

The Iberian Peninsula

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In a letter dated 29 January, 1568, Jacopo Strada, an artist at the court of Vienna, asked Emperor Maximilian II to grant a passport to a company of actors called the *Disiosi* and nicknamed *la compagnia del Ganassa*. They had the reputation of being ‘the most excellent who have ever been heard’ (Schindler 2005b: 112) and having appeared regularly at the court of the Gonzaga family in Mantua, they now wished to perform at the court of the emperor. It is possible that this request was the start of the international career of one of the most popular theatre companies in Italy in the sixteenth century. We do not know if the request was ever granted but we do know that Zan Ganassa, the stage name of Alberto Naselli, the Ferrara-born director of the company, was at the court of the emperor in Speyer in July and August 1750 (Schindler 2005b: 112–13). The occasion was the departure of Princess Anne to Spain, to become Queen Anne of Habsburg and of her sister Elizabeth to France on 24 October, where she was to marry Charles IX (Schindler 2005b: 113; 115–18). The following year, Ganassa was in France, where he gave both public and private performances at court, as he had been accustomed to do in Mantua (D’Ancona 1891: 445–62). The date of his arrival at the French court is still unknown. The first documented evidence concerning Italian players is a decree issued by Parliament on 15 September 1571, forbidding Italian actors to give public performances. Undoubtedly, parliament was taking advantage of the absence of Charles IX, who had left Paris in July 1571, to ban Ganassa’s public performances (Gambelli 1993: 136). In June 1572 the king returned to Paris, where the Italian actors had presumably remained, and in August of that year they performed at the wedding of Margaret of Valois, the king’s sister, to Henry of Navarre (Baschet 1882: 42–3). From Paris, Ganassa and his company moved to Madrid. Although it is not known with certainty when they left France,¹ it was probably after May 1574, the month of Charles IX’s death. Their presence in Spain was first recorded in October of that year.

After their appearance in Madrid, the company ceased touring internationally but remained on the Iberian Peninsula for the next ten years, moving from Madrid to Seville to Toledo and finally to Valladolid. On 14 March 1584, Ganassa's wife, the actress Barbara Flaminia, withdrew her dowry from Lorenzo Spinola's bank in Madrid to enable them to travel back to Italy (García García 1992–1993: 367–9). Ganassa probably died shortly after his arrival there, a fact hinted at in the *Lament composed by Zan Salcizza and Zan Capella inviting all the philosophers, poets and porters of the valley to weep for the dead Zan Panza di Pegora, alias Simone, the Gelosi actor and seemingly welcoming him to heaven*' (Venice 1585) (Marotti and Romei 1991: 48).

Ganassa and his company of actors probably went to Madrid in the first place because he had been engaged to take part in the festivities at court. In the second half of the sixteenth century it was common for companies of Italian actors to tour abroad, under the protection of influential patrons (Arróniz 1969: 193 and 211). By examining the family connections that existed between the courts of Mantua, Vienna, Paris and Madrid, for example, we can easily retrace the company's movements. The Duke of Nevers was the brother of the Duke of Mantua; Philip II's cousins, Catherine and Eleanor, were married respectively to Francesco and Guglielmo Gonzaga, and the Queen of France was one of the Habsburgs who had already seen the Italian actors perform in Speyer.² On this, his first appearance in Madrid and first tour of the Iberian Peninsula, Ganassa was Italy's leading professional actor and was destined to change theatre practice in Spain. In October 1574, he funded the construction of a roof for the *Corral de la Pacheca*, one of the important commercial theatres in Madrid. The following year, in Seville, he sought permission to increase the number of days of the week on which performances could be held. This he had already done in France. In the same year, he requested the municipal authorities of Seville to supply him with the wagons necessary to stage the *sacre rappresentazioni*, which was performed as part of the Corpus Christi festivities. In the next few years, Ganassa continued to invest in renovating the *corrales* and was granted the right to perform comedies throughout the kingdom on two working days a week, in addition to normal performances on Sundays and feast days.

