The articles in this study guide are not meant to mirror or interpret any productions at the Utah Shakespeare Festival. They are meant, instead, to be an educational jumping-off point to understanding and enjoying the plays (in any production at any theatre) a bit more thoroughly. Therefore the stories of the plays and the interpretative articles (and even characters, at times) may differ dramatically from what is ultimately produced on the Festival’s stages.

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For more information about Festival education programs:
Utah Shakespeare Festival
351 West Center Street
Cedar City, Utah  84720
435-586-7880
www.bard.org.

Cover photo: David Ivers in *The Servant of Two Masters*, 2003.
The Servant of Two Masters

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Synopsis: The Servant of Two Masters

The play begins in the Venetian house of Pantalone, where a party is underway to celebrate the engagement of Clarice, daughter of Pantalone, to Silvio, son of Doctor Lombardi. As the wedding agreement is being signed, the hilarious and confused Truffaldino enters to announce the arrival of his master, Federigo Rasponi of Turin.

This news comes as an amazing surprise to all, since Federigo is believed to have been killed in a duel with Florindo, his sister Beatrice’s lover. The problem arises from the fact that Federigo had originally been promised Clarice’s hand in marriage. The truth, however, is the supposed Federigo is actually Beatrice in disguise, come from Turin to claim the dowry owed by Pantalone to her brother, if he were alive. (Confused yet? Wait, it will all work its way out.)

To Clarice’s horror, her father feels obligated to honor his commitment to the supposed Federigo. Clarice refuses to comply, while Sylvio, spurred on by his pontificating father, strives to maintain his claim to Clarice’s hand. The wedding, however, is cancelled.

Brighella, the innkeeper, recognizes Beatrice, despite her disguise, but promises to keep her identity a secret and becomes her accomplice in her mission. Here Truffaldino meets the housemaid, Smeraldina, and falls in love with her. (And there’s still more!)

Later, on the street, the servant Truffaldino is approached by Florindo who, having recently escaped from Turin after killing Federigo, is seeking a servant himself. Truffaldino accepts Florindo’s offer, determining that if he is clever he can serve two masters and easily double his income. From the hotel Florindo sends Truffaldino to check for his mail. Beatrice (disguised as Federigo), who is also at the hotel, sends him to check her mail as well. As fate would have it, Truffaldino mixes up the letters and gives Beatrice’s letters to Florindo, who as a result learns that his lover is in Venice and sets out in search of her.

Back at Pantalone’s house, Beatrice, still in disguise as Federigo, reveals her secret to the distraught Clarice. Pantalone sees the two shake hands and takes it to mean that they have agreed to wed and sets out to tell Doctor Lombardi.

Eventually, through a series of comic mishaps and mix-ups, Beatrice and Florindo come to believe that the other is dead. Beatrice, grief-stricken, abandons her disguise and flees the house. Having discovered Beatrice’s true identity, Pantalone tells Lombardi that the marriage between Silvio and Clarice is still possible since Federigo is actually a woman! Fate again intervenes and brings the suicidal Beatrice and Florindo together in a chance encounter. Overjoyed, they plan to return together to Turin and buy Florindo’s freedom.

In the end, all of the couples are set to be happily married. Florindo asks Pantalone for permission for his servant, Truffaldino, to marry Clarice’s maid, Smeraldino. Clarice says that this is impossible, because Smeraldino is promised to Beatrice’s servant. Truffaldino, in order to marry Smeraldino, confesses that he is, indeed, a servant to two masters.
Characters: *The Servant of Two Masters*

**Clarice:** Daughter of Pantalone, Clarice was originally promised to Federigo, whom she disliked. However, he is now dead, so at the beginning of the play she is planning on marrying her true love, Silvio.

**Florindo:** Beatrice's lover, Florindo is rumored to have killed Federigo in a duel in Turin. He flees to Venice to seek his beloved Beatrice.

**Dr. Lombardi:** Silvio's father, Dr. Lombardi's self-absorbed pontifications are a source of constant irritation to all those around him.

**Pantalone:** Clarice's father, Pantalone is motivated almost entirely by the acquisition of money and goods. He would have preferred that his daughter marry Federigo, whom he considered a "better catch."

**Smeraldina:** Clarice's maid, Smeraldina is strong-willed and lovely. She is also the object of Truffaldino's affection.

**Beatrice:** Sister of Federigo Rasponi, Beatrice comes to Venice disguised as her brother and hoping to acquire the dowry owed to Federigo by Pantalone.

