

The *Commedia all'improvviso* Pictures in the Corsini Manuscript: A New Reading

Among the well-known *scenari* collections of the *commedia all'improvviso*, two manuscript volumes of the Corsini Library are unique. The *Raccolta di Scenari Più scelti D'istrioni* is, in fact, the only illustrated collection: each of its hundred scenarios is preceded by a hand-drawn, coloured title page depicting actors on one of a limited range of genre-specific single-perspective stages.¹ In addition to seventy-five comedies, the repertoire contains eleven pastorals, ten tragicomedies, two *opere turchesche*, one tragedy, and one *opera reale*. The so-called Corsini manuscript entered the inventory of Rome's Biblioteca Corsiniana from the collection of Cardinal Maurizio di Savoia. His coat of arms, stamped on the leather binding, has led some scholars to date it to the period of his cardinalship, 1621–42.

The term *commedia dell'arte* does not pre-date the eighteenth century. Before that, the theatrical practice it defines was known as *commedia all'improvviso*. The term *improvviso*, in the sense of 'instantaneous', in itself defines the practice of performing dialogue independently of previously fixed scripts. The term *scenari* has become generic for several closely related types of dramatic text, including *scenari*, *soggetti* and *mandafuora*. These terms, whose origins go back to the textualization of oral performance, are commonly thought to reflect the stage practices of professional actors. All three reflect insider knowledge, and serve the dramatic function of recording plot organization and, to differing extents, stage directions. *Soggetti* include more detailed stage directions than *scenari*, and sometimes also sections of actual word for word dialogue. *Mandafuora* are usually confined to brief information concerning entries, exits, and scene changes. Scholarly interest in the early texts of the *commedia all'improvviso* remains undiminished, as demonstrated by a continuing flow of publications, including no less than two significant scenario editions in 2007 alone.²

Since 1885, international researchers have identified the Corsini manuscript as a key document for European theatre history. Existing scholarship divides sharply into approaches based primarily on textual analysis and those based primarily on iconographic assessment, and the findings of each have been greatly compromised by the absence of a complete edition of the manuscript. For this reason, an edition is currently being prepared for publication at the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Bern, under the auspices of a research project led by Professor Dr. Stefan Hulfeld.³ This pro-

ject examines the Corsini texts and images with respect to their specific mediality, and analyzes the collection using interdisciplinary approaches. Central to the project's inquiry is an investigation into how the dramatic strategies and experiences of *commedia all'improvviso* troupes contributed to and influenced the cultural and intellectual debates of their time. A digitally prepared transcription of the *scenari* is being compared to the original and translated into German. The visual appearance of the manuscript is being fully taken into consideration. The project's goals are a complete published German-Italian edition of the collection's texts, including colour reproduction of all 100 of its illustrations, and three doctoral dissertations, each focusing on a specific theme. Demis Quadri is primarily concerned with the use of language and literary motifs in the Corsini *scenari*, in the context of seventeenth-century Roman linguistic usage. Sebastian Hauck focuses on madness scenes and the role of insanity in the Corsini Manuscript and other *scenari* collections, with particular emphasis on theatre-historical and cultural contextualisation of Isabella Andreini's *Pazzia di Isabella* performance of 1589. The main concern of the third dissertation is to catalogue all 100 title-page watercolours, and analyze their relationship to the texts.

The preliminary results of this research, presented here, indicate that the Corsini images do not reflect a desire literally to depict the theatrical experiences of their illustrators, but rather two other factors: iconographic tradition and a desire to convey certain quite specific visual effects. This issue is central to the interpretation of theatre images more broadly, and opinions concerning it vary greatly. Where some see a connection between the pictures and actual stage practice, others approach the images purely as visual objects. M.A. Katritzky, who has gathered and commented on a significant collection of previously unknown early *commedia all'improvviso* images, reads theatre-related illustrations with respect to both visual precedents and stage practice. Other scholars, such as art historian Angelika Leik, prefer to concentrate solely on iconographic borrowings and themes.⁴ Building on this work, Daniele Vianello's richly documented and careful contextualization succeeds in detaching the iconographic *commedia*-related evidence of the grotesque paintings and so-called 'Fools' Staircase' of Castle Trausnitz in Bavaria from the first documented (amateur) performance in the history of the *commedia all'improvviso* with which it has often been associated.⁵ In this way Vianello brings the pictures into connection with a more general interest in the theatre and its depiction.

