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The Ambivalent Perceptions of the Genoese Lotto and the Idea of the Magic Circle in the Italian Literary Discourse of the Eighteenth Century

Among the eighteenth-century literary descriptions of the lottery, the account provided by the Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793) stands out. Written in French during the final years of his life in Paris, between late 1783 and early 1787,[1] Goldoni recalls an episode from his brief stay in Genoa, from the end of May to August 1734. He recounts it in his memoirs (I, 39), under the title "Origin of the Royal Lottery".[2] Here he describes how, being in Genoa on the day a lotto drawing was scheduled to occur, he wanted to witness the ceremony (which seems to have intrigued him for its performative aspects, though he offers no specific commentary on these).[3] Writing retrospectively, he explains that the game had two names: in Italy, it was called *il lotto di Genova* whereas in Paris it was known as the Loterie Royale de France. He adds – albeit inaccurately, as we will see – that, in 1734, the public lotto had not yet been established in Venice, where clandestine collectors were instead active, gathering funds for the Genoese drawings. Goldoni himself held a receipt for a wager placed in the lagoon city, suggesting that he was already accustomed to playing.

In the first of two following paragraphs on the lottery, Goldoni outlines its origins, asserting that it was invented in Genoa. The Genoese, he explains, used to draw lots twice a year to select the five senators who would replace those leaving office. Knowing the names of all those eligible for the draw – initially 120, later reduced to 90 – private citizens began to bet on the outcome. Over time, some in-

1 *Mémoires de M. Goldoni, pour servir à l'histoire de sa vie, et à celle de son théâtre, dédiés au Roi* were published in mid-August 1787 by the publisher Duchesne, in three volumes (corresponding to the three parts of the work). See Carlo Goldoni, *Mémoires de M. Goldoni pour servir à l'histoire de sa vie et à celle de son théâtre*, ed. Paul de Roux (Mercure de France, 2018).

2 Carlo Goldoni, *Memorie. Con un'appendice di scritti goldoniani*, trans. Eugenio Levi, ed. Guido Davico Bonino, notes by Guido Davico Bonino, Eugenio Levi, Daniele Ponchiroli (Einaudi, 1993a), 180. This is the edition from which all the quotations are taken. All English translations are by the author, unless otherwise stated.

3 On the origins of the Genoese lotto, see Giovanni Assereto, *'Un giuoco così utile ai pubblici introiti': il lotto di Genova dal XVI al XVIII secolo* (Edizioni Fondazione Benetton Studi Ricerche; Viella, 2013).

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dividuals exploited this system, offering rewards to those who guessed correctly. Upon learning of this practice, the governor initially banned it. Yet, after persistent requests from would-be contractors, the lottery was reestablished and the number of drawings was increased.[4]

In the final paragraph, Goldoni offers a series of concise reflections on the lottery, emphasising how, by the 1780s, it had become nearly universal. In his own experience, he found it enjoyable, having won "one hundred pistoles".[5] He also highlights its advantages for public finances and for occupying the idle hours of those without work or business – thus establishing an implicit connection with a modern concept of leisure, which was developing during the eighteenth century.[6] Finally, from a compensatory perspective, he underscores the lottery's role as a form of hope for those he describes as unhappy (by birth), an aspect that would reappear thematically in late nineteenth-century Italian literature where the lottery features prominently.[7] Essentially, this passage presents a succinct and lucid account of the functions served by this type of game which, according to Goldoni, cannot be assigned exclusively to either the realm of good or evil.

Overall, driven by his optimism and his win, Goldoni appears to view the lottery positively. In a text that, as noted by Bosisio, aligns more with the style of "a novelist (or indeed a playwright)" than that of "a conscientious biographer", this is evident in his disregard "for any methodological systematisation" and in the way that – beneath the polished surface of the narrative – multiple layers of awareness and truthfulness intertwine.[8] This is the case in the textual segment under consideration, where the perspective of the now elderly Goldoni intersects with that of the young playwright pleased with his win, allowing for a brief but mean-

4 Anna Galletti states that the Genoese senators – with the drawing of five names at random from among the nobles over the age of forty-two, selected by the Maggior Consiglio – were renewed twice a year, in June and December. See Anna Galletti, "Il gioco del lotto a Venezia nel 1700" (Master diss., University Ca' Foscari of Venice, 1981–1982), 15–16. See also Stephen M. Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery. The History of a Revolutionary Game of Chance* (The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 19–22.

5 Goldoni, *Memorie* (1993a), 180. See also Carlo Goldoni, *Memorie*, ed. Paolo Bosisio (Mondadori, 1993b), 227–228.

6 Stefano Brogi, "Ozio e lavoro intellettuale fra Eramo e la République des Lettres", in *Idee di lavoro e di ozio per la nostra civiltà*, ed. Giovanni Mari et al. (Firenze University Press, 2024), 471–481; Robert Fajen and Andreas Gelz, eds., *Ocio y ociosidad en el siglo XVIII español e italiano – Ozio e oziosità nel Settecento italiano e spagnolo* (Vittorio Klostermann, 2017) and especially Angela Fabris, "Gli spazi pubblici e privati dell'ozio nei fogli veneziani di Gasparo Gozzi", 91–106.

7 See the article by Angela Fabris dedicated to the depiction of the lottery in Matilde Serao, currently in preparation.

8 See Paolo Bosisio, *Introduzione*, in Goldoni, *Memorie*, 1993b, XVIII and XXXII.

ingful overview – across different times and countries, with some overlap – of the eighteenth-century lottery. In this regard, some considerations on the profiles of players might depend more on Goldoni's French experiences than on the Genoese one, which was distant in time and limited to a brief period.

Goldoni reflects critically on games of chance in the same *Memorie*, in chapter XXV of the third part.[9] Here he refers to the gambling prohibition introduced by the French government in the late 1770s, intended to curb the corruption of youth and the ruin that devastated entire families.[10] In this context, he adopts a negative stance, thus contradicting the earlier account of the Genoese episode, towards games governed entirely by chance; this in contrast to those – such as card games – in which players can influence the outcome or mitigate adverse effects.[11] Considering the chronological distance between the author and the events of 1734, as well as Goldoni's later expression of distrust toward aleatory elements,[12] the Venetian playwright's ambivalent attitude towards the lottery becomes evident. As this chapter argues, moreover, this ambivalence is characteristic of the attitude expressed in literary representations of the lotto in eighteenth-century Italy, as well as of the inherently mutable concept of the *magic circle* that appears in several texts of the period.[13]

1 Towards an anthropology in verse of the eighteenth-century lottery player

As Paolo Macry asserts, the eighteenth century was not only the century of philosophy but also of the lotto,[14] which – one might add – became a literary motif. This is particularly evident in the Italian context, where depictions of the lottery and the fantasies projected onto it by various figures, alongside the whims of imagination, calculations, and forms of divination aimed at discovering the winning numbers, emerge across multiple literary genres. Beyond Goldoni's *Memorie*, such representations are found in Pietro Chiari's novel *La Giuocatrice di lotto*

9 Goldoni, *Memorie* (1993a), 550.

10 Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery*, 42–49.

11 Roger Caillois, *I giochi e gli uomini*, trans. Laura Guarino, ed. Giampaolo Dossena (Bompiani, 1981 [1958]), 33–36.

12 Goldoni, *Memorie* (1993a), 550.

13 See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, edited by Corinna van Schendel, with an introductory essay by Umberto Eco (Einaudi, 2002), 12–13.

