

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Tamburini, Elena. Culture ermetiche e Commedia dell'Arte: Tra Giulio Camillo e Flaminio Scala

Rosalind Kerr

Volume 40, Number 4, Fall 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1086100ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v40i4.29302>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Kerr, R. (2017). Review of [Tamburini, Elena. Culture ermetiche e Commedia dell'Arte: Tra Giulio Camillo e Flaminio Scala]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 40(4), 248–250. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v40i4.29302>

The volume is attractively presented. Despite the variety of sources included, its English style is evenhanded. Errata are few and seldom impede comprehension.

JANNES SMITH

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Tamburini, Elena.

Culture ermetiche e Commedia dell'Arte: Tra Giulio Camillo e Flaminio Scala.

Rome: Aracne Editrice, 2016. Pp. 263 + 25 ill. ISBN: 978-88-548-9420-4 (paperback) €16.

Elena Tamburini brings together a vast field of ground-breaking research to augment interpretations explaining the rise of the Commedia dell'Arte as she traces the myriad cultural influences it drew on to build itself into a "theatre of excellence." It investigates such topics as its signature mixture of high and low art; the Gelosi's early *zanni* origins and links to the Academy of the Val di Blenio and Giovan Paolo Lomazzo; the profound influence of Giulio Camillo's memory theatre; Isabella Andreini's *zanni* connections; and Flaminio Scala's exemplary scenarios. The introduction outlines how the six chapters connect a range of cultural movements and institutions to the Commedia dell'Arte's artists and their practice. The appendix of twenty-five illustrations links the actress with the courtesan.

Chapter 1 revolves around the claims the Commedia dell'Arte made to show how it improved on its imitative function as the third genre of comedy tasked to hold the mirror up to Nature. The actors defended their great skills as improvisers and related themselves to other artists, painters, and sculptors who were also known to act in plays. Lomazzo's stress on the artist's genius lying in the ability to capture a subject's real feelings "in motion" resonated with actors who could claim to be performing live in three-dimensional space. Tamburini traces examples of famous actors appearing in paintings holding the neutral mask to indicate their profession, and connects the mask to one in Ripa's "Ancient Comedy," arguing that this neutral mask also appears in an

emblem of “Painting,” confirming theatre’s powers to be on a par with painting and hence beyond mere imitation.

Chapter 2 concentrates on the influence that Camillo’s very famous *L’idea del theatro* (1550) had on the *comici*. His reputation and connections to princes, literati, poets, and playwrights left such an impression in Venice and elsewhere that his ideas flourished for the century that followed his death. He inspired Lomazzo to copy his theatrical model in his *Idea del Tempio della pittura* (1590). Camillo’s theatre of memory drew on alchemic magic and artifice to show how translating words into images could enlighten men’s souls. This method of acquiring knowledge offered practitioners a path to eloquence. Tamburini connects noted playwrights who moved between Roman and Venetian academies, naming influential figures including Bembo, Tasso, Aretino, Castelvetro, Piccolomini, Della Porta, and Dolce.

In chapter 3, Tamburini focuses on the much debated courtesan-actress connection by examining a series of engravings by Giacomo Franco, figures 8–22, featuring male Pantaloni, *zanni*, *dottori*, posing with different courtesans. This undeniable connection between the courtesans, who migrated to the Commedia dell’Arte after 1560 when the Council of Trent shut them down, leads Tamburini to argue for their central importance at both real and fictional levels. A 1583 Veronese portrait of Isabella Andreini serves as a vindication of her profession by including certain stylistic signs connecting her to the great courtesans while referencing her talents as an actress and *literata*. The daughter of Paolo Canali, a Venetian nobleman and member of Camillo’s circle, likely educated in the Studio in Padova, was privileged in ways most actresses were not.

Chapter 4 examines the connections of the Gelosi with the counter-literary Academy of the Val di Blenio, a mixture of artists, artisans, and actors dedicated to worshipping Bacchus and producing “divinely inspired” art tending towards the bizarre and grotesque. Its initiates had to model themselves on wine porters from the Blenio Valley, dress in rough smocks, and speak a mixture of dialects, slang, and jargon. Two sonnets and dialogues by Lomazzo document that the Gelosi actors were performing there as early as 1560. Members included the famous *zanni* Simone Panzanini da Bologna, nicknamed Zan Panza de Pecora, who was mourned in *Lacrimoso lamento* (1585), a parody of Adriano Valerini’s exalted oration for Vincenza Armani (1560). Valerini, identified as *Zan Trippone* in an engraving by Ambrogio Brambilla, may also have been a member. Other

likely members include Gabriele Panzanini as Francatrippa, Burattino as Zan Pelato, Silvia Roncagli as Franceschina, and Bernardo Rainoldi as Pedrazzo.

Chapter 5 uses the *Laments* by Lomazzo and Brambilla—telling the fabled story of a bear tied to a column outside an inn, being tortured and dismembered, to explore the similar struggles with religious authorities faced by actors and the Bleniesi. Tamburini also posits that Andreini, beyond her connections to members Comin Ventura and Gherardo Borgogni, performed with Zan Panza and knew the creative importance of the *zanni*. The restrictions imposed by Carlo Borromeo are captured through the increasing cruelty towards the bear whose death may stand in for the closed down taverns and banished charlatans and actors and the eventual demise of transgressive *zanni* theatre.

Chapter 6 elaborates on Camillo's influence on the Accademia Veneziana della Fama. Their impresa of a winged goddess blowing a trumpet and carrying a banner saying "I fly to heaven that I may rest with God" captured Camillo's belief that artists had access to the divine. Andreini used a modified image of Fame on her memorial coin. Scala even named his *profumeria* on the Rialto "Fama." His unique print collection of fifty scenarios in *il teatro delle favole rappresentative* (1611) proves he was influenced by Camillo, as can be seen by his treatment of the scenario as an art form that encompasses a range of different genres, offers models for creating the spectacle, and brings the action to life through an explicit science of gesture intended to reveal the hidden properties of every word.

Tamburini shows us how the Commedia dell'Arte was indeed a "theatre of excellence" developed by its top practitioner artists who raised theatre to the level of poetry and painting through their superior knowledge and skill. Of great interest to theatre scholars, Commedia dell'Arte specialists, and early modernists, it brings together academic, artistic, literary, dramatic, and visual cultures to provide fascinating new insights into the development of Italian professional theatre.

ROSALIND KERR

University of Alberta