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*Robinson Crusoe's nalatenschap  
/ Legacies of Robinson Crusoe*

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## *Robinson Crusoe* and the Others: On the Early Conceptualization of the English Novel in Italy

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# ***Robinson Crusoe* and the Others: On the Early Conceptualization of the English Novel in Italy**

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The publication of *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719 represents a milestone in the history of western literature, marking the beginning of a new literary genre, the realistic fiction. From then, the new genre had a huge impact on the audiences and the cultural milieus of the time, in and outside Britain. To play a pivotal role in the international dissemination of information about this new “literary object” was the periodical press: the many journals of the time were in fact instrumental in the propagation of ideas, moral values, new stylistic and narrative features connected to the English novels through announcements and reviews. In the European context, the Italian literary press was quite exceptional, as it was not immediately receptive towards the new narrative form coming from England: the first reviews of English novels started appearing consistently only in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This paper aims at conducting a preliminary investigation on how the English novels were reviewed, censored, introduced to the Italian public by the many articles, reviews, and announcements that appeared in the periodical press of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. A pilot reading shows that the novels’ questioning of social hierarchies, their examination of moral ambiguity, their interplay of gender roles, and their scrutiny of the ethical, religious, and psychological foundations of social norms were more shocking to the Italian cultural milieu than, for example, the clichéd ‘looseness of morals’ of French literature, whose dissemination had been structural in the construction of the 18th century social fabric. The paper will also show how the controversial nature of English novels started a debate on their moral values, which in Italy was carried on under

specific circumstances from an intellectual, moral and sociological point of view. This article will focus on a particular case study, namely the Venetian journals directed by Elisabetta Caminer Turra (*Giornale Enciclopedico, Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico, Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico d'Italia*): her editorial initiative was without a doubt one the most consistent and long lasting of the time.<sup>1</sup>

During the eighteenth century, Venice fully capitalized the efforts made since the Renaissance with regard to the development of a strong printing industry, and consolidated the most productive publishing centre of the Italian peninsula: as said above, around one third of all the books and journals printed at the time came from there. The city was extremely active and receptive towards the cultural debates that were animating the intellectual community spread across the many pre-Unitarian states, and quite the pioneer for what concerns the reception of trends coming from Europe. The rise of the periodical press played a key role in connecting different cultures and intellectual milieus, conveying information widely like no other medium before. Italian journalism was a bit delayed comparing to other journalistic traditions like for example the British or the French: while in these two countries periodicals started flourishing from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, in Italy the first periodicals with solid foundations and an organized editorial strategy started appearing only from the second part of the eighteenth century. The Caminer family was the main protagonist in the process of consolidation of a journalistic tradition in Venice: first was Domenico, with different initiatives that culminated in the journal *l'Europa letteraria* (first publication in 1768), and then came his daughter Elisabetta, who started as an assistant in her father's projects and went on to create her *Giornale Enciclopedico* later in 1774. As the name suggests, this Venetian journal and all the variations that came after took inspiration from the French *Journal Encyclopédique*, which was one of the most popular in the French speaking intellectual community. Its influence reached the Italian shores quite rapidly: the editorial team behind *Giornale Enciclopedico* was particularly receptive towards cultural and literary news coming from abroad, and especially from France. The French mediation is actually among the key factors that must be

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<sup>1</sup> The article builds on studies that dealt with Elisabetta Caminer's editorial initiative in the Venetian context, see Sama, Liuccio, MacMurrin, Von Kulesa and Parmegiani.

considered in the reconstruction of the Italian reception of foreign culture through the literary press in the second part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is particularly evident for what concerns English culture: as Caminer Turra repeatedly pointed out in her articles, it was particularly difficult for the Italian intellectual community to access the information coming from the United Kingdom directly, most of all because of logistical obstacles and difficulties in obtaining the actual materials, like journals and books. This is why the reception of the English novels in Italy is largely based on French sources, which were easier to access and widely spread across the peninsula. The major part of the reviews about the English novels that appeared in the Venetian press derives openly from articles previously published in journals like *Journal Encyclopédique*, *Mercure de France*, *Journal des Savants*, among many others. To understand in which way the information about the English novels made its way in the Italian press from its country of origin, it is necessary to trace and pinpoint what could be defined as the genealogical dimension of the articles, namely the evolution by the same material from England to Italy, through France. The comprehension of the differences and the similarities between the sources and the Italian reviews are crucial to reconstruct the patterns at the base of the reception and the introduction of the English novels to the Italian public.