For Ganassa, modifying the way Spanish *corrales* (theatres) were constructed was a priority. For his plays he needed a stage with a covered roof, from which he could, for example, mount the machinery used for setting up and moving scenery. For his plays staged in Mantua and Speyer, he had used both pastoral and mythological scenery. In addition, he felt that a

window was necessary to cast more light onto the stage, to compensate for the darkening effect of the roof construction. These innovations were to have enormous impact, becoming standard elements of the model on which most theatres on the Iberian Peninsula were later built. That the innovations were implemented so extensively is a reflection of the remarkable success enjoyed by Italian actors in Spain at the time. In addition, the actors' high level of professionalism allowed them to participate in the development of the commercial side of the theatre enterprise that was taking shape in those years in Spain.³

The extent of the success enjoyed by Ganassa and his players can be gauged by the large audiences they attracted and the profits they made in Madrid (Davis and Varey 1997) and by the rewards they received for their performances at the festivities connected with the Feast of Corpus Christi, starting in 1575 in Seville (Sentaurens 1984: 87–8; 217). Contemporary writers provide further evidence of their successes, stating that Italian *comici* devoted themselves to 'acting and performing comedies and other similar things in our language and in Italian', confirming what the *comici* themselves declared in a contract dated 1580 (García García 1992–1993: 361). Besides performing in the most important Spanish cities, Ganassa's company also gave private performances, both at court, for the *Consejo de Castilla*, and for noble families, for example for the wedding celebrations of the Duke of Infantado in the Palace of Guadalajara. On this last occasion, the duke wanted to have the performance recorded in a painting.⁴

An official document, drafted on the occasion of the creation of the company and registered in Madrid on 13 March 1580, includes the complete list of actors for the 1580–1581 season, confirming that the list had not changed since the preceding season of 1579–1580: Alberto Naselli, known as Ganassa, *capocomico* and first Zanni; Barbara Flaminia, his wife, in the role of his lover Ortensia; Vincenzo Botanelli, manager of the company, known as Curzio Romano (lover); Cesare dei Nobili, who played the female role of Francesca (servant); Abagaro Frescobaldi, whose stage name was Stefano Botarga (Magnifico); Giovan Pietro Pasquarello, alias Trastullo (second Zanni), who was responsible, together with the underage Scipione Graselli, for maintaining and looking after the company's props and costumes (in Spanish: *hato*); and finally, Giulio Vigliante and Giacomo Portalupo, who were paid less than the other actors and played the third female role of the lover Isabella (García García 1992–1993: 356–67).

This list of actors remained substantially the same up to March 1581, as evidenced by a document drafted that year and recording that Alberto

Naselli as *capocomico* (chief actor) and Vincenzo Botanelli as manager hired two Spanish musicians, Pedro Salcedo and Antonio Laso. The only significant difference was that Botarga was replaced by Carlo de' Masi. In the 1581–1582 season, Botarga left the company, thus breaking up the popular comic Zanni-Magnifico duo, whose '*Lament of Giovanni Ganassa with his Master Stefanello Bottarga on the Death of a Louse*' (*Lamento di Giovanni Ganassa con Meser Stefanello Bottarga, suo padrone, sopra la morte di un pedocchio*) was praised by many commentators and subsequently published by Cesare Rao (1562). In the same year he and his wife, the actress Luisa de Aranda, formed a company of their own. She was the widow of the famous Spanish *capocomico*, Juan Granado, who had died recently. How did Botarga fare with his Spanish company in the period from 1582 to 1588, after leaving the Ganassa company? A document of that year reports that Botarga was in Seville with other Italian actors (Giovan Maria Antonazone and Paulo Ferraro) and the *Compañía de representaciones de los italianos* (Ojeda Calvo 2007: 89–90).

These documents represent the only evidence we have regarding the composition of the company. Hence, it is not certain whether the troupe was the one that was brought over from France and to what extent its composition remained unvaried throughout their stay in Spain. The only changes we know about are the above-mentioned departure of Botarga and the coming of Carlo de' Massi, the musicians and a Spanish actor, García de Jaraba in 1583. It seems logical to assume that, being composed only of Italian actors, the company was formed before it set off for France and that its members remained together. Away from Italy, it would have been very difficult to find new actors who could adapt to the Italian actors' way of working.

