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Journalism and Theatre in the Age of Enlightenment: Elisabetta Caminer's Reviews for *L'Europa Letteraria*

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A New, Broadminded Journalistic Experience in an Age of Reform and Debate on Theatre

In the mid-eighteenth century no specific theatrical press was to be found in Veneto, but news about drama literature and theatrical performances was available in other journals, such as local gazettes. *L'Europa letteraria* (1768-1773) was a peculiar example that brought to the Venetian press of the time the novelty of becoming the Veneto region's first Enlightenment voice (De Michelis 312). Founded in Venice in 1768 by Domenico Caminer, it belonged to the literary and encyclopedic dissemination press, offering translated articles on various subjects taken from European journals (mainly from the *Mercure de France* and the *Journal encyclopédique*) with some original excerpts preceded by an asterisk.¹ The journal devoted great attention to theatre, focusing on new Italian and on foreign works that came mainly, but not exclusively, from France. From the beginning Elisabetta Caminer (Domenico's daughter, who was seventeen years old when the journal was founded) contributed mainly with translations and reviews.² While her intentions and methods were in line with the contemporary and traditional Venetian literary press Elisabetta Caminer's personality made the journal stand out. As Marino Berengo reports:

Dotata di un entusiasmo che il pacato e un po' smorto Domenico non conobbe forse mai, Elisabetta non si attenne alle umili mansioni di riassumere ed informare. [...] Lo slancio con cui interveniva in ogni polemica, era presto destinato a trasformare *L'Europa letteraria* che

¹ The first issue of *L'Europa Letteraria* dated back to September 1768. The journal was published until May 1773, when it was replaced first by the *Giornale enciclopedico* (January 1774 – December 1782) and then by the *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (January 1783 – December 1789); the last journal edited by Elisabetta Caminer (Turra) was the *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico d'Italia*, from January 1790 until her death in 1796 (Fattorello 76-82; Berengo LI-LVIII).

² Elisabetta Caminer (Venezia, 1751- Vicenza, 1796) is considered an intellectual, a cultural promoter and a modern woman. She was a journalist, a translator, a publisher, a playwright and a theatre director.

[...] divenne un giornale moderno e nuovo, quale il Veneto non aveva mai conosciuto. (Berengo LII-LIII)

[Provided with an enthusiasm which the calm and a fairly dull Domenico perhaps never knew, Elisabetta did not limit herself to the humble duties of summarizing and informing. [...] The impulse with which she participated in every debate was soon destined to transform *L'Europa letteraria* which [...] became a modern and innovative journal, the likes of which Veneto had never known.]

Her contributions to the journal touched on various topics, including, among others, literary news, treatises, fashion, current events. This paper will focus on the theatrical reviews published by Elisabetta Caminer on *L'Europa letteraria*, as examples significant of her intercultural engagement between literature, theatre and society, and between France and Italy.

Caminer soon linked her journalistic career to the theatrical milieu. Her first interest in theatre stemmed from translations, as Catherine M. Sama explains, “of the most recent French plays for Venetian theatre companies who wished to perform them” (Sama 12). On the pages of *L'Europa letteraria*, her theatrical vocation also found expression in the form of reviews that not only introduced the texts to the Venetian public but also functioned as a vehicle for comment, discussion and the spread of the new Enlightenment dramaturgy.

First of all, a brief (but hardly exhaustive) premise is necessary.

The eighteenth century is known as the century of theatrical reform. Theatre was undergoing a period of transformation, and in Italy, specifically, the term “*riforma*” was most closely associated with Carlo Goldoni. The well-known Venetian playwright undertook a radical conversion of staging techniques, abandoning in his works the use of the *tipi fissi* (the masked character types of the *commedia dell'arte*, such as the servants Arlecchino and Brighella or the old men Pantalone and Gratiano, etc.) in favor of characters inspired by real contemporary middle-class people. Moreover, fully written scripts were introduced to replace the *canovacci* (plot outlines) and the scenarios of improvised comedy. This renewal gave rise to a debate between Goldoni (and his supporters) and other playwrights, including Carlo Gozzi. With his theatrical *fiabe* (fairy tales for the theatre),

