



*Journal
of Early Modern Studies*

COVER LUCA GULLI

7-2018



UNIVERSITA' DEGLI STUDI DI FIRENZE

DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE, LETTERATURE E STUDI INTERCULTURALI

BIBLIOTECA DI STUDI DI FILOLOGIA MODERNA: COLLANA, RIVISTE E LABORATORIO

Volume Seven

*Out Loud:
Practices of Reading and Reciting
in Early Modern Times*

edited by

Riccardo Brusciagli and Luca Degl'Innocenti

FIRENZE UNIVERSITY PRESS

2018

Journal of Early Modern Studies. -
n. 7, 2018
ISSN 2279-7149
ISBN 978-88-6453-680-4
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/JEMS-2279-7149-7>

Direttore Responsabile: Beatrice Töttösy
Registrazione al Tribunale di Firenze: N. 5818 del 21/02/2011
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La rivista è pubblicata on-line ad accesso aperto al seguente
indirizzo: www.fupress.com/bsfm-jems

The products of the Publishing Committee of Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna: Collana, Riviste e Laboratorio (<<http://www.lils.unifi.it/vp-82-laboratorio-editoriale-open-access-ricerca-formazione-e-produzione.html>>) are published with financial support from the Department of Languages, Literatures and Intercultural Studies of the University of Florence, and in accordance with the agreement, dated February 10th 2009 (updated February 19th 2015), between the Department, the Open Access Publishing Workshop and Firenze University Press. The Workshop promotes the development of OA publishing and its application in teaching and career advice for undergraduates, graduates, and PhD students in the area of foreign languages and literatures, as well as providing training and planning services. The Workshop's publishing team are responsible for the editorial workflow of all the volumes and journals published in the Biblioteca di Studi di Filologia Moderna series. JEMS employs the double-blind peer review process. For further information please visit the journal homepage (<<http://www.fupress.com/bsfm-jems>>).

Editing and composition: Laboratorio editoriale Open Access (<laboa@lils.unifi.it>). Editorial trainees: Giulia Ballotti, Caterina Carcangiu, Claudia Giacalone, Lucia Lanzi, under the supervision of the Journal Manager and Managing Editor, Arianna Antonielli.

JEMS has been included by Clarivate Analytics (Thomson Reuters) to ESCI (Emerging Sources Citation Index) and accepted for indexing in ERIH PLUS (The European Reference Index for the Humanities and the Social Sciences).

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Università degli Studi di Firenze
Firenze University Press
via Cittadella, 7, 50144 Firenze, Italy
www.fupress.com
Printed in Italy

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As ever, the endeavour of the students working in the Laboratorio editoriale Open Access, the generosity, willingness and expertise of their guide and mentor, Arianna Antonielli, have been essential to the composition and production of this issue of JEMS. Luca Baratta and Alessandro Melis have been indispensable, dependable and harmonious assistants; John Denton has created for us and for our authors scrupulous, masterly and elegant translations. To them all,

we have ...

Great cause to give great thanks. (*Coriolanus*, 5.4.60-61)

Donatella Pallotti and Paola Pugliatti

Contents

<i>Editorial</i> Riccardo Bruscagli	7
--	---

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

<i>Storytelling, Memory, Theatre</i> Cesare Molinari	25
---	----

PART TWO

CASE STUDIES

<i>Chivalric Poetry between Singing and Printing in Early Modern Italy</i> Luca Degl'Innocenti	43
---	----

<i>Voices from the New World: Giuliano Dati's La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria indiane</i> Riccardo Bruscagli	63
--	----

<i>'Parole appiastricciate': The Question of Recitation in the Ariosto-Tasso Polemic</i> Christopher Geekie	99
--	----

<i>Animated Pulpits: On Performative Preaching in Seventeenth-Century Naples</i> Teresa Megale	129
---	-----

<i>'Donna il cui carme gli animi soggioga': Eighteenth-Century Italian Women Improvisers</i> Antonella Giordano	139
--	-----

<i>Reading Aloud in Britain in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: Theories and Beyond</i>	157
Roberta Mullini	

APPENDIX

<i>'and I would like to be hearing about them night and day'</i>	179
Paola Pugliatti	
Contributors	221

Editorial

The present issue of *JEMS* (*Out Loud: Practices of Reading and Reciting in Early Modern Times*) intends to map an insidious territory. The debate about orality is not only old, but illustrious, since it has been revolving, for a couple of centuries, around two fundamental texts of the Western canon, i.e. the Homeric poems, *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. And yet, this subject, while inevitably involving the field of ‘orality’, concentrates on a more specific instance of that domain, and, in line with the chronological span of this journal, on a specific time span known as ‘early modern’. This means that the ‘orality’ dealt with in this volume cannot be separated from the phenomenon which characterizes the beginning of the early modern era, i.e. the invention of printing – certainly, a non-Homeric phenomenon. That is why this is an insidious territory. The ‘literature read aloud’ dealt with in the present volume is assailed from every corner by concurrent and competing traditions and procedures of the fruition of literary texts: silent reading of books, which the printing industry made readily available; the subsequent, general increase of literacy, especially in Protestant countries; the explosion (or re-explosion) of the theatre as a secular, open form of entertainment. And yet, all these phenomena, which might seem to discourage and make sadly obsolete the custom of reading aloud, in the end reveal themselves to be peculiar, but effective bed-fellows of this very custom. The main, collective and final result of the essays in the present volume is precisely the demonstration of the interferences, reciprocal influences, and productive reactions that took place between the persistent, resilient habit of ‘reading aloud’ and the other means of getting acquainted with a verbal text.

The Introduction by Cesare Molinari, in this sense, frames this issue by addressing head-on the challenging nature of the subject. An experienced scholar in the field of theatre studies, Molinari is quite aware especially of the porous borders between the actual performance of a text – on a designated stage, in a theatre of some sort, by professional actors, with the aid of all the customary paraphernalia of a show – and the very different nature of simple ‘reciting’, or reading aloud, a text. This is why his contribution does not avoid the confrontation between these two procedures of oral fruition of a text, where the addressee, in both cases, is a listener and not a reader. Molinari emphasises first of all the discredit that written texts – and its custodians – seem to nourish against any form of taking over by the human voice, be it the voice of a simple reader, or of a professional actor. This is why Lycurgus (fourth century BCE)

had a measure approved providing for the setting up of bronze statues of the three great fifth-century tragedians – Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides – in the Theatre of Dionysus (which had recently been rebuilt in stone). At the same time he also



ordered that the authentic texts of their works be placed in the city archives so as to prevent actors from introducing additions or variations. (25)

This is why the Shakespearean first folio and subsequent editions were so anxious to protect the true words of the Bard from the ‘iniurious impostors’ who ‘maimed’ and ‘deformed’ them. But even such an exclusionary relationship between written, and oral texts, even in the perilous domain of theatrical works, can give way to a sort of alliance. Molinari cites the well known case of the reading aloud (not performance!) of Alfieri’s tragedies in Florence, in private, by the author himself: the reduction of a potential public performance to a one-man reading aloud, something intended as a preliminary test for sure, but also perfectly autonomous per se, and charged with demanding expectations by the author/reciter. On the other hand, Molinari demonstrates how fragile and ever changing this relationship of rivalry/alliance between theatrical texts performed/read aloud can be. A situation similar to the one staged by Alfieri in his Florentine home – the recitation of *Marion Delorme* by Victor Hugo, at ‘a meeting of the cream of Parisian intelligentsia’ – turned into an instantaneous, unintentional rehearsal of the play, when one of the listeners, Baron Taylor, at that time the manager of the Théâtre Français, ‘forced Hugo to sell him the play forthwith’ (27). In Molinari’s view, a text read aloud is, in other words, always on the threshold of the stage: but what is interesting is exactly the distance, small as it may be, that separates the two: it is the border, as thin as can be, which is of the utmost interest here. Another border explored by Molinari is the one between the book and recitation. Where the book – and here Molinari delights in pushing the challenge to the extreme – is not simply an ordinary literary text but, again, a ‘book’ for the theatre, a script. In this case, Molinari deals with the relationship between memory and the reciting voice, considering the case of a written text which lies behind the voice, but has been hidden and ‘forgotten’ when the voice speaks aloud. And, again, the most interesting cases are those when the border is more fragile. Molinari addresses here the questions of the improvisation in the Italian *Commedia dell’Arte*, reaffirming the opinion that this phenomenon actually existed (against some illustrious negationists), but emphasizes the importance of the written texts consulted and memorized by the improvising actors in order to accumulate the verbal means which allowed them the acrobatic quality of their technique: here we have, once again, a case of an alliance between the book and the voice. Certain specific occurrences of an alliance of this type seem even more enticing: the case when ‘the story-teller recites, book in hand (the *Kings of France*), which did not stop him gesticulating and moving about on the small platform: he looked at the book when he needed to, as though it were a prompt’ (28); the case of ‘May celebrations along the North Tuscan coast’, where, according to some scholars, ‘the presence of a prompt or scroll’ is included, but ‘the audience could not see them’; whereas, in the personal experience of Molinari himself, such a presence sometimes is visible: he recalls

a *Maggio* (traditional May celebration-performance) held near a village in the Apennine mountains. It was thus a specifically theatrical occasion. There was a single performer (an actor or storyteller, whatever you want to call him) who recited a story mostly consisting of words of characters from the story of Renaud de Montauban (aka Rinaldo), moving around the meadow in front of no more than twenty spectators, but accompanied by a prompter who whispered in his ear, reading the words the reciter had to turn into a chant, naturally accompanying them with limited though intense gestures. It should be recalled that Maestro Cosimo mentioned by Pitrè had used a book as a prompt, but only for occasional use, for any moments of uncertainty. Here, though, prompting was permanent, the utterances being brief, their length being increased by a drawn out, monotonous chant, albeit subject to a strong rhythm, as if the storyteller wanted to confer on the words that he alone could hear a kind of religious tone rather than the coherence of a story. (29-30)

These might constitute some exceptional aspects of the rivalry/alliance between the written text and the voice: more common, at the beginning of the early modern era, was certainly the contemporary presence of the performer and his text in the squares and streets where the *cantari* were sung, or recited, with the aid of the ubiquitous ‘viola’: a phenomenon well illustrated in the essay by Luca Degl’Innocenti. But Molinari also quotes as customary the fact that the *canterino*, after singing his *cantare*, would sell the text of his performance to the audience, so that his verses, after being listened to, could be read calmly in silence (or maybe repeated aloud?).

The voice and the recitation of a literary text naturally imply the presence of a body. Here, once again, the domain of reading aloud borders dangerously on the domain of theatre. But in fact there are so many differences, and nuances, between the ability of a reader and the profession of an actor. Molinari is quick to remind us, in fact, that a substantial section of the *Institutio oratoria* by Quintilian deals with action, i.e. non-verbal communication or body language, of the orator: something – and someone – that is not (yet?) a true acting skill, or a fully professional actor. In this sense, the strange misreading of Livy by Nicholas Trevet, about the ancient actor Titus Andronicus, and the way the Latin comedies were performed, makes a further contribution to this subject: i.e., the possible splitting of the actor’s professional skills among different mimes or speakers. As Molinari recalls, Trevet wrote:

You should know that tragedies and comedies were acted as follows: the theatre was semi-circular, at the centre of which there was a booth called *scena* containing a pulpit from which the poet recited his lines; the mimes were outside, acting the words with gestures, associating them with the character concerned. (31n.)

This is a curious misunderstanding indeed: but it takes us back to a time where the different skills that we instinctively associate today with ‘acting’ could be considered separate, and linked to different typologies and levels of fruition of an ‘oral’ text.

Concerning the voice being separated from the body, and pronunciation from non-verbal communication, Molinari quotes the case of ‘Cimador, the son of the actor/clown Zuan Polo Liompardi’, who ‘imitated a whole troop of voices’ (according to Pietro Aretino) ‘from behind a door – or perhaps a curtain. Thus the “show” consisted of a voice, though one can imagine that the spectators gazed at that curtain, as though they were awaiting the appearance of those characters who sounded like a large group but were only a single individual’ (34). Which brings us, with a quite a vertiginous leap, to modern times, or rather, the possibility of a progressive disappearance of the body from the action of reading aloud. The curtain behind which Cimador used to hide can become the device which ‘reads’ to us, aloud, a text: pure voice, be it coming from the radio, an audiobook, or even a visual medium, where, however, the physical presence of the reciting person is no longer required. Reading aloud has become quite popular again: probably it has been the influence of modern media which has triggered the contemporary practice of public reading of classics, Dante *in primis* (at least in Italy). This opens a further question: is the ever-changing relationship between an ‘oral’ and a ‘written’ text also a reflection of a different, and yet parallel relationship, between illiterate people (the ones who could, and can, only ‘listen’) and literate people (the ones who could, and can, listen *and* read)? It is a loaded, and even disturbing question, which resurfaces more than once in the essays of the volume.

The essay by Luca Degl’Innocenti – ‘Singing and Printing Chivalric Poems in Early Modern Italy’ – while concentrating on a specific literary genre, on a specific literature and language, and on a specific span of time (essentially the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) deals with a question which is fundamental for the general subject developed in this volume. In other words, this contribution is presented as a case study, but its implications are also methodologically significant. Degl’Innocenti is well aware that he is dealing with a tradition

that had been intimately linked to orality since the dawn of time, so much so that research on oral poetry itself, as is well known, was born and has grown in close contact with that on epic traditions, both dead and alive, be it the Homeric poems, *Beowulf*, and the *chansons de geste*, or the poetry of modern-time Serbian *guslar*, West African *griot*, and Turkish *âşik*. (43)

And he is well aware that the prevalent position, within this field of study, has been, and is, quite sceptical about the actual possibility of orality: i.e., the possibility that epic Western poems could be created and performed without the aid of writing. From the very beginning of his article, Degl’Innocenti states his position quite clearly, which is exactly the opposite:

This text-centred approach may be right in many cases, but it might turn out to be rather overcautious and ultimately counterproductive in others, especially when a substantial body of textual and contextual evidence proves that orality (and vocality,

and aural) played a very active role in the composition and circulation of a certain genre. In my experience, Italian chivalric poetry is a perfect case in point. In theory, literary scholars know well that during the first centuries of Italian literature the oral and the written dimensions were mutually, continuously, and deeply permeable; in practice, nevertheless, such awareness fades away into an inert historical background when examining specific texts and genres, which are interpreted only in terms of written texts and of interactions between them. (44-45)

The author, on the other hand, pleads vigorously for the vital, continuous presence of orality in the Italian tradition of chivalric *cantari* (a word which, after all, means nothing else, but 'singing'), arguing for a fundamental principle: the distinction between 'oral composition' and 'oral recitation'. Having demonstrated elsewhere that even Machiavelli was an improviser, Degl'Innocenti doesn't shy away from affirming that 'oral composition' never died, and was very well alive even during the Renaissance; but, in particular, his point is 'that a decline of oral composition does not imply a decline of oral recitation' (45). In other words, even when poems were no longer composed *during* performance, and therefore they were not strictly speaking 'oral poems', they could still be mainly composed *in order to* be performed, at least through reading aloud, and in this sense their orality was real. This principle guides Degl'Innocenti in his investigation about the relationship between printing and reciting chivalric texts: once again, the 'book' and the 'voice' are here under scrutiny, not only as irreconcilable enemies, but also as allies – and not just occasional ones. The essay makes three main points: 1. 'Chivalric poetry was still commonly and primarily performed in public both in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries'. 2. 'Oral poetry and printed books were not at all on opposite fronts in the first decades of the Gutenberg era; on the contrary, they were very close allies'. 3. 'Even from a textual point of view, the relationship between performed poems and printed ones could be much closer and more direct than we are used to thinking' (47). The force of such arguments relies first of all on the anecdotal evidence of the widespread practice of singing aloud. Degl'Innocenti quotes two very humorous and well known *Facetiae* by Poggio Bracciolini which should be able to convince anyone of the popularity of the *canterini* in fourteenth-century Italy: the first one, 'of the man who gets home from the piazza in speechless despair and barely finds the courage to confess to his worried wife the daunting news he just heard from a 'cantor', that the paladin Roland is dead'; and that of 'the man who ruins himself by paying day by day a special reward to a street entertainer who sings the deeds of Hector, if only he postpones the instalment in which the Trojan hero must die' (47). But, beyond such colourful accounts, which demonstrate the ongoing success of chivalric public recitations in Renaissance Italy, it is mainly in the painstaking reconstruction and reconsideration of certain obscure, but indeed illuminating figures active in the field of chivalric literature between the end of the fourteenth and the first decades of the fifteenth centuries,

which sheds a clear light over the cultural panorama we are observing here. The lives and activities of individuals like Antonio da Guido, Jacopo Coppa, and especially – the most controversial, but the most fascinating of them all – ‘Zoppino’, eloquently demonstrate that a powerful synergy between the printing industry and vocality was at work from the very beginning of the Gutenberg era:

In late fifteenth-century Florence the art of printing itself was first imported by the most famous street singer of his age, Antonio di Guido . . . , and the account books of printing shops such as the Ripoli press (based in a convent near Santa Maria Novella) were soon dotted with names of charlatans and street singers (*ciurmadori* and *cantimpanca*) who reportedly bought dozens of copies of popular books, including many short chivalric romances, for the evident purpose of selling them during their performances. (48)

Degl’Innocenti demonstrates beyond any doubt that

By the early sixteenth century, it was far from unusual for *cantimpanca* also to do business as regular publishers and booksellers: such is the case, for instance, of the Florentine Zanobi della Barba, who published no less than 30 titles in the 1500s and 1510s . . . , and of numerous peers of his in central and northern Italy, like Paolo Danza, Ippolito Ferrarese, Francesco Faentino, Jacopo Coppa called ‘Il Modenese’, and Paride Mantovano called ‘Il Fortunato’. (48-49)

But, as already observed, the most intriguing case is that of Zoppino: well documented as a publisher, but only recently revealed by Massimo Rospocher in his identity as a *cantimpanca*. The symbiosis between the profession of printer and that of public reciter could not be better exemplified – with telling consequences on the evaluation of well-known techniques of the narrative chivalric code. For example, the continuous interruption of the narrative, that is, the fundamental axiom of *entrelacement*, in the poems of Boiardo and Ariosto, appears not to be just a typical device of simulated orality, but the reflection of an actual performative mode of the cantimbanchi. Degl’Innocenti quotes a malicious passage in Piero Aretino’s *Dialogues of Nanna and Pippa*, where Zoppino is cited as a paradigm of the charlatans’ mastery in enthralling the audience and playing with the dynamics of pleasure postponement. But, what is even more curious, Nanna quotes Zoppino’s ability as an example for the technique of sexual pleasure postponement that Pippa, if she wants to be a good courtesan, must learn:

You know that Zoppino sang the tale up to the midway point; and when he had gathered a mob about him, he would turn his cape inside out and before getting set to finish the tale, he wanted to peddle a thousand other trifles . . . Well, saying ‘I don’t want to’ and ‘I can’t’ just at the sweet climax, are in fact like the recipes that Zoppino gets down to sell, when he leaves the delighted crowd high and dry by cutting short his story of Campriano. (51n.)

Which is no less than funny, since the technique of *entrelacement* has been in turn compared to sexual pleasure postponement in Daniel Javitch's well-known essay entitled '*Cantus interruptus*'. The last point touched upon by Degl'Innocenti in his article is a final re-evaluation of the problem of texts vocally performed – for sure – but also orally composed. The solution proposed here is, let us say, moderate. Degl'Innocenti does not dismiss the idea that a *cantimpanca* could actually compose his script during the performance, but 'not ex nihilo': that is, taking advantage of a baggage of topoi, and tropoi, amassed in his memory, from the reading of written and printed texts (something very similar, in other words, to the improvisational technique of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, as interpreted by Molinari in the previous essay). Conversely, Degl'Innocenti's article agrees with the old proposal of Domenico de Robertis, who imagined *cantari* composed 'a tavolino': some sort of 'performance at the desk', 'a sort of *in vitro* reproduction, quill in hand in facing a blank page, of an actual oral performance, bow in hand in front of an audience' (55-56). Finally, the ultimate word is that we should never consider the 'book' as a drastic alternative to 'performance', and silent reading as the enemy of reading aloud. The very special case of Cristoforo l'Altissimo teaches us that what is interesting is to investigate the numerous and sometimes surprising ways in which these two phenomena interact. A whole cycle of recitations by Altissimo (from the *Reali di Francia* by Andrea da Barberino), in fact, had the very special destiny of being reported in writing (in real time) and then printed, many years after they were actually performed, without revision by the author: they keep all the marks of orality that we can expect from this kind of transcription. On the other hand, when Altissimo himself printed his *Rotta di Ravenna*, he accurately erased the most obvious oral traits of his text, trying to transform it into a 'legitimate' literary work. Once again, improvisation, memory, transcription, print, play together a game much more complex than the supporters of orality *vs* the book – or vice-versa – could ever imagine.

The essay by this writer, 'Voices from the New World: Giuliano Dati's *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria indiane*' is an apt case-study within the larger frame built up by Degl'Innocenti's article. It deals with two documents, two poetic texts in octaves, both related to the discovery of the New World: a *cantare* by the Florentine Giuliano Dati, which recasts the Letter of Christopher Columbus to Luis de Santángel (or/and to Raphael Sanchez), and a chapter of the *Libro dell'Universo* ('Book of the Universe') by Matteo Fortini, another Florentine, which re-writes the Letter of Vespucci to Soderini announcing the discovery of a 'mondo nuovo'. And yet, these two literary productions, so symmetrical in that they both take advantage of the first 'news' related to so great an event, share little besides their metrical structure. In fact, they neatly show the pliable nature of the 'octave' at the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries: Dati's work is an independent text, truly intended to be 'sung'; Fortini's work, on the other

hand, is just an expansion within a long, complex, rhymed treatise; Dati's *cantare* enjoyed quite remarkable success as a published text (there were three editions – that we are aware of – in the year 1493 alone: one in Rome, by E. Silber, on 15th June; a second in Florence, by 'Johannes dictus florentinus', on 25th October, and a third one in Florence again, publisher unknown, on 26th October); Fortini's report, on the other hand, was buried within the pages of the manuscript of the *Libro dell'Universo*, and only in recent times has been printed and made accessible to a larger audience. In this sense, the opposition between the two 'poetic' translations of Columbus' and Vespucci's announcements could not be starker. Dati constantly addresses an audience of listeners (*auditore* is a word disseminated all through the text, and at the end of his *cantare* the author explicitly mentions a crowd of 'Magnific'e discreti circhunstanti' – 'Magnificent and kind people, gathered around'; 72n.); Fortini, on the contrary, continually conjures up an audience of 'readers'. But, once again: given this basic distinction, and established without any doubt the nature of Dati's text as a 'script' to be recited, we are not authorized to conclude that Giuliano Dati was in fact a *canterino*. His *Storia della invention delle nuove insule di Channaria indiane* is actually a perfect example of what Luca Degl'Innocenti, echoing a suggestion of Domenico De Robertis, has dubbed 'performance at the desk'. Giuliano Dati was a prelate, a dignified member of the court of Pope Alexander VI, and the author of a substantial body of *cantari* (*Historia e leggenda di San Biagio*, 1492-1493, *Historia di Sancta Maria de Loreto*, 1492-1493, *Stazioni e indulgenze di Roma*, 1492-1493, *La Magna Lega and Il Diluvio di Roma*, both printed in 1495-1496, *Leggenda di S. Barbara*, 1494, *Storia di S. Job profeta*, 1495), all of them printed – in fact, the author seems to have accurately cultivated the publication of his works, taking prompt advantage of the newly available technology. Not a 'singer' himself (at least, as far as we know), that does not imply, though, that Dati did not intend his *cantari* to be sung, but simply read. On the contrary, we are witnessing here a typical case of a body of texts composed scrupulously following the format of oral texts, but not – this is the argument of the essay – as a pure fictive literary device, but as a real compliance to the demands of an actual oral purpose of these texts. On this assumption, the essay proceeds in detecting the oral marks of Dati's *cantare*, in a close, constant comparison with its Latin source – since Dati did not follow the original text by Columbus, but its Latin translation by the humanist Leandro de Cosco (even though there is some evidence of Dati's possible knowledge of the Spanish text). Among these features, the most characteristic are the oscillation between the management of the narrative by the *canterino* himself, and his surrender to the voice of Columbus (with a consequent, curious passage from the plural 'voi', when it is the singer who addresses his crowd, to the singular 'tu', when it is Columbus who addresses his king, the official addressee of the original letter); the clumsy repetition of information, especially at the beginning of the *cantare*; and Dati's dissection, and re-assembling, of the 'narrative cells'

of the original narrative in a different order (a phenomenon that has already been noticed, but that is painstakingly reconstructed in this essay in its systematic procedure). Can we detect a real ‘strategy’ in all this? Something resembling a ‘poetics’? Up to a certain point. The final conclusion of the essay limits itself to an idea of a poetics of ‘confusion’:

... the dismembering and reassembling of the original text does not seem to follow an alternative compositional plan. Instead, the impression one gets is that Giuliano Dati scribbled down the most interesting bits of information he could glean from his source and then assembled them in his *cantare* without any scruples about fidelity to the structural order of the text he was transforming. The new disorder, shall we say, of the text was apparently of no importance to Giuliano Dati. He knew that what was important was to communicate in the most interesting, vibrant, exciting manner a bundle of information, information that his listeners would have neither the time nor attention to scrutinize for inconsistencies. (93-94)

After all, the author himself, in a sudden access of naïveté and sincerity affirms towards the end of his endeavour: ‘inanzi voglio confuso esser nel dire/ ch’i’ voglia alchuna cosa preterire’ (‘I would rather be confused in my words, but without leaving out anything that I have to say’). ‘Perhaps we can be so bold as to read these lines as Dati’s declaration of poetics. We might call “confusion” the creative hallmark of the *canterino* style’ (94).

Christopher Geekie’s ‘“Parole appiastricciate”: The Question of Recitation in the Tasso-Ariosto Polemic’ dwells, one more time in this volume, on texts in octaves, produced in Renaissance Italy. But with Geekie’s contribution we are very far away from the clumsy *canterino* style of Giuliano Dati. Geekie transports the reader to the opposite end of the fortune, in Italy, of the poems in octaves. He deals with the most sophisticated, learned literary product of that format: Torquato Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata*, and the heated debates that this poem triggered among the Italian literati of the time. It is a field of study which has enjoyed much scholarly attention, from both sides of the Atlantic: the Italian mid-sixteenth century discussions about ‘epos’ and ‘romanzo’ are by now recognized as nothing less than a precocious, brilliant laboratory (or incubator) of modern narratology. Scholars, though, have concentrated their attention especially on the subjects of *materia* and *favola*, i.e. the question of the structure of the narrative text; much less emphasis has been accorded to the problems of style, or ‘elocution’, that is the actual ‘sound’ of Renaissance poems. In this sense, Geekie’s contribution is a novelty, since it digs out a particular, yet very telling moment of the polemics which accompanied the shocking – for the time – emergence of a poem like Tasso’s *Liberata*. In general, what was discussed in these polemics was the relationship of Tasso’s poem with Ariosto’s; or his more or less rigorous compliance with the new rules dictated by the re-discovery of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. But the Florentine Accademia della Crusca – the arch enemy of the novelties introduced by Tasso

in his poem – also attacked the *Liberata* on another front. In the words of the ‘cruscante’ Lionardo Salviati:

‘[The poem] has neither beautiful words, nor beautiful figures of speech ... and both are beyond any natural manner of speaking. They are bound together in such a distorted, harsh, forced, and unpleasant way that, upon hearing these words recited by someone else, rarely does one understand them, and it is necessary to take the book in hand and read the words on our own. These words are such, that sound and voice are not enough, and to understand them you must see the writing. Sometimes even that is not enough.’ (100n.)

The target of the criticism by the Florentines are the so called *parole appiasticciate*, or *mashed-up words*, of which these malevolent readers provide quite a colourful list: *checcanuto*, *impastacani*, *crinchincima*, etc. It is quite a humorous move, but a very significant one. First of all, it implies a consideration of the epic text of the *Liberata* as one made not just to be read, but to be read aloud, to be recited: because only the ‘voice’ could produce such cacophonies: the reader does not even perceive them. And this is the point of Geekie’s article: what kind of ‘reading aloud’ of the text did the Crusca have in mind? Can we only consider their observations the fruit of a biased, malevolent attitude against Tasso’s poem? This was, naturally, the stance of Tasso’s defenders: they stated, in general, that only by ignoring the punctuation, the rhythm of the verse, and only purposely obeying the metric elisions of the words, could one obtain the distorted, almost comical readings of the Crusca. But according to Geekie ‘the Crusca’s combination of entire phrases into single nonsense words occurs as a result of several reading strategies’ (105). Essentially, the Crusca applied to Tasso’s verses a pure metrical reading: ‘An analysis of the metrical schemes that emerge in these mashed-up words will reveal a particular mode of reading lines of poetry that emphasizes regular accentuation at the expense of both the sense of the line and its graphical representation’ (106-107). In a way, the counter-objections of Tasso’s advocates, like Camillo Pellegrino, seem obvious:

‘if one word is separated from another, and uttered with a pause, then they will not produce an ugly sound, especially in those positions in the verse, where it is possible, or where it is praiseworthy, to do so. In those positions where it is necessary to combine words, rarely does Tasso join together two sounds whose pronunciation ends up sounding ugly. On the contrary, there are words, which the academicians call ‘mashed-up’, which sound most sweet. But, by God, what are these monstrous transformations of Tasso’s words that make children of rage from children of grace?’ (108n.)

What is culturally significant, though, is that the purely metrical reading of the Crusca is deemed by the cruscanti *naturale*: as if this were the only spontaneous manner of pronouncing aloud a poetic text. The conflict here is

not only between two ways of reciting poetry aloud, but between two different ways of simply ‘speaking’: one of Tasso’s defenders negatively associates the ‘mispronouncing’ of the Crusca with the bad habit of speaking in an incomprehensible way censured in Della Casa’s *Galateo*. Thus, the ‘parole appiasticciate’ of the Crusca’s reading of Tasso’s poem are assimilated, *tout court*, with the ugly pronunciation of those who do not know how to talk and interact in a social environment. On a larger scale, this whole polemic reveals a strong tension between the way a late Renaissance poem could be perceived (as a text to be read, and/or a text that could be recited); between a text as a visual product, where comprehension is helped by a whole series of graphic conventions, and a text as pure sound, subjected to a plurality of possible executions, and fruitions. After all, the conflict between a ‘metric’ reading and a reading ‘ad sensum’ is at the core, even today, of the curriculum of every Actor’s School.

Ecclesia non theatrale negotium est: ‘The Church is no show business’. St Ambrose’s words resonated for centuries, drawing – it seemed – an unsurpassable line between the sacred space of religion and the secular space of the stage. But, in reality, as the essay by Teresa Megale – ‘Animated Pulpits: On Performative Preaching in seventeenth-century Naples’ – demonstrates, that border was very weak, and various figures of performers, especially in the Baroque era, used to go across it with surprising ease. A colourful anecdote reported by Benedetto Croce (we are in Naples, after all) says it all: we are in the streets of the city, where the conflicting performances of Pulcinella and a religious preacher are taking place: ‘The former allegedly attracted crowds with his irresistible gags, laughter overpowering catechism to the extent of making the preacher, who was so outclassed and humiliated, unsuccessfully try to dissuade the onlookers, by shouting: “Over here – this is the real Pulcinella!”’. As Megale notes, ‘The scene of a preacher outclassed by an actor, ... probably never took place’, and yet, it is ‘symptomatic of performative psychotechniques widely employed to attract (and maintain) the hearers’ attention’ (132), both in a sacred and in a secular space. The fact is that these spaces, as shown by this anecdote, were not so separate, even in a physical sense. The street was the competing arena of many performers: charlatans, actors, and preachers too. On the other hand, the ‘proper’ religious space for preachers – the Church – was, pace St Ambrose, very much prone itself to the show: in the ‘protective semi-darkness of churches’ (129-130), in the dim light of candles, the Neapolitan preachers of the seventeenth century were no less actors than their secular counterparts: indeed, someone lamented that, in comparison, ‘in the leading theatres, he heard the faded, weak voices of the actors, while those of the preachers in Catholic churches were worthy of the best theatrical professionals’ (132). Not only that: the technique of *reportatio*, i.e. the transcription, in real time, of the words uttered by the preacher, was a custom no less common in churches than in theatres, where specialized stenographers were able to ‘steal’ the texts while they

were performed: ‘... while the preacher pronounced his words resounding with Catholic teaching, a scribe often squatting on the pulpit steps, half-hidden from the throng of the faithful, wrote them down, amid the flickering of candles and clouds of incense’ (131). The permeability between the pulpit and the stage, after all, is clearly demonstrated by those who personally shifted allegiance between the two professions: ‘Before becoming lay brethren attached to the order of Piarist fathers who preached to the populace in the Duchesca district, Andrea della Valle, Francesco Longavilla, and Orazio Graziullo were, respectively, the impresario and actors at the “stanza della Duchesca” venue, opened in 1613 in the district of the same name, and in operation successfully up to 1626’ (131). And not only that: not only opposition could convert into allegiance, but even into a sort of overt complementarity. Megale quotes, in this sense, some eloquent written documents, which aimed to teach the art of performance both to secular actors and religious speakers, or introduce the spectacular character of the baroque theatre into the sacred spaces of religion:

It is enough to mention *I divini spettacoli nella notte di Natale* (‘The Divine Performances on Christmas Eve’), and *Il Mostro scatenato per le Quarant’ore del carnevale* (‘The Monster Let Loose for the 40 Hours of Carnival’) in the *Orationi sacre* by Azzolini (1633) to understand, beginning with the titles, the close link of the sacred with the profane, pulpit with stage. This was clearly visible in the continual crossover between the two phenomena: methods and techniques were taken from the theatre, but with selective eyes and ears. Even Louis de Cressolles, when, in his *Vacationes autumnales* (1620), he recorded the preacher’s repertoire of gestures, prescribed that the latter should avoid certain examples of the actor’s body language: the head not moving up and down, for example, a typical stance of the comic Zannis in the *Commedia dell’Arte*. (134)

And yet, we can infer, from the examples quoted by Megale, that such ‘infractions’ must have been quite common, and that all resources of baroque theatricality, in fact, infiltrated the preaching technique of Neapolitan preachers. The final example cited by Megale, of the Redemptorist Father Ludovico Antonelli, is conclusively persuasive. The use of a skull, on the pulpit, as a true theatrical prop, says it all: a prop to which, when turned towards the audience, the preacher himself lent his own voice, with a chilling ‘special effect’ nothing short of the most elementary, but suggestive stage tricks.

The following essay, by Antonella Giordano, pushes the subject of ‘literature aloud’ into the eighteenth century, dealing with the phenomenon of women improvisers. The title, which borrows a verse from a sonnet by Vittorio Alfieri in praise of one of these performers – ‘“Donna il cui carne gli animi soggioga”’. Eighteenth-Century Italian Women Improvisers’ – clearly declares the span and limits of this contribution: the time, the type of performing technique, the language and geography (Italian) considered, and finally the gender choice of the author of this essay. Male improvisers, and very famous ones, abounded in the eighteenth century: among them, even Pietro Metastasio in his youth

– Metastasio, to whom we owe one of the most beautiful definitions of this profession: ‘inutile e meraviglioso mestiere’ (‘useless and marvellous art’). But Giordano concentrates on female improvisers, and, namely, on the three most famous of them: Maria Maddalena Morelli (Corinna Olimpica), Teresa Bandettini, and Fortunata Fantastici Sulgher. Giordano’s contribution, thus, also crosses the field of gender studies, contaminating the inquiry about the peculiarities of this ‘inutile mestiere’ with the further ‘oddity’ constituted by the fact that the improvisers dealt with here are women. In any case, a preliminary clarification is necessary. As Giordano rightly reminds us, eighteenth century ‘improvisation’ is very different from the improvisation of the previous centuries – which is the object of reflection in many pages of this volume. The difference is, first of all, that the act of improvising in the eighteenth century leaves the streets, the piazza, open spaces, or even the theatre (if we want to consider the *Commedia dell’Arte* as a pure form of improvisation): in the eighteenth century the most famous improvisers would perform in private or semi-private spaces, in front of an audience gathered at the command of a patron (or patroness) who was the host of the event. This ambiance, infinitely more protected, and this kind of audience, in general carefully selected, allowed another seminal characteristic of the more modern art of improvisation: the performer would actually ‘improvise’ on a subject suggested, on the spot, by a member of the audience. His/her ability consisted exactly in the capacity of ‘composing’ poetry with very little time – or none – for reflection and preparation, almost under the spell of a rapturous inspiration. This was the element that triggered the almost fanatical admiration that accompanied such performances and that Giordano vividly describes in her essay, quoting an archival document, as rare as it is totally explicit about the nature of the phenomenon: the reportage (in the form of a letter by a Dr. Piccioli from Lucca to his friend Giovanni Rosini) of a combined performance by Bandettini and Fantastici:

Dear friend, I have just left like a madman, a fanatic, overwhelmed and almost delirious by the famous improvisation. What beauty, what magnificent, unrepeatable, divine things I heard this evening! Never will I experience anything like it again ... The theme was requested; nobody spoke. Alfieri, from his corner, said ‘Let us start with the Rape of Europa’. This theme was unacceptable, since it could not be conducted as a dialogue, as they wished. So Hero and Leander was suggested. Fantastici began in the role of Leander very well. Bandettini also did well in the role of Hero. I cannot tell you how well both contestants did, how the dialogue was to the point and how interesting it was. They were both well applauded. One seemed to instil the other with courage ... then Alfieri’s theme was recited by Bandettini. My friend, her words were incredible. What vivid descriptions. She depicted a bull finer than that of Ovid’. (148n.)

The sex of the performers, naturally, adds to this subject another layer of interest. Here ‘reciting aloud’, once again, reveals its risky vicinity with the actual performance of professional actors. This vicinity is particularly

dangerous when the figures involved are female, given the usually very poor moral reputation of professional actresses – despite the centuries-old repeated attempts (from Isabella Andreini on) to establish, defend and demonstrate the possibility of a perfectly moral private life of the ‘women of theatre’. But, as Giordano demonstrates, it was not just a question of morality. The three women improvisers here considered went a long way to keep, and validate, their status of honourable women, accurately trying to distinguish themselves from ‘real’ actresses: after all, they never performed on regular stages. And yet, theirs was a real profession, and they were paid for it: once again, it was difficult to trace rigorous lines of demarcation between ‘reciting’ and ‘acting’. What is more interesting, though, is the consideration that these women had of their repertoire. This had nothing to do, naturally, with the repertoire of regular theatres, which was the product of illustrious (male) writers. Sure, as Giordano observes a propos of this female professional figure, ‘Her repertoire was grounded in solid academic study and general knowledge, enabling her to deal with any subject proposed, good knowledge of metre, so as to create her verse quickly, and a good memory’ (143). But, tellingly,

both Amarilli and Corilla refused to publish the transcriptions of their improvisations, imagining the risk of transferring to the page and print poems composed for listeners. Extempore poetry is a violent, impetuous exercise which can give rise to marvellous though intermittent, random results and does not produce permanent values. Proud of their talents, but also quite aware of the specificity and limits of their art, both of them realised that it was impossible to preserve its merits beyond a public performance. (152)

In conclusion, the ‘useless and marvellous art’ of improvisation is probably the most eloquent specimen of a ‘literature aloud’ destined to evaporate without leaving behind any trace (not even something similar to the *canovacci* of the *Commedia dell’Arte*). The presence of female figures of limited education in this scenario (Bandettini had been nothing more than an illiterate dancer, before her success as an improviser) simply accentuates this characteristic of this intrinsically evanescent phenomenon. Very well conscious of the ephemeral quality of their success, these intelligent women kept themselves cautiously away from any pretension of immortal fame as writers. For them, the fanatical admiration of their listeners was enough – and they knew it.

The last contribution to this volume – ‘Reading Aloud in Britain in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: Theories and Beyond’, by Roberta Mullini – might appear to revolve around a very specific subject: the phenomenon of British ‘elocutionism’ in late eighteenth century. In fact, Mullini’s essay faces fundamental questions raised by the relationship between written and oral texts, or rather, by the usage of written/printed texts as scripts, outside, though, the professional space of the stage. In other words, Mullini’s contribution addresses the basic issues of the very subject of ‘literature aloud’. The ‘elocutionist’ movement is reconstructed here primarily following the texts

and the activity of its protagonists: Vicesimus Knox, the very successful author, in the mid-Eighties, of *Elegant Extracts: Useful and Entertaining Passages in Prose Selected for the Improvement of Scholars at Classical and Other Schools in the Art of Speaking, in Reading, Thinking, Composing; and in the Conduct of Life*; Thomas Sheridan, author of *British Education: or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain. Being an Essay towards proving, that the Immorality, Ignorance, and false Taste, which so generally prevail, are the natural and necessary Consequences of the present defective System of Education. With an Attempt to shew, that a Revival of the Art of Speaking, and the Study of our own Language, might contribute, in great measure, to the Cure of those Evil* (1756; and this is not even the complete title. . .); John Walker, author of *Elements of Elocution* (1781), and of a very influential *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (1791); plus, a series of booklets in Sheridan's wake, in general 'reading miscellanies', some of them, again, with eloquent titles (*A collection of Poems for Reading and Repetition*, *The Speaker*, and so on). All this quite massive, and impressive, production, culminated, right at the end of the century (1799), in the anonymous *The Reader or Reciter*: a title that seems to summarize the equivalence between the act of 'reading' and the act of 'reciting', that is, reading aloud, making explicit the ambiguity of the term itself (what do we mean by 'reading'? A silent, or a vocal activity? The 'elocutionists', obviously, had no doubt about it). This phenomenon is linked to the impetuous growth, in England, of a voracious audience of consumers of literature: not only read in private, but in public, to an audience. As a consequence, being able to speak clearly, correctly, with the right intonation, became a requirement for social acceptance and success: the quotation from a letter by Elizabeth Montagu, that Mullini has put as an epigraph to her essay, says it all: 'Mr Hay is an auditor, for he is not able to read aloud'. It is to help all the Mister Hays to transcend the role of a passive 'auditor', into that of an effective speaker, that so many efforts – and books, and booklets – were produced. The stress was on pronunciation, of course, but also, inevitably, on body language. As Mullini emphasizes,

in 1762 Sheridan published *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, in which he expounded his theories about delivery, including not only pronunciation and grammatical correctness, but also everything that might contribute to effectiveness, i.e. emphasis, tones, pauses, pitch, gesture . . . all the tools a reader/speaker has in order to convey passions beyond literal meanings. (163)

Which, naturally, raises again the old problem: the fragile, porous, risky borders between the reading aloud of a common speaker, and the actual performance of an actor. The 'elocutionists', though, did not seem so worried or disturbed by the siege of the professionals; actually, they willingly overcame the border themselves, very well aware of the possible, positive, reciprocal influence of 'secular' elocution and theatrical performance. In Walker's book, for example, 'each passion is exemplified by dramatic passages, generally drawn from Shakespeare', to the point that 'this part of Walker's text best resembles a

handbook for drama students rather than a series of instructions for “simple” readers’ (167); Sheridan trained not only common speakers, but also young actors, well convinced that ‘the Theatre would become an admirable Assistant to the School of Oratory, by furnishing to the young Students constant good Models and Examples in all the different species of Eloquence’ (162). The least intimidated by the possible contamination of the common reader by his resemblance to an actor seems to be (maybe not surprisingly) the anonymous author of *The Reader or Reciter*: he does not recoil from giving ‘instruction for reading plays’, exposing the costume of reading aloud, in private settings, texts destined to the actual stage; as Mullini observes, in this author’s view, ‘a reader ought to create a “stage” (a scene) in the hearer’s imagination, while actors perform on a stage whose scenery already shows places and venues to the onlookers. In a way, readers’ responsibility is even greater than actors’ when creating “aural” settings’ (172-173). The fluid passage between ‘reading’ and ‘performing’, in conclusion, seems to have been encouraged, and not curbed, by the elocutionist movement.

Mullini’s essay leads to a last, and crucial, question associated with the habit of reading aloud: the relationship of this habit with literacy – or rather, illiteracy. Quoting Adam Fox, Mullini asserts that even when most people were still illiterate, ‘Reading aloud helped to draw everyone into the ambit of the written word’, adding that ‘public places such as taverns, barber shops and, especially, coffee-houses offered the illiterate the opportunity to listen to somebody reading aloud the various printed materials available in those venues’ (158). At the end of her essay, Mullini concludes that

Eighteenth-century British society lived through an era of vast improvement of literacy, especially in the middle class, and of female literacy, so that the century’s great novels were certainly written not only for silent reading but with an ‘ear’ to family and shared readings, when possibly illiterate servants might as well be present. The now nearly lost practice of reading aloud created and reinforced sociability, while – at the same time – allowing the illiterate to access literature and any other printed material. (174)

This certainly sounds like a very happy ending for the research conducted in this volume. The only thing one is much tempted to peek beyond the time limits of this research is to reflect on what has happened after the scene here described. One wonders if those servants, those women, those poor people remained listeners, or if they finally learned how to read themselves; if to be listening truly introduced them to literature, or kept them content in their semi-ignorance; and, regarding today, one might consider how to judge the reduced habit of reading silently, privately, while ‘listening’ seems – again – so pervasive, so triumphant. Molinari, in his introductory essays, touched on these issues: it was not planned, but maybe inevitable, that they had to resurface at the end of this intellectual journey.

Riccardo Brusccoli

PART ONE

Introduction

Storytelling, Memory, Theatre

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Abstract

In the history of Western civilisation, the spread of writing, followed by the book, obviously did not entirely replace oral culture and communication, but led to the development of a dialectic relationship, especially in the sense that memory underwent a gradual shift away from the human mind, where it tended to limit itself to recalling necessary notions and facts stored in documents, books, and, more recently, in audiovisual recordings and electronic databases. The article foregrounds the most important aspects of this process by means of a series of especially significant examples in the relationship between words and other means of expression and communication by the human body.

Keywords: *Memory, Non-verbal Communication, Reading, Reciting, Recording*

In the mid-fourth century BCE, the Athenian orator Lycurgus, who at the time was invested with wide-ranging powers, occupying a position comparable to a modern economics minister, but especially thanks to his moral and political prestige, had a measure approved providing for the setting up of bronze statues of the three great fifth-century tragedians – Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides – in the Theatre of Dionysus (which had recently been rebuilt in stone). At the same time he also ordered that the authentic texts of their works be placed in the city archives so as to prevent actors from introducing additions or variations. The story is told in a text by the so-called Pseudo-Plutarch,¹ written in a vaguely mythical tone in the first century BCE, but the importance of the event did not pass unnoticed:² we could actually say that a *corpus* of ‘classical’ authors was created, their texts being fixed in a definitive edition (a critical edition?!), which should be performed to the letter – though the fact that acting could modify the meaning of the text of a play was not taken into account (something that Tommaso Salvini, the famous Italian actor, was well aware of). Nevertheless the theatrical factor remains, almost implying that the only way of publishing and transmitting these immortal texts

¹ Ps. Plutarch 1936, 400-401 (Lycurgus, 841f-842a). Molinari’s essay has been translated from Italian by John Denton.

² See Scodel 2007, with ample bibliography.



could be stage performance, ignoring the possibility that they could be written down and read, albeit at a time when books began to circulate, as, in the first instance, noted by Aristophanes.³

Almost two thousand years later, in 1623, two actors in Shakespeare's company, John Heminge and Henry Condell, published a folio edition of his complete plays – interestingly not of his poetical works, including the sonnets. This was also a case of establishing a canon *ne varietur* of a writer who had already attained 'classic' status, arguably imitating (or perhaps challenging) the attempt by Ben Jonson, who had already laid claim to this status by publishing a folio edition of his works (later the same honour was to be claimed by Beaumont e Fletcher; see Guarino 2010, 104). However, the reasons behind this move were different to, even the opposite of, those inspiring Lycurgus. Heminge and Condell, in their epistle to the reader, state that it would have been better if the author himself had been able to publish his writings, but, since destiny had decided otherwise,

we pray you do not envie his Friends, the office of their care, and paine, to haue collected & publish'd them; and so to haue publish'd them, as where (before) you were abus'd with diuerse stolne, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors, that expos'd them: euen those, are now offer'd to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers as he conceiued them. (Shakespeare 1623, A3)

It was clearly no longer a question of protecting the text from actors' whims, nobody imagining, at the time, that it ought to be or even could be performed complete. This was demonstrated by the case of *Hamlet*, the length of which made this unlikely. It was only in the early twentieth century that the Old Vic was to stage a complete performance, ironically called 'eternity *Hamlet*' (see Lunari 1959, 70). For the time being, the problem was simply the editor's concern, i.e. the restoration of an authentic text, as written down by the author in contrast with those published illicitly, on occasion based on transcriptions produced during actual performances, or relying on the memory of disloyal actors – the well-known bad quartos. The text was no longer to be performed, but addressed a 'great variety of readers' – 'theatre' had become 'literature' (just as Aristotle had foreseen).

Therefore, plays, like all other literary works, from sonnets to novels, could be read aloud in the presence of an audience of any size, or composition:⁴

³ See the well-known line 1113 spoken by the chorus of *The Frogs*: 'Each one (of the members of the audience) has a book, and understands the clever bits'. It is worth noting that some scholars have read *bublion* rather than *biblion*, preferring 'has a papyrus', perhaps using 'papyrus' as a metonym for 'book'.

⁴ The readings put on for cigar factory workers in Cuba are of particular interest (see Manguel 1996, 110-111). While Roger Chartier (1989) refers to cases where reading aloud aimed to reinforce friendship among a group of well-educated individuals.

ladies could also entertain their guests in their drawing rooms with readings, just as they did with the (more or less enjoyable) singing or instrumental performances by their daughters. But there are some specific features, not only due to the fact that plays, since they consist of exchanges between characters, required greater skill in varying tonality and expressiveness of the voice (the Neapolitan *cantastorie* – storytellers – or *cuntastorie* – the so-called *rinaldi* – being masters of the art, together with their Sicilian colleagues; see Di Palma 1991, 41). In addition, if a public reading could be seen as an initial type of publication and test of possible acceptance, in the case of a play it could also promote it for purchase by a theatre or company of actors. Certainly, Vittorio Alfieri made use of readings of his tragedies in the Countess of Albany's and other ladies' salons to test the reactions of a small, select audience and even listen to comments as a prelude to possible changes to the text. This was also the aim of Victor Hugo, who, following the discussions caused by the publication of *Cromwell* and its Preface, organized a meeting of the cream of Parisian intelligentsia to read *Marion Delorme*. But Baron Taylor, at that time the manager of the Théâtre Français, also happened to be present and he forced Hugo to sell him the play forthwith (Hugo 1985, 450). As a result, Hugo's reading was no longer for the purpose of seeking the approval of the company of actors of the text, since Taylor had already performed the task, so the various parts were assigned straightaway. Reading thus became a particularly complex affair, since the author/reader would not only have to deal with rhythm, stress and tones which the actors were implicitly required to transfer to their characters, but also to do so bearing in mind the vocal qualities of individual performers, at the same time trying to capture their more or less underlying reactions.

It was therefore a very special kind of *lettura* (reading) in a way close to a *lezione* (lesson); and it might be of some interest to investigate the number and nature of the shades of meaning of the two words in Italian and other European languages deriving from the common Latin *lectio*, or separating them etymologically. But it was a *lezione* during which the pupils would have to learn, not only and not so much from the information and thoughts contained in the text being recited, as rather from the vocal melody, probably only to a limited degree imitation, of this *recita* (performance), the idea of which seems to me to be more appropriate than that of *lettura*. The two terms, in any case, are not incompatible: indeed, reading in the form of reciting, i.e. conferring expressiveness and rhythm on the words, is the rule when reading aloud (unlike the case of endophasia), although frequent suggestions to vary the tone and intensity of the voice, in order to match the content and also the character and even the audience, suggest that the temptation of monotony is always lying in wait. Thus, the reader must be an interpreter who is able not only to bring out the psychological and emotional, logical and moral content of his text, but also communicate his own emotions and judgment

(see Trelease 2013, 107): i.e. be an actor.⁵ Actors are still asked to read literary texts in various contexts, for example during a lecture where the lecturer wants to include a quotation, on which he/she feels incapable of conferring the desired emotional character, only a true actor being able to do so. We can also find ‘shows’ consisting only of reading, which can make up a series, so as to complete the reading aloud of a large-scale text such as a novel: a ‘live’ reading which could become an audiobook.⁶

Reading and reciting by heart are not so radically different. It is widely agreed that writing began as an *aide-mémoire* (see Glasser 2000, 69 ff.) though exteriorization of memory, following Plato, is arguably more appropriate. Recently, a well-known neuroscientist, Rodrigo Quian Quiroga, maintained that the human brain is not really fit for the process of memory. It is arguably for this reason that men (or characters) with remarkable memories from Pico della Mirandola to Julien Sorel have become almost legendary and the subject of memory and mnemonics has fascinated so many from Quintilian to Cicero, up to Giulio Camillo, with whom the subject was impressively sorted out at the time of the development of printing.⁷ Reading aloud and reciting by heart are not incompatible: in both cases the reciter communicates a literary text, handed down by oral tradition or learnt from a written text, which, in a relatively recent period, could be a book, often containing personal variations. There are even cases in which the story-teller recites, book in hand (the *Kings of France*), which did not stop him gesticulating and moving about on the small platform: he looked at the book when he needed to, as though it were a prompt.⁸

The most meaningful opposite is that between reciting by heart and improvisation, precisely because of their substantial uniformity, or, more exactly, their belonging to the same category of action: a pear can be compared with an apple or even water melon but not with a cupboard. This is not the place to address the theme of improvisation in the *Commedia dell'Arte*, except to recall that major scholars have denied it existed (or even that it could exist), whereas, in my view, proof of its existence is confirmed not only by many direct witnesses, but also, and above all, by documentation concerning improviser-poets and storytellers, from Machiavelli to Cristoforo Altissimo, excellently researched by Luca Degl’Innocenti (2016). That improvisation can and must consist of formulas, repetitions and quotations is obvious and does in no way undermine the fact of the matter.

⁵ See also Chartier 2001, 27, citing *La Franciade* by Ronsard.

⁶ Concerning recent readings of play texts, so-called *mise-en-espace* have been put on where the actors stood on the stage in front of lecterns. Such a ‘reading show’ was put on in 2003 by Al Pacino who called ‘Reading’ a *mise-en-espace* of Oscar Wilde’s *Salome*. See Molinari 2015, 180.

⁷ Apart from the classic study by Frances A. Yates (1966), see the more recent one by Lina Bolzoni (1995) and, on relations with actors, Tamburini 2015, 57 ff.

⁸ See Rajna 1878, 567. Rajna refers to a Maestro Cosimo, active in the second half of the nineteenth century.

I have always thought that speaking, especially when it takes on the character of discourse, can be seen as a ball of wool, interrupted and held together by several knots making up the move from one utterance to another. So I was pleased to find this image used by a Sicilian *cuntista* (storyteller), Salvatore Ferreri, who said to Pitrè: ‘What is a ball of thread like? When unwound on one side it continues to be unwound on the other, until it reaches the end; but in my head the end of this thread never appears, because my story has no end’⁹. So we could conclude that the difference between reciting by heart and improvising consists of the different quality of thread: uniform in the former, different in material, colour and thickness in the latter. So that the improvisers themselves must be astonished in the face of their new motive, which, unexpectedly, makes them indignant or moves them, in any case involving them. For this reason, *ottava rima*, i.e. a rather complex metre, becomes a kind of stabilising device, at least permitting the continuity of rhythm; while making use of a visual aid such as a placard, so common with Sicilian *cuntastorie* very similar to the *teatro dei pupi* (the typical Sicilian marionette theatre; see Alberti 1977), ensured the continuity of the story, at the same time highlighting its realism (paradoxically making it resemble an illustrated book, in the double meaning of the word ‘illustrare’ – at least in Italian –: to make illustrious and explain). It should be added, in the light of these considerations of reciting/improvising storytelling, that recognition is due to the important suggestion by Derrida (1967, but also 1978) concerning writing as an elective (or symbolic?) modality of thought, which cannot be seen as a continuous flux, or the unwinding of a thread, but rather the problematic emergence and stabilisation of the word, or sign, adequate for the substance of thought itself.

Nevertheless, I should like to recall a third modality of recitation – and I ask my readers to forgive me, since the example is entirely based on memory, and is thus uncertain and cannot be verified. About forty years ago I was present at a *Maggio* (traditional May celebration-performance) held near a village in the Apennine mountains. It was thus a specifically theatrical occasion. There was a single performer (an actor or storyteller, whatever you want to call him) who recited a story mostly consisting of words of characters from the story of Renaud de Montauban (aka Rinaldo), moving around the meadow in front of no more than twenty spectators, but accompanied by a prompter who whispered in his ear, reading the words the reciter had to turn into a chant, naturally accompanying them with limited though intense gestures. It should be recalled that Maestro Cosimo mentioned by Pitrè had used a book as a prompt, but only for occasional use, for any moments of uncertainty. Here, though, prompting was permanent, the utterances being brief, their length being increased by a drawn out, monotonous chant, albeit subject to a strong rhythm, as if the storyteller wanted to confer on the

⁹ Pitrè 1884, quoted by Di Palma 1991, 51.

words that he alone could hear a kind of religious tone rather than the coherence of a story. Actually, I clearly remember that they were mostly incomprehensible, like a mass sung in Latin. Neither Alessandro D'Ancona (1891), nor Paolo Toschi (1955) refer to a similar type of *Maggio*; Toschi, however, does refer to the presence of a prompt or scroll at May in the Modena area or along the northern Tuscan coast adding that 'the audience could not see them' (90-91).¹⁰ In the present case, however, this presence must be seen as decisive for the emotional and ritual meaning of the show: the prompt is, though not a divine voice, at least that of inspiration or tradition.

