È caso da intermedio! Comic Theory, Comic Style and the Early Intermezzo

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of the comic intermezzo’s literary origins and musical practice in the years before Pergolesi’s La serva padrona (1733). It begins with a chronological examination of Italian comic plays and operas written between 1660 and 1723. During these years comic playwrights adopted a style of writing speech from the improvised theatre which makes use of what Richard Andrews (1993) refers to as “elastic gags.” This style of comedy flourished under Medici patronage in Florence in the last decades of the seventeenth century and then spread to Venice, Rome and Naples during the first years of the intermezzo’s development. It is a style of comedy shared with the plays of Molière, and other contemporaneous French authors. This dissertation examines several scenes based on French works which have previously not been identified as having earlier sources.

The decision to adapt these earlier sources for the intermezzo did not occur in a vacuum. The practice of comedy in the intermezzo was conditioned by the artistic, social and political climate of Italy. This study investigates the relationship between intermezzos and the milieus which produced them. The success of some intermezzos, like Il marito giocatore (1719),
resulted from a combination of their artistic merit and their broad social appeal, while others, like *Albino e Plautilla* (1723), were musically adept but remained obscure because their humour was specific to the world they satirized. Both intermezzos are indebted to earlier French sources.

Many others which are metatheatrical in nature draw on contemporary debates about opera.

A final section examines selected arias from the intermezzo repertory using incongruity theory. Comic theory makes clear that the intermezzo’s musical language was not a new development. Just as librettists drew on earlier written traditions to form the literary text of the intermezzo, composers drew on existing musical practices to create humour. The intermezzo was therefore not naively comic—a portrait of the genre which is all too common—but rather a repertory which was thoroughly enmeshed within contemporary artistic practice and a wider social and cultural world.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the dedication to *The Grove, or, Love’s Paradise* (1700), the poet and historian John Oldmixon observed that “there is nothing so tedious to Mankind in general, as an Encomium, where they are not themselves concern’d.” He nevertheless went on to heap praise on the dedicatee. I will similarly express my humble gratitude at some length, with apologies to those who are not themselves concerned. But this dissertation is thanks to so many for their kindness, expertise and support.

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Preface

Except for the occasional short phrase, all quotations in Italian, French and German appear in translation in the body of the text. The original text of secondary sources appears in the footnotes; text taken from dramatic works themselves appears either in brackets next to the translation in text or alongside the translation in an example. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. Musical examples have been notated with articulations as they appear in their original manuscript scores unless otherwise indicated. Examples are notated from published editions when possible. The clefs for the female parts have been changed from soprano or alto to treble for ease of reading. An alphabetical list of the intermezzos examined for this work appears in the appendix. Other librettos and musical scores appear in the bibliography.

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INTRODUCTION

APPROACHES TO HUMOUR AND THE INTERMEZZO

Investigating what makes people laugh is serious business. E.B. White once famously declared that “humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.”¹ The “pure sciences” have indeed found the topic of laughter and humour an irresistibly rich source for study; the cognitive sciences have recently tackled the topic with vigour. A 2003 article in Brain, a peer-reviewed neuroscience journal, surveys over one hundred studies on laughter published since the field exploded in 1985.² It is easy to understand why laughter is so seductive to the scientifically minded. The physical response to comedy offers a cornucopia of physiological responses to investigate. Even the most basic response to humour is a complicated matter. Scientists have


² For a review of recent studies see Barbara Wild, Frank A. Rodden, Wolfgang Grodd and Willibald Ruch, “Neural Correlates of Laughter and Humour,” in Brain 126, no. 10 (2003): 2121-2138. The review admittedly includes studies of patients with gelastic epilepsy, a disease characterized by involuntary fits of laughter without external stimulus (from the Greek gelos: laughter).
catalogued no fewer than sixteen different types of smiles. But they have had a relatively more difficult time dealing with the catalyst for this response. “Humour,” according to the study in Brain, is “somewhat in the role of an uninvited guest at a family reunion.” This problem of why people laugh at what they do has preoccupied and often vexed philosophers since Aristotle. This humanistic role of comedy—what it means to art and the people who watch it—has been hotly debated with respect to spoken comedy and later musical traditions, but touched on only lightly with respect to the intermezzo repertory.

Writing in The Musical Quarterly in 1917, John C. Griggs noted the salutary effect that comedy has had on operatic reform movements throughout the centuries. He poetically wrote that “[c]omedy is the universal leveler of life, the gracious light resting strained vision, the solvent breaking the tension of overwrought effort.” His purple prose perfectly encapsulates the view of those musicologists of the twentieth century who sought to ally musical comedy with the theories of Henri Bergson. Bergson’s succinct definition of the comic as “something mechanical encrusted on the living” captures not only a truth about comedy, but about the age in which he wrote. Weary of the insidious influence of evolutionary theory on all aspects of life and study, Bergson defined comedy as a necessary ointment for the disease of Darwinism. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Darwinism spurred a mechanistic approach to philosophies of the natural and metaphysical worlds.

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4 Wild et al., 2122.


6 Bergson’s philosophical work rests on belief in the “élan vital” as the driving force of evolution in the natural world. This theory was published in his L’évolution créatrice (Paris: F. Alcan, 1909). As Richard Lehan has written: “Bergson challenged at the outset the priority of a mechanistic, Darwinian evolution that robbed the universe of a creative unfolding and man of the corresponding creative power of a deep subjectivity within which
It is no surprise to find Bergson’s view echoed in the work of Richard Taruskin, who has similarly been wary of a mechanistic approach to history. In a series of articles in the public and academic press he assailed the slavish devotion to historical performance practice as a mask for a modern aesthetic of “determined literalism [...] governed by an ideal of fleet coolness and light that is wholly born of ironized 20th-century taste.” It is little surprise, then, that in detailing the development of classical style he would seek out contemporary perspectives to explain the appeal of the Italian comic idiom. His titanic *Oxford History of Western Music* begins its history of classical style with its humble origins in farcical “intermission plays,” Taruskin’s term for intermezzos. Taruskin laments the exiguous amount of secondary research on the mid-eighteenth century, but states in no uncertain terms that “the later eighteenth-century style was in effect the comic style.” To support this claim, he quotes Diderot’s famous dictum from *Le Neveu de Rameau* that “it is the animal cry of passion that should dictate the melodic line.” However, *Le Neveu* dates from sometime after 1760, and should more closely be associated with the mid-century “reforms” of Traetta and Gluck. Diderot’s concern for dramatic realism, though in part inspired by the Italian intermezzos as they were performed in Paris beginning in 1752,

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9 Taruskin, 437.
should not be taken as a direct result of the musical style of the intermezzo. Intermezzos, while naturalistic in setting, are hardly “natural” art works. They are as much artful constructions as the serious operas with which they were performed, and are the results, as I hope to show, of a highly self-conscious effort to create musical comedy based on existing literary models.

In attempting to locate the “animal cry of passion” in the intermezzo, I believe Taruskin has made a misstep. Taruskin’s view is, to paraphrase his own comments about the anachronism of historical performance practice, governed by an ideal of verisimilitude that is wholly born of sentimentalized mid-eighteenth century French taste. When we retroject mid-eighteenth century notions of musical aesthetics onto an earlier period, we distort our image of what librettists and composers were actually doing.\textsuperscript{10} In the early 1720s, for example, the composer of the \textit{opera seria} and the intermezzo were almost always the same. Can we suggest that when writing comic music composers somehow adopted a radically different method of composition from the way they prepared their operatic tragedies?\textsuperscript{11} This leaves our musical historiography somewhat wanting.

\textsuperscript{10} The theatre historian Robert D. Hume eloquently protests just this type of historiography. Regarding the notion of Romanticism, for example, he writes that later narratives have distorted our view of earlier nineteenth-century writers: “What has happened here, I think, is that a period characterization has been extrapolated out of a few privileged texts and then read back onto the literature of the time. The reading has enormous coercive power, in part because it grows out of a set of value judgements that are difficult to challenge unless they are out in the open. Wordsworth and Coleridge became heroic/valorized figures in the course of the late 1830s and 1840s. Reading this mythic construct back onto the beginning of the century has created a monstrously distorted sense of what the world looked like to the people who actually lived then—including the ‘romantic poets’ themselves.’’ In Hume, \textit{Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 68-69.

\textsuperscript{11} There is not necessarily a causal relationship between Italian music and mid-century French aesthetics. As Jaecqueline Waebner has recently pointed out, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s interest in simplicity and the primacy of melody predate the \textit{querelle} and were not primarily inspired by Italian music in the first place. She makes the point clear that: “while the reception and promotion of ‘unité de mélodie’ after 1753 clearly had much to do with the dissemination in France of the style galant, it may not be correct to project this connection back onto the origins of the concept before that time, particularly because Rousseau’s musical preferences during the 1740s and before the \textit{Querelle des Bouffons} were essentially pro-French […] and also because the origins of the ‘unité de mélodie’ have much more to do with Rousseau’s ideas about listening and musical communication than matters of musical styles,” Jaecqueline Waebner, “Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s ‘unité de mélodie’,” \textit{Journal of the American Musicological Society} 62, no. 1 (2009): 79-143.
Taruskin’s work nevertheless represents the triumph of a significant rethinking of eighteenth-century historiography that began in the late 1960s. That decade’s interest in non-Viennese musicians produced a number of dissertations on composers such as Hasse which marked a sea-change in the thinking about musical style.\textsuperscript{12} Daniel Heartz drew attention to the vocal music of such composers as Leo, Hasse, Pergolesi and Vinci. Heartz argued that these composers were pathfinders of the modern style typified by the “new simplicity and naturalness achieved in Italian opera” under the influence of the Arcadian reforms of Zeno and later Metastasio.\textsuperscript{13} Heartz was, in some ways, merely echoing the prescient voice of Edward J. Dent, who as early as 1913 boldly declared that “the classical tradition is nothing more or less than the Italian tradition.”\textsuperscript{14} The ensuing three decades after Heartz’s clarion call marked a period in which scholars attempted to shake loose from the traditional German historiography which, following Hugo Riemann, prized the Mannheim school as a sort of evolutionary “missing link” between the great north German composers of the baroque and the Viennese classical masters.\textsuperscript{15} Following Heartz, scholars began to focus on Italian vocal music as the progenitor, caregiver and trendsetter of classical style.

This period was of course also one in which musicology itself underwent dramatic changes in scholarly methods and concerns. For those who have followed the writing of Heartz, James Webster, and other scholars during this period, it may seem as though an Italo-centric

\textsuperscript{12} For example, Sven Hansell’s dissertation “The Solo Cantatas, Motets and Antiphons of Johann Adolf Hasse” (diss., University of Illinois, 1966).


view of eighteenth-century music has by now all but ossified. But it is worth remembering how recently this view has taken root in the more conspicuous musicological sources. The journal *Eighteenth-Century Music* was only founded in 2004. In its inaugural issue, editors Cliff Eisen and Dean Sutcliffe admitted that the field of eighteenth-century studies was perhaps “slow to reposition itself in this new intellectual environment.”

In that same issue James Webster suggested a tripartite division of the century to replace the outmoded bifurcation of the century at its midpoint. He was aware that the baroque had clearly taken its last breath before Bach did on 28 July, 1750. Webster separates a long eighteenth century into three stylistic periods: the late baroque (to roughly 1720), the mid-century (1720-1780) and the late eighteenth-century (1780-1815 or 1830). For Webster, classical style begins in the mid-century, a period characterized by the emergence of the *galant* aesthetic typified by Italian opera. The final period is marked by the triumph of Viennese classicism of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven (and perhaps Schubert, if one were to include Webster’s later date for the termination of the century). Only in 2006 did a seventh edition of Donald Grout’s seminal *A History of Western Music*, revised by Americanist J. Peter Burkholder, replace the baroque-classic division with a five-chapter section on the eighteenth-century. In this context, Taruskin’s inclusion of the intermezzo as the centrepiece of early classicism is both timely and telling. While the intermezzo had always had a place in musicological historiography, its status as a primarily Neapolitan vocal genre gives it a new prominence in a

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reworked historiographic model. Resected from the pallid corpse of twentieth-century histories, the intermezzo now forms the heart of the historiography of classical style.

But despite the recent triumph of the intermezzo in these historical surveys, research dedicated to the intermezzo as a genre has been limited since the early 1970s. In 1970, Gordana Lazarevich completed a dissertation at Columbia University on the literary and musical aspects of the Neapolitan intermezzo, though she also discusses its Venetian counterpart.19 Two years later, Charles Troy completed a dissertation at Harvard University on exactly the same repertory.20 His dissertation was subsequently published in 1979.21 Troy admits in the preface to his later publication that he had not consulted Lazarevich’s work in the intervening seven years since the completion of his thesis. Despite their lack of collaboration, both dissertations are thorough and accurate studies of the intermezzo, though they both choose to emphasize difference aspects of that repertory.

Lazarevich’s dissertation is divided into three sections. The second part, which discusses the evolution of the Neapolitan intermezzo, by far constitutes the bulk of the dissertation. Part I recounts the allure of Naples to “composers from all of Europe, who, once they have tasted the fruits of music ripened under the southern Mediterranean sun, became converts to the Neapolitan style of writing.”22 Lazarevich’s romantic vision of the city in no way impinged upon her rigorous historical research. Part II of her dissertation divides the evolution of the intermezzo into three phases. First, she describes its beginnings as comic scenes added to serious operas by

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22 Lazarevich, “The Role of the Neapolitan Intermezzo,” v.
such composers as Alessandro Scarlatti. Second, she details its “middle period” of the 1720s in which composers such as Vinci, Leo and Feo cut their compositional teeth writing these works. Lazarevich’s third phase constitutes the works of Hasse and Pergolesi, whose intermezzos were revived throughout Europe and performed by traveling comedic duos. She completes this section by detailing those elements of the intermezzo’s musical style which were of importance to the later classical style. She suggests that four elements were important: the periodic melodic phrase, slow harmonic rhythm, frequent cadences and a transparent texture (“orchestral padding,” as she terms it). These elements, which characterize the intermezzo’s music particularly of the 1720s onwards, became the seminal musical style upon which northern composers developed the classical style. Lazarevich’s Part III details the literary development of the Venetian intermezzo, including its links to Molière (as I later suggest in chapter two, however, this is not exclusively a Venetian phenomenon). Lazarevich’s subsequent publications in the 1970s are all largely derived from the research completed for her dissertation. She has also completed four editions of intermezzos by Hasse. These editions and her scholarship are largely responsible for the revival and performance of many of Hasse’s intermezzo output.

23 Lazarevich’s dismissal of the music of the Venetian intermezzo as “not so successful” in comic characterization was challenged by Michael Talbot in “Tomaso Albinoni’s Pimpinone and the Comic Intermezzo,” in Con che Soavità: Studies in Italian Opera, Song, and Dance, 1580-1740, edited by Iain Fenlon and Tim Carter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 229-248. Talbot concedes that Albinoni’s music is not as “progressive” as that of the Neapolitans, but suggests that Lazarevich judges the musical success of all Venetian scores too harshly.


25 Johann Adolf Hasse, L’artigiano gentiluomo: or, Larinda e Vanesio, edited by Gordana Lazarevich (Madison, WI: A-R editions, 1979); Hasse, Three Intermezzi: 1728, 1729 and 1730, edited by Gordana Lazarevich (Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1992). The three intermezzi in the collection are La contadina (Scintilla e Don Tabarano), La serva scaltra (Dorilla e Balanzone) and Il tutore (Lucilla e Pandolfo).
Charles Troy’s work covers the same repertory, but examines it through a different historical lens. Troy views the intermezzo synchronically, avoiding constructing a grand narrative about its development in favour of examining its constituent parts and contextualizing them appropriately. As such, he avoids Lazarevich’s highly geographic orientation, in which classical style develops from a distinctly Neapolitan musical vernacular. He instead begins with literary aspects of the intermezzo and moves to its musical setting, detailing those aspects of the libretto which have an impact on the musical style. In this he is more successful than Lazarevich at describing the ways in which literary verisimilitude might impact the humour of the music, which he calls “comic realism.” Troy, though, does not go on to explain how “comic realism” is indeed funny, but merely catalogues its features with musical examples. These features are: “comic realism,” repetition, parody and changes of tempo and style. Both Troy and Lazarevich confine the bulk of their research to the years before 1735, after which new intermezzos were no longer produced in Naples and were supplanted with ballets as intermission entertainments.

The same year that Troy completed his dissertation the French scholar Irène Mamczarz completed her expansive monograph on intermission plays of all sorts, including the comic intermezzo. Her wide-ranging research covered everything from seventeenth-century intermedi through mid-eighteenth century feste teatrale. Her discussion of comic intermezzos also included works far beyond 1735, including those of Carlo Goldoni, and especially those performed in Paris during the querelle des bouffons. Mamczarz’s concern is primarily the literary aspects of the intermezzo—its prosody—and not its origins, influence or significance to music history. This is partly a byproduct of her diffuse repertory of investigation, and partly because she spends a slender fifteen pages on music in a book of 684 pages. And, as Lazarevich

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noted in her review from 1974, those fifteen pages are riddled with inaccuracies and misattributions of works. Mamczarz’s work nevertheless contains an exhaustive list of performance dates and locations for many intermezzos.

German scholar Ortrun Landmann also published a dissertation on the intermezzo during those same years. Her work, completed in 1973, focused solely on the repertory of 29 intermezzos held in the collection at Dresden, including the works of Hasse. Landmann’s main concern is therefore documenting the shared musical vocabulary of Italian comic composers and their German counterparts. She ably makes the point that the comic intermezzo, by the 1730s, was a ubiquitous feature of European court entertainments.

All four of these works helped reframe the intermezzo’s place in the historiography of eighteenth-century music. They displaced Pergolesi’s La serva padrona as the beginning of classical style and instead placed Pergolesi’s work within its proper context. In doing so, they were recovering a historical narrative that Charles Burney had constructed two centuries before. As he wrote in his General History of Music:

[Pergolesi’s] charming music, which all the rest of Europe so much admired, was so little noticed in Italy during its first performance, that the name of the Serva Padrona, as an intermezzi [sic] set by the celebrated Pergolesi, is not to be found in the last edition of the Drammaturgia accresciuta e continuata fino all’anno, 1755!29

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29 Charles Burney, A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, to which is prefixed, a Dissertation on the Music of the Ancients, vol. IV (London: Payne & Son, 1789), 132. The Drammaturgia, Leone Allacci’s landmark list of Italian plays and librettos published in Rome in 1666, was updated in 1748 by Giovanni Cendon and Apostolo Zeno. Jacopo Angello Nelli’s play, La serva padrona, is included, but listed under the authorship of Giovanni Fagiuli. Nelli’s play was incorrectly published under Fagiuli’s name in 1727. Nelli’s authoritative 1731 version explicitly states that the work is his in the preface. A modern reprint was made available in 1961. See Drammaturgia: accresciuta e continuata fino all’anno MDCCCLV (Torino: Bottega d’Erasmo, 1961).
Pergolesi’s work, though brilliant, was of course no surprise to Italian audiences that had been treated to intermezzos of its ilk for at least a decade.

The work of Lazarevich and Troy does a masterful job at cataloguing and highlighting many features of the intermezzo’s musical style. But an elephant of a question remains. How might we explain the humour of the intermezzo—what makes it funny—and what significance might this have for our understanding of the intermezzo and its place in history? Lazarevich and Troy’s work, though appearing at the dawn of a new musicological age, is firmly rooted in the positivistic tradition of musical scholarship. Their work glazes over the hermeneutical problem of what a listener should take to be funny. This became the concern of musicologists in the 1980s and 1990s. However, to understand this period of scholarship on humour in music we should first examine the orientation of earlier scholarship which led to an epistemological crisis.

THE STUDY OF HUMOUR IN MUSIC

The comic in music did not arise as a philosophical concern until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Prior to this, commentators (including Kant, whom I will discuss below), were only concerned with poetry, tragedy and the visual arts as subjects for inquiry. Gretchen

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30 A good overview of the comic and music, as well as scholarship on humorous works is found in Enrique Alberto Arias, Comedy in Music: A Historical Bibliographical Resource Guide (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001).

31 Critics did of course discuss the use of comic scenes within dramas, but as abominations and not as aesthetic objects worthy of consideration on their own merit. See chapter 4, section 4.2.
Wheelock’s monograph on humour in the instrumental music of Haydn cites the first example of an essay dealing specifically with humour in music—a short article by Friedrich Weber.\footnote{Gretchen A. Wheelock, *Haydn’s Ingenious Jesting with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humor* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992).}

Physician and amateur composer Friedrich August Weber wrote in 1800 that musical humour is “the special use of the rules of harmony and melody whereby a feeling of the laughable is awakened in the listener whose ear is attuned to it.”\footnote{F.A. Weber, “Über komische Charakteristik und Karikatur in praktischen Musikwerken,” *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 3, no. 9 (1800), 139. Translation in Wheelock, “Wit, Humor, and the Instrumental Music of Joseph Haydn,” 72.} Here, in its earliest manifestation, a theory of humour implicates the listener in an understanding of musical comedy. This will become a running theme in the literature as we will find out below. But as fast as the comic in music became a concern, Romanticism’s seriousness tamped down comedy as worthy of composition or study. The bulk of the nineteenth-century literature was not concerned at all with humour in music. Comedy was an anathema to Romantic aesthetics as far as music was concerned. The problem stemmed from the Romantic view of music as the embodiment of emotion, rather than the representation of material or linguistic realities—these were the spheres of the comic. Johann Stephan Schütze, a compatriot of both Goethe and Beethoven, remarked in a treatise on comedy that

> Music cannot draw on humour itself, as the latter is based on representation. Music is the expression of feelings, and as such remains unaffected by humour since humour presupposes the possibility of representation.\footnote{Johann Stephan Schütze, “Versuch einer Theorie des Komischen, 1817,” in *Über Komik und Humor in der Musik*, edited by R. Hohenemser, *Jahrbuch Peters*, XXIV (1917), 73. Translated in Dalmonte, 168. For the competing views of theories of comedy at this time see Tilden A. Russell, “‘Über das Komische in der Musik’: The Schütze-Stein Controversy,” *The Journal of Musicology* 4, no. 1 (1985/86): 70-90.}

This view seems to have held sway until late in the third decade of the twentieth century. It was encapsulated by Alexander Brent-Smith, the composer and one-time teacher of tenor Peter
Pears. Writing in *The Musical Times* in 1927, Brent-Smith continued to deny the existence of musical humour. For him music existed “only so far as it tends towards perfection,” while humour was the representation of imperfection.\(^{35}\) In this context, Haydn’s “Surprise” symphony is “simply annoying.”\(^{36}\) But while Brent-Smith’s pronouncements seem in themselves comically preposterous, they give evidence of a specific aesthetic understanding of music. For Brent-Smith, humour works in other arts because the juxtaposition of the comic and the beautiful “need not occupy our attention at the same moment of time.”\(^{37}\) Music as a sound art exists only as time progresses, and so juxtaposition is not possible. Music is either incorrect or, as Brent-Smith suggests, “perfection.”

A composer contemporaneous with Brent-Smith voiced a contrasting opinion about the importance of humour in music as a scholarly pursuit. In an article in *The Musical Quarterly* from 1926, the American Henry F. Gilbert asked why phrases of music “seem to us funny, cause us to laugh involuntarily, to smile, or to feel amused?” He admitted that the question was of particular interest to him as someone who held his sense of humour as “one of my most precious possessions.”\(^{38}\) His motives were not entirely so benign. Gilbert was of a generation of American composers who resisted the European tradition—who had “an impatience of the restraining bonds of tradition,” as he put it—and sought to supplant this tradition with a musical style which embodied the “American spirit.”\(^{39}\) Gilbert saw the musical humour inherent in American dance forms such as ragtime as a wellspring of compositional ideas for a uniquely

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\(^{36}\) ibid., 21.

\(^{37}\) ibid.


\(^{39}\) Gilbert, “The American Composer,” *The Musical Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1915), 170. Italics are original.
American idiom. In his article on humour, however, he selects many more usual suspects to examine: Haydn’s “Surprise” symphony, Wagner’s Die Meistersinger prelude and Debussy’s Golliwogg’s Cake-walk, among others. While Gilbert sought to find a “scientific” explanation for these instances of musical humour, his article nevertheless has a decidedly populist bent (Gilbert was not formally trained as either a scholar or a composer). But his concern for formulating an aesthetic basis for our understanding of musical humour marks a turning point in the study of humour in music.

The study of musical humour often follows on the back of more serious topics. This is a pattern which we will see occur even in the writing of comedy in the seventeenth century. In the historiography of musical humour this is also the case. A satisfactory modern understanding of musical humour, then, was not possible until it could be underpinned by a serious aesthetic theory of the musical object. For the study of humour in music, this came two years after Gilbert from the enormously influential Polish philosopher Roman Ingarden. He tackled the problem of the ontology of the work of art in an essay he revised throughout his life, first in German in 1928, then Polish in 1933, and finally translated into English in 1986 (after a revised German version published in 1960). Ingarden asserts a dual nature of a musical artwork. For him, a piece of music, in addition to its existence as a creative act in the mind of the composer and as a “real” object in the form of a score, exists in the minds of its audience. As Ingarden suggests:

Thus musical works exist heteronomously and are, with respect to their properties, in the last analysis dependent on the gradually forming intersubjective conception of the work. These conceptions gradually become certain “regulative ideas” that, after they are once formed and have become known and dominant within a musical community, become a regulative factor influencing, on the one hand, the way the work is apprehended by the listeners, and, on the other hand, the way in which the work is supposed to be performed.41

40 The essay was to be included as an appendix to Roman Ingarden, Das literarische Kunstwerk: Eine Untersuchung aus dem Grenzgebiet der Ontologie, Logik und Literaturwissenschaft (Halle an der Saale: Max Niemeyer, 1931).

While this quotation has sweeping implications for every field of musical inquiry, its implication for the study of humour is straightforward but significant. Ingarden formulates an ontological conception of music which is dependent upon not only the material reality of the score, but upon a collective understanding of the musical work by its audience. A work is not merely “correct” or “incorrect” based upon arbitrary theoretical rules, but contingent upon the listener’s understanding of its musical logic. A linguistic analogy is difficult to avoid here: Ingarden posits that a sounding work, like a spoken sentence, only exists fully if the listener understands its musical grammar. This allows us to break through the problem that Brent-Smith had posed regarding musical cognition. Brent-Smith suggested that musical incongruity was not funny because it did not make musical sense—it could only be understood as noise. Ingarden allowed for any sound to be perceived as a musical artwork so long as an audience expected such an arrangement of notes, phrases and cadences to be present. If a composer manipulated the musical grammar so it would not make sense, the audience wouldn’t perceive it as noise, but rather perceive the composer’s manipulation.

This concept of musical humour was posited by a student of Ingarden, Zofia Lissa, in her dissertation completed in 1938. Lissa drew on Immanuel Kant’s discussion of laughter in his edition, which includes his other essays, was translated from the German edition of 1957, not the Polish essay of 1933. I have not compared these editions to note the nature of the changes, though Ingarden notes in his introduction that the German and the Polish versions are not substantially different in any way.

\[42\] Ingarden’s “regulative ideas” have influenced Lydia Goehr’s provocative notion of the “regulative work concept” which arose at the turn of the nineteenth century. James Webster takes this as one of the defining features of Viennese Classicism and uses this concept to defend his periodization mentioned above. See Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

Critique of Judgment. Kant made a clear break from an Aristotelian view of humour: that is, laughing at the stupidity of others. Instead, Kant suggested that “laughter is an affection rising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.” Lissa then linked this explanation to Ingarden’s concept of “regulative ideas” which govern a work’s composition and reception. For Lissa, musical humour occurs when the audience’s expectation of what should occur is upset by something incongruous. By definition, this incongruous musical moment must be something absurd, low and improper, since for Kant strained expectation must come to nothing. In other words, the composer sets up the expectation of some higher drama to be fulfilled, but finishes instead with an unsatisfactory farce. This is the case in Haydn’s “Surprise,” in which a formal piano phrase is completed with an ungainly fortissimo.

Lissa’s work remained popular in German musicological circles influenced by Ingarden’s aesthetics, and her ideas can be detected in the work of Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, who complemented his research on Bach and Schütz with a concern for aesthetics and the history of ideas. German musicology in the post-war years, following Ingarden, had been more sympathetic to reception studies. The work of Carl Dalhaus is in some ways the culmination of this tradition. English-language musicology, meanwhile, held fast to more positivistic concerns. Aestheticians began to grumble in the 1960s about this lacuna in the literature. R. Gruneberg


45 ibid., 223.

remarked in 1969 that “[f]ailure to recognize the humorous element in music must meantime remain a serious defect in critical appreciation and a distinct gap in philosophical aesthetics.”

The consequence for intermezzo scholarship is that the two major researchers of the repertory, Troy and Lazarevich, conducted their research at a time when thinking about comic music as an aesthetic object was not on their disciplinary radar. Cataloguing features of musical humour had a lengthy but separate tradition in music criticism. The composer Theodor Veidl, who died at Theresienstadt, completed a monograph on humour in Beethoven in 1929. As Gruneberg complained in 1969, Veidl “takes the existence of musical humor for granted and concentrates his study on the technical means by which Beethoven achieves the expression of its many varieties.” This tradition was continued in the work of scholars like John Kucaba who further catalogued moments of humour without explaining what makes them funny. Only in the 1990s, during musicology’s courtship of conspicuous interdisciplinarity, did the study of musical humour and the study of humour begin a peaceable remarriage.

Since musicology’s discovery of the “regulative work-concept” (of Goehr) and an aesthetic understanding of music (of Lissa) occurred almost simultaneously, it is not surprising that scholars of comedy and music have concentrated on music which is governed by the “regulative work-concept,” namely, the works of the late classical period. Mark Evan Bonds explored Haydn’s irony through the lens of Irish novelist Laurence Sterne (1991), and Janet Levy examined Haydn’s humour in light of Bergson’s dictum (1992). By far the most significant

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48 Theodor Veidl, Der musikalische Humor bei Beethoven (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1929).  
49 Gruneberg, 124.  
study of humour in Haydn is Gretchen Wheelock’s *Haydn’s Ingenious Jesting with Art: Contexts of Musical Wit and Humor* from 1992. Wheelock seeks to understand Haydn’s humour through the view of contemporaries, aided with some perspective from modern writers. The title for example, “ingenious jesting with art,” is taken from Domenico Scarlatti’s preface to a set of keyboard exercises from 1739. She divides the book into three sections. The first quotes passages from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century treatises on humour (discussed above) as well as offers a review of some modern literature on comedy (though she suggests Lissa’s view is the distant progeny of Aristotle’s; I would suggest that these views are somewhat distinct). Her second part examines humour in the minuets. The third examines closing gestures in the Symphonic works. Wheelock’s book marvelously details the variety of ways in which Haydn could subvert normative expectations to generate humour within standard musical gestures. Her linking of these techniques with contemporary notions of “Witz” provides a useful hermeneutical tool that could be applied to any number of classical works.

For theorist Justin London, however, contemporary accounts of humour are not enough to describe why something is funny. In his 1996 article on the famous rondo-finale of Haydn’s Op. 33, No. 2 (“The Joke”) he draws on the work of linguists to describe in detail the ways in which we cognitively process musical phrases. London contends that we intuit that the finale is funny because of the ingrained way we process language, as explained by George Lakoff’s and Mark


Johnson’s work on metaphor, and J. L. Austin’s work on language. \(^{54}\) London’s analysis is perhaps a response to Kendall L. Walton’s call in 1993 for a reception-based understanding of musical humour. As he put it, “explaining or understanding how it is that one hears a piece of music is not to be separated from the experience of hearing it.” \(^{55}\)

Rossana Dalmonte waded into the debate in 1995 with a semiological perspective on musical humour. Dalmonte draws on Jean-Jacques Nattiez’s concept of the poïetic, the neutral and the aesthetic level of musical semiology. \(^{56}\) She does so to attempt to differentiate between the composer’s intention and the listener’s perception of humour. She writes:

It is undoubtedly conceivable that a composer may decide to render his composition comical, and in doing so try to communicate his intentions to the listener, using various means (musical and non-musical); likewise, it is also feasible that a listener may judge a certain piece of music to be comical if it consists in modifications, contortions or the re-writing of aesthetic categories he is familiar with. Thus it is theoretically possible that two types of humour exist in music: “poïetic humour” and “aesthetic humour,” two categories that do not necessarily coincide. \(^{57}\)

Dalmonte essentially cleaves Ingardén’s dual theory of the ontology of the work of art—splitting off reception from intention. Indeed, she spends the rest of the article detailing the ways in which Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* is unintentionally funny to audiences.

This rapid expansion of the scope of humour in music studies has unfortunately not inspired more research in the area in the last decade. As the body of literature grew in the early to mid-1990s, it seems to have collapsed under its own weight. Peter Kay’s 2006 article “Music


and Humor: What’s so Funny?” is representative. He begins with a review of the various theories of humour and concludes by mentioning a couple of applications to music, though the article contains no musical examples.\textsuperscript{58} The relative neglect of musical humour as a topic of study is perhaps partially due to the myriad of approaches now available to music scholars. Humour can be subsumed under the umbrellas of gender studies, performance studies, semiotics, aesthetics or any other sub-discipline. The serious nature of these modes of study also perhaps limits humour as a topic of inquiry. Humour is here less a topic worthy of study on its own and rather the symptom of some larger and perhaps sinister ideology. Despite its recent stagnation, it remains the case that humour studies advanced during a period in which scholarship on the intermezzo has not. For this reason alone, I believe we need to take a fresh look at the comic intermezzo.

**Scope and Aims**

This dissertation is a study of humour as it is practised in the comic intermezzo in the years before Pergolesi’s famous *La serva padrona* (1733). Pergolesi’s intermezzo does not represent a special case in the history of the intermezzo—but in the historiography of eighteenth-century music its composition is regarded as epochal. I have chosen it as the end point of the repertory because it is, in many ways, the *terminus ante quem* of the intermezzo’s heyday. Its musical language remained largely unaltered in the succeeding years. In 1735, the Neapolitan

court theatre replaced comic intermezzos with ballets as intermission entertainments. Many of the great performers had brought their talents to court and public theatres elsewhere in Europe, including the German-speaking principalities, Russia, England and—importantly—France; the heart of their repertory continued to be the body of Italian intermezzos written before 1734. Within Italy, the method librettists used to assemble an intermezzo had also changed. Rather than creating original works or adapting spoken plays, they began to eat their own—raiding existing comic operas for plots which could easily be condensed. This was a practice cultivated first in Rome and then elsewhere.\textsuperscript{59} With this practice came the rise of the \textit{pasticcio}. Just as librettists borrowed from other comic operas, composers borrowed from existing comic works to update old intermezzos or create new ones. In short, after 1734 the comic intermezzo ceased to be at the forefront of modern musical development. It ceded that title to the full length \textit{opera buffa}, which was emerging out of Naples in the 1730s and making its way north through a path already cleared by the popular intermezzo.\textsuperscript{60} Composers like Piccinni and Galuppi continued to write intermezzos, but they learned the craft of writing intermezzos from writing \textit{opere buffe}, not the other way around.

The limited temporal and generic parameters of this study allow us to explore the practice of comedy in the intermezzo in detail. I aim to answer a simple question: why was the intermezzo funny? But simple questions have a way of yielding complicated answers. The variety of methodological approaches which I have used this in this study confirms this. This study takes different approaches—some solidly historicist, others theoretical—to answer the usual questions of any humanist historical inquiry: how did artists come to write what they wrote


\textsuperscript{60} Barbara Dobbs Mackenzie, “The Creation of a Genre: Comic Opera’s Dissemination in Italy in the 1740s” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1993).
and what did audiences think of the results? My approach is guided by rules for the practising historian as set out by Robert D. Hume, the theatre historian whose Brobdingnagian study of London theatre history dwarfs this dissertation’s modest scope. Hume sets out three rules to help one decide which of the myriad of approaches, theories, methodologies and ideologies to use when examining a given historical problem:

1. Avoid syncretism in method. Design your investigation within the limits of a clearly-defined method.
2. Compare your results with those of other methods. What does your method force you to omit or distort?
3. Cultivate eclecticism in systems of explanation. Eclecticism produces blurred sense of purpose in the realm of method, but is highly desirable when you are seeking hypotheses to test.

This dissertation therefore uses an eclectic set of methods to explain why the intermezzo is funny. Chapter one examines the origins of the intermezzo’s literary practice. I attempt to push the clock back on our current dating of the intermezzo’s beginnings. Working backwards from its debut in the early eighteenth century, we can see how the intermezzo was indebted to later seventeenth-century literary models through an examination of plays, documents and systems of patronage. Chapter two is a case study of Leonardo Vinci’s second intermezzo. It builds on chapter one’s research into the working methods of librettists to explain how it was that librettists selected the topics they chose, and how composers managed to amplify these texts’ comic potential through music. This requires both an examination of the socio-historical context which provided the source material for the written comedy, and an aesthetic examination of the musical practice of the composer. Chapter three takes a similar two-pronged approach, examining both the historical context of Giuseppe Maria Orlandini’s most famous intermezzo and that

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intermezzo’s musical composition as reflection of comedic practice. Chapter four examines the intermezzo repertory synchronically to demonstrate the genre’s metatheatrical nature—its continual preoccupation with itself as a theatrical work. This was a feature built into its genetic code from the very beginning because the intermezzo owed its existence to the denigration of comedy as an aesthetic object. Chapter five examines how this metasensibility is the defining feature of its comic musical language through the use of contemporary incongruity theories of humour. Each chapter is divided into sections to clearly demarcate methodological approaches and avoid the kind of syncretism that Hume cautions against.

The defining thread which runs through all of these chapters is the belief that comedy is an art. The prevailing historiographic notion of the intermezzo as the product of unmediated expression, rather than of craft—music as a kind of folk vernacular—is grounded in mid-eighteenth century French aesthetic debate. The grumbling baritones and sighing sopranos which populate the intermezzo repertory were not simply rough hewn prototypes of the Almavivas, the Cecchinas and the Ninas that occupy the later eighteenth-century imagination, though they often share their world of the middle-class, the domestic and the quotidian. Intermezzo characters instead belong to an unbroken tradition of writing comedy which dates to the later seventeenth century.

In Domenico Scarlatti’s banned 1715 intermezzo, *La Dirindina*, the lecherous music teacher Don Carissimo catches his pupil (and the object of his affection) in an argument with a dissolute castrato. Carissimo is unaware that Dirindina and her bosom buddy are rehearsing Dido’s death scene in preparation for Dirindina’s stage debut. When she is about to take her own life Carissimo rushes in and attempts to shame the castrato into marrying Dirindina. “È caso da intermedi” she exclaims—“it’s something out of an intermezzo.” Far from naïve comic
diversions, intermezzos were clever, topical and fascinating products of the early eighteenth-century stage. This dissertation is an attempt to understand the intermezzo on its own terms.
CHAPTER 1

BENEATH THE TANGLE:
ITALIAN COMEDY AND MOLIÈRE FROM 1660-1723

1.1 MOLIÈRE AND THE INTERMEZZO

While scholars have been able to readily identify its musical language as the seed of the modern style, those few who have tackled the subject of the intermezzo’s genesis have had a difficult time outlining the origins of the intermezzo and its relationship to the dominant poetics of the era. Troy is most pessimistic about this endeavour:

'The intermezzo’s literary roots lie hidden forever beneath the tangle of written and improvised comedy, non-theatrical burlesque poetry, and dramatic verse that luxuriated and intertwined in Italy and other European countries between the beginnings of the Renaissance and eighteenth century.'

While Troy compiles an insightful list of sources in this elegant sentence, we cannot be content with such a vague explanation. We would never be content to admit that the works of Goldoni arose out of a twist of literary and dramatic practices of three centuries of European history. While there may be no easy way to disentangle this mess—no cutting the Gordian knot—we may

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1 Troy, The Comic Intermezzo, 78.
still draw closer to understanding the origins of the intermezzo by examining the transmission and patronage of comic works during the seminal years before 1733. As Troy suggests, there are many influences to study, but there is one name that recurs most frequently: Molière.

I am not the first to suggest a connection between Molière and the development of the comic intermezzo. Both Troy and Lazarevich independently took note of the six extant intermezzos which bear translated titles of Molière’s comedies. These six are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intermezzo</th>
<th>Librettist</th>
<th>Molière</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>L’amalato immaginario</em></td>
<td>1707 Antonio Salvi</td>
<td><em>Le malade imaginaire</em> 1673</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>La preziosa ridicola</em></td>
<td>1712 Anonymous</td>
<td><em>Les précieuses ridicules</em> 1659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>L’avarò</em></td>
<td>1720 Antonio Salvi</td>
<td><em>L’Avare</em> 1668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>L’artigiano gentiluomo</em></td>
<td>1722 Antonio Salvi</td>
<td><em>Le bourgeois gentilhomme</em> 1670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Il matrimonio per forza</em></td>
<td>1723 Giuseppe Maria Buini</td>
<td><em>Le mariage forcé</em> 1664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Monsieur di Porsugnacco</em></td>
<td>1727 Giovanni Battista Trotti</td>
<td><em>Monsieur de Pourceaugnac</em> 1669</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Troy follows his earlier assertion that the “tangle” of sources for the intermezzo is too complex to unravel and confines his further remarks about Molière to one example of the similarity in language between Madama Dulcinea of *La preziosa ridicola* and Molière’s Cathos of *Les Précieuses ridicules*. Lazarevich goes further by explaining some of the transmission process of Molière’s comedies from France at the height of Louis XIV’s powers in the latter seventeenth century through to the twilight of Italy’s political and economic influence in the first quarter of the eighteenth. She concentrates on the importance of *scherzi* and *burlette* to the creation of intermezzo plots. These works were short comic plays intended to be performed by same-sex casts in an ecclesiastical or academic setting. They were often reductions of longer

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2 Troy, 79; Lazarevich, 337.

3 The text is attributed to Marchese Trotti by Warren Kirkendale in *The Court Musicians in Florence during the Principate of the Medici* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1993), 528.
written plays, some of which, as Lazarevich points out, were reductions of Molière’s work. She perceptively writes that:

[...]
in Northern Italy an inter-relation existed between the plots of these shorter forms, academic comedies, and the libretti of the intermezzi. Frequently the text for an intermezzo was derived from a condensed scherzo or burletta. By a reverse process of expansion of plot and cast, full-length literary comedies were created. This expansion was an accepted procedure on which [Italian playwrights] Nellis’s, Fagiuoli’s, and later Goldoni’s comedies were built.4

Her primary evidence for this is a collection of Girolamo Fagiuoli’s autograph comedies, which contains his scherzo scenici intended for performance in monasteries. He later expanded these works for publication as full-length works. The problem is that these works span a period of thirty-three years, between 1697 and 1730. In fact, all of Lazarevich’s examples of Molière-style comedies date from either the very last years of the seventeenth century or from the great swath of time that encompasses the first third of the eighteenth. For example, she gives the example of Fagiuoli’s scherzo scenico, L’avaro punito, written in 1699. It was rewritten as a full-length comedy by him in 1707 and then adapted into an intermezzo, L’Avaro, by Antonio Salvi in 1720 (with music by Francesco Gasparini). She writes that this intermezzo “is obviously related to both Fagiuoli’s and Molière’s works of the same name,” but does not enumerate the ways in which they are related.5 She is similarly cautious about the method of transmission of Molière’s works from play to intermezzo, stating rather ambiguously that “there seems to be a link between Fagiuoli, Molière, and Salvi,”6 the Venetian librettist of many intermezzi, and as can be seen from the table above, the author of many adaptations of Molière. I do not intend to impugn Lazarevich’s research. Indeed I believe she is absolutely correct. But I contend that Molière’s influence upon the creation of the intermezzo occurs much earlier, and is much more significant

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4 Lazarevich, 335.
5 ibid.
6 ibid., 336.
than has previously been stated. Furthermore, for the work of Molière to have enjoyed any popularity at all in Italian literary circles, I suggest that there was a group of northern Italian librettists and composers who prepared the way for Molière through their reforms of comedic style, going back as far as the mid-seventeenth century, to the period contemporary with Molière’s output. This chapter will trace the preparation, adaptation and significance of Molière’s writings to the comic style and practice of the intermezzo. I contend that this literary change in comic style foments a change in the musical setting of comic texts.

Molière’s importance to the history of comedy cannot be overstated. His influence is remarkable considering that he was, as Molière scholar Laurence Romero once described him, a man with “one important friend and countless enemies.”\(^7\) Though Louis XIV’s patronage provided monetary reward, it was Molière’s comedic genius that guaranteed his reputation and influence. So rare were his gifts that his friend, poet Jean de La Fontaine, wrote after his death that his theatrical accomplishments outdid those of Terence and Plautus and that they would not likely be duplicated again. His Épitaphe remains a succinct account of both Molière’s accomplishments and his legacy:

**EXAMPLE 1.2.1** Jean de La Fontaine, *Épitaphe de Molière* (1673)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>French Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sous ce tombeau gisent Plaute et Térence</td>
<td>Under this tomb lie Plautus and Terence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et cependant le seul Molière y gît.</td>
<td>And yet Molière lies there alone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leurs trois talents ne formaient qu’un esprit</td>
<td>The three formed a talented mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dont le bel art réjouissait la France.</td>
<td>Whose beautiful art delighted France.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ils sont partis! et j’ai peu d’espérance</td>
<td>They are gone! and I have little hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De les revoir. Malgré tous nos efforts,</td>
<td>Of seeing them again. Despite all our efforts,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pour un long temps, selon toute apparence,</td>
<td>For a long time, it seems,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Térence, et Plaute, et Molière sont morts.(^8)</td>
<td>Terence and Plautus and Molière are dead.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


But Molière’s talents lay not in merely channeling the ancient practitioners of New Comedy. He had a remarkable ability to knit together this learned legacy with the practices of the commedia dell’arte players of Italy, and the comedia de capa y espada of Spain’s Siglo de Oro—and to graft this all on to the comedic tradition of France. Most importantly, Molière’s writing remains timeless because he wrote about human subjects. Their arrogance, their pettiness, their bigotry—all their faults were held up to ridicule. And yet, at the heart of each of his plays, there is always a belief in the goodness of people. Molière was no misanthrope. His plays have a remarkable ability to restore one’s faith that all will turn out well. His model for the ideal social system was the home. As Henry Carrington Lancaster once wrote, his plays almost always concerned “hypocrisy in conflict with a family.” The title characters of his works—the miser, the would-be gentleman, the foolish affected ladies—wrought disorder in the domestic sphere through their human faults.

Constantly imitated, parodied or outright plagiarized, Molière’s works were not confined to the borders of the Sun King’s France. Not long after his death, Molière’s Harpagons, Alcestes and Jourdain began appearing on stages throughout Europe. Playwrights often borrowed Molière’s plots and characters to craft timely comedies which responded to local events. The actor, playwright, and memoirist Colley Cibber adapted Tartuffe for the boards at the Theatre Royal in 1717, after it had previously appeared in the British Isles in an English translation.

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9 New Comedy refers to the post-Aristophanic comedy of the Greeks and Romans typified by the use of stock characters and romantic intrigue. The most popular playwrights of this period were the Greeks Menander and Apollodorus of Carystus, and their Roman imitators Terence and Plautus.


He transformed the story of the opportunist and falsely pious Tartuffe who manipulates the naïve Orgon into signing over all his possessions to him. In Cibber’s hands, Tartuffe is reinvented as a nonjuring priest, providing a cautionary tale against both Catholicism and disloyalty to the crown. The message was particularly apt against the backdrop of the Jacobite spectre in the second decade of the eighteenth century. Cibber’s play premiered a mere two years after the Scottish rebellion known as the “Fifteen,” which attempted to restore the deposed Stuart line to the monarchy and supplant the Hanoverian dynasty.

*Tartuffe* proved a rich source for Italian authors as well. Girolamo Gigli was renowned throughout the Tuscan duchy for his acid attacks against hypocrisy and censorship in all its forms—be it by the church or the ruling Medici. He chose *Tartuffe* as inspiration for his satire on Jesuit hypocrisy, *Il don Pilone ovvero il bacchettone falso, Commedia tratta nuovamente del franzese.* However, Gigli’s creation was not merely a translation. In the preface to the published play he admits his debt to Molière, but suggests his work is something quite new:

> The subject of this work, *Don Pilone*, is drawn from the celebrated *Tartuffe* of Molière; but it has changed so much in its passing from one language to another that *Don Pilone* is now another thing that is not *Tartuffe*.

