Introduction

In many ways, the early Commedia dell'arte character of the Zanni, as he emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century, represents an archetypal Renaissance migrant. In the scenarios of the Commedia and the cheap pamphlets and street performances that also recounted his exploits, Zanni is usually depicted as a poor man forced to leave the rural penury and chronic hunger of his home in the mountains of the Bergamasco region and head towards a rich city of the northern Italian plain, often Venice. Travelling on foot, he encounters all the travails of the road, from bad weather to bandits. In one pamphlet, he takes refuge at a rural inn, where he enters into conversation with other travellers from Mantua, Ferrara, Greece, Venice, and elsewhere; a comedic cacophony of different accents and dialects ensues (*Disgrazie del Zane*, undated). In another, Zanni reaches the city and is dazzled by its noise, crowds, and abundance of goods (*Viaggio de Zan Padella*, [1580]). In the sophisticated metropolis, his rustic dialect marks him out immediately as a poor migrant from the rural periphery. Nonetheless, in other scenarios Zanni finds work as a porter (*facchino*) or as the servant of a rich merchant such as the Pantalone character. This employment sometimes takes him on additional journeys, perhaps across the Mediterranean on a trading voyage, serving for a time as a soldier in a travelling army, working as a sailor, or even ending up a captive slave.[1]

Zanni's migrations made him a vector of relations between the rural and urban worlds, an interlocuter in numerous multilingual, multicultural, and cross-class exchanges, as well as a flexible provider of the kinds of menial labour that were essential to the functioning of Renaissance cities and states. In this way, Zanni reflects – in comic mode – the experiences of a great many people in this period, whose moves, whether temporary or permanent, had significant consequences both for their own lives and in shaping the world around them. Moreover, Zanni also exemplifies a particular kind of cultural mobility; as Commedia actors travelled across the continent, turning this performance tradition into a pan-European phenomenon, the Zanni character also followed its own trajectories, spawning the celebrated figure of Arlecchino/Harlequin (see Figure 1).[2]

As Zanni's peregrinations remind us, too, the period circa 1450–1650 that we call the Renaissance was a highly mobile, turbulent era in Europe, when war, famine, land enclosures, and religious persecution pushed many onto the roads

[1] On Zanni's travels, see Henke (2015: 75–7); Jaffe-Berg (2016); Salzberg (2017); and for various texts and scenarios, see Pandolfi (1957).

[2] Henke (1991). On this image, of a destitute Arlecchino on the road with his children strapped into a basket on his back, see Henke (2015: 119).

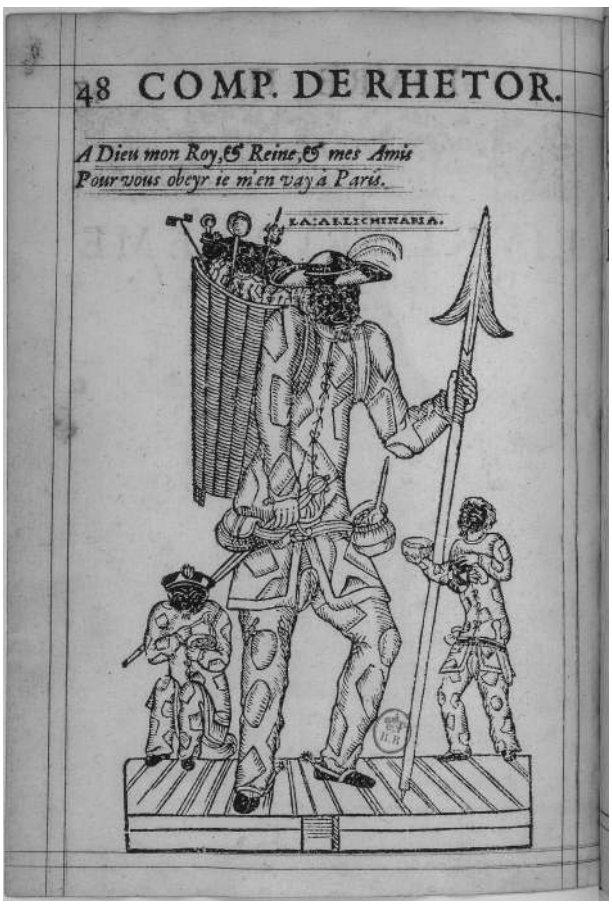

Figure 1 Arlecchino on the road. From Tristano Martinelli, *Compositions de rhetorique*, Lyon, 1601, 48. By permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

