Among the many interesting paintings the Metropolitan Museum has recently had the good fortune to receive as loans from Mrs. Payne Whitney there is one that is not only entertaining but also somewhat puzzling. It shows a pair of young lovers. The man is paying court to the woman by putting his arms tenderly round her, and she shows her satisfaction in a rather surprising way, pressing his little finger with the finger and thumb of her right hand; at the same time she holds in her left hand a pair of spectacles, which she seems to have just taken off or to be offering to some one. Her intent and mischievous eye seeks ours as if to tell us the hidden meaning of her two apparently diverse actions, lest we see in them only thoughtless feminine inconsequence, the left hand not knowing what the right hand is doing. The lovers are dressed in a rather strange style, and one suspects a fanciful version of mediaeval costume, somewhat like that worn in Burgundy at the beginning of the fifteenth century.

Fortunately it has been possible to clear up all this mystery. In the Cabinet des Estampes in the Bibliothèque Nationale there are two engravings very much like our picture, one of them anonymous, the other, in reverse, signed P. Perret sc. 79 and Le Blond excude. (illustrated on the following pages). The lovers are exactly the same in these prints as in the painting, except for a very slight difference in the position of the hand that holds the spectacles; but they have facing them a disconsolate old man, to whom the lady is presenting this symbol of old age. Immediately the enigma of our painting is solved: it is a copy of the anonymous engraving; we have only the left half of the picture; the right half, showing the old man, has been cut off, perhaps because of damage, perhaps because the indiscrет witness was thought to lessen the sale value of the young lovers. When we look carefully at the canvas we see that the old frame mark is on three sides only, proving that the right side was not framed until recently.

We can also see, near the spectacles, the outline of the old man’s coat just as it appears in the engravings. The meaning of the scene is now clear: it is, following the vigorous paganism of the Renaissance, both a commendation of young love and a satire on the unseemly ardors of love in old age. A legend in French on the prints, followed in the anonymous one by a German translation, develops this idea, not without wit and a certain charm of orthography. Here is the text:

Voie z ce vil penard enulopé dans sa mante
Les bras croizez orir ce qu’il veut et ne peut
La belle gentiment de deux dois luy presente
Ses lunettes disant qua grand tort il se deu
Dailleurs rend son mignon pleyn duc amour plaisante
Serre son petit doit et veult tout ce qu’il veult.

Bonhomme tenez vos lunettes
Et regardez bien que vous nettes
De l’age propre au Jeu d’amours
Un chacun cherche son semblable
Souffrez qu’un autre plus valable
Cueille le fruit de mes beaus Jours.

The arrangement of this satirical subject that we have in our picture and the two prints must have been well known. There is another example of it in a painting of much higher quality in the Museum at Rennes (illustrated on p. 13, above). The same characters and the same poses, except that the hand holding the spectacles is slightly different and the old man, instead of muffling his hands in his cloak, makes the eloquent gesture of counting money—the final argument of the particular kind of old rake he is. But the costumes are entirely different. The lover appears as a French nobleman of the time of Charles IX and Henry III.

1 On canvas, 35 1/4 x 32 in. Illustrated on p. 12, above.
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

BULLETIN

Summer 1943
The Lovers. French, late XVI century, a copy after the engraving below. Lent by Mrs. Payne Whitney

Woman Choosing between Youth and Age, an anonymous copy after the engraving by Perret on the opposite page
Woman Choosing between Youth and Age, a scene from the commedia dell'arte. French painting, about 1570-1580. In the Museum at Rennes

Engraving by P. Perret dated 1579 and based on the painting above
(about 1570-1580), the old man in Venetian costume with red jacket and close-fitting trousers, black cloak and cap; the lady is dressed, if one may use the word, only in jewels and a very diaphanous veil. There is an architectural background with classic moldings that suggests the interior of an Italian palace. The traditional name of the picture at Rennes, La Femme entre les Deux Ages, sums up the scene. But there seems to be more in these pictures than a casual representation of a satiric theme. Surely there is some definite source. I believe that we have here a scene from the Italian comedy, the commedia dell'arte, which, just at the end of the reign of Charles IX, was making a brilliant entrance in France.

Of these first connections of France with the Italian theater we have today some knowledge. Old texts, paintings, and engravings were brought to light by a number of the older scholars, particularly Armand Baschet, and of recent years, when the interest in the commedia dell'arte was suddenly revived by Diaghileff's related researches for the Ballet Russe, by Mic, Beijer, Schwartz, and above all Duchartre.\(^2\) We are not here concerned with the players, professional or amateur, who spoke the literary comedies called by the Italians scritte or sostenute, but with those, almost all professional, who played comedies all'improvviso or dell'arte or a maschera. In this kind of theater the actors improvised the dialogue within the framework of a plot laid out in broad lines but allowing complete liberty of detail. They played stock characters, among which the most famous and the oldest were Il Pantalone, or Il Magnifico, the irascible old dupe; the Zany Corneto, the Zany Harlequin, Il Francatippa, and Il Brighella, rustic valets and clowns; Il Capitano, the braggart soldier, usually Spanish; Il Dottore, the pretentious savant; L'Innamorato and L'Innamorata, the young lovers; La Franceschina, the malicious servant; and the old procuress La Ruffiana. There were set costumes for each of these, several of them including a mask.

Italian players of this type undoubtedly appeared in France at an early date. Already in 1538, under Francis I, there are mentions in contemporary records of actors that may have been commedia players.\(^3\) Brantôme recounts that Catherine de' Medici from her youth was fond of the Zanies and Pantaloons and "en riait tout son saoul tout comme une autre." As he accompanied the queen in 1548 to Lyons, where there was a numerous and rich colony of Italian merchants and where a Florentine troupe was playing La Calandria, a comedy by Bibbiena, it was probably at this early date that Catherine had occasion to laugh so wholeheartedly.

We are not certain, however, that these Zanies and Pantaloons were members of complete troupes, and the first mention of an organized company of Italian comedians in France dates only from 1571. They played at Nogent-le-Roi, not far from Chartres, for the court of Charles IX. A legal document names the chief of the troupe: "Alberico Ganassa et

\(^2\) Among the works published are the following. Those by Baschet, Beijer, and Duchartre are standard for the subject. F. Bartoli, Notizie istoriche de' comici italiani . . . (Padua, 1781); A. D'Ancona, Origini del teatro italiano, 2 vols. (Florence, 1877, and Turin, 1891); L. Rasi, I comici italiani (Florence, 1897-1905) and Catalogo generale della raccolta drammatica italiana di Luigi Rasi (Florence, 1912); A. Baschet, Les Comédiens italiens à la cour de France (Paris, 1889); C. Mic [Micascevsky], La Commedia dell'arte (Paris, 1927); A. Beijer, Recueil de plusieurs fragments des premières comédies italiennes qui ont été représentées en France sous le règne de Henri III—Recueil dit de Fossard, conservé au Musée National de Stockholm, présenté par Agne Beijer, Conservateur du Musée National de Drammenhus, suivi de Compositions de rhétorique de M. Don Arlequin présentées par P.-L. Duchartre (Paris, 1928); P.-L. Duchartre, La Comédie italienne (Paris, 1928), Les Compositions de rhétorique de M. Don Arlequin (Paris, 1928), and The Italian Comedy (London, 1929); I. A. Schwartz, The Commedia dell'Arte and Its Influence on French Comedy in the Seventeenth Century (Paris, 1933).

