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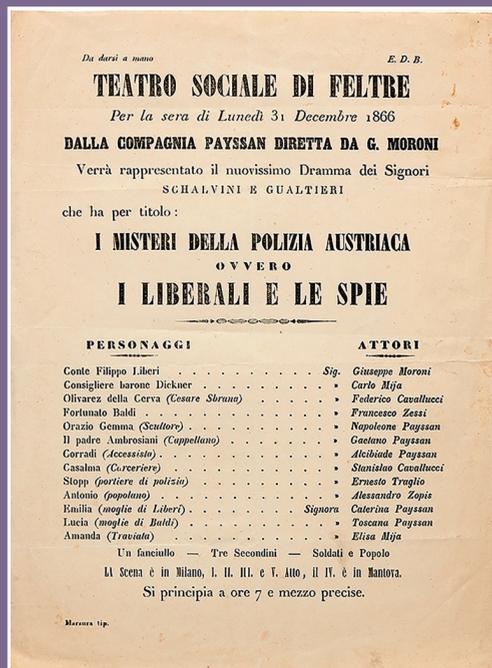
Interdisziplinäre Studien zur historischen Theaterkultur

3

Giulia Brunello – Annette Kappeler (Eds.)

Places of Cohesion and Debate

Socio-Political Roles of Provincial Theatres
during the Nineteenth Century



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edited by
Giulia Brunello and Annette Kappeler

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Helena Langewitz, Jan Lazardzig, Stephanie Schroedter
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With editorial assistance from
Daniel Allenbach,
Hochschule der Künste Bern,
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Foreword

This volume is based on the results of a 2023 conference organised by the Bern Academy of the Arts HKB, namely by its research Institute Interpretation and the group members of the project “Italian Provincial Theatre and the Risorgimento”, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. The project (2020–2024) focused on provincial theatres in what is today Northern Italy during the nineteenth century and had three research focuses: the administration of these theatres, their scenic design, and their repertoire.

This book is the third in a series of project-related publications, the first centring on the activity of provincial theatres on the Italian peninsula and in the Habsburg Empire during the nineteenth century and the second focusing on the architecture and scenic design of European provincial theatres. The third publication unites contributions of international scholars on the provincial theatres as places of social cohesion and socio-political debate, mainly in Europe but also in India.

We are aware that the following contributions on theatre performances in European regions and in India cannot give a comprehensive image of provincial theatres’ personnel and programming. Still, we believe that it is essential to study a variety of theatre cultures outside of metropolises in order to explore the relationship between their global connectedness and their local rootedness. The following contributions are therefore a few starting points in this direction.

Our special thanks go to Daniel Allenbach and Holger Schumacher, who have made this publication possible, to Dalyn Cook for her very profound English proofreading and last but not least to the SNSF, funding this publication.

Giulia Brunello, Annette Kappeler

I. Methods and state of research

Provincial Theatres as Places of Social Cohesion and Socio-Political Debate

Giulia Brunello / Annette Kappeler

Provincial theatres have long escaped the attention of researchers. Our current image of nineteenth-century theatres is shaped by historical evidence related to playhouses in European metropolises with vast auditoriums, large stages and big staffs, playing a highly canonised repertoire and accessible only to a tiny elite. Theatre on a smaller scale – especially when pieces are only orally transmitted – is still all too often considered not worth studying.¹ The vast majority of historical theatre practices is still unknown to scholars of theatre studies.²

According to Robinson, “neglected local histories” of theatres should be considered in order to broaden our perspective of theatre forms and to understand how different performing cultures were and still are interconnected.³ The exploration of local theatre cultures, according to Robinson, is a first step towards a perspective on theatre cultures that combines the particularities of local practices with a focus on their global interconnections.

In putting provincial theatres and their significance for local communities at the heart of our research, we try to avoid advancing an idea of interconnectedness that imposes a ‘Western’ perspective on theatre practices and blurs differences between local cultures.⁴ The close study of provincial-theatre forms and their importance for local populations must be the starting point for the study of interconnections, because only in taking a closer look at regional forms of theatre, the interdependence of different forms can be acknowledged. We also try to avoid what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “asymmetric ignorance” – the idea that historians of European theatre often feel no need to refer to other parts of the world while historians from the global south are thought ignorant if they do not refer to European research.⁵ In this volume, we extend our field of research beyond Europe

This Introduction is a collective effort. The writing of the text was divided as follows: Annette Kappeler primarily contributed to the chapters “State of research” and “Topical subjects in provincial theatres”, while Giulia Brunello especially focused on “The importance of provincial theatre” and “The characteristics of provincial theatre”.

¹ Khalid Amine, *Decolonizing Theatre History in the Arab World (The Case of the Maghreb)*, in *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography*, ed. by Claire Cochrane/Jo Robinson, London/New York 2020, pp. 236–246, here p. 240.

² See e.g. Claire Cochrane/Jo Robinson, Introduction, in *The Methuen Drama Handbook*, ed. by Claire Cochrane/Jo Robinson, London/New York 2020, pp. 1–20, here p. 2.

³ Jo Robinson, *Becoming More Provincial? The Global and the Local in Theatre History*, in *New Theatre Quarterly* 23/3, 2007, pp. 229–240, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0266464X07000139>, here p. 229.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2009, p. 28. See also Cochrane/Robinson, Introduction, p. 11.

and also consider theatre practices in the Indian region of Kerala. As this volume covers theatre practices in Europe (particularly Italy) and India, this introduction is also primarily dedicated to these regions of the world.

Our focus on provincial theatres does not mean that we regard local theatre practices as isolated phenomena. On the contrary, theatre cultures were globally connected during the nineteenth century. Theatre traditions of various regions became known in far distant places and were often incorporated into local practices.⁶ For example, provincial theatres in colonised regions received and appropriated European theatre forms from metropolises in a critical manner, and theatre traditions of colonised areas were influential for a multitude of European traditions.⁷ That does not mean that we can speak of symmetric relationships in this context; all too often, the colonisers imposed forms of theatre-making onto a local population.⁸ The idea of global interconnection means that provincial theatre cultures were often aware of international developments, but it does not in any way erase differences between local cultures or diminish their importance for provincial communities or their experience of colonialist violence.⁹

The provincial theatres studied in this volume were – even more than major venues – a socio-cultural space where the population of a region could meet and exchange ideas, where information was sought, and public opinion formed. The regional population often participated in on- and offstage activities of ‘their’ theatre, and they debated its performances. Nineteenth-century provincial theatres shaped the ideas and social networks of big parts of the population, and performances in provincial theatres reflected ongoing debates and developments. We are thus especially interested in the “conditions of theatre-making” in local communities, and we understand the performances we study as forms of socialising that are “reflective of wider social conditions”.¹⁰ This volume is the third and last in a series edited by the project group working on “Italian Provincial Theatre and the Risorgimento”, opening with *Feltre’s Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century* (2023) and continuing with *Architecture et scénographie dans les théâtres mineurs 1750–1850* (2025).

⁶ David Mason/Syed Jamil Ahmed/Carol C. Davis/Kanchuka Dharmasiri, Modern Theatre in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka, in *Routledge Handbook of Asian Theatre*, ed. by Siyuan Liu, London 2016, pp. 268–289, here p. 275.

⁷ Ananda Lal, Interculturalism, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, pp. 164–167, here p. 164; Julia Prest, *Public Theatre and the Enslaved People of Colonial Saint-Domingue*, Cham 2023, pp. 64ff.

⁸ Amine, Decolonizing Theatre History in the Arab World, p. 239.

⁹ Robinson, Becoming More Provincial?, p. 231.

¹⁰ Cochrane/Robinson, Introduction, p. 12.

State of research

Studies on nineteenth-century theatre have long concentrated on major venues in metropolitan areas whilst largely overlooking small theatres in provincial towns, with some notable exceptions. We do not pretend to give an exhaustive list of studies on provincial theatres here; rather, we bring a few examples of exceptional publications to the attention of the reader.

The lack of research on provincial theatres is even more conspicuous for regions outside of Europe where theatre studies are sometimes still in their infancy. For the Indian subcontinent, for example, research tools such as bibliographies or periodical indexes are often not available even for well-known historical theatre cultures. Thus, major undertakings in this field are all the more compelling, such as the *Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, Ananda Lal's *Companion to Theatres of India*, which includes both rural and urban forms of Indian theatre, or David Kerr's *African Popular Theatre*, which gives an impressive amount of information about provincial theatre practices.¹¹ The annotated bibliography in the *Methuen Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography* is of great help for research on theatre cultures in manifold regions.¹²

For French-speaking regions, Max Fuchs's work set milestones for the study of the circuits of theatre companies that performed in the provinces as well as the tastes of small-town audiences.¹³ Romuald Féret's research on provincial theatre focuses on its socio-political role.¹⁴ Christine Carrère-Saucède's publications on provincial theatres give an impressive overview of theatre halls, theatre administration and programming.¹⁵ John McCormick's *Popular Theatres of Nineteenth Century France* studies popular theatres, including those in provincial towns, and focuses on the social and economic context of their performances as well as spectacular performance forms such as acrobatics.¹⁶ Michael R. Booth's *Theatre in the Victorian Age* includes a chapter on provincial theatres and their forms of organisation.¹⁷ Sophie Horrocks is currently researching the working practices of travelling opera and theatre performers across provincial France in the period from 1824 to 1864.¹⁸

¹¹ *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004; *Theatres of India. A Concise Companion*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2009; David Kerr, *African Popular Theatre from Pre-Colonial Times to the Present Day*, London 1995.

¹² Cochrane/Robinson, Introduction, p. 12.

¹³ Max Fuchs, *La vie théâtrale en province au XVIIIe siècle. Personnel et répertoire*, Paris 1986.

¹⁴ See, for example, Romuald Féret, *Le théâtre de province au XIXe siècle. Entre révolutions et conservatisme*, in *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 367, 2012, pp. 119–143.

¹⁵ See Christine Carrère-Saucède, *Recensement des salles de spectacle et Bibliographie de la vie théâtrale en province au XIXe siècle*, see <https://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/ceredi/689.html> (last consulted 30 July 2025).

¹⁶ John McCormick, *Popular Theatres of Nineteenth Century France*, London/New York 2003.

¹⁷ Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, Cambridge 1991, pp. 16–18.

¹⁸ See Sophie Horrocks, *Performing for the Provinces. Touring Theatre Troupes and the French Political Imaginary, 1824–64*, PhD thesis, Durham University, 2023, and her contribution in this volume, pp. 47–59.

For German-speaking regions, Katharina Wessely's publications are worth mentioning. They concentrate on theatres in the Habsburg Empire and investigate questions of national identity.¹⁹ Jiří Kopecký and Lenka Křupková's *Provincial Theater and Its Opera (1770–1920)* focuses on the German-language theatre in nineteenth-century Olomouc and traces the social history of the theatre as a cultural institution for its citizens.²⁰

For the British Empire, Kathleen Barker's 1982 thesis about the performing arts in several provincial towns is still an impressive example of an in-depth study of regional theatre cultures.²¹ There are also several publications about single provincial theatres worth mentioning, such as Douglas A. Reid's "Popular Theatre in Victorian Birmingham", which studies provincial audiences;²² Katherine Newey's "Early Nineteenth-Century Theatre in Manchester";²³ and the study of the Theatre Royal in Nottingham, realised within a citizen-science project.²⁴ Frederick Burwick's volume on provincial theatres during the Industrial Revolution includes theatres in labour-class environments in provincial areas,²⁵ and Jill A. Sullivan's *The Politics of the Pantomime* gives an overview about the regional context of pantomime productions in several provincial towns and their often topical themes.²⁶

Regarding Italy, several publications give an overview of provincial theatres for various regions, providing information not only about their history, organisation, repertoire, and scenic material that is still preserved but also about the state of sources available for study. Such works can be found especially for the regions of Veneto, Tuscany, and Emilia Romagna.²⁷ Information about Italian provincial theatres and their organisation can also be gleaned from outstanding studies that

¹⁹ Katharina Wessely, Die deutschsprachigen Provinztheater Böhmens und Mährens zwischen lokaler, regionaler und nationaler Identität, in *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 59/2, 2010, pp. 208–226.

²⁰ Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, *Provincial Theater and Its Opera (1770–1920)*, Olomouc 2015.

²¹ Kathleen Barker, *The Performing Arts in Five Provincial Towns 1840–1870*, PhD thesis, Leicester, 1982.

²² Douglas A. Reid, Popular Theatre in Victorian Birmingham, in *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama. Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television 1800–1976*, ed. by David Bradby/Louis James/Bernard Sharatt, Cambridge 1980, pp. 65–90.

²³ Katherine Newey, Early Nineteenth-Century Theatre in Manchester, in *Manchester Regional History Review* 17/2, 2006, pp. 1–19.

²⁴ Jo Robinson/Laura Carletti, Our Theatre Royal Nottingham. Co-Creation and Co-Curation of a Digital Performance Collection with Citizen Scholars, in *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 15/2, 2019, pp. 128–148.

²⁵ Frederick Burwick, *British Drama of the Industrial Revolution*, Cambridge 2015.

²⁶ Jill A. Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime. Regional Identity in the Theatre 1860–1900*, Hertfordshire 2011.

²⁷ For the Veneto region see Franco Mancini/Maria Teresa Muraro/Elena Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, 4 vol., Venezia 1985–1994; for Tuscany see Elvira Garbero Zorzi, *I teatri storici della Toscana. Censimento documentario e architettonico*, Firenze 1990; for Emilia Romagna see Simonetta Bondoni, *Teatri storici in Emilia Romagna*, Casalecchio di Reno 1982.

analyse the life of itinerant troupes, especially through artists' memories²⁸ or the activities of theatrical agents and impresarios.²⁹

The importance of provincial theatre

In-depth studies of provincial theatres that consider their personnel, their repertoire and its socio-political significance are still rare. A lack of research on provincial theatres persists despite the fact that few people lived in large metropolitan areas during the nineteenth century, and even fewer could afford going to the theatre in these metropolitan areas. The share of the world urban population doubled from 6.6 percent in 1800 to still only 12 percent in 1900. In many areas of the world, urbanisation was mostly a phenomenon of the twentieth century. In Europe, the urban population went from 10 percent in the beginning of the century to 30 percent in 1900.³⁰ In 1870, Europe was still a predominantly rural society, with three fifths of the population living in the countryside. But cities began to play a role in attracting a growing mass of agricultural workers. Those who migrated to the cities were often people who could no longer make a living in the countryside and were looking for employment in the growing industrial centres.³¹ These migrants, though, were not typically the ones going to the opera in cities such as Milan. The city theatres, which research has focused on for so long, were only accessible for a small part of the population.

The vast majority of the world population lived in smaller towns or in the countryside during the nineteenth century. And those who could afford it went to theatres in local centres, some of which could be quite small, such as a barn on a local farm that doubled as a performance venue.³² Most theatre workers and -goers attended performances in small theatres with approximately 100–600 seats, not in big halls in major metropolitan areas. The reality of theatre events, for many people, was one of small scale: of small halls, often built for other purposes and adapted to the needs of a theatre performance, or of outdoor scenes; of amateur players instead of actors who made a living out of their performances; of a handful

²⁸ Davide Seragnoli, *Carlo Ritorni e lo spettacolo a Reggio Emilia nell'Ottocento*, Bologna 1987; Sandra Pietrini, *Fuori scena. Il Teatro dietro le quinte nell'Ottocento*, Roma 2004; Antonio Colomberti, *Memorie di un artista drammatico*, a cura di Alberto Bentoglio, Roma 2004.

²⁹ Livia Cavaglieri, *Tra arte e mercato. Agenti e agenzie teatrali nel XIX secolo*, Roma 2006.

³⁰ Julia Zinkina/Ilya Ilyin/Andrey Korotayev, The Nineteenth-Century Urbanization Transition in the First World, in *Global Evolution, Historical Globalistics and Globalization Studies*, ed. by Leonid E. Grinin/Ilya V. Ilyin/Peter Herrmann/Andrey V. Korotayev, Volgograd 2017 (*Globalistics and Globalization Studies*, Vol. 6), pp. 164–172, here pp. 165f.

³¹ Massimo Livi Bacci, *La trasformazione demografica delle società europee*, Torino 1977, pp. 31–53; Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848–1875*, New York 1975, pp. 228–269 (chapters XI and XII).

³² Marco Fincardi, Dal palchetto alla stalla, in *L'Almanacco* 5, 1986/87, pp. 45–67; Roberto Leydi, The Dissemination and Popularization of Opera, in *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth. Part II: Systems*, ed. by Lorenzo Bianconi/Giorgio Pestelli, Chicago/London 1988, pp. 287–376.

of musicians, singers, actors, or dancers rather than big orchestras or ensembles; and one of very limited financial means. For example, the theatre of Olomouc had a stable orchestra, which could have as few as twenty-two players for opera productions.³³ Despite these limitations, the quality of performances and the beauty of decorations – on scene and in the auditorium – was of real concern to many of the local communities we have studied.³⁴

A lack of research on nineteenth-century provincial theatre is also persisting despite the importance of local theatres as socio-cultural venues and vital places of socio-political debate in a time of rapid political and social change. During the nineteenth century, European empires such as the Habsburg or Napoleonic empire controlled vast, multilingual territories but did not allow much liberty of assembly or expression. Printed documents were censored, and assemblies in public places were mostly forbidden.³⁵ Locals were often allowed to gather in provincial theatres, but theatres were also seen as spaces easily surveilled.³⁶ In nineteenth-century India, for example, colonial authorities realised quickly that the public stage could be a place of rebellion. From 1876 on, the *Dramatic Performance Act* enabled authorities to prohibit plays that were seen as dangerous for the public order. Dramatic performances had to receive a licence, and scripts had to be deposited in advance. Thus, as was similarly done on the Italian peninsula, Indian authors set stories of subjugation, rebellion, and nationalism in

³³ Kopecký/Křupková, *Provincial Theater and Its Opera*, p. 34. In colonial regions such as today's Haiti, the opera orchestra often had even fewer members, e. g. in Port-au-Prince only eleven regular musicians. See Prest, *Public Theatre and the Enslaved People*, p. 156.

³⁴ This is confirmed by the statutes of the theatre societies of Cittadella, Castelfranco, Belluno, and Feltre and by documentation attesting to the circuits of renowned artists who worked at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice and were called by the towns to embellish their theatre. To give but a few examples, Giuseppe Bertoja released the sets in Castelfranco Veneto in 1858, see Mancini/Muraro/Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, Vol. 4: *Treviso e la marca Trivigiana*, p. 152; Francesco Bagnara painted stock scenery for Feltre's Teatro Sociale in 1825, see PBF, *Fondo Storico*, G VI 90 bis, Affiche n. 10, *Il ritorno di Pietro il Grande Czar di tutte le Russie in Mosca*, 13 September 1825; Francesco Bagnara worked for Belluno's Teatro Sociale in 1835, see Francesco Bagnara, *Teatro di Belluno. Per Dotte*, drawing and watercolour, Ca' Rezzonico – Museo del Settecento Veneziano, Venezia (inv. Classe III 5987). He also worked in Cittadella in 1831 and 1832, see Archivio Storico comunale di Cittadella (AsCC), *Serie Teatro Sociale*, b. 1 bis, *Corrispondenza varia dal 1831 al 1837*. Tranquillo Orsi painted the new curtain in Feltre in 1843, see Maria Ida Biggi, Tranquillo Orsi, in *Venezia arti* 6, 1997, pp. 153–158, here p. 158.

³⁵ Nicola Mangini, Sulla politica teatrale dell'Austria nel Lombardo-Veneto, in Nicola Magnini, *Drammaturgia e spettacolo tra Settecento e Ottocento. Studi e ricerche*, Padova 1979, pp. 67–73; Maria Iolanda Palazzolo, *I libri, il trono, l'altare. La censura nell'Italia della Restaurazione*, Milano 2003. About the censorship of comic operas see Francesco Izzo, *Laughter between Two Revolutions. Opera Buffa in Italy, 1831–1848*, Rochester 2013; for the period after the unification of Italy see Maria Teresa Morelli, *L'unità d'Italia nel teatro. Istituzioni politiche, identità nazionale e questione sociale*, Roma 2012, pp. 201–220; about censorship questions in Europe see Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the Arts and the Press in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, New York 1989.

³⁶ Fabian A. Stallknecht, *Dramenmodell und ideologische Entwicklung der italienischen Oper im frühen Ottocento*, Stuttgart 2001, p. 139.

mythologically or historically distant realms in order to be able to perform their pieces.³⁷

Literacy rates were still low in Europe and India during the nineteenth century; in some places eighty percent of the population could neither read nor write, with huge differences among periods, geographical areas, gender, age, and social class.³⁸ The Indian writer of social drama Gurazada Venkata Appa Rao (1862–1915) felt that “until reading habits prevail among the masses, one must look only to the stage” for trying to inform local populations on topics of social reform.³⁹ Theatre performances were, in many places, one of the only ways for a local population to entertain themselves, to gather, to socialise, to keep informed, to exchange views on society, and to discuss ways of improving living conditions or political systems.

In some geographical areas such as the Italian peninsula, provincial theatres could also be one of the ways in which a municipal competition, typical for this period, was played out. Each provincial theatre had a symbolic function for its town and gave it a certain reputation, especially in relation to neighbouring ones. Towns tried to outdo their neighbours through building a beautiful theatre and planning impressive programming. Performances reflected the ‘good taste’ of the administrators and enhanced the good name of the town. Driven by a love of their artistic and cultural heritage and a desire to enhance and promote it, administrators of local theatres devoted energy and space to building or renovating civic theatres and to planning an adequate program.⁴⁰ This aspect is particularly important in what is today Northern Italy, if we consider that in pre-unified Italy, and especially in the Lombardo-Veneto region, municipal pride and local patriotism permeated – and built – Italian nationalism. Monza, for example, a small town very close to the much bigger and more important city of Milan, promoted a strong local pride and supported its theatrical life.⁴¹ When the Lombardo-Veneto was annexed to Italy between 1859 and 1866, a new municipal identity was built

³⁷ Ananda Lal, Dramatic Performance Act, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, pp. 110–112, here p. 111. Concerning Italian opera, see e.g. Philip Gossett/Daniela Macchione, Le “Edizioni distrutte” e il significato dei cori operistici nel Risorgimento, in *Il Saggiatore musicale* 12/2, 2005, pp. 339–387, here pp. 355–357; Jeremy Commons, Donizetti e la censura napoletana, in *Atti del primo convegno di studi donizettiani, 22-28 settembre 1975*, Bergamo 1983, pp. 1–52; Piero Weiss, Sacri bronzi. Note in calce a un noto saggio di Dallapiccola, in *Opera e libretto*, Vol. 1, ed. by Gianfranco Folena/Teresa Muraro/Giovanni Morelli, Firenze 1990, pp. 149–163.

³⁸ Carlo M. Cipolla, *Istruzione e sviluppo. Il declino dell'analfabetismo nel mondo occidentale*, Torino 1971, pp. 68f. (originally published in English in 1969, translated into Italian by Franca Zennaro). For the region of Lombardo-Veneto see Claudia Salmini, L'istruzione pubblica dal regno italico all'Unità, in *Storia della cultura veneta*, Vol. 6: *Dall'età napoleonica alla prima guerra mondiale*, Vicenza 1986, pp. 59–79. In India, literacy was low until the twentieth century with huge literacy movements only from the 1930s on. See Mookkiah Soundarapandian, *Literacy Campaign in India*, New Delhi 2000, p. 10.

³⁹ M. Nagabushana Sarma, Appa Rao, Gurazada Venkata, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri. L'Italia del melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento*, Bologna 2001, p. 101.

⁴¹ See Alessandra Palidda's article in this volume, pp. 173–189.

inside a new national identity, and all municipal glories became national ones.⁴² Municipal competition also played an important role for France's provinces, as can be seen in Sophie Horrocks's article in this volume.⁴³

The characteristics of provincial theatre

Differently than in big cities, where attending the theatre was too expensive for the majority of the population, smaller provincial or rural theatres often had lower or no admission fees and attracted a wide range of social strata of the local society. On the Indian subcontinent, many theatres in rural areas mounted a variety of theatrical forms that were attended by semi-literate or illiterate farm workers.⁴⁴ In many rural theatres in Britain, a big proportion of the public probably came from the industrial working and agricultural labouring classes.⁴⁵ For the Italian peninsula, we know that prices for the space in the middle of the auditorium (without seats) were kept quite low and that artisans of different sorts could be seen in the theatre.⁴⁶ Agricultural or factory workers could probably neither afford the clothing nor the travel expenses for going to the theatre, even in provincial centres. Nineteenth-century provincial theatres also served as a gathering place for different linguistic groups, who met for debates about the dominances of languages and ideas of nationhood.⁴⁷

The local population often actively participated in the organisation and artistic activities of provincial theatres as amateur actors, singers, musicians, dancers, or artisans, among other roles. In many Indian provincial theatre traditions, performers worked in other professions, only appearing on stage during a theatre

⁴² On national and local identities see Carlotta Sorba, *Identità locali*, in *Contemporanea* 1/1, 1998, pp. 157–170; and Ilaria Porciani, *Identità locale/identità nazionale. La costruzione di una doppia appartenenza*, in *Centralismo e federalismo tra Otto e Novecento. Italia e Germania a confronto*, ed. by Oliver Janz/Pierangelo Schiera/Hannes Siegrist, Bologna 1997, pp. 141–182. For Feltre's municipal pride see Donatella Bartolini/Ugo Pistoia, *Erudizione e storia locale a Feltre nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento*. Antonio Vecellio, in *Erudizione e fonti documentarie. Archivi e ricerca storica nell'Ottocento italiano (1840-1880)*, ed. by Andrea Giorgi/Stefano Moscadelli/Gianmaria Varanini/Stefano Vitali, Firenze 2019, <https://doi.org/10.36253/978-88-6453-840-2>, Vol. 1, pp. 529–554, here p. 536.

⁴³ See Sophie Horrocks's article in this volume, pp. 47–59.

⁴⁴ Kirti Jain, *Nacha*, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, p. 290.

⁴⁵ Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, p. 17.

⁴⁶ In most provincial theatres on the Italian peninsula, a ticket for a prose performance for a seat in the stalls cost between 40 and 60 lira cents during the 1870s and 1880s. This figure corresponds to the daily wage of a worker of the low/middle class. See Raphaël Bortolotti/Giulia Brunello/Annette Kappeler, *In the Wings. Offstage Labour in a Provincial Theatre*, in *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 102/1, 2022, pp. 333–359. See also Michele Nani's article in this volume, pp. 97–110.

⁴⁷ Provincial theatres in Europe's colonies could be places in which, surprisingly, much-exploited people of colour and white plantation owners could meet. This seems to have happened e.g. in Haiti, see Prest, *Public Theatre and the Enslaved People*, pp. 35ff. See also Lenka Krupková's article in this volume, pp. 61–77.

festival period.⁴⁸ The theatre of Feltre performed spoken theatre and opera with the help of local amateur players.⁴⁹ Amateur artists in theatre troupes, orchestras, and civic bands were often quite important for a town's cultural life and were linked to other civic organisations.⁵⁰

The performers in provincial theatres were not only local amateur artists: these theatres were also visited by travelling professional troupes. In France, for example, travelling actors toured the provincial towns of certain regions and shaped the repertoire of the theatres they visited.⁵¹ Provincial theatres could also have close connections to major theatres in cities, as can be seen in the close relationship between Milan and Monza.⁵² In Europe, smaller theatres often acted as stepping stones for more important ones: actors or opera troupes could work their way up to major theatre stages in many regions.⁵³ Many provincial theatres maintained ties to famous artists with a link to their town, too. Local composers could thus have a great influence on the programming of a provincial theatre.⁵⁴

Locals could also shape the whole administration of a provincial theatre. They could be involved in nearly any organisational activity of 'their' theatre, acting as an actor, a journalist or the director of a theatre.⁵⁵ Forms of theatre organisation could, of course, vary considerably from one region to another. For example, most provincial theatres on the Italian peninsula did not have professional theatre managers but had instead theatre societies consisting of a town's 'elite' who were responsible for financial and programming matters. Theatres were mostly not owned by a public institution but by private individuals who bought or hired boxes in their local theatre and chose a theatre council by vote. Municipalities often made an annual contribution to theatres: they contributed to municipal theatres and made a contribution to theatres run by societies, too.⁵⁶ In Schio (Vicenza), a theatre for workers was built up as a philanthropic initiative, opened inside a worker village

⁴⁸ Jain, *Nacha*, p. 290.

⁴⁹ There are traces of amateur groups active in Feltre throughout the nineteenth century, such as when the "dilettanti di Feltre" presented the comedy *Il Barbiere di Gheldria* by Luigi Velli in 1839, with music by Giovanni Bellio (PBF, *Fondo Storico*, F II 50, *Il Barbiere di Gheldria* nel Teatro sociale di Feltre il 25-08-1839, p. 45); in 1844, an opera was composed by Luigi Jarosch for the "dilettanti feltresi" (Luigi Jarosch: *L'Avaro. Opera in due atti. Scritta per i dilettanti feltresi*, Feltre 1844); during the 1860s and 1870s, several amateur actors from Feltre performed pieces together with the company Moroni (PBF, *Fondo Storico*, playbills n. 13, 14, 23, 53, 63, 64, 66).

⁵⁰ On the importance of civic bands and philharmonic societies see Antonio Carlini, *Società filarmoniche e bande*, in *Musica nel Veneto. I beni di cultura*, ed. by Paolo Fabbri, Milano 2000, pp. 106–129; about the city of Belluno see Francesco Praloran, *Storia della musica bellunese*, Belluno 1885.

⁵¹ See Sophie Horrocks's article in this volume, pp. 47–59.

⁵² See Alessandra Palidda's article in this volume, pp. 173–189.

⁵³ Katharina Wessely, *Between Back Province and Metropolis. Actor Autobiographies as Sources to Trace Cultural Mobility*, in *The Methuen Drama Handbook of Theatre History and Historiography*, ed. by Claire Cochrane/Jo Robinson, London/New York 2020, pp. 139–148, here p. 141.

⁵⁴ See Cecilia Nicolò's article in this volume, pp. 157–172.

⁵⁵ See Anna G. Piotrowska's article in this volume, pp. 33–46.

⁵⁶ Sorba, *Teatri*, p. 81.

under the patronage of the Rossi family.⁵⁷ French provincial theatres of the nineteenth century were organised in quite a different manner: the provinces were divided in ‘arrondissements’, and each one was controlled by a licence-holder who was the director of one or more theatres.⁵⁸ British provincial theatres were organised around so-called Theatres Royal who operated under licences granted by the Crown or the Lord Chamberlain. Other theatres were visited by companies moving in a certain region, or strolling companies performing in villages and small towns.⁵⁹ The most common organisation forms of European provincial theatres were thus theatre societies, private businesses, and local public administration.⁶⁰

Locals were also involved in other theatre work researchers still do not write about much: backstage work. This could include preparing theatre material such as outfits, lighting, scenic designs and so forth; selling tickets; or clearing up after a performance. One of the most important theatre workers of this kind was often the custodian. What we know about the custodian of Feltre’s Teatro Sociale illuminates some characteristics of backstage work.⁶¹ We suppose that he lived next to the theatre and that he needed to be a professional carpenter. For the running of the theatre, he had many different tasks: solving urgent problems, carrying out daily maintenance work, storing all sorts of objects, attending rehearsals, operating the lights during performances, and finally, once the performance was over, cleaning and checking all the spaces in the theatre. This Feltre local had to know the theatre intimately and must have been present at nearly all times when a performance was prepared or held.⁶²

Provincial theatres were thus often places of permeable boundaries between the stage and the auditorium, between actors and the public. In many contexts, the local population was involved in nearly all the theatre work: acting and organising, building and renovating, washing and sweeping, and sometimes also in struggles for better working conditions.⁶³ Locals often had a say in choosing the repertoire and in staging performances for ‘their’ theatre.⁶⁴ That led to a situation where spectacles were often topical and involved themes debated by their audience.

⁵⁷ See Andrew Holden’s article in this volume, pp. 79–96.

⁵⁸ McCormick, *Popular Theatres*, p. 53. See Sophie Horrocks’s article in this volume, pp. 47–59.

⁵⁹ Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age*, pp. 16f.

⁶⁰ See Michele Nani’s article in this volume, pp. 97–110.

⁶¹ Bortolotti/Brunello/Kappeler, In the Wings, pp. 333–359.

⁶² PBF, *Fondo Storico*, G VI 90 bis, *Piano disciplinare del Teatro Sociale di Feltre*, 1813 (approved in 1829), art. 22.

⁶³ See Michele Nani’s article in this volume, pp. 97–110.

⁶⁴ For Feltre see, e.g., the letters in the *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia* written by Angelo Bilesimo in 1832 and 1833: A. B., Appendice di letteratura, teatri e varietà, in *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia* 17/223, 29 September 1832, pp. [1]f.; A. B., Appendice di letteratura, teatri e varietà, in *Gazzetta privilegiata di Venezia* 18/196, 31 August 1833, pp. [1]f. See also Giulia Brunello’s article in this volume, pp. 191–206.

Topical subjects in provincial theatres

Differently than metropolitan theatres, which often specialised in a particular theatre genre, provincial theatres often offered a varied programme, including spoken theatre, music and dance theatre, pantomime, marionette or puppet theatre, instrumental music, acrobatics and magician's shows, or shows of exotic animals.⁶⁵ In Northern Italy, for example, we only know of a few theatres that forbade such spectacular performances.⁶⁶ Many theatre productions combined various art forms. In nineteenth-century India, theatre performances often merged different art forms such as dance, acrobatics, or puppetry.⁶⁷ Naturally, theatre in this region was so varied that we cannot generalise about its performance styles, but theatre forms in various provinces seem to have been characterised by a "flexibility of form and the easy shift across genre",⁶⁸ as it was in nineteenth-century European provincial theatres.⁶⁹

While genres such as acrobatic shows or marionette theatre have been neglected by researchers until quite recently, these were a significant part of the theatrical experience for the vast majority of theatregoers during the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ Italian opera became known to a big part of the population through 'minor' forms that borrowed their themes and music from the famous operas of the time.⁷¹ Lately, considering more popular, non-literary theatre forms has become more acceptable to theatre scholars.⁷² We believe that we should move away from elitist definitions of theatre performances, and we should not dismiss performances such as acrobatics, marionette theatre or magician's shows as spectacles for the masses that have no place in theatre historiography. They are both worth being studied as artworks and as a means of staging and thereby introducing current topics to a wide audience.

The varied programme of provincial theatres often thematised ongoing local debates that were of interest to their audiences. Being one of the only nearby places of assembly, information exchange, socio-political negotiation, and the formation of public opinion, nineteenth-century provincial theatres were often engaged with a local reality. Their focus could be political events, social change, roles of particular social groups, scientific inventions, or medical debates. Sullivan's study of

⁶⁵ In the city of Medicina, near Bologna, e.g., there were shows of exotic animals, see Luigi Samoggia, *Il teatro di Medicina. Dal Seicento al Novecento. Vicende, personaggi, attività*, Medicina 1983, p. 22.

⁶⁶ See for example Archivio Storico comunale di Castelfranco Veneto (ASCCV), *Fondo Teatro Accademico*, Serie 3 Delibere, statuto e regolamenti 1778–1966, *Regolamento del Teatro Accademico di Castelfranco Veneto*, 1844.

⁶⁷ Birendranath Datta, Dhuliya, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, p. 108.

⁶⁸ Ralph Yarrow, *Indian Theatre. Theatre of Origin, Theatre of Freedom*, Richmond 2001, p. 13.

⁶⁹ See e.g. McCormick, *Popular Theatres*, p. 148.

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Becoming More Provincial?*, p. 230.

⁷¹ See Maria Teresa Morelli's article in this volume, pp. 113–126.

⁷² Robinson, *Becoming More Provincial?*, p. 237.

nineteenth-century pantomimes in provincial towns in Great Britain shows how local socio-economic and political issues were incorporated in performances in provincial towns, namely in written texts and references inserted by performers.⁷³

In many Indian regions during the nineteenth century, local theatre cultures addressed socio-political issues or local living conditions.⁷⁴ Frequent subjects seem to have been child marriages,⁷⁵ caste consciousness and untouchability, widowhood, women's oppression, and class exploitation,⁷⁶ but also colonialism.⁷⁷ The Kūṭiyāṭṭam tradition, an ancient form of Sanskrit theatre still existent in Kerala today, was known for its numerous references to contemporary social and political events.⁷⁸ In Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatres and many other local traditions, the *vidūṣaka* figure (jester), having a metatheatrical role commenting on topical subjects, had an important subversive quality.⁷⁹

Sources about various theatrical performances held in provincial theatres can give us a glimpse of these theatres as socio-cultural centres supporting a multitude of topical debates and events. We will allude to a few such examples that will be further elaborated in the contributions in this volume.

In the provincial theatre of Feltre, after the independence from the Habsburg Empire in 1866, pieces that thematised local revolts and accused the despotic regime were immediately staged⁸⁰ and could have been part of a reprocessing of an epoch of foreign domination and an engagement with new values of the nation-state of the Kingdom of Italy.

Another example from the Feltre case study are the shows featuring experiments on magnetism that were staged there, illustrating the relationship of theatre to scientific concepts and developments. Such shows were staged in many provincial theatres on the Italian peninsula; Feltre's Teatro Sociale presented experiments that aimed to unmask the falsity of magnetism.⁸¹ This demonstrates how a provincial theatre could be a venue where current scientific discussions were

⁷³ Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime*, pp. 107, 190.

⁷⁴ Kironmoy Raha, Bengali Theatre, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, pp. 39–45, here p. 46.

⁷⁵ Sarma, Appa Rao, p. 15.

⁷⁶ Basavaraj Naikar, Tygaraja Paramasica Kailasam, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, pp. 178f.; Jain, Nacha, p. 290.

⁷⁷ Lal, Dramatic Performance Act, p. 111; Yarrow, *Indian Theatre*, p. 84. In other parts of the world as well, such as Haiti, European colonialism and slave labour were thematised and debated in theatre performances. See Prest, *Public Theatre and the Enslaved People*, pp. 64ff. The fierce criticism of colonialism expressed in local popular theatre forms in nineteenth-century Africa can be explained by a vast popular theatre tradition of resistance to authorities even before European imperialism. See Kerr, *African Popular Theatre*, p. 15.

⁷⁸ Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, Kuttiyattam, in *The Oxford Companion to Indian Theatre*, ed. by Ananda Lal, Oxford 2004, pp. 228f., here p. 228.

⁷⁹ Yarrow, *Indian Theatre*, pp. 84f. See Tushara Meleppattu and Rakshit Kweera's article in this volume, pp. 127–142.

⁸⁰ See Annette Kappeler's article in this volume, pp. 143–155.

⁸¹ See Giulia Brunello's article in this volume, pp. 191–206.

introduced to a wide public just as in other social spaces like academies or private drawing rooms.

Structure and content of the publication

This volume focuses on nineteenth-century theatre-makers and -goers in provincial theatres and performances engaged with topical events or debates.⁸² We consider not only theatre pieces or other theatrical events but also forms of theatre organisation, stakeholders involved in programming and staging decisions, theatre workers, performance practices, and the composition of a local public.

Our main research questions are therefore:

What kind of performances did provincial theatres bring to the stage? Were they based on a written script? Did they involve speaking, singing, dancing, acrobatics, or other art forms?

Who made the decision to stage a performance? Who organised the events? Who performed in them? What kind of relationships were established between artists and the local community?

Who attended performances? How was the local population involved? Which parts of the local population could attend the theatre? Did the local population have other means of absorbing cultural goods or news? Did theatre in written form circulate in the area?

How was the legal situation in the given context? Were people allowed to gather freely in places other than the theatre? Were all kinds of performances allowed? Were they censored? Did periodicals and censorship structures help or hinder successful performance and the circulation of theatre pieces?

Did theatre events thematise a local reality? How were local debates, developments, or events reflected in the performance?

The book is divided in three parts: the first introduces the subject of provincial theatres and methods of research; the second considers the main stakeholders in the making and receiving of theatrical events; and the third and last addresses the topicality in the repertoire of provincial theatres.

By including theatre practices from different places outside of metropolises, we question most of our assumptions about nineteenth-century theatre: ideas about a separation between ‘actors’ and a public, the social composition of theatre workers and -goers, the function of theatres for a local population, and concepts of the theatrical art form and its links to society, politics, religion. We believe that it is enlightening to consider theatre performances from different socio-cultural backgrounds together and to compare their ways of engaging with local realities, their functions for a local population, and the people involved in theatrical activities. Even though the art forms, buildings, or dress codes might be diverse,

⁸² We understand the term “topical” to mean engaging with the topics of the day or with a particular locality. See also Sullivan, *The Politics of the Pantomime*, p. 15

nineteenth-century provincial theatres shared a common function as a privileged place for gathering, socialising, exchanging news, getting information, and engaging with current debates.

23 ans de *Bibliographie du théâtre en province au XIX^e siècle* [France] ou l'art et la manière de repousser les limites

Christine Carrère-Saucède

Les études universitaires sur la vie théâtrale en province tant en France que dans d'autres pays européens se sont fortement développées durant les vingt dernières années. L'intérêt porté à un sujet qui sembla longtemps mineur a permis de mettre en lumière sa richesse, sa variété et son existence même. En ce qui concerne la France, état fortement centralisé, la capitale, Paris, jouit d'une image culturelle dynamique par opposition à une province où culture et création seraient inexistantes. Très longtemps les chercheurs ont privilégié l'étude des théâtres parisiens, leur prêtant, à juste titre, une influence nationale, reléguant les théâtres de province à rang local, parfois inférieur et le plus souvent sans intérêt. Lorsqu'ils ont fait porter leur attention sur la province, les universitaires ont mis l'accent sur les grandes villes que nous désignons aujourd'hui sous le vocable métropoles régionales. Les études purement littéraires quant à elles, en se focalisant sur les textes ont eu tendance à mettre en avant les théâtres parisiens dans lesquels la plupart des chefs d'œuvres avaient été créés. La province a donc été, pendant très longtemps, comme l'affirme Florence Naugrette, le parent pauvre de l'histoire du théâtre.¹ Toutefois, depuis les années 2000 les chercheurs ont redécouvert la vie théâtrale provinciale des petites villes, voire des villages, et ont considéré, parallèlement, le théâtre comme un objet multiple, protéiforme et riche qu'il fallait appréhender dans sa complexité et sa globalité.

Par conséquent, les études ont pris en compte toutes les facettes de la vie théâtrale en province et les publications sur le sujet émanent de nombreuses disciplines scientifiques : littérature, histoire, histoire de l'art, architecture, arts du spectacle, musicologie, droit, économie, sociologie, information-communication, science politique... Le théâtre sort du champ purement littéraire et est examiné comme un objet multiforme et pluriel constitué de textes, de mises en scènes, de salles de tous types de la plus grande à la plus modeste, de troupes qui outre les comédiens comprennent des musiciens, des techniciens et parfois des administratifs, de publics, régi par une législation souvent contraignante en France. Cette variété d'angles se retrouve dans le projet global d'étude du théâtre de Feltre en Italie.² On sait aujourd'hui que pour étudier le théâtre, il faut sortir du carcan des études de

¹ Florence Naugrette, La province, parent pauvre de l'histoire du théâtre ? Nouvelles recherches sur la Normandie, in *L'Annuaire théâtral* 39, 2006, pp. 132-142.

² Le projet de recherche entend étudier l'histoire de l'édifice, l'administration, la disposition des espaces intérieurs, le matériel scénique, le répertoire des représentations, l'organisation des spectacles (direction, impresarios, correspondance, compagnies, etc...), les pratiques de la société

lettres et s'ouvrir aux autres disciplines, puis prôner le travail en interdisciplinarité ou en pluridisciplinarité comme le prouve cette publication.

L'ouverture et la nécessaire complémentarité des disciplines transparaissent dans la *Bibliographie de la vie théâtrale en province (France) au XIX^e siècle*³ initiée en 2000 et enrichie annuellement. Cette recension bibliographique, mise en forme et ordonnée à l'occasion de la rédaction d'un article récapitulatif⁴ ayant nécessité de très nombreuses lectures de textes⁵ souvent confidentiels publiés localement et de qualité scientifique variable, n'a cessé de croître depuis sa première mise en ligne. Le nombre d'entrées a constamment évolué, passant, par exemple, de 798 références et 224 villes répertoriées en 2016, à 850 entrées et 228 villes en 2018, ou à 947 entrées et 418 villes en 2020. L'évolution de ce document s'est accompagnée d'une réflexion sur les limites à lui assigner tant du point de vue de son organisation que de son contenu.

En effet, dès l'origine, le classement traditionnel par ordre alphabétique des auteurs n'était pas entièrement satisfaisant car il proposait une information géographique éparpillée. Il avait donc initialement été décidé d'élaborer un document à deux entrées redondantes : une partie alphabétique et une partie géographique. La question de la détermination des limites géographiques était immédiatement apparue, entraînant la question des frontières : sur quelles frontières géographiques et historiques s'appuyer ? Les frontières françaises, au XIX^e siècle, ont quelque peu bougé entre les transformations territoriales issues de la Révolution,⁶ les conquêtes napoléoniennes et le rattachement de la Savoie et du Comté de Nice en 1860. Par mesure de commodité, la décision fut prise de s'appuyer, malgré l'anachronisme, sur les frontières et dénominations contemporaines de l'écriture. C'est ainsi qu'on a travaillé d'abord sur 22 régions puis sur 13, au sein desquelles on a listé les départements (avec leurs noms actuels) puis les villes (avec leurs noms actuels également), par ordre alphabétique.

Enfin, la notion de province, qui désigne en France tous les territoires hors de la capitale a fait l'objet de questionnement dans la mesure où la Région Île de France – parfois dénommée bassin parisien – entoure littéralement Paris et se démarque des autres régions par cette proximité avec la capitale. Les départements qui composent cette région sont tous de création très récente et sont considérés comme

théâtrale, le rapport entre la structure sociale et le goût du public. Voir www.hkb-interpretation.ch/projekte/feltre-f (tous les liens dans cet article ont été consultés pour la dernière fois le 12 février 2025).

³ Ce travail est en ligne, voir <http://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/ceredi/index.php?id=689>.

⁴ Christine Carrère-Saucède, Entre misère et exubérance, la vie théâtrale dans les bourgs de la province française, in *Revue d'Histoire du Théâtre* 231/3, 2006, pp. 241–260.

⁵ La méthodologie de constitution de ce travail est retracée dans Christine Carrère-Saucède, État de la bibliographie relative au théâtre en province au XIX^e siècle, in *Un siècle de spectacles à Rouen (1776–1876)* [Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Rouen en novembre 2003], éd. Florence Naugrette/Patrick Taïeb, Rouen 2009 (Publications numériques du CÉRÉdI, Actes de colloques et journées d'étude, vol. 1), voir <http://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/ceredi/index.php?id=1288>.

⁶ Rattachement définitif du Vaucluse, de Montbéliard et de Mulhouse, par exemple.

partie intégrante de l'agglomération parisienne, en dépit de leur détachement administratif. Les départements de la petite couronne,⁷ zone constituée des trois départements limitrophes de la ville de Paris : les Hauts-de-Seine, la Seine-Saint-Denis et le Val-de-Marne, ont été écartés. Les départements de la grande couronne (Seine-et-Marne, Yvelines, Essonne, Val d'Oise), ayant été étudiés, figurent dans la *Bibliographie*. Par ailleurs, les limites géographiques se sont étoffées puisqu'en 2016 ont été ajoutés les départements, territoires et villes d'outre-mer ainsi que les anciennes colonies françaises où la vie théâtrale n'était pas foncièrement différente de ce qui se passait dans la province métropolitaine : « Dans les principales villes [d'Algérie] et, en particulier, à Alger, la direction des théâtres est confiée à des concessionnaires privilégiés qui, en échange de certains engagements, jouissent de prérogatives analogues à celles conférées en France dans le même cas. »⁸

Les limites chronologiques ont également fait l'objet d'une réflexion dans la mesure où la définition habituelle du siècle (durée de cent ans s'inscrivant dans une chronologie) qui aurait couvert les années 1800 à 1899 ne présentait pas suffisamment de cohérence historique. On aurait aussi pu se limiter à la période du privilège (1806–1864) bornée par deux textes fondamentaux en France. Le décret napoléonien du 8 juin 1806 rétablit le privilège et met un terme à la liberté d'entreprendre dans le domaine du spectacle qui avait été instaurée en 1791, il limite à douze le nombre de salles autorisées à Paris et instaure sur le reste du territoire 25 régions théâtrales nommées arrondissements sur lesquelles seules les troupes autorisées peuvent se produire. Cette loi impose le théâtre dans les territoires et confie aux préfets la surveillance de son application.⁹ Le décret du 6 janvier 1864 met fin à cette réglementation contraignante. Il a finalement été décidé de s'intéresser à un XIX^e siècle élargi qui va de la fin de la Révolution française à la première guerre mondiale. Des limites chronologiques repoussées qui permettent d'avoir un regard englobant sur la période et de mener des comparaisons entre les moments de forte réglementation et les moments de liberté commerciale. Ainsi, les limites chronologiques ont, elles aussi, été repoussées.

En 2023, le bilan de ce travail hébergé depuis le début sur le site du Cérédi de l'université de Rouen¹⁰ s'élève à 1005 références bibliographiques, 452 villes et 622 salles et ne se présente plus que sous sa forme géographique. Son intitulé¹¹ a changé puisque l'on peut désormais y trouver en plus des références bibliographiques, un

⁷ Depuis 2016, ces départements sont regroupés avec Paris au sein de la « Métropole du Grand Paris ».

⁸ Lucette Lepagnet, Les théâtres en Algérie de 1830 à 1860, in *Revue d'histoire des colonies* 39/137, 1952, pp. 76–102, <https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1952.1177>, ici p. 81. Sur le théâtre dans les colonies, on consultera aussi le numéro thématique « Le Théâtre français et l'Indochine » de la *Revue d'histoire du théâtre* 264/3, 2014.

⁹ Un régime autoritaire et répressif génère de très nombreuses archives, permettant aux historien-ne-s de travailler ensuite avec précision.

¹⁰ <http://publis-shs.univ-rouen.fr/ceredi/index.php?id=689> ; Cérédi : Centre d'Études et de Recherche Éditer/Interpréter. À l'origine ce site s'intitulait ThéNor : Théâtre en Normandie.

¹¹ Il est passé de *Bibliographie de la vie théâtrale en province au XIX^e siècle* à *Recensement des salles de spectacle et bibliographie de la vie théâtrale en province au XIX^e siècle*.

recensement des salles ayant existé de façon pérenne ou éphémère. Ce recensement est complété par des liens systématiques avec des sites institutionnels : la base Mérimée du patrimoine architectural et monumental¹² et la métabase Monumentum,¹³ mises en ligne par le ministère français de la culture. À nouveau, la question des limites va se poser : quelles limites donner à ce recensement ? Faut-il inclure les théâtres de foire ? Les cafés-théâtres ? Les théâtres de verdure ? Les théâtres marginaux ? Quelle place accorder aux théâtres de casino ? aux théâtres d'amateurs ? au théâtre en langue régionale ? La réponse à ces questions n'est pas définitive : l'envie de dresser un état des lieux exhaustif est grand et les archives, qu'elles soient nationales ou locales, riches. Par ailleurs, le titre du document mentionne la « vie théâtrale » et non « le théâtre » car s'agissant de la province française, et plus particulièrement des petites villes voire des villages le spectacle prend souvent le pas sur le théâtre *stricto sensu*, et pour rendre compte de cette vie théâtrale, il fallait outrepasser la notion de théâtre au sens noble et inclure les petits spectacles, les curiosités et les théâtres de foire. Si on ne prend pas en compte ces catégories dites « mineures », on passe à côté de la réalité de la vie théâtrale en province au XIX^e siècle.

Enfin, l'augmentation du nombre d'études recensées, qui a quintuplé depuis la première version, nous autorise à poser la question du contenu des entrées listées. En effet, au tout début, il avait semblé justifié d'inclure dans ce catalogue tout ce qui avait paru sur le sujet, même quand la qualité des écrits était piètre. Il pourrait désormais être légitime d'effectuer un tri, d'imposer un cadre qualitatif au répertoire et de transformer la *Bibliographie* en *Bibliographie critique* (ou raisonnée). On peut se demander s'il faut continuer à lister l'intégralité des productions. Il sera alors nécessaire d'élaborer des critères permettant d'établir le choix. Les études de qualité médiocre, les sites vitrines des offices de tourisme, les sites personnels dont le caractère scientifique laisse souvent à désirer ont-ils toujours leur place dans cette bibliographie ? Comment intégrer les titres qui ne sont plus accessibles dans les bibliothèques universitaires ? Autant de questions qu'il faudra prendre en considération pour améliorer cet objet.

En conclusion, cette liste organisée de titres de références peut paraître simple, puisqu'il s'agit du résultat d'une activité de recension des sources disponibles (parfois peu visibles ou connues). Elle a été conçue comme outil mis à la disposition de la communauté scientifique dans une volonté de partage qui a toujours soutenu mes propres recherches. Cependant la simplicité apparente cache un travail minutieux de recherche opiniâtre et continue. Le projet d'élaboration d'un tel document hybride entre bibliographie, catalogue, inventaire et répertoire¹⁴ a l'ambition d'être un travail d'historien-ne de la culture. « Il est en effet animé

¹² www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/search/list?base=%5B%22Patrimoine%20architectural%20%28M%C3%A9rim%C3%A9e%29%22%5D.

¹³ www.monumentum.fr.

¹⁴ Patrick Fraysse/Viviane Couzinet, L'art de la bibliographie. De l'objet à sa patrimonialisation, in *Em questão* 25, 2019, pp. 123–136, <https://doi.org/10.19132/1808-5245250.123-136>.

par le projet de constituer de véritables mémoires de la production intellectuelle, fondé à la fois sur le recensement et l'enrichissement. »¹⁵ Objet de médiation, « cet être culturel »¹⁶ permet de suivre l'évolution de la production scientifique relative à l'histoire du théâtre en province et ses modes. Enfin, ce travail¹⁷ possède une dimension mémorielle, tirant de l'oubli de nombreux travaux souvent confidentiels publiés à l'échelle d'un territoire minuscule. Pour terminer, il faut insister sur la nécessaire mise en réseau, sur l'indispensable partage des connaissances et sur l'échange, quelle que soit la section scientifique qui les produit. La pluridisciplinarité constitue une chance d'élargir nos connaissances, de faire bouger nos points de vue, et finalement de nous enrichir.

¹⁵ Viviane Couzinet, Fabrique de la liste. Un dispositif entre mémoire et commémoration, in *Redes e processos info-comunicacionais. Mediações, memórias, apropriações. Anais da 2a Jornada Científica Internacional da Rede Mussi, Rio de Janeiro*, éd. Regina Marteleto/Icléia Thiesen, Rio de Janeiro 2012, pp. 132–152, ici p. 134

¹⁶ D'après le titre d'Yves Jeanneret, *Penser la trivialité*, vol. 1 : *La vie triviale des êtres culturels*, Paris 2008.

¹⁷ Ce travail souffre d'un manque criant d'iconographie qui s'explique par des raisons de droits d'image, et sa forme désuète de fichier PDF, mériterait une transformation en banque de données électroniques accompagnée d'une illustration avec une carte interactive qui permettrait de visualiser salles d'une part et études d'autre part. L'appel est lancé... Christine.saucede@gmail.com.

II. Theatre-makers and -goers – Leadership, rebellion, and discipline

From an Actor to an Author, from an *Amante* to an Animator

The Role of an Individual in Shaping the Local Theatrical Repertoire

Anna G. Piotrowska

Warsaw in the nineteenth century could not boast of an extraordinary development of the theatrical scene, yet the absence of spectacular achievements did not preclude its rich cultural life, maintained by a certain social structure that helped to build Warsaw's theatrical scene as an arena of social and emotional exchange enjoyed by local residents. To that network of professionals who actively shaped Warsaw's theatrical life at that time belonged Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski (1777–1847). Having authored over one hundred theatrical pieces, served as a director of the theatre in Warsaw and contributed to the development of theatrical life as a journalist, he seems to deserve a place in the history of nineteenth-century Polish theatre. Although his name did not fall into complete oblivion, his input and his meaning for the development of the Polish theatre, even in its local dimension, are rarely discussed, for as an author but also as an animator of the theatrical life of Warsaw, all his life he remained in the shadow of his predecessor, Wojciech Bogusławski (1757–1829), and other prominent figures of his time. Yet Dmuszewski's versatility and adaptability to current trends allowed him to have his (in fact mediocre) plays often performed in Warsaw in the early nineteenth century. On the one hand, it was his 'hands-on' experience that enabled him to occupy the position of an influential agent impacting the repertoire of the Warsaw theatres of that time, but on the other hand, it was also his social standing that helped him profit from his high position, including his close relations with Bogusławski – a doyen of theatrical Warsaw – and with other prominent actors and authors as well as locally popular composers. Therefore, Dmuszewski can serve as an excellent example of and as a reason to discuss the role of an individual in shaping the image of the theatrical repertoire in provincial towns as he endorsed certain genres and especially promoted particular authors. This paper discusses Dmuszewski as a member of the network of people who shaped the place they lived in as an extension of their own artistic vision of the city and its theatrical scene. The paper stresses the significance of Dmuszewski's connectivity to Warsaw, arguing that his impact on the place implies a deeper understanding of the logic underpinning theatrical practices of that time, especially in their local dimension. The underlying assumption of the paper concerns the impact of everyday life experience on Dmuszewski's understanding of the role of the theatre and also attempts to reveal the close relationship between Dmuszewski's professional activities and the very place he

was based in.¹ Suffice to mention that Warsaw in the first half of the nineteenth century was an arena of violent political upheavals, which left profound marks on theatrical productions staged there, while manifestations of patriotic spirit seemed to constitute an important aspect of how Warsaw was shaping its self-image in this moment when Poland had lost its independence as a state and its citizens were holding out hope for a quick recapture of sovereignty. In Warsaw, as in other provincial cities under foreign rule, “[t]hrough performances of spoken theatre and opera, feelings and viewpoints about social realities could be expressed, making it possible to communicate political criticism or denunciations of political situations to the public.”²

Despite Dmuszewski’s great popularity during his lifetime, his significance in the city, his prominence as an actor and author and especially as a journalist and organiser of theatre life, he still seems somewhat under-researched. Although present in various scholarly works dealing with nineteenth-century Polish theatre, he is only mentioned there briefly. There are no detailed and up-to-date studies analysing his role in the creation of the intellectual atmosphere of Warsaw under Russian occupation. As mentioned above, in the early nineteenth century Dmuszewski undoubtedly belonged to the city’s elite, which, nevertheless, still remained provincial – at least in the opinion of Russians, who, even in the early twentieth century, described the city as “Russia’s backyard”.³ Rather than in quantitative measures (area, number of citizens), Warsaw’s provinciality manifested itself in “smallness [...] in the urban habitus”, that is “ways of acting, self-image, the sedimented structures of feeling, sense of place and aspiration”.⁴ Indeed, Warsaw functioned far away from the Russian capital and advanced on its own at its own pace. Its theatrical life remained dominated by a few influential residents, such as Dmuszewski, who were part of a sustainable network of individuals who fostered and supported theatrical positions. This network was based on friendships as well as family relations, shared experiences, information flows, professional collaborations and joint entrepreneurship.

¹ As Allen J. Scott writes, “Place and culture are persistently intertwined with one another, for place as it is understood here is always a locus of dense human interrelationships (out of which culture in part grows), and culture is a phenomenon that tends to have intensely place-specific characteristics thereby helping to differentiate places from one another.” See Allen J. Scott, *The Cultural Economy of Cities*, in *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 21/2, 1997, pp. 323–339, here p. 324.

² Giulia Brunello/Annette Kappeler/Raphaël Bortolotti, Introduction, in *Feltre’s Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Giulia Brunello/Raphaël Bortolotti/Annette Kappeler, Baden-Baden 2023, pp. 19–42, here p. 25.

³ “Задворки польские России”. This is how the poet Alexander Blok would describe Warsaw as late as in 1918. See Aleksander Blok, Wstęp [Foreword], in Blok, *Odwet [Revenge]*, transl. by Adam Galis, Warszawa 1980; original available at http://az.lib.ru/b/blok_a_a/text_0040.shtml (10 December 2024).

⁴ David Bell/Mark Jayne, Conceptualizing Small Cities, in *Small Cities. Urban Experience Beyond the Metropolis*, ed. by David Bell/Mark Jayne, Abingdon 2006, pp. 1–18, here p. 5.

As an actor

Warsaw as a theatrical city was framed by a long historic tradition, and it may be said that the city had a long history of theatrical life, with productions staged not only *in* Warsaw but also *for* Warsaw residents. The purported tendency of Warsaw residents to enjoy the theatre was deeply rooted in the city's aspirations to maintain its reputation as the capital of Poland and gain importance within the larger context (i.e. within the hierarchy of Polish cities) after the loss of political independence. Dmuszewski, who stemmed from minor nobility, was born in the small town Sokółka, located between Białystok and Grodno, but started his theatrical career in Warsaw, where he first moved in 1794.⁵ Although he initially worked as a clerk, his good education helped him develop his multifaceted career. Due to violent political events connected with the Kościuszko Uprising,⁶ Dmuszewski left Warsaw, only to return to it in 1799. Then, at the turn of the century, when attending a social gathering, he happened to meet Wojciech Bogusławski, who – having noticed Dmuszewski's musical talent when they were singing together – convinced him to try his hand at acting.⁷

It was not only Bogusławski but also other then-popular Warsaw actors such as Karol Świerżawski (1735–1806) and Jakub Hempiński (1749–1829) who most probably served as Dmuszewski's role models, possibly also as his mentors. As a young man, Dmuszewski watched many plays and probably also read books on acting.⁸ He began his theatrical adventure at a time when many established actors, fearing political changes that were affecting the overall situation in Warsaw, decided to leave the city, heading to provincial theatres or giving up acting altogether. Hence, Dmuszewski did not start his career, as was customary at that time, by replacing another actor but was instead cast in a main role. His theatrical debut took place in 1800: he played the *amante* (lover) Karol in *Dwóch w jednym* (*Two as One*),⁹ the Polish translation of an unidentified German comedy. Dmuszewski himself translated the work from the German. His career developed well; he performed both in Warsaw and other cities, such as during the summer

⁵ Most details of Dmuszewski's biography are to be found in *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa ozdobiona 247 rysunkami w tekście 1821–1896*, Warszawa 1896; and in Stefan Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, Warszawa 1964.

⁶ The Campaign of 1794, under the lead of Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746–1817), was an unsuccessful uprising against Tsarist Russia and Prussia in an attempt to liberate the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth from their influence after the Second Partition of Poland (1793).

⁷ “W Warszawie poznaje się przedewszystkiem z założycielem teatru, Wojciechem Bogusławskim. Zaproszony raz na obiad, po wesołej i ochoczej uczcie, gdy do pieśni i on głos swój przyłączył, Dmuszewski zadziwił Bogusławskiego czystością i wdziękiem tego głosu, choć jeszcze niewyrobionego. Ujęty powierzchownością młodzieńca nestor sztuki zaczął go namawiać do sceny, i Dmuszewski zachęcony, długo prosić się nie dając, wnet się zapisuje w poczet artystów, grywając odtąd role pierwszych kochanków w komediach i tenorowe w operach.” *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 43 (all translations by the author if not otherwise stated). See also Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 7f.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 8–11.

⁹ *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 43.

months when his troupe toured across the Polish territories (visiting such places as Poznań, Kalisz and Łowicz). Starting in 1804 Dmuszewski also embarked on writing short reports about these performances; these were published by the Warsaw press (e.g. the *Gazeta Warszawska*). These texts already revealed his witty style. Soon, Dmuszewski – who was constantly mastering his acting technique – was elevated to the position of leading actor (mainly playing roles of lovers). Because he had a good voice (as Bogusławski had observed), Dmuszewski managed to also establish himself as a singer, performing alongside well-known female singers such as Zofia Petrarsch and Konstancja Pięknowska. For example, in 1804 Dmuszewski was cast in *Palmira* with music by Antonio Salieri and in *Mieszkańcy wyspy Kamkatal* with music by Józef Elsner (based on the novel *Inkle i Joriko*, with the libretto abridged by Dmuszewski).

Recognised as the first *amante* of the Warsaw stage and adored in smaller theatres outside Warsaw, Dmuszewski was able to accumulate a small fortune and became materially independent, which was not common among Polish actors of that time. In 1805, he decided to marry the aforementioned Zofia Petrarsch (1785–1807). Unfortunately, his young wife died two years later at the age of only 22, having already been highly praised for her musical and theatrical talent.¹⁰ In 1812, Dmuszewski remarried, again choosing an actress – Konstancja Pięknowska (1784–1854) – as his spouse. Pięknowska had already had an illegitimate son (born in 1805) from her previous relationship with Wojciech Bogusławski.¹¹ In the years to come, Dmuszewski and Bogusławski still remained on good terms, and the latter allowed Dmuszewski to supervise his theatrical troupe in case of his indisposition as well as promoted Dmuszewski to the role of a manager of the tours taking place during the summer months. It seems that Bogusławski's trust, his friendship and support from the very beginning of Dmuszewski's career helped the younger man to establish and to sustain – at least in the initial period – his high position in Warsaw.

As an author

As noted above, Dmuszewski entered the world of the theatre simultaneously as an actor and as an author. His versatility and multiple talents were noticed, and he successfully continued on that dual path: his acting victories overlapped literary achievements, establishing his reputation and strengthening his position in the theatrical community. Initially, Dmuszewski was prone to some literary experimentations; for example, in 1801 he presented a comedy *Aktorowie na Elizejskich Polach* (*Actors on the Elysian Fields*), in which he attempted to encapsulate the idea

¹⁰ Despite her young age, she was already recognised as one of the best opera actresses and was cast in leading roles, oftentimes together with Dmuszewski.