Gozzi produced works that combine folklore, fantasy literature, characters and imagery from the domain of magic, *commedia dell'arte* and exotic atmospheres.³

After Goldoni moved from Venice to Paris to work for the *Comédie-Italienne* (1762), Gozzi's fables dominated the Venetian stages. This primacy was defied by Elisabetta Caminer's French drama translations, which were not only published but also performed in Venice's theatres: she "enjoyed the privilege (extremely rare for a woman) of directing the performances of some of her translations between 1769 and 1771 at the S. Angelo Theater" (Sama 12). In addition to these practical performances, the competition between the two was also at a literary level: Caminer offered productions of the new French bourgeois drama with realistic characters and moralizing purpose. The key ideas behind that theatre were moral and virtuous realism, the attributes on which she focused. The criteria that shaped the theatrical debate demonstrate that her repertoire was in line with Goldoni's reform and opposed to Gozzi's *fiabe*.

The dramaturgical dispute in which Caminer got involved (mostly from 1772) is the object of some specific studies.⁴ This paper will not retrace the phases of the controversy but will go back to the original ideas that underlay Caminer's positions, prior to the dispute. Therefore, my focus will be on *L'Europa letteraria*, the first public vehicle for Elisabetta's dissemination of ideas and the first journal in which she forged the ideals that she forcefully pursued.

Her theatrical reviews for *L'Europa Letteraria* branched off into three trajectories that can be identified as 1) openness to the new French *larmoyant* (tearful) dramaturgy that she made popular in Italy; 2) support for emerging works of Italian playwrights inspired by the French model; 3) opposition to "fantastic" and unrealistic plays, in favor of serious dramas with a moral and educational purpose. In order to show the evolution of her critical thought, some crucial reviews will be examined as examples of her intercultural, theatrical and social mission.

³ To begin: Bosisio, Beniscelli, Scannapieco, Bazoli.

⁴ On the Gozzi-Camminer debate see Sama, "Verso un teatro moderno" and Di Giacomo.

Modern French Drama Presented to Italian Readers

L'Europa letteraria includes twenty-nine theatrical reviews (mostly about single scripts and less often about collections)⁵. Thirteen of them present French productions. Therefore, a main focus of the journal was the introduction of French *pièces*, showing its cross-cultural vocation from the first issues. Elisabetta's comments it make clear that her primary interest was in plays whose Enlightenment spirit was most vivid. This choice is apparent in the first issue, where Elisabetta presents Baculard D'Arnaud's *Euphème* (subtitled *Or the triumph of religion*), a tragedy that narrates a struggle to affirm ideas of freedom. In support of the presentation, Elisabetta (who also translated the *pièce*) offers a preface through which she presents a 'manifesto' of her views on the mode and meaning of theatre writing.

Per l'ordinario le nostre tragedie moderne non hanno alcuno scopo morale; le sentenze, le massime che alcune volte vi si ritrovano non fanno sennon un'impressione passeggera, essendo isolate e qualche volta poco confacenti al soggetto. Di rado si trova chi si proponga per meta una gran verità, della quale sia il Dramma lo scioglimento. Questa maniera di trattarla renderebbe alla Tragedia la sua dignità. Il Signor d'Arnaud, che fece sopra a quest'arte delle riflessioni profonde, non mancò di valersi di questa parte essenziale, e sfortunatamente poco curata. (Review of *Euphème* 65)

[Our modern tragedies don't usually have any moral intent; the teachings, the principles that sometimes can be found just leave a temporary impression, being isolated and sometimes unsuitable to the subject. It is rare to find someone who aims at a great truth, to be revealed by the drama. Such means would render Tragedy its dignity. Mr. d'Arnaud, who deeply reflected on this art, didn't fail to make use of this essential, unfortunately little considered aspect.]

