

# HARLEQUIN ON THE MOON

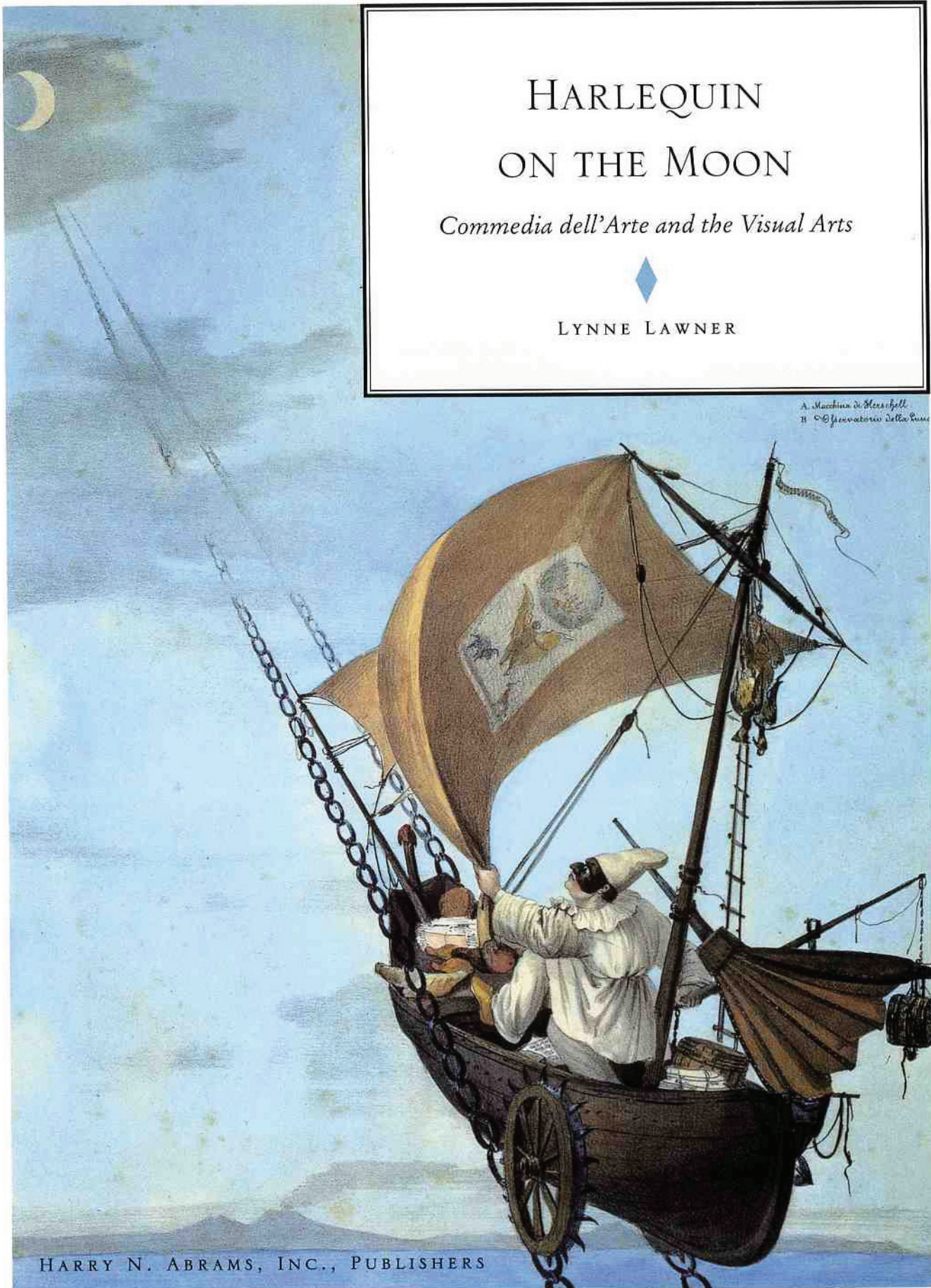
*Commedia dell'Arte and the Visual Arts*



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## Part 2

# COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE AND THE VISUAL ARTS

**H**ARLEQUIN, PULCINELLA, COLUMBINE, and their friends left a strong imprint not only on theater, but on the visual arts. No other form of performance (except perhaps ballet) has been so extensively recorded in paintings, prints, and drawings, or so lovingly. Indeed, commedia has been present in painting since its first appearance onstage. A rich, varied iconography documents and accompanies its development from the Renaissance through successive waves of Classicism, Romanticism, Symbolism, and other avant gardes. To look at this parade of marvelous images—old and recent, famous and obscure—is to discover the very heart and spirit of a style, an age, a way of looking at the world. Artists saw from the first moment that commedia dell'arte was both unique and universal, and have been responding ever since to its allure.

Artists began by attempting to capture the picturesqueness, vivacity, and rapidity of Italian comedy. In Italy they sketched the streets and city squares that were its first stages and the enthusiastic crowds that thronged to be entertained. At this initial moment, commedia dell'arte could easily be conflated with Carnival, the public market, and the fair. To artists it represented the vernacular, folklore, and popular life, in company with street performers, charlatans, jugglers, acrobats, and bearbaiters.<sup>18</sup>

As we have noted, the scenarios for early commedia performances were primitive plot outlines and character sketches. Evidently these handwritten texts were highly valued by the companies that used them; an unidentified Italian artist of the late sixteenth century took the time to illustrate an anthology of scenarios with about one hundred pleasant, whimsical watercolors, one of which

◆ *Anonymous, The Lunch, oil on canvas, 24 3/8 x 19 1/4" (62 x 50 cm), eighteenth century. Museo di Casa Goldoni, Venice. Seated at dinner are Pantaloon, Harlequin, the Captain, a gentleman, and two women. Probably these are actors onstage; the setting is theatrically grand.*



# IL GRAN MAGO

◆ *Anonymous, manuscript illustration in Raccolta di Scenari più scelti d'istrioni, watercolor on paper, late sixteenth century. Codex 652.45.C.6. Biblioteca Corsini, Accademia dei Lincei, Rome. This is a scene from The Great Magician, a scenario that shares with Shakespeare's Tempest a shipwreck and arrival on an enchanted shore.*



is reproduced here. What a startling leap from this simple, childlike image to the full-blown, realistic group scene by a painter of the eighteenth-century Venetian school that hangs in the Casa Goldoni in Venice (page 102).

In the century or so bridging the watercolor and the painting many important artworks illustrating commedia dell'arte were created. Because of the itinerant character of the phenomenon, some of the earliest and most enchanting representations were produced in places outside of Italy, such as Germany, France, and Bohemia. Among the most splendid from the sixteenth century are a cycle of frescoes dedicated to Italian comedy in the Bavarian castle of Trausnitz, near Landshut. These paintings covered the walls of several salons and rose up the so-called Stairway of Fools, illustrating scene after scene of commedia scheming, plotting, and foolery. The staircase images still exist—*Pantaloone and Zanni Serenading* and *Zanni Carrying Gifts to a Courtesan* (page 106) are two sections—but most of the others were destroyed by a fire in 1961.



Northern European theater and art interpreted *commedia dell'arte* in their own way: Hanswurst, the South German and Austrian equivalent of Pulcinella, is a misfit but, like certain Italian *zanni*, tends to tell the truth and can sometimes resolve difficult situations. Like them, too, he is a glutton. The North German version of Pulcinella is Kasperle, who, in keeping with his role in Carnival jollity, wears chains of sausages and other goodies.<sup>19</sup>

In the castle of Bergheim near Aschach, Austria, there once hung an eighteenth-century oil painting showing Hanswurst, Harlequin, Pierrot, and Scaramouche sitting around a table while Columbine plays the guitar. Such paintings are the vestiges of court entertainments of the time. Count Auersperg of Bergheim once staged the marriage of Harlequin in a ceremony involving six sleighs carrying thirty young men dressed as Harlequins, bearing trumpets. Nobles of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in this period wore *commedia dell'arte* costumes and masks at dances, a custom that at various points was forbidden by local governments because it was thought to lead to licentiousness. Artists, particularly in eastern Europe, often played on an amusing reversal of situation, depicting *commedia* actors as spectators rather than spectacle: in an eighteenth-century print Harlequin and Hanswurst, with some friends, have mounted a wall in order to watch and laugh at nobles engaging in Baroque dancing.

◆ *Anonymous, Pantaloon, Pierrot, Scapino, and Harlequin, Accompanied by Hanswurst, Watch Baroque Dancing, colored engraving, 5 1/8 x 7 1/8" (13 x 18 cm), eighteenth century. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. These aristocratic dancers wear absurdly tall headdresses, a caricature of the imported French fontange style. Even the elderly, doddering couples seated with crutches and canes wear them. The northern and southern European *commedia* are both represented: at left are Hanswurst (on a ladder) and the folk character Knofel Moferele; at right are Harlequin (on the other ladder), Pierrot, and Pantaloon. All observe the cavortings of the upper class at play with astonishment. A related rhyme in Latin and German remarks wryly: "Here we see Pantaloon, Pierrot, Scapino, Knofel Moferele, Hanswurst, and Harlequin, who learn by observing the world of the court how to perform in such a way that the nobles will recognize themselves."*





◆ *Alessandro Scalzi, Pantaloone and Zanni Serenading and Zanni Carrying Gifts to a Courtesan, two details of the Staircase of Fools, fresco, 1576. Trausnitz Castle, Bavaria. These lifesize figures are meant to follow us as we go up and down the stairs, which spiral around a central shaft that once housed a mechanical elevator that brought dishes to the dining room from the kitchen below.*

The castle belonged to William V of Bavaria, heir to the throne of Landshut, who celebrated his wedding to Renata von Lothringen in 1568 with an Italian comedy performed by local musicians and amateur actors. The plot involved three men—Pantaloone, a zanni, and a Spanish Captain—in love with a courtesan named Camilla. After the wedding, which was celebrated lavishly for three weeks, William lived in splendor at Trausnitz for well over ten years. Court life was conceived theatrically, as a production: he built an Italianate annex to the castle, arcades and pleasure gardens, and a zoo for wild animals, while collecting around him painters, sculptors, musicians, actors, and goldsmiths. His artistic director was Frederick Sustris, who had studied with Giorgio Vasari in Florence. Reluctantly disbanding his little academy in a moment of financial crisis, the prince commemorated past happy occasions by filling his castle with frescoed Pantaloons and zanni.

