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***The Teatro Moderno Applaudito (1796–1801): Italian translations of French plays in Venice***  
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While it never became a French sister republic, Venice did, under pressure from the Napoleon army, have a democratic government for five months. This regime was brought to an end by the ‘betrayal’ of the French liberators and the subsequent handover of the city to Austria in October 1797. While all political and cultural regeneration projects coming out of the Jacobin municipality were abruptly suspended by the Treaty of Campo Formio and the arrival of the imperial Austrian army in the city in January 1798, the Most Serene Republic of Venice (or *la Serenissima*), as it was called until 1797, nevertheless remained the largest producer of Francophile publications in Italy until at least 1806.

Venetian publishers played quite a remarkable role in the publication of Italian translations of French plays. A bibliographic survey shows that 169 of the 303 translations published in Italy between 1790 and 1820 were published in Venice, representing a total of 95 French playwrights and all genres except tragedies and opera librettos.<sup>1</sup> For at least two decades, the floating city maintained a strong tradition of translating French plays, which was the literature of choice for Italian intellectuals, including the playwright Francesco Albergati Capacelli<sup>2</sup> and the journalist Elisabetta Caminer Turra, to name but two.

The young ‘Bettina’ Caminer Turra was a notable cultural intermediary, known not only for her publications of large collections of translations in the 1770s but also for her fierce defence of the *drame bourgeois* against the criticisms of the conservative Venetian publisher Carlo Gozzi.<sup>3</sup> Just a month after the death, Antonio Fortunato Stella, took over the gauntlet from her and launched the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* in July 1796. This publication went on to enjoy great success, becoming the largest collection of French plays translated for the Italian audience, with 101 translations in all, until the 1830s.

Stella,<sup>4</sup> a young, dynamic entrepreneur with Jacobin convictions, was the originator of both the initial project and the first 11 volumes of the collection. He gave it up in June 1797 to join the interim democratic government before going into exile when the Austrians entered Venice. These historic events did not put an end to the collection, however. It was taken over by another editor-in-chief following the fall of the oligarchical republic in January 1798. We do not know the identity of this individual even though the majority of the collection’s volumes (41 out of the total 60) appeared under his or her direction between January 1798 and May 1801.

We begin this article with a general statistical overview before turning our attention to the 18

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<sup>1</sup> See Giovanni Saverio Santangelo-Claudio Vinti, *Le traduzioni italiane del teatro comico francese nei secoli 17 e 18* (Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1981). The majority of these translations come from three theatrical collections: the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* (1796-1801), which is the subject of this article; the *Anno teatrale* (1804-1806); and *I Capricci teatrali del secolo XIX* (1805-1806). They contain 101, 51 and 17 translated French plays respectively.

<sup>2</sup> See Francesco Albergati Capacelli, *Opere* (Venezia, Palese, 1783-1785). In this collection of his plays, the playwright also published translations of works Pont-de-Vesle, Baculard d’Arnaud, Ferrières, Monvel, Lantier and Coqueley de Chaussepierre.

<sup>3</sup> See his collections of translations: the *Composizioni teatrali moderne* (Venezia, Colombani, 1772), republished in 1774 and the *Nuova Raccolta di composizioni teatrali* (with its translations of plays by Collé, Pierre Rousseau, Mercier, Favart, Baculard d’Arnaud, Le Blanc, Fenouillot de Falbaire, Barthe and Saurin).

<sup>4</sup> On the publisher Antonio Fortunato Stella, see Mario Infelise, *L’editoria veneziana nel ‘700* (Milano, Franco Angeli, 2000), p.378-84. On the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* and the role that Stella played in the collection, see Alessandra Abiuso, ‘Antonio Fortunato Stella e il *Teatro Moderno applaudito*’, *Quaderni Veneti* 11 (1990), p.169-88.

volumes of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* that correspond to the two initial collection periods, with a particular focus on the volumes that appeared during Venice's short-lived democratic government. This analysis will allow us to determine the tastes of a Jacobin publisher operating within an old oligarchical Venetian system. It will also enable us to measure any changes in editorial strategy within a political and cultural context that, because it was fresh and revolutionary, favoured new critical reception dynamics. Finally, we take a brief look at the last part of the collection, corresponding to its 'Austrian' phase, which, as we will see, was essentially characterised by a 'return to order' in contrast to the more liberal period that had preceded it. It should be noted that the size of the corpus prevents us from taking a translation-centred approach. With the exception of a few cases, we have not carried out a linguistic and stylistic comparison of the French and Italian texts. While it is clear that this type of analysis would prove most useful in terms of understanding cultural transfer, it falls outside the scope of this study.

Although 'national' Italian output accounts for the majority of the 60 volumes of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, representing 55% of the titles (135 of the 244 plays published), almost all of the foreign plays selected for the collection are French. The 101 French plays translated into Italian thus correspond to 41% of the total number of plays, a substantial proportion in comparison with the seven German (2.8%) and three Spanish plays (1.2%).

The French plays are spread over all three periods of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, attesting the continued interest of Italian readers. Of the total 101, 14 were published during Stella's management, 14 during the Jacobin period and 73 in the remaining volumes. This corresponds to an average of between 1.3 and 1.7 French plays out of 4 per volume during the first and third phases and two out of four during the democratic interregnum. There is no doubt that the Italian public's love of all things French, which had been encouraged during the second half of the eighteenth century, was given a substantial boost by the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*.

The French plays selected for the collection were relatively contemporary. Only seven out of the 101 dated from the seventeenth century, 21 from the first half of the eighteenth century, 53 from the period 1750 to 1789 and 14 – or 16% of the total – from the period 1789 to 1799. This latter period is, unsurprisingly, particularly well represented during the Jacobin period (seven out of the 14 plays).

