

The Reinvention of Theatre in
Sixteenth-Century Europe

Traditions, Texts and Performance



EDITED BY T. F. EARLE AND CATARINA FOUTO



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T.E. & C.F., Oxford, November 2014

CHAPTER 9



Amateurs Meet Professionals:
Theatrical Activities in Late
Sixteenth-Century Italian Academies

Lisa Sampson

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Lo studio è necessario per saper, occorrendo, trattare di tutte le materie non solo in comedia, ma nelle Academie: poiché pure vi sono Academie illustrissime che, per testimonio che i comedianti che fan[n]o l'arte loro come si conviene non sono indegni d'essere ammessi nelle loro adunanze, hanno accresciuto il numero de gli academici accettando e uomini e donne che ordinariamente comparivano in iscena, come avvenne in Pavia alla signora Isabella Andreini, ed in Firenze a suo figlio, che l'una negl'Intenti e l'altro ne' Spensierati, furono accolti [...].¹

[Study is required to be able to discuss, if necessary, not only all subjects in comic theatre but also in Academies: for there are even some most illustrious Academies which have increased their membership by accepting men and women who have regularly appeared on stage, as is evident from the fact that those actors who practise their art as they should are considered worthy of being admitted to their gatherings. This happened in Pavia to Madame Isabella Andreini, and in Florence to her son [Giovan Battista], she being admitted to 'The Academy of the Intent' [Intenti] and he to 'The Academy of the Carefree' [Spensierati].]

In 1623, the working actor Domenico Bruni presented membership of a literary academy as a clear sign of the great recognition awarded to some of the leading actors of his age, and mentions as examples the legendary actress and writer Isabella Andreini (in 1601) and her actor-dramatist son, Giovan Battista (in 1604). Bruni even cites such membership alongside the imperial honours awarded to another prominent actor, Pietro Maria Cecchini. Five years later, yet another learned actor, Nicolò Barbieri, would similarly consider academic affiliation as the acme of an actor's career.² For Bruni, such an honour clearly illustrated the dignity that he was claiming for his profession (or *arte*), which he argued was based not only on *art*, that is, study and learning, but also natural talent which could not necessarily be learned even by intellectuals. To put this view into perspective, only a few decades earlier it would have been unimaginable for most learned academies, institutions founded

by intellectuals especially from the 1540s for virtuous education and learned recreation, to have admitted what were typically considered 'unlettered', itinerant and immoral, mercenary actors (*zanni*) into their hallowed throng. As Richard Andrews observes, despite some aspects of mutual influence, the mid-century in Italy witnessed an increasing separation 'in which the professional performers of farce and the gentlemanly composers of literary comedy went their separate ways'.³ However, with the more or less coetaneous appearance of formally constituted companies of actors, first documented in Padua in 1545 in the case of the 'fraternal compagnia' of Ser Maphio detto Zanini, this split seems to have intensified while becoming more problematic to sustain.⁴

Something of the sense of intellectual opposition towards — and fascination for — such professional groups is captured in the satirical verse of the unorthodox Florentine poet and dramatist, Anton Francesco Grazzini (1504–1584), himself a member of the Accademia degli Umidi, the more unruly predecessor of the Medici-sponsored Accademia Fiorentina:

Hanno i poeti questa volta dato
del cul, come si dice, in sul pietrone,
poi che il nuovo salone sverginato
stato è da Zanni per lor guiderdone,
onde delle commedie hanno acquistato
la Gloria tutta e la riputazione:
così da i Zanni vinti e superati
possono ire a impiccarsi i letterati.

(*Le rime burlesche*, c. 1552)⁵

[This time the poets have fallen
on their backsides on the floor, one might say,
as the new hall has been sullied
by *zanni* [comic actors] for their profit;
their comedies have gained them
all the glory and reputation:
now the literati, beaten and outdone by the *zanni*,
can go hang themselves.]

While it is unclear to which performance or hall Grazzini (known as 'Il Lasca') is referring here, there is no mistaking the disruptive effect of the performances of these troupes which had rapidly become popular in northern and central Italy. As this academician facetiously suggests, such companies presented a competitive challenge to the groups of serious 'poets' or literati which also began to be formally constituted around the same time, and who likewise pursued public acclaim and glory, among other things in the field of theatre. Grazzini's lively and contradictory account of *arte* performances in his various festive poems suggest that these presented a popular alternative to the scripted humanist plays written and staged by academies, which were typically characterized by long set-piece descriptions and careful attention to the classical ideals of verisimilitude and decorum. Whether performed by dignified professionals or street players, 'the new theatre provides a richer signifying system, complementing voice with actions, manners, and gestures'.⁶

So does the fact that the Andreini, mother and son, were members of an academy

by the early 1600s indicate altered and improved relations between these two kinds of 'institutions' as far as theatrical production was concerned? Or at least an opening of some academies towards some select *comici* in the later sixteenth century? If so, what kind of social and cultural forces can explain this? And what pressures did the opening of membership in the case of the Intenti or Spensierati academies, respectively of Pavia and Florence, bring to bear on the institutions themselves and their theatrical production?

This chapter can only begin to touch upon the broader questions surrounding the still obscure and complex relationship between the new professional theatrical companies and the Italian literary academies. This is due in part to the difficulty in providing an overview of 'academic theatre' in the period, given the great diversity of academies in their typology and activities across the peninsula. There is a shortage of systematic, in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, especially compared to the comprehensive scholarly documentation of the comparatively sparse surviving evidence for *arte* practices in the early decades of its existence. Nonetheless, scholarship has begun to touch upon specific relations between actors and academies.⁷ Research on late sixteenth-century Italian academy theatre, moreover, is often coloured by a prevailing negative view which holds that dramatic practices were informed by pettifogging literary debate and archaizing tastes. Academies should, however, properly be regarded as forming a third, somewhat hybrid and culturally vibrant sphere for the production of theatre in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Italy, alongside the traditional sphere of the princely courts, and the newly emerging professional marketplace. This would explain why *comici* were aware of the need to engage with these flourishing and predominantly secular institutions, especially in the transition period between c.1585, when court-sponsored theatre became less frequent, and 1637 when the foundation of professional opera theatres in Venice began to provide a more steady income stream for actors.

