

REALITY AND FICTION IN THE WORKS OF GOLDONI: FOCUSING ON THE THEME OF WAR

Introduction

Carlo Goldoni is a well-known Venetian playwright of the eighteenth century and is credited as the reformer of Italian theater who transformed the commedia dell'arte into a comedy based in realism. He is also known as a librettist.

In many of his plays he describes the peaceful lives of ordinary people, but there are notable works that focus on wars and the military. Goldoni, in fact, had experienced two wars: the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1735) and the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748); both are wars in which Italy was involved. Scholars have already identified instances where his war experiences are included in his works.

As I have mentioned, many of his works, notably his comedies, focus on the daily life of ordinary people. Goldoni probably injected actual people and events that he saw into his plays, but it is difficult to separate which individuals and facts are based on real life. On the other hand, it is easier to discuss his wartime experiences which are depicted in his works using his autobiographical *Memories* as a reference. Goldoni writes about his own war experiences in his two *Memories*: in the prefaces of the comedies of the Pasquali edition (1761-1780), generally known as *The Italian Memories*, and in *Mémoires*, written in French and published in 1787. In these *Memories*, Goldoni himself acknowledges that they are based on his own war experiences. In my paper, I would like to delve deeper into the reality and fiction contained in his works by analyzing the description of war based on his experiences. In parallel, I would like to study Goldoni's thoughts regarding war. In the first part of the paper I will discuss his comedies, followed by a discussion of his musical comedies in the second part.

The descriptions of war in comedies: from *The Military Lover* to *The War*

1.1. *The Military Lover*

The Military Lover opened for the first time in Venice in 1751. It is a work from the reform period, but still based on the commedia dell'arte style. The plot is a love story surrounding the marriage between two lovers, Don Alonso, a Spanish soldier, and Rosaura, the daughter of a merchant, Pantalone. Don Alonso falls in love with Rosaura during his encampment in the house of Pantalone. Don Garzía is Don Alonso's superior, a character very similar to the Captain in commedia dell'arte. Many events unfold in this play: Don Alonso challenges Don Garzía to a duel for insulting Rosaura, and is later arrested for harming his superior; Arlecchino, the idiot servant, envies the exciting lives of soldiers, and becomes a soldier himself; Eventually the regiment leaves for battle, but immediately thereafter peace is declared; Finally, Don Alonso, with the approval of Don Sancho, his uncle and captain, is discharged from the military and marries Rosaura.

I would now like to point out the theatrical conventions that are used in this comedy which make it apparent that this work is fictional.

First, many of the characters that appear are based on the *commedia dell'arte*: Pantalone, Arlecchino, and Brighella all wear masks from the *commedia dell'arte*. The “Lovers” Don Alonso and Rosaura, “The Waitress” Colombina and “The Captain” Don Garzía also appear in the *commedia dell'arte*.

Second, the busy plot eventually leading to a happy ending is typical of *commedia dell'arte*.

Third, all the Spanish soldiers speak Italian or Tuscan properly, while all the masked characters from the *commedia dell'arte* speak the dialect.

Fourth, as Ortolani noted, the lines in Tuscan are written in a literary language, similar to those seen in opera seria or in tragedies.

In short, *The Military Lover* is written with various conventions of traditional comedy, and quite distinct to the realistic comedy that Goldoni strived for. On the other hand, this comedy includes passages that are based on his true experiences of war. For example, the depiction of the Spanish camp and Spanish soldiers who flirted with the local women, and the lavish and loud feasts of the military—all these elements can be considered as actual portrayals of the things that Goldoni saw in Rimini.

We can also find the experience of Goldoni in the dialogue of Arlecchino and Colombina which I quote:

Colombina: In winter with the snow and in summer with the sun you'll be on the walls with a gun on your shoulder: Who goes there? You will sleep on straw, you will work hard to make exercise, and if you fail, they will give you beatings.

Arlecchino: Beatings?

Colombina: And of all sorts. And then you will go to the war in the danger of losing an arm.

Arlecchino: Eh, I have two arms.

Colombina: Or to lose an eye.

Arlecchino: I have two eyes.

Colombina: Or to lose the head.

