

Preface

This volume and the conference which led to it are the result of a research project about the Feltre theatre administration, repertoire and machinery in the nineteenth century funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation SNSF and located at the Bern Academy of the Arts HKB.¹ Its research team consists of the three editors of the present volume.

The project investigates the practices² of Feltre's Teatro Sociale during the nineteenth century from three different angles:

1. The organisation and operation of the theatre is traced and situated in its socio-historical context, taking into consideration its network of stakeholders with their forms of communication.
2. Theatre forms and performance practices are analysed within this network, and their significance for the theatre as a societal institution is assessed.
3. The original stage materials are investigated within the context of their conception, manufacture and utilisation, and the significance of scenographic developments in the practices of provincial theatres is explored.

This transdisciplinary study about the Feltre theatre aims to re-evaluate practices of (Northern Italian) provincial theatres and their socio-historical role in the nineteenth century.

The first conference of this project invited international researchers from various disciplines to contribute to a broader understanding of provincial-theatre practices.³ The papers on the socio-cultural practices, repertoire, stakeholders and spaces of provincial theatres allowed the project group to situate their hypotheses in a larger context and to compare the situation in Feltre to a variety of theatres in different towns on the Italian peninsula and within the Habsburg Empire. The present publication is based on this conference and constituted by the outcome of these exchanges.

¹ See Institut Interpretation, *Italian Provincial Theatre and the Risorgimento. The Organisation, Repertoire and Original Scenic Materials of Feltre's Teatro Sociale (1797–1866)*, online under www.hkb-interpretation.ch/projekte/feltre-e (15/04/2023).

² By 'practices' we mean forms of activity organised around shared practical understandings that were sustained through interaction and mutual adjustment. Their repetition may (re-) constitute or deconstruct behavioural norms. Cfr. Theodore R. Schatzki, Introduction. Practice Theory, in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed. by Theodore R. Schatzki/Karin Knorr-Cetina/Eike von Savigny, London/New York 2001, pp. 10–23, here pp. 11, 15; Barry Barnes, Practice as Collective Action, in *ibid.*, pp. 25–36, here p. 31.

³ See Institut Interpretation, *Provincial theatres in the Risorgimento*, online under www.hkb-interpretation.ch/feltre (15/04/2023).

Contributions

The introduction takes Feltre as a point of reference for opening the examination of the field of study, presenting the subject in light of the most recent historiography. After describing the state of research on provincial theatres, the introduction examines the vicissitudes of the theatre of Feltre, analysing the characteristics, administration and management of the theatre, the spaces and material conditions, the figures involved (actors, musicians, impresarios, amateurs, backstage workers, audience), the repertoires and the theatrical genres.

Thereafter, the volume is organised in three chapters, each of which approaches provincial theatres from a different perspective. The first chapter deals with specific case studies that reflect local realities, allowing us to understand the different aspects of theatres in the provinces. The second chapter takes a closer look at the performances in provincial theatres, allowing us to analyse what they reveal about both actors and the audience. Finally, in the third chapter, the volume considers Feltre's original stage material, which is a rare case of well-preserved historical artefacts that opens up new perspectives for research, especially with respect to the visual aspects and the material conditions of performances in provincial theatres.

Local theatre history

In the nineteenth century, the theatre was the centre of community life in small provincial towns. In this sense, an understanding of theatrical practices can reveal the particularities and similarities of different local situations. In this chapter, based on specific theatres, different approaches to research have been developed according to the available sources in order to examine various aspects of theatrical life in provincial towns on the Italian peninsula and in the Habsburg Empire during the nineteenth century.

Using a wealth of archival accounting and administrative documentation, Matteo Paoletti's article focuses on the analysis of the economic activities of Savona's Teatro Chiabrera during the post-unification period. It highlights the importance of economic sources in better describing economic vicissitudes in the theatrical world and in investigating the production methods and cultural consumption of a peripheral theatre. These documents make it possible to observe the dynamics of both demand and programming for opera and drama, providing an insight into cultural consumption during the nineteenth century.

Antonio Carlini emphasises the function of the theatre as a mirror of local reality, which is reflected at various levels: in its calendar, which coincides with iconic events of the city; through the intertwining of theatrical activity with the creative activities of local artists (choirs, civic brass band, travelling musicians); and the public's reactions to theatrical events.

Taking the theatre of Feltre as an example, Giulia Brunello's article focuses on the development of the provincial theatre, highlighting the link between theatre management, municipal pride and symbolic competition with other urban centres. The contribution delves into some aspects of theatre administration related to economic activity, the importance of 'decorum' and the musical trends that spread from the main centres to smaller towns. Finally, the article investigates the composition of the audience, their expectations, tastes and reactions to theatrical events.

Rossella Bonfatti's contribution compares two provincial theatres in central Italy, the Teatro dei Rozzi (Siena) and the Teatro dell'Aquila (Fermo) and examines their civic and artistic spaces. It particularly reflects the Italian historico-political climate in the context of the revolutionary uprisings of the first half of the nineteenth century; one of the theatres, the so called 'teatro dei conflitti', shows the drama of the Risorgimento together with a staging of rivalry between towns; the other one affirms the political status quo in the midst of the unification process, offering pleasure and public visibility to a local aristocratic community in search of public legitimacy.

