



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## ‘Il paese dei campanili’: On the Origins of Italian Operetta

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### Abstract

Operetta, with its well-structured production systems, constituted a dynamic sphere of activity that stretched across Unified Italy. This activity was rarely acknowledged by the representatives of so-called ‘high culture’, even as it stimulated the growth of the social structures that would later give rise to cinema and other forms of mass entertainment. Though in recent years scholars have focused on the foreign influences on light music theatre in Italy in the years following Italian unification, little attention has been bestowed on Italian operetta. This article concentrates on the origins of this genre, offering a detailed analysis of the dialect theatre tradition from which the first French-style operetta productions in Italy emerged. Specifically, I examine the urban contexts of Milan and above all Rome, a city of crucial importance in the diffusion of operetta in dialect, whose highly local (even parochial) connotations would exert a significant influence on the formal, social and cultural evolution of operetta right up to the turn of the century.

**Keywords:** Italian operetta; Dialect theatre; Regionalism; Entertainment industry; Post-unification Italy

‘*Opera buffa* has been killed by *operetta*.’ Thus wrote Francesco D’Arcais, one of the leading figures in post-Unification Italian music criticism, in the journal *Nuova antologia* in January 1878.<sup>1</sup> His sentiments, widely shared in the conservative press, were born of at least two prejudices, closely connected and still firmly rooted in the historiography of music practically up to the present day. The first is the belief that the Golden Age of Italian *opera buffa* ended in 1843 with Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale*.<sup>2</sup> The second, more persistent still, contrasts the noble, elevated character of *opera buffa* with the (inevitably triumphant) immorality of operetta.

This opera–operetta dichotomy – the idea of a clear division between the two genres – is not unique to Italy. France, with its rigid theatrical system, was the first country to draw such a line of demarcation, prescribing a specific perimeter of action for operetta restricted initially to just the small Parisian theatre called the Bouffes-Parisiens.<sup>3</sup> Yet being confined to

<sup>1</sup> Francesco D’Arcais, ‘Rassegna musicale’, *Nuova antologia* 8 (1878), 156–71, at 158; italics in source.

<sup>2</sup> As Francesco Izzo has stressed in his *Laughter Between Two Revolutions: Opera Buffa in Italy, 1831–1848* (Rochester, NY, 2013), 8–9, this prejudice is the result of a lack of ‘bottom-up’ analysis of the opera industry and in particular the role of minor theatres. While focusing on emblematic works of the period rather than exploring the activity of minor theatres, Izzo has usefully indicated future paths for research on the post-Unification period.

<sup>3</sup> The rigid subdivision of genres that had affected Parisian theatre since 1853, when the repertoire constraints dating back to the Napoleonic period were restored, meant that until 1864 operetta remained exclusively in the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens, founded by Jacques Offenbach in 1855; see Nicole Wild, *Dictionnaire des théâtres*

the circuit of minor theatres did not interfere with the genre's uninterrupted vitality in France through the second half of the nineteenth century and beyond. The same could be said for Italy, where the success of operetta in the years following Italian unification was disruptive enough to give a powerful boost to secondary theatres. But there was an important difference: in France a dialogue between the official theatres and fringe establishments was central to the cultural life of the country, allowing operetta to maintain a prominent position in the French theatrical panorama; but in Italy, operetta established itself and proliferated within an area that remained opaque and indecipherable in the eyes of 'official' culture at least until the early twentieth century, when workers in the operetta sector sought more and more to institutionalise their profession by (for instance) forming trade unions. Before this point, the progress of operetta might best be seen as an important undercurrent that – sometimes acknowledged, sometimes shunned by institutional culture – dragged into its orbit an increasingly large swathe of the public.

Given Italian operetta's eventual centrality to the entertainment industry, it is essential to analyse the genre if we are to bring into focus both the cultural needs and the collective imaginary of Italians then and now. Attention must be paid not only to the often obscure minor theatres, but also to more ephemeral locations such as cafés, taverns, clubs and piazzas: in short, all the places where various forms of communal leisure took place, which especially in the years following Unification played a leading role in the formation of a collective identity that linked different social spheres. We need, in other words, to adopt a broader perspective, one that would encompass unusual spaces such as a crowded tram carriage in Turin at the end of the nineteenth century:

At the entrance to Via Vanchiglia, and then in front of the Arena and the theatre, three groups of passengers, one after the other, bring into the tram three types of utterance on three very different topics, their intonations and facial expressions discordant both to the eye and to the ear. The first group is all men: they have left the *gioco del pallone*<sup>4</sup> and continue their discussions of the game and their bets on it, repeating the same words a hundred times over: fifteen, forty, fault, dividend, service, return service, and imitating shots and movements with sudden gestures and shouts of appreciation. In this case there flows a sense of healthy strength, of struggle, of life lived in the open air. In front of the Arena, where the operetta is being performed, appear young men whose faces are lit with a completely different flame: who comment with laughter and bold words on the bulging vests, the impudent gestures and the dubious *bons mots*, spreading around them a breath of sensuality and licence which prompts lewd smiles and sinful fantasies in those nearby. A little further on, shopkeepers, hairdressers, sometimes entire families exit the theatre, all with tears in their eyes, still moved by the end of the drama, all exclaiming together: – What a beautiful production! – It's too painful. – Did you see how he died? – He met the end he deserved. – Poor girl! And these things happen! – and their words breathe indignation against the wicked, pity for the oppressed innocent, joy at triumphant virtue, a good, sincere, profound emotion, which makes us understand what great power – unknown by most, badly used by many, ineptly neglected by municipalities and governments – is contained in popular theatre.<sup>5</sup>

*parisiens au XIXe siècle: Les théâtres et la musique* (Paris, 1986), 18; see also Jean-Claude Yon, *Jacques Offenbach* (Paris, 2000), 136–7.

<sup>4</sup> De Amicis refers here to the *pallone col bracciale*, a very popular sport in post-unification Italy and one to which the author had devoted an entire book some years previously (*Gli azzurri e i rossi*, 1897).

<sup>5</sup> Edmondo De Amicis, *La carrozza di tutti* (Milan, 1899), 245–6.

This quotation is drawn from a book entitled *La carrozza di tutti* (1899) by Edmondo De Amicis, one of the most popular writers in Unified Italy and author of the famous novel *Cuore* (1886), arguably the apex of patriotic myth-making in Italy at the *fin de siècle*.<sup>6</sup> The person observing the passengers on the tram is De Amicis himself, and he offers his readers a sort of sociological study of the life and habits of Turin's residents. On the journey in question the author encounters three types of spectator, types that correspond to three social categories: men, young men and women. The combinations of man–strength–*gioco del pallone*, youth–sinful fantasies–operetta, and woman–emotion–drama reflect a mentality that was widespread in those years, ultimately traceable to the image of the Italian liberal family.<sup>7</sup> De Amicis's educational–patriotic commitments as a writer – aimed at promoting the family as a space for the production of public morality – led him to interpret operetta with this pedagogical agenda in mind. For De Amicis, and also for an important segment of the Italian intelligentsia, operetta was a 'sin of youth', to be regarded with indulgence – an error that could readily be forgiven a young state like Italy.

This conception of operetta, which has remained stubbornly persistent through to the present day, has created a void in terms of research that has only recently begun to be filled. Particularly relevant here is the work of Carlotta Sorba and Valeria De Lucca, which although preliminary, nevertheless highlights the impact of operetta on Italian society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>8</sup> Equally valuable is Emilio Sala's work on the Milanese Scapigliatura and its relationship to light musical theatre,<sup>9</sup> to which can be added a range of new research on the foreign influences on the operetta sector.<sup>10</sup> These contributions are starting to populate a still uncultivated field, but we are a long way from a comprehensive understanding of the genre.

This article aims to reconstruct the beginnings of Italian operetta from the end of the 1860s to the beginning of the 1890s – that is, from the very first Italian theatrical responses to French operetta to the stirrings of a national industry at the turn of the century. I focus in particular on Milan and Rome, the economic and political capitals of Italy during this period. Naples, too, played a crucial role in the evolution of operetta on the peninsula, but given that Ditlev Rindom's contribution to this special issue treats the Neapolitan context in depth, here I restrict myself to brief comments on a few influential productions that connect thematically with those in Milan and Rome. The reference in my title to one of the best-known works of twentieth-century Italian operetta, *Il paese dei campanelli* by Virgilio Ranzato and Carlo Lombardo (1923), chimes with one of the best-known definitions of post-Unification Italy:

<sup>6</sup> Among the vast bibliography on the role of De Amicis's novel in post-Unification Italy, see Folco Portinari, 'La maniera di De Amicis', in Edmondo De Amicis, *Opere scelte*, ed. Portinari and Giusi Baldissone (Milan, 1996), ix–xcii; and Alberto Maria Banti, *Il Risorgimento italiano* (Rome and Bari, 2018), 119–30.

<sup>7</sup> On this topic see Ilaria Porciani, 'Famiglia e nazione nel lungo Ottocento', in *Famiglia e nazione nel lungo Ottocento italiano: Modelli, strategie, reti di relazioni*, ed. Ilaria Porciani (Rome, 2006), 15–53; Porciani, 'Disciplinamento nazionale e modelli domestici nel lungo Ottocento: Germania e Italia a confronto', in *Storia d'Italia, Annali 22, Il Risorgimento*, ed. Alberto Maria Banti and Paul Ginsborg (Turin, 2007), 97–125.

<sup>8</sup> See Carlotta Sorba, 'The Origins of the Entertainment Industry: The Operetta in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 11/3 (2006), 282–302; and Valeria De Lucca, 'Operetta in Italy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Operetta*, ed. Anastasia Belina and Derek B. Scott (Cambridge, 2019), 220–31.

<sup>9</sup> Emilio Sala, 'L'umorismo scapigliato e Rossini: *Il barbiere di Siviglia* di Costantino Dall'Argine (1868)', in *Gioachino Rossini 1868–2018: La musica e il mondo*, ed. Ilaria Narici, Emilio Sala, Emanuele Senici and Benjamin Walton (Pesaro, 2018), 273–99; and 'Voci della città: Da "Hé! Lambert!" (Parigi 1864) a "Se sa minga" (Milano 1866)', in *Viaggi italo-francesi: Scritti 'musicali' per Adriana Guarnieri*, ed. Marica Bottaro and Francesco Cesari (Lucca, 2020), 101–17.

<sup>10</sup> See Elena Oliva, *L'operetta parigina a Milano, Firenze e Napoli (1860–1890): Esordi, sistema produttivo e ricezione* (Lucca, 2020); see also Oliva, 'Effetto Offenbach: Novità ed adattamenti nel teatro postunitario di e con musica', *Philomusica on-line* 19 (2020), 111–39.

