and Commedia pedagogy for the remainder of the twentieth century. Sartori, a sculptor by trade, essentially "invented" the modern leather Commedia mask, especially the iconic style associated with Arlecchino. Ironically, Arlecchino does not even exist in Goldoni's play; Strehler and company changed the name of the title character from Sacchi's own "Truffaldino" to the more familiar "Arlecchino" that dominated popular culture from the eighteenth to early twentieth centuries.¹⁵⁷

Giangiaco Colli credits Moretti with creating the modern conception of Arlecchino including not only how he moves and speaks but also the wide cat-like eyeholes in Sartori's mask, which Colli says Moretti himself cut out because he did not like the way Sartori's design limited his peripheral vision. When Moretti died, his understudy Ferruccio Soleri took over the part, building on what Moretti had

¹⁵⁷The success of the play, with its new title "*Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*" and its new main character, further reinforced the primacy of Arlecchino in the twentieth century in a way that Antonio Fava has argued is an error. He once complained to me about an Italian academic imprint of Goldoni's works that included the original Truffaldino in the list of characters but retained Strehler's title. Pointing at the script, he said to me, "Arlecchino appears nowhere. Except on the cover, in order to sell the book." Fava maintains that Commedia is inherently an ensemble system, not a star vehicle, and that Arlecchino is just one of many possible names for servants: "Arlecchino by himself is not the Commedia, and the Commedia can do without Arlecchino" (Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte*, 46-47). It should of course be noted that Fava's chief attachment is to Pulcinella, a Southern rival for the Northern Arlecchino's attention.

developed but adding his own flair. In 2010, after fifty years playing Arlecchino, Soleri was listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest run of performances in the same role at the same theatre.¹⁵⁸ He had also by then taught the role to others, demanding exacting precision down to how the feet should be set and the angle of the fingers.¹⁵⁹ What started as innovation had become canon.

Sartori created a new mask for Soleri, who was more acrobatic in the role than Moretti had been, emphasizing the viewpoint that a mask-maker should work with an actor on creation of a mask and that an actor should work with the mask in creation of the character.¹⁶⁰ Original masks for Moretti (“Arlecchino Gatto” no. 64) and Soleri (no. 105) are on display at *Il Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori*, where a history of late twentieth-century Commedia can be read in the leather artifacts on display. The elder Sartori and eventually his son Donato would provide masks for a variety of important Commedia productions: Brighella for 1951 productions by Lecoq at Théâtre Marigny in Paris; Pulcinella masks for a 1957 production by the American Mime Theatre and for Eduard De Filippo’s 1958 *Pulcinella in cerca di fortuna* at Napoli Piccolo Teatro; Zan Mazzone for a 1959 San Francisco Mime Troupe production; Zani no. 128 for Carlo Mazzone-Clementi’s *I tre*

¹⁵⁸Terry Glasser describes seeing Soleri in the role in the early 2000s: “I remember the Arlecchino was boisterous and full of life and like a teenager, and the whole production was fused with this radiance, and it came time for the curtain call” and the audience screamed for him to not take the mask off, “and he had totally white hair, and it was very clear that he was elderly, and there was this moment of stunned silence, ‘How could this be?’ and then the place just erupted in mass adulation” (interview by author, 22 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy).

¹⁵⁹Scott McGehee, interview by author, 22 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy, ascribed to Michele Bottini this view of Soleri’s pedagogy.

¹⁶⁰This notion, deriving from Sartori and Lecoq and subsequently championed by Mangolini and others, will be discussed further in Chapter Six below, as will competing ideas.

cornutti in New York City in 1965, a 1980 “Arlecchino Gatto” for Dario Fo, and two 1982 Capitano masks inspired by the engravings of Jacques Callot (nos. C.2 Capitano Mala Gamba and C.1 Capitano Coccodrillo), among others.

It is no surprise that Commedia continues to inspire, that its wide and diverse tree branches continue to grow. We will return to the history and future of Commedia in Chapter Seven below. For now, this quick survey of Commedia’s past highlights the importance, when questioning what is “original,” “authentic,” or “historical” in Commedia dell’Arte, of asking, “Original to whom?”, “Authentic where?”, and “Historical when?” It is not enough to say, “Arlecchino looked like this or walked like that,” for he adopted a variety of looks and dispositions on his travels around Italy and France, throughout Europe and the United Kingdom, as far as the American Old West, the Soviet Union, and on around the world. Principles of exchange, adaptation, and improvisation continue to inform the Commedia tradition including contemporary assumptions about what Commedia dell’Arte was, is, and can be.

Chapter 3: Starting from the Scenario

3.1 “Scripts” for Commedia

The past few decades have seen an emergence of theatrical productions “in the style of Commedia dell’Arte,” that is, productions of scripts that were not born squarely within the Commedia tradition but that the director feels will somehow benefit from receiving a Commedia twist. A notable example is the famous 1976 American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T.) production of *The Taming of the Shrew* directed by William Ball, the PBS television broadcast of which garnered Ball a Television Critics Circle nomination for best director of the year.¹⁶¹ This production capitalized on Shakespeare’s greedy old men, faux pedants, and bumbling servants and translated them into their corresponding Commedia dell’Arte types. It also made use of a bare, wooden plank as a stage and a chorus of Pulcinella characters observing, chattering, and aiding in transitions—part Italianate Greek chorus and part visible stage crew.¹⁶² This Pulcinella chorus might recall Craig’s 1901 *The Mask of Love*, with its “a chorus of Pierrots” and “chorus of Harlequins.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹See Ball’s bio and his thoughts on directing in William Ball, *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing* (Hollywood: Drama Publishers, 1984). The IMDB page describes this PBS production as, “San Francisco’s A.C.T. company presents Shakespeare’s classic take with a Commedia dell’Arte flair, as if it were an inn yard performance by a traveling company.” See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0125534/reference>.

¹⁶²Although the characters are recognizable from Pulcinella’s iconic black mask, wrinkled face, baggy white dress, and tall sugar-loaf hat or “*coppolone*,” nevertheless, in the PBS special the characters are not credited as “Pulcinella” but simple as “clown.”

¹⁶³I utilize a similar Pulcinella chorus in Matthew R. Wilson, *A Commedia Christmas Carol* (New York: Playscripts, Inc., 2013). For Craig’s production, see my discussion in Chapter Two, as well as Fisher, 255.

Although the masked characters in Ball's *Shrew* were clearly tied to characters that appear in Commedia historiography, the unmasked Lovers (Fred Olster as Katherina and Marc Singer as Petruchio) partake in a variety of styles ranging from classical love to soap opera romance to grudge matches from the World Wrestling Federation as Petruchio spins Kate in a "helicopter" move and uses the ropes of the stage as turnbuckles throughout the verbal sparring of their first scene together.¹⁶⁴

This phenomenon of performing other material "in the style of Commedia dell'Arte," though prevalent in the late twentieth century, is not a recent invention. We have seen in Chapter Two how Commedia was appropriated into creations of new French and English styles in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. Similarly, while Commedia was sometimes used to create new theatre, there are also historical examples of other forms of theatre being appropriated into a Commedia dell'Arte style. What contemporary marketing renders as "in the style of Commedia dell'Arte" late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century publishers hailed as "in Grotesque

¹⁶⁴A bootleg video of this scene is currently available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdqOHvcD-VU>. Of interest in my inquiry, the posting by "marianne mueller" on Nov 23, 2008 identifies the video as "Comedia del'Arte interpretation(sp?) - Italian - 16th century - of 'The Taming of the Shrew' by Shakespeare." This "marianne mueller" currently has 103 videos posted to her channel, all of which pertain to gardening or seem to be home movies except for a handful of clips relating to this production, Bill Ball, and the musical *Kiss Me, Kate*. Nothing about the channel indicates a further affinity with Shakespeare or Commedia beyond these two productions. In her notes on the video, she suggests, "I advise inviting junior high school students who are somewhat intelligent to join you in watching it, go ahead, ask the neighbor kid or your cousin or whoever, it will be a great influence on their life and fun." As of this writing, the video has 242,997 views, all courtesy of the personal YouTube channel of a non-specialist who did not consider it important to find out the proper spelling of "Commedia dell'Arte" (note her own "(sp?)" disclaimer above) but who is nevertheless part of the cultural field promulgating and recreating what Commedia is today.

Characters” or “after the Italian manner.”¹⁶⁵ Similarly, and around the same time, Carlo Gozzi sought to defend the existence of traditional Commedia in its homeland by using the form to tell stories borrowed from Chinese folklore.

Gozzi is paradoxical in several respects. Not only did he defend the Italian style by using it to stage plots and characters from other cultures, he also defended actor improvisation through a public campaign that led to his own projects in writing dialogue as playwright. Gozzi was one of the strong voices opposed to Goldoni’s project of writing scripted dialogue for “real” characters, and he crafted the scenario of *The Love of Three Oranges* as a polemic against Goldoni to be improvised by the famed actor Antonio Sacchi (Truffaldino) and company. Soon, however, Gozzi was penning dialogue himself while still positioning himself as a defender of the “authentic” Commedia dell’Arte.¹⁶⁶

Is there such a thing as “authentic” Commedia dell’Arte, and if so what delimits it? How Italian must “the Italian Comedy” be? What if the so-called *commedia all’improvviso* tackles scripted material? For Antonio Fava, “improvisation” is one of the four necessary and sufficient conditions for a work of theatre to be “Commedia dell’Arte;”¹⁶⁷ however, he primarily emphasizes

¹⁶⁵See the subtitles of most plays by John Rich or John Weaver, as well as several by Edward Ravenscroft.

¹⁶⁶Griffin, 332-36. I was able to choreograph fights and movement as well as play the servant Truffaldino in a DC area production described by Celia Wren, “Review: Constellation Theatre Company’s ‘The Green Bird’ at Source,” *The Washington Post*, 12 May 2011, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/review-constellation-theatre-companys-the-green-bird-at-source/2011/05/10/AFDK6W1G_story.html?utm_term=.226d1a44f662.

¹⁶⁷They are (1) “Fixed types, or archetypes,” (2) “Mask,” (3) “Improvisation,” and (4) “Multilingualism,” according to Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell’Arte*, 35.

improvisation as a method for generating material in rehearsal that will then be set in performance. Similarly, Giangiacomo Colli describes how his earliest work on Commedia involved “writing” *scenari*—which in some cases meant creating new plot points from which actors could improvise but in other cases involved writing out dialogue for plays based on the plots of existing *scenari*.¹⁶⁸ Olly Crick cites as one of the major “misunderstandings” about Commedia dell’Arte, “That it was ‘improvised.’”¹⁶⁹ In fact, contrary to contemporary Improv Comedy, Commedia dell’Arte artists did not simply wing it and hope for the best. Rather, they improvised within the limits of agreed upon structures and from established repertoires.¹⁷⁰

Some of this material was recorded early on. For example, Francesco Andreini (Capitano Spavento) and Tristano Martinelli (Arlecchino) both wrote books in the early seventeenth century about their characters and the comic repertoire they had made famous during their careers. By the end of the century, Andrea Perrucci wrote the most comprehensive manual during the Golden Age, in which he recorded traits and patterns for various characters, including some famous *lazzi*.¹⁷¹ It is within

¹⁶⁸Giangiacomo Colli, interview by author, 21 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

¹⁶⁹Olly Crick, Internet survey by author, 4 February 2018.

¹⁷⁰Asked about improvisation with scripted material, Christopher Bayes responded that “there can be room inside of things for things to be improvised. Like jazz moments.... You know what the melody is and then you get some solo time. The possibility of that is what makes it Commedia.” Bayes emphasized that performers need not be forced to avail themselves of the option to improvise but that the possibility must always be present: “Everybody’s radar is on, like, ‘What’s gonna happen tonight’?... That gives the piece the spirit” (interview by author, 11 February 2018, Brooklyn, NY). On historical practices of improvising through structure and repertoire, see Henke, *Performance and Literature*, 12-15; and Fitzpatrick, 11-14.

¹⁷¹Andrea Perrucci, *A Treatise on Acting, From Memory and by Improvisation (1699) / Dell’Arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all’improvviso: Bilingual Edition in English and Italian*, trans. and eds. Francesco Cotticelli, Anne Goodrich Heck, and Thomas F. Heck (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2008).

this lineage that Mel Gordon in the late twentieth-century set out to compile historical *lazzi*, and authors such as John Rudlin and Barry Grantham wrote how-to manuals for performing characters.¹⁷² However, Gordon's work begins with historical sources but relies heavily on his own imagination or on more recent material to fill in the lacunae. He cites where *lazzi* are mentioned, but in most cases the historical mention is merely, "They do *lazzi*," not a description of how the *lazzi* go. In these cases, Gordon is relying on his own comic wit, plus the routines he has seen made famous already in the twentieth century by Moretti, Soleri, Fo, and others. Similarly, though Rudlin and Grantham describe specific steps and gestures for characters, they rarely provide historical sources for these descriptions. In many cases, their sources are twentieth-century rather than sixteenth. Rudlin notes his dependence on Antonio Fava, who founded his *Stage Internazionale di Commedia dell'Arte* in the early 1980s after having worked with Dario Fo and Jacques Lecoq and having researched the Pulcinella tradition from his own Calabrian origins.¹⁷³

We will return in Chapters Six and Seven below to questions about reconstructing the "form" of Commedia dell'Arte. What about the "content" of so-called "Commedia plays," which has been so varied since the seventeenth century and so contentious in the twentieth?

¹⁷²See Chapter One.

¹⁷³Rudlin acknowledges that he has studied with Fava and even dedicates his book to Fava's wife and daughter. His text is a mixture of various sources (some of which contradict Fava's teachings), not a direct description of Fava's method, although several of the exercises come from Fava's training repertoire. Many of Grantham's exercises are also the same material that Fava had previously been utilizing at his school.

Faction of Fools tackled head-on the problematic of Commedia “source material” by specifically dividing seasons into distinct kinds of “Commedia plays.” Some of our work would be “traditional” Commedia in the sense that it was ensemble-devised based on existing, historical *scenari*. In 2010, our first ensemble production was *The House with Two Doors* (following the Casamarciano *Casa con due porte*),¹⁷⁴ and in 2013, Toby Mulford helmed another such experiment, which he entitled *The Lady Becomes Him* (following the Casamarciano *Donna Zanni*).¹⁷⁵ This kind of approach was central to many mid-to-late twentieth century Commedia dell’Arte projects that had an “original practices” slant. Mirroring the applied theatre history projects of the Renaissance Academies, several historically-minded companies or education units have undertaken such experiments. Few, however, have resulted in commercial success, and, despite the general prevalence of a Commedia aesthetic in some contemporary theatre, it remains uncommon to see a historical *scenario* brought to life with a strong interest in how it originally functioned. Faction of Fools has thus far only attempted this twice, and both times we allowed certain liberties in updating the material.

More common among contemporary Commedia in general and in Faction of Fools’ production history are original pieces framed as contemporary continuations of the Commedia tradition. This material features “original” *scenari* gleaned from traditional material but created as the basis of modern shows that Faction has variously sold as “today’s Commedia” or “American Commedia.” The “Fool for All”

¹⁷⁴See <http://factionoffools.org/hw2d>.

¹⁷⁵<http://factionoffools.org/lbh>.

series that began in 2010 with *Tales of Love & Sausage* and has continued every year since filled this niche, as did the 2011 and 2012 evenings of *Quattro Scenari* and the 2013 *Plays on the American Mask*. I would also put my own *The Great One-Man Commedia Epic* in this category because it features an “original” *scenario* written during the twenty-first century as an homage to traditional Commedia but featuring contemporary language and jokes.¹⁷⁶ This approach is probably the most common among today’s artists who consider themselves specialized in the style of Commedia dell’Arte. I have already discussed La Fenice Austin’s contemporary approach of utilizing Commedia types to create shows based on recent events and their habit of performing in bars and other non-traditional venues as an analogue to Early Modern marketplace performances. On the occasion of the 2018 Commedia dell’Arte Day, actor/director Virginia Scott and performers associated with Christopher Bayes’s The Funny School of Good Acting in Brooklyn, NY, launched The Commedia Company. The company’s publicity says they were created in response to “students who caught [Scott] in the hallway after class and clandestinely, earnestly whispered, ‘Is there somewhere I can like go to see this, you know... performed??!’”¹⁷⁷ Scott describes her style as “a very contemporary slant on commedia,”¹⁷⁸ and the company website advertises its weekly performance series (which began 5 March 2018), as follows:

¹⁷⁶<http://factionoffools.org/gomce>.

¹⁷⁷The Funny School of Good Acting, “Commedia! Commedia! Commedia!,” email message to listserv, 6 February 2018.

¹⁷⁸Virginia Scott, founder of The Commedia Company, email correspondence with author, 6 January 2018.

Each week our company of top-of-their-game Funny School of Good Acting faculty and alums transform space and time with nothing but some hunks of leather on their faces. A different line up and a different show each night means you can come every week and see something you've never seen before . . . in more ways than one! It's not your Great-Great-Great-Great-Great-European-Grandfather's Commedia! We don't do it the Renaissance way, at least not in public (what company members do on their own time is their own damn business). It's part stand-up, part improv, part physical comedy, part character comedy, part political comedy and all imagination. These virtuoso actors switch locations and characters at a lightening pace and explode reality into a world made up of music, pantomime, and cultural and political reference. Come scratching around that "backdoor" just right and you'll find yourself sucked into a whole new world to explore... Think Robin Williams on a late night talk show (but with masks!). The heart of Commedia continues to beat out the rhythm of "Stick it to the man!" so keep your hands and feet inside the car as we careen together through the ensuing anarchy and pandemonium!¹⁷⁹

Outside the U.S., in Adelaide, Australia, Commedia instructor Corinna Di Niro, a former pupil of Antonio Fava who describes her work as "authentic to form,

¹⁷⁹"The Commedia Company," The Funny School of Good Acting website, available at <https://thefunnyschool.wixsite.com/thefunnyschool/commedia-company> (accessed 9 February 2018).

audience, history and culture,”¹⁸⁰ has begun to advocate an updated, contemporary approach to making Commedia.¹⁸¹ As she describes her practice-based dissertation for a Ph.D. in Communications, entitled *Performing Commedia dell’Arte in a Contemporary Australian Context with Reference to Antonio Fava’s Method: A Continuous Translation*,

This research contributes to performance studies by addressing the creative process and tensions that arise when working with Fava’s framework to create and perform a Commedia dell’Arte performance in Australia in contemporary times. The argument is made that while working with a 17th century historical form can be maintained, there is a constant need for innovation to remain relevant in contexts of a particular place. As such, Commedia dell’Arte, as a genre that demands continuous translation in order to maintain its coherence, will continue to impact performance practices for centuries to come.¹⁸²

Meanwhile, in England, Olly Crick, who has previously co-authored a book with John Rudlin and co-edited *The Routledge Companion* with Judith Chaffee and who

¹⁸⁰According to her website, *Commedia con Corinna*, copyright 2017, available at <https://www.commediaconcorinna.com/> (accessed 10 February 2018).

¹⁸¹Di Niro studied at Fava’s *Stage Internazionale* in 2004, the first year I was there as an instructor, and stayed on (as I had done in 2001) to participate in the subsequent *Scuola Internazionale dell’Attore Comico*. Her initial work on return to Australia involved her previous experience in burlesque mixed with a newly-honed mask and Commedia style. She formed a training company and began to create “traditional” works such as her *Marriage of Flavio and Isabella* which played the Adelaide Fringe Festival in 2012 and became the core of her PhD dissertation, for which I was interviewed in 2014.

¹⁸²Abstract to Corinna Di Niro, *Performing Commedia dell’Arte in a Contemporary Australian Context with Reference to Antonio Fava’s Method: A Continuous Translation* (Ph.D. diss, University of South Australia, 2014).

cites both Carlo Boso and Barry Grantham as influences,¹⁸³ is currently working on a Ph.D. entitled *Defining a Dramaturgic Aesthetic for Neo-Commedia* based in part on his work as Artistic Director of the Fabulous Lancashire Revels, which he describes as “a PaR company dedicated to creating Lancastrian Commedia dell’Arte.”¹⁸⁴ All of these are examples of what Faction of Fools framed as “modern continuations” of the Commedia tradition, and all are interested in bringing Commedia to contemporary audiences in specific places.

The third category of Faction’s “Commedia plays” encompasses experiments in producing non-Commedia material “in the style of Commedia dell’Arte,” the way Ball had done with *Shrew* or The San Francisco Mime troupe did with much of their material. Initially, I conceived this category to cover works like *The Mandrake* (mentioned in Chapter Two) or *Romeo and Juliet*, both of which are set within the world of traditional Commedia and involve character types common to the Commedia tradition.¹⁸⁵ Faction productions in this vein would include my *Don Juan*,¹⁸⁶ Toby Mulford’s *The Miser*, and Paul Reisman’s *The Merchant of Venice*.

¹⁸³Olly Crick, Internet survey by author, 4 February 2018.

¹⁸⁴This information is found in Crick’s Ph.D. candidate bio at <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/performingarts/about/graduate-teaching-assistants/olly-crick/>. “PaR” = “Practice-as-Research” which forms the theoretical basis of my Chapter Six below. To date, the Fabulous Lancashire Revels have produced two public performances: *Once upon a Time in Ormskirk* and *Frack Off*. Crick describes them as “the former a pure entertainment piece and the second modeled on Dario Fo’s political farces” (email correspondence with author, 11 February 2018).

¹⁸⁵*The Mandrake* at Gallaudet University and *A Commedia Romeo & Juliet* at Flashpoint were also the two productions upon which Faction of Fools became the 2012 Helen Hayes Award recipient of the John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre. The award panel specifically praised Faction for bringing a fresh take to contemporary Commedia and using Commedia as a classical form that could breathe new life into other theatrical material.

¹⁸⁶My Commedia adaptation of which was a 2014 Helen Hayes Award nominee for the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical after a discussion among

Some productions, however, are one step removed, either influenced by or somewhat akin to Commedia but not traditionally thought of as Commedia material: *Hamlet* (which we produced as *Hamlecchino: Clown Prince of Denmark*),¹⁸⁷ *A Commedia Christmas Carol*,¹⁸⁸ and Reisman's *Pinocchio*, co-produced with Next Stop Theatre.¹⁸⁹ Probably the two most far-fetched Commedia treatments we did were also among our most critically-acclaimed: Edward Albee's "The Sandbox" at Arena Stage's 2010 Edward Albee Festival and our 2015 production of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, my last production as Artistic Director.¹⁹⁰ I spoke of both these productions in an interview with DC Metro Theatre Arts and articulated our philosophy for Commedia treatments:

We always ask ourselves two questions when we approach an established text: What does this play have to say about Commedia

theatre Washington staff about what constitutes a "New Play" when adapting from previous source material.

¹⁸⁷This idea was inspired, in part, by Frances K. Barasch, "Hamlet verses *Commedia dell'Arte*," in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Literary Theories: Anglo-Italian Transactions*, ed. Michele Marrapodi (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 109-13; and Eric Nicholson, "Ophelia Sings Like a *Prima Donna Innamorata*: Ophelia's Mad Scene and the Italian Female Performer," in *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 81-98. The production was praised for a "Beckettian black-comedy aesthetic that proves surprisingly compatible with 'Hamlet's' themes" by Celia Wren, "A Noble 'Hamlecchino' by Way of *Commedia dell'Arte*," *The Washington Post*, 1 May 2012, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/theater_dance/a-noble-hamlecchino-by-way-of-commedia-dellarte/2012/05/01/gIQA8inJvT_story.html?utm_term=.a07ba184e4c2.

¹⁸⁸2013 Helen Hayes Award nominee for the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical, since published as Matthew R. Wilson, *A Commedia Christmas Carol* (New York: Playscripts, Inc., 2013).

¹⁸⁹2015 Helen Hayes Award nominee for Outstanding Production, Theatre for Young Audiences.

¹⁹⁰See Eric Minton, "A Timeless Style Creates a Timeless Feeling," *Shakespeareances.com*, 13 February 2015, available at http://www.shakespeareances.com/willpower/nonshakespeare/Our_Town-01-FRD13.html.

dell'Arte, and what does Commedia dell'Arte have to say about this play? And if we can't answer both questions well, we don't do it.¹⁹¹

This idea has been the core of my approach to making Commedia in the last few years, and I believe it is a philosophy at home in the long tradition of Commedia's innovations and evolutions. The exchange flows in two directions: Commedia influences the creation of new forms of theatre, and other forms of theatre spawn the existence of new Commedias.

3.2 Extant Scenari

The most "historical" Commedia plays exists only in summary form in the 800 or so original Commedia dell'Arte *scenari* extant from the Golden Age. Over one quarter of these are collected in two sources: Flaminio Scala's 1611 *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, which is the only collection of *scenari* prepared for publication by their writer, and the collection of *scenari* found in the Casamarciano manuscripts housed in the National Library of Naples.¹⁹² Scala published in Venice and describes the repertoire of a successful, northern Italian company in the late

¹⁹¹John Stoltenberg, *Magic Time!: 'I'm an Improviser by Trade': A Q&A With Matthew R. Wilson, Director of Faction of Fools' 'Our Town,'* DC Metro Theatre Arts, 21 May 2015, available at <https://dcmetrotheaterarts.com/2015/05/21/magic-time-im-an-improviser-by-trade-a-qa-with-matthew-r-wilson-our-town/>.

¹⁹²These sources are available as Henry Frank Salerno, trans. and ed., *Scenarios of the Commedia dell'Arte: Flaminio Scala's Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, with a foreword by Kenneth McKee (New York: New York University Press, 1967); Richard Andrews, ed. and trans., *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: A Translation and Analysis of 30 Scenarios* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2008); and Francesco Cotticelli, Anne Goodrich Heck, and Thomas Heck, eds., *The Commedia dell'Arte in Naples: A Bilingual Edition of the 176 Casamarciano Scenarios*, 2 vols. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001). See also Robert Henke, *Performance and Literature*, 218 n. 3.

sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The Casamarciano manuscripts are two hand-written volumes of 181 *scenari* (some of which are only fragmentary or indecipherable) collected and transcribed from multiple sources around Naples by the end of the seventeenth century.¹⁹³

Only a couple of *scenari* are remembered by both collections, evincing popularity for multiple companies, at either end of the Italian peninsula, across a span of what must be several decades and may be a century or more. One of these is a story called *The Tooth-Puller* (*Il Cavadente*, or, as in the Casamarciano manuscript, *Il Cavadenti*—literally, *The Teeth-Puller*), and it concerns a familiar love-triangle and a disastrous attempt on Arlecchino's part to pretend to be a dentist.¹⁹⁴ This *scenario* is the basis for the production I devised and directed for Ole Miss Theatre in 2017, which forms the case study referenced in Chapters Five through Seven and is more fully described in Appendix A. For the remainder of this chapter, I will present a translation and close reading of the first half of the original *scenario*, followed by observations about this one *scenario*'s relationship to other traditional material.

3.3 Scala, Translated

Elegant, readable translations of Scala are currently available in English.¹⁹⁵

What follows is a close translation endeavor focused neither on elegance nor

¹⁹³Thomas F. Heck, "Introduction to the English Edition and Some Translation Points," in *The Commedia dell'Arte in Naples: A Bilingual Edition of the 176 Casamarciano Scenarios*, 2 volumes, translated and edited by Francesco Cotticelli, Anne Goodrich Heck, and Thomas F. Heck (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2001), 1:1; and Francesco Cotticelli, "Introduzione," in Cotticelli, Heck, and Heck, 2:14.

¹⁹⁴Another is *Il Marito* (Scala Day IX, Casamarciano i/65). See Fitzpatrick, 215-22.

¹⁹⁵For example, Andrews, *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala* and Salerno.

readability but rather on a strict adherence to the mechanical realities of Scala's language and structure (including the original, inconsistent punctuation) with the intent of exposing the interpretative questions that surface when one attempts to make choices based upon an often ambiguous, foreign-seeming scenario. I have compared my translation with others where the distinction is telling. The translation is annotated with notes concerning grammatical and semantic nuance as well as larger questions pertaining to Commedia dramaturgy and the interpretation of *scenari* as source material for contemporary work.

I was able to examine an original copy of the 1611 publication in person through Antonio Fava's private archives, and I have also consulted the digitized photographic facsimile available online through the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek.¹⁹⁶ I present here only the first half of my annotated translation (through the entrance of Pasquella) because most of the relevant interpretative questions arise at the beginning of the *scenario*.

Day¹⁹⁷ 12

¹⁹⁶Flaminio Scala, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative, overo La ricreatione comica, boscareccia, e tragica; divisa in cinquante giornate* (Venetia: Giovanni Battista Pulciani, 1611), 36-38, available at <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/0004/bsb00048646/images/index.html?fp=193.174.98.30&id=00048646&seite=7>. Note that the original text is numbered only on the right-hand page, so the scenario from pp. 36 to 38 is actually five pages long.

¹⁹⁷Scala, like Boccaccio over two and half centuries earlier, labels his *favole* by "days." Note, however, that this "Day 12" is "*Giornata XII*," not merely "*il dodicesimo giorno*" (the twelfth day). While "*giorno*" is the day itself, a "*giornata*" is a day's event or a day of activity. As Antonio Fava first explained to me, the *giorno* "is the time;" the *giornata* "is how you pass the time." While Boccaccio's characters pass the time with stories, Scala invites the reader to pass the day with what we call "Commedia dell'Arte."

The Tooth-puller Comedy¹⁹⁸

Argument

In the city of Rome, there was still¹⁹⁹ a certain Pantalone, father of a young man Oratio²⁰⁰ and of a daughter²⁰¹ named Flam[inia],²⁰² in having fallen in love with a noble²⁰³ widow called Isabella, the young

¹⁹⁸“*Il Cauadente Comedia*.” Note that in the Casamarciano scenario, and in numerous images from the period, the dentist is called “*il cavadenti*” (plural)—literally, “the teeth-puller”—as opposed to the singular “tooth” used in Scala’s title.

¹⁹⁹“*fù già*” = most literally, “was still” or “was already,” though “*già*” can also serve as an intensifier or affirmative, according to uses 4 and 5 in *The Concise Oxford-Paravia Italian Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Andrews, 62, simply renders the phrase “there lived one Pantalone.” Federica Deigan has pointed out to me that this formula is one of the ways in which Scala’s *argomento* mirrors the novella literary style because in Boccaccio, “*fù già*” is similar to the narrative opening “There once was a...,” indicating a point in the not-too-remote past.

²⁰⁰The original spelling in Scala is “*Oratio*,” from the Roman poet and theorist Quintus Horatius Flaccus; however, contemporary Italian renders the name as “*Orazio*,” which is how it most commonly appears in the Commedia tradition today. (Note similarly that Venice or *Venezia* is rendered “*Venetia*” in Scala.) The character is also sometimes known by the French “*Horace*” or the anglicized “*Horatio*.”

²⁰¹Note that the summary calls Orazio a young man (with the substantival adjective in apposition: “*un giouane Oratio*”), rendering him an independent agent, while Flaminia is identified in relation to her father (“*una figlia*”). Patriarchal family and social dynamics structure most Commedia plays; however, this scenario highlights them particularly because the second household is without a father, and Isabella, widowed, is back under the protection of her brother, as we shall see below.

²⁰²The 1611 printing abbreviates Flaminia’s name in this sentence (“*figlia Flam.chiamata*”), presumably out of spacing concerns in the typesetting. The entire volume is justified on both the left and right sides. Names are almost always abbreviated and without consistency, as will be shown throughout this translation.

²⁰³The Italian “*nobile*,” like the English “noble,” can refer to nobility of birth, nobility of fortune, or nobility of mind, an ambiguity which Boccaccio frequently exploits in depicting characters who possess a nobility in some respects but lack it in others. In the case of Isabella, the latter two senses of *nobile* are possible. There is nothing to indicate that Isabella’s family (or that of her late husband) are of royal or noble blood. In general, Commedia—like the Roman New Comedy that influenced it—focuses on “middle class” citizens, with Pantalone and his children seen as examples of the upwardly-mobile, *nouveau riche* mercantile class. In Golden Age Commedia, Pantalone enjoys some social and economic privilege, but not ruling authority. By contrast, the characters of bloody and tragic plays—the so-called *Opera Reggia* exemplified in last few “Days” of Scala’s work, are wicked, indulgent royals who die fantastical Senecan deaths. These bloody tragedies tend to be set in ancient times or distant lands. Thus, the repertoire outlined by Scala conforms to divisions in Aristotle and Serlio’s neoclassical scenes: comedy concerns middle class people (people more or less “like us”) in a

man was requited with reciprocal affection of his love: for the which [woman],²⁰⁴ no less than the son was,²⁰⁵ Pant[alone]—he also²⁰⁶— similarly was burning: seeing that he was almost scorned by her, he judged that perhaps this was happening because he had his son Orazio for a rival,²⁰⁷ and in order for it not²⁰⁸ to be the case that he was an impediment, he resolved to send him to his studies.²⁰⁹ This came to the ears of the widow Isab[ella], the which [woman] badly suffered²¹⁰ that thing, [so she] consulted with an old woman, her confidant,²¹¹ this said to her that she possessed a secret made of certain

contemporary setting, while tragedy focuses on royals and heroes (people “better” than us) from distant lands or times. With these things in mind, and based on the details of the play, it would be incorrect to imagine that Isabella is of noble blood, but rather that her family is “aristocratic” and she is “worthy” (*The Concise Oxford-Paravia Italian Dictionary*, 2nd ed., definitions I.1 and I.2)

²⁰⁴“*per laquale*”

²⁰⁵“*non meno che il figlio facesse*” = lit., “no less than the son made”

²⁰⁶“*Pant.anch’egli*” with the name abbreviated and lacking a space. See the note on Flaminia’s abbreviated name above.

²⁰⁷“*giudicò forse ciò auuenire hauendo per riuale Oratio suo figlio*”

²⁰⁸The negative “*non*” is printed as an abbreviation resembling “*nō*” with a superscripted “*n*” placed as a diacritic above the “*o*,” allowing the line to right-justify without the extra letter.

²⁰⁹“*di mandarlo allo studio*,” rendered in Andrews as “send him away to university” (62).

²¹⁰Spelled “*sofferendo*,” not the modern “*soffrendo*.”

²¹¹“*sua familiare*,” which Andrews renders as “her trusty advisor” (62) and Salerno translates as “an old friend” (85). However, the *Oxford-Paravia* definition for the nominal form is “family member, member of the family.” The scenario does not indicate elsewhere that Pasquella is a family member, leaving interpreters to fill in the blanks themselves. More appropriate historically might be “household servant,” following the definitions of “*famigliare*” found in John Florio, *Quenn Anna’s New World of Words, Or Dictionarie of the Italian and English Tongues* (London: Melch. Bradwood, 1611), 178: “familiar, tame, gentle, acquainted, conversant. Also a household guest.” Within the scenario, she is called “*vecchia da sè*” (“an old woman, by herself”) and “*Amica d’Isabella*” (“friend of Isabella”). More on Pasquella below.

confectionaries,²¹² of which whoever was eating would remain almost empty of judgment; & in addition that she had likewise another secret, which [is] of the contrary effect, hence she judged that removing Orazio from his being²¹³ with that secret, she easily would have been able to distract²¹⁴ the father from sending him out,²¹⁵ consenting to which thing Isabella gave to Oratio the agreed upon secret, that which happened thereafter will be known from the concluding of the story.²¹⁶

Characters of the Comedy

Pantalone.

Oratio son.

Flaminia daughter.

Pedrolino servant [masc.].

Flavio.

Isabella widow sister.²¹⁷

²¹²“*confettura*” (plural), is defined in *Oxford-Paravia* as “jam, preserves,” an unlikely possibility as seen below where the props called for are “*Due scatole con dentro confetti*,” likely indicating candies. Andrews, as I have, employs the cognate but in the singular: “confectionary” (62). Andrews also renders “*segreto*” as “secret potion” and then simply as “potion,” which begs the question concerning what the actual prop is and how it takes effect. More on both points below.

²¹³“*dall’esser*” = “from his being,” as in, “from himself.” Andrews: “driving Orazio out of his mind” (62).

²¹⁴“*distorre*,” taken as *distogliere*

²¹⁵“Out” or “outside” in Scala is “*fuora*,” not the contemporary “*fuori*.”

²¹⁶“*fauola*”

²¹⁷Following common practice, the list of *personaggi* lays out the two households of the comedy, each headed by the male characters who have no other attribution. It is implied then that each character with an attribution is named in relation to the *paterfamilias*. (For example, “Orazio son.”

Francesc[hina] servant [fem.].

Arlecch[ino] servant [masc.].

Dottore²¹⁸ alone.

Capitano Spauento alone.

Pasquella old woman by herself.

Things²¹⁹ for the Comedy

Two boxes with confectionaries²²⁰ inside

implies that Orazio is *Pantalone's* son.) The exceptions that prove this rule are the three characters outside of the households, which are marked as “*solo*,” “*solo*,” and “*da sè*” (“by herself”) to indicate that they are not related to the heads of the household and, in this case, do not have relations or servants of their own in the comedy. Of note here then is that, while Flaminia was noted in relation to Pantalone in the *Argument* (recall that Orazio is listed as a “young man” of his own while Flaminia is introduced as a “daughter”), here Isabella—who in the argument is her own character as “a noble widow”—is listed under Flavio and part of his house as his “*vedoua sorella*” (“widow sister”).

²¹⁸“*Dottor*,” without the final “e.” Contemporary English and Italian both allow “doctor” or “*dottore*” to be used anarthrously as a title or in the vocative but require an article when the word is used as a common noun. For example, one may say, “Doctor, I don’t feel well” or “This is Doctor Jones,” but one would not say, “I am going to see doctor.” Some Commedia practitioners—especially among the traditionalists—are proudly careful to respect these conventions by insisting that the character type always be called “*Il Dottore*” and not merely “*Dottore*,” noting how foolish it sounds in English to say, “This character is Doctor,” rather than “the Doctor.” (They treat “*Il Capitano*” the same way). Contrary to this contemporary practice, however, Scala does not utilize the article when speaking of the character either in character lists or at *scenario* entrances but instead calls him “*Dottore*.” (The Capitano in Scala, on the other hand, typically bears the specific name of Francesco Andreini’s character, Capitano Spavento, and thus is rarely referred to generically as “*Il Capitano*” but rather as “Cap. Spavento.”)

²¹⁹“*Robbe*.”

²²⁰“*confetti*.” Currently denotes a “sugared almond” (*Oxford-Paravia*). Andrews translates as “sweetmeats” (62), an archaic term likely to confuse anyone who does not understand the old usage of “meat” as “relating to food generally” (*OED* I.a). “Candy” or “comfit” may be better. Again, I retain the closest cognate as I did in translating “*confetture*” above, although “confectionary,” like “*confettura*” could imply a jam or preserve, which does not seem likely and would not be feasible since both Orazio and Arlecchino must eat them onstage without utensils. The prop could be some sort of jam-filled sweet, but contemporary analogues would suggest something sugared or candied. The only information supplied in the scenario is that they are carried in boxes (*due scatole*, as described here in the props list) and can be eaten, presumably quickly and without much mess, out of the box on stage. Historical specifics as to size, color, and composition are left unanswered for subsequent interpreters, unless they are treated the same as the current *confetti in scatola* treats, which are smooth, oblate candy-covered almonds, typically white but sometimes pastel. Although the scenario does not

Outfit²²¹ of Teeth-puller.²²²

Tools of Blacksmith.²²³

A beautiful chair.²²⁴

[Setting:] Rome City.

First Act

Pantal. tells to Pedr. the love that he carries toward widow Isabella,

Pedrol. and that he does not doubt that Oratio his son might be his rival, and suspecting this he has decided to send him to his studies²²⁵: Ped.lo retorts, taking the part of Oratio, they attack each other with words, and with deeds,²²⁶ Pant. gives [blows]

specify this, for the Ole Miss Theatre production, we elected to have larger, brightly colored sweats with the cause of madness and the cure for it each coming in different colors, easily distinguished by the audience.

²²¹“*Habito*”

²²²Contrary to the title, the listing here is for a *Cavadenti* (“Teeth-puller”).

²²³“*Ferri da Magnano.*” *Ferri* implies iron tools and could even refer to “surgical instruments” (*Oxford-Paravia* def. II.1). Andrews, 62, translates *Magnano* as “Blacksmith.” Wikipedia and Dicios.com both translate it as “locksmith” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnano_\(surname\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magnano_(surname))). In the Ole Miss Theatre production, we began the tooth-pulling *lazzi* with a series of heavy metal tools, each more barbaric than the previous, and then progressed to contemporary power tools, allowing Arlecchino to get carried away and destroy all of Pantalone’s teeth.

²²⁴Within the *scenario*, Arlecchino in his dentist disguise makes Pantalone sit down for the moment of tooth-pulling. We found this set piece unnecessary in the Ole Miss Theatre production, preferring a more active staging of the titular action.

²²⁵“*mandarlo allo studio,*” as before. Andrews, 63: “to send him to the university.” Salerno, 86, pleonastically: “to get rid of him by sending him away to school.”

²²⁶“*s’attaccano di parole, e di fatti.*” Andrews, 63: “They quarrel and come to blows.” Salerno, 86: “They begin to argue, then to exchange blows.”

to Pedrol. & he bites an arm, showing that he has bitten him hard.²²⁷ Pant. threatening departs saying that on his behalf he should speak with Franc. He goes away.²²⁸ Pedrol. says to avenge himself of the bite that Pant. has given to him, at which²²⁹

Frances. goes in order to search for Oratio by order of her mistress, sees Pedrol. and from him understands the cause of his pain of the arm, they agree to pretend to Pantalone that his breath stinks in order to avenge themselves/himself²³⁰; *Frances.* in the house.²³¹ Pedr. remains, at which

²²⁷Andrews, 63, translates “making it seem a good hard bite,” as though this is a stage direction to the actor instructing him that the audience is to perceive this as a hard bite. Salerno omits the clause from his translation.

²²⁸“*via*.” The scenario here indicates that Pantalone does not return home (“*entra*”) but instead exits stage to another part of town (“*via*”). It is up to the post-naturalistic interpreter to decide where Pantalone is going and what he is up to between this moment and his return later in the act. Stanislavski’s concept of the “unbroken line” is not reflected in these Early Modern *scenari*. On the “unbroken line,” see Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor’s Work: A Student’s Diary*, trans. and ed. by Jean Benedetti (New York: Routledge, 2008), 286-91.