Finally, our statistical breakdown by genre of the entire French corpus shows the success of short plays, which were small one-act prose comedies that generally incorporated arias (a total of 37, or 36.7% of the corpus). These were systematically classified as 'farces' in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*. This figure reflects the reality of French theatre production in the eighteenth century, where there were at least two maybe three times more short than long comedies' written. In order of representation after the short plays come the drames bourgeois (24 titles, or 24%), the tragedies (21 titles, or 21%) and finally the comedies (19 titles, or 18.3%). It is worth noting that the tragedies and, to a lesser extent, the comedies appeared mainly (18 out of a total 21 and 15 out of 19 respectively) from 1798 onwards in the third part of the collection, which is much more conservative than the first two.

The short plays and drames bourgeois were, from the outset, the main attractions for the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*'s Italian readership. The collection promised its readers 'acclaimed' theatre, meaning plays that had enjoyed success with French audiences. While this selection criterion certainly seems to have been applied to the majority of the plays, there are nevertheless also a number of counterexamples. Among them are Dumaniant's comedy *Isaure et Gernance ou les Réfugiés*, which was staged only twice in Paris at the Palais des Variétés in 1794, *Merival* by Baculard d'Arnaud, which is only documented as having been performed once in Paris and once

in Caen in 1792 and Mercier's *Olinde et Sophronie* and *Natalie*, both performed only once on a French stage.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that, in addition to other possible factors that have sometimes been put forward, such as the circulation of French plays in Venice or the influence of French collections and specialist periodicals,<sup>6</sup> the authors and texts selected for the collection reflect the aesthetic and ideological tastes of the editors and translators. Stella, who was a theatre aficionado and the former husband of an Italian opera singer, highlighted such biases in his introduction to the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*. He also adopted a hostile approach to fantastical theatre, such as the *Commedia dell'Arte* tradition, but remained open to modern influences that were linked to the drame bourgeois, which he classed as 'superior' comedy next to the comedy genre ('average' comedy) and farce genre ('inferior' comedy). Furthermore, Stella insisted that the collection should have a pedagogical goal, or a kind of 'theoretical and practical theatrical poetics' that future Venetian playwrights could draw on.

The repetition of these critical topoi that had characterised the discourse on Italian theatre for decades was nothing new. What was new, however, was the specific focus the editor gave to the French theatre being performed in Venice. A quarter of the plays in the collection (21 out of 101) originated from the repertoires of the troupes performing in Venice during the same period.<sup>7</sup> This link with the reality of theatre halls is particularly visible in the first 11 volumes of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*. The success of the musical adaptation of Houdard de la Mothe's *Ines de Castro* (43 productions) as well as the plaudits most notably received by Marsollier de Vivetières' *Nina ou la Folle par amour*, which was set to music by Paisiello (33), Hoffman's *Secret* (17), Fuzelier's *La foire de Fées* (7) and Monvel's *Clémentine et Dorvigny* (performed four times in a Capacelli adaptation) were key to determining their inclusion in the collection. Conversely, however, French plays that had failed in Venice, such as Audinot-Arnauld's *Musicomanie*, were still also taken into account. The world of Venetian and Italian theatre also found its way into the collection. For example, Ducis' translation of *Hamlet* served to eulogise the actor Francesco Menichelli, whom Stella compared to the famous Molé, and Poullain de Saint-Fox's translation of *Oracle*, which was written by one of the most famous intellectuals of the time, Melchiorre Cesarotti, pays homage to 'Anna Fiorilli Pellandi, the prodigy of theatrical declamation'.<sup>8</sup>

Theoretically speaking, Stella rates the drame bourgeois most highly. This is symbolically represented by the fact that his opening play in the French series of the collection is Beaumarchais' *Eugénie*. However, it is clear the editor prefers the one-act comedies by Pont-de-Veyle, Patrat and Beaunoir, whose works were translated as *Le Somnambule*, *Le Fou raisonnable* and *Le Danger des liaisons* respectively. This brief introductory review of the two tragedies, two sentimental drames bourgeois and nine sentimental, exotic or supernatural short plays paints a picture of French theatre in the 1720s, 1730s and 1770s, and alongside the roll call of actors, it reflects the aesthetic preferences of Stella's favourite scholarly translators, namely Gritti, Bordoni, Cesarotti and Capacelli, who were all well-known among the educated public. While other far less well-known translators also contributed to the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* (such as

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<sup>5</sup> The data on the performances have been drawn from the *César* database.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the *Petite bibliothèque des théâtres*, published between 1783 and 1789 in Paris in 75 volumes, cited in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 6, December 1796, in the commentary to *Musicomanie*, p.45.

<sup>7</sup> For the productions, see Appendix II.

<sup>8</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 4, October 1796, Jean-François Ducis, *Amleto*, p.71 'Francesco Menichelli [...] seppe ricordare il gran Molé' and t. 8, February-March 1797, Germain-François Poullain de Saint-Fox, *L'Oracolo*, p.22: 'Anna Fiorilli Pellandi, il prodigio della declamazione scenica'.

the actor and impresario Pietro Andolfati and the novelist and journalist Antonio Piazza), the emergent figure was the marquis Albergati Capacelli, who was the author of three published translations (in addition to his own plays). This playwright, amateur actor and friend of Voltaire and Goldoni was responsible for the Italian versions of the aforementioned *Ines de Castro* and *Somnambule*. Most significantly, however, he translated Collin d'Harleville's *Optimiste*. It is worth taking a closer look at this play, which was famous for the political debate it sparked in Paris following its public and critical success in 1788.

