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Family, City or State, and Theater: Carlo Gozzi and the Rhetoric of Conservatism

It might seem odd to utilize rhetorical tools to analyze an Early Modern play written in Venice. Plays are not often framed that way. Furthermore, throughout its ‘republican’ history (697–1797), Venice did not have a ruling family, a long-standing court, appointed poets or rhetors; indeed, the *serenissima* was not a principality or a monarchy, but rather an oligarchy, in which the Doge was elected by his peers, and where his power was limited in many different ways.¹ This political and cultural situation seemingly negates another condition for rhetorical readings in a particularly Early Modern context: the existence of a court; for courts are believed to have been keen on imbuing with meaning as many events and situations as possible, and with a view to representation. In other words: in an Early Modern setting, but without a court, the postulation of a respective rhetorical intent might seem problematic. Finally, Carlo Gozzi’s *Le gare teatrali* (written in 1751, but not printed until 2011) was never performed, and so did not have an actual theatrical audience that might have been convinced.

These are superficial considerations, of course. Neither the genre of a text, nor the existence of a proto-absolutist court, nor the presence of an audience are *sine qua non* conditions for rhetorical acts. In fact, as Brian Vickers pointed out several decades ago, Early Modern culture was saturated with rhetoric; any text, including the ones without actual spectators, was pervaded by “a concept of *elocutio* lost even on modern historians of rhetoric, by which it [sc. the period] meant eloquence, the gift of speech that distinguishes us from animals and makes us fully human, with great moral and social responsibilities” (498).

¹ For a quick introduction to “The Grammar of Venetian Institutions”, see Crouzet-Pavan (195–210). The first two chapters of Rosand’s *Myths of Venice* offer an excellent primer of how narratives were made visible in Venetian art.

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Within this cultural and historical framework, the rhetorical underpinnings of a play written in Venice, a self-styled ‘republic’, cannot be discarded. One must thus begin by bringing the circumstances surrounding this specific text into sharper focus. The time of its penning was the theater season of winter 1750–1751; the place was Venice; and the author was Carlo Gozzi (1720–1806), the scion of a noble Venetian family, who held deeply conservative political and cultural views.² Theater seasons had specific opening and closing times (typically, the winter season went from St. Stephen’s Day, December 26, to the end of *carnevale*, a moving date that falls between early February and early March); this constraint was keenly felt by professional theater troupes, starting with those of the *commedia dell’arte*; and, by the seventeenth century, also by the members of those Venetian families who had invested in theater buildings: the Grimani at the San Benedetto, the San Samuele, the San Giovanni Grisostomo (now called Malibran, the second opera house for the orchestra of La Fenice), and the Santi Giovanni e Paolo; the Vendramin at the San Luca (also named San Salvador, still utilized today, and the seat of the Teatro stabile del Veneto); the Tron at the San Cassian; the Giustinian at the San Moisè; and the Condulmer at the Sant’Angelo. Renting boxes—referred to as “selling keys” (as we shall see in Gozzi’s play), because keys gave access to those privileged viewing spaces—was lucrative as long as new spoken and sung plays attracted audiences; from an economic perspective, and given the aforementioned temporal limitations, the best play was a popular, or, even better, a sold-out one.³

By 1751, Carlo Gozzi had at least indirect experience with the world of securing potentially successful scripts and staging plays. As Fabio Soldini relates in his introduction to *Le gare teatrali*, Gozzi’s brother (Gasparo) and his sister-in-law (Luisa Bergalli) had tried their hand at managing a theater during the 1747–1748 season, and ultimately failed (“Introduzione” 14–15). As an active member of the Accademia dei Granelleschi, and part of the Venetian *intelligenza*, Gozzi witnessed the tensions rising during the 1749–1750 season between two opposing camps: one supporting Carlo Goldoni, intent on carrying out what he dubbed a *riforma* (reformation) of theater habits and practices centered upon the playwright’s creation of texts, which performers had to memorize; and the other

2 A glance at the entries devoted to him in the *Enciclopedia italiana* and the *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* would confirm my broad-stroke assessment. In the latter, Alberto Beniscelli states that he transmitted to his *accademia* a “hostility toward ideological and cultural novelties”, “ostilità nei confronti delle novità ideologico-culturali” (241; trans. mgs).

3 In Jordan’s words: for *commedia dell’arte* troupes “the unavoidable fact of needing to earn a living led to a new, revolutionary imperative: the need to satisfy popular demand” (4). This also applies to Venetian theater-owning families.

rallying behind Abbott Pietro Chiari, who emphasized the actors' freedom to improvise, albeit in an instrumental (rather than ideological) fashion. At the end of that season, audiences took in a reprise of Goldoni's *Vedova scaltra* (*The Shrewd Widow*, first performed at the Sant'Angelo on December 26, 1748); the première of the polemical *Scuola delle vedove* (*A School for Widows*) by Chiari; Goldoni's incendiary *Prologo apologetico* (*A Prologue to Serve as His Defense*), printed and widely distributed around the city; and the farewell to the audience on 10 February 1750 by Teodora Medebach, the *prima donna* of the troupe performing Goldoni's plays. In this traditionally scripted speech, she announced that the troupe would perform a new comedy during each week of the following season. This was an unprecedented challenge, a clear provocation to Chiari and his supporters—and a resounding success. In his *Mémoires*, Goldoni states that, within eight days, the entire theater had been sold out—for the whole season (II.43).