in search of a living or a safe place to settle. For numerous people, as for the Zanni, 'stability was a privilege' (Page Moch, 1992: 2), while being 'unsettled' was an increasingly common experience (Fumerton, 2006). Even if Medieval Europe was already 'a world of unceasing movement' (Verdon, 1998: 6), factors such as commercialization, state formation, and globalization spurred a significant increase in the frequency, scale, and speed of mobility from the later fifteenth century and throughout the Renaissance and Early Modern period (Lucassen & Lucassen, 2009).[3] From the sixteenth century in particular we can observe the further development of transport and hospitality infrastructures across the continent, helping to accelerate the movement of people and goods.

[3] On Medieval mobility, see also Moatti (2004); Preiser-Kapeller, Reinfandt and Stouraitis (2020).

While pilgrimage remained a popular practice throughout this period for both women and men, new forms of travel for pleasure, curiosity, or education also became more and more common (Maczak, 1995; Roche, 2003). At the same time, the expansion of European states overseas opened up new avenues for settlers, soldiers, merchants, bureaucrats, and missionaries to move across the globe, as 'oceans became bridges rather than barriers to continents' (Parker, 2010: 86), while also fuelling the global traffic in slaves. Meanwhile, in Europe itself, new systems and technologies, from the postal service to the printing press, sped up the transmission of information, changing perceptions of distance and time (Behringer, 2006; Scott, 2015).

The ever-greater movement of people and goods stimulated the kinds of commercial, political, religious, and artistic encounters and exchanges that we have come to associate with the Renaissance period. Increasingly fast and multi-directional movement fostered prosperity, growth, and innovation. At the same time, however, accelerating mobility prompted the establishment of new structures of control and surveillance, expressing the 'desire to establish boundaries, to demarcate and dominate' (Martin & Bleichmar, 2016: 618). Mobility connected and enabled but it also disrupted and threatened established systems, identities, and beliefs (Young Kim, 2014: 7). States, regions, and cities worked hard to make the most of the opportunities afforded by allowing people and commodities to move to and through them, but they simultaneously strove to limit, block, or at least monitor some of these flows. They established mechanisms – some still in use today – to contain the spread of diseases, the diffusion of 'dangerous' ideas, and the arrival of unwanted migrants who might strain local resources. The mobile poor, along with other itinerant groups such as gypsies, were increasingly criminalized and persecuted (Hitchcock, 2020). The intersection and creative tension between these various crosscurrents fundamentally shaped the lives, itineraries, and experiences of mobile individuals in this period. They also left lasting traces on many other aspects of Renaissance life: on settled communities, on urban and rural landscapes, and on cultural formations.

Unravelling this continuous tension between mobility and efforts to stop or slow movement offers a new way to think about and understand the dynamism, creativity, and conflict of the Renaissance period. In this, we can take inspiration from recent research in the social sciences and humanities which provides fresh models for approaching the study of mobility, under the rubric of the 'mobilities paradigm'.[4] This body of work insists on an understanding of movement as an integral part of human societies: as the norm rather than the exception. It draws

[4] For useful overviews, see Urry (2007); Adey et al. (2014).

our attention to practices of mobility and to their impact on people, politics, culture, and the environment. It also encourages conversations between disparate branches of scholarship – on transport, communication, travel, or migration, for example (Pooley, 2017). It thereby makes more apparent the intersecting systems and structures of mobility that underpinned even the most apparently disconnected places and settled lives.