14 Paolo Macry, *Giocare la vita. Storia del lotto a Napoli tra Sette e Ottocento* (Donzelli, 1997), 22.

(1757),[15] in Carlo Goldoni's reformist comedies, and in the autobiographical writings of Giacomo Casanova. These three cases, as argued by Marius Warholm Haugen, allow for an emphasis on the relationship between eighteenth-century social mobility in a non-meritocratic society and the fantasies tied to the lottery.[16] These texts are also linked by their connection to Venetian society at the time; indeed, the Serenissima was one of the first Italian cities – after Genoa – to introduce a public lotto with regular drawings, starting from 5 April 1734 (thereby contradicting the statements later made by Goldoni during his Parisian years).[17]

There had previously been other lotteries of the blanks and prizes type in Venice, but these were infrequent events organised on an ad-hoc basis, to remedy state budget deficits. The introduction of the Genoese lotto marked, for the first time, the inclusion in the budget of a new, regular item linked to gaming and intended to be renewed over time. From Venice – where the lotto aroused great enthusiasm – it began, through different routes and thanks to various entrepreneurial figures, to spread quickly throughout Italy and beyond,[18] as explored in several of the chapters in this volume. Notably, the lotto was introduced in France in 1757, thanks to Giacomo Casanova and the brothers Ranieri Maria and Giovanni Antonio Calzabigi (see more in section 3 below).[19]

Around the time of its implementation, three anonymous sonnets, preserved in the "Fondo Cicogna 1230" of the Museo Correr in Venice,[20] offer a concise snapshot of the collective passion for and obsession with the lotto on the Venetian scene in those years. The first, sonnet no. 276 from 1736, written in Venetian dialect, ironically mocks the self-destructive behaviour of the player who personally intervenes with his meager means and, despite daily poverty, continues to invest

15 In the following, I will refer to the modern edition of the novel: Pietro Chiari, *Le memorie di Madame Tolot ovvero La giocatrice di lotto* (Edizioni Moderne Canesi, 1969).

16 Marius Warholm Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility in Eighteenth-Century Venetian Literature: Carlo Goldoni, Pietro Chiari, and Giacomo Casanova", *Italian Studies* 77, no. 3 (2022): 253–270, https://doi.org/10.1080/00751634.2022.2069409.

17 See Giovanni Dolcetti, *Le bische e il gioco d'azzardo a Venezia (1172–1807)* (Aldo Manuzio, 1903), 12–18, and Galletti, "Il gioco del lotto".

18 Galletti, "Il gioco del lotto", 7–9. The lottery spread so rapidly in Venice that by 1737 the number of open lottery booths reached thirty-seven.

19 Giovanni Antonio Calzabigi also introduced the lotto in Prussia by commission of Frederick II the Great. See Giulio Natali, *Il Settecento*, in *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, vol. I (Vallardi, 1964), 68, 112. See Clara Gabanizza, "CALZABIGI, Ranieri Simone Francesco Maria de'", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 17, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Rome, 1974, available at: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ranieri-simone-francesco-maria-de-calzabigi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/.

20 I would like to thank Melania Bucciarelli from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology for this reference. For discussions on specific linguistic and lexical features, I wish to thank Piermario Vescovo.

everything in the lotto, driven by superstitions and dreams.[21] The popular language and the explicit final metaphor – the "head of c." and "i do cojoni" (the two balls) – amplify the sarcastic tone in portraying the madness of this game that sees the player futilely rummaging through the empty pockets of his trousers.

The second sonnet, no. 286 from 1734, is a more explicit lament, in Italian: the player, a conscious victim of his own mania, lashes out against the game and those who taught it to him, calling it "a madman's game never understood by anyone".[22] His feeling of being "squinternato" (disoriented or unhinged) reveals the devastating grip of the lotto, which empties his purse and annihilates his dignity. Nevertheless, even in this despair, the illusion of "building castles in the air" remains steadfast, a testament to the eternal hope that fuels the vice. The fantasy that moves him is that of being a marquis – a Venetian term with a dual meaning alluding both to the noble title and the menstrual cycle, thus symbolising the monthly renewal of hope.

The third and final sonnet, no. 287 from 1734, also in Italian, responds to the previous one.[23] It is built on an antithetical construction that leads it to describe the lotto as a game for the wise, in which one is not considered mad for drawing omens from dreams – thus offering a perspective that opposes the preceding sonnet. Here, the lotto is defended as legitimate and potentially profitable. The argument reverses earlier condemnations: it is not madness but a calculated gamble worth trying as an act of faith in the possibility of redemption.

Taken together, these sonnets highlight two essential aspects: on the one hand, the different portrayals of players – almost representing a minimal-scale morphology of ludic behaviour – and their respective attitudes towards fantasies and numbers to be played; on the other hand, the dialogic interplay – direct or indirect – between the three texts. In the first instance, sonnet 276 presents the poor and obsessed player who endures every hardship yet does not give up playing the lottery with the little money he has. This type epitomises the figure who sacrifices everything – even necessities – for the vain hope of a stroke of luck. He embodies the downward spiral of gambling and the onset of a self-destructive compulsion that, according to Johan Huizinga, occurs when the game ceases to be governed by a "magic circle" (the protected space in which it is played), transforming into a ruinous addiction: "Every game takes place within its own sphere, separated and circumscribed". This circumscribed space, whether temporal or material,

21 *Fondo Cicogna 1230*, fol. 152v, Sonnet 276, "Sopra il Liotto Pubblico", Venice, 1736. Note the atypical use of "Liotto" instead of "Lotto".
22 *Fondo Cicogna 1230*, fol. 158v, Sonnet 286, "Sopra il Lotto Pubblico di Venezia", Venice, 1734.
23 *Fondo Cicogna 1230*, fol. 159r, Sonnet 287, "Risposta all'oltrascritto", Venice, 1734.

is a "true magic circle".[24] Huizinga further adds that when the game loses its form and its rules, it degenerates into vices such as cheating.[25]

It should be noted that the concept of the *magic circle* has become the subject of intense debate within game studies. Several scholars, including Gregory Bateson, Erving Goffman, and Roger Caillois, have proposed more flexible interpretations. Rather than viewing the magic circle as a rigid boundary or barrier, they conceive of it as a *frame*, a kind of porous *membrane*, or a negotiable border zone. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman have defined it as the space in which temporary meanings emerge as causes and effects of playing.[26] Thus, in the case of the lottery, it refers to how the access procedures and rules shape the player's experience. It can also signify the temporary suspension of critical awareness regarding, for example, the socio-cultural identity of players, who as such either do not wish or are no longer able to emerge from their obsession (as is the case with the player portrayed in Sonnet 276), becoming victims of an unstoppable and partly self-destructive tension. In this circumstance, the game loses its ritual function, transforming into an illusion that consumes life. This aspect is also typical of the visionary and naive player depicted in Sonnet 286, who believes that with only a little money he can become a marquis, building "castles in the air". This is the typical figure nourished by superstitious belief (between dreams and numerology), convinced that luck is just around the corner, losing touch with reality: "putting faith in dreams and going mad, / building castles in the air at his own expense".

Here emerges the "illusion" that Huizinga identifies as a constitutive part of play; the ludic experience generates an "other" and illusory world – a kind of compensatory or heterotopic space, where the rules of the ordinary universe are suspended. It is in this space that it becomes possible to build hypothetical castles in the air, and where the player no longer distinguishes between the real world and the imagined ludic world; rather, the latter becomes an obsession where illusion sometimes turns into delirium.[27] The danger also arises from the fact that, as Roger Caillois observes, the lottery allows players to create conditions of pure equality that are denied to them in real life.[28]

In the third and final sonnet, number 287, a prudent player emerges, defending the game as a legitimate opportunity. In his view, by playing in moderation,

24 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 12 and 91.

25 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 15 ff.

26 Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (MIT Press, 2003), 92 – 99.

27 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 13 – 15.

28 Caillois, *I giochi e gli uomini*, 13.

one avoids ruin and nurtures fantasies of winning without delirium or exaggeration. He embodies the attitude of a strategic and moderate player, convinced that the lottery in small doses is not a vice but a way to improve one's fortune ("he who plays little by little does not come undone, / and risks his fate every month"). This type of player expresses a positive attitude and a regulated practice of play, which here assumes the form of a conscious risk and a moment of "suspension" from ordinary life that can enrich existence.[29]

Secondarily, an ambiguous dialogue arguably takes place between the three sonnets, fluctuating between condemnation and justification of the lotto as a symbol of a culture of chance animated by self-deception and illusions, or by a balanced approach, or by the desire for social redemption. Thus, fluctuating formulations appear – similar but opposing ("game of the wise" versus "game of the mad") – where irony, despair, trust, and defiance mingle as expressions of the human contradiction of those who, despite being aware of the risk, cannot stop hoping; because to hope means to survive.