Exceeding even the unparalleled promise Goldoni had made in February, the Medebach troupe actually performed sixteen new plays by Goldoni between October 5, 1750 and February 23, 1751 (twice as many as had been pledged), after two season-opening performances of *Il teatro comico* (*The Comic Theater*), the manifesto (to use an anachronistic term) of Goldoni's reformed theater. In this meta-theatrical comedy, Goldoni enacted the transfer of authorship and authority from actors to playwright, which, of necessity, was also a transfer of economic power. *Il teatro comico* expresses a new idea of what a theatrical text is—and who controls it: not the performers, but the playwright, who has sole authority over character selection, plot development, and the lines to be spoken on stage.⁴ The audience's role is also fundamentally altered: no longer able to

4 This is in sharp contrast to the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, in which actors selected bits and pieces of action and speeches on the basis of the rough outline of a topic and the audience's reaction. As Gozzi himself explained in 1772, the "system of our Italian improvised comedy" ("il Sistema della nostra Commedia improvvisa italiana"; *Opere* 41; trans. mgs) rests on the following aspects: "At the moment when they are about to begin a comedy, actors change their roles according to circumstances, their seriousness, and their respective abilities, exchanging names and personalities, bringing that happy plot to its ending. Within this type of performance, some serious [to wit, non-comic] actors, especially women, have a series of different scripted materials memorized"; "Si cambiano sul momento del cominciare la Commedia, le parti agli Attori, secondo le circostanze, il peso, l'abilità proporzionata, con differenza di nome, di carattere, e tuttavia si conduce la Commedia allegra al suo termine. . . Alcuni attori seri di questo genere di spettacolo, e specialmente le Attrici, hanno un'arsenale [sic] di materiali differenti premeditati alla memoria" (*Opere* 40; trans. mgs). Consequently, at the basis of a theater's success and popularity are the performances of great actors: "A playwright, no matter how productive in his writing, will never be as useful to a theater for a long time as a skilled actor good at improvising

influence the play, they now have to pay closer attention to linguistic nuances and character development.⁵

Within this situation—opposing a “progressive”, forward-looking, and highly successful author (Goldoni) to another who overtly criticized him (Gozzi)—the latter is typically represented as aligned with conservative positions: when he did offer texts to be performed (the first was not tendered until January 1761), he penned only the scaffolding (in Italian: *canovaccio*, literally ‘canvas, skeleton’) of plays, which performers would then bring to life on the stage with great leeway in their choice of words and action.⁶ Gozzi’s own background is also brought to bear on this context: he belonged to an established (if impoverished) Venetian noble family, while Goldoni (though born in Venice) came from a professional family background, and spent many formative years outside the city (in Perugia, Rimini, Chioggia, and Pavia).⁷ We know, however, that *Le gare teatrali* (1751)—Gozzi’s first foray into playwriting—is formally different from most of his works for the stage; for it is scripted to a large extent, with only a few scenes left to the performers’ creativity. As we shall see, it also includes less than

and appreciated by the people”; “Uno Scrittore Teatrale, per quanto fertile sia nelle sue produzioni, non sarà giammai per lungo tempo utile ad un Teatro, come lo sarà un Comico valente improvvisatore entrato nella grazia del popolo” (*Opere* 25; trans. mgs). For a short and comprehensive definition of the phrase *commedia dell’arte*, see Kerr (13–14); as Katritzky has pointed out (18–20), the terminology is itself ideologically fraught.

5 Tatiana Korneeva has recently studied the changes in theatrical audiences in Venice in the 1760s; in Goldoni’s *Il genio buone e il genio cattivo* (1767), the Venetians attending theater performances are described “as ever changing, inconsistent, and never satisfied”, “come volubile, incoerente e mai soddisfatto” (100; trans. mgs), and despised by both Gozzi and Goldoni.

6 Perhaps unsurprisingly, these comic sketches attracted the attention of later authors, who were inspired by interesting plots and able to express their own stylistic abilities and cultural interests. For example, *Turandot* (written and performed in 1762) was adapted in German by Friedrich Schiller (1806), accompanied by Carl Maria von Weber’s stage music (1809), made into an opera by Ferruccio Busoni (1917), and again by Giacomo Puccini in 1926 (cf. “Carlo, Conte Gozzi”; Corneilson et al.). This would open up considerable opportunities for comparative studies, which (to my knowledge) have not yet been carried out.