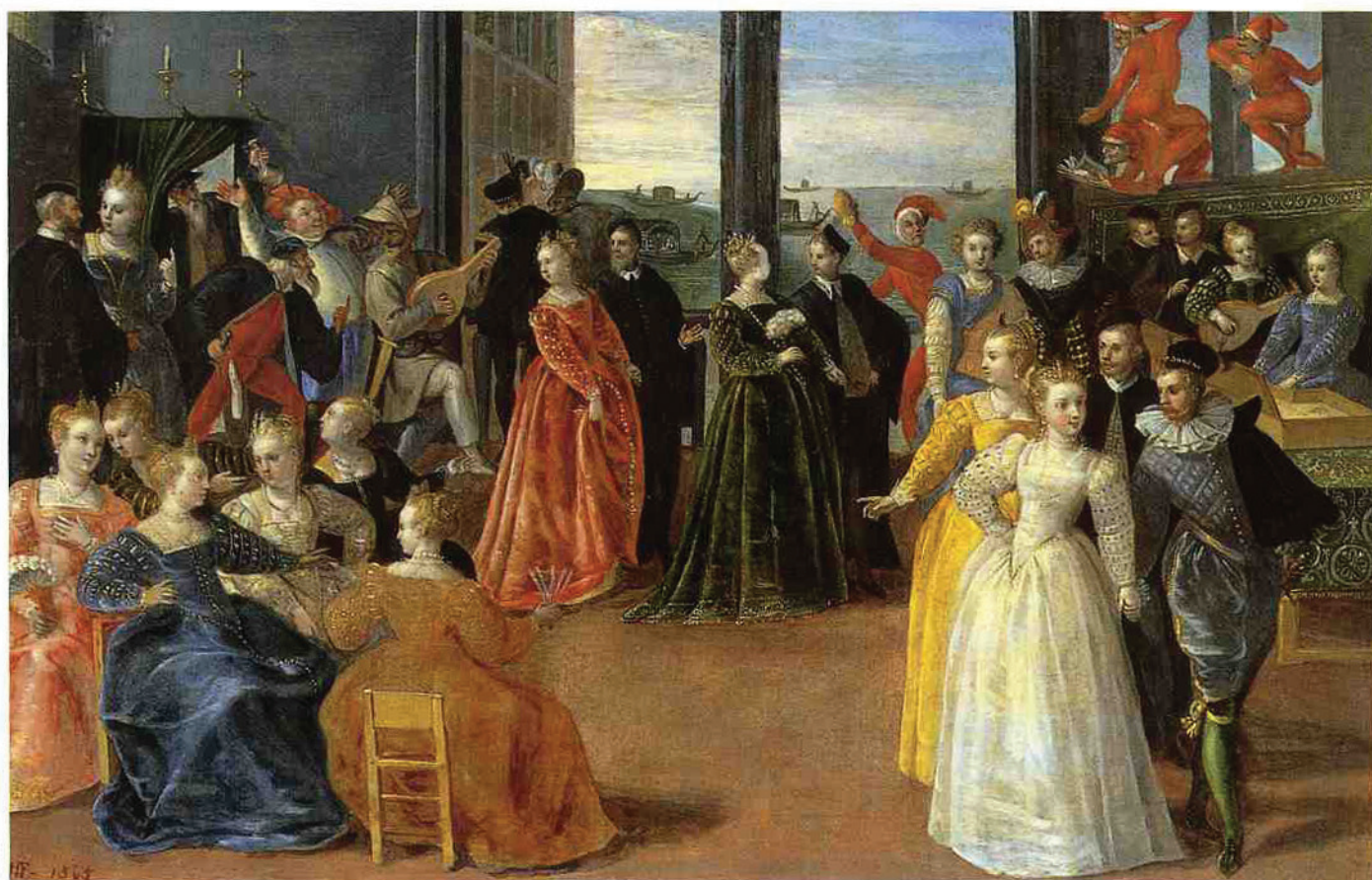


◆ *Opposite above: Jerom Francken, Venetian Carnival, oil on panel, 16 1/2 x 25 1/2" (42 x 65 cm), 1565. Suermondt-Ludwig Museum, Aachen. This is quite a gala event: elegant ladies and gentlemen dance, chat, and play musical instruments—lute and clavichord—while devilish-looking jesters in red suits and hoods caper on a coffer at right. At left a play appears to be in progress: a masked Pantaloone addresses a zanni playing guitar, an unmasked Mezzetino type stands between them, and a bearded servant pushes past a green velvet curtain, waving a flask. Note the slashed sleeves (two contrasting layers of precious materials) and the fashionable double-horn hairstyles of the Venetian ladies.*



◆ *Opposite below: Attributed to François Bunel the Younger, Characters of the Italian Comedy, oil on canvas, 46 1/8 x 67 1/8" (118.3 x 170.5 cm), c. 1587. Musée des Beaux Arts, Beziers. Eight personages are vividly portrayed: the wilder characters are at left, the more dignified ones at right. A courtesan acts as go-between for the Lovers, passing a secret note. (Male actors playing such women's parts wore falsies, but this is clearly an actress.) There are plenty of courtesans in commedia, lending an incisive presence with their spicy speech.*







Much earlier, Flemish artists who traveled to Italy and who excelled in genre scenes (see page 107) applied their talents to Italian comedy. *Venetian Carnival*, by Jerom Francken (1540–1610), offers a rare, astonishing glimpse of an interior where alongside musicians and dancers Italian masks perform for nobles at a private party. Gondolas on a canal, seen through the open window, assure us that we are in Venice. A more intimate look at actors is provided in a group portrait possibly inspired by a real performance. Unmasked Lovers flank a bare-breasted woman, most likely playing a courtesan—a key figure in the ancient Roman comedies of Plautus and Terence. Behind the back of the philandering Pantaloon, dressed in his characteristic black-and-red costume, a servant mocks him, making the cuckold sign.

When the queen of France, Catherine de' Medici, invited the Gelosi troupe to the court at Blois in 1577 (they later made a home in Paris at the Salle du Petit-Bourbon), the costumes and atmosphere of Italian comedy became all the rage, influencing art and fashion. A remarkable body of French paintings, drawings, and prints took inspiration from this new theatrical phenomenon in the next century. The quantity and quality of the work suggest the tremendous impact Italian comedy had on the educated public and the French theater, as well as on the courts of Henry IV, Louis XIII, Louis XIV, and Louis XV.

One of the earliest French artists thus inspired was Jacques Callot (1592?–1635), whose drawings, made into series of prints, were widely disseminated and imitated. His work often had political or satirical undertones. One series presents single commedia dell'arte figures on an outdoor stage that stands symbolically at the very center of public life. In another, titled *Balli di Sfessania*, or *The Asinine Dances*, highly stylized, bizarrely dressed figures engage, two by two, in vivacious, occasionally obscene actions, war and love predominating. Callot's sharply mocking images draw on the Carnival tradition exemplified by Flemish paintings of *The Combat between Carnival and Lent*, in which an early form of commedia masks may be seen (see page 110). Callot's lively, calligraphic dancing figures are given bright coloring in some seventeenth-century Bolognese paintings: *Captain Babbeo and Captain Cucuba* and *Captain Spezzamonte and Zanni Bagattino*. In the eighteenth century his graphic work influenced the Italian father and son Giambattista and Giandomenico Tiepolo (see pages 81, 137–42).

Since the late Middle Ages inexpensive prints had been a popular art form: series on the Virtues and Vices and other such themes were often executed as woodcuts or, later, as engravings or etchings. By the Renaissance the subjects were often secular: street criers, artisans at their trades, and other genres. Italian comedy, with its fixed types, costumes, and masks, invited a similar treatment.





◆ Jacques Callot, Franca Trippa and Fritellino, Riciulina and Metzetin, Fra[n]cischina and Gian Farina, three scenes from a series of twenty-four engravings entitled *The Asinine Dances, or Dances of Idiocy*, each 3 x 3 1/4" (7.3 x 9.3 cm), 1622. Biblioteca Burcardo, Rome. In general Callot's costumes are not taken to be entirely authentic; nevertheless, the theatrical gestures and extravagant dress he describes became the basis for scores of subsequent popular depictions of Italian comic actors. Nor has his influence abated: the contemporary Neapolitan mask maker Giancarlo Santelli recently created twenty-four extraordinary leather masks for the theater using Callot's drawings, some of them quite frightening.

Names of commedia characters often embody their essence and sprightly energy: Riciulina is Curly-head; Gian Farina is Johnny Flour (for his white makeup); Franca-Trippa is, of course, Frank Tripe; and Fritellino simply means Small Fry, as in a little fried sweet. Here couples enact fixed commedia poses: dancing, courting, playing a tambour, exhibiting skill with a sword, and performing a curious duel between a swordsman and a guitarist. All of the men are highly grotesque, while the women are somewhat idealized. Backgrounds show Harlequins and tumblers, soldiers, courting couples, and quarrelers, in vignettes that may be stage scenes or real life.



◆ Workshop of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Combat between Carnival and Lent*, oil on panel, 14 3/8 x 25" (36.5 x 63.5 cm), mid-sixteenth century. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Seth K. Sweetser Fund, Abbot Lawrence Fund, Ernest Wadsworth Longfellow Fund, Warren Collection, and Julia Cheney Edwards Collection. Bruegel painted a large

allegory of Carnival and Lent in 1559, at around the time when *commedia dell'arte* was emerging as a popular form of street theater. This small sketch from his workshop shows, at left, figures of Carnival with *commedia*-type masks confronting the dour figures of Lent at right in a mock battle.



◆ Opposite: Anonymous, Bolognese school, after Jacques Callot, *Captain Babbeo and Captain Cucuba* (above right), and *Captain Spezzamonte and Zanni Bagattino* (below right), each oil on canvas, 13 3/4 x 18 1/4" (35 x 47.5 cm), late seventeenth century. Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan. Here we have a taste of Callot's bold, deliberate obscenity: at top Captain Cucuba exposes his rear end in an offensive gesture and Captain Babbeo may just ram his spear up it; in the background a pair

of zanni give a donkey an enema, while other figures flirt and court in stylized poses. Enemas, because they were dreaded and frequently prescribed, constituted a continuous source of laughter in comedies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, combining satire against doctors with more general scatological humor. In the lower image Captain Spezzamonte and Zanni Bagattino repeat the lazzi: Bagattino turns his rear rudely toward the captain, counting on his adversary's legendary cowardice.