Oral (or it is perhaps better to use the more general term 'unwritten') communication does not only involve vocality. We have already recalled the frequent requests to vary rhythm and tone, as well as setting up a visual link with the audience, as though speaker and audience should look at each other. The reciter and public speaker can, or rather should support their words with gestures and miming, when addressing the listener-spectator. Quintilian, on the basis of a remark by Cicero, had devoted almost half of the eleventh book of his *Institutio oratoria* to *actio*, i.e. gesture and mime separate from *pronunciatio*. Two thousand years later, a learned writer dealing with many different subjects, who was also arguably the first professor of constitutional law, Giuseppe Compagnoni, went so far as to maintain that facial mime and hand gestures are a prelude to the meaning of the words to be read or recited.¹¹

Paradoxically, oral communication (being unwritten) can turn into visual communication, entrusted to gestures and mime, usually referred to as the 'language of gestures' such as sign language for the deaf, though anthropologists have discovered something similar among native Americans, for whom sign language was a kind of lingua franca enabling them to overcome innumerable oral linguistic barriers (see Washburn 1975). In both cases we are dealing with true languages, in which the link between signifier and signified is arbitrary, as in spoken varieties, though there is no recourse to syllabic articulation, thus being closer to pictography. This does not happen in the case of mime and gesture accompanying spoken discourse, albeit originating in a kind of zero grade consisting, on the one hand, of what we could call 'gestural silence' and, on the other, of criticized monotonous diction. It has been argued that gesture could be considered a kind of 'natural' and therefore universal expression. However, gestures normally coincide with words, or they are superimposed over them, without necessarily confirming them, even contradicting them as Quintilian had already observed.

¹⁰ The presence of a prompter who also appears to act as the 'director', is also recorded in the case of medieval mystery plays by Jean Fouquet's well known miniature, *The Martyrdom of Saint Apollonia*, in the *Livre d'heures* of Étienne Chevalier, Cluny, Musée Condé.

¹¹ 'Movement of facial features and gestures ... appearing to those spoken to by means of the eyes, touch the soul before they reach the ears' (Compagnoni 1827, 269).

But the history of the theatre includes a very well known, extraordinary case, which was destined not to remain without a sequel, in which word and gesture (or, more exactly, word and mime) came from different sources – as is the case with marionette theatre and the specific form it takes in Sicily, where vocal expressiveness must have a strong impact, or, with an even greater one, in the theatre of shadows common in China, Turkey and, especially, Bali (*wayang-kulit*) – although in these cases this dissociation is not clearly perceived by spectators.

This probably originated in the well-known anecdote in Livy concerning an actor called Livius Andronicus, who, owing to a hoarse voice, is supposed to have asked another actor to recite (in this case chant) in his place, while he continued to mime (dancing) his part.¹² This was taken up by the English Dominican friar Nicholaus Trevet, a major scholar and editor of Seneca, the anecdote being turned into an imaginary picture of theatre and shows in ancient Rome. In Trevet's words:

Et nota quod tragedie et comedie solebant in theatro hoc modo recitari: theatrum erat area semicircularis, in cuius medio erat parva domuncula, que scena dicebatur, in qua erat pulpitem super quod poeta carmina pronunciabat; extra vero erant mimi, qui carminum pronunciationem gestu corporis effigiabant per adaptationem ad quemlibet ex cuius persona loquebatur. (Trevet 1954, 5)¹³

However imaginary, this description of ancient Roman theatre immediately appeared credible, to the extent of being reproduced almost literally by Boccaccio (in a letter to Carlo Durazzo) and by Pietro Alighieri (1978) and being illustrated in the miniatures appearing in the frontispieces of *Terence des ducs* and *Terence du duc de Berry*,¹⁴ as well as in a miniature in a French translation of Saint Augustine's *City of God* (*De Civitate Dei; Cité de Dieu*);¹⁵ it remained the best known view of an ancient theatre at least up to Flavio Biondo's archaeological research and the rediscovery of Vitruvius. It actually did represent one basic element of historical truth in the fortune of 'pantomime' in the age of Augustus.

It is not always easy to have a clear idea of how and by what means mime and gesture joined or replaced words: as already mentioned, the richest source of information concerns storytellers, especially those from Sicily and Naples. But the late medieval jesters and their Renaissance heirs such as Zoppino (see Rospocher 2014) were not, or at least not mainly, storytellers (see Zumthor

¹² Livy 1924, 362-363 (*Ab urbe condita*, VII, ii, 8-10).

¹³ 'You should know that tragedies and comedies were acted as follows: the theatre was semi-circular, at the centre of which there was a booth called *scena* containing a pulpit from which the poet recited his lines; the mimes were outside, acting the words with gestures associating them with the character concerned'.

¹⁴ Held by the Bibliothèque Nationale and Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal in Paris.

¹⁵ Philadelphia, Museum of Art. On the whole question, see Pietrini 2001 and 2011.

1987, 60-63); they could act as a kind of ‘journalist’, on the one hand telling the news items they had heard or invented during their journeys, but also engaging in political or social controversy, just like Zoppino; or acting their own sufferings. Two examples, chronologically very far apart, are good illustrations: the case of the jester named Matazone da Caligano (see Molinari 1972), and that of Nicolò Campani, aka Strascino da Siena, akin to the craftsmen who were amateur comic actors known as ‘pre-Rozzi’ (Pieri 2010, 183-251).

Detto dei villani (or, more precisely ‘ragionamento’ – reasoning – *raxone*) by Matazone, which could date back to the end of the thirteenth century, begins with an address to the listeners, often seen as evidence of oral recitation, followed by a more uncommon self-presentation by the author, which classifies it as half way between the two above-mentioned types, continuing in a quasi-dramatic form with the introduction of three characters speaking to each other. This implies that the reciter may have not only varied his tone of voice but also employed mime and gestures communicating the varied social status of the characters: an old peasant woman, as well as the farmer and the lord. Here it is worth recalling the epitaph of the earliest mime Vitalis – ‘Fingebam vultus, habitus ac verba loquentum / ut plures uno crederes ore loqui’¹⁶ – which shows that interpretation of characters consisting of mime and gesture as well as the voice was part of the jesters’ skills. It could also be the case that, in a way, the reciter could show his affection for and solidarity with one or other of the characters – almost like a Brechtian actor, though he was personally involved in the discussion since he confessed that he was also of peasant origin, even if he had repudiated this fact. All this contrasts with the metre consisting of seven-syllable rhyming couplets, which recall the monotonous rhythm of a nursery rhyme. This could, however, have enlivened the presence of the speaker (especially if he coincided or could be identified with the author) characterised by a possibly painful irony, or self-deprecating humour, due to the ambiguity of his position as a peasant who had become a singer of the marvellous virtues of his master, addressing an equally noble audience of ‘seignor e cavalier’. This could have endowed this monotonous rhythm with the almost dreamlike quality of a fairy tale, or even a love song, underpinned or challenged by attitude and gesture.

The *Lament* is a specific literary genre, the oldest ancestor of which could be identified in the biblical monologue in which Job curses the day he was born. In the words of Paul Zumthor: ‘Au XII^e siècle, le *planctus* est devenu un genre noble’ (1987, 53). Naturally, several varieties can be singled out – from the lament attributed to a character in a narrative context, like that of Achilles

¹⁶ ‘I imitated the faces, gestures and speech of the characters and it could be believed that many spoke by means of a single mouth’. Noted by Reich 1903, 599, note 3, with reference to *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* XIV, 2408, also to be found in *Latin Anthology* 487a. It is a 27-line poem originally in the basilica of S. Sebastiano, on the Via Appia in Rome, now held in the Museum in Frascati, but also to be found in an eleventh-century ms. The elegiac couplets appear to give it an early date.

to his mother Venus, after the death of Patroclus, or occupying a single poem, as in the case of Catullus' *Ariadne's Lament* set to music in Monteverdi's well known aria 'Lasciatemi morire'; or a Lament by a poet or singer concerning his love pangs, which, on occasion, can become invective, as with the sonnet by Cecco Angiolieri, 'La mia malinconia è tanta e tale' ('My melancholy is so deep and such'). The poems concerned are usually nostalgic or passionate in tone. It is easy to imagine that here diction is especially heated and moving, on occasion accompanied by intensely expressive gestures and mime, so as to attract the spectator's attention and understanding.

The subject of Strascino's lament is certainly not a love pang, on the contrary, he attacks those who cry over pain of this type, which can easily be set aside. Here the pain is much more concrete and excruciating, physical pain caused by that terrible disease which, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, had reached the dimensions of a pandemic, thus being of concern to the very listeners or readers.¹⁷

The *Lamento di quel tribulato di Strascino Campana senese* was certainly performed on various occasions, probably from 1508 (see Pieri 2010, 184), before being published by Zoppino in 1521, who is considered the *trait d'union* between public reciting and printing (Rospocher 2014, 350). The problem is that perhaps it had been at least partially written before being recited. The tale of the dream which allegedly convinced him to compose the 'stanzas' leaves the question an open one,¹⁸ even though it is possible, but, in my view improbable, that the initial one hundred and seventeen stanzas (i.e. the original nucleus of the *Lamento*) had been printed on loose sheets as handouts for the audience.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the metre used is *ottava rima*, which is not to be found in previous works by Campani – at least those with a dramatic structure that survive. *Ottava rima* is a kind of metre originating in the *cantari* later consecrated by the chivalrous epic, the epic poems by Pulci, Boiardo and Ariosto, but, for this very reason, often used by storytellers. It is as though Strascino had intended to present his work not as a *planctus*, but rather an *epos*, a heroic tale, even though there is no kind of narration, the work actually ending up in a confusing medley, only held together by self-pity, as though this flow of words could be a

¹⁷ Reference is obviously required to Gerolamo Fracastoro, *Syphilis sive morbus gallicus*, Verona, 1530. Marzia Pieri recalls several previous cases (2010, 184 note 2).

¹⁸ Strascino to the Readers 'Di modo che ... così sognando alcuna stanza, più fiato rivoltata, talmente mi si fisse in la memoria, che da poi ricordandomene, di scriverla mi disposi. E, sì come avvenir suole che l'un verso l'altro tira, a tal cagione ho fatte più stanze oltre certe che già ne feci quando effettivamente da ditto male percosso e agitato mi trovava' ('So that, ... dreaming some stanzas, I did my best to memorise them preparing to write them down. And as one line led on to another, in this way I created more stanzas in addition to others when I was smitten by this illness and felt most nervous'). The original Italian has the generic 'feci' (created) which could refer either to composing from memory or writing (see Pieri 2010, 197-198).

source of comfort. As a consequence, diction will have found the appropriate accent in sorrowful pain, albeit with all the possible deviations from hiccoughs to gasping pleas, rebellious cries and profanities, on occasion attenuated by unsuccessful attempts at reasoning or at least resigning oneself. From the viewpoint of gesture it is easier to think of a general lack of it, interrupted by threatening gestures with the clenched fist against God, immediately followed by submission of defeat, while his disfigured mask spoke for itself, without the chance of making changes. I wonder whether this interpreter of himself may have recited standing up, presenting himself as a narrator, or else lying down in a kind of realistic version of something that is not a story, but present truth.

However evidently hypothetical, these attempts at visualising the speaker's (or reader's) gesture, attitude and miming and describing the sound of his voice, are necessary because the difference between speaking and reading out loud in public and private consists of the total material presence of the speaker. Obviously, a daughter reading to her sick father to help him forget the slow passing of time, or a mother telling her child a story before he falls asleep will usually reduce gesture and mime to zero, but cannot ignore expressiveness and tone of voice – and this is deliberate, though without interpretative aims, on occasion using a sing-song tone to get the child to fall asleep.

It is actually not always true that speaking or reciting in public requires visibility or even the physical presence of the speaker or actor. Pietro Aretino recalls that Cimador, the son of the actor/clown Zuan Polo Liompardi, 'contrafacea una brigata di voci' ('imitated a whole troop of voices') from behind a door – or perhaps a curtain (Aretino 1980, 46). Thus the 'show' consisted of a voice, though one can imagine that the spectators gazed at that curtain, as though they were awaiting the appearance of those characters who sounded like a large group but were only a single individual. The fact that the spectators were subsequently invited to see a 'real' play (which did not actually take place) is not relevant.

These performances consisting entirely of sound were in a way not only the equivalent of a dumb-show (called *pantomima* in Italian, which does not correspond to the usual meaning of the English 'pantomime') but also of those *tableaux vivants* called *mystères sans parler ni signer* (i.e. without words or movements) present in late-medieval France, but also fashionable between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as recorded by Goethe in *Wahlverwandtschaften*, as well as posing or 'attitudes' like those of Lady Hamilton reproducing the figures on ancient vases in her husband's collection while he was British ambassador to the court of Naples.¹⁹

¹⁹ Lady Hamilton's poses can be seen in several paintings by Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, on whom, see, among others, Fraser 2012.

In these cases theatre overtly tends to identify itself with visual art,²⁰ and thus with writing, if in this we follow Plato, whose well-known argument (*Phaedrus* 275 d-e) I find most intriguing, especially because, while writing is called *graphè*, a few lines further on it is called *logos* (actually *logoi*, in the plural), of which the first meaning is 'word', referring to the 'written word'. Without wanting to exaggerate, the thought came to me that this interpretation could call into question the first verse of St John's Gospel: '*En archè en o logos*', 'In the beginning was the Word', which could be translated 'In the beginning was the written word', which would overturn Derrida's challenging argument, making Christianity, as well as Judaism, a religion of the book²¹ – even though Jesus actually never wrote down a single line.

However, identification with visual art does not only imply doing without the word, as in the case of dumb-shows but also any kind of narration, i.e. the time dimension, which remains entirely within the observer's gaze: even though, at a certain point, the show has to stop, though its length is entirely arbitrary.

Since the source of the voice is not visible (though it can be known), it is reduced to pure time, thus losing the tangible matter characterising certain kinds of visual art, especially sculpture. There is an anecdote about Rodin supposedly stroking the ancient statues in the Louvre from which he drew inspiration. This is true of the muezzin's chant calling the faithful to prayer: precisely because the source is invisible, can his voice be perceived as coming from Heaven – just like the very voice of God. In such cases one can readily agree with Marshall McLuhan: the medium really is the message (or massage?).²²

The muezzin's voice could easily be recorded – and I imagine that this can actually be the case. This leads into a completely new question, albeit an eye-opening one. From the time radio and TV have become mere household appliances, also present in many public places, such as bars, cafés, and restaurants, we are used to hearing voices and music (aka Muzak), as well as seeing people and events, though in most cases we cannot be sure whether they are actually present at the time we see or hear them or whether they have been recorded more or less recently. Furthermore, we are able to record a particular broadcast and thus move to the present something that we know took place in the past, with a kind of suspension of disbelief. This also means that we need not ask ourselves who originally spoke the words we are listening to. Thus, a medieval audience was not interested in knowing whether a specific song or lover's lament they were listening to had been composed by the jester reciting it or was the work of some

²⁰ Ragghianti 1952. Here, as he had done in an earlier essay, Ragghianti identifies also theatre with visual arts.

²¹ Actually Derrida wrote, quoting Jabès, 'race issue du livre' ('people born of the book'; 1967, 99).

²² McLuhan and Fiore, 1967. The original title was *The Medium is the Massage*, probably owing to a typesetter's error, though McLuhan approved, because of the suggestion of the possible physical impact of the medium on the receiver.

troubadour. Words always belong to their speakers, which dashed any hope on the part of Giraut Riquier of gaining recognition of his supremacy and 'author's rights' as set out in his well-known petition (see Bertolucci Pizzorusso 1966).

A conclusion of this type, however, could ignore or neglect a concept that is as decisive as it is ambiguous: that of interpreter and interpretation. It is ambiguous, because in Latin it could already waver between the meaning of mediator and that of presenter/commentator, i.e. he/she who explains, illustrates or even translates – and here it is worth recalling that the Greek word *hupokritès*, usually understood as meaning 'actor' has been translated as 'interpreter' (Zucchelli 1963), but also decisive inasmuch as it sets up a link between a text, either oral or written, and he who transmits it or simply reads it privately or even recalls it – as if this link were necessarily *an sich*, of an interpretative nature. Many actors lay claim to the role of 'interpreter', even after the modern and contemporary avant-garde had denied this, limiting the play text as a mere theme, when not a simple pretext. This conflict was lucidly healed by Piero Gobetti, stating that an actor interprets a text just as the author (the poet) interprets nature (1974).

It is obvious that cinema audiences watch a recorded performance and that TV and the web have caused the splitting up and privatisation of this audience, with some evident exceptions, like a football match shown in the open air on a wide screen. But this has contributed to highlighting the contrast between recorded and live shows, allowing live sport and maxi rock concerts to survive, as well as even theatre and opera, despite the prohibitive expense involved. I wonder what the role of this contrast – which preserves the character of an event for a live show, while it is possible, though problematic, to confer that of monument on a recorded one²³ – was for the recent, though perhaps short-lived, fashion of the new *lecturae Dantis*,²⁴ outside the elitist academic context in public squares before a large, mixed audience, by celebrities like Vittorio Sermonti and Roberto Benigni. These readings were also commentaries, though of a predominantly spectacular nature, especially in the case of Benigni, who accompanied a varied diction interrupted by extremely expressive mime, also capable of taking on the role of commentary, as well as interpretation, i.e. two different interpretative modalities. Naturally, these readings were recorded, thus becoming documents, since they were records of an event as well as being monuments. 'The Latin word *monumentum* should be linked to the Indo-European root *men*, which expresses one of the fundamental functions of the mind (*mens*), i.e. memory (*memini*)' (Le Goff 1978, 38): thus recordings become part of the great heritage of memory removed from the human mind, starting with writing to reach fulfillment in the book. This route seems to

²³ On the event-monument contrast see Dupont 1994, quoted in Chartier 2001, 16-17, note 2.

²⁴ Started by a group of 'famous' Italian actors, who, in 1865, on the occasion of a Dante centenary, recited some cantos of the *Divine Comedy* at the Pagliano Theatre in Florence, accompanied by a series of *tableaux vivants*. See Salvini 1895, 221.

me to be illustrated in a way by the fact that in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, as in several tragedies, tablets are mentioned (*beltos*), while books (*biblios/bublios*) only appear, as already mentioned, from Aristophanes onwards.

About twenty years ago, a new product called the audiobook was launched and became popular, especially in Germany, but has also spread to other countries, including Italy, where it is marketed with a striking slogan: 'read it with your eyes shut', which sums up its advantages. The audiobook can be used on all those occasions when it is difficult or impossible to use the hands or eyes, such as when driving, or simply when you feel like relaxing, with your eyes shut, as is the case with music. It is especially useful in cases of immobility, as a result of serious illnesses affecting the muscles like ALS. The audiobook can take the place of a kind reader entertaining or comforting the aged or ill people. I wonder if it could become part of the custom typical of Protestant families in which the *pater familias* read passages from the Bible to the family often sitting at the dinner table.

The audiobook is obviously a recording of the voices of one or more readers. On occasion it could be the author him/herself and here one is tempted to believe that it is a case of authentic interpretation. This is naturally not so, for the simple reason that there is no such thing as an 'authentic' interpretation (in the words of Dante) 'per la contraddizion che nol consente' ('Because of the contradiction that consents not'). It is the paradox of all reading out loud: without going as far as Chartier, who believes that the very material quality of a book and printers' options can influence the reader, one could ask oneself if Oronte in *The Misanthrope* was really such a bad poet, or if a better diction might have protected his sonnet from the criticism of Alceste. The conclusion might well be that the only case of a text and its transmission identifying with each other is that of improvisation, even though with a new paradox one can only use the word 'text'²⁵ after the improvised stretch of speech has been registered in the *reportationes* whose purpose was to fix in writing and thus possibly communicate in print the improvisations of storytellers like Altissimo or the political 'articles' by Zoppino. The fact that other unauthorised *reportationes*, a real case of theft, even though not illegal, contributed to the circulation, albeit in a distorted form, of the works of Shakespeare, is a different problem, concerning authenticity, rather than interpretation, of the texts, as shown by the recent re-evaluation of the bad quartos, often based on the prejudice that the theatre text is always written to be acted and not read (see Ioppolo 1991 and Love 1993);²⁶ while the same

²⁵ According to Emiliy Michelson (2014), writing is no match for diction, but fixes the authentic text.

²⁶ An ancient prejudice which Chartier (2001, 60) attributes also to John Marston who, in the address to the readers of his *Poetaster* (1606) affirms that comedies are written to be played and not to be read.

could be said about chivalric romances from the *Reali di Francia* to *Orlando furioso* and all oral 'literature' (Ong 2002).²⁷

Some of the essays collected in this volume go beyond the century that saw the beginning of the Modern Era in Italy, that magic century we are used to identifying with the Renaissance, but which also saw the swift spread of printing with the related privatisation of reading which got off to a difficult start in the thirteenth century with the closure of the monastic *scriptoria* and the transfer of their activities to private craftsmen (see Alessio 1990). In particular, the essay by Roberta Mullini examines a handbook for 'reading and reciting' written by a famous English-Irish actor (or rather actor/director), Thomas Sheridan, active in the second half of the eighteenth century. This makes the link between theatre, reading aloud and reciting from memory or improvising explicit. The eighteenth century is also dealt with by Antonella Giordano, who writes of a number of women who turned improvising into a new professional skill, admittedly already practised by men, who, in a way, had preceded the success of the writing profession favoured by the invention of printing (see Di Filippo Bareggi 1988). Teresa Megale deals with the rise of improvising preachers in the streets of seventeenth-century Naples, recalling that, from the time of Savonarola, treatises on the art of preaching had been published: another case of a kind of new profession. Of the three remaining contributions, the one by Riccardo Bruscaagli examines a poem on the discovery of the Canary Islands (dating from the late fifteenth century) written by the learned bishop Giuliano Dati, clearly to be recited. Christopher Geekie deals with the clashes between the supporters of Ariosto and those of Tasso, not so much on their literary value as the sound, as it were, of their verse. Luca Degl'Innocenti foregrounds the fact that many chivalric poems continued to be written and printed but also recited and, on occasion, improvised throughout the Renaissance, continuing to be popular with the lower orders but also the educated upper classes.

The purpose of this Introduction has been to frame, however roughly, a detailed picture over a long period of time and a large area of a history involving communication, orality, writing, theatre, the book and memory, since 'the book, before becoming the inexorably victorious substitute and enemy of the techniques of memory, becomes their mirror and instrument'.²⁸ I have tried to keep a difficult balance between those nostalgic for oral poetry, like Paul Zumthor, and the prophets of writing like Jacques Derrida.

I apologise for emphasizing the theme of the theatre, due to my limited competence, but I remember that someone said that the invention of printing would diminish the 'theatricality' of social life – nowadays replaced by frantic exhibitionism of the social networks.

²⁷ The essay by Ong *Orality and Literacy* (2002), goes on from Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse* (1971).

²⁸ See Bolzoni 1997, 19. Among the many histories of the book and of reading, I should like to single out the one by Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (1996).

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PART TWO
Case Studies

Singing and Printing Chivalric Poems in Early Modern Italy

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Abstract

Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, chivalric romances were much loved in Italy, both in popular and in learned contexts, and were one of the bestselling genres in the nascent printed book trade. Although traditional blockbusters and brand-new poems alike typically refer to the oral performance of a poet-singer, literary scholars tend to evaluate those references as part of a rhetorical strategy of fictive orality, as literary clichés derived from a performing practice supposedly confined to earlier periods. Nevertheless, upon closer inspection, many authors and texts prove to be linked with real oral performances. Several chivalric poems, in particular, were surely composed, sung, and even improvised by street singers, who also played a very active role in printing and selling them. The article aims to survey the most relevant evidence, thus reassessing the importance of orality in fostering and disseminating one of the prominent literary genres of Renaissance Italy.

Keywords: *Canterino, Chivalric Poems, Poet-Performers, Orality, Renaissance Italy*

1. *Introduction*

Italian late-medieval and early-modern chivalric poetry narrated the battles of Carolingian paladins, the adventures of Arthurian knights, the War of Troy, the deeds of Alexander the Great, of Aeneas, of Caesar and other legendary heroes of the past. In other words, it was a form of epic poetry. As such, it belonged to a tradition that had been intimately linked to orality since the dawn of time, so much so that research on oral poetry itself, as is well known, was born and has grown in close contact with that on epic traditions, both dead and alive, be it the Homeric poems, *Beowulf*, and the *chansons de geste*, or the poetry of modern-time Serbian *guslar*, West African *griot*, and Turkish *âşik*.¹

¹ For an introduction to the flowering of studies on orality in various cultures after the seminal work of Lord 1960, see Foley 1992. For the medieval period, see Reichl 2011.

Most Italian chivalric romances, in fact, are rich in references to a situation of performance in which a poet is singing his stanzas in front of an audience. Significantly, their traditional form is that of the *cantare*, a narrative poem in *ottava rima* whose oral delivery is implied by its very name, which simply means 'to sing'. Moreover, the bulk of external and internal evidence related to the Italian tradition is among the richest and most various in pre-modern Europe, and seems capable of significantly further our understanding of how orality and writing interacted in our literary past. Nevertheless, rather surprisingly, this opportunity is still largely to be seized. This essay aims to understand why it has not been so far and why it should be seized henceforth, by reassessing the most relevant evidence on the role played by orality in fostering and disseminating one of the prominent literary genres of Renaissance Italy.

The main difficulty with the Italian case is a very common one in the field of oral studies. Only living traditions can be experienced in their own ephemeral oral dimension. It is true that they can be studied not only on account of their intrinsic interest, but also for comparative purposes. Parry and Lord's fieldwork on South Slavic *guslar* was aimed at better understanding Homer, as is well known (see Lord 1960). However, regardless of how many analogies can be traced between past and present poems, the fact remains that the former only survive in writing. This fact inevitably influences our perception in favour of a literate-minded approach, which orientates our judgement when determining the most likely hypothesis about the nature and origin of a poem, and about the oral elements involved, if any. In fact, investigating the relationships between epics and orality in the past is always complicated and potentially undermined by the scarcity of surviving texts and of documents on their original contexts. This forces scholars to formulate hypotheses, and recommends them to take extreme caution when evaluating their plausibility. Scarce and decontextualized evidence is easy to misinterpret and does not offer much protection against one's own wishful thinking and preconceptions. Therefore, focusing on the empirical written nature of a poem appears to be much more cautious than speculating on its conjectural oral qualities.

This text-centred approach may be right in many cases, but it might turn out to be rather overcautious and ultimately counterproductive in others, especially when a substantial body of textual and contextual evidence proves that orality (and vocality, and aurality) played a very active role in the composition and circulation of a certain genre. In my experience, Italian chivalric poetry is a perfect case in point. In theory, literary scholars know well that, during the first centuries of Italian literature, the oral and the written dimensions were mutually, continuously, and deeply permeable; in practice, nevertheless, such awareness fades away into an inert historical background when examining specific texts and genres, which are interpreted only in

terms of written texts and of interactions between them.² Even if a poem abounds in references to a situation of performance, as it often happens, such references are interpreted as signs of fictive orality. For the sake of prudence, until proven otherwise, aural phrases and traits that point to recitation are considered void of pragmatic value, and explained either as relics of an earlier (or marginalized) practice passively echoed by some writers notwithstanding their loss of function, or else as rhetorical devices deliberately and artfully employed by other writers in order to conjure up for their readers the illusion of attending a spectacle that would never take place other than in their minds.

The general argument of fictive orality has been applied, in many different specific variants, to authors, works, and literary genres of various periods and places. For some of them it has proved to be a very useful hermeneutical principle, on condition that it allows for the fact that a decline of oral composition does not imply a decline of oral recitation. In other words, as many have objected, even when poems were no longer composed *during* performance, and therefore they were not strictly speaking 'oral poems', they could still be mainly composed *in order to* be performed, at least through reading aloud, and in this sense their orality was real.³

In Italy, an approach exclusively focused on literacy and sceptical about orality has been granted preponderant authority by influential philologists such as the late Cesare Segre, who since the 1980s severely opposed a broad application of Paul Zumthor's arguments for a rediscovery of medieval *vocalité* (and of its effects of *mouvance* and *variance*) and battled for decades against any interpretation of the *Chanson de Roland* in terms of oral-formulaic theory.⁴ In the specific field of chivalric *cantari*, leading specialists have detected a process of *letterarizzazione* ('literarization') that gradually shifts their production from piazzas to desks and their reception from recitation to reading (see De Robertis 1966, 438 and 1984, 22). Therefore, though acknowledging the

² For a criticism of this approach from the point of view of a cultural anthropologist, see Donà 2007. The most influential arguments against the privileging of text over voice remain those of Zumthor 1987 (but see also Zumthor 1983).

³ In the latter sense, especially when referring to the 'shared hearing of written texts', one might rather speak of 'aurality', as suggested by Coleman 1996. An authoritative distinction between actual oral delivery and 'nonperformative' oral poetics expressed 'through the pens of authors engaged in ... private moments of composition' has been drawn by Amodio (2004, xv; see also 28-29); however, he does not seem immune from the objection of overlooking 'oral performance as a *goal* of writing or writing down' (Harris and Reichl 2011, 161). Further references in Degl'Innocenti and Richardson 2016, 4-7.

⁴ See in particular Segre 1985 (a later version, entitled 'Dalla memoria al codice', was published in Segre 1998, 3-9). This essay opened a quarrel against J.J. Duggan (1973) and other North American medievalists, one of whose major episodes, more than 20 years later, was the publication of Segre, Beretta and Palumbo 2008, a long negative review-essay to the three volumes of Duggan *et al.* 2005.

difficulty of establishing a clear chronology, it has been authoritatively argued that, by the mid-fifteenth century, most poems preserve 'only a fiction of recitation, codified in a series of formulas that refer to a performance that no longer exists, a mere homage to tradition' (Cabani 1988, 10-11).⁵ The theory of fictive orality has thus become received knowledge among many Italian medievalists and early modernists, who assertively classify every text of the fifteenth century as 'exclusively intended for reading' (Barbiellini Amidei 2007, 23) and, when confronted with poems exceptionally rich in oral features, strive to find them at least a 'more or less similar precedent' in other poems, supposedly 'literarized' (Morato 2011, 197).

Furthermore, what appears to be true for the fifteenth century seems even truer for the following one, when the divide between orality and literacy looks wider and wider and the latter appears to progressively supersede and overcome the former in almost every domain. This perception is particularly enhanced, as far as I can see, by the combined effect of two specific factors; namely, learned writers and printed books. Firstly, the more we move towards and into the sixteenth century, the more we find cultured authors who borrowed the traditional forms and structures of *cantari* and transformed them into literary masterpieces. The most famous is Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, first published in 1516, but the same is true for the poems of his predecessor Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441-1494), of Luigi Pulci (1432-1484), and of many other writers from the mid-fifteenth century onwards. Secondly, in exactly the same period, the poems old and new became even 'more written' than before, as they ever more often took the shape of printed books, soon establishing the hugely successful genre of the *libri di battaglia* ('books of battles').⁶ Precisely because they are artificially written gatherings of paper, printed books appear to be the furthest possible thing from oral poetry.

As a consequence, the Italian chivalric poems that were written and printed in the Renaissance appear to be confined to the realm of literacy. Nevertheless, appearances are often deceptive. If we leave received opinions aside and judge from the evidence available, the case of an author who writes a poem fictionalising for his readers a situation of recitation that would never take place is not very likely. As we shall see, it was still absolutely normal for those poems to be orally performed in both learned and popular contexts, by their very authors or at least in front of them (even in the case of Ariosto); and, what is more, many of them could even still be orally composed, during their performances, by the many poet-improvisers who authored chivalric poems in those decades.

If one takes into account the three interconnected points that I am going to examine in the following pages, fictive orality can hardly emerge as the most

⁵ Unless otherwise stated, translations are mine.

⁶ For a new analysis of an early Venetian bookseller's day-book that has fortuitously survived and is rich in chivalric titles, see Dondi and Harris 2016.

plausible hypothesis, to be held valid unless proven otherwise. On the contrary, rather than proving that an apparently oral poem was really orally performed, the issue should be proving that it was not. The three points are as follows:

Chivalric poetry was still commonly and primarily performed in public both in the fifteenth and in the sixteenth centuries.

Oral poetry and printed books were not at all on opposite fronts in the first decades of the Gutenberg era; on the contrary, they were very close allies.

Even from a textual point of view, the relationship between performed poems and printed ones could be much closer and more direct than we are used to thinking.

2. *And yet it is Sung. Evidence of Long-Lasting Oral Practices*

On the first point, there should be no need to say much. It is common knowledge that (at least) from the early fourteenth century onwards many generations of poets-singers relentlessly performed chivalric texts both in city streets and piazzas and in princely halls and gardens. Their activity is well documented throughout the early modern period by a wide range of records. These include archive documents, such as city statutes that established times and places of the performances, or simply tried to forbid them; judicial records that, though often referring to common offences, still inform about the activity of the defendant as a street singer; and account books of noble households, that record payments of inn bills and donations of gold pieces and robes to poets-improvisers who had entertained the lord and his court by singing chivalric poems (see Degl’Innocenti 2016). Evidence includes also sermons of preachers – or, more precisely, hostile sermons of rival preachers, who were competing with street performers for the same piazza audience, and condemned those *praedicatores diaboli* (‘preachers of the devil’) who committed the ‘capital sin’ of ‘singing of the paladins during Lent and holy days’, and blame the ‘listeners who crowd around them’ as soon as their bows start striking their violas (Degl’Innocenti 2016, 302 and Rospoche 2017). Further proof can be found in passages of letters and diaries that eye-witness (and ear-witness) some remarkable performance in urban or domestic spaces.

Street performances of singers of chivalric tales are also portrayed in diverse literary anecdotes, often written by learned authors who made fun of their gullible audiences, but in so doing also exalted (if unintentionally) the street-singers’ ability to mesmerize them. Such is the case, for instance, of the humanist Poggio Bracciolini, whose *Facetiae* 82 and 83 tell the humorous tales, respectively, of the man who gets home from the piazza in speechless despair and barely finds the courage to confess to his worried wife the daunting news he just heard from a ‘cantor’, that the paladin Roland is dead; and that of the man who ruins himself by paying day by day a special reward to a street entertainer who sings the deeds of Hector, if only he postpones the instalment

in which the Trojan hero must die (Bracciolini 1995, 88-91). Finally, accounts of the recitation of texts can be found in forewords and rubrics of manuscripts and printed books, as well as in other paratextual materials, including the remarkable visual evidence supplied by book illustrations, and in particular by some popular woodcuts that depict real and fictional poets, both ancient and modern, in the guise of street singers playing their *viola* in front of an audience (Degl'Innocenti 2011).

3. *Who Wants to Buy what I Sing? Selling Printed Books and Performing Oral Poetry in the Piazza*

The mention of books leads us to the second point. Once verified that reciting and listening to a poem was as common and normal as writing and reading it, we could nonetheless wonder whether the invention of print – which is commonly identified as the capital enemy of oral practices – did change anything in this landscape, and in its soundscape. The answer is yes, of course. But not in the sense of marginalizing oral practices. Actually, at first it was rather the contrary.

In a context of mixed orality such as the Italian one, a synergy between the written and the spoken word had already been active for centuries before the invention of print. Books were employed as models and sources by professional oral entertainers already in the age of manuscripts, and handwritten copies of their poems were often circulated. What made the difference, in all likelihood, was the price. Printed books were far cheaper than manuscripts, and this could make them appear as very promising wares to poet-performers who were already accustomed to earning their living by selling literature. Printers, on their part, had much to gain in letting their products be circulated and promoted in squares and marketplaces and other public spaces by singers of tales who were able to gather and mesmerise large crowds of listeners of oral poetry, and easily turn them into buyers of printed poems.

In late fifteenth-century Florence the art of printing itself was first imported by the most famous street singer of his age, Antonio di Guido (see Böninger 2003), and the account books of printing shops such as the Ripoli press (based in a convent near Santa Maria Novella) were soon dotted with names of charlatans and street singers (*ciurmadori* and *cantimpanca*) who repeatedly bought dozens of copies of popular books, including many short chivalric romances, for the evident purpose of selling them during their performances (see Burke 1998). By the early sixteenth century, it was far from unusual for *cantimpanca* to do business also as regular publishers and booksellers: such is the case, for instance, of the Florentine Zanobi della Barba, who published no less than 30 titles in the 1500s and 1510s (see Villoresi 2007), and of numerous peers of his in central and northern Italy, like Paolo Danza, Ippolito Ferrarese, Francesco Faentino, Jacopo Coppa

called 'Il Modenese', and Paride Mantovano called 'Il Fortunato'. Venice, the rising capital of Italian book trade, was an important hub in the activity of many of them, but most street singers were itinerant performers, who crisscrossed the peninsula singing and selling their own poems and those of more famous authors, especially the most fashionable ones, such as Ariosto and Pietro Aretino.⁷

Some of them were marginal figures, but some others were able to make their own way right to the epicentre. Jacopo Coppa, for instance, was a typically protean street entertainer, particularly famous for his medical and cosmetic products, and for his ability in advertising them. He achieved success in cities as diverse as Naples, where he ingratiated himself with the Viceroy Don Pedro of Toledo; Venice, where he found the protection of Caterina Cornaro and applied for medical licenses; and Florence, where the great favour that he gained at the court of Cosimo de' Medici was largely due to the healing of the Duke's favourite dog and to a whitening toothpaste which endowed the Duchess Eleonora (daughter of Don Pedro) with the brightest of smiles. Medical charlatanism was not only a key to success with noble patrons, but also a very important aspect of his multifaceted itinerant activity in the piazzas. Another essential facet was singing poetry, and it is significantly on Coppa's ability as a performer of poetry that Pietro Aretino opened a famous letter of October 1545 that proclaims him 'un dei primi ceretani del mondo' ('one of the world's best charlatans') and wittingly develops upon his figure a half-serious eulogy of the charlatans' craft, and of their ability to gain the attention, admiration, and trust of their listeners:

[Io] non pur sopporto, ma in tutto mi rallegro d'essere in bocca de i ceretani ... Quale è quello infacendato, quale è quel bisognoso e quale è quello avaro, che al primo tocco de la lor lira, al primo verso de la lor voce e al primo iscorinar de la lor merce, non si fermi, non s'impegni e non si scagli nel conto del comperare le ricette, i bossoletti e le leggende ch'essi donano con la vendita sino a queglii che son certi che niente vagliano, che niente importano e che niente dicono?⁸

The alluring and mesmerizing power of the *cantimpanca* is here described at its best: even if many people know that nothing of what they sing or sell is really worth it, upon first hearing their music and their voice, everybody stop, gather around and listen to them, in a sort of mirroring trance, pulled and

⁷ See Salzberg 2010 and 2014, Petrella 2012, and Rhodes 2015.

⁸ 'Not only I tolerate, but I really rejoice in being in the mouth of charlatans ... Whoever is so busy, so needy, or so mean, that at the first stroke of their lyre, at the first call of their voice, at the first display of their wares, he would not stop, engage and let himself be carried away by the idea of buying the recipes, the tins, and the stories which the charlatans donate for sale even to those who know for sure how worthless, fruitless, and meaningless they are?' (On Coppa, see Refini 2016).

dragged along by 'la calamita de le chiacchiere, di che gli diluvia la lingua' (Aretino 1999, 325-327).⁹ The art of these charming entertainers hinges upon the sounds of their voices as well as on the meanings of their words. Far from being art for art's sake, however, theirs is put at the service of a commercial activity. Now, if one takes a closer look to the wares they peddled, in a jumble with soap bars, perfumes, quack remedies and tins of ointments, one also finds 'stories' and 'ballads' ('leggende' and 'cantafavole', as Aretino says), which they both sang and sold. The letter was reportedly occasioned by the fact that Coppa had been heard singing some of Aretino's poems on the bench 'in su la piazza di Ferrara, cantando in banca':¹⁰ a piece of news that makes the author even happier than being praised by Apollo himself 'nei chiostri di Parnaso, poetizando improvviso'.¹¹ Reference is also made, though, to Coppa's initiative of dedicating those poems to Sansovino, another of Aretino's friends, without the author's consent: this must have happened in a printed edition unrecognised so far, and yet possibly to be identified with one of the unsigned reprints of the *Capitoli del signor Pietro Aretino, di messer Lodovico Dolce, di m. Francesco Sansovino*, published in the 1540s.¹² Jacopo Coppa, in fact, was not only an itinerant charlatan, street singer and bookseller, but a publisher as well – and a particularly resourceful one, at that, considering that he was able to lay his hands even on some tasty unpublished works of Ludovico Ariosto: namely, the monologue known as the *Erbolato* and, more importantly, his collection of lyric poems, the *Rime*, published by Coppa in Venice in 1546 and reprinted by others dozens of times in the following decades (see Casadei 1992).

Being a noticeable publisher was not at all exceptional for an Italian *cantimpanca*. The most striking example is almost certainly the Zoppino. In the first half of the sixteenth century, a charlatan that goes under this name appears in several satirical works of Pietro Aretino, Teofilo Folengo, Francisco Deligado and others, doing business in various capacities, from the street singer to the pimp. His most important literary biographer is once again Aretino, who many times insists upon the irresistible attraction of his street performances. In the *Dialogue* of Nanna and Pippa, Zoppino is a paradigm of the charlatans' mastery in entralling the audience and playing with the dynamics of pleasure-postponement. At a certain point, Nanna needs a comparison that would make clear to Pippa how a courtesan should play her lovers along by allowing them to foretaste the joys of love just up to the

⁹ 'the magnet of the chatter, that pours down from their tongue'.

¹⁰ 'singing on the bench, in the piazza of Ferrara'.

¹¹ 'in the cloisters of Parnassus, improvising verse'.

¹² See EDIT16-*Censimento nazionale delle edizioni italiane del XVI secolo* (<<http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it>>), entries number 2430 and 2436. I am most grateful to Neil Harris for this suggestion.

point in which the business gets serious, and then suddenly refusing them, so that they will ever be at her mercy thereafter, ready to pay any price in order to resume their intercourse. This is exactly the same trick, she explains, employed by the *cantimpanca* Zoppino:

NANNA. Non ti ricordi tu, Pippa, quando il Zoppino vendette in banca la leggenda di Campriano?

PIPPA. Mi ricordo di quel Zoppino che quando canta in banca tutto il mondo corre a udirlo.

NANNA. Quello è desso. Hai tu in mente il ridere che tu facesti sendo noi dal mio compar Piero, mentre con la Luchina e con la Lucietta sue lo ascoltavate?

PIPPA. Madonna sì.

NANNA. Tu sai che 'l Zoppino cantò ... la storia fino a la metà: e come ebbe adescata la turba ben bene, voltò mantello; e inanzi che si desse a finirla, volse spacciar mille altre bagattelle ... Il dire 'non voglio' e 'non posso' in sul bel del fare, sono le ricette che vende il Zoppino, nel lasciare in secco la brigata che smascellava, stroncando la novella di Campriano. (Aretino 1969, 161-162)¹³

The comparison with a prostitute may not have been most flattering – and one could well imagine Aretino's amusement in setting it up – but it is undoubtedly apt. Not by chance, the characteristic technique that Ariosto (and Boiardo before him) derived from the *cantimpanca*, of choosing always a suspenseful moment for abandoning a narrative strand and switch to another one, or simply close the *canto*, has been wittily dubbed 'cantus interruptus' (Javitch 1980). The acclaimed street entertainer Zoppino (whose audience, we learn, included a noteworthy feminine component), first grips his listeners by telling an amusing tale, thus making sure that no one would leave before the end, and then suspends the story in the thick of it and starts an endless sequence of advertisements (any resemblance with modern-time TV channels is by no means coincidental), peddling all sorts of stuff, and in particular – precisely as Coppa – his recipes and stories. Once again, we have a charlatan who is also both a story-teller and a book-seller. This time, the book is *Campriano contadino*, a popular *novella* in *ottava rima* about a cunning peasant who outsmarts some rich town merchants in a series of funny pranks. On other

¹³ NANNA. Don't you recall, Pippa, when Zoppino was selling on the bench the story of Campriano? / PIPPA. I remember that Zoppino whom everyone run to hear when he sings. / NANNA. That's the fellow. Do you recollect how you laughed when we were visiting my good old friend Piero, and you listened to him together with Luchina and Lucietta? / PIPPA. Yes, my lady. / NANNA. You know that Zoppino sang the tale up to the midway point; and when he had gathered a mob about him, he would turn his cape inside out and before getting set to finish the tale, he wanted to peddle a thousand other trifles ... Well, saying 'I don't want to' and 'I can't' just at the sweet climax, are in fact like the recipes that Zoppino gets down to sell, when he leaves the delighted crowd high and dry by cutting short his story of Campriano'. Translation (amended) from Raymond Rosenthal's version in Aretino 1972, 178.

occasions, though, the story sung and sold by Zoppino is a chivalric one: case in point, in Aretino's *Dialogo del giuoco*, having 'promesso al popolazzo di ammazzar Ranaldo', the well-beloved Paladin, in the next day's show, he finds a listener who begs him: 'Deh togliete questi cinque carlini e non l'aammazzate!' (Aretino 2014, 327).¹⁴ This is clearly a revamp of Poggio's *facetia* 83, but if it seemed easy-fitting for Zoppino, it means that his activities included the recitation of series of chivalric *cantari* over many days.

Chivalric titles are abundant in the annals of a famous namesake of his, the publisher Niccolò d'Aristotele de' Rossi from Ferrara called Zoppino, who cherished this genre so much that he engaged many young promising authors, restored the text of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato* by getting back to its first complete edition, and was the first to produce a complete series of woodcut illustrations for Ariosto's *Furioso* even before its final edition of 1532, thus paving the way for many publishers to come (see Harris 1987, 88-94 and 1991, 87-92 and Caneparo 2008). He mostly published cheap and yet well-crafted popular books: collections of rhymes, entertaining stories, and bestsellers past and present, almost exclusively in the vernacular, and also manuals on various subjects (including embroidery designs) and books of recipes as well. Furthermore, albeit mainly based in Venice, his itinerant activity spread all over the peninsula, through a network of local bookshops and editions commissioned to local printers on the eve of important fairs. Among other things, it is also worth mentioning that in 1512 he was the first publisher of Aretino himself, and kept on reprinting his works also in later years.

It is hardly surprising, then, that scholars have long wondered whether the two Zoppinos could ever have been one and the same person (Degl'Innocenti 2008b, 196-197). Until very recently, though, the most common answer has been scepticism. The publisher Zoppino was one of the most enterprising and productive ones of the early sixteenth century, a respectable businessman whose activity lasted for more than forty years (1503-1544) and whose annals, recently published, fill up a volume of 355 pages.¹⁵ The idea of identifying him with a crafty peddler has appeared awkward to many, and would probably be still deemed so, if it wasn't for a couple of recent discoveries. Although two Zoppinos have long been part and parcel of the historical account, in fact, the one and only real Zoppino has been lately healed from his multiple personality disorder by means of some Ferrarese and Venetian archive records which unequivocally refers to Niccolò Zoppino as a publisher and *cantimpanca* at the same time (Cavicchi 2011, 282 and Rospocher 2014). Of course, even if Aretino's characters are always grounded in real life, one

¹⁴ 'promised to the mob to kill Renaud', 'Here, take this five coins, but, please, don't kill him!'

¹⁵ Baldacchini 2011 (reviewed by Harris 2013). Interestingly, Harris suggests that Zoppino may also have been the printer of some of the numerous unsigned editions of Aretino of the 1530s and 1540s.

should always account for the literary nature and the ridiculous register of his portraits. Nevertheless, no matter how fictive some details may well be, what is not fictional but factual beyond doubt is the symbiosis that linked book publishing and street performances in early modern Italy at all levels of the two professions, and in the persons of their leading exponents.

Such links can be substantiated also through material objects. That is, of course, through printed books. The most conclusive document about the hybrid profile of Zoppino, made public by Massimo Rospoche a few years ago, is a Venetian record related to his conviction for having publicly sung and sold ('cantaverint in bancho publice et vendiderint') in his native Ferrara, in 1509, a poem against Venice (2014, 349 and 357). That poem was in all likelihood a very rare *Barzoleta*, a booklet of 4 pages (just half a sheet of paper folded in two) survived in two copies only, in London and in Turin, in whose last strophe the poet encourages the bystanders to buy a copy of the text at the end of the performance: 'Chi vorrà sta frotelina ... / metta mano a la scarsella: / dui quattrin tragram di quella / al Zopin li ponga in mani' (Zoppino 1509?, Aiiiv).¹⁶

Zoppino's urging is particularly effective to us because we know for certain that this specific book was publicly sung and sold, but it is common for similar references to appear in the final lines of popular pamphlets in verse. Among the possible examples, at least another one is directly connected with documented performances of a text. At the end of the eighth and last *canto* of his mock-chivalric *Libero del Rado Stizuxo* ('Book of the Furious Rado'), in fact, the renowned Venetian *buffone* Zuan Polo dismisses his audience with the advertisement of a special sale price: no more than two *marcelli* for a copy, and just a *mocenigo* for his friends (but the *mocenigo* was a coin worth twice as much as a *marcello*, and so the latter offer is just a joke).¹⁷ The first and only known edition of this work was published in Venice in 1533, and the author held the privilege to print it since January 1532 (see Salzberg 2014, 83). It is more than likely, therefore, that this edition was published by Zuan Polo himself, who would then sell it during his performances, even if its 46 leaves qualify it as a product less ephemeral than cheap pamphlets like Zoppino's *Barzoleta*. Actually, this is not only a likely supposition, but a documented fact, recorded by the diarist Marino Sanudo on the 10th of August of that very year 1533, when he attended in Piazza San Marco a performance of Zuan Polo, 'vestito da poeta con zoia de lauro in testa' (precisely as he is portrayed

¹⁶ 'Those who want this little book may simply put their hands in their pockets, take out [the modest sum of] two *quattrini*, and hand them to the *Zoppino*' (Zoppino 1509?, Aiiiv). I quote from the copy held in the British Library, 11426.c.93; the other one is in Turin, Biblioteca Reale, L.11.11.

¹⁷ 'Demilo vui per vostro chortexia / dui marcelli e portelo via. / E si xe qua qualche mio amigo / non voio laltro che vn mocenigo' (Zuan Polo 1533, Miv).

in the woodcut on the title-page), who 'fè un sermon a tuti' and then 'dete fuora l'opera composta per lui a stampa di Rado Stizoso'.¹⁸ Even when they didn't become publishers in a general sense, street singers took care of having their own works printed and of selling copies of them.

4. *The Chicken or the Egg? Voicing Scripts and Scribing Voices During Oral Performances*

Voices and books were bound in perfect harmony and worked in spontaneous synergy in the piazzas of early modern Italy, as we have just seen. Fostered by chivalric poetry, it is this symbiosis between the written and the oral that Teofilo Folengo vividly, though disdainfully, evoked in the proem of his *Orlandino*, when he deprecated the ongoing public performances of old poems such as 'Trabisunda, Ancroia, Spagna, e Bovo' (that he'd rather burn or use as toilet paper) by means of an apparent synaesthesia, blaming the 'Di quanti scartafacci e scrittarie / oggidì cantar odo in le botteghe'.¹⁹

These pages and writings that turn into sounds and songs urge us to deal with the third and last point of this essay. How did recited texts and printed ones relate to each other? Obviously, it makes a great difference which came first, the voice or the book – but sometimes solving the dilemma is not much easier than with chickens and eggs.

The simplest case is that of a written version composed before the recital and simply sung from memory, or even read aloud, by the performer. Such is the case of some century-old poems which were still performed in the late fifteenth century, if we are to judge from a manuscript of the timeless *Spagna in rima* that a *cantimpanca* annotated with marginal warnings such as 'Questa [stanza] non bisogna dire più'.²⁰ After all, even *Orlando furioso*, when Ariosto was still working on it, was both regularly read aloud at the court of the duke of Ferrara, together with Boiardo's *Innamorato* (according to the diary of one of the duke's footmen, Agostino Mosti; see Dorigatti 2011, 34), and sung by mountebanks in the city streets in front of the author himself (according to the poet's first biographer and fellow citizen, Giovambattista Pigna).²¹ Oral communication was so congenial to chivalric poems that many of them may have been performed by their very authors in the first place: though usually disregarded, this is likely even in the major cases of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto, and is almost certain for Aretino's *Marfisa*, which not only was

¹⁸ 'in the guise of a poet with a laurel on his head'; 'recited a text in front of everyone'; 'peddled the printed work composed by him of *Rado Stizoso*' (Sanudo 1879-1903, vol. LVIII, col. 542).

¹⁹ 'The many scrap papers and scribbles that nowadays I hear being sung in the shops' (*Orlandino*, I 17 1-2 in Folengo 1991).

²⁰ 'This [strophe] mustn't be recited any more'. See Strologo 2014, 44 and note 51.

²¹ See Pigna 1554, book III (*Scontri de' luoghi*), observation LII.

seized, modified, sung, published, and sold by itinerant street singers such as Ippolito Ferrarese in the 1530s and Cristoforo Scanello aka ‘the Blind Man from Forlì’ in the 1560s, but was also first made known through recitals given by Aretino himself in Venice and elsewhere (see Degl’Innocenti 2016, 320). Once acknowledged that such texts were commonly really performed, and written with the goal of being so, their frequent references to oral delivery prove to be functional to their performability, and there is no advantage in interpreting them as purely fictional.

However, although performances allowed for extempore variations and modifications, these poems were, strictly speaking, simply *vocally performed* and not *orally composed*. Yet, one of the most striking facts about chivalric poetry in early modern Italy is that many authors (and possibly most of them) were known and renowned for their ability to sing *all’improvviso*. They were capable, in other words, of composing their cantos *during performance*: more than three hundreds lines, to be sung in about one hour, for an average *cantare*.²² A comprehensive study of poetic improvisation in late medieval and early modern Italy is still lacking, but the cases investigated so far suggest that composing a narrative poem *all’improvviso* did not usually mean creating it *ex nihilo*, but rather assembling it on the spur of the moment through a recombination and adaptation of source materials such as set pieces and recurrent phrase-patterns (i.e. ‘themes’ and ‘formulae’, in terms of oral-formulaic theory) that had been stocked and organized in the poet’s well-trained memory.²³ Written texts were essential to this process of semi-improvisation in many ways: narrations in prose were employed as plot outlines, set pieces were elaborated in writing before memorizing them, one’s own formulaic repertoire was largely based on the works of the most influential writers, not uncommonly known by heart. As paradoxical as it may seem, then, even a process apparently originating in pure orality such as poetical improvisation did actually rely extensively on books.

All the same, the relations between the improvisational activity of many poets and the written and printed texts that go under their names still need to be explained. A possible scenario is what have been called a ‘performance at the desk’:²⁴ the poem is composed in writing by a poet-improviser who draws upon the same materials and techniques that he employs when composing in public;

²² For a provisional survey, that includes the already mentioned Antonio di Guido, Luigi Pulci, Niccolò Zoppino, and Pietro Aretino together with Niccolò Cieco d’Arezzo, Francesco Cieco da Firenze, Francesco Tromba da Gualdo, Giovambattista Dragoncino da Fano, Niccolò degli Agostini and Cristoforo l’Altissimo, see Degl’Innocenti 2014, 329-331 and 2016, 311-319.

²³ See Degl’Innocenti 2008a, 190-201 and 2014, 320-321; Ventrone 1993, 108-114; Wilson 2015, 292; on lyric poetry, see Richardson 2017.

²⁴ De Robertis 1984, 22 (‘esecuzioni al tavolino’).

it is a sort of *in vitro* reproduction, quill in hand in front of a blank page, of an actual oral performance, bow in hand in front of an audience: as such, it may be of some help in understanding the features of real performances, and yet, being more meditated and refined than them, it would differ from orally improvised poetry to an uncertain, but still significant, extent. Ultimately, these poems would fall within the same category of the vocally performable texts considered above, although their authors, when reciting in front of an audience, might have drifted away from the written version much more freely than those who were not skilled in improvising.

There are cases, nevertheless, for which such an interpretation is clearly inadequate. For instance, among the numerous itinerant singers cherished by the duke of Ferrara in the 1470s, and by Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga before him, is frequently mentioned a Francesco Cieco from Florence who 'dice in rima a lo Improviso', or 'canta de jesta in rima', which means 'who sings improvised chivalric tales in verse'. Like many other epic poets at the time (as well as at Homer's time), Francesco was 'Cieco', that is 'blind', and therefore writing could not be of much use to him. Nevertheless, he authored a long poem called *Persiano*, published in 1493 and reprinted no less than six times in the following century (see Bertoni 1929, Foster French 1937, Everson 1983). He could not create poetry other than orally, so how was his oral poetry ever turned into writing?

The answer is as simple as is usually overlooked. The crucial missing link is the custom of transcribing improvised texts along with their composition – that is, during their performance. Such practice of *reportatio* is well known for preachers' sermons, but the evidence that can be gathered from the early fifteenth to the late eighteenth centuries suggests that it was widespread also for poetry.²⁵ Predictably, at times the evidence refers to blind poet-performers, such as Niccolò Cieco d'Arezzo in the 1430s and Luigi Groto, alias the Cieco d'Adria, in the 1570s (for Groto see Carnelos 2016). Many other times, though, the improviser was perfectly able to see and, presumably, to write. The most impressive case is that of Cristoforo l'Altissimo, whose chivalric *Primo libro de' Reali* was printed posthumously in Venice in 1534, but – as many internal elements show – had been sung extempore in piazza San Martino, Florence, during a year-long cycle of 94 performances some twenty years before, in 1514-1515. According to the anonymous foreword, the 94 cantos had been copied from the poet's own voice, and the claim is proven true by the presence of very unusual and yet typically oral features in the text, such as details strictly related to the circumstantial context, including the date of the next show; repeat performances of set pieces, with minor contextual adaptations; barefaced perjuries about opinions expressed in earlier cantos, on-the-air mistakes, and memory leaks on the poet's part; deictic phrases such

²⁵ For some references, see Degl'Innocenti 2012, 110-112.

as ‘he did *thus*’, ‘in *this* manner’, ‘he hit him *here*’ ‘between *these* bones’, that are meaningless in the absence of the gestures which they originally referred to (see Degl’Innocenti 2008a, 34, 238 and 321-322).

When carefully reading a text, such features are relatively easy to identify. As far as they are not detected in other poems of the same genre, the case of Altissimo’s *Reali* could appear as one of a kind – if it wasn’t that other works of his do suggest rather the contrary. The Altissimo was a first-rate improviser who reached his acme in the 1510s, when his acclaimed piazza performances were witnessed by the publisher Bernardo Giunta in Florence and the diarist Marino Sanudo in Venice. Like most of his peers, he not only did sing but also published some of his works, and to that purpose he requested print privileges in both cities. In 1516, in particular, the *Signoria* of Florence granted him the privilege to print a war poem on a crucial recent battle, the *Rotta di Ravenna*. The text came out soon after that, with a title which informs that it was ‘copiata dalla viva voce ... mentre cantava’ (Altissimo 1516?).²⁶ The strophes of the *Rotta* were undoubtedly sung in the same piazza and in the same months as the *Reali* (probably in April 1515, when the instalments of the *Reali* appear to take a break), and most importantly they even made use, here and there, of the very same repertoire of set pieces (see Degl’Innocenti 2008a, 34 and 238). Yet, the *Rotta* does not present any of the extraordinary features listed above for the *Reali*. How did that happen? What made the difference? It was the author, in my opinion, who made it. No matter whether out of piety or of laziness, whoever edited the posthumous *Reali* was uncommonly conservative towards the transcriptions, but when the initiative of publishing his improvised poems was taken by the Altissimo himself, it is no surprise that in the act of polishing and transforming the transcriptions of his own oral performances in a text to be read in a book, he erased all the contextual references and incidental details that made sense for his past listeners but couldn’t make sense anymore for his future readers.