Academies vs *comici dell'arte*: Antagonism or Overlap?

During this time, academies could offer economic or practical benefits as well as the social validation that many learned actors like Bruni sought. Less clear, though, is why an academy would admit a professional actor to their sodality. As Grazzini's verse suggests, academies and their members typically liked to present themselves in their theatrical practices as distinctly superior, and even antagonistic, to professional troupes — now known by the eighteenth-century term of *commedia dell'arte*.⁸ *Arte* actors in the sixteenth century were often disparagingly termed by literati as *comici della gazzetta* ('tuppenny actors', referring to a Venetian low value coin). Battista Guarini, the author of the *Pastor fido* (first printed 1589), famously described them as 'sordid and mercenary people', who have profaned comedy.⁹ Like his colleague, Angelo Ingegneri, in his treatise on theatre (*Della poesia rappresentativa*, 1598), Guarini does however distinguish between corrupting practitioners of this potentially noble art, and virtuous thespians — a distinction that actors themselves would soon apply. The 'othering' of professional *comici* was of course sanctioned by religious discourse

and political legislation. It must also reflect a sense of competition on the part of aristocratic intellectuals and, as Roberto Tessari suggests, represent a defensive response on their part to what they perceived to be a contaminating act of theft perpetrated against them by the 'ignoble plebeians'.¹⁰

Such distinctions between traditions have traditionally been perpetuated in criticism. As mentioned, academies are often viewed as favouring humanist-inspired, literary, and antiquarian forms of theatre (as epitomized by the first academy theatre in Vicenza, the Teatro Olimpico), typically influenced by critical (mostly Aristotelian) theoretical considerations, and cultivated predominantly by amateurs. Professional companies, on the other hand, are considered to be based broadly on popular, oral culture, using freer 'modern', improvised forms, as well as fixed characters or 'masks' and dialect. However, recent scholarship has shown that such ideas require careful nuancing. Studies of *commedia dell'arte* have demonstrated extensively that there was much productive cross-fertilization between this art-form and learned culture both in terms of performance practices, content, and rhetorical style. From the 1570s, numerous leading *arte* practitioners began to imitate, adapt and challenge more official 'literary' forms and ideas through their dramatic, literary and theoretical writings. On the other hand, the academies could be laboratories for changing conceptions of dramatic genre and theatre design: the Olimpici Academy of Vicenza developed new technical devices for lighting, while the Alterati Academy and the Camerata de' Bardi of Florence were instrumental in pioneering the explicitly modern dramatic genre of *melodramma* (opera). The Intronati Academy of Siena has been studied especially for its performances of trend-setting, collectively written plays.¹¹

These two kinds of 'microsocieties', each relatively closed and self-regulated in their distinct ways — and for different reasons — may then have sought ostensibly to promote different kinds of theatrical experience, but they also increasingly came into contact (at least in the case of the leading companies) within the context of Court theatre during the later sixteenth century.¹² Aristocratic patrons made use of both academies and professional troupes to deliver the most spectacular and innovative theatrical events possible for important political occasions, doubtless engendering both rivalry and emulation among the different kinds of theatre producers as they converged. Notably, at the much lauded 1589 Medici wedding celebrations in Florence, an academic comedy (*La Pellegrina* [The Lady Pilgrim]) by Girolamo Bargagli, a member of the Intronati who had died in 1586, was staged by young amateurs from the same academy. The lavish and innovative *intermedi* which were interspersed between the acts of the play, probably against the wishes of the academicians, were designed by the leading Florentine nobleman and academician Count Giovanni de' Bardi as well as others, but executed by a variety of leading professionals in different fields. These mythological interludes were repeated several times during the festivities and probably accompanied the virtuoso performances of first Vittoria Piissimi with the Gelosi troupe in *La Cingana* [The Gypsy] (perhaps based on a comedy by Gigio Giancarli) and then, a few days later, of her rival leading lady, Isabella Andreini, in *La Pazzia d'Isabella* [The Madness of Isabella]. For practical reasons, all these performances were held in the same recently remodelled Medici Theatre in the Uffizi.¹³

While such aspects of convergence and rivalry especially in courtly contexts have received great attention from historians of theatre and especially of *commedia dell'arte*, research into specific cases of professional actors approaching or belonging to formal 'literary' academics before and around 1600 has been more limited. Why and how were they accepted? And what form did their association take? Mostly, scholars are content simply to repeat uncritically the assertion that actors (especially Isabella Andreini) were admitted in this period.¹⁴ Studies documenting links between (and even borrowings from) actors and celebrated playwrights of the time, like Battista Guarini and Gabriello Chiabrera, who belonged to numerous academies as well as informal aristocratic circles, provide a context for this kind of investigation. So too does the evidence of professional artists and musicians joining literary circles and more experimental academies, especially in Rome, Florence, Siena, and Milan from around 1600.¹⁵ Nonetheless, unlike their fellow *virtuosi* musicians and even artists, actors in this period — and indeed for long after — presented a more oblique relationship with the liberal arts generally cultivated in academies (notably with rhetoric through the arts of memory, oratory, and invention), and faced particular prejudice because of their unconventional and apparently immoral, even irreligious, lifestyle.

This chapter aims to add some further evidence for interactions between early professional actors and academies, which will help to nuance Bruni's assertion quoted above. It will also question why, and which, academies accepted actors as members. First, the academic context will be introduced, then there will be a brief examination of some specific cases of interactions between the actors Adriano Valerini and Isabella Andreini with academies in Northern Italy around the end of the sixteenth century. Closing observations on Giovan Battista Andreini will signal further developments in the next century.