While it is extremely difficult to find comments on subjects other than those concerning aesthetics and dramaturgy in any of the translators' notes to the plays, *Ottimista* provides us with a happy exception. It should be noted first of all that this play is especially interesting because of its sociopolitical implications (which have been expertly documented by Laurent Loty, which are linked to the 'theological optimism' of the main character, Monsieur de Plinville, a nobleman who is always happy with his lot and constantly referring to Providence, which guarantees that 'everything happens for the best'. For the French audience in 1797, the play cannot be disassociated from Pigault-Lebrun's polemic response in his *Pessimiste ou l'homme mécontent de tout*, which was written and performed in 1789, or more especially from Fabre d'Eglantine's virulent attack in 1791, denouncing it as an 'école anti-sociale, où le fort apprend à tout oser et le foible à tout souffrir'.<sup>9</sup> It is hardly surprising that no reference was made to d'Eglantine's denunciation in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*; Venetian censorship was known for being flexible in all areas except politics. It also comes as no surprise that a large part of the commentary on the Italian translation extols the literary qualities of this theatrical 'masterpiece'. However, it is interesting to note that in publishing Capacelli's highly faithful translation, Stella, in contrast to d'Eglantine, eulogised the optimist de Plinville by 'depoliticising' his 'philosophy'. According to Stella, the reader's admiration for 'la facilité de l'optimiste de se résigner de tout' can be explained by the timeless and universal nature of his optimism. Far from being dependent on the 'circumstances of the times or the vices and faults of particular societies' or even on 'the philosophies and maxims of the day', his optimism reflects a general psychological attitude that 'constitutes the happiness of humankind'. Stella's extolment of this quality of resignation appears contradictory in relation to the hopes that would presumably have been inspired in a future member of the democratic municipality by the imminent arrival of the French army. It was no doubt imposed on him by censorship, but it might also be put down to an extremely prudent attitude or, quite simply, the sign of a confident ideological moderatism. Whichever the case, Stella's caution in his critique of d'Harleville's *Optimiste* seems to have disappeared from the next volume that was published, the first tome of which appeared after the fall of the oligarchical republic.

In the introduction to the twelfth volume of the collection, which pays tribute to the fall of the 'Vandalic barriers that oppose the talents and ideas of men',<sup>10</sup> we can clearly see the desire to make the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* an agent in the regeneration of the theatre, which had

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<sup>9</sup> See Fabre d'Eglantine, *Philinte de Molière ou la Suite du Misanthrope* (1791), *Préface*, p.V, cited in Laurent Loty, 'L'Optimiste de Collin d'Harleville ou l'idéologie de la soumission à l'inégalité: succès, procès et réécritures (1789-1805)' in *Le théâtre sous la Révolution française: politique du répertoire (1789-1799)*, edited by Martial Poirson (Paris, Desjonquères), p.440-45, particularly p.45.

<sup>10</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 12, June 1797, *Discorso dell'editore*, p.3: 'Superate le vandaliche barriere frapposte ai talenti ed ai pensieri degli uomini, la felicità dei popoli formerà nelle contrade rigenerate l'unica meta a cui tenderanno gli studi di ogni puro ed utile scrittore drammatico' (Once past the vandalic barriers that oppose the talents and ideas of men, the happiness of the people will develop in the regenerated lands, which is the only goal every pure-hearted, useful playwright's studies strive to achieve).

become an indispensable cornerstone in the education of the people and the consolidation of the new political order. Although it is difficult to know who was managing the collection during this period, the series of 14 French to Italian translations that were included reveals a desire to create a homogenous and coherent ethical horizon using plays from the French theatre.

There is no need to dwell on Capacelli's translations of Legrand's *L'Aveugle clairvoyant* or La Noue's *La Coquette corrigée* except to note that in the latter work, there is a noticeable divide between the mentality of the translator and the democratic spirit that permeates the play's commentary. Capacelli, who was almost in his seventies, was a representative of the Italian aristocracy, immersed in the culture of the Enlightenment. The gap between the two narrows solely on the topic of misogyny, which is the only common ground the play seems to offer. Capacelli's misogyny is frivolous and trivial while that of the Jacobin commentator is peremptory and moralising. The commentator writes that 'While the habits and customs of the marquises and counts may have changed in France, those of the Julies have not', and he concludes in a disappointed tone that 'The coquettes, whatever the principles of government, will never be eradicated'.<sup>11</sup>

The primary focus of Pigault-Lebrun's *L'Orphelin* is 'the terrible example that is presented for the weaker sex to see'.<sup>12</sup> This play shows the torment of 'Citizen' Dericourt, who is trying to prevent a marriage between her two children, one being the secret product of her adultery when she was a teenager. The familial and republican ethics depicted in this play are complemented by other virtuous examples taken from plays centred around a mother figure. For example, de Vivetières' *Marianne, ou Amour maternelle* is 'based on the purest of morals',<sup>13</sup> namely that of self-sacrifice, where a mother plays along with becoming her daughter's housemaid in order to keep her from destitution. There is also Favières' musical drame bourgeois *Lisabeth*, which portrays a father's clemency towards his young daughter, an unmarried mother, in the name of a humanity that surmounts old prejudices.<sup>14</sup> These plays by Pigault-Lebrun, de Vivetières and Favières opened up the collection to post-revolutionary French theatre for the first time. Before we move on to consider other translations of this kind, we should point out the homage to Voltaire 'who honours our collection for the first time'<sup>15</sup> with the translation of his tragedy *Mérope* and more particularly the praise given to Louis-Sébastien Mercier, whose tragedy *Les tombeaux de Véronne* begins the 'democratic' series of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*. This play, which was unknown on the French stage but which had been 'shown for years in Italian theatres', is presented as the expression of a 'philosophy' that was valued for its 'moral principles' as well as for its 'portrayal of inherited hatred'. There is some reservation, however, over 'the particular explanation of paternal and filial rights', which were deemed to have swung 'a bit too far in favour of the latter'. The commentator, who was more of a traditionalist than Mercier in terms of the limits that should be imposed on the sons' will, highlights the playwright's value as a new

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<sup>11</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 13, July 1797, De La Noue, *La civetta punita*, p.82: 'Se gli usi e i costumi dei Marchesi e dei Conti sono cangiati in Francia, non sono cangiati già quelli delle Giulie. Le civettuole, qualunque sieno i principi del governo, non ne verranno mai del tutto estirpate'.

<sup>12</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 14, August 1797, Pigault-Le-Brun, *L'orfano*, p.67: 'il terribile esempio che si presenta agli occhi del debole sesso [...] deve interessare, commuovere ed impegnare l'attenzione di qualunque siasi spettatore' (the terrible example that is presented for the weaker sex to see [...] has to be both interesting and moving and attract the attention of each and every spectator).