'the country of a hundred cities and a thousand bell towers'.<sup>11</sup> This vision of Italy as a patchwork quilt of hyper-local identities fits perfectly into the field of our investigation here, which is mostly centred on dialect operetta – the first type to appear on the Italian scene. As I argue, the strongly 'parochial' connotations of operetta written in Italy's many regional languages exerted a significant impact on formal, social and cultural developments in this genre in the years following Italian unification.

### A new social geography of theatres

The origins of Italian operetta are closely linked to France. As we shall see, the simultaneous arrival of Offenbach, Hervé and Lecocq on Italian stages powerfully influenced indigenous production at least until the end of the century. Starting from the second half of the 1860s, in fact, we can see a proliferation of forms inspired by French models. The areas most affected by this development were the large cities, with Milan and Naples – the two most important centres for Francophile operetta – in the vanguard. These two geographically and culturally opposed poles reflected a country already moving at two distinct speeds. On the one hand was Milan, a city renowned for progress and industrialisation that in the years following Unification became the 'moral capital' of Italy – an industrious place sustained by its economic forces, proud of its autonomy in the face of a malfunctioning state machine.<sup>12</sup> On the other was Naples, which in the post-Unification years suffered a precipitous social and economic decline, largely to the indifference of the ruling classes. In spite of continuous warnings from the intellectual class about the 'Naples question', part of the broader and more difficult 'Southern Question', the city was basically left to itself, and one of the darkest chapters in its history thus culminated in the cholera epidemic of 1884.<sup>13</sup> These critical issues aside, however, numerous points of similarity can be found between the two cities with regard to operetta. In both cases operetta initially flourished in the context of dialect theatre.<sup>14</sup> But if in the case of Naples this was predictable, given the continuing vitality of

<sup>11</sup> In all likelihood this expression, in all its many variants (e.g. 'the Italy of a hundred cities and a hundred bell towers'; 'the country of a thousand cities and a thousand bell towers'), first emerged in the years following Italian unification and remains in common use today. Its precise origins are unclear, but it is clearly tied to the concept of 'parochialism' (*campanilismo*): a term that itself became widespread after Unification in place of 'municipalism' (*municipalismo*), emphasising attachment to one's own city and therefore one's own prominent bell tower. As the linguist Massimo Fanfani explains, 'under the new Kingdom of Italy's strong centralizing political agenda, both the federalist aspirations of many intellectuals and the affectations and local peculiarities of regional populations were cast negatively as anti-patriotic and anti-national, including through the use of *ad hoc* expressions such as *campanilismo*.' See Massimo Fanfani, 'A proposito di campanilismo e dell'affrontare i dubbi di lingua', *Italiano digitale* 23/4 (2022).

<sup>12</sup> On Milan's mythical status as the cultural capital of Italy, see in particular Vittorio Spinazzola, 'La "capitale morale": Cultura milanese e mitologia urbana', *Belfagor* 36/3 (1981), 319–27; and Giovanna Rosa, *Il mito della capitale morale: Identità, speranze e contraddizioni della Milano moderna* (Milan, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> See in particular Pasquale Villari, who lamented the position of the South in his *Lettere meridionali e altri scritti sulla questione sociale in Italia* (1878); and Giustino Fortunato, who dedicated various publications to the issue including *La questione demaniale nelle province demaniali* (1882) and *Il mezzogiorno e lo stato italiano* (1911). On Naples and the Southern Question, see among others Francesco Barbagallo, *Mezzogiorno e questione meridionale (1860–1980)* (Naples, 1980), *La questione italiana: Il Nord e il Sud dal 1860 a oggi* (Bari, 2013) and *Napoli, belle époque (1885–1915)* (Bari, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> With this term I refer broadly to the world of theatre written or performed in one of Italy's many regional languages, and the associated deployment of features derived from the culture and traditions of individual regions. Often this entailed the appearance of characters and tropes specific to regional variants of *commedia dell'arte* traditions and the insertion of vernacular poetic forms. However, as the nineteenth century wore on, Italian dialect theatre progressively shed its regional peculiarities, aligning itself more and more with national and international trends (especially French ones) with respect to formal features and typical subject matter.

the comic tradition in Neapolitan dialect at a local and national level, it was less obvious in the case of Milan, which in the aftermath of Unification found itself almost completely without dialect theatre.

Stimulus came from the enormous success of Offenbach's operettas in numerous Italian theatres, from north to south, starting in 1866 with the arrival of the Grégoire brothers in Italy.<sup>15</sup> *Les Soirées Parisiennes* was the name of the wooden theatre that the company installed in various squares across the country, in the process constructing one of the first spaces for mass entertainment in Unified Italy. The title alone was intended to evoke glamorous evenings Parisians spent in the capital's boulevard theatres: *Les Soirées Parisiennes* brought a slice of Parisian life to Italy, and specifically to the square, a space generally dedicated to popular types of spectacular entertainment, but to which the Grégoire family was able to give the appearance of exclusivity and extravagance.

The social frenzy that the Grégoires' operetta aroused was the object of satire in both the press and the theatrical world. Particularly interesting in this respect is the revue *1868 sguardo politico-artistico-sociale*, written by the Neapolitan playwright Antonio De Lerma, set to music by Michele Ruta and staged in January 1869 at the Teatro del Fondo in Naples. In the fourth scene, set in a Neapolitan square in which the four façades of the city's main theatres are visible, we find various allegorical characters amongst whom are the Critic, the Poet, 1868, Old Giuseppe (alias Giuseppe Verdi), a Woman, a Husband and La Belle Hélène. Discussing the spectacular failure of Errico Petrella's *Jone* at the Teatro San Carlo, the characters voice different feelings, ranging from amazement to disappointment, at the favourable reception of the Grégoires' 'circus' by the Neapolitan public:

Vecchio Giuseppe: Godo che il mio amico sia diventato Impresario, ma bisogna convenire che la vera musica è questa (*mostra il baraccone*).

Critica: Eh! ... Eh! ... infatti se questo Teatro è sempre affollato, bisogna convenire che la prima musica dell'universo è questa, e quel Baraccone il Teatro più importante di Napoli.

Belle Hélène (*esce dal teatro Gregoire, e canta francese, indi dice*): Entrez messieurs, ne vous arrêtez pas aux bagatelles de la porte et aux affiches. Entrez, si vous voulez vraiment rire et goûter de la gaie musique [...]. Oui, messieurs, notre musique part du cœur, est celle du peuple [...].

Voci di dentro, poi il Vecchio Giuseppe: Viva la Bella Helena (*critica ride*).

Poeta: È vero che la Francia in tutto oggi si mischia. Ma se v'è che l'applaude, v'è pure chi la fischia.

Critica: Produzioni francesi dovunque! In nome della lega pacifica,<sup>16</sup> protesto contro tutto ciò che sa di francese.

Vecchio Giuseppe: Sì. Sì parlate, e protestate pure, mentre la Bella Elena... [...]

1868: Poeta mio carissimo, i fatti parlano chiaro. O la musica è bella, o il pubblico è somaro. Donna entra seguita da marito, e da due giovanotti, comparse.

<sup>15</sup> On the presence of the Grégoire company in Italy and on the reception of Parisian operetta, see Oliva, *L'operetta parigina a Milano*, 47–66.

<sup>16</sup> *La lega pacifica* was an association that the journalist and parliamentary deputy Giovan Battista Bottero tried to create in 1867, with the aim of boycotting France. Members of the league would undertake to abstain from buying anything that originated in France. Bottero's proposal was not taken up but remained at the centre of the political/journalistic debate for several years.

Vecchio Giuseppe (*le si fa incontro, e dà braccio*): Solo io ò potuto ottenere questo biglietto con la folla che vi è.

Donna: Lo credo (*fanno scena fra loro*).

Critica: (*fra se*) Se tutto il pubblico è formato da tali tipi le mie forbici serviranno poco. [...]

Donna: Ninno! ... (*con sostenutezza*) (*si ode la campana de' Gregoire*) Su via giovanotti, il tempio sacro alla buona società dischiude le sue porte. Questo baraccone ci ricorda i boulevards, i boulevards Parigi, è Parigi il centro di quanto vi è più di elegante.<sup>17</sup>

[Old Giuseppe: I'm pleased that my friend has become an Impresario, but we must agree that this is real music (*gestures to the circus*). Critic: Eh! ... Eh! ... yes, if this theatre is always crowded, we must agree that the best music in the universe is this, and that this Circus is the most important theatre in Naples. Belle Hélène (*exits the Grégoire theatre, sings in French, then says*): Entrez messieurs, ne vous arrêtez pas aux bagatelles de la porte et aux affiches. Entrez, si vous voulez vraiment rire et goûter de la gaie musique [...]. Oui, messieurs, notre musique part du cœur, est celle du peuple [...]. Voices from inside, then Old Giuseppe: Long live la Belle Hélène (*the critic laughs*) Poet: It's true that France intrudes into everything today. But if there are those who applaud it, there are also those who boo it. Critic: French shows everywhere! In the name of *la lega pacifica*, I protest against everything that smacks of French. Old Giuseppe: Yes. Yes, speak up, and protest, while la Bella Elena ... [...] 1868: My dearest poet, the facts are clear. Either the music is beautiful or the audience is stupid. *Woman enters followed by her husband and two young men (extras)*. Old Giuseppe (*he comes to meet her and gives her his arm*): I alone was able to get this ticket, what with the crowd that's there. *Woman*: I believe it. (*they make a scene among themselves*). Critic (*aside*): If the entire audience is made up of such people, my scissors will be of little use. [...] *Woman*: Ninno! ... (*coldly*) (*the Grégoire bell is heard*) Come now, youngsters, the temple of good society is opening its doors. This circus reminds us of the boulevards, the Paris boulevards, Paris is the centre of everything elegant.]