Older studies attributed documentary value to the Corsini images, based on actual *commedia all'improvviso* stage practice,⁶ in almost inverse relation to the perceived naive level of their artistic quality.⁷ The *scenari* were often linked to specific otherwise undocumented performances, even to previously unknown troupes.⁸ Scholars attributed to an amateur troupe the initiative for creating the manuscript and its illustrations,⁹ with the suggested purpose of contributing staging information for the instruction of these amateurs.¹⁰ (Other scholars considered whether these *scenari* were amateur adaptations of the professionals' texts,¹¹ or academic transcriptions of professional performances.)¹² Such assumptions are especially problematic because they are based on studies that do not recognize the obvious interdependence of the Corsini manuscript's images and texts, and consequently do not analyze them together and in relation to each other. Rejecting previous theories, Elsebeth Aasted suggests that only a professional troupe would be qualified to understand the language of these *scenari* and that the only intention of their illustrations was to decorate their title pages. Their purpose was to impress prospective patrons, for whom the Corsini manuscript represented an opportunity to study the troupe's repertoire, with a view to commissioning performances.¹³

Strategies of Visual Composition

In what follows, I argue that the watercolours are not simply documentary evidence of performance but rather independent research objects in their own right. I will focus on their visual composition and on how the chosen iconography was realized.¹⁴ In creating these illustrations, the artist followed a series of compositional strategies. Above all, the artist's concern was to transform textual information into visual information. The most important image-text connections are: reference to the title, reference to a specific event in the text, combinations based on more than one passage of text, and emblematic depictions of plot elements that cannot be directly related to specific text passages.

The clearest visual realization of a title occurs on the title page of *The Six Twins* (*Li sei simili*, I/47). With its three sets of identical twins, this scenario is a masterpiece of comic confusion and mistaken identities. The title page depicts two identical Innamorate (Lidia), standing between an identical pair of Innamorati (Oratio) and an identical pair of fathers (Cassandro). The picture does not refer to any actual scene in the scenario because a scene in which the double roles appear simultaneously is obviously impossible. But its

depiction of the triple doubling expresses a simple compositional shorthand for summarizing the basic gist of the plot. From this perspective, the picture is a direct visual 'translation' of the scenario's title.

Only rarely does an illustration refer to a single specific scene. *The Two Slave-Girls* (Plate 2) depicts an episode near the end of the second act in which a herald sounds his trumpet to announce the exhibition and sale of the slave-girls Isabella and Doralice. The servants Zanni and Trappolino, and an Innamorato (Lelio or Fabbritio) who stands between them, all disguised as slave-dealers, appraise the two women. Another example is *The Ghosts* (*Li spiriti*, I/6), where Zanni and four further figures are all depicted holding candles and wearing white sheets and pointed hats. Despite the scenario's title, and the suppositions of previous interpretations, this illustration does not depict ghosts, who are only mentioned briefly in the text. It depicts a *lazzo* (*lazzo della bona religione*) at the end of the scenario's first act, in which rogues disguise themselves as clergymen in order to steal fifty *scudi* from Zanni. More typically, these artists chose several episodes from a particular scenario and merged them into a type of montage, as with *The Sorceress* (*La maga*, II/57), on whose title page Aasted identified no less than five different plot episodes.¹⁵ In an approach reminiscent of medieval simultaneous stages, the same characters are sometimes doubled and shown in two different scenes. The left corner of the title page of *The Prisoners* (*Li carcerati*, I/19), for example, features Pantalone and Zanni stealing something out of a window, while the right-hand side depicts their incarceration. The frontispiece illustration to the comedy *The Exchanged Daughters* (*Li scambi*, I/7) (Plate 3) features three figural groups in the foreground of an urban perspective stage without side streets. In the middle stand the Innamorati Silvio and Hortentia. Silvio makes advances to Hortentia because he thinks that she is Flavia. She pretends to be embarrassed. The arrangement of the scenery and figures conveys the impression that the lovers are caught in a dangerous situation between two men with threatening, drawn swords. Lelio stands in the left corner of the illustration. In love with Flavia, he is, according to the text, under the assumption that she is in the room from which he hears the whispered endearments of lovers. Enraged, he has already drawn his sword in preparation for killing his rival in love when Zanni holds him back. Their shouting leads Capitanio, who stands in the right corner of the picture and is in love with Hortentia, to draw his sword in defence. According to the text, the depicted love scene actually takes place offstage, in a windowless room of the house. With reference to several brief allusions in the scenario's third act,