Within this chronological and spatial framework belong also the satires, partly in Venetian dialect and partly in Italian, transcribed in *Fondo Cicogna 1224*, fols. 19r–24r and 37r–42r, also preserved in the Museo Correr. They recall the first appearance of the Genoese lottery in Venice in 1715 (although the date recorded is April 1716),[30] and the great enthusiasm aroused by the public lottery in 1734. In the first of these two extended poetic compositions, popular credulity is staged – incarnated by those who resort to numerology and consult astrologers – and the widespread diffusion of gambling across all social strata is highlighted, from the poor to friars, up to those who gamble their rent or women who pawn their household linen. Dramatic consequences follow, such as hunger, poverty, family quarrels, and the destruction of the household economy.

In the second text, entitled *Il Canacchione* (fols. 37r–42r), an ambivalent and multifaceted image of the lotto emerges.[31] The text draws a parallel between gam-

29 On the topic of play in moderation and the tradition of *eutrapelia*, see, *infra*, Michael Scham, "The Failed Promise".

30 *Raccolta di Satire di Diversi Auttori, et altro*, Biblioteca del Museo Correr, Fondo Cicogna 1224: cc. 19r-24r, "Sopra Quelli, che Giocano / Al Liotto di Genova, Introdotto / In Venezia L'Anno 1716 /D'Aprile and cc. 37r-42r, "Il Canacchione /Trattenimento delle Ore Ozione / Di N.N./ Sopra il Liotto Di Venezia / 1734. See Alberto Fiorin, *Lotto, Lotterie e altro ancora*, in *Fanti e denari. Sei secoli di giochi d'azzardo*, ed. Alberto Fiorin, Gino Benzoni, Giampaolo Dossena, and Filippo Pedrocco (Arsenale Editrice, 1989), 128. The experience proved unsuccessful, and the concession granted to private parties (including Ludovico Cornaro and his Milanese partners) was not renewed.

31 In eighteenth-century Venetian usage, *canacchione* was a pejorative and caricatural term used to describe a coarse, unsophisticated person – often from the mainland – who was perceived as rough and ignorant. More broadly, the term could refer to a comic theatrical mask resembling the

bling and a "great labyrinth" that is easy to enter, for both sexes, but difficult to escape from; many indeed end up "saddened", defeated, and ruined.[32]

In these satires, the lotto becomes a metaphor for the individual's loss, human precariousness, and the tension between the desire for redemption and the trap of illusion. However, in the conclusion there is also room for praise, where the poet addresses the reader in a confidential and almost paternalistic tone, recognising the legitimacy of moderate play as a form of leisure. The "Holy Peace" of playing "a few small coins in cash" contrasts with the ruin and delirium to which the lottery can lead if practiced without moderation. The suggested solution is a form of responsible play, in which one avoids spending part of one's savings. The acceptance of risk must therefore be exercised with measure and good sense, balanced by a combination of pleasure and prudence essential to avoiding moral and economic ruin.

Within a similar framework – marked, however, by a clear predominance of condemnatory tones – lies a poem in Italian by the Arcadian poet Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni (1692–1768), which offers a vivid and witty depiction of the lotto as a source of illusion and ruin.[33] At the outset, the lotto is ironically described as follows: "There is a game called the Lotto / Played with ninety numbers, / Where more than one little fool [merlotto] / Is always caught and undone".[34] By using the word "merlotto" (a term that may evoke a small, naïve bird), Frugoni – who spent several seasons in Venice – likens lottery players to unsuspecting birds lured into a trap. This metaphor reinforces the dangerous allure of the game, evoking a scenario not unlike the labyrinth described in *Il Canacchione*. Here, the deceptive nature of the lotto is brought to the fore: it is a trap in which, once the threshold is crossed, mechanisms of self-control and moderation are suspended, leaving players ensnared.

Throughout the poem, irony is directed at the naivety of those who place their faith in irrational methods when engaging in a game governed purely by chance. These are the individuals who choose their numbers based on a pinprick or the

simple peasant or intrusive rustic, a stock character found in *commedia dell'arte* and in the plays of Goldoni and Chiari, intended either to provoke laughter or to criticise uncivil, "non-urban" behaviours.

32 This stereotype is explicitly referenced in *Fondo Cicogna 1224* (fols. 37r–42r), particularly in the poem titled *Il Canacchione* from 1734.

33 *Poesie dell'Abate Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni fra gli Arcadi Comante Eginetico*, vol. XIV (Lucca, 1780), 128. The title of the composition is *Il racconto interrotto.*

34 Frugoni, *Poesie,* 128.

advice of someone who never guesses correctly – figures at whom the poetic voice looks both with condescension and with admonition.[35]

The year is 1756, coinciding with the introduction of the lotto in Parma by Minister Du Tillot. For an extended period, Frugoni resided in Parma, where the lotto came to acquire particular social and political relevance, being tied to public fundraising and charitable projects, such as dowries awarded by lottery to unmarried young women. The poem's ironic barbs are aimed at the human folly of those who play and will never win, not even if they lived as long as Noah.[36] The humorous, moralising style is structured in irregular metre, predominantly in quatrains composed of seven- and eight-syllable lines. Two motifs stand out throughout the text – the trap and the theme of naivety – both of which closely echo the imagery found in the Venetian manuscripts.

2 Female figures between pseudo-rationality, kabbalah, and dream interpretation

Alongside general reflections on the dangers of playing the lotto and on the literary representation of different types of players in its early appearances, several eighteenth-century texts focus specifically on the dreamlike dimension. This is the case in a poetic composition in which Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni criticises the misplaced trust in nocturnal excursions for determining which numbers to play. Addressing the Marchesa Paveri Fontana, Frugoni ironically mocks the feminine illusion of being able to derive winning lottery numbers from the visions developed during the night while asleep.[37] The dedicatee, portrayed as a naïve soul, flatters herself with the idea that dreams can yield the winning combination, having placed under her "fair head" a slip of paper with the numbers to be played.[38]

While Frugoni acknowledges the understandable allure of enriching oneself without effort, he ultimately exposes the fallacy of such belief. With refined scatological precision and clear satirical wit, he recounts a dream in which he experiences a violent intestinal attack, described in vivid detail ("I dreamt of a deluge /

35 Frugoni, *Poesie*, 128.

36 Frugoni, *Poesie*, 130.

37 Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni, *Opere poetiche del signor Abate Carlo Innocenzo Frugoni, fra gli arcadi Comante Eginetico, segretario perpetuo della Reale Accademia delle Belle Arti, compositore e revisore degli spettacoli teatrali di S. A. R. il Signor Infante Duca di Parma, Piacenza, Guastalla,* vol. IX (Parma, 1779), 3–4.

38 This is a practice also found in the story "Terno secco" (1896) by Matilde Serao.

of a fierce diarrhoea. / I thought it burst out / in a cursed manner; / I thought it flooded / the entire bed like a river"). He then expresses relief upon realising it was merely a dream. In the final verses of the satire, he wishes the Marchesa success in the lottery, while simultaneously deeming it highly unlikely.