¹¹ Dmuszewski's only daughter Ludwika was also born before he married Pięknowska. When Ludwika Dmuszewska married Ludwik Sanvan, Dmuszewski became a grandfather to their daughter Natalia Sanvan. See *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, pp. 43f., 58.

of the quodlibet as a type of theatrical performance, mixing various topics and topoi.¹² Recognition and respect came in the times of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw (established in 1807), as Dmuszewski's works usually included allusions to political events and contained overt patriotic motifs. While never steering away from current subjects, he also authored satirical and historical plays. Although patriotic and historical themes persistently appeared in his works throughout his life and dominated his entire oeuvre, the latter can nevertheless be divided into three general phases. In the first period, until 1807, Dmuszewski privileged comedies and comedy-operas. The only drama from this early period is the 1803 *Oblężenie Odensy* (*The Siege of Odensa*), with an alternative title *Oblężenie miasta Odensy* (*The Siege of the City of Odensa*). In the second period (1807–1813), Dmuszewski became more engaged in political themes, and his works were often conceived in a patriotic spirit. Among the plays written at that time is *Pospolite ruszenie, czyli bitwa z Kozakami* (*Mass Mobilisation, or the Battle Against the Cossacks*; 1807). Given that Dmuszewski occasionally alluded to contemporary political events, some of his plays feature citizens of Warsaw as characters, such as in his comedy *Okopy na Pradze* (*Trenches on Praga*; 1809), based on the construction of entrenchments in the Praga district of Warsaw during the Polish-Austrian war.¹³ In the third period between 1814 and 1821, from the entry of the Russian army into Warsaw until his resignation from writing, Dmuszewski dedicated more time to translating and adapting, writing only a few plays (including more dramas), but in general he became interested in other literary genres and soon started to work as an editor of a gazette. His creativity as a playwright slowly decreased, and from 1822 onwards he wrote no theatrical works. Coincidentally, in the 1820s his plays were losing their popularity, among other things because of the rising star Aleksander Fredro (1796–1876), a fellow playwright who excelled at comedies. In fact, Dmuszewski wrote his best and most popular works between 1810 and 1820. Although he authored over a hundred plays, not all of them survived; among the best-preserved autographs is his 1804 one-act comedy-opera *Siedem razy jeden* (*Seven Times One*). For Dmuszewski (both as an actor and author), it proved to be a big success, and it settled in the repertoire of Warsaw theatres for the next thirty years. The music was written by the established composer Józef Elsner (1769–1854); supposedly Elsner agreed to set Dmuszewski's text to music because of his respect for Dmuszewski's champion, Bogusławski. Elsner had befriended Bogusławski during their times together in Lvov in the 1790s, while Dmuszewski became Bogusławski's protégé in Warsaw at the turn of the nineteenth century. The play *Siedem razy jeden*, like most of Dmuszewski's works, was based on a simple scheme: it is a masquerade in which the same actor appears on stage in seven

¹² Jakub Chachulski, *Zły smak i gminna przesada. Kilka uwag o muzyczno-dramatycznej konstrukcji opery *Sultan Wampum* Józefa Elsnera na tle oryginalnego libretta Augusta von Kotzebue*, in *Muzyka* 4, 2019, pp. 3–36, here p. 3.

¹³ Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, *Galeria gatunków widowiskowych, teatralnych i dramatycznych*, Poznań 2015, p. 134.

different roles. While he remains unrecognised by other protagonists, the audience is fully aware of the ploy. The musical comedy was set in the general mode of eighteenth-century works and exposed individual characters by underlining the dynamics of their relations. Choruses were introduced as vehicles transporting certain moral truths and providing background for the main heroes; Carl Dahlhaus described them as an “extension of the stage décor”.¹⁴

The presence of educational elements was typical for the majority of Dmusczewski's works, although at the same time they were not devoid of a slightly satirical character. Like *Siedem razy jeden*, his plays usually promoted traditional Polish values but also underlined the local character, for they were often set in Warsaw and featured petit-bourgeois (and/or aristocratic) characters. In that respect, Dmusczewski's comedies seemed rather old-fashioned and can be classified as representative of the transitional period between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. While Dmusczewski as an author was generally praised during his lifetime, his plays were not often performed after his death, and even when staged, they failed to raise further interest (one of the most renowned Polish poets, Juliusz Słowacki, is known to have seen a play by Dmusczewski but left no commentaries on it). The popularity of Dmusczewski's works vanished, the plays seemed outdated and fell into oblivion, and Dmusczewski himself became forgotten.

As a journalist

Why did Dmusczewski – still popular as an actor and as an author in the 1820s – decide to shift his interest to other realms of theatrical activities despite his obvious successes onstage? It seems that his looks changed, and accordingly he needed to adjust his employ as he was no longer apt to be cast as a passionate lover. Also, doubt began to be cast upon his acting talent: he was particularly criticised and negatively assessed in the press by the publicist Kajetan Koźmian (1771–1856), who practically campaigned against Dmusczewski's acting skills. As a consequence, Dmusczewski ceased performing but still retained his robust contact with the theatrical world. Nevertheless, he searched for alternative sources of income and turned towards journalism. He became the owner of the recently founded *Kurier Warszawski* (*Warsaw Courier*), which was a daily newspaper printed in Warsaw from 1821 to 1939. The man behind the paper was its creator and first editor, Bruno Kiciński (1797–1844), who nevertheless was not satisfied with the initial results and sold the title to Dmusczewski. The actor-turned-journalist became its second chief editor and managed to establish the high position of the gazette; he was predominantly responsible for endorsing its tabloid character. Dmusczewski, for example, disregarded the chronology of the news and often had trivial and important information printed alike and often next to each other. Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849), who lived at that time in Warsaw, once described Dmusczewski

¹⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, transl. by J. Bradford Robinson, Los Angeles 1989, p. 66.

as “the same as ever”, that is telling lies and inventing “various queer things”.¹⁵ On top of everything, Dmuszewski resorted to clever tricks to promote his newspaper (e.g. hiring students to provoke local citizens to buy the *Warsaw Courier*). One of the readers, Count Fryderyk Skarbek (1792 –1866), a successful writer and playwright whose works Dmuszewski helped to stage in the theatre, recalled that the journal was extremely popular for it had a convenient format and was affordable for virtually everyone. Skarbek also confirmed the role of Dmuszewski in establishing the gossipy, tabloid-like character of the journal, stating:

It was not Kiciński, the first founder of the “Kurier”, but Ludwik Dmuszewski, its next editor, who gave the paper that original quality of naive simplicity that no other publications, domestic or foreign, had. Without any pretensions to scholarship or wit, with a clear disregard for the conditions required of the editors of public periodicals, and with no concern for the correctness of style or a thorough knowledge of the things he was writing about, the editor of the “Kurier Warszawski” was able to occupy the public of his day with everything and anything, to such an extent that it became some kind of daily indispensable mental food. It was trusted, even though it often told the untruth, it was forgiven, even though it printed falsehoods, and finally it was subscribed and read, even though it was the object of constant jokes.¹⁶

As an editor, Dmuszewski became legendary already during his lifetime, and he was known to have worked very hard and for long hours; for example, he even personally supervised the process of printing. Surprisingly, his gazette was not concerned with theatrical news, but when some materials about Warsaw theatrical life were featured, Dmuszewski took care that such texts were informative in nature, presented as announcements or reports¹⁷ devoid of judgmental and/or critical elements. Dmuszewski was prone to present anything connected with the theatre in a positive light. At the same time, his own knowledge about theatre was manifested in several para-scholarly texts that he published, including “Krótka kronika teatru polskiego 1764–1808” (Short Chronicle of the Polish Theatre 1764–1808), appearing between 1814 and 1817 in the *Rocznik Teatru Narodowego Warszawskiego* (*Yearbook of the Warsaw National Theatre*), among others.

¹⁵ *Chopin's Letters*, ed. and transl. by Ethel Lilian Voynich/Henryk Opieński, New York 1931, p. 84.

¹⁶ “Pismo to znalazło od razu łatwe i wielkie wzięcie. Drukowane na jednej tylko ćwiartce małego formatu, było tanie i pożądanę przez wszystkich, nawet słabo czytać umiejących, skutkiem czego stało się poniekąd duchową potrzebą całego miasta. Ale to nie Kiciński, pierwszy założyciel tego ‘Kurier’, lecz następny jego redaktor Ludwik Dmuszewski, nadał dopiero pismu temu tę oryginalną cechę naiwnej prostoty, jakiej żadne tak krajowe jako i zagraniczne nie miało, i potrafił z wydawnictwa tego osiągnąć zyski takie, do jakich żadne inne dowcipne lub poważne dojść nie mogło. Bez żadnej pretensji do uczoneści i dowcipu, z wyraźnym nawet lekceważeniem warunków od redakcji pism publicznych wymaganych, nie troszcząc się bynajmniej o poprawność stylu ani o dokładną znajomość rzeczy, o jakich pisał, umiał redaktor ‘Kurieru Warszawskiego’ wszystkim a niczym tak mocno zajmować ówczesną publiczność, że się stał codzienną a niezbędną strawą umysłową. Że mu wierzone, chociaż się często z prawdą miały, że mu przebaczano, choć i fałszy drukował, wreszcie że go prenumerowano i czytano, chociaż ciągłych żartów był przedmiotem.” Fryderyk Skarbek, *Pamiętniki*, ed. by Piotr Mysłakowski, Warszawa 2009, p. 163. (Originally printed in: Fryderyk Skarbek, *Pamiętniki*, Poznań 1878).

¹⁷ For example, Chopin wrote in one of his letters in the early months of the year 1830 that “the Courier announces Fräulein Sontag”, suggesting it was a reliable source of that type of information. See *Chopin's Letters*, p. 84.

Together with Alojzy Żółkowski he worked on the *Dykcjonarzyk teatralny* (*Theatrical Dictionaries*, 1808).¹⁸ Dmuszewski also authored the “Spis wszystkich oper granych w polskim języku na teatrach warszawskich” (List of all Operas Performed in Polish at Warsaw Theatres), published in 1820 in *Tygodnik Muzyczny*. He can be credited as one of the first historians of Polish theatre, although he wrote quite selectively, for example only mentioning some operatic performances of foreign troupes in Warsaw, skipping operas during Władysław IV’s reign, briefly mentioning Italian operas staged during the reign of August III, only vaguely referring to performances of Italian ensembles during the reign of Stanisław August Poniatowski, etc.¹⁹

As a theatre manager

In the 1820s Dmuszewski not only became a full-fledged editor but also started to engage in the organisation of Warsaw theatrical life, sometimes – especially in the beginning – working without remuneration, such as from 1 July 1826 to 15 June 1827, when he served as an unpaid member of the economic committee of the theatre.²⁰ In 1827, Dmuszewski became one of the directors of the National Theatre in Warsaw and held this position until his death in 1847. Before that, for two years he had already collaborated with its director Ludwik Osiński (1775–1838), who stepped down from the post in 1833 and was replaced (for the next three years) by Boris Halpert (1805–1861), then by Ignacy Koss (1800–1848), who quickly overshadowed Dmuszewski. However, Dmuszewski was also active in other theatrical domains: in 1825 he joined as an assessor the Government Directorate of Theatre and Performing Arts, established in 1820 as a body controlling and censoring theatrical life in the Russian-occupied parts of Poland.²¹ Also, from 1836 onwards, Dmuszewski lectured at the School of Drama, educating aspiring actors willing to perform in the National Theatre.

Dmuszewski’s career as one of the directors of the National Theatre developed in the shadow of the November Uprising (1830/31),²² which broke out soon after he was appointed to supervise the theatre. At that point, the management of the National Theatre (then called the Great Theatre) was of two minds concerning the politics of the repertoire to be adopted: on the one hand, the necessity of political involvement was felt as the theatre was supposed to play a special role during the upheaval, but on the other hand, the Committee also believed that direct political

¹⁸ See Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 97f.

¹⁹ See Grzegorz Markiewicz, *Opera w Polsce w latach 1635–1795*, Łódź 2019, p. 16.

²⁰ *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 44.

²¹ See Encyklopedia Teatru Polskiego, *Ludwik Osiński*, online, n.d., <https://encyklopediateatru.pl/osoby/79489/ludwik-osinski> (11 December 2024).

²² The Polish–Russian War 1830/31, known as the November Uprising, was an armed revolt that started on the night of 29 November 1830 in Warsaw when young Polish cadets led by Lieutenant Piotr Wysocki (1797–1875) rebelled against the Russian Empire occupying partitioned Poland.

immersion should be avoided. It is rather difficult to determine Dmuszewski's own political stances: obviously he was interested in Polish history and generally in Polish matters, yet he seemed to support pro-Russian policy, serving on Russian-orchestrated and Russian-supervised official committees. Like many other Poles, Dmuszewski had hoped that Napoleon Bonaparte could restore Polish independence, but he revised his views after Napoleon's defeat. Dmuszewski initially assessed the Tsar of Russia, Alexander I, in a more favourable light; alas with time he became disappointed in and disillusioned with his politics towards Poles.²³ At the same time, the audience as well as the press, especially right after the November Uprising, demanded a pro-Polish repertoire, and Dmuszewski rather hastily suggested a range of plays to be performed in this situation. On 5 December 1830, a production of Bogusławski's *Krakowiacy i Górale* (*Cracovians and Highlanders*) was performed on the stage of the Great Theatre; even today, the play is considered a milestone in the history of Polish theatre and perceived as an allusion to the Kościuszko insurrection. Its staging under the particular, extraordinary conditions after the defeat of the November Uprising was read as a response to the current political situation.²⁴ Classified sometimes as a *Dialogoper*,²⁵ with music by Jan Stefani (1746–1829), *Krakowiacy i Górale* invariably captivated the audience with its powerful national message. Furthermore, the play seemed to be easily adaptable to the new political circumstances and was subjected to changes reflecting on the dynamically changing situation, thus addressing the expectations of the society.²⁶ In fact, the staging of *Krakowiacy i Górale* was not only conditioned by the political situation and allusions it could propose, but also by its generic potential, since it clearly followed the typical structural model of the late eighteenth-century opera buffa (two acts with a climax in the finale of the first),²⁷ which was still very popular in Warsaw in the early nineteenth century. At the same time, the play conveyed some French charm combined with features borrowed from Italian opera buffa as well as German singspiel.²⁸ On top of that, as suggested by Jakub Chachulski, this particular play seemed to smuggle in a few Viennese traits, for example in the form of more or less obvious *alla turca* motifs heard in the rhythmic layer and its instrumentation; it also followed the late eighteenth-century Viennese convention of opera semiseria.²⁹ It can be suspected that the staging of *Krakowiacy i Górale* in the initial phase of Dmuszewski's

²³ Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 90–93.

²⁴ See Jakub Chachulski, Genologia i polityka. Swoistość *Cudu*, czyli *Krakowiaków i Górali* w horyzoncie gatunków operowych końca XVIII stulecia, in *Muzyka* 66/3, 2021, pp. 117–147, <https://doi.org/10.36744/m.976>, here p. 134.

²⁵ See Thomas Betzwieser, *Sprechen und Singen. Ästhetik und Erscheinungsformen der Dialogoper*, Stuttgart 2002. See also Thomas Betzwieser, Verisimilitude, in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. by Helen M. Greenwald, Oxford 2014, pp. 297–317.

²⁶ Zbigniew Krawczykowski, *Wojciech Bogusławski. Ojciec sceny narodowej. Kronika życia i działalności Wojciecha Bogusławskiego*, Warszawa 1954, p. 23.

²⁷ Chachulski, *Zły smak i gminna przesada*, p. 21.

²⁸ Chachulski, *Genologia i polityka*, p. 118.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133; Chachulski, *Zły smak i gminna przesada*, p. 19.

directorship clearly signalled his sensitivity to the needs of the public, and his openness to political allusions while proving his awareness of the importance of genres chosen to be performed in the theatre.

Creating the repertoire policy

As a pupil of Bogusławski, Dmuszewski saw the role of the theatre as a vehicle for commenting on current public affairs, even “serving as a sort of social thermometer”.³⁰ Hence, when choosing plays that addressed important social issues, Dmuszewski seemed somehow naturally to continue the line started by Bogusławski. This view became particularly evident when Dmuszewski shared the directorship with Osiński, who wanted to steer away from political involvement in his theatre. Dmuszewski and Osiński showed distinctive approaches to both the theatre and life; in fact, the differences in their mentalities translated into mutual animosities. To a certain degree, however, when it came to managing the theatre, they complemented each other quite well.³¹ Osiński, for example, was rather reserved, more calculative, “cunning, greedy for profit” but at the same time “undoubtedly superior to his colleague in terms of education and literary talent” (he, for example, translated Pierre Corneille’s *Le Cid* and seemed more knowledgeable about the theory of theatre).³² Unlike Dmuszewski, who was always supportive of actors and aspiring authors, Osiński was more prone to scrutinise them and generally had more enemies than Dmuszewski, who was very popular in the theatrical circles. Furthermore, Osiński was more in favour of classical repertoire, especially tragedies, while Dmuszewski insisted on performing plays, possibly even of lower standard, which could nevertheless ensure popularity among viewers and thus generate generous profit for the theatre. As could be expected, the repertoire that the theatre eventually proposed included comedies, comedy-operas, light musical comedies with songs, while dramas, tragedies and operas were staged less frequently.³³

As an experienced actor and especially as a successful editor who understood and closely monitored the needs of the public, Dmuszewski was well aware of the expectations of Warsaw theatregoers. The audience was still in a transitional phase: the middle classes and petite bourgeoisie were slowly finding their place and cementing their status, and they treated theatre attendance as an integral part of cultural life. Their tastes had to be catered to, and Dmuszewski – with his literary and translative skills, his first-hand experience of theatrical life and his sharp

³⁰ Brunello/Kappeler/Bortolotti, Introduction, p. 25.

³¹ Mieczysław Rulikowski, *Teatr warszawski od czasów Osińskiego, 1825–1915*, Lwów 1938, p. 16.

³² “przebiegły, na zysk łączący”; “niewątpliwie przewyższający swego kolegę wykształceniem i talentem literackim.” Ibid.

³³ Mieczysław Inglot, Repertuar teatrów warszawskich w świetle raportu carskiej cenzury z 1843 roku, in *Pamiętnik Literacki. Czasopismo kwartalne poświęcone historii i krytyce literatury polskiej* 71/3, 1980, pp. 219–251, here p. 221.

journalistic eye for a good story – seemed to understand that and tried to provide the audience with the repertoire that would not be too demanding for them yet satisfying at the same time. Thus, Dmuszewski was not very picky when it came to the choice of the plays and was quite ready to accept translations (often his own) as well as adaptations of trivial comedies, preferably those by August von Kotzebue (1761–1819). Although many plays staged in Warsaw were of foreign origin, Russian works were quite strikingly absent, and the preferred ones were translations and adaptations of French, German and Italian authors. Left aside, however, were works by, for example, Alfred de Musset (1810–1857), Alfred de Vigny (1797–1863) and even Friedrich Schiller (1802–1759).

Dmuszewski preferred lighter plays that were not, however, completely devoid of satirical commentaries on political events. After the November Uprising, the theatre resigned from staging many plays that had been performed before (i.e. in the years 1810–1820), for most likely they were no longer found appropriate and/or up-to-date by the post-November-Uprising society and were perhaps even considered as quite obsolete and old-fashioned.³⁴ While the repertoire was supposed to satisfy the needs of the emerging petit-bourgeois public, it still included pre-Romantic dramas and plays in the style of the grand spectacle.³⁵ Following the politics of escapism, Dmuszewski – who was always very practical – did not try to overwhelm the audience with plays that could prove to be rather problematic for staging or those which were banned by the censorship. The Russians prohibited staging several works containing elements of social and political criticism, and the censors were reluctant to mount romantic dramas raising ethical questions.³⁶ Mieczysław Ingot argues that the delicate relation with the censorship was a very important factor impacting the repertoire of the National Theatre. Accordingly, the Imperial Censorship Report of 1843 produced by the Central Censorship Board at the Ministry of National Enlightenment headed by Sergey Uvarov (1786–1855) reveals that the majority of the works staged in Warsaw in the years 1832–1843 were actually in line with the censorship guidelines (these were, of course, conceived in the spirit of the politics endorsed by Tsar Nicholas I).³⁷ Accordingly, in order to avoid any controversies, dramas authored by playwrights denounced by the Russian censorship were not staged, such as works by the Polish emigrant Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), the liberal Victor Hugo (1802–1885) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616), the plots of whose tragedies might have contained too many conspiracies and crimes committed against the powers that be.³⁸

The most popular authors who were staged in Warsaw under Dmuszewski's directorship were local Poles: Fryderyk Skarbek and Jan Tomasz Seweryn Jasiński (1806–1879), who was himself an actor – often cast as an *amante* – but

³⁴ Ibid., p. 222.

³⁵ Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 100–102.

³⁶ Ingot, *Repertuar teatrów warszawskich*, p. 221.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 220.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 222.

also a gifted adaptor, translator and author of dramas and comedies. The plays of Dmuszewski that were included in the repertoire were mostly those dealing with historical topics, such as the 1818 opera with music by Józef Elsner titled *Król Łokietek, czyli Wiśliczanki* (*King Ladislaus the Elbow-High, or The Peasant Girls of Wiślica*), being Dmuszewski's own answer to Bogusławski's masterpiece *Krakowiacy i Górale* and functioning as a counterpoint to the latter's popularity. Dmuszewski also had many plays in his own translation staged: his translation of Gaspard Spontini's *La Vestale* (*Westalka*) proved to be very successful, while his translation of Giacomo Meyerbeer's grand opera *Robert le diable* (the first three acts) was performed in Warsaw under the Polish title of *Robert Diabeł* until the end of the nineteenth century. Also, the above-mentioned authors Skarbek and Jasiński often translated plays performed in Warsaw. In the Great Theatre there was a long tradition of performing plays translated from other languages along with so-called 'original operas' (i.e. written in Polish). The description 'Polish', 'German', 'French' or 'Italian' appearing in the playbills was immediately linked to the language in which they were originally written rather than with their generic features.³⁹ This association was reinforced by the theatrical practice of linking a work – play, musical comedy, even opera – with the author of the text or libretto rather than the composer; consequently, the language of the original libretto mattered most even if the play was translated and presented in Polish.⁴⁰

Observing what kind of repertoire was endorsed under Dmuszewski's directorship, it is easy to notice that his own experience as well as the pressure from the censors and the public seemed to be the decisive factors. Additionally, his individual preferences and – above all – societal connections were extremely crucial. His circle of collaborators was rather limited and well connected. It is well to remember that Osiński's wife was the daughter of Wojciech Bogusławski, while Dmuszewski's second wife was the mother of Bogusławski's illegitimate son. One should not forget either that Dmuszewski preferred his own works and those of his collaborators, including Jasiński, who was also responsible for the group of actors in the theatre from 1842 on. Dmuszewski was open towards young, aspiring authors and was willing to have their works performed. Around 1843, Aleksander Niewiarowski, under the pseudonym Aleksander Półkoźic (1824–1892), together with Michał Morzkowski (1816?–1868) authored a short comedy, *Dwie szkatułki* (*Two Caskets*); it was praised by experts and recommended by Morzkowski's friends to Dmuszewski. Much to the surprise of the authors themselves, who considered the work as half-improvised and trivial, Dmuszewski had it performed in the theatre and arranged payment for the young writers.⁴¹ Dmuszewski displayed a similarly patronising attitude toward the young Chopin, whom he informed, in April 1830 about his generous 'offer' to publish a sonnet dedicated

³⁹ Markiewicz, *Opera w Polsce*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴¹ *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, p. 51.

to the composer in one of the issues of the *Warsaw Courier*. In his style, Chopin commented upon the whole situation:

“For the Lord’s sake,” said I – “don’t do such silly things.” – “It’s already in print,” said he, with the smile of one doing a kindness, apparently supposing that I ought to be glad to have met with such an honour. A poor sort of kindness!⁴²

Dmuszewski in the collective memory

Dmuszewski’s repertoire policy was an extension of Bogusławski’s postulates and his artistic vision. Yet Dmuszewski became well-known as a prominent figure on his own and was remembered as a very eccentric and popular persona of early nineteenth-century Warsaw. He was accordingly portrayed in the book celebrating the 75-year anniversary of the *Kurier Warszawski* printed in 1896. Although the text in this special publication was clearly meant to glorify Dmuszewski as one of its chief editors, one can easily read between the lines and see that Dmuszewski was genuinely respected and liked. Predominantly appreciated as an editor of the successful daily newspaper, he was also remembered as a person involved in several initiatives outside the theatrical world. For example, Dmuszewski was committed to charity,⁴³ supported young authors, belonged to the Polish Freemasonry⁴⁴ and lectured at the drama school, teaching several subjects, including pronunciation, declamation, music and dance as well as languages and general history. When he died, the Warsaw press wrote about his funeral, which was attended by local notables and the local theatre community alike. On the day of the funeral, all theatres in Warsaw were closed.

Dmuszewski today may be predominantly perceived as a figure whose versatility was a phenomenon typical of leading figures in Warsaw’s social and cultural life of the early nineteenth century: born of a politically turbulent time, he found himself in an artistically flourishing environment that provided an opportunity for the realisation of many of his talents. It was, after all, not that unusual that an actor who understood the requirements of the stage and knew the audiences – their tastes and habits – began in the later stages of his life writing plays and successfully joined both careers, namely as a performer and as an author. It was also not that uncommon for an actor to become a theatre manager. Yet Dmuszewski proved the impact of an individual with a strong personality on the development of the local theatrical scene and showed how personal experiences and views (he was known for the motto ‘*primum non nocere*’) may affect institutional policies.

⁴² “Na miłość Boską prosiłem, żeby głupstwa nie robił. ‘Już wydrukowany’, odpowiedział z uśmiechem przysługującym się, myśląc, że się pewnie radować powinien z zaszczytu, jaki mię spotkał. O, źle zrozumiane przysługi!” Narodowy Instytut Fryderyka Chopina, *Listy Chopina. Do Tytusa Woyciechowskiego w Poturzynie*, online, n.d., <https://chopin.nifc.pl/pl/chopin/list/670>, English translation after *Chopin’s Letters*, p. 84.

⁴³ *Kurjer Warszawski. Książka jubileuszowa*, pp. 47f.

⁴⁴ Durski, *Ludwik Adam Dmuszewski*, pp. 93f.

What distinguished Dmuszewski from others was his unique position in the city as he built up his career and became a press tycoon who could easily influence the public opinion. Well established in the intellectual and artistic circles of the city as an editor of the daily journal, he also understood the needs and expectations of the city's inhabitants. Thus, he tried to cater for them, not only in his journal but also in the theatre, where he was responsible, among other things, for co-creating the repertoire policy and always strove to provide Warsaw residents with the best amusement, alas not devoid at the same time of some dose of sensation, and some – more vague and less obvious – political innuendos.

In the context of today's theatrical scene, Dmuszewski's works may seem outdated, and while they answered the artistic cravings of a nineteenth-century audience, they may lack that appeal today. Likewise, what twenty-first-century audiences enjoy may have been received with little or no interest – and possibly even indifference – in the early nineteenth century in a city like Warsaw.⁴⁵ One also cannot forget that an individual like Dmuszewski, responsible for the shaping of the theatrical repertoire, was a member of the local establishment, that is an informal network of people that exercised an impact on the entire infrastructure of Warsaw's theatrical scene. Arguably that network played a central role exerting influence over the local acting school, running the newspapers, etc., which, in return, played a key part in supporting the status quo of Warsaw theatrical life. While the network provided Dmuszewski with recognisable support,⁴⁶ he was also quick enough to seize various opportunities on his own, notwithstanding constraints caused by the overall political and economic situation of the city. As a very active and eventually prominent member of the network, Dmuszewski facilitated the diffusion of conventions (defined here as customary agreements⁴⁷) in artistic productions proposed in Warsaw. While adhering to them, he reinforced the routinisation of the local theatrical life and indirectly defined the resources used in theatrical endeavours. Worth underlining is the fact that Dmuszewski himself vigorously contributed to the Warsaw scene by writing his own plays and working on translations while constantly searching for potential authors (often in the close circle of his friends and acquaintances). Effectively, Dmuszewski provided the Warsaw public with the repertoire that was generally accepted and enjoyed, proving thus his excellent ability to decipher and understand the needs of the local audience.

⁴⁵ See Alfred Einstein, *Muzyka w epoce romantyzmu*, transl. by M. i S. Jarocińscy, Warszawa 1965, p. 275.

⁴⁶ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, Cambridge 1993, p. 64.

⁴⁷ See Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1982, p. 29.

French Travelling Theatre Troupes and the Creation of Regional Theatrical Communities, 1824–1864

Sophie Horrocks David

In the summer of 1852, director Joseph Hermant's decision to drop opera from his repertoire unleashed an administrative tussle for regional theatrical control between two French prefects: Paul Féart of the department of Gers and Adolphe Fournier of the neighbouring Basses-Pyrénées.¹ Hermant managed the 16th *troupe d'arrondissement*, a theatre company that toured between the southwestern provincial towns of Auch (Gers), Pau (Basses-Pyrénées), Bagnères-de-Bigorre and Tarbes (Hautes-Pyrénées), towns of varying sizes and socio-economic importance but each without a residential theatre company.² As part of the French government's infrastructure for overseeing provincial stage culture during the first half of the nineteenth century,³ *troupes d'arrondissement* were established across the nation between 1824 and 1864 to perform sung and spoken repertoire to a mandated cross-departmental region (the *arrondissement*).⁴ As a result, spectators and critics in towns such as Auch and Pau found themselves beholding and responding to the same troupe while these towns' officials juggled the shared responsibility of overseeing directors and their repertoires. In 1852, this responsibility provoked tensions between southwestern prefects: Féart, supported by the mayor of Auch (Jean-Paul Soulier), wanted to strip Hermant of his contract, going as far as to request that the Minister of the Interior, Victor Fialin, step in to secure opera for Auch with a new director.⁵ Fournier, by contrast, feared the cost of opera and argued that it was more important to keep Hermant on as a trustworthy director, regardless of genre.⁶ The result of the tussle demonstrated that there were inbuilt hierarchies in this provincial theatrical region. Due to the economic importance and larger

¹ Archives nationales de France (AN), F/21/1278, letter from Paul Féart to Victor Fialin [Minister of the Interior], 30 April 1852; letter from Adolphe Fournier to Victor Fialin, 16 June 1852. Christine Carrère-Saucède, *La direction de troupe de province au XIX^e siècle: une fonction polymorphe*, in *Directeurs de théâtre, XIX^e-XX^e siècles. Histoire d'une profession*, ed. by Pascale Goetschel/Jean Claude Yon, Paris 2008, pp. 31–45.

² On the contemporary municipal theatrical system: Katharine Ellis, *French Musical Life*, Oxford/New York 2021.

³ On the larger ministerial theatrical system established between 1806 and 1864: Cyril Triolaire, *Tréteaux dans le Massif. Circulations et mobilités professionnelles théâtrales en province des Lumières à la Belle Époque*, Clermont-Ferrand 2022; Triolaire, *Le théâtre en province pendant le Consulat et l'Empire*, Clermont-Ferrand 2012; Romuald Féret, *Théâtre et pouvoir au XIX^e siècle. L'exemple de la Seine-et-Oise et de la Seine-et-Marne*, Paris 2009.

⁴ *Collection complète des lois*, Paris, Vol. 15, p. 457; Vol. 16, pp. 137–142; Sophie Horrocks, *Performing for the Provinces. Touring Theatre Troupes and the French Political Imaginary, 1824–64*, PhD thesis, Durham University 2024.

⁵ AN, F/21/1278, letters from Féart to Fialin, 30 April, 6 June 1852.

⁶ AN, F/21/1278, letter from Fournier to Fialin, 16 June 1852.

population of the spa town of Pau compared to Auch and others,⁷ the Prefect of the Basses-Pyrénées had the final say in approving directors' plans submitted to the Ministry in this situation and throughout the century. In 1852, Fournier thus dismissed the Gers officials' preference for opera and renewed Hermant with his vaudeville and spoken-play repertoire,⁸ a scenario which repeated biases favouring the Basses-Pyrénées against other towns in this region evident at least as early as the 1830s.⁹ As this incident shows, being a French provincial town within a theatrical network such as an *arrondissement* involved the negotiation of cross-regional power dynamics that had the potential to fundamentally determine local stage practices.

In this contribution I investigate how itinerant stage culture fostered theatrical relationships between the provincial towns joined in an *arrondissement* not only for administrators but also for many agents involved in local theatrical life between 1824 and 1864. Expanding on the administrative tensions mentioned in my introduction, in the following I concentrate on the writings of journalists from different towns in the 1st, 6th and 16th *arrondissements* in the north, west and southwest of France.¹⁰ These critics' discussions of touring troupes, like the correspondence produced by their administrative counterparts, reveal the ways through which journalists constructed a regional theatrical framework for their readers, who, in these small towns, doubled as the core audience in the *salle de spectacle*. Drawing especially on the period 1824 to 1846, where sources are most abundant, I argue that, within these writings, the regional community became a significant and recurring topic that was key to these historical agents' understanding of the socio-political context of local theatrical life.

I suggest that the region was in itself a socio-political topic through which administrators, critics and their readers/spectators engaged with various aspects of small-town theatrical culture, including the movements of companies, appraisal of actors, sharing of theatrical territory and the negotiation of repertoire. I will show that the critical refraction of the regional theatrical community in newspaper columns both fostered a strong sense of collective identity through stage culture while also promoting a level of competition and inter-town hierarchy at a journalistic, as well as administrative, level: a natural by-product of the shared *arrondissement* system. Moreover, in thinking regionally in this way, I offer a way of complicating the local specificity traditionally associated with the conditions

⁷ Abel Hugo, *La France pittoresque ou Description pittoresque, topographique et statistique des départements et colonies de la France*, Paris 1835, Vol. 2, pp. 52, 56; Vol. 3, pp. 14, 16.

⁸ AN, F/21/1278, letter from Fournier to Fialin, 16 June 1852.

⁹ AN, F/21/1277, letter from the Prefect of the Landes (Toussaint Curel) to Fialin, 10 May 1839, complaining of the dominance of Bayonne.

¹⁰ 1st *arrondissement*: Nord, Pas-de-Calais; 6th *arrondissement*: Morbihan, Finistère, Côtes-du-Nord; 16th *arrondissement*: Gers, Landes, Basses and Hautes Pyrénées.

of nineteenth-century provincial theatre:¹¹ the *arrondissement* environment naturally draws attention to how the socio-political function of local theatre was conceptualised through regional connectivity both by members of administrative bodies and the small-town presses.

Collective theatrical experience

The regional sphere loomed large in local journalists' accounts of stage culture across the French *arrondissements*, and it largely had the power to shape theatrical experience in a more positive manner than in administrative matters. A town journalist's primary role was to report on local performances, yet this work nearly always involved some level of comparison made between their locality and the *arrondissement*. Critics not only reviewed performances in their town but also reported on the troupe's travels across the *arrondissements*,¹² printed reviews of performances in neighbouring towns¹³ and transmitted accounts of troupe incidents, from the mundane to the eventful.¹⁴ Take examples from the 1st and 16th *arrondissements* in 1844: two critics in Valenciennes published accounts of the "stormy" reception of director Guillaume Bertéché's troupe in Dunkerque that led to the departure of the tenor Alphonse Grousseau,¹⁵ while a Pau journalist dedicated a long column to a review of Hermant's troupe's regional premiere of Gaetano Donizetti's opera *La Favorite*¹⁶ in Tarbes, critiquing the troupe's first excursion into large-scale opera from afar.¹⁷

It was not just that journalists, and by extension their readers, cared about the fate of troupe performers and developments in troupe repertoire beyond their town walls but also that, through columns, the press underlined that no local performance existed in a vacuum. Indeed, cross-*arrondissement* reporting evoked the constant connectivity of theatrical networks, firstly by tracking companies' physical movements. In the 16th *arrondissement*, for instance, the writer for the *Mémorial des Pyrénées* described how Hermant's troupe had come to the Pau *foire* after performing in Tarbes in June 1844, just as, in the 6th *arrondissement* in Brittany,

¹¹ Seen in local monographs such as *L'opéra de Rennes. Naissance et vie d'une scène lyrique*, ed. by Marie-Claire Mussat, Rennes 1998; Marie-Odile Jubert-Larzul, *Le théâtre à Toulouse au milieu du XIX^e siècle*, in *Annales du Midi* 109/217, 1997, pp. 53–69.

¹² *Le journal des comédiens* (Paris), 3 March 1833, p. 7, printing a column from *Le mémorial des Pyrénées* (Pau).

¹³ *Les petites affiches de Valenciennes*, 10 October 1827, p. 819, 19 July 1828, p. 286; *Le courrier du Nord*, 22 July 1834, pp. 1f., 22 October 1858, p. 2, 17 February 1861, p. 2. These terms were also used in national reports of the troupes, for example in *La Gazette des Théâtres* (Paris), 20 May 1832.

¹⁴ *Le mémorial Artésien* (Saint-Omer), 9 September 1841, p. 5, 24 May 1845, p. 6, 1 November 1856, p. 2.

¹⁵ "Tempétueuse", *L'Écho de la frontière* (Valenciennes), 2 November 1844, p. [527]; *Le courrier du Nord*, 7 November 1844, p. 2.

¹⁶ Libretto by Alphonse Royer, Gustave Vaëz and Eugène Scribe.

¹⁷ *L'Observateur des Pyrénées* (Pau), 24 July 1844, p. 2.

the reviewer for the *Abeille de Lorient* looked onwards to Alphonse Seymour's troupe's Vannes visit after it left his town of Lorient in December 1842.¹⁸ Columns referencing the theatrical network enabled readers to follow the travelling troupe's journeys throughout the season from the comforts of their own home via the newspaper page.

Secondly, press columns established an important pan-provincial theatrical frame of reference within which information about and opinions on the *troupes d'arrondissement* were constantly linked to the regional community. In the 1st *arrondissement*, for example, the journalist for *La Feuille de Saint-Omer* published a report in June 1829 of the *troupe d'arrondissement* while they were absent from his town. Drawing on statements from the *Journal de Dunkerque* and *Feuille d'Arras*, the critic gave his readers an account of *arrondissement* director Henri Delorme's new troupe debut in Cambrai, the particular success of two opera singers and news of the *troupe ambulante* – a different roving company headed up by director Antoine Pétrin *dit* Tony – as it travelled to Valenciennes.¹⁹ In some columns, town journalists spoke directly to the *arrondissement* public at large, emphasising the regional importance of their opinions of a local event. In June 1845, for example, the *Mémorial* critic wrote that he would “abstain” in this edition from publishing critiques of Bertéché's performers, whom he had not yet had time to fully review in Saint-Omer, because his lack of a firm opinion of their talent “without holding any importance for us could, however, have importance for these artists in other towns in the theatrical *arrondissement*.”²⁰ The journalist here implied that an incomplete critique of performers whom he had only heard a handful of times might give other towns a false impression of their talents, having a knock-on effect on their regional reception. Not only did the Saint-Omer writer see his role as a reviewer as integral to the theatrical discourse of the entire *arrondissement* in this column, but his words also confirm that it was normal practice for provincial audiences to build up their assessment of a troupe from a distance through the words of critics – here all looking towards Saint-Omer while the troupe was not in their town.

Updates about the troupe's travels and travails across the theatrical network allowed commentators to conjure a virtual sense of yearlong theatrical provision when their inhabitants were without a physical troupe. This connectivity offered *arrondissement* spectators a taste of what it would be like to live in a larger provincial town with a year-long company.²¹ At the same time, by conjuring for the reader a sense of being vicariously involved in a troupe performance far from their locale, *arrondissement* reporting allowed writers to smooth over some of the tensions inherent in the shared itinerant season that were central to administrative

¹⁸ *Le mémorial des Pyrénées*, 27 May 1844, p. 4; *L'Abeille de Lorient*, 25 December 1842, p. 2.

¹⁹ *La Feuille de Saint-Omer*, 6 June 1829, p. 15.

²⁰ “sans importance pour nous-mêmes, pourraient cependant en avoir pour les artistes dans les autres villes de l'arrondissement théâtral.” *Le mémorial Artésien*, 4 June 1845, p. 7.

²¹ For example Lille or Rouen.

tussles such as that between the Gers and Basses-Pyrénées prefects with which I opened this chapter. Moreover, these journalists' comparative descriptions of troupe performances exhibit the formation of an imagined community made tangible for readers through their engagement with print capitalism, Benedict Anderson's concept here configured at the *arrondissement* level.²²

The imagined *arrondissement* community invited readers to critique and comment on performances at a distance, thus having a direct impact on local assessment of the work of travelling troupes. Indeed, due to inter-*arrondissement* reporting, troupes lived their successes or failures across the itinerant network. This could work in troupes' favour: the arrival of new repertoire in one locality, for example, was often framed by reports of its regional success. In 1829, the Valenciennes journalist for *L'Écho du nord* announced the director Guillaume Dellemeance's²³ troupe performance of Georges Ozaneaux and Ferdinand Hérold's *drame Le dernier jour de Missolonghi* by underlining the acclaim that the piece had generated in Arras, Lille and Douai,²⁴ a strategy to arouse public interest – and ticket sales – through regional comparison. Similarly, some artists were defined by *arrondissement*-wide accomplishments. As an actor, Bertéché was described by critics in Saint-Omer and Valenciennes with similar phrases emphasising his region-wide success, as a figure “deservingly appreciated in all of the *parterres* of the 1st *arrondissement théâtral*.”²⁵ These comments instilled local confidence in a director by invoking the shared judgement of the *arrondissement's* combined audiences.

More generally, journalists' depiction of the *arrondissement* community also benefited troupes by magnifying local successes on a regional scale. In the 1840s, a Valenciennes column announcing the arrival of Bertéché's opera troupe advertised how the troupe “seemed to please the inhabitants of Cambrai, where they have been for a month.”²⁶ A reporter for the Saint-Omer journal similarly told its readers that, according to reviews from Valenciennes, Bertéché's troupe was this year superior in talent, with a young, talented tenor.²⁷ In the Breton 6th *arrondissement*, the Vannes columnist also described how, in September 1844, “a good reputation preceded Mr Seymour's troupe; we hasten to say that the artists in this

²² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition, London 1991, pp. 6f.

²³ Dellemeance was the stage name for Guillaume, Baron de Navailles. See Auguste Philibert Chaalons d'Argé, *Histoire critique et littéraire des théâtres de Paris. Année 1822*, Paris 1824, pp. 216f.

²⁴ *L'Écho du Nord*, 21 March 1829, p. 99.

²⁵ “[...] apprécié à si juste titre de tous les parterres du premier arrondissement théâtral [sic].” *Le courrier du Nord*, 25 January 1834, p. 3. See also *Le mémorial Artésien*, 11 December 1844: “M. Bertéché est toujours l'excellent acteur apprécié et aimé à Saint-Omer comme dans toutes les villes de l'arrondissement théâtral”. Bertéché held the position of director between 1835 and 1848 before handing over the title to his son Prosper.

²⁶ “[La troupe] a paru faire plaisir aux habitant[s] de Cambrai où elle vient de donner des représentations pendant un mois.” *L'Écho de la frontière*, 4 June 1840, p. [927].

²⁷ *Le mémorial Artésien*, 17 May 1845, in advance of the town premiere of *La juive*.

troupe have victoriously justified this [reputation]”,²⁸ a comment that underlines again just how frequently opinions from across the theatrical network were read, assessed and justified by other critics. These intra-*arrondissement* reports primed audiences to receive troupes and specific pieces in a positive manner far before performers had even set foot in a new locale.

Of course, attention to performances across the *arrondissement* could also be detrimental. Companies could have future stops on their itineraries marred by transmitted accounts of their past failures. In 1824, for instance, an anonymous journalist in Valenciennes warned readers that director Alexis Dupré-Nyon’s 1st *troupe d’arrondissement* “marching towards us is not escorted by an excellent reputation”.²⁹ As this quote demonstrates, the *arrondissement* grapevine had the potential to prime the audience to be wary of upcoming performers, especially since local columnists went as far as to anticipate poor troupe standards from regional silence about directors’ successes. Writing about Dellemence’s troupe in 1829, for example, another Valenciennes critic wrote that:

Dellemence’s opera troupe must be making very little impact in Arras because this town’s newspapers do not mention their performances. *Le journal de Cambrai* has announced that Dellemence is doing everything to avoid going to the latter town, where he never makes enough profit.³⁰

From journalistic silence, the Valenciennes’ critic inferred the artistic weakness of Dellemence’s troupe and, from Dellemence’s avoidance of Cambrai, further assumed mismanagement of the troupe. These two elements prepared a lacklustre reception for the group’s initial Valenciennes performances, although the troupe was found to improve as their shows continued.³¹ The fate of travelling troupes in one locale could therefore easily be affected by the reported successes and failures of their recent *arrondissement* history since ephemeral and geographically distant performances could be preserved for posterity through connected and comparative press reports.

Overall, the typical journalistic practices of small-town critics offered a sense of communal theatrical membership that encouraged readers to transcend the limitations of the shared itinerant system by participating vicariously in the theatrical season taking place across the *arrondissement*.³² By situating performances,

²⁸ “Une belle réputation avait précédé la troupe de M. Seymours; hâtons-nous de dire que les artistes qui la composent l’ont victorieusement justifiée.” *Le journal des théâtres* (Paris), 18 September 1844, p. 3.

²⁹ “[La troupe] qu’on nous annonce ne marche point escortée d’une excellente renommée.” *Les petites affiches de Valenciennes*, 20 November 1824, p. 380.

³⁰ “Il faut que la troupe d’opéra de M. Dellemence fasse bien peu de sensation à Arras, car les feuilles de cette ville ne rendent point compte des représentations. *Le journal de Cambrai* annonce que M. Dellemence fait tout son possible pour ne pas aller dans cette dernière ville, où il ne fait pas d’assez bonnes recettes.” *Les petites affiches de Valenciennes*, 11 February 1829, p. 53.

³¹ *L’Écho de la frontière*, 14 March 1829, p. [90].

³² *Le Morbihan* (Vannes), 24 June 1843, p. 3.

performers and spectators within an imagined *arrondissement* community, critics placed provincial connections at the heart of local performance culture.

Self-definition through the community

Journalists' articulation of an *arrondissement* community had a decided effect on how readers understood the socio-political context of hometown stage cultures. On many occasions, the regional framework was used by local critics to consider the place of the local by outlining *arrondissement* comparisons and subsequent hierarchies. In this vein, several northern critics used the issue of taste to discuss the regional status of their towns. In 1848, a Saint-Omer journalist writing about the upcoming town premiere of Fromental Halévy's *Charles VI*³³ referenced inter-town competition when stating that the *grand opéra* "will not be less attended in Saint-Omer than in Arras, in Cambrai, in Valenciennes, in Dunkerque, or, in fact, anywhere Mr Bertéché has given this opera".³⁴ A few years earlier, the same journalist similarly included a review of the same troupe's Dunkerque premiere of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma*,³⁵ declaring that the piece in his town would "attract all those people who like music and have an interest in art to the theatre next Tuesday".³⁶ In both of these columns, the critic made it known that his locality valued musical art by boasting that Saint-Omer audiences would match their compatriots in other *arrondissement* locales, but, in doing so, also voiced a call for his inhabitants to step up and buy tickets to prove said advertised artistic intelligence. In the case of Saint-Omer, these statements also formed a way of justifying the town's place in the artistic network of the north at a time when the town was the Auch to the Pau of Dunkerque and Valenciennes: Saint-Omer received far fewer *troupe d'arrondissement* visits per year than the rest of the regional network due to its smaller population and the lack of space and decors in its *salle de spectacle*.³⁷

Across France, theatrical resources were other key features through which journalists charted *arrondissement* dynamics, most often negative ones. The journalist A. B., writing in the Vannes paper *Le Morbihannais* in August 1841, for one, emphasised the discrepancies between troupe performances in his hometown and Lorient:

there [Lorient] are the decors, there is the [music] library, there the *magasin*, there the orchestra. [...] The voices that cannot make themselves heard here, the orchestral ensemble that

³³ Libretto by Germain et Casimir Delavigne.

³⁴ "Charles VI ne sera pas moins bien venu à St.-Omer qu'à Arras, à Cambrai, à Valenciennes, à Dunkerque, que partout enfin où M. Bertéché a donné cet opéra". *Le mémorial Artésien*, 26 January 1848, p. 3.

³⁵ Libretto by Felice Romani.

³⁶ "attirer au théâtre [de St.-Omer], mardi prochain, toutes les personnes qui aiment la musique et qui portent intérêt à l'art". *Le mémorial Artésien*, 11 January 1845, p. 7.

³⁷ AN, F/21/1235, Itinerary (Bertéché), 16 March 1840.

we are searching for, and the interpretation that comes with it will no doubt also be found there.³⁸

The comparison between Lorient and other towns was an ongoing concern in Brittany as, two years later, A. B. once more complained about the inferiority of Vannes versus Lorient, calling his hometown, along with the nearby small town of Quimper, the “thorn in the crown of the poor director”.³⁹ Similarly, in an 1842 account of Bertéché’s troupe performing Friedrich von Flotow’s opera *Le naufrage de la Méduse* (1839)⁴⁰ in Saint-Omer, journalist Georges Fleury described that the stage effects depicting a foundering boat appeared lacklustre: on their stage, “the storm reigned on one side of the waves, and calm on the other”.⁴¹ The writer could not help adding that this effect had been more convincingly executed on the larger Dunkerque stage, where the “audience’s impressions were entirely in contrast to ours”. Indeed, he reported that Bertéché’s performance there had led to an emotional connection with the audience (“everyone was moved”). For Fleury, Dunkerque’s more expansive theatrical resources allowed troupe performances to offer a deeper level of artistic expression than was available in Saint-Omer. This is demonstrated in the reporter’s statement that the moving effect allowed Dunkerque spectators to make a connection between the onstage portrayal of sailors drowning and their lived experiences of similar events in their coastal town. This emotive reaction was, the journalist implied, a far cry from the “unflattering” reception by spectators in Saint-Omer. Theatrical resources thus led to differences in the profundity of performed experiences offered across an *arrondissement*. In their comparison of the theatrical resources and consequential audiences reactions of Breton and 1st-*arrondissement* towns, A. B. and Fleury both outlined a clear pecking order: Saint-Omer and Vannes were seen as satellites of Dunkerque and Lorient due to their lesser resources and the resulting differences in spectators’ experiences, charting a clear provincial hierarchy within the region.⁴²

Simply pointing out the power dynamics caused by theatrical culture was not the point of such columns. Rather, they were usually a means to a particular end: bettering the town in question and potentially changing readers’ conceptions of existing power dynamics. An 1839 column written by journalist Alphonse Thinius for *L’Industriel alsacien*, a paper from industrial Mulhouse, exemplifies how theatrical relationships were used to reflect more widely on the regional status of

³⁸ “là en effet est la subvention, là sont les décors, là la bibliothèque, là les magasins, là l’orchestre [...] là aussi se trouveront sans doute les voix qui ne peuvent parvenir à se faire entendre ici, l’ensemble que l’on cherche, l’intelligence qui viendra”. *Le Morbihan*, 28 August 1841, p. 2.

³⁹ “pas la seule épine de la couronne de l’infortuné directeur”. *Le Morbihan*, 24 June 1843, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Libretto by Auguste Pilati.

⁴¹ “La mer n’avait pas assez de répétitions, la tempête régnait d’un coté sur les flots, le calme de l’autre [...]. A Dunkerque [...] les impressions des spectateurs ont été toutes contraires aux nôtres; là tout le monde était ému”. *Le mémorial Artésien*, 27 October 1842, p. 5.

⁴² Critics also highlighted the differences in decors provided for troupes in Cambrai versus Valenciennes, using a comparison to call for municipal investment. See Archives départementales du Nord, 1/T/222, IN, 10 September 1860.

provincial towns. Thinus stated that music was an educational art from which he believed many Mulhouse families had turned away, although without describing why. The critic, however, saw the work of the *troupes d'arrondissement* as a means to revitalise “the taste of the city for singing and theatre in general”. Crucially, Thinus envisaged the development of Mulhousian taste as essential to wider civic development. Once Mulhouse had regained the title of “an artistic city”, he argued, it could then become “a big town, benefitting from all the advantages of real civilisation.”⁴³ Once regional hierarchy was defined through theatre, journalists could also refer to the *arrondissement* community to train local readers’ and audiences’ theatre-going behaviours. For example, references to other towns’ appreciation of certain performers could be used to model appropriate local behaviour towards singers. In the Saint-Omer journalist’s review of 1st-*arrondissement* soprano Athénaïs Lefèvre in 1845, he wrote: “M^{me} Lefèvre deserved to be recalled; she was [recalled] twice in Dunkerque and will be, we predict, in all of the towns of the 1st *arrondissement*.”⁴⁴ Here, the Saint-Omer critic reported the Dunkerque audience’s praise of Mme Lefèvre as a way of guiding his own populace’s reaction to the singer: by emphasising the artistic intelligence of the Dunkerque audience in applauding her, he suggests that this reaction to her singing was the gold standard for the *arrondissement*, implying that other audiences of similar good judgment – namely Saint-Omer – would be expected to repeat it.

In the 6th *arrondissement*, positive comparisons of spectatorship practices between Saint-Brieuc and Lorient audiences were also invoked by the critic from the former town to affirm his local audience’s appraisal of troupe members Guillemain (tenor)⁴⁵ and Ferdinand (baritone) in 1844. Writing as if he were talking directly to these singers, the journalist stated that “you are precious acquisitions for a director, and you contribute to an ensemble that will be heartily appreciated in Lorient, our principal town, where we don’t doubt our judgements shall be confirmed.”⁴⁶ In this statement, the Saint-Brieuc writer sought to capitalise on the established cultural hierarchy of the 6th *arrondissement*, leaning on Lorient’s reputation as a place of artistic importance to confirm the judgement of the Saint-Brieuc populace. In this way, regional critique in both the 1st and 6th *arrondissements*

⁴³ “Mulhausen n’est pas encore une cité artistique. [...] Ainsi se formerait sans doute et se développerait le goût de la cité pour le chant et en général pour le théâtre ; [...] et Mulhausen ne tarderait pas à prendre place au rang des grandes villes et à jouir de tous les avantages d’une véritable civilisation.” A. Th. [Alphonse Thinus], Mulhausen sur le point de devenir grande ville, in *L’Industriel Alsacien* (Mulhouse), 29 December 1839, pp. [417]f., here p. 418.

⁴⁴ “M^{me} Lefèvre a mérité d’être rappelée; elle l’a été deux fois à Dunkerque et elle le sera, nous le lui prédisons, dans toutes les villes du premier arrondissement.” *Le mémorial Artésien*, 15 January 1845, p. 4. Mme Lefèvre married and from 1845 was subsequently known as Mme Charton. *Écho de la frontière*, 21 January 1845, p. 1 [33]. See also AN, F/21/1236, troupe list (Bertéché), 1845/46.

⁴⁵ Also spelled “Guillemin”, Archives départementales du Morbihan, 1/Z/197, Prospectus, 24 September 1844.

⁴⁶ “[...] vous [êtes] de précieuses acquisitions pour un directeur, et vous contribuez à un ensemble qui sera vivement apprécié à Lorient, votre ville principale, où, nous n’en doutons pas, nos jugemen[t]s seront confirmés.” *Le journal des théâtres*, 11 July 1844, p. 4.

could help to shape the direction of local audiences' taste and engagement with troupes by creating a sense of communal, approved reactions to certain singers. In other words, what was artistically correct would, in these critics' eyes, be confirmed and maintained through imitation between towns within the *arrondissement*.

It is, of course, possible to see the reverse happening too: regional comparison could be used to promote differences in the artistic-judgement practices of *arrondissement* spectators and, in turn, to distinguish the behaviours of towns' inhabitants. Indeed, the writer from the *Écho* in Valenciennes was at pains to emphasise that his town's spectators did not accept the new tenor Allard as warmly as those in Dunkerque in 1845.⁴⁷ Several town newspapers had previously reported Allard's success in Dunkerque,⁴⁸ but once the *Écho* writer had heard the tenor in Valenciennes, he judged Allard as "unremarkable".⁴⁹ Subjectivity aside, the *Écho* critic's reference to the *arrondissement* was significant in this review. The commentator wrote that "we were wrong to boast so much about the troupe's new acquisition" although he had earlier repeated the Dunkerque paper's praise for Allard;⁵⁰ he thus framed the local reception of this performer as a rejection of the artistic taste of the Dunkerque public.

In the same theatrical season, a comparison of the reception of soprano Pauline Gourdon in different towns also allowed Saint-Omer critic Georges Fleury to similarly establish his public's taste versus the *arrondissement* community. Discussing Bertéché's troupe's production of Halévy and Scribe's opera *La juive* in Valenciennes in March 1845, Fleury criticised this town's audiences for having celebrated M^{me} Gourdon's singing. He described that the Valenciennes audience's behaviour "mislead the director. [...] recalling M^{me} Gourdon, who has no voice nor does she understand what is required of her role type, is wrong."⁵¹ By redefining M^{me} Gourdon's talent through the eyes of the Saint-Omer public, Fleury reflected on the Valenciennes audience and denigrated their opinions, thereby establishing the superior artistic tastes of his local populace. Comparative reviewing in this vein thereby allowed critics to impose their own regional hierarchies within the *arrondissement* based on the reception of troupe members.

Regional comparisons were also employed didactically as a means of bettering local spectators' judgements. In 1828, for instance, a Valenciennes journalist compared their town's appreciation of singer M^{me} Dellemece (the director's wife) with recent reports that her performance in *Zaire* in Dunkerque had been

⁴⁷ *L'Écho de la frontière*, 25 January 1845, p. 1 [41].

⁴⁸ *Le courrier du Nord*, 16 November 1844, p. 2.

⁴⁹ "On a eu tort de vanter outre mesure cette nouvelle acquisition de la troupe; si on n'eût parlé ni de son talent ni de ses appointements, M. Allard eut passé inaperçu." *L'Écho de la frontière*, 25 January 1845, p. 1 [41]. See also *L'Écho de la frontière*, 21 January 1845, p. 1 [33].

⁵⁰ *L'Écho de la frontière*, 11 November, 1844, p. 1 [531]

⁵¹ "Voilà comme le public égare le directeur. [...] redemander M^{me} Gourdon, qui n'a ni la voix, ni l'intelligence de son emploi, c'est un tort." *Le mémorial Artésien*, 1 March 1845, p. 5. The term *emploi* referred to a role type, applicable across different pieces and genres (i.e. the ingenue, comic male etc.) with specific vocal and physical characteristics. Each performer was hired to fill one or two *emplois* within a provincial troupe.

“whistled and jeered at [...], those people there are not po...polite at all.”⁵² Not only positioning his populace as superior to their Dunkerque counterparts, the critic implicitly advocated for a correct type of behaviour that he wished to instil in his local audience by insulting the Dunkerque towns’ audiences and underlining the Valenciennes’ correct – in his eyes – reaction to the actress. Through these types of comments, journalists suggested that there was a golden standard of artistic judgement and behaviour that only *their* town embodied, once again affirming their central position within the *arrondissement*. Especially in smaller towns such as Saint-Omer such comparisons made between audience behaviours formed a potential strategy for surmounting the peripheral nature of the town in material terms, such as the aforementioned poor theatrical resources or fewer troupe visits. The *arrondissement* community as articulated through these newspaper columns thus hinged on a paradoxical axis: it created both a sense of collectiveness that combatted some of the absences and fluctuations of the itinerant system, but the shared readership and spectatorship of this community also encouraged the press’s formation of different hierarchies and power dynamics between members.

Community, hierarchies and repertoire

I have argued so far that the process of sharing a troupe across a provincial network of towns during the mid-nineteenth century resulted in the critical articulation of the regional as an important sphere for the mediation of the everyday socio-political function of the theatrical life of small French towns, including the voicing of competitive tensions about power dynamics and hierarchies across the region. Crucially, theatrical competition and comparison on a regional level could be used productively by town critics to reflect on and define cultural behaviours and identities in their locale, as shown in the work of critics from Mulhouse and Saint-Omer. As I hope to have shown, acknowledging the interconnected nature of local theatrical life in these provincial environments offers an important way to reconceptualise the broad and relationally-dependent ‘local-ness’ of the socio-political topicality of repertoire, performance practices and theatrical life as a whole in small French towns between the 1820s and 1860s.

Moreover, I wish to conclude by suggesting that the process of defining the local through regional connectivity was none the more pressing than in discussions of the socio-political function of one specific repertoire and its regional place. It was the provision of opera – and not just theatre in general – that was central to the Prefect of Gers’ complaints about the influence of his colleague over Hermant’s troupe in 1852, just as it was most often operatic pieces, such as *La juive* and *Le naufrage de la Méduse*, that revealed the discrepancies in theatrical resources or differences in regional taste outlined above. The potency of the regional theatrical

⁵² “Mad^e Dellemece aurait été sifflée et huée [...], ces gens-là ne sont pas po...polis du tout.” *Les petites affiches de Valenciennes*, 20 December 1828, p. 499.

community was thus expressed most strongly in provincial operatic conditions, yet so were the community's limitations. The sharing of operatic troupes, for example, was apt to escalate the largest regional tensions. In Valenciennes, a critic writing on 29 April 1834 described an increase in visits from a variety of itinerant companies that came to this corner of the north. He relayed his disappointment, though, that a rise in performances did not mean a rise in opera: "[T]his year we are favoured a little more, but by the *comédie troupe*."⁵³ The 'but' indicated the journalists' distress at the lack of opera in Valenciennes, confirmed later in the column as he stressed the anticipated delights provided by the *troupe d'arrondissement* who *could* provide this repertoire, including the local premiere of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831).

Critics such as this Valenciennes writer not only distinguished the local worth of two genres but communicated a clear delineation of artistic hierarchies that were aligned with the performing troupe presenting the genre. The *troupes d'arrondissement*, the groups that I have mentioned throughout this chapter, were the only type of itinerant company that attempted, in varying levels of frequency across France, to stage *opéra-comique*, *grand opéra* and French translations of Italian operas. By comparison, provincial towns at times also hosted *troupes ambulantes*, a smaller type of itinerant company which concentrated on vaudeville and spoken plays and which was ranked underneath the *arrondissement* performers in the government's 1824 legislation.⁵⁴ Crucially, at times, the troupes' differences and genres were reflected hierarchically onto the *arrondissement* community. This is exemplified in an 1827 article by a different Valenciennes reviewer discussing L. Dumanoir's *seconde troupe ambulante*:⁵⁵ "Perhaps the size of our *salle* is not aligned with the level of talent of some of the troupe's artists, who will no doubt be better appreciated in Saint-Amand, Bavai and Bouchain."⁵⁶

In his column, the critic used a comparison of the metaphorical size of traveling troupes' talent to make a wider social comment about the differences between Valenciennes and three much smaller northern villages without a dedicated theatre building. The *ambulante* company was not talented enough for Valenciennes, with its sizeable *salle*, the critic suggested, but was appropriate for the scale of the other towns' poky, temporary stages and, by implication, their limited understanding of artistic talent. In addition, the column inferred an unspoken comparison of place through repertoire: the *troupe ambulante* did not produce opera and, the journalist implied, the inhabitants of Saint-Amand, Bavay and Bouchain could therefore not expect to measure up to the regional artistic importance of

⁵³ "Cette fois nous sommes un peu mieux favorisés, mais par la troupe de Comédie". *Le courrier du Nord*, 29 April 1834, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Horrocks, *Performing for the Provinces*, pp. 7, 48f.

⁵⁵ The *seconde troupe ambulante* was the third troupe working in the northern region, alongside the *troupe d'arrondissement* and the *première troupe ambulante*.

⁵⁶ "Peut être que la dimension de notre salle n'est pas en rapport avec le talent de quelques uns des artistes qui la composent, qui seront sans doute mieux appréciés à St Amand, Bavai et Bouchain." *Les petites affiches de Valenciennes*, 9 May 1827, p. [598].

Valenciennes. This short column therefore acted as a multi-layered metaphor in which the journalist cuttingly used the *troupe d'arrondissement* and its operatic fare to position Valenciennes as a town of greater regional importance and artistic taste than its neighbours.

Given the stakes for regional comparison and self-definition through the performance of operatic repertoire, it is unsurprising that many municipal councils also used the genre to attempt to shift their town's place in regional hierarchies. Councillors in Vannes, Lorient and Tarbes began to fund their *troupe d'arrondissement* for certain seasons between 1824 and 1864 as a strategy to ensure that directors would visit more regularly.⁵⁷ This move attempted to outmanoeuvre other towns by dangling a financial carrot in front of self-supporting directors, and in all of these cases, the municipal councils demanded that the *troupe d'arrondissement* guarantee operatic productions.⁵⁸ Attempts to become a more dominant centre in the theatrical network were therefore strictly tied to the local promotion of opera. Such moments reveal that it was the act of choosing operatic talent and repertoire, of defining themselves regionally through the operatic troupe and of competing with other provincial centres through opera that mattered most to critics and administrators at the local and regional level. To be part of a regional framework for theatre was, for many administrators and critics, thus primarily the experience of belonging to a shared operatic community, and issues of *arrondissement* hierarchy were determined most significantly through this high-art lyric genre.

⁵⁷ Archives municipales de Vannes, 1/D/1/8, municipal council minutes, 17 November 1835; 11 September 1839; 17 February 1862.

⁵⁸ AN, F/21/1250, letter from the Prefect of Morbihan (Édouard Lorois), 9 April 1841; F/21/1277, council minutes, 27 November 1841.

Visitors to the Municipal Theatre in the *Olmützer Sprachinsel* at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Lenka Křupková

The Königlich-städtisches Theater (Royal Municipal Theatre) in Olomouc (in German Olmütz), whose history began in 1770, occupied the position of the most important cultural institution in the city with its predominantly German inhabitants until the end of its existence in 1920. There was only one period in the theatre's history when its significance went beyond the borders of the Moravian region, both qualitatively and geographically. Friedrich Blum was responsible for this during his directorship from 1847 to 1859. Blum headed the Olomouc theatre during the turbulent revolutionary period of 1848, when the imperial court was expelled from Vienna to Olomouc. At that time, as well as in the following years when the imperial court visited Olomouc several times, Blum made the theatre a kind of court institution, which attracted the attention of important artists and was also popular with audiences from distant regions.¹ This chapter of the Olomouc theatre, however, was an exception to the otherwise prevailing type of provincial theatre of the nineteenth century, whose sphere of activity did not extend beyond the city and its immediate surroundings. In my paper, I will attempt to reconstruct the structure of the opera audience at a time when what had hitherto been a German majority began to be threatened by the growth of the Czech population and the emancipation of Czech culture in Olomouc. The aim is to characterise the specifics, tastes, national distribution, and dynamics of changes in the audience.

From the mid-seventeenth century, the city of Olomouc was an important military fortress located near the Austrian-Prussian border and built up over the years, its task being to protect the military interests of the Habsburg monarchy. The importance of the city was also increased by the fact that the Olomouc bishopric was elevated to the seat of an archbishopric in 1777. The city, set in the centre of Moravia, one of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, was for centuries a German-speaking area, the so-called "Olmützer Sprachinsel". Before I get to the core of my contribution, I consider it necessary to introduce the basic characteristics of theatre operations in Olomouc.