\(^3\) Specifically, on the occasion of Eleanor of Austria's entrance into Paris. In speaking of a company of farcers the record names a certain "Maistre André Italien" who was in the service of Francis I. He was commanded to "faire et composer des farces et moralités les plus exquises." The word moralités does not necessarily suggest the French farcers but is simply used as part of the current vocabulary of the French comedy. The words faire et composer may mean that Maistre André's productions were not written comedies to be memorized but plays quickly put together by the leader of the troupe to be delivered impromptu. If so, then we have to do here with the real commedia dell'arte.
Ganassa was a famous actor, the creator of a Bergamask Zany with long nose and prominent jaw (ganascia), and probably the first to play the role of a more agile Zany to whom the people of Paris soon gave the name of Harlequin. The players were making a bid for the bourgeois French public after having won success with the learned and Italianate audiences at the court of the Valois. But they managed to play only three times in Paris. The Parliament, inspired as much by the Huguenot revolt against the formidable indecency of the Italian comedy as by the intrigues of the Confrères de la Passion, French players who saw in the Italian troupe a dangerous rival, succeeded in driving them out, in spite of letters patent from the king. Ganassa, however, remained in France and played long enough to produce a lively impression. It seems that the French word *ganache*, which means the cheek of a horse, a massive human jaw, and also a comic figure in a play, a foolish old dupe, comes from Ganassa. He reappeared in Paris in June 1572, playing at the Château de Madrid and even at the Louvre three days before the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

After this there was a succession of Italian troupes in France. That same tragic year of 1572 the company directed by the Florentine Soldino played for Charles IX at Blois, while another, with a Venetian chief, Antonio Maria, is mentioned at Paris. But the troupe that later seems to have made the greatest impression was the Gelosi (the jealous, the zealous to please). And with reason, for it was the most accomplished of all the troupes of the commedia dell’arte. When, at the death of Charles in 1574, Henry III set forth on his *opéra bouffe* flight from Poland, abandoning by night his kingdom and the castle of Wawel in Cracow for the crown of France and the Louvre, he passed through Venice. The Council of Ten, not without thought of the Turkish danger, decided to seduce the youthful Very Christian King, and the reception prepared for him became a famous one in the annals of Venice, already laden with pomp and magnificence. The commedia dell’arte was part of the program; in the company of choice shone Victoria Piissimi as the Innamorata, Simone da Bologna as Harlequin, and, above all, Giulio Pasquati, a Pantaloon without equal. Henry did not forget them. Two years’ diplomatic correspondence with the French ambassador at Venice, Monsieur Du Ferrier, shows the tenacity of the royal wish to see again the Venetian troupe and the Magnifico that had so struck him. There was a long wait for Pasquati, who was engaged in playing before the Emperor in Vienna. Finally the agreement was made and the troupe crossed the Alps. But in December 1576 France was in a turmoil, and the Huguenots were on the watch for the least advantage to let fly at Henry. So they stopped the Gelosi at Charité-sur-Loire and would not let them go except for the king’s ransom. Arrived at Blois on January 25, 1577, the comedians played the same evening in the great Salle des États before the court and the deputies of the nation, who were then in session. They stayed in Blois until spring, then betook themselves to Paris and appeared before the Parisian public on the nineteenth of May in the Hôtel de Bourbon.

It was a triumph. “Ils prenoient de salaire quatre sols par teste de tous les Français qui les voulaien aller voir jouer, où il y avait tel concours et affluence de peuple que les quatre meilleurs prédicateurs de Paris n’en avaient pas tretous ensemble autant quand ils preschoient,” says the Sieur de l’Estoile in his

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4 The opinion that has recently been uppermost in the voluminous discussions of the name Harlequin places its origin in the north of France, where the word *harlequin* has meant an airy sprite, a will-o’-the-wisp, a fantastic stage figure since the eleventh century, when it was used in the writings of Adam de la Halle. Cf. Otto Driesen, *Der Ursprung Harlekins* (Berlin, 1904); Martin Ruheleman, *Etyologie des Wortes Harlequin und verwandter Wörter* (Halle, 1912); L. Sainéan, *Les Origines indigènes de l’étymologie française* (Boccard ed., Paris, 1925).


7 Baschet, *op. cit.* This author does not always give his sources, but he is a thoroughly trustworthy scholar. Much of his information comes from the Gonzaga archives in Mantua.
Journal, and he adds to this disillusioned thought a bolder comment: "La corruption de ce temps estant telle que les farceurs, bouffons, putains et mignons avoient tout le crédit auprès du Roy." The Parliament of Paris was of the same opinion in declaring that "les comédiens n'enseignent que paillardise et adulteres et ne savent que escole de débauche à la jeunesse de tout sexe de la ville de Paris." Threatened with expulsion, the Gelosi got new guarantees of protection from the king, and in the end they stayed in France for almost a year. This censure reveals the currents of thought that were then dividing French society: the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the court nobility, the reaction of the new puritanism, and the resistance of national feeling to the Italian influence spread by Henry's court. We must not forget that at the same time Henry Estienne was publishing an essay under the significant title of Deux Dialogues du nouveau language français italianisé et autrement desguizé, principalement entre les courtisants de ce temps.

The increasing success, however, of the commedia dell' arte in France prevents us from exaggerating the importance of such opposition. The very fact that this form of theater was well received in France, both by the intellectual élite and by the people, proves that it was a ripe fruit of the civilization of the time, that it satisfied certain needs not met by existent dramatic forms. The French comedies, indeed, were only popular farces, at once moralizing and coarse, played by actors from the street fairs, whose talent, though considerable, did not succeed in hiding the hopeless boredom of the text. Occasionally a satiric turn of thought or a political allusion made them too intellectual for the people. In contrast to these, the Italian comedians had a richer and more direct appeal. Their plots were more complex and full of the unexpected, with extempore dialogue endlessly renewing itself. Their lazz
counter with the fantasy of pantomime, tumbling, comic dances, quarrels, and slapstick gags of all kinds. The stock types and costumes were easily recognizable. Their particular way of playing, adapted to the poor light of torches or the open-air visibility of a public square, gave more importance to gesture than to speech—thus also lessening the handicap of a foreign language. That put them within everybody's range. The most cultivated literary men of France were fascinated by their gaiety and their vitality. Montaigne, who saw the Italian comedians at Bologna in 1580 and the following year at Pisa, confesses: "Il m'est souvent tombé en fantaisie de faire des comédiennes, ainsi que les Italiens, qui y sont assez heureux. . . . Ils ont de quoi rire partout, il ne faut pas qu'ils se chatouillent." They had besides a certain staple of classic learning. The good Italian players were often writers, poets, playwrights, accomplished musicians. They took care to fill their lines with erudite allusions and bits of ancient history and mythology. And keeping in mind one of the essential characteristics of the commedia dell' arte in its early days—a robust libertinism—it is easy to see how court and people agreed in applauding. We have here an attitude that is innate in renaissance society and one of the most authentic survivals of antiquity, this frankness that calls a spade a spade and adds an enormous laugh in the very intonation of Rabelais or Brantôme. The perversity of Henry III's mignons should not mislead us in this respect; it was only the snobbishness of sophisticated intellectuals and did not prevent them from giving a just value to the classic ribaldry, if one may call it so, of mankind. Finally, the use of the dance, music, singing, and, above all, women actors gave the Italian stage an unrivaled attractiveness. For we must not forget that women did not appear on the French stage until 1672.