the title-page illustration depicts this aspect of the plot's love intrigue, without being directly based on any continuous passage of text.

Observing the image, the spectator creates something new out of a visual composition based on the simultaneous depiction of two or more events in the plot. Recurring actions and interrelated codified gestures of rhetoric, recognition, command, defence, refusal, or the like, that draw on rhetoric texts by Cicero, Quintilian, and other classical authors, are often distributed between the figures. This creates visual tension and conveys narrative. Sometimes, communication between on-stage figures and those at upper windows provides yet another opportunity to further optically enhance the composition.

Pictures that achieve their impact at a purely symbolic level, without any connection to specific textual passages, include *The Hermaphrodite* (*L'ermafrodito*, I/10; Figure 1). On the left side of the picture a young man raises his hat, whilst on the right a woman hands him a scarf or short coat. At the end of this comedy, Pantalone's son Flaminio turns out to be his daughter Isabella, who had lived as a man since fleeing six months previously. Two possible readings of this picture are that it shows either the initial moment when Isabella adopts her disguise, or the subsequent discovery of her identity. The figure on the left could be Isabella disguised as Flaminio, raising her hat in



Fig. 1. Title page to *The Hermaphrodite* (detail), watercolour. Biblioteca Corsiniana, Manoscritti, 45 G5 (*L'ermafrodito*), Rome. Courtesy of Biblioteca Corsiniana.

greeting — in which case Isabella is again depicted on the right, this time as a woman holding an item of male clothing in her hands. Rather than referring to any specific textual passage, this composition offers a purely symbolic interpretation of the scenario's title. Made aware of the hermaphrodite by the title, the observer is actively encouraged to examine the illustration for visual clues regarding the identity and gender of the depicted characters. Since the main emphasis in both figures is on items of clothing which can function as disguise and means of 'gender reassignment', the observer oscillates between the two depicted characters, and is encouraged to reflect on the possibility that they depict the same person in each of her 'facets'. As this example suggests, the part of the plot referred to in the title usually encapsulates the scenario's essence, and this is also what most of the pictures are primarily concerned to illustrate.¹⁶

When these illustrations depict scenery, rarely is that scenery appropriate to the specific requirements of the text. In *The Advice of the Pantalones* (*Li consigli di Pantalone*, I/36), for example, the abandoned house, which plays a central role, is not depicted at all. Generally, the stages are generic. This depiction of standard models, rather than stages modified for the precise requirements of specific plots, strongly suggests that these illustrations are idealized compositions, not primarily intended to document performance practice. Rather than having any direct documentary value, they convey an idea. They are the end-product of a successfully achieved abstraction, based on converting textual into visual information, typically through the use of more than one plot episode. They convey narration at the level of plot coherence, and direct the spectator's attention towards specific content related and scenographic elements of the scenario. Through specific selection of depicted incidents, each picture captures a characteristic aspect that differentiates that particular scenario from all the other *scenari*.

Differentiation between fore- and background

This analysis becomes more complicated if one addresses the chosen form of visual transformation by inquiring into iconographic precedents for the stages and characters. Because using previously existing iconography was a common artistic technique in the Renaissance, and the Corsini illustrations are by no means the product of outstanding or even particularly original artists, this article fundamentally assumes the existence of iconographic precedents. Obvious stylistic differences point to a team of at least four illustrators.