### **Original Reviews**

Before going into this aspect in depth, let us start with the only case of completely original reviews and advertisements. As I hinted at the beginning of the article, Venice was the most active publishing hub in the entire peninsula. This means that the city was receptive towards literary novelties coming from abroad in terms of foreign publications, and some publishers were starting to circulate Italian translations of those novelties. This is the case of the Venetian publisher Pietro Valvasense. Sandra Parmegiani has already pointed out how:

the early 1780s were the years in which the Venetian publisher Pietro Valvasense printed two collections of Fielding's and Richardson's novels, and Elisabetta Caminer translated for him the *History of Sir Charles Grandisson*. Since she had no knowledge of English, Elisabetta based her translation on Prevost's heavily abridged version published in Amsterdam in 1755,

according to a well-established practice, and legitimized well into the nineteenth century. There is, however, no extended review of this work to accompany the several announcements of the new translation that appeared in her press, where the old masters of the English novel were, as a rule, acknowledged as such, without too many words spent to justify the relevance of their work or their significance for the Italian readership. Though certainly great novels, they were well established in the second half of the eighteenth century and not often in need of many journalistic remarks. (Parmegiani 3)

The fact that well-established authors did not seem to need extensive comments is a pattern that we will have the opportunity to further investigate later on. In an article about Venetian editorial initiatives, Richardson is for instance introduced to the readership as ‘l’autore immortale, la di cui penna è stata condotta dalla natura, dalla virtù, dalla morale più fina, e dal sentimento più delicato’ [the immortal author, whose pen was steered by nature, by virtue, by the finest morals, and the most delicate feeling]: a simple yet truly meaningful description (*Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*, 1786, 111–112).<sup>2</sup> Not many words were used to describe his work, either: ‘Crediamo inutile il rinnovare gli elogi di quest’Opera, che nel suo genere può dirsi eccellente’ [We believe it is unnecessary to repeat our praise of this work’s worth, which can be said to be excellent in its genre] (*Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*, October 1785, 125). Richardson’s reputation was already established, and his work was quite popular among the Italian readers. Some more stylistic remarks will integrate Parmegiani’s words. While introducing the news of the imminent publication of a collection of ‘Operette galanti’ [gallant works] by Valvasense in May 1781, the *Giornale Enciclopedico* states that the publisher would always opt, in this regard, for works in which the dominant feelings are Love, Virtue and Truth. Immediately after, the ‘ultimi Romanzi del famoso Fielding Inglese’ [the last novels of the famous English author Fielding] are named as the first books to open the collection. It seems quite obvious that the audience, after reading this announcement, was immediately brought to associate the concepts of Love, Virtue and most of all Truth with Fielding’s works, and by extension with the literature coming from England. On the one hand, the journal was

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<sup>2</sup> References to these historical journals are always difficult, because most of the articles are anonymous and the issues were not published regularly (i.e. the identification, and distinction, according to the months of publication is more reliable than a ‘numerical’ one). For these reasons, in order to be consistent and intelligible throughout the article, the reference system concerning the historical Italian and French journals is slightly different than the one regulated by the MLA style guide.

showing an early appreciation for the sentimental novel, on the other, it was pinpointing some of its key concepts, which will prove to be fundamental in the change of the literary paradigm that the reception of the English novel, often investigating the dialectics between love, decorum and virtue, will bring into the Italian cultural horizon of the time.

Another article written by Elisabetta Caminer that appeared in the *Giornale Enciclopedico* in January 1782 deals with matters of literary taste in Italy. The review is about the publication of Fielding's *Amelia*. Before indulging in a long paragraph in which the plot of the novel is described, along with the moral qualities and the misadventures of the female protagonist,<sup>3</sup> Elisabetta praises the book and reflects on the only two categories of people that might not enjoy it. According to her, literary taste was compromised in Italy by a passion for the preposterous and a sort of analytical frenzy. Italy is the place where published novels were characterized by extravagance, unlikely events, monstrosities and a fake conception of the marvellous (a 'twisted' heritage of the extremely successful epic poetry). Therefore, the simplicity and the naturalness of the reviewed English novel would not be understood or appreciated by readers, who were fond of preposterous literature. Also, the 'aridi pensatori' [arid thinkers] who flatter themselves talking about 'things' and 'reality', always using cold reasoning and 'dissecting' literary works analytically, will never grasp the real meaning of the 'arte interessante' [interesting art] conveyed by the novel: they cannot draw from the pleasure of the illusion, they never listen to their heart, so they remain insensitive towards the 'bellezze di dettaglio, a quegli slanci del sentimento, a quella malia dell'eloquenza che l'anima sola può valutare, e che in apparenza assessorj, divengono per chi gl'intende i principali oggetti d'un'Opera di questo genere' [beauty of details, rushes of emotion, or charm of eloquence that only the soul can evaluate, and that while appearing to be secondary, become to those who can understand them the foremost objects of a work of this kind] (Caminer Turra 98). The perception of

