

Commedia dell'arte

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Comedy is a type of drama in which action and characters are interpreted in a comic form. Like tragedy, comedy originated in ancient Greece from the rituals that accompanied processions in honor of the god Dionysus. Comedy, soberly exploring human nature, ridiculed the vices and misconceptions of people. There are many types of comedies, but among them stands out the Italian comedy of masks, dell'arte. This is an improvisational street theater of the Italian Renaissance, which arose by the middle of the 16th century and, in fact, formed the first professional theater in history.

Commedia dell'arte came out of street festivals and carnivals. Its characters are some kind of social images in which not individual, but typical traits are cultivated. There were no plays as such in Commedia dell'arte, only a plot scheme was developed, a script that was filled with live replicas during the performance, varying depending on the composition of the audience. It was this improvisational method of work that led the actors to professionalism – and first of all, to the development of the ensemble, increased attention to the partner.

These performances were the favorite entertainment of the mass audience. A certain mask was assigned to a particular actor once and for all, but the role – despite the rigid typographic framework – infinitely varied and developed during each performance. The number of masks that appeared in Commedia dell'arte is extremely large – more than a hundred. However, most of them were rather variants of several basic masks.

Commedia dell'arte had two main centers – Venice and Naples. In accordance with this, two groups of masks were formed. The style of performance of the Venetian and Neapolitan Commedia dell'arte also differed somewhat: the Venetian masks worked mainly in the genre of satire; the Neapolitan ones used more tricks, rude buffoonery jokes.

The main characters of the comedy include two quartets of male masks, a mask Captaino, as well as the characters who do not wear masks, are zanni girls (servants) and Lovers, as well as all noble ladies and gentlemen.

The northern (Venetian) quartet of masks includes Pantalone, Dottore, Brigella and Harlequino.

Pantalone is an old merchant, rich, almost always stingy. His mask is red, it covers half of his face; he has a long, "aquiline" nose, gray mustache and a pointed beard. Pantalone, as a rule, is the center of intrigue, and, as a rule, always remains the victim of someone, most often Harlequino, his servant. He is sickly and frail: he constantly limps, groans, coughs, sneezes, blows his nose, has a stomach ache. This is a lustful, immoral man, he passionately seeks the love of young beauties, but always fails.

Dottore is a pseudo—scientist doctor of law (very rarely a doctor of medicine, which is why he is often called a Doctor in translations). His mask is black with a huge nose, usually covers the whole face, but sometimes only the forehead and nose, then the Doctor's cheeks are heavily rouged. Like Pantalone, Dottore is deceived by other comedy characters. This person is very fat, his stomach protrudes forward, hinders free movement and is clearly visible. It's hard for him to bend over and walk. He is just as lustful as Pantalone. He is a vain, ignorant pedant, talking incomprehensible Latin terms and quotations, which he mercilessly distorts. A little eccentric and very fond of wine.

Brighella is a clever servant. His mask is hairy, dark in color with a black mustache and a black beard sticking out in all directions. He is clever and resourceful, often a thieving servant; cheeky with women, insolent with old men, brave with cowards, but helpful to the strong; always loud and voluble. He is always against old people who prevent young people from living, loving and achieving happiness.

Harlequino is a stupid servant. He has a black half-mask with a long nose. The forehead and eyebrows are deliberately highlighted, with black tousled hair. Harlequin is cheerful and naive, not as smart, not as clever, not as resourceful as Brigella, therefore he easily commits stupidities, but he perceives the punishments that follow with a smile. He is lazy and looks for any opportunity to dodge work and take a nap, he is a glutton and a womanizer, but at the same time courteous and modest.

The southern (Neapolitan) quartet of masks included Tartaglia, Scaramuccia, Coviello, Pulcinella.

Tartaglia is an official in the civil service. He has huge glasses on his nose. As a rule, he is an old man with a fat belly; downtrodden, timid, always a stutterer, his trademark trick is the fight against stuttering, as a result of which a serious monologue, for example, in court, turns into a comic stream of obscenities.

Scaramuccia is a warrior. Scaramucci's mask partly repeated the northern mask Capitano, but carried less political satire. This was no longer a Spanish invader, but a simple type of boastful warrior. He is boastful, likes to swear, but as soon as it comes to a fight, he cowardly runs away or, if he does not have time to escape, he will invariably be beaten.

Coviello is a clever servant. His mask is red, with a long, beak-like nose; he often wears glasses. He always acts with cunning, pressure, clever invention, intelligence; he grimaces a lot, dances and plays the mandolin or guitar.

Pulcinella is a stupid servant. His mask is black and covers half of his face, his nose looks like a beak. Pulcinella is almost always married and deceived by his wife, which also gives him the features of the old Pantaloon and Doctor masks that are absent in the southern quartet. Along with Harlequino, Pulcinella is the most popular of the masks. A witty and funny man, he is often the bearer of a satirical beginning in the representations of Commedia dell'arte.

Other masks were Capitano, Columbine and Signora.

Columbine is the maid of Pantalone or Dottore. She does not wear a mask, being a village fool, similar in character to the Harlequino mask; her honesty, decency and good mood are emphasized.

The Capitano is a soldier, he doesn't have a mask. He is a coward pretending to be brave, a boastful warrior. He is characterized by cold arrogance, greed, cruelty, prudery and braggadocio, hiding cowardice. When one of the characters orders him to do something or forces him to commit a decisive act, he retreats and looks for an excuse to refuse to execute the order or the reasons why he cannot commit the act. At the same time, Capitano tries not to lose face, using a magnificent speech and bravado. There are a lot of wild tall tales in his conversations, which even the most gullible viewers do not believe. Capitano loves sorority, where he brags about the exploits he invented. Columbine, using Capitano, makes Harlequino jealous.

Signora is the wife of Pantalone or Dottore. She is directly attracted to her double, Capitano, and they should be together. However, she is married to Pantalone and regularly cheats on him. The usual trick of the Signora is to quarrel with another woman, since she is very proud and often makes fun of others.

According to functional groups, masks can be divided into the following categories: old men (satirical images of Pantalone, Dottore, Tartaglia, Capitano); servants (comedy characters-zanni: Brigella, Harlequino, Coviello, Pulcinella and the maid-fantesca – Smeraldina, Francesca, Columbine); lovers (images closest to the heroes of the literary drama).

Commedia dell'arte had a huge impact on the development of the world theatrical art. Its echoes are clearly visible in the dramaturgy of Moliere, Goldoni, Gozzi and others.

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