

The Old Man's Spectacles and Other Traces of the *Commedia dell'Arte* in Early Shakespearean Comedy

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Shakespeare's direct references to the characters and methods of the early Italian *commedia dell'arte*, together with the many distinctly Italianate elements of his early comedies, lead one to speculate about the nature of his acquaintance with the Italian popular comedy. It is possible that he saw performances by Italian players, or that he worked with English players influenced by them, but his knowledge of the dramatic methods and materials of the Italian actors is beyond dispute. Further, although Shakespeare's use of Italian erudite drama as a source for incident and plot is widely acknowledged, a purely literary analysis of the debt does not adequately explain his access to this source material. Although his ultimate sources may have been classical drama or the contemporary Italian erudite drama, Shakespeare's immediate dramatic model appears in many cases to have been the *commedia dell'arte*, with its reworking of classical and erudite materials. I argue here that Shakespeare is likely to have derived his knowledge of contemporary Italian drama not only from literary sources, but more directly, from the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*.

Elsewhere I have considered whether Shakespeare and his actors might have used improvisation in performance, in the way the Italians did.¹ In this paper,² I wish to focus on his use of *commedia dell'arte* characters and plot situations. I shall look particularly at three of Shakespeare's early comedies that seem to contain a variety of elements from the *commedia dell'arte*: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Love's Labour's Lost*. I hope to show that resemblances of character and incident to their earlier manifestations in the *commedia dell'arte* are too numerous to be coincidental, and that they cannot be due to knowledge of written Italian plays alone. Such elements are also to be found in Shakespeare's later comedies and romances, and even in some of the tragedies, and I believe that the *commedia dell'arte* made a lasting impression on Shakespeare's dramatic imagination and that he drew on it for inspiration throughout his career.

I shall be dealing with an obscure period of theatre history, during the final decades of the sixteenth century, the period in which Shakespeare rose from anonymity to lasting fame as a dramatist. Much of my argument will therefore be speculative, but I hope to take a fresh look at some of the connections between Italian and English renaissance theatre and the question of Shakespeare's debt to the *commedia dell'arte*.

Other more able scholars have considered this topic at various times, and have arrived at a variety of conclusions. Kathleen Lea's book on the Italian popular comedy and its links with the Elizabethan stage is so meticulously researched that it has come to be regarded as the last word on the subject. She comes to the cautious and perhaps contradictory conclusion "that the contact between the English stage and the *Commedia dell'arte* was considerable but that the Italian influence was mainly sporadic and superficial," and "artistically . . . almost negligible" (Lea 453).

Lea argues that Shakespeare used *commedia dell'arte* scenarios as a source for the early play *The Comedy of Errors*, and the very late play *The Tempest*, but surprisingly, that "*Commedia dell'arte* influence on Shakespearean plays must be restricted to those plays for which hitherto there has been no satisfactory explanation of the Italianate elements." Lea finds that the sources in Italian *novelle* and literary drama therefore "have the stronger claim" in such plays as *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Measure for Measure* or *All's Well that Ends Well*. These are all plays that have Italianate elements, but which she argues must have had literary sources (Lea 453, 431).

I fail to understand, though, why, if *commedia dell'arte* influence is admitted for an early comedy and one of Shakespeare's last plays, it should be denied a part in the rest of his drama. Many of his plays, particularly the other early comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *Love's Labours Lost*, seem to contain elements that can only be accounted for by knowledge of the *commedia dell'arte* rather than literary sources. If Shakespeare used the erudite Italian drama and all the other "sources" that have been suggested for his plays, he must have read very widely indeed, in several languages, and have had access to manuscripts or publications from Italy, France, Spain and Germany. It seems more likely that his contact with these sources was not through the printed page, but by word of mouth, via the actors of the *commedia dell'arte*.

But what was the *commedia dell'arte*, and how might Shakespeare have come into contact with it?

From records that remain, it is clear that by the late sixteenth century a dynamic new form of theatre had spread across Europe from Italy. With a newly emerged class of professional comic actors playing the instantly recognizable parts of Pantalone, Zanni and company, it was later to become known as the *commedia dell'arte*, the comedy of the professionals. It should be remembered that although they usually played *all'improvviso*, the actors worked from written material to a greater or lesser degree. Besides their method of working from a basic outline or scenario of the play's action, they relied on memorized set pieces, typical conceits adaptable to various dramatic circumstances, and set gags and bits of stage business to keep the action moving. The Italian "comedians" performed a great variety of dramas, from farces and comedies through to tragedies and pastorals, and their repertoire included the *commedia sostenuta*, fully scripted plays by recognized literary dramatists. Many of the actors themselves were reputable poets and playwrights, and members of the Italian academies. The most successful of them became the favourites of rich and powerful princes in courts throughout Europe.

By 1590, various Italian troupes had travelled widely, in France, Belgium, Germany, Spain and even England, where their activities can be traced in court records, private diaries, literature and pictorial works. The Norwich Chamberlain's Accounts for the years 1546 to 1547 refer to "certen Spanyards & Italyans who dawnsed antycks & played dyvrse other feets" before the Mayor. Some decades later, Italian actors and acrobats seem to have become quite fashionable in England. There are records of performances by Italians in London and the provinces on at least ten occasions between 1573 and 1578, and on four of these they entertained Queen Elizabeth herself, playing at Court, and following her progress to Windsor and Reading in July 1574 (Lea 352–358).