Beyond poetry, memoirs, theatre, and novels, one must also consider a distinctively eighteenth-century genre widespread in Venetian society at the time: the book of letters, that is, collections of fictional epistles.[39] One example comes from the aforementioned Pietro Chiari (1712–1785), who, in one of his *Lettere critiche e giocose* (1752), articulates a perspective distinct from that found in his fictional narratives, particularly regarding the protagonist Eugenia Tolot of *La Giuocatrice di lotto* and her devotion to the lottery. Eugenia becomes the victim of lottomania in her attempt to achieve the social ascent she so desires. She takes both dream interpretation and (pseudo-)cabalistic methods seriously, hoping to win the dowry that would allow her to marry her beloved Valerio. For her, the lotto appears – and ultimately proves – to be the only solution to a problem originally caused by that very passion for gambling: her family had been impoverished by her deceased father's obsession with the lottery.[40]

While on one hand the narrative seems to come full circle with a positive outcome, on the other it reveals a dual level of awareness, as also seen in Goldoni's memoirs. As Haugen observes, Eugenia, as both protagonist and retrospective pseudo-memorial narrator, is able to assess, justify, and even criticise her own actions through self-reflective commentary interspersed throughout the narrative.[41] This ambivalent trait becomes evident in the way she judges both the game itself and the strategies for choosing which numbers to play. It also implicitly informs her attitude towards dreams. Initially, Eugenia claims that nocturnal visions are nothing but a confused reworking of daytime impressions,[42] yet she soon shifts – in a decidedly anti-Enlightenment direction – to the belief that immutable laws can be imposed on the unpredictable combinations of chance, using dreams as a guide.[43] She begins to analyse every detail of her dreams, seeking in them the signs of an oracle.[44]

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39 See, in this regard, Fabio Forner, Valentina Gallo, Sabine Schwarze, and Corrado Viola, eds., *Le carte false. Epistolarità fittizia nel Settecento italiano* (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2017).

40 This is emphasised in Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility", 260.

41 Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility", 261.

42 This passage clearly reflects a rational and Enlightenment-inspired perspective. See Pietro Chiari, *Le memorie di Madame Tolot*, 67.

43 For general insights into the literary treatment of dreams, see Silvia Volterrani, ed., *Le metamorfosi del sogno nei generi letterari* (Le Monnier, 2003), with an introduction by Lina Bolzoni and Sergio Zatti.

Soon, however, she and her companions – the hostess Madame Sibilla and her friend Don Graziano – come to the clear realisation that these oneiric explorations yield no winning numbers. Still, Eugenia does not doubt the validity of the method, blaming her failure on a mistaken interpretation. Thus, the fallibility of dreams as predictive tools in gambling is not questioned by the narrator. Furthermore, over the course of the novel's three parts, the protagonist undergoes a notable evolution. Initially, she highlights women's general ignorance when it comes to arithmetic or cabalistic science – domains later represented by the figure of Astrolabio, a man of reputed learning.[45] Yet in the final section, the decisive lottery win is credited to Eugenia's own ability to perform complex calculations. At this stage, she even voices ideas that reveal a level of knowledge considered superior to that of her sex.[46] Her development follows a progression: from a rational view (dreams as mere psychological residues), to an irrational belief in their divinatory power, and finally to a computational, methodical approach – the latter, combined with her determination, securing her ultimate victory.

This oscillating pattern of judgment and reasoning surrounding the lottery recurs in other Italian eighteenth-century literary texts – including in different works by the same author. One clear example appears in a direct intervention on the subject in one of Chiari's *Lettere scelte.* In the first volume, one finds a letter titled *Del lotto*, dated 22 March 1748,[47] in which the abbot underscores how his reputation as a sage and a great traveller – a recurring topos of eighteenth-century literature – has led his correspondent's cousin to believe him an oracle capable of revealing winning numbers.[48]

Chiari approaches the matter rationally, committing to investigate it thoroughly. A few days later, he provides a detailed report. First, he laments the gullibility of "tiny little men" and "half-pound women" who believe that some mysterious virtue lies hidden in the numbers of the abacus – drawing, perhaps ironically, on the legacy of Pythagoras and Philo of Alexandria.[49] He points out that every number has its advocates: the number one and three for the Trinity, seven for the wonders of the world, ten for containing within itself even, odd, cubic, long, wide, and square numbers.[50] His proposed method is to choose the

44 Chiari, *Le memorie di Madame Tolot*, 82.
45 Chiari, *Le memorie di Madame Tolot*, 140.
46 Chiari, *Le memorie di Madame Tolot*, 170.
47 Pietro Chiari, *Lettere scelte di varie materie piacevoli, critiche ed erudite scritte ad una dama di qualità dall'Abate Pietro Chiari bresciano*, vol. I (Venice: Angelo Pasinelli, 1752), 122–128.
48 Chiari, *Lettere scelte*, 123–124.
49 Chiari, *Lettere scelte*, 123–124.
50 Chiari, *Lettere scelte*, 125.

numbers to which one feels the greatest personal devotion. Whether or not those numbers actually appear in the next draw, however, depends entirely on chance.

He goes on to criticise the suggestions offered by the cabalists – namely, their "most confused responses", which he deems incomprehensible. He proceeds to dismantle the supposed divinatory powers of dreams, which he considers entirely fallacious, to the point of describing them as the vast reservoir of collective ignorance: "Many believe they can understand in their sleep what they despair of understanding while awake".[51] He concludes that it makes no sense to study possible lottery combinations: the only certainty is that a reasonable person should play within their means, unlike those who, lacking "any sense", risk everything by relying on a dream, a childish observation, or a superficial and contrived conjecture.

What prevails, then, is a rational spirit that, in addition to reiterating the equal probability of each number being drawn, rejects the popular belief that winning numbers can be predicted through the divinatory power of dreams. Nevertheless, Chiari begs his interlocutor – the cousin of the original petitioner – to deliver a response that can preserve his reputation as an oracle without making him appear a liar, a request that is both ambiguous and difficult to fulfil.[52]

This fictional letter by Chiari thus contains – notwithstanding its ironic tone – a kind of eighteenth-century rationalism that leads him to disavow the false hopes placed in cabalistic practice and oneiromancy, the very same practices on which he will later rely in weaving the fictional narrative of *Madame Tolot.* Like Frugoni, Chiari also links deceptive oneiric suggestions to a female subject in his epistolary writing, turning her into an object of criticism and irony. However, while Eugenia is portrayed positively in light of her awareness of gambling and the social norms of the time, the cousin of Chiari's addressee is marked by naivety and the stereotypes she embraces, particularly that of the eighteenth-century traveller presumed to be wise and oracular. Added to this is Chiari's paternalistic male condescension, partly softened by the complicity he shares with the lady to whom the letter is dedicated, and by his ambivalent stance, whereby he seems to deny the cabalistic abilities he would later attribute to his heroine a decade on.

Goldoni, too, reveals fluctuating positions, as can be seen particularly in two of his plays written around the mid-eighteenth century, where the game of the lotto appears as a recurring theme and theatrical device. In one case, the moder-

51 Chiari, *Lettere scelte*, 126.

52 Chiari, *Lettere scelte*, 128. This appears to align with Goldoni's position, who criticises parlour games (giochi di società) and asks the reader not to make public his scepticism toward games based solely on chance; see Goldoni, *Memorie* (1993a), 550.

ate and prudent attitude of the widow Lugrezia in *Le donne gelose* prevails.[53] In the other, the reckless and unrestrained behaviour of Ottavio – heir to a wealthy family and addicted to the lotto – is depicted in *La donna di garbo.*[54] The ideological setting also differs: while the first play is set in Venice, where the public lotto had existed since 1734, the second is set in Bologna – a frequent strategy of Goldoni, who often chose to portray unresolved vices outside the boundaries of the Serenissima. The playwright Goldoni thus – consistent with his autobiographical writings – arguably reserves an ambivalent judgement for the lotto, creating sharply contrasting characters. Compared to his memoirs, his theatrical writing includes even stronger narrative suggestions.