7 See this assertion by Gozzi: “I will forever believe that humankind is always composed of despotic government rulers, the rich, the moderately rich, the poor, and the wretched [...] Mocking the government and the wealthy and turning the populace against them in a theater is a temerity to be punished much more than to be allowed”; “crederò perpetuamente di veder il genere umano esser sempre composto di presidenti al Governo dispotici, di ricchi, di semiricchi, di poveri, e di miserabili [...] che il porre in ludibrio i Governi, e gli agiati, e l’accendere il popolo minuto contro quelli in un pubblico Teatro sia imprudenza da punirsi più, che da permettersi” (*Opere* 17; trans. mgs).

flattering characters drawn from the nobility. While it is not exactly clear why it was never performed—its text is certainly not conducive to being staged, seeing that it is wordy and convoluted—*Le gare teatrali* demonstrates the importance of rhetoric as an ideological mode within the cultural life of mid-eighteenth-century Venice, a late Early Modern city, where artistic style and political ideology coexisted and reinforced each other.⁸

Gozzi's first play is built on dual oppositions, which demonstrate a clearly pro- or anti-theatrical ideology, reinforced by a respective rhetoric. *Correctio* and *refutatio* occur constantly in the play, finding their place in the lines uttered by characters in the same scene or following one upon the other. Even more interestingly, given Gozzi's reputation and his earliest forays into writing (Beniscelli 240), we could imagine that the anti-theatrical positions would emerge as successful; but that would not be accurate. *Le gare teatrali* is an excellent piece of epideictic rhetoric, which juxtaposes praise and blame, the two poles along which Aristotle describes the genre in his 'Art' of *Rhetoric*. Recalling Vickers' abovequoted words, I will show that the role of *epideixis* is central to this play, because it underscores the dangers inherent in Goldoni's type of theater, not least in that it emphasizes the importance of playacting to a harmonious community. In other words: the vituperative and the praiseworthy are found side by side, thus demonstrating the hidden and pervasive power of the epideictic genre, which is decidedly instrumentalized, here. Through his playwriting, Gozzi aims at *docere*, while the play itself aims at *delectare*, with a view to moving (*movere*) its presumptive viewers to appreciate and thus conserve the order of the city.

Let us now turn our attention to the text. From the very beginning, the topicality of the play is evident, as it takes place during *carnevale* in the fictional city of Ovaia, in Mississippi, in 1751.⁹ While the location is remote (even exotic),

⁸ Soldini offers two hypotheses (36–38), both reasonable and ultimately unprovable in the absence of additional evidence: Gozzi could not find a troupe to stage it; or he decided to rewrite the play in verse, and later abandoned the task. Given the references to contemporary stage culture, timeliness was crucial in order for Gozzi to take part in the polemic coursing through Venice. Issues of copyright or libel were not a consideration, since the former did not yet apply to performance (and it had a limited impact on published texts, as well), and the latter did not deter other writers from attacking enemies in writing or on the stage, albeit in a thinly veiled manner—as Gozzi does in this play.

⁹ The name of the fictional city is intriguing, as it translates to “ovary”. To my knowledge, no one has studied the gender implications of this name; this is not surprising, given what little critical attention has been devoted to this play; it is not possible to perform that task within the scope of this essay.

the time frame is not: indeed, it would have coincided with the first performance of the play, had it been staged soon after being written; and it evokes a specific set of events and occasions that any Venetian acquainted with the recent occurrences in the world of playwriting and acting would have been familiar with. Briefly put, the play is concerned with two playwrights, Pasticcio (that is, ‘Mess’, a veiled reference to Goldoni) and Girandola (‘Windmill’ or ‘Weathervane’, alluding to Chiari)—each of whom is presented as writing for a different theater and troupe, and each of whom is backed by his own group of supporters, exemplified by a couple, whose allegiances are split between the two authors.¹⁰ Each writer and his camp try out various types of mischief (lies, accusations, anonymous pamphlets, and more) to come out on top as the more successful faction; unsurprisingly, neither will win the victory in the end, but their shenanigans comes very close to having dire consequences for playwriting and performance in Ovaia, and for the community as a whole. Gozzi’s conservative overall message might be phrased in the following way: words have a far-reaching power, and need to be used with a great sense of responsibility—rather than simply out of a desire for monetary gain or personal fame; playwrights naturally aim at influencing many people, because their audiences tend to be considerable, and because their plays elicit strong emotions—wherefore dramatists must be even more conscientious than other authors.¹¹

Le gare teatrali makes this visible by showing—by staging—the profound effects of playwriting and acting on many levels within a community. In Ovaia (as will be evident from the above, very short *précis*), it is entire families who are affected. In the second scene of the play, Windmill states in passing that he has his supporters—the same as Mess has his own: “If he [sc. Mess] has protectors, I will have some too! If he owns count Drum, I own his wife, countess Trumpet,

10 Gozzi mixes things up by portraying Mess as working at Teatro Vecchio (the Old Theater), and Windmill at Teatro Nuovo (the New Theater), perhaps as a commentary on the fact that there is in fact not much difference between the two playwrights, their styles, and their goals, as his play demonstrates.