The clearest trace of *commedia dell'arte* players in England is that "Drousiano" Martinelli and his company were given permission by the Privy Council to perform in London in January and February 1578 (Chambers II: 262–263). Drusiano and his more famous brother, Tristano Martinelli, played with various companies under the patronage of Vincenzo Gonzaga, the Duke of Mantua. Apparently, both Martinellis played the part of Arlecchino, and they may have been co-creators of this, probably the most famous of all *commedia dell'arte* roles. The earliest traces of the activities of their company have been found not in their native Italy but in Antwerp. They appear to have performed in Antwerp and its surroundings from about March to August, 1576. In mid-October of that year they left Antwerp for Paris, probably spending the following year in France. Whether the entire company, including Tristano, went to England in late 1577 or early 1578 is not known; Drusiano is the only one named in the records. The troupe may have played before Elizabeth and her Court in London, for the Chamber Accounts for 1577–1578 include payment for "a mattres hoopoes and boardes with tressells for the Italian Tumblers." A decade later, the Martinellis were in Madrid with the *Confidenti*. And with their new company, the *Accesi*, they performed at the wedding of Maria de Medici and Henry IV in July 1600, staying in France until 1604 (Schrickx 1976; Chambers II: 261–265).

The Martinelli troupe was only one of many companies touring outside of Italy in the late 1500s. The *commedia dell'arte* seems to have been a favourite form of entertainment with the French kings, Charles IX, Henry III and Henry IV, and many of the most famous Italian troupes

visited France and entertained the French Court and important guests at Paris and Blois. We may guess at the extent of the popularity of the Italian *comici* in England during this period. But, as Lea has pointed out, the stock types of the *commedia dell'arte* were certainly familiar to Elizabethan audiences, judging from the frequency with which they are mentioned in plays of the time (Lea 374).

The clearest evidence we have that Shakespeare knew of the *commedia dell'arte* is that his plays refer directly to some of these stock characters. The word “zany” is found in *Love's Labour's Lost* (V.ii.463/2213)³ and *Twelfth Night* (I.v.84/367), where it is used to indicate a foolish servant or follower, clearly a reference to the *zanni* of the *commedia dell'arte*. And there are a number of clownish servants or *zanni* types in Shakespeare's plays. There are braggart captains, any number of young lovers, and several pedants too, such as Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*, who bears a close resemblance to the Gelosi's Dottor' Gratiano of Bologna in his fondness for absurd Latinisms.

We find Pantalone first mentioned in *The Taming of the Shrew* (?1590–1591).⁴ Gremio, the unsuitably elderly suitor to Kate's sister Bianca, is referred to as a “Pantalowne” in a stage direction (I.i.45/322). Later, during Bianca's “music” and “grammar” lessons, the young lover Lucentio again calls Gremio “the old Pantalowne” (III.i.36/1251).

And in *As You Like It* (?1599–1600), Jaques, in his speech on the Seven Ages of Man, again names,

... the leane and slipper'd Pantaloone,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side

(2.7.158–159/1081–1082)

This mention of the old man's spectacles tallies with early iconographic evidence of the *commedia dell'arte* in the frescoes at Schloss Trausnitz in Bavaria (c.1576) or the French woodcuts and engravings in the *Recueil Fossard* (c.1580), where Pantalone is shown wearing spectacles for comic effect (see Figure 1, from Duchartre 324).



Figure 1: Pantalone with spectacles

There is another Pantalone with spectacles in the Elizabethan "stage plot" of *The Dead Man's Fortune*,⁵ which, like Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, is believed to date from the early 1590s. A number of these stage plots were discovered in the Dulwich College Library during the 1700s. They must at one time have been in the possession of the Lord Admiral's Men, whose leading actor, Edward Alleyn, founded the College. The "plots" give only a brief outline of the characters' names, the order of their stage entrances, and the props for each play, set out on a sheet of card that could be hung up back-stage for reference during performance. In *The Plot of the Dead Man's Fortune* (see Figures 2 and 3, from Greg, 1931, vol. II) we find the following scene, part of a comic subplot to the main tragicomedy:

Enter pateloun & pesscode = enter asspida
to her validore & his man b. samme
to them the panteloun & pesscode wth spectakles.

	Eschimes lino Enter for Bell veric
	Enter panteloun & his man to her validore to her validore
u	Enter Tepephon, a Algerine a keyano & party ca note attendant to her validore & his man pesscode to her validore & Bell veric
	Enter validore & asspida & party up to her validore & his man
f	Enter panteloun, pesscode & spectakles validore & party to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man
	Enter alyumb & party = her validore & his man to her validore & his man
	Enter Caertes & Bell veric to her validore & his man to her validore & his man
	Enter Tepephon alygerine at severall doore to her validore & his man
f	Enter panteloun & pesscode = enter asspida to her validore & his man b. samme to to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man
e	Enter Tepephon alygerine wth attendant to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man
	Enter alyumb & party to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man to her validore & his man

Figure 2:
The plot of
*The Dead Man's
Fortune*

	Enter panteloun & his man to them his wife asspida to hir validore	
Dar lee fam	Enter <i>Tesephon</i> allgerius alcyane & statyra w th atendants to them [to th] carynus & prelyor to them laertes & Bess veile	
	Enter valydore & asspida cuttynge of ruffes to them the maide	
	Enter panteloun whiles he speakes validore passeth ore the stage disguise then Enter pesscode to them asspida to them the maide w th pesscodds appareth -----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----	
Musi que	Enter carynus and p'lyor = here the laydes speake[s] in pryfoun	
	Enter laertes & Bess veile to them the Iayler to them the laydes	
	Enter <i>Tesephon</i> allgerius at severall dores disguisd wth meate to them the Iayler	
	Enter pateloun & pesscode = enter asspida to hir validore & his man · b · samme to them the panteloun & pesscode w th spectakles -----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----x-----	
Musi que	Enter tesephon allgerius w th atendants Dar & others to them Burbage a messenger & tyre to them Euphrodore = Robart lee & b samme man	
	Enter carynus & p'lyor to them vrganda wth a lookinge glasse accompaned w th satires plaine on ther Instruments	
	Enter carynus madde to him prelyor [d] madde	