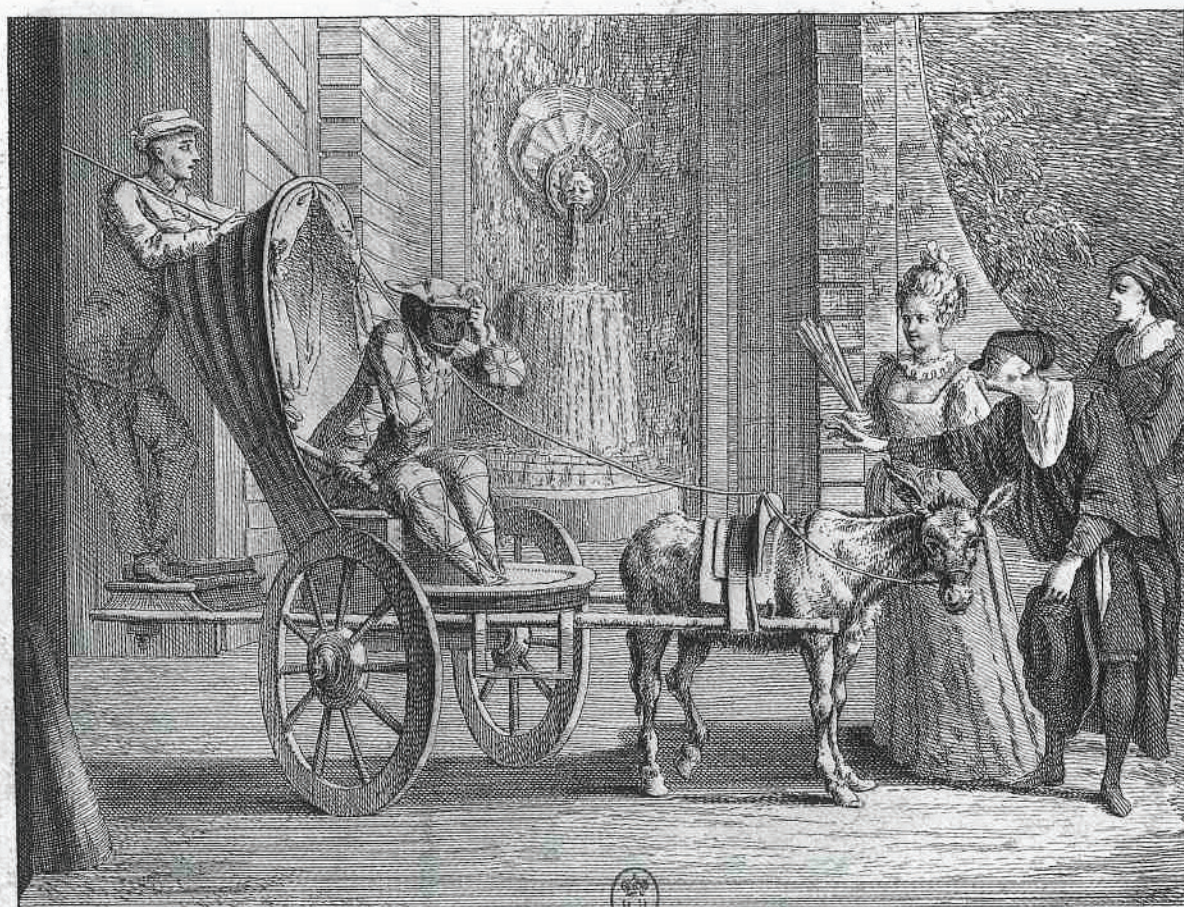
Above and opposite: Gabriel Huquier, after Claude Gillot, two scenes from *Harlequin, Emperor of the Moon*, by Nolant de Fatouville, engravings, each  $6\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{3}{8}$ " (16.5 x 21.4 cm), eighteenth century. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes (this page) and Bibliothèque de l'Opéra (opposite), Paris. These scenarios appear in volume 1 of Evariste Gherardi's *Le Théâtre italien, ou le recueil général de toutes les comédies*, edition of 1741. Above, *Harlequin*, disguised as the apothecary *Monsieur de Cusiffle*, one of the contenders for the hand of *Columbine*, steps out of a portable pharmacy cupboard rather like a sedan chair. On the left are *Pierrot*, leaning on a long rod, and *Mezzetino*.

Its taste for disguises and cross-dressing, comical and transgressive, also lent it appeal. In addition to the merchant, doctor, captain, servant, soubrette, lovers, go-between, and courtesan, many trades and stations of life were parodied and explored in these plays, from jailers, barbers, judges, and apothecaries to exotic foreign ambassadors and emperors. Like the popular print, commedia itself was accessible, cheap, fun, and rich in criticism of people in power.

In two prints by Gabriel Huquier (1695–1772), after drawings by Claude Gillot (1673–1722), we see an Italian actor trying on new roles on stage: here *Harlequin* is disguised as an apothecary and as an ambassador in scenes of a play with which we are already familiar, *Harlequin, Emperor of the Moon*.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, on rue Montorgueil in the second *arrondissement* of Paris were located some famous printshops, only a stone's throw from the Hôtel de Bourgogne theater, built in 1548. Not far away was the Salle du Petit-Bourbon, the hall annexed to the Louvre in which, as we have seen, Italian comedy was also performed, especially by the Gelosi company.





Colloc. inv.

ARLEQUIN EMPEREUR DANS LA LUNE

Buquier Sculp. ex.

Contempler d'Arlequin la fameuse Embarcade,  
De son Maître Lunaire expliquant le dessein;

C'est dit il pour guérir le beau Sexe Malade  
Qu'il daigne s'allier avec un Médecin J.D.F.

Paris chez Buquier vis-à-vis le grand Châtelet, aux Armées d'Angleterre avec Privilèges du Roi

Columbine is at right, with the Doctor. The backdrop is a Classical-style villa with a pediment and curved wings. Harlequin pays his respects to the Doctor and the medical profession and announces that he is lovesick for Columbine, claiming that only she can heal him. He then discourses freely—and ungrammatically—on pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. The French poem captioning the image reads:

Halt, Harlequin! What do you  
think you're doing?  
You're making us sweat with fear.  
You wound us already being only  
a pharmacist;  
as son-in-law of a doctor you'll kill us!

In a later scene (above) Harlequin, disguised as an ambassador, arrives in

a carriage drawn by an ass to ask Doctor Balouard for the hand of his daughter Isabella on behalf of the Emperor of the Moon. On the back of the carriage, in the groom's post, stands Pierrot. At first, the Doctor refuses to send his daughter to the moon. To reassure him, Harlequin confesses that he himself is, in fact, only an Italian born in Prato, a town near Florence. He relates how he landed on the moon and also issues a series of bizarre pronouncements about the signs of the Zodiac. To the Doctor's many other questions, Harlequin replies in a fantastic vein. When the Doctor hears a voice ordering him to hand over to Harlequin six large gold coins for the emperor, he does not hesitate to comply, but when the same voice

commands him to give Harlequin his diamond ring, the Doctor balks. Harlequin warns him that he will report his conduct to the emperor. Fearing to lose the chance to make his daughter an empress, the Doctor hands over the ring. Observing that the Doctor still has forty-four large gold coins in a purse hanging from his waist, Harlequin announces that he must now go consult with the emperor and leaves the stage, laughing. The French caption reads:

Look at Harlequin, disguised as an  
Ambassador  
outlining the intentions of his lunar  
[also: lunatic] Master,  
who claims he'll deign to marry the  
Doctor's daughter  
in order to cure women of their  
heartache.



In these shops woodcut artists, called "history artists" or "painters in wood," devoted themselves to an abundant production of prints. When the technique of copper engraving evolved, it too became widely popular and prints were sold in England, Flanders, Spain, and further points of the Continent. Throughout Europe the genre print enjoyed a great vogue and its commerce played an important role in diffusing images of commedia. It has even been proposed that such prints were a form of publicity partially financed by the troupes themselves.

Prints may also have been used as programs to actual performances. Offered for sale as souvenirs, they named characters and described scenes in little poems. Perhaps the premier collection of these is the Fossard Collection, now principally in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. In a cartoonlike sequence of sixteen scenes, one of which is reproduced here, we are shown Harlequin's





travails as he tries to win the love of Donna Lucia. This is a typical scenario involving the antics of Pantaloon, Zanni Cornetto, Donna Lucia, Harlequin, and Captain Cocodrillo; many such scenes were probably improvised and a good number resemble familiar *lazzi*.

Another popular vehicle for commedia prints in France was the almanach, a large broadsheet print that commemorated important events of the preceding year, subsidized by the crown. The format usually comprised one or two large scenes and several smaller ones. Sometimes the figures were discreetly numbered, with a legend or captions. French almanachs often publicized the semidivine character and heroic exploits of Louis XIV and his family, with illustrations and verses depicting wars, royal weddings, important political developments, outrageous fashions, and occasionally famous stage performances.

The almanach for 1688 illustrates a lost play titled *Harlequin, Grand Vizier*, an account of Harlequin's adventures at the court of the Ottoman Empire. Sultan Süleyman II was perhaps Louis XIV's greatest rival on the world stage; moreover, the Turks had been a perennial threat to European security for some two hundred years and were prosecuting a war with Venice and Austria in Hungary. A vulgar satire upon the Turks, using all the scatological, sexual, and racial slurs of which commedia was capable, was therefore a welcome nationalistic entertainment to the French. The exoticism of the Sublime Porte—the mysteries of the Seraglio and the alien Muslim faith—fascinated Europeans, as Mozart's 1782 opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* attests.

In the principal scene in the almanach sheet we see the rogue Harlequin before the Ottoman throne, disguised as a seductive harem girl. Mezzetino has paid him to enter the harem to take a love letter to one of the young ladies. Caught, he tries, without offending the sultan, to ward off the sexual advances he has unwittingly provoked. Naturally, his masquerade is discovered. Below this are other scenes from the play: he has traveled overseas to Turkey inside the "womb of his mother," a wine cask; in the second panel it is being opened. In a later scene (the third panel) he claims to be Muhammad himself and is at once proclaimed Grand Vizier. He is carried in triumph by Turkish soldiers, along with the sultan, until he is found out. In the confusion he loses his shoes. At bottom he is arrested, but the sultan's daughter obtains his pardon in the nick of time.

Almanachs overlap somewhat with another species of print dedicated to the commedia, the frontispieces of published plays and scenarios. Among the best of these are the fifty-five pictures illustrating Evariste Gherardi's early eighteenth-century anthology, *Le Théâtre italien, ou le recueil général de toutes les comédies*. We have already seen images from this treasure trove (for example, pages 24, 30, and 71).

♦ *Anonymous, scene from the Fossard Collection, wood engraving, sixteenth century. Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen. In this scene, after only one month of marriage Harlequin has discovered that his wife is about to give birth. He knows Pantaloon to be the father not only of this babe, but of eight children, all of whom not only resemble the fellow but seem to have been born dressed like him! Disillusioned and wishing to rid himself of the brood, he delivers them all to Pantaloon's door. The dialogue beneath the image runs:*

HARLEQUIN: *Disloyal Pantaloon,  
I am really upset.  
You have made me wed an  
infamous harlot,  
She is now about to give birth  
to a daughter  
And I've been united with her  
for only one month.  
I could die of shame and scorn.  
Nonetheless, miserable as I am  
I bring you eight children,  
all yours, leading them to you,  
So that you may feed them in  
these hard times:  
A father must help his children  
in need.*

PANTALON: *Go with God, poor  
fool, you are breaking your brain,  
I have never in my life had aught  
to do with your wife:  
If you want both the cow and  
the calf,  
Go feed them yourself if you like;  
I wouldn't have any notion of  
what to do about this [situation].*





Mozart dans ce temps, homme plein d'industrie,  
Voulant se signaler par son digne tour,  
Fut un Arlequin fort propre à cette cour,  
Et lui dit qu'on le prenait pour son amoureux.  
Pour voir s'il était si sûr de son amour,  
Voulant bien qu'il eût le cœur tout à fait sûr,  
Qu'il y pût aller comme un homme d'honneur,  
Les grands seigneurs l'attendaient en suite à son retour.

Arlequin l'entreprend, s'agit de la garde,  
Met en main le poulx, l'écuyer le grand Arlequin,  
Et ne dans le moment vient pour par malheur  
Sur Arlequin femme qui est amoureuse d'Arlequin,  
Les deux corps se font de si entendre par  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin qui est d'Arlequin le poulx,  
Et qui la nouvelle agitée en voyage,  
L'écuyer le dit à son retour de son voyage.



Arlequin au Venise  
de sa mère, la tante.

