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# Elisabetta Caminer Turra's Editorial Strategies for Introducing English Novels in Italy through her Periodicals

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## ABSTRACT

This article investigates the figure of Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751–96) and the role she played in the Italian reception of English novels during the eighteenth century. One key characteristic of Caminer Turra's editorship of *Giornale enciclopedico* (1774–82), *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (1783–89), and *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico d'Italia* (1790–96) was the diffusion of foreign culture in the Italian peninsula: during her career she always aimed at the renovation and improvement of the intellectual milieu of the time. Caminer Turra's journals played an important role in the Italian reception of foreign literature during the second half of the eighteenth century. The goal of this study is to show (a) how English novels were reviewed, censored, and introduced to the Italian public through the many articles, reviews, and announcements that appeared in the journals she supervised, and (b) to examine, from a stylistic, thematic, and political point of view, the ways in which she played her role as maker of culture and arbiter of taste, in order to clarify the importance of her function as a cultural mediator.

## KEYWORDS

Women editors, *Giornale enciclopedico*, Elisabetta Caminer Turra, Italy, English novels, reception

When Domenico Caminer (1721–95), a famous journalist and publisher of the Venetian *Settecento*, left the co-direction of the *Giornale enciclopedico* (formerly *L'Europa letteraria*) in 1776, his daughter Elisabetta (1751–96) (Fig. 1) took control of one of the most popular journals of the time. In her role as editor, she promoted a project that was more organic, moving the journal towards a deeper cultural and editorial engagement closer to the reality of the times. The *Giornale enciclopedico* and other periodicals that were published under her direction (*Nuovo giornale enciclopedico*, *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico d'Italia*) sought to establish new relationships with prominent literary men and scientists of the era, while looking for new means and centres of distribution. Despite attracting harsh criticism and opposition, Caminer Turra's journals played an important role in the Italian reception of foreign literature during the second half of the eighteenth century. Her role as an editor is one of the most important of this period in the dissemination of foreign culture in the Italian peninsula, and throughout her career her aim was always to revitalize and improve the intellectual milieu of her time. Building on the studies conducted by Sama, Liuccio, MacMurran, Mangione, von Kulesa, and most of all Parmegiani, this essay aims at investigating the editorial strategies behind how English novels were reviewed, censored, and introduced to the Italian public through an assortment of articles, reviews, and announcements that appeared in the journals Caminer Turra supervised.<sup>1</sup> Many were written by herself, and signed, the main criterion for establishing her authorship. The enquiry will bring a new transnational perspective to the study of the eighteenth-century Italian periodical press, leading to a more thorough understanding of Caminer Turra's editorial work.

The Italian cultural and political horizons of the eighteenth century were extremely variegated. The editorial industry was no exception: many pre-Unitarian states possessed active publishing hubs, which engaged in the intellectual debates of the time and were attentive to various literary and reading trends. In this fragmented context, Venice certainly had the most prolific printing industry of the epoch. Over a third of all the books published in the peninsula came from the lagoon city, making it a point of reference within a growing inter-European cultural dialogue on the continent in the second half of the century. Instrumental in such dissemination was the periodical press: its popular appeal reflects, like no other medium, the perception of 'other' European cultures and European cultural diversity. The Caminer family played a major role in the development of Venetian journalism. As Parmegiani explains in her seminal work on eighteenth-century Venetian journalism:

[O]ne of the longest-lasting, ideologically progressive and unconventionally run periodical ventures of the second half of the century was the Caminer-Fortis 'project'. Rather than a laid out project from the start, it was a progressively evolving initiative that lasted three decades, despite the relatively short life of the individual

1 See Catherine Sama, ed., *Selected Writings of an Eighteenth-Century Venetian Woman of Letters. Elisabetta Caminer Turra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Michaela Liuccio, *Elisabetta Caminer, la prima donna giornalista italiana* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2010); Mary H. MacMurran, *The Spread of Novels: Translation and Prose Fiction in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Daniela Mangione, *Prima di Manzoni. Autore e lettore nel romanzo del Settecento* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2012); Rotraud Von Kulesa, 'Elisabetta Camniera Turra e L'Europa letteraria. Riflessioni sulla traduzione', *Circula*, 2 (2015), 18–30; Sandra Parmegiani, 'Textual Mobility in the Eighteenth Century: English Novels and the Venetian Press', *Crossways Journal*, 1.1 (2017), 1–11. For the conceptualization and the role of the review as a genre and as a vehicle of information in the long eighteenth century, see in particular Marilyn Butler, 'Culture's Medium: The Role of the Review', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 120–76; and Barbara M. Benedict, 'Readers, Writers, Reviewers, and the Professionalization of Literature', in *Cambridge Companion to Literature, 1740–1830*, ed. by T. Keymer and J. Mee (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 3–23.



Fig. 1 Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751–96). Europeana/Österreichische Nationalbibliothek Digital Collections

periodicals of which it was comprised. The Caminer-Fortis project included five Venetian periodicals that from 1768 to 1797 formed a continuous publishing enterprise that positioned itself at the forefront of progressive ideas, promoted Enlightenment values and played an essential role in fostering a network of critically informed Italian readers. In 1768 Domenico Caminer [...] founded the periodical *L'Europa letteraria*. Among his collaborators, he appointed his seventeen-year-old daughter Elisabetta who was then just starting her career as a translator and director of French plays. In 1773 *L'Europa letteraria* was restructured and changed its title to *Giornale enciclopedico*. In 1777 Elisabetta assumed its direction, moved the periodical to Vicenza (where she was living with her husband) and transformed it into a combative, progressive, and internationally-minded enterprise.<sup>2</sup>

Parmegiani also stresses that Elisabetta Caminer Turra was a member of the Venetian bourgeoisie, who found an ideal environment in the native city to fully exploit her intellectual work. Besides her activities as a journalist (the first female journalist in Italy), she eventually became an editor and a renowned translator. Caminer Turra was

<sup>2</sup> Parmegiani, p. 2.

in fact a prolific translator from the French, particularly of theatrical pieces belonging to the so-called *comédie larmoyante*. Her main goal as a translator was not to adhere completely to the original content, but rather to mediate between the originals and the Italian public and its expectations. That is why on some occasions she even modified some topical parts of the works she translated, in order to make them comprehensible to her Italian audience. As we shall see, her editorial strategies concerning the introduction of the English novel in Venice did not differ much from this policy. As an editor too she aimed to give a pedagogical and ideological function to her work.