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<sup>3</sup> The journalist at one point speaks about the "fatti strani [bizarre facts]" that abound in the novel: in Italian the word "strani", which can also translate into "diverse", is really revealing of the perception of the diversity of such complicated, sentimental plots by the Italian intellectual *milieu*. Also, Elisabetta underlines the fact that the female protagonist is characterized by beauty, grace, amiability, and she plays an active role in the falling in love process. She is not "conquered", she actually displays her virtues and her courage in the pursue of true love and happiness.

the novelty and the disruptive impact of the novel on the Venetian cultural milieu might be seen in the filigree of these words: to fully explain the sentimental value of the novel, Elisabetta recurs to a comparison with well-known literary works like *Nouvelle Heloise* or *Phaedra*. Only insensitive people will not find those adventures, as well as those of *Amalia*, moving and touching, full of ‘interesse, soavità, tinte felici, natura’ [interest, suavity, well-chosen shades, naturalness] (Caminer Turra 99). It looks like Elisabetta felt the need to *prepare* the readership, to explain the state of mind to be adopted in order to fully appreciate and comprehend the meaning of the novel. In this case, her function as a cultural mediator appears rather clear.

### **The Influence of The French Press**

As I explained at the beginning of the article, most of the reviews that appeared in Caminer’s journals might be traced back to French sources. The operation is normally quite easy, as a cross check shows that the time gap between the publication of the original French article and the derived Italian review is usually two or three months. It is sufficient to ‘retroactively’ search the journals that were regularly used as points of reference and the source can be easily identified.

Two examples from the latter *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico* will support a first incursion into the terms and conditions of how the introduction of information about the novels from France to Venice actually worked. Sometimes, the Italian journals just took a direct ‘copy and paste’ from the French reviews. The first case concerns the novel *Memoirs of the Manstein family. Pathetic, sentimental, humorous and satirical*, published anonymously in 1783. A review appeared in July 1784:

*Memoires ec. Memorie sopra la famiglia di Manstein, Storia patetica, sentimentosa, piacevole e satirica. 2. vol. in 12. Londra, presso Lowndes. 1783. - La lettura di questo Romanzo e’ interessante, e lo sarebbe ancora piu’ se contenesse un minor numero di digressioni. (Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico, July 1784, 122)*

[*Memoires etc. Memoirs of the Manstein Family. Pathetic, sentimental, humorous and satirical story.* 2. vol. in 12. London, Lowndes. 1783. –This book is an interesting read, and it would be even better if it contained fewer digressions.]<sup>4</sup>

This article is taken in its entirety from *Journal Encyclopédique*:

*Memoirs on the Manstein family &c.* C'est-à-dire, Memoires sur la famille de Manstein, histoire pathétique, sentimentale, plaisante & satyrique, 2 vol. in 12. A Londres, chez Lowndes. 1783. La lecture de ce roman est intéressante, & se seroit encore plus s'il y avoit moins de digressions. (*Journal Encyclopédique*, December 1783, 549)

Another example concerns Lucy Peacock's *The rambles of Fancy, or, moral and interesting tales and friendly labours*, published in 1786. The review appeared in *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*:

*The rambles, ec. Le escursioni dell'immaginazione, ovvero Novelle morali ed interessanti.* 2 Vol. in 12. Londra presso Buckland 1786. In questi diversi squarci, dovuti alla giovane Miss Pencock, le descrizioni sono ripiene di fantasia, e le situazioni sovente inverisimili. L'Autrice abbandona per le grazie del romanzo l'impero della natura; eppure la cognizione ch'ell'ha del cuore umano le permetteva di penetrar negli ultimi ripostigli di esso, e trarne situazioni superiori di molto alle pitture triviali d'un padre moribondo asperso delle lagrime d'un amato figliuolo, il quale resta privo nel medesimo tempo d'ogni sua facoltà. (*Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*, May 1787, 124–125)

[*The rambles, etc. The Rambles of Fancy, or, Moral and Interesting Tales and Friendly Labours.* 2 Vols, in 12. London, Buckland 1786. In these various passages, which we owe to young Miss Pencock [*sic*], descriptions are full of creativity, and circumstances often implausible. The author abandons the realm of naturalness in favour of the beauties of the novel; and yet, the knowledge of the human heart she possesses allowed her to enter its most secluded corners, and draw out of them some far superior situations than the trivial images of a dying father perfused with the tears of his beloved son, who is at once deprived of all his possessions.]

