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Palerme*

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Carmel Raz

- 1 After her carriage broke down near the town of Aversa, a few miles away from Naples, Maria Malibran decided to visit the local madhouse with her companions. The first patient they saw was a young nobleman suffering from a profound melancholy caused by a romantic disappointment. The youth begged her to sing, and burst out crying upon hearing Rossini's "Willow Song". Soon, however, other patients approached her:

They gradually formed a circle around the singer, but not too close, as if to show their deference. They were dressed in weird outfits, with colorful scraps of cloth, one had a blackened face, another braided hair of straw, others wearing large cones of gray paper that they had stolen from the kitchen. Once she had finished singing, they wanted to display their expertise. They began to jump and frolic as if in a frenzy; some cavorted, others were rolling about; one tore his jacket and another his hair [...] "Well!" one of us said, "here is an example of an Atellan farce: singing, dancing, shrill laughter, broken sentences, hiccups, capers, and above all this, Madness himself, sweet and frustrating, waving his jester's scepter and jingling his bells."¹

- 2 This anecdote is embedded within Pier Angelo Fiorentino's review of Maurice Sand's compendious *Masques et bouffons : comédie italienne* (1860), a two-volume illustrated history of the *commedia dell'arte*. Fiorentino takes issue with Sand's assertion that the *commedia dell'arte* tradition is extinct. It lives on, he argues, in the famous Teatro San Carlino in Naples, in local puppet theaters, in nativity plays, and most of all, in the national

consciousness. Malibran, her companions, and the melancholy patient here serve witness to an involuntary outburst of *commedia dell'arte* in an Italian madhouse.

- 3 At first glance, Fiorentino's allusion to Malibran's experience at a lunatic asylum seems curious in the context of a review published thirty years after her death. Yet this visit is situated within a specific cultural moment: in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Aversa madhouse was famous throughout Europe for successfully using music, theater, and dance to treat mental illness. Many of these accounts made much of the fact that modern-day Aversa was built near the ruins of Atella, the birthplace of *Atellanae* farces that were the precursors of the *commedia dell'arte*. Malibran's visit is only one of a plethora of first-person anecdotes, medical reports, fictional accounts, and newspaper articles that emphasized the efficacy of music and other arts at the institution.
- 4 This paper examines the use of music, dance, and theatrical therapy in the lunatic asylums of Aversa and Palermo. I argue that the use of the performing arts in these institutions should be understood not only within the context of the emerging field of psychiatry, but also as interacting with popular notions about the national characteristics of Italians. I begin by contextualizing the debate around roleplaying and theatrical productions within the new "moral approach" characteristic of early nineteenth-century psychiatry. I subsequently examine historical reports on the use of music and drama in these asylums. Following a comparison of various accounts of Malibran's visit to Aversa, I end by considering how depictions of these asylums relied on the assumption that Italian minds and bodies had a special sensitivity to the arts.

Theater, music, and the "moral treatment"

- 5 The association between theater, music, and madness is of course deeply rooted in antiquity². The deliberate staging of plays and operas by lunatics, however, is a nineteenth-century variation on this ancient tradition, stemming from new ideas pertaining to subjectivity and to the nature of mental illness. We can pinpoint the start of this practice to the late-eighteenth-century rise of the so-called "moral treatment", commonly associated with Philippe Pinel in Paris, Vincenzo Chiarugi in Florence, Benjamin Rush in Philadelphia, and William Tuke in York³. Proponents of the moral treatment viewed patients as amenable to persuasion and education. They rejected traditionally harsh methods such as restraint and physical punishment in favor of a gentle regime of care that appealed to a patient's moral sensibility.
- 6 The rise of the moral treatment can be directly linked to eighteenth-century psychologists such as John Locke and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, who regarded madness as a result of the false connection of ideas⁴. The goal of therapy was therefore to modify unhealthy mental habits through external stimulation, forging new patterns of cerebral activity that would encourage the invalids to gradually regain their senses. The success of a cure became dependent on diverting the patient away from the cause of his sorrows, or disabusing him of irrational beliefs. The primary therapeutic means were conversation, persuasion, and distraction through physical labor or entertainment, as such activities were thought to alter morbid trains of thought.
- 7 In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, physicians taking a moral approach frequently implemented an additional method to combat diseased modes of thinking. If a patient, they believed, could not be rationally convinced of the error of their ways, it was

