

Prof. Salvatore Bancheri
Emilio Goggio Chair in Italian Studies
University of Toronto

cordially invites you to a public lecture by

Prof. Salvatore Di Maria

(University of Tennessee)

“The Growth and Demise of the Erudite Comedy”

Thursday, October 22, 2015

4:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Carr Hall 406

100 St. Joseph Street

University of Toronto

A reception to follow.

Everyone is welcome and admission is free.

Please RSVP at italian.studies@utoronto.ca

The Italian Renaissance, having discovered, revived, and adapted the theater of Greece and Rome, made it an expression of the times. With regard to comedy, early 16th-century authors imitated the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence, and went on to build a theater that reflected their own culture and esthetic preferences. Playwrights, ever eager to amaze their audiences and win their applause, did not hesitate to put to the test their stagecraft by venturing beyond the example of the Ancients. Unhinged from the time-honored rules of the genre, playwrights went on to stage all sort of stories, some of which hardly qualified as comedies, while others undermined the very structure of comedy. But if, on the one hand, authors aspired to be creative, on the other hand, they hardly modified the theatrical stock types they adopted from the Classics. Instead, they continued to cast and recast them in the same, old roles until their behavior became so standardized as to be virtually predictable. Characters such as wily servants, old men in love, old misers, pedants, braggart soldiers, eventually took a life of their own, characterized by their individual histrionics and mannerisms. As such, they were ultimately absorbed into the masked types of the *Commedia dell'Arte* where they became *zanni*, Arlecchino, Pantalone, Capitano, Dottore, etc. Thus, fractured, undermined, and repetitive, neoclassical comedy scripted its own demise. The vacuum it left was eventually filled by the increasingly popular *Commedia dell'Arte*, an art form that welcomed and exploited the histrionics, verbal virtuosity, and mannerisms of the stock types from the comic stage of the Renaissance.

Salvatore DiMaria is a professor of Italian at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He received his early education from the Italian public schools, the B.A. from the University of North Carolina, and the Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. In 1984, he co-authored a book on Ariosto, and has since written articles on various Renaissance authors, ranging from Dante and Boccaccio to Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Bandello, Cecchi, and others. In 2001, he published *The Italian Tragedy*, and in early 2013 *The Poetics of Imitation in the Italian Theater of the Renaissance*. He is presently working on the *Questione meridionale*.