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SPECTACLE IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY VENICE:
OR HOW CARPACCIO, GIORGIONE AND TITIAN
REPRESENTED PATRICIAN YOUTH THEATRE

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The principal Italian piazza in every city has an urban presence of *longue durée*, one that has continually evolved over many centuries. None more so than St Mark's Square in Venice, where innumerable events have taken place from the moment of its creation until the present day. Unlike theatres as we know them, a piazza is a space that is accessible to the urban public. Its form is determined by buildings, streets, or even, as in this case, a waterway – the famous *bacino* between St Mark's and the Isola San Giorgio. In one sense the space of a piazza is defined by the surrounding city and in another it can be transformed into the internal space of a theatrical stage.

The Italian piazza often metamorphoses as a stage, furnished and refurnished for events, with temporary seating, sculpture, and stage sets, in short a work of art that is never finished, but always in the process of reinstallation. Unlike Australian theatre audiences, who are predominantly middle class and tertiary educated, the spectacle-loving Venetian public were from all social groups, were musically literate, and performed in what was perceived as a Republican space, that proclaimed the virtues of an oligarchic government. No wonder that in succeeding centuries British Republicans appropriated Antonio Canaletto's views of Venice for the newly-invented dining room in the eighteenth century as symbolic of what might be achieved elsewhere and of the Republic they hoped to create. Venetians made spectacle a political art all their own. They have a trajectory from the ninth to the eighteenth century, unique in Italian cities, of theatrical traditions that began with the origins of the Venetian Republic and lasted until Napoleon Bonaparte disrupted and changed everything. After 1809, festivals were no longer in vogue, only to be revived in the twentieth century as tourist attractions, like the Venetian Carnival.

One of the most popular stage sets was the Piazzetta before the Doge's Palace. Canaletto's drawing (Fig. 1), now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, represents the spectacle for Maundy Thursday, the anniversary of the Last Supper, when the *Labors of Hercules* (*Le Forze di Ercole*) were performed, a juggling act of equilibrium and agility in which human pyramids were formed in configurations, on

¹ My lecture was conceived in response to the unique configuration of subjects that we have in this section of the Academy, The Arts, that is, a collaboration between Art History, Musical History and Theatre. The experience of research for this lecture has led me to begin to write a short book on the subject of Theatre and Art in Renaissance Venice.



Figure 1: Antonio Canaletto. The Maundy Thursday Festival before the Ducal Palace, 1765. Drawing in pen and brown ink with grey wash, heightened with white gouache, 38.5 x 55.3 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington.

high platforms. The Doge, surrounded by patricians and citizens of all ranks, watched the event. Canaletto's drawing is one in a series of 12 representing festivals in Venice, made in preparation for the widely distributed popular engravings by Giambattista Brustolon.² The origins of such an event went back to the earliest days of the Venetian Republic. A famous Doge in the tenth century, Pietro Orseolo, divided his enormous estate into three thirds, one third to his relatives, another third to the poor, and a third purely to be used for public festivals, a gesture that reveals how important spectacle always was, both for those who ruled, and those who lived in Venice.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries young Venetian patricians, between the ages of 16 and 30, formed chic informal groups, called the *Compagnie della Calza*,³ to perform theatrical entertainments, to hold banquets, and to celebrate weddings. They were in essence patrician event managers and played an important role in the

2 The series, some twelve prints, was known as the *Feste dogali* (1770–1778), a celebration of festivals in which the Doge participated.

3 The classic articles on the phenomenon are: I. Venturi, 'Le Compagnie della Calza, Sec. XV- XVI', *Nuovo archivio veneto*, n.s. XVI (1908), pp. 161–221, XVII (1909), pp. 140–223; Maria Theresa Muraro, 'La Festa a Venezia e le sue manifestazioni rappresentative: Le Compagnie della Calza e le Momarie', in *Storia della Cultura veneta*, III, parte 3, pp. 315–41, Vicenza, 1981.



Figure 2: Anton Maria Zanetti II. Engraving with coloured watercolour, after Giorgione's *Compagno della Calza* from the Canal façade of the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*. Illustration from Anton Maria Zanetti, *Varie Pitture a fresco de' principali maestri veneziani*, Venice, 1760. From the hand-coloured copy in the *Biblioteca Herztiana*, Rome. Photo © Jaynie Anderson.

creation of early theatre and opera. They also appear in a number of significant Renaissance paintings by Carpaccio, Giorgione and Titian, although their appearance has been almost entirely unnoticed. An eighteenth-century coloured copy of a lost fresco by Giorgione from the façade of the German Customs House in Venice, the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*, shows their flamboyant dress, easily identifiable by their bi-coloured white and red stockings (Fig. 2).⁴ They often wore their blonde hair long in a fashion, known in Venetian dialect as *zazzara*, with a cap at a rakish angle.

At the German Customs House in Venice, there is and was a central courtyard where theatrical representations took place, which may explain their presence on the façade

⁴ For the most recent analysis of the *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*, see Alessandro Nova, 'Giorgione e Tiziano al *Fondaco dei Tedeschi*', in *Giorgione entmythisiert*, ed. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, Brepols: Turnhout, 2008, pp. 71–99.