The same might have happened with many other oral poems converted into books, whose oral traits were neither merely fictional nor simply functional, but rather genuinely factual. It is not easy to say how many, but it is worth bearing this possibility in mind.

After all, the degree of self-consciousness with which early modern street singers could perceive the hybrid nature of their own poetry, both oral and written, and embrace the cause of print culture could be surprising. One of the Altissimo’s lesser known texts, in particular, proves him capable of a subtle attention to the materiality of the book and of a precocious awareness of the revolutionary consequences of its mechanical reproduction. At the end of a collection of amorous poems that he published in Venice in the early 1520s, one finds a short poem entitled *Liber de se ipso loquitur* (‘The book talks about

²⁶ ‘transcribed out of the poet’s voice’

itself”), which plays with the possible double meaning of *libro* (which means ‘book’, but can also be read as a syncopated form of *libero*, ‘free’) in order to celebrate books as powerful means of free thought and free expression:

L'Altissimo poeta mi fe' libro ...
 Ognun mi pò squarciar, mordere e volvere,
 ma nissun mi può tôr l'eterno vivere.
 Ferro, ardor, vento, sol, pioggia, omin' e polvere,
 perch'io mi fo rimprimere e riscrivere,
 forza non han di potermi dissolvere.
 Quando le membre mie son rotte e livere,
 per le immense virtù ch'io porto e speculo,
 come Fenice torno al fin del seculo.

A mia posta mi scopro, orno, apro e chiudo,
 perch'io son libro; e s'io son nudo e sciolto,
 vo' più presto esser libro e sciolto e nudo
 che servo in drappo, in oro, in gemme avvolto.
 Quale i' sia, tristo, buon, facile o rudo,
 non curo altrui piacer poco né molto,
 ché satisfar solamente disio
 dua amici, li aditor, me, lauro e Dio. (Altissimo 1520?, 14r)²⁷

The most impressive stanza is probably the first one, a sort of hymn to the immortality of books. Notwithstanding the overwhelming list of their enemies (which rightly includes their worst enemy ever, mankind) and all injuries that can be inflicted on them, says the Altissimo, books will never die, because at the end of their life cycle, just as a Phoenix, they will be born again. Such (over-)confidence in the resilience of books could hardly be inspired by manuscripts that, once destroyed, can't be brought back to life; and the same is true for any single copy of a printed edition. What the poet had in mind, I believe, was rather the edition as a whole, as an entity made up of hundreds of identical individuals. Each of them can be broken apart,

²⁷ “The poet Altissimo made me {into a book / free}: ... / Everyone can tear me, bite me and turn me, / and yet no one can take my eternal life away. / Iron, fire, wind, sun, rain, men and dust / don't have the power to break me apart, / because I get myself reprinted and rewritten. / When my limbs are broken and loosened, / by the unlimited virtues that I carry and conceive, / like a Phoenix at the end of the century, again I can live. // As it pleases me I uncover, adorn, open, and close myself, / because I am {free / a book}; and if I am naked and unbound / I like better being {free / a book}, and unbound, and naked, / than being a slave, wrapped in cloth, in gold, and in gems. / However I may be – evil or good, easy going or rough – / I don't care much nor little to be liked by others; / because all that I want is to please / two friends, the listeners, myself, the laurels, and God’.

but the survival of the species is much more difficult to put at risk: as soon as a copy is reprinted (and the poet explicitly used 'rimprimerè'), hundreds of new copies will guarantee the eternal life of the book (in the sense, here, of the literary works that are printed and reprinted in it).

The book that speaks in these lines, however, is not only a printed artefact or a literary work: it is the poet himself, too, as the second stanza does make clear. The one that would rather be naked but free than rich but enslaved, in fact, is obviously the Altissimo – not to mention the unexpected 'listeners' of the last line. If this personified book can speak to listeners rather than readers, it is because it is the incarnation of an oral poet, a poet-improviser whose *voice* was one of the most popular ones of his age, but who was also able to imagine his own self as a physical *book*.

Altissimo's triumphal and defiant celebration of the eternal life of printed books could not but make a sharp contrast with the inherently ephemeral nature of his oral performances. When publishing and selling their books, street singers were conscious of, and confident in, the books' ability to spread and preserve their words through space and time. They were also probably confident that books would never be considered an alternative to their performances, as printed pages lacked too many of their most compelling aural, visual, and social components. If so, they were actually wrong, since printed books were in the end destined to marginalise the oral art of the *cantimpanca*. For certain, though, it is thanks to printed books and to their early alliance with oral poets that we can still read their words, and attempt to capture an echo of their voices.

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Voices from the New World: Giuliano Dati's *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria Indiane*

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Abstract:

The article deals with two poetic translations of the first documents announcing the Discovery of the Americas: Giuliano Dati's *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria Indiane* ('The History of the Discovery of the Indian Canary Islands'), which rendered Columbus' letter to the Spanish court, and Matteo Fortini's *Libro dell'Universo* ('Book of the Universe'), which instead translated Amerigo Vespucci's account. It concentrates on Dati's *cantare*, exploring its status as a text destined to be recited and performed, and situates the poem within the author's oeuvre. Closely comparing Dati's stanzas with their main source (the Latin translation by Aliander de Cosco of one of Columbus' letters in Spanish to the Court of Spain), the article demonstrates how Dati dismembered and re-assembled his material in accordance with the improvisational devices of the *cantare*, the poetic genre in which he was working. In so doing, Dati replaces the narrative sequence of Columbus' (and Cosco's) report with his own ordering. He substitutes for the coherence of the original a mode of 'impulsive' communication, a manner of transmission essentially indifferent to narrative flow, and he does so to the point where we can theorize what might be called a 'poetics of confusion', a compositional strategy which is perhaps to be identified with the *cantari* style.

Keywords: *Cantare, Columbus/Vespucci, Discovery, Orality, Textual Dismembering*

1. *The Discovery in Octaves*

It is well known – it has been, actually, the object of a truly 'oceanic' bibliography – that the first documents announcing the discovery of 'new islands' (Columbus) or a 'new world' (Vespucci) were promptly translated into 'poetry' – that is, if by 'poetry' we mean simple versification. These first documents were transposed into octaves, the metrical form which, from the end of the fifteenth century to the beginning of the sixteenth, was in Italy an ubiquitous instrument 'bon à tout faire', a stanza applicable to the most



diverse subjects, chivalric (obviously), but also hagiographical, historical, and, in a manner of speaking, journalistic. Given the constant use of this verse form, it is not surprising that the Letter of Christopher Columbus to Luis de Santángel (or/and to Raphael Sanchez) was recast by the Florentine Giuliano Dati into a *cantare*, *La storia della inventione delle nuove insule di Channaria Indiane* (1493);¹ or that, a few years later, the Letter of Vespucci to Soderini was reworked into the octaves included by Matteo Fortini in his *Libro dell'Universo* (post 1514; 'Book of the Universe'). And yet, these two literary productions share little besides their metrical structure. Of course, it is true that their authors were both Florentine. Indeed, this fact is a significant testimony to the ties between the Discovery and Florence, ties that involved the city's cultural influence, as well as its prominent network of commercial activities all over Europe, particularly in Spain and Portugal. After all, more than mere chance was at work when the 'New World' received its name from a Florentine representative of the mercantile aristocracy of the city. The poems of Fortini and Dati were part of this Florentine nexus, but nonetheless from a literary, or simply a communicative, point of view their compositions are two very different things. Among other considerations, Matteo Fortini's 'translation' of the Soderini letter is not an autonomous text. Rather, it is part of a voluminous geographic-cosmological treatise. This larger work is an encyclopedic endeavor – entitled not accidentally *Il libro dell'Universo* – and the recent 'American' news was included as an intriguing addition to the general trove of information accumulated by its author. Thus, Fortini's version of the letter constituted an up-to-date expansion of an already copious discourse.² It was offered as new knowledge, albeit Fortini composed his stanzas in accordance with the standard format of the *cantari*, so that his opening treatment of the Vespucci material, couched in three successive cantos, sounds old-fashioned, not to say trite, with its stereotypical invocation to God:

¹ *Cantare*: according to the common understanding of Italian scholarship, the term is used, here and in the following pages, to identify a poetic text in octaves, of variable length, loosely dating from the XV and XVIII centuries. Such texts are always in precarious balance between the nature of 'oral' and 'written' texts: see Farenga, who argues in favour of a total destination of Dati's work for print ('The characteristic element in the works of Giuliano Dati is the fact that they were totally conceived to be published in print'; 2011, 30). This argument seems to me too absolute: even though we know that Giuliano Dati was not a *canterino* himself, and that he surely promoted the printed editions of his *cantari*, it is equally obvious that they were made available, through the new technology, for professional performers. In other words, I don't think that the 'oral' system of communication, in such works, was just a literary ruse. For an illuminating case in this sense, see Degl'Innocenti 2008.

² *Il libro dell'Universo* is a *codex unicus*, now in the Biblioteca Nazionale of Florence (Magliabechiano VII 172), and was never published in its entirety. Since the author declares he is over seventy years old, it must have been composed after 1514. The octaves which translate the Vespucci letter have been published by Formisano 1986.

O trionfante Iesù benedetto,
 volgi verso di me gli occhi e la facc[i]a,
 perdona al servo che si picchia il petto
 e fatti sempre croce delle bracc[i]a,
 perché tu gli perdoni ogni difetto
 e della grazia Tua degno lo facc[i]a,
 acciò che in questo fine l' m'apparecchi
 far penitenza de' peccati vecchi ... (VII 1)³

Onnipotente, magno, alto e divino,
 sincera carità, unica e pura,
 specchio dove uno Iddio si vede trino,
 che formò e cieli e l'umana natura,
 tu ha' diritto la str[a]da e 'l cammino
 pel fine dell'umana creatura:
 così drizza la mano e lo 'ngegno,
 tanto ch'i' g[i]lunga al disiato segno ... (VIII 1)⁴

Po' che Tu se' quel ben(e) che tutto vedi,
 vero Messia, anzi Verbo incarnato,
 e se' colui che le grazie concedi
 a chi Te l'ha con fede dimandato,
 i' che sto genuflesso a' santi piedi
 come Tuo servo e di Te innamorato,
 supplico e priego almen(o) ch'i' viva tanto
 ch'i' conduca alla fin qu[e]sto mie canto. (IX 1)⁵

2. *Octaves to be Read, Octaves to be Listened to*

Among the other differences between the translations of Fortini and Dati, the most striking is that, while the octaves of the former's *Libro dell'Universo*

³ 'O triumphant blessed Jesus, pray turn to me Your eyes and Your face, pardon your penitent chest-beating servant, keep Your arms spread out on the Cross, so that You may absolve him of all his errors, and make him worthy of Your Grace, and I prepare myself, to such an end, in order to atone for my obdurate sins'. Dati's poem was translated by Martin Davies (1991). Here I present my own translation which is more literal. Unless otherwise stated, also translations from other works are mine.

⁴ 'O You Omnipotent, great, celestial and divine, You, sincere Charity, unique and pure, You, mirror where One God reflects into Three, You who made the heavens and human beings, You have traced the path and the way which lead humanity to its end: the same way lead my hand and my mind, so that I could reach my desired goal'.

⁵ 'Since You are the Good that sees everything, You true Messiah, indeed incarnate Verbum, and you are the One that bestows graces upon those who requested them in good faith, I, who here am kneeling at Your feet, Your servant, Your worshipper, I beseech and pray that at least I may live long enough to finish this song of mine'.

were clearly composed to be read quietly in private, those of the latter's *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* were intended to be read aloud and listened to. Fortini addresses himself to an audience of readers more than once:

Lettore, l' t'ò per insin a qui mostro
come l'acqua divide l'universo ... (VII 2, 1-2)⁶

Quanto tempo, *lettore*, invan si spese,
quanto mar si solcò ... (VII 12, 1-2)⁷

Se tu vuo' pur, *lettor*, ch'i' ti raguagli,
questo paese, chi ben lo procura ... (VII 54, 1-2)⁸

Io ò fatto, *lettor*, questo discorso,
perché non manchi nulla o 'ndrieto resti ... (VII 82bis, 1-2)⁹

Non più, caro *lettor(e)*, ch'i' vo' far festa,
ch'è 'l sol [n]el fin del suo meridiano ... (VII 108, 1-2)¹⁰

Però, *lettore*, non ti dar più affanno
e tien' questo per regola infallante ... (VIII 121, 1-2)¹¹

S'i' mi son, *lettor* mio, troppo ito a spasso
l'ò fatto per chiarirti ... (VIII 124, 1-2)¹²

De' leva, *lettor* mio, un po' l'ingegno,
e nota di costui la fantasia ... (VIII 138, 1-2)¹³

Tutta la frotta ed io vedem[m]o Iris
- che vuol dir, *lettor* mio, l'arcobaleno ... (VIII 140, 1-2)¹⁴

... se non ti par(e), *lettor(e)*, questo abbastanza,
guarda questo disegno. (VIII 143, 6-7)¹⁵

⁶ 'Reader, I have shown to you so far how water parts the universe'. Here and in the following passages quoted, the italics of *lettor* and *lettore* are mine.

⁷ 'How much time, *reader*, was spent in vain, how an immense sea was navigated'.

⁸ 'If you desire, *reader*, that I inform you about this land, about who takes care of it'.

⁹ 'Reader, I made this digression, so that nothing be missed, nothing neglected'.

¹⁰ 'And now enough, dear *reader*, because the sun is at the end of its meridian course'.

¹¹ 'Therefore, *reader*, worry no more, and keep this as an infallible rule'.

¹² 'If I have been wandering a little too much, my *reader*, I have done so in order to explain better to you'.

¹³ 'Well, *reader*, open up your mind a little, and note the fancy of this man'.

¹⁴ 'The whole crew and myself all of us saw Iris - which means, my *reader*, the rainbow'.

¹⁵ 'If this seems not enough to you, *reader*, look at this figure'.

Dati, instead, emphatically and from the start addresses an audience of listeners: ‘S’i’ ti volessi e’ sua tituli dire, / o *auditore*, I’ ti potre’ tediare’ (XIII, 1-2; see here below for other occurrences).¹⁶ Obviously, this does not mean that Giuliano Dati was himself a *canterino*. He was a prelate, and one of some importance in both his native Florence and his adopted Rome.¹⁷ An intimate of several Popes, he was an especially ardent admirer of Alexander VI (a fact that earned him the unsavory title of ‘mitred sycophant’; HARRISSE 1866, 29), a Pope all-too-well-known for his sexual excesses, but who might be better remembered for the important role he played in the early stages of the New World’s Discovery. Not, then, a *canterino* himself, Giuliano Dati was nevertheless a prolific producer of *cantari*, but it should be emphasized that for him the use of that verse form did not mean what it meant for his more literary contemporaries, such as Matteo Maria Boiardo. Dati was a functional versifier, whose lines betray no ambition to ennoble the genre and whose treatment exhibits no intention of transforming the octave into the glorious vehicle for courtly poems that it became in the hands of others. Instead, Dati remained faithful to the popular, even plebeian level of discourse typical of the era’s octave pamphlets, as even the physical nature of his printed works demonstrates. His publications generally consist of no more than four pages, are crudely illustrated, and are often printed on cheap paper. Surviving imprints of his pamphlets are quite scarce, due in part to their humble status: they were bought to be read and discarded. What survives may be described as the relics of an ephemeral market, where such imprints were often purchased in the very *piazza* where their texts were being – or had just been – performed.¹⁸ A devout, conventionally religious figure moving between Florence and Rome in the midst of the fifteenth century’s triumphant Humanism, Dati seems to have been entirely unaffected by the ‘new world’ that was having an explosive impact all around him. Or maybe we should say that he embodied the intellectual compartmentalization in his time, the complex stratification of culture wherein a flux of tenaciously traditional, devotional, even folkloric elements kept flowing under the stupendous achievements of the new classicism:

Indifferent to the Humanism which was triumphing in Literature, Science, Philosophy, deaf to the domineering secular culture, pagan in its substance, classical in its elegance, he is a typical representative of the ‘popular culture’ of his time. This

¹⁶ ‘If I wanted to tell you his titles, *listener*, I would bore you’.

¹⁷ The most complete account of Giuliano Dati’s life and works is found in Curcio and Farenga 1987. Further details in Farenga 2011; very detailed information about Dati’s pious participation in the activity of the Roman Confraternita del Gonfalone in Wisch and Newbiggin 2013.

¹⁸ For a full description of Dati’s *poemetti*, see Dati 1967, 8-10.

culture would keep more or less intact the traditional customs and interests of the Middle Ages and was still impenetrable to the influence of the new doctrines and the peculiar trends of the courts and their intellectuals. (Olschki 1938, 291)

Such critical judgement (which is, after all, a little dated – it was written in 1938) might sound overly harsh. Yet it is difficult not to agree with the same author, when he states that Giuliano Dati ‘was the first to share with the Italian illiterates the details of the great endeavour’ (298), because this is exactly what constitutes the most interesting aspect of Dati’s *cantare*, both in itself and in comparison with Fortini’s octaves. In Dati’s unpretentious verse, the novelty of the newly discovered islands is reported by an unrelentingly old-fashioned sensibility and is couched in an extremely traditional literary format. Nevertheless, unlike the much more ambitious and erudite *Libro dell’Universo* of Matteo Fortini – which was unpublished in its day and remained for a long time unknown – the agile *cantare* of Giuliano Dati enjoyed an immediate success. We can count three editions (that we are aware of) in the year 1493 alone: one in Rome (by E. Silber, on the 15th of June); a second in Florence (by ‘Johannes dictus florentinus’, October 25th); and the third in Florence again (publisher unknown, October 26th). This is the way the news of the New World’s discovery was disseminated throughout Italy: in print, to be sure, but in a manner of print that retained the unmistakable marks of oral transmission. This strongly suggests that the poem was addressed to the same crowds for which Dati had provided, and would continue to provide, stories of Saints, descriptions of places, chronicles of contemporary sensational events. The oral quality of his work has occasioned some rather imaginative responses: ‘Questo e tutti gli altri poemetti che di lui si conoscono deggiono aver deliziato molte volte le pubbliche e le famigliari adunate: e chi sa quante fiata il canterino di piazza li avrà ripetuti con modulate cadenze innanzi all’attenta e rapita moltitudine!’ (Dati 1876, 142).¹⁹ A bit ‘romantic,’ no doubt, but probably not far from the truth. And, in any case, the question remains: how was the new wine poured into the old wineskin? How was such an astonishing piece of news made compatible with so traditional a medium as the *cantare in ottave*?

3. *From Latin Prose to Vernacular Verses*

As we know, Dati didn’t translate directly from Christopher Columbus’ letters in Spanish which announced the discovery of the new islands to

¹⁹ ‘This, and all the other brief poems he wrote (at least, those we know of) must have often entertained public and private audiences: and who knows how many times a street *canterino* performed them again and again, in his musical voice, in front of an enthusiastic, fascinated multitude of listeners!’

Ferrando and Isabella and to members of their entourage. The complicated story of Columbus' early accounts – starting with the perhaps legendary *pergamino* (sort of parchment brief) written in the midst of the tempest that caught the explorer on his return trip at a location very near the coast of Spain – has been studiously reconstructed and progressively modified as more and more documents have come to light. This has been done most recently and conclusively by Luciano Formisano.²⁰ The Spanish version of these documents, however, had no impact on Giuliano Dati. The text that he had before him was the Latin translation of the letters sent by Columbus to Luis de Santángel and Rapheal Sanchez. This was a quite basic, inelegant translation, by Aliander de Cosco, a member of the Roman court. As poor as Cosco's Latin was, it nevertheless marked the precise moment when the Discovery was made public, the announcement of an expanded cosmos, as well as the acquisition by the crown of Spain of an unforeseen, immensely rich and promising new territory. The keen eyes of modern philologists have demonstrated, though, that Giuliano Dati probably made use of other sources. He perhaps used another Latin version – now lost – of Columbus' letters. Maybe he even had available to him some Spanish text, which would not have been impossible to understand for somebody like Dati who, after all, was familiar with a Spanish Pope and his Spanish-speaking court. But regardless of what other versions might have been known to Dati, for our purposes it will be enough to presume that Cosco's letter was the source of Giuliano Dati's *cantare*. Enough, that is, for us to examine the procedures by which a letter sent to be read became a *cantare*, i.e. a small poem intended to be performed and listened to.

4. *The Frame of the Story*

The *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* consists of 68 octaves, plus an *explicit* in which the origin of the poem is clearly laid out: *Finita la Storia*

²⁰ Luciano Formisano has published a final account of the question together with the pertinent texts, offered in the most currently reliable critical edition (see Colombo 1992). The book contains the *Lettera a Luis de Santángel e Gabriel Sanchez (Testo Spagnolo and Versione Toscana)*, *De insulis in mari Indico nuper repertis* (Facsimile, critical edition and translation: it is the Latin of Cosco's translation). For Dati's text, Formisano follows, with some further corrections, the edition established by Mario Ruffini (Dati 1967). See De Lollis 'Illustrazione [of the Santángel/Sanchez letter]', in De Lollis 1892, liii-lvi, and Formisano in Colombo 1992, 51. Just one year before, the same texts had been published (and translated into English) in Davies 1991. Davies argued for a more complicated relation between Dati's *cantare* and the Latin translation of Columbus' letter, given 'a number of points independent of the Latin that we have. All this can be resolved if we assume that what Dati saw was a Latin translation of the lost letter attached to the surviving Spanish letter to Santángel' (20).

*della invention delle nuove insule di Cannaria indiane, tracte d'una pistola di Cristofano Colombo e per messer Giuliano Dati tradutta di latino in versi vulgari a laude de la celestial corte e a consolation della Cristiana religion ...*²¹ These 68 octaves, however, do not simply correspond to the Latin text. The actual report of the 'invention' is framed by a series of thirteen octaves (at the beginning) plus two octaves (at the end), which establish and confirm the parameters of the genre. The *cantare* duly opens with a characteristic invocation to God, conjured up to assist the *canto* of the poet-performer:

Omnipotente Idio, che 'l tutto regie,
 donami gratia ch'io possa cantare
 a laude Tua e di Tuo santa legie
 cosa che piaccia a chi starà 'scoltare. (I, 1-4)²²

Then Dati proceeds to contextualize the subject of his report – the 'isole trovate' (I, 8) – by placing it within a larger account of the 'fatti egregi' of the 'antichi regi / e princip 'e signori' (II, 1-2).²³ He mentions, quite randomly, Belùs, Anfitrione, 'de' Lacedemoni el gran Tetrate', Laborès, Oreste, 'il principe Giesippe', Tolomeo, il 'gran Faraon', 'quel fiesolan re Atthalante', and, last but not least, 'Allexandro magnio papa sesto', 'sesto Allexandro papa Borgia Ispano, / giusto nel iudicare e tutto humano' (VI, 2, 7-8).²⁴ The switch from the fabulous kings and heroes of antiquity to a champion of contemporary politics is indicative not only of the flattering mode of this Vatican 'sycophant' but also of Dati's shrewd oratorical technique. The author introduces the shocking news of his report within the well-known and reassuring framework of references to a traditional repertoire, so that the contemporary is seen as contiguous to the ancient, and the 'isole trovate' are from the very beginning presented as a new chapter of a coherent and connected narration. In this way, the listener is at once stimulated – that is, offered something new –, and reassured – given something in the vein of what he/she was accustomed to hear in the piazza, in the market, in the situations and locations of contemporary everyday life. The pressure of the contemporary becomes more and more apparent in the last octave of Dati's framing device,

²¹ 'Here ends the History of the Discovery of the new Indian Canary Islands, drawn from an epistle of Christopher Columbus and translated from Latin into vernacular verses by messer Giuliano Dati, in praise of the celestial Court and for the comfort of the Christian religion'.

²² 'Omnipotent God, You who all govern, give me grace so that I can sing in Your praise and in praise of Your Holy Gospel something that may please those who listen'.

²³ 'egregious endeavours'; 'ancient kings, princes and Lords'.

²⁴ 'Belùs. Amphitruo, the great Tetrate of Sparta, Laborès, Oretes, ... prince Joseph, Ptolemy, the great Pharaoh, that famous Atlas from Fiesole, ... Alexander VI Borgia, the Spanish Pope, the fairest judge and champion of humanity'.

where he introduces, by way of a simple possessive, the overarching hero of his account, the king 'Ferrando': 'E chi leggesti po' del suo Ferrando, / christianissimo rege infra 'christiani ...' (VII, 1-2)²⁵ Here 'suo' refers to Pope Alexander and underscores the shared nationality of the pope and the Spanish king. It makes for an audacious transition, a sudden movement that is typical of the arbitrary, almost Pindaric, style of the *canterino*. The sharp transition does not shy away from a flagrant *anacoluthon* (a characteristic of oral poetry), but the ungrammatical dislocation does serve to push Dati's audience closer to the very subject of the *cantare*:

E chi leggesti po' del suo Ferrando,
christianissimo rege infra 'cristiani,
che l'Isabella tiene al suo comando,
unica sposa sua, che nelle mani
tanti reami in dota a lui donando
gli à dati, intendi ben, con pensier' sani,
ché gli è re della Spagna e di Castella
e di Leon, Toledo villa bella. (VII)²⁶

Dati's framework of introductory and concluding octaves testifies to the ambiguity of this literary genre, which is balanced – and often oscillates – between its status as oral and written (and printed) text. As we have observed, from the very beginning of Dati's poem the marks of oral transmission are clear. Dati's intention is 'cantare ... cosa che piaccia a chi starà 'scoltare' (I, 2, 4).²⁷ The addressee of his texts is an 'auditore' ('S'i' ti volessi e' sua tituli dire, / o auditore, i' ti potre' tediare' (XIII, 1-2),²⁸ to whom these first octaves speak directly with an eloquent 'tu' (you): 'so che inteso l'hai' (III, 4),²⁹ 'come saprai' (III, 6),³⁰ 'certo farei la tua mente stupire' (V, 3),³¹ 'Or vo' tornare al mio primo trattato / dell'isole trovate, igniote a'tte' (XIV, 1-2),³² 'come tu

²⁵ 'And what if somebody read about his Ferrando, the most Christian king among the Christians'.

²⁶ 'And what if somebody read about his Ferrando, the most Christian king among the Christians, he who commands over his Isabella, his only spouse, who putting in his hands her dowry, gave him possession of so many kingdoms: listen well, with full attention, that he is the king of Spain, Castile, Leon, and Toledo, the beautiful city'.

²⁷ 'to sing ... something which will be pleasant to its listeners'.

²⁸ 'If I wanted to tell you his titles, o listener, I would bore you'.

²⁹ 'I know you heard of it'.

³⁰ 'as you may know'.

³¹ 'I would make you marvel for sure'.

³² 'Now I want to go back to my original subject of the newly found islands, that you do not know'.

'ntenderai qui ascoltando' (XXIII, 4).³³ Finally, at the end of the *cantare*, a whole crowd of listeners is addressed: 'Magnific' e discreti circhunstanti, / quest'è gran chosa, certo, da pensare...' (LXVII, 1-2).³⁴ And there is an explicit reference to the poem's orality: the *cantare* is referred to as a text that 'a laude del Signior si canta e dice' (LXVIII 7).³⁵ At the same time, Dati touches upon his experience as a reader: 'I' ò già *letto* de li antichi regi' (II, 1).³⁶ He refers to the stories of his ancient kings and heros as 'read stories' ('come se *legie*', III, 4; 'che, se *tu legi*, tu'lle troverai', V, 6).³⁷ We are confronted here with a circularity which is inherent in the very nature of these literary opuscles. Items intended, as we have mentioned, to be bought and read at the time their texts were performed, they constitute the equivalent of a musical score, printed matter closely connected to a vocal presentation, but destined possibly to survive the performance and be saved as a personal library, no matter how humble such a library might be.

³³ 'as you shall understand, by listening here'.

³⁴ 'Magnificent and kind people here gathered around me, this is for sure a great thing, worthy of reflection'.

³⁵ 'it is sung and spoken in praise of the Lord'. Such procedures are common, as is to be expected, in all the other *cantari* by Dati. It is worth quoting the initial octaves of *La gran magnificenza del Prete Janni* (*The great magnificence of Priest Janni*), where the religious invocation (octave I) is combined with an eloquent address to the audience (octave II), which echoes quite precisely the beginning of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*: a minimal, but telling evidence of some sort of contamination, within the precinct of the 'poem in octaves' genre, between high and low style: 'O glorioso Omnipotente idio, / che col tuo sangue el peccato pagasti / da noi commesso tanto iniquo & rio, / & con la tua morte ci ricomperasti, / donami gratia dolce signor mio, / ch'io dica in versi una parte, che basti, / d'un de' principi tua infra christiani, / maximo prete soopra gl'indiani. // O venerandi e discrete auditori, / che cose nuove udir vi delectate, / maxime in versi, perché da' doctori / antichamente queste son tractate, / ben che 'n diversi modi gli autori / le loro oppenioni hanno notate, / gli orecchi attenti, & lo ingegno tenete, / & cose magne certo intenderete' (Dati 1876, I-II; 'O glorious God omnipotent, you who atoned our so grave and cruel sin with your own blood, and saved us by your death, bestow upon me, sweet Lord, enough grace so that I be able to say in verse something sufficient about one of your Christian princes, the highest priest among the Indians. O you, esteemed and wise listeners, who take pleasure in hearing new things – especially in verse - because they have been dealt with by the ancient sages, even though the authors have registered their opinions in different ways, keep alert your ears, alert your minds, and for sure you shall listen to great things'.) See *Orlando innamorato*: 'Signori e cavallier che ve adunati / per odir cose dilette e nove / stati attenti e quieti, ed ascoltati / la bella istoria che 'l mio canto muove; / e vedereti i gesti smisurati, l'altra fatica e le mirabil prove / che fece il franco Orlando per amore / nel tempo del re Carlo imperatore' (Boiardo 1995, I, I, 1-8; 'You who assemble – lords and knights – to hear things new, things of delight, be still, attentive, listen to the rare events that prompt my song; you shall see deeds no man can measure, stupendous feats, amazing labours that bold Orlando wrought for love, when King Charles reigned as emperor').

³⁶ 'I have *read* about the ancient kings'.

³⁷ 'which you can find as you can read them'.

In his introductory stanzas, Giuliano Dati has not yet touched upon his Latin source. Nor does he do so for six more octaves. Instead there is a further inner frame of the 'translation' which provides the back-story of the Discovery itself. In these six octaves, the narrator compresses the many incidents leading to Columbus' arrival at the New World. As we know, these incidents were very complex, but they are dealt with here with the simple naïveté of a fairy tale. The hero of the story is a visionary treasure-hunter who proposes to his king a practical bargain in direct, vernacular terms: 'Vo' mettete la roba, io la persona...' (XVI, 1).³⁸ He supports his proposition by quoting (or misquoting) a proverb from the Gospels ('perché, dice 'l Vangelio in lege nuova, / che chi cerchando va ispeso truova' (XVI, 7-8).³⁹ The hero's enabler is a king at first a little resistant ('po' che l'ebbe e rre più volte udito ...'; XVII, 1),⁴⁰ but soon smiling ('soridendo' XVII, 2) at the prospect of a lot of land ('molta terra', XV, 2) to be added to his possessions. The story proceeds with a predictably adventurous voyage, which elicits a dramatic reference to Ulysses' trip to the edge of the earth as described in Dante's *Comedy*. Columbus, according to Dati, 'navicò più giorni per *perduto*' (XIX, 1),⁴¹ and thus he is analogous to Ulysses who, in the *Inferno*, is interrogated by Virgil about 'dove per lui *perduto* a morir gissi' (*If*XXVI, 84).⁴² On the other hand, the high-brow allusion (but one not so unfamiliar, especially for a Florentine), is balanced by the down-to-earth common sense of the narrator, who once again resorts to a proverb: '... chi va in mar non è mai tuto, / ma sempre combattendo in aqua e vento, / perdesi spesso el guadagni' e 'l tributo' (XIX, 3-5).⁴³

5. *A Change of Voices*

At the end of octave XX, Giuliano Dati finally starts to engage with Cosco's text. But, once again, we are not given a literal 'translation' of Cosco's Latin prose. Here, when he starts establishing a closer relation, Dati lets himself to be trapped, as it were, in a sort of structural incertitude, and this has curious consequences for his narration. After his short account of Columbus' perilous navigation, he plunges into his subject, the amazing Discovery:

³⁸ 'You contribute the money, I, my person'.

³⁹ 'Indeed, the new law of the Gospel says that he who seeks, will find'.

⁴⁰ 'after the king heard him many times'.

⁴¹ 'navigated many days with no direction'.

⁴² In Longfellow's translation: 'Whither, being lost, he went away to die' (Alighieri 1867, I, XXVI, 84). Pio Rajna (1920, 224) pointed to the highly stylized meaning of the word *perduto* in the Arthurian vocabulary, where it designates those knights who 'departed for adventures, entered some forests, never again were heard of, so that people fear, or believe, that they are dead'.

⁴³ 'those who navigate are never secure, but fighting water and wind incessantly, often they lose their earnings and tribute'.

...

Ma come piaque a Dio, che mai non erra,
in trentatré giornate pose in terra.

E misse dua de' suoi huomini armati
a cerchar per le terre ch'àn trovate
se forse si schoprisin qualche aguati;
ma caminaron ben per tre giornate
che non si furon mai 'ndietro voltati,
e non trovaron mai vill'o brighate. (XIX 7-8, XX 1-6)⁴⁴

It is worth noting here that the 'invention' of the islands is told to us by the voice of the main narrator, Dati himself, or, better, by his *canterino* persona. The information that he finds in his source is seamlessly included in his own narration. This goes on for four more octaves, stanzas filled with what are already crucial observations about the nature of the newly found islands and their inhabitants. Then, all of a sudden, the narrator's voice gives way to the voice of Columbus himself, and the *cantare* will continue from this moment until the very end as an open paraphrase of Christopher's 'pistola magna', the 'great letter' which the great explorer addressed to his king: 'come dirà questa pistola magna, / da Christofano scritta a re di Spagna: // Perch'i' so, Signor mio, che gran piacere / harà la Vostra Magna Signoria, / quando potrà intendere o sapere / de le cose ch'ò prese in mia balia ...' (XXIII, 7-8, XXIV, 1-4).⁴⁵ This is vivid, and yet, by going back in the voice of Columbus to the 'invention' of the islands, Dati complicates his narration with some unavoidable repetition. The duration of the journey is reiterated ('dal partir mio a trentatré giornate / molt'isole e gran gente i' ò trovate', XXIV, 7-8)⁴⁶ and the anticipation of various characteristics of the Discovery (the nudity of the natives, the motif of the 'fuga al monte', the escape to the hills) creates some confusion in the orderly account of the facts. In other words, Dati doesn't seem to be fully in control of the sudden transition from the voice of the *canterino* to the voice of Columbus. Nor does he appear to be in total control of the shift from a communicative system wherein the addressee was the audience around the performer (treated, as we have seen, with the amicable 'tu') and a new one, where the listener is above all the king (duly addressed

⁴⁴ 'But, thanks to God, who never fails, after thirty-three days he went ashore. Then he sent two of his men, armed, to search the land that they had just found, in case there might be some ambush; but they walked for three days without ever looking back, and they did not find either town or tribe.'

⁴⁵ 'as this great letter will say, written by Christopher to the king of Spain: since I know, my Lord, that Your Majesty will truly be pleased, when you will realise and be informed of the possessions that have come under my control'.

⁴⁶ 'thirty three days from my departure I have found many islands and many people'.

with the respectful ‘voi’). The result is a structurally odd passage; but it might be interesting to observe that something similar happens in the octaves of Matteo Fortini. Fortini, too, at a certain point decides to give up his voice and let his hero Amerigo speak for himself in continuing the narration. Actually, during Fortini’s much longer and complex account, this sort of narrative transition happens more than once and without any warning. The narrative continually switches back and forth between the voice of Matteo (the voice that says ‘io’ and is tasked with paraphrasing Amerigo’s prose in verse) and the voice of Amerigo himself, who speaks instead in the first-person plural (‘noi’ – that is, ‘me and my crew’). The great majority of the time, Fortini adopts this second solution, with the result that his versification exhibits an almost obsessive use of the simple-past tense (*cercammo, trovammo, lasciammo* ...), a verb tense very useful to the author in providing ready-made, easy rhymes.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ ‘To the point that in the octaves of ser Matteo the actor-author of the “four days” can identify with his interpreter or spokesperson from the XVI century; as demonstrated by the blurred distinction between the text which is narrated and the text which is narrating, between Vespucci as the addressing agent and an addressee who does not recoil, after all, from declaring his name’ (Formisano 1986, 335). This structural oscillation between different narrative voices is not, indeed, the only similarity between the works of Dati and Fortini. It seems that the mere use of the octave induces in such works similar communicative devices: namely, a metanarrative attitude which in the *cantari* becomes a systematic simulation of orality. In other genres, it reveals the very action of ‘writing’, if not performing, the text. This is what happens, quite interestingly, at the end of Fortini’s Canto VII, where he takes his leave from his ‘lettore’ in terms very similar to the typical ‘farewell’ of the *canterini* to their audiences: ‘Non più, caro lettor(e), ch’i’ vo’ far festa, / chè ’l sol [n]el fin del suo meridiano, / dove fa fin el cerchio della sesta / e passa co’ suo’ crin(i) nell’oceano. / I’ vo a mostrare un paese che resta / discosto, lungo, salvatico e strano: / però mi vo’ posare in su le piume, / finché torni domane a farci lume. // O signor mio, s’io dovessi morire, / questo decimo canto che tu vedi / intendo e vo’ lo per tuo amor finire; / perché questo né altro non mi chiedi; / a te lo reco, signore, e vo’ tel dire, / mentre che in ozio in camera ti siedì, / perché la voglia el desiderio muove / a voler sempre udir le cose nuove’ (VII, 108-109). ‘Enough, dear reader, I want to be done, since the sun is at the end of its meridian voyage, where the circle of the sixth hour comes to an end, and the sun dips its locks in the Ocean. I am about to illustrate a land that is far away, very large, wild and strange; that is why I want to get some rest on my bed, until the sun comes back tomorrow to illuminate us. O my Lord, even if I had to die, I intend and want to finish for your love this tenth canto which is under your eyes – since this, and nothing else, you ask from me. I am bringing it to you, my lord, and I want to recite it to you, while you are enjoying some leisure in your bedroom, because your craving always moves your desire towards listening to ever new things’. It should be noted how, in the last verses of octave CIX, the written texts, intended for a ‘lettore’, become a text that the writer plans to ‘dire’, that is, to read aloud, to his ‘signore’, to his lord, in the peaceful setting of the latter’s ‘camera’, or private room. Thus, the final expression – ‘udir le cose nuove’ (‘hearing new things’) – fully mimics the ‘oral’ language of the true *canterini*.

6. *Dati versus Cosco: a comparison*

This initial structural oddity is not the only peculiar way Giuliano Dati deals with his source. If we follow the development of the Latin source letter, and divide it into narrative segments, or, let's say, thematic cells, and if we then compare the result with the corresponding sequence of the *cantare*, we see that the two do not mirror each other very closely. The fact is, Giuliano Dati has totally dismembered and re-assembled the material of Cosco's original Latin. Mario Ruffini has already noted Dati's textual surgery, but for concision's sake, or as he puts it, 'per non tediare soverchiamente il lettore' ('not to bore too much his readers'), he decided to limit his demonstration to just a few examples (see Ruffini, in Dati 1967, 24). A complete, more analytical comparison, seems both feasible and intriguing, and I have undertaken it here. By sequencing the Latin prose and juxtaposing it with the corresponding lines of verse, we can obtain the following combined data (the numbers and titles of the individual segments, or 'cells', are mine):

i. *The conquest*

Quoniam suscepta provincie rem perfectam me consecutum fuisse gratum tibi fore scio, has constitui exarare. (146)⁴⁸

XXIV

Perch'ì so, Signor mio, che gran piacere
 harà la Vostra Magna Signoria,
 quando potrà intendere o sapere
 de le cose ch'ò prese in mia balìa,
 per virtù del Signore e Suo potere
 e simil de la madre Sua Maria:
 dal partir mio a trentatré giornate
 molt'isole e gran gente i'ò trovate.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ 'Since I know for sure that it will please you that I have fully perfected the conquest of the new territory, I decided to narrate in detail the whole thing'. All the quotations from the Latin letter of Aliander Cosco follow the text of the Formisano edition (Colombo 1992, 146-162).

⁴⁹ 'Since I know, my Lord, that Your Majesty will be pleased, when you will realise and are informed of the possessions that have come under my control, thank to God and His might – and His Mother Mary – thirty-three days after my departure I found many islands and a great number of people'.

ii. *Official possession of the territory*

Ubi plurimas insulas innumeris habitatas hominibus repperi, quarum omnium pro felicissimo rege nostro preconio celebrato et vexillis estensis, contradicente nemine, possessionem accepi. (146)⁵⁰

XXIII

E Christofano e gli altri dismantati,
armati tutti, el paese cercando,
insule molte e huomin' à trovati
come tu 'ntenderai qui ascoltando,
e gli stendardi de're à rizati,
e a ciascuna il suo nome mutando,
come dirà questa pistola magna,
da Christofano scritta a're di Spagna.⁵¹

iii. *Renaming the islands*

Primeque earum Divi Salvatoris nomen imposui, cuius fretus auxilio tam ad hanc, quam ad ceteras alias pervenimus: eam vero Indi / 'Guanahanyn' vocant. Aliarum etiam unamquamque novo nomine noncupavi: quippe aliam 'insulam Sancte Marie Conceptionis', aliam 'Fernandinam', aliam 'Hysabellam', aliam 'Iohanam', et sic de reliquis appellari iussi. (146)⁵²

XXV

L'isola prima ch'io trovai, Signore,
i' l'ò per nome facta nominare
Insula Magnia di San Salvatore;
e la seconda poi feci chiamare
Conceptio Marie, a Suo honore;
dipoi la terza feci battezzare
per Vostra Signoria ch'è tanto ornata:
Insola Ferrandina è nominata.

⁵⁰ 'Where I found many islands inhabited by innumerable people, of which all I took possession in the name of our most blessed king, after a public reading of the act, with our flags unfolded, and nobody making any resistance'.

⁵¹ 'And Christopher and the others, once disembarked, all armed, searching the new land, discovered many islands and many people, as you will know if you keep listening: they raised the royal flag, and proceeded in changing the name to each one of those islands, as this great letter will tell you, written by Christopher to the king of Spain'.

⁵² 'and I called the first one with the name of our Saviour, thanks to whose aid we reached this island, as well as the others; the Indians call it 'Guanahanyn'. I also gave a new name to each one also of the other islands: indeed one 'Island of the Conception of Saint Mary', another 'Fernandina', another one 'Isabella', another 'Johanna', and similarly I had re-named all the others'.

XXVI

E la quart' *Isabella* fo chiamare
 per la Regina ch'è tanto onorata;
 e alla quinta il nome volsi dare
 che l'isola *Giovanna* sia chiamata;
 e la sesta d'un nome volsi ornare
 che congruo mi parse a quella fiata,
 che *La Spagnuola* quella si chiamassi,
 perché mi par che chosì meritassi.⁵³

iv. *The escaping natives*

Nulla tamen videns oppida municipiave in maritimis sita confinibus, preter aliquos vicos et predia rustica, cum quorum incolis loqui nequibam (quare simul ac nos videbant, surripiebant fugam), progrediebar ultra, existimans aliquam me urbem villasve inventurum. (148)⁵⁴

XXII, 5-8

... e, come vidon questi, <al> le diserte
 forte fuggiendo ciascun si nasconde;
 e questi dua indrieto si tornavano
 e a Christofano 'l facto racontavano.⁵⁵

v. *Two searchers on the ground*

Unde duos homines ex nostris in terram misi qui investigarent essetne rex in ea provincia urbesve alicue. Hii per / tres dies ambularunt inveneruntque innumeros populos et habitati<i>ones, parvas tamen et absque ullo regimine; quapropter redierunt. (148)⁵⁶

⁵³ 'The first island that I found, my Lord, I had it named *Insula magna di San Salvatore*; the second one I had renamed *Conceptio Mariae*, in honour of the Virgin Mary; the third one I had baptized for Your Majesty of such great nobility: now its name is *Insola Ferrandina*. The fourth one I named *Isabella*, for the so highly honoured queen; as for the fifth, I desired that it be called *Giovanna* island; the sixth one I wanted to grace with a name that I thought was fit, and I wanted her to be named *La Spagnuola*, since it seemed to me that she deserved that name'.

⁵⁴ 'Since I could not see any town or municipality on the coasts, except for some villages and rustic dwellings – and I could not talk with their inhabitants, because as soon as they saw us, they would flee, I stated to go ahead in the land, thinking that I would find some town or village'.

⁵⁵ '... as soon as they saw them, everybody ran away into the wild to hide; these two went back and told the story to Christopher'.

⁵⁶ 'Therefore I sent two of our men ashore, who would investigate if there was a ruler in that land, or some towns. These men walked for three days and found innumerable people and dwellings, but small and with no ruler; consequently they came back'.

XX

E misse dua de' suoi huomini armati
 a cerchar per le terre ch'àn trovate
 se forse si schoprisin qualche aguati;
 ma caminaron ben per tre giornate
 che non si furon mai 'ndrieto voltati,
 e non trovaron mai vill'o brighate;
 sì che si maraviglia chi chamina
 e più chi è restato alla marina.⁵⁷

vi. *The Giovanna island*

... que dicta Iohana et alie ibidem insule quam fertilissime existunt. Hec multis atque tutissimis et latis, nec aliis quos unquam viderim comparandis, portibus est circumdata, multi maximi et salubres hanc interfluunt fluvii; multi quoque et eminentissimi in ea sunt montes. (148)⁵⁸

XXIX, 1-2, 7-8

E questa e tutte l'altre è molto forte,
 ma questa sopra l'altre par fortissima;⁵⁹

...

E' dotata di frutte molte e varie,
 e liti, e porti, e chose necessarie,

XXX, 1-2

e molti fiumi, e massime montagne,
 che son d'alteza molto ismisurate ...⁶⁰

⁵⁷ 'He sent two of his men, armed, to search the land that they had discovered, in order to investigate if there were ambushes; but they walked for three days without ever looking back, and they never found any towns or people; therefore these explorers were very surprised, and even more those who had remained on the shore'.

⁵⁸ 'The above-mentioned Iohana and the other islands around are extremely fertile. She is surrounded by many harbours, ample and very secure, not to be compared to any that I ever saw; she is crossed by very large rivers of the purest water; also there are in this island very high mountains'.

⁵⁹ Cosco's original text in reference to these islands reads *fertilissime*, according to the Spanish sources. We follow here the text established by Formisano, who keeps the misreading of Dati ('fortissima', 'very strong', instead of 'fertilissima', 'very fertile') while alerting the reader to it.

⁶⁰ 'This one, and all the others, are very strong, but this is the strongest over all; ... She is rich in many and various types of fruit, and beaches, and harbours, and necessary provisions ... and many rivers, and especially huge mountains, which are of immeasurable height'.

vii. *Marvellous trees*

Omnes he insule sunt pulcerrime et variis distincte figuris, pervie et maxima arborum varietate sidera lambentium plene, quas nunquam foliis privari credo, quippe vidi eas ita virentes atque decoras, ceu mense maio in Hispania solent esse; quarum alie florentes, alie fructuose, alie in alio statu, secundum uniuscuiusque qualitatem, vigeabant. (150)⁶¹

XXXII

Alberi ci è d'una ragion fioriti,
del mese di novembre che no' siàno,
come 'n Ispagna e ne' suo' degni liti
li alberi sono el magio, e 'l monte e 'lpiano;
sì che no' altri stian tutti stupiti
per l'abondantia che trovata habiàno.
Sonci li alberi verdi e le lor foglie
ch'i' credo che non perdan mai le spoglie.⁶²

viii. *Marvellous palm trees*

Sunt preterea in dicta insula / Iohana septem vel octo palmarum genera que proceritate et pulchritudine, quemadmodum cetera omnes arbores, herbe fructusque, nostras facile exuperant. Sunt et mirabiles pinus, agri et prata vastissima, varie aves, varia mella variaque metalla, ferro excepto. (150)⁶³

XXXI

Sonci di sette o ver d'otto ragioni
di palme, che mi fan maravigliare;
e se, alzando gli occhi, cura poni,
pini vi son che l'aria par tohare;
passere, lusignioli e altri doni
che non si potre' mai tutto narrare;

⁶¹ 'All these islands are beautiful and variously shaped, easy to access and full of great, diverse trees, which seem to touch the sky; I think that they never shed their foliage, since I saw them green and full, as in the month of May in Spain; and they were vigorous, some in bloom, some bearing fruits, some at another stage of development, each according to their nature'.

⁶² 'There are trees in bloom – in the current month of November – like the trees are in Spain and in its decorous regions during the month of May, on the mountains and plains; so that all of us are stupefied because of the abundance that we found here. The trees and their foliage are so green, that I think that they never shed their foliage'.

⁶³ 'Furthermore there are on the above mentioned island Iohana seven or eight types of palm trees, which, because of their height and beauty – like all the other trees, herbs and fruits – easily surpass ours. There are also marvellous pine trees, vast fields and grass, various birds, various types of honey and metals, except iron'.

della bambagia un pondo ci è infinito
e d'altre cose assai ci è 'n questo lito.⁶⁴

ix. *The Spagnuola island*

In ea autem quam 'Hispanam' supra diximus nuncupari, maximi sunt montes ac pulcri, vasta rura, nemora, campi feracissimi, seri pascique et condendis edificiis aptissimi. Portuum in hac insula commoditas et prestantia, fluminum copia salubritate admixta hominum, que, nisi qui viderit, credulitatem superat. Huius arbores, pascua et fructus multum ab illis Iohane differunt. Haec pretera Hispana diverso aromatis genere, auro metallisque abundat. (150)⁶⁵

XXXIV

Simil, Signore, i' vi vogli' avisare
Che 'n quest'isola ci è molta pianura,
dove 'difizi molti si puon fare,
e chastelle, ciptà chon magne mura,
ché non bisogna poi di dubitare,
né d'aver, chi ci sta, nulla paura;
molte terre ci son da seminare
e da pascere le bestie e nutrichare.

XXXV, 1-6

O' po' trovati certi fumaticelli
che tutti menan oro, e non già poco,
e molti porti grandi e da far belli,
ché abbondanza ci è d'acqu'è di loco;
l'erbe e lle selve fatte cho' penelli
non son sì belle; ...⁶⁶

⁶⁴ 'There are seven or eight types of palm-trees – a thing that makes me marvel – in addition, if you look up and consider, [you'll see that] there are pine trees so tall that they seem to touch the clouds; there are sparrows, nightingales, and other graceful things that it is impossible to mention; there is an infinite quantity of cotton, and there is abundance of many other things in this land'.

⁶⁵ 'In the island that we mentioned above named 'Hispana', there are very high, beautiful mountains, vast farmlands, forests, very fertile fields, totally apt to be sown, put to pasture, and built on. The facility and beauty of harbors on this island, the abundance of rivers together with healthy population is such that it is unbelievable, if one does not see it. The trees, pastures and fruits of this island are very different from those of Iohana island. This one, Hispana, furthermore, is abundant with different types of spices, gold and metals'.

⁶⁶ 'The same way, my Lord, I want to advise you that on this island there is abundance of plain territory, where many buildings could be built, castles, cities with high walls, so that the inhabitants could not doubt of any fear; there are many fields to sow, and to graze for the animals. Furthermore I found certain streams of water that run gold, and not in a small quantity, and many harbours, big and easy to make even more beautiful, since there is abundance of water and space; herbs and woods painted with the best brushes are not as charming'.

x. *Naked natives*

Cuius quidem et omnium aliarum, quas ego vidi et quarum cognitionem habeo, incole utriusque sexus nudi semper incedunt, quemadmodum eduntur in lucem, preter aliquas feminas que folio frondeve aliqua aut bombicino velo pudenda operiunt, quod ipse sibi ad id negotii parant. (150)⁶⁷

XXI, 6-8

dove trovoron poi molta brigata
senza panni vestire, o arme, o scudi,
ma tutti e' membri loro erano nudi,

XXII, 1-4

salvo ch'alchuna donna, che coperte
tiene le parte genitale immonde
con bambagia tesuta, e dipo' certe
l'àven coperte con diverse fronde.⁶⁸

xi. *No arms, but sharpened canes*

Carent hi omnes, ut supra dixi, quocunque genere ferri, carent et armis, utpote sibi ignotis, nec ad ea sunt apti, non propter corporis deformitatem, cum sint bene formati, sed quia sunt timidi ac pleni formidine. Gestant tamen pro armis arundines sole perustas, in quarum radicibus hastile quoddam ligneum siccum et in mucronem attenuatum figunt, neque his audent augite uti. (150)⁶⁹

XXXV, 7-8

... gli uomini sono afabile formati,
timidi sempre e al fugir parati.

...

XXXVII, 1-3

Portano alchun' certe chann'apuntate

⁶⁷ 'The inhabitants of this island, and of all the others, that I saw and of which I have some knowledge, go around always naked, men and women, the same way they were at birth; except for some women, who cover their pudenda with some leaves or branches or some cotton wool, that they provide themselves for this purpose'.

⁶⁸ 'where they met then many people who had no clothes, or arms, or shields, but their bodies were naked, except some women who keep covered their shameful genitalia with some cotton wool – and certain others covered them with different types of vegetable'.

⁶⁹ 'They lack, as I said before, any type of iron; they lack also weapons, since they do not know them, and they are not used to them: not because they are deformed in their bodies – actually, they are well built – but because they are shy and full of fear. However, they carry in lieu of weapons some burned canes, where they insert, in the root, some sort of dry wood, sharpened as a point, in the fashion of a spear: but they do not dare to use these, either'.

sotto le braccia, come noi le spade,
archi con frecce di channe tagliate.⁷⁰

xii. *The unequal trade*

Ceterum, ubi se cernunt tutos, omni metu repulso, sunt admodum simplices ac bone fidei et in omnibus que habent liberalissimi: roganti quod possidet inficiatur nemo, quin ipsi nos ad id poscendum invitant. Maximum erga omnes amorem pre se ferunt: dant queque magna pro parvis, minima licet re nihilove contenti; ego attamen prohibui ne tam minima et nullius precii hisce darentur, ut sunt lancis, parapsidum vitrique fragmenta, item clavi, lingule, quanquam, si hoc poterant adipisci, videbatur eis pulcerrima mundi possidere iocalia. (152)⁷¹

XLIII

Signior mio dolce, la piacevolezza
di questa gente non potre' narrare;
per una stringa, che poco si preza,
volson tant'oro a un de' nostri dare
ch'è tre ducati e mezo: o che richeza
are' potuto in queste parti fare!
Ma io ho comandato alla mia gente
che ciascun doni e non pigli niente.

XLIV

Per far lor grata Vostra Signoria
di molta roba i'ò fatto donare,
di quella di mia gente e della mia,
come scodelle e piatti da mangiare,
e vetri e panni ch'era in mia balia,
senza riserva alchuna per me' fare;
perch'io gli ò cognosciuti tanti grati,
io gli ò come fedeli e buon' tractati.

...

⁷⁰ 'Men are pleasantly built, always shy and fast at running away ... Some of them carry under their arms certain sharpened canes, as we carry our swords, bows and arrows made of cut canes'.

⁷¹ 'On the other hand, as soon as they feel secure, all fear abandoned, they are very simple people, true, and extremely generous with everything they possess: nobody reacts badly if somebody requests his possession, on the contrary, they are the ones who invite us to ask. They love all the other people before themselves: they offer great things in exchange for small ones, content with the slightest thing, or even nothing. Anyway I prohibited that they be given minimal things and of no value, like dishes, fragments of plates or glass, nails, spoons – even though, if they could obtain such objects, it seemed to them that they possessed the most marvellous trinkets in the world'.

XLVI

Volsan anchor per una botte trista
 e per un pezo d'archo che non vale,
 tre oncie d'oro darmi e simul mista
 tanta bambagia ch'è mezo quintale;
 ma po' ch'i' ebbi questa cosa vista
 parsemi di pigliar niente, male,
 et ho commesso a ciasch<h>edun de' mia
 che di pigliar niente ardito sia.⁷²

xiii. *No idolatry; Columbus and his crew adored like deities*

Nullam hii norunt ydolatriam, immo firmissime credunt omnem vim, omnem
 potentiam, omnia denique bona esse in celo meque inde cum his navibus et nautis
 descendisse, atque hoc animo ubi<que> fui susceptus, postquam metum repulerant.
 (152)⁷³

XXXVI, 7-8

e' credan che no' siàn di cielo in terra
 mandati per camparli d'ogni guerra.

...

XLVII

Non è fra loro alchuna briga o setta,
 ma, pacifici, tutti insieme stanno;
 di parole o di facti mai s'aspecta
 di far vendecta alcuna, ingiuria o danno:
 beato è quel che servir si dilecta!
 Acompagnati a braccio sempre vanno;
 i' gli ò visti sì buoni e recti e grati
 che a buon fine Idio gli arà chiamati.

⁷² 'My sweet Lord, I could not express how pleasant these people are; for one piece of lace, of such small value, they wanted to give to one of ours so much gold, that it would be paid three ducats and a half: oh how much wealth I could have accumulated in these lands! But I ordered my people to give away everything for nothing. In order to ingratiate them in the name of Your Majesty, I commanded to give them a fair amount of stuff, belonging to my people and to me personally: dishes, plates, glass, cloths which were in my possession, without any hesitation, everything well-meant; since I found them so grateful, I treated them as faithful and good people. ... Moreover, they insisted on giving me – for a cheap barrel and for a piece of bow of no value – three ounces of gold, plus so much cotton that it may be half a quintal; but after seeing this business, [where] I thought it would be bad not to take anything, I ordered each one of my crew not to dare to take anything anymore'.

⁷³ 'These people know no idolatry, indeed they firmly believe that any force, any power, finally, all good is in heaven, and believe that I descended from on high with my ships and my crew; in this persuasion I was welcomed everywhere, once they were free of fear'.