11 It could be argued that my statement flies in the face of Gozzi’s later assertion that “I only tried to have fun, entertain my fellow townspeople, and make some money for a troupe who does not have any faults in the eyes of the audiences that they serve”, “Io non ho cercato, che di divertirmi, di spassare i miei concittadini, e di procurare dell’utile a una Truppa, che non ha demeriti con quel Pubblico, a cui ella serve” (*Opere* 11; trans. mgs). This passage follows the *tópos* of modesty, whereby writers averred to have had much more limited ambitions than their works manifest; this is particularly common in autobiographical contexts such as the one above, penned later on in Gozzi’s life.

and then the young countess, who's a real devil!" ("Gare" 128, I.2; trans. mgs).¹² Windmill expresses his satisfaction for what may otherwise be considered a deeply troubling set of circumstances: dissension is tearing an aristocratic couple asunder. In addition, Gozzi's language here is full of sexual double entendre: if we read Windmill's words with care, we see that Drum and Mess are conceivably involved in a homosexual relationship, adding insult to literary injury (by the public value judgments of the period in question); at the same time, Windmill increases his own sexual prowess by expanding his influence to comprise two noblewomen, including the young and unmarried countess, whose virginity is an expensive and coveted prize typically reserved for a husband (again, by the value judgments of the respective period). Windmill's self-interest blinds him to the consequences that the enmity, which he is embroiled in, tends to have within families and traditional settings.

As partisanship becomes ever more radical, Gozzi makes clear that the tension between Drum and Trumpet is not merely a figment of the imagination of the self-aggrandizing Windmill, and that the consequences will be considerable. After disparaging texts have been penned, printed, and distributed throughout the city in support of the Old Theater and its resident playwright (as had actually happened with Goldoni's *Prologo apologetico*), its supporters look to assign guilt to someone, and the following exchange occurs:

Young Countess Spark: If it was your wife [who was behind this ploy], I wouldn't hold you to be the man I believe you to be unless you stop sharing a bed with her.

Drum: If indeed it was her, I will divorce her and perhaps I would even try to annul the marriage. ("Gare" 194, II.19; trans. mgs)¹³

This short conversation implies three levels of estrangement: sexual (being mentioned by an unmarried woman), legal according to civil statutes, and legal according to canon law. In a mere two lines, Gozzi powerfully points out that family dissension is spreading to all levels of order within a community—even going as far as sapping the codification of behavior according to church and state. Divorce is here not a private matter, but something openly discussed; and indeed by a woman with a man, who happens not to be her husband. Harmony is

¹² "S'egli ha de' protettori, ne avrò anch'io [...] s'egli ha il conte Tamburo io ho la contessa Trombetta sua consorte ch'è tutta mia, e poi la mia contessina ch'è un diavolo".

¹³ "Favilla: E se è stata vostra consorte, non vi stimo l'uomo che siete se almeno non vi sceparate di letto. / Tamburo: Se è stata lei vo' fare un divorzio e forse vo' tentare scioglimento di matrimonio".

impossible within the walls of Drum and Trumpet's home, as a subsequent scene indicates:

- Drum: Before we divorce, I'll win this battle, you know? Oh yes, I'll assuredly win it—I know what's going on over here.
- Trumpet: And I know what's going on on my side, so we'll see...and then indeed we'll divorce. We are no longer children, my dear count. ("Gare" 218, III.9; trans. mgs)¹⁴

Here we witness two characters belonging to the nobility—hence (traditionally) endowed with specific responsibilities as regards upholding the principles of, and best behavior within, the community—who are now squabbling like children, and using unrefined language ("bollire in pentola", literally "to boil in a pot", was, and still is, a popular phrase, socially beneath the two characters on stage by contemporary standards). Through Trumpet's ironic proclamation at the end of her line, Gozzi seems to emphasize the chasm between what they say and how they behave. This is particularly relevant to my point, since, for Gozzi, playwriting and acting have a fundamental, necessary role within a community: that of representing exemplary behavior to the audience's view. This ideological point is reinforced (and rendered in more comical, but also gloomier terms) by the visual spectacle: the two characters are wearing nightgowns as they are about to retire separately for the night, making the fundamental breakdown of propriety, and of their marriage, manifest on stage. The visual, performance-based element and the ideological, word-based one, reinforce each other, and underscore the censorious aspect of this play.

