

M. A. Katritzky. *The Art of Commedia: A Study in the Commedia dell'arte 1560–1620 with Special Reference to the Visual Records.*

Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006. 626 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$234. ISBN: 90–420–1798–8.

Using hundreds of visual images (many first identified by the author), new documentary sources, and an extensive and deftly-employed bibliography, M. A. Katritzky has written a history of the *commedia dell'arte* that demonstrates its reach to have been far broader than earlier believed and its dynamic to have been more creative and innovative. Most of the images cited are reproduced in the volume, which, beyond assisting the reader, makes available many works whose whereabouts are currently unknown or difficult of access, although legibility is reduced in some cases by the necessary restriction to small sizes. The author has with ingenuity located documents with which to overcome the improvised medium's daunting lack of written texts: actors' own support material, literary works, government documents, legal records, and accounts in letters, diaries, and diplomats' reports. The rich presence of *commedianti* and their performances in many parts of Italy as well as France, Flanders, the Holy Roman Empire, and England is described, as well as their role as artistic ambassadors. In the final section of the book, Katritzky explores some technical issues of staging and various character types, including some neglected ones. The thorough index, which includes locations of performances, works, and character names, will prove a valuable aid to scholars.

On the question of realism versus convention in *commedia* figures, Katritzky

wisely notes that they occupied a continuum between the two poles. She also recognizes the distinction between images of *commedia* figures that followed performance practice and those dictated by artistic convention. Katritzky makes numerous important new attributions of artworks, including to Ambrogio Brambilla and the circle of Martin de Vos. New identifications include one of a young Francesco Andreini and the Gelosi as gameboard figures. Jacques Callot's famed group of engravings is affirmed (*pace* Richard Posner) to represent a *commedia* troupe in acrobatic dance. The book offers findings concerning social history, one of the most significant being the importance of actresses to *commedia* troupes in both female and, surprisingly, male roles, which actresses sought out to expand their repertoires. One that is missed is that the likely reason that Zanni wears the wide-legged pants typical of sailors is that the Venetians drew their galley crews from the same mainland population that supplied their porters.

One point with which to quarrel is the adoption, unmodified, of Kathleen Lea's origin theory, according to which folk sources were added to the *commedia* subsequent to its development on the basis of erudite and Roman comedy and literary texts. The research of other scholars showing that folk traditions were fundamental to the forerunners of *commedia* characters created by early sixteenth-century amateurs, particularly Angelo Beolco, is neglected. Paolo Toschi's monumental volume, while cited in the bibliography, is not utilized for evidence that features of *commedia* masks reflected their origin in agricultural rites celebrating the return of the vegetation spirit from its underground winter exile. Also ignored is the work of Toschi and Ludovico Zorzi connecting Harlequin to a range of folk Carnival characters as well as Beolco's Ruzante. Exploring earlier Harlequin variants would have explained, among other features, the pied patches as representing the renewed vegetation sprouting up from the earth and the newly-bright sun awakening it. While the contentious duet of Magnifico (Pantalone) and Zanni (a Harlequin variant) is acknowledged to be "the heart, and oldest core" (187) of the *commedia*, the book contains no reference to its first significant development in the works of Beolco, particularly the *Anconitana*. Also missed is the opportunity to articulate the duet's fight over the innamorata as a re-lexicalization of the folk battle between winter's old sun and spring's new sun so profoundly affected by the social hierarchicalization of the sixteenth century that victory was incongruously allotted to the older man because of his higher social status (though, as Katritzky notes, he is artificially rejuvenated by the *calze* and *zipon* of his youth still visible under his open *vesta*). There is also a limited awareness of the extent to which earlier amateur performances involved women (*viz.* Beolco's letter to Ercole II d'Este).

Questions of precedents aside, scholars of the *commedia*, art historians, and historians *tout court* will find much of use in this very important volume, a milestone in *commedia dell'arte* scholarship.

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