XLVIII

Non è fra loro idolatria nisuna,
tutti le mani al ciel tengono alzate,
non adoran pianeti, o sole, o luna,
ma, le lor menti al ciel tut<t>e levate,
dichon la gloria in ciel esser sol una;
da la qual patria credon che mandate
le nostre barche siano, e noi in terra
a far pace col ciel d'ogni lor guerra.⁷⁴

xiv. Indians kidnapped and domesticated; natives' adoration of Columbus and his crew; the canoes; no difference of language, looks, habits among the inhabitants of the islands

Ego statim atque ad mare illud perveni, e prima insula quosdam Indos violenter arripui, qui ediscerent a nobis et nos periter docerent ea quorum ipsi in hisce partibus cognitionem habebant; et ex voto successit: nam brevi nos ipsos, et hii nos, tum gestu ac signis, tum verbis intellexerunt, magnoque nobis fuere emolumento. Veniunt modo mecum tamen, qui semper putant me desiluisse e cello, quamvis diu nobiscum versati fuerint, hodieque ver / sentur; et hi erant primi, qui id, quocunque appellebamus, nunciabant, alii deinceps aliis elata voce dicentes: 'Venite, venite, et videbitis gentes eterea'; quamobrem tam femine quam viri, tam impuberes quam adulti, tam juvenes quam senes, deposita formidine paulo ante concepta, nos certatim visebant, magna iter stipante caterva, aliis cibum, aliis potum afferenti bus maximo cum amore ac benevolentia incredibili. Habet unaquaeque insula multas scaphas solidi ligni, etsi angustas, longitudine tamen ac forma nostris biremibus similes, cursu autem velociore: reguntur remis tantum modo. Harum quedam sunt magne, quedam parve, quedam in medio consistent, plures tamen biremi, que remiget duodeviginti transtris maiores, cum quibus in omnes illas insulas, quae innumere sunt, traicitur, cumque his suam mercaturam exercent et inter eos comertia fiunt. Aliquas ego harum biremium seu scapharum vidi quae vehebant septuaginta et octuaginta remiges.

...

In omnibus his insulis nulla est diversitas inter gentis effigies, nulla in moribus atque loquela, quin omnes se intelligunt adinvicem; que res perutilis est ad id quod serenissimum regem nostrum exoptare precipue reor, scilicet eorum ad sanctam Christi fidem conversionem, cui quidem, quantum intelligere potui, facillimi sunt et proni. Dixi quem / admodum sum progressus antea insulam Iohanam per rectum tramitem

⁷⁴ 'Among them there is no quarrel, no party, but they all live together in peace; nobody is supposed to seek revenge, or respond with offence or any damage for words or actions: happy are those who take pleasure in their service! They go around all the time arm in arm; I saw them so good, honest, grateful, that God surely might have prepared some good for them. Among them there is no idolatry, all of them keep their hands raised up to heaven; they do not worship any planet, or Sun, or Moon, but – always with their minds turned to heaven – they maintain that there is just one and only glory, in heaven; they believe that our ships have been sent from there above, and that we have been sent on earth to make peace with heaven and finish any war'.

occasus in orientem miliaria CCCXXII, secundum quam viam et intervallum itineris possum dicere hanc Iohanam esse maiorem Anglia et Scotia simul: nanque ultra dicta CCCXXII passuum milia, in ea parte que ad occidentem prospectat, due, quas non petii, supersunt provincie, quarum alteram Indi 'Anan' vocant, cuius accolae caudati nascuntur. (154-156)⁷⁵

XLIX

Io n'ò con meco sempre alcun menato,
li quali i' feci per forza pigliare,
quand'al principio in terra fui smontato,
non potend'io in altra forma fare:
pel veloce fugir mai ascholtato
non era le mie voci o 'l mio parlare;
e questi, che per forza allor pigliai,
son per amor venuti sempremai.

L

Sempr'a mangiare, a bere e a dormire
acanto a me i' gli ò sì ben tractati
che gli aferman per certo e usan dire
che dal regno del ciel no' siam mandati;
vannoci inanzi gridando: 'Venire

⁷⁵ 'As soon as I arrived at that sea, I abducted a few Indians, so that they could teach us, and the same way we could teach them, what they knew about these territories – which happened as we desired, because very soon they started to understand us, as well as we started to understand them, sometimes with gestures and signs, sometimes with words; and so they turned out to be extremely helpful. They accompany me all the time, still believing that I descended from heaven, even though by now they have been with us for quite a time, and still are; these were the first ones to loudly enunciate whatever we named, while others would proclaim: 'Come, come, and you shall see folks from heaven!'; so that all the people, women and men, children and adults, young and old, not fearful anymore, would mingle with us; the crowds would block our path, while some of them offered food, some drinks, with incredible love and affection. All these islands have boats made of solid wood: they are narrow though, similar in length and shape to our two-oared boats, but speedier; and they are driven just by oars. Some of them are big, some are small, some are of medium size, most of them with two oars, that navigate – the biggest ones – with eighteen benches of oarsmen. With such boats they go from one island to another – they are innumerable –, and carry on their trade, and sustain commerce among them. I saw some of those boats which could transport seventy and also eighty oarsmen'.

...

'In all these islands there is no difference in the features of the people, nor in their costumes or language, so that all of them can understand each other; which is extremely useful to what I believe is the greatest desire of our most blessed king, that is, the conversion of these populations to the holy faith of Christ: and as far as I could understand, they are totally open and ready for it'. 'I said how I went beyond the above mentioned Iohana island, straight towards East from West, for three hundred and twenty-two miles; calculating that route and the way in between I can say that this Iohana is larger than England and Scotland put together: in fact, beside that distance of three hundred and twenty-two miles, along the side exposed to the West, two more regions extend – which I did not visit – of which one is called 'Anan', where the inhabitants are born with a tail'.

debba ciaschuno a vedere e' beati!;
 Si ch'al presente ogniun corr'a vedere,
 e portan tutti da mangiare e bere.

LI

Dall'un'isola a l'altra questi vanno
 con certe barche che in quest'isol'è,
 le qual' d'un legnio solo fatte stanno,
 e son chiamate queste chanoè;
 son lunghe e strette, e par quasi volanno
 andare a chiunche messo drento ci è,
 ben che sian grossamente lavorate
 (con sassi e legni e ossi son cavate).

LII

E òne vista alchuna tanto grande
 che ottanta persone ci sta drento,
 e ciaschun à 'l suo remo e le vivande;
 navichan questi e con buon sentimento
 la roba l'uno a l'altro li si spande
 (quel ch'i' vi scrivo, Signior, nulla mento);
 e vanno baratando tutti quanti
 come se fussin quasi mercatanti.

LIII

In quest'isole tutte nominate
 non ho veduta nulla differenza
 d'incharnati, di visi, o di brigate;
 ma tutti quasi son d'una presenza
 e d'un costume tutte costumate;
 homini e donne son pien' di clemenza;
 tut'anno una loquela e un parlare,
 che vi farien, Signor, maravigliare.

LIV

Che par che util cosa questa sia
 a convertigli a nostra santa fede;
 ché, come scrivo a Vostra Signoria,
 ciaschun disposto ci è, e già la crede,
 di que' chàn vista la presentia mia.
 Non gli ò tutti veduti, ma si vede
 che gli è maior Giovanna, senza sotia,
 che non è l'Inghilterra con la Scotia.

LV, 1-6

Son due provincie ch'i' non ho cerchate,
 secondo che quest'altri detto m'anno:

una ce n'è, la qual queste brigate
 dichan che quelle gente che vi stanno
 son con le chode tutte quante nate,
 et Anahan el nome posto l'anno.⁷⁶

xv. *Building a fortress*

... ibique arcem quandam erigere extemplo iussi, que modo iam debet esse peracta; in qua homines qui necessarii sunt visi, cum omni armorum genere, et ultra annum victu opportuno reliqui ... (156)⁷⁷

XL, 7-8

e di legniamè una bastia fo fare
 e'lla giente vi metto per ghuardare.

XLI, 1-2

E forniti gli lasso per un anno
 d'arme, di victoaglia ...⁷⁸

⁷⁶ 'I have been bringing with me all the time some of them, whom I had taken by force, when I first disembarked, since I could not do otherwise: my voice or my talk was never listened to, because they would always flee from me; and now those, whom I took by force, have been accompanying me for love. I have treated them so well – always eating, drinking, sleeping with me – that they state and say that we are sent from above; they precede us yelling: 'Come, everybody must come to see the blessed ones!' So that now all people hurry to see, and everybody offer food and drink. These people go from one island to the other with some local boats, made in one whole piece of wood, and they are called canoes; they are long and narrow, and their passengers feel as though they are flying when they are transported by them – even though they are roughly made (they are hollowed out with stones, pieces of wood and bones). And I saw some of them so big that they could carry eighty people, and each one has his oar and his provisions; so they navigate and exchange goods in good faith (what I'm writing about, my Lord, is the truth); and everybody goes around trading merchandise, as if they were regular merchants. In all the islands I mentioned I saw no difference in skin color, features, communal behavior; everybody seem the same, and follows the same norms; men and women are very compassionate; all of them share the same language, the same tongue, so that you would marvel at that, Sir. This circumstance seems useful in order to convert them to our holy faith; because, as I am writing to Your Majesty, everybody is well inclined, everybody already is a believer, of those who have been in my presence. I did not see all of them, but it is evident that the Giovanna island, alone, is bigger than England and Scotland put together. There are two regions that I have not visited, according to what I have been told: there is one, of which these folks living with me say that its inhabitants are born with a tail, all of them; they call it Anahan'.

⁷⁷ 'There I ordered the building of a fortress immediately, which by now must be already standing; where I left the men who seemed necessary, with all sorts of weapons, and food provisions for one year and more'.

⁷⁸ 'I order a fortress in wood to be built, and I put in it the people necessary to guard it ... and I leave them well provided for one year with weapons, and food'.

xvi. *Marriage; women's labor; the laws of property*

In omnibus his insulis, ut intellexi, quisque uni tantum coniugi acquiescit, preter principes aut reges, quibus viginti habere licet. Femine magis quam viri laborare videntur; nec bene potui intelligere an habeant bona propria: vidi enim quod unus habebat aliis impartiri, presertim dapes, obsonia et huiusmodi. (158)⁷⁹

LVII

In quest'isole tutti questi stanno
contenti d'una donna ciascheduno,
ma questi principali tutti n'anno
venti, le qual' son date lor per uno;
e l'uno a l'altro mai torto non fanno,
ché a ciò fare non ci è pronto nisuno;
e nelle cose tutte da mangiare
nulla division ci vegho fare.⁸⁰

xvii. *The Caribs; Mateunin's women; other, hairless, populations*

Itaque monstra aliqua non vidi, neque eorum alicubi habui cognitionem, excepta quadam insula 'Charis' nuncupata, que secunda ex Hispan<i>a in Indiam transfretantibus existit, quam gens quedam, a finitibus habita ferocior, incolit: hi carne humana vescuntur. Habent predicti biremium genera plurima, quibus in omnes indicas insulas traiciunt, depredant surripiuntque quecumque possunt. Nihil ab aliis differunt, nisi quod gerunt more femineo longos crines, utuntur arcubus et spiculis arundineis, fixis, ut diximus, in grossiori parte attenuatis hastilibus, ideoque habentur feroces; qua re ceteri Indi inexhausto metu plectuntur, sed hos ego nihil facio plusquam alios. Hi sunt qui coheunt cum quibusdam feminis, que sole insulam 'Mateunin', primam ex Hispan<i>a in Indiam traicientibus, habitant. He autem feminae nullum sui sexus opus exercent: utuntur enim arcubus et spiculis, sicuti de earum coniugibus dixi, muniunt sese laminis eneis, quarum maxima apud eas copia existit.

...

Aliam mihi insulam affirmant supradicta Hispana majorem: eius incole carent pilis, auroque inter alias potissimum exuberat. Huius insulae et aliarum, quas vidi, homines mecum porto, qui horum que dixi testimonium perhibent. (158-160)⁸¹

⁷⁹ 'On all these islands, as I understood, everybody is content with one partner, except princes or kings, who are allowed to have twenty of them. The women seem to do harder work than men; I have not been able to discover if they own private possessions: indeed, I have seen that what one possesses, is shared with others, especially food, bread and dripping, and such like'.

⁸⁰ 'On all these islands all the men are content with one woman each, except that their rulers have twenty, all of them, who are given to them: they never do wrong to each other, since nobody is inclined to do so; and as far as food is concerned, I see that everything is shared, with no distinction'.

⁸¹ 'I did not see any monster, nor had I any knowledge of them anywhere – except a certain island called 'Charis', the second that the passengers from Hispania to India encounter, which is inhabited by a population that its neighbours consider quite ferocious: they feed on human flesh.

LVIII, 5-8

In queste parti nulla cosa ria
 si truova di che questi habin paura,
 salvo che ci è un'isola all'entrare
 de l'India, per voler qui arrivare,

LIX

in nella quale sta gente villana;
 da questi non mi par che siano amati:
 perché dice che mangian carne umana,
 però non son da questi qui prezati.
 Ann'assa' legni questa gente strana
 da navichare, e hanno già rubati
 a questi, discorrendo d'ogni banna
 con archi i'mano e con freze di canna.

LX

Nonn-è da questi a quelli differentia
 se non i'ne' capegli che quelli hanno
 lunghi come le donne, e di presenza
 son come questi, e fanno molto danno
 a questi, che son proprio essa clemenza,
 sì che in gelosia sempre ne stanno;
 ma ispero ben che Vostra Signoria
 saprà purghare una tal malatia.

LXI

Un'isola ci è detta Mattanino,
 i'nella qual le donne sole stanno,
 e questo iniquo popul gli è vicino
 e a usar chon queste spesso vanno;
 ma questo popul tutto feminino
 esercitio di donne mai non fanno,
 ma con gli archi traendo tuttavia,
 che par per certo una gran fantasia.

This population have various types of boat, by which they travel across all the Indian islands, they pillage and ransack whatever they can. They do not differ from the others, except that they let their hair grow long, like women; they use bows and sharp spikes, inserted, as I have said, in the thickest part of thinned spears, so they are considered ferocious; that is why the rest of the Indians are disturbed by continuous fear of them – but I do not esteem them more than the others. Those are the ones who mate with certain women, who live by themselves the island 'Mateunin', the first one encountered by those who go from Hispania to India. These women do not do anything expected of their sex: they use bows and spikes, like I said of their partners, and provide themselves with leaf blades of bronze, of which there is abundance in their land. They tell me that there is another island even bigger than the above-mentioned Hispana: its inhabitants are hairless, and their land is rich in gold above all others. I am bringing with me men from this island, and from the others that I saw, who can bear witness to what I have said'.

LXII

E vanno queste ben tutte choperte
 non già di panni lini o lani o veli,
 ma d'erbe e giunchi, e queste cose certe
 son, ché di qua non è lenzuoli o teli;
 'n un'altr'isola poi le genti oferte,
 femin'è maschi, naschon senza peli;
 inanzi voglio confuso esser nel dire
 ch'i' voglia alchuna cosa preterire.

LXIII

E dove questi senza peli sono
 più oro ci è ch'i' abbia anchor trovato;
 di quel che scrivo o parlando ragiono,
 Signore, i' ne son ben giustificato:
 a Vostra Signoria u'magnio dono
 i' ò per portar mecho preparato;
 di tutti questi luoghi i' vo' menare
 gente che possin ciò testificare.⁸²

Even a superficial review of the above correlations shows quite clearly that Dati didn't follow the order of the subjects as they appear in his source. Indeed, if we give a number to the passages from Dati's *cantare* in relation to the narrative position of the same material in the corresponding textual portions in Cosco's letter, we obtain the following sequence: 5, 4, 6, 3, 1, 7, 9, 8, 10, 2, 11, 13, 14, 15, 12, 16, 17.⁸³ We see that only in two instances

⁸² 'In these lands nothing nasty can be found that scares these peoples, except that there is one island, the first we encounter on the way to India, in order to arrive here, where a primitive population lives; they do not seem to be much loved by the population around me: they are said to feed on human flesh, that is why they are not so greatly appreciated by these ones. This weird people have many boats to navigate, and they have robbed my people in the past, coming from anywhere with bows and arrows made of canes. There is no difference between the ones and the others besides their hair, that they grow long like women; physically they are the same as these ones, and damage them gravely – and these are goodness itself, so that they live in terror of the others all the time; but I hope that Your Majesty will be able to heal this disease. There is another island called Mattanino, where only women live, and this unjust people, their neighbours, often go there to mate with them; but this population, all made up of women, never do anything feminine, but live always using their bows – a truly peculiar thing. These women go around all covered not with linen or veils, but with grass and reeds, which is sure, because here linen or fabrics do not exist; in another island the population, male and female, is born hairless; I prefer to be confused in my explanation, than leave out something. And where these hairless people live, there is more gold than I have found so far; Sir, I have just reason to say or write what I am saying or writing: I prepared a great gift to be given to Your Majesty: from all these lands I want to bring with me people who can testify to everything I said'.

⁸³ According to the following equivalence: i = XXIV > 5; ii = XXIII > 4; iii = XXV-XXVI > 6; iv = XXII > 3; v = XX > 1; vi = XXIX-XXX > 7; vii = XXXII > 9; viii = XXXI

(13-15, 16-17) did successive textual fragments in Dati's *cantare* follow the sequencing of the original Latin source. In all the other cases, Dati completely subverted the order of the original. Moreover, within this mode of procedure, he sometimes chose to follow extensive portions of his source quite faithfully, even as he at other times rearranged the given order for no apparent reason. This is evident if we notice how closely he kept the order of the arguments towards the ends of his work, whereas elsewhere he was moved, to give only one example, to invert the order of segments 7-8 (octaves XXXII-XXI), in which he praises the variety, beauty and height of the local palm trees before introducing the general magnificence of the islands' flora. Is there a reason for this kind of practice? Can some sort of poetics, or at least some consistent compositional principle, be detected in such a radical, apparently unjustified manipulation of the pre-text of Dati's *cantare*?

7. *Incongruence, Discrepancy, Ambiguity*

Case by case, an explanation for Dati's rearrangements can be posited, but I'm afraid the explanations taken as a whole don't add up to a coherent vision of operational behaviour. The initial liberties can be attributed to the impatience of the *canterino*, who has dragged his audience through nineteen octaves of introduction and now feels an urgent need to grab its attention with some exciting news. That is probably why the explorers of Giuliano Dati jump ashore right away, instead of cautiously exploring the coasts of the newfound 'terra' by ship, as they do in Cosco's text. This is also probably why Dati's text immediately calls up, for his listeners, the image of 'montagnie ... d'altura smisurata', 'molti fiumi', 'molta brighata',⁸⁴ and why it concentrates right away on the nudity of the natives (a shocking detail, which was to resonate for a long time in the reports from the New World). Other alterations reveal what seems to have been a rather cursory reading of the original. Dati's anxiety to entertain his audience generated ambiguities that a close reading can easily detect, but that might well go unnoticed by listeners overwhelmed by the many marvels showered upon them in a live performance. This is what happens, for example, in the case of the subsequent descriptions of two islands called Giovanna and Spagnuola. In octave XXVII, Dati specifies the distance between them: 'dalla Giovanna alla Spagnola el mare / cinquantaquattro miglia largo apare' (7-8).⁸⁵ Yet, in the following octave, we are told of what

> 8; ix = XXXIV-V > 10; x = XXI-II > 2; xi = XXXV-VII > 11; xii = XLIII-IV, XLVI > 13; xiii = XXXVI, XLVII-III > 14; xiv = XLIX-LV > 15; xv = XL-XLI > 12; xvi = LVII > 16; xvii = LVIII-LXIII > 17.

⁸⁴ 'mountains ... of excessive height', 'many rivers', 'a lot of people'.

⁸⁵ 'from the Giovanna Island to the Spagnola island the sea appears to be fifty-four miles wide'.

seems to be Columbus' navigation towards the island of Spagnuola, and we are made to think that the mileage given in the previous distich refers to the dimensions of Spagnuola itself: 'son cinquecensantaquattro miglia / la larghezza che questa isola piglia' (XXVIII, 7-8).⁸⁶ In another inconsistency, up to the point when, in the octave XXIX, the extreme fertility of 'questa sopra l'altre isole'⁸⁷ is celebrated, the listener has every right to suppose that Dati is talking about the virtues of Spagnuola. However, this turns out to be wrong: a comparison with the Latin source makes it clear that we are dealing instead with the superlative qualities of the Giovanna island: 'que dicta Iohana et alie ibidem insule quam fertilissime existunt. Hec multis ... portibus est circumdata ...' (148).⁸⁸ Even more disconcerting, a few octaves later, this remarkable island starts changing its landscape under our very eyes. Besides being provided with 'massime montagne, / che son d'alteza molto ismisurate' (XXX, 1-2), it is now suddenly blessed with vast plains: 'Simil, Signore, i' vi vogli' avisare / che 'n quest'isola ci è molta pianura ...' (XXXIV 1-2).⁸⁹ Of course, islands can quite naturally be both flat and mountainous in various parts of their territory; but the reality is that Dati has here begun to describe not the Giovanna island, but, without any warning, the Spagnuola (Compare this to the precision of Cosco's letter: 'In ea autem quam 'Hispanam' supra diximus nuncupari, maximi sunt montes ac pulchri, vasta rura, nemora, campi feracissimi ...' (150).⁹⁰ Also, Dati's subsequent observation that it would be easy to build cities and castles and establish a regular agriculture in such a favourable landscape is likewise made with regard to the island of Spagnuola rather than to Giovanna: '... 'n quest'isola ... / ... 'difizi molti si puon fare, / e chastelle, ciptà chon magne mura, / che non bisogna poi di dubitare, / né d'aver, chi ci sta, nulla paura; / molte terre ci son da seminare / e da pascer le bestie e nutrichare' (XXXIV, 2-8).⁹¹

In conclusion, the dismembering and reassembling of the original text doesn't seem to follow an alternative compositional plan. Instead, the impression one gets is that Giuliano Dati scribbled down the most interesting bits of information he could glean from his source and then assembled them in his *cantare* without any scruples about fidelity to the structural order of

⁸⁶ 'this island is five hundred and sixty-four miles wide'.

⁸⁷ 'this (island) over all other (islands)'.

⁸⁸ 'The above mentioned Iohana and the other islands around are excessively fertile. It is surrounded by many ... harbours'.

⁸⁹ 'huge mountains, which are of immeasurable height ... The same way, my Lord, I want to advise you that in this island there is abundance of plain territory'.

⁹⁰ 'On the above mentioned 'Hispana' island there are very high beautiful mountains, vast farmlands, forests, very fertile fields'.

⁹¹ 'on this island ... many buildings could be built, castles, cities with high walls, so that the inhabitants should not suffer any fear; there are many fields to sow, and for animals to graze'.

the text he was transforming. The new disorder, shall we say, of the text was apparently of no importance to Giuliano Dati. He knew that what was important was to communicate in the most interesting, vibrant, exciting manner a bundle of information, information that his listeners would have neither the time nor the attention to scrutinize for inconsistencies. Of course, what I am saying should not be misinterpreted as a self-righteous condemnation of Dati's compositional methods, but rather as an attempt to understand how the mind of a popular narrator of the late sixteenth century might have functioned when confronted with what was highly challenging and indeed previously inconceivable information. After all, the author himself, in a sudden access of naïveté and sincerity affirms towards the end of his endeavor: 'inanzi voglio confuso esser nel dire / ch'i' voglia alchuna cosa preterire' (LXII, 7-8).⁹² Perhaps we can be so bold as to read these lines as Dati's declaration of poetics. We might call 'confusion' the creative hallmark of the *canterino* style.⁹³

8. *The Indian Tryptic*

Finally, the *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* must also be considered in the context of Giuliano Dati's body of work, within which it constitutes a sort of line of demarcation. Before the *Storia della inventione*, Dati had written hagiographic or devotional *cantari* (*Historia e leggenda di San Biagio* 1492-1493; *Historia di Sancta Maria de Loreto* 1492-1493; *Stazioni e indulgenze di Roma* 1492-1493); after it, he expanded his repertoire to treat of more contemporary subjects (*La Magna Lega* and *Il Diluvio di Roma*, both printed in 1495-1496). He did so, however, without abandoning the religious subject matter of his earlier compositions (*Leggenda di S. Barbara* 1494, *Storia di S. Job profeta*, 1495; a life of Giovanna da Signa, written in 1522, was never published). What is telling, though, is that after the *Storia della inventione delle nuove insule* he wrote, one after the other, two other

⁹² 'I'd rather be confused in my words, but without leaving out anything that I have to say'.

⁹³ Perhaps not only of *this* style. As scholars have noted, Matteo Fortini, too, in his paraphrase of Vespucci's text, doesn't follow the narrative ordering of his source: 'Regarding the literary devices used by the paraphrasing author, they consist first of all of a very shrewd combinatory technique which prefers, instead of following the sequential order of his source, to contaminate the single sequences, alternating unities even very remote from one another in the text (especially if such contamination is prompted by internal links with Vespucci's text) ... The source is treated like a narrative repertoire open for free exploitation, thus creating a true stylistic competition between the texts' (Formisano 1986, 336, 339). The textual procedures of Dati and Fortini are in this sense similar, even though it would be hard to attribute to Giuliano Dati any special 'very shrewd combinatory technique', or any intention of 'stylistic competition'. In Dati's case, the structural 'disorder' of the text seems instead more connected to the improvisation intrinsic to the genre of the *cantari*.

cantari, poems dealing with the subject of ‘prete Janni’. This was the fabled monarch of the East Indies, who had already been reassigned in the popular literature to a new throne in Ethiopia, albeit not in the fantasy of Giuliano Dati, who entitled his two new *cantari* *La gran magnificenza del Prete Janni o Primo Cantare dell’India* (1493-1494) and *Secondo Cantare dell’India* (1494-1495).⁹⁴ In other words, after having celebrated the discovery of the ‘new’ Indies, Dati was inspired to go back to the lore of the ‘old’ Indies. In so doing, he ended up composing what was almost an Indian tryptic, working his way through the assortment of western marvels revealed by Columbus and on to the fantastic treasures of the East.⁹⁵ And, speaking of marvels, Dati has an odd approach to such things. One might expect him to take literary advantage of the highly ‘alien’ traits offered by the New World. Instead, he shares the attitude of Columbus himself who, in his reports, pursued a strategy of reassurance, emphasizing the similarity of the natives to the people of his own world rather than their differences (hence his insistence on their eagerness for the conversion to the ‘true Faith’). Dati takes a similar approach. For example, he reports the existence of humans born with tails with no evident emotion, and he highlights the fact that in the new islands ‘... nulla cosa ria / si truova di che questi habin paura’ (LVIII 5-6).⁹⁶ This is an even blander translation than that of his Latin source, which reads: ‘Itaque monstra aliqua non vidi’.⁹⁷ Even the omission of a crucial reference to the kingdom of Catai in the Columbus-Cosco report could be considered as part of this strategy of reassurance. Columbus, faithful to his strongest convictions, mentioned his initial impression that the ‘Iohana insula’ might actually be a continent: ‘tamque eam magnam nullo reperto fine inveni, et non insulam sed continentem Chatai provinciam esse crediderim’.⁹⁸ Perhaps it is not an accident that Dati omitted this observation from his *cantare*. His

⁹⁴ ‘The only feature that demonstrates a relative independence of the author from his sources consists in the fact that he shifts the kingdom of the legendary Priest to India Major, whereas the *Meschino* puts it in Ethiopia’ (Olschki 1938, 300). The *Meschino* is the extremely popular poem *Guerin Meschino* (or *Meschino di Durazzo*), the main source of the ‘Indian’ *cantari* written by Giuliano Dati. The complete title of the first *cantare* reads: ‘La gran Magnificencia de Prete Ianni Signore dellindia / Maggiore & della Ethiopia’; the second one has no title, but the colophon reads: ‘Finito el secondo / cantare dellindia’. They are both in quarto, with no date or place of publication; the proposed dates are conjectural.

⁹⁵ As noted by Olschki: ‘Therefore these two “Indian cantari” ... are the most interesting among those composed by Dati: they prove how the old legends grafted upon the reports of the most recent geographical discoveries, integrating them in the imagination of the general public’ (1938, 295).

⁹⁶ ‘nothing nasty can be found that scares those people’.

⁹⁷ ‘I did not see any monster’.

⁹⁸ ‘I found this island so big, with no visible border, that I was prone to believe it was not an island, but a region pertaining to the continent of Chatai’.

islands are new, certainly, but from the title of his *cantare* on through the body of his poem, they are presented as additions to the well-known isles of *Channarie*. That is, they are imagined as the extension of an already assimilated geography and not as a dramatic discovery resulting from what was thought to be the first circumnavigation of the globe.

Yet, even as he seeks to reassure his audience, Dati insists that in the new islands there are rivers flowing with gold: 'l'or e l'argento e 'l metallo ci avanza, / massim'un fiume ch'è per questa via, / che non può questa terra farne senza, / dov'ò trovato con mie fantasia / che di molt'oro è piena quella rena / sì come l'acqua di quel fiume mena' (XXXIII 3-8);⁹⁹ 'O' po' trovato certi fiumicelli / che tutti menan oro, e non già poco' (XXXV 1-2).¹⁰⁰ This is an invention which is nowhere to be found in his Latin source. Once again, the textual practice of Dati is inconsistent. On the one hand, his narrative downplays some obvious opportunities for fantastic expatiations; on the other, he resorts to the trite repertoire of the 'mirabilia' tradition. However, this apparent contradiction operates to a single end: the domestication of the marvellous, a normalization of the new. Dati assimilates the newly discovered Indies with the old ones. He includes 'wonders' so familiar to his audience that they surely inspired a sense of continuity and normalcy rather than provoke consternation or unease. In his role as a *canterino* aligned with the expectations of the 'common man,' he understands that his audience is to be amazed, but not beyond certain limits. His common man (or woman) must marvel at the wonders on offer, but he/she must do so without being unduly disturbed by the narrative extravagances he/she is listening to. Which means that, in the end, the traditional format of the *cantare* prevailed over the novelty of the Discovery. Never before had such a potentially troubling piece of news been conveyed in so conventional a manner. In the treatment of Giulano Dati, the shocking is thoroughly domesticated, very often at the expense of accurate translation or faithful reportage. In 1493, the news of a New World was without doubt amazing, but *les mots pour le dire* had not been found yet.

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⁹⁹ 'There is great abundance of gold, silver and metals – especially considering a river nearby, essential for the well-being of this land, where I found by myself that its sand is full of gold, down along its flow'.

¹⁰⁰ 'Furthermore I found certain streams of water that run gold, and not in a small quantity'.

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‘Parole appiastricciate’: The Question of Recitation in the Tasso-Ariosto Polemic

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Abstract

The article explores issues of reading and recitation in the literary polemic surrounding Torquato Tasso’s epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581). This controversy emerged as the result of competing claims regarding the identification of the modern vernacular heir to the epic works of Antiquity, with two separate camps arguing for either Tasso’s poem or Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* (1532). Writing against Tasso was the Florentine Academy of the Crusca, who claimed that Tasso’s poem was difficult to understand during recitation due to seemingly nonsensical phrases which they termed *parole appiastricciate*, ‘mashed-up words’. Through an analysis of the discourse surrounding these words, the essay investigates competing manners of reciting poetry as they are described by both the Crusca and Tasso’s supporters. It argues that the Crusca employed, and vehemently defended, a particular manner of recitation derived primarily from the poem’s meter; by contrast, Tasso’s supporters emphasized attention to the phonetic texture of the verse produced by the interrelationship of individual sounds. By comparing these different positions and investigating the structure of the *parole appiastricciate* themselves, the article suggests that Tasso’s poem, and the controversy surrounding its form and structure, offer an important perspective on changing literary tastes in late sixteenth-century Italy.

Keywords: Epic Poetry, Meter, Recitation, Sixteenth Century, Tasso-Ariosto Polemic

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you,
trippingly on the tongue. But if you mouth it, as many of your
players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 3.2.1-4

1. Introduction

In February 1585, the newly founded Accademia della Crusca of Florence, intent on purifying the Tuscan language, published a lengthy screed against the epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581), emphatically condemning the



work and maligning its author, Torquato Tasso.¹ Censuring the text for its use of unnatural words and overwrought syntax, the academicians declared that the *Liberata*'s language was often so deformed as to prevent understanding the sense of the poem:

[il poema] non ha né belle parole, né bei modi di dire ... e sono l'une, e gli altri, oltre ogni natural modo di favellare, e con legatura tanto distorta, aspra, sforzata, e spiacevole, che udendole recitare ad altrui, rade volte s'intende, e ci bisogna prendere il libro in mano, e leggerle da per noi: essendo elle tali, che non basta il suono, e la voce: ma per comprenderle bisogna veder la scrittura: e qualche volta non è assai. (Salviati 1588, 230-231)²

Tasso, the Crusca claimed, had strayed so far from a natural – and presumably more purely Florentine – form of poetic expression, that one could no longer rely on the traditional manner of enjoying poetry, namely its recitation before a group of people.

The Crusca's remark offers a useful starting point for considering the immediate impact of a work, already notorious for its difficulty, and, by extension, valuable insight into the various, sometimes conflicting, ways of responding to poetry in late sixteenth-century Italy.³ Due to the harsh reception of Tasso's poem by the Florentine academy, such a comment also helps us begin to map the various socio-cultural positions of Tasso's early readers, who were often in conflict with one another for extra-artistic reasons.⁴ The Crusca's criticisms of the sound of Tasso's poem immediately

¹ For a discussion of the early years of the Crusca, see Parodi 1983.

² '[the poem] has neither beautiful words, nor beautiful figures of speech ... and both are beyond any natural manner of speaking. They are bound together in such a distorted, harsh, forced, and unpleasant way that, upon hearing these words recited by someone else, rarely does one understand them, and it is necessary to take the book in hand and read the words on our own. These words are such, that sound and voice are not enough, and to understand them you must see the writing. Sometimes even that is not enough'. The Crusca's principal works are gathered together in their last major contribution, *Lo 'Nfarinato secondo* (Salviati 1588). I will cite from this edition unless otherwise noted. All translations of works not available in English are mine.

³ The 'artificiality' of Tasso's poem has long been a subject of scholarship. For discussions of 'artificiosità', 'gravità', and other related aesthetic categories, see Ferroni and Quondam 1973; Raimondi 1980; Baldassarri 1983; Afrifo 2001.

⁴ Regional and political tensions are evident throughout the polemic, most noticeably in the anti-Florentine remarks made by various interlocutors, including by Tasso himself. For an account of the 'municipal-regional' component of the polemic, see Godard 2003; for a discussion of Tasso's rejection of the Florentines' claimed linguistic authority, see Di Sacco 1997. Of particular interest was also the so-called 'precedence controversy' between the d'Este and Medici families, which had emerged in 1541 between Cosimo I de' Medici and Ercole II d'Este over who would have precedence in the procession in Lucca honoring Charles V and Paul III. The issue of rank continued under the ducal reigns of both Francesco I de' Medici and Alfonso II d'Este, until an alliance of sorts was formed by the marriage

suggest certain expectations, perhaps entirely Florentine, concerning a so-called natural poetic language that allows for ease of comprehension. In their account, listeners were not expected to follow along with the written text, and the need to consult the book seems to have entirely exasperated the group.

Such exasperation implies a tension between poetry as written and poetry as spoken in early modern letters. This is not to say, however, that the poem's written form and its oral execution were clearly defined, discrete modes of consumption and experience. On the contrary, as the Crusca's comment implies, and as further analysis will show, the written text and its recitation often sat in uneasy relation to each other, due largely to the particular literary tastes and expectations of the academicians. This relation is perhaps best understood with reference to a perennial issue found in metrical studies, namely the ambiguous connection between a written text and the multiplicity of its possible metrical executions, whether read aloud or mentally.⁵ In terms of meter, the text – as encountered on the page by a reader or performer – often presents moments of interpretative uncertainty. A line offers a range of possible metrical interpretations out of which a single reading must be chosen when the line is 'performed', a choice determined largely by the reader's own tastes and customs.⁶

As we shall see, the Crusca's account of their unpleasant experience listening to Tasso's poem emerged from their particular approach to poetic prosody. Our focus then is on the Crusca's manner of recitation as it is brought to light through a reconstruction of their ideas about meter. Since the Crusca's statements generated a vehement response from other writers supporting Tasso's poem, we can also compare different readings of those same lines. By studying this opposition, we can get at the matter of metrics, prosody, and recitation as they were practiced at the time of the publication of the *Liberata*. This controversy thus provides a window not only into the possible manners of recitation of Tasso's poem, but also – and perhaps more importantly – the diverse and often conflicting values and interests of its first readers.

2. *The Crusca's Criticism of Tasso*

The Crusca's critique of Tasso's use of poetic language was in reality a response to an earlier dialogue written by the Capuan canon Camillo

between Cesare d'Este and Virginia de' Medici in 1586. See Santi 1897, Williams 1993, Plaisance 2004, and Quint 2005.

⁵ For discussion of the complex relationship between abstract models and concrete realization in meter, see Menichetti 1993, 55-60; Praloran and Soldani 2003, 3-12.

⁶ Menichetti notes the variety of possible executions of a text due to the reader's own idiosyncrasies and cultural context: 'The execution ... is also affected by conventions, poetics, fashions' (1993, 58).

Pellegrino (1527-1603), entitled *Il Carrafa, o vero dell'epica poesia* (1584).⁷ In this work, Pellegrino set out to define the correct elements of epic poetry, largely following an Aristotelian paradigm, as well as identifying the modern vernacular equivalent of Virgil and Homer.⁸ He ultimately chose Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* as the foremost example of vernacular epic over Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, which had remained at the summit of vernacular poetry since the publication of its third edition in 1532.⁹ The Crusca, incensed at Pellegrino's preference for Tasso and his attack on Ariosto, published a *Difesa dell'Orlando furioso* (Salviati 1584), which turned out to be less a defense and more a full-scale assault on Pellegrino, Tasso, and his work. These two documents, the *Carrafa* and the *Difesa*, immediately sparked controversy across Italy throughout the 1580s, with *letterati* of various cities publishing works in favor of either Tasso or Ariosto. In this same period, Pellegrino and the Crusca continued their own heated debate, consisting of numerous letters and several published dialogues.

The main focus of this exchange was the proper definition of epic poetry according to Aristotle and other classical authorities. Much ink was spilled debating the appropriate structure of epic narrative, including the length of the plot, the importance of a historical basis, and the types of digressions permitted. The focus of these treatises lay primarily on arguing the finer details of Aristotelian theory. On occasion, however, descriptions of experiencing the poem would emerge. In such instances, problems of establishing iron-clad rules for poetic composition gave way to accounts of aesthetic evaluation: literary theory ceded to matters of taste and sensibility. Virtually all of these moments dealt with the use of language, a topic hardly touched upon by Aristotle, and whose prescriptions would have regardless offered little help for the specific problems of the Italian vernacular still in development.¹⁰

The Crusca's concerns largely involved Tasso's use of so-called 'artificial' language, an issue which had already been under debate by the time of their response to Pellegrino. In April 1582, less than a year after the *Liberata's* first full publication, Giovan Battista Deti, one of the co-founders of the Accademia della Crusca, wrote a letter to Filippo Magnanimiti describing

⁷ This dialogue originally appeared at the end of an anthology of lyric poetry from three Capuan poets, including Pellegrino; see Dell'Uva 1584. For more on the regional tensions between Florence and Naples, see Cardillo 2008.

⁸ For a general analysis of the polemic, including a description of Pellegrino's work, see Weinberg 1963, 991-1073; Gigante and Sberlati 2003. For a description of the academic context in Florence, see Plaisance 2004.

⁹ A discussion of the near universal acclaim for Ariosto's poem, hailed as a 'modern classic' soon after its first publication, can be found in Javitch 1991; see also Sberlati 2001, 31-87.

¹⁰ For a recent description of the *questione della lingua*, together with an extensive bibliography, see Alfano, Gigante, and Russo 2016.

recent literary discussions on the language of the poem. Deti states that there are 'alcuni' ('some') in Florence who are of the opinion that the *Liberata*, though 'molto bello' ('beautiful'), contains language which is 'troppo bello' ('too beautiful') because it is 'troppo limato' ('overwrought'). Because of such excessively refined verse, readers have difficulty comprehending it. As Deti claims, 'è necessario per intenderlo stare non manco attento leggendolo, che si stia alle scritture d'Aristotle; la qual cosa in un libro siffatto, che si legge per piacere o per divertimento, non par che sia gran fatto lodevole' (Solerti 1895, 186).¹¹

Regarding the language ('locuzione'), Deti further writes that, though the poem contains words which are often elevated and heroic, 'non è di quella proprietà, né di quella purità fiorentina che è quella dell'Ariosto, ed anche ci ha delle cose che a noi paion barbarismi' (186).¹² Deti's criteria of linguistic approval thus depend explicitly on standards of Florentine purity. Issues of 'propriety', exemplified by Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*, contrast with certain 'barbaric' constructions found in Tasso's poem.¹³ Such ideals for a stable and rigid vernacular would come to animate the later critical activity of the Academy of the Crusca, in particular their condemnation of Tasso's deviations from accepted usage.¹⁴

It is worth noting that Pellegrino himself, in his own treatise praising the *Liberata*, admits that the poetic language of the poem often presents difficulties in comprehension, due mainly to Tasso's use of a certain *brevitas*:

usando il Tasso modi di dir poetici lontani in tutto del parlar dell'uso comune, molte volte, la sua sentenza non è così chiara come altri vorrebbe, e studiando egli sempre in ciò d'esser breve e significante nelle voci, non è maraviglia se alle volte oscuro ne diviene. (Salviati 1588, 230-34)¹⁵

¹¹ 'To understand the poem, it is necessary to be no less attentive in reading it than in the writings of Aristotle. In a book such as this, which should be read for pleasure or entertainment, this does not seem particularly praiseworthy'.

¹² 'it does not possess that propriety, nor that Florentine purity, which is found in Ariosto, and even in that work some things strike us as barbarisms'.

¹³ See Martillotto 2014, especially 41-43. For a broader discussion of censure of Tasso's lack of linguistic purity, see Martillotto 2007.

¹⁴ Salviati had made remarks, even prior to debating the *Liberata*, on the need for poetry to be easy to pronounce. In a letter to Giovanni de' Bardi (28 September, 1582), Salviati writes that he prefers the *Orlando furioso* to 'poesie difficili, dure, sforzate, e che non si possono né pronunciar con agevolezza né imparare a mente' ('those difficult, hard, and overwrought poems that you can neither pronounce easily nor memorize') cited in Plaisance 2004, 122. For more on Salviati's views on Ariosto, see Brown 1971.

¹⁵ 'Since Tasso uses poetic modes of speech entirely distant from common linguistic usage, many times his meaning is not as clear as some would like. And since he always strives to be concise and meaningful with his words, it is not surprising that sometimes he becomes obscure'.

In Pellegrino's view, Tasso deliberately seeks a form of language as far from common use as possible in order to achieve a level of magnificence and *gravitas*.¹⁶ The Crusca, by contrast, attribute the difficulty and incomprehensibility of the poem not to an intentionally laconic style, but rather to Tasso's overall artistic failure to respect the poetic norms established by the vernacular canon. In their view, Tasso does not intentionally create a new poetic language, but simply lacks the skill to write beautiful, proper diction, resulting in a language that is 'distorta, aspra, sforzata, e spiacevole' (Salviati 1588, 230).¹⁷

After complaining of the difficulty of understanding the poem when recited, the Crusca also offer examples of a listener's confusion due to the peculiar construction of the lines. In their view, Tasso's arrangement of words often leads to unintelligible and ridiculous sounds:

tra l'altre cose buona parte delle parole paiono appiasticciate insieme, e due o tre di loro ci sembrano spesso una sola, di niuno o di lontanissimo sentimento da ciò, che s'aspettava dalla continuazion del concetto; sì che spesso muove a riso, come alcuni di questi suoni, che si sentono ne' versi suoi: *checcanuto, ordegni, tendindi, mantremante, impastacani, vibrei, rischiognoto, crinchincima, tombeccuna, comprotton, incultavene, alfiancazzo*, a imitazione di quel chazzolino di suo padre: *Poi più che Neron'empio, e ch'Azzolino*. (231)¹⁸

This list of 'mashed' words clearly belongs to a larger rhetorical strategy to ridicule Tasso's poem as much as possible. Nevertheless, closer analysis of these *parole appiasticciate* reveals a certain degree of consistency in the Crusca's reading of the poem, not only in the oral articulation of the words and their transcription, but also in the comprehensiveness of the list, which spans virtually the entire poem. Through the recontextualization of these apparent nonsense words in the poem, it becomes clear that the Crusca were relying consistently on a particular mode of recitation that would effectively produce such sounds.

¹⁶ The stylistic ideal of *gravitas* is found everywhere in Tasso's discussions of the grand style. For a discussion of early modern theories of style, see Grosser 1992. For an extended discussion of *gravitas* in the sixteenth century, see Afribo 2001.

¹⁷ 'distorted, harsh, forced, and unpleasant'.

¹⁸ 'among other things, a good number of his words appear mashed together. Two or three words often seem to be a single one, with their meaning either unconnected or very distant from what you were expecting from the sequence of thought. Often this moves one to laughter, such as some of these sounds heard in his verses: *checcanuto, ordegni, tendindi, mantremante, impastacani, vibrei, rischiognoto, crinchincima, tombeccuna, comprotton, incultavene, alfiancazzo*, in imitation of his father's *chazzolino*: *Poi più che Neron'empio, e ch'Azzolino*'. The allusion is to Bernardo Tasso's *Amadigi*.

The original verse for each of these words, arranged in chronological order, reads as follows:¹⁹

checcanuto	Ad un'huom, che canuto havea da canto	(II 43, 6)
ordegni	O' degno sol, cui d'ubidire hor degni	(II 62, 1)
tendindi	Impon, che sian le tende indi munite	(III 66, 1)
mantremante	Nè più governa il fren la man tremante	(VII 1, 3)
incultavene	Misto, e di boscareccie inculte avene	(VII 6, 3)
impastacani	Ch'in pasto a' cani le sue membri i neghi	(VII 54, 8)
vibrei	Vibra ei , presa nel mezo, una zagaglia	(IX 82, 5)
rischiognoto	E tacito, e guardingo al rischio ignoto	(XIII 33, 2)
crinchincima	E l' crin, ch'in cima al capo havea raccolto	(XV 61, 1)
tombeccuna	A l'essequie, a i natali ha tomba, e cuna	(XVII 20, 8)
comprotton	Genero il compra Otton con larga dote	(XVII 76, 4)
alfiancazzo	C'hor l'è al fianco Azzo quinto, hor la seconda	(XVII 79, 2)

The Crusca's combination of entire phrases into single nonsense words occurs as a result of several reading strategies. Some words are simply joined together without any further alterations to the original text, such as *ordegni*, *mantremante*, and *crinchincima* (ignoring for now the punctuation for this phrase). The word *checcanuto* also emerges largely due to this strategy, but with an apparent, subtle modification to its pronunciation, namely the syntactic gemination of the 'C' of *canuto*.²⁰ The Crusca's inclusion of a lengthened 'C' immediately suggests their intention to appear faithful in transcribing a specific and concrete recitation of Tasso's poem.

Most of the words mentioned by the Crusca, however, are formed primarily as a result of their elimination of vowels, specifically those found at word boundaries: *tendindi*, *incultavene*, *impastacani*, *vibrei*, *rischiognoto*, *tombeccuna*, *comprotton*, and *alfiancazzo*. In these cases, the Crusca employ elision, a prosodic figure whereby word-final vowels are suppressed when

¹⁹ It is impossible to identify the exact edition used by these early readers, given the complex history of the early printed editions of the poem, of which there were already fifteen by 1584. For a description of printed editions of Tasso, see Carpanè 1998. Of the various early editions consulted, I have decided to use the text of the 1581 Febo Bonna edition: *Gierusalemme liberata, poema heroico del Sig. Torquato Tasso*. There are two reasons for this, based largely on the text as cited in the polemic. First, for 'tombeccuna', both Tasso's supporters and the Crusca read 'ha tomba, e cuna' and not 'ha tomba, ha cuna', as it appears in the Ingegneri edition from 1581. In contrast, both Bonà and later Francesco Osanna (1584) read this line as 'tomba, e cuna'. Second, Tasso's supporters refer 'alfiancazzo' to the verse 'C'hor l'è al fianco Azzo Quinto, hor la seconda'. The Osanna edition reads 'C'hor l'è al fianco Azzo il Quinto', while Bonna had eliminated the definite article before 'Quinto'. Based on these admittedly shaky criteria, references to Tasso's poem will come from the Bonna edition.

²⁰ For a discussion of these phonotactic phenomena in the Italian language, see Marotto 2011.

they precede vowels in subsequent words.²¹ The most extreme cases appear to be *impastacani* and *tombeccuna*, in which syntactical units with multiple elements ('in pasto a' cani' and 'tomba, e cuna') are reduced to a single word. These examples also present further phonotactical adjustments, not only the consonant gemination in *tombeccuna*, but also the nasal assimilation found in *impastacani*, which appears to represent a natural shift in pronunciation from 'N' to 'M' that occurs even today in Italian and many other languages.²² Attention to such minute phonosyntactic details reinforces the overall rhetorical strategy of ridiculing Tasso's poem by implying that their method of execution follows natural speaking patterns. By faithfully recording this 'natural' pronunciation, the Crusca further emphasize an ordinary manner of enunciation that would seem at odds with Tasso's supposedly overwrought verse.²³

Yet, as is clear with examples such as *crinchincima* and *tombeccuna*, such a 'natural' mode of recitation also contends with other possible executions of these lines. In these instances, written elements – specifically letters and punctuation – are passed over by the Crusca, in favor of a seemingly fluid 'superword' containing only one accent and allowing for no pauses. There is thus a clear tension between the Crusca's spoken language and the written text of the poem. This approach, at least as argued by the Crusca, offers an immediate response to Pellegrino's claim that Tasso's language is far from 'common use'. These *parole appiastricciate* suggest that, by deviating so far from normal usage, Tasso's manner of writing has strayed into absurdity. By situating themselves on the side of the *uso comune*, the Crusca are thus able to develop a scathing rhetorical strategy to dismiss the *Liberata*.

Despite the obvious polemical nature of their attack on Tasso's use of language, it seems unlikely that the Crusca would have invented this list of *parole appiastricciate* from nothing. The consistency of the elision, and the fact that the words span the entirety of the poem, indicate that the Crusca may well have been reading in a specific way before taking up the task of censuring the poem. An analysis of the metrical schemes that emerge in these

²¹ The only exception to the regular pattern of elision is *rischignoto*, where the final vowel of *rischio* remains, most likely due to the semiconsonantal nature of *-io*.

²² The shift from the alveolar nasal of 'IN' to the bilabial dental of 'IM' follows a common phonotactic constraint whereby a nasal assimilates to the place of articulation of the following consonant, in this case the labial 'P' of 'pasto'. For an overview of consonantal assimilation, see Brucale 2010.

²³ It seems reasonable to hypothesize that the Crusca's emphasis on a natural mode of recitation aligns with the linguistic program set out by Lionardo Salviati in his *Degli avvertimenti della lingua sopra 'l Decamerone*, printed in two volumes in 1584 and 1586. There Salviati elevates the language spoken by educated Florentines as the standard by which to judge all literary production. For an overview of the structure and themes of Salviati's *Avvertimenti*, see Gargiulo 2009. For more on Salviati in an academic context, see Godard 2003.

mashed-up words will reveal a particular mode of reading lines of poetry that emphasizes regular accentuation at the expense of both the sense of the line and its graphical representation. Yet, before analyzing further the Crusca's model of metrical execution, let us look first at the responses of Tasso and his supporters to these *parole appiastricciate*.

3. Responses to the Crusca

In addition to Pellegrino, at least three other writers responded directly to the Crusca's complaints of unintelligible words in the *Liberata*: Giulio Ottonelli, Orazio Lombardelli, and Malatesta Porta. Coming from different socio-cultural contexts, their positions and arguments diverge in various ways. Despite the different form and character of their responses, they are all unified in their rejection of the Crusca's method of reciting Tasso's poem. Above all, they emphasize the need to attend to the structure of the written text, as opposed to relying on some predetermined metrical scheme. In their view, the Crusca deliberately exaggerate their manner of recitation and fail to respect the text as presented on the page. More specifically, they all argue against elision in the execution of the verse in favor of distinctly articulating individual sounds.

After the Crusca published their *Difesa* and after a lengthy epistolary exchange, Pellegrino composed his own response, *Replica di Camillo Pellegrino alla Risposta degli Accademici della Crusca* (1585).²⁴ Much like the Crusca's text, Pellegrino responds to each individual objection in turn. Regarding the *parole appiastricciate*, Pellegrino does not defend Tasso so much as criticize the Crusca's manner of reading. His emphasis falls on the Crusca's deliberate attempts to combine letters, that is 'a studio': 'appiastricciandosi a studio, hor vien loro aggiunta, et hora via tolta una lettera, per farle sentir di mal suono' (Salviati 1588, 232).²⁵

In his view, the ugly sound that emerges – that is, the words as recorded by the Crusca – only emerge with the improper reading of the letters of a line. Instead, Pellegrino writes, the Crusca should employ a more accurate method:

distaccate [le voci] l'una dall'altra, e proferite con pausa, niuno mal suono renderanno. Massimamente in quelle giaciture del verso, dove è libero di ciò fare, o dove è loda, che nelle giaciture, ove di necessità si collide, di rado sarà avvenuto al Tasso di far che la pronuntia congiungendo le dittioni sortisca mal suono: anzi vi sono delle parole, che chiamano appiastricciate, che dolcissime suonano. Ma per dio che

²⁴ Many letters on Tasso's poem, including exchanges between Pellegrino and the Crusca, can be found in Solerti 1895, 211-254.

²⁵ 'these words were studiously mashed together – here a letter is added, here a letter is taken away – in order to make them sound ugly'.

trasformazioni mostruose delle voci del Tasso, da figliuoli di gratia, in figliuoli d'ira? (Salviati 1588, 232)²⁶

While the Crusca combined various words into a single phrase, Pellegrino wants them separated in the pronunciation through the use of a pause. He also identifies certain positions ('giaciture') in the verse where words can be combined ('si collide'). In contrast to the Crusca's absolute rejection of such collisions, Pellegrino claims that they result in a 'most sweet' sound. At stake, then, is not simply the clear articulation of sounds but the underlying aesthetic preferences for engaging in such practices in the first place.

In Pellegrino's view, these words were so ordered not by chance, but because Tasso intended to produce a specific phonetic texture which would enliven the verse and depict the subject matter more vividly: 'in *man tremante*, non si vede la cacofonia, e le liquide lettere mettono innanzi a gli occhi il tremar della mano?' (Salviati 1588, 232).²⁷ This statement is perhaps the most emblematic of the divergent sensibilities between Pellegrino and the Crusca. Whereas the Crusca censure Tasso's language for using a vocabulary replete with supposedly ugly words both harsh and dissonant, Pellegrino appears to celebrate Tasso's technique for using these same qualities.²⁸ For Pellegrino, *cacofonia* becomes, perhaps counter-intuitively, a term of praise. Such cacophony does not arise, however, from the combination of words but from their distinct articulation in the recitation of the text.²⁹

A similar, though much more caustic, critique of the Crusca's apparently deliberate manner of misreading Tasso's lines can be found in the writings of

²⁶ 'if one word is separated from another, and uttered with a pause, then they will not produce an ugly sound, especially in those positions in the verse, where it is possible, or where it is praiseworthy, to do so. In those positions where it is necessary to combine words, rarely does Tasso join together two sounds whose pronunciation ends up sounding ugly. On the contrary, there are words, which the academicians call 'mashed up', which sound most sweet. But, by God, what are these monstrous transformations of Tasso's words that make children of rage from children of grace?'

²⁷ 'with *man tremante*, do you not see how the cacophony and liquid letters place the trembling hand before your eyes?'

²⁸ Tasso himself, in his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* of the early 1560s, praises the production of a certain stylistic harshness ('asprezza'): 'S'accresce la magnificenza con l'asprezza, la quale nasce da concorso di vocali, da rompimenti di versi, da pienezza di consonanti nelle rime, dallo accrescere il numero nel fine del verso, o con parole sensibili per vigore d'accenti o per pienezza di consonanti' (1964, 45; 'Magnificence is increased with harshness, which arises from the combination of vowels, from the breaking of verses, from the fullness of consonants in the rhyme words, [and] from increasing the rhythm at the end of the line with distinctly felt words, either through the force of accents or the fullness of consonants'). An overview of the early modern theoretical discussion of epic 'harshness' can be found in Ramos 1992, in particular 243-282.

²⁹ For an extensive discussion of this emergent structure of feeling, often labeled 'Mannerism', see Quondam 1975, in particular 25-61.

Giulio Ottonelli (1550-1620). Born in the Modenese town of Fanano, Ottonelli was a magistrate, courtier for the d'Este family, and frequent antagonist to the Crusca.³⁰ He composed several works on the use of the vernacular, including a treatise in 1586 on the proper usage of titles for addressing popes, emperors, and princes.³¹ At the end of this particular work, he appended his contribution to the Tasso-Ariosto dispute, a brief work entitled *Difese della Gerusalemme liberata*. This text follows the same format of a composite dialogue as found in the Pellegrino-Crusca exchange. Though he deals exclusively with the Crusca's complaints regarding the language of the *Liberata*, his tone and manner of argumentation are far less temperate than Pellegrino's.

In a much more aggressive response to the Crusca's claims of unintelligible writing in the *Liberata*, Ottonelli moves from general mockery of the academicians as unlettered pedants to the more specific charge that they are purposefully mispronouncing the language and distorting the written word:

dove sono queste parole e questi parlari con legatura tanto distorta, aspra, sforzata, e spiacevole, che per comprenderli neanche basta veder con gli occhi la scrittura? Ai litterati e giudiciosi basta per intendere il Tasso, e gli altri buon poeti, udir solamente recitare i versi loro; ma a quei, che non hanno lettere, né giudicio ... non basta né udirgli, né leggerli più volte. (Salviati 1586, 122)³²

Despite the exaggerated rhetoric, Ottonelli makes an interesting point about the relationship between written and spoken texts. In his view, there should not exist such a vast divide between the printed page and the manner of recitation. He attributes the appearance of nonsense words to a more general inability to pronounce words correctly, ultimately contrasting the Crusca's *parole appiastricciate* with the rules for proper enunciation found in contemporary treatises on etiquette and behavior: 'E questi tali son quegli,

³⁰ The primary biography of Ottonelli remains Tiraboschi 1783, 365-400. For a brief description of Ottonelli's linguistic ideas see Diffley 1993.

³¹ Ottonelli's 1586 work on epithets is entitled *Discorso del S.^{or} Giulio Ottonelli sopra l'abuso del dire Sua Santità, Sua Maestà, Sua Altezza, Senza nominare il Papa, l'Imperatore, il Principe. Con le difese della Gierusalemme Liberata del Signor Torq. Tasso dall'opposizioni degli Accademici della Crusca*. This work appears to participate in the 'precedence controversy' between the d'Este and Medici dynasties, in favor of the former's claims to aristocratic nobility against the merely mercantile interests of the latter.