Certain kinds of mobility have been central to the study of this period at least since the 1990s. Around this time, scholars began to emphasize a vision of the Renaissance as 'a remarkably international, fluid, and mobile phenomenon' (Brotton, 2002: 19) as a result of escalating transfers of people, styles, techniques, texts, and especially luxury goods between Europe and the wider world.[5] More recent research has probed the significance of Renaissance mobility in new ways, drawing on spatial, material, and sensorial approaches to help us understand what it meant to move at this time and what impact that movement had, as well as shedding light on the experiences of more ordinary migrants and those who were forced to move against their will because of poverty, persecution, or slavery. Recent overviews of Renaissance culture have given more space to the mobility of ideas and objects (manuscripts and antiquities, for example) as well as paying attention to how physical mobility promoted interactions between centres and peripheries and between learned and uneducated social spheres (e.g. Ruggiero, 2015; Cox, 2016). Various projects and publications have examined in detail the translation and 'migration' of texts across Europe as well as the movement of art objects and manufactured goods that underpinned the spread of Renaissance culture (Helmstutler Di Dio, 2015; Martin & Bleichmar, 2016; Fraser, 2020). Important work has highlighted the cultural influence of highly mobile groups such as artists (Young Kim, 2014), religious refugees (Terpstra, 2015), itinerant performers (Degl'Innocenti & Rospocher, 2019a), and exiled intellectuals (Burke, 2017), as well as the social, political, and economic impact of immigration to Europe's growing cities, especially of artisans and other workers (Luu, 2005; De Munck & Winter, 2012). The long-flourishing field of research on travel writing has begun to expand to examine a wider range of travellers and texts (Holmberg, 2019; Gelléri & Willie, 2021).

Still under-examined are what we might call the 'quotidian mechanics' of moving around at this time: the material and physical experiences as well as the structures, technologies, and practices that facilitated, or impeded, mobility, whether on a local or a global scale (Nelles & Salzberg, 2023). As Stephen Greenblatt stressed, before examining the cultural transfers that it engenders,

[5] For an overview of this scholarship, see Trivellato (2010).

mobility needs first to be studied in a highly literal sense and these practical aspects seen as 'indispensable keys to understanding the fate of cultures' (2010: 250). In other words, to better understand the impact of mobility and what it meant to people at the time, we need to know more about what it felt like and how it *worked* (or did not), in a very concrete sense.

Applying a 'mobilities lens' to the Renaissance implies a move away from a more fixed perspective focused on the achievements of major capitals or leading individuals. Instead, it suggests that we follow some of the wanderers on their travels, while also casting an eye back to how the centre looks from a more peripheral, more mobile point of view. It means resting our gaze on liminal, in-between moments in people's lives (examining journeys, not just destinations) and slowing down transfers to examine their constituent parts. This approach shows how even what previously seemed fixed and solid was more contingent and malleable than we might once have thought, shaped by the continuous movement that flowed around, under, or through it.

Closer examination of practices and experiences of mobility reminds us that 'while movement was common' in this period, 'it often proved difficult, dangerous, laborious, and slow – aspects that can be easily overlooked in our instantaneous digital age' (Martin & Bleichmar, 2016: 608). Even as it became easier and faster to move across long distances in the Renaissance, that movement was never smooth or 'frictionless'. Rather, it was interrupted by numerous obstacles and delays: from the mundane (waiting for documents to be checked or for a ship to depart) to the dramatic (a violent storm, an outbreak of plague, or an armed conflict). Travel, even by the fastest methods available, took time, and weather or other adversities could make it take even longer. And yet, this friction could also be a creative force, provoking encounters and confrontations.

As our own times make plain, we need to be careful not to promote a triumphalist narrative about increasing mobility and global interconnectedness. Looking beyond the border crossers and go-betweens, we also must seek to understand the intertwined phenomenon of rootedness and how accelerating mobility spurred the assertion of identities and differences (Greenblatt, 2010: 252; Ghobrial, 2019). Attentive to this, studying mobility can in fact help us to better understand local identities and communities which were often defined in relation to extraneous or mobile 'others'. As recent scholarship has stressed, even those who seemingly 'stayed put' in their native place might still be highly mobile on a small scale (Faroqhi, 2014), while some of the most active cross-cultural brokers led relatively sedentary lives (Raj, 2016). We can see this inextricable interweaving of mobility and immobility evidenced also in Renaissance cities, whose solid forms were moulded by the 'micro-mobilities' of people and things – movements which can be examined to reveal

dynamics of power, gender difference, belonging, or exclusion (De Vivo, 2016; Gonzalez Martin, Salzberg & Zenobi, 2021; Nevola, 2021). Even rural areas which were seemingly more static and socially homogeneous than the era's multi-ethnic urban centres could be indelibly marked by the passage of people, carts, or boats, their societies and cultures shaped by their role as border lands or transit zones (Scholz, 2020).

