

## VI. Goldoni's Musical Legacy

Between 1749 and 1761, Venetian theatres produced a total of 69 new comic operas.<sup>181</sup> Of these, 44 used libretti by Carlo Goldoni. After he left Venice, Goldoni's *drammi giocosi* continued to receive performance every year until 1768. Over the entire arc of the 18th century, an estimate of nearly 2000 comic operas were produced in all of Italy, of which 283 productions with our author's texts. Goldoni's texts began to circulate outside of Italy as early as the 1749, launching the *dramma giocoso* throughout the whole of Europe.

Within his own lifetime, Goldoni's publication history provides further testimony of the wide circulation of his work. In the preface to the Pasquali edition (one of the last undertaken during his life), Goldoni offers this modest summary:

Ecco dunque alla luce del mondo il primo tomo della nuova edizione delle mie Comedie, ed eccolo a fronte di altre dieci edizioni che lo hanno fin'or prevenuto, ed hanno, posso dir senza ostentazione, empito il mondo delle Opere mie (...) Cinque edizioni del Bettinelli, una del Pitteri in Venezia, la mia di Firenze, quantunque spacciata prima di terminarla; le ristampe di Pesaro, di Torino, di Napoli, di Bologna; le traduzioni in Francese, in Inglese, in Tedesco(...) etc.<sup>182</sup>

Goldoni's comedies and *drammi giocosi* boast an impressive reach. The vast diffusion of these works has in large part been traced and catalogued

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181 As accounted for by E. Dent & P. Smith, "The Italian libretto to 1800" in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 14th Edition, vol. 13. (New York: Macmillan Press, 1995).

182 Carlo Goldoni, *Memorie Italiane (Prefazioni ai Diciassette Tomi delle Comedie edite a Venezia da G.B. Pasquali)*, tomo I. Here then, brought to the light of the world, is the first volume of the new edition of my Comedies, at the head of ten other editions that have preceded it, and have, I can say without boasting, filled the world with my Works (...) Five editions by Bettinelli, one by Pitteri in Venice, my own in Florence, however doomed it was before I even finished it; then reprinting in Pesaro, Torino, Naples, and Bologna; not counting the translations into French, English, German, (...) etc.

in the latest critical edition of Goldoni's complete works (directed by Anna Laura Bellina and Anna Vencato).<sup>183</sup>

i. Globalization? Old news! International *drammi giocosi* and diffusion of a new genre

The exportation of Goldoni's texts for music began from his *intermezzi*. While the earliest of these did not appear outside of Italy, *Il filosofo* (1735) was performed at the royal theatre in Potsdam set to music by Johann Friedrich Agricola (1720-1774), who also translated the libretto into German. Agricola's musical setting has been traced from Prague (1752) to the electoral court of Mannheim (1753), Bonn (1757), Dresden (1762), and a new appearance at Mannheim as late as 1771. Similar itineraries were made by *L'amor fa l'uomo cieco* (Hamburg 1743, Leipzig 1744, Prague 1744) and *Il finto pazzo* (Dresden 1747, Vienna 1759, Prague 1748). An even longer trail was left by the popular *La favola dei tre gobbi* (1749), which from Venice traveled to Verona and Padua (1750), Ferrara (1756), Parma (1773, performed for Duke Ferdinando di Borbone), and Naples (1783) in the original musical setting of Neapolitan-trained composer Vincenzo Ciampi. Outside of Italy, the *intermezzo* saw performances in Potsdam (1754), Munich (1758), Vienna (1759), Prague (1760), Bonn (1764), Brussels (1766), Saint Petersburg (1759), and even appearing in French (*Les trois bossus*) and Slavic (*Tri brata gorbuni*) translations.

The paths of Goldoni's early works foreshadow the diffusion of his *drammi giocosi*, which come to overwhelming numbers in their appearances throughout Europe. The first *dramma giocoso* to appear outside of Italy was *Il negligente*, given in London in 1749 and 1750. It was followed by *Il mondo della luna*, given in Barcellona (1751, 1765), Brussels (1753), Dresden (1754), Prague (1755), Hamburg (1755),

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183 *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Carlo Goldoni* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2009-present).

Saint Petersburg (1758), Brunswick (1760), London (1760, 1761), Brno (1761), and many others. Virtually all of Goldoni's principal libretti traveled throughout Europe; even the lesser-known *La scuola moderna* appeared in Berlin and in Paris by 1754.