³² 'Where are these words and these ways of speaking bound together in such a distorted, harsh, forced, and unpleasant way that, to understand them, it is not even enough to see the writing with your own eyes? For literate and judicious men to understand Tasso and other good poets, it is enough only to hear their verses recited. For those who have neither letters nor judgment ... neither hearing nor reading the poets multiple times will suffice'. Citations of Ottonelli's work come from the response written by Lionardo Salviati under the guise of 'Carlo Fioretti' (Salviati 1586), which follows the same structure of alternating 'dialogue' between two texts.

che contro a gl'insegnamenti di Monsignor della Casa nel suo *Galateo*, inghiottendo le lettere, le sillabe, e le parole appiccate, e (come dice anche egli) impiastricciate insieme l'una con l'altra' (123).³³ Ottonelli thus associates the Crusca's style of recitation with the defective speech patterns enumerated by one of their fellow countrymen, Giovanni Della Casa. The rhetorical purpose of this reference seems clear: if the Crusca wish to establish themselves as a normative cultural force, they should avoid infringing on the customs established by their own previous Florentine authorities.

Ottonelli also claims that this linguistic *impiastricciamento* could just as easily be reproduced in reading canonical authors. He offers several examples taken from Petrarch and Dante, such as 'fera cuna' (*RVF* 174), 'man manca' (*RVF* 286), 'man, che trema' (*Par.* 13), and 'man mozza' (*Inf.* 28).³⁴ Ottonelli's list appears to miss the principal feature of the Crusca's *parole appiastricciate*, namely the elision of vowels. Instead, he simply provides examples of phrases with the words 'man' and 'cuna'. Ottonelli's general point is that the Crusca are deliberately contorting a normal manner of reading lines of poetry in order to condemn Tasso. In this case, 'normal' refers not to any daily spoken language, but rather the ways in which one customarily reads the established authors of the vernacular canon. In fact, in Ottonelli's view, even unlettered and unintelligent readers would correctly read the words of Tasso's poem, 'non confuse insieme, ma distinte, come deono esser lette'³⁵. He points specifically to their misreading of 'Al fianco Azzo,' which he claims is clearly written with two vowels. Written correctly – that is, with both vowels –, Tasso's line is not as offensive as the Crusca claim. But if the text had been written with an apostrophe at the end of *fianco*, would not be appropriate ('non sarebbe stato da comportare'; Salviati 1586, 125).

In general, Ottonelli's comments are much less subtle than they are openly polemical against the Crusca as Florentines, a fact which he believes should render them more knowledgeable about the vernacular. He comments wryly:

³³ 'These are men who, against the teachings of Monsignor della Casa in his *Galateo*, swallow letters, syllables, and neighboring words, thereby (as he also says) smashing together the one with the other'. Ottonelli apparently has in mind the section of Della Casa's *Galateo* dealing with proper pronunciation: 'se tu preferirai le lettere e le sillabe con una convenevole dolcezza, non a guisa di maestro, che insegni leggere e compitare a fanciulli, né anco le masticherai, né inghiottirai le appiccate et impiastricciate insieme l'una con l'altra; se tu arai dunque a memoria questi et altri sì fatti ammaestramenti, il tuo favellare sarà volentieri e con piacere ascoltato dalle persone' (Della Casa 1990, 38; emphasis added; 'if you pronounce letters and syllables with an appropriate sweetness, not like some schoolmaster teaching children how to read and spell; and if you do not chew them, nor swallow them stuck and smashed together; and if you keep in mind these and other teachings, your speech will be willingly and enjoyably heard by other people').

³⁴ Ottonelli's list of *parole appiastricciate* can be found in Salviati 1586, 124.

³⁵ 'not mixed together, but distinct, as they should be read'.

se essi non sanno la lingua loro natia niente meglio de' forestieri, co' quali dovrebbero pure haver vantaggio grandissimo, considerisi di gratia, quanto meglio possono sapere le cose di retorica e di poetica; le quali non dalle madri, o dalle balie, o dal popolo s'apparano, ma fa mestiere diligentemente cercarle ne' buoni scrittori. (129)³⁶

The main force of Ottonelli's argument thus lies in the implied irregularity of the Crusca's manner of recitation, which should depend on their familiarity with the literary language and customs developed in their very region. They misread and mispronounce the words in their bid for provincial superiority. No wonder then that the Crusca, and in particular their *de facto* leader Lionardo Salviati, would respond with equal vehemence, as we shall see shortly.

A more sophisticated response appears in the *Discorso intorno a' contrasti, che si fanno sopra la Gerusalemme Liberata* (1586), written by Orazio Lombardelli (1545-1608).³⁷ Born in Siena, where he spent the majority of his life, Lombardelli would ultimately become a major authority on the Italian language, in particular its orthography.³⁸ His views were much more moderate than the Crusca's crusade for rigid linguistic purity, and he was particularly interested in the *Liberata*, which he saw as the first true epic poem in the vernacular.³⁹ His *Discorso* is valuable in that it accurately and dispassionately summarizes the main issues of the polemic up to that point before undertaking a sustained defense of Tasso's poem.⁴⁰

Much like Pellegrino, Lombardelli finds that the Crusca are guilty of manipulating the letters and syllables of the poem in a way that conflicts with the written word. In his view, this approach to modifying the text according to one's peculiar tastes runs the risk of mutilating even the most canonical poets:

gli scritti nobili de' moderni si debbon legger con certa equità e riverenza, come si leggono quelli, che da gli antichi furono scritti felicemente ... se altrimenti faremo, cioè confondendo le parti, sottraendo o aggiugnendo lettere e sillabe, come che anco togliendo via o chiamando a forza gli accenti, non saranno sicuri né i Danti,

³⁶ 'if these men do not know their own native language better than foreigners, against whom they should have the greatest advantage, then consider how much better they know matters of rhetoric and poetics. These are things which are not learned from mothers, wetnurses, or the people, but they must be diligently sought in good writers.'

³⁷ For a discussion of Lombardelli in the polemic, see Sberlati 2001, 229-236.

³⁸ For Lombardelli's biography, see De Gregorio 2005.

³⁹ In a letter to Maurizio Cataneo (28 September, 1581), one of the earliest responses to the *Liberata*, Lombardelli writes, 'Confesserò, che l'opera del sig. Tasso non è per ognuno; che è quello, per lo che io vie più la stimo: non si vedendo (che io sappia) fin oggi nella nostra lingua poema eroico, il quale un ben letterato voglia legger più di una volta' (Rosini 1828b, 302: 'I will confess that Tasso's work is not for everyone, and this is the reason for which I most esteem it, since, as far as I know, in our language, up to now, there has not been a heroic poem that a well-lettered man would want to read more than once').

⁴⁰ For a summary of Lombardelli's work, see Weinberg 1963, 1025-1029.

né i Petrarci, né i Boccacci. Che, per esempio, s'io trovo *in pasto ai cani, tomba e cuna*, e leggo *impastacani*, e *tombeccuna* ... questo è un modo da corromper tutto il parlare. (1586, 122-123)⁴¹

Echoing Ottonelli's position, Lombardelli sees the Crusca treating Tasso's poem differently than they would their own revered authors. Without a coherent method, he claims, the Crusca jeopardize the entire Tuscan literary project. To prove this point, he presents a list of ugly sounds deliberately sought out ('a studio') in Petrarch's poetry, specifically RV/F 353 and 366. He thus offers his own 'voci appiasticciate': *checcantando* ('che cantando'), *vernallato* ('verno a lato'), *gravosaffanni* ('gravosi affanni'), *di solvestita* ('di sol vestita'), *spingaddir* ('spinge a dir'), *pregotinchina* ('prego t'inchina'), *belnumeruna* ('bel numero una'), *partintera* ('parte intera'), *vennassalvarne* ('venne a salvarne'), *drizzabbuonfine* ('drizzi a buon fine').⁴² These words offer examples much more in keeping with the Crusca's reading strategies than the ones found in Ottonelli's attempted list of 'mashed-up' words. Apart from eliding a large number of vowels, Lombardelli is also much more attentive to elements of 'spoken' language, such as reduplicated consonants (*checcantando*, *vennassalvarne*).

Yet Lombardelli does find that certain 'vocaboli impropri' are to be found in the poem; however, they can all be salvaged through either careful recitation or slight emendations to the text.⁴³ Most important, in his view, is the simple fact that language is always changing: 'la lingua è viva, ed in corso; e si dee giornalmente illustrare' (1586, 124).⁴⁴ In his view, the Crusca rely on a debilitating view of language in general which would prevent further development of literary techniques. In other words, Tasso's poem – and more specifically elements such as clashing vowels – represents an expansion of the expressive possibilities of the vernacular. This conception of the evolution of language situates Lombardelli squarely against the linguistic ideology of the Crusca, who see their task as not only preserving a specifically Florentine usage, but one limited by the literary authorities of the Trecento, namely Petrarch and Boccaccio.

⁴¹ 'The noble writings of the moderns must be read with a certain equity and reverence, much like we read those writings composed so felicitously by the ancients ... If we do otherwise – that is, by confusing the parts, by removing or adding letters and syllables, or by taking away or emphasizing the accents – neither the Dantes, nor the Petrarchs, nor the Boccaccios will be safe. For example, if I find *in pasto ai cani* and *tomba e cuna* and read them as *impastacani* and *tombeccuna* ... this is a way to corrupt all language'.

⁴² His *parole appiasticciate* can be found in Lombardelli 1586, 123.

⁴³ Lombardelli writes, 'De' vocaboli impropri vi ho trovati in tutto da dieci; e tutti con particolari, o ragioni, o scuse riceverebber difesa' (1586, 124; 'Concerning improper words, I have found ten of them in all, and all of them could be defended with specific justifications').

⁴⁴ 'Language is alive and in flux, and it must be ennobled daily'.

While the previous three responses all appeared in 1586, several years later a fourth writer, Malatesta Porta (1561-1629), also took issue with the Crusca's *parole appiastricciate*. Unlike the others, Porta offered a radically different approach. Civic administrator, intellectual, and lifelong resident of Rimini, Porta composed several dialogues on diverse literary subjects, including one dedicated to an analysis of the *Liberata*, entitled *Il Rossi* (1589).⁴⁵ In this work, a lengthy rebuttal of the extensive criticisms made against Tasso's poem, Porta emphasizes the innovative style of the work. Rather than engage in bitter polemic with the Crusca or refute their pedantic minutiae, Porta is much more interested in defending Tasso through an exploration of the efficacy and vividness of his poetic language.

Earlier defenders of Tasso, such as Pellegrino and Ottonelli, mention only in passing the effect of Tasso's grand style. These earlier responses depend largely on a theoretical discourse that seeks to correct misreadings and misunderstandings according to the correct interpretation of authorities such as Aristotle. Though he does engage in more theoretical questions, Porta focuses extensively on the effects of the *Liberata*'s linguistic, specifically acoustic, features and their effect on the reader's experience of the work.

As just one example, Porta praises the expressive force of the verse 'Così vien sospirioso, e così porta' (I, 49, 3: 'thus he goes sighing, and thus he carries'), one of the many lines maligned by the Crusca as possessing a 'suono dispiacevole' (Rosini 1828a, 200; 'an unpleasant sound'). According to Porta, this particular line, offering the first description of Tancredi in the poem, contains an abundance of the vowel 'O' in order to contribute more effectively to evoking the image of a lovesick knight:

in leggendosi, o recitandosi questo verso ... egli mi è avviso di veder l'innamorato Tancredi col capo chino, e con gli occhi in terra fissi mandar fuori ad ora ad ora centi sospiri dal più profondo petto, che quasi me ancora a sospirare invogliano: e giungendo alla voce *sospirioso*, cotale mi è forza pronunciarla, come sogliono que' loro sospiri i musici o per arte, o per ripigliare alquanto di spirito. (Rosini 1828a, 219)⁴⁶

For Porta, the verse's assonance is most effective when uttered with attention to the relationship between sound and subject matter. The vividness of the image leads almost automatically ('è forza') to a corresponding manner of

⁴⁵ For an introduction to Porta and his participation in the Tasso-Ariosto polemic, see Apollonio 2007.

⁴⁶ 'while reading or reciting this verse, ... it seemed that I could see the lovesick Tancredi with his head bowed, eyes fixed on the ground, repeatedly letting out deep sighs from his breast, all of which almost makes me want to sigh myself. And arriving at the word *sospirioso*, it is necessary for me to pronounce it like those sighs made by musicians, either done artfully or for recovering their breath'.

reading, which Porta further associates with the mannerisms of musicians, whose sighs punctuate and intensify their own performances.

Porta thus offers a manner of recitation diametrically opposed to that of the Crusca. The academicians recite according to some model imposed on the text, which we will further explore below. In contrast, Porta champions an approach derived entirely from his individual response to the poetic word. As such, the reader's sensitivity to the shifting quality of the text affects, perhaps even determines, the style of performance. Such a nuanced view of the potential sympathy between reader and text appears to be the first full-blooded alternative to the Crusca's approach, as opposed to the previous authors who simply reject the *parole appiastricciate* without detailing their own style of reading. Yet Porta does not present his manner of recitation as some innocuous second choice. Instead, he directly challenges the Crusca's approach to reading the written word, suggesting that these different practices do not sit in peaceful co-existence.

Porta's main arguments echo those already seen in the earlier three writers, namely that the Crusca unnecessarily disfigure the written text. Regarding the *parole appiastricciate*, he limits his critique to an analysis of one example, the word *lordodio*, a crude deformation of the phrase 'lor d'odio' in order to produce the sound 'lor do' ('filthy'). This word does not appear in the original list, though it is mentioned elsewhere by the Crusca.⁴⁷ Criticizing their pronunciation, Porta takes issue with the apparent disregard for the written phrase:

se non si appiastriccia a prova, non si legge talmente, che ne risulti cotale appiastricciamiento: perciocché la voce *lor* è separata così dal segno del secondo caso *di*, scritto senza lo apostrofo distesamente, come è regola migliore di ortografia e di poesia, che non se ne può far nascere, meno che troppo stiratamente, la voce *lord*; e parimente la voce *odio* cotale disgiunta, che non senza grande appiastricciamiento si può trarne *lordodio*: anzi mi pare, che a forza si faccia ritegno nella *lor*. Così negli altri versi, togliendosi via lettere a ciascuno, si appiastricciano le voci a pruova. (Rosini 1828a, 219)⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Earlier in their critique, the Crusca provide a list of 'versi bassi' found in Tasso's poem, adding: 'Dove c'è anche per giunta alla derrata il *lordodio*: benché di questi suoni, oltre ad ogni altro, sia tutto ripien quel poema' (Salviati 2588, 89; 'On top of that, there is also the phrase *lordodio*, though the whole poem is full of these sounds more than any other').

⁴⁸ 'if one does not combine words deliberately, one will not read in such a manner that produces such combinations, since the word *lor*, separated from the second word *di*, is written entirely without an apostrophe, as is the best rule in orthography and poetry. In this way it is not possible, unless reading overly quickly, to produce the word *lord*. Likewise, the word *odio* has such separation, that not without a great mashing together can one produce *lordodio*. On the contrary, it seems to me that one should necessarily pause with the word *lor*. Similarly, in the other verses, if one takes away letters, the words are deliberately mashed together'.

As with Tasso's earlier supporters, Porta expresses amazement that the Crusca appear to be deliberately removing letters from words. He refers specifically to the orthography, which must be taken into consideration in order to produce the proper execution of the verse. Moreover, precisely because *lor* (shortened for *loro*) is written without an apostrophe, as it normally is in poetic diction, the word should remain separated from the following phrase. In fact, Porta believes that there should be a moment of pause ('ritegno') on the first word in order to articulate appropriately the line.

Regarding the *parole appiasticciate* themselves, Porta limits his response to one particular instance, the potentially offensive sounds of 'al fianco Azzo' and Bernardo Tasso's 'che Azzolino':

non saranno di così spiacevole suono, se non si accorciano in essi a bello studio le voci; perciocché nel primo si legge la voce *fianco*, interamente scritta; nel secondo la *che* ultima, intera altresì leggiamo: le quali voci non accorciate per sottilizzamento, non porgono altrui cagione di biasimare que' versi ov'elle sono, anzi rinchiudono arte maggiore che non sarebbono, come se accorciate fossero senza cotale spiacevolezza di suono. (Rosini 1828a, 220)⁴⁹

He thus continues to berate the Crusca for a continued, purposeful distortion of the text, relying on a specific vocabulary to characterize their claimed manner of reading: 'a pruova', 'a studio', 'per sottilizzamento'. He contrasts this intentional mishandling of the verses with the poet's own greater art ('arte maggiore'): whereas the Crusca remove vowels and shorten words according to their pernicious design, Tasso makes use of those letters quite intentionally in order to produce a certain aesthetic effect. Indeed, for Porta, the use of contiguous vowels produces a certain 'wondrous amplification' of the poetry.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ 'these words would not be of such an unpleasant sound if they were not shortened so deliberately. Indeed, in the first verse, one should read the word *fianco* as it is written in its entirety. In the second verse, one also reads the last *che* in its entirety. If such words are not shortened through subtlety, there will be no reason to censure the verses; on the contrary, they contain greater art now, than if they were shortened and lacked such an unpleasantness of sound'. It is worth noting that earlier printings of Bernardo Tasso's *Amadigi* contain the reading 'Poi più che Neron empio, e ch'Azzolino' (B. Tasso 1581, 30). Porta actually inserts vowels which are not originally in the printed editions.

⁵⁰ Regarding the 'clashing vowels' present in 'al fianco Azzo', Porta writes: 'Brevemente adunque io dico, che se si accorciava la *che* ... egli venìa a farsi men grande: il che non accade, intera scrivendosi, come fu da quel valentuomo; perciocché insieme coll'altre voci ... aggiunge un certo aggrandimento maraviglioso, cagionato dall'ammontarsi le lettere in esso' (Rosini 1828a, 220; 'I shall briefly tell you therefore that if you were to shorten the *che* ... the verse would be less grand, which does not happen when written in its entirety, as was done by this fine man. Thus, together with the other words ... it adds a certain wondrous amplification caused by the accumulation of letters in the verse').

Porta's discussion thus shifts from the Crusca's errors of reading to the expressive virtues of 'clashing vowels' ('concorso delle vocali'). In his view, the presence of contiguous vowels elevates the style of a poem and should be employed by any poet seeking a 'fullness of sound' ('pienezza di suono').⁵¹ He emphasizes the effect of 'greatness' achieved through such a sound, noting that it should obviously be avoided if the poet wishes to evoke a sense of 'sweetness': 'Dove poi si volesse attendere alla dolcezza dell'orazione, anziché alla grandezza, io loderei bensì, che tale concorso ed ammontamento di vocali si fuggisse' (223).⁵² In other words, this figure should be used only when required by the subject matter and the intended effect on the reader or listener. Porta's emphasis on stylistic decorum further contrasts with the Crusca's indiscriminate truncation of vowels and words, which does not seem to take into account the variety of tones, registers, and inflections of the *Liberata*.

Taken together, these responses to the Crusca focus on several themes. First, the Crusca's approach is everywhere characterized as deliberate ('a studio'), rather than following a more natural or customary manner, becoming therefore injurious to the text itself. Second, in the view of Tasso's supporters, any reading of a line of poetry must involve attending to the written word, which already offers a first-level interpretation for the manner of recitation. Corollary to this principle is Porta's insistence on keeping in mind the sense of the verse, including its affective content, which should further determine the style of reading. These positions all suggest that the Crusca may be acting in bad faith regarding their approach to Tasso's text, and that their creation of mashed-up words is wholly arbitrary and manufactured for the purpose of belittling Tasso and his work. When we turn to look at the Crusca's responses to these remarks, they clearly stand by their earlier claims. More than that, they continue to insist on the naturalness of their pronunciation, namely by appealing to the authority of metrical scansion.

4. *The Crusca and Scansion*

The Crusca, primarily through the pen of Lionardo Salviati (1540-1589), responded in various ways to the criticisms levied against them. In response to Ottonelli's caustic *Discorso*, Salviati responded in a likewise pungent manner, adopting the pseudonym Carlo Fioretti to allow him more freedom

⁵¹ On 'fullness of sound' Porta writes, 'se molte [lettere] ve ne sieno, producono la pienezza del suono, di donde si cagiona la grandezza del verso' (Rosini 1828a, 223: 'If there are many [letters], they produce that fullness of sound that is the cause of greatness in the verse'). This discussion mirrors Tasso's own theory of epic style as outlined in his *Discorsi dell'arte poetica*, first printed in 1587; see note 28. Apollonio 2007 notes several close similarities between Tasso and Porta; however, the author focuses primarily on general statements about Aristotelian poetics. A more sustained analysis of Porta's stylistic ideology is warranted.

⁵² 'Wherever one aims at sweetness of speech, rather than greatness, I would prefer that such a sequence and accumulation of vowels be avoided'.

as a polemicist. His *Considerazioni* (1586), like much of the other documents in the controversy, addressed each of his opponent's points in turn, although most of 'Fioretti's' remarks seldom move beyond the level of invective.⁵³ Despite the paucity of substantive comments, we do occasionally find traces of the Crusca's reading practices through Salviati's rejection of Ottonelli's suggestions of the proper way to 'mandar fuori i versi' (Salviati 1586, 125; 'pronounce the verses').

In opposition to Ottonelli's earlier claim that one should read words clearly, Salviati-Fioretti retorts that the Crusca read in the only manner available, that is, naturally. When Ottonelli criticizes the pronunciation of the word 'tombeccuna', emphasizing that the written text must be respected, Salviati replies, 'Dovendosi legger distesamente, e secondo il natural flusso del verso, non ne può uscire altro suono' (124).⁵⁴ Against Ottonelli's recommendation for the 'distinct' articulation of individual sounds, Salviati argues for the uninterrupted, fluid reading of the verse. It appears that, in Salviati's view, the overemphasis of separate sounds leads to a disruption of the larger unit of rhythm, namely the line as a whole. Unfortunately, Salviati does not elaborate further on the nature of this rhythm, nor address Ottonelli's complaint that the Crusca ignore the written text and the presence of punctuation.⁵⁵

⁵³ Salviati often insults Ottonelli directly: 'Dite il vero per vostra fede: di questi diciotto mesi, che voi avete consumati in impastando il vostro discorso, contr'agli Accademici della Crusca, quante settimane siete voi stato ad assottigliarvi su le facezie del Gonnella, del Barlacchi, e del Carafulla, per arricchirvi di questa arguzia? Ma per tutto ciò conveniva anche pensarvi più' (Salviati 1586, 76-77; 'By your faith, tell us the truth: out of these eighteen months spent kneading your discourse against the Academicians of the Crusca, how many weeks did you spend sharpening your wits with the jokes of Gonnella, Barlacchi, and Carafulla to come up with this brilliance? For all that work, perhaps you should have spent more time thinking about it').

⁵⁴ 'Since one must read continuously, and according to the natural flow of the verse, no other sound can emerge'.

⁵⁵ Tasso, responding to the Crusca in his *Apologia* (1585), echoes the arguments made by his various supporters, 'Non era necessario congiungerle [i.e. le parole] in quella guisa, e confonder la scrittura' (Salviati 1585, 95; 'It was not necessary to join [the words] in this manner and mix up the writing'). Apart from this, Tasso does not respond to the Crusca's *parole appiasticciate*. Salviati, in response, writes, 'All'orecchie d'assai persone forse non era necessario, ma farle sentire a voi, al qual dite, che non dispiacciono, non si poteva mancar di farlo' (96; 'For the ears of most people perhaps it was not necessary, but to make you hear these words, which you say are not unpleasant, it couldn't be avoided'). Salviati passes again over issues of writing, further suggesting that the Crusca's manner of recitation is widely acceptable (i.e. by 'many people'). For more on the exchange between Tasso and Salviati, see Godard 2003. Tasso's own conceptions of elision, vowel collision, and synalepha are important to a more general discussion of literary sensibilities, but they are outside the scope of this article. For Tasso's theories of epic style, see Grosser 1992 and Vitale 2007.

The approach that the Crusca use becomes clearer in their second response to Pellegrino, the *Nfarinato secondo* (Salviati 1588).⁵⁶ Replying to the claim that the written word requires a corresponding shift in utterance, the Crusca admit that one could, in fact, be more generous toward Tasso's text:

Tra le voci appiastricciate, che si notarono, ve n'ha alcune, che perché si scrivano diversamente, rendono pur sempre quel suono stesso, che dicono gli Accademici: conciosiacosa che tanto riesca nella pronunzia *che canuto* quanto *checcanuto, or degni*, quanto *ordegni* ... e tutti gli altri di questa fatta. Qualch'un'altra con la scrittura, per lo contrario, e con le pose ch'ammette il verso, è capace di medicina; potendosi scrivere, e pronunziare *rischio ignoto, Tomba, e cuna*, e s'altre v'ha di cotai. (Salviati 1588, 233)⁵⁷

From this response emerges the recurrent tension between writing and pronunciation. The Crusca's first claim is that their mode of reading necessarily produces certain sounds, regardless of the written text (e.g. *checcanuto, ordegni*). They further acknowledge that, despite earlier complaints, one could both write *and* pronounce certain phrases in the same manner ('rischio ignoto', 'tomba, e cuna'). Yet they also qualify this second type of 'medicine' by limiting such instances to certain positions within the line, where certain pauses ('pose') are permitted by the verse itself. From this discussion of the 'verso' as the structure which determines not only placement but pronunciation, it becomes clear that the Crusca have not been indiscriminately eliding vowels and combining words. Instead, their manner of recitation insists on giving priority to the construction of the line as a rhythmical unit.

Yet the Crusca also claim that there do exist two general tendencies in recitation: on the one hand, a leisurely and slow approach, and on the other, an unimpeded reading of the entire line:

Di queste ultime [i.e. 'rischio ignoto', 'tomba, e cuna'] dice la Crusca, che il non ispesso uso può tollerarsi, ma nel fermo, e quasi continuo qual sembra loro in Torquato Tasso, estimano che i versi, non solo mandandogli fuor con lentezza, e agiatamente, ma esprimendogli a tutto corso, e secondo il natural flusso, che gli misura, e come dicono i Latini scandendogli, debbano esser privi di cotai suoni. (Salviati 1588, 233-234)⁵⁸

⁵⁶ A description of the *Nfarinato secondo*, and its relationship to Pellegrino's earlier arguments, can be found in Weinberg 1963, 1039-1042.

⁵⁷ 'Among the mashed-up words that were noted, there are some that – even if written differently – would still produce the same sound that the Academicians claim. Indeed, the pronunciation of *che canuto* would still be *checcanuto, or degni* would be *ordegni* ... and all the others of this type. By contrast, some of the other words can be cured through writing and with the pauses allowed by the verse. One could both write and pronounce: *rischio ignoto; tomba, e cuna*; and other similar words'.

⁵⁸ 'Regarding such words [e.g. 'rischio ignoto', 'tomba, e cuna'], the Crusca believe that occasional use is tolerable; however, concerning the constant and continuous use that seems

This contrast suggests that the former, slower manner corresponds to the positions argued by Tasso's various supporters, whereby the reader carefully articulates the written in order to distinguish individual sounds. The Crusca do recognize this as one possible way of uttering a verse. However, they clearly favor the second, 'natural' manner, which approaches each line of poetry as a unit meant to be read in its entirety ('a tutto corso'). This emphasis on an uninterrupted flow echoes Salviati's earlier response to Ottonelli, where he argues for reading 'distesamente' ('continuously'), rather than focusing on individual words as distinct ('distinte'). Although they concede the possibility of reading differently, they nevertheless claim that the sound of clashing vowels should still be avoided altogether. In their view, even if one were to read as Tasso's supporters claim to do, the aesthetically unpleasing vowel sequences ought to be avoided as a general rule.

More importantly, the Crusca claim that the second method of recitation is the truly 'natural' manner. While in the response to Ottonelli the notion of natural flow ('natural flusso') was left unexplored, here the Crusca legitimize the 'naturalness' of their approach by appealing to the authority of scansion. They establish further the authority of this argument by referring to the classical, specifically Latin, origin of this approach, which allows one to derive the 'measure' of each verse.⁵⁹ As a result of this repeated emphasis on the prosody of the entire line, together with their appeal to scansion, we can begin to reconsider the Crusca's list of mashed-up words. Indeed, once we view their vowel elision as a specifically metrical issue, we can attempt to reconstruct the Crusca's application of scansion as it reveals itself through the *parole appiasticciate*.

In order to recover the model used as the basis for the Crusca's recitation, we can apply the principles of modern Italian scansion, itself derived from the general efforts to standardize meter in the sixteenth century.⁶⁰ Scansion, in its most general sense, is the mapping of stressed syllables in a line of poetry in order to identify its metrical structure and describe its rhythm.⁶¹ The

to them to be in Torquato Tasso, they believe that verses should lack such sounds, not only when the verses are pronounced slowly and leisurely, but also when expressed in their entirety, according to the natural flow that determines their measure, that is – as they say in Latin – when following scansion.

⁵⁹ The Crusca's emphasis on a regular way of reading the line, including respecting certain 'giaciture' and 'pose', follows near contemporary metrical discussions, such as the treatises of Trissino and Ruscelli. A history of debates over scansion is outside the scope of this study, but for an overview of various treatises in the Cinquecento, see Abramov-van Rijk 2009, 171-236.

⁶⁰ For an analysis of the metrical tendencies in sixteenth-century Italy, see Bausi and Martelli 1993, in particular 147-175.

⁶¹ Menichetti defines scansion with reference to the activity of the reader: 'it can be defined as the more or less conscious attempt to capture, in the blink of an eye, the way

basic metrical category of a line of Italian poetry derives from the number of syllables and the position of the final accent, also known as the *ictus*. For example, the hendecasyllable, the most common and flexible of Italian lines, has a necessary *ictus* on the tenth syllable. The position of other accents on the preceding, semantically significant words (that is, not words such as definite articles or conjunctions) further determines the type of hendecasyllable under consideration. The metrical structure thus derives from available grammatical accents, rather than imposing an *a priori* structure onto a line. This approach is further complicated by the fact that contiguous vowels are almost always counted towards the same metrical syllable, even if they are ultimately separated in pronunciation. As such, multiple vowels within, and across, words are reduced to a single syllable in scansion. This metrical figure, if it involves contiguous vowels across word boundaries, is called synalepha.⁶² It is distinct from elision, which instead subtracts vowels from the line, effectively eliminating them from both scansion and recitation.

Since scansion necessarily takes into account the placement of syllabic stress in a line, we can make use of the *parole appiasticciate* and their suppressed syllabic accents in order to reconstruct a model of the Crusca's approach to reciting the *Liberata*. By contrasting such a model with a modern scanning of the same lines, we place into sharper relief their particular reading practice. As a first example, let us take the original line for *tombeccuna*, noting all of the available syllabic positions (while also reducing vowels according to synalepha):

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
A l'essequie, a i natali ha **tomba**, e **cuna**.

By mapping the accents of semantically significant words within these available syllables, this line presents metrical stress on syllabic positions 3-6-8-10.⁶³ The final *ictus*, here on syllable 10 (**cuna**), identifies this as a hendecasyllable. Other features, namely the presence of an available accent on syllable 6 (**natali**) and the lack of stress on syllable 4, categorize the line as an *endecasillabo a maiore*. Secondary accents on 3 (**essequie**) and 8 (**tomba**) further distinguishes the line as one of the common sub-categories of the *maiore* group, named according to the internal syllabic positions, in this case 3-6-8.

in which each line is constructed regarding its essential metrical features ... In order to be correct, the scanning of a traditional line implies ... at a minimum, an instinctual knowledge of "models" (1993, 56-57).

⁶² While synalepha refers to the contraction of vowels across words, the related figure of syneresis indicates a similar vocalic reduction within individual words. For the purposes of our study, syneresis is less important for understanding the Crusca's approach to recitation, although it doubtless plays a role.

⁶³ For a discussion of the different metrical typologies in the *Liberata*, see Grosser 2014.

It is important to note that, in modern practice, the syllabic reduction produced through synalepha exists in theory and not at the level of concrete realization.⁶⁴ As a result, the recitation of this line could potentially read a total of fifteen syllables, depending on the speed with which contiguous vowels are uttered. It is in this regard that the Crusca's practice differs from a modern approach. In their reading of this line, the previously theoretical synalepha translates into an effective elision of the vowels. Thus, *tombecuna* emerges as their reading of the end of the line.

The structure of *tombecuna* implies another element of the Crusca's pronunciation which does not normally exist in modern scansion, namely the minimization – possibly full suppression – of the accent on syllable 8. Today we would characterize *tomba* as possessing a secondary accent, perhaps leading to a diminished weight in the line's execution, though not to its complete suppression. In the Crusca's rendition, however, *tomba* is fully elided into both the following conjunctive *e* and the final *cuna*. The reason for this appears to be quite simply that the principal *ictus* of the line, contained in *cuna*, has a dramatic effect on the preceding words. By thus prioritizing *cuna*, the Crusca all but erases the rhythmic and phonetic potential of the secondary accents of the preceding words.

We can thus conclude our analysis by returning to the *parole appiasticciate*, viewing them not as arbitrary instances of elision, but rather as consistent elements of their metrical reading of a line. To understand better the tendencies in their prosody, we can also loosely group the *parole appiasticciate* according to the position of the 'suppressed' syllable in the line. In the following list, modern scansion is noted with the diminished syllable in square brackets:

tombecuna	A l'essequie, a i natali ha tomba, e cuna	3 – 6 – [8]
incultavene	Misto, e di boscareccie inculte avene	1 – 6 – [8]
rischiognoto	E tacito, e guardingo al rischio ignoto	2 – 6 – [8]
tendindi	Impon, che sian le tende indi munite	2 – 4 – [6] – 7
comproton	Genero il compra Otton con larga dote	1 – [4] – 6 – 8
alfiancazzo	C'hor l'è al fianco Azzo quinto, hor la seconda	2 – [3] – 4 – 6
impastacani	Ch' in pasto a' cani le sue membri i neghi	[2] – 4 – 8
vibrei	Vibra ei , presa nel mezo, una zagaglia	[1] – 2 – 3 – 6

The Crusca's elided syllables seem to appear in any position across the span of the entire hendecasyllable, although a small majority (3) appear at the end of the line. In these cases, syllable 8 – despite belonging to semantically significant words ('tomba', 'inculte', 'rischio') – is absorbed into the final word containing the final *ictus*. Two other examples suggest that the Crusca may observe a bipartite division of the line, an aspect of scansion which typically

⁶⁴ An overview of these issues can be found in Menichetti 1993, 51-66.

exists at the theoretical level, rather than in practice.⁶⁵ For instance, the words *comproton* and *impastacani* sit clearly at the boundary of a first hemistich. Much like the elision of line-final syllables, these significant words ('compra'; 'pasto') are absorbed into a principal *ictus* ('**Otton**'; '**cani**').

In the remaining examples, the *parole appiastricciate* result from the simplification of rhythmic complexity, wherein multiple contiguous stressed syllables undergo a peculiar shift in accentuation. With *tendindi*, a line with the accents on 2-4-6-7 is simplified to 2-4-7, a more common sub-category of *endecasillabo a minore* that avoids adjacent stressed syllables. There are also two lines with three possibly adjacent accents, a problematic metrical phenomenon that continues to frustrate metrical scholars today.⁶⁶ As a result, with *alfiancazzo*, a line with a potential metrical scheme of 2-3-4-6 becomes 2-4-6. Likewise, with *vibreï*, the Crusca simplify a line of 1-2-3-6 into 2-3-6.

Lastly, there are four *parole appiastricciate* which occur not because of elision but simply due to pronouncing the words in rapid succession. In some cases, the absorbed words are not semantically significant enough for accentuation within the line, noted by an asterisk.

ordegni	O' degno sol, cui d'ubidire hor degni	2 – 4 – 8 – [*9]
mantremante	Nè più governa il fren la man tremante	4 – 6 – [8] – 10
checcanuto	Ad un'huom, che canuto havea da canto	3 – [*4] – 6 – 8 – 10
crinchincima	E 'l crin, ch'in cima al capo havea raccolto	[2] – 4 – 6 – 8 – 10

None of these words undergo the same elision as the previous group, and their 'appiastricciamento' seems to result more from an infelicitous linguistic construction than any deliberate mishandling of the verse on the part of the Crusca. The 'absorbed' syllables, especially *hor* and *che*, have much less semantic weight than the earlier examples. As a result, it is less surprising that they would be easily joined with following words in the execution of the line. Nevertheless, it is still clear that, as with the previous elided examples, the weight of the *ictus* exerts a palpable influence on the preceding syllables. *Crinchincima*, in particular, suggests that, in their reading of the line, the Crusca emphasized the stress on 'cima', rather than the potential pause suggested by both the syntax and punctuation following 'crin'. Given the

⁶⁵ Current opinions on bipartite lines are divided, especially with regards to the existence of the caesura. In the sixteenth century, several theorists and writers acknowledge the existence of the caesura, even suggesting that it be respected in pronunciation. For a theoretical discussion, see Menichetti 1993; for historical examples, see Abramov-van Rijk 2009.

⁶⁶ J. Grosser, in the introduction to his study of the meter of the *Liberata*, emphasizes that the only *a priori* principle of his method of scansion is the 'regola dei tre *ictus*'. He also admits that the *Liberata* presents numerous moments of ambiguity, where one must decide the best way to de-accentuate words in order to avoid scanning three contiguous accents. (2014, 6-24).

position of both *checcanuto* and *crinchincima* at the end of potential hemistichs, these words confirm the pattern noticed in the previous examples, namely the influence of the *ictus* on the execution of the line.

The Crusca's emphasis on reading 'distesamente' and 'a tutto corso' thus corresponds to a specific practice, rather than simply serving as a rhetorical strategy to refute Tasso's supporters. While the latter argue for the expressive value of individual sounds and letters, the Crusca insist on the absolute priority of the metrical *ictus* in the execution of the line. This specifically metrical emphasis necessarily diminishes other elements of the line, such as the subtle interplay of more local sounds, as well as the meaning of the words themselves. As a result, the Crusca's claim to be using a 'natural' approach raises further questions. In their transcriptions of the *parole appiastricciate*, they attempt to demonstrate the naturalness of their reading through attention to phonetic modifications which mirror more quotidian patterns of speech. Yet they also appeal to the authority of scansion, a theoretical mapping of the accentuation of a line that does not correlate with 'normal' spoken language. The 'naturalness' of their manner of recitation may thus not refer to common, spoken usage, but rather more generally to Florentine customs surrounding the reading of poems in *ottava rima*. Given the ubiquity of public performances of poems in *ottava rima* in late sixteenth-century Italy, it is not difficult to imagine the existence of a manner of reading that emphasized the uninterrupted execution of verse.⁶⁷

The Crusca, by their very nature as an incipient cultural institution, represent an attempt to consolidate a vernacular literary language in keeping with a kind of archaic purism. Moreover, they were attempting to establish a cultural hegemony rooted in the authority of Florence and Florentine customs.⁶⁸ Any claims for 'naturalness' are therefore thoroughly normative and regionally specific in character. In contrast, we find *letterati* from Naples, Siena, Fanano, and Rimini, resisting the Crusca and their ambitions to become the final authorities on vernacular letters. As such, the *Liberata* offers a site of contention, where opposing camps argue over the control and correct method of writing and experiencing poetry. This opposition allows us to trace the emergence of various structures of feeling of late sixteenth-century poets and their audiences.⁶⁹ This particular exchange concerning

⁶⁷ *Ottava rima* appeared in a larger number of different types of public performance, from recitations of chivalric romance to the news. Daily exposure to *ottava rima* was thus unavoidable. For recent studies related to the performance of this metrical scheme, see Degl'Innocenti 2008; Rospocher and Salzberg 2012; Goethals 2016; McIlvanna 2017.

⁶⁸ As Di Sacco notes, 'The Crusca's purism, by refusing the expression "lingua toscana" and defending the municipal peculiarities of the "volgar fiorentino" (as Salviati defines it), ended up limiting itself to a miserly and provincial usage with no future' (1997, 122).

⁶⁹ Much has been made of the radical changes in poetic practice in the late sixteenth century relative to the broader cultural movements of 'Mannerism' and 'Baroque'. See

parole appiastricciate reveals certain reading strategies, together with their attendant sensibilities and modes of consumption. On the one hand, the Crusca emphasize the recitation of a poem before a group of listeners, while on the other, defenders of the *Liberata*, such as Malatesta Porta, focus on their own personal experience.⁷⁰ Tasso's poem becomes a pretext for debating the relationship between the abstract level of scansion and the execution of poetry, an issue that remains open and troublesome even today.

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Ferroni and Quondam 1973; Quondam 1975; Baldassarri 1983. It is again worth pointing out that the Crusca's complaints about Tasso's style in a sense confirm his own declared stylistic program, in particular his emphasis on harshness (see note 28).

⁷⁰ Di Sacco comments, "The controversy quickly left the level of language to move to other areas of critical reflection, thereby revealing its true face, which involved a different idea of culture and aesthetic sensibility" (1997, 124). Di Sacco's analysis of such aesthetic sensibilities focuses almost largely on Aristotelian categories, such as unity of action, verisimilitude, the role of history, and so forth. It is our hope to have shifted attention in a different, though complementary, direction by emphasizing the ways in which the interlocutors of the polemic might have consumed and enjoyed poetry.

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Animated Pulpits: On Performative Preaching in Seventeenth-Century Naples

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Abstract

The article foregrounds a number of cases of performative preaching in Naples under Spanish rule with particular attention to the specific form of competition between preachers and professional actors. In the churches and streets of the city, preaching was ever present, nourished by a mix of theatre and sacred oratory, a near realisation of the concept of *théâtre sur le théâtre*. Examples of this phenomenon are to be found in the cultural transformation of certain actors and impresarios into hypocritical, bigoted preachers and the dazzling voice of Giacomo Lubrano, the Jesuit poet, who created the rhetorical machinery of Neapolitan-style preaching.

Keywords: Acting, Actor-Preacher Competition, Naples under Spanish Rule, Preaching, Voice

The voice was a call for life, but, above all, for attention in the maze of streets in seventeenth-century Naples. The voice laid claim to the space of attention and that of emotion in a city resounding with words in different languages, ranging from the Neapolitan dialect of the indigenous populace, to the Spanish of the rulers, the Tuscan variety of Italian in the speech of the wealthier classes and the Latin of the Catholic Church, as well as the languages spoken by so-called ‘foreigners’. Thus the city, second only to Paris for the number of inhabitants and arguably first for that of different ethnic groups, was thronged with preachers in both streets and pulpits.¹

For religious orators the distinction between open air and closed-in spaces meant two levels of prestige, the former preparatory for the latter, as well as two different performative modes. Only after the experience of the streets and passing the relevant tests (beginning with human and meteorological unpredictability) could they aspire to the pulpits in the protective semi-

¹ On Naples’ cultural environment see Megale 2017; on performances from pulpits, see, in particular, 306-311. Megale’s essay has been translated from Italian by John Denton.

darkness of churches, no longer subject to any kind of risk. Whether in town or church, the preacher fashioned words in his mouth, shaping them, trying them out, intoning them, so as to overcome any interference from onlookers: the din of chattering voices, shouting and prattling, aware, in the words of St Paul, no one is *oudèn áphonon* ('no language'), that is, 'without one's own voice' (1 Corinthians 14:10). Just as in the case of an actor's monologue, the main aim of the words proclaimed from the heights of the marble church pulpits or the specially erected structures in strategic positions in the city, frequented by all sorts of people, was to captivate, or rather mesmerise the listeners, issuing dire warnings to those over whom they held sway.

We have no documented evidence of the types of voice involved. We should think of them as thundering, high, well-pitched rather than soft or shrill, able to command respect, since, on each occasion, the preacher had to face the serious problem of audibility, which was obviously easier to solve in apses and naves built with acoustics in mind, rather than in the squares or broad spaces of the cramped Neapolitan cityscape, architecturally prone to the dispersion of sound.

However, among the varied seventeenth-century evidence concerning the voice, one example emerges capable of illustrating this complex phenomenon, which was so crucial for the success of the preacher's words. In the last year of the seventeenth century, Andrea Perrucci, originally from Palermo, but educated in Naples, a poet at the Theatre of San Bartolomeo and author of religious works (in the form of both tragedies and oratorios), in his 1699 treatise entitled *Dell'arte rappresentativa premeditata, ed all'improvviso* (*A Treatise on Acting from Memory and by Improvisation*) devoted a chapter to this decisive subject, stating, among other things:

Esce la voce dalle fauci per la ripercussione dell'aria, e se queste saranno tumide la strangolano, se ottuse la oscurano, se rare l'esperano, e se sono sconvolte la rendono uguale al suono di organi rotti. Si distingue la voce per quantità e qualità, per quantità è grande o piccola; per qualità è chiara, fosca, piena, sottile, leggera, aspra, rotta, sciolta, dura, flessibile, candida, ottusa, acuta, grave e fluvida. La buona voce è quella, ch'è dolce, libera e sonora, uguale al tintinnio dell'argento e dell'acciaio, ma che non faccia un istrepitoso suono. (1961, 116; Part I, Rule 10)²

² 'The voice emerges from the throat because of the reverberation of the air. If the throat is swollen, it strangles the voice; if thick, it dims it; if thin, it irritates it, and if upset, it makes it sound like broken instruments. The voice can be characterised by quantity and quality. With regard to quantity, it can be loud or soft; as for quality, it can be clear, dark, full, subtle, light, rough, broken, relaxed, hard, flexible, pure, dull, high, low or fluent. A good voice is one that is sweet, free, and resonant, like the tinkling of silver or steel; it does not make a roaring noise, and is not brittle, like broken, untuned bells, which can in no way adapt to the ear, but will offend it instead ...' (Engl. trans. 2007, 52-53).

In his thorough treatment of the subject, Perrucci, whose legal background accustomed him to attracting his listeners' attention by means of words, effectively defined the voice as 'l'interpretazione della mente' (1961, 116) ('the interpreter of the mind'; Engl. trans. 2007, 54). Previously, Carlo Borromeo, who overcame his stutter to become an excellent preacher, had been well aware of this, though, perfectly coherent with his attack on the theatre, he had chosen to preach from the altar rather than the pulpit. The reason was that he did not want his body to be in any way contaminated by a place reminiscent of the actors' theatricality he detested.

Thus, the seventeenth-century preacher mixed the most daring rhetorical procedures with performative practices, measuring them out and shaping them, so as to *delectare et docere* holy writ in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, turning to the practice that, for centuries, had indoctrinated the illiterate masses by means of the spoken and repeated word. The appeal of the problematic mastery of orality could be recorded by transcription, which was usually immediate: while the preacher pronounced his words resounding with Catholic teaching, a scribe, often squatting on the pulpit steps, half-hidden from the throng of the faithful, wrote them down, amid the flickering of candles and clouds of incense.

In the 1630s, in the streets and alleyways of Naples, mingling with the professionals and imposters, there will have been a group of preachers with a recent background as impresarios and actors. Before becoming lay brethren attached to the order of Piarist fathers who preached to the populace in the Duchesca district, Andrea della Valle, Francesco Longavilla, and Orazio Graziullo were, respectively, the impresario and actors at the 'Stanza della Duchesca' venue, opened in 1613 in the district of the same name, and in operation successfully up to 1626. It was the arrival in Naples of Giuseppe Calasanzio (founder of the above-mentioned religious order) that determined the closure of the theatrical venue and its associated recreational activities; and that, thanks to support from the Spanish viceroy and powerful urban authorities, allowed the opening of the first state school for poor children in the kingdom, to replace the theatre and rooms used for playing ball games.

Andrea della Valle, Calasanzio's first adversary, did not give in when confronted by the authority of the future saint from Spain and his successful educational model, which had already been tested in Rome, but took over its mode of operation. After selling him the theatre, which soon adjoined the first church of the Piarist order in the Kingdom of Naples built next to the school, at a high price, he successfully put his theatre impresario expertise at the service of the spread of the Catholic faith. His example was followed by the above-mentioned actors who, after removing their theatrical gear, turned to the task of winning over souls for God. Their art was transformed and miraculously cancelled the contrast (i.e. Theatre *vs.* Heaven) on which the ecclesiastical condemnation of the stage and its actors had been based in the modern age: an exceptional example of switching allegiance and, at the

same time, cultural resilience, grounded in the shift of the meaning of the verbal art and its performance.³

If in this historical context actor-preacher competition had become less intense and settled down on the performance level, nevertheless, more than once the preachers clashed with the actors in the streets: the evangelical word *vs.* the theatrical one, an individual performance *vs.* a group one, the pulpit *vs.* the stage. A symbolic anecdote, reported by Benedetto Croce, even referred to Pulcinella as a rival of the crucifix. The former allegedly attracted crowds with his irresistible gags, laughter overpowering catechism to the extent of making the preacher, who was so outclassed and humiliated, unsuccessfully try to dissuade the onlookers, by shouting: 'Over here – this is the real Pulcinella!' (1992, 125). The scene of a preacher outclassed by an actor, which probably never took place, is symptomatic of performative psychotechniques widely employed to attract (and maintain) the hearers' attention. Although it cannot be attributed to a precise temporal context, the episode clarifies assimilation between two systems of 'entertainment', each with different aims but similar methods, oral communication making the attraction of opposites possible, actual practice demolishing the thought barriers erected by theology to separate the two worlds. It is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the repeated attacks by the Church on the world of theatrical make-believe – in Naples as well as elsewhere – at the time of the Counter-Reformation could be, in its extreme forms, the very substance of the clash between preachers and actors, or hide glaring traces of a communication conflict, with no holds barred, between the two sides of active intellectuals.

As in a system of correspondences, the rule of reciprocity controlled the world of both actors and preachers, and they were well aware of this fact. 'I gesuiti sono i comici della Germania' (Burattelli, Landolfi and Zinanni 1993, I, 142; 'The Jesuits are the actors of Germany') was the baffled comment of Giovan Battista Andreini, one of the seventeenth century's leading actors, playwrights and theatre company leaders, writing from Prague to Ercole Marliani on 4th December 1627, thus revealing the relentless, widespread competition from the clergy. Further support for this view was to come, more than a century later, from the Rev. Laurence Sterne in Paris, when, in the leading theatres, he heard the faded, weak voices of the actors, while those of the preachers in Catholic churches were worthy of the best theatrical professionals (Frasca 2015, 323). This competition could even turn into reciprocal imitation, spurred on by the Catholic clergy, whose aim was the spread of the instructions of the Council of Trent to combat the unsettling consequences of the Lutheran Reformation; and by actors, who needed to expand their audiences and steer well clear of the fear of boredom, that was always lying in wait in the theatrical world, and could strike a mortal

³ For the history of the theatre and its actors see Megale 2017, 199-220.

blow. The extent to which the entrenchment of sacred theatre depended on sacred eloquence is an illuminating reflection of this cultural process, in the century that made of the prose of preaching ‘l’espressione più genuina e più violenta del ... concettismo’ (Pozzi 1954, 13).⁴ Thus, the title of the above-mentioned treatise by Andrea Perrucci is not at all surprising. In the last year of the seventeenth century, when eloquence from the pulpit had penetrated and enriched all the means of communication from literature to the theatre, the Neapolitan printer Michele Luigi Muzio published the work with a title significantly divided into two parts: *Dell’arte rappresentativa, premeditata ed all’improvviso parti due. Giovevole non solo a chi si diletta di rappresentare; ma a’ predicatori, oratori, accademici, e curiosi* (‘A Treatise on Acting from Memory and by Improvisation in Two Parts. Helpful not only to those who enjoy acting, but also to preachers, orators, academics and the curious’). The subtitle indicates the target readership presumably as widespread as the use of prescriptive acting and performative rules indispensable for those capable of weaving words and voicing them: professionals and amateurs in the theatre, preachers, orators, academics and ‘the curious’, i.e. the whole world of oral communication.

In modern times, beyond theological differences, shepherds of souls have always had to face applause seekers: they competed for audiences and stole techniques from each other. The permeability inherent in performative acts from the pulpit in relation to the theatre centred on the use of the performative word, measured out in pauses and accumulations, accompanied by amplified gestures, enlivened by improvised phonetic variations, enriched by the artificiality of baroque *concettismo*, rhetorical devices stimulated by the implicit challenge of theatrical symbolism like ‘tante coorti di vocaboli’ (‘the unending cohorts of words’), metaphorically comparable, according to Giovanni Pozzi, to a ‘procession’ (Pozzi, in Marino 1960, 46, 48). In Naples, the Franciscan friar Francesco Panigarola was well aware of this. He was well known for his ‘rutilanti prediche’ (‘fiery sermons’), maintaining that ‘il christiano dicatore sempre dice cose grandi’ (‘the Christian speaker always speaks great things’), in line with the principle of ‘mediocrità artificiosa’ (‘affected mediocrity’; Giunta 2012, 110).

Preachers, like actors and those who were able to speak in public, could have their own fans, and had to travel as a consequence of their reputation. It was by no accident that Giovanni Azzolini, the Neapolitan Theatine father, originally from the Salento region in southern Apulia, complained about this to his readers, forced – like many others – ‘col piè sù la staffa’ (‘keeping his feet in the stirrups’), ‘con animo sfacendato et agiato sui libri’ (Azzolini 1647, ‘A chi legge’ [To the Reader]; ‘unable to devote his time to books in peace and quiet’). The regret expressed by this great preacher, whose language was strongly influenced by Marinism (the ornate style of Giovan Battista Marino),

⁴ ‘the most genuine and forceful expression of ... *concettismo*’.

in an attempt to justify the small scale of his published work, is very close to the stereotyped complaints of the *Commedia dell'Arte* actors concerning the hardships of travel. Competed for like stars, as had previously been the case with the early generations of professional actors, the best preachers were hired in advance by the churches of major cities for the most important dates in the liturgical calendar. The church of the Annunciation in Naples, for example, welcomed the Venetian preacher Serafino Collini, specially called in from Mantua owing to his extraordinary public speaking skills. He was so popular with the Neapolitan congregation that his funeral homilies from his time in Mantua were hastily printed, under the title *La regia tomba* ('The Regal Tomb'), by Lazzaro Scorriglio in 1615, with enough examples of the words 'da lui composte, e recitate' ('composed and proclaimed by him'; Collini 1615, title-page) for specific preaching performances able to satisfy the better educated citizens of Naples. A kind of 'instant book' publishing industry sprang up in connection with eloquent sermons, almost as if they were commercial products nourishing the fashion for panegyrics.

The sermons preached by the most incisive orators teamed with images from the performing arts, both owing to the festive atmosphere in which preaching was required by the liturgy, and to the informal use of lexical items often borrowed from the despised world of the theatre. A rich catalogue of these performances could be put together. It is enough to mention *I divini spettacoli nella notte di Natale* ('The Divine Performances on Christmas Eve'), and *Il Mostro scatenato per le Quarant'ore del carnevale* ('The Monster Let Loose for the 40 Hours of Carnival') in the *Orationi sacre* by Azzolini (1633) to understand, beginning with the titles, the close link of the sacred with the profane, pulpit with stage. This was clearly visible in the continual crossover between the two phenomena: methods and techniques were taken from the theatre, but with selective eyes and ears. Even Louis de Cressolles, when, in his *Vacationes autumnales* (1620), he recorded the preacher's repertoire of gestures, prescribed that the latter should avoid certain examples of the actor's body language: the head not moving up and down, for example, a typical stance of the comic Zannis in the *Commedia dell'Arte* (Fumaroli 1990, 268). So, at the technical level, the orator's eloquent body, the direct incarnation of the *Logos*, following the unbeatable interpretation of Marc Fumaroli, is moulded in a mirror relationship with the actor's body, opposites irresistibly attracting one another, both sharing the same public, communicative media.

From simple raised platforms or pulpits, surrounded by the *chiaroscuro* effects of large paintings, amid clouds of incense, in the dimness interrupted by shafts of light and the flickering flames of candles, surrounded by the varied colours of hangings, the preachers became closer and closer to entertainers, and ended up by being themselves an active part of the spectacle offered by baroque churches, certain sources of astonishment and 'maraviglia' ('wonder'). And so great was the performative impact of the preachers, whatever religious

order they belonged to, that they attracted, as is well known, a long series of attacks, to the extent of inducing Pope Innocent XI Odelscalchi to publish, in 1680, an *Admonitio ad verbi Dei concionatores* to condemn the plague ('pestis') of the histrionic word ('tamquam histriones'), versifying ('conversi ad fabulas uti poëtae'), empty and ornamental ('inanis facundiae lenocinio'), bizarre and ineffective ('per quaestiones curiosas ac paradoxa vana'; Forni 2011, 29).

But, despite the official directives of the Roman Catholic Church, towards the end of the century, Spanish-ruled Naples, experiencing the widespread phenomenon of preaching, was the scene of a near manifestation of the concept of *théâtre sur le théâtre*. The dazzling voice of Giacomo Lubrano, the Jesuit poet, was mainly responsible for this invention. He created the 'Neapolitan style of preaching', rhetorical machinery comparable in precision and complexity with the stage machinery of the time. Both sacred and profane, it was an expression of the extreme baroque style,⁵ a synthesis of the theatre and sacred oratory. Lubrano was so well known that his sermons were preached from pulpits in Venice, as well as Rome, Naples, Sicily and the rest of the kingdom, and his Lenten compositions were published posthumously in 1703. 'Molte prediche furono fatte dall'Autore nell'immaturo dell'età giovanile, molte nell'improvviso o delle congiunture, o del tempo, altre per aderire al genio vario degli Uditori, altre per ubbidire a' comandi espressi de' padroni e degli amici' (Lubrano 1703, 2).⁶ These words appear in the address to the *Lettor cortese* (Gentle Reader), appropriately presenting a summary of the ground covered by his preaching. This Neapolitan Jesuit was an illusionist of the word, by means of which he enthralled his hearers, changing their moods and directing their feelings. He did not fail to distance himself, with perfect Counter-Reformation rigour, from ephemeral festive decorations in churches, warning, following St Ambrose, that 'Ecclesia non theatrale negotium est'; see – on this subject – his sermon warning against the use of rich decorations customarily hung in Naples on the occasion of the great feast of Corpus Christi and the authoritative sources he referred to:

Non cascano gli occhi a chi ha Fede nel vedere nell'Ottava di solennità così santa esposte nella pubblica piazza pitture favoleggiate dall'arte con disegni d'impudicizia, non vi volendo più a sensuali per prenderne copia, che un guardo. Tutta la pompa svanisce in merenduoie di sbevazzamenti nelle finestre in immodestie curiose: che apparati idolatri di libidine o intessute negli arazzi, o colorite ne' quadri! Questa è Fede di Crocifisso, che nell'adorarlo l'offende? Questa è Fede argumentum non apparentium, piena di vagheggiamenti, di cianciumi. Intendiamola con Ambrogio:

⁵ For clarification of this point see Frasca 2002.

