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Commedia Dell'Arte Influences on Shakespearean Plays: *The Tempest, Love's Labor's Lost,* and *The Taming of the Shrew*

Amy Drake
Franklin University, amydrake1018@aol.com

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Amy Drake, *Franklin University*

William Shakespeare incorporated the rich theatrical tradition of *commedia dell'arte* into some of his plays by basing some plots and characters on Italian pastoral scenarios. This paper explores the extent to which Shakespeare was influenced by *commedia dell'arte* and applied elements of the form to his own works. Many Shakespearean researchers support the belief that the Bard was familiar with *commedia dell'arte* as a cultural phenomenon in theater, both before and during Shakespeare's career as a playwright. Shakespeare scholar Andrew Grewar supports this theory by quoting Edward Gordon Craig, who states: "The naturalness of the Dramas was, I believe, wafted to England from Italy. Italy had awakened just previous to the birth of Shakespeare to a new sense of Drama"(9). Robert Henke notes that "Winifred Smith (1912) is among the first Anglo-American critics to examine the flurry of visits to the English court by Italian layers between 1573 and 1578." Smith's documentation includes: "a list of props and apparel for the 'Italian Players' who performed for Queen Elizabeth, a permit to perform from the Privy Council to Drusiano Martinelli, (brother of Tristano, the first Arlecchino) and a 1550 payment from the Privy Council to a group of Italian players". Henke goes on to reference E. K. Chambers "early compendium of documents regarding Italian players in England between 1573 and 1578" (227). Henke notes that Chambers' documentation includes "a payment by the Treasurer to Alfonso Ferrabosco, court musician and entertainer, 'and the rest of the Italian players' for a play performance at the English court on 27 February 1576" (227).

This new wave of theater became known in other European countries as well. "By the end of the sixteenth century, popular *commedia* companies were traveling throughout Europe, performing in Spain, France, England and Germany, as well as Eastern Europe…influencing writers and performers including William Shakespeare" (Human Race Theater). Although the action of *commedia* was improvised, the storyline

was carefully considered in advance of the performance: the stories were transmitted orally from troupe to troupe until the seventeenth-century when the plots were recorded on paper.

According to drama historian M. F. Bellinger, *commedia dell-arte* means unwritten or improvised drama, and it

> implies rather to the manner of performance than to the subject matter of the play. The play was not, in any sense, the result of the moment's inspiration. The subject was chosen, the characters conceived and named, their relations to one another determined, and the situations clearly outlined, all beforehand. The actors had the opportunity to heighten, vary, and embellish their parts as their genius might suggest (153).

Shakespearean plays are similar to commedia dell'arte in that the plots, character relations and situational outcomes were delineated [in order to] to create a cohesive structure.

The origins of *commedia dell-arte* can be traced back eight centuries before the Common Era in Greece. The Etruscans were among the first cultures to perform drama and "the ancient city of Atella, now known as Aversa, was one of the first to have a theater" (Duchartre 17). Three centuries later, similar bands of comic actors were active in Athens, Sparta and Rome where they performed improvised plays called "Atellanae, which became their accepted name", taken from the name of the city. In these plays, scenarios would be "acted out by one actor while another actor recited the story". It behooved actors to learn their craft well because popular actors were "granted [Roman] citizenship and the protection of the gods and laws". It is interesting to note that women were part of these early theatrical troupes as actors and singers[i], which was not the case even in Shakespeare's day in England. It would be centuries before women were again to be seen performing in European theater, which will be discussed later.

According to the Human Race Theatre study on commedia dell'arte, "the first recorded performances took place in Padua, Italy in 1545", nearly 20 year before Shakespeare's birth. Commedia troupes gave their companies descriptive names, just as "literary, scientific and scholarly academies" had done. The "performing troupes included the Gelosi ('the zealous'), the Uniti ('the Union'), or the Confidenti ('the Confident')…these companies consisted of 10 to 15 performers, each with

his or her specific character to play" (Human Race) with which the performer became associated, such as with Isabella Andreini, sometimes for life. The troupes traveled lightly, with minimal "props, costumes, and simple, portable stages and basic backdrop resembling a street that could be set up in any outdoor space . . . keeping the focus on the comic performances." It is the opinion of the Human Race Theatre that these troupes did indeed "influence writers and performers all over the continent, including William Shakespeare."