<sup>13</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 14, August 1797, Marsollier des Vivetières, *Marianna ossia la buona madre*, p.43: 'Fondata sulla morale la più pura'.

<sup>14</sup> See *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 17, Favières, *Elisabetta*.

<sup>15</sup> *Moderno Applaudito*, t. 14, Voltaire, *Merope*, p.71: 'Voltaire la prima volta onora questa collezione'.

intellectual model on account of his dual role as a dramatist and ‘representative at the *Convention Nationale*’.<sup>16</sup> However, it is interesting to note that four months after this first play by Mercier was published in the October 1797 volume, there was a significant shift in the way in which he was judged and in the evaluation criteria that were applied to his work. Mercier, who also wrote *L’Habitant de la Guadeloupe* (the translation of which is a reprint of the text published by Caminer Turra three years earlier), is presented as a ‘mediocre genius’ who tries ‘to spread himself too thinly over too many subjects’. The commentary, which is mostly negative, then focuses on the literary qualities of the translation, which it judges to be inadequate, remarking that they could ‘be far better’.<sup>17</sup>

These two very divergent appraisals can undoubtedly be attributed to the two different commentators and to the fact that one was writing at the beginning of the period of ‘liberty’ and the other at its end, when the dark clouds had already gathered over the democratic dreams of the Venetian municipality with the negotiations and the subsequent signing of the Treaty of Campo Formio. They nonetheless express a palpable tension between the new radical, ideological authorities and the literary and aesthetic conformism of most intellectuals at the time.

The fresh approach seems to have been brought, first and foremost, by new translators, such as Giuseppe Ramirez (*Les Tombeaux de Vérone* by Mercier), Giovanni Battista Armani, (*La vraie bravure* by Picard), Girolamo Savorgnan (*Isaure et Gernance* by Dumaniant) and the enigmatic Pio, who had been completely unknown in the literary world before he translated *Médiocre et Rampant* by Picard and who disappeared again just as quickly. Whether these individuals were committed Jacobins or polygraphs who were prepared to put their quills into action in the service of the new system, they adopted relaxed translation practices, which were, it would seem, marked by conferring absolute primacy on the plays’ political messages to the detriment of maintaining any respect for literary conventions. The comments on their practices in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, either shared their innovative spirit or, more frequently, fully aligned themselves with conventional literary criticism.

The translation of Picard’s *La vraie bravoure* is an example of the former. This patriotic, one-act play, written in 1793 and subsequently performed continuously on the Parisian stage,<sup>18</sup> exalts the courage of Lieutenant Firmin, who was a model of republican military virtues. The Italian version of the play was performed five times in Venice by the Teatro Civico’s company of amateur actors, who were democrats, in July 1797. By all accounts, this production was inspired by the publication of the text in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* in June of the same year. The rather shoddy version produced by Armani was a rough translation, which was full of Gallicisms, where the urgency of transmitting the content took precedence over any concern for linguistic exactitude. Upholding the translator’s position, the commentator also maintained that what mattered was the play’s inherent social ‘opportunity’. It was aimed at a new audience of ‘citizen-

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<sup>16</sup> Cfr. *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 12, June 1797, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Tombe di Verona*, p.72: ‘Il cittadino Mercier si rende ancor più benemerito con le sue opere filosofiche e politiche e coll’esercizio di funzionario pubblico come deputato alla Convenzion [sic] nazionale’. (Citizen Mercier was more renowned for his philosophical and political works as well as his public office as a representative at the *Convention Nationale*).

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 16, October 1797, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L’Abitante della Guadaluppa*, p.81: ‘Ebbe la sorte comune a tutti quei geni mediocri che applicar si vogliono a troppi oggetti’ (He had the same fate as any mediocre genius who tries to spread himself too thinly over too many subjects) and p.84: ‘Le sue traduzioni potrebbero essere assai migliori, singolarmente nel genere comico, e tra queste *L’abitante della Guadaluppa*’ (His translations could be far better, particularly where the comic genre is concerned, including that of *L’Habitant de la Guadeloupe*).

<sup>18</sup> A total of 252 productions according to *César*.

soldiers', which would form as soon as 'the interim municipalities and the new governments call their citizens to arms in the name of freedom'.<sup>19</sup> It was left to Antonio Piazza, the French to Italian translator for the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* and journalist for the *Gazzetta urbana veneta*, to reduce the ideological significance of the play by way of a linguistic analysis. Piazza only managed to state that Armani's text 'does not match up to the merits of the original'. Through a critical topos that was used a great deal in relation to French plays but which was extremely ill-suited to the qualities of Picard's *La Vraie bravoure*, Piazza links this play to its use by the French army rabble, which had surprisingly become a model 'of good taste, sense and decent, instructive, amusing leisure pursuits'<sup>20</sup> during the Venetian *Gazzetta*.

The permanence of the traditional aesthetic and literary filter is also visible in the commentary on another of Picard's plays, *Médiocre et Rampant*. However, reading between the lines of this unremarkable critique, we can see the emergence of new elements, which reveal some kind of shift in critical information due to the capacity of the original text to destabilise certain beliefs. It is clear that the satirical vigour of this 1797 play, which was targeted at the parvenus, or the 'nouveaux venus en politique' typical of French Directory members,<sup>21</sup> completely captivated the commentator, who presents the comedy as 'one of a number of plays that merit a more careful examination than the rest'. It was more difficult for him to generate interest in a theatrical text. He wrote 'I do not know what could be so dazzling as to remove all means of forming a sound judgement of it from a first reading or performance'. This 'blindness' was, however, quickly absorbed by a more conventional review that limited itself to challenging the author's choice of title: 'If [the author] wants to propose the correction of these vile insects that unfortunately infest the governments and cabinets, why does he take so false a title that, just hearing it, makes virtue and morals tremble?'.<sup>22</sup>

This ambivalence is more marked still in Girolamo Savorgnan's translation of Dumaniant's *Gernance et Isaure ou les Réfugiés* (1794), another play that is full of patriotic tirades in the

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<sup>19</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 12, June 1797, Louis-Benoît Picard, *La vera bravura*, p.35: 'Mentre le nuove provvisorie Municipalità ed i nuovi Governi che in Italia si stabiliscono eccitano i rispettivi loro cittadini ad armarsi in difesa del miglior dono del Cielo, della Libertà, opportunissima ci sembrò questa farsa' (While the interim municipalities and the new governments call their citizens to arms in the name of freedom, the greatest gift from God, this farce seems most opportune) and p.36: 'Cittadini soldati, che stringete l'armi in difesa della libertà, se aspirate alla vera gloria, se volete dar prova di vero coraggio, se amate veramente la patria, imitate Firmino' (Citizen soldiers, you who clutch your weapons ready to defend freedom, if you aspire to true glory, if you want to show real courage, if you truly love your country, do like Firmino does).