Beyond the original works, we must especially take into account foreign translations and the manifold musical settings undertaken by composers of many nations. The list of composers who set Goldoni's libretti (often several) to music is almost as endless as the chronology of their performances. Outside of Italy, these include Florian Gassmann (1729–1774) in Presburg, Pedro Avondano (1714–1782) in Lisbon, Venanzio Rauzzini (1746–1810) in Munich, Carl Dittersdorf (1739–1799) and Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809) in Esterhaza, Antonio Salieri (1750–1825) in Vienna, and finally the young W. A. Mozart (1756–1791) among many others. The great variety of musical adaptations created implies the gradual assimilation of Goldoni's theatrical innovations within the traditions of other national schools, accounting for their reappearance in the works of Mozart and Da Ponte among others. Naturally, a great number of musical reworkings was produced in Italy as well, and these too traveled beyond the Alps as far as Russia, particularly the scores of Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801), Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816), and Niccolò Piccinni (1728–1800).

Goldoni's works did not travel exclusively through the exportation of texts, but also thanks to a thriving network of cultural exchange that characterized the entire 18th century, marking in this sense the beginning of the modern era. To cite a rather extreme example, we know that Lorenzo da Ponte traveled the whole of Europe, from then-Austrian Gorizia to Dresden, Vienna (where he collaborated with Salieri), Prague (where he met Giacomo Casanova, another such adventurous figure), then London, and, fleeing financial disaster, finally to New York city, where as a naturalized American he became the first professor of Italian at Columbia University.

In the same way (though for more honorable reasons), several of Goldoni's direct collaborators traveled extensively (as the author himself did, throughout Italy), becoming conduits of Goldoni's texts. Baldassarre Galuppi, for example, one of Goldoni's regular composers who first set to music *L'Arcadia in Brenta*, *Il Conte Caramella*, and *Arcifanfano re dei matti* (for the *Teatro S. Angelo, Accademia Vecchia*

in Verona, and the *Teatro S. Moisè* respectively), and following their success *Il mondo della luna*, *Il paese della cuccagna*, *Il mondo alla rovescia ossia Le donne che comandano*, *Il filosofo di campagna* (considered his masterpiece), *Le virtuose ridicole* and *Le pescatrici* in a collaboration that lasted until 1756, acquired such fame that he was called to Saint Petersburg by Catherine II, where he served as *maestro di cappella* at her court. Goldoni's *drammi giocosi* received an additional impulse in Russia thanks to the Florentine composer Giovanni Rutini (1723–1797), who, during a tour with Locatelli, proposed his own settings of Goldoni texts. Another of Goldoni's composers to travel far was Giuseppe Scolari, who died in Lisbon, where many of the surviving musical manuscripts on Goldoni's texts are still housed today.

Goldoni's works were performed outside of Venice throughout his career, but began to circulate in northern Europe especially after his move to Paris in 1761. During his voyage to the city of Molière, Goldoni fell ill and was required to delay his arrival. While convalescing in Bologna, he authored a peculiar *dramma giocoso*, *La bella verità* (The Pretty Truth), for his patron and frequent correspondent the Marquis Albergati. Clearly Goldoni knew it was not his best work: "Arrivé à Bologne, je tombai malade; on me fit faire par force une Opéra Comique; l'ouvrage sentoit le fièvre comme moi."<sup>184</sup> The result was a peculiar metatheatrical work about the absurdities of show business,<sup>185</sup> in which Goldoni even represents himself—through the anagrammed character Loran Glodoci—as a miserable librettist subject to the demands and whim of his vocalists and actors. For its very subject matter if nothing else, this text clearly adheres to the realist tradition that Goldoni hoped to develop with more freedom at the *Comédie Italienne* once in Paris. He also deliberately omits any ties to a specific setting, which, coupled

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184 Carlo Goldoni, *Memoires*, vol. II, xlvi. Once I arrived in Bologna, I fell ill; they forced me to write a comic opera; the work felt the fever as much as I did.

185 Comic criticism of theatre was a very diffuse in the 18th century, beginning early on with Benedetto Marcello's popular satire, *Il Teatro alla Moda* (1720). Goldoni's is thus one small tile in a longstanding tradition, and by no means his only metatheatrical work, at that. Other examples include: *Il teatro comico* (1750), *La cameriera brillante* (The Brilliant Chambermaid, 1754), and in musical theatre *L'Arcadia in Brenta* (1749), the farce *La cantarina* (The Singer, 1756), and through the character of Petronilla, *La ritornata di Londra* (1756).

with a rather generic, Italianate language, shows a deliberate effort to transcend the Venetian context and point towards a broader, more diversified, European stage.