We know that Ganassa's *company* achieved great success right from their first appearance on stage and, as documented by Ricardo de Turia in *El apologético de las comedias españolas in 1616*, 'earned both the applause and the money of people'. What we do not know is what their performances were like. Documents available in Spain do not provide any real answer, in particular because there are no surviving pictures. Not even reports or descriptions of performances have survived. The situation in Italy is different, but scholars of Spanish theatre have only in relatively recent years begun to study the available documents. In 1891, D'Ancona drew attention to the wealth of information contained in the correspondence of members of the court of Mantua. Thanks to detailed notes – such as those sent by Rogna to the Duke of Florence – the repertoires of the companies performing there between 1567 and 1568 are partly known.

One of these companies included Barbara Flaminia, future wife of Ganassa, and another Armani, *primadonna* of his company, until her death in 1568. According to Rogna's descriptions, these companies performed in both public spaces and palaces and had extensive repertoires, including comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies, pastorals and mythological plays. Their titles and contents are also known, one example being a tragedy based on an episode from *Orlando Furioso*. They enriched their performances with music, dances, mythological *intermedi* and, in some cases, with stage machinery. The real attractions for the audience, however, were their rich costumes and the skills of their actresses (D'Ancona 1891).

Further information has been provided by two manuscripts discovered later in Madrid. They have been attributed to Abagaro Frescobaldi, who is better known as Botarga (Ojeda Calvo 2007). The contents of these manuscripts illustrate Botarga's working method and his normal repertoire. He played the role of the Magnifico and had his own way of using the *Letter* by Calmo to create a certain verbal texture for this type of character (Ojeda Calvo 2004). One of these manuscripts (II-1586) reveals part of the repertoire played by Ganassa-Botarga's company in the 1580 season. The main part is taken up with the accounts for the months of April and May, but the last pages of the manuscript include titles of some of the plays they performed (*Cavalier Ingrato*, *Inocente fanciulo*, *Bravo falito*, *Cavallier Costante*, *Comedia del Intronati*, *Don Ramiro*, *La Persiana*, *Pazoamante*, *Tarquino*, *Formenti*, *Leone* or *Furtinovi*), as well as prose descriptions of some scenarios or plots complete with titles (*Formento*, *Ramiro*, *Costante*, *Leone*, *Furti*, *Ambasciatori*, *Grota*, *Doi Pazzi* and *Spada mortal*) of comedies, tragedies, tragicomedies and pastorals in their repertoire. Interestingly enough, these plays were mostly the ones also being played in Mantua and described by Rogna, the most obvious example being the tragedy based on *Orlando Furioso* mentioned earlier (Ojeda Calvo 2007). It is also interesting to note that on many occasions, the order in which Botarga's scenarios are sequenced seems to reflect that of the performance. For example, the three acts of any of the comedies were preceded by *intermedi*, or by the acts from a pastoral play or from a tragedy, though the core of the performance remained the *commedia*.

An analysis of these scenarios leads us to believe that the *comici*'s basic intention was to offer a multifaceted treatment of a single topic, for example, women's chastity. This was not, however, confined solely to the *commedia dell'arte*. The classical comedy *Cofanaria* by Francesco D'Ambra, for instance, was performed at the court of Florence in 1565, with *intermedi* dealing with the psyche and the story of Cupid. As declared

in the prologue to the comedy, the purpose was to ‘make it seem that what gods did in the fable of *intermedi* – under the spell of a superior power – men would do in the comedy’.