Arlecchino: Oh my head is only one.

(*The Military Lover*, I, 14).

The words of Colombina, while seemingly comical, cleverly convey the harsh reality of war, and may be based on the actual observation of dead soldiers on the battlefield by Goldoni in 1734 in Parma.

In summary, *The Military Lover* is a fictional comedy written with traditional theatrical conventions, but also containing realistic scenes based on the war experiences of the author.

1.2. *The War*

The comedy *The War* opened for the first time in Venice in 1760. Donna Florida is the daughter of the commander of the besieged fortress, and becomes a prisoner of the enemy. She is also the lover of Don Faustino, the enemy. This comedy is centered around their love and marriage, however also describes the lives of invading soldiers and the people surrounding them.

Let us first examine the theatrical conventions mentioned previously. We note that in *The War*, unlike *The Military Lover*, no masks appear and the characters are not typical of the commedia dell'arte. However we also note the plot centering on the lovers who get married is typical of the commedia dell'arte, and the love between enemies is not realistic. As for the language, all the characters speak Tuscan. In the eighteenth century, Italy was not unified and generally people spoke the local dialect, therefore this can be considered fiction. The language itself, although literary expressions remain, is more plain and fluid than that of *The Military Lover*. The scene of the siege of a fortress, can be considered a reflection of what Goldoni saw in Milan, or in Pizzighettone in 1733.

The plot does not have a major event like the duel as in *The Military Lover*, and is mainly concentrated on the psychological description of the characters. So as Fido emphasized, the main strength of this comedy is in the characters, and therefore is more convincing. If we look at each of the soldiers, every soldier has a distinct personality, so we see more diversity than in *The Military Lover*. The character that is in stark contrast from the commedia dell'arte is Donna Florida, the daughter of the commander of the fortress. She is not a lover who languishes over love like Rosaura in *The Military Lover*, but a woman of great intelligence. There are also other characters who do not fit into the commedia dell'arte. For example, Don Polidoro, commissioner of the army, who unabashedly admires war, can be defined as a merchant of war. There is also Orsolina, a young woman merchant, who dreams of becoming rich by profiting from the conflict. Through the characters of Don Polidoro and Orsolina, we see the experiences of Goldoni. During the war, Goldoni encountered many people who profited from it. Even Goldoni himself was able to accumulate a fortune by writing plays for soldiers. There is a scene where deserters steal a basket from a peasant: this incident is also from Goldoni's experience when he was robbed of everything by deserters. The soldiers and various other characters are described in a very realistic way.

The War ends in peace, with the marriage of lovers and Donna Florida praising peace. In fact Goldoni himself, in the preface of this comedy, writes: "The ending is very happy, because it is crowned by peace: an ending that I long for with these wars in Europe(...)" Goldoni's viewpoints about the war and the military have already been discussed. Saulini, studied his poems, and believes they reaffirm Goldoni's opposition to war. Del Negro, states that while Goldoni was intrigued by the playful characters, ultimately concludes that Goldoni is hardly among the authors of the "theater against" the war. From the epilogue of this comedy and Goldoni's words, we can see that Goldoni does not criticize the existence of soldiers, however he did not condone war: later I will examine the proof.

War was an inevitable event for most people, and Goldoni describes the reactions of people facing war very realistically. *The War* differs from *The Military Lover* in its depiction of reality: although it contains less elements of traditional theatrical conventions, the comedy remains fictional, but a new kind of fiction with more realistic elements.

2. "War" in musical comedies: *The Lucky Quarters* and *The Land of Cockaigne*

2.1. *The Lucky Quarters*

According to Ortolani, *The Lucky Quarters* was an intermezzo that was written and performed in

1744 during Goldoni's stay in Rimini, and is the basis for *The Military Lover*. The plot revolves around Roccaforte, an officer, who camps in the house of a widow Bellinda. They fall in love and Bellinda follows him disguised as a man to battle which they eventually win. Bellinda, demonstrates her wealth and is able to convince Roccaforte to marry her. Peace is proclaimed and they marry at last.