Theatrical Practices in Sixteenth-century Italian Academies

From the mid-sixteenth century secular theatre was one of the specific activities most cultivated by academies, which were commonly at this time interdisciplinary in character, though marked by a strong penchant for ritual and spectacle. Indeed, theatrical activities formed the major concern of two of the earliest academies formed, the above mentioned Intronati of Siena (1525) and the somewhat anomalous Congrega dei Rozzi (1531), as well as of others such as the Olimpici of Vicenza (1555) and the Innominati of Parma (1574). These institutions to different extents led the way in innovating dramaturgical and technical practices, in addition to theatre-building during the later sixteenth century. Such high profile examples were merely the tip of the iceberg: Amedeo Quondam's important survey essay on Italian academies calculates that 4.2% of the 2,000 or so academies listed in Michele Maylender's encyclopedia (itself a somewhat problematic source) had a special interest in theatre in the sixteenth century. This interest remained at about the same level in the seventeenth century (4.3%), rising to 6.6% in the eighteenth century.¹⁶ In some centres this specialization was more marked. In Florence from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries it has been calculated that about 42% (45 of 106 documented academies) cultivated theatre in a sustained fashion, though a large proportion of these fall in the later part of the period surveyed.¹⁷

Such cultivation of theatre was in some cases a hangover from earlier more socially mixed groups, including 'bourgeois' confraternities, and festive societies like the Compagnia della Cazzuola of Florence, which included the freelance actor Domenico Barlacchia.¹⁸ For more exclusive academies, there must have been some continuity with the earlier sixteenth-century practices of festive companies of young patrician elites like the Venetian *compagnie della calza* [companies of the hose], upon whose constitutions the notarized contract of the first professional group was based.¹⁹ These *compagnie* were active until 1565, first performing and then patronizing comedies. This explains why public, dramatic spectacles were usually staged by academies for occasional or festive events (*feste*) before distinguished invited audiences and, importantly, why they were not commercially motivated.²⁰

In hosting or staging public performances academies typically sought to exploit the power of spectacle to gain prestige and honour for their institution, reflected glory for their members and city, as well as potentially to attract political patronage and public recognition. For this reason, if the occasion demanded it, they would recruit high-profile professional musicians, artists and scenographers, following the practice of courtly sponsors. The dramatic texts selected for performances could be by academy members or outsiders, though in either case they were subjected to close collective scrutiny usually by censors (*censori*), who were specially appointed. (One wonders whether improvised comedies with *arte* style 'masks', widely documented from the 1620s, were practised much in Italian academy contexts before 1600, as they had been for the famous 1568 performance at the Munich Court in Bavaria.²¹) As at the 1589 *La Pellegrina* performance in Florence, however, the actors were normally amateurs and male in the sixteenth century, following earlier and continuing courtly practices.²² Nonetheless, as we shall see, there is some rare evidence of women on stage in plays put on by academies in the late sixteenth-century academy.

By this time, however, the distinction between amateur and professional was complicated by the presence of a few highly specialized, semi-professional actors. In northern Italy they were associated particularly with Ferrara, rather than Florence and Mantua, the more remunerative centres for *arte* performances. As Alessandro Marcigliano has documented, actors of this kind like Giovan Battista Verato were highly valued for their practical skills within courtly and academic spheres, and carefully presented as virtuoso amateurs.²³ The specialized team of amateur actors led by the literato and actor-dramatist 'Ruzante' (Angelo Beolco, d. 1542), a protégé of the patrician Alvise Cornaro in Padua who at one time worked with Ariosto, also provides a transitional model for the evolution between amateur and professional theatrical groups.²⁴

The performance in 1585 of Orsatto Giustinian's translation of Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* to inaugurate the magnificent theatre of the Accademia Olimpica of Vicenza provides a well-documented example of both traditional and innovative aspects of academic theatre. Innovations abounded in the theatre itself, designed by Andrea Palladio with additions by Vincenzo Scamozzi, in the lighting technologies by Antonio Pasi, the music by the organist of St Mark's Venice, Andrea Gabrieli, and the splendid costumes probably designed by the artist-member Giambattista

Maganza. By contrast, the director, the Venetian literato Angelo Ingegneri, was a highly skilled amateur, as were (it appears) the actors taking the speaking roles, thus allowing the academy to circumvent Venetian theatre legislation which pertained to professionals.²⁵ The eight speaking parts were played by dramatists and writers as well as (initially) university professors from the Veneto area. There was also a chorus of fifteen, and nearly one hundred other non-speaking parts on stage, including, unusually, young women and children ('putti'). Surviving eyewitness accounts report favourably on the staging aspects. However, of the actors, Giacomo Dolfin singled out for praise only the experienced semi-professional, Giovan Battista Verato, who played Tiresias, the priest of Apollo, and, unusually for a public academy performance, his daughter, who played Jocasta. Both had been brought to Vicenza by their sponsor, Battista Guarini. Dolfin praises the girl's control of voice and gesture, but especially her extremely moving performance in the recognition scene. However, Antonio Riccoboni in his more critical account found it to be lacking 'affetto' or emotional power; and criticized the inappropriate casting of this 'giovinetta, assai bella putta' [very pretty young girl] as Oedipus's older consort (and mother).²⁶ Others commended the off-stage singing and playing by two sisters, Elisabetta and Lucia Pellizzari, who served the academy as salaried musicians (1582-87), though not in the capacity of full members.²⁷ Two further very young girls appeared in the *esodo* (as Antigone and Ismene).