Arlequin est dans l'écuyer d'Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
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L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,



Arlequin dans le Turc  
après l'élection d'Arlequin  
grand Visir.

Arlequin est dans l'écuyer d'Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,  
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L'écuyer d'Arlequin, le grand Arlequin,



la Princesse obtient le  
pardon d'Arlequin auprès  
du grand Visir.

Arlequin est dans l'écuyer d'Arlequin,  
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◆ Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, *A Turk, a German, and a Venetian (Pantaloone) Gamble at Cards*, engraving, early eighteenth century, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe, Rome. This print satirizes the geopolitics of the day: here Pantaloone the merchant represents the Venetian Republic and competes with two other great mercantile nations. Each is identified by his dress: the Turk wears a turban and long beard, the German a round hat with a plume, Pantaloone glasses and casual slippers. The latter two make common cause to trounce the Turk. The text expresses a good deal of nationalistic bigotry. It reads: "The New Game of the Turk, the German, and the Venetian. First speaks the Turk, who says, 'I invite you, German and Venetian, to play

at Primiera.' And they accept, swearing on their faith to gang up on him and skin him if they can, with reason. The Turk shows his hand and says, 'I've won.' Responds the German, 'My spades [a pun on swords in Italian] will kill your great pride and my flush in spades will make you cough up all that which you have unjustly usurped.' Says the Venetian [in Venetian dialect], 'Mister Beast Turk, we shall all beat you—you and your little sultanlets and Hungarians. You shall be made to pay.' The German and the Venetian speak together, saying, 'Let's share the feathers of this fellow we have plucked between the two of us.'" On the tablecloth are written the rules of the game, and on the print's border are the scores of the players.

◆ Opposite: Nicolas Bonmart, *Harlequin, Grand Vizier*, engraving, 1688. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. The captions to each scene describe the action in little rhymes.





◆ Above left: Gerard Edelinck, after J. Netscher, Raymond Poisson Costumed as Crispin, engraving, 1682. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.



◆ Above right: Nicolas Bonnart, Crispin, engraving, seventeenth century. Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Crispin, wearing a foolish expression, and with one legging untied, holds a sheet of paper inscribed FA FA FA RE MI RE MI FA RE MI, and appears to be singing. The caption reads:

Crispin, whose figure you see  
Is a poor musician  
Who can't even read music.  
But wine helps him to stay in tune.

French *farceurs*, like their Italian colleagues, are recorded in stylized engravings, frequently with witty explanatory poems. Serious attempts at portraiture are often interestingly commingled with sly caricature. The two approaches can be compared in two prints of Crispin, a role thought to have developed from the figure and costume of Scaramouche. A portrait of the well-known actor Raymond Poisson playing Crispin presents him with respectful realism (above left). But the amusing Crispin engraved by Nicolas Bonnart (above right) is frankly caricatural; this fellow clutching a sword and grinning above his ruff collar is clearly meant to provoke laughter.

Treatises on the theater, such as the one published in French by the Italian actor Luigi Riccoboni in 1730, could be adorned with such engravings. For Riccoboni's text the artist Charles-Antoine Coypel (1694–1752) produced pairs of designs of “old” and “new” costumes for certain prominent figures.<sup>20</sup> Later in the century engravings illustrating dramatic moments were created for printed editions of Goldoni's and Gozzi's plays. A number of extraordinary Dutch and German engravings illustrate an international taste for commedia's bizarre plots.

Needless to say, theaters themselves, from foyer to balcony, loggia to café, were often gaily painted and carved. Even theater tickets and other ephemera were



sometimes works of art. A drawing by Carlo Marchionni (1708–86) illustrating a masked ticket-taker at a theater door is itself a ticket. In some related prints by Marchionni we are startled to see Pulcinella himself slyly mixing with the crowd pushing eagerly to be let into the theater before the curtain rises. A pretty ribbon, made in 1718 to commemorate the return of the Italian comedy to France, has a motif of Harlequin with his stick.

The myth and folklore of *commedia dell'arte* were carried through all Europe by such common, lighthearted images. An eighteenth-century Dutch printmaker, Gérard-Joseph Xavery, produced a set of seventeen remarkable prints that were popular not only in Holland but in England and throughout the Continent. These envisioned a complete private life for Harlequin, including childbirth and parenthood. As we have seen, Harlequin cross-dresses often; in his role as clown provocateur he likes to play gender-switching games, usually in order to stir up trouble, shock the staid, and break the normative rules of nature and society. To this end we have already seen him pretend he is pregnant and flirt with men (see pages, 71, 88). In the popular imagination Harlequin and his companions are nearly real people—only slightly bolder and more extreme.



◆ Above: Anonymous, Harlequin ribbon, textile, 1718, created in France to mark the return to Paris of the Italian comedy troupes.

◆ Carlo Marchionni, theater ticket, ink and watercolor wash on paper, eighteenth century. Gabinetto delle Stampe, Rome. The inscription at right reads: "Good for two [seats]."



♦ Gérard-Joseph Xavery, three engravings from the English edition of *The New Italian Theater Revealing the Strange Malady, Pregnancy, and Child-Bearing of Harlequin, in Addition to the Education of His Son*, after 1710. Biblioteca Burcardo, Rome. Texts in the first edition of 1710 are in French and Dutch. These scenes illustrate Harlequin giving birth to several babies in a basket (actually hatching them from eggs) while Pierrot assists, bathing a baby, and giving suck. The scenario on which this series of prints is apparently based has not been identified and may simply be an invention of the artist. Fantasies such as Xavery's of an independent domestic life of *commedia dell'arte* personages are extremely curious and merit further study.





In Xavery's cycle Harlequin actually takes the woman's role, giving birth (hen style) and suckling the baby. Other scenes picture him pregnant (the doctor can't figure out what's wrong with him) and teaching the baby to walk by means of an ingenious wicker contraption. The effect is at once extremely touching, ludicrous, and disturbing, commedia at its most arresting and peculiar.

Xavery's prints illustrate one obsession of artists who, in different lands and in various media, tried to capture the essence of Italian comedy—namely, the impulse to give these often grotesque figures some semblance of normal family life. This duplication of a mask or personage—for example, Harlequin



engendering many young Harlequins—represents a fantasy related to the general multiplication of identities that takes place in commedia scenarios onstage, and that often leads to much riotous confusion. But it also surely indicates an unconscious desire on the part of actors and audience to perpetuate the phenomenon, to create little dynasties. The destinies of Italian-comedy babies in artistic representations are predetermined: they are uniformly conceived as miniature adults, born wearing tiny masks and costumes identical to those of their parents (see page 114). In a striking print, *Harlequin, Count of Ville Brochet*, Harlequin bears his babies on his back.



◆ *Anonymous, Harlequin, Count of Ville Brochet, engraving, seventeenth century. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Harlequin holds a pan of food with which to feed his three children, miniatures of himself. (Even the baby wears particolored swaddling clothes and a tiny black half-mask.) The citizens of the town appear behind him on the cobbled pavement and several are denizens of commedia: Pierrot and Pulcinella, a Moor and a Chinese man (two staple foreigners); near at hand, an old lady in a bonnet is being given an enema.*

◆ *Opposite above: Johann Joachim Kändler, Harlequin Family, hard-paste polychrome porcelain, 7 1/8" high (18.1 cm), Meissen manufacture, c. 1740. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Jack and Belle Linsky Collection, 1982.*

◆ *Opposite below: attributed to Giuseppe Gricci, Pulcinella and Harlequin Play Cards While Pantaloon Watches, hard-paste polychrome porcelain, 5 1/4" high (14.5 cm). Capodimonte manufacture, Naples, c. 1750, permanent loan from Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Blohm. Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. This exceptionally fine work, animated and extremely colorful, depicts a classic genre scene of cardplayers.*



The offstage domestic lives of commedia dell'arte personages are often depicted in eighteenth-century Meissen and Capodimonte porcelain figurines. These exquisitely detailed objects were produced in major porcelain factories across Europe and served as high-class souvenirs. Such statuettes were originally fashioned in sugar as table favors at royal and noble banquets, where guests played at identifying which plots were being illustrated. French, Italian, and German porcelain commedia figurines were highly prized by collectors, as they are today. They use an extremely refined technique to portray the homeliest, most plebeian occurrences.

Narrative interest also invests the vigorous, action-filled engravings of an Augsburg printmaker, Johann Balthasar Probst (active 1673–1750), in an album somewhat inaccurately entitled *The Loves of Pantaloon and Harlequin*.



## THE FAIR OF ST. GERMAIN

*In this scenario Scaramouche, a card shark, and Mezzetino, his helper, deceive Harlequin, who is disguised as a wealthy and pompous man.*

SCARAMOUCHE (*in a red cape, counting his money*): Five and four make nine, and twenty makes twenty-nine. Two snuffboxes worth ten, that makes thirty-nine. One watch, twenty-five. All of it makes nearly sixty *pistoles*. That's not a bad catch.

MEZZETINO (*overhearing*): What's up, sir? What are you counting?

SCARAMOUCHE: Oh, nothing. Just seventy *pistoles* I won in a game at La Frenaye's. Why so curious?

MEZZETINO: My God, seventy *pistoles*! That's a lot of dough.

SCARAMOUCHE: Well, if I really wanted to, I could win ten thousand. But I'm a good soul. I settle for only a little.

MEZZETINO: A good soul? What does that have to do with gambling?

SCARAMOUCHE: I can allow myself to have a conscience, since I'm always sure to win.

MEZZETINO: How can you always be sure?

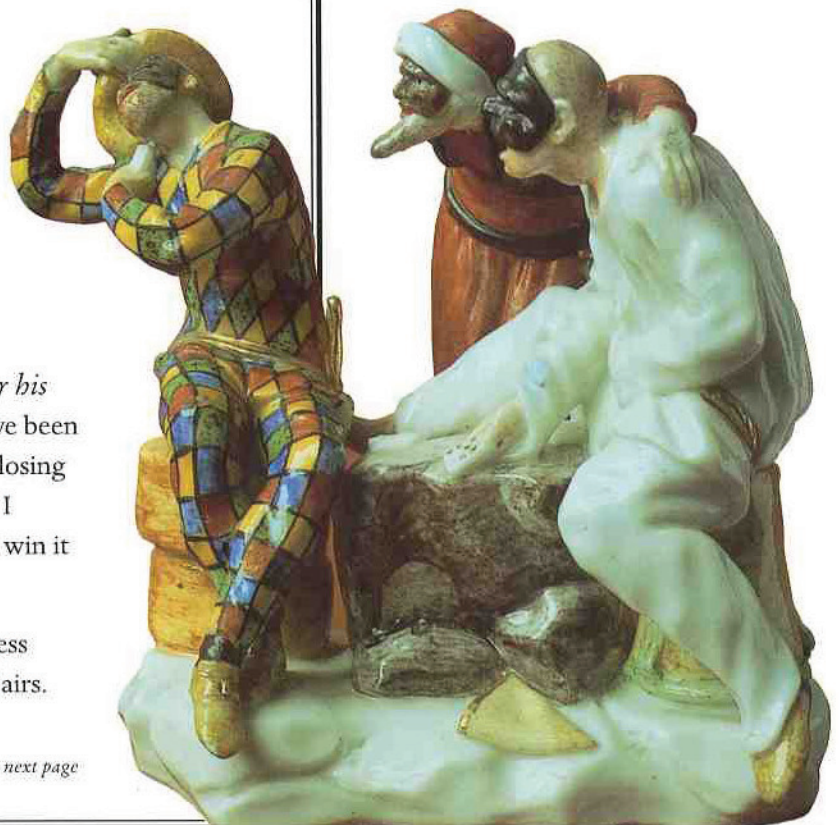
SCARAMOUCHE (*looking around cautiously*): Let me tell you a secret. I'm a hustler. I gamble with loaded dice that always come up six when I want them to.

