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# Plautus and the Italian *commedia erudita*: Plautine reminiscences in “La Cassaria” by Ludovico Ariosto

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## Abstract

The presence of ancient comedies on stage, during a period when vernacular language appeared as the language of literature, resulted in the creation of autonomous comedic genres. These boldly reached for ancient models such as erudite or learned comedy and are said to have been originally created by Ludovico Ariosto. This paper aims to discover the aspects, motifs, and elements of Plautus' *palliata* that inspired Ariosto to create “La Cassaria”. The article therefore explores how Plautus' Roman concepts went on to influence Ariosto with regards to character creation, motifs, the use of names that belong to the category of *nomen omen* or transgression, and role reversal.

## Keywords

erudite comedy; Renaissance; Ludovico Ariosto; *La Cassaria*; Plautus; *palliata*; Roman comedy

Nowadays, research concerning Roman *palliata* and, consequently, the most important playwrights of this genre, namely Plautus and Terence, is very extensive and substantial. There are no doubts that masterpieces, such as Plautus and Terence's comedies, had a tremendous influence on the formation and evolution of the comedy genre in subsequent eras. Certainly, Plautus' *vis comica* is a piece that has greatly influenced his comedic successors, after all he is considered to be the most well-known and distinguished Roman playwright. This paper will focus on the Renaissance work of the Italian author Ludovico Ariosto, who developed a previously unknown type of humanistic comedy – the *commedia erudita*. There will be a particular emphasis on his drama *La Cassaria*, which employed the same model as Plautus' comedies, and is also considered to be the first erudite comedy.<sup>1</sup> Finally, I will seek to compare *La Cassaria* with its ancient model in order to indicate both the most distinctive Plautine features and the elements of innovation employed in Ariosto's reworking of the genre.

In the period of the late Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, Plautus' pieces did not go unnoticed, however, they were scarce. As a matter of fact, it was Terence who garnered the most plaudits for comedy.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Plautus' style had almost disappeared until the Renaissance in Italy. One of the most important discoveries was that of a manuscript, a witness to fourteen Plautine comedies, by Nicolas of Cusa, in 1428, twelve of which were previously unknown. Humanist research generated such an interest in Roman comedies that, in the last twenty years of the fifteenth-century, the plays of Plautus and Terence were adapted for public performances. The rediscovery of Plautine comedies sparked a surge in his popularity. Peculiar staging caused artists to recreate his comedies and consequently led to the creation of a new type of comedy genre based on its motifs. By the time of the Renaissance, a new theatrical form and variable stage models, had cropped up and these "new" Plautine comedies were in the limelight.<sup>3</sup> This is when Plautus' comedies began to appear on the stage, mostly in Italian courts. Back then, the most illustrious court was the d'Este in Ferrara.

Italian Quattro and Cinquecento were a period of revival for secular theatre art, which reached for ancient models to acquire entirely independent comedy genres such as *commedia umanistica*, *commedia erudita* or *commedia dell'arte*. Comedies played an important role in the cultural development of sixteenth-century society. Every state event became an opportunity to perform other comedies such as the one in Ferrara and as a part of carnival festivities, for example, in Florence.

1 According to scholars the first erudite comedy, *Formicone* of Publio Filippo Mantovano, was staged in November 1503. The subject of the plot came from *Asinus aureus* (IX, 17–21) of Apuleius. Mantovano decided not to introduce an intricate intrigue, which was the key element of 16<sup>th</sup> century comedies. The structure of his plot is quite simple. The author retained the classical division of the structure, but because he drew inspiration from a Late Latin source, his characters do not resemble those used by Plautus or Terentius. Cf. Radcliff-Umstead (1969: p. 63). Therefore, Ariosto's *La Cassaria* might be considered the first erudite comedy which has a classical structure and reminiscences such as stock characters, motifs and language of Roman *palliata*.

2 Saint Augustine knew and cites Terence, Charlemagne's library hosted his comedies – not Plautine ones. Cf. Hardin (2007: p. 789).

3 Paratore (1961: p. 103).

## 1. "La Cassaria": structure, plot and Plautine reminiscences

Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533) composed his first comedy *La Cassaria* at the request of Ippolito I d'Este. The play was first performed at the Palazzo Ducale in Ferrara on Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1508, as a part of carnival festivities.<sup>4</sup> Then, after nearly twenty years, the author rewrote the comedy in proparoxytonic hendecasyllabic verses. On Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1529 the comedy was staged for the second time as a pre-dinner amusement to entertain the Este family and their guests.<sup>5</sup> To summarize, the prose version was staged twice (in 1508 and 1529), as well as the verse version (1531 and 1532).

