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I

Prologue

Virtù, fama ed onor: ne fer i Gelosi

Virtue, fame, and honour: of these are the Gelosi made

So reads the *impresa* of the longest-standing *commedia dell'arte* company to hold the Renaissance stage. Formed in imitation of the intellectual academies of northern Italy, the Gelosi took for their own this proud motto and the sign of the Janus face, which looks both back to the classical past, with its ancient harmonies of intoned poetry and mystical powers of representation, and forward to a new golden age of theatre in which women mount the stage with men to sing and speak with sibylline authority. This golden age endured for fifty years, although its classical foundations and inclusion of women in the profession continue into the present, and the three generations of the *Compagnia dei Gelosi*, together with the first flowering of its heir, the *Compagnia dei Fedeli*, comprehend its entirety. This book narrates the story of the Gelosi and the Fedeli in this first era of the *commedia dell'arte*, focusing in particular on the representation of women on stage and on the role of music-making in their craft.

The Milanese printer Pandolfo Malatesta marks a precise beginning of this golden age of theatre, ascribing the genesis of the *commedia dell'arte* to an era of peace in Italy, when thoughts of survival gave way to dreams of life and compassion. His dedication to Alessandro Striggio of Giovan Battista Andreini's comedy *Lo schiavetto* in 1612 associates the new practice with the political calm granted by the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, signed by Henri II of France and Philip II of Spain in 1559: 'From those years, when beautiful Italy began to enjoy a tranquil peace, almost as a restorative to the hardship of such continuous wars, the most valiant persons began to rediscover the ancient forgotten practice of performing comedies.'¹

¹ G. B. Andreini, *Lo schiavetto* (ed. Falavolti), dedication, 57: 'Da quegli anni, che la bella

As important as is his chronological contextualization of *commedia dell'arte* practice, Malatesta associates the performance of comedies with politics, characterizing the art form as a reprise from, and even an antidote to, war. Numerous documents confirm this relationship, from the declaration by the historian Pietro Mattei that one comedienne's performances were commonly used by princes to exorcize the turbulent moods of the French populace, to the Count of Fuentes's request in 1601 that Vincenzo Gonzaga send his comedians to Milan to perform for the conclave of the papal legate Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini and the Duke of Savoy.² Bound to politics and civic life by Aristotelian philosophies of art in the service of the state, *commedia dell'arte* performances thus mirror the societies for which they were created in a manner that is both profound and perverse. Humour, with all its distortions, lies at the core, but as an adjective, modifying the critiques, commentaries, and satires comedians made of the world around them.

It is the dramatist Angelo Ingegneri who, in 1598, distinguishes stagecraft in this era by its imitation of ancient Greek and Roman ideals and the introduction of 'virgins and honest women' to the stage.³ While the appearance of women on stage might at first seem to invoke a simple sense of realism in an otherwise fantastical art form, the resulting exercise of female authority virtually requires the invocation of classical reasoning in order to justify women's expression, although the relationship is hardly one of cause and effect. This is, in my view, the central precept of the *commedia dell'arte*, which distinguishes it from *commedia vulgare* and *commedia erudita*. As will be seen in the pages that follow, classicizing themes arise over and over again as Renaissance writers strive to define the authoritative voice in new ways to encompass the speech of women. Conceptions of Aristotelian *virtù*, Neoplatonic divine madness, and sibylline prophecy—at times wonderfully contorted and often intertwined—form the foundation of nearly all descriptions of comediennes in performance, allowing for the expression of emotional excess and its subsequent regulation by social norms. The ubiquitous staging of contests between actresses similarly rests on ideas of enacting transcendence from

Italia cominciò pur a godere una tranquilla pace, quasi a restoro de' travagli di tante continuate guerre, cominciarono valentissimi personaggi a ritrovare l'antico tralasciato uso del rappresentar comedie.'

² Pietro Mattei, *Della perfetta historia di Francia*, trans. Alessandro Sanesio (Venice, 1625), 227; ASM, Autografi, cart. 95, fasc. 19bis.

³ Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa* (ed. Doglio), 4–8.

discord to concord, and the performance of music, especially singing, is often given as proof of a comedienne's attainment of celestial virtue and god-like authority.

Contributing to both Ingegneri's and Malatesta's formulations of this first era of the *commedia dell'arte* are the fortunes of the noble houses that patronized comedians and their troupes. Foremost among them stood the Medici and, in particular, the generations comprising Eleonora, Ferdinando, and Maria. Medici patronage, by definition, had a strong French cast due to the long history of interwoven relations between the two courts (not for nothing does the Medici coat of arms bear the fleur de lis), and this intertwining of French and Tuscan affairs was further strengthened by the weddings of Ferdinando de' Medici to Christine of Lorraine in 1589 and of Maria de' Medici to Henri IV in 1600. Many *commedia dell'arte* performances during this period thus enunciated a dialogue between French and Florentine politics and styles. Medici influence radiated also to Mantua with the wedding of Eleonora de' Medici to Vincenzo Gonzaga in 1584, and the Mantuan court gained prominence thereafter as a centre of *commedia dell'arte* production. Indeed, by the end of the century, and especially after the devolution of Ferrara to papal rule, when Vincenzo Gonzaga undertook a programme reminiscent of the Caesars of bestowing citizenship on his prized actors and musicians, Mantua became the undisputed epicentre of theatrical activity in Italy.

But when, within the space of three years from 1609 to 1612, Ferdinando de' Medici, Henri IV, Eleonora de' Medici, and Vincenzo Gonzaga died, the *commedia dell'arte* suffered a blow from which it never recovered, and these events mark the final close of its first, golden age. The subsequent era of *commedia dell'arte* production centred initially, as one would expect, around the court of Maria de' Medici, as comedians spent more time in the French capitol. Beyond this geographical shift, however, the *commedia dell'arte* in this second era was characterized by the increased production of composed plays—including the nascent genres of *dramma per musica* and 'opera reale' in addition to comedy, pastoral, tragedy, and tragicomedy—and the publication of fully texted dramas, often with instructions on how to perform them, became an increasingly important part of the profession. What had been an era of avant-garde performance turned quite suddenly into a time of documentation and commemoration.

The Compagnia dei Gelosi, whose *impresa* opens this chapter, came into existence at the beginning of Malatesta's tranquil peace and endured

until the year of the second treaty of the Pax Hispanica.⁴ From the start, as if in proof of Ingegneri's portrayal of the craft, the troupe was primarily identified with its leading actresses, the first surviving notice of the Gelosi's activities dating from a contest held in Mantua between the comedienne Vincenza Armani and a Roman called Flaminia in 1567. Armani was the troupe's first *prima donna innamorata*, and her talents for oratory, singing, and musical and poetic composition made her the most lauded actress of the 1560s. Vittoria Piisimi reigned over the Gelosi's next incarnation, and she too brought a lively talent for music, and especially for dancing, to her art. The third generation was that of Isabella Andreini (née Canali), whose magnificence came to define the company that died with her in Lyons on 10 June 1604.

When the Gelosi disbanded, some of their members retired, as did the bereaved Francesco Andreini, while others looked to Isabella's and Francesco's son and daughter-in-law to lead them. Thus, most of the Gelosi brought the era to a close as members of the Compagnia dei Fedeli, the troupe established by Giovan Battista Andreini and his wife Virginia. Cast in the mould of the Compagnia dei Gelosi, the Fedeli came under the patronage of Eleonora de' Medici and Vincenzo Gonzaga in Mantua, and they spent much of their time performing in the Mantuan capital—most significantly for the wedding celebrations of Francesco Gonzaga and Margherita of Savoy in 1608. Virginia Andreini (née Ramponi), once a member of the Gelosi and *prima donna innamorata* of the Fedeli, represents the last generation of the era and she, like her predecessors Vincenza Armani, Vittoria Piisimi, and Isabella Andreini, received high praise for her musical skills. In particular, Virginia Andreini was known as a fine singer and a virtuosa of the five-course Spanish guitar.