Ganassa was such a popular performer that he remained on the Iberian Peninsula for ten years. In 1584, probably due to illness, he returned to Italy. The other members of the company remained some time longer in Spain. Later, they broke up and tried their luck individually in Portugal, France or Italy. Some of them joined other troupes in Italy – Cesare dei Nobili was taken on by the Desiosi in Genoa in 1586 – while others, like Giovan Pietro Pasquarello, continued their wanderings in Spain. According to Aurelia Leyva (1997: 13) Pasquarello may be identified with ‘Juan Pedro italiano andante en la corte’ who, at the beginning of June 1587, lent eighteen ducats to Pedro de Plata, *autor* of *commedie* (this is highly probable because he wrote only ‘Joan Pietro’ in the two documents of 1580 where his signature appears). Jaime Sánchez Romeralo (1990: 126) reports that in 1586, Pasquarello, together with Giacomo Portalupo, Scipione Graselli and Giulio Vigliante – all highly regarded members of Ganassa’s troupe – formed an excellent company with other Italian actors and with the Spanish actress Maria de Baeza. This may be the same troupe which created the *compañia nueva de los ytalianos* performing in Madrid at the Teatro del Principe from February to 5 March – Shrove Tuesday – 1585. This would mean that the actors had already formed the company before Ganassa left for Italy. There are records of performances given by the *Compañía de los Cortesanos* on 7 and 14 July 1585 but it is not known for certain whether this was the new company formed by the Italian actors (Davis and Varey 1997: 324). Vigliante later returned to Italy and was performing with the *Gelosi* by 1590 (Rasi 1912: 758). Finally, in 1593 Portalupo became *capocomico* in Lisbon, a fact recorded in the account books of the *Hospital Real de Todos os Santos* on 29 December (Bolaños and Reyes Peña 1990: 51).

The popularity and success enjoyed by Ganassa and his company of actors probably encouraged other Italian actors to move to Spain. For example, Massimiano Milamino’s *Los italianos nuevos* went to Valladolid and performed there in 1581. However, as can be inferred from the administrative records of the city, they were unable to live up to the expectations generated by their predecessors. The company had a short life. The *capocomico* was killed in a brawl in 1582 and the remaining actors joined other Spanish companies. The same occurred in 1592 when an actor bearing the name Ganassa (Juan Jorge) arrived in Spain. He too was unable to

live up to the high expectations generated, in this case, by the name he was appearing under and was soon forced to join a Spanish company.

The *Confidenti*, an Italian theatre company owned and managed by the Martinelli Brothers, including Tristano, the first great Harlequin, in their troupe of performers, fared much better. They arrived in Spain in 1587; it was one of the destinations on their international tour, on which they had already made very successful appearances in Antwerp, Lyon, Paris and London. Significantly, the tour had started from Mantua, which was ruled by the Gonzaga family, a family well established as patrons of the theatre (Ferrone 2006). Their appearances on the Iberian Peninsula were so successful that, as far as is known, they remained there from 18 November 1587 until October of the following year, if not longer. They performed in Madrid and other important Spanish cities.

At one of their performances in the capital, Lope de Vega, still a novice playwright at the time, was in the audience. In October 1588 in Seville, the company fired the musician Juan Bautista Carrillo, accusing him of not knowing *tonadas* (traditional songs) and thus, of not being useful.⁵

The role of the *Confidenti* company in the history of Spanish theatre has been exaggerated in the past; it was thought that the company was responsible for the introduction of women onto the Spanish stage. It is true that the women of the company did present a petition to the authorities seeking permission to perform on stage. At the time, women were generally banned from appearing on stage in Spain. Their petition was granted on condition that they did not play male roles. However, Italian actresses were not the first to be allowed to perform on Spanish stages. Recent archival research has revealed that Spanish actresses had been acting on a regular basis since the 1570s. Furthermore, a record of litigation against the ban dated 1587 shows that Spanish actresses working in Madrid at the time also presented a petition. They were led by two women, Mariana Vaca and María de la O., who were already established as actresses in the 1570s.