Euphème exposes the fatal consequences of the injustice of a mother who for monetary reasons forces her daughter (and, indirectly, the girl's lover) to enter religious orders. The tragedy is full of languid, sentimental nuances that effectively convey its deep ideological meaning. Caminer

⁵ In detail, Elisabetta Caminer wrote reviews on the following dramatic works: d'Arnaud's *Euphème*; Fontanelle's *Ericie*; the collection *Scelta di alcune eccellenti Tragedie Francesi tradotte in verso sciolto Italiano* by Albergati Capacelli and Paradisi; Carli's *Telane ed Ermelinda*; Cailhava's *Le Mariage interrompu*; Carli's *I Longobardi*; the collection *Teatro Spagnolo*; Albergati Capacelli's *Il Saggio amico* (I and II); Fenouillot de Falbaire's *L'honnête criminel, ou L'amour filial*, translated by Elisabetta Caminer; Champfort's *Il Mercante di Smirne*; Albergati Capacelli's *Il Sofà*; the collection *Composizioni teatrali moderne, tradotte da Elisabetta Caminer* (II, III and IV).

especially appreciated the last act, in which she notices its “patetico” (pathetic tone) and disapproved of the more Gothic scenes, such as the last one, which takes place in a cemetery.

Furthermore, she uses critical keywords to highlight the value of this work:

Il terrore è addolcito dal patetico. [...] Ella [la tragedia] impegna, e maggiormente intenerisce. [...] Si piange con piacere in sì fatti casi, ed essa farà cadere molte lagrime. (Review of *Euphème* 74)

[Terror is softened by the pathetic style. [...] The tragedy engages, and mostly moves the reader. [...] The reader cries with pleasure in such instances, and will shed many tears].

Terms like ‘pathetic’, ‘engagement’, ‘moving’ and ‘tears’ are clear references to the French sentimental comedy (*comédie larmoyante*), which, on the one hand, replaced declining traditional Neoclassical tragedy and, on the other hand, anticipated the new serious bourgeois drama.⁶

This intellectual debut was a daring choice for Caminer. D’Arnaud’s tragedy had already aroused controversy in his country of origin. Sama points out: “Baculard d’Arnaud’s play was originally published in 1768, but it was not performed in Paris until 1789, because of its antiecclesiastical tone” (Sama 12). Something similar happened to the second tragedy presented by Elisabetta, *Ericia*, ovvero *la Vestale*, “forbidden to be performed on stage, and burned as irreligious” (Sama 199). In this case, too, Caminer selected a family tragedy, although contrasting the power of a father with the happiness of a daughter.

Questa Tragedia, che produce i migliori effetti su’ Teatri dove viene rappresentata, offre il più compassionevole spettacolo, e la più terribile verità. [...] In *Ericia* si attacca un abuso [...] pernicioso, e sfortunatamente più frequente fra noi. Purtroppo numerosi sono gli esempi di padri ingiusti, che sacrificano il resto della loro famiglia ad un figlio che idolatrano: e di figli infelici, che o per dispetto, o per timidezza, o sedotti da altre vittime, si lasciano impegnare in legami che non possono più rompere. Tale è la misera *Ericia*. (Review of *Ericia* 55-56)

[This Tragedy, which produces the best effects on the theatres where it is performed, offers the most compassionate spectacle, and the most terrible truth. [...] In *Ericia* a pernicious, and unfortunately more frequent among us, abuse is criticized. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of unjust fathers who sacrifice the rest of their family to a child they

⁶ On the *comédie larmoyante*: Marchand.

idolize: and of unhappy children who, either out of spite, or shyness, or seduced by other victims, allow themselves to be ensnared in bonds they cannot break. Such is poor Ercia.]

This analysis precedes a long paragraph in which the plot of the tragedy is described, along with the moral qualities of the heroine and the tragic events that lead to her death. Then, examining all the characters, Caminer expresses a harsh judgement against Ercia's father.

These comedies offered a model of moral behavior through virtuous characters, such as Euphemia and Ercia. Even though they die, their moral nobility is rewarded, since they become examples of virtue and positive values.