Figure 3: Vittore Carpaccio. The Miracle of the Reliquary of the True Cross at Rialto Bridge, Venice. *Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice*. Published with permission from the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

of the building. Marino Sanudo, the Venetian diarist, who is the principal source for the *Compagnie*,⁵ described one such occasion at the Fondaco on 12 February 1517, to celebrate an alliance made with the German Emperor. The celebrations began in the morning and lasted until 3 am the next day. The entertainments consisted of masked dancing, different kinds of ballet, comic interludes from the celebrated buffoon Zuan Polo and elaborate triumphal chariots, with appearances from Cupid,

⁵ Marino Sanudo's Diaries were published in 58 volumes over 24 years (1879–1903), from the manuscripts in the Biblioteca Marciana. An English translation of excerpts has recently been published, as *Venice, Città [sic] Excelestissima: Selections from the Renaissance Diaries of Marino Sanudo (1496–1533)*, ed. Patricia Labalme, Laura White and Linda L. Carroll, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 2008, see especially section 9, Theatre in Venice. See also their earlier article, 'How to (and How Not to) Get Married in Sixteenth-Century Venice (Selections from the Diaries of Marino Sanudo)', *Renaissance Quarterly*, LII, no. 1 (1999), pp. 43–72.



Figure 4: Three woodcuts of patrician *Compagni della Calza*, *Gioventù antica*, fol. 66 verso; *Giovane antico*, fol. 68 verso; *Compagni della Calza*, fol. 101 recto. From Cesare Vecellio, *De gli habiti antichi, et moderni di diversi parti del mondo libri due, fatti da Cesare Vecellio, & con discorsi da lui dichianti*, Damian Zenaro: Venice, 1590. Biblioteca Marciana, Venice.

marine animals, amorous nymphs making sacrifices and demonstrations of ancient fables. It was, Sanudo declared, a very luxurious and expensive event.⁶

Of all Venetian artists it is Carpaccio who is the painter par excellence of the *Compagnie della calza*, as in the classic representation of the long-haired blonde youth with his back to us, in the left foreground of the *Miracle of the Reliquary of the True Cross* in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice (Fig. 3). Distinguished by his pose, long hair and fashionable attire, he has long been recognised in the costume books as a member of the *Compagnia della Calza*, most notably by Cesare Vecellio in the first global account of fashion, *De gli habiti antichi, et moderni di diverse parti del mondo*, published in Venice in 1590 (Fig. 4). According to Vecellio, 'Cristoforo Guerra, tedesco, Da Norimberga', better known as Christoph Chrieger,⁷ created the exceptional woodcuts in the volume after drawings by the author.⁸ The *compagno* in the *Miracle of the Reliquary* plays the role of principal spectator. He is depicted just outside the fictional space of the large painting, in which is represented the illusion of a streetscape in Venice, at a point on the Grand Canal not so far from the Fondaco dei Tedeschi's site. A preparatory drawing, a detailed study of this enigmatic and handsome youth, in the Albertina Vienna, reveals how Carpaccio took considerable care in delineating his

6 Marino Sanudo, *I Diarii*, op. cit., vol. 23, p. 583. A further reference in Sanudo to a ball there on 12 February 1520, suggests the space was considered appropriate for such events.

7 Thieme-Becker, VI (1912), p. 533.

8 Vecellio, op. cit., pp. 155 and 200.

silhouette.⁹ It was more than most a significant detail. He must have been a member of the *Compagnia degli Ortolani* (the confraternity of the farmers), who were responsible for the commission of a series of paintings from Carpaccio.

In the background the multicoloured representation of street fashion mimics the clothes worn by the *compagni*, whether on land or on sea, gondoliers being portrayed as a particularly modish example of street, or rather canal, fashion imitating high fashion. Carpaccio is the Venetian painter who is fascinated by luxurious men's clothing. Why are these young men, the *compagni della calza*, represented in some of the most significant Venetian paintings as if set apart from the illusion created by the painter in the main representations? Are they merely part of the passing scene, spectators with whom we identify, onlookers who have created what is happening? Are they also the patrons? Would patrons wish to be identified with their backs to the audience? What are their roles in the creation of this imagery? Many of these paintings have complex subjects that have proved elusive to interpret, which might indicate an origin in contemporary theatre. In what follows I shall attempt to answer the complex questions that their presence provokes.

The costumes that the *compagni* wore were analysed in the first multicultural review of fashion, written by Titian's distant cousin, Cesare Vecellio, a Venetian painter and engraver (1521–1601). Vecellio is best known for his prints and illustrated books on costume, embroidery and lacemaking, in which he records the quotidian life of Venetians. Vecellio is acutely aware of Venetian painting and on a number of occasions appropriates details from famous Venetian painters without recognition as from Carpaccio (Fig. 4) and many others including Titian. In his text Vecellio states that these companies were first formed during the dogeship of Michele Steno in 1400. He goes on to say that the *compagni* wore stockings, which were either quartered in contrasting colours, or were embroidered with pearls and jewels up to the knee, or on their sleeves. Their thoughts were expressed with the choice of a particular impresa, or sign to denote the disposition of their soul.¹⁰ Their long hoods were decorated with imprese in silken embroidery. They wore little red or black berets that fell over the ear, their hair worn long and thick, tied with little silken cords. Vecellio states that the long hair does not denote femininity, but is for them a religious ritual. They often wore velvet jackets. Their sleeves were tied with silk and gold bands, slashed so as to see the underlying shirt. Vecellio also refers to the building that the *compagnie* frequented that abutted the clock tower at St Mark's.

Vecellio's book contains much useful discussion about how to use piazza space for processions, which he illustrates in the three squares associated with St Mark's, the

9 The drawing, no 1456v, is executed in brown ink with white body colour, on green paper, 22 x 27.6 cm. An overweight child is to the right of him, as in the painting, and the mount is inscribed with an old attribution to Giovanni Bellini.

10 Vecellio, 1590: 'Ebbe la famosa ed onorate Compagnia della Calza principio sotto il Doge Michele Steno l'anno 1400, stante che molti Giovani principali della Città, radunata, soma di denari si trattenevano con feste splendide e magnifiche. Per tutto quel tempo la nobile società fiori, portando ciascuno dei patrizi aggregate una Calza appunto quartata di colori diversi, o ricamata di perle e gioie fino a mezza gamba, e facevano conoscere il suo pensiero particolare con qualche ingegnosa impresa, più o meno a gara secondo la disposizione del loro animo.'