The huge success of the Grégoire show, which so worried Italian music critics, indicates a trend that affected numerous other centres in post-Unification Italy: the appearance of a new social geography in the theatrical environment, linked to an increasing need among the public for entertainment. *Jone's* failure in Naples demonstrated in this sense a decline of interest in the opera house, now unable to offer 'proper' entertainment. As Francesca Vella has recently shown, the success of Petrella's opera in the years following its first performances was in fact due less to the opera itself, and more to brass-band performances of certain excerpts. It was these arrangements – significantly removed from the trappings of the opera house, and rooted in highly localised expressions of feeling – that enabled the composer's widespread diffusion across the country, and a more direct contact with the popular imagination.<sup>18</sup>

Returning to De Lerma's revue, another aspect seems relevant: the need for more popular forms of entertainment, which although stigmatised by the critics are endorsed by 'old' Giuseppe Verdi. In addition to having been a regular visitor to the Parisian boulevard theatres, Italy's greatest living composer can be understood here as a guarantor of public morality; if he goes to that theatre, then we can all do so. Verdi never explicitly expressed

<sup>17</sup> 1868 *sguardo politico-artistico-sociale. Rivista dell'anno. Divisa in un prologo ed otto quadri dei signori Antonio De Lerma dei Castelmazzano ed Elviro Bartolin. Con musica espressamente scritta dal M. Michele Ruta. Rappresentata in Napoli al R. Teatro del Fondo la sera del 30 Gennaio 1869* (Naples, 1869), 23–5.

<sup>18</sup> Francesca Vella, *Networking Operatic Italy* (Chicago, 2022), 45–78.

any sympathy for operetta, nor do we know of him having attended the Grégoire brothers' performances, but the use of the composer in this revue is explained by the desire for recognition that Italian popular theatre had for so long been seeking.

### An Italy of bell towers

The Grégoires' sojourn in Italy, which lasted approximately ten years, thus had the effect of reinvigorating a sector that, especially in the North, had seemingly dried up. Milan is the best example here. In the wake of the Grégoire performances, which first occurred in May 1866 in the gardens of Porta Venezia, a group of young composers mostly linked to the Scapigliatura tried their hand at producing operettas, revues and vaudeville in the Offenbach style. In addition to well-known figures such as Carlos Gomes and Costantino Dall'Argine, who composed the first examples of revue theatre in Italy (*Se sa minga*, 1866, and *il diavolo zoppo*, 1867), among the most prolific were Cesare Casiraghi and Angelo Pettenghi, who together with the playwright Cletto Arrighi contributed to the rebirth of Milanese dialect theatre.<sup>19</sup> A key document here is the vaudeville *El barchett de Boffalora*, an adaptation of Eugène Labiche's *Cagnotte*, with which Arrighi inaugurated the Teatro Milanese in 1870.<sup>20</sup>

This hall, located near the new Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, represented one of the prime venues for Milanese variety music until well after the end of the century, together with the Teatro Fossati. Arrighi's project, as outlined in his 1873 book *Il teatro milanese*, was guided by political concerns.<sup>21</sup> The revival of dialect and the use of genres belonging to the lighter side of French musical theatre represented a reaction against the rhetoric of 'making Italians', which characterised much public debate in the years following Unification.<sup>22</sup> In opposition to the vaunted unifying power of the Italian language, Arrighi saw dangers in the process of levelling up and the attendant loss of local identity:

The language used by Italian writers, not being a *spoken language*, is deprived of that *colour*, that *flavour of real truth* that are the attributes of dialect, which is a spoken language. And this is clear when we recall [...] that in the majority of comedies written in Italian, the authors are condemned never to designate the place of action, to the great detriment of effect and local colour; after all, life in Turin is certainly not the same as life in Palermo, and life in Venice is completely different from that in Naples.<sup>23</sup>

Even expanding the repertoire to include non-Italian theatrical genres was understood by Arrighi as a gesture of resistance against these powerful homogenising pressures:

Other kinds of criticism came from outside. The Florentine newspaper *La nazione* wrote about our theatre as follows: 'All the dramas and comedies of the Teatro Milanese belong to the French school and have nothing that distinguishes them from modern theatre. [...]'

<sup>19</sup> On *Se sa minga*, see Sala, 'Voci della città'.

<sup>20</sup> The Teatro Milanese, constructed by Cletto Arrighi thanks to the modernisation of the Padiglione Cattaneo, began regular activity from 1870. As well as the dialect troupe, the Ferravilla-Sbodio-Giraud, which was a permanent presence, the theatre featured other companies that performed operetta. On the activity of the theatre, see Giovanni Acerboni, *Cletto Arrighi e il teatro milanese (1869–1876)* (Rome, 1998) (Le fonti dello spettacolo teatrale, 4), which also contains a complete chronology of works staged up to 1876.

<sup>21</sup> Cletto Arrighi, *Il teatro milanese: Rendiconto morale, letterario e amministrativo* (Milan, 1873).

<sup>22</sup> 'Italy is made, now we must make Italians', a statement traditionally attributed to Massimo D'Azeglio, one of the emblematic political figures of the Risorgimento. Although its authenticity is still in some doubt, it became one of the most famous slogans in United Italy.

<sup>23</sup> Arrighi, *Il teatro milanese*, 12–13. Italics in source.

What does it mean to not understand and want to warble in someone else's milieu!

[...] there must be a complete lack of understanding if one doesn't see in Milanese comedies clear evidence of the particularities of Milanese life. Our *pompier* is completely different from the French *pomprière*; our *Barabba* is completely different from the Parisian *Gamin*; the Parisians don't have our *Spazzabaslott* [...].

Why would we want to limit ourselves to just one genre? The beautiful thing is to show that we are capable of staging and enjoying all genres, including French ones.<sup>24</sup>

The ability to stage all genres, including French ones, in Arrighi's view demonstrated the potential to find common ground without eroding difference. His argument, in short, was that preserving the network of singularities that make up Italy was the only possible route to a truly united country. Such sentiments clearly shine through the vaudeville-operetta *On milanes in mar*, premiered on 26 September 1871 at the Teatro Milanese. With music by Angelo Pettenghi and words by Arrighi, the protagonists are a Milanese and a Frenchman who find themselves on a sea voyage to Sardinia, accompanied by a group of sailors of various origins, including a Neapolitan, a Genoese and a Venetian. The peculiarity of this operetta lies in the linguistic melange: each character expresses himself in his own dialect or language, but they understand each other easily.

The plot is an adaptation of a French *pochade* by Lavassor, *Le mal de mer* (1855), which featured two characters: a distinguished English gentleman (Sir James), who in order to conceal his tendency to seasickness pretends to be an expert in the art of navigation; and a French sailor in his service. Arrighi's apparent intent with respect to his French model was not so much to ridicule the foreigner – Sir James, in this case, becoming the braggart Frenchman Monsieur Choufané – but rather to create a grotesque space of contrasting identities. The voyage becomes a place of national confession or declaration: each character reveals himself and tells his story, especially in the sung numbers. The situation is highly reminiscent of the ending of Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims*, a work that Arrighi and Pettenghi could not have known but which had behind it a considerable literary and theatrical tradition. In fact, in the first version of the vaudeville-operetta, the Venetian sailor sings a barcarolle ('Voga, voga, la sponda felice'), the Genoese sailor a cabin-boy song ('Mi quand sera piscin'), the Neapolitan a tarantella ('Songo nato povaretto') and then all join in a chorus, 'La canzone del Fernet Branca' ('Viva la patria di Meneghino'), a hymn to the famous Lombardian liqueur that the Milanese protagonist uses to treat his seasickness. Each song thus signifies belonging: to a city, to a tradition, to a 'bell tower'. To borrow Paul Gilroy's expression, Arrighi's ship is 'a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion'.<sup>25</sup>

The 'Tarantella napoletana', the only number not composed by Pettenghi, was well known in southern Italy under the title of 'Tarantella di Pompei', and precisely because it is the most 'authentic' and familiar, it takes on paradigmatic importance as the fulcrum around which all the other numbers revolve.<sup>26</sup> This is evident from the fact that the song, despite representing the classic cliché of the poor, hungry beggar looking for a plate of macaroni, is sung by the Neapolitan sailor in response to the Frenchman's bravado. The latter, after singing an aria in pseudo-Neapolitan ('Io songo mica di chisso convento'), had proclaimed himself the true inventor of Neapolitan song:

<sup>24</sup> Arrighi, *Il teatro milanese*, 15–16.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 4.

<sup>26</sup> The excerpt was part of the celebrated collection of Neapolitan songs assembled by Guglielmo Cottrau and entitled *Passatempi musicali*, which appeared in 1865 from the publisher Teodoro Cottrau.



Choufané: Sapete, Capitano, che codeste cantate napoletane le ho introdotte io per prima volta in Napoli?  
 Napoletano: Il chiaccherone! Gnor Cappelano, mo ce date la premissione?  
 Capitano: Cossa scìa voeu?  
 Napoletano: l'aggio a cantà veramente. Molanese, reggi a mazza. Cappelano, mo' canto i maccheroni.

Songo nato povaretto  
 Senza casa e senza tetto  
 Venderei li miei calzoni  
 Per un piatto di macaroni.  
 S'esser vuoi un buon soldato  
 Va alla guerra sempre armato  
 Purché sparino dai cannoni  
 Un sol piatto di macaroni.  
 Aggio visto d'un tenente  
 Che cambiava con sergente  
 Le spalline col galloni  
 Per un piatto di macaroni.  
 Cicirinella teneva uno gallo  
 Tutto lo jorno ne stava cavallo  
 Era un gallo senza sella  
 Chillo è lu gallo di Cicirinella.<sup>27</sup>

[Choufané: Did you know, Captain, that I was the first to introduce these Neapolitan songs to Naples? Neapolitan: What a loudmouth! Mr Captain, will you permit me? Captain: What do you want? Neapolitan: I'm going to sing in true Neapolitan. Milanese, take the oar. Captain, I'm singing macaroni now. I was born poor / without a house and without a roof / I would sell my trousers / for a plate of macaroni. / If you want to be a good soldier / Go well-armed into battle / In case the cannons should fire / Even a single plate of macaroni. / I saw a lieutenant / who swapped with a sergeant / his shoulder pads with braids / for a plate of macaroni. / Cicirinella had a rooster / he sat on it all day / It was a rooster without a saddle / That is Cicirinella's rooster.]

In other words, the operetta delights in juxtaposing identities and claims to authenticity: 'Songo mica di chisso convento', an original number for the operetta in fake Neapolitan, rubs up against a real Neapolitan song that existed outside the theatre, 'Songo nato povaretto' (the 'Tarantella di Pompei'), which nonetheless deals in stereotypes and descends into nonsense by its end.

*On milanes in mar*, after its success on the Milanese stage, toured venues both large and small around the peninsula until the end of the century. What made it even more popular was the insertion of the duet 'E benedetta màmata', better known as 'Na cammisella', commissioned by the director of the Teatro Milanese's resident company, Edoardo Ferravilla, who had succeeded Arrighi in 1876. This number, also in Neapolitan dialect, was composed in 1878 by the well-known Neapolitan publisher Teodoro Cottrau (Example 1).<sup>28</sup> The insertion of 'E benedetta màmata' thus introduced into Arrighi's work one of the typical traits of the French-derived operetta, namely deliberate exposure of the female body; but at the same time it represented an exchange with the Neapolitan song industry,

<sup>27</sup> *On milanes in mar*, by Cletto Arrighi with music by Angelo Pettenghi (Milan, 1876), 25–6.