sometimes necessary to shock them into comprehension through a significant emotional experience. These shocks typically took on one of three forms: they could be *physical*, and involve cold showers or some other stimuli; *aesthetic*, and arise from an emotional response stimulated by music or other art, or they could be *psychic*, and involve the staging of an event that resolved a patient's obsession without their knowledge. The latter were enthusiastically undertaken at numerous mental asylums and reported in medical treatises and journals⁵.

- 8 The historian of psychiatry Mary de Young terms these enactments “pious frauds”, which she defines as “ruses, deceits, and trickeries to humor, distract, challenge, and sometimes ridicule the content of delusions, hallucinations, and fixed thoughts and ideas⁶”. This was not a new strategy – according to a famous anecdote, the sixth-century physician Alexander of Tralles had cured a woman who was convinced that she had a serpent in her belly by planting and then extracting a small snake from the receptacle into which she vomited⁷. However, the extent and complexity of these staged events was unprecedented. In a sense, early nineteenth-century pious frauds reveal an Enlightenment-era optimism regarding the nature of mental illness, founded on the belief that delusions could simply be dispelled if confronted with rational evidence.
- 9 In perhaps the most famous example of a pious fraud in the psychiatric literature, Pinel described treating a paranoid tailor obsessed with political persecution through an elaborate mock trial in which visiting physicians played the role of a government delegation. He reported:

These commissaries, who were dressed in black robes suitable to their pretended office, ranged themselves round a table and caused the melancholic to be brought before them. One of them interrogated him as to his profession, former conduct, the journals which he had been in the habits of reading, and other particulars respecting his patriotism. The defendant related all that he had said and done; and insisted on a definitive judgment, as he did not conceive that he was guilty of any crime. In order to make a deep impression on his imagination, the president of the delegates pronounced in a loud voice the following sentence. “In virtue of the power which has been delegated to us by the national assembly, we have entered proceedings in due form of law, against Citizen: and having duly examined him, touching the matter whereof he stands accused, we make our declaration accordingly. It is, therefore, by us declared, that we have found the said Citizen a truly loyal patriot; and, pronouncing his acquittal, we forbid all further proceedings against him.”⁸

- 10 The patient initially improved, but relapsed after inadvertently learning that his trial and acquittal had been staged. Pinel ends this case history with the chilling observation that the man was now wholly incurable.
- 11 A few years later, German psychiatrist Johann Christian Reil inverted the “pious fraud” paradigm by proposing that asylums should have “a specially designed working theater, with all the necessary apparatus, masks, stage machinery, and sets⁹”. Roleplay and theater, he argued, could be used by the physician to combat madness by awaking the passions, and inducing experiences of fear, horror, or astonishment. A jarring emotional shock could thus be experienced in real life or enacted on stage. Whereas in Pinel's scenario, the patient was unaware of the fact that he was participating in a staged enactment, Reil appears to advocate for targeted therapeutic role-playing in a theatrical setting. There is a difference between pious frauds and targeted therapeutic theatricals. Both involve actors, sets, costumes, and lines: in the first case the patient is unaware of

the deception, while in the second he is presumably conscious of the theatricality to a greater or lesser extent.