This Element seeks to illuminate the material and social mechanisms that enacted mobility in the Renaissance. Spurred by recent 'mobilities' studies, it looks at different kinds of mobility and of mobile people alongside each other. This is done with the conviction that the treatment and experiences of various mobile groups were interconnected and intertwined – that motives for moving can be hard to discern or disentangle. For instance, peasants travelling in and out of cities to sell their produce at the market also carried news and gossip between rural and urban worlds (Hewlett, 2016); European merchants operating in the East also went on pilgrimage to the holy sites of Christianity, while pilgrims both Christian and Muslim often engaged in some trading or shopping on the side (Bianchi & Howard, 2003; Faroqhi, 2014); humanist scholars travelled not just to teach or study, to visit libraries or cultural sites, but also to contract with printers for the publication of their works and to escape war, persecution, or plague (Stagl, 2002; Burke, 2017).

While it can be hard to separate distinct types of mobility or migration, it is nonetheless vital to emphasize that experiences of moving differed greatly depending on factors such as age, sex, race, class, and religion.[6] Likely even more meaningful were the distinctions between those who chose to move, those who fled (refugees, persecuted religious minorities), and those who were forcibly moved or removed (vagrants, slaves, Indigenous peoples). Moving, of course, is a radically different experience depending on whether one intends to or can return home or not; goes alone or with familiar companions; is welcomed or shunned in new places; and has the means to move comfortably or not. And still, many travellers might share important things in common: for example, interacting with the same regimes of identification, mixing in the same spaces of hospitality or transport, or needing to negotiate linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is thus helpful to consider some of these common structures and challenges, even while remaining aware of the critical differences with which people faced or overcame them.

This Element aims to give a sense of the many reasons for moving in this period and the role that mobility played in the daily lives of many people. It also

[6] For an important recent discussion of connections between race and mobility in this period, see Das et al. (2021).

hopes to offer new insight into the social and cultural life of the era, by illuminating some of the mechanisms that facilitated and shaped the trajectories of renowned figures as well as 'ordinary' people and brought them into contact with each other. Even as it concentrates on people in motion – and, to a lesser extent, on the movement of things – by doing so it hopes to unpack some of the 'invisible baggage' that travelled along with them: ideas, styles, knowledge, skills. While the principal zone of interest is continental Europe and Britain, the Element also casts an eye towards the escalating connections with the wider world, with the hope of understanding how European mobility in this period fitted into broader, global currents.

But how can we follow mobile people, who slip across borders and jurisdictions? Archival sources tend to be written from the settled point of view of those in power, and thus much scholarship has naturally adopted this perspective. However, documents can also be read to illuminate the people coming and going out of a particular territory, especially as increasing efforts to control mobility in this period left more and more documentary traces of them (Rollison, 1999). Travel diaries and guidebooks have been used to explore the experiences and mentalities of pilgrims and proto-tourists, even as these necessarily represent a privileged upper stratum of Renaissance society: people generally literate and wealthy enough to travel out of choice rather than necessity. But such sources can also be mined for information about others who accompanied or served the diary writers and guidebook users or who shared space with them in inns, boats, or on the road (Verhoeven, 2019). While it is extremely difficult to access the subjective experience of most individuals who moved in this period (highly mobile groups such as domestic servants, artisans, sailors, soldiers, labourers, and many other, often illiterate, migrants), we can shed some light on their movements through a variety of sources, from images to architecture to literature. And again, while evidence privileges the experiences of those who chose to move, recent work shows that it is possible to know something of the numerous involuntary migrants of this period, such as slaves, deportees, and refugees (McKee, 2008; Terpstra, 2015; Hitchcock, 2016; Barker, 2019). Mobile people also sometimes left traces on the rural and urban landscapes through which they passed, which can provide evidence of their itineraries and experiences: from the family crests of nobles affixed to the interiors of inns in which they stayed (Meer, 2021) to the graffiti of merchants and sailors on the walls of lazzaretti where they were forced to spend time in quarantine (Malagnini, 2017).

