

Italian Opera, French Criticism, and English Letters: The Case of *Le Mercure de France* and Joseph Addison¹

Le Mercure de France has long been regarded as valuable source for the documentation of musical history. For students of Italian music, it is a particularly rich source of information about musical events in Venice. An index to notices about music in the *Mercure* was compiled in the nineteenth century.² In its early years *Le Mercure* frequently published the texts and occasionally the notated music for “airs that pleased the King.” It reported on the publication of substantial works on music theory and musical history. It sometimes carried polemical writings, such as Saint-Evremond’s “Discours . . . sur les opéra françois et italiens” (Février 1683). Between the late 1670s and the late 1720s writings about Venetian opera constitute the most extended musical commentaries in the *Mercure*.

A substantial item on the strengths and weaknesses of Venetian opera was published in the *Decembre 1724* issue of *Le Mercure*. Said to be “extracted from a letter written in Venice,” it is, like most writings in the issues of the 1720s, anonymous. Because the *Mercure* was published monthly, it is logical to assume that this anonymous letter had been written in recent weeks or, at the most, months—and in French. One would also presume that it describes recent events. Yet efforts to link the works discussed in this passage with those in a detailed chronological listing of Venetian operas³ revealed that there was no fit, at least not within the two decades immediately prior to 1724, for the work most fully described—one in which Cato was the main character. The absence of a corresponding work led to a search for the basis of the *Mercure*’s report.

By searching for works in which Cato played an important role, I was led quite quickly to another description of the same Venetian production. The corresponding reference appeared in Joseph Addison’s travel diary, in a passage relating to the early part of the year 1701. The extent of similarity was completely unexpected: except for the language in which they appear, these commentaries turn out to be almost identical!

Readers who simply want to see the proof are welcome to skip immediately to the appendix, in which the relevant passages of each work are laid out in parallel. This

¹ I am cordially grateful to Catherine Massip, Sylvie Mamy, Lowell Lindgren, and François Farges for their helpful comments on this article.

² The Fiche Peyrot is available for reference in the music reading room of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

³ My own unpublished chronology, which dates works to within the week and usually to the date of opening. It is based chiefly on the parallel reading of approximately a dozen series of weekly dispatches from Venice. Performance dates given here are taken from this source, provisionally entitled *Venetian Opera, 1680-1750: A New Chronology*.

accompanying note takes up a series of questions related to the three separate elements of this narrative—the original author, Joseph Addison; his subject, Venetian opera; and the means by which his notice could have found its way into *Le Mercure de France*. Not all of these questions are fully answerable, but their collective examination offers some noteworthy cross-disciplinary insights.

(1) Addison's Travel Diary

Shortly after his appointment to a fellowship at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1698,⁴ Joseph Addison was encouraged by Charles Montagu⁵ to pursue a career in government. To further this end, he was granted a pension of £300 a year and was sent abroad to acquire the skills necessary for a position in diplomacy. Departing from England in the autumn of 1699, Addison spent a year in Paris and Blois, where he made the acquaintance of such advocates of classicism as Boileau. He then traversed Italy, from Genoa to Venice, before heading down the peninsula to Rome, which proved to be his favourite Italian venue. Addison's brief stay in Venice must have occurred in the early months of the year 1701.⁶ He returned to England in 1703.

Montagu (by now Lord Halifax) was the patron of Addison's first published work, a politically motivated epic called *The Campaign*, which celebrated the victory of Marlborough at Blenheim (1704). Addison went on to pursue a political career, sitting in Parliament from 1708 and serving as Secretary of State from 1717. Contemporaneously he came to be regarded as England's supreme essayist. He died in 1719.

Addison's *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, compiled during his travels in summaries without precise dates, were first published in 1705.⁷ They were well received, were reprinted in more than a dozen editions and numerous translations through 1767, were

⁴ In 1687 Addison (1672-1719) matriculated at Queen's College, Oxford, and two years later accepted a scholarship at Magdalen College. As a student he was particularly noted for his accomplishments in classical studies and his Latin verse. He held a fellowship at Magdalen until 1711, when he won £1000 in the London lottery (*The Letters of Joseph Addison*, ed. Walter Graham, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941, p. 266).

⁵ Montagu was, coincidentally, serving as extraordinary ambassador to the Republic of Venice.

⁶ Among surviving letters from Addison's trip, three help to define his movements in the relevant time period. These were written in Marseilles on 29 November 1700, in Venice on 13 January 1701, and in Rome on 2 July 1701 (see *The Letters of Joseph Addison*, Nos. #21, #22, and #23). No further letters from intervening dates are known. Venetian treatment of annual dates fluctuated: the calendar did not advance officially until March 1, but scribal practice varied, such that the year accompanying January and February dates could be given in either the traditional style or the modern style. Since the sequence of Addison's travels is known from other sources to have been from Marseilles to Venice and then to Rome, there can be no doubt that his Venetian visit occurred in what is reckoned today as 1701. The "13" in "13 January" may also be presumed to be modern (since the English did not adopt the Gregorian calendar until 1752, a letter dated "13 January" would have been reckoned by later editors as "24 January").

⁷ *Remarks on several parts of Italy &c. In the years 1701, 1702, 1703*. London: Jacob Tonson, 1705. I have principally used the third edition (London: F. Tonson, 1726), which is identical in content to the first edition but set in fewer pages. The material can also be found in numerous more recent prints, for example in "Remarks on Italy-Venice" in *The Works of Joseph Addison*, II (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1888), 186-191.

much discussed, and were often imitated. To Addison, there was “certainly no place where a man may travel with greater pleasure and advantage than in Italy.”⁸

(2) Addison as a Music Critic

Addison’s slightly later writings in *The Tatler* (principally in 1710) and *The Spectator* (1711-14) on the earliest Italian operas staged in England are familiar to students of Handel studies and of opera more generally. His caustic aphorisms trip lightly off the tongue. The dictum “Nothing is capable of being well set to music that is not nonsense”⁹ expresses his overall bias toward the sanctity of texts. The thought is more explicitly articulated in a slightly earlier commentary, where we read that “An opera may be allowed to be extravagantly lavish in its decorations, as its only design is to gratify the senses.”¹⁰

Addison was always arguing for common sense. “Common sense,” he continued in the *Spectator*, No. 5, “requires that there should be nothing in the scenes and machines which may appear childish and absurd.” What Addison found “childish and absurd” in the performance of the famous Italian castrato Nicolò Grimaldi (“Nicolino”)¹¹ in Handel’s *Rinaldo* (1711) were the hero’s wearing of an ermine robe during a tempest and his sailing in an open boat “upon a sea of pasteboard.” It was ever thus with Addison: he scrutinized every set and every costume for evidences of incompatibility with a sensible reading of the text. Italian staging, designed to thrill Carnival onlookers rather than to enlighten academic readers, was only slightly more alienating than the Italian language itself, which became Addison’s chief cause for objection in his opera commentaries in the *Spectator*.