Her choosing to review these *pièces*, in the first two issues of *L'Europa letteraria*, immediately indicate the type of theatre that Elisabetta considered worthy to be presented to Italian readers: on the one hand, a contemporary European theatre, on the other, serious works with high moral standards, inviting audiences to reflect on the meaning of justice. Her purpose was to show examples of a new kind of theatre sensitive to the needs of a changing society, more conscious of moral and civic matters and, not secondary, opposed to the merely entertaining comedies offered on Venetian stages. Her adhesion to this particular type of modern tragedy did not end with the presentation of French texts but developed with the promotion of Italian works inspired by French dramaturgy.

Between Classicism and Innovation: Italian Tragedy Inspired by the French Model

Besides the French productions, *L'Europa Letteraria* focused on the Italian authors Saverio Bettinelli, Francesco Ulisse Righieri, Carlo Goldoni, Francesco Albergati Capacelli and Alessandro Carli. While Domenico Caminer wrote about Bettinelli, Righieri and Goldoni, Elisabetta introduced to readers to the works of Alessandro Carli and Francesco Albergati Capacelli, who became, respectively, the only Italian dramatist and the only comedy writer, whom Caminer directly presented in the journal.

The first Italian work to enjoy broad consideration was *Telane ed Ermelinda*, the first tragedy by Count Alessandro Carli (1740-1814) of Verona. A former student of Saverio Bettinelli's, Carli had gained firsthand experience of French theatre with the famous Lekain in Paris and at Voltaire's residence in Ferney. Once back in Verona in 1767, after his *Grand Tour*, he decided to devote himself to theatre, by both becoming a writer of tragedies and establishing a school of drama arts for a select circle of fellow Veronese aristocrats, among whom stand out the Pindemonte brothers, Teresa Colloredo Pellegrini, the Counts Marioni, and Silvia Curtoni Verza (Brunetti 151-158).

Telane ed Ermelinda is a tragedy set in Ravenna in the fifth century, at the moment of the transfer of the first Italic Roman-Barbarian kingdom, initiated by Odoacre, and built on the ashes of the Western Roman Empire, to the domination of Theodoric's Ostrogoths. Two thematic paths can be identified: the struggle for power and the tragic love affair between Prince Telane and Ermelinda.

During the Enlightenment, the moralization of theatre was one of the concerns of reformers. In order to prepare the emerging bourgeoisie for its social responsibilities, theatre was a potentially important vehicle of education, offering plays in which values, morality and rational intelligence converged. In this context, the tragedy *Telane ed Ermelinda* stood out for the particular meaning provided by the author. This work conveyed messages of measure and reasonableness, it also included elements anticipating the developing idea of a national conscience and community. The virtue of temperance represented an antidote to the excess of passions, sentimental impulses and emotional upheavals, and it moved audiences toward a healthy and balanced relationship with reality.

Elisabetta Caminer published a review of *Telane ed Ermelinda* on April 1769. She started it by including in the text an excerpt from a letter of Voltaire's to Carli, and adding words of praise for the modern Enlightenment qualities of the tragedy.

Noi assoggettiamo il nostro giudizio a quello di tanto celebre uomo, che nel tragico diede saggi di maestria, e fece tacere que' ridicoli antiquarj, i quali non approvano sennon ciò che pute di greco, o è circoscritto da vocaboloni inintelligibili non solo, ma seccanti a segno, che fanno inaridire le loro miserabili copie prima che dilatino i rami, onde nè il Lettore, nè l'amatore del Teatro ne ritrae frutto alcuno. [...] Grazie però alle Muse moderne, sopra questo punto s'illuminarono i Poeti, e danno saggi tuttogiorno del loro ravvedimento. L'Autore di *Telane ed Ermelinda* ne somministra una prova. (Review of *Telane ed Ermelinda* 59)

[We subject our judgement to that of that famous man, who in tragedy gave proof of mastery, and hushed up those ridiculous traditionalists who do not approve of anything that is not Greek-sounding, or is circumscribed in incomprehensible and utterly annoying words, which make their miserable scripts wither before they can spread their branches, so that neither the Reader, nor the Theatre enthusiast can get any benefit from it. [...] Thanks to the modern Muses though, the Poets have been enlightened on this point, proving their reform as each day goes by. The Author of *Telane and Ermelinda* gives proof of this.]