The French review at the base of this one was published in *Journal Encyclopédique* in March 1787:

THE RAMBLES OF FANCY, &C, C'EST-A-DIRE, LES EXCURSIONS DE L'IMAGINATION, *ou Contre moraux & intéressans.* 2 volumes in-12. A Londres, chez Buckland. 1786. Dans ces divers morceaux, que l'on doit à la jeune Miss Peacock, les descriptions sont pleines d'imagination, & les situations souvent invraisemblables. L'auteur quitte en faveur des scènes brillantes du roman, l'empire de la nature. Nous le voyons avec d'autant plus de regret, que sa connoissance du cœur humain lui permettoit d'en pénétrer les derniers replis, & d'y puiser des situations bien supérieures aux tableaux triviaux d'un père mourant, arrosé des pleurs d'un enfant chéri qui est en même tems privé de tout ce qu'il possédoit. (*Journal Encyclopédique*, March 1787, 367–368)

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<sup>4</sup> All the translations from Italian contained in the article are mine.



In both of these cases, the attitude of the Italian journalist was rather passive: the source review is imported without any modification or omission.

In most occasions, the reviews were modified and adapted by the Italian journalist to be understood by the audience. We have seen that it was common practice in both the Venetian and the French press, to use an established author as a term of comparison, when the journal was introducing a new or a non-popular novel to the readers. It is relevant to observe that if the Italian journalist found in the French source review a comparison with a famous author, on certain occasions they felt it was legitimate to push the boundaries of the review a bit further by adding some personal remarks to help the readers understand the subject. Let's look at the following example. In *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*, a review of John Moore's *Zeluco: Various Views of Human Nature, taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic* appeared as follows:

*Zeluco, various views &c. Zeluco, ovvero saggio su la natura umana formato sopra i costumi domestici e stranieri. 2. vol. in 8vo. di 500. pag. l'uno. Londra presso Cadell. 1789. Gli è un romanzo, ma da non confondersi con i comuni. Lo scopo a cui è diretto si è il dimostrare, che il vizio non manca mai di generar la miseria. L'Autore n'è il celebre Dr. Moore autore eziandio de' noti viaggi in Francia, in Alemagna, ed in Italia. Egli ha preso in questa sua nuova opera per modello Richardson; e gli è dir tutto. (Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico, May 1791, 122)*

[*Zeluco, various views, etc. Zeluco, Various Views of Human Nature, Taken from Life and Manners, Foreign and Domestic. 2 vols. in 8vo. of 500. pp. each. London, Cadell. 1789. This is a novel, but should not be confused with ordinary ones. It sets out the aim of showing that vice never fails to generate misery. Its author is the renowned Dr Moore, also the author of the famous travels to France, Germany and Italy. He took Richardson as his model for this new work of his; and this says everything.*]

The review is taken from an unusual source, *L'Esprit des journaux français et étrangers*. The French text is a lot longer than the Italian, which merged some content from the beginning and the end of its source to form the review:

Ce roman ne mérite pas d'être confondu avec la foule de pareils ouvrages dont nous sommes malheureusement inondés. Son auteur réunit à toutes les grâces de la littérature un esprit très-cultivé & un grand fond de connoissances. L'important objet de son livre est de démontrer que « le vice ne manque jamais d'enfanter la misère ».

[This novel does not deserve to be confused with the crowd of such works of which we are unfortunately inundated. Its author brings to all the graces of literature a very cultivated mind

and a great depth of knowledge. The important object of his book is to demonstrate that ‘vice never fails to bring misery’.]

Ceux qui trouveront cette conversation trop proluxe n’ont pas formé leur gout dans l’école de Richardson. Ce n’est pas le seul point dans lequel notre auteur imite cet excellent modèle. L’ouvrage est anonyme ; mais c’est de la plus grande conviction que nous osons l’attribuer au célèbre docteur Moore, l’auteur des voyages connus en France, en Allemagne & en Italie. (*L’Esprit des journaux français et étrangers*, August 1790, 154–172)

[Those who find this conversation too prolific have not formed their taste in Richardson’s school. This is not the only point in which our author imitates this excellent model. The work is anonymous; but it is of the greatest conviction that we dare to attribute it to the famous Dr Moore, the author of known travels in France, Germany, and Italy.]

In the French review (which stems directly from a British source, *The Monthly Review*, as declared at the end of the article – although I was not able to locate the English review), the reference to Richardson is only made to suggest a similarity with a better-known author, or to give an idea of the genre of the new publication. In the Italian one, the comparison immediately becomes a judgement on the intrinsic value of the new book. The words added by the Venetian journalist do not suggest any critical interpretation of the novel, but simply and firmly state that an association with Richardson represents everything that is needed to describe a book, with the tone of a *sententia* and without other argumentation. This treatment that Richardson and others were receiving by the press helped them to build their reputations as *auctoritas*, becoming privileged terms of comparison for the Italian readership, and points of reference in matters of modern literary taste. As soon as an established and well-known author was named in the source, the Italian journalist felt authorized to express a more personal judgement, going beyond what was written in the original review. We are, of course, far from an informed, inter-authorial, critical analysis, and we cannot expect it from the early experiences of the Venetian journalists and the Italians overall. The parallelisms are functional only to guide the journal’s readers in the ‘good book vs. bad book’ dialectic. Even more interesting is the fact that on this occasion the source review was taken from *L’Esprit des journaux français et étrangers*, and not from the usual *Journal Encyclopédique*. But an article on *Zeluco* did appear in the latter: a long review gives a negative judgement about the novel in the March 1790 issue, unlike