<sup>28</sup> 'E benedetta màmata! (Duettino ad una voce di Ciccio e Ceccia) eseguito dalla Sig.a M. Yvon e G. Sbodio. Parole e musica di Teodoro Cottrau', in *Album della regina: 40 serenate del Golfo* (Naples, 1878), 25–6.

40 SERENATE DEL GOLFO 25

Album della Regina  
N.º 8

**E BENEDETTA MÀMMATA!**  
(Duettino ad una voce di Ciccio e Ceccia)  
*eseguito dalla Sign.ª Fran. e G. Storti* Fin. C.º 4.º

Parole e Musica di  
**Teodoro COTTRAU**

CANTO

CICCIO *con dolcezza* CECCIA

Levate a cam - mi - sel - la; levala? No, guer -

ANDANTE  
MOSSO

*f* *stacc.*

CICCIO (*ironico*) CECCIA

- no. Ceccia si tan - to bel - la! Abi - mè ca bel - la sol

CICCIO CECCIA (*con ritrosia*) CICCIO

Faccia de san - ta - rel - la! Fa chello che tu vuò! Sia be - nedet - ta

*Imp. Teodoro COTTRAU - Italia Estero.* *Napoli - Londra.*

Example 1. 'E benedetta mammata!' by Teodoro Cottrau (1878). From *Album della regina: 40 serenate del Golfo* (Naples, 1878), 25–6. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Reale, Turin / Su concessione del MiC-Musei Reali, Biblioteca Reale, Torino.

something that, as Ditlev Rindom explores elsewhere in this issue, would be of vital importance for Italian operetta in the years to come.

'E benedetta mammata' stages a dialogue between two newly weds, Ciccio and Ceccia, in which the husband invites his wife, who feigns reluctance, to take off her clothes. The duet

26

CECCIA

mam-mata quan-no te ma-ri-tò..... Sia be-nedet-ta va-vama

che mamma mia fi-gliò!

*F* *mf* *F* *P* *Fine* <sup>1<sup>a</sup></sup> <sup>2<sup>a</sup></sup> <sup>3<sup>a</sup></sup>

2<sup>a</sup>  
Levate sta trezzella ecc:  
(*Continua le istesse parole della 1<sup>a</sup>*)

3<sup>a</sup>  
Levate cheste nocche ecc:  
(*Continua le istesse parole della 1<sup>a</sup>*)

4<sup>a</sup>  
Ciccio. Mename nu vasillo:  
Menalo! <sup>Ceccia</sup> No, gnerno!  
Ceccia, si troppo sgrata!  
Ceccia. Sgrata, ma bella sò!...  
Contentate, Ciccillo,  
Fa chello che tu vuò!  
Ciccio. Sia benedetta mammata,  
Quanno te maritò!  
Ceccia. Sia benedetta vavama  
Che mamma mia figliò!

Example 1. (Continued)

was written for the two actor-singers of the Teatro Milanese, Gaetano Sbodio and Emma Ivon (Figure 1). The studied gestures with which Ivon, dressed as a sailor, undressed on stage – first taking off her blouse (*na cammesella*), then undoing the braids of her hair (*la trezzella*) and the laces (*le nocche*) of her bodice, without ever becoming completely naked – was a powerful, almost cinematic scenic device. Through a game of concealment and unveiling,



**Figure 1.** Emma Ivon and Gaetano Sbodio in *On milanes in mar*, from 'Il natale del teatro Milanese', *La donna* (20 December 1913), 50. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Italiana delle Donne, Bologna.

the spectator's gaze is channelled onto certain points of the body. This 'keyhole' idea, which would later become a typical device of early cinema, had already found its way into Italian operetta thanks to Ivon, who became one of the most iconic and often-discussed figures of the nineteenth-century stage. She had much in common with the Offenbach diva Hortense Schneider, known to the French public for the plasticity and opulence of her physique (which she exhibited on stage with consummate ease), and also because she was at the centre of more than one sex scandal. In Ivon's case, the rumours swirling around her – an alleged relationship with King Vittorio Emanuele II, and an 1879 trial in which she was accused (and eventually acquitted) of baby-swapping – only contributed to her popularity. The realist novels *Nanà a Milano* by Cletto Arrighi (1880) and *Emma Ivon al veglione* by Paolo Vallera (1883) were dedicated to events in her life, just like Émile Zola's *Nana* with Schneider.<sup>29</sup> 'E benedetta màmata' remained a cornerstone of Italian variety theatre until well after the mid-twentieth century and was later featured in the extremely popular film *Siamo uomini o caporali* (1955), directed by Camillo Mastrocinque and starring Totò and Fiorella Mari.

In addition to *On milanes in mar*, other productions by the Teatro Milanese included *La statua del sur Incioda* which, owing to its various dialect adaptations in the north (Piedmont,

<sup>29</sup> For further information of the life and career of Ivon (b. Milan 1851, d. Genoa 1899) and on the impact she had on Italian society at the *fin de siècle*, see Gioia Sebastiani, 'Emma Ivon in un'alba editoriale', *Belfagor* 46/5 (1991), 567–75.

the Veneto and Emilia Romagna), became a sort of 'tribal encyclopaedia' of municipal Italy. The play is set in a mysterious town with the evocative name of Vattalappesca (an Italian proverbial phrase meaning 'Who knows?'). Gioacchino Finocchi, as well as being mayor of the town, owns a tavern where the renowned chef Paolo Incioda works; the plot revolves around Incioda's alleged death at the hands of bandits and the mayor's decision to erect a statue to him. The sculptor Topiatti fails to complete the statue within the scheduled time. At the inauguration, however, the statue is replaced by none other than Sur Incioda himself, who thus acts as the sculptor's saviour, at the same time deceiving the mayor and the rest of the citizens. Premiered on 23 July 1873 at the Teatro Balbo in Turin, this vaudeville-operetta, with a libretto by Paolo Ferrari and music by Cesare Casiraghi, is a satire on the rampant 'monumentomania' that was sweeping Italy post-Unification, but it is first and foremost a reflection on the changed relationships between centre and periphery, city and town.<sup>30</sup> The small community is not associated here with the authentic, a place of memory and nostalgia, but rather mocked for its desire to model itself at all costs on the big city. The town's mayor is the primary target. His obsession with Milan – which he sees both as a competitor and as a source of emulative inspiration – combined with the fact that he is an evident braggart, make him into a farcical figure, almost an archetypal one. This theme is also evident in other adaptations of the work, such as a version entitled *La statua di Paolo Incioda ovvero Gioacchino Cacai sindaco de Torselo*, which circulated in the Veneto from 1877; and a trilogy of works by Luigi Gaibi on the same subject (*La statua del Sgner Incioda, Ai matrimoni del Sgner Incioda, La mort del Sgner Incioda*), all set in the fictional town of Scaricalasino (the name of a children's game), presented at the Teatro del Corso in Bologna in 1876.

The discourse of Nation clearly affected these early proto-operettistic forms, and current events found their way onto the Italian stage in this form. Indeed the social, administrative and cultural contradictions of post-Unification Italy were not only felt in the North. An emblematic example from the other end of the peninsula, which emerged earlier than those discussed so far, is *Na Bella Elena imbastarduta infra la lingua franzesa, napoletana e toscana*, a *commedia-parodia* with music, written by the famous Neapolitan playwright Antonio Petito and performed at the Teatro San Carlino in Naples throughout 1868.<sup>31</sup> Here the action takes place in Boscotrecase, a (real) small village in the Neapolitan hinterland, where the mayor Don Sempronio, in order to impress his fellow citizens, tries to hire the famous Grégoire company (which at the time was enjoying success in Naples). However, in reality a ramshackle troupe from Campania, passing itself off as the Grégoires, performs a Neapolitan version of *La belle Hélène*. The interesting elements here lie in the second level of theatricalisation to which *La belle Hélène* is subjected, becoming among other things a parody of a parody, and in the linguistic deformation. Indeed, the operetta relies on the co-presence and contamination of three levels, French, Tuscan and Neapolitan. This linguistic intertwining is similar to that in *On milanes in mar*, and embeds a critique of the homogenising approach of the State in negotiating the relationship between centre and periphery. Don Sempronio has

<sup>30</sup> In the satirical periodical *La commedia umana* we read that 'Everyone knows that "monumentomania" has become one of the afflictions of our society, because everyone has to some extent been the victim of at least a dozen public subscriptions to erect one of these marble memories to those who have in any way been distinguished in their home town' ('Non più statue. Scultori. Leggete', *La commedia umana* V (13 January 1889), 10). On the phenomenon of monumentomania in the second half of the nineteenth century in Italy, see Maria Giuffré, Fabio Mangone, Sergio Pace and Ornella Selfavolta, eds., *L'architettura della memoria in Italia: Cimiteri, monumenti e città, 1750–1939* (Milan, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> On Petito's *commedia-parodia*, see Ettore Massarese, ed., *Tutto petito*, 4 vols. (Naples, 1978–84) (*Le undici muse. Sezione teatro* 1 (1978), vol. II, p. [428]); and Annamaria Sapienza, *La parodia dell'opera lirica a Napoli nell'Ottocento* (Naples, 1998), 59–61.

the same cosmopolitan yearnings as the mayor of Vattelapesca, and multiple levels of identity interact (local, national, transnational), reflecting a trend that, as Axel Körner has discussed, concerned numerous Italian cities in the years after Unification, enacting as they did a series of cultural policies aimed at communicating ‘an idea of the city to its citizens, to the nation, and beyond’.<sup>32</sup>