⁶ 'Many sermons were preached by the Author, in the immaturity of youth, many improvised owing to circumstances or time, others to suit the hearers' sensibility, others to obey the requests of employers and friends'.

Ecclesia non teatrale negotium est. Omnis gloria eius ab intus. Intendiamola con Agostino che non tutti i concorsi alla feste del Sacramento appartengono alla misericordia di Cristo, anzi lo provocano a gastighi mentre lo strapazzano con finta di applausi. Non omnes qui portant Sacramenta Christi, spectant ad misericordiam Christi. Intendiamolo dal vescovo Scipione che è una contradizione sacrilega pregiarsi del titolo de' Christiani e caricar Cristo d'ingiurie. Hæc est difficillima improbitas, nomine Christiani appellari, et Christum impugnare. Non facciam che di noi si averri: Filii autem Regni ejicientur in tenebras exteriores. (Lubrano 1703, 27)⁷

The rivalry between the world of preachers and that of actors, the latter having chosen as their patron the Roman actor St. Genesius, who, while making fun of baptism by miming it, had been converted to Christianity and subsequently suffered martyrdom, also included street entertainers. They were feared enemies in some urban environments, to the extent that Lubrano himself, at one point in one of his Lenten sermons, when complaining about the absence of the whole of Naples from churches, included the 'vagabondi', who 'Senton le prediche continove dalle gesticolazioni mimiche di un saltimbanco, dalle cantilene di squaltrinacce [*sic*], senza tedio, senza stanchezza ritti in piè fino al tramontare del sole, allo scoperto dell'aria infreddata' (23).⁸ This antagonism lasted well into the eighteenth century, and was challenged, on occasion, by effects lifted directly from theatrical practice. A good example of this is the sermon on death, during which the Redemptorist Father Ludovico Altorelli, recalling similar previous performances, prescribed that the preacher – a kind of new Hamlet – should conduct a dialogue with a skull, not without sufficient stage lighting and vocalism as in the theatre:

Voglio far venire un altro predicatore su questo pulpito, vostro paesano, ma venuto dall'altro mondo e voglio farvi fare da esso la predica della morte ... e in ciò dire

⁷ 'Do not the faithful lower their gaze, when seeing, during the Octave of such a holy feast, fanciful paintings with immodest figures, so that only a glance is enough to those who are inclined to sensuality to perceive a great amount of such images. Ceremonial is reduced to drinking bouts at the windows with curious immodest acts: what idolatrous decorations full of lust woven into tapestries or coloured in pictures! Is this faith in the Crucified Christ, which in worshipping Him offends Him? This is faith *argumentum non apparentium* full of vanities. Let us follow Ambrose: *Ecclesia non teatrale negotium est. Omnis gloria eius ab intus*. Let us follow Augustine when he says that all the throngs at the feasts of the Blessed Sacrament belong to the mercy of Christ. On the contrary, they provoke Him to punishment while they overwhelm Him with feigned acclamations. *Non omnes qui portant Sacramenta Christi, spectant ad misericordiam Christi*. Let us follow Bishop Scipio in saying that it is a sacrilegious contradiction to call oneself a Christian and hurl insults at Christ. *Hæc est difficillima improbitas, nomine Christiani appellari, et Christum impugnare*. May it not be true for us *Filii autem Regni ejicientur in tenebras exterioris*'.

⁸ 'Listen to the continuous preachings with the mimicking gesticulations of an acrobat, the crooning of whores without losing interest, without growing tired, on their feet till sunset, out in the cold'.

prenderà le torce accese e dirà al popolo via! Prima che venghi quell'altro predicatore cercate perdono a Gesù Cristo, sì, correte a Maria Santissima, e intanto subito prenderà il teschio di morte e lo girerà con le torce accese avanti, e dopo farà un dialogo di domande fra lui e il teschio, avvertendo però che quando parla al teschio si volterà al medesimo e quando poi farà rispondere il teschio, si volterà al popolo. Si avverte pure che la risposta che lui stesso darà da parte del teschio, la darà sempre a terzo tono di perorazione. (De Rosa 1983, 215)⁹

The staging of the *facies hypocratica*, with a voice coming from the afterlife, was intended to terrorise, encourage to avoid sin and educate: the faithful, petrified by this vision and chilled by what they heard was thus ready for any kind of penance. For Deleuze, 'the essence of the Baroque entails neither falling into nor emerging from illusion but rather *realizing* something in illusion itself, or of tying it to a spiritual *presence* that endows its spaces and fragments with a collective unity' (2006, 143).

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⁹ 'I want to invite another preacher to this pulpit, a fellow countryman of yours, though he comes from the world of the dead and I want him to deliver the sermon on death ... and when saying this he will take the burning torches and will tell the people Go! Before the other preacher arrives seek pardon from Jesus Christ, yes, run to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and he will then take the dead man's skull and will turn it with the burning torches in front of it, and will conduct a dialogue between him and the skull, warning that when he speaks to the skull he will turn towards it and when he gets the skull to answer he will turn to the people. The answer that he will give from the skull will be delivered in the third pleading tone'.

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‘Donna il cui carne gli animi soggioga’: Eighteenth-Century Italian Women Improvisers

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Abstract

The article, by way of the careers of two of the most famous eighteenth century Italian improvisers, Corilla Olimpica and Teresa Bandettini, investigates the way in which favourable socio-cultural circumstances allowed a number of Italian women living in the eighteenth century to make use of the widespread fashion of their time for extempore poetry to excel in an occupation, gaining success together with acceptance and advancement in society, thus taking one of the earliest steps forward in the history of women’s liberation.

Keywords: Corilla Olimpica, Extempore Poetry, Fortunata Fantastici Sulgher, Poetic Improvisation, Teresa Bandettini

1. *Introduction*

Io non avrei mai avuto idea dell’entusiasmo estemporaneo, se non avessi veduto il bel fuoco e non avessi udito i bei trasporti di Corilla. Se questi pregi sieno comuni a tutte le donne poetesse per la maggiore sensibilità de’ loro nervi, per la maggiore elasticità, e delicatezza delle loro fibre, e per qualche stravagante prodigioso rapporto dell’utero colla mente, io non so; ma so bene, che Ella mi è sembrata sempre superiore ne’ suoi voli, ne’ suoi trasporti, nelle sue immagini, e nelle sue idee a tutti gli uomini poeti, che ho sentito in suo confronto, e lungi da Lei. (Amaduzzi and De’ Giorgi Bertola 2005, 215)¹

¹ ‘I would never have had an idea of extempore enthusiasm, if I had not witnessed the fine fire and heard the fine ardour of Corilla. Whether these virtues be common to all women poets, owing to the greater sensitivity of their nerves, the greater elasticity and delicacy of their constitution and to some bizarre, exceptional relationship between the uterus and the mind, I know not; but I do know well that she has always seemed to me superior in her flights, her ardour, her images and her ideas to all the male poets I have heard in competition with her, and alone’. Giordano’s essay has been translated from Italian by John Denton.

These are the words used by Giovanni Cristofano Amaduzzi, in a letter dated 29 April 1777 to abbé Aurelio De' Giorgi Bertola, when singing the praises of Corilla Olimpica, the most highly celebrated, popular and envied woman extempore poet in the eighteenth century. The cornerstone of so much admiration was the 'enthusiasm' generated in audiences by Corilla's 'fine fire' and 'fine ardour'. Gifts that lay behind her superiority to 'all male poets' were sensitivity, delicacy, and 'some bizarre, exceptional relationship between the uterus and the mind'. Thus Amaduzzi took the overpowering emotions aroused in audiences to be the characteristic aspect of the female improviser's extempore performance, acknowledging Corilla's singularity as a specifically feminine quality. However, when listing her virtues, her 'ideas', i.e. the originality of her poetry, come last, after her 'flights', 'ardour' and 'images'.

The clues provided by this eyewitness account are very useful departure points in understanding the phenomenon of eighteenth-century poetic improvisation in Italy, a genre in which women not only found room for manoeuvre but also excelled.² Considering the period in which extempore poetry 'became customary and set up a tradition' (Croce 1918, 219), i.e. 1700 to 1850, among the leading names in the genre we find a substantial female group. From Bernardino Perfetti, the first of the major professional improvisers in the eighteenth century, to Giuseppe Regali and Giannina Milli, the last ones, together with other famous names such as Francesco Gianni, the Napoleonic Imperial poet and Tommaso Sgricci, who improvised whole tragedies, among a large group of minor figures,³ the names Maria Maddalena Morelli (Corilla Olimpica), Teresa Bandettini and Fortunata Fantastici Sulgher stand out.

The aim of this article is to investigate one of the earliest stages in the long, hard struggle for women's liberation, limited to eighteenth-century extempore poetry, which is quite distinct from the nineteenth-century patriotic brand, with special attention devoted to the former's two leading female representatives: Corilla Olimpica and Teresa Bandettini.

² For bibliography on eighteenth-century extempore poetry, apart from information in the writings of contemporary Italian *letterati* and foreign travellers on the *Grand Tour*, as well as entries covering individual male or female improvisers and Arcadian shepherds/shepherdesses in the major biographical reference works and the relevant chapters in the leading histories of Italian literature, see Vitagliano 1905; Croce 1918 and 1949; Gentili 1980; Di Ricco 1990 and Fernow 2004.

³ Reading the names in the index of the study by Vitagliano, among the long since forgotten female improvisers we find: Teresa Bacchini, Maria Beoti, Beatrice Bugelli dal Pian Degli Ontani, a certain Gazzeri, Teresa Gualandi Gnoli, Lucrezia Landi Mazzei, Maria Domenica Mazzetti Forster (aka la Menichina di Legnaja), Anna Maria Parisotti, Livia Sarchi, Rosa Taddei (1905, 141-142 and 181-188). We can add Livia Accarigi and Emilia Ballati Orlandini (see Giordano 1994, 23-32 and 37-39).

2. *A Hybrid Art*

Extempore poetry has very ancient origins, with roots in various periods and cultural settings, both popular and high, illiterate and literate. It is a poetic genre in which the creative process is 'improvised' on themes suggested by members of the audience during a performance. In the eighteenth century, though retaining all the features of an impromptu performance, it was not only a leftover from a period characterised by orality, but also had points of contact with more orthodox, 'noble' literature, inasmuch as the breeding ground of improvisation lay in poetic material from the Greek and Roman traditions, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, fifteenth-sixteenth century chivalric epics, and Renaissance and Arcadian verse. This 'literary' material, cleverly or mechanically made use of by the performer, was supported by the persuasive resources of orality, without which it would have shown all its poor essence. Thus, eighteenth-century improvised poetry was certainly linked to the literary environment, though retaining orality as its main feature (of 'composition', since improvisation is extempore, of 'communication', that is, performance, and 'transmission', which is left to memory), as well as the performer's competence and appeal and audience involvement, all typically theatrical. So we are dealing with a hybrid phenomenon, halfway between poetry and theatre. It was on this ambiguous balance that the great reputation of the eighteenth-century extempore poet relied in his/her role as a new bard of ancient ancestry and at the same time the product of the taste and historical, political and social conditions of his/her own time.

As a crucial link between the *ancien régime* and the contemporary world, the eighteenth century witnessed the passage from a phase of great uncertainty and immobility to one of excitement, an urge for renewal, which led to profound socio-cultural changes impacting both the figure and role of the members of the literary profession, as well as the reputation of the female intellect, and, more generally, women's access to culture. During the eighteenth century, with the spread of less reactionary ideas about the education of girls, the ever growing circulation of printed books and the increase of fashionable salons and Arcadian colonies to which women were admitted, the opportunities for them to make contact with the literary environment increased.

Although widespread female education was a long way off, a number of books on the subject were published in the eighteenth century,⁴ which did not deny women's right to education in principle. One of the subjects 'allowed' was literature, which, together with music and dancing, made up the triad of the *artes foemininae*, which were accepted, since they belonged to

⁴ For a general survey of eighteenth-century didactic/moral writings concerning women's education see Guerci 1987 and 1988.

the domain of entertainment. During the century, albeit limited mostly to the nobility, women's education became ever more common, though its end was seen as a way to improve their role as family members and certainly not as a stage in their social emancipation. The age-old prejudice limiting the fair sex to 'needle and spindle' was hard to demolish; confined to the private sphere, women had to excel in the difficult art of daily life involving, apart from domestic duties, denial of the right to personal dreams and aspirations, exhibiting perfect altruism, unending understanding and total compliance.

With the spread of the Arcadian Academy, which, by favouring the good taste of the classics in contrast with baroque excess, introduced poetry to high society, the various academies were founded and the first salons opened their doors, presided over by a lady. Following the example of the Parisian *salons*, in Rome, Milan, Naples, Venice, Padua, Genoa, Bologna and, only towards the end of the century, Florence, after the beginning of the rule of the House of Lorraine, the salons of a number of upper-class ladies became the meeting places for civilised Italian society. In these new 'courts', where high culture was ensured by the presence of scholars, scientists, artists and intellectuals, women found a new freedom: they could converse, entertain, express their opinions openly, without losing any aspect of their femininity, and avoid being accused of overwhelming ambition or immorality. Women were also admitted to the various 'Arcadian colonies', which, during the century, spread out from Rome to many other Italian towns, though a misogynous regulation demanded 'nobiltà dei costumi', a minimum age of twenty-four and poetic experience, while men were only expected to be 'eruditi'. These environments were halfway between the public and private spheres, establishing 'appropriate' spaces for discussion and meeting that were less selective from the social and cultural points of view than the salons, thus facilitating the birth of an initial female intellectual élite.⁵ More a social than a strictly educational phenomenon, the abstract Arcadia also permitted fledgling 'letterati' dressed up as shepherds and shepherdesses to play with versifying gallant, satirical, scientific and celebratory themes.

Furthermore, the eighteenth century was the period of the greatest splendour of opera which, by linking two heterogeneous arts like poetry and music, was not too distant from extempore poetic performances; the latter were actually often accompanied by music. It is no coincidence that the opponents of improvisation used the same moral-intellectual arguments underpinning the hostility to opera. The rationalism of the period led to demoting music to a lower rank among the arts, considering it irrational, with no cognitive value since it was empty of concepts, aiming only to delight the senses. A stage work in which poetry was at the service of music thus seemed hybrid, incoherent, implausible and frivolous.

⁵ On the Arcadian shepherdesses see the valuable data base *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*, <www.arcadia.uzh.ch>, containing plentiful bio-bibliographical and critical material on the subject.

3. *A Profession*

In a century in which taste was dictated by Arcadian ideals, operatic arias could be heard in theatres and courts, and in which salons, academies and fashionable venues were favoured by a frivolous, idle society, the extempore poetry phenomenon flourished. It was in this sociable context that women, in line with their well-established reputation as hostesses, found room to manoeuvre.

However, these favourable socio-cultural circumstances were not sufficient to explain the wide-ranging nature of this phenomenon. A large group of women managed to exploit this new fashion, intelligently creating a profession, reaching success in fashionable society, as well as recognition and social upgrading. Making use of the Arcadian stamp of approval on taste by way of presenting a way of creating poetry seen from the viewpoint of technique and mastery of the classical literary tradition, the female improviser made her appearance as a professional who spoke, wrote and acted, applauded by her audience. Her repertoire was grounded in solid academic study and general knowledge, enabling her to deal with any subject proposed, good knowledge of metre, so as to create her verse quickly, and a good memory. But in her improvisation she used all the techniques making up the appeal of an actress, whose advantages she enjoyed while also running the risks involved. While their poetess colleagues, by publishing a sonnet in one of the multitude of collections of poetry, gained limited recognition, the women improvisers made money out of their art, which was being established as a real profession. This was how they gained financial independence from men and the family. By emancipation they became 'public' celebrities. Even the most admired queens of the salons held conversations in their home environment, in the private sphere which had imprisoned women for centuries. The female improvisers, on the other hand, like actresses, performed in public, toured Italy, appeared on stage, held master classes in improvisation for a fee; in short, they left the private sphere to face the public domain. Actually, the female improviser gave more performances in private, rather than public environments: theatres, salons and academies being private spaces. But the way in which she presented herself was different. While the lady who ruled over her salon was a 'private' hostess, because she held conversations in her own home, with a carefully selected group of people, simply for pleasure, the female improviser presented herself as a 'public' entertainer, since she was entering other people's private spaces, where she did not know her audience and offered her talents in exchange for money or gifts. But a woman performing in public becomes a 'public woman', just a short step from being considered a prostitute. The new freedom won by these improvisers inevitably led to the accusations of immorality that had always made life difficult for women working in theatres.

Right from the first-stage performances by the comediennes of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, actresses were taken to be 'siren enchantresses', 'Satan's snares', temptresses of lust, the woman who 'vende a prezzo vile su per le scene,

i gesti e la favella' (De' Sommi 1968, 95).⁶ All biographical notes accompanying printed verses by a female improviser, this also being true for poetesses and all women writers in general, deliberately foreground the honesty, purity, great loving care for the family shown by her, together with her literary-artistic merits, the explicit purpose being to distance the traces of immorality inevitably linked to her profession. Adele Vitagliano, for example, wrote of Fortunata Fantastici Sulgher: 'as a poetess she was not that much superior to her contemporaries, but had the merit of linking literary skill with domestic virtues, making her family happy and intelligently educating her children' (1905, 139-140). It is also significant that Teresa Bandettini tried to 'legitimise' the profession recently achieved by publishing learned translations, thought out rhymes, tragedies and epic poems, thus aiming to elevate with a literary 'licence' a fame that she herself acknowledged to be ephemeral and doubtful.⁷

4. *'Carmine Temira edocet, oblectatque Corilla, / Tu quocumque animos vis, Amarilly, rapis'*

Corilla Olimpica (Maria Maddalena Morelli, Pistoia, 1727-1800) *oblectat*, Fortunata Fantastici Sulgher (in Arcadia, Temira Parraside, Livorno, 1755-1824) *edocet*, Teresa Bandettini (in Arcadia, Amarilli Etrusca, Lucca, 1763-1837), *rapis*. This is how Father Pagnini, an eminent Greek scholar from Pistoia, depicted the three most important eighteenth-century women improvisers, linking their names in the Latin couplet quoted in the title of the present sub-section, which in the free translation of the same author reads:

Con gli improvvisi accenti
 Temira spande di saper torrenti
 Corilla in ogni petto
 Mirabile diffonde alto diletto:
 E Tu Amarilli, puoi,
 Gli spiriti rapir ovunque vuoi. (Maylender 1926-1930, I, 277)⁸

⁶ 'Sells for vile money on the stage gestures and language'. This is how an anonymous H.N.A. described an actress to Leone De' Sommi.

⁷ Together with the large number of verses in the various collections of eulogies, Bandettini published a translation from the Greek of *Paralippomeni di Omero di Quinto Smirneo Calabro*, the tragedies *Polidoro* and *Rosmunda in Ravenna* and the poem *La Teseide*. For a thorough bibliography of Bandettini's printed works see the above mentioned data base *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*, <www.arcadia.uzh.ch>.

⁸ 'With her impromptu words / Temira effuses torrents of knowledge, / Corilla in every heart / spreads marvellous high delight: / and you, Amarilli, can / ravish our minds and take them wherever you wish'.

Humble origins, premature intelligence, obstinacy, perseverance and boundless ambition were common to the two most famous women improvisers of the eighteenth century. Neither Corilla nor Amarilli were of noble birth or from rich families, and it was arguably this very humble condition that lay behind their decision to take up the profession of improviser.

The case of Bandettini is particularly informative, as an example of ambitious self-instruction which was to turn her from being an illiterate dancer into the favourite of educated high society, a legitimate, salaried professional.⁹ She was acclaimed, admired and idolised by the most illustrious men of her time, the extempore art being a true profession, in exchange for immediate monetary reward or fruitful protection, which bestowed upon her glory, honours and unending eulogies, but also resulted in disappointment, compromises and limitations. 'Quanto è sterile l'alloro!' (Di Ricco 1990, 45)¹⁰ she wrote disappointed to Bettinelli, after one of many let downs. She could live on her activities as an extempore poetess, but was forced to go on ever longer and exhausting tours to support her 'sickly' husband and son, to the extent of 'overstretching' her talent. Obligated to write opera libretti which she herself considered 'monstrous' in the hope of being employed by the Austrian court as reader to the Empress and Court Poet, Teresa was forced to sell her art only to pander to the taste and interests of her time.¹¹ Like Isabella Andreini in the early seventeenth century who, by carefully building up her public image and the distribution of printed works, had freed actresses from

⁹ See Vannuccini 1899, 501-526 and 732-756; Vitagliano 1905, 98-115; Di Ricco 1990; Giordano 1994, 40-58, and the above-mentioned data base *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*, <www.arcadia.uzh.ch>.

¹⁰ 'When the laurel wreath is sterile'. Letter dated 9 September 1795. Bandettini's letters to Bettinelli can be consulted in the Biblioteca Comunale in Mantua, Fondo Bettinelli, busta 2, *Teresa Bandettini*; while those from Bettinelli to Bandettini are in the Biblioteca Statale in Lucca, Ms. 644.

¹¹ In a letter to Bettinelli, from Vienna, dated 14 January 1802, she wrote: 'Ora sto componendo un dramma per questo Teatro, anzi un mostro poi che vogliono che si rinunzi al buon senso. Avrà per titolo *La morte di Ettore*; devo storpiare Omero se voglio servire ai pregiudizi chiamati *convenienze teatrali* de' due eroi che rappresentano Achille ed Ettore. È forza però piegare alla necessità e sacrificare a certe viste particolari l'onore delle Muse e d'Apollone. Il Metastasio fu fortunato, egli scriveva in tempi in cui la musica era ligia della poesia; ora questa è una schiava tiranneggiata dal capriccio di poche note in cadenza. Da banda adunque gli scrupoli, io farò un'opera come un intercalare con le rime obbligate, e ballerò sulla corda co' piè legati' (Di Ricco 1990, 25n.; 'I am now writing a libretto for this Theatre, or rather a monstrosity in which they want me to sacrifice common sense. Its title will be *La morte di Ettore*; I must distort Homer if I wish to bow to the prejudices called *convenienze teatrali* of the two heroes representing Achilles and Hector. One must however obey necessity and sacrifice to certain sights the honour of the Muses and Apollo. Metastasio was fortunate. He wrote in times in which music was the servant of poetry; now the latter is a slave at the mercy of the whim of a few notes. Away with all qualms therefore, and I shall write a libretto with set rhymes, dancing on a rope with bound feet').

accusations of being whores and had managed to go down in history as the famous *amorosa* of the 'Compagnia dei Gelosi',¹² Amarilli placed all her hopes in her epic poem entitled *Teseide*, which was the source of her intellectual credentials, and dreamed of going down in history as the heir to the glory of Ariosto and Tasso.

For Corilla Olimpica, who experienced an ambiguous but uproarious renown and led the lifestyle of a princess, adored and protected by the most illustrious celebrities of her time, the career as an improviser was, on the other hand, an ongoing test of ambition, an unending race to overtake herself.¹³ With a free, independent character, as the first woman to be crowned in the Capitol in Rome and become a court poetess, Maria Maddalena Morelli was quite capable of managing her fame, nonchalantly surviving outrageous scandals, of which she was often the innocent victim:

Fu la prediletta di principi, di regine, di imperatori; per lei profusero carmi e madrigali letterati e poeti; perfino il pontefice Pio VI permise che sul suo capo si ponesse quella simbolica fronda di alloro che avea cinto il capo superbo d'un Petrarca. E dire che la sua vita privata fu delle più irregolari: separata dal marito, dignitario spagnolo, noncurante dell'unico figliuolo, a quando a quando amante di questo o di quell'abate, di questo o di quel principe, vagò di corte in corte a fianco di un Ginori o di un principe Gonzaga, senza che l'essere espulsa talvolta da una città o da uno stato la sconcertasse punto. (Villani 1915, 450)¹⁴

Adventuress and *prima donna*, the forerunner of the *femme fatale* in later centuries, she was soon followed as a model by generations of poetesses and

¹² Isabella Andreini also seems to have been an improviser. Her son, Giovan Battista Andreini, relates how his mother: 'In Roma fu non solo dipinta, ma coronata d'alloro in simulacro colorato fra 'l Tasso e 'l Petrarca, alor che doppo una mensa fattale dall'Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini doveran pur presenti sei cardinali sapientissimi, il Tasso, il Cavalier de' Pazzi, l'Ongaro et altri poeti preclari, sonettando e scrivendo improvvisi, la stessa, dopo il Tasso, ne portò il primo vanto' (Andreini 1984, 28; 'in Rome she was not only painted but crowned with a laurel wreath in effigy between portraits of Tasso and Petrarch, after a banquet offered by the Most Excellent, Most Reverend Cardinal Cinzio Aldobrandini in the presence of six most learned cardinals, Tasso, Cavalier de' Pazzi, Ongaro and other famous poets writing and improvising sonnets in a contest in which Andreini came second only to Tasso').

¹³ See Ademollo 1887, Vitagliano 1905, 85-97, Giordano 1994, 119-137 and 201-237, Amaduzzi 2000, Fabbri 2002 and data base *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*, <www.arcadia.uzh.ch>.

¹⁴ 'She was the favourite of princes, queens and emperors. Men of letters and poets showered her with odes and madrigals. Even Pope Pius VI allowed her to be crowned with the symbolic laurel wreath which had been placed on the proud head of Petrarch. And yet her private life was unorthodox: separated from her husband, a Spanish dignitary, neglecting her only son, on several occasions the lover of this or that abbé, this or that prince, she wandered from court to court together with a Ginori or a Prince Gonzaga, without turning a hair when she was expelled from a town or state'.

women writers. Some believe that she inspired the novel *Corinne ou l'Italie* (1807) in which Madame de Staël, by way of the story of Corinna, an extempore woman poet, who plays instruments, sings, dances, draws, acts and engages in conversation, criticised the exclusion of women with intellectual, literary and artistic aspirations.

Fortunata Fantastici Sulgher had a somewhat different, less tumultuous career.¹⁵ She was more learned than Corilla and Amarilli (Temira *edocet*), had begun studying Greek and Latin and other foreign languages as a girl, as well as history, philosophy, morality, botany and even anatomy and achieved 'una certa reputazione' ('a certain reputation'), especially in Florence, where, every Wednesday, she opened the rooms of her house near the Ponte Vecchio 'al fiore dei cittadini e dei forestieri' (Pera 1897, 8; 'to the cream of local citizens and visitors'). She became particularly famous for her 'facili e piacevoli' ('easy and pleasant') poems, even though they were often 'infarciti di erudizione soverchia e di ingombrante mitologia che mortificavano la vivezza del sentimento' (Vitagliano 1905, 138; 'stuffed with excessive erudition and cumbersome mythology which upset the liveliness of feeling'). She is remembered for an extempore competition, which, in December 1749, saw her in a duet with Teresa Bandettini in a dialogue on the mythological theme of 'Hero and Leander' in the presence of Vittorio Alfieri. We have an exceptional eye-witness account of this performance, in the shape of a letter written by the otherwise unknown Dr Piccioli to his friend Giovanni Rosini:

Amico caro,

io sono uscito in questo momento pazzo, fanatico, sorpreso al segno del delirio dal famoso improvviso. Che piena di Bellezze, che cose grandi, inarrivabili, divine, che ho sentito stasera! Mai più mi troverò a tanto ... Questa è la più grande improvvisatrice, che io abbia sentita; anche più di Gianni; ha la vivacità di fantasia com'esso, ma una Locuzione, una frase così poetica, che il Suo linguaggio è quello dei Classici; maggior economia d'esso nelle immagini, giacché tu sai che esso era troppo ardito, maggior proprietà nell'Epitetare, nel quale genere m'ha sorpreso, giacché che tu sai che gli improvvisatori prendono ordinariamente quello che si presenta; ed Essa pare che scelga sempre il più proprio, il più conveniente, e il più vero nel soggetto ... Arrivò alle otto, e un quarto, la Bandettini, essendosi fatta aspettare, perché l'ora destinata era vanti l'otto ... Eccole tutte e due a sedere dirimpetto. Credi lo Spettacolo era interessante al sommo. Veder due donne che interessavano un pubblico intero. Era il trionfo del Bel Sesso. Cominciò la Fantastici con un complimento bellino, grazioso, e adatto. Piacque, e si sentì gl'applausi. Rispose graziosamente la Bandettini, e piacque anch'essa. Si sentì un poco di differenza nello stile, ma non vinse assolutamente. Fu chiesto il tema, e tutti in silenzio. Alfieri dal suo angolo disse: 'Bene via, Il ratto d'Europa'. S'oppose a questo tema; che non poteva cantarsi in dialogo, come avrebbero

¹⁵ Cf. Vitagliano 1905, 138-140; Di Ricco 1990, 27-29 and 217-228; Giordano 1994, 155-164 and data base *Donne in Arcadia (1690-1800)*, <www.arcadia.uzh.ch>.

desiderato. Dunque fu dato Ero, e Leandro. Cominciò la Fantastici facendo Leandro e disse benone. Rispose benissimo la Bandettini facendo da Ero. È impossibile il dirti quanto fosse bene trattato per ambe le parti, come ben concentrato il dialogo, e quanto interessante. Riceverono pieni applausi. Pareva che una desse coraggio all'altra ... Fu cantato dopo dalla Bandettini il tema d'Alfieri. Amico è incredibile quello che disse. Che vive descrizioni. Ella dipinse un Toro più bello di quello di Ovidio ... (Di Ricco 1990, 217-219)¹⁶

5. *The Sacred Poetic Fire*

Dr Piccioli left 'like a madman, a fanatic, overwhelmed and almost delirious by the famous improvisation' by Amarilli and Temira. The cause of this highly emotional state was the enthusiasm the hearer felt during and after the woman improviser's performance. Corilla Olimpica was the undoubted expert in provoking the 'sacred poetic fire'. In the letter from Amaduzzi to Bertola quoted above, this extraordinary phenomenon is described in its various stages (beginning, continuing and sublimation) and states (rapture, vision, passion, frenzy and transfusion of passion). After a slow, unsure, hesitant beginning linked with an initial state of concentrated meditation, inspiration was ignited:

¹⁶ Undated letter in the Lucca Archivio di Stato, *Carte Tommaso Trenta*, filza 18, lettera 53. 'Dear friend, I have just left like a madman, a fanatic, overwhelmed and almost delirious by the famous improvisation. What beauty, what magnificent, unrepeatable, divine things I heard this evening! Never will I experience anything like it again ... She is the greatest woman improviser I have ever heard; even greater than Gianni; she has his vivid imagination, but such a poetic turn of phrase making her language that of the Classics; less vivid images than him, since, as you know, he was too daring, more appropriate in her choice of epithets, in which she surprised me, since, as you know, improvisers usually make use of what is to hand; and she always seems to choose what is most appropriate, most proper, the truest in the subject ... Bandettini arrived at a quarter past eight, keeping people waiting, the appointed time being before eight ... There they were sitting opposite each other. Believe me that the performance could not have been more interesting. Seeing two women attracting the attention of the entire audience. It was the triumph of the fair sex. Fantastici began with a nice, graceful, appropriate compliment. This was well received and she was applauded. Bandettini replied gracefully and was also appreciated. There was only a small difference in style, but she was not the winner outright. The theme was requested; nobody spoke. Alfieri, from his corner, said 'Let us start with the Rape of Europa'. This theme was unacceptable, since it could not be conducted as a dialogue, as they wished. So Hero and Leander was suggested. Fantastici began in the role of Leander very well. Bandettini also did well in the role of Hero. I cannot tell you how well both contestants did, how the dialogue was to the point and how interesting it was. They were both well applauded. One seemed to instill the other with courage ... then Alfieri's theme was recited by Bandettini. My friend, her words were incredible. What vivid descriptions. She depicted a bull finer than that of Ovid ...'.

Vinto, che Ella avesse o la usa ritrosia, o il suo timore, cominciava il suo canto bassamente, tentava tutte le vie per destare il fuoco, e sempre ne vibrava qualche scintilla, ma mancavano i suoi versi del pregio dell'unità, e della orditura d'un ordinato lavoro. Si sprigionava in appresso il fuoco rinchiuso, grandeggiava a poco a poco, e si diffondeva ne' sentimenti, nelle parole, nella voce, e nel gesto fintanto che non scoppiava in un incendio, che tutto avvampava, che la rendeva gigante, che la astraveva fuori di se, che la rapiva in alto, e quasi la trasportava a cimentarsi colla Divinità. Allora la celerità del suo canto, la rapidità delle sue espressioni, la felicità de' pensieri, e tutte le sue esterne operazioni erano un annuncio di quel fuoco celeste, che era in lei disceso, e che agiva su di lei senza veruna sua precisa, e riflessiva cooperazione. Quelli che la accompagnavano col suono, erano affaticati estremamente in seguirla, e quelli, che l'udivano, elettrizzati da quel fuoco contagioso non potevano fare a meno di non dar segni di tanto scuotimento, e di tanta impressione. (Amaduzzi and De' Giorgi Bertola 2005, 215)¹⁷

This contagious fire is transmitted to the audience and bounces back from them to the poet who receives a fresh impulse from the enthusiasm of his/her listeners.¹⁸ This phenomenon is explained scientifically today by cognitive neuroscience as 'one of the many neural expressions of a basic functional mechanism of our brain-body system called "embodied simulation"' (Gallese 2014, 55). This emotional reaction is caused by mirror neurons, i.e. motor neurons which are activated both when we act and when we see others act.

The signs of poetic inspiration or *afflatus* are to be seen externally, involving total commitment of the senses: the face reddens, the eyes light up, the gaze becomes rapt and distant, absorbed in a world of images and visions; the voice

¹⁷ 'After having overcome her usual hesitation, or worry, she began her poem with a low voice, trying out all the ways for lighting the fire, always creating some sparks, but her verses lacked the merit of unity, and an orderly framework. Subsequently she unleashed the hidden fire, gradually towering over others and spread out in feelings, words, voice and gesture up to the point at which she burst into flames, which flared up making her a gigantic figure, disengaging herself, enrapturing her on high, almost uplifting her to face God Himself. Thus the speed of her reciting, the velocity of her expressions, the bliss of her thoughts and all her outward looking activities were the forerunners of that heavenly fire, which had descended upon her and acted on her without any precise, reflective cooperation on her part. Those who accompanied her with instruments had great difficulty in following her and her listeners, electrified by that contagious fire, could not avoid showing signs of such agitation and shock'.

¹⁸ Saverio Bettinelli, in his treatise entitled *Entusiasmo*, describes 'il sacro fuoco poetico' ('the sacred poetic fire') as a ball bouncing from the improviser to the audience and vice versa: 'Il quale fremito e fuoco diffondesi negli uditori, che gridano per gioia tratto tratto, e s'alzano dal luogo, e applaudono, e pajano in lui assorti, e trasformati, e trasportati con lui, ripercotendosi come palla da lui a loro, da loro a lui l'entusiasmo, ed a vicenda crescendo insieme le scosse della immaginazione, e della sensibilità' (1799, 48; 'the excitement and fire spreads among the listeners, who cry out with joy from one moment to the next, and they jump to their feet applauding and seem engrossed by him and transformed and rapt by him, their enthusiasm bouncing like a ball from him to them and vice versa and the tremors of imagination and sensitivity mutually increased').

becomes louder and gestures more agitated; all the body is overwhelmed by the flux of ideas, and images evoked by the rhythm of the rhymes:

Non si taccia, come nel principio, e nell'incremento di quel suo fuoco animatore acquistava negli occhi un certo truce, ma un truce amabile, e graziosamente rigoglioso, che insieme rendeva intenso il suo sguardo, smaltava il viso d'un insolito colore, e le donava quella giovinezza che Tibullo assegnò eterna ad Apollo ... Grande in appresso era il sudore, che le grondava dal viso, e che le inondava tutto il corpo, e grande era la commozione di tutti i sensi, e la dissipazione de' spiriti, onde restava infiacchita per molte ore. (Amaduzzi 2005, 216)¹⁹

At the height of her rapture, the poetess fell into a kind of trance, in the grip of the creative madness of Dionysus, i.e. divine possession.

Confessava poi Ella, che il fuoco poetico non le era prontamente propizio, benché pronto avesse il dono delle rime e che perciò le conveniva cercarlo, scuoterlo, e sprigionarlo a poco a poco. Soggiungeva, che prendeva diletto Essa medesima, quando lo vedeva in sua proprietà, e che da se medesima s'accorgeva di dir cose, che arrivavano nuove, ed inaspettate anche alla sua immaginazione. Diceva però, che quasi nulla intendeva cosa dicesse, quando era nell'apice del suo furore; ed infatti Ella non riconosceva mai per sue certe cose vibrato, ed entusiastiche, che restavano impresse nello stupefatto uditorio; e che le si ripetevano dopo l'improvviso, benché provasse una modesta compiacenza d'averle dette. (217)²⁰

6. *An Example of Professionalism*

If Corilla was the undisputed expert in bringing out the sacred poetic fire, but proved to be unable to defend herself from envy, enemies and political

¹⁹ 'We should not overlook the fact that, as at the beginning, and in the increase of her animating fire she took on a kind of menace in her eyes, but it was an amiable, gracefully lush menace, which made her gaze intense, painting her face with an unusual colour and bestowed upon her the youthfulness that Tibullus ascribed to Apollo as eternal ... Subsequently she began to perspire, the sweat pouring from her face and covering her whole body and the emotion of all the senses and dissipation of spirits was enormous, so that she was weakened for many hours ...'.

²⁰ 'She later confessed that the poetic fire was not immediately favourable to her, although the gift of rhyming was readily available to her and so it was best for her gradually to search for it, bestir and unleash it. She added that she was delighted when she realised that she possessed it and was saying things that were new and unexpected in her imagination. She did say, however, that she understood hardly anything of what she was saying, when she was at the peak of her frenzy, and actually never acknowledged to be hers certain highly emotional things that reached the astonished audience, and that they repeated to her after the improvisation, although she appeared mildly content to have said them'.

exploitation, Amarilli was not only her equal as far as allure and magnetic attraction were concerned (the lines by Vittorio Alfieri in the title of this article: 'Donna, il cui carne gli animi soggioga' – 'Woman whose poetry enslaves minds' – were dedicated to her; Alfieri 1912, 172), but was able to manage her personality with an expert hand, as we have seen, and practised her art with outstanding professionalism, prudence and intelligence.

To begin with, Teresa Bandettini had an excellent feeling for audiences, as well as making an intelligent use of codified strategies, foreseeing complements, greetings and thanks from her audience, she often indulged in extempore jokes *ad personam* (see Di Ricco 1990, 163-164), or avoided subjects which could be unpleasant or politically 'dangerous', as when, reciting Conte Ugolino in Tuscany in 1794 she avoided 'tutto quel che di spiacente dice Dante dei Pisani', or in the *Allocuzione di Virginio alla Figlia*, omitted 'tutte quelle espressioni sonanti Libertà e Patriotismo' (214)²¹ which, in a climate of Thermidorian reaction to revolutionary excess, could have been unwelcome. She was an expert director of her performances, carefully selecting the formulas used to invite members of the audience to suggest a theme, passing from one subject to another, or interrupting the narrative, making intelligent use of metre or moving the account on with strategies such as overturning worn out clichés.

In her private life her behaviour was impeccable. She was married to Pietro Landucci, who also came from Lucca, an actor ('primo grottesco'), therefore her equal, never linking her name with gossip and being very careful not to provoke envy. For example, as soon as she arrived in Florence, where the now aging Corilla no longer performed, but where Fantastici Sulgher lived and presided over a salon, she avoided an extempore performance for a fee before a Florentine audience in a tavern, so as not to be criticised, not to attract attention, and not to let people think that she wanted to undermine Temira's reputation. Moreover, Bandettini disliked performing in theatres, thinking that it was unseemly to resemble stage performers too closely: the former dancer, ennobled thanks to extempore poetry, whose career had begun on the stage, had no intention of returning there (Chelini 1794 in Di Ricco 1990, 195).

Her whole life had been devoted to the mirage of finding a safe haven under the protection of a powerful patron. After being granted a pension by the Duchy of Modena, she ended up her career as court poet in Lucca, the tiny state of her birth, and became aware of the disappointment holding this office involved. Lucca was not Vienna, to which she had aspired: Imperial Poetess with a diploma and pension.

²¹ 'All the nasty things Dante says about the Pisans'; 'all those expressions involving Liberty and Patriotism'. *Dettaglio delle Accademie tenute a Livorno nell'autunno del 1794 dalla celeberrima Sig.ra Teresa Bandettini poetessa incomparabile*, Lucca, Archivio di Stato, *Carte Tommaso Trenta*, filza 28, n. 15.

7. *The Border between the Judgement of Eyes and that of the Ear*

Both Amarilli and Corilla refused to publish the transcriptions of their improvisations, imagining the risk of transferring to the page and print poems composed for listeners. Extempore poetry is a violent, impetuous exercise which can give rise to marvellous though intermittent, random results and does not produce permanent values. Proud of their talents, but also quite aware of the specificity and limits of their art, both of them realised that it was impossible to preserve its merits beyond a public performance. If we know some of the extempore lines this is thanks to hurried transcriptions by witnesses present at performances distributed in a somewhat clandestine way. Amaduzzi was also aware of this when, in the above-mentioned letter to Bertola, he noted that the poetic value of an 'Immortal Lady' like Corilla Olimpica remained 'senza documento, e senza orme durevoli per essere le migliori sue cose condannate ad essere un ristretto pabulo dell'aure, e dell'orecchie, ed uno stupor passeggero dell'intelletto' (Amaduzzi and De' Giorgi Bertola 2005, 218).²² Metastasio, too, who, describing in a letter to Algarotti 'l'inutile e maraviglioso mestiere' ('the useless, marvellous art') he had abandoned, but in which he had made his initial virtuoso efforts, wrote:

Poiché, riflettendo in età più matura al meccanismo di quell'inutile e maraviglioso mestiere, io mi sono ad evidenza convinto che la mente condannata a così temeraria operazione dee per necessità contrarre un abito opposto per diametro alla ragione. Il poeta che scrive a suo bell'agio elegge il soggetto del suo lavoro, se ne propone il fine, regola la successiva catena delle idee che debbono a quello naturalmente condurlo, e si vale poi delle misure e delle rime come d'ubbidienti esecutrici del suo disegno. Colui all'incontro che si espone a poetar d'improvviso, fatto schiavo di quelle tiranne, convien che prima di rifletter ad altro impieghi gl'istanti che gli son permessi a schierarsi innanzi le rime che convengono con quella che gli lasciò il suo contraddittore, o nella quale egli sdruciolò inavveduto, e che accetti poi frettolosamente il primo pensiero che se gli presenta, atto ad essere espresso da quelle benché per lo più straniere, e talvolta contrarie al suo soggetto. Onde cerca il primo a suo grand'agio le vesti per l'uomo, e s'affretta il secondo a cercar tumultuariamente l'uomo per le vesti. Egli è ben vero che se da questa inumana angustia di tempo vien tiranneggiato barbaramente l'estemporaneo poeta, n'è ancora in contraccambio validamente protetto contro il rigore de' giudici suoi, a' quali, abbagliati dai lampi presenti, non rimane spazio per esaminare la poca analogia che ha per lo più il prima col poi in cotesta specie di versi. Ma se da quel dell'orecchio fossero condannati questi a passare all'esame degli occhi, oh quante Angeliche si presenterebbero con la corazza d'Orlando e quanti Rinaldi con la cuffia d'Armida! Non crediate però ch'io disprezzi questa portentosa facoltà, che onora tanto la nostra spezie; sostengo solo che da chiunque si sacrifichi affatto ad un esercizio tanto contrario alla ragione non così facilmente:

²² 'Without documentation, and lasting traces, her best things being limited nourishment for the air and ears and a passing wonder for the mind'.

...Carmina fingi
 posse linenda cedro, et levi servanda cupresso. (Metastasio 1954, 327-328)²³

8. *Conclusions*

As an often overlooked phenomenon, seen as minor, when it was not openly looked down upon by literary critics (see Croce 1918 and Dionisotti 1967, 86), including contemporary ones, extempore poetry had an ambiguous reputation, combining admiration for boundless versatility, wealth of language and flair and the irrepressible suspicion of this incredible ability to produce a stream of impromptu verse. While it is true that illustrious men of letters such as Foscolo, Manzoni, Monti, Alfieri, Goldoni, and Pindemonte, showered this or that improviser with praise, they certainly did not mistake a performance in an academy for a certificate of eternal poetic glory. Apart from the words of Metastasio, the sonnet written by Alfieri in praise of Bandettini is symptomatic; the line 'Donna, il cui carme gli anima soggioga' is followed by 'Rimar mi fa, benché tal rime io danni' (i.e. although the lady enthral listeners with her poetry, Alfieri does not have a high opinion of its literary quality). Furthermore, Goldoni's admiration for Bernardino Perfetti, in his *Mémoires*, was contradicted in *Poeta fanatico*, where the fashion for improvisation seen as the expression of the spread of the mania for composing verse, is harshly satirised. Yet again, when Monti was praising Amarilli's 'veloci carmi' ('lively poems') and her 'eleganza ne' bei modi ardita' (Monti

²³ 'Since, thinking, at a more mature age, about the mechanism of that useless, marvellous art, I have come to the conclusion that the mind forced into such a rash operation must dress in clothes diametrically opposed to reason. The poet writing at leisure chooses his theme, examines its purpose, orders the chain of ideas that are to lead him naturally to this end, and makes use of metres and rhymes as obedient executors of his plan. On the other hand, he who faces the challenge of extempore poetry, enslaved by these tyrannies, ought to, before thinking of other things, make use of the minutes allowed to him to arrange the rhymes to be matched with those of his opponent, into which he slipped carelessly, and then hurriedly accept the first thought that enters his mind, suitable to be expressed by them albeit mostly foreign and on occasion in opposition to his subject. Whence the former searches for the clothes for the man at his convenience, while the latter hurriedly and frantically for the man for the clothes. If the extempore poet is barbarously enslaved by this inhuman lack of time, he is admittedly compensated by protection from the severity of his judges, who, blinded by present flashes, have no room for examination of the minimal analogy of before and after in this type of poetry. But if from the ear they were forced to pass on to examination by the eyes, oh how many Angelicas would show themselves with Orlando's breastplate, and how many Rinaldos with Armida's coif! Do not think that I disdain this extraordinary ability, which greatly honours our species; I only maintain that from anyone who makes the sacrifice of practising an art so contrary to reason: ... can we expect that such verses should be made / as are worthy of being anointed with the oil of cedar, and kept in the well-polished cypress?' (Letter from Vienna dated 1 August 1751. The Latin lines at the end of the passage quoted are from Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 331-332).

1969, 236, 239; bold and finely shaped elegance'), no man of letters was willing to consider an improviser a true poet. Admittedly, in the eighteenth century the widespread social importance of literary phenomena provided the poetic improviser with a substantial, relatively differentiated audience, in his/her presence in salons, academies and theatres; this type of audience was more accustomed to listening than reading and was therefore better disposed towards oral expression as compared with nineteenth century private reading practices. Extempore poets had a very ambiguous nature: they presented themselves as the new bards, but were really only entertainers; indeed, in a society grounded in written culture, they could only be able manipulators of literary products made inflexible by tradition, devoid of their original function. It was precisely in this dysfunctional orality that they could play a legitimate role. The improvisers themselves were quite aware of this and never challenged official culture, only aiming to be accepted by it.

It may well have been in the ambiguity of the role of the extempore poet, and in these apparent contradictions, that the success of the women improvisers lay. They could be tolerated by the moral prejudices of a society which, nevertheless, and in spite of the Enlightenment, remained deeply male-centred. On the other hand, persons who met considerable difficulties in being considered autonomous individuals could feel comfortable practising a phenomenon which drew upon a way of creating verse empty of individuality.

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Reading Aloud in Britain in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century: Theories and Beyond

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Abstract

Thomas Sheridan, actor, theatre manager and elocutionist, had been dead for eleven years, when *The Reader or Reciter* was published, targeting those who had already followed Mr. Sheridan's instructions about elocution and reading, but who still found themselves 'deficient of that attractive power to engage the attention, and afford gratification to [themselves] and those who are [their] hearers'. The occasions for reading aloud evidently were still quite numerous if the anonymous author(s) of *The Reader* thought of publishing this Do-It-Yourself guide to shared reading. The article investigates the late eighteenth-century cultural milieu within which a booklet of this type was produced, mainly the elocution movement and its principal exponents, i.e. Sheridan himself and John Walker, and their theoretical production. Then a series of books are analysed, printed towards the end of the century in order to guide those people who wanted to practice reading aloud on the various occasions offered by genteel British society, in order to attain efficacious and pleasurable standards in their performances. The issue of the difference, if any, between communal reading and theatre is also taken into consideration.

Keywords: Britain, Eighteenth Century, Elocution, Reading, Thomas Sheridan

Mr. Hay is an auditor, for he is not able to read aloud.
Elizabeth Montagu, 1741

1. *Introduction*

The words used by Mrs. Montagu when writing to her sister from Bullstrode in October 1741 show that reading aloud was a greatly appreciated skill in



eighteenth-century English society.¹ Far from being a naïve way of reproducing a written (printed) text orally, reading aloud appears to have been an accomplishment expected of members of the middle- and upper-classes. Even when most people were still illiterate, ‘Reading aloud helped to draw everyone into the ambit of the written word’ (Fox 2000, 37), and public places such as taverns, barber shops and, especially, coffee-houses offered the illiterate the opportunity to listen to somebody reading aloud the various printed materials available in these venues. Further occasions should also be added which gave the illiterate the chance of becoming acquainted with printed matter: church services, encounters with peddlers able to read ballads and newspapers, and schooling (both as education of the better-off, and as Sunday schools for the poor) at least since the seventeenth century (see Reay 1998, 36-70). The growth of the reading public, at least in the middle- and upper-classes, also meant a parallel growth of women readers, a fact that certainly encouraged writers to construe plots and narratives for this readership (see Barry 1995, 86). Among the factors which possibly bore upon the creation of printed narratives, but also poetry, the social occasions during which readings took place must be taken into account as well, given that family reading aloud was one of the most widespread forms of entertainment. Examples of this type are to be found both in personal documents (and the epigraph from Mrs. Montagu’s *Letters* bears witness to it), and in fiction. For example in Fanny Burney’s *Camilla* the chapter entitled ‘A Raffle’, after introducing an ‘elegant young man’ reading ‘Thomson’s Seasons’ by himself, but unable to curb his emotions, presents him while reading to the onlookers, who are deeply impressed, especially by the young man’s delivery:

even Indiana [one of the protagonists of the novel], though she listened not to the matter, was struck by the manner in which it was delivered, which so resembled dramatic recitation, that she thought herself at a play, and full of wonder, advanced straight before him, to look full in his face, and watch the motions of his right arm, with which he acted incessantly, while the left held his book. (Burney 1796, I, Book 2, Chap. V, 236-237)

Of particular relevance in this passage is Indiana’s interest in the reader’s elocution and gestures that – as the narrator notices – ‘so resembled dramatic recitation’. Reading together actually allows the bystanders to observe a ‘performer’ better than at the theatre, supplying them with ‘close-ups’ of the reciter, so to speak. Furthermore, Indiana’s imagination about watching a play introduces the problem of the relationship between reading a play

¹ The letter is not dated exactly, but it must have been written between 11 and 17 October 1741, respectively the days of the previous and following letters (Montagu 1809-1813, I, 301).

aloud and performing one (and the topic of the possible eighteenth-century dramatic schools).²

Another interesting piece of evidence, albeit later, comes from Jane Austen's *Emma*, chapter 4, when Emma and Harriet discuss Mr. Martin's character. Emma's question about Mr. Martin's reading is answered as follows by Harriet:

He reads the *Agricultural Reports* and some other books, that lay in one of the window seats – but he reads all *them* to himself. But sometimes of an evening, before we went to cards, he would read something aloud out of the *Elegant Extracts* – very entertaining. (Austen 1896, 22)

The relevance of this passage consists in its mention of a miscellaneous collection, the *Elegant Extracts* (compiled by Vicesimus Knox), which, printed first in the 1780s, was to become central to nineteenth-century education both in England and the US. It originated in the numerous anthologies of various genres printed throughout the second half of the eighteenth century: e.g. compilations of riddles and jestbooks (see Williams 2015),³ but also stories for young people, the latter with an educational purpose.⁴ The complete title of this anthology reads: *Elegant Extracts: Useful and Entertaining Passages in Prose Selected for the Improvement of Scholars at Classical and Other Schools in the Art of Speaking, in Reading, Thinking, Composing; and in the Conduct of Life*.⁵ The title itself, therefore, clearly illustrates the purpose of the collection: its educational aim is first of all the 'Art of Speaking', followed immediately by 'Reading': in other words, the moral aims of the book – guaranteed by the selected passages – go hand in hand with training in (public) speaking and reading (aloud), which thus figure as the first tools in education. Before the end of the eighteenth century the elocutionists' movement (see section 2 below) seems to have succeeded, with a very general readership at least, in

² Because of the main focus of this article, only brief and cursory references are made to the authors of acting treatises such as Aaron Hill (1754) and John Hill (1750 and 1755). In a broader perspective, though, they should be considered together with the elocutionists when investigating the growing role of theories of passions and sensibility in eighteenth-century British culture (on these issues see Roach 1983; see also Goring 2005, esp. 127-135 for Aaron Hill, and 136-141 for John Hill). For brevity I refer the reader to an article by Lily Campbell (1917), which – although written a century ago – still sums up very well the situation of the London dramatic arts in the eighteenth century.

³ For example *Yorick's Jest* (1770), *Sir John Fielding's Jest: New Fun for the Parlour and Kitchen* (1781), and *Fun for the Parlour: Or, All Merry Above Stairs* (1771).

⁴ See Kilner 1780? and 1795?.

⁵ The first edition in ECCO (Eighteenth-Century Collections Online) dates from 1784 (also the *ESTC – English Short Title Catalogue* – does not list a previous edition). Five years later, a similar miscellany was published, containing passages of poetry (Knox 1789). All eighteenth-century works cited here are quoted from ECCO.

stressing the necessity for the middle- and upper-classes to learn to speak their language well. Such compilations were indeed read aloud at school (but also in the family) in order to practice correct elocution, an issue much stressed by those who fought for decades to see their principles accepted.

Mr. Hay, though, according to Mrs. Montagu, had not practised enough, therefore his role in the Queen of Blues' house was limited to that of listener to somebody else's reading.

2. *Thomas Sheridan and the Elocutionary Movement*

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following as the only definition of 'elocutionist': 'One who practises the art of elocution; a proficient in the art of elocution', while the fittest definition of 'elocution' for the present case is 'The art of public speaking so far as it regards delivery, pronunciation, tones, and gestures; manner or style of oral delivery' (def. 4). These definitions are clear and acceptable, but the former in particular does not historicise the term as connected principally to eighteenth-century rhetorics, lexicography, and theatre. In the eighteenth century, some people started thinking that English was not taught (and spoken) correctly, and tried to act in order to improve their countrymen's 'art of public speaking', which also implied – as the definition itself underlines – pronunciation and body language. Among the elocutionists Thomas Sheridan and John Walker were the most eminent ones.

2.1 *Thomas Sheridan*

Thomas Sheridan, who was to become the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan's father, was born in Dublin in 1719. He started early in his life to question the contemporary ways of teaching the English language to British natives, and to advance his own educational plans. In 1756 he published, both in Dublin and London, his most important book, according to Benzie (1994, 197), the long title of which best explains the author's intent:

British Education: or, The Source of the Disorders of Great Britain. Being an Essay towards proving, that the Immorality, Ignorance, and false Taste, which so generally prevail, are the natural and necessary Consequences of the present defective System of Education. With an Attempt to shew, that a Revival of the Art of Speaking, and the Study of our own Language, might contribute, in great measure, to the Cure of those Evils. In three parts. I. Of the Use of these Studies to Religion, and Morality; as also, to the Support of the British Constitution. II. Their absolute Necessity in order to refine, ascertain, and fix the English Language. III. Their Use in the Cultivation of the Imitative Arts: shewing, that were the Study of Oratory made a necessary Branch of the Education of Youth; Poetry, Musick, Painting, and Sculpture, might arrive at as high a Pitch of Perfection in England, as ever they did in Athens or Rome. (Sheridan 1756, title-page)

From this early work, indeed, all the following ones can be said to derive, from *An Oration, Pronounced before a Numerous Body of the Nobility and Gentry, Assembled at the Musick-hall in Fishamble-street, on Tuesday the 6th of this instant December* (1757), to *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762), from the *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (1775a and 1775b) to *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780). Actually, in *British Education* there are the foundations of Sheridan's ideas and plans, those for which he was also ridiculed by Samuel Foote in his play *The Orators* (premiered in the Haymarket in 1762; see Campbell 1917, 192-193), and by Dr Johnson (see Benzie 1994, 198). Sheridan was an advocate for a new, albeit rather idealistic and simplistic, method to solve British (and Irish) social problems by teaching the English language, which was to be grounded on the 'Art of Speaking'. The initial idea about all this occurred to him on a very special occasion, as he writes in his *Oration*:

That which chiefly gave my Mind this Turn, was a Conversation which I once had with Dr. *Swift* [Sheridan's godfather], soon after my Entrance into the College [Trinity, Dublin]: He asked me what they taught there? When I told him the Course of Reading I was put into, he asked me, Do they teach you English? No. Do they teach you how to speak? No. Then, said he, they teach you *Nothing*. (1757, 21-22)

It is clear from all his writings that by 'language' Sheridan mainly meant speech.⁶ In the 'Preface' to his *Dictionary* he insists that one of the two causes of the poor state of English (the other being the excessive time devoted in schools and universities to learning Greek and Latin) is 'an utter inattention to the living language, as delivered to the ear by the organs of speech; from making the written, as presented to the eye by the pen, the sole object of instruction' (Sheridan 1780, A1v).

Sheridan's interest in the spoken word was also the major cause of his starting a career as an actor, albeit a minor one, especially when one thinks that he could not certainly compare with David Garrick, with whom – nevertheless – he shared the stage on some occasions (see Bacon 1964, 6 and 48-50).⁷ Besides performing, he also tried to 'raise the standard of the Dublin theatre' (Thomson 2004; see also Brown 2016, 285-286). In the *Oration* he reveals that, being sure that '*Theory* alone would never bring me far on my Way; and that continual *Practice* must be added ... To obtain this, there was but one Way open, which was the Stage' (1757, 20-21). As well as acting, however, he also became involved in the management of Dublin's two theatres (in 1744; see Thomson 2004, and Brown 2016, 243-244), where he planned to open 'an oratorical academy', especially after Garrick's encouragement to do so

⁶ 'Sheridan's emphasis was always upon the *spoken* word' (Goring 2005, 105).