While her collaborators were predominantly male, Caminer Turra was directly managing all her publishing enterprises and under her management the journals developed a progressive view of society. The emancipation and education of women was one of the foundational ideas of the cultural initiative promoted by her journals (with some contradictions in the process, which I will point out below). Among the most important and active collaborators was Alberto Fortis, an enthusiastic promoter of Enlightenment culture. As a contributor (and to a certain degree right-hand man), he produced many reviews, translations, and original articles. The editorial team was particularly receptive towards cultural and literary news coming from abroad, and especially from France. The very name of the journal, *Giornale enciclopedico* (Fig. 2), and its variations illustrate a clear debt to transalpine journalism: *Le Journal encyclopédique* was extremely popular in France, and played a fundamental role stretching as far as Italy.

French mediation is one of the most significant aspects that must be taken into account when attempting to map the reception of foreign culture in the periodical press of the late eighteenth century across the Italian peninsula. The reception of English novels is no exception: many of the reviews concerning this new literary phenomenon published in the Venetian journals stem directly from reviews previously published in France. *Mercure de France*, *Journal des sçavans*, and *Journal encyclopédique* are only a few examples of the many French journals that were an endless source of information for Italian journalists. In order to outline the history of the reception of the English novel through the periodical press, the most interesting and useful approach is to trace the genealogical dimension of each review that made its way to Italian journals from English journals, via the French. This operation is usually quite easy: normally, once an Italian review of an English novel is found, it can be assumed that a couple of months earlier a review of the same novel was published in one or more French journals. My research reveals that in the journals directed by Elisabetta Caminer Turra almost sixty reviews and announcements about English novels were published over twenty years. Of these sixty, at least ninety per cent stem directly from the French press, and only a few may be traced back directly to the British press. Understanding and pinpointing in what ways the Italian reviews differ from the French (and through what patterns) is crucial for the reconstruction of the Italian reception of the English novel in the literary press. Parmegiani has already shown some significant examples of how the Venetian press dealt with the reviews of English novels and the French mediation of these. The aim of this essay is to integrate the valuable information revealed by Parmegiani's study into an analysis of new cases and to bring to light other patterns in this phenomenon.

### **The Relationship with the French Sources**

The majority of the reviews and articles that appeared in Caminer Turra's journals can be traced back to French sources that are usually acknowledged at the beginning of the column treating foreign press news. On many occasions, there are direct references to the original journals in the text of the Italian articles. These published links allow us

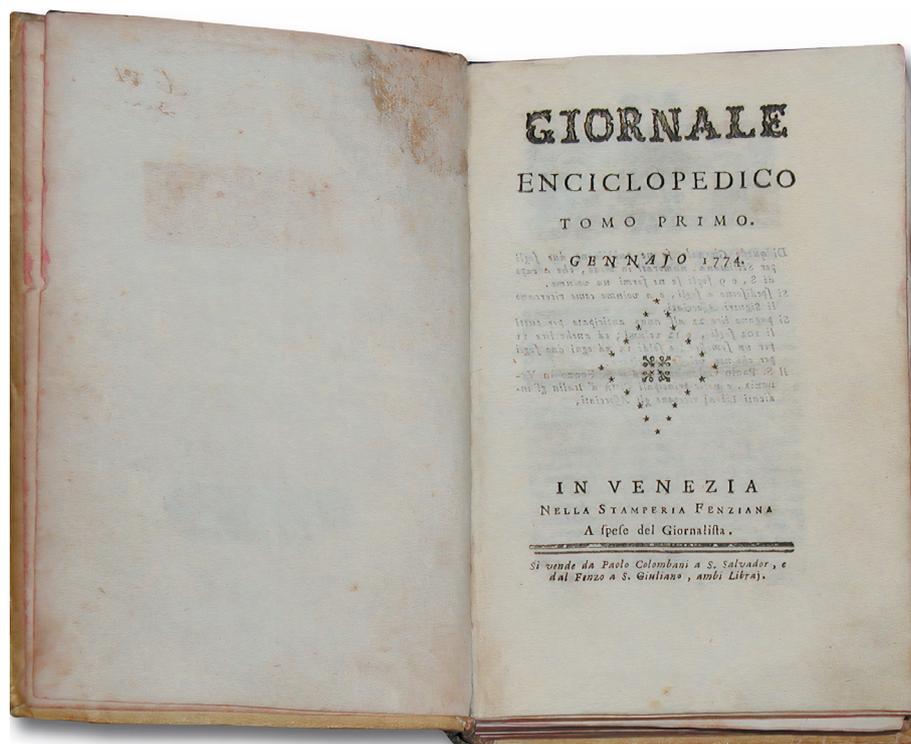


Fig. 2 Title page of the first issue of the *Giornale enciclopedico* (January 1774), photographed by Ettore Castiglieri. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0

to see the attitude Italian journalists had towards their sources, as some examples will demonstrate. My first example is a review of a French adaptation of Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, published in *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* in May 1785:

*New, etc. The New Journey to France, by Mr Sterne, with the History of Lefèvre, and a Choice of Letters by the Same Author.* Geneva 1785. — The late Mr Sterne is very well known for the pleasant Works he wrote and for his Sentimental Journey. This new Journey to France is similar in its style to the life of Tristan Shandy. A touch of agreeableness, a touch of extravagance, and an abundant amount of originality make these works untranslatable, and uncongenial to be reduced to excerpts. In France, however, they are subject to both types of mistreatment.<sup>3</sup>

The source review appeared in the *Journal encyclopédique* in May 1785.<sup>4</sup> The French article is much longer: eight pages. It deals with the plot and the characters of the book, giving some comments and presenting extracts. In the Italian review there are no traces of information about the story: the judgement is limited to a few words, which are different

