

A DISTORTING MIRROR? HOW ITALIAN RENAISSANCE  
REGULAR (FIVE-ACT) COMEDY REFLECTED ITS  
SOCIETY

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# ABSTRACT OF THESIS

## A DISTORTING MIRROR? HOW ITALIAN RENAISSANCE REGULAR (FIVE-ACT) COMEDY REFLECTED ITS SOCIETY

This is an investigation into a specific genre of Italian theatre - erudite comedy of the first half of the sixteenth century. The investigation has been undertaken through the close study of the texts of five plays: *La Calandra* by Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, *Il Negromante* by Ludovico Ariosto, *Il Marescalco* by Pietro Aretino, *Gli Straccioni* by Annibal Caro, and *L'Assiuolo* by Giovanni Maria Cecchi. These cover a chronological spread, from the first play performed in 1513 to the last play written in 1549; and a geographical spread, both in terms of the origins of the playwrights and in the settings of the plays.

The broad focus is on how this type of comedy provides an insight into how the society in which it was written and staged viewed typical members of bourgeois urban life, such as tutors, lawyers, well-to-do young males and servants, and incomers such as itinerant sorcerers and pedlars. (One of the plays, *Il Marescalco*, by virtue of its setting in a princely court, has a broader cast of characters, which includes an aristocrat.)

The principal set of analyses concerns the interplay of characters as to how they gain ascendancy over, or are dominated, by others through four discrete dimensions: authority, morality, intelligence and culture. In Chapters Two to Five inclusive these aspects are examined separately, whilst Chapter Six considers them together, either operating complementarily or in opposition. In addition, there is an evaluation of each play and certain characters within each play as to their degree of artifice or verisimilitude.

The final chapter, Chapter Seven, draws together the various conclusions adduced in the previous chapters and places the thesis's findings into the broader perspective of Italian political and cultural life of those times.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years Alain de Botton, philosopher, writer and broadcaster, has come to prominence through his book and parallel TV series *Status Anxiety*. In his introduction, he points to various anxieties - health, crime, physical attractiveness, the aging process, which he felt had had their fair share of media attention and public debate. A starting justification for his thesis was the assessment that anxiety about status, though widely experienced, was surprisingly under-discussed or at least under-examined, although he gauged that most people from time to time would worry about their place in the scheme of things, their worth in the eyes of fellow members of society. He defines status anxiety as:

A worry, so pernicious as to be capable of ruining extended stretches of our lives, that we are in danger of failing to conform to the ideals of success laid down by our society and that we may as a result be stripped of dignity and respect; a worry that we are currently occupying too modest a rung or are about to fall to a lower one.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident both from one's own commonsense assumptions and from Alain de Botton's more systematic approach that status anxiety is not just a modern-day phenomenon but has existed since the dawn of civilization. It is true, however, that status anxiety usually only comes to the fore when it is not submerged under greater, more urgent anxieties: those in response to war, famine or an epidemic of deadly disease. It is also evident that status anxiety is likely to be less prominent in societies with a rigid class or caste system, but more so in a less rigidly structured society. There is a well-known four-line verse that sums up the fixed social order of the Middle Ages, although it was composed during the Industrial Revolution (perhaps harking back to what was naively considered a golden age):

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alain De Botton, *Status Anxiety* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2004), pp. 3-4

<sup>2</sup> Verse from the nineteenth century church hymn *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, words and music by C.F. Alexander.

This is a simplification of the reality, since there have been notable, though rare, examples of a movement from peasant to merchant to aristocrat in three or four generations from the thirteenth century onwards in England, but it has a general validity. It is also worth noting that, when the social order is overly rigid and is seen by its lower classes to be too repressive, status anxiety not only surfaces but can develop from an individual sense of unease into a collective grievance and become the precursor to mass uprising.<sup>3</sup>

If status anxiety is assuaged through successful personal effort, preferment by others or merely through a lucky break, or is exacerbated through unsuccessful action, malign forces arrayed against oneself, or simply through misfortune, we can often turn to stories, real or fictional, to alleviate or sometimes, unwittingly, stoke that anxiety. If we read a story of the downfall of a crook, we may feel moral superiority; if we see someone the victim of an obvious confidence trick, we may feel intellectual superiority, or toward someone mispronouncing a word we may feel cultural superiority. Conversely, if we see our own faults too closely mirrored in another (in real life or in fiction) our own sense of security may be undermined. Evidently, the concept of status has little meaning if the individual is examined as a discrete entity in isolation, but only accrues meaning from the individual's relationship to others. One particular form of fiction – theatre, which depicts the interaction of several characters over the course of two or three hours, provides a particularly suitable platform on which the ebb and flow of status can be given tangible form, enabling an audience member to tap into an immediate collective experience and gain a sense of how others view particular individuals or particular groups of individuals: how much worth or lack of worth, how much approval or condemnation these fictional stage characters should be accorded.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> If England experienced a dramatic clash between ruler and ruled in the shape of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, northern and central Italy saw more sporadic, smaller scale, clashes: 'The reaction of *contadini* and rural community to the demands of landlords and cities did not always stop at petition and complaint. If there was no *Jacquerie* in the Italian countryside, violence and the threat of violence were certainly present and the level of disorder could become intense; [...] in Friuli in the early years of the sixteenth century attempts by members of the feudal nobility to insist on a vigorous interpretation of their lordship, together with the burdens placed on the region by the Venetian government, provoked a series of rural revolts.' Denys Hay and John Law, *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance: 1380 – 1530* (London: Longman, 1989), pp. 61-62.

<sup>4</sup> In any given performance, usually we do not know the verdicts reached by our fellow audience members until afterwards, either in informal discussion or, more formally, through a published review. Though in certain types of theatre such as pantomime, the recognition of a villain may come during a performance through a collective hiss from the audience. Conversely, a sustained display of physical or verbal dexterity by a character may elicit a spontaneous round of applause.

We like to see the hero come out on top; equally we like to see the person or persons opposing the hero come to a sticky end. We discern characters like us, or idealized versions of ourselves, characters alien or at least strange to us, characters we deem good, bad, smart or incompetent. If the stage fiction and its cast of characters are not too far removed from reality, it may provide a useful aid for judging the behaviour of their real-life equivalents.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis will be devoted to a study of *commedia erudita* (erudite comedy), a theatrical genre that was born in northern Italy in the first decade of the sixteenth century and saw its full flourishing during the following half century, before being supplanted as the dominant theatrical genre by *commedia dell'arte* towards the end of the century. (This is a simplified description since the waxing and waning of *commedia erudita* had considerable regional variation.) This genre of theatre featured typical figures from urban bourgeois life and, despite its comic exaggerations and set-pieces, is far less removed from reality than other contemporaneous theatre genres. Whereas other Cinquecento, and preceding, genres of theatre – tragedy, the pastoral, *sacra rappresentazione* or *farsa rusticale* largely featured characters outside the experience of most of the audience: kings, popes, gods, mythical figures or stereotypes of outsiders (e.g. country bumpkin or eastern mystic), the real-life counterparts of the stage characters of *commedia erudita* were figures audience members might easily have encountered in their daily lives. If the more artificial elements, such as pratfalls, *bastonatura* or repetitive verbal exchanges, featured in this type of theatre engendered a certain distance between the audience and what was unfurling on stage, the viewing of immediately recognizable figures from bourgeois life: lawyer, spinster, servant, bawd or school teacher, tended to have a countervailing effect, i.e. bringing matters closer to home.

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<sup>5</sup> Ancient Greek drama in particular was a vigorously 'didactic' theatre, in which the affairs of great men were held up for public scrutiny, with the chorus offering guidance to the audience on reaching verdicts on their behaviour. A more specific example of this notion is given by Drakasis who, referring to the trial and execution in 1594 of Dr. Roderigo Lopez, a Portuguese Jewish physician, asserts that the account of this by William Camden 'makes more of Lopez's Jewishness than the actual accounts of his trial and especially his public execution, and does much to reaffirm the extent to which theatrical representation (possibly Marlowe's) influenced perception.' *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. by John Drakasis, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010), Introduction, p. 21.

The society which gave birth to the genre of theatre under study in this thesis – that of northern and central Italy during the Renaissance – was in many ways similar to the ancient Roman and Greek societies from which its theatrical templates were largely drawn.<sup>6</sup> However, there was a crucial difference: a much expanded middle class. Whereas ancient Roman society consisted of patricians and landowners and their dependent workforce (in the main slaves), sixteenth-century Italy was at the vanguard of the rise of both an entrepreneurial class - bankers<sup>7</sup> and merchants, and a professional class - doctors, teachers and notaries.<sup>8</sup> The existence of this *nouveau riche* class and those who succeeded in becoming pillars of respectability through merit and individual effort, rather than through inheritance or patronage, meant that status was not determined at birth to the degree that pertained in the more feudal societies of other European countries. However, the degree of replacement of feudal by republican authority in northern Italy should not be exaggerated.<sup>9</sup> At any rate, whatever the contrasts between different European countries and between northern and southern Italy in terms of the mix between autocratic, democratic, signorial and republic forms of governance, any increase in the opportunities for upward social mobility would inevitably bring in its wake ‘downward mobility’ for those who had been overtaken; for these ‘victims’ as well as a wider section of society who merely feared falling down the social hierarchy, the phenomenon cited above, status anxiety, would have been keenly felt. The following thesis is devoted in large part to examining how such mobility (upward or downward) and any status anxiety engendered in its wake find an echo in *commedia erudita*, which featured the social strata most likely to have been affected by such phenomena: the middle classes.

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<sup>6</sup> Andrews asserts: ‘It seems that the structures, inhibitions, prejudices and proprieties of urban Italian society in the Renaissance were remarkably similar to those of urban antiquity. Many of the Roman stereotypes struck familiar chords.’ Richard Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 29-30.

<sup>7</sup> ‘By 1525 the principal sources of papal revenue were in the hands of Roman and Tuscan bankers’, Hay and Law, *Italy in the Age ...*, p.102. ‘As early as mid-fourteenth century, Edward III of England turned to Florentine bankers for a substantial loan.’, *The Long View*, BBC Radio 4, 2 February 2012.

<sup>8</sup> ‘All over Italy notaries proliferated, especially in the bigger towns where they fulfilled important secretarial posts. It was their use in such a capacity (and many places insisted on employment of notaries in key jobs) that gave them the grip they evidently acquired on the machinery of government.’ Hay and Law, *Italy in the Age ...*, p. 290.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Even more effective in thwarting the aspirations of the ‘Renaissance State’ were the feudal nobility who were prominent, even dominant, in the countryside in all regions of Italy except central Tuscany.’ Hay and Law, *Italy in the Age ...*, p.71.



Distinct from genres such as tragedy or religious theatre (*sacra rappresentazione*) which had avowedly didactic purposes, the primary objective of this new erudite comedy was to entertain. However, I suspect such theatre had a secondary function, or at least by-product, intentionally or unwittingly, of confirming or occasionally challenging the audience members' notion of their place in the world. Pertinent to this notion, it will be instructive to quote a passage from the introduction of a recent publication on the topic of *commedia erudita*:

And not surprisingly, given its importance in the Renaissance, *virtù* plays a central role in our comedies as well. At one level, *virtù* meant something quite simple: an approach to life and a set of behaviours that made one person superior to another. Thus throughout our comedies certain characters are constantly alerting us that they deserve our empathy and are superior (presumably like us) because they have *virtù*, while others are constantly demonstrating that they deserve to be laughed at or be made victims of cruel jokes or even to be despised because they lack this quality.<sup>10</sup>

The critic Richard Andrews also uses this same word 'superior' when discussing the antecedents of Ruzante's theatrical output and more specifically a genre called *mariazi*, which were dramatic rituals of betrothal set in peasant villages:

In depicting, and even impersonating, characters who seem to have none of the normal civilized constraints on their behaviour, Paduans and Venetians may on the one hand have been seeking the laughter of superior contempt.<sup>11</sup>

However, subsequent to these observations, the authors here do not attempt to 'unpack' the various components which might constitute this sense of superiority.

When our thoughts tend toward an egotistical, or at least competitive, rather than an altruistic attitude, we may feel superior to another individual for a host of different reasons: in terms of physical health, income, sporting ability, attractiveness to the opposite sex, level of education, reliability, extent of our family or social network. Thus, if assessing an individual in terms of worth, there are a large number of possible criteria. Whichever combination is picked, and whatever 'weighting' is accorded to

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<sup>10</sup> *Five Comedies from the Italian Renaissance*, trans. and ed. by Laura Gianetti and Guido Ruggiero, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), Introduction, p. xx.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, pp. 124-5.

each quality, if applied to a real-life figure this exercise would ultimately prove an arbitrary exercise open to dispute. However, for our purposes we are dealing with a drastic distillation of real-life characters – characters that appear on stage for only two or three hours at most and thus susceptible to an easier process of evaluation and the reaching of less contentious judgments. These characters exist permanently only in the text: dialogue plus (if any) stage directions, and ephemerally in terms of actual theatrical performance.<sup>12</sup> For the latter, the director's particular interpretation, properties, costume, scenery and the shape and dimensions of the edifice in which it is staged would contribute to the finished product; likewise the actor would be in a position to embellish the character he played, with the possibility of giving him a more heroic, villainous or pathetic aspect.

The depiction of 'a set of behaviours that made one person superior to another' (to repeat Gianetti and Ruggiero's phrase) provides a useful insight into part of the satisfaction we may derive from attending theatre. However, from my research of critical literature, this pivotal notion has been under explored. As a consequence, I intend to look more closely at how hierarchies of status are built up during a theatrical performance, and how these are subject to change: how one character may gain initial mastery or kudos over another character, but later on forfeit that ascendancy, to detect what elements go to make up such initial ascendancy and subsequent reversal. Further, attempting to evaluate matters from the audience's point of view, I will look at how one might, like a spectator at a sporting match between opposing teams, appreciate the tactics employed by each side, follow the shifts of advantage and disadvantage accruing to each side and perhaps, at a certain juncture, be in a position to predict a winner.

A theatrical character could be viewed through a single perspective, e.g. within the moral perspective as a downright villain deserving our censure or an unsullied hero meriting our wholehearted admiration or, since we are dealing with comedy, solely on

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<sup>12</sup> Pirandello, in his seminal theatrical piece *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore*, wryly alludes to this paradox in this exchange: IL PADRE: 'E per vivere eterna non ha neanche bisogno di straordinarie doti o di compiere prodigi. Chi era Sancho Panza? Chi era don Abbondio? Eppure vivono eterni, perchè – vivi germi – ebbero la ventura di trovare una matrice feconda, una fantasia che li seppe allevare e nutrire: far vivere per l'eternità!' / IL CAPOCOMICO: 'Tutto questo va benissimo! Ma che cosa vogliono loro qua?' / IL PADRE: 'Vogliamo vivere, signore!' / IL CAPOCOMICO: (ironico): 'Per l'eternità?' / IL PADRE: 'No, signore: almeno per un momento, in loro.' Luigi Pirandello, *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore*, ed. by Roberto Alonge (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1993).

the criterion of how funny he or she is. Moving away from these linear judgments towards a fuller set of criteria, the basis on which we 'judge' a character begins to expand and could include all of the aspects outlined above employed when judging real-life figures. But for figures which solely exist on the page or on the stage (for my specific purposes Italian erudite comedy of the first half of the sixteenth century), I have chosen the following four aspects on which to base my investigation:

#### Authority/Economic Dimension

An investigation into who has mastery over others by virtue of rank, who is subordinate and/or dependent on others; whether a character is part of a power hierarchy (typically a bourgeois household) or operates as an independent agent; who has ample economic resources and who has very little.

#### Moral Dimension

An investigation of a character to see if he/she is intent on doing good or doing harm to others, acts selfishly or altruistically; where he or she is placed on a spectrum between saints and sinners.

#### Intelligence Dimension

An investigation into who outsmarts whom, an examination of the battle of wits in such encounters as between master and servant, husband and wife, father and son, native and incomer; a look at who falls prey to the guile of others and who can see through this guile.

#### Cultural Dimension

An investigation into how a character is presented as regards the way he/she speaks, behaves, dresses and reveals his/her knowledge, or lack of it; in other words an evaluation as to who is considered refined and who is considered uncouth.

These four dimensions between them will provide a reasonably comprehensive viewpoint from which the worth of character can be evaluated and, though this is a more ambitious aim, how they might have been evaluated at the time of the first performance (or reading) of these plays.

When looking at the behaviour of these stage characters, I may on occasion need to cite two additional dimensions which I term the ‘supra-human’ and the ‘sub-human’. The first of these is where a character advances through elements outside his own merits, through coincidence or chance circumstance if taking a secular viewpoint, through divine intervention or pre-destination if taking a religious viewpoint.<sup>13</sup> The second essentially refers to episodes where a character resorts to violence or the threat of violence to gain mastery over another. (The expectation is that such episodes will be infrequent in comparison with the less erudite earlier theatre forms such as *farsa rustica* or later forms such as *commedia dell’arte*.)

The four chapters which follow this introductory one will look at each of these separate dimensions in turn. Necessarily, these dimensions will overlap to some extent: tranches of text or even single words may span two or more of these dimensions. However, I will endeavour not to use the same piece of text for illustration in more than one dimension. For the subsequent chapter (Chapter 6), I will move away from this analytical, narrowly focused approach towards a more holistic investigation, under which previous assessments in one particular dimension will be subsumed under a more comprehensive set of evaluations. I will examine how these dimensions vie with each other (e.g. a positive cultural image may compensate for any deficiency in morality) as characters interact either co-operatively or competitively with one another. I will then consider the overall thrust of each play: whether a particular dimension forms a dominant thread, whether any of the dimensions are underplayed or even absent.

In considering a play as a whole, I shall try to determine whether it is to be taken at face value (i.e. presenting a set of behaviours for which we are invited to judge in a way we would judge behaviour in the real world), or is deliberately constructed to be viewed ironically. For a particular play’s cast of characters, is there at least one whom the typical audience member could identify with or at least one whose values and moral compass he can share? If not, is the play presenting an alternative world where there is no hero or villain, no contest of good against evil? Is it a presentation which invites us to jettison our standard set of criteria by which we judge the worthiness or lack of such

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<sup>13</sup> To use Machiavelli’s *schema*, success through personal merit or effort is classed under *virtù*, success (or failure) through forces outside of one’s control is classed under *fortuna*.

of the stage characters, to be replaced by a different set of criteria, possibly antithetical to that we would use in judging real life characters?

There will be two distinct, if inevitably overlapping, sets of evaluation: first how, using the four dimensions listed above as analytical tools, the status of a character is viewed by other characters both during the fluctuations as the storyline unfolds as well as at the end of the play; secondly, his/her status as designed to be regarded by the audience. It is not uncommon that during the course of the play these two viewpoints – other characters' and the audience's - would diverge (in episodes which we now refer to as 'dramatic irony') but it is less common for there still to be a divergence at the close of the play. A character whose virtue has been apparent from early on to the audience may still be vilified by the majority of other characters at the end: conversely a character, whose treachery or hypocrisy is at some stage revealed to the audience, may be still held in high esteem by other characters even after the denouement. In these cases, this would tend to indicate a deliberate attempt by the playwright to portray a notionally unpopular figure in a more favourable light or, conversely, an attempt to 'puncture the halo' of those types he saw as accruing undeserved admiration.<sup>14</sup>

As delineated in the next section of the present chapter, 'The Critical Context', ways of looking at theatre can encompass one or more of a number of perspectives, such as political, archaeological<sup>15</sup>, anthropological<sup>16</sup> or feminist. Since these terms are rather loose and ill-defined, any particular set of analyses is inevitably prone to being placed somewhat arbitrarily into a particular perspective. My own approach can be summarised as an attempt to evaluate the behaviour and overall attitude of a stage character and to speculate how a contemporary audience member might have viewed that character: does he or she esteem, despise, trust or distrust, feel indulgent or

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<sup>14</sup> Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* does not present Shylock as an out-and-out villain from the outset but initially gives him a sympathetic presentation, particularly in the famous speech 'If you prick us, do we not bleed...' (III,1). Machiavelli in *La Mandragola* gives an unflattering portrait of the priesthood in the shape of the amoral, manipulative figure of Fra Timoteo. (Of course, it is difficult to ascertain to what to attribute the various opinions espoused in a play text: the playwright's own opinion; an attempt to mirror accurately public attitudes; a deliberate pander to public prejudice; or a deliberately mischievous inversion of widespread public attitudes.)

<sup>15</sup> The discovery or unearthing of now defunct performance spaces, which can provide clues as to the size of the audience, the spatial division between genders and ranks of society, and the level of prestige accorded to the plays performed in these.

<sup>16</sup> A wider study of essentials of human behaviour which are valid beyond specific geographical locations or historical periods.

ensorious towards that character? What are the essential components of a stage character that provide the basis for such judgments and reactions? In this sense my approach could be classed as a ‘psychological’ one. But as Borsellino reminds us, these Renaissance comedies did not in the main feature fully rounded individuals but relied on a limited repertoire of ‘types’.<sup>17</sup> Rather than assessing how a particular individual is viewed, the nature of this enquiry becomes more a case of how a category of individuals is viewed. Thus within that framework my approach might better be described as sociological: the study of groups and interaction between different groups, though one which readily links into other perspectives: the economic, the cultural and even the political.

Whereas the bulk of my investigation will be an analysis of stage characters through the aforementioned four dimensions, a secondary line of enquiry will focus on the degree of caricature accorded to the figure under scrutiny. I shall be on the look-out for any stage figure who is ‘far removed from reality’ (to re-use my phrase of p. 3) or, conversely, is sufficiently well-drawn to avoid the denotation as a mere stereotype. I shall try to ascertain whether Borsellino’s description of figures on stage as *tipi* is universally valid, or whether there are cases where a character reacts idiosyncratically to the particular scenario he finds himself in rather than follow a narrow set of attitudes and behaviours routinely ascribed to his type. In other words, are there signs, however nascent, of cases where a particular character, invested with some of the complexities of real-life people, reacts unpredictably and against the grain laid down by his more stereotypical predecessors. In addition, I will look at the play as a whole and judge whether it reflects the status quo, challenges, idealizes or sidesteps it.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, I hope to gauge the degree of distortion of the ‘mirror’ which *commedia erudita* holds up to its society and reach a verdict on how far, in the years from 1508<sup>19</sup> to 1550, it had moved theatre away from ‘symbolic’ representation towards what we today term ‘naturalistic’.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Tipi perciò e non veri e propri individui teatrali, i personaggi della commedia cinquecentesca operano in definitiva [...] secondo le leggi di comportamento della loro specie: gli innamorati in continua ansietà per il meccanismo di equivoci e impedimenti che ritarda il felice epilogo del loro amoroso contrasto; i pedanti con untuosa e melliflua severità; i capitani con la loro studiata truculenza di *miles gloriosi*, e così via.’ Nino Borsellino, *Rozzi e Intronati* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1974), p. 67.

<sup>18</sup> For example, by creating a ‘parallel universe’ where judgements valid for real-life equivalents become redundant.

<sup>19</sup> The year in which the first full length erudite comedy appeared – Ariosto’s *La Cassaria*.

Chapters Two to Six will be concerned with describing ‘how’ these theatrical presentations have been constructed. The concluding chapter (Chapter 7) of this thesis, as well as summarising the findings of the previous chapters, will try to answer the question: ‘why have such depictions been presented?’ Beyond the obvious answer: ‘to make the audience laugh’, I hope to tease out overtly moral or didactic intentions as well as any unintentional value judgments. From these I will draw a tentative inference as to what qualities, values and habits the society in which these plays were written and performed were held in high esteem or, conversely, frowned upon; to what degree individuals were judged according to their behaviour rather than their designated status.

## THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

I start with those commentators who have taken a broadly historical approach, a more straightforwardly descriptive look at *commedia erudita*, its origins and aftermath, followed by those whose analysis is biased towards a particular perspective: archeological, political, feminist or indeed theatrical. Regarding this last approach, for a long period there was a prevalence among critics to view *commedia erudita* as a literary rather than a theatrical artifact; however, in the last twenty years the bias has swung back to looking at this genre as a performative entity; particularly noteworthy in this endeavour are Richard Andrews and Angela Guidotti (both of whose contributions are included below). For my own line of enquiry, I am also looking at *commedia erudita* as it would have been staged in front of an audience. Since we only have the texts bequeathed to us, plus treatises on theatre written before or contemporaneous to this period, a few illustrations of stage sets and the occasional comments in letters by a person present at these stagings, these performances in the totality of their visual, audio and spatial impact and the audience reactions can only ever be imprecisely inferred.

I begin the survey of the critical context with the work of Marvin Herrick. Although now quite old, his *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance*<sup>20</sup> provides an excellent history of *commedia erudita*. The background of the title of the first chapter - *Fifteenth Century Background* – refers solely to theatrical antecedents e.g. *sacre rappresentazioni*,

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<sup>20</sup> Marvin Herrick, *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance* (Urbana, USA: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

*contrasti* and *maggi*, together with a more elitist theatre form, namely Latin humanist plays which were staged in increasing frequency towards the close of the fifteenth century. This is followed by a full list of the types of comedy and developing genres of the sixteenth century: farce, learned comedy, serious comedy, pastoral and finally *commedia dell'arte*, which did not emerge as a distinct genre until the last third of the sixteenth century. Herrick cites individual playwrights he considers worthy of attention and plays worthy of close scrutiny. At intervals he quotes whole passages from plays to highlight stylistic forms. However, he concedes the limitations of just studying texts: 'No historian can accurately evaluate the inevitable compromise in actual production between the written word and action.'<sup>21</sup> In the preface, he sees Italian drama as a tool in understanding Shakespeare and in the final chapter he tries to delineate instances where specific characters in the plays of Shakespeare are foreshadowed in Italian drama earlier in the sixteenth century.

This book is a comprehensive and comprehensible guide to Italian theatre as it developed during the sixteenth century. It lists, region by region, all the prominent playwrights and their extant works. It is above all an historical approach in that it describes in chronological sequence the appearance of plays, together with the briefest biographies of their authors. As a subsidiary topic it looks at *commedia erudita*'s theatrical legacy: as source material for English playwrights of the late sixteenth century. Although this volume provides interesting details of the literary composition of some of the play texts, it does not attempt to place these plays in a wider social or political context or make any enquiry into the nature of the audience for those plays and what they might find appealing in them.

Giorgio Padoan's *L'Avventura della Commedia Rinascimentale*<sup>22</sup> takes a similar approach. Since it appeared some thirty years after Herrick's study it benefits from the substantially increased pool of research into the texts and historical documents accumulated in the intervening period. This study provides a comprehensive overview of all the types of theatre of Italy in the sixteenth century for which there are extant scripts. (Additionally Padoan mentions surviving fragments or refers to play texts which are now lost). It is by and large chronological, starting with the turn of the

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<sup>21</sup> Herrick, *Italian Comedy...*, p. 222.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Padoan, *L'Avventura della Commedia Rinascimentale* (Padua: Piccin Nuova Libreria, 1996).



century and tracing developments stage by stage as they unfurled during the sixteenth century, though sometimes for schematic convenience he deviates from a strict chronology when switching from one geographical centre to another or when switching from discussing one genre to another. Padoan also manages to impart fascinating details on various facets surrounding the writing and staging of these plays.

He tries as far as possible within the realm of plausible speculation to make links between various plays and different playwrights: how they might have influenced one another, how the fashion for different styles and subject matters came and went, and how political and social circumstances may have influenced the plays written. Padoan on occasions attributes specific motives to a playwright, for example: ‘l’Ariosto si faceva portavoce della sana borghesia cittadina contro il malcostume e le prevaricazioni della burocrazia allineandosi con la politica moralizzatrice perseguita dal potere ducale.’<sup>23</sup>

In a quite extensive analysis of the works of Beolco, Padoan spots in his first play *La Pastoral* three linguistic planes: literary language for the shepherds, Bergamasco for the doctor and his servant, and Paduan for the peasants. He notes the more sympathetic depiction of the doctor figure – though this falls far short of defining him as a hero figure – and the double-edged nature of the Ruzante character: both as an object of derision but also as a conduit through which a dig against the unnatural (*mondo rovescio*) city is expressed. Of relevance to my research is Beolco’s *La Vaccaria*, of which Padoan says: ‘Si delineano dunque due distinti piani linguistici, per cui il dialetto è attribuito al ceto subalterno.’<sup>24</sup> Not surprisingly, this underclass includes the servants and the parasite Loron, but strangely the procuress Celega, Padoan notes, speaks in standard Italian.<sup>25</sup> Of equal interest is Padoan’s description of the disparity between the depiction of the *contadino* as uncouth and naïve and that of household servants who are often accorded high levels of intelligence and competence. But, as he notes, the servants’ rural origins are made plain in that they speak in a Paduan

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<sup>23</sup> Padoan, *L’avventura ...*, p. 18

<sup>24</sup> Padoan, *L’avventura...*, p. 102

<sup>25</sup> In this period, the concept of ‘standard’ Italian, let alone any comprehensive prescription of what that might consist of, was very much in its embryonic stage. Therefore, here and for subsequent instances of the phrase ‘standard Italian’ or ‘standard Tuscan’, its sense is necessarily retrospective, i.e. that which later came to be regarded as standard.

dialect. Padoan is careful to demur from construing what was presented on stage as a direct comment or direct satire on contemporary life since many of the characters, particularly the servants, were becoming autonomous theatrical entities rather than a mirror of actual suburban household life.

In detailing the career and works of the playwright Andrea Calmo, Padoan perceives a noticeable trend, from his early to later works, of a progressive use of standard Italian. In *La Saltuzza*, he observes that most of the characters categorised as ‘personaggi socialmente subalterni’ do not speak in dialect, this being reserved only for two or three very minor characters, Paduan for the servant, Bergamasco for the porter. But he does not speculate as to any sociological reasons for this; he merely cites it as a refinement of theatrical style. When discussing Aretino’s *Marescalco*, Padoan sees that any display of a battle of wits is invariably played out against the immutable hierarchy of those are accorded power and those who are not: ‘chi ha la potere di imporre la propria volontà e chi, non volendo, non è in grado di sottraversi.’<sup>26</sup> This observation would lend itself to further discussion of the interplay between two of my perspectives, viz. economic and political power against power derived from intelligence and quick wit. However, Padoan does not enter into such an enquiry.

Padoan’s book is a wide-ranging survey not just of the texts but texts in context of performance, playwrights in the relationship to their patrons, and to earlier and contemporary playwrights; it is full of cross-referencing and reasoned speculation as to who influenced whom. However, such is its breadth rather than depth that it is not and indeed does not claim to be an analysis of sixteenth century Italian theatre as social comment.

Another very valuable critic of Italian Renaissance theatre is Ludovico Zorzi who has produced extensive studies on Ruzante.<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, he often uses an archeological approach as a starting point and occasionally as a stopping point as well. In a more expansive work, *Il Teatro e La Città*,<sup>28</sup> Zorzi considers the places where theatre was performed and uses this as an initial reference point to discuss the nature of

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<sup>26</sup> Padoan, *L'avventura...*, p. 65

<sup>27</sup> Ludovico Zorzi, *Due Dialoghi/Ruzante* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1974).

<sup>28</sup> Ludovico Zorzi, *Il Teatro e La Città*, (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1977).

the ruling oligarchy who instigated the erection of these buildings and funded theatrical performance in them. He traces a line from the seat of a particular dynasty (here a large proportion of the analysis is devoted to the Florentine Medici) to the manifestation of its power and prestige in the shape of the city it ruled, even down to the minutiae of stage backdrops and costume prescribed for certain types of character. He brings into this discussion the role of architects, sponsors and, most interestingly, a group of practitioners who were becoming recognized as belonging to a distinct profession, those engaged as *architetti-scenografia*.

There are no analyses of play texts, although there are some interesting quotations from contemporary letters, mainly from princes to their subordinates and vice-versa, regarding the building of theatre structures and the staging of plays. The last third of the book is devoted to Venice with an even broader background picture drawn. However, the survey of this particular city is almost exclusively devoted to developments in theatre post-1600. The only exception is a look at censorship and other attempts by the authorities to regulate theatre.<sup>29</sup>

Zorzi's line of investigation here could be described as the politics of architecture: how a ruling elite's influence on the subject population's environment ranged from large permanent structures to smaller ephemeral phenomena such as theatre scenery. This book has a limited range geographically. It looks in detail at only three centres: Ferrara, Florence and Venice. It has a broader historical scope, covering the period from mid-fifteenth century to early eighteenth century. In particular, it goes into considerable detail of the physical aspects of the staging of revived Latin texts: where they were performed, the topology of the spaces in which they were formed as well as the more ephemeral aspects of theatre presentation: performers, scenery, properties and lighting. Much of the argument he propounds appears rather abstruse. It explores fully the idea of how the abstract hierarchical structures of that society manifested themselves in the physical structures and choreography of stage presentations. This study could be described as an exploration of extrinsic rather than intrinsic aspects of Italian Renaissance theatre texts and, as such, falls largely outside my own intended field of enquiry.

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<sup>29</sup> In 1577 the most influential Senator of that time, Zaccaria Contarini, managed to get the Venetian Senate to issue a decree designed to expel theatrical performers (*gli istrioni*) from the city.

Although the ultimate focus of Louise Clubb's seminal work *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*<sup>30</sup> is on how Italian drama might have been perceived by Elizabethan dramatists, this book nevertheless gives some penetrating analysis on Italian theatre. Clubb enters into a lively debate and challenges some of the ways previous commentators had looked at this subject. Despite its title, the major part of the first half does almost wholly concern itself with Italian drama. More than merely a historical account of the development of Italian theatre during the sixteenth century, this is the most exhaustive investigation into how ideas were transmitted from one generation of theatre practitioners to the next, from one geographical area to another: specifically from fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Italy to late sixteenth-century England. Rather than, as other commentators had done, draw direct links between Italian classical theatre texts of the first half of the sixteenth century and the texts of Shakespeare's plays, she endeavours to locate their common ancestry in the basic building blocks of theatrical enterprise which she terms 'theatergrams': these are wider than and often predate specific written dialogue.

Clubb devotes more space than previous surveys to try to describe how women are depicted in these dramas. Inter alia, the role of the female servant is analysed; she often has the role of a confidante, or a go-between since she has more independence of movement than the mistress she serves. But this figure commonly had no influence on the plot development: the maidservant in Ariosto's first play, *Cassaria*, is cited to illustrate this. But then Clubb instances later cases where the title character is a female servant, a notable example being Girolamo Razzi's *La Balia* (1560). She also cites plays where non-aristocratic females play an important role in plot development: Cariclea as a woodland 'balia' in Raffaello Borghini's *Diana Pietosa*, and Corisca as an older more independent nymph in *Il Pastor Fido* by Guarini. However, these descriptions and analyses are only in terms of the female role as an intrinsic component of the plot, not as an evaluation of their depicted status in the context of the overall allocation of authority.

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<sup>30</sup> Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

Clubb points to how the depiction of the courtesan changed from sleazy and disreputable ‘lady of the night’ (based closely on Latin comedy prototypes) in the early plays to a much more sympathetic portrayal: Aurelia in Bernardino Pino’s *Gli Ingiusti Sdegni* (composed in the early 1550s) is a loyal and altruistic character. Clubb also gives an interesting description of the less tangible elements of these plays as they developed through the century, most notably the switch away from the idea of random fortune (*fortuna* or *sorte*) to the idea of providence, i.e. that which was pre-ordained by divine power. She does not, however, relate this to the increasing power of the Church to regulate entertainment and cultural artefacts, culminating in an official list of banned books issued by Pope Paul IV in 1559.

Of particular relevance to my investigation is the tracing by her of the development the female in the early comedies as a largely peripheral mechanical figure inserted to serve the exigencies of the plot, sometimes depicted as behaving in a morally suspect way, towards the later comedies where the woman is often the central figure and is imbued with steadfast moral values and has to negotiate herself through a world full of morally compromised others. However, Clubb does not look at a stage figure’s moral profile in the context of other dimensions of character which will form part of my intended area of research.

While Clubb’s book touches on various manifestations of the female on stage as part of a broader argument, an interest in the theatrical depictions of women and the status of women in the outside society lies at the heart of Maggie Gunsberg’s *Gender and the Italian Stage*<sup>31</sup>. This is a broad survey in terms of chronology – from 1500 to the present day. Speaking of social and political conditions, Gunsberg straightaway propounds the notion of: ‘the effect on women of social relations as governed by market relations in a capitalist economy subtended by the ideology of patriarchy.’<sup>32</sup> This particularly applies to the conditions pertaining in northern Italy during the sixteenth century which forms the focus of the early part of Gunsberg’s study. She notes that, in the new comedies of the early sixteenth century, characters, both female and male, vary greatly in terms of class and age as well as in marital and household ranking. She then

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<sup>31</sup> Maggie Gunsberg, *Gender and the Italian Stage: From the Renaissance to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>32</sup> Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p. 1

proceeds to make this telling point: ‘The higher the status of the female character, the less power and stage presence she can be seen to have in both visual and oral terms.’<sup>33</sup>

She discusses at some length the ‘commodification’ of the female, where her range of choices, whether she is the object or subject of plot machinations, impinges on how the audience would view her status. Gunsberg posits in an overview of these early comedies that women are on the whole treated like chattels as part of a rigid patriarchal society but concedes that this derives in part from the heavy reliance on ancient world theatrical templates. Although running counter to her general thrust, Gunsberg does include instances where females manage to circumvent or undermine patriarchal authority: Polinesta in *I Suppositi* and Fulvia in *La Calandra*.

In the sub-section entitled ‘Addressing the Audience’ she asserts that ‘verbal expression of the actions also plays its part in shaping audience perception of these hierarchies of gender, age, and social status’<sup>34</sup> and links this to examining various speech vehicles such as prologue, soliloquy, monologue, aside and dialogue. Her set of examples for female characters tentatively leads to the conclusion that there is an inverse relationship operating here: i.e. the higher the social status, the lower the theatrical status and vice-versa, but she does not spell this out in such an equation. Of male characters, she concedes that there is no equivalence operating here: aristocrats or rich merchants as well as socially disadvantaged persons may be given equal voice in terms of soliloquies and asides. However, there seems to be a tendency on Gunsberg’s part to conflate, or at least not make sufficiently clear, the distinction between a study of the *theatrical* prominence and that of the *social* profile of female characters.

The major topic of her next chapter ‘Gender Deceptions’ is that, by adhering to the convention of sixteenth-century European theatre, all characters, whether male or female, must be enacted by males, thereby giving the power play between the sexes an extra complication and an added frisson. Overall, the chapter on gender deceptions is less germane to my sphere of investigation: it enters into a complex discussion on fetishism, audience identification, Freudian theory and sumptuary laws. It omits, however, any discussion of the comic – as opposed to the sexual or political –

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<sup>33</sup> Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p. 8

<sup>34</sup> Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p. 41

connotations of cross-dressing. Even today, the appearance of a man dressing as a female is intrinsically funny whereas a woman dressing as a man is decidedly less so. Is this to do with a perceived sudden loss of status when a male dons the apparel of a female, in contrast to the possibly perceived appropriation of higher status when females disguise themselves as males which then becomes threatening? I pose this question, which Gunsberg does not.

Some of the observations made in the section sub-headed 'Plotting the Trick' do border on my line of investigation. Gunsberg points to the importance of wit (*ingegno*) as a vital ingredient of these comedies and for her more narrow purpose examines 'the extent to which female characters contribute to its conception (the trick) and its enaction'.<sup>35</sup> Although her central focus is on the portrayal of females, as a side observation she says that: 'in identifying who conspires with and against whom, a distinct hierarchy of male characters also comes into focus'.<sup>36</sup> Both of these concerns fall squarely into my intended field of investigation.

In discussing the theatrical genre of comedy, there is a somewhat surprising lack of discourse in Gunsberg's argument on what makes a theatrical performance funny. What is more surprising is that there is little discussion on what I would term the moral dimension. She omits a possible conclusion that, by giving male characters the majority of stage presence and plot initiation, this also gives the male characters a much greater length of 'rope to hang themselves' so to speak.

At times, Gunsberg's approach seems to me rooted too much in simple quantitative analyses rather than an attempt to evaluate overall impacts: just because a character never appears on stage, this does not necessarily mean that that character cannot loom large in the audience's imagination – just think of the eponymous figure of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* who, like many of our early *commedia erudita* heroines, never actually appears. However, her general point that upper-class women, particularly young upper-class women, had very little opportunity to express themselves as themselves on stage, partly as a function of theatrical tradition, partly as a reflection, indeed a reinforcement, of the patriarchal values of the wider society of those times,

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<sup>35</sup> Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p. 22

<sup>36</sup> Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p. 24

remains valid. If the moral perspective is under played, certainly the economic dimension is thoroughly explored here, to the extent that Gunsberg is able to conclude that these comedies bring into focus the fact that, not only do females have little access to economic resources, they are part and parcel of that resource. Many of her analytical devices are employed to ascertain the status of the female as represented in these early Italian stage productions and, as such, do border on my line of enquiry. However, I intend to look at female character depiction more broadly, not just in terms of gender power politics but also in the context of her intellectual and cultural profile.

Nino Borsellino has written at length on Italian theatre as it has manifested itself at various stages through half a millennium. He is well placed to pick out antecedents that can be detected in Italian Renaissance theatre and the legacies it generated, not just in subsequent Italian theatre but in theatre throughout Europe. In his broader surveys such as *Commedie del Cinquecento*,<sup>37</sup> his approach may be categorised as historical. But in a more narrowly focussed study, *Rozzi e Intronati*<sup>38</sup>, he takes a more literary perspective. Its first chapter is devoted to looking at Boccaccio's *Decameron* as source material for *commedia erudita*. Borsellino is adept at pointing out not just the *novellesca* aspects of many of these early Renaissance comedies, but also the intrinsic theatricality of many of the stories in the *Decameron*. He has other chapters devoted to specific geographical areas such as Siena or to specific playwrights such as Annibal Caro. But he also has a long chapter which discusses theatre in general. In this can be gleaned both a philosophical approach: he describes the spirit of comic theatre as in opposition to: 'al Rinascimento idealizzato su schemi platonici',<sup>39</sup> as well as an approach slanted toward the psychological, or at any rate, the sociological: 'Il comico per la mentalità cristiano-medievale e il demoniaco, una forza diabolica e profanatrice.'<sup>40</sup> He cites De Sanctis as describing the comic theatrical ethos of the Renaissance as 'il lato negativo' which hitherto had been restricted to the margins and allowed expression only at Carnival time but was now struggling to gain respectability through its incorporation in a new, decidedly elitist, form of theatre. Borsellino here warns against seeing these comedies as documents which accurately reflect the day-to-day life of the bourgeois society; rather they contain 'caratteri tipici dello spettacolo,

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<sup>37</sup> Nino Borsellino, *Commedie del Cinquecento*, 2 vols (Rome: Feltrinelli, 1967).

<sup>38</sup> Nino Borsellino, *Rozzi e Intronati* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1974).

<sup>39</sup> Borsellino, *Rozzi...*, p. 55

<sup>40</sup> Borsellino, *Rozzi...*, p. 59



schemi, astrazioni'.<sup>41</sup> He emphasizes that the characters presented on stage were types rather than fully rounded individuals and makes the insightful point that it is the servants, of all the categories of characters, who were the least stereotyped.

Although Borsellino has some interesting things to say on the nature of the Renaissance and the nature of Renaissance theatre – he is most articulate in expressing its broader characteristics, perceptions, ideology, social outlook, and in tracing the literary antecedents of the content of these plays, his observations seem to lie largely in a different realm to my subject area which will focus on the specific make-up of individual characters of these stage plays.

Borsellino's most recent publication *L'Età Italiana*<sup>42</sup> takes an even broader perspective than do his previous works: here he looks at the whys and wherefores of the Italian Renaissance as a whole; only the final fifty pages of this volume are dedicated to theatre. Although his first chapter, *Rinascimento e umanesimo: Un Prologo* deals with quite broad currents of intellectualism, cultural identity, religious orthodoxy versus pre-Christian philosophies which underpinned the birth and development of humanism, he does tangentially touch upon an issue relevant to my enquiry: how a particular tier of the bourgeoisie came to feel bold and secure enough to formulate and promote some challenging cultural ideas but at the same time felt circumscribed by the wider power structure. Later on he cites particular figures who were both playwrights and theorists such as Piccolomini who concerned themselves with the tension between stagings that were deliberately emblematic and those that aimed at greater verisimilitude. Of all the books in this overview of critical literature, this has undoubtedly the widest scope in terms of its analytical tools and phenomena under scrutiny; as such it is a long way from the narrower focus that I intend to employ.

The monolithic study of Georges Ulysse – *Théâtre et Société au Cinquecento*<sup>43</sup> takes what could be described as a sociological perspective, providing in considerable detail evidence of the social conditions of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy. His research comes from diverse sources: historical, literary and documentary ; his survey

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<sup>41</sup> Borsellino, *Rozzi...*, p. 13

<sup>42</sup> Nino Borsellino, *L'Età Italiana* (Rome: Vecchiarelli Editore, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> George Ulysse, *Théâtre et Société au Cinquecento* (Aix en Provence: Université de Provence, 1984).

extends to a considerable length (over 650 pages).<sup>44</sup> It focuses to a great extent on the actual texts of sixteenth-century theatre pieces, alongside a long section devoted to an historical survey of the typical economic relationship between peasant and land-owner, referring in particular to the writings of G. Sermini on rural matters in the middle of fifteenth century. As for theatre texts, a broad range is cited, many outside the five-act format. Ulysse organises his study schematically into categories and sub-categories such as *La Comédie Siénnoise Sémi-Populaire*. Early in the introduction, Ulysse declares his intention: 'Eclairant ainsi le rapport qui existe entre les textes et le milieu dans lequel ils apparaissent.'<sup>45</sup>

Much of his study is given over to the relationship between the city dweller and the country dweller and how that translated into stage presentations, most notably those of the Veneto playwright Beolco. Even in the plays which verge towards those we might classify as pastoral and where the peasant character is not presented as base or uncultured, however sympathetic the portrait, there is always the ultimate lesson, Ulysse notes, that even those blessed with good looks, charm and/or industrious nature, cannot escape from the class they were born into.

Ulysse analyses the language of theatrical expression, particularly that given to characters considered to be outsiders: peasants, foreign soldiers and itinerant merchants, and concludes that the language employed is less an attempt to render a picture of life as it is actually lived but more an exercise in ascribing to the speaker a social value or ranking in the pecking order:

Un langage différent, donc 'hors du commun', 'anormal' et comme 'monstrueux', est considéré comme le signe d'une infériorité [...] Le Vénétien, le Napolitain, le Piémontais sont a priori ridicule pour un toscan.<sup>46</sup>

In an extensive survey of the depiction of the peasant, Ulysse points out that the overwhelming majority of playwrights of this period had no intention of presenting any propaganda on behalf of the peasant class, to write any remotely, as we now term it, 'agit-prop' pieces. Ulysse observes that, on the contrary, even the names given to the peasant character, such as 'Rovisto' or 'Grinza' are designed to provoke an initial

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<sup>44</sup> There is an appendix to this work, *Notes*, which is a separate volume, extending to a further 678 pages.

<sup>45</sup> Ulysse, *Théâtre et Société ...*, Introduction, p. x.

<sup>46</sup> Ulysse, *Théâtre et Société ...*, p. 38

derision or belittlement towards these characters. Such satire, Ulysse observes, is often accompanied by anti-female polemic. He concludes that if the rural masses were badly treated in society, they were similarly treated in literature and plays of the time.

At one point in the introductory chapter, Ulysse makes this telling point in comparing theatre with other forms of literary communication, a readily evident observation often overlooked by other commentators:

Il est certain que le spectacle théâtral peut avoir un impact social plus fort que d'autres oeuvres; il s'adresse à un groupe, provoque des réactions immédiates, et risque de susciter des tensions et des discussions.<sup>47</sup>

Relevant to my own enquiry into the authority/economic dimension, Ulysse gives, after surveying character depictions in these theatrical offerings, typical placings on the social ladder: 'le paysan' at the bottom, the artisans of the town such as the mason on the next rung above, the landed aristocracy at the top. But there is also, he observes, an urban equivalent of the *villano* or *contadino*: the *facchino* who occupies the equivalent bottom rung of the city's social ladder, although regarding one aspect – that the *facchino* is rarely accorded even a name, he may be seen to inhabit a position even lower in the hierarchy than the rural worker. Ulysse points to rare examples where this general hierarchy appears not to be observed: in certain plays set in Venice the porter figure holds a much less ignominious position. Ulysse opines that these theatrical productions may well have served an important function beyond that of mere entertainment or divertissement:

Pourrait laisser supposer que le théâtre joue dans ces cas-là un rôle cathartique; le danger du *furor rusticorum* est exposé aux spectateurs pour leur rappeler leurs préoccupation véritable.<sup>48</sup>

To the degree that Ulysse attempts to gauge how a particular stratum of society, rural or urban, was intended to be regarded by a potential audience when represented on stage, his study coincides with my aims. However, his survey concentrates on theatre inspired by rural life, or at least how rural life impacted upon the life of the city, during the first third of the sixteenth century, whereas my focus will be exclusively on the city

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<sup>47</sup> Ulysse, *Théâtre et Société ...*, p. XX111

<sup>48</sup> Ulysse, *Théâtre et Société ...*, p. 312

and will include the period comprising the two decades beyond the cut-off point of Ulysse's study.

In ways similar to Ulysse, Angela Guidotti in *Scenografie di Pensieri*<sup>49</sup> devotes much of her investigation to trying to determine which elements of the milieu in which these pioneering playwrights operated had the most influence in shaping their theatrical output. However, her focus, unlike Ulysse, is on theoretical treatises that attempted to lay down rules and precepts for playwrights to follow. Her perspective very much concerns *commedia erudita* as performance rather than as a literary phenomenon. As such, she considers at length the extra-textual elements of these performances: scenography, acting and the particular spaces these plays were performed in. From written sources such as these theatrical treatises and literary fiction, Guidotti speculates on the acting styles adopted by this new theatre and posits that drama and literature influenced one another:

Molto spesso si è registrata con insistenza la certezza di una grande interscambialità fra dialogo e teatro, specie guardando agli insegnamenti di tipo retorico da impartire all'attore.<sup>50</sup>

If the resurrection of plots from Plautus and Terence had a decisive role in shaping the content of this new comic theatre, Guidotti points to the ancient world commentators such as Aristotle and Horace as having a pivotal role in shaping its style. She declares:

L'Epistola oraziana ai Pisoni, chiamata già da Quintiliano *Ars poetica*, svolge un ruolo fondamentale per la configurazione del teatro cinquecentesco pari alla *Poetica* aristotelica.<sup>51</sup>

She later refers to theatre commentators of the sixteenth century who had studied treatises from the ancient world and set then about amending and elaborating them to produce guides for contemporary theatre practitioners. She extensively cites Piccolomini and Giraldi Cinzio, with particular reference to the subject of verisimilitude.

By reproducing tranches from the various treatises on theatre written before or during the advent of *commedia erudita*, Guidotti provides some valuable insight into

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<sup>49</sup> Angela Guidotti, *Scenografie di Pensieri* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi Editore, 2002).

<sup>50</sup> Guidotti, *Scenografie...*, p. 148.

<sup>51</sup> Guidotti, *Scenografie...*, p. 22.

what these early playwrights were trying to achieve, the strictures as well as the freedoms they were operating under. Like Andrews (the evaluation of whose criticism directly follows), she discusses the concept of *decorum* in both its senses: that of fittingness and that of moral rectitude. Most of the book is devoted to areas outside my own intended field of investigation. However, there is a subsection towards the end - *Smarrito peregrinaggio d'intelletto: la follia in scena* which does come closer to my own area of interest. Here Guidotti gives an elaborate series of analyses of the different types of *follia*, whether they occur as just part and parcel of a temporary turning upside-down of status for carnivalesque frivolity or have a more serious didactic purpose: as a means of earmarking a character as deficient, someone whose erratic behaviour will render him permanently an outcast. However, she does not, as I intend to do, weigh up this aspect in the context of a broader totality, comprising designated status and aspects of character such as level of cultural sophistication and moral probity.

Richard Andrews in *Scripts and Scenarios* looks at theatre in a wide context; he goes beyond examination of surviving texts to examine staging, performance, audience and audience response. In his preface, he declares that he intends to view 'text-audience' relationship over that of 'author-text' - an attempt to redress the balance, since previous analyses had in the main been from the standpoint of the reader rather than that of the spectator. Andrews traces broader political movements such as Spanish and Imperial struggles for dominance, the ebb and flow of the Catholic Church's power, as well as specific events such as the war of Cambrai and the Sack of Rome, all of which may well have had an effect on what playwrights felt to be of interest to their audience, and on what playwrights dared or dared not say. He observes that the use of different language registers and use of dialect in play-scripts were of greater significance in a country which had the most diverse and sometimes mutually incomprehensible set of regional dialects in all Europe. Regarding comic theatre, Andrews asks simple questions which seem obvious but had remained unasked by previous commentators, the foremost being 'Why do we find something funny?'

This study looks more thoroughly than most other commentaries at the function of theatre, looking beyond the text to performer-audience relationships. Andrews gives an extensive description and review of Machiavelli's *Mandragola* which impinges on my area of enquiry: a collection of unscrupulous conspirators, including a man of the

church, dupes a married couple, the husband of which is a willing party to a reprehensible act and the wife a reluctant and conscience-troubled participant, though, paradoxically, post-coitus she is less troubled, despite knowingly having committed adultery. Andrews concludes that this play can be seen as a carnival romp which manages to distance itself from its blatantly immoral plot line, immoral in that the perpetrators of an act of gross deception are ultimately rewarded rather than punished. Andrews makes the more general point that the moral aspect of these plays is peripheral to what he sees as an invitation 'to glory in the victory of the astute over the foolish.'<sup>52</sup>

Andrews spots a development: a move away from mechanistic plotting and two-dimensional characters of the plays of the first third of the century to a period between 1540 and 1560 where: 'young men are shown as people with problems and feelings, in contrast to the colourless or indeed callous nature which they still had in Ariosto.'<sup>53</sup> However, he does not enter into speculation as to whether this was due to a change in public taste or the preference of potential sponsors – from cruder comedy to a gentler, more sentimental type, whether there was a conscious drive initiated by playwrights to depict characters, female as well as male, with discernable moral scruples. I intend to look more closely at this development and try to adduce reasons for such a trend which are not covered by Andrews.

In a résumé of the works of Beolco, Andrews concludes that, although Ruzante is the central figure of these plays, he is to be viewed as an anti-hero and was not employed for 'any serious subversive programme'. Indeed, Ruzante does not finish up in a better position than that he started in, but often in a much worse position. Andrews concludes: 'He is thus in plot terms an object of derision – a fool in the non-heroic sense, a coward, an inadequate, a loser.'<sup>54</sup> However, Andrews points to a complication of this blanket view: he cites examples of where the Ruzante character steps outside the ongoing narrative and adopts the role of a *giullare* (a jester-type figure who addresses the audience and who dates back to earlier populist medieval theatre forms). Ruzante is here allowed, in these interludes, to be more knowledgeable and articulate and therefore much less of a figure of derision.

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<sup>52</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 52

<sup>53</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 114

<sup>54</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 131

Andrews does not just give detailed analysis of how, where and by whom these comedies came to be written and staged but addresses the question of why they were written, giving the reader fresh insight into the triangular relationship between promoter, playwright and audience. He posits the notion that judging the moral values of fictional characters is altogether a different exercise from judging the moral values of their real-life counterparts, although he also suggests that this duality was by no means universally understood and accepted at the time when these plays were first staged.

At one point, Andrews analyses the nature of laughter, dividing it roughly into laughter of derision and laughter of approval and sympathetic recognition. The type of laughter, derisive or complicit, intended by the playwright bears directly on the perceived status of the character concerned. This touches on but does not pre-empt my own proposed analysis, since Andrews does not then go on to link the type of laughter provoked with how this shapes the overall 'worth' of specific stage characters. I shall, however, build on the firm foundations and insights which this book has provided.

Finally, in this section I shall consider the criticism of Mario Baratto, whose focus is on how political currents in society were manifested through art. If not overtly Marxist, his approach to theatre criticism is decidedly more political than those of say Ulysse or Andrews.

In *Tre Studi sul Teatro*<sup>55</sup>, not only does Baratto give detailed analyses of the construction of certain theatrical pieces, but he also outlines the cultural background from which they sprung, citing contemporary diaries, establishment of studios, printing houses, even profiling particular actors who helped promote this new type of theatre. He sees the creation of Beolco's central and repeatedly featured character Ruzante as: 'un umile testimone, forse più scontroso e chiuso di altri, delle sofferenze dei contadini.'<sup>56</sup> Alongside specific biographical details of the particular playwrights under scrutiny, there is discussion on the nature of theatre in general rather than analysis of specific texts.

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<sup>55</sup> Mario Baratto, *Tre Studi sul Teatro: Ruzante, Aretino, Goldoni*, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1964.)

<sup>56</sup> Baratto, *Tre Studi sul Teatro ...*, p. 21

The introduction to Baratto's *La Commedia Del Cinquecento* is devoted in considerable part to discussing the revival of certain sixteenth-century Italian plays during the twentieth century, particularly in the periods just before and after the Second World War, its impact as regards its political content in the context of public art in general under a fascist regime, and as regards its aesthetic content in the post-fascist era, i.e. as containing vulgarity which was deemed to go beyond the accepted taste of the time. Here, Baratto notes parallels between social conflicts in the sixteenth century and those occurring before and during the Second World War, and considers why these revivals provoked strong reactions from both the authorities and the viewing public. He makes decidedly polemical points on the function and role of the theatre:

Forte fu il trauma suscitato da una rappresentazione della *Moscheta* (di Ruzante) offerta da un' angolazione sociologica dura, aspra: piú che proposta, direi imposta agli spettatori, quasi con un atto di sfida al pubblico, che non doveva piú ignorare lo sfruttamento patito dai contadini, il loro vivere subumano.<sup>57</sup>

However, he makes it clear that he is cautious in attributing the creation of Ruzante's rustic comedies directly to a conscious political agenda.

Baratto concludes that Machiavelli in his two extant plays employed theatrical formats that would disguise overt political or social comment: in *Clizia*, a template and plot from a Latin play was borrowed to add distance or at least detachment to the on-going action; similarly in *Mandragola*, the evident satire of corrupt Florentine society is disguised by giving it an other-worldly aspect. Baratto makes the point, already made by Machiavelli himself, that the princes of the peninsula were more intent on garnering prestige through staging spectacles than paying for and organizing military defence.

In the chapter entitled *Il teatro comico e la storia*, Baratto at some length analyses the role of the servant in Bibbiena's *Calandra*. Here his investigation impinges on an aspect which I shall be looking into: how the natural hierarchy of the master-servant relationship is temporarily overturned in a scenario where the intelligence and inventiveness (paradoxically through feigned stupidity in this instance) of a servant frustrates the wishes of the master.

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<sup>57</sup> Mario Baratto, *La Commedia del Cinquecento* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1977), p. 16



Baratto, somewhat sententiously to my mind, draws a causal link between the theatrical offerings of Machiavelli and Ruzante and the political situation in the areas in which they lived and offered up these plays for public viewing. Regarding Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, he sees the characters of Callimaco and Nicia as symbolizing respectively France and Italy in their political relationship: 'ed egli (Nicia) sarà sbeffeggiato e cornificato da Callimaco, il quale viene da Parigi, e accenna fin dalla prima scena alla situazione politica italiana.'<sup>58</sup>

Although there can easily be gleaned satirical overtones in these theatre pieces, I think it is risky to be so categoric in saying that these were written as a sharp reprimand to society of its foolish ways, rather than pointing to a more obvious motive: that depicting people behaving badly has much more comic potential than depicting people behaving well.

Baratto points to how the political impacted on the cultural. He asserts that certain productions were encouraged because they helped promote the idea of the cultural superiority of one region over another; e.g. the Medici had a vital role in funding and promoting Tuscan or Florentine writers. He offers this reflection on Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*:

I personaggi che parlano il 'dialetto' fiorentino, i loquenti dialettali, sono quelli mentalmente o socialmente inferiori ... servire a caratterizzare a satireggiare l'angustia mentale, l'orizzonte provinciale di una certa borghesia fiorentina [...] quasi il Machiavelli aprisse una sorta di gerarchia socio-linguistica nella *Mandragola*.<sup>59</sup>

Overall, this is an interesting and passionately argued overview of sixteenth-century Italian theatre in its multiple aspects: where theatre was staged, scenery used, recruitment of actors, relationship between playwrights and sponsor, modern-day revivals, the limits of the comic form in transmitting political concerns of the times, the depiction of contemporary society through Latin templates. Baratto argues that these texts still have relevance to modern political life.

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<sup>58</sup> Baratto, *La Commedia del Cinquecento*, p. 80

<sup>59</sup> Baratto, *La Commedia del Cinquecento*, p. 69

Although his study of the interplay between, and co-dependence of, playwright and prince is insightful, there is a tendency to over-emphasize the role of the playwright as propagandist. Baratto recognises that Renaissance comedy deals with members of the well-off middle class who nevertheless have no political power, i.e. their follies or reckless behaviour tends to rebound on them (or at most on their own immediate household) without affecting the wider society. But he does not then proceed to detail the difference between temporary loss of status through ridiculous behaviour and permanent loss of status, though this would lend itself to a discussion on the ill-defined dividing line between comedy and tragedy. In a matter of a few pages (pp. 80 to 95 of *La Commedia del Cinquecento*), Baratto touches on economic, cultural and moral aspects of a collection of characters but these occur as part of a broader exposition, and are not part of a rigorous and systematic analysis that I intend to undertake.

To close this section, a summary of the above survey now follows. Herrick, as well as providing a 'guided tour' of Italian erudite comedy of the sixteenth century, cites this genre as a source material for English playwrights later that century. Louise Clubb offers an even more Anglo-centric standpoint, as is immediately evidenced by the title of her treatise *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*. Her analysis is deeper than Herrick's in that she looks beyond written play texts to what she dubs 'theatre-grams', the building blocks of theatrical presentation in its totality, encompassing acting styles, choreography and scenography which overlay performances, either from set texts or improvised. Part of her discourse focuses on the depiction of females: young, old, bourgeois or servant class, respectable or unrespectable. A more trenchantly feminist stance is taken by Maggie Gunsberg whose central thesis is the scarcity of women, particularly well-to-do women, featured in these plays. She posits that this type of theatre did more than just reflect the very circumscribed rights and choices open to well-to-do females of marriageable age in real life; it re-affirmed the patriarchal notion of these females as 'tradeable commodities'. She does cite exceptions to this general rule, instancing the case of Polinesta from Ariosto's *I Suppositi*. However, Gunsberg does not go on to discuss the ramifications of such a figure transgressing the behaviour

expected of young maidens, a discussion a very recent publication by Yael Manes does enter into more fully.<sup>60</sup>

Examination of class differences, which includes differences between urban and rural dwellers, depicted in theatrical comedy forms the focus of both Ulysse's and Baratto's commentaries. Both conclude that sixteenth century theatrical comedies affirm rather than challenge the established social hierarchy. Ulysse more minutely examines the 'worth' accorded to the lowest rung of urban society as against the lowest rung of rural society and concludes that the latter is invariably presented in the most deprecatory way. Zorzi does not examine *commedia erudita* through extant scripts but through architectural remains and written records relating to the layout and construction of spaces designed for theatrical performances. Zorzi views this topology as an important manifestation of the ruling elite's need to entrench its political hegemony and advertise its cultural superiority.

Andrews and Guidotti focus on the staging as much as on written texts; the former gives more thought than previous commentators to the nature of laughter and what satisfactions these comedies might have provided to their audiences; the latter concentrates on prevailing theories and prescripts of staging comedies which influenced and shaped what these pioneering playwrights of a new genre felt they could or could not present on stage. Borsellino, particularly in his most recent work *L'Età Italiana*, takes the broadest perspective of all, placing *commedia erudita* within the wider prevailing currents of the changing philosophical outlook of Italian Renaissance society.

The above illustrates the broad spectrum of approaches taken by commentators on this genre of comedy, be it feminist, quasi-Marxist, archaeological or literary; it ranges from those that focus on the micro-level of stage presentations to those that place the role of theatre in a broader context: topological, historical or cultural. I shall devote this next section to the question of what was the appeal of *commedia erudita* and to which section of society it was directed.

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<sup>60</sup> Manes, analysing this same stage figure, is able to place this case of a female acting contrary to type in a broader perspective, positing that such depicted behaviour serves as an indirect criticism of the failures of patriarchal *virtù*. Yael Manes, *Motherhood and Patriarchal Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century Italian Comedy* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), pp. 115-16.

## THE APPEAL OF *COMMEDIA ERUDITA*

Various critics have chronicled the increasing popularity of *commedia erudita* from its inaugural stage in the first decade of the sixteenth century. In her introduction to *Motherhood and Patriarchal Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century Italian Comedy*, Manes asserts: ‘The popularity of comedy during the Renaissance outweighed all other dramatic forms (and, in fact, comedies accounted for 90 per cent of all performances).’<sup>61</sup> In his *Scripts and Scenarios*, Andrews lists around 80 published editions of new *commedia erudita* plays for the whole of Italy during the first half of the century. Falletti is able to provide a more detailed picture of its increasing popularity, not just in staged performances but as printed texts.<sup>62</sup> From its inauguration, the expansion was falteringly slow: according to Andrews, up to 1525 there had been only 15 five-Act plays written, not all of which were ever performed or published. Falletti confirms this slow start but then cites the sudden expansion of erudite comedy: within a period of less than a year (1524 – 25) seven comedies were published by a single printer (Minizio Calvo) in Rome.<sup>63</sup> She then adduces further statistics: the first quarter of the sixteenth century saw a mere 14 theatrical texts (which span all genres of theatre, not just Five-Act comedies) published in Rome. By 1550, this figure had risen to only 33, despite the exponential growth of Five-Act comic plays written between 1525 and 1550.<sup>64</sup> This slow increase reflects the lag between the advent of *commedia erudita* as live spectacle and its recognition as a cultural artefact in its own right. Regarding its changing form from Ariosto’s first play, Falletti provides this excellent summary:

Così possiamo dire che la drammaturgia nel Rinascimento nasce dal modello classico del teatro latino e greco ma non si irrigidisce in quel modello perché è bagnata continuamente dagli afflussi provenienti da un lato dalla prassi delle egloghe, farse e commedie e recite latine, e dall’altro dall’uso delle traduzioni e adattamenti, ma anche dall’elaborazione della tragedia o dallo studio dei grammatici e dalla *routine* dei commenti e delle lezioni accademiche, nonché

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<sup>61</sup> Manes, *Motherhood ...*, p. 7. (I assume that the figure quoted above refers to all comic theatre, rather than to solely erudite comedy in the five-Act form.)

<sup>62</sup> Clelia Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia: Cinquecento e Seicento*, Vol. 2 (Rome: Edizioni Studium, 1999).

<sup>63</sup> The seven plays were Machiavelli’s *La Mandragola*, Bibbiena’s *La Calandra*, Grasso’s *L’Eutichia*, Mantovano’s *Formicone*, Ariosto’s *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi* and *Aristippia* by an unidentified author. Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia...*, p. 13, n.

<sup>64</sup> Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia...*, pp. 15-16

poi dalla sfida della messa in scena che sempre più offre un confronto e una verifica.<sup>65</sup>

I now turn my attention to the question: at whom was this new genre aimed? If the inauguration of *commedia erudita* as a distinct genre was in large part due to the endeavours of one man – Ludovico Ariosto, this was facilitated by the particular environment in which he was raised: the court of Ferrara, whose ruling dynasty, the Estense, had encouraged and sponsored the staging of ancient Roman comedies (mainly in the original Latin but sometimes in the vernacular) since Ariosto's infancy. This small principality in northern Italy was at the vanguard of Italian cultural life, particularly in promoting the new 'humanism', at least among its educated elite.<sup>66</sup>

The appeal of *commedia erudita* in its fledging stage continued to be aimed at the very top tier of society. Three seminal works - Ariosto's *I Suppositi*, Bibbiena's *La Calandra* and Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* all enjoyed performances in front of the Pope.<sup>67</sup> Thus at this stage *commedia erudita* was very much theatre written by the elite for the elite,<sup>68</sup> performed by the elite (at any rate, the sons of the elite: university students or younger members of the court who volunteered or were co-opted into performing). Baratto terms it 'teatro privilegiato', which offered to its bourgeois audience, rather than any disquieting or subversive ideas, reassurance: 'sancisce la sua superiorità socio-culturale.'<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia...*, p. 41

<sup>66</sup> '... Ferrara si può considerare più di Firenze la capitale italiana della moderna letteratura in volgare e l'Ariosto il poeta che più di tutti impersonò gli ideali del classicismo rinascimentale.', Borsellino, *L'Età Italiana*, p. 48. The Estense, Ferrara's 'royal' family – Duke Ercole, his successor Alfonso and in particular his daughter Isabella d'Este (later Marchioness of Mantua) were all theatre enthusiasts. It is from the letters sent by or received by Isabella that we know something of the staging and impact on the audience of this first wave of *commedia erudita* plays.

<sup>67</sup> '*La Calandra* fu rappresentata a Roma nel 1514 a metà dicembre con la scena di Baldassarre Peruzzi, davanti al papa Leone X, e replicate nel 1515; *I Suppositi* furono rappresentati a Roma in un'occasione memorabile soprattutto perché ornati da una scena e da un apparato di Raffaello davanti a Leone X nel carnevale del 1519, *La Mandragola* fu recitata a Roma nel 1520, ad istanza di Leone X (lettera di Battista della Palla dell'aprile 1520).' Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia...* p. 14, n.

<sup>68</sup> However, the lower orders were not deliberately excluded. Although not open to the outside public, within the small community all classes had the chance to attend, as attested by Peter Brand: 'for *commedia erudita*, like Roman comedy, is closely linked to festivity, to Carnival or weddings or the visits of celebrated persons [...] it is frequently opened up to the lesser court servants or dependants...', *The Renaissance of Comedy: The Achievement of Italian Commedia Erudita*, Peter Brand, *The Modern Language Review*, Volume 90, (Part 4), W.S. Maney & Son Ltd, October 1995.

<sup>69</sup> Baratto, *La Commedia del Cinquecento*, p. 51

If Falletti is able to give copious details of the staging as well as the changing format of *commedia erudita*, she does not enter into any in-depth consideration of what particular elements of this emerging genre appealed to the particular section of Italian society it was aimed at. The following three critics have delved more fully into this question.

In *Scripts and Scenarios*, Andrews offers trenchant insights into possible underlying motives in staging these plays beyond the obvious ones of providing entertainment and provoking laughter. This is his key finding:

The new genre of secular comic theatre was not, initially at least, intended to provoke the laughter of all the people, nor to sink social differences in a feeling of common humanity. It was staged by and for a courtly educated elite, who were more attracted by the pecking order involving winners and losers.<sup>70</sup>

In *L'Età Italiana*, Borsellino echoes this assessment. When discussing the notion of the *gioco* in fictional works of the Italian Renaissance, he avers:

Quando pone una posta alla competizione e comporta un esito che distingue chi vince e chi perde, il gioco non è produttivo perché si limita a trasferire beni da un soggetto all'altro senza produrli.<sup>71</sup>

And, like Andrews, he includes the audience as part of the equation:

Ma nel teatro, quando si definisce in pieno Rinascimento come un istituto pubblico, non più come esperienza profana occasionale o rappresentazione rituale, il gioco entra a far parte di un evento collettivo immediatamente messo in rapporto con lo spettatore e le sue reazioni [...] *L'homo ludens* è contemporaneamente sulla scena e in sala, benché in sala agisca come interlocutore muto.<sup>72</sup>

As set out earlier, I intend to further examine this concept of 'winners and losers' not just as an ultimate verdict on a character at the end of the play, but also at strategic moments during his/her journey through the story line.

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<sup>70</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 21

<sup>71</sup> Borsellino, *L'Età Italiana*, p. 255

<sup>72</sup> Borsellino, *L'Età Italiana*, p. 258

In a very recent (2011) study,<sup>73</sup> Manes offers a more nuanced approach as to the appeal of *commedia erudita*. She points to a distinction between evaluating these plays from a non-ironic viewpoint (her position) and an ironic one, that which she infers the majority of the audiences of those times would have viewed it. She suggests that the audience would not solely have seen, as Andrews posits, the depiction of a set of losers whom they would have superior to and separate from, but, albeit at a less emphatically signalled level, a broader vision of their world, a vision which offered a critical insight into a society, particularly its patriarchal framework, that malfunctions, or at least falls far short of forging ideal familial relationships or ideal personal attributes as postulated in, respectively, Alberti's *Della Famiglia* and Castiglione's *Il Cortigiano*. In other words (this is my summary rather than Manes), rather than the audience regarding with condescension the foolish antics of inferiors (inferior regarding intelligence, morality or culture as well as in terms of social rank) there is also an element of the elite themselves being held up to a measure of scrutiny and found wanting. It is my intention to explore further both these suppositions and, to employ the useful terminology furnished by Manes, look at the behaviours presented on stage from a non-ironic viewpoint. (To analyse them from an 'ironic' viewpoint would be more an exercise in judging whether the jokes and conceits of these playwrights worked, which is outside the remit of this present study.)

Part of the drive of the first wave of *commedia erudita* playwrights was to render their theatrical offerings less rarefied than their Latin (or Latin texts translated into the vernacular) antecedents, to broaden its appeal beyond a narrow scholarly elite, although it was never their intention to produce theatre that had 'mass' appeal.

There is a possible inference to be drawn that audiences, even the educated elite, of those times had not quite become accustomed to sequential story-telling imparted in the form of spoken dialogue as entertainment on stage; that they preferred visual spectacle<sup>74</sup> constructed in discrete, self-contained, episodes. Andrews gives some

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<sup>73</sup> Manes, *Motherhood...*

<sup>74</sup> For those attending theatre, the Italians generally use the word *spettatori*, whilst English speakers use 'audience' which may be just a quirk of etymology but may indicate that, from early on, Italians were more attuned to visual rather than auditory stimuli in a way that did not apply to their northern European counterparts. This may be related to climate. One can consider these two extremes. In Iceland their sagas were originally transmitted verbally: one can imagine, at least during the winter months, the difficulty of embellishing spoken communication with any visual elements in cramped indoor conditions.

support to this supposition when he cites the fact that the *intermezzi* were integral constituents of an evening entertainment and formed a key attraction:

Florentine comedies were often swamped, as the early Ferrarese ones had been, by enormously expensive *intermezzi* which often bore no relation to the play. As in earlier Ferrara, it often seems that the five acts of narrative were seen by many spectators as the real ‘intervals’ between the songs, dance and allegorical spectacle they had actually come to see.<sup>75</sup>

In addition, many of these early *commedia erudita* productions included elaborate and expensive stage sets.<sup>76</sup> Upon the first staging of Ariosto’s *La Cassaria*, Bernardino Prosperi reported back details in a letter to Isabella d’Este. I cite this extract [translated by Andrews]:

The best part of these plays and festivals has been the scenery in which they have been performed [...] there is a road and a perspective of a town with houses, churches, belfries and gardens. A person cannot tire of looking at it.<sup>77</sup>

Andrews further quotes from correspondence from the period just prior to *commedia erudita*’s inauguration: ‘Letters from courtiers describing these dramatic evenings enthuse in great detail over the lavishness of the decoration, scenery and costume, and the inventiveness or symbolic charm of the *intermezzi*.’<sup>78</sup>

The fact that well before the end of the sixteenth century erudite comedy had been eclipsed (apart from in Naples<sup>79</sup>) by *commedia dell’arte* suggests that visual aspects – masks, costumes, choreography (including *bastonatura*) were always of wider

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By contrast, the sunnier climes of Greece would have lent itself all year round to elaborate visual spectacle to convey a dramatic story line.

<sup>75</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 109.

<sup>76</sup> ‘It is significant that while the actors and director (if there was one) of the comedies were all gentlemen amateurs, the scene-painters, costume designers, choreographers and musicians were all professional. The money was spent where the audience felt it mattered.’ Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 33.

<sup>77</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 36.

<sup>78</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 33.

<sup>79</sup> According to Andrews, the Neapolitan Giovan Battista Della Porta’s extant comedies, printed between 1589 and 1616, numbered fourteen, and in 1582 Giordano Bruno’s landmark comedy, *Il Candelaio*, was published. *Scripts and Scenarios*, p.243.



appeal than extended verbal narratives; that from the outset *commedia erudita* had faced an uphill struggle to achieve popularity, even among the educated elite.<sup>80</sup>

If erudite comedy had to be constructed according to strict Aristotelian prescripts, the contemporaneity or otherwise of the form was negotiable. Even between Ariosto's first play of 1508 and his second of a year later – *I Suppositi*, a signal shift is identifiable. Andrews outlines this progression:

The most obvious step forward, as was duly noted by Prospero<sup>81</sup> was that it was placed in a modern setting, in contemporary Ferrara itself. This being so, the anachronistic aspects of Plautus and Terence had to go: there could be no more pimps with virgin slave girls to sell. In *I Suppositi* the hero is a travelling student of good family who falls in love with a respectable Ferrarese girl.<sup>82</sup>

The setting, plot, characters and moral concerns of Ariosto's final (unfinished) play, *Gli Studenti*, have even more of a contemporary feel, as affirmed by Falletti:

Tra il 1520 e il 1525 l'Ariosto comincia a scrivere gli *Studenti*, che lascia incompiuti. Temi e situazione sono ormai così padroneggiati da poter esser usati in perfetta autonomia e piegati ad accogliere la realtà contemporanea diventando plausibili, così come i tipi convenzionali diventano figure credibili e attuali: verosimili sono i due giovani [...] E poi ci sono i riferimenti continui ai luoghi di Ferrara e dei dintorni e l'uso di un *linguaggio più semplice e naturale malgrado l'endecasillabo*' (my italics).<sup>83</sup>

The last phrase (in italics) in this quotation points to a paradox: that while there was a movement towards greater verisimilitude, there was a tendency by certain playwrights (most notably Ariosto himself) in the opposite direction: a conscious effort to enhance the 'cultural worthiness' of their theatrical offerings by making them more literary, notwithstanding the degree of artificiality that would necessarily entail. However, the

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<sup>80</sup> Part of the 'handicap' that this new form of theatre suffered from was that there was little sense of a need to build up intrigue or suspense, to provoke the audience into wondering: 'how will this all end?' This is indicated by the commonplace practice of summarising the story in the *Argomento* at the start.

<sup>81</sup> Bernardo Prospero, a courtier at the court of Ferrara during the first decade of the sixteenth century, kept Isabella, who had become Marchioness of Mantua by the time of Ariosto's first play, informed of affairs there, including theatrical performances.

<sup>82</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 38

<sup>83</sup> Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia*, p.91.

equation ‘the greater the stylisation of speech, the greater the artificiality’ does not automatically hold true, since the perception as to whether a piece of theatre is true to life stems from many levels, only the first and most immediate of which is the form of dialogue (prose or verse) employed.

If the playwrights of Ferrara, Rome and Florence in the early phase of *commedia erudita* wrote theatrical pieces for the very top echelons, the picture in other urban centres was somewhat different. A consensus that the language spoken in *commedia erudita* should adhere to standard Italian was decisively broken by the second theatrical offering *La Betia* (1523) of Beolco, a writer born and raised in the Veneto region. For this play there is an unapologetic use of broad rustic Paduan dialect throughout. (His first play *La Pastoral* (1521) was a mixture of literary Tuscan and the Paduan dialect.) Beolco played the principal character named Ruzante (from whom the playwright’s nickname derives) in several of his plays. Another maverick who scorned theatrical convention (particularly regarding the concept of *decorum*), as laid down by Aristotelean precepts and Ariosto’s seminal works, was Pietro Aretino. It is difficult to discern if Aretino’s deliberate use of more plebeian dialogue in his earlier theatrical pieces sprang from an overriding desire to add a greater patina of realism to his play or was merely a ‘shock tactic’, part of his rebellion against tradition, from a member of the court who was never reticent about shocking people, even those on whose livelihood he might depend. Falletti offers this verdict on Aretino’s first play:

Il colpo che sferra con la *Cortigiana* è duplice. Colpisce il corrotto mondo romano ... e colpisce ogni accademismo, nella lingua e nella commedia: sulla questione della lingua interviene dichiarando guerra al formalismo letterario di una lingua anemica, frutto di ricostruzione sui modelli illustri ...<sup>84</sup>

Andrews attests to the ‘reality’ of *La Cortigiana*:

... its air of white-hot immediacy – the text’s remarkable ability to convey, even through its many obscurities, a sense that its action springs directly from the life which its audience lives from day to day, and indeed that the distinction between stage and auditorium is very blurred [...] Altogether, the play constantly gives

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<sup>84</sup> Falletti, *Il Teatro in Italia*, p.133.

the impression of overflowing into, or being an overflow from, the crowded street which it represents.<sup>85</sup>

Lying somewhere between the refined theatrical offerings of Ariosto and the cruder ones of Ruzante and Aretino was the theatrical output of Siena which appears to have developed more autonomously than as a ready recipient of trends and innovations from other cities.<sup>86</sup> In 1531 a group of Sieneese artisans founded the 'Congrega dei Rozzi'; they wrote and performed farces, pastoral and rustic pieces using the local dialect and self-consciously distanced themselves from the more elite theatre of nearby Florence. However, contemporaneous to this movement, there was another group in Siena who were more steeped in classical theatre; they officially launched their theatrical enterprise in 1525 under the name Accademia degli Intronati. Of their output, the two plays which had the most lasting significance were *Gl'Ingannati* (1532) and *L'Amor Costante* (1536). The latter is a prime example of a more romantic sensibility and stronger moral ethos that typified Sieneese theatre from 1530 onwards, distinct from the mechanistic hedonism of much of erudite comedy created in other cities.

Thus a broad developmental arc has been traced: from initial close imitation of plays from the classical world to presentations that increasingly mirrored contemporary society. Falletti in particular is able to monitor the development of erudite comedy from a rarefied cultural artefact towards stage presentations that attempted to reflect more closely contemporary Italian life, not just in speech patterns and the featuring of recognisable figures from bourgeois life but in the scenery, costumes and style of acting, a move away from stylised and symbolic stage presentations that had characterised fourteenth century drama towards a form with greater verisimilitude.

The writers of these early five-Act comedies probably did not think in such terms as symbolism versus naturalism or caricature versus verisimilitude but were only mindful of trying to present an entertaining spectacle on stage, sometimes devising

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<sup>85</sup> Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, pp. 68-69

<sup>86</sup> Clubb concurs: 'Intronati drama did not depend on external inspiration, for it was already gestating at home. Of course it took shape in correspondence and competition with fashionable models of comedy produced at Urbino, Rome, Florence, Ferrara, but the impetus came from Siena, jointly from circles tangent to the Studio and from local popular culture.', Louise Clubb, *Pollastra and the Origins of Twelfth Night: Parthenio, Commedia (1516) with an English Translation* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 47

passages that directly referenced the contemporary world, at other times deliberately using or refashioning tropes that belonged only to the fictional language of the stage (*theatre-grams* to use Louise Clubb's succinct phrase). It was not until the second half of the century that this antithesis was considered in depth and articulated in formal treatises. Alessandro Piccolomini, a playwright and member of the Sienese Accademia degli Intronati, became in his latter years more notable as a theorist on theatre. In her book *Scenografie di Pensieri*, Guidotti quotes at length from his treatise of 1575.<sup>87</sup> She summarises one of his contentions:

Anche nella rappresentazione drammatica il pubblico sa di non assistere a cose che accadono al momento come se fossero vere, ma al verosimile, cioè ad imitazioni di cose accadute or che portrebbero accadere;

before quoting directly from Piccolomini:

“Gli spettatori delle tragedie, et delle commedie, habbian notizia, et conoscentia, che le cose, che si fanno, o si dicon nelle scene, non accaschin quivi allora, come vere, et senza finzione alcuna; ma che siano imitationi delle già accadute, o che accascar potessero altrimenti, se gli spettatori le stimassero, non come imitationi, ma come vere quivi avvenute.”<sup>88</sup>

This is probably the nearest these sixteenth-century theorists came to articulating our modern concept of ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’ which most believe is an essential prerequisite to enjoying drama.<sup>89</sup>

At a later stage of my own thesis, as a secondary and more minor line of investigation, I shall formulate my own assessment of the tug between verisimilitude and artificiality during this period, extrapolating from an in-depth study of five particular plays which will form the basis of my main enquiry.

