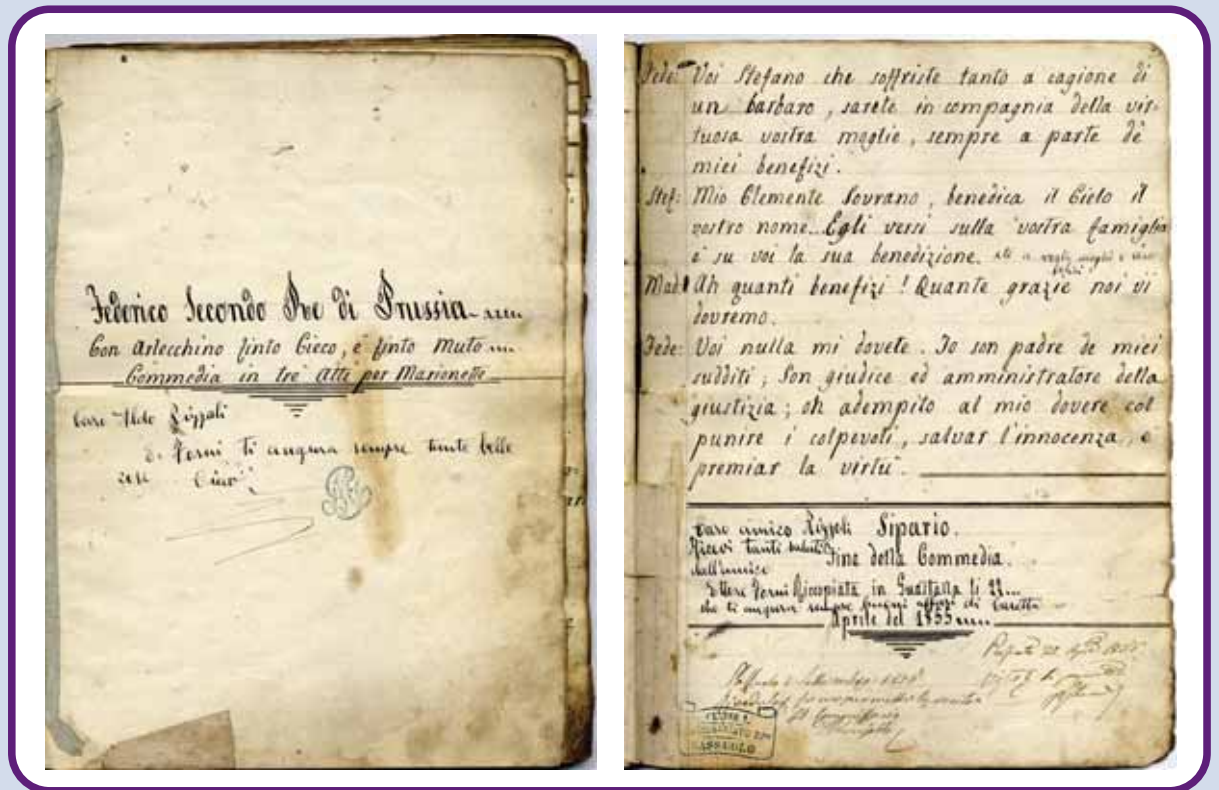




The 18th Century Stock Masks



As a consequence of the French Revolution and following Napoleon's empire, the ideas of liberty and equality spread all over Europe. The characters of the *Commedia dell'Arte* were, indeed, banned because they were thought to give voice to an idea of subordination and subversity which was unacceptable.

When Italy became one single nation under the control of Napoleon, political boundaries were broken down but, paradoxically, the various companies of puppeteers restricted their field of action and started to learn the language and traditions of those villages which formed part of a fixed tour they repeated periodically. This trend favoured the development of a series of neatly defined characters, each speaking in a specific local dialect: thus, Sandrone was invented in the city of Modena, Gioppino in Bergamo, and Fagiolino in Bologna, while Gerolamo was created in Genoa and later evolved into Gianduia in Turin.

These were the masks of a new kind of theatre which, inspired by the Jacobin ideals, was the result of the censorship which was then imposed on performances. Liberty, which the Jacobins had been supporting, was in fact limited with the introduction of a censorship aimed at prevention, which had never occurred before. Puppeteers were obliged to submit all their scripts to the local police departments in order to obtain the necessary certificates from the censors.

Sandrone

Sandrone was created in the end of the XVIII century in the puppet theatre of Luigi Rimini Campogalliani - who was from the town of Carpi (Modena); the character had a very long name: *Sandrón Paviròn dal bosch ed satta da Modna* (dialect).

Sandrone is a rude countryman, but very wise; he can behave at best while in the countryside, but once out of his element he always makes mistakes and says something improper which provokes immediate laughter and turns him into a comic character. His mouth is almost toothless, his face is rounded and flushed; he normally wears a brown jacket and a brimless hat with white and red stripes. When asked about his origins, he would introduce himself as follows: «*La Sciatta (Franceschetta) l'era me medra, Bernerd l'era al papà. Al gran Giòli Preti mi ha tegnito à baglia secca con latte fresco di vacca vecchia per darmi le forze bestiali che sostengono il mondo. Me sono un bell'omo ed ho un fegato da tre fegati!*» (dialect).

This speech sums up all Sandrone's comic verve which consists in: mixing up an improbable Italian with dialect forms, displaying great self confidence, and constant reference to very tangible subjects such as physical strength and food.

He is married to Apollonia, whom he names Pulonia: she is a typical housewife of the Emilia county, faithful to her husband. She often quotes proverbs about the food habits in Modena.



Fagiolino

This mask is unique in that it comes from the sub-proletarian outskirts of the city and it was only put on stage as an hand-puppet, never as a marionette; nonetheless, it was sometimes performed by human actors. The character has a proper name and surname, that is Fagioloino Fanfani, but is also known as *Fasulein* and *Fasol*; during the XIX and at the very beginning of the XX centuries it is sometimes called *Faggiolino*. This mask already existed at the end of the XVII century and reached a huge level of popularity in Bologna thanks to the puppeteers Filippo and Angelo Cuccioli. Fagiolino is poor, but rich.... in hunger; he is liberal with humble people and severe with the bad. He practices self-justice using his inseparable slapstick. He can be recognized through a series of attributes such as the spot on his cheek and the white cap on his head, which was typical of the *birichino* (dialect: trickster) in Bologna, the city he belongs to.

Gianduia

A mask from the region of Piedmont, it first came on stage as a puppet, only later becoming more typical of the marionette theatre. It seems to derive from a character known as *Gironi d'la crina* (dialect; in Italian: Gerolamo della scrofa) – which had been created around 1630. At the beginning of the XIX century, the name of this puppet got his operator Giovanni Battista Sales into trouble, because, though common people strongly appreciated its humour, neither the Doge of Genoa nor the brother of Napoleon could stand the fact it had their same Christian name. Sales was expelled both from Genoa and Turin, and confined in Caglianetto d'Asti, where, probably, determined to avoid more problems, he changed the name into *Gioan d'la douja* (dialect; in Italian: Giovanni della duja) which was contracted into Gianduia.

The puppet's nature and costume derive from those of Gerolamo: a brown wool jacket with red trim, a yellow waistcoat, a tricorn hat and, since it first appeared in the marionette theatre in 1848, green or brown breeches with stripped red-and-white stockings.

In early performances Gianduia is still a servant, but during the course of the XIX century he becomes a sort of urban hero in Turin as he personifies all the civic virtues at the base of the current bourgeois ideology.

He is a real gentleman who appreciates wine, happiness and vitality, which are clear elements of his humble village origins.