⁷ On Sheridan's career as an actor see Brunström 2011.

(Campbell 1917, 192). The project, like similar others in that century, failed in the end (even after a reiterated attempt in the late 1750s), but Sheridan continued training young actors, convinced that ‘the Theatre would become an admirable Assistant to the School of Oratory, by furnishing to the young Students constant good Models and Examples in all the different species of Eloquence’ (1757, 24).⁸

Sheridan’s tenets about the teaching of English (grammar, pronunciation, and correct elocution) are summed up in the ‘Preface’ to his *Dictionary* where he not only insists on the benefit of good elocution to the clergy, justice administrators and statesmen, but also to the people at large, and – particularly worth noting – with no gender divide.⁹ When asking the reader some rhetorical questions about the usefulness of the ‘true art of oratory’ for the whole nation, he also wonders

Whether the first step necessary to the accomplishment of these points [the attempt at the creation of a standard language] be not that of opening a method, whereby all children of these realms, *whether male or female*, may be instructed from the first rudiments, in a grammatical knowledge of the English tongue, and the art of reading and speaking it with propriety and grace. (1780, B1r; italics mine)

This dictionary, therefore, is actually also a pronunciation dictionary, where particular graphic signs – though far from offering transcriptions according to the present International Phonetic Alphabet – are used to provide the reader with help in pronouncing words in the right way.¹⁰ The author also declares

⁸ Sheridan certainly knew the publications of acting theorists such as Aaron Hill and John Hill, but also of David Garrick himself to whom an *Essay on Acting* (Anonymous 1744) is attributed. Aaron Hill’s emphasis on the correct use of both voice and gesture (1754, 340), and John Hill’s insistence on the necessity of rules and study to guide and mould an actor’s natural gifts (1755, 5-6) do not differ much from Sheridan’s principles about efficacious reading. Similarly, Sheridan must have shared John Hill’s opinion concerning the use of the voice, in particular when the latter claims that ‘by force is not meant loudness, but energy’, and that another defect in delivery is monotony, i.e. ‘an eternal sameness of tone and pronunciation’ (Hill 1755, 146).

⁹ Sheridan had already shown his interest in women’s education in his *Lectures on the Art of Reading. First Part* (1775a), in which the ‘Discourse II’ explicitly laments that the issues concerning women’s education ‘have scarcely been considered’ (316). In spite of his attitude towards women, not so different from his contemporaries’ in the end (see when he writes that ‘Man is formed for public, as well as for private life, woman for private life only’, 322), Sheridan highlights the cultural drawbacks of the ‘fair sex’ because of the lack of a proper education even though it ‘has been amply proved [that] several ladies ... have distinguished themselves as eminently in their spheres when they have had equal advantages of culture’ (317).

¹⁰ Of course all our modern discussions and theories about the acceptance of multiple varieties of English and on the negativeness of prescriptive grammars are alien to Sheridan’s thought. However he appears to be a forerunner of many approaches to language teaching, for example when he assumes that one’s way of speaking coincides with a social mark or

that he was educated in the correct pronunciation of English by Jonathan Swift himself, because ‘for several months [I] read to him three or four hours a day’ when the famous writer was accustomed to ‘correcting them’ if he heard ‘any mistakes committed by his friends’ (B1v).

So far nothing has been said about the ‘art of reading’ in itself, but it should not be difficult to understand that being able to read well goes hand in hand with being able to speak well (actually, in the passage about children’s education quoted above, reading and speaking are considered together). In 1762 Sheridan published *A Course of Lectures on Elocution*, in which he expounded his theories about delivery, including not only pronunciation and grammatical correctness, but also everything that might contribute to effectiveness, i.e. emphasis, tones, pauses, pitch, gesture (see Benzie 1994, 198-199), all the tools a reader/speaker has in order to convey passions beyond literal meanings.¹¹ Besides being concerned with public speaking (and reading) in general (the senate and the bar), Sheridan appears to be particularly interested in church speaking (and in its positive or negative effects on congregations). For example, he – although being a high-church Anglican – observes the efficacy of ‘our methodist preachers’ and ‘the power which words acquire, even the words of fools and madmen, when forcibly uttered by the living voice’ (1762, xiii). Nevertheless, his lectures, which attracted a large attendance when delivered publicly (see xv), deal with aspects of interest to various kinds of speaker. A good reader/speaker, according to Sheridan, needs ‘a refined understanding, and delicate sensibility’, all this ‘to produce effects by the dead letter, which can never be produced but by the living voice’ (xii). The author is rather pessimistic when he starts ‘Lecture I’ by saying: ‘That a general inability to read, or speak, with propriety and grace in public, runs thro’ the natives of the British dominions, is acknowledged’. Then he insists even more on this topic when, soon afterwards, he asserts that ‘good public reading, or speaking, is one of the rarest qualities to be found, in a country [i.e. Britain], where reading and speaking in public, are more generally used, than in any other in the world’ (1).

The Mr. Hay Mrs Montagu considers a poor reader must have been among those who were ‘taught to read in a different way, with different tones and cadences, from those which we use in speaking; and this artificial manner, is used instead of the natural one, in all recitals and repetitions at school, as well as in reading’ (4), especially if we see him as a member of the literate

stigma, while it were desirable ‘to put an end to [this] odious distinction’ (1780, A2v). Among the many interesting points of this dictionary there is a list of subscribers, which also includes ‘David Garrick, Esq.’ (who died in 1779, evidently during the preparation of the volume), and ‘Mrs. Montague’ (who died in 1800).

¹¹ On the role of passions in eighteenth-century culture (and in the theatre in particular), see Roach 1983.

circle of such a famous hostess. But Sheridan does not seem to think much of such people when observing that ‘reading ... by means of the press, is become almost universal among us’ and that ‘the most bookish men are generally remarkable for the worst delivery’, therefore unable to really communicate to others (8). After these harsh remarks about his countrymen’s inability to read aloud, Sheridan offers his definition of ‘a just delivery’:

A just delivery consists in a distinct articulation of words, pronounced in proper tones, suitably varied to the sense, and the emotions of the mind; with due observation of accent; of emphasis, in its several gradations; of rests or pauses of the voice, in proper places and well-measured degrees of time; and the whole accompanied with expressive looks, and significant gesture. (10)

These words sound like a description of a theatrical performance, thus revealing one of the problems attached to reading aloud, in particular when the text being read is a play or a work of fiction. Sheridan himself mentions ‘comedians, whose profession it is, to speak from memory, the sentiments of others’ (13), a profession implying a lot of practice, that same practice that the author judges absolutely necessary to readers. It is clear, from what has been exemplified so far, that Sheridan’s theatrical activity merges here with his more general educational intents, even though he seems quite aware of the dangers and bad habits derived from what ‘is commonly called Theatrical Declamation’ (54), i.e. mechanical imitation and blaring noise.¹²

This is not the place to deal in greater detail with Sheridan’s theories of elocution/reading aloud. Suffice it to observe, though, that in Lecture VI and Lecture VII he lays great emphasis on body language and also on inarticulate sounds, which he considers essential to communicate passions and emotions: ‘The muscles, nerves, the blood and animal spirits, all are at work to shew internal commotion’ (114). Furthermore, after reminding his reader of the power of David Garrick’s eyes when performing (116), Sheridan reproaches his countrymen, so to speak, because ‘of all nations in the world, the English seem to have the least use of this language of signs’ (118). In the end, he insists on the need for practice, and, in some way, of training oneself, given the lack of proper educational institutions, thus suggesting a ‘Do-It-Yourself’ approach to the problem:

But the use of tones and gesture, as marks of our emotions, not having been established amongst us, by any such general compact; at least there being but very few that have any settled significance; each individual, has a proportional latitude, to adopt such as he thinks proper, for his own use. (125)

¹² It is interesting to see that the passages used to exemplify the role of emphasis are mainly drawn from drama: Shakespearean plays (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*), and Dryden’s *All for Love*.

Besides *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* – which, as discussed above, includes a lot of advice for reading aloud –, in 1775 Sheridan published two volumes specifically devoted to the ‘Art of Reading’, one for prose and one for poetry (1775a and 1775b). ‘Discourse II’, devoted to women’s education, has already been quoted;¹³ nevertheless, it is important to notice that at the end Sheridan addresses women directly as the best artificers of politeness in social encounters:

In short it rests upon you ladies to bring about this reformation. Nor can you in so doing be thought to step out of your sphere as the most perfect and critical knowledge of English could never be charged on you as an affectation of learning or female pedantry. (1775a, 329)

This involvement of ladies in the process of their own education (and the indirect defence of the so called ‘Blue stockings’ of whom Mrs. Montagu was one of the major representatives) should be based, according to Sheridan, on the skills of reading and reading aloud, because these ‘elegant arts ... can contribute to the happiness of social life or the delight of social converse’ (326).¹⁴

2.2 *A Short Note on John Walker*

John Walker was born in England in 1732 and died in 1807. His career in many ways resembles Sheridan’s in that he was an elocutionist, a lexicographer and an actor. He was also a teacher: even if he did not found an academy such as Sheridan would have liked to do, he started a school in 1769. Later he became a teacher of elocution and, like Sheridan, gave lectures in Edinburgh, Dublin and Oxford (see Beal 2004). His *Elements of Elocution* was published in 1781, while his influential *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* appeared in 1791. From these dates it is evident that Walker’s works were issued later than Sheridan’s. In the long run, Walker was more influential, albeit more rigid and mechanical, than his contemporary and predecessor, so much so that whereas Sheridan’s dictionary was quickly forgotten, Walker’s became *the* guide to English pronunciation and was reprinted up to the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Benzie, Walker ‘became the leader

¹³ See n. 9. This Discourse and the three others in the volume are enriched with the reading marks Sheridan invented in order to show his readers how to pronounce the texts (especially, perhaps, as a reminder for those people who had attended one of his ‘Attic Nights’ when he read his lectures live; see Bacon 1964, 36-37; Benzie 1994, 203).

¹⁴ It is clear that Sheridan’s educational plans and works only include the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy (both male and female); this because for him ‘the stabilization of the English language was to be achieved through the careful education of the elite, whose polite linguistic and social practice should then function as a template for all classes’ (Goring 2005, 104).

of the “Mechanical” school’ (1994, 199), since he gave rules for delivery and also for gestures and body language in order to express emotions, to a certain extent in the wake of John Bulwer’s *Chirologia; or, The Naturall Language of the Hand* (1644).¹⁵

In his *Elements of Elocution* Walker offers rules to help speakers and readers towards correct pronunciation and delivery such as, for example, ‘Rule VI: ‘Whatever member intervenes between the verb and the accusative case, is of the nature of a parenthesis, and must be separated from both by a short pause’ (1781, I, 81). To the same prescriptive attitude the following ‘Rule XI’ can also be appended: ‘Whatever words are put into the case absolute, commonly called the ablative absolute, must be separated from the rest by a short pause’ (95). Actually, all the elements discussed in the two volumes (punctuation and inflexion of the voice mainly in volume I; accent, emphasis, and gesture in volume II) are ruled by norms. With a very modern attitude, though, Walker recognises the cultural bases of gestures, when he writes that

The common feelings of nature, with the signs that express them, undergo a kind of modification, which is suitable *to the taste and genius of every nation*; and it is *this national taste* which must necessarily be the vehicle of every thing we convey agreeable to the public we belong to. (II, 262; italics mine)

Then, since ‘An awkward action, and such as is unsuitable to the words and passions, is the body out of tune, and gives the eye as much pain as a discord does the ear’ (264), Walker proceeds to advise prospective readers on how to behave and ‘how to do things with one’s body’. It is a very detailed paragraph deserving a long quote:

When we read to a few persons only in private, it may not be useless to observe, that we should accustom ourselves to read standing; that the book should be held in the left hand; that we should take our eyes as often as possible from the book, and direct them to those that hear us. The three or four last words at least of every paragraph ... should be pronounced with the eye pointed to one of the auditors. When any thing sublime, lofty, or heavenly is expressed, the eye and the right hand may be very properly elevated; and when any thing low, inferior, or grovelling is referred to, the eye and hand may be directed downwards; when any thing distant or extensive is mentioned, the hand may naturally describe the distance or extent; and when conscious virtue, or any heart-felt emotion, or tender sentiment occurs, we may as naturally clap the hand on the breast. (266-267)

This passage is followed by the minute description (prescription) of how to speak ‘extempore’, and, in the following part (‘The Passions’), by a careful, long

¹⁵ On Bulwer’s work and the development of treatises dealing with the ‘art of acting’ see Roach 1983.

list of passions each of which is described, commented upon and accompanied by the appropriate body language. Furthermore, each passion is exemplified by dramatic passages, generally drawn from Shakespeare. Indeed, this part of Walker's text best resembles a handbook for drama students rather than a series of instructions for 'simple' readers; suffice it to see how Walker introduces 'MALICE':

Malice is an habitual malevolence long continued, and waiting occasion to exert itself on the hated object. This hateful disposition sets the jaws, or gnashes the teeth, sending blasting flashes from the eyes, stretches the mouth horizontally, clinches both fists, and bends the elbows in a straining manner to the body. The tone of voice and expression are much the same as in anger, but not so loud. (364)

A single passage is printed under 'Malice': Shylock's monologue from *The Merchant of Venice* ('How like a fawning publican he looks', 1.3, 36-47), and really we seem to be taken to an eighteenth-century performance of this Shakespeare play, possibly with Charles Macklin playing Shylock, after the actor's revolution in the interpretation of this character (1741).¹⁶

As mentioned above, the influence of Walker on the teaching of elocution turned out to be more long-lasting in comparison with Sheridan's. Nevertheless, the anonymous *The Reader or Reciter* mentions the latter as its inspirer, even eleven years after Sheridan's death.

3. *Booklets in Sheridan's Wake*

3.1 *Reading Miscellanies*

While scholars are still working at indexing the multifarious and rich production of British eighteenth-century miscellanies,¹⁷ this article will take into consideration just some of them, i.e. some which are particularly interesting to the present research in so far as they contain guides to reading aloud. Indeed, all of them consist of collections of various passages selected for their moral and educational content, and for the literary value attributed to their authors. They are, in other words, anthologies that already show a sort of definition of the British literary canon, of course as it was accepted at the time. But, either in the form of prefaces or of preliminary chapters, they also include instructions on how to read aloud, which sound as if taken directly from the elocutionists' reading and speaking principles. Just to mention some

¹⁶ On Macklin's acting and on his activity as a drama teacher see Campbell 1917, esp. 181-188.

¹⁷ See the Digital Miscellanies Index project (DMI) at <<http://dmi.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/>>.

of these volumes, there are the anonymous *A Museum for Young Gentlemen and Ladies: or, A Private Tutor for Little Masters and Misses* (1751?), *A Collection of Poems for Reading and Repetition. Selected from the Most Celebrated British Poets* (1762) by John Drummond, and *The Speaker: or, Miscellaneous Pieces Selected from the Best English Writers* (1774) by William Enfield, a volume to which a second book was added later, in order to enlarge the readers' possible choice. The selected authors go from Homer (via Alexander Pope's translation), to Cato, Livy, Addison, Bacon, Mrs. Barbauld, Cibber, Collins, Dryden, Goldsmith, Gray, Johnson, Milton, Shakespeare, Steele, Sterne, Thomson, Young. Enfield's book also tags its passages according to either genre (for example Book II collects 'Narrative Pieces' while Book VI is made of 'Dialogues'), or 'interpretative' and axiological labels, so to speak (e.g. Book III contains 'Didactic Pieces', Book VIII 'Pathetic Pieces'). On the other hand, *A Museum for Young Gentlemen and Ladies* appears to be more as a little encyclopaedia than an anthology, since it includes chapters like 'An Account of the Solar System', 'Rules for Behaviour', and 'Tables of Weights and Measures'.

All of them, though, offer their readers instructions about reading. *A Museum*, in spite of not being a literary anthology, presents an initial chapter entitled 'Directions for Reading with Elegance and propriety' addressed to 'Little Masters and Misses, how to Read well, to keep their Stops, and pronounce or speak their Words properly; which will make every Body delighted to hear them read, or talk in Company' (Anonymous 1760, 1). From these introductory words it is easy to understand that the preoccupations of the compiler are more or less the same as Thomas Sheridan's: good readers observe punctuation and, when reading, understand the different pauses a passage implies. At the same time, they follow some 'rules' in order to place emphasis and stress correctly.

To trace Sheridan's legacy in others' works, it is interesting to note that Drummond's *A Collection of Poems for Reading and Repetition* mentions the lectures Sheridan had given in Edinburgh just a year before the publication of the anthology. The book, the 'Preface' reads, 'among many other articles, contains most of the pieces that were read by Mr. Sheridan at his public lectures in Edinburgh' (1762, vii-viii).

It is William Enfield's *The Speaker* that contains the longest guide to reading with propriety. Enfield (1741-1797) taught elocution at the Warrington Academy, for the students of which the book was originally written. In 'An Essay on Elocution', which precedes the presentation of the various passages (1774, v-xxix), he explains that his purpose is to 'point out a practicable and easy method by which this accomplishment [good reading and speaking] may be acquired' (vi). On these premises, he proceeds to supply some rules, 'adapted to form a correct and graceful Speaker' (vii): they go from 'Rule I. Let your Articulation be distinct and deliberate' (viii), to 'Rule VI. In every sentence, distinguish the more significant words by a natural, forcible, and

varied EMPHASIS' (xvi), to 'Rule VIII. Accompany the Emotions and Passions which your words express, by correspondent tones, looks, and gestures' (xxiv). Enfield's book was published one year before Sheridan's *Lectures on the Art of Reading*, but the principles at the basis of this book had already been expressed in his *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762). Therefore Sheridan's ideas about speaking and reading were well known in the 1770s, so as to be accepted and adopted by other people. In *The Speaker*, though, there is something that appears to connect its author rather to Walker than to Sheridan, i.e. the stress given to rules, and the rejection of 'particular characters or marks' printed together with a passage in order to help readers, because – Enfield observes – 'they [these marks] mislead instead of assisting the reader' (1774, xviii). Sheridan, instead, relied much on these devices and published some of his own discourses with printed marks so as to show readers how to pronounce them. Nevertheless, Enfield's stress on the necessity to follow nature shows how much he adhered to Sheridan's tenets (see Benzie 1994, 204).

3.2 After Thomas Sheridan

The short list of books dealing with elocution mentioned in 3.1 lacks three titles that explicitly – either on the title-page or in a preface – cite the name of Sheridan. All were published after Sheridan's death: *Sheridan's Strictures on Reading the Church-Service; with the Notes, Regularly Annexed, and Proper References* by W. Faulkner (1789), *Sheridan's and Henderson's Practical Method of Reading and Reciting English Poetry ... A Necessary Introduction to Dr. Enfield's Speaker* (Anonymous 1796), and *The Reader, or Reciter: By the Assistance of which Any Person may Teach Himself to Read or Recite English Prose with the Utmost Elegance and Effect. To which are Added Instructions for Reading Plays on a Plan never before Attempted* (Anonymous 1799).

From its very title, *Sheridan's Strictures on Reading the Church-Service*, compiled by the Reverend William Faulkner, declares its target, i.e. the clergy. Actually it prints church prayers and services accompanied by footnotes explaining where stress and emphasis should be laid, how to observe pauses and how to avoid sounding disagreeable. Many words are italicised in the text to highlight them as emphatic; words in small caps and 'the letters marked with the grave accent of the Greek, 'Require to be dwelt on some Time' (1789, 8). The book is based on Sheridan's interest in the delivery of divine services and summarises Sheridan's paragraphs on similar issues. See, for example, pp. 9-14, where, the author guides the pronunciation of Psalm 143 – 'Enter not into Judgment with thy servant' – already commented upon by Sheridan in *Lectures in Elocution* (1762, 59-60), and again in *Lectures on the Art of Reading* (1775a, 183-185). Another example is offered by 'The Lord's Prayer', discussed by Sheridan in the latter book (207-215) and accordingly annotated by Faulkner in *Sheridan's Strictures* (1789, 16-20).

The second, in time, publication bearing Sheridan's name in its title is *Sheridan's and Henderson's Practical Method ...* (Anonymous 1796). Both 'authors' had long been dead (John Henderson, a young actor very good at comic roles, died in 1785),¹⁸ but very probably the book was printed in remembrance of their 1785 very successful public readings. The mention of Dr Enfield's *A Necessary Introduction* also testifies to the cultural connection between Sheridan and Enfield. In the dedicatory letter to 'Morris Robinson, Esq.', the anonymous compiler claims that the purpose of the book is to give 'metrical compositions the force, harmony, and animation of which they are susceptible' (iii-iv), thus confirming what the title says about the miscellany including poetry on the one hand and, on the other, stressing the necessary features of a good poetical reading according to Sheridan's principles. In the 'Preface' (v-x) the author claims to be able to offer a method for reading, since those promoted in the past have failed because of their dryness and theoretical paraphernalia. No 'regular system' will ever be able to teach the 'simple graces of Expression, look, and manner'. By taking this stance, the writer takes sides against the 'mechanical' school, with Sheridan against Walker (but neither is mentioned here). The 'new plan', on the contrary, is based on a 'practical method' which will be implemented on passages that 'I have heard read or recited either in public or in the hour of social enjoyment' by Sheridan or by Henderson (vii). The first example in the text is Thomas Grey's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard' which,

Being a plaintive, mournful Poem ... ought, of course, to be read with a *gravity* of look, and a *solemnity* of tone, suitable to the *sober melancholy* of the subject. A *low key* of voice is the most appropriate; for if we begin in a lofty tone, the mournful effect, intended by the Poet, is at once destroyed. (Anonymous 1796, 1)

The anonymous author discusses then how to read the first line, 'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day', advancing his own reading modelled on Henderson's example, this consisting of the introduction of a comma after 'tolls'. The actor, the book explains, delivered the words 'the knell of parting day' 'as if they were placed between a parenthesis' (2). Just to give another example of the way this book's author 'used', so to speak, the names of his two authorities, suffice it to say that for l. 22 of the 'Elegy' ('Or busy housewife ply her evening care') he proposes Sheridan's contraction of 'housewife' 'as if it spelt *hussif*, which has a much better effect than the other [the normally pronounced 'housewife']' given that this latter 'sounds rather clumsily on the ear'. Whether the readers of this book accept the suggested versions or not, they have in their hands the result of an interesting attempt at reproducing the

¹⁸ An 'exquisite gift of mimicry clearly made Henderson one of the great Falstaffs of his time' (Bacon 1964, 45).

two public readers' performance, and at producing an *ante litteram* (written) recording of Sheridan's and Henderson's readings.

The Reader or Reciter was published at the very end of the century, in 1799. Like other publications, its title-page boasts of containing 'a plan never before attempted', but the real novelty of this text is that the anonymous author claims that, 'by the assistance' of this book, 'any person may teach himself to read or recite English prose' (from the title-page). After other manuals which, like those discussed so far, aimed at helping prospective readers, this at last declares its Do-It-Yourself perspective overtly. But what does this originality consist of? The volume is preceded by an 'Advertisement' which laments, like *Sheridan's and Henderson's Practical Method*, the failure of previous reading guides. The cause of this situation, according to the author, is that – while the role of punctuation has always been attentively highlighted in order to point out 'the emphatic word' – 'the spirit and animation of elocution are entirely neglected' (Anonymous 1799, iii). The result of previous manuals is the creation of 'uniformly accurate' readers who have learned to be correct, but who lack attractiveness and fail to transmit to their hearers 'the proper portion of animation which belongs to each Author' (iv). The 'Advertisement' goes on imputing to 'Mr. Sheridan, and others in the same way' the responsibility of these effects, while – of course – upholding the values of this 'small Volume' for readers who really want to 'afford gratification to [themselves] and those who are [their] hearers' (iv). The attack on the elocutionists in general seems to reveal on the one hand limited improvement of British reading abilities, notwithstanding at least half a century of insistence on the role of oral delivery in polite society, and on the other the still felt social need for good reading.

The author shortly introduces the first passage ('An Eastern Story' from Samuel Johnson's *The Rambler*), as possessing 'a peculiar harmony and smoothness of diction throughout most parts of it, and the different picturesque scenes and changes with which it abounds, if well marked in the reading, give infinite pleasure to a hearer' (1). He also apologises, so to speak, because of the 'intervening observations, which, conformably to our plan, we are compelled to introduce', thus anticipating his 'method', i.e. passages will be interspersed with annotations (in italics and between brackets) referring to tone of voice, mimicry, gestures. The 'small Volume' seems to address genteel readers more than other similar books, given not only the authors anthologized (actually not so different from other selections), but also because of the high register of the language used for the reading suggestions. Some examples will better illustrate this point:

OBIDAH, the son of Abensina, left the caravanser early in the morning, and pursued his journey through the plains of Indostan. (*Be now a little warm and animated in your expression.*) He was fresh and vigorous with rest; he was animated with hope; he was incited by desire; (*Now look as if you were viewing the scene described.*) he walked swiftly

over the valleys, and saw the hills gradually rising before him. (*You must glow with the writer, in your expression, as you proceed with this enchanting description.*) ... (*Let your tone be now more powerful, in order to create a contrast that follows, of great beauty. Mark particularly the word 'towering.'*) he sometimes contemplated the towering height of the oak, monarch of the hills; (*Here comes the contrast alluded to – Be peculiarly soft and gentle in your voice to the end of the colon.*) and sometimes caught the gentle fragrance of the primrose, eldest daughter of the spring; (*Conclude the sentence with a glow of satisfaction.*) all his senses were gratified, and all care was banished from his heart. ... He saw on his right hand, a grove that seemed to wave its shades, as a sign of invitation: he entered it, and found the coolness and verdure irresistibly pleasant. (*In descriptions be equally descriptive in your manner of reading them. When you mention the sun ... cast your eyes upwards; and give a look as if you discovered the grove, when you read, 'He saw on his right hand a grove,' &c Your fore-finger pointed at the same time will produce a good effect.*) (2-3)

At the end of Johnson's story, the author adds some final remarks advising the reader to give their language 'great smoothness and melody in the delivery', and just before introducing the second passage (again by Samuel Johnson), he suggests that it should be read 'with a clear, distinct articulation' (10).

When, commenting another Johnsonian passage that is considered to be 'pathetic' (the story of Misella, a prostitute, narrated in the first person singular), the author states:

(... Throughout the whole of the relation itself, you must give it a considerable tinge of the melancholy, and occasionally you may melt into a strain of the most heart-rending pathos, with great advantage, in several of the following sentences.)

Thus driven again into the streets, I lived upon the least that could support me, and at night accommodated myself under pent-houses as well as I could. At length I became absolutely penniless. (45)

It can be noticed how near these notes are to instructions for a performance. Indeed, this booklet, even if not targeting drama students, sounds as if it were prefiguring those who read aloud as actors. Actually, although not explicitly said, a sort of 'stage' is envisioned when, discussing 'The Strolling Player' by Oliver Goldsmith, besides observing that 'There must be a difference of voice in the dialogue parts to the others' (49-50), the author remarks: '*To give a proper life and spirit to this character [the player of the title], you ought to enter, in some parts, a little into acting them. Action, if well applied as you go on, may be frequently practiced with great effect*' (53). Nevertheless, from a further remark about another passage, it seems clear that the author is still addressing readers (or reciters, according to the title), and not actors in a theatrical situation, when he says that '*You must, by your manner of reading this, try to bring the very scene described before the mind's eye of your hearer*' (73). Put differently, a reader ought to create a 'stage' (a scene) in the hearer's

imagination, while actors perform on a stage whose scenery already shows places and venues to the onlookers. In a way, readers' responsibility is even greater than actors' when creating 'aural' settings, even though – according to John Hill's first version of *The Actor* – 'playing' is to 'common reading' 'what a finish'd picture is to a first rough draught in chalk' (Hill 1750, 317).

About a third of the text is devoted to drama (the reads that the volume also contains 'instructions for reading plays'). After stressing the difficulty for play readers to give voice to different characters, the author admits that he 'cannot commence this part of [his]work better than with Hamlet's well-known instructions to the Players' (Anonymous 1799, 139). Before the introduction of long passages from *The Merchant of Venice* and from *Othello*, we find a paragraph which, after condemning the monotony and uniformity of some readings, expressly encourages readers to peruse Shakespearean drama. But, the text adds,

It will not be expected in the reader that he should enter into a theatrical exhibition of them [Shakespearean scenes] and give them that personation which we are used to see displayed on the stage. It is however necessary that he [the reader] should discriminate between several parts he has to read; give to each its peculiar look, voice, and manner; mark the transition from one sentiment to another; although the whole need not be so forcibly delineated, or painted with such strength of colouring, as a public dramatic display of the characters requires. (142-143; italics mine)

The miscellany ends with a long (and of course commented) passage from *The Provoked Husband*, a play by John Vanburgh and Colley Cibber (1728).

Like other manuals for reading aloud, *The Reader or Reciter* always highlights the need for continuous practice: actually, all these anthologies collecting literary passages are reading exercise-books. All of them show the importance of reading aloud as a social practice in the eighteenth century, increasing the sociability of British drawing-rooms in middle-class homes.¹⁹ At the same time, they run parallel to the growth and improvement of British theatrical performers, some of whom – like Mrs. Siddons and John Philip Kemble – attended with interest Thomas Sheridan's lectures (see Bacon 1964, 45), and possibly found many a connection between this author's theses and the principles outlined in the 'art of acting' manuals of the time.

4. Conclusions

At the end of this research through the elocution movement and some publications embodying its principles, what has been said must also necessarily be briefly regarded in a broader frame. If we consider, with Roger Chartier,

¹⁹ About the relationship between English literature and salon meetings, see Tinker 1915.

that ‘Works and discourses exist only when they become physical realities and are inscribed on the pages of a book, transmitted by a voice reading or narrating, or spoken on the stage of a theatre’ (1994, 7), the elocutionary production can be interpreted as a powerful way British society used to think of its own language and culture, and to refine the awareness of its national identity. In a certain way, the elocutionists also laid the foundations of the ‘art’ of teaching English to foreigners and not only to their countrymen (let us think of Walker’s *Pronouncing Dictionary*, and of Sheridan’s dictionary, whose full title claims to have the establishment of ‘a Plain and Permanent Standard of Pronunciation’ as a main and primary object).

Eighteenth-century British society lived through an era of vast improvement of literacy, especially in the middle class, and of female literacy, so that the century’s great novels were certainly written not only for silent reading but with an ‘ear’ to family and shared readings, when possibly illiterate servants might as well be present. The now nearly lost practice of reading aloud created and reinforced sociability, while – at the same time – allowing the illiterate to access literature and any other printed material.²⁰ British elocutionists had understood that reading aloud had the

dual function of communicating the written word to those who are unable to decipher it themselves but also of cementing the interlocking forms of sociability that are emblematic of private life in the intimacy of family circle, in worldly conviviality, and in literary circles and spheres of scholarly sociability. (Chartier 1994, 8)

But exactly because of the social value of shared reading and the pleasurableness of this practice when properly performed, the elocutionists invited unskilled readers to learn how to avoid dullness and the ‘cold inanimated manner usually adopted’ (Anonymous 1796, ix). To achieve these skills, easy-to-use manuals were printed as would-be guides for the various Mr. Hay(s) of those days, whose inability Mrs. Montagu stigmatises in her letter.

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²⁰ Recently, there appears to be a rebirth of the desire of and interest in shared reading: see the high number of web sites devoted to this. The possible influence exerted by the awareness of communal reading on eighteenth-century British writers is announced as central to Williams (2017). This volume, whose scope is much richer and broader than that of the present article, was still forthcoming when the latter had already been written; therefore it could not be made use of for this research, and all possible coincidences are simply due to the separate investigations of a common – or at least partly similar – cultural and literary corpus.

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APPENDIX

‘and I would like to be hearing
about them night and day’¹

Orlando. I pray you, mar no more of my verses
with reading them ill-favouredly.
William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 3.2.257-258

1. *Recollections, Memoires, Diaries*

Augustinus Hipponensis, *Confessiones*

Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by J.G. Pilkington (1943), from Book V

To Milan I came, to Ambrose the Bishop, known to the whole world as among the best of men, Thy devout servant; whose eloquent discourse did then plentifully dispense unto Thy people the flour of Thy wheat, the gladness of Thy oil, and the sober inebriation of Thy wine. To him was I unknowing led by Thee, that by him I might knowingly be led to Thee. That man of God received me as a father, and showed me an Episcopal kindness on my coming. Thenceforth I began to love him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth (which I utterly despaired of in Thy Church), but as a person kind towards myself. And I listened diligently to him preaching to the people, not with that intent I ought, but, as it were, trying his eloquence, whether it answered the fame thereof, or flowed fuller or lower than was reported; and I hung on his words attentively; but of the matter I was as a careless and scornful looker-on; and I was delighted with the sweetness of his discourse, more recondite, yet in manner less winning and harmonious, than that of Faustus. Of the matter, however, there was no comparison; for the one was wandering amid Manichaeian delusions, the other teaching salvation most soundly. But salvation is far from sinners, such as I then stood before him; and yet was I drawing nearer by little and little, and unconsciously.

¹ Miguel de Cervantes, *The ingenious gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, translated by John Ormsby (1885), Part I, chap. 32. Unless otherwise stated, translations of works not available in English are by the compiler of this Appendix. I wish to thank Carmelina Imbroscio for the suggestion of the French (and not only French) texts that appear in this Appendix.

Dante Alighieri, 'Inferno', *La divina commedia*, from Canto V, 115-138

Poi mi rivolsi a loro e parla' io,
e cominciai: 'Francesca, i tuoi martiri
a lagrimar mi fanno tristo e pio.

Ma dimmi: al tempo d'ì dolci sospiri,
a che e come concedette Amore
che nosceste i dubbiosi disiri?'

E quella a me: 'Nessun maggior dolore
che ricordarsi del tempo felice
ne la miseria; e ciò sa 'l tuo dottore.

Ma s'a conoscer la prima radice
del nostro amor tu hai cotanto affetto,
dirò come colui che piange e dice.

Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto
di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse;
soli eravamo e senza alcun sospetto.

Per più fiate li occhi ci sospinse
quella lettura, e scolorocci il viso;
ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse.

Quando leggemmo il disiato riso
esser baciato da cotanto amante,
questi, che mai da me non fia diviso,

la bocca mi baciò tutto tremante.
Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse:
quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante'.

Dante Alighieri, 'Hell', *The Vision, or Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, of Dante* (1814), translated by H.F. Cary, from Canto V, 112-135

Then turning, I to them my speech address'd,
And thus began: 'Francesca! your sad fate
Even to tears my grief and pity moves.
But tell me; in the time of your sweet sighs,
By what, and how Love granted, that ye knew
Your yet uncertain wishes?' She replied:
'No greater grief than to remember days
Of joy, when misery is at hand. That kens
Thy learn'd instructor. Yet so eagerly
If thou art bent to know the primal root,
From whence our love gat being, I will do
As one, who weeps and tells his tale. One day,
For our delight we read of Lancelot,

How him love thrall'd. Alone we were, and no
 Suspicion near us. Oft-times by that reading
 Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
 Fled from our alter'd cheek. But at one point
 Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
 The wished smile so raptoriously kiss'd
 By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er
 From me shall separate, at once my lips
 All trembling kiss'd. The book and writer both
 Were love's purveyors. In its leaves that day
 We read no more.'

Samuel Pepys, from *Diary* (1660-1669)

Saturday 4 November 1665

Thence I to the Swan, ... and so I by water to Deptford, and there made a visit to Mr. Evelyn ... He read to me very much also of his discourse, he hath been many years and now is about, about Guardenage; which will be a most noble and pleasant piece. He read me part of a play or two of his making, very good, but not as he conceits them, I think, to be ... He read me, though with too much gusto, some little poems of his own, that were not transcendant, yet one or two very pretty epigrams; among others, of a lady looking in at a grate, and being pecked at by an eagle that was there.

...

Tuesday 4 June 1667

To the office all the afternoon, where I dispatched much business to my great content, and then home in the evening, and there to sing and pipe with my wife, and that being done, she fell all of a sudden to discourse about her clothes and my humours in not suffering her to wear them as she pleases, and grew to high words between us, but I fell to read a book aloud in my chamber and let her talk, till she was tired and vexed that I would not hear her, and so become friends, and to bed together the first night after 4 or 5 that she hath lain from me by reason of a great cold she had got.

...

Tuesday 26 May 1668

Up by four o'clock; and by the time we were ready, and had eat, we were called to the coach, where about six o'clock we set out, there being a man and two women of one company, ordinary people, and one lady alone, that is tolerably handsome, but mighty well spoken, whom I took great pleasure in talking to, and did get her to read aloud in a book she was reading, in the coach, being the King's Meditations; and then the boy and I to sing, and so about noon come to Bishop's Stafford, to another house than what we were at the other day, and better used.

Vittorio Alfieri, *Vita di Vittorio Alfieri da Asti, scritta da esso* (1804)
Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Victor Alfieri; Written by Himself, translated
 by Henry Colburn (1810)

I had successively read all these tragedies in different societies composed of men of letters, literary females, others, who though not possessed of cultivated minds were yet susceptible of all the passions, and of others again who were grossly ignorant, and wholly destitute of education. In reading them, it is true, I had utility not praise in view; I knew the world, and especially the great world, too well to be inflated with pride, or stupidly to believe in any praises which flow not from the heart, but which cannot well be refused by a well-bred audience to an author who makes no pretensions, and who fatigues himself by reading his productions for their amusement. I estimated therefore the eulogiums I received at their true value, but I knew how to appreciate, and was extremely attentive to the praise and disapprobation of looks, if I may be permitted to employ the expression. Whenever twelve or fifteen individuals are assembled together, such as I have described, the general feeling which pervades this assembly will very much resemble that of a pit in a theatre. Though not compelled to be present, and though politeness requires that they should appear to be satisfied, it is nevertheless impossible to conceal the coldness and ennui they may feel, and still more so, to assume a lively interest in what is going forward, or to display an ardent curiosity to reach the development of the plot. As an auditor can neither command his features, nor fix himself to his seat, his countenance and motions must afford a sufficient indication to an author respecting the sensations which his work is calculated to produce. This was almost the sole object I had in view by reading my pieces; and I thought I could remark, that during two thirds of the time my hearers gave to them an undivided attention, and that their anxiety redoubled on approaching the catastrophe. ... I must here also acknowledge that those tedious and languid passages, which fatigued and disgusted me on a reperusal were done ample justice to by the eternal yawnings, involuntary coughs, and restless motions of my hearers, who in this manner afforded me, without intending it, the most salutary counsel.

...

As, however, I neither wished to expose myself to the charge of plagiarism, nor of the sin of ingratitude, and as I conceived this tragedy belonged by right to Euripides, I placed it among my translations, where it remains under the title of *Alceste II*. by the side of *Alceste I*. which led me to conceive and execute the former. I mentioned not the infraction of my vow to any one, not even to my better half, hoping to derive some amusement from this silence. In the month of December, I read this production, as a translation from Euripides, to a party of friends, whom I had purposely invited to my house. Those who did not thoroughly remember the original fell into the snare; but

an individual happening to be present who perfectly recollected it, discovered the joke towards the end of the third act; and the reading, which began in the name of Euripides, concluded in mine. This drama was well received, and even I myself, though I saw in it much to correct and retrench, was on the whole not displeased with it.

...

I read Homer in the original Greek, pronouncing every word in an audible tone of voice, and rendered literally, into Latin, those verses which I wished to study in the morning. Those frequently amounted to sixty, eighty, or even a hundred and the blunders I committed in this exercise never interrupted my progress. After mangling these verses, I endeavoured to accent them properly.

2. *Courtesy and Conduct Books*

Baldesar Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1528)

The courtyer of Count Baldessar Castilio diuided into foure bookes, done into English by Thomas Hoby (1561), from Book I

So the daye after the Pope was departed, the companye beeinge gathered to the accustomed place, after muche pleasaunt talke, the Dutchesse pleasure was that the *L. Emilia* should beginne these pastimes: and she after a litle refusing of that charge, sayd in this maner: Syth it is your pleasure (Madam) I shall be she that must giue the onsett in oure pastimes this night, because I ought not of reason disobey you, I thinke meete to propounde a pastyme, whereof I suppose shall ensue litle blame, and lesse trauayle. And that shall be to haue euery man, as nigh as he can, propounde a deuysed not yet hearde of, then shall we chuse out such a one as shall be thought meete to be taken in hande in this companye. And after she had thus spoken, she tourned her vnto the *L. Gaspar Pallauicin*, willynge him to propounde his ... After the *L. Gaspar* hadde thus spoken, the *L. Emilia* made a signe vnto the *Lady Constance Fregosa*, because she was next in order, to folow: who was now about to speake, whan the Dutchesse sodeinlye said: Seinge the *L. Emilia* will not take the paine to fynde out some pastime, reason willeth that the other Ladyes should be partakers of the same priuilege, and be also fre from this burden for this night: especially seing there are so manye men in place, for assure your self we shall want no pastimes. So shall we do, aunswered the *L. Emilia*, and puttinge the *L. Constance* to silence tourned her to the *L. Cesar Gonzaga*, that sat next her, commaunding him to speak ... This pastime was muche praysed, and therefore dyd euerye man setle himselfe to reason vpon this matter. But the *Lady Emilia* holdyng her peace *M. Peter Bembo*, that satt next in order, spake in this maner: My Lordes, this pastime that the *L. Octauian* hath propounded hath rayseed no smal doubt in my mind, where he hath resoned of the disdiegnes of loue, the whiche though they be sondry,

yet vnto me haue they alwaies bin most bitter. Neither do I beleue that I can learne any sauce y^t shalbe sufficient to sweten them. But peraduenture they are the more & the lesse bitter according to the cause wherof they arrise. For I haue in my daies (I remember) seene the woman whom I serued, stirred against me, eyther vpon a vaine suspicyon that she conceyued her self of my trustinesse, or elles vpon some other false opinyon that had bine put into her head by some mennes report to my hindraunce, so that I beleued no grief might be compared to myne . . . Therefore woulde I oure pastyme were to haue euerye man declare his opinion, where there must be a disdeigne agaynst hym in the person beloued, of whom he woulde the cause of this disdeigne shoulde haue his beeginning, whether of her or of him selfe: to know which is the greater grief, eyther to dysplease the wight beloued, or to receyue dyspleasure of the wyght beloued. Euery man looked what the *L. Emilia* woulde make aunswere to this, but without anye woord speakyng to *Bembo*, she tourned her and made a signe to *Sir Friderick Fregoso* to shew his deuysse. And he incontinentlye beegan thus: Madam, I woulde it were lawfull for me, as the maner is manye tymes to remytte me to the iudgement of an other, for I for my part woulde wyth all my heart allowe some of the pastymes that haue bine already propounded by these Lordes, bicause in deede me thinke they would be worth the hearing. Yet least I shoulde breake the order, thys I saye: who so woulde take in hande to praise our Court leauing a part the desertes of the dutchesse, which ghostly spirite, with her influence, is sufficient to drawe from the earth vp into heauen the simplist wittes in the worlde, he might wel do it without suspicion of flattery. For peraduenture in all Italy a man shall haue muche a do to fynde out so many gentlemen and noble personages that are so worthy, and besyde the principall profession of Chiuallrye so excellent in sundry thinges, as are presently here. Therfore if in any place men may be founde y^t deserue the name of good Courtyer, and can iudge what belongeth to the perfeccion of Courtyership, by reason a man may beleue them to be here. To disgrace therefore many vntowardly asseheades, that through malepertnes thinke to purchase them the name of a good Courtyer, I would haue suche a pastime for this night, that one of the company myght bee picked out who should take in hand to shape in woordes a good Courtyer, specifying all suche condicions and particuler qualities, as of necessitie must be in hym that deserueth this name. And in suche thinges as shall not appere necessarie, that it may be lawfull for euery man to replye against them, as the maner of Philosophers schooles is against him that kepeth disputacions. *Syr Friderick* proceaded styll forward, in his talke, whan the *L. Emilia*: interruptyng hym, sayde: If it bee my *L.* the dutchesse pleaser, this shall be our pastime for this once. The dutchesse aunswere: I am wel pleased. Then (in maner) all the company began to say both to the dutchesse, & among themselues that this was the trimmest pastyme they could haue, and without looking for answeere the one of the other, thei craued vpon the *Lady Emilia* to appoint who shoulde first beginne.

Giovanni Della Casa, from *Galateo overo de' costumi* (1558)
Galateo of Maister Iohn Della Casa, Archebishop of Beneuenta. Or rather, A Treatise of ma[n]ners and behaiours, done into English by Robet Peterson (1576)

Neither in sporte nor in earnest, must a man speake any thing against *God* or his *Saintes*, how witty or pleasaunt so euer the matter be. Wherein, the company that *Giouan Boccaccio* hathe brought to speake in his *Nouvelles* and tales, hath faulted so muche: that me thinkes euery good body, may iustly blame them for it. And you must thinke *It is not only a token of great detestation & Impietie in a man, to talke in iesting wise of God: but hee is a vvicked & sinfull man, that will abyde to heare it.* But you shall finde some suche good men, as will flie asmuche as the plague, the company of such as talke so vnreuerently, and without respect, of the incomprehensible Maiestie of God. *And vvee must not alone speake religiously of him: but in all our talkes wee must auoyde what vvee may, that our vvordes may not vvitnes against our life and our vvorkes.* For me[n] doe hate their owne faultes otherwhile, when they see them in another. Likewise it is vnsauourie, to talke of things out of tyme, not fitting the place and company: although the matter it selfe, and spoken in tyme, were otherwise both good and godly. We must not then rehearse Fryers sermones to young gentlewomen, when they are disposed to sporte the[m] selues ... And in feastes & at table, wee must beware wee doe not rehearse any sorrowfull tales, nor put them in minde of woundes, of sicknes, of deathes, of Plagues, or of other dolefull matters. But if another man chauce to moue suche matter: it shalbe good, after an honest and gentell sorte, to exchange that talke, and thrust in some other, yt may giue them more delighe and pleasure to heare it.

...

So that, in no wyse, I can excuse our friend *Philostrato*, for his worke that hee made full of dule and of death, to suche a company as desired nothing more then myrthe. Wee must the rather vse sylence, then discourse of suche sorrowfull matters. And they doe asmuch amisse too, that neuer haue other thing in their mouthe, then their children, their wife, and their nourse. *My litle boy, made mee so laughe yesterday: heare you: you neuer savue a svveeter babe in your life: my wyfe is such a one, Cecchina told mee: of troth you vvould not beleeeue vvhat a vvit shee hath:* There is none so idle a body, that will eyther intend to answer, or abyde to heare suche foolishe prytte prattle. For it yrcks a mans eares to harken vnto it. There be some againe, so curious in telling their dreames from point to point, vsing such wonder and admiration withall, y^t it makes a mans hart ake to heare them: & specially because (for y^e most parte) they be such kinde of people: as it is but labour lost to heare, euē the very best exploits they doe, when they be most awake, and labour most to shew their best. Wherefore we must not trouble men with so base and absurde matter as dreames bee: especially suche foolyshe things, as most tymes men haue.

...
Our vvordes (be it in longe discourses or other communication) *Must be so plaine, that all the companie may easily vnderstand them:* and withall, for sounde and sense they must be apt and sweete. For if you be to vse one of these two wordes: you shall rather say, *Il ventre:* then *L'Épa.* And where your country speache will beare it, you shall rather say: *La Pancia,* then *L'Ventre:* Or, *il Corpo.* For, by these meanes you shalbe vnderstoode, and not misse vnderstoode, as we *Florentines* say, nor be darke and obscure to the hearers.

...
 It is not then for a man to vse any talke, with him that vnderstandeth not that language you talke vnto him. Nor yet, bycause a *Douche man* vnderstandes not the *Italian tounge,* must wee (for that cause) breake of our talke, to holde talke with him, to make our selues counterfets, as Maister *Brufaldo* did, and as some other be woont, that fondly and coldly, without any grace, thrust them selues in to Chat in their language with whome they talke, what so euer it be, and chop it out euery worde preposterously. And many times it chaunceth, the *Spaniard* talkes *Italian* with the *Italian,* and the *Italian* babbles againe in a braueuery and gallantnes, the *Spanishe tounge* with the *Spaniard.* And yet, it is an easier thing to know, y^e they both talke like strangers: then to forbear to laugh at the folish follies that scape them both in speache. *Let vs not therefore vse our forreigne language, but vvhen it is needefull for vs to be vnderstoode, for some necessitie or other, that appertaineth vnto vs:* And in common vse, vse our owne tounge, though not altogether so good: rather then a forreigne language, better then our owne that is naturall vnto vs. For a *Lumbarde* shall speake his owne tounge more aptly (which is, notwithstanding, but base and barbarous) then he shall speake the *Tuscane,* or other language: euen bycause he hath not so redily, so proper and peculiar wordes, althoughe he studie much for them, as wee our selues that be *Tuscanes.*

Stefano Guazzo, from *La civil conuersazione* (1574)

The ciuile conuersation of M. Steeuē Guazzo written first in Italian, and nowe translated out of French by George Pettie, deuided into foure bookees (1581), from Book I

Guaz. [William Guazzo]

For that this is a profitable and pleasant matter, I beséech you that in these thrée dayes which I haue to stay héere with you, wée may employ héerein that little leasure which shalbe left you from practising on your patients: and that you will shewe vnto me all those things which belong to conuersation, to the ende, that comming in company with any, of what calling and condition soeuer, I may bee sure to omit nothing which [*sic*] I ought to performe.

Annib. [*Annibal Magnoca*]

I cannot throughly satisfie your desire, for many causes: and first, for that to searche out all the particular points of conuersation, were a matter, if not impossible, yet at least that would require manie monethes worke: besides, we must consider that (as the Philosophers say) there can be no certaine and determinate science, from particular to particular. Then the particularities of conuersation being knowne for the most part to men of meane vnderstanding, I should do you wrong, & should thinke my self to speake superfluously (yea, euen when I should speak to those ignorant and vnskilfull fellowes) if I should intreate of things so ordinarie and common. And therefore it shal suffice vs to intreate of those things which are principally required in conuersation, wherewith perchance we shall haue occasion to mingle & ioyne so manie other bymatters, that I doubt not but you shall rest satisfied.

Guaz.

Uerily, I see by this time that as well for the diuersitie of matters which occurre in conuersation, as for the difference of the life & manners of men, with whom we are conuersant, you shall take vpon you a trauell & charge farre greater than the twelue labors of *Hercules*, throughly to intreate of it. For considering that people differ one from another in degree, in age, in kinde, in life, in maners, and in profession, it were a hard & tedious peece of worke to set downe fully and absolutely the proper dueties of euery one of these, and of whosoever shall frequent their companie. And I am of opinion, that when one shall haue prescribed a certaine fourme of conuersation to all those, yet hee shal not then haue doone, for that there must bee respect has not onely to the difference which is betwene one kind and another, but to that also which is betwene persons of one onely kinde: for not onely young men differ in behaiour from olde, and Gentlemen from Yomen: but euen young men amongst themselues differ, as also one olde man differeth in behaiour from another olde man, and one Gentleman from another Gentleman.

Annib.

Seeing that these differences fall out in all kindes, I will briefly set fourth certaine generall and most needefull meanes, whereby all of them may bee reduced to one law: Touching the fourme afterward required in conuersation, with persons different in state and condition, whom wee haue already named, to the end you bee not deceiued, you shal vnderstand, my meaning is not to discourse formally of their duetie, neither to lay before you all those morall vertues which pertaine to the perfection and happy state of life.

Guaz.

Why deferre you to speake of a matter so profitable.

Annib.

Two speciall causes withholde mee: the one, for that I know that not onely the *Greekes & Latines*, but also all other nations haue filled the worlde with diuers volumes full of precepts of Philosophie.

Guaz.

The more bookes of Philosophie we haue at this day, the fewer Philosophers we haue but tell me if it please you, the other cause.

Annib.

The other is, that if I should make a ful & perfect discourse of Morall *Philosophie*, it would stande none in stéede, but such as are of deep vnderstanding, as you are, but minding to speake in particular, of the manners of conuersation méete for all sortes of people, it behouoeth mée to haue an eye to the common profite, weighing that the most parte of men, is not only destitute of intellectuall and morall vertues, but besides, is neither in wit apte, nor in wil desirous to receiue them, so that it were a vaine thing (that I may not say foolish) to goe about to teache by Art, and improper termes, theforesaide vertues to such kinde of people.

Guaz.

I holde well with that you haue saide, and for that perchance the time approacheth, that you are to visite your patientes, it shall doe well heere to make a pause, and to morrowe if it please you, wee will take againe our matter in hand, either héere, or at your house at your choice.

Annib.

If it shal not trouble you, I can stay heere with you a little while longer, and we can choose no fitter place for our purpose then this same, which with the goodly sight of diuerse pleasant pictures (wherwith it is adorned) doth meruellously recreate or mindes, and ministreth occasion of witty talke.

Guaz.

Goe forwarde (I pray you) hardly so farre as it shall please you, for I assure you I neuer hearde more delightful harmonie then this same.

Annib.

For so much then as your question was what manner of conuersatiō is necessarie for the attaining of that perfection which we haue spokē of, I set a part al other sorts, and propose for this purpose the ciuile conuersation.

Guaz.

What meane you by that woord, Ciuile?

Annib.

If you meane to know my meaning of it, I must first aske if you know any citizen which liueth vnciuilly?

Guaz.

Yes mary doe I, more then one.

Annib.

Now let me aske you on the contrarie, if you know any man of the countrey which liueth ciuilly.

Guaz.

Yea very many.

Annib.

You sée then, that we giue a large sense & signification to this woorde (*ciuile*)

for that we would haue vnderstoode, that to liue ciuilly, is not sayde in respect of the citie, but of the quallities of the minde: so I vnderstand ciuile conuersation not hauing relation to the citie, but consideration to the maners and conditions which make it ciuile. And as lawes and ciuile ordinances are distributed not onely to cities, but to villages, castles, and people subiect vnto them, so I will that ciuile conuersation appertaine not onely to men inhabiting cities, but too all sortes of persons of what place, or of what calling soeuer they are. Too bee shorte, my meaning is, that ciuile conuersation is an honest commendable and vertuous kinde of liuing in the world.

Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), from chapter 6 ('Of stile in speaking and writing, and of Historie)

Since speech is the Character of a man, and the Interpreter of his mind, and writing, the Image of that: that so often as we speak or write, so oft we undergoe censure and iudgement of our selues: labour first by all meanes to get the habit of a good stile in speaking and writing, as well in English as Latine. I call with *Tully* that a good and eloquent stile of speaking, *Where there is a iudicious fitting of choise words, apt and graue Sentences vnto matter well disposed, the same being vttered with a comely moderation of the voyce, countenance, and gestures.* Not that same ampullous and Scenicall pompe, with empty furniture of phrase, wherewith the Stage, and our petty Poeticke Pamphlets sound so big, which like a net in the water, though it feeleth weighty, yet it yeeldeth nothing ... and as *Plutarch* saith, when our thirst is quenched with the drinke, then wee looke upon the enameling and workmanship of the boule; so first your hearer coveteth to have his desire satisfied with matter, ere hee looketh upon the forme or vinery of words, which many times fall in of themselues to matter well contriued, according to *Horace*:

Rem bene dispositam vel verba invita sequuntur
To matter well dispos'd, words of themselves doe fall.

Let your stile therefore bee furnished with solid matter, and compact of the best, choice, and most familiar words; taking heed of speaking, or writing such words, as men shall rather admire than understand.

...

In speaking, rather lay downe your words one by one, than powre them forth together, for, ... beside the grace it giueth to the Speaker, it much helpeth the memory of the hearer, and is a good remedie against impediment of speech. Sir *Nicholas Bacon*, sometime Lord Chancellor of *England*, and father to my Lord of *S. Albanes*, a most eloquent man, and of as sound learning and wisdom, as *England* bred in many Ages: with the old Lord *William*

Burghley, Lord Treasurer of England; haue aboue others herein beene admired, and commended in their publike speeches in the Parliament house and Starre-Chamber: for nothing drawes our attention more than good matter, eloquently digested, and vttered with a gracefull, cleere, and distinct pronuntiation.

3. *Telling Tales in a Garden, on the Road, before the Fireplace*

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, translation attributed to John Florio (1620), from 'Giornata prima'

In the morning, the Queene and all the rest being risen, accounting ouermuch sleepe to be very hurtfull: they walked abroad into a goodly Meadowe, where the grasse grew verdantly, and the beames of the Sunne heated not ouer-violently, because the shades of faire spreading trees gaue a temperate calmenesse, coole and gentle winds fanning their sweet breath pleasingly among them. All of them being there set downe in a round ring, and the Queene in the middest, as being the appointed place of eminencie, she spake in this manner.

You see (faire company) that the Sunne is highly mounted, the heate (else-where) too extreme for vs, and therefore here is our fittest refuge, the aire being so coole, delicate, and acceptable, and our folly well worthie reprehension, if we should walke further, and speede worse. Heere are Tables, Cards, and Chesse, as your dispositions may be addicted. But if mine aduice might passe for currant, I would admit none of those exercises, because they are too troublesome both to them that play, and such as looke on. I could rather wish, that some quaint discourse might passe among vs, a tale or fable related by some one, to vrge the attention of all the rest. And so wearing out the warmth of the day, one prety Nouell wil draw on another, vntil the Sun be lower declined, and the heates extremity more diminished, to solace our selues in some other place, as to our minds shal seeme conuenient. If therefore what I haue sayde be acceptable to you (I purposing to follow in the same course of pleasure) let it appeare by your immediate answer; for, til the Euening, I think we can deuise no exercise more commodious for vs.

The Ladies & Gentlemen allowed of the motion, to spend the time in telling pleasant tales; whereupon the Queene saide: Seeing you haue approoued mine aduice, I grant free permission for this first day, that euery one shall relate, what to him or her is best pleasing. And turning her selfe to Pamphilus (who was seated on her right hand) gaue him fauour, with one of his Nouels, to begin the recreation: which he not daring to deny, and perceiuing generall attention prepared for him, thus he began.

Messire Chappelet du Prat, by making a false confession, beguyled an holy Religious man, and after dyed. And hauing (during his life time) bene a verie bad man, at his death was reputed to be a Saint, and called S. Chappelet.

The first Nouell

Wherein is contained, how hard a thing it is, to distinguish goodnesse from hypocrisie; and how (vnder the shadow of holinesse) the wickednes of one man, may deceiue many.