Like Molière, who had troubles with the Jansenists after the first performance of *Tartuffe* in France, Gigli ran afoul of conservative Jesuits who objected to his tart treatment of their religious order. However, the climate of Medicean Florence was less kind to Gigli than Bourbon France was to Molière. He had a less sympathetic ear with the pious Cosimo III than the pragmatic Louis XIV and was expelled from his post at the University of Siena and forbidden to

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13 “Il soggetto di quest’opera del Don Pilone è tirato dal celebre Tartufo del Molier; ma egli è così mutato nel passaggio, che ha fatto da un idioma all’altro, che il Don Pilone è oggi di un’altra cosa che non è il Tartufo.” Gigli, *Il Don Pilone* (Lucca: Pel Marescandoli, 1715), [3].
publish his incendiary play. Tartuffe, though the most provocative of Molière’s plays and the most obvious example of the influence of his satire, was not the only one of his works to find success in translation or adaptation elsewhere in Europe. The more domestic comedies of Les Précieuses ridicules, L’École des femmes, Le Médecin malgré lui and Les Femmes savantes also found welcoming audiences with their send-up of middle-class pursuits—fastidious refinement, May-December romantic entanglements, medical treatments and female snobbery respectively. Not all authors found the need to tinker with Molière’s source texts as both Cibber and Gigli had done. As late as 1769 the English playwright Isaac Bickerstaff remarked in his preface to his translation of Tartuffe that an author seeking to translate Molière into a play in English “cou’d not [...] produce a very bad one; especially if he presum’d to foist in little or nothing of his own.” But Molière’s works would prove to be invaluable to Italian authors seeking to “foist in” their own agendas to his works, as Gigli would do, to restore elegance to comedic practice or to simply raid his treasure chest of comedic scenes to produce new works for the stage. In the early decades of the eighteenth century, authors would do all three in an effort to bring musical comedy into its own and out of the shadow of opera seria.


15 Isaac Bickerstaff, The hypocrite: a comedy. As it is performed at the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane (London, 1769), [4].
1.2 **THE MEDICI COURT BEFORE MOLIÈRE**

The seminal source for the study of Molière’s reception in Italy is Pietro Toldo’s *L’Oeuvre de Molière et sa fortune en Italie*, published in 1910.\(^\text{16}\) His chronicle of the performance, translation and adaptation of the French master’s works throughout the Italian states remains the most exhaustive account of the subject. Toldo confines his research to the purely literary tradition of Molière in the years leading up to and including the work of Carlo Goldoni. An earlier and very brief publication by Toldo surveys the appearance of scenes from Molière in the scenari of *commedia dell’arte* troupes.\(^\text{17}\) My attempt to sketch the proliferation of Molière’s works will draw heavily from Toldo’s research, with some details added from more recent authors writing on the subject of the French influence in Italy during this period. I must emphasize the debt of these authors to Toldo as well; he is by far the most prominent, if not the sole source cited for many discussions of Molière in Italy. But my goal in this chapter is not merely to regurgitate the scholarship of Pietro Toldo, fine as it may be; I aim rather to sketch the most significant trends of Molière’s fortunes in Italy which led to the development of the comic intermezzo. Selecting the intermezzo as the endpoint of Molière’s transformation from French to Italian theatre, rather than the comic works of Goldoni, allows us to review Toldo’s scholarship with an eye towards those features of Molière which were most appealing and most important to intermezzo authors. This will set the stage for the last part of this chapter, in which we will dissect some scenes in the intermezzo repertory to examine the ways in which librettists of the 1720s adapted, imitated or simply purloined the French author. We must first begin before


\(^{17}\) Toldo, *Di Alcuni Scenari Inediti della Commedia dell’Arte e delle loro Relazioni col Teatro del Molière* (Turin: Vincenzo Bona, 1907).
Toldo and consider the authors who helped usher in the fashion for Molière’s works in order to understand the widespread affinity for Molière in the early eighteenth century. By the time scenes taken from his works began appearing in Italian plays in the 1690s, Italian dramatists had already taken steps towards accomplishing the same comedic verisimilitude we revere Molière for. Tuscany was the centre for these changes, instigated by a small number of physician/playwrights working for the richest and most storied family of the Grand Duchy: the Medici.

The Medici family’s patronage of the arts is legendary. In the fifteenth century, this most powerful banking family of Florence solicited works from the finest sculptors, scientists, poets, painters and architects of the day—spurring a burst of creative energy we now consider the beginning of the Renaissance. It is little wonder, then, that a family which nurtured the talents of artisans from diverse fields would soon play an important role in the art form defined by its multi-modality—its ability to bring together disparate arts. Opera thrived in Tuscany; and for a brief period between 1683 and 1695 it became a locus for the development of comic style.

The last generation of Medici rulers is populated with some of the most colourful historical figures one can find. Harold Acton popularized the soap-opera quality of their personal lives in his eminently readable The Last Medici, published in 1932.¹⁸ His vivid depiction of the Medici family’s sordid domestic life allows us to grasp their character and lifestyle in all its oddity. But as Franco Angiolini cautions, their behavior does not represent a special case in the history of court life in the late baroque: “ultimately, the Tuscany of Cosimo III, for all its undoubted peculiarities, presents characters and movements not dissimilar from

those encountered in other absolutist monarchies of Europe.” 19 It certainly differs from other centres in Italy by a matter of degree, however. Late-Medicean Florence is characterized by excessive indulgence in every pursuit: religion, theatre, travel, sex. Thankfully, for the purposes of comedy, there was one Medici interested exclusively in the latter three.

Ferdinando de’Medici (1663-1713) was the first son born to Cosimo III and Marguerite-Louise d’Orléans. According to Acton, Ferdinando’s highly independent French mother oversaw his education through the age of seven, at which point her fiery spirit could not be contained by the increasingly stern Cosimo. 20 By 1674 Marguerite-Louise secured a separation from Cosimo and fled to France, leaving custody of her three young children to her husband in a blithely worded letter. 21 When Ferdinando II, Cosimo’s father, died in 1670, the “prolonged and pleasant autumn” 22 of Tuscany under his reign gave way to austere years of proscriptions under the devout Cosimo and his Svengali mother, Vittoria delle Rovere. Cosmopolitan, handsome, homosexual—the young Ferdinando was not ideally suited to attending to affairs of state in Cosimo’s Florence. His prodigious musical talent provided him with a pleasant diversion, one which he indulged passionately. He would spend much of his life commissioning, staging and performing (as harpsichordist) operatic works at the Medici villa at Pratolino. The villa was left to Ferdinando’s care by his uncle Francesco Maria, who shared Ferdinando’s interest in the


20 Acton, 113-114.

21 ibid., 121. Louis XIV welcomed Marguerite-Louise back to France, perhaps in no small measure influenced by lingering distrust of the Medicis, brought on by Catherine de Medici’s long and bloody period of influence, and the chaos wrought by Marie de Medici’s regency. See N.M. Sutherland, “Catherine de Medici: The Legend of the Wicked Italian Queen,” The Sixteenth Century Journal 9, no. 2 (1978): 45-56.

22 ibid., 109.
performing arts, but devoted his last years to his service as a cardinal. The young Medici prince’s first commission was at the age of sixteen. He took frequent trips to Venice to experience the vibrant musical culture there. He always brought back singers and composers with him to the Tuscan capital, including Alessandro Scarlatti and Carlo Francesco Pollarolo, indicating his taste for modern trends in music. He maintained twenty-one singers on his payroll, seventeen more than any other member of the Medici family. In 1683 he commissioned the first of a series of comic librettos from Giovanni Cosimo Villifranchi, Cosimo III’s personal physician and an important figure in the life of the numerous academies of late-seventeenth century Florence.

Villifranchi was born in 1646 in the town of Volterra, an ancient Etruscan settlement some 75 kilometres southwest of Florence. After receiving his doctorate in medicine he came to Florence to serve the Medicis. In addition to his more perfunctory duties at court, Villifranchi honed his literary talents through his membership in academies throughout the north of the Italian peninsula. He was a member of the Concordi of Ravenna, the Accedi of Bologna, the Capricciosi of Pisa, the Abbozzati, Arsi, Arsura, Compagnia dei Bratti and Imperfetti of Florence, the Arcadi of Rome and the Sepolti of his hometown of Volterra. The following excerpt gives us a glimpse into Villifranchi’s academic life and commitments. It is taken from a


note in a 1731 edition of *Il Malmantile racquistato*, a satirical take on Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* by the Florentine painter and writer Lorenzo Lippi (1606-1665):

We have in Florence an Academy or Fellowship, called the Ugly, which gathers every year the day of Befana (so called the day of Epiphany) and a very loud and extravagant symposium names the Consul for another year, and he is called the Founder: he is always the ugliest. More recently they met in person in the village of the Albizzi: and were dressed at their worst to face the ballot. Dr. Villifranchi gave the speech. There is no more standing Academy or Fellowship, but sometimes one makes conversation among friends with food and such, and writes compositions alluding to this subject: to escape the charge of mixing things sacred with the profane, honest and prudent persons meet the last day of Carnival.27

The Albizzi connection mentioned in the excerpt is important. One of Villifranchi’s future colleagues was Antonio Salvi. Like Villifranchi, Salvi was a physician and librettist in the employ of the Medici family. He was born in Arezzo, the home to the Albizzi country residence most likely alluded to in the note above. Villifranchi married into the Salvi family in 1689 when he took Maria Maddalena as his wife.28 The younger Salvi’s association with the Medicean court and the comedy of Villifranchi would have important consequences for his own work, discussed below.

Villifranchi wrote three spoken plays, five comic operas, and two *opere serie*.29 Four of the five operas were produced under Ferdinando’s guidance at the Medici’s country villa in Pratolino. Located some thirteen kilometres north of Florence, the small estate was constructed


28 Leve, 186.

29 ibid., 191.
between 1568 and 1586 as an isolated bucolic getaway nestled among the rolling Tuscan hills.

When its first phase was complete, the poet Francesco de’Vieri wrote a panegyric for the Medici family extolling Pratolino’s beauty, calling it “a place for wild nature, surrounded by mountains and full of woods.”

The architect, Bernardo Buontalenti, enhanced the natural beauty of the estate by installing an array of beautiful gardens and magnificent grottoes on the grounds. The reclusive Francesco I originally conceived of the residence as a haven from the bustle of Florence. But under Ferdinando, the estate was expanded and a new theatre for opera was added in 1697. From 1679 until 1710, a new opera was performed every season at Pratolino. Its productions were often duplicated at the urban Florentine theatres with the same cast the following season. For the elite of late-seventeenth century Florence, Pratolino was an operatic oasis—a sort of Glyndebourne of the Italian baroque.

Giovanni Battista Ricciardi, a mid-seventeenth century comic playwright, and Giovanni Cosimo Villifranchi are not household names in the operatic literature. James Leve, who completed a dissertation in 1998 on Florentine and Roman comedy laments that “a thorough study of Ricciardi has yet to be written, despite his large dramatic output.” Ricciardi is perhaps better known to art historians than he is to musicologists. In the 1650s, the iconoclastic painter Salvator Rosa dedicated a portrait of himself as a philosopher to Ricciardi in honour of their friendship. With the exception of Leve’s dissertation, Villifranchi, too, has been neglected in

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31 Holmes, 153.


33 Leve, 205, n. 79.

the wider literature, in spite of Robert Lamar Weaver’s declaration that he is “the most productive and creative Italian comic librettist in the second half of the 17th century.”

No music for any of Villifranchi’s works survives, save for two settings of his comedy *Il Trespolo tutore* (adapted from a spoken play of the same name by Ricciardi). Bernardo Pasquini set the text in 1677 for Rome, and Alessandro Stradella set it again for performance in Genoa in 1679. *Trespolo* was Villifranchi’s only comic opera that was not produced for Pratolino (as it was written before comic opera took hold there), but according to James Leve, it exemplifies the same style of comedy as the Pratolino operas. He therefore considers them as a group and discusses their debt to the earlier spoken comedies of Ricciardi. For Leve, the comedies of Ricciardi have a formative influence on Villifranchi’s works. In the following section, I will review and expand his findings and highlight those features of Villifranchi’s comedies which have important consequences for the history of the intermezzo. I contend that not only do Molière’s works play an important role in this process (something unnoticed by Leve), they also help foment a change in the literary aspect of comic practice, which will eventually lead to the musical breakthrough of the intermezzo in the second decade of the eighteenth century.


36 It was formerly believed that the 1677 version was Stradella’s, but this was corrected by Carolyn Gianturco in her article “A Possible Date for Stradella’s *Il Trespolo tutore*,” *Music & Letters* 54, no. 1 (1973): 25-37. Robert Weaver had asserted Pasquini was the author of the 1677 version in 1971 in a paper presented at the National Convention of the American Musicological Society in Durham, NC, entitled “Il Trespolo tutore.” Gianturco compares the two in “Il trespolo tutore di Stradella e di Pasquini: Due Diverse Concezioni dell’Opera Comica,” *Venezia e il Melodramma nel Settecento*, Vol. 1, edited by Maria Teresa Muraro (Florence: Olschiki, 1978), 185-98. See also Gianturco, “Evidence for Late Roman School of Opera,” *Music & Letters* 56, no. 1 (1975), 5, n. 7. The scores are extant at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (Bernardo Pasquini, *Il trespolo tutore*, Vm°924), and the Biblioteca estense in Modena (Alessandro Stradella, *Il trespolo tutore*, MUS.F.1128).
To understand the works of Villifranchi, we must first understand the comic style he adopted from earlier models. The playwright who had the most direct impact on Villifranchi’s operatic output was Giovanni Battista Ricciardi (1623-1686). Ricciardi was born in Pisa, but spent most of his life in Florence, the city of his parents’ birth. There he worked in service of the Medici and struck up a friendship with Salvator Rosa (1615-1673). Art historians have benefitted from the copious letters that Rosa wrote to Ricciardi, discussing his thoughts on art and philosophy and promoting his stoic (and perhaps even solipsistic) attitude towards the artistic process. In one letter to Ricciardi he wrote that a patron should “content oneself with not wanting to tell fathers how to make sons” when commissioning works from “painters of my condition and extravagant genius.” While this in no way suggests that Ricciardi held similar views, it allows us to place him in an intellectual circle which prizes iconoclasm. Rosa frequently asked for Ricciardi’s advice on historical and philosophical matters, in addition to asking for suggestions for subjects to paint. The stoic philosophy of Seneca figured prominently in their correspondence. The self-portrait Rosa dedicated to Ricciardi features Rosa dressed as a philosopher writing “Behold, whither, when” in Greek on a skull, reflecting, according to art historian Wendy Roworth, “Rosa’s interest in stoic moral philosophy as the basis for contemplation and resignation in the face of death.” While only barely visible in a photographic reproduction of the painting, “Seneca” is written on the spine of the book supporting the skull. Rosa may have absorbed much of the baroque temperament of the Senecan tragedy. According


39 Roworth, 103.

to William Levitan, Seneca’s writing is “incorrigibly bloodthirsty, rhetorical, self-conscious, and stagy where it should moderate itself into a seemly verisimilitude.”

Rosa’s stormy landscapes and “self-conscious” works (as in the self-portrait described above), exemplify this same dramatic style. Ricciardi’s comedy, however, seems to take more inspiration from his informal interactions with Rosa than from Rosa’s artistic output or philosophical pronouncements in his letters. Ricciardi participated in Rosa’s Accademia dei Percossi, a series of gatherings of Florentine intellectuals in Rosa’s home. Together their main activity was to participate in improvised comedic routines. Here, Ricciardi had the opportunity to absorb the tools of the great comic improvisers of the commedia dell’arte troupes. These skills would prove invaluable to him as a writer of comedy.

Leve identifies two important facets of Ricciardi’s comedic prose which set it apart from other works of the period. First, Ricciardi adheres to the Aristotelian unity of action. There are no subplots which are extraneous to the main narrative. All of the characters participate in the main story, and their individual storylines intersect with the main plot. Second, Ricciardi simplified his comic prose, rejecting “linguistic gamesmanship in favor of a more homogeneous and natural poetic language.”

Let’s examine the first play Villifranchi adapted into an opera to observe the features Leve identifies.

Il Trespolo tutore was completed by 1669 while Ricciardi’s friend Rosa was in Rome serving under the Colonna family. According to Gianturco, it seems likely that Trespolo was

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41 William Levitan, “Seneca in Racine” Yale French Studies 76 (1989), 193. Levitan discusses the complex relationship between Racine (and other French tragedians) who modeled their works on Seneca, while rejecting his “baroque” tendencies in favour of maintaining the Aristotelian unities.

42 Leve, 208.

43 ibid., 210.
first put on at the Colonna palace that same year.\textsuperscript{44} The story revolves around the character of Trespolo, an old tutor with amorous feelings towards Despina, the daughter of his maid Simona (a vecchia). Before he can pursue her, however, he must rid himself of Artemisia, his young pupil who is ardently in love with him. Two brothers, Ciro and Nino, are smitten with Artemisia. Ciro is in poor mental health, but regains his composure when he believes he has a chance to win Artemisia. The stress of losing her affection eventually drives his brother Nino to madness. In his quest to court Artemisia, Nino recruits Despina to flirt with Trespolo in order to free up Artemisia. In a series of complications and disguises which take place under the cover of night, Artemisia declares her love for Trespolo, who is in fact Ciro in disguise. They run off to marry, leaving Trespolo free to wed Despina. All of the characters’ individual stories are tributaries of Trespolo’s quest to take Despina as a bride. This simplification of the comedic narrative creates an integrated plot. Even the vecchia maintains a stake in the dramatic action. Her role is not superfluous and unnecessary as it is in other comedic plotlines of the mid-century.

In Ricciardi’s world, the comedic scenarios of the commedia dell’arte are similarly not superfluous and unnecessary. Rather than providing comic diversions, they further the story. Take for example the following excerpt in which Artemisia asks Trespolo to write a letter for her. She protests that it is too dark by candlelight to properly form her letters, and so she needs someone to take dictation. It is in fact one of her attempts to relay her feelings to Trespolo (who obtusely believes the letter must be for Ciro). Their misunderstandings develop into a comedic routine.

\textsuperscript{44} Gianturco, “A Possible Date for Stradella’s Il Trespolo tutore,” 30.
EXAMPLE 1.2.2 G. B. Ricciardi, Il Trespolo tutore, Act I, scene xi.45

Artemisia. Orsù, io dìtto, mio bene. Alright, let’s start: “My dear”
Trepolo. Mio bene. “...my dear...”
Art. E possibile, che voi à tanti segni? “Is it possible after all the signs?”
Tres. A tanti segni. “...all the signs...”
Art. Non habbiate conosciuto “You don’t know...”
Tres. Non habbiate conosciuto “...you don’t know...”
Art. Che colui, che adoro. “the one whom I love?”
Tres. Che adoro. “...whom I love...”
Art. Sete voi. is you.
Art. voi, voi, sete voi. you, you, it’s you.
Tres. Ho scritto sete voi I wrote “it’s you”
Art. Dico voi, voi. I say you, you.
Art. E non intendete, seguitate, You don’t understand, let’s go on: “and e pur dovreste conoscer, che la sola you should know, that only shame...”
vergogna.
Tres. Che la sola vergogna. “...that the only shame...”
Art. E quella, che mi ritiene, dal dirvi “kept me, I believe, from telling you palesamente, che il mio bene è riposte in clearly that my love is yours.”
voi.
Tres. Dal dirvi palesamenti, che il mio bene è “...from telling you that my love is riposte in voi. yours.”
Art. In voi. it’s yours
Tres. In voi. “...it’s yours”
Art. In voi, in voi. it’s yours, it’s yours
Tres. Ho scritto in voi. I wrote “it’s yours.”
Art. Ma in voi dico, in voi. But I’m saying to you it’s yours.
Tres. Dico, che ho scritto in voi. I’m saying that I wrote “it’s yours”
Art. O cieli, che stolidezza è questi; scrivette, e Oh heavens, how ridiculous is this; voi siete si stupido? write, “and you are stupid?”
Tres. Si stupido. “Yes, stupid.”

The passage constitutes what commedia scholar Richard Andrews would call an “elastic gag.”46

Elastic gags are modular units of dialogue which can be expanded or contracted for comedic effect during improvisation. Andrews gives the following example of an elastic gag from the

45 Giovanni Battista Ricciardi, Il Trespolo tutore (Bologna: Per il Longhi, [1680?]). C-Tu, itp smb.

Dialogo de un Magnifico e Zani Bergamasco, printed in Vito Pandolfini’s collection of *commedia dell’arte* material. In this scene, the servant Zani cannot believe that his master, Magnifico is in love. He reiterates his disbelief over and over in a manner similar to the passage from *Trespolo*.

**Example 1.2.3 Dialogo de un Magnifico e Zani Bergamasco**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magnifico</th>
<th>e voio che tu ssappi ehe son inamorao.</th>
<th>I want you to know that I am in love.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zani</td>
<td>inamora.</td>
<td>In love?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mag.</td>
<td>si che son inamorao</td>
<td>Yes, I am in love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zani.</td>
<td>e si inamora vu.</td>
<td>You mean you are in love?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mag.</td>
<td>si no lintendestu bestia.</td>
<td>Yes, idiot, don’t you understand?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zani.</td>
<td>desif dauera.</td>
<td>You really mean it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mag.</td>
<td>co se digo dauera.</td>
<td>Yes, I really mean it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zani.</td>
<td>Vo si inamora.</td>
<td>You are in love?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mag.</td>
<td>mei son iamorao.</td>
<td>Yes, I am in love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zani.</td>
<td>ah ah ah.</td>
<td>(Collapses with laughter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mag.</td>
<td>de che ridestu cauallo.</td>
<td>What are you laughing at, you clodhopper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zani.</td>
<td>e ridi de vu che desì che si inamora.</td>
<td>I though you’d made a joke. You said you were in love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mag.</td>
<td>e tel digo de nouo che son inamorao,</td>
<td>But I <em>am</em> in love. What’s the matter, don’t I look like a man with normal drives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perche e non ho mi una bella vita da</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>essere inamorao.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zani.</td>
<td>messer si da mutatieri.</td>
<td>Driving mules, more likely.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The snippet above is just a section of a longer chain of three similar exchanges in which Magnifico becomes exasperated with the disbelieving and insolent behaviour of Zani. Andrews uses the examples to explain his concept of the elastic gag. I’ll quote him here at length:

The three “sections” chosen [...] are autonomous units of dialogue, each reaching a simple conclusion (which may also involve a joke), and each is potentially usable in other situations. They can be seen as a series of beads threaded on a string, or as a set of blocks which together will build a wall—in either analogy, the structure of the scene which they compose can be described as “modular.”

In addition, the single units of the modular structure are in many cases “elastic”; they can be made longer or shorter, in improvisation, without losing their essential point. [...] What the units have in common is that their conclusion, or punch line, is never in doubt, so the actors cannot get lost—all they need to do is to identify each sequence by its climax and get them in the right order. For a smooth performance there has to be a previously agreed cue line or gesture, which brings the sequence to an end.  

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48 Andrews, 178.

49 ibid., 178-9.
In Andrews’ example, the gag is set up by Magnifico’s declaration that he is in love. It is
terminated when Magnifico sets Zani up for the punch line of the routine. When he asks
“What’s the matter, don’t I look like a man with normal drives?” he opens the door for Zani to
make a pun: “driving mules, more likely.” What happens in between can be padded with as
much dialogue as the actors feel is necessary to get a laugh. The material itself is uninteresting
(it is highly repetitive), but it allows for humour to come from the actors’ inflections as they
repeat the lines. If the audience responds favourably, they could continue for as long as their
laughter allowed. If the sequence was met with disinterest, the actors could quickly skip to the
punch line and move on to the next sequence. We find exactly the same formula in the example
taken from Ricciardi’s Trespolo. Artemisia initiates the sequence by asking Trespolo to write up
her letter as he pleases. Trespolo finishes the gag by humorously repeating the end of
Artemisia’s sentence (which she has set up for him). Her exasperation at his ineptitude is met
with his unwitting affirmation of it. One can imagine her sighing cadence followed by his
earnest echo as he scribbled her words onto the page. Just like Andrews’ example, the entire
middle section is the repetition of the same gag, but with increasingly more animated readings (I
have attempted to highlight and clarify this in my translation through the use of quotation marks
and italics).

We may even break down the scene further into two elastic gags. The first ends with
Artemisia’s remark that “you don’t understand.” It isn’t a punch line, but it does mark off the
first section of the text. Her next interjection (“let’s go on”) initiates the second gag which
continues until the end of the passage. If Artemisia and Trespolo were improvising commedia
dell’arte actors they could lengthen, shorten or outright remove either of the sections. If the
audience did not laugh at their back-and-forth misunderstanding in the first gag, Artemisia could simply forgo saying “let’s go on” and skip to setting up Trespolo for his unwitting punch line to ramp up the humour. The skill of improvising actors lies in their ability to gauge the success that their build up and release of tension has on the audience. They could deny the audience the punch line for as long as they were still amused by the elastic middle section of the “joke.” If this material found little positive reception, the actors could skip to the punch line to keep the audience onside. But the excerpt from *Trespolo* is not an improvised scene, though it has exactly the same formulation as the one analyzed by Andrews. Ricciardi, in his capacity as a playwright, must gauge the success of his joke by anticipating the audience’s reaction. His time spent in the improvising troupe of Rosa no doubt helped hone his skills at crafting a successful “elastic gag.” On the page of a play, these “elastic gags” are not elastic, but rather idealized frozen versions of improvised scenes.

It is not surprising that Ricciardi would then put these skills to use in creating similar comic situations in his prose plays. Here the elastic gags do not merely serve as jokes in and of themselves, however. In Ricciardi’s hands, they are put to use to further the plot and create rich characterizations. In the small scene above, we grasp Trespolo’s idiocy and Artemisia’s romantic disposition (if not also her sly wit). The beauty of the punch line (Trespolo’s echo), is that it is at his expense and not of his doing. The audience may both laugh at the joke and at the same time respect the artful construction of the scene. But it is Ricciardi’s art, not the actor’s. They may appreciate the skill of the actor performing the scene, but the comedy is not a self-conscious display of improvised skill. Trespolo’s joke simply fits with his character. Ricciardi has commissioned the most artificial of constructs—a self-contained joke patterned on an improvised sketch—in the service of theatrical verisimilitude. Unlike the works of Seneca,
Ricciardi’s writing is not “rhetorical, self-conscious, and stagy,” but does indeed “moderate itself into a seemly verisimilitude.” This development is decidedly forward-looking, and represents, as Leve suggests, a break with the comedic style of Ricciardi’s rival, Giovanni Andrea Moniglia (1624-1700), who wrote in the older, more ornate style of the *commedia erudita.*

In 1669 Villifranchi adapted Ricciardi’s comedy into verse to be set to music. He did so rather obsequiously, maintaining every scene, and simply trimming the fat to keep the text lean enough to allow time for singing (he also altered some of the words). In doing so, Villifranchi adopted the same comedic style that Ricciardi had been refining. As Leve suggests:

> A number of features distinguish Villifranchi’s comic operas from those by the older generation of librettists: greater unity of action, a smaller number of characters (fewer of them deriving from the *commedia dell’arte*) a simpler dramaturgic design, a more uniform linguistic style, and an increased number and standardization of arias. [...] Villifranchi’s operas reveal a fresh attitude to comic theater: plots revolve around a small group of characters, each of them an indispensable part of the whole dramaturgic design. This is a departure from the comic operas of the 1650s-1660s, which include numerous scenes and characters that are extraneous to the main action. The concept clearly derives from Ricciardi, who also influenced the linguistic style of Villifranchi’s five comedies.

Taking the scene from Ricciardi’s comedy discussed above, we can see how Villifranchi massaged the text in the manner of an improviser without altering the dialogue significantly. The “elastic gag” of Artemisia’s and Trespolo’s exchange is expanded and altered somewhat, while the material leading into it is redacted from Ricciardi’s play in order to allow for a brief aria by Artemisia before Trespolo arrives. Villifranchi only made very slight changes to Ricciardi’s original text in order to make it rhyme and fit into a poetic metre (in this case *settenari*). We’ll begin exactly where our excerpt from Ricciardi began.

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50 Leve, 210.

51 Leve, 204-5.
EXAMPLE 1.2.4 C. Villifranchi, *Il Trespolo tutore*, Act I, scene xi.  

Art. Orsù detto: Mio bene.  
Tres. et io scrivo mio bene  
Art. e pure à tanti segni?  
Tres. à tanti segni.  
Art. non havete anco inteso  
Tres. non havete anco inteso  
Art. ch’il ben per cui mi moro  
Tres. Per cui mi moro  
Art. Che tant’amo, et adoro  
Tres. Che tant’amo, et adoro  
Art. Sete voi.  
Tres. Sete voi.  
Art. Sete voi.  
Tres. Sete voi.  
Art. voi, voi, voi, sete voi.  
Tres. io scritto sete voi  
Art. Dico voi, voi.  
Tres. ah, ben voi, voi hò scritto.  
Art. Ah, cieli e non intendo, seguitate. E ancor non conoscere, che la sola vergogna  
Tres. che la sola vergogna.  
Art. e Lei che mi trattiene  
Tres. Che mi trattiene  
Art. E dirvi che il mio bene  
Tres. che il mio bene  
Art. è poste in voi  
Tres. è poste in voi  
Art. in voi  
Tres. in voi  
Art. in voi, in voi.  
Tres. ah ben, hò scritto in voi.  
Art. mà in voi dico, in voi.  
Tres. ah bene, io dico che ci hò scritto à voi in  
Art. et ancor non mi giova, e pur sete si stolto.  
Tres. si stolto.

Art. Ok, I’ll start: “My love…”  
Tres. and I write, “My love…”  
Art. “…after all the signs…”  
Tres. “…all the signs…”  
Art. “…you still haven’t understood…”  
Tres. “…you still haven’t understood…”  
Art. “…that the one for whom I die…”  
Tres. “…for whom I die…”  
Art. “…for whom I have so much love, for whom I adore…”  
Tres. “…for whom I have so much love, for whom I adore…”  
Art. “is you”  
Tres. “is you”  
Art. “is you”  
Tres. “is you”  
Art. “you, you, I love you”  
Tres. “I’m writing “I love you”  
Art. I’m saying you, you.  
Tres. Ah, very good, “you, you,” I wrote that.  
Art. Ah, heavens, that’s not what I meant, let’s go on. “And yet not to know that only shame…”  
Tres. “...that only shame…”  
Art. “...held me back from you”  
Tres. “...held me back from you”  
Art. “...to tell you that my love”  
Tres. “...that my love…”  
Art. “is yours”  
Tres. “is yours”  
Art. “yours”  
Tres. “yours”  
Art. “yours, yours”  
Tres. “ah yes, I wrote “yours”  
Art. but yours, I say, yours.  
Tres. ah good, I say that I wrote “yours”  
Art. and still this is no use, and you are so foolish  
Tres. so foolish.

Villifranchi follows Andrews’ schema perfectly. He seizes the opportunity to punctuate the first elastic gag by misinterpreting the object of Artemisia’s affection. This is the “cue line” Andrews identifies as the end to one unit of improvisation. One can imagine Villifranchi reading over

Ricciardi’s text, imagining himself as an improviser in the scene, exploring the comic possibilities offered by the text. As a comparison will show, the texts are nearly identical, with only small details changed (“stolto” is substituted for “stupido”), and some exchanges lengthened to fit the metre. In this respect, Villifranchi adapts the simplistic and uniform linguistic style of Ricciardi, a feature noted by Leve in the quotation above. In setting the text to music, Stradella maintained the parallel structure of the dialogue. Trespolo repeats each of Artemisia’s statements at the octave.

**EXAMPLE 1.2.5** Alessandro Stradella, *Il Trespolo tutore*, Act I, recitative.

![Musical notation image]
Ferdinando de Medici was an admirer of Ricciardi’s comic style. Leve quotes a letter written by a clerk of the Medicis to Ricciardi asking for a copy of one of his plays. At the time Ricciardi was in nearby Pisa where he taught philosophy at the University from 1673 until his death.\(^5^3\) The clerk, Giuseppe del Papa, requests Ricciardi send “that lovely comedy presented there last carnival season” for Ferdinando, who “ardently desires this work of yours.”\(^5^4\) The clerk writes back after receiving a copy to report Ferdinando’s enjoyment of the play: “His Serene Highness has read the whole comedy, which pleases him like any other from your pen, in other words, immensely.”\(^5^5\) The Medici connection is therefore one that is vital to the changing landscape of comic opera in Tuscany. Through Ferdinando’s patronage of both Ricciardi and Villifranchi, he united two great comic literary minds. Ricciardi’s streamlined comedy—shorn of extraneous plots and verbal artifice and inspired by the *commedia dell’arte*—becomes the template for Villifranchi’s comic librettos. These features—the Aristotelean unity of action, linguistic verisimilitude and “elastic gags”—prepare the way for the introduction to the Italian peninsula of a new voice in comic writing.

At the same time as Villifranchi was first experimenting with adapting Ricciardi’s comedies for musical use, Molière was perfecting his mastery of the Italian comic idiom in service of French spoken comedy. The stage was set for his introduction to Italian audiences. Prepared by the reforms of Ricciardi, aristocratic Florentine audiences had been conditioned to

\(^5^3\) Roworth, 103.


demand verisimilar Italian comedy with a new attention to character. In this respect, Molière knew no equal. Richard Andrews has gone so far as to proclaim Molière “the supreme Italian comic dramatist whom Italy itself never produced.”56 In the decades after Il Trespolo tutore, the cosmopolitan Ferdinando, son of France’s most famous exiled bride, became the centre of a coterie of literary francophiles that would have important consequences for the development of comic style in the last years of the seventeenth century.

1.3 THE MEDICI COURT AFTER MOLIÈRE

After Trespolo was successfully set to music by Alessandro Stradella in 1678 or 1679, Ferdinando chose Villifranchi as his favourite author of comic texts for productions at Pratolino. The decade after 1683 saw four productions of Villifranchi works. Lo Speziale di Villa was performed twice in both 1683 and 1684, though the composer for these settings is not known and the music is lost. La serva favorita premiered in 1689; the music is lost, though Weaver makes the case that the composer is Alessandro Scarlatti.57 Trespolo oste, the sequel to Il Trespolo tutore and similarly based on the spoken play of Giambattista Ricciardi, was set in 1692 by an unknown composer; the music is, again, lost. For his final comic opera at the Pratolino estate Villifranchi wrote L’ipocondriaco in 1695. It was set to music by Giovanni Battista Benini.58

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57 Weaver and Weaver, A Chronology of Music in the Florentine Theatre, 155-173.

58 Benini’s authorship is attested to in a manuscript catalogue of “autori volteranni,” Villifranchi’s birthplace. See I-Volterra, Biblioteca Guarnacciana, Ant. Ormanni; cited in Weaver, Chronology: 1590-1750, 176.
The title alone brings to mind Molière’s final play, *Le malade imaginaire*, completed in 1673 (the year of his death). In his preface to the published libretto, however, Villifranchi is careful to obscure any reference to his contemporary Molière’s work. He instead cites Terence and Menander as inspiration for the title, if not the content of the play, in the manner of a sixteenth-century comic playwright:

This opera could be titled *Heautontimerumenos* [sic], in the manner of what Terence did to Menander, borrowing the title without touching the subject. [...] And in truth, the above-mentioned title seems to adequately describe one who believes himself to be sick, that is (according to the Greek translation into Tuscan) *The tormentor of oneself*. I wanted to instead call it *The Hypochondriac* because it is intended to be in the vernacular.  

*Heautontimorumenos* was a play by Menander adapted by Terence. Terence chose to retain the original Greek title though his Latin adaptation contains many alterations to the plot. An 1885 translation into English by Frederick Ricord renders the title as “The Self-Tormentor,” a literal translation from the Greek in the manner of Villifranchi’s suggestion. The self-tormentor of the ancient playwrights’ versions is a man wracked with guilt for exposing his infant son—abandoning him to the elements as a form of infanticide. The son of course survives and returns to engage in romantic intrigue. The self-tormentor in Villifranchi’s incarnation is an aging hypochondriac who, in typical *buffo* fashion, is ardently in love with his ward many years

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59 This quotation is found in Italian in Toldo, 263: “Quest’operetta voleva intitolarla *Heautontimerumenos*, per far a Terenzio quello ch’egli fece a Menandro, togliendogli il titolo senza toccargli il soggetto [...] Ed in verità, il titolo sopradetto mi pare adeguatissimo ad uno che si crede infermo, cioè (portandolo dal Greco al Toscano) *Il tormentatore di se stesso*. Ho voluto non ostante intitolarla *L’ipocondriaco* per farmi intender dal volgo.”


62 Infant exposure (*expositio* or ἔχθεσις) was the most common form of infanticide in ancient times. It came to an end with the conversion of Constantine and his legalization of the selling of children for the purposes of adoption. The frequency, barbarism and social stigma of the practice remain hot topics in classical studies. Its controversy and ubiquity make it akin to the early modern practice of killing newborns with a pin in the brain or the modern practice of abortion. See W. V. Harris, “Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 1-22.
his junior. The plot is highly elaborate, but in the style of Ricciardi, all plotlines are tributaries of the main action; all the characters’ romantic mayhem stems from the hypochondriac. No score is extant; only the printed libretto survives. The story revolves around Cleone, a widower who has taken in an orphaned young woman from Pavia (Elvira). Elvira is in love with Cleandro, who has followed Elvira to her new home disguised as a servant. Cleone’s daughter, Florinda, is in love with the dashing Gilberto. Limbella, a neighbouring widow, wants to marry Cleone. His desire for his ward stands in the way of everyone’s romantic fulfillment. The story’s conflicts arise from Limbella’s elaborate schemes to hook Cleone, which involve multiple disguises and all of the main characters. While Leve describes L’ipocondriaco as an “original” work, it has some obvious debts to Molière. Pietro Toldo recognized this fact, stating that “while the intrigue of Villifranchi’s melodrama presents remarkable differences, the idea on which this work is based is without a doubt that of Molière.”

Toldo’s further remarks about L’ipocondriaco are confined to one paragraph which cites a short passage of dialogue in Villifranchi’s play reminiscent of Argan’s complaints in Le malade imaginaire. He then wittily and perceptively remarks that “plagiarists prefer to cite great classics as models, giving them a scholarly air and at the same time hiding their forgeries,” in reference to Villifranchi’s unwillingness to acknowledge Molière’s influence.

Toldo goes on to write that the same was true in France throughout the seventeenth century, when authors would “loot” Italian works while citing Horace and Virgil as

63 Cosimo Villifranchi, L’ipocondriaco (Florence: Gio. Filippo Cecchi, 1695), I-Fe.

64 ibid., 193.

65 Toldo, 263. “Bien que l’intrigue du mélodrame de Villifranchi présente des différences remarquables, l’idée sur laquelle cette pièce est fondée est sans contredit celle de Molière.”

66 Toldo, 264: “[...] ces plagiaires préfèrent indiquer comme modèles les grands classique, ce qui leur donne un air érudit et cache en même temps les calques.”
models. He is no doubt referring to playwrights such as Rotrou, who professed his allegiance to the authors of antiquity but owed his greatest debt to contemporary Italian writers.

Though no dialogue is lifted straight from *Le malade imaginaire*, many of the main characters in *L’ipocondriaco* enact various elements of the plot or behave exactly as Molière’s characters would. Cleone’s moaning about his various diseases echoes Argan’s complaints. Cleone’s clever servant Tarpino is simply a male Toinette. Florinda and Gilberto are nearly identical to Angélique and Cléante. The primary difference between the works is the absence of Argan/Cleone’s wicked second wife. In many adaptations of Molière’s plays, Italian authors preferred an unmarried older protagonist in order to provide a happier ending. Limbella, though scheming, is no Béline; she honestly loves Cleone. The two end up together in Villifranchi’s version. Though Villifranchi has made this change, he maintains many of the most comical scenarios from Molière, including a character disguised as a real Doctor. The most important similarity, however, is the style of comedy which Villifranchi uses. Like Molière’s original, the dialogue has a naturalness characterized by simplicity and the use of elastic gags punctuated with laugh lines. In one of the final scenes, for example, Cleandro, disguised as a doctor, has Cleone get into a bath to cure him. The increasing silliness of the doctor’s orders culminates in a punch line for Cleone.

**EXAMPLE 1.3.1  C. Villifranchi, L’ipocondriaco, Act III, scene xvi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cleone</th>
<th>Che ch’ha far quest’olio?</th>
<th>What does he want with this oil?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cleandro</td>
<td>Per addolcire quegl’acidi</td>
<td>To lessen the acids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gilberto</td>
<td>Per discioglier quei fali.</td>
<td>To ease those burns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleone</td>
<td>Aceto, sale, e olio!</td>
<td>Vinegar, salt and oil!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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67 ibid., 264: “Il en était de mêmê, en France, le siècle précédent; on pillait les auteurs de la Péninsule et l’on citait Horace et Virgile.”

68 The character of the wife is erased in the intermezzo adaptations *L’ammalato immaginario*, *L’Avaro* and *L’artigiano gentiluomo*.

69 Villifranchi, *L’ipocondriaco*, 75.
A subsequent elastic gag involves Cleone’s attempts to get out of the bath to the entire cast’s protestations of “State giù. Modestia, modestia!”

Villifranchi, the court doctor and would-be literary great, perhaps found expression for his distrust of his own profession, as his copious output indicates he was much more preoccupied with literary challenges than medical ones. The doctor, for Molière, had provided a convenient vehicle to mock both the pedantry of pompous individuals (which was immensely appealing to audiences, evidenced by the great numbers of pedant characters mocked on stage), and his own concerns about the quasi-scientific nature of medical inquiry (grounded in the humanist philosophy of Michel de Montaigne). Molière scholar Andrew Calder has pointed out that “Molière reflected and shared Montaigne’s view that the irreconcilable differences of opinion between doctors interpreting the same symptoms were evidence enough that the claims of medicine had no basis in science.” Villifranchi’s mockery of them is then a remarkable collision of insider knowledge (about medicine), fine craftsmanship (of dell’arte principles) and literary savvy (through his channeling of Montaigne by way of Molière). For the aristocratic and erudite audience of Pratolino, the multivalent nature of the work would have been particularly stimulating.

This situation is one more example of the cross-pollination of national theatrical traditions that characterizes the history of drama after the Renaissance. Beginning in the mid-seventeenth century, the breeze which carried the seeds of Italian theatre and prosody from the

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peninsula to France reversed direction. From the death of Molière through to the eighteenth century, it was the theatre of France which would provide the inspiration for Italian works.

The first translation of a Molière play into Italian appeared in 1680. One Napoleon della Luna (obviously a pseudonym) rendered *L’École des femmes* as *La Scuola delle mogli* in a faithful adaptation of Molière’s 1662 original. French scholar Paul Lacroix, in the *Bibliographie moliéresque*, cited an anonymous work published in 1673 as the first translation: *Trufaldino medico volante, comedia nuova e redicolosa*. As Toldo points out, however, this work merely borrows the themes of Molière’s original, and so cannot be taken as a translation so much as a very loose adaptation. Nevertheless, it is clear that Molière was beginning to exert a powerful influence over the literary atmosphere of Northern Italy.

As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, Molière’s importance to the intermezzo did not go unnoticed by the two main scholars of the genre. *L’ipocondriaco* suggests, however, that his influence was felt much earlier than the dates previously given by Troy and Lazarevich. Troy dates Molière’s presence in Italy to the publication of an Italian edition of his plays in Leipzig in 1698. Lazarevich gives the earliest example as 1697, and traces *Le malade imaginaire*’s influence to a performance by a troupe of comedians in Verona in 1700. By 1695, however, we have a musical comedy based upon the work of Molière, written by a librettist immersed in the French great’s comic style. We can now also say that his importance to musical comedy flows directly from the comedic style cultivated by the artistic patronage of the

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72 Toldo, 259.

73 Troy, 79.

74 Lazarevich, “The Role of the Neapolitan Intermezzo in the Evolution of Eighteenth-Century Musical Style,” 336. Her source for this information is Toldo, so it is curious she would avoid discussing Villifranchi’s work at all, considering that it was a musical work, unlike most other early works she cites.
Medici in Florence. When Cosimo Villifranchi died in 1699, Florence continued to be the locus for French influence on literature of all types, under the auspices of the enthusiastic Ferdinando. This second generation of librettists continued the trends of Ricciardi and Villifranchi. But in a decade’s time, their influence would begin to spread beyond the Tuscan Duchy, and with it, the importance of Molière.

Giovanni Battista Fagiuoli was born into a modest family in 1660. His father died when he was twelve and Fagiuoli was forced to find income for himself and his family. He found work as an actor, taking page parts in comedies. His first recorded performance is in Pietro Antonio Susini’s *La cortesia fa rivali* at the *Accademia degli Imperfetti* in 1675. At the *Accademia* in Florence, at the age of fifteen, the young man was surrounded by some of the greatest writers of the North. Ricciardi had left two years earlier to teach in Pisa, but Villifranchi, at the age of 29, was a member of the *Imperfetti* and just beginning his career as a librettist for the Medicis. Eleven years later, on 10 September 1684, Fagiuoli recorded in his journal that he saw Villifranchi’s *Lo speziale di villa* at Pratolino.75 He was a regular at the Pratolino operas, attending numerous times, including a performance of a musical setting of Susini’s *I tre fratelli rivali per la sorella*, where he once again encountered the comedic style of Susini. Susini belonged to the older generation (he was born in 1620 and died in 1670), and so according to Leve, he wrote in the older style of Moniglia characterized by “a rich mixture of linguistic styles and a fanciful vocabulary.”76 This tradition, from the *commedia dell’arte*, would not figure prominently in the comic works of Fagiuoli. But like Fagiuoli, Susini was an actor who would often perform the comic servant roles in his plays, and so was an expert at composing

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75 Fagiuoli, I, 37v. quoted in Weaver, 155.
76 Leve, 139.
the “elastic gag” sequences that had a more significant impact on later comedy than his linguistic gamesmanship. He was a prolific playwright, but as Leve points out, Susini “has been virtually ignored by critics and historians.”

At Pratolino Fagiuoli also had the opportunity to see the works of younger Tuscan playwrights, such as a performance of Villifranchi’s *L’ipocondriaco* in 1695.

Like Villfranchi, Fagiuoli was captivated by the comedy of Molière. Toldo remarks upon the danger of imitating the Frenchman in the precarious intellectual climate of Cosimo’s Florence. He quotes a letter to Fagiuoli from a friend that cautions him against finding inspiration in Molière:

> I would not, however, I say to you, take this theater as a model to imitate, and use it as a method of punishing the defects that you fight so well, because, after what I know, it instead is made to encourage [the same defects].

This letter tells us two important pieces of information. First, it indicates Fagiuoli was looking for models of comic writers. Secondly, it shows the degree to which the work and style of Molière had penetrated the consciousness of Tuscan intellectual life. It was a subject to be debated. Does this new style of comedy have a place in Italian theatre?

Fagiuoli responded in the affirmative. However, Toldo is careful to draw sharp limits around Fagiuoli’s progress towards the complete assimilation of Molière’s style. He writes of the protagonist of a Fagiuoli play:

> Its hero has only one goal—that of being fun—and so became the most boring. [...] His psyche remains unknown, and the poet, who gives himself the airs of a moralist, never made the vice

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77 Leve, 125.

78 Fagiuoli, I, f. 229, quoted in Weaver, 176.

79 Cod. Ricc. Lettres à Fagiuoli; Cfr. Bencini, ouvr. cite, p. 162; quoted in Toldo, 287: “je ne voudrais pas cependant, dit-il, que vous prissiez ce théâtre comme un modèle à imiter, et que vous cherchiez là la manière de chattier les vices que vous combattez si bien, parce que, d’après ce que j’en sais, ce théâtre est plutôt fait pour les fomenter.”
simmer, stirring *indignatio* like the pages of the French master. However the work of Fagiuoli marks some progress and is a commendable effort. In its fight against masks, in its testing of a natural painting of men and things, the raciness of its dialogue, and even in the strength of reason, we find that the Italian comic art is already in the running and Molierian models make up the track.80

Toldo enumerates several scenes inspired by the work of Molière that dot the plays of Fagiuoli. In his *Ciò che parte non è, ovvero Il cicisbeo sconsolato* of 1708, the exchanges between the aged and suspicious Anselmo and his servant Scappino mirror those between Harpagon and La Flèche in *L’Avare*. Anselmo, for instance, pesters Scappino to show him his hands and empty his pockets, just as Harpagon does to his valet in his first scene (I, iii) in Molière.81 As the quotation above indicates, Toldo is highly critical of these borrowings since they do not enrich the characterization or further the plot, but merely steal from Molière. But Toldo is prejudiced towards identifying an Italian version of Molière’s genius—Goldoni is the hero of his book—and therefore is not interested in exploring why certain scenes made it easily into Fagiuoli’s works. I suggest that it was not the comic material that made Molière attractive, but rather the refined touch he brought to its execution. Molière’s “elastic gags” became models for the refined use of a *dell’arte* principal and were therefore those elements of his plays that entered the Italian repertory.

Antonio Salvi was only four years Fagiuoli’s junior. He was born in 1664 in the town of Lucignano, a day’s carriage ride from Florence. Like Villifranchi before him, he was employed

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80 “Fagiuoli ignore l’analyse qui aboutit a la synthese, les dialogues, les scenes qui donnent a la fin de la piece l’image nette, tracee a grandes ligne, d’un caractere determine. Son heros n’a qu’un but, celui d’etre amusant, et il finit par devenir le plus souvent ennuyeux; nous le voyons sous tous ses aspects, mais rien qu’a la surface, sa psyche nous reste inconnue, et ce poete, qui se donne des airs de moraliste, ne nous presente jamais le vice que fait fremir, l’*indignatio* animant les pages immortelles du comique francias. Cependant l’oeuvre de Fagiuoli marque un certain progres et de louables efforts. Dans sa lutte contre les masques, dans ses essais d’une peinture naturelle des hommes et des choses, dans la verve du dialogue et meme dans la vigueur de certains raisonnements, l’on s’apercoit que l’art comique italien est deja en marche et que les modeles Molièresque viennent de lui faire entrevoir la bonne voie.”