These illustrators, probably more by chance than by intention, nonetheless succeeded in creating an excellent compositional formula.

The Corsini illustrations differ from previously known early modern *commedia all'improvviso* stock characters on a stage with Serlian angle-wings. On-stage depictions of these characters are the exception in the visual record. More often, they appear in the context of festivities or processions.¹⁷ When stages are depicted, they are generally simple platform stages with nothing more than a neutral, or at most painted, curtain backdrop. The Corsini watercolours are probably so frequently cited in connection with visual considerations of the *commedia all'improvviso* not least because they are strikingly spectacular by comparison.

For the purpose of visual comparison, the separate examination of the fore- and background of the Corsini illustrations offers a fruitful approach. This differentiation has the advantage of allowing access to two strands of iconographic tradition. The composition of the watercolours merges these two traditions into one, and it is precisely this feature that constitutes their uniqueness. The foreground is defined as including all the characters, and the nearest building to them on either side. This invites comparison with well-known prints such as those of the *Recueil Fossard*, which are among the few pictures reliably associated with professional *commedia all'improvviso* troupes. Moreover, their scenic houses exhibit a comparable focus on facilitating interactions between the characters. The background is defined as including the depicted stage as a whole and the space behind the characters. Here, the illustrator developed genre-specific models. These models in the Corsini manuscript are reminiscent of certain other familiar early modern book illustrations, even more than they are of the three stage genres canonized by the comic, tragic, and pastoral stage settings depicted in three woodcuts of the second volume of Serlio's treatise on perspective, published in Paris in 1545. This is especially true of the townscape of the comic stage. When depicting other genres, such as the pastoral, or the half-town, half-forest stage set and other hybrid forms with more complex stage iconography, our illustrators, whether because they lacked stage experience, iconographic precedents, or because a literal depiction of the stage setting was not convenient or possible for them, are suspiciously imprecise and elusive. The orientation of the arranged spatial structure of the perspective stage suddenly seems to dissolve. In some cases, as with the title-page illustration to the tragicomedy *The Strenuous Female Soldier* (*La gelosa guerriera*, I/49), where Pantalone and the other soldiers stand in an unspecified setting, no background at all is

defined. Other characters act before distant landscapes. One example of this is the background to *Adrasto* (*L'Adrasto*, I/37), which, with its *argomento*, *prologo*, and *intermezzi*, is the collection's only tragedy in five acts. Its title page (Plate 4) depicts a visual interpretation of the *argomento*, which precedes the scenario. In the foreground, the secret envoy of the King of Thrace informs Capitanio Demonatte of the approaching Thracian army. Moreover, it also depicts the fleet, guided by the beacon lit on the mountain by Leontio, heading for the fortress, while King Filippo protectively holds his hands in front of his sons Adrasto and Teodoro. This kind of title page, with a tripartite composition, more closely follows the rules of Renaissance painting than the spatial structure of any stage setting.

Iconographic relationships to the depicted Corsini stage settings

Given that the Corsini illustrators are thought to have moved in academic circles, published book illustrations offer a fruitful source of possible iconographic precedents for the Corsini stages. Locating a network of dated iconographic references would also facilitate more accurate dating of the manuscript. This desirable goal would help clarify the intertextual references and their chronological relationships, a subject of much discussion in connection with the Corsini *scenari* and Basilio Locatelli's collection of 103 *scenari* in two manuscript volumes dated 1618 and 1622.¹⁸ The last significant study of the Corsini collection, published more than fifteen years ago by Aasted, overlooks the collection's lack of consistent mask types — a feature whose presence would suggest that the collection belonged to a single troupe. Pandolfi, noting this feature, used it not to reject the idea that the collection represented one troupe's repertory but to show that it did not represent the repertory of professional *comici*. Also relevant in this context is the similarity in textual quality and length between the first ten Corsini *scenari* and those of the generally more detailed Locatelli *scenari*. This quality distances these examples from the basic function of the scenario, as generally defined, which is to provide a brief informative summary of the plot, performance, and stage business. It also raises interesting questions. Did all 100 Corsini *scenari* really originate in professional circles? Were some adapted for academic performances?