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<sup>87</sup> *Annotationi di M. Alessandro Piccolomini, nel libro della Poetica d'Aristotele; con la traduzione del medesimo libro in lingua volgare*, Vinegia, Giovanni Guarisco et compagni, MDLXXV.

<sup>88</sup> Guidotti, *Scenografie...*, p. 95.

<sup>89</sup> A notable dissenting voice to this notion is Bertolt Brecht, who maintained that a total suspension of disbelief would dilute any didactic element and the necessary maintenance of viewing theatre as a self-evident artifice rather than as a carbon copy of real life.

## THE PLAYS SELECTED FOR INVESTIGATION

In selecting plays for analysis, my first requirement was to choose plays that form a chronological sequence. Thus my first choice is *La Calandra* which was first performed in 1513, the second *Il Negromante*, composed in 1520,<sup>90</sup> the third *Il Marescalco*, composed in 1527, the fourth *Gli Straccioni*, written in 1544 but never performed, and finally *L'Assiuolo*, first performed in 1549. Additionally, I wanted the first three to be within two decades of the first fully realised attempt in this new genre - Ariosto's *La Cassaria* (1508) and by playwrights who were born and educated in different regions of the Italian peninsula. A more minor consideration was to choose plays with different geographical settings. (Admittedly two of my selections, *La Calandra* and *Gli Straccioni* are both set in Rome but they are separated by three decades.)

As the survey above indicates, *commedia erudita* had not properly 'bedded in' as a theatrical form before 1530 so I consider all of the first three playwrights (Bibbiena, Ariosto and Aretino) under scrutiny in my thesis as pioneers who were probably influenced more by pre-Ariosto theatre that they saw growing up rather than the fully-fledged form of erudite comedy that their contemporaries were staging. I have then selected the remaining two plays because they were written in the middle period of this new wave and whose authors may well have been more influenced by preceding *commedia erudita* models<sup>91</sup>, partly to see what developments or discernible trends had taken place in the intervening period between the last of the first three plays, *Il Marescalco* of 1527, and the 1540s.

One of my objectives, which will only come to fruition in the latter stages of the thesis, is to compare these plays in terms of my four stated areas of investigation, and speculate briefly whether any differences as to the relative proportions of these four elements stem from the playwright's geographical origin, individual predilections - whether he has a 'conservative' or 'radical' bent, or whether chronology has played a

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<sup>90</sup> For my investigation, I have used the first redaction of this play; however, I may occasionally refer, where illustrative of a notable variation, to passages in Ariosto's later version, which was drafted in 1528.

<sup>91</sup> This influence, rather than merely inferred, sometimes can be identified by specific statements from the playwright: 'e che, se già la non fusse una Commedia dello Eccellentissimo M. Lodovico, o del Machiavello [sic], io crederei molto meglio, credendo non soddisfare a persona...', Giovan Maria Cecchi, *Commedie*, Vol. 3 (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1899), *La Stiava*, Prologue.

crucial role, that is whether the form or subject matter of the play has built heavily upon earlier models.

Another criterion for choosing these plays was the number and diversity of characters featured. I was looking for plays with between around eight to twelve substantial characters (that is those who are given more than 300 words to speak) and who span a broad range both in terms of age and social rank and include at least one main female character.

The plays *La Calandra* (1513) and *Gli Straccioni* (1544) appear to be the only five-Act comedies penned by their authors, respectively Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena and Annibal Caro. Both of these playwrights were employed in the diplomatic service and both had spent a number of years living and working in Rome<sup>92</sup>, which makes the choice of setting for both of their plays – Rome, not surprising. *Il Negromante* was Ariosto's third play which he wrote in 1520, eleven years after his second *I Suppositi* was staged. Aretino's debut *La Cortigiana* was also set in Rome but his second, the one which I intend to investigate in depth - *Il Marescalco*, is set in the princely court of Mantua where Aretino stayed for a short period between his departure from Rome and arrival in Venice. *L'Assiuolo* is Cecchi's seventh comedy, his first being *La Dote* written in 1544.

Four of the five plays I have selected for detailed investigation were performed: *La Calandra*, *Il Negromante* (though it was only the later redaction which was given a theatrical airing) *Il Marescalco* and *L'Assiuolo*. Unfortunately, *Gli Straccioni* never reached the stage, largely it transpires because Caro himself was rather precious about his work, stipulating where and under what conditions it could be staged.<sup>93</sup>

As the following chapters will be discussing detailed aspects – character traits, particular scenes or tranches of dialogue, it may be helpful at this juncture to give plot summaries for each of the five plays which will allow for some initial comparisons.

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<sup>92</sup> Bibbiena had close personal contacts with the Roman political elite and later became a Cardinal; Caro was engaged in 1542 by Pier Luigi Farnese (nephew of Pope Paul III) and later from 1547 as secretary to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.

<sup>93</sup> For further details, see Introduction, p. XVIII of Guglielminetti's edition of *Gli Straccioni*.

Following the summary, I give further reasons (over and above those adduced above) for the choice.

*La Calandra* by Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena

A pair of young twins, Lidio and Santilla, arrive separately and unbeknownst to each other in Rome. Each resorts to cross-dressing – Santilla in order to protect herself from assault, Lidio, disguised as a maidservant, in order to gain access to his lover, a rich middle-aged woman, Fulvia. Fulvia is married to an imbecile, Calandro, who falls in love with Lidio dressed as a female. Calandro's servant Fessenio devises a ludicrous plan for Calandro to gain access to this would-be lover; this fails but not before Calandro has been subjected to all manner of physical discomforts and humiliations, not least his wife's discovery of him in the house of his putative lover. In desperation to be with Lidio, Fulvia employs a necromancer Ruffo, asking him at one point to turn Santilla, whom she believes to be Lidio after a sex change, back to a masculine form. Fulvia does eventually find carnal fulfilment with the real Lidio. The denouement involves further degradation for Calandro who is seen to falsely accuse his wife of adultery when Santilla is craftily substituted for Lidio; Santilla and Lidio are reunited, Santilla given in marriage to Fulvia's son, Lidio to Santilla's guardian's daughter who was the intended husband for Santilla when she was disguised as a male.

I have chosen this play because of its enduring popularity,<sup>94</sup> and because it is widely recognised as a well-constructed and thoroughly integrated piece of theatre. It does not suffer from the faults of previous attempts (including Ariosto's first two plays) where the crude amalgam of Plautine or Terentian plot devices with more contemporary elements is uncomfortably evident. This play also recommends itself because of the diversity of characters: of the bourgeois class, it has two youngsters of both sexes and two middle-aged persons of both sexes; of the lower class, it has three servants, one of whom is female, and one outsider – a necromancer.

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<sup>94</sup> 'The play was revived and reprinted more often than any other in the genre – twenty-six separate editions between 1521 and 1600.', Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 48.

### *Il Negromante* by Ludovico Ariosto

The youth Cintio has secretly married the young Lavinia who, for public purposes, is married to the elderly merchant Cambio. Under pressure from his step-father, Cintio has wed another young female Emilia but in order to keep faith with Lavinia he feigns impotence. His step-father Maximo hires, at great expense, an itinerant necromancer Lachellino, accompanied by a servant, Nebbio, to cure this impotence. Meanwhile another youth Camillo employs the necromancer to further his pursuit of Emilia whom he has loved for ages. Lachellino devises a plan whereby Camillo is hidden in a chest which is to be transported to Emilia's bedroom. However, the only person who recognises the necromancer as an evil confidence trickster – Temolo, servant to Cintio, manages to thwart Lachellino and Nebbio who then have to make an ignominious escape without any booty. The denouement involves Camillo being granted permission to marry Emilia and Cintio's marriage to Lavinia given the elders' blessing after it is revealed by Maximo that Lavinia is his long-lost daughter.

I have chosen this play because it is by the acknowledged founding father of *commedia erudita* – Ariosto, and because this play comes after a long interval from the issue of his first two more experimental works. In comparison to both *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*, this play has a more contemporary feel to it, principally because one of its major themes is a satire against necromancy and the gullibility of its adherents, numbered amongst all social classes and, in contrast to antique models and early imitations, this play depicts young females as persons of sensibility rather than as merely sexual prizes to be won by males (though regrettably these females are not accorded any appearance on stage).

### *Il Marescalco* by Pietro Aretino

The Marescalco<sup>95</sup> is told by everyone he encounters, from his lowly servant Giannicco to titled members of the court, that the Duke has commanded that he marry. The Marescalco is determined to hold out against this diktat if at all possible. He has

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<sup>95</sup> Whereas other versions of this play in English translation denote this figure by such terms as Stablemaster or Master of the Horse, titles which either underplay or overplay his status, I will refer to this figure as the Italian original does: the Marescalco. (The play itself will, of course, be rendered in italics: *Il Marescalco*.)



discussions with others in his wide social circle as to the merits and demerits of marriage. His old nurse and a courtier, Jacopo, paint marriage in rosy terms. Another courtier, Ambrogio, takes the opposite viewpoint, denouncing married life as a series of inconveniences and humiliations. Eventually, under coercion from the knight and the count, the Marescalco is escorted to the wedding ceremony. The denouement comes when the intended bride reveals herself to be the page boy Carlo in disguise, which provokes much laughter from everyone and huge relief from the Marescalco.

I have chosen this play primarily because, unlike the other four which depict a bourgeois neighbourhood, this is set in a princely court. Another reason is that it is written by one of the most renowned, some would say notorious, literary figures of his age, Aretino. In addition, of my five choices, this play features the greatest variation of social rank, from itinerant pedlar to Count. I also wanted to include a play which did not depict the usual run of well-to-do young males in pursuit of maidens or young married females, but feature a scenario that would give a greater opportunity for the playwright to impart a more original take on the social and sexual mores of his times.

#### *Gli Straccioni* by Annibal Caro

One plot line involves brothers Giovanni and Battista searching for their abducted daughter/niece Giuletta. A second plot line concerns the attempt by his friends to persuade Tindaro to marry the presumed widow Argentina; Tindaro is reluctant since he is hugely attached to his first lover (the said Giuletta) even though at this stage he believes her to be dead. A third plot line involves Marabeo and Pilucca (the two male servants of Giordano (presumed dead) and his widow Argentina) who try to embezzle money from the household accounts and frustrate any attempts by Argentina to remarry. In addition, Marabeo has kept as a prisoner Giuletta, whom he believes to be a slave girl under the name Agata. Later on, both Giuletta and Giordano suddenly return 'from the dead'. Giuletta, by way of a letter, informs Tindaro that she is still deeply in love with him but recognises that he has no obligation towards her. Giordano pursues Tindaro to punish him for his dalliance with his wife Argentina. The denouement consists of the restoration of Giovanni's and Battista's lost fortune and their reunion with Giuletta, and the procurator Rossello's settlement of the dispute between Giordano and Tindaro,

revealing them to be first cousins. The servants Pilucca and Marabeo are brought to book before Rossello but, after an intervention from Giordano, are pardoned.

I have chosen this play as a contrast to the more conspicuous display of social hierarchy apparent in other plays such as *Il Marescalco*. For example, the first scene of this play sees the upper-class Demetrio, the middle-class print shop owner Barbagrigia and the servant Pilucca interact with each other with little regard to rank. Another feature of this play which distinguishes itself from the mainstream is that the pursuit and the eventual pairing of Tindaro and Giuletta is given a romantic and serious slant in comparison to the more risible depictions and hedonistic attitudes found in other plays.

#### *L'Assiuolo* by Giovan Maria Cecchi

The well-to-do youth Giulio has fallen for the charms of Oretta, the young wife of the obnoxious lawyer Ambrogio who, in turn, intends to commit adultery with a married woman Anfrosina who is the mother of another youth Rinuccio, who is also in pursuit of Oretta. An initial scheme is devised by Oretta and Anfrosina to catch Ambrogio in the act of adultery. This plan is then hi-jacked by Giorgetto (loyal servant to Giulio) who thereafter becomes the puppet master of the subsequent action. Ambrogio bribes his dolt of a servant Giannella to accompany him on his nocturnal escapade to seduce Anfrosina. Giorgetto, aided by Agnola, Ambrogio's female servant, manages to manipulate matters so that Ambrogio remains stuck outside all night in the cold, while Giulio gains access to Oretta's bed and, back at Ambrogio's house, Rinuccio succeeds in bedding Oretta's sister Violante. In the denouement, Oretta and Violante manage to exculpate themselves whilst getting Ambrogio, after damning evidence by Giannella, to confess to his wrongdoing.

I have chosen this play as a late representative of erudite comedy in general and of Cecchi's work in particular: it is his seventh play. I have also chosen this because it is a play which, even more so than *La Calandra*, has a close alliance with the stories of the *Decameron* in which the wily and resourceful wife manages to outwit her jealous and arrogant husband. Though more clumsily plotted, it has a lot in common with Machiavelli's *La Mandragola* in that both male and female participants abandon any moral scruples in order to enjoy illicit sex. A peripheral though noteworthy facet of this

play is that the female servant Agnola is presented as bright and resourceful, in contrast to the male servant Giannella who, at least initially, is presented as a complete imbecile.

## **METHODOLOGY**

For the next chapter, I shall choose an equal number of characters from each play and look at them (both as to what they say and what is said about them by other characters) under the dimension of authority and economic resources. For the subsequent three chapters I shall repeat this exercise for three further dimensions: morality, intelligence and culture. For other characters (not necessarily minor ones) outside of the five selected, I may add brief descriptions, particularly in the Authority Chapter, if they illustrate an interim stage of representation between two of my selected characters or whose depiction gives further insights into the construction of one of the characters who form part of my central focus.

Chapter 6 will look at these dimensions in combination, as they are exhibited by characters in their interaction with others; I will evaluate whether there is a spirit of co-operation or competitiveness, and then ultimately judge which character comes out on top, and by which positive display in a particular dimension, or combination of dimensions, this is achieved; conversely, by which negative display in a particular dimension (or combination of dimensions) the loser manages to forfeit any prestige he may have had at the start. I shall then consider each play individually as to which of the four dimensions appears as a dominant thread, which feature only peripherally or not at all.

On occasions, I will make a judgment as to the degree of naturalism of the depiction of a character: whether the character is an out-and-out caricature or leans more toward a recognisable figure found in real life. Side by side with this I shall comment where appropriate on how consistent the portrayal of a character has been: whether the depicted behaviour of a particular stage figure is 'character-driven' or has been constructed to meet the exigencies of the plot. However, in no way am I comparing behaviours depicted on stage (as extrapolated from the play text) with that of the real-life habits and comportment of members of the society in which these plays were written and performed. However, this, I contend, does not prevent me evaluating

how naturalistically a character has been portrayed. An analogy would be seeing the reflections of persons in a severely bent mirror of the sort you used to find in fairgrounds as compared with a 'true' mirror found in most people's living room; one does not have to view the face of the subject to determine whether the image reflected is a true unmediated one or a grossly distorted one. Although human faces come in all shapes and individual features differ widely, when viewing a photo or a portrait of a face we do not have to have seen the original in the flesh to determine whether the image is a true likeness or a caricature. This hypothesis, I suggest, is equally valid when considering the simulation of human behaviour, i.e. acting on stage. Whereas the judgment by a contemporary audience member as to the veracity or otherwise of portrayals on stage concerning minor aspects (such as costume or whether a particular word or phrase is 'fitting' as regards the speaker's social class, profession or regional origin) is necessarily more acute than that of someone solely looking at texts several centuries later, a modern-day critic can still judge as to whether the broad behaviour of a stage character is plausible or contrived and whether attitudes exhibited by a character are consistent with those he had shown earlier.

In summary, I am attempting to draw inferences from these play texts as to which set of characters and types of attitudes and behaviour were extolled and which were deprecated in the society in which these plays were written and performed. This thesis is not therefore an exercise in measuring the portrayal of a stage figure against his real-life counterpart, as might be assembled from exhaustive historical research. Nevertheless, on occasions I may elucidate a particular character or episode of the play, or draw an inference as to the playwright's intentions, with some relevant biographical, historical or geographical background facts in the form of a footnote.

## AUTHORITY DIMENSION

As outlined in the introductory chapter, this investigation is an attempt to discern the individual building blocks that are deployed by the playwright in placing his created characters along a spectrum of worth, the degree of inferiority or superiority to a perceived social norm. For this objective, I intend to look at each stage character through four discrete dimensions: authority, moral, intelligence and cultural. This chapter is devoted to the first of these dimensions.

The authority dimension I denote as the default dimension, a preliminary indication of where a character stands in the eyes of society, which the remaining three dimensions can modify, either towards an enhancement or a diminution of this initial status. In visual terms, the authority dimension can be looked upon as a *tableau vivant*, an initial frozen picture of a character which accords him a basic ‘starting’ value before any interaction with others occurs. Even within this narrow consideration, an initial ‘rating of worth’ may prove to be misleading since at a later stage, often not until the denouement, a character may be revealed as a much higher-ranked individual or as possessing much greater wealth than hitherto indicated.<sup>96</sup>

In the written text, this default status is initially manifested in the *personaggi*, *persone de la comedia* or *persone della favola* which invariably precedes the first Act or Prologue. Alongside the name of the character, there is usually a short description, commonly only one word, denoting the age, professional status or condition of the character, e.g. ‘Lippo, vecchio’; ‘Messer Rossello, procuratore’; ‘Mirandola, pazzo’. Sometimes, the name will give an indication of whether the character is to be taken seriously, e.g. Demetrio, or with a degree of levity: e.g. Camillo Pocosale.<sup>97</sup> When considering an actual stage performance, initial ranking would be readily apparent by the costumes the actors wore, serving to demarcate the difference between master and

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<sup>96</sup> Within my chosen sample of plays, in *Il Negromante* Lavinia is discovered to be the long-lost daughter of one of the rich patriarchs, thus making her a suitable marriage partner for one of the nobly-born males; in *Gli Straccioni* the noble but impecunious young man Tindaro is revealed at the play’s end to be a very close relative of the rich and powerful Cavaliere Giordano.

<sup>97</sup> Guidotti gives an even more graphic example from Belo’s *Il Pedante*: ‘Malfatto, il cui nome indica subito una stortura, come sottolinea una battuta nel testo, sembra rivestire, diversamente dagli altri e da quanto individuato finora a teatro, il ruolo di folle in modo assoluto...’, *Scenografie...*, p. 237

servant, town dweller and country dweller, a native or incomer.<sup>98</sup> (In this epoch, where Italy did not exist as a unified political entity, native could denote those from quite a narrow geographical area.). Such distinctions are likely to have been finessed by the accent, posture and gait of the actors.

I ascribe the above aspects as authority in its preliminary form, i.e. stage representations that elicit similar initial evaluations to those we form when encountering an individual in real life for the first time, before any behaviour of that individual can modify this impression. However, once the action on stage has begun I shall evaluate authority, in so far as it can be separated from the other dimensions, in terms of practical consequence: the ability of one person to get another person to do his or her bidding.

Some of the urban societies in which these plays were written had a long tradition of republican forms of government, e.g. Venice and Siena. Others, such as Ferrara and Mantua, retained (or regained) their ancestral feudal structure, whereas others oscillated between these two models: Florence, from a wider participative form of governance in the fourteenth century, through the oligarchical dominance of successive generations of the Medici family during the fifteenth century (interrupted for a short period by the rule of the evangelical priest Savonarola) finally emerged as a Dukedom under Cosimo Medici in the 1530s. Even if a city state was nominally republican, its rulers often behaved like princes and, even during periods of genuine 'bourgeois' democracy, the city state in question would never manage to be totally immune from the politics being played out in the wider peninsula between the Papacy, the reconstituted Holy Roman Empire and the two big continental power brokers, France and Spain.

Even at the microcosmic scale of the fictional staging of urban bourgeois life that these plays largely depict, any purely meritocratic values derived from republican idealism would inevitably be subsumed under, or at least contaminated by other, older

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<sup>98</sup> There is very little documented as to costumes worn in *commedia erudita*. It is likely that, even more markedly than in real life, every rank, from porter to Count, would be clearly differentiated by costume. An extract from Cecchi's play *Il Figliuol Prodigio* (1550) touches on the strict rules governing costume: MENICO (Contadino): 'O buon fanciullo, queste son cose da cittadini che stanno nella città, e posson portare la seta; e a noi altri portando cotal cose, sarebbe poi, ben sai, posto il balzello.' Giovan Maria Cecchi, *Commedie, Vol. 1* (Florence: Successori Le Monnier, 1899), *Il Figliuol Prodigio*, (II,3).

and geographically more widespread, value systems: aristocratic<sup>99</sup>, plutocratic<sup>100</sup> and even theocratic. Thus, notwithstanding fledgling signs of more meritocratic values, in the particular society under scrutiny here – central and northern Italy in the first half of the sixteenth century, authority would still have been largely a function of rank which was for the most part determined at birth. However, if the broad division pertaining to the distribution of authority still lay between the aristocratic and non-aristocratic classes, the rise of the merchant and pedagogic classes from the twelfth century onwards served to widen the scope for distinctions within this latter category.

Primary authority as a function of rank could be enhanced or attenuated through the level of the character's economic resources. There was not always a straight correlation between this and designated status: for example, a middle-aged wife classed as a subordinate to her husband may have sufficient economic means – money, her own retinue of servants - to be able to act independently; conversely the grown-up son of a well-to-do household may be of considerably higher rank than say a *mezzana* (bawd) but be in a more powerless position if he has less ready money at his disposal.<sup>101</sup>

Part of the investigation of this chapter will be to see how much the behaviour of a stage character is seen to subvert, if only briefly, the strictures of a hierarchical society which circumscribes the individual's room to manoeuvre. Another line of investigation will focus on any change in a character's long-term authority by comparing his/her status at the end of the play with that at the beginning, in addition to noting any temporary shifts in the balance of authority between characters during the vicissitudes

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<sup>99</sup> Zorzi provides a detailed analysis of how the wider political environment impacted, however indirectly, on Renaissance theatre: 'La figura di Lorenzo il Magnifico, che completa l'accenramento del potere iniziato da Cosimo nelle mani di una consorteria sempre più ristretta, consapevole di approfondire il distacco tra popolo e classe dirigente, ma indifferente a mimetizzare il fenomeno frenando la degradazione delle sembianze repubblicane. L'immaginazione supplisce all'assenza di partecipazione politica, colmando il vuoto dell'esercizio democratico con l'impulso alle attività artistiche e spettacolari. Lo spazio è ancora quello della città, ma con zone, sapientemente recintate, di relativa indipendenza: operatori artistici e operatori ludici beneficiano di una maggiore autonomia rispetto alla normatività della comittenza trecentesca e dei primi anni del secolo. Anche in questo è il segno di una fase matura del capitalismo.', *Il Teatro e la Città*, pp. 81-82

<sup>100</sup> Venice, classed as a republic as opposed to a principality, could also be termed a plutocracy since its wealth and prestige was founded on trade rather than ownership and exploitation of land; likewise Florence, well before the sixteenth century, had established itself as one of the leading financial centres of Europe.

<sup>101</sup> A rich father coupled with his impecunious son is a common scenario in comic theatre, dating at least as far back as Plautus (see his *Mostellaria*, inter alia.) Ariosto's first play of 1508, *La Cassaria*, reprised this theme.

of the unfolding drama. At a later stage, I shall posit possible motives behind these depictions of authority challenged or subverted: as an admonishment of bad behaviour, as a cautionary warning against excess passion in the young (occasionally not so young) men, as political satire - what we would today term 'agit-prop' theatre, or merely as a device by which the normal hierarchy is temporarily overturned for fun and mischief. I shall examine the power play between characters of roughly equal status: young noble men, older and established professionals, between servants of the same household and of different households; and that between those of unequal status: the tussle between young and old, between master and servant, the perennial 'battle of the sexes' in male/female partnerships, both long-established and newly-formed, and between those who are recognised as respected and established members of the local community and those who are delineated as incomers, outsiders or interlopers.

In the following survey, both in this chapter and the subsequent three chapters, I shall start with low-ranked characters and work upwards through the pecking order, although not all characters can be slotted neatly into such a schema.

## SERVANTS

The primary questions to pose concerning the servant class are: how much autonomy are they presented as possessing; does the servant's master/mistress keep a close eye on him/her?; how much of a free rein is the servant permitted? A secondary line of enquiry will concern whether a master (or mistress) regards the servant merely as a drudge or whether he turns to the servant for advice and, if so, how much notice the master/mistress takes of the servant's advice when proffered? Other lines of investigation will include how, within the same household, one servant gains dominance over another, how, outside his/her own household, a servant interacts with masters and servants of other households or with peripatetic figures such as pedlars and sorcerers. Does the servant observe the rules of etiquette concerning hierarchical deference more closely when dealing with members of his/her own household than when dealing with outsiders? I shall investigate whether female servants behave with a greater sense of loyalty and conscientiousness than do male servants. From this I hope to form a judgment on which set of servants – male or female, owes more to theatrical



tradition,<sup>102</sup> which to an intention to reflect more the circumstances and behaviour of their real-life counterparts. (As stated in my introductory chapter, this latter endeavour will stop short of any thorough historical or sociological research.)

Outside of designated status, age and experience may affect the degree of authority a character is able to assume. Evidently these qualities do not operate in isolation but are tempered by the age and experience of the character they most often come into contact with; in the case of servants this would be their masters or mistresses. Therefore as a convenient starting point, I shall compare two servants, one very young and immature – Giannicco, and the more mature and staid figure of Temolo.

*Il Marescalco* opens with a commonplace trope of servant/master relationship: we see the Marescalco trying to maintain his authority by directing some mild insults - 'questo tristo' and 'matto' at his young servant (in Act I, Scene 1). In contrast, Giannicco, to mitigate what might be construed as insolence, intersperses his remarks with deferential phrases: in this short exchange he uses the word 'padrone' twice, although this might be intended to be said with heavy irony.<sup>103</sup> Giannicco observes the rules of etiquette by always using the 'voi' form of address towards his master.<sup>104</sup> If signs of insubordination are apparent in his repartee, Giannicco nevertheless accepts and carries out orders given by his master without query. Later on, Giannicco's sarcasm becomes even more pointed, although the following line may have been intended as a 'stage whisper', out of earshot of the Marescalco: 'Entro, padron caro,

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<sup>102</sup> Guidotti, expounding on the theme of audience expectations, cites this example: 'Nella prima redazione della *Cortigiana* ad esempio, l'Aretino sembra avere ben presente lo spirito (e le singole battute) della *Mandragola*, mostrando consapevolezza del fatto che il pubblico conosce quell'opera e può coglierne facilmente i rimandi.' *Scenografie...*, p. 268

<sup>103</sup> It is now impossible to discern whether in actual performance Giannicco's sarcasm was designed to be picked up on solely by the audience or by the Marescalco as well. The former condition fits well with the picture of the Marescalco as bluff and insensitive to such subtleties. It also fits in the idea of the audience being 'secretly' let in on elements of subversion. On the other hand, the intention may have been for Giannicco's sarcasm to be clearly registered by the Marescalco, in which case much comedy could be derived from him fuming with impotent rage.

<sup>104</sup> According to Radcliff-Umstead 'the boy Giannicco takes delight in infuriating others, impudently addressing his superiors with the familiar 'tu'.', Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, *The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969), p. 168. However, upon scouring the text, I can find no occasion on which Giannicco directly uses 'tu' to his superiors. In Act II, Scene 2 while talking to the Pedant he says the line 'Tu fuggi al corpo ..' but that is directed to his co-conspirator the page boy who is a silent presence in this scene; and in Act IV Scene 3, Giannicco is merely repeating (*sotto voce* perhaps) the Count's reprimand: CONTE 'Taci tu'; GIANNICCO: 'Come taci tu'. Nevertheless, it is true to say that Giannicco often interrupts the conversation of his 'elders and betters', much to their irritation.

padron santo, padron buono.’ (I,7).<sup>105</sup> In this same scene, although he uses the ‘voi’ form of address to the Old Nurse, this is the only sign of deference he shows her. He feels free to use slang and to disparage his master in her presence. During Act I, Scene 11, Giannicco is sufficiently self-possessed to ask the Pedant what he and his master were discussing and, upon their departure, to instruct the Pedant to meet him later on in the square. In the second Act, in the build-up to the execution of the practical joke, Giannicco’s expressions of deference towards the Pedant – ‘la Signoria de la magnifica paternità’ and ‘Maestro’ (II,2) are patently insincere, since the pedant’s dignity is the least of Giannicco’s concerns.

Towards others of high rank, such as the Count, Giannicco ingratiates himself and, through playful banter, tries to dissolve some of the stiff formality which would normally pertain between parties of such diverse age and status. The only person to whom Giannicco shows abiding loyalty is the knight’s page-boy with whom he teams up to play a prank on the Pedant. The form of greeting used - ‘fratellino’ by Giannicco, just before the discussion on their jointly engineered practical joke, expresses a solidarity between these two characters of similar age and rank.

In the figure of Giannicco, we have a youthful servant on a tight rein who, having no power to influence events or others’ opinions, gains what merriment he can from playing pranks or repeating rumours, generating a portrait of a rebellious youth, frustrated by the limitations placed on him. However, within this constraint, he is depicted as a likeable and enterprising youth as well as a mischief-maker, although he is careful never to directly challenge his master’s authority.<sup>106</sup>

I now look at the reverse situation where the servant is an older than, or at least the same age, as his master.<sup>107</sup> Temolo is servant to the young Cintio in Ariosto’s *Il*

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<sup>105</sup> Pietro Aretino, *Il Marescalco*, Teatro Italiano, ed. by Silvio D’Amico (Milan: Nuova Accademia Editrice, 1955). All citations will be taken from this edition hereafter.

<sup>106</sup> There is here a possible dark sub-text of an adult male in a superior position subjecting a youth under his tutelage to perverse sexual practices: Giannicco says at one point ‘egli m’abbia torto’ (V,7) and Jacopo remarks, when suddenly coming across this pair: ‘Sempre ti trovo in conclave col tuo pivo’ (I,2). However, such a modern classification as ‘perverse’ would find no concordance with Aretino himself who, if only judging by the benign outcome for the Marescalco in this play, would think of various sexual behaviours as merely different without attaching labels such as abnormal, perverse or immoral.

<sup>107</sup> In Ariosto’s first redaction of *Il Negromante* (the version on which I base my analyses) Temolo’s youthfulness is first alluded to when Cintio remonstrates with him: ‘La poca esperienza c’hai del mondo,

*Negromante*. In his first appearance, at the start of the second Act, Temolo uses the deferential address ‘patron’ towards his master. However, during the course of their subsequent conversation, he gently but effectively ridicules Cintio’s belief in the necromancer’s powers. Temolo’s exposition of the way officials of the state behave is in a manner akin to a parent or teacher imparting his greater wisdom to a pupil who is green in the ways of the world. However, Temolo can only try to get his young master to think and act wisely through teasing and light-hearted debunking of his beliefs rather than by instructing him directly. When Cintio then confides in Temolo the grave predicament he finds himself in – that the necromancer will find out that his claimed impotence is just a ploy so that he does not consummate his marriage to Emilia, Temolo hatches a plan of action, not all of which Cintio submits to. Temolo’s influence is thus shown to extend only so far: the master, although young and impressionable, still makes the final decision.

If the dynamics of the power play between Temolo and his master follow a believable pattern, does this apply to Temolo’s interaction with characters outside his own household? At the beginning of Act III, there is an exchange between him and the merchant Cambio concerning the course of events. Here they appear as equals: Cambio confides in him not just his worry over Cintio’s and Lavinia’s relationship but also specific details as to how he can raise the sum of 50 Florins. Further, in a later meeting between these two, it is apparent that Temolo is better apprised of the negotiations between Maximo and the necromancer and feels fit to reprimand Cambio for causing additional anxiety to Lavinia and orders him to make amends. At the end of the next scene, Temolo, having taken control of matters, instructs Cambio thus: ‘Paga poi quest’ uomo, e mandalo via.’ (IV,2).<sup>108</sup> He repeats this instruction two scenes further on and adds ‘e mandalo ben lontano, e subito’ (IV, 4).<sup>109</sup> By the end of this scene, Temolo is still issuing instructions to Cambio using the ‘tu’ form of address: ‘Dalli tu, Cambio, / A manicar qualch’ altra ciancia, e spingilo / Via.’ (IV,4). However, in the final Act

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n’è causa’ (II,1) and later by Nebbio when he describes him as ‘quel giovane’ (IV,5). In the second redaction, in the additional scenes at the end of the play, Lachellino addresses him as: ‘O giovane, / Il mio garzon’ (V,4). However, I infer that Ariosto intended this character to be merely someone under 30 years of age rather than an adolescent.

<sup>108</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Tutte Le Opere*, Vol. 4, ed. by Casella, A., Ronchi, G. and Varasi, F. (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1974). All citations will be taken from this edition hereafter.

<sup>109</sup> The 1530 redaction has Temolo in this scene using the more deferential: ‘Pagate’ and ‘mandatelo’ which increases the perceived status of Cambio (Fazio in the later redaction) whilst reducing that of the servant.

Temolo assumes a humble, more marginal role, although he is still given the function of heralding the announcement of good news concerning the paternity of Lavinia.

Temolo exercises a power and influence far beyond his nominal role as Cintio's servant: much of the mechanics of the intrigue - the redressing of wrongs, the foiling of the villains' scam - is played out through this figure. Temolo is seen to wield considerable clout in the wider world beyond his own household. He is an essential pivot in the fall of events which will determine who will be winners and who will be losers. Effective leadership eventually devolves upon this servant figure since he is able to show a resolute and decisive frame of mind in contrast to the vacillation of his superiors.<sup>110</sup>

Along the spectrum, positioned between the young, flippant Giannicco and the graver Temolo, sits Giorgetto, servant to the young well-born student Giulio in *L'Assiuolo*. His private discussions with Giulio have a notable lascivious content and, more specifically, in a later soliloquy Giorgetto mentions his intention to visit a brothel: 'E poi darò una volta da casa la femmina' (IV, 7), from which we can infer that Giorgetto is still a virile young man, for whom sexual matters, his own as well as his master's, are to the forefront of his mind.<sup>111</sup> Distinct from Temolo, Giorgetto fulfils a much narrower function: solely that of facilitating his master's sexual conquest of a young female; he has little impact on the welfare or fortune of others except to the degree they directly affect his master.

In the opening scene of the play, after Giulio has confessed to his longing to pair up with young married female, Madonna Oretta, Giorgetto takes charge of the conversation. He asks Giulio some searching questions: 'Siete voi innamorato solo, o pur accompagnato?' [...] 'Come è egli in grazia dell'Amore. Evv' e gli ancora andato?' (I,1).<sup>112</sup> Giorgetto's authority over his master reaches its peak during the third Act.

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<sup>110</sup> When staged, I would imagine the actor playing Temolo to be the most physically imposing of the cast, since physical stature is one obvious way of augmenting stature in its abstract sense.

<sup>111</sup> Giorgetto marks a departure from the more traditional servant figure as embodied in Fessenio who, by virtue of his advancing years, cannot fully identify with the delights of his master's sexual adventures (see p. 109 below); by contrast Giorgetto's youthfulness and spirit of adventure gives him added confederacy with his master.

<sup>112</sup> Giovanni Maria Cecchi, *L'Assiuolo*, Teatro Italiano, ed. by Silvio D'Amico (Milan: Nuova Accademia Editrice, 1955). All citations will be taken from this edition hereafter.

After Giorgetto has taken control of the intrigue, he issues a series of instructions to Giulio, ending with a boast of his supreme abilities:

Date qua ch'io la suggelli. Andatevene in casa, e non vi lasciate veder fuori per nulla, che voi non guastate tutto lo incantesimo [...] Fidatevi di me, se voi potete, e levatemivi dinanzi, e andate dove i' v' ho ditto; vo' sapete pur chi io sono, e quel ch'io so fare. (III,1)

The scene ends with a soliloquy from Giorgetto, spoken after Giulio has exited, in which he outlines his plan of action to the audience. Although Giorgetto does not appear himself in the long second scene of Act V, his name is cited three times by his master. It becomes clear that he has been responsible for closely supervising Giulio at crucial moments of the night's happenings: (as narrated by Giulio): ' Serrato l'uscio, e Giorgetto mi si fa incontro tutto lieto, e mi dice: "Messer Giulio, spogliatevi tosto e entrate in camera, che Madonna Oretta v'aspetta"' (V,2).

Outside his dealings with his master, Giorgetto has little sway over others. In scenes 2 and 3 of Act III, Giorgetto appears in disguise as a servant of Madonna Anfrosina. Here he is more patient and less assertive; in fact he has to wait three hours outside the house of Madonna Oretta since he has no powers of persuasion over the implacable servant Giannella who stands sentry over the only entrance. In a reversal of this situation later on, it is only by physical intimidation that Giorgetto manages to get one over on Giannella by abusing and frightening him under the cover of darkness:

GIANNELLA: Oimé! Non mi date, i' non son io.

GIORGETTO: Vien qua, bestia: chi accenna di darti? (IV,7)<sup>113</sup>

Similar to Temolo's fate, once Giorgetto's plans have been successfully executed, he fades into the background, although in a coda to the denouement he is seen in receipt of fulsome praise from his master (in Act V, Scene 8). Placing this private scene between master and servant at the very end of the play, together with the opening scene which also features just these two, gives weight to a notion that the play is more about male bonding than male/female relationships.

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<sup>113</sup> This event takes place away from Giannella's abode at a time when all 'decent' people should be at home in bed. Here is captured the notion of a realm beyond societal rules, where agility and brute force, or the threat of such, determine who has mastery over whom.

I shall now look at Fessenio, the principal servant in *La Calandra*.<sup>114</sup> One can infer that much of the story-line relating to Fessenio derives from theatrical considerations, specifically the concision of the plot. Instead of presenting three separate servants to serve their respective masters (or mistress) which would necessarily involve two extra characters and a more ramshackle plot, we are presented with one composite figure - Fessenio who, acting on behalf of three major characters, is able to possess a 'super-cognisance' of what other characters are up to and as a consequence is more readily able to take control of events.

Although employed as a servant to the wealthy middle-aged Fulvia, in their encounter in Act II, Scene 5 she treats Fessenio more as an equal than a subordinate. She greets him very cordially 'Ben venga, Fessenio caro' (II,5). Outside any theatrical contrivance, this may fairly reflect the reduced 'status gap' between a high-ranked female and a low-ranked male who has become a trusted member of the household. She encourages him to follow a course of action – to get the necromancer to work for her, not through direct instruction but rather through gentle supplication: 'se tu stimi la salute mia, trovalo, persuadilo, pregalo, stringilo' (II,5).<sup>115</sup> In a soliloquy (Act III, Scene 1) Fessenio reveals that he has been charged with carrying out a monetary transaction: the hiring of a prostitute to be employed in the scam against Calandro. This has a twin significance: firstly that Fessenio is considered trustworthy enough to be given such an important undertaking, secondly that nominally respectable persons of high status such as Lidio and Calandro are mindful of not being seen dealing directly with a character who is not considered respectable.

A brief passage at the beginning of Act III, Scene 3 depicts a traditional master/servant relationship where Fessenio is subjected to all sorts of abuse and threats of violence from his master Calandro. However, this is an isolated episode in a story-line which sees Fessenio almost continuously in control of his master, getting him to believe and do the most outlandish things. In his dealings with other household subordinates, Fessenio is also seen to be on top: he manages in an early scene to belittle

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<sup>114</sup> Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena, *La Calandra*, ed. by Giorgio Padoan (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1985). All citations will be taken from this edition hereafter.

<sup>115</sup> When staged, Fulvia could also display a physical flirtatiousness, to which even the hardened Fessenio might be susceptible.

the pompous Polinico, his young master's old tutor, exercise control over the maidservant Samia and later on (in Act III, Scene 2) he takes charge of both a prostitute and a porter.

Alongside the greater prestige accorded to Fessenio comes extra responsibility which he is keenly aware of from the outset. In the long soliloquy which opens the play, Fessenio does not miss a chance to grumble, albeit in a light-hearted way, about the onerous burdens placed upon him: 'Nessuno potette mai servire a due, e io servo a tre: al marito, alla moglie e al proprio mio patrone; in modo che io non ho mai un riposo al mondo.' (I,1). There is no room for advancement. On the contrary, he has to work hard to prevent himself falling into a worse position. If things go well, he will not get promoted or indeed receive any extra material rewards, but if things go badly the implication is that he may lose his job and therefore his accommodation along with it: 'Tutta la ruina caderia sopra me: per che mi bisogna bene sapere schermire'. (I,1). Here we see elements which relate to the real-life conditions of servant skilfully intermeshed with fantastical elements. However, any inferences drawn as to Fessenio's place in the social hierarchy are of limited value, since the accumulative import is of Fessenio as a theatrical entity rather than as a recognisable representation of a real-life servant.<sup>116</sup>

If Fessenio is largely constructed as a theatrical device, as the 'straightman' to Calandro's fool, how much theatricality is there in the next servant I intend to examine - Pilucca from *Gli Straccioni*? Together with the steward Marabeo and the maidservant Nuta, he forms the domestic staff of the wealthy household of Madonna Argentina. The early story-line contrives to feature Pilucca and Marabeo left to their own devices: their master is absent (presumed dead) and their mistress appears to exert minimal control over them. Thus the inquiry here will focus as much upon servant/fellow servant relationships as upon those between servant and master.

Although in the *Persone de la comedia* Marabeo is described as a 'fattore' and Pilucca is only accorded the appellation 'servo', it is Pilucca who has been instructed,

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<sup>116</sup> Guidotti supports this conclusion: 'Evidentemente l'interesse dell'autore è puntato sulla sequenza dialogica nel suo insieme più che sulla fissazione caratteriale', Angela Guidotti, *Il Modello e la Trasgressione: Commedie del primo '500* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1983), p. 139

presumably by their mistress Madonna Argentina, to check the accounts.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, in their ‘unofficial’ activity – embezzlement of money and goods from the household, it is Pilucca who initially takes charge. Their dialogue here contains relevant antecedent facts: it transpires that once Pilucca was the junior partner to Marabeo. But upon Pilucca’s arrival back in the house, the roles have been reversed; Marabeo now concedes that he is subservient to and dependent upon Pilucca: ‘Infine, io ho tanto paura e tanto bisogno d’un tuo pari, che son forzato a far ciò che tu vuoi.’<sup>118</sup> (I,4). But by Act II, Scene 3, it is Pilucca who now assumes the role of subordinate to Marabeo who comes up with a master plan. The opening of Act IV has Pilucca squirming before Marabeo protesting his innocence: Marabeo is certain that Pilucca has aligned himself with their master Giordano to foil his plans. After Pilucca finally convinces Marabeo of his innocence, he becomes even more subservient: he echoes Marabeo’s sentiments, he merely asks how best he can help deal with the sudden return of their master and readily agrees to carry out Marabeo’s instructions (IV,1). Two scenes later on, Pilucca initially co-operates with Marabeo in their forcible transference of the maiden Giuletta. However, when their plan is frustrated, it becomes a case of everyman for himself:

MARABEO: La lasserò io, menala tu Pilucca.

PILUCCA: Sì, ch’io voglio essere impiccato per te.

MARABEO: Io voglio fuggir via...

PILUCCA: Ed io, via! (IV,3)

Here is a further illustration of the uncertain and oscillating power balance between these two.

If the interactions with his fellow servant Marabeo show a sustained and nuanced battle of wills between two abrasive servant figures, are Pilucca’s dealings with his master and mistress portrayed in a similar vein? Early on, after arriving back, after a long absence, at his place of employment - Giordano and Argentina’s estate, his mistress repeatedly demands confirmation from him that her husband, Cavaliere Giordano, is dead: ‘Questa mia padrona mi ha stracco con tante minuzie ch’ella mi domanda.’ (I,4). (Typically, for a high-status female, her sayings are not presented

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<sup>117</sup> PILUCCA: ‘Odi. Lo ho commissione di rivederti i conti’ (I,4)

<sup>118</sup> Annibal Caro, *Gli Straccioni*, ed. by Marziano Guglielminetti (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1967). All citations will be taken from this edition hereafter.



directly but through reports from male characters.) The implication from this scene is that there is minimal contact between Madonna Argentina and her male servants, that Pilucca would receive instructions from her only periodically and carry them out without any close supervision.

More complicated are Pilucca's dealings with his master Giordano, who returns unexpectedly later on. Pilucca has to endure the dismissive attitude of Giordano, who at one point exclaims: 'Va' alle forche' (IV,2). But shortly after this, Pilucca steps outside of his role as a mere servant. Through satirical asides to the audience, he assumes the role of a *giullare*:

GIORDANO: Gran tiranna degli uomini è questa bellezza; bella sopra modo e costante giovine è costei.

PILUCCA: Uscito dell'orso, entra ne la pecora. (IV,2)

Through this device, Pilucca takes control of the scene, casting himself as a sensible figure, to whom the audience can relate, in contrast to the raving Giordano. At the end of this scene, Pilucca steps back into his role as a loyal servant by offering to help his master in the fight against his adversaries.

If Pilucca's interactions with his master Giordano are in the tradition of theatrical farce - those of a determined master's crass attempts to gain control over his recalcitrant servant, Pilucca's interactions with the well-born Demetrio are in a different vein. In the opening scene of the play, the large difference in rank between Pilucca and Demetrio is transcended due, firstly, to the disclosure that both have spent a long time together as fellow captives of pirates and, secondly, because Demetrio is more dependent on Pilucca than vice-versa, since he is a newcomer to Rome whereas Pilucca is a native. But even by the end of this scene, Pilucca asserts sufficient independence to be able to disoblige the well-born Demetrio who requests his help in trying to find his friend. At the beginning of Act III, Scene 2, when Demetrio again asks, disingenuously, if Pilucca will help him find Tindaro (he has already found him), Pilucca fobs him off. Pilucca is in turn equally disingenuous when he feigns shock at the rumour, which he and his accomplice Marabeo have circulated, of Madonna Argentina's pregnancy (in Act III, Scene 2). Throughout this scene, they behave towards each other as equals; the

only concession to rank here is that the formalities of address are preserved: Pilucca uses the 'voi' form towards Demetrio who uses the 'tu' form towards him.

In the portrayal of Pilucca and Marabeo, particular reference is made to their economic circumstances. They are convinced that, once their mistress has re-married, they will be subjected to more discipline and be financially worse off, as Marabeo ruefully remarks: 'E se 'l marito ha stocco, dove ci troviamo noi del ruspato?' (II, 3). In this same passage, the banter between Marebeo and Pilucca indicates that, although they do not want the actual marriage to take place or at least the consummation of it, they are regretful at the prospect of losing out on the hedonistic pleasures of the wedding feast.

The scenes between Pilucca and Marabeo are innovative. Presented here is a fascinating study of the see-sawing power struggle between two characters roughly equal in rank. These two switch from co-operation to competitiveness, from trust to distrust and back again, from submissiveness to querelousness, sometimes in an instance.

Nebbio is the servant and long-term accomplice of Lachellino, the eponymous villain of Ariosto's *Il Negromante*. It soon becomes clear that, distinct from his role as a servant, Nebbio also assumes the role of impartial observer and commentator. In his first appearance (Act I, Scene 4), Nebbio is present throughout the duologue between his master Lachellino and the high-ranked Maximo, but he does not take part in their conversation.<sup>119</sup> Within the fictional society of the play he is accorded a low status. However, because his character is given some trenchant asides, addressed solely to the audience, within the totality of the theatrical presentation he achieves a higher status. This is further enhanced by the soliloquy he is accorded which forms the entirety of the second scene of Act II. Although Nebbio reveals here that he is entirely dependent on his master and receives a share of his ill-gotten gains, the speech as a whole confers on Nebbio a marginally positive status as it casts him as a perceptive chronicler of events.

In their first appearance together without others present (Act II, Scene 3), Nebbio and the necromancer come across as partners in crime rather than as servant and master,

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<sup>119</sup> One can imagine, when staged, Lachellino and Maximo occupying centre stage, with Nebbio on the very periphery, although still visible and audible to the audience.

albeit with the necromancer as the principal deviser and perpetrator of their numerous confidence tricks. Nebbio is seen here to be able to freely ask searching questions of the necromancer and to add his own comments on matters. In Act III, Scene 4, the necromancer keeps Nebbio fully informed of the next stage of his plan as well as asking him to take the expected booty to their lodgings.

Once their schemes have been foiled, Nebbio becomes a forlorn figure when he realises that he has been outwitted by the servant Temolo and, separated from his master who has managed to escape, becomes the target of wrath from the youth Camillo. From being one half of a team that once instigated and controlled events, he has now become a plaything of others, as he ruefully laments:

Credo che tolto per una pallottola  
Da maglio questi ghiottoni oggi m'abbino:  
Che l'un, con una ciancia percotendomi,  
Mi caccia a un colpo fino a San Domenico. (V,2)

At the end of the play, it is indicated that Nebbio is still being pursued, although this is depicted in terms of light-hearted farce rather than as a judiciously delivered comeuppance.<sup>120</sup>

Compared to male servants, female servants are featured much less frequently in *commedia erudita*. It would be reasonable to assume that this disproportion in no way reflects the reality of households of those times, and that the preponderance of male servants on stage derives from inherited theatrical tradition.<sup>121</sup> As with male servants, there are designated differences in rank even within this grouping: a female titled in the *Personaggi* as merely 'serva' ranks below one who is given the appellation 'balia'; the prefix *Madonna* adds further status. Part of the investigation below will be to see if,

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<sup>120</sup> The end of Ariosto's later redaction has Nebbio trying to persuade Lachellino to cut his losses and escape with him to a port on the river, but Lachellino instructs Nebbio to first return to their lodgings to recover their belongings and to meet up with him later (V,5). The final scene (V,6) of the later redaction indicates that Nebbio has betrayed his master by getting him to take the wrong road, one, it is implied, that will lead to capture rather than to safety.

<sup>121</sup> Gunsberg points out the even scarcer representation of females further up the social hierarchy: 'The remarkable paucity of mothers in these plays, as opposed to the ubiquity of fathers or male guardians, is a significant feature.', *Gender...*, p. 9.

like male servants described above, they are accorded roles beyond their nominal servant function.

Samia is the long-serving maid to the wealthy Fulvia in *Calandra* and does just enough to meet the demands that Fulvia places on her. She simply carries out her duties, offers no advice and, although fulfilling a minor practical role in the unfolding of the intrigue, has no input into its planning. Although treated scornfully or at least dismissively by her own mistress, in the interactions Samia has with characters outside her own household she is on a more equal footing. Samia addresses fellow servant Fessenio and the necromancer Ruffo in the 'tu' form but also uses this same form of address when dealing with the nobly-born youth Lidio (though actually his sister in disguise). One can infer that it is principally the extreme youth of Lidio and his twin sister Santilla which permits Samia (who may be a decade or more older) to use this form. In the first encounter between these two, because the disguised Santilla has never met Samia or her mistress Fulvia before, she naturally treats Samia's familiarity with suspicion. In reaction to this, Samia remonstrates with him/her: 'Eh! Lidio, tu vuoi straziarmi, si?' and 'Fingi non intendere, eh?' (II, 2). Later on, in her meeting with Ruffo, the necromancer, Samia is shown as sufficiently bold to upbraid Ruffo for his tardiness in producing any concrete results from his application of necromancy: 'Tu stai pur troppo a far questa cosa.' (III,15). Samia manages to stop the servant Fessenio from entering her mistress's house. She is also assertive enough to rebut his assumptions concerning necromancy:

FESSENIO: Son tutte bubole.

SAMIA: Bubole son le tua. (III,19)

At the start of Act V, Samia encounters both Lidio and Santilla (who look identical). Unsure of who is the genuine Lidio, at various points she tries to dismiss the supposed imposter: 'Tu, adio'; 'tu, va' al camin tuo' and 'Tu, sta' discosto.' (V,1).

The paradox which Samia embodies is that a maidservant, though subservient, has greater freedom of movement than does her mistress. Samia is authorized, beyond the confines of the house, to deal with servants of other households and directly with the dubious figure of the necromancer and, crucially for Fulvia, with her lover Lidio. Although not always proficient in carrying out her duties, Samia is spirited in her

defence of her mistress's interests and does not automatically defer meekly to others, even those of considerably higher rank.

Nuta,<sup>122</sup> the maidservant from Caro's *Gli Straccioni* is an unusual portrayal, in that she is depicted much more in dealings with other household servants than with her mistress. She first appears at the very end of a long scene (Act I, Scene 4) when she interrupts Marabeo and Pilucca's private conversation. Even though she is of slightly lower rank ('serva' compared to Marabeo's 'fattore'), Nuta refuses to recognise any greater authority these two male servants may nominally possess: they fail to dissuade her from informing the authorities of Marabeo's wrongdoing. She is also seen cajoling them into action rather than the other way round. The duologue between Nuta and Marabeo (comprising the whole of Act II, Scene 2) suggests that the chain of command has Madonna Argentina at the head of it, Marebeo at the end of it with Nuta acting as a conduit between these two.<sup>123</sup> If Nuta is seen to be resistant to any domination by male servants in her household, she remains unquestioningly obedient to her mistress, Madonna Argentina.

Ascending the hierarchy, the next figure is the Old Nurse (*balia*) from *Il Marescalco*. Part of her status derives from her advanced age. If she had been a wetnurse for a character now over 30 years of age, she would now in the unfolding story be a woman of at least 45.<sup>124</sup> She acquires an extra degree of authority over the Marescalco since she has in effect played the role of second or substitute mother to him since his infancy. She senses that she still has sufficient authority to cajole the Marescalco into agreeing to take a wife. Both Giannicco and the Marescalco address her in the 'voi' form, no doubt in deference to her much greater age than to any recognised superior rank. Revealingly, the Old Nurse's sense of her own standing, or at least how she perceives herself relative to the Marescalco's standing, remains uncertain, as this speech illustrates: 'Fatevi scorgere per le piazze; non più, dico; levati di qui, sta'

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<sup>122</sup> The appearance of this maidservant is too brief to warrant a study of her character in the subsequent three dimensions. However, for this current dimension, she is of interest since she is bold enough to challenge her fellow male servants' authority.

<sup>123</sup> There is also a suggestion that Nuta derives extra status from being the only female servant; the male servants compete for her attention and possibly sexual favours.

<sup>124</sup> Aretino may have intended that the figure of the Old Nurse be over 50 or even over 60 years of age: in Act 1, Scene 4, she refers to 'mia vecchiezza' which it is possible to infer as something current or at least imminent.

suso tu, or non più mo.’ (IV,7). She starts off with the more formal ‘voi’ form and, within a few phrases, switches to the ‘tu’ form of address. This shift results in a greater friendliness but also an implied, if unintended, diminution of how she rates the Marescalco’s status. The Old Nurse is aware that this proposed marriage would be a great opportunity for the Marescalco to climb further up the court’s pecking order: ‘ed il Signore ti donerà l’arme, e così sarai chiamato dei tali e dei cotali.’ (I,6). In the next scene, she is not above telling the Marescalco how to deal with his squire’s rebellious behaviour: ‘Castigalo a tempo e luogo.’ (I,7) Ultimately, all her chiding of the Marescalco proves ineffective; it requires figures of much higher rank to coerce him into doing what he is set against doing.

If much of *Il Marescalco* concerns the unseemly scramble for power and status in the rough and tumble world of the princely court, the inclusion of the Old Nurse reveals a more humane side to that society: that an older woman who now has long lost her principal function, that of a wet-nurse, is still listened to and treated with respect.

I shall now look at Madonna Agnola, Argentina’s maidservant from *L’Assiuolo*. Her prefix ‘Madonna’, derived from her greater age or possibly from the fact she is a widow of someone of sufficiently high rank, accords her an enhanced status from the outset.<sup>125</sup> In her first appearance, where she is in conversation with the young man Rinuccio outside the house in which she is employed, Agnola is acutely aware of the tight rein her master keeps her on: ‘E poi se ’l padrone uscisse di casa e mi vedesse qui con voi, o sciagurata a me!’ (I,2). In contrast to the respect with which Rinuccio, a well-to-do youth but not of her household, treats her, her master treats her brusquely, to the point of roughing up her headdress as she enters the house (Act II, Scene 6). However, through the farcical turn of events, Agnola is eventually allowed to get one over on her master (see pp. 162/63 below).

At two points, Agnola’s poverty and dependence on gratuities are illustrated. Although evidently on cordial terms with the youths Rinuccio and Giulio, Agnola still expects a monetary reward for any information she is able to supply: ‘Buone in modo, che, se voi sarete quell’ uom dabbene ch’ io credo, voi mi darete la mancia.’ (I,2). In a

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<sup>125</sup> Neither her age nor her marital status is specifically mentioned in the dialogue. All one can reasonably infer is that she has been living in the local neighbourhood for some time.

later conversation, before Agnola and Rinuccio enter into the meat of their discussion, Rinuccio, noticing the threadbare state of her skirt, gives Agnola enough money to buy a new skirt, for which she expresses gratitude. Presumably because neither Rinuccio nor Giulio is her employer and because she may be much older than them, Agnola feels at liberty to roundly admonish them:

(to Rinuccio) Oh, ribaldonaccio! Fannosi coteste cose pe' munisteri?

(to Giulio) E voi, mona schifa 'l poco, che fareste. (I,2)

Even in these admonishments, Agnola is careful to maintain a respectful form of address. Later in this scene, Agnola reveals that she has been privy to the private deliberations between her mistress and Madonna Anfrosina, indicating a considerable trust in and esteem towards her. In her next appearance (Act II, Scene 5), it becomes evident that she has been torn between her duty to her mistress and her promise to meet Rinuccio at a pre-arranged time; she explains upon meeting him that her mistress had gone on chatting away to her without seemingly being aware of the passage of time. In this same scene, Rinuccio lets Agnola in on his plan to gain access to the young wife Madonna Oretta. In exchange for this confidence, Agnola offers practical assistance and useful information regarding the habits of the members of the household where the female whom Rinuccio intends to seduce resides.

Madonna Agnola's function in this play is principally that of a conduit through which vital information is passed. She also has a minor practical role in the execution of the schemes of others, which she undertakes voluntarily as extra-mural services rather than as part of her duties as a maidservant. Agnola is an interesting construction in that we glean two distinct pictures of her: within her own household, particularly in her dealings with her master, she has little prestige but within the larger neighbourhood she has acquired considerable standing amongst high born, younger males.

The final character study in this sub-chapter is that of the Marescalco, the eponymous hero of Aretino's *Il Marescalco*. The unusual aspect of this play is that he is seen interacting, not principally with servants, family or the family of a potential bride, but with other members of a small enclosed society to whom he is not related by blood or marriage. The figure of the Marescalco is anomalous in that he is both master,

having under his jurisdiction a young squire, Giannicco, and servant, in the sense that he is one of the Duke's permanent staff.

With his subordinate Giannicco, the Marescalco retains sufficient authority over him despite the former's merciless teasing. He orders him to go on a morally dubious spying mission; Giannicco obeys without question. In the talks between the Marescalco and his former wetnurse (*balia*), she tends to overlook his current adult status and reverts to treating him like a wayward adolescent. Although this adds to the comedic content, it nevertheless captures the notion that a man, however high he rises through the ranks, might still be mindful not to do anything that would offend his mother, or mother substitute. With those of slightly higher rank, the Marescalco is still able to enter into a robust debate, while still observing formalities. In Act I, Scene 9, in his conversation with the Pedant, the Marescalco addresses him using the 'voi' form. This may in part be a recognition of the addressee's greater age, but also a recognition of an acknowledged hierarchy, whereby an academic is automatically ranked higher, as a man of (supposed) learning, than those who are engaged in practical matters. The Marescalco adds to this deference by addressing the Pedant as 'maestro'. However, this formal show of respect does not prevent the Marescalco querying some of the Pedant's pronouncements. In the discussion with his friend Ambrogio, the thorny issue of rank crops up: they discuss the circumstances where the wife is of higher social rank than her husband. The Marescalco remarks ruefully that, if that were so in his case, he would expect his wife never to let him forget this difference: 'Mi par già sentire darmi del marescalco nel capo ad ogni parola.' (II,5).<sup>126</sup>

In contrast to earlier scenes with lower-ranked court members, where debates are conducted with a certain mutual respect, however forcibly and even rudely expressed are the opinions of the Marescalco and his interlocutors, once the Marescalco enters into discussion with much higher-ranked members, the tone darkens: a greater formality is observed with undercurrents of menace. The Marescalco is very much on

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<sup>126</sup> This exchange illustrates snobbery in general in that society and the more cutting snobbery with which a disagreeable wife might habitually bait her husband and alludes to the lament, commonly attributed to discontented wives, that they have married 'beneath' themselves.



the defensive.<sup>127</sup> He acknowledges the superior rank of the knight and the count and hesitates to voice a contrary opinion to theirs: ‘Le Signorie Vostre mi son padroni; e non è lecito che i servidori si corrucino con essi.’ (V, 2). As this scene progresses, there is the sense of a noose being tightened around the Marescalco’s neck; he is acutely aware of the limits of his ability to assert himself. (However, one can deduce that this is in part attributable to theatrical concerns: the need to build up tension before the denouement, rather than a desire to portray the Knight and the Count as innately sinister.<sup>128</sup>)

The more telling encounters regarding the nuances of hierarchy occur with those nearer his own rank. Jacopo enjoys a position a rung above the Marescalco. Although he is the least threatening of the Marescalco’s fellow courtiers, the Marescalco at one point is quick to assert his status: ‘Son cortigiano anche io.’ (I,2). This remark clarifies the point that even a lowly member of court society, someone engaged in purely practical matters, in this case looking after and securing a fresh supply of horses, can be still be classed as a courtier.<sup>129</sup> A more abrasive encounter occurs between the Marescalco and the ostler (*staffiere*). While he attends the Duke’s living quarters with the ostler (Act II, Scene 3), the Marescalco addresses this figure as ‘fratello’, prima facie an expression of equality and friendship.<sup>130</sup> In a later encounter, the ostler refers to the Marescalco as an ‘amico’. However, one can infer that the word ‘amico’ is to be uttered sarcastically, since in the subsequent conversation, the ostler is scathing towards the Marescalco; he cannot resist belittling his role:

io non ti stimo questo, e se non che mi vergogno a porre con un artigiano, che appena sa tenere in mano duo chiodi ed un martello, non che la spada, ti proverei che la cappa che tu hai intorno è de tela di ragni. (IV,8)<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Andrews concurs with this: ‘There is nevertheless an uneasily concealed cutting edge to the play, relating to the genuine impotence of real courtiers and subjection to the fact of absolute rulers.’ *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 76

<sup>128</sup> This is a case where the Count’s and Knight’s threats are to be perceived with an ironic edge to them by the audience but such irony to be lost on the Marescalco.

<sup>129</sup> As someone fulfilling a key function and someone with whom the Duke might personally liaise from time to time.

<sup>130</sup> Though, if staged, the word *fratello* could no doubt be given a sarcastic undertone, as a precursor to their more combative exchange later on in Act IV, Scene 8.

<sup>131</sup> This increased sense of superiority of the upper classes and their retinues over the artisan class captures a real historical development: ‘institutional changes do suggest much more clearly that urban society was becoming more hierarchical in the period. Distinctions became increasingly marked between guilds associated with ‘honourable’ professions and occupations – law, medicine, large-scale commerce – and those of a more manual nature linked to the ‘mechanical arts.’ Hay and Law, *Italy in the Age...*, p. 30

During this short scene, in keeping with this rapid change by the ostler from outward respect to undisguised disdain, the ostler switches from the 'voi' to the 'tu' form of address.<sup>132</sup> (Unlike the Count's and the Knight's mock show of menace, one can deduce that the ostler's hostile attitude is to be taken at face value both by the audience and the Marescalco.)

In this world of the seigniorial court, a complicated and not always static hierarchy emerges: nominal rank is often shaded by other considerations: age, gender, length of service and personal ties to the Duke. Certain lower-ranked figures such as the ostler and the Marescalco himself are keen to assert their importance and are sensitive to any slights against their status.<sup>133</sup> In addition, in the particular plot line featured here, whether a character is party to the central prank played on the Marescalco or remains ignorant of it affects his overall standing.

Aretino here has devised an original and intriguing story-line. Uniquely, the male protagonist has homosexual rather than heterosexual leanings and, to add further spice, this individual has been placed in a milieu where the figure at the apex of this society has absolute power, in contrast to the more circumscribed power accorded to even the most authoritative patriarch in the bourgeois settings more commonly featured in these comedies.

## YOUNG NOBLE MALES

A young servant as he grows older into middle or old age is likely to remain a servant. Over time his status may be marginally elevated if, for example, in a large household he is put in charge of younger, less experienced servants. In contrast, there is an expectation that young noble males will, in the short term, get married and set up their own households and in the longer term inherit their parents' wealth and property.

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<sup>132</sup> This is one of the rare scenes where the hand of the Duke is directly revealed. In a closing soliloquy, the ostler reveals: 'io ho servito il Signore, che mi commise che io lo molestassi, ah, ah, ah, ah; che dolore egli ha, lasciami ritornare in corte.' (IV,8). Rather than merely role-playing, one can infer that the ostler actively enjoys insulting those towards whom in other circumstances he would be expected to display a certain deference.

<sup>133</sup> The ostler has a longer scene with the jeweller (Act III, Scene 6) in which he tries to ingratiate himself, but only reveals his ignorance of matters outside his own narrow world.

However, *commedia erudita* presents us solely with a snapshot of bourgeois life: following Aristotelean principles, the story line lasts for twenty-four hours at the most. With this constraint, one would not expect to follow the ‘life story’ of a character; nevertheless, it should be possible to detect, even within this highly restricted time frame, some echo of the real-life transition from carefree youth with little responsibility (and often with little money) to a more responsible role.<sup>134</sup> So, even within these snapshots of the circumstances of young noble males, I hope to deduce longer-term implications.

I shall try to ascertain the degree of authority the single, well-to-do youth has over, or subservience under, or independence from, significant others: parental figures (father, step-father or guardian), his own servant, the female object of his desire, other male heads of households (particularly his putative father-in-law), and peripheral figures of lower ranks: servants of other households, shopkeepers, itinerant pedlars or sorcerers.

Camillo is one of the two well-born young males featured in *Il Negromante*. He is depicted as a much freer agent than Cintio, the other nobly-born young man. Camillo is never shown taking advice from a servant or being questioned by a parent, although he is mindful of how his prospective father-in-law views him. Although of equal rank, Camillo differs from Cintio in the economic resources at his disposal. Whereas Cintio is impecunious, needing to pawn family valuables to raise money, an indication of Camillo’s greater wealth first comes when the necromancer mentions the specific sum of 30 Florins which Camillo has promised to pay him in the event of the dissolution of marriage between Cintio and Lavinia because of non-consummation (Act II, Scene 3). In addition, Lachellino later (in Act III, Scene 5) refers to the retinue of servants at Camillo’s disposal: ‘li suoi famigli’.

Camillo first appears when he meets the necromancer in Act II, Scene 4. Here Camillo launches into a paean of adulation towards him, before enquiring as to the state of mind of his loved one, Emilia. The necromancer then produces a letter purported to

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<sup>134</sup> However, by the insertion of an *antefatto*, coupled with the denouement where indications regarding marriage, or at least future sexual couplings, are announced or hinted at, some sense of a more complete life story can be imparted.

be from her. After some debate, Camillo bows eventually to Lachellino's view that the reading of the letter would be better left until Camillo has reached home. In their next encounter Camillo greets the necromancer with the respectful appellation 'maestro' (III,3). He is then persuaded, after raising certain objections which are skilfully refuted by Lachellino, to take part in a daring and risky enterprise.

The action in Act IV, Scene 6 hinges on the notion that part of a person's status is invested in his or her apparel.<sup>135</sup> In those times the more stratified social order was reinforced by official edicts, issued periodically, prescribing what type of costume should be worn by which rank, profession or age group.<sup>136</sup> Because of his scant attire, Camillo is initially mistaken for a servant by the elder Cambio; he expresses a worry that his mere appearance in this state will cause a loss of respect from those figures important to him, above all his prospective father-in-law:

Ma da chi potrò aver or ora in prestito,  
Da pormi almeno in sul farsetto, un piccolo  
Mantellino per ire a trovar subito  
Abondio... (IV,6)

In the first scene of Act V, Camillo tries to restore his reputation by insisting that it is Cintio, not he, who has committed a grievous wrong. In the final scene of the play, Camillo is vindicated and is offered the hand of Emilia in marriage by her father Abondio, which he gracefully accepts. Thus Camillo's status at the end of the play is not merely restored but enhanced.

Unlike Bibbiena or Cecchi, Ariosto had a predilection for setting his well-to-do young men as part of a larger family network, where they are often under close scrutiny

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<sup>135</sup> 'Clothes were a prime indication of status during the Renaissance, playing their part in commodity fetishism.' Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p 78.

<sup>136</sup> These edicts belong to a wider set of prescriptions known as sumptuary laws. They varied in detail from region to region in sixteenth-century Italy; in Venice for example 'a nobly-born male on attaining the age of 25 was obliged to switch from wearing colourful attire to sombre dark grey or black', *In Our Time* (on the subject of Venice), BBC Radio 4, 12 May, 2010. 'Sumptuary laws appear in the statute books of Italian cities from the thirteenth century. They sought to regulate dress according to social rank through prohibitions regarding types of cloth, intricate and costly decorations, ornaments and jewellery, in order to highlight the differences between ranks and to privilege the wealthiest and more powerful groups which were exempt from restrictions.' *Woman in Italy: 1350 – 1650: Ideals and Realities*, Rogers, M. and Tinagli, P. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 147.

of a parent or guardian figure.<sup>137</sup> Even Camillo, whose original family members do not feature as characters, is still seen to interact with, and pay deference towards, a set of elders, who include not just Abondio, his prospective father-in-law, but also Maximo and Cambio. (Incidentally, the youth Camillo's ready submission to the necromancer as an older man of supposed distinction is more plausible than the elder Maximo's similar submission.)

Lidio is the young nobleman in *La Calandra*. The second scene, a three-way debate between him, his tutor Polinico and servant Fessenio, suggests that Lidio is young enough to still be receiving formal lessons from his tutor.<sup>138</sup> Initially, Lidio appears to seek advice from Polinico but it soon becomes clear that he has already decided on the course of action he will follow: a determined pursuit of the married female Fulvia. He is presented here in similar terms to a king holding court: whatever the merits or demerits of the advice advanced by his 'counsellors' (here the servant Fessenio and tutor Polinico), it is clear that Lidio will make a final decision on his course of action entirely of his own volition.

If Lidio is depicted as possessing supreme authority within his own household, in the outer world beyond, he is seen to have very little power, influence or indeed financial resources; his only currency appears to be that of a 'stud' for older sexually frustrated females. When speaking of his imminent encounter with Fulvia, wife of the foolish Calandro, Lidio betrays not just a lustful nature but also a mercenary one. He attests of Fulvia: 'in fede mia meglio è che io, come soglio, spacciatamente da lei ritorni, che quelli denari non sono pochi.' (V,1)

In his first soliloquy, as late as the middle of the fifth Act, and in another, briefer, one four scenes later on, Lidio reveals that he is largely a pawn in a scheme devised by others. Although Lidio's desire to possess Fulvia at any cost is presented as the initial motor of the plot, subsequently he plays a peripheral role in the engineering and executing of the intrigue. Despite his high status, Lidio appears more of an object than

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<sup>137</sup> In Ariosto's first two plays, *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi* the young men are under more distant scrutiny but there is always the inherent threat that the father will turn up unexpectedly, as indeed happens.

<sup>138</sup> The *antefatto* (as detailed in the *Argumento*) reinforces this notion: 'Lidio, il maschio [...] Essendo di anni diciassette in diciotto, a Roma viene.'

an instigator of the machinations that are devised. There is also the suggestion that Lidio, contrary to his presentation as a 'gentleman', is playing a more unsavoury role, that of a gigolo. However, this remains a secondary rather than dominant impression: across a broader perspective, there is an underlying idea that Lidio, having been born into a prosperous bourgeois family but then fallen, through no fault of his own, into reduced circumstances, is entitled to restore, through whatever means available, his lost fortune and live as comfortably as befits someone of his class.

Rinuccio from Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo* is similar to Lidio in that he is able to act independently without interference from older relatives. Rinuccio is the head of a large household, comprising his widowed mother, a guest and the guest's servant, as well as his own servants (though none of this last group appears as a character). Rinuccio is depicted as wealthy enough for the maidservant Agnola to expect a generous tip from him (Act I, Scene 2). At the start of Act II, Scene 5 Rinuccio donates to her another three ducats. In contrast to Lidio, rather than physical attractiveness, Rinuccio has to resort to more circuitous means to secure his intended seduction: his main leverage is the offering of bribes to obtain co-operation from servants of other households.

During the first Act, it becomes clear that Rinuccio is dependent on his friend and contemporary Giulio for any advancement of his romantic quest: the bedding of the young married female Oretta: 'Deh, caro fratello, ditemi come voi vi governeresti in questo caso; Deh sì, ché senza voi i' sarei più che morto.' (I,2).<sup>139</sup> This dependency is shown to continue in the next Act, where Rinuccio enjoins Giulio: 'Ricordatevi di ritornare a casa a buon' ora; accioché, se io avessi bisogno di voi, io non v'abbi a cercare.' (II,3). A little later, Rinuccio outlines to the maidservant Agnola a scheme for him to gain access to Madonna Oretta's bed. It transpires that this is his own separate scheme, designed by himself without consultation with others. But he is then forced to amend this when Agnola apprises him of certain factors he has overlooked:

O qui sta il punto: questa cosa ha più difficoltà che voi non pensate [...] Dirollavi. Benchè il dottore si parta, che non credo che si parta (ma diciàn ch'e si parta) egli lascerà in casa quella bestia Giannella. (II,5)

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<sup>139</sup> The other well-to-do youth Giulio also has designs upon Madonna Oretta but is too circumspect towards his friend Rinuccio to mention this in his presence.

The encounter between Rinuccio and Messer Ambrogio in Act II, Scene 7 shows a progressive reversal of social standings. Initially Rinuccio goes out of his way to show deference to the older man, using the phrase 'l'eccellenza vostra' four times in this short exchange,<sup>140</sup> but at the end of this same conversation Rinuccio tips him, as he would a waiter or servant, for expediting his legal case. The tip is the sum of one scudo, which Ambrogio accepts, albeit with feigned reluctance. Outside of the comedy and furtherance of the plot, in this scene there is an allusion (whether intended by the playwright or not) to the competing status between the old landed gentry and the new class of professionals.<sup>141</sup> However, money ultimately proves to have limited leverage in the fulfilment of Rinuccio's ambitions. His bedding of Madonna Oretta is revealed to depend much more on the beneficence of others and upon coincidence. Rinuccio readily acknowledges this latter factor: 'A dubitare è tocco a me stanotte, che sono stato gonfiato com'una palla a vento, benché io non mi vo' dolere; tuttavolta io ho avuto più ventura che senno.' (V,2).

In the long exchange of accounts given by Rinuccio and Giulio in Act V, Scene 2, although each has a distinct tale to relate, each is allocated roughly equal space to tell it and each listens patiently to the other, occasionally asking a question to seek clarification. The fact that up till then this pair have been rivals in love does not appear to impinge at all on the tone of cordial friendship and mutual respect shown by each. In the closing stages of the play, it is Rinuccio to whom Messer Ambrogio turns when he is being castigated by his brother-in-law. Rinuccio assumes the role of final arbiter over familial affairs. Implicit here is the notion that he has the authority to resolve any strife or outstanding disagreements: 'Andate là, non dubitate, i' assetterò le cose in modo e' ci sarà la soddisfazione e 'l contento di ognuno; venite dentro ancor voi, Giulio.' (V,7)

An interesting, although not entirely plausible, trajectory has been constructed for this character. At the outset, Rinuccio is depicted as a young man of standing and considerable financial means but without a corresponding influence over others. It is

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<sup>140</sup> Obviously, the deference shown here has undertones of insincerity, comparable to Giannicco's 'padron caro, padron santo. padron buono' in *Il Marescalco*, Act 1, Scene 7.

<sup>141</sup> From the first scene, we learn that Rinuccio is in possession of a house large enough to accommodate his mother, Giulio and Giulio's servant which, combined with the reference to Ambrogio handling a lawsuit instigated by him (II,7) and the deference Ambrogio pays him in the final Act, suggests that Rinuccio has considerable wealth and property and may be destined in time to succeed his father as a member of the town's ruling elite.

only in the closing stages that he comes into his own as an authority figure.<sup>142</sup> In the intervening period, any status he possesses is undermined by his naivety and willingness to be directed by others.

In this category of young well-to-do males, I shall lastly look at the figure of Tindaro from *Gli Straccioni*. He is depicted as possessing gravitas; he is different from the general run of foolish or foppish young noble males who pursue the female object of their desire through Boccaccian lechery and guile, or comic ineptitude. Tindaro's relationship with his lost love - Giuletta, supposed dead, and his attitude towards a potential new partner in marriage, the widow Madonna Argentina, are presented within the framework of serious deliberations, more fitting to a tragic hero than a figure from the comedy genre.<sup>143</sup>

We learn early on from Demetrio that Tindaro's mother is still alive, in the context of his family's distress at Tindaro's sudden unannounced departure: 'La povera madre, ricevute lettere di qua, fu molto dolente de la vostra partita' (I,3). At this stage, no mention is made of his father which suggests he is no longer alive; this is confirmed in the final scene of the play when Tindaro is questioned about his relatives by Rossello. By dint of this, Tindaro, though still a young man, is the titular head of a noble family (or at least a high-status male within an extended family network<sup>144</sup>) with power, status and wealth, albeit not necessarily in ready money. Further details of Tindaro's past emerge during Battista/Giovanni's encounter with Demetrio in Act I, Scene 2. We learn that he had the authority and means to enable him to organise the abduction of a well-born maiden and, as yet, remain unpunished for this. We infer that he is 'on the run' and that he has changed his name to Gisippo to avoid being found, though this is never

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<sup>142</sup> There may be a sub-text here: that is is only once Rinuccio has enjoyed a sexual liaison with a female (possibly his first) that he is regarded as a fully-fledged adult and accorded the same level of status as his late father.

<sup>143</sup> Guidotti cites another play written slightly later, *Gli Eudemoni* (1549) by Giraldi Cinthio, as a cross-over between comedy and tragedy: '...almeno in sede teorica la commedia coincide nei suoi aspetti fondamentali con la tragedia a lieto fine. Emerge dunque un'idea di comico ben distinta da quella di "ridicolo" che tenderà in seguito a sovrapporsi come unico produttore di comico, qui inteso solo come antitesi del tragico in quanto "non-tragico", ossia: *decorum* più "maraviglioso" con lieto fine.', *Scenografie...*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>144</sup> Hay and Law point to the slower decline of the extended family in certain outlying reaches of the Italian peninsula: 'Most agree that in some of the cities the *consorteria*, or clan, was no longer the force it had been in the thirteenth century [...] However, this was not the case everywhere and the clan survived in political and economic terms on the islands, in the south, in the Papal States and - as the *albergo* - in Genoa', *Italy in the Age...*, p. 41. (Scio, Tindaro's home town, was close to and under the jurisdiction of Genoa.)



made explicit in the text. In the long discussion in Act II, Scene 1 it is evident that Tindaro, through excessive grief, has given up making any major decisions and lets Demetrio take them on his behalf. Once Tindaro has given his consent for the nuptials for his marriage to the rich widow Madonna Argentina to go ahead, the elaborate organisation of this prestigious event falls upon others, most heavily upon the servants of the prospective bride's household.

However highly esteemed by others, Tindaro is not above the law or indeed the claims against him made by Giovanni and Battista, as Demetrio succinctly points out to him: 'Oh fermatevi, messer Gisippo, ché ci bisognerà render conto de la Giuletta [...] al padre ed al zio.' (III,3). When he is finally confronted by the two brothers in this same scene, he is reduced to a quivering wreck, at loss for words. He again lets Demetrio do all the talking. His image as a vacillating and unreliable figure is re-inforced when he tries to excuse himself from going to the planned wedding, and an even more drastic loss of authority and room to manoeuvre occurs when he is forced to flee ignominiously from the vengeful Giordano (Act V, Scene 2). Just before the denouement, in front of the lawyer Rossello's judicial examination, Tindaro's case is defended by Demetrio acting as his representative. However, by the final scene of the play, Tindaro has to answer directly for himself to the lawyer's probing questions. It is established that Tindaro and Giordano are cousins and therefore of comparable status; all previous accusations against Tindaro are dropped and his reputation is completely restored.

More than in any other play under study here, money plays a dominant role. To add complexity to the portrait of Tindaro, he is at various points described as both rich and poor. His friend and co-conspirator Demetrio ranks Tindaro thus: 'E perché non v'avete voi a contentare, che una vostra figliuola sia maritata al più nobile, al più ricco e al più dabben giovane di Scio.' (I,2). Later, we have the opposite assessment of his material wealth from two of his other associates. The servant Satiro confides in Demetrio as to his master's financial state: 'Voi sapete lo stato nostro: se non vogliamo andare sempre raminghi è necessario lo faccia' (I,3), indicating that Tindaro and his whole retinue, including Satiro, are in a parlous financial state and thus the urgent need for him to marry, if only for financial reasons. This state of penury is highlighted by a remark of Barbagrigia in Act II, Scene 1 when he describes Tindaro as 'giovine, forestiero e povero.' However, we may infer that Barbagrigia's assessment may only be

accurate as far as Tindaro's immediate financial resources go – in modern parlance we would say he 'lacks liquid assets'. Tindaro is, nevertheless, considered a worthy marriage partner for Madonna Argentina.

As in many plays of this genre, the prestige and capability of a young man of noble birth is depicted as severely affected by a reckless pursuit and then deep attachment to the object of his love, although here it is given a sombre rather than farsical tone. Such is Tindaro's innate superiority that no-one takes advantage of him or mocks him; rather they gather round to protect him during his period of incapacity. Like Lidio, the stamp of nobility combined with his youth, solicits a greater degree of tolerance from other characters (as well, one can surmise, from potential audience members or readers) than would be granted to an older or lower-ranked figure behaving in a similar fashion.

#### YOUNG NOBLE FEMALES

I shall now look at well-born young females on stage, both single and married. In real life, they were generally powerless and led restricted lives, although in certain circumstances, principally widowhood, they could assume roles comparable to those of their male counterparts.<sup>145</sup> Beyond the codified limits placed on well-born females as to their property rights and degree of participation in the affairs of the town, unwritten social mores placed considerable restrictions on their day-to-day lives. There was a general bar against well-do-do females, married or unmarried, proceeding through the city streets unaccompanied. Indeed with shopping for provisions and other errands undertaken by servants, this class of females was for much of the time housebound: exceptions being attendance at church or society weddings, visits to relatives or to convents. These real-life restrictions had a considerable impact on theatrical presentations of the female since, as has been pointed out by previous commentators (such as Andrews and Gunsberg<sup>146</sup>), *commedia erudita* only allowed for a single scene

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<sup>145</sup> 'From the Tuscan *catasto* of 1427, there were recorded 7,114 female heads of household (against 52,661 male heads).' Christopher Black, *Early Modern Italy: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 88.