Ariosto's *La Cassaria* has a classical structure; it is divided into five acts with division into: *protasis* (exposition in Acts I and II), *epitasis* (complication in Acts III and IV) and *catastrophe* (resolution in Act V), identified by 4<sup>th</sup> century Roman grammarian and rhetorician Aelius Donatus. The author respects the unity of place, time and action. The plot takes place in a public square, within one day and the main plot point is a love intrigue. In this comedy classical devices and inflows such as the exchange of identity, trickery, unexpected arrivals or transgression of hierarchical boundaries are used.

### (a) The plot

The motifs and intrigue that Plautus is known for are already used in the plot. The love plot is encapsulated in many threads characteristic of *palliata*. The action of *La Cassaria* takes place in a Greek city<sup>6</sup> and it seemingly depicts the same realities that Plautus presented in his comedies that have survived to this day. While the comedy is far from slavish copy of Plautus, imitation does permeate its entire fabric. This which is evident in the scene of action, which is public square or a street in front of Lucrano's and Crisobolo's house, in the title, in the dialogues and in the plot.

In the first act, it turns out that Erofilo and his friend Caridoro are deeply in love with two young slaves, Eulalia and Corisca, and that they desperately need money to free their beloved from the procurer, Lucrano. That is why Erofilo asks his clever servant Volpino to come up with a plan to free the girls. In this act, a helpless young master relies on the help of his clever servant. This is a typical situation that can be found in many of Plautus' comedies. A helpless young men, supported by clever slaves, plotting intrigue depicted in comedies such as *Asinaria*, *Bacchides*, *Epidicus*, *Poenulus* or *Pseudolus*. Usually, the problem is a lack of money to free the girl from the procurer.

In the second act, the cunning slave reveals a clever plan in which his friend, Trapola, should wear Crisobolo's fine clothes to appear as if he is a wealthy merchant. He would go to Lucrano's house with a casket full of gold brocade, stolen from Crisobolo, and use it as a deposit to buy Eulalia. Once Eulalia is in a safe place, Erofilo would then go to city's governor, Caridoro's father, to tell him that Lucrano stole the chest from his

4 Catalano (1930: p. 302).

5 Catalano (1930: p. 302).

6 Mithylene, the principal city on the Island of Lesbos – cf. Ariosto (Beame & Sbrocchi 1975: p. 48). This is the one Ariosto comedy that takes place in a Greek city. In other plays the author presents the plot in the markets of Italian cities.

father's room. Consequently, the pimp will go to prison and the other girl will be freed. In this act, the servant, who appears as a *spiritus movens*, presents his plan to the young masters. Thus, he resembles one of the Plautine slaves, who in most comedies were the funniest characters who often appeared on the stage.

However, the plan cannot be accomplished because of a series of unexpected events in the third act. Firstly, a group of Erofilo's slaves suspect the planned kidnapping; they attack Trappola and take Eulalia to another house. Therefore, Erofilo, confused by his love, leaves Volpino and tries to find the girl. Meanwhile, the pimp decides to steal the coffer and leave the city as soon as it is possible. This act reveals the young man's typical features – his helplessness and passivity, which is contrasted with the cunning of the slave.

In the fourth act, there is another incident which complicates the intrigue – Crisobolo's unexpected return. Volpino tries to convince him that Lucrano was the casket thief. Crisobolo is fooled, but on the way back from Lucrano's house, he meets Trappola dressed in his own clothes. In fear of punishment Trappola reveals Volpino's plan. However, Fulcio's actions solve all problems. He realises what penalty Lucrano may face if the governor blames him for the theft. Plautine influence that is scattered throughout the play is found in the motif of the father's unexpected return from a journey. A similar situation is presented in the *Mostellaria*, when the slave keeps old Theuropides, who comes back home, away from the house when his son Philolaches is having a boozy banquet.