In mid-sixteenth century Italy, the masks, or stereotypical personas portrayed by the troupe formed the basis for the stock characters of commedia The standard masks of commedia include: Harlequin (a shrewd buffoon), Brighella (a gruff, scheming inn keeper), Pantaloon (a wealthy merchant, descending from the Roman Pappas, a lecherous, old miser), the Doctor (of Law), Pulchinella, the Captain (military hero or returning explorer), Pedrolino (a clown), Zany (a named character, which became a character type), the Lovers, and Isabelle and Columbine, the women of commedia, who at this time were played by male actors as in traditional Shakespearean theater.

In sixteenth-century Italy women enacted female characters on stage. One of the most famous of the commedia actresses was "Isabella Andreini (1562-1604), a member of Il Gelosi . . . the character of Isabella is named after her" (Human Race). As laws in England forbade women on stage, it is with men in female roles that Shakespeare may have witnessed a performance. This practice was revived for the 2014 all-male Broadway production of *Twelfth Night*, which features the character Malvolio who is akin to the commedia mask Dottore. Also in the mid-sixteenth century theater became a legitimate business: "A major landmark in theatre history occurred in Padua, Italy, on February 25, 1545, when Ser Maphio's troupe of performers signed a letter of incorporation establishing themselves as a "*fraternal compagnia*." This capitalistic innovation represents a departure from classical models of civically funded theatre or medieval models of amateur, pan-handling, or church-funded performances" (Faction of Fools).

The recognition of theater as a viable concern does not mean that patronage ended. In fact, some [commedia] troupes "acquired wealthy patrons who could provide indoor performing spaces" (Human Race).

Acting became a vocation, rather than predominantly an avocation. "Count Carlo Gozzi gave the Sacchi company financial support and wrote material for them". Patronage of theater by nobility was still necessary to gain entrée to performing at court and maintaining the esteem, along with monetary benefits, accorded to companies favored by royalty. Recognition by nobility could also bar a troupe from performing in a country or region if the troupe fell out of favor with crowned heads either by word or deed. Shakespeare was supported by "his royal patrons were Queen Elizabeth and King James I, both of whom greatly loved the drama" (Brown). Shakespeare's other patron, Henry Wriothesly, "[t]he Earl of Southampton became the poet's chosen patron, and accepted the poet's dedication of the 'Venus and Adonis' in 1593, and in the following year the 'Tarquin and Lucrece'" (Brown). Although Shakespeare enjoyed high-ranking support it came at a price. "Shakespeare's play of *Richard II* had been printed in 1597, with the suppression of 154 lines containing the trial and deposing of the king" (Brown). Censorship was part and parcel of the theater business in Shakespeare's day; however, *Commedia* troupes got away with staging bawdier material. This freedom of expression may be due to the transitory nature of the shows and that *commedia* audiences were more often made up of commoners rather than nobility. Many of Shakespeare's plays were written on two, or more, levels: complicated plots for the educated elite and double-entendre dialogue to amuse the middle classes and groundlings.

Commedia came into its own in Italy during the sixteenth century through the work of the "famous Gelosi, Confidenti and Uniti [acting] troupes" (Ducharte 17). According to the Victoria and Albert Museum website, "from the 1660s *Commedia dell'arte* characters began to appear in English plays. Such was the success of *Commedia* in England that an intense rivalry soon sprang up between the theatres producing it," (V&A). This information may be inaccurate because Shakespeare incorporated *commedia* references into his plays early in the seventeenth century. It is also unlikely because both the "Confident company and the Pedrolino troupes were active from the mid-1570s and the Gelosi company performed for English King Henry III in 1574" (Human Race). Documentation that *commedia* troupes were enjoying the attention of the English court during Shakespeare's early life lends credibility to the possibility that Shakespeare was familiar with the commedia genre.