Municipal theatre administration

The theatre in Olomouc was a type of municipal theatre in the Austrian monarchy with a half-yearly season from the end of September to Easter. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the role of the city as the owner of the theatre in Olomouc

¹ On Friedrich Blum's directorship of the Olomouc Municipal Theatre, see Jiří Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci 1770–1878 I*, Olomouc 2012, pp. 71–157.



Fig. 1. The building on the Lower Square in Olomouc, where theatre performances took place in the years 1770–1830. Its capacity was 350 seats. Photography by Lenka Křupková

was significantly strengthened, especially since the director was relieved of the obligation to pay rent for the building, and the municipality took over a large part of the operating expenses.² However, the municipality was by no means content with the role of building manager and became instead the theatre's intendant,

² On the relationship between the management of the City of Olomouc and theatre directors, see Lenka Křupková, *The City of Olomouc and Theatre Directors. A Model Example of the Functioning of the Austro-Hungarian City Theatre*, in *International Review of Music Aesthetics and Sociology* 45/2, 2014, pp. 275–291.



Fig. 2. The new theatre on the Upper Square was built in 1828–1830, a project by the Viennese architect Josef Kornhäusel. Photography by Lenka Křupková

co-determining its artistic character. Its executive body was the *Theatercomitée* (theatre committee), whose members were regularly elected, managed communication with the theatre director, and prepared key measures, which were then submitted to a vote of the college of city councillors. The city's management concentrated mainly on opera performances, whereas the public's preferences since the invasion of operetta had been directed mainly towards more entertaining forms of musical theatre. Opera, however, determined the artistic level of the Olomouc theatre. As can be seen from the contemporary press and documents on the meetings of the city councillors, the evaluation of the theatre, the activities of its directors, and the performance of the ensemble were primarily derived from the quality of the opera repertoire and opera performances. The municipality provided strict feedback to the theatre and its management, supervising the form of the repertoire and the level of its performance. The councillors had the right to approve or prohibit the programme, which the theatre directors were obliged to

submit for checking every week. The city council could also recall singers if, in their opinion, they put on poor-quality performances. The theatre director had only limited creative or production freedom. It is clear from the contracts concluded between the theatre director and the municipality that there was hardly a single step that the theatre director could take without the approval of the municipal government.³

Opera ensemble of a provincial theatre built from ‘beginners’

From the 1870s onwards, the theatre, which originally featured a cosmopolitan opera repertoire, gradually transformed into a stage of a distinctly national character. The basis of the opera programme consisted of the most-performed operas of the time, mostly of German provenance.⁴ The Olomouc opera scene (like every other Austrian opera scene) was embedded in a network of provincial theatres, characterised by a constant changing of membership. Many other German city theatres in Central Europe faced similar difficulties. The theatres had similar operating conditions, repertoires, and travelling company members. Theatres also put on productions with a similar visual appearance, for which they had the sets made in the Viennese studio of theatrical decorative painting firm Brioschi, Burghart and Kautsky.

A typical situation always occurred after the end of the season when theatre directors went to Vienna or other larger centres to select fresh singing talent. The successful guest appearances of the artists invited during the season were also decisive for their eventual entry into a contract relationship. For the smaller city theatres, it was advantageous to attract especially talented beginners, whose wage demands were not high. Successful theatre business was largely tied to the ability of directors to recognise yet undeveloped skills in inexperienced singers. The Olomouc German municipal stage also became, in some of its periods, a breeding ground for future stars whose brilliant careers were launched there.

Nationality conflict

For a long time, Olomouc was a German-speaking national island surrounded by Czech towns and villages. In 1876, the demolition of the fortress walls began, and the city, which was still dominated by a German population with numerical and economic predominance, was opened to new construction. The Germans feared the influx of Czechs as the number of Czechs in the adjacent suburbs and villages

³ The conditions of the operation of the theatre were clearly set out in agreements between the city of Olomouc and the theatre directors; see Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, *Provincial Theatre and Its Opera. German Opera Scene in Olomouc (1770–1920)*, Olomouc 2015, pp. 21–48.

⁴ On the repertoire of the Olomouc theatre see Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, Olomouc’s “Half-Year” Provincial Theatre and Its Repertoire, in *Opera as Institution. Networks and Professions (1730–1917)*, ed. by Cristina Scuderi/Ingeborg Zechner, Wien 2019, pp. 157–179.

had gradually outnumbered the Germans in the city outside the walls. They tried to resist any signs of what they collectively called *Tschechisierung*. A city still living in relative national peace became a restless melting pot of national conflicts.⁵ This state of affairs was also reflected in the situation in the city's theatre. While until then it had been open to Czech productions organised by local amateur actors or travelling Czech theatre troupes, from 1884 onwards they were denied this opportunity. The Czechs soon found an alternative to cultural productions outside the German theatre. They managed to overcome the building restrictions that were still in place and built the National House outside the city walls in the centre of Olomouc, where opera performances and other musical works were staged by the semi-professional singing and music society Žerotín.⁶

Social stratification of the theatre audience

The composition of the subscribers of the Olomouc municipal theatre can be reconstructed today only with difficulty and only on the basis of indirect indications. The reason for this is that the relevant sources, such as the box office books, have not survived as they were destroyed along with other valuable documents from the theatre archives during the flood in Olomouc in October 1930. As in the case of other European theatres of this period, the Olomouc theatre's public was principally constituted of locals.

The social stratification of a theatre audience can be deduced from the way it is seated in the space of the theatre auditorium. The architect Josef Kornhäusel provided the theatre with a horseshoe-shaped auditorium with four rows of boxes and a gallery, accessible from side corridors around the perimeter of the auditorium. The capacity of the auditorium in 1830 was approximately 900 to 1,000 people, with the parterre and gallery containing standing-room places.⁷ In the early 1880s, seats were installed in the auditorium parterre, reducing the capacity of the hall. Similarly to other German or Austro-Hungarian theatres, the audience seated in the parterre and boxes consisted of representatives of the then haute and petite bourgeoisie. These were factory owners, directors, bankers, lawyers, doctors, and clerks. This is also documented by the composition of the theatre committee of the Olomouc City Council, whose members were regular visitors to the theatre.

For example, in 1886 the Committee's chairman was Adolf Thannabaur, the director of the grammar school. Among the business elite were Carl Brandhuber, a textile-factory owner who served as vice-chairman of the Theatre Committee and later became mayor of Olomouc; Raimund Nietzsche, the owner of an engineering works; and Eduard Hamburger, who owned a malthouse and was a tenant of two

⁵ Jaroslav Horejsek, *Měšťanstvo ve druhé polovině 19. století a jeho politická, společenská, sociální a kulturní aktivita*, in *Studie k sociálním dějinám 19. století* 5, 1995, pp. 8–55, here p. 14.

⁶ Jiří Kopecký/Lenka Křupková, *The "Slavic Spirit" and the Opera Scene in Olomouc, 1830–1920*, in *Studia Musicologica* 58/3-4, 2017, pp. 341–361, here pp. 352f.

⁷ Kopecký, *Německá operní scéna v Olomouci I*, p. 46.



Fig. 3. Original state of the auditorium, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií* [Collection of images and photographs], State Archive Olomouc (SOKA), call no. V/103

breweries. Other members of the Theatre Committee were the trader in spices Josef Englisch, shoemaker Franz Hartwich, and optician and house owner Heinrich Sachs.⁸ Lawyers and high officials were also represented in the Theatre Committee: Conrad Bayer, lawyer and first secretary of the chamber of commerce; and Carl Buchberger, Imperial and Royal Court Councillor; and the dentist and house owner Franz Patloch.⁹

A quarter of a century later, the Theatre Committee still had the same composition, presided over by the bookseller and house owner Friedrich Grosse; his deputy was the director of the municipal elementary school, Josef Föhner. The members of the Theatre Committee included two school directors – the director of the Imperial and Royal Grammar School, Adolf Daumann, and the director of the municipal elementary school, Theodor Knaute. The business elite was

⁸ The ownership of residential houses and rental of apartments later became a source of income for Olomouc citizens (Horejšek, *Měšťanstvo ve druhé polovině 19. století*, p. 18.); therefore, the statement of ownership of a house was as important as the information regarding a trade or a profession, if not more so.

⁹ *Statistisches Jahrbuch der königlichen Hauptstadt Olmütz*, Vol. 1: *Einleitungsband als Festschrift zum vierzigjährigen Regierungsjubiläum Sr. Majestät des Kaisers*, ed. by Wilibald Müller, Olomouc 1888, pp. 117–122.

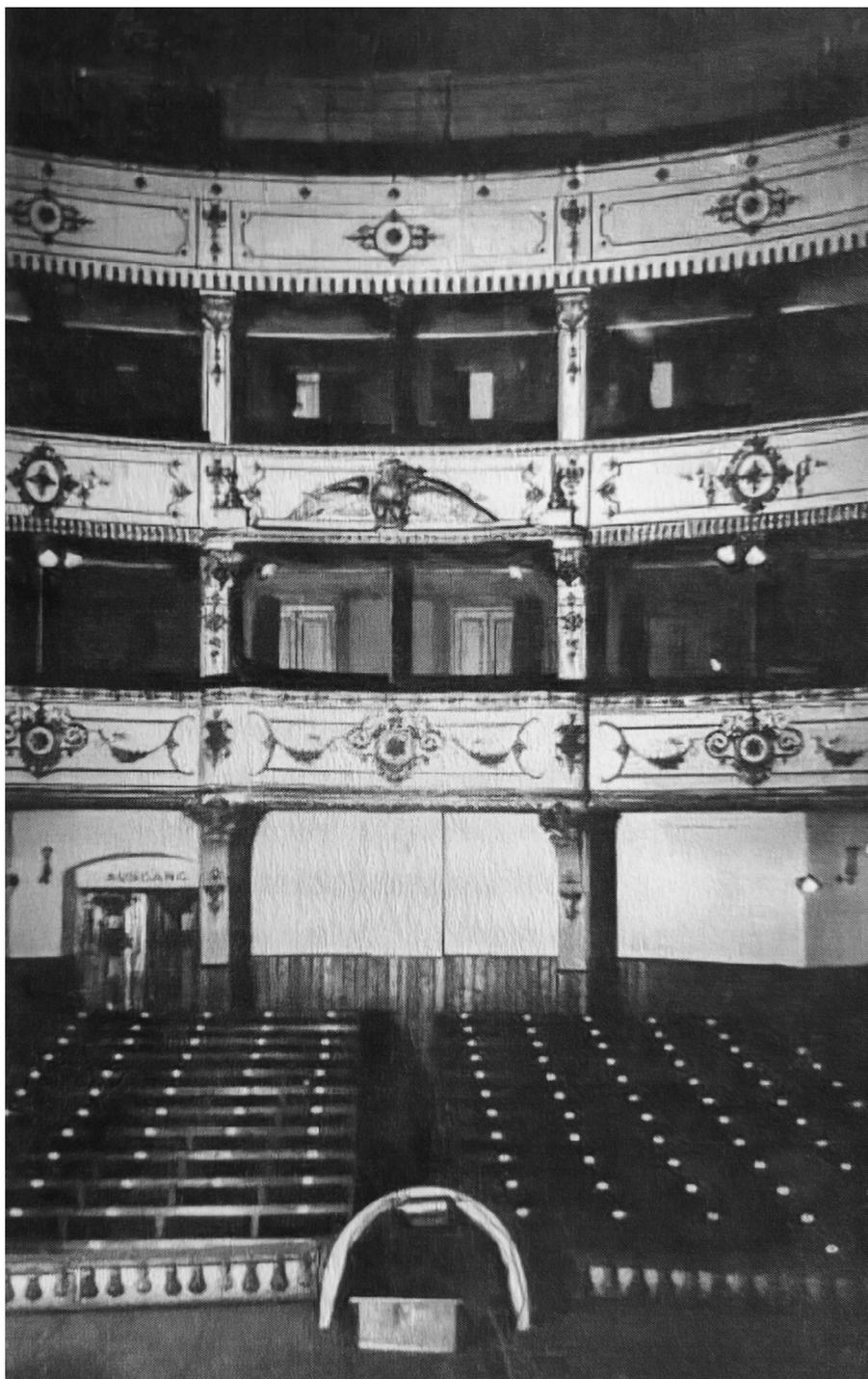


Fig. 4. Auditorium after rebuilding in 1880, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií*, SOKA, call no. XXVIII/141

represented by the industrialist and factory owner Robert Primavesi, while other members of the committee owned smaller-scale businesses – the malt-factory owner Friedrich Fischel, factory and house owner Eduard Mayer, trader in leather Max Deutsch, soap boiler Karl Weiß, and café owner Johann Rupprecht. Among the municipal clerks were the director of the post office, Josef Benda; the secretary of the chamber of commerce, Dr. Hans Krick; and the Imperial and Royal Court Councillor Dr. Oswald Theimer. The Theatre Committee would not be complete without the Imperial and Royal Lawyer Richard Mader and the dentist Dr. Josef Schön.¹⁰

The cheapest seats in the galleries and the standing area in the parterre were presumably occupied by groups of students and lower military ranks. Members of the lower social classes – workers and employees – could hardly afford to visit the theatre for two reasons. First of all, the price of admission was too high; in 1888, a parterre seat cost seventy kreutzers,¹¹ which was out of proportion, for example, to food prices (a loaf of bread was six kreutzers at the time, and half a kilo of beef was twelve kreutzers). Craftsmen, who in the 1880s earned an annual wage of 180–190 florins,¹² could visit the theatre from time to time when they managed to save enough money, but labourers living on a hundred florins¹³ could not afford such a luxury. The early start of the show was the second reason why there were no workers or employees among the theatregoers. In Olomouc, theatre performances started at 7 p.m.,¹⁴ which was incompatible with the working hours of manual workers. We can hardly imagine that after many hours of hard work, workers would find enough energy to go to the theatre, even for the cheapest standing-room tickets (twenty kreutzers)¹⁵ that they could possibly afford. However, many members of the petite bourgeoisie also had a long working day. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the theatre director Leopold Schmid wanted to move the start of the performances to half past seven so as to

¹⁰ *Die Statistischen Jahrbücher der königlichen Hauptstadt Olmütz*, Vol. 5: 1905–1910, ed. by Statistische Commission des Gemeinderathes, Olomouc 1911, pp. 185–187.

¹¹ State Archive Olomouc (SOKA), Olomouc Archives (AMÖ), Registratura hospodářská 1874–1920 [Economic Registry, 1874–1920], Divadelní ředitelé 1878–1896 [Theatre Directors, 1878–1896], carton 765, sign. L 2 – item 359, *Abschrift. Pachtvertrag, welcher mit dem Theaterdirektor Stick abgeschlossen wurde. Welcher zwischen der Gemeinde der kgl. Hauptstadt Olmütz an einendann dem Herrn Carl Stick an anderen Theile um die Benutzung des Olmützer städtischen Theaters samt Redoutensales in Folge Beschlusses des Stadtverordneten-Kollegiums vom 1. 6. 1888, Z911W nachstehend abgeschlossen wurde.*

¹² Milena Lenderová/Tomáš Jiránek/Marie Macková, *Z dějin české každodennosti. Život v 19. století*, Praha 2011, pp. 32f. In the Czech lands, the conversion rate of 1 florin = 100 kreutzers was valid between 1857 and 1892.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ On days when balls were held in the Reduta Hall, which was located in the municipal theatre building, or other events organised by the municipal council accompanied by the municipal band, of whose members the theatre orchestra consisted, theatrical performances had to begin as early as at 6 p.m. and end at 8 p.m. This rule was usually formulated in § 9, 10 of the theatre contracts concluded between the theatre directors and the city council.

¹⁵ Twenty kreutzers was the cost of a standing place in the gallery in 1888. See *Abschrift. Pachtvertrag, welcher mit dem Theaterdirektor Stick abgeschlossen wurde*, 1 June 1888.

enable business owners and other traders who offered their services until the evening hours to also attend the theatre on working days.¹⁶ Theatregoing was mainly a Saturday and Sunday evening pastime because on those days the lower classes also found time to attend the performances, which mainly comprised entertaining genres, especially operetta and comedy. Hence, opera – a genre that was not too popular with the lower social classes – was usually presented during the week. With the emergence of the social state at the end of the nineteenth century, European theatres started to organise so-called popular performances with a reduced ticket price. Popular performances put on in Olomouc on Sundays and holidays at half past three were introduced by the director Stanislaus Lesser in 1898, and they were also organised by his successors. Aside from these popular shows, the director Leopold Schmid organised performances for schools. Their programme was carefully supervised by the municipal authorities to make sure that the young were offered valuable classical dramas by the greats of German theatre, supporting and encouraging national attitudes.¹⁷ Popular performances were fully in the hands of the theatre directors, who were aware that operetta would, above all, resonate with the mainstream audience.

Theatre attendance problems and solutions

The Olomouc theatre had periods of good and bad attendance. The worst situation in this regard was in the 1880s, when the general economic and agrarian crisis was considerably weakening the population economically. In hindsight, the poor attendance of the 1880s was seen as a consequence of the great fire at the Ringtheater in Vienna in December 1881, with more than 380 fatalities; afterwards, there was a great fear among the German population of Olomouc of any visit to the theatre. However, these attendance crises returned to the Olomouc theatre periodically. The theatre directors were not interested in investing in the operation of the theatre because they could not get a return on it, and consequently the level of quality fell further and further. The situation gradually improved towards the end of the 1880s, when the city council decided to contribute to the theatre's operation with higher subventions. The theatre directors were able to invest not only in singers and more expensive productions but also in buying the rights to perform operas and operettas that were particularly popular in Vienna at the time. The opera scene in Olomouc took a turn for the better, especially under the leadership of Carl Berghof (1890–1896). He won over the audience in particular with the performance of Mascagni's one-act *Cavalleria rusticana*¹⁸ (*Rustic Chivalry*) just a few months after its premiere at the Vienna Hofoper. For the production of *Cavalleria rusticana*, Berghof had new stage sets made in Vienna in the studio of

¹⁶ [Anon.], Theaterfragen, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 261, 16 November 1910, pp. 3f.

¹⁷ SOkA, AMO, Knihy [Books], sign. 2092, *Protokoll über die Sitzung des Stadtverordneten Collegiums der k. Hauptstadt Olmütz am 7.10.1912.*

¹⁸ In the first place are listed the titles of the operas under which they were performed in Olomouc.

MĚVEGKO-HUDEBNÍ SPOLEK ŽEROTÍN V OLOMOUCI.

Ročník XII. Výkon 66. a 67.

PRODANÁ NEVĚSTA.

Komická zpěvohra o třech jednáních. — Slova od Karla Sabiny.

Hudba od

BEDŘICHA SMETANY.

VE VELKÉ DVORANĚ „NÁR. DOMU“ V OLOMOUCI

v sobotu dne 3. prosince a v neděli dne 4. prosince 1892.

OSOBY:

<p>Krušina, sedlák. Ludmila, jeho manželka. Mařenka, jeho dcera. Mícha, sedlák. Háta, jeho manželka. Vašek, jejich syn.</p>	}	<p>Jeník, Michův syn z prvního manželství. Kecal, vesnický dohazovač. Principal komediantů. Esmeralda, komediantka. Indian, komediant.</p>
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Vesnický lid. Komedianti. Děti.

Místo a čas děje:

Vesnice o posvícení, děj odehrává se odpoledne po službách božích až pod večer.

Solové partie zpívají vesměs členové „Žerotína“; sborovou část smíšený sbor Žerotínský; úplný orchestr (kapela c. a k. pěš. pluku č. 93.).

Řídí pan Ant. Petzold. — Režii má pan Ant. Bendl.

Z A Č Á T E K:

v sobotu dne 3. prosince 1892 o 7. hod. večer, konec o 1/2 10. hod.
v neděli dne 4. prosince 1892 o 5. hod. odpo. konec o 1/2 8 hod.

CENY MÍST: Sedadla v sále v první řadě po 1 zl. 50 kr., v dalších řadách po 1 zl. Sedadla na balkoně v I. řadě po 1 zl., v II. a III. řadě po 70 kr. — Sedadla na první galerii po 70 kr. — Lístky na stání v sále po 50 kr., na I galerii po 30 kr., na II. galerii po 20 kr. — Kničky textové po 30 kr.

Vstupenky prodávají se v obchodě p. A. Hrubé na Horním náměstí a v knihkupectví p. R. Prozobergra v Olomouci a před představením u pokladny.

Kniř. arcib. knih- a kamenotiskárna v Olomouci, 2932-92.

Fig. 6. Poster for the Czech staging of *Prodaná nevěsta* (*The Bartered Bride*) by the local vocal and music club Žerotín on 3 and 4 December 1892, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií* [Collection of theatre posters], SOKa, C 1892/11

Nachdruck verboten! Direction: **Carl Berghof.** Nachdruck verboten!

Samstag den 9. März 1895.

36. Vorstellung. Abonnement suspendu. Gerader Tag.
Novität! Zum ersten Male. **Novität!**

Die verkaufte Braut.

Komische Oper in 3 Acten von C. Sabina. — Deutscher Text von Max Kalbeck.
 Musik von Friedrich Smetana.

Dirigent: **Carl Berghof.** Regie: **Gustav Rodmann.**

Personen:

Kruschka, ein Bauer	—	—	—	—	—	Hans Melms.
Katinka, seine Frau	—	—	—	—	—	Paula v. Richenfels.
Marie, beider Tochter	—	—	—	—	—	Henriette Dina a. G.
Micha, Grundbesitzer	—	—	—	—	—	Ludwig Rochelle a. G.
Agnes, seine Frau	—	—	—	—	—	Johanna Schönberger.
Wenzel, beider Sohn	—	—	—	—	—	Arthur Amendt.
Hans, Micha's Sohn aus erster Ehe	—	—	—	—	—	Georg Unger.
Regal, Heirathsvermittler	—	—	—	—	—	Emst Grünzberger.
Springer, Director einer wandernden Künstertruppe	—	—	—	—	—	Adalbert Winich.
Esmeralda, Tänzerin	—	—	—	—	—	Josefine Schwarz.
Muff, ein als Indianer verkleideter Kundsdiant	—	—	—	—	—	Gustav Rodmann.

Dorfbewohner beiderlei Geschlechts, Kunstfreier. — Ort: Ein großes Dorf in Böhmen. — Zeit: Die Gegenwart.

Tänze arrangiert von August BERGER, Balletmeister und Choreograph des königl. böhmischen Landes- und National-Theaters in Prag.

Die neue Decoration ist von Carl Latzin und Rudolf Knops ausgeführt.

Preise der Plätze:

Voge im Parterre u. I. Rang 4 fl. Voge im II. Rang 3 fl. Fant. Sitz 90 fr. Sperrsitz 70 fr. Stedparterre 50 fr. Garnisonstarkn 30 fr. Studentenstarkn 30 fr. Gallerie-Sitzplatz 30 fr. Gallerie-Stedplatz 20 fr.

Die Tagescassa ist geöffnet Vormittag 9—12 Uhr. Nachmittag 3—5 Uhr.

Cassa - Eröffnung $\frac{1}{2}$ 7 Uhr. **Anfang** 7 Uhr. **Ende** $\frac{1}{2}$ 10 Uhr.

Wochen-Spielplan:

Sonntag den 10. März 37. Vorst. Abonn. susp. Ung. Tag. Novität! Zum zweiten Male. „Die verkaufte Braut“. Komische Oper in 3 Acten von C. Sabina. Deutscher Text von Max Kalbeck. Musik von Friedrich Smetana. —

NB. Für sämmtliche am Spielplan angegebenen Vorstellungen werden jetzt schon Karten von den nicht-abonnierten Plätzen an der Tagescassa abgegeben.

Abgang derzüge von Olmütz nach:

Osavan 9 Uhr 50 Min., 12 Uhr 48 Min. — **Steenberg** 11 Uhr 38 Min. — **Proßnitz** 10 Uhr 50 Min
Gittan 11 Uhr 38 Min.

Druck von Josef Brod' in Olmütz.

Fig. 7. Poster for the première of *Die verkaufte Braut* at the German municipal theatre, 9 March 1895, in *Olmützer Zwischenakt*, 9 March 1895

the painter Hermann Burghart as well as new costumes based on original Viennese figurines. Two years later Berghof also pleased the public by purchasing the rights to perform Leoncavallo's *Der Bajazzo* (*The Clown*), which he staged again on the Viennese model.¹⁹ In contrast, the theatre was empty mainly when repertoire operas were on the programme. Especially the early nineteenth-century operas were no longer of interest to the Olomouc audience at the turn of the century. Berghof, like other directors in Olomouc, promised better attendance, primarily at benefit performances by popular singers. In the 1890s, drama performances used to be poorly attended; only the operetta was always of interest to the public. Berghof was aware of the competition from Czech productions at the National House and also that Bedřich Smetana's operas in particular attracted the interest of the German population. In order to retain the goodwill of his audience, he sought to perform Smetana's *Die verkaufte Braut* (*The Bartered Bride*), something in which he succeeded in 1895 to the great enthusiasm of the German public and local critics.²⁰ His successor Stanislaus Lesser also took advantage of the extraordinary success of *Die verkaufte Braut* and included the opera in the repertoire in two seasons. Encouraged by the success of another Smetana opera, *Dalibor*, at the Vienna Court Opera, where it was performed eleven times between October and December 1897, Lesser decided to include this opera in the Olomouc repertoire in the same year. *Dalibor*, however, provoked a major disagreement among the representatives of the local nationalist *Deutscher Verein* (German Association), who subsequently forced its withdrawal and a definitive ban on Czech works on the German theatre stage in Olomouc.²¹

Problems with attendance also arose at the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, when the public exchanged attending the theatre for going to the cinema.

The city's leadership saw the reason for the theatre's low attendance in the increase in admission fees, for which the directors were constantly asking for approval. The city council, however, was reluctant to accept these requests. In good times, however, even an increase in ticket prices did not discourage visitors, as in 1918, when war-weary people were again hungry for art.

Czechs in the audience of the German theatre

Czechs were only marginally to be found in the audience of Olomouc's municipal theatre from the mid-1880s onwards, and their numbers decreased over the years, partly because of the growing mutual national resistance but also as a result of the greater frequency of Czech cultural activities in the city. To attend a German theatre was to act against Czech national interests, and the Czech press in

¹⁹ [Anon.], Vom Theater, in *Die Neue Zeit* 272, 28 November 1893, p. 4.

²⁰ Kopecký/Křupková, The "Slavic Spirit", pp. 354f.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 356–358.

Olomouc repeatedly criticised the Czech population for this.²² The German theatre directors were very interested in attracting the Czechs to the auditorium, and their declining participation was significantly reflected in the theatre's income. The German city leadership resisted the directors' efforts to get Czechs into the theatre and would not listen to the pragmatic reasons for their actions.²³ The contemptuous attitude of the Germans towards the Czech population became apparent in the early days of the Czechoslovak Republic, which was established in 1918. In the struggle for the common use of the theatre, the Czechs were accused of being culturally immature. Germans were of the opinion that there would not be enough wealthy and educated Czechs in Olomouc to fill the auditorium of the city theatre.²⁴ It must be admitted, however, that the Czech side was also aware of this and therefore tried to attract Czechs from neighbouring villages or towns to the theatre, sending special trains for them and providing transport from the station.²⁵

Going to the theatre as part of the fight for German national interests

The German population was encouraged by the city authorities to attend the theatre and show their national feelings, which should not just be talked about but demonstrated by supporting German art.²⁶ The German audience was especially urged to attend the performances in the period when there was a real chance that the German theatre would be taken over by the Czechs, i.e. after the establishment of the independent Czechoslovakia. During this time, the theatre became part of the fight for German national interests. In this sense, the Olomouc theatre became a space for public demonstrations of a political nature much earlier. When, during a performance of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* in April 1895, there were cries of "Berghof hinaus!" (Berghof out!), it was not an expression of the audience's dissatisfaction with the conducting performance of the then theatre director Carl Berghof. It was an expression of the disapproval of the members of the *Deutscher Verein* of the German performance of the Czech composer's work in a German theatre.²⁷ Indeed, after the premiere of Smetana's *Dalibor* in 1897, the *Deutscher*

²² See e.g. [Anon.], *Dalibor v německém divadle v Olomouci*, in *Pozor* 131, 16 November 1897, p. 2.

²³ The director Stanislaus Lesser, who had the theatre on lease in Olomouc in 1896–1904, was particularly involved in this respect. In copious correspondence to the city council, he asked for permission to include a Czech repertoire that would bring Czechs into the German theatre. On this, see Lenka Křupková, "Deficit, který ani vyčísřit neumím..." Olomoucká éra divadelního ředitele Stanislause Lessera v letech 1896–1904, in *Divadelní revue* 25/2, 2014, pp. 58–76.

²⁴ [Anon.], Die Anteilung der Theaterspielzeit. Ein Antrag des tschechischen Theatervereins, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 267, 22 November 1919, pp. 3f.

²⁵ [Anon.], Zur Eröffnung der tschechischen Theaterzeit, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 199, 1 September 1920, p. 3.

²⁶ [Anon.], Benefice der Frau Rochelle, in *Die neue Zeit* 34, 12 February 1898, p. 7.

²⁷ [Anon.], Vom Theater, in *Die neue Zeit* 81, 8 April 1895, p. 4.

Verein threatened to “create a demonstration of enormous proportions in the theatre” if the opera was performed again.²⁸

Taste of the audience

Reflections on the bad taste of the Olomouc audience were quite often made by theatre critics in the local German newspapers *Die neue Zeit* and the *Mährisches Tagblatt*. Above all, they were dissatisfied with the fact that the public preferred operetta to opera or other forms of theatre. Theatre directors were advised not to be servile to the audience in this respect but instead to educate them through quality operas. The critics could not understand, for example, how, despite the opera ensemble’s poor performances, the director Carl Stick still had a full auditorium;²⁹ because of these and a number of other misdeeds, the city council prematurely terminated his contract to lease the theatre in the late 1880s. Olomouc audiences were criticised for their inability to recognise the good from the bad as they enthusiastically applauded even outrageous performances. Critics then accused the audience of having no standards for the quality of productions and individual performances. Equally, however, ordinary theatregoers resented the arrogance of the critics and their persistent attempts to create a better audience, as shown, for example, by a letter from an anonymous writer in 1913. He reproached the critics for considering every visitor to an operetta or a lighter piece as stupid and unintelligent: “Unfortunately, not everyone is as well off as the *Tagblatt* reviewer. There are other people in the city who work hard for 12 hours a day and whose tastes are not served by a perverse, hypermodern piece, who see the theatre as a place of entertainment and therefore also visit ‘stupid’ operettas.”³⁰ The idea of the theatre’s mission as a temple of education for the German population of Olomouc, which had been proclaimed for years by the city’s leaders, seemed increasingly alien to the ordinary theatregoer, who wanted to be entertained and to rest from their everyday worries in the theatre.

Czechs and the new rich

A significant rearrangement of the social composition of the Olomouc theatre audience started to take place after the end of World War I, i.e. in the last years of the existence of an independent German theatre in Olomouc. This transformation

²⁸ “[...] že v divadle stropí demonstrace ohromných rozměrů.” [Anon.], *Dalibor v Olomouci*, in *Pozor* 134, 23 November 1897, p. 2. All translations by the author.

²⁹ [Anon.], *Die erste Verwarnung*, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 245, 24 November 1889, p. 4.

³⁰ “Leider geht es nicht jedermann so gut, wie dem Redakteur des *Tagblattes*, es gibt außer ihm auch andere Leute in der Stadt, die sich im Tage redlich 12 Stunden plagen und deren Geschmack ein pervernes, hypermodernes Stück eben nicht dient, die das Theater als Aufheiterungsstätte betrachten und deshalb auch ‘blöde’ Operetten besuchen.” [Anon.], *Theatererinnerungen*, in *Mährisches Tagblatt* 34/217, 22 September 1913, p. 4.



Fig. 8. The municipal theatre in Olomouc in 1899, postcard published by Römmler & Jonas in Dresden, in *Sbírka obrazového materiálu a fotografií*, SOkA, call no. XXVIII/14

was due to the new national conditions in the city, where the German population was losing its majority status and the Czechs were taking over the city's institutions, including the theatre. Now the city's elite also included those who had made significant economic gains from the war. This new situation was reflected in numerous comments in the German newspapers. Johann Kux, the author of a German-language history of Olomouc, described this period with a certain amount of bitterness in his book published in 1937:

This was no longer the old theatre-loving, art-loving Olomouc bourgeoisie; rather, the newly risen stratum of war profiteers, racketeers, and chain dealers made itself conspicuously felt in the expensive stalls and box seats, the same class of the 'nouveaux riches' who now filled the fine restaurants and cinemas every evening and who raised their heads in triumph over the impoverished bourgeoisie.³¹

³¹ "Das war nicht mehr das alte theaterfreudige, kunstsinnige Olmützer Bürgertum; es machte sich vielmehr auf den teuren Parkett- und Logensitzen die neu emporgekommene Schicht der Kriegsgewinner, Schieber und Kettenhändler auffallend breit; dieselbe Schicht der 'Neu-Reichen', die jetzt die feinen Restaurants und Kinologen jeden Abend füllte und die, über den verarmenden Bürgerstand hinweg, triumphierend das Haupt erhob." Johann Kux, *Geschichte der königlichen Hauptstadt Olmütz bis zum Umsturz 1918*, Reichenberg/Olmütz 1937, p. 468.

When the Czech Theatre Association took over the theatre building in 1920, it meant the end for German opera in Olomouc. German theatre operations were restricted to the summer months after the end of the Czech season and were limited to operetta and drama performances, which were provided by a company from a theatre in nearby Brno. After two seasons, however, even this limited operation was discontinued. The German theatre no longer found support from the Czech town hall, but also from the German-speaking public, who did not visit the theatre during the warm weather months. This completed the process of 'Czechisation' of Olomouc. Opera in Olomouc found its place on the Czech stage.

Opera and Theatre in a Model Worker Village – Schio’s “*nuovo quartiere operaio*”

Andrew Holden

Introduction

Despite being successively on the periphery of the Venetian and Austrian Empires and the new Kingdom of Italy, the tiny city of Schio had long seen itself as part of a transnational political, economic and cultural network. A few miles northwest of Vicenza in the Veneto, sitting at the foot of the Dolomites, its reputation as a wool-making centre was established in the early eighteenth century when its first mill was founded by Nicolò Tron, Venetian Ambassador to London from 1712 to 1717, who imported several English innovations in weaving. By the early nineteenth century, despite periodic economic and political vicissitudes, Schio was home to several mills employing around 4,000 workers in addition to thousands more home weavers.¹ For centuries an outpost of the Venetian terra firma, following the tumult of the Napoleonic occupations the Veneto became part of the Austrian Empire within the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia, bringing with it a resurgence of economic activity and more benign political conditions.²

By now Tron’s premises had passed into the hands of Francesco Rossi, himself the lowly son of shepherds and now a wool merchant. His own son, Alessandro, instigated a further revolution in wool-making techniques, again by importing the latest English and French technological innovations from the 1840s.³ By the time that Alessandro Rossi assumed the leadership of Lanerossi, the company destined to become Italy’s leading woollen manufacturer up to the late twentieth century, Schio’s development as a town had already seen a burgeoning middle class inaugurate its first permanent theatre. Now wishing to compete with other provincial towns of the Veneto like Feltre or nearby Bassano del Grappa, the opera lovers of Schio constructed the Teatro Piagno on the site of an old warehouse and staged performances, particularly of Rossini operas.⁴ Unfortunately this building was destroyed following a particularly heavy snowfall that caused its roof to collapse

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¹ Giovanni L. Fontana, *L’industria laniera scledense da Nicolò Tron ad Alessandro Rossi, in Schio e Alessandro Rossi. Imprenditorialità, politica, cultura e paesaggi sociali del secondo Ottocento*, ed. by Giovanni L. Fontana, Vol. 1, Roma 1985, pp. 71–256, here pp. 71f.

² David Laven, *Venice and Venetia under the Habsburgs 1815–1835*, Oxford 2002.

³ Fontana, *L’industria laniera scledense*, p. 72.

⁴ Giuseppe Baice, *Il teatro civico di Schio. Cronistoria con ‘variazioni’*, Schio 1979, p. 4.

in 1829. By 1835 the burghers of Schio had collected a subscription for the city's first *teatro all'italiana*, named the Teatro Sociale, with good acoustics and seats for 400, which was inaugurated with a production of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma*.⁵ Over the following decades, the Sociale ploughed a familiar course for provincial Italian theatres, still favouring *bel canto* works of the *primo ottocento* over new operas, and coming later to Giuseppe Verdi than his patriotic memorialisation has given credence in most histories of Italian opera.⁶ The local premiere of a Verdi opera was not until 1873 when *I masnadieri* was performed, followed by *Il Trovatore* (1875), *Ernani* and *Rigoletto* (1885), and *Un ballo in maschera* (1888). Similarly the first 'verismo' operas only arrived at the Sociale with *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* in 1904, a decade and more after their worldwide success began.⁷

If this window on the operatic history of Schio feels typically provincial, the greater reason for Schio's value as a case study of the socio-political role of provincial theatre in this period lies in two other theatres, the Jacquard and the Civico, which were constructed in the town under the patronage of the Rossi family. The grander would be the Teatro Civico, inaugurated in 1909 with a production of Arrigo Boito's *Mefistofele*, which achieved significantly wider profile through coverage of the event in Ricordi's house journal *Ars e Labor*.⁸ Firstly, the scale and ambition of the theatre in a town of only 16,000 is striking. It was commissioned by Rossi's grandson (also Alessandro) and designed by *vicentino* architect Ferruccio Chemello, using the most advanced technology and seating 1,500. The design of its *loggione* benefitted from cutting-edge engineering using the Hennebique system of reinforced concrete, recently employed locally by Rossi's competitor in Schio, Alvise Conte, for his mill built in 1906, which enabled the construction of much larger unobstructed interior spaces.⁹ The Teatro Civico's position in the town is also notable, being situated in the heart of the model worker village, or *nuovo quartiere operaio*, which *nonno* Rossi had begun building in the 1860s. Also remarkable is the choice of *Mefistofele*, a daring adaptation of Goethe in which, despite its conventional Catholic apotheosis, the thirst for knowledge causes the pregnancy and death of an unmarried girl.¹⁰ What might an audience from the community of this paternalistic, Catholic, industrial community, either middle class patrons or their workers, read in such a work? *Ars e Labor*'s correspondent

⁵ Ibid.; Franco Mancini/Maria Teresa Muraro/Elena Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, Vol. 2: *Verona, Vicenza, Belluno ed il loro territorio*, Venezia 1985, pp. 323–328.

⁶ Regarding the more complex reception of Verdi in Italy during and after the Risorgimento see for example Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*, London 2008, pp. 226–230.

⁷ Baice, *Il Teatro Civico di Schio*, pp. 5f.

⁸ [Anon.], Il Nuovissimo Teatro Civico di Schio, in *Ars e Labor*, 15 July 1909, pp. 508f.; Mancini/Muraro/Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, pp. 333–338.

⁹ Baice, *Il Teatro Civico di Schio*, pp. 5f.

¹⁰ On the complex reception of *Mefistofele* in Italy in this period see Andrew Holden, From Heaven and Hell to the Grail Hall via Sant'Andrea della Valle. Religious Identity and the Internationalisation of Operatic Styles in Liberal Italy, in *Italian Opera in Global and Transnational Perspective. Reimagining Italianità in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Axel Körner/Paulo M. Kühl, Cambridge 2022, pp. 167–191, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108920636.010>, here pp. 177–183.

perhaps answered some of these questions by highlighting the technical abilities of the new theatre and the range of fantastical scenes in *Mefistofele*, which the theatre was clearly able to represent in a more dramatic way than many a provincial theatre.¹¹ Following *Mefistofele* the Civico's seasons up to the First World War read like a more standard provincial theatre with significant resources, including *Tosca* and even *Aida* but also combining operetta with the advent of cinematic projection.¹²

Nineteenth-century industrial paternalism and workers' theatres

The scale of investment by the dynasty of this wool-making business in Schio's theatres and other social and cultural amenities can be read within its leading role in Italy's wider history of industrial paternalism, as Schio became a model for other corporate initiatives across northern and central Italy in the late nineteenth century.¹³ The rich history of Schio's *nuovo quartiere operaio* and its factory system was explored by historians led by Giovanni Luigi Fontana from the late 1970s, work that resulted in their two-volume work on aspects of the Rossi establishment drawing on its rich archives.¹⁴ However, this and other works on Italian worker villages pay cursory attention to the detail or significance of the cultural activities of the workers, including music and theatre, as opposed to urban planning, factory production, housing or other social amenities.

Of course, Rossi's innovations took place within a strong transnational market for wool that stretched back centuries and across the globe.¹⁵ Its networks furnished the company not only with technical innovations to drive productivity but also the managerial models to organise, control and motivate its workforce. Rossi's *nuovo quartiere* took direct inspiration from the Alsatian *cit  ouvri re* in Mulhouse, first laid out in the 1850s. In turn the Calvinist burghers of Mulhouse behind this scheme had looked to the recent construction of Saltaire in West Yorkshire, the Congregationalist Titus Salt's purpose-built worker village and cotton

¹¹ [Anon.], *Il Nuovissimo Teatro Civico di Schio*, p. 508.

¹² Baice, *Il Teatro Civico di Schio*, pp. 39–71.

¹³ Ciuffetti maps the Italian sites and sets them in the context of the wider industrial movement: Augusto Ciuffetti, *Casa e lavoro. Dal paternalismo aziendale alle comunit  globali*, Perugia 2004; see also Luigi Guiotto, *La fabbrica totale. Paternalismo industriale e citt  sociali in Italia*, Milano 1979; *Villaggi operai nell'Italia settentrionale e centrale tra 19. e 20. secolo*, ed. by Renato Covino, Narni 2002; *Villaggi operai in Italia. La Val Padana e Crespi d'Adda*, ed. by Renato Covino, Torino 1981.

¹⁴ *Schio e Alessandro Rossi. Imprenditorialit , politica, cultura e paesaggi sociali del secondo Ottocento*, ed. by Giovanni L. Fontana, 2 vols., Roma 1985–1986.

¹⁵ *Wool. Products and Markets. 13th to 20th Century*, ed. by Giovanni L. Fontana/G rard Gayot, Padova 2004.

mill outside Bradford.¹⁶ Further north in France from Mulhouse, the anticlerical Jean-Baptiste Godin, inspired by the utopian *Phalanstère* of Charles Fourier, constructed the *Familistère*, a collectivist model of housing for the workers of his cast-iron stove factory in Guise. The second phase of this development, which opened in 1870, included a horse-shoe theatre.¹⁷ Even earlier, Robert Owen had fought against considerable opposition to his housing and welfare schemes at New Lanark in Scotland before moving to the United States to found another worker colony at New Harmony, Indiana.¹⁸ In all these case studies, the scope and design of recreational and cultural activities reflected the philosophical, political and religious proclivities of their owner-patrons and local cultural traditions, but the imperative of channelling spare energies into regulated, decorous, communal activity was paramount. For example, at New Lanark, instruction in singing and dancing (to the consternation of much local Presbyterian sentiment) was given alongside military drilling, and comments by spectators continually referenced the ‘correctness’ of workers’ artistic accomplishments rather than any sense of creativity or individuality – recreation was, in a sense, another manifestation of the ideal productive worker.¹⁹ At Saltaire from 1879, choral singing was the fulcrum of artistic activity among the workers.²⁰ In the *Familistère*, the theatre, in addition to being a space to encourage collective music making and drama, functioned more as the secular church for ceremonies, festivals and lectures.²¹

It was not only Rossi benefitting from these international networks. Similar innovations began to be replicated in different industrial sectors across northern and central Italy. Just within the Veneto, southwest of Schio at Valdagno, the Marzotto woollen business was building its own Fabbrica Alta with associated worker housing and social amenities, including a workers’ musical band.²² Between Vicenza and Padova at Piazzola sul Brenta, the Camerini family made huge investments in its chemical fertiliser business. Having acquired the Palladian Villa Contarini from Venetian aristocratic families, they set about redesigning the whole village to support their vision of a ‘utopian agro-industry’ while

¹⁶ Giovanni L. Fontana, *L'Europe de la laine. Verviers, Biella et Schio*, in *Wool. Products and Markets. 13th to 20th Century*, ed. by Giovanni L. Fontana/Gérard Gayot, Padova 2004, pp. 687–746. Significantly, both Mulhouse and Schio acquired the epithet of being the ‘Manchester’ of their own nation.

¹⁷ Michel Lallement, *Le travail de l'utopie. Godin et le Familistère de Guise*, Paris 2009.

¹⁸ Lorna Davidson, *A Quest for Harmony. The Role of Music in Robert Owen's New Lanark Community*, in *Utopian Studies* 21/2, 2010, pp. 232–251; Melanie Zeck, *Well-Regulated Amusements and the Longitudinal Viability of Robert Owen's 'Plan for the Amelioration of the Condition of Mankind'. New Harmony, Indiana, 1825–1874*, PhD thesis, Chicago 2019.

¹⁹ Davidson, *A Quest for Harmony*, pp. 236–238.

²⁰ Katharine Ellis, *The Structures of Musical Life*, in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. by Jim Sampson, Cambridge 2001, pp. 343–370, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521590174.014>, pp. 365f.

²¹ Lallement, *Le travail de l'utopie*, pp. 148f.; Joseph J. Ermenc, *Avant-garde Capitalism in France*, in *The French Review* 31/2, December 1957, pp. 129–135, here p. 131.

²² Ciuffetti, *Casa e lavoro*, p. 50.

pursuing an anticlerical political agenda.²³ Within the extensive urban replanning they undertook from 1890 until the 1920s, among typical worker amenities were a *sala di spettacoli* and a plan for a theatre (never realised). Again within the textile industry, the Ceresa-Antonini partnership opened the *canapificio veneto*, producing rope and twine, at Crocetta del Montello by the Piave river. Its particular distinction in the context of this chapter was the refusal of the owners to create any philanthropic institutions for their workers.²⁴ By the final decades of the nineteenth century, northern and central Italy were dotted with similar industrial sites including Crespi d'Adda near Bergamo, the Villaggio Leumann outside Turin and the boric acid plant at Larderello in Tuscany.²⁵

Parallel to this history of industrial paternalism were a range of charitable, philanthropic initiatives more often operating in urban settings but with similar class-based, political and religious motivation, often clustered within similar industries, for example confectionary as well as cloth-making. One case study is the Drapers' Company of the City of London, which constructed the People's Palace in the East End in 1883; this became one of the main educative and cultural spaces in which working people, of both sexes, were introduced to and participated in theatre, music and opera.²⁶ Both these manifestations of nineteenth-century paternalism are rich seams of evidence for how the labouring classes were able to engage in artistic pursuits including opera, music and theatre, outside the commercial theatres, to which they had limited access. They also allow us to interrogate how these activities functioned as signifiers of instruction, control, recreation, elevation and progress within bourgeois programmes of cultural philanthropy and to what extent working people had agency over the activities in which they were involved. Beyond the scope of this chapter, we should also consider the response of socialist and trade-union organisations that often issued trenchant critiques of paternalist initiatives.²⁷

²³ Carlo Fumian, *La città del lavoro. Un'utopia agroindustriale nel Veneto contemporaneo*, Venezia 1990, pp. 80–90.

²⁴ Ciuffetti, *Casa e lavoro*, pp. 49–53. Ironically, Pacifico Ceresa, one of the directors of the company, was a very prominent boxholder at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice, see Holden, *Opera avanti a Dio! Religion and opera in Liberal Italy*, PhD thesis, Oxford Brookes University 2019, pp. 261–263.

²⁵ Guiotto, *La fabbrica totale*, pp. 83–89.

²⁶ Andrew Holden, A Slice of Operatic Life in the East End of London, in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 26/1 (*Italian Musical Migration to London*), 2021, pp. 70–87.

²⁷ See for example the work of Gianni Isola, La ribalta socialista in Italia tra Otto e Novecento, in *Ventesimo secolo* 2/3, 1991 (*Il popolo a teatro. Esperienze europee (1870–1939)*), ed. by Isola/Gianfranco Pedullà), pp. 387–411; Isola, Utopia sociale e società del futuro nel teatro socialista delle origini, in *Movimento operaio e socialista* 11/3, 1988 (*Il mondo nuovo. L'utopia sociale nel teatro europeo (1870–1939)*), ed. by Isola/Gianfranco Pedullà), pp. 469–480.

Schio's nuovo quartiere operaio

In Schio perhaps the most significant cultural innovation was in neither of the theatres already mentioned but in another space built by Alessandro Rossi in 1869 as part of the original plan for his model village, or *nuovo quartiere operaio*. The *nuovo quartiere*, which would eventually house up to 1,500 residents in over 200 houses, was laid out from 1872 in the area west of the centre of Schio and south of the Fabbrica Alta, the imposing new factory that Rossi had built in 1862. Houses were designed with modern facilities, including bathrooms as well as gardens and allotments, and were divided into four grades, the higher two for managers and technicians (including foreigners) and the lower two for workers' families.²⁸ Additionally, they built social amenities ranging from schools, churches and hospitals to public baths, a laundry and an icehouse. Rossi's own political philosophy was grounded in his observant but liberal Catholicism and moderate conservative outlook, which motivated his response to the social threat that industrialists feared in the first years after unification as worker organisation increased and radicalised.²⁹ In his writings, while condemning the rapacity and callousness of English industrialists, he specifically railed against socialist ideas of equality, insisting that social inequality was part of the natural order.³⁰ While Rossi's schemes and those of other industrial paternalists were motivated by a genuine distaste for the social condition of the contemporary factory worker and her or his family, benevolence was severely tempered by the primary goal of controlling the workforce, including outside working hours. Rossi himself was known to tour local taverns to recover recalcitrant workers.³¹

Furthermore we should not forget – as it is significant for our consideration of the cultural activities of the workers – that despite Rossi's paternalistic vision, working conditions in his mills continued to be harsh, often punitive, and exploitative of women and children (as elsewhere). In the 1860s and 1870s, the number of working days throughout the year was 295. In winter working hours were 07.00 until 19.00 with an hour's break. In summer, work started at 05.30 and finished at 19.30 with two ninety-minute breaks. Daily rates rose gradually through the 1860s, by the end of which decade men were paid 1.50 to 4 lire a day and women (who made up 30% to 40% of the workforce) only 0.65 to 1.25L. According to Rossi himself, the average worker would spend almost 70% of their pay just to

²⁸ The designs are preserved in the Archivio Storico Lanerossi (ASLR), available at the Biblioteca Bortoli, Archivio di Comune di Schio. The presence of highly educated foreign technicians reinforces the sense, discussed earlier, of Schio as a transnational network of innovation and production, and the potential inclusion of foreign workers in the recreative and musical activities of the factory is a further point of reference for this.

²⁹ Alice A. Kelikian, *The Church and Catholicism*, in *Liberal and Fascist Italy*, ed. by Adrian Lyttleton, Oxford 2002, pp. 44–61, here p. 49.

³⁰ Alessandro Rossi, *Socialismo e fraternalismo*, Firenze 1888, p. 6.

³¹ Guido Piovene, *Lanerossi da ieri*, Milano 1967, p. 108.

feed himself and his family.³² Children were paid from 0.40 to 1.20L.³³ These officially declared rates would often be eroded by punitive fines, as reported in the local socialist press. Regarding the exploitation of women and girls, factory directors specifically claimed to save money by employing adolescent girls rather than boys.³⁴ Managers were allegedly abusive. Unmarried women and girls were accommodated in a separate boarding house and their dress and conduct regulated even on Sundays, which featured compulsory prayer. Excursions outside had to be authorised.³⁵ From the late 1860s, Rossi's paternalistic vision did begin to mitigate some of the symptoms of the distress of working life through sickness insurance, the new housing scheme, nurseries and health care. Yet despite Rossi's focus on the condition of his workforce, industrial relations at Lanerossi did not always meet the harmonious vision of its founder, with strikes over pay and mechanisation in March 1872 and in January 1890, during which striking workers were sacked.³⁶

However, even before the first housing was constructed, Rossi was deeply concerned with other schemes to raise the moral and intellectual condition of his workers. Rossi's network of literary and political friends included the historian Cesare Cantù and poet Jacopo Cabianca. Together they believed that the novels and periodicals written by and for their circle were, according to Cantù, "as likely to bore as corrupt" the workers; moreover, they noticed that, despite the effort put into educating working families, illiteracy was still widespread. Thus, they planned to focus on a theatrical enterprise at Schio, seeing the theatre and music, for their immediate emotional impact, as more fertile media for their ideas.³⁷ They were also conscious of arguments that mechanised industry risked replicating mediaeval feudalism in the factory system by sweeping away artisanal independence and self-worth, symbolised by the monolithic Fabbrica Alta that Rossi constructed in 1862. Rossi's circle sought to combine morally instructive art with genuine entertainment in recompense for the sacrifices made by the workers through long hours.³⁸

³² Fontana, *L'industria laniera splendense*, pp. 229f.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 223f. In fact it is misleading to speak of average 'salaries' for workers as only a small percentage (mainly managers and specialists) were paid a fixed salary with the majority of weavers still paid by piecework (*cottimo*), as Rossi himself reported, see *ibid.*, p. 225.

³⁴ Franca Bertamini, La "città del capitale" e il controllo sulle donne. Considerazioni sulla classe operaia femminile a Schio 1873–1915, in *Schio e Alessandro Rossi*, Vol. 10, pp. 447–459, here p. 450. Bertamini's research draws on reportage from the Vicentine socialist newspaper *El Visentin*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 451.

³⁶ Roberto Canaglia, Salario e salute pubblica nella Schio di A. Rossi. Considerazioni sul costo sociale della prima industrializzazione, in *Schio e Alessandro Rossi*, Vol. 10, pp. 405–435.

³⁷ "I libri, e massime, i romanzi che si scrivono da noi, per verità sono più atti ad annoiare che a corrompere". Ferruccia Cappi Bentivegna, *Alessandro Rossi e i suoi tempi*, Firenze 1955, p. 163. All translations by the author if not otherwise stated.

³⁸ Alessandro Rossi, *Questione operaia e questione sociale*, Torino 1879, pp. 9f.

A new 'workers' theatre'

The new theatre was to be situated behind the Fabbrica Alta on the site of an old warehouse, flanking a garden laid out in the English style favoured in Italy in the late nineteenth century, leading up to an elegant conservatory and a series of fantastical grottoes, one even festooned with a stone crocodile. Designed by Antonio Caregaro Negrin, who would also design the workers' housing on the other side of the factory, the theatre building presents a neoclassical facade that echoes buildings in Schio of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Fig. 1).³⁹ The elevation of the theatre building onto the garden is embellished with medallions of significant political, scientific and artistic figures of the area and the wool industry, including Nicolò Tron.⁴⁰ From the glasshouse at the top of the gardens, the Fabbrica Alta looms ahead, dominating the setting of the gardens. The gardens and theatre were named after Joseph-Marie Jacquard, a mythical figure who can be seen to have had an almost god-like hand in the evolution of the lives of generations of weavers. His eponymous loom, patented in 1804, revolutionised the weaving of intricate designs in fabrics through a system of automated punched cards, presaging developments in computing. This juxtaposition between neoclassicism, a fantastical Arcadian garden and the rationalist edifice of the factory could hardly be a clearer metaphor for Rossi's philosophy and the concerns of his and his circle that industrial modernisation contained an inherent risk of dehumanisation.

The theatre building itself is divided into two floors. The ground floor was used as a library and meeting space while the theatre ran the length of the second floor. It is rectangular in design with bench seating for 600.⁴¹

What can we learn about the artistic activity in which Rossi's workers were involved, either as participants or spectators? The Teatro Sociale, of which Rossi was incidentally the president, continued to offer a serious, if less than progressive, operatic programme. Meanwhile its prose productions, including Carlo Goldoni, George Sand and Victorien Sardou, would suggest perhaps a richer satirical and melodramatic tone than Rossi thought fitting for a new workers' theatre.⁴² At the

³⁹ Negrin also designed the Teatro Sociale in Riva del Garda, inaugurated in 1865. See Federica Fanizza, *Teatro Sociale di Riva del Garda in Trentino (1862–1910). Un palcoscenico per la passione musicale tra pratica dilettante e spettacolo lirico*, in *Feltre's Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Giulia Brunello/Raphaël Bortolotti/Annette Kappeler, Baden-Baden 2023, pp. 149–167.

⁴⁰ Enrico Castelnuovo, *Lo stabilimento Rossi a Schio*, Venezia 1865, pp. 18f.; Bernardetta Ricatti Tavone, Antonio Caregaro Negrin. Architetto-Urbanista di A Rossi, in *Schio e Alessandro Rossi*, Vol. 1, pp. 687–730.

⁴¹ Some descriptions of the theatre, including on the panel outside the entrance to the gardens, erroneously describe the space as a horseshoe (*ferro di cavallo*), which may have been a putative part of the design plan which was never realised. See e.g. Ricatti Tavone, Antonio Caregaro Negrin, p. 694. My gratitude goes to Stefania Torresan at the Comune di Schio for allowing me access to view the theatre and gardens outside the appointed times for guided tours and providing me with additional information about the workers of the town.

⁴² Mancini/Muraro/Povoledo, *I teatri del Veneto*, Vol. 2, pp. 329–333; Paola Giandomenici, *Il Teatro Jacquard di Schio*, PhD thesis, Padova 1969, pp. 20f.



Fig. 1. ASLR, Il Teatro Jacquard interior, Biblioteca Bertoli, Comune di Schio. All images from the Lanerossi archive are reproduced by kind permission of the Biblioteca Bertoli, Comune di Schio.

Jacquard, a range of musical and theatrical groups were created in which workers participated, from a prose theatre company (*compagnia filodrammatica*) to a choir and instrumental bands, with professional troupes imported to perform alongside them. Rossi recorded that there were 60 choral and 24 orchestral students.⁴³ Photographic evidence within the Lanerossi archives suggests that opportunities for women were highly limited, perhaps only within the *compagnia filodrammatica operaia* (Fig. 2).

Meanwhile Rossi was searching for repertoire that better suited his didactic ideals, and the theatre opened in October 1869 with two *opere semiserie*, which offered tangential frames of reference for their participants and audience (Fig. 3).⁴⁴ *Pipelè or Il portinaio di Parigi* by Serafino De Ferrari was based on the melodramatic series *Les mystères de Paris* by Eugène Sue, whose sympathetic portrayal of the lower classes of Paris had become phenomenally popular across and beyond France. *Tutti in maschera* was composed by the Veronese Carlo Pedrotti, also a conductor, who enjoyed success for several of his operas and as an administrator, having recently been appointed the head of the Teatro Regio in Turin. While no

⁴³ Alessandro Rossi, *Risposte alle domande dell'inchiesta industriale delle ditte Francesco Rossi ed Alessandro Rossi e C. di Schio*, Firenze 1872, p. 21.

⁴⁴ ASLR, Locandina. See Figure 3.



Fig. 2. ASLR, La Compagnia Filodrammatica operaia, Biblioteca Bertoli, Comune di Schio

more didactic than *Pipèle*, *Tutti in maschera* did offer a meta-framework for introducing workers to the world of theatre with a plot concerned with a cast of singers and dancers overcoming the disappointments of a theatrical failure and ending with a masked ball at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice.

Rossi's next project for the Jacquard in 1869 was far more progressive in the context of an exploration of social and economic conditions in the new Italian state. He commissioned teachers from his school in Schio to make a local-dialect translation for the *compagnia filodrammatica* of the recent national success *Le miserie di Monssù Travet* (1863) by the Torinese author and journalist Vittorio Bersezio.⁴⁵ Originally written in Piedmontese, Bersezio's play spread rapidly across Italy, including in Milan to the approbation of Alessandro Manzoni, and the author himself made an Italian translation.⁴⁶ Paradoxically, dialect literature and theatre experienced a new flourishing during the period of the Risorgimento as regional identities were celebrated in the absence of a clear, new national identity and also as part of the turn towards naturalism and realism that explored the

⁴⁵ Cappi Bentivegna, *Alessandro Rossi e i suoi tempi*, p. 165.

⁴⁶ Vittorio Bersezio, *Le miserie di Monssù Travet. Comedia in 5 atti. Versione italiana dal dialetto col testo piemontese unito e presentazione di Renzo Laguzzi*, Torino 1945. A film version was also made in 1945 under the title *Le miserie di Signor Travetti*. A dialect television production of the play from the 1980s is available to view on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/hKCPHzMW2N4> (all weblinks in this contribution last accessed 8 August 2025).

SCENIO
INAUGURAZIONE
 DEL
TEATRO JACQUARD

Autunno 1869 - Due Opere Buffe Semiserie.

PIPELE
 del Maestro S. A. DE FERRARI

TUTTI IN MASCHERA
 del Maestro C. G. PEDROTTI

ELENCO DELLA COMPAGNIA

PRIMA DONNA SOPRANO ASSOLUTA
AMALIA FUMAGALLI DE GIORGI

PRIMO TENORE ASSOLUTO
LUIGI MINOTTI

PRIMO BASSO TENORE ASSOLUTO
FRANCESCO TOURNERIE

PRIMA DONNA BASSO IMPERANO ASSOLUTA
LUCIA CAVALLINI

BASSO GENERICO
MICHELE GRASSI

TENORE COMPARTIATO
GIUSEPPE GALVANI

PRIMO BASSO BASSO ASSOLUTO
PIETRO PRETTE

MAESTRO CONCERTATORE DIRETTORE D'ORCHESTRA
GIOVANNI BATTISTA BARBIROLLI

VALLETO PRIMO ALTA SPALLA
ANTONIO BARBIROLLI

VALLETO PRIMO BASSO
GIUSEPPE VALENTE

ALTRE PARTI PRIMARIE

<p>NATALE GRANOLA primo Contrabbasso al cembalo</p> <p>FRANCESCO SERATO Violoncello</p> <p>LORENZO PERONI prima Viola</p> <p>VINCENZO GUARDIERI primo Clarinetto</p> <p>FRANCESCO GALLI primo Oboe</p>	<p>PAOLO BORGONZI primo Flauto</p> <p>ASSIEME RIBIATTI primo Corno</p> <p>CESARE SELLA primo Fagotto</p> <p>FRANCESCO BASSO prima Tromba</p> <p>ANTONIO SORGATO primo Trombone</p>
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ed altri 24 fra Professori e Dilettanti, la massima parte di questi addetti all'Opificio Rossi.

CORISTI E BANDA DELL'OPIFICIO ROSSI

BORTOLO CRESTANA

PIETRO MASCOTTO

Proprietari della società: PIPELE Sig. FRANCESCO LICCA di Milano. TUTTI IN MASCHERA Sig. TITO DI GIOVANNI RISARDE di Milano.
 Proprietari della Società: Sig. LORENZO GASSONELLE di Novara. Proprietari della Società: Sig. PIROLA e SOCI di Milano. Utterata. - Macchibadi. - Paravento. ecc.

Il prezzo di abbonamento per l'ingresso a S. 31 recide e stabilisce in Lire 10 pagabili metà all'atto dell'iscrizione, metà prima della 12. - recide.
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 Gli abbonamenti e le vendite di libretti si fanno al Negozio del Sig. Antonio Pavesi nella Piazza maggiore, ed all'ingresso del Teatro.

Il biglietto d'ingresso è fissato in Lire 0.75 - quello per lo Scanno, Loggia o Platea in Lire 0.50.

La Stagione avrà principio il sabato 2 Ottobre alle ore 8 pom. coll'Opera **PIPELE**

La 20 Settembre 1869.

OPIFICIO ROSSI
 LA ROSSIGNOLE

Fig. 3. ASLR, Locandina, inauguration of the Teatro Jacquard, Biblioteca Bertoli, Comune di Schio

lives of the working classes.⁴⁷ Antonio Gramsci, writing in 1916 after the death of Ferruccio Benini, the celebrated dialect actor from Conegliano near Treviso, stated that “dialect theatre has been a great tutor of sincerity in Italy.”⁴⁸

In *Le Miserie di Monssù Travet* Ignazio Travet is an honest but lowly functionary (*impiegato regio*) of the royal bureaucracy at a time when Turin is still the capital of Italy, a status it had lost only in 1864. Repeatedly passed over for promotion, he is mocked by a pair of younger, more cynical colleagues (Moton and Rusca) who are constantly scheming against him. However, he has a young second wife who is beautiful, socially ambitious and admired by the Commendatore, who is Travet’s new divisional head (*cap division*). The Commendatore is also an old friend of Madama Travet’s family, remembers her fondly as a child and has recently moved into the same apartment block where the Travets live. Travet hopes he will receive better treatment from him. The Commendatore invites the Travets to use his family box at the Teatro Regio, and Madama Travet, desperate for entertainment and possibly the flattery, accepts, despite the couple having no suitable dress for the opera. She coerces her husband into giving up his prized pocket watch (inherited from his father, also an *impiegato regio*), the symbol of his desk-bound status, so she can visit the Monte de Pietà, the Italian pawnbroker, to cash it in and finance the purchase of attire worthy of a box at Turin’s premier theatre. The Commendatore, perhaps unwisely, praises Travet to his wife and suggests his overdue promotion may soon be possible.

Travet’s immediate superior, the *Cap Session*, is a vainglorious pedant, recently awarded the rank of cavaliere. He despises Travet, not recognising his honesty and hard work. Meanwhile Moton and Rusca open an office subscription to present the *Cap Session* with a cross to mark his enhanced status and give him a celebratory lunch. Travet has no money to contribute and also fails to acknowledge the *Cap Session*’s new designation of ‘cavaliere’ when addressing him, further aggravating the former’s animus against him. Moton and Rusca get wind from a blabbermouth neighbour of Travet (Barbarot) of the association of the Commendatore with the Travets and the trip to the theatre. They exaggerate this gossip to the *Cap Session*, implying an unseemly relationship between the Commendatore and Madama Travet, who in turn reports this directly to the Minister’s Secretary General. As punishment Travet is to be exiled from his beloved Turin (which he has never left) to a post in Sicily, without promotion. Realising he has been traduced and standing accused of selling his honour to gain promotion, Travet angrily confronts the *Cap Session*, who immediately fires him.

⁴⁷ Hermann W. Haller, *The Other Italy. The Literary Canon in Dialect*, Toronto 1999, pp. 3–7, 136. See also the introduction by Renzo Laguzzi in Bersezio, *Le miserie*, pp. 5–23, particularly for the play’s enthusiastic reception in the Veneto, p. 17.