Together with the Gelosi's leading actresses, the comedians who formed the core of the ensemble quite rightly called themselves 'comico geloso' or 'comica gelosa'. The appellation was a proud one, which had effect even after the troupe disbanded in 1604, and individual members reminded patrons of their quality by invoking the almost mythical name. In addition to the Gelosi's leading actresses, among the longest-standing members of the company were Adriano Valerini and Silvia Roncagli, Giovanni Pellesini (*in arte* Pedrolino), Giulio Pasquati da Padova

⁴ The Pax Hispanica was negotiated in three major treaties: the Treaty of Vervins in 1598, the Treaty of London in 1604, and the Treaty of Antwerp in 1609. See Paul Allen, *Philip III and the Pax Hispanica*, pp. vii–xi.

(Pantalone), Lodovico de' Bianchi (Dottor Graziano), Flaminio Scala, and Francesco Andreini. Other comedians known to have performed with the troupe at various times in its history include Giovan Battista and Virginia Andreini, Orazio de' Nobili, his wife Vittoria, and their son Flaminio, Simone Basilea, Gabrielle Panzanini, Giovan Paolo Fabbri, Lutio Fedele, Girolamo Salimbeni, Nora fiorentina, and Aurelia romana.

The troupe's membership, however, like that of any *commedia dell'arte* company, rarely remained fixed for long and various members performed with other companies as well. Illustration of the ease with which individual comedians entered and exited the troupe is perhaps best served by the examples of Isabella Andreini and Vittoria Piisimi, two of the Gelosi's *prime donne*. Both performed with the troupe in the festivities for the Medici wedding of 1589, but in the Milanese licence dated 15 October the following year, neither Isabella nor Francesco Andreini was named.⁵ Perhaps Isabella was pregnant and temporarily needed to avoid the rigours of work, or perhaps she and Francesco travelled from Florence directly to Rome, where they attended the inauguration of the new Pope, Urban VII.⁶ In any event, they left the Gelosi for a while, and the Andreinis' licences in 1591 refer to 'Isabella and her company'.⁷ At the time of Cosimo II de' Medici's baptism on 26 April 1592, however, the Gelosi and the Andreini were together again in Florence on the recommendation of Emilio de' Cavalieri, and payments for the troupe were made to Francesco Andreini.⁸ At about the same time, Piisimi began performing with the *Confidenti*. But in 1595 Piisimi again requested a licence in Milan for herself and the Gelosi, while Francesco Andreini sought permission for the *Compagnia degli Uniti* to perform in Bologna. The composition of the Gelosi thus changed regularly, and sometimes significantly, although the basic identity of the troupe remained intact.⁹

Patrons, too, often worked to form new companies, putting their favourite performers together for a season or for a specific occasion.¹⁰ But

⁵ ASM, Registri delle Cancellerie, serie XXI, no. 23, fo. 119^v.

⁶ Isabella Andreini dedicated a sonnet, 'Quando i tuoi chiari, e gloriosi honori', to the new pope Giovan Battista Castagna for the occasion.

⁷ ASF, Mediceo del Principato, filza 2941, 7 Jan. 1591; 29 Mar. 1591.

⁸ ASF, Filze strozziane, serie I, fasc. 27, fos. 2^r, 6^r.

⁹ See the Chronology, 16 June and 15 Oct. 1595.

¹⁰ The calendar year is typically divided into four seasons of *commedia dell'arte* production. The carnival season, when comedians tend to perform publicly, extends from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday. It is followed by Quaresima or Lent, when comedies are generally

this is not to say that the social fabric of the *commedia dell'arte* was chaotic. It was instead a highly energized and fluctuating system of artists who sometimes dealt individually and sometimes collectively with each other, with their patrons, and with the owners or managers of public performing spaces, making both permanent and temporary alliances. The resulting hierarchy of allegiances was complicated, and many comedians exercised a diplomacy worthy of ambassadorial rank in maintaining good relations with all concerned. When, for example, in 1583, Vincenzo Gonzaga wanted to create a virtuoso comic ensemble to perform for his wedding to Eleonora de' Medici, Francesco Andreini politely refused the summons on behalf of himself and his wife, explaining to the Mantuan prince that they were obligated to the Gelosi and to the patron of the *stanza delle commedie* in Venice:

Most serene sir. I understand from your highness's musician Sig. Antonio your desire and good intentions regarding the New Company that you would like to assemble. And because I hold myself very much obliged to your highness's most good graces, I cannot, without great displeasure, thank you for your most courteous intention, in having made me worthy, together with my wife, to be numbered among such a worthy company, since, finding myself bound by faith to the Gelosi, and in particular to Sig. Alvisè Michiel, patron of the hall in Venice, I am constrained to decline the offer. [Nor can I fulfil] your highness's wish, since, to put together this company requires breaking up three, which is difficult, even though to your highness every most difficult thing is very easy to do. Moreover, because I am in Ferrara by myself, I lack the ability to offer the Gelosi to your highness's service without the agreement of the others in the company. With which I pray that you will keep my wife and me among the number of your least servants and in your good graces. I kiss your most worthy hands, together with my wife, praying to Our Lord for your happiness and exaltation. From Ferrara, 13 April 1583. Your highness's most humble servant, Francesco Andreini, *comico geloso*.¹¹

Andreini's letter is an extremely important document. It not only contains an illustration of the webs of obligation governing *commedia dell'arte* performers in the late sixteenth century, but it provides us also with a sense of comedians' stature within the hierarchy of the Renaissance

prohibited. The summer season tends to run from just after Easter to around 15 Sept., during which time a company will usually accompany a ruler to the summer residence of his or her court. The *commedia dell'arte* troupe will then usually relocate to another court for the winter season, which includes the December holidays and New Year.

¹¹ Doc. 9.

court. For although comedians were itinerant, performing for various rulers and in public spaces as well as private, they most certainly entered into the sociology of the court and occupied clearly defined positions within it.

Francesco Andreini's polite refusal to Vincenzo Gonzaga, together with other documents, indicates that comedians and musicians shared similar status at the Mantuan court and that some of their duties were interchangeable. The Antonio Ricio to whom Andreini referred was a Mantuan musician who had been sent in April 1583 to visit the Este court in Ferrara, not only to treat with Francesco, but to also assess the quality of the *concerto delle donne*.¹² At the same time, another musician named Filippo Angelone, a *cantore* in the chapel of Giaches de Wert, was the official purveyor of comedians' licences in Mantua, a position conferred on him on 14 March 1580. This post later devolved to the comedian Tristano Martinelli, who replaced Angelone nineteen years later, on 29 April 1599. Further evidence of activities shared among comedians and musicians at the Mantuan court dates from the earliest years of the seventeenth century, when Giovan Battista and Virginia Andreini collaborated on several projects with the composer Claudio Monteverdi and his brother Giulio Cesare, including the performances of *Arianna* and *Il ballo delle ingrate* in Mantua in 1608 and of *Il rapimento di Proserpina* in Casale in 1611, and the composition of *La Maddalena*, published in 1617.

Francesco Andreini's enunciation of comedians' allegiances opens up a world of elaborate ties, formal and informal agreements, and standing versus temporary obligations. He mentioned two specifically and alluded to a third: first came the bond of faith to his company, which might be honourably broken only in consultation with the other members of the troupe, and second was his contractual obligation to the owner/manager of the Gelosi's performing space in Venice. Andreini's third obligation, peeking through the obsequious language of his letter, was his continuing relationship with Vincenzo Gonzaga as the ruler of one of a number of courts on which Andreini, his family, and his troupe depended for their livelihood.

The fact that Andreini was alone in Ferrara at the time of writing should not be taken to indicate that he had broken with the Gelosi, although his reluctance to speak on behalf of the company he clearly led is noteworthy. Both the tone and date of the letter suggest that the troupe

¹² Cavicchi, 'Lettere di musicisti ferraresi', 196.

had simply agreed to resume their performing schedule in Venice after the Lenten season and Easter holiday, during which time the performance of comedies was typically prohibited.¹³ Still, comedians straddled an inconvenient fence in maintaining relationships with noble patrons at the same time as they entered into contractual agreements with others, as Andreini's reference to Alvise Michiel indicates. One such negotiation, between Vittoria Piisimi and Alfonso II d'Este, shows how disastrous the results could be. Obligated by contract to the owner of another of Venice's *stanze delle commedie* during carnival in 1581, Piisimi politely refused a summons from Alfonso II to return to Ferrara together with her colleague Pedrolino. In spite of a consoling letter of explanation written on 4 January by the owner of the theatre, which accompanied a similar letter from Piisimi, the duke's anger was not assuaged, and Piisimi again begged his forgiveness for both herself and Pedrolino after carnival ended.¹⁴ Clemency was not granted until the following year, however, and the next time Piisimi performed in Ferrara was on 18 June 1582.