Addison’s numerous commentaries on opera were not entirely disinterested. In 1707 he had written the opera libretto *Rosamond*, which enjoyed little success as a stage work.¹² He was also the author of a neoclassical tragedy, *Cato*¹³ (1713), and a prose

⁸ Horace Walpole, in 1740, questioned the accuracy of this observation. According to him, “Mr. Addison travelled through the poets, and not through Italy. . . . All his ideas are borrowed from descriptions, not from reality.” See *Horace Walpole’s Correspondence with Thomas Gray et al.* ed. W. S. Lewis, George L. Lam, and Charles H. Bennett, 70 vols. (New York: Yale University Press, 1948), 13, 231.

⁹ From *The Spectator*, No. 15, March 21, 1711.

¹⁰ From *The Spectator*, No. 5, March 6, 1711.

¹¹ By coincidence, Nicolino [Nicolò Grimaldi] had been brought from Italy in 1708 under the auspices of the Addison’s original patron, the Duke of Manchester, who also befriended Sir John Vanbrugh, the owner of the Queen’s Theatre, where *Rinaldo* was given.

¹² This text may have been one of only two entirely new ones created for the London stage between 1705 and 1719 (see Lowell Lindgren, “Critiques of Opera in London, 1705-1719,” *Il melodramma italiano in Italia e in Germania nell’età barocca: Atti del Convegno internazionale sulla musica italiana nel secolo XVII, Como 1993*, ed. Alberto Colzani, Norbert Dubowy, Andrea Luppi, and Maurizio Padoan [Como: A.M.I.S., 1995], p. 153). With music by T. Clayton, its first performance was given on 4 March 1707 (Lindgren, p. 159). It closed after three performances. Addison’s *Rosamond* was later set by Thomas Arne (1743) and by Samuel Arnold (1778).

¹³ In his article on Addison in the *Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London: Macmillan, 1992; I, 18), Donald R. Boomgaarden conjectures that Addison actually wrote his *Cato* as a retort to the Venetian opera he had condemned in his *Remarks*.

comedy, *The Drummer* (1716). Like his writings in *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, all three literary works enjoyed numerous reissues and translations.

Addison's criticisms did not exist in a vacuum. In portraying the absurdities of Italian opera John Dennis had preceded him in his *Essay on the Operas after the Italian Manner* (1706) and had acquired his own defendants and detractors.¹⁴ One important contribution to this literature was the anonymous *Critical Discourse upon Opera's in England*, appended in 1709 to Ragueneau's *Comparison between the French and Italian Musick and Opera's*. Dennis's interests, like Addison's, spread well beyond music. Indeed he published a criticism of Addison's *Cato*.¹⁵ In actual fact, however, he seems to have shared Addison's view that Italian opera contained everything except "sense".¹⁶ *Cato* also had its defenders, among them George Sewell, the author of *A Vindication of the English Stage, exemplified in the Cato of Mr. Addison* (1716).

(3) Addison's Remarks on Venetian Opera

The commentary on Venetian opera that appears in Addison's *Remarks* considers the pleasures of Carnival in general and of opera in particular. Visitors, particularly English visitors, almost always preferred to visit Venice during the winter months, when the many libertine pursuits of Carnival (the chief attractions of which were gambling, comedy, opera, balls, and street entertainments) were available. In the face of the extravagant Venetian love for the here-and-now, Addison comes across as a bookworm whose temperament ill suits him to enjoy its frivolities.

It is clear that when Addison attended the theatre, his ear was tuned to the text. His commentary on Venetian opera highlights some differences in the treatment of poetry and prose between Italy and England. He discusses Italian comedy in tones of dismay and disgust and then moves on to non-theatrical subjects—street song and the special entertainments of Giovedì Grasso,¹⁷ the Thursday preceding Shrove Tuesday, when a great many special entertainments were given out-of-doors in the Piazza San Marco. His consideration of Venice concludes with quotations from the poetry of Claudian and Sannazzaro. The parallel texts concerning opera, comedy, and street song are given in

Addison's *Cato* (on which work seems to have begun in 1703) in turn became a model for Johann Christoph Gottsched's *Der sterbende Cato*; Gottsched's wife, Luise Adelgunde Viktorie Kalmus, translated many of Addison's plays and commentaries from *The Spectator* into German. (In some editions, it is she who is credited in various editions with the translation *Cato: ein Trauerspiel*.) Addison's *Cato* was, somewhat ironically, translated into Italian (by Luigi Albergati, a Bolognese senator; the work was printed in Venice by M. Rossetti in 1715).

¹⁴ See Lowell Lindgren, "Critiques of Opera in London, 1705-1719," *Il melodramma italiano in Italia e in Germania nell'età barocca: Atti del Convegno internazionale sulla musica italiana nel secolo XVII, Como 1993*, ed. Alberto Colzani, Norbert Dubowy, Andrea Luppi, and Maurizio Padoan. Como: A.M.I.S., 1995.

¹⁵ *Remarks upon Cato, a Tragedy*; see John Dennis, *The Critical Works*, ed. E. N. Hooker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1939), II.

¹⁶ Cf. Lindgren, p. 146.

¹⁷ In 1701 the date of this feast would have been 3 February.

the Appendix. The commentary on Giovedì Grasso that follows in both sources is excluded here.

In his remarks on opera, Addison reports that the opera that was “most in vogue” during his stay was one concerning the rivalry between Caesar and Scipio for the hand of Cato’s daughter. Since 99.9% of all libretti for Venetian opera survive,¹⁸ it can be ascertained that this work would have been *Catone uticense*.¹⁹ Given at the august Teatro di San Giovanni Grisostomo, *Catone* was a major production. It involved seven principal characters and six gods. At least 18 copies (an exceptionally large number) of the libretto survive.

