

Autobiographical Writing of Italian Playwrights at the Turn of the Enlightenment: A Source for the History of European Theatrical Life

Definition of the corpus

The self-writing of Italian men and women of letters in the 18th century finds its programmatic origin in the appeal launched in 1721 by Giovan Artico di Porcia in the pages of the *Giornale de' Letterati d'Italia*. The article, entitled “Progetto ai Letterati d'Italia per iscrivere le loro vite”, establishes the framework for a self-writing as an intellectual autobiography that should embody a solid pedagogical aim, evident in the narrative of both scientific and literary educational journey. The autobiography must also positively present the new rationalist and classical culture promoted by the most important Italian cultural academy, the *Accademia dell'Arcadia*, and show the creative and theoretical path to overcome the literary and artistic strategies of a Baroque era that is perceived as the cause of the marginalization of Italian culture in the international “*République des Lettres*”.

Writing one's own life thus becomes not only an individual mythopoetic stake but also the instrument for establishing a method of constructing a national culture in the absence of an Italian state and a state cultural policy.

This programmatic line feeds self-writing throughout the century and finds a specific realization in the autobiographical approach of playwrights of the second half of the 18th century. Carlo Goldoni, Carlo Gozzi, Giacomo Casanova, Vittorio Alfieri, Lorenzo Da Ponte, namely, the most important Italian playwrights of the “*Tournant des Lumières*”, write their own lives by either adhering to or challenging the framework conceived by Di Porcia.

In writing their own lives, the playwrights also delve into the European theatrical life of their time: actresses and actors, musicians and impresarios, private performance halls and public theatres, theatrical cities, programming and artistic competition, poetic debates and artistic and production strategies, itineraries of theatrical circulation. All these elements are at the core of an autobiographical writing that needs the theatrical context amplifying the originality and subjectivity of the exemplary artist.

Scientific Objectives

While strategies for writing the subject, self-apologetic rhetorical modalities, and the process of shaping a “*discours de vérité*” have been partially studied by scholars, there is a lack of a study that can properly highlight the elements for constructing a collective history of European theatrical life of the time through traces of autobiographical writing and travel writing.

Therefore, the objective of this doctoral project will be to define a first milestone of this history of European theatrical life through the source of the autobiographies of playwrights, starting from the first published autobiography, that of Carlo Goldoni, written in French by a Venetian.

The doctoral project will have to provide for two specific parts:

1. The realization of a hypertextual and multimedia open access commented edition of the *Mémoires de M. Goldoni pour servir à l'histoire de sa vie et de son théâtre* to map the theatrical life presented.

This edition aims to enrich the collective history of the European theatrical world told by Goldoni. To this goal, the candidate will consider biographies, iconography, hall plans, circulation routes of troupes and playwrights, documentary and literary sources, theatre programming, and the potential inclusion of AI - powered text translation.

2. A study of the *Mémoires* as a literary object.

The candidate will define in his/her project a methodological approach that takes into account not only current theories of self-writing, adapting them to the specific case, but also the questioning inherent in diasporic writing and writing in another language.

Scientific and institutional context

This call is part of the scientific project “Le Théâtre et la Cité” of the Initiative Théâtre, of the axis "Digital Literary Humanities" of the UMR CELLF and within the framework of Program Phare 2 (Multilingualism, pluralities, citizenship) of the Alliance 4EU+, of which the University of Milan is a member. It outlines a new scientific collaboration between the Priteps (Interdisciplinary Research Program on Theater and Scenic Practices) and the CELLF of Sorbonne University and the Dipartimento di Beni culturali e ambientali of the University of Milan to explore European theatrical life through the eyes of women and men of theatre and travellers who travel through Europe with a particular attention to artistic and theatrical facts (e.g. Charles de Brosses, Goethe or Stendhal).

The interdisciplinarity of the doctoral contract is based on the contributions of the methodologies and scientific literature of digital humanities, history of Theatre, history of cultural practices, as well as Italian and French literature.

The doctoral student will actively participate in the work and initiatives of the teams of the supervisors (Équipe Littérature et Culture Italiennes and CELLF of Sorbonne University; Dipartimento di Beni culturali e ambientali of the University of Milan) and those of the Initiative Théâtre and the Priteps of Sorbonne University.

The doctoral student must be a specialist in Theatre studies or Italian studies or French literature or History of cultural practices with a good knowledge of digital humanities tools as well as Italian and French.

The thesis may be written in French or Italian.

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