With the help of watermarks dating from the 1570s to the 1590s, Aasted dated the manuscript to the late sixteenth century.¹⁹ Aasted's methodology for dating the manuscript is at odds with previous scholarship. Her differen-

tiation between the dating of the text and the dating of the leather bindings goes against the long-held assumption that the Corsini collection was based on Locatelli's collection. Now, new evidence suggests that the production date of the Corsini text and illustrations does not, after all, correspond with the date of the paper. Typical transcription errors indicate that the Corsini manuscript is itself copied from probably partially much older material. Perhaps it is even a copy of the same barely readable sheets of paper that, as Locatelli notes in the preface to his collection, served him for his *soggetti*. The watermarks appear on the text *and* picture pages, and the question of why decades-old paper was used for transcribing and illustrating these *scenari* remains unanswered.

Certainly, the manuscript cannot predate the 1603 founding of the *Accademia dei Umoristi*, given hidden signatures, noted by Tina Beltrame as early as 1931, on two of the title pages.²⁰ The marked stylistic similarities between the title-page illustrations for *The Slave-Girl* (*La schiava*, I/2) and *The Exchanged Daughters* (Plate 3), whose foreshortened streets without side exits are the only such stage sets in the collection, indicate their composition by the same artist. Although his hand cannot be found elsewhere in the collection, he left two signed pictures. Their inscriptions, 'L'Occulto. Ac.^{co} Hum. sta', hidden beneath glued-on pieces of paper and revealed only when they are held up to the light, link this copyist or illustrator to this *Accademia*.

Evidence for a somewhat later date of origin than 1603 can also be found in *The Exchanged Daughters*, in a textual passage noting a fire caused by Turks in Reggio di Calabria as having taken place fifteen years previously. Historical documentation of an incident of this type in 1594 indicates that this scenario was written down around 1609. Images relating to the Corsini illustrations point to an even later date of origin. Their closeness to the illustrations to the comedy *Il Pantalone imbertonao* (1617), by the Roman painter and theatre practitioner Giovanni Briccio, is striking (Figure 2). His woodcuts show typical *commedia all'improvviso* characters in a stage setting distinguished by two accessible houses in the foreground and a perspective backdrop. One could almost assume that the comic stage of the Corsini manuscript dissolves Briccio's backcloth into the urban setting of a deeper perspective stage, based on the spatial construction of perspective stages such as that of the Terence illustrations of 1591.²¹

This issue becomes even more fascinating if one considers the ideal kind of stage for the Corsini pastorals, with their numerous transformations and special effects. In addition to sudden changes of location and effects such as



Fig. 2. Stage with painted perspective backdrop, woodcut. Book illustration in Giovanni Briccio, *Il Pantalone imbertonao* (Viterbo, 1617).

fire, rain, a collapsing tower, mountains that open up, rainbows, and ‘flying’ gods or eagles, these pastorals specify sea ogres to be emerged from, dolphins to be ridden, and boats to be sailed. Such effects require a stage equipped with complex machinery of a type owned by no contemporary travelling troupe. All previous studies have concluded that these title-page illustrations represent a stage with Serlian angle-wings. None have questioned the capacity of this type of stage to meet the technical requirements of *all* the collection’s *scenari*. In the case of the pastoral *The Ship* (*La nave*, I/33), in particular, with its liberal use of elaborate stage machinery and scene changes, the question arises whether a baroque perspective stage equipped with scenery would have been more appropriate. In keeping with their diverse dates of origin, the Corsini *scenari* have very diverse technical requirements. Taken as a whole, their stage effects refer to performances of the academic courtly milieu. Jacques Callot, for instance, shows us such a stage, with perspective scenery and the obligatory mountain of the pastoral, in his engraving of the Uffizi theatre.²²