In the fifth act, Fulcio persuades the pimp to seek refuge with Caridoro and free Corisca. He convinces Erofilo to apologize to his father for being disobedient, and obtains ducats from Crisobolo to acquire Eulalia from the procurer. Thus, the young girls achieve their freedom; the young masters are united with their beloved and old Crisobolo achieves his coffer.<sup>7</sup> This act also shows how slaves can help each other. In Plautus' work this is evident in the *Persa*, when Sagaristio is ready to sacrifice himself by helping Toxilus recover the girl from the pimp.

### (b) The title

The title itself, created in a classic manner, forces one to closely reflect on the influence of Plautus in the comedic output of Ludovico Ariosto. The title *La Cassaria* comes from the word *cassa* "chest", which is the main prop in the plot.<sup>8</sup> Previously Plautus titled his *Cistellaria* in the same way. The title comes from the Latin word *cistella* (a small box, chest), which in this case is also the main prop. The title emphasizes the importance of the prop, which allows the recognition of the girl Selenium, a free born daughter of a citizen of a Greek polis. The comedy revolves around the motif of recognition and children's toys closed into the chest, identify the child abandoned years ago. In the same manner, Plautus titled his other comedy – the *Aulularia*. In this case the title consists of the word *aulula*, meaning a small pipkin, a pot which refers to the main prop as well.

7 Ariosto (Segre 1976: pp. 1–59).

8 The comedies of Ludovico Ariosto were translated into English and edited by Edmond M. Beame and Leonard G. Sbrocchi. Published by University of Chicago Press, 1975. *La Cassaria* was translated as *The Coffer*.

A pot which contains treasure is lost and subsequently found allowing for a happy ending. In the previously mentioned comedies the titles are constructed similarly, meaning that the authors announce at the beginning what the comedy will be about and thus directs the viewer. In these comedies the plotlines are built around a prop, which is a chest, vessel or pot. Whatever it is called, the fact that the prop is contested is of key importance in this case. In the *Cistellaria*, because the chest is contested, the prop becomes an object participating in the process of recognition: *Crepundia haec sunt, quibuscum tu extulisti nostram filiolarum ad necem* (*Cis.* 665). In the *Aulularia* and *La Cassaria*, the connecting element that is found in the vessel is gold: *Edepol, ne tu aula, mulom inimicos habes atque istuc aurum quo tibi concretum* (*Aul.* 580–581) and “Non sai tu, come so io, che quella cassa tutta d’ori filati è piena, che dua milia ducati comprerieno a pena?”<sup>9</sup> (*Cass.* II,1). The slaves from *La Cassaria* use the casket to plot an intrigue to entangle the procurer in a lawsuit. A similar plan is concocted by slaves in the *Poenulus* by Plautus. Similarly, we can refer to two other Plautus’ comedies, whose title does not come from the main prop, but from an indirect prop, which leads to the right prop, which in turn leads to the moment of anagnorisis – *Rudens* and the not entirely preserved, *Vidularia*.

### (c) *Dramatis personae*

- Erofilo, *young master*.  
 Caridoro, *young master*.  
 Eulalia, *young lady*.  
 Corisca, *young lady*.  
 Lucrano, *a procurer*.  
 Crisobolo, *a merchant, Erofilo’s father*.  
 Critone, *a merchant*.  
 Aristippo, *Critone’s brother*.  
 Fulcio, *Caridoro’s cunning slave*.  
 Furba, *Lucrano’s slave*.  
 Nebbia, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Gianda, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Volpino, *Crisobolo’s cunning slave*.  
 Corbacchio, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Negro, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Morione, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Gallo, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Marso, *Crisobolo’s slave*.  
 Trappola, *a cheat*.  
 Brusco, *Trappola’s helper*.

9 “Don’t you realize, as I do, that this coffer is full of gold brocade you could scarcely buy for two thousand ducats?”. All references to Ariosto’s plays will be taken from Cesare Segre’s edition of the *Opere minori* (1954). All English translations from Beame and Sbrocchi’s edition, *The Comedies* (1975).