In keeping with this new international perspective, the libretti Goldoni wrote once in Paris (five over a period of five years, 1763–68, and three between 1777–79) were almost all derived from contemporary literary models of non-Italian authors. Galuppi's *Il re alla caccia* (1763, premiered at the *Teatro S. Samuele*), for example, can be tied to *La partie de chasse d'Henri IV* (The Hunting Match of King Henry IV, 1762), a French comedy by Charles Collé, as well as to the French *opéra comique* drawn from it, *Le roi et le fermier* (The King and the Farmer) libretto by Michel-Jean Sedaine, of which Goldoni recalls:

Je vus le Roi et le Fermier à sa première représentation, j'en fus extrêmement content, et je le voyois avec douleur prêt à tomber, il se releva peu-à-peu, on lui rendit justice; il eut un nombre infini de représentations, et on le voit encore avec plaisir.<sup>186</sup>

*Il re alla caccia* was followed by *La finta semplice* (1764, premiered at the *Teatro S. Moisè* on a score by Perillo (dates unknown), now lost), based on *La fausse agnès ou le poète campagnard*, prose comedy in three acts by Destouches (translated by the Marchesa Ottoboni, a friend of Giuseppe Parini, with the title *I poeti in villa*). *La notte critica* (The Critical Night, 1766, for the *Teatro S. Cassiano*, set by Boroni (?- 1792)) is based on a French *scénario* by Goldoni, *Les rendezvous nocturnes* (Nighttime Encounters), and the first group concludes with *L'astuzia felice* (The Happy [successful] Guile) 1767, originally titled *La cameriera spiritosa* (The Spirited Maid) for its premiere in Milan, 1766, on a score by Gherardeschi (dates unknown), now lost) and *Le nozze in campagna* (The Country Wedding, 1768, for the *Teatro S. Moisè*, on a score by Gregorio Sciroli (1722–1781), also lost).

Importantly, these first Parisian *drammi giocosi* were still written for Italian audiences, and most had Venetian premieres; this because

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186 Carlo Goldoni, *Memoires*; II, xv. I saw The King and the Farmer at its premiere, I liked it very much, and I was pained to see it on the verge of failure, but it recovered little by little, and in the end was given justice; the work received an infinite number of productions, and it is still viewed with pleasure.

Goldoni's initial intent was to remain in France only for a limited period, and these collaborations were meant to preserve his name at home and maintain professional grounds for a return to Venice. These libretti therefore do not present significant departures from Goldoni's new consolidated style, new mode of realism, and structural complexity in ensembles. They are texts that evidence new horizons but also important elements of continuity with the author's Venetian output.

Differences arise in Goldoni's final three libretti, no longer written for Venetian theatre and of diverse nature: while *Vittorina* (1777) is still a *dramma giocoso* (or "new comic opera," as it was called in London for its world premiere at the King's Theatre, composer unknown), *I volponi* (The Old Foxes, composer unknown) of the same year, premiered in Paris, is a simple *dramma per musica*, while *Il talismano* (The Talisman, 1779, premiered at the *Teatro Canobiana* in Milan) is instead a *commedia per musica*. Of the three texts, only the first appears to retain some continuity with Goldoni's preceding realistic tradition, by no coincidence the only named *dramma giocoso* of the three. In particular, *Vittorina* suggests clear points of contact with *La buona figliuola*, a story well known to Parisian audiences. By contrast, *I volponi* is surprisingly general in content, without a definite setting (Goldoni's only indication is "nel castello del Marchese"), and even without specific names for some of the characters (the "Marchese," for example, is known only by title). The characters in this work, contrary to Goldoni's norm, are not well-developed originals but rather typified exponents of different trades and social spheres, as Franco Fido has observed.<sup>187</sup> In equal measure, *Il talismano* is largely occupied with exoticism rather than realism, set in a feud in an unspecified time, involving gypsies and mystical elements of their world, including palm readings and a famous talisman that changes its holder's appearance. Despite the popularity of fantastical theatre at the time, Goldoni's talisman does not detain any true supernatural power, yet at the same time he does not criticize this illusion as elsewhere he appeared ready to. It is just one among many adventurous elements,

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187 F. Fido, *Nuova Guida al Goldoni* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000); 150.

including the recovery of a daughter lost at sea, that focus the work on extraordinary rather than quotidian events.

Judging from these very last works, Goldoni's career appears to close in an enigmatic retrocession from the hallmark characteristics of his *drammi giocosi* and the dilution of their realistic elements, and an analogous- or perhaps even more burdensome- surrender of the reform principles also occurs in Goldoni's prose theatre during this time. And yet, while an inversion from decades of innovative work may seem strange, the author's broader circumstances are the clear cause.