Further iconographic relationships link the Corsini illustrations to published book illustrations. One can draw parallels between the landscape-like composition of the title-page illustration to *Orlando furioso* and the illustrations in B. Guarini’s *Il pastor fido* (1602); likewise, the staging for *The Love Spell* (*L’amorosi incanti*, I/12), with its burning houses, strongly recalls P. Bonarelli’s *Il Solimano* (1622). A watercolour for the first *intermezzo* performed during the 1623 academic staging of A. Adimari’s *Il pianto di Ezechia* exhibits the typical stage design of the Corsini comedies.²³ I am not suggesting that the Corsini illustration was based directly on this astonishingly similar watercolour. Given the lack of comparative visual material, however, the *intermezzo* watercolour offers a possible reference point for determining when knowledge of perspective stage iconography became established in this way. Similar comparisons can be made with an engraving of 1618, which

shows the *Teatro degli Intrepidi* in Ferrara,²⁴ or with the illustration in Nicola Sabbatini's treatise of 1638.²⁵

Iconographic relationships to the depicted Corsini characters

The iconography of the characters relates more closely to the generalities of the character types, and less closely to the specific costume details defining individual named characters. The iconography of the *commedia all'improvviso*, already standardized by the beginning of the seventeenth century, provided the illustrators with an approved formula from which they did not depart but which they strongly simplified and standardized. The characters with the most recognizable and familiar visual characteristics, such as Pantalone, Zanni, Gratiano, or Capitano, are depicted according to the standard iconography. Others, such as the Innamorati, the second Zanni, or maidservants, are rendered in a type of generalized iconography that ignores the individual characteristics of specific named parts. For instance, when two Innamorati are depicted, they always wear similar clothes, differentiated only by contrasting colours. Nevertheless, the Corsini *scenari* feature a few more unusual characters, such as slaves. The *scenari* provide no information concerning their appearance or costumes. Yet *The Two Slave-Girls* (*Le due schiave* I/16; Plate 2), for example, depicts slaves in distinctive iron collars whose shape is very similar to the collar found on the title page of G.B. Andreini's *Lo schiavetto* (1620; Figure 3).

The illustrators were evidently working at a time when knowledge of character types and confidence with respect to the perspective stage and stage effects was such that they could, at least, reproduce them to some degree. This consistency, and the various iconographic relationships that have been noted, encourage a dating of the illustrations, and consequently also the text, to after the 1620s. Thus, the origin of the whole manuscript can be dated to the time of its binding. This dating is distinct from the various dates of the original *scenari* from which they were copied.²⁶ Numerous intertextual references to the *scenari* of Botarga, Scala, Locatelli, Correr, and others amply demonstrate that the mobile structure of this genre allows adaption and variation.²⁷ Questions concerning the extent to which actual experience of theatrical practice influenced the depiction of the Corsini foregrounds cannot currently be answered conclusively. Unexplained issues include the iconography of the servant Bertolino in the illustration to the pastoral *The Magician*, and some other Zannis or second errand boys who wear black costumes with red buttons, black or red feathered hats, and sometimes swords.²⁸



Fig. 3. *A slave*, woodcut. Frontispiece to Giovanni Battista Andreini, *Lo schiavetto* (Venezia, 1620).

I would suggest reading the manuscript as the result of a personal or collective symbolization,²⁹ the realization of a private vision in the public sphere, and certainly also as the confirmation and visualized expression of a personal plan. The Corsinian spatial construction, with its townscape based on a perspective that only delivers its full effect to a single audience seat, mirrors an arrogant, humanistically influenced and academic, courtly self-concern.³⁰ Through their references to the standard iconography, these illustrations display their illustrators' interest in the depiction of stage practice.