<sup>20</sup> *Gazzetta urbana veneta*, n. 58, 22 July 1797, cited in Cesare De Michelis, 'Teatro e spettacolo durante la Municipalità provvisoria di Venezia, maggio-novembre 1797' in *Venezia e lo spazio scenico* edited by Manlio Brusatin e Aldo De Poli (Venezia, Edizioni 'La Biennale di Venezia', 1979), p.55-68, particularly p.63: 'La traduzione del cittadino Giovan Battista Armani non corrisponde al merito dell'originale. [...] ma ad onta di tutto ciò conosco in pratica una verità, di cui sempre ho temuto, che ci sia una gran difficoltà a far gustare a questo popolo le belle cose che ci vengono dalla Francia per il teatro, e son modelli di gusto, di sensatezza, di trattenimento decente, istruttivo e piacevole' (Citizen Giovan Battista Armani's translation does not match up to the merits of the original [...]) However, regardless of all that, I know the practical reality, which I have always feared, (namely) that it is very difficult to make these people appreciate the beautiful things that come to us from France, in other words the models of good taste, sense and decent, instructive, amusing leisure pursuits).

<sup>21</sup> On the play, see Philippe Bourdin, *Fustiger le parvenus: autour du Médiocre et Rampant de Louis-Benoît Picard*, dans *Le théâtre sous la Révolution française: politique du répertoire (1789-1799)*, cit., p. 227-242, en partic. p. 233.

<sup>22</sup> *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*, t. 18, December 1797, Louis-Benoît Picard, *Mediocrità e bassezza*, p.86: 'Questa commedia [...] è una di quelle opere che meritano forse più di molte altre un attento esame, mentre porta seco un certo non so che di abbagliante, che toglie il modo di formarne un sano giudizio ad una sola lettura, o rappresentazione', and p.88: 'Se si propone la correzione di questi vili insetti, che pur troppo infestano i governi e i gabinetti, perché prende un titolo così falso, e che al solo enunciarlo fa tremare la virtù e la morale'.

historical context of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes (when it was revisited to meet the demands of the republican war). On the one hand, the commentator uses the words of the French playwright to recall the usefulness of a dramaturgical text that both denounces ‘the criminal mistakes of one of our tyrants’ and makes us ‘feel the advantages and benefits of a Revolution that redresses their injustices’. On the other, however, he calls its value into question, pointing out its rhetorical excesses: ‘the poet reveals his intellect in the enunciation of his ideas’. Neither this play by Dumaniant nor Picard’s *Médiocre et Rampant* nor the other translations that appeared in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* during the municipal government were performed on the Venetian stage. The only exception was Picard’s *La vraie bravoure*, which was performed at the Teatro Civico, Venice’s patriotic theatre. This theatre’s members made a point of filling their repertoire with French plays, which accounted for more than a third of their productions (26 out of a total of 77). The *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* would most certainly have provided the texts for the production of Patrat’s *Fou raisonnable* (three performances) and Hoffmann’s *Secret* (nine performances), which were published in the volumes edited by Stella. The actors themselves preferred Voltarian tragedies – such as *La Mort de César* (five performances) and *Mahomet ou le fanatisme* (four performances), which, according to the patriotic *Monitore Veneto*, was perfectly ‘fitting in the current circumstances’ – to the contemporary French theatre that was valued by the new editors of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*.

When the short-lived democratic municipal government came to an end, the collection continued to be published as the Austrians entered Venice in January 1798. The majority of the translations of the French plays appeared in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* (73 out of 101) during this period.

We can see two main trends in this collection of works that were selected by a group of anonymous professional writers. First, we note a desire to transform the collection into an apotheosis of French theatrical tradition since it included classics from the seventeenth century (Racine, Corneille, Molière) and the first half of the eighteenth century (Destouches, Crébillon, Nivelle de La Chaussée) as well as the masters of the Enlightenment (particularly Voltaire but also Diderot and Beaumarchais). Second, the collection also includes a series of republications, most notably those of the translations by Caminer Turra (12) and Capacelli (five). These two important intermediaries for the French theatre in Italy thus became the most featured translators in the collection. It is therefore their tastes and predilections that we see reflected in the genres – namely tragedies, bourgeois tragedies and drames bourgeois – that are offered to the reader. In the case of Caminer Turra, these include four plays by Mercier, two by Fenouillot de Falbaire and one each by Beaumarchais, Dormont de Belloy, Desforges, Saurin, Baculard d’Arnaud and Perreau. In Capacelli’s case, the translations are of Racine, Le Mierre, Andrieux and Mercier.