**Brighella:** Friend of the Rasponi family, Brighella is the owner of the local inn.

**Silvio:** The son of Dr. Lombardi, Silvio is planning on marrying Clarice; however, the wedding is disrupted by the rumor that, contrary to original reports, Clarice's intended groom-to-be, Federigo Rasponi, is still alive.

**Truffaldino:** The servant of the play's title, Truffaldino is content with his lot in life as a servant, and he is in love with Smeraldina. His attempts to work for two masters make him the agent of much of the play's confusion.

First waiter
Second waiter
First porter
Second porter
About the Playwright: Carlo Goldoni

By Marlo M. Ihler
From Insights, 2003

Carlo Goldoni, considered one of Italy’s finest playwrights, was born on February 25, 1707 in Venice, Italy, to a theatre-loving family. By age four, Goldoni had started to read, write, and create little puppet performances for his family; and by age eight he had sketched his first comic drama. Due to his father’s medical practice, his family moved frequently, living in such cities as Venice, Perugia, and Rimini. At age fourteen he was apprenticed to his lawyer uncle in Venice and continued his law studies until he was accepted to the Venetian bar in 1732.

During this time, however, he maintained his passion for theatre by writing plays for amateur companies and studying classical dramatists, especially Molière. His first dramatic venture, a melodrama written during times of clientele shortage, was rejected because it did not adhere to the rules of Italian theatre. He was told, “everything must be done according to a certain form. . . . In France, you can try to please the public, but here in Italy it is the actors . . . whom you must consult” (“Carlo Goldoni,” www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc93.html). Consequently, he burned the rejected manuscript and kept trying.

The style of the day was to write comedy in the “style of the masks,” otherwise known as commedia del arte. Although the general public favored this form, Goldoni preferred to try new ideas and styles. He aimed to write about representations of actual life and people and eventually was credited with creating a superior form of Italian character comedy.

In 1736, Goldoni met and married Maria Nicoletta Connio. The following year he became the director of the Teatro San Giovanni Crisostomo, a Venetian opera house. By 1744, he and Maria had moved to Pisa, where he practiced law until 1747, at which time he signed a contract to be the house dramatist for a theatre in Venice. In his third season there (1750–51), he wrote an astounding sixteen comedies in order to promote subscription sales after one of the company’s most popular actors quit. From 1753 to 1762, he wrote for another Venetian theatre, now known as the Teatro Goldoni, where gradually he discontinued writing commedia del arte.

During this time he also wrote opera libretti and served as the court poet for a duke. Goldoni was working to expand the content and scope of his comedic plays, much to the criticism of his rivals, Carlo Gozzi and Pietro Chiari. He eventually tired of this struggle, and accepted a position at the Comedie-Italienne in Paris in 1761, where he had only one major success. He retired in 1764 and became the Italian tutor to the daughters of King Louis XV at the Versailles palace. A few years later he emerged from retirement to produce his last successful comedy, The Beneficent Bear, performed by the Comedie-Francaise in 1771.

The last years of his life were spent in Paris, where he wrote his celebrated Memoires and was supported by a royal pension from the French government. However, the pension was discontinued during the French Revolution, and Goldoni died in dire poverty in 1793, only one day after the National Convention had voted to reinstate it.

Goldoni’s work remains very important because of the contributions he made to comedic theatre. He was considered the “first important Italian comic dramatist after the Renaissance.” His early comedies “relied on stock characters who still wore masks, a concession to the actors, who felt threatened by Goldoni’s innovations” (McGraw-Hill Utah Shakespeare Festival
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Encyclopedia of World Drama, vol. 2, 1984, p. 345-346). Goldoni initially wrote the scenario for The Servant of Two Masters for the commedia del arte actor Antonio Sacchi. In 1753, it was published as a fully written-out script of how Sacchi and his fellow actors had developed and performed it the decade before. It is a play that focuses more on the plot than the characters, and its storyline is celebrated as “one of the most ingeniously organized in comic drama” (International Dictionary of Theatre: Plays, vol. 1, 1992, p. 730). It uses stock themes from the then-popular Italian improvised comedy: disguise, mistaken identity, and misunderstandings.

As for the rest of Goldoni’s works, they can easily be divided into five categories. The first group focuses on comedy about the aristocracy. He was able to criticize the upper class without offending. Some of his plays that fit into this category are The Mistress of the Inn (La locandiera, 1753), The Jealous Miser (Il geloso avaro, 1755), and The Contriving Woman (La donna di maneggio, 1757).

The second group centers on the middle class, or bourgeoisie. Generally, they tell the story of a character who has strayed from conventional behavior, but is eventually reconciled. The Prudent Man (L’uomo prudente, 1748) and The Venetian Lawyer (L’avvocato veneziano, 1750) are part of this category.