Meaning and function

The originality of the Corsini illustrators' compositions should by no means be undervalued. In transforming the textual information of these *scenari* into the visual medium, a remarkable achievement in terms of narrative painting takes place. Through this series of title-page watercolours, the artists developed a pictorial formula for the illustration and enhancement of textual material that was in itself not particularly accessible to the reader.³¹ Only the illustrations, composed in the exemplary tone of a treatise, enhanced these *scenari*, gathered from diverse sources dating from various centuries, in such a way as to satisfy the curiosity of educated observers capable of understanding visual and textual conventions. By combining the movable stage sets depicted in the visual tradition of academic stages with the standard iconography of the *commedia all'improvviso*, the Corsini illustrators create an innovative visual composition. This original strategy enabled them to create the richest known collection of

scenic depictions dating to the early phase of the *commedia all'improvviso*. Its iconographic combination of cultural systems that rarely came together in real life reflects the socio-cultural environment within which the manuscript was created. These illustrations, I suggest, express a transfiguring vision which rises above the practicalities of theatrical practice to harness *commedia all'improvviso* iconography for its own purposes. Through this manuscript, its creators, patrons, and readers embedded the *commedia all'improvviso* into its own paradigm. Despite their aesthetic shortcomings, the Corsini illustrations radiate as much confidence in the ethically and morally superior status of their patron and his circle of amateur courtly actors, by comparison with paid professional actors, as they do in the amateurs' technical advances on the stage. This attitude becomes explicit on the title page of *The Comedy in the Comedy*, whose depiction of the professional comedians, engaged to perform at a festival, relegates them to a simple trestle stage with painted backdrop.³² By embedding *commedia all'improvviso* iconography into the Corsini manuscript as decorative ornament in its own right, these illustrations raised the status of the manuscript as a whole to an exemplary paradigm of academic collecting activity, a highly sought after book-collector's curiosity, whose safe-keeping on the shelves of the cardinal's library ensured its survival for modern researchers.

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Notes

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- 1 *Raccolta di Scenari Più scelti D'istrioni. Divisi in Due Volumi coll'Indice de'Soggetti nella seg. pag.*, MS 45.G. 5/6, Biblioteca Corsiniana, Roma. Except as otherwise noted, the titles of individual scenarios given here are taken from this manuscript, with volume and scenario number indicated in brackets.
- 2 Maria Del Valle Ojeda Calvo, *Stefanelo Botarga e Zan Ganassa. Scenari e zibaldoni di comici italiani nella Spagna del Cinquecento* (Roma, 2007); Anna Maria Testaverde, *I canovacci della commedia dell'arte. Trascrizione dei testi e note di Anna Evangelista, prefazione di Roberto De Simone* (Torino, 2007). Ojeda Calvo's study of Stefanelo Botarga's *zibaldone*, which includes the oldest known *scenari* texts, provides new biographical information on Botarga as an actor and troupe-leader, and explores its

- intertextual relationships. Testaverde's scholarly scenario edition is especially notable for its consideration of little known scenario collections.
- 3 'Humanitas und Zivilisation im Spiegel der italienischen Improvisationskomödie des 16. Jahrhunderts', funding: Swiss National Science Foundation (Schweizerischer Nationalfonds), 2005–9.
 - 4 M.A. Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560–1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records* (Amsterdam, 2006), 25, 183–4, 262–3; Angelika Leik, *Frühe Darstellungen der Commedia dell'Arte: Eine Theaterform als Bildmotiv* (Neuried, 1996).
 - 5 Daniele Vianello, *L'arte del buffone. Maschere e spettacolo tra Italia e Baviera nel XVI secolo* (Roma, 2005). On the 'Fools' Staircase' frescos, see also Leik, *Frühe Darstellungen*, 40–105, esp. 103–5; Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 46–53; and Figure 5 of Aliverti's article in this issue.
 - 6 Tina Beltrame, 'Gli scenari del Museo Correr', *Giornale storico della letteratura Italiana* 97 (1931), 1–48; John H. McDowell, 'Some pictorial aspects of early commedia dell'arte acting', *Studies in Philology* 39 (1942), 47–64.
 - 7 Kathleen M. Lea, *Italian popular comedy: A Study in the Commedia dell'Arte 1560–1620 with Special Reference to the English Stage* (1934), 2 vols (New York, 1962), 2: 139–44.
 - 8 Alois Maria Nagler, 'The commedia drawings of the Corsini scenari', *Maske und Kothurn* 15 (1969), 6–10.
 - 9 *La Commedia dell'Arte: Storia e testo*, 6 vols, Vito Pandolfi (ed.), (Firenze, 1955), 5: 256b.
 - 10 Marianne Hallar, *Teaterspil og tegnsprog: Ikonografiske studier i commedia dell'arte (Theater and sign-language: Iconographic studies in the commedia dell'arte)* (København, 1977), 57–9.
 - 11 Luciano Mariti, *Commedia ridicolosa. Comici di professione, dilettanti, editoria teatrale nel Seicento: Storia e testi* (Roma, 1978), CXLIII.
 - 12 Ludovico Zorzi, 'Intorno alla commedia dell'arte', *Forum Italicum* 14.3 (1980), 432.
 - 13 Elsebeth Aasted, 'What the Corsini Scenari can tell us about the Commedia dell'Arte', *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* (Roma, 1992), 159–82. On page 162, Aasted refers to the famous passage in the memoirs of Giacomo Casanova, who described such an instance in the 1740s.
 - 14 On the methodologies of theatre iconography see the collaborative book authored by Thomas F. Heck et al, *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice*, T. F. Heck (ed.) (Rochester, 1999), as well as Christopher Balme et al (eds), *European Theatre Iconography: Proceedings of the European Science Foundation Network* (Roma, 2002).