81 Fagiuoli might also be making a sly reference to Molière’s original with the character of Anselmo, who shares his name with Anselme, the Neapolitan nobleman in *L’Avare*. 
by the Medici family as a court physician. And, like Villifranchi, he seemed to spend much more energy writing literary works than attending to his medical duties. He became Ferdinando’s favourite librettist, writing seven *drammi per musica* between 1701 and 1710 for performance at Pratolino.\(^{82}\) As a literary figure in Florence, Salvi was steeped in the works of French authors which flowed into the Tuscan duchy in the last decades of the seventeenth century. Francesco Giuntini writes that at the time of Salvi’s maturity, “Italian culture’s interest in the French theatre in this period was not limited to musical dramas, but manifested itself in the many translations and retellings in prose that were performed in private theatres, religious colleges, and in the academies.”\(^{83}\) Salvi adapted no fewer than nine tragedies from French sources in his career. He raided Jean Racine, Jean Galbert de Campistron, Nicolas Pradon, and the Corneille brothers for material. The four earliest examples of his borrowing were all written for Pratolino: *Astianatte* in 1701, *Arminio* in 1703, *Il Gran Tamerlano* in 1706, and *Rodelinda regina de’Longobardi* in 1710.

As Francesco Giuntini points out, the patronage of Ferdinando had a “more or less direct” influence on Salvi in his choice of French sources.\(^{84}\) Prior to his employment at Pratolino, Salvi wrote a comedy for Livorno in 1694. Giuntini suggests that the differences between this work and his later dramatic creations are telling, even though this early work was a comedy. Adapted from the Spanish playwright Lope de Vega’s *Fuerza lastimosa*, Salvi’s *La forza compassionevole* featured labyrinthine stories, extraneous subplots, and no fewer than eight

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\(^{83}\) Francesco Giuntini, “Modelli Teatrali Francesi nei Drammi per Musica di Antonio Salvi,” *Revista de Musicología* 16, no. 1 (1993): 335-47, 335. “[…] l’interesse per il teatro francese nella cultura italiana dell’epoca non si limita al dramma per musica ma si manifesta anche nelle numerose traduzioni e rielaborazioni in prosa che venivano recitate nei teatri privati, nei collegi religiosi, nelle accademie.”

\(^{84}\) ibid., 338. “[...] Ferdinando de’ Medici [...] siano contrassegnati dall’influenza più o meno direta del principe, grande appassionato di opera e patrono della vita musicale fiorentina.”
changes of scene in a fifteen-scene act. Astianatte, adapted from Racine’s Andromaque for Pratolino in 1701, is a much different opera. Giuntini concludes that with the influence of French tragedy, Salvi absorbed the traits of Aristotelian drama. He writes:


The liaison des scènes, literally the “link between scenes,” was the technique of maintaining at least one character onstage throughout an act, making individual scenes part of a larger continuum of action rather than discrete units of drama. While I do not want to suggest that trends in opera seria always, or even ever, presage changes in comedy, I believe in Salvi’s case his exposure to and use of French theatrical conventions was formative. It was important in two ways, which Salvi himself suggests in his preface to the published libretto for Stratonica. He based this work on Thomas Corneille’s 1666 play Antiochus for performance in Florence in the autumn of 1707.

The opera in its original French has already received much acclaim. This is not a translation, which will be all the better, as it should serve the music and must be limited for brevity, while still leaving many of such beautiful feelings which suit the author.

85 Ibid., 344.
86 Ibid., 345. “[...] a partire dall’Astianatte del 1701, la serie dei libretti scritti per Pratolino e per Firenze presenta caratteristiche profondamente diverse: una trama più semplice, una Maggiore verosimiglianza nel contenuto, un Maggiore rispetto delle unità drammatiche (anche il luogo dell’azione non supera i dintorni di una città), una riduzione dei cambiamenti di scena, regularmente distribuiti tra gli atti, un’ordinata liaison des scènes.”
87 The liaison was codified by theorists such as the Abbé d’Aubignac in La Pratique du Théâtre, edited by Pierre Martino (Algiers: Carbonel, 1927), 90.
88 Giuntini, 337.
First, Salvi learned under Medici patronage that writing in the French style put him at the forefront of literary vogue, and on the receiving end of audience approval. He explicitly states that audiences have already endorsed French theatre by 1707. Librettists are of course always inclined to say that their models were received with acclaim elsewhere—it’s a subtle appeal to audience jealousy. But when viewed in light of Villifranchi’s and Fagiuoli’s reliance on French works and their continued patronage by the Medici (to say nothing of the revivals of their works in Florence and other centres), Salvi’s opening remark seems historically sound. His preface also reveals a second, and perhaps more important aspect to Salvi’s adaptation of French works: it allowed him the opportunity to hone his skills adapting a spoken play for a musical setting. Most of the tasks in doing so are generic, and would therefore seem to be of little importance. Reducing the number of characters, cutting text for time, and embellishing the poetry for arias are necessary skills for any librettist. When coupled with his familiarity with French theatre, however, these skills become significant. As Mary Hunter once pointed out, comedy presupposes the existence of a “parallel higher genre.” Something is only funny if viewed in relief of that which it is not. Salvi’s imitation of French tragedians prepared the way for adaptations of Molière because it made him proficient in those features of French style which we have already indicated were the hallmarks of modern comedy: the Aristotelian unity of action and linguistic verisimilitude. More than this, Salvi’s adaptations also conditioned audiences to understand and appreciate this new style. It is little wonder that their love of French tragedy would spill over into a taste for French comedy.

Girolamo Gigli belonged to the same generation as Salvi. He was born on 14 October 1660 in Siena in the south of Tuscany. His uncle’s wealth furnished an unhappy marriage to a

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noblewoman, Laurenzia Perfetti, with whom he had twelve children. Gigli belonged to all the major academies, including the Accademia della Crusca of Florence (from which he would infamously be expelled) and the Arcadi of Rome. His career falls into two general periods: an early parochial one spent writing opera librettos on historical subjects in Siena, and a second, longer, cosmopolitan period writing comedies, novels, intermezzos and treatises in Florence, Rome and in exile in Viterba. His early operas were set by the Sienese Composer Giuseppe Fabbrini for performance at the Collegio Tolomei. These include La Genefieva (1685), La forza del sangue e della pietà (1686), Lodovico Pio (1687), La fede ne’ tradimenti (1689), and La forza d’amore (1696).91 Gigli’s L’Anagilda proved to be his most popular work. Based on an episode in Spanish history, it was first set by Luigi Mancia in 1700, but was reset by many of the greatest composers of the late baroque including Carlo Francesco Pollarolo (1705), Antonio Caldara (1711) and the Neapolitan Domenico Sarro (1718), among some eight other composers.92 This early conservative period is in marked contrast to the later period. For much of the early eighteenth-century (he died in 1722), Gigli was dogged by controversy. Beginning the late 1690s, Gigli, seemingly restless, branched out from writing librettos and began translating French plays into Italian. He began with a translation of Pierre Corneille in 1698, and followed with several works by Racine and Pradon, but quickly turned to Molière.93 As we saw in 1.1, Gigli was not one to shy away from Molière’s more incendiary topics. He imported the scathing Tartuffe with its mockery of piety (or at least false piety) intact in his Il Don Pilone of 1707. He turned to Molière in a more indirect way for its sequel, La sorellina de Don Pilone.

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93 The only complete listing of Gigli’s works appears in Frenquellucci’s dissertation, 210-217.
(largely a satire of his wife). As Toldo points out, Pilone’s sister, the bigoted and parsimonious Egidia, is based on the Harpagon of L’Avare and berates her servants in the same manner. A number of Harpagon’s more abusive scenes, as in the one in which he repeatedly slaps his servant La Flèche’s hands, are repeated in the play.

This experimentation with Molière and other French works seems to have bolstered Gigli’s confidence to attack the establishment. His rocky relationship with the Medici had a reprieve in 1708 when he left Florence for Rome. But Gigli could not escape the reach of the censorious Cosimo III. In 1715 he wrote an intermezzo to be performed with Domenico Scarlatti’s Ambleto. But when Ambleto premiered at the Capranica in Rome during Carnival of 1715, La Dirindina had been cast aside in favour of a pastoral intermezzo for two performers: a female role (Elpina) played by Domenico Fontana, and a male one (Silvano) played by Michele Salvatici. In the libretto published for Ambleto’s premiere, however, Fontana and Salvatici’s names are still visible under the censor’s ink which blotted out their names in the cast list for Gigli’s intermezzo, along with all evidence of La Dirindina. Fontana, Salvatici and one Tommaso Bizzarri Sanese were to play the soprano ingénue Dirindina, the baritone music teacher Don Carissimo and the soprano castrato Liscione respectively. La Dirindina’s text, excised from Ambleto’s libretto, was first published as a second edition in Lucca that same year.


96 Domenico Scarlatti, Ambleto: drama per musica da rappresentarsi nella sala de’ signori Capranica nel carnevale dell’anno MDCCXV (Roma, Il Bernabò; si vendono a Pasquino nella librarìa di P. Leone, 1715), 7. C-TU itp pam 00911. See also Sartori 1215. Saverio Franchi incorrectly states that Ambleto was performed with La Dirindina.
1715. This was almost certainly not set to different music for performance. Gigli states in a letter to Anton Francesco Marmi from 3 December of 1715 that he had the libretto printed and brought to Rome after theatre patrons shouted their annoyance at Dirindina’s replacement, “but people were so displeased with the prohibition that they let it be known in the theatre, shouting ‘bring out Liscione, bring out Dirindina.’” He goes on to write that “the musicians, afraid of being ridiculous, procured the cancellation of the work by way of Francesco de Castris and his protectors, and by way of a powerful lady in love with a castrato.” Ferdinand de Medici carried on an open affair with the castrato Francesco de Castris (1650-1724). Acton deliciously recounts a story in which the overzealous Ferdinando displays his open affection for Castris after a performance at the harpsichord, eliciting gasps from those in attendance. The ensuing scandal forced Castris to be exiled to Rome in 1703 where he lived out his days with a wealthy pension from the Medici in Florence (Acton suggests he remained a favourite of Cosimo). In Gigli’s letter above, he mentions that it was Castris who thwarted the intermezzo’s performance and the libretto’s printing at the behest of the singers and a “powerful woman in love with a castrato.” It is fitting that an intermezzo satirizing singers, castratos, and male fears


98 “Ma dispiacque tanto al popolo tal proibizione, che ne diede piu volte segni in teatro, gridando: ‘fuora Liscione, fuora Dirindina.’” Quoted in Frenquellucci, 71.

99 “I musici, temendo farsi ridicoli, procurarono impedire la recita per via di Francesco de’ Castris e de’ suoi protettori, e per via di una potente signora innamorata di un musico recitante.” Michael Talbot translates “‘musico recitante’ as simply an “opera singer” in Domenico Scarlatti, La Dirindina, edited by Francesco Degrada (Milan: Ricordi, 1985), xxi. While “musico” could technically mean any musician, it was a term often applied in favour of “castrato” in the eighteenth century. I have elected to use this term in light of the discussion below.

about homosexuality and sexual relations between women and castratos would be cancelled by a homosexual castrato and a woman in love with a castrato.\textsuperscript{101}

Molière’s influence on \textit{La Dirindina} is oblique, but important. If not for Molière’s model of comedy, Gigli might not have turned to writing the kind of acidic social commentary that characterizes the intermezzo. Roman intermezzos always represent a special case since there was no tradition for intermezzo performance, as there was in Venice and Naples, until the third decade of the century.\textsuperscript{102} But through its numerous republications, \textit{Dirindina} set the blueprint for the popular metatheatrical works of the 1720s, including Benedetto Marcello’s treatise \textit{Il teatro alla moda} (1720), and Pietro Metastasio’s intermezzo \textit{L’impresario delle Canarie} (1724; see chapter 4 for more on metatheatre and the intermezzo).\textsuperscript{103} More generally, it is indicative of Gigli’s attempts to transform Italian comedy into trenchant social commentary in the manner of Goldoni. Frenquellucci sums up his importance in this respect:

\begin{quote}
Gigli’s debt to the \textit{commedia dell’arte} was not as significant as has often been implied; the inclusion of elements common in popular theater was only one component in his experimentation as a playwright. But even within this limited context, those masks (especially the servants and the old men) of the \textit{commedia dell’arte} that will undergo a complete psychological transformation in Goldoni’s comedies […] marking their change from improvisational to literary, began their development in Gigli’s imitations [of French models], as well as Nelli’s more traditional comedies.\textsuperscript{104}
\end{quote}

While the evolution of comedy to its apex (so the historiography tells us) is not the concern of this chapter, Frenquellucci’s observation nevertheless points out the ubiquity of the influence of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{101}{I made this argument in a paper for a graduate seminar entitled “Domenico Scarlatti’s \textit{La Dirindina} and the Birth of Eighteenth-Century Musical Comedy” (Submitted to Professor Caryl Clark and Professor Linda Hutcheon, 10 December 2007).}

\footnote{102}{See John A. Rice, “The Roman Intermezzo and Sacchini’s ‘La contadina in corte’,” \textit{Cambridge Opera Journal} 12, no. 2 (2000): 91-107.}

\footnote{103}{For a complete list of metatheatrical works of the eighteenth century see Jürgen Maehder, “A queste piccolezze il pubblico non bada: Librettisten und Komponisten als Zielscheibe der Opernparodie,” \textit{Die lustige Person auf der Bühne}, vol. 1 (Anif: Universität Müller-Speiser, 1994), 235-252.}

\footnote{104}{Frenquellucci, 98-99.}
\end{footnotes}
French works. Though Gigli never borrowed material directly from Molière in his intermezzi (he wrote only two), his works still show the remarkable stamp of a librettist who spent his formative years in Tuscany and who tenaciously sought to adapt French comic principles to Italian purposes.

1.4 Expansion and Transformation

On 30 October 1713, Prince Ferdinando died, his fifty-year-old body ravaged by syphilis. While his death meant the end of operatic patronage at Pratolino—the theatre was closed permanently after his passing—it also marked the beginning of a remarkable period of transformation for Italian theatre. Librettists suckled on the aristocratic patronage of the Medici were forced to find their nourishment in the commercial theatres of Venice, Rome and Naples. With them, they brought the comic style nurtured in Tuscany and a collection of comic material in the work of Molière, ripe for use in other centres which had not yet been flush with French works as Florence had been.

Antonio Salvi began a working relationship with Antonio Vivaldi in 1718 when both were commissioned by the impresario Luca Casimiro degli Albizzi (1664-1745) to write an opera for the reopening of a public Florentine theatre, the Pergola. The result, Scanderbeg,

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premiered in June of 1718 starring a young Francesca Cuzzoni.  

In the following eighteen years, Vivaldi chose to set another three of Salvi librettos: *Ipermestra* in 1727, *L’Adelaide* in 1735 and *Ginevra, principessa di Scozia* in 1736. Only Handel and Giuseppe Maria Orlandini wrote more works based on librettos by Salvi. It is therefore not surprising to find that one of Salvi’s first intermezzi in Venice appeared within Vivaldi’s *La verità in cimento* in the autumn of 1720 at the Teatro Sant’Angelo, where Vivaldi acted as an impresario for his own productions. The music for the intermezzo was provided by Francesco Gasparini, but the score is unfortunately lost. It is also not surprising that Salvi based this work, *L’Avaro*, on Molière’s play about the miserly Harpagon, *L’Avare*.

The first Salvi intermezzo based on a work by Molière for which the music survives is his *L’artigiano gentiluomo* after Molière’s *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*. Orlandini set the text for performance in Florence in 1722. He had already set Salvi’s intermezzo *Bacocco e Serpilla* for Verona in 1715, as well as his *seria* operas *Amore e maestà* for the Cocomero in Florence also in 1715, and *Le amazoni vinte da Ercole* for Reggio nell’Emilio in 1718. The enormous popularity of *Bacocco e Serpilla* helped ensure Salvi’s reputation as a comic writer. Though Orlandini’s setting of *L’artigiano* does not survive, Johann Adolf Hasse’s setting of the same text does. Hasse set Salvi’s text for the San Bartolomeo in 1726. Gordana Lazarevich published

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an edition of Hasse’s *L’artigiano* in 1979. Troy also commented briefly on the work. We will therefore examine it in detail to observe both the technique of adapting a Molière play into an intermezzo and at the same time reconsider some of Troy’s and Lazarevich’s conclusions.

*Le bourgeois gentilhomme* was first performed for Louis XIV at his palaces of Chambord and Saint-Germain in October of 1670. It then moved to the Palais-Royal in Paris for public performances in November and ran until Easter. This comédie-ballet featured extensive musical sections by Lully, marking it as one of his first extensive forays into theatrical music. The plot centres on the character of Monsieur Jourdain, a *nouveau riche* merchant who aspires to become a member of the established nobility. To this end he hires a music master, a dancing master, a fencing master and a philosophy master to tutor him in the pastimes of the aristocracy. He also befriends the impecunious count Dorante, who wrings money out of Jourdain with his flattery, much to Madame Jourdain’s chagrin. Dorante uses the borrowed funds to woo the marquise Dorimène, whom Monsieur Jourdain hopes to take as his mistress. He holds a great feast at his house and invites the marquise, hoping to impress her with his ostentatious display of wealth and artistic taste. Meanwhile, Madame Jourdain conspires with the Jourdain’s daughter Lucile, her *amant* Cléonte, and his valet to dupe Monsieur Jourdain into allowing the marriage of Lucile and Cléonte, a wealthy but non-noble suitor. Cléonte and his valet Covielle disguise themselves as “the Grand Turk” and his translator and grant nobility to Jourdain in an elaborate ceremony, persuading Jourdain to allow his daughter to marry “the Grand Turk” (Cléonte in disguise). The play ends with Jourdain clueless about his acquiescence, Lucile and and Cléonte happily headed

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towards marriage, the marquise amused but interested only in the count and Madame Jourdain pleased to have outwitted her husband. The plot is a rather loose connection of “elastic gag” sequences which nevertheless flesh out the characters involved in the action. One iconic scene involves the sharp-tongued maid Nicole handily beating Monsieur Jourdain at fencing. The late-romantic English painter Charles Robert Leslie (1794-1856) perfectly captured the scene in an 1841 painting that now hangs in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. In it, Monsieur Jourdain, in his ridiculously elaborate clothing, squats awkwardly and shields his face as Nicole, in an elegant ballet-like pose, delivers a direct blow with her foil. Madame Jourdain stands to the side in amusement.\textsuperscript{112} The painting captures the essence of Molière’s story. Jourdain appears ungainly while the servant character dances steps around him—his rehearsed attempts at elegance are easily upstaged by her natural grace. This reversal of roles, in which the wealthy but undistinguished merchant is made a fool by the wily servant, provided a rich source of material for Italian imitators, who saw in the story a polished version of the vulgar \textit{commedia} routines of their native theatre.

Troy writes that “it was impossible […] for the Italian arranger to preserve any more than the barest outlines of Molière’s plots and characterizations in the reduced format dictated by the intermezzo’s traditional two roles and two or three short episodes.”\textsuperscript{113} He uses Salvi’s \textit{L’artigiano} as an example of this condensation to the “barest outlines.” Lazarevich similarly writes of Salvi’s adaptation that “although the intermezzo does not present the plot of Molière’s work in summary, the source of its ideas is obvious.”\textsuperscript{114} Like Molière’s protagonist, Vanesio

\begin{footnotes}
\item[112] For the origins of this painting as well as a biography of Leslie, see Gervase Jackson-Stops, “Some Sources for the Paintings of C.R. Leslie,” \textit{The Magazine Antiques} 135 (1989): 310-21.
\item[113] Troy, 80.
\item[114] Hasse, \textit{L’artigiano}, ed. by Lazarevich, xi.
\end{footnotes}
(Salvi’s would-be gentleman) is a merchant in search of a paramour, but is unmarried in this adaptation. Larinda opens the intermezzo, explaining her desire to snag the wealthy Vanesio as a husband. She disguises herself as “Larindo,” a fencing instructor, a dancing master, and a “mezzano”—a marriage broker.  

At the end of Part I, “Larindo” tells Vanesio of the Baroness Stellidaura d’Arbella, who has heard of his good looks and is coming to visit him. Vanesio is smitten and the rest of the intermezzo is dedicated to his histrionic excitement at her arrival. Part II covers her arrival (Larinda once again in disguise), Vanesio’s awkward greeting, and their agreement to marry. Part III begins after their marriage, with Vanesio furious there is no dowry. Larindo un.masks herself and offers her life for her trickery. Vanesio of course is at once taken with her, forgives her and they resolve to live happily ever after. Lazarevich illustrates the two examples of text which are more or less translated directly from Molière. The most similar scene is the one in which Vanesio greets the Baroness for the first time. Below the two scenes are presented in parallel:

**EXAMPLE 1.4.1 Molière, Le bourgeois gentilhomme, III, xix / A. Salvi, L’artigiano gentiluomo, II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jourdain</th>
<th>Va.</th>
<th>Dorimène</th>
<th>Jour.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(après avoir fait deux réverences, se trouvant trop près de Dorimène) Un peu plus loin, Madame.</td>
<td>Inanzi di sedere faccia favor di ritirarsi al quanto perchè possa compire al mio dovere.</td>
<td>Comment?</td>
<td>E qual Dover?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(after bowing thrice and finding himself too close to Dorimène) Stand back a little, Madame.</td>
<td>Before you take a seat do me a favour to retreat a few steps so that I can proceed to execute my duty.</td>
<td>What on earth...</td>
<td>And what is that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un pas, s’il vous plaît.</td>
<td>Sospiro, sospiro che si retiri un poco.</td>
<td>Quoi donc?</td>
<td>Reculez un peu, pour la troisième.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor.</td>
<td>Or mi ritiro.</td>
<td>La.</td>
<td>Io per atto di stima ho già fatto la prima, ho fatto la seconda, ed or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jour.</td>
<td>As you wish.</td>
<td>La.</td>
<td>Out of respect towards you I have just made the first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

115 In early Renaissance Italy there was a distinction between a *sensale*, a professional matchmaker, and a *mezzano* (literally, “one who procures”), a family friend or relative who sets up a couple. See Lorenzo Fabbri, *Alleanza matrimoniale e patriziato nella Firenze del ‘400: studio sulla famiglia Strozzi* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1991), 143.
The above example makes for an easy comparison with the source material. It implies that the author (Salvi) has read Molière thoroughly and attempted to extract those elements of the play which will sketch out the plot. But I believe this evaluation is simplistic. Troy and Lazarevich are concerned primarily with determining those elements which are identical to the source material. This suggests that Salvi was a mere adaptor, not an adept comedic playwright in his own right. To paraphrase Troy, it was Salvi’s job only to “preserve” the “barest outlines” of the plot to make it intelligible to the audience.

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To look at Salvi’s role in a different light we need to take a step back. Louise George Clubb has come up with a useful term to discuss those scenes which bear a similarity in plot between plays in the Renaissance. She uses the term “theatergram” to denote dramatic scenarios which were in common use throughout Europe. We may use this term to describe scenes in Molière which resemble a *commedia* routine, like the “elastic gags” described by Andrews (who borrows Clubb’s term for this purpose). The scene above, for example, constitutes an “elastic gag.” In Salvi’s adaptation, he stretches out the back and forth banter between Jourdain/Vanesio and Dorimène/Larinda and compresses Jourdain’s speech to Vanesio’s more brief but no less nonsensical exhortation. In adapting Molière’s text, Salvi was not merely translating, but engaging in the same act that Molière engaged in to bring about the text in the first place. That is to say, the process that brought about both scenes is identical. Clubb writes eloquently about this process:

> Constant as a principle from the time of Ariosto on was construction by contamination, the meditated and usually explicit combination of pre-texts. But in addition to the mere fusion of borrowed plots, this demanded the interchange and transformation of units, figures, relationships, actions, *topoi*, and framing patterns, gradually building a combinatory of theatergrams that were at once streamlined structures for svelte play making and elements of high specific density, weighty with significance from previous incarnations.

In this light, Salvi’s accomplishments with *L’artigiano* are more significant than mere adaptation (or worse, translation). In this short intermezzo, Salvi creates the dramatic scaffolding on which to hang scenes straight from Molière, while enriching them with the traditions of both the *commedia dell’arte* and the comic intermezzo. The scenes taken from Molière are therefore not mere translations, but “elements of high specific density.” A literate audience would recognize the significance of the scene from their knowledge of its “pre-text.” A scene such as the one

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118 Andrews, “the Question of Influence,” 454.

above behaves both as shorthand for the more elaborate plot of Molière, and an invitation to compare the comedic skill of Salvi with Molière. The intermezzo demands from the audience a critical engagement with the work. The audience perceives the “palimpsestuousness” of the intermezzo, to use Michael Alexander’s term so much in vogue in literary criticism. In these “elastic gag” sequences we see not only Salvi’s craft, but the impression of Molière’s handiwork underneath; it is in this sense, a palimpsest.

1.5 CONCLUSION

There is a twofold benefit to viewing Salvi’s intermezzo as a collection of “elastic gags” taken from a common source rather than a direct adaptation or condensation of an earlier dramatic whole. First, it allows us to understand the process by which intermezzos were created. Molière’s plays were not shaved bare to be paraded in front of an Italian audience. They were instead used as repositories of model comic scenarios. Secondly, in thinking about adaptation as a process, and not an outcome, we can more readily comprehend the consequences for a musical setting of the work. If intermezzi are collections of “theatergrams,” and “theatergrams” are scenarios for “elastic gags,” it follows that these units could be recombined and reordered to generate ever more original intermezzos in the same manner that modular units of dialogue can be lengthened, shortened or eliminated in “elastic gags” (as we observed above).

120 To my knowledge, the poet and writer first used the term in his The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), 114. The term was taken up by Elizabeth Deeds Ermareth in several articles, most importantly “Agency in the Discursive Condition,” History and Theory 40, no. 4 (2001): 34-58, 47. Linda Hutcheon uses the term as a focus for her A Theory of Adaptation (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6, 21-22.
The similarity in the structure of Salvi’s intermezzo with the earlier comic operas of the Florentine period also highlights something important about the musical architecture of comedy during this period. Already in the early 1680s, with Stradella and Villifranchi’s *Il Trespolo tutore*, we have the standard design of musical comedy firmly in place. Elastic gags form sections of action—that is sections which further the plot. These scenes are set by the composer as recitative. The scenes are then capped with a moment of reflection for one character—an aria. Over the succeeding 50 years, from Stradella through to Pergolesi and beyond, the musical style of the arias of course will change dramatically, but the sections of dialogue written as “elastic gags” will almost always be written as recitative.

As we move further in time from the epoch of French influence on spoken comedy in Florence, and further geographically from the crucible of intermezzo adaptations of Molière in Florence and Venice, instances of Molière’s influence become much less readily visible than ones such as Salvi’s *L’artigiano*. However, librettists still borrowed “elastic gags” from Molière’s output in order to enrich their new intermezzos. Most surprisingly they used such scenes in intermezzos which are not in any way related to a play by Molière. A scene from *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, for example, appears on the Neapolitan stage in an intermezzo unconnected to both Molière’s original and Salvi’s adaptation: in Leonardo Vinci’s *Albino e Plautilla* of 1723.
2.1 INTRODUCTION: LEONARDO VINCI AS INNOVATOR

The Neapolitan composer Leonardo Vinci occupies a significant place in the historiography of the galant style. In his *General History of Music* Burney named him as the first reformer of opera. After recounting the increasing complexity of musical settings since the time of Jacopo Peri, Burney famously credits Vinci as

> [...] the first opera composer who saw this absurdity, and, without degrading his art, rendered it the friend, though not the slave, to poetry, by simplifying and polishing melody, and calling the attention of the audience chiefly to the voice-part, by disentangling it from fugue, complication, and laboured contrivance.¹

For Burney, the worst form of vocal music was that which was “instrumental”—music which functioned as empty display rather than furthering the drama through its elucidation of the text. Vinci, as an early proponent of a melodious vocal line supported by simpler accompaniments,

was a hero. Burney also gave Vinci credit for the diffusion of this new style. He remarked that Vinci’s premieres in Venice were significant in the musical life of that city, as they were the first time that Venetians heard the “natural, clear, and dramatic strains” of Vinci’s music.²

Vinci’s significance is now wedded to the rise of Metastasio as galant librettist par excellence. Many authors, from Algarotti to Burney to Strohm, identified their first collaboration, on the 1726 opera Didone abbandonata, as a seminal moment in the development of galant style.³ Drawing on the substantial research of Kurt Markstrom, Daniel Heartz has all but enshrined this narrative in his tome on the galant in music. He writes that “Metastasio’s clarity and force inspired Vinci to simplify and clarify his music even further.”⁴ Lazarevich identified Vinci with her “second phase” of the intermezzo development. She quite correctly remarked on his conservatism in his early intermezzi.

Although he embodies the pre-Classic idiom, in many respects he is the carrier of the Scarlatti tradition through his talents for expressive melodies, filled with pathos (in the operas), and a strong sense of dramatic expression obtained by the use of accompanied recitative applied to the intermezzo. He successfully presents humorous musical characterization of the male comic character.⁵

She makes two important points that bear exploration. First, Vinci’s early comic intermezzi do not feature many of the modern elements for which he became so famous in his serious operas. This seems to be a small issue, but it is one that is significant for the broader placement of the intermezzo within the development of classical style. If Vinci’s output is emblematic (and it is), it would suggest that whatever modern elements are audible in the intermezzo are ones that were

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² ibid., 537.


borrowed from the *seria* tradition, not the other way around. We therefore must not overstate the importance of comedy to the aesthetics of classical style given that many features of the intermezzo’s comic style are borrowed from an existing *seria* tradition. We might need to be more careful in our quest for the source of classical aesthetics in the 1720s. Just as Eric Weimer was wise to suggest that *seria* aria structures played an important role in the development of classicism in the mid-century, an evaluation of Vinci’s intermezzo output shows the degree to which *seria* developments had an effect on the comedic music of the 1730s (including the intermezzos of Pergolesi). Lazarevich’s second point is also crucial. Vinci’s success in writing for the bass voice is another example of his conservatism. Musical humour in the early intermezzo was primarily a male buffo phenomenon. This was a style that was developed early and maintained throughout the entire intermezzo tradition.

Vinci’s upbringing and early career was emblematic of many of the young composers from southern Italy who exerted an extraordinary influence on European operatic life in the 1720s. He was born in Strongoli, on the arid western side of Calabria, some five kilometres from the Ionian Sea, around the turn of the eighteenth century. Nothing is known about his earliest years there. He entered the Neapolitan Conservatorio dei Poveri di Gesù Cristo later in life than most boys, perhaps at the age of seventeen. The conservatory system was the only training ground for young musicians in the south of Italy. It was an admirably democratic system in which orphaned boys were educated alongside talented boarded pupils, such as Vinci. The four

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7 Until 2003, the approximate age and the year Vinci died were not known with any certainty. Markstrom’s recent book has clarified this problem with the discovery of his death certificate: Vinci died in 1730, at the approximate age of 34. See Markstrom, *The Operas of Leonardo Vinci, Napoletano* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2003): 2.

conservatories produced such luminaries of eighteenth-century composition as Alessandro Scarlatti, Nicola Porpora and Niccolò Jomelli.\(^9\) In the years between 1719 and 1722 Vinci made a name for himself composing Neapolitan comedies. Of the eight works he wrote during those years, only the last, *Li zite 'n galera*, survives as a complete score.\(^{10}\) While some arias hint at the quality of his later works, *Li zite 'n galera* is filled with rustic Neapolitan music that is not represented in Vinci’s serious or comic music of the latter part of the decade.

From 1722 on Vinci enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity. Like Pergolesi, his bright flame was snuffed out at the height of his popularity. He left a remarkable body of work which was admired by composers throughout the following century. But while his serious operas have rightly been hailed as important events in eighteenth-century music history, his intermezzo output is less lauded. *Albino e Plautilla*, Vinci’s second comic outing, was not a successful intermezzo by the measure of those we are familiar with today. It was never revived, never revered and never formed the basis for a great debate about musical aesthetics in the way Pergolesi’s works did for the *querelle des bouffons*. This is certainly not for a lack of quality. And though the arias are in a more conservative vein, Vinci’s musical language is not backward looking, but firmly within the comic intermezzo tradition.

In this chapter I suggest that *Albino e Plautilla* was not revived because of the specificity of its comedy. This is not to say that the comedy is not successful—in fact, both the libretto and the musical score are very funny. But the satire in the intermezzo is specific to the Naples of the early 1720s. Unlike many of the domestic comedies which became staples of intermezzo performers’ touring repertories, *Albino e Plautilla* takes place in the social sphere—a world in

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\(^{9}\) For more on the conservatory system see Salvatore Di Giacomo, *I Quattro antichi conservatorii di musica di Napoli* (Milan: Remo Sandron, 1928).

which the politics of philosophy, gender and education, rather than marriage, are the main topics of debate. This chapter explores the musical and textual sources of comedy in *Albino e Plautilla*. As we will see, Vinci and his librettist followed the usual pattern of composing for the intermezzo by setting elastic gag sequences as recitative and punctuating these with arias. However, the choice of source material for these gags was determined not merely by aesthetic practice. The social context played a vital role in shaping the comedy of the intermezzo. For contemporary audiences, *Albino e Plautilla* held a meaning that is largely unrecoverable for modern listeners. One of these hidden meanings was a scene borrowed from Molière—a feature of this intermezzo not yet mentioned in the literature. Its presence suggests that Molière had a more formative impact on the intermezzo than has been acknowledged.

2.2 **ALBINO E PLAUTILLA**

In November of 1722 Vinci premiered his first *dramma per musica*. Vinci’s collaborator for his comedies, the local librettist Bernardo Saddumene, adapted the libretto from Agostin Piovene’s 1712 Venetian production of *Publio Cornelio Scipione*, following the usual pattern of adapting Venetian works for Neapolitan audiences (within a decade the pattern would reverse direction). It was performed with the intermezzo *Bacocco e Ermosilla*, whose music does not survive. The earliest extant Vinci score comes from his *Albino e Plautilla da Pedante*, performed with the opera *Silla Dittatore* in Naples on 1 October 1723.\(^{11}\) *Silla* was based on

Vincenzo Cassiani’s *Il tiranno eroe* set by Albinoni for the Venetian stage in 1711. It is an invented political intrigue centering on Sulla’s dictatorship during the early part of the first century BCE (with the requisite romantic entanglements added). The preface mentions that some alterations have been made to suit the taste of Neapolitan audiences, including the addition of certain “buffê” scenes which constitute the intermezzo, *Albino e Plautilla*. “In order to give a playful character to some of the scenes, which one calls Buffê, scenes were added to the ends of the acts by he who adapted the opera for this theatre.”

The text is by an unknown author. But as Markstrom suggests, he may have been Bernardo Saddumene, the local librettist who had adapted Vinci’s first *opera seria* the previous season. Following early Neapolitan practice, the comic characters participate directly in the action of the *seria* opera. Unlike later intermezzi which were performed during intermissions this early comic work is integrated loosely into the serious plot. Albino, a tenor on the Venetian stage, is here rescored for baritone. In addition to performing the small role of Sulla’s military commander in the *seria* action, Albino is the main male character in the intermezzo, playing opposite Plautilla, the prima donna Emilia’s maidservant. In the Naples production, Giacchino Corrado performed the role of Albino. He continued performing roles such as this in Naples throughout the 1720s, and originated the role of Uberto in *La serva padrona* in 1733. Plautilla was performed by Santa Marchesini, the undisputed queen of comic roles on the Neapolitan stage in the early years of the intermezzo. She performed with Corrado in at least 39 intermezzo

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12 Ibid. “Per dargli un Caratere in qualche parte giocoso nelle Scene, che disconsi Buffê, aggiunte nel fine degli Atti, quali, sono state abozzate da chi hà l’incumbenza di adattare la Opera a questo Teatro”.


premieres between 1711 and 1726.\footnote{For a list of their performances together see Franco Piperno, “Buffe e buffi: considerazione sulla professionalità degli scene buffi ed intermezzi,” Rivista Italiana di Musicologia 17, no. 2 (1982), 264-265.} Between 1719 and 1725, the two performed together exclusively. It is a near certainly that the roles of Albino and Plautilla were written with this comic duo in mind.

*Albino and Plautilla* is performed in three parts. Parts I and II end Acts I and II. Part three is performed as the penultimate scene in Act III. Part I is the shortest section, and introduces the central conflict of the plot. Albino, the commander of the Roman army, must get dressed to go to the Senate. He hollers for his servants, but gets Plautilla, the *serva scaltra* with the wry wit (and implied physical beauty) instead. Albino protests, but Plautilla flatly declares that she is also his servant, to which he amorousy responds that “on the contrary, I would like to be your good servant” (“Anz’io voglio esser suo bon servitore”). Plautilla rebuffs him by asking him to set aside the compliments if he wants to get dressed (“Da parte i complimenti / Si vorrebbe vestire?”) and proceeds to help him get his things. Albino is at first reluctant to have her help him because he is not fully dressed (one can sense the sexual tension), but relents and the two chat while he puts on his things. Albino is fussy—he complains about his pants, which cut off his circulation. Plautilla inquires about his business, and Albino responds that he hopes to be elected Praetor in the senate today. She scoffs at his lack of preparation and suggests sending for a tutor to help him prepare as others have for such a position. Albino agrees to do so once he is done getting dressed. They sing a final duet during which Plautilla helps Albino put on his clothes (see example 2.2.1). It is slightly reminiscent of a later eighteenth-century action aria such as Mozart’s “Vnite, inginocchiatevi” from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. But rather than having the requisite freneticism the text implies, the aria has the square cut of a minuet, with its symmetrical four-bar phrase structure. The tempo marking “tempo giusto” implies a quickened gallop rather...
than a stately dance (a typically Italian trait in the minuet repertory), but the scene still seems static and somewhat cute. The square phrases are reminiscent of Ciccariello’s aria from the second act of *Li zite ‘ngalera*. As in *Li zite*, the melody is refreshing, but the general character of the aria is conservative—like something out of Domenico Sarro’s *seria* output—rather than *au courant*.

**EXAMPLE 2.2.1** L. Vinci, *Albino e Plautilla*, Part I, “Si lasci servire,” (folio 65r)


During the duet, Albino announces that he will make Plautilla Praetoressa if he is elected, to which she responds favourably. This is of course contingent upon his successful education and preparation for the job. The first part of the intermezzo concludes with the action set: Albino is to be tutored if he is to be successful in the political and romantic arenas.

Part II begins with Plautilla, disguised as a tutor, announcing her intention to have a bit of fun with Albino, while at the same time admitting her affection for him. She suggests her delight in his naivety by singing that “all he’ll buy, I’ll sell to him” (“Che tutto comprerà, quel che gli vendo”). When Albino approaches, Plautilla greets him in Latin, which Albino mistakes for Greek (and announces so, presumably to the audience’s laughter). After some awkward greetings and an agreement to speak in Latin (which Albino does very poorly, despite his protest that he speaks “modern Latin” [“latino moderno”], not the brand that Plautilla is proffering), Plautilla, as the pedant, asks what he would like to learn. He replies that he’d like to learn what would befit a man of his quality, and admits that he finds philosophy hard to stomach. Plautilla announces that her school has very distinct principles, the first of which is that “you must cast doubt on everything” (“Il primo / È che si debba dubitar di tutto”). Albino is at first confused,
but is required to agree to doubt all that he can touch and see. If he follows this, Albino asks how he will know if the pedant is even a man, to which he is forced to admit that Plautilla’s beard indicates that it is so. Plautilla then sings an aria about the need for doubting everything (see example 2.2.2). Like many seria arias by Neapolitan composers in the 1710s, it is an aria in the minor mode and in common time. Also like such arias, including Vinci’s own “Del tuo più bel sembiante” from Act I of Silla dittatore, it features a halting rhythm with lengthy pauses. The quasi-contrapuntal lines also contribute to its gravity. While usually employed in opera seria for moments of psychological distress and indecision, this style of aria is here written for an obstinate pedant.

**EXAMPLE 2.2.2**  L. Vinci, Albino e Plautilla, II “Affirmare vel negare,” (112r-v)
d' quant' è sotto la luna
Nihil cer-

Tum mai si dà mai si dà mai mai
nihil cer-tum mai si sa mai si

Con.
Plautilla then queries Albino about his ability to pronounce. Albino demonstrates, to comic
effect, and the two go on repeating basic vowel sounds with Plautilla’s exacting help. She says
that with her help, Albino will soon be able to speak as well as Cicero. Tickled with his easy
mastery of the vowels, Ablino sings his first aria, a swaggering celebration of his
accomplishment. He then announces that it is getting on and he must be on his way to the
Palatine hill, but invites Plautilla to come. She agrees, but won’t give her hand until Albino
insists. He seems confused by the delicacy of her hand and voice, to which Plautilla comes up
with a little-red-riding-hood-like list of excuses. In the final duet she expresses her concern he’s found her out while Albino sings about his confusion.

The final intermezzo, though not as lengthy as the second, is still of considerable length. Here the action takes on a magical element that, while bizarre, allows for a good deal of physical comedy to occur onstage. It begins with Albino remarking that the goddess Erinia, his relative, has given him a wand that with the word “bicche” transforms whomever it touches into whatever the holder wishes. Touching them once again and saying “bacche” releases the spell. When Plautilla, still disguised as a pedant arrives, Albino freezes her with his new wand. A frightened Plautilla announces that she was only joking with her lessons. An enraged Albino then proceeds to attack Plautilla, before she reveals herself to be his servant and the object of his affections. A shocked Albino immediately releases her. She grabs the wand and then freezes him. He protests, so she makes use of her newfound occult powers and forces him to dance instead. Albino than sings a lumbering aria (which Markstrom describes as a “rustic forlana”). His protestations only encourage Plautilla to torture him further by taking away his sight. He stumbles around before Plautilla makes one last assault on his dignity: she summons up the devils to take him away. His whining is met with her pretending to converse with the devil Baruffo by disguising her voice, before releasing him after his desperate apology. They agree to marry as long as she can keep the wand, but she must agree not to use it to torture him. They sing a love duet about their impending marriage and agree to remain happy for the rest of their lives.18

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18 In relating the plot, Markstrom does not mention the magical element. He states that, while dancing, “Albino gets carried away and offends Plautilla who then in an accompagnato buffo calls upon the devils to punish him for trying to kiss her and touch her,” 44. This may leave the reader with the impression that Albino’s dancing is voluntary. Albino also makes no untoward advances while dancing. Lazarevich similarly misreads Albino’s earlier pronunciation scene as “music lessons,” 175.
2.3 **A SCENE BORROWED FROM MOÎRIÈRE?**

Several of the elements of this intermezzo are recycled from other works. The “theatergram” of the female with occult powers had been used by Saddumene the year before *Albino* in the comic scenes of *Ermosilla and Bacocco* appended to *Publio Cornelio Scipione*.\(^{19}\)

In that work, Ermosilla enacts a visual gag. Disguised as Venus, she arrives on a machine and parades a series of genetically ungifted children across the stage (one imagines aged actors in ridiculous costumes) to show Bacocco what their offspring would look like. Domenico Sarro’s 1727 intermezzo *Moschetta e Grullo*, by an anonymous librettist, also contains a scene in which the female protagonist tortures the *buffo* male with her powers. Albino’s forced dancing is another scene reminiscent of so many others in the intermezzo repertory. *L’artigiano* contains a similar episode during the dancing lesson. The most conspicuous example of borrowing, however, is the pedant’s scene, in which the disguised Plautilla gives Albino an elocution lesson. Troy and Lazarevich focused only on intermezzi whose titles were direct translations from Molière, and so missed some smaller examples such as this scene. It is taken directly from Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (though one of the scenes not included in Salvi’s adaptation [see chapter one]). As we might expect, it is a textbook “elastic gag.” The text of Molière and Saddumene is presented in parallel below:

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**EXAMPLE 2.3.1 Molière, Le Bourgeois gentilhomme, II, iv / Albino e Plautilla, Part II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philosophy Master</th>
<th>There are five vowels: A, E, I, O, U.</th>
<th>Plautilla.</th>
<th>On to the vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jourdain</td>
<td>Il y a cinq voyelles ou voix: a, e, i, o, u.</td>
<td>Alle vocali Bisogna star attento Per dir A, come fate?</td>
<td>You need to play attention. How do you say “A”?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^{19}\) Troy, *The Comic Intermezzo*, 82.
The vowel A is produced by opening the mouth wide: A.

A. A. Right.

The vowel E is produced by bringing the lower jaw up until it almost meets the upper jaw: E.

A, E, A, E. My word, yes! Oh this is marvellous!

For the vowel I, Bring the jaws even closer together and stretch the corners of the mouth towards the ears: A, E, I.

A, E, I, I, I. Quite right. Isn’t knowledge woderful!

E l’I?

The vowel O is produced by opening the jaws and rounding the lips top and bottom and at each side: O.

A, e, i, o, o. Cela est admirable! I, o, i, o. Quite right. Isn’t knowledge woderful!

I know this

The opening of the mouth forms a small circle which mimics exactly the shape of the letter O.

O, o, o. Vous avez raison, o.

O, o, o. That’s absolutely right. A, e, i, o, i, o. This is splendid! I, O, I, O.

You’re right again. Ah,
Ah! la belle chose, que de savoir quelque chose!

**Phil.**
La voix u se forme en rapprochant les dents sans les joindre entièrement, et allongeant les deux lèvres en dehors, les approchant aussi l’une de l’autre sans les rejoindre tout à fait: u.

**Jour.**
U, u. Il n’y a rien de plus véritable: u.

**Phil.**
Vos deux lèvres s’allongent comme si vous faisiez la moue: d’où vient que si vous la voulez faire à quelqu’un, et vous moquer de lui, vous ne sauriez lui dire que: u.

**Jour.**
U, u. Cela est vrai. Ah! que n’ai-je étudié plus tôt, pour savoir tout cela?

**Phil.**
The vowel U is produced by bringing the teeth close together but without quite meeting, and pushing the lips out and bringing them close together too but not letting them touch: U.

**Jour.**
U, U. It’s as true as I’m sitting here.

**Phil.**
Both your lips are pushed out, as if you were pulling a face, so that if you want to let someone know you don’t think much of him, you only need to say: U!

**Jour.**
U, U. That’s absolutely right. Oh, why didn’t I study when I was younger so I’d have known all this earlier?^20

While we can safely say that the pronunciation scenes in Molière’s play and in *Albino* are nearly identical, a thornier question remains: did the librettist of *Albino* borrow the scene from Molière, or from some other source? Molière did not invent the scene himself, but borrowed it in its entirety from Géraud de Cordemoy’s *Discours Physique de la Parole*, a philosophical tract

[^20]: Wood and Coward, 200-201.
published two years before Molière’s 1670 play.\textsuperscript{21} This was first noted in the secondary literature by Louis-Simon Auger in his publication of the complete works of Molière in 1824.\textsuperscript{22} The French classicist Pierre Brumoy had earlier suggested in 1730 that Molière borrowed the scene from Aristophanes’ \textit{Nephelai}.\textsuperscript{23} That play features a scene in which Socrates attempts to teach the buffoonish and venal Strepsiades the gender of nouns. But Socrates’ and Strepsiades’ exchange resembles only the broad architecture of Molière’s scene. They are both, in a sense, elastic gags dealing with philosophy. Claude Bourqui dismisses Aristophanes as a likely source for this particular scene, but gives six other likely ancillary sources which inspired certain other scenes in \textit{Le bourgeois gentilhomme} in his exhaustive \textit{Les Sources de Molière}.\textsuperscript{24} Even the general theme of the play is not original: Molière borrowed it from Francisco Manuel de Melo’s 1646 Portuguese play \textit{O Fidalgo Aprendiz} (“The Apprentice Nobleman”). Further complicating matters is the fact that, as Andrews points out, Molière had access to many oral traditions of performance that we cannot recover today. Those \textit{commedia dell’arte} scenarios which were put to paper and have survived, though numbering more than one thousand, do not represent the complete number of routines, including elastic gags, which were available to playwrights.\textsuperscript{25} One who may doubt the promiscuity of \textit{commedia dell’arte} material, to borrow Andrews’ phrase, need only peruse the table of concordances compiled by Thomas Heck for the printed collection

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Œvres de Molière}, VIII, edited by Louis-Simon Auger (Paris: Vve Desoer, 1824), 44.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Pierre Brumoy, \textit{Le Théâtre des Grecs}, vol. III (Paris: Rollin, 1730), 70-73.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Claude Bourqui, \textit{Les Sources de Molière: Répertoire Critique des Sources Littéraires et Dramatiques} (Paris: SEDES, 1999), 294-310.
\item \textsuperscript{25} This estimate of the extant “scenari” and “suggettii” is given by Cesare Molinari in \textit{La Commedia Dell’Arte} (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1999), 61.
\end{itemize}
of the Casamarciano scenarios. Eighty-seven of the 107 scenarios share material with other scenarios as well as Italian, French, and Spanish plays and opera librettos.\(^{26}\) And certainly there are countless more that have yet to be catalogued by scholars. Innumerable comic scenarios circulated in a variety of formats, making the task of tracing the origins of a particular scene troublesome if not impossible.