For Gozzi, the same as for most conservatives, family is the fundamental building block of society; accordingly, any problems in this area will soon spread to the society at large. If husbands and wives do not respect each other, if noblemen and women do not care to be seen in their pajamas, if unmarried women openly discuss divorce, then it is unsurprising that other social boundaries are equally crossed, and proprieties voided. The play stages transgressions of the rhetorical *aptum*, in ways that are apt to its intratextual goal of *movere*. An excellent example is found in the second act, when Trumpet quarrels with a man wearing a mask (as was, of course, customary during *carnevale*), who is selling keys to theater boxes:

14 "Tamburo: Prima di fare il divorzio vincerò il mio puntiglio, sapete? Oh lo vincerò lo vincerò, io so ciò che bolle nella mia pentola. / Trombetta: Ed io so ciò che bolle nella mia, vederemo, e poi divorzio pure, non siamo più ragazzi, no signor conte".

The man with the keys: I understand where you belong socially from the way you talk.
 Trumpet: What do you mean, reckless man?
 The man with the keys: That you talk like a commoner, like riff-raff.
 Trumpet: If only I had a knife... [to Narrow Mind, a marquis who follows Trumpet] What are you doing, Mr. Stupid? Do you let me be offended like that? (“Gare” 204–205, II.24; trans. mgs)¹⁵

The destabilization of traditional gender roles (already evident in the two examples above) continues, is exacerbated in this snippet of dialog. When visual indications of socio-economic strata are erased (by face masks worn during *carnevale*, or by costumes and make-up on stage), other signals become more important; here, it is particularly the choice of words and inflection, which are crucial. Earlier in the scene, Trumpet addresses the key seller with the respectful “voi”; at this point, she has switched to the familiar “tu”. Even assuming that her choice is justified by the occupation of her interlocutor (and that, earlier in the scene, she was merely trying to be accommodating), the insult she directs at her peer, Narrow Mind, is gratuitous, and even dangerous. Moreover, the distance between language and behavioral impropriety is short: we can quibble over Trumpet’s choice of words, but her wish to act violently (“If only I had a knife...”) marks the breaking down not only of well-mannered behavior by a noble woman, but more generally of the boundaries of legality within the community.

In fact, this seed of violence is present from the very beginning of the play, threatening its rhetorical nature of comedy to turn into tragedy. The first scene of Act I is only partially scripted; it shows Truffaldino, Drum’s servant (a key character of *commedia dell’arte*, the perennially hungry servant, whose name derives from *truffare*, ‘to swindle’) and Brighella (another such character, whose name derives from *brigare*, ‘to scheme’), as they are exchanging judgments concerning the plays about to be performed at the two theaters; they proceed to insulting each other, until finally “Brighella slaps him [Truffaldino], and the latter hits him with a club; people wearing masks want to separate them, a melee ensues, and people fall all over”—as the scene comes to an end (“Gare” 125, I.1; trans. mgs).¹⁶ Tensions among playwrights and performers, Gozzi might be seen to imply, are dangerous, because they spill over from the stage into the

15 “Quel dalle chiavi: Vi sento nel parlare. / Trombetta: Che vuoi dire, temerario? / Quel dalle chiavi: Che parlate da pedina e da plebaglia. / Trombetta: Oh se avessi un coltello... Che fate voi, signor stolido, mi lasciate vilipendere? (*a Barbino*)”.

16 “Brighella gli dà uno schiaffo. Truffaldino lo bastona; le maschere vogliono scepararli, barruffa, maschere in terra”. Gozzi’s choice to open his largely scripted play with an *improvviso* scene is noteworthy, as it might be read as an indication of his stylistic predilection, borne out in his later production.

community. In *Le gare teatrali*, physical violence is initially enacted among two servants, is then invoked by the noblewoman Trumpet later, and finally explodes in Act III, when it threatens to destabilize the entire city and community of Ovaia—hence requiring decisive countermeasures. This emerges when the two aforementioned servants—having become even more radical as they observe their masters’ opinions regarding Windmill and Mess—decide to settle the matter once and for all:

- Brighella: Ah, murderer! I challenge you and all your followers, supporters of Mess, I challenge you to a Venetian-style war. Tomorrow at sunrise I challenge you to the Bridge of Crazy People.
- Truffaldino: Be my guest, come with all your herds, supporter of Windmill; you’re all such idiots! (“Gare” 213, III.4; trans. mgs)¹⁷

If ever we needed confirmation that Gozzi writes “Ovaia” and thinks “Venice”, Brighella’s verbal slippage gives us an explicit one: he is referring to the long tradition of the “fist wars” fought on the Ponte dei Pugni (still extant today), near Campo San Barnaba in the Dorsoduro neighborhood (*sestiere*), the site of Bakhtinian carnivalesque violence.¹⁸ In *Le gare teatrali*, however, the inevitable fistfight has the potential of involving the society at large, since family tensions had by then leaked outside their more limited domain.

