

Italian Plays of the Renaissance

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The University of Iowa Library's collection of Italian plays of the sixteenth century is a recent acquisition. Its forty odd volumes, though numerically few, constitute a nucleus around which it is hoped a larger collection will grow. It owes its origin to no special plan or fund, but only to the scholarly needs of faculty and students, at whose behest the books were purchased during the last decade. The aim of these acquisitions has been primarily not to duplicate works already plentiful in modern editions, but to purchase only those that have become rare or out of print. Thus the availability of reputable modern editions of the plays of better known dramatists like Machiavelli, Bibbiena, Aretino, Della Porta, Tasso, and Bruno, was a determining factor in the exclusion of these authors from our collection. In virtue of the criterion used in making the acquisitions, it follows that most of the books in the collection are valuable *per se* as rare editions. Still others are valuable for the fact that they are first editions.

On the basis of the information given in the imprints, we learn that our plays issued from presses located in Venice, Florence, and Rome. It should be noted, however, that these were not the only cities engaged in the art of book making at that time. By the start of the sixteenth century, printing establishments had sprung up in almost all Italian cities. Their highest concentration was in the north. Venice soon became the printing capital of the Peninsula. The thirteen plays in our collection bearing a Venetian imprint reflect this fact.

Of the Venetian printers whose names appear in the bibliographical list appended to this note, mention might be made of two of the most outstanding; the Giunti and Giolito. The Giunti were descendants of the Florentine printer, Lucantonio Giunti, who had been a major rival of Aldus Manutius. At an early period, members of the family left Florence to continue the paternal craft in other cities such as Rome,

Venice, Lyons, Madrid, and Burgos. The standards of excellent workmanship associated with the founder of the dynasty were also maintained by the Venetian descendants. The Giolitos, like the Giunti, were not originally Venetians, since their forebears hailed from Piedmont. This shop remained in the family for almost a century and earned its reputation from the work of Gabriele, who brought out as a series many excellent editions of Italian classics, noteworthy for their clear italic type and uniform duodecimo format.

The international significance of the Italian dramatic literature of this epoch is evident in the vogue obtained in countries such as France, England, and Spain. For example, included within the limitations of our collection was Cecchi's *Servigiale*, the source for Lope de Rueda's *Comedia Armelina* (a critical edition of which was recently produced as a doctoral dissertation at this university). Molière drew upon Secchi's *Interesse* for his *Dépit amoureux*; and the *Inganni*, which Larivey translated into French as *Les tromperies*, is regarded as the possible model for a scene in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. Odet de Turnèbe, in his *Les contens*, borrowed extensively from Piccolomini's *Alessandro*, which George Chapman took over part and parcel for his *May-Day*. The Shakespearean character *Petruccio* appears for the first time in Pino's *Ingiusti Sdegni*, and one of the earliest English tragedies, Gascoigne's *Jocasta* (1556), was based on Dolce's *Giocasta*. Epicuro's *Cecaria* (1525), a dramatic eclogue more than the tragic-comedy it purports to be, found its way into some of the passages of Garcilaso de la Vega's first eclogue.

One of the best examples of the Italian farce of this period is Giancarli's *Cingana* (the Gypsy), 1545. It is remarkable for its polyglottism, and is probably the first play where, in addition to various dialects, the characters speak Graeco-Italian, Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic, and Romany. In spite of the difficult reading resulting from this linguistic hodgepodge, the work enjoyed such widespread appeal that Lope de Rueda saw fit to imitate it in his *Medora*. Standard Italian, however, is the language of another farce, *Floria* (1560), a three-act play by the Siennese Antonio Vignali. Its rather obscene subject matter did not prevent it from being premiered at a convent of nuns. Its author, incidentally, was the first, perhaps, to take a group of players abroad with an Italian repertory. Vignali directed the performance of the *Floria* and other plays at the court of Philip II of Spain.

For purposes of classification, most of our plays may be labeled "learned comedy" because they are consciously modeled after the works of Plautus and Terence. Their essential traits are the love in-

trigue and typological characterization. To this category belong Piccolomini's *Amor costante* and *Alessandro*, Dolce's *Marito*, Gabiani's *Gelosi*, Parabosco's *Contenti*, Gelli's *Errore*, D'Ambra's *Bernardi*, as well as the plays of Secchi, Cecchi, and Guarini.