In fact, Voltaire had sent Carli a letter full of appreciation, in which he declared having read the tragedy with great pleasure, to the point of being able to free his mind of his health problems. Among the qualities, he pointed out the liveliness of the plot, which kept the reader absorbed from start to finish ("Letter to Alessandro Carli" 25). Voltaire had read *Telane ed Ermelinda* because his correspondent Albergati Capacelli described it as an Italian tragedy in the French mode ("Letter to Francesco Albergati Capacelli" 100).

This *pièce* has been described as being of French inspiration, and more precisely Voltairean (Piva 319), on account of certain tropes used in it: a variety of episodes and events; the prevalence of the love subject; the development of the theme of the clash between populations; a subject associable with themes of national identity; and a narrative development based on dynamism and action. Once printed, *Telane ed Ermelinda* shocked classicist readers and, when its performance was announced in Venice, it provoked diatribes by Venetian critics, especially those most averse to change and to anything French (Capuzzo 119).

Elisabetta Caminer criticized such attitudes in her review, naming the stricter classicists "ridicoli antiquari" [ridiculous traditionalists] (59). She made a thorough analysis of the work, act

by act, evaluating the writing,⁷ observing the temper of the different characters⁸ and highlighting the effects of the most successful scenes.⁹ In a critical passage in the review, Elisabetta allows herself to give rein to more emotional comments, in scenes where the characters are overwhelmed by the events, defining some crucial ones as “very sweet” or “very gloomy”.¹⁰

She closed the article with an evaluation of the intrinsic nature of the writing, declaring: “Questa Tragedia è scritta con forza; molti suoi tratti meritano particolari riflessi” [This Tragedy is written with vigor; many of its features deserve particular reflections] (66).

Francesco Albergati Capacelli, Marquess of Bologna, and a theatre enthusiast, playwright and passionate promoter of amateur theatre, was particularly pleased by the review.¹¹ Albergati Capacelli himself, a friend of Carli and admirer of his works, had arranged for the presentation and promotion of the tragedy by writing enthusiastically about it to Voltaire and to Caminer and (unbeknownst to Carli) by sharing Voltaire’s letter with Caminer. He was very pleased by her words, especially the “Sonora, graziosa, e mortificante [...] sferzata ai Grecisti” [Resounding, graceful and humiliating [...] lashing out at the Hellenists] (Albergati Capacelli, “Letter to Elisabetta Caminer”, 28th April 1769, 125).

Albergati Capacelli was the only other Italian author Elisabetta dealt with directly on *L’Europa Letteraria*, reviewing five of his works in three years (the first in 1770, the last in 1773). Between

⁷ “Questa scena è scritta felicissimamente” [This scene is wonderfully written] (Caminer, Review of *Telane ed Ermelinda* 60).

⁸ “Resta Odoacre con Ferusto; il carattere di questo Ministro è odiosissimo, ma nel suo genere benissimo condotto” [Odoacre stays with Ferusto; the character of this Minister is hateful, but of his type very well realized] (Caminer, Review of *Telane ed Ermelinda* 62).

⁹ “È questo un colpo da maestro dell’astuto Ferusto per far tanto maggiormente rilevare la fuga già eseguita da Telane” [This is a master stroke of the cunning Ferusto, to make Telane’s escape much more evident] (Caminer, Review of *Telane ed Ermelinda* 64).

¹⁰ “Ermelinda dà in ismanie, ma molto più quando sente da Svenno che un certo amore è cagione della morte del Principe. Ella accusa se stessa; questa Scena è tenerissima” [Ermelinda becomes restless, and much more so when she hears from Svenno that a certain love is the cause of the Prince’s death. She accuses herself; this Scene is very tender]”, or: “Ermelinda disperata si uccide; l’ultima scena è tetrissima” [Ermelinda, in desperation, kills herself; the last scene is very gloomy] (Caminer, Review of *Telane ed Ermelinda* 65).