Both Piisimi's and Francesco Andreini's negotiations involving performances at the *stanze delle commedie* in Venice allude to a great watershed in the history of theatrical production in Italy and especially of the *commedia dell'arte*: the openings of the Teatro Michiel and the Teatro Tron in the parish of San Cassan. In 1581, during a meagre carnival season that lasted only a month from 6 January to 8 February, the Teatro Michiel and the Teatro Tron for the first time offered theatrical productions to a ticket-buying public. Owned and operated by the sons of noble Venetian families, both theatres contracted with elite *commedia dell'arte* companies for the use of a regular hall, with permanent or semi-permanent audience seating and stage, lavish decoration, sets, and lighting.¹⁵ Actors and actresses like the Gelosi, used to performing in the galleries of ducal palaces, found a familiar, luxurious ambience in the *sestiere* Santa Croce's two *stanze delle commedie*. Francesco Sansovino's guidebook to 'Venice, noble and singular city', published that same year, gives a modest

¹³ It should be noted that *commedia dell'arte* troupes often continued to perform through the first few weeks of Lent, stopping just short of the fourth Sunday in Quaresima. The week before Easter and the octave of the feast, however, were held sacred.

¹⁴ ASMO, Archivio per materie, Comici, letters from Vittoria Piisimi to Alfonso II d'Este, 4 Jan. and 5 Mar. 1581; Ettore Tron to Alfonso II d'Este, 4 and 26 Jan. 1581.

¹⁵ Examples of late 16th-c. technology regarding stage sets and theatrical lighting are well preserved in the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, which was built in 1585 by the Accademia Olimpica to designs by the renowned architect Andrea Palladio. See Rigon, *The Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza*.

announcement of the theatres that provided permanent, indoor stages to professional comedians and which made impresarios of the noblemen who owned them: 'Not far from this Church of San Cassan are two theatres, very beautifully built at great expense, one in the form of an oval and the other round, with a capacity for a great number of people, for reciting comedies during the carnival season, according to the customs of the city.'¹⁶

The Teatro Michiel stood on the opposite side of the Grand Canal from Ca' d'Oro, tucked in just behind the Palazzo Brandolin on the Rio di San Cassan. The hall was built in the shape of an amphitheatre; Sansovino called its interior measurements capacious at approximately 20 × 21 m. Owned by the Michiel family and run by the then 36-year-old Alvisè and his brothers, the Teatro Michiel was open only a short time, and documentation of its activity ceased by 1608.¹⁷

Christoforo Ivanovich, writing one hundred years after the Teatro Michiel's opening, recorded its inauguration with performances by the Bolognese comedian Francesco Gabrielli (*in arte* Scapino). Ivanovich's chronicle must be discounted, however, because Scapino, born in 1588, could hardly have graced the Venetian stage seven years earlier. The writer simply may have confused Gabrielli with his father, Giovanni (*in arte* Sivello), also a famous comedian and, like his son, the owner and player of a magnificent collection of exotic musical instruments. Or, he may have been altogether wrong, for a letter written by the Mantuan comedian Drusiano Martinelli (the brother of Tristano) on 17 October 1580 suggests that it was in fact the Gelosi who performed for the Teatro Michiel's opening season.

In his letter, Martinelli offered the services of his company to Duke Guglielmo Gonzaga for the carnival season of 1581, 'since the Gelosi and the Confidenti will be in Venice'.¹⁸ Franco Mancini and the other editors of the monumental series *I teatri del Veneto* have taken this to signify that the Gelosi performed for the opening of the Teatro Michiel, since it is known that the Confidenti, then led by Vittoria Pissimi and Giovanni Pellesini (Pedrolino), inaugurated the other of Venice's new theatres, the

¹⁶ Sansovino, *Venezia città nobilissima*, 175. Cfr. Mancini et al., *I teatri di Venezia*, 94: 'Sono poco distanti da questo Tempio [di San Cassan] due Teatri bellissimi edificati, con spesa grande, l'uno in forma ovata et l'altro rotonda, capaci di gran numero di persone; per recitarvi ne' tempi del Carnevale, Comedie, secondo l'uso della città.'

¹⁷ See Mancini et al., *I teatri di Venezia*, p. xviii.

¹⁸ ASMN, Gonzaga, Autografi, b. 10, fo. 130^r.

Teatro Tron. But Martinelli, too, was mistaken, for the Gelosi did not go to Venice. The company were in Bologna throughout the carnival season of 1581, as may be seen in the account books of the Monasterio Corpus Domini, to which they made weekly payments of L.100 in alms.¹⁹ And on 25 April, Jacopo d'Osimo in Bologna wrote to Guglielmo Gonzaga to say that the comedians were on their way to Mantua, where they had been summoned to perform for the wedding festivities of Prince Vincenzo and Margherita Farnese.²⁰

In the end, nothing certain is known of the Teatro Michiel's inaugural performances, although I suspect that Isabella and Francesco Andreini, leading a company other than the Gelosi, performed there in 1581. This would make sense of Martinelli's assumption that both the Confidenti and the Gelosi were in Venice for the carnival season, while allowing for the Gelosi to be, in fact, in Bologna. The Andreinis' whereabouts in this period are not known, in that their names are not specified in any of the extant documentation, and so it is both possible and probable for them to be performing independently of the Gelosi. Francesco Andreini's letter of 1583, outlining the troupe's obligation to the owner of the Teatro Michiel, is the first extant notice of him and Isabella after the birth of their eldest son Giovan Battista in 1576, as well as the earliest known documentation of the theatre's operations.

The Teatro Michiel's sister theatre, the Teatro Tron, located at the intersection of the Rio di San Cassan and the Rio della Madonnetta, just off the Campo San Polo and directly opposite the Palazzo Albrizzi in what is now a public garden, opened its doors during carnival, 1581 with performances by Vittoria Piisimi, Giovanni Pellesini (Pedrolino), and company.²¹ This marks the initial period of activity of the theatre, which lasted

¹⁹ ASB, Assunteria di Munizione, Recapiti, b. 3, fasc. 18. Surprisingly, the Gelosi's donations to the Monasterio, which were a requirement of their contract to perform, continue past Ash Wednesday, abating only with the fourth week of Lent. Similarly, Vittoria Piisimi's letter of reconciliation to Alfonso II is dated the fourth Sunday of Lent. Bolognese contracts customarily require comedians to pay alms. See Documents, no. 8.

²⁰ Vincenzo Gonzaga was married twice: the first time to Margherita Farnese in 1581, a marriage that was annulled when Margherita failed to become pregnant, and the second time to Eleonora de' Medici, in 1584. For both occasions, the Prince negotiated with the Gelosi to perform for the nuptial celebrations. No descriptions of their performances, however, are known to survive.

²¹ A prolonged battle for performing rights at the Teatro Tron in 1619 demonstrates its financial appeal. From June to Dec., Flaminio Scala tried valiantly to oust Virginia and Giovan Battista Andreini and the Fedeli from the favoured venue. See Scala's letters to Giovanni de' Medici, dating June to Dec. 1619, in ASF, Mediceo, f. 5150. For excellent trans-

until 1629, when it was destroyed by fire. After the terrible plague that ravished Venice in 1630 and 1631, which years saw the deaths of Virginia Andreini, Tristano Martinelli, and Alessandro Striggio, the Teatro Tron reopened for the carnival season in 1633, only to burn again on 20 December of that year. Its second restoration did not begin until May 1636, when it was designated by the Council of Ten as a music hall and finally opened its doors again with a performance of Benedetto Ferrari's opera *L'Andromeda*.²² Although not specifically heralded as a 'teatro di musica' before 1636, the Teatro Tron in its earliest incarnation saw much music-making and deserves recognition as a site where the Venetian public paid to enjoy music and spectacle fifty-five years in advance of 'the first public opera house'.