Plautine influence can also be seen in character creation. One of the most recognisable figures from *La Cassaria* is the Albanian procurer, Lucrano, a typical stock character. This pimp is very similar to Ballio in the *Pseudolus* by Plautus. Lucrano considers prostituting his girls if the young lovers do not acquire them. Lucrano is a purely evil character with atrocious traits and he even describes himself in such terms (III,3). Trappola, who disguised as a merchant, comes to the pimp's house. The thief wants to find the pimp by berating him with words such as: "bugiardo", "maldicente", "bestemmiatore" or "seminatore di scandali"<sup>10</sup> etc. – this motif is also used in the *Pseudolus*. A similar scene is shown in the *Persa*, as well, when Toxilus greets the pimp with many abusive invectives (III,3). Afterwards, Lucrano admits that he is the pimp, meaning that he refers to himself in this way: "[...] in Metellino non puoi cercare se non di me, sì che 'l mio proprio nome ti vo' ricordare anco: mi chiamo Lucrano. [...] Che vuoi da me?"<sup>11</sup> A similar scene is presented in the *Pseudolus*, when Callidorus and Pseudolus insult pimp Ballio. Another one of Lucrano's traits is eagerness – one passage displays this precisely (III,7), Lucrano says: "Non fu mai uccellatore più di me fortunato, che avendo oggi tese le panie a dui magri uccelletti, che tutto el dì mi cantavano intorno, a caso una buona e grassa perdice ci è venuta ad invesciarsi. Perdice chiamo un certo mercante, perché mi par che sia più di perdita che di guadagno amico"<sup>12</sup> In this case, Erofilo and Caridoro are two scrawny birds, while Trappola is the fat partridge who lost the chest in purchasing the girl. It shows how Lucrano is inebriated with his prosperity in receiving the chest. The pimp compares himself to a fowler, which resembles the passage from Plautus' *Asinaria* (I,3), in which the pimp Claereta is shown to be cynical, merciless and consistent in her actions. Therefore, the previously mentioned passage can be seen as a classical Plautine pun (*perdice* and *Perdita*).<sup>13</sup>

However, Lucrano is not the only typical Plautine figure that appears on the stage. Ariosto created the typical young lover (two lovers actually). Erofilo, like most young masters in Plautus' comedies, is truly in love. His propensity for love is given further testimony by his name – *Ἐρωτός + φίλος*. The young master only complains about his state of mind, instead of thinking about how to acquire the young lady: "Ah! Misero chi è servo d'amore"<sup>14</sup> (II,1). It should be mentioned, that Callidorus laments in exactly the same manner: *Misere, miser sum [...]* (*Pseud.* 13). Erofilo also seems to be a careless young man, who wastes his father's resources, Crisobolo says: "Io in la tua etate ero sempre a lato del tuo avo, e con sudore e fatica lo aiutavo ad ampliare el patrimonio e le facultà

10 "An informer", "a slanderer", "a sower of discord", "a scandalmonger".

11 "[...] but in Mitylene you could only be looking for me. And to remind you of my proper name, I'm called Lucrano. [...] What do you want from me?"

12 "There was never a fowler more fortunate than I am; for, having prepared a snare today for two paltry little birds who hung around and sang all day, by chance a big fat partridge came along and got caught in it. By a partridge I mean a certain merchant, because it seems to me he's more partial to loss than to gain."

13 An example of a pun, typical for Plautus is as follows; Trappola (partridge) lost the chest whilst purchasing the girl – according to Lucrano the situation turned out to be a loss rather than a profit for the merchant (*perdere* – to lose; *perdita* – loss).

14 "Ah, how unhappy is he who is the servant of love."

nostre, che tu, prodigo e bestiale, con tua lascivia cerchi consumare e struggere"<sup>15</sup> (V,2). Lavishness is another typical trait of the young master – the most powerful example of such a character is presented in the *Mostellaria*, in which the son of Theuropides, takes advantage of the fact that his father has left for some time, organising libations and squandering his father's fortune every day.

Also, Caridoro, as a typical *senex*, is quite a rude and strict to his son, he says: "Se non fussi per l'onore di tua madre, io direi che non mi fussi figliuolo"<sup>16</sup> (V,2). In addition to severity, he is also an avariant, Erofilo comments: "Non ti credere, benché io vada onoratamente vestito, e sia di Crisobolo unico figliolo, estimado el più ricco mercante di Metellino [...]. E quel che io dico di me, dico di questo altro ancora, che li nostri vecchi non sono meno ricchi che avari; né più è il desiderio nostro di spendere, che la lor cura di vietarci el mondo"<sup>17</sup> (I,4).