In the case of Rosaura, the eponymous *donna di garbo*, we observe that, when she is not forced to pretend with Ottavio, she expresses herself with passionate vehemence against gambling (I, 2). Rosaura is the main character of what Goldoni, in his French-language memoirs, calls one of his "less elaborate comedies", due to its excessive reliance on the marvellous and its lack of realism.[55] Rosaura, he claims, was judged as an unnatural character, made to appear overly educated and knowledgeable in too many fields.[56] He adds that the title itself was considered misleading, since she is more of a "flattering, sycophantic woman" than a truly refined one.[57]

In the introductory section *L'autore a chi legge*, however, Goldoni defends his choices: he maintains that such a character is indeed plausible and explains that, by the title, he meant to refer to a clever woman. Rosaura herself, in her final lines, seems to be aware of this ambiguous status, delivering a sort of metatheatrical monologue in which the voice of Goldoni subtly echoes in the background. She

53 See Angela Fabris, "La questione dei generi teatrali e delle figure dedite al gioco e alla lotteria ne *Il giocatore* di Luigi Riccoboni e ne *Le donne gelose* di Carlo Goldoni", in *Goldoni 'avant la lettre': evoluzione, involuzione, trasformazione dei generi teatrali (1650–1750)*, ed. Javier Gutiérrez Carou, Maria Ida Biggi, Piermario Vescovo, and Paula Gregores Pereira (Lineadacqua, 2023), 225–235. The play was performed during the 1751–1752 season at the Teatro Sant'Angelo in Venice.
54 First performed in 1743 at the Teatro San Samuele in Venice. See Carlo Goldoni, *La donna di garbo*, ed. Giuseppe Ortolani (Mondadori, 1935), 1013–1165. For a critical introduction, see also Francesco Cotticelli, "Il giuoco delle parti. Su una chiosa goldoniana a proposito della *Donna di garbo*", *Studi goldoniani*, 9 (2012): 53–70.
55 Goldoni, *Memorie* (1993a), part three, chapter X, 486.
56 *Lettere di Carlo Goldoni*, with preface and notes by G. M. Urbani de Gheltof, including the vocabulary compiled by C. Goldoni for interpreting his plays (Ongania, 1880), 19–26: 19. See Carlo Goldoni, *Polemiche editoriali. Prefazioni e polemiche.* I. Edited by Roberta Turchi (Marsilio 2009), 104–109, and *Memorie italiane. Prefazioni e polemiche.* II. Edited by Roberta Turchi (Marsilio 2008), 285–288.
57 *Lettere di Carlo Goldoni*, 20.

confesses that she merely catered to the desires of others and adjusted to each personality she encountered, when she should have been more honest and less flattering. It is precisely through this confession, Goldoni claims in the paratext, that she proves herself to be a *donna di garbo*.

The lotto appears as a motif through Ottavio's obsession: he is firmly convinced of the excellence of cabalism and the accuracy of its calculations. His reasoning – uttered aloud – is irrational and corresponds to the player described by Caillois in the *alea* category: one who "counts on everything, even the vaguest sign, the slightest outside occurrence, which he immediately takes to be an omen or token – in short, he depends on everything except himself".[58] In this sense, during Ottavio's numerical deliria, Rosaura easily inserts herself, pretending to possess superior knowledge – about lunar phases, the influence of constellations, cabalistic practices, and possible combinations – in which her interlocutor blindly believes.

Not only that: she also recounts a fabricated dream, in which she finds herself atop a high mountain with three women, alluding to an imminent win confirmed by the final image of a little dog's excrement in her lap, symbolising gold. In this instance, Rosaura seems to mock those who believe in the predictive power of dreams, relying on well-known clichés designed to provoke laughter. Her role, once again, appears to include metatheatrical elements that hint at Goldoni's own authorial voice.

Ottavio, by contrast, obsessively consulting the kabbalah and seeing numbers everywhere, is portrayed as a parodic figure, devoid of rational inclinations and imprisoned within the alternate space of the game. A further reflection of this duplication appears in the servant character, who plays the numbers chosen by his master, mirroring Ottavio's irrational dependency at a lower social level. This confirms Ottavio's alignment with one of the types Goldoni identified in his memoirs: those who play the lotto are people with nothing better to do. But the lotto is also played by those – like Ottavio – who are trying to recover from significant losses and unable to see anything beyond their obsession with numbers. In this sense, Ottavio's characterisation remains static, consistent, and plausible throughout the three acts, unlike Rosaura's, who – through her skilful deception – proves to be protean ("proteica")[59] and overly sophisticated in her didactic criticism of lotto playing.

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58 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (University of Illinois Press, 2001 [1958]), 17–18.

59 Edgardo Maddalena, *Nel teatro del Goldoni. Giuoco e giocatori*, notes by E. Maddalena (Steyrermühl, 1898). Extracted from: *Resoconto annuale dell'Accademia di Commercio di Vienna* (1898), 15.

In *Le donne gelose*, a three-act comedy in Venetian dialect, we also find a reference to dreams from which lottery numbers are derived. At the centre is the story of a widow, Lugrezia, who is fortunate enough to occasionally win through *ambi* and *terni*.[60] In this way, she affords herself dresses and evenings at the theatre, luxuries beyond her usual means, sparking jealousy and gossip among her neighbours.[61] Her actions, along with those of the male characters around her, offer insights into the strategies adopted by the Venetian playwright to stage the workings of chance in mid-eighteenth-century theatre.[62]

In this comedy, one can observe, first of all, that the figure of the female lotto player, as well as those who turn to her for advice or guidance on the matter, shows little interest in the prospect of significant wealth or social advancement. Instead, what emerges is a need to restore an economic situation compromised by failed ventures or gambling losses, or – on the part of the protagonist – a rational aspiration for financial improvement, reflecting a proto-bourgeois mindset. The first information provided about the protagonist, through the women's gossip that precedes her entrance, immediately links her to the lotto, as the neighbours comment on her wardrobe and her regular attendance at theatre premieres.[63]

This initial portrait of the widow is countered by the scepticism of one of the women, Giulia, who does not believe in the possibility of acquiring wealth through such means. In this exchange, strategically placed at the beginning of the play, a variety of views on gambling present in Venetian society at the time are reflected in condensed form – views that would eventually lead to the abolition of the Ridotto – the famous Venetian gambling house – in 1774.[64] The theme of the lottery

60 Regarding the terminology of the lotto, see, *infra*, Johanne Slettvoll Kristiansen, Marius Warholm Haugen, and Angela Fabris, "A Cultural History of European Lotteries", section 2.

61 Carlo Goldoni, *Commedie di Carlo Goldoni*, vol. VIII (Istituto Veneto di Arti Grafiche, 1910), 115; Carlo Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, ed. Giuseppe Ortolani, *Tutte le opere di Carlo Goldoni*, vol. IV (Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1940), 351–437.

62 Piermario Vescovo considers *Le donne gelose* "an absolute masterpiece". The play, he adds, "although belonging to the 1752 carnival season, appears – by a stroke of grace – only marginally touched by the moralising themes typical of the earlier repertoire: a comedy in which the 'freedom' of the widow Lugrezia is built not only through her liaisons with other women's husbands, but also through her reputation as a lotto player". See Piermario Vescovo, *Partite goldoniane*, in *Studi goldoniani* XIX (2022): 94. See also Piermario Vescovo, "Jeu", in *Dictionnaire Goldoni*, ed. Lucie Comparini and Andrea Fabiano (Classiques Garnier, 2019), 103–107.

63 Carlo Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, in *Commedie di Carlo Goldoni*, vol. VIII (Istituto Veneto di Arti Grafiche, 1910), 115. First performed in Venice during the Carnival of 1752.

64 In the preface to the comedy, Goldoni writes: "This, dearest reader, which I now present to you, is a Venetian comedy – thoroughly Venetian – which perhaps will not be easily understood by those unfamiliar with our customs and our language". Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, 109. With this statement, Goldoni underscores the central importance of the themes addressed in the play for

reappears – emphasising its centrality in the play – in a dialogue shortly thereafter, set in Lugrezia's home, during the sixth scene of the first act. Here, she and Boldo discuss the numbers to bet on and the strategies to use for identifying the winning combination. The fast-paced and pragmatic tone of their conversation leaves no room for parody or caricature of superstitions and practices, unlike what happens in *La donna di garbo.*[65]

In *Le donne gelose*, in fact, Boldo interrupts Lugrezia's complaints about the gossip provoked by her male visitors by stating that he is there for serious business – namely, the upcoming lottery draw. The aim is to combine forces: he brings two sure numbers to be played alongside the one in the widow's possession (she is reputed for frequent wins). At this point, Lugrezia – almost in the manner of a small-scale entrepreneur boasting of her achievements – recounts her past wins: two *terni* and five *ambi*, which, she declares with satisfaction, allowed her to purchase several dresses. Boldo, for his part, is in need of a win, having lost everything and closed his shop. Lugrezia consoles him by saying he is not alone; in fact, she confides to him – and thus also to the audience – that many borrow goods to cover their shortfalls (a clear critique of the gambling craze and its widespread presence in Venetian society). She then dismisses these "melancholies" (an almost prophetic allusion to Venice's future decline) and turns to reasoning about numbers. While Boldo believes in cabalistic interpretations, Lugrezia believes in dreams.[66]

In this case, however, the pairing of a female character and faith in dreams appears entirely logical and coherent with the development of a credible plot, especially in light of the wins she achieves. Boldo, a miniature representation of Venetian merchants who neglect shop and family for gambling, relies on the widow's predictive abilities. She, however, is not a character driven solely by irrational beliefs; rather than relying exclusively on the lottery, she seeks to earn money through a range of side ventures that blur the line between legality and trickery, skilfully conducted. In this sense, she proves to be a shrewd entrepreneur, diversifying her sources of income and protecting her interests – having Boldo sign promissory notes before he leaves for the square to witness the lottery draw.