In contrast with the propagandistic programme representing a court's wealth through staged spectacle, public theatres generally lack descriptive documentation. This is unfortunately true for Piisimi's and Pellesini's performances for the inauguration of the Teatro Tron. But diaries of other spectacles do survive that give us an idea of the comedians' individual styles of acting and of the role of music in their productions. Analysis of the documents surrounding their performances in Venice in 1574 and in Milan in 1594 allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the *commedia dell'arte* as well, by offering an introduction to the various theatrical genres that made up the Gelosi's repertory and to the characteristics that distinguished men's and women's performances.

Piisimi and Pellesini stood at the height of their profession in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Piisimi performed with the Gelosi for Henri III in 1574 in Venice when he travelled from Warsaw to Paris to take up the crown, and again in 1594 for the wedding of the Count of Harò in Milan—an event for which Pedrolino also took the stage.²³ For the representation of Cornelio Frangipani's *Tragedia* in Venice on 24 July 1574, Piisimi and her colleagues

criptions of Scala's notoriously sloppy hand, see *Comici dell'arte: corrispondenze*, 540–66. These and other notices of performances by Scapino, Cecchini, the Andreinis et al., and of negotiations concerning the Teatro Tron in this period, may be found in Mancini et al., *I teatri di Venezia*, 126–30.

²² Correr, MS Cicogna 3234, no. 6, *Sommario degli avvenimenti accaduti nella parrocchia di S. Cassano*, 'Teatro Tron ridotto in cenere'; Mancini et al., *I teatri di Venezia*, i, 97–100.

²³ ASV, Collegio IV, fol. 50; ASV, Senato III, Secreta, Lettere del Residente a Milano, 13 July 1574; BNF, ital. 1494, fo. 49; Frangipani, *Tragedia* (1574 edn.); Nolhac and Solerti, *Il viaggio in Italia di Enrico III Re di Francia*, 133–4, 144, 231. The last notice we have of Piisimi is 15 Oct. 1595; the dates of her birth and death are unknown.

recited in the manner derived from the form of the ancients: all the performers sang in the softest harmonies, sometimes singing alone, sometimes together; and at the end, the chorus of Mercury was of instrumentalists, who had the most various instruments that were ever played. The trumpets heralded the entrance of the gods on stage, which was done with a tragic machine that was impossible to regulate because of the great tumult of people who were there. Neither was it possible to imitate antiquity in the musical works, which were composed by Sig. Claudio Merulo, of such quality that the ancients could never aspire to it, nor of that of Monsig. Gioseffo Zarlino, who was occupied with the music played for the King on the Bucintoro, which set some of my Latin poetry, and with the [music for the] church of S. Marco. And he was the director of those [compositions] that were made continually at His Majesty's command.²⁴

Frangipani's description extends the compass of our understanding of comedians' talents and performing repertoires. It tells us not only that the Gelosi performed tragic texts set to music, but that they sang music composed by Claudio Merulo in both solo and accompanied settings. Moreover, it relates that their style of singing was suited to the neoclassical manner favoured by Renaissance humanists like Giovanni de' Bardi in Florence, whose *camerata* similarly began to imitate the ancient manner of combining music and rhetoric in the 1570s.

Merulo's settings for Frangipani's *Tragedia* unfortunately share the fate of much music performed on the *commedia dell'arte* stage in that they are not known to survive, and the above passage describing the 1574 performance—the sole known report of that entertainment—appears only as an addendum to the second edition of Frangipani's text.²⁵ The lyrics published in that edition, however, offer tenuous clues to their musical settings and to the performing styles of those who sang them. The resulting analysis becomes a kind of archaeology of musical performance, divining the shapes and character of entire vessels on the basis of a few random shards. In spite of its title, *Tragedia* appears to have been a set of *intermedi*—this because the entire text was sung and because it begins

²⁴ Frangipani, *Tragedia*, afterword to the second edition (see Documents, no. 4); cited in Nollhac and Solerti, *Il viaggio in Italia di Henri III*, 133–4.

²⁵ Indeed, the printed editions of *Tragedia* contain only musical lyrics, leading Nollhac and Solerti to hypothesize that the work more closely resembled a cantata than a play, which would make the employment of Piisimi and company as its performers extraordinary. It is not clear, however, that the work consisted only of the published text, and its performance by professional comedians suggests that additional spoken text may have been improvised, while the music and musical lyrics were composed. If not, Frangipani's *Tragedia* would be one of the earliest dramatic works set entirely to music.

with a prologue and ends with an encomiastic chorus. Most of the text is set in *ottava rima*, although Mars and the choruses sing in *versi sciolti* of varying stanza lengths and rhyme formations, freely alternating seven- and eleven-syllable lines and concluding each stanza with a rhyming couplet. The musical settings for Mars and the choruses were thus undoubtedly madrigals, some set for solo voice, as indicated above, and some sung in parts, as in the choruses of Amazons and Soldiers. The *ottave*, too, may have been set as madrigals, although the variation in poetic form suggests a corresponding difference in musical setting—perhaps they were sung over a ground bass or other recurring formula, in the manner of the *cantastorie*.²⁶

What is remarkable about this performance is its timing. On 10 July Aloisio Mocenigo in Venice wrote to Ottaviano Maggi in Milan to request that the Gelosi be sent with all speed in order to perform for the king. Three days later, the comedians requested permission of their patron Don Giovanni d’Austria to leave the city. And on the 21st, one week after they left Milan, Vittoria Piissimi and the Gelosi performed Frangipani’s *Tragedia* in Venice. That the comedians learned the music composed for the performance in less than a week’s time is impressive indeed. It also tempers the shock of Antonio Costantini’s remark during the winter of 1608 that Virginia Andreini similarly learned the role of Monteverdi’s *Arianna* in six days.²⁷ Whereas one might suspect Costantini of exaggerating about Andreini’s facile memory, Piissimi’s feat is circumscribed by physical fact, and the unassailable truth of it thus lends credence to the later report. Clearly, comedians were quick on their feet and could learn new material, be it music, poetry, or prose, at a speed we now find astonishing.

In some cases, as with Giovan Battista Andreini’s comedy *Lo schiavetto*, the written composition of theatrical material followed after any number of performances, and so the issue of memorization does not arise.²⁸ These compositions are most accurately characterized as codifications of an oral process, although as artefacts they do not appear to differ from works first conceived in writing. But to say that Merulo composed

²⁶ Haar discusses the possible musical genres for setting *ottava rima* in his book *Essays on Italian Poetry and Music*, 76–100.

²⁷ Costantini’s letter is transcribed by Solerti, *Gli albori*, i. 95, and translated in Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, trans. Carter, 83.

²⁸ As Andreini writes in his preface to *Lo schiavetto*, ‘Having exercised the comic arts for many years, such that I would be the inexpert gardener of such a flowering and fruitful orchard, I am nevertheless persuaded to put into print some of those subjects that I composed in performance (“composi recitando”).’

the music for *Tragedia* or that Monteverdi composed the music for *Arianna* implies that composition precedes performance in these works. And to show that comedians were able to learn and perform their parts in a matter of a few days suggests not only that their powers of memorization were acute, but confirms what we know from the existence of *scenari*—that their comprehension of texts was fundamentally structural, resulting in a dense intertwining of memorization and improvisation. Indeed, comedians may have constructed for themselves hermetic theatres of memory like that of Giulio Camillo, which combined memory theory with concepts of proportion, imagination, celestial harmony, and the dramatic arts. As Camillo wrote in his *Discorso in materia del suo teatro*,

I have read, I believe in Mercurius Trismegistus, that in Egypt there were such excellent makers of statues that when they had brought some statue to the perfect proportions it was found to be animated with an angelic spirit: for such perfection could not be without a soul. Similar to such statues, I find a composition of words, the office of which is to hold all the words in a proportion grateful to the ear . . . Which words as soon as they are put into the proportion are found when pronounced to be as it were animated by a harmony.²⁹