Figure 5: Three images of Venetian Piazzas as theatres of fashion and spectacle, from Cesare Vecellio, *De gli habiti antichi et moderni*, Venice, 1590. Corte del Palazzo Ducale di Venezia, fol. 120 verso; Prospettiva della seconda Piazza di San Marco, fol. 151 verso; Terza prospettiva della Piazza di San Marco, fol. 151 verso. Biblioteca Marciana, Venice.

Piazzetta before the Ducal Palace, the main Piazza San Marco, and the interior courtyard of the Doges' Palace (Fig. 5). Countless paintings and prints testify to how popular these squares were for different spectacles over many centuries, fashionable venues for events, secular or religious. Documentary and visual evidence suggests that there were more informal venues for theatre, such as the villas on the outlying islands at Burano, and Murano, or on the Brenta, and the *terraferma*.

Francesco Sansovino, a sixteenth-century cultural historian of Venice, described some 43 *Compagnie delle calze* between 1400 and 1560;¹¹ the first took the name of *Pavoni* (The Peacocks) and the last the *Accesi* (The Inspired Ones). Some of the names of the societies occur frequently in relation to distinguished theatrical events and commissions, such as the *Zardinieri* (The Gardeners), the *Ortolani* (The Farmers) and the *Sempieterni* (The Eternal Ones). Others were less conspicuous, such as the *Felici*, *Immortali*, *Perpetui*, *Reali*, *Semprevivi*, and *Trionfanti*. The elegant young men assumed such disguises for amusement, presumably because there was no real possibility that they could ever have been confused with rustics, just as Marie Antoinette never expected anyone to take her for a shepherdess. As they were ephemeral companies, informally organised, the documentation that they left about themselves is slight. They distinguished themselves by their flamboyant costumes, their imprese embroidered on their right sleeves, and hoods. Their statues had to be approved by the Council of Ten, the highest committee of government in Venice, or the *Provedditori del Comune*, but in fact they had considerable political autonomy. Every company had a prior, a *camerlengo*, a secretary and two councillors, who every

11 Francesco Sansovino, *Venetia città nobilissima e singolare*, Venice, 1581.



Figure 6: Bernardino Licinio, Portrait of Ottaviano Grimani as a Procurator of St Mark's and a member of the Compagnia della Calza Sempiterno. *Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1541.*

year employed a poet, an architect and a painter. The opportunities for patronage were considerable; some 40 companies would have commissioned works from painters, poets, and architects.

Among those artists documented as employed by the *Compagni* in Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, are Pietro Aretino, Giorgio Vasari,¹² Andrea Palladio, Titian and Valerio Zuccato, a mosaicist at San Marco who was also an actor. There were certainly many more. Vasari's first known visit to Venice of nine months was to design sets for Aretino's play *La Talanta* for the Sempiterno. If annually every one of these 40 or so companies employed artists, poets and architects, the *Compagnie delle Calze* created significant patronage networks. Every man's election

to a confraternity was celebrated with dinners accompanied by dancing. If a *compagno* married he had to offer two banquets, one in his own house, the other in the home of his bride; on the death of a *compagno* his company wore mourning dress for four days.

The formation of these youthful groups occurred at the liminal threshold of young adulthood. At the age of eighteen, if their patrician birth had been proven legitimate, young men were given the chance of entering patrician government, to be part of the Great Council, *Maggior Consiglio*, by participating in a golden ballot, the *Balla d'Oro*, on 4 December. Only one fifth succeeded, while the others could retry annually until they reached the age of 25, when they could assume their legitimate place. Marino Sanudo, who outlined the process in some detail in the 1490s, described those who did not make the first ballot, as the *tristi*, the sad ones.¹³

12 Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori...*, ed. G. Milanesi, Florence, VI (1878–85), p. 223 ff., VII, p. 670 ff. The phenomenon is discussed by Juergen Schulz, 'Vasari at Venice', *The Burlington Magazine*, CIII (1961), pp. 500–511.

13 Sanudo, *I Diarii*, op. cit., (1490), p. 146.

Ottaviano Grimani has the characteristic biography of a *compagno*. He is portrayed by Bernardino Licinio, in a portrait now in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Fig. 6). He has chosen to be represented as a proud member of the *Sempereterni*, those who aspired to be forever eternal. The biography of a young patrician involved in one of these *compagnie* was inevitably distinguished. Bernardino Licinio's portrait of Ottaviano Grimani, painted in 1541, when Ottaviano was 24 years old, represents a superbly confident young man, dressed with a refined and erotic elegance. As Licinio's portrait was a kneepiece, stockings were not in evidence. Beneath the black cloak Ottaviano wore a spectacular slashed red jacket, with a green slashed codpiece.¹⁴ The picture is signed, dated, the sitter identified, and Ottaviano's allegiance to the confraternity of the *Sempereterni* is proclaimed with their impresa. It is unique in Venetian portraiture as a representation of a *Compagno della Calza*. Ottaviano was the grandson of a famous Doge, Antonio Grimani (1436–1523). He was the nephew of the Cardinal Domenico Grimani, the most celebrated collector of antiquities known to Renaissance Venice. The Cardinal Grimani was also the proud owner of significant works by Giorgione, including Giorgione's *Self-Portrait* (Braunschweig) and the *Vecchia*, in the Grimani inventories described as Giorgione's mother. His collection was celebrated for many Flemish paintings and the famous Grimani Breviary. The princely palace of the Grimani at Santa Maria Formosa has been opened as the newest museum in Venice on 29 December 2008 to show their extraordinary architectural and artistic patronage. From 1571 to 1576, Ottaviano Grimani was Procurator of St Mark's, in charge of the ceremonies for the visit of Henry III together with Tommaso Contarini, Sebastiano Venier, Nicolò da Ponte, Marcantonio Barbaro, and Gerolamo Contarini. At this time he was portrayed by Alessandro Vittoria, in a sculpture now in Berlin.