There is no doubt, however, that the performances of Ganassa, Botarga and the Harlequin, Tristano, had a huge impact on Iberian audiences in the sixteenth century. This is confirmed by surviving records from contemporary authors and commentators. Juan de Pineda (1589: 350r), for example, reported that a doctor skimped on food and gave up almost all his day's earnings, simply in order to be able to go with his wife to see a performance by the Italian actors. A character of a *loa* (prologue), possibly in a play by Lope de Vega, commented that even after many years absence,

people yearned for Ganassa: 'sisospirava per Ganassa', (Antonucci and Arata 1995: 85). In 1581, Pedro de Saldaña, a Spanish *capocomico*, cancelled his own performance to attend a performance by his Italian rivals. The Portuguese author, Tomé Pinheiro da Veiga mentioned Ganassa and the Harlequin, Tristano in his *Fastiginia* in 1605. Lope de Vega reported that even the austere King Philip II laughed at a joke during a performance by the Italians: Ganassa noticed that Botarga's fly was open and said to him: 'Master, for a dead bird, you opened the cage'. Lope de Vega himself was arrested in 1587 while attending a performance given by the *Confidenti* in the Corral del Príncipe. In his works he often mentions Italian theatre characters such as Ganassa, Botarga, Trastullo, Franceschina or the Harlequin, Tristano. That these characters were important to him is further emphasised by the fact that he chose the character of Botarga for the play he wrote for the celebrations surrounding the double royal wedding of Philip II with Margaret of Austria and of the Infanta Isabel with the Archduke Albert in 1599 in Valencia.

With the passing of time, and despite their considerable initial success, Italian *comici* went out of fashion. Names like Ganassa, Botarga and the Harlequin, Tristano came to exist only as memories or echoes in the works of authors like Lope de Vega. Spanish theatre companies and actors reconquered the stage on the Iberian Peninsula.⁶ In France it was a different story – Italian actors continued to enjoy great popularity there for another century. It was not until the eighteenth century that Italian companies like those led by Bartoli⁷ or by *truffaldino*, Antonio Sacchi were successful again in Madrid and Lisbon.⁸

That is another story and another commedia.

Notes

- ¹ It is worth noting that the account books of the *Esparagne*, which offered this information, cannot be found in any archives for the years 1572 to 1574 and for the last years of Charles IX's life (Baschet 1882: 49).
- ² Since there is no historical record of Ganassa's presence in Italy from January 1570, it is possible that his troupe followed Elizabeth of Habsburg in her journey to France. Anne of Habsburg, newly married to her uncle Philip II, left for Spain on 1 July. The festivities continued at court until Elizabeth, married by proxy to Charles of Valois, left for France.
- ³ In Portugal this probably happened later, perhaps in the 1580s. The first records of professional companies in Lisbon date back as far as 1582. Perhaps this is why Italian troupes arrived late in Portugal (Bolaños and Reyes Peña 1990: 69–70).

- ⁴ In the inventory of the sixth *Duque del Infantado*, Don Juan Hurtado de Mendoza, there is mention of ‘seis quadricos de Ganassa de figuras diferentes de ganasa y arlequines en tabla con sus marcos que eran del dicho Duque Don Íñigo que se alló entre los demás vienes que dejó’ (Sanz and García García 1995: 484). These paintings have not been found; at least, they are not part of the inheritance of Don Íñigo’s heirs.
- ⁵ There is documentary evidence that they were in Seville in October 1588 and that they engaged the musicians Juan Baustista Carrillo and Alonso de Briones until Carnival Season in 1589 (Archivo Histórico de Sevilla, Sección de Protocolos, Oficio XI, Leg. 6799, 21 October 1588, ff. 620v–622v).
- ⁶ In Portugal too, where Spanish troupes performed throughout the seventeenth century, in particular in the years up to 1640. In that year, the Bragança dynasty ascended the throne, deposing the Habsburgs of Spain, who had reigned in Portugal since 1580.
- ⁷ In 1702 Francesco Bartoli’s troupe arrived in Madrid, following Philip V and his court there and remaining in the capital until 1711 (Doménech Rico 2007).
- ⁸ Antonio Sacchi’s troupe arrived in Lisbon from Genoa in November 1753 and remained there at least until 1757, though it is probable that they remained until 1759 (Almeida 2007: 177–97).