



**MIMESIS  
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THE ITALIAN METHOD OF  
*LA DRAMMATICA*

Its Legacy and Reception

Edited by  
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*Eterotopie*

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ANNA DE DOMENICO SICA

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *drammatica* is a theatrical declamatory system that has been completely neglected since the dawn of the twentieth century; nevertheless it formed the foundation of the Italian national theatre and played a remarkable role in the history of eighteenth-and nineteenth-century European theatre. It featured a scale of intonations and gestures which were represented by symbols of notation. Some of those symbols are still preserved and readable in actors' prompt-books.

Now that the Italian method of the *drammatica* has been defined as a distinctive way of acting, new perspectives have emerged. We are able to prove that there are differences as well as similarities between French, English and Italian acting, and that the origins of those three ways lie in the great Italian tradition of the *rappresentativa*.

The discovery of the *drammatica*'s code sheds new light on nineteenth-century acting. We may note how Adelaide Ristori passed on her art to Irving's actress Genevieve Ward, and how Stanislavsky, almost aflame, moulded his system from Eleonora Duse's acting. We may detail the evidence for the development of systems of notation of voice and gesture in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century acting and, what's more unearth Calzabigi's theory according to his creation of the so-called music of declamation (*musique de declamation*), and examine Pascoli's metatonic syllables theory, which we find in Duse's prompt-books. From all these strands a previously unexplored variety in the reception of the *drammatica*'s legacy is revealed.

The first time I saw a specimen of the declamatory symbols of the *drammatica* was when I read Duse's copy of Alfieri's *Mirra*. I was working on the reconstruction of the Murray Edwards Eleonora Duse Collection, and at that time I thought I had found Duse's gold. I was wrong! I had indeed found Duse's gold, but I had not unearthed all of it. I had failed to identify the key to the roots of nineteenth-century Italian acting. Now I know that the ink and pencil marks made by Duse, still readable in the margins of pages 247 and 265 of her copy of *Mirra*, are

the declamatory symbols of the 'neo-classic' *drammatica*. I realised that those marks were the symbols of an acting code only when I read Lorenzo Camilli's *Fonografia* (1852). That was the starting point of an extraordinary adventure which has led me to the inner secrets of Duse's acting, and consequently to the neglected Italian method of the *drammatica*. For years I have been searching to find differences and parallels between the declamatory symbols still readable in Italian actors' prompt-books and the rules that governed the application of the symbols traceable in eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century treatises.

In the last five years I have been trying to decipher the neglected acting code of the *drammatica*, and during all this time I have been given the generous support and have gained the invaluable friendship of many scholars and artists. I should like to thank them all, and in particular Laura Mariani, Sayoko Onishi, Marco Gambino, Daniele Prestigiacomo.

I have been granted the privilege of giving birth to an investigation, along with a group of outstanding scholars, into the *drammatica*'s legacy in acting, music and literature, and its reception in Europe as well as in Asia. This volume is the result of Palermo University FFR 2012-2013 research programme *La recitazione nel XIX secolo. La drammatica metodo italiano: la sua eredità e recezione in Europa e nel mondo* [Nineteenth-Century Acting. The Italian Method of la *drammatica*: its Legacy and Reception in Europe and in the World] which I have the honour to lead. I should like to express special thanks to Prof. Ivano Cavallini for his essay which unearths new borders between acting and opera singing; to Prof. Massimiliano Pecora, who sets out in his work the routes of the metrical rhythm of the *drammatica*; to Prof. Raffaele Furno, who skilfully explores the reinvented tradition of Carmelo Bene's acting; to Dr Fabio Palma for his unique experience as an actor; and to Prof. Giusi Tamburello for her remarkable work – she meticulously investigates the Italian theatrical legacy in China, and sets new light on it before us. My special thanks must also go to Prof. Claudio Maria Schirò, Prof. Sergei Tcherkasski and Prof. Xuedong Wang, who generously contributed an examination of the routes and roots of the international reception of the Italian theatre.

I want to express my most sincere thanks to Dr Irene Scaturro, to whom all the contributors and I owe a special debt of gratitude for her excellent editorial care. Without her invaluable help we would never have achieved the goal of publishing *The Italian Method of la drammatica* in 2014. I am also deeply grateful for her essay that expands on the legacy of the *drammatica* in twentieth-century Italian acting. I am particularly grateful for the assistance given by Leonardo Mancini. And once more I express my

heartfelt gratitude to Fr Alban McCoy, the current Dean of St Edmund's College, Cambridge, for his ever invaluable help and support.

I am indebted in more ways than I can easily define to Prof. Renato Tomasino, who introduced me to theatre studies. I would like to thank him now for twenty-seven years of inestimable debates.

Finally, my greatest thanks are due to Prof. Nicola De Domenico, an incomparable philosopher and historian. I recall that it was on an autumn evening that he showed me Camilli's *Fonografia*.