Ottaviano Grimani's sumptuous dress in the Licinio portrait appears to contravene all the sumptuary laws, whereas Giovanni Bellini's masculine sitters suggest a sombre conformity. If they followed the sumptuary laws, Venetian patricians from their thirties wore black, as is testified by the many Venetian portraits of the sixteenth century by Bellini, Titian and their contemporaries.¹⁵ They all follow a formula in which Venetian men are seen to be rigorously following etiquette. These anonymous men, all half figures, are dressed in Venetian black or senatorial red. Nevertheless, as Titian's portraits of men reveal, black could be depicted with many shades and nuances, so that it was not a dull form of dressing, but one that required a certain refined ingenuity both on the part of artist and sitter. Three portraits from various stages of Titian's life are the youthful man in a red cap in the Frick Gallery, New York, Titian's portrait of one of his best mates, Pietro Aretino (Galleria Palatina, Florence, and the Frick Art Gallery, New York), and Titian's *Self-portraits* in old age (Berlin and Madrid). Many colours of black could be used and invented to

14 See the catalogue entry in the exhibition catalogue, *Venezial Kunst aus venezianischen Palästen*, Bonn-Venice, 2002–2003, No 91, p. 166.

15 Amedeo Quondam, *Tutti i colori del nero. Moda e cultura nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, Angelo Colla Editore, Vicenza, 2007.

demonstrate different textures and materials, from Titian's velvet cap, to the cloth of their jackets, and curls of their hair and drapery of all kinds. Giorgio Vasari, in the life of Sebastiano del Piombo, wrote of five or six kinds of black colours, 'cinque o sei sorti di nero', when describing a portrait of Aretino. 'It is marvellous to see in the painting five or six kinds of black that he has adopted, to render the velvet, the satin, the ermine, the damask and the pleats ...'¹⁶

By contrast Carpaccio's world is multicoloured, brilliantly multicoloured to such a degree that one wonders if it can be the same society that Bellini and Titian represent. Carpaccio made a spectacular debut as an artist with a series of paintings about the life of St Ursula, dated between 1490 and 1498, for the confraternity of Sant Orsola, a small building that abutted the huge church of SS Giovanni and Paolo (Figs. 7–9). The cycle is now in the Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.¹⁷ Little is known of Carpaccio's biography, let alone what he did before the Ursula cycle, except that his uncle, a Franciscan friar from the convent of Sant'Ursula at Padua mentions him in his will, in 1479. He is known to have married a woman called Laura, and had two sons, Piero and Benedetto. Both became painters. Given the considerable presence in Carpaccio's paintings of the *compagnie*, could Carpaccio have had an earlier career working for these confraternities as a scene painter?

The Ursula cycle is a representation of a saint's life in a completely secular manner, always taking place in Venice, except for the scene of martyrdom. The narrative is so laicised that the English court in the south of England where the ambassadors arrive to ask for Ursula's hand in marriage looks just like the fifteenth century Venetian Republic. The English never looked so good. The elaborate ceremonies may reflect the actual return to Venice of Caterina Cornaro in 1489, an extraordinary event in a society that forbade Queens. Carpaccio is a fabulous storyteller, who invents rich narrative detail. The open loggia gives the space of the reception the appearance of scenography. The space most closely resembles the Piazza San Marco, with a view across the Lagune to the Isola San Giorgio, with a pre-Palladian building, well before the Basilica of San Giorgio as we know it was conceived.

None of the many versions of the story of St Ursula are historical. Carpaccio probably used a Venetian edition of the story as told by Jacopo da Voraigne in the *Golden Legend*.¹⁸ Ursula was a Christian British princess, the daughter of King Donaut of Dumnonia in southwest England. The ambassadors of the pagan Governor Conan

16 'Ritrasse in questo tempo ancora messer Pietro Aretino, il quale oltre il somigliarlo è pittura stupendissima, per vedervisi la differenza di cinque o sei sorti di neri che egli ha adosso, velluto, raso, ermisino, damasco e panno, e una barba nerissima, sopra quei neri sfilataa, certo da stupirne, che di similitudine e di carne si mostra viva. Tiene in una mano un ramo di lauro e una carta, dentrovi scritto il nome di Clemente VII, e due maschere inanzi, una bella per la virtù e l'altra brutta per il vizio; e certamente non si potrebbe a tal cosa aggiungere.'

17 The cycle has been extensively discussed, with significant contributions from Pompeo Molmenti, pp. 56–112; also Giovanna Nepi Sciré, *Carpaccio. Storie di Sant'Orsola*.

18 *Legenda di tutti i sancti et le sancte dalla romana sedia acceptati et honorati tradotte dal latino di Jacopo da Voraigne per Nicolao di Manerbi Veneto Monaco dell'orinde Camaldolese*, in one of the many popular editions of 1477, 1481, and 1487.



Figure 7: Vittore Carpaccio. *The Arrival of the Ambassadors to ask for Ursula's hand in Marriage*. *Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice*. Published with permission from the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.



Detail of *The Arrival of the Ambassadors*.

Meriadoc of Armorica (Brittany) request her hand in marriage. None of the protagonists can be identified in history. After an interview with his daughter, seen on the right hand side of the picture, the King agrees to the marriage if the bridegroom is baptised and Ursula is allowed to make a pilgrimage. With some 11,000 virginal handmaidens she sets sail and lands in Cologne, where in a dream she is commanded to go to Rome. She travels to Rome and persuades Pope Cyriacus (unknown in the pontifical records), and Sulpicius, Bishop of Ravenna, to join them. After setting out for Cologne, which was being besieged by Huns, all the virgins were beheaded in a dreadful massacre. Ursula was shot supposedly in 383. She was betrothed, but martyred before her marriage took place.