- 15 Elsebeth Aasted, 'The Corsini Scenarios: The Oldest Surviving Commedia dell'Arte Collection', *Nordic Theatre Studies* 4 (1991), 106.
- 16 Alternatively, with a view to making the highest possible impact on the spectator, they depict *lazzi*, *burle* or impressive technical stage effects.
- 17 Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, esp. 120–39 and plates 62–211.
- 18 Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense.
- 19 Aasted, 'The Corsini Scenarios'; Aasted, 'What the Corsini Scenari Can Tell Us'.
- 20 See Beltrame, 'Gli scenari del Museo Correr', 32; on the *Umoristi*, see Michele Maylender, *Storia delle accademie d'Italia*, 5 vols (Bologna, 1976), 5: 370.
- 21 Some are reproduced in *Dionysos: Archivio di iconografia teatrale* (Corazzano, 2006) (henceforth referred to as DAIT 2006).
- 22 Jacques Callot, *Il balletto* (intermezzo from *La liberazione di Tirreno e d'Arnea*) (Firenze, 1617). For the engraving cf. DAIT 2006, YN379.
- 23 Cf. DAIT 2006, YP523.
- 24 Cf. DAIT 2006, KB829.
- 25 *Pratica di fabricar scene e macchine ne' teatri*, cf. DAIT 2006, XM682.
- 26 The origins of Corsini *scenari* such as *La spada mortale* (II/95) go back to the second half of the sixteenth century. See Anna Maria Testaverde, 'Stanze pubbliche e Accademia privata nel viaggio di un testo scenico tra Italia e Spagna', *Medioevo e rinascimento* 14 (2000), 243–71.
- 27 Ojeda Calvo, *Stefanelo Botarga e Zan Ganassa*; Flaminio Scala, *Il teatro delle favole rappresentative*, Ferruccio Marotti (ed.) (Milano 1976); Carmelo Alberti (ed.), *Gli scenari Correr: la commedia dell'arte a Venezia* (Roma, 1996). Several of Locatelli's *scenari* have been edited, for example in Testaverde, *I canovacci*.
- 28 For excellent reproductions of the title-page illustration of *Il mago* (I/13) and other Corsini illustrations, see Testaverde, *I canovacci*, 118 ff.
- 29 The terminology is from Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (2001) (München, 3rd ed. 2006), 11–12.
- 30 This spatial concept should not be taken as a key feature or precondition for the stages of *commedia all'improvviso*, which, as the familiar spectrum of visual documents shows, could be performed on much less technically sophisticated stages.
- 31 For terms such as 'series', see Cesare Molinari, 'Notes about Series in Theatre Iconography', *European Theatre Iconography* (Bulzoni, 2002), 85–92.
- 32 *La Commedia in Commedia* (I/34) is pictured in Testaverde, *I canovacci*, 630a.