We can nevertheless be quite certain that Molière borrowed the scene specifically from Cordemoy and not another source because of the similarity of the wording between the two texts.\(^ {27}\) Could Cordemoy’s text, then, have been the source for the librettist of *Albino e Plautilla*? The text of *Albino e Plautilla*, this time in Italian rather than French, bears little difference to either Cordemoy’s or Molière’s version.

While we cannot be certain, I would suggest that *Albino*’s pronunciation scene is likely taken directly from Molière without inspiration from Cordemoy. The librettist Antonio Salvi adapted Molière’s play into an intermezzo to be performed in Venice in 1722.\(^ {28}\) While Salvi’s intermezzo, *L’artigiano gentiluomo*, contained the fencing master scene, the philosophy master and his pronunciation lesson are excised completely. That it reappears in *Albino e Plautilla* suggests that the librettist knew that the scene was absent from Salvi’s intermezzo. Audiences would have been primed for more Molière given the success of the intermezzo. Why let good source material go to waste?

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\(^{27}\) “Les similitudes de formulation exposées plus haut ne laissent pas de doute: Molière avait sous les yeux le texte du *Discours physique de la parole* au moment de la composition du *Bourgeois gentilhomme*,” Bourqui, 303.

Could the librettist, however, have had access to Cordemoy’s text? Proper pronunciation seems to have been a particularly French preoccupation of the final quarter of the seventeenth century, some time and place removed from our Italian intermezzo of the 1720s. Neapolitan circles would nevertheless have been familiar with Cordemoy’s work, but only by way of the philosophical writings of Nicolas Malebranche. Exponents of Cartesian philosophy, to whom the librettist of Albino e Plautilla undoubtedly was exposed, read Malebranche in its Latin translation. In his De la Recherche de la Verité, Malebranche makes a passing reference to Cordemoy’s Discours:

Nonetheless, in order to pronounce but a single word, it is necessary to move many muscles, such as those of the tongue, lips, throat, and diaphragm, all at once, within a certain time, and in a certain order. But one can, with little meditation, satisfy oneself on these questions, and on many other very curious and rather useful ones, and they need not detain us here.

While Malebranche appears dismissive of the pedantic nature of pronunciation texts, he was nevertheless influenced by Cordemoy’s more sophisticated post-Cartesian philosophy (specifically his occasionalism, which reintroduced God as an efficient cause of motion; this feature also attracted Neapolitan philosophers to Malebranche). It seems unlikely, however, that this short passage would entice a librettist to seek out a text (such as Cordemoy’s) to which Malebranche refers.

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One may argue, however, that the target of the satire presents a complicating factor for my argument above. In Molière’s play, is it the *Discours* of Cordemoy that is being satirized, or is it Monsieur Jourdain’s loutish behaviour during the lesson? Deciding on the interpretation of the scene in Molière influences not only on our interpretation of the scene as it appears in *Albino e Plautilla*, but also on the plausibility that the scene comes from Molière and not straight from Cordemoy. If Molière’s satire is directed only at the fact that Jourdain is learning Cordemoy’s text, then the librettist of *Albino* was likely familiar with it. Regarding the scene as it appears in Molière, one French Scholar, C. Voile, wrote that the scene does not satirize the real Cordemoy, but the fictional Jourdain. He concedes that the scene works well as a satire of a particular pedantic mode of philosophy, but suggests that it was in fact intended to be a satire of the merchant middle class dallying in natural philosophy. He writes that “for insiders, it was not so much the phonetic explanation that was out of season. It was M. Jourdain who was not in his place.”³³ For Voile, the learned and aristocratic audience at the theatre of the Château de Chambord at the premiere was likely laughing only at the ridiculous Jourdain who does not understand the importance of the lesson he is learning.

Cordemoy’s purpose, after all, is not to tediously provide a practical explanation of pronunciation. In fact, he makes the point that even children readily pick up such a simple task. Rather, he gives a long and detailed explanation of the mechanics of speaking to show that the body was designed as an instrument of sound production. He suggests that any animal can similarly produce such sounds, and so it is only in language that we can deduce that the body has

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a soul—a preoccupation of post-Cartesian thinkers like Cordemoy. He marshals a pedantic explanation of pronunciation in order to clearly differentiate, as he states in the preface to the *Discours*, “all that which is owed to the soul, and all that which is borrowed from the body.”  

When Molière takes the pronunciation passage out of context it appears to be nothing but ridiculous. But if we are to believe Voile, we must look past this in order to see that it is Jourdain’s inability to understand the broader implication of the lesson that is humorous, not the lesson itself.

If this is the case, does it then follow that the librettist of *Albino e Plautilla* intended Neapolitan audiences to similarly find the humour in the stupidity of a social-climbing middle-class politico (Albino), or could the target of the humour be limited to the ridiculousness of the lesson itself? Given the broader critique of Cartesianism that I believe this scene develops, I suggest that audience members would find either target of humour within the text, according to their personal bias, learning and experience. What is at the heart of the humour, however, remains the dogmatic adherence to a philosophy in the face of the practical skills necessary for negotiating the social sphere of politics and aristocratic life. Neapolitan audiences were therefore afforded a rich comedic experience in the pronunciation/philosophy lesson as it appears in *Albino e Plautilla*. Uneducated audiences could laugh at the seeming absurdity of the lesson, lovers of literature could appreciate the reference to Molière and cultured elites could marvel at the timeliness of it all. And, as we shall see, the degree to which philosophy could inform the practice of civic life was of profound concern to Neapolitans in the years before *Albino e Plautilla*’s performance.

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Just as Villifranchi turned to Molière for scenes satirizing doctors, Saddumene has similarly looked to Molière for scenes satirizing pedants. This ridiculous elocution lesson follows the lengthy passage in which Plautilla attempts to lay out a Cartesian philosophy, which Albino cannot, of course, grasp. But after being taught pronunciation, the self-satisfied Albino sings a triumphant aria in which he congratulates himself on being a changed man who knows much more than before (see example 2.2.4). Lazarevich singled out this aria as an example of the “new style” because of its static harmony. Lazarevich, 176. Markstrom mentions the passage briefly as a mock singing exercise, which hits much closer to the mark. Markstrom, “The Operas of Leonardo Vinci,” 44.

EXAMPLE 2.3.2 L. Vinci, Albino e Plautilla, Part II, “AEIOU” (folio 115v)

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35 Lazarevich, 176.

36 Markstrom, “The Operas of Leonardo Vinci,” 44.
This scene in *Albino e Plautilla* provides a fascinating case study to examine what’s at stake in the intermezzo for the librettist, composer and the audience. In the span of ten minutes, an elastic gag borrowed from Molière is framed by an antique-style philosophy aria by Plautilla and a new-style aria by Albino. The rest of this chapter details the sources of humour for this scene.

In this chapter I suggest that music is not a significant source of humour in Vinci’s intermezzo. This is, of course, not to suggest that it isn’t funny. But I contend that the source of the intermezzo’s humour is primarily thematic, rather than aesthetic—and therefore primarily textual rather than musical. That is, the humour of the intermezzo is dependent upon cultural knowledge beyond the music of the comic intermezzo itself. If a non-Italian speaker attended a

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Domenico Scarlatti, *La Dirindina* (Milan: Ricordi, 1985), 4-5.
performance at the King’s Theatre in Naples in 1723, and paid no mind to the sight gags on stage, she would be at a loss to explain much of the laughter of the audience. This would be true to some degree for all later intermezzos. But some later works, as we’ll explore below, relied on purely musical means to entice guffaws from an audience. Vinci’s skill as a composer of comedy lies in his ability to pace the comic dialogue in the form of recitativo. The elastic gag the librettist has borrowed from Molière provides some choice material to set and Vinci obliges with a musically compelling setting.

My discussion of the humour of the text—both literary and musical—is based on a close reading of that text. I will begin by examining the musical setting of the text to explore the means by which humour is—or is not—generated.\(^\text{38}\) I will then move on to discussing the broader social context for that humour. I am here assuming that laughter is not generated in a vacuum, but requires a degree of cultural knowledge to understand a joke. As Walter Nash has suggested, each humour “act” requires a thoroughgoing knowledge of “culture, institutions, attitudes, beliefs.”\(^\text{39}\) I will therefore examine some of these contexts that form the cultural knowledge necessary to understand the humour of this borrowed scene from Molière.

\(^{38}\) I aim here to examine the music as an aesthetic object with the unique ability to present certain qualities of humour. Charles Martindale has recently called for a return to this type of criticism, though the rest of this chapter engages in the work of what Martindale calls the “vulgar historicists.” See Martindale, Charles, Latin Poetry and the Judgement of Taste: An Essay in Aesthetics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10.

2.4 SOURCES OF HUMOUR I: THE MUSIC

As we saw in the scene from Stradella’s *Il Trespolo tutore*, music proves to be a complicated medium in which to express comedy. The fact that it assigns specific pitches to recited text can have the effect of strong-arming the performer into a specific mode of delivery. That is to say, that its fixity of pitch creates fixity of interpretation—robbing a performer of the ability to change delivery for an audience. The added benefit of this, of course, is that we have a musical text to study the pacing of comedic delivery in the eighteenth century, albeit one in which there are a host of intangible effects that are lost to us on the page. We must always be conscious of the severely limited ability that a score has to communicate a “performance” to us. It is little more than a very faded imprint of the real thing—and one struck with a crude plate at that.

We can, however, still discern some principles composers adhered to in setting an elastic gag to music. The first is a concern for parallelism in the stichomythic exchange. We saw this in *Trespolo*: Artemesia’s dictations were echoed at the octave by Trespolo. In this scene, the pitch assigned to the vowel “a” by Albino is repeated at the octave by Plautilla three lines later. When Plautilla asks him to open his mouth wider, Vinci maintains the same pitch for Albino’s response. The only time Albino deviates from this pitch is after Plautilla shows him the exact width his mouth should be. He then jumps up a fourth for a triumphant declaration of “ah,” and announces his own satisfaction with himself. This is perhaps a source of humour. Plautilla has suggested only a small correction in his jaw placement, but Albino has compensated by deviating from the pitch quite considerably. A performer could presumably coax laughter from the audience by making a very deliberate attempt at forming the correct mouth shape and then
yelping these higher notes, creating a marked visual and aural incongruity. A small clue to such opportunities for humour is suggested by the marking “for.” in the top right hand of the page above Albino’s first note, indicating that Albino is to give a forceful enunciation of his “ah.” While such markings are rare elsewhere in the score, it gives perhaps a tiny glimpse into the small ways humour can be wrung out of standard recitative. Regardless, the parallelism of notes and vowel sounds is maintained on different pitches throughout the course of the scene, indicating that Vinci paid some mind to making this a priority, especially since this consistency impinges upon the choice of harmonic progression. Vinci facilitates this by the motion of thirds in the bass (see example 2.4.1). Albino’s first a, for example, is initially supported by an a minor harmony; his second is above a d major in first inversion. An intervening resolution to d minor sets up a descending bass pattern through a dominant seventh in second inversion on c, which can support Plautilla’s first statement of “a.” The resolution on g minor in first inversion serves a double purpose: it releases the tension of the diminished seventh while at the same remaining tonally unclosed. It furthers the action—and illuminates the text—in which Albino plows on without having properly completed the first lesson. The intensification of the harmony in the drive towards the g minor chord also heightens the humour. The seventh chord increases our desire for a sensible resolution, like Albino singing a g over a g minor harmony. This would close the gag with some degree of satisfaction. A g over g minor is, after all, the exact pitch Plautilla gives in her initial inquiry into how Albino pronounces “a.” However, Vinci, in crafting his musical elastic gag, has put only a small pause on the sequence, leaving open the possibility for a continued comic sequence in the concatenatious structure of the elastic gag.

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40 The fact that the vowel “a” is given the pitch a is not likely significant. While meta-musical jokes of this nature do appear in the intermezzo repertory, Italians would denote an a as “fa.” There is perhaps a connection between the vowel sounds that Vinci found amusing, but I would not jump to this conclusion.
EXAMPLE 2.4.1  L. Vinci, *Albino e Plautilla*, Part II, recitative (folio 115r-v)
chiuso bastaprirne la metà e l'inferior labro va con-

tratto un poco in giù lìh lìh giusto così ma l'O ques-to l'O sò oh

oh veniamo all'U si pronunzia stringendo i labri in fora Uh Uh più

stretti Uh Uh va bene a desso alla bona-ora co-

si avrete la lingua assai più sciolta ma meglio ac-costu-mar-si torna-te a ri-
EXAMPLE 2.4.2  Harmonic reductions, Albino e Plautilla, Part II, recitative (folio 115r-v)
In these five examples we can clearly see the pacing of the comedy that is suggested in the text and fixed in the music. The first gag is by far the longest and most harmonically extensive. The second gag is elided harmonically with the first, setting up the expectation of continuation. The others are more discrete, fulfilling the requirement that elastic gags be autonomous units. They also become increasingly shorter, from four harmonic changes, to three and then a mere cadence. The final gag, on “u,” is slightly more extended and brings us harmonically to where we need to be for the next aria in F major.

While the recitative shows genuine comic skill in its assembly, Albino’s subsequent aria is less adept in its construction. We have already seen the way in which it draws on familiar tropes of intermezzo composition (by way of its similarity to La Dirindina). It is undoubtedly in the buffo aria tradition that stretches back at least to Domenico Scarlatti. But unlike the famous later works in the same vein, Albino’s elocution aria does not have the supple phrasing that allows for more purely musical humour. Its piping string lines and dactylic rhythms find an interesting parallel in Uberto’s first aria from La serva padrona (see example 2.4.3). It is, of course, manifestly unfair to judge Vinci’s success by comparison with a later work (and one of
his students’ no less); an entire decade of stylistic change separates the two. But even the opening ritornello of Pergolesi’s aria highlights the aspects of early comic style that had yet to be fully exploited in the musical language of Vinci. The most obvious is the somewhat waggish character of the unison line, which not only has the haste necessary to convey the fact that Uberto is fed up, but seems to mock him all the same. It paints—in six measures—the entire text of the aria. Uberto complains of the three things that will be the death of him; Pergolesi gives us three statements of the opening motive followed by a quivering string line that at once seems to be an end, and yet only the beginning of the surging rage within him. The three-note chromatic motive (E-flat, E, F) that ends this phrase once again emphasizes the “tre cose” Uberto laments, a point which is emphasized when he sings “da morire” in unison with the string flourish on those three notes later in the aria.


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41 Pergolesi, *La serva padrona*
Albino’s aria is not nearly so compact. Its rhythm is unceasing for the entire length of the aria—one tires of it near the end. Its harmonic content is similarly unleavened with any piquant chromaticism. Perhaps this suits Albino’s character, which is self-satisfied and pompous. But the music somehow lacks the wit of the Pergolesi. Vinci’s only great success comically in this aria occurs when he resets the “AEIOU” text. He rearranges the letters to “UEIOA” and gives Albino a vocal line which leaps around in octaves (see example 2.4.4). This rearrangement is not reflected in the printed libretto. Vinci presumably intended to have the voice leap in octaves, as this is a typical feature of buffa arias. He then perhaps chose to rearrange the letters to reflect the changed musical circumstance, rather than the other way round. This moment does highlight a feature of comic style that will be further developed as the decade wears on: the manipulation of musical syntax for comic purposes. By altering the text, Vinci suggests that the octave leaping is an intentional rearrangement of the opening phrase, and not a thoughtless idiom of comic style.
EXAMPLE 2.4.4  L. Vinci, Albino e Plautilla, Part II, “AEIOU” (folio 116v)
Albino’s aria is also forward-looking in one key respect. As Markstrom has pointed out with respect to arias in Vinci’s *seria* repertory:

> [...] the binary organization of the first section of Vinci’s da capo arias closely approximates the so-called sonata form of the late eighteenth century. The only ingredient missing is the development, which was later created by omitting the da capo and splicing the modulatory second section between the two halves of the first section.  

“AEIOU” fulfills this requirement to the same degree that his *seria* arias do. The opening section which modulates to the dominant is balanced by a repetition of the opening material without a modulation. Though this short aria is a much abbreviated form of the da capo aria (and therefore a very germinal precursor to the sonata), it nevertheless evidences Vinci drawing on *seria* harmonic principles to scaffold even comic arias.

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If it’s true that Vinci’s fame rested on his accompanied recitatives for *Didone Abbandonata*, completed one year after *Albino e Plautilla*, it would seem that he paid a great deal of attention to wringing the most out of recitative sections in his operas. In this intermezzo, we see that he paid similar attention to setting comic exchanges. The recitatives are certainly brilliantly written comedy. The arias, while of a high quality in comparison to some contemporary comic tunes, are less progressive in their approach. Vinci draws on well-established melodic precedents for writing comic male roles, but marries this style to a harmonic plan which he used in his seria writing. In this way Vinci has, in a small way, put the intermezzo on its way to becoming the cynosure of the classical style that it became in the hands of Vinci’s most famous pupil, Pergolesi.

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43 Kurt Markstrom has already commented that the accompanied recitative in Part III of the intermezzo is of an extended length, which again shows Vinci’s attention to recitatives. See Markstrom, “The Operas of Leonardo Vinci,” 44.
2.5 **Sources of Humour II: Naples and the New Philosophy**

Plautilla’s pedant is clearly a Cartesian philosopher. Her declaration that her first rule is “to cast doubt on everything” (“Il primo / È che si debba dubitar di tutto”) is remarkably similar to Descartes’ first rule of his *Discourse on Method* from 1637, which was “to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognize to be so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgments, and to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it.”

She questions Albino to the point that he no longer can be sure whether it is night or day (“Non saper dir se sia di giorno, o notte”). The state of confusion brought on by philosophy was a state that many Neapolitans had been exposed to in the decades leading up to the intermezzo’s performance. It is this history of intellectual and political strife which forms the backdrop to the pronunciation lesson as it appears in the intermezzo. The scene’s parody of Cartesianism made it a timely “elastic gag” to include in an intermezzo of the second decade of the eighteenth-century. It was this precise historical moment which allowed the audience to find humour in the work.

In 1723 Naples was re-emerging from its slumber as a cultural and intellectual powerhouse. Dogged by political instability within the city state (and hemmed in by roving bandits outside), Naples in the mid-seventeenth through the early eighteenth century underwent a tortuous phase of unrest. The Masaniello revolt of 1647 provided the catalyst for this period of instability. Tommaso Aniello, a lowly fisherman, led the plebs in an uprising against vice-regal

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Spanish rule. The bloodiness that followed invited an opportunistic invasion by the French, establishing a Neapolitan outpost for their empire. The French occupation was brief. In April of 1648 the French forces were expelled and Spanish rule was re-established with the arrival of a new viceroy from Rome: Íñigo Vélez de Guevara Tasis, conde de Oñate (1597-1658). Oñate had learned the value of public spectacle as propaganda from his time in Rome. He immediately set about importing operas to Naples and placing them at the centre of a new public culture of festivals presided over by his court. Opera therefore occupied an important place in Neapolitan social life—a place where social, intellectual, and political concerns could be expressed in drama. As Dinko Fabris has suggested, “[f]rom then on, the Neapolitan public still participated in battles, but only by way of stage fiction.”

But the Masaniello revolt also left a deep psychological scar in the minds of Neapolitan intellectuals. Though they were quietly opposed to the status quo—poised as they were between heavy-handed and sometimes fickle viceroyalty and the suspicious and powerful church—intellectuals did not eagerly embrace fully republican forms of government. They had been made cautious by the lingering memory of the bloody revolt. Many of the intellectual class, however, sought to increase the power of Naples’ bourgeois class, the ceto civile. What is remarkable is the degree to which philosophy played into their designs for statecraft. The first

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49 This view is advanced by Robertson, 198.

two decades of the settecento mark a period in which intellectuals wrestled to fuse morality with politics in order to conceive of a more perfect political union. Much of the Neapolitan reaction focussed on what Harold Samuel Stone referred to as the supposed “metaphysical bankruptcy of modern philosophy and mathematics.” In the first two decades of the eighteenth century, following his disenchantment with Cartesianism more generally, the philosopher and friend of Vico, Paolo Mattia Doria, set out to outline a statecraft founded upon virtue that could mitigate the recklessness of pure republicanism while still granting personal liberties greater than those offered by Machiavellian statism. Doria’s La Vita Civile, published in 1710, was written to accomplish this task. Historian John Robertson succinctly defined Doria’s aims:

In effect what Doria sought to supply in these early chapters of the Vita Civile was what Descartes had failed to provide: a Cartesian ethics, skeptical without being Epicurean in its recognition of the strength of sense impressions and the force of the passions, rational but not Stoic in the conviction that virtue could be identified and pursued.

The philosophic project of creating a moral vision of man was by no means a simple one. Neapolitan philosophers of the first two decades of the eighteenth century were faced with knitting together a metaphysical conception of man based on the frayed threads of sixteenth-century philosophical debates. Especially in Naples, the philosophies of Descartes, Pierre Gassendini and others competed for a viable successor to the Aristotelianism that dominated through the late medieval and renaissance periods. The situation is complicated by the fact that

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few of these philosophies were accepted by the Church, and alliance with any one of them could lead one to potentially be claimed an apostate or atheist.

The latter half of the seventeenth century had already featured an aborted attempt to modernize the philosophical landscape of Naples. The scientific and philosophic academy founded by Tommaso Cornelio and other luminaries, the *Investiganti*, for instance, lost steam in the closing decade of the *seicento* in its quest to unseat the philosophical conservatives.\(^{53}\) Their strict adherence to the scientific method as the only viable method of explaining phenomena left them vulnerable to attack from the authorities. As Vincenzo Ferrone vividly suggested,

> The group’s professed naturalism so naively disposed towards any dangerous overture—even materialist atomism and Spinozan theories—had become an embarrassing burden at the very moment when Rome had decided on a drastic turn of the inquisitorial screw for Italian culture, obliging the *novatores* to abandon their cause.\(^{54}\)

The danger of flirting with modern philosophy was solidified in the minds of the “new thinkers” in Naples with the infamous “trial of the atheists” of the 1690s in which three individuals were imprisoned and tried for their supposed denial of the divinity of Christ, of miracles and of the immortality of the soul.\(^{55}\) The three men were admonished and released—making the event a rather tepid one in the history of the Inquisition. But the spectacle showed the Church’s eagerness to tamp down the freedom to philosophize for fear the *novatores* could encourage other dangerous attitudes.

Scholarly opinion remains split on the significance of the trial. Did it represent the vitality of philosophical debate and embolden the followers of the New Philosophy? Or did it

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\(^{53}\) For more on the importance of Cornelio see Maurizio Torrini, *Tomaso Cornelio e La Ricostruzione Della Scienza* (Naples: Guida, 1977).


mark a turn away from radicalism towards conciliation, defensiveness and weakness? Either way, the trial innervated a debate in print about the value of philosophy, with defenders and proponents of the New Philosophy writing sharp attacks on the other side.

Reactionaries had been notified early of the coming storm. Church authorities warned the archbishop of Naples in 1671 that “a certain Renato De Cartes” had been stirring up talk concerning atoms. Descartes had been not an uncontroversial figure within philosophical circles, but soon assumed metonymic status among reactionaries in Naples. Descartes was to them not the author of a discrete philosophy, but the representative of the entire body of New Philosophy—even radical atomist philosophy—which circulated in Europe at the turn of the century. He represented the first trickle down the slippery philosophical slope towards blasphemy. The conservatives, clinging to the Aristotelianism that had nurtured generations of Italian thought, attempted to shore up their Neapolitan fortress from the northern invaders.

“Aristotle may have said some things that were false,” wrote the conservative Giovanni Battista Benedetti, “but ‘Renato’ has said not one thing that is true.” A volley of ripostes followed with both sides failing to come to a consensus other than the agreeing that Spinoza was perhaps the

56 Robertson emphasizes the positive aspects of the trials, including the emboldening of the novatores to take on ecclesiastical authorities, 100. Comparato and Ferrone emphasize the strong message sent by the church and suggest that the investiganti were, as Israel summarizes, “firmly pinned on the defensive;” 51. Comparato, 143-48; Ferrone, 17-18.


58 Raffaele Ajello writes that the term “Cartesian” was more often “attributed by the veteres than recognized without reservation by the juvenes, and it came to designate all the moderns’ positions in the dispute, even if they were quite far from those of Descartes.” See Ajello, Arcana Juris: Diritto e Politica nel Settecento Italiano (Naples: Jovene, 1976), 169.

59 “Aristotele ha detto qualche cosa di falso, ma Renato non ne ha detta niuna di vero”. Giovanni Battista Benedetti, Lettere apologetiche in difesa della teolgia scolastica (Naples: Raillard, 1694), 185. Benedetti published these four letters under the pseudonym “Benedetto Aletino,” 185.
most godless ingrate Western civilization had yet produced. Against this contentious background the librettist of Albino e Plautilla—likely Saddumene—was born, educated, and made his career. The opera Silla dittatore offered an opportunity to write an intermezzo set in late-republican Rome. On the stage, therefore, Neapolitan audiences saw a classical reflection of their own struggles for political stability and moral correctness acted out in the form of the comic intermezzo.61

The degree to which the writings of Descartes filtered down to the opera librettist is attested to by Metastasio. Charles Burney provides the following translation of a letter Metastasio wrote to the Neapolitan Carlo Valenti in 1771. In it he warmly recalls the instruction in Cartesian physics he received from Gregorio Caloprese. Caloprese, one of the leading exponents of Cartesian thought in Italy, had retired from civic life in Naples in the years following the trial of the atheists to his birthplace of Scalea, to the south.62 As the cousin of Metastasio’s guardian, Gian Vincenzo Gravina, Caloprese was enlisted to tutor the young literary phenom.

I have again heard the venerated voice of the celebrated philosopher Caloprese, who adapting himself, in order to instruct me, to my weak state, conducted me, as it were by the hand, through the vortices of the ingenious Descartes, at that time in high favour with the philosophers, and of which he was a furious asserter; and indulging my childish curiosity, now demonstrating with wax, in a kind of sport, how globes were formed by the fortuitous concourse of atoms: now exciting my admiration by the enchanting experiments of Dioptrics. I seem still to see him labour to convince me that his little dog was only a

60 Though Spinoza was regarded as the worst exemplar of modern philosophy, he was nevertheless read in Naples clandestinely and had a clear influence upon the later writings of Vico. See James C. Morrison, “Vico and Spinoza,” Journal of the History of Ideas 41, no. 1 (1980): 49-68; and Frederick Vaughan, “La Scienza Nuova: Orthodoxy and the Art of Writing,” Forum Italicum 2, no. 4 (1968): 332-57.


62 For more on Caloprese and Cartesianism see Silvio Suppa, L’Accademia di Medinacoeli: Fra tradizione investigante e nuova scienza civile (Naples: Instituto italiano per gli studi storici, 1971), 177-212.
machine: and that the trine dimension was a sufficient definition of solid bodies. And I still see him laugh, after plunging me for a long time in a dark meditation, and making me doubt of every thing, in proving that I breathed, by his *Ego cogito, ergo sum*: an invincible argument of certainty, which I despaired of ever again demonstrating.  

Caloprese’s laughter is quite telling. It appears that in addition to the seriousness of physics, Descartes’ insistence on doubt as an epistemology could be the source of humour. Perhaps the librettist of *Albino e Plautilla* received a similar instruction and recognized the latent comic possibilities in the exchange as the pupil was brought to doubt even his own existence. The pattern by which Metastasio was taught, at least, seems to mirror in a significant way the structure of an elastic gag: questions and answers go back and forth before the dialogue is concluded with the punctuation of laughter.

We cannot be sure that this lesson had a formational impact on Metastasio’s brand of humour. He left us only one intermezzo, *L’impresario delle canarie* (“The Impresario of the Canary Islands”) of 1724. It was contained within his *Didone abbandonata*, which was first set by the Neapolitan composer Domenico Sarro, but was set again to great acclaim by Vinci in 1726 for Rome. Since the intermezzo satirized Italian opera, placing it within the thriving metatheatrical genre, it relied less heavily on the use of elastic gag sequences for humour.  

It relies more on the direct satire of operatic convention (as opposed to the more oblique target of philosophy of *Albino e Plautilla*). More humour is wrung out of the arias which lampoon contemporary operatic practice. In other words, the music itself becomes the vehicle of satire rather than the text. The repartee between the main leads is less important.

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Metastasio nevertheless showed himself to be a capable practitioner of the elastic gag routine. During one sequence in which the impresario coaxes the soprano into signing despite her excuses, Metastasio writes an elastic gag.

**Example 2.5.1** Pietro Metastasio, scene from *L’impresario alle canarie*, Part I.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nibbio</th>
<th>Ma vuol ch’io parta</th>
<th>You would like me to leave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senza farmi sentire una cantata?</td>
<td>Without hearing a song?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorina</td>
<td>Son tanto raffreddata...</td>
<td>I have such a chill...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nib.</td>
<td>Eh non importa.</td>
<td>It doesn’t matter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per dir un’aria sola</td>
<td>You don’t need a lot of breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non bisogna gran fiato.</td>
<td>To sing an aria by yourself</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor.</td>
<td>Il cembalo è scordato.</td>
<td>The keyboard is out of tune.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nib.</td>
<td>Questo non le sarà gran preguidizio.</td>
<td>This won’t affect it much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor.</td>
<td>Non sono in esercizio.</td>
<td>I haven’t been practicing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nib.</td>
<td>Qui canta per suo spasso.</td>
<td>Here you can sing for your enjoyment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor.</td>
<td>Non v’è chi suoni il basso.</td>
<td>There’s no one to play the bass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nib.</td>
<td>Da se non vuol sonare,</td>
<td>If you don’t play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per non farmi goder la sua virtù.</td>
<td>I can’t enjoy your virtue.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor.</td>
<td>Ella mi vuol burlare.</td>
<td>You’re playing a trick on me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nib.</td>
<td>Eh favorisca: (io non ne posso più).</td>
<td>Oh if you would: (I won’t ask anymore).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dor.</td>
<td>Sonerò per servirla; (va alla spinetta)</td>
<td>I will play to please you (goes to the keyboard)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Metastasio’s text is funny but does not exploit every opportunity for humour. Lewis Theobald’s 1741 English version, for example, makes a pun when Dorina protests that the keyboard is out of tune. Theobald has Nibbio (or Capoccio, as he has renamed him) reply that “I shall quite lose all Temper soon,” a more humorous reply. Such changes are typical when an elastic gag sequence is adapted or translated. Just as the examples from *Il Trespolo tutore* and the pronunciation scene show, writers fiddled with an elastic gag, making it funnier and adapting it to the tastes of the audience in the manner of an improvising actor. Metastasio’s gag is surely in no way

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66 Extracts of Theobald’s text are found in Richard G. King, “Metastasio’s *L’impresario delle canarie* and its fortunes in London,” *Händel-Jahrbuch* 45 (1999): 143-56.
inspired by his tutoring by Caloprese, but the antagonistic back and forth of a Cartesian tutorial session perhaps struck the librettist of *Albino e Plautilla* as being the perfect match for an elastic gag sequence dealing with Cartesian philosophy which was excised from *L’artigiano gentiluomo*.

2.6 **Sources of Humour III: The Female Philosopher**

It is not an inconsequential detail that Plautilla gives her philosophy lesson disguised as a man. If the fierce debates about the New Philosophy had not been enough to inspire *Albino e Plautilla*’s librettist to borrow Molière’s scene, the translation and publication of Descartes’ *Principles of Philosophy* in 1722 certainly must have. It was a task completed by Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola, an extraordinarily learned woman, friend of Vico’s daughter Luisa and future Arcadian poet. We know nothing of her education and little of her life other than the monumental task she set herself in the publication of Descartes’ treatise. Like the other pro-Cartesian writers in Naples in the early eighteenth-century, Barbapiccola had to falsify her publishing location to avoid the censors, replacing “Naples” with “Turin” on the title page of her translation. But unlike the sometimes cautious and clandestine support offered to Cartesianism by the Neapolitan intelligentsia, Barbapiccola fearlessly carried the torch for his writings. Her translation was published with a full page engraving of herself as a frontispiece (see figure 2.6.1). In the frontispiece she appears in all her youthful splendour with enormous eyes, plump cheeks, an impossibly small mouth, and ringlets trickling over her shoulders. But her cherubic
countenance is framed by sobriety. Dark curtains behind are gathered to reveal a bookcase over her right shoulder. In her hand she holds a book—presumably Descartes’ *Principia*—and marks a page with her finger. And while loose-fitting *sacque* back gowns were notoriously popular in the teens and twenties (think of Watteau), Barbapiccola appears downright frumpy in what appears to be a “wrapping gown” (albeit a beautifully patterned one).  

This is the young Barbapiccola as philosopher. Her attire suggests that she has much more in common with Rembrandt’s *Philosopher in Meditation* (1632, similarly in a dressing gown), than with other contemporary wealthy young women.

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In addition to defending the merits of Cartesian thought, Barbapiccola also defended with vigour the right of women to participate in philosophy. Her first sentence put this desire pointedly: “I would not like it if you, first encountering the title of this book and seeing that it is the work of a

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woman, were to consign it to the distaffs, spindles, and linens [...].”69 She goes on to provide an extensive list of famous female philosophers and poets and their admirers, as well as holding up Descartes as a proponent of women’s education. She cites the correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia, one of the few women of philosophical accomplishment who received training from professional philosophy tutors, rather than being self-taught.70 Naples itself had a woman of philosophical training in the aristocrat Aurelia d’Este (1683-1719). She had been a student of Doria and the dedicatee of his 1716 treatise, “which demonstrates that woman, in almost all the important virtues, is not inferior to man.”71 With the Duchess d’Este newly deceased, it would appear that Barbapiccola asserted herself as the heir to her reputation, and embarked on a new project to spread Cartesian ideas to the masses through a translation of Descartes’ Principia into the vernacular. Rebecca Messbarger and Paula Findlen characterized Barbapiccola’s preface to the Principia in the following manner:

Barbapiccola’s preface brought together several different strands of intellectual debate then preoccupying scholars in Naples. On the one hand, it responded to the growing anti-Cartesianism of important philosophers such as Vico and Doria, who increasingly felt that a modern metaphysics that emphasized the mathematical certainty of reason limited the possibilities for other kinds of discussions about the nature of knowledge. On the other hand, it sought to integrate some of the new philosophical insights of Neapolitan scholars into a fresh reading of Descartes.72

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70 For an account of this correspondence see Margart Atherton, Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1994), 9-21; and, for a critical perspective see Jacqueline Broad, Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13-34.

71 Paolo Mattia Doria, Ragionamenti di Paolo Mattia D’Oria indirizzati alla Signora D’Aurelia D’Este Duchessa di Limatola: Ne’ quali dimostra la donna, in quasi che tutte le virtue più grandi, non essere all’uomo inferiore (Frankfurt: [s.n.], 1716).

With Barbapiccola at the confluence of these developments, it is impossible not to imagine a literate audience being wise to the librettist’s allusion. On stage they witnessed a woman, dressed as a man, giving a philosophy lesson. When they saw Santa Marchesini don a philosopher’s gown and beard, they quite possibly saw the comely Barbapiccola gazing out from underneath the costume.

2.7 CONCLUSION

Despite its reputation for appealing to the lowest common denominator, even modest scrutiny reveals humour to be an enormously complex enterprise. It is the product of a meticulously honed technique and is dependent upon cultural knowledge of a very high order. These twin components—the topical and the aesthetic—work in tandem to generate laughs in an audience. Even a simple cartoon illustrates the co-dependency of the two (see figure 2.7.1). Robert Mankoff’s 1993 New Yorker cartoon is rightly famous for delivering a clever quip (it is aesthetically sophisticated) and for capturing a cultural moment of the early nineties (it is topically engaging). In it a well-dressed businessman is on the phone in his high-rise office. Leafing through his date book he responds to a caller on the telephone asking about his availability.
Mankoff’s caption is like the tag line of an elastic gag. The entire cartoon acts as a sort of tableau version of an elastic gag sequence. One imagines the various exchanges that occurred before the punch line caption.

“How about Tuesday, would that work?”
“I can’t I have a prior commitment.”
“Wednesday?”
“Wednesday’s all booked up.”
“Can we do it on Thursday?”
“No, Thursday’s out. How about never—is never good for you?”

Mankoff has expertly miniaturized the comic technique of the elastic gag for readers. Through the visual cues given by the drawing and the witty caption, readers of the cartoon can recreate the joke by retroactively constructing the drama in their own minds (this is one of the great pleasures of editorial cartoons). But, in addition to relying on his mastery of the comedic witticism (which
audiences of all sorts may enjoy), Mankoff trades in the humour of a particular cultural group to garner his biggest laughs. The gentleman in the cartoon—white, urban, professional, upper-middle class—is certainly not the target of the joke. By my reading there are two potential targets: the caller or the gentleman’s schedule. Either the caller is a particularly irksome individual with whom our gentleman would prefer to avoid meeting, or his schedule is hectic to the point that he has no time for personal engagements. In both cases his displeasure with his situation is cloaked in the polite patois of wasp propriety. This discrepancy between the mode of delivery (his politeness) and his message (a rude dismissal) would categorize this joke under what John Morreall categorized as “the incongruity theory” (typified by the writings of Schopenhauer, Bergson and to some degree Kant). 73 This is a value-free category which makes no claims about the derisive nature of the joke. But as Charles Gruner has persuasively argued, “innocent” humour is a “mirage.” 74 He uses the metaphor of a game to explain the relation between the jovial and scornful nature of humour. Gruner writes that “[t]he very idea of a game implies fun, leisure, entertainment, recreation, affable human interaction; but it also implies competition, keeping ‘score’ and a winner and a loser.” 75 The craft of joke telling is not simply a benign and sociable practice. It is reliant upon a slight mean streak both the person who tells the joke and the one who laughs at it. The “loser” is not only one who is the target of derision, but also an excluded audience who won’t understand the humour. In the cartoon, humour is generated not merely through incongruity, but through the derision of some person, and the implicit understanding that “getting” a joke means that someone else is not. In this sense,

75 Ibid., 2. Italics are original to Gruner’s text.
Markoff’s cartoon is funny because of what Morreall termed “the superiority theory” (a theory he does not subscribe to). The gentleman makes himself superior not only through his wit, but through his social circumstance. If the target of the humour is the unwanted caller, his wit and social calendar place him above the pestering person on the phone. If the target of the humour is the hectic pace of his life, the gentleman lessens its pressure by mocking the language and demands of upper-middle class life. This “inside joke” aspect of the cartoon (only heightened by the fact it was published in The New Yorker) freights a four-square inch drawing with privilege and its attendant airs. The joke is not a particularly populist one, but rather an exclusive one. A reader’s laughter signals that she belongs to an exclusive group—that her life, too, is that busy, or that she, too, cannot be bothered with an irritating caller. It is a joke accessible only to individuals who can identify with the gentleman, his urban existence, and his phlegmatic corporate manner.

The philosophy lesson scene in Albino e Plautilla is similarly dependent upon the dual strains of aesthetic and topical understandings of the humour. In his music, Vinci has, to differing degrees of success, crafted comedy through his choice of pitch and rhythm for the “elastic gag” sequence. In some cases, as in the “AEIOU” aria, he has altered the text in order to compose a musical joke. But these aesthetic concerns cannot in and of themselves create compelling humour for an audience. In addition, the listener must be immersed in the cultural atmosphere of Naples in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. As Nash suggested, the humour is inextricably bound up with its contemporary “culture, institutions, attitudes, beliefs.” Albino’s librettist has here drawn on contemporary debates about Neapolitan culture, particularly its debates about philosophy and gender.

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76 Morreall, 4-14.
For whom was *Albino e Plautilla* written? We must conclude that it was for a well-read, aristocratic and upper-middle class Neapolitan audience familiar with the works of Descartes and likely even his Italian translator, Barbapiccola. Perhaps it is for this reason that Vinci’s intermezzo was not revived elsewhere, as domestic intermezzos like *Il marito giocatore* or *La serva padrona* were. It is not for lack of quality of the music, but rather perhaps because of the specificity of its jokes. The borrowing of a scene from Molière was commonplace and the technique of the “elastic gag” was universal to all intermezzos. But the uniquely Neapolitan critique of Cartesianism was something that could only be thought hilarious in Naples.
CHAPTER 3

AFFECT, CHANCE, AND THE RISE OF THE INTERMEZZO:
THE CASE OF IL MARITO GIOCATORE

Quando si parte il gioco de la zara,
colui che perde si riman dolente,
repetendo le volte, e tristo impara;
con l’altro se va tutta la gente;
qual va dinanzi, e qual di dietro il prende,
e qual dallato li si reca a mente;
el non s’arresta, e questo e quello intende;
a cui porge la man, più non fa pressa;
e così da la calca si difende.

(Dante, Purgatorio, Canto VI, 1-9)

When the game of hazard breaks up, the one who has lost stays behind grieving, repeating the throws, and sadly learns;
with the winner all the people go off; this one goes in front, this one pesters him from behind,
the one alongside begs to be remembered;
the winner does not stop, but listens to this one and that one; those to whom he stretches out his hand press no more upon him, and thus he defends himself from the crowding.¹

3.1 INTRODUCTION

While Albino e Plautilla appears to be a funny intermezzo that was not popular, Il marito giocatore seems to be a very popular intermezzo that was not exclusively funny.² The only account of a performance of giocatore from the 1720s fails to mention any laughter, but instead concentrates on its moving libretto (and, curiously, its costumes). Giovanni Cosimo Rossi-Melocchi, a nobleman and active theatre goer, attended a series of opera performances over the summer of 1725 in his hometown of Pistoia.³ In June, July, and August he saw the comic team of Rosa Ungarelli and Antonio Ristorini perform three intermezzi: Il marito giocatore, Lesbina


² Several ms. scores exist for giocatore. Gordana Lazarevich thoroughly disentangles the mess of multiple attributions and versions of the work. See Lazarevich, “The Role of the Neapolitan Intermezzo,” 264-284.

Rossi-Melocchi took great care to describe the plot, costuming, and action of the intermezzos in some detail, but noted almost nothing about the serious operas in which they were embedded.\textsuperscript{4} Such an attitude seems to be typical. Four years later he wrote in his journal that only the presence of the great castrato Caffarelli could make serious opera more successful than the intermezzos.\textsuperscript{5}

But rather than attributing the success of the intermezzos to the strength of their comedy, as one might expect, Rossi-Melocchi spends more ink on the “beauty” of the works. In his diary entry from 17 August 1725 he reflects back on the three intermezzos performed that summer and concludes that \textit{Grilletta e Porsugnacco} had “more beautiful music than the other two,” though he concedes that opinions on the subject differ.\textsuperscript{6} “Bella” was the same word he used to describe the music of \textit{Lucio Vero}, the \textit{opera seria} performed with \textit{Lesbina e Milo} in July.\textsuperscript{7}

Writing about \textit{Il marito giocatore}, he remarks twice on the affecting nature of the words and actions of Serpilla—the supposed hypocrite of the title. For Rossi-Melocchi, Ungarelli’s actions in part two “could have moved a stone.”\textsuperscript{8} In part three she could have “melted bronzes.”\textsuperscript{9} His observations are consistent with a certain strain of criticism which evaluates the success of the intermezzo by its ability to measure up to the dramatic force of later operas. In the preface to the exemplary UT Orpheus edition of the score, Giuseppe Giusta and Amos Mattio write that

\textsuperscript{4} Rossi-Melocchi’s letters are reprinted in Alberto Chiappelli, \textit{Storia del teatro in Pistoia dalle origini all fine del sec. XVIII} (Pistoia: Officina Tipografica Cooperativa, 1913), 195-198. Rossi Melocchi unusually refers to the full-length serious operas as “Comedia.”

\textsuperscript{5} See Fanelli, 61.

\textsuperscript{6} “...la Musica è più bella delli altri due...ma però sono varie le oppinioni.” Chiappelli, 198.

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 197.

\textsuperscript{8} “che avrebbe mossi una pietra.” ibid., 195.

\textsuperscript{9} “che avrebbero liquefatto i bronzi.”
if compared to the contemporary works of Hasse and Scarlatti and the later works of Pergolesi, Jommelli and Cherubini, Serpilla e Bacocco appears closer to the later works in the dynamism of the action, the expressivity of the recitatives, and the richness and balance of its arias and duets.\textsuperscript{10}

But the supposed “richness” of the music is not the musical characteristic of the intermezzo which has elevated its status within the historical narrative of eighteenth-century music. Survey texts instead emphasize the fact that it is the simplicity of the comic music that is the catalyst for classical style. Richard Taruskin, for example, suggests the importance of Il marito giocatore lies in the low character of the music. He writes that “Orlandini’s simple syllabic setting with its frequent repeated notes and wide vocal leaps was ‘the animal cry of passion’,” linking the music of giocatore with the form of musical expression preferred by Diderot and those on the Italian side of the querelle des bouffons.\textsuperscript{11} Taruskin’s argument is constructed around Bacocco’s first aria, unlike the previous authors who instead concentrate on the beautiful music of Serpilla. “Si, sì, maledetta la bassetta” he suggests “made a sensation” with its simple style. He incorrectly states that the aria is a rage aria in which “the distraught husband hurls imprecations at his wife.”\textsuperscript{12} Rather, the aria is one in which Bacocco, alone on stage, curses the card game of bassett and the person who invented it. But such minor points are less important than the broader claim he is making—that “the low art of comedy was born of nature.”\textsuperscript{13} But we might ask what about nature is funny?

\textsuperscript{10}“Se confrontata con opera coeve di Hasse e di Scarlatti e con opere più tarde di Pergolesi, Jommelli e Cherubini, Serpilla e Bacocco risulta molto più vicina a queste ultime per la dinamica delle azioni, per l’espressività dei recitativi e per la ricchezza e l’equilibrio di arie e duetti,” Orlandini, Serpilla e Bacocco, edited by Giuseppe Giusta and Amos Mattio (Bologna: UT Orpheus Edizioni, 2003), xiv.

\textsuperscript{11} Taruskin, 437.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 435.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 437.
Franco Piperno makes a similar argument for the importance of the comedic aspect of the intermezzo repertory in general. He writes that “Intermezzi were a success as an alternative to opera seria thanks to their immediate dramatic impact as an entertaining, escapist sort of musical theatre.”\(^{14}\) Rossi-Melocchi’s diary attests to the first point. Audiences certainly seemed to be struck by the “immediate dramatic impact” of the work. But does that square with “an entertaining, escapist sort of musical theatre”? The former seems to refer to the “beautiful” music of Serpilla that Rossi-Melocchi was entranced by and that Giusto and Mattia indentify as a feature of excellence. The “escapist” element seems to refer to the comedic music of Bacocco that Taruskin cites as the source of an entire musical style.

Piperno’s orientation is primarily Marxist, and therefore largely unconcerned with the aesthetic importance of *Il giocatore* as either a comedic or dramatic entity.\(^{15}\) His concern is for the institutional forces of contract players, impresarios, composers, librettists and audiences which made the intermezzo the popular genre that it was. Taruskin’s account, by contrast, is concerned with tracing the roots of classical style and therefore solely with those elements of *Il marito giocatore* which appear to have musical relevance to the later style. This thesis explores the means by which comedy is created in the intermezzo repertory, and so will attempt to flesh out both of these aspects—the sociological and the aesthetic—and describe the ways in which they contributed to the success and importance of the intermezzo.

As Rossi-Melocchi’s diary makes clear we impoverish our view of the intermezzo if we take its importance to be related only to the supposed low character of the music. “Beauty,” it


\(^{15}\) Piperno sets out plainly his concerns for the chapter: “Rather than opera as an artistic phenomenon, we will be concerned with opera as a social and material phenomenon reduced to the concrete realities of its daily struggle with practical problems of a political, legal, and financial nature.” See “Opera Production to 1780,” 1.
seems, was an integral part of the genre. But how does this dramatic aspect of the intermezzo interact with the comic? This distinction is also the concern of much of the writing on humour. The American writer and theorist of humour Max Eastman once wrote that “no definition of humor, no theory of wit, no explanation of comic laughter, will ever stand up, which is not based upon the distinction between playful and serious.”¹⁶ This chapter will attempt to draw a sharp distinction between the “playful” and “serious” music of Il marito giocatore. In doing so, we can better appreciate what made this work such an enormous success. But we can also work more towards an understanding of how composers came to create humour in the music of the intermezzo. By exploring the theme of gambling as both a sociological and musical phenomenon, this chapter will build on the narrative thread of the previous two chapters which explored: (a) the importance of the “elastic gag” as the basic literary mode of humorous expression; (b) the importance of French comedy as literary sources; and, (c) the importance of contemporary events in decoding the humour of the intermezzo. It will build on these findings by exploring the role of chance in the creation of musical comedy.