the other two articles we have so far considered (*Journal Encyclopédique*, March 1790, 430–437). No reference to Richardson appears in the *Journal Encyclopédique*'s review: maybe the mention of Richardson published in the other journal convinced the Italian writer of the value of the novel, and pushed them not to stick to the usual source. In this case, the authority of the established novelist would have played an important role in the reception of a minor work, which would have obtained a positive judgement just because *one* French review compared it to Richardson's works. It is indeed impossible to tell with certainty; but at the same time, it is unlikely that the journalist did not have access to the *Journal Encyclopédique*, which represents the base for at least 80% of all the reviews published in the Venetian journals. If the Italian correspondent had the chance to see both reviews, he deliberately chose to import the more positive one, where a reference to a known author would have corroborated the review and its statements.

### **Reviewing Canonized Authors**

With regard to what I just discussed about the canonized authors, it is possible to observe another remarkable pattern within the process of reception of the English novel. We already pointed out that most of the time the reviews taken from the French press were only slightly modified. Of course, these changes had multiple consequences and implications, but it was not common practice for the Venetian journalists to differ *too* much from their source reviews, when they were not entirely copied. The situation changes when works by famous and established authors were reviewed. Let us consider an example that appeared in *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*. The novel is a translation of Richardson's *Clarissa*:

*Clarisse, ec. Clarissa Harlove, traduzione novella, e sola completa, pel Sig. le Tourneur, fatta su l'edizione originale, riveduta da Richardson; con rami. Ginevra presso Barde, Manget, e Compagni, e si trova a Parigi presso Buisson. L'eccellenza di questo Romanzo merita che si raccomandandi a tutti coloro che amano di versare quelle tenere lagrime che fanno l'elogio de'cuori sensibili. (Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico, April 1787, 124)*

[*Clarisse, etc. Clarissa Harlove, a new translation, and the sole complete one, by Mr le Tourneur, based upon the original edition, revised by Richardson; with copper etchings.*

Geneva, Barde, Manget & Co., and available in Paris from Buisson. The excellence of this novel deserves to be recommended to all those who love shedding those tender tears that make sensitive hearts so praiseworthy.]

The source review was published in *Journal Encyclopédique* the previous February. But the text is quite different:

*CLARISSE HARLOWE, traduction nouvelle & seule complete, par M. LE TOURNEUR, faite sur l'edition originale, revue par Richardson, avec des planètes en taille douce. Dernière livraison, comprenant les tomes 8, 9, 10 in 8''., & 11, 12, 13 & 14 in 16. A Geneve, chez Barde, Manget & compagnie, & se trouve à Paris, chez Buisson. L'edition de cet ouvrage en 10 volumes in-8''. coute 36 liv. br., & 41 liv. fr. de port de la poste ; celle en 14 volumes in-16, 18 liv. br., & 21 liv. 10 f. fr. de port par la poste ; la meme en papier d'Hollande, 36 liv. br., & 39 liv. 10 f. fr. de port par la poste. (*Journal Encyclopédique*, February 1787, pp. 175–176)*

[*CLARISSE HARLOWE, traduction nouvelle & seule complete, par M. LE TOURNEUR, faite sur l'edition originale, revue par Richardson, avec des planètes en taille douce. Last delivery, including volumes 8, 9, 10 in 8" & 11, 12, 13 & 14 in 16. In Geneva, at Barde, Manget & Company & in Paris, at Buisson. The edition of this book in 10 volumes in-8". Costs 36 liv. br. & 41 liv. fr. postage; that in 14 volumes in-16, 18 liv. br. & 21 liv. 10 f. fr. postage; the same in paper from Holland, 36 liv. br., & 39 liv. 10 f. fr. postage.]*

There are no traces of the comment published in the Italian review, and I was not able to find other reviews in French journals of the same period that might have influenced the Italian journalist's observations. Probably, there was no need to be influenced after all: Richardson's novels were rather popular in those days, even in Italy, and his fame and reputation were already established. The journalist might have felt entitled to add a personal remark, because the novelist was well known, so there was no risk of committing mistakes while exposing personal opinions differing from the source review. This is particularly evident in the following example, taken again from *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico* and again regarding Richardson's *Clarissa*.