Figure 3:
Transcript of the plot of
The Dead Man's Fortune

Besides the Pantalone figure, what we can discern of the action immediately reminds us of the *commedia dell'arte*. All the basic types are here: the old man and his manservant with the suitably clownish, suggestive, yet English name, Peascod; the young wife and her maid, Rose; and the young lover who visits, with his boy, Sam. Like his counterpart in some of the early Italian scenarios, cuckolded by his wife, Asspida, with the help of the servants, this Pantaloon appears to need spectacles to see the lovemaking between Asspida and Validore going on under his nose!⁶

Another interesting feature of *The Dead Man's Fortune* is the direction,

Enter tesephon [&] allgerius wth atendants & others
to them Burbage [&] a messenger

This is believed to refer to the young Richard Burbage, later to be the leading actor in the Shakespearean company.⁷ Who were the other actors in this anonymous play with its curiously

Italianate characters and themes? Unfortunately, they are not named. But another, very similar stage plot, *The Second Part of the Seven Deadly Sins* (1590–1591?), lists in its cast not only Richard Burbage but most of the actors who from 1594 were to work with Shakespeare as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. They include Thomas Pope, George Bryan, Richard Cowley, William Sly, John Duke, Augustine Phillips and John Sinkler. In about 1590 they seem to have been playing as Lord Strange's Men, probably in a company combined with the Lord Admiral's Men. Unfortunately again, two crucial names are missing from these early documents: those of the clown, William Kemp, and William Shakespeare, actor and playwright.

Despite this, the mention of Richard Burbage is a definite link between actors of the Shakespearean company and the plot of *The Dead Man's Fortune*, this early English experiment with *commedia dell'arte* types and situations. There is also the interesting coincidence of the name Pantaloon, in *The Dead Man's Fortune* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, with both plays being dated at about 1590 or 1591. We shall return to the stage plots later in this discussion. But first I wish to look more closely at the three Shakespearean comedies I have mentioned, for other traces of the *commedia dell'arte*. Finally, I hope to point out certain features of these plays which may cast light on the problem of their sources, and the possible role of Shakespeare's actors in all of this.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, another of Shakespeare's earliest comedies (also dated c. 1590–1591), provides clear examples of parallels with the Italian popular comedy. In the first place, the entire cast of characters is not only obviously "Italian," it is immediately reminiscent of the set of stock types of the *commedia dell'arte*. The two pairs of young lovers, Valentine and Silvia, Proteus and Julia, are the *innamorati*. Valentine's foolish, boastful rival, Thurio, plays a role equivalent to that of the *capitano*. The two clownish servants, Launce and Speed, are in effect *zanni*, as is Antonio's manservant, Panthino. Antonio and the Duke of Milan take the roles of the old fathers usually played by Pantalone and the *dottore*. And Julia's waiting woman, Lucetta, plays the traditional *servetta*. The Host of the inn where Julia lodges in Milan, might also have appeared in the late sixteenth century *commedia dell'arte*. Innkeepers feature regularly in Flaminio Scala's scenarios, *Il Teatro delle favole rappresentative* (Venice, 1611), for example.

Scala published his scenarios in 1611, but they are generally taken to represent the repertoire of the Gelosi and the Confidenti in the second half of the sixteenth century, two of the most renowned companies of the time, with whom Scala seems to have been associated. It is likely, then, that his scenarios were based on performances given some decades before Shakespeare's plays. The Gelosi are first heard of in 1568 in Milan, and were to include Francesco Andreini (Capitan' Spavento) and Isabella, his famous and accomplished wife. Scala himself played the lover, Flavio, and was at one time the leader of the Confidenti. It is worth noting that the Gelosi paid their second visit to Paris at the request of the French King in 1577. We remember that Drusiano Martinelli and company were probably in Paris at the same time, before journeying to London.

There are several interesting similarities between Scala's work and Shakespeare's (Salerno, Appendix, 395–413). Not only the characters of *Two Gentlemen*, but the main plot and its surprising denouement might have been modelled almost directly on the types and themes of these early *commedia dell'arte* plays. In fact, one of Scala's scenarios, *Flavio Tradito*,⁸ contains the essentials of the Valentine-Silvia-Proteus plot. In outline it tells how Flavio is betrayed by his best friend, Oratio, who falls in love with Flavio's beloved, Isabella, just as Proteus betrays Valentine by pursuing Silvia. Captain Spavento is the third suitor to Isabella, and is preferred by her old father, Doctor Gratiano, just as the Duke prefers Thurio over Valentine as a suitor to Silvia. Oscar Campbell long ago noted that this sort of three-handed contest of suitors was commonplace in the *commedia dell'arte*.⁹ The often repeated comic devices of dropped love-letters and overheard conversations are also found in both *Flavio Tradito* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Scala's play also ends with the traitor being forgiven by the betrayed lover as an example of the triumph of friendship over love. In outline, as well as in details, Shakespeare's romantic comedy bears some remarkable resemblances to Scala's *commedia dell'arte* scenario.

