

Fausta Antonucci
and Anna Tedesco, editors.
*La Comedia nueva e le scene italiane
nel Seicento: trame, drammaturgie,
contesti a confronto.*

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THE RICH AND COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP that developed during the seventeenth century between the *comedia nueva* and the various forms of Italian theater (theater, commedia dell'arte, opera) has been a steady object of study by several talented Italian Hispanists since the 1980s. Yet, this field has remained something of a specialist niche. This might be explained in part by the fact that, for several historical reasons, the literary *Seicento* was traditionally the poor relation of studies in Italian literature, and its richness has generated little attention. Also, until recently as we shall see, Italian stage works of the seventeenth century were not performed regularly, so there was little practical incentive to examine them as literature. In the last couple of decades though, interest in Venetian opera of that period has grown rapidly, not only in academia—as attested by the now classic study by Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (U of California P, 1991)—but also in the opera houses of Europe and North America, in which the operas of a composer like Francesco Cavalli have now become quite popular. In parallel, the discovery that many Venetian operas had Spanish comedias as their sources has energized the research on the theater connections between Spain and Italy, yielding much new scholarship, predictably often produced by musicologists (e.g., Anna Tedesco. “Teatro del Siglo de Oro y ópera italiana del Seiscentos: un balance,” *Criticón*, vol. 116, 2012, pp. 113–35).

The volume *La Comedia nueva e le scene italiane nel Seicento: trame, drammaturgie, contesti a confronto*, edited by Fausta Antonucci, a Hispanist, and Anna Tedesco, a musicologist, is a magnificent result of this new synergy between scholars of different disciplines. The book gathers the proceedings of a conference held in Rome in January 2015 and jointly organized by the volume's editors. Proposing a very strong interdisciplinary vision for the field,

the editors invited scholars from various disciplines (Hispanists, musicologists, Italianists, and theater historians) to participate to the conference. This handsome volume published by Olschki, the prestigious Italian academic press, presents twenty-three contributions from scholars based in Italy, Spain, France, and the United States, with most texts written in Italian, though two articles are in English and two in Spanish. There are two substantial introductions—one by each editor—with the rest of the essays divided among five sections. The introductions and the first section present comprehensive overviews of the field, whereas the remaining four sections feature thematically related articles—although some of the subject matter addressed could fit in more than one section, and the volume does encourage a transversal reading of the articles.

The introductions by Antonucci and Tedesco present the vision, goals, and achievements of the conference and of the book, each writer addressing the issues from their own specific disciplinary point of view. These two texts set the tone of the volume and establish with great clarity the motivations and ambitions of the book. They situate the state of the scholarship today but also trace the many avenues of research for the years to come. A section in three voices follows this dialogical opening, as the editors asked three seniors scholars to survey the field through the lens of their own disciplines.

Understandably, the opening statement is by Hispanist Maria Grazia Profeti, widely recognized as a pioneer and a major contributor to the study of the relationships between the *comedia* and the Italian stage. Profeti first offers a survey of the critical reception of Spanish Golden Age theater in Italy from the nineteenth century to today. A substantial part of her study, as her audience would expect, is dedicated to an examination of her own production and role in the development of the studies of the Spain–Italy relationship since the 1980s. It is fascinating to see such an eminent scholar revisit and interpret her own scholarly path. In the second part of the essay, Profeti paints in broad strokes the theatrical relationship between the two peninsulas from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Her vast knowledge produces a compelling and vivid picture of such a rich relationship. Furthermore, she offers a useful background for the reader of this volume that allows for better comprehension of the more philologically oriented studies of the book.