⁴⁸ “Il teatro dialettale è stato in Italia un gran maestro di sincerità” Antonio Gramsci, *Ridicolo e comico* [5 March 1916], in Gramsci, *Sotto la Mole. 1916–1920*, Torino 1960 (Opere di Antonio Gramsci, Vol. 10), pp. 63f., here p. 63.

Meanwhile Travet's daughter Marianin is in love with Paolin, the rich but dopey young associate of Giachëtta, a childhood friend of Travet who pursued a career in trade rather than the bureaucracy, managing a bakery and making his fortune, which he will pass on to Paolin. Madama Travet resists the match as unworthy of an *impiegato regio*, but the Commendatore advises Travet to overrule his wife. The denouement sees Giachëtta offering Travet a post as bookkeeper in the bakery with a pay rise, only for the Commendatore to arrive to reinstate Travet with his overdue promotion, having uncovered the calumny against himself and resolved the scandal (with the *Cap Session* the one to be posted outside the city). Travet politely declines in favour of joining the bakery as Giachëtta restores Travet's pawned watch to him as a token of the young lovers' engagement.

Without any direct evidence of the play's reception in the Teatro Jacquard, we can only speculate about the motives for choosing this work for the new workers' theatre or what the audience might have read in its celebration of petty bourgeois virtues. The success of *Travet* was so widespread and long-lasting that a *travet* became synonymous with the idea of pen-pushing in Italian. The play critiques the phenomenon of *impiegomania* in the new State that drove the lower middle classes to seek the security of permanent employment in the rapidly expanding state bureaucracy, and which became a tool to co-opt the elites of the former Italian states, but also made the political class anxious about the dominance of the state within the economy of Italy.⁴⁹ Rossi and his circle had supported the Risorgimento, but, as more recent scholarship by David Laven and others has shown, Austrian rule was in many respects no more oppressive than the sovereign Italian states or the new Kingdom.⁵⁰ Satire of the new bureaucracy in the play might therefore have been keenly observed, particularly in an area of Italy with such recent memories of Imperial rule, while the depiction of lowly officials as mere cogs in a bureaucratic machine would have elicited some sympathy.⁵¹ However, the life of the *impiegato regio*, while dull and relentless, was far removed from the grinding hours of a worker in the deafening and dangerous atmosphere of the mill factory. Alternatively, the play can be read as the redemption of the virtuous little man in the face of hierarchy and authority as well as artisanal freedom privileged over institutional drudgery.

⁴⁹ Maria Sophia Quine, *Italy's Social Revolution*, London 2002, p. 40; Guido Melis, The Irresistible Rise of Monssù Travet. The Bureaucrat in Italian Literature from the 19th to the 20th Century, in *Bilder der Verwaltung. Memoiren, Karikaturen, Romane, Architektur/Images de l'administration. Mémoires, caricatures, romans, architecture*, ed. by Erk Volkmar Heyen, Baden-Baden 1994 (Jahrbuch für Europäische Verwaltungsgeschichte, Vol. 6), pp. 99–120, see especially pp. 99–104.

⁵⁰ For example, David Laven/Elsa Damien, *Empire, City, Nation. Venice's Imperial Past and the "Making of Italians" from Unification to Fascism*, in *Nationalizing Empires*, ed. by Stefan Berger/Alexei Miller, Budapest 2015, pp. 511–544, here pp. 514–516.

⁵¹ Laven points out that Cesare Cantù, who, as we have seen, was a member of Rossi's circle, was even-handed about the Austrian domination in his *Cronistoria*. He also cites Brigitte Mazohl-Wallnig's more benign assessment of the role of lowly officials in the Austrian administrative machine (see David Laven, *Venice and Venetia under the Habsburgs 1815–1835*, Oxford 2002, pp. 3, 10).

In terms of a socio-political reading of the play, we might also consider how theatre and opera function within the narrative. Seen as an aspirational luxury for the Travets, the Teatro Regio is a parallel, hierarchical world. We even learn from the exchange between the Commendatore and the Travets that his (mother's) box, the key to which he hands to Madama Travet, is in the third tier of five.⁵² The Travets have only occasionally been to the Gerbino and Rossini (minor theatres presenting less-elevated fare than opera and ballet, including French plays and illusionists), where they sit in the gallery for just sixteen soldi.⁵³ Pawning the pocket-watch ends up embarrassing them before the Commendatore and their friends, suggesting living beyond their means and that aspiring to visit the Teatro Regio was immoderate or pretentious. Travet's cynical colleagues, Moton and Rusca, are far more familiar than Travet with the world of the Teatro Regio. They read the press reviews, agreeing wearily with negative criticism of the current production. Rusca, meanwhile, actually has an *abbonamento* but attends not for the productions but to 'protect' a young ballerina whom he showers with applause and a few packets of sweets, gifts that elicit only silence from the unimpressed dancer. They cut short this conversation for mock fear of scandalising Travet.⁵⁴

The play's gentle but essentially conservative commentary on class relations might also have appealed to Rossi. Travet, under the snobbish pressure of his wife, asks the Commendatore whether marrying the daughter of an *impiegato regio* to a baker risks him losing his dignity, to which the Commendatore expounds the following moral lesson:

Dignity one loses through dishonest actions, not for this sort of trifle. This is the shortcoming of the bourgeoisie, to have such senseless pride against the class of artisans and shopkeepers. There isn't an honest trade that is dirty or dishonourable, and when a person is educated, whatever honest activity he practices, is equal to every other person. We bourgeois complain about the nobility who behave with pride and strive to make us believe them superior to ourselves, but we behave in the same way with those who are or seem inferior to us. What nonsense! To be an *impiegato regio* is certainly an honest thing, but it doesn't give you the right to disparage people in other circumstances.⁵⁵

While distinct from any sense of political equality that Rossi would have opposed, this lesson of moral equality between classes would have suited his didactic vision.

⁵² Bersezio, *Le miserie*, I/viii, p. 35.

⁵³ On the operatic and theatrical life of Turin in the post-Risorgimento period see Holden, *Opera avanti a Dio!*, chapter 4, pp. 167–234; Luigi Tamburini, *I teatri di Torino. Storia e cronache*, Torino 1966.

⁵⁴ Bersezio, *Le miserie*, II/i, p. 47.

⁵⁵ "Il decoro si perde facendo delle cose disoneste e non per queste sciocchezze. È questo il difetto di gran parte della borghesia, di avere certe superbie senza ragione verso la classe degli artigiani e dei bottegai. Non vi è nessun mestiere onesto che sporchi e che disonori, e quando una persona è educata, qualunque attività onesta eserciti, è uguale a qualsiasi altra persona. Noi borghesi ci lamentiamo della nobiltà quando ci tratta con orgoglio e si sforza di farci comprendere di essere superiore a noi, ma poi ci comportiamo nello stesso modo con quelli che sono o che ci sembrano inferiori. Che diavolo! Essere un impiegato regio è certo una cosa onorevole, ma non dà diritto a disprezzare le altre condizioni." Ibid., IV/ii, p. 76.

Furthermore, the Commendatore also delivers a judgment on correct marital relations that Rossi might also have been keen to emphasise to his workers. Having realised that Madama Travet was meddling in her husband's affairs, he advises Travet that "a woman should have an influence and greater role within the family than in other situations. But if it's wrong that a wife is treated like a servant, it's also wrong that a man fails to command and – allow me the expression – is led by the nose."⁵⁶

Writing to his friend Domenico Berti, the former Minister of Education and now President of the National Association for the Education of the Population, Rossi outlined this moral vision for the theatre:

The stage, like the press, when we are moved by noble aims, can be a focused means, even efficient I would say, of education, to mould a healthy people, brave and hard-working. We fortunates who, coming from part of a great nation in the middle of a new era, know we will benefit, morally and economically prepared, from the wonderful future which is now beginning, avoiding the dangers and making us worthy of it.⁵⁷

The following year, 1870, the Teatro Jacquard produced *L'amore di un operaio* by Massimiliano di Valvasone, a Friulian writer and journalist. By 1871 they were performing existing Italian comic operas like *Il birraio di Preston* (*The Brewer of Preston*) by Luigi Ricci and *Crispino e la Comare* (*Crispino and the Fairy Godmother*) from 1850 by Ricci and his brother Federico.⁵⁸ This last work, one of the most popular *opere buffe* of the mid-nineteenth century, gently satirises avarice and the professional classes while valorising the homely virtues of the artisan with an impecunious cobbler as its hero.

Conclusion – the performance and iconography of Rossi's moral vision

It is clear that suitable repertoire for the Jacquard theatre had to be relevant both to the worker experience and the moral vision of their employer, although we might wonder whether the operatic tropes within Bizet's *Carmen* – which apparently the factory choir was involved in in 1889, as depicted in Figure 4 –, despite containing factory workers, were quite within this morally educative spectrum.

⁵⁶ "È certo che in una famiglia la donna deve avere un'influenza e una considerazione maggiore di quanto non ne abbia in tanti casi. Ma se in una casa è un male che la moglie sia trattata come una serva, è anche un male che l'uomo si lasci comandare e... mi permetta l'espressione... condurre per il naso." Ibid., IV/ii, p. 76.

⁵⁷ "[...] il dramma, come il giornale, quando siamo rivolti a nobile fine, riescano un mezzo concentrato, direi così efficace di educazione, per formare un popolo sano, gagliardo operoso. Noi fortunati se, fatti d'un tratto grande nazione nella pienezza dei tempi nuovi, sapremo approfittare, moralmente ed economicamente armati, dell'immenso avvenire che ci sta innanzi, evitandone i pericoli e rendendocene degni." ASLR, Alessandro Rossi to Domenico Berti, 25 June 1868.

⁵⁸ Baice, *Il Teatro Civico di Schio*, p. 6.



Fig. 4. ASLR, L'Unione corale Lanificio Rossi, 1869, Biblioteca Bertoli, Comune di Schio⁵⁹

While Rossi's vision for his workers' moral elevation and recreation through culture was certainly as much participative as passive instruction, we might question how much agency the workers had in this programme. There is certainly little suggestion that the workers were much consulted in the vision or repertoire for the theatre.⁶⁰ As we can see from the playbills and other material, there is evidently a quite dynamic mix of professional singers and players in these productions alongside amateurs from the musical groups established in Schio. Other archival evidence shows that the musical and theatrical performances toured to other villages like Bassano del Grappa.⁶¹ Indeed there was a lively exchange of visits and tours between factories, for example nearby Valdagno, the site of the Marzotto factory.⁶² Furthermore, we might reflect on the fact that the commitment involved in training and executing performances beyond the work and domestic commitments of the average worker was surely immense. Economically, the ticket prices for the Jacquard were pitched to accommodate the audience, 10 centesimi for female

⁵⁹ The image records that the chorus were performing in a production of Bizet's *Carmen*, corroborative evidence of which has yet to be identified, though again, as with *Mefistofele* at the Teatro Civico, the subject matter would hardly have chimed with the morally educative prescriptions of the Lanerossi corporation.

⁶⁰ Cappi Bentivegna, *Alessandro Rossi*, pp. 162–171.

⁶¹ ASLR, various *locandine*.

⁶² Lanerossi became part of the Marzotto group in 1987.



Fig. 5. “L’Omo” (L’Uomo) – Monumento al Tessitore, Schio (Photo: Elisa Rolle, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28262141>)

workers and children, 20c for male workers, 40c for foremen (*agenti capi*) and their wives.⁶³ We can compare these prices to those at the Teatro Civico when it opened in 1909, where popular performances (*serate popolari*) with reduced prices allowed entrance to the *loggione* at 50c for *Mefistofele*.⁶⁴ Given the high proportion of wages that were spent on subsistence, we shouldn’t assume tickets were affordable for all, even if performances were rare. In the context of the disparity of pay between specialist and non-specialist workers as well as between men, women and children (as discussed above), the relative disposable income available across the workforce would suggest that audiences at the Jacquard were the preserve of the better-paid.

However, we should not forget that Rossi’s primary aims were the creation of a model workforce in the new Italian state, and we see this embodied in the memorial he erected to his workers (Fig. 5).

⁶³ Giandomenici, *Il Teatro Jacquard di Schio*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ ASLR, *Provincia di Venezia*, 23 September 1909, “Teatro civico, serata popolare”.

The statue is by Giulio Monteverde (1879). It depicts the idealised mill worker in a relaxed artisanal pose, shuttle in hand, looking almost like a painter at his easel (a stance mirrored in Rossi's own posthumous memorial in the Jacquard gardens). On the octagonal base of his pedestal (designed by Negrin) are engraved the following mottos, which tie the whole Rossi project back to identity formation in the new Italian state, including the final incorporation into the Italian kingdom – only recently achieved – of Rome as its capital.

Poised at the shuttle for the family, rifle in hand for Italy and the King.
 Through the loom we save money, by saving we become owners.
 The Capital was the work of yesterday, work will be our capital of tomorrow.
 Work liberates and ennobles us.
 He who conquers work conquers gold.
 Through its renewal we reclaim the art of our fathers.
 Equal before the loom as before God.
 The future belongs to the working people.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “Pronti alla navetta per la famiglia, alla carabina per l'Italia ed il Re / Dal telaio al risparmio, dal risparmio la proprietà / Capitale lavoro di ieri, lavoro capitale del domani / Il lavoro ci affranca ed eleva / Conquiste di lavoro conquiste d'oro / Rivendichiamo rinnovando l'arte dei padri / Eguali dinanzi al telaio come dinanzi a Dio / L'avvenire è dei popoli lavoratori”. The monument was originally erected between the Fabbrica Alta and the *nuovo quartiere*, further elaborating the visual and spatial narrative that Rossi and Negrin were creating for his workforce from the Jacquard gardens and theatre back through the factory site to the residential quarter. However, the monument was moved in 1945 to the piazza in front of the Duomo. The inscription can be read in any order round the octagonal base. For an alternative reading (which begins from the line “L'avvenire è dei popoli lavoratori”) and suggests an ‘escalation’ from the material to the metaphysical, see Franco Barbieri, *Dal primo al secondo progetto della ‘nuova Schio’ verso Crespi d’Adda*, in *Schio e Alessandro Rossi*, Vol. 1, pp. 731–744, here p. 737.

Disciplining Theatre Workers

Fines and the Fined in Nineteenth-Century Ferrara (Italy)

Michele Nani

At a sign from Etienne Lousteau, the doorkeeper of the orchestra took out a little key and unlocked a door in the thickness of the wall. Lucien, following his friend, went suddenly out of the lighted corridor into the black darkness of the passage between the house and the wings. A short flight of damp steps surmounted, one of the strangest of all spectacles opened out before the provincial poet's eyes. The height of the roof, the slenderness of the props, the ladders hung with Argand lamps, the atrocious ugliness of scenery beheld at close quarters, the thick paint on the actors' faces, and their outlandish costumes, made of such coarse materials, the stage carpenters in greasy jackets, the firemen, the stage manager strutting about with his hat on his head, the supernumeraries sitting among the hanging back-scenes, the ropes and pulleys, the heterogeneous collection of absurdities, shabby, dirty, hideous, and gaudy, was something so altogether different from the stage seen over the footlights, that Lucien's astonishment knew no bounds.¹

Introduction

If in general it is not legitimate to reduce human activities to 'texts' and 'languages', it is perhaps even less so in the case of theatre, which establishes a living and reciprocal relationship between authors and their audiences through performers and performances. A step further is required if the study of theatrical life is to be taken away from idealist hypothecation, and brought back to concrete relations and real contexts: the institutional, economic and social aspects of the theatrical fact, that is, the wider conditions of possibility of the daily staging of works.²

Thanks to the work of scholars who have not contented themselves with the 'stage' but have reconstructed its practical aspects, the material making 'behind the scenes', we have a less-approximate picture of financing models; theatrical structures; the activities of impresarios, agents and companies; and the lives of actors

¹ Honoré de Balzac, *Lost Illusions* [orig. *Illusions perdues* (1837–1843)], transl. by Ellen Marriage, ed. by Project Gutenberg, online, 2004/2020, www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/13159/pg13159-images.html.

² A call to overcome the "centrality of the aesthetic object" ("centralità dell'oggetto estetico") is to be found in Livia Cavaglieri, *Il sistema teatrale. Storia dell'organizzazione, dell'economia e delle politiche del teatro in Italia*, Roma 2021, p. 20. Generally, in brief: Roger Chartier, Why the Linguistic Approach Can Be an Obstacle to the Further Development of Historical Knowledge. A Reply to Gareth Stedman Jones, in *History Workshop Journal* 46, 1998, pp. 271f. On theatres and historical-social sciences see Christophe Charle, Sociétés du spectacle, in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 186/187, 2011, pp. 4–11.

and musicians.³ Less frequented are the offstage and the backstage: the activities, framed in precise labour relationships, that allow the curtain to rise, accompany the performances and continue when the curtain falls and which represent a cost for the owners and a source of income for the workers but also a management problem for the organisers, not without more or less acute conflicts.⁴

I summarise here some surveys of the rich theatrical sources offered by the nineteenth-century archives of the Italian city of Ferrara,⁵ which is my usual laboratory of historical investigation.⁶ With the necessary brevity I will articulate my exposition around four sections. In the first I will present the case study and the general coordinates of theatre life in Ferrara in the second half of the nineteenth century. I will then illustrate some aspects of the functioning of the theatrical organisation in the city's main theatre, the Comunale, focusing on programming methods, the management of activities, and the personnel involved. In the third section I will analyse the disciplinary regime of theatre work through an examination of the fines imposed on the different types of workers. Finally, I will examine a case of a strike and its repression, with some final considerations on the possible matrices and relations of the two forms of conflict, the daily and ordinary one that prompts fines and the extraordinary and open one of explicit resistance.

³ Limiting the mentions to a few examples: Daniele Seragnoli, *L'industria del teatro. Carlo Ritorni e lo spettacolo a Reggio Emilia nell'Ottocento*, Bologna 1987; Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo, istituzioni e società nell'Italia postunitaria (1860–1882)*, Roma 2001; Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri. L'Italia del melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento*, Bologna 2001; and Livia Cavaglieri, *Tra arte e mercato. Agenti e agenzie teatrali nel XIX secolo*, Roma 2006.

⁴ Raphaël Bortolotti/Giulia Brunello/Annette Kappeler, In the Wings. Offstage Labour in a Provincial Italian Theatre, in *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken* 102/1, 2022, pp. 333–359. For pioneering articles cf. John Rosselli, Il sistema produttivo, 1780–1880, in *Storia dell'opera italiana*, Vol. 4: *Il sistema produttivo e le sue competenze*, ed. by Lorenzo Bianconi/Giorgio Pestelli, Torino 1987, pp. 97–165; and Tracy C. Davis, Laborers of the Nineteenth-Century Theater. The Economies of Gender and Industrial Organization, in *Journal of British Studies* 33/1, 1994, pp. 32–53.

⁵ On Ferrara sources: Corinna Mezzetti, Fondi archivistici e documenti tra Archivio Storico Comunale e Biblioteca Ariostea per la storia dei teatri di Ferrara nell'Ottocento, in *Lorenzo Barbirolli (1798–1867). Un musicista tra due patrie*, ed. by Nicola Badolato/Corinna Mezzetti/Antonietta Molinari, Ferrara 2016 (Quaderni dell'Archivio Storico Comunale di Ferrara, Vol. 4), pp. 95–101; Maria Cristina Bergamini, Note intorno al riordino del fondo archivistico "Municipio di Ferrara. Commissione pubblici spettacoli. Direzione teatrale", in *Bollettino di notizie e ricerche da archivi e biblioteche* 1, 1980, pp. 45–50.

⁶ I became interested in theatre not only because of old personal passions (the discovery of Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud and the Living Theater, and the vision of Teatro Nucleo, Odin Teatret and others, when I was in high school) and research vicissitudes (Michele Nani, Una zuffa di simboli. Il Cristo di Bovio e il suo pubblico, in *Scene di fine Ottocento. L'Italia fin de siècle a teatro*, ed. by Carlotta Sorba, Roma 2004, pp. 147–192) but also as part of a 'pilot' project for a historical-digital atlas of the city (WebGIS), centred, for reasons of cartographic and demographic sources, on 1881 (Francesco Di Filippo/Davide Guarnieri/Corinna Mezzetti/Michele Nani/Giuseppe Scandurra, Per un Atlante storico digitale di Ferrara. Note sul progetto-pilota Ferrara1881, in *Popolazione e storia* 2, 2022, pp. 37–54; <https://ferrara1881.wordpress.com/> [5 August 2025]). I would like to thank the staff of the Municipal Historical Archive of Ferrara and in particular its head, Corinna Mezzetti. I drew valuable insights from the discussion with Livia Cavaglieri and useful tips from Daniele Seragnoli and Fabio Andreazza.

Ferrara and its theatres

Ferrara is a medium-size city in northern Italy at the eastern end of the Po plain at the beginning of the river delta. Once the capital of the Este dukedom and a European centre of culture during the Renaissance, in 1598 it was absorbed by the Papal States. Apart from the revolutionary and Napoleonic parentheses, it remained a frontier city of the papal dominions until the Risorgimento. A provincial capital in the Kingdom of Italy, Ferrara was a classic ‘Mediterranean’ city, not industrialised despite the arrival of the railway, and nourished by agricultural rents and profits as well as by the presence of institutions. Its population (around 30,000 inhabitants in 1881) lived within the old walls (still extant today), which surrounded an urban space filled with vegetable gardens and orchards. It had a modest cultural life, strong above all in a technical culture (agronomy and hydraulic engineering) shaped by the needs of a territory that was undergoing a revolutionary transformation: the mechanical reclamation of half the province.⁷

As elsewhere, all along the nineteenth century, known as “the century of the theatre”, theatres were the “centre [...] of urban life” in Ferrara.⁸ In Ferrara, too, theatrical life was framed within a structured system of public performances, which also included open-air and children’s theatres, fairs and festivals, performances of curiosities, band concerts, and concerts in other kind of venues (e.g. cafés). The hierarchy of venues reflected the hierarchy of genres and audiences, with opera at the municipal theatre at the top. However, even common people went to the opera, although confined to the gallery.⁹ Confirming their role of openness to social mixing, the theatre venues were used for multiple functions and not only for performances: political meetings, charity evenings, galas and dance parties were held there.

Ferrara’s municipal theatre (Teatro Comunale), inaugurated at the height of the republican season in 1798, had been wanted by the papal administrators since 1773.¹⁰ Located close to the Castle, the seat of political power, and the Curia, seat of the religious one, it was consecrated to operas and balls, generally divided in two seasons. It goes without saying that the construction of a large Italian-style opera

⁷ There is no general history of Ferrara and its province in the nineteenth century. Still useful are Teresa Isenburg, *Investimenti di capitale e organizzazione di classe nelle bonifiche ferraresi (1872–1901)*, Firenze 1971; and Alessandro Roveri, *Dal sindacalismo rivoluzionario al fascismo. Capitalismo agrario e socialismo nel ferrarese (1870–1920)*, Firenze 1972.

⁸ “centro della vita sociale, ludica, culturale urbana.” Cavaglieri, *Il sistema*, p. 38. Cf. Giulia Brunello, *Decoro artistico e orgoglio municipale. Note sul Teatro Sociale a Feltre nell’Ottocento*, in *La rivista feltrina* 46, 2021, pp. 40–51.

⁹ Incidents of theft in the gallery reveal the presence of schoolteachers there: see for example the episode when an elementary school teacher was robbed of her wallet, and a pickpocket was arrested ([Anon.], In trappola, in *Gazzetta ferrarese*, 16 January 1880, p. 3). Even in the boxes, however, the disappearance of a gold necklace worth 300 lire was recorded ([Anon.], *Furto o smarrimento?*, in *Gazzetta ferrarese*, 24 May 1880, p. 2).

¹⁰ Alessandro Roccatagliati, *Ferrara dà spettacolo. Vicende, persone e denari nell’organizzazione del Teatro Comunale (1786–1940)*, in *I teatri di Ferrara. Il Comunale*, ed. by Paolo Fabbri/Maria Chiara Bertieri, Lucca 2004, Vol. 1, pp. 51–198.

house (1,800 seats) was symbolically important for Ferrara's urban identity. The city's second venue, the Tosi-Borghesi arena, was built close to the southern walls in a square of the medieval city. Inaugurated in 1857 (seating up to 2,000 people), it hosted dramas and comedies, with a mixed audience and more affordable prices.¹¹ Other performance venues were the Bonacossi theatre, renovated in 1846 (800 seats), and the Montecatino theatre (300 seats). In 1881, the theatre of the Philharmonic-Dramatic Academy (formerly the Church of San Giovannino, 400 seats) was still active but soon destined for closure (Fig. 1).¹² Other performance spaces were in Santa Margherita and in secondary squares (such as the Piazza Travaglio). As many as nine small towns in the province had a theatre (between 200 and 800 seats).¹³

Precisely because of its centrality in the city's claim to prestige and the provision of leisure and entertainment, the theatre had a significant economic and therefore social weight in nineteenth-century urban society. In 1870, in the same year that the city endowed itself with a musical institute for the training of instrumentalists and singers (the nucleus of the future conservatory), the local daily newspaper *Gazzetta ferrarese* published a long and significant article. It estimated that at least 350 families lived off what today we would call the theatre's 'linked economic activities', drawing an average of around a hundred lire a year (around €500 today – assuming, with reservation of course, that this kind of conversion makes sense) but with a distribution that ranged from 20 to 1,600 lire (€100 to €7,500 today), without taking into account the income gained from the consumption by outsiders. The estimate, the methods and sources of the author are not stated; in any case the article was intended to denounce the risks of an eventual closure or downsizing of the municipal theatre, which, in addition to the economic damage, would have precipitated Ferrara's decline to the level of secondary towns such as Cento and Lugo. It was also a response to the first rumours of protest against municipal expenses, considered a luxury in the face of social malaise.¹⁴ In March 1880, the opening of the theatre for the spring season was considered by some municipal councillors to be a sort of "relief" owed "to the shopkeepers" in the face of the winter subsidies distributed to unemployed rural labourers, while others recalled that "in Ferrara one [had] to live not only on bread, but that there [had] to be some decorum as well, also in the interest of the

¹¹ Maria Chiara Bertieri, *I teatri di Ferrara. Il Tosi-Borghesi (1857–1912)*, Lucca 2012.

¹² For the liquidation of the Academy's assets, including the theatre, see the handwritten reports in Archivio storico del Comune di Ferrara (hereafter ASCFe), *Deliberazioni di Giunta dal 3 gennaio al 30 dicembre 1882*, pp. 392f. and 396 (31 October and 4 November 1882).

¹³ From the results of the 1868 enquiry summarised in Sorba, *Teatri*, pp. 267–296. On theatre life in Ferrara, see Domenico Giuseppe Lipani, Cronache di provincia. Annotazioni sull'Ottocento teatrale ferrarese, in *Annali online sezione di Lettere* 2, 2016, pp. 210–218 (from two contributions to *Dizionario storico dell'Ottocento ferrarese*, www.ottocentoferrarese.it/ [5 August 2025]). We have robust general studies on the two main theatres (see footnotes 10 and 11) in the last decades of the seventeenth-century. For the Bonacossi Theatre see Chiara Binaschi, *Il Teatro Bonacossi o di S. Stefano, poi Ristori*, in *I teatri di Ferrara (I). Commedia, opera e ballo nel Sei e Settecento*, ed. by Paolo Fabbri, Lucca 2002, pp. 289–293.

¹⁴ [Anon.], Teatro e consiglio comunale, in *Gazzetta ferrarese*, 25 July 1870, pp. 1f.

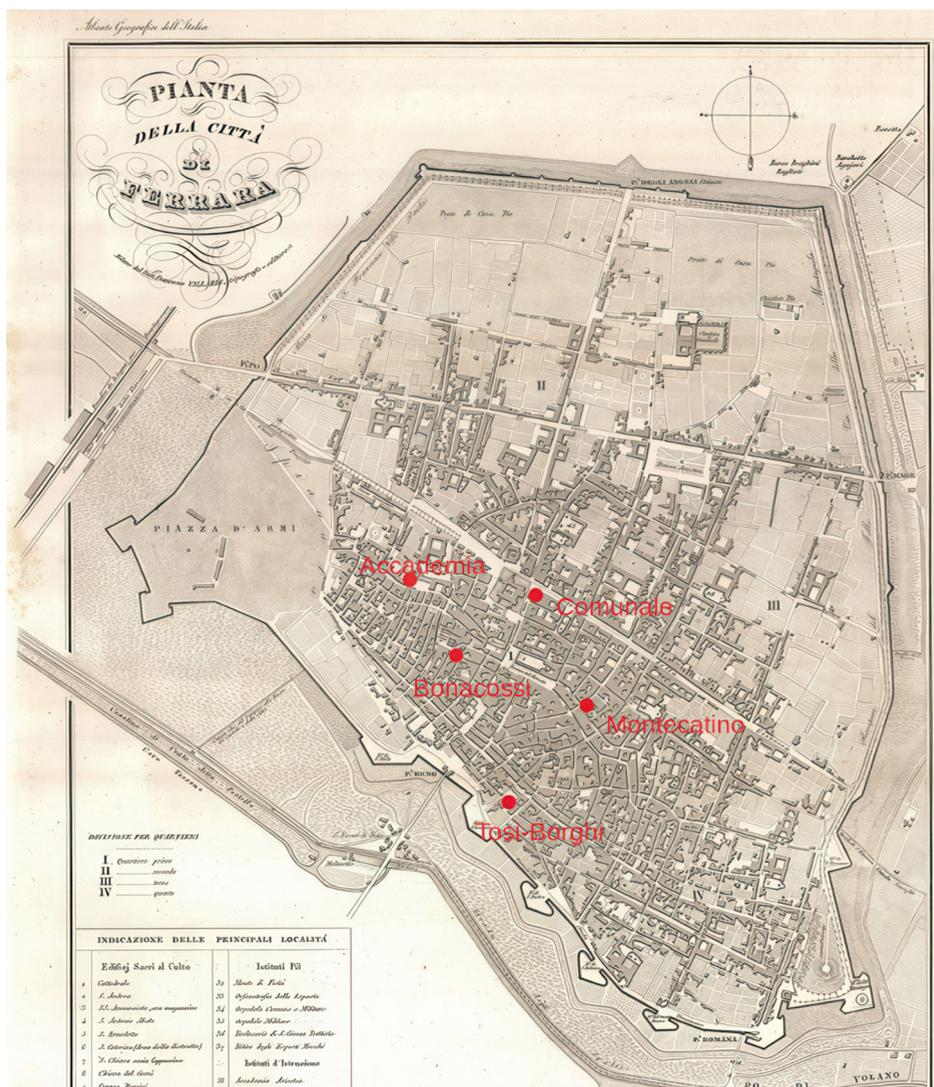


Fig. 1. Locations of Ferrara's main theatres in 1881

[military] garrison, so it [could] not be reduced to a simple question of economy”.¹⁵ The mayor, who was still appointed by the government at the time, the administrative board and the elected city council were constantly discussing theatre: their heavy involvement stemmed from the fact that in Ferrara a public (municipal)

¹⁵ “soccorso agli altri esercenti e negozianti aprendo il teatro”; “a Ferrara non si debba vivere di solo pane, ma che ci abbia ad essere anche un po’ di decoro, anche nell’interesse della guarnigione, per cui non si può ridurre la cosa a una semplice questione di economia”. *Atti del consiglio comunale di Ferrara. Anno 1879–80*, Ferrara 1881, pp. 296–301, quotations on pp. 296 and 301. Cavaglieri considers protest against subsidy to be generally well-founded (Cavaglieri, *Il sistema*, p. 41 and footnote).

model was in force, not a social (managed by associated box owners) or private (as an ordinary business) one.¹⁶ One only has to glance through their acts and minutes or even just take a look at the local pages of the *Gazzetta ferrarese* that summarise their contents. Between 1880 and 1882, there were at least eighty items on the agenda of the discussions that took place in the council and between the board and the council. What were they about? The financing of ordinary maintenance work, extraordinary maintenance work to remedy the risks after a leak of the gas used for the lighting, petitions to hold the season, renewal of materials, dealings with state authorities (the prefect or the civil engineering office) and the new *Regolamento*.¹⁷ But at the centre of the discussions was always the endowment (*dotazione*) or subsidy (*sussidio*), i.e. the funding that the municipality provided so that the shows could be held and be of a good standard.

Managing performances and workers

The municipality did not deal directly with theatre seasons but left the supervision of all performances in the city and the management of the public theatre to the Public Performances Commission, or Theatrical Direction (*Direzione*), whose members were appointed by the council and who enjoyed a certain cultural autonomy but who had to receive authorisation from the administration for all expenditure.¹⁸ The *Direzione* organised the seasons, contacting companies and signing contracts. The basic problem, as in many other cases, was the strong presence of the private owners of the boxes (*palchi*), who could choose individually whether to pay the subscription to the proposed season or to leave the keys to the municipality, which had to rent them at set costs. Subscriptions were a guarantee of takings, but the withdrawal of a large quota of box owners undermined the season's financial foundation because it was not certain that the boxes would actually be taken, and relying solely on municipal funding meant that only mediocre performances could be organised, which the public would reject.¹⁹ In the three-year period of 1880–1882, the theatre management was made up of three people.²⁰ Luigi Alberto Trentini, already a member of the first post-unification provincial council, was born in Ferrara in 1817 and would die in 1886, a few years

¹⁶ See always *ibid.*, pp. 52–55.

¹⁷ Other traces of ordinary works carried out in ASCFe, Carteggio amministrativo (hereafter CA), XIX, Teatro e spettacoli, bb. 20, 46 e 93 and *ibid.*, Commissione pubblici spettacoli (hereafter CPS), b. 76.

¹⁸ During these years, the management was supported by two municipal employees, assigned with extra pay: ASCFe, *Giunta [...] 1882*, p. 256 (22 July 1882).

¹⁹ Open conflict arose in the spring season of 1880, which is amply documented not only in the minutes of the council board and in the acts of the city council but also in the *Gazzetta ferrarese* between February and April 1880. For the organisation of the performances in the seasons between 1879 and 1881 cf. ASCFe, CPS, bb. 43 e 44.

²⁰ The *Direzione* was often divided and just as often the source of controversy, e.g. P.C., Appendice. Musica dell'avvenire, in *Gazzetta ferrarese*, 1 December 1880.

after his three-year stint in theatre management. The son of Countess Beatrice Gulinelli and widower of Marquise Vittoria Costabili, Trentini lived with his son, who was an engineer, and two maids in the 26 rooms of his central palace on corso Giovecca.²¹ Trentini took care of administrative matters, leaving artistic matters to the two other younger members of the theatre management. Severino Sani was born in 1840 in Massa Superiore in the Polesine area on the other side of the river Po. A former Garibaldino, follower of General Garibaldi in the battles of the Risorgimento, although he never fought, he was active in the veterans organisations,²² which in turn would support him in his long local political and parliamentary career as leader of the democrats and then the radicals. During his tenure, he was constantly at the centre of controversy for his alleged inconsistencies, especially when it came to alliances. He lived in the nine rooms of his house on the affluent via Mascheraio with his wife Marianna (née Trentini), a young daughter and three servants.²³ The third member was the lawyer Giovanni Battista Boldrini, who was born in Ferrara in 1844 and would die in 1886, the same year as Trentini, but at a much younger age. He held several positions, was a justice of the peace (*conciliatore*) but also supervised the music band and was involved in the administration of the city hospitals. He lived a stone's throw from the theatre in 14 rooms on via Borgo Leoni, with his wife Antonietta (née Agnelli), two small daughters and two servants.²⁴ Resigning at the end of 1882, the commission would be reconstituted in the figures of Antonio Finotti, Giulio Gatti Casazza (future director of the Metropolitan Opera in New York) and Trentini himself.²⁵ The *Direzione* was also responsible for the management of the large number of workers needed for the evenings: in the theatre (guardians, doormen, ticket-takers, cleaners), behind the scenes (stagehands and lighting men; tool-makers and carpenters; tailor, hairdresser and shoe-shiner; announcer, stage servants and firemen) and on stage (choristers, orchestra members, dancers, pages and extras). Suspended (and segmented) between guarantees and liberalisation,²⁶ these fig-

²¹ ASCFe, Stato civile-anagrafe (hereafter SCA), Censimento 1881, b. 10, f. "Corso Giovecca"; *ibid.*, Registro di popolazione (hereafter RP), Città, p. 3334.

²² Associations that, on the strength of their prestige as fighters for national unity, continued the political struggles of the Risorgimento, distinguishing themselves from the moderates in power.

²³ ASCFe, SCA, Censimento 1881, b. 11, f. "Via Mascheraio"; *ibid.*, RP, Città, p. 3815. About Sani cf. Davide L. Mantovani, *Liberali, radicali, socialisti. La battaglia delle idee, in 1892–1992. Il movimento socialista ferrarese dalle origini alla nascita della repubblica democratica*, ed. by Aldo Berselli, Cento (FE) 1992, pp. 49–60.

²⁴ ASCFe, SCA, Censimento 1881, b. 2, f. "Via Borgo Leoni"; *ibid.*, RP, Città, p. 8160.

²⁵ *Atti del consiglio comunale. 1882–83*, Ferrara 1883, pp. 138 (10 November 1882) and 150 (20 December 1882). Trentini would once again resign in the same year 1882 and then be replaced by Gaetano Forlani.

²⁶ Rosselli, *Il sistema*, pp. 129–148. Cf. also Seragnoli, *L'industria del teatro*, pp. 125–130. On the recruitment of orchestra members cf. *Le orchestre dei teatri d'opera italiani dell'Ottocento. Bilancio provvisorio di una ricerca*, ed. by Franco Piperno, in *Studi verdiani* 11, 1996, pp. 119–221, esp. pp. 119–133 and 219–221; and Franco Piperno/Antonio Rostagno, *The Orchestra in Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera Houses*, in *The Opera Orchestra in 18th- and 19th-Century Europe*, ed. by Niels Martin Jensen/Franco Piperno, Berlin 2008, Vol. 1, pp. 15–62.

ures were recruited periodically on the basis of written applications,²⁷ which we imagine were at least partly the result of informal contacts and/or recommendations (for example it is evident that family relationship played a role) while for the artistic staff, examinations were organised or references sought. After a probationary period, they became part of a recognised ‘corps’ but worked and were paid only when required, depending on the works staged and the need for local staff. Staff salaries were very unequal: in the 1879/80 Carnival opera season, the per-day salary spectrum ranged from seven lire for the tailor to a few tens of cents for the secondary doorkeepers and guardians; from seven lire for the choirmaster to two to four lire for the choristers and chorus girls and 25–30 cents for extras and pages; from 25 lire for the orchestra director to seven lire for the ‘first’ instruments and 1–1.5 lire for the second violins.²⁸

Disciplinary fining

All around Europe performing arts workers had to be supervised to ensure that they performed their duties well but also decently as they were invested with a public function that put urban prestige at stake. In 1865, in addition to the *Regolamento (Regulations)* issued by the local chief of the state police and addressed to the public of all shows, the municipality of Ferrara printed a *Regolamento disciplinare (Disciplinary Regulation)* for its theatre, which meticulously regulated access to the stage and wings, clothing and the conduct of all workers in the productions.²⁹ Guaranteeing compliance with the regulations was an inspector who, when necessary, would compile a report on non-compliance and propose fines to the *Direzione*, to whom the final decision is entrusted. The inspector could be a member, in turn, of the *Direzione* itself, but in 1880–1882 the task was entrusted to Enrico Manfredini and paid 2.5 lire per evening. Born in 1816 in Cassana, a village in the countryside, Manfredini was an elderly member of the local ‘philharmonic’ orchestra who, like Boldrini, lived close to the municipal theatre in a seven-rooms house he owned on via Borgo dei Leoni with his wife Anna Poltronieri, their son Nemesio (a municipal employee but also a musician) and their daughter Ester.³⁰

The main source for this examination of the fines are the inspector’s *rapporti*, preserved among the papers of the Commissione Pubblici Spettacoli (Public Entertainment Commission) in the historical archives of the municipality of Ferrara.³¹

²⁷ Hundreds of instances, especially individual ones, are in ASCFe, CPS, b. 84. Cf. also *ibid.*, b. 79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, b. 43, Teatro municipale di Ferrara, *Spesato Serale. Spettacolo d’opera seria. Carnevale 1879–1880*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, b. 86, f. 2, Comune di Ferrara, *Regolamento disciplinare pel servizio dei teatri di proprietà comunale*, 21 April 1865 (manifesto). Cf. Enrico Rosmini, *Legislazione e giurisprudenza dei teatri. Trattato dei diritti delle obbligazioni degli impresarij, artisti, autori, agenti teatrali, delle direzioni, del pubblico, ecc., ecc.*, Milano ³1893, pp. 172, 533 and 732.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, SCA, Censimento 1881, b. 2, f. “Via Borgo Leoni”; *ibid.*, RP, Città, p. 864.

³¹ *Ibid.*, CPS, b. 87 (1869–1873, 1880–1882, 1883–1889, 1891–1898), and, to a lesser extent, *ibid.*, bb. 43 (1879–1880) e 95 (1863).

Registers of fines and bulletins of payments also existed but were only exceptionally preserved.³² By comparing the lists of performances and the dates of the progressively numbered reports, it is clear that *rapporti* were only compiled when problems arose. Of the 184 incidents recorded between 1880 and 1882 (although for 1882 the documentation is meagre), 46 concerned absences for proven health reasons, which obviously did not give rise to fines. The actual violations recorded (138) comprised mainly unjustified absences for the entire evening or rehearsal (41% of the total) and tardiness, early departures or partial absences (35%).³³ For example, the first note in this three-year period concerns the chorister Alessandro Martinelli, who was absent from the rehearsal of Fromental Halévy's *L'Ebrea* on 9 May 1880. Martinelli himself arrived late at the performance on 3 June at 8.15 p.m., and although he had claimed he had "arrived on time" (because of a "delay" in "raising the cloth") he was nevertheless fined fifty cents withheld from his pay.³⁴ Much less frequent was another set of fines levied for mistakes, clothing or decorum in general (9%). On 20 May 1880 at another performance of the *L'Ebrea*, the soprano chorister Vittoria Baccarini must be dressed as a princess in the third act: "instead she comes on stage dressed as a peasant girl" and was fined fifty cents (Fig. 2).³⁵

More serious was the attitude of the dancer Luigia Naldi, who was fined two lire (later forgiven) because during the Giacomo Meyerbeer's opera *Gli Ugonotti* (The Huguenots) on the evening of 2 February 1881, "before starting the first danceable, there was continuous laughing and loud chattering in the wings".³⁶ Cases of indiscipline or outright insubordination were rare but not insignificant (9%). Violinist Vittorio Mingardi was fined ten lire – later divided in half with fellow violinist Ulisse Pasquali – for being co-responsible for opening the windows of the staircase leading to the boxes during the rehearsal of Giovanni Battista Bergamini's *Ugo e Parisina* on 2 February 1881, a heavy fine that was not pardoned despite several attempts. Similarly, the choristers Paolo Vancini and Ferruccio Scanavini had threatened the audience who booed them at the performance of Charles Gounod's *Faust* on 9 February and they were fined 2.5 lire each directly by Severino Sani himself, although their fine was later remitted.

³² *Ibid.*, *Spettacolo di Carnevale 1880–1881 – Multe* (register); *ibid.*, b. 95 (bulletins 1869–1881).

³³ Even in nineteenth-century theatres, as in contemporary factories, the ways of discipline pass through regulations and fines centred on attendance and timing. Cf. Edward P. Thompson, *Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism*, in *Past & Present* 38, 1967, pp. 56–97; and Franco Ramella, *Terra e telai. Sistemi di parentela e manifattura nel Biellese dell'Ottocento*, Torino 1984.

³⁴ "arrivato alle 8¼, avendo tardato un poco l'alzata della tela è arrivato a tempo". ASCFe, CPS, b. 87, f. "1880 Primavera", Reports of stage inspector, 9 May and 3 June 1880.

³⁵ "[N]el 3° atto deve essere vestita da Principessa, invece viene in scena vestita da contadina". *Ibid.*, Report of stage inspector, 20 May 1880.

³⁶ "prima d'incominciare il primo ballabile, fra le quinte è stato un continuo ridere e ciarlar forte". *Ibid.*, f. "Stagione Carnevale 1880–81", Report of stage inspector, 2 February 1881.

Table 1 summarises the data on absences and offences recorded in 1880–1882 as well as in earlier or later years.³⁷

Table 1. Absences and fines, Municipal Theatre of Ferrara, 1869–1889

	1869–1873		1880–1882		1883–1889		<i>sum/average</i>	
<i>N absences (fines + illnesses)</i>	474		184		243		901	
<i>N Illness</i>	110		46		21		177	
<i>% of illness on total absences</i>	23		25		9		20	
<i>Reasons for the fines:</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Sum N</i>	<i>Avg %</i>
<i>unjustified absence</i>	209	58	56	41	119	54	384	53
<i>tardiness and partial absences</i>	106	29	48	35	51	23	205	28
<i>errors, clothing, decorum</i>	37	10	13	9	28	13	78	11
<i>indiscipline/insubordination</i>	11	3	13	9	17	7	41	6
<i>other/not indicated</i>	1	0	8	6	7	3	16	2
<i>Total</i>	364	100	138	100	222	100	724	100

The three-year period of 1880–1882 was a phase of declining unexcused absences, offset by an increase in tardiness and partial absences. These years also seem to mark an increase in insubordinate conduct, destined to be confirmed in subsequent years.

According to the available sources, in two years the individuals fined or absent for health reasons were about one third of the choristers and regular orchestra members (154), but many external musicians, dancers and extras were also fined. Limiting ourselves to the three seasons of 1880–1881 (Carnival 1880, Spring 1880, Carnival 1881; NB in 1881 no spring session was held) and separating absences due to certified illness and those subsequently justified, 25 of the 51 fined are recidivists, such as the ‘foreign’ violinist (i.e. not part of the Ferrara municipal corps) Ulisse Pasquali (five fines), chorister Vittoria Baccarini, viola player Odoardo Cristofori and violinist Giuseppe Tagliati (four fines each) and another four violins and a trumpet (three fines each). Of these nine multiply fined, four were engaged for only one season, and only Cristofori was to be engaged again in 1882. Several striking cases are recorded, starting with the collective fines imposed in January 1881: to chorus girls who “did not maintain a serious demeanour” and to

³⁷ Although their variations stand up to an elementary test of statistical significance (chi-squared), the data are often incomplete and should be taken as indicative (it would make no sense, e.g., to calculate annual averages).

dancers who “danced carelessly”.³⁸ The aforementioned Baccharini did not dress properly and even laughed on stage, as did other chorus girls. Some of the dancers omitted to perform expected figures while others made noise, laughing and talking. In February 1881, some of the extras were expelled from the corps for disapproving of the audience’s reactions while lighter punishments, as mentioned before, were handed down to the choristers Scanavini and Vancini for similar behaviour. A singer, a dancer and a band member were caught smoking in the dressing room. In addition to Mingardi’s and Pasquali’s case, perhaps the most interesting episode is that of the chorister Eugenio Ghiraldi, who arrived late in January 1881, quarrelled with the porter as he went on stage and then, having taken off his stage clothes, sat in the stalls to enjoy the opera. He was suspended and then readmitted to the corps within a week.³⁹ Controversially, even the choirmaster Giuseppe Ungarelli was fined for being slightly late, and then he blamed Manfredini for not calling him and was outraged at receiving his first fine in twenty years of service.⁴⁰

Beyond fines

The 1881 Carnival season marked a change in the choral corps. On 24 November 1880, a commission consisting of the *maestri* Tullio Finotti, Giuseppe Ungarelli, Francesco Renone and Serafino Cristani selected 30 new choristers out of 51 aspirants who had presented themselves for examination (three out of five women, 27 out of 46 men). They were introduced into the choir after gathering information from the local police headquarters, which reported only one conviction for battery, later amnestied, and one indictment for perjury that resulted in an acquittal.⁴¹ Partly dictated by ordinary turnover, the selection was mainly due to an incident that occurred in June 1880, which perhaps also explains the aforementioned recourse to the police. The choir had been offered a half-paid evening by the management for the benefit of the impresario Federico Tati; accepting, they planned to donate the sum to their comrade Guglielmo Masotti, who had been “struck down by grave misfortune”.⁴² Shortly afterwards, they were asked to perform for free, a request that divided the choir. Gathering most of the members at the tavern of Sant’Antonio, they asked for at least the promised pay, but the impresario refused. They were even summoned to the police, but in the end, convinced that the management had let them off the hook, 22 did not turn up. They found

³⁸ “non mantengono un contegno serio”; “hanno ballato con disattenzione”. ASCFe, CPS, b. 87, f. “Stagione Carnevale 1880–81”, Report of stage inspector, 23 January 1881.

³⁹ Ibid., Report of stage inspector, 9 February 1881; *ibid.*, Reports of stage inspector, 16 January, 27 and 28 February 1881; *ibid.*, minutes of reunions of the *Direzione* and correspondence, 1–5 February 1881.

⁴⁰ Ibid., f. “1880 Primavera”, Report of stage inspector, 26 May 1880 and letter of Ungarelli to the *Direzione*, 29 May 1880.

⁴¹ ASCFe, CPS, b. 79, f. 2.

⁴² “colpito da grave disgrazia”. ASCFe, CA, XIX, Teatri e spettacoli, b. 43, *Istanza dei coristi espulsi*, 11 March 1881.

themselves expelled “forever” from the choir. The management blamed chorister Enrico Buccelli in particular for “insinuation and pressure” on his colleagues.⁴³ Born in Ferrara in 1837, Buccelli worked daily as a waiter, and although he was married with children, he had been living separately from his wife since 1875 and in 1881 was living in a single room on the Vicolo delle Stalle.⁴⁴ The choristers who went to the theatre took a stand in the press as did the expelled, asking “whether it is right that poor and poorly paid people such as we are should have to give alms to a rich impresario.”⁴⁵ Since the management did not accept the appeals, in order to set an “example” in the name of “order”, “discipline” and the “public interest”,⁴⁶ 21 of the expelled choristers turned to the city authorities, but on 16 April 1881 the city board decided to dismiss the appeal as the choristers were not “salaried employees of the Administration”. In the following seasons, despite explicit requests, they were not readmitted to the choir.⁴⁷ It should be noted, however, that between 1882 and 1883 the city board and the city council, in order to avoid the recurring problems posed by the theatrical ‘masses’, went so far as to discuss the payment of a fixed salary to choristers and orchestral players.⁴⁸ Agitations were anything but rare among the male and female choristers, non-professionals who sang in their free time and were once described as the “always restless” (Bologna 1855) “pariahs of art” (Rome 1872).⁴⁹ In Ferrara, the near-strike of 1880, the endemic absenteeism and the not-infrequent cases of indiscipline cannot be reduced to a common matrix, not least because of the diversity of relations among the theatre personnel (from the *maestri* of the orchestra to the extras and stagehands) as well as between them and the members of municipal administration. We learn from some later correspondence that in the event of a successful season (in economic terms), those who were fined could expect to be graciously reimbursed, as happened in 1884.⁵⁰ However, relations between theatre management and workers were not always paternalistic. A large part of the personnel did not live off their theatre earnings: at the 1881 census, only a few heads of

⁴³ “che siano per sempre esclusi da qualsiasi spettacolo” and “per insinuazione e pressione su loro esercitata, secondo il solito, da Buccelli Enrico”. ASCFe, CA, XIX, Teatri e spettacoli, b. 43.

⁴⁴ About Buccelli cf. *ibid.*, SCA, Censimento 1881, b. 20, f. “Vicolo Stalle” and RP, *Città*, p. 4216; in 1870 he had obtained a morality certificate to enroll his ten-year-old son Vittorio at the Liceo Musicale (*ibid.*, Fondo popolazione, b. 39).

⁴⁵ “se è giusto che povera gente, mal retribuita quale noi siamo, debba fare l’elemosina ad un ricco impresario”. See the column “Dichiarazione” in the *Gazzetta ferrarese*, 15 June 1880, p. 3.

⁴⁶ “nell’interesse dell’ordine e della disciplina, e perché si era riconosciuta la necessità di dare un esempio”. ASCFe, CA, XIX, Teatri e spettacoli, b. 43, *Istanza dei coristi espulsi*, 11 March 1881.

⁴⁷ “non essere [...] salariati del Comune”. *Deliberazioni prese dalla Giunta municipale dal 5 gennaio al 30 Dicembre 1881*, pp. 225f. (16 April 1881).

⁴⁸ *Atti del consiglio comunale. 1882–83*, Ferrara 1883, pp. 120f. (9 December 1882) and 347–353 (23 June 1883).

⁴⁹ “sempre irrequieti” and “paria dell’arte”. Quotations from Rosselli’s delightful treatment of the world of choristers (Rosselli, *Il sistema*, pp. 133 and 135).

⁵⁰ ASCFe, CPS, b. 87, f. “1883–84 Rapporti Provvedimenti generali”, Theatre choristers to “onorevole Direzione”, 22 February 1884 and the *Direzione*’s handwritten resolution, 23 February 1884.

families declared themselves to be choristers or orchestra players; and it is enough to scroll through the professions of the aspiring choristers to come across many shoemakers, carpenters, hemp workers, porters, bricklayers, painters, tailors and many other manual workers, with a few exceptions (housewives on the one hand, students and clerks on the other). Multi-activity was a double-edged sword.⁵¹ The salary for an evening at the theatre was often higher than that of a day's work for a farm labourer in the countryside or an urban labourer,⁵² thus it was as a valuable resource to cope with the precariousness of work and existence that characterised nineteenth-century European society. However, precisely because the main theatre, Teatro Comunale, did not provide them with their only or main source of income and because there were alternatives on the show-business labour market (e.g. the Tosi-Borghesi Arena, which was open almost all year round), many of the theatre workers could afford to behave in a somewhat deviant manner and did not refrain from complaining about the too-low wages and demanding wage increases (as did the female choristers, who in 1869 demanded rehearsal pay like their male colleagues – in vain, it seems).⁵³ The mutual aid and trade-union organisations of male and female theatre workers, founded in Ferrara in the years at the end of the nineteenth century, rested on a social and cultural autonomy dating back a couple of decades, which deserves careful investigation.

⁵¹ Cf. Fritz Trümpi, Ironworks as Venues of Music Production. The Ostrava/Vítkovice Case from the 1890s to the 1910s, in *Music as Labour. Inequalities and Activism in the Past and Present*, ed. by Dagmar Abfalter/Rosa Reitsamer, London/New York 2022, pp. 23–36.

⁵² *Lotte agrarie in Italia. La Federazione nazionale dei lavoratori della terra, 1901–1926*, ed. by Renato Zangheri, Milano 1960; Francesco Saverio Rotili, *L'organizzazione sindacale edilizia dalle origini all'inizio del secolo (1886–1902)*, Roma 1989.

⁵³ ASCFe, CPS, b. 87, f. “1869–1873”, Female choristers to Casanova (representative of the theatre company), 1 April 1869.

III. Performances –
Social criticism, local pride,
and scientific debate

‘L’Opera’ come forma popolare di comunicazione politica

Maria Teresa Morelli

Teatro e comunicazione nel XIX secolo

Il teatro non è soltanto quello realizzato in uno specifico edificio

all’uopo costruito, ma *ovunque* esista un gruppo che teatralmente si manifesti di fronte ad un gruppo in grado di recepire il suo manifestarsi. [...] è da considerarsi teatro la più rigorosamente classica delle tragedie realizzata nel più rigidamente classico degli edifici, come lo spettacolo improvvisato per la strada o in una piazza [...].¹

Attraverso il teatro si realizza una forma di comunicazione² politica *sui generis* che attraverso la forma dialogica, realizza immediatezza e facilità di memorizzazione dei contenuti. Elementi essenziali della comunicazione teatrale sono autore, attore e pubblico,³ quest’ultimo – in particolare nei teatri di carattere popolare, nei teatri all’aperto, nelle rappresentazioni di strada⁴ – è parte attiva dello spettacolo.

Il teatro del XIX secolo esprime il nuovo clima pervaso da spirito nazionale e rivendicazioni politiche e sociali.⁵ Tale atmosfera trova nel pubblico una consonanza di sentimenti al punto che – al di là delle intenzioni dell’autore o degli attori – il pubblico prorompe in applausi e si esalta al semplice sentir parlare di lotta agli oppressori; si immedesima quando i riferimenti alludono alle situazioni vissute non più soltanto dai grandi eroi e dai personaggi storici ma dai suoi simili alle prese con i problemi del vivere quotidiano:

il pubblico si appropria di melodie che sente non più appartenenti alla storia ma al presente. I *Puritani* di Bellini è uno di quei piccoli miracoli «dal basso» operati dal pubblico che ne ha cambiato il senso rispetto alle primitive intenzioni dell’autore [...]. L’opera è ambientata nel Seicento inglese ma la sua ricezione andò ben oltre le coordinate geografiche e temporali di partenza. Infiammò – in particolar modo l’aria *Suona la tromba, intrepido* – i cuori degli esuli

¹ Cino Capitanio, *Note sul teatro politico*, Roma 1971, pp. 14–15.

² Cfr. Gianfranco Bettetini/Marco De Marinis, *Teatro e comunicazione*, Rimini/Firenze 1977; Massimo Canevacci/Alfonso De Toro, *La comunicazione teatrale*, Roma 1993.

³ Cfr. Bruno Sanguanini, *Il pubblico all’italiana. Formazione del pubblico e politiche culturali tra Stato e Teatro*, Milano 1989.

⁴ Cfr. Policarpo Petrocchi, *Teatri vernacoli e teatro popolare italiano*, Bologna/Milano/Napoli 1881; Mario Corsi, *Il teatro all’aperto in Italia*, Milano/Roma 1939; Alfredo Ronchetta/Ferdinanda Vigliani/Alberto Salza, *Giubilite il teatro di strada. Manuale per fare e disfare un teatro politico d’occasione*, Torino 1986; Paolo Stratta, *Una piccola tribù corsara. Il teatro di strada in Italia*, Torino 2000; *A History of Italian Theatre*, a cura di Joseph Farrell/Paolo Pappa, Cambridge 2006.

⁵ Cfr. Carlo Ghisalbetti, *Istituzioni e società civile nell’età del Risorgimento*, Roma/Bari 2005.

italiani a Parigi che si identificarono con quelle vicende a cui sovrapposero l'attualità politica e l'aria in questione [diventò] a tutti gli effetti uno dei più potenti canti politici dell'epoca.⁶

Il pubblico del teatro d'opera⁷ include sempre più le classi meno agiate rappresentando, secondo Antonio Gramsci,⁸ quella massa non 'illuminata' che trova nel teatro musicale l'appagamento culturale che il distacco tra intellettuali e popolazione incolta non avrebbe consentito altrimenti. Pertanto, il melodramma ottocentesco diventa strumento di educazione e identificazione, mezzo di diffusione di messaggi di natura patriottica e nazionale. Il testo letterario, ossia il libretto, è interamente cantato su accompagnamento musicale e questo avvicina il pubblico, ancora poco alfabetizzato, non solo alla musica ma anche alla letteratura. Il melodramma del XIX secolo svolge, dunque, una funzione di unificazione culturale e linguistica e rappresenta la più significativa opposizione a una cultura 'appartata' e resa impotente dal fatto che «il 'contenuto' sentimentale dell'arte, il mondo culturale, è astratto dalle correnti profonde della vita popolare-nazionale».⁹

Le caratteristiche dell'opera lirica consentono di esprimere e far circolare sotto forma metaforica e con ricorso alla melodia temi che, espressi diversamente, verrebbero sottoposti al pesante vaglio della censura.¹⁰

Anche se non è esplicita la perorazione della causa italiana, se il luogo in cui si svolge l'azione e l'identità dei protagonisti sono ambientati in epoche diverse, a cantare di una patria bella e perduta sono, ad esempio, i congiurati spagnoli contro Carlo V nell'*Ernani* di Verdi¹¹ o gli schiavi ebrei nel *Nabucco*,¹² o il coro de *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*,¹³ dove si rinviene l'emozione che gli esuli provano al ricordo dei profumi e dei panorami della propria terra. D'altronde, come evidenzia Massimo Mila:

c'erano stati i primi moti del Risorgimento [...] le cospirazioni, le vendite carbonare, la predicazione mazziniana. [...] Quasi non c'era famiglia, fra quei milanesi che il 9 marzo decretarono il trionfo del *Nabucco*, che da vicino o da lontano non ne fosse toccata: [...] non v'era più nessuno, in quella Milano che sarebbe poi esplosa nelle Cinque Giornate, che non conoscesse

⁶ Paolo Prato, Musica e politica all'italiana. La lezione del Risorgimento, in *Musica/Realtà* 97, 2012, pp. 91–98, qui alle pp. 94–95. Vedi anche Antonio Cassi Ramelli, *Libretti e librettisti*, Milano 1973.

⁷ Cfr. Maurice Descotes, *Le public de théâtre et son histoire*, Paris 1964.

⁸ Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), politico, filosofo, linguista, politologo, giornalista e critico letterario italiano; tra i fondatori del Partito Comunista d'Italia nel 1921 e deputato del Regno d'Italia dal 1924 al 1926, Segretario generale del Partito Comunista d'Italia dal 1924 al 1927.

⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, Torino 1953, p. 67.

¹⁰ Cfr. Margherita Maria Aiello, *Il melodramma ottocentesco tra libertà e censura con particolare riferimento alle opere di Donizetti, Bellini e Verdi*, Catania 2020; Irene Piazzoni, Il governo e la politica per il teatro. Tra promozione e censura (1882–1900), in *Scene di fine Ottocento. L'Italia fin de siècle a teatro*, a cura di Carlotta Sorba, Roma 2004, pp. 61–100.

¹¹ *Ernani*, prima esecuzione: Teatro La Fenice di Venezia, 9 marzo 1844. Cfr. *Giuseppe Verdi e il Risorgimento*, a cura di Ester Capuzzo/Antonio Casu/Angelo Guido Sabatini, Soveria Mannelli 2014.

¹² *Nabucco*, Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 9 marzo 1842.

¹³ *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 11 febbraio 1843.

[...] qualche esule politico. In Svizzera, in Francia, in Belgio, in Inghilterra, gli esuli pensavano all'Italia lontana, come questi Ebrei pensavano alla loro Gerusalemme.¹⁴

Durante il Risorgimento quindi il melodramma simboleggia una realtà a lungo agognata e resa ancora più urgente dal clima di clandestinità, che molti esuli¹⁵ vivono all'estero: l'unità della nazione italiana.¹⁶

Melodramma: strumento di propaganda politica?

Dal punto di vista dell'espressione politica il teatro musicale del XIX secolo contribuisce ad affinare la sensibilità popolare penetrando nella coscienza di strati sempre più vasti della popolazione. Una chiara percezione delle grandi potenzialità comunicative del melodramma è avvertita da Giuseppe Mazzini, lucido osservatore del mondo musicale italiano, che nel *pamphlet* dedicato alla *Filosofia della musica*¹⁷ coglie la centralità acquisita dal melodramma nell'Italia del primo Ottocento e ne propone un utilizzo in forma di pedagogia nazionale. Egli considera il melodramma un genere più comunicativo e di più facile comprensione rispetto al linguaggio strumentale o alla grande tragedia. Mazzini evidenzia in particolare la funzione del coro che incarna il popolo nel ruolo di una «individualità collettiva»,¹⁸ rende l'ascoltatore partecipe del conflitto delle passioni e lo avvicina all'azione rappresentata, dando vita dunque ad una sorta di immedesimazione con l'eroe dell'opera che diventa modello a cui ispirarsi e motivo di conforto. Il melodramma esprime il dinamismo della lotta tra bene e male, tra amore e morte, tra sconfitta e salvezza; la lotta dell'eroe è anche legata alla stirpe, al popolo e alla nazione, ai valori di una terra e di un'origine. La struttura del libretto è chiara, la trama comprensibile, il linguaggio musicale universale, presenta modelli di comportamento semplici che lo spettatore può comprendere secondo la propria capacità culturale; è la musica a narrare, a sottolineare gli eventi, a toccare gli animi.¹⁹

Il melodramma definisce il senso di identità e di appartenenza nazionale²⁰ attraverso sentimenti che facilmente colpiscono l'immaginario collettivo: il riferimento alla fedeltà, all'onore, al patto tra i cittadini, alla difesa contro l'oppressore,

¹⁴ Massimo Mila, *L'opera come forma popolare della comunicazione artistica*, in *Il Romanticismo. Atti del sesto congresso dell'Associazione internazionale per gli studi di lingua e letteratura italiana, Budapest e Venezia, 10-17 ottobre 1967*, a cura di Vittore Branca/Tibor Kardos, Budapest 1968, pp. 193-203, qui alla p. 201.

¹⁵ Cfr. Luciano Russi, *L'emigrazione politica*, in Russi, *I percorsi della stella. L'idea di nazione in Italia dal 1796 al 1946*, Pescara 2000, pp. 39-53.

¹⁶ Cfr. Prato, *Musica e politica*, p. 92.

¹⁷ Pubblicato a Parigi a puntate sul foglio letterario *L'Italiano* nell'estate del 1836.

¹⁸ Giuseppe Mazzini, *Filosofia della musica*, a cura di Stefano Ragni, Pisa 1996, p. 33.

¹⁹ Cfr. Guillaume Cottrau, *Lettres d'un mélomane pour servir de document à l'histoire musicale de Naples de 1829 à 1847*, Napoli 1885, pp. VIII-IX.