<sup>146</sup> 'Basically, the higher the status of the female character, the less power and stage presence she can be seen to have in both visual and oral terms. Highest in social terms, but not in dramatic presence, are young, nubile, virginal, beautiful, well-born (middle class or higher) freewomen living in the household of their fathers and guardians.', Gunsberg, *Gender...*, p. 8

and convention dictated that had to be an outdoor scene, most commonly a short section of a street or the town's *piazza*.<sup>147</sup>

I shall look at young well-to-do females – single, betrothed or newly married - to see how much or how little leverage they manage to assert among their menfolk, and to what degree they participate in any *rovesciamento* of the established balance of power, or whether the female figure is in the main employed to re-present theatrically the existing status quo. I shall first consider Santilla, the female half of the well-born but geographically displaced pair of siblings in *La Calandra*.

Although Santilla enjoys a certain level of status and economic resources (sufficient to employ at least one servant), her long lament in Act II, Scene 8 highlights the fact that when it comes to choice of a marriage partner, she has very little power. Her powerlessness here goes beyond gender: Santilla, disguised as a male, has been rescued by the merchant Perillo who had to pay a considerable sum to free her. Therefore there is an obligation on her part to fall in with his wishes: 'Negar di sposarla non posso; e, se pur niego di farlo, sdegnati, a casa maladetta a me ne manderanno. Se paleso esser femina, io medesima a me stessa fo il danno.' (II, 8).<sup>148</sup>

Santilla is obliging and co-operative when dealing with lower ranks and is particularly compliant towards the necromancer Ruffo:

RUFFO: Ma, se più ti parla, monstratele più piacevole, se alla cosa  
Attender vorremo.

LIDIO FEMINA: Così si farà. (II,3)

But the final verbal exchanges of this scene reveal a more equal power balance between the three parties (Santilla's servant Fannio being the third person present in this

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<sup>147</sup> The first Five Act comedy to conspicuously break with this convention was *La Venexiana* (by an unknown author) reckoned to have been written in the early 1530s. Giannetti and Ruggiero summarise this departure: 'Rather than taking place in the streets and squares of a city – the quintessentially masculine domain of the period [...] the action of this play is largely confined to the bedrooms and halls of private homes, the classic sphere of women.' *Five Comedies...*, Introduction, p. xviii.

<sup>148</sup> The indication here is that, although Perillo treats Santilla (assumed by him to be a male named Lidio) well, the fact that he has paid good money for him has given him the right to dictate whom and when Lidio will marry. Santilla's status therefore is uncertain: somewhere between a slave and a free-born citizen. This is a faint precursor to the circumstances of Giuletta in *Gli Straccioni* where her temporary designation as a slave, traded between various parties, robs her of all rights.

discussion). Ruffo defers to Santilla as to whether they should go ahead with the proposed plan: ‘Be’, volete darli effetto?’ Santilla’s reply ‘Da qua ad un poco te ne diremo l’animo nostro’ indicates that any decision reached will be a joint one between her and her servant Fannio. In the next scene, Santilla only agrees to go ahead with the plan after Fannio has outlined its ramifications. By Act IV, Santilla has become more assertive: she queries Fannio’s confidence that any difficulties in their plan to send her instead of Lidio to Fulvia will ultimately resolve themselves:

LIDIO FEMINA: Ma non sai tu, sciocco, che, s’io fo prova a me, paleso quel  
ch’sono, me stessa offendo, Ruffo perde il credito, et essa scornata  
resta? Come vuoi che si faccia?

FANNIO: Come, ah?

LIDIO FEMINA: Come, sì.

FANNIO: Ove omini sono, modi sono. (IV,4) <sup>149</sup>

However, she then agrees to follow the plan that Fannio devises. A few scenes later on, Santilla’s tolerance of others reaches a limit when Fessenio signals that he intends to physically probe her: ‘Ah, presuntuoso! Sta’ discosto!’ (V, 2). She is rescued by the arrival of Fannio. In the very final scene which unfolds rapidly and somewhat mechanically, Santilla is freed from her obligation to marry her guardian Perillo’s daughter.

Although very much the object of others’ schemes, at least Santilla is allowed to appear (unlike her counterparts in Ariosto’s play *Il Negromante*). Her portrayal is a notch above that of a stereotype and, if still a little simplistic, does bring to the fore the all-too-real restrictions placed on a young female’s room to manoeuvre and the propensity for such a female to acquiesce to the demands of her elders. However, any potential critique of entrenched patriarchal values remains muted, since most of the time she is disguised as, and taken to be by other characters, a male. Even for the one person who does know her true gender, her servant Fannio, any attempt at drawing inferences regarding the power balance between older male servant and younger mistress is

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<sup>149</sup> This is a multi-layered quip by Fannio: beyond the simple boast of male superiority, it alludes within the fiction of the play to both Lidio’s true male identity when disguised as a female and to Santilla’s assumption of a male identity and, beyond the stage fiction, to the realities of stage performances where all roles were played by males, a practice that lasted until at least the middle of the sixteenth century.

confounded by Fannio's need to behave, at least in public, towards Santilla as he would towards a male master.

A small advance, in terms of progression towards naturalism, in the profiling of females on stage lies in the figure of Giuletta from Caro's *Gli Straccioni* (1543). But even here, much of the information concerning her comes from others. We first hear of Giuletta in the three-way discussion between Giovanni, Battista and Demetrio in Act I, Scene 2. It is noteworthy that her father, the elder Giovanni, uses the verb 'rubare' when describing her abduction by Tindaro: 'se é vero che Giuletta mia figliola sia stata rubata da Tindaro.' (I,2). He uses the same word again for this same act in Act III, Scene 3. This fits in with the notion of woman as chattels: Giovanni and Battista view the abduction of Giuletta principally as an insult to their honour rather than in terms of the suffering and hardship undergone by an innocent young maiden.<sup>150</sup> It is Demetrio, the henchman involved in her abduction, who cites love as the reason for his and Tindaro's ignoble action. However, this sympathy for Giuletta, treating her as a sentient being rather than a piece of merchandise, is somewhat undercut in Demetrio's later argument that he and Tindaro had abducted Giuletta to solidify relations between Tindaro's and Giovanni/Battista's clans. Paradoxically, it is only when Demetrio hears of her supposed death that she is viewed as more than tradeable goods: 'Oh, sfortunata giovinetta.' (I,3)

It is this same Giuletta who becomes the 'property' of Marabeo, Madonna Argentina's steward. Neither Marabeo with his accomplice Pilucca nor Giordano, who later takes ownership of her, treat her other than as a tradeable commodity, although all three are unaware of her true identity: they think she is just an exquisitely good-looking female slave under the name Agata.<sup>151</sup> It is only the maidservant Nuta, also unaware of her true identity, who protests on Giuletta's behalf: 'Donne per forza? Per forza.' (I,4). However, Nuta's apparent concern for Giuletta here may be just a weapon to do down

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<sup>150</sup> Gunsberg finds a similar attitude in *Gli Ingannati* (1532) which 'opens with Virginio negotiating the marriage of his daughter, Lelia, with Gherardo. The discussion between the two male characters revolves around money and patrimony, and is couched in mercantile terms.' *Gender...*, p. 32.

<sup>151</sup> Here plot and theatrical convention dovetail into one another: it is more 'permissible' for the upper-class Giuletta to appear outdoors whilst under the designation of slave. Similarly, in Ariosto's *La Cassaria*, Eulalia and Corisca are allowed to express themselves on stage (Scenes 3 and 4 of Act I) only while they are designated as the property of the pimp Lucrano.

Marabeo with whom she has fallen out.<sup>152</sup> When Giuletta does finally make a flesh-and-blood appearance, albeit during two fairly short scenes, we see her in desperate straits. In Act III, Scene 3, her utter powerlessness is made explicit when Marabeo and Pilucca attempt to forcibly move her from one hideout to another. It is only by the chance arrival of the lawyer Rossello that Giuletta is saved from this fraught situation. She then comes under his protection.

We hear Giuletta's true sentiments through a long letter penned by her (read out by Demetrio in Act V). It is deferential in tone throughout, indeed overly deferential, particularly considering the travails she has endured: 'Tindaro, padron mio (così convien, ch'io vi chiami, poiché mi truovo serva dei servitori de la vostra moglie)'.<sup>153</sup> (V,2). The letter reveals her dependence on Tindaro and to a lesser degree on an older female, the widow Argentina. Giuletta here even volunteers to put up any money required to secure her release. (In the fictional time frame of the play, the letter was written before her escape in Act III, Scene 3.) This is the last we hear from Giuletta. Following convention, the denouement consists entirely of the menfolk sorting out matters: past quarrels, future personal relationships and who shall marry whom. In this case, since two people previously regarded as deceased are now discovered to be alive and well, it consists of the restoration of the situation pertaining prior to the start of the play's action: Giordano married to Argentina, Tindaro to Giuletta. The two female parties here are, predictably, absent from these negotiations.

The misadventures of Giuletta belong very firmly among the serious elements of this play; as such she is depicted as extremely demure and the epitome of loyalty; there are no strong hints of her rebelling against the status quo. However, there remains the possibility that she is not totally reconciled to all of Tindaro's rash actions, irrespective of his good intentions.<sup>154</sup>

The two young well-born females in *L'Assiuolo*, sisters Madonna Oretta and Madonna Violante, share a common feature in that they are married to men they no

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<sup>152</sup> Just as solidarity across the servant class is largely absent, fellow feeling between females is also rare.

<sup>153</sup> This line could be intended sarcastically, in a tone of bitter reproach, rather than as a meek acknowledgement of her situation.

<sup>154</sup> Such a nuance could only be brought out by the actor playing Demetrio who, when reading out Giuletta's letter, could imbue it with recriminatory undertones, indicating that he had sympathy with her possible disquiet over Tindaro's behaviour.

longer care for. The main difference, from a theatrical point of view, is that Oretta's husband features as a main character whereas Violante's husband does not appear at all.

The portrayal of Oretta is more detailed than that of the other young well-born females under study here. We gain insight into her economic circumstances and scope, or rather lack of it, for independent movement. Very early on, her romantic pursuer Giulio outlines the severely restricted day-to-day existence Oretta has to endure: 'la poveretta è tenuta peggio che in prigione da messer Ambrogio, il quale è geloso.' (I,1). It transpires from the maidservant Agnola's account in Act I, Scene 2 that the only time Oretta manages to escape from her husband is when she visits a convent, from which men are strictly barred entry. Oretta, together with her accomplice - the older married woman Madonna Anfrosina, have devised a scheme whereby Oretta's husband's intended adultery can be exposed. Thus we have a rare, possibly unique, role for a female character: the initiation of the main intrigue. Through the course of the play, between this scene and the denouement, it emerges that this initial plan has been radically altered by the machinations of her male admirers – Giulio, acting on instructions from his servant, and the more independent Rinuccio. Oretta is kept in the dark about these subsequent changes and thus has no foreknowledge of Giulio's arrival in her bedroom. From this point onwards, any independent action on her part ceases; she submits without protest to his seduction.<sup>155</sup>

As in *La Calandra*, the play ends with enhanced prestige and authority for the wife and an equivalent diminution of prestige and authority of the husband. In the final scene of the play, (Act V, Scene 8) in which she does not appear, her lover Giulio describes how Oretta's life from thenceforth will be much improved: she will no longer have to endure her husband's unreasonable behaviour and the easy-going female servant Agnola rather than the implacable Giannella will assume responsibility for admitting or refusing visitors to the house, a strong hint that Oretta will have future opportunities to enjoy love-making with her Giulio.

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<sup>155</sup> The inference is that whilst Oretta submits under sufferance to the commands of her elderly husband Ambrogio, later on she submits unquestioningly to the commands of the young Giulio. Thus this play can hardly be seen as a plea for liberating women from male dominance.

Quite rarely for either male or female figures, in the portrayal of Madonna Oretta there is a discernable character development. From timid, even frightened, figure early on, Oretta is transformed into a bold, assertive individual by the end of the play, where she becomes imperious and scathing in the interrogation of her husband. She acts almost as a prosecuting counsel in teasing out the truth of her husband's nocturnal activities: 'Dimmi un poco, Giannella, se' tu ito stanotte in cotesto abito a accompagnarlo a casa la dama?' (V,6). However, we cannot deduce that Cecchi had the deliberate intention of giving one of his characters an 'emotional arc' as we say nowadays; Oretta's change in demeanour may simply have been constructed to serve the needs of the denouement.

#### MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD

Within the bourgeois society of a small town or city neighbourhood (the mainstay of the geographical setting for these comedies), the apex of authority is the male head of household.<sup>156</sup> A marked deviation from this standard set-up occurs in the court setting of *Il Marescalco* where the ultimate authority is the Duke. The city of Rome, where two of the plays under investigation are set, presents a more complicated set-up. Its greater size, larger transient population, together with its singular aspect of governance - the Papacy with both spiritual and temporal remits, result in a more fluid and less easily determined devolvement of authority.

If the lowly and poorly remunerated servant has the most to gain, the male head of household has to the most to lose: his dignity and reputation amongst his neighbours, his ability to govern his own household, including, most crucially, retention of his wife's sexual fidelity. In evaluating any diminution or any enhancement of authority in the figures described below, I shall look at initial status and the elements which make up this status: wealth, number of servants, professional standing, degree of respect he

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<sup>156</sup> For day-to-day purposes, this is valid. However, for jurisdiction over long-term behaviour, particularly behaviour that brings disrepute, over and above the individual male head of household often stands the figure of the *paterfamilias*, the head of an extended family or clan, or the most authoritative figure within a small community. Uggucione from *L'Assiuolo* and Maximo from *Il Negromante* are cast in this role. (For further discussion, see last page(s) of this chapter.)



elicits from other prominent citizens<sup>157</sup>, and chart how these are either maintained or undermined as the story unfolds. (As far as possible, I shall try to avoid aspects which belong more properly to the other dimensions, analysed in subsequent chapters.)

The figure of Calandro from *La Calandra* (1513) may be looked on as a theatrical prototype, although his literary antecedents go much further back.<sup>158</sup> An early play in this new genre, *La Calandra* takes carnivalesque reversal to its furthest extreme, with the figure of Calandro, nominally of high authority, subjected from the outset to all manner of abuse, discomfort and humiliation: in the early stages from his servant, in latter stages from his wife.

Messer Ambrogio from the later play *L'Assiuolo* (1549) is similar to Calandro in that he is mercilessly intrigued against and humiliated as just punishment for his lechery and would-be adulterous affair with a married woman. We first hear of Messer Ambrogio from the youth Giulio who gives specific details of Ambrogio's professional life: 'Che e' soleva già andare avvocando per questo e per quello, siccome fanno gli altri dottori nella corte del Commissario e del Provveditore.' (I,1). In response to a query from his servant, Giulio observes pithily: 'Sì; egli è ricco che e' crepa.' (I,1). In the scene following, there is a telling observation from his maidservant Agnola who attests that without direct evidence any accusation by Ambrogio's wife of his adultery would be dismissed as merely a fancy born out of jealousy. Thus, at this stage, Ambrogio still retains credibility and status within his extended family and neighbourhood.

His image of himself as a powerful, respected figure is first dented by Madonna Verdiana, the local gossip. In the exchange between Ambrogio and her, there is a whole tranche of dialogue comparing the upkeep of Ambrogio's vegetable garden with that of the local monastery. It is full of innuendo and double-entendres. Here Verdiana

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<sup>157</sup> As an enhancement to high status, there is often the depiction of the established professional male possessing a 'trophy' wife, someone very young and exceptionally good-looking. (Lucrezia, the wife of Nicia in *La Mandragola*, can be looked upon as an archetype of this trope.)

<sup>158</sup> Elements from three stories of Boccaccio's *Decameron* featuring a figure called Calandrino appear in the character traits or habits of both Calandro (from *La Calandra*) and Ambrogio (from *L'Assiuolo*). Calandro is closer to the Calandrino of Day VIII, Story 3: 'un dipintore chiamato Calandrino, uom semplice e di nuovi costumi'; Ambrogio closer to that of Day VIII, Story 6: 'Calandrino è avaro e come egli bee volentieri quando altri paga.'. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Vol. 2 (Milan: Aldo Garzanti Editore, 1974).

implies that what the monks lack in material wealth they score over Ambrogio in sexual potency: 'I nostri frati [...] tengon fornito con esso il convento, e tutte noi; e tra l'altre se e'vi piantano carote, elleno si fanno tosto tosto, vedete, di questa posta.' (11,2). By the end of this scene, Ambrogio has suffered not only blows to his finances but to the sense of his own manhood. At the end of his encounter with the younger Rinuccio (Act II, Scene 7), Ambrogio's extreme avarice induces him to accept a small monetary tip from him, thereby unwittingly undercutting his standing as an established professional man who should be above such petty gains.

Ambrogio's treatment of his servant Giannella oscillates widely. At several points early on he is crudely insulting towards him: 'ti venga il cacasangue' and 'tu sei un baccello' (II,8); and even brutal, where he treats his servant more like a slave who requires the stick rather than the carrot:

'I' vo' che tu rimanga il cacasangue che ti venga, pezzo d'asino. Lievati di costì, ch'i' non so chi mi si tiene ch'io non ti dia di questo stucco più diritto ch'i' so sulla testa.' (IV,2).

But on other occasions, Ambrogio treats him with more respect. Just before their nocturnal outing, he debates with his servant as to how they should proceed, even allowing at one point for Giannella to make suggestions, with the outcome that all of his ideas are eventually dropped, to be substituted for one of Giannella's devising (Act III, Scene 5). During the night's adventures which see Ambrogio completely thwarted in his plan to bed Madonna Anfrosina, his anger and frustration are directed firstly towards womankind, then people in general; he strangely desists from taking it out on the nearest available target, his servant Giannella.

If Ambrogio's self esteem has suffered a series of temporary knocks, the denouement erodes his authority in a more permanent way. In Act V, Scenes 3 to 6, Messer Ambrogio looks to Ugucione for redress as regards his wife's alleged adultery. However, this backfires; the focus turns from his wife's behaviour to his own. Madonna Oretta manages to completely deflate his authority and reduce him to a laughing stock. Ambrogio then appeals to Rinuccio to help him restore his reputation but this only succeeds in provoking more scorn from Ugucione. The final scene of the play – a conversation between Giulio and his servant - details how Ambrogio's

authority would thenceforth be much circumscribed. He has to declare his wife to be the most faithful in all Pisa and promise never to show jealousy again and refrain from continually checking on her movements.

Ambrogio's depiction is sufficiently shaded to prevent it being a mere stereotype. We get much more detail of his wealth and status than we do with Calandro and his jealousy, although extreme, has a foundation in reality: his fears of local youths cuckolding him prove to be justified and his relationship with his male servant oscillates between complete mastery (when on home soil) and a rather surly dependence (when venturing abroad).<sup>159</sup> In these plays, usually some semblance of the status quo is restored at the end, even though certain characters are better off than at the outset, others worse off. Here we see this difference spelt out in a particularly trenchant way: the wealthy lawyer Messer Ambrogio, who at the start of the play had complete dominion over his own household and considerable influence beyond it, sees his authority over his wife curtailed and his reputation seriously dented by the end.

Next, I shall look at another older man of status - Cambio who, together with Maximo and Abondio, plays a pivotal role in the romantic intrigues of Ariosto's *Il Negromante*.

Considerable detail is given in the early part of the text to indicate that Cambio is a man of wealth and distinction. Cambio's use of the jargon of commerce suggests that he is or has been a merchant or banker. His very name Cambio is no doubt a jocular (and possibly satirical) pointer to his trade.<sup>160</sup> The notion of Cambio as a man of considerable wealth is confirmed when he describes how, on the death of his brother-in-law, he was able to uproot himself immediately from Florence and go to Cremona to

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<sup>159</sup> The placement of these characters in the smaller town of Pisa, allows for the idea of Ambrogio being a local 'big-shot' and for most of the other characters to be initially cast as his social inferiors and for them to be aware of his reputation as a successful lawyer. These result in a character more grounded in reality than as a mere theatrical conceit. (By contrast, *La Calandra*'s setting in the city of Rome seems arbitrary, apart from lending credence to the idea of two siblings arriving there without the other finding out. The status of the major characters in no sense derives from its setting.)

<sup>160</sup> In the later redaction, this merchant figure's name has been changed to Fazio which, along with other alterations (see p. 133 and p. 179 below), renders him a more respectable, if duller, figure.

support his sister and her daughter.<sup>161</sup> A further indication lies in the disclosure that he has a large enough property to be able to invite his friend Lippo to lodge with him. More crucially, the fact that Cambio can devise, implement and maintain an arrangement whereby he is seen to be officially married to the much younger Lavinia, without drawing any apparent disapprobation from her immediate family and the wider community, points to a figure of considerable standing.

But this authority is not sufficient to withstand the determination of someone of much lower rank, the servant Temolo, to co-opt him into a scheme to thwart the necromancer. To seal this erosion of rank differential, Temolo uses the familial form of address towards him: in their first meeting at the beginning of the third Act he says: ‘Li cinquanta fiorini che tu gli offeri’ (III,1). By the beginning of Act IV, it becomes clear that Cambio has totally surrendered the overseeing of the intrigue to Temolo. Temolo instructs him to make amends after unnecessarily alarming Lavinia and, at the end of the scene, Temolo is again seen ordering Cambio around, this time regarding his future role in foiling Lachellino. A slice of dialogue at the beginning of Act IV, Scene 4 reveals an interesting hierarchy emerging, albeit brief in duration, with Temolo at the top, Cambio in the middle and the porter at the bottom:

TEMOLO: Paga il facchino, e mandalo  
Via, e mandalo ben lontano e subito  
CAMBIO: Te’, questo è un soldo, fammi anco un servizio.  
FACCHINO: Che vuoi tu? (IV,4)

The fact that even the lowly porter addresses Cambio in the familiar ‘tu’ form adds to a perception that Cambio lacks bona fide status.<sup>162</sup> Later on, Cambio manages to restore some of his authority: in Act IV, Scene 5, he is seen ridiculing the necromancer’s servant and, at the end of fourth Act, he instructs Temolo to inform everyone of events and report back to him:

Va’ Temolo / In casa, e diligentemente informati  
Di tutto quel ch’accade, e riferiscimi. (IV,7)

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<sup>161</sup> A Florentine merchant paying a business trip to Cremona has a ring of plausibility. Black states that ‘Vigevano, Cremona and Lodi gained in size and economic strength by the sixteenth century’, *Early Modern Italy...*, p. 33.

<sup>162</sup> This familiarity by the porter is missing from the later redaction: FAZIO: ...fammi anco un servizio; FACCHINO: Lo farò (IV,3).

However, the fact that he does not feature in the denouement of the play and is excluded from the group of intimates summoned by Maximo suggests that he does not altogether recover the high status he is ascribed at the beginning of the play. A possible interpretation of his non-appearance is that, although Maximo has pardoned his step-son, he has not altogether forgiven Cambio for his role in the initial deception and so excludes him from this celebratory gathering.<sup>163</sup>

Cambio and Maximo share a similar trait in that they allow themselves to become subordinate to persons of lower rank: Maximo defers in the most supine way to the commands of the itinerant necromancer; Cambio bows to the wishes of the servant Temolo as to how to proceed. Maximo's subservience can be viewed as part and parcel of Ariosto's satire against those who are credulous enough to believe in necromancy, whereas Cambio's, even after allowing for the mechanics of the plot, may be indicative of how the merchant class was viewed: as slightly suspect and in need of supervision.

## LONE FIGURES

This group consists of those who are not part of a family grouping, romantic couple or fixed household. I shall divide this category into residents and newcomers.

The highest-ranked individual in the first group is Rossello from *Gli Straccioni*. He is described as a *procuratore*. His principal function is to adjudicate on law suits brought by persons not just within the city of Rome but far beyond it, as he boasts in his opening speech: 'In Roma si conoscono le cause di tutto il mondo.' (III,5). Newcomers to Rome such as Giovanni and Battista, as well as natives of the city such as Cavaliere Giordano and Mirandola, look to Messer Rossello to redress their grievances. Rossello also takes it upon himself to assume the role of law-keeper in a very practical way. At the end of Act IV, Scene 3 he stops in its tracks the forced transference of the maiden Agata from one house to another. Although Pilucca and Marabeo are prepared to use physical force to subdue Agata, they abandon their efforts when confronted by the

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<sup>163</sup> A broader inference may be drawn: that the denouement and its fallout should only concern permanent members of the local community: that incomers, however highly esteemed, are to be excluded.

physical presence of Rossello. In the scene following, when he is trying to comfort and reassure Agata, he very much embodies official authority:

In questa città, in una piazza così celebre, a tempo di questo prencipe, queste soperchierie a una vergine! Non dubitate, figliuola mia, che voi sete salva, e questo tristo sarà castigato. (IV,4)

Rossello voices his amazement at the audacity of miscreants committing crimes virtually under the very eyes of the Pope. (It is indicated that the street in which Marabeo and Pilucca tried to frogmarch Agata was opposite the Papal residence.<sup>164</sup>)

Messer Rossello is generally seen acting in his full professional capacity in securing redress for his clients. However, his status as a man of the utmost dignity is temporarily compromised when he not only participates in but actually initiates a childish practical joke against the hapless Mirandola (in Act IV, Scene 5). But in the last two scenes of the play, Rossello reassumes an air of gravity. Here he very much forms the pivot of the action, firstly settling the quarrel between Giordano and Tindaro and then, by persistent enquiry, ascertaining the precise dynastic links between the parties. Finally, upon the request of Giordano, he pardons the miscreants Pilucca and Marabeo. It is also Messer Rossello who delivers the valedictory address to the audience.

The introduction of a figure such as Messer Rossello gives recognition to the social structure of a large conurbation where maintenance of law and order, or at least the redressing of civil wrongs, has to a considerable extent devolved away from powerful heads of clans to state officials.<sup>165</sup> Unusually for the genre of play which

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<sup>164</sup> This and other geographical or historical references such as the demolition and rebuilding of parts of central Rome (specifically here the new Farnese palace) in Act I, Scene 1 gives this play an extra patina of reality.

<sup>165</sup> The depiction of Giovanni and Battista having to travel from the north-east of the Italian peninsula to Rome to secure justice suggests that, outside of large conurbations, an effective police force or judiciary was often rudimentary or non-existent. In Ariosto's second play, *I Suppositi*, at one point the elder Filogono, coming from Sicily, laments: 'Ah infortunatissimo vecchio! Non è Giudice o Capitano o Podesta o altro rettore in questa terra, a cui mi possa ricorre?' (IV,8), which suggests that someone from another part of the Italian peninsula could not take for granted the existence of effective law-enforcement in a territory he had newly entered.

normally features the adventures and misadventures of the bourgeoisie, it is a state official who plays the crucial role of sealing the romantic pairings in the denouement.<sup>166</sup>

There is a swathe of lone individuals of middle rank who are mainstays of the fictionalised court world of *Il Marescalco*. I shall focus on two of them: Ambrogio and the Pedant. One litmus test to help determine who is recognised as superior and who inferior is the choice of either the ‘tu’ or ‘voi’ form of address. However, this is not always a constant but can be subject to flux even during the briefest tranche of dialogue (as illustrated below).

Jacopo heads the pro-marriage faction; he himself has eschewed political power play and the jockeying for position in favour of family and secure home life. Heading the anti-marriage faction is Messer Ambrogio.<sup>167</sup> He initially acknowledges Jacopo’s superior, or at least equal, status by addressing him in the ‘voi’ form (in Act I, Scene 3) even though the content of his remarks is quite disparaging. However, later on Ambrogio suddenly switches from the ‘voi’ form to the more informal ‘tu’ form just after he has asked Jacopo his opinion of the Duke:

AMBROGIO: Che vi pare del nostro Signore?

JACOPO: Mi pare che Dio non ne porrà fare un migliore.

AMBROGIO: Tu parli da savio; ma non sarebbe di Gonzaga se non fosse buono, umano e liberale. Ma donde lo hai che Sua Eccellenza gliene dia?  
(III,9)

By initially offering his due respects to a fellow courtier, then switching to the more familiar form of address, Ambrogio conveys increased friendliness, although this may be just a ploy to get Jacopo to confide in him. In this particular exchange, there may also be an implicit acknowledgement by Ambrogio that, whatever their private reservations over the Duke’s character and conduct, they must at all costs appear totally loyal in public.

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<sup>166</sup> An alternative take on this is that the placing of the official Rossello at the heart of the settlement of romantic and financial affairs adds weight to the notion that the parties involved here are at least one rung above the bourgeois class featured in other comedies.

<sup>167</sup> Gunsberg informs us: ‘the title *messer* was only held by lawyers and nobles.’ *Gender...*, p. 24.

Ambrogio is on surer ground with the Marescalco as to their relative rankings; he habitually uses the 'tu' form when addressing him. The Marescalco is seen to defer to Ambrogio for his greater experience and wisdom. In his long exposition on the pitfalls of marriage (Act II, Scene 5), Ambrogio explains in graphic detail what might befall a man if he takes a wife of superior rank or possessing greater wealth.

More than any other character, Ambrogio is a mouthpiece through which the playwright makes satirical observations on the artificial, sometimes downright illogical, hierarchy that has grown up in this narrow tightly-knit society, where frivolous or haughty types of higher rank are shown automatic respect whereas the more useful and self-effacing lower-ranked members are vulnerable to uncalled-for slights. Ambrogio is a character who stands aloof from the intrigues of the court and is seen to have greater independence than other courtiers, certainly greater than that of the much put-upon Marescalco.

Like Jacopo, the Pedant belongs to the pro-marriage faction but his support for this institution comes from an academic, indeed theological, rather than personal, standpoint. At the first entry of the Pedant (Act I, Scene 9), the Marescalco immediately shows deference towards him: 'Perdonatemi, maestro' and he always uses the 'voi' form of address. The Pedant shows equal respect when speaking of one of his superiors, in this case the Duke himself, but this is extended into comic sycophancy: 'Sua Eccellenzia, Sua Signoria Illustrissima [...] il magnanimissimo Duca nostro.' (I,9). Later on, the Pedant boasts to the Marescalco that it is only someone of his rank and prestige whom the Duke would feel he could confide in: 'una altra fiata ti exporrò quanto meco ha confidato lo Armiclarissimo Prencipe.' (II,11). This boast proves not to be entirely hollow since later on during a soliloquy (Act III, Scene 10) it is revealed that it is the Pedant to whom the Duke has entrusted the sermon and oration of the Marescalco's wedding ceremony, thereby taking on a priestly function. Of course, this apparent honour is negated by the fact that the marriage ceremony, unbeknownst to the Pedant, will be a grotesque facsimile of the real thing.

The Pedant is the character most conscious of rank. While overly deferential to those of higher rank, he is pompous and condescending to those of inferior rank. In reaction to the knight's page's prank against him, the Pedant delineates their difference



in status in an absurdly pompous way: ‘Un cinedulo, un presuntuoso capestrulo osa irritare i gravissimi precettori de le grammaticali discipline?’ (II,2). There is a brief moment in Act IV, Scene 5 when the Pedant defers to someone else’s knowledge and opinion, in this instance those of Messer Jacopo. But elsewhere it is the Pedant who dominates the conversation, albeit with the acquiescence of the others, an acquiescence born more of amused indulgence rather than respect. At one point, the Pedant is invited by Jacopo to expound on his knowledge: ‘Maestro, udite, esortatelo con le vostre filosofie a torla, ed allungate la diceria.’ (V,3). The Pedant eagerly takes up this invitation: he proceeds to make a series of references to a whole spectrum of politics, arts and sciences and is only occasionally interrupted by some brief light-hearted comments from the others. The final valedictory scene is accorded to the Pedant, but here he is uncharacteristically (and possibly ironically) modest in that he acknowledges that he took the advice of a servant boy as to how to ingratiate himself with the audience.

This portrait is undoubtedly a broad caricature, through which a self-conscious display of learning is mercilessly lampooned. The pedant figure is a favourite target of ridicule, alongside that of the errant middle-aged husband, in plays in *commedia erudita*.<sup>168</sup> Unlike the parallel figure of the tutor Polinico in *La Calandra*, the Pedant here is allowed to continue under the delusion that he is an important, well-respected member of the court: most of the deference shown towards him is either insincere or downright sarcastic, though voiced in such an oblique way that the self-absorbed Pedant fails to register such undertones. In this aspect, the Pedant is the opposite of the other status-conscious individuals such as the ostler and Marescalco in that he remains blissfully unaware of veiled insults and satirical barbs lobbed in his direction.

Whereas almost all the characters of a ducal court as imagined by Aretino are keenly aware of nuances of rank, the individuals who populate the urban streets of Rome depicted in Caro’s *Gli Straccioni* show much less recognition of any formal hierarchy. The next character under scrutiny, Barbagrìgia, is illustrative of this: he

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<sup>168</sup> A satire against this generic figure is at the centre of Belo’s *Il Pedante* (1529). [There is an argument as to which came first – Aretino’s or Belo’s pedant, and thus who may have influenced whom.] *Gli Ingannati* (1532) by the Sienese Accademia degli Intronati also features a mocking portrayal of a similar figure, the tutor Messer Piero. Polinico, the straight-laced tutor to Lidio in *La Calandra* (1513) can be viewed as a prototype, although he is portrayed more naturalistically, as merely pompous rather than as outrageous caricature.

appears on equally close and friendly terms with the servant class as with the lower echelons of the nobility.

Barbagrigia appears in the first scene of the play where Pilucca informs us that he is the owner of a printing shop.<sup>169</sup> Pilucca addresses him in the ‘voi’ form whilst Barbagrigia addresses Pilucca in the ‘tu’ form. However, they interact as two long-standing friends who are re-united after a long interval. Barbagrigia’s barbed comments are playfully ironic and would only be understood as such between two people who knew and trusted each other extremely well. At the end of this scene, Barbagrigia acknowledges the superior status of Demetrio in his courteous enquiry using the ‘voi’ form, though neither he nor Pilucca has disclosed his name, let alone any clues as to his social standing: ‘Chi cercate, uomo dabbene?’ (I,1).<sup>170</sup>

In Act II, Scene 1 Barbagrigia is similarly deferential towards Tindaro. Since Barbagrigia is now party to a discussion on a very personal matter – whether Tindaro should marry or not, one can deduce that in the interim (between the first scene and this one) Barbagrigia has managed to forge a close friendship with Demetrio and Tindaro, again illustrating the more inclusive nature of social relationships between different classes in this inner-city scenario. Further, Barbagrigia is shown to have sufficient status and authority to act as a marriage broker between Madonna Argentina and Tindaro. During the debate between himself, Tindaro and Demetrio, Barbagrigia invokes his greater age and experience as additional leverage in his strategy to persuade Tindaro to marry the widow: ‘Voi sète giovine, figliuolo mio. Oh! guardate questa mia barba bianca, e credete quel ch’io vi dico così alla materiale.’ (II,1).

In Act III we see Barbagrigia caught between the obligation to his friend and neighbour Madonna Argentina – to organise the wedding feast and have everything ready on time, and to Demetrio’s intention to delay the wedding. Here, albeit with a marked comic slant, is depicted Barbagrigia’s fear of the wrath of women in general and of Argentina in particular as a crucial factor in his decision making: ‘lo sdegno delle

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<sup>169</sup> One can guess that the trade of printer was not entirely a random choice by Caro of a figure to represent the entrepreneurial class but a more specific homage to a trade that was obviously crucial in Caro’s own professional success.

<sup>170</sup> This is a clear instance where the high status of Demetrio, if staged, would have to be solely conveyed through extra-textual elements: costume, bearing or accent.

donne è precipitoso ed ella, come sapete, è potente.’ (III,4). Indeed, such is his fear of her that at the end of this scene he tells Demetrio that he cannot summon up the courage to face her: ‘A me non basta più l’animo di capitarle innanzi.’ (III,4).

In the fraught situation depicted in Act V, Scene 2 where Demetrio and Tindaro, joined shortly after by Barbargria, are on the run from the vengeful Cavaliere Giordano, an equality is established between all those present: Barbargria is allowed equal participation in the speculation and nervous banter. But at the end of this episode he is seen taking instructions from Demetrio. As with the first scene of the play, Caro captures here the notion that when people are under stress or in a fraught situation differences of rank tend to dissolve but re-emerge once the danger has passed.

Barbargria is a noteworthy character in that, as an independent though small-time businessman, at times he is depicted as being on almost the same social level as upper-class characters, both native such as the wealthy widow Madonna Argentina whom he refers to as ‘questa mia comare’ (II,1);<sup>171</sup> as well as incomers: he is able to fully join in Tindaro and Demetrio’s long debate at the start of the second Act. However, Barbargria retains the deferential ‘voi’ form of address whenever speaking to any of the above. At other times, his lower rank becomes more evident when he is called upon to carry out tasks on others’ behalf; indeed at one point he is classed alongside the servant Satiro:

DEMETRIO: Bisogna ora che ci guardiamo da la inimicizia del cavaliere, e che mandiamo qui Barbargria a madonna Argentina, e Satiro a Giuletta (V,2).

A quirky aspect of Barbargria, which goes against the grain of indicating a highly patriarchal society, is that he is more intimidated by females of high rank than males of high rank.<sup>172</sup>

Lastly in this section, I shall consider two outsiders, both itinerant figures. Lachellino, the eponymous villain of *Il Negromante*, is described as originating from

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<sup>171</sup> The narrow definition of *comare* is godmother, but more loosely it can also refer to a close neighbour.

<sup>172</sup> This could, alternatively, be viewed as a subtle piece of misogyny on the part of the playwright: that a wealthy widow such as Madonna Argentina has appropriated for herself more authority than she is entitled to.

Castille in Spain; Ruffo in *La Calandra* as arriving in Rome from Tuscany, although originating from Greece. Both earn a living from the ‘profession’ of necromancy.

In his first meeting with Maximo (in Act I, Scene 3), Lachellino<sup>173</sup> starts the discussion respectfully, if a little impatiently. But soon he starts using jargon that Maximo cannot understand and impresses Maximo by his apparent business acumen and wide experience. He at one point mentions ‘lire d’imperiali’ which implies that he has had business dealings in regions far distant from Cremona, that he is a man of national, even international standing, in contrast to Maximo’s more parochial status. But in the soliloquy by his servant Nebbio (Act II, Scene 2) it is revealed that the necromancer’s claimed status is a complete sham, although Nebbio does concede that he is a master of disguise and a person of supreme adaptability. By Act III, Scene 4, the necromancer has reduced Maximo to a state of obsequious compliance. In the final scene of this Act, the necromancer lists all the money and property he is about to acquire from his three victims. He then describes how he and Nebbio will make their getaway. This marks his last appearance; strangely he is hardly referred to again by any of his victims, who turn their ire instead upon his servant Nebbio.

In terms of authority, Fisico is a ‘hollow man’, someone of humble origins and little education, whose authority and status is spuriously constructed: he professes to having extraordinary skills and specialist knowledge and can boast, perhaps with a grain of truth but no doubt with a large degree of exaggeration, that he is on friendly terms with heads of states, the inference being that men of greater status than Maximo could have also been duped by Lachellino. Whatever his deficiencies, he is skilful enough to persuade others to take him seriously. He manages to exploit his ‘foreignness’ as part and parcel of his claim to possess rarefied abilities. (Such aspect is more readily conveyed in an actual staging of the play where costume, props and accent could augment his designation as an exotic outsider.)

Although also a parasite and confidence trickster, Ruffo, the necromancer featured in *La Calandra*, is a much more small-time and local operator than Lachellino.

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<sup>173</sup> This figure is given various appellations: as well as an actual name, Lachellino, he is called ‘(il) Fisico’, ‘astrologo’ as well as ‘negromante’. In English translations, he is variously designated as necromancer, magician or sorcerer.

At the end of the scene in which Ruffo first appears - a duologue between himself and the maidservant Samia (Act I, Scene 6), he asks her to go on ahead, after which he will catch her up. This serves two purposes: firstly a theatrical one so that he can address the audience alone, but secondly to identify himself as a member of an underclass with whom it is preferable for respectable members of society, even lowly maidservants, not to be seen. In his first meeting with the maiden Santilla who is disguised as a male, Ruffo is circumspect towards her and delicate in the way he updates her on matters: 'Udite. Una donna, di te, Lidio, innamorata, cerca che tu suo sia come ella è tua.' (II,3).<sup>174</sup> However, later on in Act III, Scene 3 it is Ruffo who gives instructions to Santilla rather than the other way round, despite the fact that he has been hired for his services and she (he) is of much higher rank. Towards the end of Act III, Scene 17, in conversation with the servant Fannio, Ruffo is quite open about the material gain he hopes to extract from Fulvia, whom he sees as a rich and respectable woman made vulnerable by the force of love: 'Gli amanti serran la borsa con la fronde del porro; perché i ducati, e' panni, il bestiame, li offizii, le possessioni e la vita darieno coloro che aman come costei.' (III,17). Later, Ruffo's acquisitiveness is conveyed even more explicitly when he relishes the prospect of future monetary reward: 'S'ella se lasserà prendere, che mi pare ormai di sì, io la spiumerò di maniera che bene ne staranno un pezzo i fatti miei.' (III,20).

Whereas Fisico is respected for his supposed learning and esteemed as a great international scholar, Ruffo is a much less grand figure, depicted as a member of a slightly unsavoury section of the local community but one who nevertheless elicits a degree of respect from certain quarters. Although this is not a heavily signalled theme, Ruffo is able to find solidarity with the servant class; even Fannio who takes the rise out of his ignorance does not betray him to Fulvia. They share a common cause: to extract as much money from Fulvia as possible, Ruffo by trickery and the servants by performing extra-mural duties.

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<sup>174</sup> Prior to this line, Ruffo had addressed Lidio Femina more formally: 'vi cognoschi, pur molto vi amo'. Here he continues in the same vein - 'Udite' but then switches to the more familiar 'tu' form of address for the rest of this scene. This switch occurs just after Ruffo has mentioned that he and she are from the same country, Greece. Thus there is a suggestion that Ruffo claims a greater parity with Lidio Femina through their common status as immigrants in a new country.

## CONCLUSION

The plays analysed above feature a whole gamut of characters, from the lowest ranked - in the court society of *Il Marescalco*, it is the pageboy; in the urban settings of the other plays, it is the porter,<sup>175</sup> - to the highest ranked - in the *Il Marescalco*<sup>176</sup> it is the Count, (although the higher-ranked Duke, who never appears, is a frequent reference point); in the Roman city centre setting of *Gli Straccioni* it is the procurator Rossello; and in the remaining plays it is the local paterfamilias such as Uggucione of *L'Assiuolo*.

The subsequent three chapters will chart whether there is either an enhancement or diminution of the status of a character through his/her moral, intellectual and cultural presentations. In this current chapter, I have tried to assess which character or class of character undergoes a change (enhancement or diminution) of prestige outside any consideration of these other dimensions.

From this assessment, the broad inferences drawn are: (1) the young are to be generally favoured over the old; (2) the native slightly favoured over the incomer; and (3) women of middle-rank or higher should enjoy more rights and privileges with a concomitant diminution of male privilege. (For the last of these, this inference emerges as an inchoate impression rather than as sustained argument and moreover remains subordinate to the main focus: that of the upturning of status for comic purposes.)

- (1) Though possessing no particular admirable qualities apart perhaps from a firm determination to have his own way, the youth Lidio ends up being rewarded sexually - being paired with Fulvia, materially - having access to her considerable wealth, and socially - finally being re-united with his long-lost sister. Tindaro is re-united with his lost love Giuletta and also with hitherto unknown wealthy relatives at the end. The youths Camillo and Cintio finally, after many vicissitudes, are granted in marriage to their lovers; Giulio and

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<sup>175</sup> Even the lowly household servant appears to possess acknowledged superiority over the porter figure, e.g. Fessenio in *La Calandra* (III, 2) and Temolo in *Il Negromante* (IV,2).

<sup>176</sup> Larivaille points to an interesting statistic for this play: 'Solo 5 personaggi su 21 hanno un nome, mentre il rapporto nella *Cortigiana* è 15 su 25', Paul Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino: Fra Rinascimento e Manierismo* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1980), p. 117, n. By having the majority of characters referred to by their title or role, hierarchical differences of rank between characters more readily come to the fore.

Rinuccio gain carnal access to the objects of their desires. On the other side of the equation, the elderly would-be adulterers Calandro and Ambrogio are shamed and humiliated. For Giovanni/Battista for most of the duration of the play they are seen in severely reduced circumstances and, although they eventually regain their lost wealth, they still retain a buffoonish aspect through to their final appearance. *Il Negromante*'s Maximo runs counter to the general loss of prestige for the well-to-do older male. Although for a long period he is depicted as an abject victim of the necromancer, his status among his fellow citizens remains untarnished and his fortunes are enhanced by the finding of his long-lost daughter. We infer that the lives of the older high-ranked characters in *Il Marescalco* will carry on much as before.

The succession of one generation over the previous one has provided a subject matter for theatre in general. In royal and aristocratic circles, this process, particularly when it did not unfold harmoniously, provided a rich source for dramatists in the tragedy genre.<sup>177</sup> If serious theatre could unflinchingly examine the rights and wrongs of competing generations in the upper class, did comic theatre offer any insights into generational struggles of the middle class? Were the *commedia erudita* playwrights merely re-working well-established theatrical or literary tropes, or trying to offer fresh insights, however minimal, into the transfer of authority from the old to the young? Is there articulated within these far-fetched scenarios a real grievance against the informal rules of patriarchy and the more formal laws of inheritance that artificially kept in prime position the older (male) generation and blocked the legitimate aspirations of the up and coming generation? Or were these plays conceived as an extension of the carnival spirit where roles were reversed merely to generate a frivolous divertissement rather than be taken as a serious critique of contemporary social structures?<sup>178</sup> The fact that these plays were seen by, indeed often sponsored by,

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<sup>177</sup> In English speaking theatre, Shakespeare's *King Lear* must rank as the most searing account of generational discord in royal circles; apart from the main plot of King Lear's increasing disillusion regarding the actions of his two eldest daughters, there is a sub-plot where the younger, illegitimate son of a nobleman attempts to take over as the head of the family through trickery and violence.

<sup>178</sup> The overthrow, or at least drastic diminution of authority of the middle-aged man of standing by younger adult males in *commedia erudita* is never presented, as it sometimes is in tragedy, as unjustified or as idiosyncratic rebellion; the eventual 'overthrow' of this figure is always rooted in a gross deficiency, or multiple deficiencies on his part. Nevertheless, the habitual coupling of the elderly with these negative

the ruling elite suggests that any content which could be regarded as subversive was too deeply buried in the farcical framework to be readily perceived by the casual reader or attender of these plays.

In these five plays, we see quite a diversity of scenarios and social attitudes: from the conservative Ariosto where the young prosper only with the full approval and consent of their elders, through to the more ambivalent attitude of Caro where establishment figures Giovanni/Battista and Cavaliere Giordano, though ultimately restored to powerful positions they held previously, are depicted for the bulk of the action as absurd characters, set against the more sensible younger ones, to the more radical message of Cecchi where not only do the young get the better of their elders but young females are seen to be proactive and challenge successfully the previously unquestioned authority of their menfolk. Aretino is even more radical in the proposition implicit in *Il Marescalco*: that the 'state' should be neutral regarding a person's private life, that it should not be in the business of promoting heterosexuality over homosexuality.

- (2) Concerning the lower ranks, in *Gli Straccioni*, the outsider Mirandola is the victim of a cruel prank and the itinerant Jewish pedlar of *Il Marescalco*, though receiving no direct loss or injury, is met with considerable hostility. Similarly, the porter figure in both *La Calandra* and *Il Negromante* is treated with scant respect. The only outsider of low rank who does appear to prosper is the necromancer Ruffo, but even he becomes the target of a playful ruse by one of the domestic servants.

For the upper classes, being an incomer incurs no disadvantage whatsoever. Three of the principal young men detailed above - Lidio, Tindaro and Giulio, are all denoted as arriving from outside the town or city in which the action is set and they all fare well; their origins are rarely mentioned (apart from in the *antefatti*) and on the odd occasions when they are, it is very rarely in a

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characteristics does seem to constitute a more pointed criticism of the behaviour of this class than merely as the basis of a comic tale.



prejudicial sense.<sup>179</sup> The duo Fisico and Nebbio are clearly depicted as foreigners (originating from Castille in Spain) but they are initially accorded great respect in keeping with Lachellino's perceived high standing as a man of exceptional abilities; it is only once his wicked intentions are unmasked that this respect is withdrawn.

The origin of a character does not appear to be a dominant factor in his depiction. The Jewish pedlar is belittled momentarily by both Giannicco and the Marescalco but this could be viewed as an oblique jibe against observed prejudices held by lower-ranked members of society. An 'insider' figure such as the ostler as a jumped-up minor bureaucrat who has delusions of his own importance is more of a target for Ariosto's satire than the outsiders who temporarily visit - the pedlar and the jeweller who are portrayed as respectable traders trying to earn a living. The Jewish aspect of the villain Lachellino may have been simply included by Ariosto as a ready marker to convey learnedness as well as exotica, rather than from any intention to couple wickedness with the Jewish race per se.<sup>180</sup>

- (3) As for gender, the lower status males are accorded more respect than lower status females: compare Fessenio against Samia or Temolo against the Old Nurse. But as one goes up the social ranks this is reversed: the professional heads of household Calandro and Ambrogio both lose out badly to their female partners. Among the middle-ranked characters the picture is mixed – Lidio has a far easier ride than does his sister Santilla; he is accorded support and deference from everyone whereas Santilla is much more constrained and is subject to others' interference. Similarly, there is great indulgence towards

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<sup>179</sup> The depiction of the youthful 'hero' as an incomer may have been a choice (conscious or unconscious) by the playwright to render him more mysterious or a more romantic figure, closer to those found in folklore, invoking a common trope in which the young heroine meets and is captivated by 'a tall dark stranger' rather than by one of the local youths. Indeed, in real life the higher up the social hierarchy a family is situated the chances of finding a suitable match locally for their offspring decreases and thus the need to look further afield would increase.

<sup>180</sup> As for any negative association, it is more likely that it is the Spanish aspect of Lachellino's origin that had significance for Ariosto. In his other plays there are occasional anti-Spanish sentiments: for example '... e si sgombrarei di ogni masserizia camera e sale, che parrebbe che uno anno ne avessimo avuto li Spagnuoli alloggiamento.' *Cassaria* (in prose), (I,5). In addition, Ferrara, the playwright's home town, was notable as a city where Jews were welcomed as financiers. (But see also p.108 below for less attractive responses to their presence.)

Tindaro but his lover Giuletta faces subjugation from a series of parties – the Turks, the steward Marabeo and then Cavalier Giordano, before eventually reaching the protection of Rossello. But the trio of females – the young sisters Oretta and Violante and the older Anfrosina in *L'Assiuolo* are a match for their male counterparts and only lose control over the main intrigue through the tireless machinations of the servant Giorgetto.<sup>181</sup>

The exercise of power and authority and the identification of those who wield it and those who are subject to it are harder to detect when the affairs of a community are peaceful and running smoothly. It is only when there is a serious breach of the moral code or, more grievously, a breach of the law, that the identity of authority figures becomes more apparent.

For serious moral transgressions such as adultery, or at least strong evidence of an intent to commit adultery, depicted in *La Calandra* and *L'Assiuolo*, the ultimate judge of guilt or innocence is left to a *paterfamilias* figure; for the former, one of Fulvia's brothers, for the latter Uguccione.<sup>182</sup> In *Gli Straccioni* and *Il Negromante*, the committing of actual crimes – abduction, embezzlement and forced imprisonment of an innocent victim in the former, and fraud and deception in the latter, and the responses to them reveal either a paucity of law enforcement or a patchwork of interconnected 'regulatory powers' comprising lone persons acting unofficially and representatives of official bodies. The response, albeit minimal, to the crimes of Lachellino and his accomplice Nebbio is confined to actions by prominent citizens of Cremona.<sup>183</sup> In

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<sup>181</sup> It is tempting to see the victory of females over males as part of a deliberate feminist agenda but the more likely explanation is that these playwrights saw great mileage for comic purposes in presenting scenarios in which those with power have that power craftily wrested away from them by those who are seen to have much less power.

<sup>182</sup> As a final comic twist at the very end of the *L'Assiuolo*, the libidinous and irresponsible Rinuccio seems to have usurped this role from Uguccione.

<sup>183</sup> It is only the later redaction of *Il Negromante* that includes mention of potential official retribution: in the last scene Nibbio warns his master: 'Guardatevi, patron, da maggior perdita / Che d'una vesta [ ...] Mi par che giunghino tuttavia i birri, et in prigion ci caccino.' (V,5).

contrast, crimes of comparative severity in *Gli Straccioni* are eventually adjudicated upon by a State official – Messer Rossello. In the remaining play *Il Marescalco* the only serious misdemeanour – the attachment and setting off of fireworks on the person of the Pedant, is dealt with by the victim complaining, albeit forcefully, only to those who lack capacity to administer sanctions or punishment.

One can reach a tentative conclusion that *commedia erudita* has captured, unintentionally, a period of flux and transition between an earlier epoch where crime, apart from really serious offences such as murder and leading an insurrection, was dealt with, perhaps quite arbitrarily, by members of the town's oligarchy, and a later period where crime and punishment were dealt with by a more structured and more impartial network of official law enforcement agencies. One can surmise, however, that the playwrights constructing these stories did not overly concern themselves with describing the capture of miscreants and any punishment meted out with an authentic ring; they would have happily mixed fact and whimsy in order to produce a colourful storyline.

## MORAL DIMENSION

It is rare that one comes across persons whom one would categorise as wholly bad or wholly good - the vast majority of our friends and acquaintances possess favourable qualities alongside some less favourable ones. It is only in the wider world that one is likely, through the means of mass communication, to learn of people such as Pol Pot or Fred West whom one would categorise as wholly evil or, at the other extreme, persons deemed to be wholly virtuous such as Mother Teresa or Nelson Mandela. However, contemporaries who actually knew Mother Teresa on a day-to-day basis might attest to her possessing less worthy attributes such as impatience or arrogance; conversely a friend of Pol Pot might attest to his kindness and generosity. One has to conclude that the very process of transmitting the 'image' of these famous persons through to a wider public entails some degree of distortion. What we, the ordinary members of the public, receive is an 'edited' version of these people and I would argue, in its very broadest sense, a 'fictionalised' version. If we accept that even historical accounts and documentary evidence necessarily give a 'refracted' image of a real-life figure, then it is logical to assume that the intentionally fictionalised versions of society and its members through such media as film, books and theatre are inevitably, however much there is an attempt at verisimilitude, going to produce a distorted image, where the vast complexities of even a single ordinary life undergo a process of simplification to produce an image that would often veer towards either the saint or the sinner.

In our long European theatrical tradition from its ancient Greek origins, through its medieval manifestations – miracle and mystery plays in England, *sacra rappresentazione* in Italy – through later *commedia dell'arte*, finally to modern-day manifestations such as British pantomime, there has been a consistent strand in which

there is a firm divide between heroes and villains in stage presentations. One might tend to think that this type of theatre appeals only to children or pre-literate societies but even the most sophisticated adult in modern-day society sometimes yearns to see a production where good guys and bad guys are clearly 'labelled' - the equivalent of old-style Westerns where one could immediately recognise the guys in white hats as good, the guys in black hats as bad. Current television soap operas often pander to our penchant for characters 'we love to hate'.<sup>184</sup> If a stage character is based largely on someone who lived a long time ago or in a distant land, then there is greater scope to portray him or her as egregiously good or bad since any potential audience member would be unlikely to possess knowledge to be able to contest these perceptions.<sup>185</sup>

As for Italian erudite comedy, one can speculate as to whether the first audiences for this new style theatre would have perceived characters presented before them on stage as archetypes who had antecedents going back to time immemorial, or figures drawn more from their own times and locality.<sup>186</sup> When the moral dimension is explored, this question becomes more pressing: did the villain who appeared on stage belong to the distant world of fable or was he a closer representative of a real-life individual from the outside society from which the audience was drawn? For the reader of these plays<sup>187</sup>, did the mere designation of procurer, Spaniard or sorcerer predispose him into thinking of this figure as bad or risible before the action had even begun? Conversely would the description *giovane* or *innamorato* automatically gain the sympathy of the reader from the very outset. For actual stage performances, certain characters (prototypes of the stock characters which would later form the core of *Commedia Dell'Arte*) would no doubt have worn a particular costume, spoken in a

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<sup>184</sup> Two characters who spring to mind who fulfilled this role are 'Dirty' Den Watts and 'Nasty' Nick Cotton, both from the BBC's *EastEnders*.

<sup>185</sup> An example of this is Shakespeare's *Richard III* who was portrayed as a treacherous and murderous figure, although later historians who have carefully looked into the matter attest that the 'real' Richard III was not nearly as irredeemably evil as Shakespeare would have us believe. The legendary King Arthur has experienced the opposite fate: in lieu of any concrete historical evidence even of his existence, a myth has been allowed to grow up around him as the embodiment of every possible virtue.

<sup>186</sup> Before the sixteenth century, outside the narrow world of academia which staged Latin and Greek plays (in the original or in the vernacular), mainstream theatre - religious forms such as *sacra rappresentazione* and secular forms such as *farsa rustica* - would have prominently featured mythical or 'everyman' figures such as Adam and Eve or the hapless country bumpkin.

<sup>187</sup> Since even the most successful plays were staged only a few times (some not at all), the subsequent printed versions (for example, twenty-six editions of *La Calandra* between 1521 and 1600, *La Mandragola* fifteen editions during the same period, according to Andrews) would have reached vastly more people.

particular accent or carried an unusual physical quirk as a ready signal to the audience of either saintliness or villainy.<sup>188</sup>

Within the limits of this in-depth but necessarily narrow survey, I shall attempt to discover which social types were depicted in crude black and white terms, which impart a more ambivalent picture, and whether any tendency to construct polar opposites on the moral spectrum had lessened or increased over the period under review here. I shall also, where applicable, evaluate whether a character is perceived as good or bad solely through his own actions, or whether there are cases of ‘reflected glory’ or, conversely, ‘guilt by association’.

In the previous chapter, I selected five characters from each of five plays and examined these in detail under the dimension of authority, which I termed the character’s ‘default’ status. For this current chapter and subsequent two chapters, I intend to investigate how this narrowly defined status is altered through looking at a broader character presentation in terms of three other dimensions: morality, intelligence and the cultural. Together with a further chapter in which I shall attempt to assign a particular ‘weighting’ to each dimension for a selected number of characters, I hope ultimately to estimate the aggregate or overall ‘worth’ of a stage character as would be perceived by an audience member, or reader.<sup>189</sup> This current chapter is devoted to the morality dimension.

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<sup>188</sup> From earlier times up to and including the Renaissance, there was a widespread belief that physical beauty betokened a virtuous nature, and ugliness or physical deformity was a sure sign of villainy. A reiteration of this belief can be found in Shakespeare: (Miranda) ‘There’s nothing ill can dwell in such a temple: / If the ill spirit have so fair a house, / Good things will strive to dwell with’t.’ Act I, Scene 2, *The Tempest*, followed by this illuminating footnote: ‘This is conventional Renaissance Neo-platonic doctrine. Cf. *Euphues* (ed. Croll and Clemons), p. 50: “How can she be in mind any way imperfect who in body is perfect every way?” [...] Amerigo Vespucci noted with surprise that the women of the New World were often beautiful despite their “natural” (i.e. libidinous) ways. He expected this moral ugliness to be reflected in their physical features (Chinard, *L’Exotisme*, p. 13).’ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Frank Kermode, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1954). Again referring to Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, a few years ago Anthony Sher in the title role was noted for his use of crutches and spider-like movements across the stage, intended as immediate visible signs of Richard’s treacherous nature.

<sup>189</sup> The perception by an audience member of a stage character may differ radically from his perception as a reader or for a different staging of the same play. For example, a production of Shakespeare’s *Henry V* staged (and then filmed) in the 1940s in which Lawrence Olivier played the lead role presented *Henry V* as a symbol of patriotic courage pitted against deadly enemies. A production of the same play in 2004 with Adrian Lester in the title role, using the same text, contrived to present *Henry V* as an opportunistic war-monger. Gunsberg makes this general point: ‘What are the possibilities of counter-reading or deconstructing dramatic texts, given that the text is now no longer viewed as monolithic and univocal, but, rather, as a site of conflicting ideologies and contestation of meaning.’ *Gender...*, p. 2

Since there are only rare and fragmentary descriptions of actual stagings of *commedia erudita*<sup>190</sup> from either audience members or those involved in the staging, I limit my analysis to the written text. However, within that restriction, I shall occasionally identify particular tranches of dialogue that would readily lend themselves to different stagings which would markedly alter the audience's interpretation as to the speaker's motives or intent; for example where a character's utterances can be said straightforwardly, or with heavy irony, or disingenuously as a deliberate attempt to deceive or avoid blame. The choice of one interpretation as against another would in some cases have an impact on the overall presentation of a particular character, making him either more compliant or more rebellious, more naive or more knowing or, pertinent to this chapter, more complicit in, or innocent of, wrongdoing.

## SERVANTS

The investigation for this section will focus on whether the servant is above board or devious, loyal or treacherous, whether he is working for or working against his master, or acting solely for his own interests. A subsidiary line of enquiry will seek to find out to what degree the servant in question reflects the degree of moral probity of his master: is the servant depicted as morally superior or at least equal to his (reputable) master, as equally culpable or an even more egregiously evil version of his (disreputable) master. Are there cases where master and servant stand at the opposite ends of the moral spectrum?

In light of such questions, a pertinent starting point is to look at Nebbio, servant and henchman to the villainous necromancer in *Il Negromante*. In his first appearance, Act I, Scene 3, Nebbio describes rather than endorses his master's nefarious practices. In Nebbio's next appearance, a long soliloquy, he begins in a similarly detached vein but at a certain juncture admits to sharing in the spoils of his master's scams:

e gode, e fa godere a me (aiutandoci  
la sciocchezza, che al mondo è in abbondanza) (II,2)

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<sup>190</sup> Not all the published plays had been staged, as is the case of one of my five chosen plays – *Gli Straccioni*.

But for the rest of this speech, Nebbio uses the third person singular rather than the first person plural, a device which plays down his complicity in his master's dishonest activities, which he proceeds to detail with cold precision:

Quanti plebei, quante donne, quanti uomini  
Ha giuntati e rubati, quante povere  
Case lasciate, quante di adulterii  
Contaminate, or mostrando che gravide  
Volesse far le maritate sterili,  
Or le suspizioni e le discordie  
Spenger, che tra mariti e moglie nascono. (II,2)

This speech also conveys the idea of an amateur or disciple admiring the skill of the consummate professional.

By Act III, Scene 3, Nebbio is seen as an active participant rather than outside observer of Fisico's wicked deeds; he plots together with the necromancer and offers practical suggestions on how to best accomplish their acts of trickery. Even after his master is reported to have been killed (this is merely a ruse by the servant Temolo to foil their plans), Nebbio shows no contrition for his own part in their crimes, nor utters a word of reproach towards his (supposed) late master. Although initially grief stricken, his venal and self-serving side soon reasserts itself. A speech by Nebbio, made once his and his master's plans have gone awry, flags up his hypocrisy; he bemoans the boorish behaviour of others:

Che uomini oggi al mondo si ritrovano  
che si diletta, senza alcun lor utile,  
dar tuttavia a questo e a quel molestia! (IV,5)

Nebbio's final speech is a protestation of his own innocence, a cowardly disclaimer that he should accept any responsibility for his master's behaviour:

Potete dir quel che vi par, ma ufficio  
Non è già vostro, né di gentiluomini  
di dir o far a' forestieri ingiuria,  
El mio patron ben sarà buono a rendervi





in, he sets about devising ways of extricating him. Later on, there is a rare moment, when developments are reaching a crisis point, in which the usually imperturbable Temolo loses his patience and castigates the merchant Cambio:

Tu ancor dàì fede a tal sciocchezze? O semplice

Omo! Sopra me sie tutto il pericolo! (IV,4)

By the time matters have resolved themselves in favour of the 'good' characters, Temolo has taken a back seat but he is still able to vicariously enjoy the good fortune of his social superiors:

Ch'io gli annunzii

il maggior gaudio, la maggior letizia,

che possa aver... (V,3)

Throughout the play, Temolo's actions are directed towards the welfare of others, principally that of his master, but also for the benefit of the maiden Lavinia, the elder Maximo and even someone of lower status than himself - the porter.<sup>192</sup> Beyond his narrower function as an advancer of his master Cintio's interests, Temolo represents the moral heart of the play as the most indefatigable fighter against evil practices. However, such a degree of selflessness appears unrealistic. In this aspect he has more of the chivalric knight of medieval literature than a representation of a contemporary servant or even a recognisable re-modelling of past theatrical servants.

From the outset, Giannicco, young apprentice to the Marescalco in *Il Marescalco*, is seen extracting enjoyment from the discomfort of his master:

MARESCALCO: Parla d'altro che di moglie, se no...

GIANNICCO: Di che vuole che vi parli? di marito? E se tutto il mondo dice che il Signor vi dà moglie, perche nol posso dire anch'io? (I,II)

However, Giannicco can justify this behaviour to himself by considering that he is at least facilitating the wishes of his elders and betters, foremost the Duke, who have

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<sup>192</sup> In contrast to Cambio's abrasive treatment of the porter, Temolo is courteous towards him and makes sure he is duly rewarded for his services (see Scenes 2 and 4 of Act IV).

commanded that the Marescalco marry.<sup>193</sup> Giannicco is largely limited to teasing and engaging in verbal sparring; his lowly status means that he has little ability to affect others, either to their benefit or detriment. It is only during his interaction with the pedlar and his subsequent discussion with his master (Scenes 1 and 3 of Act III) that his behaviour becomes morally suspect. First, there is his scarcely veiled disdain for the Jewish pedlar, not for anything he has done but simply because of his ethnicity and religion.<sup>194</sup> More disreputable than this is Giannicco's blatant dissembling when asked by the Marescalco if he had solicited the Jewish pedlar to call on him with the aim of selling him a wedding ring. However, compared with all the other slights, mockery and eventual coercion the Marescalco has to endure, Giannicco's mendacity here is of little consequence.

The character of Giannicco is well constructed, in that he exhibits some less attractive aspects plausibly found in a very young person of lowly rank: mischievousness, a tendency to answer back, and an insensitivity towards the feelings of others. However, on the positive side, Giannicco's antics are never intended to permanently damage anyone's reputation; in fact at one point he avers a lasting loyalty to his master: 'E benché egli m'abbia torto, non mi vo' partir d lui.' (V,7).

If Temolo is the reluctant hero and Giannicco finds it hard to be taken seriously, Fessenio from *La Calandra* is bent on being at the centre of the action. In his long soliloquy, which comprises the entirety of the first scene of the play, Fessenio describes the affair between young Lidio, his master, and the older married female Fulvia but refrains from making any moral judgments. In the scene following, Fessenio tries to counter the arguments of Lidio's tutor Polinico who seeks to dissuade Lidio from pursuing the affair. Here, Fessenio's stance may not be wholly disinterested: there is the prospect of material reward or a more prosperous life-style if and when his master couples up with a rich female.

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<sup>193</sup> It is never made explicit whether Giannicco is in on the prank – the setting up a pretend marriage ceremony - or not. I would deduce that he was not since entrusting such a blabbermouth with such knowledge would seem an unwise move by the Duke.

<sup>194</sup> Both Giannicco and the Marescalco reveal anti-semitic sentiments. However, the Jewish pedlar himself is depicted as polite, honest, slow to take offence, if a little persistent. Andrews points out that anti-semitism was not just widespread throughout all classes but institutionalised: 'One of the 'carnival' events mounted regularly in Ferrara around 1500 was the Palio di San Giorgio [...] Jews (possibly made to run naked) [...] a humiliating public race for Jews, the 'giudiata' was for centuries a feature of Carnival events in Rome.', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 22.

If Fessenio is unswervingly loyal and supportive of the youth Lidio, he is merciless in his manipulation of the elderly Calandro. However, this appears to be done in a mischievous, anarchic spirit rather than from any sadistic intentions on the part of Fessenio.<sup>195</sup> Act II, Scene 6 sees further humiliation of Calandro by Fessenio: he gets Calandro to repeat several times the syllables of a meaningless occult word and then persuades him of the necessity of hiding in a trunk which is then to be carried to his supposed lover's abode. Fessenio's parting remarks, delivered once Calandro has exited, indicates that Fessenio's enjoyment here derives in part from his anticipation of detailing Calandro's folly to Lidio when they later meet up: 'Sarà or ben ch'i trovi Lidio e seco ordini questa cosa, della quale ci fia da ridere tutto questo anno.' (II,6). One way of interpreting this is that Fessenio is acting as a bully partly to enhance his reputation in the eyes of someone he wants to impress - his master Lidio.

In his soliloquy which opens Act III, Fessenio reveals that he is past feeling amorous desires: '... ché io, come cose l'omo già passato di questa vita.' (III,1). In acknowledging this, Fessenio is less able to identify with those who are driven to folly by love. However, he is not altogether without feeling, since he manages to show sympathy for the desperate situation that Fulvia finds herself in when she learns that Lidio has left town unexpectedly: 'Costei sta come pò; e, per Dio, ormai è d'aver compassione di lei.' (II,5). This concern for Fulvia comes to the fore again later (Act III, Scene 14) when he protects Fulvia from the possible dire consequences of being seen dressed as a male, and resolves to find Lidio in order to reunite the two of them. But, however much sympathy he may feel for Fulvia, Fessenio does not lose sight of his own interests. In his soliloquy (Act III, Scene 19), he admits to a determination to be the one, rather than the maidservant Samia, to impart good news regarding Lidio to Fulvia in the expectation of earning a generous tip.

At the close of the play, it is Fessenio who sums up the happy state of affairs and gives the valedictory address to the audience, from which one might infer that the

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<sup>195</sup> For a stage performance, a darker rendition rather than just a light-hearted frolic, would be open to the director and actors. Padoan sums up Fessenio's behaviour towards Calandro thus: 'egli si diverte a straziare' which suggests he sees a strong element of intentional cruelty. *La Calandra*, Introduction, p. 28.

playwright wanted to seal Fessenio's character as a good-natured prankster rather than an as a more brutal, disruptive force.

Fessenio is very much in the tradition of theatrical male servants who cunningly campaign in favour of the young against the interests of the elder figures of authority. However, he is saved from being merely a stock character in that he is seen to express cognisance of, and increasing compassion towards, the tribulations of Fulvia and is, at certain points, allowed to voice his own needs. In addition, Fessenio acts as a metaphorical gatekeeper for the audience: for certain characters such as Fulvia, he invites us to share in their emotional struggles, but for others, including his young master Lidio, Fessenio steers us to view them with wry detachment, irrespective of whether their affairs are going well or badly.<sup>196</sup>

As a general rule, most of the servant figures are closely tied to the actions and fortunes of their masters. A divergence from this occurs when the master is absent and therefore the scope for acting disloyally without immediate discovery is considerably increased. Pilucca, together with his fellow servant Marabeo from *Gli Straccioni*, illustrate this situation.

Pilucca returns, after a long absence in a vain search abroad for his master, to his mistress's household. After establishing to the best of their satisfaction that their master is dead, Marabeo and Pilucca pledge to help each other to steal money and goods from their master and mistress' household. As Pilucca approaches his old working quarters, he declares: 'Sarà bene che me ne vada a beber un tratto col fattore e rinnovar la lega con lui di robbar la padrona.' (I,4). However nefarious or treacherous the schemes of Marabeo and Pilucca appear, this negative aspect is offset by a sympathetic insight into their situation, one of poverty and hardship:

MARABEO: Si questa fedeltà e queste conscienze son cose da morirsi di fame e di freddo. (I, 4)

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<sup>196</sup> This role, as an intermediary between cast and audience, has its antecedents in ancient Roman plays. In his introduction to four comedies by Plautus, Erich Segal quotes Gratwick: "The slave is [...] at once a member of the audience and of the cast, the director of the action, and the intermediary between us and the more exotic characters. There is, as it were, no actor behind the mask of the slave." (Gratwick, *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ii. 107), Plautus, *Four Comedies*, trans. by Erich Segal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xxii.

Here, as in later episodes, a resort to crime is adduced as the only way out of extreme penury.

In the first half of the play, the main focus is on the uneasy relationship between Marabeo, Pilucca and Nuta (a female servant) in a household setting. But the opening scene of the play features Pilucca as newly arrived back on the streets of Rome after a long absence. Here Pilucca feels no obligation to help his travelling companion Demetrio, despite Pilucca belonging to the servant class and Demetrio to the gentry. Of the three characters featured in this scene, it is only Barbagrìgia, the print-shop owner, who is altruistic; both Demetrio and Pilucca are preoccupied with their own needs.

It is only with the eventual appearance of Cavaliere Giordano that there are any direct servant/master interactions; this occurs as late as the fourth Act. In the opening dialogue with his master, Pilucca, with some justification, declares that he has sacrificed much for his master's sake: 'Sono stato in galera per amor vostro e per cercar di voi.' (IV,2). During the ensuing conversation, however, Pilucca mocks Giordano's descent into misery because of unrequited love, although he finishes with this more sympathetic note: 'Adagio; col tempo si maturano le nespole.' (IV,2). In contrast to Marabeo's continued stubbornness in the final scene of the play after these two have been apprehended, Pilucca shows due contrition for his wrongdoing and a desire to lead an honest life henceforth: '... da qui inanzi volemo esser uomini da bene.' (V,5).

This play presents a colourful portrait of 'life below stairs' and one of its compelling aspects is the contrasting strategies and attitudes of the two male servants. Although they are both willing partners in a scam to embezzle money from their employers and frustrate a marriage which would be to their detriment, Marabeo is presented as a hardened criminal who plans ahead and is insouciant of the impact on others of his various criminal acts, whereas Pilucca comes across as more of an opportunist: he will take advantage in the absence of any supervision but when confronted with authority switches to a more compliant stance.

Giorgetto from *L'Assiuolo* embodies the archetypal loyal and dedicated servant, one who uses his greater knowledge, intelligence and insight into the ways of the world to promote the welfare and success of his young master, Giulio. This loyalty

springs from more than just contractual obligation but from a genuine devotion: 'l'ho piacere d'esser atto a farvi servizio.' (I,1). Giorgetto bends over backwards not to offer any criticism of his master's dilatory ways regarding his studies (Giulio is a student in his first year at the local university). Later on in their discussion, Giorgetto reveals a crude attitude towards pursuing females, in contrast to his master's more romantic one. He only considers the practical aspects of his master gaining the sexual favours of the woman he is pursuing; he voices no opinion as to its morality. However, this ruthless pragmatism seems to apply only to his advice regarding the pursuit of females, married or unmarried. When Giulio muses over whether he has been too selfless for his own good concerning his male friend Rinuccio, Giorgetto praises rather than criticises his master's regard for his friend: 'Non vi pentite del ben far, né d'aver fatto piacere a uno amico s'è fatto.' (III,1). In his closing remarks at the end of Act IV, Scene 3 Giorgetto indicates that he intends to spend the rest of that night enjoying the pleasures of a brothel.<sup>197</sup> However, this is a rare episode of Giorgetto thinking purely of his own pleasures. More typical is the exchange in the final scene of the play between master and servant, where Giulio hints that he would like to reward his servant, but Giorgetto rebuffs this: 'Non cortigianerie, padrone, i' son sempre ristorato da voi.' (V,8). This cements the impression of Giorgetto as a selfless and dedicated servant.

Regarding morality there are contrary strands in the behaviour and attitude of Giorgetto: his expenditure of time and effort over and above the call of duty to serve his master can be seen as laudable, but the end he is serving - that of a blatant act of adultery, is more questionable. Moreover, Giorgetto exhibits male chauvinism in a more blatant way than either his master or his master's friend Rinuccio dare do. He promotes loyalty and self-sacrifice between males but regards females as mere sex objects.

I shall lastly examine in this sub-section the Marescalco, the eponymous hero of Aretino's play. Although employed in the service of the Duke it can be inferred that, unlike a domestic servant, he does not live under the same roof as the Duke. He thus

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<sup>197</sup> This is in line with a common supposition of these plays: that the lower classes are more interested in short-term sexual satisfaction, whereas the upper classes are keener to establish long-term attachments. Even the most urbane and articulate servant seems not to escape from this correlation. (See also Samia (p. 115 below) whose brief sexual dalliance with her lover Lusco contrasts with her mistress's deep commitment to Lidio.)

has a greater degree of autonomy but how much autonomy forms the central thrust of this play: does he obey or disobey the edict from the Duke that he must wed? Is he free to discuss the rights and wrongs of the matter with others?

Aside from the humour generated by the *beffa* whereby the Marescalco is gulled into thinking that the Duke has issued a solemn edict that he get married, this play can be seen as a study into split loyalties: does the Marescalco forego all consideration of his own welfare in order to comply with the orders of the Duke and appease the expectations of the wider court by taking a wife, or does he stoutly defend his right to continue to live singly? In contrast to the young noblemen who are manifestly discontent with being celibate and who pursue their romantic or sexual goals with dogged, sometimes ruthless, determination, the Marescalco here is seen at the outset of the play to be living a happy, comfortable life as a singleton until he is enjoined by seigniorial edict to wed.<sup>198</sup> There are firm indications early on that he has a deeply ingrained aversion to the notion of sharing his life and home with a female. In conversation with the Pedant, he expresses the idea of having a wife imposed upon him as a punishment for past sins: ‘ma di punire tutte le mie colpe con la crudele penitenza de la moglie.’ (I,9). In conversation with his Old Nurse, the Marescalco articulates the idea of rights rather than responsibilities, a desire to retain as much freedom as possible: ‘Io vo’ vivere a mio modo, dormir con chi mi piace, mangiare di ciò che me gusta, senza rimbrotti di moglie.’ (II,6). This reveals a somewhat adolescent and self-centred attitude to life rather than that of a responsible adult.

At various times in the play, religious concepts are debated: in Act I, Scene 9, the Marescalco points to the priestly ideal that it is laudable to lead a celibate life, although this is immediately countered by the Pedant who cites the biblical edict to be fruitful and multiply. In the dilemma over whether to take a wife or not, the Marescalco focuses on his own feelings and concerns without at all considering those of his prospective wife and only marginally those of the court circle in which he lives. However, in mitigation of this, he is seen not to be swayed in his deliberations by the promise of a substantial dowry or the assertion that this prospective bride is beautiful,

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<sup>198</sup> The Marescalco has this much in common with Santilla from *La Calandra*: both are pressured into getting married by powerful authority figures, he by the Duke and she by her guardian. In addition, they are both at some stage paired up (or threatened to be paired up) with partners of the same sex, the Marescalco through choice and Santilla through her assumption of a male identity.



virtuous and well-born, as attested by Messer Jacopo at their first meeting.<sup>199</sup> In a similar vein in Act V, when the Count and the Knight inform the Marescalco that the Duke, over and above other promised benefits, is prepared to make him a knight, he scorns such honours:

In fine io ho inteso che come un signore vuol dar lo incenso a uno, lo fa cavaliere.  
E sta bene cotal nome a chi ha più bisogno di reputazione che di roba [...] cavaliere senza entrata è un muro senza croci, il quale è scompisciato da ognuno  
(V,2)

This more noble side of the Marescalco is first evidenced during a soliloquy where he deliberates on whether it is worthwhile to remain in court circles: ‘mi fu pur detto che in queste maladette corti non c’è se non invidia e tradimenti e tristo a chi meno ci puote.’ (I,8). The suggestion here is that the Marescalco possesses an innate integrity which he fears may be corrupted by remaining within a society of such compromised values.

Although the Marescalco is the target of an elaborate prank, he is not depicted as an object of outright ridicule and one who deserves an ignominious fate; rather he is portrayed sympathetically as an honourable man torn between duty and personal preference. Moreover, the Duke and his subordinates devise an intrigue that only temporarily discomforts him; the denouement frees him from the terrible fate he has been dreading. In this, his fellow members of the court are seen to regard him as someone sufficiently valued not to merit any long-term punishment and someone big-hearted enough to take a joke.<sup>200</sup> There is an implied tolerance of homosexual activity, even between an older man and an adolescent.<sup>201</sup> However, this should not be taken as

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<sup>199</sup> ‘Oltre l’essere bella, virtuosa e ben nata, intendo che ti da quattro mila scudi di dote.’, *Il Marescalco* (I,2).

<sup>200</sup> Through this drama, Aretino conveys the notion that so-called sexual deviation, within a larger moral framework, is a negligible matter compared to the vices of disloyalty, material greed, and ruthless self-promotion.

<sup>201</sup> *Il Marescalco* may not be such a wild, libertarian fantasy but closer to reality. Gunsberg quotes an extract from a report in the sixteenth century by the Scottish traveller Lithgow: “for beastly Sodomy, it is rife here [Padua] as in Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, Venice, Ferrara, Genoa, Parma not being exempted, nor yet the smallest village of Italy: A monstrous filthiness, and yet to them a pleasant pastime, making songs and singing Sonets of the beauty and pleasure of their Bardassi, or buggerd boyes.” (Taylor 1953, p. 150)’, *Gender...*, p. 67.

an across-the-board condonement; it applies only to those in more lowly, anonymous positions.<sup>202</sup>

Looking at female servants, since they feature less frequently (in parallel with less frequent appearances of their mistresses), any overall picture adduced for the morality aspect of this category will necessarily be sketchy. Moreover, their limited power, not just in comparison with household heads but with male servants, means that they have less scope to act either for the benefit or detriment of others.

Samia, servant to Fulvia in *Calandra*, is neither an ultra loyal servant nor a treacherous one. In an early monologue, she voices concern that her mistress's affair with the youth Lidio will be discovered. She also expresses compassion for lovers in general: 'Bene è vero che chi ha amore in seno sempre ha li sproni al fianco. Or voglia il cielo che a bene ne esca.' (II,7). In a similar vein, Samia sympathises not just with her mistress, Fulvia, but also with the lot of women in general: 'Oh, povere e infelice donne! a quanto male siamo noi sottoposte quando ad Amore sottoposte siamo!' (III,6). With this utterance couched in such a philosophical tone, Samia steps beyond her role as a servant to assume momentarily the role of one-woman chorus. However, two scenes further on she shows herself to be in a much more personal, self-serving frame of mind when she learns that her mistress will be out of the house for some time and takes the opportunity to entertain her lover: 'Matto è chi non sa pigliare e' piaceri quando può averli.' (III,8) The exchange between Fulvia and Samia at the beginning of Act IV shows the latter's vain side, which her mistress is contemptuous of:

SAMIA: Vo su, pel velo.

FULVIA: Che velo? Bestia! Tira via così; vola. (IV,1)

However, elsewhere Samia is bold and assertive in furthering her mistress's cause. She tries hard, under trying circumstances, to carry out the tasks with which she has been

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<sup>202</sup> Larivaille points out that Aretino was of the view that moral responsibility should be linked to degree of power held by the individual: 'In altri termini, condannando nei *gran maestri* quei peccati che considera con indulgenza nei comuni mortali, postula che gli uomini non siano uguali davanti alla legge morale e rivendica una gerarchizzazione delle responsabilità [...] Sono dunque in particolare responsabili gli individui che, in grazia della loro *virtù* o della *fortuna*, per riprendere i termini di Machiavelli, sono i garanti dell'ordine morale. Proprio per questo, saranno molto da biasimare se sbandano nel loro comportamento, cosa tollerabile in un uomo di rango inferiore o nei giovani.' p. 342; 'la pubblica moralità dipende più dall'esempio che viene dall'alto.', *Pietro Aretino...*, p. 351. In terms of my thesis, the suggestion here is that the moral dimension is ideally viewed through that of authority.

entrusted, as in Act V, Scene 1 when she tries to give a bag of money to Lidio, but is ultimately frustrated since before her stand two figures who both look like and claim to be him.