The Julia-Proteus subplot also has precedents in Italian comedy, both *erudita* and *dell'arte*. Campbell observes that the device of the girl disguised as a pageboy, usually in order to follow her lover, solved the dramatist's problem of how to give the young women in a play an opportunity to converse with the young men, when in Italian society respectable girls were not to be seen on the streets. Because most renaissance comedies used the setting of a public street, the heroine had to speak to her young man from a window or balcony, or assume a male disguise. The device of a girl disguising herself as a youth occurs in many written Italian comedies and in no fewer than eighteen of Scala's fifty scenarios (Salerno, Appendix, 396, 401; cf. Campbell, "Two Gentlemen," 56–58; Bullough I: 208). In Scala's scenario *Il Ritratto*, for example, Silvia has followed her lover, Captain Spavento, from Milan to Parma, where, disguised as a youth and calling herself Lesbino, she becomes Spavento's page with the help of his servant, Arlecchino. Later she tries to persuade him to stop seeing the actress Victoria with whom he is infatuated, and asks him if he has ever been in love before. The captain replies that in Milan he loved a very beautiful girl named Silvia (Salerno 292–302).

Campbell ("Two Gentlemen," 57) points out the exact similarity of this scene to one between Julia and Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen* (4.4.37ff/1787ff), and notes the coincidence of the name Silvia in both plays. Julia has followed Proteus, her false lover, from Verona to Milan, where she enters his employ in the disguise of a page-boy, calling herself Sebastian. The following dialogue ensues:

Protheus. . . . Go presently, and take this Ring with thee,

Deliuier it to Madam *Silua*;

She lou'd me well, deliuier'd it to me.

Iulia. It seemes you lou'd not her, to leaue her token:

She is dead belike?

Protheus. . . . Not so: I thinke she liues.

Iulia. Alas!

Protheus. Why do'st thou cry alas?

Iulia. I cannot choose but pittie her.

Protheus. Wherefore should'st thou pittie her?

Iulia. Because, me thinkes that she lou'd you as well

As you doe loue your Lady *Silua*.

(4.4.67–76/1817–1826)

Shakespeare was to disguise his heroine as a page again, both in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. The play usually cited as a source for this element of *Twelfth Night* is *Gl'Ingannati* (1531), written by a member of the Sienese Academy the *Intronati*. But *Gl'Ingannati* also contains a scene (II.vii) very like the one we have been discussing in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The heroine, Lelia, disguised as the page Fabio, has entered the service of her unfaithful lover, Flaminio. He uses her to take messages to his new love, Isabella, but Isabella becomes infatuated with "Fabio." Lelia/Fabio tries to discourage Flaminio's interest in Isabella, and asks him whether there is no other woman he loves in Modena. He replies that he once loved Lelia, but he fears this is why Isabella despises him, believing his old love persists.

Flaminio. . . . But I will give Isabella to understand that I love Lelia no longer; rather that I hate her, and cannot bear to hear her named, and will pledge my faith never to go where she may be. Tell Isabella this as strongly as you can.

Lelia. Oh, me!

Flaminio. What has come over you? What do you feel?

Lelia. Oh, me!

Flaminio. Lean on me. Have you any pain?

Lelia. Suddenly. In the heart.¹⁰

It appears, then, that *Gl'Ingannati* must have been a source of incident for both Shakespeare and Scala, and that both used the play's device of the girl-page repeatedly. But if Shakespeare drew on *Gl'Ingannati* for the elements we have been looking at, it was not his only source for *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. A number of other sources, influences or parallels have been proposed for the various plot elements in the play, ranging from Boccaccio and Chaucer to Sir Thomas Elyot, Lyly, Sydney and Anthony Munday, as well as plays or stories in Italian, French, Spanish, and German (Bullough I: 203ff). This very diversity suggests that the various strands of the play represent elements of wide-spread narrative traditions. It seems most likely that such narrative strands would first have been woven together by the professional Italian actors, into stage plays such as we find indeed in Scala's scenarios.¹¹

Jorge de Montemayor's pastoral romance, *Diana Enamorada* (Valencia, 1559), in which Don Felix is the unfaithful lover and Felismena the disguised page, is generally cited as the main source for *Two Gentlemen* (Bullough, Introduction, I: 205–207). It is true that there are peculiar details of incident common to both: the scenes where the maid drops a love-letter for her mistress to find, and where the disguised girl overhears her betrothed wooing another woman. Again, however, these are stock elements of Italian improvised comedy. Campbell believes that Shakespeare obtained these details not directly from the Spanish tale by Montemayor, but from the lost play *Felix and Philiomena* performed at Court by the Queen's Men in January 1585. This, he argues, must have been a "thoroughly Italianate" play, with elements from *Diana Enamorada* (Campbell, "Two Gentlemen" 62; Bullough I: 206). Shakespeare might also have drawn on another English play with Italian origins, *Fedele and Fortunio* or *Two Italian Gentlemen* (London, 1584), an anonymous translation of Luigi Pasqualigo's *Il Fedele* (1576). Whatever the case, his immediate model seems to have been one or more ready worked plays incorporating different elements all of which were stock features of the *commedia dell'arte*.

Returning briefly to *The Taming of the Shrew*, we find evidence there too of Italian origins for the characters as well as the main elements of the plot. We have noted the appearance of Gremio as the Pantaloon. But again, virtually all the characters are similar to the types of the *commedia dell'arte*, falling into the familiar groups of hoodwinked old men, tricky servants, and young men and women in (and out of!) love. That Shakespeare thought of the old men in the play in terms of the stock Italian types, may be seen not only in his reference to the Pantaloon, but from Biondello's description of the "ancient Angel" about to be lured into Tranio's plot as a substitute for Lucentio's father, Vincentio: ". . . a Marcantant, or a pedant, I know not what, but formall in apparell, in gate and countenance surely like a Father" (4.2.63–65/1821–1823). Here both the *mercante* and the *dot-tore* of the Italian scenarios are conflated in their typical role of father to the *innamorati* (see Wells and Taylor 172). Petruchio is a type of braggart suitor, although an unusual one in that he wins his love. Once again, the characters and the setting of the main action of *The Shrew* could not be more "Italian."