Goldoni was called to Paris to renew public interest in the *Comédie Italienne*, of which he was named director, an offer he accepted with optimism but, at the same time, undeniably motivated by disappointments, too. His theatrical reform had Venice did not come without cost, and Goldoni was tried by his rivals Carlo Gozzi and Pietro Chiari, the demands of his *impresari*, and the protests of actors who accustomed to the freedom of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Paris on the other hand seemed to offer better treatment, not only materially but ideologically: Goldoni was a great admirer of Molière, with whom he shared the inclination for social criticism and realism,<sup>188</sup> and on more than one occasion had received the praises of Voltaire for his theatre.

He set out for Paris not without a certain sadness, as testified by his autobiographical farewell play *Una delle ultime sere di carnevale*, but with high hopes of finding a new audience and new collaborators more open to his ideas, and while early letters show enthusiasm and satisfaction for the distinguished treatment received, so different from what he had left behind: "Che ne dite, eh? Bella differenza! Dover faticare come un cane per guadagnare cento ducati, amareggiati ancora da rimproveri e malegrazie!"<sup>189</sup> As early as the next year, however, problems began to arise as Goldoni suspected Denis Diderot of plagiarizing his

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188 In the words of Giorgio Padoan "L'attenzione di Goldoni a Molière si lega concretamente all'attuazione della riforma." Giorgio Padoan, in *Carlo Goldoni, 1793- 1993. Atti del Convegno dei Bicentenario* (Venezia: Regione del Veneto, 1995); 24.

189 Al Sig. Gabriele Cornet" (Paris, Sept. 27, 1762), from *Lettere di Carlo Goldoni*, ed. by Ernesto Masi (Bologna: Zanichelli); 175. What do you say, eh? A nice difference! To have to work like a dog to earn a hundred ducats, and on top of that embittered by reproofs and ingratitude.

*Il vero amico* (The True Friend, 1750) in the creation of *Le fils naturel* (The Natural Child, 1757), a diatribe some scholars suggest may have contributed to the relative indifference accorded to Goldoni's reform project in France.<sup>190</sup>

Whatever the reason, it soon became apparent that Goldoni's work in Paris presented no fewer challenges than his previous charges in Venice. Not only was the *Comédie Italienne* incorporated within the *Opéra comique*, contributing to its crisis, but moreover Goldoni soon discovered that the preferences of Parisian audiences, not to mention of his new performers, did not go beyond the *Commedia dell'Arte* he had so labored to leave behind. Roberta Turchi's description of Goldoni's condition as one of "disagio culturale e esistenziale,"<sup>191</sup> is perhaps no understatement to judge from his later correspondence: "Questi commedianti italiani sono *des parasites*... Il paese sempre più mi diletta. Ma il diletto senza l'utile non è per un uomo, che ha bisogno dell'uno e dell'altro."<sup>192</sup>

Little more than one year after his arrival Goldoni could already declare with certainty: "Il gusto delle buone commedie in questo paese è finito. Fa pietà il Teatro moderno francese: non si bada più alla condotta, ai caratteri, alla verità."<sup>193</sup> A further element of disenchantment followed in the treatment given to Goldoni's comedies at court, where they were "scannate in tre quarti d'ora" because "il Re voleva andare al soupé" (slaughtered in three quarters of an hour, as the King wanted to go to supper). As Roberta Turchi rightly observes, "Il destino toccato a

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190 See Paola Luciani, *Drammaturgie goldoniane*, (Firenze: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 2012).

191 Roberta Turchi, "Un'edizione 'colta e magnifica,'" introduzione a Carlo Goldoni, *Memorie Italiane, III* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008); 23. cultural and existential unease.

192 *ibid* "Al Marchese Albergati Capacelli" (Paris, Dec. 13, 1762) from *Lettere di Carlo Goldoni*, ed. by Ernesto Masi (Bologna: Zanichelli); 188. These Italian actors are lazy...this country entertains me every day more. But pleasure without usefulness is not for a man, who has need of one and the other.

193 Lettera al Marchese Albergati Capacelli (13 June 1763) in *Tutte le opere di Carlo Goldoni*, vol. XIVa cura di G. Ortolani (Milano: Mondadori, 1935) 43; 287. The good taste in comedy of this Country is finished. Modern French theatre is pitiful: there is no attention to plot, to the characters, and to truth [realism].

corte alle sue commedie segnò la fine del convincimento, legato al mito di Luigi XIV, che gli uomini di lettere godessero in Francia di favori maggiori che in Italia.”<sup>194</sup> Despite some modest successes in theatre, therefore, in 1765 Goldoni officially resigned his post at the *Comédie Italienne*, becoming the official Italian language tutor at the court of Louis XV (his pupils Madame Adelaide, the king’s firstborn daughter, and Marie Joseph of Saxony learned Italian with the help of his texts), following the entourage from Paris to Versailles. Goldoni lived through the French revolution, during which his court stipend was, of course, suspended. Troubled by debt and outliving his fame, the author died in Paris in 1793, just as his income was being reinstated. In northern Europe, however, Goldoni’s works lived on to make a lasting imprint.