So, in spite of the hostility of Parliament, royal favor and the applause of the public

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10 Voyages de Michel de Montaigne, pp. 103 and 295.
brought the Italian comedians regularly to France, then persuaded them to stay there. The period that interests us is that of the beginnings, the reigns of Charles IX, Henry III, and Henry IV (1560-1610). The success of the Gelosi brought in 1578 and 1579 several troupes to the court of Navarre and in 1584 and 1585 the Confidenti, protégés of the Duke of Joyeuse. It was only after 1588, the time of the worst disorders of the League in Paris, that the comedians stopped venturing beyond the Alps. But they returned by 1600, and the best of them, the Gelosi, in new guise with the famous actors Isabella and Francesco Andreini and probably Flamminio Scala as director. In 1603 and 1604 the Parisians applauded anew; then Isabella died suddenly in Lyons. After that came the troupes of Battista Austoni in 1608, Giovanni Alfiere in 1612, and the Fedeli under Giovanni Battista Andreini in 1613, 1621-1623, and 1624-1625.

They certainly had chance enough of impressing French society of the time to lead us to expect a reflection in the plastic arts. Indeed a number of prints of scenes of the commedia dell’arte, made in France between 1570 and 1585, have been published; but only three paintings of the same period. Research begun in France in 1935 has enabled the author to find three other pictures, which, with Mrs. Whitney’s painting, are the subject of the present article. Much precise information is lacking that can only be obtained with the return of peace; some ideas are only hypotheses for lack of research that can only be done in France. It seems, however, that even the incomplete publication of these rare documents is not without interest for the history of the commedia dell’arte or for French painting of the sixteenth century.

Let us review each of these pictures, even the three that have been published, since they have been studied almost entirely from the point of view of the history of the theater. As for their interest as paintings, they have never had any serious analysis, and the old errors have simply been repeated. We begin with them.

1. A Scene from the Commedia dell’Arte Played in France before a Noble Audience. In the Museum at Bayeux, France. Wood, 31 1/2 x 32 3/4 inches (80 x 83 cm.). Ill. p. 18.

Ever since the time of Maurice Sand it has been said that this picture was painted by Pourbus in 1572 and that it represents the court of Charles IX playing with the Italian comedians at Blois. This was based on an inscription at the bottom of the picture, according to which the man enveloped in a cloak in the background at the left is “Pourbus peintre l’auteur du tableau,” the two Innamoratos are King Charles and Henry Duke of Guise (the famous Balafré), while the kneeling Innamorata is the fickle Marguerite of Valois, the clumsy Zany at the right the Cardinal of Lorraine, and the young lady playing with her dog Marie Touchet, the king’s gentle mistress. To avoid mistake all of them have little numbers painted on their heads corresponding to the names in the inscription. Nothing could be more suspect than this roster of players so obviously well chosen for their roles; it proclaims naïve wishful thinking. But Maurice Sand, the son of George Sand, who wrote the preface to his book, belonged to a generation steeped in romanticism. The idea of a licentious comedy played by a court that several days later was to witness the horrors of Saint Bartholomew’s night was irresistible to him. However, if he and his successors had taken the trouble to examine the inscription, they would have seen that it was painted on a piece added to the original panel, that it was recently painted, and that the lettering was exactly like that of the innumerable inscriptions ordered by Louis Philippe to explain the portraits and historical scenes in the Versailles Museum and the Château d’Eu. The inscription is, then, only a quarter of a century older than Sand’s book and has no documentary value whatever. It has, nevertheless, been accepted by historians of the theater, and Duchartre, for instance, describes the picture

A scene from the commedia dell'arte played in France before a noble audience.

Probably Flemish, about 1571 or 1572. In the Museum at Bayeux

as painted about 1572 by Paul or Frans Pourbus and as very probably Alberto Ganassa’s troupe playing with the court of Charles IX. The same author, in answering a hypothesis of Constant Mic’s suggesting Jacques Pourbus, a Flemish painter of whom nothing is known except that he lived in Paris from 1570 to 1580, says that it is useless to consider this unknown painter because, “although the history of the Pourbus family is far from clear, their hand is sufficiently recognizable in the painting.”

The facts are unfortunately entirely different. The history of the Pourbus family is quite clear enough to make it impossible to recognize in the painting the hand of any of the three known Pourbuses, Pieter, Frans the Elder, or Frans the Younger,13 who are, moreover, very different from each other. Only the last named came to France, and a quarter of a century after the Bayeux picture was painted. On the other hand nothing excludes Jacques Pourbus; but we are completely ignorant of his style of painting. There is, however, no reason for clinging to this name. It is not in a serious tradition. In the early nineteenth

century every painting done in France about 1600 that gave any evidence of Flemish influence was automatically labeled "Pourbus."

What can we say of the subject and the author of this picture? Is it a scene from the commedia dell’arte with a cast of both professional players and courtier amateurs? This is not impossible, for, though it is rare, we have evidence of the fashionable world mingling with Pantaloons and Zanies, not only in carnival but on the stage. Massimo Trojano reports such an example in 1568 at the court of Bavaria.14 But in our picture two groups are clearly distinguishable: in the foreground eleven people in lively attitudes, some in the costume of the commedia dell’arte; behind these, at a distance of several feet, nine people conversing with each other or playing musical instruments or simply appearing as immobile spectators. They give the impression of a group of courtiers watching a company of professional players at the close range customary in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when, playing indoors for a small audience, actors did not need a real stage. It is interesting to note that the scene takes place in the entrance hall of a castle whose high door opens on a park laid out in Italian style. Scenery has been provided, simple structures of wood, suggesting walls decorated with flat moldings; on the left wing a window is painted with pleated curtains or wooden shutters and, on the right wing, a doorway framed with large ashlar stones.15 This is the kind of setting that contemporary drawings and prints of the commedia dell’arte have made familiar to us.16

The costumes, besides the traditional ones of the principal characters of the commedia, are French of the last years of the reign of Charles IX (1570-1574). So nothing prevents us from identifying these players as one of the troupes that came to France in 1571 or 1572. But why should it be Ganassa’s? A legal document states that in 1572 Ganassa had only six fellow players. In the picture there are eleven professional players, admitting that there are no amateurs. If we must have a company mentioned in documents it would be better to choose that of the Florentine Soldini, who with his eleven fellow troupers played in March 1572 before Charles and his court. But there were several companies in France, their personnel always changing, and information about the actors is summary or lacking. Thus no attempts to identify the players in this picture can ever lead to conclusive results—and this applies to almost all the paintings and engravings dealt with in this article.