Samia, despite occasionally being on the receiving end of some brusque treatment from her mistress, remains loyal to her and sympathetic to her plight, although she does not always place her mistress's concerns above her own. Samia's readiness to imagine herself in the shoes of those in distress provides a counterpoint to the male servant Fessenio's indifference to, or even pleasure in, the travails of others.

The Old Nurse (*balia*) in *Il Marescalco* is even less central to the storyline than is Samia to that of *La Calandra*: the Old Nurse is merely one of several who express an opinion on the Marescalco's proposed marriage. In her first appearance, in conversation with Giannicco, she is egotistical enough to claim some of the credit for what she regards as a fortuitous turn of events – the imminent marriage of the Marescalco: 'le mie orazioni, i miei digiuni faranglino far questo passo.' (I,4). Moreover, she sees this prospective marriage initially in terms of her own future welfare: 'Ella sarà la suppa della mia vecchiezza.' (I,4). But she then goes on to list the advantages that would accrue to the Marescalco himself if he were to marry.

In a subsequent conversation with the Marescalco (Act II, Scene 6) in seeing his state of desperation, the Old Nurse offers a possible way out of his plight: invoking an occult ritual to deflect the Duke's attention away from the marriage. In Act IV, Scene 7, the Old Nurse tries to save the Marescalco from himself but, because of his continual obstinacy and verbal abusiveness, she temporarily gives up on him. However, later on she relents and, by the middle of the final Act, is convinced that his innate good nature will return to him: 'Passatagli la stizza, è meglio che il pane.' (V,7).

If the Old Nurse looks upon some members of this close-knit society with motherly concern, there is a striking passage which she lambasts a whole swathe of members of the court:

Qual limosina può far maggiore, che fargli torre questa moglie, dando esempio a' ribaldoni, ai ghiotoni, i quali vanno dietro a le gagliofferie, che ogni dì se ne dovrebbe abbruciare un centinaio. (II, 4)<sup>203</sup>

Although the Old Nurse shows occasional flashes of self-interest, on the whole she has a generous nature, especially to her old charge when she senses the distress he is suffering. The figure of the Old Nurse is a plausible mix of selflessness and selfishness.

The activities of Madonna Agnola in *L'Assiuolo* extend beyond the confines of the household she serves in, that of Messer Ambrogio. Her main role in the play is as a confidante and adviser to the two principal young men, Giulio and Rinuccio. She is depicted as helpful but not entirely altruistic. In her first appearance, it becomes clear that she expects some form of payment for any information given or service rendered. Although she does not explicitly condemn Rinuccio's pursuit of Madonna Oretta, she voices reservations, interrupting at one point to opine that his romantic passion should be dampened down rather than stoked: 'È vero; ma sul fuoco, a volerlo spegnere, bisogna gettarvi acqua, non zolfo.' (I,2).

It is also apparent here that she is reluctant to trust people whom she barely knows and is too ready to spot hypocrisy or infer base motives to others' actions: 'Quella pinzochera bigia, che va tuttavia per queste chiese con una filza tanto lunga di paternostri, sempre biasciando pissi pissi.'; and 'si, da cotesta spigolistra picchiapetto.' (I,2). She has not a good word to say about her master Ambrogio or fellow servant Giannella: 'Quello stregone di messer Ambrogio, e quel pazzo alla sanese di Giannella.' (I,2). Her negative verdict on the former has some justification, but her views of the servant appear to be born from a blind prejudice regarding his origins.<sup>204</sup> Act II, Scene 5 depicts Agnola in a more favourable light. She is here apologetic for causing possible inconvenience to Rinuccio and also claims that she would do him favours irrespective of whether there was any reward attached. For the remainder of this scene, Agnola is shown to be keen to assist Rinuccio in his scheme to bed Oretta.

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<sup>203</sup> This rant appears incongruous with the Old Nurse's gentler tones of rebuke elsewhere and reads more like an artificially inserted diatribe coming directly from the playwright himself.

<sup>204</sup> Mockery towards or belittlement of the Sienese appears elsewhere in *commedia erudita*: in Ariosto's *I Suppositi* it is a Sienese traveller Filogono who is easily gulled into swallowing an absurd fiction and to masquerade as the father of one of the young protagonists; in Aretino's *La Cortigiana*, Maco da Siena is a figure of ridicule.

The characterisation of Agnola sits in the tradition of the servant aiding and abetting the love interests of the younger generation and against the arrogance and hypocrisy of the older male heads of household. However, she is portrayed as a less partisan figure than the male servants typified by Giorgetto and Fessenio who give unqualified support and assistance to their young masters, however dubious their causes. Madonna Agnola is an independently-minded female who voices qualms about the morality of the action of even those she nominally supports. She manages to overcome her reservations concerning Giulio's and Rinuccio's scheme partly from a desire to see comeuppance for her brutal and unreasonable master Ambrogio and partly, one can infer, from a genuine liking for these youths. Agnola is less a theatrical standby of the egregiously naive or incompetent maidservant, but a more plausible figure, one who is able to judge the rights and wrongs of others' actions and help or hinder accordingly.

One sees in this cross-section of plays a wide diversity of servants as regards the moral dimension, ranging from the most altruistic and morally upright to the most self-serving and insouciant to society's mores and sense of fairplay. I would assert that it is this latter category (exemplified by the arch-schemer Giorgetto) that is the least realistic and owes more to theatrical tradition. Such figures are a stock device by which the young sons of a bourgeois household are able to advance towards their dubious goals.<sup>205</sup> Moreover, having servant figures as initiators or at least facilitators of the nefarious enterprises of their young masters renders the latter figures less culpable, if one subscribes to the notion that youth is rarely innately bad but susceptible to the corrupting influence of older, more disreputable, associates. Such a construction allows for the noble or bourgeois class to be seen retaining a vestige of integrity.<sup>206</sup>

These theatrical servants sometimes embody a very old trope: the device whereby the 'bad' angel of a man's conscience is always waging war against his 'good' angel. In

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<sup>205</sup> In part a theatrical device, but partly based on a reality, since young well-to-do males did spend a lot of time with their servants: 'Nelle case più ampie e ricche si rinvengono anche piccoli letti a rotelle, che si fanno scivolare di giorno sotto i letti più grandi, nei quali dormono di notte i servitori accanto al padrone o alla padrona di casa.', Paul Larivaille, *La Vita Quotidiana in Italia ai Tempi di Machiavelli* (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1979), p. 260. Of course, this is merely evidence of close physical proximity between master and servant, not of any empathy a servant may have for his master.

<sup>206</sup> This would apply to the Giorgetto and Giulio pairing but not to Fessenio and Lidio, the latter clearly depicted as determined to pursue an illicit affair, irrespective of any encouragement or discouragement from others.

the opening act of *Calandra* the servant Fessenio serves as a human embodiment of the former, with Lidio's old tutor Polinico in the latter role, when the young Lidio is contemplating pursuing a married female. If Lidio had yielded to the arguments of the 'good' angel, then no intrigue would have then ensued. In *L'Assiuolo* there is no good angel to counter Giorgetto's encouragement of Giulio's plan of seduction, unless you count the few words of admonishment from the maidservant Agnola. For the Marescalco, one perspective would have the encouragers of his prospective marriage as the good angels, the opponents as the bad angels; an alternative viewpoint would posit the opposite equation, in which loyalty to one's own conscience rather than to an external authority is to be lauded.

Fessenio and Giorgetto are artificial composites, servant figures who are simultaneously uncritical of their masters' intended wrongdoing but are loyal and self-sacrificing beyond the call of duty. I would contend that it is the more self-serving servants, as exemplified by Marabeo and Pilucca, who provide a picture closer to that of real-life servants.<sup>207</sup> This pair could be described as 'lovable rogues', in that their nefarious schemes are driven by an understandable desire to pull themselves out of abject poverty by whatever means available, whether honest or dishonest.

For female servants we are left with a motley collection of rather peripheral characters: the fussy and gossipy old nursemaid to the Marescalco, the obtuse but redoubtable Samia, maidservant to the middle-aged Fulvia in *La Calandra*, and Aurelia, the outspoken maidservant who affronts the mores of the more genteel Margherita in *Il Negromante* (Act I, Scene 1). There is no female servant figure equivalent to Giorgetto, i.e. there is no female servant who is pro-active in fighting her mistress's cause. In the rare cases where a nobly-born young female appears accompanied by a female servant, the latter's role is invariably limited to just lending a sympathetic ear.<sup>208</sup> It is only by the time we get to *L'Assiuolo* (written towards late 1540s) that we are presented with a more rounded female servant, that of Agnola who does encroach a small way into the

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<sup>207</sup> Borsellino gives a similar verdict to the play as a whole: '*Gli Straccioni* hanno un forte colorito locale. Nessun altro testo evoca tanti personaggi storicamente ricostruibili. Caro assimila questa realtà [...] rinuncia alla tipologia e agli schema di derivazione plautina e punta nella singolarità di personaggi.', Nino Borsellino and Roberto Merairi, *Il Teatro del Cinquecento* (Bari: Editori Laterza, 1979), p. 43.

<sup>208</sup> At the beginning of Ariosto's *I Suppositi* the opening scene is between the young well-to-do female, Polinesta, and her maidservant (*Nutrice*) in which Polinesta reveals the true identity of the male with whom she has become romantically involved.

territory hitherto reserved for male servants: viz. that of an aider and abetter of a devious enterprise.

## YOUNG NOBLE MALES

I shall now look at the young sons of well-to-do households, although sometimes these figures are of sufficient age and independence to be able to operate away from, sometimes a great distance from, the original parental household. In the vast majority of these cases, the young gentleman in question has brought at least one servant along with him. I shall try to ascertain where the young male character's loyalty lies: towards his parents, other members of his family, towards his peers, towards his love interest, toward himself, or even more narrowly, solely towards his own libido? The principal trait that these well-born young adult sons share, whether still remaining in the family household of their birth or, following upheavals in their infancy, resettling in new households, is their passion for and pursuit of females, usually chaste young maidens but can include young married women (invariably partnered to much older husbands), older married women or even courtesans.

The youth Lidio has few antecedents in *commedia erudita*, appearing in the theatrical presentation *La Calandra* during Carnival in 1513. Despite the impropriety of his affair with a married woman, through which he hopes to derive material benefits as well as sexual satisfaction, he pursues this affair with nonchalant disdain for anyone who criticises him for it. Dismissing dire warnings and appeals to his conscience from his tutor Polinico, Lidio is determined to pursue his adulterous love affair with Fulvia and is careless as to the consequences. He tries to formulate some rather clumsy justifications for continuing the affair, though eventually concedes that the only excuse he can offer is that he is under a compulsion: '... e mi sforza ad amare questa nobil donna più che me stesso.' (I,2). From then onwards until the beginning of the final Act, Lidio is consigned to the periphery of the action: he rarely appears in person, although is often referred to by others, in particular Fulvia and the two male servants. Through these reports, we, together with the forlorn Fulvia, are led to believe that, whether through deliberate cruelty or careless indifference, Lidio has allowed Fulvia to remain

in a state of emotional turmoil and does nothing to clarify his intentions towards her.<sup>209</sup> In the final scene of the play, where a happy reconciliation between Lidio and his long-lost sister occurs, he appears for the first time as an upright figure: he shows a deep affection and obligation towards his sister. Here he is in a more reflective mood: 'E tu, sorella, tanto più cara mi sei quanto io per te oggi salvato mi trovo; ove che, se tu non eri, forse ucciso stato sarei.' (V,12).

Lidio's loyalty and concern for his sister redeem him to a small extent. I would surmise that his initial portrayal as a insouciant hedonist and final appearance as a manifestly more selfless and caring person in the denouement without any interim incremental changes in character are indicative of a case where exigencies of plot overrode any intention to present a consistent set of character traits or plausible character development. Since the denouement is often the most artificially constructed part of the play with a contrived happy ending, often with scant regard to behaviour patterns exhibited in earlier scenes, the image of Lidio as an egotistical figure, showing minimal pangs of conscience and little concern for the feelings of others, remains dominant.

Camillo, one of the two young men of noble birth featured in *Il Negromante*, is, in contrast to Lidio, not only keen to act morally but also one who takes great pains to proclaim his integrity. In conversation with the elder Maximo, he impresses upon Maximo his innocence and vows that his version of events is the exact truth; moreover, if that is proved not to be the case, he consents to grievous retribution:

...e se truovi ch'io ci abbia  
più de la verità giunto una minima  
parola, ti consento e do licenzia  
che mi tragga la lingua, gli occhi e l'anima; (V,1)

The register of this speech emphasises the highly strung nature of Camillo, his tendency towards hyperbole and penchant for playing the martyr. During the scene following, when Camillo encounters Nebbio, he is filled with rage and wants to exact his revenge on a person to whom he has given his trust:

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<sup>209</sup> A possible interpretation of his behaviour is that he is so pre-occupied with finding his sister that he neglects Fulvia. However, this priority is not explicitly voiced by Lidio himself.



Ah, giotton, baro, traditor e perfido,  
E tu e tuo patron! Così si trattano  
Quei ch'alla fede vostra si commettono? (V,2)

Although an ardent pursuer of the object of his desire and one who is easily duped by the necromancer, Camillo comes across as a sympathetic character: a lovable buffoon or innocent abroad. Although to a large extent a cartoon character,<sup>210</sup> his persistent endeavour to do the 'right thing' and his undoubted patience, having, unsuccessfully for five years, tried to get the maiden Emilia to reciprocate his love, lend him a certain appeal.

Next is the figure of Tindaro from *Gli Straccioni*. He apprises his good friend and supporter Demetrio of his change of name – to Gisippo, but offers no reason for this. However, we can infer from later scenes that he has done this to slyly avoid his pursuers rather than face them. A great proportion of his early utterances concern his devotion and attachment to his erstwhile lover, Giuletta – 'erstwhile' because he believes her to be dead. Even when his friend Demetrio points out that to refuse the prospect of marriage to a rich, young widow would affect his as well as Tindaro's fortunes, he remains obstinate. To counter Demetrio's line of argument, Tindaro declares that it would be a greater sin to marry someone whose love he is incapable of reciprocating:

O non sarebbe il maggior tradimento del mondo a pigliar una simil gentildonna  
che tanto liberamente mi dona l'animo, la persona, la roba sua; e che io non  
l'amassi poi con tutto il core, come merita? (II,1)

These reservations are eventually set aside, but even then Tindaro makes it clear that it is only out of loyalty and high regard for his friend Demetrio that he has finally agreed to the marriage plan. He acknowledges his great debt to Demetrio: '...ch'io son già vinto dall'obbligo che vi tengo.' (II,1).

In his unswerving love and loyalty to Giuletta, Tindaro can be viewed as an admirable figure. However, this positive aspect is undermined by some less admirable characteristics when Tindaro's behaviour is considered in the round. From early on, his

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<sup>210</sup> It is Camillo's rival in love, Cintio, who is portrayed with greater subtlety, a figure whose trials and tribulations we more readily empathise with, rather than laugh at, as is the case with Camillo.

behaviour is highly suspect: it is revealed in Act I, Scene 3 that Tindaro was the prime mover in the abduction of Giuletta. Moreover, unlike Demetrio, Tindaro expresses no qualms over this abduction. (This would not necessarily have jarred with the audience, particularly its upper-class male members.<sup>211</sup>) When confronted by Giuletta's father and uncle and then by his intended bride's returning husband, he reveals himself to be a self-pitying coward. Giovanni and Battista overhear a slice of the conversation between Tindaro and Demetrio; from this, they are convinced that not only has Tindaro abducted their daughter/niece but has murdered her in order to move on to another victim. When they try to confront him, Tindaro can offer no explanation; he just tries to escape. He can only express what a sorry state he himself has arrived at: 'Ohimé! Sono in tanta miseria?' (III,3). Later on, Tindaro is content to go along with Demetrio's plan to evade, rather than face, Cavaliere Giordano.

Thus we see Tindaro display determination and physical force when dealing with a young woman but equivocation and cowardice towards stronger or more authoritative males; he also demonstrates that he is inadequate in sorting out his own problems, being heavily reliant on his associate Demetrio. Despite all of the above, Tindaro is ultimately presented as a sympathetic figure, indeed almost a heroic one. How is this achieved? In parallel to many other young male lovers, Tindaro is depicted as egotistical, obsessed by his own troubles, and does good only upon the prompting of others. However, these apparent weaknesses are given a positive spin in that he is shown to place love of a young woman above all other worldly concerns, including material riches and social prestige. Another major positive aspect is his loyalty and consideration shown towards his friend Demetrio. But beyond those particulars, he is presented as possessing a 'noble' nature, imparted mainly by the deference and sensitivity shown toward him by his nearest and dearest. In terms of my thesis, his negative moral profile is subsumed under a more positive authority profile.

In *L'Assiuolo*, the young well-born males Rinuccio and Giulio share a common trait: a cavalier attitude towards women; they view the married status of the objects of their desires as no bar to a determined pursuit of them. Rinuccio voices support for his

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<sup>211</sup> Andrews, discussing the plot of Ariosto's *I Suppositi*: 'The main story of illicit seduction being regularized by marriage has something about it of the medieval *novella*, and thus represents a pattern of sexual intrigue far more familiar to a courtly audience.' *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 29.

friend's methodically engineered seduction of Oretta, additionally arguing that, although reluctant at first, a young woman would quickly acquire an insatiable appetite for sex from her new lover: 'E' non è 'l primo che non vuol cenare, e poi cena per sette.' (V,2). Rinuccio reiterates this notion when he recounts his own amorous adventures in which Violante mistakes him for her sister's husband: 'ed ella salvaticchetta a ritirarsi, e dire: "Deh, messer Ambrogio, non fate, i' non voglio", e così con questo "non fate", i' non voglio", ella volle, e i' feci e refeci.' (V,2).<sup>212</sup> Rinuccio goes a lot further in his transgressions than does Giulio, in that he personally initiates a series of deceptions, one involving usurping his mother's authority by means of a forged letter, his deliberate lie to Ambrogio, his intention to make him suffer and his ruse of impersonating another in order to deceive Violante and ultimately induce her to commit adultery.

At various points there are revelations that add light and shade to Rinuccio's character. In a soliloquy, he launches into a paean of praise for his friend Giulio but from the outset this is tied to the benefits that Rinuccio has accrued from this friendship:

Di quanta utilità sia uno amico fedele, io lo provo al presente [...] lasciato da banda l'utile che da lui cavo, il quale è grandissimo, le sue cortesie, li suoi consigli m'hanno data la vita sei volte. (II,4)

In a later soliloquy, there is a strange mix of nonchalantly admitting to wrongdoing 'mettere il vecchio in chiusa' and mawkish self-pity: 'Oh a che miseria è sottoposta la vita sua d'uno amante!' (IV,1). Rinuccio recounts how he had addressed the object of his desire with the utmost decorum and solicitude: '... e chi mi parve averla addomesticata abbastanza, io le feci così quattro parole cortigiane.' (V,2). The key word here is 'addomesticata' which betrays a treatment of females akin to the taming of a wild horse. Rinuccio's 'quattro parole cortigiane' can be viewed, in light of his attitude revealed in conversation with Giulio, as insincere and just a way of giving ignoble behaviour a respectable gloss. However, the impression of a calculating and crudely self-serving figure in ruthless pursuit of sexual gratification is undercut by his

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<sup>212</sup> Perhaps we should not altogether take this crude Chauvinist attitude towards females, espoused by both Rinuccio and Giulio, at face value, since this episode may just be reflecting a recognised phenomenon: that when two young males talk of their sexual escapades, a certain macho competitiveness often comes to the fore which may belie a gentler, less aggressive attitude underneath this bravado.

seducee's sudden declaration that she has for ages been deeply enamoured of him.<sup>213</sup> Here a farcical tone comes to the fore which considerably militates against seeing Rinuccio as a distinctly disreputable figure.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, there is here the persuasive notion that as long as the outcome is satisfactory for both parties, i.e. the attraction is proved ultimately to be mutual, then all previous ruses, deceptions or even brute force can be overlooked.<sup>215</sup> If Rinuccio's treatment of women lacks gallantry, in the closing stages of the play he appears as a paragon of virtue, as a wise and compassionate arbiter who pleads for clemency for Ambrogio, for whom previously he had scant regard, in the face of the paterfamilias Uguccone's call for a more severe punishment: 'Eh, messer Uguccone, tra parenti non s'ha a tener odio.' (V,7).

Rinuccio is a clumsily constructed figure, appearing at arbitrary moments compassionate, loyal and sensitive to the plight of others, on other occasions displaying an egotistical, even ruthless, streak. He is not viewed by others as a treacherous person; indeed Giulio vouches for the honourable intentions of his friend: 'Messer Rinuccio non farebbe peggio all vostra padrona che se la fusse una sua moglie.' (I,2). Rinuccio is a strange mix of a wilful schemer and an innocent pawn, the hapless victim as well as the fortuitous beneficiary of others' machinations. In his overall presentation Rinuccio's moral profile is heavily subsumed under those of authority and intelligence: it is hard to impute wicked intentions to such a bumbling incompetent, heavily reliant on the direction of others. A favourable impression of Rinuccio is, I infer, what the playwright wished to convey to the audience: any deviousness on his part is to be overlooked, indeed admired, in the cause of bringing the villain of the play, Ambrogio, to book and for young love to triumph.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> 'Messer Rinuccio, il timor della infamia m'ha tenuto più mesi che io non v'ho dimostro l'amor ch'io vi ho portato e porto' (V,2).

<sup>214</sup> The behaviour and reactions of both the seducer and seduced in *L'Assiuolo* have strong echoes of Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, which features Callimaco being hailed as a figure to look up to and Lucrezia's abrupt transition from reluctant and chaste female to one who relishes adulterous sexual pleasure.

<sup>215</sup> This accommodating attitude has parallels in real-life practices. Andrews cites: 'Guido Ruggiero (1985) documents how seduction and even rape received mild, or suspended, punishments from Venetian law courts, if the situation was capable of being regularized by marriage.', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 39

<sup>216</sup> The fact that in the denouement the previously wayward Rinuccio is cast in the role of unofficial judge on the behaviour of others is just another element in this play's comprehensive upturning of moral outcomes, where wrongdoing is seen to be rewarded.

An overview of the young men in the plays analysed above leaves us with a picture which in the main is not too much of a departure from the young men that appear in the comedies of Terence and Plautus and in the bawdy tales of Boccaccio's *Decameron*<sup>217</sup>; the central plot invariably springs from the young man's determination to sexually possess the woman (single or married) he has become infatuated with and he will do anything, however unscrupulous, to achieve this goal. Alongside this inherited thread of shameless self-serving and insouciance, in *commedia erudita* more sympathetic traits are beginning to appear: loyalty to friends, appreciation of servants, and acknowledgement of their own inadequacies. A greater divergence from the classical world's theatrical templates lies in the occasional presentation of these young men showing concern and consideration for their parents or parental generation, and towards the feelings and welfare of the young woman whom they are pursuing.<sup>218</sup> However, this is not a chronological progression since the insouciant and hedonistic Rinuccio and Giulio of *L'Assiuolo*<sup>219</sup> appear more than a generation after Ariosto's more chivalrous figures of Cintio and Camillo in *Il Negromante*. (The difference in these two plays may be explained by the particular outcome sought by the playwright: did he want the audience to engage fully in the dilemmas and vicissitudes of stage characters with whom they could identify, or was he content to merely present a fantasy romp with unreal characters? These choices are further reflected by the dominant source material the playwright drew upon: a novelistic one in the case of Cecchi and a theatrical one in the case of Ariosto.<sup>220</sup>)

In many of these plays, there is a discernible subtext which indicates a tolerance, indeed an implicit approval, of baser animalistic instincts, in the form of youthful

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<sup>217</sup> Four out of the ten stories of Day III feature young males seducing, or being seduced by, married females.

<sup>218</sup> Andrews points to a parallel development in Sieneese theatre: 'Drawing perhaps on morality plays as well as medieval *novella*, they allowed their audiences to explore feelings of sympathy, genuine though not necessarily uncritical, for the predicament and emotions of selected characters. These characters were usually young, and included females as well as males.', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 107

<sup>219</sup> Andrews reaches this verdict: 'The amoral peak of this genre, however, is now reckoned to be Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo* [...] This is an elegant and heartless tale of symmetrical trickery, elaborating on a device first found in *Decameron* III, 6.', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 115

<sup>220</sup> Peter Brand is able to pinpoint particular influences on Ariosto: 'Ariosto took note of the increased moral seriousness of Terence which was much admired in his day: the aphorisms of Terence's comedies were much quoted in manuals of rhetoric throughout the humanist Quattrocento and these re-appear in Ariosto's comedies, as for example at the conclusion of *La Cassaria* where the errant Erofilo meekly begs his father's pardon.', Peter Brand, 'Ariosto and Classical Comedy' in *Theatre, Opera, and Performance in Italy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present: Essays in Honours of Richard Andrews*, ed. by Brian Richardson, Simon Gilson and Catherine Keen (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2004), p. 8.

virility, being allowed to override the established, though essentially artificial, societal constraints and legal obligations.<sup>221</sup> In *L'Assiuolo*, we can infer that Ambrogio's marriage to Madonna Oretta took place as a consequence of the former's wealth and professional status (as well as possible pressure from Oretta's father) rather than springing from romance or mutual sexual desire. Thus, beneath this carnivalesque inversion of social norms for comedic purposes, a satire by Cecchi on the state of marriage of his times can be faintly detected.

## YOUNG NOBLE FEMALES

I have included wives alongside daughters since, while nominally there is a difference between unmarried and married females, in *commedia erudita* this latter category appears as equally vulnerable to the libidinous desires and machinations of young gentlemen as their unmarried counterparts.

In these plays, females of the bourgeois class are often accorded a low or non-existent presence.<sup>222</sup> In *Il Negromante* the two young women, Lavinia and Emilia, who comprise the love interest of the two young blades Cintio and Camillo, are only ever referred to by others; they make no actual appearance.<sup>223</sup> Trying to reach even a cursory verdict on their behaviour from the descriptions and comments by others is difficult since they are in the main passive recipients of others (largely men's) actions. All one can infer is that they appear to co-operate fully with their menfolk's plans and fit squarely into the classical mould of demure young maidens: obliging, loyal and not of a particularly robust nature: the servant Temolo reports Lavinia as suffering from 'un svenimento d'animo.' (IV,3).

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<sup>221</sup> This still featured as a theatrical trope until relatively recent times: see Pirandello's play *Liola* of the 1920s.

<sup>222</sup> Gunsberg sums this up: 'Basically, the higher status of the female character, the less power and stage presence she can be seen to have in both visual and oral terms. Highest in social status, but not in dramatic presence, are young, nubile, virginal, beautiful, well-born (middle-class or higher) freewomen living in the household of their fathers or guardians.', *Gender...*, p. 8

<sup>223</sup> Whilst in Ariosto's most renowned work of fiction *Orlando Furioso* upper-class females feature strongly as protagonists (e.g. Angelica, Bradamante), their middle-class equivalents are conspicuous in their absence in his stage comedies. One possible explanation is that for theatre, Ariosto felt under a greater obligation to follow the convention which prescribed that stage action be confined to one outdoors' scene, under which restriction it would have been problematic to place young, well-to-do females without resorting to cross-dressing. (In his first play, *La Cassaria*, he got round this obstacle by casting the young men's love interests as slave girls.)

However, in the earlier play *Calandra* (1513), the unmarried female of noble birth, Santilla, has a sizeable role. But even here the focus is not on her romantic pursuits; she mainly serves as a vehicle for the machinations of others who have co-opted her to play a part in their scheme. In a long monologue, Santilla expresses a pang of guilt as to her inability to repay the kindness of her guardians, followed by a deliberation on the precarious position she now finds herself in:

Se io sposo costei, subito conoscerà che io femina, e non maschio, sono; e, da me scornati, el padre e la madre e la figlia potriano farmi uccidere. Negar di sposarla non posso; e, se pur niego di farlo, sdegnati, a casa maladetta me ne manderanno [...] Misera a me! Ché da uno lato ho il precipizio, da l'altro e' lupi.  
(II, 8)

Later, an entire scene is given over to a soliloquy by Santilla in which she expresses the unhappy lot of women in general. It is clear from this that she has a scrupulous conscience and agonises over how she should behave and is even wary of her own mental deliberations: 'Oh, infelice sesso femminile, che, non pur alle opere, ma ancora ai pensieri sottoposto sei!' (IV, 5). Unlike her brother Lidio, her cross-dressing is undertaken for reasons of pure survival rather than to facilitate any romantic pursuit. Although considerably less culpable in her actions than her brother, she is much more troubled in her conscience than he is.

However, Santilla is not depicted as an out-and-out saint. When agreeing to take part in the scheme to deceive Fulvia, she manages to shift the responsibility on to Ruffo and absolve herself, somewhat disingenuously, of any personal responsibility: 'Ruffo, in queste cose assai fraude intendo si fanno, e io, inesperto, facilmente potria esserci gabbato. Ma, fidandomi di te che sei il mezzano.' (II,3). There are a couple of occasions when her patience is severely tested, such that she reacts with irritation when mistaken by the maidservant Samia for her brother (Act II, Scene 2), and when she is being physically probed by Fessenio (Act V, Scene 2). The most notable deviation from her habitual modest, self-effacing, demeanour occurs at the start of the fifth Act when she brazenly competes for the sum of money proffered by Samia.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> In this scene, where Lidio's and Santilla's behaviour - one of naked greed - is a mirror image of the other, one can infer that the creation of a pleasing theatrical symmetry had overridden the maintenance of character consistency regarding Santilla. Padoan has a different take on this and sees less inconsistency:

In summary, although none of her actions is directed towards any goals of her own volition, Santilla is depicted as the character who exhibits the most conscience and subjects herself to probing examinations as to how to behave with propriety. (The older female Fulvia is depicted having similar internal deliberations over the rightness of her actions but, unlike Santilla, these spring from a compromised moral position brought about by her own wilful transgression.)

Giuletta in *Gli Straccioni* has aspects in common with Santilla: they have both been kidnapped and have had to assume a different name for a long period of time. Giuletta, after being held captive by Turks, becomes a slave girl with the new name of Agata,<sup>225</sup> first under the ownership of the servant Marabeo and then under Cavaliero Giordano, to whom Marabeo has sold her. Her first actual appearance, as late as the middle of the third Act, is brief: we see her as she is being manhandled by Marabeo and Pilucca, as a victim who has very little room for manoeuvre. In the next scene, Giuletta rages against the wrongs done to her and looks to the lawyer, Messer Rossello, to redress these wrongs. After these brief two scenes – her abduction and her subsequent rescue, she does not appear again. However, Giuletta is given an opportunity to express herself more fully later, although only by way of a letter which a male character, Demetrio, reads out.<sup>226</sup> In this letter are lengthy protestations, detailing the injuries done to her, but which also evidence a steadfastness during adversity, a willingness to undergo sacrifices and endure hardship:

Ricordatevi che per voi sono stata a tante tempeste, per voi sono venuta in preda de' corsari, per voi si può dir che io sia morta, per voi son venduta, per voi carcerata, per voi battuta. (V,2)

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'Nei lunghi anni di vita condotti come un maschio (tale da guadagnarsi l'assoluta fiducia del tutore anche sul piano del lavoro) Santilla ha acquisito modi e mentalità mascholini, trovando però nella realtà del proprio sesso continui ostacoli alla completa libertà d'azione.' *La Calandra*, Introduzione, p. 23

<sup>225</sup> This character is also referred to by an affectionate (or possibly dismissive) diminutive: 'Agatina'.

<sup>226</sup> Helena Sanson points to the debate during this period about whether literacy for young females was a desirable goal: 'As for girls, opinions on the possible benefits of education for the 'weak' sex remained contradictory and debated throughout the sixteenth century. Even though it is true that some moralists and intellectuals rejected the common view that learning might lead to loss of chastity – citing in their support numerous examples of admirable ancient and modern learned women – for the most part they expressed their perplexities about the appropriateness for the female sex to be able to read and write. Clearly moral issues were tied to these beliefs since a woman's honour was her most precious asset and literacy was seen as a potential danger to her integrity.', Helena Sanson, *Women, Language and Grammar in Italy: 1500-1900* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011), p.27.



Although she is the subject of lengthy discussion both in the first Act and in the denouement, Giuletta is not given any direct voice at those junctures. In line with many of the earlier comedies, more can be gleaned from what others say concerning her than from her own mouth. Tindaro describes her as a ‘fanciulla innocente’ (I,3). A little later on, Demetrio surmises this about her (she is assumed to be dead at this juncture):

Giuletta o non sente o non cura più queste nostre vanità; e se le sentisse e se le curasse, dovemmo credere che amasse piuttosto la quiete e l’utile e l’onor vostro che ’l dispiacere, il danno e ’l biasimo che trarrete di questa vostra vana Costanzia.  
(II,1)

Giuletta is an archetype in her display of loyalty, modesty and sense of decorum.<sup>227</sup> What makes her stand out is the degree and duration of the suffering she has had to bear and the outrages she has endured from several disparate quarters. She has been kidnapped by two men from northern Italy, then taken prisoner by Turkish pirates, kept under house arrest by a citizen of Rome and was about to be sold to another Roman citizen before being rescued. Compared to Santilla, whose cartoonish aspects overshadow any tragic ones, Giuletta qualifies as a genuine heroine: one who never buckles or gives way to self-pity whilst undergoing the most brutal and humiliating treatment. The phrase ‘grace under pressure’ could fittingly be applied to her.

The bourgeois young female featured in *L’Assiuolo*, Madonna Oretta, owes more to the novelistic tradition in which a sexually dissatisfied and neglected wife finds a more mutually respectful and sexually satisfying relationship from an outside party.<sup>228</sup> An early impression of Madonna Oretta as an upright character occurs during the first scene of the play when Giulio springs to defend her against his servant’s suggestion that she might be a lady of easy virtue. However, this image of demure innocence is somewhat modified when the maidservant Agnola reveals that Oretta, together with an

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<sup>227</sup> This type of long-suffering female figure has theatrical antecedents, among which are Lucrezia in Piccolomini’s *L’Amor Costante* (1536), the young wife in *Parthenio* (1516) and, further back, the eponymous heroine of Antonia Tanini Pulci’s tragedy *Santa Guglielma* (composed in the 1490s).

<sup>228</sup> Oretta shares some aspects of the adventure which befalls Catella in *Decameron*, Day III, Story 6. The initial spur to action for both these figures is jealousy of their husbands; each initiates a plan to catch her husband in adultery but both wind up inadvertently in the bed of a stranger. However, in the *Decameron* story, the interloper, Ricciardo Minutolo, is cast as a much more determined, at times even threatening, figure than the hapless Giulio, and Catella’s switch from chaste wife to willing adulteress is even more abrupt than that depicted for Oretta.

older woman, whom Ambrogio has designs upon, has devised a scheme to expose his adultery (I,2). Further, the local gossip Madonna Verdiana casts doubt upon Oretta's chastity during her conversation with Ambrogio: '...guardate che la non voglia; che voi potrete ben guardare.' (II,2). However, we get the opposite picture of her from the maidservant Agnola in her conversation with Rinuccio:

Come io vi dissi l'altrieri, io le sono più volte entrata così dalla lunga in qualche cosa d'amore, e d'aver delli innamorati; e l'ho trovata più da queste cose discosto che gennaio dalle rose. (II,5)

It is only in the later stages of the play that we learn which of these opposing impressions is the closer match to her true nature as revealed by her behaviour.

In the soliloquy delivered by the servant Giorgetto, he testifies that his master Giulio has got to know Oretta carnally with her consent and surmises that Oretta would welcome the sexual satisfaction she is now getting from Giulio that her husband was unable to provide: 'A madonna Oretta parrà quella di messer Giulio altra giacitura che quella del suo gocciolone.' (IV,6). This surmise proves to be accurate since, in a discussion with Giulio after their sexual liaison has taken place, Oretta takes delight in, rather than shows dismay over, her unwitting sexual liaison with Giulio. Moreover, she does not express any pangs of guilt or remorse over this; instead she disingenuously declares that that episode must have been part and parcel of a divine plan:

Poiché la pazzia sua, la gelosia mia, e l'astuzia vostra mi hanno condotto a far quello ch'io da per me mai arei fatto, i' non posso dir altro, se non che così fusse destinato da chi di noi può disporre. (V,1)

In the scene following, she reiterates this idea of divine providence and fatalism rather than confessing to any wayward behaviour on her part: 'pur sia con Dio, non siàn qui: a fine di meglio ogni cosa.' (V,2). Earlier, Oretta is given the opportunity to justify in advance any future misdemeanours on her part. In a soliloquy, she laments the lot of women in general before delineating her own grim circumstances:

E al male dell'aver il marito vecchio, s'è accozzato l'averlo geloso, geloso a torto e d'una gelosia che io non credo che la maggiore immaginare si possa; e così per la gelosia mi sono tolti gli spassi di fuori, e per la vecchiezza quelli di casa. (IV,4)

She finishes this soliloquy by declaring that she does not mind sacrificing her dignity for the laudable aim of showing up the folly of her husband. Thus her eventual adultery can be seen partly as an act of revenge, or at least redress for the iniquities she has suffered.

Oretta's speech at the start of Act V reveals a less admirable aspect of character: Oretta concedes here that her main worry is that she fears her husband will find out about the affair, broadcast it to a wider public, thus blackening her reputation: 'Messer Giulio mio [...] voi vogliate aiutarmi; accioch'io non perda in pubblico quello che voi in privato fatto mi avete.' (V,1). In the second half of this request is the wilful construing of the seduction as entirely due to Giulio without admitting to any complicity on her part. Any fear of exposure proves to be unwarranted: in the final scene in which she appears (Act V, Scene 6), Oretta manages to manipulate the evidence to exculpate herself from her husband's accusations of adultery while at the same time managing to draw attention to scandalous behaviour on his part. However, after her brother Ugucione is convinced of her innocence and of her husband's guilt, she appears more forgiving and magnanimous towards her husband: she begs Ugucione to rein back on his demand for severe punishment.

This is an interesting portrait of a female character in that it presents a new composite: the loose, lecherous married woman who manages to get one over on her hypocritical elderly husband combined with that of a demure and noble woman who has, at least on the surface, a strong religious ethic and sense of decorum. Morally Oretta is presented as an ambiguous figure: on the one hand as an honourable woman trying to maintain her marriage despite the unreasonable and brutal behaviour of her husband and, on the other, that of an unfaithful wife and sexually ravenous female.<sup>229</sup> (I suspect that the playwright Cecchi, rather than worry about any incongruity, thought that the unexpected behaviour of, and glib explanations given by, Oretta added to the overall comic impact.) Oretta's fall from grace and her brazen attempts to explain it with a

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<sup>229</sup> There is here an echo of Lucrezia from Machiavelli's *Mandragola*: both are depicted initially as married women of integrity with firm religious scruples but, once seduced, rather too readily accept it as a *fait accompli*, relishing a new found sexual satisfaction with a younger, more virile, partner. However, Lucrezia is a passive, and largely silent, object in the machinations of male characters, whereas Oretta here is more active and vocal.

specious explanation render her a more culpable, although more inventive, figure than either of her two male pursuers.

## MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD

I shall next look at the figure of Cambio from *Il Negromante* who, together with Maximo and Abondio, is part of a network of patriarchal relationships which play a crucial role in determining the outcome of the love interests of the younger generation.

Cambio is presented initially as a morally suspect person, one who has exploited his wealth and status in order to forge a liaison with a much younger female. This moral aspect is brought to the fore by his friend Lippo who queries: ‘Ah Cambio, ma l’onore? Non son simili cose vergogna qui.’ [I,2] At the start of a long discussion between these two, Cambio disavows money as a motive for the marriage; instead he gives the impression that he is unashamedly enjoying the fruits of a relationship with a comely young girl:

L’essere

Lei gentil, graziata e bella giovane,

Mi dà d’ogni stagione buona rendita.<sup>230</sup> (I,2)

Cambio asserts that this is in line with the permissive mores of Cremonese society which is met by Lippo’s caustic summing up:

Fusse stata la contagion de’ pessimi

Costumi qui, di se presto corromperti.<sup>231</sup> (I,2)

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<sup>230</sup> Gunsberg espouses the same idea in a serious polemic: ‘Social relations in early sixteenth-century Italy are informed by a fast-developing market capitalism, to produce a fetishism of commodities which extends to the female body. In the comedies the female body is particularly commodified as merchandise in its central role in the marriage market, especially as far as the merchant class is concerned.’, *Gender...*, p. 56

<sup>231</sup> Here Cambio’s adopted town Cremona is contrasted with the stricter morality of Florence, Cambio’s home town. This could be construed as a rather convoluted homage to Florence as the acme of Italian virtue for which Ariosto needed a negative counterpoint and Cremona fitted the bill. Since Cremona had been a client town of republican Venice between 1499 and 1509, the choice of this town may have had less to do with any reputation Cremona had for lax standards than a gratuitous sideswipe at Cremona’s political alliances. (During this period, Ariosto’s home town Ferrara aligned itself with France and the German ‘empire’ against both Papal and Venetian claims on its sovereignty.)

However, soon after this, in a long exposition, Cambio is able to detail the true state of affairs which reveals that he is, rather than an opportunistic hedonist, someone who has taken much trouble and willingly incurred considerable sacrifice for the benefit of others: firstly in moving to Cremona to support his widowed sister and then to help facilitate the youth Cintio's relationship with Lavinia.<sup>232</sup>

Cambio behaves decently towards members of his own class, young and old alike, but not so magnanimously towards the lower orders. When he requests that the porter transport some large vases of oil, the porter protests that the journey is at least two miles. Cambio curtly and sarcastically dismisses this protest: 'Se ve ne fusse sei! Vuoi, se non, essere pagato?' (IV,4). Similarly, in Act IV, Scene 5, he seems to take a little too much pleasure in seeing the servant Nebbio's distress as his plans go awry. On the other hand, he takes trouble to reassure the noble young man Cintio that things are not as bleak as he imagines.

Cambio is not altogether a convincing character, particularly as one who would willingly sacrifice his good name for the benefit of a non-relative. However, his occasional impatience with members of the lower orders does chime in well with the idea of a successful businessman used to supervising others. His initial presentation as a shameless flouter of convention, his playful name Cambio, suggestive of a financier rather than just a trader in merchandise, and his role as a somewhat vacillating supporter of the heroic Temolo may be indicative of a reservation felt by Ariosto: that commerce was not an entirely respectable profession.<sup>233</sup>

The overall presentation of the trio Cambio, Maximo and Abondio as patriarchal figures is positive; they are unlike most of the paternal figures of Roman comedy and earlier Renaissance comedy (including Ariosto's own first two plays) who are cast as

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<sup>232</sup> In the later version of *Il Negromante* (1530) this merchant figure, now named Fazio, is cast as a more straightforward character. He loses the daredevil aspects of Cambio; instead of the pretend husband of the young Lavinia, he now appears in the role of her step-father. In losing the moral complexity of Cambio committing subterfuge for ultimately a good cause, Fazio is rendered a blander figure.

<sup>233</sup> Ariosto's equivocation here may be attributable to his upbringing in the upper stratum of Ferrarese society, as suggested by Beecher: 'The Este regime was a true feudal seignory, and had certainly obstructed the development of a strong merchant class comparable to what had arisen in Florence [...] Ariosto came to live in this climate of rigid political absolutism in close proximity to the lords of Ferrara.' Donald Beecher, Massimo Ciavolella and Roberto Fedi, *Ariosto Today: Contemporary Perspectives* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 72.

obstacles that frustrate the love ambitions of the younger generation; these three are active promoters of successful, legally sanctioned, romantic partnerships of the young. In this, the element of *rovesciamento* in *Il Negromante* is much reduced. The younger male characters form the main target of extensive, though affectionate, lampooning rather than the older generation, although the latter is not portrayed without defects. (Since Maximo emerges as an enhanced character in the denouement, we can infer that the brunt of Ariosto's satire is directed at the practice of necromancy rather than at the folly of its victims.)

The next figure I consider is Messer Ambrogio from Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo*. He is an older man of high status who is married to a much younger female. In his desire to commit adultery without others, apart from his faithful servant, finding out, he has kinship with the figure of Calandro. But whereas Calandro, whose egregious stupidity goes beyond the limits of accepted theatrical caricature<sup>234</sup>, is subjected to ridicule at the outset from everyone, Ambrogio is shown, at least initially, to be taken seriously by his opponents.

In his first appearance, a soliloquy (Act II, Scene 1), Messer Ambrogio appears as an arch-hypocrite: whilst freely confessing to planning to pursue a woman other than his wife without a pang of conscience, he castigates others – local students and his own household servants – for their readiness to seduce his wife. In the scene following, his jealousy takes on an even more brutal form when he speaks of the possible necessity of castrating his servant Giannella: 'e poi i' credo che e' sia impotente; che s'io credessi altrimenti, o e' non mi bazzicherebbe per casa, e io lo castrerei.' (II,2).

It is evident by the second Act that Ambrogio has lost all regard for and, crucially, any sexual interest in his wife. Nevertheless, he keeps a watchful eye over her and is still racked by jealousy. Ambrogio is censorious towards what he sees as illicit pleasures of others, including those of the nuns at the convent his wife visits. He puts the worst construction on hearing that Madonna Violante, his sister-in-law, has taken items of men's clothing to the convent: 'I' dubito, che queste non sieno da pazzi,

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<sup>234</sup> Of his depiction, Guidotti cites the opinion of Giraldo Cinthio 'nei *Discorsi* l'autore si scaglia con rabbia proprio contro la commedia del Bibbiena in quanto modello antiariostesco: critica l'eccessiva caratterizzazione in direzione del ridicolo nel caso del vecchio sciocco, fuori dalle norme del *decorum*.' *Scenografie...*, p. 49.

e cattivi.' (III,4). When Ambrogio's scheme for bedding Madonna Anfrosina begins to unravel disastrously, his vindictive nature is revealed in a brutal form: not only does he verbally abuse his servant but threatens violence: 'I' vo' che tu rimanga il cacasanguè che ti venga, pezzo d'asino. Lievati di costi ch'i' non so chi mi si tiene ch'io non ti dia questo stocco più diritto ch'i' so sulla testa.' (IV,2); and against others he threatens this petty act of revenge: 'ma s' i' vivo, io me ne vendicherò. Se non altro, i' farò perder loro una causa, che io ho in mano di loro.' (IV,9). However, there is a passage (Act III, Scene 5) in which he treats Giannella with more respect, and considers his point of view. More tellingly when Giannella 'spills the beans' in the denouement (Act V, Scene 6), Ambrogio refrains from insulting or threatening him. Ambrogio is eventually outmanoeuvred by his female relations, is shamed in front of others and is obliged to beg for clemency. But, rather than confess to any wrongdoing, Ambrogio protests that he has been unfairly judged: '... che, per un poco d'erroruzzo di fava ch'io ho fatto, mi vuol morto.' (V,7)

In the early stages of the play, Ambrogio emerges as a lustful, ruthless, distrustful and miserly person and by the closing stages this negative image is further tarnished by his lack of repentance. Although Ambrogio is primarily a collection of exaggerated negative traits, his occasional show of regard for his servant saves him from being an out-and-out caricature.

## LONE FIGURES

Next comes the swathe of characters who have no familial or directly personal interest in the intrigues of the protagonists. They are characters who solely appear as sponsors, advisors or confidantes to the major characters (in this last aspect, they have much in common with the servant figure).

By dint of setting his play *Il Marescalco* in an aristocratic court rather than a bourgeois neighbourhood, Aretino more plausibly introduces and brings to interact with the protagonist, the Marescalco, a whole array of characters who are neither his blood relatives nor close friends. Thus, unlike the majority of characters in other plays who have some familial or financial interest in the affairs of the central characters, this set of characters can more readily give unbiased opinions and pontificate more broadly on the

issues under discussion. In effect, they are disinterested though not uninterested parties. The Marescalco encounters an assortment of individuals of equal or higher rank who are ready to give, sometimes at considerable length, the benefit of their wisdom and experience upon the subject of marriage.

Two figures here are set in opposition. Messer Jacopo paints a rosy picture of married life and thus urges the Marescalco to discard his reservations and embrace married life with faith and optimism. In marked contrast, Messer Ambrogio has a cynical and disparaging view of mankind and even more so of womankind. He sees unfaithfulness and conflict as characterising married life and corruption as rife among members of the court circle. In his first speech (Act I, Scene 3) Ambrogio shows irritation and even censure over the foibles of others, particularly the behaviour of Jacopo who, although naïve and overly talkative, seems harmless enough. However, at one point Ambrogio is keen to share Jacopo's disdain for the Pedant:

JACOPO: Ecco il pedante del Comune, che borbotta con la sua castrona pecoraggine.

AMBROGIO: Camminiamo, che s'egli ci si appicca a le spalle, ci assordirà con il suo parlare fastidioso. (III,9)

If Ambrogio has reservations concerning Jacopo's too trusting nature, he suspends these here in order to express a greater antagonism towards a third party.

In Act II, Scene 5 Ambrogio appears insensitive to the Marescalco's plight in that he uses, more than once, the phrase 'la tua moglie' as though the marriage were already a fait accompli. He then relates at length the various ways a wife could cause annoyance to a husband. Towards the end of this scene, Ambrogio's praise of Venetian women and Venetian society in general goes some way to attenuate the ferocity of this misogynistic rant. But later, in a brief conversation with Phebus, Ambrogio is even more graphic in conveying the deleterious affects a wife could have:

La moglie in una casa è come il mal francioso in un corpo, e sì come sempre al corpo ora duole un ginocchio, ora un braccio, e ora una mano; così ne la casa ove ella sta, sempre manca qualche cosa di quiete... (V,6)



Ambrogio appears to take a vicarious pleasure rather than show concern over the Marescalco's state of anguished indecision, which undermines his stance as a sympathetic friend. There is also an impression that he is keen for the marriage to go ahead in order that the Marescalco experience all the hassles and inconveniences of married life that he has had to endure. He asks Giannicco this question with decidedly ironic undertones: 'Che c'è, figlio bello, faremo noi questa pace e queste nozze?' (V,7).

If Jacopo and Ambrogio give the Marescalco their honest opinions concerning marriage and are seen as men of principle who treat the Marescalco as an equal, the portrayal of the Pedant is rendered in less positive terms: he is boastful, self-absorbed and treats the Marescalco as an inferior in need of instruction. Rather than impart to the Marescalco the potential merits and demerits of married life, most of the Pedant's speech is devoted to a demonstration of his own recondite learning or complaints about others.

In his first encounter with the Marescalco, the Pedant at first appears solicitous of his welfare but soon after is insensitive to the Marescalco's anxieties about marriage, indeed makes matters worse by being overly prescriptive; he instructs him as to righteous behaviour by citing tenets found in the classics and the Bible: 'Dice la seguenza de lo Evangelista, idest il fattore coeli e terrae ne lo Evangelio dice che la arbore che non fa frutto, sia tagliata e posta al fuoco.' (I, 9).<sup>235</sup> In a later conversation (Act II, Scene 11), the Pedant complains that the good name of Mantua has been tarnished by the bad behaviour of the city's youth. He associates this bad behaviour with those dressed as dandies or androgynously. He sees that the city's patrimony of strength and virility has become emasculated. There is a dramatic irony at work here since later on there is a clear suggestion that he himself has been engaging in deviant sexual practices. In his encounter with the knight's page who has played a prank on him, the Pedant quickly descends into verbal abuse: 'forchicula' and 'meretriculo' (III,11), before descending even further to actual physical assault. Despite the lofty patina of his utterances, there are frequent signs that beneath an urbane exterior the

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<sup>235</sup> Cairns notes this unusual aspect: 'the function of the *pedante* in Aretino's Marescalco is almost priestly in his arguments for Christian marriage, supported by biblical quotations, his nuptial oration and so on. Almost all other sixteenth century pedants are opponents of marriage.' Christopher Cairns, *Pietro Aretino and the Republic of Venice: Researches on Aretino and his Circle in Venice* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1985), p. 58.

Pedant has earthier matters on his mind: in Act IV, Scene 5 during Messer Jacopo's oration, the Pedant interrupts him with such phrases as 'famose puelle di Mantova', 'La carne da la affinita tira' and 'nel latteo ed eburneo pettulo.' Towards the very end of the play, the image of the Pedant as supercilious and self-absorbed is modified when, after he has fantasised over whom the Marescalco's future offspring might emulate, makes this simple parting wish: 'Ora Cristo di mal vi guardi, marescalco onorando.' (V,10).<sup>236</sup>

Through the figure of the Pedant, Aretino is lambasting the notion that academic knowledge, Christian theology or an extensive grasp of classical ideas and precepts can offer any useful insights or guidelines into such personal matters as married life, or provide a moral compass.<sup>237</sup>

Next are two characters who belong to city life and who are defined by their occupation: the lawyer Rossello and the print-shop owner Barbagrìgia, both from *Gli Straccioni*. Messer Rossello is a high-ranking professional – part lawyer, part bureaucrat. He has a central role in the administration of justice, civil rather than criminal, throughout Rome, although his jurisdiction seems to extend far beyond the confines of the city itself.<sup>238</sup> Messer Rossello is given the task of prosecuting the claims of the two litigants Giovanni and Battista (*Gli Straccioni* of the title) but also that of defending these two against a claim made against them by the eccentric Mirandola. Shortly before the final Act, Messer Rossello intercedes in the criminal actions of Marabeo and Pilucca when he spots them forcibly transferring Agata from one house to another (Act IV, Scene 3). In the scene following, not only does Rossello rescue and tend to the shaken Agata and pledge that her abductors will be caught and punished, he helps her in other practical ways: he finds her a place of sanctuary and promises to return later to hear fully her grievances and to assist her as best he can. Later in Act V,

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<sup>236</sup> This line could be intended to be uttered ironically but irony does not seem to be one of the pedant's modes of expression. Moreover, there is no previous indication that the Pedant wishes the Marescalco any ill-will.

<sup>237</sup> Guidotti says: 'Come ha dimostrato con chiarezza Ferroni, l'Aretino prende in giro la presunta superiorità della filosofia sul desiderio, una "disputa" che stava alla base di tutta la battaglia culturale di quest'autore, sempre pronto a difendere la "natura" contro la pedanteria.' *Scenografie...*, p. 130

<sup>238</sup> Rossello's wide area of activity - redressing the lost fortunes of litigants from far afield, settling rich estates and marriage partnerships as well as apprehending and prosecuting criminal miscreants suggests that he is more of a fantasy figure conjured up by Caro rather than a close representation of a contemporary State official.

Scene 3 Rossello announces that, after finding out the true identity of Agata and keeping her in a place of safety, he will endeavour to reunite her with her kinfolk.

Towards the play's end, Rossello is seen to fulfil a priestly as well as a lawyerly function: he not only manages to dispel the long-term grievances between Tindaro and Giordano but spells out and sanctifies romantic pairings:

... voglio che facciamo un bel ciabaldone di ogni cosa. Cavaliere, Madonna Argentina è vostra moglie ed è gentildonna onorata. L'avete a restituire il vostro amore e la sua fama. Giuletta e Tindaro si sono d'accordo moglie e marito, e ve ne dovete contentare. (V,5)

However, his role as an official rather than as a partisan friend soon reasserts itself when he warns: 'Ora dove è congiungimento, si restringa, dove non può essere, l'amore diventi carità. Spartitevi per ora gli abbracciamenti fra voi.' (V,5).

Rossello on certain occasions falls short of someone who has universal love for his fellow man. His generosity and compassion appear not to extend to outsiders or to the lower classes. In his dealing with Mirandola, as well as making sure that Mirandola's absurd claims against his clients Giovanni and Battista receive short shrift, he extracts some gratuitous merriment by deceiving, in quite a child-like way in its careless cruelty, the hapless Mirandola. Even in the atmosphere of warmth and reconciliation at the close of the play, Rossello still sees it as part of his duties to apprehend and send to the gallows Marabeo and Pilucca. Although Marabeo has been found guilty of abduction (the same crime that Tindaro and Demetrio admit to) and both he and Pilucca of attempted embezzlement, they have not done any lasting injury to anyone. In the end, Rossello accedes to Giordano's request that they be pardoned, but even here he cannot resist making this disparaging jibe: 'Sì, ma fate pensiero che le forche vi gli prestino.' (V,5).

In most previous plays of this genre, family matters, particular those concerning marriage, are resolved by the family members themselves, but unusually here it is a professional outsider who arbitrates between the competing claims of the quarrelling parties. Rossello is portrayed as a wise, diligent seeker and enforcer of justice but with

limited compassion.<sup>239</sup> He is seen to maintain the status quo, favouring the welfare of the haves over that of the have-nots, overly helpful to the first group and gratuitously mean to the second.<sup>240</sup>

Barbagrigia, another character from *Gli Straccioni*, is the proprietor of the neighbourhood print-shop. In his initial encounter with Pilucca and Demetrio (Act I, Scene 1) when the former informs him of his capture and long incarceration by the Turks, Barbagrigia adopts a sceptical and at times satirical tone rather than a sympathetic tone. This mockery is couched in gentle rather than cutting terms, the sort which would typify the close and trusting relationship of persons who have known each other over a long time. At the close of this scene, Barbagrigia is shown to be helpful and sympathetic towards Demetrio, a stranger whom he has only just met.

Lacking any formal capacity to arbitrate in the affairs of others, in this case Tindaro's dilemma over whether to marry the supposed widow Madonna Argentina, Barbagrigia nevertheless is concerned that those involved should achieve a favourable outcome to their troubles. In the long three-way conversation (Act II, Scene 1) where both Demetrio and Barbagrigia try to persuade Tindaro of the benefits of marriage to the young widow, Barbagrigia's advice is given disinterestedly: he laments the wasted opportunity Tindaro's refusal would represent. In the later debate with Demetrio over a possible postponement of the wedding, Barbagrigia appears to act out of the interest of his neighbour and friend, Madonna Argentina. Ultimately, he admits to an urge to wash his hands of the whole debacle and re-divert his energies into his own affairs: 'Io me ne andrò piuttosto a far certe mie faccende, a tra voi ve la spicciate.' (III, 4). In the first scene of Act V, Barbagrigia's concern for Argentina takes on a more practical form when he visits her home in order to warn her of her returning husband's wrath. He

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<sup>239</sup> Guidotti, in her sub-chapter *La "scena di città" e la commedia* reflects on the compromise between generic and specific settings, and concludes: 'Realtà politiche e culturali diverse influiscono sensibilmente infatti su un prodotto come la commedia che s'inserisce entro un programma propagandisticamente molto forte per il potere e che per questo subisce parecchi condizionamenti.', *Scenografie...*, p. 166

<sup>240</sup> In this, Caro may be seen to be aiming at two objectives which run in tandem: to render Rossello a more naturalistic figure than an idealised one and, secondly, in contrast to many of the topsy-turvy elements found in this type of comic theatre where a man of law is routinely portrayed as a risible or hateful figure, refrain from including any hint of criticism when depicting members of the Roman legal system. (Caro was an intimate of, and sometimes dependent upon, the Roman Curia: 'Morto il Gaddi nell'ottobre del '42, il Caro passò al servizio di Pier Luigi Farnese, nipote di Paolo III [...] Quando il duca fu assassinato a Piacenza (nel '47), il Caro ritornò a Roma, nominato segretario del Cardinale Alessandro Farnese.', *Comedia degli Straccioni*, Introduction, p. XVII.)

offers to escort Argentina out of her home to a safer place, though she proudly refuses to accept this offer. On first meeting Tindaro and Demetrio in the next scene (Act V, Scene 2), he first of all makes enquiries as to their welfare, mindful of their vulnerability to the raging Cavaliere Giordano.

Barbagrigia is presented as a courteous and obliging neighbour who, finding himself unwittingly caught up in the fraught affairs of his acquaintances, does his best to assist. Although not coming across as a strong theme, or indeed be construed as an intentional one on the part of the playwright, there is the idea that the upper and lower classes are pre-occupied with their own troubles and it is the middle classes, as exemplified by Barbagrigia, who show the most altruism.

Lastly, there is a group of characters who are not well-to-do, do not practise a 'respectable' profession and who are not linked by any familial or contractual bonds to a particular group. Among these are the hapless and ill-fated Mirandola who is mercilessly teased by Rossello in *Gli Straccioni*, the Jewish pedlar who is the innocent target of Giannicco's prejudice and the Marescalco's petulance, and Madonna Verdiana from *L'Assiuolo* who, despite her reputation as a busy-body and hypocrite, is allowed to get one over on Ambrogio.<sup>241</sup> However, I will focus on the two sorcerers or necromancers: Lachellino and Ruffo.

In his first appearance, Lachellino the necromancer is seen as extravagantly boastful:

Prima che facciamo altro, voglio, Maximo,  
fare una cosa che pochi altri medici  
vorrebbon far o, volendo, saprebbono. (I,3)

Subsequently, he displays no qualms about putting Maximo, who has engaged his services, to all manner of expense and inconvenience. The soliloquy by the necromancer's servant Nebbio gives a bald summary of his master's previous history of crimes and misdemeanours:

quanti plebei, quante donne, quanti uomini,

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<sup>241</sup> It is worth noting that two of these 'outsiders' are given negative appellations: Mirandola - *pazzo* and Verdiana - *pinzochera* in the listing of *personaggi*, before any stage action has begun.



Cintio. There is no rejoicing over his defeat, or any calls for him to be caught and brought to justice.<sup>243</sup>

Ruffo, the necromancer in *Calandra*, is by comparison to Lachellino only a mildly nefarious figure. It is clear that earning a buck, by whatever dubious means, is Ruffo's driving force. Since he is not violent, does not directly steal goods or money and is duping someone who is herself undertaking a morally dubious enterprise, Ruffo comes across as an amoral rather than downright immoral figure. He has none of the arrogance or callousness of Fisico. Not all of Ruffo's utterances should be taken as insincere or self-serving: there is at least one episode where I infer Ruffo is expressing genuine goodwill:

FULVIA: Ruffo mio, vivi lieto, che mai più povero sarai.

RUFFO: E tu non più scontenta. (IV,2)

This exchange modifies the image hitherto of Ruffo as a cold-hearted exploiter of a vulnerable individual towards that of a more considerate person; rather than a comprehensive scheme to deceive, the impression now is of a more above-board arrangement between Ruffo and Fulvia in which each party knows full well the terms and conditions which apply to it.

Lachellino and Ruffo share one trait: the gratuitous disparagement of women. At the start of their conversation in the third Act of *Il Negromante*, Lachellino could have just instructed Camillo to keep their discussions secret from others without singling out females as the main culprits in betraying confidences: '... e tutto un dì non è possibile / Che cosa occulta stia che sappia femina.' (III,2). In the similar vein, in Act

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<sup>243</sup> Such a benign outcome for the wicked Lachellino seems strange, unless Ariosto, in true Christian spirit, deliberately concentrated on the sin rather than the sinner, in a scenario where Lachellino is more akin to a plague, originating from distant shores, whose visitation on the parochial society of Cremona infects the more vulnerable members of that society. Once free from this affliction, the principal victim Maximo avoids referring back to that disturbing episode. Ferroni offers this analysis: 'Più che dell'attribuzione di una direzione moralistica alla *pièce*, si tratta dell'affermazione di una tranquilla convergenza con le attese e con i gusti sociali del pubblico: agli spettatori cortigiani l'Ariosto offre occasione di trarre divertimento teatrale da una figura di 'giuntatore', che, secondo la norma sociale vigente, deve restare punita e sconfitta. Il teatro della mistificazione e della 'sciocchezza' umana viene presentato al pubblico senza intenti polemici, ma con una agevole aderenza alla morale corrente e disegnato con leggere sfumature di colore.', Giulio Ferroni, *Ariosto* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2008), p. 71. However, Ariosto himself must have been dissatisfied over the story line he had laid down for Lachellino, since in the later redaction he added extra scenes at the end in which the necromancer is cheated out of his cloak by Temolo and may be heading for judicial punishment.

II, Scene 3 of *La Calandra*, Ruffo cannot resist this jibe: 'tra le donne, che credule sono.'<sup>244</sup> (III,3).

For Ruffo, there are no descriptions of past crimes and villainous behaviour. More crucially, unlike the necromancer in Ariosto's play, none of the other characters closes ranks against him; all Ruffo suffers is some mild ribbing from the servant Fannio in Act III, Scene 17. Whereas Fisico is described as having left a trail of heartbreak, enmity and destitution in his wake, the only implication of Ruffo's behaviour is that he has left a rich woman slightly less rich than before.

## CONCLUSION

In this dimension, the young appear to get away with 'bad' behaviour to a far greater extent than do the old. The desperate young male lover is invested with such attractive personal qualities (plus presumably, when staged, with attractive physical qualities) that allow any wrongdoing on his part to be accorded greater licence or indeed total forgiveness. For example, the noble youth Tindaro, prima facie guilty of grave wrongdoing – the abduction of a young female from her family home, is ultimately rewarded for this and, even while the crime is still fresh, is only condemned by characters, the eponymous *straccioni*, whose absurd appearance and manner undercut much of the moral authority they rightly possess. Conversely, wrongdoing, or even suspected wrongdoing, by older figures of authority is treated harshly. These older men are invariably depicted as having serious flaws: as being rampantly lustful, cruel, hypocritical, or extremely gullible, which renders them unworthy as suitable husbands to these younger females and thus legitimate targets of cuckoldry.

The unequivocally villainous Lachellino with a whole history of crimes and misdemeanours, although eventually foiled in his machinations against several prominent members of Cremonese society, is not ultimately brought to book to answer for his crimes. Even his accomplice Nebbio at the end only receives some verbal baiting from one of their victims. From this one can tentatively conclude that the necromancer is more a fantasy figure than a flesh-and-blood individual who has to

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<sup>244</sup> In both these cases, the playwright manages to distance himself from an accusation of misogyny by contriving to have these views expressed by unsympathetic or marginal characters.



account for his wrongdoing.<sup>245</sup> Such is the element of unreality of *Il Negromante* that neither Lachellino nor his victims can be viewed with clarity through the moral dimension.<sup>246</sup> Outside a scathing satire on the practice of necromancy, Ariosto's play offers the notion of forgiveness: towards the young who place love and loyalty to a female above social respectability, and towards elders who should know better than being taken in by a bogus cult.

Madonna Oretta, the heroine of *L'Assiuolo*, follows a similar trajectory to that of *La Calandra*'s Fulvia up to the seduction scene: she searches her conscience to find justification for embarking on a nocturnal illicit romantic tryst. But post-seduction, she shows no pangs of guilt, only the fear that her errant behaviour will become known to the wider public. *L'Assiuolo* is even more a celebration than *La Calandra* of female victory and emancipation from the dominance of overbearing males.

The singular aspect of *Il Marescalco* is that in the end no-one, including the eponymous hero, is seen to be guilty of any wrongdoing.<sup>247</sup> Unusually here, there is a perfect return to the status quo; everyone carries on the same as before. However, it is under the expectation of a drastic punishment (from the viewpoint of the anti-marriage faction) or handsome reward (from the viewpoint of the pro-marriage faction) for the Marescalco that a diversity of attitudes is revealed: from benign tolerance to stout intolerance of others' behaviour, from strict adherence to Biblical injunctions to a blatant disregard of them, to view the female sex through rose-coloured spectacles or with extreme misogyny. Although the ending of *Il Marescalco* spares the Marescalco a grim fate, thus confirming this particular 'head of state' as a tolerant, decent type who happens to enjoy a prank, there is along the way a clear exposition of the possibility that

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<sup>245</sup> On this verdict, Andrews concurs and is able to trace Lachellino's antecedents: 'He is also a firmly theatrical figure, with a personality still based on the cheerfully open villany of a Plautine *leno* or pimp. He and his servant Nibbio ('Kite'), as is often the case with villains on stage, strike a closer relationship with the audience than do their virtuous opponents.', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 82

<sup>246</sup> Guidotti expands upon this 'other-worldly' nature of the play: 'Il binomio qui è negromante-metamorfofi e non certo negromante-donne (grandi assenti di questa commedia): è un tema continuamente evocato, che cattura l'attenzione dello spettatore visualizzandosi in un'atmosfera abbastanza vaga e sospesa cronologicamente alla vigilia della notte, caratteristica di tutta la *pièce*.', Guidotti, *Il Modello e La Trasgressione: Commedie del Primo '500* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 1983), p. 39

<sup>247</sup> Larivaille opines: 'Ma l'insistenza con cui Aretino lo ritrova alla base della maggior parte delle azioni umane implica da parte sua una concezione determinista, che postula il primato degli impulsi naturali e ereditari sulla ragione non senza conseguenze sulle sue convinzioni morali.', *Pietro Aretino: Fra Rinascimento...*, p. 333.

those invested with supreme power could abuse it and inflict, with no redress, arbitrary suffering on subordinate members under their jurisdiction.

Male servants suffer or benefit in parallel to the fate of their masters, often irrespective of their own degree of culpability. Nebbio becomes the target of the wrath of Lachellino's victims in the absence of the necromancer himself. The 'honest' servant Giannella is demoted in the household pecking order alongside the curtailment of his master Ambrogio's authority. The sterling efforts of Temolo on behalf of others merit no reward at the end. Conversely, despite the catalogue of deceptions, cruel tricks, forgeries and insults perpetrated by Fessenio and Giorgetto, they share in the glories of their triumphant young masters. From this, one can conclude that the behaviour of the servant class is to be viewed purely as mischievous carnivalesque inversion and not part of any didactic intention.

From the above, we can deduce that *commedia erudita* exhibits a strong element of *rovesciamento*: the arbitrary (i.e. unrelated to good or bad behaviour) gaining or losing of status and material or sexual rewards, presented purely for comic mischief in which the rich and powerful fall, though not too far, while the poor and subservient rise a little. Overlaid on this is a more didactic stratum: that those with authority who abuse that authority will be punished. However, this is limited to the abuses and subsequent comeuppance of wayward individuals of middle rank; any similar depiction of wrongdoing by the State or its higher representatives is carefully avoided.<sup>248</sup> These two strata do not mesh together particularly convincingly: the episodes of amoral knockabout humour, whether depicting violence or sex, stand as distinct vignettes and do not integrate well into the overall story-line of individuals whose presentation is sufficiently three-dimensional for the audience (or reader) to care about.

A broad division can be drawn in human behaviour between selfish and altruistic actions, between self-promotion (or promotion of a narrow sectional interest) and actions aimed at promoting the communal good. Outside of individual families, what structures would have influenced the formation of a moral compass, or the lack of

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<sup>248</sup> The nearest any of these tracts gets to political satire is the disparagement of minor officials, such as the episode in *La Calandra* where customs officials are duped by Fessenio's spurious explanation (Act III, Scene 2). Aretino indulges in salacious abuse rather than pointed satire against the ethos of the court as a whole rather than against particular individuals in *Il Marescalco*.

such? The first candidate that springs to mind is obviously the Church which, alongside its propagating of moral values, was also the major inculcator of the idea that every individual is a part of, and owes a duty towards, an entity beyond the individual self, the commune, fiefdom or even sizeable kingdom: viz. western Christendom with its seat in the Holy See of Rome.<sup>249</sup> (This sense of loyalty towards a greater whole pre-dates the advent of Christianity and was, arguably, even stronger during the height of the Roman Empire.<sup>250</sup>) One can observe, from this survey of five *commedia erudita* plays, a marked absence of orthodox religious thinking; indeed when religion does surface it comes across as peripheral, irrelevant or, more subversively, as a vehicle for suborning religious notions to nefarious ends. I adduce here the Old Nurse's and the Pedant's pretentious or incongruous insertion of liturgical Latin into their everyday speech, Samia's propensity to pepper her remarks with religious expletives, and the disingenuous invoking of divine providence by Madonna Oretta to justify her act of adultery.

During this period, Italy's fragmented geo-political condition (as attested by maps of the peninsula circa 1500) and increasingly mobile workforce - from displaced peasants fleeing rampaging mercenary armies to itinerant scholars and travelling merchants - may have all contributed to the erosion of the notion of the sovereign State in which everyone, of whatever rank or profession, toiled towards its preservation: simple feudal loyalty giving way to a narrower, more atomised set of obligations. Moreover, Paul Grendler's research into schooling in Italy identifies a significant change in the education of children that had taken place from the beginning of the fourteenth century: the increasing dominance of a curriculum based on the needs of the expanding bureaucracy and entrepreneurial class. He ends with this conclusion: 'The laicization of education is an overlooked but significant feature of the Renaissance.'

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<sup>249</sup> During the period under study in this thesis, the English monarch Henry VIII eventually concluded that the realm of England was autonomous in all matters and no longer needed to defer to Rome as the final arbiter in religious matters.

<sup>250</sup> 'Not laws but the consciousness of always being watched was what prevented a Roman's sense of competition from degenerating into selfish ambition. [...] To place personal honour above the interests of the entire community was the behaviour of a barbarian - or worse yet, a king. In their relations with their fellows, then, the citizens of the Republic were schooled to temper their competitive instincts for the common good.', Tom Holland, *Rubicon: The Triumph and Tragedy of the Roman Republic* (London: Little, Brown, 2003), p. 5.

(For fuller text see below.<sup>251</sup>) If one assumes that values taught in schools are a microcosm of those of the wider society, one could posit the notion that, compared with two centuries earlier, the Church's grip on Italian society had lessened. Thus, by the start of the sixteenth century, in the wake of the possible weakening of both the Church's influence and of a sense of 'national' identity, where did a person's loyalty now lie? Does *commedia erudita* provide any kind of guidance? After subtracting the trickery, cross-dressing, one-upmanship and the besting of rivals in love through underhand means and other ingredients constructed purely for comic effect, are there elements which mirror a more exploitative, as opposed to a co-operative and self-sacrificing, attitude that pertained in the outside society? Can the highly competitive, at times a veritable 'dog eat dog', world of *commedia erudita*, where individual desires, often crudely hedonistic or avaristic, reign supreme,<sup>252</sup> be seen as an authentic echo of uncertain loyalties and the less attractive, self-serving side of the emerging entrepreneurial spirit of the Renaissance?<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> 'In Italy church schools are very difficult to find after 1300. The reasons seem to have been twofold. As Italian monasteries and cathedral chapters declined in the later Middle Ages, they withdrew from the business of educating children (Petti Balbi, 16-32). Sporadic attempts to revive them in order to train boys intended for the secular priesthood had very limited success. Second, the wealthy merchants who dominated late medieval and Renaissance Italy wanted a schooling more oriented towards living in lay society. They provided this for their sons through independent and municipal schools. [...] The laicization of education is an overlooked but significant feature of the Renaissance.' Grendler later identifies a particular topic, that of usury, where church and lay teaching came into conflict: 'Italian abbaco schools taught boys to solve mathematical problems in which the interest payment due on a loan had to be calculated. Abbaco treatises assumed that *all* loans earned interest and never raised moral objections. Thus, merchants learned as schoolboys that taking interest was a morally acceptable practice. They must have been disconcerted and sceptical when theologians told them that they would go to hell if they loaned money at interest.', Paul Grendler, *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1995), p. 778 and p. 786. [Note: the pages of this book do not run sequentially.]

<sup>252</sup> This is a generalisation which omits the periodic appearance of more nobly-minded characters: devoted servants, faithful lovers (both male and female) or helpful, self-sacrificing, outsiders. Moreover, Ariosto's *Il Negromante* and to a lesser extent Aretino's *Il Marescalco*, in contrast to the other three plays, feature, alongside legitimate private goals, a strong sense of communal cohesiveness and the honouring of the elderly and those of high status.

<sup>253</sup> Throughout history, the economy has undergone cycles of boom and bust. If we look at the last hundred years in Britain, periods of economic expansion such as the early 1920s and the late 1980s have been associated with a more individualistic ethos (e.g. the 'me' generation of the 1980s' yuppie), whilst times of economic stress, such as the Second World War and the economic retrenchment of current times have been associated with a more communal, self-sacrificing ethos – 'We're all in this together' to quote a popular current saying. Therefore, an alternative take on the self-aggrandising ethos prevalent in *commedia erudita* is to view it as a reflection of increasing prosperity as much as any increase in selfishness.

## INTELLIGENCE DIMENSION

They say death is the great leveller. I shall quote a few lines from a poem by James Shirley who lived in an epoch where pestilence or warfare could bring sudden death to anyone, irrespective of social class, and if you managed to avoid those you would, of course, suffer eventual demise alongside everyone else:

Sceptre and crown  
Must tumble down  
And in the dust be equal made  
With the poor crooked scythe and spade<sup>254</sup>

One of the major tenets of Christianity endorses this notion: however low down the social hierarchy you were when you were alive, in the afterlife, providing you had conducted yourself justly during your mortal life, you could enjoy equal treatment to the rest of the souls there. Conversely, if you were rich and successful during your lifetime there was no guarantee you would enjoy the same privileges in the afterlife; indeed there was the contrary expectation, as can be inferred from the Biblical saying ‘It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.’<sup>255</sup>

In the fictionalised world of *commedia erudita*, the notion of death was largely unrepresentable since this genre concerned the day-to-day lives of the urban bourgeoisie, in contrast to certain longer established forms of theatre, most notably *sacra*

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<sup>254</sup> From *Ajax and Ulysess*, 1659 by James Shirley (1596 – 1666)

<sup>255</sup> The King James Bible, Matthew 19. 24.

*rappresentazione*, where man's sense of his own mortality and depictions of realms beyond this life (heaven and hell) were indeed its mainstays. According to the ideology of religion, eventual equality could be achieved in the world beyond if one had lived a morally upright life. In theatre, tragedy (also being revived in a classical format during the period under study) captured the notion that during life, let alone the afterlife, the rich and powerful could, if they misbehaved, descend to the level of those less privileged and a lot further – to ruin, death and the threat of eternal damnation.

If religion and its theatrical representations offered the prospect of eventual equality or redress of fortune, what could the devisers of the comic genre of theatre do to fulfil this need for a fantasy of a more equal world? If power and privilege were inherited, others traits, such as intelligence, seemed to the acute observers of social life more randomly distributed (though there still existed in the less acute observers the popular, though untested, notion that noble blood bred noble attributes and ignoble blood would more likely breed dishonesty and stupidity). The notion that there is no correlation between societal rank and degree of intelligence was echoed by this new breed of playwrights, who realised that, unlike in the real world, in the greater freedom of the fictional world of the stage, a show of intelligence from whatever rank of person could be visibly rewarded and foolish behaviour roundly punished. Thus in these theatrical presentations, great play is made of someone of superior intellect tricking or getting one over on someone of less acumen.<sup>256</sup>

Compared with other, more feudal, European states of the sixteenth century, northern Italy was more meritocratic; the expansion of the academic, financial and trading sectors resulted in increased social mobility.<sup>257</sup> However, it was hardly comparable to a modern western democracy: an individual's prospects were still largely determined at birth. Thus there would have been a perception in the cities in which these plays were written and performed that power and privilege would not necessarily

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<sup>256</sup> Andrews, discussing Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, posits 'The whole surface dynamic of the action seems indeed to invite us to glory in the victory of the astute over the foolish.', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 52.

<sup>257</sup> This expansion partly resulted from increased opportunities in 'higher' education, as more universities, schools of jurisprudence and medicine were founded, fuelled by the demands of an expanding bureaucracy needed to run republican or ducal territories. Hay and Law affirm this development: 'In the course of the fifteenth century the workings of government, from the management of armies to the conduct of diplomacy, can be shown to become increasingly the business of professional state servants.', *Italy in the Age...*, p. 78.

devolve upon those most capable of exercising it. A proportion of those of great standing would have been perceived as acquiring that status through inherited titles, wealth, patronage, spurious academic attainments or merely through a fortuitous fall of fortune rather than through merit. So real life is unfair: those with greater intellectual capacity are passed over for preferment by those of lesser capability.

The Christian religion promised a redress against the unfairness of mortal life – the losers would become winners and vice-versa in the shake-up of the afterlife. Were the writers of these early modern comedies expressing a similar wish fulfilment?; that for a couple of hours in the fictionalised world of the stage the worthy but hard-done-by would gain ascendancy over the rich and privileged who had achieved their positions through dubious or arbitrary means, a world where the humble with greater native ability would receive a greater reward, and the unprincipled or pretentious suffer forfeits. However, any such rewards or punishments could never be presented in too concrete a form or as part of a permanent realignment of power, since these writers had to observe two restraints: a theatrical one in that the genre in which they were devising their plays dictated that, by the end of the piece, a restoration of the status quo is effected; and a political one (political in its broadest sense of how power is distributed) by which it would have been unacceptable to suggest that servant/master roles should be permanently switched or that every wife should have ascendancy over her husband. Part of this investigation will be to see how far these playwrights could push the notion of reversal without conspicuously entering into taboo territory.<sup>258</sup>

Outside of brute force or an exceptional degree of charm or sexual allure, the main way a character can manipulate someone of superior rank, if only temporarily, is by use of greater intelligence. How this intelligence is distributed amongst stage characters and to what extent this particular dimension determines the interplay between characters will form the basis of the enquiry below. I will try to identify, in any given scenario, who is accorded the role of the ‘conner’ and who the role of the ‘conned’. I shall look at whether this interplay has a strong satirical strand – drawing attention to

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<sup>258</sup> Even Beolco, along with Aretino the most revolutionary playwright of his times, invariably presented his hero Ruzante as an ultimate loser and powerless against greater forces; only in *Parlamento de Ruzante che iera vegnù de campo* and *Bilora* does the Ruzante figure come remotely near being seen as an agitator for social change. Andrews says of these: ‘Both contain a bleak subversive realism which in the *Parlamento* is wrapped in farce, and in *Bilora* is hardly veiled at all.’, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 128.

the non-meritocratic distribution of power, or whether it is merely a continuation, in a more formal and closed setting, of the anarchical activities of carnival. An additional aspect under investigation will be any display of spurious intelligence by a character, where the reciting of academic, theological or scientific tracts, the use of jargon or Latin is adduced in substitution for rational argument. Related to this will be the level of acumen accorded to the other party of the duologue, whether he/she is capable of seeing through the pretensions or cant of his interlocutor or whether he has been blinded by science or pseudo erudition. In some cases one can infer that the playwright was aiming satirical barbs at a specific class of professionals; in other cases a more general critique of unmerited or artificial elevation to high positions observable in real life.

The remit of this chapter on the intelligence dimension will extend to include impulsiveness versus caution, the ability to weigh up short-term advantage in the context of long-term outcomes, and episodes where emotion or particular personality traits are seen to get the better of reason. Under this last aspect will be included a favourite theatrical theme, that derived from the widespread perception that love and reason rarely go together. Thus one line of investigation will be to identify those who are depicted as losing their powers of reasoning as a result of unbridled romantic or sexual passion.