Just as dangerously, violence has the potential of turning into a spectacle, the object of scopophile attention on the part of other social strata, who have been primed by the tensions and inimical actions between the two theatrical camps. This is, in fact, what Gozzi’s stage directions indicate:

Trumpet, Windmill, Cloyingly Sweet [a young countess, the object of Windmill’s attention], and Zanetto [the New Theater’s impresario] run from one side [of the stage] to see the brawl; Drum, Spark, Mess and Owl [a washer, Truffaldino’s wife] run from the other. Nobody talks; they act out their support for Truffaldino and Brighella. Soldiers arrive carrying shotguns and two cannons and take position to fire over the fighters, who split and flee. The soldiers leave. (“Gare” 229, III.21; trans. mgs)¹⁹

¹⁷ “Brighella: Ah sassin. Te sfido con tutti i to seguaci parziali de Pastizzo, te sfido a far una Guerra alla veneziana, doman a bonora te sfido al ponte dei matti. / Truffaldino: Vien pur con tutte le mandre, parziale de Girandola, razza de becchi”.

¹⁸ For a concise and insightful introduction to this “mode of sociability”, see Ferraro (95–97), which is tellingly followed by her account of the Venetian tradition of *carnevale*.

¹⁹ “Trombetta, Girandola, Milensa e Zanetto da una parte corrono a vedere la zuffa; Tamburo, Favilla, Pasticcio e Civetta dall’altra; nessuno parla ma fanno gesti di parzialità chi per Truffaldino chi per Brighella. Giungono soldati con fucili e due cannoni, si piantano per far fuoco sopra i combattenti, i quali si seceparano e fuggono, i soldati partono”.

Windmill's and Mess's plays have elicited such strong emotions and actions that the State needs to intervene directly: first with this show of force, and later with specific forms of legislation, as we shall presently see. Setting aside the fact that this scene would posit some difficulties to its staging, since it requires props and a large number of extras, Gozzi indicates that a certain type of theater encourages a dangerous drift from civic responsibility to personal and emotional responses, including within the upper strata of society—meaning, those on whom the State counts to maintain, and pass on, propriety, legality, community. The intratextual audience, presented here as involved, if from the periphery, in this violence, does not understand this danger. Gozzi's presentation is geared toward raising an awareness thereto in the extratextual audience.

Why is it necessary, then, to have theater at all? Why use a play to lay bare the weaknesses and dangers of theater? This is the crucial paradox of *Le gare teatrali*, fully borne out in the two-part conclusion of the play. First, a decision is rendered and made known by a crier, accompanied by a companion, whose role it is to repeat what the crier states in a louder voice. In what follows, I have connected line fragments in order to compose a more readily comprehensible speech; in Gozzi's original script, each fragment is stated by the crier and repeated by his companion, and therefore amplified and emphasized:

Crier: With each passing day [...] we continue to uncover a notable, scandal-bearing, [...] ruinous change in the brains [...] of our city's inhabitants, [...] [we see] disputes, discord, [...] and offenses to the reputation and the very lives of both sexes, [...] [we note] licentiousness and immoderation in habits, [...] and from the countless multitude of complaints [...] made to Justice [...] we observe that the source of all disorder [...] are the so-called character comedies [...] by the authors Mess and Windmill [...]. We maturely reflected on this [...] and we decide and order what follows [...]: All the comedies by the abovementioned authors [...] are and will be forever suspended and prohibited [...] from the theaters of this city of ours [...]. However, we do not want to take away [...] a moderate, innocent enjoyment from the population [...] as well as profit from actors and impresarios [...]; we allow the following comedies [...] to be performed [...]: *The Feast with the Great Statue* [...]; *Arlecchino Pretend Prince* [...]; *The Great Bernardo dal Carpio* [...]; *The Glorious Labors of Hercules* [...]; *Roland's Honorable Poverty* [...]; *Pantalone's Thuggish Acts* [...]; *Pantalone, Bankrupt Merchant* [...]; *Pietro Barliario* [...]; *Brighella's Characters* [...]; and all scripted comedies [...] written between 1630 [...] and 1690, included[.] (“Gare” 229–31, III.22; trans. mgs)²⁰

²⁰ “Scoprendosi sempre più di giorno in giorno [...] una notevole scandalosa [...] essenziale [sic] alterazione nei cervelli [...] degli abitanti di questa città nostra, [...] nascere contese, discordie, offese [...] alle riputazioni e alle vite dell’uno e dell’altro sesso, [...] introdursi libertinaggio e smoderatezza nei costumi, [...] e rilleandosi [sic] dalla innumerabile moltitudine di reclami [...] fatti innanzi la Giustizia [...] essere la fonte di tutti i disordini [...] le nuove commedie dette di