As for the author of this picture painted in France about 1571 or 1572: from the relatively broad brushwork, the spontaneous drawing of outlines, the lively, sometimes rough gestures of the players, and the bourgeois plodding of the onlookers, we recognize an artist of Flemish temper. A French painter would have had more care for the calligraphic quality of the line, would have softened the violence of the players, and would have managed a more aristocratic grace in the motionless audience. The thick texture, with impasto here and there in the Venetian manner, the often heavy features sketched freely with the brush, the hands with their long, flexible fingers, encourage a more precise opinion: the painter was a pupil of Frans Floris. There were many of them in France in the last third of the sixteenth century: Hieronymus Francken, Cornelis Floris II, Apert Fransen, Jan de Meijer, Georges Boba. Of those whose works are known, like Francken and Boba, we find no characteristics in the Bayeux picture. But they painted similar subjects. In the Museum at Aix-la-Chapelle there is a Ball in Venice by Hieronymus Francken signed and dated 1565.

14 Massimo Trojano, Discorsi della trionfi, giostre, apparieti e delle cose più notabili, nelle sottuose nozze dell’ Illustr., et eccell. Sig. Duca Guglielmo . . . , nell anno 1568, di Massimo Trojano da Napoli (Munich, 1568).
15 The curtain appearing at the upper left corner seems to be a recent addition.
in which a whole group of Italian comedy characters rush in among the dancers. There are also several pictures of balls at the court of the Valois and processions of the League through the streets of Paris done in a closely related Flemish mood, but we do not know who painted them. For the moment the Bayeux picture is in the same case.

To sum up: this picture represents a troupe of Italian comedians, which we cannot identify with certainty, playing in a French castle before a noble audience, probably about 1571 or 1572. It was painted by one of the Flemish pupils of Floris, whether transient or living in France.

For the history of the theater it has great importance: it is the oldest painting known (or at least published) of a scene from the commedia dell’arte, the oldest not only in France but in Italy. It gives us, by the way, the oldest known version of Harlequin’s costume.

A replica of this picture, once in the collection of Jules Sambon in Paris, is said to have been acquired by the museum of the Scala Theater in Milan.

For some time after Victor Cousin published it in 1890 critics considered this picture a scene played by the Gelosi when they were in Paris in 1603 and 1604. In the charming Innamorata they were led to see the famous Isabella Andreini. More recently it became clear that the young actress in the picture could not possibly be Isabella, at that time in her forty-second year, and that the costumes dated from an earlier period, about 1570-1580.

17 The Duke of Alençon’s Ball (in the Louvre), the Duke of Joyeuse’s Ball (at Versailles), and the Ball at the Court of Valois (in the Rennes Museum) have been attributed, without convincing proof, to Hermann van der Mast, by L. Dimier, and to Hieronymus Francken, by L. Demonts. Cf. Catalogue des peintures de l’école française au Musée du Louvre by G. Brière (Paris, 1924), no. 1034, p. 286.
So, without giving up the idea of having such an attractive picture of the great actress (as a matter of fact, the only authentic portrait we have of her, an engraving, shows a face that is intelligent and firm but without charm), it was supposed that the Gelosi, who had come to France also in 1577, already had Isabella with them and that the Carnavalet picture shows her at that time, when she was fifteen years old. But there is no proof; Isabella is not known to have appeared in the Gelosi cast until 1578, in Florence, when she had just married Francesco Andreini and the troupe was reorganized.

In fact, this scene may have reference to the Gelosi of 1577 or to one of the troupes playing in 1571 or 1572. If the Gelosi, they must be the celebrated players that Henry III admired at Venice: Giulio Pasquati as Pantalon, the beautiful and famous Vittoria Piissimi, called La Fioretta, as the Innamorata, Simone da Bologna as the Zany, and Rinaldo as the Innamorato. But whatever the troupe, the picture is an important record of a very early and glorious period of the commedia dell’arte. It shows the simplicity of the setting—curtain and trestle stage—and the expressiveness of acting based on gesture and the mimic significance of the whole figure, the slightest motions of which were studied as in dancing.

From the point of view of painting the style and technique are rather close to those of the Bayeux picture. But the artist is more subtle, a surer and more graceful draughtsman, a painter more conscious of his effects and of the pantomime effects of the players. It is possible that he was both a Fleming and a follower of Floris. But the French feeling is so strong that he may have been a Frenchman under Flemish influence. The type of the young woman, a stock figure of the School of Fontainebleau, and her gestures, like those of most of the other figures, are treated with the lively and delicate distinction that is often the mark of the French temperament.


A replica of this picture, possibly of better quality, belongs to Mlle Wenner-Gren, Stockholm. It is reproduced in Allardyce Nicoll’s book, Masks, Mimes, and Miracles (London, 1931), page 345, figure 224, as “one of the earliest pictorial representations, if not the earliest, of the commedia dell’arte,” and attributed to “F. Pourbus, sixteenth century.”

This little panel and the following picture introduce a type unknown till now among the paintings that the commedia dell’arte inspired from the time of its first appearance in France, the portrait of the whole troupe, or at least of the typical characters. The two pictures have a similar composition. In each, two groups stand out. At the left there is Pantaloons surrounded by his satellites and constant persecutors, the two Zanies and Franceschina, who make fun of him, holding behind his head the horned symbol of his conjugal misfortune (or, to speak the language of our time, the V that makes Hitler cuckold in his amours with Victory). At the right are the lovers, exchanging tender looks or letters, accompanied by Columbine or old Ruffiana. Pantaloons’s gesture towards the lovers unites the two groups and summarizes the most typical plot of the commedia dell’arte: the jealous old man duped and beset by the clowns in plain view of the happy lovers. Thus the portrait of the troupe is made dramatic and takes on the character of a poster, a bit of publicity to which we shall return later.

The lady’s dress is Italian with a French toque, a toune, is the middle of Henry III’s reign, between 1575 and 1585—let us say about 1580. The lady’s dress is Italian with a French toque. The style and technique betray a Flemish artist who applied himself to detail and whoinfused his modeling with a rich and supple chiarosuro, bringing out with minuteness the plasticity of the flesh. The second Zany, in the puffy beret with plume and crenellated brim, has a touch of the jesters of Lucas van Leyden and bears out the Netherlandish descent of the painter. He was one of those little masters skilled in scenes of genre in the tradition of the Monogrammist of Brunswick, of Jan van Hemessen, and of Martin van Cleve.

19 Beijer, op. cit.
Group portrait of a troupe of Italian comedians in France. Flemish, about 1580.

In the collection of Jacques Combe, Paris

There are in France other pictures very similar in approach, and one of them, in the Marcus collection at Nancy (1938), may even be by the same hand.

4. A TROUPE OF ITALIAN COMEDIANS. In the Museum at Béziers, France. Canvas, 46½ x 67 inches (1 m. 19 cm. x 1 m. 70 cm.) (figures life size). Ill. p. 23.