²²⁹Scala indicates immediate or interrupted action by ending plot points with “*in quello*,” linking them to the next entrance. Andrews routinely translates “*in quello*” as “*next*” (in italics) preceded by a semicolon, whereas Schmitt, 3, adopts a cleaner and more literal, “at that,” also following a semicolon. Both give the false impression that a new sentence or idea has begun. In fact, “*in quello*” is typically preceded by a comma and grammatically subordinates the next character’s entrance to the final sentence of the previous point. This syntactically links the new action and implies an uninterrupted flow by having each new entrance triggered by the previous plot point.

²³⁰The reflexive verb used here (“*per uendicarsi*”) is the same form used earlier when Pedrolino decided to avenge himself; however, the reflexive pronominal suffix “-*si*” is both third-person singular and plural, allowing the possibility that Franceschina agrees to help Pedrolino get his revenge or that they both agree together to get *their* revenge. Either way, Franceschina requires some impetus to join Pedrolino. Is it merely empathy at her having understood the cause of his pain? Or does she have a personal stake in this revenge as well? More on this below as the conspiracy widens.

²³¹Note that the *scenario* implies the existence of two houses, one for each family, and specifies different entrances and exits as being to/from the house or to/from another part of town. A

Flauio discovers to Pedr. his love hitting him in the arm Pedrolino shouts,²³² then they agree to pretend to Pantalone that his breath stinks.²³³ Flauio goes away Pedr. remains, at which

Dottore that must have 25 *scudi*²³⁴ from Pant. grabs Ped. on the arm, he shouts, and with him makes the same agreement of the stinking breath, [with Pedrolino] promising to make him to have his 25 *scudi*, Dottore goes away, Pedr. goes away in order to find Oratio.²³⁵

Cap. Spa. the love to Isabella, and his *brauure*,²³⁶ at which

character who leaves stage into a house is signaled with “*entra*” (“he/she enters [the house]”), whereas a character who exits the stage to another part of town is signaled with “*via*” (“away” or “street”).

²³²The original lacks punctuation to this point except for the periods in the abbreviated names.

²³³Flavio is now allied with Franceschina and Pedrolino’s plan. As before, a gap in logic is left for the interpreter. Why does Flavio agree to do this with Pedrolino? He has the opportunity to notice that Pedrolino’s arm is injured, though the text does not say here, as it did in Franceschina’s case, that Flavio “understands the cause of his pain.” Is Flavio duped into joining this plan unawares? Does he intend to help Pedrolino gain vengeance? Does he have a personal stake in getting vengeance for himself? Because the scenario revolves around a large conspiracy against Pantalone, it falls into a “*Pantalone paga*”-type situation. The Italian phrase “*Pantalone paga*,” meaning “Pantalone pays,” describes the moment of comeuppance when the miser, often literally but always metaphorically, is eventually forced to “pay” for the harms his actions have inflicted upon others. To strengthen the “debt” he must repay, we made the choice to give every character a grievance against Pantalone, in this case, that Pantalone has restricted Flavio’s access to his love Flaminia, Pantalone’s daughter. This is entirely an artistic addition on our part, not in any way suggested by the bare plot points of the *scenario*. For Scala’s tale, it is important that Flavio and the others conspire against Pantalone; however, the *scenario* is indifferent to the specifics of each character’s backstory or justification for doing so.

²³⁴Scala reads “Δ. 25.” Anders, 63, and Salerno, 86, both translate “25 *scudi*.”

²³⁵This is the first plot point without the transition “*in quello*” because it marks a total scene change in which all of the previous characters exit and a new character enters alone. The stage action gives Cap. Spavento a dramatic solo entrance, which, for the Ole Miss Theatre production, we chose to stage as a musical number, with the Capitano singing of his exploits on an empty street while the townspeople pop out their windows to see the new arrival.

²³⁶Unlike the previous characters, the Captain enters without a full sentence and without specific action. Instead, Scala here names the *topoi* of the Captain’s solo performance: Il Capitano enters opining of his love for Isabella, even though no backstory has been described concerning his knowledge of Isabella or relation to the town, and he performs a series of “*le sue brauure*,” “his

Arlecc. servant of Isab. makes with him a ridiculous scene,²³⁷ & he enters²³⁸ in order to make Isabella to come outside, Cap. awaits.

Flamin. that from the window²³⁹ has seen the Capit.[.] by her loved[,] him she begs for his love, at which

Isabella outside believing herself to find Oratio, Cap. begs her for her love, she drives him away, & he makes the same with Flam. making a three-way scene,²⁴⁰ at the end Isab. enters in the

bravuras". A *bravura* (sing.) is a set piece for the Captain in which he recounts astounding tales of heroic feats in love, war, travel, and the like. See Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Comedy dell'Arte*, 157-59; Rudlin, 123-26; Grantham, *Playing Commedia*, 175-79; and Henke, *Performance and Literature*, 77-78.

Effectively, at this point, the action is placed on hold for Capitano Spavento (played by Francesco Andreini, the company manager) to make a glorious entrance and engage in comical business from his personal repertoire. For the Ole Miss Theatre production, we created an elaborate song and dance number which also allowed the Capitano to be a foreigner (in our case Spanish), newly arrived in town, who—at this moment on stage for the first time—sees Isabella and is seen by Flaminia.

²³⁷"*fà seco scena ridicolosa*," in other words, the action of the scenario remains on hold for more comical business improvised from the repertoire of the two actors. These kind of *lazzi*, ridiculous scenes, and *bravura* must be entirely reinvented by contemporary interpreters wishing to restage the piece. Like other historians and practitioners, I am routinely frustrated by the fact that the *scenari* always omit all details of what must have been the funniest parts of the show.

²³⁸That is, he exits stage by "entering into" the house of Flavio and Isabella. More on the scenic requirements and possibilities will be discussed in Chapter Five below.

²³⁹The *scenario* indicates that the character has seen action out on the "street" from a "window" in the house, but it does not actually require a practical window at this point, as it will at the end of Act One below. Flaminia may simply report that she has seen the Captain from the window without the audience seeing her see him. Nevertheless, for the Ole Miss Theatre production, we followed later cues in the *scenario* to incorporate practical windows, as well as practical doors, within the set.

²⁴⁰The steps of the three-way scene ("*scena interzata*") are clear from the repetition of language in the scenario: (1) Flaminia begs the Capitano for his love. (2) The Capitano begs Isabella for her love. (3) Isabella drives the Capitano away. (4) The Capitano drives Flaminia away. In the Ole Miss Theatre production, we developed this three-way *lazzo* into a tango dance number, also allowing Franceschina to take part by trying to rescue Isabella from the Capitano and occasionally getting caught in her place.

house driving away the Cap. he makes the same with Flam. and
departs, she remains sadly, at which

Pedrol. that aside²⁴¹ has heard everything. He threatens to say it to her
father, then they agree on the thing of the breath with her
father, she enters in: Pedr. that the arm hurts him more than
ever, although he had made it treated,²⁴² and that he wishes to
revenge himself in all ways,²⁴³ at which

Arlecch. arrives, Pedr. with money persuades him to masquerade as a
Teeth-puller,²⁴⁴ he sends him to disguise himself, and Arlecch.
goes away: Pedr. stays, at which

Oratio understands from Pedrolino how Panta. his father competes
with him in loving Isabella, and that he wants to send him to
his studies; Oratio [is] hurt by this news, he pleads with
Pedrolino, the which [man] promises him help, and they agree
on the thing of the breath. Oratio, that he would like to discuss
with Isabel. Pedr. calls her.

²⁴¹“*indisparte*,” as opposed to the contemporary theatrical terminology “*a parte*.”

²⁴²“*sebene* [sic] *s'è fatto medicare*,” which Salerno mistranslates as “swears that if he could become a doctor” (87). My translation agrees with Andrews; however, the scenario does not previously indicate where or how Pedrolino’s arm has been treated. He could have treated it himself while off looking for Orazio, which would allow the actor to make an adjustment to the arm offstage. Or it could be treated onstage by Franceschina, Flavio, or Il Dottore, all of whom encountered the injured arm. We elected for the Doctor, at his first entrance, to inspect and bandage the arm, thereby giving him the opportunity to charge Pedrolino for his services, meaning that the Doctor then had a running tab with both Pedrolino and Pantalone.

²⁴³“*à tutte le vie*.” Again, Salerno mistranslates: “against everyone” (87). Cf. Andrews, 63: “by whatever means he can.”

²⁴⁴“*Cauadenti*” in the plural, agreeing with the character list but not the title.

Isabella understands his love, and his hard departure, she saddens, at which

Pantal. speaking loudly, Isab. hearing him enters inside, Pedrol. makes a show of berating Oratio because he does not want to go to Perugia.²⁴⁵ Pant. sees his son, to the which he commands, that he go to put himself in order immediately, immediately [*sic*], because he wants that he goes to Perugia. Oratio all fearful enters to put himself in order watching Pedr. Pant. understands how Pedr. has spoken with Frances. then hears Pedr. that says, “*ohibò*,²⁴⁶ boss,²⁴⁷ your breath stinks out of manner!”²⁴⁸ Pant. laughs, at which

²⁴⁵“*Pedrol. braua con Oratio perche non vuole andare à Perugia*,” which Salerno mistranslates “Pedrolino tries to argue Oratio out of going to Perugia” (87). Meanwhile, Andrews underplays the sense with “Pedrolino scolds Orazio for not wanting to go to Perugia” (64). The verb *bravare* is not found in most common contemporary dictionaries (for example, it is absent from *Oxford-Paravia*); however, Treccani’s first definition follows the most intuitive reading “*Fare il bravo*,” highlighting the fact that for Pedrolino to *bravare*, he has to be in a sense playing up his actions (<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/bravare/>). *La Repubblica*’s Italian dictionary defines the intransitive verb as “*Agire in modo prepotente e minaccioso*,” which I translate as “to act in a domineering and threatening manner.” The transitive verb—which is what appears in the text—is defined as “*Minacciare, provocare, sfidare*,” that is, “to threaten, to provoke, to challenge” (<http://dizionari.repubblica.it/Italiano/B/bravare.php>).

If the sense of “playing the *bravo*” is important, as I believe it is, Pedrolino is acting this part for the benefit of Pantalone, whom he has just heard enter. This aligns with Pedrolino’s duplicitous character, and it explains why he would quickly turn on Orazio at this moment. He has plotted with Orazio, but now he intends to show Pantalone that he is on Pantalone’s side against Orazio. The plot point, however, is further complicated as written because it is the first time the city of Perugia is introduced in the scenario. Perugia, an old university town, is presumably where Pantalone intends to send Orazio *allo studio*. For the Ole Miss Theatre production, we clarified this by having Pantalone state from the outset that he intends to send Orazio to the University of Perugia and then created a series of Perugia-based *tormentoni* for both Orazio and Isabella.

²⁴⁶Salerno, 87: “Pew.” Andrews, 64: “Hey.” *La Repubblica* Italian-English dictionary: “pooh, phew, tut-tut” (<http://dizionari.repubblica.it/Italiano-Inglese/O/ohibo.php>).

²⁴⁷“*padrone*,” traditionally “Master.”

²⁴⁸“*il fiato ui puzza fuor di modo*,” translated by both Salerno and Andrews as “your breath stinks something awful!” (87 and 64, respectively).

Frances. does the same, saying, that if his breath did not stink, that Isab.
would love him, & she enters,²⁴⁹ Pant. is amazed, at which
Flauio passes & at signals from Pedr. does the same with Pantal. and
goes away, Pant. is amazed by such offense,²⁵⁰ at which
Dottore arrives, Pedrol. makes to him the signal of the thing of the
breath, Dottore does the same, & goes away, Pant. that he

This is one of only two instances of direct address written into the *scenario* (the second is Arlecchino's, "Who has rotten teeth?" below). In all other instances, the *scenario* functions through indirect address, using "that" ("*che*") to indicate the subject on which the actor will improvise. Where *scenari* utilize quoted text, the text is frequently something that must be said in a precise manner for the action of the plot to function. For example, in the Casamarciano collection's *Casa con due porte* (*The House with Two Doors*, produced by Faction of Fools in 2010 and described briefly above), we see direct quotations such as, "Come out, you, who came to this place for love," "Take heart, milady, your friend is now safe," and "Rescue this woman for me," which are purposefully ambiguous to allow for necessary misunderstandings about who the antecedents are (Coticelli, Heck, and Heck, 1:318-19).

²⁴⁹Franceschina has not been mentioned since her opening scene with Pedrolino when this plan was hatched. In typically confusing and fragmentary fashion, the *scenario* here includes her exit ("*entra*" or "she enters," indicating that she leaves stage by returning into the house of Flavio and Isabella, where she is employed); however, at no point does the *scenario* note when she first arrives at the scene. Presumably she has been onstage for the previous plot point to see how Pedrolino begins the ruse, or otherwise she would not be able to "do the same" ("*fà il simile*") at the start of her plot point. Perhaps, as befits a servant, she enters earlier with Isabella and then remains on stage after Isabella exits. According to the *scenario*, she enters the house (as Isabella has just done) after she tells Pantalone about his bad breath. This same pattern is followed in the *scenario* as each character exits immediately after confronting Pantalone. In the Ole Miss Theatre production, we elected instead to keep all the characters upstage in a huddle, plotting and watching as their co-conspirators move down stage to speak with Pantalone. Franceschina, the clever *servetta*, served as behind-the-scenes mastermind of the plot and orchestrated the townspeople's participation in the plan. This circulation of individuals from the group downstage to Pedrolino and Pantalone and back helped to physicalize the theme of conspiracy of all the characters against the one trouble-maker and allowed for what calls a "machine," that is, "a way of [the actors'] arranging themselves onstage and a mode of moving together that creates structures in continuous movement and mutation, authentic human machines that can have either dynamic value—the minimum obligation—or can create double and triple images or other visual and rhythmic effects, a triumph of three-dimensionality in every direction." See Fava, *The Comic Mask in the Commedia dell'Arte*, 170.

²⁵⁰"*di tal mancamento.*" "*fig.* sin, fault, offence" in *La Repubblica* dictionary, def. 3 (<http://dizionari.repubblica.it/Italiano-Inglese/M/mancamento.php>).

wants to question his daughter if it is true about that smell.²⁵¹

He calls her.

Flamin. confesses to her father how his breath stinks to her out of
manner. & she enters: they remain, at which

Oratio from the house confirms the same, then returns into the house:
Pant. resolves himself to have that tooth removed, that causes
the stench,²⁵² he orders to Ped. that he bring to him a Teeth-
Puller,²⁵³ & he enters Ped. remains;

Arlecc dressed as a Teeth-Puller, Ped. orders Arlecch. that he should
pull all the teeth of Pant. saying to him that they are rotten, he

²⁵¹*“di quel puzzore.”* “*Puzzore*” is absent from contemporary dictionaries, where the term is “*il puzzo*” (“the smell”), but Florio’s 1611 Italian-English dictionary contains an entry for “*puzzóre*” defined as “a stink, a stench, and an ill sent [*sic*]” (412). Andrews: “if it’s true about the smell” (64); Salerno: “if it’s true that his breath stinks” (87).

²⁵²A large leap in logic is presented here for modern audiences. Pantalone is told repeatedly that his breath stinks, and then he resolves to have a tooth pulled; however, the *scenario* does not specify the moment when Pantalone concludes that the breath problem has been caused by a rotten tooth. Prior to confronting Pantalone, Pedrolino had already bribed Arlecchino to pose as a Tooth-Puller, so he seems to have had this plan for a while, but it has never been spelled out. It may be that an Early Modern audience would have followed this thought process more clearly, illustrating again that even if “original practice” work were to succeed in perfectly recreating the original production, it still cannot recreate the original audience. It may also be that this clause in the plot point “*che cagiona il fetore*” (“that causes the stench”) is a signal to the actor to search out and find the culprit tooth onstage, thus embodying the thought process that leads from the bad breath to the need to pull a tooth, a conclusion that Pedrolino is prepared for Pantalone to reach.

For the Ole Miss Theatre production, we felt it was crucial to carefully walk the audience through the logical steps that lead from bad breath to tooth extraction. We began this process all the way back with Pedrolino and Franceschina’s initial idea: Pantalone needs to be punished for biting, so they will construct a plan to have his teeth pay the price, a plan that proceeds through convincing Pantalone that he has bad breath. It may be that the original actors would have known to connect all these details, or it may be that the improvised Early Modern style did not pay such special attention to through-lines and intentions but functioned more on immediate surprises and leaps on logic.

²⁵³*“un Cauadenti”*

withdraws, Arlecch. under the windows shouts, “Who has rotten teeth?”²⁵⁴ At which

Pantal. from the window calls him, then he exits outside,²⁵⁵ Arlecc. gets out his tools, they are the same as all the tools of a Blacksmith, naming them ridiculously,²⁵⁶ he makes him to sit,²⁵⁷ and with the pinchers he removes four good teeth, Panta. from the pain clings to the beard of the Teeth-Puller, the which being artificial remains in his hand, Arlecch. flees, Panta. tosses the chair after, then complaining of the pain from the teeth enters into his house, and here ends Act One.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁴“*Arlecch. sotto le fenestre grida, chi ha denti guasti.*” This is the second instance of a direct quotation in the *scenario*. Salerno translates it indirectly, “Arlecchino begins shouting under the windows, calling for those who have bad teeth” (88). Andrews keeps the direct quotation but massages it into more conversational English: “Anyone here with bad teeth?” (64).

²⁵⁵The *scenario* now requires a practical way to represent a window, at which Pantalone may be seen calling down to the “street” before he “exits” from the house out on to the stage to join Arlecchino.

²⁵⁶ This *lazzo* of giving the tools ridiculous names covers the time necessary for the actor playing Pantalone to get from the window out the doorway and allows Arlecchino to indulge in preparing for his “big moment.” For more on the tools, see the note above on the prop list (“*Robbe*”).

²⁵⁷This is presumably the appearance of “*Una Sedia bella*” from the prop list, although the *scenario* does not indicate who brings the chair on stage or under what pretense it is set up. As mentioned above, we chose to dispense with the chair in the Ole Miss Theatre production.

²⁵⁸Act One of the *scenario* is almost a full comic plot in itself, and, in fact, the titular moment occurs at the Act One finale, barely to be mentioned again in Acts Two and Three. I have often said of farcical violence that it gives wounds but not scars, suffering but not PTSD. Pain is real but vanishes upon completion. So it is in this *scenario*. By the start of Act Two, Pantalone seems to have forgotten about the Tooth-Puller and makes no more mention of his pain. To justify this for modern audiences, the Ole Miss Theatre production chose not to have Pantalone realize that the Tooth-Puller was in fact Arlecchino and chose for Pantalone to confront on every subsequent entrance the reality of his damaged teeth. He lisped, spat out remnant teeth, and eventually received an ostentatious fake grill.

Second Act

*Pasq.uec.*²⁵⁹ an old woman, friend of Isabella comes in order to visit her she
knocks

Isabella narrates to Pasquel. the love of Oratio, the which must depart
in order to obey his father, Pasquella consoles her promising to
her help with her secrets²⁶⁰ and that she should send Arlecch. in
an hour that he will send to her to the fatal candies²⁶¹ she exits.
Isab. remains happy, at which

Pedrol. happy about the joke made to Pant. says to Isab. how Pant. is
obstinate, and that he wants that Oratio should depart form the
city, at which

²⁵⁹The character description “*uec.*” is taken by both Andrews, 65, and Salerno, 88 as an abbreviation for *vecchia*, the female version of the technical term for the Old Man. Fitzpatrick, 380, places this simply as an adjective before “*amica*”: “an old friend of Isabella’s.” Fitzpatrick’s reading ignores the typeface of the original, where “*uec.*” is placed on the left margin with the character names and separated from “*amica*” by the drop cap initial “A,” ornamenting the beginning of the text for Act Two. Therefore, I conclude that the “*uec.*” is a marker for the character type. For more on the rarities of Pasquella as a character see the next section of this chapter below.

²⁶⁰“*aiuto con li suoi secreti [sic]*,” here spelled with a “c,” as opposed to the “g” used elsewhere. Salerno, 88: “to help with her secrete formulas.” Andrews, 65: “to help her with her magic charms.” Fitzpatrick, 380: “to help her with her secret remedies.” Andrews’s translation assumes that “*segreto*” implies magic, both here and in Isabella’s explanation to Orazio in Act Three where he translates “*il segreto per sanarlo*” as “the potion to cure him” (67). More on this below.

²⁶¹“*confettioni fatali.*” Salerno, 88: “the fatal candy.” Andrews, 65: “the magic sweetmeats.” Fitzpatrick, 380: “the magic sweets.” By translating “*segreti*” and “*fatali*” with regard to magic, Andrews (on both occasions) and Fitzpatrick (at the later) support the interpretation that Pasquella is a witch, but the *scenario* never says that her powers are through magic rather than herbal concoctions, medicinal knowledge, or some other “secrets.” The Early Modern mind would be less likely to see a distinction; nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that this *scenario* does not explicitly rely on “magic,” despite the interpretation of these translators. Similarly, in Act Three, Salerno, 90, refers to the “poisoned candy” and “untainted candy,” when Scala merely reads, “*Isabella riceue le scatole, e manda quella della follia, ad Oratio, e si ritie ne l’atra, che sana* (emphasis added).” Andrews and Fitzpatrick do not make this interpretative leap as to how the “candy of the madness” functions. More on magic and the character of Pasquella below.

<i>Pantal.</i>	in order to bring Oratio to the bank for money so that he might
<i>Oratio</i>	depart immediately, he sees Isab. he greets her, then he departs with Oratio behind which with signs he ²⁶² salutes Isab. and he pleads with Ped. he goes away, Isab. says to Pedrol. that in an hour he should return to her, at which
<i>Flauio</i>	sees him discussing with his sister, gets suspicious, and he sends her into the house threatening Pedr.

This point roughly marks the middle of the entire *scenario* and the point by which most of the story has been set in motion. We will now move on to further interpretive matters.

3.4 Scala's Cavadente vs. the Casamarciano Cavadenti

Tim Fitzpatrick has thoroughly analyzed the two extant *Tooth-Puller scenari* in Scala and the Casamarciano collection, primarily in service of his larger interest in the relationship between oral culture, written *scenari*, and Commedia dell'Arte performance. He concludes that, while the Casamarciano text is later and could be read as a reliant on the printed Scala text, nevertheless the two texts "are almost always close paraphrases of each other, suggesting that the transmission has been partly via oral processes." He also notes that, in many instances, the hand-written

²⁶²A good example of how the unstated Italian subject creates interpretative problems. In this plot point Pantalone and Orazio enter together (hence the appearance of both names in the left margin), so it is not entirely clear who the "he" is in each situation. Presumably, "he" is Pantalone in the independent clause until the phrase "*con Oratio*," at which point Orazio becomes the implied subject.

Casamarciano text “provides slightly more explicit indications for the performers” than the published Scala scenario, leading to his conclusion that the fact that Scala’s version was published (“the one differentiating factor in their transmission”) “does not seem to result in radically different notation process.”²⁶³

In other words, Scala’s versions of *Commedia scenari*, though prepared for publication and intended for general readership, are in Fitzpatrick’s mind still consistent with the notation practices seen in non-circulated, handwritten *scenario* copies kept for private, company use. Furthermore, he notes, as a key premise of his entire study, that even the written manuscripts of *scenari* are a result of the culture of oral performance behind *Commedia dell’Arte*, a culture that reaches beyond the “improvisation/memorization divide” and in fact permeates the entire structure of *Commedia dell’Arte* practice: “*commedia dell’arte* was a prominent and predominately oral process in a society in which oral and literate processes happily cohabited and complemented each other in a manner modern scholars might well find unusual.”²⁶⁴

While Fitzpatrick’s work and Henke’s later continuation of it²⁶⁵ use the *scenari* as data for the oral-literary nature of *Commedia* performance conventions, my focus in this section is how the two separate *scenari* from two separate collections

²⁶³Fitzpatrick, 185-86.

²⁶⁴*ibid.*, 1-2.

²⁶⁵Henke emphasizes how *Commedia* performance—both on stage and off—embodied an oral performance shaped by and into literary conventions. He notes this even in the private lives and personal correspondences of *Commedia* performers who positioned themselves as literate and literary, even as their characters’ oral performance was shaped by literary conventions and tropes of the novella. See Henke, *Performance and Literature*, 45.

reflect aspects of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition (Taylor's "Repertoire") beyond the printed page (or "Archive").²⁶⁶

3.4.1 Settings

The extant Commedia dell'Arte *scenari* typically list their setting merely as the city in which the play takes place. While pastoral or tragic plays might occur in forests, glens, or far-off kingdoms, the comedies are almost always set in contemporary, real-life cities.²⁶⁷ This follows the convention of Roman comic playwrights who built their stories around the day-to-day life of an urban environment. Some *scenari* require in-door scenes,²⁶⁸ but many—including *The Tooth-Puller*—take place exclusively on the street, with the doors and windows of houses used to allow characters to appear in the action by poking out of their homes and to retreat from action by returning either back inside or off to another part of the city. Within Scala's collection, the locations of the cities vary: Rome is by far the most common setting as the location for sixteen different plots; Perugia, Florence, Bologna, and Naples, for three each; Venice and Genoa claim two; and one *scenario*

²⁶⁶See my discussion of Diane Taylor's *The Archive and The Repertoire* in Chapter Four below.

²⁶⁷One notable exception is Scala's Day 6: *The Jealous Ole Man* set at "Villa sul Padouano." Andrews, *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*, 39, wonders if this *scenario* might have been written for a performance at a real country villa, "with some of the household staff taking walk-on roles." Regardless, *The Jealous Man* stands indomitably within the tradition as a counter-example to the ubiquitous claim that Commedia is (always) "urban" comedy.

²⁶⁸For example, the Casamarciano *Casa con due porte* (discussed earlier in this chapter) shifts between scenes on the street and multiple scenes within Tartaglia's house (a house that, incidentally, has "two doors," for requisite intrigue).

is located in each of Pesaro, Milan, Mantua, Parma, and—the outlier—a Paduan villa.²⁶⁹

Notably, all these cities except Naples (mentioned three times) and Rome (the most frequent) are in the north of the peninsula. The northern cities, as well as Rome, could easily have been tour stops on a northern Italian circuit for a company like Scala's. Natalie Crohn Schmitt raises the possibility that "in performance of Scala's scenarios the city names were changed to accommodate the places of performance," noting that the Capitano character frequently enters praising the town and its women and Flaminia in Day 26 takes time to pay compliments to the city.²⁷⁰ These moments provide opportunities for local improvisation, a Renaissance version of, "Hello, Cleveland!"

Some have held that perhaps each city as written was the location of the premiere performance of that *scenario*, though in most cases there is no reason to suspect this.²⁷¹ Typically, the cities are interchangeable, with no identifying markers other than the universally recognizable aspects of urban life. Unlike, say a Shakespeare history play, with specific reliance on historical people and unique places, these comedies can be played anywhere interchangeably.

Of note then, is the fact that, while the Scala *scenari* are almost exclusively set in the north, the Casamarciano *scenari* are almost all set in Naples, where the *scenari* were collected and transcribed. Only a handful of stories are set in Rome, Genoa,

²⁶⁹See Schmitt, 67.

²⁷⁰*ibid.*

²⁷¹See *ibid.*, as well as Andrews, *The Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*, 39.

Messina, Livorno, Turin, Florence, Venice, Milan, or even fantastical forests or exotic locales such as Barcelona, Seville, and Copenhagen. *The Tooth-Puller* (*Cava denti* i/93) is set in Naples, but, as with the Scala version, no mention is ever made of the town beyond the setting. In reality, the cities are interchangeable, which will be discussed further in Chapter Five with regards to the scenic design for Ole Miss Theatre's *The Tooth-Puller*.²⁷²

3.4.2 Character Names

Most contemporary understandings of Commedia embrace the notion that there are only a few character types within the tradition, even though there are scores and scores of unique character names within the records. The two different versions of *The Tooth-Puller* in Scala and the Casamarciano collection evince this phenomenon. As Fitzpatrick points out, “The names of the characters have been changed, but the internal relationships [are] preserved precisely from one scenario to the other.”²⁷³ This reality is part of why nearly all teachers and practitioners today stress the “character relationships” or the “dramaturgy” (by which they mean the

²⁷²*The House with Two Doors* is also set in Naples, and the Faction of Fools 2010 production incorporated frequent references to the city and its characteristics. The effect on the audience was the opposite of how such a tale would have originally played. To our audience in Washington, DC, Naples was exoticized by the references, which in some instances were admittedly caricatured. On the other hand, an audience witnessing a Commedia performance during the Golden Age would have assumed that the story was about them and their city. This reality led to Faction of Fools' experiment with *Plays on the American Mask* and is behind the work of companies like La Fenice Austin and the Fabulous Lancashire Revels, both of which embrace as part of their mission creating a form of Commedia dell'Arte that is unique to their own cities and audiences.

²⁷³Fitzpatrick, 86.

system of relationships and motivations between characters) as fundamental to the style of Commedia.²⁷⁴

While the character roles in the two *Tooth-Puller scenari* function similarly in relation to each other, some have different names based on geographic connections. This is common from town to town or company to company, but it is especially prevalent across the divide of “northern” and “southern” traditions on the Italian peninsula. In the Casamarciano scenario, the first and second Zanni pair of Pedrolino and Arlecchino has been replaced by Coviello and Pulcinella, the most famous servants in the Neapolitan tradition and standard players in the Casamarciano collection. All Lover names are changed from standard northern names to names more common in other Casamarciano *scenari*. The Franceschina character is named “Frauletta,” a name that is not as common and that indicates German influence. Interestingly, the Pantalone character is not replaced by the common southern Vecchio Tartaglia but instead by the generic name “Magnifico,” a point we will return to in Chapter Four.

3.5 The Tooth-Puller vs. *The Tradition*

In selecting *The Tooth-Puller* as the *scenario* I would pitch to the Ole Miss Theatre Season Selection Committee, I was of course drawn to the famous moment when Arlecchino, in disguise, yanks out Pantalone’s teeth. The image is ripe with

²⁷⁴In all my practitioner surveys and interviews, no question produced greater unanimity than asking respondents to rank how much they agree with “A Commedia dell’Arte character is defined by the relationships with other characters.” While definitions based on name, mask, gestures, language, etc. produced different reactions, nearly all respondents answered “agree” or “strongly agree” regarding the central importance of “the relationships with other characters.” We will return to the concept of character relationship and performing “dramaturgical social types” in Chapter Six.

deep psychological associations (recall that in dreamology, broken or missing teeth are often tied to impotence), is a brilliant example of the topsy-turvy possibility of servants in disguise as powerful figures, and provides a perfect situation for the “*Pantalone paga*” moral in which the greedy old man is called to recompense for his self-centered abuses of others. I was also especially enrapt by the fact, discussed above, that this *scenario* is remembered in both Northern and Southern traditions. I assumed that the *scenario* then would be a “typical” display of Commedia as I knew it from other sources with which I had previously worked more closely.

To my surprise, delight, stupefaction, and ultimate epiphany, the *scenario* is actually an outlier in many respects. I frequently found myself scratching my head in rehearsals, wondering if we should add aspects of characters that I thought should be present but did not see in the text, and students in the production would often ask why something they had studied with me in class did not seem to match what they saw play out in this *scenario*. As can be read in the full script below (Appendix A), we opted for a balanced approach but generally tried to be led first by the *scenario* in establishing who the characters are in this particular story and what the world of this play looks like. I will describe in the remainder of this chapter several the seeming “oddities” from this scenario as well as how another recent script of the play handles the difficulties.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁵The play described below is by Terry Glaser, whom I met in June 2017 at the Accademia dell’Arte Faculty Symposium. She mentioned that she was working on this script, and I responded that we had just staged a version of it the previous winter at the University of Mississippi. She began to circulate her final script for performance in October, and she shared it with me and answered interview questions about it in an email correspondence on 29 January 2018.

Who is Il Dottore?

The Dottore type is typically seen as “the caricature of a pedagogue, the pedantic windbag.”²⁷⁶ Sources are consistent in describing his character as hailing from Bologna, wearing a black doctor’s gown, and presenting a propensity for Renaissance “philosophy,” which is to say “the study of everything.”²⁷⁷ While some Commedia characters and relationships appear indebted to Roman comedy, for example Il Capitano’s connection to the *miles gloriosus* (see Chapter Two) or the prevalence of domestic master-servant and parent-lover relationships, Il Dottore by contrast is frequently seen as a type drawn from contemporary satire, based on the pedants of the Early Modern university culture and the charlatans of the market culture grown through the middle ages. Even though Il Dottore is situated within this Renaissance typology, the character changes very little throughout the subsequent centuries of the tradition, with *lazzi* and character iconography remaining consistent from early seventeenth century depictions all the way to the late nineteenth and twentieth-century Neo-Commedia historiographic movements (see Chapter Four).

Despite the uniformity of character type in the sources and the consistency of iconographic data across the centuries, Il Dottore in *The Tooth-Puller* is never described with any of the characteristics usually ascribed to him. Terry Glaser’s 2017 script of *The Dentist: An Original Commedia dell’Arte Play Inspired by a Flaminio Scala Scenario from 1611* adds in the customary verbal *lazzi* described in Fava,

²⁷⁶Grantham, *Playing Commedia*, 164.

²⁷⁷Fava describes Il Dottore as a “*gran tuttologo*” or “Great Everythingologist” (Fava, *La maschera comica nella commedia dell’arte*, 197.)

Rudlin, and Grantham's manuals, frequently giving Il Dottore pompous monologues and specific prompts for intellectual *grammelot* à la Dario Fo or John Cleese.²⁷⁸

Nevertheless, none of these wonderfully "classic" Il Dottore moments in Glaser's script are indicated by the source *scenario*. Il Capitano, for example, is specifically given *topoi* for a *bravura* at his entrance, but Il Dottore never gets such a cue. His entrances are always specifically tied to a subplot: he is owed 25 *scudi* and has come to collect. He has no further backstory and no additional engagement with the plot. Elsewhere, Il Dottore is frequently one of the two parents and heads of the household, but here he appears "*solo*." Although he sometimes has an involvement in the central love story, as either a promiser of a child to be married or as the promised groom of a new young bride, he has no such function in this tale. In the text, he is not a father and not a professor, just a man who wants his money.

Upon close reading of *The Tooth-Puller scenario*, Il Dottore emerges as nothing more than a second "Vecchio" character. His one driving force appears to be greed, and his only social relationship is as an equal to Pantalone, with whom economic transactions are mediated by the servant Pedrolino. Within the Ole Miss Theatre production, we had frequent discussion in devising sessions about whether traditional verbal *lazzi* and character traits should still hold. Should the Doctor be in engaged in the practice of law or of medicine? Would that mean that the 25 *scudi* he

²⁷⁸Terry Glaser, *The Dentist: An Original Commedia dell'Arte Play Inspired by a Flaminio Scala Scenario from 1611*, unpublished manuscript, October 2017. On *grammelot* see Dario Fo, *The Tricks of the Trade*, trans. Joe Farrell, ed. Stuart Hood (London: Methuen Drama, 1991), 61-63, 76-80. For a hilarious English rendition of Fo's "technocrat," see John Cleese, "Podcast #33: The Brain Explained," *John Cleese Podcasts: The Thoughts, Observations, and Musings of John Cleese*, 7 August 2008, available at <http://www.johnclesepodcast.co.uk/cleeseblog/2008/08/john-cleese-podcast-33-brain-explained.html>.

is owed is a bill for professional services rendered? Should he take extensive opportunities to soliloquize upon scholarly matters, or should he focus solely on the plot points at hand?

In one sense, these questions relate back to the relationship between character and plot, specifically in structures where the character exists *a priori*. To what extent are the aspects of the character's personality expected to appear in and drive each episodic situation, and to what extent are unnecessary aspects of the character ignored when they do not serve the specific structure and comic logic? For example, several modern Dottore-type characters appear in the CBS sit-com *The Big Bang Theory*, and, while aspects of personality, language, and relationships within the group are consistent, other details—such as each character's scientific field of study—are frequently omitted in situations where their jobs are irrelevant to the plot. In many episodes, none of them ever practice science at all.

Another specific example of this relationship between character and plot in situational television can be seen in the popular *Seinfeld* episode “The Chinese Restaurant.”²⁷⁹ This “bottle episode” focuses exclusively on Jerry, Elaine, and George waiting for a table at a local Chinese restaurant. Kramer does not appear at all. Jerry's career as a comedian has no bearing. Jerry and Elaine's sexual relationship (rekindled just a few episodes earlier and then completely dropped) is not mentioned.²⁸⁰ George had been fired from his job a few episodes earlier, but his lack

²⁷⁹*Seinfeld*, episode 2.11 “The Chinese Restaurant,” directed by Tom Cherones, written by Larry David and Jerry Seinfeld (Sony Pictures Television, 23 May 1991).

²⁸⁰Jerry and Elaine rekindle their sexual relationship in episode 2.09 “The Deal,” but after breaking things off at the end of that episode, the dalliance is not mentioned again until episode 3.03

of employment or professional life in no way factor into his behavior in this moment.²⁸¹ Avid viewers may have all of these things in the back of their minds while watching, but the episode requires nothing further than three people waiting for a dinner table and fearing they will be late for their movie. Similarly, when viewing *The Tooth-Puller*, audience members familiar with the Commedia dell'Arte system may hold in mind a variety of details about the character Il Dottore, but all he needs to do in this particular *scenario* is appear occasionally to demand money and then become enrapt in Pedrolino's ploys.²⁸²

3.5.1 Pairs and Pairs of Lovers

Among the extant *scenari*, we often find intertwined plots of two sets or even three sets of *innamorate*. Many teachers and handbooks acknowledge this historical possibility, and yet most only teach one pair and use simplified training exercises involving only two households with one child each.

"The Pen," when Jerry's mother asks about it. The intervening five episodes (including "The Chinese Restaurant") play out as though the encounter in "The Deal" never even took place.

²⁸¹George is fired in episode 2.07 "The Revenge," a fact he alludes to in episode 3.02 "The Truth" when, accused of being cheap, he responds, "I mean, I'm not really working right now." George's career problems would occasionally be featured until he is memorably hired by George Steinbrenner to work for the New York Yankees in 5.21 "The Opposite." However, in most episodes, including "The Chinese Restaurant," this major reality of George's life plays absolutely no part except in his general outward characterization as a spendthrift and a lightning rod for failure.

²⁸²For the purposes of explaining the backstory of the 25 *scudi* and quickly establishing the character relationships in the town, the Ole Miss Theatre production added a Prologue scene in which Pedrolino must purchase "special medication" from Il Dottore to aid his virility and ensure a successful courtship with Isabella. Terry Glaser's production also employs a prologue (in her case, a dumb show) to establish traditional relationships and introduce an unfamiliar audience to the characters and the form.

The multiple sets of Lovers allow the possibility of comedic and dramatic pairs, which can also be satisfied by giving the *innamorate* servants who engage in their own courtship or by providing a second young woman of the *signora* or “bawd” type who frequently is an object of the Old Man’s affection but has her own designs on Il Capitano or the *innamorato*.²⁸³ This distinction between “First Lovers” (high) and “Second Lovers” (low) was borrowed by comic opera and is seen then heavily in American musical theatre, where romantic leads typically have comedic compatriots with their own relationship (for example, the Sky-Sarah and Nathan-Adelaide couples in *Guys and Dolls*).

Frequently, however, the “First Lovers” and “Second Lovers” scheme is accomplished without recourse to other character types but with two distinct pairs of *innamorate*. While most “how-to” books and courses teach the Lovers as a single, monolithic social type, we see a range of Lover styles within the extant written sources. In *The House with Two Doors*, Orazio’s friend Luzio is described as arriving from out of town and frequently is the inadvertent butt of jokes due to situations he does not understand as he pursues Tartaglia’s daughter Ortenzia. The Faction of Fools production exploited this by making Luzio a Spaniard (pronouncing his name “Luthio”) whose great passion and unfamiliarity with Napolitano customs left him, unknowingly or unintentionally, in a series of compromising and embarrassing positions.

²⁸³In his workshops, Fava describes the distinction by saying that, for the First Lovers, “Love is forever,” while, for the Second Lovers, “Love is for tonight.” One pair is poetic and celestial; the other, carnal and terrestrial.

Some sources differentiate the Lovers by having the Primi Innamorati depicted as mature, poetic, dignified Lovers (still capable of madness or inadvertent obscenity when the situation justifies it), while the Secondi Innamorati are younger, more naïve, and more impetuous.²⁸⁴ *The Tooth-Puller*'s Flaminia more closely fits this description than the traditional depiction of the elegant, poetic *innamorata* Isabella. She is immediately in love with Il Capitano, even though he is a different (grotesque, comedic) character type and without any backstory or romance. Her love shifts to Flavio on a whim later in Act Three, and, though we see him pine and plan for her along the lines of poetic, written-in-the-stars destiny, she is never described as matching his methods for courtship.²⁸⁵ These considerations led in part to the decision described below to make Isabella and Orazio the elder siblings and Flaminia and Flavio adolescents.²⁸⁶

Tellingly, Glaser's 2017 script of *The Tooth-Puller* omits one pair of the Lovers found in the source material. As she describes, "I went with one set of lovers in order to streamline the plot, reduce the number of characters, and not dilute the love interest."²⁸⁷ She accomplishes these goals and molds the play and the characters

²⁸⁴Christopher Bayes teaches the First Lovers as having "more sexual knowledge," while his Second Lovers are "unexperienced but still burning with passion" ("Commedia dell'Arte Weekend," a workshop given at The Funny School of Good Acting, 10-11 February 2018, in Brooklyn, NY). Others describe idealized First Lovers whose relationship is entirely poetic and not at all sexualized, while Second Lovers have baser urges.

²⁸⁵In fact, Flaminia enjoys significantly less stage time than the other three Lovers, a point not obvious on the page but clear in rehearsals and devising.

²⁸⁶As will be seen in Appendix A, we also created a servant love story between Pedrolino and Franceschina, and we allowed Arlecchino to have an unrequited infatuation with Isabella. This sort of impossible longing for a higher-class, more ideal woman is frequently seen in Pulcinella stories and later in Pierrot's heartbroken longing (as utilized in Faction of Fools' *Don Juan* through Pierrot's fascination with Charlotte).

²⁸⁷Terry Glaser, email correspondence with author, 29 January 2018.

into conformity with the bulk of the current teaching. Glaser's Lovers seem like what one expects having perused Rudlin's book or taken a brief workshop. By contrast, Scala's Lovers are contradictory and complex with far more problems to solve, meaning that in this case the original historical material is not as tidy as the reconstruction.