One needn't mythologize the comediennes who performed with the Gelosi to note how often ideas of facile memory, proportional perfection, an angelic spirit, and harmonious animation were invoked to describe them. The cleric Tomaso Garzoni, writing in *La piazza universale*, published in 1585, attributed to Vittoria Piisimi such non-sequiturs as 'proportionate gestures' and 'harmonious and concordant movements', and when Vincenza Armani sang, 'souls that no longer heard that true harmony which makes the stars move, melted in the ineffable sweetness [of the sound], remembering their celestial home'. In his discussion of Piisimi, Garzoni emphasized the nobility and refinement of the actress's manner, not only in this 1574 entertainment, but throughout her career. Using neoclassical terms of proportional beauty and enchantment, Garzoni accorded her the highest praise and suggested that her inspiration was conveyed by a harmonious voice that was sweet, soft, and penetrating:

But above all, the divine Vittoria, who metamorphoses herself on stage, seems to me worthy of the highest honours; that beautiful witch of love who entices the hearts of a thousand lovers with her words; that sweet siren who bewitches the souls of her devoted spectators with soft incantations, and who without doubt

²⁹ Camillo, *Discorso in materia*, in *Tutte le opere*, 33, as cited in Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 156.

deserves to be heralded as the summation of the art, having proportionate gestures, harmonious and concordant movements, majestic and welcome acts, affable and sweet words, lovely and cunning sighs, witty and gentle laughter, noble and generous deportment, and in her entire person a perfect decorum that is due to and belongs to a perfect comedienne.³⁰

Imagine the delight of Henri III in having such an enchantress perform for him. Pallas Athena, the leading female role in *Tragedia*, and therefore the role Vittoria Piisimi would have performed, sang a substantive and affective address to the French King ('Poi che veggio de' Dei questo soggiorno') and then, in the finale, a duet with Mars ('Spargiam piante felici allori, e mirti'). The duet was followed by a chorus, which concluded the work. Piisimi's appearance as a goddess in the entertainment implies that her entrance was heralded by a trumpet fanfare, as stated in Frangipani's description, and that she sang Merulo's melodies with the proportional perfection and harmonious manner due to music that surpasses the quality of ancient music. The rhetorical tropes contained in her opening aria betray its formula, which bears marked similarities to other sung introductory soliloquies of its kind:

Poi che veggio de' Dei questo soggiorno
 Così illustrarsi, e come de' bei lumi
 Celesti adorno farsi tutto Cielo,
 Vò discoprirmi, e uscir da quella nube
 Che me ha celato a gli occhi de' mortali
 Indegni di guardar celesti numi,
 Per parlar teco che tuoi detti rei
 Potriano tormi tutti gli honor miei.³¹

(Since I see this abode of the gods so disclose itself, and how the heavens adorn themselves with beautiful celestial lights, I wish to unveil myself and to step down from the cloud that has concealed me from mortal eyes, which are unworthy of looking at the celestial gods, in order to speak with you, for your wicked words could take away all my honour.)

³⁰ Garzoni, *La piazza universale* (1595), 737: 'Ma sopra tutto parmi degna d'eccelsi onori quella divina Vittoria che fa metamorfosi di se stessa in scena; quella bella maga d'amore che alletta i cori di mille amanti con le sue parole; quella dolce sirena che ammaglia con soavi incanti l'alme de suoi divoti spettatori, e senza dubbio merita d'esser posta come un compendio dell'arte, avendo i gesti proportionati, i moti armonici e concordi, gli atti maestevoli e grati, le parole affabili e dolci, i sospiri leggiadri ed accorti, i risi saporiti e soavi, il portamento altiero e generoso, e in tutta la persona un perfetto decoro quale spetta e s'appartiene a una perfetta comediante.'

³¹ Frangipani, *Tragedia*, fo. [3^v].

Fifteen years later, Vittoria Archilei's opening aria for the intermedii sung at the wedding festivities of Ferdinando de' Medici and Christine of Lorraine would deliver a similar rhetorical formula:

Dalle più alte sfere
 Di celeste sirene amica scorta
 son l'Armonia, ch'a voi vengo, ò mortali,
 poscia, che fino al Ciel battendo l'ali
 l'alta fiamma n'apporta,
 che mai sì nobil coppia il sol non vide
 qual voi nuova Minerva, e forte Alcide.³²

(From the highest of the spheres, gently escorted by celestial sirens, I am Harmony, and I come to you, O mortals, after beating my wings up to the heavens to bring back their flame. For never did the sun see such a noble couple as you, the new Minerva and powerful Hercules.)

Both 'Poi che veggio de, Dei questo soggiorno' and 'Dalle più alte sfere', one an *ottava*, the other composed in *versi sciolti*, transcend the physical space between earth and heaven. Both feature a goddess or a female allegory descending to earth on a cloud, and both offer a direct mode of address between the singer and her audience, wherein she describes heaven and equates the audience members with gods and heroes. This is as standard a trope as the ball and sceptre.

In Athena's aria, as in Harmony's, words that carry obvious madrigalistic potential, like 'celesti' ('celestial') and 'celato' ('hidden'), together with the wonderfully vivid depiction of the gods and mortals looking at each other from distant realms—embodied in Frangipani's parallel references to eyes, 'bei lumi celesti' ('beautiful celestial lights') and 'gli occhi de' mortali' ('the eyes of mortals')—invite interpretation with brilliant flights of diminutions and the muted, sombre tones of flatted *ficta*. The precise notes and rhythms Merulo used, however, to fill the formulaic mould of Athena's address—much less the notes and rhythms sung by Vittoria Piisimi towards the same end—we cannot know, but the composer's cooperation in the performance, together with the texts he set and Frangipani's all too brief description, provide a strong foundation for our developing comprehension of the Gelosi's music-making and the nature of their performative tropes in the early years of the company.

In its representation of Piisimi as a siren, Garzoni's encomium presages

³² Walker, *Les Fêtes du mariage*, i: *Musique des intermèdes de 'La Pellegrina'*, p. xxxvii.

another performance by the actress that took place in Milan five years following the Medici wedding of 1589. The nuptial celebrations of the Count of Harò in October 1594 offer us another intriguingly hazy glimpse of one of the finest singing actresses of the sixteenth century, thanks to an atypically detailed description of the intermedi performed on that occasion.³³ In Milan, Piisimi again sang the prologue for a set of intermedi depicting the Fall of Phaethon:

First intermedio.

The signal given, a curtain depicting the ocean fell, adorned with diverse sorts of fish, revealing a scene representing Naples. In the middle of the stage, a curtain portraying the ocean was drawn, above which the comedienne Vittoria appeared in the guise of a Siren. From there she made the prologue and, when it was finished, the scene suddenly was covered by a curtain painted with pleasant trees, woods, mountains, and hills, where Phaethon and Epaphos appeared, in dialogue together. . . .³⁴

The description of these intermedi is extraordinary. It offers us a second example of Vittoria Piisimi singing the prologue to an entertainment and, together with testimony given by Lodovico de' Bianchi in 1585 and by Francesco Andreini in 1615, it demonstrates that the Gelosi performed not only the plays that offered a pretext for the scenic and musical indulgence of intermedi, as suggested by Nino Pirrotta, but the intermedi themselves.

Bianchi's letter to Vincenzo Gonzaga of 16 December 1585 is an extremely valuable document, although it elicited no response from the comedian's patron. It was sent just a year after Vincenzo's marriage to Eleonora de' Medici. Writing from Bologna in an untutored hand and signing himself 'servitore lodovicho di bianchi da bolognia deto il dottor graziano comicho geloso', Bianchi informed the then Prince of Mantua that he would no longer suffer working with the importunate and overbearing actress Delia [Camilla Rocha Nobili]. If she forms part of the company in Mantua, he writes, he will remain in Bologna! On top of

³³ I say 'atypically detailed' because this is one of the very few descriptions of wedding entertainments that mentions comedians by name. Witness that, among the plethora of publications describing the Medici wedding of 1589, only one—the privately written *Diario* of Giuseppe Pavoni—mentions the performances of Vittoria Piisimi, Isabella Andreini, and the Gelosi, even though the comedian's plays were accompanied by the famous and extravagant intermedi.