Undoubtedly forced to use already-published materials because of the difficulties of circulating works during wartime and with censorship reimposed, it seems the volumes of the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* undertook an ideological and literary normalisation of the French plays, which aimed to marginalise to a large extent the plays published after 1789 (six out of 73) within a city that had moreover become ‘Austrian’. There are a number of plays within this restricted group that enjoyed success on the contemporary Venetian stage. These include Jean Nicolas Bouilly’s historical and philanthropic drame bourgeois *L’Abbé de l’Epée* (1799), which was brought to Venice from Milan in 1801 (10 performances) and de Vivetières’ *Les deux petits savoyards* (1789), which was put on stage as *Costanzo e Michioletta* (11 performances), an adaptation by Venetian Antonio Simone Sografi. Less well-received plays also feature in this group, such as d’Harleville’s *Les châteaux en Espagne* (one production), Dejaure’s *L’incertitude maternelle ou le Choix impossible* (1790), Desforges’s *Le sourd ou l’Auberge pleine* (1793) and

finally Picard's third play *Le cousin de tout le monde* (1793), which made him the most published post-revolutionary author in the collection.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight the fact that the translations of the French plays in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* broadened the Italian audience's knowledge of eighteenth-century French theatre. With more than half the plays dating from the period 1750 to 1789, the collection was, above all, a means of disseminating the dramatic works of the more or less 'politically engaged' Enlightenment authors (Voltaire, Diderot, Mercier, Beaumarchais, Saurin, Fenouillot de Falbaire, Perreau, Patrat and Vigée, among others).

As is the case with any collection that has to guarantee the periodicity of its publications and, moreover, satisfy the Gallicised tastes of the largest number of readers possible, the collection favoured quantity over quality. The editors seem to have been open to all kinds of contributions, including Venetian stage productions, contributions from accredited translators as well as from journalists and troupe directors, plays sourced from French periodicals, translations that had already been published, and so on. This all resulted in a collection that appears heterogeneous at first glance with its combination of different types of authors and plays. While this can admittedly be attributed to the three management changes that occurred during the publication's history, it is also tempting to propose a sort of proportionally inverse correlation between quantity (which was essential to the collection as a genre) and (ideological, dramaturgical) coherence.

In this article, we have attempted to shed light on the ideological positions expressed in the choices made in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* collection, such as the moderate and prudent intellect of its first editor, Stella, through his commentary on d'Harleville's *Optimiste*. Plays impregnated with the sans-culotte ideals are rare in the collection, with the only examples being Picard's *La vrai bravoure* and Dumaniant's *Gernance et Isaure ou les Réfugiés*. Rarer still are contemporary French plays, which are concentrated, as one would expect, in the collection's democratic period. However, the commentary on such a play as Picard's *Médiocre et Rampant* demonstrates the author's appeal and the power of the text to shift, if only within the limited space of a brief commentary, an aesthetic that is ultimately traditional.

During its brief democratic period, Venice was characterised by an absence of the most politically engaged plays in its theatre halls, such as Marie-Joseph Chenier's *Charles IX* and Fénelon and Monvel's *Les Victimes cloîtrées*, which were all performed in the democratic theatres of Milan, Bologna and Genoa. This moderate mentality is reflected in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* collection and, moreover, confirmed by the quite extraordinary rash of 'patriotic' Venetian plays that were hastily published in the collection.<sup>23</sup>

Venice, a conservative city par excellence, seems to be far removed from the possibility of even conceiving of one truly revolutionary idea. The first official democratic proclamation declares that 'Revolution in the Republic does not mean the destruction of the Republic or the subversion of religion, justice, property [...] but rather the reform of our government that has become flawed over time'.<sup>24</sup>

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In the construction of the democratic myth of a revolution as a 'return to one's origins', it is

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<sup>23</sup> On the republican theatres in Italy, see Paolo Bosisio, *Tra ribellione e utopia. L'esperienza teatrale nell'Italia delle repubbliche napoleoniche (1796-1805)* (Roma, Bulzoni, 1990).

<sup>24</sup> *Monitore Veneto*, n. 2, 20 May 1797, cited in De Michelis, 'Teatro e spettacolo', p.55: 'La rivoluzione nella Repubblica non significa dunque la distruzione della Repubblica, né la sovversione della religione, della giustizia, della proprietà, dell'onore [...] ma significa anzi la riforma del governo divenuto col tempo difettoso'.

above all local history that is called upon for the stage and the printed page, which inevitably leaves less space for French revolutionary theatre.

## APPENDIX 1

### **French Theatre translations in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito* (Venice, 1796-1801)**

In order: French author's name, Italian translation title, French play title and year of publication, Italian translator's name (if mentioned), volume number, number of productions in Venice during this period.

Between square brackets: anonymous authors who have been identified in the *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*.

Abbreviations: **ECT** (Elisabetta Caminer Turra), **FAC** (Francesco Albergati Capacelli)

Anonymous, *Le Consulte ridicole*, tome 47; *Il Raro esempio*, tome 58.

[F.G. Andrieux], *Il Morto vivo* (*Les étourdis ou le Mort supposé*, 1788), FAC, tome 23, 1.

[N.M. Audinot-J.F. Arnould], *La Musicomania* (*La Musicomanie*, 1779), Placido Bordoni, tome 6, 1.

Baculard d'Arnaud, *Merival* (*Merival*, 1774), ECT, tome 28.

Beaumarchais, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (*Le Barbier de Séville*, 1755), Francesco Balbi, tome 27; *I Due amici*, (*Les Deux amis*, 1770), ECT, tome 24; *Eugenia* (*Eugénie*, 1767), Luigi Pieroni, tome 1, 2.

Beaunoir, *I pericoli di una falsa amicizia* (*Le Danger des liaisons*, 1784), Antonio Piazza, tome 4.

Beaunoir-[Pompigny], *Il Principe spazzacamino* (*Le Ramoneur prince et le prince ramoneur*, 1785), tome 33, 10.

J.N. Bouilly, *L'abate de l'Epée* (*L'Abbé de l'Epée*, 1799), Giuseppe Bernardoni, tome 55, 6.

[E. Boursault], *Le Favole di Esopo* (*Les Fables d'Esopé*, 1670), tome 21.

S.R.N. Chamfort, *La Giovine indiana* (*La jeune indienne*, 1764), AP (=Antonio Piazza?), tome 23; *Il mercante di Smirne*, (*Le Marchand de Smyrne*, 1770), Fabio Gritti, tome 28; *Mustafo e Zanghire* (*Mustapha et Zéangir*, 1778), Vincenzo Jacobacci, tome 47.

J.F. Collin d'Harleville, *I Castelli in aria (Les châteaux en Espagne, 1789)*, Giovanni Piazza, tome 29, 1; *L'Ottimista (L'Optimiste, 1788)*, FAC, tome 11.