These rhythmic repetitions extend and expand the effect of the proclamation for the intra- and extratextual audiences, insisting on the ruler's decision and tautologically instructing those in attendance (both on stage and off) about the seriousness of the situation and of the consequent decision. The problem, according to the (anonymous) ruler (or rulers) of Ovaia, is not theater *per se*, but the newfangled, character-based plays by the two 'recreant' writers. In fact, theater is necessary for the "enjoyment" of "the population" (the rhetorical function of *delectare*), and to support two professional groups: those who run theaters and those who perform there. In this, Gozzi's text is also profoundly Venetian, because (as mentioned above) the economy of performances was based on investments by noble and established merchant families, rather than on courtly or aristocratic sponsorship, as was the case in other Italian cities. Consistent with his choice to write a comedy that disparages and criticizes contemporary plays, Gozzi argues for a compromise: some playwrights are to be sacrificed for peace and harmony to prevail, and for theater to continue to take place. Central authority is needed for this, as well; for the second part of the play's conclusion (the extended last scene: III.26) is built around the actions of the Governor, an enlightened ruler, who imposes measures of reconciliation on previously split couples (both masters and servants), as well as on noblemen and women, who had quarreled, because they did not agree on whom to support. Moreover, he calls Windmill to his court; and exiles Mess, who, before exiting, utters the following line: "I'll find other companions and I'll go to Venice. Comedies, or death! I want to see if I'm capable of making the Venetians go crazy; my heart tells me I'll find my luck there" ("Gare" 238, III.26; trans. mgs).²¹ Mess is

carattere [...] degl'autori Pasticcio e Girandola, [...] fatto maturo riflesso [...] deliberiamo e comandiamo come segue: [...] che tutte le commedie dei suddetti autori [Pasticcio e Girandola] [...] siano e s'intendano sospese e proibite [...] per sempre dai teatri di questa città nostra. [...] Non volendo però levare [...] un moderato innocente divertimento alle persone [...] né l'utile agl'impresari e comici [...] permettiamo che siano recitate [...] le commedie che seguono: [...] *Il gran convitato di pietra*, [...] *Arlecchino finto principe*, [...] *Il gran Bernardo dal Carpio*, [...] *Le gloriose imprese d'Ercole*, [...] *L'onorata povertà di Rinaldo*, [...] *Le bulate di Pantalone*, [...] *Pantalone mercante fallito*, [...] *Pietro Barleario*, [...] *I personaggi di Brighella*, [...] e tutte le commedie scritte [...] dall'anno 1630 [...] sino l'anno 1690, inclusive". Note the great, and seemingly random, variety among the titles of permitted comedies: several are clearly specimen of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition (those including Brighella, Arlecchino, and Pantalone); one is recognizably by Molière (*Dom Juan or le festin de Pierre*, first performed in 1655 and printed in 1682, typically translated in English as *Dom Juan or The Feast with the Statue*); others derive from Medieval epic (Bernardo dal Carpio and Roland) or legend (Pietro Barliario), and even Greco-Roman mythology is represented (Hercules).

21 Pasticcio: "Mi procurerò altri compagni e anderò a Venezia. Vo' far commedie se crepassi.

presented as interested solely in effect, rhetorical fireworks, so to speak, without any concerns for content; he is a sophist, to use historico-rhetorical terms. Gozzi's edifying message for his city (the rhetorical function of *docere*) comes to the fore without any metaphorical disguise: what happened in fictional Ovaia is precisely what is happening in his beloved Venice.

Even so, Gozzi's position is remote from those espoused in anti-theatrical writings on the part of post-Tridentine prelates, who were intent on vanquishing, or at least curbing, performances altogether, such as Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, and Bishop Carlo Bascapè.²² In fact, his very text demonstrates the positive power of playacting, thus taking the opposite approach to stagecraft, when contrasted with other personalities and orders within the Catholic Church, ranging from the Devotions of the Forty Hours to the use of performances with pedagogical and spiritual goals by the Jesuits.²³ The intended audience for *Le gare teatrali* would be awakened to the dangers their city (Venice) was facing, due to the markedly exaggerated attention paid to theaters, playwrights, and actorial troupes. If we wanted to categorize Gozzi in rhetorical and ideological terms, he utilizes Aristotelian categories and aligns with the Platonic Socrates' stance against the sophists qua (solely) interested in effects for the sake of effects and personal gain. More specifically, his unperformed play puts at its center the community, as well as dangers to it, while referring both to its nucleus (the family), and to its political expression (the Governor). In this it falls squarely within the parameters of the epideictic, whose goal is to praise or blame a person or an action. Let us recall Aristotle's definition of noble actions, worthy of praise:

Those things of which the reward is honour are noble; also those which are done for honour rather than money. Also, those desirable things which a man does not do for his own sake; things which are absolutely good, which a man has done for the sake of his country, while neglecting his own interests; things which are naturally good; and not such as are good for the individual, since such things are inspired by selfish motives. (*Art' of Rhetoric* 95, l.ix.16–17, 1366b)

Vo' vedere se so far impazzire i Veneziani; il cuore mi dice che farò fortuna".