Addison is most informative when he takes exception. Among his remarks on the performance of *Catone*, his comments on the *battaglia* (a mock battle in the form of a dance) are helpful. Battle scenes, like lavish scenery, distinguished productions at San Giovanni Grisostomo from those in Venice’s other theatres, where simple *balli* would usually have been given. Feigned battles engaged the interest of the soldiers and military leaders who were often found, particularly in the 1680s and 90s, in the audiences of the Teatro di San Giovanni Grisostomo.²⁰ *Battaglie* usually required two or more companies of dancers in distinctive costumes and occurred at the ends of acts. Exceptionally in *Catone*, the *battaglia* for “soldiers disguised as shepherds”²¹ occurs in the opening scene of the work. Before their flight, according to Addison, these soldiers danced under a great silver moon. A second *ballo* for the soldiers occurred in Act I, Scene 3.

Addison’s chief objection to this work concerns a detail of its staging: in the library in which Cato commits suicide, Addison observed anachronistic titles by Plutarch and Tasso.²² In the libretto, the setting (Act III, Scene 10) is merely described as a library in Cato’s house in Rome.²³ The libretto says that after a discussion with Scipio about Flaminia, Cato “goes to sit down at the small table and reads from works by Plato.”²⁴

¹⁸ They are catalogued, *inter alia*, in Irene Alm, *Catalogue of Venetian Librettos at the University of California, Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and Claudio Sartori, *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800*, 7 vols. (Cuneo: Bertola & Locatelli Editori, 1990-3). The first is a catalogue of physical sources arranged in roughly chronological order. The second is a catalogue of titles in alphabetical order.

¹⁹ Usually attributed (without secure proof) to Carlo Francesco Pollarolo; the libretto was by Matteo Noris.

²⁰ A case in point could be said to be Charles Montagu, sent to Venice as Ambassador Extraordinaire in 1698. Montagu was the dedicatee of Pallavicino’s *Gierusalemme liberata* (libretto by Corradi; SS. Giovanni e Paolo, 1686), which had a celebrated battle scene, and of C. F. Pollarolo’s *Marzio Coriolano* (libretto by Matteo Noris; San Giovanni Grisostomo, 1698). The best description of a battle scene in any Venetian opera seems to be that for another Pallavicino opera, *Elmiro, re di Corinto* (San Giovanni Grisostomo, 1686), as given in the Venetian monthly *Pallade Veneta* (an analogue of the *Mercure*); see E. Selfridge-Field, *Pallade Veneta: Writings on Music in Venetian Society, 1650-1750* (Venice: Fondazione Levi, 1985), p. 155.

²¹ According to the libretto, they wore garlands of poppies in their hair.

²² The historical Cato’s biographical dates are 234-149 B.C. Those of Plutarch are c.46-c.120 A.D. Tasso’s dates are 1544-95.

²³ “. . . libreria nella casa di Catone in Roma.”

²⁴ “. . . va a seder al tavolino e legge sopra l’opere di Platone.”

Cato contemplates suicide in Scene 12 and stabs himself in Scene 13. Here Addison's description and the narrative of the libretto fit plausibly together.

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Addison's description of a concurrent opera production at another Venetian theatre is more problematical. In 1700, only three of Venice's principal theatres were actually functioning. They were San Giovanni Grisostomo (the richest), San Cassiano (the oldest), and Sant'Angelo (the least prestigious of the established theatres). Two eminent theatres of the seventeenth century—SS. Giovanni e Paolo (known for its enthusiasm for military subjects) and San Luca (also called San Salvatore; frequently praised for the beauty of its productions and performances)—had functioned through 1699 but were currently closed. San Moisè, which had functioned as a puppet theatre in the 1680s, was similarly closed; it was destined to reopen (some 15 years hence) as a low-budget rival to Sant'Angelo. Operas were occasionally given in noblemen's homes, and one such venue had recently emerged as the Teatro di San Fantin, replacing the struggling Teatro di Cannaregio.

In his description of a second opera, Addison was again sceptical of a conflict between the characterization and the staging. This time the heroine seized a knife from the girdle of her would-be rapist, a king, and thereby defended her honor, he wrote. From Addison's point of view, the king's intent seemed necessarily a pretence, thereby undermining the dramatic quality of the work.

If Addison's identification of the theatre ("Sant'Angelo") were correct, then the work he cites would have been Albinoni's *Diomede punito da Alcide*,²⁵ which had its first performance on c. 13 December 1700 but principally ran after Christmas.²⁶ The character Diomede is described in the *argomento* of the libretto as "barbaro e inumano," and there is certainly a villain in the work Addison ascribes to Sant'Angelo. Once again Addison mentions a battle scene. In Act III, Scene 10 of *Diomede*, there is a battle in "a place outside the walls of the city".²⁷ The battle that occurs is between the troops of Diomedes and those of his virtuous brother, Euripe. According to the libretto, Alcide gives a(nother) blow to Diomedes, who falls to the ground dead.²⁸

In the *Diomede* libretto there is no mention of (or apparent opportunity for) the attempted rape that occurs in Addison's account. The one libretto of the years 1700 and 1701 that fits Addison's account is that for *Pericle in Samo*,²⁹ which was given neither at San Giovanni Grisostomo nor at Sant'Angelo but rather at the upstart, low-budget Teatro di San Fantin. In *Pericle*, Doralbo, the prince of Samos, rapes Aspasia, the wife of Pericles, prince of Athens. In Act I, Scene 8, which takes place on a wooded mountain,

²⁵ Text by Aurelio Aureli.

²⁶ In most years Venetian theatres were closed from December 15 through 25.

²⁷ "Loco fuori della mura della Città, con chiuso staccato."

²⁸ ". . . Replica Alcide un colpo a Diomede, a lo stende a terra mort alme ferito."

²⁹ Text attributed to Francesco Rossi.

a cordial relationship is established and plans are laid for a clandestine rendezvous between the two. In Act II, Scene 7, Aspasia, visiting Doralbo in prison, sings the lines

Doralbo ch'è un Tiranno.
 D'un Principe la Moglie
 Tù sapesti rapir, e ti pensasti
 Trionfar d'un Regno, e del mio honor ancora
 Perfido è giunta l'ora,
 È gionto quel momento,
 Che paghi la tua Vita il Tradimento.³⁰

The libretto does not describe the action in detail. It does indicate that in Act III, Scene 10 Aspasia stabs Doralbo, using his own sword, in revenge.