3 'Nouveau, ec. Nuovo viaggio in Francia, del Sig. Sterne, a cui è unita la Storia di Lefèvre, e una scelta di Lettere del medesimo Autore. Ginevra 1785. — E' conosciutissimo per le piacevoli Opere da lui pubblicate e pel suo Viaggio Sentimentale il fu Sig. Sterne. Questo nuovo Viaggio in Francia è sul gusto della vita di Tristano Shandy. Un po' di piacevolezza, un po' di stravaganza, una dose copiosa d'originalità rendono cotali opere intraducibili, e insuscettibili d'Estratti. In Francia però subiscono e l'uno e l'altro maltrattamento.' [Anon.], 'Nouveau, ec. Nuovo viaggio in Francia, del Sig. Sterne', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (May 1785), 202. Referencing these historical journals is complicated by the fact that most of the reviews did not bear any title, and the issues were not published regularly. All translations are the author's.

4 [Anon.], 'Nouveau voyage en France de Sterne', *Journal encyclopédique* (15 May 1785), 71–79.

in tone from the French review. After all, Sterne was a well-known author, and the Italian review could offer some independent opinions. Even more importantly, the journalist, probably Alberto Fortis, seems to attack the *Journal encyclopédique* ('In Francia...'), saying that French journalists were mistreating Sterne's works. The French review, in fact, serves as a starting point for criticizing some aspects of French journalism, such as the long extracts taken from the book without appropriate context. On this occasion, the editor's decision to include a review that is sceptical of some of the communicative strategies of its source manifests an early intention of affirming a more independent editorial policy, and a different way of disseminating knowledge and information about the English novel through the press.

My second example is a review of another work by Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*, which appeared in *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* in October 1786:

*Fin*, etc. Conclusion of the News entry regarding Mr Sterne's spirit and Works. This strange author, who yet manages to please and seduce the less strange readers too, had the misfortune of having three translators who took unforgivable liberties in their work, changing and cutting his text here and there. It is debated here who among them has distorted it more. However, one of the three translators, Mr D. L. B., deserves to be preferred, since he collected and published at the end of the *Sentimental Journey* several selected letters and passages by Sterne, which were not known in France.<sup>5</sup>

The source is once again a review in the *Journal encyclopédique*, published in August 1786, and once again the article is much longer than the one that appeared in Venice.<sup>6</sup> The French review contains some information about a series of translations of Sterne's novel published in France at that time, offering comments and some details about their quality, deemed as not excellent. The Italian journalist expresses quite a sharp judgement about the translations in the first paragraph, but only evidencing it with general and brief considerations. His conclusion is also very brief, with the acknowledgement that an enigmatic 'Mr D. L. B.' is the translator to be preferred. The Italian readership is not provided with further explanation or contextualization: sometimes, the process of reception of foreign culture was building on laconic information. This example provides us with a glimpse of a characteristic pattern in the editorial strategies behind the Venetian reception of English novels: the quantity of the news imported from France was deemed more important than its accuracy and quality. The Italian article, in fact, looks more like a review of the French review than an informative piece in its own right: 'si discute' ['it is discussed'] shows that the attitude of the journalist towards the source is passive, aimed at summarizing rather than actually contextualizing the content to be later delivered in Italy. It gives an account of what was going on in France, but it does not provide the same apparatus that was available for the French readership.

Another example of how the sources were acknowledged is a review that appeared anonymously in *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico*, in November 1788, of *Edward and Sophia. A Novel by a Lady*. The text reads as follows: '*Edouard, ec. Odoardo e Sofia, Romanzo tradotto*

5 'Fin, ec. Conclusione della Notizia su lo spirito e le Opere di Mons. Sterne. Codesto strano Autore, che pur piace e seduce anche i non istrani, ha avuto la disgrazia d'aver tre traduttori, che si sono prese libertà imperdonabili alterando, e troncando tratto tratto il di lui testo. Si discute in questo scritto qual sia quello che l'ha storpiato più. Uno però de' tre traduttori, il Sig. D. L. B., merita d'essere preferito, perchè ha raccolto e pubblicato in fine *Viaggio Sentimentale* molte lettere scelte e frammenti di Sterne, che non erano conosciuti in Francia.' [Anon.], 'Fin, ec. Conclusione della Notizia su lo spirito e le Opere di Mons. Sterne', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (October 1786), 92.

6 [Anon.], 'Fin de la Notice adressée aux memes sur l'esprit & les ouvrages de Sterne', *Journal encyclopédique* (August 1786), 134–42.

*dall'Inglese*. 2 vol. in 12. Parigi presso Desenne 1788. vale 3 lire di Fr. Vien lodato anche questo. Noi non lo abbiamo veduto.' [*Edouard, etc. Edward and Sophia, Novel translated from English*. 2 vols. in-12. Paris, Desenne 1788. Worth 3 French liras. This one is also praised. We have not seen it.]<sup>7</sup>

The source review was published in the *Journal encyclopédique* in September 1788 and is significantly longer:

*Edouard and Sophie*, novel translated from English. 2 volumes in-12. In Paris, at Desenne's. 1788. (Price, 3 pounds). 'To give the excerpt of a novel,' (it is said in a printed notice which we have just received) 'is to deprive the reader of the pleasure of the surprise always caused by well-organized events, and to deprive him of the attraction of discovering the escapes and the result is, finally, to instruct him in the aspects he must ignore to enjoy reading these kinds of works with a complete interest.'