Lugrezia, as a widow, is free to associate with other women's husbands, to whom she gives lottery advice. She is a particularly compelling figure in her pur-

Venetian society at the time. On this point, see also Roberta Turchi and Beatrice Alfonzetti, *Goldoni e il gioco fra dediche e commedie*, in *Spazi e tempi del gioco nel Settecento*, ed. Roberta Turchi and Beatrice Alfonzetti (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2011), 325–351.

65 See also Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility", 256–260.

66 Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, 120–122.

suit of modest economic improvement and in promoting a form of independence built on her social skills in navigating male-dominated spaces. In this respect, she stands as an exception to the observation made by Antonella Rigamonti and Laura Favero Carraro, namely that, in Goldoni's work, gambling is typically portrayed as an obsession that negatively affects the gambler's social interactions.[67] Lugrezia, by contrast, shows herself capable of cultivating various social relationships useful to sustaining both her lottery play and her small enterprises.

The theme of gambling, both in general and performative terms, returns in the second act, set in the institutional space of the Ridotto.[68] Here, during the final days of Carnival, in an atmosphere of moral looseness, the play's characters reappear, wearing masks that protect their anonymity. Here, the protagonist notes how one can witness more interesting scenes at the Ridotto than in the theatre itself – testifying to the competition and interplay among life, theatre, and gambling.[69] This connection deepens further when, during her stay at the Ridotto – a key site for gambling and masked identities – Lugrezia's servant calls her by name, triggering her anger and the laughter of those present. This is a moment that feels like a play within a play.

Meanwhile, Lugrezia's predictions and lottery advice come true: Todero wins two hundred zecchini, and Boldo returns announcing a successful *terno* worth 1,800 ducats. A generally positive attitude towards gambling practices and the lotto in mid-eighteenth-century Venice thus prevails in the play. Indeed, it is the lottery win that restores family harmony, which would otherwise have been irreparably damaged – a stark contrast to the case of *La donna di garbo*, where gambling is depicted as ruinous, a kind of social disease with clear negative effects on domestic life and business, as also seen in *Il caffè* (1750).

In *Le donne gelose*, within an overall positive representation of the lotto, we also witness Arlecchino's enthusiasm in act III, scene XII, where he carries food and drinks for the celebration and exclaims a telling "Viva el lotto!"[70] – highlighting the game's centrality, since it appears at both the opening and the conclusion of the play. Yet this enthusiasm is ultimately counterbalanced in the final scene by Lugrezia, who plays a metatheatrical role similar to that of Rosaura in *La donna di garbo*. She urges Boldo and Todero to give up both the lottery and card games,

67 Antonella Rigamonti and Laura Favero Carraro, "Woman at Stake: The Self-Assertive Potential of Gambling in Susanna Centilivre's *The Basset Table*", *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 16, no. 2 (2011): 54.

68 Regarding eighteenth-century images of the Ridotto and its iconography in Goldoni's play, see Turchi and Alfonzetti, *Goldoni e il gioco*, 340.

69 Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, 166.

70 Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, 188.

reaffirming the necessity of maintaining a rational and moderately positive approach to gambling. The protagonist also expresses satisfaction with her ability to earn money and enjoy independence – an independence that Boldo's wife appears to envy, as she confesses in an aside that she would not mind being a widow herself.[71]

What is particularly striking is this subtle moment of female self-awareness and self-determination, sparked by a lottery win. *Le donne gelose* thus arguably features well-defined characters, far removed from the static masks to which they allude only in the Ridotto scene. Such is the case with the widow, who skirts the boundaries of legality while preserving appearances – committing a telling transgression at the Ridotto – and secures additional income. And while other Goldoni comedies (*Il giocatore*, *La donna di garbo*, *Il caffè*) tend to emphasise the destructive nature of gambling on business and family life, *Le donne gelose* portrays the category of chance in a more positive light, alongside a form of female competitiveness vis-à-vis men – especially in terms of entrepreneurial skill. Lugrezia also proves adept at simulating and concealing her intentions, both regarding the lottery (through Boldo) and her small speculative ventures.

Finally, the performative aspect of gambling appears to compete with theatrical performance itself.[72] This is evident from Lugrezia's own comparison between the Ridotto (where, she claims, the wit on display is more enjoyable than on the theatre stage) and the plays performed in theatres – a comparison that enhances the dramatic impact. It is a *mise en abyme* of theatrical entertainment, gambling, masquerade, and Venetian life.

It is also worth noting that those most overtaken by an unrestrained passion for the lottery in Goldoni's theatre are almost exclusively male. This is the case, for example, with Baron Federico in *La donna bizzarra* (from the 1757–1758 season),[73] a lotto player who recites in verse his visions, calculations, and rational deliberations used to choose his numbers. He even extols the merits of cabalism and the

71 Giulia: "Oh, now, with these eighteen hundred ducats, what a marvellous thing it would be if I were a widow too!" Goldoni, *Le donne gelose*, 196.

72 Marius Warholm Haugen also identifies analogies between theatre and the lottery in French comedies, although there, the trend is towards privileging the spectacle of theatre over that of the lottery. See, *infra*, Haugen, "Staging Lotteries", conclusion.

73 This is one of the comedies written by Goldoni for Marquis Albergati Capacelli, a senator of Bologna, which, together with four others, form a small private theatre repertoire intended for aristocratic amateurs. These plays are characterised by being shorter and having fewer characters than his other works. Specifically, this is a five-act comedy written in verse, featuring a young, beautiful, and engaging widow endowed with many qualities, who becomes ridiculous in her relentless effort to please everyone. See Guido Davico Bonino, "Introduzione. Goldoni racconta se stesso", in Goldoni, *Memorie* (1993a), IX.

study it requires, dismissing poetry in the process and drawing a parallel between predictive reasoning and literary composition: "When it comes to the kabbalah, I yield to no one. / The kabbalah is a fine study. Far more than poetry!" ("In materia di cabala non cedo a chi si sia. / La cabala è un bel studio. Altro che poesia!")[74]

This line, spoken by the character, seems as though directed by Goldoni at himself – creating a link between the lotto (and its associated practices) and the evolving literary genres of the late eighteenth century. It applies to the comedy of manners, to realist theatre with touches of farce, and even to poetry, which Baron Federico appears to deem useless. The lotto, however, can also absorb the new educational stimuli emerging in the latter half of the century, where it features both as a literary motif and as a broader cultural and social phenomenon.

3 Numerical and alphabetical lottos between literary play, truth, and fiction

In the late eighteenth century, one must also consider the skilful intrigues woven around the Genoese lottery by the Venetian adventurer Giacomo Casanova (1725–1798); a man who had sworn lifelong allegiance to fortune – while remaining immune to the lottery addiction – and who often managed to exploit it to his advantage through a lucid combination of boldness, intelligence, skill, and cunning. The episode of Casanova and the French lotto is particularly interesting for the way it intertwines numerical sciences, philosophical dispositions, entrepreneurial initiative, and the late eighteenth-century concept of literary memory. Traces of this can be found in his life story – written in French at the end of the eighteenth century and first published in 1822 – where literary aspects merge with historical, social, political, and cultural elements.[75]

It must be premised that Casanova's memoirs arise from "a clever game of writing between truth and plausibility, public and private",[76] where the reader confronts a form of pseudo-truth; a narration heavily undermined by the desire for self-representation, evident also in Casanova's account of his role in promoting

74 Carlo Goldoni, *La donna bizzarra*, in *Raccolta completa delle commedie di Carlo Goldoni*, vol. XII (La Società Editrice, 1828), 270.