The composition of this picture is very much like that of the preceding one, a sort of frieze made up of two groups, one centering round Pantaloon, the other round the lovers, but the minor actors are not the same, the old procuress is not there, and three young women instead of one accompany the “prima donna innamorata.” One of them, in the background between Francatrippa (or Brighella) and Pantaloon, is closely wrapped in a dark veil; it is the costume worn by a courtesan at the end of the sixteenth century in most Italian cities. Her face is puzzling; it has the regularity, the rigidity, the roundness, and the brown color of a mask. But we know of no special courtesan’s mask in the commedia dell’arte. It is rather a face obscured in shadow, the impassive image of nocturnal vice, the archetype of the courtesan. Besides, the troupe portrayed in this picture shows a very restrained use of the mask. Pantaloon himself and the second Zany wear only false beards, and Francatrippa, instead of having a mask covering his entire face as in the preceding pictures, wears a sort of half mask that leaves his mouth uncovered and allows him to make horrible faces. The idea comes to mind that this is a concession made to French audiences. Indeed, the French public was used to acting based on facial expression, and, with the usual French interest in psychological matters, had a lively appreciation of it. The French farcers preferred make-up to the mask, daubing their
Group portrait of a troupe of Italian comedians in France. French, about 1580-1585.
In the Museum at Béziers

In the eighteenth century the rare Italian players that still wore the mask were forced by the French public to take it off. It is possible that already in the sixteenth century the Italians had limited the use of the mask to flatter French taste; in any case the pictures painted for the French public show very few masks.

The costume seems to date this picture roughly between 1580 and 1585. As for the style, it is entirely different from that of the preceding paintings. The texture is thin and smooth, the drawing linear and precise, the light and shade are neatly brought out and define the planes broadly, the folds of the costumes are straight and simple, all secondary details have been omitted. The result is a feeling of monumentality and strong plastic quality, although the modeling is not without delicate nuances. These can only be guessed at under the thick layer of dirt and varnish, the picture perhaps not having been cleaned since it came to the museum eighty years ago. The reproduction gives the impression of crudity, which might suggest a copy. But actually some of the cleaner parts are excellent, for instance, the head of the young man at the right, in design at once accurate and full of life, with a delicate and vibrant touch. The movements and the slender fingers are graceful without being insipid. Here we have characteristics of the French painters of the sixteenth century, in which the tradition of François Clouet, of his incisive line and solid masses, mingles with the Italian aesthetics that spread from Fontainebleau, the search for the melodious aria-

20 In France in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries the word *enfariné*, which originally meant a farcer, was used almost synonymously with actor. According to V. Roquefort (Glossaire de la langue romane, vol. II, p. 358) the use of flour as make-up began with the *pistori*, bakers, who, in the south of France, were probably also farcers; hence the French word *pitre*, clown. The mask must have originated from another made-up face, that of the actors in antiquity who used the dregs of wine.
besque of gesture and the use of an elongated canon of the body.

Thus it is not among the Flemings of Fontainebleau or Paris but among French artists that we must seek the author of this picture. In the archives of the Basses-Pyrénées, at Pau, among the quittances addressed to the treasurer of Henry of Navarre (the future Henry IV of France) there is a receipt from the painter François Bunel the Younger (born about 1552, died before 1599) for several pictures ordered by this prince. There occurs, among others of the date 1587, the following mention: “Pour un pourtraict de comédiens que sa Majesté a retenu—50 escus—réglé à 25, bordure comprise.”21 This means that for a picture representing a troupe of comedians engaged by the King of Navarre for which the painter asked fifty écus, twenty-five were paid, the price of the frame included, and the painter gave quittance. This reduction in price is usual in the accounts of Navarre and is an example of the meanness of the little principality that played at being a kingdom and of the personal stinginess of Henry. The comedians in question could only be the Italian players of the commedia dell’arte, as the word comédiens was then used only for them and as the same accounts tell us that Henry engaged their troupes a number of times in aping the court of Paris. In 1578 and 1579 three companies, directed by Massimiano Milano, Marc Antonio Scotivelli, and Paolo da Padova, played for the court of Navarre at Pau and at Nérac.

Could the picture by Bunel, paid for in 1587, have been painted at that earlier time and could it be a representation of one of these companies? Certainly not: in 1580 Bunel was established at Tours and the first mention that he was in the service of the King of Navarre as “peintre de cour et valet de chambre du Roy” dates only from the year 1583. But it is very probable that between 1583 and 1587 another Italian troupe came to Pau or Nérac; for several account books of the court of Navarre were destroyed in the archives of the Basses-Pyrénées, and Henry IV gave every evidence of a strong taste for this kind of theater. As Béziers is close to the Pyrénées region, the thought arises that the portrait of comedians in the Béziers Museum may be the very one commissioned from Bunel and paid for in 1587. The museum got this painting from the Coste family of Béziers in 1862.22 It is possible that it had come from one of the castles of Navarre, misplaced like so many works of art in France by the great upheaval of the Revolution. If so, we should have an argument in favor of our identification, especially as evidence based on style is excluded, no work of François Bunel the Younger being known. But such proof can only be found in France.

5. Woman Choosing between Youth and Age
(LA FEMME ENTRE LES DEUX ÂGES): A Scene from the Commedia dell’Arte. In the Museum at Rennes, France. Canvas, 46 1/8 x 67 inches (1.17 x 1.70 cm.). Ill. p. 13.

According to the costume, this picture seems to have been painted between 1570 and 1580. Perret’s engraving, mentioned at the beginning of this article, which is dated 1579, is in reverse and the style is obviously inferior to that of the painting; we can then conclude that the painting served as a basis for the engraving and was therefore painted before 1579. But it is possible that both painting and engraving were taken from a lost engraving of the type in the Recueil Fossard, a collection of prints that will concern us in studying the next painting. The gesture of the old man wrapped in his cloak in Perret’s engraving is typical of the Italian comedy and occurs often in the Recueil Fossard. This is not the only reason for thinking the picture a scene from the commedia dell’arte. The costume of the

22 “Musée de Béziers,” Inventaire des richesses d’art en France, Province, Monuments civils, vol. vi (1891). The note about the painting, written by Charles Ponsonnaille, attributes it to an unknown seventeenth-century painter of the French school, calls it “Les Personnages de la comédie italienne,” and reports that it was acquired by the city in 1862 from the heirs of the Coste family in execution of a contract.
old man, like Pantaloon’s except for the mask and beard, could very well be that of the Vecchio, the old merchant made ridiculous by his pretensions and his misfortunes in love. It may perhaps be objected that the seminudity of the woman could not have been seen on the stage in the sixteenth century. This is an illusion of our times. Many witnesses, sincerely or hypocritically indignant, give us reason to believe that the commedia dell’arte was at times a worthy precursor of the “burlesque.” Padre Ottonelli25 complains of such episodes as a nude woman jumping through a window or a woman who pretends to be mad appearing on the stage in a transparent gown. Scenarios suggested this kind of sensational costume for scenes of fire, shipwreck, and midnight brawls, and, of course, for mythological scenes.

The simplified architectural setting is quite similar to that installed in the castle hall in the Bayeux picture. Perret’s engraving has a legend very much like those in the Recueil Fossard: it has two parts, the first a sort of “argument” giving the general sense of the scene, the other written in the first person like a speech in a play. So there seems to be no doubt that the picture at Rennes was taken from the Italian comedy.24 I have not been able to find this exact scene in any of the scenarios that I have read.25 But the scenarios are not very particular; the scene is based on a current theme in the commedia dell’arte and so could have been included in a number of different plays.