MEZZETINO: What a talent! And what a lucky guy, to play a winning hand whenever he wants.

HARLEQUIN (*entering, a red cape pulled over his face*): Ah, Mr. Trickery, it's nice to see you. I've been looking all over for you. You tricked me into losing all my money. Here are one hundred *pistoles* I fetched from my house. Give me a chance to win it all back or we'll cut each other's throats.

SCARAMOUCHE (*drawing his sword*): Goodness gracious, Mr. Hustler, you're giving yourself airs. By heavens. . . .

*Continued on next page*





◆ *Opposite: Johann Balthasar Probst, two engravings from the album The Loves of Pantaloon and Harlequin, 1729. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Cabinet des Estampes, Paris. This album contains twelve engravings, with texts in German and Latin. Nocturnal Shenanigans (above) involves Harlequin, the Captain, his son Rodomonte, Mezzetino, Pantaloon, his daughter Isabella, and a water hose. In Mezzetino Painting Harlequin as Cupid (below) chaos reigns in the artist's studio and several lazzi are being executed at once: Harlequin is filling Pantaloon's wineglass through a long straw to get him drunk, while Mezzetino is literally painting him; the Lovers are exchanging a door key; Scaramouche, with a bunch of "Cupid's" arrows in one hand, is emptying an animal udder (perhaps filled with wine) over his head, and Pierrot is observing the whole in astonishment.*

MEZZETINO (*stepping between the two*): Hey, sirs, stop shouting. (*To Harlequin*) Is it true, sir, that this man won a lot of money from you at dice?

HARLEQUIN: He's a hustler, and either he gives it all back, or he'll have to give me a chance to win it back.

MEZZETINO: How much do you still have?

HARLEQUIN: Look, here are one hundred *pistoles*. (*He shows his purse.*)

MEZZETINO: Wait here; I'm going to speak to him and try to get you some satisfaction. (*To Scaramouche*) Well, sir, this fellow still has one hundred *pistoles*. You have the chance to get them.

SCARAMOUCHE: I would never do that. I have a conscience.

MEZZETINO: For Pete's sake, then, play for me. I don't have an ounce of conscience. I'm from Normandy.

SCARAMOUCHE: Do you really want me to?

MEZZETINO: I beg you to. My blessings on loaded dice and sixes coming up every time.

SCARAMOUCHE: OK, get out of my way. (*To Harlequin*) You, there, since you want to play with me so much, have a table brought in.

HARLEQUIN (*to Mezzetino*): Go quickly and bring a table, a shaker, and some dice.

MEZZETINO: I'm going, I'm going. (*To Harlequin*) If it hadn't been for me he'd never have agreed.

HARLEQUIN: I don't know how to thank you. I was ready to stab him to death, and you've saved both of us.

*A shop-boy comes in, bringing a table, a shaker, and dice. Scaramouche sits down at one side of the table, Harlequin at the other. Mezzetino stands between them.*

HARLEQUIN (*picking up the shaker and shaking the dice*). Let's go, sir, place your bets.

SCARAMOUCHE (*taking Harlequin's purse and drawing out twenty louis*): I wager twenty gold *louis*.

HARLEQUIN: I match it. (*He tosses the dice.*) I win!

*The game continues until Scaramouche has beaten the socks off of Harlequin by cheating.*

Jean-François Regnard and Charles-Rivière Dufresny, *La Foire St. Germain* (*The Fair of St. Germain*), act II, scene V, in Evariste Gherardi's *Le Théâtre italien, ou le recueil général de toutes comédies*, volume 6, edition of 1741









◆ *Claude Gillot, Harlequin, the Greedy Soldier, scene from Le Tombeau de Maître André (The Tomb of Master André), oil on canvas, 37 1/8 x 54 1/8" (100 x 139 cm), 1716–17. Musée du Louvre, Paris. The subject of this painting is a scene in a play based on a fable by Jean de La Fontaine, The Oyster and the Litigants. First performed at the Comédie Italienne in 1695, it was written by Claude-Ignace Brugière de Barante with the help of Jean-François Regnard and Charles-Rivière Dufresny and is collected in Evariste Gherardi's Le Théâtre italien, ou le recueil général de toutes les comédies, volume 5, edition of 1741. Pierrot and Scaramouche (in black) quarrel over a bottle, while Harlequin, the referee, takes advantage of the fight to down all the wine himself. Another male figure, at left, wears a theatrical costume.*

The pictures are enriched by lengthy accounts in Latin and German. The artist has attempted to re-create the experience of the stage, representing multiple actions as close to simultaneously as possible. The scenario that inspired Probst is known only through this album, but is surprisingly complete in its twelve episodes. It must have been elaborately produced, as we may deduce from the intricate scenery and props in his illustrations.

Let us now imagine ourselves transported to a remarkable little room in the Louvre that seems to contain its own secret messages of theatricality. On one wall hang two paintings by Claude Gillot, *Harlequin, the Greedy Soldier* and *The Two Carriages*, inspired by scenes recorded in Gherardi. Both paintings marvelously capture moments of psychological conflict, confusion, and cunning.

Just across from Gillot's paintings Jean-Antoine Watteau's most famous creation, *Gilles* (page 129), gazes at them dreamily (and—who knows?—perhaps critically). Gillot is best known as Watteau's teacher from 1703 to 1708. The two may well have met at one of the engravers' shops on rue St.-Jacques in Paris—for example, that of Pierre II and Jean Mariette; the Mariette family executed many





prints based on Italian comedy. Commedia dell'arte appears in both Gillot's paintings and his drawings, the theme having become extremely fashionable in France after the Italians were banished from the stage in 1697. The drawings, made with deft, quick strokes, are quite unique, lively and vernacular. His piquant sense of humor emerges fully in a marvelous sanguine drawing of a scene from *La Fausse Coquette* (*The False Coquette*) in which Mezzetino, Pasquariello, and Harlequin earnestly play a funeral march on invisible instruments to mourn the death of their favorite tavern keeper. Harlequin, absurdly, wears three hats, as if to signify that he is capable of all kinds of actions. These affectionately caricatural figures, with their droll expressions and gestures, capture the most ephemeral moments of theatrical experience.

Gillot and Watteau both frequented the theater and counted actors and playwrights among their closest friends. If both worked from life and from memory, the latter also drew from a deep well of poetic imagination, eventually inventing his own fictitious company of actors, an imaginary fantasy ensemble.<sup>21</sup> The count of Caylus, Watteau's great friend and patron, once revealed that the painter

◆ Claude Gillot, *The Two Carriages*, scene from *The Fair of St. Germain*, oil on canvas, 50 x 63" (127 x 160 cm), 1707. Musée du Louvre, Paris. The subject is an autonomous comic scene tacked onto the end of Jean-François Regnard and Charles-Rivière Du Fresnoy's comedy *The Fair of St. Germain*, published in Evariste Gherardi, *Le Théâtre italien, ou le recueil général de toutes les comédies*, volume 3, edition of 1741. Gillot's conception in both works is like a stage set painted on canvas. Here Harlequin and Scaramouche, both disguised as ladies and riding in carriages pulled by servants, quarrel about precedence at a crossroads. In perfect parallel, the two lackeys also confront each other. A fifth figure, a judge, attempts to mediate. Brilliant colors characterize the painting: rose, scarlet, orange, forest green, royal blue.





◆ Claude Gillot, scene from *The False Coquette*, by Claude-Ignace Brugière de Barante, sanguine on paper, 6 1/4 x 8 1/2" (16 x 21.8 cm), n.d. Musée du Louvre, Paris. This delicate scene (collected by Evariste Gherardi in volume 5 of *Le Théâtre italien*, ou le recueil général de toutes les comédies, edition of 1741) illustrates a simple lazzi: Harlequin finds Pasquariello and Mezzetino in mourning and, without knowing the reason for it, begins himself to weep "simply to keep them company." The three play a dirge on invisible musical instruments, making the music themselves. We are encouraged by Gillot to imagine the absurd sounds that must issue from them.

kept a collection of theater costumes in his studio, so that his friends could pose for paintings. Another friend of Watteau, the merchant Pierre Sirois, appears as the central figure of *Gilles and His Family*, surrounded by his sons (page 132). An intriguing work done under the influence of Gillot, this painting shows little children, scarcely more than babies, dressed up in commedia dell'arte costumes and honoring a crowned lady who presides over their shenanigans (page 130).

Watteau's rare blend of imagination and re-creation is a signature element of his style and runs right through his ethereal, elusive paintings. Their delicate colors, vaporous luminosity, and inherent theatricality, which owe something to Peter Paul Rubens and Titian, give new life to the painterly commedia tradition. His warm, somewhat impressionistic style was grafted onto a solid base of precisely observed Flemish genre painting, which Watteau had learned early in life, having been born in the north of France, in Valenciennes. A striking number of his paintings and almost all of his drawings take their inspiration from commedia—not only its literal details of costume, mask, and gesture, as we have seen, but also its atmosphere, flavor, and coded messages.





◆ Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Pierrot*, also called *Gilles*, oil on canvas, 72½ x 58⅞" (184.5 x 149.5 cm), 1719. Musée du Louvre, Paris. *Pierrot*, presented in heroic scale, seems to gaze across the Louvre's gallery at Gillot's genre scenes, creating a theatrical space. Watteau has made a leap from the charm and wit of Gillot to something more complex. He has turned this youngest of the masks into a protagonist, both actor and eternal spectator, and has exposed

him in a portrait of intense psychological depth. *Pierrot*'s hands hang lifelessly; he is something between a marionette—suspended, dependent—and a human agent. Yet he is neither stupid nor a simpleton, but filled with feeling, as his expression shows. The disjunctive relationship between him and his half-hidden, half-identifiable companions suggests to us that something is going on, but we are unable to define it. The priapic

herm at far right links the scene soberly to ancient, pagan themes. The work has an air of suspended action, set in an ambiguous time, space, and situation. Is this the moment of pause before the play begins, a rehearsal for life and drama? Indeed, can we be certain that this is a portrait of an actor playing a role, or have commedia's characters perhaps been released from the stage and allowed to wander through a living landscape?





♦ Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Children Playing at Commedia dell'Arte*, oil on canvas, 19 1/8 x 24" (49 x 61 cm), c. 1706. Musée Carnavalet, Salon Brulart de Genlis, Paris. This is an odd, semiallegorical scene. A crowd of puttolike children, naked or in commedia costume, dance before a theatrically garbed lady on a throne. Some may be identified by their dress or masks: the Captain, Innamorati, a baby cardinal. In the roundels on the wall are barely perceptible commedia scenes.