¹¹ Francesco Albergati Capacelli (1728-1804) was a marquess and senator from Bologna who played an important role in the municipal government. Nevertheless, he dedicated his whole life to theatre. He translated important French works into Italian, was a playwright, an actor-manager of various amateur companies, an acting coach, besides being an avid writer who corresponded with many personalities, including Carlo Goldoni and Voltaire.

1768 and 1771 the two exchanged a number of interesting letters, revealing of their love for theatre, the interest for the modern French culture and their adhesion to the Goldoni's reform.

The analysis of the reviews of Albergati Capacelli's works can lead to further considerations, presented in the next paragraph.

Toward a Theatre of Social Commitment, from Literature to the Stage

From the beginning of 1770 Elisabetta's taste grew more sophisticated and her ideas about drama became clearer and more defined. She didn't write exclusively about tragedies, but also about other genres, focusing in particular on that 'third genre' of French origin that took the shape of '*commedia lacrimosa*' or '*dramma patetico-sentimentale*' in Italy, assuming, on the one side, the fragile sentimentalism of the *comédie larmoyante* and, on the other side, the more solid and powerful ideological meaning of serious, realistic and socially meaningful bourgeois drama. The moment was crucial: a demand for renewal was perceived in both the dramaturgical and the performative fields of theatre.

Between the 1760s and 1770s, the dissemination of this new dramaturgy also became a practical matter of competition, as was indicated at the beginning of this article: the '*dramma lacrimoso*' and the bourgeois dramaturgy of French origin started to gain ground in the Venetian theatres, alongside the comedy repertory (Giardi 115). Caminer reported on this phenomenon: in her reviews there is often mention of the staging and of audience appreciation, in her opinion the best indication of the quality of a dramatic work.

Il maggiore e più sincero applauso che ricever possa una Teatrale composizione si è quello che le viene dall'Universale. Può essere benespesso sospetta una particolare opinione, imperocchè vari sono i gusti, e varie talvolta le ragioni di chi biasima o loda: ma quando un Pubblico intero applaude ad un'Opera, e tanti gusti diversi si accordano nel commendarla, non c'ha chi possa non riconoscerne il merito. (Review of *I Longobardi* 84)

[The greatest and most sincere applause that a Theatrical composition can receive is that which comes from the Universal. A particular opinion can often be suspected, since tastes vary, and sometimes varied reasons for those who blame or praise it: but when an entire

Audience applauds a Work, and so many different tastes agree in commending it, there is no one who may not recognize its merit.]

The most significant example of the echo offered by Elisabetta on the pages of *L'Europa Letteraria* to the success of the new dramatic genre in theatres can be read in the May 1770 issue, in which the information on a specific work (*L'Honnête Criminel, ou l'Amour filial* by Fenouillot de Falbaire, translated into Italian by Caminer herself), gave her the opportunity to open the discussion more widely on the popularity and appreciation of bourgeois drama in Italy:

Questo Dramma, giacchè così l'Autore lo chiama, fu applaudito moltissimo non solo su' nostri Teatri, dove fu replicato parecchie sere, ma eziando in tutt'i luoghi ne' quali fu rappresentato, e particolarmente a Vicenza un mese fa. L'incontro da esso fatto, e da varie altre opere dello stesso genere prova, che gl'Italiani non meno che i Francesi capaci sono di que' teneri sentimenti, che molle rendono di dolce pianto il ciglio dello Spettatore. (96)

[This Drama, as the Author calls it, was greatly applauded not only in our Theatres, where it had several repeat performances, but also in all the venues where it was performed, and especially in Vicenza a month ago. The success enjoyed by it and various other works of the same genre proves that Italians, no less than the French, are capable of those tender feelings, which softens the spectator's eye with tender tears.]