Some of Goldoni’s best works belong to the third set: those that are written in Venetian dialect. His famous sixteen comedies from 1750 to 1751 are part of this category. Women’s Gossip (I pettegolezzi delle donne, 1751), The New House (La casa nova, 1760), and The Chioggian Brawls (Le baruffe chiozzotte, 1762) are part of this group.

The fourth category consists of his non-Italian comedies such as Pamela the Spinster (Pamela nubile, 1750) and The War (La guerra, 1760).

The fifth group represents his best and last plays: The Fan (Il ventaglio, 1763) and The Beneficent Bear (Il burbero benefico, 1771).

Goldoni wrote over 260 dramatic works of all kinds, including 150 comedies and libretti for over 80 operas. He is credited with creating the opera genre, drama giocoso, or “jocular drama,” (Paul den Auden, “The Opera Librettist,” http://home.prcn.org/~pauld/ata/articles/librettists.htm). In this type of opera, stock characters from serious operas (opera seria) appear with the servants, peasants, and buffoons from comic operas (opera buffa).

“Goldoni is considered by the Italians as the author who carried dramatic art in Italy to its highest point of perfection” (www.imaginat-ion.com/moonstruck/clsc93.html). He is renowned for his inventiveness, the ease and speed at which wrote, and the animation and meaning with which his characters are infused.
The Politics of Self-Interest
By Stephanie Chidester
From Insights, 2003

Carlo Goldoni’s The Servant of Two Masters is at once charmingly light yet surprisingly complex, blooming as it did in the garden of commedia dell’arte. The playwright grafts depth of character and theme into the Italian comedic forms of his day, taming the wildness of farce and improvisation while cultivating the joyful exuberance inherent in those forms. It is, in Timothy Holme’s words, “not only . . . a pure joy from beginning to end, but . . . also a perfectly constructed halfway-house between the commedia dell’arte and the new comedy of character, containing, it could be argued, the best of both worlds” (A Servant of Many Masters: The Life and Times of Carlo Goldoni [London: Jupiter Books, 1976], 91).

Goldoni enriches the farcical plot-lines of The Servant of Two Masters with themes both humorous and serious. One such theme is self-interest, a force seen not only in the behavior of the characters but also in the play’s backdrop of Venetian society. Occasionally, some aspects of this backdrop creep into the foreground of plot-lines—namely, double standards and the callous treatment of women by male guardians and law-makers. Of the female characters in the play, Smeraldina feels the injustice of double standards most strongly, and she speaks out against it repeatedly. She berates Silvio, “It’s as the old saw says; we get the kicks and you the halfpence. They say women are unfaithful, but men are committing infidelities all day long. People talk about the women, and they never say a word about the men. We get all the blame, and you are allowed to do as you please.” She then explains the root of this evil: “’Tis the men who have made the laws. If the women had made them, things would be just the other way” (Goldoni, Carlo, The Servant of Two Masters (Il Servitore di Due Padroni), trans. Edward J. Dent. 2nd ed., [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952.], 39). This is self-interest on a truly large scale. Smeraldina makes no claim for the moral superiority of women—indeed, if positions were reversed, women would show just as much bias.

By the end of the play, Smeraldina, and perhaps even Clarice, come to see marriage as a necessary evil—a matter not merely of romance and flirtation but also of conflict and subjugation. Smeraldina’s final word on this subject is less than optimistic: “Men are all cruel to us, some more, some less. They demand the most absolute fidelity, and on the least shadow of suspicion they bully us, ill-treat us and are like to murder us. Well, you have got to marry one or another of them some day, so I say to you as one says to sick people—since you have got to take your nasty medicine, take it” (78).

Though Beatrice evades the tyranny of male guardians by disguising herself and fleeing to Venice, she has great faith in Florindo’s love and views marriage as an escape from ill-treatment. The threat of male guardians, as much as her love for Florindo, informs her every action. Beatrice’s worst act of self-interest—deceiving Pantalone and fraudulently taking his money—is tempered by the fact that less subversive behavior would mean giving up her freedom and abandoning her search for Florindo. Beatrice rejects Brighella’s suggestion that she be honest with Pantalone: “If I do that, I can do nothing. Pantalone will begin by treating me as if he were my guardian; then they will all worry me and say my conduct is unbecoming and all that sort of thing.” Her final plea is rather poignant and shows awareness that she must soon return to that restrictive world: “I want my liberty. Help me to it. ’Twill not last long” (12).