On the left hand side of Carpaccio's painting *The Arrival of the Ambassadors at the Court of England* (Fig. 7), a group of elegant young men, dressed in conspicuous luxury, turn their backs on the reception of the ambassadors, seemingly indifferent to the

representation of the life of St Ursula. Their quartered stockings reveal they are *Compagni della Calza*. Their hair is long, immaculately groomed with curls, their berets decorated with rich jewels, and their gloves are those adapted for falconry. They are portraits, perhaps younger members of the Loredan family, who commissioned the cycle, and who were prominent office bearers in the confraternity of Sant'Ursula. The figure on the left hand side of the composition near the pillar has been identified as Pietro Loredan, clad in scarlet robes.¹⁹ The others are presumably his younger brothers. Could they be part of a theatrical audience and the whole composition a sacred representation? Other major Renaissance artists are known to have been involved in theatre as protagonists and designers, namely Donatello, Brunelleschi, Mantegna and Leonardo da Vinci. It has sometimes been argued that the spatial compositions and arrangements of their paintings were adopted from theatrical spaces, usually wide, but narrow stages, created for productions in which they were involved as designers and in Donatello's case, as an actor.²⁰

Moving on to the next scene, (Fig. 8) the *compagni* are no longer spectators but are playing the roles of ambassadors and marriage brokers, roles that they played as events managers of weddings. The scene is again a Venetian cityscape. One of the three figures in the foreground has exceptional gala hose, embroidered with *impresse* of the Ortolani up to the knee. Is this again a representation of patronage and of an actual stage set? The Fourth Scene (Fig. 9) represents the betrothal, and again in the centre next to the flagpole are two handsome portraits of exquisite youths, both wearing *impresse* of the *compagni*, and dominating the scene. Throughout the composition there are many portraits, especially evident in the group on the extreme left hand side of the composition, presumably members of the Scuola di Sant'Orsola, and members of the Loredan family, the principal patrician family associated with the Scuola. The seated youth has been plausibly identified as Antonio Loredan, who wears the emblem in silver and pearls on his sleeve, the sun's rays illuminating an oval formed by laurel branches, inside which stands a young woman beside a tree to which are attached a hoe and ribbon, the motto of the *Zardinieri*, or *Gardeners*.

Carpaccio established an iconography for the *Compagnie della Calza*,²¹ and subsequently they appeared in paintings by Giorgione and Titian, though with less elaborate dress. One of the most discussed figures in the history of art, a man, variously identified as a soldier, shepherd, or a deity on the left hand side of Giorgione's *Tempesta* (Gallerie dell'Accademia) wears differently coloured stockings.²² The underdrawing

19 Molmenti, op. cit., pp. 88–90.

20 See for example, Timothy Verdon, 'Donatello and the Theatre: Stage Space and Projected Space in the San Lorenzo Pulpits', *Artibus et Historiae*, VII, 14 (1986), 29–55; see also C. Gould, 'Sebastiano Serlio and Venetian Painting', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XXV (1962), 56–64. A later example is provided by the relationship between Pietro Longhi and Carlo Goldoni, 'Relations between Painting and Theatre', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, VL (1982), 256–273.

21 See the initial exploration by Giuliana Chesne Dauphiné, 'I costumi della Compagnia della Calza dipinti dal Carpaccio nel ciclo delle Storie di S. Orsola: immagine di Venezia nel Rinascimento', in *Quaderni del Teatro*, IV (1981), 31–44.

22 On the critical reception of the *Tempesta*, see Jaynie Anderson, *Giorgione: The painter of 'Poetic Brevity'*, Flammarion: Paris, New York, 1997, especially 165–75, 301, 303.



Figure 8: Vittor Carpaccio, *The Return of the Ambassadors*. *Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice*. Published with permission from the *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*.



Figure 9: Vittor Carpaccio, *The Betrothed Pair take leave of their parents*. *Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice*. Published with permission from the *Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali*.

shows that initially the composition was conceived with two women, one seated on the bank beneath the young man. Was our *compagno* a theatrical afterthought or a modification of the composition that placed him as a spectator, the creator of the subject?