Let us examine the theatrical conventions. The characters singing their lines, the presence of two characters, and Bellinda's disguises, are all conventions of the intermezzo. Tuscan is used as the language, and in verse.

Goldoni's experiences are reflected in the descriptions of the camp of Roccaforte, as well as the character of Roccaforte who discovers the wealthy Bellinda and is convinced into marrying her. Roccaforte represents the reality of the military where many people were forced to become soldiers for economic reasons.

This intermezzo was performed for soldiers, and as a work that was meant to lift their spirits by eliminating the tragic elements of war. From this fact we can see Goldoni's sympathy and compassion for soldiers.

2.2. *The Land of Cockaigne*

Now let us consider *The Land of Cockaigne*, *dramma giocoso* set to music by Galuppi and presented for the first time in Venice in 1750. This is as an interesting example of a musical comedy in which war is used as a theatrical device.

The Land of Cockaigne is similar to *The Lucky Quarters*, however differs in that it is a larger production and contains more characters. The actual war experiences of Goldoni are not reflected because it has a fantastical plot as follows: Pandolino and Pollastrina, betrothed, flee by boat to get married but are shipwrecked, and eventually arrive on a beach. They are greeted by a group of people who bring food and explain that they are in a realm where one can eat and drink freely and do nothing, provided they abide by the law of the land: the groom shall not be jealous if his wife becomes intimate with other men. At the beginning Pandolino is intensely jealous, but he eventually becomes accustomed to the law. Thus the bride and groom spend days "in peace". But the drama ends with an invading army capturing the inhabitants of the land: the men are sent to war, and the women to the hospital.

What interests us in this work is the structure of the drama: at the end of the play, "war" appears in the land of Cockaigne and the peace is shattered, and we return from the world of fantasy to the real world. This play actually contains two layers of fiction: one is the fantasy land of Cockaigne, and the other the real world that surrounds it. The "war" acts to cut through the first layer of fiction, the land of Cockaigne, which was the "real" world on the stage until the army arrives. But this world is transformed into a fantasy world as war brings into view a new real world. *The Land of Cockaigne* is truly original in this way.

Goldoni's opinions of war can be gleaned from the lines of Oronte, captain of the army that invades the land of Cockaigne:

Those who do not have a good job,
should become a soldier;
even if you are killed,

at least people will glorify your value.

It is beautiful to be able to say:
 "I will die with the sword in my hand;
 I will die for my sovereign;
 I will die to honor myself".
 (*The Land of Cockaigne*, III, 1)

In this drama, people who lived "in peace" albeit imperfect, are sent to the battlefield. The war and the military are not praised, and are described as something people must accept. In Oronte's words, we can hear the wrath of Goldoni against war: he witnessed countless anonymous soldiers die in the battle due to conflicts caused by the monarchy.

In the title, *The Land of Cockaigne*, we see the word "Cockaigne". This is the word Goldoni used to describe the armistice in his *Memories*. We can conclude that the content of this drama expresses Goldoni's opinion of war.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to clarify the relationship between reality and fiction in the works of Goldoni, first in his comedies and second in his musical comedies, by analyzing the description of the war based on his experiences. I have also examined Goldoni's view about war.

Goldoni experienced two wars during his life. Based on these experiences, early in the period of his reform of Italian theater, he wrote the comedy *The Military Lover*, using the traditional theatrical conventions. Nine years later, in the comedy *The War*, these conventions are minimized, and instead Goldoni takes a more realistic approach, and focuses on the characters by providing more psychological insight, thereby managing to create a new type of fiction with more realistic elements.

Compared to his comedies, his musical comedies are clearly works of fiction. The reality of soldiers is described in *The Lucky Quarters* of 1744, but in *The Land of Cockaigne* of 1750, Goldoni created a new structure of fiction: a "real" world which is turned into a "fantasy" world with the arrival of the real world through the invasion of "war". This transformation would have been difficult to pull off in realistic comedies.

Through his works, we can find different representations of war, and we are able to appreciate that Goldoni has narrated many adventures using the instruments of "reality" and "fiction". And when we regard the skill of using these instruments, as well as consider the great variety of his narratives, he seems to be without parallel in Venetian theater of the eighteenth century.

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