Glaser's script not only omits a pair of Lovers, it also omits two-thirds of the plot by focusing solely on the farcical tooth-pulling that completes Act One and cutting Pasquella, the treats, the madness, and all the imbroglio of Acts Two and Three. Like many Commedia scripts produced in the last few decades (and I would count my own *The Great One-Man Commedia Epic* in this group), it is essentially a simple *canovaccio* stretched out to 80 minutes and replaying the basic distillation of social types and situations from the "how-to" materials. Here, the Lovers are divided by simple misunderstanding and become reconciled through a change of heart. In the original *scenario*, however, the solutions bring even more problems as the story spins onward. Isabella earns a happy ending only by first consulting a specialist in wonderous arts, by joining a plot to brutalize her future father-in-law, by overcoming the mistakes of her servants, by inflicting insanity upon her lover (and Pedrolino as well), by throwing the town into chaos, by curing her lover (and Pedrolino as well), and both her brother and her future father-in-law, the most powerful man on the block. While the common, simple understanding of Commedia involves a circular system that moves from happy stasis to unhappy accident to happy stasis, the extant *scenari* often show a spiraling structure that moves from good to bad to worse and

worse and worse until, finally, the problems are wrapped up through a complicated, unexpected turn of events. Many contemporary reconstructions often perpetuate the notion that Commedia was simplistic and formulaic, but the Golden Age plots often prove themselves complex and even difficult to follow for contemporary practitioners.

3.5.2 Parents and Children

A central relationship in most Commedia dell'Arte plots—one that is borrowed from Italian *novelle*, Roman Comedy, and human societies—is the relationship between an aging parent and a maturing child. Typically, the parent in question is a widowed father, representing Early Modern and classical patriarchy and sustaining the practice inherited from male-only theatrical models of limiting the number of female roles within a plot.²⁸⁸ The child is a young person of marrying age, and the most fundamental conflict within the tradition is the clash between the desires young lovers and the wills of their fathers.

While each household typically has its own *paterfamilias* in the form of the Old Men, *The Tooth-Puller scenario* does not give any explanation for the whereabouts of Flavio and Isabella's father who is presumably deceased (just as most *scenari* offer no information about the mother, also presumably deceased). Nor does it provide any additional backstory about Isabella's late husband, simply noting that when the play starts she is a widow.²⁸⁹ The clearest indication of the family

²⁸⁸See M. A. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 200-201.

relationship is seen in the list of characters, which typically groups the characters into their respective households, with a *paterfamilias*, children, and servants listed together for each domestic unit. Isabella is listed under Flavio, clearly indicating that she is part of the household of which he is the head, a relationship that invites several comic opportunities for power disparities. First, the two heads of the family units are Pantalone and Flavio, who are on unequal footing socially and who represent different characters typologically. They are not conventional foils, and they are not a traditional *coppia comica*, as the Dottore and the Magnifico so fluidly are. Not only is Flavio not an equal to Pantalone, but he has not even been successful in becoming Pantalone's son-in-law by gaining the hand of Flaminia. Secondly, the patriarchal power structure places Isabella, who presumably has been a woman with her own household prior to the death of her husband, back at home now as the ward to her brother. To heighten this conflict and considering the different traits observed in the Lovers (discussed in the previous section), the Ole Miss Theatre production decided to make Flavio younger and much less experienced as a person of the world than Isabella. In fact, in the design process, we discussed his appearance as a child playing dress-up in grown-up clothes, a boy trying to fill a role that he has not yet grown in to. Deprived of her own agency, Isabella must negotiate her plans through her younger brother, making him imagine that he is having his own way while the audience knows that the marginalized women Isabella, Franceschina, and Pasquella are, in actuality, the town's only hope for a happy ending.

²⁸⁹For common aspects of courtship, marriage, and divorce in northern Italian cities during the Early Modern period, see the microhistory Gene Brucker, *Giovanni and Lusanna: Love and Marriage in Renaissance Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

3.5.3 Whither Il Capitano?

Day 11 of Scala's *favole* focuses on its title character *The Captain*, in what one imagines as a tour de force by and about *Gelosi* manager Francesco Andreini who originated the role of Capitano Spavento. By contrast, the Day 12 *Tooth-Puller scenario* has the Captain, not only as an outsider, but barely connected to the central plotlines. His entrance in Act One is the first solo performance described in the *scenario*, and it contains the usual *topoi* for a Captain's comic *bravura*. However, his relationship to Isabella (whom he loves) and Flaminia (who loves him) is not specified and receives little stage time beyond the comic *scena interzata* he shares with the two *innamorate*. In his next big moment, he closes Act Two as the victim of Flavio's misplaced rage against Pantalone. He barely features in Act Three, and his relationship with Flaminia, never having been solidified, evaporates as quickly as it started when Flaminia capriciously reciprocates Flavio's love.

In the Ole Miss Theatre version, we took the cues for extraneous comedy in the Captain's involvement in Acts One and Two to glorify him in largescale *lazzi* whenever possible. We wrote in the most cursory of backstories through his relationships with Arlecchino and turned his entrance into a musical number featuring the entire cast. Similarly, his spectacular conclusion to Act Two and his final, unceremonious farewell at the end of Act Three became musical moments in which the Captain scored gratuitous laughs. Nevertheless, the character, though amusing, was also confusing to several viewers, and the plot would function more smoothly

without him. Glaser's script, having already eliminated Flaminia, struggles even more to connect Il Capitano to the plot when the source material has him as ancillary.

3.5.4 Pasquella, *La Vecchia* or *La Strega*?

Although Pasquella appears in a handful of *scenari*, she nevertheless occasions hardly any mention within writers as far apart as Duchartre and Schmitt.²⁹⁰ Katritzky's *The Art of Commedia* does not discuss her by name but notes, "Older women depicted in the iconography are generally maids, bawds or wives."²⁹¹ Within Scala's collection, Pasquella is presented with aspects of all of these. She is described as a "*vecchia*," or old woman, at her first entrance in *The Tooth-Puller*, and the Ole Miss Theatre production imagined her as Isabella's former nursemaid, akin to Juliet's Nurse. In the Day 6 *scenario The Jealous Old Man*, Pasquella appears as the wife to the gardener Burattino, but she also is depicted as bawdy both in her own actions toward Orazio and in how she is treated (and mistreated) by others.

It is common to hear, "There are no old women in Commedia," when what the speaker typically means is, "The birthmothers of the Lovers are not traditionally featured." In fact, there are old women, as Pasquella proves, but they occupy a curious place in the tradition. Practitioners as distinct as Antonio Fava and Christopher Bayes have experimented in classes with a "Pantalona" character, allowing female performers to play the Vecchio-type without denying their gender

²⁹⁰Schmitt offers little more about her than that she is "a woman at the lower end of the social scale" (149). Duchartre does not discuss her.

²⁹¹Katritzky, *The Art of the Commedia*, 205. Pasquella is similar to *The Mandrake*'s Sostrata, discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

identity. Of course, this Vecchia quickly becomes a somewhat different type from the Magnifico, and often takes on some aspects of the traditional Bawd or “Ruffiana” seen in some historical iconography.

Carlo Boso amplified this character into La Strega, “The Witch,” a female type from recent decades that has caught on with enough popularity that some mask-makers now include La Strega in their Commedia inventory.²⁹² On first blush, Pasquella from *The Tooth-Puller* seems to fit this type nicely; however, as discussed above in the notes to my translation, the text does not explicitly state that she has magical powers, only that she knows *segreti*. In *The Jealous Ole Man*, Pasquella has no special powers, and it does not seem to me like she needs to be a “witch” in order to make *The Tooth-Puller* function.²⁹³ While the Ole Miss Theatre version wrote her into the top of Act Three (when the sweets are delivered), Scala features her only in the opening scene of Act Two. The Casamarciano *scenario* does not show the character on stage but merely mentions her, by the name of as Madonna Spizzica, as the source of the madness-inducing candies. Her omission indicates how she serves only as a plot device. Glaser’s script for *The Tooth-Puller*, on the other hand, omits the madness entirely and therefore has no need of Pasquella at all.

²⁹²As discussed in Giangiacomo Colli, interview by author, 21 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

²⁹³On the other hand, Anders Bandy who created the character of Pasquella for the Ole Miss Theatre Production did want to stress her magical powers, which, in that production, were tied to theatrical conventions. She cued blackouts and thunder, conjured entrances, and participated in the production’s most direct moments of audience interaction. She was also hoist on her own petard when each of the character’s exits comically backfired (see Appendix A). Still, at least one audience member, whose other answers reveal a familiarity with and expectations about Commedia dell’Arte, found that these magical powers did not conform to previous experiences. When asked, “What is one way in which the play was different from what you expected?” this responder wrote in, “I didn’t expect magic to play a part.”

3.5.5 “Tradition” *contra* Data

Commedia dell’Arte characters exist outside of the stories that feature them. As both types and individuals, they are a product of Renaissance humanism and one of the first, clearest counters to Aristotle’s claim that action supersedes character. The Commedia character exists in the performer’s repertoire and in the cultural sphere before the *scenario* is written down and even before the show is performed. For this reason, most instructors and books teach Commedia dell’Arte by describing its characters (see Chapter Six). On the other hand, the *scenari*, descriptions, and iconography are the most reliable historical data we have about what the characters were like. Commedia research is its own special hermeneutic circle in which one cannot understand the tradition without studying the sources, but one cannot interpret the sources without knowledge of the tradition. Researchers might find themselves in Baudrillard’s simulacrum with a “map that precedes the territory.”²⁹⁴ As this project emphasizes, Commedia historiography and reconstruction have frequently read later understandings of the tradition back into the very sources needed to document the tradition.

Glaser’s 2017 script of *The Dentist* is a perfect example of this, in part because it is such a lovely, funny play. It feels like pure Commedia in the way that most late twentieth-century experts and “how-to” manuals describe the form. Just as the tradition preserved in the Casamarciano *scenario* replaced some characters, Glaser also substitutes Brighella for Pedrolino and “Colombina [sic]” for

²⁹⁴Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

Franceschina. As she explains matter-of-factly, “I have a beautiful Brighella mask, and I wanted to use his particular character in the play. I chose Brighella and Colombina, as I think their names are more recognizable and their character traits are so strong.” She also adds Pulcinella: “Again, I have a beautiful Pulcinella mask, and I love his complex character.”²⁹⁵

Her script also omits two-thirds of the *scenario*’s plot, cutting the madness, Pasquella, and all of Acts Two and Three, “to simplify and unify the plot.” Glaser even eliminates one set of lovers “in order to streamline the plot, reduce the number of characters, and not dilute the love interest,” and she gives her *innamorati* the more famous names “Flavio” and “Isabella,” even though in the source material, those two are siblings, not lovers.²⁹⁶

The play achieves the goals stated above. It is much simpler than Scala’s original, and it is more “recognizable” for people mildly acquainted with the tradition because it elides the oddities that have been the subject of this chapter. On the other hand, as Glaser explains in her Note from the Author, “I wrote *The Dentist* in the spirit of the *Commedia dell'arte*, with the characters fundamentally true to their original Renaissance personalities.” My project seeks in part to interrogate the so-called “spirit of Commedia” as a locus of authenticity. Is Glaser’s *The Dentist* more authentically Commedia because it is updated for contemporary expectations and to

²⁹⁵All the quotations in this section are from Terry Glaser, email correspondence with author, 29 January 2018. Flavio and Isabella appear in extant materials as siblings, lovers, and friends. The individual characters remain constant, but their relationships change from plot to plot, the same way that Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan are cast with different relationships in different movies.

²⁹⁶Terry Glaser, email correspondence with author, 29 January 2018.

entertain today's crowd? Or is it less authentic because it purposefully omits aspects of the very tradition to which it claims to be "fundamentally true"?

Chapter 4: Images in the Archive

"Commedia dell'Arte doesn't exist," Fabio Mangolini said as soon as I requested to interview him about it. "What?" he asked with a provocative grin to his colleague Giangiacomo Colli sitting nearby, "I'm sorry, but it doesn't exist. It doesn't exist."²⁹⁷

Mangolini teaches Commedia regularly in his own workshops and serves as an acting instructor at Accademia dell'Arte. He also penned an essay for *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte* entitled, triumphantly, "Despite Everything, Commedia dell'Arte is Alive in Italy. Long Live Commedia!"²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, with equal but opposite bombast, he insists to anyone who tries to nail down what Commedia was or is, "It doesn't exist!"

Similarly, when asked about contemporary Commedia dell'Arte and "the tradition," Olly Crick gave no opinion beyond the comment, "What tradition? There is a modern tradition since 1946...." When asked how an actor should prepare to

²⁹⁷Fabio Mangolini, interview by author, 20 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

²⁹⁸idem, "Despite Everything, Commedia dell'Arte is Alive in Italy. Long Live Commedia!," in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Olly Crick and Judith Chaffee (New York: Routledge, 2015), 401-7.

perform Commedia, he agreed that one should study with a living Maestro or expert, adding, “But be very suspicious of any claims to authenticity or tradition....” Crick himself has co-authored and edited popular books on Commedia and has staged performances with the Fabulous Lancashire Revels, which he describes as “a PaR company dedicated to creating Lancastrian Commedia dell’Arte.”²⁹⁹ Nevertheless, like Mangolini, he “strongly disagrees” that there is such a thing as “‘authentic’ Commedia dell’Arte” (instead “There is only good performance and bad performance”), and he feels that one of the biggest misunderstandings about Commedia is “that it is a fixed form and not an evolving one.”³⁰⁰ Crick follows Giulia Filacanapa in asserting that what we have today is a “Neo-Commedia dell’Arte,” reinvented—not continued—from Renaissance inspiration (see Chapter Two).

So how does one participate in this evolving form to make something called “Commedia” today? It did not take long for Mangolini, who insisted that “it doesn’t exist,” to mention half a dozen different historical sources with reference to what they do or do not indicate about Commedia’s history. Crick also concluded his remarks by saying, “There are plenty of historical sources that indicate the rough area of how commedia was performed historically.” Crick called these “guides” for contemporary

²⁹⁹“PaR” = “Practice as Research,” which will be the topic of our Chapter Six below. The description of the Fabulous Lancashire Revels can be found in his PhD candidate bio at <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/performingarts/about/graduate-teaching-assistants/olly-crick/>. Crick’s in-progress dissertation is entitled *Defining a Dramaturgic Aesthetic for Neo-Commedia*.

³⁰⁰Olly Crick, Internet survey by author, 4 February 2018.

performers, adding, “Ultimately each idea or dramaturgic trick must be tested in front of a live audience.”

We will save the test in front of the audience for the following chapters and turn our attention in this chapter to historical sources, including the problems and potentials that arise from pointing at a piece of data to say, “Look, Commedia exists; that’s it right there!”

4.1 Movement in History

What Crick, Mangolini, and many others I spoke with are concerned about is the “fraud” or “marketing gimmick” behind someone’s claim to know and be able to demonstrate what historical Commedia looks like.

The problem is akin to what Hobsbawm and Ranger call an “invented tradition,” a practice or custom with documented origins in the recent past that has nevertheless become culturally accepted as being much older and more central to society’s roots than it actually is.³⁰¹ This is Crick’s point in mentioning that the “tradition” of Commedia, as it is most commonly known today, is not a centuries-old institution but one that originated, more or less, with the 1947 production of *A Servant of Two Masters*.

That production was hailed as a kind of new Renaissance of the Renaissance, a rediscovery of Early Modern theatre. It was positioned along the lines of Richard Schechner’s “restored event,” a performance that moves the subject (in this case,

³⁰¹Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Giorgio Strehler and company) into the indicative past to a real-life “Event” (in this case Renaissance Commedia dell’Arte) in order to bring that past to an indicative future in the form of a “Restored Event.” The Restored Event is hailed as being seen anew as it really was before.

However, Schechner points out that most so-called “restorations” are more honestly “reconstructions” because the subject in question cannot travel to the actual, indicative past. Rather, the subject imagines or re-constructs a “subjunctive past,” a “Nonevent” that stands in for the inaccessible “Event” of history. From this re-constructed “Nonevent,” one re-presents the imagined past anew as a present “Restored Nonevent,” a recreation of something that never actually appeared this way before its reinvention.³⁰² In other words, *a la* Mangolini, the so-called “Event” “doesn’t exist!”

In fact, nothing performative truly exists long enough to be pointed out. As Peggy Phelan has articulated, “Performance’s being...becomes itself through disappearance.” Its “only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance.”³⁰³ If the ontology of performance is disappearance, is the same true of the “historical” or “authentic” style of Commedia dell’Arte, which was, even more than other theatre of its time, primarily concerned with movement and not with what can be circulated “in

³⁰²On “restored behavior,” see Richard Schechner, “Restoration of Behavior,” in *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 35-116.

³⁰³Peggy Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction,” in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146.

representations of representations”?

Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire* theorizes this problem. She defines the Archive of “documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change” in contradistinction to the Repertoire, which “enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge.”³⁰⁴ Commedia in many ways falls into the category of “nonreproducible knowledge.” Although some “how-to” manuals were written during the Golden Age of Commedia,³⁰⁵ most theatrical knowledge was handed down through apprenticeships, family heritage, and living witnesses to a living practice. The plays themselves were created as presented on stage, and no scripts exist as artistic precursors to the play or literary artifacts after the event. Given this problem, how does the historian attempt to recover material from within the Repertoire? This chapter will focus on Katritzky and Heck’s art historical approach that can aid the process of analyzing extant iconography, but, as mentioned in Chapter Two, much twentieth-century historiography and “recreations” of Commedia were based on misleading surface readings of the iconography rather than a careful analysis of how the images are themselves a construction.

Schechner and Taylor’s theories, from the realm of Performance Studies, align

³⁰⁴Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 19-20.

³⁰⁵For example, Andrea Perrucci, *A Treatise on Acting, From Memory and by Improvisation (1699) / Dell’Arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all’improviso: Bilingual Edition in English and Italian*, trans. and eds. Francesco Cotticelli, Anne Goodrich Heck, and Thomas F. Heck (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 2008).

with Louis Gottschalk's caveat to historiography: "the historian's 'truths' are derived from analytical evaluations of an object called 'sources' rather than an object called 'the actual past.'"³⁰⁶ Along these lines, Thomas Postlewait describes how theatre historians may "reconstruct" or "represent" their own versions of theatrical events based upon the "presentations" and "constructions" in theatrical sources.³⁰⁷ Barbara Hodgdon notes, with reference to archival photos of theatrical events, that still photographs do not "mean" or "remember" something, but rather they "do" something anew within their own ideological framework.³⁰⁸ In other words, even photographic images associated with productions from the recent past are not transparent "documentation" of the performances, for they are staged, framed, selected, captioned, and recirculated until they take on a life of their own outside of the original performance. Sources construct or present events, and historians reconstruct or represent events based upon sources. In *The Tooth-Puller* we quite literally "re-presented" a newly constructed model of Commedia dell'Arte, one that was informed and inspired by how it was originally constructed in the sources, but a new invention nonetheless.

³⁰⁶Louis Gottschalk, *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Methods*, 2nd ed, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 1969), 171, as quoted in Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 29.

³⁰⁷See Postlewait, 29, for the larger discussion of these terms and how he applies them to the case study of the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London.

³⁰⁸Barbara Hodgdon, "Photography, Theatre, Mnemonics; Or, Thirteen Ways of Looking at Still," in *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History*, ed. W. B. Worthen with Peter Holland (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 99-100.

4.2 Interpreting Iconography: An Art-Historical Approach

In analyzing pictographic sources for how they construct Commedia dell'Arte, M.A. Katritzky, Robert Erenstein, and Thomas Heck advocate a careful art historical approach that seeks first to understand any source as a work of art in its original context before attempting to apply it to a historiographic enterprise. M. A. Katritzky has identified a five-point methodology for analyzing visual art with reference to performance:

- (1) Identify sources of relevant pictures.
- (2) Find pictures.
- (3) Obtain legible reproductions.
- (4) Classify the pictures art-historically.
- (5) Interpret their performance content and significance.³⁰⁹

The first three of Katritzky's steps—60% of the entire enterprise—begin with properly assessing what does or does not constitute data and finding reliable access to that data. Her concern is not pedantic as much ink has been spilled over mistaken interpretations of poor reproductions, as well as over materials that are not actually relevant witnesses. Most explorations jump directly to Katritzky's step five; however, the success of the enterprise hangs upon step four, which Erenstein and Heck further unpack in their systems.

Robert Erenstein follows the three-step pattern established by Benedetto Croce for analyzing literary evidence: *accettare, qualificare, e conoscere*, which

³⁰⁹M. A. Katritzky, "Performing-Arts Iconography: Traditions, Techniques, and Trends," in *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice*, ed. Thomas F. Heck (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999), 86-88.

Erenstein expands for iconography as follows:

- (1) “Verify the Evidence,” including “the origin of the picture, its attribution, its date, and so forth,”³¹⁰ as well as the art historical conventions in which it partakes. (Erenstein describes how the conventional *trompe l’oeil* painted dust covers at the top of seventeenth-century Dutch paintings have been misread as stage curtains misleading earlier theatre historians to include the paintings as elements of theatre iconography.)
- (2) “Put the Visual Evidence in Context,” in order to understand the conventions used by the painter in selecting and framing the material.
- (3) “Be Well-Versed in *all* the Evidence,” so that a single piece of data does not carry the interpretation contrary to other, perhaps more reliable, data.³¹¹

Erenstein’s last point about additional data agrees with Katritzky’s assertion, “We need to know the extent to which [a picture’s] visual information can be interpreted and corroborated, for example, through external sources concerning its place and date of production, its artist and patron or commissioner, and the performers or performance it depicts.”³¹²

³¹⁰Robert Erenstein, “Theatre Iconography: Traditions, Techniques, and Trends,” in *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice*, ed. Thomas F. Heck (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999), 139.

³¹¹*ibid.*, 139-46.

³¹²Katritzky, “Performing-Arts Iconography,” 68.

What Katritzky and Erenstein both describe in terms of interpretation, Thomas Heck further unpacks based on three levels of analysis:

Consciousness I: A surface or literal reading.

Consciousness II: A deeper, more formal reading of the work, which seeks to enter the mind of the artist and ask how and why the artist put a given composition together, what the artist borrowed and from where, who commissioned it, etc.

Consciousness III: The deepest reading of the work, relating it if possible to the artistic traditions, the symbolic conventions of the time, and the culture in which the artist lived.³¹³

In short, all three historians emphasize the need, not only to judge the surface of the picture, but to apply art historical approaches toward understanding how the picture functions within its own context and how it is, itself, a work of art produced by an artist whose primary goal was likely *not* providing documentary evidence for later theatre historians.

Many early works on Commedia's history (and most of what can be found on the Internet now) fail to employ the strategies of Katritzky, Erenstein, and Heck and thereby create confusion by assuming that images can be taken at face value (Heck's "Consciousness I") or that they teach something about Commedia dell'Arte, when in fact they may have very little connection to actual Commedia practices. Before drawing conclusions from iconography, one would do well to ponder whether the

³¹³Thomas F. Heck, "Introduction," in *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice*, ed. Thomas F. Heck (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999), 4.

image has any connection to Commedia's theatrical practice and, if so, what that relevance actually is and to which places and times in history it applies.

This chapter and the following chapter seek to apply these approaches to images and artifacts associated with the Commedia dell'Arte tradition for the purpose of finding, as Crick says, "guides" in the effort to represent Commedia dell'Arte today.

4.3 Pedrolino-Pierrot: A Test Case

One of the most inconsistent or variable threads within the evolution of a Commedia character type is the strand drawn from Pedrolino to Pierrot. Duchartre, who frequently perpetuates the notion of a monolithic Commedia tradition, draws this connection definitively in a chapter on "Pedrolino and his Family," where he writes

Pedrolino, Pierrot, and Piero are one and the same person. The character dates from the second half of the sixteenth century and not the second half of the seventeenth, as is generally supposed. Pedrolino was originally a valet, but he differs radically from the other valets of the *commedia dell'arte*: he is a young, personable, and trustworthy individual who can be a charming lover if necessary, like Lelio and Flavio, although he usually confines his attention to the soubrettes.³¹⁴

Several claims within these two sentences clash with other material from the tradition. While the later Pierrot character is often young, in numerous versions

³¹⁴Duchartre, 251.

Pedrolino and Pierrot are not. Fava does treat Pedrolino as a valet or house servant, typically the serving-man to la Signora; however, Fava's Pedrolino is an *infarinato* character performed in white-face rather than a mask, and his general demeanor is stiff and pointedly asexual. Fava's *infarinato* would never be entangled in romantic intrigues.

By contrast, the boyish Pierrot of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century stage and screen (the kind made famous in the film *Les Enfants du Paradis*) is frequently a pining lover, although his attention is not confined to soubrettes. He is also found longingly doting on women who are his social superiors, and his inability to reach them is a source of his melancholy.³¹⁵

Scala's Pedrolino, on the other hand, does have an appetite for soubrettes and is full of deceptive and even cruel intentions. He is far from "young, personable, and trustworthy," although he assumes these characteristics when manipulating others for his own gain or pleasure. Rather than a winsome underdog, Scala's Pedrolino is "disobedient," "cunning," and a "trickster."³¹⁶

One of earliest images of Pedrolino, on the frontispiece of *La gran vittoria di Pedrolino*, depicts him on the ground recoiling from a beating, which, akin to Scala's *The Tooth-Puller* plot, sets him up on a mission for satisfaction. This put-upon Pedrolino is similar to the abused and woeful Pierrot of later stories, though his hopelessness in this image does not correspond with the cunning seen in Scala's or Fava's version.

³¹⁵Faction of Fools drew on this tradition of Pierrot in the pantomime sequences in our 2013 adaptation of Molière's *Don Juan* and in the character's pining for Charlotte.

³¹⁶Schmitt, 48, 51, and 148-50.

In the frontispiece image, Pedrolino appears in flowing white dress and potentially unmasked. All versions of the character mentioned above share the same white clothing (as does Pulcinella, who is also sometimes associated as a cousin on this family tree); however, Fava's version is strictly bound in tight clothing while the later Pierrot of Deburau, Regnard, and Meyerhold is being swallowed by mounds of baggy fabric. The character in *La gran vittoria* appears unmasked, but etchings are not always clear on the distinction between a mask and a face. Fava's *infarinato* and the nineteenth-century French Pierrot both perform in white-face without a mask.

Unmasked, powdered characters date back to the appearance of the Lovers (by the 1560s, likely sooner) and include Guérin's Gros-Guillaume with his corpulent belly and floured face³¹⁷ and Fiorilli's Scaramouche played with a powdered white face and dark black moustache (see Chapter Two). The white face became even more iconic following the success of Garibaldi's white-faced clown in the nineteenth century, and, by the twentieth-century, three styles found in (1) Pierrot, (2) the "white clown" (*contra* the Auguste), and (3) the modern mime all shared in this convention. It is generally agreed that those three performance conventions emerge from similar cultural territory; however, the line drawn from that family back to Renaissance Pedrolino is neither as strong nor as straight as is often assumed. Based on the variety seen throughout the family, one wonders how useful it is to group them as

³¹⁷Linking him to Pedrolino and Pierrot, Duchartre describes Gros-Guillaume as both white-faced and "dressed entirely in white;" however, on the same page he includes a contradictory (uncited) quotation from Hugues Guéru's character: "'This is my valet, Guillaume le Gros [Big Bill],' Gaultier-Garguille would say, 'and I can always tell him by his clothes striped like the Swiss Guard of Francis I'" (259). How is Gros-Guillaume recognizable as both "dressed entirely in white" and as wearing "clothes striped like the Swiss Guard"? And how does this data contribute to Duchartre's shaky insistence, now made commonplace, that all these characters form a "family" that unites Pedrolino with Pierrot?

related (much less, “one and the same” *a la* Duchartre), beyond their similarity as a servant-type who wears white, a trait shared by most early Zanni.

A seeming flashpoint in the customary genealogy occurs in the eighteenth-century paintings of Jean-Antoine Watteau, although that entire corpus reveals so many complexities that Thomas F. Heck uses one of Watteau’s images as a case-study for theatre iconography gone wrong.

The painting in question is typically entitled “*Comédiens italiens*” (c.1719-20), and the central figure is the recognizable Pierrot-type that so captured Watteau’s fascination. Ironically, the painting in most descriptions is called, not Pedrolino, but “Gilles,” although the Louvre now refers to another painting of this “sad clown” as “Pierrot, formerly known as Gilles.”³¹⁸ Referring to Gilles as part of Pedrolino’s “family,” Duchartre writes,

The Giglio of the sixteenth century, who played the part of an amorous valet in the Intronati company, was as much like Pedrolino as Pierrot was like Gilles and Gilotin, between whom there is apparently no difference whatever.³¹⁹

Duchartre cites no evidence for this bold claim other than the white costume. Is it proper to agree with Duchartre and the Louvre that Gilles and Pierrot are always exactly one and the same? Is it possible to know which name Watteau would have given the painting?

³¹⁸Vincent Pomarède, “Pierrot, formerly known as Gilles,” Louvre website, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/pierrot-formerly-known-gilles> (accessed 16 February 2018).

³¹⁹Duchartre, 254.

Heck's concern about the so-called "*Comédiens italiens*" includes his concern about the painting's name: "Can the titles of paintings always be trusted?" he asks rhetorically, noting that the title of this painting "is probably a quirk of its publication history."³²⁰ The titles under which early images circulated were rarely affixed by the painters themselves. Especially if the painting is taken as iconographic evidence of something else, it will often be reproduced with an interpretive description rather than the "original" title. Through this process, titular attributions can be marshalled in circular reasoning as evidence of the thing for which evidence is sought. Assuming that this painting in question depicts "Italian comedians," two twentieth-century scholars use it as a source of theatre iconography:

- (1) "Watteau recreates the moment in the theatre when the performers look to the audience for applause."³²¹
- (2) "Gilles, an avatar of the commedia dell'arte's Pedrolino" in a "curtain call."³²²

Heck employs the techniques discussed above in his "Consciousness II," which relates to the art historical practice seen in Katritzky and Erenstein's methods. The first thing he highlights is that this painting was likely created in London in 1720, placing it at a far remove from Riccoboni's *Nouveau Théâtre-Italien* in Paris. The scholars quoted above take this painting as contemporary documentation of a

³²⁰Heck, "Introduction," in *Picturing Performance*, 2.

³²¹Heck, "Introduction," 2, citing Daniel Heartz "Watteau's Italian comedians," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 22, no. 2 (1988-89): 173.

³²²*ibid.*, 3, citing Felicia Hardison Londré, *The History of World Theatre from the English Restoration to the Present* (New York: Continuum, 1991), 51.

performance at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, but that does not square with the evidence about how, when, and where it was created.³²³

Rather than simply dispute the surface facts, however, Heck identifies the larger issue, which is that Watteau's work of art is, itself, *a work of art*. In his "Consciousness I"—"surface or literally reading"—of a work, the depiction is taken at face-value to document the thing that it depicts. Art historians do not treat images this way, and Heck argues that theatre historians should not either. Instead, one ought to attempt the "deepest reading" of the work on its own terms. In the case of the so-called "*Comédiens italiens*," Heck notes that the topics and arrangements are not consistent with an actual live performance. He suggests instead that the array of characters surrounding Pierrot depict the "stages of man" through reference to aspects of European performance and that Pierrot, bathed in white light, stands in the center in an *Ecce homo* pose. Under these allegorical and figurative interpretations, the painting, according to Heck might well be called "The Apotheosis of Pierrot" rather than "*Comédiens italiens*." If this is the case, Watteau here provides a fascinating source concerning Pierrot's cultural impact, but he does not provide a clear source about how Commedia dell'Arte was performed.

³²³Heck concedes that Hertz does not say the painting "is" a curtain call but rather that Watteau "recreates" a curtain call and that Hertz stipulates that Watteau at times "seems to be making up his own theatrical scene as suits his fancy" (*ibid.*, citing Hertz, 167).

4.4 Images of Commedia on Stage³²⁴

Despite ample evidence that Commedia dell'Arte grew up with and utilized indoor theatrical venues, Commedia companies have long been identified with temporary stages in market squares as evocatively depicted in the visual art of Callot, Scarron, Dujardin, and others. The Renaissance marketplace was inherently “theatrical,” a civic center where townspeople “performed” the drama of their everyday lives, where public gatherings were held, where merchants competed for the attention of potential customers, and where charlatans staged their demonstrations;³²⁵ however, a close association between Commedia dell'Arte and “public art of the people” is misleading. There are certainly woodcuts, engravings, paintings, and drawings of masked and costumed characters appearing on market stages, but this iconography is not easy to interpret.

In the seventeenth century these images show everything from performers on the ground, to three planks supported by low trestles, to large rectangular or square platforms raised five to eight feet.

One of the latter structures is depicted in two prints from Jacques Callot's collection *Balli di Sfessania* (1621-22).³²⁶ In one engraving, two characters labeled “Razullo” and “Cucurucu” dance in the foreground while a crowd in the background

³²⁴Portions of this section are reprinted, with permission of Routledge, from my contributions to Franklin J. Hildy and Matthew R. Wilson, “Stages and Staging Practices in Early Commedia dell'Arte,” in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell'Arte*, edited by Judith Chaffee and Olly Crick (New York: Routledge, 2015), 229-37.

³²⁵Eugene J. Johnson, “Jacopo Sansovino, Giacomo Torelli, and the Theatricality of the Piazzetta in Venice,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59, no. 4 (2000): 436-453.

³²⁶This collection is “the most artistically influential set of images relating to [Commedia dell'Arte] ever produced,” according to Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 17.

watches a scene staged on a temporary, out-door platform. The audience members stand around three sides of the stage, with the majority across the front. The stage appears to be elevated by scaffolding to about six feet high. The area underneath the stage is curtained, perhaps allowing for storage or an “off-stage” area for actors. The playing space appears to be roughly fifteen feet wide and half as deep. At the back hangs a simple curtain painted with an urban background, similar to a backdrop described in a 1533 Ruzante performance.³²⁷ This curtain also creates a “backstage” area, and one actor is seen peeking out from its right side. The frontispiece for the *Balli* collection depicts a closer view of a modest stage with three masked performers in front of a bare, nondescript curtain. Two other performers—an unmasked woman and a masked man—peak from two slits in the curtains, which could be used to indicate windows or doorways. At stage right, another performer is climbing a ladder from the ground level to the stage.

Scholars have argued that, at best, these images represent one of the less-successful Commedia troupes³²⁸ and that they may not depict Commedia at all. The collection specifically treats, not theatre, but “dances” (*balli*), and almost all the etchings in the collection showcase fairground performers, minstrels, and acrobats, rather than Commedia actors.³²⁹ Later illustrations from the eighteenth century show much more sophisticated structures with scene changing equipment and boxes for

³²⁷Ronnie Ferguson, “Venues and Staging in Ruzante’s Theatre: A Practitioner’s Experience,” in *The Renaissance Theatre: Texts, Performance, Design* (Aldershot: Ashgate Ferguson, 1999), 149.

³²⁸Robert L. Erenstein, “The Rise and Fall of Commedia dell’Arte,” in *500 Years of Theatre History* (Lyne: Smith and Kraus, 2000), 4-6.

³²⁹Donald Posner, “Jacques Callot and the Dances Called *Sfessania*,” *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 2 (1977), 203-4.

audience seating. But these are most likely illustrations of comic opera. So, while numerous paintings and engravings depict performers on market stages, it is not clear whether many of them actually represent Commedia dell'Arte performances.

Pictographic evidence can shed light on the kinds of stages that might have been available, but written reports demonstrate that the most successful troupes preferred to work indoors. This may have been part of “the constant struggle of early *comici* to dissociate themselves from the stigma attached to *buffoni*, street players and mountebanks,”³³⁰ a struggle the *prima donna* Isabella Andreini (1562–1604) illustrated when she complained to the Governor of Milan that “those who mount benches in the public piazza perform comedies and thus ruin them” and petitioned to have them banned.³³¹

As in the case of Watteau's Pierrots, the numerous images of mountebank troupes on raised trestle stages provide a window into cultural conceptions of performance and of Commedia—especially as imagined by foreigners. However, they are not enough to serve single-handedly as historical data in mining what Commedia dell'Arte was. The following chapter describes one example of grappling with these facts to design what Commedia is today, at least in one instance.

³³⁰Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 35.

³³¹Henke, *Performance and Literature*, 234n.

Chapter 5: Designing Commedia

5.1 Questions of Theatrical Design

Within many theatrical design programs, students find themselves navigating a spectrum between historical and period research on the one hand and artistic innovation on the other hand.³³² This dynamic in theatrical design pedagogy aligns with the focus of this dissertation, which explores how artists both look backward dramaturgically and forward creatively in staging contemporary works of Commedia dell'Arte.

This chapter, told through words and images, begins with some of my previous endeavors at staging productions that were, to a greater or lesser degree, “historical” Commedia dell'Arte. It then focuses specifically on pre-production research for Ole Miss Theatre's *The Tooth-Puller*, presented in February of 2017. By examining the theatrical design processes behind these productions, I will return to the applied theatre history question of this study: “How can we assess, analyze, and implement historiographic sources from Commedia dell'Arte's past to inspire the creation of new works that continue the style of Commedia dell'Arte today?”

While modern Western theatre typically starts from a script and works toward the stage, this Commedia process begins with the characters, only adding the dialogue much later. This is possible because Commedia dell'Arte characters live outside their

³³²This observation is based on my experiences working on production teams with student designers on eight different productions at the University of Maryland, University of Mississippi, Howard University, and LeMoyne College, as well as the course THET 670: “History of Art, Architecture, and Decor” taught by scenic and costume designer Misha Kachman at the University of Maryland, College Park.

own stories. Their identities reside in the larger cultural sphere, and, like characters from popular situation comedies, they already exist before they are instantiated in each episode.³³³

5.2 New Flesh on Old Bones

When I began Faction of Fools Theatre Company in 2009, I assumed that the company would produce at most one show a year and that it would largely be dedicated to “original practices” of “traditional” Commedia dell’Arte. As interest grew among audiences and performers alike, the company found itself with wider possibilities, including a permanent residency at Gallaudet University and the opportunity to mount whole seasons of fully produced productions. As discussed in Chapter Three, the possibility to produce more frequently also brought the opportunity and the pressure to experiment with new forms of Commedia in order to drive excitement about the next new show. Through this practice, we developed the following Mission Statement:

We preserve and promote this Renaissance theatre style by both respecting its heritage and exploring its future. We embody the spirit of Commedia, which is traditional yet innovative, international yet familiar, and classical yet accessible. In our performances, actor

³³³Cf. Marvin Carlson’s concept of “the haunted body” in *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 52-54. Commedia characters have also lived in the wider cultural sphere as seen in the ubiquity of porcelain figures from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which the characters have no connection to theatrical practice whatsoever. This pattern is generated anew in the early twentieth century as Commedia characters once again become popular in visual art, dance, and cinema, prior to their strong return to the stage. See Martin Burgess Green and John Swan, *The Triumph of Pierrot: The Commedia dell’Arte and the Modern Imagination*, rev. ed. (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

training, international initiatives, and educational outreach, Commedia dell'Arte is theatre at its best: physical discipline, spontaneous imagination, collaborative energy, and joyous wonder.³³⁴

The opportunity to explore both the past and the future of Commedia and the stated mission to pull from all aspects of the tradition and not only the most original practices, led to a variety of aesthetic styles. Chapter Three discussed the content of some of these plays. The following images convey their various design aesthetics.



Figure 1 *The House with Two Doors* (Faction of Fools Theatre Company, 2010)

TD Smith (Orazio), Michelle Tang Jackson (Ortenzia), Toby Mulford (Il Dottore), Annetta Dexter Sawyer (Tartaglia), Vanessa Buono (Isabella), and Graham Pilato (Luzio), Laura J. Scott (Rosetta), J. Denise Perrino (Pulcinella), and Chase Helton (Coviello). Devised & directed by Matthew R. Wilson and Toby Mulford based on the Casamarciano *Casa con due porte*, costumes by Lynly Saunders, leather masks by Antonio Fava. Photo by Yuriy Zahvoysky.

³³⁴See <http://factionoffools.org/about>.



Figure 2 *The Lady Becomes Him* (2013)

Lindsey D. Snyder (Celia, transformed into Pulcinella), Matthew Pauli (Il Dottore), and John V. Bellomo (Pulcinella). Devised & directed by Toby Mulford based on the Casamarciano *Donna Zanni*, costumes by Lynly Saunders, neoprene masks by Aaron Cromie, set by Daniel Flint. Photo by Second Glance Photography.



Figure 3 *Hamlecchino: Clown Prince of Denmark* (2012)

Billy Finn (Claudius), John V. Bellomo (Laertes), Emma Crane Jaster (Ophelia), Eva Wilhelm (Gertrude), Matthew R. Wilson (Hamlet), and Rachel Spicknall (Horatio). Directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Dennis Umland, neoprene masks by Aaron Cromie, set by Ethan Sinnott. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.



Figure 4 A Commedia Christmas Carol (2013)

Featuring the chorus of Pulcinella-Phantoms surrounding Tyler Herman (Fred). Written & directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Dennis Umland, neoprene masks by Tara Cariasio, set by Ethan Sinnott, lights by Andrew F. Griffin. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.



Figure 5 Scrooge and the Cratchits

Paul Reisman (Scrooge), Michael Sprouse (Tiny Tim), Joel David Santner (Bob Cratchit), and Julie Garner (Mrs. Cratchit). Written & directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Dennis Umland, neoprene masks by Tara Cariasio. Photo by Second Glance Photography.



Figure 6 Pantomime fireworks in *Don Juan* (2013)

Matthew Taylor Strote (Pierrot), Sun King Davis (Don Juan), Hannah Sweet (Charlotte), and Charlie Retzlaff (Sganarelle). Adapted & directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Dennis Umland, papier-mâché masks by Aaron Cromie, scenic, lighting, and projections design by Klyph Stanford. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.



Figure 7 *Don Juan* banquet scene (2013)

Matthew Taylor Strote (Statue), Charlie Retzlaff (Sganarelle), and Sun King Davis (Don Juan). Adapted & directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Dennis Umland, papier-mâché Masks by Aaron Cromie, scenic, lighting, and projections design by Klyph Stanford. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.