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Grewar states that "John Payne Collier, in his Annals of the English Stage (1831), was apparently the first to note the possibility that the plots of English plays [*The Plot of the Dead Man's Fortune and The Platt of the Second Parte of the Seuen Deadlie Sinns*] show a direct link between the *commedia dell'arte* and Elizabethan drama because the outlines were equivalent to the Italian *scenari*, and that the plays must have been presented impromptu" (15). By virtue of attending popular theatrical performances Shakespeare would have become acquainted with elements of *commedia dell'arte*.

Two of Shakespeare's plays are widely recognized as Italian influenced works. Shakespeare scholar Kevin Gilvary argues that while the plays *Much Ado* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona* are classified as Italian comedies, *The Tempest* should also be classed in this category, thereby defining it as a "pastoral comedy derived from commedia dell'arte". Gilvary states: "sources [of Italian plays] were transcribed and published in 1913 by Ferdinando Neri. These plays were used as outline plots by travelling troupe of players in Italy and written down in manuscripts c. 1620 and include elements of the plot of *The Tempest*. Gilvary cites the research work of scholar Kathleen Lea as corroborating Neri's conclusion that *The Tempest* is an Italian comedy, as opposed to romance, as argued in Coleridge's lecture of 1811. Likewise, Grewar concurs that, "both Lea and Nicoll find evidence of the influence of the Commedia dell'arte on Shakespeare" and "no one has ever refuted Craig's remarkable claim that the original actors improvised parts of Shakespeare's plays." Due to the intricate nature of Shakespearean plots and character-driven dialogue, improvisation was probably not left up to the actors.

Gilvary also finds commonalities between the background of *The Tempest* and a letter penned by traveler William Thomas in the mid fifteenth-century which "included a story about a Duke of Genoa, Prospero Adorno, who briefly held power in 1460. In his letter, William Thomas also describes the rule of Alfonso, King of Naples, who married the daughter of the rightful Duke of Milan. The king gave the throne to his son, Ferdinand, and set sail to Sicily. Gilvary finds "six points of comparison between Thomas's *Historie of Italie* and *The Tempest*: (1) the princes names Prospero and Ferdinand, (2) deposed rulers (3) alliance

with the King of Naples, (4) a marriage between the King of Naples and the daughter of the Duke of Milan, (5) a king named Alfonso or Alonso, and (6) a prince given to solitary study." Through Lea's research of Neri's work, Gilvary (2007) cites three pastoral scenes linking *The Tempest* with commedia dell'arte in unity of time and place: *Il Mago* (a magician inhabiting an island), *La Nave* (a shipwreck) and *Gli Tre Satiri* (three satyrs on a remote island). Comparable events identified by Gilvary occurring in *The Tempest* and pastoral scenarios include: "unities of time, place and action; lost island setting; Pantalone's distress over shipwreck and hunger; food magically appears; the magician's influence over spirits and satyrs". Gilvary quotes Coursen in correlating the following characters from *The Tempest* with Italian comedy roles: Alonso with Pantalone, Ferdinand with Fausto, Antonio with Gratiano, Stephano with Pulchinello, Trinculo with Brighello, Miranda with Filli, and Prospero with the magician.

