



# **Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: The Comic Scenarios (Toronto Italian Studies)**

*Natalie Crohn Schmitt*

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The most important theatrical movement in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe, the *commedia dell'arte* has inspired playwrights, artists, and musicians including Molière, Dario Fo, Picasso, and Stravinsky. Because of its stock characters, improvised dialogue, and extravagant theatricalism, the *commedia dell'arte* is often assumed to be a superficial comic style. With *Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala*, Natalie Crohn Schmitt demolishes that assumption.

By reconstructing the *commedia dell'arte* scenarios published by troupe manager Flaminio Scala (1547–1624), Schmitt demonstrates that in its Golden Age the *commedia dell'arte* relied as much on craftsmanship as on improvisation and that Scala's scenarios are a treasure trove of social commentary on early modern daily life in Italy.

In the book, Schmitt makes use of her intensive research into the social and cultural history of sixteenth-century Italy and the aesthetic principles of the period. She combines this research with her insights drawn from studying with contemporary *commedia dell'arte* performers and from directing a production of one of Scala's scenarios. The result is a new perspective on the *commedia dell'arte* that illuminates the style's full richness.

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