While the men in the play—and Beatrice in male disguise—have great freedom of movement, the women—maid and mistress alike—must either comply with social mores (which require chaperones and restrictions) or suffer recriminations. “Female presence in rooms where male visi-
tors are received is . . . strictly controlled. . . . The inn too represents an indoor setting, but with a very public significance (which accounts for the young maid Smeraldina’s reluctance to enter it).” (Günsberg, Maggie. Playing With Gender: The Comedies of Goldoni [Leeds (U.K.): Northern Universities Press, 2001], 62). So when Clarice inconsiderately orders Smeraldina to go alone to Brighella’s inn and deliver a letter to Beatrice/Federigo, she places her maid’s reputation in jeopardy. Even though Smeraldina refuses to enter the inn, she nonetheless suffers implied insults when the waiter mistakes her purpose in being there. Likewise, Beatrice’s flight and her disguise are seen as serious offenses, crimes for which “The Court of Justice . . . intends to have [her] arrested” (23).

Self-interest also rears its ugly head in the play on the level of individuals. Pantalone’s choice to offend both his friend the doctor and his daughter stems not from a desire to honor his word to Federigo, but rather from greed. He puts an end to Silvio’s petitions and insults by revealing his primary motive: “The Rasponis are worth a hundred of the Lombardis. An only son, and rich as he is—you won’t find that every day. It has got to be” (35).

Silvio too is appallingly selfish. While he does seem more attached to Clarice than to her dowry, his behavior toward her, after the engagement is dissolved, is more that of a child whose new toy has been snatched away than that of a man who loves his fiancée and cares for her well-being. When it appears that Clarice is complying with her father’s wishes, Silvio accuses her of infidelity and disbelieves her protestations of her innocence and her love for him. Worse, he stands by unmoved when she attempts suicide—if he can’t have her, why should anyone else? It is Smeraldina who rescues and defends her mistress: “Look at you, you’re a pretty little fellow, that expects ladies to disembowel themselves for you!” (38).

The most entertaining—and arguably most innocuous—example of self-interest in the play is the title character, Truffaldino. When sent to announce Beatrice/Federigo to Pantalone, he is easily distracted from his errand by a pretty maid. When Beatrice fails to feed and pay him as much as he would like, he takes on two masters at once, hoping to double his wages and his meals. “Truffaldino . . . is greedy and cheerfully muddle-headed, but the light of pure truth shines in the touching pride he shows at being able to serve two masters at the same time, although the feat involves hard word and kicks. . . . He is a sort of archetype of all those Italian waiters who even today face a packed restaurant, not as a piece of drudgery, but as a challenge to their skill” (Holme, 91).

Ultimately, love and kindness triumph over selfishness. Beatrice takes pity on Clarice and reveals her true gender; Clarice forgives Silvio rather than revenging herself by rejecting him; and Truffaldino sacrifices his double meals and wages for the love of Smeraldina. Goldoni’s denouement is unabashedly happy: The Court of Justice is conveniently forgotten, the lovers are happily mated, Pantalone and the doctor are reconciled, and Beatrice and Truffaldino are forgiven their deceptions.
Replacing Farces with Comedies
By Elaine Pilkington
From Midsummer Magazine, 2003

Stage-struck at an early age, Carlos Goldoni wrote his first comedy when he was eleven, stowed away with a group of traveling actors when he was fourteen, and was later expelled from the ecclesiastical college of Pavia for writing a dramatic satire on the college. Even though he obtained his law degree when he was twenty-five, “his face was too jovial to attract clients,” and he eventually joined a group of “strolling players,” writing “scenarios for their comedia dell’arte performances.” Once married, he returned to practicing law in Venice and then Pisa until he was lured back to the stage in 1747 at the age of forty (Frederick Davies, Goldoni: Four Comedies [New York: Penguin Books, 1968], 11 13). Throughout his career, he wrote more than 150 plays.

It was Goldoni’s ambition “to reform the decadent comedia dell’arte and replace it by an Italian theatre that would rival that of England and France” (Davies, 13). He did not, however, diminish the energy or humor of his plays’ ancestral origins. Rather than relying merely on the fixed masks, broad shtick, obscene gestures, and grotesque noises of comedia dell’arte, Goldoni incorporated more serious themes and conflicts into his plays, writing in his Memoires his hope “to replace farces with comedies” (cited by Pierre Louis Duchartre, The Italian Comedy [New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1966], 48) and regarding “comedy as a means to correct ‘faults and foibles’” (Theodore W. Hatlen, Drama Principles and Plays [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967], 40).