It is a matter most conuenient (deare Ladies) that a man ought to begin whatsoeuer he doth, in the great and glorious name of him, who was the Creator of all things. Wherefore, seeing that I am the man appointed, to begin this your inuention of discoursing Nouelties: I intend to begin also with one of his wonderfull workes. To the end, that this beeing heard, our hope may remaine on him, as the thing onely permanent, and his name for euer to be praised by vs. Now, as there is nothing more certaine, but that euen as temporall things are mortall and transitory, so are they both in and out of themselues, full of sorrow, paine, and anguish, and subiected to infinite dangers: So in the same manner, we liue mingled among them, seeming as part of them, and cannot (without some error) continue or defend our selues, if God by his especiall grace and fauour, giue vs not strength and good vnderstanding. Which power we may not belecue, that either it descendeth to vs, or liueth in vs, by any merites of our owne; but of his onely most gracious benignity. Mooued neuerthesse, and entreated by the intercessions of them, who were (as we are) mortals; and hauing diligently obserued his commandements, are now with him in eternall blessednes. To whom (as to aduocates and procurators, informed by the experience of our frailty) wee are not to present our prayers in the presence of so great a Iudge; but only to himselfe, for the obtaining of all such things as his wisdom knoweth to be most expedient for vs. And well may we credit, that his goodnesse is more fully enclined towards vs, in his continuall bounty and liberality; then the subtilty of any mortal eye, can reach into the secret of so diuine a thought: and sometimes therefore we may be beguiled in opinion, by electing such and such as our intercessors before his high Maiesty, who perhaps are farre off from him, or driuen into perpetuall exile, as vnworthy to appeare in so glorious a presence. For he, from whom nothing can be hidden, more regardeth the sincerity of him that prayeth, then ignorant deuotion, committed to the trust of a heedlesse intercessor; and such prayers haue alwaies gracious acceptation in his sight. As manifestly will appeare, by the Nouell which I intend to relate; manifestly (I say) not as in the iudgement of God, but according to the apprehension of men.

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, original text ed. by F.N. Robinson (1933), from 'The General Prologue', 751-858

A semely man oure hooste was withalle
 For to han been a marchal in an halle.
 A large man he was with eyen stepe —
 A fairer burgeys is ther noon in chepe —
 Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,
 And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.
 Eek therto he was right a myrie man,
 And after soper pleyen he bigan,
 And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,
 Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynges,
 And seyde thus: now, lordynges, trewely,
 Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;
 For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,
 I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a compaignye
 Atones in this herberwe as is now.
 Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.
 And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,
 To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.
 Ye goon to caunterbury — God yow speede,
 The blisful martir quite yow youre meede!
 And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,
 Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;
 For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon
 To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon;
 And therefore wol I maken yow disport,
 As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.
 And if yow liketh alle by oon assent
 For to stonden at my juggement,
 And for to werken as I shal yow seye,
 To-morwe, whan ye riden by the weye,
 Now, by my fader soule that is deed,
 But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed!
 Hoold up youre hondes, withouten moore speche.
 Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche.
 Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,
 And graunted hym withouten moore avys,
 And bad him seye his voidit as hym leste.
 Lordynges, quod he, now herkneth for the beste;
 But taak it nought, I prey yow, in desdeyn.
 This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn,

That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,
 In this viage shal telle tales tweye
 To caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
 And homward he shal tellen othere two,
 Of adventures that whilom han bifalle.
 And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle,
 That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas
 Tales of best sentence and moost solaaas,
 Shal have a soper at oure aller cost
 Heere in this place, sittynge by this post,
 Whan that we come agayn fro caunterbury.
 And for to make yow the moore mury,
 I wol myselfen goodly with yow ryde,
 Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde,
 And whoso wole my juggement withseye
 Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye.
 And if ye vouche sauf that it be so,
 Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo,
 And I wol erly shape me therfore.
 This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore
 With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
 That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,
 And that he wolde been oure governour,
 And oure tales juge and reportour,
 And sette a soper at a certeyn pris,
 And we wol reuled been at his devys
 In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent
 We been acorded to his juggement.
 And therupon the wyn was fet anon;
 We dronken, and to reste wente echon,
 Withouten any lenger taryynge.
 Amorwe, whan that day bigan to sprynge,
 Up roos oure hoost, and was oure aller cok,
 And gradrede us togidre alle in a flok,
 And forth we riden a litel moore than paas
 Unto the wateryng of seint thomas;
 And there oure hoost bigan his hors areste
 And seyde, lordynges, herkneth, if yow leste.
 Ye woot youre foreward, and I it yow recorde.
 If even-song and morwe-song accorde,
 Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.
 As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale,
 Whoso be rebel to my juggement

Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent.
 Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne;
 He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.
 Sire knyght, quod he, my mayster and my lord,
 Now draweth cut, for that is myn accord.
 Cometh neer, quod he, my lady prioresse.
 And ye, sire clerk, lat be youre shamefastnesse,
 Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man!
 Anon to drawn every wight bigan,
 And shortly for to tellen as it was,
 Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,
 The sothe is this, the cut fil to the knyght,
 Of which ful blithe and glad was every wyght,
 And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun,
 By foreward and by composicioun,
 As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?
 And whan this goode man saugh that it was so,
 As he that wys was and obedient
 To kepe his foreward by his free assent,
 He seyde, syn I shal bigynne the game,
 What, welcome be the cut, a goddes name!
 Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye.
 And with that word we ryden forth oure weye,
 And he bigan with right a myrie cheere
 His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere.

Miguel de Cervantes de Saavedra, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha*, Part I (1605)

The ingenious gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha, translated by John Ormsby (1885), from chapter 32

While at dinner, the company consisting of the landlord, his wife, their daughter, Maritornes, and all the travellers, they discussed the strange craze of Don Quixote and the manner in which he had been found; and the landlady told them what had taken place between him and the carrier; and then, looking round to see if Sancho was there, when she saw he was not, she gave them the whole story of his blanketing, which they received with no little amusement. But on the curate observing that it was the books of chivalry which Don Quixote had read that had turned his brain, the landlord said:

‘I cannot understand how that can be, for in truth to my mind there is no better reading in the world, and I have here two or three of them, with other writings that are the very life, not only of myself but of plenty more; for when it

is harvest-time, the reapers flock here on holidays, and there is always one among them who can read and who takes up one of these books, and we gather round him, thirty or more of us, and stay listening to him with a delight that makes our grey hairs grow young again. At least I can say for myself that when I hear of what furious and terrible blows the knights deliver, I am seized with the longing to do the same, and I would like to be hearing about them night and day.'

'And I just as much,' said the landlady, 'because I never have a quiet moment in my house except when you are listening to some one reading; for then you are so taken up that for the time being you forget to scold.'

'That is true,' said Maritornes; 'and, faith, I relish hearing these things greatly too, for they are very pretty; especially when they describe some lady or another in the arms of her knight under the orange trees, and the duenna who is keeping watch for them half dead with envy and fright; all this I say is as good as honey.'

...

'And you, what do you think, young lady?' said the curate turning to the landlord's daughter.

'I don't know indeed, senor,' said she; 'I listen too, and to tell the truth, though I do not understand it, I like hearing it; but it is not the blows that my father likes that I like, but the laments the knights utter when they are separated from their ladies; and indeed they sometimes make me weep with the pity I feel for them.'

...

The landlord was carrying away the valise and the books, but the curate said to him, 'Wait; I want to see what those papers are that are written in such a good hand.' The landlord taking them out handed them to him to read, and he perceived they were a work of about eight sheets of manuscript, with, in large letters at the beginning, the title of 'Novel of the Ill-advised Curiosity.'

The curate read three or four lines to himself, and said, 'I must say the title of this novel does not seem to me a bad one, and I feel an inclination to read it all.'

To which the landlord replied, 'Then your reverence will do well to read it, for I can tell you that some guests who have read it here have been much pleased with it, and have begged it of me very earnestly; but I would not give it, meaning to return it to the person who forgot the valise, books, and papers here, for maybe he will return here some time or other; and though I know I shall miss the books, faith I mean to return them; for though I am an innkeeper, still I am a Christian.'

'You are very right, friend,' said the curate; 'but for all that, if the novel pleases me you must let me copy it.'

'With all my heart,' replied the host.

While they were talking Cardenio had taken up the novel and begun to read it, and forming the same opinion of it as the curate, he begged him to read it so that they might all hear it.

‘I would read it,’ said the curate, ‘if the time would not be better spent in sleeping.’

‘It will be rest enough for me,’ said Dorothea, ‘to while away the time by listening to some tale, for my spirits are not yet tranquil enough to let me sleep when it would be seasonable.’

‘Well then, in that case,’ said the curate, ‘I will read it, if it were only out of curiosity; perhaps it may contain something pleasant.’

Master Nicholas added his entreaties to the same effect, and Sancho too; seeing which, and considering that he would give pleasure to all, and receive it himself, the curate said, ‘Well then, attend to me everyone, for the novel begins thus.’

Henry James, from *The Turn of the Screw* (1898)

The story had held us, round the fire, sufficiently breathless, but except the obvious remark that it was gruesome, as, on Christmas Eve in an old house, a strange tale should essentially be, I remember no comment uttered till somebody happened to say that it was the only case he had met in which such a visitation had fallen on a child. The case, I may mention, was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion — an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also, herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shaken him. It was this observation that drew from Douglas — not immediately, but later in the evening — a reply that had the interesting consequence to which I call attention. Someone else told a story not particularly effective, which I saw he was not following. This I took for a sign that he had himself something to produce and that we should only have to wait. We waited in fact till two nights later; but that same evening, before we scattered, he brought out what was in his mind.

‘I quite agree — in regard to Griffin’s ghost, or whatever it was — that its appearing first to the little boy, at so tender an age, adds a particular touch. But it’s not the first occurrence of its charming kind that I know to have involved a child. If the child gives the effect another turn of the screw, what do you say to TWO children —?’

‘We say, of course,’ somebody exclaimed, ‘that they give two turns! Also that we want to hear about them.’

I can see Douglas there before the fire, to which he had got up to present his back, looking down at his interlocutor with his hands in his pockets. ‘Nobody but me, till now, has ever heard. It’s quite too horrible.’ This, naturally, was declared by several voices to give the thing the utmost price, and our friend, with quiet art, prepared his triumph by turning his

eyes over the rest of us and going on: 'It's beyond everything. Nothing at all that I know touches it.'

'For sheer terror?' I remember asking.

He seemed to say it was not so simple as that; to be really at a loss how to qualify it. He passed his hand over his eyes, made a little wincing grimace. 'For dreadful — dreadfulness!'

'Oh, how delicious!' cried one of the women.

He took no notice of her; he looked at me, but as if, instead of me, he saw what he spoke of. 'For general uncanny ugliness and horror and pain.'

'Well then,' I said, 'just sit right down and begin.'

He turned round to the fire, gave a kick to a log, watched it an instant. Then as he faced us again: 'I can't begin. I shall have to send to town.' There was a unanimous groan at this, and much reproach; after which, in his preoccupied way, he explained. 'The story's written. It's in a locked drawer — it has not been out for years. I could write to my man and enclose the key; he could send down the packet as he finds it.'

...

'You'll receive the packet Thursday morning?' I inquired.

'Probably not till the second post.'

'Well then; after dinner —'

'You'll all meet me here?' He looked us round again. 'Isn't anybody going?' It was almost the tone of hope.

'Everybody will stay!'

...

I knew the next day that a letter containing the key had, by the first post, gone off to his London apartments; but in spite of — or perhaps just on account of — the eventual diffusion of this knowledge we quite let him alone till after dinner, till such an hour of the evening, in fact, as might best accord with the kind of emotion on which our hopes were fixed. Then he became as communicative as we could desire and indeed gave us his best reason for being so. We had it from him again before the fire in the hall, as we had had our mild wonders of the previous night. It appeared that the narrative he had promised to read us really required for a proper intelligence a few words of prologue. Let me say here distinctly, to have done with it, that this narrative, from an exact transcript of my own made much later, is what I shall presently give. Poor Douglas, before his death — when it was in sight — committed to me the manuscript that reached him on the third of these days and that, on the same spot, with immense effect, he began to read to our hushed little circle on the night of the fourth. The departing ladies who had said they would stay didn't, of course, thank heaven, stay: they departed, in consequence of arrangements made, in a rage of curiosity, as they professed, produced by the touches with which he had already worked us up. But that only made his little final auditory more compact and select, kept it, round the hearth, subject to a common thrill.

4. *Reading and Reciting: Letters, Poems*

William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night or, What You Will*, from 2.5

Malvolio. [*seeing the letter*] What employment have we here?

Fabian. [*aside*] Now is the woodcock near the gin.

Toby. [*aside*] O, peace, and the spirit of humors intimate reading aloud to him.

Malvolio. [*taking up the letter*] By my life, this is my lady's hand! These be her very c's, her u's, and her t's, and thus she makes her great P's. It is in contempt of question her hand.

Andrew. [*aside*] Her c's, her u's, and her t's. Why that?

Malvolio. [*reads*] To the unknown beloved, this, and my good wishes — Her very phrases! By your leave, wax. Soft. And the impressure her Lucrece, with which she uses to seal — 'tis my lady! [*he opens the letter*]. To whom should this be?

Fabian. [*aside*] This wins him, liver and all.

Malvolio. [*reads*]

Jove knows I love,

But who?

Lips, do not move;

No man must know.

'No man must know.' What follows? The numbers altered. 'No man must know.' If this should be thee, Malvolio!

Toby. [*aside*] Marry, hang thee, brock!

Malvolio. [*reads*]

I may command where I adore,

But silence, like a Lucrece knife,

With bloodless stroke my heart doth gore;

M.O.A.I. doth sway my life.

Fabian. [*aside*] A fustian riddle!

Toby. [*aside*] Excellent wench, say I.

Malvolio. 'M.O.A.I. doth sway my life.' Nay, but first let me see, let me see, let me see.

Fabian. [*aside*] What dish o' poison has she dressed him!

Toby. [*aside*] And with what wing the staniel checks at it!

Malvolio. 'I may command where I adore.' Why, she may command me; I serve her; she is my lady. Why, this is evident to any formal capacity. There is no obstruction in this. And the end — what should that alphabetical position portend? If I could make that resemble something in me! Softly! 'M.O.A.I.' —

Toby. [*aside*] O, ay, make up that. — He is now at a cold scent.

Fabian. [*aside*] Sowter will cry upon 't for all this, though it be as rank as a fox.

Malvolio. 'M' — Malvolio. 'M' — why, that begins my name!

Fabian. [*aside*] Did not I say he would work it out? The cur is excellent at faults.

Malvolio. 'M.' But then there is no consonancy in the sequel that suffers under probation. 'A' should follow, but 'O' does.

Fabian. [*aside*] And 'O' shall end, I hope.

Toby. [*aside*] Ay, or I'll cudgel him and make him cry 'O.'

Malvolio. And then 'I' comes behind.

Fabian. [*aside*] Ay, an you had any eye behind you, you might see more detraction at your heels than fortunes before you.

Malvolio. 'M.O.A.I.' This simulation is not as the former, and yet to crush this a little, it would bow to me, for every one of these letters are in my name. Soft, here follows prose. [*reads*] If this fall into thy hand, revolve. In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy fates open their hands. Let thy blood and spirit embrace them. And, to inure thyself to what thou art like to be, cast thy humble slough and appear fresh. Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants. Let thy tongue tang arguments of state. Put thyself into the trick of singularity. She thus advises thee that sighs for thee. Remember who commended thy yellow stockings and wished to see thee ever cross-gartered. I say, remember. Go to, thou art made, if thou desir'st to be so. If not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of servants, and not worthy to touch Fortune's fingers. Farewell. She that would alter services with thee, The Fortunate-Unhappy. Daylight and champaign discovers not more! This is open. I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-devise the very man. I do not now fool myself, to let imagination jade me; for every reason excites to this, that my lady loves me. She did commend my yellow stockings of late, she did praise my leg being cross-gartered, and in this she manifests herself to my love and, with a kind of injunction, drives me to these habits of her liking. I thank my stars, I am happy. I will be strange, stout, in yellow stockings, and cross-gartered, even with the swiftness of putting on. Jove and my stars be praised! Here is yet a postscript. [*He reads*] Thou canst not choose but know who I am. If thou entertain'st my love, let it appear in thy smiling; thy smiles become thee well. Therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee. Jove, I thank thee! I will smile. I will do everything that thou wilt have me [*exits*].

Molière, *Les précieuses ridicules* (1659)

The Pretentious Young Ladies, translated by Henri Van Laun (1880), from 1.9

Madelon. I must admit that I dote upon portraits; I think there is nothing more gallant.

Mascarille. Portraits are difficult, and call for great wit; you shall see some of mine that will not displease you.

Cathos. As for me, I am awfully fond of riddles.

Mascarille. They exercise the intelligence; I have already written four of them this morning, which I will give you to guess.

Madelon. Madrigals are pretty enough when they are neatly turned.

Mascarille. This is my special talent; I am at present engaged in turning the whole Roman history into madrigals.

Madelon. Goodness gracious! that will certainly be superlatively fine; I should like to have one copy at least, if you think of publishing it.

Mascarille. I promise you each a copy, bound in the handsomest manner. It does not become a man of my rank to scribble, but I do it only to serve the publishers, who are always bothering me.

Madelon. I fancy it must be a delightful thing to see one's self in print.

Mascarille. Undoubtedly; but, by the by, I must repeat to you some extempore verses I made yesterday at the house of a certain duchess, an acquaintance of mine. I am deuced clever at extempore verses.

Cathos. Extempore verses are certainly the very touchstone of genius.

Mascarille. Listen then.

Madelon. We are all ears.

Mascarille. *Oh! oh! quite without heed was I,*

As harmless you I chanced to spy,

Slyly your eyes

My heart surprise,

Stop thief! stop thief! stop thief I cry!

Cathos. Good Heavens! this is carried to the utmost pitch of gallantry.

Mascarille. Everything I do shows it is done by a gentleman; there is nothing of the pedant about my effusions.

Madelon. They are more than two thousand miles removed from that.

Mascarille. Did you observe the beginning, *oh! oh!*? there is something original in that *oh! oh!* like a man who all of a sudden thinks about something, *oh! oh!* Taken by surprise as it were, *oh! oh!*

Madelon. Yes, I think that *oh! oh!* admirable.

Mascarille. It seems a mere nothing.

Cathos. Good Heavens! How can you say so? It is one of these things that are perfectly invaluable.

Madelon. No doubt on it; I would rather have written that *oh! oh!* than an epic poem.

Mascarille. Egad, you have good taste.

Madelon. Tolerably; none of the worst, I believe.

Mascarille. But do you not also admire *quite without heed was I? quite without heed was I*, that is, I did not pay attention to anything; a natural way of speaking, quite without heed was I, of no harm thinking, that is, as

I was going along, innocently, without malice, like a poor sheep, *you I chanced to spy*, that is to say, I amused myself with looking at you, with observing you, with contemplating you. *Slyly your eyes ...* What do you think of that word *slyly* — is it not well chosen?

Cathos. Extremely so.

Mascarille. *Slyly*, stealthily; just like a cat watching a mouse — *slyly*.

Madelon. Nothing can be better.

Mascarille. *My heart surprise*, that is, carries it away from me, robs me of it.

Stop thief! stop thief! stop thief! Would you not think a man were shouting and running after a thief to catch him? *Stop thief! stop thief! stop thief!*

Madelon. I must admit the turn is witty and sprightly.

Mascarille. I will sing you the tune I made of it.

Cathos. Have you learned music?

Mascarille. I? Not at all.

Cathos. How can you make a tune then?

Mascarille. People of rank know everything without ever having learned anything.

Madelon. His lordship is quite in the right, my dear.

Magdelon. Certainly, my dear.

Mascarille. Listen if you like the tune: *hem, hem, la, la*. The inclemency of the season has greatly injured the delicacy of my voice; but no matter, it is in a free and easy way. [*He sings*]. *Oh! Oh! quite without heed was I*, etc...

Cathos. What a passion there breathes in this music. It is enough to make one die away with delight!

Madelon. There is something plaintive in it.

Mascarille. Do you not think that the air perfectly well expresses the sentiment, *stop thief, stop thief?* And then as if some one cried out very loud, *stop, stop, stop, stop, stop, stop, stop thief!* Then all at once like a person out of breath, *Stop thief!*

Madelon. This is to understand the perfection of things, the grand perfection, the perfection of perfections. I declare it is altogether a wonderful performance. I am quite enchanted with the air and the words.

Cathos. I never yet met anything so excellent.

Mascarille. All that I do comes naturally to me; it is without study.

Molière, from *Les femmes savantes* (1672)

The Learned Ladies, translated by C.H. Page (1908), from 3.2

Philaminte. Serve us at once your exquisite repast.

Trissotin. For this great hunger that you manifest,
A single course of eight lines seems but little;
I think I might do well to reinforce

The epigram — or madrigal — by adding
 The relish of a sonnet, which a certain Princess
 Esteemed quite delicate;
 It is seasoned throughout with Attic salt,
 And you will find, I think, that it is really rather tasty.

Armande. Ah! I am sure of that.

Philaminte. Quick, let us hear.

Belise. [interrupting him each time he starts to read]

I feel my heart leap up for joy beforehand ...

I do love poetry quite to distraction ...

Especially when gallantly expressed.

Philaminte. If we keep talking, he can't say a word.

Trissotin. Son ...

Belise. [to *Henriette*] Niece, be silent.

Trissotin. Sonnet: To Princess Uranie, Upon Her Fever

Your prudence sleepeth, by my fay

To treat so fair and splendidly

And lodge in state luxuriously

Your foe that lies in wait to slay.

Belise. A lovely opening!

Armande. How gallantly 't is turned!

Philaminte. For lighter verse, he stands alone.

Armande. There's no resisting his *Your prudence sleepeth.*

Belise. To lodge her foe is full of charms for me.

Philaminte. I love *luxuriously* and *splendidly*;

Two adverbs rhymed together; so effective!

Belise. Let's listen to the rest.

Trissotin

Your prudence sleepeth, by my fay

To treat so fair and splendidly

And lodge in state luxuriously

Your foe that lies in wait to slay.

Armande. Prudence asleep!

Belise. To lodge her foe!

Philaminte. *Luxuriously* and *splendidly*!

Trissotin

Send her away, whate'er they say

From your rich lodging presently;

Th' ungrateful wretch most shamelessly

Doth make your lovely life her prey.

Belise. Ah! gently! Give me breathing-space, I beg you.

Armande. Oh! grant us, please, a moment to admire.

Philaminte. These verses thrill you to the inmost soul.

With some strange feeling that quite makes you faint,
Armande. Send her away, whate'er they say
From your rich lodging presently.
 How well that lovely phrase, *rich lodgings* fits!
 How skilfully the metaphor is chosen!
Philaminte. Send her away whate'er they say —
Whate'er they say is in such perfect taste!
 I think that passage altogether priceless.
Armande. Yes, I'm in love too, with *whate'er they say*.
Belise. Yes, I think, too, *what'ver they say* is happy.
Armande. I wish I'd written it.
Belise. 'T is worth whole poems.
Philaminte. But do you feel its finer shades of meaning as I do?
Armande and Belise. Oh: Oh! Oh!
Philaminte. Whate'er they say —
 No matter who may take the fever's part.
 Pay no attention, never mind their babble.
Send her away whate'er they say
Whate'er they say, whate'er they say.
Whate'er they say says much more than it seems to,
 I'm not quite sure if others feel with me;
 But in that phrase I find a million meanings
Belise. 'T is true it says more things than it seems big with.
Philaminte. [to Trissotin] But when you wrote that grand *whate'er they say*,
 Did you yourself, then, fully feel its power?
 Had you in mind, then, all it means to us?
 And did you know you'd put such genius in it?
Trissotin. Eh! eh!
Armande. I can't forget *th'ungrateful wretch*
 The fever, that ungrateful, low-bred creature,
 That injures those by whom 'tis entertained.
Philaminte. In fine, the quatrains both are wonderful.
 I beg you, let us hear the tercets straightway.
Armande. Oh — but once more, please, read *whate'er they say*,
Trissotin. Send her away, whate'er they say —
Philaminte, Armande and Belise. Whate'er they say!
Trissotin. From your rich lodging presently —
Philaminte, Armande and Belise. Rich lodging!
Trissotin. Th' ungrateful wretch most shamelessly —
Philaminte, Armande and Belise. The ungrateful wretch, the fever!
Trissotin. Doth make your lovely life her prey.
Philaminte. Your lovely life!
Armande and Belise. Ah!

Trissotin. What, shall so rude a creature dare
 Touch noble bloody and rank so fair —
Philaminte, Armande and Belise. Ah!
Trissotin. And night and day insult you so!
 If to the baths you chance to go
 Then seize her without more ado
 In your own hands and drown her there.
Philaminte. I faint.
Belise. I swoon.
Armande. I'm dying with delight.
Philaminte. It thrills you with a thousand gentle shivers.
Armande. If to the baths you chance to go —
Belise. Then seize her, without more ado
Philaminte. In your own hands, and drown her there.
 There drown her, in the bath, with your own hands.
Armande. Each step, in lines like yours, shows special beauties.
Belise. And everywhere one walks, is sheer delight.
Philaminte. One cannot tread save on the fairest flowers.
Armande. 'T is little garden-paths all strewn with roses.
Trissotin. You think the sonnet ...
Philaminte. Admirable, novel; nothing so fine was ever done before.

Antoine Baudeau Sieur de Somaize, *Le grand dictionnaire des précieuses, ou la clef de la langue des ruelles* (*A great Dictionary of the 'précieuses', or, the key to the language of the alcove*), Nouvelle édition augmentée (1661); from 'Préface' to the 1856 edition by M. Ch.-L. Livet

But the main kind of entertainment was the discussion of literary issues. They argued about certain ways to soften pronunciation. M.me de Rambouillet, for instance, favoured *serge* rather than *sarge*; they read in public letters of absent people, which had been written and refined to this effect. The author, who seemed to be conscious that the only newspapers were at the time letters, made sure to fill them with quaint elements. By quoting a thousand authorities, he appealed to the readers' memory, now light and playful, now austere and serious ... It is curious to see that, in all letters that have survived from that time, the deep knowledge that both men and women showed in languages, in philosophy; and it is no less curious to see how prompt they were in praising the letter of a rival in order to get his or her approval by the next mail, and how they were generous with those whose praise was most expected.

...

In addition to the daily events which can be found behind a very thin veil, they learned 'to compose notes and reports, entrances and exits; in what way one should address princes, in what obsequious guise one should address

ladies; how to express status, and how to govern sexes'. These works, read in public, submitted to the judgement of the bedchamber before being sent to the printer, became in a way a collective work. There are numerous traces about the way in which the meetings of the *précieuses* took place. In the works of Vion D'Alibray we find some *dissertations galantes* that cannot have been composed in a different circumstance; in the same source one can read some pre-ordered portraits, who had become fashionable following Cyrus² and which were later published in collections. For fun, they assigned themselves some subjects to be proclaimed out loud sometimes unprepared, other times a week apart. More than once ... issues were addressed such as: should one write according to pronunciation, or follow ancient common orthography? We should not think that the seriousness of these subjects would intimidate the ladies: indeed, they were as eager as the men to treat them, and, if the men were entitled to the honour of decisions at the *Bureau d'adresse* or at the Academy, the women reigned incomparably in the bedchambers.

5. Rehearsals and Public Performances

Sir William Corne-Waleys the younger, *Essayes* (1600-1601). From Essay 15 ('Of the obseruation, and vse of things')

I haue not beene ashamed to aduenture mine eares with a ballad-singer, and they haue come home loaden to my liking, doubly satisfied, with profit, & with recreatiō. The profit, to see earthlings satisfied with such coarse stuffe, to heare vice rebuked, and to see the power of Vertue that pierceth the head of such a base Historian, and vile Auditory.

The recreation to see how thoroughly the standers by are affected, what strange gestures come from them, what strained stuffe from their Poet, what shift they make to stand to heare, what extremities he is driuen to for Rime, how they aduenture their purses, he his wits, how well both their paines are recompenced, they with a filthy noise, hee with a base reward.

George Villiers, 2nd Duke of Buckingham, *The Rehearsal* (1672), from 1.1

[Enter three Players upon the Stage.]

1 *Play*. Have you your part perfect?

2 *Play*. Yes, I have it without book; but I do not understand how it is to be spoken.

3 *Play*. And mine is such a one, as I can't ghesse for my life what humour I'm to be in: whether angry, melancholy, merry, or in love. I don't know what to make on't.

² John Denton suggests that the name Cyrus is probably an allusion to Madeleine de Scudéry's novel *La grand Cyrus* (1649-1653).

1 Play. Phoo! the Author will be here presently, and he'l tell us all. You must know, this is the new way of writing; and these hard things please forty times better than the old plain way. For, look you, Sir, the grand design upon the Stage is to keep the Auditors in suspense; for to gness presently at the plot, and the sence, tires 'em before the end of the first Act: now, here, every line surprises you, and brings in new matter. And, then, for Scenes, Cloaths and Dancing, we put 'em quite down, all that ever went before us: and these are the things, you know, that are essential to a Play.

2 Play. Well, I am not of thy mind; but, so it gets us money, 'tis no great matter. [*Enter Bayes, Johnson and Smith*].

Bayes. Come, come in, Gentlemen. Y'are very welcome Mr. — a — Ha' you your Part ready?

1 Play. Yes, Sir.

Bayes. But do you understand the true humour of it?

1 Play. I, Sir, pretty well.

Bayes. And Amarillis, how does she do? Does not her Armor become her?

3 Play. O, admirably!

Bayes. I'l tell you, now, a pretty concept. What do you think I'l make 'em call her anon, in this Play?

Smi. What, I pray?

Bayes. Why I'l make 'em call her Armarillis, because of her Armor: ha, ha, ha.

Johns. That will be very well, indeed.

Bayes. I, it's a pretty little rogue; she is my Mistress. I knew her face would set off Armor extreamly: and, to tell you true, I writ that Part only for her. Well, Gentlemen, I dare be bold to say, without vanity, I'l shew you something, here, that's very ridiculous, I gad.

[*Exeunt Players*].

Johns. Sir, that we do not doubt of.

Bayes. Pray, Sir, let's sit down. Look you, Sir, the chief hindge of this play, upon which the whole Plot moves and turns, and that causes the variety of all the several accidents, which, you know, are the things in Nature that make up the grand refinement of a Play, is, that I suppose two Kings to be of the same place: as, for example, at Brentford; for I love to write familiarly. Now the people having the same relations to 'em both, the same affections, the same duty, the same obedience, and all that; are divided among themselves in point of devoir and interest, how to behave themselves equally between 'em: these Kings differing sometimes in particular; though, in the main, they agree. (I know not whether I make my self well understood.)

Johns. I did not observe you, Sir: pray say that again.

Bayes. Why, look you, Sir, (nay, I beseech you, be a little curious in taking notice of this, or else you'l never understand my notion of the thing) the

people being embarrass’d by their equal ties to both, and the Sovereigns concern’d in a reciprocal regard, as well to their own interest, as the good of the people; may make a certain kind of a — you understand me — upon which, there does arise several disputes, turmoils, heart burnings, and all that — In fine, you’ll apprehend it better when you see it.

[*Exit, to call the Players*].

Smi. I find the Author will be very much oblig’d to the Players, if they can make any sence of this.

Thomas Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick* (1780), from vol. I

The amiable author read his *Boadicea* to the actors. But surely his manner of conveying the meaning of his poem was very unhappy; his voice was harsh, and his elocution disagreeable. Mr Garrick was vexed to see him mangle his own work, and politely offered to relieve him by reading an act or two; but the author imagining that he was the only person fit to unfold his intention to the players, persisted to read the play to the end.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Critic, or a Tragedy Rehearsed* (1781), from 1.1

Dangle. Now, Mrs Dangle, didn’t you say it struck you in the same light?

Mrs Dangle. No, indeed, I did not — I did not see a fault in any part of the play, from the beginning to the end.

Sir Fretful. Upon my soul, the women are the best judges after all!

Mrs Dang. Or, if I made any objection, I am sure it was to nothing in the piece, but that I was afraid it was, on the whole, a little too long.

Sir Fret. Pray, madam, do you speak as to duration of time, or do you mean that the story is tediously spun out?

Mrs Dang. O lud! no. — I speak only with reference to the usual length of acting plays.

Sir Fret. Then I am very happy — very happy indeed — because the play is a short play, a remarkably short play. I should not venture to differ with a lady on a point of taste; but, on these occasions, the watch, you know, is the critic.

Mrs Dang. Then, I suppose, it must have been Mr Dangle’s drawling manner of reading it to me.

Sir Fret. Oh, if Mr Dangle read it, that’s quite another affair! — But I assure you, Mrs Dangle, the first evening you can spare me three hours and a half, I’ll undertake to read you the whole from beginning to end, with the Prologue and Epilogue, and allow time for the music between the acts.

Mrs Dang. I hope to see it on the stage next.

Carlo Goldoni, from *Mémoires* (1787)

Memoirs of Carlo Goldoni, translated from the Original French by John Black (1877)

Before quitting Tuscany, I was anxious once more to pay a visit to the city of Florence, the capital. In taking leave of my acquaintances, it was proposed to me to visit the Academy of the Apatisti. It was not unknown to me; but I wished to see that day the sibillone, a sort of literary amusement which takes place from time to time, and which I had never yet seen. The sibillone, or great sibyl, is a child of only ten or twelve years of age, who is placed on a tribune in the middle of the assembly. Any one of the persons present puts a question to the young sibyl; the child must pronounce some word on the occasion which becomes the oracle of the prophetess, and the answer to the proposed question. These answers of a boy, without time for reflection, are in general destitute of common-sense; but an academician beside the tribune rises up, and maintains that the sibillone has returned a very proper answer, and undertakes to give an immediate interpretation of the oracle. That the reader may have some idea of the Italian imagination and boldness, I shall give some account of the question, the answer, and the interpretation, the day when I was present. A person who, like myself, was a stranger, asked the sibyl to inform him why women weep with greater ease and more frequently than men. The only answer which the sibyl returned was straw; and the interpreter, addressing the author of the question, maintained that nothing could be more decisive or satisfactory than the oracle. This learned academician, who was a tall and lusty abbé of about forty, with a sonorous and agreeable voice, spoke for nearly three quarters of an hour. He went into an analysis of different slender plants, and proved that straw surpassed them all in fragility; he passed from straw to women; and in a manner equally rapid and luminous, entered into an anatomical view of the human body. He explained the source of tears in the two sexes. He proved the delicacy of fibres in the one, and the resistance in the other. He concluded with a piece of flattery to the ladies who were present, in assigning the prerogatives of sensibility to weakness, and took care to avoid saying anything of their having tears at command. I own that this man surprised me. It was impossible to display more erudition and precision in a matter which did not seem susceptible of it. These are tricks, I am willing to admit, something in the taste of the masterpiece of an unknown author; but it is not the less true that such talents are rare and estimable, and that they only want encouragement to rise to a level with many others, and carry those who possess them to posterity.

Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814), from chapter 18

Everything was now in a regular train: theatre, actors, actresses, and dresses, were all getting forward; but though no other great impediments arose,

Fanny found, before many days were past, that it was not all uninterrupted enjoyment to the party themselves, and that she had not to witness the continuance of such unanimity and delight as had been almost too much for her at first. Everybody began to have their vexation. Edmund had many ... Tom himself began to fret over the scene-painter's slow progress, and to feel the miseries of waiting. He had learned his part — all his parts, for he took every trifling one that could be united with the Butler, and began to be impatient to be acting; and every day thus unemployed was tending to increase his sense of the insignificance of all his parts together, and make him more ready to regret that some other play had not been chosen. Fanny, being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and the distresses of most of them. She knew that Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully; that Mr. Yates was disappointed in Henry Crawford; that Tom Bertram spoke so quick he would be unintelligible; that Mrs. Grant spoiled everything by laughing; that Edmund was behindhand with his part, and that it was misery to have anything to do with Mr. Rushworth, who was wanting a prompter through every speech ... Everybody had a part either too long or too short; nobody would attend as they ought; nobody would remember on which side they were to come in; nobody but the complainer would observe any directions. Fanny believed herself to derive as much innocent enjoyment from the play as any of them; Henry Crawford acted well, and it was a pleasure to her to creep into the theatre, and attend the rehearsal of the first act, in spite of the feelings it excited in some speeches for Maria. Maria, she also thought, acted well, too well; and after the first rehearsal or two, Fanny began to be their only audience; and sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator, was often very useful. As far as she could judge, Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor of all: he had more confidence than Edmund, more judgment than Tom, more talent and taste than Mr. Yates ... Lady Bertram seemed quite resigned to waiting. Fanny did not share her aunt's composure: she thought of the morrow a great deal, for if the three acts were rehearsed, Edmund and Miss Crawford would then be acting together for the first time; the third act would bring a scene between them which interested her most particularly, and which she was longing and dreading to see how they would perform. The whole subject of it was love — a marriage of love was to be described by the gentleman, and very little short of a declaration of love be made by the lady. She had read and read the scene again with many painful, many wondering emotions, and looked forward to their representation of it as a circumstance almost too interesting. She did not believe they had yet rehearsed it, even in private. The morrow came, the plan for the evening continued, and Fanny's consideration of it did not become less agitated.

6. *Improvising and the Commedia dell'Arte*

Adriano Valerini, from *Oratione d'Adriano Valerini veronese, In morte della Diuina Signora Vincenza Armani, Comica Eccellentissima* (*An Oration by Adriano Valerini, Veronese, in Death of the most Excellent Comica, Lady Vincenza Armani*) (1570)

... as you have probably heard, this Lady played in three different styles: the Comic, the Tragic and the Pastoral, observing the decorum of each so perfectly that the Accademia degli Intronati in Siena, in which admiration for acting was rife, intimated many times that this Woman succeeded by improvising much better than expert authors did writing at ease ...

...

she was to be praised not only when playing on a stage, but also when composing the very Poems, and when instructing her interlocutor in this same art.

Leone de' Sommi, from *Stanze di L. S. H. Alla Signora Vincenza Armani*, in Valerini (1570)

Voi ben potreste, uoi Vincenza esporre
 in versi, il bello, oue altra non ha parte:
 Voi dirne sola, quanto dir ne occorre
 Deureste, e dispiegarlo in uoce e in carte,
 ma se vostra modestia humile, abhorre,
 in propria laude oprar lo stile, e l'arte,
 mè aiuti si, ch'io regga vn tanto pondo,
 d'aprir cantando, vostra gloria al mondo.

You might, Vincenza, well expose
 in verse, beauty, where other women cannot:
 You only what is fit to say of it
 could say, unfolding it on paper and by voice,
 but if your humble modesty disdains
 in your own praise to employ your style and art,
 help me, that I may bear so heavy a burden
 to open, singing, your glory to the world.

Andrea Perrucci, *Dell'Arte rappresentativa premeditata e all'improvviso* (1699) *A Treatise on Acting, from Memory and by Improvisation*, translated by F. Cotticelli, A. Goodrich Heck and T. Heck (2007), from Part II

The choragus [director], leader, master, or the most experienced person in the company, should coordinate the *soggetto* before it is staged, so that the performers know what the comedy contains and understand where to conclude their speeches, and so they can work on any possible new witticism or *lazzo*. The task of this organizer is not only to read the *soggetto*, but also to explain the characters with their names and traits, the subject of the story, the place where it is set, the houses, the *lazzi*, and all the necessary details, paying attention to the properties required for the comedy, such as letters, purses, daggers, and anything else noted at the end of the *soggetto*. He should say, for example, 'the play we are to perform is *La Trapolaria*. The characters are Tartaglia, father of Fedelindo and master of Coviello; Pulcinella, a slave merchant, and Turchetta, his slave girl; Isabella, a courtesan, and her servants, the parasite Pespice and Pimpinella; the Capitano, master of his manservant Pasquariello; Donna Laura, Tartaglia's wife, who arrives from abroad with a manservant; a peddler; and people to play the constables, both real and feigned. Tartaglia will be played by Mr. So-and-so; Fedelindo by Mr. Such-and-such'. He will then name the households, assigning the first house on the right as Tartaglia's, the second on the left as Pulcinella's, and the second on the right as Isabella's. He should then give the storyline as follows.

Plot of La Tripolaria

Tartaglia Raganelli, a merchant from Naples, got into a serious dispute with another merchant, who had called him a failure, and was induced to stab him with his dagger. As a consequence, being exiled from his fatherland and pursued by his enemies, he left for Barcelona with his pregnant wife. Upon arriving there ...

Francesco Bartoli, *Notizie istoriche de' comici italiani che fiorirono intorno all'anno 1550. Fino a' giorni presenti* (*Historical Accounts of the Italian Comici who Flourished about the Year 1550. Up to the Present Day*) (1782)

This virtuosic actress [Isabella Andreini], finding herself in Rome, was not only portrayed but crowned in laurel in a coloured headform placed between portraits of Tasso and Petrarch when, after a banquet offered to her by the

Most Eminent Cardinal Cintio Aldobrandini, great patron of artists, where at table six most learned cardinals, the above mentioned Tasso, the Cavalier de' Pazzi, Antonio Ongaro, and other very illustrious poets, among whom, writing and improvising sonnets in a fine contest, Andreini, with sparkling wit, came second only to the great Torquato Tasso.

Edward Gordon Craig, from 'The Commedia dell'Arte Ascending', *The Mask* 5, 2 (October 1912)

The manager-author would call the company together and explain to each the relation he was supposed to bear toward all the others. Then he would indicate the sequence of scenes in the several acts; and this scenario, as it was called, would be written out and pinned up behind the scenes. The play might begin with a violent altercation between Pantaleone [*sic*] and the Doctor; but this would be no difficult demand upon either performer, since they had often quarrelled in earlier plays. A little later might come a long love-scene for Lelio and Leonora: and this again would be no novelty, since he had been making love to her in almost every other piece since he joined the company. Lelio had in stock a dozen perfervid declarations of devotions; and Leonora had by experience a dozen different ways of receiving that declaration.

In this fashion, the story of the loves of Romeo and Juliet might be unrolled by means of these stock-figures, each of which retained his own name always and his own individuality. And in this fashion, any other story, tragic or comic, might be represented by a similar company of Italian comedians, accustomed to one another, and realizing the advantages of conscientious 'team-play'.

...

It demanded men of great talent ... For to be a good Italian actor means to be a man who possesses a rich store of knowledge, who plays more from fancy than from memory, who while he plays invents all he says; who seconds his colleagues on the stage, that is, matches his words and actions so well with those of his comrade that he enters at once on all the movements to which the other invites him, and in such way as to make everybody believe that all has been settled beforehand.

7. *Mountebanks and Street Players*

Tomaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (*The Universal Piazza of All the World's Professions*) (1585); from Discorso CIV ('Of performers in general and, in particular, of mountebanks and charlatans')

In our time, the number and kinds of these mountebanks have grown as weed, so that in every city, land or square you see nothing but mountebanks

or *cerretani*, who could be better called good-for-nothings. These, with many devices and deceits cozen the minds of the populace, and entice their ears to hear the lies they tell, their eyes to see their trifles, and all their senses to pay attention to the ridiculous demonstrations they make.

...

But who wishes to tell all the ways and manners practised by these *cerretani* in order to make money will have to spend a lot of time. To tell only some, at one corner of the piazza you can see our gallant Fortunato who, together with Frit[t]ata, tells exaggerated lies, keeping the people every night from 10 p. m. until midnight, telling tales, inventing stories, performing acrobatics, quarrelling and then making peace between them, dying from laughing, quarrelling again, fighting on the banco, disputing; at last, they shake the dice and come to the point of the money they want to grab with these most pleasant and graceful blabbers. At another corner, Burattino clamours as if the hangman were hanging him. Wearing the sack of a postman, a cap on his head which gives him a roush air, he calls the audience in a loud voice; the people approach, the populace bump into each other, gentlemen come closer and, as soon as he has pronounced his farcical and hilarious Prologue, Burattino starts a strange tale about the Master, a tale which makes your heart sink, disheartens your spirit, and makes those who have gathered around him become demoralized. And if the first with pleasant gestures, with foolishly witty quips, with words which sound savoury to people's ears, with ridiculous expedients, with his neck like that of a hanged man, with his shrewed moustache, his voice like a monkey's and all his rascally deeds gains a large audience, the second, with his rude way of speaking, his Bolognese diction, his vapid talk, his mumbling tale, with the inappropriate advertisement of the privilege of his doctoral knowledge, the ungratious display of noblemen's long grants, by acting the medical doctor though having no science, eventually loses all his audience, and stands like a cricket in the middle of the piazza. In the meantime, from under the porches comes out the Tuscan and mounts the banco with his girl companion ... People gather in a ring around him, and the audience is intent on watching and hearing. Then, all of a sudden, he starts a rambling speech in a ridiculous Florentine dialect ... From another corner of the piazza, the Milanese, wearing a velvet cap and a white feather ... smartly dressed like a gentleman, plays the lover with Gradella, who mocks his master, makes obscene gestures to his face, curses behind him, swears he is ready to take a lot of blows, lowers his cap to his whisker, pulls out a small knife, and with cross eyes, a dark face, and a muzzle like a pig, looking with a sneer at his master's rivals, takes on the appearance of a scowling bulldog.

...

Nowadays, the piazza is full of these *ciurmatori*. There are those who sell a powder to set the wind from behind free, those who give housewives a recipe to make the beans pour out of the pan, those who sell tallow for perpetual

candlewicks, others sell the philosophers' oil, others the quintessence for becoming rich, others oil of mullein against colds; others tallow ointment from castrated animals against flakyskin, others mange unguent for memory, others cat or dog dung to apply on crackings, others lime paste to kill mice, others iron crutches for those who have broken bones, others mirrors to kindle a fire when placed against the sun, others spectacles to see in the dark; there are those who put horrible sensational monsters on show, those who eat tow and spit out a flame, those who oil their hands with oozing out grease, those who wash their face with melted lead, those who feign to cut the nose of another with a contrived knife, those who pull twenty yards of rope out of their mouth, those who make a playing card suddenly appear in the hands of another person, those who, blowing into a shell case, dye some scoundrel's face, and those who make the same eat excrementas if it were a good meal.

Thomas Coryate, from *Coryats Crudities* (1611)

I hope it will not be esteemed for an impertinencie to my discourse, if I next speake of the Mountebanks of Venice, seeing amongst many other things that doe much famouse this Citie, these two sorts of people, namely the Cortezans and the Mountebanks, are not the least: for although there are Mountebanks also in other Cities of Italy; yet because there is a greater concurse of them in Venice then else where, and that of the better sort and the most eloquent fellowes; and also for that there is a larger tolleration of them here then in other Cities (for in Rome, &c. they are restrained from certain matters as I have heard which are heere allowed them) ...

...

The principall place where they act, is the first part of Saint Marks street that reacheth betwixt the West front of S. Marks Church, and the opposite front of Saint Geminians Church. In which, twice a day, that is, in the morning and in the afternoone, you may see five or sixe severall stages erected for them: those that act upon the ground, even the foresaid Ciarlatans being of the poorer sort of them, stand most commonly in the second part of S. Marks, not far from the gate of the Dukes Palace. These Mountebanks at one end of their stage place their trunke, which is replenished with a world of new-fangled trumperies. After the whole rabble of them is gotten up to the stage, whereof some weare visards being disguised like fooles in a play, some that are Women (for there are divers women also amongst them) are attyred with habits according to that person that they sustaine; after (I say) they are all upon the stage, the musicke begins. Sometimes vocall, sometimes instrumentall, and sometimes both together. This musicke is a preamble and introduction to the ensuing matter: in the meane time while the musicke playes, the principall Mountebanke which is the Captaine and ring-leader of

all the rest, opens his truncke, and sets abroach his wares; after the musicke hath ceased, he maketh an oration to the audience of halfe an houre long, or almost an houre. Wherein he doth most hyperbolically extoll the vertue of his drugs and confections:

Laudat venales qui vult extrudere merces.

Though many of them are very counterfeit and false. Truly I often wondred at many of these naturall Orators. For they would tell their tales with such admirable volubility and plausible grace, even *extempore*, and seasoned with that singular variety of elegant jests and witty conceits, that they did often strike great admiration into strangers that never heard them before

...

After the chiefest Mountbankes first speech is ended, he delivereth out his commodities by little and little, the jester still playing his part, and the musitiens singing and playing upon their instruments. The principall things that they sell are oyles, soveraigne waters, amorous songs printed, Apothecary drugs, and a Commonweale of other trifles. The head Mountbanke at every time that he delivereth out any thing, maketh an extemporall speech, which he doth eftsoones intermingle with such savory jests (but spiced now and then with singular scurrility) that they minister passing mirth and laughter to the whole company, which perhaps may consist of a thousand people that flocke together about one of their stages. For so many according to my estimation I have seene giving attention to some notable eloquent Mountbanke.

Ben Jonson, *Volpone* (1616), from 2.2

[*Enter Volpone, disguised as a mountebank doctor, and followed by a crowd of people*]

Volpone. [to Nano] Mount zany.

Mob. Follow, follow, follow, follow!

Sir Politic. See how the people follow him! he's a man

May write ten thousand crowns in bank here.

Note, [*Volpone mounts the stage*] Mark but his gesture: — I do use to observe

The state he keeps in getting up.

Per. 'Tis worth it, sir.

Volp. Most noble gentlemen, and my worthy patrons! It may seem strange, that I, your Scoto Mantuano, who was ever wont to fix my bank in face of the public Piazza, near the shelter of the Portico to the Procuratia, should now, after eight months' absence from this illustrious city of Venice, humbly retire myself into an obscure nook of the Piazza.

Sir P. Did not I now object the same?

Per. Peace, sir.

...

Volp. I protest, I, and my six servants, are not able to make of this precious liquor, so fast as it is fetch'd away from my lodging by gentlemen of your city; strangers of the Terra-firma; worshipful merchants; ay, and senators too: who, ever since my arrival, have detained me to their uses, by their splendidous liberalities. And worthily; for, what avails your rich man to have his magazines stuff with moscadelli, or of the purest grape, when his physicians prescribe him, on pain of death, to drink nothing but water cocted with aniseeds? O health! health! the blessing of the rich, the riches of the poor! who can buy thee at too dear a rate, since there is no enjoying this world without thee? Be not then so sparing of your purses, honourable gentlemen, as to abridge the natural course of life —

Per. You see his end.

Sir P. Ay, is't not good?

Volp. For, when a humid flux, or catarrh, by the mutability of air, falls from your head into an arm or shoulder, or any other part; take you a ducat, or your chequin of gold, and apply to the place affected: see what good effect it can work. No, no, 'tis this blessed unguento, this rare extraction, that hath only power to disperse all malignant humours, that proceed either of hot, cold, moist, or windy causes —

Per. I would he had put in dry too.

Sir P. 'Pray you, observe.

Volp. To fortify the most indigest and crude stomach, ay, were it of one, that, through extreme weakness, vomited blood, applying only a warm napkin to the place, after the unction and fricace; — for the vertigine in the head, putting but a drop into your nostrils, likewise behind the ears; a most sovereign and approved remedy. The mal caduco, cramps, convulsions, paralyties, epilepsies, tremor-cordia, retired nerves, ill vapours of the spleen, stopping of the liver, the stone, the strangury, hernia ventosa, iliaca passio; stops a disenteria immediately; easeth the torsion of the small guts: and cures melancholia hypocondriaca, being taken and applied according to my printed receipt. [*pointing to his bill and his vial*] For, this is the physician, this the medicine; this counsels, this cures; this gives the direction, this works the effect; and, in sum, both together may be termed an abstract of the theorick and practick in the Aesculapian art. 'Twill cost you eight crowns. And, — Zan Fritada, prithee sing a verse extempore in honour of it.

Sir P. How do you like him, sir?

Per. Most strangely, I!

Sir P. Is not his language rare?

Per. But alchemy, I never heard the like: or Broughton's books.

Nano. [*sings*] Had old Hippocrates, or Galen, That to their books put med'cines all in, But known this secret, they had never (Of which they will be guilty ever) Been murderers of so much paper, Or wasted many a hurtless taper; No Indian drug had e'er been famed, Tabacco, sassafras not named; Ne yet, of guacum one small stick, sir, Nor Raymund Lully's great elixir. Ne had been known the Danish Gonswart, Or Paracelsus, with his long-sword.

Per. All this, yet, will not do, eight crowns is high.

Volp. No more. — Gentlemen, if I had but time to discourse to you the miraculous effects of this my oil, surnamed Oglgio del Scoto; with the countless catalogue of those I have cured of the aforesaid, and many more diseases; the pattendts and privileges of all the princes and commonwealths of Christendom; or but the depositions of those that appeared on my part, before the signiory of the Sanita and most learned College of Physicians; where I was authorised, upon notice taken of the admirable virtues of my medicaments, and mine own excellency in matter of rare and unknown secrets, not only to disperse them publicly in this famous city, but in all the territories, that happily joy under the government of the most pious and magnificent states of Italy. But may some other gallant fellow say, O, there be divers that make profession to have as good, and as experimented receipts as yours: indeed, very many have assayed, like apes, in imitation of that, which is really and essentially in me, to make of this oil; bestowed great cost in furnaces, stills, alembecks, continual fires, and preparation of the ingredients (as indeed there goes to it six hundred several simples, besides some quantity of human fat, for the conglutination, which we buy of the anatomists), but, when these practitioners come to the last decoction, blow, blow, puff, puff, and all flies in fumo: ha, ha, ha! Poor wretches! I rather pity their folly and indiscretion, than their loss of time and money; for these may be recovered by industry: but to be a fool born, is a disease incurable. For myself, I always from my youth have endeavoured to get the rarest secrets, and book them, either in exchange, or for money; I spared nor cost nor labour, where any thing was worthy to be learned. And gentlemen, honourable gentlemen, I will undertake, by virtue of chemical art, out of the honourable hat that covers your head, to extract the four elements; that is to say, the fire, air, water, and earth, and return you your felt without burn or stain. For, whilst others have been at the Balloo, I have been at my book; and am now past the craggy paths of study, and come to the flowery plains of honour and reputation.

Sir P. I do assure you, sir, that is his aim.

Volp. But, to our price —

Per. And that withal, sir Pol.

Volp. You all know, honourable gentlemen, I never valued this ampulla, or vial, at less than eight crowns, but for this time, I am content, to be deprived of

it for six; six crowns is the price; and less, in courtesy I know you cannot offer me; take it, or leave it, howsoever, both it and I am at your service. I ask you not as the value of the thing, for then I should demand of you a thousand crowns, so the cardinals Montalto, Fernese, the great Duke of Tuscany, my gossip, with divers other princes, have given me; but I despise money. Only to shew my affection to you, honourable gentlemen, and your illustrious State here, I have neglected the messages of these princes, mine own offices, framed my journey hither, only to present you with the fruits of my travels. — Tune your voices once more to the touch of your instruments, and give the honourable assembly some delightful recreation.

8. *Nomadic Readings*

BBC News, Wednesday 16 June, 2004, 'Celebrations mark Joyce centenary' <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/3811171.stm>, accessed 18.02.2018

More than 1,300 people have gathered in Dublin for the 100th anniversary of Bloomsday, marking the day James Joyce's classic *Ulysses* was set. Irish President Mary McAleese joined lovers of the book for the centenary.

...

Fans have travelled to Dublin from all over the world, including pilgrimages to Joyce's house to join in with the centenary celebrations.

...

The breakfast featured food in keeping with Bloom's love of 'the inner organs of beasts and fowls' as described at the start of the book, at a cost of 12 euros each (£ 7.88). It recreated chapter four of the book, where Bloom cooks a mammoth breakfast for himself and his wife Molly, including mutton kidneys. 'We've found that mutton kidneys aren't terribly popular. We have some available, but they tend to end up in the bin', said Helen Monaghan, a grand niece of Joyce who runs the James Joyce Centre.

...

Readings from the book — which recounts Bloom's day spent walking around the centre of Dublin — will be performed by TV host Gay Byrne, playwright Gerry Stembridge and musician Ronnie Drew.

The readings will also take place on the streets of Dublin, with a cast of actors dressed as characters from the book.

...

To Celebrate Centennial of Proust's *Swann's Way*...

<http://frenchculture.org/about-us/press-room/4896-celebrate-centennial-prousts-swanns-way>, accessed 18.02.2018

As part of a year-long celebration of the 100th anniversary of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way*, dozens of French and American writers, artists, scholars, and Proust fans, ... will participate in a weeklong live reading of the classic at venues across city beginning November 8th.

...

Presented by the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, 2013: A Year with Proust Centennial Celebration has showcased festivities throughout New York City, including exhibition of manuscripts, notes, letters and other materials at the Morgan Library and Museum, a screening of *The Captive* by Chantal Akerman, based on the fifth volume of *La Recherche*, and a concert and reading devoted to the composers and works that inspired the famous *Vinteuil Sonata*. From November 8-14, *Swann's Way: A Nomadic Reading* will feature the entirety of the iconic work read in three hour increments in locations from the Bronx to Brooklyn. In a traveling tribute, each location will echo a major theme of the reading: a hotel bedroom, for the famous opening pages; the forest of the Botanical Gardens for Proust's childhood in the countryside; a theater, to evoke the writer's fascination with actors; a nightclub, to recall *Swann's* late-night searches for the unfaithful *Odette*.

Contributors

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Christopher Geekie is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Paris-Sorbonne (Paris IV) within the Observatoire de la vie littéraire (OBVIL), where his current research project investigates the intense literary polemic in Italy in the 1580s regarding Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata*. Apart from preparing a digital edition of the polemical text *Lo 'nfarinato secondo* (1588), he is also exploring digital methods for the analysis of literary controversies in early modern Europe. His main research interests include literary debates, historical conceptions of literary style (particularly as they relate to issues of genre, taste, and social class), as well as the processes of cultural and literary standardization.

Antonella Giordano is an independent scholar. For several years, she has worked at the 'Archivio Contemporaneo "Alessandro Bonsanti"' at the Gabinetto Vieusseux in Florence. In her position as archivist, she organized and catalogued documents concerning important Italian writers (Eduardo

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Teresa Megale is Associate Professor of Arts and Performance Studies at the University of Florence. Her main areas of research are the *Commedia dell'Arte*, the history of actors and drama from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Her publications include *Tra mare e terra. Commedia dell'Arte nella Napoli spagnola (1575-1656)* (2017); *Paolo Poli* (2009); *Mirandolina e le sue interpreti* (2008); Carlo Goldoni, *La locandiera* (2007, co-edited with Sara Mamone); *Visconti e la Basilicata. Visconti in Basilicata* (2003) and *Il Tedeschino* by Bernardo Ricci (1995).

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI FIRENZE
DIPARTIMENTO DI LINGUE, LETTERATURE E STUDI INTERCULTURALI
COORDINAMENTO EDITORIALE

Opere pubblicate

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