Her analysis is not limited to an abstract assessment, but also touches on very concrete points of the play, by investigating the reasons that can affect the success of a performance. For example, in the case of Fenouillot de Falbaire's *Le Fabricant de Londres*, Elisabetta reported, on the one hand, the success it achieved on the Venice stages in the autumn of 1771 (as well as in Germany, where the drama enjoyed great popularity); on the other hand, she explained the reasons that brought about its flop in France: the vastness of the theatre didn't allow the audience to hear the "*mezze parole*" [hinted meanings], thus removing "moltissimo alla verità dell'azione" [a great deal from the truth of the action] (Review of *Composizioni* 99).

This demonstrates the strong link that Elisabetta identified between drama writing and stage performance. It is no coincidence that she was involved in theatrical practice both as director and, later, as agent for a company of amateur actors in Vicenza.

This attention to the performative facet of theatre also found space in her reviews of the first Albergati Capacelli ‘commedia lacrimosa’, *Il saggio amico* (*L’Europa Letteraria*, April 1770). She reports: “fece moltissimo incontro su le nostre Venete Scene, e fu replicata per ben dodici sere, con sempr’eguale concorso di gente” [it had a great impact on the Venetian scene, and had twelve repeat performances, with constant audience attendance] (74). Among the comedy’s qualities, she especially valued the dialogue, which she described as “naturale, sempre pieno di spirito” [natural and always full of spirit] (77) and the womens’ characters, “con moltissima verità” [very true] (77). These realistic and emotional features were considered positive values and, from another perspective, they opposed the fantastic and unreal elements of the *fiabe*.

While Elisabetta used the pages of *L’Europa Letteraria* to popularize in Italy a dramaturgy with moral and virtuous intentions, she also used her reviews to criticize what, in her opinion, should be avoided.

In another review of a new work by Albergati Capacelli, Elisabetta Caminer expresses a steadfast opposition to unrealistic plays (*L’Europa Letteraria*, November 1770). Despite her friendship with the author, Caminer remained true to her taste and ideology by not approving of the genre with which Albergati Capacelli was experimenting. The comedy *Il sofà* followed the model of Carlo Gozzi’s *fiabe*, which Albergati Capacelli admired on the Venetian stages.

Il sofà is set in the city of Hira, in Persia, at the foot of a mountain “che vomita fuoco” [that vomits fire] (Albergati 4). It tells the story of Ormed and Azema, who are in love. Believed to be illicit lovers, they are punished by Selim, father of Azema, because of a misunderstanding orchestrated by Zulima, Selim’s sister, with the help of Tartaglia (a typical old man character of the *commedia dell’arte*, here Selim’s counselor). The sincerity of the two lovers is restored by the onstage magic carried out by Pluto (a god beloved by the Persians) through the words of Zanetto, Selim’s butler, and an interpretation of the divine signs sent by the god.

After presenting the author and a summary of the play, Caminer points out its shortcomings, among which the lack of “un grand’intreccio” [a great plot] and “una forte passione” [a strong

passion] (Review of *Il Sofà* 81). She concludes with a judgment which leaves no room for doubt about the genre chosen by the author, wishing that

il Sig. Marchese Albergati segua ad impiegare il suo conosciutissimo talento in composizioni di genere più regolato, onde accresciuto si vegga il numero de' buoni pezzi Teatrali Italiani. (81)

[The Marquess Albergati continues in using his famous talent in compositions of a more down-to-earth genre, so as to see an increase in the number of good Italian theatre texts].

After reading the review, the comedy writer was keen to specify some of his changes of ideas in a letter dated November 6th, 1770:

Col sol nominare la mia Commedia nel suo Giornale, fa ad essa un non meritato onore. [...] Se fossi atto a scriverne mille, non mai ne farei più una di sì strano genere. (Albergati Capacelli, "Letter to Elisabetta Caminer", 6th November 1770, 167)

[By the mere mention of my play in your journal, you pay it undeserved tribute. If I could write a thousand of them, I would never compose another in such a strange genre].