We also find this co-existence of localism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the operetta production system. Especially after the 1880s, the system was largely controlled by geographical origin. In addition to the Milanese company directed by Edoardo Francavilla, among the most important were the Scalvini company, also in Milan, the Tomba and Tani companies in Rome, the Scognamiglio and Maresca companies in Naples, and other city-based organisations that appeared in the early years of the twentieth century. Testifying to the triple identity of these companies is not only their range of action (national, European and international), but also their repertoire, which featured dialect and obviously local productions as well as foreign and Italian ones. It is enough to look at the titles in the programme of the Scalvini company for the year 1887: as well as numerous French operettas in translation (Lecocq’s *Giorno e notte*, *La figlia di Madama Angot*; Suppé’s *Boccaccio*; Planchette’s *Le campane di Corneville*; Offenbach’s *Orfeo all’inferno* and *La bella Elena*) and zarzuelas by Barbieri (*Robinson Crusuè*), Caballero (*La marsigliese*) and Llanos (*Cristoforo Colombo*), there were also Italian works by Errico Sarria (*Il babbeo e l’intrigante*), Giovanni Ferrua (*L’oroscopo*) and finally Scalvini’s own *La principessa invisibile*, a ‘fiaba umoristica’ premiered in 1869 that reflected the heady Scapigliatura movement in Milan immediately after unification.<sup>33</sup>

### The taverns of Italy

On 20 September 1870, with the conquest of Rome, Italy completed the Unification process and the country finally had a permanent capital. The acquisition of Rome had represented an *idée fixe* in Risorgimento thought, the basic premise of which was to build the entire nation: ‘without Rome, the capital of Italy, Italy cannot be built’ argued Camillo Benso di Cavour, one of the main protagonists of Unification.<sup>34</sup> Its imperial past, its geopolitical location (between the North and the South, between Europe and the Mediterranean) and its place as a centre of Christianity made the city a powerful vector for forging the character of Italians. But the idea of Rome as the capital of a ‘united people’ was not so easy to implement, especially at the beginning. Indeed, the general impression was of an infrastructure imposed from above, one that did little to adapt to the restricted urban, social and economic perimeters of a city that had not undergone significant transformation for at least three centuries. The Rome of 1870 was in fact a demographically small centre (212,000 inhabitants) that showed evident signs of backwardness compared to other Italian and European major cities.

Added to this was another difficult circumstance: bringing Rome into step with the great European capitals via processes of modernisation was not in itself enough to make Rome the new capital. Equally vital was an effective reunification of the Roman population with the rest of the country – an ‘Italianisation’ of Rome. To do this it was essential to place in dialogue the two main souls of the city: the aristocratic Rome of the Pope and the Rome of

<sup>32</sup> Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: From Unification to Fascism* (New York, 2008), 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Annuario teatrale italiano per l’annata 1887* (Milan, 1887), 751–3.

<sup>34</sup> These words were pronounced by Cavour in a famous speech given on 25 March 1861, during the initial sessions of the lower house of the newly formed Italian parliament. *Atti parlamentari, Camera, Discussioni*, leg. VIII, sess. 1861 (Turin, 1861), 284. On Rome as capital, see Marina Formica, ed., *Roma capitale: La città laica, la città religiosa (1870–1915)* (Rome, 2021).

the lower classes, both of them resistant to any change or modernisation. This peculiarity of the Roman context is also captured in the city's operetta culture, as Rome began producing operettas in dialect starting in the 1880s, a period of significant change in the city as the beginnings of urban modernisation produced a conflict between old and new identities.<sup>35</sup>

This tension emerged in the aftermath of the first performance of *Li Maganzesi a Roma*, a Roman dialect operetta in three acts with music by Giovanni Mascetti and a libretto by Luigi ('Giggi') Zanazzo, first performed at the Teatro Rossini on 30 September 1882. The decision to use dialect aroused negative reactions from some of the city's critics, among the most negative being Giuseppe Prospero Zuliani. In an article in the *Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, Zuliani explained the reasons why Roman dialect was basically anti-theatrical, and he insisted on the importance of the Italian language as a unifying factor:

At the Teatro Rossini they decided to give us nothing but a series of new operettas in Roman dialect; when you have no other purpose than to entertain the public, everything is good, even such fare; but I confess that I don't understand why Roman dialect should entertain in Rome more than Italian does. Among the wealthy classes no one speaks it, few understand it; among the common people it is understood, but not by everyone; as for speaking it, it's hardly known in some neighbourhoods; in all Rome there's not a single person, however ignorant, who doesn't understand and speak Italian. So where will the Teatro Rossini's authors go to look for examples of lively dialogue? In books by specialist writers? A fine principle for creating a new theatre! In Monti, in Trastevere? There they will hear corrupt Italian, merely with abundant examples of plebeian foul language. And even if the question of the spoken word were resolved favourably, where would comedy go from there? Into just one class, the popular? [...]

For example, the first operetta given, *I Maganzesi*, is appreciated for Mascetti's music, which is light, cheerful and rhythmic; it is perhaps formulaic, but with a certain effect, and the musical performance is quite good; as for the dialogue in Roman dialect, the most indulgent scarcely find it amusing.<sup>36</sup>

In the case of *Li Maganzesi*, as with a good number of the Roman operettas of this period, only the sung parts of the libretto survive, but these offer us numerous clues about the internal structure of the genre.<sup>37</sup> The operetta is set in the Trastevere district during the first Roman Republic (1798–99). Zanazzo, a leading figure in Roman vernacular poetry, as well as a connoisseur of local popular traditions, was inspired to write the libretto by events that occurred in February 1798, when the population of Trastevere rose up against its French occupiers. We are thus in the 'belly' of Rome, in its most authentic district, one always considered a symbol of the city. As in the case of Charles Lecocq's *La fille de Madame Angot*, set in the years of the French Directory, the clash between republicans and papists (monarchists in the case of Paris) forms the backdrop against which legendary figures with farcical features appear in the most popular places in the city. In *Li Maganzesi* we find Meo Patacca, Cencio Sferra, Giorgio Stennarello and Piacchiabbò er Tartaglione, characters well known in

<sup>35</sup> The first master plan for the restructuring of Rome dates back to 1873. The works lasted approximately thirty years and led to the demolition of hundreds of houses and other buildings to make room for wider streets. On this topic, see Italo Insolera, *Roma moderna: Un secolo di storia urbanistica 1870–1970* (Turin, 1971), 34–45.

<sup>36</sup> Giuseppe Prospero Zuliani, 'Scienze, lettere ed arti: Rassegna musicale', *Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia*, n. 239 (12 October 1882), 4450–1.

<sup>37</sup> *Li Maganzesi a Roma: Operetta in 3 atti in dialetto romanesco, parole di Giggi Zanazzo, musica del Maestro Giovanni Mascetti* (Rome, 1882).

Rome's various *rioni* (districts), deriving from *commedia dell'arte* and vernacular poetry, who move energetically through the squares and taverns of Trastevere.

Zanazzo designed a *mise en scène* aimed at legitimising the daily life of a neighbourhood that, with the modernisation of the capital, was losing its identity. For example, the tavern in Act I scene 5 and Act II scene 7 takes on a central role in *Li Maganzesi* as a space for displaying local pride, for exalting daily life. Courtships and toasts take place there, as in so many other taverns in the operatic universe. The only difference is that the *Maganzesi* tavern is a space that extends over the entire operetta. There are numerous songs in praise of drinking and beautiful women, and the operetta begins and ends with toasts ('Viva, viva l'allegria, viva sempre la sciampagna'; 'Evviv' er vino! La vista sola ciarin-consola').

The exaltation of wine was a constant in Roman operetta, one attributable to the vernacular poetry tradition. Gioachino Belli, one of the greatest figures of early nineteenth-century Roman dialect poetry, dedicated numerous sonnets to wine and to the world of taverns, using the common speech of the Roman people. Zanazzo does something similar: he records exactly the language of the Trastevere – what Zuliani contemptuously called 'plebeian foul language' – and translates it into verse. Despite the strong local connotations, the field of reference here remains that of French operetta, especially regarding music. An important clue comes from the constant use of onomatopoeia, which recalls the Offenbachian syllabic style, of which Mascetti had profound knowledge since he had conducted numerous Offenbach works as director of the Teatro Metastasio.

After the success of *Li Maganzesi*, Mascetti formed a company that operated for some years both in Rome and in other Italian cities. Another successful production of his was *Er testamento de Padron Checco*, premiered at Rome's Teatro Rossini on 11 December 1886. Set in contemporary Rome, this stages the kind of love intrigue on the border between the sensual and the grotesque that the Italian public had already seen in French operetta after 1870.<sup>38</sup> An example is the quarrel duet between Nena and Marietta at the end of Act I, which recalls successful French models such as the 'Couplet de la dispute' between Clairette and Mademoiselle Lange in the third act of *La fille de Madame Angot*.<sup>39</sup> Despite the reference to France, the *Er testamento* duet has evident local characteristics:

Nena: Un momento bella mia – t'averebbe da parlà.  
 Marietta: Io non posso perde tempo – proprio mò me nò dà annà.  
 Nena: Te vojo dì na cosa – che nun me vò annà giù.  
 Marietta: Nmbé se non voi scegnie – lassatela stà sù.  
 Nena: Colle bone te lo dico – tu me devi stà a senti.  
 Marietta: Già me rodono le mani – fora fora che voi dì.  
 Nena: Tu facevi la graziosa – quanno Pietro mio passava  
 Ma lui manco ci abbadava – ma alla fine te capì  
 E sarai contenta adesso – che per tè lui m'hà piantato  
 Ma però non t'hà sposato – chi sà come finirà  
 Noi faremo a tortorate – cara mia non ce sò santi.  
 Marietta: Sì lo fanno tutti quanti – oggi è moda questa qua  
 A voi v'ammaanca l'arte – che ogni donna cià  
 Che serve incantà l'omini – pe facceli cascà

<sup>38</sup> On operetta post-Sedan, see Elena Oliva, "'Les filles mal tournées' dell'offenbachiade, ovvero fisionomia e caratteri dell'operetta francese post-Sedan', *Studi musicali*, 13/2 (2022), 185–214.

<sup>39</sup> *Er Testamento de Padron Checco in dialetto romanesco. Operetta in un prologo e 3 atti. Parole del Cav. Sabbatucci e Raffaelli. Musica del Maestro Giovanni Mascetti* (Rome, 1886), 7–8.



Appena che Pietruccio – a visto stò visetto  
 Jà fatto un certo effetto – che sé attaccato qua.

Nena: A me me manca l'arte – ciovetta io non so  
 Me chiamo Nena Spizzole – e no Marietta no.  
 Sò stati li quattrini – che l'anno innamorato  
 Quer grugno aripezzato – che effetto jà da fà.

Marietta: La rabbia ve se rosica.

Nena: Io nun ce penso più.

Marietta: Ma tai da magnà er gomido.

Nena: Tietelo pure tù.

Marietta: Ce fai fatica e dammelo – nun te se vò pijà.

Nena: Ma tù le corne aspettale – te le farà portà.

Marietta: Guardame grugno – vò critica

Le gamme prima – fatte addrizzà.