As in Shakespearean plays, commedia "contains not only comedies and farces, but tragedies, tragi-comedies, and pastorals complete with fauns, nymphs and spirits" (Grewar 15). Grewar references research by Northrup Frye who "has pointed out the similarities in plot conventions in Shakespeare's comedies and romances to those in the Commedia dell'arte, and their relation to popular folklore and myth" (10). Some of these elements date from centuries prior to the formation of commedia troupes. Duchartre quotes Driesen's research of 1904, indicating that Harlequin originated in "France before 1100, preceding *commedia dell'arte* by four and one-half centuries and connoted a mythical sprite" (23). As quoted by Henke, Oscar Campbell's studies published between 1925 and 1932 finds commonalities between Shakespeare's characters of the "Dottore in *Love's Labor's Lost* and Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* with qualities of the commedia Dottori such as the Gelosi's Lodovico dei Bianchi." Further, "Campbell points out the commedia scenario 'Flavio tradition,' Day 5 of Flamino Scala's *Il teatro dele favole rappresentative*, resembles the Pasqualigo play (and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*) in many respects" but he does not elaborate upon them.

Commedia characters could be identified not only by the type of face mask they wore, but also by costume. Acrobatic Harlequin, who appeared to be a dullard but could delight audiences with flashes of brilliant wit, was typically seen in a multicolored patchwork suit and wore

a black leather mask covering most of his face, indicating that he was foreign to the region (Duchartre 23).

Brighella, the intriguer, sported a moustache and wore "a jacket and full trousers adorned with a braid of some sort of green material along the seams, [with] a short mantle, a hat with a green border and a trusty dagger by his side". This fellow was too refined to be a common thief, but always sought opportunities for personal gain, legally or otherwise.

The role of the Doctor was created in Bologna around 1560. This erudite man took on the guise of "a philosopher, astronomer, man of letters, cabalist, barrister, grammarian, diplomat and physician," spouting Latin phrases at every opportunity. His pomposity made him a comic character. His clothing resembled the outfit worn by University of Bologna scholars: "a short black, gown, covered by a black robe, black shoes, and a black hat with the sides turned upward" (24).

Pulchinella was a direct descendant of both Bucco and Maccus, characters of the Roman Atellanae. As a result, he had the dual nature of "impertinence and timidity," physicalized by a humpback and swelled stomach, and a large nose and thin legs, features giving him an off-balance look. His costume was that of a peasant, "a loose linen blouse, wide pantaloons, a wooden dagger hanging from a wide leather belt and a scarf bordered with green lace." Late in the seventeenth century, this womanizing and quarrelsome character evolved into the British Punch of Punch and Judy marionettes (24).

The Captain is full of lust and bravado, ready to regale peasants and fair maidens with stories of his military victories. He was a mercenary, ready to fight for the highest bidder, and as such, a despised character of the *commedia* ensemble. The Captain appeared in the military dress of the period and region: he wore "a mask with a long, thin nose and a bristling moustache resembling iron spikes" (24).

The Venetian merchant Pantaloon symbolized wealth and prosperity. This "eminent" character was recognized by his "red tights, loose black cape, long beard, Turkish slippers and red woolen bonnet." His name may have come from the phrase "to plant the lion" referring to staking a claim for land in the honor of Venice's emblem of St. Mark's lion

(Duchartre 24). It is this mask which is aligned with Shakespeare's Gremio from *Taming of the Shrew*.

Although Gilvary cites Allardyce Nicoll's quote below as evidence supporting a link between the works of Shakespeare and scenarios of *commedia dell'arte* based on Arcadia *incantata*: "It is virtually impossible not to believe that Shakespeare had witnessed the performance of an improvised pastoral of this kind," and any solid evidence of Shakespeare's attendance at a *commedia dell'arte* performance is yet to be discovered. However, Grewar proffers that besides the likelihood that Shakespeare actually saw the performances of such layers, there is the even greater likelihood of contact between English and Italian actors, both in England and abroad" and "it is clear from contemporary records that the Elizabethan public was by no means unfamiliar with the Italian comedy. References to the main characters of the *Commedia dell'arte* are found in many English plays of the period"(10). As these actors changed troupes word of mouth would have spread information about masks, plots and *lazzi* of *commedia dell'arte* throughout the European theatrical community.