*Clarice Harlove, Dramma in tre atti in prosa. Parigi presso Née de la Rochelle 1786. Fa compassione il vedere strapazzato com'è in questo Dramma il sublime Sogetto di Richardson. L'anonimo ha fatto quanto sapea meglio per deturparlo : ha preso per argomento del suo Dramma la parte che esigeva maggior delicatezza dell'altre, e l'ha maneggiata come si avrebbe fatto non già per un teatro, ma per un postribolo ; ha perduto di vista intieramente l'unità della scena e del tempo, e ha dato prova di non saper conoscere i soggetti adattati alla scena, nè condurre quelli che ha creduto di questo numero. (*Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*, November 1787, 84)*

[*Clarice Harlove, Prose drama in three acts*. Paris, Née de la Rochelle 1786. Seeing Richardson's sublime subject to be ill-treated as it is in this drama is really pitiful. The anonymous author has done its best to disfigure it: he took as his drama's subject that very part which demanded more sensitivity than the others, and he handled it the way one would not for the theatre, but a brothel; he completely lost sight of the unity of action and time, and gave proof of his incapacity to choose the suitable subjects for the stage, as well as of directing the ones he believed to be so].

The source review appears to be once again published in *Journal Encyclopédique*. The text is too long to be transcribed here. What is important to notice is that the biggest part of the French text is dedicated to the summary of the drama's plot, which is completely omitted in the Italian one, where the journalist speaks briefly about a 'sublime sogetto' [sublime subject] and 'la parte che esigeva maggior delicatezza delle altre' [the part that needed more gentleness than the others]. The Italian article also skipped the initial theoretical debate about how dramatic novels can nourish theatrical adaptations. Most relevantly, the Italian reviewer agrees with the French on the non-excellent quality of the play, but the verbal violence of *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico* is something completely new. In the *Journal Encyclopédique* it is possible to find the following passage:

Tel est ce drame, qui ne nous semble pas fait pour le théâtre par tous les objets de dégoût qu'il présente dans l'action des personnages subalternes, mais qui n'est point sans mérite. Ceux qui connaissent beaucoup le roman de Richardson verront bien que les meilleurs détails de la pièce sont mot à mot de l'auteur anglois, & que les défauts qu'on peut y trouver sont de l'écrivain françois. C'est une chose digne d'observation, que les romans les plus fameux n'ont jamais produit de pièces qui ne leur fussent inférieures. La perfection du modèle nuit à tout ce qui a la prétention de s'égalier à lui. (*Journal Encyclopédique*, November 1786, 466–478)

[Such is the drama, which does not seem to us to be made for the theatre because of all the objects of disgust which it presents in the action of the subaltern characters, but which is not without merit. Those who are very familiar with Richardson's novel will see that the best details of the play are word for word by the English author, and that the defects that can be found there are from the French writer. It is worthy of observation that the most famous novels have never produced pieces which were not inferior to them. The perfection of the model is detrimental to anything that claims to be equal to it.]

Even if the content is similar, there is no trace of strong words such as 'deturparlo' [disfigure it] and most of all 'postribolo' [brothel], which is a totally original statement. Without any argumentation, or only relying on a very short one, the sharp judgement must have been really effective for the

Italian readers to picture how poor the play was. The French actually seem to give some credit to the play in the end, even if it cannot be compared with the famous novel. For the Italian, this theatre adaptation is irremediably bad: on the one hand, the author was not able to apply the Aristotelian criteria of unity of time and space, on the other, his choice and treatment of the characters were absolutely inadequate. The strong lexicon adopted by the Italian journalist in the review represents a *unicum*, when it comes to the topic of English novels: they might have felt confident enough about the subject to harshly criticize an editorial initiative that was deemed as badly conceived, without following the orientation of the source review. Again, this complete autonomy of judgement only appears when the subject of the review is an established, famous novelist.

### **Building a New Lexicon**

The last aspect of the reception of English novels in Caminer Turra's journals I am going to analyse concerns the style and the linguistic code used in the descriptions of the new literary object. We have already noticed that the definition and the conception of the English novel as a genre was not a completely straightforward process in the early days of the journals we are considering as cultural mediators. From a linguistic point of view, the Italian articles reveal another interesting clue in this regard. Since the novel was a rather new entity in the cultural horizon of the peninsula, a linguistic code to describe, interpret and comprehend it was not yet established. This is probably the reason why in the migration from France to Italy, some expressions used originally to talk about the novels were manipulated and redirected towards a more 'familiar' lexical constellation. Some examples will clarify the trend. *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico* published the following review of Albinia Gwynn's *History of the Honourable Edward Mortimer. By a lady*, in February 1786:

*History, ec. Storia del Lord Mortimer; scritta da una Dama. Londra 1785. L'Autrice di codesto Romanzo sembra conoscere profondamente il cuore umano, ed il mondo. Essa ci ha sparso a proposito de' fini tratti satirici, delle situazioni commoventi, della sublime moralità. La catastrofe però vi è un po' forzata, inverisimile, ed involuta. (Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico, February 1786, 123)*

[*History, etc. The History of Lord Mortimer; written by a lady.* London 1785. The author of this novel seems to have a deep knowledge of the human heart, and of the world. She has purposefully strewn it with subtle satirical traits, touching situations, and a sublime morality. The catastrophe in it, however, is rather forced, unnatural, and involute.]