Nena: Le gamme mie – so dritte vò

Guardele e squerciate – te poi cecà.

Marietta: Grugno amaro.

Nena: Brutta faccia.

Marietta: T'arizzollo.

Nena: Fatte qua.

Marietta: Brutto grugnaccio – de pastufato

Der vicinato – la spia sei tù.

Io te finisco – tu nun ce credi

Sotto alli piedi – t'ho dà schiaffà.

Nena: Nù stò più ferma – tu ce le voi

Bada Marietta – che te le dò

E quanno bene – t'ho arizzollato

Io dal curato – to da mannà.

Marietta: Brutta.

Nena: Gobba.

Marietta: Storta.

Nena: Infame.

Marietta: Boia.

Nena: Strega.

Marietta: Fatte quà.

Nena: Quella faccia ho dà sgraffià.

Marietta: Quelli ciurli ho dà strappà.

[Nena: One moment, my dear – I have to speak to you. Marietta: I've no time to waste – I really must go. Nena: I want to tell you something – That's really bothering me. Marietta: If you don't want to make a scene – Best leave it unsaid. Nena: I'll tell you honestly – you owe it to me to listen. Marietta: I'm biting my finger – out with it, what do you want to say. Nena: You were making yourself pretty – when Pietro passed me by / But he didn't pay attention – but in the end he understood you, / And you will be happy now – that he's left me for you. / But he didn't marry you – who knows how it will end? / We'll fall to blows – my dear, it's inevitable. Marietta: Yes, everyone does it – today this is the fashion / You lack the art – that every woman has, / To enchant men – and make them fall down before you / As soon as Pietruccio – saw this little face / It made a certain effect – and he came running to me. Nena: I don't have the art – I don't know how to be a minx, / My name is Nena Spizzola – and not Marietta, no. / It was the money – that made him fall in love / That patched up face – what effect could it have

on him? Marietta: Anger is gnawing at you. Nena: I don't even think about it anymore. Marietta: Jealousy is eating you up. Nena: Keep it for yourself. Marietta: Do what you can to me – He doesn't want you anymore. Nena: But just you wait, he'll betray you – he will make you grow horns. Marietta: Look at me, ugly face – I want to pick you apart / The legs first – straighten them out. Nena: My legs – are straight / Look at them as much as you like – you can envy them. Marietta: Snout face. Nena: Ugly mug. Marietta: I'll pinch you, Nena: Go ahead. Marietta: Ugly face – like *pane cotto* / You are the spy in the neighbourhood. / I'll finish you – you don't believe it / but at my feet – I'll have you fall. Nena: I can't stand it anymore – you're asking for it, / Take care, Marietta – I'll give it to you / And when – I've straightened you out, / I'll send you – to the priest. Marietta: Ugly. Nena: Hunchback. Marietta: Twisted. Nena: Infamous. Marietta: Hangman. Nena: Witch. Marietta: Do it here. Nena: That face is for scratching. Marietta: Those curls are for tearing.]

Compared to the duet in *La fille*, here the level of conflict is decidedly more excited: a fast-paced dialogue that seems to recall aspects of the poetic contests that took place in certain taverns in Rome. Zanazzo offers us testimony of how this type of performance took place in his *Usi, costumi e pregiudizi del popolo di Roma* (1908):

[The poetic challenges] mostly took place every Sunday in the evening, in taverns, or in a few cafés in the Monti and Trastevere districts, or even in the countryside. About twenty or thirty acquaintances would gather, men and women, and standing there they would challenge each other to see who could improvise better poems [in *ottava rima*], on one thing and another.

Sometimes these challenges lasted for two or three days in a row, without ever resting even during the night. You can see how both poets became warmer, as did those who listened to them!

Sometimes women were involved; I would hear laundresses who, if you understood them, would leave you speechless!<sup>40</sup>

Clearly the call and response between Nena and Marietta does not have the same metric-rhythmic frame as a poetic argument in *ottava rima*. Here the alternation of double *ottonari* in *rima baciata* of the initial alternating lines is followed by three series of verses in double *ottonari* with internal rhymes. Then the dialogue continues with a dizzying sequence of back-and-forth retorts, in which the tension between the two increases dramatically. If on the dramatic level the scene does not stray far from the typical quarrel duet, some analogies can be found with the poetic arguments to which Zanazzo refers. The dialogue between the two is indeed structured as a poetic competition in which one character (Nena in this case) proposes the conflict and an opponent responds. Even when the relationship between proposer and opponent changes, there is always an attempt by the latter to formulate answers by taking up the other's metric-rhythmic scheme. The absence of the music prevents us from fully understanding this dynamic; but it is clearly related to the world of female improvisation that consumed southern Italy during the nineteenth century and whose operatic manifest-

<sup>40</sup> Giggi Zanazzo, *Usi, costumi e pregiudizi del popolo di Roma* (Turin, 1908), 244–5. On the topic of poetry contests in Italy, see Maurizio Agamennone, ed., *Cantar ottave: Per una storia culturale dell'intonazione cantata in ottava rima* (Lucca, 2017). The quoted passage is in Roman dialect.

ations Melina Esse has recently examined.<sup>41</sup> The fascination that improvisers exercised on nineteenth-century audiences was thus also exploited by operetta. Given the ambivalent role that these performers had, as both (transgressive) creators and muses, greater importance was attributed to the corporeal aspects of their performance – their status as muses understood as sensual inspiration.

Roman operetta thus tends to textualise the improvisational practices of vernacular poetry. Confirmation of this comes above all in the character of Pippetto, one of the protagonists of *Er testamento* and of other successful productions performed in those years such as *Pippetto sposa e Tarantola fa da testimone* (1887), *Pippetto ha fatto sega a scola* (1887), *Pippetto ner crin* (1887) and *Pippetto e Pippone* (1888). Indeed, as some chronicles of the time testify, Pippetto, played for several years by the actor–singer Oreste Raffaelli, at a certain point in the performance improvised poetry on pressingly current themes:

A great fire broke out in the palazzo Odescalchi on the evening of the Befana, one that all the newspapers in Italy talked about; and on that occasion it was demonstrated how, in the capital of the kingdom, one of the most beautiful buildings, located in a very central square, could burn freely, without the municipal pumps being able to function; something similar to how the machine guns performed in Dogali.

Adesso per calmà questo bruciore  
 Ci avemo pure la macchina a vapore,  
 Che sopra tutte le altre ha il bel trovato  
 D'arriva quanno er foco è già smostrato.

[Now to put out this fire / We also have a steam engine, / Which has the advantage over all the others / That it arrives when the fire has already burned out.]

Imagine the applause from the audience; they reached delirium: *encore! bis!* was shouted from everywhere. But if Paganini never repeated himself, Pippetto was his equal. I reply with this other verse:

Da che l'ultimo foco s'è avverato  
 Un altro editto è stato pubblicato  
 Che un'ora pria che si ricominci er foco  
 Pompe e pompieri stieno sul loco.<sup>42</sup>

[Since the last fire came to pass / Another edict has been published: / That an hour before the fire starts / Pumps and firefighters should already be on site.]

The event is narrated here by the theatre critic Pier Luigi Gelmi in an article that appeared in the March 1888 issue of the Milanese periodical *Cronaca rossa*. The same article reports other episodes in which Pippetto launched into improvisations about news or political events that had impacted on public opinion. His invective was so famous that he became a key character in Roman operetta. Gelmi defines him as 'a popular type like Don Felice Sosciamocca, created by Eduardo Scarpetta, for the Neapolitans, just as [...] the Milanese have Massinelli'. Raffaelli's Pippetto drew inspiration from Giovanni Giraud's Pippetto, a character in Donizetti's *L'ajo nell'imbarazzo*. This foolish young daddy's boy, caught between ostentatious Christian virtue and explosive sexual curiosity, was well placed to become a popular character in the poorer localities. The fact that he was also clever, hard done-by and noble

<sup>41</sup> Melina Esse, *Singing Sappho: Improvisation and Authority in Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Chicago, 2021).

<sup>42</sup> Pier Luigi Gelmi, 'Idoli popolari: L'eredità di Pasquino', *Cronaca rossa* 6 (18 March 1888), 6–7.

– that is a Harlequin, a Pulcinella and a Cassandrino – somehow reflected the various inhabitants of the Trastevere neighbourhood, in which Papal nobility and the common people coexisted. Donizetti's *L'ajo* also contributed to the popularity of the character: this opera continued to circulate in minor Italian theatres and often found a place on the billboards of the Teatro Metastasio, a temple of operetta and a favourite destination for the Trastevere public.

Pippetto's return to the Roman stages once again demonstrates the city's attachment to antiquity as a factor in shaping collective identity. But there is more: Pippetto, with his dual clerical and revolutionary nature, ultimately reflected one of the typical attitudes of the districts, namely the struggle to maintain the status quo.<sup>43</sup> This emerges most clearly in the operetta *Er marchese der Grillo*, a production which had unusually lasting success on the Roman and Italian stages. Performed for the first time at the Teatro Metastasio on 23 November 1889, the operetta, in three acts with a libretto by Domenico Berardi, was set to music by Mascetti. *Er marchese der Grillo* brought to the stage one of the most popular legends of the districts, destined to become the legend of an entire country, thanks to the film of the same name directed by Mario Monicelli (1981). The famous comic actor Alberto Sordi played the Marchese on screen, and presented a version of the character so irreverent that it remains imprinted on the collective memory of Italians to this day. A series of stories and anecdotes was, over the years, also created around the Marchese, whose real existence has been questioned (but never resolved) by several local scholars. These stories were collected for the first time in 1887 by Raffaello Giovagnoli, in the volume *Leggende romane: il marchese del Grillo*, and later by Zanazzo in *Novelle, favole e leggende romanesche* (1907).

So who was the Marchese del Grillo? Zanazzo describes him as 'a great gentleman so rich that money came out of his ears. And, to kill time, he had as much fun as much as he could, telling jokes, making pranks, teasing and so on.'<sup>44</sup> Richer in detail is Giovagnoli's portrait:

Il marchese del Grillo, others call him il duca del Grillo, was a Roman gentleman; he was born c.1730–1740 and died around 1800. [...] The Marchese – who was slightly hunch-backed – was gifted with an original, extravagant spirit, bizarre, very witty. He was always eager to carry out the wildest plans: he spared no expense; he was not afraid of rumour and scandal; once he was fixed on an idea he would put it into effect at any cost.