Corneille, *Il Cid (Le Cid, 1637)*, Giuseppe Greatti, tome 29, 2; *Orazio (Horace, 1639)*, Placido Bordini; tome 52.

Crebillon (The Elder), *Atreo e Tieste (Atrée et Thyeste, 1707)*, Giuseppe Urbano Pagani Cesa, tome 31; *Radamisto e Zenobia (Rhadamiste et Zénobia, 1711)*, Carlo Innocenzio Frugoni, tome 21.

[J.C.B. Dejaure], *La incertezza materna (L'Incertitude maternelle, 1790)*, Fabio Gritti, tome 37.

De la Noue, *La civetta punita (La coquette corrigée, 1757)*, FAC and Alessandro Pepoli, tome 13.

Desforges, *Il sordo o la locanda piena (Le sourd ou l'Auberge pleine, 1790)*, ECT, tome 25; *Tom Jones a Londra (Tom Jones à Londres, 1782)*, Giovanni Piazza, tome 27.

Destouches, *Il filosofo maritato (Le Philosophe marié, 1727)*, tome 30; *Li tre matrimoni (Le triple mariage, 1716)*, tome 34.

Diderot, *Il Figlio naturale (Le Fils naturel, 1757)*, vo. 40; *Il Padre di famiglia (Le Père de famille, 1758)*, Michele Bocchini, tome 41.

Dormont de Belloy, *Gabriella di Vergy (Gabrielle de Vergy, 1773)*, ECT, tome 35, 1; *Zelmira (Zelmire, 1762)*, Alessandro Zanchi, tome 38.

J.F. Ducis, *Amleto (Hamlet, 1770)*, Francesco Gritti, tome 4.

Dumaniant, *Isaura e Gernanzio (Isaure et Gernance, 1794)*, Girolamo Savorgnan, tome 15; *Guerra aperta (Guerre ouverte, 1786)*, Pietro Andolfati, tome 28, 2; *La notte delle avventure (La nuit aux aventures, 1787)*, tome 26; *I raggiratori (Les intriguants, 1788)*, FAC, tome 20.

C.-B. Fagan de Lugny, *Gli Originali (Les Originaux, 1737)*, A.R.F.A.P.A., tome 41, 62.

E. Favieres, *Elisabetta (Lisbeth, 1797)*, Girolamo Savorgnan, tome 17.

C.G. Fenouillot de Falbaire, *L'amor filiale (L'Honnête criminel, 1768)*, ECT, tome 48; *Il fabbricatore inglese (Le Fabricant de Londres, 1771)*, ECT, tome 30.

[J.-P.-C Florian], *Giannotto e Colino (Jeannot et Colin, 1780)*, tome 57.

[L. Fuzelier- A.R. Lesage- J.P. d'Orneval], *La Fiera delle fate (Le Foire des fées, 1724)*, tome 5, 7.

Genlis (Mme de), *La Curiosa (La Curieuse, 1779)*, ECT, tome 17.

F.B. Hoffman, *L'Originale* (*L'Original*, 1797), Fabio Gritti, tome 17; *Il secreto* (*Le secret*, 1796), Antonio Piazza, tome 9, 46.

A. Houdard de la Motte, *Ines di Castro* (*Inès de Castro*, 1723), FAC, tome 2, 43.

[M.A. Legrand], *Il cieco che vede chiaro* (*L'aveugle clairvoyant*, 1716), Francesco Arrisi [but FAC ?], tome 18, 3; *Lo speciale burlato* (attributed to), (?), tome 39.

A.M. Le Mierre, *Ipermestra* (*Hypermnestre*, 1758), tome 32; *La vedova del Malabar* (*La veuve du Malabar*, 1770), FAC, tome 23.

[C.-H. Longueil] attributed to Sauzin (sic), *L'orfano inglese* (*L'Orphelin anglais*, 1769), tome 37.

B.J. Marsollier des Vivetieres, *I due savoiard* (*Les Deux petits savoyards*, 1789), Giuseppe Brunati, tome 25, 11 (*Costanzo e Michieletta*, adaptation by Sografi); *Marianna ossia la buona madre* (*Marianne ou l'Amour maternel*, 1796), Domenico Bresciani, tome 14; *Nina ossia la pazza per amore* (*Nina ou la Folle pour amour*, 1786), Pietro Andolfati, tome 2, 33.

L.S. Mercier, *L'Abitante della Guadaluppa* (*L'Habitant de la Guadeloupe*, 1782), ECT, tome 16; *Il disertore* (*Le Déserteur*, 1771), ECT, tome 25, 4; *Emilia* (*Zoé*, 1782), FAC (adaptation), tome 31; *Jenneval* (1769), ECT, tome 29; *Natalina* (*Natalie*, 1775), ECT, tome 53; *Olindo e Sofronia* (*Olinde et Sophronie*, 1771), ECT, tome 42, 28; *Le Tombe di Verona* (*Les tombeaux de Vérone*, 1782), Giuseppe Ramirez, tome 12, 6.

A.G. Moissy, *Le False incostanze* (*Les Fausses inconstances*, 1751), Fabio Gritti, tome 48.

Moliere, *Il Misanthropo* (*Le Misanthrope*, 1666), Placido Bordoni, tome 44; *Il siciliano ossia l'amore pittore* (*Le Sicilien ou L'Amour Peintre*, 1667), Girolamo Zanetti, tome 29.

Monvel, *Biagio e Barbaretta* (*Blaise et Babet*, 1783), Giovanni Piazza, tome 59; *Clementina e Dorvignì* (*Clémentine et Desormes*, 1781), FAC (adaptation), tome 3, 4.

P.-C. Nivelles de la Chaussee, *Melanide* (*Mélanide*, 1741), A.R.F.A.P.A., tome 33; *Il pregiudizio alla moda* (*Le préjugé à la mode*, 1735), tome 31.

J. Patrat, *L'Inganno fortunato* (*L'Heureuse erreur*, 1783), tome 26; *L'inglese ossia il pazzo ragionevole* (*Le Fou raisonnable*, 1781), Placido Bordoni, tome 3, 8.