### Sources

Il marito giocatore tells the story of two very unhappily married people. Bacocco is an inveterate gambler in constant conflict with his disapproving wife, Serpilla. In the first part of the intermezzo he returns from an unsuccessful night at the card table and faces the questioning

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of his wife. After discovering cards on his person Serpilla demands a divorce and both sing a duet in which she expresses her resolve and he begs her to be reasonable. The second part of the intermezzo opens with Bacocco in disguise as a judge. He announces his intent to expose his wife as a hypocrite—the “bacchettone” of the title—by hearing her case. She, unaware the bearded and robed judge is her deceiving husband, begs for the court’s mercy in granting her a divorce. The judge agrees on the condition that she take him as a lover. Serpilla agrees, Bacocco reveals himself, and the scene ends with a reversal of Part I: Bacocco demands she leave and Serpilla begs for forgiveness. Part III opens with Serpilla dressed as an itinerant beggar soliciting alms from passersby. She comes across Bacocco, who is furious and draws his sword. She begs him to take her life and put her out of the misery in which she lives. After a lengthy lazzo in which Serpilla’s prolix tongue gets in the way of a succinct final goodbye, Bacocco finally relents and they agree to live happily ever after—sentiments expressed, of course, in a final love duet.

Like the intermezzos discussed in previous chapters, the plot of Il marito giocatore was not newly created whole cloth from the imagination of Antonio Salvi. Rather, it drew upon a wealth of earlier works for inspiration. But unlike the intermezzos adapted from works of Molière, giocatore does not contain any sections of literal quotation from another work—at least not a work which has been preserved for us in written form. Giocatore nevertheless had a pedigree of moralistic plays from the spoken theatre featuring a dissolute “gamester,” as was the preferred eighteenth-century term, which bear a striking resemblance to the scenes we witness in the intermezzo. These scenes can be classified as “theatergrams,” a concept explored in chapter one. These “theatergrams” were stock scenarios that could be riffed on in prose or verse, in a
play or in an opera, in the theatre or on the pages of a novel. The term’s all-encompassing nature helps us to better conceptualize the transmission process of theatrical ideas in an early-modern context. Librettists had available to them both scenarios from the *commedia dell’arte* and written plays from the spoken theatre. Since intermezzos were conglomerations of “theatregrams,” they naturally contain plot points from multiple works in both genres—they are literary pasticcios. *Giocatore* is no exception. We can point to a couple of scenes from earlier plays which appear to serve as models for some scenes in the intermezzo. These scenes may yet have earlier sources in the improvised theatre, but these are not recorded for us in the scenarios which survive.

The clearest example is the opening scene of the intermezzo. Bacocco, alone onstage, sings an aria in which he curses the inventor of the card game bassett.

**Example 3.2.1 Antonio Salvi, *Il marito giocatore*, Part I, “Sì, sì, maledetta la bassetta”**

Si, sì, maledetta la bassetta,  
E chi l’inventò destin manigoldo.  
Un picciolo, un soldo,  
né pur mi restò.18

Damn the bassett table.  
Whoever invented it was a rogue.  
A penny, a cent,  
Nothing remained with me.

He then curses the fact that he has wasted a night emptying his pockets. He has not eaten or slept and lost his ring, timepiece, sword, hat, and cape.19 This scenario is nearly identical to the opening scene of a 1696 play by Jean-François Regnard, *Le Joueur*. Regnard was himself an incurable gambler and so knew his subject well.20 *Le Joueur* tells the story of Valère, a

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18 All text examples taken from the *Raccolta copiosa d’intermedii*, vol. II (1723).

19 “Disgrazia Bacocco!/Avanzasti giocando/Solo le tasche rotte/Mal’impiegata notte/Senza cenar, senza dormir, peruduto/Oltre al danar, l’anello, e l’oriuolo/Ho la spada, il cappello, il ferraiolo./Disdetta auditora!”.

compulsive gambler engaged to the beautiful Angelique. She begins the play as a moralistic but forgiving naïf, young and in love, but through the repeated lies and disappointments of her fiancé (and the wise counsel of her friends) she comes to understand the limitations of a man in the grips of an addiction. In the end she gives in to the advances of another suitor. As a full-length spoken play, _Le Joueur_ of course features more characters than an intermezzo, including a valet for Valère named Hector, and a maidservant for Angelique named Nérine. The opening scene of Regnard’s play features Hector as he waits for his master’s return in the early morning hours. Nérine arrives to tell Hector that Angelique will no longer tolerate Valère’s gambling ways. This scene has no equivalent in the intermezzo. But in scene ii, Valère arrives “disheveled, like a man who has been gambling all night” (“en désordre, comme un homme qui a joué toute la nuit”) and curses his inability to avoid the temptation of gambling and his poor luck. In the opening scene of Salvi’s intermezzo, Bacocco arrives from a night of gambling, curses the game of cards and the fact he lost the items listed above. The fact that he lost his watch may be significant. The first words out of Valère’s mouth in _Le Joueur_ are “quelle heure est-il?” suggesting Regnard’s gambler may have lost his watch as well.

A nearly identical play entitled _Le chevalier Joueur_ by Charles Rivière Dufresny premiered in February of 1697, just five months after Regnard’s _Joueur_. The characters even have the same names, except for Hector who is called Frontin in Dufresny’s version. Some scenes appear in a slightly different order, but the outline of the plot is identical. Only two features substantially distinguish the works: Dufresny’s play is in prose and has a bitterer ending. Valère is rejected by Angelique, and later by her wealthy widowed sister the Comtesse. The play ends with Frontin’s consolations that he would follow his master “jusque sur la borde de la
rivière,” because he did not deserve to drown.\textsuperscript{21} This cruel ending perhaps kept the play from being a favourite. Its bitter tone perhaps resulted from Dufresny’s own dissatisfaction with Regnard’s success. He accused Regnard of plagiarism in the prologue, and rumours circulated that Dufresny had given an early manuscript to Regnard. The two rivals, formerly friends, were never reconciled.\textsuperscript{22}

Regnard’s work is much better known. In 1705, the English comic playwright Susanna Centlivre published two plays based on the theme of gambling. One of them, *The Gamester*, was a faithful adaptation of Regnard’s play into English prose. The only difference between the plays is the ending. Centlivre writes a happy ending in which Angelique is so moved by Valère’s willingness to exile himself that she forgives him and they marry. Some of Regnard’s plays were translated into Genoese dialect by Steva di Stefano in the second-half of the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{23} It is impossible to know for sure whether Salvi had read a copy of the play. But given his penchant for adapting French sources (see the two previous chapters), it is entirely plausible that he at least knew of the play. It is even tantalizing to imagine that Salvi and Regnard may have crossed paths during one of the French playwright’s many trips to the bassett tables of Venice. Such speculation cannot pass scholarly muster, but given the similarity of the opening scenes, it seems that both men endured the same experience of a wasted night of gambling followed by a morning of reckoning.

A later scene in Regnard’s play also finds a rough equivalent in Salvi’s intermezzo. In scene vi of Act V, Angelique questions Valère about the diamond studded portrait of herself she


\textsuperscript{23} Hermann W. Haller, *The Other Italy: The Literary Canon in Dialect* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 43.
gave him. She asks Valère to produce it to disprove her other suitor’s claims that Valère has gambled it away. She of course already knows that he has pawned it to furnish funds for his vice. Valère enacts an elastic gag as he shamefacedly scrambles to come up with an explanation about where the portrait has gone. Hector here provides a welcome excuse. In the first part of Salvi’s intermezzo, Bacocco similarly responds to Serpilla’s questions about the location of his missing items of clothing. Bacocco provides an explanation for each item in the list: he gave his hat to a homeless man and his sword, ring, and watch to bail out a prisoner—and all this after having spent the night in the company of “honourable, decent gentlemen” (“In compagnia di gente/Onorata, e dabbene”) lecturing on morals. Serpilla is incredulous at his sudden transformation and questions him further. Both elastic gags in Regnard’s play and Salvi’s intermezzo terminate with the surprise revelation that the men have been gambling once again. Angelique produces the portrait after Valère fails to do so and Serpilla spies cards hanging from Bacocco’s pocket. Given that the scenes do not reference the same items we cannot say that they are related. But since they follow the same architecture it is reasonable to assume they both draw on an earlier improvised version of the scene that was performed as a commedia scenario. These two scenes offer, at the very least, one more example of the ubiquity of the elastic gag as a method of constructing a comic scene between two characters in the years just before and after the turn of the eighteenth century.

Centlivre’s play with its happy ending provides an interesting counterpoint to Salvi’s intermezzo. Regnard’s cynical ending never allowed for Angelique and Valère to marry. But in Centlivre’s adaptation Angelique and Valère are still young lovers about to be married. In Il marito giocatore, Serpilla and Bacocco have been married for some time. One imagines the intermezzo as the continuation of Angelique’s and Valère’s love story twenty years on—after the
fairy tale wedding and the happily ever after have evaporated into the loveless misery of an unhappy marriage. Salvi almost certainly did not know Centlivre’s play, but the intermezzo nevertheless seems to respond to Centlivre’s rosy conclusion of Angélique and Valère’s story. Angélique’s (Angelica’s) second last line of the play is this question to Valère: “Can you upon Honour (for you shall swear no more) forsake that Vice that brought you to this low Ebb of Fortune?” Valère responds in the affirmative. Salvi has written a cautionary tale to Angelique’s acceptance of his word. He is not a man capable of changing, as Bacocco shows.

By drawing upon well-worn conceits, intermezzo librettists like Salvi were able to write in a kind of short-hand. By beginning *Il marito giocatore* with this “theatregram” scene, the librettist could make audiences aware of the possible back story of the characters. As Louise Clubb pointed out, characters then become “elements of high specific density, weighty with significance from previous incarnations.” You can not help but feel sympathy for Serpilla, who has been down this road before, and even for Bacocco, who is stuck with a wife who should have known better than to make him give up his favourite pastime. To quote Mrs. Favourite’s cautionary words from Centlivre’s comedy, “she that marries a Gamester [...] can expect Nothing but an Alms-House for a Jointure.”

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24 Centlivre, Act V, scene ii.
25 ibid., 7.
26 Centlivre, 3.
3.3 **Husbands: Gambling in the Early Eighteenth Century**

*Il marito giocatore* is one of many theatrical works which present gamblers and scenes of gambling on the stage. *La Traviata, Manon, The Queen of Spades, La fanciulla del West, Schwanda the Bagpiper*—operas in the Romantic tradition had a fascination with scoundrel characters and the women who became involved with them.\(^{27}\) *Il marito giocatore* is somewhat exceptional as gambling was a less popular subject in operas of the eighteenth century. But as we’ve seen above, there were no shortage of plays featuring a gambler in the spoken theatre. The intermezzo’s popularity is perhaps due in part to its unique status as an operatic work which depicts the everyday travails of a husband and wife dealing with one’s gambling addiction. As we noted in the previous chapter with respect to the philosophical debates of Naples, comedy is very specific to a place and time. Comedies’ details tell us an enormous amount about the ways eighteenth-century audiences viewed their world.

Venice is the most well-studied Italian city when it comes to gambling. According to historian Jonathan Walker, by the early eighteenth century gambling was one of the principal attractions of *La Serenissima* to foreigners.\(^{28}\) The preferred game by far was bassett—a rudimentary form of blackjack and the very game for which Bacoco has a weakness. Gambling was officially illegal in most places in Venice, but foreigners and nobles could not resist the temptation to bet on everything from races to elections. To avoid prosecution for taking bets, “bookies” (*toccadori*) would conduct their business in San Marco where the tradition of

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sanctuary sheltered them from arrest. Gambling was sanctioned in the *ridotti*—operations licensed to a nobleman where patrons had to attend masked. The carnivalesque atmosphere of the gambling house helped garner its reputation. Pietro Longhi’s oil painting *Il ridotto* (c. 1757) captures some of the lasciviousness that could occur in such a hothouse environment. A masked man lifts up the front of a woman’s dress while she coyly looks away. Men play at the tables in the background and women mill about. It is no wonder that Bacocco must make clear to Serpilla that at his fictional meeting of gentlemen “it is never permitted to mix pants and skirts” (“fra noi non è permesso / di mescolar giammai calzone e gonna”). Even the fact that Bacocco has lost his clothing reflects historical practice. It was common to use one’s clothing—a far more valuable commodity in the early modern period than today—to secure a loan or line of credit.

Walker theorizes that gambling in Venice can be conceptualized as a continuum between two idealized types of gambling. “Social gambling” involved persons of equal social standing and less competitive games that may involve co-operative play. “Professional gambling,” on the other hand, was characterized by high stakes and simple games like bassett. This type of gambling involved persons from differing social backgrounds and could often lead to cheating and violence. Such violence unsurprisingly did occur. Giovanni Dolcetti catalogued the deaths of nine individuals from 1722 to 1730 which resulted from altercations at or outside of gambling

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houses. Bacocco’s presumably lower-class station and penchant for bassett would place him as a professional gambler prone to the hazards of the trade.

The highly sexual, competitive, and reckless atmosphere of the gambling house did not escape the notice of the church. John Dunkley has examined the increasing references to gambling in church sermons in France that occur from the end of the seventeenth through the eighteenth century—the years during which gambling in France becomes extremely popular. Famous homileticians like Louis Bourdalaoue and Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet inveighed against the evils of games of chance and attempted to persuade their parishioners to give up the vice through the publication of their sermons. Dunkley, in his edition of Regnard’s *Joueur*, links the increasing public debate about gambling to the success of the play. But this phenomenon was not limited to France. In Italy, the Jesuit Cesare Calino published his “lezioni” on the evils of gambling in 1720. In a series of nine lessons Calino lays out the argument against games of chance presented by Christian theologians, the Saints, and Greek philosophers. He tempers their condemnations with his own perspective that one should not hate the game, but hate the abuse of the game (“Cosi non detestano il giuoco, ma solamente il mal uso del giuoco”). Calino has no problem with the recreational play of a card game; it is only the habitual playing of it for sport that endangers the soul. His series of lessons culminates with a remarkable thirteen-point

32 Dolcetti, 193.
36 Ibid., 39.
37 Ibid., 48.
checklist of things which indicate that your gambling has put your soul in danger. Number six indicates you may have a problem

if for gambling you have seriously grieved your father, or your mother, or your wife, or your children, or your siblings, creating strife at home.38

When Serpilla reaches into Bacocco’s pocket to pull out a card he is hiding, she sarcastically asks if “this is the libretto from your lesson?” (“Ah, si quest’è il libretto della vostra lezione?”) Might Bacocco have been pretending to have spent the night reading one of Calino’s lessons? The problem of gambling would certainly have been in the air in the Venice of the 1710s and 20s. Calino’s accessible “self-help” book points to the widespread practice of gambling in homes of the middle- and upper-classes. Bacocco’s habit has certainly grieved his wife and caused strife at home. In giocatore, Salvi turned this everyday misfortune into a trenchant social satire.

3.4 **WIVES: DIVORCE AND THE SICILIANO**

In the previous chapter we encountered an extraordinarily learned woman, Giuseppa Eleonora Barbapiccola. Her efforts to participate in the philosophical discussions of her day helped to promote the cause of women’s education in Italy. By 1753, the landscape had changed to the point that the English Lady Mary Wortley Montagu—herself a brilliant writer—recorded her relief to find upon arriving in Italy that “the character of a learned lady is far from being

38 Ibid., 198. “Se per giocare abbia gravemente contristato il padre, o la madre, o la moglie, o i figliuoli, o i fratelli, dando occasione di discordia domestica.”
But although the eighteenth century is dotted with women who achieved professional renown in the fields of science, philosophy, and the arts, the vast majority of women continued in their traditional roles as wives, mothers, or nuns. Our material evidence of their lives is impoverished by the lack of written sources, save for those instances in which women voiced their concerns in private letters, or in the public domain. One of the richest sources comes from court cases in which women sought divorce from their abusive or neglectful husbands. This makes the court scene in the second part of *Il marito giocatore* an interesting text to compare to the historical record. When audiences watched Serpilla plead to be released from her marriage bond, did they see elements of the lives of their families, neighbours—or themselves—on the stage?

Salvi originally wrote his intermezzo for a performance of Fortunato Chelleri’s *Amalasunta* in Venice. The archival record of divorce proceedings for this city is particularly rich as it was a state which was actively engaged in the resolution of marital disputes. As historian Joanne Ferraro has pointed out, cities like Venice began to exert greater control over institutions, including marriage, during a period of secularization in post-Tridentine Italy. She also documents the fact that the number of divorce cases continued to be the same from the implementation of the Council of Trent reforms through to the fall of the republic at the end of the eighteenth century. In Venice the Patriarchal Court settled domestic disputes. Though

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nominally an ecclesiastical court, Patriarchs were selected from the city’s ruling elite and swore allegiance to the Doge.\textsuperscript{42} They were not trained in canon law, and made their rulings based upon their own interpretation of what kind of marriage arrangements and dissolutions they felt were warranted. Testimony that elicited their sympathy, therefore, was of vital importance to the outcome of a case.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Patriarchal Court of Venice heard three or four cases per month.\textsuperscript{43} Eighty percent of these cases were brought by women. All classes are represented in the court records. Not only patricians, but a significant number of the artisan class and even lower classes sought divorces and gave testimony before the court. In Daniela Hacke’s tabulation of the results of these cases, 67\% of annulments and 79\% of separations were granted.\textsuperscript{44} The life that came after, however, was not necessarily substantially better. Divorced women who did not remarry were expected to live in an asylum. Those who did not, as Ferraro notes, usually were forced into domestic service, or worse, prostitution.\textsuperscript{45}

Given the ubiquity of divorce and the importance of the testimony of fellow citizens it seems clear that eighteenth-century audiences would have been familiar with the divorce process. This familiarity is perhaps one reason why \textit{Il marito giocatore} was such a great success across Europe. Though the intermezzo presents the somewhat unlikely scenario of a husband disguised as a judge setting up a fake court to deceive his wife, the story that Serpilla tells—of a wife neglected by a spendthrift husband—is in line with many of the accounts on record from the divorce courts. Historian Joanne Ferraro has documented many of these cases in her research,

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{45} Ferraro, 8.
culled from the archives of the Patriarchal court. Many of the tales that emerge are dramatic stories of women who suffered abuse at the hands of their husbands. She relays the story of one Pasquetta Peregrini, who was beaten, starved, and neglected by her husband. Furthermore, he had squandered her dowry and pledged her jewels. One night, under the cover of darkness and with the help of her sister-in-law, she fled the city to a convent on the island of Murano where she could be sheltered from the accusation of adultery while she filed for divorce and gave her deposition.46 During the ensuing trial, she enlisted the support of neighbours who bore witness to the abuse and neglect she suffered. In the crowded cities of early modern Italy, lives could only be lived semi-privately. The testimony of her neighbours gives us some clue as to just how familiar others could be with the intimate details of one’s life. Ferraro makes a compelling argument for the existence of a semi-public culture of family life—one lived out in the narrow streets, tiny courtyards and thin walls of an urban centre.47 Serpilla called no witnesses in her case, but after witnessing the first part of the intermezzo—which centres on a lover’s quarrel—the audience is in a way enlisted as witnesses to her case. Her plea in the aria “Signor giudice, giustizia,” in this light is sung not in the privacy of a courtroom (fictional though it is), but rather in the public forum of the courtroom with the complainant’s neighbours presumably in attendance.48

In the early eighteenth century, emotional appeals for “giustizia,” like the one Serpilla makes, began to acquire a new level of importance in judicial proceedings. Some scholars have


47 Ibid., 505.

48 The degree to which these archival accounts square with reality is of course also in question. As Natalie Zemon Davis showed with her examination of letters of remission in sixteenth-century France, court documents about private lives are crafted to persuade and adhere to familiar narratives. She argues, however, that rhetorical strategies nevertheless articulate lived experience. See Davis, Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).
linked the confessional performances of women in court with the emergent sentimentalism of eighteenth-century literature, philosophy, and religion. Historian Caroline Castiglione has recently documented a custody case that took place in Rome in the 1720s between the Cardinal Francesco Barberini and his sister-in-law over the care of Barberini’s niece. In his letters the Cardinal makes clear his outrage that his widowed sister-in-law was poisoning his chances in court by sullying his name among the public of Rome. Rather than adhering strictly to canon law—which would grant him full custody—the courts were responding to public pressure brought on by empathy for the girl’s mother. Castiglione links his protestations to the new reality of eighteenth-century life in which “sentiments could overturn historical precedents, imbalances in account books, and laws that violated human feelings.”

This new reality was by no means uncontroversial among eighteenth-century intellectuals. Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, provides a telling critique of women’s attempts to secure a divorce in his Persian Letters. He writes of a visit to a Parisian court in 1715:

The other day I visited the place where justice is administered. Before getting there I had to run the gauntlet of a crowd of young shopwomen who press you to buy in a most seductive manner. At first, the sight is sufficiently amusing; but it becomes dismal when one enters the great halls, where all the people wear dresses even more solemn than their faces. At last one comes to the sacred place where all the secrets of families are revealed and the most hidden actions brought to light.

[…] A great number of young women, ravished or seduced, represent men as being much worse than they are. This court resounds with love; nothing is talked of but enraged fathers, deluded daughters, faithless lovers, afflicted husbands.

Montesquieu’s critique rests on his supposition that the women’s plight is false, and that their inability to be faithful is an inborn deficiency (a theory he would develop later in his influential


Baccoco’s triumph in court, in which he finally exposes Serpilla as a hypocrite for agreeing to take a lover, can be seen as the triumph of Montesquieu’s assertion and a fitting comedic reversal of the scene he presents in his letter. Antonio Salvi could not, of course, have known Montesquieu’s letter when he wrote the libretto to *giocatore*; the *Persian Letters* were not published until 1721. But we may nevertheless take Montesquieu’s position to be representative of a certain male perspective on women’s standing in a divorce case. This may help explain why Bacocco is so willing to throw Serpilla out on the streets, though he clearly has been a negligent spouse for far longer than she. As Daniela Hacke points out, “adultery, perceived as a predominately female crime in early modern Venice, was a much more drastic measure that questioned marital conjugality than male cruelty and violence.”

Given the high stakes, it is no wonder that Serpilla begins her case with a moving aria: “Signor giudice, giustizia.” The fact that it is addressed directly to the judge immediately suggests that it is meant to move his affections. The music is clearly not funny. The aria contains much repetition of text and is broken up into short phrases—features which we will later find it shares with the true comic style. But the repeated words are meant to put across the desperation of her situation.

**Example 3.4.1  Antonio Salvi, *Il marito giocatore*, Part II, “Signor giudice, giustizia”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signor giudice, giustizia</th>
<th>Mr. Judge, Justice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>e pietà chieggo per me;</td>
<td>and pity I ask for me;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>una povera affogata,</td>
<td>a poor woman drowned,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dal marito strapazzata</td>
<td>by her mistreating husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>per disgrazia o per malizia,</td>
<td>by accident or by malice,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supplicante eccovi al piè</td>
<td>here begging at your feet.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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51 In *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu theorized that marital law must attempt to constrain women at all turns in order to prevent them from being unfaithful. He links the strength of domestic unions to the stability of the state. For more on Montesquieu’s writing see Sarah Hanley, “Social Sites of Political Practice in France: Lawsuits, Civil Rights, and the Separation of Powers in Domestic and State Government, 1500-1800,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997), 40-43.

52 Hacke, 228.
“Pietà” is repeated no fewer than seven times. But not even by the end of this lengthy phrase does the repetition become humorous. This is partly achieved through the three-note figure which sets the trunco “à” syllable. Unlike comic music, which usually favours a piano paroxytone to end a phrase, Orlandini instead opts for a lilting proparoxytone. This sighing figure doesn’t feel overdone. It is quite affecting in the context of a slowly moving harmonic shift from ii-VI-I-I-IV which is completed while obbligato violins play lute-like arpeggios in unison. The fact that the voice leans on an E-flat which is not resolved down to the D until the change in harmony heightens the affective nature of the aria. Here Serpilla does not sound at all like the shrill hypocrite she is made out to be in the title.

Example 3.4.2  G.M. Orlandini, Il marito giocatore, Part II, “Signor giudice, giustizia,” mm. 24-30.53

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53 G.M. Orandini, 43.
Serpilla may have been unable to move Bacocco to understanding with her first aria, but she still had another musical resource to elicit his sympathy: the *siciliano*. Charles Troy remarked on the ubiquity of the *siciliano* as a setting for pathetic texts in the early phase of the intermezzo’s development:

> Late Baroque practice […] was for composers to provide for such texts a *siciliano*-like setting in 12/8 meter, generally in the minor mode, with imitation of the vocal line by accompanying instruments, suspensions, and touches of expressive chromaticism. In arias composed after about 1720 the same affect is generally rendered by a musical setting in triple meter and moderate tempo with homophonic accompaniment.\(^5^4\)

It is interesting that the latter type that he describes is the aria type of “Signor giudice, giustizia.” This more modern type of aria was the type which was not compelling to Bacocco. Serpilla therefore makes use of a more traditional aria form in order to appeal to Bacocco’s sense of pity. But rather than the minor-mode version, which is more common, she sings a major-mode *siciliano*. This change adds an appropriate pastoral quality to the aria. As a “pellegrina”—a poor pilgrim begging for alms—it is likely she would have sung a song as she begged. The aria, “A questa pellegrina,” therefore is not merely a straightforward musical setting of a text. It becomes a “phenomenal” song, that is, a song which other characters in the fictional stage world

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\(^5^4\) Troy, 115.
perceive as a song.\textsuperscript{55} Like Cherubino’s “Voi che sapete” from \textit{Le nozze di Figaro} or Marietta’s \textit{Lautenlied} from Korngold’s \textit{Die tote Stadt}, the musical language nods to vernacular musical practices. This is usually in the form of accompaniment which mimics an instrument (think of Susanna’s guitar), and a melody in the style of a folk song. In the early eighteenth century the \textit{siciliano} is found in a great number of operas, but it is not usually used in a “phenomenal” manner. But scholarship has pointed out the range of extra-operatic associations that this type of song can conjure up. In the context of the intermezzo, these connections may have been one contributing factor to the “immediate dramatic impact” of the genre to which audiences responded. It certainly points to the fact that this style of composition was in no way humorous, and will provide our point of departure for separating serious style from comedic style.

\textbf{Example 3.4.3 Antonio Salvi, \textit{Il marito giocatore}, Part III, “A questa pellegrina”}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
A questa pellegrina & To this pilgrim \\
fate la carità. & give charity. \\
La povera meschina, & The poor wretched one, \\
per un error non fatto, & for an error not made, \\
un volontario sfratto & a voluntary eviction \\
prese dalla città. & took her from the city. \\
\end{tabular}

One of the most remarkable features of the aria is its extended pedal points on the tonic. Four extra measures are appended to the ritornello which is used to open and close the aria. These extra measures repeat a two-bar unit of what Robert Gjerdingen refers to as a “quiescenza” in his taxonomy of galant musical figures. He writes that “a Quiescenza exploits a moment of quiescence following an important cadence, likewise holding back the further progress of the movement or delaying its ultimate close.”\textsuperscript{56} It consists of harmonic motion above an extended tonic pedal. Orlandini’s version does not have the chromatic melodic figuration of b7-6-#7-1


typical of the mid-century—it only oscillates between $I_5^3$ and $I_6^4$ harmonies. But the facts it is presented twice and in a post-cadential position it is similar to its galant cousin.

The brief B section of the aria contrasts markedly with the languishing music of the A section. Here six bars of presto patter interrupt the lulling trochees of the rest of the piece. Ortrun Landmann has suggested that this section ironically comments on the outer sections of the
aria by interrupting the affect of pathos with a “wrong” note.\textsuperscript{57} The introduction of a chromatic half-step perhaps surprises us with its sting. But the desperate text that this section sets hardly sounds like satire. At this point in the intermezzo Serpilla has suffered enough and the audience is certainly on her side. The B section may strike the ear as shrill, but it does not strike it as comically so.


\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Violin 1 & & & \\
\hline
Violin 2 & & & \\
\hline
Viola & & & \\
\hline
Serpilla & & & \\
\hline
Continuo & & & \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

The siciliano was a ubiquitous feature of operas, cantatas, and instrumental music of the first decades of the eighteenth century. But it would be misguided to view the siciliano as merely a hackneyed aria type. It was rather a moving musical topic rich with significance for audience members. Its major-mode incarnation has a lighter touch, with the evocation of an Arcadian paradise. But the siciliano was an aria type exploited in sacred music as well.

Alessandro Scarlatti wrote the major-mode siciliano “Toccò la prima sorte a voi, pastori” for his Christmas cantata, O di Betlemme altera povertà. It features an extended pedal point with a I\(^{5/3}\)-I\(^{6/4}\)-I\(^{7/4\#2}\)-I\(^{5/3}\) resolution. Here Alessandro Scarlatti uses the figure as both an opening gambit and cadential extension (a “quiescenza” as an opening figure is more typical of the baroque siciliano). The use of a pastoral siciliano was dictated by the text, which is an exhortation to

\[\text{\footnotesize For example, Handel’s siciliano “Felicissima quest’alma” from his cantata Apollo e Dafne (1709) is such an example which breathes “with a ravishing bucolic air,” to quote Paul Henry Lang. Paul Henry Lang, George Frideric Handel (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), 65.}\]

shepherds to “leave your herds and huts” and follow Christ.\textsuperscript{60} These connections hint at the emotional immediacy of the \textit{siciliano} and its deep religious connotations. I do not mean to say that Orlandini’s setting of “A questa pellegrina” suggests an allegory of Christ or the Madonna, only that the depth of feeling associated with its performance was potentially comparable.

It is little wonder, then, that spectators such as Rossi-Melocchi were moved to comment that Serpilla could have “melted bronzes” with her performance. The \textit{siciliano} had a rich number of connections with pastoral beauty, religious observance, and folk idioms which heightened the dramatic impact of the work. The years around 1720 were particularly important ones for the popularity of the \textit{siciliano}. It was then that Handel began simplifying the more imitative and learned style of \textit{siciliano} he inherited from Scarlatti. He began crafting it into a more ingenuous style of long-breathed lines and simple accompaniment to capitalize on the vocal strengths of Francesca Cuzzoni.\textsuperscript{61} Handel’s success in this endeavour in London finds a parallel on the Italian peninsula, where Rosa Ungarelli’s performances of \textit{Il marito giocatore} seem to have similarly been well served by Orlandini’s moving music. Musicologists have recently paid closer attention to these supposedly “standardized” forms of expression, like the \textit{siciliano}—

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{60} [“Lasciate i vostri armenti la capana / Abbandonate si le pecorelle / Ve’ una speranza in lui che non v’inganna / E chi vi puo dar loco in fra le stelle”]. One of the most exquisite examples of this type of aria—the major-mode Christian pastoral—is of course “He shall feed his flock” from Messiah. This aria, though, borrows its opening melodic phrase from the seventeenth-century Neapolitan Christmas carol “Quanno nascette ninno,” highlighting the connection between folk musical practices and high-art vocal writing. This was a practice shared among devotees of the Italian style, including Orlandini, Handel, and Alessandro Scarlatti. Reinhard Strohm remarked that these types of \textit{sicilianos} were effective as “a universal appeal to the human heart.” See Reinhard Strohm, “Alessandro Scarlatti and the Eighteenth Century,” \textit{Essays on Handel and Italian Opera} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 15-33, 27. Raymond Monelle has written critically about the inclusion of folk elements in the “true” \textit{siciliano}: that “[t]he true siciliana lacks the bagpipe crudity of pedal points, of course,” in \textit{The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 234. Regarding the more elevated, abstract incarnation see
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
investigating the dramatic power that these forms could acquire in live performance. Martha Feldman has eloquently written about the power of standard formal procedures in the aria.

[...] the intangible character of performance, and the feelings it can arouse, are not irreconcilable with the concrete processes that bring them about, and "magic" is no longer simply the stuff of dreams, hallucinations, and rumors. To the contrary, repetitions of formal patterns, built upon their antecedents through a variety of sensory media, become tangible means of stirring the senses into states of enchantment.\(^{62}\)

Ungarelli was able to hold the audience in enchantment not by "magic," but through the standardized musical form of the siciliano.

But how does the artless emotionality of Serpilla’s music differ from the supposed artless comedy of Bacocco’s arias? As we will now discuss below, Bacocco’s music is characterized by a fundamentally different approach to melodic figuration which is free of the dramatic associations of Serpilla’s emotionally charged arias. Serpilla’s music relies on familiarity to derive its sentimental impact. Bacocco’s arias derive their comedic power from their unfamiliarity.

### 3.5 CHANCE AS METAPHOR

As we have seen above, *Il marito giocatore* owes much of its commercial success to its dramatic affect—it’s ability to elicit sympathy from the audience. Within the highly Classical notion of aesthetic pleasure that was so much a part of tragic theory of the eighteenth century this makes the intermezzo an artistic success. But as we also saw above, intermezzos, operatic

tragedies, secular cantatas and sacred music drew on vernacular traditions to achieve the same dramatic ends. The only distinguishing feature between the genres is the difference in class of the persons represented onstage. For *opera seria*, the nobility continued to be the only appropriate caste of persons. For the secular cantata, it was the gods. For religious music it was the personification of some spiritual entity. For the intermezzo, it was a person of a lower station. It is this incipient “bourgeois reality” that seems to mark the intermezzo as being unique in some way in its presentation of dramatic music. For this reason some scholars trace the beginnings of Enlightenment *galant* music back to the intermezzo. But if intermezzi, operatic tragedies, and cantatas all used a similar musical language to achieve dramatic ends, what is remarkable about the intermezzo?

As Max Eastman suggested, it is necessary to distinguish the “playful” and “serious” musical languages of the intermezzo’s characters to better understand how the intermezzo was innovative, if at all. *Albino e Plautilla* showed us how a female character could be funny. But her source of humour comes primarily from her transvestism. By appropriating the language of the *buffo* bass, she makes herself ridiculous. In *giocatore*, Serpilla’s music from parts two and three is not funny on the page—and contemporary evidence suggests that it was not funny in performance. Bacocco’s music, however, exemplifies all those aspects of the *buffa* aria: syllabic text setting, octave leaps, and paroxytonic endings to musical phrases. But why might these musical features make us laugh?

As we saw in the introduction, Charles Troy discussed four features of comic music in the intermezzo: (a) “comic realism,” by which he meant the imitation of extramusical sounds, (b) constant repetition, (c) “parody,” and (d) changes in tempo or style. He termed these “methods” of creating humour. But it would be more exact to call these *descriptions* of music rather than
methods of creating humour. Musical mimesis, for example, is a common feature of arias of an opera seria—a context in which it is presumably not a humorous feature. One may think of the popularity of nightingale arias like Geminiano Giacomelli’s “Quell’usignolo,” which brought Farinelli so much fame.\(^{63}\) Repetition as a musical device can be funny in some circumstances. But no one could say that the crucifixus of Bach’s B-minor mass is funny because it is repetitive. The chaconne was among the most serious and dramatic forms of early eighteenth-century music. Parody more properly refers to humour which references a pre-existing text, not simply all forms of satire—the sense in which Troy uses it (though the literature on humour admittedly mixes the terms; see chapter five).\(^{64}\) Changes in tempo or style are, again, stylistically neutral as abstract formulations. What is it about the manipulation of all of these features that makes something funny?

We will take as our first example Bacocco’s first aria. It fulfills all of the requirements of the previously mentioned buffa aria. It is, in many ways, the prototype. All of the characteristics appear in their most essential form: bare octave leaps, syllabic text setting, repetition, and paroxytonic endings. These traits of course indicate that the music is humorous. But do they make the music humorous, or merely somehow suggest that it is? The vexing philosophical question about music’s ability to actually move one’s emotions has preoccupied thinkers since at least the time of Adam Smith, who published his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in 1759.\(^{65}\)

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\(^{65}\) One of the most prominent thinkers on this subject in contemporary times is Peter Kivy. See Kivy, *Music Alone: Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 146-72.
Regarding affecting music, he wrote that “it either actually inspires us with those passions, or at least puts us in the mood which disposes us to conceive them.”

Music theorist Kendall Walton more recently confronted this problem with respect to musical humour using the analogy of relaxation.

It may be only after I have had a beer, or only after I have successfully completed a difficult project and so am in a relaxed mood, that I laugh in a certain situation. But it is not the beer or my completion of the project or my relaxed mood that I am amused by or find funny. These are causes but not objects of my amusement.

Is Bacocco’s music like a beer—a sort of elixir that tells us it’s ok to laugh? Or does the music perform some rhetorical feat which causes us to laugh? If we suppose that Bacocco’s first aria is funny, then we must affirm the latter. Because if the music is not funny, then audiences could only have found two other aspects of the aria funny: its text or its performance. The text of the aria contains no joke. There is no punch line or witty wordplay. It is merely the complaint of a man who has lost at cards. The performance could have contained humorous gestures to be certain. But surely intermezzos were not considered funny simply because the performers made outlandish gestures during the performance of an unfunny text set to unfunny music.

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67 Kendall L. Walton, “Understanding Humor and Understanding Music,” *The Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 1 (1993): 32-44, 34. Italics are original to the text. Research in the sciences calls into question Walton’s notion that relaxation is a prerequisite for laughter. A 1962 study showed that patients injected with a dose of epinephrine (a catecholamine which increases heart-rate and is part of the body’s “fight or flight” response) were more disposed to laughter than those injected with a dose of the depressant chlorpromazine and than those in a placebo control group. See Stanley Schachter and Ladd Wheeler, “Epinephrine, chlorpromazine, and amusement,” *Journal of Abnormal & Social Psychology* 65, no. 2 (1962): 121-128. A study of university students showed that those in stressful exam situations find cartoons funnier than those in more relaxed states (Thomas L. Kuhlman, “A study of salience and motivational theories of humor,” *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology* 49, no. 1 [1985]: 281-286). A study has also shown that laughter increases levels of cortisol—a steroid hormone associated with stress (Walter Hubert, Mathilde Moeller, and Renate de Jong-Meyer, “Film-induced amusement changes in saliva cortisol levels,” *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 18, no. 4 [1993]: 265-272). Walton was, at any rate, unconcerned with reaching a complete theory of musical humour. His article is ultimately a defence of theoretical analysis. He states that no matter the outcome, the act of analysis brings us closer to an appreciation of the music.
The only other plausible source of humour could be the fact that Bacocco’s aria is a parody of an *aria di smania*—a rage aria for high voice. Taruskin suggests that this is the case. The theory here is that Bacocco’s low voice, fumbling through the performance of an aria normally reserved for a character of high rank, is humorous because it is literally and figuratively the high style brought low. “Si, si maledetta” does contain the rhythmic vigour of a rage aria, but it contains none of the coloratura that is one of its defining characteristics. Does the absence of coloratura then mark the musical language as funny? I would suggest not. Based on contemporary evidence, critics already thought that the vocal pyrotechnics of the rage aria were animalistic and therefore not in a high style. Johann Mattheson, in his 1724 article “Des fragenden Componist”—a composition lesson for Passion texts in the form of a dialogue—advised his fictional student on how to set a rage text:

> First set the first three lines with suitable liveliness without inserting coloraturas, so that one can tell what the words are supposed to say. Thereafter you may tear loose as much as you like with “Krachen,” “Rachen,” and “Abgrund.” For, though there is nothing easier than to compose such furious arias (if they deserve this name) with many clashes and clatters, there still are many who maintain that the imitation of bestial, brutish, and abominable things in music is something artificial. 68

Mattheson’s account states plainly that imitating “bestial, brutish and abominable things” is the most natural part of the composition of a rage aria. If the imitation of base passions in music is humorous, rage arias were apparently already suitably hilarious. Eliminating the coloratura section, by this criterion, would if anything make a rage aria more artful—the opposite effect than that desired for a humorous parody.

Taruskin’s contention that “the low art of comedy was born of nature,” therefore, is not the appropriate lesson to draw from Bacocco’s aria. Taruskin’s argument links the French, mid-

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century notions of a balanced, periodic phrase structure—the music of the *galant* style—with the early periodic phrasing of the intermezzo repertory. That earlier Italian music genres, of which the intermezzo was one part, influenced later music is beyond doubt. But the metaphor he borrows from Diderot to describe the ideal *galant* musical phrase—that of a “polyp”—is not the appropriate metaphor to describe comic music of the intermezzo. This “polyp”—a cephalopod which is mutable in shape—more appropriately describes exactly what it was meant to by Diderot: *galant* music of the mid century. Only then did the conflation of naturalness and musicality assert itself as an aesthetic principle of composition.69 But even at that time it was not the comic aspect of the music which was deemed natural. I quote here again from Adam Smith:

> Joy, grief, love, admiration, devotion, are all of them passions which are naturally musical. Their natural tones are all soft, clear and melodious; and they naturally express themselves in periods which are distinguished by regular pauses, and which upon that account are easily adapted to the regular returns of the correspondent airs of a tune. The voice of anger, on the contrary, and of all the passions which are akin to it, is harsh and discordant. Its periods too are all irregular, sometimes very long, and sometimes very short, and distinguished by no regular pauses. It is with difficulty, therefore, that music can imitate any of those passions; and the music which does imitate them is not the most agreeable.70

Smith’s contention that music cannot express strident emotions as effectively as pleasing ones is certainly contentious. But his point of view does evidence the mid-eighteenth century belief that naturalness in music was the result of setting these pleasing emotions, not the more base passions of anger and its ilk. Comic music in the intermezzo is not balanced, malleable, and moveable. It is therefore, from an eighteenth-century perspective, not natural. It is not a “polyp.” Comic music is more easily understood through the metaphor of chance. Comedy, no less than a game

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70 Smith, 37.
of bassett, has winners and losers. It has suspense. It has surprise. And it has relief. It has all of
the elements necessary for a good joke.

I am not the first to suggest links between games of chance and the modern galant style. In 1970, Leonard Ratner proposed that the musical dice games of the eighteenth century
exemplified many compositional procedures of galant composers. These dice games usually
consisted of pre-composed bars of music which were numbered. A throw of the dice determined
which measure would succeed each previous measure by referring to a table that accompanied
the dice game. Once sixteen bars had been arranged in order, players could play through an
entire short dance—one made entirely through chance. According to Stephen Hedges, at least 20
musical dice games were published in Europe between 1757 and 1812. These games were
billed as compositional lessons in addition to trifling home entertainments. As the title of Piere
Hoegi’s 1770 dice game put it, they sought to create

[...] a tabular system whereby the art of composing minuets is made so easy that any person, without the
least knowledge of musick, may compose ten thousand, all different, and in the most pleasing and correct
manner. Hoegi’s claim of “ten thousand” combinatorial possibilities was rather modest for the time. Most
other games, which composed works no longer than sixteen bars, could have combinatorial
possibilities in the tens of thousands of trillions. Ratner quipped that the entire population of
Europe could have spent every waking moment of their lives playing dice games and still not
have composed every piece possible.

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Eighteenth-Century Music: A Tribute to Karl Geiringer on his Seventieth Birthday, edited by H.C. Robbins Landon


73 Hedges, 185.

74 Ratner, 344.
But these novelty pieces are more significant than mere party games. They represent compositional strategies which are fundamental to the syntax of eighteenth-century music. As Lawrence Zbikowski has suggested, “what emerges from the study of the Musikalisches Würfelspiel is the significance of typicality effects for compositional strategy.” These “typicality effects”—signposts in the music—became the musical language composers could later manipulate to construct larger and more complex movements. Ratner makes the comparison between the games and theorist Josef Riepel’s Anfangsgründe zur musicalischen Setzkunst (1752). Riepel outlines common melodic formulas for standardized bass plans. The musical dice games follow these patterns. The variety produced in each bar is therefore not the result of creative genius, but the conscious reordering of notes to create new melodies. This recombination and reordering was central to the idea of the ars combinatoria—one of the primary modes of compositional thought of the galant style.

Ratner never suggested that musical dice games were funny. And should one have come across a completed sixteen-bar score of one of the games, one would likely not think it to be very funny at all. A pleasing dance, perhaps, but not a humorous piece of music. Nevertheless I have observed others laugh—and I myself have laughed—upon hearing the completed score when playing the game. What could account for this marked change in reaction? The music is perhaps slightly awkward, but not more so than any number of amateur compositions from the eighteenth century. The only new ingredient in playing the game is our expectations. When we include the element of chance in our compositional process, the music suddenly becomes funny.

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Humour theorist Charles R. Gruner provides us with the most plausible explanation for our laughter during a musical dice game. In his 1997 book *The Game of Humor*, Gruner puts forward his thesis that all forms of humour are games, and our laughter is dependent upon winning that game. Gruner defines winning broadly as “getting what we want.” He furthermore states that our laughter increases in proportion to how suddenly we “win.” The more sudden our perception of victory, the more hearty our laughter will be. Gruner’s thesis rests on the idea that humour comes only out of competitive interactions in which someone wins and someone loses. He concedes that it is not always easy to tell who wins and what, but that if nothing were at stake nothing would be funny. Gruner does not differentiate between different expressions of humour. For him, “laughing, smiling, grinning, sometimes screaming with joy or applause” are all reactions which stem from a response to humour. The more extreme reactions do not occur when listening to one’s completed musical dice game, but everything from an upturned lip to a chuckle certainly does. Gruner’s thesis seems to explain why. Since the musical dice game involves chance, we prepare ourselves to lose as we would at another dice game. In this context, losing would mean composing a piece which makes no musical sense. But a completed dice game does make musical sense. All sixteen bars flow from one to the next in a logical harmonic sequence. The melodic profiles differ, but this is precisely the desired effect of the *galant* style—the balance of contrasting melodic types. Our laughter, then, is the sudden realization that we have won. Fortune has smiled on us and we have got what we wanted—an enjoyable piece of music.

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78 ibid., 8.
The trick is of course that everyone wins at a musical dice game all the time. Composers have specifically created the numbered charts which dictate which bar to select for each corresponding throw of the dice. It is not possible, if one plays the game correctly, to choose a bar which modulates from the dominant to the tonic as the opening of a piece. But the element of chance in play creates for us the illusion that things could go wrong—that we could come out on the losing end of the throw of the dice. We may fear that we will lose. Imagine if one played the game incorrectly and simply assembled the bars at random, avoiding the numbered key provided with the game. The resulting piece would turn out terribly and we would not likely be amused. We did not, in Gruner’s terms, get what we wanted. But if we play it correctly, we are amused because we get what we want, and we get it right away. With each successive bar we realize that we’ve won the game and so we smile and laugh at our luck.

Gruner’s theory is founded upon a much more ancient conception of comedy usually grouped under the heading of “the superiority theory.” This is the oldest conception of comedy, which stretches back to the writings of Plato and Aristotle. The most distinguished proponent of this theory in the modern era was Thomas Hobbes who famously wrote that

laughter is nothing else but the sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly.

But these earlier writings also form the basis for the branch of superiority theory which associates laughter solely with a feeling of supremacy. In the twentieth century, writers like

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80 Translations of Plato’s writings on humour can be found in Wallace Chafe, *The Importance of Not Being Earnest: The Feeling Behind Laughter and Humor* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 140.

Anthony Ludovici married superiority theory to a Darwinian conception of one’s superior adaptation. The advantage of Gruner’s theory is that it supposes no innate advantage on the part of the person who laughs. He instead bases his theory on interactions rather than states of being. These games can be played by anyone, and anyone can laugh when they win.

Bacocco’s “Sì, sì maledetta” operates musically in a similar way. The harmonic plan is sure. The aria modulates from the tonic to the dominant over the course of the first stanza of the text. It then modulates back to the tonic under a more free melodic treatment of the same text. But rather than hearing an arching musical line which would carry us surely from the opening text to the end of the stanza, we confront an angular and segmented series of phrases which seem not to go anywhere. This analysis is not at all different from the traditional argument for the innovative nature of the intermezzo. But I would suggest a new way of conceiving of the comic effect of this melodic type. Rather than seeing it as a parody of a more “proper” form of musical expression, I suggest we instead examine the melodic line for its ability to create uncertainty in the listener. It is this uncertainty which creates the context for humour in the aria.

The opening ritornello sets the stage. The repeating c’ over four measures sets up a strong pulse. But the lack of harmonic development gives no clue as to where the piece should go. At measure four the melody drops an octave and then rests. We are suddenly thwarted from any forward momentum created by the pulse. A following three-note motive appears separated by eighth rests. This creeping figure sketches out a descending sequence, the Romanesca (with the leaping 1-5-6-3-4-1 bass figuration). We are then suddenly confronted with a flurry of sixteenth notes which rush us through a typical galant-style I⁶-IV-V-I cadence to finish the phrase. At each point in the ritornello the melodic line keeps us on our toes, always in suspense.

of what is to come next. The harmonic plan, however, could not follow a more predictable pattern. Like the musical dice games, it has been predetermined, but the melodic elements seem to be arranged at random.


The vocal line follows a similar procedure, but this time the three-note motive has been extended by four notes to accommodate the extra text. It still maintains the paroxytonic ending to the phrase in which the vocal line jumps a third on the downbeat of the bar. These little upturns indicate that the musical phrase is going to continue. But they are again separated by eighth rests. Our ear is forever tripping over itself listening for completion.
The second part of the A section only heightens this sensation. Here the phrase is further broken down into its elements, interrupted by lengthier rests which test our patience.
Each time that the phrase begins again we are amused because it is like winning another role of the die. We expect that something could go terribly wrong with each phrase since the music does not conform to our conception of what a properly phrased aria should sound like. Compare the texture of Bacocco’s aria with “A questa pellegrina.” All of the musical lines in
Serpilla’s *siciliano* serve one affect. In “Si, si maledetta” each phrase seems to bristle at the one before it. The phrases compete for supremacy in the piece. The listener is caught in the middle, rooting for musical logic. Though we never expect that it will arrive, it always does because the harmonic plan does not deviate from our expectations. In Gruner’s terms, we get what we want and so respond with at least a smile.