Strictly speaking, Shakespearean plays were not part of the *commedia* genre because they were scripted. "Without actor improvisation, the play was not properly *commedia dell'arte* and left no room for the performers to display the full range of comedic skill" (Human Race). Interestingly, Grewar argues that "some companies had a repertoire of scripted as well as improvised plays. The extempore roles were often in fact only partially improvised, for each actor had a stock of memorized speeches in character which could be introduced at appropriate moments"(13). Playwright Carlo Goldoni was criticized by Gozzi for doing just this: recording the play on paper, thereby "transforming it into ordinary scripted theater." In contrast, "Gozzi used material from fairy tales and folk stories, tailoring his material to the talents of the actors, in much the same way writers for television comedy shows *Saturday Night Live* and *Mad TV*" have done in recent years (Human Race). The names of the commedia characters used by the acting troupes varied slightly from country to country and region to region presumable to make them more familiar to their audience. "According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest known use of the word 'pantaloon' occurs in a stage direction from the 'stage plot' or outline of a

play called *The Dean Man's Fortune*, believed to be the papers of Edward Alleyn at Dulwich College." The plot contained holes at the top, indicating it had been "hung on a peg at a playhouse." More interestingly, the plot "contains the direction 'Enter Burbage,' referring to none other than Richard Burbage" (Grewar 14). Grewar goes on to quote Greg, who states: "The name Burbage is also found in another of these stage lots, *The Platt of the Second Parte of the Seuen Dealie Sins* (?1592), which contains the names of most of the combined Admiral's-Strange's company [including] Thomas Pope, George Bryan, Richard Crowley, Augustine Phillips, John Sinclair, and William Slye who...were the players who with Shakespeare and Burbage were to form the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594." Some of these character types, familiar to European audiences of the seventeenth century, found their way into Shakespearean plays. Cambridge University Shakespearean lecturer John Lennard states:

> Shakespeare stole from many books but also from living theatre, and especially Venetian *Commedia dell'arte*. it is very clear that Shakespeare was familiar with many elements of *commedia dell'arte*, Both its roles (or masks) and its characteristic structures and actions repeatedly appear in his comedies, from the repressive father Pantalone to the stuttering Tartaglia and braggart soldier, *Il Capitano*, and from the cross-pairings of lovers to the disastrous encounter of *Il Capitano* with that real soldier, *Il Cavaliero*. The Folio text of *Love's Labour's Lost* actually gives Don Adriano de Armado and Holofernes the speech-prefixes *Brag.* (for Braggart) and *Ped.* (for Pedant), underlining the presence of character-types, and the action centres on four pairs of lovers, as if doubling the two typical of *Commedia*. In *Hamlet* the part of Pantalone is played by Polonius. Awareness of the presence of elements taken from *Commedia* in Shakespeare's drama, and especially awareness of their translocations into tragedy, illuminates much about his work.

Borrowing from *commedia* terminology, "*Love's Labor's Lost* (?1595) contains one of the earliest examples in English of the word 'zany,' from *zanni.* Clearly Shakespeare takes the word to mean 'servant,' 'follower' or 'imitator' as well as 'clown'". Another example is taken from "*Twelfth Night* (?1598) when Malvolio refers to those who laugh at the jokes of his

enemy, the fool Feste: I protest I take these wise men that crow so at these set kind of fools no better than fools' zanies (1.5.83-4). Grewar also cites Shakespeare's reference to Jacques' The Seven Ages of Man speech from *As You like It* (1599-1600) referring to "slippered Pantaloon" by name.. Grewar goes on to quote Nicoll stating, "[No one] can turn to the 'Seven Ages of Man' and deny that Shakespeare has seen a real Pantalone"(18).

The Royal Shakespeare Company supports this position, noting that the characters in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593-94) are "broadly drawn":

> This is not surprising for the play is descended from the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* whose essential features were farcical improvisation and stock characters. Gremio, for example, is a direct descendent of the *Commedia* rich old man, Pantelone. Both Bianca and Kate reflect aspects of the young and headstrong Commedia heroine Isabella. Shakespeare, as ever, borrows from past histories and dramatic traditions in order to fashion something very new (RSC).