This performance thus provides unusually early evidence of women performing on stage for an official, public academy event, at a time of significant restrictions on theatre in the Veneto, even for noble academies. A continuum may in this respect be seen with the Olimpici's private musical performances, for example by the professional Maddalena Casulana in 1583 and perhaps by the noblewoman poet Maddalena Campiglia. Such entertainment undoubtedly reflects contemporary courtly practices, especially in Ferrara with the celebrated *musica secreta* performed in private first by skilled amateurs and then by professionals. It also looks forward to a greater inclusion in academies, from the turn of the seventeenth century, of virtuoso female poet-musician-performers, sometimes as full members, despite the usual formal constitution of academies as male-only preserves. Virginia Cox has gathered significant new evidence in this respect. An important example is the exceptional intellectual and poet Margherita Sarocchi's active participation in academy debates and literary activities in Rome; first with the Umoristi, founded for a performance in 1600, then as a founder of its offshoot, the Ordinati Academy (1608).²⁸ Similar involvement may perhaps be hypothesized for the noble Siense musician-poet Ippolita Benigni Manfredi, who became a member of the Affidati of Pavia, the Insensati of Perugia, and perhaps the Informi of Ravenna (by 1609) — as well as for the actress Isabella Andreini.

The question of female performance within academies — of music, poetry and drama — still requires further examination, but could present an important motive for contacts between the worlds of the academies and *commedia dell'arte*. As is well known, *commedia dell'arte* practices changed significantly with the appearance of actresses (documented in Italy from 1564) who, together with a number of learned actors, could in the mask of the *innamorata* play more socially elevated roles and

engage with 'serious' and moral genres, while often performing as singers. This created a more hybrid form of theatre, mixing higher with the traditional lower registers.²⁹ At around the same time some actors and their companies began to gain wider recognition in Italian princely courts and the royal Court of France. From the 1570s a few actors also began to venture into print to seek commercial success, fame and honour ('symbolic capital') for themselves, and increasingly sought to defend and commemorate their profession.³⁰ In this way, higher-level, educated actors began to encroach on the theatrical preserve of *letterati* and academies, competing for the same patronage and print markets. This tendency towards upward social mobility and transcendence of the material aspects of the art must also explain the fantastic names and emblems that some of the most distinguished *commedia dell'arte* companies took on, which are evocative of academies, starting with 'I Gelosi' [The Jealous], who adopted the emblem of the Janus face.³¹ For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between these groups where the only surviving documentation relates to theatrical performances.

Despite the efforts by academies with theatrical interests to distinguish themselves in name and style from professional companies, there was still some blurring of the boundaries. Naturally, if academies themselves took on the production of drama, they were obliged to adopt a corporate approach and could over time assume specialized 'roles' as in professional troupes. The Intronati Academy of Siena also appear to have composed their plays collaboratively under a collective name in the mid-sixteenth century, and in ways suggesting the modular approach of the *commedia dell'arte*.³² Furthermore, as we have seen, various skilled amateur directors and actors like their professional counterparts were peripatetic, including Battista Guarini, Angelo Ingegneri, and Luigi Groto, who operated across courtly and academic venues in northern Italy (like their courtly predecessors) and worked closely with their preferred musicians, engineers and architects — as well as actors.³³ Such collaboration by academies and their members with professionals of this kind could stimulate innovations especially in scenography and theatre design, which allowed them (as in the case of the Olimpici of Vicenza) to compete with princely patrons, and distinguished their productions from the public ones of itinerant *comici*. However, an academician's openness to effective stage practices and appeal to modern sensibilities could, if extended to *dramaturgy*, result in outcomes that to other academic critics smacked pejoratively of *arte* practices. Notably, the Paduan university professor Giason Denores publicly argued in 1586, and again in 1590, that Guarini's tragicomedy *Pastor fido* not only lacked the novelty the dramatist claimed for his work but, worse still, it imitated *arte* productions. The vehemence with which in 1593 the dramatist (presumably) — under the academic pseudonym 'L'Attizzato Ferrarese' — denies any such hybrid and low-brow precedent in his erudite play, and defends the nobility of the actor Verato (who supposedly penned the first defence of the play in 1588), testifies to the contested nature of amateur 'academic' status in this case.³⁴

Given the blurring between 'academy' and 'professional' theatrical practices and *dramaturgy*, it is striking how little concrete evidence there is of actual contacts between these *milieus* up to at least 1600, when the Roman Umoristi academy was

founded and began to open up to singers, semi-professional actors, and women.³⁵ If one sets aside the unusual example of the Intronati of Siena, which more than others straddles the divide between amateur and professional, it would seem that by 1604 the only securely documented instance of a professional actor becoming a full member of a literary academy is Isabella Andreini. This actress joined the Intenti academy of Pavia in 1601, with the nickname 'L'Accesa' [The Enflamed], as attested by the local contemporary historian and poet laureate, Antonio Maria Spelta. After Andreini's death, the editors of her literary works and pastoral play (*Mirtilla*) also emblazoned her academic identity on printed editions. Notably, a cluster of compositions by the Intenti are placed prominently and highlighted typographically in the second part of the 1605 edition of Isabella Andreini's *Rime*.³⁶

The evidence for her son Giovan Battista's membership of the still little known Accademia degli Spensierati of Florence (documented in print publications from 1600), stated as fact by Domenico Brunni and others, is a little less conclusive. Giovan Battista, a Florentine citizen despite his itinerant existence, and educated at Bologna university, clearly demonstrates his connections with this academy in his early print publications. As Fabrizio Fiaschini has detailed, four printed works (dated between 1604 and 1606), including his tragedy *Florinda* (1606), refer to the academy and its members in their dedicatory letters, through internal references, the inclusion of verse by members, and other circumstantial links.³⁷ Importantly, a portrait engraving preceding the text of *Florinda* pictures the actor wearing a medal with a symbol that evokes the emblem of the academy, which was possibly given to him in recognition of his services or merit. However, the medal does not fully reproduce the academy emblem (there is no motto for example). In addition, unlike in the case of other dramatist members of this academy (including Vincenzo Panciatici, Francesco Vinta and Giovanni Soranza), there is no mention of Andreini's academic nickname in the linked publications. After 1606, Andreini's publications no longer mention this association, though the academy was still publishing theatrical and other literary works after this time. This may reflect the actor's physical distance from the academy and a consequent break in connections, perhaps prompted by the academy itself. Though, as has been suggested, it may also indicate Andreini's sense that he no longer needed academic validation of his success.³⁸

