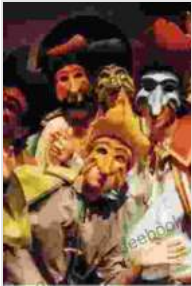


# Shakespeare and Commedia Dell'Arte: A Play-by-Play Comparison



## Shakespeare and Commedia dell'Arte: Play by Play

by Sarah Bolitho

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

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William Shakespeare and the Italian theatrical form known as Commedia dell'Arte were two of the most influential forces in the development of Western theater. While they emerged from different cultural and historical contexts, their plays share a number of striking similarities.

## Origins and Development

Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, in 1564. He began writing plays in the late 1580s and quickly became one of the most successful playwrights of his time. His plays were performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors that included some of the most famous actors of the Elizabethan era, such as Richard Burbage and Will Kemp.

Commedia dell'Arte originated in Italy in the mid-16th century. It was a form of popular theater that was performed by troupes of actors who traveled from town to town. The actors wore masks and played stock characters, such as the zanni (clowns), the innamorati (lovers), and the vecchi (old men). The plays were often improvised, and they relied heavily on physical comedy and slapstick.

### **Similarities in Form and Structure**

Despite their different origins, Shakespeare's plays and Commedia dell'Arte share a number of similarities in form and structure. Both types of plays typically feature a cast of characters that includes a protagonist, an antagonist, and a number of supporting characters. The plays are often set in a single location, and they typically follow a linear plot structure.

In addition, both Shakespeare's plays and Commedia dell'Arte plays often use music and dance to enhance the action. Music is used to create atmosphere, set the mood, and provide a backdrop for the action. Dance is used to express emotions, convey character, and tell stories.

### **Differences in Content and Style**

While Shakespeare's plays and Commedia dell'Arte plays share a number of similarities, they also have a number of important differences. One of the most obvious differences is in the content of the plays. Shakespeare's plays are often historical or tragic, while Commedia dell'Arte plays are typically comedies. This difference in content is reflected in the style of the plays. Shakespeare's plays are written in a more elevated style, while Commedia dell'Arte plays are written in a more colloquial style.

Another difference between Shakespeare's plays and Commedia dell'Arte plays is in the use of masks. In Commedia dell'Arte, the actors wear masks to create a sense of anonymity and to allow them to play multiple roles. In Shakespeare's plays, the actors do not wear masks, and they typically play only one role.

## **Influence on Later Theater**

Both Shakespeare's plays and Commedia dell'Arte have had a profound influence on later theater. Shakespeare's plays have been performed and studied for centuries, and they continue to be a major source of inspiration for playwrights and actors. Commedia dell'Arte has also had a major influence on later theater, particularly in the development of comedy and slapstick. The techniques and conventions of Commedia dell'Arte can be seen in the work of playwrights such as Molière, Goldoni, and Beaumarchais.

Shakespeare and Commedia dell'Arte were two of the most influential forces in the development of Western theater. While they emerged from different cultural and historical contexts, their plays share a number of striking similarities. These similarities include the use of stock characters, the reliance on physical comedy and slapstick, and the use of music and dance to enhance the action. Despite their differences in content and style, both Shakespeare's plays and Commedia dell'Arte plays have had a profound influence on later theater.

## **References**

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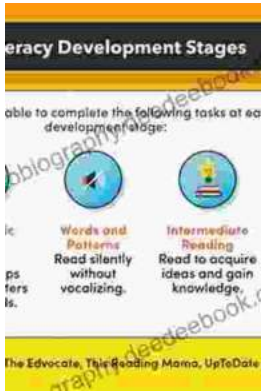
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