

2009 Suggestions for Teaching *The Servant of Two Masters*
by Carlo Goldoni adapted by Oded Gross and Tracy Young

Before seeing/reading the play

1. Research commedia dell'arte. Where and when was it performed? Who were the traditional or "stock" characters? What physical characteristics are associated with each? To what extent were the performances scripted and to what extent were they improvised? Define lazzi. Explain how physicalizations were developed to convey character and emotion. Describe the use of masks. This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.delpiano.com/carnival/html/commedia.html>
<http://www.shane-arts.com/commedia-stock-characters.htm>
<http://www.american.edu/IRVINE/jenn/home.html#history>
2. Describe the social climates in which commedia thrived. How was commedia subversive of the status quo in those times and places?
http://www.theatredatabase.com/16th_century/commedia_dell_arte_001.html
3. Who was Carlo Goldoni? What was his contribution to theatre in Italy during the 18th century? To theatre in France? How have these contributions continued to influence theatre today? These and other websites provide information:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Goldoni
<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clscg3.html>
4. Goldoni is credited for reviving Italian comedy and for rescuing commedia dell' arte from becoming stuck in old fashioned, disreputable farcical conventions. How did he accomplish this? In what way do his plays marry the traditions of commedia dell'arte with elements of modern comedy? This and other websites provide information:
http://www.theatredatabase.com/18th_century/italian_drama_001.html

5. Goldoni observes the three classical unities in *The Servant of Two Masters*. What are the three unities? What are the benefits of confining the play within the three unities? What might be lost through this kind of restriction? This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.artandpopularculture.com/Unities>

6. What are the essential differences between commedia and scripted drama? Describe the strengths and weaknesses of each. This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.enotes.com/literary-criticism/commedia-dell-arte>

7. How has commedia influenced movies and television? List examples. This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Romantic-Comedy-Yugoslavia/Slapstick-Comedy-SOUND-AND-AFTER.html>

8. What is a slapstick (the object)? What is slapstick (the comic form)? How are they related? What is the history of each? Name modern examples of the comic form. What makes it funny? This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.straightdope.com/columns/read/2199/whats-the-origin-of-slapstick>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slapstick>

9. Identify and define forms of verbal humor. In *The Servant of Two Masters* verbal humor is used by nearly all the characters, who use different conventions of verbal humor specific to their stock 'type'. How might the way a character speaks, or the phrases they use (or misuse) help us identify what type of character they are? This and other websites provide information:
<http://www.write-out-loud.com/types-of-verbal-humor.html>
http://library.thinkquest.org/J002267F/types_of_humor.htm

10. What are "asides?" According to theatrical convention, who can hear them? What happens when others hear them?
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aside>

9. On a map of Italy, find the locations mentioned in the play: Venice (the play's setting), Turin (home of Beatrice and Florindo) and Bergamo (home of Truffaldino). Research the characteristics associated with people from each of these locations (for example, in the United States people from New York City are thought to have certain qualities in common different

from common qualities found in people from Dallas). This and other websites provide information:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_Italy

http://www.travelvantage.com/fset3.htm?ita_regions.html

10. Describe the status of women in 18th-Century Italy. What rights did women have? What responsibilities? What powers? How did women work around the restrictions placed on them?

<http://www.sup.org/book.cgi?id=8753>

11. Research the theatrical convention in which a woman character disguises herself as a man. Give examples. Research the audience responses in different countries and different time periods. What do you think the convention contributes to or detracts from a play in 2009?

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Breeches_role

12. Define betrothal and marriage as they were understood at the time of the play (18th Century). What were the significant differences between them? What did they have in common?

<http://www.1911encyclopedia.org/Betrothal>

Other Resources:

Web sites

<http://www.isebastiani.com/Scenarios.html>

http://www.theatrehistory.com/italian/commedia_dell_arte_001.html

<http://harlequinhostilery.net/commedia.html>

Books

Ducharte, Pierre Louis. *The Italian Comedy*, Dover Books.

Fishetto, Laura. *The Harlequin and the Green Dress*. For ages 4 to 8.

Lawner, Lynn. *Harlequin on the Moon: Commedia dell'Arte and the Visual Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on commedia dell'arte. Describe each character in *The Servant of Two Masters* in terms of her or his commedia type. Describe the lazzi of each. The physicalization of each.

2. Describe one distinctive trait for each character (e.g., Bob is always afraid). What does each value most? Want most? Fear most? How do these qualities contribute to the comedy?
3. Commedia characters fall into three categories: masters, servants and lovers. What category does each character fall into? What conflicts arise among the categories?
4. Chart each character's journey through the play, including how their categories change (for example, Truffaldino is a servant who becomes a lover). Tell the story of the play from each character's point of view.
5. Chart the status of all the characters, from highest to lowest. Take into account these elements for determining status: age, wealth, employment, gender, family relationships. Which characters change their status? How and why? How does status determine the respect with which individuals are treated? Their influence? Their control over their own lives? How they are perceived?
6. Since this production treats the audience as a character in the play, where does the audience fit into the status chart? Why? Under what circumstances does the audience's status change?
7. One theme of commedia is generational conflict. In *The Servant of Two Masters*, how do the elders attempt to thwart the young? How do the young outwit the elders?
8. Identify the actions in the play involving money. What is each character's relationship to money? How does having or not having money help to define each individual? How does the disparity between the "haves" and the "have nots" influence their relationships?
9. Refer to your research on Italian regions. How do the play's characters exemplify the characteristics attributed to their regions?
10. In a review of *The Servant of Two Masters* at Lincoln Center, the reviewer mentions "comic archetypes whose influence cannot be overstated, stretching as they do from Shakespeare to Homer Simpson." Describe the comic archetypes in *The Servant of Two Masters*. Find examples of those same archetypes in comedies "stretching...from Shakespeare to Homer Simpson." Why do these types continue to be funny?

11. Refer to your research on Goldoni and his use of commedia dell'arte. *The Servant of Two Masters* is considered the first play ever written for a company of commedia dell'arte players with a complete and formalized script. Describe the ways *The Servant of Two Masters* combines elements from commedia dell'arte with the structure of a scripted comedy.
12. Goldoni is said to have written *The Servant of Two Masters* to impose form on the anarchy of improvisational commedia dell'arte. Describe elements of the OSF production that reintroduce improvisation (and possibly anarchy).
13. In this production of *The Servant of Two Masters*, find references to other plays in OSF's 2009 repertory. To current events. Popular music. Contemporary society. Details specific to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and Ashland. Why do you think the adapters of the script chose to include these references? How did jokes specific to our present time and place add to your experience of the play? How were they in keeping with the art form of commedia?
14. Refer to your research on verbal humor. What characters in *The Servant of Two Masters* employed the use of specific types of verbal humor? What types did they use? Almost every character in the play had a catch phrase, or line they repeated over and over again such as Smeraldina's line, "I like that in a man!" List a specific phrase or verbal tic each character uses within the play. What does each phrase reinforce about the type of character that person is? What does it say about what is important to each character?
15. If you're seeing *Much Ado About Nothing*, extend your research on the regions of Italy to include the characteristics of the locations mentioned there (Florence, Messina and so on). How do the characters from each place exemplify the traits associated with their regions? Which characters in *Much Ado About Nothing* are descendents of commedia types? What other elements of commedia do you find in the play?

Members of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival's Education and Publications departments—Hilary Tate, Sarah Langan, Suzie DuVal—created the "Suggestions for Teaching *The Servant of Two Masters*."

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