Grewar also notes an "OED reference to 'pantaloon' in *The Taming of the Shrew* (?1592-94), where the term is twice used to refer to Gremio".

In another example of *commedia's* influence on Shakespeare researcher Richard Whelan writes:

> A close reading of *The Tragedy of Othello* in light of the popularity of improvised *commedia dell'arte* in Italy at the time the play was written suggests that *commedia dell'arte* strongly influenced the composition of the play. Commedia dell'arte was at the height of its popularity in Italy in the late 1500s, when the Shakespeare plays were being written. Among the principal stock characters in *commedia dell'arte* were the Zanni, the secondary Zanni, Pantalone, the Capitano, Pedrolino, the innocent woman, and her lady-in-waiting or maid. These seven stock characters are mirrored in the seven principal characters in Othello.

Soon the female roles of *commedia* would be played by women.

By the late sixteenth century commedia dell'arte began to spread throughout Western Europe and we again see women on the stage. Ducharte writes in *The Italian Comedy*:

> Due to fear of giving in to pleasures of the flesh and the devil, for sixteen centuries throughout the Christian world all women were prohibited from acting in the theater. When they began to reappear on the stage in the sixteenth century, in the more important troupes like the Gelosi, the ban against them was lifted in several of the Italian states. With the exception of three legations, however, the exclusion lasted in the Papal States far into the eighteenth century. (Ducharte 24).

For this reason, the female characters were not as well-developed as the male characters and were often identified by character type, such as *Inamorata*, *Courtesan*, or *La Cantrina*, the songstress, rather than by name. As more women joined commedia troupes the characters assumed the stock names of Columbine, Isabella and Zerbinette, among others. Even though the plots presumably became more involved with increased character roles, some audiences were more responsive than others. Even though female roles were portrayed by men in Elizabethan theater Shakespeare's female characters transcended commedia masks in terms depth and complexity, such as Katherine in *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Unlike most Shakespearean comedies, when audience attention began to wane, the action in *commedia dell'arte* would be paused in order to bring on singers, musicians or jugglers to recapture the attention of the crowd. Occasionally, these performance pieces are incorporated into a Shakespearean plot, but the action is not halted to accommodate them. These interludes were known as *Lazzi* and evolved into slapstick (with an actual slapstick) with songs, jugglers and acrobatics. The origin of the word *lazzi* has several possible origins, but has come to be known as comedic stage business incorporated into the plot. The various types of *lazzi* later identified by theater historians ranges from acrobatic to silly to vulgar. A few of the recorded examples include the acrobatic "*Lazzo* of the Cat (Rome, 1622) in which *Zanni* or [Arlecchino, another name of the Harlequin character] act out the [yoga-like] movements of a cat and the grotesque Lazzo of Being Brained (Paris, 1716) in which Scaramouche hits Arlecchino so hard that his brains spill out and Arlecchino eats them as not to lose his intelligence." Some *lazzi* even included magic tricks, such as the "Lazzo of the Disappearing Fruit performed in Naples in 1700. [In this skit] fruit disappears and is changed into water and flames" (Gordon

11). These feats were designed to engage the audience and refocus their attention back on to the stage.

Commedia continued expanding its reach throughout Europe into the eighteenth century. At that time two playwrights emerged as leading figures in the creation of *commedia dell'arte*: Carlo Goldoni and Carlo Gozzi. Goldoni focused on themes of timeless love, mistaken identity and societal contracts governing marriage and class difference in Italy. Gozzi chose to place his stories in fairy tale settings, with castles, magic and talking animals. Goldoni is best known for penning *The Servant of Two Masters*, which recently returned to the London and Broadway stages as *One Man, Two Guv'nors*. Gozzi's best known play, *The King Stag*, lives on as the twentieth century opera *König Hirsh*, which premiered in 1956 at the Städtische Oper (Berlin City Opera) by Hans Werner Henze, libretto by Heinz von Cramer. In 1984, Albert Bermel's translation of The King Stag was brought to the stage by the American Repertory Theater with "the marvelous costumes, masks, and puppetry of Julie Taynor" (*NYT* Dec. 19, 1984). Similarly *Hamlet, Much Ado about Nothing, Macbeth, The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *King Lear* have been revised as opera. In this way Shakespearean plays and *commedia dell'arte* have been brought closer together centuries after being created.