It was for this reason that the legend attaching to his name is so rich in delightful adventures and salacious jokes. Perhaps not all the happy pranks, not all the dreadful plots attributed to the Marchese were actually imagined and carried out by him, but even discounting those invented by popular imagination, there always surrounds him enough truth to give us a good idea of the character, the tendencies and oddities of the man: one in whom the haughtiness of a feudal lord, the religious prejudices of a Catholic, the biting wit of a Pasquino and a careful dose of Aesopian moral purpose were collected together and merged in curious harmony.<sup>45</sup>

Even more than Pippetto, the Marchese del Grillo was the governing arbiter of old Rome's three souls before Unification: the aristocratic, the papal and the popular. The irreverent aristocrat conversed both with high ecclesiastical personages and with the oppressed, making fun of each. In short, he was the type of multifarious character who embodied the multiple identities of Roman operetta.

<sup>43</sup> This tendency is discussed in Massimo Cattaneo, 'L'opposizione popolare al "giacobinismo" a Roma e nello Stato pontificio', *Studi storici* 39/2 (1998), 553–68.

<sup>44</sup> Giggi Zanazzo, *Novelle, favole e leggende romanesche* (Turin, 1907), 382.

<sup>45</sup> Raffaello Giovagnoli, *Leggende romane: il marchese del Grillo* (Rome, 1887), 5–7.

Berardi and Mascetti's operetta deals with one of the episodes narrated by Giovagnoli. We are in the Carnival of 1782: the poor coal burner Giachimone Baciccia falls asleep, drunk, at night near the fountain in the Piazza di Spagna. A group of Grillo's servants pick him up and take him to the Marchese's palace. Waking up and finding himself dressed in aristocratic clothes, Giachimone is led to believe that he is the Marchese. For three days the real Marchese has him experience all the advantages of being rich; he then puts him back to sleep with a narcotic and returns him to the square where he was found, so that Giachimone, on waking up the next day, will believe he has been dreaming.

The operetta was an immediate success, above all for the interpretation of the actor-singer Filippo ('Pippo') Tamburri in the role of Giachimone. According to Ettore Veo's recollections, it was the song he sang in Act I, 'Er vino costa caro', that was most successful, becoming a real hit.<sup>46</sup> But Tamburri was already known to the Roman public, especially those frequenting the taverns, for his abilities as a poetic improviser. 'Er passagallo', a well-known popular song in *ottava rima*, was one of Tamburri's specialities, something he brought from the taverns to the theatre, interpolating it into operettas just as Oreste Raffaelli had done.<sup>47</sup> Giachimone's song, as well as being a classic hymn to wine in Bellian style, also contains references to current events, such as the expensive restoration of the Colosseum, which weighed on the shoulders of the citizens ('Ce vò mette 'n 'antra tassa / Sto governo Fariseo / Perché dice che vo' mette / Li cristalli ar Coliseo!'; They want to lay on another tax / This Pharisee government / Because they say they want to put / Crystals in the Colosseum!). If in the first Roman operettas satirical critique was peripheral to dramatic construction, here it became an integral part. This emerges more clearly in the song 'L'altro jeri er Cracasse ha stampato', sung by the puppeteer Ghetanaccio, again in the first act. Ghetanaccio was a real-life character, who lived in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and remained imprinted on the memory of Romans through his biting satires against the ruling classes. In *Er marchese der Grillo* Ghetanaccio maintains a similar tone:

L'altro jeri er Cracasse ha stampato  
 Un Editto rarissimo e fino  
 Dove a tutti vie' bene insegnato  
 Che 'na spia è 'n dabben cittadino!  
 Ma guardate che grosso smarone  
 Che pijava 'sto vil popolaccio ...  
 Se credeva che a fa' lo spione  
 Fosse peggio che a fare er ladraccio!  
 Ma l'Editto però j'apre l'occhi ...  
 'Na spiata è un dover de coscienza  
 E te piji, c' onori e bajocchi,  
 Cento giorni de santa indurgenza!  
 Che paese affortunato!  
 Che bellezza! Che allegria!  
 Chi vo' esse rispettato  
 S'ha da mette a fa la spia!  
 Ma io faccio passo  
 Ce vada chi vo'  
 Perché li Romani  
 Spiaccie nun so!<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ettore Veo, *I poeti romaneschi: Notizie, saggi, bibliografia* (Rome, 1927), 245.

<sup>47</sup> Giuseppe Micheli, *Storia della canzone romana* (Rome, 1966), 167.

<sup>48</sup> *Er marchese der Grillo. Leggenda romana in 3 atti e 4 quadri di Domenico Berardi. Musica di Giovanni Mascetti* (Rome, n.d.), 7–8.

[The day before yesterday *Cracas* printed / A very rare and fine Edict / Which everyone will be taught: / That a spy is a good citizen! / But look into what great error / This vile populace has sunk ... / It thought that to be a spy / Was worse than being a thief! / But the Edict opens my eyes ... / Spying is a duty of conscience / And it get you, with honours and benefits, / One hundred days of holy indulgence! / What a fortunate country! / How beautiful! How joyful! / Whoever wants to be respected / Just be a spy! / But I don't agree / That anything goes / Because the Romans / Are not spies!]

Given the setting of the operetta, the reference here is to the ecclesiastical ruling classes; after all, *Cracas* had been the official organ of the Papal States since the early eighteenth century. However, Ghetanaccio's words can also be understood as a manifesto denouncing the inadequacies of post-Unification Italy, which in the 1880s was hit by an unprecedented political, financial and social crisis. Rome, as the seat of power, was the city that paid the highest price. The building crisis of 1887, after years of mismanagement in urban renewal, had devastating consequences for the city.<sup>49</sup> The bankruptcy of numerous companies and the consequent dismissal of thousands of workers exacerbated social tensions. Workers' riots, supported by other inhabitants of the areas in which they lived, were harshly repressed by the government and discontent increased dramatically. In this hostile climate – with frequent police incursions – Ghetanaccio became the spokesperson for popular Rome: unlike the rulers (who would soon become enmeshed in a scandal at the Banco di Roma) he always maintains his moral integrity ('Because the Romans are not spies!').

### Towards 'national' operetta

Approximately five years after the first performance of *Er marchese der grillo*, Mascetti's company sold the rights of the operetta to Ciro Scognamiglio's group; in 1894 the latter decided to translate it into Italian, in order to guarantee wider diffusion both at home and abroad. A comparison of the two editions reveals substantial changes that allow us to understand better the developments Italian operetta was undergoing.

Table 1 compares the two librettos, of 1889 and 1894.<sup>50</sup> It becomes clear that the Compagnia Scognamiglio's adaptation is not simply a translation, but a thorough-going adaptation, one indication being that the number of characters is reduced from twenty-one to seventeen. This decision was probably made to accommodate the company's existing personnel, but the absence of one of the most important characters, the puppeteer Ghetanaccio, is surely of further significance. One consequence is that the song 'L'altro jeri er *Cracasse* ha stampato' was also eliminated, though it would in any case have been considered too political. What is more, the very presence of Ghetanaccio in the operetta would have appeared superfluous and difficult to understand to an audience that (with the exception of the Romans) had never heard of him.

A *propos* the list of characters, the loss of a specific neighbourhood is also significant, with the 'curato della Trinità de' Monti' becoming simply 'un curato', just as there is no longer a street vendor of brandy, a character who might well have alluded to a real-life character. In short, the Italianised version, *Il marchese del Grillo*, eliminates the space of everyday life, replacing it with something more neutral, in the process attenuating those processes of territorial identification we saw in Roman operetta. Another point concerns the distribution

<sup>49</sup> On this topic, see Giuseppe Cuccia, *Urbanistica, edilizia, infrastrutture di Roma capitale 1870–1890* (Rome, 1992), 15–49.

<sup>50</sup> *Il marchese del Grillo: Leggenda romana in 3 atti e 4 quadri di Domenico Berardi. Musica di Giovanni Mascetti* (Venice, 1894).

**Table 1.** Comparison of the characters and structure of the Roman dialect operetta *Er marchese der Grillo* (1889) and its Italian adaptation *Il marchese del Grillo* (1894).

<i>Er marchese der Grillo</i> (1889)		<i>Il marchese del Grillo</i> (1894)	
Pergonaggi		Personaggi	
Il marchese del Grillo	DOMENICO BERARDI	Il marchese del Grillo	Petroni Emireno
Giachimone, <i>carbonaio</i>	FILIPPO TAMBURRI	Giacomone, <i>carbonaio</i>	Berardi Domenico
Ercole, <i>operaio falegname</i>	VITTORIO FIORETTI	Ercole, <i>falegname</i>	Bertocchi Guelfo
Titta, <i>cameriere del Marchese</i>	Luigi Cordella	Titta, <i>cameriere del March.</i>	Marone Luigi
Ghetanaccio, <i>marionettista</i>	Abelardo Speranzini	Barbieri, <i>avvocato</i>	Alcozer Eugenio
L'avvocato Barbieri	Luigi Corsari-Amilene	Un curato	Fioretti Vincenzo
Il curato della Trinità de' Monti	Vittorino Lenci	Un ufficiale	Castellano Vincenzo
Un pittore inglese	Filippo Rocci	Annibale	Fiore Domenico
Un acquavitaro, <i>ambulante</i>	Amedeo Riva	Toto, <i>popolani</i>	D'Onofrio Antonio
Un ufficiale di pattuglia	Antonio Lombardi	Un garzone d'osteria	Bianchi Enrico
Annibale	Arturo Garberini	Olimpia	Guerrini Linda
Toto	Oreste Pompei	Virginia	Marchesi Adele
Un popolano	N. N.	Rosa	Cauto Fanny
Uno sguattero	N. N.	Properzia, <i>levatrice</i>	Marone Angelina
Eusebio, <i>cocchiere</i>	Antonio Lombardi	Cunegonda	Ghinassi Fanny
Olimpia	LINDA GUERRINI	Mariona	Berardi Giulia
Virginia	GIOVNA CAPOGROSSI	Elettra	Carini Ester
Rosa	EMMA PACCARONI		
Properzia	MARIA GIORDANI		
Cunegonda	Emma Ajani		
Elettra	Pia Gammelli		
Mariona	Luisa Testa		
Atto I no. 1 – Coro d'introduzione. <i>Come s'indora il profumato ciel</i> no. 2 – Aria. <i>Nun posso, no, scordammelo</i> (Rosa) no. 3 – Duetto comico. <i>Da que' la bocca tanto ciumachella</i> (Giachimone, Rosa) no. 4 – Romanza. <i>Stasera lo vedrò que' l'angioletto!</i>		Atto I no. 1 – Coro. <i>Come s'indora il profumato ciel</i> no. 2 – Romanza. <i>Non potrò mai scordarmelo</i> (Rosa) no. 3 – Duetto comico. <i>Da quella tua boccuccia</i> (Giacomone, Rosa) no. 4 – Duetto. <i>Ma che! Pare impossibile</i> (Ercole, Virginia)	