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The Teatro di San Fantin did not cater for noble clientele. In fact, epithets of disapproval ripple through letters and documents of the time.³¹ Its very existence owed to the misfortunes of those august Venetian allies whose fortunes were soured by the War of the Spanish Succession. Difficulties in travelling through Northern Italy by land discouraged some; the loss of holdings deprived others of the means to enjoy Carnival. San Fantin excited comment because it charged less for tickets than the other theatres. Its performers were young and not yet well established, but even sceptics noted that the quality of the voices was excellent.³² Its fare suited the strained purses of the time. More and more, the audience for Venetian opera was drawn from the merchant class rather than the nobility.

It appears that it was not at Sant'Angelo but rather at San Fantin where Addison would have seen the work he describes. Interestingly enough, it may have been Addison's immersion in classics that led him to some confusion. "Alcedes" [the Alcide in *Diomede*] was a patronymic for Heracles. In Greek legend, Heracles killed Ippolita, the queen of the Amazons, in order to retrieve the magical belt, a gift from Ares, that she wore at her waist. In Addison's mind the sword taken by Aspasia, a character in *Pericle in Samo* in 1701, may have become confused with the sword taken by Alcide (who does not confront any Amazons in *Diomede punita*) in legends remembered from his reading. Such confusion suggests that Addison's account may have been written substantially after his visit. Indeed, many entries of his *Remarks* seem to have been made as composite summaries, possibly long after the events which they describe took place.

³⁰ This may be roughly translated as "Doralbo, being a tyrant, you would know how to rape the wife of a prince, and you would consider yourself to have triumphed over his rule; and [while you are] still perfidious of my honour, the hour, the moment has arrived when you must repay this treachery with your life."

³¹ A later opera, *Erginia immascherata*, given at San Fantin in 1710, was described in *Pallade Veneta* (*op. cit.*, p. 263, Document #207) as "an entertainment for one with a narrow purse . . . since the music is accompanied by little sound of coinage."

³² Of the première work, *La Nicopoli*, which opened between 23 and 30 October 1700, an anonymous commentator noted the presence of "due buonissime voci d'una donna et d'un castrato" (I-Vnm Cod. It. VI-477 [=12121], entry by date).

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If there is an error on Addison's part, there may also be one on the title-page of the libretto for *Pericle*. Librettos subscribed to no fixed system of dating; inconsistencies often arose among the four usual presentations of the date. Three were within the libretto. These were the seasonal date (e.g., "Carnovale 1701") given on the upper half of a libretto's title-page; the publisher's date at the bottom of the same page; and the dedication date (usually provided by the librettist) given inside. One external date, usually based on those found within the libretto, was given in the censors' approval slip. On the title-page of *Pericle*, the seasonal date is given as "Carnovale 1701" but the publisher's date reads "1701 M.V." [i.e., 1702].³³ We know that Addison was not in Venice in 1702. Thus, if we accept *Pericle* as the work that Addison attended at "Sant'Angelo," then we must accept the designation "M.V." as mistaken. The scribe (or printer) may have intended to write "1700 M.V." [i.e., 1701], for it was not at all uncommon to have two differently reckoned dates (e.g., "Carnovale 1701" and "1700 M.V.") on the same title-page.

Because Addison's stay in Venice can now be anchored to exact dates—the period of overlap between *Catone* and *Pericle*, which he says were playing "at the same time"—Pollarolo's *Catone* can be more securely dated. Its libretto has a dedication that is dated "16 January 1701" which must be new-style for the production to have occurred during Addison's visit.³⁴ The time frame in question would appear to have spanned the third and fourth weeks of January 1701. In fact, a contemporary source of confirmation suggests one thing that Addison does not reveal: he apparently was travelling (at least as far as Venice) with a substantial delegation of Englishmen.³⁵ Addison's visit could not have coincided with a period of less theatrical activity. In the winter of 1700-1701 the nobility of northern and central Italy were unsettled not only by the War of the Spanish Succession but also by the deterioration of affairs in the Duchy of Mantua.³⁶ Duke Ferdinand Carlo, who was to be the last of the Dukes of that province, had been possibly the most

³³ *More veneto* ["M.V."] dates recognized the Venetian practice of advancing the legal year on March 1.

³⁴ A censor's permission for this work dated "12 January 1702" suggests that a reprise could have been given (or at least planned) in the following year, when once again far fewer than the usual ten or twelve new works were given. In 1702 the theatres did not open until early February, when Albinoni's *L'arte in gara con l'arte* was given at San Cassiano and Boniventi's *La vittoria nella costanza* at Sant'Angelo. Gasparini's *Tiberio* opened at Sant'Angelo on 19 February 1702. Shrove Tuesday, the final day of Carnival, fell on the 28th.

³⁵ A report of 22 January 1701 (new-style) in I-Rvat, Nunziatura, N. 149, f. 73r, relates that "Carnival is advancing with not much entertainment . . . because of the snows [that have] fallen and the intensity [*rigore*] of the cold, and yet foreigners, among whom are many Englishmen who come from France, continue to arrive daily" [translation mine].

³⁶ It was this war which gave occasion to the Battle of Blenheim (1704) and which brought the House of Brunswick onto English soil.

enthusiastic patron of Venetian opera of all time.³⁷ His councillor Lorenzo Beretti was the dedicatee of *Pericle*.

(4) *Le Mercure de France* on Venetian Opera

When in its *Décembre 1724* issue the *Mercure de France* provided what it called an “extract” of a letter written from Venice concerning “le Carnaval et les Spectacles, &c.”, it was shifting the emphasis from Addison’s interest (fidelity to classical models in the performing arts) to its own—the needs of (mostly armchair) travellers. Thus the intent was not specifically to describe opera or comedy but simply to report on the most noteworthy events of Carnival. All but a few perfunctory phrases of this report come directly, but without acknowledgment, from Addison’s *Remarks*.

While we now know that the writing is not French in origin and that what it describes is not contemporary with the date of publication, it is impossible to say who translated the material, or when. It is less difficult to say why a translation to French was made, for many general reasons were available. The flood of translations of Addison’s works to French, German, and Italian was at crest stage. In particular, Addison’s diary was greatly respected. Travel literature in general was popular at the time. Having died six years before the appearance of his material in *Le Mercure*, Addison could not object.

The translation itself may give a few further clues. In the *Mercure* commentary, anything that might have identified the writing as English has been suppressed. While in Addison’s English text, English and French styles of writing are compared to Italian ones, in the *Mercure* text only the French and Italian styles are compared. Addison’s digressions on blank verse and on the writing of John Milton (which is, of course, irrelevant to Venetian opera and more particularly to Carnival in Venice) have been omitted.