³⁴ Gentile Pagani, *Del teatro in Milano avanti il 1598*, cited in D'Ancona, 'Il teatro mantovano', pt. 3, p. 333 (Doc. 22).

everything, he exclaims, because of Delia, whom everyone in Bologna calls the hunchback, the troupe must omit from their number Adriano Valerini and Silvia Roncagli, who are essential members of the company and who are necessary for performing intermedi.³⁵

Francesco Andreini's smug dedication to the readers of his *Bravure* bolsters Bianchi's documentation of the Gelosi performing intermedi, and demonstrates that the context of Piisimi's performance in Milan in 1594 was anything but unique: 'That famous and never enough lauded company of the Gelosi endured many, many years, demonstrating to future comedians the true manner of composing and reciting comedies, tragicomedies, tragedies, pastorals, visibile intermedi, and other dramatic inventions, that are seen daily on the stage.'³⁶

Visible intermedi, or *intermedi apparenti*, are most closely identified with the grand spectacles produced for the Medici court in Florence after the commencement of the *principato*. Prior to their advent, comedic structures were articulated by *intermedi non apparenti*, which usually took the form of madrigals sung between the acts (or sometimes between scenes) of a play. Notable examples include Nicolò Machiavelli's *La mandragola* of c.1518³⁷ and *Clizia* of 1525, and Anton Francesco Grazzini's *La gelosia* of 1550. These types of intermedi were, as their name suggests, sung without staging or costumes, and their subject matter may have been only tenuously related to the comedy they accompanied, if, in fact, it was related at all. As early as 1539, however, Francesco Corteccia, together with Giovan Battista Strozzi, created a set of intermedi for the wedding of Cosimo de' Medici and Eleonora de Toledo that may be clearly characterized as both visible (that is, staged) and distinct from the comedy they accompanied, Antonio Landi's *Il commodo*. After *Il commodo*, it was nearly thirty years before the Medici court again would mount grand spectacles with intermedi. In 1567, they did so for the baptism of Francesco de' Medici's and Giovanna d'Austria's first child, and in 1569 for the entry of the Archduke

³⁵ ASMN, Gonzaga, b. 1162, fos. 743^r–744^v (Doc. 13). Delia's activities are not heavily documented, but see the title page of Bruni, *Dialoghi scenici*, which states that he composed the prologues in the collection at the suggestion of his colleagues Flaminia [Orsola Cecchini], Delia [Camilla Rocha Nobili], Valeria [unknown], Lavinia [Diana Ponti], and Celia [Maria Malloni]. It is possible, although I have not investigated the matter, that Rocha Nobili is the hunchback of whom Carlo Rossi writes in his letter dated 14 Mar. 1608. See Fabbri, *Monteverdi*, trans. Carter, 83; and Solerti, *Gli albori*, i. 95.

³⁶ Andreini, *Le bravure* (ed. Tessari), 7.

³⁷ For a detailed discussion of the dating of *La Mandragola*, see Radcliff-Umstead, *The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy*, 116–18.

of Austria into Florence, on both occasions with music by Alessandro Striggio.³⁸

The most lively period of grand court spectacles in Florence, however, began in 1583 with the performance of Giovanni Fedini's *Le due persilie*, with intermedi by Stefano Rossetti, Giovanni Legati, Gostantino Arrighi, Jacopo Peri, Cristofano Malvezzi, and Alessandro Striggio. By this time, the Gelosi had been performing intermedi for nearly a decade, although none of the Florentine performances before 1589 is known to have included comedians in either comedies or intermedi. This lacuna makes the intermedi performed for the wedding of the Count of Harò in 1594 all the more important for the history of music theatre and the history of the commedia dell'arte.

The Count of Harò's wedding and the description of its intermedi, in addition to opening up a wide field of inquiry regarding the production of staged musical events and comedians' participation in them, enhances our nascent understanding of one of the most important facets of commedia dell'arte performance: the prologue. Typically sung by the leader of the troupe, the prologue served to explain the reasons for the performance and to contextualize its plot and metaphors. As such, its text was often excerpted and printed with the text of the play, if the play was published. The prologue for the Count of Harò's wedding was performed, as one would expect, as part of the first intermedio, and it shares a generic designation with sung introductory soliloquies like Piisimi's 'Poi che veggio de Dei questo soggiorno' (1574), Archilei's 'Dalle più alte sfere' (1589), and Musica's 'Dal mio permesso amato a voi ne vegno' from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607), which is called 'Prologo' in the score.

The Fall of Phaethon, together with the other prologues listed here, reveals that women, as often as—and perhaps more often than—men, sang the opening soliloquies to a variety of dramas, and that they might do so in costume rather than always in the archetypal toga and laurel wreath stipulated by Leone de' Sommi in his treatise on theatrical performance, the *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche*.³⁹ The resulting

³⁸ Stefano Rossetti and Scipione della Palla also contributed music to the 1567 celebrations; see Pirrotta and Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 202–6.

³⁹ Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi*, ed. Marotti, 55. The dating of Sommi's treatise is uncertain, although his mention of the Roman actress Flaminia and of Dottor Graziano suggests a date of composition c.1567. The original manuscript of the treatise was lost in the fire that consumed the Biblioteca Nazionale in Turin on 26 Jan. 1904, and the only surviving copy is an 18th-c. transcription housed in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma. See p. xvi, and Blanchard-Rothmuller, pp. xiv–xv.

feminized contextualization of the dramas that followed these prologues stands in marked contrast to the masculine gendering of other theatrical frames, such as the more closely circumscribed narratives that accompanied Monteverdi's laments of Arianna and the Nymph.⁴⁰ The performance of prologues by women emphasizes the aggressive representation of gender in music theatre of this period and,⁴¹ when combined with the omnipresent references to acting companies by the names of their *prime donne*, demonstrates the strength of feminine representation within the profession.

The characterization of men's performances in the commedia dell'arte was very different from that of women's. Like Piisimi, Pedrolino too performed in Milan for the Count of Harò's wedding, although his style of performance contrasted sharply with hers, and no neoclassical encomia like Garzoni's are known to have been written for him. In the 1594 festivities, Pedrolino appeared notably at the end of the second intermedio, together with the Mantuan comedian Tristano Martinelli (*in arte Arlecchino*), in a scene designed to show off the acrobatics and dancing that distinguished these two comedians throughout their careers:

Phaethon, passing over the chariot, lamenting the great toil and peril in which he found himself, Jove struck him down and made him fall from the sky, and his mother appeared, lamenting the loss of her son; and his sisters, for their great weeping, were turned into poplar trees. And they heard roaringly loud thunder from the heavens, after which, with continued thunder and lightning, confetti rained down on the stage, which caused great delight in Arlecchino and Pedrolino, and much laughter in the audience . . .⁴²

This version of the Fall of Phaethon is an odd story for its juxtaposition of sorrow and joy. Here, the audience is uncharacteristically aligned with the designated mortal response to the action on stage, and one can only imagine their delight in seeing these two famous actors—comedians who would work together for another twenty years—capering about joyfully amid a cloud of confetti as the heavens opened up with thunder and lightning. Pedrolino's lifelong acrobatic acumen was attested to in a letter written by Martinelli on 15 August 1612, in which he informed Ferdinando

⁴⁰ See Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 80–111.

⁴¹ I deliberately use the term music theatre here to avoid the cumbersome and at times overly pedantic distinctions employed in discussions of genre as it applies to opera and its related forms.

⁴² D'Ancona, 'Il teatro mantovano', pt. 3, p. 333. See Doc. 22 for a transcription of the account in its entirety.

Gonzaga that the aging Pedrolino had lost his ‘natural vigour’.⁴³ But in 1594 Pedrolino was in his prime, and his skill as a dancer was commemorated by a style of dancing that bore his name, as mentioned in a famous letter written by Emilio de’ Cavalieri in Rome to the Florentine secretary Marcello Accolti.