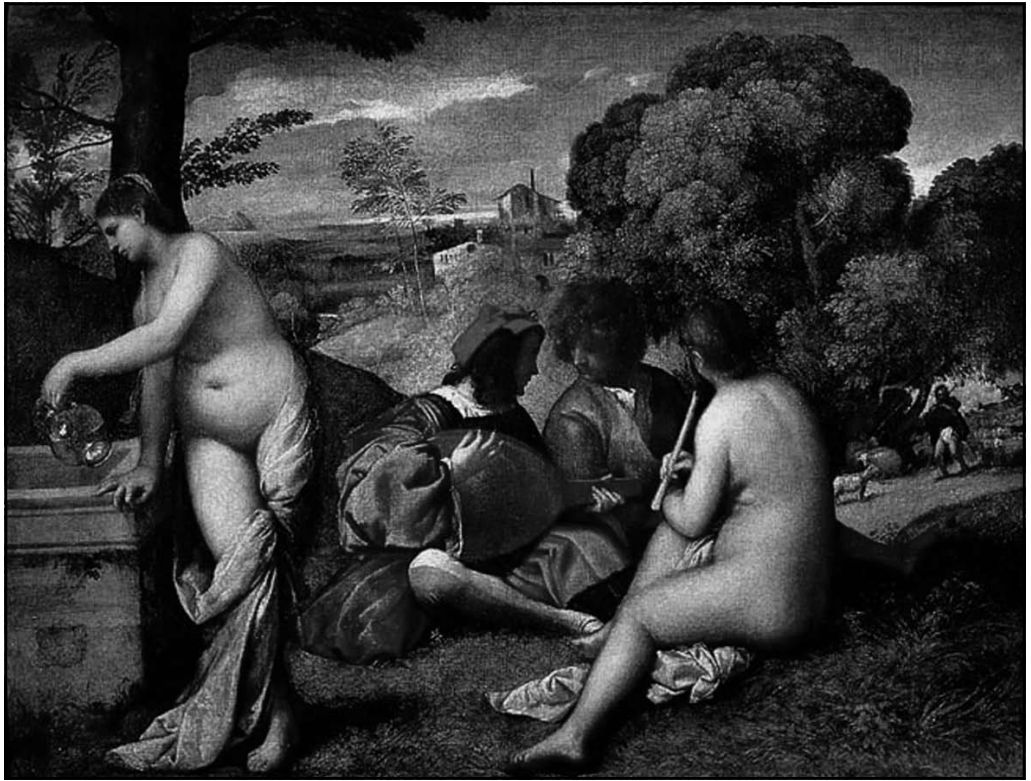


Figure 10: *Concert Champêtre*, attributed to either Giorgione or Titian. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Art historians have always assumed that the subject of the *Concert Champêtre* (Fig. 10)²³ was not just a simple bucolic picnic between two music-making couples on a warm afternoon. (Much of the literature about the painting is about attribution, whether it is by Titian or Giorgione, a question not discussed here.) At the centre of the painting are two young men locked in a close encounter, who have eyes only for one another. The lute player is an urban sophisticate with a taste for luxurious clothes. His lute is fragile and costly, modish but not delineated in such detail that the kind of lute may be precisely identified. He wears a gorgeous beret of red velvet and a matching outer garment, also of kermes red, a luxurious red that is achieved by a complex dyeing process. He also wears a refined white embroidered shirt beneath outer clothing of the same colour. On his crossed legs he thrusts into the centre of the painting the bicoloured stockings, the attribute of the *Compagnie della Calza*, or the confraternity of the sock. His companion is a country boy, dressed in a simple leather jacket, his feet bare. The central and most remarkable motif in the painting is the relationship between the two men, as one sings and plays, while the other listens.

²³ See Anderson, *Giorgione*, pp. 285–6.

In recent decades the interpretation of their engagement has been seen as homoerotic, that they are in fact Cordon and Alexis from Virgil's *Eclogues*.

The nude woman seen with her back to the spectator on the right has her hair tied back in a chignon, a chaste hairstyle of aristocratic chic, and of a married woman. She holds a flute in her hands unplayed. It is unclear if she has just taken it from the country lad or whether she herself intends to play it, or both. On the left hand side of the painting another woman is pouring water from a glass jug into a fountain. The opacity of the pictorial surface is different in this area of the painting to the rest of the work. The two motifs are in fact the allegorical attributes of Poetry, as has been long recognised. The subject of the painting seems to be about the allegory of creation, poetic, theatrical and musical. The central character, the lute-playing *compagno*, is memorable as an elegant participant in a pastoral rustic milieu.

In Titian's *Bacchanale of the Andrians*, from the Prado (Madrid), it is previously unnoticed that two of the spectators, placed seemingly casually in the background of the painting, are distinguished from the nude god-like participants. They are dressed unlike the gods, and they are in contemporary costume, their legs wearing different coloured stockings.²⁴ Alfonso d'Este was a passionate admirer of Philostratus and commissioned several paintings that recreated the ancient pictures described in the picture gallery, including the *Bacchanale of the Andrians*, a fairly faithful recreation. But who are the poetic figures in the background in the clothes of the *compagni della calza*? Could they be Alfonso and his son, who may have spent time in Venice with the confraternities as many Renaissance princes had done? We know from Marino Sanudo's diaries that Federico Gonzaga, Isabella d'Este's son, participated in an elaborate festival described by Sanudo in 1520, again with the *Accessi*, (the enflamed ones) the year after he became Marchese of Mantua at the age of 19. Alfonso d'Este was also a member of the *Compagnie*, and he was the man who commissioned the Bacchanale. What then is the reference in the back of the *Andrians* about?

Was this subject from Philostratus ever acted on stage as a private theatrical entertainment in Renaissance Ferrara? Alfonso's correspondence with Titian shows that he longed for the artist to come to Ferrara to paint the work *in situ*, but Titian preferred Venice, where he said there was a better supply of models.

The *Compagnie* were particularly attractive to princes from the central Italian courts, who as part of their education spent some time in Venice to learn how to commission, invent or compose sophisticated entertainments. For example, the young Federigo da Montefeltro visited Venice and joined the *Accessi* for a considerable amount of time. To the end of his life Federigo kept as his *impresa* the flames from the livery of the *Accessi*. This *impresa* is a frequent decorative motif on the ceilings of his palaces at

²⁴ For the most recent discussion of the painting, see Jaynie Anderson, in David Alan Brown, Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, Jaynie Anderson, Deborah Howard, Peter Humfrey and Mauro Lucco, *Bellini, Giorgione, Titian and the Renaissance of Venetian Painting*, catalogue of an exhibition at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 2006.



Figure 11: Luca Signorelli. Erotic Devil, detail from the fresco How St Benedict reproved Fra Valeriano's brother from breaking his fast, where a devil tempts the friar. The Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, Chiusure. 1488-89.
Photo © Jaymie Anderson.

Urbino and elsewhere, as in the *studiolo*/library at Urbino.²⁵

The Venetian reverence for the stocking was not paralleled elsewhere in Italy, where men's stockings were often the subject of parody, such as in Signorelli's homoerotic devil from the fresco of *How St Benedict reproved Fra Valeriano's brother from breaking his fast*, where a devil tempts the friar, from the Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore, Chiusure (Fig. 11). In the case of Piero della Francesca's image of one of the executioners of Christ, in the *Carrying of the True Cross*, Arezzo, he shames the man, who executes Christ, by representing him as unable to hold up his stockings, to denote a lack of control and decorum.