Otherwise, the changes are remarkably few. The *Mercure* has corrected Addison’s Italian in one place. It has committed an extraordinary *faux pas* in substituting “Petrarch” for “Plutarch” and thereby compounding the grounds for complaint against anachronistic writings.³⁸ Perhaps to better accommodate the French pantheon of classical authors, Horace’s name has been added to the company of Galen, Hypocrates, Plato, and Vergil in the discussion of authors frequently quoted by the *commedia dell’arte* character Pantalone.

In all other respects, the French version is virtually the same as the English. Yet the very few omissions (of material that might have suggested that the source was in fact English) change the complexion of the passage. By concentrating interest on differences between the French and Italian approaches to opera, it foreshadows the coming *guerre des bouffons*. It is impossible to know, however, whether some sense of that *guerre* motivated both the use of this text and the suppression of its telling signs of Englishness, or whether

³⁷ This point is considered extensively in E. Selfridge-Field, “The War of the Spanish Succession: Consequences for Music in Venice,” *Austria 996-1996: Music in a Changing Society*, ed. Walter Kreyszig [forthcoming].

³⁸ Petrarch’s biographical dates are 1304-74. The substitution augments the extent of the anachronism very substantially!

changes were simply motivated by haste and exclusions by the *Mercure*'s emphasis on Carnival.

(5) The "French" Authorship

In 1724 the *Mercure* was nearing the end of a transitional phase that had coincided, more or less, with the Regency of Louis XV. Symptomatic of this were the journal's changes of name—from *Le Mercure galant* (1672-1716) to *Le nouveau Mercure* (1717 to May 1721), then simply to *Le Mercure* (June 1721 to December 1723), and thereafter (until nearly the end of the century) to *Le Mercure de France dédié au Roi*.

Le nouveau Mercure was a publication of the Moderns, but it was not necessarily anti-classicist. Even those French who did not support the besieged Ancients generally held Addison in high esteem. One Addison enthusiast among the Moderns was Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688-1763),³⁹ who during the years 1717-1720 contributed to *Le nouveau Mercure*. Derailed from a career in law in 1720, he began to publish *Le spectateur français*, which was modelled on Addison's like-named example, in 1721. It was similarly short-lived, ceasing publication in 1724.⁴⁰ Despite the coincidence of dates, it seems unlikely that Marivaux had anything to do with the *Mercure de France*'s appropriation of Addison's text. Addison's content was much too weighty for Marivaux's purposes.

A 1722 translation—*Remarques sur diverse endroits d'Italie par Mr. Addison pour servir au Voyage de Mr. Misson*, published in Paris by D. Horthemels—reached a substantial audience through its insertion in the fifth and sixth editions (Utrecht, 1722, and The Hague, 1723, respectively) of Maximilien Misson's *Nouveau voyage d'Italie*. In all cases, however, Addison's authorship was acknowledged.⁴¹ Misson's work may even have been known to Addison, for it had been available in English translation (as *A New Voyage to Italy*) since 1695.

It is likely that a translation made much nearer the original date of publication of Addison's *Remarks* by Jean Le Clerc, a bibliophile and professor of philosophy at the Protestant seminary in Amsterdam, had stimulated this interest. Le Clerc published some brief selections from Addison's *Remarks* in the *Bibliothèque choisie, pour servir de suite a la Bibliothèque universelle* in 1707.⁴² The encyclopedic nature of this series may have been

³⁹ Marivaux did go so far as to satirize the Ancients in such burlesque works as *Télémaque travesti* (1714) and the *Iliade travestie* (1717).

⁴⁰ Marivaux's effort waned after his wife's death in 1723. Much of the motivation for his work seems to have come from the salons of Mesdames de Tencin and de Lambert. Much later (1743), Mme. de Tencin succeeded in having Marivaux elected to the French Academy over the objections of Voltaire. On Marivaux generally, see Pierre Brunel, Yvonne Bellenger, Daniel Couty, Philippe Sellier, and Michel Truffet, *Histoire de la littérature française du Moyen Âge au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Bordas, 1972), pp. 317-22, and Marcel Arland, *Marivaux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).

⁴¹ The task of determining how closely these texts correspond to the *Mercure* version has not been undertaken here.

⁴² XI, 198-217. This series, begun in 1703, reached 28 volumes by 1713. Twenty-nine further volumes were published (under the modified title *Bibliothèque ancienne et moderne, pour servir de suite aux Bibliothèques universelle et choisie*) in Amsterdam (1714-27); publication then moved to The Hague, where the series continued until 1730.

designed to demonstrate Le Clerc's familiarity with contemporary English letters and his consequent competence to become the official librarian to Queen Anne. Recruitment efforts had been initiated by the Court of St. James, but the plan did not proceed. It is imaginable that in the process of collecting materials, Le Clerc would have provided himself with a translation more extensive than the one which was published. Given that Addison's works were so readily available in editions that had not been through the translation mill, it is most ironic that a reverse translation (to English) of Le Clerc's excerpts were made by Lewis Theobald in 1715.

It was noted several years ago by Madeleine Blondel that French translations of travel books of the eighteenth century were often passed off as newly created works when in fact they were not. Although none of the examples she cites is as early as this one, the spirit of the endeavour is suggested by the titles she mentions.⁴³ The nature of these titles suggests that the intent of the *Mercure's* editor in 1724 was simply to provide material in this vein. What we may read today as a form of cultural criticism may have been regarded by a French reader of the time as practical information of an ephemeral nature.

(6) The Language of the *Mercure* "Extract"

The French of the *Mercure's* translation may have been made, or at least typeset, in haste, for it has numerous flaws. Only misspellings that could not under any circumstances be correct have been corrected in the transcription given here, and they are signalled in footnotes. Some missing letters (as in *tems* for *temps*), now superfluous letters (*şçavez* for *savez*), missing accents (*opera* for *opéra*), and now superfluous accents (*joüer* for *jouer*) were common at the time, *inter alia* in the *Mercure* itself. Some verb forms (*şçauroit*, *tuë*) and plurals (*absurditez*) are now obsolete.

Apart from these divergences from modern French, readers familiar with a broad range of French writings of the period suggest that the overall usage and occasional word choices (e.g., *Païs*) are not Parisian; they may be suggestive of a central or southeastern French provenance. The pre-publication travels of translations of Addison's *Remarks* may be said to have been so broad that the likelihood of multiple translations is considerable. It must also be allowed that the editors of the *Mercure* could themselves have been deceived by an anonymous submission with definite linguistic evidence of "foreign-ness".