Figure 2 Papier-mâché masks in *Don Juan* (2013)

Charlie Retzlaff (Sganarelle), Sun King Davis (Don Juan), and Hannah Sweet (Don Louis) in *Don Juan*. Adapted & directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Dennis Umland, masks by Aaron Cromie, scenic, lighting, and projections design by Klyph Stanford. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.



Figure 3 Titus Andronicus (2014)

Faction of Fools' *Titus Andronicus*, 2014, featuring Nello DeBlasio (Titus), Toby Mulford (Marcus), Tyler Herman, and Charlie Ainsworth. Directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Denise Umland, neoprene masks by Aaron Cromie, set by Ethan Sinnott, lights by Michael Barnett. Photo by Teresa Wood.



Figure 10 Bloody, mournful Titus Andronicus (2014)

Nello DeBlasio (Titus), Matthew Pauli (Lucius), Miranda Medugno (Lavinia), Toby Mulford (Marcus). Directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Denise Umland, masks by Aaron Cromie, set by Ethan Sinnott, lights by Michael Barnett. Photo by Teresa Wood.



Figure 4 Prologue from *Our Town* (2015)

Matthew Pauli (Stage Manager) and Company. Directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Denise Umland, masks by Sarah Conte, lights by Michael Barnett. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.



Figure 5 Wedding scene from *Our Town* (2015)

Drew Kopas (George), Teresa Spencer (Emily), Matthew Pauli (Stage Manager), and Company. Directed by Matthew R. Wilson, costumes by Denise Umland, masks by Sarah Conte, lights by Michael Barnett. Photo by C. Stanley Photography.

These few images from Faction of Fools past productions are presented, not in chronological order, but as a continuum away from “original” practice and toward experimentation and hybrid. The first two images feature period design and historical *scenari* with *The House with Two Doors* utilizing Fava’s leather masks and *The Lady Becomes Him* featuring Cromie’s neoprene masks with traditional designs and faux-leather paint. *Hamlecchino* and *A Commedia Christmas Carol* both featured costume design from later periods and scenic design based on artistic abstractions of those period worlds. The masks were neoprene, painted in shades across the color palette of the costume design. *Don Juan* featured period costumes and a high-concept set that utilized projection technology to create a living art museum, but the masks—Faction’s only masks made of papier-mâché—were designed to closely fit the actors’ features and mimic their skin tones, looking more like exaggerated faces than separate masks and providing a lighter, more refined aesthetic for the later French style. (The Pierrot character from that production also borrowed from the *fin de siècle* French Pierrot aesthetic.) *Titus Andronicus* went high concept across the design spectrum, presenting everything as stark white until it became painted with stage blood from twenty-two different blood effects throughout the show. The white make-up borrowed from the *infarinato* tradition, and the white masks resembled porcelain carnival masks. With *Our Town*, the entire world was adapted anew in a variety of bold colors and in shapes that were far less influenced by traditional mask iconography.

5.3 Designing The Tooth-Puller

The design team for our version of *The Tooth-Puller* had to wrestle with the question at the heart of “reconstruction” efforts focused on Commedia today. Would our aim be to reproduce the original results of historical Commedia (potentially resulting in what critics from Chapter One might call “museum-piece theatre”), or would we seek to continue the tradition by trying to follow the original process (potentially becoming untethered “anarchists” in the spirit, but not the style, of Commedia)? My goal, discussed through the next three chapters, is to find a process somewhere in between that marries reliable scholarship with reasonable innovation: to find, in the past, inspiration for the future.³³⁵

5.3.1 Mask Design and Construction

While some practitioners today believe that the physical mask should be the first and primary entry point into the study of the character in particular and Commedia in general, nevertheless, the field of mask design and construction is not without its controversies.³³⁶ Like the images discussed in the previous chapter, a

³³⁵Compare this with Giovanni Poli’s mission in 1966: “Our aim is to create a theatrical movement which is inspired by the old one.... To take the essential elements and adapt them to the demands of the modern stage. It is a matter of inspiration, not of imitation” (quoted in Giulia Filacanapa, “Giovanni Poli: The Missing Link,” translated by Eileen Cottis, in *The Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte*, edited by Olly Crick and Judith Chaffee, 353-363. New York: Routledge, 2015, 379).

³³⁶See “Where to Begin” in Chapter Six below. Lecoq and Mangolini are among those who advocate beginning from the mask. Fava, on the other hand, though he is also a mask-maker, believes that the primacy of the mask is one of the chief “misunderstandings” in Commedia today. For him, the mask is not “a special symbol” or “something superior,” but too often becomes “superstition” when treated with the kind of quasi-mystical reverence found in most Lecoq pedagogy or described in the “Masks and Trance” section of Keith Johnstone, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1981), 143-205 (Antonio Fava, interview by author, 12 April 2017, Oxford, MS).

mask is itself not a piece of objective data but rather a work of art created by a subjective artist working for and from a particular context.

For Ole Miss Theatre's *The Tooth-Puller*, each member of the creative team designed and fabricated a mask out of papier-mâché, relying on their own historical and artistic research and guided through the process by mask and Commedia specialist Aaron Cromie. Dramaturg Sydney Hanson reflected on the special subjectivity of the mask—from design to performance—by noting

how much of a person goes into the character. Each mask was handmade to fit a specific person and their face exactly. Another person could wear the mask, but it wouldn't be quite right. I feel like that shows how much of each person goes into the character. The character (and the mask) will always be there, but it needs a real person to be able to give a little part of themselves to breathe life into it.³³⁷

Most students commented that the physical process of designing and crafting a mask gave them special insight into Commedia practice and into the process of creating and embodying a character.³³⁸ Nevertheless, their epiphanies occasionally were at odds

³³⁷Sydney Hanson, dramaturg of *The Tooth-Puller*, email correspondence with author, 12 June 2017. For qualitative methodology and demographics on interview/survey groups, see the notes in "Theoretical Framework" at the conclusion of Chapter One and the sample questions in Appendix B.

³³⁸For the production, each actor wore the mask that they themselves created except for the Capitano mask that was the work of scenic and props designer Angela King, based on research and inspiration from the actor. (The Dottore and Brighella masks also received additional construction and paint support from members of the assistant stage management team.)

with each other, and some of their disagreements strike to the very heart of the mask's place in the Commedia tradition. For example, actor Emily Stone commented

Each character has a specific face structure. The way the mask is made for each character determines their identity.³³⁹

On the other hand, costume designer John Polles found freedom more than structure in the process of designing masks. He appreciated

how Commedia can kind of be what you want it to be. I know there are set rules that make it Commedia, but I liked how we let the actors go through their own mask-making process and we chose to use different colors instead of the traditional brown and tan colors.³⁴⁰

For Polles, the ability to entertain unusual color palettes helped him to move from “research” to “design.”

Issues of color and material in mask-making are hotly contested. Barry Grantham argues against the leather neo-Commedia aesthetic that he attributes to Sartori's influence in the twentieth century:

A beautifully made mask, which might look superb on the studio wall, is not necessarily the best one for performance. These masks are frequently too dark: dark browns and blacks might be suitable for the bright Italian sun but are rarely satisfactory under stage lighting. They

³³⁹Emily Stone, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 10 May 2017, Oxford, MS. Her perspective is like that of the minority of professional practitioners who assented to the statement “A Commedia dell'Arte character is defined by the mask (or non-mask) the actor wears.” In my interviews and surveys, that statement received mixed responses, while a majority affirmed instead that a character is primarily defined “by the relationships with other characters.”

³⁴⁰John Polles, costume designer of *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 10 May 2017, Oxford, MS.

are generally too shiny, causing another lighting difficulty.... The highly polished surface in no way duplicates the texture of skin, and the colour range is extremely limited.³⁴¹

Grantham's company utilized papier-mâché masks in a range of colors, typically drawn from the character's iconographic tradition but not from the spectrum of the "original" leather hues.

Faction of Fools, as seen in the images of above, adopted an eclectic approach to mask design, allowing each show to dictate its own terms. We worked in leather, papier-mâché, and various formulas of neoprene. We adopted color palettes from "traditional" leather to a variety of technicolor worlds to "flesh tones" or even the stark all-white approach. Across these experiments, I began to believe that the colorful masks had the best effect on our audiences and students, primarily because non-flesh colors like purple, blue, green, and orange signaled to the audience that the masks explicitly were not markers of race or ethnicity.

On the other hand, the traditional tan-to-black range of leather colors created the opposite effect, not because of their own history but because of our society's. From the earliest days of our guest artist residences within DC public schools, I witnessed even primary school children approach our work with suspicion as they scanned our neoprene training masks painted in light shades of faux-leather tan or in deep brown and black shades of aged leather. Older students would pointedly ask, "Why's he black?" especially of characters like Arlecchino who were depicted as foolish and servile. I believe that apologists for traditional mask colors have the

³⁴¹Grantham, *Playing Commedia*, 113-14.

history of early Commedia on their side, but I also acknowledge the honest reactions of contemporary audience members who experience dark masks quite differently after the legacy of slavery and blackface minstrelsy.

At least one such family left the 2012 Shakespeare Theatre Company production of Christopher Bayes's *The Servant of Two Masters* over concerns about perceived racism. Bayes and members of the Shakespeare Theatre Company organization have confirmed the incident, though uncorroborated rumors circulated at the time about what exactly prompted the offense. The most obvious possibility is that Stephen Epp, a white actor, in the titular role of Truffaldino, played with a traditional black mask, was seen as participating in blackface minstrelsy. One actor within the cast, however, voiced to me the theory that Allen Gilmore, an African-American actor, in the role of Pantalone, also with a traditional black mask, sparked the controversy. According to this theory, audience members might not have realized that Gilmore was black since he was covered head-to-toe in Maurice Sand-inspired Pantalone garb, with only his relatively light palms and his chin (highlighted with make-up for contrast) visible under the mask and costume. The production brimmed with pop culture references and topical improvisations, including frequent references to hip-hop culture—in the performance I saw, Gilmore broke into Beyoncé's "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)"—which could further contribute to the impression that African-American culture was being insensitively appropriated or lampooned by the production. Whatever the initial cause of the walkout, the theatre company hung dramaturgical aids about the history of leather masks in the lobby in order to contextualize the performance. To my knowledge, no further incidents occurred at

this production or at productions of Bayes's *Servant* at other regional theatres (which routinely featured Epps and Gilmore in the same roles). The incident, though, highlights how difficult it can be to present "original" practices to a contemporary audience as well as the importance of interrogating design choices anew even when being inspired by historical material.³⁴²

Our choice to utilize vibrant colors in the masks of *The Tooth-Puller* was further connected to the choice to favor papier-mâché over neoprene, leather, or other materials in mask construction. I knew that I wanted the actors to design their own masks, and papier-mâché is the easiest form to learn and work with quickly. Some practitioners freely employ any convention available, including a "mask" of make-up rather than a physical object.³⁴³ Others favor traditional leather masks either for their

³⁴²Wiles, 126, uncritically asserts, with reference to Carlo Boso, the notion that the "blackness of Arlecchino's mask suggests the slavery of the Negro." Still, many other practitioners insist that the blackness of the mask is merely a factor of the cow's skin, not a comment on the character's. My stance, as indicated in Chapter Two above, is that sixteenth-century Arlecchino was not born with African origins or as a comment on race (anachronistic in Early Modern Europe) but that nineteenth-century Harlequin was demonstrably appropriated into oppressive, racist iconography and theatergrams as part of systems that still haunt us today. Contemporary American audiences will (and should) interrogate racial issues if provoked to do so, even unconsciously, which in many Commedia plays is at best a distraction and at worst an offense. I made this case to Antonio Fava who insists that colorful masks are "a mistake," and when he considered how an American audience might read Arlecchino as a blackface minstrel character, he blanched and voiced that this would be "terrible." After a few moments of considering the situation, he returned to Renaissance history to insist that, regardless, historical Arlecchino is not a racist character (interview by author, 12 April 2017). I had a similar conversation with Christopher Bayes regarding his *Servant*, noting that Faction of Fools had decided in most cases to favor non-traditional (and non-"racial") colors. He responded sympathetically before commenting that the colors would not "play the same way" (interview by author, 11 February 2018). Undoubtedly, colorful papier-mâché and neoprene masks do not play the same way as natural leather ones. On the other hand, leather masks do not play the same way to contemporary audiences as they did to Renaissance audiences. Which approach, then, is more "authentic" or "original"? For more on the question, "Why Is Harlequin's Face Black?" see the chapter by that name in O'Brien, 117-37, and also Gates, 51-52.

³⁴³When asked if a "Commedia dell'Arte play" needs to utilize masks, Olly Crick commented that "makeup can fulfill the functions of a mask" with reference to the work of Dublin by Lamplight in Ireland and The Rude Mechanical Theatre Company in England (internet survey by author, 4 February 2018).

aesthetic, their longevity in the tradition, or their status as sophisticated works of art in and of themselves. Leather traditionalists appreciate that the material is organic and porous. The fact that leather “breathes,” to some, makes it simply more comfortable and luxurious, while, to others, it is more aesthetical potent in a quasi-mystical sense.

Aaron Cromie, who designed over half of the masks used by Faction of Fools (mostly in neoprene, though his masks for *Don Juan* were papier-mâché) and who led *The Tooth-Puller* students through their mask-making workshop, says he respects leather “if you can afford it” but that his preferred material is neoprene because of its durability and mass-producibility. He respects the tradition and the traditionalists but simply stated, “I do think that there is room for non-organic colors depending on the design and goals of the show one is building.”³⁴⁴

Mask-maker Jonathan Becker, known for his neoprene masks in particular, conceded

the difference between a leather mask and a neoprene mask is the difference between a wool polyester blend and cashmere or the difference between a Stradivarius and a Balzarini. If I were doing commedia all the time and wanted the deepest best connections, best fit and best comfort for the actor then I would choose leather. It is in my opinion, for those of us who can tell, the most beautiful material

³⁴⁴Aaron Cromie, mask maker, email correspondence with author, 7 February 2018.

and the most alive. These qualities do not, however, rule out other materials as being valid and vibrant for commedia masks.³⁴⁵

Defending the option to use other materials and to develop other styles, Becker refuted the familiar criticism that plastic or rubber masks are “synthetic” noting, “Neoprene is an organic. All of the materials used to create it come from plants (it’s rubber),” and he championed the use of various materials throughout different world cultures of mask play. For Becker, a mask “breathes,” not based on its materials but based on how the actor plays it; its breathing is “connected to the success of its form much like a puppet.” Furthermore, Becker argued, “If the mask makers of the 16th century had the materials we have today they would have used them like every artist of every era,” invoking again the “spirit” of the original tradition rather than the original “form.”

Becker, like Sartori, views the mask as an element of sculpture, and sees its relationship to the character and to the actor as a relationship of three-dimensional composition:

What makes a mask play is connected to the level of sophistication as concerns the rhythmic expressive form of the sculpture itself. The material the mask is made out of does not affect the ability of the mask to play. It is the skill of the sculptor and the success of the form that allows for the play of the mask to succeed or fail.³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵Jonathan Becker, mask maker, email correspondence with author, 25 January 2018.

³⁴⁶*ibid.*

Even through their first attempt at making and utilizing masks, many of the members of *The Tooth-Puller* became aware of this “rhythmic expressive form” in the mask. Allen Dillon noted that “small differences between characteristics in their face make a big difference in who they are.”³⁴⁷ Anderson Bandy described almost meeting her character in the mask and “how the facial features can bring out so much about the personality that you feel like you know.”³⁴⁸ Karen Anne Patti on the other hand was surprised that she had made her Capitano nose so upturned when she saw the reflection of herself in it and realized how “snobbish” she looked. “It was kind of ugly, but I thought I was fabulous,” she reflected, and “it totally changed how I was going to play the character.”³⁴⁹

Minute details in sculpture become heightened through motion. Angela King noted “how a slight movement could completely change the expression of the mask” the same way that looking at a sculpture from various angles can tell a different story or depict a different aspect of character. Practitioners routinely call this phenomenon the “counter mask,” that is the ability of the mask to hold its own opposite when a performer embodies it differently, revealing the character’s “shadow side.”³⁵⁰

³⁴⁷Allen Dillon, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 9 May 2017, Oxford, MS.

³⁴⁸Anderson Bandy, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 9 May 2017, Oxford, MS.

³⁴⁹Karen Anne Patti, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 23 May 2017, Sienna, Italy.

³⁵⁰At *Il Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori*, Sara Sartori demonstrated this principle, which was so important to Amleto and Donato, by donning one of her father’s “expressive masks” and becoming at once a rigid, impervious, angry brute of a man and then slowly exhaling and dropping her joints to appear a hapless, sympathetic, and deeply tormented soul.

Once the performers began to play with their masks, they frequently found their own works of visual art inspiring how they wanted to make their performative art.³⁵¹ The masks themselves provoked the artist who was both mask-maker and mask-performer with new realizations, especially in unintended ways. Darbianna Dinsmore describes the process in her exploration:

If I could name my character (it was this Zanni character with a really bird-like nose, almost a Capitano nose, but I didn't intend it to be that way...) I would name it "Beaky." It was kind of a cutesy, quirky character that doesn't really understand a lot of things but that tries real hard. I really imagined the character looking up at the sky and the audience just seeing this nose sticking up in the air.³⁵²

Others found their epiphanies working in the opposite direction. For them, the charge to sculpt a mask required asking more precise questions of the character or the material up front. For Stephen Wagner, who was confronting the ways in which Scala's Pedrolino differed starkly from other sources he had encountered,³⁵³ the *scenario* itself became a guidepost, along with the freedom to make his own contributions to an already diverse character tradition. He was inspired by how he felt "uptight" when trying to perform Fava's version of the character walk, and he was struck by the "squat nose" he saw in the frontispiece of *La gran vittoria di*

³⁵¹More on this Practice-as-Research approach in Chapter Six.

³⁵²Darbianna Dinsmore, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 30 May 2017, Sienna, Italy.

³⁵³See "Pedrolino-Pierrot: A Test Case" in Chapter Four and Wagner's further remarks in Chapter Six.

Pedrolino. These things came to fruition in his decision to play the character not as an *infarinato* but in a red mask with an upturned nose and austere features. He described his nose as a sculptural version of what he felt like when he moved in character.³⁵⁴

For Tysianna Jones, Brighella's mask was a product of his character backstory. In her research, Brighella "was kind of a rough and tough character." She saw his traditional associations with taverns and graft and decided that the character would likely have a drinking problem and a meagre, dirty existence. In sculpting his face, then, she asked, "How would a middle-aged man with this lifestyle look?"³⁵⁵

Articulating a different viewpoint still, Jerry McCalpin saw his Dottore mask as a "supplement" to the character. He had previously done Neutral Mask work and recalled being taught to "stare at the mask and figure out what the mask wants you to do and...treat it like a relic almost." He described taking this approach "as Gospel" until he discovered the approach of beginning instead with the character physicality: "The more I learned, the less important the physical mask became, the less important it was as an instrument."³⁵⁶

Students who participated in *The Tooth-Puller* described physically "discovering," through their own embodiment, aspects of the Commedia tradition that have been articulated by more seasoned practitioners.³⁵⁷ Some began from backstory

³⁵⁴Stephen Wagner, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 5 May 2017, Oxford, MS.

³⁵⁵Tysianna Jones, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 11 May 2017, Oxford, MS.

³⁵⁶Jerry McCalpin, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 9 May 2017, Oxford, MS.

³⁵⁷See my summary of approaches under the heading "Where to Begin" in Chapter Six.

to see how the mask would reveal the human aspects of their character. Some found the sculpture of the mask provoking them to make new and unexpected character choices. Some found grounding in connecting to historical or iconographic data, while others found freedom through invention. Most found that the mask in motion shaped elements of the character they would embody, while some described the mask as a mere instrument through which their physical actions could be focused.

For the sake of a single production, however, it was necessary that each individual mask and each actor's contribution be unified into a single aesthetic, a task managed by BFA Design student John Polles, whose work as costume designer will be discussed in the following section.



Figure 6 Tooth-Puller mask-making workshop

Photos by author.



Figure 7 Applying plaster for negative face casts



Figure 8 Positive sculpting in clay

(Leather masks pictured are by Newman and Fava.)



Figure 9 Jerry McCalpin applies paper to his Il Dottore matrix



Figure 117 Cassidy Woodfield paints Franceschina



Figure 10 Finished Zanni mask

5.3.2 Costume Design

Knowing that the actors would have a strong hand in creating their characters and their masks, costume designer John Polles asked them to present their own character research independent of his and specifically to give him three adjectives that they felt described their take on the character. Those adjectives in turn became another source of inspiration for him in designing the costumes. Prior to this meeting with actors, during design meetings among the production team, we had agreed upon a basic color story in which Flavio and Isabella's house would live in cool blue tones while Pantalone's household would have warm red, pink, and brown tones. These colors corresponded with the variety of blues and pinks seen in Lover iconography and allowed Pantalone to retain his traditional red union suit. Pasquella would partake in purple, and Il Dottore and Brighella would combine their traditional black and green colors as a pair. In a sense, this color palette for design functioned as our visual *scenario* upon which each of the characters would be further improvised.

Polles's experience recapitulated much of what this dissertation project is about. At the beginning, he described, "I was very invested in my period research," still learning what costume design was and feeling like he was just "regurgitating" styles from history. He described knowing that the production must "stay rooted in period research" but also feeling conflicting pressures to find his own point of view as an artist.

He noted in his period research that while characters like Pantalone or Il Dottore tended to be standardized, the Lovers could vary considerably based on the

time and place in which they performed. I invited him to toy with this notion: if the Lovers are traditionally dressed, more or less, like the audience in front of them, would he want to explore contemporary dress for our Lovers? While he ultimately decided that Lovers on stage who look like Ole Miss students in the audience would be too pedestrian for the style, the thought-experiment invited him to realize that he could pull from other times and places since Commedia dell'Arte has lived through so many eras. When I later asked him if he had an “ah-ha” moment during the process, he pointed to his work between first and second designs when he realized that “costume design isn’t just about period research” but also includes bringing in your own innovation as an artist. Once he started “taking more of an artistic risk,” he also started getting better feedback.

In a sense, Polles’s needs as a student drove this aspect of the production. I did not want him to simply try to remake the images he found, but I wanted him to find inspiration in those images in order to make a new show for our local audience. At the time, I remember thinking that this would mean the end of our “original practices” experiment, but upon continued reflection I have realized that the practice of updating Commedia in certain ways *is* the original practice. The original *comici* employed applied theatre history to bring historical inspiration to contemporary audiences, and so did this production.

As will be discussed further in Chapter Seven, much of *The Tooth-Puller* remained “traditional”—especially in the broad strokes of its visual design—but there are few specific translations that the costumes made which warrant another look.

At first the character of Pedrolino stymied Polles's costume design as much as it stymied Wagner's character development. As discussed in Chapter Four, the



Figure 12 Brighella and Pedrolino

tradition of the character is varied and contradictory, and Scala's depiction of Pedrolino is at a remove from the more common discussions about him as an *infarinato* or an analogue to the more poetic Pierrot. Like Wagner,

Polles focused on the specific function of the character within the *scenario* and saw him primarily as a butler. This led to a character whose uniform combined certain elements of Renaissance silhouettes and garments with identifiable markers of an 1890s butler.³⁵⁸ Once the bold color choices and accessories were added, the character lived with cartoony flair.

In working with the *innamorate*, Polles was guided by my views on the First and Second Lovers in this *scenario* (see Chapter Three) and also by the personalities

³⁵⁸Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century pieces have been in vogue of late, with examples including *Downton Abbey*, *Peaky Blinders*, and *Dunkirk*. As director, I did not push Polles toward his butler formulation, but I am not surprised that arrived at it since it is the most recent example in broad English-speaking culture of a period with such strict social hierarchies fixed so clearly in clothing style. Faction of Fools' 2012 *Hamleccchino* also adopted a WW1 aesthetic, based on a desire to find available, recognizable military vocabulary that still felt dated and socially "constricted." I employed a similar *Downton Abbey* conceit in directing Chesapeake Shakespeare Company's 2015 *Much Ado about Nothing* primarily because that setting combines the freedom of jazz, the folly of silent film slapstick (for the Watch), the agony of warfare, and the profound stricture of social mores in crisis. While Wagner described his Pedrolino as "uptight," the snug, high-collared severity of Polles's English butler look emphasized the confines within which the dubious servant operates, although the look was at a far remove from any of the (albeit inconsistent) Pedrolino iconography found in the tradition. I suspect that, with further effort, a more balanced marriage could have been made between the "spirit" and the traditional "form" of this character.

and choices of the actors playing Isabella and Flaminia. Darbianna Dinsmore's research on Isabella was classic and refined, but, noting Flaminia's capriciousness in the *scenario*, Emily Stone was more intrigued by "really bratty pop culture icons" such as Jenny Slate's character from *Parks and Recreation* and Angelica from *Rugrats*.³⁵⁹ Still wanting to elevate the aesthetic of the character while keeping her "young" and "bratty," Polles became inspired by Japanese Lolita fashion trends. The exposed knees and baby-doll



Figure 13 Il Capitano and Flaminia

silhouettes brought out the spoiled, immature personality of the character, but the quality of fabrics and defined lines lived within the period and aesthetic style.

Polles's other attempt to juxtapose Renaissance and modern, a move that I strongly supported, played less well to his design mentors and respondents. Intrigued by the visual history of Arlecchino, in which sixteenth-century patches became eighteenth-century patterns and inspired twentieth-century cubism, Polles conceived Arlecchino and Franceschina as standard, simple servants but with groups of patches that would be a nod to Picasso. I found the idea intellectually inspired and a perfect aesthetic encapsulation of the character's iconographic lineage. Polles viewed the character's origins alongside the earliest Zanni but also saw in him some of the later qualities of the title character on *Gilligan's Island*, a goofy first mate who is himself a

³⁵⁹Emily Stone, interview by author.

descendent of the Zanni. The design then was a man-for-hire wearing the poor, simple garments of early servants and a sailor-esque cap that was a salute to Gilligan,



Figure 14 Franceschina, Il Capitano, and Arlecchino

but the character would wear his patches like a badge marking him as an unwitting member of modernist chic culture. As with so many overly-clever ideas, the cubist patches and the design in general were a practical flop. All

of the design faculty who had not listened in on design meetings for the show commented on how they did not understand the Arlecchino costume, which either (1) failed to look like the “traditional” Harlequin (whichever one the critic had in mind) or (2) failed to look like actual, lived-in clothing: the patches were not distressed enough; or the patches were not present enough throughout the look; or the patches felt like an imposition from some other aesthetic



Figure 15 Arlecchino and Pedrolino

system—which, in fact, they were and are. Such is Arlecchino’s life.

5.3.3 Scenic Design

The production manager and technical director for *The Tooth-Puller* assumed that our set would be an simple trestle stage, the kind discussed in Chapter Four

above. Because I personally campaign against the assumption that Commedia was fundamentally “street theatre” and because I appreciate the history of theatre architecture as part of the history of Commedia practice, I encouraged scenic designer Angela King to consider other options. I wanted to avoid the meta-theatrical “let’s put on a show” trope that bookends so many Commedia plays (including my own *The Great One-Man Commedia Epic* and Faction’s *A Commedia Romeo and Juliet*, which still tours to schools and festivals), and I wanted the play to stand for itself. The set, I urged, should reveal the world of the play, not the world of the players.

King describes her “ah-ha” moment as the decision to combine aspects of historical research into a synthesis of the tradition. As she determined, when thinking of *piazza* performances, *stanza* halls, purpose-built theatres, traveling carts, and the rest, “It’s *all* Commedia.” Still, she feared that the performance “wouldn’t live up to Commedia’s history and that it would be misunderstood and not be a continuation of it.” She describes how both fears and discoveries took physical shape while “seeing it slowly all come together. At first you just imagine it in your head, but you can’t know what it’s going to be until it’s all put together.” As Franklin J. Hildy has noted regarding his own applied theatre history and Practice-as-Research, you cannot footnote a building. You must make a choice, and only one choice, leading King to wonder, “How can you fill in the gaps but make it historically accurate at the same time?”

The scenic process relied on two questions: (1) “What elements are necessary to tell this story?” and (2) “What aspects of historical Commedia practice can be incorporated?”

Because the story is an urban comedy set on the street outside three houses, King noted that the *scenario* frequently required windows and doors (see Chapter Three). She decided that a forced perspective stage, with the possibility of multiple houses, streets, and opportunities for doors and windows, would be the most useful for staging. Serlio's comic scene and the fixed scene reconstruction at *Teatro all'antica* were early influences, but she gravitated toward images of Venetian buildings, since her family is from the Veneto and frequently returns for visits.



Figure 16 Scenic model by Angela King

However, in considering how to construct these buildings, King turned to other aspects of Commedia tradition. Rather than attempt to replicate the stone and wood architecture of purpose-built theatres, she decided to employ the materials of temporary backdrops and painted clothes. This led to real, framed doors within

buildings that faced by canvas drops. King wanted a “homey old feel” and a “painterly” aesthetic, like what you might see in the backdrop of a traveling show but magnified throughout the whole town. Realizing that such a traveling show would use curtains to indicate windows and doors, she and I began to brainstorm various gags we could use for surprising door and window tricks: places where painted doors did not actually open, places where physical openings did occur in spots that were not painted as doors; various mechanisms for door openings including Dutch doors and saloon door swinging hinges; different modes for window openings such as shutters, venetian blinds, spring action rolls, and more. Each opening became its own gag, and the backstage network of platforms ended up far more complex than the



Figure 17 Pantalone and Pedrolino

simple painted facades. I asked if we could end the play with a chase scene during which the canvas walls collapsed around the characters as a nod to Commedia’s influence all the way up to Buster Keaton. The walls did fall, and, in the end, the meta-theatrical world I had wanted to avoid at the beginning came into full view as crew members and off-stage actors were comedically revealed by the play’s final “calamity.”

The process of designing *The Tooth-Puller* began with research reaching all the way back to Commedia's origins and included developments throughout its history and recourse to contemporary technology and aesthetics. Design conversations, like this dissertation process, interacted with history, literary source material, and iconographic data. They also involved the input of performers in the play. While the design team was busy putting ideas on paper, actors were busy putting ideas on their feet through Practice-as-Research models that will be the focus of the next chapter.



Figure 18 Pedrolino and Orazio

Chapter 6: Practice-as-Research and Research-as-Practice

6.1 Problems and Methods

This chapter describes on-the-feet work of training, rehearsing, and devising with performers. If the theoretical concerns of Chapters Four problematize the move from archive to design, they further complicate the leap from archive to performance. This is where a Practice-as-Research approach can illuminate aspects of historical sources.

In many ways, this chapter forms the beginning of *my* “how-to” contribution to the extant contemporary manuals, as it describes the process of leading performers through my own methods that rely on training and research in Commedia as well as influences from Alexander, Laban, Lecoq, Stanislavski, and the RSC’s John Barton, to name a few.

6.2 A Brief History of PaR vis-à-vis Performance

The Practice-as-Research (PaR) movement arose in the 1980s among studio art professors who began to theorize ways in which their artistic creations were in fact elements of scholarly research. As Corinna Brown notes, “Art making can be both content (raw data) and process (analysis).”³⁶⁰ This led to two distinct patterns of seeing practiced-based studio art as, on one hand, an academic pursuit toward scholarly “publication” requirements and, on the other hand, a pedagogical method

³⁶⁰Corinna Brown, “Capturing the Transient,” in *Art as Research: Opportunities and Challenges*, ed. Shaun McNiff (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 222.

for helping students utilize their own studio work as a form of research: identifying their point of view, outlining their methodologies, and carrying a project through to fruition as a practice-based contribution to the discipline.³⁶¹

The PaR movement in studio arts quickly moved to art therapy where it was theorized not only as a means of constructing visual art objects or methods for the creation of such objects but also a means for constructing “therapeutic space” and of addressing the human subject who is seen as a “work in progress.”³⁶² Some PaR theorists from the art therapy world have shifted the initial conception of art objects as research even further toward a conception of human processes as research. Candice P. Boyd describes how this shift is bolstered especially by the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead who conceived of being and existence as “process-based” rather than “substance based.” For Whitehead, “actual entities” or “actual occasions” are momentary events which humans perceive and process as parts of continuous “strings” or “societies.”³⁶³

By conceiving of “entities” not merely as physical objects but more so as phenomenological events that constitute human perception and experience, this movement is akin to Diana Taylor’s work on the Archive and the Repertoire (see Chapter Four). Within Taylor’s scheme, a ceramic object could be seen as part of the Archive. As I argued in Chapter One, many archeologists would view an extant

³⁶¹Shaun McNiff asks students, “‘What are you going *to do*?’ along with ‘Why? And how will it be of use to others?’” in “A Critical Focus on Art-Based Research,” in *Art as Research: Opportunities and Challenges* (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 112.

³⁶²Candice P. Boyd, *Non-Representational Geographies of Therapeutic Art Making: Thinking through Practice* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1.

³⁶³*ibid.*, 6-7

Commedia mask as a material artifact from outside the “official” history, an important, non-literary archival object in a “history from below,” giving witness to the lives and work of subaltern artisans in the same way that studio arts academics of the 1990s and 2000s argued that a material work of art “speaks” on their behalf as scholarly contributors to their discipline.

However, in Taylor’s model, whereas the object itself could be a witness from the archive, the human process by which the object is made would be part of the Repertoire. This is the premise behind the efforts of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to recognize aspects of “Intangible Cultural Heritage” as a complement to their program of identifying material “World Heritage” sites.³⁶⁴ This initiative was adopted in Paris at the 32nd convention of UNESCO from 29 September to 17 October 2003. As the Intangible Cultural Heritage website explains,

Cultural heritage does not end at monuments and collections of objects. It also includes traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.....

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that

³⁶⁴Stefano Villani pointed out to me that the concept of “heritagization” generated through Museum Studies is also applicable here.

is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a State, and is as important for developing States as for developed ones.³⁶⁵

The items included on this list, such as “Colombian-Venezuelan llano work songs,” “Chogān, a horse-riding game accompanied by music and storytelling,” “Mediterranean diet,” and “Yuki-tsumugi, silk fabric production technique” would all fall under Taylor’s category of the Repertoire. Several traditional performance forms have been recognized on the list.³⁶⁶ However, despite the efforts of the international cultural organization SAT (and its annual worldwide Commedia dell’Arte Day), the petition for Commedia dell’Arte’s inclusion on the list has not found success.

According to SAT correspondences and meeting minutes, UNESCO officials have embraced Commedia dell’Arte as an ideal candidate for Intangible Cultural Heritage, but efforts to get a state or regional sponsor have failed. Ironically, Commedia’s broad status as universally acknowledged and equally at home in a variety of communities, especially throughout Italy and France has meant that no single political sponsor has yet been able to form a proposal as “holder of the tradition.”

Furthermore, the fact that Commedia was born, so to speak, in the “free market” and

³⁶⁵United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, “What is Intangible Cultural Heritage,” *UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Website*. Available at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>.

³⁶⁶The list is publicly available at <https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists>.

passed through the ages without an “unbroken line” of inheritance complicates the effort to justify who that “holder of the tradition” would be.³⁶⁷

6.2.1 PaR vis-à-vis Autoethnography

As PaR methods find a kinship with theoretical performance studies in Taylor’s work on the Repertoire, Practice-as-Research also relates to qualitative ethnography based on phenomenological approaches to embodiment. Clifford Geertz famously describes anthropology as straining to read culture “over the shoulders” of the people to whom the culture belongs.³⁶⁸ This approach to qualitative ethnography is seen in many of the interviews throughout this dissertation, as well as the discussions of recent actions by Commedia companies or conservatories. “Reading over the shoulder” treats qualitative research as an objective, empirical endeavor while acknowledging that a researcher needs to be positioned close to the subject in order to picture the data faithfully from the subject’s cultural perspective. However, influenced by postmodern critiques, late twentieth-century ethnographers began to embrace an approach that did not mimic positivist scientific “objectivity” but rather “positioned the researcher as a subject” within the realm of research, acknowledging,

³⁶⁷Commedia dell’Arte Day was first conceived as an initiative of SAT with the goal of having Commedia dell’Arte recognized by UNESCO as an Italian object of World Cultural Heritage, and since then thousands of people have signed petitions around the world in support of this appeal to UNESCO. This initiative was the subject of my “Practice & Patrimony: Worldwide Commedia dell’Arte Day,” a paper presented at *Passing on the Commedia dell’Arte Tradition*, 18 February 2012, at Glendon College, Toronto. The stirring video appeal to UNESCO, featuring many of the most prominent Italian practitioners and researchers of Commedia at the time, is available on the Faction of Fools YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kB9sfXp3miA>.

³⁶⁸Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 452.

with a nod toward both Heisenberg and Foucault that the position of the researcher in relation to the research inescapably alters the outcome of the research.

Following the phenomenology of theorists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty a new kind of subjectivity entered ethnography as research began to embrace as data those realities that are not only perceived by the researcher in an empirical sense but also those that are experienced by the researcher first hand. If Geertz advocated “reading over the shoulder” of the ethnographic subject, the phenomenological approach allows the research to move one step closer and become the subject. Thus, the realm of “participant observation” was born, and an array of new autoethnographic work began to be generated from researchers who proudly claimed an “insider’s” perspective rather than latching on to a scholarly “distance.” This approach can include what Eugene T. Gendlin calls “felt sense,” the physical rather than mental experience.³⁶⁹

To the extent that PaR focuses on the practice of the “process” and meditations on that process, it potentially converses readily with participant-observer autoethnography. This is especially the case for aspects of research that involve embodied artistic knowledge, which Ross W. Prior calls a “tacit knowledge” formed through “creative acts of discovery.” Prior further argues that art can not only be a field for inquiry but can also be the scholarly outcome of that inquiry:

³⁶⁹Laury Rappaport, “Trusting the Felt Sense in Art-Based Research,” in *Art as Research*, 201. Cf., the dance/movement therapy attempt to refine a research question in which the researcher describes, “[W]e found ourselves physically re-experiencing these ah-ha moments,” in Brown, 224.

much creative or artistic knowledge is not necessarily in a form that can be stated in propositional or formal terms, yet is profoundly significant and crucially important.³⁷⁰

Because in PaR “the artist can oscillate attention between subjectification of objective experience and objectification of subjective experience,”³⁷¹ the artistic process invites and accommodates the human capacity of artist-researchers to “say” something both about their own research and about broader aspects of the human condition. In this dissertation, where I speak of my own work with Faction of Fools Theatre Company or in teaching and writing about Commedia dell’Arte, I claim my own subjectivity as a participant-observer. Throughout the remainder of this chapter and Chapter Seven, I also will endeavor to demarcate my own autoethnographic experiences as separate from the qualitative data provided in interviews with other practitioners and my co-creators.

6.2.2 Problems and Potentials in PaR

These lines of demarcation, however, can become porous. Much of the recent scholarship on PaR or art-based research (ABR) struggles to justify and solidify methodologies for reliable data and to avoid “one-sided self-absorption.”³⁷² Even

³⁷⁰Ross W. Prior, “Foreword,” in *Art as Research*, ix-x.

³⁷¹Michael A. Franklin, “Know Thyself: Awakening Self-Referential Awareness through Art-Based Research,” in *Art as Research*, 86.

³⁷²Shaun McNiff, “Opportunities and Challenges in Art-Based Research,” in *Art as Research*, 4.

still, other theorists praise these problematics in PaR as virtues by noting that the arts accept “not knowing”³⁷³ and invite “expecting the unexpected.”³⁷⁴

Although the Australian graduate system has led the way in officially accepting practice-based PhDs, recent years have still seen controversial efforts to identify appropriate methodologies and academic classifications for practice-based doctoral degrees with that system. As one survey found,

The practice-based PhD is, however, a somewhat contested Academic site. As an emerging genre it is both in the process of being defined and of defining itself. The various attempts to codify and reach

³⁷³Ariane Berthoin Antal, “Art-Based Research for Engaging Not Knowing in Organizations,” in *Art as Research*, 176. Undoubtedly, artistic production is an excellent practice in formulating a goal before the plan exists and in embracing questions and challenges without falling back on easy answers. In this regard, I agree completely with Antal’s point; however, I would also stress the opposite point: one of the greatest virtues of PaR is that it does *not* accept “not knowing” as an option. Regarding the Shakespeare’ Globe Theatre in London and his own “applied theater history” work, Franklin J. Hildy has repeatedly pointed out in classes and in lectures that one cannot simply footnote a slew of options or agnostically avoid a conclusion if one is actually constructing a theatre building. While papers about historical theatre architecture may survey a variety of possibilities and may note the limitations in making a claim, an actual building must exist and can only exist in one way. This reality of “existence” forces the PaR researcher to make a choice and, to varying degrees, be stuck with the results of that choice. This raises the stakes of the inquiry and forces bolder experimentation than traditional scholarship. The practice will never come to fruition if the researcher accepts “not knowing” as a possibility.

³⁷⁴Stephen K. Levine, “Expecting the Unexpected: Improvisation in Art-Based Research,” in *Art as Research*, 125. Levine’s point about ABR’s inherent unexpectedness is reminiscent of the definition of performance studies in Richard Schechner, “What is Performance Studies Anyway?,” in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 357: “Is performance studies a ‘field,’ an ‘area,’ a ‘discipline’? The sidewinder snake moves across the desert floor by contracting and extending itself in a sidewise motion. Wherever this beautiful rattlesnake points, it is not going there. Such (in)direction is characteristic of performance studies. This area/field/discipline often plays at what it is not, tricking those who want to fix it, alarming some, amusing others, astounding a few as it sidewinds its way across the deserts of academia.” Cf., also Jess Pillmore’s thoughts on “Creative Ownership” (see Chapter Seven): “As opposed to linear, running towards a finish line, or circular where you are looping yourself infinitely, as if getting nowhere. The process of creative ownership is a spiral, where things may look familiar as you go round and round, but you have the advantage of a different perspective of that familiar issue” (Jess Pillmore, *Shakespeare’s Ensemble: The Creative Ownership Project*, unpublished manuscript, 2018).

consensus on the nature and structure of the practice-based doctorate are a further indication that it is a site for both genre invention and evolution. This is evidenced in university guide-lines for this degree as well as in the debate over the terms ‘practice-based’ versus ‘practice-led.’³⁷⁵

In endeavoring to utilize PaR approaches, one would do well to ask Shaun McNiff’s question, “How do researchers minimize one-sided self-absorption when personal, often intimate, art making is a core element of research?”³⁷⁶

Michael A. Franklin argues, “When it comes to research through art rather than casual expressive work, first-person methods of reflection and contemplation ought to transcend severely narcissistic, self-indulgent practices.” Franklin outlines several, sometimes overlooked, qualities of the artistic process that do lend credence and imply creative specialization rather than personal indulgence: First of all, artist-scholars employ a “craft,” not merely creative caprice. Training and honed skillsets are necessary to contribute positively to artistic spheres. This is certainly true of all the Commedia dell’Arte methods discussed below. Secondly, the artist, the process, and the artwork are all situated within realms of history and culture, just as this dissertation outlines. Furthermore, a PaR practitioner engages in the extra step of not only making art but also subjecting the process and the product to “personal reflection” and “contemplation.” This reflection, which Franklin links to

³⁷⁵Brian Paltridge, Sue Starfield, Louise Ravelli, and Sarah Nicholson, “Doctoral Writing in the Visual and Performing Arts: Issues and Debates,” *International Journal of Art & Design Education* 30, no. 2 (2011): 243.