The fact that Perret changed the costumes is not without significance. He (or the engraver he borrowed from) imagined trappings like those of the French farcers,26 but with an intentional antiquarian touch.27 Towards the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, when painters wished to suggest earlier times, they took their inspiration from the engravings of Lucas van Leyden, from his voluminous but tight-waisted gowns, his hoods and fantastic pointed caps. This was especially frequent in the Netherlands and the Rhenish country: indeed Perret’s engraving was copied by another Netherlander and provided with a translation of the legend into German.

The scene was thus set back into the past to give it a more general significance and a sort of antique, proverbial authority. That these scenes of the commedia dell’arte lent themselves to such generalizations is proved by the Recueil Fossard. On three of its engravings28 there are some Latin phrases in handwriting, literary quotations of a philosophic turn, emphasizing the satiric theme illustrated by the scene of the comedy. One of these quotations heaps ridicule on the futility of love in old age.

All this suggests that, although it was inspired by a scene in a comedy, our subject has been done by historians of the theater.

23 Della christianam moderazione nel teatro (Florence, 1646).
24 This idea has already been presented in the author’s Peinture française aux 16 et 17 siècles (Braun ed., Paris, 1957), legend under figure 4. At the time of the publication of this book M. Pierre du Colombier pointed out to me in a letter that M. Lébègue, who in 1925 was Maître de Conférences on the Faculté des Lettres of the University of Rennes, had already noticed the connection between the Rennes painting and Perret’s engraving. But all my efforts to find M. Lébègue’s publication have been in vain. M. D. Henkel mentions in Thieme-Becker (vol. xxvi, p. 456) “die 1579 datierten Darstellungen der italienischen Komödie und der französischen Posen nach Janet (Fr. Clouet), von denen ein Blatt voll bezeichnet ist.” Supposedly the representation of French farce signed and dated 1579 is the engraving reproduced here, but I have not been able to see the other engraving, nor to verify the curious statement that these prints are after François Clouet.
25 The time at my disposal for this study has not allowed me to examine the six-hundred-odd scenarios in existence. This work will undoubtedly be better done by historians of the theater.
26 Duchartre (ed. 1925, p. 60, ed. 1929, p. 68) reproduces an engraving published by Antonio Correnzano in Rome in 1583 and representing “La Cuisine pour le repas de noces de D’Antiparano” in which a servant girl wears a tight-fitting dress with low-cut bodice and ruching border very much like those in Perret’s engraving. In Bruegel’s engraving of Temperance (1558; see ill. Bull., June, 1943) there are some farcers, no doubt Flemish, one of whom, playing the role of a woman, wears a large hat and a tight-waisted dress with round neck and long, wide sleeves like those in Perret’s engraving.
27 This archaizing had already in the sixteenth century found its own convention. When Cesare Vecellio in his Habitii antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo (Venice, 1590) wishes to show “the costume worn by Roman women throughout Italy about the year 1000” (see pl. 29, Firmin-Didot ed., Paris, 1839), he gives as example a tight-waisted dress with low neck and slashed border and a headdress made of bands of scalloped cloth very much like those in Perret’s engraving.
28 Pp. xiii, xvii, xxi in Beijer and Duchartre, op. cit.
Harlequin Disguised, a scene from the commedia dell'arte played in France.
Flemish, about 1600-1605. Based on the engraving on the opposite page

become in the Rennes painting, and even more in Perret's engraving, a satiric picture of a general kind. From Donna Lucia choosing between Orazio and Il Vecchio it has become La Femme entre les Deux Ages.29

The quality of the Rennes painting is quite remarkable, much superior to that of all the other paintings dealt with in this article. Monumental broadness and sureness of form are combined with exquisite fineness of detail. A close connection can be observed with the Troupe of Comedians in the Béziers Museum. The face of the woman is of the same type as that of the second Innamorata at Béziers; the young gallants in the two pictures are not only of the same type but seem to represent the same man; the right hands of the women show a striking resemblance in the way they are drawn; the long fingers of the young man in the Rennes picture are like those the other Innamorato lays on the lady's shoulder; the profile of the old man, with the eye turned upwards in such a peculiar way, is like that of one of the women in the Béziers picture.

We should not be surprised if, when the picture at Béziers is cleaned and freed of the heaviness of flesh and shadow, we should find here too the clear, almost cold modeling and the fine drawing, at once sharp and supple, which are the charm of the Rennes picture. Then the two will be recognized as works by the same artist, or at least the Béziers picture as a copy from maturity to the autumn of life. The les is necessary to make it clear that two ages of life in general are meant.

29 The label on the picture at Rennes reads: "La Femme entre Deux Ages," which is equivocal, suggesting two ages of the woman herself, the passage...
of a work by the Rennes painter. We do not know his name. Perhaps he was François Bunel the Younger, but, whoever he was, he will take a distinguished place in French art of the sixteenth century if only for having among his assets a painting like that at Rennes, a work with so sure a balance, its vigorous sensuality so instinctively tempered with elegance and wit.


This little panel is one of the most complete representations of a scene from the commedia dell' arte. The actors are playing on a simple wooden platform; behind them is a green curtain attached to a metal rod and divided into two parts to allow the actors to pass. The costumes are of striking colors, with red, yellow, brown, and black prevailing. Harlequin has a white costume with irregular patches of red, yellow, and green; it was not until later, in the seventeenth century, that these pieces became triangles and were arranged in a pattern. Over her dress of white damask the Innamorata wears a red cloak with gold braid in the Venetian manner.

The principal figures are defined as stage characters by inscriptions painted beneath: "Il Capitan Cocodrillo," "Harlequin," "La Donna Lucia." At the bottom of the picture a French text summarizes the actors' lines. The whole plot of the scene represented is given: that they might have belonged to a series of commedia dell' arte pictures painted in the same workshop.
Harlequin, disguised as Orazio, the cavalier in love with Lucia, insinuates himself into the good graces of the lady, who ingenuously confesses a sensibility, not to his charm but rather to his money; while the Captain, under cover of his cloak, surprises the secret of this deceiver and, with a naïvely worthy of Don Quixote, tries to punish the brigand Harlequin in order to protect “cette Dame qui l’estime discret.”

The costumes, particularly the Captain’s Spanish hat with broad, low crown and Lucia’s coiffure and high collar, suggest a date around 1600 or 1605. This is about the time when the Gelosi at their height came to Paris, sent for by Henry IV, and played there for more than a year, that is, 1603-1604. But the troupe painted here is not, alas, the Gelosi; their Captain was famous under the name of Spavento da Vall d’Inferno. On the contrary, we must conclude in all certainty that this picture painted about 1600 or 1605 does not represent a scene composed at this time but one already old and graphically set twenty years before. Here is the proof.