'We will content ourselves, to announce this one, to say that the translator, struck by the truth of the characters, the plausibility of the interesting anecdotes that the novel contains, of the inevitability of the denouement, took care to make the length of the original work disappear, which would have been able to soften the interest, and gave him the rapidity which one likes to find in these sorts of readings. Lastly, the moral object which we perceive in this novel is filled with events which are attached, and make us love the virtuous characters, and detest those who have so many vices they become ridiculous.'<sup>8</sup>

It is evident that the first paragraph of the French review is completely overlooked (even if, as we saw earlier, the tendency to give excerpts and syntheses of the novels was not appreciated by Italian journalists themselves), and that the second is summarized with a laconic 'this one is also praised', without giving any of the information contained in the original text. However, the Italian journalist declares that they did not have the chance to see the novel, so the French are completely 'responsible' for what the Italians say about it. The attitude of the journal is, in this case, rather passive or, at least, neutral: without the possibility of building a personal opinion, the journalist opts to report the news without adding any unverifiable details. This editorial strategy has important consequences and repercussions: the journals directed by Caminer Turra were divulging information about an important phenomenon concerning foreign culture and literature, but without any articulated, specific input other than the manipulation of pre-existing material, the French source reviews, on which the Venetian editorship was depending almost entirely for the introduction of news coming from abroad.

7 [Anon.], 'Edouard, ec. Odoardo e Sofia, Romanzo tradotto dall'Inglese', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (November 1788), 124.

8 'Edouard et Sophie, roman traduit de l'anglois. 2 volumes in-12. A Paris, chez Desenne. 1788. (Prix, 3 livres). "Donner l'extrait d'un roman, (dit-on dans un avis imprimé que nous venons de recevoir) c'est ôter au lecteur le plaisir de la surprise que causent toujours des événemens bien tissus, c'est le priver de l'attrait qu'on trouve à en deviner les suites & les résultats, c'est enfin l'instruire de ce qu'il doit ignorer pour lire avec un intérêt complet ces sortes d'ouvrages".

"Nous nous contenterons, pour annoncer celui-ci, de dire que le traducteur, frappé de la vérité des caractères, de la vraisemblance des anecdotes intéressantes qui le composent, du naturel de son dénouement, a eu soin de faire disparaître les longueurs de l'original qui auroient pu assouiblir l'intérêt, & lui a donné la rapidité qu'on aime à trouver dans ces sortes de lectures. Enfin le but moral qu'on aperçoit dans ce roman, y est rempli par des événemens qui attachent, en faisant aimer les personnages vertueux, & détester ceux qui réunissent autant de vices que de ridicules". [Anon.], 'Edouard et Sophie, roman traduit de l'anglois', *Journal encyclopédique* (September 1788), 538.

### Small Omissions, Big Differences

In many cases, the process of cultural mediation in the *Giornale enciclopedico* is very straightforward, almost 'lazy'. Once a portion of the source review is deemed to have enough interesting information about the novel, it is copied in the Italian journal without any significant changes. This happened particularly with topical parts of the articles such as the *incipit* or the *explicit*. More interesting, however, for the history of the reception of the English novel are the omissions. Let us look at some examples of this trend. The *Giornale enciclopedico* published the following review of Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* in September 1775:

*L'Homme sensible. The Man of Feeling*; translated from English. Paris, Pissot 1575 [sic]. The author is Mr Brrok [sic], also known for other novels. The translator is Mr S. Ange, who has also translated some extracts from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>9</sup>

The source review was published in *Journal encyclopédique* in April 1775, and it was substantially longer, consisting of nine pages. As we can see from the following excerpt, the beginning was copied meticulously by the Venetian journal:

*L'Homme sensible, traduit de l'anglois. A Paris, chez Pissot. 1775. L'Auteur de cet ouvrage est M. Brook, connu en Angleterre par quelques romans. Le traducteur est M. de St. Ange, jeune homme connu avantageusement par la traduction de quelques morceaux des Métamorphoses d'Ovide.*<sup>10</sup>

First of all, it should be noted that the French journal made a mistake attributing the novel to Henry Brooke, as suggested already by Pierre M. Conlon.<sup>11</sup> The same identification mistake with *The Man of Feeling* was made in *Giornale enciclopedico* in May 1775:

*L'homme, & la femme, ec.* The man and the woman of feeling; translated from the English; London 1775. and available in Paris from Le Jay, 2 parts in-12. The Author is guaranteed to be Mr Brook, famous writer of Novels: and the present one is very pleasant, and interesting.<sup>12</sup>

The wrong author is described as a celebrated novelist: this is an example of how sometimes the cultural mediation was building on misunderstandings and mistakes, which, most of the time, were not amended by the Italian journalists, who did not have the instruments or the interest to verify the reliability of the French sources. The readership was therefore led in building an idea about English novels and authors based on erroneous assumptions. In its early steps as cultural mediators, periodicals were sometimes conveying confusing or misleading information, which the readership could

9 *L'Homme sensible. L'Uomo sensibile*; tradotto dall'Inglese. Parigi presso Pissot 1575 [sic]. L'Aut. è il Sig. Brrok [sic] noto per altri suoi romanzi. Il Traduttore è il Sig. di S. Ange, da cui sono stati tradotti anche alcuni pezzi delle Metamorfosi d'Ovidio.' [Anon.], 'L'Homme sensible. L'Uomo sensibile', *Giornale enciclopedico* (September 1775), 133.

10 [Anon.], 'L'Homme sensible, traduit de l'anglois', *Journal encyclopédique* (April 1775), 282-90 (p. 282).

11 Pierre M. Conlon, *Le siècle des Lumières: Bibliographie chronologique, Volume 17:1773-1775* (Genève: Droz, 1997), p. 499.

12 *L'homme, & la femme, ec.* L'uomo, e la femmina sensibili; tradotto dall'Inglese; Londra 1775. e si trova a Parigi presso Le Jay, 2 parti in 12. S'assicura che l'Autore è il S. Brook cel. scrittore di Romanzi: ed il presente è molto piacevole, e interessante.' [Anon.], 'L'homme, & la femme, ec', *Giornale enciclopedico* (May 1775), 132.

hardly verify. Only at the beginning of the nineteenth century did Italian journalism begin to be more independent and 'careful' about its sources.