Concluding Thoughts

⁴³ Madeleine Blondel, "French and English Eighteenth-Century Guide-Books to London: Plagiarism and Translations," *Notes and Queries*, XX (1985), 240f.: (1) *Guide d'Angleterre ou Relation curieuse du voyage de Mr de B+++* (Amsterdam, 1744), being a translation of John Macky's *A Journey through England in Familiar Letters from a Gentleman here, to his Friend Abroad* (London, 1714); (2) *Les Curiosités de Londres et de l'Angleterre par Lerouge* (2nd. edn, Bordeaux, 1766), being a translation of the English text in the bilingual *Foreigner's Guide* (London, 1763); (3) *Londres et ses environs: ou Guide des Voyageurs, Curieux et Amateurs . . . par M. D. S. D. L. T.* (2 vols., Paris, 1788), of which Vol. 1 is a translation of *London and its Environs Described* (London, 1761) and Vol. 2 of most parts of *The Ambulator or the Stranger's Companion in a tour round London* (2nd. edn, London, 1762). The initials in (3) stand for Monsieur [Alphonse] de Serres de La Tour.

Since there are numerous commentaries on Venetian opera and other entertainments of Carnival in the *Mercure*, and since it is a resource which, having been initiated in 1672, grew almost in parallel with Venetian opera itself, material of this nature has been generally regarded by cultural historians as relatively unassailable in its veracity and contemporaneity. Obviously their faith has been misplaced. But what should be made of this curious story, which raises fundamental questions of authority and genre?

Whether this misappropriation was a unique occurrence or whether it is symptomatic of a more general phenomenon, one which puts all such anonymous commentaries in a questionable light, is an important question but one that will not be easy to answer. Viewed from a different perspective, might this instance of apparent plagiarism instead be regarded more as a measure of Addison's considerable reputation (albeit posthumous and without explicit acknowledgment)? The dynamics of publishing today, when new titles appear by the thousands but translations and re-editions are relatively few, are inverted from those of Addison's time. The question of reputation is obviously significant.

Finally, cultural historians may want to reflect on the question of genre. When the intellectual context is fully acknowledged, some writings exalted today as "opera criticism" may merely be yesterday's travelogues. The present example, in its different guises, seems to be both, but that does not alter the fact that it was understood by its English readership to be the first and likely to have been taken by its Continental readers as the second. It should also be recognized that Addison himself was wanting in cultural consciousness, for he failed to realize that the motivation for staging operas in Venice (or for that matter in London) was not to exalt classicism.

Appendix

To facilitate comparison of the two texts, they are shown side by side. Texts that vary between the two sources are identified in the following ways:

~~text by Addison omitted in the *Mercure* translation~~

text newly introduced in the *Mercure* translation

text for which a substitution was made in the *Mercure* translation

Joseph Addison, *Remarks on several parts of Italy &c. In the years 1701, 1702, 1703*, 3rd edn. (London: F. Tonson, MDCCXXVI), pp. 64-69:¹

The carnival of Venice is every where talked of. The great diversion of the place at that time, as well as on all other high occasions, is masking. The Venetians, who are naturally grave, love to give into the follies and entertainments of such seasons, when disguised in a false personage. They are, indeed, under a necessity of finding out diversions that may agree with the nature of the place, and make some amends for the loss of several pleasures which may be met with on the continent. These disguises give occasion to abundance of love-adventures; for there is something more intriguing in the amours of Venice, than in those of other countries, and I question but the secret history of a carnival would make a collection of very diverting novels.

Operas are another great enter-tainment of this season. The poetry of them is generally as exquisitely ill, as the music is good. The arguments are often taken from some celebrated action of the ancient Greeks or Romans, which sometimes looks ridiculous enough; for who can endure to hear one of the rough old Romans squeaking through the mouth of an eunuch, ~~especially when they may chuse a subject out of courts where eunuchs are really actors, or represent by them any of the soft Asiatic monarchs?~~

The opera that was most in vogue, during my stay at Venice, was built on the following subject. Caesar and Scipio are rivals for Cato's daughter. Caesar's first words bid his soldiers fly, for the enemies are upon them. "Si leva Cesare, e dice a Soldati. A la fugga. A'lo Scampo." The daughter gives the preference to Caesar which is made the occasion of Cato's death. Before he kills himself, you see him withdrawn into his library, where, among his books, I observed the titles of **Plutarch** and Tasso. After a short soliloquy he strikes himself with the dagger that he holds in his hand, but being interrupted by one of his friends, he stabs him for his pains, and by the violence of the blow unluckily breaks the dagger on one of his ribs, so that he is forced to dispatch himself by tearing up his first wound.

This last circumstance puts me in mind of a contrivance in the opera of St. Angelo, that was acted at the same time. The king of the play endeavours at a rape, but the poet being resolved to save his heroine's honour, has so ordered it, that the king always acts

Le Mercure de France, Decembre 1724: "Extrait d'une Lettre écrite de Venise, sur le Carnaval & les Spectacles, &c.", pp. 2869-2875.

Il est vrai, Monsieur, on parle par toute l'Europe du Carnaval de Venise, pendant lequel les Masques sont le plus grand divertissement, aussi-bien qu'en toutes les autres occasions distinguées. En ce temps-là les Venitiens, qui sont naturellement graves, aiment à la faveur de *l'Incognito*, à donner dans les amusemens de la saison, & à jouer divers personnages. Il est nécessaire pour eux de trouver des divertissemens qui conviennent au lieu & à la situation de leur Ville, & qui compensent en quelque maniere ceux qu'on a en Terreferme. Les déguisemens & les Mascarades donnent lieu à quantité d'aventures galantes, & les galanteries de Venise ont quelque chose de plus intrigué & de plus piquant que celles des autres Païs. Je ne doute point que l'Histoire Anecdote d'un Carnaval de Venise ne fournisse un morceau bien divertissant.

Les Opera sont un des principaux plaisirs, & le plus grand ornement du Carnaval. La Poésie en est d'ordinaire assez mauvaise, mais la Musique en est bonne. Les sujets sont souvent pris de quelque action celebre des anciens Grecs ou Romains, qui quelquefois paroissent assez ridicules, par le peu de vrai semblance qu'il y a d'entendre, par exemple, un de ces anciens & fiers Romains, pousser des cris aigus par la bouche d'un Eunuche.