One more Plautine figure is the slave, or rather the group as a whole including Volpino, Trappola and Fulcio. The first one, Volpino, appears as a typical *servus callidus*, who becomes the *spiritus movens* of the intrigue. He tries to find a solution to purchasing the ladies: "Se potrebbe, Fulcio, per salvare dua amanti e distruggere uno avarissimo ruffiano, ordinare astuzia che fusse più di questa memorabile?"<sup>18</sup> (II,1) – in fact, Erofilo, without Volpino's (and then Fulcio's) guidance, would not be able to acquire Eulalia. This cunning slave, with his vivacious manner and witty remarks gives a real life to the comedy. However, not only does Volpino turn out to be a cunning slave – Fulcio, who is a secondary figure for most of the play, finally displays his own intelligence, designing a scheme which leads to the release of Volpino and the girls. Another example is Trappola disguised in Crisobolo's fine clothes, in doing so the servant pretends to be a well-to-do merchant. This type of masquerade occurs, for example, in the *Poenulus*, in which Collybiscus, disguised as a foreigner can easily acquire Phoenicium from the procurer. Disguise is a combination of these motives; taking on someone else's role with a change of costume that adds to the intrigue. Plautine characters don characteristic outfits; they dress up as a soldier, for example. This costume is used by Pseudolus when he transforms a slave into a legate, Harpaks (*Pseud.* II,4), and Milphio when he wishes to send a servant as a foreign officer to the procurer (*Poen.* I,1). Curculio also disguises himself as a soldier to allegedly take from the pimp a girl whom the young man loves (*Curc.* III,1). In the comedy *Persa*, not only does Sagarystion put on a Persian outfit, but also the girl who is meant to be sold (III,1). Of course, disguise is a prerequisite for a sneaky plot. The costume has a similar function in the comedies *Captivi* and *Miles gloriokus*.

15 "At your age I was always at your grandfather's side, and with hard work and sweat I helped him increase our patrimony and property, which you, prodigal and foolish as you are, try to diminish and waste away with your lasciviousness."

16 "If it weren't for your mother's honor, I would deny that you were my son."

17 "Don't think that because I dress well and because I'm the only son of Crisobolo, who is considered the richest merchant in Mytilene [...] And what I say about myself is true of him also; for our old men are no less rich than greedy, and our desire to spend is no stronger than their diligence in watching our spending."

18 "Could one possibly devise a more remarkable scheme than this, Fulcio, in order to save two lovers and destroy such a greedy pimp?"



In *La Cassaria* we can find more slaves: Furba, Nebbia, Gianda, Corbacchio, Negro, Morione, Gallo, Marso and Brusco. Despite the fact that Ariosto's slaves often resemble those of Plautus' comedies, the number of servants in *La Cassaria* is much bigger than in Plautine ones. Introducing many slaves to the stage increases dynamism in a few scenes and their activities interrupt the plot. In some scenes dialogues between servants add a choral effect to the drama and provide the liveliest action at the center of the play,<sup>19</sup> which can be seen notably in the third act. One of the Plautus' comedies in which such a group of characters is shown is *Rudens*. The second act begins with a group scene in which fishermen complain about their miserable lives (II,1). This performance resembles choirs in a Greek tragedy however, in classical plays the number of servants was usually very limited, that is why the introduction of more minor slaves may be considered as one of Ariosto's innovations. These supporting servants in *La Cassaria* also demonstrate the ability to work together and help each other. However, the presence of a large number of slaves in this play, may also suggest that all of them, including Volpino and Fulcio, can be seen as representatives of one character, which is a peculiar personification of the universal slave, who is not only able to take over the role of his master, as shown on stage between Volpino and the young masters, but he also has the ability to mock, cheat and humiliate his master.

Plautus' influence can be seen in naming of the characters. Names, very often, bring an extra meaning and thus inform the audience about a particular character's traits. In *La Cassaria* we can find many characters named in this manner. Previously mentioned, Erofilo – a name of Greek origin may testify to the master's passion for love. One of the most significant examples is Trappola – the Italian word *trappola* means "trap", so naming a character in this way, who disguises himself as a well-to-do merchant, enhances the comic effect. Volpino is another interesting exemplar – the name refers to the word *volpino* which is an adjective for "foxlike". Surely, this is an appropriate name for a character that plots an intrigue. Referring to another servant – Fulcio (the cunning slave who allows for a happy ending) – one can hypothesise that the name comes from the Latin verb *fulcio* (to prop up, support). In the Italian language there is no such verb, but there is a noun *fulcro* (fulcrum), which comes from Latin *fulcrum*.<sup>20</sup> Another one of the slaves is named Furba, as a result of his sly characteristic (the word *furba* means "sly" or "cunning"). Finally, the procurer, may be called Lucrano, because of meaning of the word *lucrare* – "to gain" or "to make a profit" – that being most important goal for a pimp.<sup>21</sup>