The Venetian journalist did not investigate the accuracy of the French text, but passively imported the information containing the erroneous attribution. This is a significant example of how cultural mediation worked sometimes between the two or, on other occasions, three countries: the Venetian readership was introduced to the English novels through a process of absorption that at times was not really mediated, but rather 'osmotic'. People could indeed form an opinion about the novels by reading the journals, but it was inevitably 'partial' in relation to the amount of information available in the original source. In the specific case of the September 1775 review of *The Man of Feeling*, the Italian article omits two important parts of the French one: first, a rather long disquisition about the novel as a genre, a topic that neither the Italian public nor the actual journalist was entirely familiar with; second, the pages containing the plot summary are completely skipped, leaving the readers with no precise information on the storyline and the characters involved. The Venetian journalist had the opportunity to introduce readers to a more complete description of the publication (copying would have sufficed!), but decided not to. It is difficult to determine the reasons behind this editorial approach: it could very simply be for practical (less space in the journal) as well as ideological reasons (the reviews were deliberately shortened because they were considered less important than other news).

When tracing a history of the reception of English novels through the press, what matters is that the Italian readership of the time was sometimes introduced to them in quite an enigmatic way. Unlike the French readers, who could access the publications more easily and take advantage of more detailed reviews, engaging with the novels also from a critical point of view, Italian readers had to make an extra effort to interest themselves in the novels whose publication was announced. This trend, of course, has enormous implications: the definition and rise of the novel as a genre was neither an easy process to follow nor linear. Venetian and Italian readers at large accessed novels coming from England through a much thinner version of the critical apparatus that mediated these texts in the French press: the information was taken from the French source but often de-contextualized, with the result that the subjects must have been perceived as rather mysterious on many occasions, even if the cultural mediators actually had more articulated and detailed sources available to them.

Another interesting example of this pattern can be found in the *Giornale enciclopedico* for May 1776. The subject of the review is a translation of *The History of Miss Lucinda Courtney*, published by an anonymous author in 1764. The text reads as follows: '*Histoire, ec. Istoria di Miss Lucinda Courtney tratta dall'Inglese*. Londra, e si trova a Parigi presso Moutard 1775. Questo romanzo è scritto in uno stile naturale, ma qualche volta un poco negletto.' [*Histoire, etc. The History of Miss Lucinda Courtney*, translated from English, London, available in Paris from Moutard 1775. This novel is written in a natural style, though shabby at times.]<sup>13</sup> The source review appeared in the *Journal encyclopédique* in December 1775. In a similar vein to the previous example, it is not much longer, consisting of just one page. The first part of the text, entirely omitted by the Italian journalist, gives details about the plot and the characters. Once again, this information is not considered important by the Italian journalist and is entirely lost in the migration to the *Giornale enciclopedico*. The last paragraph is the one that 'survived', but with some interesting modifications. The 'selected' passage reads as follows: 'Ce romans [*sic*] a quelques détails piquans [*sic*], et peut être trop de ce qu'on trouve dans

13 [Anon.], '*Histoire, ec. Istoria di Miss Lucinda Courtney tratta dall'Inglese*', *Giornale enciclopedico* (May 1775), 135.

toutes les productions de ce genre; le style en est naturel, mais quelques fois un peu négligé.' ['This novel has some piquant details, and maybe too much of what we find in every work produced in this genre. The style is natural, but sometimes a bit shabby.']<sup>14</sup> In this case, there is room for a more accurate assumption regarding why the Italian journalist decided to omit some of the lines of the selected passage. First of all, speaking about 'piquant details' was probably perceived as inappropriate for the public, as content that would have conflicted with the moral values of the Italian readership, even in the comparatively free Venetian environment. Secondly, the Italian public was probably not ready to think about the English novel in terms of a wide cultural phenomenon, nor even capable of doing so. When the French journalist writes of 'what we find in every work produced in this genre', the Italian reader may have struggled to fully understand the meaning of such an affirmation, with all the intertextual implications deriving from the conceptualization of the novel as a genre. As previously noted, cultural awareness of the English novel in Italy, and literary reflection about it, was still in its early stages. Thus, a sentence such as the one highlighted here may have been hard to understand. In other words, the journalist may have omitted the reference to the novel as a genre because they realized that it would have been difficult to adapt such content for the target audience.

## Gender Issues

I turn now to consider some examples of how the reviews were introduced to the Italian readership after a deeper and wider manipulation, which led sometimes to some misunderstandings concerning the role of women in society and in the intellectual community. In February 1787, the *Journal encyclopédique* published a very long review (eight pages) of the novel *Maria*, by Elizabeth Blower, in its French translation *Maria, ou Lettres d'un gentilhomme anglais à une religieuse, traduit de l'anglois*. The judgement is not positive, as can be seen from the very first paragraph: 'Si ce ouvrage est vraiment une production angloise, l'auteur n'as pas donné a son compatriote, M. Croli, le plus beau role à jouer.' ['If this work is really an English production, the author did not give to his compatriot, Mr Croli, the most beautiful role to play.']<sup>15</sup> The journalist then explains the plot of the novel, providing from time to time some personal remarks on the poor quality of the story. Two months later, the *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* published a much shorter review of the same novel, adapting the French content for the Italian readership. The judgement in this case is much sharper than the first one. The novel is defined as a 'romanzetto di poco edificante condotta e di men lieto fine' ['novette of a poorly edifying conduct, with an even less happy ending'], filled with characters whose behaviour is unworthy ('indegnamente'), and whose brains deserve to be burnt ('cervello ch'era degnissimo d'esser bruciato').<sup>16</sup> Whereas the Italian journalist goes deeper into the moral judgement of the novel, there is no such harshness in the French review, which indulges more in the content and its weakness. This is most obvious in the conclusion of the review, an original section added by the Italian journalist that is completely absent in the French: 'Maria ha servito di titolo a varie produzioni Letterarie, e chi sa quanto dovrà servirne ancora; ma codesto romanzo non è degno di portare un così bel nome.'<sup>17</sup> ['The name of Maria has served as the title for several literary works

14 [Anon.], 'Histoire de Miss Lucinde Courtney', *Journal encyclopédique* (December 1775), 545.

15 [Anon.], 'Maria, ou Lettres d'un gentilhomme anglais à une religieuse, traduit de l'anglois', *Journal encyclopédique* (February 1787), 72–80 (p. 72).