Watteau's sense of reality was shaped primarily through the stage. Society in early eighteenth-century France, especially that of royalty and the upper strata, was staging its appearances, creating a facade. Prescribed manners, procedures, costumes, and conversations rendered social and official life highly artificial. Not least among the actors was the Sun King, Louis XIV, whose court at Versailles constituted a giant stage on which political rituals were enacted with utmost grandeur and ceremony. It is natural that members of such a society loved to go to the theater, felt at home there, and theatricalized their daily life.

In the real-life play making at the court of Louis XIV a place of prominence was naturally given to masks and fancy dress. The king himself liked to dress up in court ballets and masques, more than once donning woman's clothing. Behavior at these fêtes could be risqué as long as it followed the unspoken social rules. Molière's archetypal unmasking of hypocrisy in the comedy *Tartuffe* (1667) criticizes this system of manners. As in the Venetian Carnival,



masks and disguises temporarily annulled identity and personality, offering freedom and license through anonymity. Concealment and transfiguration permitted the assumption of arbitrary identities and multiple personalities, allowing the expression of bizarre humors and forbidden lusts—even, occasionally, in this highly regimented and polished society, the perpetration of violent acts.

Commedia in Watteau's artful conception occurs within the world of the *pastorale*, a genre that enjoyed a particular vogue in the eighteenth century. When members of the French upper class retreated to the countryside or urban parks for diversion and repose, they expected the bucolic and the rustic to be just as refined and well-mannered as life at court. Country entertainments, called *fêtes galantes*, used a cast of superbly composed and garbed shepherds, shepherdesses, and mythological characters, including gods and goddesses of antiquity, all reciting eloquent rhymed lines; *pastorale* as a genre in literature, art, and music (and in court theatricals and ballets) allowed a status-conscious society to project its own image—indeed, its own *amour propre*—onto nature. Even so, it is not easy to fathom the very odd blending of the extremely natural and the extremely artificial in Watteau's landscapes, whether the large-scale *fête galante* paintings in which so many Italian comedy figures appear, or the more intimate scenes of actors in parks and gardens, still wearing their costumes and playing their fixed roles.

In the mysterious painting *Gilles and His Family* (page 132), for example, the theatricality is highly ambiguous. Who are these six people, including a little child? The central figure is Gilles, or Mezzetino (a figure sometimes conflated with Pierrot). He is dressed as a commedia musician in a striped white satin costume and holds a guitar. But is this Gilles the fictitious character, or an actor in the role? The identities of the others are even less certain, as their dress is less theatrical: the two at left are either stage *Innamorati* or real lovers. Above and behind Gilles is yet another figure, a sculpture of a herm with a masklike, satyric face. This seems to represent his double—his other self, or a revelation of his true self. It presides over the group like a familiar spirit, the genius of art, seductive and faintly frightening. One could perhaps say that the herm, symbol of heathen eros, and the lovers inspire one another. No simple *pastorale*, this.

In Watteau's paintings nature is the ideal background for tender encounters, but within nature lurk many presences, pagan reminiscences that still have powers. His gardens and parks, populated with statuary and fountains, offer a complicitous physical world for the acting out of human dramas. Indeed, what is nature but another form of theater? His commedia actors, released from the stage, prolong their performances beneath a canopy of trees, blending their stage existence into a real one. Thus does individual subjectivity invade this lush *arcadia*, endowing it with desire, melancholy, and sensual joy.





◆ Above: Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Gilles and His Family*, oil on panel, 10<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" (27.1 x 19 cm), c. 1716–18. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London.

◆ Opposite: Jean-Antoine Watteau, *Gallant Harlequin*, also called *Would You Like to Win Over Beautiful Women?*, oil on canvas, 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" (36 x 25.9 cm), c. 1725. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London. In an arcadian landscape both rural and courtly, Harlequin flirts with a reluctant Columbine beneath a herm, an eighteenth-century evocation of an ancient Greek celebration of eros. Five other figures, including Crispin, read a book and play musical instruments in the background. Music, always connected to the Dionysian, is inherently seductive. The references here are many: to noble manners and social arts, to love's civilized pleasures and its risks in the state of nature. The delicious tone is entirely Watteau's own, and the rendering of voluptuous silks and rustling leaves incomparable. We catch glimpses of a clear blue sky among the shadows; its effect is to distance the world and to make this crowded clearing in a wild garden both a grove inhabited by ancient spiritual presences and a haven and sanctuary for intense present experience.









**Columbine.**

*How happy are the Man and Wife!  
Who lead an easy cheerfull Life?  
And by Indearments daily strive,  
To be the fondest Pair alive*

**Harlequin.**

*'Tis thus with you and I my Dear!  
'While you take all the Household Care,  
'Tis mine alone to Coax and Wheedle,  
Or when you want it thread y Needle.*



In *Gallant Harlequin* (page 133), again we find a group of actors dwelling in an enchanted and enchanting space, magnetically drawn into and inebriated by their surroundings, by the luminous, erotically charged, and nostalgia-drenched atmosphere. In many Watteau paintings garden and fountain statues related to Venus and Priapus, satyrs and nymphs, are deliberately placed in correspondence with commedia dell'arte players. The presence of explicitly amorous, vaguely classicizing herms enhances the mystery and raises the emotional pitch, linking an apparently lighthearted scene to an ancient symbolic heritage having to do with pleasure, fertility, and the very wellsprings of inspiration.

Interestingly, this connection is recognized even by lesser artists such as the Dutch printmaker Xavery, to whose engravings of similar scenes are appended gently satiric and ribald poems. These more popular artworks invest the satyr-nymph metaphor with perhaps too raucous a brand of humor. A grave irony is present, instead, in Watteau.

Indeed, the emotional underpinning of many of Watteau's works on theater is what might bluntly be called the tragedy of comedy, the melancholy awareness at the very moment of greatest enjoyment that theatrical magic is but sleight of hand, a prodigious but ephemeral illusion. It is Watteau's great insight to perceive that the "tragedy" of reversal, of the return to reality, is suffered equally by the actors and audience.

Watteau, who died young, was known to be spleenish and dissatisfied, and something of a recluse. But his pessimism passes through some glorious moments: after all, in order to regret lost pleasures we must first have them. He uses the artifice of the court and the theater to reveal truths of existence. Viewing his paintings, we are drawn from the real world into a fictive one where many things are possible, permitted, desirable. At the same time, these images retreat into the realm of the untouchable, like a continually withdrawn invitation. Watteau's world is a prelapsarian Eden, a utopian golden age, an island of absolute devotion to love—a realm we can enter only if Harlequin and Columbine take us by the hand.

Thus we may say that Watteau does not so much interpret the essence of commedia—its real history, so to speak—as use it to reflect on and mirror his social world. His vision greatly influenced French eighteenth-century art. The tradition of the *fête galante* painting was carried on by his disciples Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743), Jean-Baptiste Pater (1695–1736), and later Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732–1806). In their works elegant courtiers flirt in lush glades to musical accompaniment, while unambiguous Pierrots and Harlequins entertain them. In Lancret's *Actors of the Italian Comedy*, Watteau's equivocal, romantic, dream-like tone is mingled with something more concrete and humorous: Harlequin

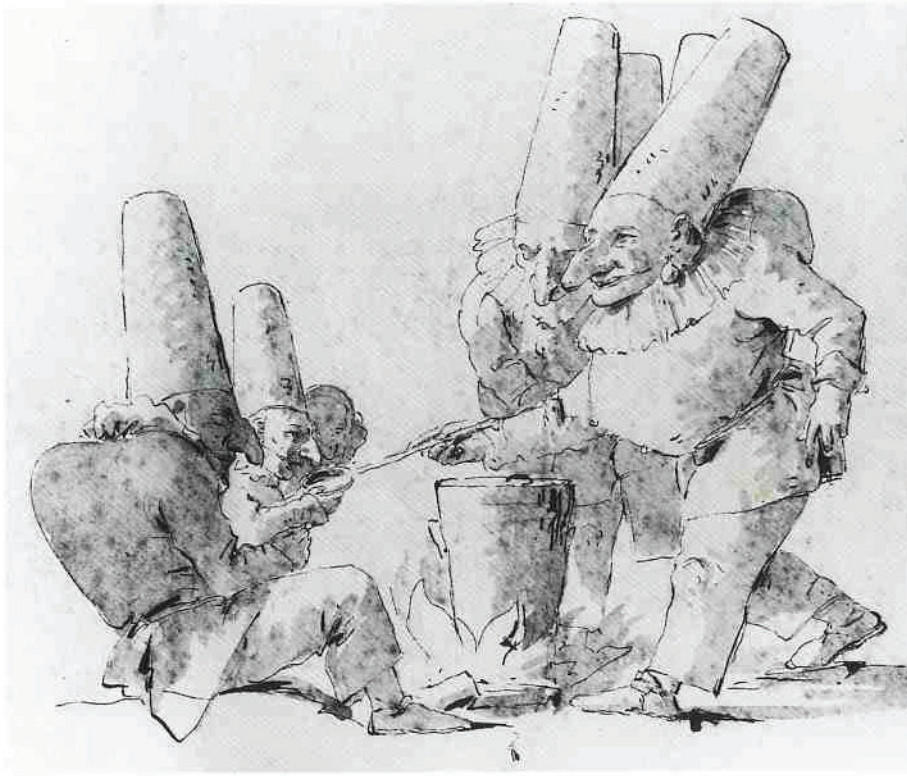
◆ Gérard-Joseph Xavery, Columbine and Harlequin, engraving, eighteenth century. Biblioteca Burcardo, Rome. Watteau's refined bacchic revelry is captured in a commonplace way by Xavery. The inscription, more jocular than the print itself and perhaps by another hand, makes a joke of the scene. Late sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century prints are frequently accompanied by sentimental or mocking poems; a successful print might be reprinted and translated into three or four languages, often with the meaning of the scene altered. Indeed, a kind of intertextual play occurred among engravers of different nationalities, who took advantage of a new translation to express their own indigenous sense of humor or lend the original subject new local meanings. The public seems to have found the additional attraction of words irresistible; on many prints we find poems in two or three languages.





◆ *Nicolas Lancret, Actors of the Italian Comedy, oil on canvas, 11 3/8 x 14 1/2" (28.8 x 36.8 cm), c. 1730. Reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection, London.*





◆ *Giambattista Tiepolo, Pulcinellas Cooking and Tasting Gnocchi, brown ink and wash with black chalk on paper, 7 3/4 x 9" (19.7 x 23.1 cm), c. 1740–52. The Art Institute of Chicago. Helen Regenstein Collection.*

woos Columbine, as always, but our attention is drawn to an ostentatiously paunchy and substantial Pulcinella.

The device of depicting imaginary figures from the stage pursuing the everyday activities of real people also greatly appealed to the eighteenth-century Venetian painters Giambattista Tiepolo (1696–1770) and his son Giandomenico (1727–1804). Giambattista, the more famous of the two, produced eighteen charming drawings of Pulcinella in the 1740s. Many of these show several Pulcinellas cooking or eating gnocchi or polenta—culinary symbols of, respectively, Naples and Venice.