Earlier on, the supposed association between the Veronese actor, Bernardino Lombardi, and the Rinnovati academy of Ferrara, on the basis of a play published in 1579 under an academic pseudonym, is now thought to originate from the actor's own attempt at plagiarism.³⁹ Yet there is some evidence of connections from the 1560s between *arte* actors and academies that specialized in the visual arts, because of their mutual interest in hybrid and even anti-literary cultural forms, in impersonation, and in the expression of the 'affects'. As Elena Tamburini has shown, Simone Panzanini of Bologna, famous for taking the Bergamasque porter role in the Gelosi company, among others from the group, had connections with the more socially and culturally heterogeneous and marginal Accademia della Val di Blenio (near Milan). This Academy was founded in 1560 and presided over for many years by the painter and theorist Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo.⁴⁰ By 1585, Isabella Andreini also became close to some leading members of this and other more

'serious' Milanese academies, including the important cultural operator and poet Gherardo Borgogni, a member of the Inquieti academy of Milan and the Intenti of nearby Pavia.

However, printed works by actors often exude a sense of separateness from more official academic circles. Like many novice writers, some explicitly express fear of hostile criticism from academicians versed in the art of poetics rather than performance. In the manner of Grazzini, various cultured professional actor-writers also exploited the opposition in polemic and parodic vein. For example, the popular collection of facetious letters by Cesare Rao (*Largute e facete lettere*, first printed in Brescia, 1562) presents much academic satire, through pillorying pedants, mocking academic-style *conclusioni* and orations, and even a paradoxical address from the 'Academy of the Zanni' to the 'Academy of the Ignorant' (*Accademici Ignoranti*).⁴¹ Rao is addressed in these both as the 'presidente' and 'Lo Svegliato' [The Awakened] of the *Accademia Peregrina*, which coupled with a mention of Anton Francesco Doni in the address just mentioned, apparently suggests his connection to the fictitious academy invented by this *poligrafo*. These letters in fact uniquely turn out to plagiarize Doni's — an act that Rao would not, Giorgio Masi argues, have dared to contemplate for any other academy.⁴² A contemporary Sicilian *comico* Vincenzo Belando ('il Cataldo'), author of *Lettere facete e ghiribizzose* (Paris, 1588) similarly signs himself in one as 'el Dottor incognito Accademic Balord' [The Unknown Doctor, the Idiot Academician].⁴³ As late as 1655, Bartolomeo Bocchino or Zan Muzzina's works are accompanied by sonnets by such unlikely *comici* academicians as Zan Gurgola, *Accademico Frullato* [The Whirled Up Academician] and Zan Scaramuzza, *Accademico Sdruciolato* [The Slipped Over Academician].⁴⁴

It seems then that more elite and formal academies tried to maintain an outward segregation of their theatrical practices from those of the professional *comici* in this formative period before the opening of Venetian opera theatres in 1637. They did this through controlling access to membership and their performance spaces, and by differentiating performance practices and actors involved. How far then did these theatrical economies — professional vs 'serious' literary academies — actually converge and cohabit in the period before the 1620s–30s when, as we shall see, the crossover between *arte* and amateur theatrical styles became more widely consolidated? To answer this, let us now turn to two cases around the end of the sixteenth century where actors were involved with literary academies.

Adriano Valerini and the *Accademia Filarmonica* of Verona

My earliest example is of the celebrated actor, Adriano Valerini (c. 1546–c. 1592), a *comico* famed for his role as lover (*innamorato*) in the Gelosi company, who made various approaches to the local *Accademia de' Filarmonici* [Philharmonic Academy] of Verona in the 1580s. Founded in 1543, this academy was known especially for its exceptional musical activities, but it also staged scripted comedies and pastoral plays from 1549 — including notably, an early production of Tasso's *Aminta* (1581). Valerini's print publications show from the start how he cultivated academies favourable to theatre to elevate his social status by association, and presumably to

gain patronage. His first and best known work, probably the first of any *arte* actor in print, was compiled to celebrate his beloved colleague in the Gelosi, Vincenza Armani, on her untimely death in 1569, a publication which would spawn a fertile tradition of literary compilations for female actors and singers. Valerini's oration alludes to the praise of the *Intronati* Academy of Siena — in which there flourished 'the cult of the stage' — for Armani's eloquence in improvised performance, which exceeded that of the most expert authors 'in carefully contemplated writing'.⁴⁵ This is the only direct reference to a cultural authority in the work, and is confirmed in the closing collection of verse by two sonnets by the *Intronati* (or by a key member, Scipione Bargagli, as Laura Riccò suggests).⁴⁶ Additionally, there is verse here by the *Accademia degli Ortolani*, by Leone de' Sommi the Jewish semi-professional dramatist for the *Invaghiti* academy of Mantua (but identified only as L.S.H.), and by the *Filarmonici* Academy member Francesco Mondella, who would later author a Senecan tragedy (*Irifile*, 1582) in the manner of Valerini's *Afrodite* (1578).

In 1583, when the actor was domiciled in Verona with his family, Valerini is recorded as having sent to the *Filarmonici* a possibly autograph manuscript copy (now lost) of Count Federico Asinari's still unprinted tragedy *Tancredi*, with a dedication.⁴⁷ The summary of the manuscript *atti* of the academy notes that it was judged according to the usual procedures for works submitted to them by a committee of three members. No subsequent verdict or recognition is recorded, which is intriguing particularly since the play would later be pirated by a fellow actor, Bernardino Lombardi, and printed under the false name of Torquato Tasso as *La Gismonda, tragedia* (Paris, 1587). The correct attribution was exposed in the 1588 edition by Gherardo Borghini, who was close to Isabella Andreini.⁴⁸ It is possible then that Valerini was hoping to gain credit with the *Filarmonici* by supplying a rare manuscript copy of a text then circulating among actors, perhaps because he was aware of their interest in theatre.