The source review can be found in *Journal Encyclopédique*:

*History of the honourable Edward Mortimer, &c. C'est-à-dire, Histoire de l'honorable Edouard Mortimer. Par une Lady.* 2 volumes in-12. A Londres, chez Dilly. 1785. L'anonyme paroît connoître supérieurement le coeur humain & le monde ; l'Histoire est agréable ; les traits satyriques sont bien places ; les scènes, les mouvemens de tendresse, sans affectation ; mais quelques invraisemblances trahissent la fiction, & le dénouement est trop embarrassé. (*Journal Encyclopédique*, February 1786, 548)

[History of the Honourable Edward Mortimer, etc. that is, History of the Honourable Edouard Mortimer. By a lady. 2 volumes in-12. In London, at Dilly's. 1785. The anonymous author seems to know superiorly the human heart and the world; the history is pleasant; the satirical features are well placed; the scenes, the movements of tenderness, without affectation; but some improbabilities betray the fiction, and the denouement is too embarrassing.]

The texts are quite similar, even if the Italian journalist speaks autonomously about the 'sublime morality' of the novel and skips the parts about '*les mouvements de tendresse*' and the '*invraisemblances*'. What is even more interesting is how the Italian article imports the concept of '*dénouement*'. In current Italian, the word used to translate this narrative concept is '*scioglimento*'. But back then, the journalist chose to adopt the code of the tragedy, and decided to write '*catastrofe*': it is a clear example of how the lack of linguistic instruments to critically describe the new literary genre forced the journalist to operate within the framework of a more familiar semantic field. Tragedy was, of course, a very well-established genre in Italy, and it was probably considered among the most prestigious. The critical literature had a long tradition, and its linguistic tools were well mastered by literary journalists and by the erudite public of the time. By changing that one word, the journalist made the content more comprehensible for their readers, by leading them in a semantic field they were acquainted with. The reception of a new, unprecedented concept also passed through the association with familiar lexical terms.

The last example I will consider is a review of an adaptation of Frances Burney's *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress*, published in *Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*.

*Cecilia*. Commedia in 3 atti con ariette, rappresentata a Parigi nel Dicembre 1786. – Il soggetto n'è tratto dal conosciutissimo Romanzo Inglese di Miss Burney, pienissimo d'accidenti, forzati non di raro, ma che in pieno formano un tutto interessante. La Commedia, che riconosce per accozzatore il Sig. Combe, non poteva a meno di riuscir mediocre; poichè non v'ha nelle ventiquattr'ore prescritte al periodo dell'azione tempo che basti per preparare e svolgere molti avvenimenti. Il Sig. Combe però non potendo scansare la soverchia complicazione, l'ha resa meno ingrata colle grazie dello stile. (*Nuovo Giornale Enciclopedico*, April 1787, 97)

[*Cecilia*. Comedy in 3 acts with ariettas performed in Paris in December 1786. –Its subject is taken from the very well-known English Novel by Miss Burney, which is extremely full of incidents that are often unnatural, but combined together well to form an interesting whole. The comedy, that recognizes Mr Combe as the one who jumbled it together, could not help but turn out mediocre; since there is not enough time in the required plot time of twenty-four hours for the preparation and the unfolding of many events. Mr Combe, however, although unable to sidestep this major difficulty, has made it less disagreeable with the elegance of his style.]

The source review was published in *Journal Encyclopédique* in January 1787 (*Journal Encyclopédique*, January 1787, 275–279). It consisted of four pages, so it was considerably longer than the Italian, which as usual cut short the part with the plot summary. The first difference concerns the 'accidenti' [accidents]: while the Italian depicts them as too many, and 'forzati non di rado' [often forced], conceding an appreciation for the play only after an adversary 'ma' [but], the French only appreciates their 'charme & la variété'. The Italian journal is sharper in its judgement: nowhere in the French article is it mentioned that the comedy was 'mediocre' and that the author was an 'accozzatore' [from 'accozzare', to arrange in an untidy manner]. More importantly, with regard to the 'topic' of this paragraph, a change can be seen in the 'theatrical language' used to describe the play. The French just talked about the fact that such a novel made it difficult for the comedian to create a play with 'une action qui fut une & simple' [an action to be one and simple], but there is no trace of bitter opinions; the Italian, on the other hand, refers directly to the Aristotelian 'prescriptions', stating that in no way such a big number of facts could fit into the canonical twenty-four hours of action. Maybe the harsher judgement is due to the fact that the Italian journalist did not like the violation of the 'tradition', since a novel with so many incidents



was not suitable to be converted into a theatrical play. It is, again, hard to tell. What matters the most is to point out how the audience was always led towards a more familiar lexical code, where an established critical and literary tradition would have helped with the understanding of the novelty brought by the novel.