## ii. Mozart and Goldoni

Generations after Goldoni, it is possible to find echoes of his celebrated texts in the works of many. *Il maestro di cappella* (1793, first performed in Berlin) of Domenico Cimarosa (1749–1801, librettist in this case unknown), for example, uses verses taken directly from Goldoni’s *dramma giocoso, Il viaggiatore ridicolo* (1757):

Ci sposeremo fra suoni e canti Sposi brillanti, pieni d’amor. Voglio i violini, voglio i violoni, Voglio il fagotto, con l’oboè [*suonano corni da caccia*] questo strumento non fa per me.<sup>195</sup>

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194 Roberta Turchi, “Un’edizione ‘colta e magnifica,’” introduzione a Carlo Goldoni, *Memorie Italiane, III* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2008); 25. The fate met by his comedies at court marked the end of the belief, tied to the legacy of Louis XIV, that men of letters could enjoy more favorable treatment in France than in Italy.

195 Carlo Goldoni, *Il viaggiatore ridicolo*; Act III, iii. We will be wed amidst music and song, shining newlyweds, brimming with love. I want violins, and want violas [and celli], I want bassoon with oboe [*hunting horns are heard*]. No, this instrument doesn’t suit me!

The musical use of the horn to signify “cornuto” (cuckold) is a comic device used by Mozart as well, in Figaro’s aria “Aprite un po’ quegli occhi” (*Le Nozze di Figaro*, Act IV, viii). More famously, Da Ponte’s *Don Giovanni* appears to quote various Goldoni texts. Most notably, the character of Semplicina in *Arcifanfano re dei matti* first utters the verses “vorrei e non vorrei...son fra il si e il no,”<sup>196</sup> the hallmark of Zerlina’s role in Mozart’s famous duet, “Là ci darem la mano” (*Don Giovanni* I, iii). Goldoni’s *Il viaggiatore ridicolo*, known throughout Europe by 1770, also contains a ‘catalogue aria’ that, while in comic key, bears notable similarities to Leporello’s analogous exploit:

A Lion la Contessa la Cra. A Paris la Marchesa la Gru. A Madrid la Duchessa del Bos. In Inghilterra Miledi la Stos. In Germania ho le mie Baronesse. In Italia le mie Principesse...etc.<sup>197</sup>

Lorenzo da Ponte (1749–1838), together with Giambattista Casti (1724–1803), was one of the most prominent librettists to continue in Goldoni’s style, though his theatre was also imitated by Marco Coltellini (1719–1777), author of *opera seria* libretti for Gluck, Traetta, and others, and by Giovanni Bertati (1735–1815), the most prolific librettist to follow Goldoni, best known for Cimarosa’s *Il matrimonio segreto* (The Secret Wedding, 1792).

In the case of *Don Giovanni*, notwithstanding Tirso de Molina’s original text, Moliere’s *Le festin de pierre* (1665), and Goldoni’s own *Don Giovanni Tenorio o sia il dissoluto* (1736), the direct model used by Da Ponte was most likely *Don Giovanni o sia Il convitato di pietra* (The Stone Guest), libretto in one Act dated 1787 by Bertati. Notably, Bertati became one of the most sought-after librettists in Venice after Goldoni’s departure. His texts therefore drew from the same context that Goldoni had helped to create and establish before leaving. The music

196 Carlo Goldoni, *Arcifanfano Re dei matti*,; Act II, viii. I’d like to and I wouldn’t... I’m between yes and no.

197 Carlo Goldoni, *Il viaggiatore ridicolo*, Act II, iv. In Lyon the Countess of Crow. In Paris the Marchesa of Stork. In Madrid the Duchess of Bos. In England Mylady of Stos. In Germany I have my baronesses. In Italy my princesses (...).

for Bertati's rendition was by Giuseppe Gazzaniga, and some scholars have furthermore seen direct influences in Mozart's score.<sup>198</sup>

A further bridge of connection from Goldoni to Emanuele Congliano- better known by his pen name Lorenzo da Ponte- is the figure of Casti, author of *Il Re Teodoro in Venezia* drawn from Chapter XXVI of Voltaire's *Candide*. For Paolo Gallarati, Casti is a point of transition from the net divisions of *buffo* and *serio* of the 'rationalistic' Goldoni to the entirely realistic and psychologically-oriented Mozartian theatre,<sup>199</sup> though the attenuation of *buffo* and *serio* in opera clearly already commences in Goldoni's later *drammi giocosi*, especially through the *mezzo carattere* and new elements of sentimentalism as we have seen. Casti definitively abolishes the sententious Metastasian style of arias as well as caricature or satirical humor in the comic sphere, and as the following description of his own work shows, he contributes to the continuation of Goldoni's desire for realism through a different approach:

(...)dieci o dodici drammi eroicomici di genere affatto nuovo, ove trattandosi temi e soggetti seri, eroici, tragici, vi si trappongono dei tratti comici ove la circostanza della cosa o delle persone lo richiede, seguendo in ciò la natura stessa.<sup>200</sup>

While Casti also continued Goldoni's legacy of expanding ensemble pieces and using them more frequently, he did not emulate Goldoni in every respect, as his title of "drammi eroicomici" shows. Furthermore, in a spirit of affinity with tragic theatre, he often included dramatized prologues ("esposizione dell'argomento") to his operas in the manner of Metastasio. It was the cultivated *medietas* of Casti's theatre that assured his fame, but also brought criticism from Da Ponte:

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198 D. Hertz, "Goldoni, Don Giovanni, and the dramma giocoso" (Musical Times n. 1642, 1979).

199 Paolo Gallarati, *Musica e Maschera*. "Tutto volge verso una *medietas* che neutralizza il divario tra personaggi seri e comici e tende a fare di ciascuno un carattere individuale."

[Everything turns towards a *medietas* that neutralizes the divarication between tragic and comic roles, and tends to make each an original character.]

200 G. B. Casti, Lettera (20 July 1796) cited in Paolo Gallarati; 157. (...) ten or twelve drammi *eroicomici* of a new genre, where, dealing with subjects that are serious, heroic, and tragic, we juxtapose some comic elements where the circumstances of the action or the characters requires, following Nature herself.

Non vi mancava purità di lingua, non vaghezza di stile, non grazie e armonia di verso, non sali, non eleganza, non brio; le arie erano bellissime, i pezzi concertati deliziosi, i finali molto poetici; eppure il dramma non era né caldo, né interessante, né comico, né teatrale. L'azione era languida, i caratteri insipidi, la catastrofe inverisimile e quasi tragica. Le parti insomma erano ottime, ma il tutto era un mostro. Mi parve di veder un gioielliere, che guasta l'effetto di molte pietre preziose per non saper bene legarle e disporle con ordine e simmetria. (...) Non osai tuttavia dire ad alcuno il pensiero mio, certissime essendo che, se fatto l'avessi, m'avrebbero lapidato o messo come farnetico ai' pazzereilli. Casti era più infallibile a Vienna che il papa a Roma.<sup>201</sup>

It is not surprising that Da Ponte, to a greater extent than Casti, in his libretti preserves Goldoni's structure of *buffi*, *seri*, and *mezzi caratteri* in psychological characterization, and inserts *serio* material within an overarching structure of comedy.

In Mozart's collaboration with da Ponte, both structural and ideological elements of Goldoni's *drammi giocosi* are found in abundance. Even before his work with the Veneto librettist, however, Mozart had become acquainted with Goldoni's libretti through direct experience. His first opera *La finta semplice* (The False Simpleton, 1768), written when he was 12 years old, was based on a reworking of Goldoni's *dramma giocoso* of the same title (1764) by Marco Coltellini, then court poet in Vienna. Four years later, Mozart also produced *La finta giardiniera* (The False Gardener), which, despite its lack of attribution to an author, Daniel Hertz has connected to *La buona figliuola*.<sup>202</sup>

By the time Mozart began setting operatic texts, the spectrum of dramatic roles developed by Goldoni through a lifetime of innovation

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201 Lorenzo da Ponte, *Memorie*, I, ii. It was not without purity of language, nor without beauty of style, nor spirit, nor elegance, nor verve; the arias were very beautiful, the ensemble pieces delightful, and the finali very poetic; and yet the dramma did not have warmth, nor was it interesting, nor comic, nor theatrical. The action was languid, the characters insipid, the action unrealistic and almost tragic. The parts were very good, yet the whole was a monster. It was like seeing a jeweler who ruins the effect of many precious gems because he does not know how to order them in symmetry. (...) I nonetheless did not dare to share my thoughts with anyone, because, had I done so, they would have stoned me or thrown me into the asylum. Casti was more infallible in Vienna than the Pope in Rome.