"Serious comedy," in which the border-lines between the comic and tragic orders are less neatly drawn, comes as a subsequent development of "learned comedy." One of its merits was a more realistic portrayal of the human condition. In his *Ingiusti sdegni* more than in *Sbratta*, Bernardino Pino relied on sentimentality and pathos and reduced the coarse and slapstick, and thus helped guide Italian comedy in the direction of "serious comedy." But one of the best examples of this new manner was Oddi's *Erofilomachia*. Oddi also left us his "manifesto" on "serious comedy" in the prologue to his *Prigione d'amore*. It is worth noting that the discussion takes on the form of a debate between Tragedy and Comedy personified and is, therefore, a departure from the traditional prological mold.

Within the framework of the "learned comedy," other playwrights, such as the dramatists of the Intronati Academy of Siena, though not practitioners of the serious manner in the strict sense, introduced the romantic love theme. A case in point is the Romeo-and-Juliet theme of Piccolomini's *Amor costante*. To the Intronati group we can also trace some of the earliest attempts to assign the heroine a more dominant role. The ancients had regarded the "puella honesta" as a creature to be heard of but never to be seen, but Renaissance Italy realized that this attitude clashed with the facts of reality which comedy, more than other genres, mirrored so faithfully. The Intronati achieved their goal by a veritable *tour de force*: the heroine was smuggled on stage, so to speak, disguised as a man. Such emancipatory moves for the female role bore fruit especially in the second half of the century in the plays of Niccolo Secchi (*Inganni* and *Interesse*) and eventually led also to the replacement of *iuvenes imberbes* by actresses.

Not unlike comedy, neo-classical tragedy sought its model primarily in Rome, by borrowing its cothurn from Seneca. Italy's first "regular" tragedy, that is, composed in accordance with Aristotle's precepts, is the *Sofonisba* (1524) of G. G. Trissino. A pedant more than a poet, he also took up the cudgels in behalf of a more rigid Hellenism. But Sophocles and Euripides are late-comers on the Italian scene, where Seneca is too solidly entrenched; from his plays the Italian tragedians ape the horrific, long sententious speeches and sluggish action. Trissino, with his retinue of uninspired disciples, succeeded only in producing a congeries of boring closet dramas. Among them, the Floren-

tine Lodovico Martelli, in an endeavor to heed the gospel of Trissino, tailors the Roman account of *Tullia* to fit the structural pattern lifted from the Sophoclean *Electra*, but only with partial success. His play was hailed in its day as the first tragedy to observe rigorously all three unities. The Venetian Lodovico Dolce, an avowed follower of Euripides and Seneca, in his *Giocasta*, *Thieste*, *Medea*, *Ifigenia*, and *Hecuba*, did no more than to translate from the original, despite his claim that they were products of his imagination. Yet, it may be said in his behalf, that he rendered a real service to his contemporaries, for the vernacular dress permitted classical tragedy to reach a wider reading public.

With *Selene*, *Didone*, and *Cleopatra* by Gibaldi, the label "tragedia" has already become inadequate to describe the product aptly. Best known as the author of *novelle* (*Hecatommithi*) containing the stories of *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, Gibaldi effected a most important innovation in dramatic literature by preferring, against the express dictum of Aristotle, tragedy with a fictional plot and a happy ending. Gibaldi never admitted his plays were tragicomedies, but only tragedies with a happy ending (*di lieto fine*). Though still taking his cue from Seneca in his practice, Gibaldi, in his *Selene*, takes a bold step toward the elimination of the horrific from tragedy.

The cultural environment of the Ferrara court and the patronage of the Este princes fostered much of the most important dramatic production of the century, starting with the plays of Ariosto and continuing with Gibaldi, Guarini, Tasso, and others. It was this cultural humus that bred the first full-fledged pastoral drama, the *Sacrificio* of Agostino de' Beccari (1554). With its never-never land of Arcadia, peopled with shepherds and shepherdesses, concerned primarily with the joys and woes of love, it sets the standard for all subsequent pastorals (from Guarini's *Pastor Fido* to Tasso's *Amyntas*), and provides its aristocratic audiences with an escape literature and an intriguing game, wherein the players are thinly disguised contemporaries and fellow patricians. To this genre, that had its flowering in the decadent stages of the Italian Renaissance, belongs the *Filli di Sciro* by Guidobaldo De' Bonarelli, regarded by many as the best pastoral after the *Amyntas* and *Pastor Fido* on account of its flowing, musical lines and its sound dramatic structure. A most influential play, it served as a model well into the nineteenth century.