³⁷⁶McNiff, “Opportunities and Challenges in Art-Based Research,” 4.

contemplative traditions, is also a form of self-analysis, as seen throughout this project in autoethnographic examination, conversations with other practitioners, and the interview data gleaned after-the-fact from participant artists in *The Tooth-Puller* project.³⁷⁷

Such reflection led me specifically to the linked questions “What is Commedia dell’Arte?” and “How do we make it today?” The questions intersect, especially, in analyzing where various instructors begin their teaching, for the entry point to practice in each occasion marks a specific view of what Commedia fundamentally is.

6.3 Where to Begin

One of the biggest divergences observed in Commedia pedagogy across various research participants and publications deals with the question of where the performer should begin to encounter the Commedia dell’Arte tradition in learning how to perform it. This inquiry into pedagogical processes also touches on where the locus of Commedia “authenticity” or authority resides for certain practitioners, and, in PaR terms, it ponders the proper methodology for turning Commedia practice into Commedia research (or vice versa). I have identified five different popular approaches for starting the Commedia inquiry: Historical Iconography, Postural/Gestural Descriptions and Demonstrations, the Mask Itself, Dramaturgical Social Types, and Contemporary Social Types.

³⁷⁷Franklin, 86-88.

6.3.1 Historical Iconography

Some teachers and practitioners begin from historical images of the sort analyzed in the previous two chapters.³⁷⁸ These images are taken as documents of how *Commedia dell'Arte* was performed and performers are encouraged to adopt the gestures and relationships they see in imagery and develop a movement pattern based on historical sources. Of course, the source is only as reliable as the analysis behind it, and some alleged “*Commedia dell'Arte*” sources can be misleading for all the reasons discussed in Chapter Four. Furthermore, the performer must imagine a movement based on a stagnant image. As one student observed in a workshop I attended while researching various practices, “It took a while to discover how she moves. Because you told us how she stands. But how does she move?”

What few people realize is that the difficulty can also flow in the other direction: several postural assumptions have arisen in the tradition based on images that may, in fact, be images of characters in motion. For example, *Arlecchino* is frequently taught as having one foot flexed so that the heel touches the ground while the toes are pointed upward. I am of the camp that believes this image of the flexed foot is the depiction of a gesture, not a stance. The raising of the foot may be a flourish that “means” something in the body of the character rather than a posture that is intended to be held. Standing and moving become nearly impossible if the foot is never brought to the ground, so why would it be raised as a default? Similarly, some

³⁷⁸In my THEA 324: “*Commedia dell'Arte* in History and Performance” at The University of Mississippi, we began with this approach. Marcello Bartoli also began this way when he taught at *Accademia dell'Arte* according to Scott McGehee, interview by author, 22 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

practitioners teach Zanni with the rear end protruding outward and the back hunched forward, noting that Zanni spends much of his time carrying things. While iconography frequently shows servants (and others) pitched forward at the hips, this could also be interpreted as the action of bowing or of leaning in.

While an eager performer must make these interpretive choices when utilizing historical iconography, nevertheless, images can be evocative and can lead to interesting character physicality. Probably the most common example of this is the Zanni walk drawn from Callot's *Balli* images. Although the images are subject to dispute as historical data and are influenced by the aesthetic concerns of the visual artist as least as much as they are dependent upon movements of performers (see Chapter Four), the image of Franca Trippa and Fritellino has spawned a common Zanni walk in twentieth- and twenty-first-century reconstructions. Giovanni Poli's Zanni character in *Commedia degli Zanni* is like a Callot character come to life, walking gingerly with outstretch legs and careful feet. This is the same as Fava's "*passo di grande Zanni*," which Rudlin describes as the "Big Zanni walk."³⁷⁹

6.3.2 Postural/Gestural Descriptions and Demonstrations

This so-called *grande Zanni* step is an example of the type of Commedia pedagogy where by the instructor demonstrates a canon of established stances, walks, and gestures that are emblematic of each character.³⁸⁰ In many cases, the walks are based on the instructor's explorations of iconography, as above; however, most

³⁷⁹Rudlin, 70.

³⁸⁰This approach can be linked to Antonio Fava, Carlo Boso, Claudia Contin, and Ferruccio Soleri, as well as the handbooks by John Rudlin and Barry Grantham.

practitioners who work this way have also created the form based on their own classroom or performance work. I followed this approach in my years teaching at the *Stage Internazionale di Commedia dell'Arte*, where I was credited as “instructor of gesture” or, more properly “of *gestus*.” *Gestus* denotes not only simple gestures but also the physicality or attitude of the character. I still follow this approach in demonstrating how a Magnifico character appears older if the feet are kept close together in small steps or how a Dottore character appears more massive if the arms are curved out at the sides creating the illusion of rotundity. I also prefer to see Lovers performing with hips squared rather than opened to the audience because their whole-hearted, single-minded energy is more clearly conveyed through straight lines of energy than when the energy is dispersed along multiple lines with the chest, hips, knees, and feet pointed in different directions.

Nevertheless, the approach can lead to students awkwardly attempting to recreated shapes or gaits that are uncomfortable for them and unmotivated. Critics of this approach call the result “Commedia robots” devoid of inner life. In Fabio Mangolini’s polemic, “If you find someone who says, ‘Zanni moves like this,’ shoot him with a bazooka.” For Mangolini, the mistake is believing that Commedia is “a style,” rather than “living theatre.”³⁸¹

When I do teach character postures or walks, I introduce a psychosomatic approach saying, “Put the Stanislavsky in your feet.” As John Barton describes Shakespeare verse, “You’ve got to find out why the character needs those particular

³⁸¹Fabio Mangolini, interview by author, 20 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

words.”³⁸² I submit that playing Commedia is no different than playing heightened verse: the form is larger than life and will come across as lifeless unless the actor justifies why the character *needs* to behave in this way. When played well, the emotions and the situation are so extreme that a walk like the *grande Zanni* step becomes justified. When played poorly, you have Commedia robots.

Christopher Bayes’s approach begins with character postures but then immediately asks the artists to respond personally to the emotions and the sensations that the postures create. Many practitioners follow this approach, but Bayes goes so far as to say that the form can be discarded once the feelings they generate take over: “It’s your inner feelings that will fire the character.”³⁸³

6.3.3 The Mask Itself

Some instructors who begin with gesture and movement will speak of the “physical mask” that the entire body creates as it adapts to a character. In this approach, the literal mask is a final design accessory that can be added later after the movements are learned. Others work the opposite way and begin with the mask itself. Lecoq and many people from character mask traditions will begin by studying the mask—sometimes even communing with it in a spiritual way—and allowing the sculptural elements of the mask to guide the body into new shapes and energies.³⁸⁴

³⁸²John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1984), 15.

³⁸³Christopher Bayes, “Commedia dell’Arte Weekend,” a workshop given at The Funny School of Good Acting, 10-11 February 2018, in Brooklyn, NY.

³⁸⁴This was the approach that Dody DiSanto and Isabelle Anderson (both trained by Lecoq in the 1970s) utilized in my MFA program at the Academy for Classical Acting. It is also what Keith Johnstone describes in his mask work and what Fabio Mangolini recommends. It further corroborates Amleto Sartori and Jonathan Becker’s approaches to mask-making.

“Reading the lines of the mask” can be an effective way to draw a persona off of a new mask, and I have seen powerful results from it in character mask work. The results, however, can be short-lived because they are contingent on how the mask makes the performer feel at a given time. Furthermore, the approach does not solve any of the problems encountered in the above techniques. Mangolini advocated this approach saying of the mask, “It’s the only thing we have.” However, this attitude simply passes the problem of interpretation and inspiration off to the mask-maker, who still must make decisions about how to make the mask in the same way that an instructor or actor in the above techniques must decide how to make the character. Mangolini responded to this problem saying, “You have a mask-maker who works with you and will make a mask on you,” which is in fact the exact approach that Lecoq and the creators of Piccolo Teatro’s *Servant* took in working with Amleto Sartori. The collaboration can be fruitful, can provide insights from various perspectives, and can lead to a successful harmony between performer, character, and mask. However, it still requires answering the same questions about which sources to consider and how to implement them.

6.3.4 Dramaturgical Social Types

While practitioners disagree on the usefulness or lack thereof in the previous three starting points, everyone I have interviewed or researched agrees that Commedia dell’Arte characters are defined by their relationships with each other. Parents and children, masters and servants, “First”s and “Second”s (among Zanni or Lovers)—all are parts of the microcosm of society presented in a Commedia

company. Some instructors, therefore, emphasize the dramaturgy of relationship above all else.³⁸⁵ This approach does not begin with each character type in isolation but rather in combination, mining not only the social positions of the characters but also how they behave in relationship to each other. Iconography can be useful in this approach as well since many of the more famous images depict duos and trios of characters in physical situations based on their social standing.

While Scott McGehee emphasizes that the characters are “social types” in relationships “based on power,”³⁸⁶ others instead view the characters as literal “archetypes” based on primal drives or urges. The appetites (food, money, attention, love/sex) can be seen as psychological manifestations of a larger cultural psychology and can also be used to organize characters into cultural relationships based on how their fundamental desires drive them.

6.3.5 Contemporary Social Types

Practitioners who focus on the dramaturgy of character relationship will often make analogies between Commedia characters and other fictional or real-life personas. For example, it is easy to see Zanni in the Blues Brothers; Pantalone in *The Simpsons*’ Mr. Burns; Il Dottore in *The Big Bang Theory*’s Dr. Sheldon Cooper; or Il Capitano in a few recent U.S. Presidents. The comparisons could go on and on, and this translation is at the heart of most endeavors to perform a given text “in the style

³⁸⁵Giangiacomo Colli relies heavily on this approach, as do most practitioners whose root interest lies in how the *scenari* function.

³⁸⁶Scott McGehee, interview by author, 22 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy. See Chapter Two.

of Commedia dell'Arte.” One dramaturg/choreographer from *The Tooth-Puller* justified this kind of approach in imagining how our process might have been different from the original processes:

I think probably back then they just did a lot more observing on people that existed as opposed to us looking back and seeing how they saw the stereotypes. They were the ones who are almost creating them initially, and they were looking at the way that certain people behaved and the way that they looked and the way that they moved.... So they were just taking what they knew and applying it...and it wasn't very difficult to find those things for them. But now we're looking back on the way that they have influenced so many characters later in time...and so we are basing our stereotypes that we're creating in Commedia off of their stereotypes of real people.³⁸⁷

If one accepts this theory in the history of Commedia, it makes perfect sense to question whether the proper approach today might involve cutting out the “middle man” so to speak by eliminating the historical sources and simply going straight to the root, which is the observation of human behavior.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁷Kaelee Albritton, dramaturg and choreographer of *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 5 May 2017, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS.

³⁸⁸Human behavior depicted in historical Commedia dell'Arte could be viewed through a variety of lenses, as has previously been noted throughout this study: Scott McGehee emphasizes the “social types” as commentaries on social power structures, which are still present—though not as defined or acknowledged—in today's western world. On the other hand, Christopher Bayes, and many others, call attention to the individual “appetites” or primal urges that motivate characters. While these drives toward money, sex, love, food, or attention can be individualized, they also relate to interpersonal social structures. Some recent approaches to characterization tends to focus less on interlocking social relationships or “universal” cultural psychology and more on individual personality traits. Some such characters (for example those by Carlos García Estévez) are mentioned in the footnote below. It should also be noted that, the more one narrows the audience population (for example, focusing on Lancastrian Commedia as Olly Crick is doing or establishing regular routines for

Some practitioners take this approach so far that they begin to read other contemporary types back into Commedia dell'Arte and end up creating new characters for the tradition.³⁸⁹ Practitioners who believe that the "spirit" of Commedia is more important than the "form" are likely to see it as their job to satirize society and continue the tradition by inventing their own personal contribution, the same way the original *comici* did. For them, an artist who wants to make Commedia should begin by looking at contemporary society and finding a way to comment upon it. This approach gives political teeth to the artform and allows it to speak to the present. On the other hand, critics of this endeavor question why a new masked character deserves to be called "Commedia" rather than simply "mask."

Whatever the starting point for creating Commedia dell'Arte, nearly all practitioners agree that the form is larger than life. The mask reveals as it conceals, and the amplified features of the mask are aesthetic markers of the size of "play" it entails. Noses are longer; furrows are deeper. The resultant form turns up the amplitude on normality so that the highs are higher while the lows are lower. No one

patrons in Austin, TX, or Brooklyn, NY, as Kate Meehan's and Virginia Scott's companies do), the more tightly a "type" can be fixed to local particularity without appealing to general humanity. This move toward the "local" runs contrary to the traditional depiction of touring *comici* who needed to amuse across linguistic, social, and political boundaries, but it is a strong thread in the Commedia practice happening today, as I have noted in Chapter Three. At any rate, practitioners who identify their approach as one based on "observation of human behavior" must further clarify what aspects of "behavior" and of "humanity" are under consideration.

³⁸⁹The Zanni "Stupino" (and the female counterpart "Stupina") is one example introduced by Gina Bastone and now a fixture of the Dell'Arte School in Blue Lake, CA. That character has caught on so strongly that some mask-makers, such as Newman, include him in their repertoire of Zanni. Carlos García Estévez has created so many original, masked characters based on contemporary society that his "Commedia" shows are almost entirely made of masks and character types otherwise unknown in the Commedia tradition. One might also see Carlo Boso's La Strega (see Chapter Three) or the "Pantalona" that both Fava and Bayes have utilized in class as additions to the system from outside social types. Bayes also employs his "Fix-it Guys" as another type of middle-manager first Zanni.

in a Commedia dell'Arte play is having an “okay” day—the situation is always the best or the worst of all things possible. This style requires an accelerated pace and heightened energy. The mask also requires a magnitude and focus that will not tolerate pedestrian energy. The entire head acts as an eyeball, pointing directly at whatever it “sees.” The entire body takes on the expressive qualities of the face, conveying emotion and communicating ideas. Zanni smiles with his feet. Il Dottore lectures with his belly. The Lovers swoon in each and every joint. Meanwhile, the entire company works together in a giant, physical comedy “machine.”

6.4 Commedia on Its Feet

6.4.1 Physicalizing the Character

Examples from Chapters Two through Four reveal how easily interpreters can be swayed by recent experience to read later developments back into their discussions of “original” or “historical” practices. My stance on this phenomenon is that even evolutions and errors become a part of the Commedia tradition (whether one wants them to or not) and that contemporary practitioners have the freedom to define their continuation of the tradition how they choose (more on this in Chapter Seven).

Nevertheless, this project assumes that informed choices are better than ignorant ones and that historical materials can more easily inspire when they are understood with fitting methods and analyzed in reference to their own context. As seen in the previous section, one of the methodological factors that separates Practice-as-Research from casual artistic expression is the ability to self-reflect upon one’s artistic product and process. Throughout this section, I will make use of interviews

with the creative team behind *The Tooth-Puller* to draw conclusions based on my analysis of both their work and their reflections upon their work.³⁹⁰

Just as previous experience or expectation can color scholarly pursuits, as seen in Chapters Two through Four, it also came up frequently in student self-reflection during our follow-up conversations. One of the most interesting prompts in the semi-structured interviews was, “What parts of our physical training came more easily to you?” The entire creative team took part in a hybrid history-performance course on Commedia dell’Arte in the fall, prior to direct work on *The Tooth-Puller* that began during the January intersession. Each member of the class was required to study each of the main character types and then to specialize in one or two types for final performances.³⁹¹ When the actors in *The Tooth-Puller* were asked several months later about this process, invariably, they noted that the character style that they felt came most easily was one that they had connected to a previous physical experiences.

I had cast the production based on my own assessment of how each performer’s physical habits related most easily to the characters as I envisioned them, and many students had similar thoughts about ways in which their habits matched characters they portrayed. For example, Tysianna Jones said that Zanni came most easily to her “because my personality is already bouncy and kind of happy.... It kind of was a mesh of who I am already.” Anderson Bandy felt that Il Dottore, *servetta*

³⁹⁰For qualitative methodology and demographics on interview/survey groups, see the notes in “Theoretical Framework” at the conclusion of Chapter One and the sample questions in Appendix B.

³⁹¹Each student also had a final written project through the Wiki Ed program, with the *Tooth-Puller* creative team required to research and write on their particular design area or character. The 28 students in the class made the following updates to Commedia dell’Arte-related articles on Wikipedia in the fall of 2016: seven new articles created, 34 existing articles edited, 578 total edits including adding over 29,600 words (and especially citations) and uploading 13 images to WikiCommons. As of February 2018, their work on Wikipedia has been viewed over 512,000 times.

characters, and Il Capitano “were more natural in my body” based on habitual ways in which she holds herself. Darbianna Dinsmore felt at home in her role as Isabella: “I naturally carry myself similarly to the Lover characters. The Lover characters are grounded in their feet” but “carry themselves forward from their chest and their head,” which she said is “kind of how I approach the world.” She also noted, though, in connection with Isabella’s situation in *The Tooth-Puller*, that sometimes she finds herself physically pulling back when she is not sure of herself or is following “societal rules.” Nathan Reed spoke similarly about his relationship with Orazio, saying, “I’m a pretty dramatic person,” so the Lover felt like “a slightly exaggerated” version of himself. Dinsmore further connected to the character’s backstory through her own subjective experiences, admitting

I see a lot of my high school self as the Lover characters. When I was doing research I was like, “Oh, God, I was like that. I know exactly what that is.” The Lover characters can be very naïve, but there’s also this natural, “I’m better than everyone else of course because I’m noble. And they have to be perfect, and when they’re not perfect they are devastated. And I was really like that in high school...I was so full of myself, but that’s the Lover character...this is just how the world is to them.... They don’t see the faults in themselves.... They see the beauty in the world, and they go towards it.

She noted that this mentality moves the body, saying “My heart sees it, and then my body follows” (a paraphrase of my teaching, which in this case is a paraphrase of

Fava's teaching), and her psychological connections helped her whenever she found herself stuck in an idea of what "the posture should be."

Nearly half of the cast described how, predictably, they latched on most quickly to aspects of the characters that they felt most matched their own habits and personalities. Surprising to me, however, was how frequently the student performers also made connections to other experiences. For example, Emily Stone said that Il Capitano was recognizable to her because "that's how my dad walks." Stephen Wagner explained how Pedrolino's Zanni steps came more easily because "I have quick feet. I was a runner back in high school." Austyn Davis also reported gravitating to the Zanni, saying, "My dance experience made it easier to pick up the physicality of the lower body and the position of the legs for each character and the specific ways that they walk and move and carry themselves." Meanwhile, John Polles made an unexpected connection with how he, as a non-actor, felt at home in Pantalone: the heel-toe rolling step he found came easily because of his years in marching band. Through a less roundabout translation, Nathan Reed described finding the Zanni "creeping motions" (by which, I believe he means the Callot-Poli-Fava "Grande Zanni Step" described above) by thinking of *The Three Stooges*, cartoons, and early silent films "where the comedy is really embellished."

As a teacher and director, these connections delight me because they are immediate entry points for physical exploration. On the other hand, in considering the rigor of PaR methodology, I wonder whether these experiences are not a result of circular reasoning. Essentially, Polles is saying that he knows how to walk like Pantalone because Pantalone walks in a way that he knows. The approach might be

valid for individual characterization, but it is not actually a new discovery, even though it is the kind of experience most participants latch onto when they enroll in a Commedia dell'Arte workshop. In my interviews, I became much more fascinated by the negative experiences than the positive ones, for example Kaelee Albritton's memory that she felt blocked in practicing *servetta* walks because she just found herself doing the tap dance triplets that are so familiar to her.³⁹²

In reflecting on the development of her Capitano, Karen Anne Patti described an interplay between iconographic inspiration, physical imitation, and experiential discovery. She described looking at a particular image "where he was so garnished [with medals on his chest] and his chest was out, and he kind of looked down at everyone. And it was fun being a small person trying to figure out how to embody this big man." Describing the moment where she felt she "got it," she responded, "Probably when I bent my knees for the first time and figured out how that opened up my hip movement." I stress in my teaching that the masked/comic/grotesque characters tend to favor mid-limb articulations, whereas the Lovers are more distal. The comic characters move with amplified elbow and knee action, which is part of what creates the physical mask, by exaggerating the joints of the body the same way that a literal mask exaggerates the nose. In my view, power in the thighs relies on bent knees, so I teach the Capitano, following Fava, as having big thighs, big pectorals, and far-spread knees and elbows. Patti latched onto that knee action, but, as she indicated in this interview, allowed the freedom in the knees to also translate

³⁹²As a side note, I am currently taking tap dance and tripping all over myself as my legs revert to engrained Zanni walks while I am trying to learn a new flap-ball-change sequence.

into a hip gyration that became her own. Essentially, she began with images and with a demonstration of a movement style, but what she tried in her knees based on those sources became a different discovery in her hips. Her character in the end is something that only she could have created this way and only through the physical process of exploring different sources of inspiration and allowing them to grow in ways that felt appropriate in her body for her interpretation of her character.

Actor Jerry McCalpin described an experience that was less decisive and more fraught with self-contradictory worries that made his experience a microcosm of the problematics behind the entire enterprise. He felt that his Dottore was “just exaggerating what I normally already do,” which made it accessible to him but also caused him doubts about whether the character was “right,” or just his default choice. He referenced early seventeenth-century engravings that inspired him, but he also felt guilty that he “did not convey the physicality” in the engravings when he was “actually moving” because the engravings only showed specific frozen moments in time. In particular, he regretted not having incorporated the sweep of the hat that can be seen in the seventeenth-century images of “Il Dottore Scatalon” and “Baloardus, Medicus, Pantomimus,” even though the function of his hat was a result of choices made in the costume shop and not anything in his control. He found some guidance in Grantham’s Dottore exercises but then qualified, “You have set ways of doing things, but it’s just a guideline because we don’t know what happened [historically].” He recalled enjoying Fava’s Dottore with his bouncing belly and bubbling personality, but then said that the historical material he found “didn’t look anything like I had been led to believe it would” based on Fava’s characterization. He also

fretted that he would never be able to rise to the challenge of constant verbal *lazzi*, despite the fact that he was one of the most inventive and prolific ad libbers in the cast.

By the close of the run, he thought he “inadvertently ended up doing the thing that is accepted” by following some of Fava and Grantham’s cues, but he simultaneously celebrated that “when I stopped worrying about doing it ‘the right way’ I came up with a thing that I think was mine.... I don’t know if that’s because of the training or if it’s because of some feeling I had about the way it should be or if it’s a mixture of the two.” The conflict he felt internally he also saw happening externally because he said when he tried to lean toward more historical inspiration, he felt that the rest of the cast was straying toward a more contemporary style. Though at one point in the interview he faulted himself for following Fava and Grantham uncritically, he later summarized, “I don’t think any of what I did as Il Dottore matches what I had read, but I adapted it to fit what everyone else was doing.”

In McCalpin’s view, the rest of the cast moved away from what he perceived to be my training from class: “Everybody didn’t do it the way you taught them,” he told me, “but they ended up embodying the character in a way that was their own.” It could be argued that this lesson was what I taught them, and I certainly stressed that cohesion among the cast is crucial in a Commedia dell’Arte company because the characters do not exist on their own but rather in relationship to one another.

6.4.2 Ensemble Physicality

Every single creative team member, during their interviews, emphasized the importance in this process of “working with people,” “collaborating,” or developing ideas as an “ensemble.” Although the twentieth-century historiographic trend stressed individual character and “how-to” manuals and workshop training models focus on individual learners, the historical reality in Commedia dell’Arte is one of collaboration. Companies that have managed to continue for several years with an emphasis on Commedia practices, such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Dell’Arte International, Bayes’s and Epp’s de facto company of *Servant* actors, or DC’s Faction of Fools, have embraced the reality that it is not enough to train individuals; you have to train the company.

My Commedia aesthetic has relied on ensemble acrobalance since my earliest days training under acrobat/dancer Jonna Kevin at Fava’s *Stage Internazionale*. As with the physical characters, performers in *The Tooth-Puller* were more or less comfortable with acrobalance work depending on whether they had or had not had previous analogous experiences. Those who had done gymnastics, cheerleading, or athletic partner dance took to the ensemble lifts and carries with ease, while other individuals struggled. For the company, though, the acrobalance work became crucial not only as shared techniques for the product but also a shared experience for the process. When asked to describe a memorable moment from training, Tysianna Jones recalled the first day of acrobalance and observing who trusted whom and who needed to build trust: “It was fun to watch everyone fear and freak out and then, once they did it, celebrate about it.” In answering the same question, Darbianna Dinsmore

recalled a time in class when they had “five minutes to come up with the scene” as Il Dottore and a Servant: “We used our bodies as the set pieces, as well as just being the characters. It was a lot of physical comedy that I’d never thought to do before, and it just came out of nowhere and we did it.”

I stress in improvisations the importance of making physical offers as well as verbal offers because I personally dislike Commedia dell’Arte that is driven mostly by verbal jokes while characters stand around and banter. The partnering should be visceral and should involve not only shared dialogue, but also shared action. This concept of sharing led Cassidy Woodfield to reflect especially on how character relationship and ensemble collaboration informs character development. “Through helping each other, it somehow helped us understand our characters more,” she said, citing as an example, “Well, if that’s how Isabella feels, then Franceschina would probably do this.”

The ability to work together also serves the energy and pace of the show because Commedia dell’Arte is characteristically fast and tight. In relating what her friends and family had to say about the show, scenic designer Angela King passed on a high compliment from her mother, a native Italian, “My mother, who has seen Commedia dell’Arte before, she forgot that they were speaking English” because she felt that the ensemble movements and tempo were executed “in the same style” that she recognized from Italian mask play. The ensemble effort necessary to achieve this style relies on well-honed collaboration with one another and with the audience.

6.4.3 Playing the Audience

Mikhail Bakhtin argues that carnival “does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.”³⁹³ Commedia, he asserts, “kept a close link with its carnival origins”³⁹⁴ While I doubt that Commedia originated in Carnival (see Chapter Two), I agree with the thematic links Bakhtin draws between Commedia and the grotesque and with the notion that Commedia, like carnival, frequently ignores the metaphorical “footlights” by interacting directly with the audience. This is the reason that, whatever the venue, I always perform my *The Great One-Man Commedia Epic* with the house lights up. It is crucial for us to see each other, and it is even more important for the audience to *know* that we all see each other.

Practice-as-Research affirms that creative work is itself a “detectable research output,”³⁹⁵ and, in the case of Commedia dell’Arte, the art-based outputs are immediately detected and assessed by an audience. “*Il pubblico é sempre giusto*,” Antonio Fava has long maintained: “The audience is always right.” In Christopher Bayes’s formulation, the audience is “your mirror” because they immediately reflect back whether something is or is not working. A positive response is a memorable

³⁹³Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans Hélène Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 7.

³⁹⁴*ibid.*, 34.

³⁹⁵H. Smith and R. Dean, *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 9, quoted in Shaun May, *Rethinking Practice as Research and the Cognitive Turn* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England: Palgrave Pivot, 2015), 4.

rush, as Sydney Hanson recalled in reflecting on opening night of *The Tooth-Puller*. Her “memorable experience” from the run was

The first time we had an audience. By the end of our rehearsal process, all the jokes felt so old that they weren’t funny anymore. I think we all began to doubt ourselves. When our first audience arrived, though, they LOVED it. It was such a relief to know that these people were enjoying the show we had created. There’s something very personal about that.³⁹⁶

For good or bad, Commedia provides “very personal” interactions between performer and actor. Aristotle says a friend is “another self,”³⁹⁷ and in this sense, each Commedia character treats the audience as a “friend.” Through the practice of theatrical asides, the characters speak to the audience as though speaking to themselves. To think, to pray, to notice, to want—in Commedia, each of these is the same as talking to the audience. The relationship with the audience is so central that I once heard of a mask company in England whose rule was, when a new mask enters the stage, the actor must immediately look at the individual audience members in all four corners (front right, back right, back left, and front left, though not necessarily in that order) before taking any other action. This ensures that the mask has been clearly seen by the entire audience and that it has been seen at a variety of angles (recall the concept of “counter-mask” discussed in Chapter Five above), and it also reminds the performer to relate to the audience as individuals rather than as a mass.

³⁹⁶Email correspondence with author, 12 June 2017.

³⁹⁷*EN* 1166a30. See Aristotle, from *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross, rev. J. Barnes, in *A New Aristotle Reader*, edited by J.L. Ackrill (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 453.

Among the myths of twentieth-century neo-Commedia dell'Arte is the notion that Commedia was “political theatre.” While practitioners such as Dario Fo, Franca Rama, and the San Francisco Mime Troupe effectively used Commedia styles to make their own pointed political and religious commentary, the historical *comici* tended to avoid controversial topics because their ability to circulate and do business relied on the good will of local rulers and the noninterference of the Church. However, while I maintain that historical Commedia dell'Arte is apolitical, I insist that it is subversive because of the special relationship each character has with the audience. Darbianna Dinsmore describes an “ah-ha” moment from the show that is illustrative:

It's a scene where Isabella is sad, and Flavio comes out and asks her what is wrong.... She's created a great plan and she gives him the idea of her plan and makes it feel like it was his plan the whole time. She realized, “I played to the audience. I wasn't playing to Flavio at that point,” which helped ensure that Flavio “looked like an idiot in front of the audience.” By playing to the audience, this character without agency in the social world of the play achieved “the sense of power that I had been lacking before.”

Within the confines of the *scenario* and the historical social norms, Isabella must defer to her brother Flavio and to her wooer Pantalone. The dramaturgical structures of the *scenari* do not dispute these outward power structures, and the characters are not depicted as revolutionary or disobedient. Isabella must remain secondary, and she must affirm, to their faces, whatever the men require. However, the ability to speak to the audience allows her to give voice to her actual thoughts

and, in this case, to embarrass her brother, who is patently wrong in the audience's eyes. The Commedia aside does not directly challenge social norms that oppress women or the poor, but it does give voice to the voiceless. A servant can charm the master and then tell the audience what he really thinks. The ability to speak honestly to a sympathetic public is inherently subversive, if not overtly political.

While performers around the world frequently get a small glimpse of Commedia work in classrooms or workshops, few ever have the chance to put their work in front of a real audience. PaR insists that presenting art-based work in an artistic environment brings about new understandings. Several members of *The Tooth-Puller* noted that the experience of working with an audience altered what they thought of Commedia and their approach to it. Dinsmore understood how audience reaction was a component of improvising from a repertoire, noting that her colleagues would have “three or four different choices in their pocket for different scenes” and would make different choices based on how the audience was responding. Stephen Wagner describes his “ah-ha” moment as discovering the physical connection between his character posture and his play to the audience, saying that one day where he was focusing on footwork he suddenly “felt in touch with the whole body, which I felt was part of the style, and then that got me moving along in talking to the audience, using the whole head.” He realized later, “We read about [Commedia] and studied” how to talk to the audience and performed “the little cookie-cutter movements of the character,” but it was not until tying the entire process together in front of an audience that he felt like he “got it.”

6.5 Improvisation & Dramaturgy

6.5.1 Developing an Idea: Always say “Yes”

The fundamental rule of contemporary improvisation is, “Always say, ‘Yes.’” This does not mean that the character literally has to say, “Yes,” (that would lead to repetitive dialogue) but that the actor behind the character should positively affirm every offer made within the scene. Sometimes saying, “No,” could be a terrific way to say, “Yes.” For example:

IMPROVISER A: Does it hurt?

IMPROVISER B: Nah, you get used to gunshot wounds after a while.

Or:

IMPROVISER A: So, will you go out with me?

IMPROVISERS B: No, but my husband might. Here he comes!

In each of the examples above, the character responds negatively to a question, but the actor affirms the question as valid in the world and, through negation, advances the relationship and the details of the scene in an unexpected way.

Sometimes, however, if Improviser B has mentally committed to aspects of the scene that have not been stated, she or he might fail to “say, ‘Yes,’” by contradicting the offer on the table. For example:

IMPROVISER A: Nice weather we’re having.

IMPROSIVER B: What do you mean? It’s raining.

Or:

IMPROVISER A: Can I get a cheeseburger, please?

IMPROVSEER B: This is a bank.

Or, the classic first blunder:

IMPROVISER A: Hi, Sally!

IMPROVISER B: That's not my name.

All of the above effectively stop a scene in its tracks, but any of them could still be saved by a clever “Yes, and...” retort from Improviser A (Maybe: “I know, I love the rain;” “In that case, a cheeseburger and a line of home equity credit, please!;” or “[hushed] Shh, ‘Sally.’ They’re watching us...”). The scene can only move forward when improvising partners agree to accept and build upon other ideas.

After a basic refresher of this premise, Day One of rehearsals for *The Tooth-Puller* began with an uninterrupted improvisation of the entire play. Cast members had been studying their characters and the *scenario* throughout the fall semester, but they had not come together to actively work on this show until the start of January intersession. Each cast member had a print-out of the *scenario* in the “off-stage” areas of the studio space, from which they could see and hear the “on-stage” action. In addition to shared expectations about the characters and the *scenario*, there were only two rules for the improvisation:

- (1) No one is permitted to break character while on stage.
- (2) Any character can enter or exit the stage whenever they want.

In other words, the “on stage” area was a dedicated “yes-saying” space. Anyone who was confused would be required to be confused in character or to invent a reason to leave the situation and regroup off-stage, but there could be no reset on



Figure 19 Improvising as animals (rehearsal video screenshot)

stage, nor any negation of ideas that had been accepted and developed on stage.

The first run served primarily to be accomplished and thrown away. It was uninspired, but not calamitous, and it proved that the company could in fact make it through the play with no more assistance than their own character work, the structure of the *scenario*, and their collaborations with each other. In its own small way, this first group experiment confirmed the feasibility of Commedia dell’Arte practice.³⁹⁸

After this first accomplishment, we spent the remainder of the day on each act of the *scenario* discreetly, running each two or three times before moving on to the next. At this point, I introduced a third rule:

- (3) On a subsequent pass at a scene, you cannot make the same choice you made previously, unless you make it better.

This rule was designed to ensure that nothing became set simply by virtue of being first and to encourage performers to be available for new experiments and fresh offers

³⁹⁸This first full improvisation was mentioned by several creative team members when asked about “a memorable moment from the rehearsal process.” Karen Anne Patti describes, “When we did the entire show the first week, and seeing, even though we did a lot of failures, there were some successes in that.... I think maybe one or two jokes ended up in the final show.... That really put us on our feet” (interview with author, 23 May 2017).

each time. As discussed above, Stephen K. Levine has pointed out that art-based research and theatrical improvisation both thrive on being available for the “unexpected,” and it was frequently the case throughout rehearsals that the most brilliant moments of artistic inspiration arrived by accident or through desperation.³⁹⁹ In requiring the actors to continue to explore (“If that’s not it, what is it?” Floyd King used to say to my MFA comedy class), we dedicated the space to experimentation and the permission to fail. In allowing them the option to repeat something if they could “make it better,” we also set an expectation of learning from failure and moving from random improvisation toward set repertoires and defined material.⁴⁰⁰

Expanding material requires the company to move from saying, “Yes,” to saying, “Yes, and...” by building on subsequent offers and fleshing out the details surrounding events. The second phase of improvisation focused on this theme of “development,” both in reference to psychologically-based interrogations of backstory and motivation (For example, what exactly does Pantalone find so appealing about Isabella?) and in reference to physical relationships and *lazzi* (For example, how exactly does Pantalone woo Isabella?). Although Commedia precedes Stanislavski, the notion of character need (or, more poetically, “appetite”) runs throughout each *scenario*, so it was important to us that the characters act in accordance with clear, strong intentions. Those actions, however, are not mere

³⁹⁹Levine, 125.

⁴⁰⁰When asked, “What is something you will take from this process to apply to other kinds of plays you do?” Tysianna Jones, a senior BFA actor who had also directed shows for the student-produced Ghostlight Repertory Theatre and was a leader in the campus improv community, connected directing with improvisation. “The rehearsal processes really influenced me from a director’s sense,” she said, citing tools for getting into a character, for developing a character, and for writing a script. “I really liked our just getting up and playing and then when we would all realize as a group that something clicked” (Interview by author, 11 May 2017, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS).

psychological obsessions, they are physicalized in a grandiose style along the lines of Fava's "machine" (see Chapter Three). What is internal becomes external, which means that Commedia performers must improvise not only text but also action. They must produce not only dialogue but also *lazzi*. Through improvisation, the cache of possible material continued to grow and expand, and, when actors felt a desire to hone an idea, they "made it better" through a second pass that was cleaner, tighter, and fuller.

6.5.2 Less is More: Hitting Plot-Points

At its longest, *The Tooth-Puller*'s three-act improvisations reached nearly three hours of consecutive material, with hours and hours of other possibilities having been explored, record, transcribed, and left to the side for possible use. Having proven capable of generating enough material, the performers were asked to select the necessary material. We began to improvise with the aim of concision: entering with a strong intention, accomplishing that action, and forcing an exit as soon as possible. The shortest run of the play took slightly over 17 minutes and managed to hit every single plot-point in the *scenario*. It was, however, not particularly funny, and several plot-points felt random and unmotivated. This run, in a sense, took us back to the basics of the *scenario*, both in emphasizing what the necessary actions are and in confronting again the questions that remain unanswered.

Our task from this point on was to develop and sharpen the necessary material while stripping away the unnecessary material. Faculty dramaturg Dr. Matthew Shifflett responded to a particularly unfocused and dragging run, and Department Chair Michael Barnett dropped in occasionally to offer a fresh eye. In subsequent

interviews, the cast reported feeling “vulnerable” through these critiques, thinking, “We wrote these things, so you can’t just blame someone else.”⁴⁰¹ However, the cast understood the importance of “killing our darlings” and knew that neither they nor the audience could physically last through a three-hour show. We had already determined that our goal was an 80-minute show with no intermission. “Cutting things was pretty hard,” but performers worked at distilling moments that had become overly-pleonastic or simply eliminating what was unnecessary. Each cut begat more cuts, because so many moments “added a complete other storyline that didn’t have to be there.”⁴⁰²

One strain that was cut involved the backstory behind Isabella’s disdain at marrying Pantalone. In an effort to concretize her response to Pantalone’s advances and as a means of foregrounding the Act One finale, a storyline developed in which Pantalone did in fact have bad breath, a condition that Isabella’s disposition specifically would not abide. In this version, Isabella developed a peculiar fetish for dental hygiene, was frequently seen brushing her own teeth, and became fond of poetic metaphors surrounding mouth and breath. The theme was developed so thoroughly that it became internally consistent; however, it ultimately lessened Isabella’s *pathos* by making her seem overly picky and compulsive, and it lowered her status by forcing her to comment on private matters that a *prima donna* would not

⁴⁰¹The sentiment was common among the creative team. The words are from Anderson Bandy, actor in *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 9 May 2017, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS.

⁴⁰²Giving voice to the consensus, the quotations are from Kaelee Albritton, dramaturg and choreographer of *The Tooth-Puller*, interview by author, 5 May 2017, University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS.

traditionally acknowledge. Furthermore, the creative team realized that the entire strain was unnecessary: Pantalone's actions were self-evidently repulsive without needing further justification from Isabella, and Pedrolino and Franceschina could spin their own plan and create, *a vista*, the ruse of the bad breath without any prior set-up. Isabella's oral fixation was jettisoned; the plot became tighter; and the actress playing Isabella arrived at a more focused, dignified character.

Although a quarter of the actors thrived on the ability to continue improvising and discovering, a majority—both at the time and later upon reflection—felt a sense of relief when the rough script finally arrived.⁴⁰³ Technical rehearsals pushed the devising process toward a more prescriptive paradigm because it would have been impossible to tech the show by committee in the amount of time we had. Furthermore, lights, sound, and stage management needed specific cue points around which to structure their designs. The show relied especially upon visual cues (cues taken from actor action rather than actor dialogue), and the stage manager worked with actors to mark beginning and ending points of improvisation so that they had freedom in between to play a moment however it arrived but could ensure that the ending of the moment would be cued the same way every time. A general sense of relief was given voice by actor Nathan Reed, who said that his “ah-ha” moment came when the cast “had the structure of the show down.” He added “I’m somebody who thrives on cues. I memorize things down pat, and then everything else I add on top of that.” For him, this meant, “if I have the structure, I won’t get lost.”

⁴⁰³Among the twelve-member cast, Will Frierson (Arlecchino), Jerry McCalpin (Il Dottore), and Tysianna Jones (Brighella) were the three who continued to favor improvisation, as will be discussed further in Chapter Seven below.

For others, the ability to keep from “getting lost” also relied upon the sense of ensemble and the practical understanding of how the characters would work together. Karen Anne Patti described learning not only her own Capitano character but also needing “to figure out who the other characters were and what to expect when we were improv-ing.” This point has been too off underemphasized in Commedia dell’Arte pedagogy, which caters to individual performers rather than long-term company building: not only were the original *comici* experts in their own characters, but they were experts in how their colleagues would play other characters. They developed a shared repertoire as well as a long-formed understanding of how to create conflict, humor, or resolution for each other. One needs to know how other characters are likely to react in order to improvise moments that will amuse and provoke while also advancing the story.

Having focused in the preceding pages upon the story, we will turn our attention in the concluding chapter to how audiences responded to these attempts at amusement and provocation, as well as concluding thoughts about the place of Commedia dell’Arte in theatre and actor training today.

Chapter 7: *The Tooth-Puller* Then, Now, and Beyond

7.1 From Renaissance Page to Contemporary Stage

As he plucked his Renaissance fiddle, Robert Eisenstein looked at the singer-actress with excited raised eyebrows. “You can sing this, too,” he said as he inverted a descending melody line into a rising ornamental phrase. “Okay,” she replied hesitantly, “When do I do that?”