75 Giacomo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, 3 vols., ed. Jean-Christophe Igalens and Éric Leborgne (Robert Laffont, 2013–2018).

76 See the introduction to the volume *Le memorie di Casanova. 200 anni di intrighi, censure, misteri*, ed. Gianluca Simeoni, Antonio Trampus, and Simone Volpato (Ronzani Editore, 2022), 9.

the lottery in France.[77] Simeoni, Trampus, and Volpato highlight this, referring to the ambivalent relationship between truth and falsehood "which reveals itself immediately" – and with considerable overlap, we might add – stating that truth "is loved so passionately that one does not hesitate to lie".[78] In line with this blending, Alberto Beniscelli notes regarding eighteenth-century self-writing: "Scholars of eighteenth-century memoirs have identified a possible reading of the 'autobiographical impulse' as a 'novelistic impulse'. Within the processes of genre contamination [...], autobiography also closely dialogues with the novel, borrowing its forms", as demonstrated by Casanova's writings or the entire first part of Goldoni's *Mémoires.*[79]

A significant role is thus played by the staging of the ability to create intricate plots interwoven in various ways throughout Casanova's pages devoted to the lottery. While Casanova's entire existence was oriented towards social and economic advancement in a non-meritocratic society, the lottery episode, albeit brief, occupies a significant and exemplary place, as demonstrated by Haugen.[80] It is especially relevant insofar as it encompasses different contents that outline Casanova's will and capacity to rationally master chance or fate to his advantage.[81] As Jesse Molesworth observes, Johnson's dictionary defines adventurers as those who seek "occasions of risk", implying a complex and specific change in the circumstances typically accompanying such strokes of fortune.[82]

This appears an essential aspect of the Venetian's psychological profile, who, during his second Parisian stay starting in 1757, does not pursue any direct ludic purpose regarding the lottery. Rather, he is driven by the desire to attain wealth and accomplish the coveted social rise by organising the French royal lotto in a manner advantageous to him. Whereas the lotto, with its high degree of accessibility, allowed anyone – regardless of social class – to imagine alternative realities by dreaming of the big win, Casanova's imagination is directed differently. In him,

77 For an analysis of this episode, and the role of Casanova in the establishment of the French Loterie de l'École Royale Militaire, see also Stigler, *Casanova's Lottery*, 9–18.

78 See the introduction to Simeoni, Trampus, and Volpato, eds., *Le memorie di Casanova*, 10.

79 Alberto Beniscelli, *Il Settecento*, in *Storia della letteratura italiana*, vol. IV, ed. Andrea Battistini (il Mulino, 2005), 119. It is no coincidence that the fourth section of Franco Fido's volume *Il paradiso dei buoni compagni. Capitoli di storia letteraria veneta* (Antenore, 1988), is entitled "Fra romanzo e autobiografia". The volume includes two essays: one devoted to Chiari as a narrator and the other focused on Casanova's memoirs (87–146).

80 Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility", 264–269.

81 See Anne Beate Maurseth, "Le Motif du jeu et la fonction du hazard – un topos littéraire dans les mémoires de Casanova", *Revue Romane* 42, no. 2 (2007): 283–296.

82 Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 22.

the planning aspect predominates, with a rational understanding of the mechanisms of the eighteenth-century lotto institution and its possible applications for the success of the enterprise and his personal gain. And although Casanova – faced with the suggestion to find a method to replenish the royal treasury and increase the crown's revenues – claims to understand nothing about finance, the success of the French lotto venture he initiated with the Calzabigi brothers proves otherwise. It is evidence that the memoirs result from a continuous and mutable narrative pact between truth and fiction.

This is also evident from the official approval, with the related decree, which is directly linked to Casanova's skilful argumentation supporting the introduction of the royal lotto, alongside his persuasive and explanatory skills. One of the underlying aims of this episode's description seems to have been to leave for posterity a carefully composite portrait employing forms of self-representation, emerging from a sophisticated blend of truth, plausibility, and simulation.

Let us take a step back: until that moment, Casanova had mostly lived in Venice, a city where the public Genoese lotto had long been in operation and successful in terms of participants. Immersed in an urban space with a deeply rooted and widespread culture of gambling, he had undoubtedly acquired solid experience, both as a player and an observer. Thus, Casanova knew – through direct experience and mathematical expertise – that lottery wins were highly unlikely, especially for complex numerical combinations such as the *terno*, *quaterna*, and *cinquina*. The question is how and to what extent, in Paris, he became a promoter of the lotto and the associated fantasies, as recounted in his memoirs and therefore in a literary guise.

As is well known, the adventure begins with Casanova's arrival in Paris on 5 January 1757; the key moment, however, is when he is advised to find a way to guarantee a considerable increase in royal revenues, amounting to 20,000,000 livres, necessary to maintain the Royal Military School. As Haugen notes, Casanova at that moment boasts of having bluffed his way into the project, in a clever game of simulation.[83] But in light of Molesworth's definition of adventurers and Casanova's desire for self-promotion, might it not also be a game of simulation to portray himself on the page as one who grasps opportunities with a certain nonchalance?

On this point, the older Casanova's memorial weaving offers no further speculation. In his life story, however, he notes how he calmly reflected on the strange chance fortune had offered him. In this case, his reasoning thread, summarised, develops around the hypothetical construction of a situation generated by fate but requiring qualities – possessed by him – of invention and planning. This is not

83 Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility", 265.

linked to the drawing of a ticket or the identification of winning numbers but is rationally connected to the deployment of a series of skills, including his mathematical and calculation abilities.

Also evident are the skills he displays when presenting the project at the Military School, in the presence, among others, of the expert mathematician D'Alembert. During the discussion – which, he narrates, lasted for hours – Casanova skilfully refuted several objections. He explained that "if the art of calculation in general is nothing more than the art of finding the expression of a single ratio resulting from the combination of several ratios, that very definition also applies to moral calculation, which was as exact as mathematical calculation".[84]

The interesting point in this passage lies in the establishment of an effective parallelism between moral calculation and mathematical calculation, the latter being the ultimate result of a series of complex ratios. In other words, Casanova shows how human choices can also be analysed rationally, weighing causes, effects, desires, and consequences as if they were numbers. This position exalts rational intelligence and emotional control in relation to the establishment of the French lotto, in keeping with the Enlightenment spirit, where logic and morality follow similar dynamics. In doing so, Casanova not only defends his actions but legitimises rationality even in seemingly subjective domains, proposing an almost scientific trust in the measurability of human behaviour. This is evident in key moments linking his Parisian trajectory to the direction of the French lotto: the initial simulation, the rapid adoption of the Calzabigi brothers' inventions, the successful project presentation, and finally, its fortunate implementation.

Proof of the success of his advocacy – as we read – is the lotto establishment decree issued eight days after the meeting with French authorities, stipulating that the direction of the tax office would be entrusted to Giovanni Antonio Calzabigi (the true inventor, along with his brother Ranieri, of the lotto of the French Military School), while Casanova himself was assigned six lotto offices and a pension of four thousand francs from the lotto interests. As he writes: "this was the income from a capital of one hundred thousand francs which I was free to collect whenever I wished by renouncing the offices, since that capital served as my guarantee".[85]

Later, we witness Casanova's rise, pursued with full control over his impulses and thus in contrapuntal terms to the irrationality of lottery players. Enlightenment discourse contrasts the aleatory nature of the lotto with ideals of calculation,

84 Giacomo Casanova, *Storia della mia vita*, ed. Piero Chiara and Federico Roncoroni, vol. II (1756–1763) (I Meridiani, Mondadori, 1984), 163.