16 [Anon.], 'Maria, o sia Lettere d'un Gentiluomo Inglese, e d'una Monaca', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (May 1787), 76.

17 Ibid.

produced, and who knows how many more it will serve; but this novel is not worth bearing such a beautiful name.’] Such a beautiful name as Maria should not belong to a licentious, negative character. The reference to the Holy Mary is clear: giving her name to a totally unworthy woman is almost blasphemous.

It is impossible to determine if the Italian reviewer actually read the novel, or if they simply adapted the information obtained from the French review. In any case, what matters for understanding how the readership was influenced by the review is the role that Catholic morality played in the reception of English novels. In this particular case, the grounding of ethics is conveyed starting from a very simple fact, the name of the character, which foregrounds how far from moral orthodoxy the novel’s contents were to be located. It is no surprise that a remark like this one appeared in a journal led by Caminer Turra, who was openly against the interferences of the Church in matters of politics and education, and whose editorial policies involved measures and actions to oppose those interferences.<sup>18</sup> Still, Caminer Turra never wanted to ‘violently’ part ways with the Church, and her audience remained predominantly Catholic: the unorthodox content of the novel in question was apparently too extreme even for her progressive editorship.<sup>19</sup>

The example suggests that the questioning of social hierarchies in the English novel, its examination of moral ambiguity, its interplay of gender roles, and its scrutiny of the ethical, religious, and psychological foundations of social norms were in fact more shocking to the Italian cultural milieu than, for example, the clichéd ‘moral looseness’ of French literature, whose dissemination had been structural in the construction of the eighteenth-century social fabric. The controversial nature of English novels started a debate on their moral values, which in Italy was carried on under specific circumstances, the Catholic groundings of ethics and the predominance of Cartesian thought in philosophy of knowledge and psychology.

Although French was a language that Caminer Turra and her editorial team knew fairly well, the risk of divulging misunderstandings was always a concrete threat. This is the case in a review published by the *Giornale enciclopedico* in May 1775 concerning the novel *The Married Victim: Or the History of Lady Villars*. The text of the review reads as follows:

*Le Victime* etc. The Married Victim, or, the History of Lady Villars, translated from English; from Mr A, in London, 1775, and available in Paris from Merigot, 2 parts in-12. This novel, whose basis is rather mediocre, offers an appalling picture of all the ills that a bad wife can cause.<sup>20</sup>

The French review at the base of the Italian one was published in March 1775 in the *Journal des beaux-arts et des sciences*:

18 See in this regard the studies by Sama and Liuccio listed in note 1.

19 Caminer Turra was the object, during her lifetime (and even after her death), of gossip and slander, due to her intellectual independence and her strong opinions. Her ideas regarding the role of the Church, for example, led her to be accused of jeering religion and moral orthodoxy. Some nineteenth-century biographers tried to explain her death, due almost surely to breast cancer, with some imaginative tales. Bartolommeo Gamba, for example, depicts her as a quite curious, restless, and unhappy woman, too keen on leaving female occupations to pursue male, literary interests. He also narrates that the tumour was caused by the punch she received from a drunken soldier, confirming that rumours were circulating about her unruly behaviour. See Bartolommeo Gamba, *Alcuni ritratti di donne illustri delle provincie veneziane* (Milano: Silvestri, 1827), p. 336.

20 ‘*Le Victime* ec. La Vittima maritata, o Istoria di Lady Villars, tradotta dall’Inglese; dal S. A., A Londra 1775, e si trova a Parigi presso Merigot, 2 parti in 12. Questo Romanzo, il cui fondo è mediocre, presenta una pittura spaventevole di tutti i mali, che una cattiva femmina può cagionare.’ [Anon.], ‘*Le Victime* ec. La Vittima maritata, o Istoria di Lady Villars’, *Giornale enciclopedico* (May 1775), 130.

*The Married Victim, or History of Lady Villars, translated from English, by Mr A., two parts. in-12.* In London; and in Paris, at Mérigot the young, quai des Augustins, 1775. A wicked mother, a father tender but weak and dominated by the ascendancy of his wife, compel their daughter to marry a man she hates, and whom she has every reason to detest, and to renounce the most amiable of men, who at last dies at the hand of the jealous. This death leads to that of the unfortunate woman, whose father perished with grief before her. This novel offers a picture of the misfortunes that a wicked woman may cause.<sup>21</sup>

It is evident that the Italian journalist took only the last part of the original article. The differences between the two reviews and the excluded material occasion some fascinating consequences. First, there is no trace in the French review of a judgement on the value of the novel: the Italian journalist writes autonomously about a 'mediocre basis'. Second, in the Italian version there is a mistake with the article in the novel's title, which is male (*le*) instead of female (*la*). An Italian reader who learned of this novel for the first time would not have necessarily realized it was an error, and could have been misled into thinking that the victim was a man, and not a woman. Even more interestingly, the body of the review seems to contain some kind of misogynistic information, since it explains how the novel in question deals with the topic of bad wives and the troubles that may arise from them. Conjugating the title and the information conveyed by this review, a reader was directed to think that this novel coming from England told an appalling ('spaventevole') story in which a poor man was mistreated by a mean woman. The 'cattiva femmina' becomes the negative protagonist of the book, and it seems like the male character is, precisely, her victim.