There is always the possibility that the playwright is merely repeating, not wholesale but in the form of small vignettes, what others had done before. One has to be mindful of the powerful legacy of fiction from earlier epochs: the plays of Plautus and Terence, Boccaccian-style *novelle* and from the increasing canon of plays in this new genre as the century progressed. In this regard, any feature which at first glance may seem to reflect contemporary society has to be carefully disentangled from those arising from the habitual tendency to repeat, albeit with minor variations, what went on before; so that a particular *beffa* or comic episode may not be intended as a trenchant comment on social mores current at the time, but merely a refashioning of a previous piece of stage fiction.<sup>259</sup> To employ my central metaphor, any images from a mirror of

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<sup>259</sup> Louise Clubb articulates this idea at greater length: 'The same theatrical movement that promulgated the imitation of classical models produced romantic comedy and mixed genres, in Italy as well as England, and did so through a common process based on the principle of contamination of sources, genres, and accumulated stage-structures, or theatregrams [...] that were at once stream-lined structures



contemporary society would inevitably be interspersed with those mirroring past theatrical presentations.

Thus in these plays there may be diverse motives as to why wisdom should be conferred on certain characters and foolishness on others: as a mischievous upheaval of the natural order found in real life, as an oblique critique of an unmeritocratic society, a satire on pedantry and pretentiousness, a mockery of those ‘unhinged’ by romantic infatuation, or simply the pleasure of seeing one character outwit another.

## SERVANTS

I shall begin the analysis with those less sympathetically portrayed – those with foolish or villainous tendencies, and end with those who are portrayed as possessing sharp intellect or great acumen and who use these gifts for the benefit of others rather than for themselves. I shall also monitor whether the level of intelligence accorded to the servant corresponds to that of his master or mistress or is in opposition to it.

Nebbio is the faithful accomplice of the necromancer in Ariosto’s *Il Negromante*. His first appearance consists of a series of asides to the audience which skilfully lay bare, through a series of puns and metaphors, the true objectives behind his master’s requests to Maximo:

La mignatta è alla pelle, né levarsene  
vorrà, fin che vi fia sangue da suggere. (I,3)

In his next appearance, Nebbio reveals the history and way of operating of the necromancer. Here are clever, succinct and sometimes brutally crude descriptions of how his master earns a living:

Or ha in piè questo gentiluomo, e beccalo  
Meglio che mai sparvier facesse passera. (II, 2)

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for svelte play making and elements of high specific density, weighty with significance from previous incarnations.’, *Italian Drama ...*, pp. 5-6.

It becomes evident further on that, although Nebbio is able to analyse acutely the way in which his master operates, he is unable to devise schemes of his own.<sup>260</sup> Further, in Act IV, Scene 2, Nebbio does not realise that Temolo's report of his master's stabbing is just a ruse to get him removed far away from the scene. At a later juncture, Nebbio acknowledges his own credulity:

io, babbion , che me credevo d'essere  
Il maestro di dar la baia, e trovami  
Non esser buon discepolo, che correre  
Sì scioccamente m'ha fatto una bestia; (IV,5)

Nebbio in this same speech reports his master's displeasure at this show of gullibility; he is upbraided for this folly. In his final appearance in Act V, Scene 2, when challenged by Camillo, rather than try to invent an explanation to exculpate himself, Nebbio can only offer a feeble plea that he and his master were actually trying to help Camillo. He then falls back on the even more dubious assertion that he and the necromancer, as foreigners, should be exempt from punishment.

Although a shrewd commentator on the affairs of others, Nebbio remains dependent on his master's ability to orchestrate scams and extricate them from any trouble. This becomes more evident when, once separated from him, he falls easy prey to the machinations of those bent on exposing their nefarious schemes. Nebbio's ability to take an insightful and objective view of matters when affairs are proceeding well and his subsequent descent into a state of dejection when everything goes awry appear plausible. His twin roles, as an outside commentator and as accomplice to the principal villain, dovetail well into each other. Despite the degree of helplessness that befalls Nebbio in the late stages of the play, he still comes across as more villain than fool.

Less villainous than the ill-fated Nebbio, although clearly possessing roguish traits, is the servant Pilucca from *Gli Straccioni*. We first meet Pilucca in a drunken state. At times, he is slow on the uptake, as he himself acknowledges just after Barbagrìgia has explained the new layout of the neighbourhood: 'Oh gran capocchio

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<sup>260</sup> Nebbio's relationship with Lachellino is the reverse of the typical servant/master relationship: rather than a shrewd and inventive servant helping out his less intelligent master, Nebbio is dependent on his master's ingenuity.

ch'io sono! Adesso la intendo.' (I,1). However, this dullness of mind should be seen in the context of Pilucca's exhaustion and disorientation after undergoing a long gruesome ordeal. Even so, he still manages to make a witty observation on the redevelopment that his own neighbourhood of Rome has undergone during his absence: 'Oh! non poteva ruinar più gloriosamente, poiché la sua ruina è parte di tanta magnificenza.' (I,1). In his next appearance (Act I, Scene 4), Pilucca re-acquaints himself with his old partner-in-crime, the steward Marabeo. This time it is Pilucca who is sober and his companion and fellow employee Marabeo who is drunk. Pilucca asks exacting questions of his friend and, in the scene following, engages in some teasing reproaches to Marabeo. When Pilucca and Marabeo next meet, it is Pilucca who espouses a hedonistic approach to life: enjoy the sensual pleasures of the moment without considering the future: 'Non pensiamo al male prima che venga. Godiamoci queste nozze.' (II,3).

As far as the wedding between his mistress and Tindaro is concerned, Pilucca considers it a *fait accompli*. It is left to Marabeo to devise a scheme to delay the wedding, the mechanics of which Pilucca is slow to comprehend. However, it is Pilucca who is employed to see whether Marabeo's ruse - concocting a rumour that Madonna Argentina is pregnant - has been successful. He proves effective in gleaning the fact that Demetrio has swallowed this rumour. Pilucca is also crafty enough to realise that feigning surprise at this revelation is more politic than confirming it:

PILUCCA: Uh, tant'oltre?

DEMETRIO: E anco pregna, ch' è un altro praeterea.

PILUCCA: Pregna?

DEMETRIO: È così alquanto. (III,2)<sup>261</sup>

Act IV, Scene 3 sees Pilucca at his most uncivil: as the brutal henchman of Marabeo in their joint attempt to forcibly transfer Giuletta. However, he is quick-witted enough to resist Marabeo's attempt to get him to take charge of the young female, which would have given Marabeo a greater chance to escape whilst simultaneously increasing Pilucca's risk of being caught. In his final appearance, Pilucca is prudent enough, in

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<sup>261</sup> This subtle piece of deception, disingenuously upholding the innocence of the accused female, can be seen as a forerunner to Iago's tactics in getting Othello to believe Desdemona's unfaithfulness in Shakespeare's *Othello* (see Act III, Scene 3).

contrast to Marabeo's stubborn recalcitrance, to humbly accept with simply expressed gratitude the magnanimity of his master Giordano.

Although Pilucca occasionally displays wit and quick comprehension, the general import of his presentation is of someone who is not a deep thinker, but one who looks upon events in the short-term. He employs a certain crude cunning to survive and uses his intellect to better his lot, whether by fair means or foul. Interestingly, he appears more adroit when dealing with his master Giordano than with his fellow servant. This is a fetching portrait of an individual who, had he been born in more fortunate circumstances or managed to escape the lowly rung on the societal ladder he is assigned to, might have prospered by virtue of his fortitude and native wit. (There is an intriguing contrast between the two confederates in crime: whereas Marabeo is portrayed as possessing slower reactions but a much greater capacity for planning long-term strategies, Pilucca is presented as the more quick-witted and impulsive.)

Likeable but displaying a mischievous, at times even subversive, attitude is Giannicco, the very young apprentice to the Marescalco in Aretino's play. In his first appearance, Giannicco is seen to act the buffoon but one who can also engage in smart repartee. In the next scene, Giannicco makes this witty rejoinder:

MARESCALCO: Parla d'altro che di moglie, se no ...

GIANNICCO: Di che volete che vi parli? di marito? (I,2)

Giannicco has a fine line in carefully phrased innuendo, as in Act I, Scene 7, when he argues: 'E però sì gran male a dir che togliete moglie, che mi avete ne la stalla.' (I,7).<sup>262</sup> Act I, Scene 11, a conversation between Giannicco and the Pedant, sees the former both in a dull ignorant light – misunderstanding or misconstruing words, but also as sharp-witted: he is able to quickly alight upon the most vulgar construction of what the Pedant has said. However, during his conversation with the Count (Act II, Scene 8) Giannicco mistakes the word 'malizia' for 'malia'. At the end of the conversation he has with the Jewish pedlar, Giannicco shows that he is capable of irony in order to reinforce a point:

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<sup>262</sup> Sbrocchi and Campbell also spot a possible double entendre: 'In the text this sentence '*che mi avete ne la stalla*', "that you have me in the stable" is rather ambiguous. It could be understood to suggest that some of the "services" Giannicco performs for the Marescalco are sexual.', Aretino, *The Marescalco*, p. 49, n.

‘A proposito che la cosa va segreta come un bando.’ (III,1). Similarly, in the next scene, Giannicco is adept at picking up a metaphor and imaginatively extending it:

MARESCALCO: E ben ne vo io, se non esco de’ gangheri.

GIANNICCO: Se tu uscissi del mondo, ne sarebbe il gran danno. (III,2)

Giannicco is both verbally adroit and skilled in engineering pranks. His intelligence is in part directed towards maintaining the grand hoax instigated by others; he rarely misses an opportunity to increase his master’s discomfiture, from which he derives gratuitous pleasure. Giannicco’s ability to comprehend varies between situations. Although his apparent obtuseness and adroitness both serve in themselves to create comic vignettes, his character is skilfully constructed so as to accommodate these two polarities without straining credulity: in conversation with the ill-educated Marescalco, he can easily score points off him in argument but, when dealing with the more cultured higher ranks, Giannicco’s limited lexicon reveals him to be not as smart as he likes to make out.

Fessenio is the very able servant in Bibbiena’s *Calandra*: during the time-span of the play’s action, he fulfils the role of servant to three masters (two masters and one mistress to be precise). With different characters, Fessenio uses different means to get the better of them. In his encounter with Polinico (Act I, Scene 2), he is quick to counter the other’s point of view, using vivid metaphors and occasional resorts to sarcasm. In his dealings with Calandro, he is the one that shapes the course of the discussion, by feigning stupidity or leading Calandro into false expectations. Their duologue in Act I, Scene 7, comprises in the main short questions from Calandro followed by even curter replies from Fessenio. Here Fessenio assumes the role of a patient and indulgent schoolmaster instructing an obtuse pupil. In his encounters with the female servant Samia, he has to be very persistent when trying to extract information, since Samia is shown to be both reticent and inarticulate. In Act V, Scene 4, it is Fessenio who has the job of telling Samia that the reputed miracle, converting Lidio/Santilla from one gender to the opposite, was a fiction.

Fessenio is depicted as cleverer than those he works for or works with: the love-struck Fulvia, the scatty Samia and the supercilious Polinico, as well as, of course, the main victim of his baiting – Calandro. Fessenio represents the servant class at its most

autonomous and adaptable. He is adroit at winning an argument or getting his own way. The high point of his quick-wittedness occurs in his encounter with the customs officials in Act III, Scene 2 when, apprehended while accompanying a large chest in which Calandro is hidden, he instructs the prostitute, who is accompanying them, to pretend to be the distressed widow of the person in the chest whom Fessenio declares to have just died of the plague. The customs officials swallow this explanation and flee in horror. In the scene following, Fessenio easily persuades Calandro that he has just done him a huge favour by preventing him being sequestered by these officials.

The degree of distortion depicted here – Calandro as impossibly gullible and naïve, Fessenio as possessing implausible degrees of energy, inventiveness and powers of manipulation, renders these characters direct heirs to characters from farce or the comic *novella*; as such there is no attempt to say anything insightful about their equivalents in the real world.

Giorgetto is servant to the young and naïve Giulio in Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo*. In the first scene of the play, when Giulio tells him that his rival Rinuccio keeps him abreast of the progress he is making in his romantic pursuit, it is Giorgetto who seizes on this as an advantage: 'Ella non è piccola comodità saper li fatti suoi, ed egli non sappia i vostri.' (I,1). Towards the end of this discussion, Giorgetto makes this shrewd observation regarding Giannella, Messer Ambrogio's servant: 'Fatica è ingannare i cattivi, i pazzi quanto maggior sono, più facilmente si ingannano.' (I,1). Giorgetto is the deviser of an elaborate scheme; he assumes the role of a puppet master controlling the movements of others, most extensively those of Giulio.<sup>263</sup> In their conversation in Act III, Scene 1 when Giulio laments the fact that it will be Rinuccio rather than he who will be enjoying the favours of Madonna Oretta, Giorgetto trenchantly points out that Rinuccio will only have achieved this through his (Giulio's) help. The rest of this scene consists of Giorgetto outlining in somewhat piecemeal fashion the elements of a scheme he has devised for Giulio to gain access to Madonna Oretta. It involves, among other ruses, a forged letter and false beard. In the initial stage of the plan, Giorgetto fools Madonna

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<sup>263</sup> This model of the all-powerful, all-knowing servant goes at least as far back as Palaestrio in Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus*. Segal describes Palaestrio thus: 'He is repeatedly an 'architect', as well as a planner of strategy, an opponent of the enemy, an assailant from the ramparts, a company commander, and [...] an *imperator* – in short, the real conquering hero of the piece.', *Plautus: Four Comedies ...*, Introduction, p. xxiv-xxv.

Violante into thinking that he is one of Anfrosina's servants, thereby getting her to take receipt, and later hand over to Oretta, the letter and clothing he is carrying. Giorgetto's soliloquy (Act IV, Scene 6), delivered when the scam is well under way, shows that he, of all the characters, most fully comprehends where everyone is and what they are doing, although the chance liaison between Rinuccio and Madonna Violante falls outside even his superior cognisance.

More than anyone else, Giorgetto is presented as the mastermind behind all the nocturnal shenanigans, although even he falls short of being totally in control of events; chance also has its role. Apart from his accumulated wisdom and inventiveness, Giorgetto achieves the role of arch-manipulator by being able to astutely assess the various appetites of others, together with their degree of gullibility.<sup>264</sup> In the topsy-turvy world of *L'Assiuolo* where both intellectual capacity and moral attitudes run counter to expectations, Giorgetto is as much a theatrical artifice as Fessenio.

I shall now look at the redoubtable figure of Temolo, servant to the young man Cintio in *Il Negromante*. As a counterweight to his master's naivety, Temolo is presented as knowing and worldly-wise. He also has a strong line in mockery when pointing out the foibles and pretensions of others:

Non hai tu veduto, subito  
ch' un posto sia sopra la vittuaria,  
o sia exattor de la gabelle o giudice  
o notario o che paghi li stipendii,  
lasciar l'umana forma tutta, e prenderla  
o di lupo o di volpe o d'alcun nibio? (II,1)

In this same exchange of points of view with his master, Temolo reflects on the paradox that while he, a humble servant, can see through the bogus nature of necromancy, great men, including princes and bishops, are fooled by it.<sup>265</sup> At one point in this discussion, Temolo, in order to reinforce his argument that high rank is no guarantee against

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<sup>264</sup> In a soliloquy, Giorgetto expounds on the way of the world, in particular on the nature of women's appetites: 'Essere avvezza a stentare per forza, e credere che, trovandosi nel mezzo delle vivande, e possendone torre, ella si stia con le mani giunte, e con la bocca chiusa?' (IV,6).

<sup>265</sup> One can reasonably assume that in the outside world, plebeians as well as men of great standing would have been equally susceptible to the claims of necromancy, but only the latter would have had the means to handsomely reward its practitioners.

extreme credulity or, conversely, low rank is not necessarily synonymous with greater gullibility, refers to himself as “vilissimo fante” (II,1), imbued with ironic self-deprecation.

When confronted by the evidence of the necromancer’s dishonest behaviour and the necessity for a practical response to it, Temolo is canny enough to see that money is Lachellino’s sole motivation and therefore he would be susceptible to a higher offer (40 Florins) to fail to cure Cintio of his supposed impotence, than the one currently on offer by Maximo (20 Florins) to cure him of this (Act II, Scene 1).<sup>266</sup> Temolo perceives that, in order to obtain long-term advantage, short-term sacrifices may be called for. Temolo is the most suspicious of the necromancer and is the first to conclude that he has duped everyone. There is, however, one episode when even he is seen giving some credence to the claimed powers of necromancy:

... certo altare incantato, che se ponere  
lo farà apresso ove li sposi dormono,  
avrà forza di far ch’insieme si amino,  
se ben fussi tra lor capital odio. (IV,1)

Although shortly after this, Temolo is shown robustly chiding Cambio (first in Act IV, Scene 1 and later in Act IV, Scene 4) in his foolish belief that Lachellino has any out-of-the-ordinary powers. It is Temolo who devises the ruse to send Nebbio on a wild goose chase, far away from the chest, to allow sufficient time for him to decide how and where to dispose of it.

As well as being the most courageous, Temolo is depicted as the most perceptive character. He is prudent, decisive in action and has a nice line in satirical jibes. In bringing home with some force a satire against belief in necromancy, the playwright here has constructed the servant Temolo as an uncomplicated figure without much shading. His moral and intellectual superiority is not embedded in a sufficiently rounded character; as such he is too readily identifiable as a conduit through which the playwright imparts a scathing denunciation of necromancy and its adherents. However, we cannot infer that this creation shows negligence; this may have been a deliberate

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<sup>266</sup> In Ariosto’s later version of the play (1530), this ploy is presented as originating from the merchant Fazio (Cambio in the first redaction) rather than from Temolo.



choice on Ariosto's part: to create an uncomplicated shining hero, a deliberate foil to the folly and villainy of others.<sup>267</sup>

Now follows a survey of the rarer presentations of the female servant. I shall try to see how the prevalent strain of misogyny (not so surprising in theatrical pieces written by male playwrights for largely male audiences in a patriarchal society) impacts on the degree of intelligence or common sense these female servants are accorded and, as a subsidiary question, how central or marginal they are in the engineering of the main ruse.

Samia is the maidservant to the rich, middle-aged Fulvia. She very much plays the role of lackey and go-between; she carries out her duties with varying degrees of competence. In the third Act, she is seen at her most incompetent which provokes impatience and verbal abuse from her normally mild-mannered mistress Fulvia: 'Sia col mal anno, cervel d'oca.' (III,5). Along with her mistress, Samia subscribes to the notion that necromancy can spontaneously engender amorous feelings in someone and, even more far-fetched, can change a person from one gender to the other. At various points in this scene, Samia is shown to either misapprehend matters, or demonstrate a poor memory:

FULVIA: Che dice?

SAMIA: Niente, pare a me.

FULVIA: Pure?

SAMIA: Che lo spirito gli ho risposto ... come diss'egli? Non me ne ricordo.

(III,5)

In Act IV, Scene 6, Samia fails to comprehend the euphemism *ramo* which the male servant Fessenio then has to explain to her. Samia's incompetence extends to the inability to open a locked door (Act III, Scene 10) although one can surmise that this scene was included primarily to generate a series of double-entendres rather than to illustrate Samia's cackhandedness.

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<sup>267</sup> Guidotti observes: 'Il fatto è che, nella 'scala di valori' che l'Ariosto si sta costruendo per arrivare ad una sempre maggior precisazione della sua idea di drammaturgico, il tessuto di base in cui immettere moduli astratti (i *tòpoi* della commedia classica e gli intrecci narrativi) acquista sempre maggior importanza, relegando al secondo posto sia la coerenza di personaggi.', *Il Modello...*, p.40.

Despite the above impression, Samia is not beyond making some shrewd observations on the ways of the world: ‘Tanto faccia Ideo sani delli reni voi altri amatori quanto voi dite mai il vero.’ (III,16). In the penultimate scene in which Samia appears (Act V, Scene 1), she is stupefied at seeing two individuals who appear identical; she then proceeds to pose a series of simple questions to try to identify the ‘real’ Lidio but eventually gives up and returns to her mistress. Samia’s simple-minded nature here lends reinforcement to the theatrical conceit of a male and a female, one of whom is cross-dressed, appearing indistinguishable from one another. As well as being presented as credulous in her belief in necromancy (a trait she shares with her mistress), she is shown as the character most prone to invoke the Christian religion, most pointedly when she makes the sign of the cross over Ruffo’s missive (in Act IV, Scene 6) in an attempt to neutralize any malignant powers it might have acquired by proxy.

Generally, Samia comes across as unsophisticated and one whose views are rooted in superstition, folklore and a more literal interpretation of the Bible. Although Samia does not come across as very bright, she does her best within her limited grasp of the circumstances she finds herself in.

The character of the Old Nurse in Aretino’s *Il Marescalco* is a little more shaded. Like Samia, she is depicted as firmly adhering to religious doctrine and social convention which she does not question. In her only soliloquy (Act I, Scene 5), it is apparent that she belongs to the more superstitious section of society (or at least those who lack any notion of scientific enquiry) who believe that dreams have a predictive value. However, she is clever enough to use her dream as a pretext to try and get the Marescalco to comply with the Duke’s wishes, as well as a chance to impart a veiled criticism of his behaviour:

L’uccellino che cantava è il tuo ragazzo, che dolcemente ti ragionava de la moglie, l’uomo bestiale sei tu, che lo minacci ragionandotene, ed io sono io, sedea sotto al fico, che tanto farò e tanto dirò, che torrai questa moglie; che buon per te. (I,6)<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Another possible take on this episode is that the dream the Old Nurse relates is pure invention on her part, a ruse to get the Marescalco to conquer his reluctance to get married. However, I suspect Aretino intended this speech to come across as a genuine recollection, since elsewhere the Old Nurse is not presented as possessing much guile.

The Old Nurse has the capacity to paint an elaborate picture of the potentially rosy life that awaits the Marescalco if he goes ahead with the marriage. She holds to the conviction that life's events are governed by divine ordinance and takes the Bible and church liturgy as guidelines as to how to conduct oneself. She also has a belief in magic practices but she resents these being described as witchcraft or necromancy.

The Old Nurse belongs to that group of the Marescalco's associates who do not suspect that his prospective marriage is a hoax. Her level of understanding accords well with her social position and general character, as one who views family ties and duties to be of the prime concern and is happy to let Christian precepts and values be her guide. However, when arguing with those on the lower rungs of Court society, including the Marescalco, she is able to hold her own.

Both Samia and the Old Nurse fit into the broad stereotype of the loquacious but ineffectual female servant. By contrast, the female servant, Agnola, who appears in the later play *L'Assiuolo*, is at least one remove from this stereotype. In the three-way conversation between Agnola, Rinuccio and Giulio, Agnola is initially cautious of divulging household secrets to these two outsiders although, upon firm re-assurances from both of them, she eventually does. During this discussion, Madonna Agnola protests that she is no fool: 'Datemi a cognoscere i polli miei.' (I,2). In support of this claim, Agnola is quick to spot and then condemn the discrepancy between Madonna Verdiana's show of religious devotion and her mercenary ambitions and unsavoury role in others' affairs. Agnola shows she is capable of articulating the difficulty her mistress, Madonna Oretta, would have in exposing her husband's adulterous intentions without concrete evidence:

... che se madonna Oretta facesse di questa cosa romore col vecchio, or co' fratelli di lei, che egli subito negherebbe, e i fratelli non le crederebbono, non avendo sù fatta oppenione d'un pari di messer Ambrogio; e si penserebbono, che la fusse gelosia di madonna: (I,2)

She then details the ruse which Madonna Anfrosina and her mistress Oretta have devised to catch Messer Ambrogio out and expose his adulterous intentions. Agnola is dextrous at pointing out all the possible obstacles in Rinuccio's scheme to sleep with her mistress and is able to suggest actions to surmount these (Act II, Scene 5). In her

final appearance (Act V, Scene 4) it can be inferred that she is in cahoots with Madonna Oretta and thus, in response to Ugucione's enquiry, is deliberately disingenuous when she replies that her mistress is upstairs sewing. Similarly, she repels two undesirable types whom she contrives not to recognise (they are actually Ambrogio and his servant in disguise) away from the house's entrance. When they protest, she points out that she is simply following the instructions given to her earlier by Ambrogio himself:

AGNOLA: Chi è?

AMBROGIO: Tu lo potresti vedere, troiaccia.

AGNOLA: Voi dovete essere un monte d'ubriachi: andate, andate a smaltir il vino, andate. (V,4)<sup>269</sup>

Although she only has a small role here, it is rare to see a female servant play such a vital part in the denouement: Agnola's delaying tactics save Madonna Oretta from being caught *in flagrante*. In the figure of Madonna Agnola, Cecchi has constructed a more rounded female servant, one who possesses wit and ingenuity and can verbally spar with her social superiors, indeed often showing greater perception than her interlocutors.

As in the two previous chapters, in this section I shall lastly look at the Marescalco, the central character of Aretino's *Il Marescalco*. When Jacopo starts to discuss the qualities of the Duke, the Marescalco affirms: 'Il Signore ha il miglior tempo di signor che viva, Dio lo mantenga;' (I,2). One can construe this either as the Marescalco's sincere evaluation of the Duke or something said out of prudent self-preservation; the picture here is of a tightly-knit society where gossip and rumour abound. When the Old Nurse paints an idyllic picture of all the wonderful services a wife could bring to his life, the Marescalco is adept at describing an alternative bleak scenario. He also shrewdly points out that all the services a wife could provide could equally be carried out by a male servant who, moreover, could be readily dismissed, unlike a wife: 'Ed un famiglio basta far tutto quello, che con sì lunga diceria avete conto, il qual si può cacciare in bordello a tutte le ore, che non si può far così de la moglie.'

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<sup>269</sup> There are two distinct options for staging this scene. The first is to have Agnola as knowing and mischievous, having fun at her master's expense which would also serve the notion that all the females, including Agnola, whom Ambrogio has treated badly, would exact revenge if and when the opportunity arose. The second option would be to have Agnola as 'genuinely' not recognising her master and her fellow servant. This would play into the more stereotypical presentation of the female servant as not very perceptive.

(I,6). In a conversation with the ostler (Act II, Scene 3), the Marescalco ruefully pinpoints one of the paradoxes of court life: if he had petitioned the Duke with a multitude of supplications to gain his blessing to take a wife, each petition would have been denied; conversely, when he does not want such a thing, it is forced upon him. He widens this observation to courtship in general: women run after those who are not interested in them and run away from those who are. In some quick-fire repartee with his squire and the Old Nurse, the Marescalco manages to interject this rueful observation: 'La medicina trae il tristo del corpo, e la moglie trae il buono del corpo e de l'anima.' (II,6).

In response to the Marescalco asking for help, the Old Nurse suggests resorting to occult practices (*incantesimi*) to make the Duke forget his plan for the Marescalco to marry. The Marescalco readily entertains such a notion, more out of desperation one can infer than as a sign of his gullibility. In the scene following (Act II, Scene 10), when the Old Nurse and the Marescalco rehearse the occult ritual, she recalls that in his childhood he took a long time to learn to say grace at the table and to learn by heart the Ave Maria, which reinforces the impression that he is not particularly quick-witted. (Alternatively, rather than a slowness to learn, this could be construed as an unwillingness to learn, conveying the idea that he had, from an early age, been wilful and unco-operative.)

In his conversation with Jacopo, although the Marescalco listens respectfully to the latter's listing of the great benefits that a wife could bestow, he is able to parry this argument by observing that the particular cannot always be translated into the universal: 'ma parvi che un canestro d'uva faccia vendemmia?' (IV,5). Often the Marescalco's hostility to the idea of taking a wife is expressed in a wise-crack, as in this remark uttered just before the wedding ceremony: 'Se io avessi a morire una volta senza moglie, sarebbe una pietà, ma avere a morir mille con essa è una crudeltà.' (V,10). When the Pedant lists the prestigious heights a potential offspring of the Marescalco could reach in politics or in the arts, he cleverly rebuffs this notion by adducing his own list of negative possibilities:

Brigata, al pedagogo non s'ha da rispondere altro, se non che questi figli che vuole che nascono del fatto mio, sendo maschi, potrebbero essere giocatori, ruffiani, ladri, traditori, poltroni, e sendo femine, a la men trista, puttane. (V,3).

However, despite this and other displays of wit and his ability to counter the arguments of his associates, it should not be forgotten that the Marescalco does not see through the prank played upon him until the denouement.

Unlike the majority of plays under study here, *Il Marescalco* comes with no *antefatti*: the lengthy debates all concern either the present or the future; we learn nothing of the Marescalco's past life. We may infer that his preference for male company and dislike of females had been widely known for a long time and that, outside the cut and thrust of the politics of the inner court circle, the outer society which the Marescalco inhabited was a more benign one where its members generally had a trust in and regard for each other. If this were not the case, the unfolding of the elaborate scam would not be convincing: the choice of the well-regarded and competent Marescalco as the victim of the *beffa* and the idea that a reasonably intelligent man such as he could be hoodwinked for a sustained period would lack credibility.

#### YOUNG NOBLE MALES

Most of the main plots of these early comedies involve the pursuit by a young male of a young female (though other permutations occur, as in *Calandra*, which features the pursuit by the middle-aged of both sexes of younger sexual partners). Sentiments expressed by these fictional young men range from desperate sexual longing<sup>270</sup> to more measured romantic yearnings. It has long been observed that someone in the throes of such passions sometimes behaves oddly, out-of-character, often with their normal common sense overturned.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> There is a phrase which Giulio (of *L'Assiuolo*) uses 'non trovo luogo nè dì nè notte' (I,1), which parallels that of Callimaco's in *La Mandragola*: 'ho trovato la fama di Madonna Lucrezia essere minore assai che la verità [...] e sommi acceso in tanto desiderio d'essere seco, che io non truovo loco.' (I,1).

<sup>271</sup> Giannetti and Ruggiero concur: 'the Renaissance was acutely aware that love, especially young love, was not a reasonable or moderate emotion. It was a strong, often violent emotion that overwhelmed people with passion and robbed them of their senses and peace.', *Five Comedies ...*, Introduction p. xxiv. A prominent member of the *Intronati* at Siena, Piccolomini, theatre theoretician as well as gifted playwright, couples particular theatrical figures with particular personality traits; included in this is 'pazzia e cecità di innamorati.', *Annotationi di M. Alessandro Piccolomini, nel libro della Poetica d'Aristotele con la traduzione del medesimo Libro in lingua volgare*. Piccolomini, Alessandro, 1575.

I shall now consider the portrayal of these young men and try to determine, *inter alia*, whether this ‘excessive’ passion is reflected plausibly within the overall character portrayal or is merely added for gratuitous comic effect. Aside from romantic yearnings, male youths are attributed with acting on impulse, more spontaneously and lacking consideration for long-term consequences; this is often, though not invariably, juxtaposed against the more moderate and cautious behaviour of the older generation, and against the female sex who are considered less prone to excessive passion and reckless behaviour.<sup>272</sup> I will look to see if these hypotheses are reflected or indeed emphasized in these play texts, whether a contrary view is ever posited, and how ‘comic’ exaggeration is distributed among the genders and generations. I shall arrange this tranche of the survey in chronological order, partly to see if there is any discernable trend over time in the depiction of young males regarding the balance between wisdom and folly.

Lidio is the displaced young nobleman featured in *La Calandra*. After various traumas, forced migration and separation from other family members, he eventually fetches up in the city of Rome. Lidio tends to make pronouncements rather than engage in debate. An exception to this tendency occurs towards the later stages of his argument with his tutor, where he manages to take up the metaphor adduced by the straight-laced Polinico and counter it:

POLINICO: Amore è simile al foco che, postovi sopra zolfo o altra trista cosa,  
amorba l’omo.

LIDIO: E postovi incenso, aloè e ambra, fa pure odore da resuscitare morti. (I,2)

This riposte finds immediate approval from his servant Fessenio. However, in general, whatever arguments against pursuing his affair with Fulvia his tutor propounds, Lidio merely re-affirms his determination to go ahead. He relies in the main on his servant to refute the arguments of Polinico.

The impression is given that Lidio negotiates his way through the world through his good looks and natural authority rather than through his wits. Although he is single-

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<sup>272</sup> One rare example of a female figure acting recklessly is Polinesta, the female love interest of Ariosto’s *I Suppositi*: she falls in love with the noble youth Erostatò when she spies him on the street and immediately starts an illicit affair with him.

minded in his pursuit of the object of his desire, he is not shown as becoming the least bit unhinged. This is in part attributable to certain unusual features of the plot: there are very few obstacles placed in Lidio's path to thwart his sexual designs and the object of his desire seems as keen, if not keener than he, for a liaison between them to take place. Thus for Lidio unrequited passion or uncertainty is absent as a trigger for descent into reckless or undignified behaviour. Lidio does not need to exercise any intellectual prowess since the means to his desired goal are fortuitously provided by others.

Lidio's pursuit of Fulvia veers towards the cold and calculating, particularly when he openly expresses an expectation of greater prestige and wealth that this liaison is likely to confer on him. On the other hand, there is a sense that the figure of Lidio provides a steely imperturbability at the centre of a narrative in which other main characters are overwhelmed and destabilised by desperate sexual longing: both Fulvia and Calandro undergo varying degrees of turmoil, frustration and disappointment. (However, Lidio's cool approach is not lauded over Fulvia's more desperate demeanour since they both achieve their goals in the end.)

In *Il Negromante*, Ariosto has constructed contrasting images of the young male lover: Cintio is a shrewder, more level-headed individual but one who engages in deception: he has secretly married a female (Lavinia) without telling his step-father and has to counter his step-father's increasing suspicions. By way of contrast, the other well-to-do youth featured in this play, Camillo, is depicted as less grounded, indeed something of an air-head; his nickname "*Pocosale*" signals this character trait.<sup>273</sup>

In his first appearance, Camillo evidently clings naively to the maxim of hope triumphing over experience: he admits that during the five years he has tried to court Emilia she has never responded:

Da la qual, già cinque anni che continua-  
mente ho amata e servita, un segno minimo  
Non potetti aver mai d'esserli in grazia. (II,4)

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<sup>273</sup> Camillo's nickname is first cited by Lachellino in Act II, Scene 3.



In this same scene, he does not question the authenticity of the letter that Lachellino avers has come from Emilia (it has actually been written by Lachellino himself). In the next encounter with the necromancer, Camillo reaches the height of his gullibility: he completely swallows the notion of the possibility of being transformed into an animal or rendered invisible:

CAMILLO: Né topo anco né ragno né pulce essere  
Voglio, che mi potrebbe troppo nuocere  
Ogni piccol sinistro.

FISICO: Tu hai del provido

CAMILLO: Meglio sarà che mi mandi invisibile. (III,3)

Camillo is then persuaded to allow himself to be locked in a chest which is to be transported to Emilia's bedroom. He even allows the necromancer to take charge of his servants for a brief period.<sup>274</sup>

From a figure of ludicrous optimism and extreme gullibility, as soon as the necromancer's schemes unravel and his treachery is unmasked, Camillo undergoes a change in his intellectual outlook. He now espouses more realistic goals: to expose the adultery of Cintio and bring the necromancer and his servant to book. However, Camillo is still reluctant to admit to personal responsibility for past folly but blames it on forces beyond his control:

ABONDIO: Fu gran pazzia la tua, lasciarti chiudere  
In una cassa, e messo a gran pericolo  
Ti sei per certo ...

CAMILLO: Veramente, Abondio,  
Non voglio attribuirlo sì al mio essere  
Sciocco, come al voler di Dio... (V,2)<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> In Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, the list of those who lose their reason includes those susceptible to the claims of sorcery: 'Altri in amar lo perde, altri in onori, / altri in cercar, scorrendo il mar, ricchezze; / altri ne le speranze de' signori, / altri dietro alle magiche sciocchezze;' *OF* 34.85, 1-6. (See also *The Lunar Renaissance*, Simonetta Bassi, Science and Literature in Italian Culture, ed. by Pierpaolo Antonello and Simon Gilson (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), pp. 140-1.)

<sup>275</sup> The attribution of the cause of dubious behaviour to a divine plan re-occurs at the start of Maximo's peroration at the end of the play: 'Alla temerita non più del giovane / Si deve attribuir, che all'infallibile / Divina provvidenza, che a principio / Così determina ch'avessi ad essere.' (V,3).

In the final scene, as well as being given permission to marry the girl of his dreams, Emilia, Camillo is accorded the valedictory address to the audience. This further adds to his resurrection as a more perceptive, self-knowing individual.<sup>276</sup>

Camillo plays the role of a young fop, someone with more money than sense. His single-minded pursuit of a young female renders him incapable of distinguishing between reasonable and outlandish suggestions, between sensible and absurd behaviour. Camillo's buffoonish quality makes the other young male Cintio, who is also initially duped by the necromancer, a more sympathetic figure by way of comparison, or at least one easier to identify with.

Next under examination is the noble youth Tindaro from *Gli Straccioni*. He is depicted as occupying a social rung above the bourgeois pair Cintio and Camillo, as a high-ranked member of a powerful clan.<sup>277</sup> Does this influence the way Caro presents any folly in this character, one who also suffers the pangs of romantic longing? We are first apprised of the most significant episode of Tindaro's recent life in the conversation between Demetrio and Giovanni/Battista (Act I, Scene 2): Tindaro, with the help of his close friend and confidant Demetrio, has abducted the maiden Giuletta, the object of his romantic desire. Demetrio assigns such a reckless act to 'troppo amore' when he is defending the actions of Tindaro to these two, father and uncle respectively of Giuletta. We can infer that this passion has overridden Tindaro's common sense since we learn in the next scene that had these two waited one day more the abduction would have been unnecessary.

Tindaro is occasionally given to making observations on the ways of the world. He ruefully observes: 'Delle disgrazie, che tu mi mandi, non ne coglie una in fallo; le grazie o non vengono mai, o non arrivano a tempo.' (I,3). Act II, Scene 1 is a long, heated debate as to whether Tindaro should marry the rich widow Madonna Argentina. In this debate Demetrio and Barbagrigia represent the rational, Tindaro the sentimental. Demetrio makes allowances for his friend's irrational stance: 'Messer Gisippo, la nebbia delle passioni oscura il lume de la prudenza ne' savi.' (II,1). In the face of some

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<sup>276</sup> As with the Pedant in *Il Marescalco* and Nibbio in the second redaction of *Il Negromante*, who are also given the valedictory address, there may be an intention by the playwright to partially rehabilitate certain previously villainous or foolish characters before the 'final curtain' falls.

<sup>277</sup> The full extent of the wealth and standing of Tindaro is not revealed until the final Act.

highly sophisticated and extensively articulated reasoning from Demetrio and Barbargia, Tindaro can only counter this with this simple declaration: 'Queste sono parole; ed io so come mi sento.' (II,1). This remark is immediately seized upon by Demetrio who bluntly describes Tindaro's arguments as 'queste scempiezze!' In Act III, Scene 3, when confronted by Giovanni and Battista, Tindaro's instinct is to hide or run away rather than try to explain his past behaviour. He seems to have neither the will nor the intellectual resources to be able to exculpate himself. However, in the closing stages of the play Tindaro regains some astuteness: it is he rather than the lawyer or Cavaliere Giordano who is the first to deduce the familial relationships between all the interested parties (Act V, Scene 5).<sup>278</sup> Tindaro is finally able to articulate his own defence and reasons for acting in the way he did, this time without any assistance from Demetrio.

Tindaro is at the opposite end of the spectrum to Camillo in terms of risibility: his folly, rather than presented as farce, has the tenor more of tragedy although, unlike a truly tragic figure, events resolve themselves very much in Tindaro's favour. This descent into mental incapacity is presented as something almost noble, an eminently pardonable by-product of constancy of devotion, which the audience is invited to admire, or at least indulge, rather than condemn or find ridiculous.

Lastly in this section, I shall look at the youth Rinuccio from *L'Assiuolo*. Rinuccio is almost a mirror image of Giulio, the other well-to-do young male in this play: he is naive and heavily dependent on the ingenuity of others. The most notable difference between these two is that Rinuccio is not given any scenes with his own servant in which his naivety could be brought to the fore. However, occasionally Rinuccio displays greater astuteness. When bargaining with the maidservant Agnola, he proffers this calculation: 'O i' crederei che la metà delle parole che io ci ho speso attorno bastassino a fare che voi me fidate maggior secreti che questi.' (I,2). But within the space of this single scene, an impression is also given that Rinuccio is not even as bright as Giulio in interpreting the behaviour of others:

GIULIO: Sequitate voi prima questa serva, e vedete se ell'ha altro, che ella dir vi voglia da voi e lei; che questo partirsi così a rotta me ne fu sospettare.

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<sup>278</sup> There is a faint suggestion here of cause and effect: once Tindaro is sure of reunion with his lost love, he regains clarity of mind.

RINUCCIO: Credetelo voi? (I,2)

Rinuccio's first soliloquy underscores his simple nature; he accepts at face value the advice and help which Giulio has given him without any suspicion of a hidden motive; Rinuccio does not realize until very late (in Act V) that Giulio is in pursuit of the same female he is. Here he also pays tribute to Giulio's keener mind: 'Per certo egli è pur di desto ed elevato ingegno; ma che? E' non sarebbe Fiorentino.' (II,4).<sup>279</sup> In the scene following, Rinuccio outlines to the maidservant Agnola the elaborate scheme devised to lure Ambrogio away from his house for the whole night, enabling Rinuccio easy access to Madonna Oretta. When Agnola alerts Rinuccio to possible risks, he does not come up with any contingency plans but merely declares that he will cross any bridge when he comes to it: 'Questa è una di quelle cose, alla quale io no vo' pensare se no quando i' sarò sul fatto: io m'andrò accomodando al temporale; veggiàn ch'io mi vi conduca.' (II,5). However, in Act II, Scene 7, Rinuccio manages with considerable finesse to convince Ambrogio that he intends to depart that very evening for Florence and not return for several days.

In the long exchange between Rinuccio and Giulio at the beginning of the final Act, the former cheerfully attests that his success of that night was attributable to chance rather than any ingenuity on his part: 'A dubitare è tocco a me stanotte, che sono stato gonfiato com'una palla a vento, benché io non mi vo' dolere; tuttavolta io ho avuto più ventura che senno.' (V, 2).<sup>280</sup> During Rinuccio's account of his nocturnal adventures, it becomes apparent that Rinuccio had only recently fathomed that Giulio and Giorgetto had superimposed their own separate agenda on the proceedings to deliver up Madonna Oretta to Giulio rather than let her fall into his own hands. Rinuccio's marked

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<sup>279</sup> This exchange can be interpreted as either an oblique jibe: that the Pisan Rinuccio would perceive Giulio's inept behaviour and foolish sayings as astuteness renders Rinuccio an even greater fool, with the possible implication that this applies to other inhabitants of Pisa as well; or more straightforwardly as a boast by the playwright himself, artificially inserted into the dialogue, of the intellectual superiority of the Florentines.

<sup>280</sup> Radcliff-Umstead sees this as a manifestation of a larger pattern: 'In literary works of an earlier period like the *Decameron*, the *beffa* represents the triumph of a superior intelligence over an inferior mind [...] Already at this initial moment in Cecchi's career as a dramatist, the *beffa* results in frustration of intelligent effort rather than in victory. This attitude of the futility of inventiveness eventually predominated in the writer's works after he came under the influence of the Catholic Reformation.', Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, *Carnival Comedy and Sacred Play* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 41.

obtuseness is combined with an equal measure of calm acceptance of whatever fate or human agency throws at him.

Although Rinuccio is not as adept at forward planning as others, when a favourable circumstance arises he is able to exploit it with some dexterity. Rinuccio's role in the denouement as someone to whom others look for wisdom and arbitration seems at odds with his earlier appearances as a happy-go-lucky bumbler. Overall Rinuccio remains an unconvincing composite of imbecility and shrewdness.<sup>281</sup>

#### YOUNG NOBLE FEMALES

Next under scrutiny is the smaller category of young well-born females. In the comedies of this epoch, it is typical to depict the heroine (usually though not invariably a chaste young maiden) as having so little room to manoeuvre, to be denied any say in the important aspects of her future life, that any display of intelligence or ingenuity can find little expression. For her parents and other close relatives, it is her chastity that matters most, for her prospective husband it is beauty, obedience and faithfulness, as well as the more practical consideration of the dowry price she brings with her. Since it is largely from the viewpoint of these significant others that the heroine is portrayed, any intellectual acumen on the part of these females tends to be sidelined. However, I shall look at the few well-to-do young females who are given a flesh and blood reality on stage and see if they blindly accept or question the situations they find themselves in; if the latter is the case do they then devise ways of extricating themselves or, failing that, are they at least able to surmise the motives behind others' behaviour.

Santilla, the heroine of *La Calandra* is somewhat thinly characterised. Although cultured and articulate, there is no episode here where Santilla is shown in verbal jousting with another character in order to win an argument, apart from the first scene of Act V in which she vies with Lidio for a sum of money proffered by Samia.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Rinuccio's earlier depiction as an ingénu may have been a deliberate contrivance in order that his eventual seduction of Madonna Violante seems more of a stroke of good fortune than something planned with deliberate calculation. If this equation is valid, his moral profile is thereby enhanced, whilst his intellectual profile is diminished concomitantly.

<sup>282</sup> This scene, together with those featuring Calandro and Fessenio, are the most 'theatrical' in design, i.e. they appear as separate comic vignettes which add little to further characterisation of the principals or to plot development.

Elsewhere, she plays the role of an inert pawn in the machinations of others, under which strictures any intellectual capability cannot find an outlet. Within these strictures, Santilla is eloquent and insightful in describing her past travails and current dilemma, starting with this bold generalisation: ‘Assai è manifesto quanto sia miglior la fortuna degli uomini, che quella delle donne.’ (II,1).

Santilla follows, and indeed can be seen as part of the foundation of, a standard template: that of a well-born young maiden imbued with the dominant trait of forbearance and keen sense of propriety. Santilla is not shown as the instigator of, or contributor to, the devising of any of the schemes, merely a willing accomplice.

A generation after the first staging of *La Calandra*, Annibal Caro wrote *Gli Straccioni* which features Giuletta as the main female character. She is more pivotal to the story line here than is Santilla to hers but, paradoxically, appears less frequently. In her first appearance (Act III, Scene 3), she is in such distressed circumstances, manhandled by two males, that she can only utter short vocal protests. It is only in the scene following that she is calm and collected enough to be able to articulate what has happened to her. Here Giuletta points to the grim paradox that among Turkish pirates she managed to preserve her chastity but arriving back among Christian folk she has been subjected to gross physical abuse: ‘In man di Turchi ho salvato l’onore e la persona mia, ed ora son forzata e martirizzata da’ Cristiani?’ (IV,4). She is also shrewd enough to praise and voice gratitude to the Pope in front of the lawyer whom she recognises as a representative of his temporal authority.<sup>283</sup>

It is in the letter she has penned (read out aloud by Demetrio) that we can glimpse Giuletta’s fine mind. This reveals her to be highly educated, articulate and a skilful delineator of the situation she finds herself in. She starts by making this statement which can be interpreted as either genuine puzzlement over what has happened or as an oblique jibe against Tindaro’s apparent betrayal:

Tindaro, padron mio (così convien, ch’io vi chiami, poiché mi truovo serva dei servitori della vostra moglie), gli affanni ch’io ho sofferti fino ad ora grandissimi

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<sup>283</sup> Similar to Aretino’s contriving to have his characters sing the praises of the Duke of Mantua, the fulsome praise for the Pope in this episode comes across more as a direct sentiment from the playwright himself.

ed infiniti sono stati passati da me tutti con pazienza, sperando di ritrovarvi e consolarmi d'aver voi per mio consorte. (V,2)

A more directly expressed criticism of Tindaro would both go against Giuletta's sense of decorum and rule out the possibility that Tindaro's behaviour – his seeming abandonment of her – has other explanations that do not implicate him in an act of unwarranted cruelty. Giuletta also makes it clear shows that she is aware of the legal niceties of marriage: that it does not become a binding contract until it has been consummated. The general thrust of this communication, beneath the decorous phrasing and understated passion, is the implication that, whereas she has conducted herself with absolute propriety despite suffering untold hardships, Tindaro has displayed a cavalier attitude towards her. Not relying on any consistency of romantic interest from him, or indeed on any kindness or generosity, she takes the precaution of offering financial recompense to secure her freedom: 'e, bisognando, promettete il prezzo ch'io sono stata comprata, ch' io prometto a voi di restituirvelo.' (V,2).

The letter form of communication captures the notion that a person can marshal a line of argument more succinctly and trenchantly than would be the case if required to express the same ideas verbally without preparation. Giuletta here is very careful not to let her justified indignation at the way she has been treated override her sense of decorum and propriety; she is keen not to be seen as a supplicant even though there is a strong moral obligation for Tindaro to make amends by re-affirming his original commitment to her.

Despite this innovation of a young female given the opportunity to express herself fully and with an unusual degree of gravitas, Caro follows convention in the denouement: although referred to by others and forming a principal partner in the romantic pairings, Giuletta does not appear in the closing scenes where these pairings are decided upon. If her partner Tindaro belongs half in a serious drama concerning the vicissitudes of romance and half in a farcical piece where he is pursued by the risible pair Giovanni and Battista, the sombre presentation of Giuletta is not contaminated by such absurdist elements.

Last in this category is Madonna Oretta who, together with her sister Violante, forms the female love interest in Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo*. Long before she actually appears, we are told by Agnola of the ingenious plot devised by Madonnas Oretta and Anfrosina (Rinuccio's mother) to catch her husband red-handed in adultery.<sup>284</sup> Agnola outlines this plan to Rinuccio and Giulio:

Madonna Anfrosina ... mandi di notte per il dottore, e lo metta a letto nella vostra camera terrena, avendo prima fatto intendere il tutto a Madonna Oretta, e mandatoli tanti delli vostri panni, che ella travestire si possa, e così ella travestita da uomo se ne verrà a casa vostra, e al buio sen'enterrà in camera col suo dottore.  
(I,2)

In her first appearance, which occurs as late as the fourth Act, Oretta delivers the most eloquent and well-constructed speech of the whole play. It starts with a lament on the sad lot of women in general and on her own particular onerous circumstances, before outlining the role she is obliged to play in the ruse by which her husband can be caught. This speech concludes with a persuasive defence of what would be considered indefensible by others: a respectable married woman venturing out alone at night: 'E se non ch'io credo, che questa abbia a essere una ottima medicina per cavare chetamente il pazzo del capo a questo vecchiaccio, io la pigliavo altramente.' (IV,3).<sup>285</sup> In her brief conversation with Giulio at the beginning of the fifth Act, Oretta cleverly attributes her adulterous behaviour to the confluence of three disparate elements: her husband's erotic obsession, her own jealousy and Giulio's inventiveness. She manages to further exculpate herself by citing divine destiny: 'a far quello ch' io da per me mai arei fatto, i' non posso dir altro, se non che così fusse destinato da chi di noi può disporre.' (V,1).

In the absence of Giulio and Rinuccio, it devolves upon Oretta to mount a scathing denunciation of her husband's behaviour (Act V, Scene 6). She asks the servant Giannella a series of questions to establish what happened the previous night, before finally getting him to confess that he and his master had visited Anfrosina's

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<sup>284</sup> Gunsberg cites this precedent for females acting in concert to expose male folly: 'in *Clizia* [1525] [...] several female characters (Doria, Sostrata and Clizia) have combined forces to successfully outwit the patriarch himself, who is made a figure of ridicule.', *Gender...*, p. 12

<sup>285</sup> This speech has a close similarity with Fulvia's soliloquy of Act III, Scene 5 of *La Calandra*. However, Oretta has a greater justification: she is married to a brutally oppressive older husband who keeps her virtual prisoner and only provides bare subsistence: 'Oh gli è ricco! già non mangi io per questo di più un boccon di pane.' (IV,3) whereas Fulvia's husband may be vain and foolish but is not brutal.



house during that time. As a result of this damning confession from the servant, Oretta achieves her goal: to expose her husband's wrongdoing and divert attention away from any further investigation into her own conduct. Madonna Oretta's continued reputation as a wholly virtuous woman is confirmed in the last scene of the play when Giulio reports that her husband has been forced to declare that his wife is: 'la più fedel moglie che sia in Pisa.' (V,8).

As well as being accorded the opportunity to play a major role in the denouement, the other unusual aspect of this portrayal is that a young married woman is credited with being one of the co-designers of the original *beffa*.

#### MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD

If the young female has limited opportunities to demonstrate intellectual ability, the older male head of household is under more scrutiny to show that he is intellectually capable of fulfilling the roles of responsibility that come with this position. The older, deluded, husband who is the victim of a ruse soon becomes a stock figure in these comedies. After *Calandra* (1513), there are the two surviving plays from Machiavelli in which Messer Nicia (*La Mandragola*) and Nicomaco (*Clizia*) are cast in this role. This tradition is still going strong by the time of the late 1540s. Messer Ambrogio, a main character of Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo* (1549) fulfils a similar role to Calandro in *La Calandra*<sup>286</sup>: an ageing, outward respectable married man determined to pursue an extra-marital affair. Do these portraits differ?

In Act I, Scene 1 Agnola's description of Ambrogio as 'quello stregone' (I,2) suggests that he is more bad than mad. But Giulio, alluding to Ambrogio's crafty manoeuvres to be close to Madonna Anfrosina, praises the ingenuity of the older generation: 'In fatto questi vecchi ci vincono tanto nello ingegno, quanto noi vinciamo loro nella forza.' (I,2). Ambrogio's opening speeches confirm that he is no simpleton: in Act II, Scene 1 he is able to define the dilemma of his situation: if he were to pursue his extra-marital affair with Madonna Anfrosina, this would leave his wife unguarded

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<sup>286</sup> Both these plays draw on plots and a character, Calandrino, from *Decameron*. (For details, see Chapter Two, p. 83 above.)

and susceptible to would-be seducers. He is shrewd enough to realise that an incompetent servant is preferable to a disloyal, self-serving one:

Va prima per la vesta, che ti venga il cacasangue. O che grosso stornamento ! pure egli è meglio questo così fatto, di chi io mi posso fidare, che non sarebbe un altro destro e sottile che me la caricasse. (II,8)

In his discussion with Madonna Verdiana, the local gossip (Act II, Scene 2), Ambrogio is able to comprehend and thus parry her series of double-entendres. But in the haggling over how much she should receive for the information she carries, he is eventually outsmarted by her, finally promising to pay her more money than he had bargained for at the outset. Further, in Act II, Scene 7, Ambrogio is completely deceived by the bogus announcement from Rinuccio that he and Giulio were leaving that evening for an extended trip to Florence.

However, Ambrogio is not always presented as being on the receiving end of a ruse. In order to induce his servant Giannella to accompany him on his nocturnal escapade, he has to butter him up beforehand. By promising his servant Giannella a considerable reward at some unspecified time in the future, thus incurring no immediate loss, he gets him to promise to carry out activities beyond his normal duties. He also manages slyly to insult Giannella in such a way that he remains oblivious of it: 'perché la ragion vuole che all' uom grosso gli si dia del macco.' (III,5). At various points in the drama, Ambrogio demonstrates a salacious wit, as evidenced in the episode, when his wife is suspected of being upstairs with her lover:

UGU: Buona sera. Dove è l'Oretta?

AGN: E' su che cucie.

AMB: E debbe adoperar l'ago grosso. (V,4)

Although Messer Ambrogio manages to maintain a precarious control whilst remaining at his own residence, once he ventures abroad he is at the mercy of forces beyond his control and is seen to be more susceptible to others' suggestions. For example, at the end of Act III, Scene 5, the supposedly bird-brained servant Giannella manages to get the hitherto more sensible Ambrogio to agree to imitate the sound of an owl during their proposed nocturnal adventure. In their next scene together (Act III, Scene 9) Ambrogio, when he reprimands Giannella for failing to come to his aid,

gullibly accepts Giannella's absurd explanation, of being assailed simultaneously by a horde of ruffians, at face value.<sup>287</sup> Finally, in the denouement, Messer Ambrogio is outwitted by his wife who manages to demonstrate to the satisfaction of her brother Ugucione that it is her husband rather than she who has transgressed. Madonna Violante's epithet 'vecchio pazzo' now seems more fitting than ever. By this stage, Ambrogio lacks the wit or invention to exculpate himself.

Unlike Calandro from *La Calandra* or Messer Nicia from *La Mandragola* whose naivety and gullibility feature throughout as a constant, the figure of Messer Ambrogio, who is of similar status, is more subtly constructed; he follows a more complicated trajectory. At the outset, he is presented as an astute individual, such an attribute put into greater relief by his servant's imbecility. Ambrogio is pictured as capable of running his household, controlling his wife and servant, and repelling outsiders whom he considers as potential seducers of his wife. But in the unfolding story, he is undone by the acting out of his most negative traits: lust, avarice, jealousy and a desire to ingratiate himself with those he deems to have social cache. These tendencies allow him to be out-witted incrementally by a succession of characters, ending with his wife and her sister acting in concert in the denouement (Act V, Scene 6). Ambrogio's eventual downfall is not heavily signalled early on: his mastery and control over people and events at the start only gradually slip away from him from a confluence of his own weaknesses and the machinations of others, principally the servant Giorgetto. This more complex characterisation of Ambrogio gives *L'Assiuolo* greater tension: rather than the egregiously stupid Calandro or gullible Nicia falling easy prey to the ruses of their adversaries, Ambrogio is almost equal to outsmarting his enemies, so his eventual defeat is not such a foregone conclusion in a story-line where shrewdness and naivety are more evenly distributed between sympathetic and unsympathetic characters.

In *Il Negromante*, the merchant Cambio is of similar age to the patriarch Maximo, the principal dupe of Lachellino. In the early part of the conversation with his old friend Lippo (Act I, Scene 2), Cambio rashly expects to get away with pretending to be younger than he is in front of someone who had known him since childhood, an instance where vanity is seen to override common sense. For a time Cambio is as

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<sup>287</sup> 'Eh padrone, e' ci è stato da fare per ognuno. I' fui assaltato da più di 300 uomini d'arme, che mi si colseno in mezzo, e m'hanno concio male.' (*L'Assiuolo*, IV,9)

gullible as Maximo in his belief that the necromancer has extraordinary powers: in his meeting with Temolo he voices his fear that Lachellino has managed to switch Cintio's affections from Lavinia to Emilia:

E facci con qualch'arte diabolica  
Che Cintio levi da Lavinia l'animo  
E lo volga all'amor tutto d'Emilia. (III,1)

However, by the start of the fourth Act, Cambio has become a little more sceptical:

Sta' pur sicura, ch' io non son per dargliene  
Uno, se prima nol veggio far opera  
Degna de la mercede ... (IV,1)

Although Cambio eventually realizes that they have all been deceived by the necromancer, he has sufficient humility to include himself as one of those initially duped: 'noi sciocchi' (IV,1). At the end of this scene, he is slow to understand the ruse Temolo has devised to foil the necromancer; and even three scenes further on he is still espousing a belief in the power of the occult, for which gullibility he is more roundly rebuked by Temolo, who calls him a 'semplice omo.' (IV,4). However, to redress this impression, in the scene following Cambio makes some cutting satirical remarks towards the necromancer's servant. In Cambio's final appearance (Act IV, Scene 7) he explains matters to Cintio and tries, unsuccessfully, to persuade him to stay and face his step-father.

A possible interpretation to be drawn from the portrait of Cambio is that he is representative of a class who, however successful at trade and financial affairs, is not particularly perceptive at figuring out human nature.<sup>288</sup> Cambio provides a counterpoint to Maximo who blindly accepts everything Lachellino asks of him and, even after the necromancer has been unmasked as a fraudster, does not confess to any previous

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<sup>288</sup> In Ariosto's later version of this play, Cambio is not only given a different name – Fazio, but is also given lines previously spoken by Temolo, most significantly for this dimension those which posit that the necromancer would be susceptible to a greater monetary inducement, 40 florins as opposed to 20, for him to change his treatment regarding the supposed impotency of the youth Cintio.

stupidity. By contrast, Cambio's progress from gullibility to greater wisdom and acknowledgement of previous naivety is fully aired.<sup>289</sup>

## LONE FIGURES

In examining the intelligence accorded to this group, I shall start with the settled members of the urban society, beginning with those at the top of the social hierarchy and then move downwards. Then I shall move on to characters who are outsiders or itinerant figures, again starting with the character with the most standing.

Messer Rossello from *Gli Straccioni* is a well-established professional: as well as being a legal advocate for hire to individuals, he is also designated as a procurator, an important position in the legal administration of the city of Rome. Not only does he demonstrate his prowess by securing a favourable verdict for Giovanni and Battista, he uses his knowledge of Mirandola's penchants and pre-occupations to finally end his tiresome meddling in others' affairs:

Ma con tutto abbiamo la sentenza, questa bestia non vi si spiccherà mai da torno,  
se non gli facciamo qualche stratagemma; e già l'ho pensato io, poiché so  
che l'umor suo pecca in gioie ed in spiriti. (IV,5)

Towards the end of the play, the lawyer lists his achievements to date and future intentions:

Di poi, mi sono informato da lei; ho inteso tutti i suoi casi, ho trovato ch'è  
vostra figliuola; ho preso la difension della sua libertà; e farò che questi  
ribaldi siano castigati. (V,3)

Here, more than elsewhere, he trumpets the fact that he is a man of quick intellect and decisive action. In the final two scenes of the play (Scenes 4 and 5 of Act V), through direct and succinctly phrased questions, Messer Rossello manages to find out the circumstances behind the hostility between Tindaro and Cavaliere Giordano. He also

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<sup>289</sup> This difference may derive from Ariosto not wanting to dent the image of Maximo as the dignified *paterfamilias* and undercut his sombre summing up in the final Act, whereas any dignity accorded to the lower status Cambio would be more expendable.

uncovers the complex pattern of familial relationships between the parties, not just between Tindaro and Giordano but also between Giordano's wife and Giovanni/Battista.

Though a man of considerable ability and intellect, Messer Rossello is not presented as a humourless, stuffy official as would befit his professional role.<sup>290</sup> He is seen to have a strong streak of frivolity, which makes him a more likeable character, although his juvenile pranks against Mirandola stretch this trait to an incongruous degree.

Next are two characters who are members of the princely court society featured in Aretino's *Il Marescalco*. Ambrogio is a middle-ranked courtier. In his first meeting with the eponymous hero, Ambrogio is able to extrapolate from the Marescalco's particular circumstances to state a general rule: 'Sempre i signori fanno bene a chi no 'l merita, o a chi no 'l conosce.' (I,3). In the next discussion between these two, at one point Ambrogio prevaricates to make it look, disingenuously, as though the Marescalco has dragged out of him descriptions of the scandalous behaviour of women. Ambrogio expounds on situations where the male is bound to lose: if a husband admonishes his wife for her brazen behaviour he is branded an ass, if he appears to tolerate such behaviour he is held to have forfeited his honour. Ambrogio also warns that kind acts and an overly attentive attitude of a wife might just be a ruse to cover up unfaithfulness. The Marescalco is in awe and admiration of Ambrogio's powers of argument and analysis and thanks him profusely: 'Per i tuoi ottimi santi e divini consigli.' (II,5). (An alternative interpretation is that it is intended to reveal the impressionable nature and a degree of simplemindedness on the part of the Marescalco rather than indicate any profundity on the part of Ambrogio.)

During a soliloquy, Ambrogio makes a series of coruscating observations about life at court:

Chi non scappa ne le corti; o che è di legno d'India, o vero un Aristotile; che studio di Bologna? Mandinsi pure i suoi figliuoli in corte che gli vuole dottori in tre dì; è pure una dotta scuola la corte! (III,8)

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<sup>290</sup> In *commedia erudita* lawyers, alongside doctors and teachers, were a standard target for ridicule and often played the role of the would-be adulterer but ultimately the one to be cuckolded. Rather than an astute but self-serving individual who over-reaches himself (as embodied by Cecchi's Ambrogio), Rossello is presented as someone who uses his intellectual abilities to serve others.

Ambrogio cites the willingness of courtiers to readily carry out the wishes, however absurd, of the Duke in order to increase their chances of preferment. In the next scene, Ambrogio is sarcastic towards Messer Jacopo's revelation as to his information source regarding the Marescalco's wedding: 'Ah, ah, luogo degno di fede è la barberia, dove tutti i corrieri del mappamondo dimontano e portano gli avvisi.' (III,9). In his conversation with Messer Phebus (Act V, Scene 6) in response to the latter's remark that the Marescalco's obstinacy will drive the Duke to send him to the gallows, Ambrogio quick-wittedly rejoins by saying that forcing a wife on the Marescalco would likewise be tantamount to sending him to the gallows.

In this play, we are presented with two characters who nicely counter-balance each another: on the one hand Jacopo whose bonhomie and universal goodwill border on simplicity, on the other Ambrogio whose scepticism borders on the curmudgeonly.

Ambrogio and Jacopo, although taking opposing sides in the debate over marriage, both display practical wisdom, derived from personal experience. Their arguments are set in contrast to the academic and suspect wisdom of the Pedant. In his first encounter with the Marescalco, the Pedant's speeches quickly descend into verbose irrelevance: after the Marescalco has lamented the cruel punishment of inflicting a wife on him, the Pedant answers him thus:

Caro ed unico Marescalco, animadvertete là nel vecchio Testamento e vedrai oculata fide sì come erano expulsi de i templi, ed interdettogli ignem et aquam, tutti quelli che, sterili di prole, conculcavano la macchina mondiale, e dal motore, dal donatore signati e maledicti, andando de malo in pejus ... (I,9)

In his dealings with the young Giannicco, the Pedant is easily fooled by flattery and a seeming show of good will. By the end of Act II, Scene 11, it becomes apparent that, however teasingly or dismissively the Pedant is treated by others, he does not alter his pompous manner. In Act III, Scene 11, after a few short exchanges with the page-boy, he abandons verbal debate and resorts to violence. In Act IV, Scene 5 the Pedant is able

to identify, not always accurately, the source of quotes and sayings proffered by Messer Jacopo.<sup>291</sup>

In the early part of the final Act, the Pedant avows that wise men are ruled by the stars and that everything is willed by God: ‘Ogni cosa è volontà d’Iddio, e massimamente i matrimoni, ne i quali sempre pone la sua mano. (V,3). This view tends to align him more with the religiously orthodox and common masses than with advanced thinkers and philosophers. Later in this scene, the Pedant evinces the widely spread though unsubstantiated notion that worthy parents produce worthy offspring, an assumption which is ably refuted by the nominally less learned Marescalco. In the last scene of the play (Act V, Scene 12) which is a soliloquy, the Pedant seems to step out of his normal persona: unlike in the rest of the play where he lays down rigid laws and strictures, here he is willing to promote a more open debate.

It is evident from the outset that the Pedant is one of those courtiers fooled by the Duke in the staging of a hoax marriage ceremony. It is also shown that to win an argument the Pedant, does not, possibly cannot, use logic and reason but resorts to precedent and example. Even when he does manage to cite a source accurately, this is merely testament to a prestigious memory rather than to any great intellect. His verbosity, love of long words and quotes cannot conceal the illogicality of many of his pronouncements. The figure of the Pedant is the most caricatured. Rather than anything approaching a plausible character, he mainly serves as a vehicle through which Aretino is able to poke fun at the status of formal learning – university doctorates, degrees in medicine and law, study of the scriptures and texts handed down from the ancient world, all of which have been elevated above common or practical sense. The Pedant here is an exemplar of the ‘learned fool’.<sup>292</sup>

It is worth noting that Aretino has imbued the pro-marriage faction with either flaky intellectual capacity: the doddery and vague Jacopo and the sentimental Old Nurse,

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<sup>291</sup> Andrews describes the pedant figure thus: ‘he mingled bad Latin, good Latin, Latinised Italian, and endless superfluous scholarly references’, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 76

<sup>292</sup> Cairns notes of this character: ‘The characteristics which many of the Pedants share may be summarized briefly: he is ridiculed by other characters for his appearance, his stupidity, his other-worldly devotion to the classical writings of Greece and Rome [...] his speech is a cocktail of Latin and Italian, or Latin and Italian dialect, stuffed with quotations from the ancients, aphorisms and proverbs.’, Cairns, *Pietro Aretino and the Republic...*, p. 50



or bogus intellectual capacity, as in the absurd and verbose Pedant, whereas the anti-marriage faction is represented by those, principally Ambrogio, who display a more rigorous intellect. All of which tends to convey the message that it is only those who lack deep insight or do not bother to examine closely the realities of human experience who would look upon marriage with favour.

Turning from an aristocratic setting to a bourgeois one, I shall now look at the figure of Barbagrìgia who is a representative of the lower middle classes. During a conversation early on with the servant Pilucca, he displays a deprecating wit:

PILUCCA: ... e quasi che mi son perduto io.

BARBAGRIGIA: Il maggior guadagno che potessimo fare. (I,1)

He then amusingly undermines Pilucca's description of the martyrdom he suffered at the hands of the Turkish pirates by pre-empting any colourful or exaggeratedly bleak descriptions of Pilucca's ordeal:

BARBAGRIGIA: Il resto mi so io. Un remo di trenta piedi!

PILUCCA: Peggio

BARBAGRIGIA: Ferri di cinquanta libbre!

PILUCCA: Peggio

BARBAGRIGIA: Anguillate quante la rena? (I,1)

Barbagrìgia is also adept at summing up succinctly a complicated situation. In referring to Pilucca's escape when the ship in which he was imprisoned started to founder, he says: 'Tanto che la disgrazia t'è stata ventura.' (I,1). In his next appearance, he appears less diplomatic and insightful than does Demetrio when they are both trying to persuade Tindaro to marry the widow Madonna Argentina, although at one point he does adduce some simple logic, untinged by sentiment: 'Per una morta dunque volete scontentare tanti vivi e far contra di voi medesimo?' (II,2). In this same debate, Barbagrìgia relies on the expectation that, as a young man, Tindaro would bow to wisdom gained by greater experience that he, as a much older man, has acquired.

In contrast to his earlier appearances as a cool, acerbic commentator, by the middle of the third Act, Barbagrìgia has been reduced to a panic-stricken fusspot. Part of the humour here lies in the fact that this character is composed and nonchalant among

his male associates, but is reduced to a quivering wreck by a woman, in this case the formidable Madonna Argentina, whose wedding he is helping to organise. He shows exasperation at the contradictory messages he is receiving from his superiors: ‘Oh, che diavolo di brigate sono queste? Si soglion dir grechi salati; ma costoro mi paiono schiocchi a me. Vogliono, e non si risolvono, promettono, e si disdicono.’ (III,4). By the fifth Act, Barbargrigia is seen at his most muddle-headed, a condition he himself readily acknowledges: ‘Avete ragione, ho detto di gran passerotti che non me sono avveduto [...] Io non la so dire, perché non la intendo, e straparlo perché straveggo. (V,2).

The level of acumen attributed to Barbargrigia accords well with his position as a capable owner of a printing works and respected member of the local community. Although undoubtedly his descent from a calm and shrewd individual into a bumbling simpleton when he finds himself in extremis is principally constructed for its comic potential, nevertheless Barbargrigia’s behaviour follows a plausible arc: a person’s composure and clear thinking can be upset in times of crisis or when faced by impatient superiors or an implacable adversary.<sup>293</sup>

Ruffo is the key member of the team which conspires to defraud the rich middle-aged Fulvia. In his communications, either directly with Fulvia or indirectly through her maidservant Samia, Ruffo easily manages to persuade them that he possesses supernatural powers. When Samia shows impatience at the time Ruffo has taken to accomplish his allotted commission, Ruffo fools her into accepting that his dark arts need time to come to fruition: ‘Bisogna accozzare stelle, parole, acque, erbe, pietre e tante bazzicature, che è forza che ci vada tempo.’ (III,15). Similarly, when Fulvia starts to complain to him that events have gone seriously awry, Ruffo convinces her that he has the ability to rectify matters. After Fulvia exits, in a short soliloquy he pours scorn on her gullibility: ‘Costei è per amor accecata sì ch’ella s’avvisa che uno spirito possa fare una persona femina e maschio a posta sua.’ (IV,2).

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<sup>293</sup> Barbargrigia’s passage through the storyline reflects the notion that the lower ranks, excluding male servants, however much shrewdness and common sense they possess, will always be at the mercy of those of greater status, irrespective of how irrational the latter’s behaviour. In the contrasting presentations of those on the bottom rung (servants) and those occupying a slightly higher rung (independent traders), the former conform more to archetypes of theatrical inversion, whereas the latter embody a trend, however tentative, towards more naturalistic presentations.

However, between these two scenes, there is introduced a reversal, whereby the arch-trickster Ruffo is himself fooled by the servant Fannio, on this occasion into believing that Lidio is a hermaphrodite. Further, Fannio has to patiently explain to Ruffo the meaning of that word:

FANNIO: Ermafrodito, dico, io, Diavol! Tu se' grosso!  
RUFFO: Be, che vuol dire?  
FANNIO: Tu nol sai?  
RUFFO: Per ciò il dimando.  
FANNIO: Ermafroditi sono quelli che hanno l'uno e l'altro sesso.  
RUFFO: Et è Lidio uno di quelli.  
FANNIO: Sì, dico.  
RUFFO: Ed ha il sesso da donna e la radice d'uomo?  
FANNIO: Messer sì. (III,17).

This episode serves to deflate Ruffo's image of himself as the master of affairs. However, if Ruffo's perceived level of intelligence is thereby reduced, conversely this display of simplicity impinges positively on his moral profile, making him less of a cold, calculating villain and ruthless exploiter of others. It is also worth noting that Ruffo is depicted as being cleverer than the two principal female characters but not cleverer than any of the male characters (apart from Calandro obviously).

If Ruffo is a petty fraudster who operates on a small scale, Lachellino is a confidence trickster on a grand scale. At the beginning of the negotiations with his client Maximo, the necromancer uses some very subtle tactics to draw him in. He proposes to Maximo that in order to avoid unnecessary expense it would be better to find out first how long a cure might take or even if a cure is feasible. At this stage, he is careful to avoid making the claim that he can definitely cure Cintio of his apparent impotence. To sustain the illusion of his expertise in the field, one of the devices he employs is to always specify the precise part of the required animal's anatomy and the precise length of a piece of material needed. He also uses the street trader's trick of stating the standard cost of an item and then declaring that he will generously let the other party have it at a huge discount. He manages to give the impression that he is the one willing to make all the effort and bear any sacrifice in order to save Maximo the expense and bother. In order to bolster his standing even further, Lachellino asserts that

he has had dealings with very prominent people in far-flung places, banking on the assessment that Maximo, though much travelled, would not have moved in such exalted circles and would thus be unable to refute these claims. In his next meeting with Maximo (Act III, Scene 4), Lachellino uses the tactic of repeating slurs and accusations against him in order that Maximo obligingly distance himself from these and be rendered even more willing to ingratiate himself and fall further under this thrall.

The necromancer's lack of any real scientific knowledge but possession of a consummate skill in exploiting the innate trust and goodwill of others is graphically summed up by his servant Nebbio:

Ma con un viso più che marmo immobile,  
ciance e menzogne, e non con altra industria,  
aggira e aviluppa il capo a gli uomini. (II,2)

In dealing with Camillo (Act II, Scene 4) Lachellino first of all flatters him by enacting the routine of dismissing his servant to imply that their business is of great moment and requires absolute privacy. His servant Nebbio, in an aside to the audience, expresses admiration for this ploy. Lachellino adroitly manages to construe the wishes of others as fitting into his vision of intended development of the overall scheme so that any doubts expressed by the person with whom he is currently dealing are dispelled: at one time he sustains the hope Maximo has for Cintio's recovery from impotence but shortly after this is seen supporting Camillo's fervent wish that he does not recover. In order to persuade Camillo to undertake the risky enterprise of gaining access to Emilia's bedroom, the necromancer has included in a letter (believed by Camillo to be written by Emilia's own hand) a threat by her to come to Camillo's residence if he does not show up at hers, which Camillo recognises would, if discovered, cause an even greater scandal.

The necromancer is presented as a master schemer and dupe of whom it takes a formidable opponent to unmask and defeat: the resourceful servant Temolo. The play is

carefully plotted so that the victims of Lachellino do not meet up and compare notes and thus reveal the contradictory pieces of advice issued by him.<sup>294</sup>

## CONCLUSION

There is a long theatrical tradition of the crafty male servant aligning himself with the young master against his father or the husband of the female chosen for seduction. In the survey above, the servants Fessenio and Giorgetto use their quick wits and powers of invention to advance the cause of their masters, respectively Lidio and Giulio. Temolo aids his master's romantic cause by giving straightforward advice rather than formulating an elaborate ruse. Moreover, there is a strong sense that Temolo is serving the wider community as well as his master. Occupying a role outside the above considerations is the young servant Giannicco in *Il Marescalco*. His undoubted quick wit is used for minor objectives: either to further discomfort his already uncomfortable master, or to ingratiate himself with those further up the hierarchy such as the Count and the Knight. The only real victim of his ingenuity is the Pedant who is subjected to a humiliating prank, although to no lasting harm. A more radical departure from this template is embodied in the two male servants of *Gli Straccioni*, Pilucca and Marabeo, who are self-serving and plot against the interests of their master and mistress.

If the majority of servants are accorded a greater degree of wit and acumen than their low status would suggest, the opposite is true of many of the higher-ranked characters. Leaving aside the unfeasible gullibility of Calandro, there still remains the well-to-do youths Camillo, Giulio and Rinuccio who, in different ways, display a naivety and slowness to comprehend; Giulio in particular has a child-like dependency on his nimble-witted servant Giorgetto. Although not presented as particularly obtuse, nor indeed as particularly bright, Lidio is also reliant on his more astute servant Fessenio.

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<sup>294</sup> That each party is unaware of the others' involvement with the necromancer is rendered plausible in that each of the three participants – Maximo, Cintio and Camillo, is either at loggerheads with, or lacks sufficient trust in, the other interested parties.

Cecchi's play *L'Assiuolo* offers reversals at their most extreme, not just between classes but across the genders. Although paralleling the earlier *La Calandra* in that both feature a middle-aged head of household cuckolded by a much younger man, in *L'Assiuolo* the young seducer is presented as far more naive and slow at comprehending matters than his putative lover's husband, the brutal Ambrogio, who is only ultimately defeated by the combined intellectual resources and machinations of the servant Giorgetto and sisters Oretta and Violante.

How is intelligence distributed between the sexes? In the earlier plays, *La Calandra*, *Il Negromante* and *Il Marescalco*, the females appear insightful into their own predicament but they are accorded little ingenuity or ability to deduce motivations behind others' behaviour; that remains the sole preserve of the men. However, the narrative of *Gli Straccioni* signals a change: within the limitations of severely restricted circumstances, the heroine Giuletta manages to articulate her plight with precision and clarity; she makes rueful comments on contemporary politics and is able to deliver a protest against the way she has been treated in an understated but witheringly effective manner. By the time of the last play *L'Assiuolo*, the initial devising of a plan to catch out the errant older man has been given to female characters and the denouement rests upon the two sisters' systematic questioning of him and his servant. The maidservant Agnola is able to identify flaws in the youth Rinuccio's scheme for seducing Oretta and, just before the denouement, initiates a ruse which prevents her mistress being caught in the act of adultery. Moreover, of the four categories – young and older males, young and older females, it is only the young female who remains immune from gross distortion toward an extreme negative image in the intelligence dimension.<sup>295</sup> If the young Camillo and the elderly Calandro display unfeasible degrees of gullibility (both allow themselves to be locked in a chest and transported across town) and the middle-aged Fulvia is susceptible to the most outlandish claims by Ruffo, even the most unworldly of the young females surveyed above, Santilla, is not subject to, or does not succumb to, any sustained acts of deception.

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<sup>295</sup> Guidotti cites Ferroni who contends that such exaggerations do not always render the theatrical piece far-fetched but mirror aspects of reality: 'G. Ferroni ad esempio sottolinea l'effetto di stravolgimento che coinvolge ambiente, personaggi e modi espressivi e che, paradossalmente, produce però un effetto realistico, perché è appunto la realtà stessa a porsi come irrazionale, in una società che premia gli sciocchi ed emargina i migliori.', *Scenografie...*, p. 237.

The middle ranks are less subject to any *rovesciamento* in their intellectual capacity: they appear as reasonably proficient but are not gifted with any extraordinary acumen. The necromancer Ruffo manages to maintain his pretence to magical powers sufficiently to gull both Fulvia and her maidservant but he himself is later deceived by the servant Fannio into believing that Lidio is a hermaphrodite. Barbargria starts with witty and sceptical questioning of his friend Pilucca's claimed ordeal, a few scenes later he is able to add some judicious comments to Demetrio's and Tindaro's long debate on the latter's proposed marriage but later on admits that he is perplexed by the dead seeming to come back to life.

The affairs of the astute Ambrogio and the even astuter Lachellino end badly. Despite the ingenuity and endless scheming of Pilucca and Marabeo, at the end they escape severe punishment by the skin of their teeth. Conversely, the unenterprising Lidio and the none-too-bright Rinuccio both achieve their ambitions. Thus there is little correlation between degree of intelligence and degree of ultimate success.<sup>296</sup> A possible message to be inferred in these plays therefore is that those who scheme and plot for their own ends will wind up in a worse position than those who leave matters to fate. (This runs counter to the Machiavellian idea that man should take more control of his destiny through the application of *virtù* rather than surrender to *fortuna*.<sup>297</sup>)

*Il Marescalco* is in a different category, in that the central character's folly - believing the hoax perpetrated on him by the Duke and his cohorts - is not depicted as a character fault but serves more as a plot device. Irrespective of whether the Marescalco should have suspected the bogus nature of the diktat that he should get married, any naivety on his part has no negative consequences for him in the denouement. (Paradoxically, for the play that contains the most heated arguments, the most

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<sup>296</sup> Brand expands on this notion : 'Success is not always the consequence of intelligence and enterprise, which sometimes seem to lead nowhere, leaving the young lovers dependent on a lucky chance to resolve their problems. The interplay of effort and luck which runs like an undercurrent through most *commedie erudite* reflects another of the preoccupations of early sixteenth century writers in Italy and dates their work almost as clearly as the topical allusions to local affairs.', Peter Brand, *The Renaissance of Comedy: The Achievement of Italian Commedia Erudita* (London: W.S. Maney and Son Ltd., 1995), p. 11.

<sup>297</sup> His own play *La Mandragola* firmly illustrates this supposition by its strict cause and effect sequencing which stands in marked contrast to the story lines of many *commedia erudita* plays where coincidence and perverse fate dominate.

aggressive one-upmanship and the foulest language, *Il Marescalco* has the most benign outcome: no one is left humiliated or downgraded in prestige.)

If on the micro-level there is the triumph of the trickster, where the more astute gets one over on the less astute (exemplified by Ruffo's claim to be able to change the gender of a person), on a wider purview, intelligence continues to be subordinated to other aspects: nominal status, random chance, physical attributes such as youth and beauty, in determining eventual success or failure. There may be vignettes, even sustained vignettes, where a more meritocratic distribution of power holds sway, but ultimately a hierarchy based on social position re-asserts itself.

## CULTURAL DIMENSION

If outsmarting others through greater intellectual capacity is one way of gaining ascendancy, cultural one-upmanship is another.<sup>298</sup> While the morality of a character, both in the real world and the fictional world of the stage, may take a long time to assess, and his intellectual capacity or lack of it may not become apparent until particular circumstances put it to the test, I would assert that the final dimension under investigation, the cultural, is more quickly perceived.