²⁰ Evidenzia Luciano Russi che a leggere i libretti d'opera, si rafforza la convinzione che il concetto di nazione in Italia diventi una sorta di sintesi tra la *Nation* tedesca, che si ricollega con etnia e lingua, e la valenza terminologica inglese e parzialmente francese che «si definiscono in stretta correlazione a indipendenza politica e a sovranità statale». Russi, *I percorsi della stella*, p. 8.

al legame parentale, al ricordo dei luoghi nativi.²¹ Il patto rappresenta un atto sacro che unisce tutti i figli d'Italia, trasformando «un volgo disperso che nome non ha»²² in una schiera di combattenti eroici; esprime la concezione volontaristica della comunità nazionale che si accompagna alle visioni idilliache del bel paese e alle idee che fanno leva sulla tradizione eroica e sul fatto etnico.²³

Il melodramma rappresenta, dunque, uno strumento di propaganda politica anche oltre le esplicite intenzioni dei suoi autori; diventa un supporto emozionale e simbolico per il popolo che ne esalta il messaggio modificandolo a sostegno delle proprie idee.²⁴ Durante la rappresentazione dell'opera verdiana *La traviata*, subito dopo l'Unificazione italiana, le parole del medico «la crisi non le accorda che poche ore» provocano nel popolo romano «vibranti applausi che alludevano alla fine del governo pontificio».²⁵

Paolo Prato ritiene che sia una «convenzione stabilita a cose fatte che Verdi abbia cantato 'con consapevole determinazione' il Risorgimento»; di fatto per Verdi

sono proprio gli Ebrei o i Lombardi a cantare i rispettivi cori [...] e non gli italiani dell'Ottocento in procinto di rivoltarsi. [...] Sono gli altri che vi hanno voluto cogliere un impulso patriottico, frutto di quella chimica delle emozioni che nel mondo parallelo dell'arte e della letteratura opera con assoluta precisione, basta combinare gli elementi giusti.²⁶

Enfatizzare il carattere nazionale dell'opera lirica italiana è secondo recenti studi internazionali molto riduttivo. Lo storico Axel Körner, ad esempio, rivisita la tradizionale interpretazione dell'opera lirica italiana intesa come strumento di diffusione del nazionalismo politico nel XIX secolo.²⁷ Körner sottolinea, invece, come l'opera si basi su tecniche musicali di stampo transnazionale, evidenzia il merito del repertorio operistico in quanto cerniera tra le diverse culture nazionali e artefice di una rete di relazioni culturali e intellettuali decisive nel processo di formazione di un'opinione pubblica europea.²⁸ Gioachino Rossini, ad esempio, svolge un ruolo molto importante nella celebrazione degli eventi dinastici degli Asburgo²⁹ e tale scelta della politica imperiale rende poco plausibile sostenere l'idea

²¹ Cfr. Eric Bentley, *Melodrama*, in *The Life of the Drama*, New York 1964, pp. 195–218.

²² Alessandro Manzoni, *Adelchi*, Milano 1822, p. 107 (Coro Atto III).

²³ Cfr. Carlotta Sorba, *Musica e nazione. Alcuni percorsi di ricerca*, in *Contemporanea* 6/2, 2003, pp. 393–402.

²⁴ Francesco Sanvitale, *La patria del melodramma*, in *Amadeus* 256/3, 2011, pp. 36–39, p. 38.

²⁵ Giuseppe Micheli, *Storia della canzone romana*, a cura di Gianni Borgna, Roma 1989, p. 154.

²⁶ Paolo Prato, *La musica italiana. Una storia sociale dall'Unità a oggi*, Roma 2010, p. 27.

²⁷ *Italian Opera in Global and Transnational Perspective. Reimagining Italianità in the Long Nineteenth Century*, a cura di Axel Körner/Paulo M. Kühl, Cambridge 2022; Axel Körner, *Dalla storia transnazionale all'opera transnazionale. Per una critica delle categorie nazionali*, in *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 24/1, 2017, pp. 81–98.

²⁸ Cfr. Axel Körner, *Beyond Nationaloper. For a Critique of Methodological Nationalism in Reading Nineteenth-Century Italian and German Opera*, in *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 25/4, 2020, pp. 402–419. Il successo delle opere di Mozart in Germania, di Rossini a Vienna, Parigi, in America Latina dimostra come l'opera trascenda i confini nazionali.

²⁹ Cfr. Michele Leigh Clark, *The Performances and Reception of Rossini's Operas in Vienna 1822–1825*, Ann Arbor 2005.

di alcuni storici³⁰ che l'opera italiana nel XIX secolo servisse in particolar modo a veicolare messaggi nazionalisti e antimperialisti. In particolare il *Guglielmo Tell* di Rossini – basato su un'opera di Friedrich Schiller – che diversi studiosi descrivono come una narrazione dell'oppressione austriaca,³¹ secondo Axel Körner, invece, rappresenta per gli Asburgo un fiore all'occhiello e, analogamente, il repertorio verdiano si rivela espressione di varie influenze di matrice internazionale.³² Infatti il *Don Carlos* diventa un'opera cosmopolita su libretto di Joseph Méry e Camille du Locle, tratto dall'omonima tragedia di Friedrich Schiller; alcune scene si ispirano al dramma *Philippe II, Roi d'Espagne* di Eugène Cormon, scritto non nello stile della tradizione italiana bensì nello stile di un *Grand Opéra* francese. Rappresentato per la prima volta in lingua francese, l'11 marzo 1867 alla *Salle Le Peletier* del *Théâtre de l'Académie impériale de musique* di Parigi (sede dell'*Opéra national de Paris*), si pregia di cantanti e ballerini provenienti da tutta Europa, armonizza passioni private e politiche attraverso un linguaggio musicale cosmopolita – con elementi italiani ma anche francesi e tedeschi – che fa vibrare le corde dell'anima indipendentemente dalla nazionalità.

John A. Davis sottolinea inoltre come l'idea che l'opera abbia avuto un ruolo significativo nell'ascesa del nazionalismo italiano non sia sostenuta da tutti gli studiosi, evidenziando le riflessioni di Roberto Leydi, secondo il quale i legami tra nazionalismo e opera sono molto esagerati e in gran parte sono frutto di un'invenzione retrospettiva.³³ Allo stesso modo, John Rosselli sostiene che i tentativi di imporre letture nazionaliste alla musica di Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti e Vincenzo Bellini siano anacronistici e tengano poco conto delle opinioni politiche dichiarate (o delle indifferenze) dei compositori o i gusti politici e culturali notoriamente conservatori del loro pubblico.³⁴

D'altra parte Fabrizio Della Seta evidenzia come gli elementi peculiari dell'opera verdiana, quali il giuramento, l'immagine del vecchio guerriero, i rapporti intrafamiliari, i conflitti sociali, siano comprensibili a chiunque viva nel contesto socio-culturale dell'Italia del XIX secolo, pertanto possono essere interpretati come un invito all'azione politica da parte delle ristrette élite impegnate nel movimento risorgimentale. Il teatro verdiano viene percepito quindi come un aspetto

³⁰ Ad esempio Giovanni Gavazzeni, *Il melodramma ha fatto l'unità d'Italia*, in *O mia patria. Storia musicale del Risorgimento, tra inni, eroi e melodrammi*, a cura di Giovanni Gavazzeni/Armando Torno/Carlo Vitali, Milano 2011, pp. 51–183; Carlotta Sorba, *Politics and Sentiments in Risorgimento Italy. Melodrama and the Nation*, Cham 2021.

³¹ Chiara Plazzi, *Nemico della patria! Migranti e stranieri nel melodramma italiano da Rossini a Turandot*, Acireale 2007; Alberto Mario Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento. Parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell'Italia unita*, Torino 2000.

³² Körner, *Beyond Nationaloper*, p. 407.

³³ Cfr. Roberto Leydi, *Diffusione e volgarizzazione*, in *Storia dell'opera italiana*, vol. 6: *Teorie e tecniche. Immagini e fantasie*, a cura di Lorenzo Bianconi/Giorgio Pestelli, Torino 1988, pp. 301–392.

³⁴ John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi. The Role of the Impresario*, Cambridge 1984. Cfr. John Antony Davis, *Opera and Absolutism in Restoration Italy 1815–1860*, in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36/4, 2006, pp. 569–594.

del discorso nazionale a prescindere dalla volontà del compositore, in quanto le sue opere si prestano ad essere lette anche in quella chiave.³⁵

Molto sentito è il clima patriottico e l'aspirazione indipendentistica nel 1849, anno della prima rappresentazione dell'opera verdiana *La battaglia di Legnano*, che vede la contrapposizione tra il duca milanese Rolando e il guerriero veronese Arrigo da un lato e l'invasore Federico Barbarossa dall'altro, una vicenda che pur realizzandosi nel 1176 sembra fotografare la situazione coeva. La rappresentazione di quest'opera suscita grandi manifestazioni patriottiche: «Le signore dai palchi agitavano fazzoletti tricolori; da tutta la platea si gridava: 'Viva l'Italia'; ad ogni giunger degli autori sulla scena era un delirio: il Lombardo ed il Napoletano uniti insieme in un solo trionfo, nella Città Eterna, italiana.»³⁶

Patria, famiglia, rispetto dell'onore e degli antenati comuni, senso della vergogna e dell'infamia per i traditori della patria, sono temi presenti ne *La battaglia di Legnano*. Si tratta di un'opera il cui empito patriottico viene espresso da una struttura musicale adatta al livello dello scontro storico-politico dell'anno in cui l'opera vede la luce: il 1848, epoca di rivoluzioni, cambiamenti politici, strategici e militari. Gli anni 1848/49 sono decisivi per la futura nazione italiana: scoppia la rivoluzione siciliana seguita dalla promulgazione della Costituzione del Regno delle due Sicilie da parte di Ferdinando II, anche nel Granducato di Toscana Leopoldo II promulga la Costituzione e Carlo Alberto in Piemonte concede lo Statuto Albertino che resta operativo fino al 1948 quando entra in vigore l'attuale Costituzione della Repubblica italiana. A Venezia gli insorti, guidati dal patriota di origine ebraica Daniele Manin, proclamano la Repubblica di San Marco mentre il popolo di Milano erige le barricate nelle strade e combatte per cinque giorni finché le truppe austriache, comandate dal maresciallo Radetzky, si vedono costrette ad abbandonare la città. Nel febbraio del 1849 nasce la Repubblica Romana che nel luglio dello stesso anno promulga la Costituzione.³⁷ L'esperienza della Repubblica romana del 1849, seppure di breve durata, segna profondamente il corso del Risorgimento fornendo la prima concreta occasione per mettere alla prova le nuove idee democratiche di stampo mazziniano.³⁸

³⁵ Fabrizio Della Seta, *Opera e Risorgimento: si può dire ancora qualcosa?*, in *verdiperspectiven* 2, 2017, pp. 81–106.

³⁶ [Anon.], *La battaglia di Legnano*, in *Pallante*, 28 gennaio 1849, p. 1. Cfr. anche Vittorio Viviani, *Storia del teatro napoletano*, Napoli 1969, pp. 479–480.

³⁷ Cfr. Carlo Ghisalberti, *Storia costituzionale d'Italia 1848–1994*, Roma/Bari 2001.

³⁸ Cfr. Simona Mori, *I governi delle città italiane fra antico regime e unità nazionale. Percorsi storiografici*, in *Società e Storia* 95, 2002, pp. 91–140, e 99, 2003, pp. 105–157; Francesco Bonini, *Dai parlamenti italiani del 1848 al parlamento del 1861*, in *Culture parlamentari a confronto. Modelli della rappresentanza politica e identità nazionali*, a cura di Andrea Romano, Bologna 2016, pp. 11–18.

La circolazione musicale informale

L'opera italiana dell'Ottocento³⁹ oltre ad essere rappresentata all'interno del teatro inteso come luogo fisico,⁴⁰ acquista anche una sua dinamica autonoma che le consente di uscire dall'edificio teatrale per riversarsi nella società. Le arie del melodramma vengono parodiate dal popolo: «non c'era vicolo romano in cui a sera, specialmente il sabato, non si sentisse la voce di un artigiano, o di un lampionaio, o di un popolano qualsiasi che non cantasse, o tentasse di cantare, una delle tante cabalette di cui erano infiorate le opere di Verdi».⁴¹ Lo stesso compositore, infatti, comunica l'aria de «La donna è mobile» dal *Rigoletto* soltanto alla vigilia della prima messa in scena, per evitare che venisse cantata dal popolo anteriormente alla rappresentazione ufficiale.⁴² Viene a crearsi un importante circuito di comunicazione informale che penetra capillarmente nella società, attraverso corali operaie, bande locali, teatri di marionette e burattini⁴³ che, attingendo al repertorio operistico, avvicinano pubblici eterogenei, accomunati dallo stesso amore per la musica che supera anche le difficoltà della mancanza di una lingua comune,⁴⁴ restituendo «nelle cittadine di provincia, nei paesi e nei borghi gli intrecci del melodramma, debitamente adattati alla comprensione e al gusto popolare».⁴⁵ A Napoli, ad esempio, è diffusa la consuetudine di cantare in giro per la città arie e duetti che diventano immediatamente celebri; le opere liriche si riducono a scritture per pianoforte, molte opere circolano nelle fiere e nei mercati a cura di cantastorie e suonatori ambulanti, raggiungendo un pubblico di operai e contadini⁴⁶ che imparano a memoria i cori di Verdi scoprendo nelle note di quelle arie un'identità spirituale fino ad allora sconosciuta.⁴⁷

I documenti di polizia conservati negli Archivi di Stato di Roma, Firenze, Napoli⁴⁸ forniscono interessanti notizie sull'attività dei principali suonatori ambu-

³⁹ Cfr. Giovanni Morelli, L'Opera nella cultura nazionale italiana, in *Storia dell'Opera italiana*, a cura di Lorenzo Bianconi/Giorgio Pestelli, vol. 6, Torino 1988, pp. 393–453.

⁴⁰ Cfr. Prato, Musica e politica, pp. 91–98.

⁴¹ Giuseppe Micheli, *Storia della canzone romana*, a cura di Gianni Borgna, Roma 1989, p. 323.

⁴² Cfr. János Maróthy, *Musica e uomo*, Milano 1987, p. 232.

⁴³ Yorick (Pietro Coccoluto Ferrigni), *La storia dei burattini*, Firenze 1902, pp. 195–196.

⁴⁴ Prima dell'Unificazione in Italia non esiste una lingua comune. A Napoli e in Piemonte, ad esempio, l'idioma ufficiale è il francese, negli stati papalini il latino, nelle province sotto la dominazione austriaca il tedesco, altri territori comunicano attraverso il proprio dialetto, dal milanese al ligure. Cfr. Tullio De Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*, Roma/Bari 1976; *Lingua e lingua nel teatro italiano*, a cura di Paolo Puppa, Roma 2007.

⁴⁵ Fiamma Nicolodi, Il teatro lirico e il suo pubblico, in *Fare gli italiani. Scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, a cura di Simonetta Soldani/Gabriele Turi, Bologna 1993, vol. 1: *La nascita dello stato nazionale*, pp. 257–304, qui alla p. 286.

⁴⁶ Cfr. Lorenzo Bianconi/Renato Bossa, *Musica e cultura a Napoli dal XV al XIX secolo*, Firenze 1983.

⁴⁷ Cfr. Enzo Siciliano, L'Italia del melodramma, in *La Repubblica*, 24 gennaio 1995; Philip Gossett, Giuseppe Verdi and the Italian Risorgimento, in *Studia Musicologica* 52/1–4, 2011, pp. 241–257.

⁴⁸ Cfr. Archivio di Stato di Roma, *Direzione generale di polizia (1817–1870)*; Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Presidenza del Buon Governo (1814–1861)*; Archivio Centrale di Napoli, *Ministero di Stato della polizia generale, Gabinetto (1814–1861)* e *Questura, Affari diversi (1861–primi 900)*.

lanti ottocenteschi, che eseguono spesso famose arie d'opera tratte da Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi. Molti fogli volanti che riportano il testo delle opere più conosciute sono custodite presso il Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari di Roma.⁴⁹ Una menzione particolare meritano i suonatori d'arpa di Viggiano – paese della Lucania, in provincia di Potenza – esecutori anche di brani d'opera, che hanno il pregio di esportare la musica italiana all'estero.⁵⁰ Si tratta di piccoli gruppi di composizione maschile, formati da quattro o cinque suonatori, che durante tutto l'Ottocento esportano la loro musica in Europa e nelle Americhe.

Anche il teatro di prosa trae a soggetto delle sue rappresentazioni il mondo della lirica, attraverso parodie, trasposizioni in prosa e commedie, dando vita ad una sorta di 'teatro nel teatro' introducendo nella cultura collettiva e nell'immaginario popolare Verdi, Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Mercadante, in un circuito di fruizione insospettato agli autori stessi. In tal modo si introducono nella cultura e nell'immaginario popolare modelli e stili di vita altrimenti sconosciuti.⁵¹ Il dramma in cinque atti *Antonello capobrigante calabrese* di Vincenzo Padula, ad esempio, descrive i fratelli Bandiera che, mentre si avviano verso il vallone di Rovito per essere fucilati, cantano «Chi per la Patria muore vissuto è assai», dal melodramma *Donna Caritea* di Saverio Mercadante. La copiella⁵² *No masto scarparo a lo Trovatore a S. Carlo* testimonia l'esistenza a Napoli di un consumo culturale che raggiunge livelli di fruizione molto popolare, portando il melodramma verso altri generi di spettacolo e il mito verdiano anche verso la sua canzonatura. La parodia de *Il Trovatore*⁵³ di Giuseppe Verdi circolante in forma di copiella esprime questo coinvolgimento, definito in maniera fortemente incisiva nel ritornello della *Canzone buffa* scritta dal napoletano Michelangelo Tancredi: «Lo Trovatore! è troppo bello! / [...] Tutta nfoscata tengo la mente. / Quanto sto a dicere è poco, è niente! / Uh! nc'esciarraggio certo a 'mpazzia! / Da che so ghiuto, mogliera mia, / lo Trovatore pur'io a trovà, / Cchiù lo scarparo non saccio fà!»⁵⁴

Le parodie prendono di mira anche la successiva produzione della 'Giovane Scuola', ricordiamo ad esempio *Cavalleria rustico-napoletana* (Milano, Teatro

⁴⁹ Cfr. Museo Nazionale delle Arti e Tradizioni Popolari di Roma, armadio fogli volanti, cart. 1/6, n. 13315.

⁵⁰ Chiara Trara Genoino, Suonatori ambulanti, cantastorie ed altri artisti girovaghi. I rapporti della polizia dell'Ottocento a Roma, Firenze, Napoli. Nuove fonti per la ricerca storica in etnomusicologia, in *La musica a Roma attraverso le fonti d'archivio*, a cura di Bianca Maria Antolini/Arnaldo Morelli/Vera Vita Spagnuolo, Lucca 1994, pp. 337–344, qui alla p. 341.

⁵¹ Cfr. Fedele D'Amico, Verdi e il quarto Stato, in *I casi della musica*, Milano 1962, pp. 298–300.

⁵² Le copielle sono fogli volanti con testi e musiche di singole canzoni, stampati dalle case editrici e venduti da cantanti e suonatori ambulanti ad un prezzo molto contenuto. Diffuse dalla metà dell'Ottocento, le copielle riportano i nomi dell'autore e dell'editore e ospitano, a volte, anche le pubblicità degli sponsor. Sulle copielle è stata costruita la storia della canzone napoletana. Cfr. Ettore De Mura, *Enciclopedia della canzone napoletana*, Napoli 1969, ad vocem.

⁵³ *Il Trovatore*, Teatro Apollo di Roma, 19 gennaio 1853.

⁵⁴ Franco Carmelo Greco, *La scena illustrata. Teatro pittura e città a Napoli nell'Ottocento*, Napoli 1995, p. xvi; vedi anche Lorenzo Bianconi, *Il teatro d'opera in Italia*, Bologna 1993.

Fossati 1891), *Cavalleria rustico-romana* (Roma, Teatro Metastasio 1891).⁵⁵ È fiorente anche l'editoria musicale. Dallo spoglio dei periodici musicali e dall'esame delle cronistorie dei singoli teatri si rileva un importante aumento del numero delle stagioni d'opera che nel periodo compreso fra il 1825 e il 1846 vedono incrementare le produzioni da 128 a 270 annue, con un aumento da 388 a 798 allestimenti per anno, in particolare nelle regioni italiane del Centro Nord. Nel 1830 sono attivi oltre 180 teatri, per la maggior parte distribuiti nell'Italia del Nord compreso il Sud Tirolo, con Trento e Rovereto, e Trieste, ma anche nelle Marche, in Umbria e in Toscana. Nel solo anno 1830 si svolgono ben 170 stagioni d'opera, per un totale di oltre 490 allestimenti, di cui oltre 210 di Gioachino Rossini. Indizio della sempre maggiore importanza che la produzione operistica viene assumendo è la progressiva affermazione dei periodici teatrali, concentrati soprattutto a Milano che ben presto supera Bologna, tradizionale punto di riferimento del mercato del lavoro operistico. La concentrazione a Milano delle testate più autorevoli va di pari passo con l'aumento delle agenzie teatrali e lo sviluppo dell'editoria musicale, che consentirà alla capitale lombarda di esercitare, anche dopo l'unità nazionale, una funzione di monopolio assoluto.⁵⁶

Tra le tipologie di giornali che accolgono l'argomento musicale meritano una menzione quelli politici-umoristici-pupazzettati, come *Don Limone e Don Ortensio*, in cui prevale una satira politica che spesso trae ispirazione dai libretti d'opera, presentati in forma parodiata per raccontare le vicende delle amministrazioni politiche locali.⁵⁷ Il messaggio che la musica invia trova numerosi mediatori; tra questi le società filarmoniche.⁵⁸ Nel 1871/72, in vista dell'Esposizione Universale di Vienna del 1873, lo Stato italiano commissiona un censimento delle istituzioni musicali; vengono censite 65 filarmoniche che presentano 4.849 iscritti.⁵⁹ Le filarmoniche sono sempre aggiornate sulle novità musicali, pertanto in grado di offrire al pubblico i brani più noti anche a brevissima distanza dalla loro prima apparizione.

Mentre la unidimensionalità della musica classica obbliga al solo ascolto restando prerogativa di una minoranza, il melodramma, invece, assume un ruolo pedagogico, rappresenta uno strumento di alfabetizzazione e acculturazione delle

⁵⁵ Cfr. Stefano Scardovi, *L'opera dei bassifondi. Il melodramma 'plebeo' nel verismo musicale italiano*, Lucca 1994.

⁵⁶ Cfr. Marcello Conati, Periodici teatrali e musicali italiani a metà '800, in *Periodica Musica* 7, 1989, pp. 13–21. Tra i più importanti periodici musicali ricordiamo: *Politecnico*, *Gazzetta dei Teatri*, *Fama*, *Cosmorama pittorico*, *Gazzetta privilegiata di Milano*, *Strenna Teatrale Europea*.

⁵⁷ La fonte giornalistica è importante anche perché fornisce notizie riguardanti i rapporti dell'imprenditore con il potere politico locale. Cfr. Maria Giovanna Brindisino, Notizie musicali sui periodici politico-letterari salentini (Puglie) della seconda metà del secolo XIX sino al 1911, in *Periodica Musica* 3, 1985, pp. 19–25; Bianca Maria Antolini, *Dizionario degli editori musicali (1750–1930)*, Pisa 2001.

⁵⁸ Cfr. Marco Capra, Società filarmoniche nell'800. Tipologia e repertorio, in *Accademie e Società Filarmoniche. Organizzazione, cultura e attività dei filarmonici nell'Italia dell'Ottocento*, a cura di Antonio Carlini, Trento 1998, pp. 73–96.

⁵⁹ Cfr. *Istituti e società musicali in Italia. Statistica*, Roma 1873.

classi subalterne;⁶⁰ ad esso si ispirano formazioni dilettantistiche rappresentate non solo dalle filarmoniche ma anche dalle bande⁶¹ che svolgono un ruolo importante nella diffusione e sprovincializzazione dell'opera presso i centri minori.⁶² Come evidenzia Antonio Rostagno,⁶³ le accademie filarmoniche dell'Ottocento sono piccoli gruppi di appassionati dilettanti, ma anche gruppi più ampi composti di dilettanti e professionisti per lo più provenienti dall'alta fascia sociale, ma con il termine filarmonica si intende spesso anche la banda locale, che ha conformazione e indirizzo sociale opposti. Tale caratteristica evidenzia la vastità del fenomeno e l'eterogeneità delle iniziative accomunate sotto la definizione di filarmonica. I repertori e l'attività concertistica o teatrale delle filarmoniche sono interessanti quanto la loro attività didattica. Se quest'ultima educa un numero ristretto di allievi, le filarmoniche entrano in contatto con un pubblico vasto negli spettacoli spesso rappresentati, oltre che nei teatri, nella sede della filarmonica o nelle chiese.

La banda rappresenta un'istituzione centrale della vita pubblica, militare, civile e religiosa,⁶⁴ funge da collegamento tra la musica colta e quella popolare; i suoi componenti sono spesso dilettanti provenienti dalle classi lavoratrici, la sua essenza interclassista le consente di connettere il villaggio con la nazione, permettendo alle classi subalterne di condividere un repertorio che appartiene alla cultura borghese.⁶⁵ La musica militare contribuisce in misura rilevante allo sviluppo della banda, ma è improprio identificare i due concetti in quanto la musica per banda non è necessariamente a carattere militare. La banda rappresenta un'espressione musicale indiscussa anche in occasione delle celebrazioni religiose, festeggiamenti del santo patrono della città e manifestazioni civili. Gli annunci dei concerti bandistici che frequentemente si incontrano su molti giornali del secolo XIX testimoniano quanto essa fosse parte integrante della vita sociale del tempo. Alla lettura dei programmi presentati da vari complessi bandistici emerge un lento e progressivo mutamento nella scelta del repertorio, dalle composizioni espressamente scritte per banda alle trascrizioni del repertorio lirico-sinfonico corrente. Questa tendenza ha il merito di divulgare la letteratura musicale presso determinati e più vasti ceti sociali, non abituati a frequentare un certo tipo di repertorio riservato a classi sociali più elevate. Inoltre illustri compositori dell'Ottocento

⁶⁰ Cfr. Sidney Finkelstein, *Come la musica esprime le idee*, Milano 1955.

⁶¹ Un censimento del 1873 svolto dal Ministero della Pubblica istruzione mette in luce la presenza sul territorio italiano di 2047 bande. Cfr. Marcello Ruggieri, Lo Stato e l'associazionismo musicale dallo Statuto Albertino alla crisi di fine secolo, in *Accademie e Società Filarmoniche*, a cura di Antonio Carlini, Trento 1998, pp. 13–72; Marco Capra, Bande musicali e società filarmoniche nell'area medio-padana del XIX secolo. Analisi statistica e distribuzione geografica, in *Musica/Realtà* 40, aprile 1993, pp. 173–195.

⁶² Mario Isnenghi, *L'Italia in piazza. I luoghi della vita pubblica dal 1848 ai giorni nostri*, Bologna 2004, p. 40.

⁶³ Cfr. Antonio Rostagno, *La musica italiana per orchestra nell'Ottocento*, Firenze 2003.

⁶⁴ Prato, *La musica italiana*, p. 40. Cfr. Benedetto Grillo, *La banda musicale dalle origini alla strumentazione con le moderne tecnologie*, Bari 2020.

⁶⁵ Cfr. Tommaso Petrucciani, *La rivoluzione entra a suon di banda. Politicizzazione e identità comunitaria nel Lazio (1870–1913)*, Velletri 2016; Carmelo Mario Lanzafame, *Socialismo a passo di valzer. Storia dei violinisti braccianti di Santa Vittoria*, Lucca 2006.

introducono brani bandistici in determinate scene delle loro opere - in questo caso la banda suona o sulla scena o dietro le quinte - come, ad esempio, nella *Norma* di Bellini, *Fidelio* di Beethoven, *L'elisir d'amore* di Donizetti e le opere di Giuseppe Verdi *Ernani*, *La traviata* e *Aida*.

La banda rappresenta la realtà musicale più diffusa nell'Italia dell'epoca; da un censimento effettuato negli anni 1871/72 risulta che la sola provincia di Piacenza, Parma e Reggio vanta un suonatore di banda ogni 445 abitanti.⁶⁶

Durante i moti del 1848 le bande ricoprono un ruolo centrale nel catalizzare i sentimenti di rivolta, alcuni maestri di musica si ergono a difensori civici e le loro lezioni si trasformano spesso in assemblee politiche; le feste patronali diventano occasioni per suonare musiche sovversive e manifestare contro il potere costituito. L'attività delle bande viene monitorata costantemente dalla polizia borbonica che svolge regolare rapporto sulla moralità dei membri piuttosto che sul repertorio.⁶⁷ Nel 1872 debutta il mensile *La Banda* con partitura in allegato e l'editore Giulio Ricordi nel 1888 istituisce un concorso annuale e promuove nuove collane «con lo scopo di innalzare il livello delle bande per farne il surrogato popolare dell'orchestra».⁶⁸ Nel 1896 presso il Conservatorio romano di Santa Cecilia viene inaugurata la prima cattedra di Composizione e Strumentazione per Banda.⁶⁹ Nel XIX secolo i movimenti politici in ascesa aspirano a costituire le proprie bande o subordinare quelle già attive al fine di definirne il repertorio, con l'intento di conquistare la piazza del paese e modificare colore alla musica e al «berretto dei suonatori».⁷⁰

Produzioni teatrali legate all'ambiente popolare

All'indomani dell'unificazione italiana si assiste, nella provincia di Reggio Emilia, ad una significativa presenza di produzioni teatrali legate all'ambiente popolare.⁷¹ Sull'Appennino emiliano, come sottolinea Marco Fincardi, si diffonde il cosiddetto «maggio drammatico» attraverso rappresentazioni teatrali che si svolgono all'aperto, prevalentemente in una piazza o in un prato, con un tipo di recitazione in rima per lo più cantata che si ispira alla letteratura popolare o a elementi religiosi;⁷² nella pianura reggiana, inoltre, si definisce un particolare genere di spettacolo che viene rappresentato nelle stalle dalle *mascherate* carnevalesche e che risponde

⁶⁶ Cfr. [Anon.], Parliamo di bande. Censimento!, in *Laboratorio Musica* 1/2-3, 1979, p. 31.

⁶⁷ Cfr. Chiara Trara Genoino, I suonatori popolari nelle pandette della polizia del Regno Borbonico, in *Musica/Realtà* 28, 1989, pp. 96-98.

⁶⁸ Ugo Piovano, Il contributo di Giulio Ricordi alla diffusione delle musiche per banda alla fine dell'Ottocento, in *Fonti musicali italiane* 10, 2005, pp. 149-212, qui alla p. 153.

⁶⁹ Prato, *La musica italiana*, p. 43.

⁷⁰ Isnenghi, *L'Italia in piazza*, p. 154; cfr. Marino Anesa, *Musica in piazza. Contributi per una storia delle bande bergamasche*, Bergamo 1988.

⁷¹ Cfr. *Cultura popolare nell'Emilia Romagna. Espressioni sociali e luoghi d'incontro*, a cura della Federazione delle Casse di Risparmio dell'Emilia Romagna, Milano 1978; Paolo Puppa, *Parola di scena. Teatro italiano tra 800 e 900*, Roma 1999.

⁷² Marco Fincardi, Teatrini proletari, in id., *Primo Maggio Reggiano. Il formarsi della tradizione rossa emiliana*, Reggio Emilia 1990, vol. 2, pp. 235-263, qui alla p. 235. Cfr. anche *La tradizione*

alle esigenze ricreative di contadini, braccianti, artigiani.⁷³ Tra i generi proposti dal teatro di stalla vi è anche il melodramma. Si tratta di spettacoli messi in scena da attori non professionisti a beneficio di un pubblico rurale caratterizzato da un alto tasso di analfabetismo. Le rappresentazioni vengono prodotte durante la sosta invernale dei lavori agricoli; il cosiddetto teatro di stalla⁷⁴ adatta il repertorio ai gusti, ai valori, alle conoscenze di un pubblico contadino; è un teatro che esprime le nuove aspirazioni politiche e sociali del mondo rurale e prende posizione su quanto accade sia all'interno sia all'esterno della propria comunità. Questa produzione teatrale – sostenuta anche materialmente dalle strutture associative dei lavoratori – testimonia il processo di riorganizzazione delle comunità rurali che concorre alla trasformazione della società padana.⁷⁵ Intorno l'ultimo ventennio del XIX secolo aumenta la produzione di copioni manoscritti ad opera di artigiani alfabetizzati le cui opere vengono rappresentate in molti villaggi; tra questi spicca il nome del giovane falegname Anselmo Alvisi.⁷⁶ Il melodramma penetra dunque negli strati sociali più modesti anche attraverso il teatro di stalla alimentando «l'immaginario – civile e politico oltre che musicale – con i suoi contenuti spesso altamente laici e patriottici.»⁷⁷

Il teatro di stalla, soprattutto nell'ultima parte del XIX secolo, porta nelle campagne della pianura padana opere in versione marionettistica; ad esempio a Bibbiano (Reggio Emilia) nel 1897, in occasione del carnevale, si dà vita ad una reinterpretazione dell'*Aida* di Verdi che viene allestita in un teatro di stalla, ovvero nella casa della cultura del mondo contadino.⁷⁸

Nel 1897, l'anno successivo all'avventura coloniale dell'Italia in Abissinia «una *Aida* da fattoria si dimostrò momento di forte anticolonialismo»,⁷⁹ provocando reazioni simili a quelle suscitate dai riferimenti patriottici della prima metà del secolo.

Nell'Ottocento è anche presente un'altra esperienza teatrale che penetra nel sociale e in maniera capillare nelle classi più modeste. Si tratta del melodramma delle aree depresse o plebeo, che trova la sua piena realizzazione nel periodo

del maggio, a cura di Giorgio Vezzani, Reggio Emilia 1983; *Il maggio drammatico. Una tradizione di teatro in musica*, a cura di Tullia Magrini, Bologna 1992.

⁷³ Cfr. Riccardo Bertani, La commedia di stalla, in *La provincia di Reggio Emilia* 6/2, 1978, pp. 21–29.

⁷⁴ La stalla durante il periodo invernale rappresenta il centro della vita sociale e spesso anche familiare; gli uomini riparano gli arnesi da lavoro, le donne si dedicano all'arte del cucito, filano la canapa o il lino. Cfr. Dino Coltro, *Stalle e piazze. El filò, il teatro di paese e di parrocchia*, Verona 1979, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Cfr. [Anon.], In campagna, in *Lo Scamicciato*, 25 febbraio 1883, p. 5; Marco Fincardi, Dal palchetto alla stalla, in *L'Almanacco* 5/8–9, 1986/87, pp. 45–67.

⁷⁶ Cfr. Fincardi, *Teatrini proletari*, p. 239.

⁷⁷ Stefano Pivato/Anna Tonelli, *Italia vagabonda. Il tempo libero degli italiani dal melodramma alla pay-tv*, Roma 2001, p. 24; cfr. Prato, *La musica italiana*, pp. 71–72.

⁷⁸ Leydi, *Diffusione e volgarizzazione*, pp. 350–354.

⁷⁹ John Rosselli, *Sull'ali dorate. Il mondo musicale italiano dell'Ottocento*, Bologna 1992, p. 130.

verista,⁸⁰ dagli anni Novanta del secolo XIX in poi. Il melodramma delle aree depresse è caratterizzato dalla semplicità degli allestimenti: niente scene macchinose, niente costumi sfarzosi, pochi personaggi principali.⁸¹ Tra i protagonisti figurano pescatori, montanari, operai, popolani; predomina l'ambientazione meridionale e il testo prevede inserti in dialetto. Gelosia, dramma d'amore, tradimento, senso dell'onore, sono tra gli ingredienti di opere veriste quali *Cavalleria rusticana*⁸² di Pietro Mascagni e *Pagliacci*⁸³ di Ruggero Leoncavallo. Traspare una visione della vita e una rappresentazione di costumi che contribuiscono a perpetuare nell'immaginario collettivo lo stereotipo del meridionale. Anche altre due opere rientrano a buon diritto in tale atmosfera: *A Santa Lucia*⁸⁴ di Pierantonio Tasca e *Malavita*⁸⁵ di Umberto Giordano, dove sono inseriti usi e costumi tipici del luogo in cui si svolge la vicenda; con un linguaggio gergale viene rappresentata la vita dei quartieri bassi napoletani, il loro folclore ma anche la loro autenticità fatta di sentimenti e superstizione, di forte senso della religiosità e immediatezza di rapporti.⁸⁶ Vengono descritti modelli non più riferiti all'ambiente mitizzato delle corti ma a quello quotidiano, minuto e popolare; la scelta del soggetto non verte su fatti lontani nel tempo ma privilegia la realtà presente, soprattutto quella delle classi umili e oppresse.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Il Verismo è una corrente letteraria italiana dell'ultimo Ottocento e del primo Novecento caratterizzata dalla rigorosa rispondenza alla realtà effettiva delle situazioni e dei fatti, degli ambienti e dei personaggi, con una particolare attenzione alle classi sociali più umili. In ambito musicale verismo indica la tendenza dell'opera lirica degli ultimi decenni del XIX secolo ad affrontare temi tipici del verismo letterario, come episodi di cronaca, vicende drammatiche di ambientazione contadina o proletaria. Le opere più rappresentative del verismo musicale sono *Pagliacci* di Ruggero Leoncavallo e *Cavalleria rusticana* di Pietro Mascagni. Cfr. Rubens Tedeschi, *Addio, fiorito asil. Il melodramma italiano da Boito al verismo*, Milano 1978; Montalto e Leoncavallo, *alle radici del Verismo musicale. Omaggio a Giulietta Simionato*, a cura di Enrico De Luca, Montalto Uffugo (CS) 2005; Gemma Pappalardo, *Due rappresentanti del verismo musicale italiano. Pietro Mascagni e Ruggero Leoncavallo*, Catania 2007; Giorgio Ruberti, *Il verismo musicale*, Lucca 2011.

⁸¹ Rodolfo Celletti ci restituisce un accurato elenco di opere melodrammatiche che lui definisce «melodramma delle aree depresse»; tra le opere citate: *Tilda* del calabrese Francesco Cilea, *La bella di Alghero* del sardo Giovanni Fara-Musio, *A Santa Lucia* del siciliano Pierantonio Tasca. Cfr. Rodolfo Celletti, *Il melodramma delle aree depresse. Miseria e nobiltà del meridione nelle opere dei veristi minori*, in *Discoteca* 21, 15 giugno 1962, pp. 18-24 e 22, 15 luglio 1962, pp. 20-25.

⁸² *Cavalleria rusticana*, Teatro Costanzi di Roma, 17 maggio 1890. Riscuote un enorme successo, tanto che vengono coniate delle medaglie in onore di Mascagni e il re in persona lo nomina cavaliere della Corona. Cfr. Gino Negri *L'Opera italiana. Storia, costume repertorio*, Milano 1985, p. 220.

⁸³ *Pagliacci*, Teatro Dal Verme di Milano, 21 maggio 1892.

⁸⁴ *A Santa Lucia*, Teatro Kröll di Berlino, 15 novembre 1892.

⁸⁵ *Malavita*, Teatro Argentina di Roma, 21 febbraio 1892.

⁸⁶ Cfr. Stefano Scardovi, *L'opera dei bassifondi. Il melodramma 'plebeo' nel verismo musicale italiano*, Lucca 1994, pp. 47-58.

⁸⁷ Cfr. Folco Portinari, *Pari siamo! Io la lingua, egli ha il pugnale. Storia del melodramma ottocentesco attraverso i suoi libretti*, Torino 1981.

Conclusione

In conclusione possiamo ritenere che diffusa in tutta la penisola⁸⁸ – con una capacità di penetrazione decisamente più ampia ed efficace delle altre forme teatrali – l'opera lirica fa vibrare degli stessi entusiasmi tutti gli italiani, da Nord a Sud,⁸⁹ ed è capace di far circolare, attraverso la favola, sentimenti e modelli. Le situazioni e i gesti vissuti sul palcoscenico finiscono per trasferirsi nel pubblico che assiste alla rappresentazione,⁹⁰ pertanto la musica, in quanto straordinario veicolo di messaggi politici e sociali, realizza coesione sociale e condivisione. Accanto alle compagnie ufficiali si fanno largo le corali operaie, le bande locali e i teatri di marionette che attingono al patrimonio operistico adattando gli intrecci del melodramma alla comprensione e al gusto di un pubblico popolare.

Prima dell'Unificazione italiana, quindi nella prima metà dell'Ottocento, il teatro musicale esalta il tema della comunità e della patria, presentandosi anche come strumento di opposizione politica, con una capacità di penetrazione decisamente più ampia ed efficace rispetto al teatro di prosa. Il melodramma, assolvendo alla funzione auspicata da Giuseppe Mazzini, diventa quindi produttore e veicolo di diffusione di immagini della patria in particolare attraverso lo sviluppo della dimensione corale con la sua attitudine a risvegliare il mondo delle emozioni indipendentemente dallo spazio e dal tempo, dalle differenze sociali e culturali. Nella seconda metà del secolo XIX, invece, quando comincia a prendere corpo il dramma borghese, i temi fantastici, leggendari e storici, vissuti nella loro dimensione epica, lasciano il posto ad una dimensione più prosaica. La fase entusiastica di patriottismo, vissuto soprattutto in termini di liberazione dal dominio straniero, ora cede il posto a tematiche legate al mondo reale contemporaneo nei suoi aspetti pubblici e privati preannunciando la nascita del verismo.

⁸⁸ Cfr. Marco Meriggi, *Gli stati italiani prima dell'Unità. Una storia istituzionale*, Bologna 2011; id., *Il Risorgimento rivisitato. Un bilancio*, in *La costruzione dello stato-nazione in Italia*, a cura di Adriano Roccucci, Roma 2012, pp. 39–57.

⁸⁹ Cfr. Raffaello Monterosso, *La musica nel Risorgimento*, Milano 1948.

⁹⁰ Cfr. Vittorio Bersezio, *Il gusto del pubblico*, in *Il Teatro Illustrato*, marzo 1881, p. 3.

Between Ritual and Radical

Socio-Political Discourses at the Transition of Kūṭiyāṭṭam's Performance Tradition

Tushara Meleppattu / Rakshit Kweera

Introduction

This article considers the performative tradition of nineteenth-century Kūṭiyāṭṭam and the circumstances that led to a canon shift in this theatre form during this time, with a special focus on the performance of Kūṭiyāṭṭam in the provincial theatre complexes in Kerala. In contrast to larger cities such as Bombay and Kolkata, where modern, proscenium-style theatre was being performed, theatre in Kerala was predominantly presented within temples and court establishments, a situation that in this context is understood as a representation of provincial-theatre practice in India. This paper examines the transitions that occurred in the provincial-theatre complexes in Kerala since the nineteenth century, the moment when Kūṭiyāṭṭam was first introduced to the masses, the influence of British colonial rule on the performance of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, and the effect of the feudal establishment of Kerala on the socio-cultural and political aspects of its theatre tradition.

The study examines performance in provincial theatres as structured behavior through an analytical framework that integrates interdisciplinary methodologies. This approach highlights the dynamic intersection between aesthetics and politics. Employing a historical research method, the study draws on primary and secondary sources, including archival data.

Kūṭiyāṭṭam – setting a historical backdrop

Tracing the roots of the *Natyasastra*, the ancient Sanskrit treatise on performing arts written around the second century CE, reveals that southern India, especially the area known as the Tamilakam (Fig. 1), including the erstwhile kingdoms of Cholas, Ceras, and Pandyas, had a strong theatrical tradition, often termed as a golden era for Sanskrit theatre (500 BCE – 400 CE). There is also considerable evidence that Sanskrit theatre was used both as propaganda and a religious tool during the period of Brahmin-Buddhist religious contention.¹

However, the following four centuries marked a decline of Sanskrit theatre. By the eleventh century CE, it was on the verge of extinction on the Indian subcontinent, with the prominent growth of vernacular languages as well as art forms

¹ Mundoli Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing. The Performance Culture of Kutiyattam*, New York 2022, p. 61.

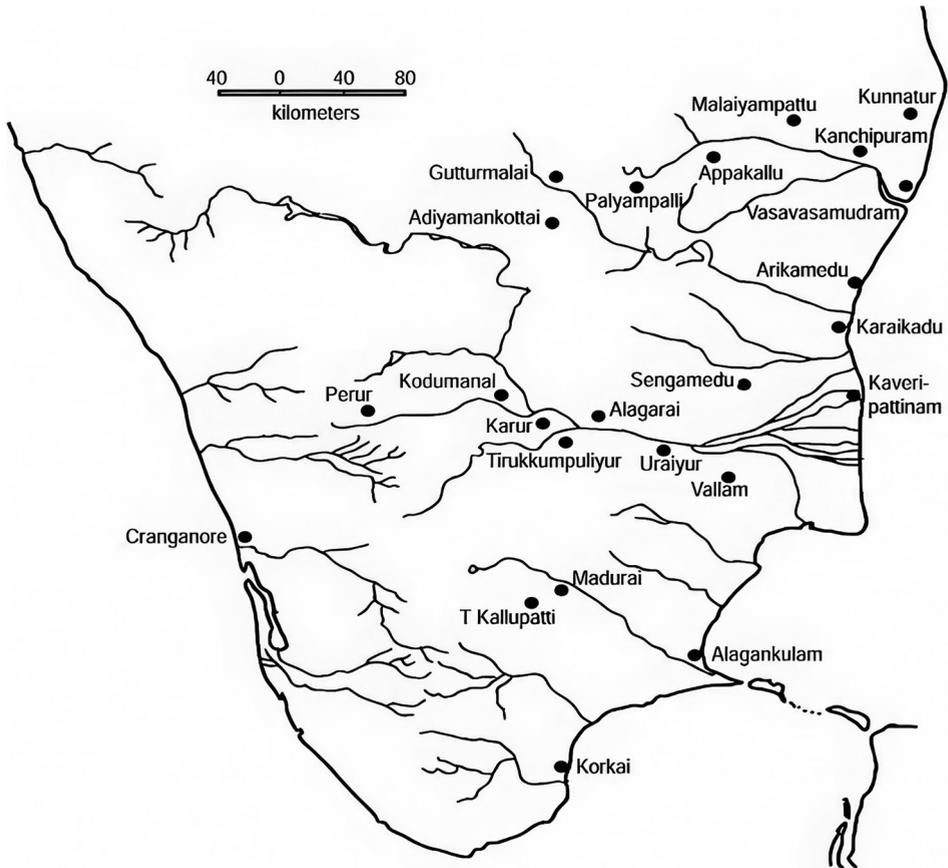


Fig. 1. Settlements in Tamilakam from 300 BCE to 300 CE (Shinu A. Abraham, Chera, Chola, Pandya. Using Archaeological Evidence to Identify the Tamil Kingdoms of Early Historic South India, in *Asian Perspectives* 42/2, 2003, pp. 207–223, here p. 214)

that adapted to regional and more flexible Desi traditions. Desi traditions are art forms shaped by regional and cultural variations, distinct from those that adhered strictly to the codified principles and performance guidelines outlined in the *Natyasastra*.

During the golden era of Sanskrit theatre, this genre did not create much movement in Kerala. However, whereas it continued to diminish in its glory in the rest of the country, in the twelfth century in the region then known as Tamilakam, Sanskrit theatre saw its repertoire grow in abundance thanks to contributions from playwrights Kavi Nilakantha (author of *Kalyanasaugandhikam*)² and Kulasekhara Varman³ (author of *Subhadhrādhanañjayam*, *Tapatisamvaranam*). Kulasekhara Varman, considered a pioneer in the field, brought in an innovative method of

² Text written in the 6th century.

³ Royal Dramatist from Kerala who lived in the 11th century.

presentation, namely the enactment of the *vyāṅgya*, the underlying meaning of the text.⁴ An inscription from Chembra in 954/55 CE mentions the performance of the play *Tapatisaṃvaraṇam*.⁵ In medieval Kerala, theatrical performances were often organised and performed by members of the royal lineage as part of religious ceremonies or as means of entertainment. In the following centuries, plays ascribed to the playwright Bhasa⁶ were frequently represented on Kerala stages, and actors prepared an elaborate stage manual on techniques that were deviations from the traditionally written texts.⁷

Kūṭiyāṭṭam – performative aspects

The pre-modern sociopolitical and cultural landscape of the territory of Kerala paved the way for the emergence of numerous art forms, including Kūṭiyāṭṭam, which has remained an age-old art tradition in this province. One of the oldest living theatrical traditions, it represents a synthesis of Sanskrit classicism and reflects the local traditions of Kerala, emphasising a highly stylised and codified theatrical language. The twelfth to fourteenth centuries are considered the origin phase of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, an art form connected to the temples and performed for the temple-going elites.

While some have speculated that it began as a secular performance in royal courts, it was definitively incorporated into Kerala's caste-based temple complex in the thirteenth or fourteenth century, where it remained until 1949 [...]. As a *kulathozhil*, or hereditary occupation, it was performed in the temple by both men and women [of upper-caste communities].⁸

Bruce Sullivan argues that the adaptation of Kūṭiyāṭṭam performers to evolving ritual and religious frameworks within the temple space has been a key factor in the innovation and survival of the theatre form. Rather than merely maintaining traditional temple performances, performers have actively reinterpreted and expanded ritual elements, incorporating extended gestures, narrative elaborations, and heightened devotional aspects that align Kūṭiyāṭṭam more closely with temple liturgical practices. These innovations include the deepening of *abhinaya* (expressive acting) to highlight theological themes, the integration of specific ritual invocations, and an increased emphasis on the performer's sacred status within temple

⁴ Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, pp. 74–76.

⁵ Manu V. Devadevan, *Knowing and Beeing*. The Semantic Universe of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam Theatre, in Devadevan, *The 'Early Medieval' Origins of India*, Cambridge 2020, pp. 225–253, here pp. 229–231.

⁶ Celebrated Sanskrit playwright who is believed to have lived between 200–300 CE.

⁷ See e.g. K. G. Paulose, *Kutiyattam Theatre. The Earliest Living Tradition*, Tripunithura 2006, p. 66.

⁸ Leah Lowthorp, *Voices on the Ground*. Kutiyattam, UNESCO, and the Heritage of Humanity, in *UNESCO on the Ground. Local Perspectives on Intangible Cultural Heritage*, ed. by Michael Dylan Foster/Lisa Gilman, Bloomington 2015, pp. 17–180, here pp. 19f. See also Leah K. Lowthorp, *Folklore, Politics, and the State*. Kutiyattam Theatre and National/Global Heritage in India, in *South Asian History and Culture* 8/4, 2017, pp. 542–559, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2017.1371513> (all weblinks in this article last consulted 13 February 2025).

spaces. This ritual augmentation, while reinforcing Kūṭiyāṭṭam's connection to temple culture, also played a role in its adaptation to public, non-temple venues.⁹

However, the extension of Kūṭiyāṭṭam beyond the temple setting – into more democratised public performance spaces – was historically constrained by social structures, including caste hierarchies and gender restrictions. The authority historically wielded by the *cākyār* (performer) and *nambiyār* (musician) communities within temple spaces did not automatically translate into control over Kūṭiyāṭṭam's presence in secular or non-traditional settings. This transition, particularly in the modern era, involved negotiating social barriers and redefining the performative agency of actors, musicians, and even female performers, who were traditionally excluded from the form. Understanding this trajectory provides insight into how Kūṭiyāṭṭam has evolved, balancing its ritual sanctity with contemporary theatrical expressions.

From the perspective of linguistics, Kūṭiyāṭṭam was often considered as an elitist art form. This has much to do with the use of classical Sanskrit texts as performative texts. Even though the Indologist David Shulman highlights its classical status and heavy reliance on Sanskrit, he thinks that the dominant language of Kūṭiyāṭṭam is in fact Malayalam because actors perform according to the *Aattaparakaram* acting manuals,¹⁰ which are written in Malayalam, and because the *vidūṣaka* (jester) speaks in Malayalam.¹¹ The *vidūṣaka*, an important figure in Kūṭiyāṭṭam, used the vernacular Malayalam language (instead of Sanskrit) to make subtle witticisms and engage the public.¹² This was the first evidence of Malayalam penetrating into the otherwise rigid structure of Sanskrit theatre. The *vidūṣaka* thus appealed to the common audience and slowly gained more prominence than the mute hero of Kūṭiyāṭṭam plays – in a sense, taking centre stage.

Kūṭiyāṭṭam is traditionally performed in the *kūttampalam*, the part of the Hindu temple that was intended as a stage for dances and dramas. Access to performances was originally restricted owing to their sacred nature, but in the twentieth century, the plays have progressively opened up to larger audiences. The participation in and audience for Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances were influenced by a variety of factors including social class, gender, religion, and cultural norms.

Kūṭiyāṭṭam as an art tradition heavily relies on extending the performance score to heights of imaginative fancy while choosing a text that encompasses poetic

⁹ Bruce M. Sullivan, Temple Rites and Temple Servants. Religion's Role in the Survival of Kerala's Kūṭiyāṭṭam Drama Tradition, in *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 1/1, 1997, pp. 97–115, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-997-0014-9>, esp. pp. 98 and 107.

¹⁰ Acting manuals that help the *cākyār* in stage performance with specific reference for the actors related to movement. They were handed down by the actors to their trainees, often remaining even in the family until late in the twentieth century. See e.g. Mani Madhava Chakyar, *Nāṭya-kalpadrumam*, Kerala 1975.

¹¹ Sudha Gopalakrishnan, *Kutiyattam*. In *Conversation with David Shulman*, online, 9 January 2015, www.sahapedia.org/kutiyattam-conversation-david-shulman.

¹² Rajendran Chettiartodi, From Fast to Feast. The Asana Discourse of the Vidusaka in Kerala's Traditional Sanskrit Theatre, in *A World of Nourishment. Reflections on Food in Indian Culture*, ed. by Cinzia Pieruccini/Paola M. Rossi, Milano 2016, pp. 111–120.

quality, multiple layers of meaning, speech, and obscure expressions. Through the performance, the performers try to exemplify a character's ideas and emotions through intricate detailing of events via the layered *abhinaya*.¹³

Thus, the convergence of Sanskrit theatre, pioneering playwrights, and the mixing of Sanskrit with the Malayalam vernacular paved the way for the emergence of Kūṭiyāṭṭam as a unique art form.

Time and spatiality of the oldest performance tradition

Most of the sophisticated art forms of South India had their genesis and growth in medieval temples. The late medieval inscriptions of Kerala temples refer to the *kūttampalam*, the stage where dances and dramas were performed. *Kūttampalam* exemplifies the medieval styles of Kerala temple architecture.¹⁴

In order to appreciate the manner in which space is employed in the construction and conceptualization of the *kūttambalam*, one needs to understand the concept of *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala*, which is a composite of three words: *vāstu*, *Puruṣa*, and *maṇḍala*. The word *vāstu* means site or residence. In the context of *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* it means boundaries of existence, of space, of an ordered universe – hence, in this instance, the boundaries of the temple and the *kūttambalam*. As the universe is the outward manifestation of the Divine Cosmic Essence (*Puruṣa*), the temple is also, together with the *kūttambalam*, the outward form of this Divine Cosmic Essence.¹⁵

Prominent performance-studies researcher Mundoli Narayanan explains that the “*kūttampalam* brings the actors and spectators to meet in a small, circumscribed space, the length of which is between 6 and 30/40 feet [...]. It [is] a ‘close, proximal viewing’ which enables certain ways of seeing that are possible only in that particular space.”¹⁶

In the *kūttampalams*, the space and the audience's view are both defined through the use of a single lamp to light the space in a particular manner:

The crucial feature of the single lamp is that its twin flames offer a small circle of light which delimits the area of prime visibility to a defined arc downstage centre, steeping everything outside the arc in relative darkness [...]. In a sense, the light of the single lamp provided the spectator with a pin-hole vision, in which only an area of a small circumference is properly visible, the other areas outside being pushed into non-visibility and the border areas between the two appearing in a hazy penumbra. [...] With the light being circumscribed to a small area, larger movements are effectively curtailed, and the actor is generally fixed to one location.¹⁷

However, this “stasis” elevates the effectiveness of fine movement such as “eye movements, facial expressions and minute variations in hand gestures”, all of

¹³ Gopalakrishnan, *Kutiyattam*.

¹⁴ Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, pp. 85–120.

¹⁵ Farley Richmond/Yasmin Richmond: The Multiple Dimensions of Time and Space in *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, the Sanskrit Theatre of Kerala, in *Asian Theatre Journal* 2/1, 1985, pp. 50–60, here p. 52.

¹⁶ Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, pp. 87f.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90 and 94.

which can be executed in the limited space and are perceptible for the audience given their proximity to the action and the slower overall tempo of this style of acting.

[I]n response to a microscopic way of seeing, a microscopic way of doing evolved, wherein every phenomenon that is featured in the acting came to be magnified and its fine details revealed as if viewed through a microscope. This microscopic method of acting is undoubtedly the primary cause and motivation for Kutiyattam's culture of elaboration, which in the parlance of the form is known as *vistarikkal* (to elaborate).¹⁸

The role of the vidūṣaka – the popularisation of Kūṭiyāṭṭam

The *vidūṣaka* is credited with inspiring additions of colloquial language and usages to Kūṭiyāṭṭam with its otherwise stylised Sanskrit vocabulary. The *vācika* (verbal expression through speech and dialogue) acting technique of the *vidūṣaka*

provides the significant model for the enactment practices of all other characters, especially in the translation and interpretation of the Sanskrit play text into Malayalam, through a process of questions and answers that unravels the significance of each important element of the text.¹⁹

The Kūṭiyāṭṭam “tradition of providing complete immunity to the character of the *vidūṣaka* where he can lash out at anyone on any level or status of society”²⁰ is funded

at least in part on the Cakyars' interstitial and illegitimate position in the caste hierarchy. This position allows a Cakyar playing the Vidusaka not only to break social barriers by criticizing his “betters,” but also to use the parody of the four *puruṣārthas*²¹ to criticize the caste system itself by describing illicit sexual relationships between Brahmin men and courtesans.²²

The fact that this criticism

was not just tolerated but was positively accepted and encouraged by the Brahmins themselves, who most often would sit with undisguised glee as they themselves were being ridiculed and derided, suggests that it was a sanctioned subversion, a controlled carnivalesque, where critique was permitted as a social safety valve that ultimately serves to preserve rather than destabilize that society and its power structures.²³

In the tenth century CE, Tolan, the legendary court poet and jester of Kulasekhara Varman, is believed to have reformed Kūṭiyāṭṭam theatre. One of the many major contributions brought by Tolan was the foregrounding of the character of the

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 94f.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 236.

²⁰ Kapila Vatsayayan, *Traditional Indian Theatres. Multiple Streams*, New Delhi 1980, p. 26.

²¹ *Puruṣārthas* literally means 'object of men'. It is a key concept in Hinduism and refers to the four proper goals or aims of a human life. The four *puruṣārthas* are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha (righteousness, prosperity, pleasure, and self-actualisation).

²² Christian DuComb, Present-Day Kutiyattam. G. Venu's Radical and Reactionary Sanskrit Theatre, in *TDR. The Drama Review* 51/3, 2007, pp. 98–117, here p. 103.

²³ Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, p. 239.

vidūṣaka, which in turn made the *cākyār* into a crucial and engaging presence in Kūṭiyāṭṭam.²⁴ The emerging prominence of the *vidūṣaka* figure was the striking element that led to the popularisation as well as the colloquialisation of the art form.

While the rest of the characters can never acknowledge the presence of the audience or directly interact with them, the *vidūṣaka* makes direct remarks to the audience, comments on them, makes fun of them, asks them questions, and also refers to features, events, and persons figuring in their lives. The audience, however, can never talk back to the *vidūṣaka* or bring him down to their mundane level, their responses being limited solely to passive actions such as laughter, sounds of appreciation, and so on. In a sense, the *vidūṣaka* inhabits a time/space matrix between that of the play and that of the audience and functions as a link between the two worlds.²⁵

Prominence of Cākyār-kūttu performances in the nineteenth century – a source-based analysis

The role of the *vidūṣaka* became a full-fledged form called Cākyār-kūttu, which emerged as an offshoot of Kūṭiyāṭṭam and became prominent during the nineteenth century. Cākyār-kūttu is a solo performance where the *cākyār* is supported by two drummers of the *nambyār* caste who drive the rhythm of the performance and emphasise the *cākyār*'s punchlines on large pot-shaped drums called *miḷāvu*.²⁶

In a satirical performance, the *cākyār* narrates stories, incidents, or anecdotes from the *Puranas* (ancient texts, epics like *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*) and entertains the audience. During the *Kūttu* (performance), the *cākyār* comments on current affairs of society. The text for such presentations was produced by either *cākyārs* or poets. These texts are called *prabandhas*, and their performance came to be known as *Prabandhakūttu*. *Prabandhas* were written mostly in *Champu* style, a literary tradition that combines poetry and prose. *Prabandhakūttu* and Cākyār-kūttu are sometimes used interchangeably, the difference being that when *Prabandhakūttu* is performed, the text consists exclusively of *prabandhas* whereas when Cākyār-kūttu is performed, the text could contain *prabandhas* as well as other ancient Sanskrit texts. These *prabandhas* became prominent during and after the nineteenth century, as is clearly established in two sources: the Sanskrit *bhāṇa*²⁷ and colonial administrative records of that period.

²⁴ Snehal P. Sanathanan/Vinod Balakrishnan, Before the Political Cartoonist, There Was the Vidusaka. A Case for an Indigenous Comic Tradition, in *The European Journal of Humour Research* 9/4, 2021, pp. 91–109, <https://europeanjournalofhumour.org/ejhr/article/view/571>.

²⁵ Mundoli Narayanan, Over-Ritualization of Performance. Western Discourses on Kutiyattam, in *TDR. The Drama Review* 50/2, 2006, pp. 136–153, here p. 146.

²⁶ Donald R. Davis Jr, Satire as Apology. The Puruṣārthakkūttū of Kerala, in *Irreverent History. Essays for MGS Narayanan*, ed. by Kesavan Veluthat/Donald Richard Davis, New Delhi 2014, pp. 93–109.

²⁷ *Bhāṇa* is a comedic monologue in one act, in which the *viṭa* or 'playboy' engages with a number of unseen characters, using the *ākāśabhāṣita* ('talking to the sky') technique. The *viṭa* is highly witty and satirises the evils of the society. He is similar to the *vidūṣaka*, the difference being that the *viṭa* used Sanskrit whereas the *vidūṣaka* used the local Malayalam language.

The Sanskrit *bhāṇa* is one of the classical forms of theatre delineated by Bharat-amuni in his *Nāṭyaśāstra*. This tradition of performing *bhāṇas* spread across the country, and Kerala was not untouched by this development. Particularly between the fourteenth and mid-nineteenth century, many *bhāṇas* were produced and performed in Sanskrit and Malayalam for audiences across Kerala.²⁸

The Kerala *bhāṇas* seem to have interfered with the styles of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* and *Cākyārkūttu*: “[T]he fact remains that the *Bhāṇas* influenced the *Cākyārkūttu* and in terms [recte: in turn] the *Cākyārkūttu* encouraged the composition of a large number of *bhāṇa*.”²⁹

Here, it is crucial to mention one of the *bhāṇa* texts of nineteenth-century Kerala that gives a vivid account of the *Cākyārkūttu* theatre and its relevance during this period. *Rasasadana-bhāṇa* by Godavarma Yuvaraja (1800–1851) was a popular text of that period that was widely performed. The main character of the plot is the *viṭa* named Pallavaka.

He is clever, confident, and married; an expert in the erotic arts and wise to the ins and outs of the red-light district. His friend has asked him to escort his wife, Candanamālā, to go and worship at the temple of the Goddess Bhadrakālī (Bhagavathy) amidst the annual *Keliyātrā* (Tālappoli) festival that is happening at the temple. During the morning hours, the *Viṭa* successfully accomplishes this task, with an assortment of encounters along the way.³⁰

Towards the end of the *Rasasadana-bhāṇa*, the *viṭa* “finds himself near a stage where drumrolls can be heard, summoning people to an enactment” of a *prabandha*.³¹ The description suggests it to be a *Kūttu*, one of the earliest performative traditions of Kerala:

The stage is rocking to the beat of the drum in the back, in the middle is a pleasant shining lamp, while on the side there are marvelous female musicians, and, in the front, distinguished Brahmins, the *rasa*-connoisseurs. Onto this stage, some actor enters, and enacts some sort of story (*prabandham*) with clear expressions.³²

The *viṭa* calls this performance something extraordinary. He subsequently says:

What is this play? Ah, it’s like the sweetness of *athirasa*, deriving its essence from the expressions of emotions and gestures. Through the eyes, through the gestures prescribed by Sanjaya, through the subtle nuances of speech, the soul of Sanskrit storytelling is revealed. Explaining

²⁸ See Tarakad S. Devarajan, *A Critical Study of the Bhāṇa Literature of Kerala*, PhD dissertation, University of Kerala 1988.

²⁹ K. K. Raji, *Rasaratnākara Bhāṇa. Critical Study and Translation*, PhD dissertation, Government Sanskrit College Tripunithura 1999, pp. 66–83, quotation on p. 83. See also Elena Mucciarelli/Adheesh Sathaye, Transcreating Sanskrit Humour through *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. The Translation and Performance of the *Rasasadana Bhāṇa*, in *Asian Literature and Translation* 11/1, 2024, pp. 16–51, <https://doi.org/10.18573/alt.38>.

³⁰ Kerala *Bhāṇas*, *Nepathya*. *Humour through Kūṭiyāṭṭam Performance*, online, n.d., <https://blogs.ubc.ca/bhana/>.

³¹ Mucciarelli/Sathaye, *Transcreating Sanskrit Humour through Kūṭiyāṭṭam*, p. 26.

³² “अत्र गत्वेदमपि कचिदिवलोकयामि । (इति तथा कृत्वा ।) मध्ये दीपज्वळनमधुरे पार्श्वतः पाणधिसूत्री- चित्तिभूते सरसहृदयर्भूसरैभस राधे । पृष्ठे मारुदङ्गकिलिसति रङ्गदेशे प्रवर्षितः स्पष्टाकृतं नटयति नटः कोऽपि किंचपिरबन्धम् ॥ २२० ॥” (*Rasasadana*: 220). Quoted after *The Rasasadana Bhāṇa of Yuvarāja*, ed. by Pandit S’ivadatta/Kās’ināth Pāndurang Parab, Bombay 1893 (*Kavyamala*, 37), p. 59. Translation: Kerala *Bhāṇas*, *Nepathya*.

each element in detail, with all its six virtues shining brightly as ornaments, one can see the essence.³³

In the above reference, it is pretty clear that the *viṭa*, who is himself a wanderer, observes a *Prabandhakūttu* and registers the minute details of the performance. The detailing is similar to what has been mentioned earlier about the space and the sequence of events that is followed while performing *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*.

Another source for performance traditions of nineteenth-century *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* are the British colonial accounts where we find descriptions of *Cākyārkūttu*. During the nineteenth century, the colonial masters strengthened their grip all over India. In the province of Kerala, the princely states of Cochin and Travancore became a subsidiary alliance, and the Malabar region came under direct rule.³⁴ During the late part of the nineteenth century, *Cākyārkūttu* formed a major part of the repertoire of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam*. With temples' resources dwindling and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin having limited resources to fund the temples and the *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* performers, the artists used the *vidūṣaka* and the solo performances of *Cākyārkūttu* as a means to critique the state and tell of their present dismal conditions.