The very "English" setting and characters of the play's Induction, the trick played on the drunken tinker, Christopher Sly, accentuates the Italianate quality of the play-within-the-play. But the Induction itself has far from English origins, and has been traced to an old tale from *The Arabian Nights* which had many subsequent versions. It was again current in the late sixteenth century in a story in Latin (1584) about Philip the Good of Burgundy (Bullough I: 58). The play-within-the-play is performed for Sly by a group of travelling players, and Shakespeare emphasizes its Italianate qualities. There are a number of Italian words and phrases in *The Shrew*,¹² and the presence of the "Pantalowne" surely indicates that Shakespeare means Sly to see a typical *commedia dell'arte* presented *all'improvviso* by an Italian troupe.

There are two elements to the play-within-the-play: Petruchio's taming of Katharina, which forms the main plot, and the wooing of Bianca, the sub-plot. Like the Induction's tale of the beggar transported into luxury, the story of the "shrew" and her "tamer" originates in folk literature. Bullough (I: 61–63) and Salerno (398) give several variants of the theme from England and France. The story is also found in an Italian novella by Andrea Volpino, *Madonna Isota da Pisa* (Siena,

1581). The subplot of Bianca's wooing appears to come from Ariosto's *I Suppositi*, perhaps through George Gascoigne's translation, *The Supposes* (1556), which had had at least one performance, at Trinity College, Oxford, in 1581 (Chambers III: 327).

But in looking at sources for *The Taming of the Shrew*, we must not forget the anonymous play, *The Taming of a Shrew*, which is believed to have preceded Shakespeare's play.¹³ The relation between the two is unclear. *A Shrew* contains all the basic elements found in Shakespeare's play but is set in Athens, although the characters all have Italian names. The main differences are in the sub-plot: *A Shrew* gives Katharina two sisters, whereas Shakespeare's story of the wooing of Bianca is closer to Ariosto's *I Suppositi*, or Gascoigne's version of it. Shakespeare probably used both *The Taming of a Shrew* and Gascoigne's *Supposes* as a basis for *The Taming of the Shrew*, but it has been argued that *A Shrew* might have been his first version of the play (Bullough I: 57–58). Once again, it seems that Shakespeare had a ready-made, Italianate play to use as a model for his writing, one which combined various plot strands that can be traced ultimately to Italian *novelle* and *commedia erudita*.

Turning finally to *Love's Labour's Lost* (?1594–1595), another of Shakespeare's earliest comedies, we find at first sight a somewhat different picture. The date of the play is disputed, and no single source has been discovered which covers the plot. Shakespeare is often credited with having invented it himself. The play is full of obscure topical allusions, some of which are believed to satirize various members of Elizabeth's court. The general influence of John Lyly's comedies of courtly love has been detected by some critics, and there are some resemblances to his *Endimion* (1591). The story of *Love's Labour's Lost* appears to be based in part on a visit by Catherine de Medici and her daughter, Margaret of Valois, with their ladies-in-waiting to the court of King Henry of Navarre in 1578, where, interestingly enough, they were entertained by a company of Italian players. But at any rate, there appears to be no dramatic precedent for the main plot, involving the lords and ladies.¹⁴

However, when we consider the subplot, with its low comic characters, we are immediately struck by their resemblance to the character types in the *commedia dell'arte*. I have already mentioned the play's verbal reference to the "zany." In Act Five, scene two, Berowne refers scathingly to the French lord Boyet as "Some carry tale, some please-man some sleight sanie," for having helped the Princess and her ladies trick the King and his companions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this is the earliest use of the word "zany" in English. Shakespeare is also credited as the first English writer to have used the word "pantaloon," though as we have seen, its use in *The Taming of the Shrew* may have been preceded by the appearance of the Pantaloon in *The Plot of the Dead Man's Fortune*. Another familiar English word first used by Shakespeare, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and which may also come directly from the *commedia dell'arte*, is the word "pedant."¹⁵ This brings us to a very interesting feature of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

The word "pedant" occurs in both the Quarto and Folio versions of the play, as a stage direction at the start of Act Four, scene two: "Enter Dull, Holofernes, the Pedant and Nathaniel." At the start of the next act, the direction is, "Enter the Pedant, the Curat, and Dull." Again, in the last scene (V.ii.581/2333), during the Pageant of the Nine Worthies, there is the stage direction, "Enter Pedant for Iudas, and the Boy for Hercules." And in the Quarto version (1598), the word "Pedant" is used as a speech heading, instead of "Holofernes," the character's name, throughout the rest of the scene. In fact, in many of the speech headings and stage directions the name of a stock type is used in place of that of a character: Don Armado and Moth are referred to as the "Braggart and his Boy" (III.i.1/735; V.i.29/1633), Costard is almost always "Clowne," and Nathaniel is the "Curate." Dull is called "a Constable" at his first two entrances, and Jaquenetta is simply "Wench."

That Shakespeare thought of these characters first and foremost as comic types is substantiated by Berowne's dry comment on the actors presenting the Pageant to the King and his guests:

The Pedant, the Braggart, the Hedge-Priest, the Foole, and the Boy.