Our immediate impression of an individual encountered for the first time derives in large measure from how this person bears himself, what clothes he is wearing or the person's accent, rather than what he actually says. Given rather longer than just an instance, other factors begin to colour this initial impression when assessing another individual whom we have come across for the first time. A character's phraseology, his degree of articulation, the cultural or political references he makes and his brand of

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<sup>298</sup> Castiglione posits that, second only to morality, the cultural was the criterion by which the worth of an individual should be judged: 'Ma, oltre alla bontà, il vero e principal ornamento dell'animo in ciascuno penso io che siano le lettere', Baldassare Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, ed. by Ettore Bonora (Milan: Mursia, 1972), Book I, Chapter XLII.



humour would quickly embellish this first impression. Our accent is discernible very quickly; given a little longer certain words or phrases we use offer strong clues as to which region we hail from: somewhere local, from a remoter part of the country or from overseas, which class we are from or even what line of occupation we might be engaged in. If we spend say several hours in the company of this new acquaintance or meet him on several subsequent occasions, we may well be able to infer what level of education our new friend has attained, how knowledgeable or how well read he is; further on we might categorise our new friend as to what cultural taste he has: high-brow, low-brow or middle-brow.

In the real world, we usually have the opportunity to build up a picture of a newly acquired acquaintance, friend or lover over several encounters; the accumulated period of time may amount to several hours, days or even years before we are in position to say that we 'know' this person. However, in the world of the theatre, this time-span is drastically reduced; considerable concision is required. Information as to the setting, historical period, array of characters, type of genre needs to be imparted quickly. To achieve this, some kind of shorthand, familiar to most of the audience by habituation, is necessarily employed. Costume, gait and accent, alongside the natural physiognomy of the actors employed, would straightaway denote a character as belonging to a particular age group, social class, profession or originating from a particular region. Artificially added physical aspects such as facial scarring, hunched back or uneven gait could be used to signify abstract characteristics such as hardness or deviousness.

For my purposes, since I am analysing play texts rather than actual live performances, these extra-textual considerations cannot be entered into any fruitful way in this investigation. I am left solely with the initial description of a character in the list of *personaggi* (more often than not just a single word such as *vecchio* or *ragazzo*), tranches of dialogue, plus on the rare occasions very brief stage directions. Outside of the actors' physicality, costume or choreography, do the written texts themselves employ theatrical shorthand? Part of the investigation below will be to identify such clues in the written speeches which might indicate whether a character is from the town or country, resident or foreigner, respectable or unsavoury; to assess whether such 'markers' are introduced quickly in order to straightaway signal to the audience to

which class a character belongs or whether there is a more gradual and incremental presentation; and, crucially, identify cases where the cultural presentation of a character is at odds with his designated status. (This last aspect is discussed more fully in Chapter Six).

The cultural inheritance from the Middle Ages had been greatly changed and challenged by the revival of classical culture and intellectual developments that that provoked. During the medieval period literacy and academic learning was generally confined to a narrow sector of society: the nobility and the clergy. But in the following centuries some of this high culture managed to filter down to the subordinate classes and the laity, initially through art and architecture on display to the general public, then to an even greater extent though the rapid expansion of printing during the first half of the sixteenth century, which meant that such new ideas could reach a much greater proportion of the populace, well beyond the scholarly and ecclesiastical elite. Thus the writers of erudite comedy were provided with the notion of the potentiality, if not the reality, of such hitherto recondite knowledge reaching even the servant class, to furnish them with a further tool in confounding expectations of the capabilities of a particular social class.

In examining these stage characters, a crude dividing line can be drawn between those who could read and those who could not, and within the first group between those who read mainly 'approved' religious tracts and those who were interested in new philosophical ideas and current political thought. The advent of printing also tended to exacerbate the divide between town and country: the town was where bookshops and pamphleteers operated from, with the consequence that rural areas would be seen to be more 'out of touch' and cultural backwaters.<sup>299</sup> Therefore a possible criterion to evaluate a character's standing is whether his knowledge is confined to events of his own locality or whether he is cognisant of events beyond in the wider world; more

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<sup>299</sup> In Aretino's *La Cortigiana* the two principals, Messer Maco and his servant (il) Sanese, are depicted walking through the streets of Rome. They come across a pamphleteer, Furfante, who is advertising his wares: 'A le belle istorie, istorie, istorie, la guerra del Turco in Ungheria, le prediche di Fra Martino, Il Concilio, Istorie, Istorie, la cosa d'Inghilterra...' Pietro Aretino, *Tutte Le Commedie*, ed. by G.B. De Sanctis (Milan: Grande Universale Mursia, 1968), *La Cortigiana* (I,4). Thus dwellers, of whatever rank, of a large metropolis such as Rome had by the 1530s ready access to knowledge of events far afield. It seems likely that such 'world' news would take longer to percolate to smaller towns and even longer to remoter rural areas.

generally whether his cultural frame of reference is rooted in the medieval world, reliant upon Christian theology, folklore or superstition for explanations, or takes account of up-to-date scientific ideas and more empirical approaches.

As is still current nowadays, in that epoch one of the ways of increasing your kudos among your fellow citizens was to gain an academic title or, failing that, to be able to display knowledge of contemporary politics, history or classical antiquity. Allied to the last of these would be the extra kudos accrued to those who demonstrated the ability to quote Latin<sup>300</sup>; the renewed interest in the classical world during late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries gave this aptitude added currency. The obverse of that coin is that grammatically incorrect Latin or the sudden incongruous interjection of Latin would tend to diminish one's standing and lay one open to being classed as a pseudo-intellectual.

Into the mix of social intercourse one must be aware of the less noble side of human nature, where an insecure individual is ever on the look out to class another as inferior through the way he expresses himself and the cultural references he makes. Snobbery is an ignoble trait, but is probably more commonplace and certainly more understandable in a society which hitherto had a more rigid hierarchy. If the fixed demarcations of rank of the medieval world were becoming less clear cut, where status by virtue of birth purchased increasingly less traction, a display of cultural superiority could act as an alternative mark of status, either to provide a platform by which to belittle others or, more benignly, a bulwark against belittlement by others.

We all want to make a good impression and sometimes we overreach ourselves, pretending to a greater level of knowledge or sophistication that we actually possess. Or, having only recently acquired a more urbane cultural gloss, in an unguarded moment we might inadvertently slip back into our old, more plebeian ways of expressing ourselves. If this superficial patina of refinement disguising an unmerited claim to cultural sophistication is penetrated by those with whom we interact, we lay

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<sup>300</sup> Hay and Law attest to an increase in the number of professionals who could use Latin during this period: 'Some of these humanists were 'wandering' as medieval scholars. In general the tools of their trade were linguistic, a revived classical Latin as practised by a few schoolmasters in the fourteenth century and by nearly all schoolmasters and university teachers of rhetoric and 'poetry' by the end of the fifteenth.', *Italy in the Age ...*, p. 19.

ourselves open to greater scorn and disapprobation than if we had stuck to our habitual, however commonplace, way of expressing ourselves.<sup>301</sup> I shall attempt to identify parallels to this phenomenon in the plays under scrutiny here. Part of my task will be to look for tell-tale phrases in the dialogue from which it can be inferred that the playwright was signalling to the audience that a particular character, despite his superficial appearance as an *uomo dabbene*, was in some ways an upstart, a parvenu, not the genuine article.<sup>302</sup> Conversely, there may be occasions where a person of low status unexpectedly expresses himself in erudite language or makes scholarly references, prompting a re-evaluation of our initial view of him or her. I shall try to determine whether such episodes are just part and parcel of a temporary reversal of roles introduced merely for the fun of it, are designed for overtly didactic purposes, or simply to provide insight into how people function in their day-to-day negotiations.

More than any other European country (with the possible exception of the Netherlands), Italy was, prior to and during the Renaissance, a territory where the city predominated. Although the city was dependent on the countryside for food and a source of labour and the countryside for capital and demand for its produce from the city, this mutual dependence rarely engendered mutual respect. For the politically fragmented territories of central and northern Italy, the divide between town and country seemed greater than in politically unified territories such as France and England where, even though the 'pyramid' of social rankings was steeper, there was still a sense of those who worked on the land belonging to the same larger entity.<sup>303</sup> For Italy north of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily there was less of a sense of communality between

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<sup>301</sup> Much of the comedy of the British TV sitcom of the last half century derives from cultural pretensions being unmasked, in such characters as Tony Hancock in *Hancock's Half Hour* (1950s), Derek Trotter in *Only Fools and Horses* (1980s) and Hyacinth Bouquet in *Keeping Up Appearances* (1990s).

<sup>302</sup> In a hierarchical society, the elite would possess a sense, though not always a consensus, of what vocabulary was proper and acceptable for their class to use and what was *infra dig*. This topic is given considerable airing by Castiglione. Messer Barnabò (Bibbiena) opines: 'Queste parole che non s'usano più in Firenze sono restate ne' contadini e, come corrotte e guaste dalla vecchiezza, sono dai nobili rifiutate.' Book I, Chapter XXXI. Elsewhere, Count Ludovico da Canossa cautions against such prescriptive rules: 'Ma oggidì son certi scrupolosi, i quali quasi con una religione e misterii ineffabili di questa lor lingua toscana, spaventano di modo che gli ascolta, che inducono ancor molti omini nobili e literati in tanta timidità, che non osano aprir la bocca e confessano di non saper parlar quella lingua, che hanno imparato dalle nutrici insino nelle fasce.', *Libro del Cortigiano*, Book I, Chapter XXXVII.

<sup>303</sup> One of the negative consequences of this sense of 'one nation' was that, in times of conflict, rebel leaders representing rural workers directed their ire on central government figures rather than on regional representatives. (For example, the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt in England of 1381 mustered their followers for an assault directly on the King's Ministers, particular the Chancellor, in London rather than on the earls of Kent and Essex or any of the local lords of the manor.)

rural and city dwellers. The tenuousness of this bond was exacerbated by geo-political climate of those times: as a result of the endemic struggle between neighbouring city states engaged in either trying to extend their own territory or in fending off the territorial incursions of others, a particular rural area could find itself under the jurisdiction of a particular city state at one time, then shortly afterwards, after a battle or a treaty agreement, under a different one.<sup>304</sup> Such an unstable political climate tended to heighten the divide between town and country, between *cittadino* and *contadino*.<sup>305</sup> The perennial town/country divide provided a rich seam from which humour and social comment could be extracted, some of which found its way into works of fiction, particularly theatrical offerings where the 'foreign' nature of the *contadino* could be emphasised with costume and accent as well as with linguistic quirks. If in urban society there existed already a steep hierarchical structure between the highest and lowest ranked, incomers from the countryside formed yet another, more alien, underclass.<sup>306</sup>

Whereas in unified kingdoms such as England and France with a designated capital, a person born and brought up a long way from the capital, might be, irrespective of his wealth, current rank or claimed 'pedigree', classed disparagingly as a provincial, such a simple division was unavailable in Italy<sup>307</sup> where several cities could claim parity of status.<sup>308</sup> If political and military rivalry was rife between city states, there was also

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<sup>304</sup> An example of this is Florence's continual attempts to extend its sovereignty, Pisa being one of its main targets: 'In 1405 and 1406, as the republic (Florentine) prepared to conquer Pisa, these communities were won over to the Florentine side with promises of greater autonomy under Florentine Rule.', Hay and Law, *Italy in the Age...*, p. 62; 'Cities might be besieged for lengthy periods: Pisa by the Florentines through the 1490s.', Black, *Early Modern Italy...*, p. 9. Eventually in the middle of the sixteenth century Pisa succumbed and became part of the Grand Duchy of Florence.

<sup>305</sup> Since the beginning of the second millennium across all of Western Europe there was an inexorable drift of population from the countryside to the town. Whereas employers of this new source of labour saw incomers as a great benefit, other more patrician members of the city often saw these people as a cause for alarm – *furor rusticorum*, or at least a potential threat to city values and cultural identity. However, the loyalty or disloyalty of the countryside was not always easy to gauge: the dwellers of the rural Veneto region unexpectedly came to the aid of Venice during the War of Cambrai (1508 to 1516).

<sup>306</sup> 'Urban dwellers could despise the caricatured dumb and dangerous peasant/*contadino* [...] The Bergamo province provided many migrants in our period, escaping the poverty of mountainous areas. In popular literature, such as the short stories of Bandello and Straparola in the 1550s, such Bergamaschi were coarse, money-grubbing and sponging on others.', Black, *Early Modern Italy...*, p. 39.

<sup>307</sup> Beccaria makes a similar point: 'Le corti di Parigi, Londra, Madrid, le rispettive amministrazioni statali, sono state strumento di unificazione politica, culturale, linguistica. In Italia è mancata una capitale linguistica e culturale accentratrice.', Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Letteratura e Dialetto* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1975), Introduction, p. 2.

<sup>308</sup> Rome could claim pre-eminence as the 'headquarters' of Catholic Europe, Milan as the great industrial centre, Venice as the most democratic city, as well as being at the forefront of the arms and printing industries, Florence and Ferrara as at the vanguard of Italian cultural life. Even within small independent

a fierce clash over who had cultural superiority, in particular the question of where ‘standard’ Italian, if it existed at all, could be found. By the early decades of the sixteenth century a consensus was forming around the proposition that the Florentine dialect used by Petrarch and Boccaccio in their fourteenth century vernacular writings represented the ideal.<sup>309</sup> The Venetian Pietro Bembo set out this argument the most cogently in his treatise *Prose della volgar lingua* published in 1525.<sup>310</sup> However, this proposition was not universally accepted; even after this date, debates on the usage of regional dialect as opposed to ‘standard’ Italian continued.<sup>311</sup> There was also a subsidiary debate concerning theatrical dialogue as to whether it should be written in prose or verse form, indeed in which verse form. Employing verse would tend to render a play more literary, eschewing verse in favour of prose would tend to render it more realistic. Intertwined into such considerations is the intention of the playwright, as to whether he was more concerned with writing text for live theatre or whether he had regard to a longer-term perspective, a view to having his words preserved in the permanent form of a printed book.<sup>312</sup>

The five plays under scrutiny here are set in various cities of Italy. I shall make an attempt to identify whether a character’s utterances are specific to the fictional location of the play, thus denoting him as a ‘native’ or whether he uses speech patterns which denote him as a foreigner or incomer; or whether the playwright seems to be less concerned with presenting an authentically regional flavour to his cast of characters

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regions, the citizens of larger, more centrally placed, urban centres could, and did, look down on the inhabitants of smaller, peripheral towns. (See p. 117 above regarding the attitude of Florentines to the Sieneese).

<sup>309</sup> Andrews asserts: ‘The sixteenth century [...] is characterized by a drive to make *fourteenth-century* Florentine, as found in the three ‘canonical’ writers, the basis of a literary language which would be accepted throughout the peninsula for written cultural communication.’, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 7.

<sup>310</sup> In the previous century, Leon Battista Alberti had been similarly prescriptive: ‘egli afferma che, come il Latino era stato lingua comune di popoli dell’Italia antica e non esclusivamente lingua propria della comunità degli uomini versati nello scrivere, allo stesso modo ora, intorno alla metà del Quattrocento, la lingua comune dei popoli è il *Toscano (lingua nostra o, secondo come l’Alberti generalmente lo chiama, lingua Toscana)*’, Miklos Fogarasi, *Nuovo Manuale di Storia della Lingua Italiana* (Florence: Casa Editrice Felice Le Monnier, 1990), p.133.

<sup>311</sup> Migliorini cites Castiglione’s reaction against the prescriptions of Bembo and Trissino: ‘Se in Toscana si usano “molti vocaboli chiaramente corrotti dal latino, li quali nella Lombardia e nell’ altre parti d’Italia son rimasti integri e senza mutazione” perché attenersi alle forme toscane?’, Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della Lingua Italiana* (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1983), p. 345.

<sup>312</sup> Peggy Osborn examines this consideration in regard to the plays of Giraldo Cinthio: ‘The fact that he only published one of his tragedies, *Orbecche*, during his lifetime, may perhaps suggest that he was writing primarily for stage production rather than for literary renown.’, ‘G.B. Giraldo Cinthio’s Dramatic Theory and Stage Practice: a Creative Interaction’, in *Scenery, Set and Staging in the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by Christopher Cairns (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 39.

than with constructing a piece of theatre that could be readily understood in any of the major cities of central and northern Italy.<sup>313</sup> In the main, I shall not attempt to draw any specific correlations between how a particular character expresses himself and the cultural background of the playwright who created that character. I shall now examine groups of characters, starting with those of the lowest social rank and then proceed upwards through the hierarchy.

## SERVANTS

Since there are no extant letters from servants from this historical period, it is impossible to say with any conviction whether the degree of learning and cultural knowledge accorded to these fictional servants reflects to any degree the reality. One can surmise that the portrayal of the servant class in *commedia erudita* served purposes other than an intention of documenting the conditions of the servant class in Renaissance Italy: conveying vital information (including the *antefatto*) to the audience, as a necessary foil or debating partner to the servant's master or mistress, as the most suitable conduit through which vulgarities and mischief-making elements of the play can be imparted. Servants, more than any other class of character, are the most plastic: since they form an extensive underclass who remain anonymous but nevertheless are often privy to the deliberations of those of exalted rank, their utterances can be more easily 'fictionalised' and woven around the story-lines of their masters and mistresses, as well as being more easily moulded to fit the exigencies of the plot.<sup>314</sup>

As we have seen under the intelligence dimension, male servants are routinely accorded an elevated level of shrewdness and inquisitiveness, whereas female servants are more commonly depicted as naive and unquestioning. Is such disparity also evidenced in their respective cultural dimensions?

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<sup>313</sup> During this period it was Venice and the Veneto region that saw the greatest diversity of theatrical speech in *commedia erudita*. Beolco is recognised as the pioneer of this more concerted move to stage regional rather than 'pan-Italian' theatre. However, that geographical area is outside the scope of this present study.

<sup>314</sup> 'Unici imprevedibili personaggi di questo mondo burlesco, i servi [...] I padroni gli concedono, come negli antichi saturnali, una straordinaria libertà, ed essi si prendono cura e gioco di loro, ricamano sul filo dell'intreccio il contrappunto osceno, la dissonanza scurrile, la contraffazione improvvisa delle smanie degli innamorati o del compassato linguaggio di pedanti, sempre cogliendo a volo la parola o il gesto da distorcere comicamente.' Nino Borsellino, *Rozzi e Intronati* (Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 1974), p. 67.

Samia is the only female servant in Bibbiena's *La Calandra*. It soon becomes evident that Samia is less cultivated not just in comparison to her mistress but also to male servants. Early on Fessenio's patience is strained when trying to extract coherent information from her (Act I, Scene 5). Moreover, Samia often misunderstands or mispronounces words: e.g. 'favellario' for 'familiare', 'canti' for 'incanti' (I,5) and 'anghibuo' for 'ambiguo' (III,5). Samia also uses quite earthy or slang expressions: 'la robba' (III,6), when referring to money or expensive gifts, 'M'hai fatta sudare' (I,6) and 'La stima quanto il fango.' (II,7)

She can only go so far in her deprecation of Lidio Femina's behaviour when addressing her directly. It is only once Lidio Femina has exited that Samia is able to give full vent to her dislike, confiding her scathing opinion solely in the audience: 'Ci starai se crepassi, greco taccagno.' (II,2).<sup>315</sup> This is one of the rare instances of an insult based on the nationality of the individual. Later, in a conversation with Fannio and Santilla, Samia has the decorum to avoid direct reference to the male member: 'la intende che abbia rifatta quella novella' (IV,4). Samia's habit of using short forms – 'mo' for 'mio', 'vo' for 'vado' (I,5) and 'tocco' for 'toccato' (IV, 6) puts her in the same class linguistically (i.e. with a distinct Florentine patina) as Fessenio.

There is a strong indication that, while Fessenio can evidently read, Samia cannot: after she has reluctantly handed over the missive (written by Ruffo to Fulvia) to Fessenio, Samia entreats him: 'Leggi forte, che intenda anch'io.' (IV,6).<sup>316</sup> One is led to infer that Samia has been raised in a family who hold Christian values and practices dear, since references to the Christian religion form a routine part of her daily utterances.<sup>317</sup> I list below a couple of examples:

A fe, non bene per la patrona [...] Fatti con Dio. (I,5);

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<sup>315</sup> Padoan has this footnote: 'L'accusa di avarizia era tradizionalmente rivolta ai Greci.' *La Calandra*, p. 93. One can assume that Lidio (and Santilla disguised as Lidio) would have had a distinct accent or costume in order that Samia is able to recognise him (her) as originating from Greece from a brief acquaintance.

<sup>316</sup> On this topic, Helena Sanson says: 'Children of the lower classes received little formal schooling, and were expected to contribute to the family economy as servants, apprentices, and unskilled helpers in the workshops of artisans. Girls from the most disadvantaged background – if their mother was illiterate and could not help them – might learn a little reading and writing on Sundays and holidays in the Schools of Christian Doctrine or in a handful of charity schools [...] education for girls of the lower classes would often end up being nothing more than a very rudimentary ability to read prayers, or perhaps even simply learn them by rote.', *Women, Language and ...*, p. 30.

<sup>317</sup> This aspect of Samia contrasts sharply with that of the male servant Fessenio who makes scholarly references to the classical world rather than rely on commonplace sayings based on the Christian faith.



Naffe! Il demonio c'è entrato [...] egli e 'l vangelo. (IV,6)

In her soliloquies, Samia is able to be more discursive and express herself with greater elegance, as when she is able to sympathise not just with her mistress Fulvia but with the lot of women in general: 'Oh, povere e infelici donne! A quanto male siamo noi sottoposte quando ad Amore sottoposte siamo!' (III,6). She then goes on to delineate the particular challenges and dangers facing her mistress:

Ecco, Fulvia, che già tanto prudente era, ora, di costui accesa, non conosce cosa che si faccia. Non possendo aver Lidio suo, a trovarlo va, vestito da omo: senza pensar quanti mali avvenir ne potriano quando mai si sapere (III,6)

At junctures such as these, Samia can be seen to step outside her usual role as merely a drudge and assume the role of an outside commentator on the on-going action, equivalent to a Greek chorus, for which she temporarily acquires a higher degree of articulation. The first extract above has a measured, even philosophical tenor, which is uncharacteristic of Samia's usual terse or down-to-earth way of speaking. Elsewhere, Samia can be succinct to the point of insensitivity, as when she imparts some distressing news to her mistress regarding Lidio's attitude: 'Nè te ama nè ti stima.' (III,5)

The depiction of Samia often veers towards a stereotype, that of an illiterate and highly superstitious maid-servant. However, the inclusion of episodes where she is more reflective and articulate serves to shade this linear impression.

If Bibbiena's *La Calandra* panders, or at least does not run drastically counter, to prevailing stereotypes, does Aretino in his depiction of the Old Nurse in *Il Marescalco* (written over a decade after *La Calandra*) follow suit? In conversation with the boy servant Giannicco, the Old Nurse's speech contains several Latin phrases. However, these are not the words of a scholar, rather a random assortment of phrases of Church Latin. We can infer that the Old Nurse is a frequent attender at church and by a process of osmosis has, without purposeful effort, absorbed over time many of the oft-repeated

phrases heard during a church service: ...et in mulieribus [...] nomen tuum [...] vita dulcedo [...] panem nostrum... (I,4)<sup>318</sup>

In her first sizeable speech, the Old Nurse adopts a singular habit when using the imperfect: '(io) andava'; 'io ascoltava'; 'io gariva' and 'io sono io, che sedea sotto al fico.' (I,6). Here the Old Nurse is trying hard to sound educated but ends up as the equivalent of a comic Cockney figure who places an 'h' sound randomly before words beginning with a vowel in a misconceived attempt not to sound common.<sup>319</sup> The Old Nurse is prone to adding suffixes to harsh or demeaning adjectives to lessen their impact: 'pazzarone' and 'mattaciuolo' (I,7) and diminutives such as 'ladroncelli' (II,4). In Act 1, Scene 6 she uses three in a row: 'Poveretto, poveretto, poverino'. This last phrase could be seen as a rather clumsy attempt to impress by using alliteration, instead of which it tends to indicate a limited vocabulary. Her habitual use of these diminutives – 'bambini, i cagnolini, buffoncini' (I,6) is both affectionate and patronising, which fits well into the notion of a motherly figure trying to gently cajole her erstwhile and still immature charge into correct behaviour. When describing at length, in this same scene, the delights of married life, she does not shrink from including its cruder aspects: 'E fattoti buona pezza vento, ti fa orinare.' (I,6). And, at a moment of exasperation, she uses an even more vulgar expression: 'io cacai' (II,5). Similar to Samia, the Old Nurse mispronounces the occasional word: 'impertrepatò' for 'interpretato' (I,6).<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Migliorini, speaking of language of the fifteenth century: 'La miscela più curiosa è quella che notiamo in numerose prediche degli ultimi decenni del secolo [...] Poiché anche nelle prediche in volgare i testi biblici e patristici si citavano in Latino, l'uditorio era abituato ad ascoltare un discorso mescidato....', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 259-60. Thus Aretino, rather than just poking fun at the tendencies of elderly females, may be also satirising church practices prevailing at that time.

<sup>319</sup> That the Old Nurse is presented as going to these lengths to sound educated is supported by an observation by Migliorini when he discusses Ariosto's final redaction of *Orlando Furioso*: 'Gli imperfetti di prima persona in -o (*ero, andavo, potevo*) sono abbandonati per quelli in -a, contrariamente all'uso del fiorentino parlato, ma conformemente alle prescrizioni del Bembo.', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, pp. 375-6. Earlier, describing fourteenth century usage, Migliorini states: 'All' imperfetto la forma di 1a pers. in -'a', se in Toscana è in assoluto regresso, persiste a Nord e a Sud (*io ragionava* – Boiardo; *me maravigliava* Arienti)', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 291. Thus the alternative inference to be drawn is that the Old Nurse, a native of the northern town of Mantua, was merely using a more archaic form. However, of these two inferred intentions, the first fits better: as a satirical jibe by Aretino against attempts to impose literary standards.

<sup>320</sup> Both Samia and the Old Nurse can thus be seen as forerunners of the English playwright Sheridan's Mrs Malaprop from whom we derive our term for such distortions. This is also indicative of a misogynistic mind-set where a lower class female is considered a more worthy target for ridicule of educational inadequacy than her male counterpart.

This is a believable portrait of an old female retainer who has spent her life helping to bring up others' children, one whose manner of expression tends towards the commonplace rather than the erudite. The comic aspect of this figure is that when in a calm mood she strains towards gentility but once given to anger or exasperation this artifice quickly falls away to reveal an innate coarseness. The Old Nurse is set in opposition to the Marescalco in the aspect of cultural presentation. He is unashamedly vulgar, whereas she makes a conscious effort to sound pious and genteel.

The last of the female servants under scrutiny here is Madonna Agnola. She has a more varied role than merely as an assistant or foil to a main character. From her first appearance, it soon becomes evident that she has a strong sense of propriety; she is very uneasy at even the remote chance that she will be spotted talking to a young man who is not a member of her own household: 'Non voglio che persona mi vegga con voi, che tosto tosto si penserebbe a male.' (I,2). At times, Agnola uses commonplace figures of speech: 'cognoscere i polli miei' (II, 2); 'cercando miglior pan che di grano' (II,2) and 'feciono mula di medico' (II.2). However, elsewhere Agnola is capable of elegance and grammatical precision: 'Vedete, io vi conterò certi segreti che importano; ma se si sapesse mai che e' fussino usciti...' (I,2). She is given to uttering cryptic remarks at random moments: well before any mention of Giulio's or Rinuccio's longings towards Madonna Oretta, she suddenly opines 'Chi ama, teme' (I,2) which is somewhat of a non-sequitur. Not only does Agnola use disparaging epithets to those out of earshot – 'Quello stregone' for Messer Ambrogio, 'pinzochera bigia' and 'costesta spigolistra picchiapetto' for Madonna Verdiana, she is bold enough to use some unvarnished epithets to upbraid those to whom she is speaking directly. She calls Rinuccio a 'ribaldonaccio' to his face, to Giulio 'mona schifa 'l poco' (I,2).

Agnola's attitude, at least initially, concerning young males' drive towards sexual conquest runs counter to that of the general run of male servants; she wants to discourage rather than encourage it: 'sul fuoco, a volerlo spegnere, bisogna gettarvi acqua, non zolfo' (I,2). When dealing with those whom she considers as undesirables, as at the beginning of the denouement, Agnola is seen to be cuttingly dismissive: 'Voi dovette essere un monte d'ubriachi: Andate, andate a smaltir il vino, andate [...] Andate a far le baie, e' travestimenti a casa le sciagurate, non a casa gli uomini dabbene' (V,4). The irony here is that Agnola is able to be more articulate towards those she classes,

however mistakenly or disengenuously, as drunken riff-raff, than she ever had been towards her master.

Madonna Agnola is a marginal character in terms of the unfolding plot, but she is seen to converse at length with principal characters. Her powers of articulation stand at the same level as the well-to-do young males, but a little lower than the typical scheming male servant. Although she possesses a strong sense of decorum, this does not prevent her from expressing her opinions robustly to those of superior rank. Unlike male servants such as Fessenio, who openly insult their masters, Agnola manages to maintain an outward display of decorum and subservience, underneath of which are occasional glimpses of a more subversive attitude.

I shall now examine male servants, in chronological order, starting with those featured in *La Calandra* (1513) and ending with those depicted in *L'Assiuolo* (1549).

Although Fessenio, one of the two male servants in Bibbiena's *La Calandra*, is skilful at arguing a case, he often resorts to crudities, particularly when driving home a point, as in this interjection in the argument between his master Lidio and Lidio's tutor: 'Quelli del tartufo: che a' giovani fa rizzar la ventura e a' vecchi tirar coregge.' (I,2). This earthy mode of speech serves as a foil to the tutor Polinico's stuffy and over-formal way of speaking. Polinico readily links baseness of manner to inferiority of intellect, since he says of Fessenio to his master Lidio: 'Non puole essere superiore di consigli chi è inferiore di costume.'<sup>321</sup> (I, 2). As a reaction to this slight from Polinico, Fessenio maintains that even someone of subordinate status has a limit to the level of vituperation he can tolerate: 'Benché io sia vil servo, anco la mosca ha la sua collera' (I,2). The first part of this rejoinder is judiciously expressed in the subjunctive mood, reminding Polinico that he (Fessenio), a supposed plebeian, is capable of speaking with grammatical precision.

Quite frequently Fessenio has recourse to metaphors involving farmyard animals: 'Non puole il vitello, e vuol che porti el bue' (I,2): as well as single epithets such as

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<sup>321</sup> There is an obvious irony at play here, since later in this same exchange it is strongly hinted that Polinico is a sexual deviant. Also his speech deviates from 'standard Italian' as much as Fessenio's: an example of this, as identified by Padoan (*La Calandra*, p. 71, n.), is Polinico's use of *puole* instead of *si può*.

‘castrone’ (I,3), ‘pecore’ (I,7), ‘porca’ (II,9) and the even more cutting ‘patron buaccio’ (II,9). Thus the servant Fessenio retains much of the frame of reference and way of thinking of a country yokel, which suggests that he has spent his childhood in a rural setting and has only come to the city as an adult to seek employment or that he is at most a second generation city dweller but still retains the metaphors and modes of expression that his parents would have used. If the above examples tend to denote Fessenio as a ‘son of the soil’, there is an interesting remark by him which implies that he considers himself a cut above the lowest strata of society: ‘In fine, *come il vulgo dire*, se mangiasse fieno sarebbe un bue.’ (I,3) (my italics).

Fessenio uses four different slang terms for the prostitute he has hired as part of the scam against Calandro: ‘scanfarda’ (II,9); ‘la lordezza’ (II,9); ‘vezzosa porca’ (II,9) and ‘la troia’ (III,1). More than any other character, Fessenio betrays a Florentine background in his concision of certain words: ‘beuta’ for ‘bevuta’; ‘ariano’ for ‘avriano’; ‘omo’ for ‘uomo’; ‘guasto’ for ‘guastato’<sup>322</sup>; ‘fo’ for ‘farò’; ‘faren’ for ‘faremo’ and ‘vo’ for ‘vado’.<sup>323</sup> These are in keeping with the biographical detail (as revealed in the *Argomento*) that he had spent a number of years in Tuscany.<sup>324</sup> (It is interesting to speculate whether, in the first staging of the play, Fessenio, either by virtue of his costume or accent, appeared totally ‘Italianised’ or at least more so than the other low-ranked character of Greek origin – Ruffo.)

Fessenio uses a wide range of speech registers, not just limited to the type of vulgarisms cited above.<sup>325</sup> He is able to refer to Aristotle and Seneca (Act I, Scene 3) and later on alludes to a composition by Guinizelli in his remark: ‘Amore, che suole inviscare solo i cori gentili’ (I,7).<sup>326</sup> Fessenio is at his most vulgar when he sets about humiliating Calandro and at his most refined and lyrical when participating in, or

<sup>322</sup> In the chapter devoted to fifteenth century usage, Migliorini says: ‘Alcuni participi sono diversi da quelli più tardi prevalsi (*dotto Poliziano*). I participi senza suffisso sono frequenti nell’uso popolare (“voi mi avete *guasto*”)', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 290.

<sup>323</sup> Padoan identifies another of Fessenio’s expressions ‘Babuasso’ (I,7) as a specifically Florentine variation of ‘babbeo’, *La Calandra*, p. 86, n.

<sup>324</sup> ‘Lidio, il maschio, con Fessenio servo da Modon esc’ in salvo; in Toscana e in Italia si conduce; ivi il vestire, il vivere e la lingua apprende.’, *La Calandra, Argomento*.

<sup>325</sup> Guidotti is able to expand on this: ‘È Fessenio comunque il personaggio più composito: egli predilige un parlato franto e interiettivo, con macchie proverbiali e dialettali, storpiature e sintagmi che sono talvolta una ghiotta anticipazione dei composti imperativi tipici dell’Aretino [...] Fessenio si presta talvolta al gioco anaforico dei raccordi stilistici, indugiando in frasi dalla sintassi più composita’, *Il Modello...*, p. 139.

<sup>326</sup> I am thankful to Padoan for identifying this source; *La Calandra*, p. 86, n.

observing, the affairs of Fulvia, most notably in the soliloquy where he marvels at Fulvia's comprehensive besting of her husband: 'O Amore, quanto è la potenza tua! Qual poeta, qual dottore, qual filosofo potria mai monstrare quelli accorgimenti, quelle astuzie che fai tu a chi séguita le tua insegne' (III,13). However, his predominant speech mode is one of crudity. (Perhaps as a deliberate counterpoint, the other male servant, Fannio, in *La Calandra* is presented as more refined in his speech and behaviour.<sup>327</sup>)

The figure of Fessenio acts as a counterpoint to other characters: he is cruder and more rambunctious than his young master Lidio and fellow servant Fannio, more knowledgeable and culturally sophisticated than his elderly master Calandro and female servant Samia, more direct and less pretentious than the tutor Polinico. Fessenio's cultural profile serves as more of an insight into the circumstances of his real-life counterpart than does his intellectual profile which is almost wholly fashioned towards facilitating a fantastical story line. Here is a plausible depiction of someone of rural origin who has quickly learnt to adapt to a more sophisticated urban life without obliterating all trace of his origins.

Next under scrutiny is the servant Temolo from Ariosto's *Il Negromante*. When Temolo and Cintio discuss the necromancer and Cintio's romantic troubles, the servant readily picks up on his master's allusion to trials for heresy and responds appositely:

Or andian pur. Cotesto<sup>328</sup> non è articolo

Che, non credendo, io sia stimato eretico. (II,1)

This represents Temolo at his most refined. Otherwise for most of the play Temolo speaks in a straightforward, unvarnished manner, particularly when discussing practical matters on how to proceed or when he is reporting events back to others. Even when

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<sup>327</sup> This is most vividly demonstrated in Act V, Scene 2 where, in order to satisfy his curiosity as to the gender of the person before him, Fessenio starts to grope Santilla and she is only rescued from this indignity by the timely arrival of Fannio who castigates Fessenio for this outrageous behaviour. When staged, one can imagine Fannio more elegantly attired than Fessenio and one who speaks in the same cultivated accent as the urban bourgeoisie, distinct from Fessenio's more plebeian accent.

<sup>328</sup> Migliorini cites this word as among those Petrarch avoided for being too Florentine: 'Infatti il Petrarca ha evitato di scrivere vocaboli 'propri fiorentini' come testé, costì, costinci, cotesto.' *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 347. Later he makes this more general observation: 'Cotesto stenta ad essere accolto fuori di Toscana, e spesso è inteso a sproposito.' *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, pp. 469-70. One can speculate that, rather than evaluate this particular word for its degree of 'Toscanity', Ariosto selected it primarily for its scansion properties, obviously important when composing verse.

remonstrating with someone, his insults lack invention or a cutting edge; for example when rounding on Cambio, he merely exclaims: ‘O semplice uomo!’ (IV,4).<sup>329</sup> There are only two occasions when he becomes poetic in his language: in Act 2, Scene 1 he compares various state officials to different types of animals: wolves, foxes and kites, by which similes he is able to trenchantly denounce the venality of those in high office; and towards the end of the play he manages to rise to a metaphor, albeit a trite one, when he announces good news:

Come tanta paura e tanto orribile  
tempesta in sì sicura et in sì placida  
quiete hai rivoltata così subito! (V,3)

Unlike the scathing diatribe of Act II, Scene 1, the tone of this speech better suits Temolo in his role, which he steps out of for much of the drama, as a humble, unquestioning servant.

In Act IV, Scene 11, Temolo’s precise and detailed instructions to Nebbio as to where he would find his wounded master gives both specificity to the play as a whole and weight to the notion that Temolo has been born and brought up in Cremona. However, Temolo has not been accorded any particular speech idioms to identify him as someone from Lombardy.<sup>330</sup> Temolo lacks both the earthy speech patina of a Fessenio and the smart-Alec cheekiness of a Giannicco (see p. 207 below). Linguistically there is nothing to denote this figure as either belonging to the servant class or to a young age group.<sup>331</sup>

A shrewd, knowledgeable and insightful individual, Temolo wears such learning as he has lightly. He is the opposite of a show-off: he is mindful to communicate in the

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<sup>329</sup> This simplicity can be attributed in part to the decision by Ariosto to render the text in verse. Evaluating *Il Negromante* and the later, revised editions of *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*, Andrews gives this verdict: ‘The resulting texts have to sacrifice comic colloquialism without achieving anything much like poetry in compensation.’, *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 40.

<sup>330</sup> Of the five playwrights under close examination in this thesis, Ariosto is the least concerned in giving his characters distinctive class or geographical identities. One may infer that Ariosto wanted his theatrical pieces to be readily understood across a wide area of the Italian peninsula and, as demonstrated by his switch to verse (in the first redaction of *Il Negromante* and in later redactions of *La Cassaria* and *I Suppositi*) was keen to aspire to literary respectability, as is also demonstrated by his efforts to produce a more polished (i.e. conforming more closely to standard Tuscan) versions of his 1516 epic poem *Orlando Furioso*.

<sup>331</sup> Both Cintio in the first redaction and Lachellino in the second redaction make reference to Temolo’s youthfulness (see p. 54 above)

simplest, most direct way without drawing attention to himself or eliciting admiration for any verbal dexterity. Temolo's integrity and perceptiveness come into sharp focus as events unfold, whereas any cultural embellishments to this character are few and far between. In this latter aspect he differs greatly from the figure of Fessenio. However, he is as much of a theatrical construction as Fessenio in that he plays a role far beyond that of household servant.

The other servant featured in *Il Negromante* is Nebbio. His first remarks (Act 1, Scene 3) are a series of asides to the audience which contain graphic metaphors, comparing his master's victims with food to be consumed. At one juncture, he delivers a smart pun 'San Godenzio' which alludes to his master's prospective enjoyment of his victims' spoils.<sup>332</sup> In his next appearance, a soliloquy, Nebbio is accorded a flight of eloquence whereby he details the history and past misdemeanours of the necromancer. Here, he finds parallels in the cruelty of the natural world with his master's callous *modus operandi*:

Or le suspizioni e le discordie  
Spenger, che tra mariti e moglie nascono.  
Or ha in piè questo gentiluomo, e beccalo  
Meglio che mai sparvier facesse passera. (II,2)

He is apt to use similar unsavoury parallels when talking directly to his master, as in this line from the third Act:

De le tre starne, ch' in piè ha, qual pensi tu  
mangiarti al fin? (III,3)

However, when he begins to experience woes of his own, Nebbio changes to a gentler, more reflective manner of expression:

Che uomini oggi al mondo si ritrovano,  
Che si diletta, senza alcun lor utile,  
Dar tuttavia a questo e a quel molestia! (IV,5)

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<sup>332</sup> Cesare Segre has this footnote: 'Gioco di parole con *godere* che ha certamente legami con l'espressività del furbesco. (cfr. *Cass.*, pr, I n. 82): cfr. Ad esempio *S. Gotardo* per 'gotata', 'schiaffo' (cfr. Bellincione, I 171; CAMMELLI Sonetti, CXX 4), *S. Bovo* (cfr. CAMMELLI Sonetti, CXX I) e *Buezio* (cfr. PICO LUBI *Modi*, n. 135) per 'buaggine', 'stupidità, ecc.' *Tutte le Opere di Ludovico Ariosto*, Vol. 4, ed. Cesare Segre (Verona: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1974), note 68 (Act I).



Later in this same scene, Nebbio reverts back to crude, disparaging remarks, ruefully against himself at one point: 'io babbion' and angrily against those who he thinks have betrayed him: 'ghiotton' and 'facchin asino'. Some of Nebbio's expressions suggest a rural background: 'Di questo il muso anch'io m'aspetto d'ugnere' (I,3); 'il terren semina' (I,3) 'Che sa l'asino e il bue di sonar gli organi' (II,2), with the possibility that his family of origin was engaged in subsistence farming, from which poverty and adoption by Nebbio of a dishonest way of earning a living was his only viable option.<sup>333</sup> Nebbio's last major speech (Act IV, Scene 5) is a succinct account of his most recent misadventures; it has an uncharacteristically gentle tone, lacking the sardonic harshness of his earlier speeches.

Ariosto has managed to shape the tenor of Nebbio's speech according to his fortunes: when initially Nebbio is riding high, he either expresses himself in cynical, although elegantly couched, neutrality, as if he and his master's activities were simply part and parcel of the natural world order operating outside of human agency, or robust slang when discussing matters privately with his master. When later he faces disaster and humiliation, Nebbio resorts to an almost infantile whinging and self-pity.

In this play Nebbio plays two interlocking roles: a narrow one of a servant and partner in crime to the necromancer and a broader one of narrator. It is in this latter role that Nebbio's power of articulation finds its full flowering. It is noteworthy that the treacherous, though not wholly unsympathetic, figure of Nebbio is portrayed as having a broader range of speech registers, a greater use of simile and metaphor than the upright Temolo exhibits.<sup>334</sup> Maybe there is a subtle message here, deliberately or unwittingly imparted by the playwright: that virtue has no need to embellish itself with

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<sup>333</sup> This may be reading too much into these expressions. However, the suffusion of simple rural metaphors during the long private discussion between the necromancer and Nebbio (Act II, Scene 3) does at least hint at the pair of them having humble backgrounds.

<sup>334</sup> In the later redaction, Nebbio is even accorded some Latin expressions: *Cuius figurae?* Ben si puo dir: *simplicis*. (II,3) Guidotti makes this observation regarding Nebbio: 'Si pensi ad esempio all'introduzione delle frasi-commento del Nibbio vero e proprio dialogo alternativo del servo col pubblico, o ad intarsi nuovi, come le riflessioni sui travestimenti e i costumi. Nella morfologia si avverte tutta la meccanicità del processo epurativo del consueto idioma (anche se già 'risciacquato' fin dal '20 nelle 'fresche e dolci acque' toscane).', *Il Modello...*, p. 149,

fancy verbiage, whereas there is a perverse delight in seeing evil wrapped in trenchant and colourful language.<sup>335</sup>

Neither hero nor villain, but a representative of carefree, exuberant youth is Giannicco, the very young squire of the Marescalco in Aretino's *Il Marescalco*. In his early appearances, Giannicco switches from a crudity 'La mi fa male in punto' (I,1) to, in the very next line, a more erudite expression 'buon pro', which manages to discombobulate his master. Giannicco uses a Latin expression at the beginning of the next scene: 'a vobis' (an expression he may have heard often during church services), again to baffle his master. Two scenes further on, Giannicco is crude when he speaks to the Old Nurse: 'Al cor, per la put ..' and even cruder a few lines later on: 'Potta, che non dico di ...' (I,4). This provokes the Old Nurse to entreat him to mind his tongue.

In contra-indication to the scene examined above, when Giannicco falls into conversation with the Pedant (in Act 1, Scene 11) he proves to have a very shaky knowledge of Latin:

PEDANTE: De le copule matrimoniali.

GIANNICCO: Come, domine, de le scrofula

PEDANTE: Io dico copule.

GIANNICCO: Che cosa sono pocule? (I,11).

However, any exposure of Giannicco's shortcomings regarding knowledge of Latin is quickly subsumed under a series of crude innuendos and double entendres which both parties are complicit in, as exemplified by this exchange:

PEDANTE: Funes, idest vincula

GIANNICCO: Oh, buono (I,11)<sup>336</sup>

Both parties in this duologue seem equally keen to distort his own phrasing or misconstrue that of his interlocutor towards an obscenity. Giannicco's tendency to insert a Latin word or phrase (which he seems to have picked up randomly rather than through any dedicated study) is one of his 'weapons' in the battle of cultural one-

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<sup>335</sup> This notion is echoed in the well-known English saying 'The devil has all the best tunes'.

<sup>336</sup> 'Giannicco purposely misinterprets the Latin word *vincula* – "ties" as the Italian phrase 'v'incula' – "up your arse" The Pedant's reply carries on the homosexual imagery.', *The Marescalco*, Sbrocchi and Campbell, p. 118, n.

upmanship. Against the decidedly unlearned Marescalco he is successful, but against more cultivated figures such as the Count he comes unstuck; although in talks with the Pedant, rather than a contest developing, the misunderstandings and mishearings are bent toward generating mutual amusement.

In the next scene, Giannicco attempts to raise the register of his speech, albeit in an amusingly mock sententious way, when he again has a dig at the Marescalco's brusque manner: 'Oh, voi ci avete guasto il galante e profumato ragionamento.' (I,12). A delicious irony here is that in this accusation Giannicco himself is careless enough to use a colloquialism - the truncated form of the past participle: 'guasto' instead of 'guastato'.<sup>337</sup> In his response to the Count's question as to how his master is faring, Giannicco here as elsewhere expresses several discrete facts and episodes in one long continuous sequence without a pause, indicating nervousness or deviousness. This scene also illustrates Giannicco's frequent recourse to metaphors derived from rural life: '... egli averà da spendere primamente per qualche giorno, poi ella tirerà a casa i bei giovanetti, ond'egli mangerà gli uccelli, ed io la civetta.' (II,8) Here, we can infer, the main aim of Giannicco is to impart a clever analogy rather than to impress verbally. Elsewhere, Giannicco does show a gift for verbal invention, used both for sympathy: 'che a crepacuore, a crepafegato, a crepapolmone toglie istasera moglie' (III,1); and for abuse: 'Credilo a me, se tu vuoi; se non, menati la tempella a la martingala.' (III,1). For the first quote, as well as showing an ability to employ bathos - the more frivolous 'crepafegato' immediately following the genuinely sympathetic 'crepacuore', Giannicco adds the prefix 'i' to the more regular 'stasera'. One can infer that Giannicco's tendency to truncate words, as in *guasto* (cited above) is an unconscious habit, whereas the addition of the prothesis 'i', as in the case of *istasera*, is a conscious effort to sound more high-falutin. During the last Act, Giannicco is keen to impress the Pedant by displaying his greater knowledge of slang:

GIANNICCO: Ah, ah, ah!

PEDANTE: Di che ridi tu, asinellulo?

GIANNICCO: Rido che non sete pratico al soldo, perché pettine in campo vuol dire mangiare a scrocco. (V,11)

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<sup>337</sup> Giannicco shares this habit with another male servant, Fessenio from *La Calandra* (see p. 202 above).

An alternative construction is that Giannicco is here getting his revenge for the Pedant's earlier attempt to belittle him for his poor Latin.

This is a plausible portrait of a very young person who tries to impress his elders and betters with his verbal ability but who also on occasions intends to shock or even antagonise those closer to him in rank with the use of slang or swear words. Towards those of much higher rank (with the notable exception of the Pedant), Giannicco's circumspection suggests that even the slightest show of vulgarity on his part might be construed as insubordination and therefore he is more guarded and polite. Sometimes Giannicco over-reaches himself in an attempt to appear adult and sophisticated with the result that, rather than creating a good impression, he embarrasses himself.

Pilucca, one of the pair of 'rogue' servants in *Gli Straccioni*, is colourful in his speech and insouciant in his behaviour. We first meet Pilucca at the very start of the play, where he has been drinking heavily, as can be inferred from the rueful remarks by his travelling companion, Demetrio: 'Oh! Tu hai bevuto a Ripa in tanti luoghi' and 'Tu sei ben più alto di lui' (I,1). With pleasing symmetry, a few scenes later on, the now sober Pilucca meets up with his drunken fellow servant Marabeo.<sup>338</sup> It is Pilucca this time who is able to pass playful comments, couched half-way between indulgence and disapproval of Marabeo's drinking habits: 'fa l'amor con un fiasco' and 'Tu incanti la nebbia a mezzogiorno' (I,4). He refers to his unreliable friend and work-mate by way of affectionate insults: 'gaglioffo'<sup>339</sup> and 'briccone.' Later on in this same conversation, Pilucca uses colloquial phrases such as: 'tenerci il sacco l'un l'altro', 'di sgaglioffarteli' and 's'è buscato'<sup>340</sup> (I,4) when discussing their criminal activities. In the scene

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<sup>338</sup> These depictions of drunkenness by the servants, as well as denoting these types as wayward and unreliable, also point to a degree of sympathy: in the subsistence level of their day-to-day lives, alcohol becomes an understandable source of comfort. Moreover, in the first scene Pilucca's resort to alcohol is even more excusable since he has been held in captivity (presumably with bare rations and no alcohol) for some years. However, since Pilucca's fellow captive, the nobly-born Demetrio, manages to resist the lure of alcohol, there still remains the implication that the lower ranks are more intemperate and less disciplined.

<sup>339</sup> Analysing the linguistic aspects of a letter written by Machiavelli in 1513, Fogarasi finds instances of 'Parole e strutture popolari, a volte plebee, molto espressive come le adopera il Machiavelli rendono in maniera pregnante i suoi umori e le circostanze che esse sono chiamate ad illustrare: *cricca, tricke-trach, m'ingaglioffo* da *gaglioffo* – uomo vile, spregevole.', *Nuovo Manuale...*, p. 152. Later on, Marabeo uses a diminutive of this word 'gaglioffetto' (IV,1).

<sup>340</sup> Migliorini on sixteenth-century usage indicates that this word has a Spanish origin or, at any rate, a form influenced by Spanish word construction: 'Ci si rende conto della forza di penetrazione esercitata dagli iberismi sul nostro lessico anche attraverso le molte parole generali che allora vi penetrarono: *accudire, buscare*.' , *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, pp. 420-21

following, he uses earthy slang when mocking worries voiced by Marabeo: ‘Canchero a la falla!’<sup>341</sup> (I,5).

But Pilucca is also capable of using neat diminutives such as in the phrase: ‘glie ne darò una calcatella’<sup>342</sup> (III,1) and even able to coin new words, some with obscene connotations: ‘Mi piace questa dottrina. Di chi è ella [...] di peripottetici, e di stronzici’ (I,4); and at the end of Act 3, Scene 4, Pilucca inventively coins, or at least appositely quotes, the word ‘Spartimatrimonio’<sup>343</sup> for someone who is adept at breaking up romantic partnerships. When Marabeo declares that they can now seize the opportunity to extract the sum of 100 scudos, Pilucca uses this erudite metaphor to express his scepticism: ‘Di questo minerale, non gli caverebbe già un archimista’ (IV,1).

At certain junctures during his encounter with his angry and impatient master, Pilucca makes some asides to the audience. These are mocking comments on Giordano’s behaviour or intentions: two of them are crude references to bodily parts: ‘Mi par d’aver le budella in un catino.’ (IV,2); and ‘Or sì che gli daremo in culo a Castruccio!’ (IV,2).<sup>344</sup> In this same verbal exchange, Pilucca is seen to express disdain for Demetrio’s need for requited romantic feelings and entreats him to focus solely on obtaining physical satisfaction. In the scene following, disdain for women’s feelings is more concretely shown when Pilucca and Marabeo try forcibly to remove Agata (Giuletta’s slave name) from her lodgings. Pilucca twice applies the disparaging word ‘putta’ to her and compares her cries of protest to something bestial: ‘Mugola a tua posta: in qua, in qua ti dico.’ (IV,3).

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<sup>341</sup> ‘Espressione proverbiale (‘alla malora!’) di significato osceno. Per il Tommasco-Bellini *falla* è il membro virile e vengono portati a conferma i seguenti versi del Berni nel *Capitolo a messer Antonio da Bibbiena*: ‘voi dite poi che vi duol una spalla, / e credete aver il mal franzese / almen venisse il cancaro alla falla’, Annibal Caro, *Opere*, ed. A. Jacomuzzi (Turin: Unione Tipografico – Editrice Torinese, 1974), p. 402, n..

<sup>342</sup> ‘Calcatella: una leggera spinta’, *Comedia degli Straccioni*, ed. Guglielminetti, p. 44, n.

<sup>343</sup> Jacomuzzi opines: ‘... più probabilmente si tratta di termine popolare e scherzoso per indicare l’uditore della Sacra Rota incaricato di emanare le sentenze di nullità matrimoniale.’ Caro, *Opere*, p. 433, n.

<sup>344</sup> ‘*budella* espressione proverbiale (al catino può essere in pericolo di vita, sul punto di essere *sbudellato*).’ Caro, *Opere*, p. 442 n. ‘Con ogni probabilità *Castruccio* è nome formato da ‘castrone’, nel senso appunto di persona grossa, sciocca e balorda.’ Caro, *Opere*, p. 443, n.. If staged, the comments containing the first of these words would be made whilst Pilucca was some distance (perhaps near the wings) from Giordano, whilst the second would be uttered *sotto voce* while he was standing quite close to Giordano; hence Giordano’s response ‘Che di’ tu Pilucca?’ (IV,2)

In Pilucca, we see the servant class depicted in all its colourful, inventive and sometimes subversive use of language. Pilucca is ascribed a higher percentage of slang than any other character. However, these are not specific to the play's setting – Rome, but used to denote a generalized plebeian way of talking.<sup>345</sup> We can relish all Pilucca's witty, crude and distorted use of language as well as his anti-establishment attitudes, although probably balk at his crass attitude to the female sex. Even compared to Fessenio's man-of-the world persona, Pilucca's vocabulary denotes him as a more rugged, more 'urban' figure. He is also given, rare for a servant figure, a backstory. In these aspects, he is accorded a greater degree of 'reality' in comparison with the bulk of servant figures who are largely designed to serve theatrical goals. In Pilucca we see a clear move toward fashioning a servant figure through whom is provided an insight into the conditions and possible attitudes of real-life servants, a move away from previous stage servants who typically had multi-functions beyond those of a mere lackey and whose designation of 'servant' was only pertinent in that he was a constant companion of the master.

In contrast to the down-trodden Marabeo and Pilucca, the next servant in this list, Giorgetto, appears to lead a very comfortable life. All he is tasked with is to think up ways of enabling his master to gain access to the object of his desire, the young married female Oretta, a role he relishes. In his initial discussion with his master, Giorgetto employs some elegant phrasing as he sympathises with his master's tribulations, which includes his difficulty in getting down to study: 'Voi non vi avete addottarla sì tosto, che e' non bisogni che voi ci torniate almanco un altro anno; sicché pigliatelavi consolata.' (I,1). His eloquence extends to being able to quote Latin phrases: 'Per far coram vobis'. Though he is also adept at using more populist sayings: '... e fareste, come si dice, prima cento gelosi ch'un becco' (I,1); and 'O vedi, a che otta suona nona in questo paese'. (I,1). This last expression is a dig at his master for acquiring some bad local habits; in this case answering a different question to the one asked. In the same

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<sup>345</sup> Whilst Annibal Caro paid less attention to Pietro Bembo's prescriptions on literary language (as codified in his 1525 treatise *Prose della volgar lingua*) than did Ariosto, he strove to write in a contemporary Tuscan vernacular, as Migliorini testifies: 'Pochi sono i non Toscani che si sforzano di adeguarsi all'uso parlato fiorentino. Il più notevole è il Caro, marchigiano, che nel *Commento di Ser Agresto* asseriva di non voler usare "nè la boccacchevole, nè la petrarchevole, ma solamente la pura e pretta Toscana d'oggi, e della commune quella parte, che ancora da essi Toscani è ricevuta"; mentre stava scrivendo gli *Straccioni* chiedeva agli amici fiorentini di fornirgli modi di dire.', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 318.

conversation, Giorgetto's expressions vary from the plebeian: 'Crepar poss'egli, e io lo credi' to the pseudo-erudite: 'Come dice i Fransoi? Argièns fa i tott.'

Giorgetto uses short forms for some verbs: 'fo' and 'vo', which serve to underline his Florentine origins. Similar to other characters whose aim to present themselves as urbane and well mannered is not always successful, in moments of exasperation Giorgetto resorts to pithy curses and insults, as when he is frustrated by the asinine stubbornness of the servant Giannella: 'Eh, apri, canchero ti venga [...] questa bestia pazza.' (III,2). During the fourth Act, Giorgetto makes two literary references, the first one to the *Decameron*: 'A Madonna Oretta parrà quella di messer Giulio altra giacitura che quella del suo gocciolone; il quale, come messer Ricciardo di Chinzica, debbe sempre tenere il calendario a canto.' (IV,6);<sup>346</sup> the second to a classical myth: 'e' gliele faranno più lunghe che non le fece la moglie ad Atteone...' (IV,6).<sup>347</sup>

The final scene of the play, like the first, is a conversation just between Giulio and Giorgetto where his master tries to praise him. Giorgetto resists this with this rebuttal: 'Non cortigianerie, padrone, i' son sempre ristorato da voi.' (V.8), an oblique request for his master not to use hollow compliments and gilded phrases typically employed by members of the court as part of their strategy to gain preferment by flattery. Giorgetto is given the valedictory speech to the audience; it is couched in more genteel, though still admirably succinct terms: 'vecchi che vogliono tor moglie [...] fanno il primo errore a torla; che non faccino il secondo a esserne gelosi.' (V,8).

The figure of Giorgetto comes across as unrealistically knowledgeable and erudite for a mere servant. Undoubtedly this creation is principally an artifice to throw into greater relief the ignorance and incompetence of Giorgetto's master Giulio in order to heighten the comedy. But underneath this, there may be a more serious satire on the iniquities and absurdities of the real world where you could well find a servant who

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<sup>346</sup> Ricciardo di Chinzica, a Pisan judge, is the impotent husband of Bartolomea of *Decameron* Day II, Story 10. He tries to hide this weakness by citing a whole series of spurious reasons for abstaining from sex: 'egli le mostrava, niun di era che non solamente una festa, ma molte non ne fossero; a reverenza delle quali per diverse cagioni mostrava, l'uomo e la donna doversi astenere da così fatti congiugimenti ...'

<sup>347</sup> Acteon is a figure from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Book III): in this mythological story, as a punishment for spying on the goddess Diana while she was bathing, he is turned into a stag and then ripped to pieces by hounds. There is no mention of a wife. However, in another account by Acusilaus, there is a description of how he was killed by dogs at the command of Zeus because he sued for the hand of Semele who, according to Greek mythology, was the daughter of Cadmus.

possesses a level of education and intelligence far greater than that of his Philistine master.

Lastly in this section is the Marescalco, eponymous hero of Aretino's *Il Marescalco*. He is both a master to the young Giannicco but also a minion of the Duke. In the opening scene the Marescalco is engaged in some quick-fire banter with his squire Giannicco, where he uses very short phrases or even single words: 'Novelle di corte', 'Taci, taci' and 'Matto' (I,1) in response to Giannicco's provocations. Throughout the play, the Marescalco is often in an angry or prickly frame of mind which either manifests itself in violent imagery: 'Per gittarla in un pozzo la torrò.' (I,2) or crude expressions: 'alla puttana che mi cacò' (II,10), 'bestiuolo!' (II,7), 'putti' (IV,5) and 'cacone' (IV,7). It is notable that the last of these expressions is said during a monologue, an indication that his bad temper and deprecation of others permeate his every waking hour rather than solely being triggered by the provocative remarks of others.

The aversion the Marescalco has for taking a wife is expressed most graphically when he lists the symptoms of venereal disease, the discomforts of which he professes to be able to tolerate more readily than those inflicted by a wife: '... che minor pena è il mal francioso con tutte le solennità de le gomme, e de le bolle, e de le doglie con le podagre sue sorelle appresso, che non è lo avere moglie.' (I,6). In his first encounter with the Pedant, at the outset he appears impatient with the latter's supposed learnedness, referring dismissively to 'vostre astrologie' (I,9). He does not try to compete with the Pedant's elevated way of talking, rather he conspicuously keeps to a mundane, colloquial way of expressing himself. In Act II, Scene 6, in conversation with the Old Nurse, the Marescalco appears to mistake the word 'canti' for 'incanti'.<sup>348</sup> Although undoubtedly introduced for comic word-play, it also points to the Marescalco's limited vocabulary.

In Act 4, Scene 1, the Marescalco is given a soliloquy where his register of expression becomes loftier and his sentences longer. Elsewhere, the Marescalco is seen to make reference to political and religious figures:

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<sup>348</sup> This is the same malapropism uttered by Samia in Act 1, Scene 5 of *La Calandra*.



... che non è la liberalità e la virtù al Cardinale Hippolito de' Medici, disse Pasquino da Roma; ma che ho io operato contro il Marchese? Sappilo il cielo che io non assassino la bontà sua, come assassinava fra Benedetto. (IV,3);

as well as referring to passages from the Bible: 'Voi scorgete il fuso ne i miei occhi, e non sentite la colonna ne i vostri'<sup>349</sup> (V,2); and on the rare occasion, the Marescalco even manages to use Latin: 'Vengo; di gire al Sepolcro, in Galazia, ed *in finibus terrae*'<sup>350</sup> (II, 6); '*ad verbum*'<sup>351</sup> caro' (V,2); and 'Or vedete *cujus figurae*' (V,3)<sup>352</sup>. However, these are exceptional departures from the Marescalco's usual prosaic way of expressing himself. During the denouement when his prospective bride is revealed to be a youth disguised as a female, the Marescalco reproaches himself, using simple farmyard imagery: 'O castrone, o bue, o buffalo, o scempio che io sono.' (V,10)

As befitting someone who has a practical function in the running of the court, the Marescalco is given the bluff and sometimes downright crude mode of expression reminiscent of the soldier. Although he technically is, and he describes himself as such at one point, a courtier, his overall presentation is of a man who has worked himself up through hard work from humbler origins to attain his present rank.<sup>353</sup> He has none of the obsequiousness or polished manner of a typical courtier. Occasionally, he does attempt more elevated speech forms (including Latin) and one can surmise that, like Giannicco, he wants to impress on those of higher rank that he is not altogether a Philistine. To those of lower rank, he makes no such effort. Generally, the Marescalco is unsophisticated in his way of talking and is not ashamed to be viewed as such.

From the above survey, a tentative conclusion can be drawn: that in portraying servant figures, there were four, sometimes incompatible, objectives:

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<sup>349</sup> Matthew 7. 4.

<sup>350</sup> Possibly a phrase the Marescalco has seen whilst scrutinising a geographical map.

<sup>351</sup> A phrase most likely to have been heard in church.

<sup>352</sup> The first of these phrases the Marescalco addresses to the Old Nurse, the second to the Count and the third to the Pedant. In all three cases, each of these figures had previously used Latin in his presence. We can infer that the Marescalco is either trying to keep up with their level of erudition or, particularly in the case where he responds to the Old Nurse, a deliberate attempt to be sarcastic towards others' pretensions.

<sup>353</sup> *Admittedly*, the presence of his old wetnurse does not quite fit with this conjecture. However, I suspect that in furnishing the Marescalco with a plebeian vocabulary, Aretino did not consider that aspect with any thought of how that would fit in with an inferred backstory for this figure.

- 1) to reflect or highlight their base condition and in so doing include saltier language: jargon, short-forms, underworld slang, and swear-words;
- 2) to imbue them with a high degree of articulation and cultural sophistication, as a deliberate counterpoint to the ignorance and Philistine demeanour of a higher-ranked character, often the servant's own master, or as part and parcel of more general aim to generate comic inversions;
- 3) as a means to impart essential plot information, where the servant's lowly status and concomitant speech patterns are subsumed under the role of a disinterested narrator who uses neutral language;
- 4) to cast the servant in the role of chief mischief-maker.

In the above survey, the first of these objectives is well illustrated by the figure of Pilucca, the second by Giorgetto, and the third by Fessenio. All three fulfil the last objective. Temolo is a singular portrayal in that he is plain in speech, given neither to uttering vulgarities or flights of erudition, and other characters rather than him - Emilia's mother, the maidservant Aurelia and Nebbio, are used as vehicles for imparting essential plot information. Moreover, Temolo is bent on thwarting the mischief created by others; he does not instigate any himself. The fact that *Il Negromante* is written in verse form imposes a further restriction on Temolo being ascribed a more 'authentic' imprimatur of the servant figure through his manner of speech.<sup>354</sup> Notwithstanding this same restriction, the rogue servant Nebbio is able to impart, sometimes scathingly, sometimes wryly, sometimes self-pityingly, the ups and downs of a life serving a criminal mastermind.

If male servants are presented linguistically in all shapes and sizes, female servants are portrayed in a much narrower mould: as unsophisticated, God-fearing and occasionally given to vulgarities. Of the female servants examined above, only Agnola is accorded a higher degree of cultural sophistication, but not to the artificially elevated level routinely given to male servants.

## YOUNG NOBLE MALES

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<sup>354</sup> If Ariosto's use of verse was a conscious attempt to produce a more literary product, this, doubtless unintentionally, also engenders a greater meritocracy: in terms of speech patterns and vocabulary, it is more difficult to present readily identifiable upper or lower class, native or foreign figures.

For this group there would be an expectation, if perceived as a faithful mirror of real life, for them to exhibit a higher degree of literacy and erudition since this category of individuals, through the greater wealth and privilege of the families into which they were born, would have had greater access to education.<sup>355</sup> However, there would also be a counter expectation, particularly for those steeped in theatrical tradition, of a presentation of these well-to-do youths behaving against type, in terms of both moral rectitude and cultural sophistication (running parallel to that of routinely seeing on stage unfeasibly scholarly servants).

Lidio, the young ‘stud’ of *La Calandra*, despite being denoted as having been born of a noble family, is not accorded any skills of oration beyond the ordinary; his frame of cultural reference appears limited. Indeed, his own tutor Polinico refers at one point (Act 1, Scene 2) to Lidio as a *forestiero* which could be construed as just a factual reference to him as an newcomer to Rome but could also be interpreted as a subtle rebuke that he has yet to acquire the more civilised manners of his adopted city.

When speaking of strong passions, Lidio does not express these by way of any poetic metaphors, indeed by any metaphors at all. At best, Lidio is able to justify his current stance - his determination to pursue, come what may, the older married female Fulvia - by this rather sententious and somewhat unromantic assertion: ‘Alla potenza sua ogni cosa è suggestta. E non è maggior dolcezza che acquistare quel che si desidera in amore, senza il quale non è cosa alcuna perfetta né virtuosa né gentile.’ (I,2). Elsewhere, Lidio’s answers tend to be more terse, as evidenced later on in this same discussion when the subject of women’s behaviour crops up:

POLINICO: Non son già d’una apparenzia, ma sono ben tutte d’una natura.

LIDIO: Gran fallacia pigli. (I,2)

Ever briefer are Lidio’s responses to Polinico’s counsel, where he reacts in a querulous, almost child-like, way:

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<sup>355</sup> Indeed, the well-to-do youth is often presented at a stage when he is still undergoing formal education, either in the shape of a private tutor, as in the case of Lidio, or attending university, as in the case of Giulio. However, these circumstances are outlined principally to indicate the privileged position of these youths or as elements of restraint in the absence of parental figures, rather than to feed into any expectation of cultural superiority.

POLINICO: Levati, dico, da questo tuo amore.

LIDIO: Perché?

POLINICO: Non ve arai mai se non tormenti

LIDIO: Perché? (I,2)

The most lyrical Lidio becomes is towards the end of this scene when he wants to impress upon Polinico the pointlessness of his warnings: ‘E però, se pensi levarmi dallo amore di costei, tu cerchi abbracciar l’ombra, e pigliare il vento con le reti.’ (I,2).

Lidio’s first soliloquy, which comes as late as the fifth Act, is merely a factual account of the events that he has been involved in. His second soliloquy, a few scenes later on, is in a similar vein but here Lidio does manage to cite this more recondite dictum: ‘Amante non sia chi coraggioso non è.’ (V,9). However, Lidio’s rather pedestrian summing up of his miraculous escape from a very fraught situation ‘da un grandissimo dolore mi trovo in grandissima contentezza’ (V,5) is more typical. Even in the rapture of his rediscovery and reconciliation with his sister whom he did not know for certain was still alive, Lidio can only manage this trite metaphor ‘Vedi che pure doppo gran pioggia viene bellissimo sereno.’ (V,12).

Lidio is a rather sketchy character and one can infer his construction was more plot driven than character driven.<sup>356</sup> One could also make the case that the presentation of Lidio as an uncultured individual was deliberate, in order to underscore his immaturity and boorish demeanour.<sup>357</sup>

Giulio and Rinuccio are the two single well-born males featured in *L’Assiuolo*. Rinuccio is described as the head of a household and a native of Pisa, where the play is set, whereas Giulio, his friend and lodger, is denoted as a student from Florence attending the local university. Do these biographical facts have any bearing on the comparative level of cultural sophistication they are accorded? From the outset, Rinuccio’s speech seems to be of similar low register as Giulio’s; he employs common-

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<sup>356</sup> Lidio is accorded three soliloquies (which in the main are factual and descriptive rather than philosophical in nature), all bunched up in the final Act, whereas his sister Santilla is given four, and the necromancer Ruffo five, all of which are more evenly distributed through the Acts.

<sup>357</sup> At the risk of sounding anachronistic, Lidio has many of the hall-marks of the ‘anti-hero’: one who exhibits an insouciant attitude combined with a laconic, often charmless, way of expressing himself.

place metaphors rather than lofty or poetic ones when speaking about love: ‘A dire che Amore abbia del fanciullo e dello scioperato, facendo andare in zoccoli questo gattaccio da ammazzarlo con la zucca.’ (I,2). When events appear to be falling in his and Giulio’s favour, Rinuccio uses these commonplace metaphors: ‘il tordo si cala alla frasconaia’ (IV,2); and ‘la vacca è nostra’ (IV,5). He is not above swearing on the odd occasion: ‘Canchero! Di cotesto desse il convento.’ (I,2); ‘Canchero! Io mi fondavo come messer Giorgio Scala.’ (V,2).<sup>358</sup> Even when not showing surprise or disgust, Rinuccio can be crass: when asking Giulio about his nocturnal adventures, he phrases his question thus: ‘E in vero, come riesce la mercanzia al saggio, che voi l’avete saggiata?’ (V,2). When he is relating his own nocturnal adventures, he downplays his sexual conquest with this matter-of-fact recollection: ‘apro l’uscio col grimaldello, vo’ su alla volta della camera; aprola similmente, cavomi il cioppone, e entro nel letto [...] e comincio a volere consumare il matrimonio;’ (V,2).

Rinuccio is witheringly scathing about the servant Giannella: ‘Un famigliaccio che non vale la vita sua duo danari.’ (IV,1). In his conversation with the maidservant Agnola (II, 5), Rinuccio is misogynistic enough to declare that ‘la maggior parte delle donne’ is guilty of the habit of chattering away endlessly. (There is a theatrical irony in this statement in that Rinuccio and Giulio’s conversations tend to be long and discursive, as in I,2 and V,2, in comparison to the brevity of the exchanges between the sisters Oretta and Violante.) Rinuccio sometimes shows a little more cultural finesse, as demonstrated in his first soliloquy<sup>359</sup>, where he ponders on his friendship with Giulio: ‘Di quanta utilità sia uno amico fedele, io lo provo al presente; e nel vero io mi stimai sempre, che egli fusse di gran comodo;’ (II,4);<sup>360</sup> and during the closing stages of the play when he acts as a peace-maker: ‘Io voglio, piacendo a voi, intender la cosa, e che chi ha errato, s’emendi, e che l’offese passate vadino a terra, e che da quinci innanzi voi siate buon parenti.’ (V,3).

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<sup>358</sup> Silvio D’Amico has a footnote relating to this simile: ‘forma proverbiale (cfr. anche ‘fondarsi sul vento’) per ‘campare in aria’, *Teatro Italiano*, Vol I, ed. Silvio Di’Amico (Milan: Nuova Accademia Editrice, Milan 1955), p. 693, n.

<sup>359</sup> Although Giulio is nominally the central character, it is his friend Rinuccio who is accorded two soliloquies, in contrast to Giulio who is given none.

<sup>360</sup> These ruminations by Rinuccio in this and a subsequent soliloquy (Act IV, Scene 1) can be viewed partly as a send-up of the heart-felt soliloquies by female characters in the throes of desperate longing featured in earlier plays. Here Rinuccio is fulsomely praising someone who, if he took the trouble to find out, is in pursuit of the same female.

Rinuccio, together with his friend Giulio, is firmly in the Boccaccian tradition of a hedonistic schemer rather than that of a hapless romantic. Instead of expressing love's woes through any reference to the classics or poignant lyricism, he revels in detailing his sexual encounters in crass vocabulary.

Rinuccio's various speech registers illustrate a widely observed phenomenon: that we often adopt different modes of expression according to whom we are addressing. Rinuccio is crude and salacious when talking privately to a close male friend, but shows much greater decorum when addressing a young female individually or a larger grouping when it includes respected male elders and younger females. However, such is the wide overall variation of speech register and often incongruous juxtaposition of high and low speech that a coherent, recognisable figure fails to emerge.<sup>361</sup> (The characterisation of his friend Giulio is more of a piece: he maintains a fairly consistent pedestrian mode of expression.)

Although both the young male lovers in Ariosto's *Il Negromante*, are markedly less earthy than the above two, Camillo is marginally the more highfalutin. In his first appearance, when asked where he is going, Camillo replies in a sententious manner with the object of ingratiating himself with the necromancer. He is able to wax lyrical when contemplating his loved one:

Di quelle man, più che di latte candide,  
più che di neve, è uscita questa lettera (II,4);

before going on even more preposterously to eulogise the paper on which his loved one has written. Camillo is able to adopt legal terminology, which as the son of a wealthy father<sup>362</sup> (possibly a lawyer or notary) appears plausible although, in line with Camillo's habitual tendency, it is verbose:

Quanto d'aver t'han quelle carte invidia,

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<sup>361</sup> This is no doubt attributable in part to two distinct source materials from which the figure of Rinuccio is drawn: the opportunism and rudimentary speech of a typical young lust-driven male from the *Decameron*, upon which is grafted rather awkwardly a 'theatrical persona', one who is mindful of the feelings and reputation of others, as well as an ability to articulate such a propensity.

<sup>362</sup> Early on, the wetnurse Aurelia, when questioned as to who was the richer of the two (Cintio or Camillo), attests: 'Di roba è poca tra loro' (I,1); in the third Act, the necromancer refers to Camillo not just having one servant but several: 'ma piaciati commettere / Alli famigli tuoi che mi obediscano' (III,3); and in the third Act Lachellino lists certain luxury items he intends to purloin from Camillo's house.

De le quali si fan libelli, cedule,  
Inquisizioni, estratorce, esami, strumenti,  
Processi e mille altre opere. (II,4)<sup>363</sup>

Towards the end of the fourth Act, when matters have gone disastrously wrong, Camillo invokes religious phraseology: 'Bontà divina' and 'O giustizia di Dio' (IV,6); later 'al voler di Dio' (V,2) and 'Cotesta bocca sia da Dio in perpetuo / Benedetta' (V,3).<sup>364</sup> At moments of exasperation, Camillo is not above letting loose a stream of invective, as occurs when, after discovering Lachellino's scam, he comes across his servant:

Ah, ghiotton, baro, traditor e perfido  
e tu e tuo patron!... (V,2):

and more trenchantly, wishes ill-fortune upon Nebbio as the latter departs:

Ora col diavolo  
Va, ladroncello, va' alle forche, e impiccati (V,2)

However, after the crisis has been resolved in his favour, Camillo returns to making polite conciliatory remarks:

Io l'averò di grazia:  
Così con tutto il cor ti priego, e supplico  
Che tu me la conceda di buon animo. (V,3)

Camillo appears as the most volatile character whose moods swing from rapture, through to embarrassment and then rage and finally to blissful contentment. He is accorded the vocabulary and skill of expression to fully articulate these different states of mind, although these are often couched in comically exaggerated tones. Flights of

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<sup>363</sup> However, Camillo's subsequent observation: 'De' rapaci notari, con che i poveri / Licenziosamente in piazza rubano!' (II, 4) seems a little too worldly wise for a naïve youth in the throes of unrequited love and comes across more as the playwright's own cynical viewpoint, using this character as a cypher.

<sup>364</sup> Ariosto presents the opposite schema to that of Bibbiena's: in *La Calandra* most of the religious expressions come from the servant class, Samia in particular, and very few from the higher ranked characters, whereas in *Il Negromante* it is the bourgeois figures Camillo and Maximo who cite religious phrases or notions much more frequently than do the male servants Temolo and Nebbio or the female servant Aurelia. From this one could infer that Bibbiena saw the use (indeed the over-use) of religious expressions as characteristic of low culture, whereas Ariosto saw the citation of Christian concepts and sayings as a mark of middle-class respectability.

overblown lyrical fancy which appear frequently in the speeches of Camillo and occasionally in the speeches of Cintio render these characters lightweight,<sup>365</sup> though Camillo's ability to come up with a pithy phrase even in times of crisis serves to modify this impression a little.

Camillo indulges in what could be termed the mock heroic. In contrast, the lyricism found in the speeches of Tindaro, the young male protagonist from Caro's *Gli Straccioni*, is to be taken at face value, since he is clearly presented as a figure of gravitas. As befits a hero of high rank, Tindaro expresses his feelings for his lover in noble sentiments: 'Morta è ella quanto al mondo, ma nell'animo mio sarà sempre viva e immortale [...] Tu vedi che la tua imagine mi sta continuamente nel core.' (II,1). Tindaro is the arch-romantic; speaking of his prospective bride, the supposed widow Argentina, he opines: 'E bellissima, e direi senza comparazione, se gli occhi miei non avessero veduta Giuletta.' (II,2). At times he adds a more philosophical patina to his observations: 'Le grazie, o non vengono mai, o non arrivano a tempo.' (I,3). At the beginning of the second Act, when his close friend Demetrio employs a metaphor to illustrate a point, Tindaro is able to take up that metaphor and extend it: when Demetrio says 'e 'l chiodo si caccia col chiodo', Tindaro replies: 'Il mio è fitto e ribadito di sorte che, se l'asse non si rompe, non riuscirà mai.' (II,1).<sup>366</sup> When he is cornered by the relatives of Giuletta, he is reduced to inarticulate panic: 'Ohimé! Ohimé! (III, 3); and ends the scene with this rueful understatement: 'Oh, dove son' io condotto.' (III,3).

During the fifth Act when closely questioning his servant, Tindaro is brusque and impatient, although this is no doubt constructed for comic effect rather than underlining his lack of articulacy. In a departure from his usual sombre mood, at one point Tindaro sees the funny side of the situation: 'Mi fate rider, che non n'ho voglia.' (V,2). At the opening of the final scene, Tindaro indulges in some vulgar name calling in response to the same from Giordano before they are both upbraided by the lawyer. But as this scene

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<sup>365</sup> The true 'heavyweights' are Temolo and Lachellino who form the heart of the play: a struggle between good and evil. The vicissitudes of the four lovers – Cintio, Lavinia, Camillo and Emilia, form a secondary strand and are often rendered in pantomimic contrivances couched in suitably arch language.

<sup>366</sup> Contained here is a double-entendre, the secondary obscene meaning of which not all the characters may register, depending on the actor's or director's intention: Tindaro could say the line innocently enough but his fellow characters on stage as well as the audience would pick up on its secondary, less innocent meaning or, alternatively, Tindaro could speak this line with the clear import that he is well aware of this secondary meaning.



progresses, after the establishment of the details of family connections, Tindaro becomes more measured in his expressions: 'E l'animo mi dice che voi sète del mio sangue; sicché vi perdono la superchieria che m'avete fatta e voglio vi per fratello.' (V,5). The only time when Tindaro's sentiments appear to lack gravitas is when he finds out that Giuletta is still alive and is living close by. A comic rather than serious tone is created by Tindaro's terse enumeration of a succession of emotions: 'Ardo, tremo, mi meraviglio, non credo, mi rallegro, mi contristo, mi vergogno.' (V,2).

In the first half of the play when he faces greater opposition, Tindaro is seen to express himself at greater length, with greater dexterity and in a tone of sombre deliberation. At a later stage, when fortune turns in his favour, he expresses himself with increased brevity and humour. Tindaro's character is carefully constructed, so that a sudden change from the serious to the flippant does not come across as contrived but manages to capture an aspect of real life: someone in a fraught or even dangerous situation relieves the tension through the use of black humour.

One of the inferences to be drawn from the presentation of the above four figures is that, having been born into wealth and privilege, these well-to-do youths have no need to impress others through elevated modes of expression or recondite phraseology. Rinuccio, together with his friend Giulio, talk in a plebeian way undistinguishable from the maidservant; indeed they are given to greater vulgarities, though this can be attributed more to gender difference than to distinctions of rank. An element of Lidio's lofty stance and sense of entitlement is that he does not spend too much effort articulating or defending his intentions, but leaves his loyal servant Fessenio to demolish the arguments of his opponent Polinico. Paradoxically, it is Tindaro's inarticulacy at certain points that gives weight to the seriousness of his romantic commitment, whilst Camillo's verbosity and attempts at lyricism render his romantic stance frivolous, if not risible.<sup>367</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> These theatrical constructions of the young well-to-do male lover fit Castiglione's notion of *sprezzatura*: 'Ciò è fuggir quanto più si po, e come un asperissimo e pericoloso scoglio, la affettazione; e, per dir forse una nova parola, usa in ogni cosa una certa sprezzatura, che nasconda l'arte e dimostri ciò che si fa e dice venir fatto senza fatica e quasi senza pensarvi.', *Il Libro del Cortigiano*, Book I, Chapter XXVI. Expounded here is the notion that the ideal courtier should be accomplished at various activities - duelling, chess, etc. but not be seen to be making a concerted effort to attain such accomplishments. Similarly in these plays, the one character who makes the most visible effort to articulate his love and devotion, Camillo, is the one who comes across as the least dignified.