The National Museum of Stockholm has a fine volume bound in the eighteenth century, now on exhibition in the foyer of the delightful little theater in Drottningholm. On its pages are pasted seventy-nine prints representing Italian comedians who came to France in the reign of Henry III. This volume, recently published with an excellent commentary by Agne Beijer and P. L. Duchartre, is known under the title of the Recueil Fossard. In the days of Louis XIV, an “ordinaire de la musique du Roy” of the name of Fossard had a fancy for pictures of all kinds of fêtes and theatrical spectacles. He gathered together engravings and prints, some of them fragmentary, often removing them from books; the pictures were accompanied by an explanatory text written by himself or a scholar in his employ. He thus made a collection invaluable for the history of festivals and the theater. No doubt he hoped that the king would buy it some day as he had that of Monsieur de Gaignières. But he was mistaken, and it was not until many years after his death, when his family had lost hope of selling the collection as a whole, that parts of it were bought by the well-known Swedish collectors Nicolas and Carl Gustaf de Tessin, afterwards passing into the royal collection of Sweden. Another part, in which there are also engravings of the theater, went to Copenhagen and has not yet been published.

In the Recueil Fossard at Stockholm there is a woodcut which reproduces almost exactly the central group of our little picture (see p. 27). The poses and gestures are the same except for those of Lucia; Harlequin has no boots, but he wears a hat; the names of the characters are the same, and the French inscription, in three stanzas, is the same. The costumes, however, are different and clearly of Henry III’s time, between 1580 and 1590.

Another chronological hint, drawn from the names of the characters, also corresponds with this date. Captain Coccodrillo, as all historians of the commedia agree, is a stage name belonging to only one actor, Fabrizio dei Fornaris. This excellent comedian was a Neapolitan nobleman who had come to France in 1584 with the Confidenti, at the invitation of the Duke of Joyeuse. The following year he had his troupe play a comedy of his own composition called Angelica, which had a great success. It was also published in Paris at the same time by Abel l’Angelier. So Fabrizio made a deep impression on the French public, and it seems clear that the engraving of Harlequin Disguised with the name of Captain Coccodrillo, which, as the French legend shows, was made in France, is connected with his visit, 1584-1585. It should not be much later than this date, as the costume of the Innamorata, usually in the height of fashion, suggests 1590 as an extreme limit. This engraving made between 1584 and 1590 obviously gives a date to all the others of the same style in the Recueil Fossard,31 vaguely dated until now about 1580.

The engraving of Harlequin Disguised precedes our picture, then, by about twenty years. Not only the borrowed principal group but the painted copy of the engraved legend proves design, was either a Frenchman influenced by Italians or an Italian working in France.

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31 Ps. XIX-XXIV and XXX-XXXV. The anonymous engraver of these prints, remarkable for the breadth of their
without a possible doubt that the painting was based on the print in the Recueil Fossard.

The happy chance that has preserved for us an engraving and a painting of the same subject but of different dates is full of instruction for our entire series of paintings of Italian comedians in France. It makes clear for us the mechanism of the whole production. We see that when several actors or a whole troupe made a great impression on the French public, as, for example, Fabrizio dei Fornaris and the Confidenti in 1584 and 1585, publishers had engravings and woodcuts made of striking scenes in the successful plays. It was good business for both publisher and player. These prints should not be considered only as possible illustrations for published comedies but also as advertising posters. It is very probable that they were sold at the entrance to the theater. The character of the early commedia dell’arte made itself felt well into the seventeenth century, especially when playing for the public at large and not for a court. Indeed, in the street fairs, actors were often in league with quacks, eel charmers, and drug merchants, for whom they brought in trade. It was natural therefore that booksellers and printers of engravings, in making their own profit, furnished publicity for the actors. As a matter of fact, there is a parallel concerning the French farceurs called batteleurs: in front of their trestle after the play they sold “portraits” of themselves, rough paintings or engravings. In the eighteenth century Parisian printers were still producing in quantity just such engraved portraits of the popular Italian comedians. There is no reason to think that the same was not done for the early commedia troupes, especially as the French captions summarizing the plots and dialogues were undoubtedly a great help to the spectator in understanding the Italian plays. That these engravings were successful is proved by the Recueil Fossard, in which some of them appear as reprints.\(^\text{32}\) Thus the most immediate graphic records of the commedia dell’arte in France were not paintings but prints. The artist engaged to paint a scene usually based it on an engraving. He borrowed the arrangement and the poses of the principal actors, a sort of graphic canon of a popular scene. He added several variations of his own, brought the costumes up to date, and put in the secondary actors, the curtain, and occasionally some scenery. In fact, he made the sort of realistic and complete record that one expects of painting as distinguished from engraving, which is usually simpler, more concentrated, and more efficient, as befits an illustration or a poster.

The process is clear when the engraving and the painting of Harlequin Disguised are placed side by side, and it is very probable that the other pictures taken up here are also based on lost or unknown engravings. The central group of the picture at Bayeux also appears in a water color in the Henin collection in the Cabinet des Estampes in Paris.\(^\text{33}\) It is very likely that this water color is not a copy of the painting but that both are based on an engraving of the central group. For Woman Choosing between Youth and Age I have already expressed a similar idea. The composition of the Carnavalet painting recalls very clearly that of prints in the Recueil Fossard, and the simplified outlines of the figures also suggest the eloquent and concise style of engraving. Finally, the similarity in the composition of the two group portraits makes one think that a type for these had also been established by the engravers. This is not to say that all paintings representing Italian comedians in France were copied from prints. But engraving usually attacked the subject first and painting followed after.

The author of the painting of Harlequin Disguised is undoubtedly Flemish. He has much in common with little masters like Francken and Louis de Caulery. One might

\(^{32}\) See, for example, the French engraving about 1650 of the “Théâtre et boutique de l’Orviétan,” reproduced among others by S. Wilma Holsboer, in her Histoire de la mise en scène dans le théâtre français de 1600 à 1657, thèse pour le doctorat de l’Université de Paris (1933), pl. ii. We see here side by side on the stage the drug merchant and Polichinel and Brigantin, French variants of Italian comedy characters.


\(^{34}\) Beijer, op. cit., p. 13.  

\(^{35}\) Vol. xii, fol. 34.
even believe this picture to be the work of
Caulery, who is known to have been estab-
lished in France from about 1595 to 1620.36
But in spite of his similar color and his lively
and fluid brushwork, he cannot have been the
painter of our picture. He never escaped from
his elongated canon of the body and his round-
ish modeling, from a certain cold and facile
mannerism. The figures of our little master are
more frankly drawn and more abruptly mod-

eled; they are more vital and robust.

When one goes through the numerous works
on the history of the commedia dell’ arte, it
comes as a surprise that there are no paintings
of this kind of theater from sixteenth-century
Italy; at least none have been published. In
Venetian painting of this period there are
Balls, Carnival Scenes, and Banquets, in which
 commedia masks and characters appear, but
no actual stage scenes painted for their own
sake.37 And group portraits of players like
that at Béziers are quite unknown in Italy. So
that the pictures at Bayeux and in the Carne-
val Museum have been up to the present
time the oldest published paintings of the
commedia dell’ arte.38 The paintings added in
this article also date before any found in Italy.