Three years later, Valerini tried a different approach. His lengthy prose encomium of his native city, *Le bellezze di Verona* (Verona, 1586), contains a section explicitly praising the celebrated local academy.⁴⁹ It is very likely, as Gian Paolo Marchi has suggested, that the actor hoped thereby to curry favour with the local cultural, civic and religious authorities, so as to receive a permanent licence to perform in the city. Certainly, like his other eight existing printed works, the *Bellezze* shows off his humanist erudition and his close contacts with important intellectual and aristocratic circles in the city — but, significantly, it makes no mention of his status as an actor. Valerini seems intent on positioning himself as a *literato*, already with privileged access to cultural networks, in his bid for more public recognition from the most famous lay cultural institution of the city.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, it is perhaps no coincidence that this encomium appeared shortly after the inaugural performance of the Olympic Theatre in nearby Vicenza, at a time when we know that the *Filarmonici* were themselves engaged in semi-private theatrical performances, including the staging twice of Antonio Ongaro's pastoral play *Alceo*.⁵¹

Despite these approaches to the *Accademia Filarmonica* there is no indication of any official acknowledgement of Valerini on their part. This could of course simply be down to the patchy state of the archival documentation for these years. It seems

unlikely that this was solely because of the actor's modest family background, since he had a humanist training and highly placed connections. Although the academy was increasingly becoming populated by noblemen, it still admitted professional members who were of lower social extraction, including the high-profile painters, Domenico Brusaporci and later his son Felice (who appear to have been involved with the academy theatricals), as well as musicians of great renown — though these did not always have full membership status.⁵² It seems probable, therefore, that the academy ignored Valerini because of his status as an *arte* actor, perhaps exacerbated by his association with Armani and other actresses. They doubtless wished to avoid any potential run-ins over the issue of theatre with the civic and religious authorities of Verona — both of which were strongly opposed to secular dramatic performances. Notably, in 1591 the authorities even turned down a request by the Duke of Mantua to allow his troupe (headed by Valerini) to perform there.⁵³ Even so, there must have been a strong and continued local interest in *comici* in this period, given the unprecedented success with Veronese presses of the pastoral play *Mirtilla* (published in Verona in 1588, in two editions, and again in 1599) by the actress Isabella Andreini.⁵⁴

Archival evidence about the Filarmonici provides a somewhat different picture. There are suggestions that they cultivated amateur theatre in a private, even secretive manner; and some prominent members also had connections — probably in less official contexts — with professional *comici*, including Valerini. Some new evidence of this is suggested by a manuscript verse anthology in the State Archive of Verona, which has hitherto been examined only in relation to music.⁵⁵ The volume posthumously commemorates Alberto Lavezzola, an honoured 'padre' (protector) of the academy, who was clearly interested in theatre. This manuscript contains sonnets by and for Valerini among verse by Lavezzola himself and various *letterati*, including several Filarmonici members and other Veneto dramatists. One presumably posthumous sonnet appears to commemorate Valerini's tragedy, *Afrodite* (Verona, 1578):

Per Adriano Valerini, al suo tempo comico famoso

Come possa un meschin ne i lacci involto
Chieder mercè da duo benigni lumi
Come il foco eshalar, che lo consume
Far men grave il dolor nel petto accolto
Come di donna far cader dal volto
Di freddo cor, di perfidi costumi
Per la pietà duo lagrimosi fiumi,
Valerin mostri in stil purgato, e colto.
Per dar conforto a l'amorosa piaga
E quetar nostre passioni acerbe
Huopo non è di Circe, o di arte maga
Or, che poi senza incanti, o succhi di herbe
D'alma sdegnosa, e d'ogni stratio vaga
Le voglie humiliar crude, e superbe.

[For Adriano Valerini, in his day a famous actor

How a poor wretch caught in love's snares
can beg for mercy from a pair of kind eyes;
how releasing the fire that consumes him
can lessen the heavy grief in his heart;
how he can make the eyes of a cold-hearted,
treacherous-natured lady start to flow
with twin rivers of tears out of pity:
let Valerini show all this in his pure and learned style.

But to comfort my wounds of love
and to calm my bitter passions
there is no call for Circe or magic arts,
now that without enchantments or herbal draughts,
you can humiliate the cruel and bold will
of a disdainful and blood-thirsty soul.]

This poem clearly celebrates Valerini's rather gruesome tragedy for its learned style ('stil purgato, e colto', l. 8) as well as for its masterly control of the affects, aspects that suggest a learned appreciation probably in circles that overlapped with the Filarmonici. The *rime* involving Valerini and other theatrical figures in the manuscript are, however, not found in the printed volume put together for Lavezzola posthumously by Francesco Mondella (*Rime del S. Alberto Lavezzola*, Verona, 1583).

Valerini also seems to have had contacts with another 'protector' of the academy, Count Mario Bevilacqua, who headed a famous private musical and cultural gathering (*ridotto*) in his Verona palace. Kathryn Bosi has indicated that this aristocrat knew and supported various actors and dramatists in Verona (and Vicenza), including Isabella Andreini and Valerini, from the late 1580s. There seems to be some reference to this relationship in the considerably annotated copy of Valerini's verse collection, *Rime diverse* (1577), dedicated to Bevilacqua, which is held in the Accademia Filarmonica library.⁵⁶ The undated comments, to my knowledge not previously examined, would in another context merit further discussion, especially for their sometimes negative judgements on style. A later manuscript inventory (1628) shows that two further editions of Valerini's works (now lost) — but not his tragedy — were held in the academy. Whatever dealings Valerini had with the Filarmonici, therefore, seem to have been at a purely private and not an officially recognized level. Finally, it seems that Valerini gave up on this avenue for patronage in the face of the Filarmonici's lack of interest, and decided to dedicate his last work to the Olympic Academy of Vicenza.⁵⁷