The letter was written on 18 January 1594—nine months prior to Pedrolino’s performance in Milan and less than two years after Cavalieri’s recommendation of the Gelosi to Ferdinando de’ Medici for the entertainments organized for the baptism of his son. Cavalieri described a musical evening held in the room of a Mr Filippo on the 17th, which featured a woman named Vittoria. Warren Kirkendale and Claude Palisca have identified Mr Filippo as Filippo Neri and Vittoria as Vittoria Archilei. After Vittoria sang, and before she received a friendly slap from Mr Filippo, a Vallicellan priest danced in the style of Pedrolino:

Yesterday, Vittoria was in the room of Mr Filippo, where Cusano was. And she sang—a Benedictus—but they wanted to hear *spagnole* and *galanterie*, [of which] there were many. And at the end Mr Filippo made a Vallicellan priest dance a *canario* and in the manner of Pedrolino. And Vittoria told me that [he did] stupendously, so he must practise often. Mr Filippo then gave the benediction to some, and particularly to Vittoria, and so that she would remember him, he gave her a good-natured slap. And he made her promise to return another time . . .⁴⁴

What movements comprised Pedrolino’s style of dancing are not known, although the tone of this letter, together with the vigorous physicality of the evening it describes—a priest, stereotypically restrained in movement by his robes, danced and must have exercised himself at it often; a woman was slapped—and the exotic athleticism of the *canario*, implies that the priest’s dance in the manner of Pedrolino was something equally energetic and cavalier.

The pairing in Cavalieri’s letter of a *canario* and the style of Pedrolino

⁴³ ASMN, Gonzaga, b. 10, fos. 162^r–163^v; also *Comici dell’arte: corrispondenze*, 379–80.

⁴⁴ ASF, Mediceo, f. 3622, fos. 32^r–33^r, transcribed and translated by Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music*, 397. My translation differs from Palisca’s in several respects. ‘Vittoria ieri stette in camera di Messer Filippo, dove fu Cusano; et cantò, un benedictus, ma volsero sentir spagnole, et galanterie, vi furno di molti; et in ultimo Messer Filippo fece ballare un prete della Vallicella, canario et da pedrolino; et mi dice Vittoria che stupendamente sichè deve esercitarsi, spesso; Messer Filippo poi dà la benedizione ad alcuni, et particolarmente a Vittoria, et perchè si ricordasse di lui; gli diede un bono schiaffo; et si fece promettere che ritornasse un altra volta . . .’.

merits some attention because the histories of the *canario* and of Pedrolino brush against each other in intriguing ways over a period of some twenty years. If nothing else, the popularity of both waxed and waned together, and Cavalieri's letter suggests that it was Pedrolino who made the dance famous. The *canario* was a relatively recent dance in 1594, its choreography having appeared for the first time in Fabritio Caroso's *Il ballarino* of 1581, a treatise published in Venice in the same year that Pedrolino performed there for the inaugural season of the Teatro Tron. It is intriguing to think that Pedrolino might have danced the *canario* there for the first time. Julia Sutton, editor of the revised edition of *Il ballarino*, which Caroso retitled *La nobiltà di dame* in honour of the wedding of Ranuccio Farnese and Margherita Aldobrandini in 1600, has described the rise in popularity of the *canario* as 'explosive, if one is to judge by the number of canary variations in all the manuals. It exists both as a separate dance consisting of a series of variations, or as the last dance of a balletto suite.' The dance features a sequence of unique stamping movements or *battuti*, performed to a short and simple ground in either triple or compound duple metre with distinctive dotted rhythms. The style of the *canario*, according to Caroso, is in imitation of a dance or dances originating in the Canary Islands, which are located off the north-west coast of Africa and which, in the late sixteenth century, were governed by Spain.⁴⁵

Music and choreography for the *canario* are given not only in Caroso's *Il ballarino* and *La nobiltà di dame*, but also in Cesare Negri's *Le gratie d'amore*, published in 1602. *Le gratie d'amore* is a compendium of diverse chronicles and descriptions relating to the festivities staged in Milan in 1599 in honour of the double alliance of the dynasties of Austria and Spain—festivities at which Pedrolino and his company performed.⁴⁶ Negri's version of the *canario*, a court dance dedicated to the Marchesa Giulia de' Vecchi e Cusana, who is perhaps related to the Cardinal Cusano in Cavalieri's letter, comprises a sequence of variations, performed alternately by the cavalier and the lady (although in the case of the Vallicellan priest, the dance must surely have been executed by one person alone), each calling for combinations of stamping (*battuti*), leaping (*salti-ni*), and sliding (*schisciati*) steps, performed to the music shown in Pl. 1.1.

The last notice we have of Pellesini is an account by the poet Malherbe,

⁴⁵ Caroso, *Courtly Dance*, 45 and 110–11.

⁴⁶ Pedrolino and his company were paid 150 ducatonì for comedies performed for the Infanta Isabella of Spain and her husband, Archduke Albert of Austria. See ASM, Registro delle Cancellerie, serie XXII, no. 42, fo. 232^r.

PL. 1.1. ‘La musica della sonata con l’intavolatura di leuto del Canario’, from
Cesare Negri, *Le gratie d’amore* (1602), 201–2

who saw Pedrolino perform with Virginia Andreini, her husband Giovan Battista, and the Fedeli at Fontainebleau in 1613. His review of the ageing Pedrolino’s and Arlecchino’s performances is waspish, and he suffered them only at the desire of the Medici queen:

On Saturday evening I shall be at the Italian Comedy at the express bidding of the Queen, without which I would not have gone to see it before we returned from Fontainebleau. Arlequin [Tristano Martinelli] is certainly very different from what he once was, as too is Patrolin [Giovanni Pellesini]: the former is 56 years

old, and the latter 87, neither of an age any longer appropriate to the stage, where one needs lively temperaments and firm minds, and those one rarely finds in such old bodies as theirs.⁴⁷

The end of Pedrolino's career coincides precisely with the end of the first era of commedia dell'arte production. Only a year before his performance in France, Martinelli had sought to replace him with another, younger comedian: the Bolognese comedian Francesco Gabrielli, *detto* Scapino, who in his turn became the leading *zanni* of his time (see Pl. 1.2). Gabrielli's speciality helps to show the hierarchy of musical performance on the commedia dell'arte stage, and his publications—all of which post-date the period in question—offer some codification of the practices of the *zanni*.⁴⁸

Athletic dancing, rude songs, and the playing of exotic instruments were the purview of the *zanni*, male actors like Scapino, Arlecchino, and Pedrolino whose roles focused on the bizarre and the ridiculous. Refined styles of singing, however, either a cappella or accompanied by 'soft' instruments such as the lute, flauto dolce, or Spanish guitar, together with more modest forms of dance, were performed by the *innamorati*, male and female actors whose roles mirrored the ideal courtier. Gabrielli had a notorious reputation for composing and singing *tagliacanzoni* and *villanelle*, and his extensive musical instrumentarium was one of the wonders of the commedia dell'arte stage. Moreover, his collection of instruments was a source of intense interest to Claudio Monteverdi and his correspondent in Rome, widely believed to have been Giovan Battista Doni, in 1634. An engraving of the comedian made by Carlo Biffi the year before gives an indication of the plenitude of Scapino's instruments, as well as their ornate designs (see Pl. 1.3).

Doni, evidently ignorant of Biffi's engraving, wrote to Monteverdi in Venice to ask the composer to obtain drawings and descriptions of Scapino's instruments. Monteverdi, enlisting the assistance of friends because Scapino was performing in Modena rather than in Venice during the carnival season of 1634, sent Doni as much information as he was able to cull from his friends' memories. His letter, like Biffi's engraving,

⁴⁷ Malherbe, *Œuvres*, ed. Lalanne, iii. 337, as cited in Richards and Richards, *The Commedia dell'arte*, 272.

⁴⁸ ASMN, Autografi, b. 10, fos. 162^r–163^r, letter from Tristano Martinelli, Milan, to Ferdinando Gonzaga, Rome, 15 Aug. 1612; transcribed in *Comici dell'arte: corrispondenze*, 379–80.