- 12 A third twist on the idea of therapeutic theatricals arose in 1806, when the Abbé François Simonet de Coulmier, the governor of the Charenton lunatic asylum, began producing plays, comic operas, and ballets with the blessing of the institution's chief physician, Jean-Baptiste Joseph Gastaldy. These semi-professional performances featured asylum inmates acting alongside actors, musicians, and dancers hired from Paris. The director of the theater was the institution's most infamous patient, the Marquis de Sade, who frequently took part as an actor. The Charenton theater did not survive Gastaldy's death, and his successor as chief physician, Antoine-Athanase Royer-Collard, clashed repeatedly with de Coulmier over the issue. In 1813, Royer-Collard successfully convinced the government to ban theatrical performances at the institution¹⁰.
- 13 A heated debate around the use of therapeutic theater transpired in medical journals well into the 1830s¹¹. The core of this debate was concerned with the potentially disruptive effects of theatricals upon the patients. The prominent French psychiatrist Étienne Esquirol attacked the use of plays and comic operas in the treatment of mental illness, and recalled, "there were few representations [at the Charenton] that were not accompanied by some violent explosion of delirium, or by some relapse¹²". The German physician August Friedrich Schweigger took a more moderate approach, noting that theatricals had the potential to help each participating patient come to an awareness of their true situation. His Berlin-based colleague August Klaatsch confessed that he could not approve of theatrical productions, as these by definition "explore passions and relationships which are foreign to the lunatic's mode of thinking¹³". He further maintained that lunatics' cunning should never be encouraged by any activity that involved pretending and acting¹⁴. A similar skepticism was voiced by the Belgian psychiatrist Joseph Guislain, who marveled at the motivation behind putting on "a performance for an audience of fools¹⁵". "What good does one expect", he asked, "from a medium that [...] exalts the mind and disturbs the heart?"¹⁶
- 14 With the shuttering of the Charenton theatre, the only insane asylums that appear to have regularly employed theatrical spectacles in the first half of the nineteenth century were the *Casa dei Matti* of Aversa and the institution in Palermo¹⁷. In what follows, I will discuss the history of these two institutions, focusing on the use of music, dancing, and theatricals at the former, and role-playing at the latter. I rely on reports by hospital staff, visiting physicians, and tourists, as well as the interpretation of accounts of these activities by reviewers abroad. Taken together, these accounts provide an intricate snapshot of the varied uses of the performing arts in patient treatment in southern Italy during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The madhouse of Aversa

- 15 The *Casa dei Matti* of Aversa was established in 1813 on the order of Joachim Murat, the French King of Naples between 1808 and 1815. Murat, who was Napoleon's brother-in-law, was adamant about the need to modernize national institutions according to French models¹⁸. He allocated generous funds toward a new mental institution that would implement the most recent theories about mental illness coming out of Paris. Lunatics were thus removed from Naples' notorious *Ospedale degli Incurabili*, where they had been kept together with patients suffering from infectious diseases, and lodged in the new

complex at Aversa. The institution comprised three buildings with a capacity for approximately 500 patients in total¹⁹, and insane males, insane females, and epileptics were separately housed. Located only seven miles from Naples, the establishment was close enough to allow leading physicians to visit when needed, yet bucolic and beautiful, situated “in the midst of a most enchanting country, [it] combine[d] all those physical advantages which can be derived from geographical position²⁰”.

- 16 In search of a director for the new institution, the minister of the interior, Count Giuseppe de Zurlo, turned to Abbé Giovanni Maria Linguiti (1773-1825), a Neapolitan cleric who had recently published a book on the moral treatment of mental illness, *Ricerche sopra le alienazioni della mente umana* (1812). Linguiti did not possess any formal medical training, and his conception of the moral treatment appears to have been obtained solely from books²¹. The Abbé’s relentless self-promotion garnered opprobrium from local physicians, who complained about the lack of medical rigor at the establishment²². However, Linguiti was well connected to the Neapolitan press, and word of his establishment soon spread throughout Europe, attracting the interest of lay visitors and physicians alike²³.
- 17 The Aversa asylum was particularly renowned for efficaciously using music, dance, and theater to treat the mentally ill. Letters, popular accounts, and travelogues emphasized the heartwarming sight of patients playing music and acting in theatrical productions. These events soon became valuable tourist attractions. Travelers to Italy were encouraged to visit Aversa’s madhouse, where they would find “a Theatre [sic], and pianos on which other madmen are accustomed to play²⁴”. A book on Naples and its environs reported on a performance at the Aversa *Casa dei Matti* where the “orchestra, actors on the stage, and four-fifths of the audience, were all insane, or under cure for insanity; and yet the performance went off not only with decorum and theatrical propriety, but with a good deal of life and spirit²⁵”. Another guidebook deemed the asylum “charming²⁶”, and observed that the lunatics, “instead of clanking chains and looking haggard, are brought to sing songs and work works and even to play plays²⁷”. In her memoir *The Idler in Italy* (1839), Marguerite Gardiner, Countess of Blessington recalled visiting Aversa, where:

Comedies are performed twice a week, and of concerts an equal number. Balls are permitted whenever a desire for dancing is manifested [...]. Tragedies are considered too exciting; but comedies are supposed to have a salutary effect on the minds of the inmates. The performers are the patients, as are also the musicians of the concerts; and I have been told by those who have witnessed the performance, that it is so good as to defy the possibility of suspecting that the actors are deranged.²⁸

- 18 Aversa’s asylum theater was the subject of a lengthy article in the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (1823), which was subsequently republished in a number of newspapers including the *Gazetta di Milano* and even (in a German translation) in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (1823). The author described attending a performance of *il discolo ravveduto con Pulcinella giocator di vantaggio*, presented by over thirty lunatics to an audience of over 500, comprising their fellow patients as well as various local dignitaries, government officials, and Austrian officers. He commended the event for being extremely well organized and decorous, and praised the patients for their dedicated and convincing performances. The reviewer confessed that this experience caused him to change his mind regarding the healing potential of theatrical spectacle. He quoted Linguiti on this point:

I admit that selecting theatrical entertainments in an undifferentiated manner without any consideration for the cause of each madman could have dangerous consequences, but if one carefully selects works and assigns roles so that each madman plays a character whose part is opposed to his prevailing obsessions, this therapy becomes very powerful [...] in my experience the best and most effective remedy against this terrible disease.²⁹

- 19 Generally speaking, lay visitors were captivated by patient theatricals to a far greater extent than medical professionals. In 1823, the Neapolitan physician Domenico Gualandi published his observations on the Aversa *Casa dei Matti*, in which he explicitly refuted the *Giornale's* report. Not only were key technical details in the article false, he wrote, but he knew of no theater piece, whether Italian or foreign, that included thirty well-delineated characters that could contribute to the amelioration of madness. The employment of theatricals, Gualandi argued, was the result of the medical naiveté of the asylum director: Linguiti's words and actions consistently demonstrated that "he is not a doctor, and has not yet formed a just notion of madness and its varieties³⁰".
- 20 The theatrical entertainments at Aversa also attracted attention beyond Italy. The broader medical community regarded the Aversa performances as participating in the aforementioned debate concerning patient theatricals and the moral method, while interacting with specifically Italian or Neapolitan characteristics. Aversa's prominence, moreover, made it a particularly appealing point of comparison in terms of international psychiatric discourse. In 1826, Esquirol published a statistical account of the institution using data compiled by Giuseppe Lastrillo, a physician employed at Aversa. He examined parameters such as the number of male versus female patients, season, hereditary tendencies, causes of insanity, and number of deaths and cures. Esquirol's data showed that in contrast to France, where the proportion of male to female patients was equal, the ratio of male to female patients at Aversa was five to two. Therefore, he concluded, "it is not the climate which renders insanity less frequent among females in Naples, but their inferior importance in society, and consequently a less frequent exposure to the moral causes of the disease³¹". However, cases of insanity arising from romantic disappointment were far more frequent in Naples than in France. "It is long", Esquirol observed, "since love has ceased to break hearts and turn heads in France³²."
- 21 Generalizing about national difference, the renowned French psychiatrist Alexandre Brière de Boismont published a similar comparison in 1832. In a report on insane asylums throughout the Italian peninsula, he posited that insanity was inversely related to national development. Therefore:
- Mental alienation is frequent in proportion as countries are less quiet, and more advanced in civilization. Thus Turkey, Egypt, and Russia, contain very few insane, and in northern Italy, where information is more generally diffused, the number is nearly double to what it is in the south.³³
- 22 By linking insanity to civilization, Brière de Boismont ascribed the smaller number of madmen in southern Italy to that region's lack of development. Moreover, he regarded the character and propensity of Italians as a case in point. This nation, he claimed, tended to "neglect their public affairs, and spend their lives enjoying fine arts and spectacles³⁴". Such entertainments caused them to be greatly preoccupied with love, which played a central role in their lives. Compared with France there were fewer madmen in Italy because the latter "engaged themselves with a narrower range of ideas³⁵".
- 23 Similar national explanations appeared in debates around the efficacy of Aversa's theatrical therapy. A reviewer in the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* (1825) stated

that although Aversa was the finest madhouse in Italy, it fell short of its English and German equivalents due to the “habits and genius of the Neapolitan people³⁶”. In England, he reflected, wealthy patients could garden, read, and otherwise amuse themselves, while poorer patients were encouraged to work at their trades. In contrast,