Bacocco’s aria is not so humorous as to merit a full hearty laugh. But its clever musical interplay always elicits some expression of what research psychologist Rod Martin refers to as “mirth.” Several other arias in *Il giocatore* and all of the duets produce this general feeling of good humour. The tools Orlandini uses to achieve this in each of these arias and duets are the same. Successive phrases of the musical line are highly differentiated, creating a sense of uncertainty. Serpilla’s first aria, “Un consorte sciagurato,” like Bacocco’s aria contains a tripartite ritornello. The first four-measure phrase is halted by an eighth rest. Then a new four-measure phrase begins—this one not so much resembling a melodic idea as a bluster of notes. The final four-measure phrase is a more elegant scalar octave descent to the tonic (a favourite cadential figure of Hasse, which Gjerdingen calls a “Cudworth” cadence).

The duets furnish Orlandini with the opportunity to actually write two vocal lines which are in dialogue with one another. One of the most successful humorous moments occurs in the first duet, “Serpilla! Son anni!” Bacocco begs for mercy, promising never to play cards or dice again. He sings a three-note motive similar to that from his opening aria. Serpilla, meanwhile, has called for a divorce and states that each will live by themselves. Her musical line is a simple two-note repetition of b’. She is unmoved emotionally and musically by Bacocco’s entreaty.

It is not by coincidence that here the musical line begins to resemble the architecture of the elastic gag. Two characters quickly alternate lines which conflict humorously with one another. The phrase is presumably expandable in an improvised setting: Bacocco and Serpilla could go back and forth all night. But in the same way that playwrights like Ricciardi and Villifranchi captured the essence of improvised dialogue in ink on the page, Orlandini captures the essence of an improvised musical dialogue with this duet. Both plays and intermezzos are idealized forms of an improvised performance of an elastic gag. Orlandini’s music, like an elastic gag is completed with a “punchline”: a cadence brings everything to an appropriate close. This is not to say that Orlandini sought to consciously compose elastic gags in instrumental music. But both the spoken elastic gag and the humorous, dialogic method of composition we’ve been discussing share a sense of anticipation generated through segmentation. When ideas are interrupted by pauses and other ideas—whether verbal or musical—the audience is kept on their toes. They wait in anticipation for what will come next. This game of humour is the baseline upon which a host of comedic figures—puns, sarcasm, irony, etc—can be generated. This
common impulse for dialogue, interruption, and uncertainty is a defining characteristic of humour in the early eighteenth century.

Consider, for example, the elastic gag in which Serpilla questions Bacocco about what happened to all the articles of clothing which he lost during his evening supposedly spent in the company of gentlemen learning about morals.

**EXAMPLE 3.5.6  Antonio Salvi, *Il marito giocatore*, Part I, recitative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serpilla</th>
<th>Bacocco</th>
<th>Serpilla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ma chi ti vede sì disabbigliato, stordito, scapigliato penserà che tu sia...</td>
<td>Frutti della lezion Serpilla mia!</td>
<td>E del mantello in tempo così strano e così crudo?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>But whoever saw you unclothed, dazed, dishevelled would think you were...</td>
<td>Fruits of the lesson, my dear Serpilla!</td>
<td>And your coat in such terrible and such raw weather?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch’hai fatto del cappello?</td>
<td>E la spada, l’anello, e l’orologio?</td>
<td>And your sword, your ring, and your watch?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you do with your hat?</td>
<td>Tutto, sorella, ho dato per cavar di prigione un carcerato!</td>
<td>All, sister, I gave to bail a man out of prison!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’ho dato a un poverello!</td>
<td>Oh che gran mutazione!</td>
<td>Oh what a great change!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I gave it to a poor man!</td>
<td>Ah sia pur benedetto chi ha fatto quel libretto!</td>
<td>Ah, truly blessed he who wrote that libretto!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tant’è, farsi in poch’ore un pio e limosiniero un giocatore creder non so, né posso; e giurerei che tutto per giocar t’abbia impegnato, o venduto agli Ebrei.</td>
<td>In fact, being made a pious and generous man in just a few hours strains belief, I can’t believe it; and I swear that you gambled everything away, or sold it to the Jews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ma se ciò fosse vero averei meco tutto il contante almeno, e pur non ho da far cantar un cieco.</td>
<td>But if this were the case wouldn’t I at least have the cash with me, and not paid it to a blind man for a song?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lascia ch’io veda.</td>
<td>Let me see.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Si, cerca sorella ogni tasca, ogni borsa, ogni scarsella. Tu credi ch’io t’inganni e t’infinocchi, se mi trovi un quattrin, cavami gli occhi!</td>
<td>Yes, sister, search every pocket, every bag, every purse. You think that I lie to you and hoodwink you, if you find me a penny, strain my eyes!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Che cosa è questa?</td>
<td>What is this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Oh, Diavola maledetto!)</td>
<td>(Oh, cursed devil!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The audience’s laughter is dependent upon uncertainty. When will Bacocco be discovered?

Each of his replies prolongs the inevitable and thereby intensifies the potential humorous payoff.

We expect that each time Serpilla enquires about an article of clothing gone missing, Bacocco will not be able to provide a plausible justification for its absence. But each time he is able to
provide a (somewhat) reasonable solution to a missing item humour is created. We know this game must come to an end—as it does when Serpilla spies the playing cards in his pocket. This is the “cue line,” to use Andrews’ terminology, which signals the end of the gag and the beginning of a new one.

If we compare the architecture of this elastic gag with the musical architecture of the opening ritornello of “Sì, sì maledetta” we can recognize some similar principles at work. The humour of Bacocco’s responses is in part dependent upon the intelligibility of those responses—their ability to make logical sense within the context of the scene. Of course the humorous aspect of this is that his responses strain credibility. They are unexpected and in some way incongruous with his character (as Serpilla rightly realizes). But the fact that Bacocco has clothed the poor and freed the incarcerated is nevertheless a logical if improbable turn of events. In other words, Bacocco challenges Serpilla’s superficial understanding of his character, not her understanding of reality. Similarly, Orlandini’s musical phrases in the comic mode challenge our superficial understanding of the musical phrase, not our understanding of musical structure. As we observed above, the halting rhythms and angular melodic lines challenge our understanding of a fluid phrase. However, the harmonic structure—a Romanesca followed by a galant cadence—is perfectly consistent with our expectations of an opening phrase. The melodic line deceives us into thinking that the music will go amiss. But the pleasant fiction of musical respectability is maintained by the harmonic underpinning.

We can again see this similar principle at work in the musical dice games. Below is the first phrase of one of “Mozart’s” dice games, assembled by rolling the dice (the measure numbers are listed in the score itself).
The musical fragments outline an appropriate harmonic plan which takes us to the dominant at the end of the eight measure phrase. Using Gjerdingen’s terminology we can analyze the harmonic plan as a coherent eighteenth-century scheme: a Prinner leads into a deceptive cadence, followed by a comma which modulates to the dominant, confirmed with a re-mi-do cadence.

The melodic formulation, however, is very disjunct. Measures 1 and 4 appear to belong in the same piece. Measures 2-3 belong to quite another. Measure 6 contrasts well with m. 5. But m. 7 feels like overkill of the leaping figure. The contrast and balance of measures and phrases is of course the *sine qua non* of the *galant*, but here there is not the measured craftsmanship of the true *galant* phrase. Charles Burney commented on the seemingly haphazard construction of some early works in the modern style when praising the works of J.C. Bach:

Bach seems to have been the first composer who obeyed the law of *contrast* as a *principle*. Before his time, there was contrast in the works of others, but it seems to have been accidental.  

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Burney is playing his hand a bit strong here. But his admiration for J.C. Bach’s success in quilting together disparate musical patches to form a harmonious whole is representative of what eighteenth-century listeners prized in good music. It is *il filo* which Leopold Mozart recommend his son cultivate in his music.\(^8^6\) Burney’s comment that previous composers assembled such contrasts at random hints at the comic possibilities that could result. This is certainly the case in the musical dice games. We are charmed by the awkward yet plausible music that results. The same is true of the comic style in the intermezzo.

What is significant about this musical style is that a single line of music now carries on a dialogue with itself. The dialogic principle of the elastic gag is paraphrased musically by a single instrumental group performing a single musical line. Humour has dissolved the bonds of the baroque phrase, segmenting it into competing sections, each with their own personality. The collection of musical phrases now enacts a humorous dialogue in which the unexpected plays a prominent role. Humorous music begins with a sense of uncertainty in the listener. It introduces an imagined element of chance which keeps an audience guessing about what could come next. In the two succeeding chapters we will explore in more detail the methods by which composers were able to play with this uncertainty to create musical humour. Orlandini was but one practitioner of this comic music. But with the success of this new musical style, Orlandini was able to walk away from his theatrical gamble a winner—as one of the most performed composers of the eighteenth century.

\(^{86}\) “What is slight can still be great, if it is written in a natural, flowing and easy style—and at the same time bears the marks of sound composition. […] Did Bach lower himself by such work? Not at all. Good composition, sound construction, *il filo*—these distinguish the master from the bungler even in trifles.” Letter from Leopold Mozart to Wolfgang, August 13, 1778. Emily Anderson, trans. and ed., *The Letters of Mozart and His Family* (London: MacMillan, 1938), 599. Italics in Anderson’s translation. My notion of *il filo* is much the same as Robert Gjerdingen’s. He suggests that it is the logical ordering of schemata. See Gjerdingen, 369.
4.1 INTRODUCTION

Benedetto Marcello’s pamphlet *Il teatro alla moda* is one of the best known satires the conventions of opera and the behaviour of its practitioners. Girolamo Gigli’s comic intermerzzo *La Dirindina*, which treads much of the same comedic ground, predates Marcello’s pamphlet by five years. From some of our earliest examples, then, the intermezzo seems concerned with the production of opera and the means of its production. This mode of writing, known in the study of drama as metatheatre, is a popular subject for comical musical works. Mozart’s *Der Schauspieldirektor*, Strauss’s *Ariadne auf Naxos* and Porter’s *Kiss Me Kate* are just a few examples of the “backstage musical” which has been a prominent genre of the comic musical
Theatre up to today. The eighteenth century was particularly fascinated with plays and texts which made the reader aware of the form in which they were written. One of the most extreme examples was the German satirist Gottlieb Wilhelm Rabener’s *Noten ohne Text* (1743), a treatise which consisted entirely of footnotes. Rabener wanted to satirize the historian’s obsession with footnotes, but did so by creating a work in which the object of ridicule became the very form of the satire. A work like *La Dirindina* behaves in a similar way. Though the satire is directed against the practices of opera singers, the work is necessarily the product of singers singing. This paradox raises many interesting questions for the librettist, composer and singer of a work. How does one make fun of opera while still writing an opera?

Opera in the early eighteenth century was under intense scrutiny from Italian literary luminaries. Following on the heels of French dramatic criticism of the late seventeenth century, librettists began to make changes to opera to accommodate these changing dramatic tastes. Comic scenes needed a new home and were reconstituted as intermezzi. Librettists adapted a new metatheatrical sensibility to go along with the intermezzo’s newly independent form. They not only engaged in outright satire of operatic convention, but also used a number of metatheatrical devices which drew attention to the fact that the intermezzo is a work of stage fiction. Composers followed suit by playing with the musical material in order to draw attention to the act of performance as a performance. To help theorize an understanding of musical metatheatre in the intermezzo, we will examine the work of Lucien Dällenbach and Erving

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1 For a fairly comprehensive list of eighteenth and nineteenth century metatheatrical operatic works see Jürgen Maehder, “‘A queste piccolezze il pubblico non bada’: Librettisten und Komponisten als Zielscheibe der Opernparodie,” in *Die lustige Person auf der Bühne* 1 (Anif-Salzburg, Austria: Mueller-Speiser, 1994): 235-252. *La Dirindina* and *L’impresario delle canarie* are the only intermezzi listed.

Goffman as it applies to music. Their writings have documented the various means by which playwrights are able to play with an audience’s understanding of the work as fiction.

Metatheatre is important to an understanding of the practice of comedy in the intermezzo because it highlights the fact that comedy is the work of an author. When we laugh at a funny character or a humorous piece of music, we are doing more than laughing at some ridiculous thing. As Alexander Kozintsev has recently written:

To understand humor does not mean to understand the ostensible meaning of the joke (at least, not only that); for this would mean adopting the implicit narrator’s position. To understand humor means to adopt the author’s position, to view the joke from the metalevel, and to enjoy it the same way parody is enjoyed.  

Metatheatre is therefore integral to the argument that this thesis has been making. Comedy is not an imitation of nature, but rather an artful genre dependent upon juxtaposition. Instances of metatheatre in the intermezzo repertory are dependent upon knowledge of conventional musical structures. Early eighteenth-century librettists and composers took full advantage of the audience’s competence in understanding opera as the product of aesthetic ideals, compositional realities and performance whimsy. Below we explore how the intermezzo drew attention to its own excesses and habits to make the audience laugh.

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4 Carla Canestrari has recently suggested that on stage humour is by its nature meta-communicative. She has only made tentative steps towards developing this theory and so I will not discuss it in detail here. See Canestrari, “Meta-Communicative Signals and Humorous Verbal Interchanges: A Case Study,” Humor 23, no. 3 (2010): 327-350.
4.2 Metatheatre and the Intermezzo

The term “metatheatre” is one of diffuse meaning. It was coined by the literary scholar Lionel Abel in his 1966 book *Methatheatre: A New View of Dramatic Form*. Abel explicitly labelled meatheatre as a genre distinct from both tragedy and comedy. His central thesis was that “metaplays” supplanted tragedies in the Renaissance and represented a dramatic incarnation of a changed Western cultural worldview. This worldview was characterized by the acceptance of the illusory nature of existence and the primarily theatrical existence which we live. As Abel suggested, “the world is a stage, life is a dream.” Abel borrowed the sensibility of the melancholic Jaques in *As You Like It* in addition to his famous phrase. He saw his categorization of “metaplay” as a fundamentally serious genre which was not comic. Though Abel’s claims were contentious, a strong strand of metatheatrical criticism—especially that concentrating on Shakespeare—has maintained Abel’s notion of metatheatre as the new tragedy. *Hamlet* is the iconic example of a metatheatrical play as defined by Abel—a work in which the metatheatrical device of a play-within-a-play is used but also one in which the protagonist is acutely aware of his own theatricality.

Subsequent to Abel’s book many authors began to expand the definition of metatheatre to encompass a greater number of works than Abel prescribed. Richard Hornby’s expansive 1986

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6 Abel, *Tragedy and Metatheatre*, 257.

book *Drama, Metadrama and Perception* was the first to categorize systematically varieties of metatheatricality in addition to enlarging its repertory to include works from Sophocles to Pinter. He described not only the use of the play-with-the-play, but four other features of the metadramatic: the presence of ceremony, a character role playing within a play, referencing real life or another text and referencing oneself. By 1998, Mark Ringer could claim that metatheatricality “encompasses all forms of theatrical self-referentiality.” This expansion of the definition of metatheatricality from Abel’s narrow genre designation is mirrored in the expansion of the metatheatrical repertory to include works of comedy both ancient and modern. Niall Slater’s books on the comedies of Plautus and Aristophanes remain important testaments to the applicability of metatheatre as a concept to both comedy and works which predate the Renaissance. That metatheatre has any currency at all as either a genre or device within a genre is controversial. The classicist Thomas Rosenmeyer produced an acid attack on the concept. Blaming Abel for implicitly leaving “metatheater” open to application to any and all works, he wrote that

> It is evident that “metatheater” has, in the wake of Abel’s overload, been employed to cover too many different moves, and to elicit responses that undervalue the tradition of inventiveness and the wonderful immediacy of the emotional power of theater.

*Pace* Rosenmeyer, I believe the concept can illuminate a distinct practice of librettists and composers working in the intermezzo repertory. The concept of metatheatre helps us to

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understand and interpret levels of fiction within a given performance. This practice of metatheatre reveals interesting insights into the creation of comedy in the musical theatre.

Musicology has only recently taken up the topic. The most prominent recent scholar to examine the practice of metatheatre in opera in the eighteenth century is Alice Bellini. In her 2009 thesis she discussed the many eighteenth-century comic operas which feature scenes of performance or are simply about the act of putting on an opera. Like Ringer, Bellini defines metatheatre broadly:

> Metatheatre becomes apparent each time theatre brings the audience’s attention to the mechanisms governing theatre itself and to the fact that all performance is fictional and taking place *hic et nunc*.\(^1\)

Opera presents a special case in the phenomenon of metatheatre. The very fact the text is sung, rather than declaimed, draws attention to the fact that the actor is performing. However, there is a spectrum when it comes to the “theatricality” of performing a text. Straight plays with texts that are unmeasured and unrhymed will fall towards the side of realism, or to borrow J.L. Styan’s term, the theatre of the illusory.\(^2\) The audience for this type of play will expect the text to conform more closely to everyday conversation and therefore be more “believable” as real dialogue. The threshold for identifying metatheatrical devices, or moments which draw attention to the fact that the play is a performance, is very low for this type of drama. Anything that breaks the illusion of the play as reality is easily identifiable as metatheatrical. Plays written in verse (which date from before the modern period and therefore also often feature soliloquies and asides) fall in the middle of the spectrum. They are non-illusory, in Styan’s terms, because the audience is made aware through the style of language and mode of delivery (speaking directly to

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2. This terminology is used by J. L. Styan in *Drama, Stage and Audience* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).
the audience, etc.) that they are viewing a performance. The status of certain events as metatheatrical in these plays is more subject to debate. An aside draws attention to the theatricality of the dramatic event, but is a familiar convention of the genre. Rosenmeyer would contend that to call such events metatheatrical is to rob the term of any valuable meaning.

Opera lies further along the spectrum towards the point at which, when watching a performance of a work, the audience is continually aware of the fact that it is watching a piece of theatre. People do not sing their thoughts in everyday life and so we are made aware that opera by its very nature is not realistic. Here an overly liberal notion of metatheatricality threatens to subsume the entire genre of opera. If we are always aware that we are watching a performance when enjoying music theatre, is there any difference between opera and metatheatrical? The answer is obviously yes. The difference has to do with the relationship between the audience and the performer. While the audience may be made aware of the opera as performance, characters in the opera do not share a similar awareness. Carolyn Abbate stated the problem eloquently:

In opera, the characters pacing the stage often suffer from deafness; they do not hear the music that is the ambient fluid of their music-drowned world. This is one of the genre’s most fundamental illusions: we see before us something whose fantastic aspect is obvious, since the scenes we witness pass to music. At the same time, however, opera stages recognizably human situations, and these possess an inherent “realism” that demands a special and complex understanding of the music we hear. We must generally assume, in short, that this music is not produced by or within the stage-world, but emanates from other loci as secret commentaries for our ears alone, and that characters are generally unaware that they are singing.15

In true moments of metatheatrical, characters become aware that they are performing and they exist in a play as characters. Though the mode of operatic performance makes the fact of performance clear at all times to the audience, the characters on stage do not share any similar moment of epiphany. There exists an irony in the fact that opera presents human situations which are realistic, but in a mode which is anything but. Only in certain moments do characters become

conscious that they are singing; these are the so-called “phenomenal” songs we encountered in the previous chapter. These moments of rupture can have a metatheatrical effect if they draw the listener’s attention to the means of musical performance. Susanna’s guitar playing during Cherubino’s “Voi che sapete,” for example, alerts the listener to two artificialities of the operatic genre. The listener is first made aware that music comes from the orchestra, since the sound source of Susanna’s guitar comes from the pit and not from her lap. The listener is also made aware of the materiality of the instruments themselves. Since the “guitar” is played by pizzicato strings, the listener is alerted to the fact that the orchestra—with its more or less standardized complement—is the means of musical production. It is conventional to have strings and not a guitar, and so the listener has a moment of awareness about the practicalities of producing an opera (if not some understanding about the acoustic properties of plucked instruments).

Though the performers may not alter their method of voice production for their onstage “performance” of a phenomenal song, the audience still is given to understand that the character is aware that they are singing at that moment (and not talking, which is how characters onstage perceive recitative). This creates an interpretive problem for the audience. At what point does the character become aware that they are performing?

Music, in this instance, serves to clarify. Unlike text which must include stage directions to indicate a metatheatrical manoeuvre, music has the ability to frame moments all on its own. It can delineate something as separate from the illusion of reality of a particular work. Bellini makes this point clear:

[p]urely musical means can be used to underline the presence of more than one layer of reality—music can go above and beyond the dramatic narrative itself in delineating or dissolving the imaginary fourth wall between embedded and embedding representations. Thus the complex nature of meta-operatic scores and their musico-dramatic structures can be seen to be a full match for the complexity of their librettos, along with all their multi-layered plots and the games they play with dramatic conventions and levels of fiction.  

Intermezzos in their earliest incarnations do not display this level of sophistication. Composers instead seem to have rather quietly followed the cues in the libretto in order to set metatheatrical moments in the intermezzos. By the mid-1720s, however, music begins to take a more assertive role in framing these moments and becomes a more independent means of creating humour independent of the text. In this decade we have examples in which the music is “metamusical,” drawing attention to itself through the use of parody or disruption. This phenomenon is explored in section 4.5.

Intermezzos are, even more so than opera in general, metatheatrical by nature. They are plays-within-plays in the literal sense; they are performed within the frame of existing three-act works. In the case of Naples before 1725, minor characters from the opera seria perform the intermezzo, thereby strengthening the relationship between the two. Recall that Albino e Plautilla the intermezzo, like its host opera, Silla Dittatore, takes place in republican Rome. Francesco Feo’s intermezzo Rosicca e Morano (1723) features a Numidian setting like the opera seria in which it was embedded, Metastasio’s Siface. Elsewhere on the continent intermezzos enjoyed greater autonomy from the operas and did not share characters or settings. But it would be hard not to see their very presence as a comment on theatrical performance in general. Intermezzos and operatic tragedies shared similar conventions—like the use of recitative and arias. By juxtaposing the styles used for comedy and tragedy, composers drew audience’s attention to the differences between them.

More importantly, many of the techniques by which librettists, composers and performers create musical humour are metatheatrical in nature. Contemporary accounts testify to the fact that performers imitated a number of sounds, including “the cracking of a Whip, the rumbling of Chariot Wheels.”\(^\text{18}\) Troy refers to musical figures which imitate extra-musical sounds as examples of “comic realism.” Ironically, however, these attempts at verisimilitude have the opposite effect intended by “realism” by calling attention to the music as performance. Just as a speech delivered to the audience breaks the dramatic frame of a play, talking, groaning, or making non-musical sounds has the effect of breaking the musical frame. Michal Grover-Friedlander has characterized the operatic medium as one which is dominated by the “Italian notion of song.”\(^\text{19}\) She means by this that the audience is always listening for beautiful singing, which conditions a kind of listening in which the audience understands “song,” that is melody, as the primary mode of expression.

This is a kind of ecstatic listening, and it specifically acknowledges operatic singing as an activity bordering on the superhuman. Such singing is transcendent on the one hand yet always under the threat of appearing ridiculous on the other, being both miraculous and continually available for parody.\(^\text{20}\)

In the intermezzo repertory, which is often explicitly ridiculous, these moments expose the artificiality of musical expression (this artificiality was of course derided by early eighteenth-century dramatic theorists, see 4.3, below). “Comic realism” therefore always threatens to undermine whatever claims the intermezzo has to verisimilitude. If opera is characterized by beautiful singing, then much of the intermezzo is characterized by ridiculous singing. In this sense, the intermezzo cannot help but involve metatheatre.

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\(^{20}\) ibid., 3.


4.3 THE METATHEATRICAL PERSPECTIVE: MARTELLO AND MARCELLO

The intermezzo’s existence was brought about by the grumbling of literary theorists. In
the last two decades of the seventeenth century, concerned Italian writers began to voice their
concerns about the effects that opera had on its listeners. In 1700, Giammario Crescimbeni
famously assigned blame for the destruction of acting, comedy and tragedy to Giacinto Andrea
Cicognini’s libretto for Cavalli’s opera Giasone (1649). Cicognini’s mixing of serious and
comic characters and situations, Crescimbeni decried, was done for the vilest purposes. And
once done,

[i]his concoction of characters was the reason for the complete ruin of the rules of poetry, which went so far
into disuse that not even locution was considered, which, forced to serve music, lost its purity and became
filled with idiocies.

A fellow Arcadian, the librettist Apostolo Zeno, had already undertaken the task of filtering out
the comic from the opera libretto, leaving nothing but specimens of pure tragedy which Robert
Freeman—in the modern era—famously labelled “opera without drama.” Crescimbeni
revisited opera in his Comentarii intorno alla sua istoria della vulgar poesia of 1711. This time
he remarked on many improvements to the genre, which he noted now adhered more closely to
an Aristotelian notion of tragedy. Arias were fewer in number, choruses returned to replace

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comic episodes and librettists adhered to the unity of time. Crescimbeni’s complaints about opera were therefore primarily structural. With the elimination of comic scenes and a recommitment to the unities, opera could redeem itself as an aesthetic endeavour.

Ludovico Antonio Muratori was not so easily swayed by such small changes to opera. In his *Della perfetta poesia italiana* of 1706 he roundly criticized opera in not only aesthetic but moral terms. Drawing on ancient Greek criticism of the effeminacy of certain types of music, Muratori put the blame not only on comedy, but castrati, melodies, women and eighth notes. The problem of opera was not its abandonment of Aristotelian principles of tragedy, but rather opera itself. The entire enterprise was debauched and “exceedingly harmful for public mores.”

Muratori’s criticisms were echoed in 1715 by Gian Vincenzo Gravina in his essay *Della tragedia*. Gravina, though no longer an Arcadian, maintained a thoroughly attic attitude towards modern opera. Like Muratori he felt that the purpose of tragedy was to improve the moral character of the audience. Modern opera, he suggested, did the complete opposite. This was because the poet and the composer were not the same person. The composer merely

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26 One cannot think of a single sentence which more thoroughly condemns all aspects of opera than the following: “Whether this effeminacy is caused by an excessive use of eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and the smallest rhythmic values, which break the solemnity of the melody, or is produced by the voices of the singers, who are all either naturally or artificially womanlike, and consequently inspire undue tenderness and languor in the souls of the audience; or whether it stems from the use of ariettas in operas, which induce excessive enjoyment in anyone who listens to them, or from the words, which often lack integrity and abound in lasciviousness, or from the practice of using women singers in theatres; or from all these reasons put together: it is a fact that modern theatre music is exceedingly harmful for public mores, in that people become ever baser and more prone to lasciviousness when listening to it.” Translated by Wolfgang Freis, Lisa Gasbarrone and Michael Louis Leone in Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book*, edited by Bonnie J. Blackburn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 41.

27 ibid., 41.


29 Gravina’s notion of the ancient poet-philosopher-musician would later be an idea important to the work of Giambattista Vico. For more see *History of Aesthetics*, edited by Cyril Barrett (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 444; Bruno Barillari, *G.V. Gravina come precurseor del Vico* (Naples: Città di Castello, 1942). For a recent view on
pursued his own selfish goals, resulting in a text whose poor literary merit was made worse by
the indulgent and fanciful musical setting it received.

The intermezzo therefore came of age during a time in which the operatic enterprise was
under attack not only for its production practices but for every aspect of the medium itself.
When, of course, has this not been the case? But in the early decades of the eighteenth century
the voices of criticism were louder and more vociferous than they had been at any time previous.
This despite the fact that Zeno, Salvi and others had successfully implemented many changes
which critics had suggested in the previous century. But Muratori, Gravina and their ilk could
not be satisfied. More than calling for the “reform” of opera’s ways, they demanded the
purgation of its very soul.

This fevered and somewhat paranoid criticism helped pave the way for satirical
representations of opera. The two most prominent of these in literature were Pier Jacopo
Martello’s *Della tragedia antica e moderna* (1715) and Benedetto Marcello’s *Il teatro alla moda*
(1720). Martello’s treatise had appeared a year earlier, but was republished in 1715 with the
addition of a commentary on opera. The relationship of these works to contemporary operatic
practice is well documented,\(^{30}\) as is their relationship to contemporary dramatic criticism,
including some of the work cited above.\(^{31}\) This material will not be rehashed in any great detail

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here. What I will attempt to do in this section is explore how these literary works give us a
glimpse into the mindset of learned opera audiences of the 1710s. I do not want to posit a simple
causal relationship between these works of Martello and Marcello and subsequent metatheatrical
librettos. In fact, it is almost certain that none exists. The intermezzo satire La Dirindina
(discussed below) was written in 1715, the same year as Martello’s dialogue and some five years
before Marcello’s pamphlet. Yet it seems to pinpoint many of the same operatic topoi which will
be satirized throughout the century. Librettists may therefore have lampooned the same
behaviours and conventions outlined in Martello’s and Marcello’s works, but they did not look to
them for source material. The relationship between metatheatre and these literary works is not so
direct. Instead, they testify to a particular perspective, a way of looking at opera that began to
occupy practitioners and theatregoers in the 1710s. It is this perspective which allows for the
kinds of metatheatrical humour we see in the intermezzo repertory. As we will see below (4.4,
4.5) this type of humour was diverse and involved a number of different metatheatrical devices.
But much of the intermezzo’s evolving style of humour—which begins to influence its musical
language—is dependent upon a kind of meta-sensibility, that is, an awareness on the part of
creators and performers of the intermezzo medium as theatre. Humour is always dependent upon
insider knowledge. The previous chapters explored the importance of French theatre,
philosophy, gambling and divorce to an appreciation of the humour in the intermezzos discussed
there. The self-consciousness of the intermezzo—its understanding of itself as an intermezzo, or
as a comment on opera in general—is a fundamental condition of the style of musical humour
that evolved throughout the 1720s.

Given that Aristotle figured so prominently in the serious debates among dramatic theorists it is little surprise he was featured as the main character of Martello’s dialogue. The interlocutor (Martello) meets a supposedly very aged Aristotle on a ship bound for Marseilles and passes the time listening to his lengthy disquisitions on what constitutes a proper theatrical work. This Aristotle’s views on opera were far more sympathetic to actual practice than what Muratori and others had imagined the real Aristotle’s to be. Regarding the fundamental problem critics had—that the words were subservient to the music—the impostor has no problem at all. Martello here cleverly gets around the problem as posed by critics. He suggests that the text of the opera is not the work of poets at all. What opera needs is a different type of writer:

> We have need, then, not of Poets, but rather of verse-mongers; but no, not of verse-mongers, either, for there must be a plot, and that calls for something more than a verse-monger: not mere verse-monger, then, nor true Poets (I am at a loss what to call them) let those be who are called upon to serve the needs of opera, just as the choregi once served the material needs of tragedy.  

Martello’s indecision about what to call these writers is telling. He is not willing to place them in a totally subservient role, but as he later suggests, merely within a hierarchy of the art form (above the scenographer and costumer, but below the composer). The choregi of Greece may not be remembered as playwrights like Sophocles are, but they were still awarded prestigious prizes for their contributions. Martello implies there is no shame in this.

This practical consideration of opera—the idea that certain roles in a production are required and so there must be artisans to fulfill them—is the defining characteristic of Martello’s dialogue. An artist’s obligation is to the medium of theatre, not to a moral imperative. This reframing of the role of the librettist signals the turn towards metatheatrical in the sense of the term

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that Abel originally intended. Librettists were no longer meant to be original, but should be aware of their own positions as servants of the music and the drama. They were aware of the fact they were creating works of theatre, and so their work in some ways is about the nature of theatre and theatrical expression.

Martello’s suggestions about how to achieve success in this realm are familiar to lovers of *opera seria*. His suggestion for arias texts is very useful.

In the arias I advise you to use similes involving little butterflies, little ships, a little bird, a little brook: these things all lead the imagination to I know not what pleasant realms of thought and so refresh it;  

Marcello advised exactly the same thing.

The aria must in no way be related to the preceding recitative but it should be full of such things as sweet little butterflies, bouquets, nightingales, quails, little boats, little huts, jasmine, violets, copper basins [], little pots [*cavo rame*], tigers, lions, whales, crabs, turkeys, cold capon, etc.

Marcello’s tone is much more sardonic than Martello’s (he’s also much funnier). But they both get at the overuse of the simile aria in contemporary operatic practice. Bellini cautions against viewing Marcello’s pamphlet as a documentary account of actual operas. She writes that “we should attempt to distinguish between historical data and what appear to be the conventional traits and literary formulas of this repertoire.” That this trope appears in both sources suggests the latter. It does not, however, imperil our argument because tropes which contribute to the self-conscious sensibility contribute to that sensibility no less than if they were original observations.

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34 Weiss, *MQ*, 397.


Antonio Salvi introduced this literary satirical trope into his libretto for the intermezzo
*L'artigiano gentiluomo* (1722). But rather than directly parodying a simile aria, Salvi has
introduced his satire through the back door by sneaking it into the recitative. The following
excerpt is the continuation of the scene we examined in chapter 1 (section 1.4). Vanesio has just
welcomed the Baronessa d’Arbella (his servant Larinda in disguise) and completed his elaborate
salutation meant to impress the noblewoman. What preceded, as we saw, was adapted faithfully
from Molière’s original text. The following, however, is the invention of Salvi.

**EXAMPLE 4.3.1  Antonio Salvi, *L'artigiano gentiluomo*, Part II.**

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{Vanesio} & \text{Ma per dirla, com’è, ritrovo in lei} \\
& \text{Un certo brio brillante,} \\
& \text{Che piace agli occhi miei.} \\
& \text{Quel ciglio lampeggiante} \\
& \text{Dolcemente mi strazia:} \\
& \text{Signora mia, per grazia} \\
& \text{Si levi in piedi, e mi passeggi avanti,} \\
& \text{Poi mi faccia un’inchino.} \\
\text{Larinda} & \text{Di color porporino} \\
& \text{Tingo il mio volto a questa sua dimanda;} \\
& \text{Pur son costretta a far quel, che comanda.} \\
\text{Van.} & \text{Che bel taglio di vita!} \\
& \text{Che andamento, ch’alletta!} \\
& \text{Par giusto una Barchetta.} \\
& \text{Che gentil portamento! basta, basta:} \\
& \text{Non piu; morir mi sento.} \\
\text{Lar.} & \text{Non bramo la sua morte;} \\
& \text{Bramo...} \\
& \text{Che brama?} \\
& \text{D’essergli Consorte.} \\
\end{array}
\]

But to you I say that I find in you
a certain brilliant glow,
which pleases my eyes.
Those twinkling eyes
sweetly torment me:
my Lady, please
stand and walk in front of me,
then curtsy for me.
I feel my face turning purple
at your request.
I feel compelled to grant you that request.
What a beautiful figure!
What grace, how enticing!
How like a little boat.
What a noble bearing! enough, enough:
No more, I’m dying.
I do not wish you to die;
I desire...
What do you desire?
To be your wife.

Hasse’s music leaves large gaps for Vanesio’s fawning. The continuo player could have
embellished these moments in order to accompany Vanesio’s onstage actions.

Musically the most striking moment occurs at “morir.” Here Hasse has taken Salvi’s cue
to create a highly affective moment. The “mi sento morir” was the ubiquitous cry of the operatic
heroine from the late seventeenth century through to at least Aida. Its chromatic treatment

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\[37 \text{Raccolta copiosa, 365. Translation adapted from Lazarevich in Hasse, *L’artigiano gentiluomo*, xxxii.}\]
here—a rising semitone figure supported by a pointed tonal shift from D major\textsuperscript{6} to F-sharp major—recalls a madrigalesque sensibility. That it is Vanesio’s bass voice which sings the line makes it of course seem ridiculous (to say nothing of the incongruity of the fact he feels faint at merely seeing the Baronessa walk). It is a short walk from pathos to bathos.

**Example 4.3.2**  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Vanesio} \\
\text{Ba-sta, ba-sta, non più, mo-rir mi sen-to}
\end{align*}
\]

This scene does highlight a couple of important points about metatheatre in the intermezzo. The first is that the intermezzo engaged in a parody even in texts which originally did not call for such moments. Molière’s text for *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* did not contain the scene above and yet Salvi felt compelled to add it. This gives strength to this thesis’s argument in chapters 1 and 2 that the intermezzos based on works by Molière were not simply adaptations of plotlines from Molière’s original plays. They were instead collections of elastic gags newly strung together with a newly manufactured plot. It also supports the claim that the intermezzo was metatheatrical in is nature. Librettists felt compelled to include material which burlesqued the *opera seria* tradition as a matter of course. *L’artigiano gentiluomo* was written by Salvi for a performance in Florence in 1722, though Orlandini’s music for that production does not survive. Though the libretto was revised for performance in Naples in 1726, no changes were made to this scene and to the aria that follows.\textsuperscript{38} Whether in Florence or Naples (or any of the seven other

\textsuperscript{38} For a complete account of the changes in the libretto see Lazarevich, “The Role of the Neapolitan Intermezzo in the Evolution of Eighteenth-Century Musical Style,” 251-3.
cities in which the intermezzo is known to have been performed) it seems that audiences appreciated a good parody of opera seria.\textsuperscript{39}

One of the most remarkable features of Martello’s dialogue is how he has recast the moral imperative of opera producers. Recalling the quotation above, Martello suggested that arias with charming comparisons were necessary as “these things all lead the imagination to I know not what pleasant realms of thought and so refresh it.” Whereas Muratori and Gravina thought it incumbent upon artists to create works which would strengthen the moral fabric of the audience, Martello sees it as necessary to create diversions from the reality of the real world. His belief that music is the chief means of accomplishing this kind of transcendent experience is one of the great love letters to opera and is strikingly modern in its tone:

\begin{quote}
Music alone, in action, contains the all-important secret of separating the soul from all mortal cares for at least as long as the notes can keep it absorbed, through the skillful management of consonance, whether vocal or instrumental. And if sleep is so universally praised for its power to enthrall the senses of unhappy humanity, lifting them up and, for a few hours, making them impervious to misfortune, how much more praiseworthy must an art be which, not robbing us of life as does sleep (whence it is called the Brother of Death), allows us to live ecstatically in delicious, contented peace, our senses fully about us, yet glad and truly blissful.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Coming at the end of a lengthy and humorous discussion of the many facets (and sometimes excesses) of opera, Martello’s encomium could be easily discounted as hollow praise. But the dimensions of what he is suggesting extend beyond the benign enjoyment of an evening’s entertainment. The Italian critics, like their French counterparts, condemned opera in moral terms specifically because the moderation of the passions was seen to be a necessary virtue in matters greater than the opera. Philosophers such as Paolo Mattia Doria, whom we encountered in Chapter 2, for example, specifically saw the inability to control one’s pleasure-seeking as the

\textsuperscript{39} For a list of these performances see Troy, 144-5.

\textsuperscript{40} Martello, 402-3.
road to Sophism, skepticism and Epicureanism.\textsuperscript{41} Doria, like Muratori and Gravina, found refuge in the guidance of the austere Plato. Only through the subjugation of one’s passion to reason could one truly achieve good art, good character and good governance. Martello outlines the complete opposite. He states that it is opera’s job to give its audience relief from the pressures of life. A performance is a time to disengage from the world, turn off one’s faculties of reason and indulge in the beauty of music.

What is fascinating is the fact that Martello concedes that operatic enterprise is only useful to the soul “as long as the notes can keep it absorbed.” Metatheatrical devices, however, are forever undermining music’s ability to completely absorb the listener since they shock the spectator out of the awe of the moment and bring full attention to the experience as theatre. Let us now examine how librettists and composers used these devices in practice.

4.4 \textbf{METATHEATRE IN THE LIBRETTO}

Many intermezzo librettos contain moments like the one which forms the epigraph of this chapter. In the course of his argument with his disbelieving wife, Bacocco considers what his life would have been had he truly reformed his gambling ways: “Ah sia pur benedetto / chi ha fatto quel libretto!” His interjection interrupts Serpilla’s questioning, and interrupts the audience’s immersion in the domestic drama unfolding onstage. Bacocco confronts the audience with the possibility that another libretto would present his situation differently—reminding the

\textsuperscript{41} Paolo Mattia Doria, \textit{Difesa della metafisica degli antichi contro Locke}, book 4, chapter 10. For more on Doria and his views on self-restraint see Stapelbroek, 95-99; Robertson, 184-200, 338-340.
spectator that what they are witnessing onstage is the work of an author, that it is a fiction and that the actors are only playing parts. Such moments point to a general feature of the intermezzo: its willingness to recognize itself as theatre by referencing aspects of theatrical production.

No intermezzo is more metatheatrical in this sense than *Brunetta e Burlotto*, set to music by Domenico Sarro for performance in Naples in 1720. No intermezzo is more metatheatrical in this sense than *Brunetta e Burlotto*, set to music by Domenico Sarro for performance in Naples in 1720. It was a great success that was revived in Venice, Rome and Urbino by the travelling intermezzo team of Santa Marchesini and Giacchino Corrado. Its libretto was by the prolific Antonio Salvi. The intermezzo, in three parts, features a remarkable second act which we will explore in some detail. It involves the performance of a play within a play, commentary on that play and the self-referencing of the actors as characters. It is, textually, the intermezzo’s *Hamlet* in its hypermeta construction. We will first examine parts I and III, followed by an extended discussion of part II.

The intermezzo’s willingness to reference itself is made more interesting because *Brunetta e Burlotto* is in some sense about the act of recognition. It opens with Burlotto waiting outside in the cold on a moonless night for the girl he loves, Brunetta. He sings a short aria in which he steels himself against the inclement weather: “He who is in love must remain steadfast in the cold, in the heat, in the water and wind” (“Chi è innamorato / Ha da star saldo / Al freddo, al caldo / A l’acqua, al vento”). He soon sees a light coming down the road and so hides himself in case it is not his lover. It is of course, Brunetta, but as the stage directions tell us at the beginning she is carrying a mask in her hand. Unsure of whom she is approaching, she cautiously puts on the mask to disguise her identity. The two—still dark figures in the night—then confess to the audience who they suspect each other to be.

42 Domenico Sarro, *Brunetta e Burlotto* (Naples, 1720). Ms., I-Nc, 32.2.22.

43 See Piperno, 265-66.

44 *Raccolta copiosa*, 294-95.
Example 4.4.1 A. Salvi, *Brunetta e Burlotto*, Part I, recitative⁴⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burlotto</th>
<th>(Adesso se ne viene)</th>
<th>(Now if it is)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunetta</td>
<td>(A me pare assai bene)</td>
<td>(It seems like a good idea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cambiar la positura)</td>
<td>to change my posture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>cammina diversamente dal suo naturale</em></td>
<td><em>walks in a different way than normal</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur.</td>
<td>(Nel camminar non ha la sua lindura)</td>
<td>(Her gait doesn’t have her elegance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>(Fino su gl’occhi ei sta inferraiolato, in altezza, in grossezza, e in tutto il resto; Certo, Burlotto è questo)</td>
<td>(He’s cloaked up to his eyes, but, In height, fatness, and in every respect; Of course, this is Burlotto)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur.</td>
<td>(Sta masherata in viso, al camminar, E alla veste Brunetta non mi pare, O, che sciocco pur son! Non sbaglio no: E’ Madama Margò!)</td>
<td>(A mask on her face, her walk, And I do not think dressed like Brunetta. O, I’m such a fool! I’m not mistaken no: It’s Madame Margo!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>(Io non mi vo scoprire, Stiamo a veder, che mai la fare, e dire)</td>
<td>(I won’t be found out, Let’s see what he’ll do and say)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>si vede uscìr la Luna</em></td>
<td><em>the moon comes out</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Burlotto then introduces himself and a comical exchange ensues. Rather than disguising her voice (a favourite tactic in the repertory), Brunetta mutely nods or shakes her head to Burlotto’s questions. In the course of their exchange “Madama Margò” indicates that she is out wandering in the cold looking for Burlotto. He, fed up with waiting for Brunetta, turns amorous and pledges his allegiance to “Madama Margò” if she will take his hand (though he does admit that in doing so “I may have completely ruined Brunetta” [“Brunetta, sarei proprio rovinato”]). At that moment, of course, Brunetta reveals herself and curses the unfaithful Burlotto. The scene ends with Burlotto begging for Brunetta to open up his chest and see that he loves her with all his heart.

Part II of the intermezzo begins with Brunetta agreeing to stay with Burlotto, but only if he takes her as his wife. The rest of the intermezzo involves some playful behaviour which I will discuss in more detail below. Little plot is advanced, but at the end they agree to flee together and elope. Part III is especially silly and has garnered some reputation in the literature. Troy

⁴⁵ ibid., 394. “Lindura” is a Spanish word not found in Italian, suggesting the intermezzo’s Neapolitan origins.
mentions it as the “*ne plus ultra*” of clowning scenes.\(^{46}\) David Kimbell, in his history of Italian opera, uses the scene as an example of the intermezzo’s indebtedness to the *commedia dell’arte*.\(^{47}\) Brunetta and Burlotto have disguised themselves in order to make their escape. He wears a French hat, German breeches, a Turban, a fencing master’s vest and carries two foils in each hand; she is dressed as a man. Neither recognizes each other. Brunetta’s questions about Burlotto’s identity unfold as a multi-lingual elastic gag every bit as ridiculous as Burlotto’s getup.\(^{48}\)

**EXAMPLE 4.4.2 Brunetta e Burlotto, Part III**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burlotto</th>
<th>Chi è questo mai che viene?</th>
<th>Who’s coming this way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brunetta</td>
<td>(Chi è costui? O che modo di vestire! A li Baffi, e al Turbante un Turco pare: In quel linguaggio or io gli vo parlare.) Sei Musulmansin?</td>
<td>(Who is this? What a way to dress! With a mustache, and looks like a Turkish turban: What language should I talk to him in?) You’re a Muslim?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur.</td>
<td>Non Sennor</td>
<td>Non Señor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digame Cavallero</td>
<td>Tell me, Sir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>Es Espagnol! V.M.?</td>
<td>You’re Spanish? Yes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>Tedesco esso sarà</td>
<td>You’ve become German.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vasfor ein Landasman bist du.</td>
<td>What kind of countryman are you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bist en Tarter?</td>
<td>Are you a Tartar?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur.</td>
<td>Non Monsieur</td>
<td>Non Monsieur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>Ah, Ah, questo è Francese.</td>
<td>Ah, Ah, that’s French,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La lingua ancora so di quel Paese: Feites moy le Plaisir, Monsieur, De me dire, si vous etes Francois?</td>
<td>I even know that language: Do me the pleasure, Sir, Tell me if you are French?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>O Inglese è questo:</td>
<td>Oh, that’s English:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tu tell mi ifu aran Inghlis menn?</td>
<td>Do tell me if you are an English man?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bru.</td>
<td>Tal linguaggio</td>
<td>Such language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ora non intend’io.</td>
<td>Now I don’t understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O te l’ho fatta.</td>
<td>Oh, I’ve had it with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Certo Burlotto è questo:</td>
<td>(I’m sure this is Burlotto:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fingerò, non averlo conosciuto)</td>
<td>I’ll pretend not to know him)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mi favorisca, quale è il suo Paese?</td>
<td>Please, what is your nationality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bur.</td>
<td>Son Italiano.</td>
<td>I’m Italian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{46}\) Troy, 86.


\(^{48}\) For the use of multiple languages in the routines of the *commedia dell’arte* see Erith Jaffe-Berg, *The Multilingual Art of Commedia dell’arte* (Ottawa, ON: Legas, 2009).
Burlotto then attempts to give the disguised Brunetta a fencing lesson. Brunetta, of course, handily upstages him by removing buttons from his shirt with her sword. The scene is reminiscent of the fencing scene between Nicole and Monsieur Jourdain in *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, but does not quote Molière’s text in any exact way. Since Salvi adapted Molière’s play two years later it is possible that he had it in mind. This might seem especially plausible since a scene not in Salvi’s adaptation appeared in a Neapolitan intermezzo in 1723 (see chapter 3). But in that case the borrowing was much more literal. This scene perhaps took some small inspiration from Molière, but more likely owes a debt to a “theatregram” which seeded both the scene in Molière and here in *Brunetta e Burlotto*. The intermezzo ends with Brunetta revealing her true identity and the two revelling with their “hearts leaping, butterflies gone, and hoping for love” (“Il cor mi saltella / Non piu budella / Sperando goder”).

While the intermezzo’s third part might appear to be a trifle, the fact that it fits in with the larger theme of recognition that occupies all three parts suggests that Salvi was aiming for some greater unity. The third part brings a kind of symmetry to the work. Parts I and III deal with disguise as deception. Part II examines disguise as theatre. Intermezzos may be farcical in content, but their formal constructions are often more sophisticated than we give them credit for.