[J.-A. Perreau], *Clarice* (*Clarisse*, 1771), ECT, tome 44.

L.-B. Picard, *MediocrITÀ e bassezza* (*Médiocre et rampant*, 1796), Pio, tome 18; *Il parente di tutti* (*Le cousin de tout le monde*, 1793), Giovanni Piazza, tome 21; *La vera bravura* (*La vraie bravoure*, 1793), Giovanni Battista Armani, tome 12, 5.

Pigault le Brun, *L'Orfano* (*L'Orphelin*, 1794), Domenico Bresciani, tome 14.

J. Pilhes, *Il beneficio occulto* (*Le Bienfait anonyme*), M.P.A., 1783), tome 21.

A. Piron, *Gustavo Wasa* (*Gustave Wasa*, 1733), Francesco Gritti, tome 30.

A.A.H. Poincette, *La serata di moda* (*Le cercle ou la Soirée à la mode*, 1764), Girolamo Luigi Fattorini, tome 60.

P. Poisson, *La scuola dei procuratori* (*Le Procureur arbitre*, 1728), Madama NN, tome 20.

[A. Pont-de-Veyle], *Il sonnambulo* (*Le Somnambule*, 1739), FAC, tome 10.

G.F. Poullain de Saint-Foix, *L'oracolo* (*L'oracle*, 1740), Merchiorre Cesarotti, tome 8; *Gli uomini* (*Les hommes*, 1753), Domenico Bresciani, tome 16; *Le Vedove turche* (*Les Veuves turques*, 1747), Domenico Bresciani, tome 11.

Racine, *La Fedra* (*Phèdre et Hyppolite*, 1677), FAC, tome 27; *Ifigenia* (*Iphigénie*, 1664), Placido Bordini, tome 37.

[J.F. Regnard], *Il Morto risuscitato* (*Le Légataire universel*, 1708), tome 22; *Senza la gatta i topi ballano* (*Le retour imprévu*, 1700), tome 22.

C. Riviere-Dufresny, *Lo Spirito di contraddizione* (*L'Esprit de contradiction*, 1700), Gualzetti, tome 35.

M.-A.-J. Rochon de Chabannes, *Irene et Federico* (*Les Amants généreux*, 1774), A.R.F.A.P.A., tome 40.

B.J. Saurin, *Amore le insegna tutte* (*L'Anglomane ou l'Orpheline léguée*, 1772), Stefano Scatizzi, tome 27; *Beverlei* (1767), ECT, tome 22; *Bianca e Guiscardo* (*Blanche et Giscard*, 1763), tome 28.

J.F. Sedaine de Sarcy, *I Difetti supposti* (*Les Défauts supposés*, 1788), tome 54.

J.-A. Ségur, *Il Partito più savio* (*Le Parti le plus sage*, 1787), Fabio Gritti, tome 32.

L.-J.-B.-E. Vigée, *L'Abboccamento* (*L'Entrevue*, 1788), S.B., tome 46.

Voltaire, *Alzira* (*Alzire*, 1736), Matteo Franzoia, tome 44; *Merope* (*Mérope* 1744), Francesco Gritti, tome 14; *Olimpia* (*Olympe*, 1762), Leonardo Capitanachi, tome 20, 2, *Semiramide* (*Sémiramis*, 1748), Melchiorre Cesarotti, tome 33, 2; *Zaira* (*Zaïre*, 1733), Giovanbattista Richeri, tome 49, 11.

## APPENDIX II

**The French Theatre adaptations produced on stage in Venice (1795-1802) that were published in *Teatro Moderno Applaudito*: author's name, Italian title, genre and number of productions\***

C.-B. Fagan de Lugny, *Che Originali!*, farsa per musica, 62.

F.B. Hoffman, *Il segreto*, farsa giocosa, 46.

A. Houdard de la Motte, *Ines di Castro*, dramma per musica, 43.

B.J. Marsollier des Vivetieres, *Nina ossia la pazza per amore*, opera buffa, 33.

L.S. Mercier, *Olindo e Sofronia*, dramma per musica, 28.

B.J. Marsollier des Vivetieres, *Costanzo e Michieletta*, commedia di genere semplice, adaptation by S.A. Sografi de *Deux petits savoyards*, 11.

Voltaire, *Zaira*, 11 (dramma per musica, 7; tragedia, 4).

Beauvoir-[Pompigny], *Il Principe spazzacamino, Lo spazzacamino*, commedia con musica in un atto, farsa, 10.

J. Patrat, *L'inglese ossia il pazzo ragionevole*, commedia con aria di musiche, 8.

[L. Fuzelier- A.R. Lesage- J.P. d'Orneval], *La Fiera delle fate*, farsa francese, 7.

Monvel, *Clementina e Dorvignì*, dramma di sentimento, 7.

Bouilly, *L'abate de l'Epée*, dramma, 6.

L.S. Mercier, *Le Tombe di Verona*, tragedia, 6.

L.-B. Picard, *La vera bravura*, farsa, 5.

L.S. Mercier, *Il disertore*, dramma, 4.

[M.A. Legrand], *Il cieco che vede chiaro*, farsa, 3.

Dumaniant, *Guerra aperta*, commedia, 2.

Beaumarchais, *Eugenia*, dramma, 2.

Corneille, *Il Cid*, dramma, 2.

Voltaire, *Olimpia*, tragedia, 2.

Voltaire, *Semiramide*, tragedia, 2.

[F.G. Andrieux], *Il Morto vivo*, farsa giocosa per musica, 1.

[N.M. Audinot- J.F. Arnould], *La Musicomania*, farsa, 1.

J.F. Collin d'Harleville, *I Castelli in aria*, commedia, 1.

Dormont de Belloy, *Gabriella di Vergy*, tragicommedia, 1.

\*For details on productions, see Franco Rossi, *Venezia 1795-1802: La cronologia degli spettacoli e il Giornale dei Teatri*, Venice, Fondazione Levi, 2002, s/v.