85 Casanova, *Storia della mia vita*, II, 164.

skill, and merit – the very ideals Casanova promotes in this episode. Indeed, he immediately sells five of the six offices assigned to him. Then, anticipating the announced payment of winning tickets within eight days, he advertises that his office would pay within twenty-four hours of the draw, thereby ensuring high attendance. This is accompanied by an additional advantage, partly due to chance and partly to the clever launch of the initiative, namely the notable success of the first drawing on 18 April 1758. With entrepreneurial shrewdness, Casanova observes that "in Paris the winnings consisted of only about twenty *terni* and that although this was a small amount, it was sufficient to earn the lottery a brilliant reputation. The fanaticism had already begun and for the next drawing it was easy to predict a doubling of the revenue".[86]

Calzabigi – who disapproves – calls Casanova's scheme to pay within twenty-four hours "a rash move". The financier and intendant of the Military School, Joseph Pâris Duverney, on the other hand, defends it, convinced that it would ensure an increase in the lottery's reputation. Compared to Calzabigi's prudence, Casanova's main driving force is once again his initiative and enterprise, in an egotistically marked trajectory, or at least portrayed as such.

In other words, the lottery appears as a financial institution, cultural figure, and literary motif in Casanova's depiction in his story of his life; by bypassing the principle of randomness and drawing instead – at least in part – on the narrative conventions of the eighteenth-century novel, Casanova skilfully positions himself on the Parisian scene, aligning with notions of merit and ability, and with a capacity to combine calculation and morality. Moreover, we witness the representation of individual initiative: that of a figure who consciously places himself outside the magic circle and who, along the way, illustrates and adapts the procedures needed to facilitate and expand access to it.

Although the second lotto draw causes him some financial headaches in terms of balance and payment, his social ascent continues – a process which, as we learn from his own words, once again relies on the logic of calculated appearance. He recounts how, visiting private salons and theatre foyers, everyone gave him money and asked him to choose the numbers to bet on, as they "understood nothing" – presumably about the mechanisms of the lotto. He emphasises how he returned home with pockets full of money, and how this privilege depended on the fact that he moved about in a carriage, since Paris was a city (and still is, he writes from his retirement in Dux) "where everything is judged by appearances".[87] Even earlier, he had declared more generally that, in France, "nothing is true; every-

86 Casanova, *Storia della mia vita*, II, 165.

87 Casanova, *Storia della mia vita*, II, 148.

thing is appearance", in line with the logic of simulation that he rationally pursues.

In fact, at the beginning of chapter VI, he had already foreshadowed his expectations for Paris (though not yet regarding the lotto), stating his intention to embark on a career as an adventurer "in the only city in the world where blind fortune distributes her favours to those who place themselves in her hands".[88] Yet in truth, he does not abandon himself to fortune, but rather bends chance to his will. At the beginning of chapter VII, he appeals to his own intellectual faculties and social skills together with his desire to meet important and powerful people. He declares his intention "to court at any cost those in whose company blind fortune resided", thus simulating the seductive interplay between the gambler and the numbers on which to place a bet. In this light, his quest is not for fortune itself, but for those who enjoy or control it – using reason, strategy, and a calculated approach. This reveals a gap between what he claims (placing himself in the hands of fate and stumbling upon the Calzabigi lotto) and what he actually does in practice.

Even in his direct engagement with the lotto, Casanova adopts a multi-layered, ambivalent stance. His Parisian social rise – as he reconstructs it in his memoirs, only a few years before his death – relies on the rational exploitation of the lotto's aleatory structure. As Eugen Fink observes, there is a close connection between the sphere of play and the sphere of art, as both belong to a domain of "unreal reality", that is, of something which, though unreal, is real by virtue of being a "representation of the unreal".[89] This observation proves especially pertinent to the episode of the Parisian lotto. As we have seen, Casanova promotes the introduction of the lotto in Paris by relying on his intellectual skills – logical reasoning, resourcefulness, and organisational acumen. Unlike those who gamble blindly, entrusting themselves to the unknown and becoming trapped within the magic circle of possible winnings, Casanova, the adventurer-gambler, possesses the information necessary to identify the strategies that will enable him to pursue both social advancement and financial gain. He knows the rules – and how to circumvent them. His narrative about the happy and fortuitous coincidence with the Calzabigi brothers' proposal to establish the lottery is therefore clearly a literary strategy. What predominates is the portrait of a path to success built on social and strategic intelligence, calculation, and his role – as a kind of skilful demiurge – situated outside the labyrinth of the lotto.

88 Casanova, *Storia della mia vita*, II, 141.

89 Eugen Fink, *Oasi del gioco* (Raffaello Cortina Editore 2008), 112.

This ambiguous and self-promotional mode of presentation resurfaces in Casanova's memoirs some years later, when he advocates for an educational version of the lotto by proposing a *gioco del lotto grammaticale* based on the drawing of syllables instead of numbers.[90] In this context, he explicitly critiques the very system that had brought him fortune in Paris, noting that the Genoese lottery is "ruineuse pour les pauvres gens" [ruinous for the poor], who lack the mathematical knowledge required to assess the unfavourable odds.[91] He therefore turns to a different approach: the idea of a grammatical lottery[92] that could support the poor by promoting literacy. As he writes: "A curious effect of such a lottery will be that it will teach everyone who enjoys playing to read and write correctly: it will be a true school, freely available to the public".[93] The scheme he envisions will be both entertaining and educational.

It is worth noting that the ignorance of lotto mechanisms – which, during the 1757 Paris experience, Casanova had attributed to the wealthy gamblers who entrusted him with their money – is now associated with the poor. To them, in this later phase of his life, Casanova's new formula promises access to literacy, reflecting his shift toward educational ambitions and the development of a distinct skill set. The use of the lotto thus becomes an alternative and playful form of educational development. As Haugen observes, this initiative aligns with Enlightenment-era debates on the expansion of education and reflects yet another of Casanova's adept strategies of self-promotion, as he frames himself as the advocate of a broad and progressive educational vision.[94]

4 Conclusion

Ambivalent and fluctuating attitudes towards the lottery characterise the writings of different authors (such as Goldoni and Chiari), who waver between positive and negative perceptions of this game of chance – one that was open to all, regardless of social class or gender. In Goldoni's case, for example, the motif of the lottery becomes a point of inter- and intra-textual dialogue across the various expressions of his dramatic writing from the period.

A high degree of awareness regarding this ambivalence appears in sonnets and satirical compositions from the very years in which the public lottery was in-

90 Giacomo Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, vol. II (Éditions Robert Laffont, 2013–2018), 1349–1367.
91 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, II, 1365.
92 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, II, 1366.
93 Casanova, *Histoire de ma vie*, II, 1366.
94 Haugen, "The Lottery Fantasy and Social Mobility", 268–269.

troduced in Venice. These texts feature evocative images such as the labyrinth and the figure of the gambler circling around himself like a caged bird – echoing Huizinga's concept of the "magic circle" and its later elaborations. At times, critique takes on a satirical, and even scatological, tone – as in the case of Frugoni, who opposed the naïve trust in the predictive power of dreams (the same subject Chiari alternately defends and critiques at different moments).

Furthermore, in the scenes concerning the Parisian lotto and the reflections on the grammatical version, reality and fantasy intertwine with memory, literary ambition, and strategies of self-promotion. Indeed, in Casanova's protean *œuvre* – as well as in Goldoni's more restrained Parisian memoirs – we find contrasting evaluations and rhetorical uses of the lotto. In Casanova's Paris episode, the fantasy of the lotto functions as a rationally pursued means of personal success. Casanova does not play; he organises – drawing on intelligence, skill, and merit to achieve social and financial gain. In the design of the *lotteria alfabetica*, he instead presents himself as the proponent of broader ambitions: the eradication of illiteracy, in line with Horace's maxim (so influential in the eighteenth century) of *miscere utile dulci.* Casanova's lotto episode thus appears as a kind of performative self-representation, through which the author constructs his persona within a novelistic trajectory. The lotto serves as both theme and device in what ultimately becomes a literary game shaped by the allure and fascination of chance.

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