In one instance, Nagam Aiya writes a detailed account of *Cākyārkūttu*:

The Chakkiyar Koothu is one of the chief elements of enjoyment in a temple Ootsavam [festival], affording intellectual recreation to the middle aged and the old [...]. The Chakkiyar is well up in the art of humouring his audience. The one that I heard is particularly a great master of that art, being considered one of the very ablest performers in Malabar. He is well read and can himself compose in Sanskrit or Malayalam. The delivery is extempore and the Chakkiyar himself told me that he knows by rote about 15,000 Sanskrit slokas [verses].³⁵ [...] The Chakkiyar criticises men in authority and their measures in terms of scathing sarcasm whenever he gets an opportunity for doing so, or when he feels sufficient confidence in the good sense and tolerance of the officials who listen to him. Even princes and nobles are not spared. H. H. the late Maha Rajah once listened to a performance by this same Chakkiyar in one of the *Koothambaloms* attached to a most important pagoda in North Travancore. This *Koothambalom* was in a very neglected condition. The roof was riddled with holes. Wishing to draw His Highness' attention to the wretched condition of the roof, the Chakkiyar quietly remarked in the course of his performance that the occasion was not only honoured by the presence of the august Maharajah and his officials, but even by the moon and the stars resplendently shining through the roof. This had a most wholesome effect, for the building was taken in hand the next day and put into thorough order; but he is neither vulgar nor offensive in his criticisms. [...] The Chakkiyar is also a very contented gentleman, for he gives you this magnificent performance for the small sum of three rupees and a quarter, which is generally paid by one of the audience, the remaining hundreds of spectators enjoying the

33 “अये, अतरिसावहमेवैतत् । यतः । भावव्यजनमन्यदेव ललितैर्दुत्पादति नेत्रयोः संज्जायै वह्नितिसु हस्ततलयो दासु चान्यो गुणः । वाणी प्राकृतसंस्कृतात्मकतया द्वेधापयुदीण पुनयीख्याता च परैव षगुणवती सख तदसयाद्भुतम् ॥ २२१ ॥” (*Rasasadana*: 221). Quoted after *The Rasasadana Bhāna of Yuvarāja*, ed. by Pandit S'ivadatta/Kās'ināth Pāndurang Parab, Bombay 1893 (*Kavyamala*, 37), p. 59. Translation by the present writers.

34 Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, p. 244.

35 The performers of *Kūṭiyāṭṭam* were well versed in numerous Sanskrit texts. The training process of the artists, which lasted for years, had strict adherence to rote learning of Sanskrit *shlokas*. In this case, the Chakkyar claims that he knows by rote around 15,000 *shlokas*.

amusement gratis. The performance continues for several nights during the Ootsavam season, and is given in nearly all the big temples of the country. The *Chakkyarkoothu* is one of the most popular institutions of the land[.]³⁶

Kūṭiyāṭṭam is referred to here as institution in itself that provides intellectual recreation. The impact of the colonial rule is implicitly registered as the *cākyār* makes satirical jibes at the Maharaja. The patron-client relationship that flourished during the medieval period (twelfth–eighteenth centuries) had dwindled with the takeover by the colonial administration. The *cākyār* was now dependent on the audiences for payment, which was meagre compared to the time and effort he put in. So, through satire, he depicts the dismal condition of the space, the *kūttampalam* and the performers.

So, in a nutshell, it is quite evident that during the nineteenth century, Cākyār-kūttu, the offshoot of Kūṭiyāṭṭam, became prominent and was widely performed across Kerala. Its prominence can be established not only by the *prabandha* texts written and performed by the *cākyār* in this period but also by the detailed references of Cākyār-kūttu in other performing traditions such as the Kerala *bhāṇas* and in the records of colonial administration.

Reasons for the decline of Kūṭiyāṭṭam in the late nineteenth century

During the nineteenth century important developments happened in Kerala. Firstly,

British colonialism came to take firm root in Kerala, with the Malabar region in the north under direct rule, and with Cochin and Travancore signing treaties of subsidiary alliance as princely states under British control.³⁷

Second, there were caste-based reform movements throughout Kerala in this period:

[T]here was a marked decline and breakdown of the Brahminical order and the caste system associated with it. There was a steady weakening of the temple establishments as economic centres and a rapid dissolution of agrarian temple societies and their system of caste-based professions supported by *virutti* [revenue] from the temples. As the process intensified, many temples found their resources drying up and even the continuation of their customary practices being threatened due to increasing lack of funds.³⁸

Third, this period witnessed a decline in the influence of the temple ecosystem and its associated traditions over the people.

In fact, the period saw a steady exodus of people from their age-old, caste-based professions and practices to ones that were part of a more modern, capital-based, mercantile economy

³⁶ Nagam V. Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Trivandrum 1906, 2, pp. 332–334 (quoting his own “Report on the Census of Travancore for 1891”).

³⁷ Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, p. 244.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

and from the villages where their families had been resident for centuries to newly forming towns and urban centres.³⁹

Narayanan argues that all these elements “had a tremendous impact” on Kūṭiyāṭṭam with respect to “its economic contexts and structures of reception”. From the late nineteenth century, Kūṭiyāṭṭam “started facing a serious decline in economic support and [aesthetic] patronage.”⁴⁰ The system of patronage prevalent in the temples of Kerala was weakening, and there was but negligible state support for the traditional art of learning *Guru-Sisya Sampradaya* (the Indian tradition of teacher-disciple relations), especially as colonial curricula took over the Indian educational system. For these reasons, it became difficult for Kūṭiyāṭṭam to sustain itself.

Even within castes traditionally associated with temple service, the advent of modern education and the shifting knowledge requirements of emerging professions led to a steady decline in those proficient in Sanskrit and the gestural vocabulary of Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Additionally, modernisation and secularisation contributed to the diminishing value placed on traditional lifestyles and practices, resulting in the marginalisation of Kūṭiyāṭṭam and related temple art forms.⁴¹

There was a steady attenuation in the rate and number of performances, and many temples had little option but to discontinue performances altogether because their resources were totally inadequate to meet the costs of performance. At the same time, in a few temples where performances were continued, probably due to ritual considerations, the payment for the practitioners failed to do justice to their actual costs of living and performance in a drastically altered and monetized economic system. As a result, in many temples, performances continued only because the performers considered it a sacred duty they had to carry out irrespective of whether they were paid or not. Such performances were usually conducted in a vastly shrunken, ‘skeletal’ form, whereby they “became just a ‘ritual,’ in the unsavory sense of the term” [...].⁴² A major consequence of this was that several acts, roles and sections of plays fell into disuse and gradually disappeared from the stage altogether. This is of course not to deny that in some richer temples, such as the Pūrnatrayīśa Temple in Tripunithura and the Vaṭakkumṇāthan Temple in Thrissur, performances continued unhindered [by] the changing economic conditions.⁴³

Figure 2 gives an overview of the temples where Kūṭiyāṭṭam was (or is) performed.

At the same time, several other forms of popular entertainment [...] entered the scene, which demanded much less investment in terms of pre-knowledge, attendance time or attention. Inevitably, all this led to a drastic dwindling of the audiences for Kutiyattam until, by the 1950s, only a few remained as regular, knowledgeable viewers.⁴⁴

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 246.

⁴² See also Mundoli Narayanan, *From Exclusivity to Exposure. The Changing Circumstances of Kutiyattam*, in *Comparative Culture* 11, 2005, pp. 31–46, here p. 44.

⁴³ Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, pp. 245f.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

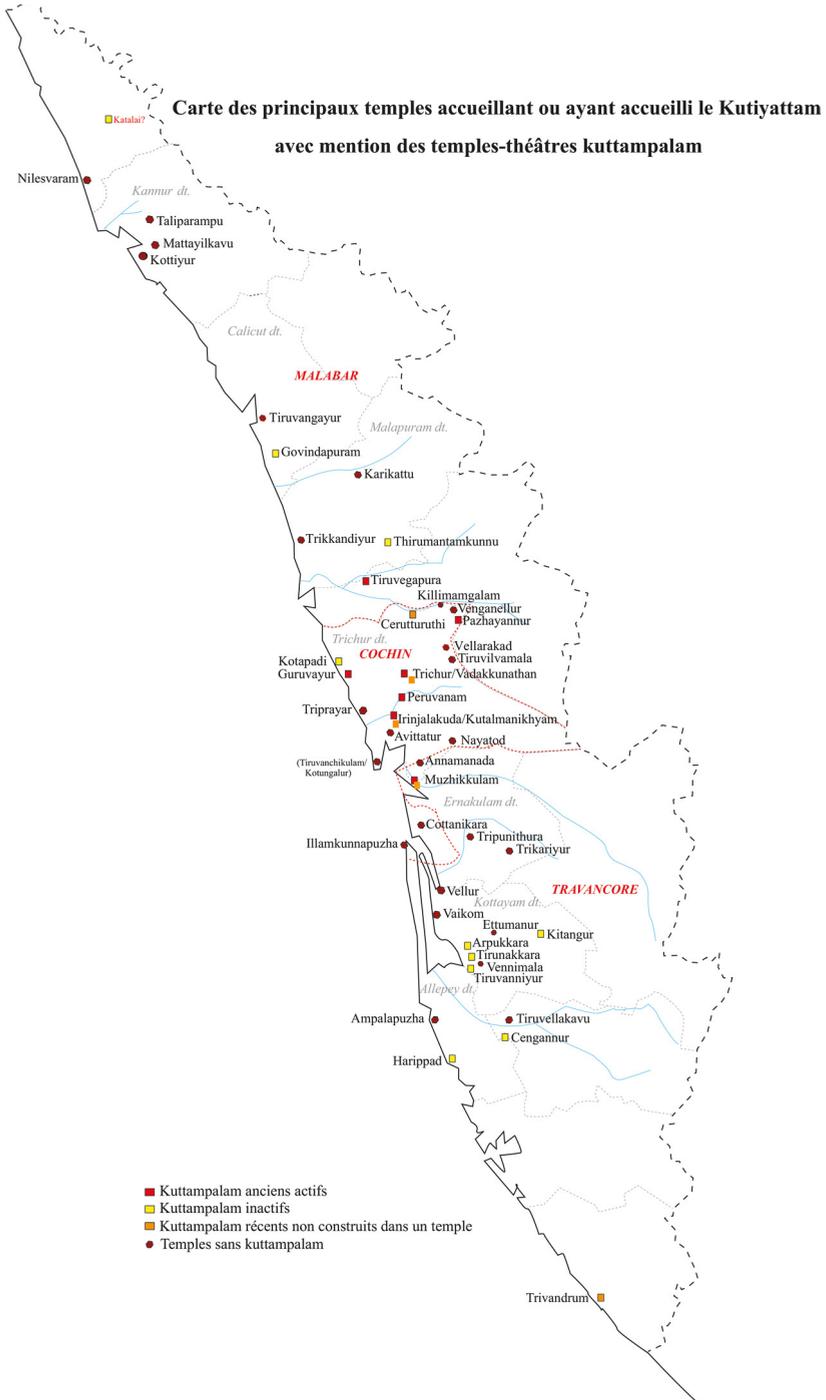


Fig. 2. Map of the main temples where *Küttu* was (or is) performed (© Virginie Johan, see V. Johan, *The Flower Needs its Roots to Continue to Grow*, in *Indian Folklife. A Quarterly Newsletter from National Folklore Support Centre* 38, 2011, pp. 20–26)

Fearing the loss of this theatre tradition, in this phase many reformist performers decided to bring Kūṭiyāṭṭam into public places after having been limited to the *kūttampalams* for the last six centuries.⁴⁵

This implied changes in the aesthetics and the performative aspect of the performance, such as the use of space, light and timings of the performance. Due to the larger dimensions of the stage and the auditorium in most public theatres and the increased distance between the performer and the audience, it became unfeasible for the audience to pay close attention to fine details and subtle movements. Similarly, the actors could not fully realise the traditional measured, contained style of acting with its strong emphasis on suggestion and evocation.⁴⁶

In the 20th century in Kerala, once-rich temples lost their holdings in the wake of land reforms. This led to performances being drastically curtailed [...]. The temples were no longer able to support the Kūṭiyāṭṭam-performing families. Additionally, [in this period there were fewer audiences] who could properly follow a theatre cultivated for an educated elite, and who could develop an appreciation for its subtly mediated messages.⁴⁷

In the 1920s, an effort was made to take Kūṭiyāṭṭam out of the temple theatre and to provide better access to the public, who were eager to watch the so-called temple art forms. Patrons of the fine arts and the elite Hindu population wanted to make Kūṭiyāṭṭam accessible to the common people, captured in an anecdote from famous actor Mani Madhava Chakyar, who was requested by P. S. Varier⁴⁸ to present a full-fledged Kūṭiyāṭṭam production in Varier's drama hall in order to start a movement and promote the artists: "We cannot take our temples everywhere we go, so we have to think of other means to present Kūṭiyāṭṭam to the public."⁴⁹ Mani Madhava Chakyar did not accept this request as he could not have gone against the existing social norms surrounding the art tradition. However, in a historical milestone, Mani Madhava Chakyar would in fact later take Kūṭiyāṭṭam beyond the boundaries of the traditional stage. The progress was slow-paced: initially he began by arranging Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances outside the *kūttampalam*, and later he performed Cākṃyārkūttu for All-India Radio and in a school at Killikkurissimangalam. He then took the form beyond the borders of Kerala, first to Madras and then to Delhi, Benares, and Ujjain. By the 1950s, Kūṭiyāṭṭam had gained wide acclamation and national attention as one of the oldest existing theatre forms.

By the 1990s, Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances staged outside the temple were no longer considered as a rare sight, and this progress was lauded as one of the most favourable consequences of the formation of a wider audience and led to not just

⁴⁵ Heike Moser, Kūṭiyāṭṭam on the Move. From Temple Theatres to Festival Stages, in *South Asian Festivals on the Move*, ed. by Ute Hüsken/Axel Michaels, Wiesbaden 2013 (Ethno-Indology, Vol. 13), pp. 245–274, p. 251.

⁴⁶ See also Narayanan, *Space, Time and Ways of Seeing*, p. 250.

⁴⁷ Moser, Kūṭiyāṭṭam on the Move, p. 251.

⁴⁸ Founder of the now world famous Kottakkal Arya vaidya Shala, a prestigious Ayurveda research centre in Kerala. He is also a luminary in the art world who has made significant contributions to the Artscape of Kerala.

⁴⁹ Paulose, *Kutiyattam Theatre*, p. 221.

local and national but global acclamation for this art form. In the same period there was an upsurge of social and aesthetic patronage through which the form was brought into the forefront through art institutions, further distancing it from the rigid caste hierarchy.⁵⁰ World institutions also recognised this, and in 2001, Kūṭiyāṭṭam became the first art form in India to get the “UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity” tag.⁵¹

Ritual versus the radical – socio-politically induced canon shift in the performing tradition

The shift of Kūṭiyāṭṭam from the temples to public places and its continued legacy can be attributed to two factors. First, the great practitioners of Kūṭiyāṭṭam managed to preserve elements of the *Aattaprakaram* (acting manuals) while evolving their practice to suit the new performance venues. Second is the aesthetic experience of the audience, which has been wide-ranging. The comedic and satirical performances of the *cākyār* have just added to this experience. Kūṭiyāṭṭam emerged as one of the prominent actor’s theatres with detailed acting techniques being developed and perfected.

As Narayanan has argued, in Western discourses Kūṭiyāṭṭam has been over-ritualised whereas this was not actually the case for this art form. He states:

[T]he very system of kutiyattam and its basic theatrical ethos do not permit devotional approaches, precisely because of the highly self-conscious nature of the kutiyattam theatrical performance. In numerous folk/ritual performances, such as *theyyam*, *thira*, or *kagura*, the god himself is supposed to be present and manifested through the actor during the time of performance; in other words, the actor is supposed to be transformed into the god-figure he plays and thus accepted with reverence by the audience/the faithful. By contrast, in kutiyattam, the actor always maintains his or her distinct identity and never fully becomes the character. The actor is the ground on which a character is placed and constructed, the neutrality of which is always preserved in order that it can be revisited and other characters constructed at the same site, with the possibility of alternation between characters.⁵²

In Kūṭiyāṭṭam, the theatrical illusion is never entirely concealed; the audience remains aware that an actor is portraying a character. In many cases, this awareness is deliberately emphasised, allowing the performance to fully explore and utilise theatrical conventions and dramatic artifice. Sudha Gopalakrishnan explains this fact in the following:

The actor has no dramatic empathy with the role/roles presented, for it is only a ‘performance’, with the actor *narrating* the events and *projecting* the roles played on the stage. Drama here

⁵⁰ See Moser, Kūṭiyāṭṭam on the Move.

⁵¹ See Lowthorp, Voices on the Ground.

⁵² Narayanan, Over-Ritualization of Performance, p. 140.

assumes an unparalleled elasticity, and acting establishes the illusory nature of play – drama is pretense; to see it is to recognise and accept the pretense.⁵³

The persistent presence of the actor as a performer, coupled with the audience's awareness of the established principles and conventions of acting, added layers of complexity to the cultivation of religious devotion within the Kūṭiyāṭṭam repertoire. Another crucial aspect is that the audience's engagement was not driven by narrative curiosity, as they were already familiar with the overarching stories of the plays. Since these performances extended over several days, with only a single act presented each day, the audience's focus did not center on the progression of the storyline. Instead, the primary emphasis was placed on the audiovisual theatrical narrative, which was shaped by a series of carefully constructed onstage micro-situations. These moments arose either from the necessity of elaborating and interpreting the play's text or from the need for character exposition, each presenting distinct challenges that demanded exceptional skill and technique from the performers. For an initiated audience, critical engagement revolved around the immediate theatrical experience and the actor's proficiency and artistry in delivering each specific situation in accordance with established expectations from past performances. Their appreciation extended beyond purely religious concerns, such as the triumph of good over evil or deities over demons, to the meticulous execution of theatrical techniques and the artistic mastery displayed onstage.

Conclusion

Mūlikūḷam Kocckuṭṭan Cākyār described the transition of the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance tradition thus: "Once Kūṭiyāṭṭam was done for the deity; now the people have become the deity, and we try to please the people".⁵⁴ From the nineteenth century onward, when the art form was made available outside the temple for the wider public, the act of the *vidūṣaka* and Cākyār-kūttu gained significance. The debates around Kūṭiyāṭṭam's radical mobility from the temple to more democratic spheres were largely based on the loss of an 'original purity' when transplanted from its original setting: the *kūttampalams* that principally accommodated caste audiences. However, practitioners of Kūṭiyāṭṭam are stuck in the dilemma of mediating between the claims of preserving the traditional repertoire and at the same time adhering to the need to sustain the relevance to modern-day viewership. As social-science and performance-studies scholars argue, the attempt to preserve the ritualistic as well as the traditional style would also imply reviving the bygone social structure with its concomitant hierarchy and rigid social order. It is merely the extra-textual performance elements, like the nuanced method of acting,

⁵³ Sudha Gopalakrishnan, *Kutiyattam*, online, n.d., http://ignca.gov.in/PDF_data/Kutiyattam.pdf, p. [4].

⁵⁴ Mūlikūḷam Kocckuṭṭan Cākyār, quoted in N. P. Unni/Bruce M. Sullivan, *The Wedding of Arjuna and Subhadrā. The Kūṭiyāṭṭam Drama Subhadrā-Dhanañjaya*, Delhi 2001, p. 64.

the recitations, that have strengthened the performativity of the art form while being connected to the religious domain, even in current times. Nevertheless, the strength of the performance tradition from its inception is derived from the power of the acting technique *abhinaya* (expressions), which yields *rasa-anubhava* (the aesthetic experience).⁵⁵ The informed theatre-going audiences are accustomed to the slow tempo of the performance, complexities of Sanskrit, and the rigidity of the performance elements such as gestures and expressions. Therefore, the performance and viewership has been limited when it comes to Kūṭiyāṭṭam, with its structure and training patterns, which has been changing in the recent past. There is a need to protect the performative elements which are unique to this art form, but at the same time, make it accessible to the ardent performers who have followed the traditional repertoire and not on the basis of familial lineage and patronage.

⁵⁵ The ensuant of emotions.

I Misteri della polizia austriaca

Reprocessing of an Epoch of Foreign Domination?

Annette Kappeler

On December 31st, 1866, a few months into the independence from the Habsburg Empire, the provincial theatre of Feltre, in the Veneto Region in what is today Northern Italy, staged a piece entitled *I misteri della polizia austriaca* (*The Mysteries of the Austrian Police*).¹ The piece by Antonio Scalvini is a severe accusation of the Habsburg authorities, especially of its police force, and it had been on the censorship lists of the whole Empire since its first publication.² The staging of the piece was one of a series of Feltre performances accusing the Habsburg rule in Northern Italy of inhumane practices.³ These examples from Feltre are not an exception – on the contrary, the 1850s and 1860s saw a multitude of theatre pieces reprocessing Risorgimento events and building a ‘patriotic’ canon.⁴

But why was a piece like this of special interest to the local population in a provincial Venetian town? This contribution tries to answer this question. The first part of the article contextualises the main themes of Scalvini’s piece: it sketches the socio-cultural situation in nineteenth-century Northern Italy, the functioning of the Habsburg police force and its networks of spies, and local attitudes towards the regime. Understanding the nature of the foreign government, its bureaucracy, its surveillance of the local population, and its attitudes towards local languages seems necessary in order to comprehend the accusations in Scalvini’s piece and why it was so popular with provincial audiences. The second part of the paper centres on the piece itself: it discusses its representation of Habsburg officials, of women suffering under their power abuse, and of its main characters involved in the Italian national movement. The article concludes with possible reasons for the popularity of the piece in the Veneto.

*Socio-political situation in Lombardy-Venetia – despotic governance at its best?*⁵

Today’s Northern Italy was dominated by war and changes of governance during the nineteenth century. The Veneto was invaded by Napoleonic troupes in 1797 and was later ruled by the Habsburg regime, except for a few years before the

¹ Playbill of the performance: Polo Bibliotecario Feltrino “Panfilo Castaldi” (hereafter PBF), *Fondo Storico, I misteri della polizia austriaca ovvero i liberali e le spie*, 1866.

² See e.g. *Journal für Österreich’s Leihbibliotheken* 4, 1863, p. 109.

³ See e.g. PBF, *Fondo storico, Silvio Pellico e le sue prigionie ovvero i Carbonari del 1821*, 1867.

⁴ See Francesco Doglio, *Il teatro patriottico nel Risorgimento*, in *Teatro e Risorgimento*, ed. by Doglio, Bologna 1962, pp. 5–52, here esp. pp. 38ff.

⁵ I am indebted to my colleague Giulia Brunello, who advised me on all historical questions.

Da darsi a mano

E. D. B.

TEATRO SOCIALE DI FELTRE*Per la sera di Lunedì 31 Dicembre 1866***DALLA COMPAGNIA PAYSSAN DIRETTA DA G. MORONI**Verrà rappresentato il nuovissimo Drama dei Signori
SCHALVINI E GUALTIERI

che ha per titolo :

I MISTERI DELLA POLIZIA AUSTRIACA

O V V E R O

I LIBERALI E LE SPIE**PERSONAGGI****ATTORI**

Conte Filippo Liberi	Sig. Giuseppe Moroni
Consigliere barone Dickner	» Carlo Mija
Olivarez della Cerva (<i>Cesare Sbrana</i>)	» Federico Cavallucci
Fortunato Baldi	» Francesco Zessi
Orazio Gemma (<i>Scultore</i>)	» Napoleone Payssan
Il padre Ambrosiani (<i>Cappellano</i>)	» Gaetano Payssan
Corradi (<i>Accessista</i>)	» Alcibiade Payssan
Casalma (<i>Carceriere</i>)	» Stanislao Cavallucci
Stopp (<i>portiere di polizia</i>)	» Ernesto Traglio
Antonio (<i>popolano</i>)	» Alessandro Zopis
Emilia (<i>moglie di Liberi</i>)	Signora Caterina Payssan
Lucia (<i>moglie di Baldi</i>)	» Toscana Payssan
Amanda (<i>Traviata</i>)	» Elisa Mija

Un fanciullo — Tre Secondini — Soldati e Popolo

La Scena è in Milano, I. II. III. e V. Atto, il IV. è in Mantova.

Si principia a ore 7 e mezzo precise.

Marzura tip.

Fig. 1. Playbill of *I misteri della polizia austriaca* in Feltre, 1866, Polo Bibliotecario Feltrino "Panfilo Castaldi", Fondo Storico

Congress of Vienna when the Napoleonic government took over once again. At this point, the French government introduced a centralised administrative system, and the Habsburg authorities adopted parts of it.⁶

At the beginning of 1859, the Italian peninsula was divided into seven main parts. Six were sovereign states; the seventh, consisting of Lombardy and Venetia, was part of the Habsburg Empire. In 1859, Austria gave up most of Lombardy but not Venetia.⁷ The Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed with neither Rome nor Venetia being part of it.⁸ Italy gained Venetia in 1866 and Rome in 1870.⁹

The Habsburg rule in Lombardy and Venetia has been read as repressive by a Risorgimento tradition of research until quite recently.¹⁰ More recent studies see their rule in Venetia “as good as imperial government ever could be”.¹¹ Substantial resources were invested in popular education. By 1860, the territories dominated by the Habsburg government had the highest literacy rates on the peninsula. Medical care was surprisingly advanced and transport infrastructure highly developed.¹² However ‘modern’ this might seem, the Habsburg regime, like other states on the Italian peninsula, did not have powerful representative institutions nor a free press.¹³

The Habsburg police in Venetia

Venetia is known for its surprising political calm during the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the Habsburg regime is said to have been preoccupied by possible uprisings.¹⁴ The idea that the government was terrified of Italian nationalism despite its lack of support in the local population seems to be unfounded, though.¹⁵ The fear of uprisings had more to do with the role of Venetia in the defence of the Empire.¹⁶

⁶ Harry Hearder, *Italy in the Age of the Risorgimento. 1890–1870*, Harlow 1983, pp. 17, 31.

⁷ Derek Beales/Eugenio F. Biagini, *The Risorgimento and the Unification of Italy*, New York 2002, p. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁰ David Laven/Laura Parker, Foreign rule? Transnational, national, and local perspectives on Venice and Venetia within the ‘multinational’ empire, in *Modern Italy* 19/1, 2014, pp. 5–19, here p. 5.

¹¹ Beales/Biagini, *Risorgimento*, p. 38; cf. also Simona Mori, *Polizia e statualità nel primo Ottocento. L’esperienza lombardo-veneta e la cultura professionale italiana*, Rubbettino 2017, pp. 53f.; see also Laven/Parker, Foreign rule?, pp. 5f.

¹² Beales/Biagini, *Risorgimento*, p. 38.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴ Michele Gottardi, Gli Asburgo e Venezia, in *Venezia suddita 1798–1866*, ed. by Gottardi, Venezia 1999, pp. 15–38, here p. 33. David Laven, Law and Order in Habsburg Venetia 1814–1835, in *The Historical Journal* 39/2, 1996, pp. 383–403, here p. 398.

¹⁵ David Laven, *Venice and Venetia under the Habsburgs, 1815–1835*, Oxford 2002, p. 79.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Nevertheless, the Habsburg government put a machinery of surveillance in action in order to track down revolutionaries.¹⁷ The police were responsible for checking the spread of liberal, national, or other 'subversive' ideas and spying on individuals suspected of being part of secret organisations.¹⁸ Secret societies, however, seem to have been almost irrelevant for the region of Venetia.¹⁹ Even though they were feared and observed by the Habsburg empire, the few arrested members were rarely executed,²⁰ and trials were mostly held transparently.²¹ The Habsburg criminal law was often seen as having advantages compared even to that of unified Italy.²²

Besides the secret police tracking down possible conspirators, the Habsburg government employed a network of spies observing all social groups in public places.²³ The activity of spies intensified after 1848.²⁴ The government supplied ample funds for paying them,²⁵ and spies could come from very different social backgrounds.²⁶

With this ample network of surveillance in place, it is important to remember that the Habsburg bureaucracy was known to be slow and inefficient. Information had to pass through numerous administrative steps before it finally reached someone with enough authority to take a decision or sufficient status to influence the emperor.²⁷ Thus, grievances in regions such as the Veneto had not much chance to be heard in Vienna. There seems to have been one notable exception to this rule, according to the historian David Laven: He claims that regional police reports about the state of public wellbeing and opinion, which had to be sent to the capital on a monthly basis, could transmit criticism about the living conditions in the regions and suggestions for improvement to the government in Vienna.²⁸ The police thus could play a double role of oppressive and disciplinary domination and of regional criticism and support of the population.²⁹

¹⁷ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 394.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

¹⁹ Laven, *Venice and Venetia*, p. 149. Nevertheless, there are two cases in which the activity of secret societies is known: The secret society *Esperia*, founded by Venetian naval officers, was active in Venetia but did not find much support within the region. Venetians also participated in the conspiracy of the *Martyrs of Belfiore* in 1852–1855. See Costantino Cipolla, *Belfiore*, Vol. 1: *I Comitati insurrezionali del Lombardo-Veneto ed il loro processo a Mantova del 1852–1853*, Milano 2006, p. 149.

²⁰ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 394.

²¹ Maria Rosa di Simone, *Il diritto Austriaco e la società veneta*, in *Venezia e l'Austria*, ed. by Gino Benzoni/Gaetano Cozzi, Venezia 1999, pp. 129–156, here p. 139.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²³ Gottardi, *Gli Asburgo*, p. 34; Simona Mori, *Spiare il popolo nel primo Ottocento. Gli informatori di polizia Lombardo-veneti, interpreti dello spazio pubblico cittadino*, in *Acta Histriae* 17/3, 2009, pp. 527–550, here p. 528.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 529.

²⁵ Piero Brunello, *Colpi di scena. La rivoluzione del Quarantotto a Venezia*, Verona 2018, p. 230; Mori, *Spiare il popolo*, p. 530.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 531.

²⁷ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 400.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Mori, *Polizia e statualità*, p. 265.

Local attitudes towards the Habsburg regime

Some of the leaders of national movements, for example Giuseppe Mazzini and Silvio Pellico, remarked on the absence of political engagement and spirit of opposition amongst the Venetians and on the failure of political movements in this region.³⁰ For example, Pellico stated in 1820 that the Venetians lived in idleness and were not interested in politics.³¹ However undeserved this commentary was, it seems to have been true that Venetia lacked a national movement and a widespread will to become part of an Italian nation.

During the nineteenth century, the Italian peninsula was characterised by what can be described as ‘cultural polycentrism’. The patriotism of many people was focused on their city or town rather than on a bigger region.³² Italian nationalism would have meant little to men and women who felt anchored in traditions of municipal pride and local culture. Additionally, for many, the term “Italy” was associated with the domination by the Napoleonic government, run from the city of Milan and having few advantages for Venetians.³³ Recent research has thus questioned the idea that a national movement in all regions of the peninsula led to a unification of an Italian state.³⁴ We cannot assume a universal discontent with the Habsburg government or a will for an Italian unification in nineteenth-century Venetia.

Speaking or understanding Italian was not a matter of course for Venetians either. Italian was mostly a written and literary language. In 1861, only about 22 percent of the citizens of the new Kingdom of Italy were literate – a normal percentage for European countries at that time.³⁵ The majority of the population spoke (but did not necessarily read nor write) local dialects. A dialect was often seen as a feature of a region of which locals were proud.³⁶ Taking pride in a dialect was not in opposition to an idea of ‘Italianness’, though: “A taste for dialect did not equate to opposition to or, for that matter, support for the idea of nationhood.”³⁷ But belonging to an Italian state or nation with a national language would not necessarily have had more meaning to Venetians than belonging to a multilingual state which did not link citizenship to ideas of ethnicity, language or religious beliefs.³⁸ The Habsburg rule was polyglot,³⁹ and the Habsburg law, in theory, gave equal

³⁰ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 394.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

³² Beales/Biagini, *Risorgimento*, pp. 16f.

³³ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 403.

³⁴ Beales/Biagini, *Risorgimento*, p. 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 75, 78.

³⁶ Laven/Parker, *Foreign rule?*, p. 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁸ Rolf Petri, *Cittadinanza, dimora, espulsione. Riflessioni sull’Austria ottocentesca*, in *Regionale Zivilgesellschaft in Bewegung. Cittadini innanzi tutto*, ed. by Hannes Obermair/Stephanie Risse/Carlo Romeo, Wien/Bolzano 2012, pp. 32–51, here p. 38.

³⁹ Hans Goebel, *La politica linguistica nella monarchia asburgica*, in *Venezia e l’Austria*, ed. by Gino Benzoni/Gaetano Cozzi, Venezia 1999, pp. 213–242, here p. 223.

rights to recognised linguistic communities.⁴⁰ German was thus not the official language in Lombardy-Venetia,⁴¹ but the high ranks of the military and the police were often filled with German-speaking or bilingual officials.⁴² The presence of German-speaking officials, though, was not as high as is often believed, and although their numbers diminished during the century, their symbolic presence could be seen as dominating and disturbing.⁴³

Locals could thus be very limited in their professional advancement. In order to serve in the army or the bureaucracy in a high position, a basic knowledge of German was required. However, the usual language of instruction in Lombardy-Venetia was Latin or Italian; German was not an obligatory subject, and even when German classes were taken, their level was often lamentable.⁴⁴ In addition, there seems to have been a prejudice against Venetians, who were seen as unsuited to be state officials.⁴⁵ Another reason for a high number of ‘foreigners’ (in the sense of ‘non-locals’) in the Venetian administration was that many well-educated subjects from other regions of the Empire sought employment in the Veneto. Employees from regions other than Venetia were a target for resentment among Venetians.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, for many Venetians, the Habsburgs seem to have been at least better masters than the French.⁴⁷ For example, many were relieved about the Habsburg attitude towards religion and towards social hierarchies corresponding better with traditional values.⁴⁸ But according to Laven, “Venetians to a great extent tolerated Austrian rule because there was no alternative.”⁴⁹

Theatres as socio-cultural centres

The question of why a piece like *I misteri della polizia austriaca* was performed in Feltre in 1866 is thus of interest – why did the theatre society in a Venetian town, who had never expressed great criticism towards the Habsburg regime, stage this piece as one of the first ones performed after independence?

Feltre was one of the hundreds of towns on the Italian peninsula that had a theatre for the surrounding population renovated or newly built in the beginning of the nineteenth century and active throughout the century. This period saw a boom of theatre construction and renovation on the peninsula.⁵⁰ A census carried out in 1871 in unified Italy registered 942 theatres in 650 municipalities, some of

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

⁴¹ Laven, *Venice and Venetia*, p. 7.

⁴² Marco Meriggi, *Il Regno Lombardo-Veneto*, Torino 1987, p. 31; Laven, *Venice and Venetia*, p. 85; Goebel, *La politica linguistica*, p. 223; Cipolla, *Belfiore*, p. 38.

⁴³ Laven, *Venice and Venetia*, p. 88.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 164.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁷ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 403.

⁴⁸ Di Simone, *Il diritto Austriaco*, p. 129.

⁴⁹ Laven, *Law and Order*, p. 403.

⁵⁰ Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri. L'Italia del melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento*, Bologna 2001, p. 28.

them having space for as few as fifty people and two thirds of them having been constructed or renovated after 1815.⁵¹

What might seem a remarkable choice in a period of war and hardship can be explained by the extraordinary role of the theatre in nineteenth-century Italy: while gatherings were forbidden in most public places, people could meet relatively freely in the theatre.⁵² While the majority of the population was illiterate,⁵³ the theatre was a place in which culture and news were accessible to many. Theatres were often supported by the governing forces, who saw them as places of education and as spaces easily surveilled.⁵⁴ That led to a situation where theatres often were the only socio-cultural centre of a region where the population could gather to socialise, discuss topical events, gamble, and attend performances of all sorts: spoken drama, musical theatre, magician's shows, acrobatics, concerts and so forth. Feltre is thus a typical example of a nineteenth-century provincial theatre, forming the socio-cultural centre of a region.

Large groups of people were not left unsurveilled, of course. Rehearsals and performances were attended by police officers; theatre texts were censored or forbidden altogether.⁵⁵ While theatres were mostly supported by governments, they were also feared as places of rebellion,⁵⁶ and rightly so – in many theatres the local population exchanged their views of politics, social change, and joined forces for political movements expressing national ideas.⁵⁷ The theatre seems to have been one of the most effective media for political propaganda in nineteenth-century Europe – propaganda by the governing forces but also by a political opposition.⁵⁸

Antonio Scalvini and his literary career

The author of the piece *I misteri della polizia austriaca*, Antonio Scalvini, was born in Milan in 1831. He wrote historical dramas, historical novels, and opera libretti, some of them long forgotten, some of them still performed today, such as

⁵¹ John Rosselli, Italy. The Centrality of Opera, in *The Early Romantic Era. Between Revolutions. 1789 and 1848*, ed. by Alexander Ringer, Basingstoke/London 1990, pp. 160–200, here p. 162; Carlotta Sorba, Musica e teatro, in *L'unificazione italiana*, ed. by Giovanni Sabbatucci/Vittorio Vidotto, Roma 2011, pp. 533–549, here p. 534.

⁵² Fabian A. Stallknecht, *Dramenmodell und ideologische Entwicklung der italienischen Oper im frühen Ottocento*, Stuttgart 2001, p. 125.

⁵³ Beales/Biagini, *Risorgimento*, p. 78.

⁵⁴ Stallknecht, *Dramenmodell*, p. 139.

⁵⁵ Sorba, *Teatri*, p. 36.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵⁷ Giorgio Pullini, Il teatro fra scena e società, in *Storia della cultura veneta*, Vol. 6: *Dall'età napoleonica alla Prima Guerra Mondiale*, ed. by Girolamo Arnaldi/Manlio Pastore Stocchi, Vicenza 1986, pp. 237–282, here p. 240.

⁵⁸ Beales/Biagini, *Risorgimento*, p. 74. See also Giulia Brunello/Annette Kappeler/Raphaël Bortolotti, Introduction. Feltre's Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century, in *Feltre's Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Giulia Brunello/Raphaël Bortolotti/Annette Kappeler, Baden-Baden 2023, pp. 19–43.

Il Guarany, about the colonisation of Brazil. Scalvini's writings were influenced by French genres such as the *vaudeville* and the *féerie*. One of the author's major successes was *La principessa invisibile* (*The Invisible Princess*), a kind of operetta characterised by political satire that was concerned with political governance in post-unitarian Italy, including with inefficient bureaucracy and corruption.⁵⁹ Scalvini was also a translator, including of works by the French author George Sand, and he was the head of a well-known theatre troupe. His written works and theatre career had great influence on Italian society, especially on the development of a spectacle 'for the masses'.⁶⁰

I misteri della polizia austriaca, performed in Feltre in 1866, had been on the censorship lists of the Habsburg empire since at least 1864. In fact, the only sources about the piece easily accessible today are the so-called *Amtsblätter*, official gazettes of regions of the empire that distributed news and new laws. One can find mentions of Scalvini's piece in the local gazettes of Lemberg,⁶¹ Tyrol,⁶² Laibach,⁶³ and the Bukowina.⁶⁴ For a few years, the piece was quite popular in towns now belonging to the Kingdom of Italy; for example, it was played in Siena⁶⁵ and in Padova in 1866.⁶⁶

I misteri della polizia austriaca

In December 1866, the piece was performed in the provincial town of Feltre in a theatre that had been active the whole century with no known events of political agitation. The piece is concerned with the aftermath of one of the anti-Habsburg revolts in the middle of the century – the Milan revolt of 1853. The uprising did not have any political success but was much thematised in the European press.⁶⁷

In Scalvini's piece, an Italian count continues to lead a group of insurgents after the revolt and is in possession of compromising documents. The Austrian police commander has the population monitored by spies who disguise and infiltrate the population. The patriotic count ends up in prison but is freed at the end of the play, and the voices of the rebellious people can be heard taking over the scene – and the city of Milan.⁶⁸

⁵⁹ Elena Oliva, *La fiaba in musica di Antonio Scalvini nell'Italia post-unitaria. Fuga e ritorno alla realtà*, online, 21 January 2023, <https://drammaturgia.fupress.net/saggi/saggio.php?id=8530> (last consulted 8 August 2025).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Lemberger Zeitung/Gazety Lwowskiej* 94, 25 April 1864, p. 323.

⁶² *Tiroler Bothe* 136, 17 June 1864, p. 303.

⁶³ *Laibacher Zeitung* 100, 3 May 1864, p. 279.

⁶⁴ *Bukowina* 96, 28 April 1864, sp.

⁶⁵ Erminio Jacona, *Siena tra Melpomene e Talia. Storie di teatri e teatranti*, Siena 1998, p. 151.

⁶⁶ Bruno Brunelli, *I teatri di Padova dalle origini alla fine del secolo XIX*, Padova 1921, p. 438.

⁶⁷ Catherine Brice, *Exile and the Circulation of Political Practices*, Cambridge 2020, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Antonio Scalvini, *I misteri della polizia austriaca. Dramma in 5 atti*, Milano 1860.

The piece is dominated by secret activities: those of the Habsburg police and its spies surveilling the local population and those of the rebels organising a national movement and uprising. The Habsburg government has a surveillance system using disguise and espionage, which one could imagine being used by the historical government's police officers and spies. In the process, police officers set in motion a web of intrigues, not least to gain personal advantage.

The Habsburg officials are portrayed as ugly, ridiculous, cruel, mercenary and corrupt, while the Italian patriots are brave, noble, honest and beautiful. But there are shades of grey, too: Italians can turn into spies for the foreign government, and police officers (only those with Italian names) can have mercy on prisoners.⁶⁹ The women in the play are first and foremost wives and mothers, but they can be noble and brave, too, when it comes to the liberation of their homeland. Their main role, though, is to submit to loveless marriages, be loyal to their husbands, and care for their children.⁷⁰

A dark portrait of the Austrian police

One of the main characters of the piece, Consigliere Dikner, director of the local police,⁷¹ is described as “German figure. Blond moustache and favourites. Grey hair and a little bald. Gold glasses. Dressed in black with a ribbon in his button-hole. Calm. Speaks without ever fixing the other's eyes.”⁷² He gets pleasure out of using his power to sexually exploit pretty women and to make people suffer and hang.⁷³ When he has to leave Milan after 1859, he is said to comment: “What a pity! and there were still so many beautiful people to be hanged!”⁷⁴ He is obsessed with finding the heads of the Milan revolt⁷⁵ by exposing secret societies and conspiracies, has a fear of international secret organisations⁷⁶ and sees suspicious activities everywhere.⁷⁷ Dikner and his system of espionage have created an atmosphere in which people barely dare to speak.⁷⁸

The police department in the piece employs spies, some of them local: Corradi is an assistant police officer, portrayed as naive and ambitious.⁷⁹ He spies on the local population in disguise and writes police reports.⁸⁰ Olivarez is a secret

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁷² “Figura tedesca. Baffi e favoriti biondi. Capelli grigi e un po' calvo. Occhiali d'oro. Vestito di nero con nastro all'occhiello. Calmo. Parla senza mai fissare gli occhi in volto.” Ibid., p. 6.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 7, 77.

⁷⁴ “[C]he peccato! e c'era ancora tanta bella gente da far appiccare!” Ibid., p. 77.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

agent of the Austrian police, formerly part of a secret society himself.⁸¹ The priest Ambrosiani is using his function as a confessor to get information out of the local population.⁸²

Austrian bureaucracy is described as inefficient and nontransparent, just as it probably was in historical reality. In the play, the local population can be imprisoned for months or years without being questioned or informed about the reasons for their imprisonment.⁸³ They can be submitted to torture, too.⁸⁴ Dikner tries to make people sign compromising documents in German when they cannot understand a word of them.⁸⁵ This practice is criticised by the Italian count, who emphasises that the Habsburg government has not been able to impose the German language on them in forty years of governance.⁸⁶

Despotism and abuse of power

The two main characters persecuted by the police are a poor woman, Amanda, and an Italian patriot, the count Liberi. Amanda has been exploited sexually by Dikner after her husband has been imprisoned. After six months of his imprisonment, she shows up at the police station and explains:

One night, it must have been six months, my husband, from whose work my children and I lived, was arrested. Why? I have always ignored the reason. I waited a day, then two, then a week ... a month! ... and no news about him. You showed up at my house under the pretext of a search, you saw me, and when leaving, you said – You are beautiful, you can still hope – I understood all the horror of my position. It was a matter of buying the husband's freedom with the wife's dishonour: you returned after a few days and I drove you away. But after another month, exhausted by hunger, by nights without sleep, anguished by the cries of my children asking for bread, I came knocking at your door, livid, haggard, with despair in my face and death in my heart. You opened [the door] to me ... from that day on you know what I have become ... and what you have done to me!!⁸⁷

Amanda is an example of the arbitrariness of despotism and sexual power abuse by the police force.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁸² Ibid., p. 18.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 26, 56, 65.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ “Una notte, saranno sei mesi, mio marito, col lavoro del quale vivevamo io e miei figli, venne arrestato. Perché? lo ignorerai sempre. Aspettai un giorno, poi due, poi una settimana ... un mese! ... e nessuna nuova sul suo conto. Voi vi presentaste in casa mia sotto pretesto di una perquisizione, mi vedeste, e partendo avete detto – Siete bella, sperate – compresi tutto l'orrore della mia posizione. Si trattava di comperare la libertà del marito col disonore della moglie: tornaste dopo alcuni giorni e vi scacciai. Ma trascorso un altro mese, sfinita dalla fame, dalle veglie, angosciata dalle grida de' miei bambini che domandavano pane, io venni a battere a quella porta, livida, sparuta, colla disperazione sul volto e la morte nel cuore. Voi mi apriste ... da quel giorno in poi voi sapete cosa sono divenuta ... e che cosa avete fatto di me!!” Ibid., p. 7.

The hero of the piece, Count Liberi, is involved in the national movement. He is spied on, interviewed, put in prison and tortured but later freed. He is not intimidated and expresses his patriotic feelings freely in front of the Habsburg officials:

As for the people who frequent my house: [...] as for the speeches that are made there, they are not the speeches of a family, but those of a nation [...]. They are not the thoughts of a few individuals, but the ideas of a whole people; if you want to condemn me, it is necessary that you bombard the whole of Italy.⁸⁸

Even when imprisoned, he does not try to get his sentence alleviated but tells the jury that he considers the Austrian dominion illegitimate:

I have conspired against the House of Habsburg because I have always considered its rule in Italy illegitimate and tyrannical; it may kill me and my companions, but [...] it will always have to fear conspiracies and uprisings; because you kill a man but you do not kill an idea, and the idea of independence would not die in Italy, even if you had to make of all this land a heap of corpses and ruins!⁸⁹

Count Liberi is convinced that the inhabitants of the peninsula – Venetians included – want to be Italians,⁹⁰ and his mission is to create an Italian state and chase away foreigners.⁹¹

A piece of propaganda?

In Scalvini's piece, what is sacred to the Italian national movement according to historians – the Italian language, women's honour, the Catholic church, its confessional secret,⁹² etc. – is used by the Habsburg police to get information out of the population, to persecute and exploit locals, and to get pleasure out of it. The author draws a dark picture of the police force, although it does not owe much to a historical reality in some respects. While the structure of the police force, its network of spies, and the inefficient bureaucracy of Habsburg government seem to be portrayed in a historically accurate manner, the treatment of the local population and attitudes towards local languages do not seem to be realistic. For example, people suspected of rebellion were not imprisoned for years without a trial nor were secret organisations a real threat to the regime. Is this drama a black-and-

⁸⁸ “Quanto alle persone che frequentano la mia casa: [...] quanto ai discorsi che vi si fanno, essi non sono i discorsi di una famiglia, ma quelli di una Nazione [...]. Essi non sono i pensieri di pochi individui, mai i voti di un popolo intiero; se volete quindi condannar me con giustizia, è d'uopo che bombardiate tutta l'Italia.” *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸⁹ “Ho cospirato contro la casa d'Absburgo perchè ho sempre stimato il suo dominio in Italia illegittimo e tirannico; essa uccida me e i miei compagni, ma [...] dovrà sempre temere e cospirazioni e sommosse; perchè si uccide un uomo ma non si atterra un'idea, e l'idea d'indipendenza non morrebbe in Italia, doveste pur fare di tuttata questa terra un mucchio di cadaveri e di rovine!” *Ibid.*, pp. 66f.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹² Cf. Alberto Mario Banti, *The Nation of the Risorgimento. Kinship, Sanctity, and Honour in the Origins of Unified Italy*, trans. by Stuart Oglethorpe, London/New York 2020.

white picture of a historical conflict that can be dismissed as a boring piece of propaganda? This view might be too limited, considering how popular the piece was and how quickly and readily provincial theatres took it to their stages.

At a second glance, some of the very real concerns of the local population in Venetia and Lombardy seem to be thematised in Scalvini's piece:

First, the inefficient nature of the Habsburg bureaucracy is alluded to in several places: its multiplication of police reports about public opinion, its concern with secret activities and societies, its ever-present surveillance of insignificant details, its lack of engagement in actual day-to-day police work, and the problems when dealing with the language of leading officers that the local population did not understand.

Even though German was not the official language in historical Lombardy-Venetia, many of its high-ranking officials might have spoken German better than Italian, and they might not have had any knowledge of local dialects. Thus, the local population and the government officials might not have communicated easily. Even if the Habsburg government was not terrified of Italian nationalism in general, there were surely officials who took their duty of surveillance seriously and put a network of spies into action who prevented the local population from speaking their minds. And no doubt there were sadistic high-ranking officers, as there always are when people have too much power. Police reports might have transmitted criticism to the government in Vienna, but what counted for the local population was probably the fact that they were spied on and that suspicious activities were reported.

Second, when one looks more closely at the depiction of the Italian patriots in Scalvini's piece, they are noblemen speaking in a metaphorical language that might not have been understood by the majority of the local population, who spoke local dialects and were not used to the written form of Italian. The characters from a lower social stratum, such as the prison guard, are not much concerned with political affairs or national ideas and collaborate with the government willingly. A division amongst the Venetian population is made visible in the piece – on the one hand, the richer and 'educated' ones, who understood Italian and were at least a little versed in national ideology; and on the other hand, the rest of the population, who were perhaps more engaged in local patriotism, had to earn their living, behave in a humane way and get on with their lives.

Even though in historical Lombardy-Venetia, the majority of government officials came from the Italian peninsula, the symbolic presence of 'foreigners' holding high positions was quite important. Locals would probably have been limited in their career, and people from lower strata of the population surely did not have much chance to advance their careers. This fact is rendered tangible in Scalvini's piece.

Third, women's grievances are made visible in the piece. Scalvini's drama is concerned with women in loveless marriages who give up their life's hopes, are loyal to their husbands and behave as decent mothers; and with women who are

dependent on their husbands' income, exposed to (sexual) violence, and who starve to death if their husband is no longer able to provide for them.

Even though Habsburg officials were probably no more prone to sexual violence than any other person, there is no doubt locals would experience sexual abuse from people in power, as they still do today in patriarchal societies.

Staging I misteri

Could these subjects have escaped the attention of a public in a provincial town, coming from a mixed social background? Coming back to my initial question – what could have prompted a theatre like the one in Feltre to stage this piece? –, I will sketch some possible answers.

Scalvini's piece might not be an accurate description of a socio-historical situation, but it describes general sensitivities of a historical population in Lombardy-Venetia. The piece alludes to several subjects important and topical to many groups of the local population, such as women's financial situation in marriage, their vulnerability to power abuse, or the elitist nature of parts of the Italian national movement. Scalvini's masterstroke was involving different parts of the population and invoking their day-to-day grievances. These multifaceted aspects of the piece would have made it particularly predisposed to be played in provincial theatres where the public was a mixed one.

Furthermore, Venetia was known for its political calm and its acceptance of political regimes during the nineteenth century, which must have implicated a certain degree of compliance with governments. The local theatre of Feltre might have pronounced their compliance with the new (Italian) regime by performing pieces such as Scalvini's *I misteri*. The Feltre theatre was led by a local elite that formed the theatre society and chose its repertoire. This provincial elite perhaps needed to express their loyalty to the new regime and publicly pronounce that they were now engaged in the cause of an Italian state and an Italian nation, even though they had had only a minor part in fighting for it. The fact that the performance of Scalvini's piece was not the only one performed in Feltre criticising Habsburg rule immediately after the declaration of independence supports this idea.⁹³

⁹³ See e.g. PBF, *Fondo storico, Silvio Pellico e le sue prigionie ovvero i Carbonari del 1821, 1867*.

Il Liceo musicale di Pesaro e le celebrazioni rossiniane del 1892

Cecilia Nicolò

C'è ancora qualche bestia che discute – una bestia che per di più discute non può appartenere che alla specie *hòmo* – sul luogo che dette i natali a Rossini – ogni cretino tiene per cosa certa che attribuendo un genio al proprio paese gliene venga di diritto una particella di intelligenza [...].¹

Così Giulio Fara, allora bibliotecario e docente di Storia ed estetica della musica presso il Liceo musicale di Pesaro, principiava una breve trattazione sulla storia del suo istituto. Se non è infrequente imbattersi in diatribe sul luogo di nascita di un personaggio notevole, nel caso di Gioachino Rossini la questione ha un peso ben più rilevante: al di là del mero dato anagrafico, il legame tra Rossini e Pesaro fu consolidato dal fatto che il compositore scelse di eleggere la cittadina marchigiana a sua 'patria morale', lasciando a essa buona parte dei suoi beni in eredità. Perciò, all'indomani della morte di Rossini, Pesaro ebbe fin da subito l'onere e l'onore di gestire il lascito del suo cittadino più illustre, compito che ha poi continuato a svolgere in vari modi fino ai nostri giorni.

Nel suo testamento olografo siglato il 5 luglio 1858 Rossini scriveva: «Nomino quale mio erede della nuda proprietà la città di Pesaro, mia patria, per fondare e dotare questa città di un Liceo musicale dopo la morte di mia moglie». ² Il Municipio di Pesaro, dunque, avrebbe ricevuto in eredità i beni del compositore a condizione che vi si fondasse una scuola di musica di alto livello e soltanto a seguito della morte della seconda moglie, Olympe Pélissier. L'intera eredità passò dunque al Municipio alla scomparsa di quest'ultima, avvenuta il 22 marzo 1878, e il Liceo musicale intitolato a Gioachino Rossini poté così essere ufficialmente inaugurato il 25 novembre 1882.

Probabilmente Rossini sentì l'esigenza di fondare un'istituzione musicale in una zona della Penisola relativamente lontana dalle grandi città, per poter fornire un'adeguata formazione ai cittadini del luogo (Rossini stesso, in giovane età, si era dovuto trasferire a Bologna per i suoi studi), formazione che avrebbe idealmente

¹ Giulio Fara, *Storia dei principali istituti musicali d'Italia. Il Liceo Musicale Rossini di Pesaro*, in *Musica d'oggi* 11/2, 1929, pp. 61–68, qui alla p. 61. Fara si riferisce qui alla diatriba sulla 'vera' città natale di Rossini e che vide Pesaro contrapporsi a Lugo (RA), paese d'origine di Giuseppe, padre del compositore. Le due tesi contrapposte sono discusse, ad esempio, in [Giuliano Vanzolini], *Della vera patria di Gioachino Rossini*, Pesaro 1873 (in favore di Pesaro) e in Luigi Crisostomo Ferrucci, *Giudizio perentorio sulla verità della patria di Gioachino Rossini impugnata dal prof. Giuliano Vanzolini*, Firenze 1874 (pro Lugo).

² «Je nomme pour mon héritière de la nue propriété la communauté de Pesaro ma patrie pour fonder et doter un lycée musical dans cette ville, après la mort de ma femme seulement». Il testamento è oggi conservato presso la Fondazione Rossini di Pesaro; ringrazio la segretaria generale Catia Amati per avermi facilitato nella consultazione del documento. (Traduzione mia).

innescato un circolo virtuoso che, col tempo, avrebbe arricchito anche lo stesso panorama musicale di Pesaro, così come avveniva da tempo nelle principali città d'Italia.

All'epoca della stesura del testamento rossiniano, la città di Pesaro era sotto il dominio dello Stato pontificio (due anni dopo sarebbe stata annessa al neonato Stato italiano), condizione politica che si protrasse fin dal 1631, fatta eccezione per la parentesi napoleonica. Pesaro, dunque, era geograficamente lontana dalla capitale, Roma, ma anche piuttosto distante (circa 150 km) dall'altra grande città dello Stato, Bologna; poteva tuttavia vantare di essere una sede cardinalizia e dunque aveva una certa valenza politica, sebbene fosse piuttosto lontana dai grandi centri dello Stato.

In questa cittadina di provincia la vita musicale era sempre stata piuttosto vivace, grazie soprattutto alla presenza, fin dal lontano 1637, del Teatro del Sole, che prese poi il nome di Teatro Nuovo (1818) e che infine, nel 1855, venne intitolato a Gioachino Rossini. Limitando il nostro sguardo al solo XIX secolo, il teatro pesarese ebbe un'attività tipica di molti altri teatri italiani di provincia allestendo spettacoli pensati per la popolazione locale, con la presenza di interpreti di 'secondo cartello' oppure di giovani artisti in erba, impegnati in riprese di titoli di sicuro successo: senza dubbio opere di Rossini, soprattutto negli anni dell'apice della loro fortuna, via via affiancate (e poi quasi del tutto sostituite) da lavori di Gaetano Donizetti, Giuseppe Verdi, Errico Petrella, etc., secondo le mode del tempo. Agli spettacoli operistici si aggiungevano anche spettacoli di prosa e circensi.³

La fondazione del Liceo musicale diede in brevissimo tempo una svolta importante alla vita musicale della città, tant'è vero che, poco meno di cinquant'anni dopo, Giulio Fara, nell'articolo sopra citato, poteva commentare: «eccomi [...] gentilmente costretto [...] a scrivere una storia... storica. E quale storia! Quella dell'istituto cui appartengo. [...] Fortuna che per me si tratta di fare la storia dell'istituto musicale meno storico d'Italia.»⁴ In effetti il Liceo musicale di Pesaro, nel giro di pochi anni, poté entrare di diritto a far parte del novero dei principali istituti musicali d'Italia: benché di fondazione decisamente più recente rispetto alle scuole più importanti dell'epoca (Napoli, Venezia, Milano, ecc.), divenne ben presto non solo un luogo di formazione privilegiato per i giovani delle zone circostanti, ma anche un istituto che richiamava studenti da ogni parte d'Italia. Fin dalla sua fondazione i suoi promotori intesero infatti creare non una scuola qualsiasi, ma una scuola degna del suo ideatore, che potesse divenire un punto di riferimento per tutta la Penisola. Il percorso non fu facile: uno dei principali problemi da superare fu proprio la 'provincialità' dell'istituto e la sua lontananza

³ L'edificio è ancora esistente e in uso. Per una ricognizione sulle attività del teatro fino alla fine dell'Ottocento si veda Carlo Cinelli, *Memorie cronistoriche del Teatro di Pesaro dall'anno 1637 al 1897*, Pesaro 1898.

⁴ Fara, *Il Liceo Musicale Rossini di Pesaro*, p. 61. Per una disamina della storia dell'istituto dalla sua fondazione fino alla fine del XX secolo si veda *I centodieci anni del Liceo musicale Rossini (1882-1992) oggi Conservatorio in Pesaro*, a cura di Antonio Brancati, Pesaro 1992.

dalle città d'Italia più attive dal punto di vista musicale; ciò fu risolto «offrendo ai professori condizioni pecuniarie superiori a qualsiasi altro istituto del genere e potendo quindi procurarsi quanto di meglio offriva allora l'Italia musicale in fatto di artisti-docenti».⁵ Venne così nominato come direttore e docente di composizione Carlo Pedrotti, allora piuttosto celebre come compositore d'opera e direttore d'orchestra, da molti elogiato per le sue qualità sia artistiche, sia umane;⁶ naturalmente una particolare attenzione venne data alle classi di canto, una delle quali venne affidata a Virginia Boccabadati, celeberrimo soprano, nonché figlia e allieva di Luigia Boccabadati, cantante attiva nel periodo rossiniano.

La città di Pesaro e le celebrazioni del primo centenario rossiniano

Esattamente dieci anni dopo la fondazione del Liceo, nel 1892, cadevano i cento anni dalla nascita di Gioachino Rossini. Naturalmente, i festeggiamenti del centenario a Pesaro furono particolarmente sentiti, tanto più che la città era appena stata dotata di quel Liceo musicale che fin da subito aveva iniziato la sua attività con i migliori propositi e che rappresentava il legame più concreto tra il compositore e la città. A Pesaro, dunque, venne organizzata per tempo una nutrita serie di festeggiamenti; a tal fine venne appositamente formato un comitato organizzatore, la cui attività è documentata attraverso una pubblicazione periodica, il *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano*, stampato dal 29 febbraio al 15 settembre,⁷ dove si dava conto sia delle iniziative pesaresi, sia dei festeggiamenti dedicati a Rossini celebrati in tutta Italia e in alcune città estere. Giacché la data precisa del 'compleanno', il 29 febbraio, cade d'inverno, il comitato decise fin da subito di spostare i festeggiamenti all'estate, sia per avere il favore di un clima più caldo, sia per invogliare un maggior numero di turisti a visitare la città, complice anche la presenza del mare, che richiamava (e richiama tuttora) molti bagnanti. I due luoghi in cui vennero svolti i festeggiamenti principali furono i due intitolati a Rossini, ossia il Teatro e il Liceo. Venne dunque programmata una stagione estiva in Teatro, mentre i saggi finali degli studenti del Liceo vennero inseriti nel novero delle celebrazioni. Oltre a ciò, in tutta la città vennero organizzate una serie di attività più 'popolari', come fiaccolate, fuochi d'artificio, gare di tiro a segno e concerti della banda municipale.⁸

Di norma il Teatro Rossini, come si è detto, aveva un'attività assolutamente consona a un regolare teatro di provincia, ma saltuariamente, e solo in occasioni legate in qualche modo a Rossini, si trovava a ospitare attività fuori dall'ordinario.

⁵ Fara, *Il Liceo Musicale Rossini di Pesaro*, p. 62.

⁶ Inizialmente si era pensato ad Antonio Bazzini, che tuttavia rifiutò a seguito dell'analoga proposta ricevuta dal Conservatorio di Milano, dove era insegnante; cfr. *ibid.*, p. 63.

⁷ *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano. Pubblicato dal comitato ordinatore*, Pesaro 1892. Il periodico consta di diciotto numeri pubblicati a cadenza irregolare, mediamente ogni dieci a quindici giorni.

⁸ Per informazioni dettagliate si rimanda al *Bollettino* sopra citato.

Era già successo nel 1818 quando, in occasione dell'inaugurazione del teatro appena restaurato, venne chiamato lo stesso Rossini, allora nel pieno della sua attività compositiva, assieme a un cast di primo livello, per concertare una versione riveduta della *Gazza ladra*, data in prima assoluta solo l'anno prima al Teatro alla Scala di Milano.⁹ Nell'estate 1869, poi, vennero solennemente celebrate le 'pompe funebri rossiniane', così chiamate per onorare il compositore scomparso nel novembre precedente. In quell'occasione si esibirono a Pesaro alcune delle celebrità del momento, come il soprano Teresa Stoltz e i direttori Angelo Mariani ed Eugenio Terziani, nell'ambito di un'importante stagione che prevedeva l'allestimento di *Semiramide*, *Otello* e l'esecuzione dello *Stabat mater*.¹⁰

Di tanto in tanto, dunque, sul Teatro di Pesaro si accendevano i riflettori di tutta Italia, ma sempre ed esclusivamente in occasione di eventi 'rossiniani'. Ciò accadde anche nel 1892: il comitato organizzatore propose, nel mese di marzo, la «rappresentazione, nel teatro, di due opere del Rossini, l'una seria, l'altra semiseria o buffa»;¹¹ vennero dunque scelte *Guglielmo Tell* (in traduzione italiana, come d'uso all'epoca) e *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, le due opere più tenacemente radicate nel repertorio operistico dell'Ottocento, ancora ben presenti sui palcoscenici di tutto il mondo. Ospite d'eccezione fu Francesco Tamagno, tra i più celebri tenori dell'epoca (solo qualche anno prima era stato il primo Otello verdiano),¹² il quale si esibì in un concerto. Le due opere vennero concertate da Eduardo Mascheroni, che l'anno successivo avrebbe diretto alla Scala la prima assoluta di *Falstaff* di Verdi. Nel cast comparvero alcuni tra i nomi più noti del momento: in *Guglielmo Tell* si esibirono Delfino Menotti (Guglielmo Tell), Rosita Sala (Matilde), Francesco Signorini (Arnoldo), e ancora Ada Bonner (Jemmy), Giuseppina Paladini (Edwige), Alfonso Mariani (Gessler), Francesco Navarrini (Gualtiero Farst), Eugenio Navarrini (Leutoldo) e Paolo Rossetti-Pelagalli (un Pescatore); nel *Barbiere di Siviglia* cantarono Regina Pinkert (Rosina), Alfonso Garulli (il Conte d'Almaviva), Antonio Cotogni (Figaro), Giuseppina Paladini (Berta), Francesco Navarrini (Don Basilio) e Aristide Fiorini (Don Bartolo).¹³

L'ambivalenza del teatro di Pesaro, cosciente della sua natura di teatro di provincia ma, allo stesso tempo, orgoglioso di rappresentare una figura così importante come quella di Gioachino Rossini, è ben palpabile in una recensione del *Guglielmo Tell*, che principia con i migliori elogi:

⁹ Su questa versione si veda Gioachino Rossini, *La gazza ladra*, edizione critica a cura di Alberto Zedda, Pesaro 1979, pp. XXIV–XXX, 1081–1101; commento critico, pp. 189–195.

¹⁰ Un resoconto dettagliato è in un libello anonimo, *Relazione delle pompe funebri fatte in Pesaro in onore di Gioachino Rossini nel suo giorno onomastico 21 di agosto 1869 e de' trattenimenti musicali che le seguirono*, Pesaro 1869; cfr. anche Cinelli, *Memorie cronistoriche*, pp. 160–161.

¹¹ *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 3, 17 marzo 1892, p. 23.

¹² Per una estesa biografia di Tamagno si veda Ugo Piovano, *Otello fu. La vera vita di Francesco Tamagno il tenore*, Milano 2005.

¹³ Il manifesto delle opere è in *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 12, 30 giugno 1892, p. 92; cfr. anche Cinelli, *Memorie cronistoriche*, pp. 184–185.