Other major theatrical figures have built on *commedia dell'arte*, sometimes attaching it to more modern theatrical forms. An example is *Ariadne auf Naxos*, where Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal conflated *commedia dell'arte* and Greek mythology to make a hybrid work that was not understood at the time but in modern times is one of Strauss's most popular operas. The plot involves a behind-the-scenes look at creating an opera about the myth of Ariadne surrounded by *commedia dell'arte* stock characters.

In the realm of film, "the great silent movie comedians Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and Harold Lloyd drew on the acrobatic physical comedy of commedia in the films…They created their own recognizable comedic characters, which they played in every film" (Human Race) just as commedia players took on the same role in every performance. "Shakespeare [also] seems to have written with members of his company on mind for various parts…This may be why we sometimes find that, as in the reference to Burbage in *The Dead Man's Fortune*, an actor's name is used in a stage direction instead of the characters." The 1599 quatro of

Romeo and Juliet has the direction Enter Will Kemp at the end of Act Four instead of Enter Peter (Grewar 18). Comic actor, screen writer and director Charlie Chaplin carried on this tradition. He is synonymous with the character of the Little Tramp, whose zany predicaments, acrobatic movements and longing for romance could be taken straight from a commedia script. "Outside of the United States, the [Little Tramp] character was known as 'Charlot'—a clear descendent of Arlecchino" (*Chronicles*). Further, Chaplin "did not write out a script; instead he came up with a basic idea for the scene, insisting that his casts work together to polish their improvisation skills, just like a class commedia troupe". Keaton was known for his "natural acrobatic skill" and deadpan expression, heightening the comic appeal of a scene. Keaton also "teamed up with Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle creating a classic Brighella and Arlecchino" duo. Ducharte wrote that Chaplin was "undoubtedly one of the rare inheritors of the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*" (Ducharte 17) appearing as a soldier in *Shoulder Arms* (1918), the [albeit dejected] lover in *City Lights* (1931) and as a clown in *The Circus* (1928) in which Chaplin did his own acrobatic stunts on the high wire. In Modern Times (1936) Chaplin engages in "classic lazzi on a conveyor belt. This lazzo was later used in the classic *I Love Lucy* episode set in a candy factory" (Human Race). Lloyd created the "'Glasses character' sometimes known as 'Harold' who was an 'everyman' who wound up in precarious situations" (*Chronicles*). This character type does not meet the criteria of a commedia stock character, but Lloyd's physicality is clearly in the tradition of Arlecchino. Human Race Theatre cites Adam Sandler as an example of a modern film actor whose style fits the commedia mold, stating [that] "Adam Sandler's brand of angry, over-the-top physical comedy can be traced back to Brighella, the crafty servant who was always looking for a fight." Examples include, "the title characters in *Billy Madison*, *Happy Gilmore*, and *The Waterboy*." The Commedia mask of Pantalone and slapstick physicality of the genre can be witnessed in the film version of *The Taming of the Shrew* with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor.

  Commedia has also seen a resurgence on the stage. The improvised comedy created from the 1950s to the twenty-first century was specifically intended to recreate *commedia*. The style was brought

back to the stage by David Shepherd who "founded the Compass Players in 1955, asking noted director Paul Sills to work with his company. Sills' mother Viola Spolin used theater improvisation techniques while working as a theater instructor to underprivileged children and adults in the 1930s" (Human Race). According to a study prepared by Human Race Theatre, "the energetic improvisatory humor of the commedia troupes is similar to the work done by contemporary improve theater groups such as Second City, the Groundlings, and the Upright Citizens Brigade" (*Chronicles*). Compass Players took "suggestion from the audiences to improvise skits and evolved into the Second City Company with noted alumni Dan Ackroyd, John Belushi and Gilda Radnor." Second City troupe members Alan and Jessica Myerson moved to San Francisco and were joined by Second City director Del Close to form The Committee, whose member Gary Austin went on to form The Groundlings, in Los Angeles in 1974. Like Sills had done 20 years earlier Austin based his work on Viola Spolin's theater games Alumni of the Groundlings includes Conan O'Brien, Mike Myers and Lisa Kudrow.