(Continued)

Table I Continued

<i>Er marchese der Grillo (1889)</i>	<i>Il marchese del Grillo (1894)</i>
(Virginia) no. 5 – Canzone. <i>L'altro jeri er Cracasse ha stampato</i> (Ghetanaccio) no. 6 – Aria comica. <i>Er vino costa caro</i> (Giachimone) no. 7 Finale primo (Rosa, Coro) A. Coro d'Inglese. <i>D'Angleterre, figli siamo!</i> B. Couplets e Coro. <i>Giranno er monno de qua e de là</i>	no. 5 – Coro. Uscita del marchese. <i>Viva il Marchese</i> no. 6 – Strofe del pizzicotto (Marchese, Coro) no. 7 – Aria comica. <i>Er vino costa caro</i> (Giacomone) no. 8 – Finale primo (Rosa, Coro) A. Coro d'Inglese. <i>D'Angleterre figli siamo!</i> B. Strofe di Rosa e Coro. <i>Del carneval che muore</i>
<b>Atto II</b> no. 8 – Coro d'introduzione. <i>Tutta la notte sempre a girà</i> (Stracciaroli) no. 9 – Serenata. <i>Bella ciumaca mia che m'hai rubato</i> (Ercole) no. 10 – Duetto. <i>Virginia bella!</i> (Virginia, Ercole) no. 11 – Preludio e Coro d'introduzione. <i>Vola, angioletto bello</i> (Donne) no. 12 – Coro. <i>Alla presenza di sua Eccellenza</i> (Servitori) no. 13 – Coro. <i>Or vedremo Sua Eccellenza</i> (Marchese, Servitori) no. 14 – Ballata e Coro. <i>Olimpia in me, potete ognun veder!</i> (Olimpia, Coro) no. 15 – Duetto comico. <i>A trovamme mo co' questa</i> (Olimpia, Giachimone) no. 16 – Marcia per orchestra no. 17 – Finale secondo A. Coro. <i>Gloria ed onor al Senator!</i> B. Recitativo e Brindisi. <i>Orsù le tazze in alto e l'allegria</i> (Olimpia, Giachimone)	<b>Atto II</b> no. 9 – Coro di Stracciaroli. <i>Ogni cantone si va a frugar!</i> (Stracciaroli) no. 10 – Serenata. <i>Bella ciumaca mia che m'hai rubato</i> (Ercole) no. 11 – Duetto. <i>Virginia cara!</i> (Virginia, Ercole) no. 12 – Duetto. <i>Dunque il nostro carbonaio</i> (Marchese, Titta) no. 13 – Intermezzo no. 14 – Coro interno. <i>Vola, angioletto bello</i> (Donne) no. 15 – Coro. <i>Alla presenza di sua Eccellenza</i> (Servitori) no. 16 – Coro. <i>Or vedremo Sua Eccellenza</i> (Marchese, Servitori) no. 17 – Strofe. <i>Olimpia in me potete ognun veder!</i> (Olimpia, Coro) no. 18 – Duetto comico. <i>A trovarmi sol con questa</i> (Olimpia, Giacomone) no. 19 – Marcia per orchestra no. 20 – Finale secondo A. Coro. <i>Gloria ed onor al Senator!</i> B. Recitativo e Brindisi. <i>Orsù le tazze in alto e l'allegria</i> (Olimpia, Giacomone)
<b>Atto III</b> no. 18 – Serenata napoletana con Coro. <i>Ma che so' cicere</i> (Olimpia) no. 19 – Aria brillante. <i>Come usignolo chiuso nella gabbia</i> (Virginia) no. 20 – Finale ultimo. <i>Finite son le pene</i> (Olimpia, Rosa)	<b>Atto III</b> no. 21 – Serenata di Pucarella con Coro. <i>Ma che so' cicere</i> (Olimpia) no. 22 – Romanza. <i>Lo rivedrò stasera il mio diletto</i> (Virginia) no. 23 – Strofe a due. <i>Tu sei bella, come stella</i> (Giacomone, Rosa) no. 24 – Finaletto terzo. <i>Eccoci lieti alfine</i> (Virginia, Rosa, Coro)

of songs: in addition to the insertion of new numbers and the elimination of old ones, virtually all numbers are translated into Italian. Only Giachimone's song remains in Roman dialect, and his 'Er vino costa caro' now plays the same role that Neapolitan song would play in Italian operetta in the years to come – a hit number, to be circulated via the operetta, which becomes yet another distribution channel for the Italian song market. Yet the 1890s were also a moment of great popularity for Roman song, which, after the establishment of the Festival di San Giovanni in 1890 (an equivalent of the Neapolitan Festival di Piedigrotta), increasingly attracted the interest of local and national publishers. Among the most



successful songs of the new version of *Il marchese del Grillo* was the ‘Canzone del pizzicotto’, sung by the Marchese in the first act. The refrain is as follows:

Giovinotti non tremate  
 E le curve appetitose  
 Pizzicate, Pizzicate ...  
 Il pizzico è mezzano dell’amore.<sup>51</sup>

[Young men, don’t tremble / And pinch, pinch / Those tasty curves ... / The pinch is the middleman of love.]

Another fundamental ingredient of international operetta was thus inserted: the erotic nudge, more nuanced in the Roman version, became here close to central, and at the expense of the political element, which almost completely disappeared. It was a trend that became clearer in Italian operetta more generally, at least until the end of the century. The second version of *Il marchese del Grillo* demonstrates these prevailing characteristics: a reduced space for political satire; a prevalence of a comedy of manners, which often tends towards sex; and frequent use of dialect song, both as *couleur locale* and as a means of technical reproducibility *avant la lettre*. These aspects can also be traced in French operetta of the Third Republic, in particular in vaudeville-operetta, which is orientated more towards the urban song market.<sup>52</sup> The best-known example is Hervé’s *Mam’zelle Nitouche* (1883), in which the *café-concert* chanson prevails and political satire is completely absent. Present in great profusion, however, are the sexual double entendres, starting with the title itself, which in Italy was translated as *Santarella* (literally ‘little saint’, and meaning a woman who pretends to be blameless but is in fact anything but). The numerous adaptations of Hervé’s work in Italy, as well as his continuing theatrical success (which stretched into the second half of the twentieth century), clearly indicate the direction Italian operetta was taking, especially in relation to the song market more generally.<sup>53</sup>

While the second version of *Il marchese del Grillo* was performed at least until the 1930s, the Roman dialect version suffered a different fate. Touted around the small Italian provinces by Pippo Tamburri’s company, it completely disappeared from the stage around 1915, the year in which Tamburri died and the group dissolved. Indeed, Tamburri and his company can be seen as a sort of act of resistance in defence of local identity. If we look at a publicity poster for the company from 1891 (Figure 2) we can see, in addition to a third version of *Il marchese del Grillo*, set to music by Giovanni Zuccani, how the majority of works were geared in both libretto and music towards the Roman context. The exceptions are *Santarellina* and *Cavalleria rusticana*, one (as mentioned above) an adaptation in Roman dialect of *Mam’zelle Nitouche*, the other a parody of Mascagni’s opera. But what is even more revealing is the note at the foot of the page, which reads: ‘In order to dispel the idea that Roman dialect is not understood outside the capital, we can assure the public that the first to appreciate it and enjoy it are precisely those inhabitants of all other Italian cities.’

<sup>51</sup> *Il marchese del Grillo*, 12–13.

<sup>52</sup> See Oliva, “Les filles mal tournées” dell’offenbachiade’.

<sup>53</sup> The first Italian version of *Mam’zelle Nitouche*, with original music by Hervé and entitled *Santarella*, was performed in Naples by the compagnia Scognamiglio at the Teatro Partenope on 14 November 1889. In the same period, other adaptations also appeared in Naples, in addition to Eduardo Scarpetta’s comedy *Na Santarella* (Teatro Sannazaro, 15 May 1889), these included: *Una santarella, operetta in 3 atti, tradotta dal francese dalla signorina Emilia Persico e ridotta per queste scene dall’artista Eduardo Minichini, musica del maestro Crescenzo Buongiorno* (Teatro Fenice, 24 November 1889); and *Na santarella, operetta in 3 atti, musica di Domenico Bertaglia* (Teatro Mercadante, 10 November 1889). See Ditlev Rindom’s article in this issue for further discussion.



Figure 2. Repertory poster for the Compagnia romanesca led by Pippo Tamburri (c.1891). Author's collection.

This request for legitimization was largely in vain, and it highlights how widespread the prejudice expressed by Zuliani was concerning Roman operetta. Tamburri and his company, as well as others of the same type, soon found themselves following a circuit even more on the margins than that of Italian operetta more generally: they performed in ephemeral theatres and makeshift constructions installed in the squares and fairgrounds of small towns in the Italian provinces. A different, more happy fate befell those companies that, despite starting with dialect operettas, decided to diversify their repertoire and include Italian and foreign productions while reducing local ones to just a handful. These included the Milanese

companies of Scalvini and Ferravilla and the Roman one of Gaetano Tani, which thanks to these changes managed to maintain national visibility.

This does not mean that localism disappeared completely from operetta, but from then on it was visible at other levels. If we limit ourselves to the production sector, the tendency was, as already mentioned, to maintain a company system tied to geographical origin, but with an expanding field of action, one that would eventually include South America (Argentina and Brazil primarily) and the United States.<sup>54</sup> The nationalisation and then the internationalisation of Italian operetta, in addition to influencing the genre in the ways we have seen, had a broader impact. By the end of the century, the Italian public had found in operetta a communal space that increasingly coincided with that of the nation. The idea of ‘parochialism’ was a thing of the past: emptied of political meaning, operetta was re-purposed as a regrettable lapse in taste, to be derided by a country trying to de-provincialise itself.

*Translation by Roger Parker*

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<sup>54</sup> On the circulation of Italian companies in South America, see Matteo Paoletti, “‘The Operetta Seasons Considerably Decreased Our Losses’: Art and Business from Italian Ledgers of the Early 1900s”, in *Genre Beyond Borders: Reassessing Operetta*, ed. Bruno Bower, Elisabeth Honn Hoegberg and Sonja Starkmeth (Abingdon, 2024), 13–27.

**Cite this article:** Oliva E (2024). ‘Il paese dei campanili’: On the Origins of Italian Operetta. *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586724000090>