Isabella Andreini's Academic Networks

The Filarmonici appear to have officially maintained this blind spot for more 'public' and controversial forms of theatre also later on. Curiously, when Battista Guarini was accepted as an 'absent' member in 1601, the academy minutes note his 'dottiss[im]e prose, et le leggiadrissime rime' [most learned prose and delightful verse], but do not even mention his dramatic masterpiece, *Il Pastor fido*, which had by then attracted much debate in other academies in the Veneto region.⁵⁸

So it is perhaps not surprising that when in the following year (June 1602) the famous actress, Isabella Andreini, sent the Filarmonici an encomiastic sonnet, the academicians agreed to honour her with a reply, but avoided a corporate response, which some feared the actress would print. Instead, an individual member was asked to respond, and five other members voluntarily did likewise.⁵⁹

Importantly, though, the Filarmonici could not ignore this *grande dame* of the stage (now aged forty) as they had done Valerini. In contrast to her fellow Gelosi member, Isabella's reputation was founded not only on virtuosity and learning, but also on personal virtue — bolstered by her patronage by Cardinal Cinthio Aldobrandini, as well as important friends in exclusive cultural circles including that of Cardinal Federico Borromeo in Milan and the Accademia degli Inquieti in the same city. Importantly, she was an academic *equal*, as in 1601 she had been made a member of the distinguished Accademia degli Intenti of Pavia. Her membership of the academy was preceded by many years of literary and social connections with academy members and local elites, such as Gherardo Borgogni, and was reinforced by publications and regular performances in the nearby capital Milan from the 1570s.⁶⁰ Her invitation to join the Intenti was probably precipitated more specifically by the recent publication of her very first organic volume of *Rime* printed under her own name, dedicated to Aldobrandini in Milan (1601). This successfully advertised her highly placed contacts and her innovative poetic skills, both of which she would have known were of interest to the Intenti. In addition, she may have been extended membership in recognition of her 'diplomatic' role in performing with her troupe in Pavia in March 1601, at the time of a political conclave involving the papal legate Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, the Duke of Savoy and the governor of Milan, Conte de Fuentes.⁶¹

When Isabella joined the Intenti (founded in 1593 by two members of the Barnabite order), the Academy included numerous prominent ecclesiastics (such as Cardinals Cinthio Aldobrandini and Federico Borromeo) as well as several secular princes. In addition, there were political authorities and other civic officials, university professors and intellectuals from across the arts and sciences. The institution had a strong interest in politics and poetry, as well as music; but it seems unclear whether they were engaged in *theatrical* activities too.⁶² Andreini and her company were certainly performing in Pavia by 12 March 1601 and were working in Milan the following summer. She had become a member of the Pavia academy by 14 November, where she apparently stayed at least until 24 December. In the following year Andreini returned to Milan in April, and she was in Pavia again in December, when Spelta was completing the *Aggiunta* to his *Historia*, a work which shows his strong interest in political and carnival spectacle. He records her 'exquisite eloquence' in Pavia in the winter of 1601, and her performance of a pastoral play which inspired him to write verse and an encomium for her, perhaps as a collegial gesture.⁶³ So if Andreini actually attended academic gatherings during her stays in the city, and performed or improvised verse or dramatic works there, or contributed to debates and lectures, one wonders *how* she did this, unless chaperoned, without contravening decorum, as the sole representative of her sex in the academy. This was of course a problem for the exceptional few female academicians generally.

However, as mentioned, there were precedents of actresses/singers in the Olimpici of Vicenza, and of singers like Vittoria Archilei performing for private male gatherings involving clergymen. Isabella Andreini is also said (perhaps not reliably) to have improvised poetry in the domestic 'academy' of Cardinal Aldobrandini in Rome.⁶⁴ On an official level, the admission of Andreini as an iconic *virtuosa* performer and poet would undoubtedly have been calculated to raise the profile of the Intenti to rival their sister-academy, the Affidati, which included two other female poets or singers.⁶⁵ This pattern of academic rivalry with female figure-heads has been identified by Virginia Cox also in other academies, and compares interestingly with *commedia dell'arte* groups — often known by their leading actress.

For Andreini herself, this membership of a literary academy apparently brought her the award of a doctoral degree ('laurea dottorale') and further opportunities for patronage as well as for display of her erudition and poetic expertise.⁶⁶ Notably, her verse is featured straight after the dedicatory letter to Antonio Maria Spelta's *La curiosa e dilettevole aggiunta*, 1602. This also describes the actress's aggregation to the academy and presents a glowing tribute to her as well as showcasing four more of her poems, all of which were included in the second edition of her *Rime* (Milan, 1605, Part 2). This posthumous volume, which, Chiara Cedrati argues, Isabella Andreini had probably in large part organized herself for a re-edition in 1602, highlights the actress's membership of the Intenti Academy both visually and poetically, by including in Part 2 various new poetic exchanges with this academy and its members, as well as with the Filarmonici of Verona and the Olimpici of Vicenza.⁶⁷ This seems to prove the point made by Bruni and Barbieri that academic membership added dignity to actors and their profession. Yet, curiously, in Part 3 Andreini's earlier play, *Mirtilla*, though presented again as a composition of a 'Comica Gelosa e Accademica Intenta', is addressed to and invokes a specifically female rather than an academic (male) audience.⁶⁸ Like Valerini, Andreini's academic identity seems therefore to be deliberately and predominantly connected with her status as a *poet* rather than as a dramatist or *arte* performer.