²² These texts, and more, are gathered in Ferdinando Taviani's *La commedia dell'arte e la società barocca. La fascinazione del teatro*—an indispensable source for any research concerning performances during the period from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century in Italy.

²³ The best introduction to the topic is Bjurström. According to *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, such devotions started in Milan in 1537 ("Forty Hours' Devotion"), only eight years before the earliest extant document related to the *commedia dell'arte*.

Throughout the play, Mess' actions are singled out as being on the opposite end of the spectrum: all he does is for his own material advancement, in a selfish, non-communal manner. Money is a preoccupation of his from the first time he is on stage: when the character Dottore, a printer, asks him to let him publish his plays, he callously replies: "well, my companion, you won't swindle me like you swindle other learned men [...] It'll cost you zecchins!" ("Gare" 137, I.5; trans. mgs).²⁴ Earlier in this scene, Mess had listed the many jobs he had had before playwrighting: "I don't want to tell you how many professions I tried my hand at *making a living*, and I was unhappy in all of them" ("Gare" 136, I.5; trans. mgs; emph. added).²⁵ Gozzi presents this character as having turned to this job for no other goal than making money.

To ensure that this element fully emerges—and even for a potentially distracted audience member—Gozzi includes a self-referential element in Act II, when Zanetto receives from Narrow Mind a mysterious script, entitled *Le gare teatrali*, which he "received yesterday from Peru":

Zanetto: Who is its author, my dear marquis?
 Narrow Mind: I cannot tell you. I will only tell you that it was written as a pastime in fifteen evenings, at a small table in a café among laughter, chatter, and the noise of cups banging against each other. You can imagine the type of comedy that it can be! Its style is poor, its scenes disconnected, some characters superfluous, some set changes almost impossible [...] everything that the author's fancy suggested is in it [...]. I will give it to you as a gift [...]. You ought to forget the idea that Mess and Windmill, those poets, inspired in you, and believe that there are poets that write purely for their own enjoyment. ("Gare" 191–192, II.18; trans. mgs)²⁶

This is a reference, indeed the only one, to the play we are reading, containing the self-deprecating assessment that it is a somewhat disjointed trifle, written solely for the pleasure and enjoyment of doing so. This, of course, radically sets

²⁴ "Eh compar mio, non la farete mica a me come agl'altri uomini dotti; vorran esser cecchini".

²⁵ "Non voglio dirvi poi a quante professioni m'appigliai per vivere e in tutte me la passai infelicemente".

²⁶ "M'è capitata dal Perù una commedia ieri"; "Zanetto: Chi e l'autor, caro sior marchese? / Barbino: Non posso dirvelo. Vi dirò solo che fu composta per passatempo in quindici sere a una pezzuolo la sera in un caffè fra le risa, il ciarlare e l'urtarsi assieme de' scodellini, figuratevi la commedia ch'ella può essere. Stile cattivo, scene slegate, superfluità di personaggi, mutazioni quasi impossibili di scene e tutto ciò che suggerì il capriccio v'è dentro [...]. Io ve ne so fare un regalo [sic] [...]. Bisogna poi alcuna volta dimenticarsi l'idea de' poeti che v'hanno ispirato, Pasticcio e Girandola, e credere che vi sieno poeti che per divertimento puramente compngano".

apart Gozzi—the play’s unmentioned author (who, until then, was not known as a playwright)—from Mess and Windmill: he does not need to make money from his work. If intratextually this play is presented as a trifle, as *delectare*-driven for its author, extratextually it embodies the *docere* that a conservative writer such as Gozzi wants to convey. The juxtaposition he sets up with his two adversaries is far more profound than simply that between ‘old’ and ‘new’ ways of writing plays; it has to do with ‘noble’ or ‘monetarily disinterested’ work, in opposition to the mercenary nature of Mess’ and Windmill’s; consequently, it is carried out for the betterment of his community, out of a sense of “moral and social responsibility” (to echo Vickers), rather than for pecuniary self-interest, or the desire to acquire fame (which can then be monetarized). This probably points to the ultimate reason for a lack of attribution of *Le gare teatrali* to Gozzi within the play’s script: anything else might seem venal or selfish.

In the end, Gozzi’s unperformed play shows that his conservatism is cultural, social, and political. Why sap the fundamental traits and organization of playacting, a successful and useful enterprise? Why allow playwrights keen on success and self-advancement to have access to this profession, which should rightly be a pastime for noblemen (and women, as Luisa Bergalli was doing at the time), disinterested in money or fame? Why rattle Venice’s political structure and provoke it to strong, military responses? No improvement to theater, no element of self-interest overrides the balanced, harmonious Venetian *status quo*—Gozzi seems to argue. His *epideixis* glorifies Venice, while simultaneously denigrating those who want to revolutionize its playwriting and performance styles.

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