“Oh, just whenever you feel like it. That’s when I do it. As we should—it’s Early Music!”

Just a few days later, Eisenstein ran another piece with us and stopped the group, “No, no,” he said. He explained that we were singing a progression in a modern way, but that the melody we should sing progressed differently by a half-step. “That half step is what makes it Early Music.”

In a matter of days, we had gone from “whenever you feel like it” makes it Early Music to “that half step difference” makes it Early Music, and it occurred to me that conversations about how to recreate Early Music must be very similar to the ones about how to recreate Commedia dell’Arte.

In the winter of 2016, I had the opportunity to perform in *The Second Shepherds’ Play* with the Folger Theatre/Folger Consort and to live in guest artist housing with a quartet of musicians. We rehearsed by day, while nights were filled either with impromptu Early Music jam sessions or data-driven debates about things like when it is appropriate to turn the fingers in while lute-plucking or what wood is suitable for Early Music reeds.

Among those conversations, as with the talks on Commedia that have surrounded me for years, I especially became intrigued by the dichotomy between the “spirit” of early music, which they described as based on improvisation, and the “form” of Early Music, which was contested ground on many levels all with the same recourse to written sources, iconography, and PaR approaches discussed above. It became clear to me that the interlocutors all agreed that within the fence of early music, there was space for incredible artistic freedom. The disagreement, though, was in where to put the fence.

Many of the practitioners surveyed for this project insisted that Commedia is theatre and that theatre is made from freedom; however, all of them also readily identified common misunderstandings in how others view Commedia.⁴⁰⁴ Olly Crick offered that “you can do what you want with it provided it looks like commedia,” thus raising the question of what Commedia looks like.⁴⁰⁵ Christopher Bayes strongly advocated for freedom from solidified rules that “become so precious.” In his words, “At its heart, you have to fuck around with [Commedia]. It demands that you fuck around with it.” Still he agreed that he has seen plays that were advertised as “Commedia” but really were just “farce” or “sit-com” or “sketch comedy.” He spoke about being able to tell the difference “because I’ve done [Commedia] so much.”⁴⁰⁶ This sort of I-know-it-when-I-see-it definition of Commedia is common to most practitioners. What some do not even realize is that other practitioners would

⁴⁰⁴For qualitative methodology and demographics on interview/survey groups, see the notes in “Theoretical Framework” at the conclusion of Chapter One and the sample questions in Appendix B.

⁴⁰⁵Crick, internet survey.

⁴⁰⁶Bayes, interview by author, 11 February 2018, Brooklyn, NY.

disagree with them. Inside the fence, there is freedom. But where do we build the fence?

7.2 Participant Reflections

In addressing the fundamental questions, “What is Commedia?” and “How does one make it?” this chapter reflects on both the process and the results of *The Tooth-Puller* as presented at The University of Mississippi in February 2017. It continues the qualitative research begun previously, including thoughts articulated through interviews with the student performers, designers, and production team members, as well as audience response surveys. Reflecting on these responses about what makes Commedia “Commedia” leads to considerations of how one can perform and teach Commedia today.

7.2.1 Creative Ownership

Rudlin begins *Commedia dell’Arte: An Actor’s Handbook* with a lofty charge:

The purpose of this book is to help give commedia dell’arte back to the actor in the hope that it may again provide one of the base languages of a theatrical lingua franca. It is also founded on the personal conviction that if there is to be regeneration of the theatrical medium in the next century, it must come via the re-empowering of the performer rather than the continued hegemony of the playwright and director.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷Rudlin, 1.

With present trends toward devised theatre, ensemble collaboration, and artist-entrepreneurship, many current acting teachers and young theatre companies have found, as Rudlin predicted, a useful ally in Commedia dell'Arte.⁴⁰⁸ This was reflected in interviews with the professional practitioners quoted below and in the experiences of the creative team from *The Tooth-Puller*.

When asked, “How much do you feel like this play is yours?” all students either stated that they felt entire ownership or that they could not say it was “their own” but rather that it belonged to all of them. For example, Assistant Director Austyn Davis voiced one aspect, saying, “Every part of it is mine” and calling the play “a little piece of my soul.” Stephen Wagner, who played Pedrolino, voiced similar ideas and then quickly corrected, “The ‘I’ is kind of like a ‘we’ because any part of it that is ‘mine’ is also ‘theirs’ because the cast was one big whole as a unit.” Nathan Reed commented on the actor’s situation saying, “Often we do a show...that we haven’t had a lot of say in,” but this process “required a lot of vulnerability because we were putting something out there that we had written.” Sydney Hanson concluded, “I have never learned more about theatre or felt more pride in my work than this show.” Her co-dramaturg Kaelee Albritton told me about her experience during the class in the fall compared with that of the production, saying that class was “about trying to get it right because you wanted to get a good grade,” but the

⁴⁰⁸Included in this group would be the company Creatively Independent, who I was able to work with in 2016 and who influenced my approach as an educator leading up to *The Tooth-Puller*. Artistic Director Christopher Beaulieu is a graduate of the Dell’Arte School. See Managing Director Jess Pillmore’s forthcoming book *Shakespeare’s Ensemble: The Creative Ownership Project* (Creatively Independent, 2018), which includes my essay about these experiences.

rehearsal process was “Alright, let’s play,” and “we were like, ‘Okay, we know that you said that in class, but what does that mean?’”

Emily Stone said that creative ownership is something she thought about in subsequent productions: “I hate now when people ask the director what they want them to do.” Jerry McCalpin describes undergoing this feeling throughout the process: “I did not understand what you kept saying about ‘creative ownership’ until...about a week after opening when I was like, ‘Oh, this is our show. This is our show. This is something we have made.’” He summarized, “I’ve never felt that kind of ownership with a character before. I didn’t think it was okay to feel that kind of ownership with a character.”

In training young artists in theatrical practice, I believe these feelings signal success. As a scholar and teacher of theatre history, however, the question may remain open: Did they actually do Commedia dell’Arte?

7.2.2 Defining Commedia dell’Arte (Again)

To “do Commedia dell’Arte,” one ought first to clarify the project: Do you seek to recreate the *product* of historical Commedia dell’Arte, making a piece of theatre in the way you think they might have? Or do you seek to follow the *process* of historical *comici*, creating a new works inspired by their philosophy and methods?

In other words, by “Commedia dell’Arte,” do you mean the style? Or the spirit? The form? Or the essence?

For some, Commedia is, at its root, nothing more than “Professional Theatre.” The term “Commedia dell’Arte” originally signified “theatre of the professional”

(where “Arte” refers to skill, craft, guild, or trade and where “Commedia” broadly indicates a theatrical form of storytelling rather than strictly a “comedy.”⁴⁰⁹) Both historians and practitioner-apologists have argued that the true contribution of sixteenth-century Italian players is a legacy of modern professional theatre, a system of emboldened artist-entrepreneurship driven by actor-creators and an industry model for touring companies beginning as early as the late 1530s. The emergences of a robust conception of professional theatre and specifically the model for theatre that “takes the show on the road” are integral to the development of the entertainment industry today. In Commedia, those things arose alongside the regular appearance of professional actresses on stage, artists who not only sculpted careers and expressive outlets for themselves but who also helped to shape the development of Western theatre. However, Commedia does not merely denote a moment from theatrical history; it also refers to a style of theatre that people practice today. Beyond the emphasis on professional artist-creator, what can we say about this style of theatre?

For others, Commedia is fundamentally “Improvised Play” rooted in playfulness, improvisation, subversion, and audience interaction. Any additional “rule” is against the spirit of the original *comici*, whose work involved breaking rules.

⁴⁰⁹The repertoire of Commedia companies included not only comedies but also tragedies, pastorals, and other genres as seen in Scala’s collection and in Perrucci’s treatment. The Italian word “*commedia*” can function in a similar but opposite way to the English “drama”: both describe a genre (in one case, funny; in the other, solemn) as well as theatrical storytelling in general. For example, it is possible in English to go to “Drama Class” or “Drama School” and study comedy there. In the case of “*commedia*,” consider Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, which was never intended to be humorous but rather to tell a story about theology playing out as a cosmic work of theatre. Dante defended his work as a kind of vernacular comedy: “Comedy, indeed, beginneth with some adverse circumstances, but its theme hath a happy termination, as doth appear in the comedies of Terence.... Likewise [Comedy and Tragedy] differ in their style of language, for Tragedy is lofty and sublime, Comedy, mild and humble, as Horace says in his *Poetica*,” in Dante Alighieri, “Letter to the Lord Can Grande della Scala,” trans. Charles Sterrett Latham, in *Dramatic Theory and Criticism: Greeks to Grotowski*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1974), 103.

To my mind, all these things are part of Commedia and are excellent components of theatre. Therefore, I advocate calling this style of theatre “clown,” “mask,” “farce,” “improv,” “popular theatre,” “political theatre,” or what you will, but I do not believe that a play should be called “Commedia dell’Arte” just because it is rowdy and of-the-people.

Commedia may also be seen as “Social Scenario” presenting and considering social relationships such as those between masters and servants, parents and children, lovers and enemies. The basic dramaturgy of character relationships is the living heritage of the *scenari* and the troupes who made shows that celebrate, question, and lampoon human behavior. I strongly believe that Commedia’s original success and living legacy are largely dependent on the ways in which audiences across time and space can recognize themselves and their society in the characters on stage. However, this is also true of works by Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Sondheim, and any other dramatic framework that manages to “hold the mirror up, as it were, to nature.” Are there other necessary components to delineate the style of “Commedia dell’Arte”?

Still others see Commedia simply as “Masked, Physical Theatre.” This emphasizes Commedia, not as a movement in theatrical history and not for its content about how societies and people function, but primarily as a “style” of physical theatre marked specifically by mask, slapstick, acrobatics, and exaggerated gesture. This definition is especially common when other material is treated “in the style of Commedia dell’Arte,” which too often simply means “done with masks” or “with a silly, physical aesthetic.” In my view, all theatre is “physical,” so this definition fails

to elucidate much. Furthermore, I continue to question why a work of masked, physical comedy should be called “Commedia dell’Arte” without conscious connections to the tradition.

7.3 Audience Responses⁴¹⁰

For most of the roughly 1400 people who attended *The Tooth-Puller*, that production is the sole connection they will ever make to the tradition of Commedia dell’Arte. A handful of audience members described some expectation from previous exposure: many THEA 201 students acknowledged that Commedia had been mentioned in class, but nearly all indicated that they did not know what to expect from the show. Only a handful of general audience members described previous expectations, for example, that Commedia would be “opera-like.” To most of the audience, *The Tooth-Puller* is all the Commedia they will ever know.

A strong majority found the play amusing. Among the THEA 201 population 87.69% either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement, “This play made me laugh.” Within the general audience surveys, the agreement was 100%.⁴¹¹ While this data

⁴¹⁰Data in this section is gleaned from online surveys conducted by students seeing the show for the course THEA 201: “Appreciation of Theatre” and paper surveys from general audience members. Survey demographics and methods are discussed in greater detail at the conclusion to Chapter One. In summary, among the THEA 201 students, 780 online surveys were completed while 1049 tickets were redeemed for a completion rate of 74.36%. It will be noted that this survey group were “compelled” viewers of the production as a requirement for the course. I estimate that 280-300 unique (non-duplicate) general audience members attended the show; 48 paper surveys were submitted, yielding a paper survey completion rate of 16.0-17.1%. It is worth noting that at least half of these responses likely came from audience members who were friends or family members of the creative team. See my “Theory & Methodology” in Chapter One for more details.

⁴¹¹Among the THEA 201 online surveys, the breakdown was as follows. Strongly Agree: 339 responses (43.46%), Agree: 345 responses (44.23%), Neutral/No Opinion: 39 responses (5.00%), Disagree: 21 responses (2.69%), Strongly Disagree: 35 responses (4.48%), No Response: 1 (0.13%).

indicates that the play mostly did its job by amusing the audience, it more significantly indicates that the vast majority of the audience understood and related to the material. As Robert Darnton has noted, jokes strongly delineate cultural insiders and outsiders because people do not laugh at what they do not understand.⁴¹² Richard Andrews comments on another production of *The Tooth-Puller*'s ability to reach contemporary, non-specialist audiences:

This scenario was fully staged (as *The Dentist*) in the 1980s by students of the University of Bristol, England: they videotaped a performance given to an audience of schoolchildren, who clearly found it hilarious and had no difficulty in following it.⁴¹³

Commedia historically found the ability to amuse across political, linguistic, and cultural borders by presenting broad social types in universal relationships. I had theorized that audience members' enjoyment of the show would correlate to their

Among the general audience paper surveys: Strongly Agree: 43 responses (89.58%), Agree: 5 responses (10.41%), Neutral/No Opinion: 0, Disagree: 0, Strongly Disagree: 0. The general audience, which responded more favorably, attended the show voluntarily and was more likely to know someone connected to the production. Nevertheless, when asked to describe the show and their impression of Commedia in three words, a majority of the THEA 201 students who in the 780 total surveys used words such as "funny" (439 times), "hilarious" (59), "humorous" (81), "comic/comical/comedic" (47), "fun" (25), "silly" (13), "goofy" (7), "zany" (3), "colorful" (12), "happy" (2), "entertaining" (171), and "well-done/written/thought(-out)/acted/produced/directed/rehearsed/performed/prepared" (30).

Interestingly, among the 12.31% of THEA 201 respondents who did not agree that the play made them laugh, most indicated finding the sexual innuendo and social satire too biting. In writing in words to describe the play and Commedia based on what they saw, these students used words such as (over/overly-/too much) "sex/sexual" (52), "raunchy" (21), "racy" (2), "offensive" (1), "vulgar" (14), and "crude" (20). Only one paper survey utilized any of these words ("raunchy"). The reader can judge the material in Appendix A, but I will point out that it is quite tame compared with other mainstage productions such as *Hair*, *Teddy Ferrara*, or *Clybourne Park*. I suspect that the cartoony and interactive quality of the jokes made reserved audience members more uncomfortable, whereas racier material feels less provocative in a fourth-wall drama.

⁴¹²Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

⁴¹³Andrews, 70.

ability to recognize and relate to the characters. Among the general audience population, this theory held with three-quarters of the audience agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement, “I know someone who acts like one of these characters.” Among the THEA 201 population, however, just over one quarter agreed or strongly agreed,⁴¹⁴ raising doubts about the relatability of characters as the prime motivator for comedy.

What both survey groups agreed upon was that the play was “surprising,” “inventive,” or “refreshing” specifically because it combined period style with contemporary references. They concurred that the scenic and costume designs and the poetic language felt “old,” but the jokes, references, ad libs, and audience interactions felt “new.”⁴¹⁵ Four students described these contemporary references as “memes,” equating Renaissance-style improvised direct address with materials circulating today through social media. General write-ins agreed that the inventiveness of the play resided in “The traditional costumes storyline and yet references to pop culture,” “the combination of substance and method,” “the mix from an old world and modern language. As well as the old world setting,” and “the cross between old and new ideas”

⁴¹⁴In the general audience paper surveys: Strongly Agree: 19 responses (40.42%), Agree: 17 responses (36.17%), Neutral/No Opinion: 8 responses (17.02%), Disagree: 8 responses (6.38%), Strongly Disagree: 0. In THEA 201 online surveys: Strongly Agree: 43 responses (5.51%), Agree: 222 responses (28.46%), Neutral/No Opinion: 230 responses (29.49%), Disagree: 196 responses (5.13%), Strongly Disagree: 89 responses (11.41%). Anecdotally, I sat in front of a group of clearly intoxicated sorority members at one show and enjoyed listening to them argue amongst themselves about which of them most resembled Flaminia, a young woman spoiled by her father and capriciously though relentlessly doting on the object(s) of her affection.

⁴¹⁵Several THEA 201 students also commented that the “class structures” in the play felt “old.” Respectfully, I disagree.

In many ways, the relationship between the “old” and the “new” permeates this entire enterprise. In the concluding sections, I will further reflect on what is old and what is new as well as the aims in continuing to make Commedia dell’Arte today.

7.4 Commedia as a “Means” or an “End”

Commedia in the twentieth century began as a reaction to realism in the work of Edward Gordon Craig, Vsevolod Meyerhold and Yevgeny Vakhtangov, Jacques Copeau, and the like. It exploded as a rediscovered practice through Piccolo Teatro di Milano, Giovanni Poli, Dario Fo, and the appearance of new companies actively experimenting with the form throughout Europe and the Americas. It became solidified in the classrooms of Jacques Lecoq, Antonio Fava, Carlo Boso, and Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and in the how-to manuals of the 1990s and 2000s. In the past decade, however, the conversation has shifted. Critical theatre historians have begun to undermine the tidiness of twentieth-century historiography, and actor training has moved from a fascination with the old forms to a hunger for the new. Are we perhaps witnessing an era of reform for Neo-Commedia dell’Arte?⁴¹⁶

Chief among the shifts I note is the move from a Commedia that seeks to reembody original practice to a Commedia that seeks to spark new discoveries. My own experiences as a practitioner have followed this trajectory. The early day of

⁴¹⁶Along with this dissertation, doctoral projects in France, Australia, and England, are asking similar questions. See the previously cited dissertations of Filacanapa and Di Niro as well as Olly Crick’s in-progress dissertation *Defining the Aesthetics of Neo-Commedia: a Dramaturgical Investigation, including the Potential for Local, Social and Political Relevance*.

Faction of Fools sought to revive a classic form, but we realized that our audiences and our artists might become bored by a season in which every show featured the same design style and conventions. We adopted a practice of letting each show live for itself and decided that each show could freely draw on whichever aspects from the Commedia tradition were relevant to that individual project. We varied the color and materials of our masks to match the design aesthetic of the world. Our physical style bounced from a Renaissance Italian earthiness to a neo-classical French flair to a contemporary “American” Commedia depending on our aim. We played with updating old material and with bringing old gags to current topics. In short, we focused on making plays out of Commedia rather than making Commedia plays.

Even in the short project of *The Tooth-Puller*, my process evolved as I considered the perspective of our non-specialist audience and the goals of our student training. I began with the expectation that we would make an “original practices” show—one even more “authentic” or “traditional” than what I had done with Faction of Fools. However, the experiment was not limited to Commedia practice but more specifically focused on Commedia pedagogy. The question, “What should our play look like?” was immediately joined by the question, “What should my students learn?” As soon as I began to talk with student designers, I became as interested in stoking their imaginations as I was in correcting their research. Similarly, in the rehearsal room, I began to prize the creative ownership that my student actors took in the work. Meanwhile, I was researching the state of Commedia pedagogy today and realizing that professional programs known as places to study Commedia dell’Arte

intensely—*École Jacques Lecoq*, The Dell’Arte School, and Accademia Dell’Arte—had shifted their focus along similar lines.

A strong component of Jacques Lecoq’s early influences came from Italy and from the Piccolo Teatro efforts to rediscover and reinvent their Commedia dell’Arte for *The Servant of Two Masters* and other plays. Lecoq was part of this training program and began working with Amleto Sartori through these connections. He spent much of the late 40s and early 50s in Italy. He later founded his school in Paris with an emphasis on Commedia dell’Arte as one of the chief styles in the program, alongside melodrama, tragic chorus, and clown, all of which were featured as units in the culminating second year of the program. However, by the 90s, Commedia was moved to the first year, with Bouffon taking its place in the second year.⁴¹⁷ Lecoq describes the change:

The commedia dell’arte and its masks were part of my teaching at the school from the very beginning. Sadly, over the course of time, a so-called ‘Italian’ style of performance, which is nothing but clichés, has begun to spread. Young actors have often done short courses in commedia and the playing has become lifeless. The very name commedia began to irk me. For these reasons I have been led to turn the problem inside out, to discover what lies beneath, that is to say *la comédie humaine* (the human comedy). From this point on, using a

⁴¹⁷Ronald East, “*TOUT BOUGE* (Revisited): Transformation in Jacques Lecoq’s Commedia Pedagogy from 1970 to 1990,” paper presented at *Passing on the Commedia dell’Arte Tradition*, 18 February 2012, at Glendon College, Toronto.

much broader field of reference, we have rediscovered our creative freedom.⁴¹⁸

The directors of Accademia dell'Arte in Arezzo, Italy, tell a similar story. Scott McGehee, the Founding Director of the program, describes how the school began with a mission to teach Commedia but has since “reversed” its pedagogy to see Commedia as a tool toward individual creation rather than seeing it as the culminating goal of their training:

I think the emphasis in the very beginning was much more on Commedia, so we did have an idea in the beginning that Commedia is the core, and movement is the necessary preparation for the Commedia—acrobatics, movement, voice, these sorts of things were all preparations to help you in Commedia. But we started moving away from that to think, “No, let’s reverse that, and let’s make Commedia a preparation for a more rich, wide-open approach to modern theatre.”⁴¹⁹

Fabio Mangolini, instructor of Acting and former MFA Program Director at Accademia dell'Arte confirms this principle in the school’s current curriculum:

Commedia is one of the tools. The first semester is tools. Learn tools. Blood and tears. Then the second semester is all the ingredients of theatre, in Commedia dell'Arte.

⁴¹⁸Lecoq, 108.

⁴¹⁹Scott McGehee, interview by author, 22 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

After “the ingredients,” Mangolini describes the program as “creation, creation, creation,” emphasizing that, “Commedia is a fundamental step to know how to create, how to have a dramaturgy of the actor.” This is the core of Mangolini’s point: “Commedia is theatre. The problem is that it’s not a style.” For him, anyone teaching Commedia as a “style” is just demonstrating “a strange dance.”⁴²⁰ In this view, the program aims to teach participants how to make theatre, not how to duplicate style.

Even Antonio Fava, held by many to be a Commedia authoritarian, agrees with this point, noting that “Commedia is theatre. Period.” After founding his *Stage Internazionale di Commedia dell’Arte*, he then created a longer course, *La Scuola Internazionale dell’Attore Comico*, described when I completed the program, as culminating in a comic style “never seen before.” The final third of the program was based on individual creation beyond any of the prescribed or studied materials.

Christopher Bayes also places his emphasis on creation and focuses specifically on sparking the growth and imagination of the artist. He speaks of the importance of the “actor-author” as fundamental to the Commedia movement and his passion for it. Half of his “Commedia Weekend” course was spent, not studying any Commedia “form” or anything “traditional,” but simply playing with basic clown techniques. As he describes:

I’m really trying to give theatre back to the actors. Find a way for the actor to have ownership again. Give them the keys.... I want to

⁴²⁰Fabio Mangolini, interview by author, 20 June 2017, Arezzo, Italy.

condition the actors and somehow give them the tools to do it on their own. Cause that's what's gonna make it unique and let you defend it some way. Take care of your own baby; don't just be a babysitter.⁴²¹

From this perspective, the tradition does not need to be nannied. It needs to be fruitful and multiply, and that is done through the fertility of the artist's playful imagine. The goal in this case is not to teach actors how to make Commedia, but rather to teach Commedia in order to make actors.

7.5 Commedia is Dead; Long Live Commedia!

I have pondered heavy-heartedly the data in my qualitative surveys that came from the question, "Whose work do you like who is performing Commedia dell'Arte today? (List as many people or companies as you want.)" Most respondents listed only one or two answers. Many were dumbfounded by the question. During in-person interviews, subjects would furrow their brows and look off intently before finally saying, "You know, I really don't see much." Despite the immense growth in interest, popularity, and discourse about the topic, it appears that many Commedia practitioners are not actively connecting with each other or seeking out work other than their own.

I also observed, especially in oral interviews but even in the patterns of some online surveys, that most subjects' positions softened as they continued thinking. The most avid anarchists would eventually speak about historical sources that inspire

⁴²¹Bayes, interview by author, 11 February 2018, Brooklyn, NY.

them or about principles that they think are crucial in Commedia. The avowed traditionalists would start to make concessions, to emphasize that living theatre is what counts, or to insist something along the lines of “I’m not religious” about my Commedia.

Nevertheless, the religion metaphor is apt. On one end of the spectrum stands the authoritarian fundamentalist, and on the other hand stands the nonbelieving nihilist. Interestingly, this spectrum does not align perfectly with the spectrum of history verse performance: both the fundamentalists and the nihilists quote history to serve their purpose. Both the traditionalist and the anarchist find comfort in the spirit of practice. In short, Fabio Mangolini seems to me to be right: Commedia does not exist, and it is alive and well. The controversy itself, the dispute and the discord, is a sign of passionate engagement.

This project is meant to be neither orthodox dogma nor Nietzschean philosophy with a hammer. Neither orthodox, nor agnostic, my project could be called “ecumenical.” It merely seeks to point out the diversity of approaches within the history and contemporary practice of Commedia dell’Arte and to offer suggestions on best practices for those who elect to try a specific approach. In summation, here are guideposts that I seek to follow:

In historiography, remember the outliers. Focus on hard data and shun recourse to cultural psychology. Remember that Commedia is made by people, about people, and that people relate through social structures that are also human-made. Rely on a variety of witnesses, including literary and non-literary documents; artifacts in the form of theatre buildings, masks, and trinkets; and iconography. Also,

never forget that historians re-construct history based on how sources construct them. In other words, the historian is doing the same thing the practitioner is, and some do it more thoroughly than others.

In literature, remember to consider the content of the stories we tell and how that content shapes or is shaped by forms. Recall that artists always borrow and that borrowing begets new art. Consider the hermeneutic circle in which you interpret the *scenario* based upon the characters, but you interpret the characters based upon the *scenari*. Do not hesitate to ask, “How would this actually work?” because Commedia scripts, *scenari*, and descriptions arrive *a posteriori* and only loosely document in the archive something that existed ephemerally in the repertoire.

In iconography, assume that the work in question does not exist with the purpose of telling you something about theatre. Treat the source as a hostile witness, as a reconstruction, and not as a piece of independent data. Ask who did it, when, where, and why. Accept the fact that you will have to be suspicious of more images than you embrace. Also, accept the fact that, even as the image is a work of art, so is your Commedia. Allow yourself to be inspired however inspiration hits you.

In design and dramaturgy, remember that an informed choice is preferable to an ignorant one. Recognize your place in the tradition, which means both that (1) someone will leave your show thinking that is what “Commedia dell’Arte” is, and (2) *la commedia continua* based on how you give it life. Ask yourself what is crucial to this story, for this venue, in front of this audience, at this time—the same questions the historical *comici* likely pondered when they prepared to improvise the tradition into existence.

In practice, be available for surprise. Recognize that your body has its own knowledge and its own ignorance. Be prepared to start from a multitude of places. Accept that, wherever you start, you will still have to make choices, even if the choice is simply which mask-maker, book, or Maestro to trust. Play for extremes, and play what inspires you. A true form is only useful to the extent that it is justified. Always find connections.

In surveys of other sources, remember that everyone who is taking part in this conversation is doing so because they love something about it. Find out what they love. Find out how to share what you love with them.

...viva la commedia!

Appendix A: Script of *The Tooth-Puller*

The Tooth-Puller

Produced by The University of Mississippi Department of Theatre Arts

February 17-26, 2017

Meek Auditorium

Written by The Company based on a 1611 scenario by Flaminio Scala

Directed & Devised by Matthew R. Wilson

Music by Jonathan Lee

Lyrics by Jonathan Lee, Anderson Bandy, and The Company

Scenic/Properties Design	Angela King
Costume Design	John Polles
Lighting Design	Nick Morrow
Sound Design	Jonathan Lee
Makeup Design	Jodi Rushing
Mask Design/Construction	Aaron Cromie and The Company
Dance Choreographers	Kaelee Albritton and The Company
Dramaturgs	Mary Kate Halpin, Kaelee Albritton, & Sydney Hanson
Assistant Director	Austyn Davis
Stage Manager	Summerlin LaCour

Featuring:

Pantalone	Micaela Kostmayer
Orazio	Nathan Reed
Flaminia	Emily Stone
Pedrolino	Stephen Wagner
Flavio	Allen Dillon
Isabella	Darbianna Dinsmore
Franceschina	Cassidy Woodfield
Arlecchino	Will Frierson
Il Dottore	Jerry McCalpin
Brighella	Tysianna Jones
Capitano Spavento	Karen Anne Patti
Pasquella	Anderson Bandy

PROLOGUE

(PEDROLINO enters from PANTALONE's home SL. He holds the door open for PANTALONE and FLAVIO as they make their way from indoors to center stage with a written contract.)

FLAVIO

Signor Pantalone, have no alarm. You can trust that I, as the new Master of the House, will uphold the contract you signed with my father before his passing.

PANTALONE

(crossing himself) May he rest in peace.

FLAVIO

I mean to enforce every detail: ArtEYEcle A, ArtEYEcle B, and, of course, ArtEYEcle D.

(FLAVIO has a habit of accenting the wrong syllable and over-pronouncing words for affect. For example, he pronounces both "odor" and "tooth-puller" as rhyming with "door": "oh-DOOR," "tooth-pull-OOR.")

PANTALONE

Signor Flavio, your father would be very proud. It's a pleasure doing business.

(A special handshake ensues between the two. FLAVIO exits into his home SR, and PEDROLINO opens the door for PANTALONE to enter his home SL. FLAMINIA appears above him in the window with one of her dresses.)

FLAMINIA

Pedrolino! My dress needs cleaning.

(He runs underneath her window.)

PEDROLINO

Your dress looks beautiful, Signorina Flaminia.

(She drops the dress, and it falls to PEDROLINO's feet.)

FLAMINIA

(Sing-song) Not anymore!

PEDROLINO

One clean dress, coming up.

(He takes the dress and disappears into PANTALONE's house. FLAMINA remains in the window. ARLECCHINO and FRANCESCHINA hesitantly peak around the US buildings.)

ARLECCHINO

(To FRANCESCHINA, in a whisper) Pssst! The coast clear.

FRANCESCHINA

(Also whispered) All clear!

(The two tip-toe out followed by ORAZIO and ISABELLA also sneaking on together to meet center stage. ARLECCHINO and FRANCESCHINA keep lookout.)

ISABELLA

Orazio!

ORAZIO

Isabella!

ISABELLA

What a naughty idea, to sneak out together and watch the morning's sunrise.

ORAZIO

I hope I was not too forward. I know your period of mourning has only recently ended.

ISABELLA

You are a gentleman to be concerned, but my late marriage to my late husband was arranged by my late father. My new feelings for you, on the other hand...those are my own.

ORAZIO

Arranged marriages, old men deciding the fate of young lovers: these practices are barbaric, but what can you do? It's the 1500s.

ISABELLA

You are so understanding. I wish we could make this moment last forever.

FRANCESCHINA

(Anxiously checks wrist as if wearing a watch) Well, we can't, so let's move this along—

ISABELLA

(Ignoring her) We must depart. My brother will wake soon.

ORAZIO

As will my father—

FRANCESCHINA

I think they're already up, so—

ORAZIO

I will see you anon, love.

(They reach for one another then begin to exit into their respective homes. ISABELLA is stopped outside of her door, alongside FRANCESCHINA and ARLECCHINO, by her brother FLAVIO, who is exiting the home.)

FLAVIO

Here I am, Master of the House, having to search for my own servants and my young ward.

ISABELLA

Flavio, I am older than you.

FLAVIO

But now you live in my house.

ISABELLA

You're sixteen.

FLAVIO

Going on seventeen! And our father's passing makes me a man!!!

ISABELLA

But baby brother--

FLAVIO

Franceschina, take my sister indoors.

FRANCESCHINA

(aside) What can you do? It's the 1500s!

(She does as she is told.)

FLAVIO

Arlecchino. My salmon and poached eggs.

(He exits, displeased.)

ARLECCHINO

Salmon. Fish. Water. Looks like I'm going for a swim!

(He runs off SL.)

(PANTALONE enters from his home on a mission.)

PANTALONE

Pedrolino, you are looking at an old man who is about to have a young wife!

PEDROLINO

Congratulations, Signore!

PANTALONE

And to consummate this marriage, I placed an order with Il Dottore for a bunch of that—

(He looks down at his genitals.)

PEDROLINO

(Hard whisper to audience) Special medication.

PANTALONE

Yes.

PEDROLINO

Right away, sir!

(PEDROLINO crosses to IL DOTTORE's door. PANTALONE crosses downstage to FLAMINIA's window where she still appears, brushing her hair.)

PANTALONE

Flaminia, what are you doing exposing yourself to the town's gossip? NO SUITORS!

(He begins exiting back through the door he came from.)

FLAMINIA

(half-heartedly) Okay.

(PEDROLINO knocks at the top half of IL DOTTORE's Dutch door. The bottom half swings open, hitting PEDROLINO, and we see BRIGHELLA, laughing hysterically.)

PEDROLINO

Brighella!

BRIGHELLA

(Coming out of door) Oh, Pedrolino, what can I do for you today?

PEDROLINO

Brighella, my master Pantalone is about to get married again, so I'm here for his *(hushed, aside to the audience)* special medication.

BRIGHELLA

Ah, yes. You know, it's funny—if you don't say what it really is, I can't help you.

PEDROLINO

Oh, Brighella, you know I can't just *say* what it is.

BRIGHELLA

Well, I can't just *help* you with Pantalone's problem.

(BRIGHELLA goes to exit.)

PEDROLINO

(Attempting to avert the crisis) Oh, oh, Brighella—

BRIGHELLA

(Not having it) Sorry! We're closed!

(He disappears through his small door. PEDROLINO's positive spirit lives on. He knocks once again. Now, the top half of the door swings open and smacks PEDROLINO in the face this time. We see IL DOTTORE.)

IL DOTTORE

I have a prescription of SILDENAFIL A.K.A., Medicine for Erectile Dysfunction ready for...SIGNOR PANTALONE!

(IL DOTTORE, BRIGHELLA, and PEDROLINO perform lazzi of doctor-patient confidentiality.)

That'll be 25 scudi!

(While IL DOTTORE says this, PEDROLINO sinks to his knees, revealing himself from behind the door. Deadpan. He rises to be standing on the other side of the door.)

ACT 1, SCENE 1

(PANTALONE has walked outside to meet PEDROLINO.)

PEDROLINO

Signor Pantalone! I have your *(whisper)* special medication!

PANTALONE

Perfect! Pedrolino, now my wedding night is a guaranteed success!

PEDROLINO

Undoubtedly, sir! Who is the lucky woman?

PANTALONE

Her name is Isabella!

(PEDROLINO looks toward her window, where ISABELLA appears brushing her hair or something.)

PEDROLINO

Isabella, the young widow across the street?

(He shows his concern to the audience, but not to his master.)

PANTALONE

How exciting it is to be in love again! I even wrote a ballad to sing when I formally propose!

(PANTALONE begins humming. His humming turns into joyful dancing. He grabs PEDROLINO to dance with him while he sings, to PEDROLINO's dismay).

PANTALONE

(sings)

ISABELLA,

LISTEN HERE:

MY THOUGHTS FOR YOU

ARE CRYSTAL CLEAR.

I WANT A GIRL

TO PARADE AND SHOW.

MY HEART BEATS FOR THE BLONDE

WIDOW.

YOU, MY DEAR, ARE

A GRACEFUL SWAN.

YOUR YOUTHFUL EYES

CAUSE ME TO FAWN.
YOUR LOCKS APPEAR
TO BE MADE OF GOLD.
IT'S ONLY YOU
I WANT TO HOLD.

(PEDROLINO gets caught up in the moment and forgets his fear momentarily. ISABELLA sees the dancing and decides to retreat into her room.)

PANTALONE

That is exactly what I will say when I announce our marriage.

(PEDROLINO snaps back to the reality of the situation.)

PEDROLINO

When are you planning to do that, sir?

PANTALONE

I'm on my way right now!

PEDROLINO

But, sir!!!

PANTALONE

What?

PEDROLINO

(struggling to make excuses) Are you sure you want to be with someone like Isabella? I mean...she's a widow!

PANTALONE

Yes, and I am a widower!

PEDROLINO

Sure, but her husband died while they both were still young.

PANTALONE

And my wife died while *we* were both still young!

PEDROLINO

Right, but that was a while ago, so...

PANTALONE

(chuckles) Pedrolino, Pedrolino. There is no way in the world that I will not marry Isabella.

PEDROLINO

Why is that, sir?

PANTALONE

When Isabella's father was on his deathbed, he was worried about Isabella (recently widowed), and he knew that his son, Flavio (soon to be Head of the Household) would never find a worthy husband for his sister. Their father begged me to sign a contract saying that when Isabella's period of mourning was over, she would marry into my house. I assumed she would marry my son, Orazio, but I then began to consider what a lovely woman she is. People respect a man with a wife like that!

PEDROLINO

The contract does allow her to marry your son, Orazio, though...?

PANTALONE

Wellllllll...I guess Orazio is going to have to be sent away to the University of Perugia.

PEDROLINO

But Orazio loves Isabella! They should be together, and you know it! (*realizing*) Is that why you're sending him away? So he's out of the way and you can have Isabella!

PANTALONE

You can't possibly understand, you worthless servant! How dare you speak to me like this! I don't have much time left; Orazio has his whole life to get as many wives as he wants!

(PEDROLINO and PANTALONE come to blows. The situation escalates acrobatically, and PANTALONE digs his teeth into PEDROLINO's left arm.)

PEDROLINO

Ow, you're biting me! He's biting me! You're biting me!

PANTALONE

Pedrolino, you've made me too angry to see my Lady Love now! Tell Isabella's servant that I need to talk with her mistress.

(PANTALONE storms back into his house.)

ACT 1, SCENE 2

FRANCESCHINA

Being Isabella's servant—you know what it consists of? Secretly keeping track of her gentleman caller every minute of the day! Orazi—Oh, Pedrolino!

PEDROLINO

Franceschina! Handmaiden of Isabella.

FRANCESCHINA

Your master, Orazio, where is he? I can't wait for them to be openly married; this wooing in secret takes up a lot of my day.

PEDROLINO

That might not be a problem anymore.

FRANCESCHINA

What do you mean?

PEDROLINO

Well, Signor Pantalone is sending his son Orazio away to the University of Perugia!

FRANCESCHINA

I'm going to have to go all the way to Perugia to find him?

PEDROLINO

No, that's just it. Signor Pantalone wants to marry Isabella *herself*!

FRANCESCHINA

She'll be devastated; this is a terrible plan!

PEDROLINO

That's what I said, and then Pantalone bit me on this arm!

(Each time, PEDROLINO raises his right arm with "bit me" and his left arm with each "on this arm." This slightly confuses FRANCESCHINA.)

FRANCESCHINA

No!

PEDROLINO

On this arm!

FRANCESCHINA

(pointing to the wrong arm) On this arm?

PEDROLINO

Yes, Pantalone bit me on this arm!

FRANCESCHINA

So...he bit THAT arm.

(FRANCESCHINA grabs the arm.)

PEDROLINO

(in pain) That arm...

FRANCESCHINA

Oh, yep, yep. That's the arm all right—we have to do something about this!

PEDROLINO

(Holding his arm, he looks devilishly to the audience) Yes! I must get my revenge. What would absolutely destroy him?

FRANCESCHINA

Hmmmm—what if we start a nasty rumor?

PEDROLINO

(Liking the idea) If we start a nasty rumor...

FRANCESCHINA

But what should it be?

PEDROLINO

Well, we could...We could...We could make the whole town think Pantalone has bad breath!

FRANCESCHINA

He has bad breasts? Well, he's pretty saggy in his old age—

PEDROLINO

BAD BREATH!

FRANCESCHINA

Ohhhh!

PEDROLINO

Bad breath from rotten teeth. So then he'll have to get his teeth pulled out! And he won't be able to bite me ever again!!!
Nah, that might be going too far...I can't do that; I'm just an obedient little servant.

FRANCESCHINA

No, it's perfect! That nasty old man deserves it!

PEDROLINO

(devilish again) Okay, you're right. We'll tell everyone to tell Pantalone his breath stinks!

FRANCESCHINA

This is GENIUS, but first I have to go tell Isabella that I can't find Orazio.
(Flirtatious) Wish me luck...

PEDROLINO

(The feeling is mutual) I'll see you soon.

(FRANCESCHINA exits.)

ACT 1, SCENE 3

(FLAVIO enters.)

FLAVIO

(authoritatively) It's good to be the Master of the House. But my heart belongs to the House of Pantalone. Three doors. Three windows. One beautiful maiden who makes my heart leap for joy.

(He turns into an awkward, lovestruck schoolboy.)

The love of my life, Flaminia. Eyes of emerald jewels. A voice more beautiful than a lark. When she walks, it seems she is floating on a cloud.

(As FLAVIO talks about FLAMINIA, he takes PEDROLINO in his arms, imagining FLAMINIA without fully realizing what he's doing.)

FLAVIO

Oh! If I could only hold her in my arms! What it would be to...touch her cheek. And smell her hair! Oh, if I could, I would dance with her for hours upon hours!

PEDROLINO

OW! MY ARM!

(FLAVIO screams and drops PEDROLINO. They both scream.)

FLAVIO

Pedrolino! I beg your pardon...Love makes me so crazy...

PEDROLINO

(flattered) You sure know how to woo a lady.

FLAVIO

I know.

Pedrolino, servant to the House of Pantalone, I must be candid with you.

PEDROLINO

Of course, sir!

FLAVIO

I don't know how much you heard, but I have fallen madly, madly in love with your mistress, Flaminia.

PEDROLINO

Oh, how wonderful!

(FLAMINIA gazes out her window perhaps doing whatever ISABELLA was doing earlier, unaware of the conversation below.)

FLAVIO

Just look at her. I could write one thousand sonnets complimenting her hair, her complexion, her...ears. But she can never hear my many words of love for her!

(FLAVIO cries.)

PEDROLINO

Sir, there is no need to weep!

FLAVIO

(instantly in a fury) You fool, I do not weep! Crying is not allowed when you are the Master of the House, and my house has *two doors*! I am just allergic to not getting what I want.

PEDROLINO

What is stopping you?

FLAVIO

Flaminia's father, Pantalone, a fine business partner, but a callous, overbearing father! He will not allow any suitors to visit his daughter! Poor Flaminia, she is like a dove locked in a cage, unable to spread her wings and sing the song of her beauty to the world. You see those three doors on your master's house? Other people see three convenient entrances, but, to me, they might as well be walls! Blocking me out! My love is doomed!

PEDROLINO

There must be a way, sir!

FLAVIO

Not with that drEEdful Pantalone hanging around. What a calamity!

PEDROLINO

You know, I'm trying to get back at Pantalone myself. He bit me on this arm! You could help me humiliate him by telling him he has bad breath.