Anonymous. *Comedia intitolata sine nomine*. Fiorenza, Giunti, 1574.
Cecchi, Giovanmaria. *I dissimili*. Comedia. Vinegia, Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari e fratelli, 1550.

- . *Il servigiale*. Comedia. Fiorenza, Giunti, 1561.
- . *Comedia*. Libro Primo. Venetia, Bernardo Giunti, 1585.
- . *La moglie*. Comedia. Venetia, Bernardo Giunti, 1585.
- D'Ambra, Francesco. *I Bernardi*. Comedia. Fiorenza, Giunti, 1564.
- De' Bonarelli, Guidobaldo. *Filli di Sciro*. Favola Pastorale. Ferrara, V. Baldini, 1607.
- Decio, Antonio. *Acripanda*. Tragedia. Firenze, Sermartelli, 1592.
- Dolce, Lodovico. *Il marito*. Comedia. Vinegia, Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1560.
- . *Tragedie: Giocasta, Didone, Thieste, Medea, Ifigenia, Hecuba*. Vinegia, G. Giolito, 1560.
- Epicuro, Marcantonio. *Cecaria*. Tragicomedia. Vinegia, Nicolo d'Aristotile detto Zoppino, 1535.
- Gabiani, Vincenzo. *I gelosi*. Vinegia, Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1560.
- Gelli, Giambattista. *Lo errore*. Comedia. Firenze, Giunti, 1603.
- Giancarli, Gigio Artemio. *La cingana*. Comedia. Vinegia, Agostino Bindoni, 1550.
- Giraldi, Giambattista. *Selene*. Tragedia. Venetia, Giulio Cesare Cagnacini, 1583.
- . *Didone*. Tragedia. Venetia, Giulio Cesare Cagnacini, 1583.
- . *Cleopatra*. Tragedia. Venetia, Giulio Cesare Cagnacini, 1583.
- Guarini, Giambattista. *La idropica*. Venetia, Gio. Batt. Ciotti, 1613.
- Martelli, Lodovico. *Le rime volgari*. Roma, Antonio Blado, 1533. (Tragedy *Tullia* starts on fol. 117b.)
- Oddi, Sforza Degli. *Prigione d'amore*. Comedia. Fiorenza, Filippo Giunti, 1590.
- . *Comedie Il duello d'amore e d'amicitia, Li morti vivi, La prigione d'amore*. Vinegia, G. e G. Sessa, 1597.
- Parabosco, Girolamo. *I contenti*. Comedia. Vinegia, G. e G. Sessa, 1597.
- Piccolomini, Alessandro. *L'amor costante*. Comedia. Composta per la venuta de l'Imperatore in Siena l'anno del xxxvi. Venetia, al segno del pozzo, 1550.
- . *Comedia intitolata Alessandro*. Vineggia, Agostino Bindoni, 1550.
- . *Alessandro*. Comedia. Vinegia, Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1562.
- Pino, Bernardino. *Lo Sbratta*. Comedia. Venetia, L. Spineda, 1603.
- . *Gli ingiusti sdegni*. Comedia. Venetia, Giovambattista e Giovan Bernardo Sessa, 1597.
- Razzi, Girolamo. *La Gostanza*. Comedia. Firenze, Cosimo Giunti, 1604.
- Secchi, Niccolo. *La cameriera*. Comedia. Vinetia, A de' Vecchi, 1606.
- . *L'interesse*. Comedia. Venetia, F. Ziletti, 1581.
- . *G'inganni*. Comedia. Venetia, G. Imberti, 1627.
- Vignali, Antonio. *La Floria*. Comedia. Fiorenza, Giunti, 1560.

[Editor's note: Spelling and punctuation follow the style of the original.]