Le rappresentazioni del capolavoro rossiniano si seguono e nel pubblico ogni sera cresce l'ammirazione. Difficilmente si può trovare, anche nelle capitali, un complesso d'artisti così specialmente adatti per l'opera che rappresentano, quale ora noi udiamo e plaudiamo sulle scene del teatro Rossini: anzi, possiamo senza tema affermare che nel giorno d'oggi il migliore spettacolo d'opera che vi sia in tutt'Italia è il nostro.¹⁴

Tuttavia, se questo spettacolo poteva gareggiare alla pari con quelli allestiti nei più importanti teatri d'Italia grazie a un cast allo stesso livello di quello consueto per i teatri di primo cartello, non così si poteva dire della compagine orchestrale; la recensione infatti continua:

Al m° comm. Mascheroni, avvezzo dappertutto a cogliere allori meritatissimi, la lode ampia, senza riserve, forse non piacerebbe perchè egli sa quanto più, con un'orchestra meglio composta nelle seconde parti, avrebbe potuto ottenere; pel concerto dell'opera però, non c'è elogio che gli basti.¹⁵

Nell'orchestra, dunque, e soprattutto nelle 'seconde parti', si rivelava l'essenza del teatro pesarese, che comunque manteneva nel suo libro paga delle maestranze, tra cui alcuni orchestrali, che non potevano essere paragonate a quelle dei teatri più importanti, nei quali Mascheroni era abituato a lavorare. D'altronde, per questa stagione, lo sforzo economico era stato piuttosto ingente; Pesaro non aspirava a fare del suo un teatro di primo cartello, in quanto non era possibile disporre delle necessarie risorse economiche, né vi erano le condizioni logistiche favorevoli (si ricordi quanto già detto a proposito del reclutamento dei docenti del Liceo, ai quali venne proposto uno stipendio ben più alto della media italiana per convincerli a spostarsi dalle città più grandi della Penisola). Pesaro, dunque, nel suo teatro poteva celebrare con tutti gli onori Rossini solo saltuariamente, sfruttando al massimo le proprie risorse.

Le celebrazioni del centenario nel Liceo musicale di Pesaro

Se dunque il Teatro propose una stagione 'di grido', la vera novità per Pesaro fu rappresentata dal neonato Liceo musicale, ampiamente coinvolto nei festeggiamenti. A ciò va aggiunto il fatto che il Liceo, dal 1882 collocato temporaneamente in un ex convento dei padri filippini, proprio nel 1892 inaugurava la sua nuova sede, ossia quella attuale, sita in Palazzo Olivieri.¹⁶ Quest'istituto rappresentava dunque il nuovo punto di forza della città: se in tutta Italia vi erano teatri simili a quello di Pesaro, in nessun luogo ci si poteva fregiare della presenza di una scuola di musica creata per espressa volontà di uno dei compositori più importanti italiani dell'Ottocento. Ed è proprio su di essa, dunque, che scommise la città di Pesaro.

¹⁴ *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 14, 31 luglio 1892, p. 107.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Cfr. Antonio Brancati, Sul Liceo musicale Rossini poi Conservatorio e i suoi direttori, in *I cento-dieci anni del Liceo musicale Rossini*, pp. 28, 31-32.

Il comitato organizzatore delle celebrazioni trovò perciò necessario coinvolgere la scuola nei festeggiamenti: furono previsti «Grandi concerti nel salone del Liceo, e rappresentazione di un'opera giovanile del Rossini, con artisti licenziati dal Liceo stesso.»¹⁷ Vennero in effetti prodotti diversi concerti in cui si esibirono gli allievi e venne realizzato anche il progetto dell'«opera giovanile»: la scelta cadde sull'*Occasione fa il ladro*, il che permise, da un lato, di apprezzare la qualità delle classi e le capacità organizzative del Liceo, dall'altro di riscoprire un titolo di Rossini allora poco noto.¹⁸ Il fatto che la città di Pesaro fosse perfettamente cosciente dell'importanza dell'aspetto didattico per la crescita della scuola e della città è ben palpabile da un dettaglio apparentemente non attinente: il comitato organizzatore dei festeggiamenti, infatti, incluse nella programmazione degli eventi anche un «Congresso pedagogico musicale»,¹⁹ i cui esiti sono riportati nel *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano*, nel quale si discussero vari aspetti legati allo stato dell'arte dell'insegnamento *tout court* nelle scuole del circondario e in particolare dell'insegnamento musicale.

Tra le attività proposte dal Liceo inserite nel programma dei festeggiamenti rossiniani, ve ne fu una particolarmente interessante e ambiziosa, ossia l'allestimento di un'opera composta, concertata ed eseguita esclusivamente dagli allievi, ossia *La bella d'Alghero*, dramma serio in due parti. Si trattò di un'operazione inedita per l'epoca, che richiamava alla lontana pratiche in passato attive in altre scuole di musica, come quelle di Napoli;²⁰ essa richiese un notevole sforzo da parte di allievi e maestri ma diede senz'altro lustro alla scuola, la quale aveva in questo modo la possibilità di far bella mostra di tutte le qualità dei suoi insegnamenti. Unico non allievo protagonista di questa iniziativa fu l'autore del libretto, Antonio Boschini, membro del comitato organizzatore dei festeggiamenti rossiniani, nonché docente di Lettere italiane, latine, storia e geografia sia al Ginnasio comunale, sia al Liceo musicale Rossini. La composizione della musica fu affidata a un allievo del direttore Carlo Pedrotti, Giovanni Fara-Musìo, un giovane promettente di origine sarda che ancora non aveva completato i suoi studi, ma che poi, una volta conclusi, avrebbe

¹⁷ *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 3, 17 marzo 1892, p. 23.

¹⁸ Tra gli allievi che si esibirono per l'occasione, vale la pena ricordare il nome del celebre tenore Alessandro Bonci, che allora si presentava nella piccola parte di Don Eusebio ma che già mostrava di essere «ben promettente», si veda *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 13, 20 luglio 1892, p. 103.

¹⁹ *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 3, 17 marzo 1892, p. 23.

²⁰ «[Nel Settecento, d]urante il carnevale si rappresentavano nei tre Conservatorii degli intermezzi, delle opere buffe, ed anche degli oratorii, composti dagli allievi, il che era come prova dell'ingegno loro e del progresso fatto negli studii, ed il pubblico accorreva in gran folla a dare il suo giudizio sul merito di quelle produzioni e pronosticare sull'avvenire di quei giovanetti compositori, nomi ignoti allora e maestri in erba, che in appresso poi si chiamarono Leo, Pergolesi, Jommelli, Piccini [sic], Guglielmi, Paisiello, Cimarosa.» Francesco Florimo, *Cenno storico sulla scuola musicale di Napoli*, Napoli 1869, vol. 1, p. 112. La pratica venne abbandonata e poi reintrodotta per un certo periodo all'inizio dell'Ottocento: caso celebre di 'saggio finale' è l'opera *Adelson e Salvini* di Vincenzo Bellini, su cui si può consultare il recente Fabrizio Della Seta, *Belini*, Milano 2022, in particolare p. 62.

abbandonato la carriera di musicista.²¹ L'opera venne diretta da Gaetano Zinetti, allievo anch'egli di Carlo Pedrotti, e cantata dagli allievi delle due classi di canto del Liceo: quella femminile di Virginia Boccadati e quella maschile di Felice Coen. Nello specifico, primi interpreti della *Bella d'Alghero* furono il soprano Elisa Petri (Eulalia), il tenore Alfredo Zonghi (Efisio), il mezzosoprano Maria Grisi (Rosalia), i baritoni Alfredo Venturini (Luisu) e Gualtiero Pagnoni (Gavino), alcuni dei quali avrebbero in seguito intrapreso una discreta carriera artistica.

La bella d'Alghero: *il libretto*

Il libretto di Boschini presenta tutti gli ingredienti tipici di un dramma operistico dell'epoca, incentrato su una coppia amorosa ostacolata dalla gelosia di un'antagonista che involontariamente provoca la tragedia conclusiva. L'opera è ambientata ad Alghero, cittadina della Sardegna occidentale, durante i festeggiamenti per il santo patrono (sebbene non esplicitato nel libretto, si tratta della festa di San Michele, ricorrenza molto sentita dalla popolazione locale). L'amore tra Eulalia ed Efisio è ostacolato da Rosalia, sorella maggiore di Eulalia e sua tutrice, anch'essa innamorata di Efisio. Rosalia destina perciò la sorella al marinaio Gavino, spasiante non ricambiato di Eulalia che, su pressione della sorella-tutrice, è costretta ad accettare. Circondati dal popolo festante Eulalia e Gavino celebrano il loro matrimonio mentre Efisio confida il suo dolore al padre Luisu. Sdegnato, Efisio rifiuta le profferte amorose di Rosalia e, disperato, si toglie la vita tra il terrore generale degli astanti.

Il testo verbale della *Bella d'Alghero* contiene diversi richiami più o meno espliciti ad alcuni dei melodrammi più noti dell'epoca. Tra questi, un punto di riferimento inevitabile è costituito dalle opere di Giuseppe Verdi: ad esempio, nel duetto tra le due sorelle che chiude la Parte Prima, la maggiore, Rosalia, minaccia Eulalia evocando l'ombra irata della madre morta:

ROSALIA

D'occulto amor colpevole
Comprender puoi qual fora,
S'ella vivesse ancora,
Di nostra madre il duol.²²

La situazione drammatica ricorda da vicino un passaggio del terzo atto di *Aida* di Ghislanzoni/Verdi (1871), quando la protagonista viene convinta dal padre Amonasso a tradire l'amato Radamès proprio grazie all'evocazione del fantasma della madre morta:

²¹ Al contrario il nipote, Giulio Fara, sarebbe poi divenuto un celebre musicista ed etnomusicologo, anch'egli strettamente legato al Liceo musicale di Pesaro; cfr. l'introduzione di questo articolo.

²² Antonio Boschini/Giovanni Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero. Dramma serio diviso in due parti da rappresentarsi la prima volta nel Salone dei Concerti del Liceo Musicale nella Ricorrenza del primo Centenario Rossiniano, luglio 1892, Pesaro 1892*, p. 15.

AMONASRO

Una larva orribile
 Fra l'ombre a noi s'affaccia...
 Trema! Le scarne braccia
 Sul capo tuo levò...
 Tua madre ell'è... ravvisala...
 Ti maledice...²³

Inoltre, nello stesso duetto, Eulalia proferisce più volte la parola «sacrifizio»: «Sorella, è troppo orribile / Il sacrificio mio»; «Poiché tu il vuoi, si compia il sacrificio!»,²⁴ evocando chiaramente in questo modo *La Traviata* di Piave/Verdi (1853), in cui il duetto tra Violetta e Giorgio Germont inscena una situazione drammatica incentrata proprio sul «sacrifizio» della donna: «È grave il sacrificio»; «Conosca il sacrificio / Ch'io consumai d'amor».²⁵

Infine, una citazione forse più sottile, ma probabilmente chiara al pubblico dell'epoca, si può ravvisare nel duetto d'amore della Parte Prima tra Efisio ed Eulalia:

A DUE

Per monti, per mari forier
 Correva qual lampo il pensier;
 Penammo divisi, ma un Dio
 A' nostri desiri fu pio.
 Or vinta la lotta, il dolore
 Si cambia in trionfo d'amore.²⁶

Il duetto è in versi novenari, un metro assai di rado impiegato nella letteratura italiana ma che, dal punto di vista musicale, ha un ritmo interno molto nitido, dal carattere cullante, giacché di norma è accentato regolarmente sulla seconda, quinta e ottava sillaba. Arrigo Boito, il più celebre poeta e compositore scapigliato, lo aveva impiegato in un analogo duetto d'amore posto nel terzo atto della seconda versione del suo *Mefistofele* (1875),²⁷ brano celebre che verosimilmente costituisce il modello del duetto approntato da Boschini per *La bella d'Alghero* (si noti inoltre in entrambi i testi la presenza di riferimenti marini):

FAUST E MARGHERITA

Lontano, lontano, lontano
 Sui flutti d'un ampio oceano
 Fra i roridi effluvi del mar.
 Fra l'alghe, fra i fior, fra le palme,

²³ Antonio Ghislanzoni/Giuseppe Verdi, *Aida. Opera in 4 atti e 7 quadri, scritta per commissione di sua altezza il Kedive per il teatro dell'opera del Cairo e rappresentata per la prima volta su queste scene nel mese di dicembre 1871*, Cairo 1871, p. 60.

²⁴ Boschini/Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, rispettivamente pp. 15 e 16.

²⁵ Francesco Maria Piave/Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata. Espressamente composta pel Gran Teatro La Fenice da rappresentarsi nella stagione di Carnovale e Quadragesima 1852-53*, Venezia [1853], rispettivamente pp. 16 e 17.

²⁶ Boschini/Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, p. 11.

²⁷ Il duetto manca nella prima versione dell'opera (1868).

Il porto dell'intime calme,
L'azzurra isoletta m'appar.²⁸

Più in generale, in tutto il libretto è presente un elemento caratteristico di molte opere del tardo Ottocento italiano, ossia il colore locale: *La bella d'Alghero* è ambientata in Sardegna, una regione che, sebbene parte del Regno d'Italia, appariva allora 'esotica', lontana per geografia e per cultura locale (da qui, tra l'altro, proveniva il giovane compositore Giovanni Fara-Musio). Questa caratteristica permette di accostare l'opera di Boschini e Fara-Musio a uno dei titoli più noti e di successo dell'epoca: *Cavalleria rusticana* di Pietro Mascagni, rappresentata in prima assoluta al Teatro Costanzi di Roma solo due anni prima (1890). *Cavalleria rusticana* presenta infatti alcuni tratti comuni con *La bella d'Alghero*: in entrambe le opere l'ambientazione è sì italiana, ma localizzata in una zona sufficientemente periferica da apparire 'altra' (la Sicilia in Mascagni, la Sardegna per Fara-Musio); inoltre, il dramma a tinte forti si svolge nella cornice di una festa religiosa alla quale partecipa tutta la popolazione (la Pasqua in un caso, la ricorrenza del santo patrono nell'altro).

La bella d'Alghero: la partitura

La partitura dell'opera è conservata presso la Biblioteca del Conservatorio «Gioachino Rossini» di Pesaro.²⁹ Si tratta di una partitura autografa di Fara-Musio: ciò è desumibile dal fatto che non si tratta di una bella copia, bensì di un manoscritto di lavoro, ben leggibile nonostante la presenza di diverse correzioni, raschiature e pagine aggiunte con indicazioni per correzioni da riportare nelle parti orchestrali. Nell'autografo di Fara-Musio non è possibile individuare interventi del docente Carlo Pedrotti, che dunque si potrebbe essere limitato a intervenire con correzioni e consigli solo in una fase preliminare della composizione, formalizzata in schizzi e abbozzi che non si sono conservati. I faldoni contenenti il materiale per *La bella d'Alghero* contengono anche le parti orchestrali copiate e impiegate nell'esecuzione del 1892.

L'organico orchestrale della partitura prevede un ottavino, due flauti, due oboi, due clarinetti, due fagotti, quattro corni, due trombe, tre tromboni, bombardone, timpani, due arpe, violini, viole, violoncelli e contrabbassi; oltre ai cantanti solisti già menzionati è inoltre presente il coro misto.

L'opera prevede una regolare alternanza di recitativi e pezzi chiusi; le suddivisioni interne, chiaramente individuabili, seguono pedissequamente quella in scene del libretto. Ciò è evidente soprattutto nella Parte Prima dell'opera: nella partitura autografa la segmentazione in scene è infatti chiaramente riportata nel

²⁸ Arrigo Boito, *Mefistofele. Opera. Teatro Comunitativo di Bologna. Autunno 1875. Terza Edizione*, Milano 1875, p. 39.

²⁹ Giovanni Fara-Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, partitura autografa manoscritta, Pesaro, Biblioteca del Conservatorio «Gioachino Rossini», segnatura: MSS FARAM BEL 01 (precedente coll.: [Mss] Rd 2 3577).

marginale superiore delle pagine. Tuttavia il flusso musicale tende a essere ininterrotto: i passaggi da una scena all'altra si susseguono in genere senza cesure nette; solo talvolta la presenza di un punto coronato nell'orchestra indica la conclusione di una sezione. La scrittura vocale è sillabica, declamata, piuttosto in linea con quella dell'epoca; il *range* vocale di ogni personaggio tende a limitarsi al registro centrale probabilmente per venire incontro agli interpreti designati, ossia gli allievi del Liceo musicale pesarese, cantanti che non avevano ancora del tutto concluso il loro percorso di formazione.

Alla luce di quanto fin qui esposto sembrerebbe però mancare un nome, ossia quello di Gioachino Rossini; eppure, fin dal frontespizio del libretto³⁰ viene posto chiaramente in risalto il collegamento tra la rappresentazione dell'opera e la ricorrenza del centenario rossiniano, cui *La bella d'Alghero* è dedicata. In realtà ci sono alcuni elementi che più o meno velatamente rimandano a Rossini e, più in generale, all'opera italiana del primo Ottocento.

Nel libretto l'alternanza di versi sciolti e versi lirici rimanda, come già accennato, alla struttura a pezzi chiusi, tipica dell'opera italiana dell'Ottocento; questi ultimi, poi, sembrano essere concepiti secondo gli stilemi propri della cosiddetta 'solita forma', giacché spesso a un primo segmento in versi lirici (pensato a modo di cantabile) ne fa seguito un secondo, di metro differente, inteso come possibile spunto per una stretta conclusiva.³¹ Tale tipo di struttura era all'epoca ormai in disuso³² e poteva perciò facilmente richiamare un modo di concepire la costruzione formale di un'opera di un periodo precedente; anche se il riferimento, in questo caso, non è diretto esplicitamente a Rossini, vi è comunque un omaggio a un generico passato dell'opera italiana, la cui storia, come si è visto, viene richiamata a più riprese in questo lavoro.

Un brano pensato dal librettista secondo questi principi è la sortita di Efisio nella Parte Prima (Scene II–III): a costui sono infatti affidati due momenti lirici consecutivi (di differente metro: decasillabi e settenari) che vanno a costituire una coerente unità drammatica (la confessione al padre Luisu dell'amore per Eulalia e la conseguente gioia per l'approvazione paterna) che sembrerebbe idealmente richiedere un altrettanto unitario trattamento musicale con il primo segmento

³⁰ Si veda nota 22.

³¹ Sulla 'solita forma' dell'opera italiana cfr. almeno il 'classico' Harold S. Powers, «La solita forma» and «The Uses of Conventions», in *Acta musicologica* 59/1, 1987, pp. 65–90, nonché, tra i contributi più recenti, Marco Beghelli, Morfologia dell'opera italiana da Rossini a Puccini, in *Enciclopedia della musica*, a cura di Jean-Jacques Nattiez, vol. 4: *Storia della musica europea*, Torino 2004, pp. 894–921.

³² L'«insieme di convenzioni formali che si formò nel primo decennio del secolo [...] trovò in Rossini il suo codificatore e restò sostanzialmente valido per i compositori successivi, ancora fino al Verdi dell'*Aida* (1871).» Fabrizio Della Seta, *Italia e Francia nell'Ottocento*, Torino 1991, p. 68. Episodici retaggi della 'solita forma' permangono tuttavia in opere successive; un celebre esempio, ancora una volta verdiano, è la sezione conclusiva del duetto tra Otello e Jago, «Sì, pel ciel marmoreo, giuro!», in *Otello* (1887), che «riprende un'ultima volta la struttura della cabaletta». *Ibid.*, p. 296.

lirico inteso come un cantabile suggellato dal secondo a mo' di stretta. Eccone qui di seguito il testo verbale:

SCENA II

Efisio e Luisu

- EF. Dopo aspra e lunga guerra
D'affetti e di pensier
Riveggo alfine, o padre mio, la terra
Dove mi chiama un angelo,
Sceso per me dal ciel.
- LU. Qual è lo spirto eletto
A cui giurasti affetto?
- EF. La fanciulla gentile vezzosa
È un profumo di vergine rosa;
Ha il candor di colomba innocente,
Quasi stella è il suo viso splendente;
Per lei ardo che il core mi diè,
Ch'è un sorriso divino per me;
Per lei ardo e di duolo io morirò,
Se d'Eulalia la man non avrò.
- LU. Il vostro amor fedel
Io benedico, e faccia
De le vostr'alme un'alma sola il ciel.
(parte)

SCENA III

Efisio solo

- EF. O sogno mio dorato!
Or che l'augusta man del genitore
Nostr'alme ha benedetto,
Io son felice appieno, io son beato.
Vieni deh! vieni, Eulalia,
Alfin mi sia concesso
Il desiato amplesso
Ricevere da te,
Vieni, chè sol per vivere
Uniti un Dio ci fè.³³

Nel musicare questo passaggio il giovane Fara-Musio dovette verosimilmente riscontrare qualche difficoltà nell'interpretazione della struttura prefigurata nel libretto. La suddivisione in due scene condizionò in qualche modo Fara-Musio, che musicò quest'unità drammatica in due blocchi separati e distinti. Nel primo, intitolato «Recita[ti]^{vo} e Romanza Efisio»,³⁴ i versi lirici sono intonati in un Andante mosso caratterizzato da un lirismo spiegato della voce, rinforzato dagli archi e accompagnato da un delicato arpeggiato acefalo degli oboi; alcuni versi, specie

³³ Boschini/Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, pp. 9-10.

³⁴ Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, p. 52 (le pagine sono numerate nel margine superiore, in posizione esterna, in inchiostro rosso).

quelli conclusivi, sono inoltre più volte ripetuti.³⁵ Il secondo blocco, dopo l'uscita di Luisu, è intitolato «Recitativo e assolo di Efisio»;³⁶ in esso i versi lirici vanno a costituire un breve momento solistico di appena dodici battute in tempo Andante mosso con slancio, senza alcuna ripetizione verbale e caratterizzato da un accompagnamento nervoso e concitato, soprattutto nella sezione degli archi.³⁷ Sebbene esso possieda alcuni dei caratteri tipici delle strette di tante arie italiane, quest'assolo è indipendente da quanto lo precede e, anzi, si collega senza soluzione di continuità al successivo duetto tra Efisio ed Eulalia, quasi a costituirne un'ideale preparazione. Lo scarto generazionale tra il maturo librettista Boschini e il giovane compositore Fara-Musio deve aver giocato un ruolo importante nella differente interpretazione della struttura sottesa al libretto; se quest'ultimo, a più riprese, rimanda infatti alla 'solita forma', la realizzazione musicale del compositore, forse poco familiare con tale tipo di antiquata struttura, sembra eluderla in più d'una occasione, cercando una maggiore celerità dell'azione ottenuta mediante più brevi sezioni musicali monopartite, spesso giustapposte senza soluzione di continuità.

Analoga situazione si riscontra in corrispondenza della sortita del marinaio Gavino (Parte Prima, Scene V–VI):

SCENA V

Si vede una barchetta avvicinarsi al lido.

Gavino e pescatori

CORO DI PESCATORI.

Voga voga, o marinar,
Voga voga, è bello il mar.
È sereno il firmamento,
Lieve in poppa spira il vento,
Voga voga, o marinar.

GAV. (*accenna all'allegria da cui egli, appressandosi al lido, vede animata la città*).

Tra mille cantici
Tra mille fior,
Rapiti in estasi
Son mille cuor.
A me che palpito
D'immenso amor,
Vorrà sorridere
La sorte ancor.
O speme o fulgido
Astro seren,
Al tuo bel raggio
M'affido appien.
Ch'io possa Eulalia
Vedere almen
E i moti esprimerle
Di questo sen.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 56–62.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 64.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 66–68.

SCENA VI

Gavino solo, sceso dalla barca.

GAV. Eccomi presso omai

Al desiato oggetto;

O istante pien di gioia e d'incantesmo.

Sovr'ali d'or – volate a lei

O ardenti ognor – sospiri miei.

Ditele voi – com'io perduto

De gli occhi suoi – qui son venuto.

Che in fondo al mar – vorrei sommerso

Morte trovar – se il fato avverso

Mi niega il core – de la donzella

Che di splendore – vince una stella.

Con questi accenti – volate a lei

O sempre ardenti – sospiri miei.³⁸

Anche in questo caso è possibile ipotizzare che Boschini abbia ideato il pezzo pensando a una 'solita forma' costituita da un cantabile con coro («Voga voga, o marinar [...]. Tra mille cantici») seguito da una stretta («Sovr'ali d'or – volate a lei»). Ancora una volta Fara-Musio rispettò solo parzialmente l'ideale struttura prefigurata dal librettista, affidando sì a Gavino il cantabile con coro («Voga voga, o marinar», denominata in partitura «Barcarola Gavino con Cori»),³⁹ ma interpretando anche in questo caso la seconda sezione lirica come indipendente dalla prima e realizzandola a mo' di introduzione al successivo duetto tra Gavino e Rosalia. Nella partitura autografa l'ingresso in scena di Rosalia è anticipato rispetto a quanto si legge nel libretto: essa intona infatti alcuni versi (assenti nel libretto e dunque di incerta attribuzione) al termine della Barcarola; Gavino poi intona il breve recitativo «Eccomi presso omai» e poi canta nello spazio di sole otto battute i primi due quinari doppi dell'ideale stretta (i successivi otto versi non furono musicati).⁴⁰ La necessità di far scorrere rapidamente l'azione comportò dunque l'accorciamento della seconda sezione lirica affidata a Gavino, con l'ingresso anticipato di Rosalia a saldare due unità drammatiche che nel libretto appaiono distinte e in successione. La scena VI risulta dunque modificata, in partitura, come segue:

SCENA VI

(*Nel mentre che [i pescatori] cantano internamente viene fuori Rosalia*)

Ros. O giusto Cielo!

il fato mi sorride[.]

Poiché Gavino avrà sposato Eulalia

Ef시오 mio sarà[.]

lo giuro. (*Guarda dalla parte che viene Gavino*)

³⁸ Boschini/Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, pp. 10–11.

³⁹ Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, pp. 118–119.

⁴⁰ Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, pp. 151–152. Tale sezione viene intitolata, in partitura, «(Romanza)»: la presenza delle parentesi tonde segnala probabilmente la difficoltà di intitolare quest'assolo che, data la sua brevità, non può certo dirsi una vera e propria Romanza.

Ecco: ei giunge[,]
lasciamolo un istante.

(Viene fuori Gavino)

GAV. Eccomi presso omai
al desiato oggetto;
o istante sol di gioia e d'incantesimo.

Sovr'ali d'or – volate a lei
o ardenti ognor – sospiri miei, ah!⁴¹

La sortita di Gavino è sicuramente il pezzo più caratteristico dell'opera. Nella *Bella d'Alghero* il tema dell'acqua è molto presente e richiama, ovviamente, l'ambientazione nella città portuale sarda. Esso costituisce un tassello fondamentale del 'colore locale' dell'opera, enunciato fin dal preludio orchestrale in 6/8. La sortita di Gavino è preceduta da una barcarola strumentale (anch'essa, come da prassi, in 6/8) che assume la funzione di intermezzo, elemento che riprende un espediente caratteristico di molte celebri opere coeve come la già citata *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Pagliacci* di Leoncavallo e *Manon Lescaut* di Puccini (per citare solo alcuni esempi). Il medesimo ritmo di 6/8 impronta anche il cantabile con coro di Gavino che ancora una volta si collega all'intermezzo senza soluzione di continuità. Questo momento piacque particolarmente al pubblico che assistette all'esecuzione pesarese;⁴² ed è proprio in questo pezzo che si concentrano alcuni altri elementi che rimandano, questa volta in maniera più esplicita, a Rossini e ad alcune sue celebri pagine.

Già l'osservazione del libretto rivela alcuni elementi di contatto con Rossini: il coro maschile dei marinai esordisce con il verso «Voga voga, o marinar», ossia il medesimo che ricorre in una delle *Soirées musicales* di Rossini su testo di Carlo Pepoli: *La gita in gondola*, anch'essa una barcarola in cui è centrale il tema della navigazione. L'intonazione di Fara-Musio questa volta rinforza il riferimento rossiniano: nella *Bella d'Alghero* il verso è preceduto da una piccola aggiunta, «Al mare, al mare, o marinar», musicato con prevalenza di note ribattute (esempio 1),⁴³ quasi a imitazione dell'*incipit* «Marinaro, in guardia sta'! / In guardia sto» dell'ultimo brano delle *Soirées*, *I marinai* (testo sempre di Carlo Pepoli), anch'esso dall'evidente connotazione marina (esempio 2).⁴⁴ In entrambi i brani viene evocata una precisa sonorità, quella dei marinai che comunicano tra di loro durante la navigazione. La seconda parte dei *Marinai* di Rossini è musicata in tempo composto a mo' di barcarola, con una melodia più leggera con frequenti acciaccature, affine, almeno nel parametro ritmico, alla melodia con cui esordisce Gavino nella *Bella d'Alghero*. Dunque non sembra improbabile affermare che

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² «Invece fu molto apprezzata per originalità di melodia e per effetto musicale la barcarola cantata dal coro insieme col baritono, e specialmente la romanza di quest'ultimo: / Sovr'ali d'or – volate a lei / O ardenti ognor – sospiri miei; / e meritatissima fu l'ovazione unanime onde fu salutato l'autore, chiamato più volte alla ribalta.» [Anon.], *La Bella d'Alghero*, in *Bollettino del primo centenario rossiniano* 16, 17 agosto 1892, pp. 124–125, qui alla p. 125.

⁴³ Fara Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, p. 118.

⁴⁴ Gioachino Rossini, *Les soirées musicales*, Mainz [1836], p. 45.

(di dentro)

Tenori I

Coro Tenori II

Bassi

Al ma - re, o ma - ri - nar. _____

Al ma - re, al ma - re, o ma - ri - nar.

Esempio 1. Giovanni Fara-Musio, *La bella d'Alghero*, partitura autografa manoscritta, Pesaro, Biblioteca del Conservatorio "Gioachino Rossini", p. 118

Tenore

Basso

Pianoforte

T

B

Pf

Ma - ri - na - ro, in guar - dia sta! _____

In guar - dia sto. _____

Esempio 2. Gioachino Rossini, *Les soirées musicales*, Mainz: Schott [1836], p. 45

le *Soirées musicales* di Rossini, opera di grande e immediato successo editoriale, facilmente disponibile nelle biblioteche musicali italiane, siano state uno spunto importante per la costruzione di questo pezzo e, in particolare, per l'evocazione del tema marino che, come si è detto, è molto importante nell'economia dell'opera di Fara-Musio.

La bella d'Alghero, saggio finale del Liceo musicale di Pesaro, sembrerebbe dunque di per sé eloquente della politica messa in atto all'epoca dalla città di Pesaro, tesa alla valorizzazione della sua scuola di musica. Nell'opera sono insieme presenti due elementi fondanti: da un lato il patrimonio rossiniano, che viene costantemente valorizzato e preso come modello; dall'altro viene posto in risalto lo spirito di una scuola nel senso più alto del termine, ossia un luogo dove vengono formati i professionisti del futuro. L'opera rossiniana, dunque, non è concepita come qualcosa da contemplare immobile in un ideale museo ma, al contrario, diviene lo stimolo per un continuo rinnovamento del genere. *La bella d'Alghero* è infatti un esempio di questa tendenza: rimandi più o meno espliciti a Rossini convivono all'interno di un'opera che mira a confrontarsi con la produzione melodrammatica del tempo, riuscendo così nella nobile intenzione di far dialogare in maniera proficua passato e futuro.

Teatro Arciducale, Teatro di Corte, Teatro di Periferia Monza, Milan and the Transnational Opera House

Alessandra Palidda

To the reader of a volume on nineteenth-century so-called ‘provincial’ theatres, the object of the present contribution might initially come across as not entirely self-explanatory in either focus or scope. First of all, the theatres considered in this paper form a case study that stretches far back into the last three decades of the eighteenth century; looking this far back into the past is necessary in order to establish narrative threads that will be needed when looking at the early decades of the nineteenth century. Secondly, the focal point of this paper, the theatres of Monza, might be rather hard to fit into labels or models of ‘province’ or ‘periphery’ as the relationship between Monza and what could/can be described as the centre, the court, the city or the capital city seems to be neither stable nor unproblematic; arguably, however, it is precisely in this instability and changing role in the regional and cultural geography that lies the particular interest of this largely forgotten yet very rich case study.

A good starting point to tell the story of Monza’s theatres is their first resurfacing from general oblivion (at least at the level of local society), represented by two articles published in the local *Rivista di Monza* in the 1930s (1934 and 1937, respectively).¹ Produced by two different compilers and rather different in scope and detail, these articles present striking similarities: both lamented the almost total oblivion that had befallen the local *teatro di corte* (court theatre), or Teatro Arciducale (Archducal Theatre), and they invoked the engagement of local institutions to save that endangered, precious piece of local heritage and re-establish its public usage. Though incorporating some major inaccuracies (for instance, the location of the original eighteenth-century theatre) and using a rather magniloquent or polemic rhetoric, these articles brought back to the general attention a venue that, despite its interesting role in issues of local identity, theatrical geography and circulation of repertoires, had been completely erased from collective practice and memory. The present paper will attempt to reconstruct some of the Monza theatres’ features and how they translated into their repertoires, and will offer some insight into the relevance and legacy of these theatres.

Though a proportionally small town very close (arguably too close) to the much bigger and more vibrant city of Milan, Monza boasted an illustrious history and a strong local pride. An ancient city of the Insubres (*Insubri*) and Lombards (*Lombardi*), in the eighteenth century the town still occupied a very important place

¹ P. L. C., Il “teatro arciducale” di Monza, in *Rivista di Monza* 2/4, April 1934, pp. 23–27; Franco Izzi, Il teatro di corte della Villa reale, in *Rivista di Monza* 5/11–12, November/December 1937, pp. 32f.

in the collective memory as safe-keeper of one of the most celebrated and symbolically powerful objects of both Christian and imperial Europe, the Iron Crown (*corona ferrea*) of Lombardy.² Highly treasured not only as the most luminous example of Carolingian gold smithery but also (and mainly) as a sacred Christian relic incorporating one of the nails of the Holy Cross, the Iron Crown had been used for centuries (since the time of Charlemagne) by the Holy Roman Emperors to assume the ceremonial title of King of Italy.³ Even well into the nineteenth century, the *corona ferrea* was used with a similar purpose (albeit in a mutated ceremonial context) by both Napoleon (1805) and Ferdinand I of Habsburg (1838).⁴ The presence of the crown, with the constant flux of pilgrims and prestigious visits aimed at its worship and ceremonial usage, gave Monza a worldwide fame and a centrality (albeit a symbolic one) that were often disproportional to its real position on the geographical and political map.⁵ While throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Milan slowly climbed the ladder of political and cultural importance by becoming the capital city of Italian, Spanish, French and then Habsburg provinces, Monza, thanks to its salubrious climate and lush greenery, was often chosen as the place to seek refuge from the city and its fast-paced and sociable life.⁶

Cultural life in Milan

In 1771, Milan had climbed a rather high step on the political and cultural ladder by becoming not only a Habsburg province (which it had been since the beginning of the century) but also the seat of an archducal court: one of the sons of Empress Maria Theresia and Francis I of Habsburg-Lorraine, Archduke Ferdinand Karl,

² Giulio Fontanini, *Dissertatio de corona ferrea Langobardorum*, Roma/Milano 1717, pp. 2f.; Lodovico A. Muratori, *De corona ferrea, qua Romanorum Imperatores in insubribus coronari solent. Commentarius*, Milano 1719, pp. 30ff.; and Wilfrid Bonser, The Cult of Relics in the Middle Ages, in *Folklore* 73/4, 1962, pp. 234–256, here p. 242.

³ Alberto Tenenti, The Silence of the Crown, in *The Iron Crown and Imperial Europe*, Vol. 1: *The Crown, the Kingdom and the Empire. A Thousand Years of History*, ed. by Gabriella Buccellati, Milano 1995, pp. 178–184.

⁴ [Anon.], *Progetto di cerimoniale per l'incoronazione di sua maestà l'imperatore Napoleone Re d'Italia*, Milano 1805, pp. 2f.; and [Anon.], *Cerimoniali per l'andata dall'I.R. palazzo alla metropolitana per l'incoronazione e ritorno, per l'incoronazione di S.M. Ferdinando I in Re del regno Lombardo-Veneto. Pel banchetto dell'incoronazione*, Milano 1838.

⁵ See, e.g., the abundance of articles dedicated to the Iron Crown in the *Rivista di Monza*, especially Andrea Fermini, La corona ferrea e l'arte dell'oreficeria, in *Rivista di Monza* 2/2, February 1934, pp. 7–10; Luigi Fossati, I cavalieri della corona ferrea. Dall'ordine austriaco della Corona di ferro all'ordine della Corona d'Italia, in *Rivista di Monza* 1/3, August 1933, pp. 3–8; Luigi Fossati, Cento anni or sono (Agosto 1838), in *Rivista di Monza* 6/7, July 1938, pp. 14–17; and Antonio Colombo, “Dio me l'ha data; guai a chi la toccherà”, in *Rivista di Monza* 6/8, August 1938, pp. 5–10; also the articles in foreign outlets, e.g. [Anon.], An Ancient Crown, in *The Saturday Evening Post* 55/14, 30 October 1875, p. 6.

⁶ Carlo Capra, Milano al tempo di Giuseppe Parini, in *La Milano del Giovine Signore*, ed. by Fernando Mazzocca/Alessandro Morandotti, Milano 1999, pp. 16–20.

married the princess Maria Beatrice of Este, daughter of the previous governor of Austrian Lombardy the Duke of Modena, and, after a memorable programme of wedding celebrations, took residency in Milan.⁷ The presence of a court in a city that had not had one for centuries (since the time of the Sforza) was bound to have a strong impact not only on the city's relationship to the Austrian monarchy but also on its society and cultural and social geography.⁸ Furthermore, Archduke Ferdinand was a particularly avid theatre patron and supporter, to the point of being reprimanded by his mother because he dedicated more time to theatre than he did to political science, hunting and military training.⁹ His wife Maria Beatrice was an incredibly refined woman, educated in Milan by the Doctors of the Ambrosiana and in music by local artists specifically employed by Maria Theresia, including Giovanni Battista Sammartini.¹⁰ From the very beginning of their mandate, the couple dedicated an incredible amount of attention to supporting the city's main opera house, the Regio Teatro Ducale, not only attending performances and social events with their family but also striving to provide a varied and prestigious operatic offering.¹¹ After the Ducale burnt to the ground in 1776, Ferdinand even fought tirelessly with his mother to not just rebuild the old theatre but to erect two new ones, one of which, La Scala, was larger and technically more advanced than any other Italian theatre of the time.¹²

In addition to the strenuous support of his capital's cultural and theatrical venues, Ferdinand's court needed to create its own representational spaces in which to host cultural and social events central to the new organisation of power. In a fashion very similar to many European courts, these were established by the Vienna court in a main residence in the very city centre and a countryside one to act as both *maison de plaisance* (a pleasure villa) and new cultural and social pole. A *casa di campagna* (countryside residence) was also needed to align the court's social calendar with that of the Milanese aristocrats, who used to spend the

⁷ Giuseppe Parini, *Descrizione delle feste celebrate in Milano per le nozze delle LL.AA.RR. l'Arciduca Ferdinando d'Austria e l'Arciduchessa Maria Beatrice d'Este fatta per ordine della R. Corte l'anno delle medesime nozze 1771*, Milano 1825; and Giuseppe Barigazzi, *La Scala racconta. Nuova edizione riveduta e ampliata*, ed. by Silvia Barigazzi, Milano 2014, pp. 22f.

⁸ Elena Riva, La corte dell'arciduca Ferdinando Asburgo Lorena, governatore di Milano (1771–1796), in *Il teatro a Milano nel Settecento*, Vol. 1: *I contesti*, ed. by Annamaria Cascetta/Giovanna Zanlonghi, Milano 2008, pp. 71–96, here pp. 73–76; and Carlo Mozzarelli, La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale, in *La Villa reale di Monza*, ed. by Francesco De Giacomo, Cinisello Balsamo 1999, pp. 10–43, here pp. 12f.

⁹ Adam Wandruszka, *The House of Habsburg. Six Hundred Years of a European Dynasty*, Westport, CT 1975, p. 151.

¹⁰ Giambattista Corniani, *I secoli della letteratura italiana dopo il suo risorgimento*, Torino 1854, p. 359; Adriano Bassi, *La musica in Lombardia nel 1700*, Sala Bolognese 1992, pp. 56f.; and Francesca Basciagli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique al Teatro Arciduciale di Monza (1778–1795)*, Lucca 2002, pp. 36f.

¹¹ Kathleen Hansell, *Opera and Ballet at the Regio Ducal Teatro of Milan, 1771–1776. A Musical and Social History*, Ann Arbor 1980, pp. 130–132.

¹² [Anon.], *Notizie storiche e descrizione dell'I. R. Teatro della Scala*, Milano 1856, pp. 5–7.

majority of the summer and part of the autumn away from the city.¹³ The main residence was kept in the traditional Palazzo Ducale (located right next to the cathedral), which was appositely refurbished and expanded by Giuseppe Piermarini (future architect of La Scala), redecorated to match the Archduke's rank and renamed Palazzo Reale (Royal Palace), a name it still bears today.¹⁴

Monza as the court summer residence

As for the pleasure or summer residence, Monza represented the perfect choice: it was located on the road to Vienna and linked by immemorial custom to the figure of the Holy Roman Emperor (a title still associated with the House of Habsburg), and it enjoyed a salubrious climate and lush greenery. The surrounding countryside also hosted the summer villas of the most important Milanese aristocrats of the time: the Archduke's residence would have thus been surrounded by his subjects' in a powerful physical representation of the court system.¹⁵ Ferdinand thus tasked Piermarini to design for him a palace for Monza, a palace that imitated in character and scope Schönbrunn or even Versailles, at the same time applying the neoclassical principles of functionality and simplicity that the architect had already used in many Milanese buildings as well as his recent experience with Luigi Vanvitelli at the Reggia (Royal Palace) of Caserta.¹⁶ The result, the magnificent Villa Reale, was already deemed disproportionate to the Archduke's effective power by some of his contemporaries (including his brother, HRE Joseph II) and can be read as an expression of Ferdinand's known desire to elevate his role from a mere representative of the imperial authority to a more independent monarch with his own court, capital and subjects.¹⁷

The Villa Reale and its beautiful and vast park (in 1806, when its boundary walls were erected, the biggest of its kind, and still Europe's third biggest walled park)¹⁸ quickly became an important presence in the leisure and cultural life of both the town and the nearby city. While the villa's very design (without boundary walls or a monumental gate) already presented it as a semi-public space, the park was frequently opened not only to the aristocracy, who carried out their popular strolls and carriage parades on its purposely built avenues before enjoying various forms of courtly-like entertainment, but also to the general public, for

¹³ Lucio Franchini, L'architettura, in *La Villa reale di Monza*, pp. 46–105, here pp. 46f.

¹⁴ Giuliana Ricci, La città rinnovata e gli edifici pubblici, in *La Milano del Giovin Signore*, pp. 192–195 here pp. 193f.

¹⁵ Elena Riva, L'arciduca e il viceré. Spigolature di vita nella villa reale di Monza, in *La villa, i giardini e il parco di Monza nel fondo disegni delle Residenze reali lombarde*, ed. by Marina Rosa, Milano 2009, pp. 29–35, here p. 30.

¹⁶ Giuseppe Marimonti, *Memorie storiche della città di Monza*, Monza 1841, p. 146; and Mozzairelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, p. 18.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 14f.; and Riva, *L'arciduca e il viceré*, pp. 30f.

¹⁸ Giovanni A. Mezzotti, *Passeggiata nel Real parco di Monza pei viaggiatori della strada ferrata da Milano a Monza*, Milano 1841, pp. 7f.; and the images in Franchini, *L'architettura*, p. 53.

instance during religious holidays or civic festivities.¹⁹ The sharing of the space and the offering of entertainment and leisure can be seen as nurturing strong links between the governing authority, the local community and the elite of the nearby city: in fact, Ferdinand's choice of Monza for his villa made him very popular among the locals, who not only enthusiastically attended the events he organised but also praised him for having brought back some of the town's long-lost prominence and fame.²⁰ A network of wider and better roads was also built to link the Villa Reale to the centre of Monza and the Archduke's two residences, reducing the travel time between Milan and Monza and nurturing a strong relationship between the ruling authority and the town that would continue in the following century.²¹ The strengthening of the Milan-to-Monza axis also impacted the urban geography of the whole province, creating a gradually more and more densely populated area that would play a pivotal role in the development of local trade and industry.²²

Theatres for Monza

In order to satisfy the representational and entertainment needs of a high-rank summer palace, as well as the interests of the Archduke, the Villa Reale included spaces that could be used for leisure, performances and spectacles as well as the reception of important visitors.²³ The park, for instance, featured not only idyllic gardens and promenades enriched with all sorts of local and rare plants but also avenues, caves and rotundas where lavish performances were staged at both day and night using devices such as mirrors, smoke and water, often choreographed to music.²⁴ It was, however, the express wish of both Ferdinand and his wife that Monza host not only a detached residence but also a detached opera house, ideally linked to La Scala but also representing a more independent and experimental venue. Thus, between 1777 and 1778, in parallel with both the Villa Reale (1777–1780) and the Milanese Scala and Cannobiana theatres (opened in 1778 and 1779, respectively), a theatre was built, christened the “Teatro Arciducal” (Archducal Theatre). Designed by Piermarini and entirely funded by the governor, this

¹⁹ Mozzarelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, p. 18; P. L. C., *Il “teatro arciducal” di Monza*, p. 23; and Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 20–23.

²⁰ Marimonti, *Memorie storiche della città di Monza*, pp. 145f.

²¹ Mozzarelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, p. 20.

²² [Anon.], *La cessione della Villa Reale ai Comuni di Milano e Monza*, in *Rivista di Monza* 2/11, November 1934, pp. 5–7.

²³ Franchini, *L'architettura*, p. 26.

²⁴ Luigi Gualtieri, *Grande illustrazione del Lombardo-Veneto*, ed. by Cesare Cantù, Vol. 1, Milano 1857, pp. 539f.; Marimonti, *Memorie storiche della città di Monza*, pp. 146f.; Mario Rivoire, *Vicende dei giardini reali*, in *Rivista di Monza* 1/3, September 1933, pp. 13f.; and Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 32f.

theatre was inaugurated in 1778.²⁵ Rather than on the grounds of the Villa Reale, the Teatro Arciducale was erected on the market square, thus strengthening even further the links between the archducal couple and the town.²⁶ Archival sources also seem to imply that a much smaller space with generic theatrical features was allocated within the villa for the court's private use only and for Ferdinand to fully apply his impresario skills, but the current state of research does not allow any definitive confirmation.²⁷ The Teatro Arciducale was Monza's first stable theatre, and it added yet another point on Lombardy's theatrical map, arguably one of the most crowded of its time.²⁸ What is sure is that the theatre had a rather polyvalent role, not only providing entertainment for both the local and the Milanese elites but also functioning as a court venue by hosting private or semi-private events for the archdukes and their guests, such as *feste da ballo*, *accademie* and *cantate*.²⁹ Until late 1795, when the fight against the revolutionary threat and the war against France had significantly eroded the court's finances and cultural capability, the Monza theatre hosted small-scale yet regular opera seasons, usually centred around the so-called *villeggiatura*, the long periods of time the aristocracy spent in their countryside villas in the warmer months.³⁰ In the case of Monza, this timescale worked perfectly: not only would the Villa Reale become the main cultural pole within the network of aristocratic residences that populated the nearby countryside, but the operatic season would also unfold on either side of the town's main religious holiday, the feast of its patron saint John the Baptist on 24 June.³¹

The Teatro Arciducale remained full property of the governor only in its very early days. Already in its opening season of Autumn 1778, following a system akin to that in force in Milan, 48 out of 68 boxes were sold to both local and Milanese

²⁵ For the theatres' inaugurations, see Mattia Verazi, *Europa riconosciuta. Dramma per musica da rappresentarsi nel Nuovo Regio Ducal Teatro di Milano nella solenne occasione del suo primo aprimento nel mese d'Agosto dell'anno 1778*, Milano 1778; Giovanni G. Boccherini, *La fiera di Venezia. Commedia per musica da rappresentarsi in Milano nel Nuovo Teatro alla Canobiana per la solenne occasione della sua prima apertura in agosto dell'anno 1779*, Milano 1779; and Giovanni Bertati, *Il curioso indiscreto. Dramma giocoso per musica da rappresentarsi nel nuovo teatro di Monza in occasione del suo primo aprimento l'Autunno dell'anno 1778*, Milano 1778; see also P. L. C., Il "teatro arciducale" di Monza, p. 23; and Zaccaria Lucchini/Giuseppe Riva, *Guida di Monza e circondario. Storica, artistica, descrittiva, commerciale. Con nuovissima pianta di Monza a colori, pianta di seregno e carta geografica del circondario in zincotipia. Riccamente illustrata*, Milano 1897, p. 104.

²⁶ Marimonti, *Memorie storiche della città di Monza*, p. 148; Bassi, *La musica in Lombardia nel 1700*, p. 132; and P. L. C., Il "teatro arciducale" di Monza, p. 24.

²⁷ Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 34f.; Barigazzi, *La Scala racconta*, p. 11; Franchini, *L'architettura*, p. 78; and [Anon.], *Il teatrino nella Villa Reale di Monza*, Monza 1975.

²⁸ Arthur Young, *Travels in France and Italy During the Years 1787, 1788 and 1789*, ed. by Thomas Okey, London 1915, p. 242; and [Anon.], *Monza a teatro. I luoghi dello spettacolo* [exhibition catalogue, Monza, November 1985], Monza 1985, p. 17.

²⁹ Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 22–24.

³⁰ Mozzarelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, pp. 17f.; and Mariangela Donà, *La musica a Milano nel Settecento durante la dominazione austriaca*, Milano s. a., pp. 22f.

³¹ Fabrizio Bugani, *Gli Austria-Este e il Teatro Arciducale di Monza (1778–1795). Luogo di svago o di sperimentazione?*, in *Quaderni estensi* 2, 2010, pp. 51–74, here p. 60.

aristocrats together with the management rights for services such as refreshments and gambling; united in a *Società dei proprietari palchettisti*, they financially contributed in proportion to the space they owned to the theatre's construction, maintenance and expansion.³² Between 1779 and 1780, thanks to the financial contribution of these *palchettisti* (who included notable Milanese families such as the Durini, Isimbardi and Greppi), as well as with the constant support of the governors, the theatre could in fact be expanded with the construction of *camerini* [literally “small chambers”, i.e. private rooms adjacent the boxes where *palchettisti* could keep refreshments, servants and commodities], a dancing salon and much more advanced stage machinery.³³ The audience that crowded the theatre for the various performances and soirees was then an interesting mixture of the local aristocracy and high bourgeoisie, proudly celebrating their cultural and social refinement and investment, and of Milanese patrons wishing to participate in the inner circle of power and, at the same time, proudly representing the cast around which that local specificity had been modelled.

Monza's repertoire: networks and experimentalism

In terms of theatrical repertoires, the Teatro Arciducale constitutes a very interesting yet chronically understudied case revealing encounters, investments and collaborations that articulated the constant tension between court and society, capital (whether Milan or Vienna) and peripheries, and the Italian provinces and European cultural networks. A notable example is the performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Lorenzo da Ponte's *Le nozze di Figaro*, which took place in the autumn of 1787, making the Monza production not only its Italian premiere but the first Italian performance of any mature Mozart work during the composer's lifetime; *Figaro*, for instance, would reach La Scala only in 1815, after the Habsburg Restoration.³⁴ The 1787 Monza production remains significant despite the fact that the original opera had undergone several changes, the main one being that only Acts I and II were performed to Mozart's music, while the Neapolitan Angelo Tarchi (who had been active in La Scala since early 1783) supplied new music for Acts III and IV.³⁵ The plot also included some cuts, most notably the role of Barbarina, who was still mentioned by other characters (e.g. by Cherubino

³² [Anon.], *Monza a teatro*, p. 18; P. L. C., Il “teatro arciducale” di Monza, p. 24; and Marimonti, *Memorie storiche della città di Monza*, p. 148.

³³ Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 28f.

³⁴ Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro. Dramma semiserio per musica in due atti da rappresentarsi nel Regio Teatro alla Scala nella primavera dell'anno 1815*, Milano 1815.

³⁵ Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro. Commedia per musica da rappresentarsi nel Teatro di Monza l'autunno dell'anno 1787 dedicata alle LL. AA. RR. il serenissimo arciduca Ferdinando Principe Reale d'Ungheria, e Boemia, Arciducato d'Austria, Duca di Borgogna, e di Lorena ec., Cesareo Reale Lugo Tenente, Governatore, e Capitano Generale nella Lombardia Austriaca e la serenissima arciduchessa Maria Ricciarda Beatrice d'Este*, Milano 1787 [digital copy: <https://cloud.sbn.it/opac/LO1/dettaglio/documento/LO1E055996>], p. [IV].

in Act I, scene 5 and by the Count in Act I, scene 7)³⁶ but whose absence caused the disappearance of whole numbers (e.g. her aria “L’ho perduta, me meschina” at the beginning of Act IV) as well as the amendment or rearrangement of several scenes in the sections reset by Tarchi (e.g. Act III, scene 9).³⁷

Despite the low respect given to Mozart’s and Da Ponte’s work, this performance offers an insight into the role Monza came to play in the network for opera circulation that existed across all the Habsburg-ruled provinces. On the one hand, the original creative team surely did not play a role in this enterprise; on the other hand, *Figaro* had not gained enough success to justify its international circulation so soon after the Viennese premiere (Burgtheater, May 1786). It is then possible that HRE Joseph II directly recommended the opera to his younger brothers Ferdinand in Lombardy and Peter Leopold (future HRE Leopold II) in Tuscany: *Figaro*, this time with no tampering, was in fact performed at Florence’s Teatro della Pergola shortly after (in the spring of 1788), and both libretti document the support and presence of the archducal governors and their families.³⁸ The preface of the Monza libretto, signed by the representatives of the society of the *palchettisti*, also acknowledged the important role played by the archducal couple in supporting the performance, including commissioning the rewriting of the music in the last two acts to make the original work a better fit for the local taste and occasion.³⁹ On a smaller-scale stage like Monza’s and in *villeggiatura* seasons such as spring, summer and autumn, local audiences sought shorter and simpler works more similar to traditional opera buffa; the suppression of Barbarina’s role and the subsequent shortening of several scenes and simplification of the plot (indeed, rather dense and complex for a comic work) would then fit better the general expectations. Besides, even in Florence, where the work was performed in its original form, the audience could not cope with it being performed in one, long soiree; the Florentine libretto in fact reveals that *Figaro* was performed over two evenings, two acts in each.⁴⁰

Another larger-scale cultural project highly representative of the Austrian-Lombard governors’ desire to elevate their theatre(s) to the level of European operatic centres, and of the role the Habsburg courts played in facilitating the transnational circulation and adaptation of repertoires, was the frequent performance at Monza’s Teatro Arciduciale of opéras comiques in Italian translation curated by the celebrated intellectual, playwright and *homme de théâtre* Giuseppe

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 8–10 and 15f.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 60f. and 67f. See also Ian Woodfield, “Che soave zeffiretto” and the Structure of Act 3 of *Le nozze di Figaro*, in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 143/1, 2018, pp. 89–136, here pp. 106f.; and Michael Raeburn/Christopher Raeburn, Mozart Manuscripts in Florence, in *Music and Letters* 40/4, 1959, pp. 334–340, here pp. 335–337.

³⁸ Lorenzo Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro o sia La folle giornata. Dramma giocoso per musica da rappresentarsi nel Regio Teatro di via della Pergola la primavera del 1788 sotto la protez. dell’A.R. di Pietro Leopoldo Arciduca d’Austria, Principe Reale d’Ungheria e di Boemia, Gran-Duca di Toscana ec. ec.*, Firenze 1788.

³⁹ Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro* (1787), pp. [ii]f.

⁴⁰ Da Ponte, *Le nozze di Figaro* (1788), p. 3.

Carpani.⁴¹ Between 1778 (the year of the theatre's very opening) and 1795 (the year prior to the Napoleonic conquest, when the war against revolutionary France had drained most of the court's funds), Monza saw the performances of several opéras comiques coming from the French capital, including André Grétry's *Richard Cœur-de-lion* (1787), Nicholas Dalayrac's *Nina, ou La folle par amour* (1788), and *Lodoiska* with music by both Rodolphe Kreutzer and Luigi Cherubini (1794). With the exception of *Lo spazzacamino principe* (1790), all librettos were French originals in Italian translation by Carpani, who left us detailed descriptions of the highly experimental process of musical and textual adaptation in his *note del traduttore* (translator's notes). Similarly, with the exception of *Richard Cœur-de-lion* in 1787 (when, being the first experiment with the genre and its sources, the Monza performers used the Parisian score and parts with just a few annotations), musical materials were prepared mainly according to the French editions but with changes and additions supplied by local musicians in order to adapt the original music to the translated text.⁴² Both the manuscript materials and printed editions are kept today in the Este musical collection at the Biblioteca Estense of Modena, where Ferdinand and his wife had to seek refuge in May 1796 after the Austrian army suffered the decisive defeat on the bridge of Lodi that opened the way to Milan to the French.

Interestingly, the process of importing and adapting Parisian works for the Monza stage changed over time in the direction of a growing 'Italianisation' of the musical material alongside Carpani's translation of the texts. While the genre-defining alternation between spoken dialogues (in lieu of secco recitatives) and closed sung numbers was retained, the musicians working for the Monza orchestra, many also employed in La Scala, introduced perceived 'Italian' or 'Neapolitan' traits such as the virtuosic expansion of cadential phrases, the more systemic use of repetition and subdivision and a stronger stress on the melodic line.⁴³ These changes mirrored the audience's predilection for and familiarity with Neapolitan-style opera buffa, which featured heavily not only in the Monza season (with important names such as Domenico Cimarosa, Giovanni Paisiello, Pasquale Anfossi and the aforementioned Tarchi) but also in the Milanese Scala and Cannobiana, where opera seria was traditionally performed only or mainly during the Carnival season (December–February).⁴⁴ These works would normally reach Monza within a

⁴¹ [Anon.], *Necrologia*, in *Biblioteca italiana* 10/37, 1825, p. 283; [Anon.], *Monza a teatro*, p. 18; and Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 41–43.

⁴² See, e.g., [Giuseppe Carpani], *Avvertimento del traduttore*, in Benoît J. Marsollier des Vivetières, *Nina ossia La Pazza per amore. Commedia d'un atto in prosa, ed in verso, e per musica, tradotta dal francese da rappresentarsi nel Teatro di Monza l'autunno dell'anno 1788*, transl. by Giuseppe Carpani, Milano 1788, pp. 7–9; and [Giuseppe Carpani], *Al pubblico colto e gentile. Il traduttore*, in Jean E. B. Dejaure, *Lodoiska. Commedia eroica in tre atti, frammischiata di canti e tolta dal francese da rappresentarsi nel Teatro di Monza l'autunno 1793*, transl. by Giuseppe Carpani, Milano 1793, pp. [III]f.

⁴³ Bascialli, *Opera comica e opéra-comique*, pp. 58–62.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129–132; Hansell, *Opera and Ballet at the Regio ducal teatro of Milan*, p. 183; and Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in France and Italy*, London 1773, p. 82.

year from their (successful) premiere in other Italian centres (mainly Rome, Venice and Naples), either passing through Milan or (even more interestingly) bypassing it; with Naples also being co-ruled by a Habsburg archduchess (Maria Carolina, wife of the king of Naples Ferdinand IV of Bourbon), these patterns add another layer of understanding of the networks established at the time and in the current political setting for the circulation of operatic works, networks in which Monza seemingly played an important role.

Monza's experiments with opéra comique can thus be considered highly significant as a rather free platform not only for the circulation of the genre outside France but also for its blending with and impact on the Italian tradition of comic operas. A particularly notable experiment in this sense is the aforementioned *Lo spazzacamino principe*, which was prepared in 1790 starting from Alexandre L. B. Robineau's 1784 *comédie-proverbe* *Le Ramoneur prince* rather than from an existing opéra comique. The creative team, consisting of two very active and celebrated artists of the time (namely, the composer Tarchi and librettist Giuseppe Foppa) sought to blend the agility and comicality of the French prose (especially in the dialogues) with the musical dramaturgy, occasions, forms, structures and conventions typical of Italian opera buffa. The resulting work – featuring, for instance, two acts instead of a single one, more characters and more dramatic occasions leading to ensemble and choral numbers – was proudly described as “the first of its genre to ever appear in Italy”.⁴⁵ With cultural operations such as these, Monza has also been recognised as one of the vertices of a quadrilateral comprising three other Habsburg-ruled capitals, namely Vienna (Joseph II), Paris (Maria Antonia/Marie Antoinette) and Bonn (Maximilian Franz), that played a pivotal role in creating meaningful occasions and a transnational network for opéra comique's circulation, appreciation and adaptation.⁴⁶

The small and seemingly provincial theatre of Monza, so close to the much bigger and prestigious Milanese theatres, can thus be seen as constantly articulating the space and relation between the governor, the court and the society as well as – thanks to its semi-public, semi-private financial and management status – serving as a centre of much greater experimentation than expected. Its activity can also be considered as part of the transnational networks for cultural circulation that, thanks to the court's function as a cultural catalyst, connected Monza to foreign theatrical centres of prime importance such as Vienna and Paris. We are unfortunately left with just speculation on what (else) could have happened had the Napoleonic Wars not chased Ferdinand, his court and his most ardent political and cultural supporters (including Carpani) away from Lombardy to Modena or Venice and then back to Vienna.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ “[...] il primo di questo genere, che compaja in Italia.” [Giuseppe Foppa], *Altezze Reali*, in *Lo spazzacamino principe. Commedia in musica divisa in due atti, e tolta dal francese da rappresentarsi nel teatro di Monza l'autunno 1790*, Milano 1790, pp. [I]f., here p. [II].

⁴⁶ Bugani, *Gli Austria-Este e il Teatro Arciducale di Monza*, pp. 51–58.

⁴⁷ [Anon.], *Necrologia*, p. 283.

Political changes at the turn of the century

As opposed to the long and stable Habsburg rule, the *Campagne d'Italie* and Napoleonic conquest of 1796 led to a season of fast-paced, sometimes rather hysterical political and social change; from these years until the end of the following century, the destiny of the villa and theatre of Monza, like the rest of its cultural venues, would be indissolubly linked to the changes in Milan's political situation.⁴⁸ During the Jacobin republics of 1796–1799 and 1800–1802, the new, transient government invested the majority of energy and funds into the production of republican cultural outputs (e.g. festivals and large-scale public celebrations) and into the Milanese venues and occasions, seen as models to export to all the other Lombard towns.⁴⁹ Strongly associated with what was now the 'foreign' and 'tyrannical' authority of the Habsburgs and to the 'obsolete' power of the Church, Monza and its cultural venues faced oblivion and neglect, if not tragic spoliation; after some initial demonstrations of enthusiasm (mainly fuelled by a few local Jacobins) for the mutated political conditions, it quickly became clear that cultural and financial exploitation was among the conquerors' main purposes.⁵⁰ Following a pattern that became sadly very familiar in all regions occupied by the French, Monza's most prestigious cultural institutions, from the cathedral's chapter to the local archives and libraries, were robbed of precious objects, incunabula and codices, and only its status as a holy relic saved the Iron Crown from suffering the same fate.⁵¹ The Villa Reale was first sold to a French officer, who even contemplated its complete destruction, but it was saved thanks to its strategic position and extensive grounds, which were ideal for military manoeuvres and drills; rechristened the "Villa della Repubblica", it was converted into military barracks and subsequently suffered tragic vandalism and spoliations.⁵²

As for the Teatro Arciducale, because of its large size and practical position on the market square, it was deprived of as a performance venue and turned first into a military butcher's workshop and then into a warehouse. Inserted into the Cisalpine Republic's wider project of reformation of its theatrical venues and practices in a more 'democratic' direction, the theatre reopened its doors in January 1798, albeit no longer offering operatic performances. In fact, according to the most vehement republican patriots and dramaturgs, spoken theatre (both tragedies and comedies) had to be the primary vehicle for the citizens' moral education

⁴⁸ Franchini, *L'architettura*, pp. 66f.

⁴⁹ Alessandra Palidda, *Urban Spectacle in Republican Milan. Pubbliche feste at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge/London 2023, pp. 38–42.

⁵⁰ Giuseppe Riva, Un diario inedito degli avvenimenti monzesi dal 1796 al 1800, in *Rivista di Monza* 3/5, May 1935, p. 3.

⁵¹ Nino Del Bianco, *Il coraggio e la sorte. Gli italiani nell'età napoleonica dalle Cisalpine al Regno Italico*, Milano 1997, pp. 64–66; and Lucchini/Riva, *Guida di Monza e circondario*, p. 80.

⁵² Mozzarelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, p. 26; and Riva, *Un diario inedito degli avvenimenti monzesi*, pp. 4f.

rather than the corrupted aristocratic pastime that opera had become.⁵³ While opera and ballet performances (though with numerous changes in subject matter and musical style as well as in the performers' rights and behaviour) continued in the most prestigious and visible La Scala, other Milanese venues (especially La Cannobiana) saw an increase in performances of patriotic spoken theatre, as well as gatherings of political clubs and forms of popular entertainment such as *feste da ballo*.⁵⁴

Deprived of their role as the theatre's supporters and co-managers, Monza's *palchettisti*, in a very similar fashion to what was happening in Milan, were also dispossessed of their boxes, and the building itself had to undergo a 'republican purge' in that the coats of arms and other symbols of aristocracy were chiselled off its walls.⁵⁵ In this new 'national theatre', performances were mostly offered free of charge or for a very cheap price, leading to a much more varied audience than in the recent years: this comprised not only those aristocrats and high bourgeoisie who wanted to try and ride the wave of political change to acquire more power and privileges but also members of the lower bourgeoisie and some of the numerous soldiers stationed nearby.⁵⁶ In addition to participating in the republic-wide project of 'democratisation' of theatre, Monza became a part of the tireless, often extreme fight against 'anti-democratic' and 'anti-republican' elements and figures, which resulted, as many lamented, in constant disorder and disruption during the performances and even in denunciations and persecutions.⁵⁷ A case that made Monza's theatre quite famous was that of the denunciation presented to the local municipality by a so-called *prete spretato* (a defrocked priest), a familiar sight at the time (as well as later in the Risorgimento years), namely a member of the clergy who was trying to turn the current political change to his own favour by being almost overly patriotic.⁵⁸ The object of denunciation were two comedies given at the theatre, especially Carlo Goldoni's *Il matrimonio per concorso*, which supposedly contained many references to the aristocracy, e.g. titles and salutations as well as an Austrian soldier on stage. Despite the performers' numerous attempts

⁵³ See, e.g., Francesco S. Salfi, Teatro nazionale, in *Termometro politico della Lombardia* [1/10, 26 July 1796], ed. by Vittorio Criscuolo, Vol. 1, Roma 1989, pp. 161–165; the *Rapporto della Commissione sui Teatri*, June 1798, Library of the Conservatorio "Giuseppe Verdi" of Milan, Legato Somma, 2; and Giovanni Azzaroni, *La rivoluzione a teatro. Antinomie del teatro giacobino in Italia (1796–1805)*, Bologna 1985, pp. 9–15.