FLAVIO

Bad breasts? Hmm!!! I've never noticed, but now that you mention it—

PEDROLINO

(Menacingly) No! Bad breath! He'll think he has rotten teeth, and then he will get his teeth pulled out! He'll look like a fool!

FLAVIO

(It comes to him) An odor *(pronounced "oh-DOOR")*. How uncouth. With Pantalone scorned throughout the entire town, then I could finally have Flaminia for myself. And then with Flaminia by my side, no longer would I be in the house with just two doors. Together we would have a total of *(counting them in the set)* one, two, three, four, FIVE, FIVE DOORS!

(FLAVIO exits USR.)

PEDROLINO

(Under his breath) Oy vey. This is getting exhausting.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

IL DOTTORE

(Spying from top of double door) Brighella!

BRIGHELLA

(From bottom of Dutch door) Yes?

IL DOTTORE

It's that orange fool!

BRIGHELLA

Boss, you shouldn't talk that way about the President.

IL DOTTORE

Alternative facts, Brighella! Get him!

(PEDROLINO tries making a hasty yet sneaky escape as IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA enter DSR.)

BRIGHELLA

Ah yes, right. Oh, scrawny servant! Your master owes Il Dottore twenty-five scudi!

IL DOTTORE

Because we kept quiet about his E-

BRIGHELLA

-REC-

IL DOTTORE

-TILE

BRIGHELLA

DIS-

IL DOTTORE

-FUNC-

BRIGHELLA

-TION

(IL DOTTORE firmly grasps PEDROLINO's arm.)

PEDROLINO

Stop that!

IL DOTTORE

Aha! Brighella, I smell a billable medical emergency!

(IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA perform lazzi of locating the injury, treating PEDROLINO and then bandaging his arm. At the end of which, they both reach out their palms as if for money.)

BRIGHELLA

Listen froggy, you need to pay up for our services!

IL DOTTORE

It can't be avoided. Brighella always wants his cut.

PEDROLINO

Oh, well Pantalone doesn't give me any money. Maybe we could make some other arrangement? I bet if you tell Pantalone he has bad breath, he will pay you for a solution.

IL DOTTORE

Oh, I didn't know if Pantalone is an ideal candidate for *breast augmentation*, I mean at his age—

PEDROLINO

Bad BREATH. BAD *BREATH*. I'm dealing with idiots!

IL DOTTORE

Ah! *Halitosis grandiosis*. We convince him his breath stinks; I sell him an unction to fix it. Great swindling idea, Pedrolino; I didn't know you had it in you.

BRIGHELLA

We better get our money, Pedrolino.

IL DOTTORE

Or we'll be forced to come after you.

PEDROLINO

Yes, Dottore.

BRIGHELLA

Boss! Come check out this lab coat I found in the dumpster yesterday! I think it will make you look *very* professional.

IL DOTTORE

Ooh! Splendid, Brighella! You know I love to play dress-up!

(IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA begin to exit SR.)

ACT 1, SCENE 5

(ARLECCHINO and CAPITANO SPAVENTO enter USL. IL CAPITANO is outfitted somewhere between a matador and a conquistador. At his side is a comically long sword, so long that it requires training wheels at the back to help it roll along.)

ARLECCHINO

Capitano Spavento!

IL CAPITANO

(entering upstage) Hola.

ARLECCHINO

Thank you so much for saving me from drowning this morning! It's lucky your ship arrived; I can't believe I forgot I can't swim.

Allow me to show you around Rome! You should meet my masters, Signor Flavio and his sister Isabella. Flavio is very...spirited, and Isabella...She is the fairest, most beautiful woman in Rome!

IL CAPITANO

Those words..."most beautiful woman"...they are like music to my ears.

ARLECCHINO

Did you say music?

IL CAPITANO

Sí.

(EVERYONE pops out of the windows and doors overlooking the street.)

EVERYONE

Music???

(ARLECCHINO strums guitar.)

IL CAPITANO

Everybody, do not fear
For Capitano Spavento is here!
(And I only look so big because of forced perspective.)

Hear my stories
Of the things I've tried.
I'll use my glories
For to win a bride.

I discovered America,
Saved the Alamo,
Drank the Kraken,
And fought a tornado.
God spoke to me.
I made the Red Sea to part.
I stabbed Caesar,
And broke Cleopatra's heart.

ALL

(Chorus)

He is Spavento the Conquistador
And all who fight him
He turns into gore.
He came from Spanish main.
The natives all he's slain.
Now with their gold
He will cajole
A woman home to Spain.
He is Spavento the Conquistador.

FRANCESCHINA

How did you guys learn all those words so fast?

(During the chorus, IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA tango; others start to dance as well. IL CAPITANO sees ISABELLA and the music stops.)

IL CAPITANO

Who is that youthful,
And so gorgeous broad?
I could use her beauty
To compliment this bod.

FRANCESCHINA

Her name's Isabella.
She's already love-sick.

IL CAPITANO

I bet she's never seen
A...neck this thick.

ALL

(Chorus)

He is Spavento the Conquistador
And all who fight him
He turns into gore.
He came from Spanish main.
The natives all he's slain.
Now with their gold
He will cajole
A woman home to Spain.
He is Spavento the Conquistador.

(By the end of this chorus, the townspeople have made their way out to the street and have been dancing along with the music.)

FRANCESCHINA

Did you guys have a rehearsal without me or something?

IL CAPITANO

You must to get me Isabella *(He pronounces it with a Castilian accent: "Ithuhbayja")* right away!

ARLECCHINO

Who?

IL CAPITANO

Ithuhbayja!

FRANCESCHINA

Are you trying to say "Isabella"?

IL CAPITANO

Yeth, I ham. Her golden hair reminds me of the time I dove for golden treasure beneath the sea. I dove to the deepest of depths and fought the Mobiest of Dicks!

FRANCESCHINA

Her hair makes you think of all that?

IL CAPITANO

Call her down for me!

ARLECCHINO

Yes, sir! Right away! Anything for you!

ACT 1, SCENE 7

(FLAMINIA bursts through the door out to the street.)

FLAMINIA

Hi, I am Flaminia.

IL CAPITANO

No, you must be confused because of my accent. I am waiting for Ithuhbayja.

FLAMINIA

I spotted you from my window and I knew you were the only one for me...

IL CAPITANO

You have the teeniest hands I have ever seen! How could you ever help to blow my big nose?

FLAMINIA

Well, I live in that house right there (*points to house*), and I have three doors!

IL CAPITANO

You're not *especial*, all women have three doors.

FLAMINIA

I need a husband.

IL CAPITANO

You need to look somewhere else. Your hair isn't golden, it's more like the color of what I excrete from my bowels

FLAMINIA

I've chosen you.

IL CAPITANO

I have chosen Ithuhbayja.

FLAMINIA

Isabella? She wants to marry my stupid brother, Orazio.

ACT 1, SCENE 8

(*ISABELLA bursts through her door expecting to see ORAZIO.*)

ISABELLA

Orazi—Oh! You are not Orazio.

IL CAPITANO

Mi amor! Ithuhbayja! *Hola*, I am Il Capitano Spavento dalle Valle Inferno. But you can call me *El Capitán*. Your eyes are so big! They are perfect to see my reflection in.

ISABELLA

Do you know where Orazio is? (*with a wink to the audience*) I haven't seen him today.

FLAMINIA

He's not here. He's somewhere else. Where you should be.

IL CAPITANO

Silence teeny woman! Ithuhbayja you should love a real *hombre*.

(ARLECCHINO is struck by inspiration and begins to strum Spanish guitar. IL CAPITANO engages ISABELLA in a Tango. FRANCESCHINA acts as a buffer between the two, and FLAMINIA practices the moves to the side, waiting for her turn.)

FRANCESCHINA

We have to go.

(FRANCESCHINA begins to tango ISABELLA off SR. FLAMINIA tries to seduce IL CAPITANO.)

FLAMINIA

Watch this!

(FLAMINIA begins to twirl as IL CAPITANO blocks ISABELLA and FRANCESCHINA from leaving.)

ISABELLA

No!

(IL CAPITANO flings FRANCESCHINA to FLAMINIA and begins dancing with ISABELLA.)

ISABELLA

No! Ora! Zi!...

(IL CAPITANO pulls ISABELLA in tightly.)

ISABELLA

Oh!

(FLAMINIA sneaks through IL CAPITANO's legs to get between him and ISABELLA and tries to dance with him once again.)

ISABELLA

I'm weary of you. I'm leaving this place!

(IL CAPITANO stops her, and the trio begin a three-way tango. FRANCESCHINA joins in, trying to push the whole group off SR.)

FRANCESCHINA

Get out of here!

(IL CAPITANO jumps into ISABELLA's arms.)

IL CAPITANO

Oh, do not tease me like this.

(ISABELLA flips IL CAPITANO over. He sees FLAMINIA who is about to grab him.)

IL CAPITANO

I must find a place to hide.

(IL CAPITANO flings FRANCESCHINA towards FLAMINIA, and they begin to twirl together. IL CAPITANO jumps in ISABELLA's arms then does a flip and crawls under her skirt to hide. He peeks out, leaving his long nose poking out from between ISABELLA's legs. FLAMINIA begins to run under ISABELLA's skirt as well to chase IL CAPITANO.)

IL CAPITANO

It is so warm down here.

FLAMINIA

I'm coming my love!

ISABELLA

(mortified) That's it! I'm leaving this foul place.

(ISABELLA and FRANCESCHINA exit.)

IL CAPITANO

I am done with you... I am a leaving this foul place.

(IL CAPITANO exits.)

ACT 1, SCENE 9

(PEDROLINO, who has been watching the Tango from the audience, enters and meets FLAMINIA on stage.)

PEDROLINO

(aside) Flaminia talking to a suitor? When her father has expressly forbidden it? This is perfect! Now she'll have to go along with my plan. Mistress. Hello. I see you're having an interesting afternoon.

FLAMINIA

I don't know what you mean.

PEDROLINO

Oh, you don't know what I mean, do you?

(He single-handedly reenacts the three-way scene, gradually getting louder, more chaotic, and more physical. At the end, PEDROLINO and FLAMINIA look at each other and then to the audience. Pause.)

You're right, just your ordinary everyday morning.

FLAMINIA

Pedrolino, you mustn't tell a soul about what you've seen here!

PEDROLINO

But Pantalone has charged me to report it if I see you with a suitor!

FLAMINIA

No, you can't! My father says if I get caught talking to a boy, he'll take away my allowance and keep me locked inside for a week!

PEDROLINO

Mistress, I must do as your father says!

FLAMINIA

Pedrolino, I will grant you one favor in exchange for your complete discretion.

PEDROLINO

Anything?

FLAMINIA

Anything!!!

PEDROLINO

Aaaanything???

FLAMINIA

Aaaanything!!!!

PEDROLINO

(deadpan) Tell your father that he has bad breath.

FLAMINIA

That's it?

PEDROLINO

That's all I ask, signorina.

FLAMINIA

Okay. I suppose a lie for a lie is a fair exchange. *(She skips off.)*

ACT 1, SCENE 10

PEDROLINO

Hehe, all is going according to plan.

(ARLECCHINO enters walking on his hands)

PEDROLINO

Arlecchino, what are doing? *(aside)* Arlecchino. Servant to Flavio. A simple man.

ARLECCHINO

Being Flavio's servant is so exhausting, I needed to get off my feet for a while.

PEDROLINO

Ahhhhhhhhh, classic Arlecchino.

ARLECCHINO

(falls and sits on the ground) Also, I've been working for Il Capitano since he saved me from drowning earlier.

PEDROLINO

From drowning? You can't swim!

ARLECCHINO

Oh, yeah. I forget that sometimes.

PEDROLINO

Classic Arlecch—

ARLECCHINO

You know, I wish I could get a real rest, like in a bed, a real bed, like the masters have...

PEDROLINO

Really? Well, I've thought of a way I could spend a night in a real bed.

ARLECCHINO

How?

PEDROLINO

Well, if I were to go to one of the master's homes in a disguise, they might let me come in, and possibly even let me stay the night.

ARLECCHINO

I bet that would work!

PEDROLINO

Would you like to test my theory for me?

ARLECCHINO

I would love to! But who would I get to be? A gallant knight? A prestigious duke?

PEDROLINO

How about (*dramatically*) a Tooth-Puller?

ARLECCHINO

(*beat*) That seems a little random.

PEDROLINO

Pantalone might need to get some teeth pulled!

ARLECCHINO

Okay, then, a tooth-puller it is!

PEDROLINO

Il Dottore recently obtained a lab coat. You could steal it and find some tools that look like stuff that a tooth-puller would have. Pantalone will be so grateful you helped get rid of his bad breath that he'll give you a real bed for sure!

ARLECCHINO

I'm sleepy just thinking about it!

(*ARLECCHINO exits rapidly with a bell kick.*)

PEDROLINO

I love it when a plan comes together.

ACT 1, SCENE 11

(*ORAZIO glides in.*)

ORAZIO

Alas! I am off to see my lady love, Isabella. Il Capitano better be nowhere near her. How dare he show up to *my* city and come after *my* darling Isabella?!

PEDROLINO

(*aside*) It's my Master, Orazio! When I tell him of his father's plans, he'll be sure to go along with my scheme. Master, thank goodness, it's you! Sir, I have tragic news for you!

ORAZIO

Pedrolino, what news is this?! Is my love alive and well??

PEDROLINO

Perfectly healthy!

ORAZIO

Wonderful!

PEDROLINO

But—

ORAZIO

BUT?!?!?

PEDROLINO

Your father plans to marry her!

ORAZIO

WHAT?!?!? Oh. Pedrolino, that's a good joke. I nearly believed you!

PEDROLINO

Signor! I promise I do not jest! If you don't do something soon to stop him, Pantalone is going to marry Isabella—

ORAZIO

Okay, Pedrolino, this is starting to annoy me.

PEDROLINO

—and he's going to ship you off to the University of Perugia, so he can have Isabella all to himself!

ORAZIO

The University of Perugia??? But that's a safety school!

My father...he must be stopped! He's been bullying me my whole life! And now...and now...he wants to (*gets choked up*) take-my-beautiful-bellah-awaee-fm meeecheheheh! (*fully weeping now*)

PEDROLINO

Master, I have a plan to make this problem go away.

ORAZIO

You're not going to kill him, are you?

PEDROLINO

Oh, no, no, no. I'm a good little servant. I would never put my master in any REAL danger.

ORAZIO

Oh. Okay, I promise to trust you completely. What choice do I have?

PEDROLINO

Perfect! (*aside*) It's so easy!

ORAZIO

But you know, if you fail, you will die.

PEDROLINO

Oh, if I fail...(*realizing*) I die....

(*PEDROLINO slowly sinks to the ground*)

I die?!?

ORAZIO

You die!

PEDROLINO

Ohhhhhhhhh. I could die.

(*PEDROLINO crumples to the fetal position.*)

ORAZIO

I must see Isabella; call her, Pedrolino!

PEDROLINO

(*still on the ground*) I could die...

ORAZIO

(*angrily looming over him*) Pedrolino!

PEDROLINO

(leaps up and runs off) Isabella!!!

(ORAZIO sighs and smiles, thinking of his love.)

ACT 1, SCENE 12

(ISABELLA enters. The lovers circle each other before meeting in the middle. They get as close as they can without touching.)

ORAZIO

(sighing) Isabella!

ISABELLA

His hair is luscious like the coat of ovine frolickers springing through a glen
as spring blossoms float from sylvan hosts.

ORAZIO

(lost in her eyes) Yeah.

But, my love, Isabella! The news I bear is not so fair as thou. I may soon be
forced to depart for a distant land, all because of my dreadful father's
scheming!

ISABELLA

Light of my life, why must you leave my side?

ORAZIO

My father's will I must abide.

ISABELLA

Where are you bound?

ORAZIO

The University of Perugia!

ISABELLA

The safety school?

(Music begins: "Why, Why, Why?")

My angel love!

ORAZIO

My darling dove!

ISABELLA

You are the light of my heart.

ORAZIO

Must we really depart?

(Their rhymes turn to singing.)

ISABELLA

ORAZIO, I FEEL LIKE A QUEEN.

YOU'VE THE BEST HAIR THAT I'VE EVER SEEN.

AND, WHEN YOU LEAVE, I'LL BE SO SICK.

I'LL MISS EVERY PART, ESPECIALLY YOUR...EYES.

(The LOVERS are entirely unaware of the ribaldry their rhymes suggest. PEDROLINO and FRANCESCHINA, on the other hand, are alarmed and confused by what may come next.)

BOTH

(Chorus)

WHY, WHY, WHY?

WHY MUST OUR LOVE BE DOOMED?

WHY, WHY, WHY

MUST WE SUFFER THIS WOUND?

WHY CAN WE NOT STAY TOGETHER?

THAT IS THE WILL OF MY HEART.

WHY, WHY, WHY?

WHY, WHY, *(crying)* WHY?!?!?

ORAZIO

SWEET ISABELLA, I DON'T WANT TO GO.

FROM MY SAD EYES, STREAMS OF TEARS WILL FLOW.

WITH THIS SAD NEWS, MY HEART TURNS TO MUCK.

YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE THAT I WANT TO...LOVE.

(One by one, the rest of the company enters, sobbing, until even the stage crew, with headsets and clipboards enter histrionically.)

ALL

(Chorus)

WHY, WHY, WHY?

WHY MUST OUR LOVE BE DOOMED?

WHY, WHY, WHY

MUST WE SUFFER THIS WOUND?

WHY CAN WE NOT STAY TOGETHER?
THAT IS THE WILL OF MY HEART.
WHY, WHY, WHY?
WHY, WHY, *(crying)* WHY?!?!?

ACT 1, SCENE 13

(The company is sobbing uncontrollable, consoling each other, flailing miserably. PANTALONE, unaware, bursts in, stepping over tormented bodies. Seeing him, everyone else exits hurriedly.)

PANTALONE
ORAZZZIIIOOOO!!!!

PANTALONE
We need to get you ready for your big trip tomorrow!

(ORAZIO whimpers as PANTALONE pulls him for a talk stage left. PEDROLINO grabs FRANCESCHINA and pulls her down right.)

PEDROLINO
Now is our chance to enact “Operation: Bad Breath.” I’ll grab Signore Pantalone.

FRANCESCHINA
And I’ll rally the rest of the town!

PEDROLINO
Break!

(FRANCESCHINA runs upstage to organize the town in a game-planning huddle. PEDROLINO runs to join ORAZIO & PANTALONE.)

PEDROLINO
(speaking loudly so PANTALONE can hear) Orazio! What is the meaning of this? Going to study at The University of Perugia is a wonderful opportunity!

ORAZIO
I thought you were on my side!

PEDROLINO
(hushed) Just trust me.

ORAZIO

Father, this is my home!

PANTALONE

Too bad! I've already paid your tuition! Now go inside and pack this instant!

(ORAZIO, crying, starts to run into the house. He is intercepted by FRANCESCHINA and pulled into the US huddle.)

(to PEDROLINO) Anyway, you spoke to Franceschina, yes?

PEDROLINO

Oh, yes, I did.

PANTALONE

Great! When did she say I could propose to Isabella?

PEDROLINO

Uhhh... Well, forgive me for saying this, boss, but I don't think you should get too close when you ask her. Your breath stinks something awful.

PANTALONE

That's no way to talk to your master! What did Franceschina say about Isabella?

PEDROLINO

(idea) Why don't you ask her yourself? Franceschinaaaaaa!!!!!!

ACT 1, SCENE 14

(FRANCESCHINA enters. The trick begins.)

FRANCESCHINA

You called?

PANTALONE

(to FRANCESCHINA) I plan to ask Isabella to be my wife and I was wondering—

(FRANCESCHINA holds her breath, acting like she cannot bear to smell PANTALONE's but still needs to be polite to the master.)

What the hell is wrong with her?

FRANCESCHINA

I'm sorry Signore! It's just the smell of—well, it's not my place to say. Excuse me!

(FRANCESCHINA returns to the huddle.)

PANTALONE

That was odd.

PEDROLINO

Hmm, so she smells something too...

ACT 1, SCENE 15

(FLAVIO enters, waiting to jump into the game.)

FLAVIO

Signor Pantalone, how are your affairs—OH! *(Sniffs near PANTALONE)* What is that vile odor *(over-pronouncing the word as “oh-DOOR”)*? It smells as if a thousand doves have died a gruesome death. *(Smells PANTALONE's mouth)* Oh, there is the source of this calamity. *(He goes back to the huddle, exhausted.)*

PANTALONE

I never liked that kid.

PEDROLINO

He's always been jealous of your house. That's probably all it is.

ACT 1, SCENE 16

(IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA approach PANTALONE.)

IL DOTTORE

Pantalone, we need to talk about the

BRIGHELLA

Twenty-

IL DOTTORE

-five

BRIGHELLA

Scu-

IL DOTTORE

-di.

(They get a whiff of PANTALONE's "bad breath" and begin dry heaving.)

IL DOTTORE/BRIGHELLA

We'll be ba-alch! Ba-alch! Ba...

(They return to the huddle, proud of their "acting.")

PANTALONE

Why is everyone acting crazy? Does my breath really stink?

(He tests it.)

PEDROLINO

Sir, if you think—

PANTALONE

Flaminiaaaaa!

ACT 1, SCENE 17

(FLAMINIA is on. She flits from the huddle to grace PANTALONE with her presence, signaling indiscreetly to PEDROLINO that she is ready to keep her end of the bargain.)

FLAMINIA

COMING! Daddy, I'm so happy to see you. Can I please have some money?

PANTALONE

Of course, darling! But first I need you to tell me if Daddy has bad breath.

FLAMINIA

Yes.

(PEDROLINO gestures for a bigger lie. FLAMINIA collapses to the ground, startling PANTALONE.)

FLAMINIA

IT SMELLS SO, SO BAD! THE ONLY THING THAT CAN REVIVE ME
IS MORE MONEY!!!!!!

PANTALONE

Here sweetheart! Take it! Daddy is going to make it better!

(PANTALONE hands her money, which she snatches and is “cured” as she returns to the US huddle.)

FLAMINIA

Perfect! Okay! Bye!

PANTALONE

She wouldn't lie to me. Maybe I *do* have a problem!

ACT 1, SCENE 18

(ORAZIO, still clueless about the plan, burst out of the huddle against everyone's wishes and begins to plead with PANTALONE.)

ORAZIO

Father I can't go to Perugia! I love Isabell— *(PEDROLINO stomps his foot)*
AHHH!

PEDROLINO

(mimicking him demonstratively) AHHH! *(to PANTALONE)* Wow, even Orazio is blown away by your bad breath!

PANTALONE

Christ! It's true! Isabella will never love me if she smells it!

PEDROLINO

She might love you for your heart.

PANTALONE

But we can't do anything if she won't come near me.

PEDROLINO

Well, it's not your fault. It's probably just a rotten tooth.

PANTALONE

That rotten tooth!

PEDROLINO

It has to go!

PANTALONE

Damn right!

PEDROLINO

Okay, I'll hire a tooth puller!

PANTALONE

(coming to his senses) A tooth puller?

PEDROLINO

We can get rid of that nasty sucker right now!

PANTALONE

(won over) You're a lifesaver, Pedrolino!

PEDROLINO

I do what I can!

(Satisfied, PANTALONE goes in his house. The rest of the citizens have retrieved ORAZIO and disperse quickly and triumphantly with congratulatory signals from PEDROLINO.)

PEDROLINO

Oh, Arlecchinoooo?

ACT 1, SCENE 19

(ARLECCHINO arrives dressed as a dentist.)

ARLECCHINO

Here. So I snuck into Il Dottore's house to get the lab coat!

PEDROLINO

So—

DOTTORE (O.S.)

Where's my coat?!?

PEDROLINO

You look perfect. Now go get him!

ACT 1, SCENE 20

ARLECCHINO

(in a tooth-puller accent) Does anyone need a tooth-puller?

PANTALONE

(appearing at his window) I do!

(PANTALONE runs downstairs while ARLECCHINO collects his tools.)

ARLECCHINO

This is going to be difficult.

(As PANTALONE approaches, ARLECCHINO grabs him and raises a pair of menacing pinchers. Lights shift, the action turns to slow motion as ARLECCHINO digs in with the pinchers, and the townspeople in choir robes and holding candles enter with solemn singing.)

CHOIR

(To the tune of Enya's "Only Time")
WHO CAN SAY WHERE HIS TEETH GO?
HOW HIS BLOOD FLOWS?
HE'LL BE FINE.
WHO CAN SAY IF HIS GUMS SHOW?
WATCH HIS TEETH GO.
ONLY TIME.

(Still in slow motion, ARLECCHINO is unsatisfied with his progress. He tosses the menacing pinchers and pulls out an electric reciprocating saw. He attacks PANTALONE's mouth with it rhythmically in time with the choir, becoming more insistent with each ascending chord change.)

(To the tune of "Carmina Burana")
THERE GO HIS TEETH.
THERE GO HIS TEETH.
NOW HE IS ALL TOOTH-LESS.

THERE GO HIS TEETH.
THERE GO HIS TEETH.
NOW HE IS ALL TOOTH-LESS.

PANTALONE

THERE GO MY TEETH!!

CHOIR

THERE GO HIS TEETH.
NOW HE IS ALL TOOTH-LESS.

(Silence. ARLECCHINO hands PANTALONE a bucket, and he spits one, two, then several teeth into it. He wobbles in pain, spits one more tooth, and then turns to the TOOTH-PULLER in rage. ARLECCHINO gasps. The CHOIR is frozen in anticipation.)

BRIGHELLA

(like a sports announcer) Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the main event, what you've all been waiting for! Let's get ready to ruuummmble!

(ARLECCHINO flees and PANTALONE chases him around the CHOIR frantically as PEDROLINO conducts the CHOIR in a dance mix to the tune of 2 Unlimited's "Get Ready for This." Chaos everywhere. PEDROLINO loves it. Eventually, PANTALONE winded and injured ends up collapsed on the floor.)

PANTALONE

Pedrolino! Help me!

(PEDROLINO cuts off the CHOIR and disbands the group in a hurry.)

(spitting and whistling) I lost all my teeth.

PEDROLINO

That's unfortunate, sir. Let me help you in.

(He helps PANTALONE up and, as they walk off, enjoys one last celebration to the audience.)

Hehe, got 'im!

ACT 2, SCENE 1

(Lights shift. ISABELLA throws open her window, sobbing, "Why, Why, Why?" FRANCESCHINA appears at the next window and tries to comfort her.)

FRANCESCHINA

Madame, I assure you it won't be that terrible. He's going to get an education! He's going to write long essays about how much he misses you.

(ISABELLA howls with grief.)

Please, madam. Let me see a smile.

(ISABELLA performs the lazzo of trying to smile.)

Okay, how about we find somebody else who can handle the situation a little better?

ACT 2, SCENE 2

(Thunder and lighting. We hear PASQUELLA's cackle on the wind. Spooky music. PASQUELLA appears in a catwalk over the audience. She unceremoniously makes her way down a ladder and through the crowd to get on stage.)

FRANCESCHINA

Somebody like Pasquella! There she is... Making an entrance...

PASQUELLA

Haha that's me. I'm up here, always watching. I see you down there texting.

(ad libs with the audience as ISABELLA and FRANCESCHINA come down from their windows out into the street)

ISABELLA

Franceschina, my heart is burdened with such sadness, that my legs no longer carry me.

FRANCESCHINA

Right, signorina!

(FRANCESCHINA claps, ARLECCHINO enters, and she grabs him and shoves him to the ground as a stool.)

Here you are, madam.

(*ISABELLA sits.*)

Hello, Signora Pasquella!

PASQUELLA

I prefer [*ad libs a unique title, referencing her previous ad libs with the audience*].

ISABELLA

Pasquella! My beloved nanny with a questionable past but a heart of gold.

PASQUELLA

(*winks*) 24 karat. Hello, precious girl! What on earth is the matter, Baby Bella?

(*ISABELLA tries to explain but cannot be understood through her sobs.*)

FRANCESCHINA

Ok, ok, ok... (*To PASQUELLA. Acting it out, as fast as humanly possible.*) My mistress is very, very sad, because, you see, she loves Orazio. And Orazio loves her, but his father, Pantalone, also loves her. Gross, I know, but what can you do?—it's the 1500s. So Pantalone is sending Orazio off to the University of Perugia, so that Pantalone can marry Isabella in his absence. And that's where you come into play! Maybe you can whip something up that might be able to—

PASQUELLA

(*Lightbulb turns on in her head*) A spell!

FRANCESCHINA

A spell?

PASQUELLA

I shall concoct a spell and fix all of this!

FRANCESCHINA

(*Elated*) Perfect!! (*To ISABELLA*) Hear that? She's going to do her thing with the spells, Isabella!

PASQUELLA

Now what recipe for disaster shall I make? Something to keep this lovely lady in the hands of her (*she gestures evoking ORAZIO to pop out the door*) pretty boy and not in the clutches of this (*another gesture: PANTALONE*

glides in disoriented) creepy old man. *(With a wave, they both fly back off stage.)* Ooooooh, a potion for emotion? A confection for erection? An unction for love functions. I know, I'll make some candy for her man...dy. Some *(ad libs a ridiculous title for sweets)*. This spell will make him crazy. But not fun crazy, like *crazy-crazy*. That way they won't send him to college, because we all know crazy people can't go to college!

(She begins to laugh maniacally, staring at the audience uncomfortably. Continuing to laugh, she removes the mask and nods at them. Then, she quickly slides the mask back on and says calmly, businesslike:)

And don't worry, I'll make a cure as well.

FRANCESCHINA

(Timidly) What do you need for this spell?

(She mimes mixing the ingredients, using ARLECCHINO's arms as her "pot.")

PASQUELLA

I will need a *[ingredient, like "a butterfly"]*... and *[something she can get from the audience, which she heads to retrieve]*... And the hair of a virgin. *(Picking out someone with a fraternity t-shirt)* You with the *[insert Greek letters]* shirt on, you'll do. Bit of *[some kind of seasoning, like "pink Himalayan salt to taste"]*. Now I will mix this up and bake it in my magic Easy-Bake Oven, and *voila!* *(To ISABELLA)* One confection will make you mad and the other will restore your sanity. Send your servant in an hour's time to my house then we'll get the plan enacted.

(With a dramatic wave, thunder and lighting and blackout. In the dark, we hear PASQUELLA grunting. Lights up to reveal her trying to squeeze through the house facades stage right.)

Well...I'm not as thin as I once... *(one more squeeze, then:)* Fuck it.

(She grabs her staff and marches unceremoniously off the other direction to the DSL exit.)

FRANCESCHINA

(Trying to save the play) See, madam? Everything is going to be fine!

ISABELLA

You are right, Franceschina! Soon this gloomy night will be replaced with the vibrant light of my gallant knight, Orazio, by my side!

ACT 2, SCENE 3

(PEDROLINO gambols on SL.)

PEDROLINO

(Out to audience) I have done it! I finally got revenge on Pantalone, because he bit *this* arm! AhhHA!

FRANCESCHINA

You got revenge on Pantalone?

ACT 2, SCENE 4

(Before he can answer, he must compose himself because PANTALONE bursts in SL, dragging ORAZIO against his will as he's sobbing. PANTALONE is still spitting and whistling from his tooth extraction.)

PANTALONE

Orazio!

PEDROLINO

(to audience) Shhh, here he comes!

(PEDROLINO runs around and enters through the same door they entered from as though following to attend them.)

PANTALONE

(lispng) We have to go to the bank and get tome traveling funds for you.

(They see ISABELLA.)

Ithabella! Now's my chance to therenade her!

(He excitedly runs up to ISABELLA and begins singing, spitting more broken teeth at her face as she disgustedly tries to protect herself.)

ISABELLA, LISTEN HERE:

MY THOUGHTS FOR YOU ARE CRYSTAL CLEAR.

I WANT A GIRL TO PARADE AND SHOW.

MY HEART BEATS FOR THE BLONDE WIDOW.

ISABELLA

Wow, that was—

PANTALONE

(starts to sing again with a big gasp)

YOU, MY DEAR—

ISABELLA

Thank you!!! That was...so lovely.

(PANTALONE leans in for a bloody, slobbery, toothless kiss.)

PANTALONE

(looks to his crotch) I think those pills I took earlier are kicking in.

FRANCESCHINA

(grabbing ISABELLA) OHHHH! I think it's time we should go.

PEDROLINO

(grabbing PANTALONE) We must go to the bank, sir! Orazio is leaving tomorrow.

PANTALONE

Oh, right, the bank! TO THE BANK! Come on Orazio.

(PANTALONE drags ORAZIO.)

ORAZIO

(Back to PEDROLINO) Remember—

(He makes slicing throat gesture to PEDROLINO as he exits with PANTALONE.)

ACT 2, SCENE 5

(FLAVIO enters DSR to listen in on the conversation at hand.)

FRANCESCHINA

(referring to ORAZIO) What was that about?

PEDROLINO

(In a cold sweat) Nothing. Don't worry about it.

ISABELLA

Pedrolino. I need you to come back here in an hour's time. Do you understand me?

PEDROLINO

I understand.

FLAVIO

(To audience, shook with silent fury) I understand? In an hour's time? I don't like this not one bit. This surely must be a nefAHHHrious plan.

ISABELLA

Do you mean "nefarious"?

FLAVIO

I think I know how to proNOONce it. *(He flies to them center stage.)* Indoors at once, and take your handmaiden with you.

ISABELLA

Flavio, you cannot—

FLAVIO

We have two doors—choose one!

(ISABELLA unhappily flies off. FRANCESCHINA goes after her.)

FLAVIO

Paydrolino. Talking to my sister, Isabella, about what? *(Beat)* Perhaps...a plan? To get *payback*? At whom? AT ME?

PEDROLINO

No, never you, sir!

FLAVIO

Oh, because we can always trust you, *Paydrolino*.

(FLAVIO grabs PEDROLINO's right arm.)

Does that hurt, *Paydrolino*?

PEDROLINO

(matter-of-fact) No because *Pantalone* *(raises right arm)* bit this arm *(raised left arm)*.

(FLAVIO moves to PEDROLINO's other side and grabs the hurt arm.)

FLAVIO

Well, then, does THIS hurt *Paydrolino*!

(PEDROLINO writhes in pain.)

Does that feel like terrible, terrible pain? Now you feel the pain I feel when I think about *(dreamy)* my Flaminia.

(PEDROLINO slowly removes FLAVIO's grip as he is lost in reverie.)

PEDROLINO

I think we're overreacting.

FLAVIO

Overreacting. I'll show you overreacting!

(FLAVIO grabs PEDROLINO's slapstick and begins attacking him around the sage. FLAMINIA skips on; FLAVIO and PEDROLINO freeze.)

FLAMINIA

(song-sing, referring to the Capitano) My lover, my lover, where is my lover?

(She sees FLAVIO, googly-eyed for her.)

Not you. *(exiting, sing-song)* Where is my lover?

FLAVIO

My sweet, freed from her cage.

(PEDROLINO sneaks over to FLAVIO, steals back his slapstick, and tries to escape back to his house. After a moment FLAVIO notices him.)

FLAVIO

Pedrolino, I'll have you hanged for this!

PEDROLINO

But I can get you into Pantalone's house to live happily ever after with Flaminia!

FLAVIO

How so?

PEDROLINO

We just need a plan where you could be someone of high esteem. *(aside)* Ha, him someone of high esteem? His house only has *two* doors! *(to FLAVIO)* What if you were *(dramatically)* a tooth-puller?!

FLAVIO

A tooth-puller? That seems a little random.

PEDROLINO

They are important.

FLAVIO

Are they?

PEDROLINO

Oh, very important. In fact, I bet they have three, four, *five* doors—

FLAVIO

Five doors?

PEDROLINO

—and if Pantalone thought you were (*dramatically*) a tooth-puller, then he'd invite you into his house for sure.

FLAVIO

Yes, but how would I dress like a five-doored-tooth-pull-oor? Who has a five-doored-tooth-pulloor outfit? (*Thinks about it*) I must find a five-door-tooth-pulloor-store!

PEDROLINO

OR! Just ask your servant Arlecchino. He happens to have one.

FLAVIO

And with this outfit I will woo my love, and coo my dove, my sweet Flaminia. (*He coos her name.*) To Arlecchino at once. (*cooing*) ARLECCHINNNNOOOOO.

(PEDROLINO makes his escape and exits.)

ACT 2, SCENE 6

(ARLECCHINO enters strumming his guitar and with the lab coat over his shoulder. FLAVIO grabs the coat and exits triumphantly.)

ARLECCHINO

(calling after him) No problem, master Flavio! Keep the jacket as long as you need! *(to the audience)* Whew, got rid of the evidence!

(singing)

THE OLD MAN

NEVER SAW IT COMING.

HIS SHORT LEGS

WERE NOT MADE FOR RUNNING.

YEAH, NOTHING KEPT ME
FROM THOSE PEARLY WHITES.
THOSE SCREAMS THEY CUT
ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT,
BUT A NEW BED
IS ALL I HEAR A CALLING.

ACT 2, SCENE 8

(PEDROLINO rolls on SL.)

ARLECCHINO
PEDROLINO, WHAT ARE YOU
DOING HERE?

PEDROLINO
ARLECCHINO, I'M
FILLED WITH SO MUCH CHEER.

BOTH
PANTALONE'S BREATH
SMELLED SOMETHING DANK.
AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT
WE MADE HIM THINK.

ALL
(suddenly popping out windows and doors to sing:)
GOT THE WHOLE TOWN
IN ON THE PRANK.

FLAMINIA
(remaining at her window as the other TOWNSPEOPLE disappear)
MY OLD MAN HAD TEETH
AS SHARP AS KNIVES.

PEDROLINO & ARLECCHINO
THEY HAD TO GO
WE MADE NO COMPROMISE.

ALL
(popping out again)
THEN WE MADE
A PULLING MACHINE.
PULLED ALL OF HIS
TEETH OUT CLEAN.

VENGEANCE NOW
BELONGS TO ME.

(PEDROLINO outlasts the rest of the ensemble with a long falsetto note at the top of the final chord. Everyone looks at him. He bows. They disappear back into the set.)

ISABELLA
Arlecchino! It's time to go to Pasquella's—

(We hear PASQUELLA's cackling laugh on the wind. Beat.)

ISABELLA
(Continues) to retrieve the box of alchemical sweets that will rob the eater of his sanity. Just follow the cackling wind.

ARLECCHINO
(unenthused) Follow the cackling wind?

ISABELLA
The cackling wind.

(We hear cackling wind.)

ARLECCHINO
(begins to exit, nonplussed) Follow the cackling wind...

(ISABELLA returns to her house.)

ACT 2, SCENE 9

(IL CAPITANO enters in passion and sees ARLECCHINO trembling away.)

IL CAPITANO
Arlecchino! There you are! What have you done to get Ithuhbayja into my big, gigantic, enormous, colossal, glorious, sexy, flawless, perfect arms? *Por qué* she no see what every *mujer en el mundo* sees?? I am *muy guapo*. No?

ARLECCHINO
Yes, you are a very...mugapo.

IL CAPITANO
But the teeny one, she sees it. What's her name? Flawn? Flan? Flim Flam—

ARLECCHINO

(joining in with the “Hotty Toddy” cheer) Bim Bam!

IL CAPITANO

(cutting him off) Don’t start that again. I have no interest in *(gesturing to FLAMINIA’s window)* teeny-hands whatshername.

ARLECCHINO

No interest in Flaminia?

IL CAPITANO

Yes, “Flaminia”!

FLAMINIA

(appearing at her window) You called, my love!

IL CAPITANO

Leave me alone teeny thing! Now Arlecchino, I need a plan. She *(to FLAMINIA’s house)* must to stop it and she *(to ISABELLA’s)* must to start it. She must to hit it, and she to quit it. I must discover how to esneak into Ithuhbayja’s house and seduce her with my sexiness.

ARLECCHINO

Pedrolino is great at figuring out these kinds of problems. Pedrolino! Here!

(ARLECCHINO passes the CAPITANO off on PEDROLINO and exits.)

IL CAPITANO

You see, I am in love with Ithuhbayja. I need to go into her house and seduce her with my body.

PEDROLINO

You know, if you dress like Pantalone who is to marry Isabella, it should be easy for you to just slip into her door. And you would look great in fine Venetian clothing.

IL CAPITANO

(exiting) Perfect!

ACT 2, SCENE 10

(FLAMINIA flies on from her home expecting to see IL CAPITANO.)

FLAMINIA

My love!? *(Sees he is gone.)* He’ll be back.

PEDROLINO

(To himself, exhausted) Oh, not again. *(Turning to FLAMINIA)* Mistress!

FLAMINIA

Pedrolino. What have you heard from...my love? What did he say about me? Does he like me back, yet? What does he like? I want to buy him things! With my dad's money.

PEDROLINO

Yes, your lover. *(Trying to get his story straight)* To get in your house he will need a disguise...Could I have one of your dresses?

FLAMINIA

What? Why?

PEDROLINO

Then he will not look like a man coming to court you—he'll just look like one of your little girlfriends.

FLAMINIA

(Physically excited by the idea) Ooooooh, okay!!! I have one right here!

(She claps. A stagehand's arm, holding a dress, appears from off L.)

PEDROLINO

Oh, this will do perfectly!

FLAMINIA

(exiting) I will be waiting for the man...in a dress! How exotic...

PEDROLINO

And he will be on his way, Flaminia! *(Begins exiting off SL with FLAMINIA's dress)* And I am on my way!

ACT 2, SCENE 11

(IL DOTTORE appears in the top part of the Dutch doors with a spy glass.)

IL DOTTORE

Brighella!

BRIGHELLA

Got it, boss!

(BRIGHELLA runs out and falls. As he tries to get up, it turns into a small break dancing routine.)

IL DOTTORE

It's that shit spackled bunny fart! Get him!

(IL DOTTORE exits his home and lands center stage behind BRIGHELLA who is still break dancing.)

You still owe us money!

BRIGHELLA

(Assuming the same pose as IL DOTTORE) You still owe us money...

PEDROLINO

(Hiding behind dress.) I'm not here! *(In high pitched voice)*
(A chase ensues)

BRIGHELLA

Pedrolino, Stop it! I have better things to do...like drink.

(He charges. PEDROLINO whips the dress over his head like a matador. The chase turns into a bull fight.)

PEDROLINO

Ole!

IL DOTTORE

(As he charges at PEDROLINO) I'm too old for this.

(BRIGHELLA eventually gets the dress from PEDROLINO.)

BRIGHELLA

Stop it! My boss is trying to tell you why we are here.