One can detect here a deliberate inversion: the presumed higher level of education for these well-do-youths has been transformed into portrayals which highlight their lack of erudition and tendency to resort to crudity of expression. Across time, between the first and last of my selected plays (1513 to 1549) the gap between the articulate, shrewd servant and his dim, inarticulate master seems to have widened (although a sample of just five plays renders this supposition necessarily tentative). A trend to highlight this counter-intuitive equation was no doubt spurred mainly by the opportunity for these playwrights to garner greater ‘comic mileage’ but also might be a reflection, whether intentional or not, of how education did not always reach those that it was intended for: an exploration of the notion that sons of the rich bourgeoisie might not be interested in acquiring knowledge despite the hiring of private tutors, in contrast to the poorer classes whose sons might acquire an education through dedicated self-tuition.<sup>368</sup>

## YOUNG NOBLE FEMALES

Compared to her brother, Santilla is given to greater articulation. In describing her situation, she is able to voice her predicament elegantly and cogently:

.. ove che, se io nel vestire e nel nome mi fussi monstro<sup>369</sup> essere donna (come sono in fatto), nè il turco, di cui eravamo schiavi, ce aria venduti, nè forse Perillo riscossici, se saputo che io femina fusse, onde in miserabil servitù ci conveniva stare. (II,1)

Santilla also shows considerable decorum. For instance, in her encounter with Samia, she maintains a civil tongue in her head under trying circumstances. The most she ventures to express her vexation is to repeat the same verb that Samia uses (Santilla dressed as a male is designated as Lidio Femina):

SAMIA: Eh, Lidio, tu vuoi straziarmi, si?

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<sup>368</sup> During the period under scrutiny here the increasing availability of printed text books made this possibility easier.

<sup>369</sup> Like Fessenio, Santilla retains the habit of truncating certain past participles.

LIDIO FEMINA:        Straziar vuoi tu me. (II,2)

However, in exasperating situations later on she does resort to blunter responses: in Act III, Scene 4, when she tries to impress upon the servant Fessenio the seriousness of the situation, she calls him 'scempio' and 'sciocco'. Santilla makes the point of distancing herself from an expression which may be perceived as belonging to the lower orders: '... per vedere se in me verificar si potesse quel che il vulgo dice: 'Chi ha tempo ha vita'. (II,3)<sup>370</sup>

At the end of the second Act, when she and her servant are discussing what to do next, Santilla is concerned not to be seen loitering in the street, especially not whilst waiting for a disreputable character: 'Meglio è che Ruffo aspetti noi. Leviamoci di qui, perché colui che è là non ci veda, se' fusse alcuno che per ordine di Perillo me cercasse: se ben de' sua non mi pare' (II,8). In a subsequent scene, Fannio sends Santilla ahead in order that he can engage in private Ruffo in a discussion of an insalubrious nature (III,17). This sense of decorum is likewise demonstrated by the servant Fannio in Act III, Scene 17 when he entreats his mistress Fulvia to go on ahead while he negotiates with the necromancer Ruffo. These episodes pay recognition to the need, recognised equally by male servants and their mistresses, that high-born women, particularly if young and still single, must behave with the utmost propriety whilst in public (although, even in her guise as a young male, Santilla, as indicated above, is still under the watchful eye of her guardian Perillo or members of his household).

However, at the end of the scene in which Santilla consults Fannio as to whether she should visit Fulvia dressed as a female in substitution of her brother (who has dressed as a female on his previous visits), Santilla does not balk at the vulgar allusions made by Fannio: 'Da lei anderai: al provar quel che cerca, troverà quel non vuole' (II,4). However, this scene still retains a certain consistency: that her servant Fannio is able to enter into a risqué subject matter when he is solely addressing her, but has to be seen to protect her 'innocence' when a third party is present (although this is further complicated by the fact that a third party would take Santilla to be male).

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<sup>370</sup> This desire not to be branded as a plebeian whilst using a plebeian expression is shared by the servant Fessenio, who had earlier used a similar disclaimer (in Act 1, Scene 3).

From discussing crude sexual matters with apparent nonchalance, a few scenes later on Santilla is seen at her most sententious:

Deh! me avesse Dio dato per luce tenebre per vita morte e per cuna sepultura allor  
che io del materno ventre uscii, da che, in quel punto che io nacqui, morir dovea  
la ventura mia... (II, 8)

At the start of the fifth Act, Santilla is at her most abrasive, using descriptions such as ‘granchio’, ‘Balorda’ and ‘Che domin indugia’.<sup>371</sup> By the final scene in which she appears, Santilla is reduced to quoting some rather limp similes: ‘Più chiaro che ‘l sole, più vero che ‘l vero.’ (V,12).

Santilla’s speech patterns denote a demure, articulate if uncomplicated heroine. However, she is not presented as overly prim and proper; she is able to enter without objection into discussions of a salacious nature with male characters. Part of that can be attributed to her natural subservience to and indulgence of older, male figures and partly to the twin roles she is obliged to play: that of a meek female Santilla conscious of decorum and that of a more assertive, less circumspect, male Lidio. However, any ‘masculinisation’ of Santilla in situations where she evidently wants to be taken as a male, is never overdone. (A stage production could strive to go as far as possible to present Santilla’s assumed masculinity consistently; alternatively, deliberately present her in this guise half-heartedly; for example, as Santilla is exiting in a rush reveal glimpses of feminine attire underneath her costume or, suddenly remembering her assumed male identity, she could abruptly lower the tone of her voice to comic effect.<sup>372</sup>)

If Santilla can be seen as a ‘real’ figure who finds herself caught up in an absurdist situation, the young noblewoman Giuletta in Caro’s *Gli Straccioni* is an

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<sup>371</sup> It is understandable that in her soliloquies, Santilla would speak with feminine sensibilities and decorum. However, in her encounters with others who suppose her to be a male character, on the whole she does not adopt a more ‘masculine’ speech pattern. But in one scene in the fifth Act (V,1), in which for the first time Santilla (still disguised as a man) and Lidio appear on stage together, she is robustly assertive. Here one can infer that Bibbiena chose to sacrifice character consistency in order to create an amusing symmetry, i.e. both Lidio and Santilla behaving with the same unashamedly selfish and acquisitive manner.

<sup>372</sup> However, even such a comic aspect could carry in its train an underlying polemic: on a sociological level illustrate the impossibility of a female adequately assuming a male role.

equally realistic character but rendered more so by the more naturalistic tone of this later play.<sup>373</sup>

Even when she is being brutally man-handled by Marabeo and Pilucca, Giuletta (at this point known as the slave girl Agata) maintains a level of verbal restraint: ‘O Vergine madre, àtame.’<sup>374</sup>; and: ‘A la strada, buone persone, a la strada.’ (IV,3). In the scene following, just after she has escaped from her tormentors, Giuletta shows a knowledge of politics of the wider world. She manages to forcibly articulate her grievances but uses the utmost delicacy to describe an attempted rape: ‘...e degli strazi che ha fatti de la mia persona, per espagnar la mia verginità e per venderla.’ (IV,4).

Giuletta often expresses herself in long sentences with numerous sub-clauses; for example in Act IV, Scene 4, one speech is a single sentence of 47 words, the next one comprises 64 words.<sup>375</sup> Similarly, Giuletta’s opening sentence of her letter consists of 60 words. In this letter, which is read out aloud by Demetrio, she rises to great heights of articulation and precision of expression:<sup>376</sup>

Per l’una di queste cose io disegno di condurmi col testimonio de la mia verginità a mostrare agli miei che io per legittimo amore, e non per incontinenza, ho consentito a venire con voi. (V,2)

Giuletta has a nice line in anaphora: ‘*per voi* sono stata a tante tempeste; *per voi* sono venuta in preda de’ corzari, *per voi* si può dir che io sia morta’ (V,2) (my italics). Also

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<sup>373</sup> The fable-like patina of *La Calandra* is maintained at a consistent level throughout whereas, although *Gli Straccioni* has a more naturalistic register overall, there are occasional tranches where it is heavily stylised (see pp. 281/282 below). Giuletta does not feature in any of these, so her ‘serious’ presentation is not compromised.

<sup>374</sup> Jacomuzzi has unearthed an interesting fact relating to this line: ‘Tutta questa battuta è stata sostituita nella edizione a stampa da: “Come, o che sarà questo?”’, Caro, *Opere*, p. 445, n. Looking at his first draft, Caro may have considered ‘O Vergine madre’ too downmarket an expression for the aristocratic Giuletta, or perhaps was mindful of the greater scrutiny which works of art were subjected to by religious authorities post-1550.

<sup>375</sup> In between these two, Rossello’s dialogue consists of three short sentences, the longest of which is just 20 words. This conveys the notion that Rossello’s mind is rooted in immediate practical matters, whereas Giuletta articulates a longer-term perspective, identifying the interconnectedness of past events and current circumstances.

<sup>376</sup> Helena Sanson outlines ways a young female of those times could acquire a high skill at letter writing: ‘The publishing market did not forget about women interested in “reading for writing”, in other words on reading as part of the process of acquiring skills as authors (Richardson 1999: 147). In the sixteenth century four editions of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* and eight of Boccaccio’s works were dedicated to a woman or a group of women (Richardson 1999: 147).’, *Women, Language and ...*, p. 54.

indicated in this passage is the notion that a well-born young maiden cannot be seen to admit to lustful desires but only express faithful devotion.<sup>377</sup>

Giuletta has a degree of articulation greater than that of her estranged romantic partner Tindaro and even surpasses that of the very urbane Demetrio, although Demetrio's skill at oratory is combined with a degree of sophistry and deviousness which tends to undercut any heroic attributes he might possess. In contrast, Giuletta's impressive display of erudition combined with a selfless demeanour adds to her nobility.

The young married female, Madonna Oretta, together her sister Violante, form the female love interest in Cecchi's *L'Assiuolo*. In Act 1, Scene 2 we learn from the maidservant Agnola that Oretta is in the habit of attending theatrical performances, in particular those presented by nuns in their convent. This fact may be included to indicate that Oretta's taste in culture is quite elevated but more crucially it is the convent which provides one of the few places where Oretta can escape her overbearing husband. Also here is an interesting detail disclosed by Agnola: that Oretta is a bit of a chatterbox: 'Quella donna m'ha conto tante cose, ch'io mi credetti che la non volesse finire stasera.' (II,5). These are early hints that Oretta may not be in the classic mould of the pious and chaste young female who is resigned to remain the passive object of the machinations of her menfolk. Oretta's first actual appearance comes when she delivers a lengthy soliloquy during the fourth Act. The beginning of it is an articulate and cogently argued assessment of the sad lot of women in general, followed by a detailed lament of the harsh and onerous conditions she herself has to endure. To offset this picture of a demure heroine in the classic mould, Oretta then obliquely alludes to her more earthy desires and of being sexually unfulfilled: 'e così per la gelosia mi sono tolti gli spassi di fuori, e per la vecchiezza quelli di casa.' (IV,3)

Madonna Oretta is the most articulate of the characters in this play; her speech register is more lofty than that of the male protagonists Giulio and Rinuccio.<sup>378</sup> Similar

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<sup>377</sup> Caro's Giuletta admits comparison with Piccolomini's heroine Lucrezia who, in an earlier play *L'Amor Costante* (1536), remains faithful to her absent husband through various hardships.

<sup>378</sup> Oretta's sister Violante is presented as less demure than her sister, one who is more robust and insouciant in availing herself of sexual satisfaction when the opportunity presents itself. If Oretta's construction is an uneasy amalgam of a chaste young female given to soul searching and a harridan determined to cuckold her husband, Violante is a simpler construction, closer to the shameless, scheming wife routinely featured in the *Decameron*.

to Giuletta, Oretta uses longer sentences with more subordinate clauses. She manages, in contrast to the prosaic speech pattern of other characters, to produce a concise and apposite metaphor to pinpoint a particular issue, as in the denunciation of her husband: 'Questo valent' uomo dell'età che gli è, della professione che egli fa, che arebb'a essere lo specchio di Pisa, si va innamorando qui e qua...' (V,6).

Madonna Oretta's resourcefulness and dextrous way with words does not quite fit with another prominent trait she exhibits: a simple belief that events unfold according to God's divine plan. However, if these passages were performed in a particular way, Oretta's citing of divine providence could come across as entirely insincere, as a comically inept attempt to cover up her transgressions.

The above three heroines illustrate the broadening spectrum of how young (single or newly married) females were presented on stage. At one extreme is Oretta who is bent on committing adultery if the opportunity should present itself, although she cannot openly own to experiencing initial sexual frustration or eventual sexual satisfaction. At the other extreme stands Giuletta who is embodiment of constancy, loyalty and self-sacrifice, allied to which is her skill in formulating a highly articulate plea, which includes passage of poignant lyricism, for her cause. In the middle stands Santilla who can be considered (alongside Polinesta from Ariosto's second play *I Suppositi*) a prototype of the young female protagonist in *commedia erudita*. Unlike either of the above two, Santilla is accorded neither a sexual appetite nor a romantic bent. It is implied that she remains chaste throughout the play; her eventual pairing with Fulvia's son Flaminio is done perfunctorily without any courtship. As befits this figure, neither saint nor villain, she voluntarily gets involved in some dodgy dealings but is also aware of maintaining a certain level of decorum. Her language is usually plain and only becomes more florid, with a patina of the melodramatic, during her soliloquies. If the other two represent to a degree fixed abstract notions: sexual liberation in the case of Oretta, unwavering loyalty in the case of Giuletta, Santilla is a more pliable figure, someone without an agenda who is content to 'go with the flow'.

In her most composed moments, principally during her several soliloquies, Santilla is able to express herself with grammatical correctness and a sophisticated use of syntax, which suggests a high level of education, perhaps equal to that of her brother

Lidio. (Lidio's plainer speech patterns may allude to the idea of a young well-to-do male's lack of interest in presenting himself as literate and eloquent. Since he is determined to rebel against the sexual mores imposed on him by his elders, this rebellious attitude may also manifest itself in a deliberate eschewing of fine phrases and decorous sentiments.) Oretta's main soliloquy (in Act IV, Scene 3) is a lament similar to that given by Santilla on the vulnerability of women but is given extra impact by the graphic description of the harsh domestic conditions she has to endure. However, this serious tone is undermined by her flippant explanations and disingenuousness in later scenes. By contrast, Giuletta's presentation as the most articulate and elegantly expressive character untainted by any comic intention serves as a more powerful reflection of the circumstances of the outside world: the rise in literacy and general educational levels among young, well-to-do females during this period.<sup>379</sup> However, such social realism is unlikely to have been Caro's objective; more probably he was simply trying his best to imagine what it would be like to be in Giuletta's predicament which required a sophisticated set of verbal expressions to convey.

#### MALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLD

Messer Ambrogio is the elderly husband of the young Madonna Oretta in *L'Assiuolo*. Despite the description of him as a lawyer and as one of the learned counsels who appear in 'la corte del Commissario e del Provveditore' (I,1), in his first appearance, a soliloquy, Ambrogio expresses himself in prosaic language: 'e non la fidi né a serve, né a famigli, perché e' sarebbe un dar la lattuga in guardia a' paperi: quantunque io credo, che di Giannella io me ne potrei fidare.' (II,1). In the next scene, Ambrogio readily engages in some saucy badinage with Madonna Verdiana, the local gossip, an exchange which contains a series of double-entendres. In this conversation he veers between down-to-earth expressions: 'e' son parecchi dì che l'ortolano non mi bazzica per casa. [...] Vuol ella però la traditora ch'io muoia di stizza come e' cani?' (II,2); and Latin

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<sup>379</sup> Rogers and Tinagli on this topic verify that girls from middle-class families were encouraged to read, but only from a very limited range of reading matter. They cite this extract (translated ) from Lodovico Dolce's treatise of 1545 *Dialogo della institutione delle donne*: 'Up to this point I have moulded a girl who could be at the head of a kingdom as well as of a private household. Because this cannot be done without books, I think, without any doubt, that the two sacred volumes of the Old and New Testament will suffice [...] there are many books in Latin, which I would not like chaste women to see and read. Amongst these I mean almost all the poets except for Virgil (though I would not advise them to read all of him).', *Women in Italy...*, p. 103.



phrases: ‘Salvum me fac; la causa gratis et amore.’ (II,2). At moments of exasperation, Ambrogio’s language descends to the depths, as when he balks at Madonna Verdiana’s request for remuneration of four ducats: ‘Cacasangue, Madonna Verdiana! Voi siete una mala barbiera.’ (II,2); when Verdiana then demands ten ducats in exchange for a letter, Ambrogio exclaims: “Cazzica!” (II,2) This diversity of language register within a short space is repeated in later scenes.

In his encounter with Rinuccio, Ambrogio tries to impress the younger man with his knowledge of Latin phrases (though these are not specifically legal terms): ‘O bene veniatis, domine’, ‘cum quibus’ and ‘civilibus’ (II,7). But in the scene immediately after, when he is berating the servant Giannella, Ambrogio repeatedly belittles him with insulting epithets taken from rural life: ‘Bue’, ‘bestia’, ‘baccello’ and ‘animalaccio’ (II,8). In a later episode, Ambrogio is not above calling his maidservant Agnola, held in great respect by everyone else, a trollop: ‘Tu lo potresti vedere, troiaccia.’ (V,4). However, there is a colourfulness and invention in some of Ambrogio’s deprecating verdicts: in his second soliloquy he says ‘ho avuta una lettera piena di caccabaldole e di cazzuole.’ (II,6).<sup>380</sup> Later on, Ambrogio indulges in an even more pointless display of erudition. He uses a long Latin phrase which he must realize would not be understood by his backward servant: ‘omnis labor optat premium [...] omnis proemium praesupponit laborem...’ (III,5). Again when trying to think up a warning signal, Ambrogio comes up with an unnecessarily recondite one – ‘Chies aglià’ (III,5), which predictably the servant Gianella is not up to memorizing.<sup>381</sup> Thus, even in critically important moments Messer Ambrogio cannot resist the temptation to impress others, even an uncultured servant, with his knowledge, even if it obstructs or delays the finding of a workable solution.

Ambrogio’s unnecessary and often clumsy use of Latin, foreign tongues and over-formal phrasing are calculated tactics to impose his superiority.<sup>382</sup> By contrast,

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<sup>380</sup> ‘caccabaldole’ is defined as a ‘spezie di soie, berte o moine’; ‘cazzuole’ as ‘quei bachi neri che nascer nell’acqua, che nulla vagliono’, D’Amico, *Teatro Italiano*, p. 665. Both also obviously possess obscene connotations in their phonetic impact.

<sup>381</sup> This is a Spanish phrase, frequently heard during the takeover of Florence by Spanish troops in 1530.

<sup>382</sup> During this period, there was an increasing divergence between ‘literary’ and ‘practical’ Latin: ‘l’Umanesimo ha portato man mano a un’enorme differenza fra un tipo letterario, elegante, che per la prosa si modella con assoluta prevalenza su Cicerone, per la poesia con predilezione su Virgilio, e un tipo pratico, considerato dai letterati assai barbaro, che persiste negli scrittori di medicina e di diritto, e negli usi amministrativi e giudiziari.’, Migliorini, *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 296.

when he is more spontaneous, in moments of frustration or exasperation, he has a propensity to utter crudities. Ambrogio's alternating use of highly erudite expressions and extremely vulgar ones points to his moral turpitude: the need to ingratiate himself with those he considers his social superiors and the impulse to insult or belittle his social inferiors.<sup>383</sup>

Cambio from *Il Negromante* is a travelling merchant who has temporarily settled in Cremona and is one of the elders of a complicated familial grouping: he is the nominal husband of the much younger Lavinia, who has secretly married the youth Cintio. At the beginning of the conversation with his old friend Lippo, Cambio refers to his newly acquired bride in crude material terms: 'Una possession [...]Mi da d'ogni stagione buona rendita'. (I,2) However, rather than being deliberately disrespectful of the female sex, this is more a display of clever banter to impress his fellow businessman Lippo, whereby Cambio transposes concepts and phrases of mercantile life to another sphere of human activity: courtship and matrimony. Throughout his lengthy detailing of the antecedents to the current state of affairs, Cambio keeps to a matter-of-fact mode of description; only once does he rise to something above the prosaic:

Non ci è in tutto fortuna, in sicurissimo  
porto trarremo alfin questo navilio. (I,2)

But even this is a somewhat trite metaphor. In telling Lippo that Cintio has yet to have sexual relations with his new bride, Cambio uses this euphemism: 'Non ha fin qui Cintio / Assaggiato di che la sposa sappia.' (I,2). In Act IV, Scene 5, in his brief encounter with the fugitive Nebbio, Cambio sarcastically compares him to a race horse: 'Corri pur, che 'l palio / Ben serà tuo' (IV,5). Sometimes Cambio uses rarefied or Latinised words, e.g. 'peculio' instead of 'sostanza' (I,2), 'dissolvere' instead of 'sciogliere' (I,2) and 'pusillanime' instead of 'vigliacco' (IV,7).<sup>384</sup> This is either to indicate a certain pretentiousness on Cambio's part, or is further illustration of Lippo's

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<sup>383</sup> Ambrogio is a clear-cut example of someone suffering from, to use the phrase cited in the introductory chapter, 'status anxiety'.

<sup>384</sup> Migliorini observes that dialects in the more northern regions of Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries retained vocabulary closer to Latin alongside more Latinesque spelling than did Florentine Italian; Migliorini, *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 345

worry that he (Cambio) has too quickly adopted the local speech patterns alongside some ‘pessimi costumi’ (I, 2) of his adopted town, Cremona.<sup>385</sup>

One can infer that, in the presentation of Cambio, Ariosto was trying to create a balanced, even favourable, picture of the merchant class: articulate but generally unpretentious in speech, yet not without the ability to display wit and a more refined style should the occasion call for it. But like Ambrogio, although to a considerably lesser extent, Cambio is seen to need to impress others by his verbal dexterity.<sup>386</sup>

## LONE FIGURES

The pre-eminent figure in this category is Messer Rossello from *Gli Straccioni*. He is designated as a well-established lawyer as well as a *Procuratore* of the city of Rome. Not unexpectedly for a man of his profession, Rossello sprinkles his speech with Latin or Latinised phrases, as in these extracts from Act III, Scene 5: ‘Andiamo dal governatore, che vi farò dare il mandato de capiendo.’<sup>387</sup>; ‘l’hai di buon loco’; and ‘le cause’.<sup>388</sup> During Act IV, it is notable that Rossello, on spotting the forced transference of Giuletta, is unable to act immediately. He has to wait till he is fully dressed; he instructs someone, presumably his manservant, to hand him his jacket: ‘Datemi la mia veste’ (IV,3). This implies that Rossello’s sense of decorum, in this case being properly dressed in public, outweighs his natural desire to aid a female in distress.<sup>389</sup> In his one-to-one conversation with Giuletta, Rossello uses some arcane or high-falutin expressions: ‘queste soperchierie’ and ‘clientoli’ (IV,4). However, elsewhere he descends to a much plainer speech: he refers to Mirandola as ‘un pazzo’ and then as ‘questa bestia’ (IV,5).

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<sup>385</sup> It is difficult to judge whether Ariosto allocated these Latinisms to Cambio to add an idiosyncrasy to this character, or whether these merely derived from Ariosto’s own penchant for Latinisms. Angela Casella, commenting on *La Cassaria* is able to identify several ‘latinismi specifici: apto, argomento, cessare, cinedo, conservo’, Ariosto, *Tutte Le Opere ...*, Introduction, p. XV.

<sup>386</sup> This may touch upon the notion that members of the merchant class may themselves have experienced a degree of status anxiety: despite possessing wealth and engaging in a respectable activity, they may still have felt an inferiority to those with titles: aristocracy, academics and lawyers.

<sup>387</sup> Jacomuzzi has this footnote: ‘*De capiendo*: di cattura (ma in bocca all’avvocato è messa l’espressione tecnica)’, Caro, *Opere*, p. 433, n.

<sup>388</sup> Refers to lawsuits.

<sup>389</sup> ‘la mia veste’ could refer to his official uniform – the *cioppa* referred to by Mirandola in III, 5. If this is the case, rather than not wanting to appear in public in a state of undress, Rossello could have reasoned that appearing in the official robe of his office would give him extra ‘clout’ in apprehending the two miscreants Marabeo and Pilucca.

Despite his role as a public officer, he is not above playing a juvenile prank on the simpleton Mirandola. During the business of comparing the inventory of jewels that Giovanni and Battista possess with that of Mirandola, Rossello slips in this sarcastic dig: ‘Che ‘l Gran Turco manda a donare al Mirandola per la sua incornazione’ (III,5).<sup>390</sup> Rossello has the habit of using formal pronouns: ‘costei’ (IV,3), ‘costui’ and ‘costoro’ (V,4) instead of their more colloquial equivalents. At other times, Rossello is able to use circumlocution as a witty but pointed means to censure others’ behaviour, as in this remark to Giordano: ‘Cavaliere, non si vuol essere così precipitoso a la morte degli uomini.’ (V.4). In his exhaustive interrogation of Cavaliere Giordano and Tindaro as to their ancestry, he shows knowledge of the political and administrative divisions of the Italian peninsula, even those (Genoa and Scio in this case) far away from his own habitual sphere of operation. Even among his more formal questions and pronouncements, Rossello is able to slip into a colloquial register: ‘V’è caduto il cacio ne’ maccheroni.’ (V,5); and ‘voglio che facciamo un bel zibaldone<sup>391</sup> di ogni cosa.’ (V,5). However cordial Rossello is in this scene, he never loses sight of the fact that he is officiating over serious business. He chides, albeit in an amusing and affectionate manner, the various parties for their demonstrativeness and requests them to cut short greetings and mutual embracing: ‘Oh! qui ci sarebbe da far tutta notte, se volessi aspettar che ognuno facesse la sua accoglienza e ‘l suo sermone. Fermatevi tutti; (V,5).

The variation from formal language to everyday colloquial speech marks the difference between Rossello’s two distinct, although at times overlapping, roles: that of an impartial city official and that of a partisan friend and supporter.

Barbagrigia is denoted as the owner of a print-shop in *Gli Straccioni*. In the opening scene, as soon as he is apprised of the identity of the person stopping by his shop, the servant Pilucca, he adopts a tongue-in-cheek disparaging attitude as befits the re-union of two old friends: after such a long interval he shows warmth and pleasure at seeing Pilucca but he wraps this up in mock abuse: ‘Che abito è questo? Tu balzasti pur

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<sup>390</sup> According to Guglielminetti (*La Commedia degli Straccioni*, p. 53, n.), Rossello purposely substitutes ‘incornazione’ for ‘incoronazione’ as a gratuitous piece of vulgarity. Guglielminetti also notes (*La Commedia degli Straccioni*, p. 54, n.) that, when Rossello cites a jewel as belonging to ‘l’imperatrice d’Orbec’ this is a playful reference to the central character of Giraldo Cinthio’s play *Orbecche*, staged some two years before the composition of Caro’s play.

<sup>391</sup> Again Rossello resorts to a slang expression: ‘zibaldone’ for ‘realignment’ (of familial relationships).

in una galera, ah?’ (I,1). Barbagrìgia manages to be elegant in expression even as he is deprecating the person he is addressing:

PILUCCA: Non ho trovato lui, e quasi che mi son perduto io.

BARBAGRIGIA: Il maggior guadagno che potessimo fare (I,1)

He continues in this mocking tone in response to Pilucca’s account of his capture by the Turks. Here he uses some slang expressions: ‘anguillate’ and ‘Grisanti a bizeffo!’ (I,1).<sup>392</sup>

In Barbagrìgia’s next appearance, a monologue which starts the second Act, his main function is to convey essential information, although at one point he does make this saucy allusion to the prospect of his neighbour the rich widow Madonna Argentina coupling with a dashing younger man: ‘Non ha cattivo gusto la comare no, un copertoro<sup>393</sup> appunto da vedove.’ (II,1). In contrast to Demetrio’s erudite discourse here, Barbagrìgia crassly compares the pain of a lost loved one to the build-up of gas in the body: ‘Il dolor mi penso io che sia nell’animo come una ventosità del corpo.’ (II,1). In this same scene, he uses further slang expressions such as ‘pittima’, ‘masson’ or diminutives such as ‘comarozza’ and ‘vedovetta’.<sup>394</sup> As a concluding comment, Barbagrìgia is not shy in bringing to the others’ attention that, in order for the relationship between Tindaro and Argentina to be firmly sealed, a sexual union must also take place, mindful perhaps that his fellow debaters may not have wanted to mention this aspect out of delicacy: ‘Altro ch’anello bisogna metterle. Voglio che gli facciamo incarnar questa sera medesima.’ (II,1). In contrast to the abstract ideas propounded by Tindaro and Demetrio, Barbagrìgia’s comments are peppered with similes and proverbs that contain more concrete imagery: ‘Vedova innamorata è come dire foco di salnitro, di carbone e di zolfo.’<sup>395</sup> (III,4).

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<sup>392</sup> Jacomuzzi has these footnotes: ‘anguillate’ – ‘dallo spagnolo *anquilazo* che indica appunto un colpo data con la sferza’; ‘Il Termine *grisanti* (variante appunto di *grisaldi*) allude in linguaggio furbesco al color grigio dei pidocchi’, Caro, *Opere*, p. 386, n.

<sup>393</sup> According to Guglielminetti ‘copertoro’ is a slang for ‘coperta’ and has obscene connotations. *Commedia degli Straccioni*, p. 28, n.

<sup>394</sup> Jacomuzzi defines ‘pittima’ as: ‘decotto, impiastro di vino e spezie che si mette sulla regione del cuore (o del fegato) per risanare il malato. ‘; ‘masson’ as : ‘*masson d’argento*: massa, mucchio d’argento (e quindi persona preziosa)’, Caro, *Opere*, p. 408, n.

<sup>395</sup> The three essential ingredients of gun powder.

Overall, we see a carefully constructed portrayal of a member of the artisan class who is more down-to-earth in both his style of argument and form of expression than those of a higher social class, although he does not reach the level of crudity of certain members of the servant class. I would deduce that Caro was attempting to mirror in a realistic way the attitudes and modes of expression of the artisan class of a large city<sup>396</sup>, although I suspect that at certain points there is the addition of argot purely for comedic ends.

In *Il Marescalco* the courtiers Jacopo and Ambrogio espouse opposite views on marriage. In his opening speech, before the conversation proper starts, Ambrogio uses the delicate phrase ‘va a le femine’ (I,3) rather than state directly that the person under discussion visits prostitutes. He uses a Latin phrase ‘hebreos fratres’ instead of the simpler ‘ebrei’. During his first conversation with the Marescalco, he uses slang expressions: ‘non darebbero un bagaro<sup>397</sup> de l’onore del mondo’; ‘sconcacarsi’<sup>398</sup>; and ‘la saja sia rascia e che il migliaccio sia torta.’ (II,5). At other junctures, instead of making a direct statement about a serious matter, he will use an amusing and self-mocking euphemistic phrase, as evidenced when speaking of a wife’s unfaithfulness: ‘La minor virtù che ella abbi, è il farmi i figliuoli senza ch’io ci duri una fatica al mondo.’ (II,5). A little later, Ambrogio again uses a circuitious expression to voice criticism: ‘Camminate, che per mia fè avete qualche parentado con il cavallo del buon Gesù.’ (III,7).<sup>399</sup> During a description of his wife, he makes literary references to the Sybil and to Fata Morgana in order to convey the idea of a female who seems virtuous on the surface but is later on revealed to be much less innocent. In picturing a wife’s behaviour, Ambrogio attributes to her the use of more abrasive language than he himself would use: e.g. ‘zambacche’<sup>400</sup> and ‘squartato’ (II,5). In conversation with Phebus, Ambrogio at one point manages to be both erudite and smutty while speaking

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<sup>396</sup> There is nothing in Barbagrigia’s sayings that denote him specifically as a native of Rome; he is constructed more as a pan-Italian figure representative of the urban lower middle classes.

<sup>397</sup> ‘A copper coin of very little value coined in Parma’, *The Marescalco*, Sbrocchi and Campbell, p. 119, n.

<sup>398</sup> ‘Sconcacarsi: efficace, formato di due verbi (sconciarsi la pelle or il viso con quegli impiastri)’, Pietro Aretino, *Tutte le Commedie*, ed. by G B Sanctis (Milan, Grande Universale Mursia, 1968), p. 60, n.

<sup>399</sup> ‘It was a donkey and not a horse that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It is the beast’s slowness that Ambrogio is alluding to’, *The Marescalco*, Sbrocchi and Campbell, p. 125, n.

<sup>400</sup> Migliorini details the origin of the word *zambacca* in sub-chapter of *il Trecento* headed *Galicisimi ed altri forestierismi*: ‘a Siena *ciambra* ha preso (già nel volgarizzamento del Costituto, che è del 1309-10) il significato di ‘pozzo per lo spurgo di materie fetide’ e spregiativo è il derivato *zambacca*.’ *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 239.

of venereal disease: 'Perche nacque fra le cosce de omnia vincit amor' (V,6). Ambrogio is able to refer to contemporary political events such as the sack of Rome in 1527 and that of Florence in 1530 as part of his misogynistic rant; he provocatively posits that the damage that these caused is nothing compared with that which a female can wreak.<sup>401</sup>

Ambrogio is depicted as the most worldly wise, bordering on world weary, character. Although on occasions he uses quite earthy expressions, overall he has an eloquence of style and is conscientious to construct sentences with precision and flair, although he also has a tendency towards circumlocution. Moreover, he often appears to be so absorbed in his own oratory that he is forgetful of, or at least insensitive to, the person he is addressing. It is evident that Aretino has invested anti-female sentiments in this largely sympathetic character, someone possessing wit, humour and a love of oratory. (Jacopo, representing the pro-marriage faction, although a sympathetic figure, is less impressive verbally: he tends to express himself simply and even when striving for greater articulation is prone to using either banal metaphors or a series of metaphors needlessly repeating the same idea.<sup>402</sup>)

The Pedant's essential trait is that he breaks into Latin at the drop of a hat. During his first encounter with the Marescalco, even after the latter has asked him to keep to the vernacular, during his exposition on biblical teaching, the Pedant still cannot resist rendering certain phrases in Latin: e.g. 'totum orbem' and 'ignem et aquam' (I,9). In this scene and throughout his later appearances, the Pedant is able to display a vast knowledge of contemporary culture as well as detailed knowledge of the Bible and the classics, although he often misquotes or cites non-existent works.<sup>403</sup> Another characteristic of the Pedant is that he is prone to make vulgar innuendo, even when the addressee, in this case the stable-boy, is unlikely to comprehend it:

GIANNICCO: E' un valentuomo con l'arme in mano.

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<sup>401</sup> 'Ma la ruina di Roma e di Fiorenze è stata più discreta, che non è quella, con la quale disfanno, spianano e profundano i meschini mariti...', (II,5).

<sup>402</sup> For example: 'ché bellezza senza bontà, casa senza uscio, nave senza vento e fonte senza acqua', (IV,5).

<sup>403</sup> Andrews opines: 'An educated audience would seize gleefully on the mockery of their own boring tutors or schoolmasters; and Aretino with the chip of his limited education on his shoulder, would take particular delight in his own verbal skill as he mingled bad Latin, good Latin, Latinized Italian, and endless scholarly references', *Scripts and Scenarios*, p. 76.

PEDANTE: E con arma virum e con i libri non cedo a niuno. (II,2)

Similarly, just before the wedding vows between the Marescalco and his supposed bride are to be taken, whilst reciting a lengthy tract from church liturgy, the initial solemn tone is undermined by the Pedant's emphasis on sensual matters: 'la Formosa Madonna [...] Formosissima Madonna' (V,10). In his confrontation with the knight's page-boy, he is almost reduced to uttering some commonplace insults but he manages to render them a little more exotic: 'ghiotticidio' and 'sfacciaticulo' (III,11). This latter word has the vulgar-sounding suffix 'culo' which the Pedant, given half a chance, will attach to any word. In the lead up to the taking of wedding vows, it is the Pedant who is the most assiduous in seeing that the wedding is conducted in a proper, regal manner: 'Vuoi tu che io manchi de la gravità oratoria?' (V,10).

In the valedictory speech to the audience given by the Pedant gone is the wilful obscurantism. Instead he adopts a straightforward and readily understood mode of expression. (Perhaps Aretino did not want him to remain altogether a figure of contemptuous pomposity as he exited the stage.<sup>404</sup>)

The Pedant figure here appears as a gross caricature (on a par with Bibbiena's Calandro); he is essentially a vehicle for a feast of verbal inventiveness and salacious innuendo, to such a degree that any pointed satire against the pomposity or dubious behaviour of his real-life counterparts is considerably diluted.<sup>405</sup> In this he is reduced (or perhaps elevated!) to a theatrical entity which places him beyond a recognisable figure whom one can approve or disapprove of.<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Rather than grant the Pedant this last chance to 'redeem' himself, Aretino may have had purely theatrical considerations in mind: the figure of the Pedant as the most artificial construction would lend itself more readily than the other characters to playing an additional role: the final addresser to the audience.

<sup>405</sup> Perhaps it was Aretino's intention for the audience to enjoy this exaggerated display of pretentiousness and idiocy without instilling in them any lasting anti-pedant sentiments. After all, unlike other unsympathetic characters, Aretino's Pedant suffers no comeuppance or punishment at the end.

<sup>406</sup> The Pedant's salient verbal habit - his incorrigible habit of using Latin at every turn - is based to an extent on a reality. During this period, mixing 'Italian' and Latin was widespread in communication between members of the governing elite. Migliorini gives several examples, one of which I reproduce here (the date of which, February 1525, is around the time of *Il Marescalco's* composition): Letter from Cardinal Rorario to Sadoletto: '... havendo sua Santità deliberato *genere se tamquam patrem omnibus communem et servare la neutralità, el re di Franza [...] inviò un esercito per lo stato della Chiesa ad tempandum regnum neapolitanum.*', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 307. However, using Latin phrases in writing can be viewed as a legitimate means of expressing a concept, whereas in speech this is more likely to be seen as absurdly pretentious.



Ruffo and Lachellino are both described as necromancers and incomers to the town in which their respective plays are set: Ruffo is a Tuscan of Greek origin settled in Rome,<sup>407</sup> whilst the Jewish Lachellino has fled Spain and is a temporary visitor to Cremona.

Just before Ruffo makes his first appearance (Act I, Scene 6), the maidservant Samia, who is waiting for him in the town square, surmises that he may still be eating breakfast. This gives Ruffo some of the patina of another theatrical mainstay - the parasite, who traditionally is adept at eating sumptuously at another's expense. In Ruffo's first soliloquy, he delivers information in a clipped style, often omitting connecting phrases, conjunctions or first syllables of words:

Costei [...] crede io abbi (l'abilità di comandare) uno spirito: et essendo fieramente d'un giovane accesa, dice (che) altro rimedio non giovandoli, al mio ricorre pregandomi che io lo (co)stringa andare da lei. (I,8)<sup>408</sup>

Other instances of this clipping of words are: 'Se così *staman* parlavi, non seguiva questo errore; del quale ho però piacere perché tu cognosca quanta sia la potenza del mio *spirto*.' (IV,2) (my italics).<sup>409</sup>

In the three-way meeting between Santilla, Fannio and Ruffo, the servant uses a formal speech pattern '...di colei che or ora ti parlo', in contrast to Ruffo who employs the more colloquial: 'La serva sua t'ha parlato?' (II,3) when referring to the same episode. Later on, in private discussion with Fannio, Ruffo reveals that he is unfamiliar with the word 'ermafrodito': 'E che importa questo merdafiorito?'<sup>410</sup> (III,17). This

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<sup>407</sup> Ruffo reveals this biographical fact in his first soliloquy: 'Lidio greco, amico e cognoscente mio per essere d'un medesimo paese che sono io.' (I,8)

<sup>408</sup> I am indebted to Padoan's footnotes on p. 89 of his edition of *La Calandra* for emendations for this quotation.

<sup>409</sup> Ruffo's clipped locutions combined with a distinct accent (the latter of which would obviously only manifest itself during an actual stage performance) might have been a signal to the audience of his Greek origins (in a similar way that nowadays a stock Italian character on stage, film or television, might speak with gratuitously added vowels at the end of every other word). However, Lidio and Santilla, also of Greek origin do not exhibit such a linguistic quirk. In which case Ruffo's clipped locutions might have been inserted as part of an intended rapid speech delivery, in order to indicate nervousness springing from dishonest intentions. (A modern-day parallel to this would be the garrulous teenage tearaway Vicky Pollard in the BBC's sketch show *Little Britain*.)

<sup>410</sup> Unlike Samia's rather plain malapropisms, Bibbiena has given Ruffo here a more colourful one: 'merdafiorito': 'blooming shit'.

indicates that Ruffo, supposedly a man of science, knows even less than a household servant in matters of biology. At a superficial level, this exchange is a vehicle for a scurrilous gag but it also points to the more serious conjecture that those claiming to possess rarified skills may have based them on fraudulent qualifications.

At the end of a scene in the fourth Act, in an address to the audience, Ruffo speaks of delicate matters directly, using the most thinly disguised euphemism: ‘... e ricucire la bocca da basso e appiccare un bischero, e così fare un maschio.’ (IV,2). To augment the impression of Ruffo as an unrefined character, he is described as laughing ‘sconciamente’ at Fannio when he appears dressed as a woman at the start of Act IV, Scene 3. Whilst Ruffo is looked down upon even by servant figures for his lack of education, the high status Fulvia treats him with considerable respect. He just about possesses sufficient knowledge and vocabulary to be able to pass as a necromancer. In his encounter with the maidservant Samia, he makes this list of supposed tools of the trade: ‘Bisogna accozzare stelle, parole, acque, erbe, pietre e tante bazicature.’ (III,15).

Ruffo is an interesting construction in that, despite his cultural shortcomings, conveyed generally by a plebeian mode of expression and more pointedly when the servant Fannio exposes his limited vocabulary, he remains a sympathetic figure.

Ruffo may lay false claims as to his occult powers, but at least he has no cultural pretensions, whereas Lachellino (the title character of Ariosto’s *Il Negromante*), in addition to pretensions to scientific acumen, his claim to being a man of culture and international reputation forms part of his arsenal to beguile potential victims. In his first conversation with Maximo, the necromancer uses recondite words and phrases: ‘li umeri’, ‘li suffimigli’, ‘manipoli’ (I,3) which belong to the jargon of specialist professions – medicine, astrology, and alchemy. Here, Lachellino uses them to bedazzle the impressionable Maximo. His servant Nebbio reveals the vast gulf between this outward display and pitiful reality of the necromancer’s abilities:

Per certo, questa è pur gran confidenza  
che mastro Lachellino ha in se medesimo,  
che leggere sapendo a pena e scrivere. (II,2)

In his more intimate conversations with Nebbio, Lachellino is earthy in his mode of expression, indeed he sometimes descends to the decidedly vulgar:

di questa debiltade et impotenzia  
del sposo avendo, che cacciare il vomere  
non può nel campo , ha di nuovo preso animo  
[...]  
Detto ch'io tolto avea a drizzare il manico  
De l'aratro; (II,3)

In contrast to the down-to-earth tone he adopts when speaking to his servant, he adopts a stiff formality when, disingenuously, he protests his innocence to Maximo:

Non fu mio uffizio  
mai di accusar alcuno;  
[...]  
Non più: lassiamo andar. Non voglio ch'abbino  
Però possanza le lingue malediche,  
Ch'avendoti promesso, mi ritraghino  
Da l'attenerti. (III,4)

In a long passage during an exchange of ideas with his servant (Act II, Scene 3), in drawing similes and metaphors to explain his *modus operandi*, Lachellino reveals an extensive knowledge of animal husbandry and cites particular practices from the agricultural world to graphically illustrate how he operates. This suggests that he has been raised in rudimentary circumstances in the country rather than in the town.<sup>411</sup>

In his dealings with the love-lorn youth Camillo, the necromancer at one point becomes more poetic in his expression although he cannot resist adding erotic overtones:

Prima da l'alabastro e da l'avorio  
del petto viene, ove fra suavissimi  
et odorati dui pomi giacevasi. (II,4)

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<sup>411</sup> It is unlikely that this conjecture, or indeed any inferred 'backstory' beyond that explicitly stated in the text, would have occurred to Ariosto who, no doubt, was solely preoccupied with creating a contrast between the urbane sophistication Lachellino displays to his victims and the much earthier persona he reveals to his servant in private.

Entering into and indeed adding to Camillo's romantic fantasies gives the impression that Lachellino's trickery does not always operate on a cold perfunctory level, but contains imaginative embellishments and considerable humour; admittedly an egotistical sense of humour since this passage is not a shared joke between the two of them but a deliberate ploy to mischievously exacerbate Camillo's sexual frustration. In a further conversation with Camillo (Act 3, Scene 2), after the necromancer has quoted a series of numbers he adds them up incorrectly: 74 instead of 69. His apparent weakness at simple arithmetic is again in keeping with his servant's observation of how poorly educated he is.<sup>412</sup>

Of all the characters under study here, Lachellino exhibits the most contrast between his public and private persona, between how he presents himself to the other characters and what he only reveals to his close associate Nebbio and, of course, to the audience. Whatever the gaps in his knowledge or abilities, this necromancer is nevertheless presented as a sophisticate, a man used to dealing with all sectors of society throughout Europe, and contrasts with the less sophisticated and impressionable small-town citizens he finds himself amongst. If both Ruffo and Lachellino occasionally let slip their masks of cultural superiority, revealing limited vocabulary in the case of Ruffo, innumeracy in the case of Lachellino, these revelations are directed at the audience rather than to other characters.

## CONCLUSION

Surveying the speeches of the diverse range of characters in these five plays, there are two dominant, though at times countervailing, notions: possession of a high degree of articulation, a wide-ranging vocabulary and an extensive knowledge of history, politics and literature confers status, but a too ready show of these in order to cover up inadequacies or malevolent intent, or to belittle one's interlocutor, is viewed with censure. A corollary of this is that plain speaking is generally to be preferred over an unnecessarily sophisticated way of expressing oneself.<sup>413</sup> An illustration of this

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<sup>412</sup> The alternative interpretation here is that Lachellino has dishonestly added another five ducats, which he surmised the love-lorn Camillo would not spot.

<sup>413</sup> In these plays, there seems to be an elaborate competition being played out analogous to the children's game 'Scissors/Paper/Stone': highly erudite speech trumps erudite speech, erudite speech trumps plebeian speech but plebeian speech trumps highly erudite speech. In the last of these, one can postulate that the

proposition lies in comparing two master/servant dialogues: the first where Cintio and Temolo debate the validity of the necromancer's claimed powers (*Il Negromante*, II,1), the second where Ambrogio converses with his servant Giannella prior their nocturnal outing (*L'Assiuolo*, III,5). In the first of these, there is a fruitful exchange of views and a tone of mutual respect; in the second a huge amount of time is wasted by Ambrogio's egregious need to impress his servant with his greater learnedness, coupled with the sense that Ambrogio takes a delight in exposing the uncultured Giannella to ridicule.

The utterance of slang, swear words or other verbal crudities has diverse impacts. From the mouths of the servants Pilucca and Marabeo and to a lesser extent the Marescalco, these tend to reinforce their image as humble, salt-of-the-earth types. By contrast, the crude utterances and swearing of the male head of household such as Ambrogio serves to underline his bad temper and vile nature. The Old Nurse is also, to a lesser extent, guilty of this tendency: her pretence at gentility is undermined by an inability to suppress outbursts of vulgarity.

The plays evince the lyrical on the one hand, and the pseudo-lyrical on the other. The genuinely lyrical speeches tend to be accorded to nobly-born female characters such as Fulvia in *La Calandra* or Giuletta in *Gli Straccioni*, whereas the risible pretence at the poetic is given to young male lovers, as is the case with Camillo in his first meeting with the necromancer where he waxes lyrical about the physical attributes of the girl he adores.<sup>414</sup> However, there are notable exceptions to this gender and class divide. The servant Nebbio gives an impressive oration when describing his master's history and modus operandi; it is cogent, concise and full of powerful imagery, telling metaphors and similes. One figure in whom the merits and demerits of plain-speaking juxtaposed with more sophisticated modes of expression are well explored is Giannicco, the very young stable boy of *Il Marescalco*. His down-to-earth, indeed occasionally downright obscene, utterances may offend the straightlaced Old Nurse but would endear himself to the audience. On the other hand, Giannicco finds himself out of his depth when he tries to match the cultural sophistication of two of his elders, the Pedant and the Count.

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audience would appreciate a character's unwillingness to enter into a vacuous game of verbal one-upmanship.

<sup>414</sup> These exchanges (in Act II, Scene 4) can be viewed as a lampoon by Ariosto on a more widespread practice, that of educated young men composing (invariably banal) poetry.

Another recurrent theme is the contrast between rural simplicity and urban sophistication. Certain expressions derived from country living ('bue', 'pecorone', 'bestia', etc.) are sometimes employed as neat insults or forceful put-downs; alternatively, these constitute a momentary disclosure of a brutal persona beneath a veneer of urbanity or a glimpse into the humble origins of a now successful urban professional. In contrast to this, for the lower-ranked individual, a display of knowledge of ancient mythology, contemporary politics or the citation of an apposite Latin phrase adds to prestige.

Certain speech registers are used to denote or augment positive aspects of a character: the noble, steadfast, nature of a female or the honourable intentions of a male. Other speech registers highlight negative traits: duplicity, pretentiousness or downright villainy. Apart from these shadings of character to embellish goodness or evil, elsewhere a diversity of expression is employed more neutrally: to help the audience place a character in terms of class and, though more rarely, geography: in *La Calandra*, there is a walk-on part for a porter (III,2) who speaks in an exaggerated Bergamask dialect. However, this is the exception rather than the rule in the five plays under study here. In *Il Negromante* and *Gli Straccioni*, both of which feature a high proportion of characters as incomers to the towns in which the plays are set, Cremona and Rome respectively, it is hard to detect any specific regional vocabulary or speech patterns that denote the origins of these characters. On the whole foreigners and incomers are depicted favourably and are rarely the subject of prejudice that results in any long-term detrimental consequences. Admittedly there remain occasional episodes where a gripe, out of earshot of its subject, is expressed to the audience: see, for example, Samia's categorisation of the Greek Lidio as mean (p. 197 above) or Giannicco's unwarranted hostile remarks towards the Jewish pedlar (p. 108 above). Moreover, these prejudices are expressed by members of the servant class and so can be viewed as an attempt to reflect, rather than endorse, widespread prejudices existing in the real world in certain quarters.

There is in these plays a marked disinclination to highlight regional differences linguistically but a greater tendency to construct a cast of characters, whatever their origins, to speak in standard Tuscan dialect. This may on the most immediate level

spring from the simple desire by the playwrights to have their theatrical offerings understood readily in as many regions of the peninsula as possible. However, it is possible that these playwrights saw beyond such practicalities: perhaps they were mindful of the recommendation expressed by Count Ludovico di Canossa in Castiglione's *Il Cortigiano*: 'se ella non fosse pura Toscana antica, sarebbe italiana, *commune*, copiosa e varia...' (my italics).<sup>415</sup>

A further factor influencing choice of vocabulary is that most playwrights of *commedia erudita* had their eye on more than just entertaining the very small number who would have attended live performances but to a potentially much wider public: those who could enjoy reading these plays in printed form. In this endeavour, these playwrights were probably mindful of avoiding words or phrases that had too strong a regional connotation.<sup>416</sup>

There may be occasional light-hearted jibes at the supposed cultural inferiority of certain provincial towns but any xenophobic digs at outsiders (outsider in the sense of being non-Tuscan) are overwhelmingly subsumed under authority, moral or intelligence perspectives. Under this scale of values in *Gli Straccioni* the 'provincial' Tindaro is championed whilst the native Mirandola is excoriated; similarly, in *La Calandra* the characters Lidio, Santilla and Ruffo, all of Greek origin, triumph over the native – Calandro.

In this period, however vicious and unrelenting 'internecine' conflicts between regions or neighbouring city states proved to be (often exacerbated by outside European powers backing one side against the other), the playwrights of this new theatrical genre tended to play down, rather than highlight, cultural differences between regions.<sup>417</sup> There seems to be, albeit as an underlying or even unconscious sentiment rather than an avowed aim, a call for inclusivity rather than exclusivity, an inclusivity that would

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<sup>415</sup> Book I, Chapter XXXV of *Il Libro del Cortigiano*.

<sup>416</sup> Beccaria cites evidence as to the movement in literary output away from unselfconscious 'regionalism' towards a more conscious awareness of the need to be understood throughout the peninsula: 'Chi legge una pagina di prosa di fine Quattrocento o primi del Cinquecento (fa notare Migliorini) può dire con relativa facilità da quale regione proviene: per un testo della fine del Cinquecento la cosa è assai difficile.' *Letteratura e Dialetto*, p. 7.

<sup>417</sup> An obvious exception to this generalisation is Beolco, more usually referred to by the stage character he habitually played, Ruzante. He was from the region of the Italian peninsula – Veneto, which saw itself, along with its main town, Venice, as separate and distinct from other parts of Italy.

encompass not just those who originate from the outer reaches of the Italian peninsula but beyond. No doubt springing largely from commercial considerations, rather than from any overtly political intention, on the part of the playwright, *commedia erudita* did not just reflect the movement towards greater cultural unity but became part of its engine.<sup>418</sup>

## HOW THESE DIMENSIONS VIE WITH ONE ANOTHER

The type of theatrical genre pre-disposes us to engage in one set of evaluations whilst disregarding others. For tragedy, we are primed to expect moral dilemmas: for example, the temptation for the lead character to succumb to short-term advantage at the risk of ultimate ruination or be bent on acquiring more power, sexual gratification or money at the expense of others. For broad farce, we tend to suspend moral judgment whilst appreciating the skill which goes towards the construction of a series of neatly orchestrated accidents or coincidences. For the pastoral, an appreciation of the aesthetic may well be at the forefront of an audience's evaluation. For the genre under investigation here – *commedia erudita* – the generation of mirth, or at least some coruscating dialogue, would be a primary expectation. But comedy in this revived five-act format rides on a story line and a set of characters whose depiction may range from the naturalistic to gross caricature. Stage characters are one step removed from our real-life interactions: we watch them as disinterested spectators (though hopefully not uninterested!). However, if we become engaged in the unfolding story and are keen to follow the vicissitudes of the various characters, we still tend to make judgments as to the appeal, or lack of appeal, of these characters. We root for those whom we consider sympathetic, conversely hope for the downfall of unsympathetic or downright villainous figures. Our assessment works on two different time scales: there is an accumulated verdict we reach, sometimes not until the final curtain, on a particular character, but

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<sup>418</sup> Migliorini pontificates: 'Se le vicende politiche del secolo impedirono che l'Italia conseguisse, in un modo or nell' altro, quell *unità* politica a cui altre grandi nazioni già erano arrivate, il sentimento di una civiltà comune (linguistica, letteraria, artistica) è diventato persuasione generali [...] si sottointende che si debba usare una lingua unica come espressione di un un' unica cultura nazionale.', *Storia della Lingua Italiana*, p. 309.



additionally, we make minute-by-minute evaluations of stage characters during each episode in which they appear: in a particular conversational exchange we can deduce who has shown the most cultural sophistication, exhibited the most honest (or the most devious) behaviour or employed the shrewdest tactics to further his cause or foil that of his adversary.

Part of my investigation is to try to determine which of the above aspects are to the forefront in these plays and which are relegated to the sidelines, to ascertain whether the celebration of the astute getting one over the less astute is a comprehensive enough description of *commedia erudita* or whether that is too simplistic and does not allow for considerations of morality, cultural display, or indeed naked power-play (including brute force) as essential elements in the overall presentation.

In the previous four chapters, I have examined a set of twenty-five characters (five from each of five plays) and looked at them through a succession of discrete dimensions: authority, morality, intelligence and culture. It is now the object of this penultimate chapter to look at characters in the round, how a picture of each is derived from a composite of the four dimensions (sometimes operating complementarily, at other times in opposition) and ultimately how, in the eyes of the audience, a cumulative judgment as to worthiness or unworthiness of a character would be reached. This evaluation can be set against the merits or demerits of other characters in the same play, further refracted through the general tenor of the play in which he/she appears, since each play will champion certain values, whilst downplaying others. From these verdicts I shall then make some tentative suggestions as to how their real-life counterparts would have been viewed by the playwrights and the intended audience of that era. I say 'tentative' since the type of theatre under investigation here is often heavily mischevious or farcical. However, beneath the belly-laughs, set pieces and *rovesciamenti*, one still might be able to glean pervading attitudes towards particular types found in the society in which these plays were staged.

I shall select two or three figures from each of the five plays (some of whom are among the twenty five selected for detailed examination in the previous four chapters, others as yet not the subject of close scrutiny) and look at them in detail by weighing up their presentation across the four dimensions, look at other major characters from the

same play more briefly, before finally, under the heading 'Overview', evaluating each play as to its overall composition in terms of the four dimensions.

### LA CALANDRA

I shall compare two characters: one a 'pillar' of the community - Calandro and the other an incomer – Ruffo. I have not previously looked closely at the eponymous Calandro, principally because he is the most caricatured of all the characters in this selection of plays. However, the figure of Calandro is useful in providing a benchmark, albeit a negative one, against which other characters may be measured.

The one character to fall down in all the four dimensions most conspicuously is Calandro. He is immoral (though no more so than Lidio or his wife Fulvia); he proves to be culturally unsophisticated, most graphically revealed in the episode where he extols the virtues of his would-be lover using clichéd or ill-fitting comparisons; he allows his authority to be thoroughly undermined by his servant from the outset; his wife's usurpation of his authority takes a little longer. But above all, it is in the intelligence dimension that he most egregiously falls short, although the episodes in which this occurs are the most artificial. Calandro is portrayed as such a pathetic and unrealistic figure throughout that it is hard to infer that his failings are presented as any reproach, however obliquely, to dubious behaviour of male heads of households in the outside society. Calandro is more a theatrical entity: a clown, whose antics are principally designed to be laughed at. He constitutes a nadir of human behaviour, with no redeeming features.

Across the spectrum of the four dimensions, the necromancer Ruffo also does not score particularly well. First and foremost, he is a confidence trickster, preying on those who have more money than sense; specifically he targets the well-to-do Fulvia, who lets her heart rule her head. If Ruffo is able to outsmart gullible females, he himself is the subject of a deception engineered by a servant, who manages to convince him that Lidio is a hermaphrodite. During this ruse, Ruffo's lack of education is exposed. His speech patterns denote him as plebeian rather than erudite (see pp. 237/38 above). But as to his general standing, despite both Fessenio's and Fannio's scepticism,

indeed outright ridicule, of necromancy, Ruffo's prestige remains intact.<sup>419</sup> His diplomacy, his humility (displayed in public if not in private) and his occasional show of compassion serve to redeem him. He is regarded by believers and sceptics of necromancy alike as an acceptable member of society.<sup>420</sup>

Thus, even in a play where the humour is broad rather than subtle, it is the nuances of presentation that renders one character worthy and another unworthy, notwithstanding their common shortcomings in the broader categories. Of course, the reactions and attitudes of other characters form part of the equation which dictates whether a character is perceived to be 'worthy' or 'unworthy'.<sup>421</sup> Most relevant here is Fulvia's dismissive attitude towards her husband compared with her warmth and indulgence toward Ruffo, irrespective of the degree of honesty which each exhibits. In addition, the happy outcome for Fulvia - she is reunited with her lover Lidio, whilst her husband is publicly humiliated, obscures the fact that Ruffo's endeavours, for which he is handsomely rewarded, contributed absolutely nothing to this outcome.

The other characters are depicted as falling short in one or more of the dimensions but not in all four. Fessenio's merciless manipulation of his elderly master and readiness to support his young master, in however dubious an enterprise, are counterbalanced by his erudition and worldly wisdom. Samia's obtuseness is counterbalanced by her unwavering loyalty to her mistress Fulvia. Fulvia herself is guilty of extreme gullibility and reckless behaviour but these are counterbalanced by her generosity and, at a crucial moment, the quick-wittedness by which she exposes the dishonourable intentions of her husband. Lidio's immorality, his over-reliance on others and his limited powers of articulation are offset by what could be described as his

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<sup>419</sup> This marks a notable difference between how necromancy is treated in *Il Negromante* compared to this play. In the former, there is a drive, principally orchestrated by the servant Temolo, to publicly expose the fraudulent nature of Lachellino, whereas in the latter the servants' scepticism is only ever voiced privately and there is no concerted effort to unmask Ruffo as a fraud.

<sup>420</sup> Ruffo's foreign origins (he first mentions his Greek origins in Act I, Scene 8, which is reiterated in Act II, Scene 3), seems to add to, rather than subtract from, his standing.

<sup>421</sup> When staged, the notion of Ruffo as 'likeable' and Calandro as 'unlikeable' can, of course, be further polarised by the skill of the actors playing these roles; conversely a more convergent picture would emerge if the actor playing Ruffo gave him a more sinister or oleagenous aspect, and the actor playing Calandro gave him a more sympathetic stance as an 'innocent' victim of unrequited passion, undeserving of such humiliation. [The figure of Calandro has parallels with that of Shakespeare's Malvolio. Since each is subjected to trickery and humiliation, there is a tendency to play these characters as villains so that the ultimate comeuppance appears justified. A contrary rendition, which I have seen in the case of Malvolio, is to construct the humiliating comeuppance as springing from the arbitrary cruelty of the perpetrators rather than from the innate 'badness' of the victim.]

‘innate nobility’ which everyone, apart from the pompous Polinico, appears to recognise. Any suspect behaviour on the part of Santilla and bouts of self-pity are more than redressed by her pangs of conscience and her willingness to co-operate with others.

The depictions of hedonistic amorality in *La Calandra* need to be viewed in the context of an unrealistic storyline which features several far-fetched elements: an implausibly suggestible master, a servant who is employed by three masters, siblings who look identical when one of them is cross-dressed and, more improbably, do not recognise one another when they finally come face to face, and an agnition in which marriage pairings are quickly and all too neatly arrived at. In this context Ruffo, rather than coming across as a disreputable character to be looked down upon, emerges as a likeable and accepted member of the neighbourhood.

## OVERVIEW

The dominant dimension of this play is that of intelligence. An astute servant achieves domination over his obtuse master. At a pivotal point, the female heroine Fulvia dexterously manages to exculpate herself from well-founded accusations of adultery whilst at the same time is able to denounce her husband for his attempted adultery; although prior to this her gullibility leads her to give credence to sudden miraculous gender change and to pay considerable sums of money for a bogus service. Even Ruffo, who tricks others, is in turn tricked.

Another ‘message’ of this play is that a sufficient level of authority can cushion an individual against failings he or she has in other aspects. The nobly-born Lidio may act in a cavalier manner, lack charm and sensitivity but his sense of entitlement to sexual satisfaction and monetary reward is indulged by key figures in his life, principally his servant Fessenio and lover Fulvia, who accord him unqualified support. Fulvia’s wealth and ability to command others prevents her extreme folly - her obsessive love for a much younger man and her naïve belief in necromancy - resulting in a disastrous outcome. Elsewhere, the authority dimension is downplayed in that servants Fessenio and Fannio debate matters with the higher-ranked Fulvia and Santilla on equal terms. The outsider Ruffo is treated with respect by servants and heads of

households alike. Even the maidservant Samia, deferential to her mistress within the household, outside it feels no inhibition in upbraiding a social superior.

There is a subtle and convincing array of cultural registers, from the high-falutin to the decidedly plebeian. Even among the servant class there is a spread: from the illiterate and superstitious Samia given to malapropisms, to the more learned, though often crude, Fessenio, through to the thoroughly urbane Fannio. Unsympathetic figures such as Calandro and the tutor Polinico are seen to express themselves in pompous and risible attempts at erudition. In contrast, the two most sympathetic characters, the middle-aged Fulvia and the young Santilla, garner greater admiration through their ability to express themselves with cogency and occasional flights of lyricism.

The moral dimension is conspicuous by its absence.<sup>422</sup> Adultery, deception and gratuitous cruelty abound without censure or detrimental consequence.<sup>423</sup> Moreover, even those who behave with propriety, make no move to condemn, or even alert potential victims to, the misdemeanours of others. Cleverness and enterprise are viewed as more admirable qualities than honesty and probity.<sup>424</sup>

## IL NEGROMANTE

I pick three characters whose presentation illustrates the variations in the degree of plausibility present in this play.

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<sup>422</sup> The depiction of a minor character, the tutor Polinico, provides an early clue as to what the audience should expect in terms of morality, or lack of such. His stout defence of the standard moral code counts little against Lidio's determination to engage in an affair with a married woman. However, even this figure, initially cast as the embodiment of rectitude and propriety, is found to be wanting. Fessenio hints at his unsavoury sexual inclinations: FESSENIO: 'Voglio inferire che tu ti accomodi al viver d'oggi'; POLINICO: 'In che modo?'; FESSENIO: 'Allo essere inimico delle donne, come è quasi ognuno in questa corte [...] le donne sono sì degne che oggi non è alcuno che non le vadi imitando e che volentieri con l'animo e col corpo, femina non deventi? (I,2)

<sup>423</sup> Five or so years after *La Calandra* an altogether more 'immoral' play appeared – Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, where wrongdoing is more systematically organised: in the earlier play individual figures such as Fessenio, Lidio and Ruffo may act dishonestly or callously but they do not form a confederacy of wicked intent.

<sup>424</sup> The fact that this play was written by a man of the church, Cardinal Bibbiena, gives further weight to the idea that this adventure takes place in a parallel universe where status and authority no longer correspond and where moral values are comprehensively overturned. It would be inconceivable that the playwright regarded his theatrical piece as anything other than a delirious fantasy rather than as any guide to how members of his Church should conduct their lives.

Cintio can be viewed as the flawed hero of this play, fulfilling the role of an everyman figure, who displays both strengths and weaknesses but manages to muddle through. He is less shrewd and resolute than his servant Temolo, though less a complete pushover to the necromancer's deception than either the pompous Maximo or foppish Camillo. Although deferential to his elders, he is able to mount a defence of his own behaviour and cite the hypocrisy of his elders. Despite his folly in initially believing in necromancy, his inept handling of his love life and propensity for self-flagellation, Cintio comes across as a sympathetic character, indeed the most sympathetic, as well as the least caricatured, figure of the play. This character is a nicely balanced portrait of a youth, headstrong in affairs of the heart but who nevertheless is conscious of the judgment of others upon his behaviour.

Cambio, despite his long speech of exposition early in Act 1 and subsequent important role in foiling the necromancer, remains a sketchy or at least ambivalent figure. His initial image, which he himself sets out, is that of a shameless old rake who, through his wealth and high status, has succeeded in marrying a female a third of his age purely for his own sexual gratification. His subsequent disclosure that this was a subterfuge in order to facilitate the affairs of the youth Cintio does not altogether convince.<sup>425</sup> Cambio's crass use of the jargon of commerce to describe the intimacies of marriage and later his overbearing attitude towards the hapless porter adds to an image of someone not entirely likeable. However, his generosity to his visiting friend Lippo and his willingness to defer to the wisdom of a nominally inferior figure, the servant Temolo, help to mitigate this impression. The mixture of positive and negative traits in Cambio is not particularly well integrated: for example, his sudden exasperation with the porter appears out of nowhere. The fact that Cambio does not feature in the agnition contributes to the notion that this character has been introduced as a plot facilitator (it is through him that we glean most of the *antefatto*) and as a 'sounding board' to the servant Temolo's deliberations, rather than as a character worthy of consideration in his own right.

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<sup>425</sup> As noted above, Ariosto himself must have been unhappy with the construction of this character since in the second redaction Cambio (re-named Fazio) is cast in the more respectable role as the stepfather, rather than nominal husband, of the young Lavinia.

If Cambio is a somewhat carelessly constructed figure, this applies to an even greater degree to Maximo. He displays inconsistent traits even within the same dimension. He is totally subservient in his dealings with Lachellino but is firm and authoritative when dealing with other high-status males in his own community. In terms of intellectual capacity, Maximo is adept in his close interrogation of his stepson's behaviour but displays an outstanding gullibility towards and naive trust in the necromancer. In the cultural sphere, he is presented as an ignoramus early on, confusing scientific terms with the names of common household objects (Act I, Scene 3) but in the final Act displays a considerable degree of erudition. However, there is one thematic thread that does come across more plausibly. Maximo is of such high status within the small-town community, where he assumes the role of a paterfamilias, that any foolish behaviour or inconsistent attitude on his part is never challenged by his associates. In the final Act, everyone listens attentively and with deference to his exposition of past events and his pronouncements on who shall marry whom. (One can surmise that Ariosto had two objectives: to expose the gullibility of even high-up members of society to the claims of necromancy, but to also maintain the high standing and respect accorded to these figures, irrespective of any past shows of foolishness. Since these two objectives are not entirely compatible, one can conclude that, in terms of my thesis, Ariosto allowed the intelligence dimension to be subsumed under that of authority.)

The well-to-do youths Cintio and Camillo have honourable intentions, since both place the welfare and reputation of their female love interests above their own sexual gratification, but each falls foul, to varying degrees of susceptibility, of the necromancer. As to cultural presentation, Cintio is the more sober figure<sup>426</sup>, Camillo the more prone to verbosity and poetic embellishment. Paradoxically, although Cintio is the first of this pair to see through the necromancer and behaves with deliberation, his over-scrupulous conscience plagues him and prevents him appearing in the denouement where he is granted a full pardon. Camillo, on the other hand, is more reckless in his behaviour and dwells more on the wrongs done to him than by him; nevertheless he does appear in the denouement and merits reconciliation with his elders as well as his beloved's hand in marriage. Thus there is no strict correlation between greater honesty

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<sup>426</sup> Although even he has moments of melodramatic pessimism, such as 'Io sono spacciato, io son morto! Apriti / Apriti, per Dio, terra e seppelliscimi.' (IV,7)

or self-awareness and greater reward at the end. In a similar way, Lachellino's grievous crimes do not result in concomitant punishment.<sup>427</sup>

## OVERVIEW

Foregrounded in *Il Negromante* is the contest between intelligence and folly. Lachellino is a well constructed character whose outward appearance as man of huge scientific knowledge and rarified ability belies his true status as an illiterate peasant but one who nevertheless is able to hoodwink several high-ranking members of a small-town community. However, this is a separate single thread which forms the core of Ariosto's satire against the practitioners and believers in necromancy, where the characters are moulded to fit this satirical intention. It clashes with the more naturalistic elements of the play: how the older generation exercises its dominance and its careful management of the romantic affairs of the younger generation. More successfully interwoven are the background dimensions of morality and authority. Cintio's deep commitment to Lavinia and Camillo's long-term passion for Emilia lead them to temporarily override their adherence to filial duty and decorous behaviour. In the denouement, previous accusations of immoral behaviour are rescinded and a harmonious relationship between the generations is restored.

The depiction of authority parallels the established order of outside society: there is very little *rovesciamento*. Only the servant Temolo is seen to rise above his allotted station: he acts independently of his master and debates matters on equal terms with those nominally his superior, in particular the merchant Cambio. But even here the implication of a servant acting well beyond his designated role is refracted through Temolo's construction as an unfeasibly heroic figure, someone of extraordinary resources who is able, almost singlehandedly, to take on the task of banishing an evil presence from the town. Temolo belongs, as much as Lachellino does, to a fairytale world where good and evil are presented in vivid, primary colours, without shading.

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<sup>427</sup> I do not infer that Ariosto had the intention, in a play that has a strong moral tone, of adducing these episodes to show that 'life is unfair' but rather that they resulted from his ramshackle plotting and concern to accommodate a stinging satire within the rules of the comedy genre. (In his later redaction, Ariosto gives more thought to Lachellino's comeuppance.)



As with certain high-ranking figures in *La Calandra*, a high degree of authority confers on the individual protection against being undone by stupidity. The most marked case here is Maximo, whose extreme gullibility in the early stages results in no long-term suffering or diminution of his standing in the community. On a more minor scale, the naivety and dubious behaviour of both the youths, Cintio and Camillo, who at the outset are well regarded members of the community, do not result in any permanent damage to their fortunes or reputations.

Since Ariosto has opted to use verse throughout this play, the scope for diversity of language and syntax is constrained: considerations of rhyme and scansion would impinge more heavily on the ability to create characters with individual modes of expression than if their speech were rendered in prose.<sup>428</sup> However, within this stricture the playwright has managed to introduce this twist: the most effective oratory, the most vivid similes and metaphors come from the mouths of the villains – Lachellino and his henchman Nebbio. By contrast, the poetic utterances of the youth Camillo are risibly overblown, those of Maximo in his extensive speeches in the closing stages tend toward the bland and platitudinous. Even the hero Temolo, apart from a single episode where his use of animal metaphors is employed to decry the venality of those in high office, is not given to poetic or droll embellishments.

### IL MARESCALCO

Since the Marescalco is featured throughout (there are only a couple of scenes, devoted to a minor sub-plot, where he does not appear or is not the subject of conversation), this figure will provide ample material in which to see how the four dimensions interlock with one another. The presentation of the Marescalco is multi-faceted, at times showing noble attributes, at other times decidedly ignoble traits. Predictably, in the interactions with his superiors, the authority dimension looms large, but with the Marescalco's equals and inferiors, intelligence, moral and cultural aspects are employed more as weapons in one-upmanship battles.

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<sup>428</sup> Shakespeare in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, among other of his plays, uses this division of language to highlight class difference: the upper classes express themselves in verse, whilst the lower classes – the 'mechanicals' - speak in prose. This schema is not found in *commedia erudita*; its equivalents of the mechanicals, exemplified by the figure of the porter, are often denoted by an exaggerated regional speech, whilst other lower ranks such as servants or tradesmen exhibit no, or only minor, deviation from standard (Tuscan) Italian.

If the stable boy Giannicco and the Old Nurse are prone to uttering vulgarities, the Marescalco does at times (most graphically in Act 1, Scene 7) outdo them in crudity of expression. However, to counterbalance this, the Marescalco possesses greater powers of discernment; he is more able to articulate the hypocrisies and deficiencies of the society he finds himself among than, say, the Old Nurse, who can only rail at others in an abusive rant (see p. 116 above).

Nominally, the Pedant ranks considerably higher than the Marescalco, an academic against a practical man (concerned with the upkeep and supply of horses) which condition obliges the latter to at least stop and listen to the Pedant. In the verbal exchange here, the Marescalco defers to his greater knowledge of the scriptures. But any initial authority the Pedant possesses is undermined by three factors: his absurd mix of Latin and Italian, the inaccuracy of many of his citations and, most damningly, by 'Freudian slips' which reveal his own base desires which he cannot help but weave into his discourse. Thus in the cultural dimension, the Marescalco's simplicity and ignorance are seen as more admirable than the claimed learning of the Pedant.

There is an episode (Act IV, Scene 7) where the Marescalco displays general misanthropy and his language descends into common abuse (even the inoffensive Jacopo gets called 'Jacopo cacone'); he rejects all advice whether coming from superiors or inferiors. Thus in all four dimensions - morality, culture, intelligence and authority, the Marescalco presents a negative image at this juncture. However, looking at the play as a cumulative whole, in comparison to the majority of other characters, the Marescalco emerges as a commendable figure. Paradoxically, although the Marescalco may be classed as a sexual deviant (though not, we can infer through his other writings, by the playwright) it is in the morality dimension that he outshines most of his colleagues. If culturally he is belittled by both his superiors and his inferiors, and is prone to descend to extreme vulgarity under minor provocation, if intellectually he is shown at times to be inadequate<sup>429</sup> and has to assert his status<sup>430</sup> or, conversely, subordinate himself to someone for whom he has no respect - the ostler, what ultimately

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<sup>429</sup> This is demonstrated most pointedly when he fails to memorize the words of a simple incantation in Act II, Scene 10.

<sup>430</sup> 'son cortigiano anche io' (I,2)

renders the Marescalco an admirable figure is his steadfast determination not to compromise his chosen life-style, no matter what inducements are offered or whatever coercion he faces.<sup>431</sup> In this aspect, the Marescalco emerges as an island of probity in a sea of vanity and duplicity.

Jacopo and Ambrogio, who are roughly of equal rank, are depicted with opposing attributes. Jacopo is well-meaning but naive: in particular he is totally convinced of the reality of the Marescalco's impending nuptials and rejoices in it. Ambrogio, on the other hand, who is shrewd and perceptive, plays the role of a curmudgeon who sees the downside of every situation and imagines, as well as recounts from his own past experience, bad behaviour on the part of others, particularly the female sex. There is a parallel twinning of two members of the lower ranks: the Old Nurse and the stable boy. The Old Nurse initially encourages the Marescalco to embrace the prospect of marriage but later, seeing his fierce opposition to it, tries to help him avoid it. Whilst this act of altruism raises her moral standing, the means she suggests – an unproven necromantic practice – lowers her intellectual standing. Whilst the stable boy is continually shown attempting to alarm or discomfort the Marescalco (inter alia, making fun of his limited vocabulary), ultimately he avows a steadfast loyalty to his master, a loyalty apparently born out of genuine devotion rather than mere duty.<sup>432</sup>

The overall inference to be drawn from the depiction of the above four characters is that astuteness and scepticism are to be valued above goodness and bonhomie. [In terms of my thesis, intelligence trumps morality here.]

One can detect at least five distinct hierarchical rungs in this fictional version of court society. At the top is the Duke himself. Immediately below him are titled figures such as the Count and the Knight who are arbitrarily and sometimes insensitively able to induce discomfort, even fear, in the lower orders. Then there is a swathe of middle-ranked characters: the Pedant, Ambrogio and Jacopo. They are depicted as free-spirited,

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<sup>431</sup> Admittedly, under the sustained pressure, indeed genuine menace, from two men of high standing, the Count and the Knight, the Marescalco's firm resolve begins to crack (Act IV, Scene 3).

<sup>432</sup> In a portrayal of fetching verisimilitude, the stable boy never openly declares his loyalty to the Marescalco's face, but confides in others (Ambrogio, Old Nurse and Phebus) to such a sentiment '... benché egli m'abbia dato a torto, non mi vo' partir di lui.' (V,7).

almost autonomous agents who do not appear to be too guarded in what opinions they express<sup>433</sup>; they converse with the Count and Knight as equals. In the same egalitarian spirit, in their discourses with the Marescalco, they show respect and let him voice an opinion and ask questions. Below them are the Marescalco and the ostler (*staffiere*). The ostler is the one figure who does not share in this convivial atmosphere where considerations of rank are momentarily forgotten. Despite his own lowly rank, he is the most supercilious and condescending towards the Marescalco.<sup>434</sup> Finally, at the bottom of the pile are the servants, here represented by the Marescalco's squire Giannicco, the knight's pageboy and the Old Nurse. Generally circumspect, though not overly so, to the higher-ups, when left by themselves they indulge in frank exchanges of opinions, often couched in robust language.

## OVERVIEW

Not surprisingly, considering the court setting of this play, the authority dimension looms large. The central story poses the question: to what degree can a low-ranked courtier challenge the command of his ultimate superior, the Duke?<sup>435</sup> Certain middle-ranked courtiers such as Jacopo are fortunate in that they have reached a sufficiently high position or have found value and meaning away from the politics of the court that they no longer vie for enhanced status. In contrast, lower-ranked members such as the ostler are seen jockeying for greater prestige, in however petty a way. Giannicco, who has the lowest status of anyone, is keen to impress his elders and betters while at the same time mercilessly teasing his own master.

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<sup>433</sup> However, they all make favourable, indeed sycophantic, references to the Duke himself. These remarks are often shoe-horned into conversation so that these characters appear as mere ciphers for a show of loyalty on the part of the playwright himself. An alternative take on these insertions is that Aretino thought it amusing for these free-thinking individuals to suddenly, apropos of very little, sing the praises of the Duke. If this latter explanation is the case, it would mean that Aretino was lampooning such displays of loyalty rather than endorsing them.

<sup>434</sup> The Marescalco has to bite his tongue when dealing with the ostler; it is left to the jeweller to deflate the self-importance of the ostler in a later scene where he exposes the ostler's ignorance and limited vocabulary (in Act III, Scene 6).

<sup>435</sup> This play faithfully adheres to the first prescript of the genre comedy, viz. that it must have a happy ending; and, during the preceding story line, a light-hearted tone is preserved throughout: even the displays of hostility from the Count and the Knight are mock rather than real. Aretino nevertheless manages to suggest that a society with such a power hierarchy could, at the whim of its ruler, turn from a utopia into a dystopia.

If the authority dimension forms the most visible thread of the play, the moral dimension underpins another essential question that this play poses: does the authority of the Duke extend as far as the right to impose upon one of his courtiers a particular pattern of sexual behaviour? This is tied to the corollary question: can a single individual hold to his principles under the weight of both negative pressure – threats, insults and attempts at inducing guilt, or positive pressure – the prospect of reward: titles and material benefits.

As to the cultural aspect, Aretino's message here is that plain-speaking is to be favoured over the erudite. The Pedant's verbosity, bogus display of scholarship and Latin-strewn phraseology are viciously lampooned. Even the attempts by the low-ranked Giannicco and the Old Nurse at greater verbal sophistication backfire. The Marescalco's resort to crudities does not show him in a good light but elsewhere his deliberate simplicity of expression compares favourably with the cant and over-verbosity of others. The stable-boy's outbursts of swearing have little effect on his perceived standing, but similar outbursts dent the status of the Old Nurse, who has pretensions to gentility. Occupying the cultural middle-ground is Ambrogio who, although given to convoluted phraseology and blatant misogyny, steers an admirable course between crudity and sententious oratory.

Of the five plays under scrutiny here, the intelligence dimension is the least visible in this play. The central *beffa* orchestrated by the Duke has such a degree of plausibility that it does not cleanly divide this cast of characters into the naively gullible and the shrewdly sceptical. In fact, those that appear to be 'in the know' are less sympathetically portrayed than those (which includes the Marescalco) who take the Duke's diktat at face value. The intelligence strand only surfaces occasionally. It is mainly employed to puncture the simplistic arguments and rosy gloss adduced by the pro-marriage faction.

### GLI STRACCIONI

Annibale Caro sees authority from a different angle in his play *Gli Straccioni*, which appears to endorse the notion that 'might is right'. This notion is explored comically

through the figure of the returning husband Cavaliere Giordano and more sombrely through the vicissitudes of the young lovers, Tindaro and Giuletta.

A colourful, if not wholly convincing, trajectory has been constructed for Cavaliere Giordano. Authority derived from his high status is augmented by physical force. However, this seemingly unopposable brute force which initially defines Giordano is moderated at certain points. Firstly, by his susceptibility to romantic sentiment: halfway through the scene in which he first appears (Act IV, Scene 2), he abruptly switches from vows of vengeance to declarations of love. This episode features a carnivalesque reversal: the much higher-ranked and no doubt physically more imposing figure of Giordano is made to look ridiculous in comparison with the level-headed but dishevelled figure of Pilucca.<sup>436</sup> As a counterpoint to Giordano's overbearing demeanour contrasting with Pilucca's supine stance is the distinction between Giordano's loftier speech register and Pilucca's cruder tones. Thus in the scenes between Giordano and Pilucca we can infer that the playwright was engaged in a delicate balancing act as to which of these figures should appear more admirable. Pilucca is clearly depicted as the more level-headed figure but his slyness and cruder sentiments are contrasted negatively with Giordano's honesty as to his state of mind and his more delicate romantic sensibilities. The upshot of this is that, deliberately or unwittingly, Caro avoids presenting a servant figure as consistently more worthy than his aristocratic superior.<sup>437</sup> In terms of my thesis, the greater shrewdness and mental stability of this servant figure does not altogether outshine the greater cultural finesse and open nature of his master.

If Pilucca experiences a downward trajectory in his fortunes – he is brought before procurator Rossello for his misdemeanours and threatened with the gallows (Act V, Scene 5), Giordano experiences an upward one: he is reconciled with his wife and

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<sup>436</sup> This aspect is indicated by two of Pilucca's old associates who comment on his appearance soon after they first meet: BARBAGRIGIA: 'Che vuol dire che sei così spiluccato?' (I,1); MARABEO: '...t'avrebbe riconosciuto così strutto!' (I,4). Pilucca's name whimsically also draws attention to this aspect.