Le sujet de l'Opera le plus en vogue dans ces dernieres années, étoit *Cesar & Scipion*, rivaux & amoureux de la fille de Caton. Les premieres paroles de Cesar sont d'ordonner à ses Soldats de fuir, parce que les ennemis approchent: *A la fugga al campo*.² La fille de Caton donne la préférence à Cesar, ce qui est cause de la mort de son pere. Avant que Caton se tuë, on le voit retiré dans sa Bibliotheque, où parmi ses livrés le Spectateur lit les titres de **Petrarque** & du Tasse. Après un court Monologue, il se perce du poignard qu'il tient dans sa main; mais étant arrêté par un de ses amis, il le poignarde en récompense de ce bon office. De la force du coup le poignard se casse malheureusement sur une de ses côtes; ensorte qu'il est obligé de se tuer, en rouvrant sa premiere playe.

Dans l'Opera représenté sur le Theatre de S. Ange, à peu près dans le même tems, on se sert d'une invention presque semblable. Le Heros de la Piece entreprennent un rapt; mais le Poëte, qui veut sauver

with a great case knife stuck in his girdle, which the lady snatches from him in the struggle, and so defends herself.

The Italian poets, besides the celebrated smoothness of their tongue, have a particular advantage, above the writers of other nations, in the difference of their poetical and prose language. There are, indeed, sets of phrases that in all countries are peculiar to the poets, but among the Italians there are not only sentences, but a multitude of particular words that never enter into common discourse. They have such a different turn and polish for poetical use, that they drop several of their letters, and appear in another form, when they come to be ranged in verse. For this reason the Italian opera seldom sinks into a poorness of language, but, amidst all the meanness and familiarity of the thoughts, has something beautiful and sonorous in the expression. Without this ~~natural~~ advantage of the tongue, their present poetry would appear wretchedly low and vulgar, notwithstanding the many strained allegories that are so much in use among the writers of this nation. The ~~English~~ and French, who always use the same words in verse as in ordinary conversation, are forced to raise their language with metaphors and figures, or, by the pompousness of the whole phrase, to wear off any littleness that appears in the particular parts that compose it. ~~This makes our blank verse, where there is no rhyme to support the expression, extremely difficult to such as are not masters of the tongue especially when they write on low subjects; and 'tis probably for this reason that Milton has made us of such frequent transpositions, Latinisms, antiquated words and phrases, that he might the better deviate from vulgar and ordinary expressions.~~

The comedies that I saw at Venice, or indeed in any other part of Italy, are very indifferent, and more lewd than those of other countries. Their poets have no notion of genteel comedy, and fall into the most filthy double-meanings imaginable, when they have a mind to make their audience merry. There is no part generally so wretched as that of the fine gentleman, especially when he converses with his mistress; for then the whole dialogue is an insipid mixture of pedantry and romance. But 'tis no wonder that the poets of so jealous and reserved a nation fail in such conversations on the stage, as they have no patterns of in nature.

There are four standing characters which enter into every piece that comes on the stage, the Doctor, Harlequin, Pantalone, and Coviello. The doctor's

l'honneur de son Heros, dispose la chose de telle sorte, qu'il jouë toujours son rôle avec un grand couteau attaché à sa ceinture. La Dame le lui arrache, & dans l'effort qu'elle fait pour lui resister, se défend, &c.

Les Poètes Italiens, outre la douceur si connuë de leur Langue, ont un avantage tout particulier sur les Auteurs des autres Nations, en ce qu'ils ont un autre langage, pour le Poësie que pour la Prose. Dans les autres Langues il y a, comme vous le sçavez, un certain nombre de phrases particulieres aux Poëtes; mais dans l'Italien il y a non-seulement des Sentences, mais encore une infinité de mots qui n'entrent jamais dans les discours ordinaires, & qui ont pour la Poësie un certain tour si particulier & si poli, qu'ils perdent plusieurs de leurs lettres, & paroissent tout autres dans les Vers. Pour cette raison les Opéra Italiens tombent rarement dans le stile bas, quoique les pensées en soient ordinairement assez communes. Il y a cependant du beau & de l'harmonieux dans l'expression: sans cet avantage leur Poësie moderne paroîtroit extrêmement rempante & vulgaire, malgré toutes leurs Allegories, aussi peu naturelles qu'ordinaires aux Ecrivains de cette Nation. Au lieu que les François, se servant presque toujours des mêmes mots pour les Vers & par la Prose, cela les oblige à relever leur langage par des Metaphores, par des figures, ou par la pompe des expressions, qui relevent la petitesse qui paroîtroit dans chaque partie de la Phrase.

Toutes les Comedies que j'ai vûës à Venice, & dans les autres Villes d'Italie, m'ont paru très-basses, pauvres, dures & fort dissoluës. Leurs Poëtes n'ont aucune idée de la Comedie agreable; ils donnent dans les plus vils équivoques qu'on puisse imaginer, quand ils veulent réjoüir l'Auditeur. Il n'y a rien de si méprisable que leur Gentilhomme, quand il s'entretient avec la Maîtresse:³ car alors tout le Dialogue n'est qu'un mélange insipide de Pedanteries & de Roman. Mais il n'est pas étrange que les Poëtes d'une Nation si jalouse & si reservée, rendent mal de telles conversations, puisqu'ils n'en ont point de modele chez eux.

Toutes leurs Pieces de Theatre ont quatre caracteres. Le Medecin ou le *Docteur, Arlequin, Pantalón, & Covielle*. Le character du Medecin comprend toute

character comprehends the whole extent of a pedant, that with a deep voice, and a magisterial air, breaks in upon conversation, and drives down all before him: every thing he says is backed with quotations out of Galen, Hippocrates, Plato, Virgil, or any author that rises uppermost, and all answers from his companion are looked upon as impertinencies or interruptions.

Harlequin's part is made up of blunders and absurdities; he is to mistake one name for another, to forget his errands, to stumble ~~over queens~~, and to run his head against every post that stands in his way. This is all attended with something so comical in the voice and gestures, that a man, who is sensible of the folly of the part can hardly forbear being pleased with it.

Pantalone is generally an old cully, ~~and~~ Coviello a sharper.