First written in 1743, The Servant of Two Masters followed the comedia dell’arte tradition by using its stock characters—the greedy Pantalone, the overbearing Doctor, two sets of young lovers, and a tricky servant, but unlike the improvised scenarios of comedia dell’arte, all of the dialogue was written with the exception of certain scenes in which Truffaldino, the tricky servant, improvised the action and the words. By the time it was published in 1755, Goldoni had written the complete text (Phyllis Hartnoll and Peter Found, The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], 190). The success of his play, The Clever Woman, had convinced Goldoni that plays of written dialogue would be accepted by his audiences in place of outlined improvisations. It was “the first play ever written down in entirety for a company of comedia dell’arte players” (Davies, 13).

The Servant of Two Masters is one of Carlos Goldoni’s best known and most frequently produced plays. Like Shakespearean comedy, it deals with the course of true love, disguised maidens, male inconstancy, and mistaken identity. The happy betrothal of Clarice and Silvio is spoiled by the arrival of Federigo Rasponi, the man to whom Clarice was formerly betrothed. Having been told Federigo was killed in a duel, Clarice’s father Pantalone has agreed to the marriage of his daughter to the man she truly loves, but feels a greater obligation to Federigo because he has more money than Silvio. Little does he know that the person who claims to be Federigo is an imposter, Beatrice Rasponi disguised as her brother to travel safely in pursuit of her lover Florindo (who also happens to be the murderer of her brother). Short of money, Beatrice comes to collect from Pantalone money due to her brother, and in order to maintain her identity as Federigo, must insist Pantalone honor the betrothal agreement.

Beatrice’s servant, Truffaldino, is the center of The Servant of Two Masters. Truffaldino seems a final incarnation of Harlequin, one of two comedies dell’arte Zanni born in Bergamo. Harlequin “was a simpleton from the beginning, while Brighella, the other Zanni, . . . was extremely crafty” (Duchartre, 124). Initially, Harlequin’s humor was broad, his antics primarily physical, and his movements almost acrobatic, but as he evolved from the Middle Ages to the
seventeenth century, his flashes of wit and cunning became more common, his romances and intrigues more than slapstick. By the time he is transformed into Truffaldino in the eighteenth century, he seems to be a split personality of sorts, part Harlequin and part Brighella. At Truffaldino’s first appearance, Pantalone says to Dr. Lombardi (Silvio’s father), “I think the man’s a fool,” and Dr. Lombardi replies, “I think he is playing the fool” (Carlos Goldoni, The Servant of Two Masters in The Classic Theatre Volume 1: Six Italian Plays ed. Eric Bentley [Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958], 150). Throughout the play, other characters cannot decide if Truffaldino is a fool or a knave.

It becomes apparent to the audience, however, that even though Truffaldino aspires to be a knave, he remains a fool. He may be able to originate a wonderful scheme, but he lacks the mental ingenuity necessary to complete it successfully. Because Beatrice has not returned from her errand, he accepts employment as servant to another person—Beatrice’s lover, who has just arrived in Venice. When Beatrice does return, he resigns neither position but resolves to serve them both, thinking it will give him twice the money, twice the food, and show what a wonderfully capable fellow he is. His rash action repeatedly brings him to the brink of discovery and requires increasingly more demanding physical and mental contortions to maintain the fiction. More from luck than skill, he just barely manages to pull it off, and the humor and suspense build with each narrow escape.

Goldoni’s life was, at times, as precarious as Truffaldino’s employment. His success caused a jealousy so severe in his contemporaries, particularly Carlo Gozzi, that he left Venice in 1762, “accepting an invitation from the King of France to write plays for the King’s company of Italian actors in Paris.” The actors were uncooperative and less skillful than those in Venice. Eventually, Goldoni learned French and wrote plays in that language. Three years after his arrival, he lost his sight but slowly regained his vision in his right eye.

He became a tutor for the French princesses and was eventually given a pension by the king. That pension ended when the Bastille fell in 1789. Goldoni’s friends helped him financially until his death on February 6, 1793, “eighteen days after Louis XVI, who had brought him to Paris, died on the guillotine” (Davis, 15 16).

Despite the uncertainty of his profession, Goldoni’s love for and joy in the theatre were ever present in his life. Like Goldoni’s other plays, The Servant of Two Masters is “orchestrated movement” and needs “to be seen in performance in order to realize the full enjoyment . . . [it offers]. From the moment the curtain sweeps back . . . , one feels that sense of happiness which comes too rarely in the modern theatre. For all that Goldoni offers is simple enjoyment” (Davies, 17).