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Jessica Goodman, *Goldoni in Paris: La Gloire et le Malentendu*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. xx + 227 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. £65.00 U.K. (hb). ISBN 9780198796626.

Review by Jeffrey M. Leichman, Louisiana State University.

In Jacques Rivette's 2001 film, *Va savoir*, Sergio Castellitto plays the head of an Italian acting troupe on tour in Paris who spends his offstage hours in pursuit of a personal grail: a lost manuscript by Carlo Goldoni putatively titled *Il Destino Veneziano*. This subplot sums up an enduring mystery of Goldoni's personal and artistic biography, in which the author of what is perhaps the best-known *commedia dell'arte* text, *The Servant of Two Masters*, as well as a reformer who helped bring the modern bourgeois comedy of manners to the Italian-language stage, remains tantalizingly unknown, the victim of a monumentally unsuccessful act of self-fashioning that has obscured his legacy ever since. Jessica Goodman, in *Goldoni in Paris: La Gloire et le Malentendu*, provides a clearly written and compelling account of how the Italian playwright's own strategies for acquiring the symbolic capital that would establish his social credentials in life and thus found the eternal *gloire* that he craved for posterity, instead led to the effacement of his reputation at the very moment of his arrival at the center of the eighteenth-century European theatrical universe.

Despite being invited to Paris in 1762 to take a leadership role at the Comédie Italienne, Goldoni's efforts to introduce the French to the reformed Italian comedy for which he had become famous in Italy were less successful than he had hoped. In his *Mémoires*, Goldoni gives this period short shrift, complaining about the actors with whom he was obliged to work, as well as the expectations of the Paris audience that desired unsophisticated light fare at the Italian theatre. By contrast, he lavishes far more attention on the success he later obtained at the Comédie Française with his 1771 comedy *Le Bourru bienfaisant*, which he situates as an apotheosis. This narrative, known as the "teoria del malinteso" (p. 7), or theory of misunderstanding, holds that Goldoni's efforts were hampered primarily by his own misreading of the Paris public and the troupe that he was recruited to helm. Goodman's book seeks to untangle "the possible reasons for this blinkered view" (p. 8) that situates Goldoni's Parisian career, reduced to two unhappy years at the Comédie Italienne and a French play that was never revived after the eighteenth century, as an embarrassing coda to an otherwise successful dramatic career in Italy.

In the introduction, Goodman details the critical pressure that had been accumulating around the *teoria del malinteso* for several decades, culminating in Andrea Fabiano's detailed reading of Goldoni's Paris career, which revealed the refusal by the Opéra to accord any part of its monopoly

on lyric theatre to its Italian rivals as a crucial factor impeding Goldoni's rise to theatrical stardom in France. Goodman then sets out a challenge that her book largely meets, yet whose framing imposes limits on the eventual reach of her scholarship. The *teoria del malinteso* has largely been debunked, replaced by Fabiano's more plausible structural explanations that Goodman does not appear to contest. Rather, her aim will be to explain *how* these three views of Goldoni's time in Paris—the author's own triumphalist version, the now-dated view of this period as a failure to impose his reformist ideas in Paris, and the nuanced view of a mostly successful stay that was marred by “systemic flaws and simple bad luck” (p. 9)—came into being. The demonstration that follows is at once convincing and well researched, and written with an admirable clarity and precision, but nevertheless stakes out a narrow position in an argument with a narrow appeal. As Goodman avers early on, “outside the academy, twentieth- and twenty-first century France tended to forget that Goldoni had ever set foot in Paris at all” (p. 10).

Methodologically, Goodman's study falls squarely within the field of literary sociology, tracking the ways in which Goldoni leveraged his cultural capital in order to acquire greater social status, a Bourdieu-inflected approach reminiscent of work by Alain Viala and Gregory S. Brown.[1] Goodman ably situates writing as one node in a wider web of practices of symbolic exchange that were available to ancien régime non-nobles possessed of literary talent, and shows a great aptitude for the detailed historical research that underpins this theoretical positioning of authorship. Chapters two through five provide a concentric view of the world into which Goldoni thrust himself, beginning with a description of the social role and commercial functioning of theatre in eighteenth-century Paris, before moving on to the place of the author within these symbolic and material economies, and finally arriving at the specificities, both social and esthetic, of writing plays for the Comédie Italienne. While the institutional overview provided in chapter two, “Mapping Theatrical Paris,” is clear and complete, theatre historians and other scholars generally familiar with the eighteenth-century French stage will find little new here. (Despite its title, this chapter contains no maps; and indeed, the entire volume is image free.) A somewhat schematic dichotomy opposes symbolic capital to the more concrete rewards of commercial success in chapter three, “Being an Author in Eighteenth-Century Theatre,” which otherwise shines with insight into how the Comédie Italienne paid its authors, according to a formula that hews closer to modern notions of intellectual property than the notoriously abuse-prone system employed by the Comédie Française. Chapter four, “The Rules of the Game: Authorship at the Comédie Italienne,” follows up with a wealth of specific details on the administration of the troupe, and in particular with respect to its authors and repertoire. Goodman contradicts Goldoni's complaints, showing that the playwright made out like a bandit, his 6,000-*livre* salary coming at the expense of the retirement pensions of much longer-serving, successful writers who worked at the Comédie Italienne.[2]

The specific problems posed by writing for the Italian troupe are a central preoccupation of chapter five, “Goldoni's Dilemma: Authorship and Authority.” The tradition of improvising based on loosely indicative scenarios called *canevas* stood in contrast to Goldoni's reputation in Italy as an author of fully dialogued theatrical texts, making his situation in Paris a significant artistic demotion. At the same time, Goldoni's aura, derived from his success as a theatrical innovator in Italy, continued to bestow status on those who could claim proximity to him, motivating not only his initial invitation to Paris—which Goodman deftly shows to have greatly benefited from a shrewd adaptation of his work for the French stage by Zanuzzi (p. 126)—but also the rafts of adaptations of his work by other authors that were presented on Paris stages in the 1770s.