The Element is divided into three sections. The first, 'Infrastructures', explores the physical sites and social processes that enabled, obstructed, or channelled the movement of people in the Renaissance. Exploring spaces of

transport (roads and water systems) and hospitality (inns, hostels, lodging houses), as well as sites of control (gates, customs points, quarantine stations), it suggests how the development of mobility infrastructure in the period shaped both urban and rural landscapes and provided focal points of interaction between people on the move and more settled communities. As contemporary mobilities scholars have argued, such infrastructures worked to '"channel" and select, offering privileged access for some and barriers for others, leading to a multiplication of borders and creating differential inclusion' (Meeus, Van Heur & Arnaut, 2019: 23). At the same time, in the Renaissance even more so than today, these infrastructures were not all planned, imposed, and regulated from above by powerful state, city, or regional authorities. In many cases, they were created and maintained by small communities and individual operators and were actively engaged with by migrants and travellers themselves.

The second section, 'Materialities', considers the physical, sensorial experience of moving bodies across distances, as well as the things that people carried with or on them, from clothes and luggage to guidebooks and travel documents. It argues that although there was a great range of levels of comfort or hardship and many kinds of reception offered to people on the move in the Renaissance (spanning from warm welcome to hostile rejection), there were similarly some common elements in the experience of mobility. It also considers how even temporary changes to one's external appearance, habits, and customs while travelling could leave more enduring marks on a person's body and identity.

The final section, 'Agents of Exchange', explores the work of some vital – but often neglected – brokers of mobility and cultural exchange, such as pedlars, itinerant performers, interpreters, innkeepers, and postmasters. These range from highly mobile to more sedentary figures who nonetheless operated as crucial mediators, supporting the movements of others as well as brokering interactions between people on the move and settled communities. While their personal experiences of migration and mobility allowed many of these individuals to act as effective enablers of a great array of cultural, economic, and social exchanges, it could also make them subject to suspicion and resentment. This in turn underlines the ambivalence and tension surrounding physical mobility in the Renaissance, as a practice that could lead to immensely profitable and creative outcomes but also engender new challenges and conflicts.

1 Infrastructures

Like many Renaissance artists, mobility was essential to the life and career of the Florentine goldsmith and sculptor Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71). Although more famous for its dramatic episodes of violence and sex, Cellini's celebrated

autobiography also relates his numerous peregrinations around the Italian states and as far as France: to train, to work, to flee the law or his enemies, and sometimes just for pleasure or curiosity (Cellini, 1995). Cellini recounts, for example, how at the age of nineteen he and a woodcarver named Tasso decided on a whim to leave Florence for Rome. The two immediately set out walking until, near Siena, Tasso complained of sore feet and begged Cellini for the money he needed to return home. The artist persuaded his friend to carry on and they did, laughing and singing as they walked.

Once he had established himself as a leading artist, Cellini was able to travel in greater style, returning to Florence with 'plenty of money, a fellow to wait on me, and a good horse' (Cellini, 1995: 73). But even then, he still rubbed shoulders with a range of other mobile people en route, especially in spaces such as rural inns and ferry stations. For instance, Cellini mentions several encounters with couriers, the cavalrymen of the expanding postal service and thus an increasingly ubiquitous presence on Renaissance roads. One courier tried to borrow money from the artist at a mountain inn before they travelled on together towards Lyon; another Cellini met on the way to Bologna and again they continued on in company to Ferrara and then to Venice by boat. Cellini's *Vita* reminds us too how all travellers could face risks and dangers on the road, as when he describes in dramatic detail how two horses in his party slipped off a precipitous mountain path as they made their way through the Alps on the way to France.[7]

The *Vita* is just one of many sources offering precious details about the practical aspects of moving in the Renaissance, as well as the social and professional interactions that mobility entailed. Such testimonies also reveal how a broad constellation of more or less permanent and more or less official sites – roads, bridges, quays, inns, hostels, lodging houses, border checkpoints, customs houses, post and quarantine stations – sustained, directed, and sometimes impeded movement in this period. Using such evidence to shine a light onto the spaces and systems which underpinned mobility helps us to better understand the experience of being on the move and the factors that moulded and constrained it. It also reminds us of the imprint that seemingly ephemeral flows of people and things left on urban and rural landscapes and built environments.

Casting a close eye on some of the spaces in which people passed the time moving (or waiting to move) is a crucial step towards unpicking the practice and significance of Renaissance mobility. This approach can tell us about the

[7] For more on the impact of mobility on the style of Renaissance artists such as Cellini, see Young Kim (2014). On couriers, see Section 3.