PL. 1.2. Dionisio Minaggio, *The Feather Book*, 'Schapin'. Blacker-Wood
Library of Biology, McGill University

PL. 1.3. Engraving of Francesco Gabrielli by Carlo Biffi. Bologna Biblioteca
Comunale dell' Archiginnasio

suggests that Scapino's instrumentarium was more exotic to the eye than to the ear:

I have seen a drawing of the instrument on the piece of paper you sent me, which—far from diminishing my eagerness—has on the contrary made it grow. And since in the aforesaid second letter you ask me to engage the services of Scapino in order that I may send Your Worship drawings of the many extraordinary instruments that he plays, because of my great desire to find an opportunity of serving you, and being unable to do this as he is performing in Modena, not in Venice, I therefore feel very disappointed.

Nevertheless I have used a little diligence with certain friends so that they can at least describe to me the ones they are able to remember, and so they gave me the enclosed sheet of paper which here and now I am sending off to Your Worship. Nor did I neglect to write to a friend about trying to obtain drawings of those most different from the ones in use. I have never seen them myself, but from the little information I am sending, it seems to me that they are new as regards shape but not in sound, since all fit in with the sounds of the instruments that we use.⁴⁹

Innovative in sound or not, Scapino used his instruments well for the performance of side-splittingly funny *villanelle*, *villanesche*, and *canzoni* (see Pl. 1.4), such as the lowbrow and stuttering ‘Ho ho ho, la la la, spu spu spu, za za za, la la la, mer mer mer, da da da’ (‘He- he- hey, sh- sh- shit st- st- stinks!’), sung at the end of a comedy performed for the fantastical wedding of Lipotoppo and Madonna Lasagna. And although Scapino’s celebrity was founded as much on satire as on his instrumentarium and songs, he was also capable of less vulgar efforts, such as the strophic song ‘I più rigidi cori’, otherwise known as the *aria di Scapino*, which he published under the title *Infermità, testamento, e morte di Francesco Gabrielli* in 1638. Not lacking in humour, the publication evokes notarial pedantry and the narcissism of one who dictates how his friends and colleagues will mourn him when he dies. The only other piece in the print is a *ciaccona*. The first stanza of Scapino’s signature piece, as it appears in the 1638 publication, to which I have added modern chord symbols above the *alfabeto* notation for Spanish guitar, is shown in Ex. 1.1.

As may be seen in the example, the *aria di Scapino* contains a modulation into the dominant key area at lines 4 to 6 and a harmonic ornamentation of the basic progression I–IV–V–I. Twenty-eight stanzas long, Scapino’s *aria* suffers harmonic variation well, as he first names many of the commedia dell’arte characters with whom he has performed and then lists the cities to which he will leave his various musical instruments. To Cremona goes the violin, to Piacenza the bass; Milan will inherit the viola, Venice the guitar, and Naples the harp; Rome receives the bonacordo, Genoa the trombones, and Perugia the mandola; Bologna, mother of Scapino’s invention, is given the theorbo, Ferrara the lute, and all the rest go to Florence. The publication of such a text cheek-by-jowl with a *ciaccona* increases the humour in its interpretation for, as the dying Scapino ekes out his last twenty-eight stanzas of living breath, one or more of his colleagues might very well caper at the foot of his deathbed to the lively,

⁴⁹ Monteverdi, *Letters*, trans. Stevens, 427.

PL. I.4. 'Per la
Varietà degli
Instrumenti
Musicisti di
Scapino',
showing
Francesco
Gabrielli on
stage. Bologna,
Biblioteca
Comunale
dell'Archiginnasio

Symbols immediately above the text indicate intabulation for Spanish guitar. The letter symbols above give the modern harmonic equivalents. Capitals indicate major chords, lower-case letters minor chords.

CIACCONA.

Rhythm:

C	e	a	d	F	G	C
B	+	D	E	G	A	B

C	F	G	C
---	---	---	---

B	G	A	B
---	---	---	---

I più rigidi cori,

C	a	E	a
---	---	---	---

B	D	F	D
---	---	---	---

che ascoltano il mio canto

C	F	G	GC
---	---	---	----

B	G	A	AB
---	---	---	----

spero pietosi liquefare in pianto;

G	A	D	G
---	---	---	---

A	I	C	A
---	---	---	---

Se in doglia universale,

G	A	D	A	D
---	---	---	---	---

A	I	C	I	C
---	---	---	---	---

se in doglia universale

G	C	D	G	D	G
---	---	---	---	---	---

A	B	C	A	C	A
---	---	---	---	---	---

e al Mo[n]do di Scappin l' hora letale,

C	F	G	C
---	---	---	---

B	G	A	B
---	---	---	---

l' hora letale.

Ex. 1.1. L'Aria di Scapino, *I più rigidi cori*, from *Infermità, testamento, e morte di Francesco Gabrielli* (1638)

syncopated rhythms of the Spanish dance, thereby gainsaying the profound mourning ascribed to the comedian's friends in the aria's lyrics. Seneca's death scene in Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, which had its premiere across town in Venice's Teatro Grimani in 1642, similarly conflates gleeful music and mournful lyrics, although in more subtle

measure than Scapino's scalding aria. In both works, the juxtaposition of opposing themes of life and death engenders a pathetic humour that stains the scene with a pungent irony and enables auditors to laugh at their own mortality. Mid-century ideas of life and death, following in the wake of the Thirty Years War, seem gruesomely jaded when viewed through lenses like these.

Forty years before the publication of the grandiloquent aria that prophesied Scapino's death, Angelo Ingegneri foretold the mortality of Italian theatre writ large and of those whose performances gave it meaning. His treatise, *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentar le favole sceniche* (1598), he avowed, would capture the spirit of theatrical performance before it vanished with the wind.⁵⁰ His motivation, in fact, was the death of Alfonso II d'Este in Ferrara, a city and court where music and drama thrived. With the collapse of Este rule, and the subsequent disequilibrium of European political structures, both comedians and playwrights intuited the demise of past theatrical practices, and they began to preserve their art, not only in treatises, but in collections of play scenarios, speeches, dialogues, and scenes. Thus, only at the end of the era do we encounter a self-conscious attempt to document what had previously been jealously guarded as the stuff of living performance. Francesco Andreini, whose sense of artistic mortality was perhaps greatest in the years following Isabella's death in 1604, freely published his wife's soliloquies and his own dialogues featuring the characters Capitano Spavento and his servant Trappola, secure in the knowledge that neither he nor Isabella would ever speak those lines again. The anthology of the Gelosi's *scenari*, written in cooperation with the troupe's *innamorato* Flaminio Scala and published in 1611, share the same fate.

Although the Gelosi's molten inspiration continued in the work of Francesco's and Isabella's son, his wife, and their company, something ineffable ended when the troupe disbanded that June in Lyons following Isabella's death. The candle-lit procession through the streets of the city, the commemorative medallion cast in Isabella's honour (Pl. 1.5), and her

⁵⁰ Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa* (ed. Doglio), 7: 'Di maniera che grand' obbligo (torno a dirlo) parmi che s'abbia ad avere a chi ci ha per questa via restituito l'uso della scena e l'utile e 'l piacere che da lei si tragge, rattivando insieme nei dotti e pellegrini ingegni lo studio delle poesie drammatiche colla speranza di veder quando che sia i lor poemi rappresentati e le fatiche loro non gettate al vento.'

PL. I.5. Commemorative medallion of Isabella Andreini. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

burial in the church of St-Croix mark the end of an era. Giovan Battista's and Virginia's careers, like Scapino's, were more 'composed' than those of their parents, and the documents of their artistry leave us a comparative wealth of scripted plays, musical scores, and letters from which to extrapolate an understanding of their performances. Giovan Battista Andreini published over forty plays, many of which contain musical lyrics and performing instructions, sometimes in sufficient detail to join them with a musical print or manuscript. And several of Virginia's performances—of both her husband's material and that of others—are preserved in the scores of composers like Claudio Monteverdi and Giulio Caccini. As a continuation of the craft of the Gelosi, this documentation is invaluable, for it gives us an anchor with which to secure the scattered descriptions of the Gelosi's earlier performances. And yet, in the end, Francesco Andreini was right when he suggested that, although we have evidence of the Gelosi's and the Fedeli's performances, and even some of the words they spoke and the songs they sang, we will never hear the sounds of their voices or be enchanted by their movements. At best, we may try to imagine the qualities that characterized the virtue, fame, and honour that were the Gelosi.

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