The next contribution to this introductory section is authored by distinguished musicologist Lorenzo Bianconi, who has dedicated a major part of his career to the study of the Italian opera of the Baroque era. In the first part of his article, Bianconi recounts the many dramatic turns that occurred in his field of study in the last decades. He narrates, in particular, how in the 1980s most musicologists, including himself, refuted any influence of the *comedia nueva* on Venetian opera, recounting, in turn, their subsequent change of heart when many important discoveries about Spanish sources were made (see Fausta Antonucci and Lorenzo Bianconi, “Plotting the myth of *Giasone*,” *Readying Cavalli’s Operas for the Stage: Manuscript, Edition, Production*, edited by Ellen Rosand, Ashgate, 2013). In the second part of his article, Bianconi takes stock of the most recent joint scholarly achievements by Hispanists and musicologists, after which he suggests methodologies and further paths of research.

The last contributor to this introductory section is theater historian Silvia Carandini. Whereas Profeti's focus was clearly on theater as text, Carandini situates the impact of the *comedia* in Italy against the backdrop of theater as performance. She surveys the scholarship of Italian theater historians on some of the most characteristic forms of theater life in Baroque Italy, like the *fiesta* and *commedia dell'arte*, and then suggests new interpretations in the light of the Italy–Spain relationship.

After the editors' introductions and the opening section, characterized by a wide-ranging perspective, the remaining four sections of the volume are dedicated to specific issues with, in most cases, distinct methodological lines. The first section, entitled "Studi di contesto," includes five studies which all focus on the impact of Golden Age theater in specific cities of the various states of the Italian peninsula. The Kingdom of Naples, a Spanish viceroyalty at the time, is examined in two articles. Francesco Cotticelli investigates the frequent and influential presence of Spanish actors in the city of Naples itself and at the viceregal court, whereas José María Domínguez brings to our attention previously unknown operatic performances in the city of Andria, a minor center today but the seat of a powerful duchy in the seventeenth century. The other articles focus on locations in the sphere of influence of the Spanish crown but not under its direct rule. Carla Bianchi examines the case of Anton Giulio Brignole Sale, an author from Genoa whose conflicted relationship with Spain mirrors the situation of the city itself. Roberto Ciancarelli reveals previously unknown documents from archives in Rome, while also reflecting on the theatrical writing practices of the time. Finally, Nicola Michelassi brings to our attention the key role of Florence, through the *Accademia degli Infuocati*, in the spread of the Spanish *comedia* throughout Italy. The important role played by the capital of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, a traditionally pro-Spain state, is further explored by the articles of two other authors (Nicola Usula and Salomé Vuelta García) in other sections of the volume. Whereas the role of Naples in the diffusion of the Spanish theater culture in Italy was previously well known, this volume establishes clearly that Florence was a major center as well. Overall, the five studies of this section share a reflection on how the political, economic, and cultural impact that Spain had on those locations impacted the reception and diffusion of the *comedia* in the Peninsula. In her introductory remarks, Antonucci notes that much work remains to achieve a better understanding of the socio-political context of the diffusion of the *comedia*, and she notes in particular the absence in the volume of any study on the other major Spanish dominion in Italy, the Duchy of Milan.

The next section ("I generi") brings together three studies that reflect on issues related to literary genres. Jean François Lattarico examines the vast and varied literary production of Sicilian born Scipione Errico. As Errico was a member of the important Venetian *Accademia degli Incogniti*, Lattarico's article adds another valuable facet to his own research on the *Incogniti* while establishing even further the influence of the *comedia* in Venice. Franco Vazzoler studies Giuseppe Artale's dramatic version of the myth of Semiramis, based on plays by Virués and Calderón. Finally, Enrica Zanin reflects on why some Spanish *comedias* became tragedies once they were adapted for the Italian stage. She locates with great insight this issue in the broader discus-

sion on the nature of tragedy. The three articles display a wide-ranging and deep knowledge on the issue of literary genre in the context of the European literatures of the period. They also convincingly support the idea that the process of adapting Spanish plays for Italian audiences strongly contributed to the evolution of literary genres in Italy and therefore opened new theatrical options for the local writers.