Albergati Capacelli radically changed his mind about the genre and disavowed the comedy, calling it "pasticcio, o aborto vacante" [a mess, or an empty abortion] ("Prefazione" 104), and started, also thanks to his discussion with Elisabetta Caminer, to give a more precise shape to his opinions on theatrical purpose, at first with his private correspondents, and then in the form of structured reasoning, in which he opposed the part of his audience that only wanted to be entertained:

Già quelli, che in maggior numero frequentan oggi il Teatro, son gente, che recano seco loro soltanto gli occhi, gli orecchi, la lingua, e lasciano a casa l'animo, o l'anima, se pur l'hanno. Dunque, per costoro ci vogliono Canto, Ballo, Decorazione, e nulla più. (*Lettera IV*)

[Most of those who attend the Theatre nowadays are people, who only bring with them their eyes, ears and tongues, and leave home their spirit or soul, if they even have one. So, all these people need are Song, Dance and Glitter, and nothing more.]

Il sofà presented Albergati Capacelli with the opportunity to question the utility and quality of theatre, in terms of content and acting. An appreciation of the attributes of theatre convinced him to

condemn the performance as a goal in itself, preferring truthfulness and adhesion to solid social values. Elisabetta Caminer shared this aim and, in her review of *Sofà* she identified the play's positive aspects: some "momenti di passion seria" [moments of serious passion], and, in particular, the part of Zanetto, because "bella, bene scritta" [fine, well written] and above all "piena di spirito e di morale" [full of spirit and morality] (81).

One can detect between the lines a general concern for the decay of Italian theatre, which needed renewal with regard not only to dramaturgy, but also to audience involvement, acting, actors and the civil and social condition of theatres. Plays were absolutely delegitimized as an experience of ephemeral pleasure, hence theatre *fiabe* and mask-based comedies should be replaced with serious plays and bourgeois drama. Elisabetta Caminer claimed these opinions as part of her theatrical reform program and giving them widespread promotion through the pages of *L'Europa Letteraria*. Caminer's journalistic reviews encouraged theatre experiments that, in Italy, subsequently paved the way to a new 'serious' dramaturgy not only on the literary side, but also on the stage, where a reconsideration of the practical organization and especially of acting became necessary. It is no coincidence that Francesco Albergati Capacelli in Bologna, Alessandro Carli in Verona and Elisabetta Caminer in Vicenza all established amateur acting companies to experiment theatrical experiences of European inspiration more suitable to the new dramaturgy. Through their leadership they encouraged these companies to adopt a natural style of acting, without excesses and exaggeration (Unfer Lukoschik 57).

Marquess Albergati Capacelli and Caminer (but they were not the only ones) shared a vision of scenic reform; they proved to be receptive to social matters and were deeply convinced of the power and value of a peculiar kind of theatre: serious, moral, based on real content and competent performance. Caminer discussed such matters with him and with other correspondents in her private letters, but the decision to publish these ideas also in *L'Europa letteraria* adhered to a precise program of cultural dissemination, both social and theatrical, of a wider scope. Furthermore, thanks to her intrepid initiative, pathetic comedy, even before being a literary reality destined to subvert the

canonical subdivision of genres in the dramaturgical context, became a considerable theatrical phenomenon, which very soon received the consecration of the stage and enthusiastic audience approval.

Conclusion

Elisabetta Caminer's views and commitment as a journalist are known. However, it is interesting to retrace the phases of her thought. Her first theatrical reviews not only show how much she was an innovator, intrepid and audacious young journalist; but they are also an important and efficient observatory of theatrical, cultural and social transformations in Italy in the second half of the eighteenth century. Through the examples presented, it is possible to observe the opening of a part of Italian intellectuals to modern French culture. The new demands of the theatrical sphere can't be disconnected from the evolution of society and its needs. This had several results. The dramatists embraced French-style dramaturgical models, in which great attention is paid to realism, morality and Enlightenment sentiments. Furthermore, the old-fashioned patterns were disapproved because of two reasons: part of them followed a classic regulations become unsuitable to the times, others offered entertainment for its own sake.

Alongside the cultural mission promoted by Elisabetta Caminer and the social commitment to which her work has turned, the reviews analyzed can also serve as examples of first modern theatrical reviews: they combine literary criticism and attention to performance, in a continuous dialogue between writing and scene.

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