202 D. Hertz, *Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); 199. "(...) an anonymous and clumsy offspring of *La Buona Figliuola*."

had become common practice, or in the words of Da Ponte, “domma teatrale.” One element among many that surfaces in Da Ponte’s autobiography is the consolidation of the ensemble finale as a standard practice, though this did not meet with particular enthusiasm on the part of the librettist:

In questo finale devono per teatrale domma comparire in scena tutti i cantanti, se fosser trecento, a uno, a due, a tre, a sei, a dieci, a sessanta, per cantarvi dei’ soli, de’ duetti, de’ terzetti, de’ sestetti, de’ sessantetti; e se l’intreccio del dramma nol permette, bisogna che il poeta trovi la strada di farselo permettere, a dispetto del criterio, della ragione e di tutti gli Aristotili della terra; e, se trovasi poi che va male, tanto peggio per lui.<sup>203</sup>

Da Ponte, and of course Mozart with him, thereby follows the trajectory of Goldoni and Casti in the expansion of the ensemble finale, which in his theatre becomes “una spezie di commediola o di picciol dramma da sé, e richiede un novello intreccio ed un interesse straordinario.”<sup>204</sup>

Goldoni’s legacy was thereby clearly assimilated by both da Ponte and Mozart himself, who, as we saw previously, makes clear distinction between *parti buffe*, *parti serie*, and *mezzi caratteri* in his personal letters:

(...) das nothwendigste dabeÿ aber ist recht *Comisch* im ganzen – und wen es dan möglich wäre 2 gleich gute frauenzimmer Rollen hinein zu bringen. – die eine müsste *Seria*, die andere aber *Mezzo Carattere* seÿn – aber an güte – müssten beÿde Rollen ganz gleich seÿn. – das dritte frauenzimmer kan aber ganz *Buffa* seÿn.<sup>205</sup>

Looking ahead to the first installment of the Mozart- Da Ponte trilogy, *Le nozze di Figaro* (1786), we encounter a markedly conversational brand of Italian, and strategic use of extended musical numbers; in

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203 *ibid.*; 147–48; In this finale, theatrical practice dictates that all singers should appear on the stage, be they one, two, three, six, ten, or sixty, to sing soli, duets, trios, sextets, or sixtyets; and if the plot does not permit it, the poet must find a way to make it possible, despite his scruples, reason, and all the Aristotles of this Earth; and, if he were to discover that it not go well, too bad for him.

204 *ibid.*; I, ii (...) a sort of small comedy or drama unto itself, requiring a new plot and extraordinary appeal.

205 W. A. Mozart, letter to L. Mozart (7 May, 1783). [previously translated]

fact, of its 28 total musical numbers, only half are arias and the rest ensembles, large or small. Naturally, the opera carries strong ideological implications (so much so that Beaumarchais' original source text, *La folle journée* (The Crazy Day), 1778 initially met with censure), and most importantly balances comedy and sentimental introspection around two pivotal *mezzi caratteri*; it would be difficult to image a work more fully in resonance with the intentions of Carlo Goldoni.

A realistic element of particular strength in Mozart's 'Italian' operas is the fragmentation of dialogue in recitative, which from Goldoni's example Da Ponte is carried to an extreme level of concision. Da Ponte's aria texts for Mozart are then often in free form, adding to their natural, non-theatrical quality, and as a general characteristic, Mozart contributes further realism in the musical sphere through the dramatic acceleration of his arias, such that a long page of text may be consumed in a short span of time.

Naturally, the admiration of later centuries for Mozart's works also stems, and in large part, from the total fusion of music and text that he is able to achieve with spontaneity. Yet this concept too, the search for intimate connection between word and music, is a legacy of Goldoni's generation. While Goldoni was making his stand for realism in theatre, others in Venice were pursuing the same principles for music, even if this art, by nature, is the most abstract. Superficiality was criticized in music as well as in comedy, and the suggested remedies were rationality, and realism.

This according to the Venetian essayist, philosopher, and *uomo di mondo* Francesco Algarotti (1712–1764) in his *Saggio Sopra l'Opera in Musica* (Essay on Musical Operas, 1755), published just a few years after Goldoni's *Conte Caramella*. The complaints he voices are numerous, and often not dissimilar from the issues confronted so ironically in Benedetto Marcello's own satirical pamphlet. Algarotti however goes a step further to discuss musical settings in their own right,

Blandire in ogni modo le orecchie, allettarle, sorprenderle, è il primo pensiero degli odierni compositori; non muovere il cuore, o scaldar l'immaginativa di chi ascolta (...)

even as concerns exclusively instrumental sections such as the opening *sinfonia*:

Ma oggidì viene considerata la sinfonia, come cosa distaccata in tutto e diversa dal Dramma, come una strombazzata, diciam così, con che si abbiano a riempiere d'avanzo, e ad intronare gli orecchi dell'udienza.<sup>206</sup>

Although not an esteemer of comic opera, interestingly Algarotti could but exempt this genre from his heavier criticisms:

Non è però che una qualche immagine di verità non si scorga anche a' di nostri nella musica. Ne sono in esempio singolarmente gl'Intermezzi, e le Operette buffe (altrove chiamate opere buffe), ove la qualità principalissima dell'espressione domina assai meglio, che in qualunque altro componimento che sia.<sup>207</sup>

Comic opera would appear to have an intrinsic advantage in the measure of verisimilitude. For an uncompromising Algarotti this 'virtue' would appear to stem only from the necessity to avoid overburdening the "cantanti mediocrissimi" (worse than mediocre singers) relegated to comic operas, spurring composers to inevitably keep it simple in their scores. Needless to say a less than flattering interpretation, but one not supported by the difficulty of certain vocal parts from this repertoire, nor by the documented involvement of professional singers of good reputation 'borrowed' from opera seria, such as the famous *castrato* Salvatore Consorti. The crucial point, in any event, is that comic opera "vuol assecondar la natura" (wants to support what is natural), and in this lies the key to its success: "a cagione appunto della verità che in se

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206 Francesco Algarotti, *Saggio Sopra l'Opera in Musica*, 1755 & 1763 editions, curated by Annalisa Bini, Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1989; 26. The primary concern of today's composers is to entice, flatter, and surprise the ear by any means possible; not to warm the heart or move the imagination of the listener (...) Nowadays the *sinfonia* is seen as something different, and completely detached, from the *Dramma*, like some sort of fanfare, let's call it that, whose purpose is to daze and saturate the audience's ears from the start.

207 *ibid.*, 38. Yet it can't be said that some image of truth not be found in today's music. Unique examples of this are the *Intermezzi* and *Operette buffe* (elsewhere called *Opere Buffe*), in which natural quality of expression dominates much more clearly than in any other type of composition...

contiene, [l'opera buffa] ha la voga e trionfa, etc.” (by reason of the truth is contains, it is in fashion and is winning out).

If for music too, the auspice is to find a close, natural connection to the plot it serves to convey, clearly Goldoni's *mezzo carattere* and his sentimental dimension, in addition to enriching the action onstage, also aids the diversification of musical content. The scores themselves confirm how Cecchina, or Count Caramella, or King Henry IV, or Mozart's Don Giovanni, for that matter, are able to transition seamlessly from a comic *cavatina* to a *serio* or sentimental aria within a brief span of stage time.

Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787), furthermore, is the sole of his operas to bear the title of *dramma giocoso* (and not *opera buffa*), in which 'dramma' appears as a clear link to *opera seria* and tragedy. As requested in Mozart's letter, this opera features three *prime donne*, a full *serio* (Donna Anna), a sentimental *mezzo carattere* (Donna Elvira), and a *buffa*, Zerlina. While not entirely realistic because of its necessary dependence upon the picaresque legend of Don Juan, and most notably its supernatural retrieval of the Commendatore from the grave, this *dramma giocoso* demonstrates the surprising depth and darkness that this prevalently comic genre can support.

### iii. Conclusions

Goldoni's contributions to the evolution of musical theatre are of both technical and ideological nature. His many structural innovations, such as the use of *ariette* instead of static exit arias, duets and ensembles at the beginning of and within scenes, and the collective ensemble finale, diversify the means of conveying the plot and ideology of his works. In terms of content, the social types and societal customs that Goldoni examines and playfully criticizes are universal. Nobility is ridiculed but so too are commoners too attached to wealth. Even the industrious bourgeoisie, when at fault, is denounced. The power of Goldoni's social commentary stems from the relevance and timeliness of his depictions,

and his adherence to figures and styles (dialects, for example, and discursiveness) of daily life.

Most importantly, the combination of *serio* and *buffo* elements in the *dramma giocoso*, and the progressive attenuation of the boundaries between them, represents the highest outcome of the author's search for realism, and a significant point of contact with his reform of the prose theatre. With the lifelike representation of comic characters, tragic foils, and *mezzi caratteri* in the *dramma giocoso*, Goldoni casts *buffo* and *serio* into coexistence, creating a new, realistic opera theatre that responds to its own time and continues well beyond it in its relevance.

Ultimately, reaching well beyond his own vast production, Goldoni's musical innovations form the foundations of the fully evolved *dramma giocoso* of the Viennese school. The highest achievements of Mozart and Da Ponte are emblematic of Goldoni's innovations and how, perfected at the end of the 18th century, these became canonical and enduring.

From its complex origins to its most sophisticated, psychological forms, this theatrical genre develops in a philosophy of realism and social relevance. Goldoni's influence on this type of musical representation has not been fully considered, and much remains to be discovered, but his determining contributions to the *dramma giocoso*, before him only nascent, after him an international genre, cannot be overstated and warrant significant reappraisal in the study of music history.



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