Bernardino of Siena preached against the fashion in his sermon: 'You young men ... When you go about wearing tight hose on your legs, with laces all around it, with your leg exposed, and your hose undone and broken, and your little doublet riding up to your

belly, with this behaviour you clearly show what you are. In the same way when you return home, you take your doublet off in front of sisters and sisters-in-law and your female relatives, and they see all sorts of filth, and with this sometimes one goes on to other things ... You young man, don't you care about anything? Know that God

25 Cecil Clough, 'Art as Power in the Decoration of the Studiolo of a Renaissance Prince: The Case of Federico da Montefeltro', *Artibus et Historiae*, XVI (1995), 19-50.

does not like it when you wear hose, or the way you wear it, with the leg open or cut up, and with your little doublet so short that it nearly shows ...'²⁶

In many different contexts such as the tiles in the abbess' room, known as the Camera di San Paolo in Parma, there were tiles beneath the feet of the abbess that parodied the fashion. To cover the ground beneath the feet of the abbess, Maria dei Benedetti, Abbess of S. Paolo from 1471 to 1482, was commissioned a series of majolica tiles with popular images. The tile carries the gothic inscription, OM NON-FAR or DIO NON-FAR. A woman ties a man to a tree having taken off his costume – that lies on the ground.

The repertoire of plays performed was usually contemporary, always humorous, satirical and erotic. The *Compagnie* commissioned many new works from distinguished writers. The preferred ancient dramatists were Plautus and Terence, while the contemporary favourites were Aretino, Ruzante,²⁷ and Macchiavelli, whose *Mandragola* was as popular in Venice as in Florence, even with anti-Florentines.²⁸ Theatrical spaces for the *Compagnie della Calza* were found in the courtyards of palaces, or in convents, or on streets. In 1541 Titian created a magnificent stage setting, an *apparato* for the *Sempieterni* in Campo Santo Stefano. In 1542 Vasari constructed and painted a temporary theatre for a performance of Aretino's *Atlanta*, described in the life of Cristofano Gherardi. In the life of Taddeo Zuccheri, Vasari wrote of the paintings made by Federico Zuccari.

Alvise Cornaro, a patrician, an architect and a playwright, made plans for a floating theatre in the Bacino, opposite the Piazza St Mark's, in about 1547.²⁹ He thought of it as a civic repertory theatre, isolated in the lagoon, open to everyone, which would unify the community. In these years a permanent theatrical space for such performances was lacking. In 1561, before Palladio erected the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, he was asked by the *Compagnie della Calza* to invent a similar one for them.

In the late Quattrocento, theatre in Venice was usually performed in spaces that gave some sort of architectural structure or background to the representation. Sacred Christian dramas were often enacted in the courtyards of churches or in squares, where an audience could be accommodated, but without tiered seating. Performances

26 'O giovane ... Quando tu vai co la gamba tirata, stringato intorno, a gamba rotta, e a calza sbarlata e fessa, e'l farsettino al bellico; per certo che a questi portamenti tu dimostri d'essere quello che tu se'. Così quando tu torni in casa tu ti trai la giornata fra suore e cognate e parenti, dove si possono spechiare in ogni ribaldaria; e per questo si viene talvolta a altro... O giovinozzo, che non ti curi di nulla, sappi che a Dio non piace che tu porti la calza, come tu la porti, a gamba rotta o fessa con salsa verde, e col fasettino tanto corto, che presso che si mostra...'. *Le prediche volgari*, vol. 3, Sermon 37, 'Come ogni cosa di questo mondo è vanità', p. 189. Quoted in Ilaria Taddei, 'Puerizia, adolescenza and giovinezza: Images and Conceptions of Youth in Florentine Society During the Renaissance', in *The Pre-modern Teenager: Youth in Society 1150–1650*, ed. Konrad Eisenbichler, Toronto, 2002, pp. 15–50.

27 On Andrea Beolco, known as Ruzzante, see the writings of Linda Carroll, for example, 'Ruzzante's early Adaptations from More and Erasmus', *Italica*, LXVI, 29–34; 'Carnival Rites as Vehicles of Protest in Renaissance Venice', in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XVI (1985), 487–502.

28 On the plays, see the writings of Giorgio Padoan, *Momenti del Rinascimento veneto*, Editrice Antenore: Padova, 1978.

29 Reconstructed in M. Tafuri, *Venice and the Renaissance*, 1995, Fig. 115.

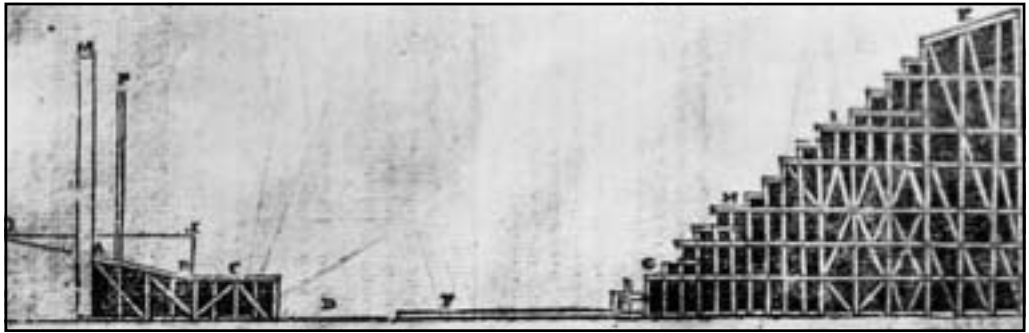
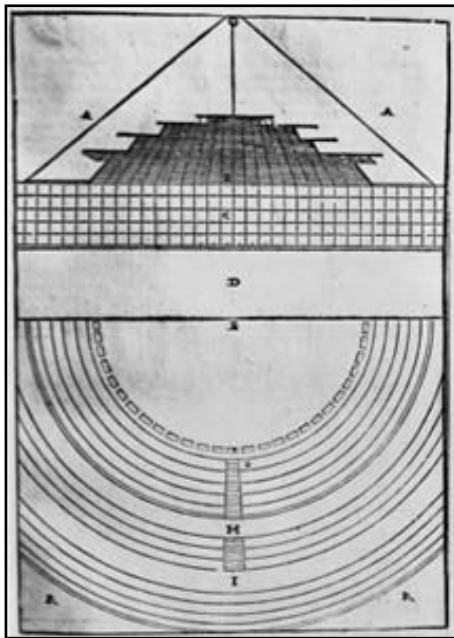