⁵⁴ Raffaello Barbiera, *Vite ardenti nel Teatro (1700–1900)*. *Da archivi e da memorie*, Milano 1931, pp. 37–39; and Pomeo Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778–1889. Note storiche e statistiche*, Milano 1889, pp. 23–27.

⁵⁵ Franchini, *L'architettura*, p. 66; [Anon.], *Il teatrino nella Villa Reale di Monza*; [Anon.], *Monza a teatro*, pp. 19f.; and Antonio Paglicci Brozzi, *Sul teatro giacobino ed antigiacobino in Italia, 1796–1805*, Milano 1897, pp. 179–184.

⁵⁶ Giuseppe Riva, Una commedia del Goldoni al teatro di Monza nel 1798 e una dimostrazione politica, in *Saggi critici e narrativi di storia monzese*, Monza 1910, pp. 264f.

⁵⁷ Paglicci Brozzi, *Sul teatro giacobino ed antigiacobino in Italia*, p. 115; and Egidio Bellorini, *Disordini in teatro a Milano al tempo delle Repubbliche Cisalpina e Italiana (1796–1805)*, in *Archivio storico lombardo* 34/8, 1907, pp. 126–131.

⁵⁸ Aurelio Saffi, *Ricordi e scritti*, Vol. 3: 1846–1849, Firenze 1898, pp. 141f.

to purge all these ‘immoral’ references from Goldoni’s text, to include as many revolutionary slogans as possible and to stress the original comic nature of the Austrian character, the performance caused such noise and disturbance that the commander-in-chief had to use the armed forces to reestablish order.⁵⁹

In the more temperate political climate that followed the proclamation of the Repubblica Italiana (1802), the links between the palace and the ruling power on the one hand and the local society on the other were renewed, albeit slowly. During the Italian Republic (1802–1805), the Villa Reale, newly christened as the “Palazzo Nazionale”, became the summer residence and main workspace of the vice-president Francesco Melzi d’Eril, who undertook significant (and much-needed) works of refurbishment and brought to Monza all sorts of important visitors, from diplomats to high-ranking officers, often organising lavish receptions and other social events.⁶⁰ As for the Teatro Arciducale, like other contemporary theatres, it was unfortunately destroyed by a fire in January 1802 and, despite a plan swiftly put together by the former *palchettisti*, was not rebuilt, leaving Monza without a stable theatrical venue.⁶¹ While Milan, capital of the Italian Republic as it had been of all Napoleonic states, saw its political status elevated and reflected in a more and more monumental layout, the town seemed confined – again – to a peripheral or provincial status.

Against all odds, Monza experienced a new wave of importance as a crucial pole in the political and cultural geography of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, which was declared in 1805 and lasted until the Restoration of 1814. Napoleon’s growing personality cult and his artificial links to the French imperial and Italian royal lines were sanctioned in all provinces of his empire through carefully detailed rituals that repurposed strong local symbols: for his Parisian coronation as Emperor of the French in Notre Dame (December 1804), Napoleon recreated the crown of Charlemagne (the original lost in the revolutionary turmoil alongside many other French regalia), while for his proclamation as King of Italy in the cathedral of Milan (May 1805), he chose the Iron Crown.⁶² Back in the spotlight, Monza received the title of ‘imperial city’, saw its cathedral chapter re-installed and its Villa Reale become the summer residence of a new royal court, that of Napoleon’s stepson and Viceroy of Italy Eugène (or Eugenio) of Beauharnais and his wife, the princess Augusta Amalia of Bayern.⁶³ The couple was forced to deal with quite a

⁵⁹ Riva, *Una commedia del Goldoni*, pp. 272–274.

⁶⁰ Mozzarelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, pp. 27f.

⁶¹ Marimonti, *Memorie storiche della città di Monza*, p. 148; [Anon.], *Il “teatro arciducale” di Monza*, p. 25; and [Anon.], *Monza a teatro*, p. 24.

⁶² [Anon.], *Progetto di cerimoniale per l’incoronazione di sua maestà l’imperatore Napoleone Re d’Italia*, pp. 2f; [Anon.], *Documenti ufficiali relativi al nuovo Regno d’Italia e all’incoronazione di Napoleone Bonaparte primo imperatore de’ francesi e re d’Italia*, Vol. 1, Milano 1805, pp. 45–48; Alain Pillepich, Napoleon I^{er} et la couronne de fer, in *The Iron Crown and Imperial Europe*, pp. 22–207, and Emanuele Pigni, *Le due incoronazioni di Napoleone*, in *Aevum* 74/3, 2005, pp. 739–744.

⁶³ Elena Riva, Eugenio di Beauharnais viceré del Regno d’Italia, in *Il palazzo reale di Milano in età napoleonica (1796–1814)*, ed. by Giovanna D’Amia, Viterbo 2017, pp. 11–19.

complex cultural and social geography in Milan, with many venues such as the Palazzo Reale and Villa Belgiojoso-Bonaparte having to function as royal residences for Napoleon as well as their own; they found in the Villa Reale room and conditions for much-needed independence, leisure and self-representation. As a result, Eugenio, Augusta Amalia and their family spent extended periods of time in Monza, much more so than Ferdinand and Maria Beatrice.⁶⁴

In their appositely refurbished, lavish residence, the vice-royal couple entertained both the Milanese and local aristocracy as well as the lower social strata with a rich programme of events that made full use of the villa's public spaces and gardens. In order to establish a good relationship with their subjects and in line with the *ancien-régime* rule of *panem et circenses* (but also to establish an alternative to the recent republican celebrations), they organised, for instance, large-scale feasts, mostly synchronised to local civic and religious holidays, that merged popular entertainment with the distribution of food and goods and often included a musical component. At the same time, the construction of the boundary walls (started in 1806) created a divide between public and private space in terms of both courtly life and entertainment/performance.⁶⁵

A new theatre for Monza

As already mentioned, the Teatro Arciducale on Monza's market square had burnt down in 1802, which meant the *coppia vicereale* was left with a rather limited choice of performance spaces in their preferred residence. As the Habsburg-Este governors, both Eugenio and Augusta Amalia were refined musicians as well as enthusiastic hosts and pleasure-seekers. Augusta Amalia, for instance, brought up at the vibrant court of Maximilian I of Bavaria, became quickly known for her lavish soirees and receptions at the Mirabellino, her favourite pavilion in the Villa Reale's park, which during the Kingdom even came to be known as "Villa Augusta".⁶⁶ While the previous Teatro Arciducale was rebuilt by its former *palchettisti* as a public theatre known as the "Teatro Sociale" and no longer linked to the ruling authority, it was probably following Augusta Amalia's desire to rejuvenate Monza's cultural life and make it less 'provincial' and more international that in 1807 the then royal architect Luigi Canonica was entrusted to build a *teatrino di corte*, a little court theatre, in the villa's north wing.⁶⁷ A sort of 'Milanese Haussmann' unrivalled in the use of neoclassicism in a Lombard context, Canonica had created

⁶⁴ Franchini, *L'architettura*, p. 66; and Giovanna D'Amia, *Da Palazzo Nazionale a Palazzo Reale tra ridefinizioni simboliche e trasformazioni edilizie*, in *Il palazzo reale di Milano in età napoleonica*, pp. 31–36.

⁶⁵ Mozzarelli, *La Villa, la corte e Milano capitale*, pp. 29f.

⁶⁶ Lucchini/Riva, *Guida di Monza e circondario*, p. 140; and Giovanni A. Mezzotti, *Passeggiata nel Real parco di Monza pei viaggiatori della strada ferrata da Milano a Monza*, Milano 1841, pp. 14f.

⁶⁷ Franchini, *L'architettura*, pp. 78f.; and P. L. C., *Il "teatro arciducale" di Monza*, pp. 25f.

some of the main urban symbols of the Napoleonic capital such as the Foro Bonaparte and Arena Civica and knew the Villa Reale very well for having contributed to its renovation for Melzi d'Eril.⁶⁸ For practical reasons mainly linked to space, but arguably also in line with the mutated celebratory frame focusing more and more on the celebration of 'Italian' royalty, Canonica (who had also curated the building or refurbishment of other theatres, e.g. the Milanese Teatro Re) did not opt for a *teatro all'italiana*, with its stalls and tiers of boxes; instead, he merged some of its features, mainly the presence of a *palchettone* or *palco reale*, with the structure and proportions of sixteenth-century court theatres, especially those of the Teatro Gonzaga of Sabbioneta (1590).⁶⁹ The lavish painted curtain was decorated by another champion of art in Napoleonic Milan, the painter Andrea Appiani, who, among many other works, had supplied the frescoes in the renovated Palazzo Reale.⁷⁰

It is rather interesting how the court of Eugenio and Augusta Amalia, peripheral from so many angles, tried to adopt the spectacular frame of the glorious Renaissance courts as centres of political and cultural power. Their *teatro di corte*, entrusting all artistic choices to the court and their employees, *de facto* obliterated the synergy between the governing authority and local elites that was at the base of the *palchettisti* system in force in Monza's earlier theatres. With its private and semi-private spaces and enclosed theatre, the Villa Reale thus transitioned (or maybe went back) to quite a secluded and self-referential type of management, repertoire and audience. While much information detailing the musical life of the Monza court with its different figures and venues has been arguably lost or dispersed due to the chronic political instability that affected Lombardy since the turn of the nineteenth century, a consistent group of musical sources pertaining to the Napoleonic court have recently been identified within the library of the Conservatoire "Giuseppe Verdi" of Milan, where they were used for educational purposes. Through these sources, we can try to reconstruct, albeit still with many doubts, some of the main features of the repertoire performed in Monza in both the *teatrino* and the other performance spaces in the gardens and their pavilions.⁷¹

Most performances were in the format of instrumental and especially vocal *accademie* that brought to the royal couple and their selected guests excerpts from some of the most popular operas, both from the recent past and currently circulating throughout the Italian peninsula. Alongside celebrated names of the glorious Neapolitan school, already popular with both the royal couple and local audiences, one can see composers who had made their fortune by writing occasional music in the republican years (e.g. Vincenzo Federici) as well as many who had won their Italian success quite recently (e.g. Simon Mayr, Joseph Weigl and

⁶⁸ [Anon.], *Il teatrino nella Villa Reale di Monza*.

⁶⁹ See Canonica's original plans in Franchini, *L'architettura*, p. 85.

⁷⁰ [Anon.], *Monza a teatro*, pp. 29f.

⁷¹ Licia Sirch, The Music Inventory of the Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy, in *Fontes Artis Musicae* 68/2, 2021, pp. 67–157, here pp. 69f.

Marcos Portugal).⁷² The music for vocal *accademie* includes even a few cases of artists (the most notable being Franz Joseph Haydn) whose works would not reach Milan's theatres until after the Restoration.⁷³ The Monza court, even in its private dimension, seems to have played yet again the role of operatic catalyst and to have provided its (admittedly small) audience with an offering more rich and diverse than other more central or accessible venues.⁷⁴

In addition to the *accademie*, Monza's *teatrino* and other performance spaces became the most representative spaces of the Napoleonic court by offering more traditional celebratory works that harked back to *ancien-régime* models, for instance cantatas and dramatic *azioni teatrali* with music especially commissioned to celebrate dynastic events.⁷⁵ Some of the works performed in Monza, either for celebration or for entertainment, went even further by incorporating some elements of the Villa Reale into their setting, such as Bonifazio Asioli's *Azione teatrale campestre*, performed in 1808, where the idyllic atmosphere was with all probability linked to the villa's lush gardens.⁷⁶ Almost all musical forces were supplied by the newly instituted Cappella Reale, where many *professori d'orchestra* of La Scala were active, including some (e.g. Pietro Ray, Bonifazio Asioli and Alessandro Rolla) who would also become teachers at the soon-to-be-born Conservatorio di Milano (1808).⁷⁷ Thus, these years saw the formation of an interesting network that tightly connected the main Milanese venues for musical production and education with their counterparts at court.

Conclusions

After the Restoration (1814), the prestige of Monza as a cultural pole and of its Villa Reale as a musical venue declined sharply as Milan would never be the seat of a court anymore; despite being frequently used by the members of the Casa Savoia as a pleasure residence, the villa did not host regular or major musical events. In its first four decades of history, Monza and its theatre(s) can, however, be seen as

⁷² See, for instance, Vincenzo Federici/Luigi Romanelli, "Dille che l'aure", from *Castore e Polluce*, 1803, manuscript copy, I-Mc, Mus.Tr.ms.410; Simon Mayr, "Tu di quest'anima", from *Il fanatico per la musica*, 1798, manuscript copy, I-Mc, Mus.Tr.ms.662; and Joseph Weigl/Giovanni Bertati, "Ah che mai dissi", from *La principessa di Amalfi*, 1803, manuscript copy, I-Mc, Mus.Tr.ms.1363.

⁷³ Franz Joseph Haydn/Nunziato Porta, "Odio, furor, dispetto", from *Armida*, 1784, manuscript copy, I-Mc, Mus.Tr.ms.577.

⁷⁴ [Anon.], *Il teatrino nella Villa Reale di Monza*; and Alessandra Palidda, Musica per le accademie, in *Il fondo musicale del regno napoleonico d'Italia. Luoghi, protagonisti, repertori* [exhibition catalogue, Biblioteca del Conservatorio "G. Verdi" of Milan], ed. by Marta Crippa/Alessandra Palidda, Milano 2023, pp. 21–33, here pp. 24–32.

⁷⁵ Pietro Franceschini, *Il tempio d'Imeneo. Componimento drammatico intrecciato con danze da eseguirsi nel Teatro della Real Corte di Monza*, Milan 1813; and the score with music by Pietro Ray, manuscript copy, I-Mc, M.S.ms.225.1.

⁷⁶ Bonifazio Asioli, *Azione teatrale campestre per il teatrino di Monza*, manuscript copy, I-Mc, Mss.Mus.B 3004.

⁷⁷ Marta Crippa/Alessandra Palidda, Per concludere. Il Regno e il Conservatorio, in *Il fondo musicale del regno napoleonico d'Italia*, pp. 45–50, here pp. 45–49.

articulating important dynamics at the level of management, authority, audiences and repertoire and constitute a long-forgotten link in the chain of musical production, circulation and reception in a highly transitional and transnational context. Despite both constituting a seemingly provincial or peripheral pole and always maintaining a certain private, semi-private or secluded character, Monza's theatres have been major operatic catalysts, centres for experimentation across repertoires and outlets where patrons and artists could undertake musical and cultural projects of prime significance. As poles in rich transnational networks that included, but also sometimes bypassed, the nearby bigger cities, provincial theatres such as Monza's can also be seen as meaningful alternatives, or even as competitors, to the 'centres', and as such they must be acknowledged and evaluated. By problematising the relationship between the centre or capital and the province based on issues such as patronage, circulation and cultural initiative, Monza's theatres also offer an alternative, meaningful reading of issues at the core of cultural production at the turn of the nineteenth century, when concepts such as localism, nationalism (or the very concept of a nation), pride and political allegiance were being subjected to a radical recodification that would have major consequences for later events.

Magnetism on Stage – Elisa and Antonio Zanardelli

Giulia Brunello

Introduction

During the nineteenth century, magnetism was widely discussed all over Europe, and this debate took place mainly in theatres. All theatres participated in socio-political discussions and artists played a role by performing scientific concepts on stage. As regards magnetism, within the scientific and medical community, there were followers of the theory of magnetism and those who opposed it. In choosing one artist over another, a city could make clear its alignment with the scientific community as well as showcase the local opinion on the topic.

After a short introduction to Feltre's Teatro Sociale, its characteristics as a provincial theatre and the performance of Mr and Mrs Castagnola that took place there in 1865, this article presents the theatrical activity of Antonio Zanardelli and his daughter Elisa, whose performances of magnetism took place in many Italian provincial theatres in the mid-nineteenth century.

Performances of magnetism like those staged by Zanardelli are mainly interesting for two reasons. First, their presence shows the variety of genres that provincial theatres hosted throughout the century. In fact, most theatres in smaller or middle-sized towns hosted a variety of theatre and dance performances, concerts, lectures, festivities, pedagogical events, spectacles like magician's shows, 'scientific' presentations and acrobatics. Secondly, on-stage experiments with magnetism demonstrate how the nineteenth century theatrical space was not only a socio-cultural space where citizens could meet and exchange ideas and where public opinion was formed but also a setting for heavily debated, topical subjects. In this sense, theatres were like all other social spaces such as private drawing rooms and academies.

Feltre's Teatro Sociale as a case study

This idea came to me after having analysed the playbills kept in Feltre's archives, collating data coming from the local archives with information from theatrical journals.¹

¹ Feltre's main archives are the Archivio Storico Comunale, where you can find theatre administrative documents and accounting books of the nineteenth century, and the Polo Bibliotecario Feltrino "Panfilo Castaldi", where playbills, contracts, correspondence and regulations are stored in the Fondo Storico. See also the online database under www.hkb-interpretation.ch/documentazione-sul-teatro-sociale-di-feltre-1802-1898 (all weblinks in this contribution last consulted 22 July 2025).

Feltre is a small town in the province of Belluno in the Veneto region. In the nineteenth century, the province of Belluno belonged to the Venetian provinces of the kingdom of Lombardo-Venetia and was under the rule of the Habsburg Empire from 1815 to 1866; Venice was the seat of government for the Venetian provinces, while Milan, where the viceroy resided, was the seat for the Lombard provinces. According to the new political order after the Congress of Vienna, Belluno became the capital and Feltre the second city of the province.

If you want to reach Feltre coming from the Venetian Plain, you have to go up the valley of the Piave River. At a certain point the valley narrows, and then you reach a basin surrounded by the Pre-Alps. There, on top of a hill, the town is perched, surrounded by walls. Toward the northwest, the way heads toward the bordering Primiero, which until World War I belonged to the Austrian Empire, while toward the east, the valley – which has become wide again – continues for some thirty kilometers to Belluno and then continues north within the chain of the Alps.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the city felt the need for a new theatre in the wake of the proliferation of new theatre buildings and the restoration of existing ones throughout the Italian peninsula.² Overlooking Piazza Maggiore stood the Palazzo della Ragione, for centuries used not only as the seat of the Maggior Consiglio but also as a theatre.³ Instead of constructing a new building, the city decided to restore the existing one, that is, the Palazzo della Ragione, engaging the well-known Venetian architect Giannantonio Selva, already famous for designing the La Fenice theatre in Venice and the Teatro Nuovo (now Teatro Verdi) in Trieste.

After a decade of restoration, the theatre opened in the 1810s, and its activity continued throughout the century.

Francesco and Concettina Castagnola in Feltre

Feltre's Teatro Sociale differed from both theatres in large cities and from those built in much smaller and geographically isolated towns, and throughout the century, it hosted a variety of theatrical genres. It was the hub of the town's cultural life but also a pole of attraction – or at least it tried to be – for the surrounding area and especially for other urban centres. In 1865 the theatrical society invited Francesco Castagnola and his wife Concettina for “three performances of magic

² Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri. L'Italia del melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento*, Bologna 2001.

³ In the sixteenth century, the building had housed an auditorium; during the seventeenth century, it had been used for various activities and the hall had been restored and turned into a public venue for comic performances and comedies at Carnival time, with movable scenes to be put together for the occasion. Afterwards, the theatre had operated intermittently and was closed in the last decades of the eighteenth century. See Anita De Marco/Letizia Braitto, Storia del teatro della Senna in Feltre, in *Rivista bellunese* 2, 1974, pp. 189–196, 3, 1974, pp. 311–316 and 4, 1975, pp. 87–94; Egle Mazzocato, *Il Teatro Comunale di Feltre. Architettura, spettacoli e lavori di restauro*, thesis, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 2014/15.

tricks and fake animal magnetism”⁴ Although we only have the announcement of their arrival in a periodical as a source for their performance, we can imagine it by looking at their repertoire in other theatres. They had performed in Trieste, mostly in arenas and in minor theatres, and they had been very successful there. Usually Francesco Castagnola started with sleights of hand, followed by experiments showing that magnetism was in fact “an obvious result of mnemonics and nothing else”⁵ One of the “amazing things” shown on stage was the experiment in which the magnetiser pierced the woman’s arm with a pin, duly magnetised, then removed the pin without a drop of blood and without the woman feeling any pain.⁶ In other experiments, which produced “frequent enthusiastic applause”,⁷ Castagnola held a lit candle in front of his wife’s open eye, asked her to read a closed book or to describe an object she could not see, made her pulse beat faster and slower, and finally made the woman prove insensitive to a very strong smell of ammonia.⁸ The couple wanted to demonstrate that “catalepsy and clairvoyance” were nothing more than “pure exercises of memory” and “combined artifices”.⁹

Castagnola presented himself as a “simple illusionist” and wanted to debunk those actors who, for at least twenty years, had been offering shows and experiments on animal magnetism trying to demonstrate the existence and capabilities of the magnetic fluid.¹⁰

Performances on animal magnetism were staged in many theatres, where they had great success, but by choosing Castagnola, we can suppose that Feltre and its theatre made a statement against those “who made magnetism a vile market”.¹¹

In 1868, three years after his journey to Feltre, Castagnola accused Antonio Zanardelli of being a charlatan and challenged him to prove the opposite in public. Why? How did Castagnola’s performances differ from those staged by Zanardelli?

⁴ “tre rappresentazioni di prestigio e finto magnetismo animale”. [Anon.], Cronaca locale, in *La Scena. Giornale di Musica, Drammatica e Coreografia* 3/2, 11 May 1865, p. [3]. All quotations taken from newspapers are in Italian in the original source and are translated by me.

⁵ “un evidente risultato di mnemotecnica e non altro”. [Anon.], Cronaca locale. Trieste 29 marzo, in *La Scena. Giornale di Musica, Drammatica e Coreografia* 2/48, 30 March 1865, p. [3].

⁶ “delle cose sorprendenti”. Satana, Teatri, in *L’Arlecchino* 1/8, 24 March 1865, pp. 56f., here p. 57; [Anon.], I coniugi Castagnola e il Magnetismo, in *La Baba* 4/25, 29 March 1865, pp. 98f.; Saltamartino, Ad Arlecchino Capo-squadra dei giornalisti, in *L’Arlecchino* 1/10, 8 April 1865, p. 73. More news in *Notizie locali. Teatro civico di Fiume*, in *Giornale di Fiume* 1/26, 1 July 1865, p. 190.

⁷ “frequenti entusiastici applausi”. [Anon.], Cronaca locale. Trieste 12 aprile, in *La Scena. Giornale di Musica, Drammatica e Coreografia* 2/50, 13 April 1865, p. [3].

⁸ [Anon.], Cronaca locale. Trieste 19 aprile, in *La Scena. Giornale di Musica, Drammatica e Coreografia* 2/51, 20 April 1865, p. 3. On clairvoyance, see Saltamartino, Ad Arlecchino Capo-squadra dei giornalisti, in *L’Arlecchino* 1/10, 8 April 1865, p. 73.

⁹ “provando chiaramente che le virtù magnetiche [...] non sono che arte portata al punto di scienza, onde la trasmissione del pensiero, la catalessia, la chiaroveggenza ed altro, puri esercizi di memoria, combinati artifici e nulla più.” [Anon.], Cronaca locale. Trieste 15 marzo, in *La Scena. Giornale di Musica, Drammatica e Coreografia* 2/46, 16 March 1865, pp. [3]f., here p. [4].

¹⁰ “s’annunziano quali semplici prestigiatori”. Ibid.

¹¹ “combattere coloro che del magnetismo animale fecero fan tuttora turpe mercato.” [Anon.], Cronaca locale, in *La Scena. Giornale di Musica, Drammatica e Coreografia* 3/2, 11 May 1865, p. [3].

Antonio and Elisa Zanardelli's performances

Differently from Castagnola, who claimed to unmask the “fake animal magnetism”, Antonio and Elisa had great success and performed experiments in magnetism and clairvoyance in the 1850s and 1860s. They performed both in the theatre for a general public and in academies and private salons in front of medical panels.

‘Animal magnetism’, more often referred to as ‘mesmerism’, originated from a theory introduced by the physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) in the last decades of the eighteenth century. Mesmer had announced his discovery of a fluid that penetrated all bodies (humans, animals, plants). He had claimed that this invisible force had physical effects and could be used in medicine. As we shall see, a confrontation took place between medical corporations and magnetisers during the nineteenth century. Mesmerism spread all over Europe, but its reception reveals specific national characteristics.¹²

Antonio Zanardelli was an illusionist and a professor of magnetism. His performances were denominated in the press in several ways: “conjuring tricks”, “physical prestige”, “experiments in clairvoyance and somnambulism”, “transmission of images and thought”, “mesmeric attempts”; some correspondents aroused their readers’ curiosity by calling them “phenomena” or “marvels”.¹³

Zanardelli became a successful artist in the early 1850s; he must have been no more than forty years old while his daughter Elisa was fifteen. Antonio dressed up in a sober, elegant, dark suit. His image reflected the typical bourgeois respectability: no flashy or bizarre elements that could link him to conjurers like Bartolomeo Bosco, who claimed to have learnt “the secrets of Egyptian magic”¹⁴ and appeared on stage wearing a tunic of black velvet and surrounded by candelabra, skeletons

¹² George Rosen, *Mesmerism and Surgery. A Strange Chapter in the History of Anesthesia*, in *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 1/4, 1946, pp. 527–550, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhmas/1.4.527>; Fred Kaplan, “The Mesmeric Mania”. The Early Victorians and Animal Magnetism, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35/4, 1974, pp. 691–702, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709095>; Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France*, Cambridge 1968; Clara Gallini, *La sonnambula meravigliosa. Magnetismo e ipnotismo nell'Ottocento italiano*, Milano 1983; Patrizia Guarnieri, *Teatro e laboratorio. Scienziati e medici davanti al magnetismo*, in *Belfagor* 40/5, 1985, pp. 561–575; Alison Winter, *Mesmerized. Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*, London 1998; *Traces du mesmerisme dans les littératures européennes du XIX^e siècle. Actes du colloque international organisé les 9 et 10 novembre 1999 / Einflüsse des Mesmerismus auf die europäische Literatur des 19. Jahrhunderts. Akten des internationalen Kolloquiums vom 9. und 10. November 1999*, ed. by Ernst Leonardy/Marie-France Renard/Christian Drösch/Stéphanie Vanasten, Bruxelles 2001 (*Travaux et recherches*, Vol. 45).

¹³ All these definitions (“giuochi di prestigio”, “prestigio fisico”, “esperimenti di chiaroveggenza e sonnambulismo”, “esperimenti di trasmissione delle immagini e del pensiero”, “tentativi mesmerici”, “fenomeni”, “meraviglie”) come from the newspapers collected for this research, namely *La Fama*, *Il Lampione*, *Lo Scaramuccia*, and *Polimazia di Famiglia* from 1849 to 1857.

¹⁴ “segreti della Magia Egiziana”. [Bartolomeo Bosco], *Curiose avventure e brevi cenni sulla vita di Bartolomeo Bosco da Torino esimio prestigiatore ed inventore della Magia Egiziana con un compendio nominativo di dilettevoli giochi di fisica e di meccanica da lui ritrovati*, Napoli 1837, p. 39.

and skulls.¹⁵ Elisa, at her father's side on stage, wearing a light-coloured dress with long sleeves and a tightly laced collar, was praised for her youthful beauty. According to accounts, she had "black hair and black eye",¹⁶ "very thick hair" that "towered on the head [...] like the diadem of an allegorical figure"; she had "diaphanous and transparent skin, like the leaf of the camellia",¹⁷ a "serene forehead",¹⁸ and she was "full of angelic beauty, full of grace, brio, spirit, wit".¹⁹

Zanardelli's experiments in magnetism and his scientific demonstrations were interspersed with magic tricks, comedies and farces and featured musical entertainment. The programme was varied and often included new performances or additions as Zanardelli often stayed in the same town for several days, and people attended his shows several times.²⁰

Thanks to his scientific knowledge and ability to manufacture electrical instruments, Zanardelli also reproduced light phenomena in the theatre and was especially invited when a performance needed "the electric sun".²¹

The most-eagerly awaited moment in the performance was when Elisa, called the "modern Sibyl",²² demonstrated her powers. This moment was made of "mesmeric and physiological attempts at animal magnetism, based on the transmission of thought images and odorous sensations".²³ "Attempts", as Zanardelli emphasised, because the outcome was successful only on "certain circumstances dependent on the physiological qualities of the subject [and] on the disposition of those

¹⁵ Bruno Di Porto, Bosco, Giovanni Bartolomeo, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Vol. 13 (1971), pp. 208f.

¹⁶ "capelli neri e l'occhio nero". Lo Zio Tom, Elisa Zanardelli e il Magnetismo animale, in *Polimazia di famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario artistico e teatrale* 1/19, 22 March 1854, p. 75.

¹⁷ "La sua età è quella dei primi amori: i capelli foltissimi torreggiano sul capo della fanciulla, come il diadema di una figura allegorica. La sua pelle è diafana e trasparente, quanto la foglia della camelia". Carlo Lorenzini, Elisa Zanardelli al teatro del Cocomero, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-Omnibus* 1/39, 14 March 1854, pp. [2]f., here p. [2].

¹⁸ "fronte serena". Lo Zio Tom, Elisa Zanardelli e il Magnetismo animale, in *Polimazia di Famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico e teatrale* 1/19, 22 March 1854, p. 75.

¹⁹ "una ragazza dotata di angelica bellezza, piena di grazie, di brio, di spirito, di ingegno". [Anon.], Antonio Zanardelli, in *Leco di Fiume* 1/37, 1 October 1857, p. 159.

²⁰ Information about reruns in Arpa, Teatri, in *I fiori* 2/2, 12 January 1854, p. 16; *La Fama del 1854. Rassegna di scienze, lettere, arti industria e teatri* 13/1, 2 January 1854, p. 4; [Anon.], Teatri di musica ed altri spettacoli. Firenze. Teatro del Cocomero, in *Polimazia di Famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico e teatrale* 1/13, 11 March 1854, p. 52; [Anon.], Teatri. Teatro Duse, in *La Rivista Euganea*, suppl. 10 February 1857, p. 24; *Gazzettino di città*. Elisa Zanardelli, in *Leco di Fiume* 1/58, 19 November 1857, p. 243.

²¹ "per la formazione del sole elettrico". [Anon.], Notizie. Ancona, in *La Fama del 1854. Rassegna di scienze, lettere, arti industria e teatri* 13/32, 20 April 1854, p. 128.

²² [Anon.], Teatri di Firenze, in *Polimazia di Famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario artistico e teatrale* 1/8, 2 March 1854, p. 32.

²³ "Aggiunse alcuni tentativi mesmerici e fisiologici di magnetismo animale, basati sulla trasmissione delle immagini del pensiero, sensazioni odorose, con prove di rigidezza e catalessi". L. Alemanni, Teatri e spettacoli. Torino, in *La Fama del 1856. Rassegna di scienze, lettere, arti industria e teatri* 15/35, 1 May 1856, p. 138.

taking part in the experiments”;²⁴ above all, the setting had to guarantee “calm and quietness of mind”²⁵

Antonio Zanardelli's career

Antonio Zanardelli began his career in the 1830s as an actor, together with his wife Teresa. After an early career in the kingdom of Lombardo-Venetia with the theatre company of Luigi Duse, the Zanardellis had travelled to various pre-unified states, in particular the Papal States, the Grand Ducato of Tuscany²⁶ and the Illyrian territory (Rijeka, Zara, Buccari).²⁷ Elisa was born in 1837 in Padova.²⁸ A few years later, Antonio and Teresa had a second child, who would take Elisa's place at his father's side in the 1860s when Elisa married Eugenio Bosco, son of the famous conjurer Bartolomeo Bosco.²⁹

As a magician and illusionist, Zanardelli sometimes shared his performance with theatre companies still in contact with him after years of collaboration.³⁰ His many tricks and ingenious mechanisms left the audience speechless. A particularly popular performance was “the chest”, described as “the *chest* taken from Venus which, empty at first, is suddenly filled with all the objects necessary for the Goddess' *toilet*”; in this feat, Zanardelli magically suddenly filled and emptied the

²⁴ “talune circo[s]anze dipendenti da qualità fisiologiche del soggetto [e] dalla disposizione di coloro che prendono parte all'esperienze.” Letter by Antonio Zanardelli published in *Corriere delle Marche*, 16 August 1868, quoted by T. Cingolari, I fluidisti alla prova, in *Il libero pensiero. Giornale dei razionalisti* 3.2/14, 1 October 1868, pp. 218–223, here p. 221.

²⁵ “calma e quiete d'animo”. This is what Zanardelli said when he was challenged in Turin in 1856. See [Anon.], Il magnetismo e la medicina. Riflessioni sopra una sfida di magnetizzatori pel dott. Luigi Berruti (Continuazione e fine), in *Gazzetta medica italiana. Stati sardi* 7/25, 16 June 1856, pp. 201–207, here p. 202.

²⁶ In 1842 he was in the Teatro del Corso in Bologna, see Francesco Regli, Teatri. Bologna, in *Il Pirata* 7/84 Suppl., 19 April 1842, p. 342; [Anon.], Teatri. Bologna, in *Bazar di Novità Artistiche, Letterarie e Teatrali* 2/34, 27 April 1842, p. 135. In 1843 Zanardelli was in the Teatro Civico in Perugia, see [Anon.], Perugia. Teatro civico, in *Osservatore del Trasimeno* 18/33, 25 April 1843, p. 4. In 1846 he was in Firenze, Civitavecchia and Tarquinia, see *Il teatro nel Lazio 1798–1870*, online, n.d., <https://movio.beniculturali.it/asrm/ilteatronellazio/it/122/anni/show/15/1560> that refers to Archivio Storico Comunale of Tarquinia, Carteggio amministrativo, tit. XIV, fasc. 11, 4875, Compagnia Viti.

²⁷ For Zara see [Anon.], Notizie. Zara, in *La Fama del 1858. Rassegna di scienze, lettere, arti industria e teatri* 17/84, 21 October 1858, p. 336; for Buccari see P. T., Corrispondenza, in *Leco di Fiume* 1/66, 10 December 1857, p. 275.

²⁸ Elisa played “parti ingenuae” in itinerant troupes together with her parents. She started her career when she was four years old, first in Treviso and then in Padova in *I due sergenti* with Gustavo Modena. Napoleone Pietrucci, *Biografia degli artisti padovani*, Padova 1858, pp. 289f.

²⁹ About Bartolomeo Bosco see [Bosco], *Curiose avventure e brevi cenni sulla vita*; Bosco, *Gabinetto magico ossia il complesso dell'arte di prestigio*, Milano 1862.

³⁰ For example, in Crema in 1852, Zanardelli performed with the theatrical troupe De Ricci-Jucchi, see Comune di Crema, Teatro Sociale di Crema. Inventario degli atti d'archivio, sec. XVII–1937, Bergamo 2012, p. 204; or in Padova in 1857 when Zanardelli performs in the Teatro Duse with the Monti-Preda theatrical troupe. [Anon.], Teatri. Teatro Duse, in *La Rivista Euganea* 1/5, supplement, 1 February 1857, p. 24.

chest with the most disparate objects: trays of silverware, clothing and eggs as well as ice cream and sweets that were offered to the public.³¹

The first time Antonio became interested in the phenomenon of animal magnetism was in a theatre in Livorno in 1849.³² Zanardelli was probably inspired by the Frenchman Charles Lafontaine, who was at that time performing in Livorno, a small town under the Austrian siege.³³ Before becoming a famous magnetiser, Lafontaine had been a theatre man. He had become famous when a countess, led to a state of somnambulism, had revealed the whereabouts of a treasure buried in the ruins of a convent in Florence.³⁴ In Livorno Lafontaine was a guest of Doctor Pellini, the head doctor at Livorno's hospital. The doctor's sixteen-year-old daughter had convulsions attributed to epilepsy. The father was unable to cure her and turned to Lafontaine, who succeeded thanks to a few magnetic sessions. From that moment on, Lafontaine increased his fame. He was also the author of a treatise entitled *L'art de magnétiser*, a study addressed primarily to physicians.³⁵

Zanardelli was perhaps influenced – even before reading Lafontaine's treatise – by the cover: a man dressed in a sober, dark tailcoat magnetising a woman with his hands (but without touching her); dressed in light-coloured clothing, she is seated on a chair with her eyes closed and seated in a posture that suggests she is levitating. In the image, one can see the signs of the magnetic fluid. Thereafter, Zanardelli's daughter was presented in the role of a sleepwalker.

Zanardelli devoted himself to experiments in magnetism thanks to the encouragement of doctors. They provided him with certificates stating that Elisa was “a sincere and splendid example of magnetic phenomena. [...] not only of external things, but of internal sensations, intimate emotions, images and thoughts.”³⁶ These certificates also emphasised the honesty of Antonio, a “skilful physicist-experimenter and mechanical performer”³⁷ moved by nothing more than “a warm love for science.”³⁸ Zanardelli kept these documents and exhibited them whenever he needed to attest the validity of his experiments.

³¹ “il forziere tolto a Venere che, vuoto dapprima, si riempie all'improvviso di tutti gli oggetti necessari alla *toilette* della Dea.” [Anon.], Teatri e notizie diverse, in *L'Italia musicale. Giornale dei teatri di letteratura, belle arti e varietà* 3/70, 30 August 1851, p. 278; the show was held in Treviso's theatre.

³² [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli in Livorno, in *Il Lampione* 251, 19 July 1849, p. [4].

³³ Charles Lafontaine, *Mémoires d'un magnétiseur*, Vol. 2, Paris 1866, pp. 239–248.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁵ Charles Lafontaine, *L'art de magnétiser*, Paris 1847, pp. V–VII.

³⁶ “un sincero e splendido esemplare di fenomeni magnetici. [...] non solo di esterne cose, ma d'interne sensazioni, d'intime emozioni, d'immagini [sic] e di pensieri.” From Giovanni Pellizzari's certificate in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/43, 28 March 1854, pp. [2]f., here p. [2] (one of several “Altri documenti relativi al magnetizzatore Zanardelli e sua figlia”; printed identically also in *Polimazia di famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico e teatrale* 1/31, 13 April 1854, p. 124).

³⁷ “valente fisico sperimentatore e meccanico esecutore.” Letter by G. P. Mazzoletti, Spilimbergo, 28 September 1850, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/43, 28 March 1854, p. 3.

³⁸ “un caldo amore per la scienza, specialmente per il magnetismo.” Letter by Dr. Esterle to a friend, Trento, 5 October 1852, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/43, 28 March 1854, p. 2.

On stage

Experiments in magnetism also took place in the open air, where, however, they were considered charlatanism.³⁹ Theatres offered magnetism a guarantee of seriousness and allowed the artists a certain proximity with the audience and visibility in theatrical newspapers.

Provincial theatres were Elisa and Antonio's main places of performance. They travelled through Central and Northern Italy up to the Illyrian coast (in Italian theatres as the performances in the Italian language had to be understandable). They performed in provincial and minor theatres, rarely in main theatres, that were usually devoted to opera. Teatro Carignano in Turin, where the Compagnia Reale Sarda performed, is an exception: the reason goes back to Turin's tradition of passion for magnetism and occultism, proving once again that medical and intellectual communities influenced theatre programming.⁴⁰

On stage, Elisa sat on a chair, and Antonio stared into her eyes; it was one of the "magnetic steps" to make contact with a subject.⁴¹ It is the same procedure that Flaubert humorously describes in his novel *Bouvard e Pécuchet*, where the main characters improvise as magnetisers.⁴² After a few minutes Elisa seemed to fall asleep; that was the state of "lucid somnambulism".⁴³

Evidence of such a state was "soft pallor on the cheeks, [...] oscillating eyelids that barely allowed the cloudy and dilated eye to be seen".⁴⁴ According to the treatises on animal magnetism, this was an exceptional state that could only be obtained "in very few cases and after a greater or lesser but always considerable number of experiences",⁴⁵ and which was characterised by "vision without the aid of the eyes".⁴⁶

At that point, Elisa provided evidence of her clairvoyance. People in the theatre would whisper a word communicating a feeling, a smell, a thought, or a place to

³⁹ Carlo Lorenzini remembers that magnetic experiments occurred in Piazza Vecchia in Florence; see Carlo Lorenzini, *Elisa Zanardelli al teatro del Cocomero*, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/39, 14 March 1854, pp. [2]f.

⁴⁰ Guarnieri, *Teatro e laboratorio*, p. 562.

⁴¹ "passi magnetici". Lisimaco Verati, *Trattato pratico di magnetismo animale*, Foligno 1869, pp. 1–5.

⁴² Gustave Flaubert, *Bouvard e Pécuchet*, transl. by Camillo Sbarbaro, Torino 1964, pp. 157–163.

⁴³ "sonnambulismo lucido". Letter by Dr. Esterle to a friend, Trento, 5 October 1852, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/43, 28 March 1854, p. [2].

⁴⁴ "con quel morbido pallore sulle guancie, con quelle palpebre oscillanti le quali lasciano appena vedere l'occhio torbido e dilatato". Il Trovatore, Elisa Zanardelli, in *Il corriere del Lario* 7/36, 3 September 1856, pp. 142f, here p. 143.

⁴⁵ "Il sonnambulismo lucido non si ottiene che in pochissimi casi e dopo un numero più o meno grande ma però sempre ragguardevole d'esperienze." Giacomo D. Nani, *Trattato teorico-pratico di magnetismo animale*, Torino 1850, p. 185.

⁴⁶ "visione senza il soccorso degli occhi". [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli al Ridotto, in *L'Indicatore. Foglio di Commercio, d'Interessi Municipali, Industriali ecc. ecc.* 2/14, 21 July 1858, p. 58.

Antonio.⁴⁷ Antonio, who walked up and down from the stage to the stalls, would ask Elisa short questions in a loud voice, standing either in front of her or with his back to her; sometimes he would communicate with his daughter with a bell. Elisa would answer in a low voice with “truncated words”⁴⁸ and a “half-closed lip”.⁴⁹

One of the most astonishing experiments was when a person in the audience thought that Elisa should bring an object – a cup, a candlestick, a pen, a playing card – to a certain place in the audience. The person would communicate the thought to the magnetiser by whispering in his ear. Antonio would ask Elisa: “What is he thinking about?” Elisa would perform this very thought.⁵⁰ In a Venetian theatre, Elisa, having descended into the stalls, could go no further than halfway. She gathered up her skirt as if to ford a river but could not, and repeated, “You cannot pass”. Then it became clear why: a woman in the audience had thought (and whispered to Antonio) that the road where Elisa was passing was cut by a ravine.⁵¹

Elisa guessed not only “the thoughts of others, and the innermost things”⁵² but also objects chosen by a person in the audience and secretly passed to the magnetiser. “What’s in my hand?”, someone from the audience asked the blindfolded girl. “A coin,” answered Elisa. “What coin?” “English, a guinea.” According to the chronicles, the proof that this was not deception was a “certain something innocent, childish, primitive” that Elisa showed in her answers. For example, after saying “a guinea”, Elisa asked herself: “What is a guinea?” How could one doubt in front of such childlike innocence?⁵³

Newspaper reports state that during these experiments, “a profound silence” reigned inside the theatre, “interrupted only by some applause or a general murmur of amazement”.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ [Anon.], Altri documenti relativi al magnetizzatore Zanardelli e sua figlia, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/43, 28 March 1854, pp. 2f. (printed also in *Polimazia di Famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico e teatrale* 1/31, 13 April 1854, p. 124); [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli a Fiume, in *Leco di Fiume* 1/57, 17 November 1857, p. 238.

⁴⁸ “le parole tronche”. Il Trovatore, Elisa Zanardelli, in *Il corriere del Lario* 7/36, 3 September 1856, pp. 142f.

⁴⁹ “labbro semichiuso”. Lo zio Tom, Elisa Zanardelli e il Magnetismo animale, in *Polimazia di Famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario, artistico e teatrale* 1/19, 22 March 1854, p. 75.

⁵⁰ [Anon.], Teatri di musica ed altri spettacoli. Firenze. Teatro del Cocomero, in *Polimazia di Famiglia. Giornale scientifico, letterario artistico e teatrale* 1/13, 11 March 1854, p. 52.

⁵¹ [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli al Ridotto, in *L'Indicatore. Foglio di Commercio, d'Interessi Municipali, Industriali ecc. ecc.* 2/14, 21 July 1858, p. 58.

⁵² “i pensieri altrui, e le cose le più recondite.” [Anon.], Scaramuccia, I giuochi di prestigio, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/37, 7 March 1854, p. [2].

⁵³ “Che cosa ho in mano ? disse uno spettatore. – Una moneta. – Che moneta ? – Inglese. Una ghinea. E poi la stessa magnetizzata domanda a sé stessa: “Che cos’è ghinea ?” con quel fare innocente, infantile che si nota in tutte le sue risposte Come ci possono aver ancora persone che credano ad artificio, ad inganno! [...] Nelle pose, nel gesto, nel parlare, ha certo che d’innocente, d’infantile, di primitivo”. [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli a Fiume, in *Leco di Fiume* 1/57, 17 November 1857, p. 238.

⁵⁴ “un sì profondo silenzio regna nel Teatro [...], interrotto solo da qualche applauso o da un mororio generale di stupefazione.” Ibid.

Other moments that caught the audience's attention were the "musical ecstasy" experiments. Music was playing in these moments. Depending on the sounds, Elisa would strike a pose suggesting "a sense of sadness, sorrow, anger, delight", only to return to a motionless, almost "marble-like" state when the sound stopped, which "made the spectators burst out in a cry of surprise."⁵⁵

Academies and medical examinations

Antonio and his daughter were also called to private houses and academies where they performed in front of doctors, journalists, city authorities, teachers, cathedral canons, government officials and military officers.

On these occasions, the medical panels subjected them to examinations and often published their judgements and reports.⁵⁶ Private experiments were a good way for them to test the validity of scientific hypotheses about the properties of the magnetic fluid.

Zanardelli did not want to compete with doctors nor challenge the Catholic Church, and whenever doubts arose, he made sure to dispel them before going on stage, publishing declarations about his absolute distance both from medical therapy and the occult. Publicising a "performance of physical jokes, mechanical recreations, and arcane transmission of thought"⁵⁷ given in 1853 at the Teatro Ducale in Modena, a city belonging to the Papal States, Zanardelli published a declaration by three university medical professors, attesting that his experiments "did not depart from the natural order" and had nothing to do with the supernatural and "nefarious and damnable magic."⁵⁸ In addition to this, Zanardelli also distributed a printed sheet in which he assured that his magnetic tests were among those permitted by the Congregation of the Holy Office (and here he expressly quoted two Church interventions, one in 1840 and one in 1850).⁵⁹

⁵⁵ "Avevano termine gli esperimenti colla estasi musicale. [...] in senso di mestizia, di dolore, d'ira, di diletto. [...] la successiva immobilità al cessar del suono è così secca, così marmorea, da far prorompere gli spettatori in un grido di sorpresa." [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli al Ridotto, in *L'Indicatore. Foglio di Commercio, d'Interessi Municipali, Industriali ecc. ecc.* 2/14, 21 July 1858, p. 58.

⁵⁶ The experiment that took place in Florence in 1854 in front of Celestino Bianchi and Carlo Lorenzini (who, under the pen name Carlo Collodi, would later become renowned as the author of *Pinocchio*), editors for *Lo Scaramuccia*, is carefully described, and the whole report was published in the periodical. [Anon.], Un'esperienza di magnetismo sulla giovane Elisa Zanardelli, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/43, 28 March 1854, pp. 1f.

⁵⁷ "trattenimento di giuochi fisici, ricreazioni meccaniche, e di arcana trasmissione del pensiero." Alessandro Gandini, *Cronistoria dei teatri di Modena dal 1539 al 1871*, Modena 1873, Vol. 2, p. 422.

⁵⁸ "non togliendosi dall'ordine naturale [...], a fronte di coloro che tenebrosamente intendono a travolgere le materie stesse in soprannaturale magia nefanda e dannata." *Ibid.*, pp. 422f.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

Competitions with colleagues

Attacks on Zanardelli never came from the Church, as he always sought its approval, but rather from anti-clerical circles and from artists and colleagues. Accused of being a charlatan, Zanardelli was occasionally challenged to prove his ‘real’ skill in magnetism in the presence of some witnesses and a panel of a few doctors. The doctors had to regulate and manage the competition and assess the experiments of somnambulism and clairvoyance by taking the measurement of the heartbeat, the movement of the eyes and the facial expression of the young sleepwalkers.

One contest came from Francesco Guidi, who called himself a “professor of Magnetism”⁶⁰ and who claimed that his own magnetism was much more serious than Zanardelli’s activity.⁶¹ Guidi arranged a meeting with Zanardelli, and the report stated that the magnetic experiments conducted by Guidi and Zanardelli were “good little games the former, good little games the latter”,⁶² that they both made “a complete fiasco”, and their “nonsense” created “a profound feeling of indignation”.⁶³

Some years later, Zanardelli was involved in a second competition at the end of his career. This time he was challenged by the illusionist Francesco Castagnola, the same Castagnola who had performed in Feltre some years before. While Francesco Castagnola wanted to prove the nonexistence of animal magnetism and completed the experiments with success, Zanardelli failed and published a statement in which he announced that he would be “giving a magnetic session in front of a group of *competent* and *prudent* people”⁶⁴ who would make the result public. After that event, Antonio Zanardelli disappeared from the press.

⁶⁰ In the frontispiece of *Il magnetismo animale considerato secondo le leggi della natura e principalmente diretto alla cura delle malattie con note ed un'Appendice sull'Ipnotismo* (Milano 1860), Francesco Guidi defines himself as a “Professor of Magnetism. Member of the Paris Magnetic Jury and other Mesmeric societies” (“Professore di Magnetologia, Membro del Giurì Magnetico di Parigi e di altre Mesmeriche società”).

⁶¹ [Anon.], Il magnetismo e la medicina. Riflessioni sopra una sfida di magnetizzatori pel dott. Luigi Berruti, in *Gazzetta medica italiana. Stati sardi* 7/24, 9 June 1856, pp. 189–195. On Guidi’s magnetism see Francesco Guidi, *Il magnetismo animale considerato secondo le leggi della natura*, Milano 1860.

⁶² “giochetti belli e buoni i primi, giochetti buoni e belli i secondi”. [Anon.], Appendice. Il magnetismo e la medicina. Riflessioni sopra una sfida di magnetizzatori pel dott. Luigi Berruti, in *Gazzetta medica italiana. Stati sardi* 7/25, 16 June 1856, p. 203.

⁶³ “un completo fiasco [...] a belle e buone cobellerie, le quali [...] fan sorgere [...] un profondo sentimento di indegnazione.” Ibid., p. 207.

⁶⁴ “di dare una seduta magnetica dinanzi un nucleo di persone *competenti ed oculate*”. T. Cingolari, I fluidisti alla prova, in *Il libero pensiero. Giornale dei razionalisti* 3.2/14, 1 October 1868, p. 221.

The audience

Theatre-goers loved variety. Men and women, artisan workers and intellectuals, doctors and notables attended Zanardelli's performances.

Chronicles seldom mention the price of tickets, but it was apparently not high enough to prevent a popular audience from attending. Chronicles also emphasise the participation of a "learned and elected" audience.⁶⁵ Zanardelli's theatrical performances testify to the presence of a "social body conceived perhaps as stratified, but also as homogeneous, and above all without tension", as Clara Gallini said about spectacles of hypnotism at the turn of the century.⁶⁶

News in periodicals show that the audience was mainly driven by curiosity. Those who tried to catch Zanardelli's deception sometimes whistled.⁶⁷ People were generally divided between those who believed in the magnetic experiments, those who suspended their judgement and those who thought they were only quack tricks.

Doctors who believed in the validity of magnetism sought seats in the front row to verify the seriousness and the scientific truth of the experiments with their own eyes. After the show, they often invited Zanardelli to perform in private salons or academies.

But people mostly went to see Elisa. All descriptions about the stage focus on her, on her beauty and her innocent air. Women felt admiration. This view was even shared by those who were opposed to magnetism but saw in the sleepwalker the "prima-donna of the magnetic stage".⁶⁸ Probably the public knew Despina's aria in Act I of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* or Bellini's *La sonnambula*, and Elisa could recall for them these female characters.

Chronicles mostly ignored the magnetiser's actions and movements. Those who believed in magnetism thought it was not the magnetiser who transmitted the fluid but the woman, who fell into the 'magnetic sleep' and thus revealed it. According to the critics, Zanardelli was neither a healer nor a hypnotist but an honest man, interested in science and recognisant of the competence of doctors. Only those who disagreed with the magnetic theory commented on his behaviour, such as his continuous loud communication with the audience and with the woman for example, managing each step of the experiment and suggesting answers to the woman. These were actions that they perceived to be manipulation and deception.

⁶⁵ "dotto ed eletto". L. Alemanni, *Teatri e spettacoli*. Torino, in *La Fama del 1856. Rassegna di scienze, lettere, arti industria e teatri* 15/35, 1 May 1856, p. 138.

⁶⁶ Gallini, *La sonnambula meravigliosa*, p. 227.

⁶⁷ Luigi Stefanoni, *Il magnetismo*, in *Il Libero pensiero. Giornale dei razionalisti* 1/32, 9 August 1866, pp. 506–508.

⁶⁸ Kaplan, "The Mesmeric Mania", p. 701.

A symbol of femininity

Magnetism of the 1850s and 1860s has some elements in common with the hypnotism⁶⁹ of the following decades: the theatrical performance, the scientific approach, a belief in phrenology (a pseudo-scientific doctrine that claims the correlation between brain areas and psychic functions) and, finally, the connection between nature, irrationality and femininity.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the sleepwalker of the middle of the century presents specific characteristics and is somehow different from the hysterical woman of the turn of the century. Both women represent male expectations of female behaviour: in a subconscious state, they are in some ways submitted to a man, and follow his instructions, but at the same time they perform particular aptitudes and are a model of a special force to other women.

Whereas the hysterical woman is seen as a sick person, the sleepwalker is not. It is only from the 1860s onwards that the *somnambula* begins to be seen as ill, and the hysterical image she embodies goes “under the doctor’s jurisdiction”.⁷¹ Moreover, the hysterical woman is no longer a “singular subject” that creates an “unrepeatable event”, as the *somnambula* does in the theatre events, but a “serial, repeatable subject, indeed constituted as a sleepwalker precisely to ensure such repeatability.”⁷² In other words, she is a patient that a doctor induces to reproduce the phases and variants of a hysterical crisis according to a pre-established scientific model.

A poem dedicated to Elisa Zanardelli – written by a man – praises the typically romantic feminine characteristics: “burning ardour”, “joy”, “fury”, weeping “for other’s grief”, “mortal languor”, “kneeling prayer”, “tender sigh”, “virginal” and “candid desire”, “pity” and “love”.⁷³ Elisa is a beautiful, innocent and obedient young lady, showing a suffering expression in her face and a strictly controlled sexuality.

In another poem dedicated to Elisa, Arnaldo Fusinato emphasises her obedience to his requests: “And as a devoted maid / With easy obedience / Every of my

⁶⁹ James Braid, *Neurypnology. Or the Rationale of Nervous Sleep Considered in Relation with Animal Magnetism*, London 1843.

⁷⁰ As regards femininity and irrationality, see for example Valeria P. Babini/Fernarda Minuz/Annamaria Tagliavini, *La donna nelle scienze dell'uomo*, Milano 1986.

⁷¹ “sotto la giurisdizione del medico”. Gallini, *La sonnambula meravigliosa*, p. 314.

⁷² “Egli non è più un soggetto singolare, portatore di un sapere rivelatorio e di un evento irripetibile. È oramai un soggetto seriale, ripetibile, anzi costituito come sonnambulo proprio per assicurare una tale ripetibilità.” Ruggero Eugeni, *La relazione d'incanto. Studi su cinema e ipnosi*, Milano 2002, pp. 112f. See also Donatella Orecchia, Appunti sull'immaginario dei nervi, in *Ara-beschi. Rivista internazionale di studi su letteratura e visualità* 1, January–June 2013, pp. 110–123, here p. 113.

⁷³ “più cocente ardor”, “gioja”, “furor”, “piange [...] Pel duolo altrui”, “languor mortal”, “Le mie ginocchia piego [...] e prego”, “tenero sospir”, “verginal” e “candido desir”, “pietà”, “amore”. Faustino Arici, Elisa Zanardelli nell'estasi musicale, in *Ricordo d'amicizia. Strenna per l'anno 1859*, Milano 1858, pp. 23–25.

new ideas / I saw you fulfil”⁷⁴ Fusinato had asked her to open a book using her thought; at first, Elisa resisted. He then promised her a flower and a poem in her honour, and she overcame “her reluctance”⁷⁵

There’s probably an ambiguity coming from the symbol of femininity that Elisa represents. She invites the female audience to conform to the model she represents on stage. On the one hand, this means that female members of the audience could feel admiration and empowerment, seeing her with strong powers on the stage; for example, the chronicle from Buccari underlines that women applauded Elisa and gathered around her in an ideal way, “forming a crown”⁷⁶ On the other hand, Elisa also represents an ideal of obedience and could encourage women to maintain their subservient position, according to the socio-cultural ideals of the time.

For her public she embodied certain artistic ideals as well: descriptions of Elisa refer to the image of a virginal, ethereal, submissive, angelic woman. From time to time the audience saw in her a Joan of Arc or the *Assumption* painted by the Italian artist Tiziano Vecellio.⁷⁷ We have no images of her on the stage, but those of Luisa, Guidi’s muse, “in the ecstasy of contemplation” are reminiscent of sacred images, like Bartolomé Esteban Murillo’s Madonna or a saint in ecstasy: arms on her chest, her gaze upwards, her head reclined.⁷⁸ Like Luisa, Elisa Zanardelli also resembles this symbolic picture linked to the cult of the Madonna, who is both a virgin and a mother, which meant that, in a young woman, virginity coexists with a maternal role.⁷⁹

Magnetism in surgery

One last interesting aspect concerns the use of magnetism as an anaesthetic in surgery.⁸⁰ The main representative of magnetism in Victorian England was Dr John Elliotson, who, after treating patients in the late 1830s at the North London Hospital with magnetism, was forced to leave academic medicine due to opposition from colleagues and the hospital management. This marked a clash between the practice of magnetism and the medical corporation.

⁷⁴ “E qual devota ancella / Con facile obbedir / Ogni mia idea novella / Io ti vedefa compir.” Arnaldo Fusinato, Ad Elisa Zanardelli, in *Lape. Giornale di ricreazione e d’istruzione per popolo* 41, 14 October 1853, p. 162f., here p. 162, published with a picture in Arnaldo Fusinato, *Poesie complete. Nuova edizione Milanese, riveduta e ritoccata dall’autore, con note, illustrate da O. Monti*, Milano 1880, Vol. 2, pp. 293f.

⁷⁵ “La sua ritrosia fu vinta”. Fusinato, Ad Elisa Zanardelli, p. 163.

⁷⁶ “formandole corona”. P. T., Corrispondenza, in *L’eco di Fiume* 1/66, 10 December 1857, p. 275.

⁷⁷ The *Assumption* is an oil painting on panel by Tiziano Vecellio (1488/90–1576), datable to 1516–1518 and held in the basilica Santa Maria Formosa in Venice.

⁷⁸ Francesco Guidi, *Il magnetismo animale considerato secondo le leggi della natura*, Milano 1863 [1860], p. 372.

⁷⁹ [Anon.], Elisa Zanardelli al Ridotto, in *L’Indicatore. Foglio di Commercio, d’Interessi Municipali, Industriali ecc. ecc.* 2/14, 21 July 1858, p. 58.

⁸⁰ See Rosen, A Strange Chapter; Kaplan, “The Mesmeric Mania”.

Apparently, mesmerists envisioned a surgery without pain for the first time. The practice was tested in Calcutta, India, on the native population by the Scottish doctor James Esdaile, who was working for the East India Company in the late 1840s. The news about this practice spread throughout Europe. Doctor Esdaile returned to Scotland in 1851; meanwhile, English hospitals banned mesmerists and began experimenting with the use of chloroform as an anaesthetic.⁸¹ The same happened in other European countries at different times from the early 1850s. In Italy, where official medicine felt no competition from mesmerists, hospitals continued to experiment with magnetism as an anaesthetic even after the middle of the century.⁸²

As Zanardelli's case shows, magnetism in Italy did not compete with medicine but rather sought its scientific endorsement. Instead of intimidating doctors, Zanardelli's performances and experiments offered them the opportunity to test the validity of scientific hypotheses on the properties of the magnetic fluid and to demonstrate the validity of the phrenological theory, namely the connection between regions of the skull and psychic functions.⁸³

Italian doctors were divided on the subject of magnetism. Zanardelli had the support of a medical network that believed that the brain was "a conglomeration of distinct organs" on which "a magnetic agent" acted.⁸⁴

In Italy there were magnetisers who, in their magnetic cabinet and with the help of sleepwalkers, promised to heal "all kinds of illnesses".⁸⁵ According to the

⁸¹ Mesmerists' studies propelled the use of ether and chloroform. See Rosen, *A Strange Chapter*. According to Alison Winter, doctors resorted to chloroform to reassert their professional prerogatives threatened by magnetism in the surgical field, see Winter, *Mesmerized*, pp. 183–186.

⁸² Giuseppe Sacchi, *Intorno alle scienze occulte ed ai così detti tavoli parlanti*, in *Annali universali di statistica economia pubblica, legislazione, storia, viaggi e commercio* 3/10/29, 1856, pp. 133–156, especially pp. 150–156.

⁸³ Experiments in academies demonstrated the phrenological theory. Examples are: a doctor approaches the girl and touches her "cephalic seat of the destructive instinct" ("sede cefalica dell'istinto *Distruttività*") with his finger; "instantly" ("all'istante"), Elisa "angrily" ("rabbiosamente") tears the gold necklace she wears around her neck. (*Commentari dell'Ateneo di Brescia per gli anni 1870, 1871, 1872, 1873*, Brescia 1874, pp. 236–239, here p. 238). Another doctor places a finger below her ear, says loudly that it is "the organ of conservativeness" ("l'organo della conservatività"), and Elisa says, "No, I don't want to die" ("no, non voglio morire"); yet another doctor places his hands on the top of her head and Elisa exclaims, "Saturday and Sunday I went to church for attending Mass" ("sabato e domenica essere andata alla chiesa poi alla Messa") and kneels down in the act of praying, and at this point the doctor reveals "that he had in mind to make the organ of Theosophy act" ("d'aver avuto in animo di far agire l'organo della Teosofia"). G. Scandellari, *Documenti riguardanti Antonio Zanardelli e sua figlia*, in *Lo Scaramuccia. Giornale-omnibus* 1/44, 31 March 1854, pp. [2]f., here p. [2].

⁸⁴ "una congerie di organi distinti", "un agente magnetico". A critic on phrenology and phrenomagnetism in Gaetano Strambio, *Su'l magnetismo animale e su'l freno-magnetismo. Risposta del dottor Gaetano Strambio al dottor Achille Filippini-Fantoni, direttore dell'ospedale di Chiari*, in *Gazzetta medica italiana. Lombardia* 3/3/17, 26 April 1852, pp. 141–148, here p. 145.

⁸⁵ "ogni genere di malattia". See for example Anna d'Amico's advertising in *L'amico del popolo* 3/75, 7 April 1869, p. [4]. In the Magnetic Cabinet in Bologna Anna d'Amico offers her consultation to those who "wish to heal or improve their health" ("a chi desidera guarire o migliorare la salute"). Her activity goes on until the end of the Eighties (see the advertising in the pamphlet *L'Ehi! Ch'hal scusa... all'esposizione* 17, 29 September 1888, p. [2]).

law, however, they could be accused of undue exercise of medicine. But in the cases in which the court intervened, magnetisers denied practising medicine and claimed that doctors had prescribed drugs and therapies on the basis of the so called “sleepwalker’s consultation”.⁸⁶ Judges did not say whether magnetism was scientific or not and held that the magnetiser was not punishable for unlawful exercise of medicine.

Conclusion

The theatrical activity of Antonio and Elisa Zanardelli was a way to perform topics that were discussed in their contemporary society; at the same time, their stage appearances contributed to the variety of genres that provincial theatres hosted in the nineteenth century. Zanardelli preferred the theatre, where he could demonstrate his skills as an actor and entertainer thanks to a mix of acting, stage design, music and science. Here, he moved on and off the stage, spoke loudly, involved the audience and created suspense. Critics accused him of preferring the theatre because he loved to be the “master of the field” at all times.⁸⁷

Zanardelli did not deal with theatrical impresarios but instead used his networks of medical and scientific societies, who discussed magnetism in newspapers in light of European scientific literature. As he became a professor of magnetism and a scientist, contact with doctors and their approval became essential. Moving from town to town, he first got in touch with doctors, notables and scholars.

The Zanardellis’ performances in Italian provincial theatres had a wide audience that was as interested in magnetic experiments as they were in all kinds of representations. In any case, as magnetism was particularly discussed at that time in several social venues, a theatrical stage offered the opportunity to present the magnetic theory in front of a local provincial community as well as to submit it to tests by the medical corporation. Zanardelli’s activity and success therefore demonstrates the importance of provincial theatres as socio-cultural environments and vital spaces for the exchange of information, socio-political public debate and the formation of public opinion.

⁸⁶ “consulto della sonnambula”. Example of a verdict in Giudicati sardi. Tribunale Provinciale di Torino. (Sessione del 17 marzo 1859), in *Leco dei tribunali. Sezione prima. Giornale di Giurisprudenza penale* 9/907, 21 April 1859, pp. 679f.

⁸⁷ “padrone del campo”. L. Stefanoni, Il magnetismo (Continuazione), in *Il libero pensiero. Giornale dei razionalisti* 1/32, 9 August 1866, pp. 506–508, here p. 506.

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