How can we explain this strange priority of
France over the native country of the com-
media dell’ arte? First, perhaps, it is exactly
because Italy was its native country, where the
commedia made no stir, was part of the life of
every day. And the stuff of daily life, in order
to become the subject of art, must be recog-
nized by artists as an essentially poetic aspect
of life fit to be translated into the poetry
of color and line. The popular comedy was
for a painter of the sixteenth century a genre
subject, and at that time genre painting was
still far from being thought of in Italy as a

noble art. The classic humanists and manner-
ists in painting could not resign themselves to
accepting the current spectacle of contempo-
rary life as worth recording and clung to re-
ligious, historical, and mythological subjects
and portraits. In the painting of still life,
genre, and even landscapes Italy was out-
stripped by the countries north of the Alps,
above all by the Netherlands. The mediaeval
humanism of the Northern peoples, less tyran-
nically governed by the known examples of
antique art, allowed painters to devote them-
selves to the varied riches of the outside world.
The only Italian school that from the six-
teenth century on was concerned with genre
painting, that of Venice, owes its interest, no
doubt, to its continual contact with Nether-
landers and Germans. The importance of the
collaboration of Northern painters in the
workshops of Titian, Jacopo Bassano, and
Tintoretto is becoming very clear. We may
even speak now of a Venetian-Flemish school
of landscape, still life, and genre, its masters
being Lambert Sustris, Pawels Franck, called
Paolo Francesco, Lodewyck Toeput, called
Lodovico Pozzoserrato, and Theodore de
Vries. Certain pupils of Frans Floris, who was
so taken with Venetian painting, also belong
in this list, for instance, Hieronymus Francken.

It is curious that the rare pictures of Vene-
tian scenes in which players of the commedia
dell’ arte mingle with party guests were paint-
ed by Flemish little masters: for example, the
Venetian Ball of 1565 by Hieronymus Franck-
en in the Museum at Aix-la-Chapelle or the
Carnival Scene by Pozzoserrato in the ancient
collection of Count Karatsonyi in Budapest.37
And if it was the Flemings who cultivated and
probably even invented such subjects in Ven-
ice, they played their role also to good effect in
France. This same Hieronymus Francken was

36 See the important article by E. Michel, Bulletin des
Musées de France (1956), p. 52, in which he repro-
duces several pictures by Caulery and discusses
whether he is the same man as a painter of the same
name who lived near Cambrai—an identification that
seems very reasonable.
37 There is perhaps one (sale of the Karatsonyi col-
collection of Budapest, Intern. Kunst- u. Auktionshaus,
Berlin, Feb. 25, 1930, cat. no. 32; reproduced in Kunst-
woche, 1930) which may be a real scene of the com-
media dell’ arte played during Carnival and before
masked and banqueting spectators. If so, it is the
only example known of such a subject in Italian
painting before 1600.
38 The earliest known pictorial representations of the
commedia dell’ arte are an engraving and a drawing;
the engraving, Italian, dated 1568, shows two players
on a trestle stage (ill. in Beijer, op. cit., p. 25); the
drawing, a water color of about 1570, shows comedi-
ans on an open-air stage (in the Staatliche Bibli-
thek, Bamberg; ill. in Nicoll, op. cit., fig. 223, where
it is erroneously dated seventeenth century).
later established in Paris. Four out of the seven pictures discussed in this article are by a Flemish hand, or at least strongly suggest Flemish influence. The makers of most of the sixteenth-century engravings of Italian comedians are Netherlanders: Perret, Julius Goltzius, J. Houvenogt, and Liefrinck. One should not underestimate the number of Netherlandish painters at Fontainebleau and Paris at the end of the sixteenth century. Most of them came to study Italian art; for north of the Alps Fontainebleau was considered as almost the equivalent of Rome, and the journey there was less costly. In Paris the whole quarter of Saint-Germain-des-Prés was peopled with artists from the Low Countries. But although the Flemings came for instruction, they brought with them their own spirit and the original conceptions of their own vital school.

Thus there was in France, and more pronounced than in Venice, a Flemish intellectual climate propitious to genre that made possible a painter's interest in the spectacles of the stage. And this interest was naturally more lively, more forcible than in Italy itself, because in France the commedia dell'arte was a wonderful novelty, not only as a picturesque pageant of life but as an unfamiliar form of the theater, with its women and its masks, its songs and its lazzis. This is the reason, I think, why north of the Alps, for instance, in Bavaria (in the frescoes of the castle of Trausnitz, painted about 1576) as well as in France (in the pictures of a parallel period presented in this article), we find comedians appearing not in the midst of masked balls and carnivals but playing their parts on the stage or in group portraits of their troupe—a tradition that Watteau did not forget. In France the fact that they were actors seemed reason enough to paint them, and so it is not strange that France preceded Italy in these paintings of the theater.

Here, then, are the beginnings of a tradition in French painting that was to continue for two centuries and to find in each century a master interpreter, Jacques Callot in the seventeenth, Antoine Watteau in the eighteenth. The Metropolitan Museum can now show an example of these beginnings as of these heights. Eight years ago, when the Museum acquired the delightful Mezzetin, Harry Wehle, in an article full of delicate incisiveness worthy of Watteau's art, stressed all the strong qualities in this passionate singer—who might so easily have fallen into sentimentality or bombast—his sincerity, his soundness and manly vitality. These, indeed, give the tone proper to the commedia dell'arte. The early pictures did not belie it. Of those we see here, painted more or less well, some confine themselves to a simple genre narration, some aspire to a record in a noble style. But in all of them there is the animus of a powerful way of life, an intensity that lays before us the desires, the intrigues, the vanities, the weaknesses, the vigorous pleasures, and the simple gaiety of man. In the commedia's gallery of finely diversified types, in the grimaces and the gestures, sometimes rude, sometimes as gracious as those of dancers, in the eye that gleams through the mask, we feel the prodigious, insatiable eagerness to embrace all the quivering substance of humanity, all the energies of life. This was a reaction against the mannerism to which the renaissance classical culture led, a strong expression of naturalistic feeling, the first manifestation of the baroque spirit in the comic theater.

The easy mixture of witty fantasy and crude pantomime in the commedia dell'arte marks the youth of a plastic art. One understands what it has in common with the youth of the cinema—the slapstick comedy. And it is not surprising that those who in our time have tried to rejuvenate the ballet have found these early Italian plays refreshing.

Nor is it surprising that cultivated Frenchmen of the time of the last Valois, torn with the wars of religion, deprived of peace for whole generations, were fond of these paintings. After the brief magic of the play had vanished, after the dust of the road had engulfed the last carts taking the troupe towards the Alps, the dialects of all the ultramontane provinces still sounded in their ears and these pictures remained and spoke to them of the Italy of their youthful travels: the rustic Zany, of Bergamo on its rough mountain; Pantalone il
Magnifico, of the Piazza San Marco, its multifariousness, its oriental vehemence, its fierce bustle as of a thieves' market. The black Doctor seemed still wrapped in the shadow of the colonnades of Bologna, so mysterious in their solemn monotony. The profile of the Vecchio was worn and polished by the subtle craftiness of Florence, like old stones by the turbid waters of the Arno. Orazio and Isabella, the lovers, brought with them the gentle air of Parma or Padua's strong and nervous grace; the Captain, the sun and tumult of Naples, the noise of Spanish swords scraping the rough pavement, the garlic-scented arrogance of the hidalgo.

Such remembrances of a vibrant Italy were embodied in these paintings for Frenchmen who had been beyond the Alps. And they are still there for us who have followed them.

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