(V.ii.538/2288)

Berowne's list is remarkably like Jaques' in *As You Like It*, sometimes called the Seven Ages of Man: the infant, the schoolboy, the lover (*innamorato*) "with a wofull ballad/ Made to his Mistresse eyebrow," the soldier (*capitano*) "Ielous in honor, sodaine, and quicke in quarell," the justice (*dottore* or *pedante*) "Full of wise sawes and moderne instances," and "the leane and slipper'd Pantaloone./ With spectacles on nose and pouch on side./ His youthfull hose well sau'd, a world too wide/ For his shrunke shanke . . ." ¹⁶ Even without the name of the Venetian magnifico, the *commedia dell'arte* characters are obvious. Although not identical, these lists of types, and the use of similar generic names in the speech headings and stage directions of more than one play, indicate once again that Shakespeare conceived many of his characters along the lines of the *commedia dell'arte*'s stock types. ¹⁷ This would hardly be surprising if he was using plays derived from the Italian comedians. The characters would have come with the plots, so to speak. ¹⁸

That these types stem from the *commedia dell'arte* and not from the types of classical comedy, as Lyly's seem to, may be seen from the fact that Don Armado is undoubtedly a Spanish braggart soldier, unlike his counterpart, Sir Tophas, the *miles gloriosus* of Lyly's *Endimion*. As Campbell has argued, the Spanish captain, his boy page, the pedant, and his parasite, the curate in *Love's Labour's Lost*, are all drawn from the Italian popular comedy as it might have been played by the *Gelosi*. The verbal acrobatics of the braggart and the pedant in particular are reminiscent of the earlier *commedia dell'arte* *capitano* and *dottore*. Don Armado's fantastic language may well be in imitation of the type of stage rhetoric for which Francesco Andreini's *Capitan' Spavento* was renowned. Armado's humiliation and marriage to a rustic wench at the end of the play is typical of the Spanish captain's role as the unsuccessful suitor. Holofernes, with his Latin phrases and his pedantic insistence on dubious pronunciations, is a close cousin of *Dottor' Gratiano*, and the pedant's "lessons" in Latin and grammar, such as the one that Dull receives (IV.ii), were a common *lazzi* of verbal confusion in the *commedia dell'arte*. Even Dull the constable may have been based on a similar role in the Italian comedy (Campbell, "*Love's Labour's Lost*," 32ff). Francesco Andreini, for example, played the part of a stupid magistrate or captain of the watch. Dogberry and Verges in *Much Ado* are also just such types.

In drafting his plays, therefore, Shakespeare seems to have thought of at least some of his *dramatis personae* as types resembling those of the *commedia dell'arte*, so that the generic titles, "pedant," "braggart," "clown," and so on, came to mind more readily than the names of the characters. ¹⁹ This, I believe, tells us much about his way of working as a dramatist. In other cases, he used the actor's name in a speech heading, in place of either the name of the character or the type. In the Quarto edition of *Much Ado About Nothing* (1600), for example, the names of William Kemp and Richard Cowley occur in speech headings for the constable of the watch, Dogberry, and his assistant, Verges (IV.ii). Like the parts of Speed and Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Dogberry and Verges fit the traditional roles of the clown and his inept companion, the first and second *zanni* of the *commedia dell'arte*.

This confirms what we can guess about the type of role commonly played by Kemp. His name is also used in a stage direction in the Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* (1599), where he must have played the part of Peter, a servant to the Capulets. It is safe to assume that Kemp's special talents as a clown and as a dancer and extempore rhymers of bawdy jigs would have been taken into account by Shakespeare when casting him in a particular role. In fact, Shakespeare may well have written his plays with the talents of his fellow actors in mind. Baldwin has argued that each of the Lord Chamberlain's Men specialized in a particular "line" or type of role. He makes some interesting conjectures in this regard, although, curiously, he seems to choose to ignore the similarity of such a practice to the working methods of the *commedia dell'arte* actors. ²⁰

As far as can be deduced, then, Kemp's roles in the plays of Shakespeare appear to run along the lines of the serving-man and clown, very like the part of the *zanni*. So it is interesting to speculate on the possibility that he had had personal acquaintance with his Italian counterparts. From the little we know of the travels of English actors abroad, it seems there were three actors in particular among the Shakespearean company who may previously have had a chance to meet

exponents of the *commedia dell'arte* while touring on the Continent. They were Will Kemp, Thomas Pope, and George Bryan, all former members of the Earl of Leicester's Men.

William Kemp is first heard of in November 1585, at Dunkirk, France, as one of the Earl of Leicester's players. In March 1586 he seems to have been in Utrecht, where he is mentioned by Sir Philip Sidney in a letter, and where, in April, Leicester's Men performed a feat of strength known as the "Forces of Hercules."²¹ Having been recommended by the Earl to King Frederick II of Denmark, Kemp and his boy, Daniel Jonns, together with Thomas Pope, George Bryan and three other members of Leicester's Men, were employed at the court in Elsinore from July to September 1586. From there, Pope, Bryan and the others, but not Kemp, appear to have gone to Berlin and Dresden as entertainers to Christian I, Elector of Saxony, until mid July 1587 (Chambers II: 90-91, 272-273).

English players were not the only ones to have been employed at the courts in Germany, however. Italian actors are also recorded at the imperial court of Maximilian II in Vienna and at the courts of the Dukes of Bavaria at Landshut and Munich during the 1570s. And an English clown is known to have worked with an Italian *zanni* in the household of the German prince Maurice, Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel, around 1596-1597, a decade after the visit of Pope, Bryan and company to Germany (Lea 352; cf. Schrickx, 1980). It is possible therefore that there was fairly frequent contact between English and Italian players, during their travels on the Continent.