Figure 12: Elevation and ground plan for the theatre of the *Compagnia della Calza degli Accesi*, Vicenza, from the second book on architecture by Sebastiano Serlio.



of Latin comedies by Plautus and Terence took place on the sides of palaces or squares where there was an appropriate perspective of columns or a view of the countryside. The earliest performances at courts, such as Mantova, Ferrara and Urbino, are described in some detail by contemporaries, such as Sulpizio da Veroli in his preface to the first printed edition of the Ten Books of Vitruvius (1486). Similar structures were described by Pellegrino da Udine in 1508 for the scenes for Ariosto's *Cassaria* or the scenography of Baldassare Peruzzi of 1514 and 1520 for the *Calandria* by Bibbiena. The *Compagnie della Calza* liked an exhibitionist presentation, and were thus ambitious to create the first theatres with tiered seating in Venice, beginning with Sebastiano Serlio and followed by Andrea Palladio. Serlio's theatre (Fig. 12) was erected at the Palazzo Porto in Via Porti in Vicenza in 1539 for the *Compagnia vicentina della Calza*,

and became widely known for the illustrations of it in his treatise on architecture.

Despite all the plans and imaginings a permanent theatrical space for such performances was lacking, and Palladio was commissioned to make such a theatre. For the *Compagnia della Calza degli Accesi* he invented a 'Half-theatre of wood to serve as a *Colosseum*' (in Vasari's words). Palladio found the commission challenging, and although an infrequent letter writer, as he stated on 23 February to Count Vincenzo Arnaldi in Vicenza, he 'undertook to make this blessed theatre for which I am doing penance for all my sins now and in the future ...'³⁰ The creation of one of

30 Lionello Puppi, *Andrea Palladio*. Opera completa, Electa Editrice Milan, 1995, No 88, pp. 196–200. The letter in the Biblioteca Bertoliana, Vicenza, is reproduced by Puppi as Figure no. 335, p. 216.

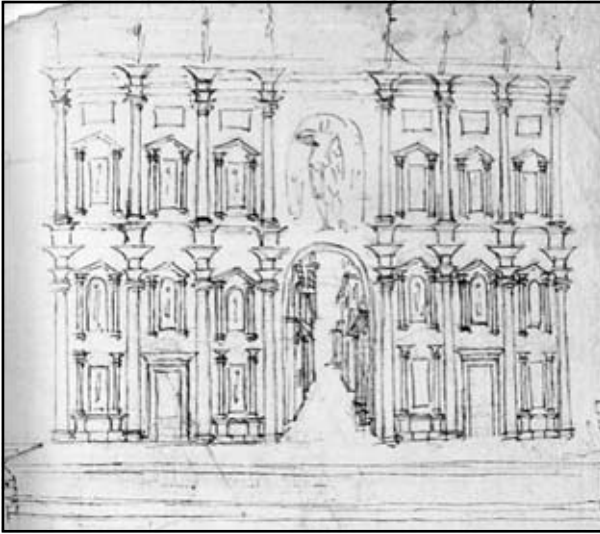


Figure 13: Andrea Palladio. View of the stage of the Teatro Olimpico. Vicenza. Photo © Jaynie Anderson.
 the finest cambric linen, such as is usually used for shirts.

the earliest theatres was the result of a demanding patron, Prior Foscari. The location of the lost theatre is believed to have been in the vicinity of San Simeone Piccolo, perhaps in a Foscari palace, since in 1565 the prior of the Compagnie was a Foscari, Girolamo Pietro di Foscari. The theatre was decorated with 12 canvasses, each measuring seven and-a-half feet, by Taddeo Zuccari. Their subject is unknown but they may have resembled Mantegna's *Triumphs* at Hampton Court, which are huge canvasses painted on the

Tracy Cooper in her monograph on Palladio demonstrates that the *Compagnie della Calza*, who commissioned this temporary theatre from Palladio, later became his patrons in Venice, a demonstration of the enduring legacy in patronage left by the youthful networking of these confraternities.³¹ The silence about the theatre in later sources suggests it was destroyed by fire, and forgotten as a temporary structure. This early Palladian theatre was the ancestor of the famous Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza, a proof indeed of the values of a society that endorsed youthful patrician culture (Fig. 13).

By the middle of the sixteenth century the phenomenon of patrician youth theatre suddenly was no longer in vogue. The growth of professional theatre companies, and the very theatres that they had created, led to their demise. The representation of society changed too. The second half of the sixteenth century invented a style of painting known as magical impressionism, the late styles of Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese, too romantic a style to include the erotic, hard-hitting theatre of Machiavelli and Ruzzante, as performed by the *Compagnie delle Calze*. They had had the public role of affirming the presence of patrician aristocracy in Venice, a role that was taken away from them abruptly in 1565. At that date the State reappropriated Spectacle for the city of Venice in a famous edict.³²

31 Tracy E. Cooper, *Palladio's Venice*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005, especially chapter 4, pp. 63 ff.

32 See Tafuri, op. cit., p. 149.