#### (d) Other Plautine influences

The scene, which can be considered an echo of Plautus' *Mostellaria* is a satire on women uttered by Fulcio, however Ariosto's description is far more pointed than the Plautine one. Fulcio describes the way in which woman apply their makeup – according to him, it would certainly take less time to equip the galley than to wait for the effects of female

19 Grabher (1946: pp. 46–47).

20 Cf. Vocabolario Treccani [<http://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/fulcro/>; accessed 12.02.2020].

21 The hypothesis about the character's names presented in the paper, are the original work of the author.

ablutions (V,3). Moreover, the speech has been influenced by Boccaccio and his *Decameron*.<sup>22</sup> *La Cassaria* also shows the transgression of hierarchical boundaries between masters and slaves – the boundaries based on socio-economic status. Firstly, during the explanation of the plan, Volpino addresses Erofilo and Caridoro in a tone appropriate for a master (II,1). In Plautus' comedies this type of transgression is very frequent. A typical example can be found in the *Casina*, when the master Lysidamus acts like a servant to placate his slave Olympio, and thus completes the wedding plans (V,2) or in the *Asinaria* when the servants do a clear act of audacity in the third act (III,3). In *La Cassaria*, another example of overstepping the already specified boundaries is the scene where Trapola comes to Lucrano's house disguised as a merchant. Because of his social status he is not able to do any business with a personality such as the procurer Lucrano. Of course, this type of masquerade and reversal of social roles is done to evoke a comedic response.

In *La Cassaria*, it is masterfully shown through the exchange of roles between servants and their masters, and between the marginalized and dominant sectors of Renaissance society in Ferrara. Servants Volpino and Fulcio demonstrate a natural talent for directing and controlling activities. With their help, the young masters Erofilo and Caridoro are able to free their beloved from the procurer Lucrano and satisfy their own bodily desires. It is important to remember however, that although Volpino helps the young men, he also demonstrates his unique ability to control his masters and acts as the true master. In Act II, when Volpino explains the details of his plan, he approaches the young man with such superiority that it is Erofilo who seems to be a servant, and not the other way round:

VOLP. *Non t'ho detto che di man del Nebbia facessi opera di avere le chiavi de la camera di tuo padre?*

ERO. *L'ho fatto.*

VOLP. *E che togliessi quella cassa che ti mostrai?*

ERO. *T'ho obedito.*

VOLP. *E che mandassi for di casa tutti li famigli?*

ERO. *Così ho fatto.*

VOLP. *E più di tutti li altri el Nebbia?*

ERO. *Non ho lassata cosa che mi abbi detta.*<sup>23</sup> (II,1)

Constantly, Volpino instructs Caridoro, his master's friend:

VOLP. *Tu, Caridoro, come il ruffian sia preso, potrai fornire il desiderio tuo per te medesimo; che mentre li toi servi meneranno Lucrano prigione, tu farai de la tua Corisca el piacer tuo.*<sup>24</sup> (II,1)

22 Radcliff-Umstead (1969: p. 72).

23 "VOLP: Didn't I ask you to get the keys to your father's room from Nebbia? ERO: I did that. VOLP: And to remove the coffer that I showed you? ERO: I did so. VOLP: And to send all the servants out of the house? ERO: I've done that. VOLP: And above all Nebbia? ERO: I've done everything you asked me."

24 "As soon as the procurer is taken, you, Caridoro, can accomplish your purpose by yourself. While your servants are taking Lucrano to prison, you'll do what you please with Corisca."

To sum up this analysis of the elements of subversion, it should be emphasized that characters in Ariosto's play are similar to their classic prototypes – they are clever, cunning and loyal to their masters – but they also supervise their masters. They criticise and mock not only them, but also other members of society. In this way they play an indispensable role in establishing the relationship between the citizens and the court – the poor and the rich.