Now of course, the names of Pope and Bryan are next found in the *Plot of the Seven Deadly Sins*, performed about 1590, by which time they had probably joined Lord Strange's Men. Kemp too is next heard of as one of Strange's Men. He is known to have performed with Edward Alleyn and the combined company of Strange's and the Lord Admiral's Men in *A Knacke to Knowe a Knave*. This play was probably given at the Newington Butts playhouse owned by Philip Henslowe, manager of the Admiral's Men. It is entered in Henslowe's *Diary* as having been performed eight times between June 1592 and January 1593. The 1594 title page advertises the play as "newly sett fourth as it hath sundrye tymes been plaid by Ned. Allen and his Companie with Kemps applauded Merymentes of the menn of Goteham." The text gives little indication of Kemp's part, and his "merriments" must have been largely improvised. By this time too, he had published several of the jigs for which he was so popular, and earlier references to him by Thomas Nashe indicate that he was well known in London by about 1590 (Chambers II: 325f.; IV: 24).

Nashe calls Kemp "Jestmonger and Vice-regent generall to the Ghost of Dicke Tarlton," and he seems to have taken over not only Tarlton's popularity, but some of the characteristics of his role as a rural clown. Dick Tarlton was one of the elite company of the Queen's Men from its formation in 1583 until his death in 1588. As I have said, both Tarlton and Kemp specialized in the comic role of the rustic peasant, and both clowns were famed for their skill in extempore rhyming. This skill was developed by Kemp in the rhyming jigs that he danced as after-pieces to the plays (Chambers II: 325-327; 342-345).

According to Gabriel Harvey, Tarlton was the author of at least one play, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the "plot" of which we have considered above. The first part of this play is believed to have been performed originally by the Queen's Men on January 6th, 1585, under the title *Five Plays in One*. The second part, *Three Plays in One*, was prepared for performance on February 21st, "but the Quene came not abroad that night" (Chambers III: 496-497; IV: 101, 160). It is a curious coincidence that on January 3rd, only days previous to the performance of the *Five Plays in One*, the Queen's Men should have played the Italianate comedy, *Felix and Philiomena*, on which Shakespeare may have based his *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. *The Seven Deadly Sins* was revived again in the 1590s, after Tarlton's death, by the Admiral's/Strange's Men, using the "stage plot" that records the names of so many of Shakespeare's fellow actors.

Here we must turn our attention again to the stage plots, although, once more, lack of information forces us into speculation. We do not know exactly how these plots were used by the actors, how they were drawn up, what their relation to a play script might have been, how widespread their use was, nor where this method of stage management originated. Do they represent some sort of

imitation of the Italian actors' way of improvising a play from a skeletal outline of the action? Does the Pantaloon in *The Plot of the Dead Man's Fortune* link the plots with the *commedia dell'arte*? If there is a link with Italian stagecraft, who was it who brought the idea to England?

It is possible that Kemp, Pope or Bryan met Italian players on their journey to France, Germany and the Low Countries. It is possible, too, that they, or previous actors whose travels are unknown, returned from abroad with new ideas about the staging of plays. English players would surely have met Italians such as the Martinelli troupe during their visits to England. They may even have been inspired by the example of the Italian professional actors to try making their own plots and using improvisation in the staging of plays. Both Robert Wilson and Dick Tarlton of the Queen's Men were praised by their contemporaries for their skill at extempore rhyming and wit, and both are known to have written plays (Chambers II: 349–350; III: 496–497, 515–517). Given the existence of Tarlton's play, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, in the form of a stage plot, together with its companion, *The Plot of the Dead Man's Fortune*, it is possible that the plots do represent an adoption of *commedia dell'arte* staging methods by the Elizabethan actors.

We remember that Shakespeare was probably just such an actor-cum-playwright at this time. The last two decades of the sixteenth century are a particularly obscure period of his life. From what we have seen about his probable methods of writing his earliest comedies, he revised or otherwise based his works on previously existing plays which all seem to have contained elements of the *commedia dell'arte*. It may well be, therefore, that some form of contact with the *commedia dell'arte* was the prime dramatic source for many of his plays, and not the *commedia erudita*, as Kathleen Lea believed. Oscar Campbell ("*Love's Labour's Lost*," 30–31) argues strongly against the position held by Lea:

Of the two sorts of Italian comedy one would expect the *Commedia dell'Arte* to have the more definite influence upon English drama. Only those few literary comedies which were translated into English could have exerted any pervasive influence. The appeal of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, on the other hand, was largely independent of language . . . Its appeal was striking, picturesque, unique. Such plays, once seen, would be held securely in memory and all their comic devices cherished.

A feature of Shakespeare's drama is the frequency with which types and situations are "recycled," with slight variations, in more than one play. In the early comedies we have looked at, we have seen examples of comic devices that Shakespeare was to use again in his later works. In many cases, these were devices, gags and other forms of *lazzi* that had previously been used by the improvising Italian players. It is possible to argue from this that Shakespeare had served an "apprenticeship" of sorts in the school of Italian improvised comedy, and that this gave him a tried-and-tested way of making a play. It gave him a basic but variable cast of characters, and a stock of comic situations and devices with which to propel a story on stage. We shall never know the full secret of Shakespeare's creativity, but I do not think the role of the *commedia dell'arte* can be ignored in a study of his dramatic genius.