## **Conclusion**

The first results of the enquiry on the periodicals that were printed in Venice in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century showed some features of the process of reception of the English novel within the Venetian cultural milieu. Owing to its strong publishing industry, Venice was among the most receptive cities in the Italian peninsula with regard to literary news coming from abroad. Elisabetta Caminer Turra and her team became precociously aware of the revolutionary impact the English novel was having on the European intellectual panorama of the time, confirming the broad cultural engagement of her editorial initiative. It was precisely because of this revolutionary impact that the reception of the English novel was not a simple, linear process, from multiple points of view. The French journals were a fundamental source for the Italian journalists, that regularly examined them in search of news to import in the peninsula. Reviews, articles and announcements regarding foreign literature publications are a clear example of this mechanism. The information about English novels is no exception: Venetian journalists relied extensively on the French sources as the primary point of reference when it came to learning and importing news about English culture. The examples we selected demonstrates that some of the articles taken by the Venetian journals were literally ‘copied and pasted’: the Italian journalists could find a news item in a French source, deem it of some interest for the public and import it without any modification. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the French news that were used as a repertoire to be introduced to the Italian readership had to undergo a process of censorship, adaptation, and modification in order to be understandable in a different cultural context. The strategy of editing out some parts of the French source reviews that was regularly applied by Venetian journalists is coherent with the necessity to make their content

understandable for an audience that was not at all familiar with the British social class system and its practices, and was based on a completely different structure. In most occasions the French reviews that were selected as sources were sectioned and only the most salient parts were copied, like for example the beginnings or the conclusions. The difficulty, if not the impossibility, in the comprehension of such a different social and intellectual milieu, led the Venetian journalists to adopt a cautious and prudent attitude towards the literary novelty coming from England. The Venetian press did not fully understand the many social, cultural and literary implications of the English novels (which were in many occasions very difficult to access, together with the British newspapers: a problem Elisabetta Caminer complained about in multiple occasions), and therefore the journalists introduced the many news about them in an ‘aseptic’ way, without interpretations, explanations or even comments, but limiting themselves to the omission of the parts that were deemed as unconventional or too far from the common moral orthodoxy. Only the already established authors benefitted of a different treatment: when they felt like knowing enough information about certain writers, either because their novels were circulating since a longer period, or because their success was immediately widespread, the Venetian journalists felt free to write articles that were considerably different from the French sources, where personal remarks and autonomous judgements were added. This did not apply to new authors, as the journalist probably did not feel like knowing enough about their work to write articles that were not based on a reliable (for them) source. As we observed, the uncertainty we described so far is mirrored by the choice of the linguistic code: the Venetian journalists still could not fully grasp and conceptualize the idea of the novel as a genre, therefore even the lexicon to talk about it had, in its way, to be created.

Further investigations on the topic will aim at deepening the analysis of how the Italian journals were understanding and conceptualizing the English novel, by focusing on other aspects of its reception in the Italian shores that were puzzling the journalists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. For example, the English novel was a gendered object since its birth and was creating more than one cause for concern for the journalists across Europe. In Italy the situation was even more peculiar,

since the censorship was fierce and religion was playing a big part in dictating which contents were orthodox and which were not. For instance, Venetian journalists showed an early appreciation for women writers, but they had to start facing a gender dimension that represented something completely new for them, and for the Italian cultural milieu in general: some reviews show for example that women writers were acknowledged and praised for their efforts, but they were almost always located in a subordinate position in comparison with male novelists as for the prestige and authority of their work. This, together with other issues related to the Venetian reception of English novels, will be discussed in a targeted paper I plan to write after a wider enquiry. This brief article already showed some of the patterns that influenced the process of reception of English novels in Italy in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The news tended to be transmitted ‘passively’, as if the goal was to import a large quantity of information without a deeper understanding of the subject and without a real critical or pedagogical initiative. This lack of context made the articles a bit enigmatic for the Italian readership, which was introduced to the English novels in a rather enigmatic way. The conceptualization of the new literary object was undermined by misunderstandings and by the absence of a robust critical apparatus, which on the contrary was made available in the French press. The French readership could not only benefit from a larger number of titles in translation, but also from commentaries and observations that were helping with the understanding and the conceptualization of the English novels. The Italian cultural environment was, at this regard, still far from fully grasping the many social and literary implications of the genre, even if initiatives such as the one promoted by Elisabetta Caminer played a pivotal role in the realization of the impact the novels from England were having all over Europe.

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