In the original review, the content was very different. As explained at the beginning of the foreign article, the real victim is in fact a young woman who is forced into an arranged marriage with a man she does not like. There is, it is true, a bad female character, namely the mother who imposed the wedding. But it is quite clear that the omission of the first part of the French review by the Italian journalist causes a twist in the meaning of the novel. The information that reached the Italian audience was wrong, and it conveyed totally different values. There is no reference to the pain of the young woman, nor to the love of the tender father (who is too weak to go against his wife and will eventually die from sadness — we are far from the stereotype of the powerful patriarch). There is also no mention of the tragic epilogue, with a murder and the death of the real lovers. It is hard to tell if the omission was deliberate, or if it was an accident and the journalist did not realize the twist he had caused (we can maybe infer that the journalist was male from the way he speaks about the protagonist). In my opinion, there was no 'forbidden' content to be censored, not even the weakness of the father, so it might have been a simple mistake. What matters the most, in any case, is to see how Italian readers could respond to that review and what opinions they could form about the novelty coming from England through France. Even without pushing the interpretation too far, it appears clear that the content of the novel, deemed as mediocre, was not in favour of women. The perspective is rather chauvinistic; let

21 *'La Victime mariée, ou Histoire de Lady Villars, traduite de l'Anglais, par M. A., deux part. in-12.* A Londres ; & se trouve à Paris, chez Mérigot le jeune, quai des Augustins, 1775. Une méchante mère, un père tendre, mais foible & dominé par l'ascendant de sa femme, obligent leur fille à épouser un homme qu'elle déteste, & qu'elle a tout lieu de détester, & à renoncer au plus aimable des hommes, qui enfin meurt de la main du jaloux. Cette mort entraîne celle de l'infortunée, dont le père a péri de chagrin avant elle. Ce Roman offre le tableau des malheurs dont une méchante femme peut être cause.' [Anon.], *'La Victime mariée, ou Histoire de Lady Villars', Journal des beaux-arts et des sciences* (March 1775), 528–29.

us not forget that the French 'femme' might be translated as 'wife', even if the Italian journalist chose to be quite literal. The article, whose goal seems once again dictated by a pedagogical editorial strategy, deals with the problems that a woman can cause to a man in a marriage, excluding any possibility of reciprocity.

### Acknowledging Women Writers

Despite the progressive views Elisabetta Caminer Turra was trying to encourage through her journals, which included the attempt to empower women and to recognize their rights to a proper education, the process towards these goals was not clear-cut nor completely linear. The topic of the English novel, in which the gender dimension plays a decisive role, is unquestionably an interesting test case in this regard. Parmegiani has already shown how the Venetian press was open to and very enthusiastic about many of the popular novels being written by women, who were considered able to depict feelings and sentiments better than men.<sup>22</sup>

However, in those very same journals it is possible to find examples of different attitudes towards women writers, such as this review, published in the *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* for November 1788, of Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline, the Orphan of the Castle*:

*L'orpheline, etc. The Orphan of the Castle*, by Charlotte Smith; translation from the English based upon the third edition. 4 vols. in-12. Paris c/o Buisson. It is said that this novel can be compared with the works of Richardson and Fielding; it is like saying as much as one possibly can about it.<sup>23</sup>

The review is taken from a longer article published in the *Journal encyclopédique* in September 1788: 'viene asserito' ['it is said'] immediately clarifies the debt to a source review. But in the French review, which also gave the readers many more details about the plot and the characters, the opening passage that is copied by the Italian was different:

If the enthusiasm which this work has excited in its novelty, if three editions in a few months can guarantee its merit, we believe that it can go hand in hand with the immortal works of Richardson, Fielding & Miss Burney.<sup>24</sup>

As we can see, to prove the value of Charlotte Smith's novel, a comparison with three great authors is established. The Italian journalist adopts the same strategy, but omits the name of the only female writer used by the French as a term of comparison. Why does the name of Miss Burney disappear in the migration from the French to the Italian journal? Only a year before, a French translation of Burney's novel *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* was reviewed in *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico*, which took inspiration from the *Journal encyclopédique*, but changed the goal of the review towards a deeper appreciation of the success of a female writer.<sup>25</sup> Parmegiani already pointed out that

22 Parmegiani, p. 3.

23 '*L'Orpheline, ec. L'Orfana del Castello*, di Carlotta Smith; tradotta dall'Inglese su la terza edizione. 4 voll. in 12. Parigi c/o Buisson. Viene asserito che questo Romanzo puo' andar del pari con quelli di Richardson e di Fielding; gli e' dire il piu' possibile.' [Anon.], '*L'Orpheline, ec. L'Orfana del Castello*, di Carlotta Smith', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (November 1788), 124.

24 'Si l'enthousiasme que cet ouvrage a excité dans sa nouveauté, si trois éditions épuisées en quelques mois peuvent être garans de son mérite, nous croyons qu'il peut aller de pair avec les ouvrages immortels de Richardson, Fielding & Miss Burney.' [Anon.], '*L'orpheline du chateau*', *Journal encyclopédique* (September 1788), 537-38 (p. 537).

25 [Anon.], '*Cecilia, o sia, Memorie d'una giovane erede*', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (July 1784), pp. 99-100 and [Anon.], '*Cecilia, ou Mémoires d'une héritière*', *Journal encyclopédique* (July 1784), 262-78.

[a]lthough the plot summary that formed the greatest portion of the *Journal Encyclopédique's* review was absent in the Italian periodical, the French journalist's remarks on the poor translation of the novel were echoed by the Italian journalist. There was also no mention of the main issue explored in the French article, which elaborated on the fundamental difference between the French and the English in matters of literary taste. Such difference — stated the *Journal Encyclopédique* — was derived from differing educations and risked impeding the appreciation of Frances Burney's novel among French readers. Alternatively, the Italian announcement exuded pride for a great achievement on the part of a woman [...]. A new identity was brought to the fore, and Frances Burney's novel acquired the status of a gendered object on both the producing and the receiving end of the creative process.<sup>26</sup>

In the light of these considerations, it appears rather strange that a year later Frances Burney was excluded by the Italian journalist in the adaptation of the original French review. It is certainly hard to tell the reasons behind this omission. Perhaps Burney was not yet famous in Italy (despite seven editions of her novel in France), or perhaps as a female writer she was perceived as not being worthy enough to represent the genre to the same extent as the other two 'big names' mentioned (and if so: was it the idea of the journalist, or just a *captatio benevolentiae* towards the public?). In any case, the consequence is that the Italian readers were precluded from associating her name with those of Fielding and Richardson, and from perceiving a woman writer as meriting a place among the most successful and well-known novelists. What can seem a harmless omission might in fact result in interesting consequences: what is basically claimed in the review is that Charlotte Smith's novel is good because it can be compared to those masterpieces written by Fielding and Richardson. The reader was led to think that a woman writer was just as capable of creating literature as men, but men were the higher term of comparison, thus implying a sort of mismatch between the genders.