## 2. "La Cassaria" as a portrait of Ferrara in 16<sup>th</sup> century

Classical (Plautus and Terence) and volgare (the Decameron) sources are present in abundance. But at the same time the characterization of the most important comic types is alive and fresh, and often exemplified on figures of contemporary daily life.<sup>25</sup> It should be mentioned that *La Cassaria* considerably reflects the tastes and customs of Ferrara's society during the Cinquecento period. There are fragments in which the characters use a jargon employed by the lower social classes of the epoch. Nowhere is it illustrated better than in the conversation between Lucrano and his slave Furba (I,7 and III,7). The drama is speckled with many references to contemporary historical and political events that afflicted society's quality of life at that time. The first remark can be seen in Lucrano's speech about the condition of courts: "[...] che più util viaggio far possiamo che quando venimmo ad abitare qui, dove sono più li forestieri in odio, che la verità nelle corti"<sup>26</sup> (I,7). He further emphasises that the situation applies not only to Ferrara, but to Rome as well – in the dialogue between Lucrano and Trappola, in which Lucrano claims that the Court of Rome accepts every blackguard: "[...] – Reportatore, maldicente, seminatore di scandali e di zizianie – Se noi fussiamo in corte di Roma, si potria dubitare di chi tu cercassi [...]"<sup>27</sup> (III,3). Ariosto wants to portray the society of his own time, that is why he inflicts satire in some fragments. In one passage, Caridoro talks about Spanish soldiers lodged in private houses of the citizens: "[...] netterei sì bene il granaro, e sì sgomberrei di ogni masserizia camera e sale, che parrebbe che uno anno vi avesseno avuto li Spagnuoli alloggiamento"<sup>28</sup> (I,5). The author criticises the misdeed of customs officers in the scene, during which Eulalia is kidnapped by the group of servants. They explain the situation by referring to the obligation to pay a custom duty on her, which went unpaid: "D'ogni merce s'ha a pagare dazio"<sup>29</sup> (III,5). Other satirical remarks can be found in the speech of Crisobolo, in which he is afraid that Lucrano wants to report him to the magistrate. The merchant says: "Se non aven meglio di cotesto, siàn forniti.

25 Cf. Rosa (2009) chapter "La situazione letteraria".

26 "Perhaps, we can make this voyage more profitable than the one that brought us here to live – to a place where foreigners are hated more than truth in the courtroom."

27 "An informer, a slanderer, a sower of discord and a scandalmonger – If we were at the Court of Rome one might wonder whom you were looking for."

28 "I'd cleanse the granary so well and clean out all merchandise from the rooms and halls that it would seem as if the Spaniards had lodged there for a year."

29 "Duty has to be paid on all merchandise."

A chi dànno più credito i gran maestri in questo tempo, e più favore, che alli ruffiani? E chi più beffano, che gli uomini costumati e da bene? A chi tendono più insidie, che alli miei pari, che anno fama d'esser ricchi e denarosi?"<sup>30</sup> (IV,2).

### 3. "Dunque una commedia: «La Cassaria». Aveva cominciato a pensarci, così, per giuoco, leggendo Plauto (...)"<sup>31</sup>

Ariosto's comedy production consists of five comedies<sup>32</sup> of which *La Cassaria* is considered to be the first erudite comedy. Its success was ensured by presenting elements of life in contemporary society through, the strongly preserved frames of ancient palliata in a delightful manner. Sources of Italian erudite comedy range from the comedies of Roman playwrights, like Plautus and Terence, to the 14<sup>th</sup> century Italian pre-humanist Giovanni Boccaccio and his Decameron or Corbaccio. The model of Boccaccio's manner inspired the authors to write prose. However, Ariosto is considered one of the best writers of early Italian vernacular comedy and the main figure in establishing this literary form.

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30 "If we have nothing better than this, we're finished. Nowadays whom the authorities give more credence and more favor to than pimps, and whom do they scoff at more than law-abiding and virtuous men? Whom are they out to get if not men like me who have the reputation of being rich and moneyed?"

31 Ubetazzi (1942: p. 68).

32 Between 1508 and 1530 Ariosto wrote: *La Cassaria* (1508), *I Suppositi* (1509), *Il Negromante* (1520), *La Lena* (1529) and *I Studenti* (completed by his brother Gabriele and his son Virginio and published twice posthumously as *La scolastica* and *L'imperfetta*). Cf. Ubetazzi (1942: p. 89).

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