IL DOTTORE

(Huffing and puffing) Twenty...Five...Scudi...

PEDROLINO

25 scudi...

IL DOTTORE

That is correct.

(BRIGHELLA and IL DOTTORE have started examining the dress.)

IL DOTTORE

Brighella, where did you get this lovely cloth?

BRIGHELLA

I snatched it from that orange one.

PEDROLINO

(Aside) How to get out of this... I could give them the dress, it's worth some scudi, I'm sure, and then I could take care of my Flavio/Flaminia situation later. This could work!

Oh, good doctor! How about...a dress?! It would look great with your eyes!

DOTTORE

Ooh! This is gorgeous fabric.

BRIGHELLA

I must admit, sir, it's pretty fetching.

PEDROLINO

And it's worth at least...30 scudi.

IL DOTTORE

30?

BRIGHELLA

30?

PEDROLINO

30!

IL DOTTORE

(Putting on the dress) You know Brighella, I haven't worn a dress since my college days in Bologna.

BRIGHELLA

It does look nice on you, boss, I must say.

IL DOTTORE

(Admiring himself in the dress) Oh, this is exquisite.

BRIGHELLA

May I have this dance?

(BRIGHELLA begins to beatbox and breakdance again.)

The beat is back, boss!

IL DOTTORE

(bumping and grinding in the dress) Yes, the beat is back, Brighella! The beat is back, and THE BITCH is back!

PEDROLINO

(aside) I can't believe that worked!

(PEDROLINO starts to tip toe off with a little dance.)

ACT 2, SCENE 12

(PANTALONE enters and, sees IL DOTTORE in FLAMINA's, believes him to be FLAMINA.)

PANTALONE

Oh, Flaminia, there you are! My dearest darlingest honey bunches of oats.

PEDROLINO

(aside) I can't let Pantalone find out that I gave away his daughter's dress.

(IL DOTTORE keeps spinning, unintentionally preventing PANTALONE to see his face. PEDROLINO and BRIGHELLA watch with mild horror and amusement)

IL DOTTORE

(still dancing, to no one in particular) Oh yes, Daddy.

PANTALONE

My, Flaminia, what long legs you have. What round spectacles you have.

(IL DOTTORE, unaware of PANTALONE's mistake, turns to look at him.)

IL DOTTORE

The better to see you with!

PANTALONE

And, Flaminia, what thick facial hair you have! *(coming to his senses)*
YOU'RE NOT FLAMINIA! *(suspiciously peeking under the dress)* What have you done to my daughter?

PEDROLINO

(whispered to PANTALONE) He must have stolen Flaminia's dress!

PANTALONE

You must have stolen my daughter's dress!

IL DOTTORE

(retreating, defensively) You both owe us 25 scudi!

PANTALONE

(the same) I'm calling the police!

PEDROLINO

(backing away with PANTALONE) You thief! You fiend! You rascal!

IL DOTTORE

The law is on our side. You'll see! You cheapskate!

(IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA exit quickly.)

ACT 2, SCENE 13

(ORAZIO glides in from his house.)

ORAZIO

(entering crying) My disgusting father will marry my lover. And then my lover will be my mother, and then I'm a mother-lover!!!

(ORAZIO heads to ISABELLA's door to knock but then has doubts.)

I can't do this. Yes, you can. I can't! You can! You are a strong, independent, beautiful man.

(In talking to himself, he has ended up back at the wrong door—the door which leads to IL DOTTORE's shop. Knocking:)

I shall miss you, my love. I will yearn for you every night like a wolf yearns for the moon. *(howling)* Hawooooo!

IL DOTTORE

(opening the top of the Dutch door provocatively in his dress) Hello, lover-boy!

(Aghast, ORAZIO runs to ISABELLA'S door. He starts to knock, but she glides out, slamming the door in his face.)

ACT 2, SCENE 14

(ISABELLA enters distraught, as ORAZIO squeals at his broken nose. They see each other, and “Why, Why, Why?” begins to play. ISABELLA tries to explain that she has a plan to fix everything, but ORAZIO is distraught and incapable of listening to reason. She continues to explain; he continues to wail. Finally, she grabs him and lifts him to his feet in time with the music. She sings:)

ISABELLA

ORAZIO, I’M SENDING YOU A TREAT
WHICH YOU MUST PROMISE, PROMISE ME YOU’LL EAT.
OUR TIME RUNS SHORT, I MUST BE BLUNT.
I STILL MISS YOU EVEN IN MY—

FRANCESCHINA

(appearing just in time) CUUUNNNN...tin-ue. Continue...whatever...it is you were saying. I should probably just—

(FRANCESCHINA exits as swiftly as she entered. The LOVERS are innocently confused by this interruption.)

ISABELLA

Promise me you’ll eat it.

ORAZIO

I would eat anything of yours. Wait. *(innocently confused)* What are we talking about?

ISABELLA

The gift of sweets I will send you. Adieu, my love, and trust that I will fix everything!

(They exit separately, enraptured.)

ACT 2, SCENE 15

(FLAVIO swoops in wearing the lab coat.)

FLAVIO

With this tooth-pull-OOR unifOORM I got from Arlecchino, I can finally get into the house with three dOORS and win the heart of Flaminia.

(FLAVIO runs to PANTALONE’s window.)

Flaminia! Flaminia! Let down your hair!

PANTALONE

(seeing him from the window) TOOTH PULLER!!!!

ACT 2, SCENE 16

FLAVIO

See how he screams with glee! Pedrolino was right; he does need a tooth-puller. I'm sure to be admitted now.

(PANTALONE runs down from his window and jumps on FLAVIO's back.)

FLAVIO

Oh, Pantalone!!!

PANTALONE

I'll show you, you lousy tooth-puller!

(PANTALONE, toothless, attempts to bite FLAVIO's arm.)

FLAVIO

Oh Pantalone! Your gummy mouth, it tickles! Pantalone, get off me you fiend!

(FLAVIO successfully liberates his back from PANTALONE only to be tripped and jumped on once more. PANTALONE opens FLAVIO's mouth and reaches attempts to pull out FLAVIO's teeth with his bare hands.)

PANTALONE

You made this look so much easier!

(FLAVIO escapes PANTALONE's clutches and flees.)

ACT 2, SCENE 17

(PANTALONE starts to make his way to his feet when IL CAPITANO enters from behind and sees the cape and hat he needs.)

IL CAPITANO

Ah, the perfect garments for my disguise!

(He snatches off the hat and cape as PANTALONE straightens and turns toward his home, without seeing IL CAPITANO.)

PANTALONE

(referring to Flavio/The Tooth-Puller) I'll get him next time.

(PANTALONE waddles off as IL CAPITANO puts on the cape and hat over his own costume.)

IL CAPITANO

I am *muy guapo*, no? Very beautiful! In the dress of Pantalone, the fiancé to Ithabayja, I can thrust myself inside her door, and she will swoon for me, and she will say "Oh *Capitán*, my love, I will have all your *bebés* and you can have all my *bebés*!"

ACT 2, SCENE 18

(As IL CAPITANO swaggers, FLAVIO returns for vengeance. Seeing the cape and hat from behind, he believes IL CAPITANO to be PANTALONE.)

FLAVIO

There is Pantalone, my nemEEsis. I will fear him no longer. Today the boy *(dramatically)* becomes a man.

(Dramatically, he extends his arm just in time to catch a large sword thrown from offstage left.)

Your time is up, Pantalone. It's the final countdown.

(Lights shift. The CHOIR appears in windows and doorways singing the synthesizer part to "The Final Countdown." IL CAPITANO and FLAVIO square off. IL CAPITANO reaches for his comically long sword and unsheathes it to reveal a tiny dagger. He steps forward to compare the length of his sword with the length of FLAVIO's. FLAVIO is satisfied. IL CAPITANO with a start turns to run. A chase ensues, punctuated by the music of the choir. Though brandishing the sword mightily, FLAVIO does nothing but slap IL CAPITANO repeated until he falls to the ground in a clump.)

FLAVIO

And stay down.

(FLAVIO chucks the sword back off from whence it came. Crash box. Cat squeal. Horrified faces from the CHOIR. The disperse as FLAVIO gathers his dignity and walks off triumphantly.)

IL CAPITANO

(lifting his weary head once they are gone) This exact same thing happened to me in the last town I went to! *(He collapses again.)*

ACT 3, SCENES 1-2

(Blackout. Thunder & lightning. Lights up to reveal PASQUELLA in a dramatic pose and ARECCHINO, dazed and facing upstage. He holds a box of sweetmeats.)

PASQUELLA

It's me! Signora Pasquella. Remember? From a few scenes back?

ARLECCHINO

(still facing upstage) Where's the audience?

PASQUELLA

(spinning him around) Out there. Judging you.

(ARLECCHINO waves. ISABELLA appears in her window.)

ISABELLA

Pasquella! Did you bring the special treats? One kind to cause madness and the other to cure it?

PASQUELLA

I sure did, sweetie. Come on down.

(ISABELLA leaves the windows as IL CAPITANO comes to, stands up, and begins to stumble off UL.)

IL CAPITANO

Excuse me.

PASQUELLA

Careful there, buddy. Why, you've really tied on a few. Geez, Rome is really going downhill. *(Or another topical ad lib.)*

(ISABELLA & FRANCESCHINA enter from their home.)

ISABELLA

Is the plan ready?

PASQUELLA

Well, your servant boy is completely useless. *(With a wave, she brings him under her control, and ARLECCHINO acts out everything she describes.)* He ran up to my house, like a chicken with his head cut off, flipping around, and

then he just started walking on his hands. Gave all my pet opossums a heart attack. I thought they were just playing opossum. Turns out they actually died.

ISABELLA

Arlecchino, you killed her possums.

PASQUELLA

I had Arlecchino bring you the sweets, both the charmed ones to make the eater mad and the cure to restore the sense!

(Coming out of the spell, ARLECCHINO pills the container, then scrambles to pick up the treats.)

Like I said, completely useless.

ARLECCHINO

No, I can fix this. Guess I'll just have to try one out to test them. *(He eats a sweet).* That's delicious. It's certainly not going to make me crazy. *(Beat. He goes crazy. Outlandish ad libs and lazzì.)*

PASQUELLA

I told you not to get them mixed up. Here, have a cure.

(She gives one to FRANCESCHINA who subdues ARLECCHINO and feeds it to him. He returns to normal with an ad lib. FRANCESCHINA conspicuously takes the container from him.)

ISABELLA

Oh, Pasquella thank you so much. Franceschina, take the cures inside. I'll send those that bring madness to Orazio.

(FRANCESCHINA exits with the curative sweetmeats.)

PASQUELLA

Anything for you Baby Bella. I must be off!

(Grand gesture. Thunder and lighting. Blackout. Lights come up revealing her dress caught in the door of PANTALONE's house.)

ISABELLA

Arlecchino, I need you to take this—

(PASQUELLA opens the door to remove the dress and exit.)

PASQUELLA

Sorry.

ISABELLA

As I was saying, Arlecchino, I need you to take this to Orazio and make sure that he eats all of them.

(As the treats pass beneath ARLECCHINO's noise, he is enticed. He sticks his hand in the container, and ISABELLA swats it away.)

ARLECCHINO

(stuttering) Yes, right. Orazio eats every...single...delicious...morsel. *(He is tempted again; ISABELLA smacks him.)* Yes, I will give these to him.

ISABELLA

I'm trusting you Arlecchino. Don't fail me.

(ISABELLA exits. ARLECCHINO remains drooling over the treats.)

ACT 3, SCENE 3

(PEDROLINO enters. Smells the sweets and stops dead in his tracks.)

ARLECCHINO

Pedrolino?

(PEDROLINO sniffs again and edges closer to the sweets.)

PEDROLINO

Arlecchino, what is this?

(ARLECCHINO hides the sweets behind his back.)

ARLECCHINO

(lying poorly) Nothing.

PEDROLINO

That doesn't seem like nothing!

ARLECCHINO

I-i-i-it's just some...thing...for Orazio.

PEDROLINO

Oh, if they're for Orazio, then, as his servant, I should take them to him!

(PEDROLINO tries to take the sweets. They struggle acrobatically over the box.)

FINE!! We can BOTH give them to him.

BOTH

(with a dramatic pose of presenting a gift) Orazio!

ACT 3, SCENE 4

(ORAZIO enters.)

ARLECCHINO

My lord Orazio, a gift from Isabella!

ORAZIO

(emotionally) My favorite treats. So sweet. Now salty with my tears. *(Puts head in container to cry.)*

PEDROLINO

(taking some of the treats) Let's not ruin them!

(PEDROLINO discreetly slips a treat into his pocket while seeming to help ORAZIO.)

ORAZIO

Waaaaahhhhaahaaaa. Pedrolino, do not fail me. Remember if you do you die.

PEDROLINO

(struck dumb again) I...die. If I fail, you I die.

ORAZIO

(exiting) Follow me, Arlecchino. Feed me these succulent treats one by one as we speak of Isabella's sweetness.

PEDROLINO

(aside) Hehe, joke's on them. Paydrolino just got *paid* in treats!

(He relishes the sweet he had stolen, and has he chews we hear cackling on the wind.)

That was so good! I've never tasted anything like thahahah— *(He convulses.)*
Strange. As I was saying, I neheheh—

(He convulses again, then straightens himself out with a shrug. Then another convulsion takes him into ad libbed, acrobatic madness.)

ACT 3, SCENE 5

*(IL CAPITANO enters in his usual clothing and holding
PANTALONE's coat and cap, which he flings at PEDROLINO.)*

IL CAPITANO

You! You and your plans! Here, take again the garments of Pantalone while I
kill you!

*(PEDROLINO has become a baby on the ground, sucking his thumb
and holding PANTALONE's robe like a blanky.)*

PEDROLINO

Goo goo, ga ga.

IL CAPITANO

Como?

(PEDROLINO performs baby lazzi.)

IL CAPITANO

(melting) Aww. You're so *precioso!* You make a fine *bebé* and Ithuhbayja
will be a perfect *madre!*

PEDROLINO

(jumping into IL CAPITANO's arms) Dadda!

IL CAPITANO

Putta madre!

*(He drops PEDROLINO, who ceases to be a baby but morphs into a
new kind of madness. He grabs PANTALONE's cloak and hat and
runs off stage playing with them.)*

ACT 3, SCENE 6

(FLAMINIA enters behind IL CAPITANO, while he still reeling.)

FLAMINIA

I heard you say my name, my love?

IL CAPITANO

Ithabayja?

(FLAMINIA puts her hand on IL CAPITANO) Ohhhh... I know that teeny hand anywhere....

FLAMINIA

(Longingly) My love...

(With a Tango flair, he grabs her and spins her into his body.)

IL CAPITANO

Look, teeny one, my humongous body towers over you.⁴²² We could never be lovers.

(He spins her away)

FLAMINA

Please, I have loved you my ENTIRE life.

IL CAPITANO

What??... I...just meet...you

FLAMINO

MY ENTIRE LIFE. I'll do anything for you. I love you with every fiber of my being. Even *those* fibers.

IL CAPITANO

But is no possible.

FLAMINIA

But I love you.

(She grabs IL CAPITANO's hand and places it on her breast.)

IL CAPITANO

But I love Ithuhbayja.

(In time, IL CAPITANO places his other hand on her other breast. Then, realizing, pulls both of his hands away.)

Ew. Ew. I am tired of wasting my sweet air. This is last time. Listen to me very closely. *(sweetly)* I hate you so much teeny little baby doll. I will never love you. Forget me.

(As IL CAPITANO turns to leave, his comically long sword swings and knocks FLAMINA to the ground. "Why, Why, Why" begins.)

⁴²²This is only amusing if the Capitano is played by a shorter, thinner performer, as when Karen Anne Patti originated the role in this production.

FLAMINIA

Why? Why? Why? Why must they keep playing this song? Why?
I'll never love again!

FLAVIO

(entering triumphantly, mid-thought) and when I see my Flaminia, I'll look
into her soul and say—

(He sees FLAMINIA and wilts.)

Oh, uh, hey, Flaminia. You know...*(handing her a handkerchief)* sometimes
I cry too.

(Nervous, he exits hurriedly.)

FLAMINIA

(gripping the handkerchief in realization) Flavio... What a man!

(She smiles at the audience and exits.)

ACT 3, SCENE 7

(Nighttime. IL DOTTORE enters with BRIGHELLA on his back. Both have been drinking from BRIGHELLA's flask. Both are currently inside the infamous dress, which fits them and the ensuing physical business because it is not fastened at the top. They are singing to the tune "My Favorite Things":)

IL DOTTORE

IL DOTTORE LIKES DRESSES. BRIGHELLA,

BRIGHELLA

DRUNK MESSES.

IL DOTTORE

THESE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVORITE THINGS.

(IL DOTTORE stops singing to collect himself.)

Oh, no, we have to focus, we have to focus. We were looking for the law,
that's right!

(Still with BRIGHELLA on his back, still with both of them wearing the dress, he searches the buildings in the set and finally runs upstage)

to one of the tiny buildings at the far end of the forced perspective scene. He knocks on a painted door that is not practical.)

Ah, the Polizia! Knock, knock.

BRIGHELLA

Boss, they're closed. Good thing too, cause their door's only painted on.

IL DOTTORE

Just our luck!

ACT 3, SCENE 8

(PEDROLINO enters upstage in a state of madness.)

IL DOTTORE

What's that noise?

(PEDROLINO tumbles and slides between IL DOTTORE's legs and now looks up at him and BRIGHELLA with his head poking out from the bottom of the dress. They both scream; PEDROLINO disappears inside the dress.)

IL DOTTORE

Brighella! Get him!

(PEDROLINO pokes his head out the neck of the dress—now all three are wearing the dress—and alarms BRIGHELLA who, still inside the dress, hops off IL DOTTORE's back. They all run from side to side in the dress.)

PEDROLINO

This way! Now that way! Now...going down!

(PEDROLINO lifts the top of the dress so that only IL DOTTORE's head is visible as PEDROLINO and BRIGHELLA crouch down. They are smacking each other around IL DOTTORE's waist.)

IL DOTTORE

(painful) Ow! Oh! *(pleasant)* Oh... *(snapping out of it)* Stop!
Don't hurt the dress!

(PEDROLINO and BRIGHELLA both fall out of the bottom of the dress as IL DOTTORE gathers it around himself. PEDROLINO hops up, causing IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA to beat a hasty exit.)

Brighella, he's crazy. Abort! Plan B has failed! Abort! Abort!!!

ACT 3, SCENE 9

(As PEDROLINO chases off IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA, FRANCESCHINA enters warily behind him, brandishing her slapstick like a baseball bat.)

FRANCESCHINA

Pedrolino? It's me. It's just Franceschina! Word is you've been acting *(he does something crazy)*...like that. What's going on?

(PEDROLINO freezes. She tries to move him, which just makes his entire body spin around on one foot like a figurine.)

FRANCESCHINA

Okay, just because you're standing still doesn't mean I can't see you. Can we talk?

(She taps him on the shoulder, and he falls down as a unit.)

FRANCESCHINA

Guess not. Pedrolino, I'm not going to judge you; I'm here to help. I just need to— You're still lying on the ground. Okay. Pedrolino, if you'll just get up *(trying to pull him up)* and just have a conversation, I can help you! Look, we can do this the easy way, or we can do this the hard way!

PEDROLINO

I like the medium way!

(He brandishes his slapstick mincingly, smacks her rear-end playfully, and then runs off upstage. From SL we hear commotion: ARLECCHINO running with his guitar and ORAZIO howling in pursuit. FRANCESCHINA is distracted from PEDROLINO by hearing and "seeing" their approach from the other direction.)

ARLECCHINO (O.S.)

No, Orazio, not my guitar!

(Sound off left of a guitar smashing twangily.)

FRANCESCHINA

Oh no, Orazio's crazy, too? He'll have to wait. Pedrolino, I have the cure!

(She runs off after PEDROLINO.)

ACT 3, SCENE 10

(ARLECCHINO enters with his head through a broken guitar. He is chased on by a rabid ORAZIO, who howls and biting his leg like a dog.)

ARLECCHINO

What's wrong, boy? Is it something you ate? Oh yeah....it is.

(ORAZIO howls something in rapid Spanish.)

Why. Is everyone. Speaking. Spanish!?

(ARLECCHINO swats him away. ORAZIO whimpers like an abused puppy. ARLECCHINO feels bad and goes to comfort ORAZIO when ORAZIO growls and leaps at him. He dodges, pulls out an imaginary ball and, with lazzi gets ORAZIO to chase the ball offstage.)

ACT 3, SCENE 11

(ARLECCHINO, still wearing the guitar, knocks at ISABELLA's downstage door. She enters from the upstage door. He doesn't notice.)

ISABELLA

Yes?

(ARLECCHINO does a double-take.)

ARLECCHINO

Isabella, it's Orazio! He's gone mad! He took a chunk out of my leg. And out of my guitar!

ISABELLA

Poor thing—

ARLECCHINO

O thank you! Thank you, sweet Mistress! I knew you cared—

ISABELLA

—Poor, poor Orazio!

ARLECCHINO

Oh.

ISABELLA

He's gone mad at my hand! O my, my, my... What is that thing inside your body that feels bad?

ARLECCHINO

Uhhhhhhhhh, your pancreas?

BRIGHELLA

(opening the Dutch door) Your liver. *(Exits.)*

ISABELLA

My conscience! O, but alas! It's for his own good. It's for our love's good. But now he's off biting people, which is a good way to catch diseases.

ARLECCHINO

It's also quite painful to be bitten.

ISABELLA

No!

ARLECCHINO

No?

ISABELLA

This must be done. This is what needed to happen.

ARLECCHINO

Me being bitten?

ISABELLA

This was the plan. This will all be alright. We will be together.

ARLECCHINO

We will? Oh, Isabella...

(ARLECCHINO leans in to kiss ISABELLA.)

ISABELLA

Bring me Orazio!

ARLECCHINO

Right. Orazio. *(calling for him as he exits)* Orazio!

ACT 3, SCENE 12

(FLAVIO enters with the contract from the Prologue.)

FLAVIO

You'd think I have the only house in Rome. Everyone is always making a rOOckus in front of... my home... Isabella?

ISABELLA

This is all my fault.

FLAVIO

Isabella, why are you outdoors? And why are you embarrassing me with your sadness?

ISABELLA

O brother, I'm sad because I love someone.

FLAVIO

Yes, you love Pantalone!

ISABELLA

No brother! I love Orazio.

FLAVIO

(pleased) Oh, and I love his sister, Flaminia. *(not pleased)* But you can't love Orazio! Father dearest made a contract with Pantalone. It says right here, Isabella must marry into the House of Pantalone.

ISABELLA

Into the House of Pantalone? It says that?

FLAVIO

Into the House of Pantalone. It says that.

ISABELLA

Oh, unhappiest of days! Oh, if only Orazio were of the House of Pantalone? If only Orazio were the *son* of Pantalone!

FLAVIO

Yes, if only. If only, if only, if only. If only Orazio, the son of Pantalone—

ISABELLA

It's of no use.

FLAVIO

Orazio *is* the son of Pantalone!

ISABELLA

You don't say.

FLAVIO

Which means I'm not a contract break-OOR! Oh! (*patronizing*) Leave it all to me! I will fix everything!

ISABELLA

But, brother, I have the cure to—!

FLAVIO

Shhhhhhhhhhhh! You must not worry yourself. I am sixteen—going on seventeen. The man of the house. Large and in charge. You...go indoors and take a nap. Or crochet.

ISABELLA

(*indignantly*) I knit!

(*She exits in a huff.*)

FLAVIO

Off to ready myself. I have a date with Pantalone.

(*He exits, full of himself.*)

ACT 3, SCENE 13

(*PANTALONE enters in a hurry.*)

PANTALONE

Orazio? Where is that boy! He is supposed to leave soon, but I have to give the "talk" before he goes to college.

ACT 3, SCENE 14

(*PEDROLINO bounds in, still mad.*)

PANTALONE

Have you seen Orazio? I have to tell him about the birds and bees.

PEDROLINO

I'm a psycho! Blah! Blah! Blah!

PANTALONE

(*aside*) What am I supposed to do with this?

ACT 3, SCENE 15

(*ORAZIO enters, mad and half-dressed. He is still acting like a wolf.*)

PANTALONE

Orazio, I have something to tell you now that you are a man and are going out on your own. When a Daddy loves a Mommy very, very much—

(*ORAZIO begins humping PANTALONE's leg.*)

Oh. He's got it!

(*PEDROLINO joins in with the humping and then chases something off stage.*)

ACT 3, SCENE 16

(*FLAVIO enters, puffed up and on a mission.*)

FLAVIO

(*aside*) What is going on? It's worse than I imagined! (*to PANTALONE*)
Pantalone, 'tis the woe-est of calamiTAYS that your house is in such
disarray. Your servant. Your son. (*coyly*) If only there were *someone* who
could help you!

ACT 3, SCENE 17

(*Right on cue, ISABELLA glides in, attended by FRANCESCHINA.*)

ISABELLA

Me!

PANTALONE

Someone needs to fix this!

FLAVIO

Like I said, me! I have the cure—

ISABELLA

Pantalone! I have the cure that can fix Orazio!

PANTALONE
My love!

ISABELLA
But—

(ISABELLA turns away from PANTALONE.)

PANTALONE
Oh, there's a butt.

ISABELLA
I will only cure him—

FLAVIO
(butts in, still believing himself to be in charge) Only!

ISABELLA
—if you agree to two things.

FLAVIO
Two terms, Pantalone.

PANTALONE
Go on.

ISABELLA
The first? Orazio gets to marry anyone of *my* choosing.

FLAVIO
Orazio is to marry anyone of my sister's choosing.

ISABELLA
The second term—

FLAVIO
MY second term.

ISABELLA
Is that Flaminia must marry Flavio.

FLAVIO
Is that Flaminia must marry *(turning to Isabella and melting)* Oh, that's so sweet! Flaminia must marry me?

(ORAZIO re-enters, crazier than ever.)

ISABELLA

(to PANTALONE) Only if you agree will I cure your son.

FLAVIO

(to PANTALONE) Agreed.

PANTALONE

I must tell my daughter at once.

(FLAVIO celebrates, grateful to ISABELLA. ORAZIO humps him.)

ACT 3, SCENE 18

(FRANCESCHINA enters in a rush.)

ISABELLA

The cure?

FRANCESCHINA

Right!

FLAVIO

Orazio!

ACT 3, SCENE 19-20

(ORAZIO is restrained, and FRANCESCHINA feeds him a curative treat.)

ORAZIO

(howling) AROOOOOOOOOO-uh? There's a weird taste in my mouth.

(He realizes he is half-dressed and hastens to cover himself.)

FLAVIO

I believe we had a deal, Pantalone.

(They shake their customary special handshake.)

PANTALONE

(calling off stage) Flaminia!

ISABELLA

Orazio!

ORAZIO

Isabella!

(FLAMINA enters hurriedly.)

FLAMINIA

Daddy, Daddy, someone got into your safe—

PANTALONE

I made a deal.

FLAMINA

—It was me.

PANTALONE

You're going to marry Flavio. Wait, what?

FLAMINIA

Flavio! THE ONLY MAN I'VE EVER LOVED!!!

FLAVIO

The “only man.” I’ve lived to hear you say those words.

ACT 3, SCENE 21

ISABELLA

Pantalone.

PANTALONE

Yes, my love.

ISABELLA

I want Orazio to marry me.

(All audibly gasp.)

PANTALONE

WHAT?!?

FLAVIO

Just as I planned!

(ORAZIO and FLAMINIA congratulate each other. ISABELLA drops to one knee.)

ISABELLA

Orazio, will you marry me?

ORAZIO

I'm going to cry...

(They embrace, and IL CAPITANO enters in time to see them.)

PANTALONE & IL CAPITANO

But, my love—

ISABELLA

I am Orazio's love.

IL CAPITANO

*¿POR QUÉ? ¿POR QUÉ? ¿POR QUÉ?
¿POR QUÉ MUST MY LOVE BE DOOMED?
¿POR QUÉ? ¿POR QUÉ? ¿POR QUÉ?*

(He exits singing and crying a sweet Spanish cry.)

ACT 3, SCENE 22

(As everyone sweetly rejoices, a commotion is heard from the lobby. IL DOTTORE and BRIGHELLA, yelling, are chased in from the audience by PEDROLINO. When they arrive on stage, the TOWNSPEOPLE corral him while FRANCESCHINA feeds him a treat.)

PEDROLINO

Whoa. *[ad libs]*

FRANCESCHINA

Are you feeling better?

PANTALONE

I'm not! Pedrolino, you've caused a lot of trouble. *En garde!* *(He draws his dagger menacingly, which wilts. After an embarrassed look.)* Everybody, get him!

ALL

Get him!

(PEDROLINO runs. He pushes past PANTALONE at C, who starts spinning out of control. FRANCESCHINA, FLAVIO, FLAMINIA,

BRIGHELLA, IL CAPITANO, IL DOTTORE, ARLECCHINO, ORAZIO, and ISABELLA run across the stage after him, and each one spins PANTALONE as they pass. They chase PEDROLINO through the saloon doors into PANTALONE's house SL.)

PANTALONE

(alone on stage with his limp dagger) I promise this never happens to me.

(The crowd reenters from UL. PEDROLINO spins PANTALONE again and crosses into the brick door and then through FLAVIO's door, followed by the crowd. PEDROLINO reenters through the DS Dutch door of IL DOTTORE's and slams/locks the top part as the crowd's feet are visible building up behind it. PANTALONE is still trying to get his dagger to stand up.)

PEDROLINO

Oh, signore, do you need more medicine?

(PANTALONE charges at PEDROLINO who opens the door allowing the crowd to pour out and trample PANTALONE. PEDROLINO sprints off into PANTALONE's saloon door and reenters through the UL door. The crowd rushes SL looking for PEDROLINO through various exits. Some go to their windows and others through the door back to various exits on SR. PANTALONE hands off his dagger and goes to his position. As the stage clears, PEDROLINO reveals that he has been out on the street, hiding behind an open door the entire time.)

(quietly, secretly, relieved) Phew. I got away with it!

(The TOWNSPEOPLE throw open doors and windows and pop out surrounding him with accusatory fingers pointing at him.)

ALL

PEEEEDROLIIIIINOOOOO!!

(Everyone comes out and swarms PEDROLINO. They begin hitting, kicking, beating him in a circle, obscuring the audiences view. As they attack, PEDROLINO easily crawls out between legs and starts to tip-toe away. One of the TOWNSPEOPLE sees him and whistles to the others. They all look to PEDROLINO then open to reveal a semi-conscious ARLECCHINO, the actual victim of their beatings! The crowd chases PEDROLINO around the stage. He runs to PANTALONE's house to the DS and opens to reveal another door. He opens that to reveal another door.

ARLECCHINO

Wait! *(All stop. Then gesturing to the trick door:)* Pantalone had five doors this whole time. *(beat)*

(The crowd rears up to pounce on PEDROLINO who dodges and runs into the audience. Everyone follows, each taking a different aisle and all working their way across the audience. Climbing over patrons, asking for assistance, shouting for people to detain PEDROLINO, etc. Everyone arrives at the other aisle just in time to run back up on to stage, where the chase continues through doorways. PEDROLINO works his way upstage and then runs in a circle past each flat, chased single file by the TOWNSPEOPLE. Last to arrive is IL CAPITANO whose sword clips the upstage (smallest) flat causing it to fall over as those nearby leap out of the way. This begins a chain reaction of facades falling over. TOWNSPEOPLE leap away or cower in doorways with flats falling around them. PEDROLINO stands center stage for all of this until the final, tallest, biggest flat falls around him and he stands, unscathed, in the open window a la Buster Keaton. Silence. Everyone gathers their senses. Then:)

ALL

PEDROLINO!!

PEDROLINO

Okay...

I've made some mistakes. But haven't we all made mistakes today? *(The listeners are won over slowly.)* Pantalone bit this arm. Arlecchino can't swim. And *those people* [the audience] just sat there laughing and never did a thing to help!

(Everyone else agrees.)

It's okay though. Because I forgive you.

(The TOWNSPEOPLE voice their solidarity. Very hugs-and-lessons-after-school-special. Ad libs like "That's big of you" or "What a Mensch" or "Thank you, Pedrolino" or the like.)

(absolving the audience as well) I forgive each and everyone one of you. We've learned our lesson. *(Group hug.)* And now all that's left to do is dance!

(An upbeat song, with everyone dancing in character, and acting out the action as they recount it.)

ALL

PANTALONE STARTS TO FIGHT.

FROM PEDRO'S ARM HE TOOK A BITE.
THE WHOLE TOWN TOLD HIM THAT HE STANK,
SO HIS TEETH THEY CHOSE TO YANK.

HIS ONLY SON HE TRIED TO RID
CAUSE HE SHARES A LOVE WITH HIS KID.
IL CAPITANO WANTS HER TOO.
YOUNG FLAMINIA, FLAVIO WOOS.

PASQUELLA MADE A MAGIC TREAT
TO CAST A SPELL ON ALL WHO EAT.
BEATEN BY THE MAN WITH THREE DOORS,
FLAV'YO FIGHTS, AND HE SCORES.

(Dance break to reprise FLAVIO's showdown with PANTALONE.)

THE BOYS IN RED DONE LOST THEIR MIND.
PANTALONE'S IN A BIND.
THESE TWO CAME OUT IN A DRESS.
AT THIS POINT THE TOWN'S A MESS.

FLAMINIA CAN'T WIN THIS GENT.
THESE TWO LOVERS SHARE A MOMENT.
ISABELLA CURED ALL THE SPELLS.
NOW ALL WE HEAR ARE WEDDING BELLS.

(Final instrumental section with dance off between BRIGHELLA and ARLECCHINO as well as acrobatic lifts and spins by the LOVERS.)

THIS WAS TIME WELL-SPENT I'M SURE
THANKS FOR WATCHING *THE TOOTH-PULLER*!

(Final tableau. Music resumes, and the COMPANY continues dancing stubbornly as the crew comes out to reset. They start to put the walls back up. They gather props and hats. A ASM on headset enters with a large broom and begins, unceremoniously to "sweep" the COMPANY away. They continue trying to blow kisses, wave, and dance. The crew forces them off, and the ASM on headset signals downstage for the curtain to drop, disappearing behind it with a business-like wave to the audience.

CURTAIN.

Appendix B: Sample Survey & Interview Questions

The qualitative components of this research are divided into three phases.

Phase I comprises surveys and interviews with contemporary practitioners about how they define their own work as members of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition. This research will largely be included in Chapter Two (above) concerning how Commedia has been defined and how its story is told. Phase II involves the actual production of *The Tooth-Puller* and interviews with participants about how the participation-as-research model influences their understanding of what Commedia dell'Arte is. This material will be included in Chapters Five, Six, and Seven (above). Phase III is conducted as audience response surveys to identify how people outside of the project view the final results of *The Tooth-Puller* production and how their experience watching the play shapes their impressions about this style of theatre. This material will be included in the final reflections in Chapter Seven (above).

Sample questions for each of these three phases are found on the following pages.

Phase I – Sample Questions for Online Practitioner Survey

The survey is designed to identify how practitioners and researchers of Commedia dell'Arte today view their own work in relation to the tradition and history of Commedia dell'Arte. The questions are not asking about the “correct” academic answer but rather your opinion about how you describe your work. Your first, immediate answers are preferred.

You will have the opportunity at the end of the survey to determine if you want your answers to remain anonymous in the final report or if you want to be cited as the source of the things you write.

(*) Name and Contact Information [You will have the choice to remain anonymous in the final report.]

(1) What person or people most influenced how you understand Commedia dell'Arte? (List as many people as you want, but I am most interested in the first people you think of.)

(2) What sources (books, images, primary or secondary texts, artifacts) most influence how you understand Commedia dell'Arte? (List as many as you want, but I am most interested in the first sources you think of.)

(3) In your view, what are the biggest misunderstandings or errors about Commedia dell'Arte today?

(4) Whose work do you like who is performing Commedia dell'Arte today? (List as many people or companies as you want, but I am most interested in the first people you think of.)

How strongly do you agree with the following statements?

(5) If a play does not use leather half-masks, I would not call it "Commedia dell'Arte."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(6) If a play does not use masks at all, I would not call it "Commedia dell'Arte."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(7) If a play does not use any improvisation, I would not call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(8) If actors do not speak directly to the audience (asides), I would not call the play “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(9) If a play has a written script that was not created by the actors, I would not call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	--------------------	-------	----------------

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(10) Characters in a play must have Italian names for me to call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/No Opinion Agree Strongly
Agree

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(11) Characters in a play must have Italian or French names for me to call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/No Opinion Agree Strongly
Agree

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(12) If there is only some improvisation in a play, I would not call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/No Opinion Agree Strongly
Agree

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(13) If a play has no dialogue but only movement, I would not call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(14) If a play uses “natural” rather than “exaggerated”/”stylized” movement, I would not call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(15) If a play does not use traditional Commedia dell’Arte character types from the sixteenth or seventeenth century, I would not call it “Commedia dell’Arte.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(16) Actors in Commedia dell'Arte plays should try their best to recreate the movements of actors from the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(17) A Commedia dell'Arte character is defined by the way the character walks.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(18) A Commedia dell'Arte character is defined by the gestures the character uses.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(19) A Commedia dell'Arte character is defined by the mask (or non-mask) the actor wears.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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(23) A play can be a “Commedia dell’Arte” play even if the Arlecchino, Pulcinella, or Pantalone character does not wear a mask.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(24) A play can be a “Commedia dell’Arte” play even if the Lovers do wear masks.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(25) I would call some plays by Molière “Commedia dell’Arte” plays.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(26) I would call some plays by Carlo Goldoni “Commedia dell’Arte” plays.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(27) I would call some plays by Carlo Gozzi “Commedia dell’Arte” plays.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(28) I would call some plays by Marivaux “Commedia dell’Arte” plays.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(29) I would call Harlequinade pantomimes “Commedia dell’Arte” plays.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(30) I have seen a play that was advertised as “Commedia dell’Arte,” but I did not agree that it was a “Commedia dell’Arte” play.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

(30a) If so, why not?

(31) The most important thing for a Commedia dell'Arte play is that it is true to the history of the tradition.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(32) The most important thing for a Commedia dell'Arte play is that it is true to the performance style of the aesthetic.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(33) The most important thing for a Commedia dell'Arte play is that it is true to the philosophy and goals of the original Commedia artists.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(34) The most important thing for a Commedia dell'Arte play is that it makes the audience laugh.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(35) It is possible to know what “historical Commedia dell'Arte” was like.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(36) There is such a thing as “authentic” Commedia dell'Arte today.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(37) Some plays are called “Commedia dell’Arte,” but that is an error.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(38) To perform Commedia dell’Arte, an actor should look at historical sources (scenarios, iconography, etc.) and try to imitate them.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(39) To performer Commedia dell’Arte, an actor should study with a living Maestro or expert.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Comments (optional):

(40) To perform Commedia dell’Arte, an actor should look at society today and satirize it.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(41) Commedia dell'Arte should look the same in the sixteenth century, today, and in the future.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
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1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(42) Commedia dell'Arte should evolve, and artists today can add their own innovations.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	--------------------	-------	----------------

1	2	3	4	5
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Comments (optional):

(43) The history of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition should be a source of imitation for artists today.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	--------------------	-------	----------------

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(44) The history of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition should be a source of inspiration for artists today.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/No Opinion Agree Strongly
Agree

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(45) The history of the Commedia dell'Arte tradition is irrelevant to artists today.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/No Opinion Agree Strongly
Agree

1 2 3 4 5

Comments (optional):

(46) What are the necessary components that a play should have to properly be called "Commedia dell'Arte"?

(47) Is Commedia dell'Arte "alive" today?

(48) Has Commedia dell'Arte ever “died”? If so, when? Was it “resurrected”? If so, when?

(49) Any further comments?

(50) Do you wish to be identified as the source of your written answers, or do you wish to remain anonymous in the final report?

Phase II—Participant Artist Sample Survey and Interview Questions

- (1) What did you learn about your character in making your mask?
- (2) What parts of physical training came easy to you?
- (3) What parts of physical training were difficult?
- (4) How do you think your training was similar or different to the training of Commedia actors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries?
- (5) How important was historical research to your process?
- (6) What sorts of historical sources were most useful to you in understanding Commedia dell'Arte or your character?
- (7) Describe the moment in this process when you felt like you “got it” or like you were truly a Comedian? (If you never felt that, what stood in the way?)
- (8) What parts of this process were you afraid of?
- (9) What parts of this process did you learn the most from?

- (10) If you could talk to a performer from the sixteenth or seventeenth century who made your role famous, what would you ask him or her?
- (11) How was our audience like or not like audiences in the sixteenth or seventeenth century?
- (12) What did your friends and family comment on when they saw you in this play?
- (13) How much do you feel like this play is “yours”?
- (14) What is something you will take from this process to apply to other kinds of plays you do?
- (15) If you could start this process all over again, what would you do differently?
- (16) Describe how well you feel like you understand Commedia dell’Arte after performing this show? What is still confusing or mysterious?
- (17) If your friends did not know what Commedia dell’Arte was, how would you describe it and convince them to come to the show?

- (18) Describe a memorable moment from training or class. Why was this important to you?
- (19) Describe a memorable moment from rehearsal. Why was this important to you?
- (20) Describe a memorable moment from the performance run. Why was this important?
- (21) Complete this sentence: Before I took the Commedia class, I thought Commedia dell'Arte was _____ but after the class, I thought it was _____.
- (22) Complete this sentence: Before I began *The Tooth-Puller* process, I thought Commedia dell'Arte was _____ but now I think it is _____.
- (23) Any other comments?

Phase III – Audience Survey Sample Questions

(1) What are three words you would use to describe this play?

(2) What were you surprised by? How did this play differ from the expectations you had before you saw it?

(3) This play is an example of Commedia dell'Arte. Based on the play, what are three words you would use to describe the style of Commedia dell'Arte?

How strongly do you agree with the following statements?

(4) “This play made me laugh.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	--------------------	-------	----------------

1	2	3	4	5
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(5) “I know someone who acts like one of these characters.”

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	--------------------	-------	----------------

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

(5a) Which character(s)?

(6) "I understood this play."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

(7) What were you confused by in the play?

(8) "If I did not know English, I think I would still understand this story."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

(9) "This play was a typical play, like what I would expect in the theatre."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

(10) "This felt like an 'old' play to me."

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Please write any additional comments or questions on the back of this form.

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