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The *commedia ridicolosa*, which was centered in Rome, is a genre of comedy that gained some success at the beginning of the 17th century. Although the *commedia ridicolosa* produced memorable masterpieces, it does, nevertheless, occupy an important place in the history of Italian theatre. This is because of a variety of reasons of which at least two can be mentioned: the great editorial success of *commedie ridicolose*, also called “new” comedies, and the ability to attract middle to low, somewhat popular, audiences, previously excluded from the wonderful world of theatre. In the first quarter of the 17th century, there was a flowering of printed titles produced in the Roman “province”, in particular in Viterbo, Ronciglione, Bracciano, Velletri, and other places. These small, pocket-sized volumes with limited editorial capacity were eagerly snapped up by an audience different to traditional comedy fans. It was no coincidence that the *commedia ridicolosa* were much in vogue during the carnival celebrations in Rome, given its less elitist, rowdy audience. Thus, while the beginnings of Renaissance comedy were intimately linked to the feast as a finely elaborated event in contemporary Courts, the *commedia ridicolosa* represented a bottom-up projection of the celebration: a popular, sensual festival, in which the recognizability of the characters and masks and their humorous verbal exchanges, functioned as powerful identity markers for the tastes of the boorish street audience.

A further reason of interest in the *commedia ridicolosa* is the fact that it represents, to a certain extent, a link between traditional comedy (albeit taking into account the linguistic twist that it had undergone in the second half of the century by authors such as Calmo and Giancarli) and the *Commedia dell'Arte* in the 17th century scene. Compared to the latter, the *commedia ridicolosa* firmly respected the tradition of the written text as a reference for the staging but shared both the use of masks and an affection for the multilingual model.

The greatest interpreter of the *commedia ridicolosa* was undoubtedly the Roman Virgilio Verucci, (1586-1650). He wrote *Li diversi linguaggi* (1609; second edition 1627), a five-act comedy representing the triumph of multilingualism, staging the ten different “languages”. Pantalone, a Venetian, had a Florentine daughter and a Roman son, one servant from Bologna and another from Bergamo; then, there was the Frenchman, Claudio, with a daughter from Perugia and a servant from Amatrice; finally, there were a Sicilian Pedantic and a Neapolitan Captain. It is important, however, to immediately recall the words that Verucci gets the Roman Giorgetto to say in the *Prologo* de *Li diversi linguaggi*:

Ma non vi immaginate però di aver a sentire un Francese, un Veneziano, un Bergamasco, un Napolitano o un parlar fiorentino o matricciano o ceciliano o perugino o bolognese, giusto giusto come è il parlare della loro patria, perché, oltre che difficilmente sarebbe inteso dalli ascoltanti per esser lingue scabrose e difficili, con tutto questo, mentre uno di questi tali che sia delli sopradetti paesi si trova fuori della sua patria, si sforza di pigliare il parlar commune e più usitato di tutti gli altri e insomma il più bello e dilettevole come è questo romano, è ben vero che sempre ritengono li accenti e le pronunzie dei paesi loro.

There could be no better definition of the stylization process than that which always falls to theatrical dialogue, however much one may wish to configure it. Languages (and especially dialects) are toned down, both because they would otherwise be incomprehensible, and because of a natural equalizing effect that prompts strangers to speak the “common” language, identified by Verucci as Roman (not Tuscan). It may be added that the public is by now accustomed to hearing “those” languages, to recognize their musicality, to identify them together with the character who interprets them.

The only available evidence of the dramaturgical activity of an artist like Gian Lorenzo Bernini is another Roman comedy characterized by the lively interweaving of different languages – Bolognese, Neapolitan, Romanesque and Judeo-Romanesque, literary Italian

etc. This work, dating back to 1644, came to us without a proper title, and then, curiously, received three: *Fontana di Trevi* by the discoverer and first editor of the untitled manuscript (D'Onofrio 1963), *L'impresario*, and *La Verità scoperta dal Tempo* by the two subsequent publishers (Ciavolella 1992; Perrini 2007).

Among the other works of the *commedia ridicolosa* genre are: Giovanni Briccio's *La Tartarea* (1614), a somewhat disjointed story which nevertheless, does have moments of grace, containing two very different narrative strands – one reminiscent of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the other about the atavistic hunger of servants; *L'Ostaria di Velletri* (1613) also by Briccio, a three-act comedy brimming with equivocations, misunderstandings, proverbs, and idioms; and *Il Pantalone impazzito* (1613) by the Mantuan Francesco Righelli, a five-act comedy set in Rome, about risky amorous encounters, their predictable equivocations and misunderstandings, and finally, the happy ending when everything works out for the various couples.

Therefore, while a linguistic Babel represents the most striking aspect of the Roman *commedia ridicolosa*, another reason for interest should not be overlooked, i.e. the strong and deliberately marked excursion through linguistic registers, with stylistic turns that oscillate from the heights of courtly language to the lows of the dialects. At the center of these extremes (and perhaps this is the most interesting observation), is a concentration of characteristics that could be understood as an attempt to reproduce an average, colloquial language, “in collusion” sometimes with dialect, but not entirely absorbed within it.

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