NOTES

1. Andrew Grewar, "Shakespeare and the actors of the *commedia dell'arte*," in George and Gossip, 13–47, originally published as "The Clowning Zanies: Shakespeare and the Actors of the *Commedia dell'Arte*," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 3 (1989): 9–32.

2. This paper was first presented at a conference on the Practice of the Theatre: Staging, Set and Scenery in the Renaissance, held at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, March 4th–6th, 1993, and at two seminars for postgraduate students at the Department of Drama, University of Exeter, and at the Graduate School of Renaissance Studies, University of Warwick. My thanks are due to the many people who in one way or another stimulated, encouraged and sustained me in my research into this topic. Funding which enabled me

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3. All quotations from Shakespeare's plays are from the Oxford Shakespeare, edited by Wells, Taylor, Jowett, and Montgomery. References are to the act, scene and line numbers as given in the Alexander edition of Shakespeare, followed by the line numbers given in the Oxford Shakespeare.

4. Dates for Shakespeare's plays are according to Wells and Taylor 109–134.

5. Greg reproduces facsimiles of the extant stage plots in *Dramatic Documents II*.

6. In both this scene, and in the situation shown in Figure 1, the "lazzi of the spectacles" provides the denouement, the moment when the dupe realises he has been deceived. The trick in *The Dead Man's Fortune* seems to be a variant of an old folk tale, found, for example, in the so-called Pear-Tree episode in Chaucer's Merchant's Tale, or the Ninth Story of the Seventh Day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*. In Chaucer's tale, old January, who is literally blind, is deceived by his young wife, May, into helping her climb the pear tree, where she and her lover Damyan make love. But, ". . . whan that Pluto saugh this grete wrong / To Januarye he gaf agayn his sighte, / And made hym se as wel as evere he myghte" (IV 2354–2356, Chaucer, ed. Robinson, 126). In Boccaccio, the deception lies in making the gullible old husband believe that the pear tree is distorting his vision, and that the lovemaking he sees is an illusion. When this stock situation came to be represented on stage, a pair of spectacles provided the professional comedians with an obvious and understandable way of restoring the old cuckold's vision at the crucial moment.

7. See Greg's discussion of the stage plots and the actors named in them, in *Dramatic Documents I*: 1–104; and *Henslowe Papers*, Appendix II, 127–154.

8. Salerno, "The Fifth Day: Flavio Betrayed," 39–46. Another translation of the scenario is given as an analogue to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in Bullough I: 256–260.

9. Campbell 1925, 54–56. Cf. Salerno, Appendix, 396. The German theatre historian, Max Wolff, seems to have been the first to point out the similarities between *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Flavio Tradito*, in his article of 1910.

10. Anonymous, "The Deceived (*Gl'ingannati*)," trans. Thomas Love Peacock, in Bentley 114.

11. See Melzi 80–81. He argues that "the elements [of *Twelfth Night*] deriving from *Gl'ingannati* came to [Shakespeare] not through direct reading of the Italian plays but through the intermediary of the *commedia dell'arte*."

12. *Shrew* I.i.25/299; I.ii.24–26/550–551; IV.i.64/1821. The Folio's first stage direction is "Enter Begger and Hostes, Christophero Sly." The Italianate version of his first name may reflect its antecedents. Rowse (134) mentions John Florio, an Italian tutor in the household of Shakespeare's patron, the Earl of Southampton, as a possible source for these and other Italian features of the play. It has also been suggested that Florio, who published two Anglo-Italian dictionaries (1598, 1611), was the pedant satirized as Holofernes in *Love's Labour's Lost*.

13. Bullough I: 69–108. Chambers (IV: 48) dates *The Taming of a Shrew* in or before 1589, since it is parodied in Greene's *Menaphon* (London, 1589).

14. Bullough I: 425f. For details of the historical events at the court of Navarre, see Campbell, "Love's Labour's Lost," 4–10; see also Nicoll 307–308.

15. See the *OED*: **pantaloön** and **zany**. According to Garner (214), Shakespeare was the first to use the words "pedant" and "pedantical," in *Love's Labour's Lost*, and Scheler (100–101) cites "pedant" and "magnifico" (from *The Taming of the Shrew*) among some thirty words coined by Shakespeare from the contemporary Italian.

16. *As You Like It* II.vii.148–161/1071–1084. See Nicoll 346–347.

17. There is an echo of these types in Hamlet's reaction to the news that the players have arrived at court: "He that plays the King shal be welcome, his Maiestic shal haue tribute of me, the aduenterous Knight shall vse his foyle and target, the Louer shall not sigh gratis, the humorus Man shall end his part in peace, the Clowne shall make those laugh whose lungs are tickled a'th' scere, and the Lady shall say her minde freely: or the blank verse shall halt for't" (*Hamlet* 2.2.317–323/1250–1256). See also David, Introduction, *Love's Labour's Lost*, xxiv, xxxv–xxxvi.

18. Campbell, "Two Gentlemen," 63, and "Italianate Background," 81–117. Bullough (I: 426) notes that the use of type-names in the Quarto of *Love's Labour's Lost* may indicate a *commedia dell'arte* original for the play.

19. This may account for the confusion in the speech headings for Holofernes and Nathaniel in *Love's Labour's Lost* (IV.ii). See Wells and Taylor 271. Generic speech headings are a feature of many of Shakespeare's plays. The term "Clowne" is particularly frequent, indicating perhaps the importance of Kemp's role in the company.

20. Baldwin, ch. 9, 229ff. See also Brown, in Brown and Harris, 106; Holmes 25.

21. Chambers II: 90, note 2, mentions the possible Italian origins of the "Forces of Hercules," a show part dramatic, part acrobatic.

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