Giandomenico, following his father's trade, looked to the French courtly tradition of Watteau and Lancret for inspiration. He works in a light, genre-based vein. His energetic *The Minuet* reinvents the *fête galante*: nobles and commedia masks enjoy an open-air gathering that is part theatrical performance, part private ball. The setting is the garden of a handsome villa in the countryside near Venice.

Giandomenico's vision is much more down-to-earth than Watteau's: this scene is likely actually to have taken place. Here the actors have been sent on no secret mission to the hidden realm of nature, nor are they likely to encounter the antique gods. Like the musicians in the background, they have been hired or invited to a party in real time. Aristocrats and actors mix together; all are equal, rendered so by costumes and masks, as if at a perpetual Carnival. Indeed, the dancing Pantaloon in the foreground is unmasked, while a watching nobleman at right wears full mask and cloak. Brilliant coloration adds to the cheerful effect.





◆ *Giandomenico Tiepolo, The Minuet, oil on canvas, 31½ x 42⅞" (80 x 109 cm), 1756. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona.*

◆ *Opposite: Giandomenico Tiepolo, Pulcinella in Love, fresco, 77⅛ x 57⅞" (196 x 147 cm), 1797. Museo del Settecento Veneziano di Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.*

The Tiepolos painted both canvases and large fresco cycles, many of which decorated luxurious palaces in Venice and noble country villas on the Venetian mainland. Commedia scenes appear in several of these by Giandomenico. Indeed, most of the Venetian painters of the eighteenth century—the Tiepolos, Luca Carlevarijs (1663–1730), Canaletto (1720–80), Francesco Guardi (1712–93), and Pietro Longhi (1702–85)—were fascinated by commedia, and especially by its masks, with their wonderful, evocative shapes. Also appearing often are the old masks of Carnival, which we have already met: the round *moretta*, the beaked *larva*, the long-billed, birdlike mask of the Plague Doctor, with its painted eyeglasses. In the fresco *Pulcinella in Love* Giandomenico Tiepolo deliberately startles us by covering the Innamorata's face with a grotesque beaked mask. He is famous for his paintings of Pulcinella, who became in some sense his trademark, and who sometimes appears as several figures within one scene. Perhaps his best-known work is *The Swing*, a delightful yet haunting ceiling fresco in which four Pulcinellas delicately cavort high up in trees like monkeys (page 140).

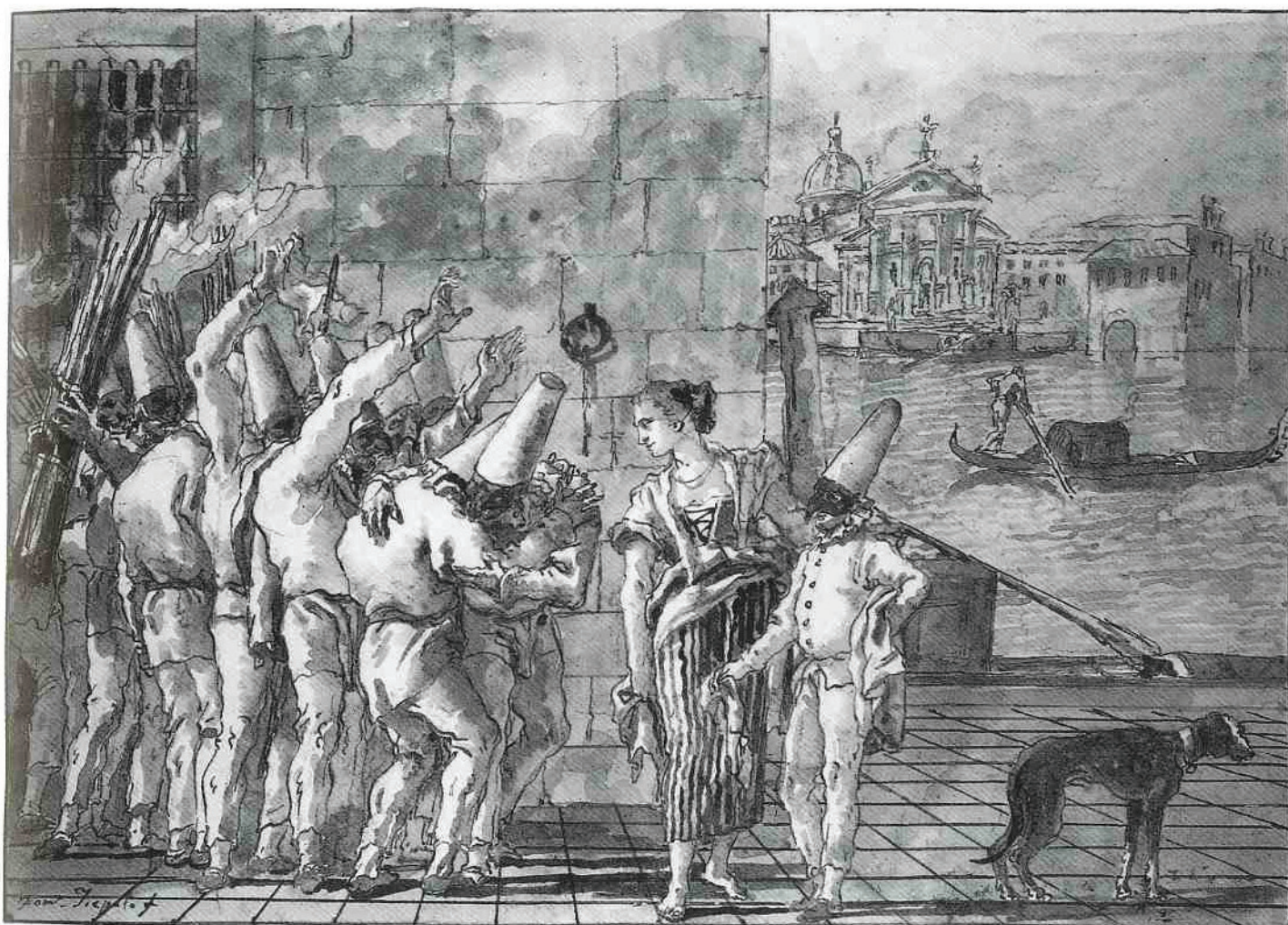












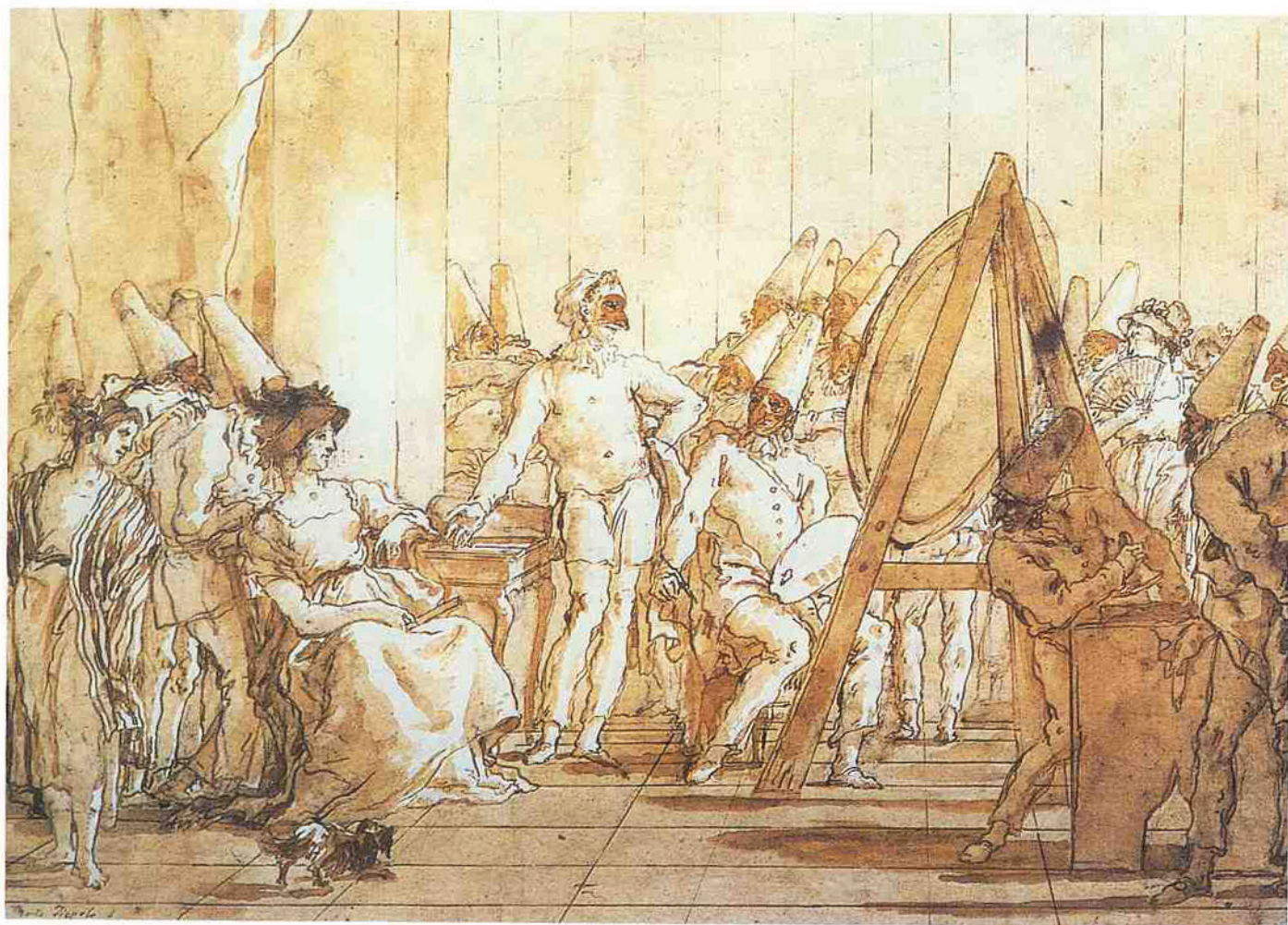
Giandomenico's album *Divertimento per li ragazzi* (*Amusement for Children*), dating from the last decade of his life, comprises 104 ink-and-wash drawings on the life of Pulcinella, now scattered in various collections. The album is not intended only for children, but aims to appeal to the child within the adult. The order of the drawings cannot now be determined, although clusters of scenes have an internal logical sequence—for example, incidents from Pulcinella's birth and childhood; scenes of his courtship, marriage, and family life; episodes of imprisonment and release; and pictures of illness, death, and burial.

Why the Venetian Giandomenico chose to focus on this single Neapolitan mask is not entirely clear. Pulcinella costumes and improvisations in public squares had become a Carnival tradition in Venice; in addition, he, more than Pantaloon, Harlequin, or Brighella, may have been seen as a blank slate, both pathetic and aggressive, who could be fashioned as a representative of the common people. Giandomenico's striking use of multiple Pulcinellas, rather than a mixture of various commedia characters, conjures up a society of identical personages, a world populated by Everyman.