Federica Fanizza's article traces the heretofore unknown history of the theatre of Riva del Garda during the second half of the nineteenth century. On the initiative of a group of city notables, the construction of a new theatre began in 1858, which was then inaugurated in 1864. This contribution, enriched by a series of historical images, describes the history of the theatre and its civic function as a reflection of a local reality that rested largely upon the participation of local musicians and actors.

Patrick Aprent's article focuses on the travelling actor drawing upon a unique and as-yet-unexplored source: the diaries of actor, theatre director and manager Ignaz Siege, whose experiences serve as a paradigm of nineteenth-century provincial-theatre practice. Through an examination of the lives and work of a troupe of travelling actors in the provinces, this contribution sheds light on different forms of cultural mobility in the Habsburg Empire. The source reveals information about the life and work of theatre artists, how repertoire was adapted when plays were transferred from city centres to the provinces, and the great fluctuation and instability of the troupe's workforce.

Repertoire

This chapter focuses on the programming in provincial theatres, examining what the choice of repertoire reveals about theatrical life in the provinces, about the actors and singers, the audience and more generally about Italian society in the nineteenth century.

Paola Ranzini's article focuses on a fascinating and singular occasion: the staging of a drama based on an ongoing Risorgimento event in the provincial theatre

of Carmagnola, a small town in the neighbourhood of Torino, in 1848. This play, of which little is known of its author, illustrates topical events in an almost contemporaneous way. The article highlights the educational and opinion-forming functions of provincial theatres and investigates the criteria that governed the programming choices of a provincial theatre in connection with local realities.

Through rich selection of various unpublished sources (contracts with artists and impresarios, reports of performances, memoirs, etc.) and eighteenth-century publications, Nicolò Maccavino's article describes the vicissitudes of the theatre of Caltagirone, exploring its failures and successes as well as links to various stakeholders gravitating around the theatre (publishers, singers, musicians, et al.). Accompanied by an expansive selection of images, this contribution describes the repertoire of the theatre, the tastes of its audience and the habits and peculiarities of the city.

Through the repertoire of plays performed in Feltre, Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol's article addresses the presentation of two emotional states, love and pain, on a nineteenth-century provincial stage. Drawing on a big collection of sources, including fascinating treatises on recitation and mime, the author explores the idea of emotion on stage in this period, both in spoken drama (linked to the actor's theatrical interpretation and gestures) and in lyrical theatre, where emotion was also expressed directly through the voice and its inflections.

Annette Kappeler's article analyses the repertoire of the Feltre theatre in the nineteenth century, highlighting the diversity of performance types (opera, spoken theatre, concerts, acrobats, etc.) and exploring the extent to which the case in Feltre is representative of other provincial theatres. It also investigates the subjects dealt with by this repertoire, such as gender roles, mental health, the ability to write and read, and political uprising (successful or not) as well as the interdependence of these themes, which echoed the questions of contemporary social change circulating outside the theatre at that time.

Scenic Material

This chapter focuses on the visual components of provincial theatres. As the original material of theatres is often scarce or non-existent today, thus requiring the researcher to work with indirect sources, there remain many open questions in this field. The case of Feltre, which preserves both a historical curtain and some elements of scenery, is exceptional, which poses new challenges for research and also for restoration and conservation.

The subject of Rossella Bernasconi's contribution is the restoration of the curtain made originally for the theatre of Feltre in 1843 by Tranquillo Orsi and restored in 2019 by the author of the article. Being the only curtain preserved by this set designer, the artefact raises many questions about its re-utilisation, such as the problem of using a historical curtain in a modern theatre environment.

Following a material analysis of the theatre curtain, the article examines issues surrounding the conservation and the contemporary use of such an object.

Maria Ida Biggi's article illustrates how the transformations in stage design in the nineteenth century – new visual codes, changes in the modalities of show production, a new status of the stage designer, and new theatrical spaces – were reflected in provincial theatres. It also reveals the relationship between major and provincial theatres through examinations of both the work of renowned set designers such as Pietro Gonzaga, Alessandro Sanquirico, Giuseppe Borsato and Francesco Bagnara, whose activities were also carried out in provincial theatres, as well as through new means of mass-reproducing images.

Raphaël Bortolotti's article uses the sources available in Feltre (preserved sets, archival documents) to investigate the scenery in provincial theatres of the Venetian region. Through an understanding of the composition and function of sets within a provincial theatre, the author reflects on the conditions of representation, correlated in particular with the Italian theatrical system. This in turn establishes the relationship between various stakeholders associated with provincial theatres (patrons, audience, professional and local, amateur actors) and these objects of scenography.

We are very grateful to the SNSF for funding this publication; we also wish to thank Dalyn Cook for her proficient proofreading of the English texts and, last but not least, Daniel Allenbach for both his highly professional editing of the entire book and his compilation of the index.

It remains for us to wish all readers interesting insights into this wide spectrum of a hitherto largely overlooked historical practice.

The editors, spring 2023,

Giulia Brunello

Annette Kappeler

Raphaël Bortolotti

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ERGON VERLAG

Feltre's Teatro Sociale and the Role of Provincial Theatres in Italy and the Habsburg Empire during the Nineteenth Century

Edited by

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and Annette Kappeler

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