Giovan Battista Andreini, *comico-accademico*

The two facets seem to have been combined in the case of her son, Giovan Battista Andreini, a distinguished *comico* and *letterato* who was associated with the Accademia degli Spensierati of Florence from 1604. This private academy functioned relatively independently from the circuits of grand-ducal power, and was connected to broader literary, religious and political circles across northern Italy in which Isabella operated. As Fabrizio Fiaschini has analysed in detail, the publications of the academy members reflect a growing openness to experiments with mixed genres and the contamination of verse, musical and theatrical forms, as practised also in other contemporary, private Florentine academies.⁶⁹ Importantly, Andreini's wife, the great actress and singer Virginia Ramponi, known by the stage name 'Florinda', seems to have been a stimulus in this respect. Circumstantial evidence suggests that she may have made her debut in the title role of her husband's tragedy *Florinda*, performed in some way (but not fully staged) for the Spensierati in 1604, or have

been involved in other performances. However, there is no direct confirmation of this in the sole surviving printed edition of *Florinda* from 1606 (the 1604 edition was apparently destroyed by the author because Acts IV and V were poorly printed).⁷⁰ Nonetheless, this lavish edition, which features an engraving of the author and another depicting the stage setting (entitled 'La scena si finge nelle Foreste di Scozzia', fol. 12/B2^v), is introduced by a small collection of verse, 'Sonetti D'Alcuni Illustriss. Signori Accademici Spensierati, Et altri dotti Scrittori, in lode dell'Opera, e dell'Autore', of which the first two of the seven authors are prominently identified as Spensierati members. Furthermore, the first of Virginia Ramponi Andreini's two sonnets included here is composed for the Spensierati Academy 'in ringratiamento d'alcune Rime sopra di lei da gli stessi composte' [to thank them for some verse which members composed about her]. Emily Wilbourne has argued that the actress is referring here to a small printed collection of verse by five Spensierati from 1604, which were composed alongside ones for *Florinda*, of which others were perhaps lost with the earlier destroyed edition. This tragedy and Andreini's other three printed works connected with the academy mark a crucial first stage of his strategy for self-affirmation and to ennoble his profession.⁷¹ In turn, it has been argued by Wilbourne that the academicians were influenced in their compositions by Virginia Andreini's performance.

From the early decades of the seventeenth century some *comici* were becoming more accepted and their performance styles were even imitated in polite, literary society, reflecting a growing interest in novel, hybrid dramatic forms mixing styles and genres, following a trend for which Guarini was an important pioneer. Numerous 'academies' of a more open and less formal type, devoted to theatrical activities, began to be formed especially in Florence and Rome (until 1627) involving skilled amateur actor-dramatists like Giovanni Briccio, who wrote and performed plays based on or incorporating the improvised dialect comedy of professionals (*commedia ridicolosa*).⁷² In Naples, Don Pedro Fernandez de Castro, viceroy between 1610 and 1616, also founded an 'academy' of noble amateur actors at Court. The Immobili [The Immobile Academy] of Florence, headed by Jacopo Cicognini, were heavily involved in improvised performances and even began to run a private theatre with Medici support from c. 1650.⁷³ As Nicolò Barbieri observed in his famous defence of the arte (*La supplica*, 1634): 'I comici mercenari sovente recitano le stesse [commedie] delle accademie e perciò sono onorati' [professional actors often perform the same [comedies] as academies and for this reason they are honoured]. At the same time, it seems, the professional actor Pier Maria Cecchini planned to set up an 'accademietta' in Rome in which amateurs could be trained privately.⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the rapport between amateurs and professionals was destined to remain problematic and the two groups followed broadly separate pathways throughout the seventeenth century.⁷⁵

Characteristically, Giovan Battista Andreini made theatrical capital of this blurred and changing relationship between specialized *arte* practitioners and their amateur counterparts in one of his most self-consciously meta-theatrical comedies, *Le due commedie in commedia* [Two Comedies in One] (1623). The title refers to two 'improvised comedies' (with *arte* characters) that are staged in a private courtyard

for the same Venetian audience, first by a group of 'accademici' and then by a professional company. This sets up an implicitly competitive structure of the kind beloved in *commedia dell'arte* performances. Inevitably, the usual distinctions are made between the groups: i.e. the *comici* are *itinerant* and *paid*, but, predictably, they are also more inventive and skilled than the *accademici*. As usual, there is also much ambiguity: Lelio (the *nome d'arte* of Andreini himself) directs and acts with both groups as well as writing sketches, while we learn that the leader of the *comici* (Fabio) is in fact an educated nobleman who has often performed in academies.⁷⁶ Two things are striking about this comedy, I would suggest, in the light of our discussion. Firstly, the term 'accademici' is understood very loosely and informally here, compared to such institutions as the Filarmonici and Intenti at least: this is simply a group of pseudo-courtly amateur performers, friends and servants of a wealthy patron, who meet at his house to perform plays for which they are trained. Secondly, the female performers play a key role in the group's overall success. The 'accademici' perform with the patron's daughter, Lidia, a talented amateur, while the all-male group of *comici* are allotted the patron's skilled musician-actress, Florinda (*nome d'arte* of Virginia Ramponi), whose particularly moving qualities in the final act bring about the full moral and Christian potential of theatre which Andreini promoted.

Andreini's dramaturgy in the early seventeenth century marks a decisive step forward on the part of this actor-literato in re-evaluating the status and function of professional drama, and bridging the 'academic'/'professional' divide. The comedy highlights the increasingly unstable notion of 'academy' over the period, and suggests the critical role of female performers in breaking down divisions between the theatrical practices of 'literary' academies and *comici dell'arte* — as seen in the cases of Isabella Andreini and Virginia Ramponi — and in encouraging the development of new genres and styles of performance. This the Intronati had already foreshadowed with their strong interest in female characters and, more covertly, in female performers like Vincenza Armani. But as Valerini's rapport with the Filarmonici shows, the task of historically reconstructing such relations seems to be obscured by the mythomania of actors and by self-censorship on an official level by academies, as well as, until recently, by a tendency for disciplinary separatism in modern theatre scholarship. So, to give a provisional answer to my initial question about how far *accademici* and *comici* interacted in this period, one might conclude that they did at first occasionally, though rarely openly or corporately. Increasingly, though, the increased blurring between the practices of these groups suggests that the rhetoric of mutual antagonism coexisted with unacknowledged coalescence.