This background information on Paris helps contextualize the biographical presentation that bookends these chapters. Chapter one, “The Strange Case of Carlo Goldoni,” traces his rise in Venice, again using the *Mémoires* as a touchstone for an efficient retelling of an extraordinarily prolific pre-Paris career. In chapter six, “Goldoni’s Parisian Career,” Goodman picks up the thread from the first chapter, narrating the author’s actual accomplishments while in the French capital, the better to expose the fictions of his subsequent rewriting of this period in the *Mémoires*. Goodman adroitly demonstrates that Goldoni’s thirty-month stint as a salaried employee of the Comédie Italienne “was both a symbolic and a financial success” (p. 145), but still not as prestigious as a lower-paying appointment as an Italian tutor to the king’s daughters, contextualizing career moves that might seem counterintuitive to modern readers. While Goodman’s very disciplined focus on “a strategic reading of [Goldoni’s] career in Paris” (p. 136) responds to her initial problematic—the ways in which scholarly opinions of Goldoni have been shaped by his biased self-presentation in the *Mémoires*—rigorously staying on message also deprives the author of the opportunity to engage with Goldoni’s artistic production as distinct from his strategic calculations.

Goldoni’s own retelling of his life is the focus of chapter seven, “The *Mémoires* and Their Legacy.” Given the centrality of this source to the entire book, one might have expected Goodman to use this opportunity to problematize the memoir genre (including its relationship to autobiography, which Goodman occasionally uses as a synonym); explore the prevalence and meaning of memoir in this period and for later scholars who return to memoir as a primary source material; or comment on the ways in which other playwrights might have used memoirs to similar or divergent ends. This wider critical frame would have helped buttress Goodman’s fine analysis of Goldoni’s (not always successful) self-presentation and the theatricalized character of the anecdotes he relates. The chapter then pivots to an interesting discussion of how the *Mémoires* served as the basis for a series of plays, mostly in Italian, that perpetuated the author’s personal mythography over the course of the following centuries. The attention lavished on these minor plays risks giving the impression that their rarity makes them more worthy of sustained analysis than Goldoni’s own dramatic production, which largely goes without comment, or even summary description, throughout the volume.

This section provides a natural transition to the eighth and final chapter, “The Afterlife of an Author,” in which Goodman shows that Goldoni’s Italian corpus continues to be held in far higher regard than his French production. (Amongst other slights, Goodman notes that the *Pléiade* edition of Goldoni’s *Théâtre* does not include *Le Bourru bienfaisant*, an omission corrected in the 2007 *Comédies choisies*, published by *Livre de Poche*, which arguably has a wider readership.) Goldoni has been neglected within French educational contexts, and “it is still as an Italian, and certainly not as an adopted Frenchman, that he appears in the Comédie-Française repertoire” (p. 183). Perhaps this is because his Italian comedies are better, or at least respond more appropriately to contemporary theatrical needs? Goodman’s reluctance to engage with the actual content of the plays makes it difficult to evaluate the significance of contemporary programming. Moreover, Goldoni is hardly the only eighteenth-century dramatist to have disappeared from modern reading lists and stages: Voltaire comes to mind, as does Nivelle de la Chaussée, both influential dramatic authors whose plays are almost never seen today, but whose exclusion cannot be chalked up to misinterpretation of their self-representation or their status as foreigners.

The search for the lost manuscript in Rivette’s film also hinges on a misunderstanding: the play turns up under the title of *Il Festino Veneziano*, with uncontrollable *destino* giving way to

effervescent celebration. In her epilogue, Goodman again affirms *malentendu* as the central figure in Goldoni's failure to achieve the cultural permanence of *gloire*. In this case, it is not a question of a mismatch between an author and a troupe, or even between an author and his public (although at various points these, too, have been conceded); "rather, the misunderstanding was in the contrast between his expectations of fame and fortune, and the limited capacity of his new position to create the great and lasting reputation he so desired" (p. 197). With *Goldoni in Paris*, Goldman pays heed to the plea from G ronte, the titular curmudgeon of *Le Bourru bienfaisant*, to "s'en rapporte[r]   mon coeur et non   ma voix"[3], reading Goldoni's desire through the symbolic self-erasure that has accumulated around the *M moires*. In rewriting the fundamental misunderstanding of Goldoni's career, Goodman's superbly researched account reveals how contingency and institutional inertia can obliterate even the most carefully crafted attempts to author one's own glorious destiny.

NOTES

[1] See Alain Viala, *Naissance de l' crivain. Sociologie de la litt rature   l' ge classique* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1985) and *Racine: la strat gie du cam leon* (Paris: Seghers, 1990); Gregory S. Brown, *A Field of Honor: Writers, Court Culture, and Public Theatre in the French Literary Life from Racine to the Revolution* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005).

[2] A rare typo in a nearly error-free text leaves some doubt as to whether it was Sedaine or Duni who was slighted, along with Favart, in order to make room in the budget for Goldoni's comparatively massive emoluments (see page 98 and footnote 51).

[3] Carlo Goldoni, *Le Bourru bienfaisant*, in *Com dies choisies*, Denis Fachard ed. (Paris: Librairie G n rale Fran aise, 2007), 1426.

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