The section entitled “Comedias e musica” is tightly focused on the relationship between the Comedia and music and comprises articles by two prominent musicologists, Margaret Murata and Louise K. Stein. The brevity of this section might seem paradoxical, considering that one of the key axis of the book is indeed the relationship between the comedia and music. In reality, that axis is indeed central to the book and examined in at least four other articles in the volume (by Dominguez, Michelassi, Nicola Usula, and Salomé Vuelta García), not to mention the introduction by Tedesco and the opening survey by Bianconi. What the two articles in this section have in common is a close examination of very specific points of contact between the comedia and Italian musical theater genres (opera and oratorio). Both authors use in-depth music score analysis as a tool to prove, in the case of Stein, how Calderonian sources modeled some arias of two operas by Alessandro Scarlatti and, in the case of Murata, the parallelism between Spanish *autos* and allegorical passages in Italian musical dramas.

The final and longest section of the book, “I rifacimenti: alcuni casi (scenari, drammi per musica, commedie distese),” includes eight essays tackling issues around the rewriting (“rifacimento”) of Spanish Golden Age plays in the various theatrical forms prevalent in seventeenth-century Italy: full plays, *commedia dell’arte* scenarios, and operas. This concluding section addresses issues beyond the adaptation of the source text, as questions relating to location and literary genre, examined earlier in the book, resonate in and enrich this final section. Yet, the central question of this section is indeed how the Spanish sources were adapted and rewritten for Italian audiences. It is interesting to note that most authors of this chapter enhance their examination by using wider frames. Thus, Nancy D’Antuono examines Andrea Perucci’s versión of Montalbán’s *Cumplir con su obligación* through the lens of Perucci’s famous acting compendium, *Dell’arte rappresentativa*. Issues of intertextuality are dominant in the articles by Elena E. Marcello, Nicola Usula, and Salomé Vuelta García as they examine plays (the first, Rojas Zorrilla’s *Donde hay agravios no hay celos*, the two others Calderón’s *El alcaide de sí mismo*) that reached Italy after a previous stop in France. Nicola Usula and Salomé Vuelta García, but even more so Nicola Badolato with Lope de Vega’s *El mayor imposible*, are also concerned with the formal transformations that the Spanish source play must undergo to fit the Italian operatic format.

The final group of articles are of particular interest to Italianists, as the focus is very much on how the Italian version of the Spanish play inscribes itself in the Italian literary frame of references. Roberto Gigliucci examines how and to what end the motif of blood-letting found in Calderón’s plays is used in some *commedia dell’arte canovacci*, whereas Diego Símini and Simone Trecca focus on two interesting playwrights. Trecca’s article is dedicated to the lesser-known Neapolitan Carlo Celano, a writer who used at least fourteen

Spanish comedias as sources of his own work, whereas Símini investigates how Cicognini adapted Rojas Zorrilla's *Casarse por vengarse*, contributing useful insights on the compositional practices of the most popular Italian playwright of the century and the librettist of the most popular opera of the *Seicento*, *Giasone*, a work directly inspired by Lope de Vega.

The exceptional breadth and depth of *La Comedia nueva e le scene italiane nel Seicento: trame, drammaturgie, contesti a confronto* is remarkable. Its originality and strength resides not only in the high quality of the articles but also in its interdisciplinary approach. In particular, it profoundly integrates for the first time the fruitful dialogue between literary studies and musicology. The book will appeal not only to Hispanists and musicologists, but also to scholars of Baroque theater, as they will find here not only many insights on the theatrical writing and textual practices of the seventeenth century, but also remarkably rich bibliographical notes in the essays. A minor criticism could be that a general bibliography of the cited works was not compiled, as this would have been a very useful tool, just as it is a pity that only the index only includes the names of persons. The titles of the theatrical works would have allowed the reader to make the most of this very rich book. However, these minor details barely detract from the notable achievement of this important and most enjoyable volume. As it is safe to predict that the rediscovery and performance of Italian Baroque operas will gain strength in the coming years, so will the interest in the study of the relationship between the comedia and the Italian stage, for which this book will remain a reference.