Another (minor) occurrence of this 'phenomenon' can be found some years later in the *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* for May 1787. The subject of this review is a collection of books written by English authors and including novels:

*Collection, etc. Collection of the Best English Authors, in English, on offer for the subscribers at a lower price than that of English Books in London.* Paris, available from Pissot Bookseller. Each volume of this interesting collection will only cost the subscribers two French liras and a half, with rustic binding; the format will be in-12; some English intellectuals are in charge of the editing; to give an idea of the selection of included Works, it will suffice to mention Hume, Ferguson, Gibbons, Robertson, Bolingbrooche, Addison [*sic*], Locke, Milton, Pope, Richardson, Fielding and many other celebrated authors, whose most important writings will be inserted in this precious collection.<sup>27</sup>

26 Parmegiani, p. 3.

27 'Collection, ec. Collezione dei migliori Autori Inglesi, in Inglese, proposta per associazione a minor prezzo che non costano i Libri Inglesi a Londra. Parigi presso Pissot Librajo. Ogni Volume di questa interessante Collezione costerà agli Associati solamente due lire e mezza di Francia legato alla rustica; la forma sarà in 12; presederanno alla correzione dei dotti Inglesi; per dar un'idea della scelta delle Opere compresevi basterà nominare Hume, Ferguson, Gibbons, Robertson, Bolingbrooche, Addison, Locke, Milton, Pope, Richardson, Fielding e tanti altri Autori illustri, le principali produzioni de' quali saranno inserite in questa raccolta preziosa.' [Anon.], 'Collection, ec. Collezione dei migliori Autori Inglesi', *Nuovo giornale enciclopedico* (May 1787), 120–21. This French collection is *Collection des meilleurs Auteurs Anglois, en Anglais; proposée par souscription à un prix plus modique que ne coûtent les Livres Anglois à Londres* (Paris: Pissot, Libraire, quai des Augustins, 1787).

The original review that appeared in the *Journal encyclopédique* was completed by a longer list of the authors included in the collection. Frances Burney's name appears in the French list with two novels, *Cecilia* and *Evelina*, the same number as Fielding (*Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*) and more than Defoe, Swift, and Goldsmith.<sup>28</sup> In the Italian list Frances Burney's name does not appear. Since the volume was listed towards the end of the inventory, probably the Italian journalist decided to cut it short and not include the last names: for instance, Sterne's name is also excluded. But Burney's exclusion is complicated by the fact that the Italian reviews speak about 'tanti altri Autori illustri' ['many more famous Authors']. There is no reference to the fact that the collection included works from female writers. Once again, it cannot be established with certainty if this exclusion was intentional. But from a reader's perspective, it is nonetheless quite meaningful: the audience was again precluded from easily discovering (the information was in the French journal!) that a female author was included in a list of 'prestigious' British authors, who were considered *exempla* of the literature coming from England. In fact, the Italian readers may have concluded that the collection only contained works composed by male authors. While in France Burney was already accepted as part of the canonical authors for the genre, in Italy public opinion had not yet matured.

## Conclusion

This brief survey has allowed me to point out how some of the editorial strategies adopted by Elisabetta Caminer Turra and her entourage in the journals she directed impacted the process of reception of the English novel through articles and reviews. Evidently, French journals played a key role as a source of information for reviews, articles, and announcements concerning the novels. The Venetian journalists working in Caminer Turra's editorial team acknowledged and relied on them as the main point of reference for learning and importing news about English culture. As I have demonstrated, only a few of the articles taken by the Venetian journals from the French were 'copied and pasted'. The others went through a process of censorship, adaptation, and modification in order to be understood and received in Italy. The cases I have analysed demonstrate that as an editor Caminer Turra was precociously receptive towards the English novel as a revolutionary literary genre, confirming the progressive imprint that she gave to her initiative.

However, the editorial strategies I have described show that this process of intercultural reception and mediation was not entirely linear. First, the conceptualization of the novel as a gendered object since its birth was creating more than one cause for concern for the journalists. Even if they showed an early appreciation for women writers, they had to face a gender dimension that represented something completely new for the Italian milieu. As I have demonstrated above, women writers were acknowledged, but they were also almost always perceived as the weak part in comparison with their male colleagues, despite their growing authority in this genre. In this respect, it should be pointed out that much of the editing done by Venetian journalists on the French source reviews was justified by the impossibility for the Italian audience to understand the British social class system, with its habits and rituals, being immersed in a radically different context. Beyond the impossibility, or the difficulty, in understanding a radically different social environment, there was also an element of prudence: sometimes Caminer Turra and the Venetian journalists did not know the subjects very well, or deemed them unorthodox, and opted for simply introducing the news of a publication of a new novel or a translation, rather than indulging in long comments and remarks. However, as we

28 [Anon.], 'Collection des meilleurs Auteurs Anglois', *Journal encyclopédique* (March 1787), 362–67.

have seen, this was not the case when the French source review concerned an established author: in these circumstances the Italian journalists felt free to create original articles by adding independent judgements and remarks. For the new authors, and for women in particular, public opinion was not yet mature enough to venture down unsure paths.

This uncertainty is mirrored by the choice of linguistic code: the Venetian journalists still could not fully grasp and conceptualize the idea of the novel as a genre, therefore even the lexicon to talk about it had, in its way, to be created. Overall, on many occasions the French reviews were simply sectioned and only some parts were transmitted, especially beginnings or endings: an example of how sometimes the news was transmitted 'passively', almost by osmosis, without building on a real communication strategy, but mostly taking care of the quantity of news, and not so much the quality. This made the information extremely laconic and de-contextualized with respect to the sources, and could give rise to misunderstandings. As a result of these editorial strategies, the Italian public was introduced to the novels in a different way from the French one. French readers benefited from the greater number of novels that could be used in translation and from the critical insights conveyed by the periodical press — critical insights that were precluded to the Italian cultural milieu, still a little delayed in the conceptualization and full understanding of the genre.

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