Let’s now examine the second part of the intermezzo, which takes the level of metatheatricality to new heights. It opens with Brunetta and Burlotto agreeing to elope. But their thoughts soon turn to how they should accomplish this task. A disguise and new identities seem in order and they decide on an interesting occupation. They will be actors in an opera. Brunetta, concerned about their abilities, suggests a rehearsal.
Example 4.4.3  Brunetta e Burlotto, Part II

Brunetta  E così di fuggir ancor dobbiamo noi pensare
        Al modo di campare.
Burlotto  Io l’ho trovato:
        Ambedue noi sappiamo un po cantare:
        Potremo recitare.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  Recitare? Eh! Non tutti quelli, ch’escono,
        A fare un tal mestier, poi ci riescono.
Burlotto  Se tu parli per me,
        Io mi confido fare anche da Re.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  A la prova.
Burlotto  A la prova.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  Recitiamo una scena ora a l’impronto,
Burlotto  Io per me sono pronto.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  La scena finge stanza;
        Qui ci vorrebbe un trono.
Burlotto  Adesso me lo trovo, e ce lo pongo.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  Questo è un Uomo curioso.
Burlotto  E in certe cose è proprio grazioso.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  Sarà il mio Trono questo Tavolino.
Burlotto  Che ci se finge sopra il baldacchino.
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  Or siedi a dar udienza,
        Ed io poi verrà a farti riverenza.
Burlotto  O che bel Re! O che bel cospettone!
Brunetta Burlotto, Part II
Brunetta  Ad esser tal ci ho gran disposizione.

And so to flee we have to think again about how we want to dress.
Both of us know how to sing a bit.
We can act.
Acting? Eh! Not everyone, who goes onstage to make it a profession becomes successful.
If you speak for me, I am confident I can do a King
To the rehearsal.
We’ll act a scene now on the spot.
I, for one, am ready.
The scene takes place in a room; In which we would like a throne.
I’ll find it, and place it there.
This is an odd man.
In some things he’s just lovely.
This table will be my throne.
If we pretend there’s a canopy above.
Now sit to hold an audience.
And then I will come to give you reverence.
Oh that good King! O what wonderful presence!
To be so greatly at your disposal.

They then act out a scene in which Brunetta, a young shepherdess, has come to ask for the right to take water from the stream by her hovel. Burlotto, the King, grants her request. Throughout their exchange Brunetta must step out of her character in order to remind Burlotto how he is supposed to act as the King and how it is he should act as an actor. When he reads out an ordinance he forgets that he has to make up what’s on the blank piece of paper he has in his hand. Brunetta’s gentle prodding, thankfully, always prompts him to act properly.

This intermezzo within an intermezzo is particularly interesting because it enacts a scene not dissimilar from the kind that was in the opera seria proper. Brunetta e Burlotto was imbedded in Salvi’s Ginevra, principessa di Scozia, an opera in which a King’s wishes play a
prominent role. The scene has no comparable one in the opera, but the audience that had been watching an opera with a King giving dispensations would then watch an intermezzo duo enact a scene in which one pretends to be a King giving a dispensation.

Then things become especially convoluted. Burlotto innocently asks Brunetta what she thinks of his performance. She replies that she does not think him particularly suited to play royal persons, but perhaps comic ones. Burlotto retorts that she could play his servant girl. They then joke that they would have to give each other stage names. He would be “Corrado,” she “Marchesina.” These of course, are the names of the real actors portraying Burlotto and Brunetta on the stage.

**EXAMPLE 4.4.4 Brunetta e Burlotto, Part II**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burlotto</th>
<th>Brunetta</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ora lasciamo un po la Maestà,</td>
<td>Now let’s leave a bit of the pomp,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E dimmi in verità</td>
<td>And tell me the truth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Che ti par?</td>
<td>What do you think?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu avvilisci il costume, e in parte grave</td>
<td>You debase the costume, and that you won’t succeed in serious parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non ci potrai riuscire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E che ho da fare?</td>
<td>And what would I have to do?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La parte del Buffon puoi recitare.</td>
<td>You can play the part of the buffoon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffone, mo’?</td>
<td>A buffoon, me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sbagliai, del grazioso.</td>
<td>I’m mistaken, of the lover.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E tu, cara Brunetta,</td>
<td>And you, my dear Brunetta,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potresti far la parte di Servetta.</td>
<td>You could play the part of the maid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servetta, mo’?</td>
<td>The maid, me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sbagliai, di Damigella.</td>
<td>I’m mistaken, of the Damsel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come vuoi caro mio.</td>
<td>However you like, my dear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si si: mia bella.</td>
<td>Yes, yes, my pretty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma se fane vogliamo,</td>
<td>But if we want to be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com’ogni Virtuoso, e Canterina,</td>
<td>like every virtuoso and singer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiamiamoci con qualche soprano,</td>
<td>we have to be known by some nicknames,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O pure col cognome.</td>
<td>or just by a surname.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Io mi dirò Corrado.</td>
<td>I’ll call myself Corrado.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Io Marchesina.</td>
<td>I’ll be Marchesina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma ci riusciroemo</td>
<td>But will we succeed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In questo modo poi di recitare?</td>
<td>in this kind of acting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai che vogliamo fare</td>
<td>You know what we want to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proviamo ancora un poco.</td>
<td>Let’s rehearse a bit longer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si mio core.</td>
<td>Yes, my love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faccio io scena di sdegno, e tu d’amore.</td>
<td>I’ll do a scene of outrage, and you of love.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
They then proceed to sing a duet very similar to the type which ended part one. Brunetta hurls insults at Burlotto, and he begs her to understand how much he loves her. All the while they refer to each other as themselves, that is, Corrado and Marchesina.

Example 4.4.5  
*Brunetta e Burlotto, Part II, “Corrado infido / Marchesina Ahi”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brunetta</th>
<th>Burlotto</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corrado infido,</td>
<td>Ah Marchesina,</td>
<td>Disloyal Corrado,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrado ingrato,</td>
<td>Cara, e carina,</td>
<td>Ungrateful Corrado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu m’hai lasciato,</td>
<td>A te ritorno,</td>
<td>You left me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E perché mai?</td>
<td>E notte, e giorno</td>
<td>And why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahi Marchesina,</td>
<td>M’avrai d’intorno</td>
<td>Brunetta dearest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara, e carina,</td>
<td></td>
<td>Do you speak the truth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No no, ch’io provo,</td>
<td>No vo parlarti</td>
<td>No no, I’m practicing,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O! Che piu meglio non puot-</td>
<td>No vo ascoltarti</td>
<td>O! What could possibly go better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>andar</td>
<td>I don’t want to listen to you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingerò piangere.</td>
<td>Vatiene via.</td>
<td>I don’t want to talk to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingerò ridere.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Go away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queste mie lagrime</td>
<td>Brunetta mia</td>
<td>Brunetta dearest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sapranno frangere</td>
<td>Dici da vero?</td>
<td>Do you speak the truth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Il tuo rigor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti puoi uccidere,</td>
<td>Brunetta mia</td>
<td>Brunetta dearest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch’a le tuo lagrime</td>
<td>Dici da vero?</td>
<td>Do you speak the truth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ride il mio cor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or burli ancor?</td>
<td>Brunetta mia</td>
<td>Brunetta dearest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Si si, ch’io burlo.</td>
<td>Dici da vero?</td>
<td>Do you speak the truth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torniam da capo cara/o a provar.</td>
<td>No vo parlarti</td>
<td>Go away.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The music is highly conventional for this type of duet, except for the two lines in which the characters refer back to themselves as characters and not to themselves as actors. This occurs towards the end of the A section when “Marchesina,” doing her “scene of outrage” tells “Corrado” to go away (“Vatiene va”). Burlotto then asks if she really means it (“Brunetta mia / Dici da vero?”). Brunetta must then break character and tell him that she’s only playing her part.
EXAMPLE 4.4.6  D. Sarro, *Brunetta e Burlotto*, Part II, duet finale, mm. 18-30 (folio 105v-160r)
This happens again at the very end of the B section when Burlotto asks Brunetta if she would like to take it from the top. Here they both again break character and become Brunetta and Burlotto again. In both of these instances Sarro leaves the strings behind and slows the bass...
down to quarter notes marked off with quarter rests. He breaks the musical frame just as Brunetta and Burlotto break the theatrical one.

**EXAMPLE 4.4.7  D. Sarro, Brunetta e Burlotto, Part II, duet finale, mm. 35-43 (folio 106r-106v)**
Salvi and Sarro have concocted a very complex situation. When “Corrado” and “Marchesina” break character to return to “Burlotto” and “Brunetta,” they are in fact actually returning to character since the performers are, in real life, Corrado and Marchesina. In order to clarify what is going on here, I will refer to the literary theorist Lucien Dällenbach. His work
describes the use of the *mise en abyme*, which he refers to as “the mirror in the text.”\(^{49}\) Dällenbach defines the *mise en abyme* as “any internal mirror that reflects the whole of the narrative by simple, repeated or ‘specious’ (or paradoxical) duplication.”\(^{50}\) These three types require some explanation. The first type we have encountered already. “Simple duplication” is the use of a play within a play which bears some connection to the play itself (as in *Hamlet*).

This is the type which occurs throughout most of Part II, in which Brunetta and Burlotto enact a fiction within their existing fictional frame. “Indefinite duplication” (or “repeated” duplication) is the recursive appearance of a play within a play which itself has a play in it. “Aporetic duplication” (the specious or paradoxical duplication) is the third type, in which the play within the play turns out to be, in fact, the play itself. Bellini describes Carlo Goldoni’s metatheatrical comedy *La bella verità* (1762) as one of the few examples of such metatheatre in the repertory.\(^{51}\) Her reference to the art of Maurits Escher helps illuminate Dällenbach’s concept. Escher’s *Drawing Hands* (1948) shows two hands on paper holding pencils drawing the other hand. We have a theatrical version of that occurring in the Part II finale duet of Brunetta and Burlotto.

Two actors pretending to be characters pretend to be the actors they actually are. But whereas Escher’s drawing shows two perfectly formed hands, our intermezzo reveals the seams between the various layers. By having Burlotto become confused and switch between characters Salvi reveals the various levels at which the scene is operating. In these instances the scene reverts to the first type in which there is simply one embedded performance. Dällenbach accounts for this

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\(^{50}\) ibid., 36

occurrence and suggests that the three types of *mise en abyme* are “trinitary” in nature. The concept is not compromised by the switching back and forth between types.

There is yet one more level on which this scene enacts the third “aporetic” type of *mise en abyme*. Brunetta and Burlotto are pretending to perform a finale duet, which, of course, they are in fact performing. As we noticed above, their ability to stay in character was only partial and so we do not have a complete example of the “aporetic” variety. But formally, as a finale duet, the scene which is supposed to be embedded does enclose itself. It also pokes fun at its own convention by having the participants agree verbally to perform the da capo.

What is fascinating is that in the moments in which Brunetta and Burlotto step back into their original characters the music essentially breaks down. In the embedded performance—the one in which they are pretending to perform as themselves—the strings hurriedly accompany the vocal line. But at the points mentioned above (at the ends of sections A and B when they return to “Brunetta” and “Burlotto”) the music is stripped bare and the continuo only lumbers along. This is remarkable because on the dramatic level the audience is able to keep track of the stacked levels of fiction (at least for the most part). They are aware that the characters are performing the roles of other people. On the musical level, however, the audience is not able to discern a similar stacking of levels. Brunetta and Burlotto do not sing with a different musical language than “Corrado” and “Marchesina.” When the actors revert back to the level of the characters of Brunetta and Burlotto there appears to be no musical activity at all. This is humorous because it draws attention to the fact that Burlotto is silly enough to believe what his “Marchesina” is saying. The musical action stops as the dramatic action pauses and the characters step out of character. But it is ironic that when they sing as themselves (as Corrado and Marchesina) they sing an aria, but when they sing as their characters they sing in something more closely
resembling recitative. The further away they get from actual speech, the closer they get to being themselves. Corrado and Marchesina—the performers—therefore appear to be as much a performance as the characters they perform on the stage. Returning to Abel’s dictum, the world is a stage and their lives as performers are a dream.

The music, in this capacity, does frame our perception of the scene. It helps clarify the various metatheatrical levels that we pass through in the course of their duet. Though the music is not overly sophisticated, it nevertheless assists the libretto in its complex treatment of several levels of fiction.

4.5 Metatheatrical Music in the Intermezzo

As we saw above, the breakdown of musical language serves to enhance a metatheatrical effect suggested in the libretto. But the intermezzo repertory also contains music which frames moments of metatheatricality in a more artful way. One of the most famous examples is explored by Alice Bellini. Metastasio’s L’impresario delle canarie—like La Dirindina—is metatheatrical by nature. It is an intermezzo about an impresario, Nibbio, from the Canary Islands who arrives backstage to convince the soprano Dorina to take a contract at his opera house. He has prepared for her an aria to sing (her complaints that she cannot are quoted in chapter 3). The aria, “Amor prepara,” is performed by Dorina with interjections of encouragement from Nibbio. Bellini suggests that Sarro has composed an “ideal” aria in 6/4 which is interspersed with Nibbio’s “real” interjections in 3/4. The metrical structure of the
work therefore serves to clarify the two dramatic frames which are occurring. Bellini remarks that this does not suggest that separate dramatic frames are inserted in sequence, but rather that there are two concurrent dramatic frames occurring simultaneously. Our attention is drawn to one at a time as suggested by the libretto, the character speaking and, in the case of this aria, by the metrical shifts.

Meta-operatic scores mirror this narrative process: when realistic music is performed, the music that supports the entire opera is still there—it may be confined to the background for a while, but does not go away. The conflict arises when the two levels of fiction (and of music) are brought to the foreground at the same time, and fixed (or recorded) within the same closed number, with occasionally paradoxical results (such as the metrical shifts mentioned above).52

Erving Goffman’s concept of “frames” helps to clarify what occurs onstage. He writes that in the normal course of experience we focus on a particular event which holds our attention. We interpret this experience through a “frame.” Goffman suggests that if multiple events are occurring simultaneously one has the ability to “disattend”—to ignore—what is going on in the other events.53 For example, when attending the opera one usually chooses to focus on the stage action and ignore any chatter, coughing or rustling in the house. These things may catch our attention, but we attempt to filter them out and don’t attach them to the experience of the opera as a work of art—we keep it out of that frame of interpretation. If our neighbour unwraps a lozenge we do not confuse that with part of the operatic work. In musical terms something similar can occur. The composer can choose to ignore what is going on in a particular event onstage musically in order to concentrate an event elsewhere onstage. Sarro, therefore, helps frame the audience’s attention by “disattending” to certain musical events and composing only those which occur within the frame. When Dorina sings, Nibbio and his competing metre fall


silent. Sarro helps the audience temporarily “disattend” to his onstage musical world in order to concentrate on Dorina’s performance of the aria. In this example, Sarro has shown his ability to treat two competing levels of fiction in musical terms. Both Dorina and Nibbio occupy different levels of onstage fiction and so have concomitantly different musical languages. In the Brunetta e Burlotto example, he only chose to sustain one event at a time.

This kind of interweaving of musical languages Sarro composed is unusual. More common in the repertory is the breakdown of musical material of the kind we saw above. Such moments often involve not only the breaking of character, but as we’ll see, the reference and parody of certain operatic conventions.

Hasse’s Dorilla e Balanzone features an aria which parodies the simile aria of the type we explored in 4.3. The rich but crass Balanzone, unsuccessful in his attempts to meet with Dorilla’s mistress, sings of his infatuation in a buffa da capo aria. The A section is entirely typical of the comic genre in both words and music. The text makes use of questo/quello wordplay and many action verbs. The music sports gruff octave leaps and patter passages. The text of the B section is a silly take on the simile aria.

**Example 4.5.1 Dorilla e Balanzone, Part II, “M’ave Amore già sbalordito”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M’ave Amor già sbalordito</th>
<th>My Amor has stunned me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E sconvolto m’ha il cervello;</td>
<td>and upset my mind;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bramo questo e fuggo quello,</td>
<td>I crave this and escape that,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prendo quello e lascio questo;</td>
<td>I take that and leave this;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ed in somma delle somme confuso,</td>
<td>So to sum it all up I’m confused,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son stordito, e non so quel che mi far.</td>
<td>I’m stunned, and I don’t know what I’m doing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Son qual pianta fra due venti, | I’m like a tree between two winds, |
| Son qual vento fra due piante, | I’m like the wind between two trees, |
| Son qual nave in mezzo all’onda, | I’m like a ship in the middle of a wave, |
| Son qual onda in mezzo al mar. | I’m like a wave in the middle of the sea. |
| Son qual nave fra due piante...No, | I’m like a ship between two trees ... No, |
| Son qual pianta in mezzo al mar, | I’m like a tree in the middle of the sea, |
Hasse creates a wind machine in music for the B section. The vocal line continues with patter and vocal leaps, but the strings accompany the line with scalar passages of thirty-second notes.

Example 4.5.2  J.A. Hasse, *Dorilla e Balanzone*, Part II, “M’ave Amore già sbalordito”
At measure 40 the music suddenly stops at the point at which the phrase would normally elide with the next. One imagines that Balanzone would perform some mock-thoughtful gestures as he tried to remember how the rest of the piece is supposed to go. He decides on an ending which is incorrect, but the music is not similarly incorrect. It continues with a literal repeat of the material. The repetition of the last two lines is superfluous as the text had already been set and the music had, at measure 39, arrived at its tonal goal of G minor. But Burlotto was too caught up in his simile and had to continue on incorrectly. In this case the metatheatrical moment—the moment which draws attention to the artifice of the aria—is again a moment in which the music gives out. Silence defines the fictional level at which Balanzone conjures up his thoughts. The level at which he performs his aria—the level the audience is exposed to through Hasse’s music—is in the familiar style of an intermezzo’s bass aria.

Some metatheatrical music in the intermezzo repertory is more subtle in its construction. Girolamo Gigli’s libretto for *La Dirindina* (1715, see chapter 1) is of course firmly in the
metatheatrical vein. It is a satire of the operatic business with its bad lead sopranos, profligate castratos, stage mothers and horny music masters. One of its arias, “Queste vostre pupillette,” uses a musical analogy to describe the visual charms of the eponymous Dirindina who, despite her mediocre singing abilities, is on her way to great success because of her obvious physical beauty. The aria is sung by Liscione, her castrato confidante. He attempts to convince Dirindina that she will be an enormous success in the theatrical world after she has just been given a contract.

**EXAMPLE 4.5.3  Girolamo Gigli, *La Dirindina*, Part II, “Queste vostre pupillette”**

| Queste vostre pupillette,     | These eyes of yours,                  |
| tanto vive e tanto nere,      | so alive and so dark,                |
| son due note armoniose        | are two harmonious notes             |
| fatte al metro d’ogni cor.    | timed to the metre of every heartbeat. |

| Son due nuove minuette        | They are two new minuets             |
| della danza delle sfere;      | from the dance of the spheres;       |
| son due chiavi luminose       | they are two shining clefs           |
| pel concerto d’ogni amor.     | for the concerto of every love.      |

The first stanza suggests the musical analogy. The second provides the inspiration for the form of the aria. The text is set as a lilting two-part minuet—a musical joke on the simile of Dirindina’s eyes being like “due nuove minuette.” Scarlatti further obliges Gigli’s poetic flight of fancy by setting the piece in D major, a key with “due chiavi luminose.”

These correlations are the source of humour in an otherwise serious-sounding cavatina. Each couplet follows the familiar versification plan for *seria* arias of the period with three *ottonarii* with *piano* endings and a final *settenario* capped with a *tronco* (eschewing the *sdrucciolato* ending common in humorous arias). This staid textual approach is mirrored in the music which remains within the ambit of minuet propriety. There is of course the potential for humour in the performance of the aria. The scene itself is ironic. Liscione clearly harbours no truly romantic feelings for Dirindina. Theirs is a platonic friendship (and one cannot escape the implication that Liscione is homosexual). A 1985 television production of *La Dirindina* (the year of its first publication in a critical edition) 54 played up the effete character of Liscione by having the falsettist, Gianfranco Mari, squeak out the aria in a kind of high-pitched whine rather than using a more cultivated counter-tenor sound. Nothing is known of the original performer, Tommaso Bizzarri Sanese (which Francesco Degrada suggests may have been a pseudonym).

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54 Francesco Degrada, *La Dirindina* (Milan: Ricordi, 1985). Degrada was also the continuo keyboardist for this production. The production was broadcast on Radiotelevision Svizzera, featuring the Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana conducted by Marc Andreae. Peter Bissegger’s set design created an appropriate setting for a meta-theatrical work; the intermezzo takes place on a giant harpsichord, which acts as a giant set piece. Liscione performs his aria as a dance on the dual-manual keyboard.
We do not even know if he was a castrato, as his part was written in the tenor clef in Part I and the soprano clef in Part II. Given that the libretto makes a lot of comedic hay of the fact that Liscione is a eunuch, it seems unlikely that Scarlatti would have envisioned the role performed in a tenor’s range. The aria’s mercilessly high tessitura—it contains five a’s and never dips below a g’—suggests either that Sanese had a remarkably lovely voice above the staff or that Scarlatti accepted that his voice may strain in performance. One wonders if Scarlatti here sacrificed his singer just to keep his “two shining clefs” in D major. This aria suggests that even in an early stage of the intermezzo’s development composers found opportunities to apply a metatheatrical sensibility to the practice of composition.

4.6 CONCLUSION: METATHEATRE AND THE AESTHETICS OF MUSICAL HUMOUR

An obsession with the “natural” pervades all forms of aesthetic criticism in the latter three-quarters of the eighteenth-century. As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the prevailing view that the comic intermezzo is the manifestation of a kind of “natural” comic expression is largely the retroactive application of mid-century aesthetic notions onto an earlier time and repertory. Many musical features are shared between the mid-century and the works we’ve explored here from the 1710s and 1720s. But we have also seen how a metatheatrical

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55 Sanese did not participate in the pastoral work which replaced La Dirindina in performance during Ambleto. The castrato Domenico Fontana took the female part of Elpina (as he was in La Dirindina) and Michele Salvatici played the baritone role of Silvano. See Sartori 13383 in Claudio Sartori, I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800: catalogo analitico con 16 indici (Cuneo: Bertola & Locatelli, 1990-1992), vol. 5. Since the work was intended to be performed in Rome a castrato had to play the female lead.
sensibility pervades the entire genre of the intermezzo. This contrasts sharply with the ideals of the natural as expressed by philosophers and dramatic theorists in the mid-eighteenth century—especially those disposed to French ideals (like Diderot, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Esteban de Arteaga). As we noted in the introduction, for Diderot the Italian comic style (as presented during the *querelle des bouffons*) was the ideal musical expression. But the intermezzo, as it was, was not so natural. Indeed, many of the basic features of the intermezzo’s comic style shatter any sense of the natural by exposing the artificial means of theatrical production. Whether containing references to the actors playing a part (as in *Brunetta e Burlotto*) or parodying musical convention, the intermezzo always reminded the audience of the operatic work as a calculated fiction.

The intermezzo belongs more properly to a different critical debate that occurred sometime earlier than the mid-eighteenth century. The dramatic criticisms of Muratori, Crescimbeni and Gravina formed the backdrop to the humour of the intermezzo. In the humorous treatises by Martello and Marcello we see further examples of how the criticisms of operatic practice were made manifest as a series of tropes about the excesses of opera. “Butterflies” and “little boats” became metonyms for the medium’s failure to achieve verisimilitude. To critics and humourists alike, therefore, opera was nothing more than a collection of stock conventions divorced from any dramatic purpose.

Metatheatre in the intermezzo shows us, once again, that the genre’s humour is dependent upon earlier theatrical models and upon a high degree of theatrical intelligence. One would not

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56 On the Relationship between Lessing and Diderot see Robert Heitner, “Concerning Lessing’s Indebtedness to Diderot,” *Modern Language Notes* 65, no. 2 (1950): 82-88. Diderot was particularly concerned with the “illusory” nature of theatrical works. He wrote that “If one is so curious about the artist, then the illusion must be very weak, one must sense little that is natural and yet be all the more aware of the artifice.” He, more than Diderot, expressed this necessity in explicitly theatrical terms. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie, Sechszunddreissigstes Stück* (September 1, 1767), *Werke: Vol. 2 Kritische Schriften. Philosophische Schriften. München*, edited by Jost Perfahl and Otto Mann (Munich: Winkler, 1969): 425-26
laugh and Marchesina’s and Corrado’s jokes about their personalities, their skills as actors and their conventional modes of representation if they were not well educated theatregoers. Humour, as Kozintsev noted, by its nature asks the audience to adopt the author’s position and view the joke from the “metalevel.” Understanding humour means not merely getting the joke, but getting how the joke came about by understanding the author’s perspective.

This point has been made several times regarding comedy in the music of Haydn. Mark Evan Bonds, for example, made clear that the brilliance of Haydn’s instrumental humour was its ability to capitalize on audiences’ understanding of convention.57 In the case of the famous surprise symphony, “Haydn does more than merely surprise us: he directs our attention toward his own open manipulation of the various artifices that we as listeners, through our familiarity with this idiom, have come to expect.”58

What Bonds asserts about the work of Haydn can easily be said about the metatheatrical comedic devices of the intermezzo. Comedy in the theatre obviously contains many more variables. An audience does not simply laugh at the music. But by the manipulation of the intermezzo’s multiple modes of presentation—its music, its text, its gesture, its costuming, its scenography—producers of opera were able to create a humorous work of art by calling attention to the act of performance itself. The audience’s expectations of how things are supposed to go are thwarted. But so are the audience’s illusions about what the operatic experience is. The kinds of metatheatrical devices which generate comedy in the intermezzo make the audience always aware of the art form itself. They annihilate any ability to “suspend disbelief.”

58 Ibid., 71.
I do not intend here to draw a facile line between the humour of the intermezzo and the musical humour of Haydn (thereby crediting it with not only classical style, but with the notion of Romantic irony in music). Many connections exist, but there is a wide temporal and generic gap that is filled with many books and dissertations. What I do want to draw attention to is the fact that in both Haydn’s music and the music of the intermezzo comedy is dependent upon manipulation of musical material for comic effect. It is not a natural phenomenon, but rather one which is fundamentally artificial. Behind every musical joke is the calculated understanding of an audience’s expectations. The intermezzo was saturated with an understanding of itself as a work of fiction—with a metatheatrical awareness—from the very start. As we saw at the start of this chapter it owed its existence to a criticism of opera which denigrated the very basis of the form. No doubt influenced by this cultural criticism, intermezzo librettists found humour in making fun of opera, of performing and of the intermezzo itself. Composers’ ability to support these turns musically is varied. In some cases they aurally composed the cues found in the music (as in the aria in *La Dirindina*). In other cases they composed music which exposed differing layers of fiction (as in the duet from *Dorina e Nibbio*). Most of the time they broke the musical frame and resorted to recitative or silence to accomplish their metatheatrical aims. In the very process of doing so these composers have revealed to us a truth about the practice of musical comedy that we will explore in the final chapter: musical humour cannot happen on its own, but is dependent upon the thwarting of listeners’ expectation.
5.1 INTRODUCTION

The intermezzo was a genre which thrived on playing games with its audience. Chapter three examined how composers were able to adapt the dialogic style of comedy typified by the “elastic gag” into the musical line of arias. This style of comedy teased audiences with its unpredictability—the angular musical line poking and prodding them into laughter. Chapter four examined how librettists and composers played with audience expectations once again—by breaking the fourth wall in words, performance and music. Each chapter has explored how librettists and composers drew on contemporary social circumstances in writing their comedy. In sum, the intermezzo was a genre that engaged the intellectual faculties of its audience in a demanding way. Opera’s multi-modality has always engaged the senses in a rich way—but comedy demands even more. Given this evidence, it is clear that we must abandon our notion of comedy in the intermezzo as mere clowning. What, then, is the nature of musical comedy in the intermezzo? To answer this question, this chapter examines the musical repertory of the
intermezzo synchronically using the contemporary incongruity theory of humour. Incongruity theory helps to illustrate that humour in the intermezzo is not the result of deficient or simplistic musical structures, but rather the conscious manipulation of established musical practice. In this way the intermezzo is not “natural” and forward looking. Just as its literary practice is indebted to seventeenth century musical literary comedic forms, its musical practice is indebted to earlier musical forms as well.

Writing about comedy is difficult. The introduction to this thesis surveyed some of the major discussions about humour scholarship. There we encountered philosophers, neuroscientists, psychologists, historians, dramatists, composers and a few musicologists. Their discussion about humour has been going on for over 2000 years and the results have not been satisfactory. These results are so far tentative, partial and contentious. They are, however, no less important for all their inability to explain to us why it is that we laugh when we do. Recent scholarship in particular has emphasized the necessity of humour to the human experience. John Morreall, a professor of religious studies and long time writer on humour, has perhaps been the most vocal supporter of humour studies in the humanities. He explicitly frames humour in moral terms, laying out the importance of humour to wisdom and the practice of an ethical life. In doing so he suggests he is merely recovering the views of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. He writes:

My approach is that of Aristotle, who coined the term *eutrapelia*, and Thomas Aquinas, who defined *eutrapalia* as “a pleasant person with a happy cast of mind who gives his words and deeds a cheerful turn.” Both considered humor, under the right circumstances, a virtue, that is, a habit that was an *areté*, an excellence.¹

Morreall suggests, following Aquinas and Aristotle, that humour is virtuous in appropriate amounts. All three caution that too much humour can be completely hedonistic. But that there are times in which a pleasant disposition fostered through the use of humour can be a necessary antidote to the stresses of life.

Morreall’s ideas are based upon his theory of humour. He suggests that laughter results from the appreciation of an incongruity. One’s understanding of incongruity as humour is dependent upon one’s “disengagement”—one’s ability to stand back and appreciate the absurdity of the joke. Humour is therefore an aesthetic experience which is not necessarily directly related to the affective state of laughter. This “disengagement” can have negative consequences, he concedes, but in most situations it is a salutary method of dealing with life.

Going further, Morreall states that this “disengagement” has additional benefits. Not only is the enjoyment of humour a beneficial coping mechanism, but it also fosters honesty, critical thinking, skepticism, patience, flexibility, empathy, collegiality and understanding. In short, humour can make you wise. He is explicitly reacting against several centuries of negative views of humour—both as an aesthetic entity and a moral behaviour. He situates his position historically, suggesting that humour was not always beneficial, but that our changing conception of humour and its changing practice have made it so.

[...] I think that there has been a general trend toward virtuous humour over the last three centuries. Western culture has made moral progress since ancient and medieval times, when the superiority theory was the only systematic way to think about humor. Indeed, my argument about how humor can embody a morally praiseworthy self-transcendence would hardly have made sense before the Enlightenment.

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2 See Morreall’s chapter “The Glass is Half-Empty and Half-Full: Comic Wisdom,” in Comic Relief, 140-145.

Morreall disagrees with proponents of the superiority theory of humour and those who in recent times continue to promote it as a viable theory. He is sympathetic to scholars who continue to explore the negative consequences of humour (especially in practice in racist and sexist humour) and is generally circumspect about his claims—he concedes he doesn’t have empirical evidence to fully support them. But it is in line with a trend within psychological scholarship to emphasize the positive aspects of humour. Much recent scholarly work on the practice of humour in the workplace, in psychotherapy and in everyday life has catalogued the many great benefits that humour holds for team building, easing depression and reducing stress.

Morreall’s contention about the less prejudicial humour of the modern era is also somewhat in line with humour as it is practiced in the history of opera. In the 1640s in Venice, for example, it was all the rage to include comic scenes with lower class characters who are meant to be unfortunate wretches—absurdly sexual, physically awkward or afflicted with a speech impediment. Iro in Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse* (1639) is described as “a parasite” and sings his awkward tunes with a stutter. Demo in Cavalli’s *Giasone* (1649) similarly sings with a stutter, but is additionally physically grotesque. His swagger and confidence about his

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4 For more on Charles Gruner, see Chapter 3.


body is meant to be preposterously funny. Both characters have a common ancestor in the figure of Tartaglia from the *commedia dell’arte*. By contrast, humour in the intermezzo is usually less crude and directed at behaviours rather than physical maladies. The intermezzo’s characters are also almost always redeemed in the end. No matter how poor their behaviour over the course of the work—be it gold-digging, lechery, gambling or neglect—they resolve to live happily and be better spouses in their final duets. This softer approach to humour can perhaps foster certain virtues along the lines that Morreall describes. By “disengaging” one’s emotional investment in the characters and considering their actions rationally an audience member would decide not to behave like the characters onstage. An audience member would not wish to be laughed at and would avoid those behaviours that were humorous. But this argument—an essentially Renaissance one—requires some elements of the superiority theory to work. The two theories are not mutually exclusive, however, and this continues to be an area of debate within humour studies.

Incongruity theory nevertheless tells us something vital about humour: laughter requires an evaluative state of mind. Humour is not funny if we do not understand it. It requires that we appreciate the joke from the perspective of the joke teller. As we saw in the previous chapter, humour is in some ways a metacommunicative process. Jokes—whether they are about lawyers, ethnic minorities or politicians—are at their heart about the pitfalls of communication. Incongruity theory seeks to understand the mechanics of humour by taking us through the thought process of the interpreter of the joke. Understanding humour in the intermezzo therefore opens up a window into the eighteenth-century mind. This chapter explores various types of

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musical “jokes” through the perspective of incongruity theory. Just as Morreall suggests, we
find that humour in the intermezzo is not about cruelly laughing at one’s inferiors. The
intermezzo’s humour is instead about the pitfalls of writing music.

I will first summarize the current state of humour theory with respect to the incongruity
theory. The incongruity theory is not one monolithic theory; nor is it bounded by a single
disciplinary concern. I will therefore discuss the work of the most prominent thinkers from
literature, linguistics and psychology to highlight the shared features of their respective theories.
After I have marshalled evidence for our unified theory, I will explore its application to Troy’s
four methods of creating humour: “comic realism,” repetition, parody and changes in tempo and
metre. The theory of incongruity helps to show us that these various tricks for creating humour
are not as distinct as they first appear. They are all merely epiphenomena of a method of
creating humour shared by all intermezzo librettists and composers.

5.2 MUSICAL HUMOUR AND THE INCONGRUITY THEORY

Since the 1960s the notion of incongruity has been central to the most popular theories of
humour. Dating to the late eighteenth century, the incongruity theory encompasses a number of
different theoretical models of humour proffered by philosophers, linguists and cognitive
psychologists. While there are subtle differences between them, all of the theories are based
upon the idea that every humorous situation contains some incongruity. We laugh when we
either perceive or resolve this incongruity.
James Beattie, a figure in the Scottish Enlightenment, was one of the first philosophers to suggest incongruity as an explanation for the production of humour. He wrote that

[...] laughter arises from the view of two or more inconsistent, unsuitable or incongruous parts or circumstances, considered as united in one complex object or assemblage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual relation from the peculiar manner in which the mind takes notice of them.\(^9\)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard and Arthur Schopenhauer.\(^10\) In the first half of the twentieth century the “relief” or psychoanalytic theory of Freud and the writings of Henri Bergson were the most popular explanations for humour. Bergson’s work has been variously interpreted as belonging to either the superiority theory or the incongruity theory. It contains some elements of both but favours the superiority theory in its tone. In the 1960s humour studies, like much else, began to change. A number of authors started advocating some version of the incongruity theory.

No one version of the theory is satisfactory to explain all elements of a joke. Part of the problem is the very complex nature of humour. The intermezzo repertory makes this point clear. Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s \textit{La serva padrona} was more successful than the \textit{opera seria} with which it was written to be performed: \textit{Il prigioniero superbo}. The musical languages of the two works, however, do not differ as sharply as one may think when one thinks of the differences between comedy and tragedy. The first full-length arias for the male protagonists of each work, for example, share a great number of musical features in common. Sostrate’s “Premi, o tiranno altero” and Uberto’s “Sempre in contrasti” are both “rage arias,” both feature highly periodic phrasing and both feature disjunct vocal lines, octave leaps and abrupt changes in texture. Given these similarities, what is it that makes “Sempre in contrasti” sound like a \textit{buffa} aria? I suggest


\(^{10}\) For a complete review of these philosophers’ views on humour see Morreall, \textit{Taking Laughter Seriously} (Albany: State University of New York, 1983), 15-19.
that each version of the incongruity theory gives us a clue as to why we interpret Uberto to be funny and Sostrate to be serious.

“Premi, o tiranno altero” introduces the character of Sostrate—the deposed King of Norway who is now being held prisoner by the conquering King of the Goths. This aria shows off Sostrate’s noble character by suggesting that in captivity he will yet be a greater man than his captor.

EXAMPLE 5.2.1 G.B. Pergolesi, “Premi, o tiranno altero,” Il Prigioniero Superbo, Act I, scene i.

| Premi, o tiranno altero,       | You win, haughty tyrant.         |
| Quel soglio ov’io regnai.     | that throne on which I reigned. |
| Ma in questi ceppi mira       | But in these shackles I aspire  |
| Quella che tu non hai,         | to have that which you do not:  |
| Alta virtù e valor.           | great honour and valour.        |
| Prepara ai danni miei         | Make ready against me           |
| Tutto il tuo sdegno e l’ira.  | all your anger and rage.        |
| Ch’io benché prigioniero       | Though I am a prisoner          |
| Sempre dirò che sei            | I will always say that you are  |
| Un vile usurpator.             | a cowardly usurper.             |

Sostrate’s vocal line begins with a somewhat noble scalar profile, though it does feature a prominent downward octave leap. The high tessitura and octave descent does not sound as silly sung by a tenor as it might in the throat of a baritone. Supported by a romanesca in the bass, the line holds its dignity while capturing Sostrate’s rage.

EXAMPLE 5.2.2 G.B. Pergolesi, Il prigioniero superbo, “Premi, o tiranno altero,” mm. 12-16.\textsuperscript{11}

Uberto is a man similarly held captive, but this time by his disobedient servant, Serpina.

Exasperated by her fickleness and insolence he complains to Serpina and seeks affirmation from his mute manservant, Vespone.

**EXAMPLE 5.2.3**  

(a Serpina)  
Sempre in contrasti  
con te si sta,  
e qua e là;  
e su e giù  
e si e no;  
or questo basti;  
finir si può.

(to Serpina)  
Always in conflict  
with you,  
and here and there;  
and up and down  
and yes and no;  
now this is enough;  
it’s finished.

(a Vespone)  
Ma che ti pare? ah!  
Ho io a crepare?  
Signor mio, no.

(to Vespone)  
What do you think? Eh!  
Will I have to die?  
No sir.

(a Serpina)  
Però dovrai pur sempre  
piangere la tua disgrazia,  
e allor dirai che ben ti sta.

(to Serpina)  
But you still  
cry about your misfortune,  
And then you say that you’re doing fine.
(a Vespone) (to Vespone)
Che dici tu? What did you say?
Non è così? Is it not so?
Ah! Che! No! Si, Ah! What! No! Yes,
ma così è. It is.

Written in multi-stanza versi quinarí (a somewhat unusual offering), the text doesn’t formally have the same gravity as Sostrate’s two-stanza model in settenari and senari. Pergolesi’s music is similarly somewhat clumsier, relying on leaping chordal figures for the vocal line. This is partly due to the change in register. It is entirely characteristic of the Neapolitan style to have bass figures which outline the chordal accompaniment. Given that Uberto is a bass his melodic line is necessarily less elegant than Sostrate’s. However, both arias share a brisk energy and similar melodic elements.

**EXAMPLE 5.2.4** G.B. Pergolesi, *La serva padrona*, “Sempre in contrasti,” mm. 7-11.12

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Though the arpeggiated melodic line is a common feature of arias for basses in the Neapolitan style, it does appear in other musical contexts as well. The ritornello of Sostrate’s aria treads similar ground with its leaping thirds figure.

Example 5.2.5  G.B. Pergolesi, *La serva padrona*, “Premi, o tiranno altero,” mm. 5-7

Both of these disjointed leaping figures do share an important feature in common: they serve to heighten the tension of the musical line. They appear after the opening melodic gambit has established the melodic trajectory. Breaking up the musical line with rests and these slightly inelegant figures create a sense of excitement about a coming resolution. They hint at two possible interpretations of the musical language: one funny and one simply energetic. What Pergolesi does to resolve this pent up tension helps us identify the difference between his humorous style of composition and his serious. This moment of resolution comes with an abrupt change in texture.

Both “Premi, o tiranno altero” and “Sempre in contrasti” feature a sudden shift in texture after the opening vocal phrase. In one the effect is humorous; in the other it is decidedly not. At measure 17 of Sostrate’s aria Pergolesi suddenly halts forward motion with a fermata and changes the texture from one of which featured a swiftly walking bass line to one with a sustained dominant pedal. This sudden shift makes sense textually as Sostrate’s thoughts change from his angered defeat to his inner resolve. He sings “Ma in questi ceppi […]” (“But in these
shackles […]”); the coordinating conjunction behaves as both a literary and musical cue to switch direction. The music, once brash, now softens.

Example 5.2.6  G.B. Pergolesi, *La serva padrona*, “Premi, o tiranno altero,” mm. 17-19

Uberto’s aria features a similar change in texture at measure 13. Pergolesi arrests harmonic motion and composes an extended dominant pedal as he did in Sostrate’s aria. Here, however, the bass remains more active than in Sostrate’s aria, outlining the triad. Uberto’s line similarly stops all motion and bellows out repeated Cs. The musical crudity is amplified by the text: “basti” ("enough"). Voiced bilabial plosives make for especially comical expressions of crankery (like “bah humbug”).

Example 5.2.7  G.B. Pergolesi, “Sempre in contrasti,” mm. 12-15
Since this moment features a collision of different musical perspectives it could be interpreted in various ways. There is an inherent ambiguity in the musical content until now—the texture of Uberto’s aria might be humorous or serious. Pergolesi creates musical vigour through similar means. Most incongruity theorists rely on the notion of competing interpretations of a text to explain its humour. There are currently two schools of thought on the subject—one psychological and the other linguistic/semiological. The psychological school has its modern roots in the work of Arthur Koestler; the linguistic school begins with work of Algirdas Greimas.

Koestler’s massive *The Act of Creation* (1966) was a wide ranging study of creativity. Only a small portion concerned humour, which he thought belonged to a broad spectrum of acts which stemmed from the creative impulse. Central to his thesis was the notion of what he called “bisociation”—the drawing together of two disparate ideas or patterns of thought. “Bisociation” was common to all great intellectual accomplishments, including science, literature and humour.
The only difference was the result of this practice: an affective reaction, a new understanding or a new idea. He writes:

when two independent matrices of perception or reasoning interact with each other the result (as I hope to show) is either a collision ending in laughter, or their fusion in a new intellectual synthesis, or their confrontation in an aesthetic experience.\(^\text{13}\)

In humour, the matrix is a particular storyline. This matrix is then interrupted and contrasted with an alternative storyline at the moment of the punch line. Laughter erupts when one “bisociates” or perceives the incongruity between the two possible stories or frames of reference. Humour, for Koestler, is the simultaneous perception of two perspectives.

One of the benefits of Koestler’s theory was that it accounted for the various reactions to the “bisociation” of different matrices. One does not laugh at a scientific discovery, for example, or at the downfall of a tragic hero, though for Koestler these two events similarly are the results of “bisociation.” To explain this he puts forward an early version of what has become known as reversal theory—the theory that humans can switch between cognitive and emotional states (discussed below). For Koestler, the comic, the scientific and the aesthetic require three distinct modes of engagement. For the comic, one must approach the material with some measure of “aggression” (here Koestler’s theory takes on some element of the superiority theory). For scientific discovery one approaches with a “neutral” attitude. When approaching art one must be “sympathetic and identificatory.”\(^\text{14}\)

The listener would therefore approach Sostrate’s aria with a “sympathetic and identificatory” ear. The abrupt change in texture—the moment of bisociation—would therefore not be interpreted as humorous, but rather would elicit the pathos of the audience. The slower

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\(^{14}\) ibid., 27.
tempo and arrested harmonic motion do not mock anything in this context. Instead, they amplify the pathetic nature of Sostrate’s situation. Here contrast is a virtue and not a liability. Sostrate is different—more noble, more reasonable—than his usurper and the musical language confirms this. We move from an expression of anger (or a “matrix” of anger, to use Koestler’s terms) to the parallel expression of resolve. This moment of bisociation only increases the tragic nature of Sostrate’s situation since his anger is well-placed and moderated by his good character.

By contrast, Uberto’s sudden shouting and sustained line is humorous, in Koestler’s terms, because the audience approaches the material with “aggression.” Harmonic motion ceases, as it does in Sostrate’s aria, but here the sudden registral shift and change in texture causes laughter. The “matrices” are in an inverse relationship to those bisociated in Sostrate’s aria. Uberto moves from a somewhat sympathetic situation (he complains that his servant is unreliable) to a more laughable one (he becomes preposterously angry). The flat melodic profile and suspended harmonic motion in this circumstance elicit the listener’s aggressive feelings of superiority. This is not the way a noble operatic character deals with his anger. Just as Morreall’s conception of the incongruity is not free of some element of the superiority theory, neither is Koestler’s.

Koestler’s work was most influential on cognitive psychologists. Other authors in the 1960s developed theories in the sphere of linguistics which mirror many of his concepts but have a different scholarly orientation. Most of these linguistic theories owe their inspiration to Algirdas Greimas. Though his *Sémantique Structurale* contains only a very brief discussion of jokes, his broader discussion of what he termed “isotopy” has been important to humour theorists.15 “Isotopy” is a concept in semiotics that states that all semantic units of a text support

a single interpretation of that text. The term quickly came to encompass various phenomena (including non-semantic ones). In 1984 Umberto Eco concluded that “isotopy” was an umbrella term which is defined by “constancy in going in a direction that a text exhibits when submitted to rules of interpretive coherence.”16 On the most basic level, for example, the phrase “I ate an omelet” is isotopic since the verb, “ate,” suggests something edible: “an omelet.” All parts of the sentence support a uniform direction. One eats edible things.

Greimas’s theory suggests that in humour a given narrative sets up an isotopy which the reader comprehends. But there is another isotopy—another plausible reading of the text—which is less obvious and goes unnoticed. Humour occurs when the reader switches from one isotopy to the next. Laughter is the recognition that one’s supposed interpretation of the text has been wrong all along. One laughs when one resolves the incongruity by switching isotopies. Salvatore Attardo refers to this theory as the “isotopy-disjunction model.”17

Greimas’s “isotopy-disjunction model” is particularly effective for explaining textual jokes which have a setup and an obvious punch line. Musically Greimas’s model is more difficult to apply. But one can nevertheless read the first part of Uberto’s aria in terms of its “constancy.” The music up until measure 13 prepares the listener for an aria of complaint, much like Sostrate’s did. However, at measure 13, the listener is then confronted with a musical mode which betrays the temperamental nature of Uberto. Suddenly Serpina’s behaviour does not seem so atrocious—working for a man like Uberto could not be easy either. Given that the music at measure 13 does not live up to our expectations of the measured complaint he has so far expressed, the listener “switches” isotopies. He will reinterpret the text conforming to the new

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opinion of Uberto. In this new reading, the leaping figures are not energetic, but the comical precursor to Uberto’s outburst.

Greimas’s theory was admittedly partial. Subsequent linguistic theorists have expanded and systematized his ideas in order to form a more complete theoretical framework. The most thorough one is the General Theory of Verbal Humour, or GTVH. Proposed by Salvatore Attardo and Victor Raskin, the theory has become one of the most popular interpretive tools in analyzing humour. The theory is based on Victor Raskin’s earlier Semantic-Script Theory of Humour, put forth in his 1985 book *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*.\(^{18}\) Raskin’s theory is similar in almost every respect to Greimas’s. It states that every joke contains two interpretations—two “scripts” which do not correspond to one another. The punch line directs the reader from one script to the next. Raskin termed this “script opposition.” Several years later, Raskin and Attardo worked together to formulate the GTVH, incorporating “script opposition,” or SO, into a more comprehensive theory.\(^{19}\) In this expanded theory, SO became one of six “knowledge resources” required for the comprehension of humour. These six are: “situations,” which are the premises of the joke; “targets,” the people who are the butt of the joke; “narrative strategies,” which are the forms of the joke; “language,” the actual means of telling a joke; “logical mechanisms,” which is the trigger for the reader to engage in the final resource, “script opposition.” A “target” need not always be present in humour. Though Attardo and Raskin first applied their theory to canned jokes, Attardo subsequently discussed its relevance to longer narrative texts which feature multiple moments of humour and not just a single punch line. He suggested that there were smaller “jab lines” which created small moments.

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of humour within longer texts (and dramatic forms, like the sitcom).\textsuperscript{20} Attardo’s analysis attempts to account for a phenomenon which Koestler briefly noted in 1964. Koestler suggested that “higher forms” of humour “do not rely on a single effect but on a series of minor explosions or a continuous state of mild amusement.”\textsuperscript{21}

The GTVH helps categorize the elements required to get the humour of Uberto’s aria. The “situation” is Uberto’s impatience with Serpina’s behaviour; the “narrative strategy” is a da capo aria; the “language” is music. The “logical mechanism”—the means of switching between scripts—is difficult to identify in a musical context. Other theorists, including Morreall, have made the case that it is not even necessary for script opposition to occur.\textsuperscript{22} The opposing scripts, however, are quite clear. The listener first activates the script associated with Uberto’s complaint. Both the text and the music support the listener’s interpretation of Uberto as a man confused and victimized by his servant. The opposing script is that of a man whose inability to control his emotions makes him appear ridiculous. The change in the musical texture at measure 13 creates an incongruity with the previous interpretation. The listener switches to the second script and “solves” the musical problem: Uberto is not a sympathetic figure, he is a buffoon.