I have seen a translation of the Cid, acted at Bolonia, which would never have taken, had they not found a place in it for these buffoons. All four of them appear in masks that are made like the old Roman *personae*, ~~as I shall have occasion to observe in another place.~~

The French and Italians have probably derived this custom of showing some of their characters in masks, from the Greek and Roman theatre. The old Vatican Terence has at the head of every scene the figures of all the persons that are concerned in it, with the particular disguises in which they acted; and I remember to have seen in the Villa Mattei an antick statue masked, which was **perhaps** designed for Gnatho in the eunuch, for it agrees exactly with the figure he makes in the Vatican manuscript. ~~One would wonder, indeed, how so polite a people as the ancient Romans and Athenians should not look on these borrowed faces as unnatural. They might do very well for the Cyclops, or a satyr, that can have no resemblance in human features; but for a flatterer, a miser, or the like characters, which abound in our own species, nothing is more ridiculous than to represent their looks by a painted vizard. In persons of this nature the turns and motions of the face are often as agreeable as any part of the action. Could we suppose that a mask represented never so naturally the general humour of a character, I can never suit with the variety of passions that are incident to every single person in the whole course of a play. The grimace may be proper on some occasions, but is too steady to agree with all. The rabble, indeed, are generally pleased at the first entry of a disguise, but the jest grows cold even with them too when it comes on the stage in a second scene.~~

l'étenduë d'un Pedant, qui avec une voix haute & un air magistral, prime dans la conversation, & rebute tout avec hauteur. Tout ce qu'il dit est fortifié par des citations de Galien, d'Hypocrate, de Platon, de Virgile, d'Horace, ou de tel autre Auteur qui leui vient à la bouche, & toutes les réponses de celui qui est en Scene avec lui sont regardées comme autant d'interruptions & d'impertinences.⁴

Le Role d'Arlequin consiste en bévûës, en absurditez & en balourdises, à prendre une chose pour une autre, à oublier ses messages, à broncher, & à donner de la tête contre tous les poteaux qu'il rencontre; ce qui a neanmoins quelque chose de si comique & de si plaisant, & dans la voix & dans les gestes, qu'on ne sçauroit s'empêcher d'en rire, quoiqu'on soit prévenu de l'impertinence du Rôle.

Pantalon est un Vieillard presque toujours dupé. *Covielle*, un rusé, un intriguant.

J'ai vû représenter à Bologne une traduction de la Tragedie du Cid, qui n'auroit jamais plû, si ces Bouffons n'y avoient trouvé place. Tous les quatre paroissoient à la maniere des personnages de l'ancienne Rome.

C'est probablement de l'ancien Theatre Grec & Roman, que les Italiens & les Français ont tiré cette coûtume, de représenter quelques uns de leurs caracteres en masque. On voit dans le Terence de la Bibliothèque du *Vatican*, à la tête de chaque Scene, les figures de tous les Personnages, & les déguisemens particuliers dans lesquels ils jouoient; & je me souviens d'avoir vû dans la *Villa Mattei* à Rome, une Statuë antique masquée; qui, **sans doute**,⁵ avoit été dessinée pour le Personnage de *Gnaton*, dans la Comedie de l'Eunuque du même Auteur; car elle répond exactement à la figure qu'il y a dans le Manuscrit du Vatican.

Since I am on this subject, I cannot forbear mentioning a custom at Venice, which they tell me is particular to the common people of this country, of singing stanzas out of Tasso. They are set to a pretty solemn tune, and when one begins in any part of the poet, it is odds but he will be answered by somebody else that overhears him; so that sometimes you have ten or a dozen in the neighbourhood of one another, taking verse after verse, and running on with the poem as far as their memories will carry them.

Puisque je suis sur ces matieres; je veux, avant que desortir de Venise, vous parler d'un coûtume qu'on m'a dit être particuliere à la populace de ce païs, qui est de chanter des Stances du Tasse sur un ton grave; & quand quelqu'un commence un endroit de ce Poëte, c'est l'effet d'un grand hazard si un autre ne lui répond; de sorte que quelquefois dans un même voisinage, vous entendez dixou douze personnes se répondre, en prenant Stance à Stance du Poëme, & aller aus si loin que la memoire les peut mener.

Notes for parallel texts:

¹In the original version all nouns took an initial capital letter and all words of place or nationality were italicized. There are numerous reprintings of these remarks, for example in “Remarks on Italy—Venice,” in *The Works of Joseph Addison*, Vol. II (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1888), pp. 186-191.

²The change from *scampo* to *campo* is merited on linguistic terms. The verb *scampare* means to flee, while the *campo* would, in this case, be the soldiers’ encampment.

³“Maïresse” in the original.

⁴The order of the last two nouns is reversed in the original.

⁵“Perhaps” in the original.

Abstract

Recycled texts, borrowed themes, and melodic quotations are phenomena so familiar to music historians that negative considerations rarely arise in discussions of what motivates such practices. The textual criticism of music, on the other hand, is something regarded as necessarily individual and completely improbable of duplication. Thus we cannot help but be confounded by the recent discovery that a key writing on the strengths and weaknesses of Venetian opera published anonymously in *Le Mercure de France* in 1724 is a nearly bald repetition of “remarks” that appeared almost a quarter-century earlier in Joseph Addison’s travel diary.

Addison had already distinguished himself as a classical scholar when, in the autumn of 1699, he was sent to the Continent to prepare himself for a career in diplomacy. Much of his time was spent in Paris and Rome; he did not return to England until 1703. His report from Venice appears to date from the first months of 1701. The travel diary in which appears was first published in 1705.

Addison describes two operas he saw in Venice and also discusses general qualities of texts, dramatic performance, and improvised comedy. The basis of Addison’s objections to the operas he witnessed is that works based on classical subjects showed insufficiently high regard for historical fidelity in staging.

The use of the same material by the *Mercure* cannot have been accidental, nor, it appears, was the effort to conceal the author’s identity under the rubric ‘extract from a letter written in Venice’. References to England, the English, and John Milton have been removed. What results is an account that poses as the “French” viewpoint of the early 1720s on Venetian opera, an assumed milestone *en route* to the *Guerre des Bouffons*.

The passage has become a touchstone of “French” views and critical style in the era of Porta, Giacomelli, and Orlandini, and the middle-aged Albinoni, who among them made multiple settings of *Ipermestra*, *Antigona*, and the like in the early 1720s. Undoubtedly Addison’s recycled criticism must have appealed to these audiences. The true context of the commentary is that provided by C. F. Pollarolo, M. A. Ziani, Gasparini, and the young Albinoni. These composers were active during what in Italy was a less self-consciously classical age, in which history, mythology, and Arcadian legend were often blended to produce an overall effect more compelling on stage than in a history book.