As Grewar notes, Shakespeare seems to contradict the commedia edict of improvisation on stage opining in *Hamlet*: And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them…(3.2.36-44). However, "the speech may be an attack on the clowning of Will Kemp, who had left the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599, apparently on bad terms with Shakespeare" (22). The phrase 'set down' may be broader than a reference to dialogue. "It is just possible, at least in parts of some of Shakespeare's plays, that what was 'set down' was the plot rather than the script as such. If this was the case, and Shakespeare permitted improvisation on his stage, the bond between Shakespearean plays and commedia may be stronger than modern scholars realize.

Commedia has also lived on through television. "The stock characters of commedia dell'arte live in in modern sitcom characters…who deal with changing situations each week" (Human Race). The cast of *The Big Bang Theory* arguably carry on the commedia tradition by fulfilling the roles of commedia masks, but do not employ improvised humor. Consider Sheldon as the Doctor, Howard as the Captain, Leonard as Harlequin, Penny as Columbine, Bernadette and Amy as Inamorata, Raj as Pedrolino and Stuart as Brighella. These characters do not necessarily fit the family role or social positions of

sixteenth century commedia masks, but they each capture the essence of the persona and interact as a solid commedia ensemble. Sheldon is as pedantic, arrogant and oblivious of how others perceive him as was the Doctor of Law. Like the mask of the Captain, Howard is something of a braggart, however, unlike commedia Captains who may or may not have undertaken the adventures they claim, Howard did go to the moon, awarding him bragging rights. Leonard and Penny have fulfilled the role of the lovers. As in paramours of traditional commedia, they have weathered miscommunications and misunderstandings throughout their relationship. Only time will tell if their relationship has a neatly wrapped up, happy commedia outcome. Shakespearean plays also tie up all loose ends of the plot providing a satisfying outcome, which audiences have come to expect on the stage, screen and on television. The late addition female characters of Amy and Bernadette represent the Inamorata love interests of Sheldon and Howard. As the popularity of both characters' has grown back stories have been created for them, but these roles were developed primarily as partners for existing characters, as Inamorata were created to support male commedia characters. Raj represents a Pedrolino in search of his lady love. Stuart is a modern-day Brighella, owner of a comic book store instead of an inn. He intrigues and schemes to join the core group, but remains on the periphery: in the modern incarnation Stuart is an outcast among super smart science nerds.

In conclusion, both *commedia dell'arte* and Shakespearean plays have informed twenty-first century audience expectations. Based on my research I hypothesize that acting ensembles' whose characters resemble commedia masks continue to resonate with audiences because they are familiar to us. The crossover between Romeo and Juliet, the young lovers of commedia and young sit-com couples are character types which we as a society can still relate. Some summer theater festivals stage commedia works by Goldoni and Gozzi along with more popular works by Shakespeare. Through these festivals Commedia has become broadly linked to Shakespearean theater by association as classical theater. By viewing commedia and certain Shakespearean works within the same season, such as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night* and *Love's Labor's Lost*, nuances of commedia within these Shakespearean plays becomes apparent. Research beginning early in the nineteenth-century

pinpoints the elements of *commedia dell'arte* employed by Shakespeare, even if scholars cannot prove conclusively that Shakespearean attended *commedia* performances.

Notes

1. This practice originated in "the Dorian countries, spreading into Sicily and Rome." See Duchartre 17.

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