◆ *Giandomenico Tiepolo, Pulcinella's Farewell to Venice (Pulcinella's Release from Prison), brown ink and wash over black chalk on paper, 13 1/8 x 18 1/4" (34.8 x 46.4 cm), 1797/1804. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., gift of Robert and Clarice Smith. As Pulcinella is released from prison, his wife and son look on and a crowd of other Pulcinellas celebrates. Behind the group is a fine panorama of the Grand Canal, a gondola, and the church of San Giorgio Maggiore.*

◆ *Opposite: Giandomenico Tiepolo, The Swing, fresco, 78 1/4 x 66 7/8" (200 x 170 cm), 1793. Museo del Settecento Veneziano di Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.*





◆ Giandomenico Tiepolo, Pulcinella as a Portrait Painter, brown ink and wash over black chalk, 14 x 18½" (35.5 x 47 cm), late eighteenth century. Collection of Alice M. Kaplan, New York. *The Amusement for Children* album gives Pulcinella a variety of professions. Here he poses as a painter in gently mocking homage to his own art. In a related drawing Pulcinella paints a history painting, a clear reference to the grandiose conceptions of Giandomenico's celebrated father, Giambattista.

◆ Opposite: Giovanni Domenico Ferretti, Harlequin as Painter, oil on canvas, 38½ x 30½" (97.7 x 78.7 cm), from the series *The Disguises of Harlequin*, 1740–60. The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota.

Besides representing all of humankind, Pulcinella is also clearly the artist's alter ego, another self given multiple reincarnations. Not least of these is a role (not entirely flattering to the artist himself) that we have seen illustrated before (see page 125): the self-parodying image of the clown as painter. Giovanni Domenico Ferretti (1692–1768), another eighteenth-century Italian painter, offers a far more grotesque image of this in his *Harlequin as Painter*, from the series *The Disguises of Harlequin*.

The *Divertimento* series, revealing Giandomenico's virtuosity and inventiveness as a draftsman, carries the eighteenth-century Venetian taste for *capricci* and *scherzi di fantasia* (imaginative visual jokes) to an extreme. In the same vein, Pulcinella appears, along with Harlequin and Columbine, the Doctor and Pierrot, on the squares of an eighteenth-century game board, as reproduced in a painting (page 144) by Francesco Celebrano (1729–1814).

Giandomenico created his Pulcinella drawings at a moment of crisis in Venice. The city, for more than eight hundred years an independent republic, fell to Napoleon in 1797. Both the nobility and the populace were greatly affected.











It is therefore tempting to see Pulcinella as something of a revolutionary figure. The *Divertimento* drawings range from the absurd and the obscene to the sublime. In the Carnival of existence, where the world is turned upside down and the impossible becomes possible, Pulcinella reigns—transgressive, liberating, socially marginal, yet poignant.<sup>22</sup>

Giandomenico Tiepolo's late eighteenth-century renderings of fantastic commedia figures in actual places are, like Watteau's, both lighthearted and serious, satirical and wistful at the same time. In Tiepolo's drawings there is nowhere that delicate sense of the mystery of nature one finds in Watteau, but like the Frenchman he wittily intermingles real-life personages and masks from the stage. In Pulcinella he achieves a synthesis of these in a single figure. For Tiepolo's charming misfit, the truth is what you can touch and enjoy with the senses in a materialist world; for Watteau's sensitive clowns, Gilles, Mezzetino, and Columbine, the truth is what you can imagine and dream about. Yet in both artists' work the commedia characters retain their magical status.

This sense of magical transformation was evoked not only in the private *fêtes* and garden parties of the French and Germanic courts and the Italian villas, or in the paintings made about them, but on the public stages too. Carnival masks, exotic costumes, and stylized behavior by both actors and audiences transformed theaters—whether in palaces or fairgrounds—into places of quasi-worship and scarcely cloaked erotic ritual. During the period of commedia's ascendancy, small court and garden theaters sprang up not only in Italy and France but in Bohemia, the German states, Scandinavia, and elsewhere throughout Europe; these became shrines to local dynastic powers.

Just as painting flowered in these centuries, so too did theatrical set and costume design. Artists such as the renowned Giacomo Torelli created splendid costumes and extravagant sets in the form of grottoes and underworld realms. We gain an idea of these from a few extant theaters (see page 65), as well as from drawings and models (see pages 12, 23). The superb watercolor sketches of Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini (1636–1707), a designer at the imperial court in Vienna, interpret commedia dell'arte themes in the Baroque mode (see pages 48, 58, 59, 146, 147). Among Burnacini's Italian-style sets for Vienna is a fanciful chariot decorated with animals, birds, and sausages, pulled and ridden by commedia characters. Such cars probably derive from Carnival floats.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries nobles built private theaters in their immense mainland villas. These provided a three-dimensional counterpart to the *fête galante* painting: set in ballrooms and gardens, they presented fantastic landscapes in architecture, often lavishly decorated with Baroque sculptures of the sort painted by Watteau and Guercino (Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, 1591–1666).

◆ Francesco Celebrano, *The Game of Even and Odd*, oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 40 1/4" (78 x 102 cm), c. 1765–80. Museo Correale di Terranova, Sorrento. This painting represents a *Biribissi* board, a form of gambling game or lotto. Traditionally popular around Naples, it was from time to time outlawed by the Bourbon rulers. Besides commedia dell'arte figures, the squares contain coats of arms, fruits, animals, a sailing ship, and other symbols. Players placed their bets on both even and odd numbers, to increase their chances of winning. Commedia characters are often associated with games of chance, at which many of them are skilled, though they are known to cheat.





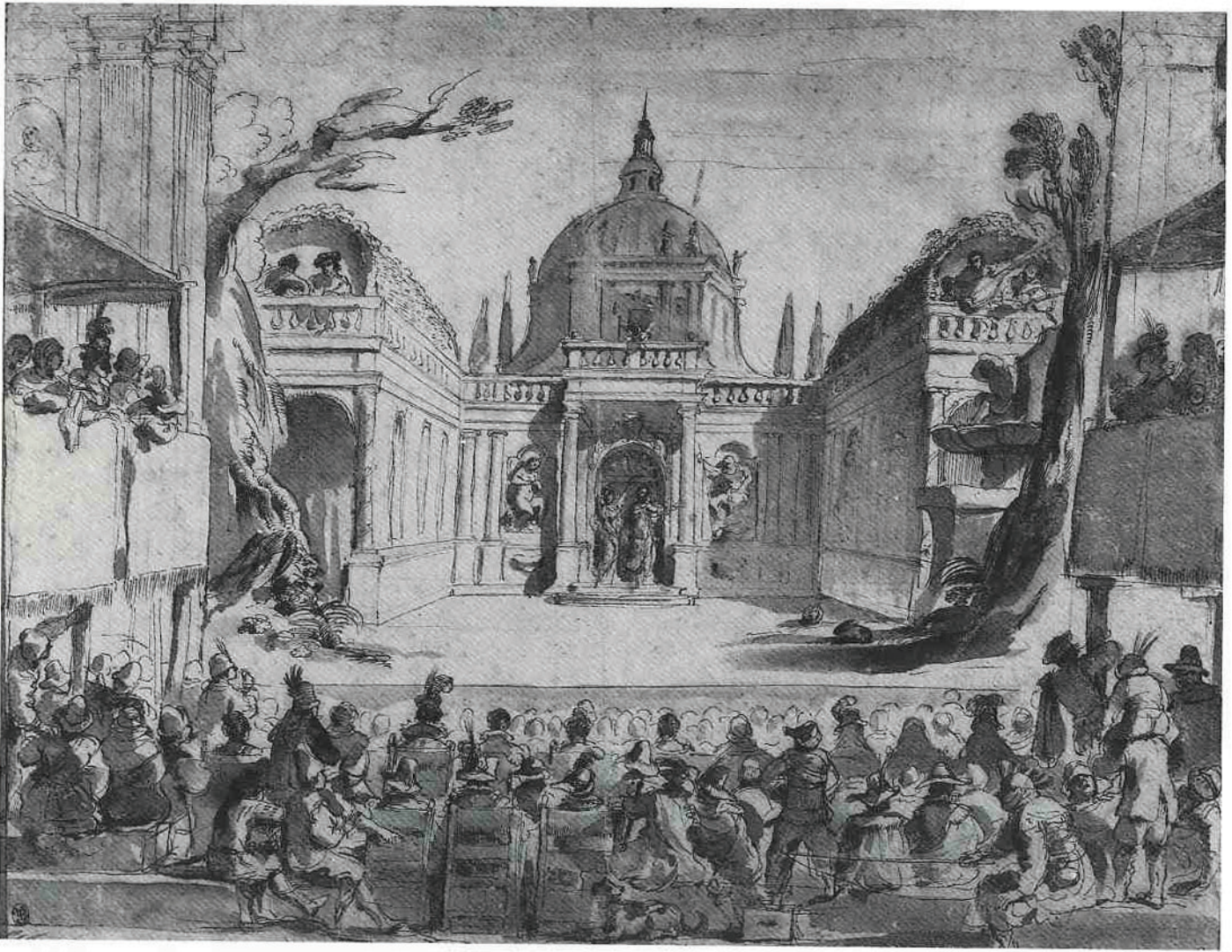




♦ Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini,  
 Harlequin's Chariot, watercolor on  
 paper, 6 x 10 1/8" (15.3 x 25.7 cm),  
 seventeenth century. Österreichische  
 Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

♦ Opposite: Lodovico Ottavio  
 Burnacini, Harlequin, watercolor on  
 paper, 10 1/8 x 6" (25.7 x 15.3 cm),  
 seventeenth century. Österreichische  
 Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.





◆ Guercino, Theatrical Performance, ink and wash on paper, 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> x 18<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" (35.8 x 46.2 cm), c. 1620. British Museum, London.

In the garden of the Villa Conti Lampertico at Montegaldella, near Vicenza, stand one hundred lifesize stone commedia dell'arte figures by Orazio Marinali (1643–1720), cunningly arranged in groups, as if conversing onstage. The habit of staging outdoor performances in imposing villas spread through Europe. The Château de Malle in the Bordeaux region of France boasts a garden full of pagan statuary, with a little arched stone kiosk with niches containing full-length statues of commedia dell'arte figures. This small loggia was used as the backdrop for theatrical performances.

In the castle of Český Krumlov in southern Bohemia is a unique example of a seventeenth-century Baroque theater. In this former stronghold of the von Schwarzenberg princes Italian comedy held an unusually high place of honor. The walls of the large Room of the Masks are entirely painted on three sides with delightful illusionistic frescoes showing members of an itinerant commedia dell'arte troupe mingling with local nobles and peasantry in an elaborate, crowded *trompe l'oeil* panorama (pages 150–55). Running around the walls are



◆ *Anonymous, The Captain, stone statue from the Château de Malle, Entre-Deux-Mers, Bordeaux.*

◆ *Below: Anonymous, eighteenth-century stone garden theater with commedia dell'arte statues. Château de Malle, Entre-Deux-Mers, Bordeaux.*

painted lifesize theater boxes in which commedia characters and other people sit or stand, conversing and gazing at the center of the room as if it were the stage and they the audience. On the end wall, on either side of a big mirror, are painted views into gardens. Adding to the illusion, the painted balconies and balustrades alternate with real balconies and deep bays with real windows. The large mirror further reduplicates parts of the scenes, as well as mirroring real visitors, playing illusion upon illusion.





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