All versions of the incongruity stress the importance of the cognitive aspects of listening and understanding. In Sostrate’s aria, the textural change elicits the affective response of sympathy. In Uberto’s case, it activates a cognitive process. The affective response of laughter


\textsuperscript{21} Koestler, 37-38.

\textsuperscript{22} John Morreall, “Verbal Humor without Switching Scripts and without non-bona fide Communication,” \textit{Humor} 14, no. 4 (2004): 393-400.
ensues, but it is a result of the cognitive process of working-out the humour of the aria. Incongruity theory points us towards the idea that humorous musical texts are the result of calculated attempts on the part of the composer to engage the listener’s critical faculties. Tickling the musical funny bone requires more than writing comically preposterous music. It requires the composer to manipulate the listener’s expectations and to make them compare the music they hear against their existing knowledge of musical forms, conventions and taste. Musical incongruities must be solved through what Jerry Suls refers to as a “cognitive rule.” In short, humour is a thinking audience’s game.

This intellectual frame of mind has been described by psychologists who analyze humour in a field known as reversal theory. Though not sufficient to explain laughter on its own, reversal theory does lay out in more concrete terms an aspect of what Koestler was describing in the 1960s—namely, the ability of the individual to adopt different cognitive states when dealing with different situations. Reversal theory was pioneered by research psychologist Michael Apter, who described the individual’s capacity to switch between a “telic,” or goal-oriented state, and a “paratelic,” or play state. An individual in this state was free to play and laugh at

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23 The relationship between humour comprehension and affective emotional response is currently an understudied yet controversial topic in humour studies. For a recent take on their relationship (and a call for more study) see Joshua Shaw, “Philosophy of Humor,” Philosophy Compass 5, no. 2 (2010): 112-126.


Humorous texts, therefore, are those which confirm the \textit{paratelic} mode of engagement with the work.

Thinking about humour as intellectual engagement also helps explain a thorny problem regarding the musical example above. Given that Uberto’s musical language is not new (it is entirely within the accepted style of a \textit{buffo} bass aria) we suspect from the very beginning of the aria that Uberto’s music is humorous. Most comic theories of incongruity usually necessitate that the listener is unaware of the alternate interpretation of a text until the moment of incongruity (the punch line). A listener familiar with the musical style of Pergolesi will be able hear the ambiguity in the musical material of both arias—the moment of incongruity (the changes in texture mentioned above) will therefore not come as a surprise and according to the theory not be funny. But incongruity theory has never been particularly successful at describing why jokes are funny a second or third time. One would suspect that jokes which are most incongruous or surprising are the funniest. But one study from 1974 showed that subjects most enjoy jokes in which they can predict the punch line.\footnote{Howard R. Pollio and Rodney W. Mers, “Predictability and the Appreciation of Comedy,” \textit{Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society} 4, no. 4-A (1974): 229–232.} Music need not always surprise us, therefore, to be funny. Reversal theory explains that we may find the kind of musical play that occurs humorous because we are in a play state. The sudden shift in texture towards crudeness in Uberto’s aria supports our humorous engagement (our \textit{paratelic} mindset) whereas Sostrate’s

\footnote{One of the most comprehensive treatments of reversal theory and humour appears in Robert S. Wyer and James E. Collins, “A Theory of Humor Elicitation,” \textit{Psychological Review} 99, no. 4 (1992): 663-688. Reversal theory embodies a number of aspects of all the other theories of humour. For this reason research psychologist Rod Martin has suggested that reversal theory may be “a promising framework for an integrative theory of humor” (see Martin, 77). In many ways, however, Apter’s work on the “\textit{paratelic}” is simply the medicalization of the some of the scholarly work on play which had been written by historian and cultural theorist Johan Huizinga and philosopher Roger Callois a half-century earlier. See Johan Huizinga, \textit{Homo Ludens: Versuch einer Bestimmung des Spielelementest der Kultur} (Leipzig: Pantheon Akademische Verlagsanstalt, 1939). Translated as \textit{Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950). Roger Callois, \textit{Les Jeux et les Hommes: Le Masque et le Vertige} (Paris: Gallimard, 1958). Translated as \textit{Man, Play and Games}, by Meyer Barash (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).}
pathetic turn, though no less surprising, elicits our sympathy. The superiority theory (as discussed in chapter three) is also instructive. If the audience is aware that Uberto is soon to erupt in rage they will laugh when he does because they are “in” on the joke. Pergolesi’s use of a standard musical device for creating humour becomes a means of flattering the audience. They laugh because the outcome they predicted occurs.

To what degree, however, must the audience be aware of musical conventions in order to “get” the musical jokes which occur in the intermezzo? Below I examine the four types of musical humour identified by Troy with respect to the incongruity theory. This theory of humour helps point to the various “knowledge resources” required to “get” the humour in the intermezzo. All four types of humour depend upon an understanding of operatic convention and musical language for their humour.

5.3 “Comic Realism”

The phenomenon which Charles Troy called “comic realism” has already been discussed in some detail in chapters three and four. We explored how mimesis was not necessarily funny—indeed it was a prominent feature of many arias of the late baroque period which were quite serious. The incongruity theory of humour can help explain why “comic realism” as it is practiced in the intermezzo is funny.

The fundamental claim of the incongruity theory is that there are two opposing interpretations of a given text. “Comic realism” as a mimetic practice cannot support dual
interpretations. If one imitates a bird, for example, there are no competing interpretations of what the singer is imitating. I would like to contend that in the intermezzo, though composers have written imitation into the music, they are not actually referring to natural phenomena. They are instead satirizing the practice of imitation in *opera seria*. Mimetic music in the intermezzo is an explicit reaction against the baroque aria of the affections which was so popular in Venice in the late seventeenth century.

The two most popular forms of “comic realism” in the intermezzo aria are the imitation of military instruments and the imitation of hearts beating. Grullo’s military aria “Il soldato che va in guerra” from Domenico Sarro’s *Moschetta e Grullo* (1727) is one of the funniest examples of its type. Grullo is momentarily tempted to take up Moschetta’s offer of love, but instead resolves that a regimented life in the military is better for a man than the unpredictability of a civilian life in love. The librettist for the intermezzo is not known.

**Example 5.3.1  Moschetta e Grullo, Part II, “Il soldato che va in guerra”**

- Il soldato che va in guerra  The soldier who goes to war
- A combatter si prepara  prepares to do battle
- Quando al suono del tamburo sente far:  when he hears the sound of the drum:
- Ta-ra-pa-tà, ta-pa-tà.

- E poi spara la schiopetta  And then fires his shot
- Quando il suono di trombetta:  at the sound of the trumpet:
- tu-tu-tu, tu-tu-tu, tu-tu-tu,
- Egli sente rimbombar  He hears it echo.

Sarro obliges the librettist’s onomatopoetic fancy by repeating the drum and trumpet sounds many times. The opening ritornello of the piece, with its dactylic martial rhythm, sets up the expectation for a military topic. Sarro accompanies Grullo’s imitation of the drum with the same rhythm in the strings.
Example 5.3.2  D. Sarro, Moschetta e Grullo, Part II, “Il soldato che va in guerra,” mm. 15-22 (folio 159r-v)²⁸

Domenico Sarro, Moschetta and Grullo (1727), contained in Siroe re di Persia, I-Nc, Ms., 32.2.24.

²⁸ Domenico Sarro, Moschetta and Grullo (1727), contained in Siroe re di Persia, I-Nc, Ms., 32.2.24.
Sarro uses the same rhythm for Grullo’s imitation of the trumpet. But here he varies the melody by having Grullo arpeggiate a triad—a fitting change. The melodic line obviously evokes the military fanfares associated with that instrument.

Example 5.3.3  Sarro, Moschetta e Grullo, Part II, “Il soldato che va in guerra,” mm. 32-34 (folio 160r)
Audiences would have been familiar with arias of this style in older Venetian operas of the 1660s and 1670s. Its aesthetic affinity was with the more mannerist style of the late-seventeenth century—a time which though only a decade previous to the composition of this intermezzo was a lifetime away. Ellen Rosand has characterized the trumpet aria’s significance to Venetian opera in the 1770s in the following way:

The trumpet aria embodies a particular kind of relationship between music and text that had broad implications for the future development of opera. It exemplifies the transformation of a pictorial approach to words developed in the sixteenth-century madrigal into the baroque aria of the affections. Although more easily identified as a type than other arias, because it exploited a well-established equation of an external image and internal feeling, the trumpet aria was only one of an increasing number of arias on various topics, expressing distinct affects that were prompted by specific textual images.  

Composers of opera seria continued to use the trumpet aria into the eighteenth century. Many of the operatic works of Alessandro Scarlatti call for trumpet—often as the only wind instrument. But by the teens the trumpet aria began to change. Composers still made use of it in serious operas, but they often recast it in a more abstract light. Handel’s aria “L’alma mia fra tempeste”

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from *Agrippina* (1709), for example, set the standard for a new kind of abstract interpretation in which there is more nuance in the aria’s equation of “external image and internal feeling.” Sarro, on the other hand, makes what was once an artful correlation between martial sentiments and martial music ridiculous by having the singer actually imitate the sounds of trumpet and drums. What was once a verisimilar representation of martial music has in Sarro’s hands becomes a kind of absurd realism—like a tonguing exercise for a new trumpeter recruit.

The incongruity theory explains why this transgression of aesthetic propriety is humorous. The martial string rhythm which opens the aria activates the “trumpet aria” script (in Raskin’s terms). We know what kind of aria this is supposed to be and what kind of sentiment it is supposed to express. But when Grullo begins to imitate the sound of the drums we are forced to re-evaluate our initial interpretation. We switch from interpreting the work as a serious contemplation of life in the military to a humorous take on how that life is depicted in serious musical works. As Rosand suggested, the trumpet aria was effective because of its ability to capitalize on the correlation between “external image and internal feeling.” Here the “internal feeling” is replaced with external representation. We interpret the martial music not through our ingrained understanding of military life but through its musical representation. At this meta-level we laugh at Sarro’s parody of hackneyed musical form.

We find an identical situation in arias and duets which mimic the sound of the heart beating. The final duet from *Il marito giocatore* features a particularly lengthy section in which Serpilla and Bacocco, newly reconciled, mimic the beating of their hearts with increasing passion.
EXAMPLE 5.3.4  G.M. Orlandini, *Il marito giocatore*, “Io già sento,” mm. 31-40.\(^\text{30}\)
As in the trumpet examples, the referent is not the actual sound of the heart beating, but rather the notion that music can convey this sentiment at all. The duet conflates the musical practice of depicting emotional harmony in mellifluous thirds with the actual beating of hearts in harmony.

Troy mentions a number of other examples from the repertory, most of which are drawn from sections of recitative. Here the singers make highly elaborate vocal gestures to paint the text, like Vanesio’s pained expression of “morir” (discussed in chapter 4, section 4.4). The arioso-like passages are similarly satirical in nature. Recitative in the eighteenth century had purged such affective passages completely. It was no longer fashionable to wallow during a recitative; singers were now all business. In this and in all of the other examples listed above, “comic realism” is not a discrete form of humour. It is, rather, a subtype of musical parody.

The humour in each case of “comic realism” depends upon the inverse relationship between the “scripts,” to use Attardo and Raskin’s terminology. In a serious interpretation of mimesis, the musical line elicits the audience’s affective reaction. In military topic arias this reaction is perhaps pride, dignity, nobility or other sentiments associated with service in the military. Arias which feature the gentle pulsations of the heart elicit feelings of tenderness and warmth. In the comical examples above, however, the fact that the singers actually make the noises they are only meant to evoke is the complete opposite of art. This kind of literalism activates a parodistic script. The listener is therefore no longer seriously emotionally invested in the work, but instead adopts the paratelic mode of engagement and appreciates the composer’s witty play rather than music’s affective ability.
5.4 Repetition

The “rule of three” is a well-known trick of the trade among comedians.\textsuperscript{31} The aphoristic witticism that there are three kinds of lies—“lies, damned lies and statistics”—is an exemplar of this rule. Its interpretation with incongruity theory is quite simple. The first two items in the series set up the expectation for a third of the same type. The expression appears isotopic. When we hear “statistics” we perceive an incongruity between this scientific discipline and the types of falsehoods we just heard. We resolve the incongruity by switching from a script which opposes falsehoods with scientific truth to one which now debases statisticians as liars. The joke is aided by our natural inclination to have things come in threes.\textsuperscript{32} We desire a sense of completion achieved through a tri-partite list and so introducing an incongruity to the third item in a list is a powerful means of creating humour. This phenomenon was explored in some detail by Neal Norrick who documented its use in witticisms, canned humour and knock-knock jokes.\textsuperscript{33} Norrick, a linguist, was particularly interested in the use of repetition in conversations and storytelling. In his subsequent work he further developed the notion that repetition in conversation serves to “heighten the dramatic effect” of the story told by the speaker and “highlight evaluations” by the interlocutor in a “metacommunicative process.”\textsuperscript{34} This underlines an aspect of repetition that makes it a potent instrument of comedy. Repetition raises the stakes

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{31} See for example Mel Helitzer and Mark Shatz’s \textit{Comedy Writing Secrets: The Best-Selling Book on How to Think Funny, Write Funny, Act Funny, and Get Paid for It}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition (Cincinnati, OH: Writer’s Digest Books, 2005), chapter 9, “Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered: Triples,” 150-162.
\item \textsuperscript{32} This aspect of literature is explored journalistically but in detail in Christopher Booker’s \textit{The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories} (London: Continuum, 2004), 229-238.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Neal R. Norrick, “Repetition in Canned Jokes and Spontaneous Conversational Joking,” \textit{Humor} 6, no. 3 (1993): 385-402.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Norrick, \textit{Conversational Narrative: Storytelling in Everyday Talk} (Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2000), 63.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
by establishing a narrative and heightening one’s anticipation for a climax. Repetition, however, also serves as a kind of commentary on an existing text. It is a form of dialogue with an existing text (or speech act or musical idea).\(^{35}\) Norrick’s ideas are firmly within the linguistic school of the incongruity theory. His emphasis on the “metacommunicative” aspects of the delivery of the joke help flesh out why it is that incongruity is as funny as it is when it comes. Repetition alerts the listener to the possibility of variation and incongruity. Repetition, in short, makes us think.

Some prominent proponents of the incongruity theory discount repetition as a significant aspect of the theory. For example, Attardo’s remarks on repetition essentially dismiss it as a humorous device.

It should be noted that there is no need to differentiate between the “normal” repetition of semantic features found across the board in language (e.g. agreement, anaphora, subcategorization, cohesion, etc.) and repetition for humorous purposes: both are repetition of features and/or larger linguistic units, with the only difference that repetition for humorous purposes repeats units that are (or have been at some point of the text) involved in a jab line (or, less frequently, a punch line).\(^{36}\)

For Attardo repetition is only funny if the text being repeated is funny to begin with. This eliminates the need to explain why Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” is not funny though it abounds in the rhetorical use of anaphora and epistrophe. But in music it is difficult to determine why repetition could be funny since the material often being repeated is not itself humorous and does not behave as a “jab line.”

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\(^{35}\) The use of repetition and the “rule of three” in both jokes and music has been discussed by Paul Rozin, Alexander Rozin, Brian Appel and Charles Wachtel in “Documenting and Explaining the Common AAB Pattern in Music and Humor: Establishing and Breaking Expectations,” *Emotion* 6, no. 3 (2006): 349-355. They statistically evaluate the occurrence of AAB patterns in musical works from a sample size comprised of half of the works from Charles Burkhart’s *Anthology for Musical Analysis* to find that 53.7% of those works make some use of an AAB structure in the melodic line. They make significant claims for the relevance of this finding to their other finding that 72.2% of jokes in an online joke database make use of the rule of three. I am at a loss to comment on the use of this study, though it does illustrate that one can, indeed, tell just about any story with statistics.

\(^{36}\) Attardo, *Humorous Texts*, 80.
Larinda’s aria from Hasse *Larinda e Vanesio* is wholly dependent upon repetition for its musical humour, even though the musical figure being repeated is not itself humorous. Larinda, feigning extreme guilt over lying to her boss Vanesio to get him to marry her, begs Vanesio to take her sword and stab her. The pathetic aria makes two clever uses of repetition. The first features a repeated ascending figure. Hasse first repeats it three times in succession in an entirely serious mode. When he sets the text a second time he repeats it eight times, ascending to a ridiculous register. Syllabic passages above the staff begin to simply sound shrill.

**Example 5.4.1**  *Hasse, Larinda e Vanesio, Part III, “Cava pur la spada fuora”*
The aria’s B section constitutes nothing more than the continuous repetition of a pathetic four-note figure. It is accompanied by the same leaping strings as the figure above. Hasse here creates an odd kind of stasis in which the Larinda wallows in pity. It also presents the opportunity for the performer to be creative in her attempt to leaven the situation. Singing twenty-one Bs in a row is a challenge.
In a serious aria, both of these figures in and of themselves would not be humorous. But in this comic aria their repetition makes them so. We laugh when they are repeated more times than we expect from a properly dramatic aria. We therefore move from thinking that these repetitions “heighten the dramatic effect” of Larinda’s plea to instead laughing at the incongruity between the seriousness usually associated with repetition and her inept use of it. We understand, therefore, that this aria is a parody of opera seria. By repeating the text Hasse has composed an “evaluation,” to use Norrick’s terminology, of the original musical topic. We perceive Hasse’s artful manipulation of a standard device use to elicit pathos. He calls attention to the use of repetition as a rhetorical musical device.

Repetition is one of the forms of humour in the intermezzo that is difficult to explain with incongruity theory in its classic interpretation because there is no clear punch line. Therefore there is not necessarily a moment that one can point to as the moment of bisociation (for Koestler) or the moment at which the listener switches isotopies (for Greimas) or switches scripts (Raskin and Attardo). However, repetition in Larinda’s aria does call for a “cognitive rule,” to use Suls’ term, which solves the problem presented by the text. Hasse’s music clearly violates the standards of good taste. The moment at which this realization occurs for the listener is, in a sense, the punch line. Different listeners may laugh at different points as they listen to the piece; their interpretations of when things have gone awry are subjective. But all listeners will still perceive and attempt to resolve the incongruity based on their understanding of the conventions of a dramatic aria. Excessive repetition induces a paratelic state and the listener therefore interprets the piece as a parody.

The examples of repetition given by Troy may be interpreted in the same way: Tracollo’s repeated begging in Pergolesi’s La contadina astuta, Don Tabarano’s repeated effusive amorous
declarations in Hasse’s *Scintilla e Don Tabarano* and Flacco’s repetitive aria in Vinci’s *Servilia e Flacco* all essentially parody the use of repetition to heighten the drama in pathetic or amorous situations. Another example clearly illustrates the point. Drusilla’s aria “Senta, senta in cortesia” from Sellitti’s *Drusilla e Don Strabone* (1735) makes use of an extreme amount of repetition. Sellitti is clearly satirizing the pathetic aria. But here the effect is heightened by irony; the text of the aria has Drusilla continually complain that she cannot breathe and yet she is able to continue to sing for an interminable amount of time.

**Example 5.4.2  Drusilla e Don Strabone, Part II, “Senta, senta in cortesia”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senta, senta in cortesia</th>
<th>Listen, please listen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Come sbate poverino</td>
<td>How my poor heart pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come un corsi piccinino</td>
<td>How such a small thing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanto strepito puol fare</td>
<td>Can make so much noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ah non posso respirare</td>
<td>Oh I cannot breathe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non ho forza di parlar</td>
<td>I have no strength to speak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Example 5.4.3  G. Sellitti, Drusilla e Don Strabone, Part II, “Senta, senta in cortesia,” mm. (folio 73r-74v)**

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These examples help illustrate that “repetition,” though an effective device for creating humour, is not necessarily a unique category which requires its own interpretive framework. It is, in essence, merely a type of parody. Troy writes that composers did not “trouble themselves over a theoretical justification for the repetition of musical units.” But I believe it would be a mistake to assume that they blindly repeated musical units thinking that that simply made them funny. In each case in which a composer made use of repetition, he did so to parody an existing type of musical work in opera seria. Parody, however, is itself a problematic term. We will now discuss its relationship to the intermezzo and to the incongruity theory.

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38 Troy, 94.
5.5 **Parody**

Parody is not a popular word in the humour theory literature. In Martin’s bibliography of over 900 linguistic, psychological and social science studies concerning laughter only one publication explicitly mentions parody. Its definition is bedevilling and debates over its precise meaning have perhaps kept it out of general use in humour studies—a field which already contends with multiple problems of definition and scope. Parody is a much more popular topic in the field of literature. Modern literary debates about the definition of parody mostly centre on the question of the comic in parody. The two sides are typified by the writings of Linda Hutcheon and Margaret A. Rose. Hutcheon—wary of pan-historical statements—proposes to apply the term to twentieth century works which engage in some aspect of imitation of previous works. Rose is concerned with reclaiming what she sees as a necessary comic component to parody—for her parody by definition is supposed to be funny. Simon Dentith, in his analysis of the historical use of the term, points out that these divergent views correspond to different historical interpretations of the term. Rose’s aligns with both a classical and popular modern view; Hutcheon’s aligns with the neoclassical view of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The use of the term in music scholarship is similarly split by historical time period. The serious or non-mocking use of the term applies to compositional borrowing practices of the Renaissance and Baroque, such as a “parody mass” of Josquin des Prez or “Bach’s Parody Procedure in the

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39 Martin, 373-420.


St. Matthew Passion.” The term as it applies to works of the twentieth century—especially Russian composers—is quite different. Here the term implies some mocking and may be used in a somewhat slippery fashion with “irony” or “satire.” Troy uses the term in its popular twentieth-century meaning as an umbrella term for “parody,” “satire” and “burlesque.” He gives two examples: Nibbio’s awkward attempts at virtuosity in his simile aria from Sarro’s L’impresario delle canarie and Morante’s demonstration of his vocal versatility in Sarro’s Merilla e Morante. Troy rightly calls the first example “burlesque” since the vocal line contains ridiculously impossible leaps (from a’ to D) which would sound absurd sung by a bass. The second example adheres to a more neutral interpretation of “parody” in which Morante’s rapid cycling between modes of expression is what is truly funny; his musical expression of each mode is quite earnest.

There is a third type of parody which should be added to this list. This is the most traditional, classical Greek notion in which a light or satirical text is written in the form of a great epic (or in the case of the intermezzo, set to familiar serious music). The aria, “Il pesciolino” from Mancini’s intermezzo Colombina e Pernicone (1723), is a perfect specimen of this variety. Colombina is a unique work. It is the only surviving intermezzo of Mancini (he wrote three) and is stylistically somewhat different in tone than other intermezzi. Mancini was conservative in his serious operas and he carries this temperament over to this comic work. His textures in the intermezzo are somewhat more luxurious than those of his contemporaries Sarro and Orlandini.

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45 Troy, 98.

46 The first recorded use of the term is in Aristotle’s Poetics. See Dentith, 10.
Though his instrumentation remained standard (violin, viola and bass) his ritornellos are longer, more arch-like and have a graceful late-baroque sensibility rather than the chic but fragmentary character of those composed by the younger generation of Vinci, Hasse and Pergolesi. The intermezzo is also somewhat more extravagant than many of its contemporaries. Only two characters sing, but the stage directions call for a number of costumed supernumeraries and even a couple of musicians who make an appearance onstage in Part III.

“Il pesciolino” is Pernicone’s first aria from Part II. He arrives at a soiree with many masked individuals and spies a young Swiss girl (Colombina in disguise). Pernicone thinks he can beat her at biribi (a game of chance much like roulette without a wheel). He states that if she is looking for love she should “behold this colossus” (“ecc un colosso”). She insults him in German, which he of course doesn’t understand. Before they place their bets Pernicone attempts to impress her one more time by singing for her (“sentite il nervo di mia voce”). Pernicone’s aria could presumably be performed in a ridiculous manner, but on the page the music is mostly serious. The text however, is not the well-crafted simile aria which audiences would expect to be the text of such an aria. The librettist for this text is unknown.

Example 5.5.1 Francesco Mancini, *Colombina e Pernicone, Part II, “Il pesciolino”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Il pesciolino</th>
<th>The minnow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scherza nell’onda,</td>
<td>plays in the waves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e l’agnellino</td>
<td>and the little lamb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salta vibrando</td>
<td>jumps wagging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>la sua codetta;</td>
<td>its tail;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tra frondi ombrose</td>
<td>among shady leaves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>treca l’augel</td>
<td>the bird coos.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dunque conviene

gombrar giocando

e cure, e pene
Filli diletta
fossi tu Europa
ed io il torel

So let’s agree
to chase away with play
cares and troubles,
Beloved Phyllis,
would that you were Europa
and I the bull.47

The first stanza is a completely meaningless list of cute images. He seems incapable of generating a simile. His one logical comparison seems to be that since minnows, lambs and birds gambol in the natural world, they should gamble in the pub and be merry. His final statement—an allusion to Zeuss’s seduction of Europa in the guise of a bull—takes things in a slightly bawdy direction.

There are only two musical moments which seem to break the otherwise earnest mood of the aria. The first occurs during the second part of the A section, which repeats the first stanza with considerable elaboration. Pernicone pulls this off all very well until his final melisma on the word “tresca.” Here his line bottoms out on the pedal C while the strings take up a sprightly figure to fill in the gap.

Example 5.5.2 Francesco Mancini, Colombina e Pernicone, Part II, “Il pesciolino,” mm. 65-70

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48 Francesco Manini, Colombina e Pernicone (Naples, 1723). Ms. I-Nc, 32.2.1.
In the B section Mancini alerts us to the fact this aria is parody by over-embellishing the word “pene” with a pathetically chromatic vocal line supported with a sudden harmonic shift to bIII followed by a diminished seventh leading to the dominant (D) of G minor. Mancini belabours the point even further with tenuto markings for the chromatic chords.

Example 5.5.3 Francesco Mancini, *Colombina e Pernicone*, Part II, “Il pesciolino,” mm. 84-87

Both of these moments alert us to the parodistic nature of the text, since they are either crudely inappropriate for an aria which is meant to have some dignity or chromatically overwrought in a way that was no longer fashionable. Parody works by inserting such moments as these in order
to alter the parodied mode of writing for comic effect. As literary scholar Susan Stewart has written, “[…] parody is a matter of substituting elements within a dimension of a given text in such a way that the resulting text stands in an inverse or incongruous relation to the borrowed text.” Humour is created by subtly shifting between these two inverse texts. For example, it is not funny to write music which is unceasingly gauche. But we laugh when a composer has inserted moments which betray the comical nature of the music. These moments become Koestler’s “minor explosions” of humour—moments in which we “bisociate” between two frames of reference (akin to Attardo’s “jab lines”). The brilliance of the intermezzo composer is his ability to convincingly write an aria of a stock variety and then subtly insert comical snippets. Pernicone’s aria is in many ways a sweet carpe diem aria. But the few moments of parody give the work’s naïve appeal an absurdist quality. These musical glitches, coupled with the bawdy text, create a truly classical parody of minuet elegance.

These elements preclude the listener from enjoying this aria in an uncritical way. Since the humour is dependent upon an understanding of the incongruous relationship between the “ideal” aria and Pernicone’s version, the audience member engages the work from a cognitive perspective. He will need to compare Pernicone’s incorrect version against the standard model that familiarity has created in his mind. This dual perspective is at the heart of both versions of the incongruity theory we have been discussing. Parody, because its absence of the punch line, makes it difficult to categorize neatly within Attardo’s and Raskin’s more rigid model and difficult to identify with precision the moment of bisociation in Koestler’s model. But if we take a step back we see that the entire work is not parody—the listener is only alerted to this fact as the aria progresses. Until Pernicone grumbles his low Cs, the listener could be forgiven for

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thinking the aria was a charming piece of music. Moments like these, as Stewart suggests, are what create the incongruity. Parody, when it occurs, therefore becomes the punch line. Like repetition, the listener's comprehension of the comedy may not be immediate, but even in their subjective evaluation they will laugh if they are familiar with the kind of music being parodied. The composer's ability to artfully oppose this correct "script" with the parodied musical version is the source of comedy in these aria types of the intermezzo.

5.6 **Changes of Tempo and Style**

Arias and accompanied recitatives of the intermezzo often feature quick changes in tempo and musical style. Troy writes that these changes "are generally not occasioned merely by parodistic intent; rather they seem to result from the composer’s genuine effort to reflect changing moods of the text."

We might take as an example Don Carissimo’s aria from *La Dirindina*. When he hears that his inept pupil has been offered a singing contract in Milan and doesn’t wish to have him accompany her for instruction he has a conniption. The text expresses his bewilderment.

**Example 5.6.1  G. Gigli, La Dirindina, part I, “Sola voi? Mi meraviglio!”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sola voi? Mi meraviglio!</th>
<th>Only you? I’m astonished!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Se vi sento</td>
<td>If you think so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dir mai più quella parola</td>
<td>never say the word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>di andar sola.</td>
<td>to go alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e di esporvi a tal cimento;</td>
<td>and expose yourself to such an ordeal;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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50 Troy, 100.
Carissimo begins singing in a quick 3/4 with rushing string lines expressing his confusion. As he then begins assailing Dirindina his music changes abruptly to a furious 4/4.


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51 Domenico Scarlatti, *La Dirindina*, 35-36.
The opening musical material is very familiar. A flat melodic profile accented with a descending octave leap on a *sdrucchiolo* verse is entirely characteristic of the *buffo* bass style. The quarter note rhythm, though allegro, sets up the expectation for a brisk but measured aria of complaint (we might think of the opening section of “Sempre in contrasti”). Scarlatti, however, suddenly shifts gears by switching to a *perpetuum mobile* texture in a presto 4/4. Carissimo’s musical material is suddenly quite different. His long, single-note exclamations are replaced with trickling lines in sixteenth notes—a kind of patter turned on its side. This sudden shift points to opposing interpretations of Carissimo’s state of mind. In the first case, Carissimo is dumbfounded. He expresses as much, but he is clear and expresses his thoughts in a direct manner. In the presto section, however, both his text and his musical line are confused, incomplete and haphazard. In performance this would be amplified by the difficulty in articulating the text with the short note values. One imagines a baritone spitting on the stage in an attempt to get through it. Carissimo’s reasonable anger turns suddenly to awkwardness.

What at first may have elicited the audience’s understanding therefore simply elicits their laughter. Sudden changes in tempo and style hold two perspectives on the character up to the audience. The incongruity between them—between Carissimo’s pretensions to dignified rage and his true inability to express himself in an appropriate manner—is the source of the humour. The audience does not invest itself with an emotional involvement, but instead resorts to an “aggressive” mode of engagement (to use Koestler’s term). Sudden shifts in the texture which contrast differing interpretations of the character forces the audience to attempt to solve this incongruity. If this were a serious aria, the contrasting section would be solemn, but the vivacious musical line in Carissimo’s aria confirms the comedic intention of the composer. The
original isotopic interpretation of the piece—the one which comprehends Carissimo as a
rightfully outraged instructor—is then replaced by a contrasting isotopy: Carissimo is a buffoon.

This suppleness of the musical language is one of the developments of the Italian comic
idiom which later reformers like Saverio Mattei admired.\footnote{Saverio Mattei, \textit{La filosofia della musica, o sia La musica de’ salmi} (Naples: Porcelli, 1779), 306-310.} They were interested in comic
music’s responsive nature to the text and its ability to constrain singers from elaborately
decorating music as they pleased. Sudden shifts in tempo and style—though liberating the
composer to be more creative—helped straight-jacket the singer into following the music as
written. They enhanced the drama, limited vocal display and were exemplars of the dictum that
content dictates form. The intermezzo is, however, still some time removed from the chain-
finales of the Goldonian \textit{opera buffa}. But both the later full-length comedies admired by opera
theorists of the later classical period and the intermezzi are shaped by the shared comic impulse
to use a variety of different styles. These abrupt changes could be humorous (as in the Pergolesi
example in 5.3) but they were more often responses to the text as written. Comic musical style
was therefore determined by comic literary practice.

Incongruity theory shows us that sudden shifts in texture, though responses to the text,
are not truly natural phenomena. These shifts, as prized by later eighteenth-century theorists, do
present a somewhat more verisimilar representation of human thought (as compared to a da capo
aria, for example). But they are nevertheless calculated attempts to get the audience to laugh on
the part of librettists and composers. They ask audiences to always compare the representations
they see on stage with those versions they are familiar with from \textit{opera seria}. In extreme
examples, like Sempronio’s multiple vacillations between whining pitifully and anger in \textit{Lesbina}
*Sempronio* (1734, the example used by Troy), these representations become complete farce.\(^{53}\) Whatever emotional content they display is completely evaporated by the incongruity of the musical expressions. The audience engages with the work cognitively, rather than emotionally.

### 5.7 Conclusion

In Troy’s discussion of the use of repetition in the comic music of the intermezzo he makes the point that the repetition of small, balanced units is an important aspect of the incipient classical style. However, he brilliantly cautions that we should not be quick to attribute the birth of neoclassicism in music to the intermezzo. He quotes Edward Downes’ comments regarding the use of periodic phrasing in both serious and comic works: “we cannot necessarily take *opera buffa* to have been its origin. We must assume, rather, that some common aesthetic impulse was at the root of both phenomena.”\(^{54}\) As we have seen above, the intermezzo was not the wellspring of a particularly new musical style. Incongruity theory has shown us that in almost every case the intermezzo’s comic musical style is indebted to *opera seria*, not the other way around. Just as Eric Weimer has convincingly argued that it is *seria* operatic models which have a formational influence on classical style later in the century, it is *seria* style which is the beginning of musical humour in the intermezzo aria.\(^{55}\) Comedy in the intermezzo was not the imitation of base


persons, which was commonly practiced in Venice in the seventeenth century. Humour was instead generated by parodying existing musical conventions of the serious opera. Many different techniques may have been used to achieve these aims—“comic realism,” and repetition foremost among them. But at the heart of the humorous aria was its parody of its serious equivalent. The music of the comic intermezzo was funny only in relation to existing musical material of the early eighteenth century.

Without incongruity theory we would be at a loss to explain why these musical techniques are funny. Though Koestler, Greimas, Attardo and Raskin, and Apter all come from different scholarly backgrounds, they highlight the fact that humour is the result of a cognitive process. It requires thoughtful interpretation on the part of the listener. Jokes are not funny if audiences cannot understand them. When we apply this principle to the four methods of humour above, we see how audiences must always refer to an existing seria model—to a pattern of how things are supposed to go—to understand the humour of the aria. “Comic realism” is only funny in relation to serious arias which engage in mimesis; repetition is only funny in relation serious arias which engage in the same practice for dramatic effect; parody is only funny in relation to the work being parodied; sudden changes in tempo and metre are only funny in relation to conventions of appropriate contrasts in music. Just as metatheatrical devices alert the audience to the fictional nature of the work they are watching, these incongruous musico-comedic devices alert the audience to the contrived nature of the humorous intermezzo aria. As Morreall suggested, comedy induces a kind of disengagement—a paratelic frame of mind (to use Apter’s term). Humour in the intermezzo is at its heart not about the imitation of base persons, as Aristotle would have it. It is rather a critique of the existing musical practice of the early eighteenth century.
CONCLUSION

JAQUES
Why, 'tis good to be sad and say nothing

ROsalind
Why, then 'tis good to be a post.

(William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act IV, scene 1)

When the intermezzo closed up shop in Naples in 1735 its performers travelled to every corner of Europe. With them they brought the repertory of works that this dissertation has examined: comic intermezzos written for Venice and Naples in the years between 1706 and 1733. Composers still occasionally wrote intermezzos, but a canon had been established and new works entered into the standard repertory slowly. The locus for the development of comedy had moved elsewhere. Suddenly the names on opera-goers’ lips were not Salvi, Sarro, Vinci and Sellitti; they were Goldoni, Galuppi and Piccini. On the heels of the intermezzo, opera buffa swept across Europe and ushered in a new age of sociability. Wit and good humour were in vogue and the music of the new eighteenth-century forms—the symphony, the sonata, the string quartet—reflect this. The interiority of baroque music, with its attempt to replicate the affections, was replaced with the gregariousness of the galant. Music now animated the senses.
Not all musicologists look back on this period fondly. Lawrence Dreyfuss, for example, condemned the early Enlightenment for its

[...] naïve worship of nature, its facile hedonism, its uncritically affirmative tone, its appeal to public taste, its privileging of the word over music, its emphasis on clearly distinguishable genres, and its rejection of music as metaphysics.¹

Eighteenth-century ears did not hear things that way. Historians like Charles Burney and philosophers like Adam Smith heard the style galant as a deeply moving, elegant and very necessary aesthetic phenomenon. Though the intermezzo had long ceased to be a thriving musical genre in its own right in the mid-century, it was thrust into the centre of the French aesthetic debate known as the querelle des bouffons. It is from this moment—from Rousseau’s and Diderot’s veneration of the intermezzo as a model of simplicity and naturalism—that the intermezzo took on a certain mystique in the historiography of eighteenth-century music.

But the aesthetic legacy of the intermezzo is not entirely clear. Different authors have identified different aspects of the intermezzo as important developments in the history of music. For Lazarevich the intermezzo’s importance was in its musical texture. The simple homophonic accompaniments and periodic musical line were the direct inspiration for the symphonic style cultivated by subsequent composers. Troy’s argument is less teleological, but he nevertheless suggests that the intermezzo’s attention to text was a contributing factor to the changing musical aesthetic of the 1730s. This feature has been amplified by Taruskin, Grout and others, who, following the Italianist faction of the querelle, have aligned the intermezzo’s clarity of musical expression with the aims of galant aesthetics. But Mancini, Pergolesi, Sarro, Vinci and most of the other intermezzo composers were long dead by 1752; only Orlandini survived (until 1760).

Looking at the intermezzo only for outcomes, therefore, gives a slightly skewed perspective on the practice of intermezzo librettists and composers. This dissertation has hopefully shown that librettists and composers did not seek to create something new; they sought to create something funny.

Traditional theories of comedy have emphasized comedy as a social activity in which, as Jan Hokenson writes, “protagonists game with or against social conventions.” Comedy therefore requires a number of people to work. Tragedy requires no more than two characters, but comedy requires three. Horace dictated that a successful play has no more than two speaking characters on stage at a time, and this is always the case with the intermezzo. Usually it was only two, but one of the characters always attempted to enlist a silent third partner as an accomplice. This was sometimes the mute character—a servant, or brother or passerby. Vespone, the mute servant in *La serva padrona*, receives an awful lot of attention. Uberto is always looking for sympathy and affirmation; Serpina succeeds in convincing him to play along with her. But most often the third party is the audience. In comedy, audience members are not passive objects who observe a performance in reverent silence. They laugh and show their appreciation immediately—a comedy without laughter is no comedy at all. The audience’s allegiance may change, but they are always aligned with a character on stage, audibly throwing their support behind them. Comedic characters are therefore always appealing to public taste (and “facile hedonism”) in a shameless way. As a result, comedy is often callous. Classicist Paul Woodruff observed that “[l]aughter tends to sop up the emotional energy that might have

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gone into pity or fear, so when we laugh at the straight man, we will not be able to feel for him.  

Comedy’s cruel edge is softened by the pleasure of laughter, but it precludes metaphysical indulgence. Instead, comedy is a game of collusion. This feature of comedy—its requirement for a third party—is a defining feature of the intermezzo’s language. The impulse for dialogue with other characters, with the audience and with other musical and literary texts forms the very basis for the practice of comedy in the intermezzo.

Several scholars have previously noted the intermezzo’s debt to other forms—especially the improvised routines of the *commedia dell’arte*. In 1955 Nino Pirrotta noted that there are many shared features between operatic practice and those of the improvising Italians. But he was careful to mention that there were “many different features by means of which each of these two manifestations of Italian life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries preserves its own independent physiognomy.” The barriers between genres were, however, much more porous than that. As we explored in chapter one, librettists moved between the worlds of improvising actors, spoken comedies and comic operas with some ease. The comic playwright Ricciardi spent some of his spare time improvising comedies in the home of his friend, the painter Salvator Rosa, as member of the *Accademia dei Percossi*. His plays adopted one of the stock and trade practices of improvising actors—the “elastic gag.” Ferdinando de Medici admired his work and

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5 Nino Pirrotta, “Commedia dell’Arte and Opera,” *The Musical Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1955), 305. Pirrotta’s qualification follows the work of Gustave Attinger, who five years previous had published his *L’Esprit de la Commedia dell’arte dans le Théâtre français* (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1950). Attinger differentiated between “pure” and “hybrid” forms of *commedia*. Theatre scholars have recently become much less rigid about what constitutes the “pure” *commedia* tradition. We can point to the work of Siro Ferrone and Robert Henke in exploring the relationship between written and improvised theatre (See Ferrone, *Commedie dell’arte* (Milan: Mursia, 1985); Henke, *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell’arte* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Richard Andrews explicitly aligns himself with scholarship in this latter vein (Andrews, “Molière, *Commedie dell’arte*, and the Question of Influence in Early Modern European Theatre,” 445, n. 5). This revisionist history of the *commedia* has, however, occurred during the period in which little new scholarship has been done on comic intermezzo.
had his in-house librettist, Cosimo Villifranchi, adapt one of his most famous plays for use as a comic opera, *Il Trespolo tutore*. Villifranchi’s apprentice, Giovanni Battista Fagiuoli, started his career as a comic actor as a way to bring his family some money. His skill and literary acumen brought him some fame and brought him under Medici patronage. The Medici court’s natural inclination for French drama permeated its comedic tastes as well. Fagiuoli and his apprentice—the youngest member of the Medici librettist fraternity, Antonio Salvi—adapted the works of Molière.

What these young Italian librettists saw in Molière was not what current historiographers have suggested. Six intermezzos do bear the translated titles of works by Molière, but their plots are not the slavish adaptations of devotees. Molière, as a playwright, was not something new to Italian theatrical life. As an actor and practitioner of the “elastic gag,” Molière was less the benign patriarch of a comedic style and much more an avuncular figure of stylish prestige—the close relative they wanted to be. To that end, librettists did not simply adapt Molière’s works; they took inspiration from his treatment of elastic gags and recreated many of them in their intermezzos. Nowhere is this more apparent than in *Albino e Plautilla*, which features a scene from Molière’s *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, but nothing else which resembles the original plot. This scene suggests that the practice of adaptation was not based on the idea of recreating the story. It was based upon the idea of artfully connecting comic sequences in service of character and plot. Comic intermezzos which feature scenes from Molière are not shorthand versions of Molière’s plays. They are instead dialogues with the previous plays. For audiences, part of the comedy of the intermezzo is the comedy of recognition. They could observe and appreciate the librettist’s selection and manipulation of an “elastic gag” sequence by Molière or another author. This occurred not only in those conspicuous places—like those six intermezzos which bear the
titles of Molière’s works—but also in those intermezzos like *Albino e Plautilla* and *Il marito giocatore* which borrow scenes from other works. The librettist’s winking allusion to these works was a sly appeal to audience taste. In some ways, therefore, the audience’s allegiance was not simply to one character onstage, but to the librettist who crafted the creation in the first place. The “straight man”—the butt of the joke—is not only the dupe onstage, but those who don’t get the joke or the witty allusion.

This constant appeal to the audience makes the fourth wall evaporate. As we explored in chapter four, comedy as it is practiced in the intermezzo makes constant reference to itself as a theatrical performance. Audiences are, in a way, always let “in” on the joke that what they are seeing performed is a fictional creation of an author, a composer and two actor-singers. Musically this presents a number of interesting problems for the composer to solve. How do you differentiate between the fictional musical world of the stage and the actual musical world of the performance space? In most cases composers broke the musical frame and reverted to silence or recitative to set moments of metatheatrical awareness. This creates a kind of musical décollage in which layers of the music are stripped away to reveal an ongoing musical world of recitative in the background. As Alice Bellini has demonstrated, other composers used shifting metrical structures to frame each musical world. A third kind of metatheatrical technique involved an obsessive literalism—painting each suggestion of the text with an analogous musical feature. For Domenico Scarlatti, composer of the metatheatrical *La Dirindina*, this meant writing a simile aria about a minuet in D major as a minuet in D major.

Chapter five explored how composers drew on existing musical forms to create the humour in intermezzo arias. Those which were truly funny were based upon earlier *seria* models. Several of the modes of humour we currently associate with the creation of humour (repetition,
for example) are in fact parodies of familiar aria types. The fact that intermezzo composers paid a great deal of attention to the text was therefore not necessarily a new phenomenon which presaged the development of classical aesthetics. It was instead the parody of the literalism of seventeenth-century *opera seria* aria types. The eighteenth-century’s preference for clearly distinguishable genres was not new. It was a feature inherent to all operatic forms from 1600 until the mid-nineteenth century.

Librettists and composers did not merely reference other artworks in a closed system of theatrical production. Their choice of subject matter and the texts they chose to write and parody were shaped by the social contexts which produced them. The comedy of the intermezzo is in constant dialogue with the world outside. Audiences could not sit and simply laugh at onstage silliness. They were provoked to engage their critical faculties because much of the humour of the intermezzo is about current events, social norms and operatic conventions. It is impossible to make absolute claims about the intentions of the creators of intermezzi. There are no sketches or journals left by composers or librettists which testify to their sources of inspiration, working method or revisions. This kind of genetic criticism is only possible for later eighteenth-century composers. In the two examples treated at length in this dissertation, however, we can see that contexts matter to the creation of the intermezzo. *Albino e Plautilla* was not subsequently successful because its humour was specifically connected to its Neapolitan context. *Il marito giocatore*, though entirely specific in its satire of domestic strife in Venice, nevertheless tapped into a broader pan-Italian phenomenon of marital discord and female suffering. Metatheatricality as a feature of the intermezzo’s comedy was similarly not an insular development. Criticism of the

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operatic form created the conditions for this kind of meta-sensibility—a sensibility which intermezzo performers could then exploit for laughs.

This last feature of this study—its attempt to understand what audiences found funny about the comic intermezzo—is, I believe, its most significant feature. Previous work on the intermezzo has largely concentrated on outcomes. What is the significance of the comic intermezzo to the history of music? To that end history books have excerpted musical phrases and a joke or two to illustrate the intermezzo’s shared affinity with the later (and implicitly more exquisite) classical style. But if we ask the question a slightly different way—what is the significance of the comic intermezzo?—we get a different set of answers. This dissertation has been an attempt to set out some of those. Comedy as it was practised in the intermezzo was an art. It was cultivated through years of study and practice. Its textual roots were nurtured by French exemplars and Medici patronage. Its music was indebted to seria models refashioned by comic principles. Its success was due to its ability to engage its audience with the problems of the day. As a genre, the comic intermezzo has an enormous amount to tell us about librettists, composers, performers and audiences. These short works give us some access to the minds of eighteenth-century opera audiences in a way that opere serie do not. For all their beauty, operatic tragedies are in many ways sad and silent about the age that produced them. The intermezzi, by contrast, offer a running commentary on the age before the galant. They do not herald something new, but reflect critically on what has come before.
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**MUSICAL EDITIONS**


MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Appendix

Intermezzi Examined

The following is a list of intermezzi examined and mentioned in this dissertation. They are listed alphabetically in the following manner:

Title [Title of opera seria]. Year. Composer [Librettist]. Library, call number.

For a complete list of extant intermezzi see Charles Troy, The Comic Intermezzo (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1979), 214-221.


Brunetta e Burlotto [La Ginevra]. 1720. Domenico Sarro [Antonio Salvi]. I-Nc, 32.2.22.

Colombina e Pernicone [Traiano]. 1723. Francesco Mancini [Anon.]. I-Nc, 32.2.1.

Corimba e Milone [Pompeo e Cesare]. 1706. Domenico Sarro [Anon.]. I-Nc, 32.2.21.


Lesbina e Milo [La fede tradita]. 1707. Francesco Gasparini [Francesco Silvani]. I-Nc, 32.3.0.
Lesbina e Sempronio [Siface]. 1734. Giuseppe Sellitti [Tomaso Mariani]. I-Nc, 32.4.12.

Lidia e Sergio [Cambise]. 1719. Alessandro Scarlatti [Domenico Lalli]. I-Nc, 31.3.29.


Moschetta e Grullo [Siroe, re di Persia]. 1727. Domenico Sarro [Anon.]. I-Nc, 32.2.24.

Roscicca e Morano [Siface]. 1723. Francesco Feo [Anon.]. I-Nc, 32.3.27.


Serpina e Uberto (La serva padrona) [Il prigionier superbo]. Giovanna Battista Pergolesi [Gennaro Antonio Federico]. I-Nc, 34.4.29 (also, 6.4.42; 30.4.20).

Servilla e Flacco [La caduta de’ Decemviri]. 1727. Leonardo Vinci [Silvio Stampiglia]. I-Nc, 32.4.10.


Sofia e Barlacco [Artemisia]. 1731. Domenico Sarro [Anon.]. I-Nc, 31.3.10.