<sup>437</sup> There is a parallel set of equations operating in *La Calandra*. In order to dilute any enhanced status Fessenio may have accrued, Bibbiena reminds the audience that Fessenio is still only a servant by framing many of his utterances in a decidedly low register: '... chiuse le finestre, una scanfarda a canto se gli metterà; attento che di sì grossa pasta è il gocciolone che l'asino dal rosignuolo non discernerà.' (II,9). At the end of this scene, the hired prostitute is even more disparagingly referred to by Fessenio as 'quella vezzosa porca', a further reminder that Fessenio, however much he appears to dominate his master, still belongs to the lower, innately more vulgar, classes.

regains his fortune. Hitherto, Giordano has been marginalised as an absurd character who exhibits a much exaggerated fury of a man who has been cheated out of his wife and property. It is only when his wife is restored to him and outstanding grievances assuaged that he for the first time assumes the role of someone whose authority derives from his wealth and status rather than from a violent temper and overbearing demeanour. If, during the course of the play, Pilucca has been a skilful wheeler-dealer, an independent operator who even succeeds in outsmarting the resourceful Demetrio, at the close of the play, his fortunes, indeed his very life, lie entirely in the hands of his now sober-minded master, Cavaliere Giordano. Thus the spirit of cunning manipulation from the lower orders, bent on challenging the establishment, is finally cowed by it. (In terms of my thesis, in a long bout between intelligence and authority, the latter secures the final decisive knock-out blow.)

If looked at solely through the moral dimension, Giordano and Giovanni/Battista can be evaluated as deserving of sympathy, whilst the pairs Demetrio/Tindaro and Marabeo/Pilucca do not. But by adding perspectives of intelligence and culture, a different picture emerges. Giordano unreasonably fails to take into account, in his rage against his wife Argentina and Tindaro, that these two had sound reasons to believe he was deceased and thus a marriage between them legitimate. Right up to the denouement, Giordano can proffer no judicial arguments; he can only advance simplistic and sometimes crudely menacing assertions of his rights. By contrast, Tindaro and Demetrio's case for acting in the way that they did is given a full airing. Tindaro and Demetrio have committed the crime of abduction and are now on the run.<sup>438</sup> However, these two are presented in such a way that any negative image of them in this narrow aspect is subsumed under more positive aspects in other dimensions: Demetrio as the ultimate urban sophisticate who, through his charm, power of articulation as well as a degree of cunning, outsmarts his adversaries; Tindaro, in contrast to the general run of young male lovers, is able to express himself in measured

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<sup>438</sup> They remain aware of their culpability in the eyes of others and vulnerability to arrest. Demetrio is emphatic in admitting their wrongdoing when he is out of earshot of Tindaro: 'Quando l'avemo rapita per forza, quando siamo condannati, confinati, ruinati per averla.' This occurs at the start of Scene 3 of Act I, before Demetrio makes his presence known. More discreetly, once the discussion with Tindaro is underway, Demetrio only refers to the trouble he (Demetrio) is in: 'scoperto che fu che io tenni le mani a la vostra rapina, la Corte m'ha sempre perseguitato, e la fortuna maggiormente.' (I,3), although the phrase 'la vostra rapina' constitutes a sly accusation against Tindaro as the prime mover, as well as an attempt to minimise his own guilt.

language and noble sentiments. Their lengthy deliberations in Act II, Scene 1 present the audience with serious and sombrelly considered arguments which lack any patina of caricature and buffoonery which characterises much of *commedia erudita*. Thus having a close-up and more naturalistic view of the high-ranked Demetrio and Tindaro and the low-ranked Marabeo and Pilucca help render these characters more sympathetic. In contrast, Giordano is seen from a distance as an unstoppable force of nature which renders him a farcical figure and less deserving of sympathy. To a lesser extent this also applies to Giovanni and Battista whose ambivalent presentation leaves them half-way between sympathetic figures and ones of dismissive risibility. Their initial appearance is as buffoons, both in the way they speak and in their appearance.<sup>439</sup> However, in argument with Demetrio (Act I, Scene 2), they are articulate and manage to counter some of the latter's assertions. But their perceptiveness is limited: they fail to recognise Demetrio as one of the perpetrators of the kidnapping of their daughter/niece and, in a sub-plot, are helpless without the assistance from Rossello to neutralize the nuisance posed by Mirandola. More fatally, towards the end of the play when they regain both their wealth and loved one Giuletta, Caro sees to it that they do not regain their dignity: they still express themselves in winsomely comic phrasing, alternating short pithy lines between them.<sup>440</sup> Moreover, they are excluded from the closing episode where legal claims are arbitrated and relationships delineated; they only appear briefly once these have been settled.

## OVERVIEW

Differing greatly from the well-ordered court society of Mantua as depicted in *Il Marescalco*, this play is set in the rough and tumble world of cosmopolitan Rome. The expectation that this slice of society will be markedly less hierarchical is straightaway confirmed in the opening scene. Here a representative from each stratum of society – the nobly-born Demetrio, the lower-middle class Barbagrigna and the servant Pilucca are seen to mix as equals. Indeed throughout much of the play up to the denouement, the ability of those with greater nominal authority to impose their will upon those with less authority is either not attempted or, if attempted, largely frustrated.

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<sup>439</sup> No doubt in a stage presentation, the description of these two as *straccioni* would be heavily signalled in terms of costume.

<sup>440</sup> GIOVANNI: 'Straccioni semo noi stati, ma ora semo fuori di stracci.' / BATTISTA: 'Semo ricchi.' / GIOVANNI: 'Semo contenti.' / BATTISTA: 'Non saremo piu pazzi.' (V,5).



If authority is upturned, likewise morality. The eponymous heroes, Battista and Giovanni (*gli straccioni* of the title) are justifiably outraged by the kidnap of their daughter/niece but fail to bring the kidnappers to book. The kidnappers themselves, Tindaro and Demetrio, are more exercised in trying to avoid their pursuers than in examining their consciences. (For Tindaro, conscience translates into maintaining devotion to a lost love rather than recognising and atoning for the original crime.) The steward Marabeo purchases a female whom he believes to be a slave and, against a strict injunction, brings her back to Rome to be his concubine. He manages to keep her prisoner in his own lodgings with apparent impunity.

It is through the display of superior intelligence that the prestige of a character emerges; conversely a persistent display of naivety undermines any initial worth derived from greater authority or moral rectitude.<sup>441</sup> Despite their a-moral attitude and indeed downright brutal behaviour towards Giuletta, Marabeo and Pilucca come across overall as sympathetic as well as fascinating characters through their witty banter and the array of attitudes they display towards each other, oscillating between trust and suspicion, affection and coldness, co-operation and rivalry. Demetrio is arguably the cleverest figure: he always manages to avoid incriminating himself through a combination of sophistry of argument and an ingratiating manner. However, I would judge that intelligence is not the dominant thread, in terms of overall impact, of this play. The fraught romance between Tindaro and Giuletta, rendered in unusually serious tones where loyalty and firm resolve rather than ingenuity dominate, leaves a more lasting impression.

Of the five plays under investigation here, the cultural dimension is explored the most extensively here. It is a celebration of both low and high culture. Low culture is represented by the exchanges between the two servants Pilucca and Marabeo. Distinct from the general run of male servants who appear more worldly wise and sophisticated than their masters, these two are less inherited theatrical stereotypes, but appear as a genuine attempt to portray the harsh nature as well as the harsh lot of the servant class.

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<sup>441</sup> This outcome is in marked contrast to that which emerges from *Il Negromante*. In terms of my central metaphor, Caro has had no hesitation in bending the 'mirror' to show authority figures as absurd, whereas Ariosto, conscientious to preserve the dignity of such figures, has refrained from such distortion.

Alongside crass sensibilities and crude language, they display a ready ability to employ imaginative metaphors and even to coin new words. High culture is given full rein through the extensive philosophical debates between Demetrio and Tindaro, with terser though no less valid contributions from Barbagrìgia, over the nature of love and romantic attachment, the conflict between sentiment and practical outcomes. Later on, equally passionate and well argued views on love, its contractual as well as its emotional ramifications, are articulated by Tindaro's love interest, Giuletta.

### L'ASSIUOLO

If *Il Negromante* is, loosely speaking, a morality play, *L'Assiuolo* is decidedly immoral. I shall start with an examination of the well-to-do youths Giulio and Rinuccio who embody this aspect, before examining a third figure, Giannella, whose behaviour runs counter to this ethos.

Whereas the two well-to-do males of *Gli Straccioni* exhibit gravitas and seriousness of purpose, this cannot be said of the two young male protagonists of *L'Assiuolo* – Giulio and Rinuccio. Whilst sombre sentiments and judicious behaviour (admittedly after decidedly less judicious behaviour earlier on as outlined in the *antefatto*) are the aspects we admire in Tindaro and Demetrio, it is almost the opposite qualities that make Giulio and Rinuccio appealing characters: frivolity, vacillation and a general air of incompetence. In the character make-up of Giulio, two dimensions work in opposition. On the one side is his inability to conduct his own affairs, his constant need to defer to and rely on his servant Giorgetto to secure any advancement. On the other side, Giulio is also presented as thoughtful, well-mannered and extremely obliging, at least towards males of his own age; in particular, he bends over backwards not to offend or upset his close friend and contemporary Rinuccio. In addition, Giulio is respectful towards servants, both male and female. However, he has no qualms over seducing a married female and cuckolding her husband Ambrogio. Interestingly, Giulio never cites Ambrogio's unreasonable behaviour - his cruelty and extreme possessiveness towards his wife, as a justification for this act of intended adultery.

Thus we are left to infer that Giulio's pursuit of Oretta stems solely from a desperate desire to possess her carnally.<sup>442</sup>

The main conceit and indeed the most fantastical element of the play is that a young married female who has no previous acquaintance or knowledge of her putative seducer would succumb to him so readily without any misgivings. Against this background fantasy that adulterous seduction can be achieved readily and painlessly, any notion of Giulio as the 'guilty' party - a shameless seducer of vulnerable young women, has limited validity.<sup>443</sup> Giulio's and Rinuccio's utterances are decidedly plebeian; indeed there is nothing to distinguish their speech register from that of the servant class. In Act V, when these two exchange accounts of their previous night's sexual adventures, their language register descends even further: the seductions of Oretta and Violante are described in either flippant mercantile language or crude, mechanical terms.<sup>444</sup> It is only in the closing stages, after Giulio and Rinuccio have been united with the objects of their desires and suspicion of bad behaviour has been diverted away from them on to Ambrogio, that they finally take charge of their own affairs. Both now appear more mature, wiser and less dependent on others. Gone also are the excessive vulgarities of their earlier speeches. Thus increased authority is twinned with increased cultural finesse.

The servant Giannella initially appears as a stock character - an arch buffoon with no redeeming qualities and the butt of others' disdain. The interplay of Ambrogio with his servant is one of broad farce, with the latter as a one-dimensional cartoon character devoid of plausible reactions.<sup>445</sup> Later on, however, the figure of Giannella is seen to grow beyond this stereotype: other character traits are revealed which show him in a more positive light. Out of an obsequious blockhead emerges someone who is both

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<sup>442</sup> Giulio has a similar determination to possess a married female as Callimaco does in *La Mandragola*. However, it is only in the matter of ultimate success that this similarity is continued. Callimaco wins out through ingenuity and the ability to recruit a team of co-conspirators, whereas Giulio succeeds despite himself: his gratitude and deference towards his friend Rinuccio often threatens to undermine his goals.

<sup>443</sup> The charge of arrogance and wilful disregard to social mores that could be justifiably attached to *La Calandra*'s Lidio in his adulterous affair is hard to apply to Giulio who achieves his goal through a serendipitous fall of fortune rather than through firm resolve and planned deceit such as dressing up as a female.

<sup>444</sup> It is worth noting that it is only when Oretta has been dismissed and sent indoors that these two launch into their salacious accounts.

<sup>445</sup> His imbecilic antics, creating broad slap-stick humour, one may infer originate more from earlier, less sophisticated theatre forms, e.g. *farsa rusticale*, than from earlier *commedia erudita* or its ancient world antecedents.

assertive and perceptive. On the cultural level, while Ambrogio's speech descends to the prosaic, Giannella becomes more subtle and elegant in his mode of expression. In the sphere of morality, in contrast to Fessenio who looks down either indifferently or with considerable glee on the folly of others, Giannella expresses sympathy for his fellow man. Although he queries the behaviour of both his master and his master's would-be-lover Anfrosina (he is unaware of her role as deliberate bait), he shows indulgence towards the baser instincts of human nature.<sup>446</sup> It is in the denouement that a crisis point is reached for Giannella when he is faced with a moral dilemma. The two sisters Oretta and Violante ask him pointedly to tell the truth about his and his master's nocturnal activities. Out of loyalty to his master, he could fabricate a cover-up story or, alternatively, not wishing to utter a falsehood in front of several witnesses, he could be entirely honest in his reply. Giannella chooses the latter option, although this clearly implicates his master in engaging in disreputable behaviour.

At the end of the play, although in authority terms Giannella is a lesser figure (inter alia, his role as the principal guardian of the household has been given to the maidservant Agnola), in terms of morality and intellectual capacity he is an enhanced figure. He is the character who has made the greatest 'journey' through the play: from despised, ill-mannered dolt at the outset to a more reasonable, even admirable, figure by the close of the play. In this he provides a minor counterpoint to the dominant ethos of the play which is a celebration of ingenuity over folly and gullibility where moral considerations are discarded. The construction of this servant figure is noteworthy in that, unlike the generality of *commedia erudita* servants who are an immutable presence (though paradoxically they are often the main agents for the change of fortunes of others), Giannella's character undergoes considerable transition.

## OVERVIEW

In the typical setting of these plays, a bourgeois neighbourhood of a town or city, nominal authority for day-to-day affairs generally resides with the male head of household or, for more serious matters, with a paterfamilias figure. But in the plays of

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<sup>446</sup> In Act IV, when Giannella has become separated from his master, he launches into a soliloquy, in which he opines: '... in queste cose della coda e' non ci si può corre posta ferma; chiunque ha pizzicore, s'ingegna o di grattarselo, o di farselo grattare; così potessi far io.' (IV,4).

Cecchi another higher or at least parallel level of authority is invoked: divine providence or *fortuna*, which Cecchi weaves into his storylines, invariably with mischievous or subversive intent, as a major determining factor in human affairs. In his schema of human relationships, divine providence provides legitimate ‘cover’ for a lapse in morality, as in the case of Oretta, and favourable *fortuna* can make up for a lack of initiative or ingenuity, as in the case of Rinuccio. The playwright is here offering (doubtless unintentionally) an optimistic slant on the fortunes of men: that, despite failure to adhere to the moral code or inadequacy in intellectual resources, one can still triumph.<sup>447</sup>

Morality features strongly in this play, or rather its lack; it is difficult at first glance to separate the degree of moral turpitude of one party from that of another. The older Ambrogio’s intention to commit adultery is equalled by the youths’ Giulio and Rinuccio, similar resolve. However, Ambrogio’s character is given further negative traits: jealousy, bullying and avarice to name but a few. The hypocritical local busy-body Verdiana is made to look a little more virtuous when she is pitted against the ill-tempered and mean-spirited Ambrogio. The young married females’ ready yielding to adulterous activity is not explained away by depicting them as victims of stronger, manipulative males but more disingenuously, as well as more comically, as victims (or beneficiaries!) of a simple twist of fate.

Great intelligence is accorded to Giulio’s servant Giorgetto. His machinations to promote the love interest of his young master and frustrate that of his more elderly rival follow theatrical tradition. However, less traditional is that an ability to manipulate affairs is also shared by female characters: the initial *beffa* is reported to have been devised by Madonnas Oretta and Anfrosina; the maidservant Agnola is sharp enough to detect the pitfalls in Rinuccio’s initial plan to seduce Oretta; and, in the

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<sup>447</sup> In this respect, this supposition differs markedly from that of Machiavelli who, in his political writings (echoed in the plot of his play *La Mandragola*) posits the view that desired goals can be attained by a greater call on human ingenuity and less upon help from a Christian God or a favourable fall of fortune: ‘E non mi è incognito come molti hanno avuto ed hanno opinione, che le cose del mondo siano in modo governate dalla fortuna e da Dio, che gli uomini con la prudenza loro non possano correggerle [...] mi sono in qualche parte inchinato nella opinione loro. Nondimanco, perchè il nostro libero arbitrio non sia spento, guidico potere esser vero che la fortuna sia arbitra della metà delle azioni nostre, ma che ancora ella ne lasci governare l’altra metà, o poco meno, a noi.’, Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe* (Milan: Mursia Editore, 1969), Chapter XXV.

denouement, the two sisters run rings around Ambrogio, managing to convince everyone of his guilt whilst exculpating themselves.

I would contend that in *L'Assiuolo* the cultural dimension is the least visible. In the main there is little to distinguish the speech registers of different social ranks, as evidenced in Act 1, Scene 2 where noble youths Giulio and Rinuccio and maidservant Agnola all speak in the same down-to-earth terms. The only characters for whom a distinct linguistic patina has been added are the servant Giorgetto and the elderly lawyer Ambrogio. For Giorgetto, his articulation and erudite references mark him as more urbane than his immature master Giulio, whilst Ambrogio's arbitrary inclusion of Latin in his speeches only serves to underline his insecurity: his neurotic need to impress others, even his unprepossessing servant.

Notwithstanding the feminist slant in terms of basic plot (in which three subordinate females secure victory over a dominant male), in other aspects *L'Assiuolo* is the most masculine of the five plays under scrutiny here. The interactions between Giulio and Rinuccio, between Giulio and his servant, and between Rinuccio and Ambrogio are all in 'close up' and, although they contain a fair degree of comic exaggeration, fall within a recognisable picture of domestic life, whereas the rapidly executed and improbably rendered 'romps' between the two young males and their respective female partners are cartoon escapades, far removed from reality. In keeping with this masculine tenor, we hear of these episodes solely from the male participants who recount them in terms of base human appetites; they express these through crass euphemisms which barely raise the tone above that of an outright graphic description with naming of parts. It is only during the closing scenes that the two female protagonists come into sharper focus: they display a greater ingenuity and powers of articulation than any of their menfolk. But even here, there is a sense that the actions and speeches of these two females serve the exigencies of the plot rather than add further shading to their characters. In contrast, the very final scene of the play, between Giulio and Giorgetto, serves as a touching and effective reminder of Giulio's dependence on and deep gratitude for his servant's services and abiding loyalty.

## **THEMES ACROSS THE FIVE PLAYS**

The first part of this chapter looked at comparisons of characters within individual plays. This second part will look at the five plays as a whole, drawing comparisons between characters and themes from across these plays, identifying differences and similarities.<sup>448</sup> For the final section, I shall try to weigh up the degree of naturalism versus caricature or symbolic representation detectable in the five plays and see diachronically if any trend is discernible.

For middle-aged male heads of household, it is reasonable to posit that their sense of worth is anchored in their prestige, comprising their professional standing, their financial resources (money, property and the ability to employ servants), the authority they hold within their own household, consisting primarily of the loyalty of their wives, offspring and servants, and their standing in the local community.<sup>449</sup> During this epoch, for this region of Europe, the reputation of the typical bourgeois male head of household did not extend beyond a small geographical area: a small town such as Cremona (the setting of *Il Negromante*) or a *quartiere* of a city, such as the urban centre of Rome (the setting for *Gli Straccioni*). Much of the comedy of these plays lies in the attempt by others, lower down the pecking order, to dislodge this seemingly secure ‘anchor’, either for the more superficial reason of making mischief or for the more serious motive of aggrandising their own position (economically, reputationally or sexually), at the expense of these ‘higher ups’, whom they invariably view as having secured an unfairly large slice of the ‘pie’ of power, prestige and call upon the nubile young females of the locality.<sup>450</sup> Thus the threat to the prestige of these middle-aged male heads of households is four fold: from their wives; from their own adult male offspring (rarely their female adult offspring); young males of the neighbourhood in pursuit of their wives or daughters; and from their servants. Extrapolating from my findings of the previous four chapters, the battle between these opposing parties is fought mainly

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<sup>448</sup> These will be, in the main, be generalisations; I shall try to avoid any recapitulation of specific cases described in the first section of this chapter.

<sup>449</sup> Yael Manes expands on this notion: ‘In the patriarchal culture of Renaissance Florence, men were defined not only through role categories (warrior, hunter, statesman) but also in terms of their relationship status as fathers, husbands, and sons. Moreover, it was quite difficult to distinguish between men’s relational status and their social roles, since “father” was both a family relation and a social and political position.’ Manes, *Motherhood and Patriarchal ...*, p. 10

<sup>450</sup> Even if such envy and resentment is not explicitly expressed by other characters, the type of presentation of the middle-aged head of household is commonly designed to induce in the audience the notion that this figure needs to be taken down a peg or two.

through the intelligence dimension, sometimes through the cultural dimension, but rarely through the moral dimension.

The last of these I will deal with first. There is often a parallel degree of culpability between middle-aged male heads of households and their main adversaries - young single males. Indeed, in terms of actual behaviour, greater culpability usually lies with the young interloper since, for the middle-aged male head of household, adultery is only ever an ambition, never brought to fruition, whereas for the young male interloper, sexual consummation, or at least the promise of such through future unimpeded access to the female, invariably concludes the story line. Thus as a criterion for predicting 'winners and losers' (to use Richard Andrews phrase) i.e. who has his prestige enhanced, who has it diminished, degree of moral probity proves to be a poor guide.

The common leitmotif through which the position of the middle-aged head of household is undermined or challenged is by means of the *beffa*, a device through which his adulterous ambition is not just thwarted but revealed to the wider family, with consequent damage to his reputation. The *beffa* is rarely devised by the putative young seducer but by his servant. It often involves disguise (including cross-dressing), substitution, transit from house to house (sometimes from room to room); it more often than not takes place during the hours of darkness in order to facilitate these substitutions. Thus it is through the intelligence of a low-ranked member of a neighbourhood – the household servant, operating through a middle-ranked member – well-to-do young male, that the authority of a high-ranked member – middle-aged head of household, is undermined, however temporarily.<sup>451</sup> Sometimes the contest between the middle-aged head of household and his adversary (typically a male servant acting on behalf of his young master) is decidedly uneven from the outset, as in the interplay between the imbecilic Calandro and his crafty servant Fessenio; at other times, as in the story-line of *L'Assiuolo*, the match is initially more even and it takes a combination of opposing forces, deployed successively, to eventually defeat this figure.

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<sup>451</sup> I use the term 'temporarily' since the story line of these comedies has a prescribed span of twenty-four hours or less. However, there is often an implicit, indeed sometimes explicit, indication that the one night of illicit sex featured in the denouement will continue in perpetuity: 'io ti prendo per signore, patrone, guida [...] e quel che 'l mio marito ha voluto per una sera, voglio ch'egli abbia sempre.' - Lucrezia's intentions, as reported by Callimaco (in Act V, Scene 4 of *La Mandragola*) after their night together.



A high degree of cultural sophistication is usually accorded to the servant figure, a low degree to the older male target of the *beffa*, with the level of cultural sophistication of the young male interloper pitched between these two, although more often than not it is pitched closer to the philistinism of the older male. The gulf between the young male's level of articulation and knowledge and that of his more sophisticated, worldly-wise servant is usually revealed early on in the play when we are privy to a private discussion between these two. (The opening scene of *L'Assiuolo* typifies this.)

In real life, one of the primary drives of the young well-to-do male is to effect a sexual liaison with a female, generally through the ritual of courtship and marriage. It is through the authority, rather than the intelligence or cultural, dimension that he achieves this aim. This authority is derived from his future potential as a holder of wealth and social standing<sup>452</sup> (once his father or guardian has died or become too feeble to manage affairs), from his current status as being in command of certain resources (viz. at least one male servant at his disposal) but also from his status as a virile, sexual partner for a nubile female.<sup>453</sup> Since the staged representation of this aspect of life focuses on the here and now and celebrates the hedonistic impulses of human affairs, the last of these tends to feature as the dominant strand. Aside from his sexual attractiveness to females, the well-to-do youthful male uses his authority over his own servant as the main tool for achieving his aims; his standing among lower-ranked individuals in his neighbourhood may provide an additional means of garnering support for either a legitimate romantic goal or a less legitimate sexual one. His leverage over these lower-ranked figures and the ability to harness their acumen means that any lack of intelligence or cultural finesse on his part will prove no hindrance to ultimate success.

As for the well-to-do young female in these plays, any authority she possesses is under-exercised since she is invariably the object of machinations by males, both of

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<sup>452</sup> In *commedia erudita* these considerations are usually only given a cursory mention in the final scene(s) where either marriage partnerships are announced or on-going sexual partnerships implied. *Il Negromante* is exceptional in that the eligibility of the competing male suitors for the hand of Emilia is discussed in the opening scene: MARGHERITA: 'Perché gli la negarono? Perché Cintio è più ricco?' AURELIA: 'Differenza / Di roba è poca tra loro.' (I,1).

<sup>453</sup> Of course, this consideration can be given a more concrete aspect when an actual stage performance of the play is embarked upon. For example, in the staging of *La Calandra*, the actor playing Lidio would have to have a sufficient degree of physical attractiveness to render Fulvia's desperate infatuation with him plausible.

higher and lower rank.<sup>454</sup> Likewise, however intelligent she demonstrates herself to be, this proves to be of little consequence since she is a pawn in a chess game dominated by male pieces. It is only in the moral and cultural dimensions that she is allowed to shine. If the young male character resorts to trickery and deceit or is prone to vacillation, the young well-to-do female is a repository of probity and steadfastness. Such positive character traits are invariably matched in her cultural profile. Whereas the speeches of the young well-to-do males provide only a rudimentary insight into their thought processes (usually limited to an expression of their desperation to carnally possess the object of their desires and/or the citing of the specific obstacles that stand in the way of that ambition), the young well-to-do female is wont to deliver, often by way of a soliloquy, lengthy disquisitions on the moral ramifications of the position she finds herself in. Sometimes this is not merely confined to an examination of past choices she has made or current options open to her, but of the position she finds herself in which has not been her responsibility at all but solely as a result of action taken, often without her consent, by others. Alongside a display of insightfulness, poetic skill in the apposite use of figures of speech such as anaphora, simile and metaphor, sometimes accompanied by erudite cultural allusions, is also demonstrated. (Thus we are presented with a picture of the young well-to-do male's full exercise of authority, notwithstanding deficiencies in intellect or cultural finesse, contrasting with that of the young well-to-do female who is accorded higher levels of integrity and articulation in compensation for her relative powerlessness.)

If the young well-to-do female is under-represented, this is even more so in the case of the married, middle-aged well-to-do female. Because of this, I shall here cite specifics rather than attempt to adduce generalities. Of the five plays covered by this thesis, only the figure of Fulvia appears as a main character in this category.<sup>455</sup> Whatever deficiencies she exhibits in the moral sphere - embarking on an adulterous affair with a much younger man, and on the intellectual plane where she falls easy prey to the necromancer, these are never allowed to overturn her authority and positive cultural presentation. Her decorum (or at least her carefully engineered outward show

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<sup>454</sup> Giuletta experiences, at different stages, coercion from the noble males Tindaro and Giordano and even greater brutality from the servants Pilucca and Marabeo.

<sup>455</sup> Machiavelli's *La Clizia* (1525) features another middle-aged female, Sofronia, who has more power and has more say in the unfolding of events than does Fulvia. (For a fuller discussion of the role of Sofronia, see Manes, *Motherhood and Patriarchal...*, pp. 46-56.)

of such), her ability to fully articulate both her own pitiful circumstances and the marital offences committed by her husband secure her continued prestige in the eyes of the audience. Madonna Argentina (from *Gli Straccioni*) is an unusual creation since she is pitched halfway between a young, single well-to-do female, as embodied by Santilla, and that of the middle-aged well-to-do female, as embodied by Fulvia. However, distinct from Fulvia, it is Argentina's resolute display of authority – a determination that the wedding shall go ahead and her refusal to be cowed by male bluster, rather than any exceptional powers of articulation, that secures her high standing.

As adduced in Chapter Two, male servants have little residual authority, female servants even less. However, part of any authority that he/she does possess is refracted through an aspect which appears not to be a reflection, however distortedly, of outside life, but exists purely as a theatrical phenomenon. Examining closely the texts of these five plays, an interesting equation emerges. If authority over those figures on the bottom rung of the hierarchy is strongly exercised within the household, including its immediate environs<sup>456</sup>, when at a distance from it, subservience to, or even recognition of, this hierarchical difference is less observed and even subject to reversal. To help explain this finding, I will first of all outline certain theatrical prescripts which the pioneers of erudite comedy generally adhered to.

Following the Aristotelian prescript regarding unity of place, *commedia erudita* routinely featured just one single, unchanging scene: that of a piazza or row of a few house fronts representing a short section of a typical street in a bourgeois neighbourhood. If this convention is strictly adhered to, no interaction between characters can take place either inside the house or beyond this narrow topological area. However, in the absence of any detailed diagrams or portraits of the staging employed for these plays, one can infer from some of the tranches of dialogue that the strictures derived from this Aristotelian rule were ignored or at least radically attenuated. One can also surmise that the physical set of *commedia erudita* did not always translate into the same proportions of its real-life equivalent. As with the passage of time, where the passing of five hours of actual time could be represented by five minutes in theatrical

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<sup>456</sup> Typically for master/servant interplay this would take place on the pavement immediately outside the residence (represented sometimes only by a single large door); typically for mistress/servant interactions, the mistress would be leaning out of a window (first floor or ground floor) issuing instructions to her maidservant standing in the street below.

time, I would posit that ten paces of real space could, in theatrical terms, represent a large multiple of this – ten, twenty or a hundred yards. From the very first productions of *commedia erudita*, the elaborate stage design often included a carefully delineated perspective where a slice of the cityscape would appear to recede a long way into the distance. Thus, if the downstage-upstage axis could be ‘optically’ extended, then it is not inconceivable that the stage right-stage left axis would lend itself to a certain degree of ‘spatial manipulation’ by the set designer and director. Without this distortion of space (readily perceived by the audience), it would be hard to represent the innumerable occasions when characters are depicted as meeting ‘in private’, or at a discreet distance from the principal residences or centrally placed piazza.<sup>457</sup>

For the middle-aged professional head of household, his residence is his power base and his authority would, all other things being equal, be at its most sovereign within the house. I intend now to chart how this notion of sovereign authority is refracted through the specifics of the topology outlined above: as a general supposition, moving outward toward the more distant reaches of his neighbourhood, the middle-age master’s power and jurisdiction tend to recede in proportion. Notwithstanding the absence of specific stage directions to indicate where a particular scene takes place, below I adduce examples where the interaction between characters appears to take place in a ‘neutral’ or ‘secret’ location, well away from a master’s or mistress’s residence. I shall concentrate on interactions of lower-ranked figures - incomers, itinerant traders as well as servants - since these are the principal beneficiaries of what I term ‘the democracy of the street’.

Ruffo is such a dubious character that, for much of the unfolding story of *La Calandra*, Fulvia who has engaged his services, cannot communicate with him directly but only through the agency of a her maidservant. Santilla, disguised as the male Lidio, liaises with him near the ‘piazza’. Ruffo’s scene with the servant Fannio (Act III, Scene 11) seems to take place in no man’s land. Although Ruffo has a residence, alluded to in

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<sup>457</sup> Mary Morrison, investigating the staging of Giraldo Cinthio’s tragedies, makes a similar finding: ‘The actual dimensions of Giraldo’s stage must have been relatively small, but by references in the text he compels the imagination of the audience to expand this space enormously. By constantly sending messengers between the buildings on each side of the stage he creates an illusion of considerable distance.’, ‘Scenery, Spectacle and Action on the Serlian Stage of G.-B. Giraldo in Ferrara’, in *Scenery, Set and Staging in the Italian Renaissance*, ed. by Christopher Cairns (Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996), p. 61.

a speech by Samia who is waiting for him (Act I, Scene 6), his negotiations with others take place on the streets or in the town's public square. One can draw an inference, that in these episodes Ruffo's distance from the *locus* of power – the residences of Calandro and Lidio, confers on him extra clout: that he can to some extent dictate aspects of the service he has been contracted to provide to Fulvia. Additionally, he is able more easily to excuse any failure to, or delay in, fulfilling his side of the contract.

The maidservant Samia is at her most subservient when directly outside her mistress's house (in Act II, Scene 7, Act III, Scene 5 and Act IV, Scene 1), but at her most assertive when she meets Lidio (actually Santilla in disguise) randomly in the street (in Act II, Scene 2). In *Il Negromante*, there is a parallel contrast between Temolo's attitude and behaviour when he is in close proximity to his master's house (Act II, Scene 1) and when, later on, he is positioned some way away from that (Scenes 1 and 2 of Act IV).<sup>458</sup> In the first scenario, Temolo hesitates to direct his young master Cintio to a particular course of action - he only offers suggestions, but in the second scenario, Temolo is less circumspect and much more authoritative, even towards those of even higher rank than Cintio's, specifically here the merchant Cambio.

In *Il Marescalco*, the topology of each scene is not specifically set out but can often be inferred by the dialogue and the mention of several specific locations: the Marescalco's abode, the stables he works in, the house of the Old Nurse, the house of the Count and the Duke's palace. In the opening scenes which are located outside the Marescalco's residence or outside his stables, he suffers only mild baiting over the prospect of his forthcoming marriage. It is only later on, where we infer that the action has moved closer to the residence of the Count (where the marriage is due to take place), that the remaining vestiges of the Marescalco's will to resist the diktat to get married begin to fall away. One can surmise that in the intervening period, when the Marescalco is debating matters on more equal terms with the middle-ranked Jacopo, Ambrogio and the Pedant, that these discussions take place on more neutral ground, perhaps half-way between the Marescalco's house and that of the Count. The denouement takes place directly outside the Count's residence; it is here that the

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<sup>458</sup> In Act IV, Scene 2, Temolo points out Maximo's residence to the porter: 'Ecco l'uscio; là ti scarica.' One can imagine the frontage of Maximo's house positioned centre stage while this exchange takes place on the periphery of the stage.

Marescalco abandons all resistance and is forced to go through with the wedding ceremony.

Even for the minor sub-plot involving the attempt of the Jewish pedlar to sell rings for the proposed wedding, a similar set of equations apply. When on more neutral ground, when the pedlar accidentally comes across Giannicco, he is treated cordially on the whole, despite some *sotto voce* or unguarded insults for which Giannicco immediately apologises.<sup>459</sup> However, in the scene following, when the Jewish pedlar is depicted knocking on the door of the Marescalco's residence, he is subjected to more trenchant abuse from the Marescalco. Thus the greater the proximity to his house, the freer the Marescalco is in giving full rein to his anger and innate prejudices.

The opening scene of *Gli Straccioni* is even more specifically denoted as not being at all near to the residence of any of the principal characters.<sup>460</sup> From the dialogue, one can clearly deduce that this is nearer the port area of Rome, where Pilucca and Demetrio have just disembarked, than to either of the residences where Pilucca or Demetrio is heading. In this opening scene, three figures of disparate rank – the servant Pilucca, the shopkeeper Barbagrigia and the nobleman Demetrio exhibit a remarkably close display of equality (see p. 261 above). In a similar vein, in the scene following, the dispossessed pair Giovanni and Battista seem to suffer further loss of authority as fresh newcomers to Rome, hundreds of miles away from their power base in the north of the peninsula. Giulia's letter, the receipt of which by Tindaro and Demetrio sets in train her eventual release and reunion with her loved one, provides another means by which the absolute authority – that of a slave owner over his slave in the confines of a single hidden room of a house – is able to be circumvented. In *L'Assiuolo*, the further the established professional married man, Ambrogio, strays from his abode, the more his authority and control of events is eroded. The additional aspect of darkness under which he is forced to operate adds to this sense of being uprooted and vulnerable to the machinations of others.

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<sup>459</sup> It is interesting to note that Aretino, when creating the dialogue for this scene, had the artificially reduced dimensions of a theatrical space in mind rather than that which would pertain to the physical reality of a seigniorial court, since he has the Jewish pedlar exclaim: 'Poca perdita va in venti passi; io vado a lui.' (III,1).

<sup>460</sup> It does, however, feature the print-shop owned by a more minor character, Barbagrigia.

However, readily noticeable in this play and in *La Calandra*, the changing topographical relationships have the opposite impact as regards the married female. Both Fulvia and Oretta, once having escaped from the confines of the house, experience enhanced authority and much greater ability to control affairs.

Thus there seems to be a general equation: effective authority of high-ranked (male) characters over lower-ranked ones is at its most robust and undiluted when the action is situated nearest the residence of the superior ranked figure, but in the street scenes distant from any of the protagonists' houses, affairs are governed by more meritocratic values, where the more perceptive and those with a stronger resolve are seen to take control over the more dull-witted or irresolute, official rank notwithstanding; the authority of the high-ranked member tends to dissipate or be attenuated under the superior attributes, be they moral, intellectual or cultural, of lower-ranked figures. For example, both the servants Samia and Temolo gain moral courage the further they are away from their master's/mistress's abode, and the servant Giannella, once finding himself some distance from his master's house, for the first time is able to offer shrewd insights into the ways of the world.<sup>461</sup>

To close this section, I shall now give a brief summary as to how dimensions other than that of authority operate through the servant figure. Moral attitudes adopted by the servant and the actions that spring from these are complex since showing loyalty to one member of the household often means showing disloyalty to another member of the household or, beyond the individual household, acting against the interests of a member of the local neighbourhood such as the middle-aged professional male or the young rival in love. Beyond this particular conflict remains the question as to what proportion of a servant's action is altruistic, what proportion self-serving; to what degree is he sacrificing his own interests and comforts to serve those of his master? Sometimes the servant is shown aiding and abetting his master with dour diligence, at other times with gleeful satisfaction. A carnivalesque inversion by which the servant is

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<sup>461</sup> The ending of these plays commonly involves an *agnizione* and resolution of previous conflicts into a harmonious reunion of principal characters. One can speculate, in the absence of any surviving diagrams or verbal descriptions of the arrangement of characters on stage in the closing moments, that the principal high-ranked characters, both parents and younger generation, would stand centre stage in front of the abode of the main (high-ranked) character. Thus the return to the status quo in the final, post-denouement, sequence would be mirrored by the spatial arrangement on stage. (As for the disgraced high-ranked figure he may well be positioned as an isolated figure on the periphery of the stage.)

accorded far greater acumen than either his young master or his elderly master or equivalent in a nearby household provides the means by which the younger male achieves victory over his older male adversary. A display of articulation or greater cultural knowledge by the servant is not essential to the execution of the *beffa* or scam but would serve to enhance his prestige in the eyes of the audience.<sup>462</sup> This display of cultural superiority by the servant over either his young or elderly master often serves to highlight their inadequacies rather than his sufficiency.<sup>463</sup>

## **SYMBOLISM VERSUS VERISIMILITUDE**

For this second section I shall compare and contrast the portrayal of a selected number of characters across the five plays and try to place them on the spectrum between convincing naturalism at one end and gross caricature at the other. I shall then look at the plays as a whole and do a similar exercise, extrapolating the inferences drawn from these specific examples as a starting point. Finally, I shall look at the presentation of characters as a whole to see if they are constructed as stock theatrical entities, with unchanging characteristics and attitudes, or whether they are more fully integrated into the story line and can be seen to undergo change in response to the situations they experience and characters they encounter. If such changes can be detected, I shall then try to determine if these spring from the exigencies of the plot or can be viewed as plausible character development. Once this is done, I shall be in a position to give a verdict as to whether the period under study here saw any progress from medieval theatre, replete with mythical figures and fantastical storylines, toward greater verisimilitude and a type of theatrical presentation which in later centuries become known as naturalistic.<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> However, any superiority garnered by the servant through his greater powers of erudition is often mitigated by his propensity to use crude speech or utter profanities.

<sup>463</sup> This notion is bolstered by the idea that, whereas other members of a typical bourgeois household depicted on stage may be heavily refracted versions of reality, the servant figure goes beyond that and has by the early years of *commedia erudita* become a discrete theatrical construction: as an agent who creates mischief but never suffers himself, a figure far removed from his real-life counterpart. The depiction of the servants Pilucca and Marabeo from *Gli Straccioni* (1543) represents a significant reversal of this development, towards grounding the stage servant in a more recognisable reality.

<sup>464</sup> By the word 'progress' I do not intend to imply that a theatrical piece featuring naturalistic performances is per se superior to theatre full of stock characters and fantastical story lines. Each form has its strengths and weaknesses. The trend during the last five centuries has been towards more naturalistic theatre, notwithstanding Brecht's staunch denunciation of this type of presentation as a corrupt bourgeois theatre that seeks to manipulate the audience's emotions in a vacuous exercise that fails to engage them intellectually.



In the analysis of *Il Negromante*, I compared three figures as to their degree of plausibility and naturalism and whether their presentation within those criteria remained constant throughout the play. In the following section, I shall make a similar comparison between characters but this time each character will be from a different play.

If Calandro's interaction with Fessenio is constructed as broad farce, far removed from any recognised real-life behaviour and devised principally to generate laughter, Maximo's interaction with Lachellino has undoubtedly a more serious, didactic purpose - as a cautionary tale to warn of the dangers of allowing oneself to be blinded by science, or rather by superstition and hokum posing as science. To these diverse ends, both the figures of Calandro and Maximo have been distorted to an egregious extent but in the case of Calandro he is more consistently presented as a buffoon and inhabits a fantastical world throughout; Maximo on the other hand, flits between the world of parable as a representative victim of necromancy and a much more naturalistic realm, particularly in the scenes where he is in debate with his step-son Cintio. In the case of Calandro, his lack of intelligence fits in well with his deficiencies in other dimensions in that he is uncultured, has no sense of loyalty to his wife or sense of etiquette in sexual matters. In contrast, Maximo's simplicity and ignorance, which is much to the fore during his meetings with the necromancer, fits ill with his appearance in the denouement where he manages to give a well-reasoned account of himself and is viewed by his listeners as a font of worldly wisdom. But, however inconsistent are the various different attitudes and behaviours of Maximo, this figure does at least change and, however deficient the story line is in adequately explaining this change, we are still left with the valid inference that Maximo's ill-judged attempt to rectify his own social humiliation (having a step-son who has failed to consummate his marriage) which almost leads to his financial ruin, has rendered Maximo at the end of the play a wiser and more compassionate individual. In contrast, Calandro does not change: he remains to the last an incorrigible buffoon in his inappropriate sexual longings and his inflated idea of his own level of sophistication; moreover he is still ridiculously in thrall to his wayward servant.

Although derived from the same source material (see p. 83 above) Calandro and Ambrogio from *L'Assiuolo* follow markedly different trajectories; the former remains a

'fixed' entity throughout the play, whereas the latter, despite possessing an unfeasibly large number of negative traits, is seen to alter in response to the fluctuating circumstances of the adulterous adventure he embarks upon. It is through a succession of encounters that the authority of Ambrogio is incrementally undermined and any ingenuity on his part is ultimately outmatched by the combined efforts of his adversaries. Ambrogio's 'journey' through the play may seem on the whole to be contrived to serve the needs of the plot, but his changing relationship with his servant Giannella has an extra patina which falls beyond mere mechanistic cause and effect. Ambrogio's initial image as an egregiously jealous, bad-tempered, avaricious, foul-mouthed individual is later softened through his interaction with his servant. Whereas in the safety of his own household Ambrogio is insufferably imperious, once embarked on his nocturnal venture well beyond the certainties he can count upon when at home, his arrogance diminishes and instead of lambasting his servant he turns to him for guidance and comfort. However, this brief show of a humbler and kindlier side to Ambrogio's nature does not translate into his receiving anything less than total humiliation in the denouement.

I shall now compare the young well-to-do male lovers from *La Calandra*, *Il Negromante* and *L'Assiuolo*. Like Calandro, Lidio is a fixed entity: a louche, supercilious and somewhat boorish figure who remains insensitive to the anxieties he provokes in his lover Fulvia. His modest demeanour in the denouement where he is reunited with his long-lost sister bears little resemblance to his former character and can be seen as a clumsy attempt by Bibbiena to mould the figure of Lidio into an ending where everyone is selfless and obliging. This is clearly a case where the exigencies of the plot ride roughshod over any consideration of character consistency. Rinuccio from *L'Assiuolo* is depicted as undergoing a similar sudden and improbable transmutation of character in the denouement. Camillo from *Il Negromante* is part caricature in his risible protestations of love for Emilia and his blind faith in the necromancer's powers, part naturalistic in his keenness to demonstrate his honourable intentions and justified desire for vengeance for the duplicity of Nebbio. The depiction of his rival-in-love, Cintio, is the most consistently naturalistic of all these young male lovers. He is first seen in dialogue with his step-father where he is able to mount an argument which successfully diverts Maximo from further investigation into his affairs; later on, he undergoes a plausible change in outlook when he first begins to doubt the necromancer's authenticity.

In *L'Assiuolo*, after subtracting the more contrived and artificial elements – the foppish inadequacy of Giulio, the almost super-human perceptiveness and resourcefulness of his servant Giorgetto and the readiness of two married females to commit adultery almost ‘by accident’ and not experience any qualms afterwards, there remains an effecting picture of how two males preserve and even strengthen their friendship through the often fraught and convoluted pursuit of illicit flesh. In *Il Negromante*, after subtracting the more improbable elements – Maximo’s extreme malleability, Cambio’s willingness to enter into a ‘sham’ marriage, Camillo’s consent to be locked in a chest and transported across town, the focus ultimately falls on the more convincing exposition of how young men will undergo all manner of frustrations, setbacks and temporary damage to their reputations in order to eventually marry their desired partners or, in the case of Cintio, be able to be above board about a previously clandestine marriage.

The two young well-to-do males from *Gli Straccioni* are given an unusually serious profile which is at its most pronounced during their long debate over whether loyalty to a supposedly deceased romantic partner should stand in the way of entering into a new partnership from which much benefit would accrue. Here the portrayal of these two is about as naturalistic as the comedy genre would permit. There is evidently a dissonance between the carefully constructed ‘real-time’ scenes here which eschew artifice or theatrical trickery and the larger adventure (set out in the *antefatti*), in which both sets of antagonists – Battista and Giovanni, Tindaro and Demetrio, behave in unrealistic ways. Moreover, Tindaro and Demetrio do not undergo any change in character during the course of the play; in fact a salient feature of their depiction is their refusal to change and their determination to withstand the challenges and onslaughts from their adversaries – *gli straccioni* and Cavaliere Giordano. Paradoxically, it is the most caricatured figure, Giordano, who does undergo a sudden volte-face in character, just after the denouement. Although this is a heavily contrived comic turn of events rather than a realistically rendered logical progression, it is just about possible to accept the idea that, having his wife and fortune restored to him, Giordano turns from an arrogant bombastic individual, full of fury and threats of vengeance, to someone placid and full of generous instincts.

I shall now look at four young females: Santilla, Giuletta, Argentina and Oretta. Although Santilla and Giuletta differ greatly in their level of maturity and cultural sophistication, the former presented as an ingénue who has limited comprehension of the ways of the world, the latter only too cognisant of the restraints that a patriarchal society imposes on her sex, both are unchanging entities as far as personal attitudes and characteristics go.<sup>465</sup> Of the above four, it is Madonna Oretta who undergoes the most change. She starts off very much under the thumb of her husband. But over the course of the play, Oretta goes from an unassertive figure, cowed into submission by her domineering husband and frustrated by the onerous restrictions he places on her, to a figure able to assert her independence and to secure the means to a fulfilling sex life.<sup>466</sup> Oretta's presentation is rather roughly assembled: she descends steeply from a lady of virtue to a lady of vice with very few intermediate stages. Initially depicted as a long-suffering victim of a brutal husband, she finishes as a debauched wanton, more concerned with preserving her reputation than in justifying her lapse in behaviour. Disregarding the more fantastic elements - the gross caricature of a brutal husband, the heavily contrived sexual pairings - of this play, a more serious conjecture can be gleaned: the possibility of a down-trodden wife being able to improve her lot, though only through bold action and blatant transgression of expected codes of behaviour.

The presentation of the two young maidens, Santilla and Giuletta provide a contrast. Compared to Giuletta's precise and measured expressions (the expressions in her letter to Tindaro are almost legalistic in tone), Santilla's sentiments are depicted with a broader brush stroke; they tend towards the melodramatic and betray an over vivid imagination characteristic of a more immature mind. This difference reinforces the idea that we are to perceive Giuletta as a true heroine and the hardship she suffers as 'real', Santilla as more of a cartoon heroine than a real one, her backstory of capture by Turkish pirates and subsequent *riscatto* by a wealthy merchant not to be taken too seriously. Even within the same play, the presentation of Giuletta contrasts with that of the other well-to-do female, Madonna Argentina. If Giuletta is only accorded a short space in which her character traits can be communicated, what does come across is a

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<sup>465</sup> Santilla does not always appear as the passive victim of others' machinations and as the face of naivety and suggestibility. As Padoan points out, she occasionally exploits her outward appearance as a male (originally imposed by her guardian as a means of protecting her) and indulges in bouts of masculine self-assertion and is seen, at one point, to actively fight for her rights (see p. 79 above).

<sup>466</sup> Unusually for *commedia erudita* a sympathetic figure such as Oretta is principally aided and abetted, not by a servant, but by a sibling.

vivid image: a loyal, long-suffering, highly principled young female with gravitas. In contrast, Madonna Argentina, who makes a similarly short appearance, is seen to express the fraught situation in which she finds herself in terser, more prosaic terms, indeed with a recognisable gloss of comic detachment.<sup>467</sup> To summarize, Giuletta's positive moral profile is enhanced by her cultural depiction, whereas Argentina's positive moral profile is undercut by her cultural profile (the former serving the more serious strand of the play, the latter its more comic elements). Argentina's construction is half-way between the manifestly cartoon figures of Giovanni/Battista and Giordano and the more naturalistic ones of Tindaro, Giuletta and Demetrio.

When comparing the interplay between three different sets of master and servant, different degrees of plausibility emerge. Fessenio very much remains the subordinate and merely interjects smart rejoinders to support Lidio's viewpoint against the censorious tutor Polinico. But his staunch loyalty to his young master is exaggerated and 'bent' to serve one of the fantastical elements of the plot; he never adopts, as would be more plausible, the role of an older, wiser man warning his very young charge against a reckless course of action. Even more distorted is Giorgetto's control over his young master, Giulio, who plays the role of a easily manoeuvrable puppet to Giorgetto's martinet. Distinct from the above two, Temolo adopts the role of an experienced teacher trying to guide and educate a pupil in the shape of the young Cintio in the ways of the world in a scene where the power balance between these two has the ring of authenticity. However, as the story progresses, Temolo's role expands into that of the main player upon which the pivotal turning point of the plot hinges. This greater originality in casting Temolo in such a role does not translate into greater verisimilitude; in fact, it runs counter to it. Moreover, Temolo, like Fessenio, undergoes little change, at least no long-lasting change. By the final scene, his function is reduced to that of a humble onlooker. Such drastic and unexplained diminution of his role serves to ultimately render Temolo a more amorphous figure, serving theatrical ends, than his initial, more limited but more concrete, incarnation might suggest.

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<sup>467</sup> 'Quanto tempo l'ho aspettato, quanto l'ho fatto cercare, quanti riscontri ho avuto de la sua morte, e nondimeno sempre sono andata a rilento di rimaritarmi [...] Dianzi ero vedova, ed ora son maritata a due e di nessun d'essi son moglie.', Caro, *Gli Straccioni* (V,1).

Satiro (from *Gli Straccioni*) and Giannella (from *L'Assiuolo*) stand at the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of degree of naturalism, Satiro being the least distorted, Giannella the most distorted. Giannella, at least in his early appearances, is a stock theatrical figure, an incompetent blockhead with violent impulses. Satiro is an unusual servant figure in that he is not depicted as scheming on behalf of his master to further his master's interests. Neither is he ascribed a superior intellect or greater erudition than his master. Satiro appears as a loyal, helpful servant, useful but not essential to his master's fortunes. In these aspects, Satiro possesses the least 'theatricality'.<sup>468</sup>

The unaltered fortune (apart from perhaps receiving a large tip for 'extra mural' services) of the servant and consistent relationship, whether friendly or hostile, between master (or mistress) and servant apply as much to females as it does to males. In this regard, Samia can be looked upon as an archetype, but when looking at the Old Nurse something more complicated can be detected. If the power play between Fulvia and Samia squarely reflects a straightforward contractual relationship between mistress and maidservant, that between the Marescalco and the Old Nurse is more complex: the balance of status of these two is considerably subsumed under the relationship, indeed a very intimate relationship, they must have had in the distant past. From the simpler authoritative master and subservient servant dynamic, the pairing of the Old Nurse with the Marescalco begins to morph into a depiction of a mother/son relationship which illuminates both the remnants of the power relationship of adult mother and dependent child that once subsisted, as well as the relationship at a much later stage (the current circumstances) between an ageing female marginalised in her usefulness and a now grown-up son who has achieved a certain status and is now recognised as a valuable member of the community. The interplay between past and present relative authority status, past and present capabilities in terms of intelligence and cultural sophistication, played across the on-going moral argument - whether the Marescalco is obliged to wed or not - renders the battle of wills between the Old Nurse and her erstwhile charge unpredictable in its outcome and gives the play as whole a frisson and a realism that is absent elsewhere.

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<sup>468</sup> This disparity no doubt arises from the contrasting objectives of the respective playwrights: Cecchi, unconcerned with verisimilitude, may have just wanted to generate some easy laughs and 'mould' Giannella to the requirements of the plot, whereas Caro, in wanting to create a more realistic hero in the figure of Tindaro, opted to pair him with a more realistic, self-effacing, servant figure.

As regards anything resembling the development of an emotional arc for a servant figure, the story line of the older maidservant Agnola comes the closest. Initially, she is completely cowed by her master Ambrogio, even to the extent of being anxious not to be seen talking in the street to two young men who are not members of her household. But by the beginning of the fifth Act, she is sufficiently assertive (though this is achieved through a shrewdly applied show of disingenuousness) to bar entry to the house of her own master. In between these two episodes is a scene where she actively helps Rinuccio, to whom she has no familial or contractual obligation, to achieve his adulterous ambitions. We may infer, though this is never explicitly indicated, that whereas Agnola was initially content to accept her subordinate position and the absolute authority of her master, once seeing how her master abused this authority and realizing that his authority could be challenged, she felt justified in joining in others' scheme to bring his errant behaviour to book.

As pertains to the typical servant, incomers or outsider figures undergo little change, although their merits and demerits at a certain stages come into sharper focus.<sup>469</sup> The Jewish pedlar (from *Il Marescalco*) comes across as an honest if a little persistent tradesman; he is an innocent caught up in a servant boy's campaign to discomfort his master, and we imagine his life carries on much as before. A slightly different picture emerges when we look at two marginalised natives. Verdiana (from *L'Assiuolo*), initially scapegoated by others as a hypocrite and scourge of the neighbourhood, is later resurrected to a small degree by the way she deals with an even more unsavoury character, the lawyer Ambrogio. Mirandola (from *Gli Straccioni*) is presented as a disruptive threat to the smooth-running affairs of the city and an irritant to those of greater standing and wealth; he is therefore viewed as a legitimate target for humiliation. If these figures experience a change in fortune (a slight elevation for Verdiana, further humiliation for Mirandola), this results not from any change of attitude or character growth of these characters but simply from the degree of competence of their respective adversaries: Ambrogio proves to be an inept haggler,

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<sup>469</sup> There is a passage where the mercenary Ruffo is seen to show genuine compassion towards his client Fulvia (Act IV, Scene 2); by contrast, in the latter stages of his story (Act IV, Scene 5), Mirandola is revealed to be vindictive as well as deluded.

whereas Rossello proves to be a skilled operator in defusing Mirandola's potential for causing chaos.

As the few brief analyses above show, not only is there a wide variation across the five plays between gross caricature and attempts at close verisimilitude, such divergence also exists within a single play. Irrespective of where they stand as a totality on the symbolic/naturalistic spectrum, certain plays are pitched evenly throughout as to their degree of realism or fantasy, whilst others contain wild variations.

The patina of fantasy is kept fairly consistent throughout *La Calandra*: even the rapidly and arbitrarily arrived at agnitions in the closing stages do not strike a too discordant note in a theatrical storyline which sets its tone from the outset, with a servant narrating the improbable history of twins separated when very young and then fetching up in the same city unbeknownst to, and unrecognised by, each other. The other play which shows a general consistency is *Il Marescalco*. Its register is much more naturalistic than that of *La Calandra*, in both its plotting, perfunctory though that may be,<sup>470</sup> and in the conversational exchanges of members of a tight-knit community; moreover, there are no jarring episodes whose tone stands out as incongruous with the rest of the piece.

The verse form of *Il Negromante* immediately removes it at least one step away from naturalism and its central satire on necromancy featuring black-hearted villains (Lachellino and Nebbio) and a pure-minded hero (Temolo) moves it another step further away. In addition, at least two characters are uneasy composites between recognisable everyday figures and artificial constructions which are designed to serve a particular didactic objective: a satire against the followers of necromancy in the case of Maximo and a satire against youthful romantic excesses in the case of Camillo. However, this play also features a much more human and compelling character - the youth Cintio, an integrated and nuanced construction whose conflict between loyalty towards his father and loyalty towards his secret lover sits as a separate, more naturalistic, strand.

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<sup>470</sup> As observed earlier, the structure of *Il Marescalco* resembles more that of medieval *contrast*i than a sequentially narrated story.



*Gli Straccioni* is the most uneven in terms of consistent level of artifice as opposed to naturalism. Even the same set of characters varies greatly in this regard. Battista and Giovanni at one point conduct a fairly long, lucid and cogent dialogue with a third party (Act I, Scene 2) but before this scene, as well as later on, they appear as a couple of buffoons who express themselves in pantomime-style comic patter. Even the sombre hero of the play, the quasi aristocratic Tindaro, given to endless pontification on the nature of love and loyalty, at one point (at the start of Act V) shouts infantile abuse at his adversary. However, notwithstanding these inconsistencies, this play, more than any of the other five, manages to present a compelling and more thoughtful insight into the lives of both the bourgeoisie, pre-occupied with matrimonial alliances, and into the lives of the underclass, pre-occupied with mere survival.

The consistent thread of *L'Assiuolo* is one of farce, starting with the utterances of a ridiculously inept and unassertive well-to-do youth, Giulio, and culminating in a deftly choreographed series of illicit night-time sexual assignations. However, alongside the comically unreal figures of the cuckolded older professional (Ambrogio) and the lascivious but insufficient youths (Giulio and Rinuccio) are two characters whose trajectory occasionally manages to rise above this risible tone into something more serious. In Madonna Oretta we glimpse a passage from total subservience to her husband to a state which confers on her considerable independence of action. In the figure of the servant Giannella, once having left the confines of the house where he is depicted as an archetypal brute and dolt, he exhibits more positive attributes: perceptiveness, compassion and moral integrity, although to prevent the appearance of some miraculous Damascene conversion from villain to hero, he still continues to display negative qualities such as cowardice and self-pity.

As the above survey illustrates, the portrayal of the majority of the stage figures of *commedia erudita* was done with fairly broad brush strokes and even those who are given a more nuanced set of attitudes and behaviours are rarely seen as having undergone genuine character development as a result of their experiences. There is also little correlation between degree of caricature and degree of character change or developmental growth, that is to say a figure constructed with cartoon-like exaggerated characteristics is just as likely to be affected by his interactions with other characters and the unfolding story line as a much more naturalistic figure; by the same token a

naturalistically portrayed figure is just as likely to remain unaltered in character, if not in fortune, as the grossest caricatured figure.<sup>471</sup>

Employing Plautine comic *rovesciamento* and Boccaccian chicanery (illicit sexual unions accomplished with improbable ease) as source material, *commedia erudita* largely presents a series of discrete and static portraits loosely hung on a heavily contrived story line. However, as can be seen above, there are occasional episodes where a character is seen to be taking part in a plausible story line and to undergo a shift in attitude or the adoption of a different behavioural tack that fits appropriately into the ebb and flow of the events he finds himself part of. There are episodes where characters escape their initially designated stereotypical template and are seen to engage in the affairs of their fictional world with more plausible as well as more varied responses. This more nuanced set of behaviours has the cumulative effect of creating stage figures with whom a typical audience member could more easily identify, or at least feel more empathy towards. When this occurs, a discernible move away from two-dimensional theatrical ‘all-purpose’ templates to three-dimensional and radically more individualized characterisation can be discerned. To extend the above analogue, it is as if the series of portraits presented in a linear sequence have become animated and move around one another in a more dynamic pattern. The reflected image, however true or however distorted, then becomes not just one in a long sequence of ‘still images’ but becomes integrated as part of a moving sequence. To extend the metaphor still further, this represents a move away from mere photography towards animated film.

However, these are occasional episodes and none of the five plays under scrutiny here manages to sustain a naturalistic bent throughout the course of its story line. Moreover, looking at the sequence of the five plays as a whole, one can infer that there was no concerted drive on the part of these playwrights to move away from symbolic towards more naturalistic theatre productions.<sup>472</sup> However, a move toward

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<sup>471</sup> Just to take one example, Tindaro from *Gli Straccioni* who, of all the twenty-five figures under scrutiny, is seen to exhibit the least caricatured demeanour and one who partakes in the most naturalistic sets of dialogue; nevertheless at the end of the play he indulges in no soul-searching as to his past behaviour but is merely pleased to have recovered his lost love and see an increase in his material wealth.

<sup>472</sup> The latest play in this survey *L'Assiuolo* has just as much a contrived ending as the first play chronologically speaking - *La Calandra*. Indeed drastic moulding of certain characters to fit the needs of the plot in the denouement is even more extreme in *L'Assiuolo* than it is in *La Calandra*.

greater 'realism' is clearly discernible,<sup>473</sup> as is evidenced by the development from the mechanistically plotted *La Calandra*, where character consistency or character development is subsumed under considerations of plot, to *Gli Straccioni* (of thirty years later) which, although not altogether dispensing with artificial elements, nevertheless manages to impart the idea of characters undergoing attitudinal changes in response to their changed circumstances and, moreover, provide 'psychological' insight, in this case into the pain of lost love and the pain of an impoverished life.

If in *commedia erudita* there appears, whether deliberately or unwittingly by the playwright, a move, however falteringly, away from crude farce, melodrama or extended satire to theatre more mimetic of outside life this trend was not sustained, at least not in the medium term. Indeed, it was reversed in the latter half of the century as the new theatrical genre *commedia dell'arte* gained popularity and largely replaced *commedia erudita*. *Commedia dell'arte* was a deliberate reverting back to two-dimension (one-dimensional might be more apt) construction of theatrical figures; a cast of a small, fixed number of specified figures imposed further limits on any possible scope of developing new and innovative scenarios.<sup>474</sup> It took another 150 years with the arrival of Goldoni to build upon the fledgling innovations of *commedia erudita*.

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<sup>473</sup> It is only later in the century when writers such as Piccolomini began to organise their thoughts upon theatre and compile these into treatises that any discussion of concepts akin to realism or naturalism began to be entered into. Earlier, is it unlikely that even the most illustrious theatre practitioner of the age, Ariosto, would have thought in such terms when drafting his comedies.

<sup>474</sup> The intention to present types rather than individuals was further concretised by the adoption of the same standard mask for each specific stage type.

## CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters comprise an extensive and systematic set of analyses into how the superiority or inferiority of stage characters are arrived at, not, as a superficial reading of *commedia erudita* might suggest, merely by noting how the astute gain ascendancy over the foolish, but by extending the field of observation to encompass other dimensions through which the overall 'worth' of a stage character can be gauged. Apart from intelligence (the criterion most commonly used by previous commentators to identify shifts in status), I have looked at stage characters through three additional criteria: degree of nominal authority, moral superiority or inferiority and level of cultural sophistication. The first of these I have denoted as the default status of a character: in terms of the metaphor of the mirror, it is the dimension that is most akin to a flat, undistorted, mirror surface, closely reflecting real life as it is lived. It is through the three other dimensions that greater distortion of that initial reflection of real life can be observed. Such distortions primarily serve to generate comedy but, beneath that overtly intentional aim, one can glean less heavily signalled messages through which certain categories of individuals and certain types of behaviour are held up for scrutiny and verdicts as to their desirability or undesirability adduced.

I draw the following general inferences. Action through the intelligence dimension is the major way of upturning the status quo, the pairing of a dim-witted master with an astute servant being a standard trope. Action judged through the dimension of morality is split between depicting immoral behaviour as meriting no punishment or even being worthy of reward, and its opposite, as meriting the most abject social humiliation, although the balance veers towards the former outcome. Both these are escapist fantasies: the first concerns in the main well-to-do youths rapidly (within the space of a day and night) gaining sexual satisfaction, or at least the promise of it; the second concerns middle-aged male professionals having their adulterous ambitions discovered and broadcast, to their abject humiliation. Action through the cultural dimension is also split into two opposing directions which is particularly noticeable in the servant class. Greater cultural sophistication in terms of scholarly references and more erudite use of language is accorded to the servant figure to augment his superior intellect but, conversely, his greater propensity to use vulgar language and adhere to more lax sexual mores tends to undercut any claims to an

overall superiority. More broadly, for the lower ranks impressions rendered through the cultural dimension tend to counter any enhanced status generated through their greater intellectual capacity, although this same equation is also valid for certain male figures of higher rank.

Another discovery that the foregoing investigation has uncovered is what I term ‘the democracy of the street’: an equation that posits that the further away the action is (by way of suggestion and illusion as well as by the actual physical dimensions of the stage) from the abode of the high-ranked principal(s), the greater the erosion of his authority, to be replaced by more meritocratic values, evidenced through the prism of the three other dimensions, which facilitate the enhancement of the status of his socially inferior interlocutor. In terms of the mirror metaphor, the greater the distance from the principal’s dwelling, the greater is the distortion of the surface of the mirror. However, even if for extended intervals this ‘redistribution of power’ reaches a high degree of fantasy or even grotesqueness, by the close of the story, the surface of the ‘mirror’ reverts back to more or less its original, undistorted, flat plane.

Much of *commedia erudita* can be viewed as an elaboration of the *rovesciamento* of carnival and long-established, more plebeian forms of theatre where the lower orders, for a brief interlude, gain ascendancy over those who normally exercise control over them. However, beyond this light-hearted mischief, I detect additional, more serious, ‘messages’, some overt, others less easily identified as conscious intentions of the playwright. In the first category is the notion, long embedded in certain types of literature, most notably medieval *novelle*, that in sexual partnerships nature should have a greater sway over outcomes: the young and virile male should be allowed to pair up with young fertile females and override a social order whereby an older male by virtue of his greater economic resources and professional status is ‘unfairly’ awarded the pick of nubile females. Such wish fulfilments are given greater justification by attributing negative traits to the older male, whilst the young male, however naïve, inept or pretentious in speech he may be, is presented as likeable.

Outside this narrow focus, I detect a more general theme, which I infer is not to be perceived as a deliberately encoded ‘message’ in these plays, rather an unwitting by-product: a tentative suggestion of a redistribution of power. If the authority dimension

dictates that characters' room to assert themselves be confined within fairly narrow lines (there is never a suggestion that masters and servants should swap roles permanently or that servants should earn more) it is through other dimensions, those of morality, intelligence and the cultural, that I detect this wish fulfilment more strongly. There is a dominant trope of a lower-ranked but more intelligent character gaining ascendancy over a higher ranked but less intelligent character. This is often so pervasive that it overrides moral considerations, whereby bad behaviour is only punished if it is twinned with stupidity and ignorance; bad or devious behaviour if combined with shrewdness and superior manners goes unpunished or is even rewarded. I sense a protest, however obliquely expressed, against a society in which those with the least ability, in terms of rank, to govern affairs are often wiser and more articulate than those who have been entrusted with the responsibility to carry out this role; and a wish for a diminution of prestige for those who lack intelligence but who have acquired status by accident of birth or by bogus or hollow academic achievement. However, this theme is never unambiguously spelt out: indeed, often in the episodes where the lower-ranked figure manages to dominate the higher-ranked figure or at least appear wholly more rational and dignified, there are included minor aspects of the lower-ranked male's behaviour - a short-term outlook, coarse speech, or disparagement of female sensitivities, which tend to militate against any claims to overall superiority. Thus, if there are any deliberately embedded calls for a revolutionary shake-up of the existing social order, they are heavily attenuated. However, referring back to the four-line verse on the opening page of this thesis, if the rich man is still secure in his castle and the poor man is largely confined to his gate, there is nevertheless a residual suggestion that jurisdiction of the no-man's land in between these two is now up for negotiation and is no longer the automatic prerogative of the rich and powerful.

The above perceptions emerge more strongly when one examines how male characters behave. When looking solely at females figures, a different picture emerges. Culturally, the class divide between high-ranked females and low-ranked females is exaggerated rather than upturned, as is often the case with males. High-ranked females are portrayed as highly articulate; they express themselves with eloquence as well as with grammatical correctness, whereas female servants are commonly presented as ignorant (even illiterate), gossipy and highly superstitious. Female characters from all ranks are accorded a disproportionate degree of moral probity in comparison to male

counterparts. In particular, the female servant, whatever her deficiencies regarding intelligence and level of education, is generally more altruistic and deals more plainly with others than the typical male servant who, though ultimately serving the interests of his (young) male master, is depicted as duplicitous and manipulative. High-ranked females are depicted across a broad spectrum in terms of intelligence, some as egregiously gullible, others as eminently rational and highly perceptive. Lower-ranked females fall into a narrower band, tending towards the naïve and rarely demonstrating acuity or deep insightfulness. Female servants are not accorded nearly the same degree of astuteness as the general run of male servants.

In terms of degree of verisimilitude, there is also a marked gender divide. Male characters are constructed with a considerable degree of distortion from reality, female characters less so; male characters as theatrical devices, to serve the exigencies of the plot, female figures as more of an attempt, deliberately or accidentally, at verisimilitude (admittedly, there is still an element of distortion: a tendency to render lower-class females as less intelligent than their male counterparts, upper-class females as more virtuous than their male equivalents).

No doubt never a conscious design by *commedia erudita* playwrights but their plays seem to be made up of two opposing hemi-spheres to make a whole globe. One half is largely peopled by men among whom there are frequent exchanges of roles, where masters become puppets of their martinet servants, the professional man is humiliated at the hands of humbler man, or the scholarly, sophisticated man is made to look absurd by the man of plain speech. These distortions are often added factors of a story-line which overturns conventional morality and where a counter-intuitive allocation of intelligence and cultural sophistication occurs. The other half of this globe is a complementary female world where roles are maintained rather than overturned, mistresses are seen to be wiser and better educated than their maidservants, young well-to-do females meekly obey their parents rather than rebel or scheme against them. It upholds rather than challenges the status quo. Thus *commedia erudita*, as distinct from recognisably agit-prop theatre, hedges its bets. For every impetus, mainly originating from male figures, potentially destabilising of the social foundations of society, there is a countervailing impetus, mainly originating from females, to shore up those foundations. Thus, contrary to expectations in such a climate of pervasive, indeed

institutionalized, misogyny, there is a message, no doubt unwitting, embedded in these plays that women represent the solid reliable heart of social life, while males represent an untamed, potentially destructive, force that threatens that stability.<sup>475</sup> (Using the mirror metaphor, this is a case of a dominant notion in the outside world being refracted into an inverted image on stage.)

The degree to which any revolutionary notion is initially posited and the degree to which any such suggestion is quickly diluted or negated altogether springs, we can infer, from two considerations. First, a theatrical one in which writers of *commedia erudita* were obliged to adhere to certain prescripts, principally to depict a happy ending and the re-establishment of the status quo by the final curtain. (The only deviation from this, if it can be even termed as such, which an audience would find right and proper, is the notion that authority and property eventually has to be passed from one generation to the next.) Second, a social one: to please rather than antagonise the prospective audience who, though no doubt open to innovation, would not take too kindly, particularly under the label of comedy, to anything too troubling or thought-provoking.<sup>476</sup> However much social inversion occurs during the course of the play, the denouement must be reassuring: that every character, apart from the egregiously stupid or egregiously wicked regains his prior position and composure. Only those figures constructed with exaggerated negative traits with whom the audience members would not identify with but regard as exemplars of a particular vice, in a theatrical fantasy at least one remove from their every-day lives, are allowed to remain 'unresurrected'. Other stage figures with less exaggerated negative traits may induce a degree of recognition, if not in themselves, then at least among some of their neighbours, and form an acceptable strand of didactic instruction.

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<sup>475</sup> Louise Clubb, analysing the behaviour of the heroine in Pollastra's *Parthenio* in a recent publication reaches a verdict which parallels this finding: 'men [...] are capricious, inconstant, credulous, concupiscent, rash and selfish; Galicella alone is presented as faithful, persistent, wise and patient enough to leave things to time...', *Pollastra and the Origins of Twelfth Night: Parthenio, Commedia (1516) with an English Translation* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010), p. 33.

<sup>476</sup> They would, in most cases, have to please another party; the patron. This would generally be the prince, members of his immediate family, or members of the oligarchy that ruled the state. The two playwrights of this epoch who appear less mindful of this consideration are Aretino and Ruzzante but even they were generally conscious of not including sentiments which could antagonise present and potential sponsors of their plays; indeed, in the case of Aretino, he seems to have purposely included passages of gratuitous flattery.



I shall end this section with a summary of what I consider to be, from this current study, original insights into or fresh ways of looking at *commedia erudita*. By subjecting individual stage characters and plays as a whole to an extensive set of investigations using the above four dimensions as analytical tools, I have identified, in a more comprehensive way than has hitherto been undertaken, an accumulative set of behaviours, either operating complementarily or in opposition, that make up the superiority or inferiority of a character, both in the eyes of other characters and those of the audience (or reader). I have identified passages where Borsellino's description of *commedia erudita* as a parade of 'types' seems inadequate, where the individual character is depicted as more than an immutable set of broad-brush characteristics but has been invested with a more complex make-up and, more crucially, is seen to modify his behaviour in response to the various vicissitudes he undergoes.<sup>477</sup> More tentatively, I have entered into speculation as to how the spatial arrangement of characters on stage might throw light onto how authority operates in the real world, how authority waxes and wanes according to location, near or far away from the principal male's residence.

For future research, the analytical framework of these four discrete dimensions could be applied to other plays, tragedy as well as comedy, produced in sixteenth-century Italy, and then to theatrical output of other epochs and from other countries. However, I suspect that certain epochs in particular countries would not be so susceptible to this type of analysis; for example, Shakespearean theatre at the time of Shakespeare where the quasi-feudal hierarchical structure of English society was solidly implanted; by contrast, current or recent theatre from modern-day Europe, where the social milieu more closely resembles that of Italian bourgeois society of the sixteenth century, would lend itself readily to the analytical methods employed in the above thesis. For a more narrow study, my brief investigation into how the spatial arrangement of characters on stage may have paralleled their changing status as inferred from the written dialogue could be extended into covering other theatrical texts of that period, both comedy and tragedy.

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<sup>477</sup> Louise Clubb finds similar verdicts in two of her fellow critics commentating on the Sieneese play *Gl'ingannati*: 'Salingar [...] hails Lelia as the first romantic heroine on the Renaissance stage and sees in *Ingannati* a pre-Shakespearean stirring of psychological movement. The power of this perception is tested and given purpose by Karen Newman's exploration of the emotional depths of *Ingannati*, where thematic and rhetorical conventions of *commedia erudita* were growing beyond intrigue or complicated farce and producing instruments for theatrically representing distinct identities and the acquisition of self-knowledge.', Clubb, *Pollastra...*, p. 55.

Most of the foregoing has focussed on **how** characters are constructed and presented. I shall now spend this final section trying to answer the question **why** such characters are presented in the way they are. The answers to such a question can be divided into two: those that stem more directly from the playwright's own intentions and predilections and those that stem more from the political and cultural milieu in which he was obliged to operate, although these two cannot be neatly separated.

We can infer that the playwright's main aim was to provoke laughter, an obvious reason but strangely minimized, or even overlooked altogether, by certain past commentators, such as Baratto and Gunsberg who have their own particular perspectives. As Richard Andrews points out, such intent can be divided into two broad, mutually exclusive, categories: the laughter of admiration where the audience is invited to admire a character's wit or ingenuity, as opposed to the laughter of condemnation where the audience is invited to look down upon a character's folly, gullibility or pretentiousness.<sup>478</sup> This division would obviously enter into assessments of whether the status of a character is enhanced or damaged. Beyond the more narrow aim of provoking laughter would be a desire to experiment with theatrical forms. There was an increasing propensity to bring plots and characters from *novelle* of previous centuries, embellish them and re-present as stage dramas, albeit within classical play structures and neo-Aristotilean precepts; and to experiment with theatrical literary forms: between prose and verse (and different kinds of verse), between standard (Tuscan) and regional lexicon.

One of the obvious motives (applicable to all creators of fiction throughout the ages) behind the writing and staging of *commedia erudita* was the desire of the playwright to garner recognition and admiration from others. However, the particular circumstances of northern and central Italy in the sixteenth century conditioned the individual's striving for recognition to run alongside of, or even be subsumed under, a collective will.<sup>479</sup> In the absence of stable political hegemony, the autonomous city

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<sup>478</sup> See Andrews, *Scripts and Scenarios*, pp. 10-18.

<sup>479</sup> In recent times, the nearest equivalent to that would be, for example, the pressure put upon the composer Shostakovich by Stalin to produce a work of art adhering to his (Stalin's) view of 'correct' State ideology. However, that is not to imply that there was any such degree of coercion between ruler

states were keen to promote their native literary and theatrical output as superior to, or at least on a par with, those of their neighbours. Thus the playwright, rather than trying to sell his product on the open market, became part of the state machinery to promote its cultural wares.<sup>480</sup> It is reasonable to assume that a playwright, of whatever epoch or whatever geographical location, would be concerned both with the immediate reception of his creation in front of a live audience but also with one eye on posterity: whether his fame was likely to outlast his death. The balance between these two considerations also bears on the division between those who saw theatre as exclusively an ephemeral activity, concerned with entertaining a particular audience at a particular location and those who saw stage presentations as the ‘first draft’ of a lasting literary artefact.<sup>481</sup> (Outside the particular playwright’s intentions, later commentators have the added advantage of being able to evaluate a work of art through a historical perspective. If a work of art is deemed to have merit through its ability to reflect contemporary social currents, then it has double merit if it also manages to capture future trends. It is my judgment that *commedia erudita*, alongside ‘serious’ treatises, has, however unintentionally, identified, and indeed prefigured, a shift from an entrenched aristocratic and plutocratic society to the more meritocratic one that evolved in subsequent centuries.)

Intricately tied in with these considerations were the competing claims of linguistic legitimacy. Latin from the time of Dante and Petrarch had been receding as the automatic *lingua franca*. By the start of the sixteenth century, the question of which dialect of the Italian peninsula should replace it became more critical and, despite edicts from such scholars as Pietro Bembo, remained unresolved during the period under study here. If part of the choice of language derived from wider political or cultural concerns, another part lay in more narrow artistic concerns: whether the playwright was endeavouring to produce ‘high art’ intended for a wide contemporary audience and with

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and artist in the Italian Renaissance (say between the Estense and Ariosto), but rather to imply that the artist in the Renaissance rarely worked independently but as part of a corporate State enterprise.

<sup>480</sup> The playwright as propagandist for the State has been extensively considered by Baratto in *La Commedia del Cinquecento*, and by Zorzi in *Il Teatro e la Città*.

<sup>481</sup> The balance of these two considerations would, naturally, vary between one playwright and another. The fact that Ariosto produced works of literature (most notably his epic *Orlando Furioso*) and that he composed his third play *Il Negromante*, as well as redrafting his first two plays, in verse suggest that he had a particular concern for his ‘long-term’ reputation. By contrast, Aretino’s more roughly crafted plays and his propensity to expound his ideas in numerous epistles rather than in one long tome suggest that he was more concerned with the here and now. (Interestingly, historians note that Shakespeare considered that his reputation would rest upon his poetry rather than any of his large canon of plays.)

an eye to posterity (by way of printed text), or a more ephemeral product, tailored to appeal to particular audiences for specific stagings.

A more self-conscious aim of erudite comedy was to potentially help identify an 'in-group' towards whom respect, admiration and considerable indulgence should be accorded, notwithstanding quite serious moral lapses, and an 'out-group', to whom stricter scrutiny should be applied and any misdemeanour committed by them roundly condemned. Surprisingly, little innate prejudice against foreigners and outsiders comes across in these plays and, on the rare occasions they do surface, such prejudice comes from the mouths of low-ranked figures.<sup>482</sup> Rather than any wide or deeply expressed dislike of a character because of his origins, overwhelmingly condemnatory satire is directed towards bad behaviour, though such condemnation is inconsistent: on the whole pardoning wrong-doing by the young and attractive, while excoriating not just the wrongs committed but wrongs merely planned by the less attractive, older male. That, commonly, pillars of the local community are cast in this latter role rather than an outsider or foreign interloper suggests that sixteenth-century Italian bourgeois society was less prejudiced than one might have imagined. One can speculate that the fragmented geo-political circumstances of the Italian peninsula at this time, with no large unified nation towards which the citizen could feel loyal or patriotic, helped promote a milieu in which the citizen's loyalty extended no further than his home town, from which circumstance any innate prejudices or sense of superiority could just as well be aimed at a citizen from a neighbouring town than a visitor from a thousand miles across the sea; conversely, kindness and hospitality might more readily be extended to an individual from a foreign country than to a near neighbour.

Thus in broad terms the central overt motive behind the writing and staging of erudite comedy was to tell an entertaining story with laughter-provoking episodes with a deliberate emphasis on attractive, virile young male outmanoeuvring the older, professionally established male. But beyond these readily gleaned intentions, I discern covert forces at play, not necessarily experienced by the playwright at a conscious level, but rather with the playwright acting as a conduit through which certain ills of

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<sup>482</sup> A modern equivalent of this would be the BBC's Sixties situation comedy *Till Death Do Us Part*, in which the plebeian Alf Garnett voices racial prejudice, to the ridicule of other, more cultivated, characters.

contemporary society are illuminated and possible remedies hinted at.<sup>483</sup> However, at a more visible level, *commedia erudita*, whilst raising a passing concern at the absence of meritocratic values in the real world, nevertheless gives an ultimate seal of approval to the existing order. After all, in the denouement of these plays, heads of household remain heads of household, servants remain servants, marriage is undertaken which preserves the transference of wealth and authority within the same ruling class.

The period which this investigation covers was also a golden age of portraiture, where princes, noblemen and high-ranked soldiers were often the subject of renowned artists of the time.<sup>484</sup> The tendency was not to present them with ‘warts and all’ but to produce an idealised image of the individual, emphasising, in the case of a male, his nobility, strength and resolution, in the case of a female, her grace and beauty. If such portraiture ‘bent’ the mirror to reflect the finer qualities of human nature, it could be said that *commedia erudita* bent the mirror in the opposite direction: to throw light on, to use De Sanctis’s phrase, on humanity’s *lato negativo* – humanity as its most vain, venal, and credulous. However, it would be unfair to characterize Italian erudite comedy’s entire output as positing such a cynical view: plucky enterprise, courage and self-sacrifice occasionally surface among a morass of base and self-serving behaviour.

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<sup>483</sup> Much of Yael Manes’ *Motherhood and Patriarchal Masculinities in Sixteenth-Century Italian Comedy* is devoted to uncovering, beneath the comic intent, a critique, albeit unintentional, of the failure of that society to live up to its own ideals of fatherhood and motherhood.

<sup>484</sup> For example, Sebastiano del Piombo rendered a portrait of Andrea Doria depicting him at his most imperious. (At the time of the portrait, Doria had just been promoted to Admiral prior to the invasion of German forces under Charles V in 1527.)

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