At Aversa, what are the objects of amusement? Billiard tables, music, various petty national games, puppet-shows of all descriptions, and a variety of toys!! We would almost believe its inmates to be boys, not men. But men it seems they are, at least in Naples, where even the upper classes spend the whole day in the coffee-houses, or at the theatre, while the lower orders visit the puppet-show at seven o'clock in the morning, after which they dance the ‘Tarantella’ and play the *Morra*.³⁷

- 24 While this critic invoked Neapolitan customs to discredit patient theatricals, other medical writers ascribed their success precisely to the national temperament. A reviewer in the *North American Medical and Surgical Journal* (1831) mused, “like the people of the south of Europe generally, the Neapolitans are instinctively fond of theatrical performances, and would probably fall into a state of despondency and melancholy were they entirely deprived of them³⁸”. Bypassing any controversy regarding the asylum’s theater, he simply commented on the presence of a “source of amusement, not commonly allowed in lunatic asylums, with which the inmates of Aversa are provided: we allude to theatrical representations, in which some of the patients are made to assume the part of performers, others of spectators³⁹”. A similar opinion was echoed by Dr. Gottlob von Nositz und Jänckendorf, who decided that the employment of theatrical spectacles was generally too dangerous for the mentally ill, with the exception of Italian lunatics, for whom marionette shows were essential. He noted, moreover, that the “justly famous” institute at Aversa had produced puppet shows with no ill effects⁴⁰.
- 25 The Scottish anatomist John Bell addressed national characteristics at length in the account of his visit to the Aversa asylum in his *Travels in Italy* (1825). Bell was unreservedly enthusiastic about the institution, which he compared favorably to the state of asylums in his home country. The patients at Aversa, he observed, seemed happy, docile, and harmless. Upon meeting a group of them near the establishment’s entrance, the “mild looking beings [...] saluted me politely, and all smiled kindly [...] gazing on me like sheep or goats, and harmless as such, without alarm or suspicion⁴¹”. This stood in sharp contrast to the unfortunate state of the mentally ill in Britain. “Our tempers and dispositions, perhaps, are more ardent, more ungovernable, than those of this nation”, he wrote, “yet I am persuaded that the irritable state of the insane with us, is produced less from natural causes, than from the mode of treatment⁴².”
- 26 Bell was particularly impressed by the establishment’s use of musical and theatrical therapy. He praised the asylum’s practice of making musical instruments and training available to patients who would not otherwise have had an opportunity to acquire such skills⁴³. As an example, he praised an aria *buffa* performed by a “young man, who sang with so much spirit and effect, his manner and expression were so truly comic, he gave so much character to his subject, that I immediately concluded he had been accustomed to perform on the stage.” In fact, he learned, the man was a jeweler who had lost his mind following his wife’s death⁴⁴.
- 27 Bell also admired the asylum’s employment of theatrical productions, which he considered akin to the “variety of games, billiards, wooden muskets, puppets dressed in various costumes, and other harmless amusements suited to the childish condition of the inhabitants⁴⁵”. In this passage, he compares the controversial use of operas and spectacle

to puppets and toys, and argues that the fact that patients *could* be entertained with such “harmless amusements” disclosed their inherent innocence, which protected them from the dangers of theatrical spectacle. During his tour of the asylum, for example, a patient approached him and declared himself to be the Emperor. Bell initially dismissed the statement as consistent with the delusions of a manic, only to realize that the man was in fact referring to “an opera, which they were getting up, [in which] he had been selected to play the Emperor of Morocco, a circumstance from which he seemed to derive much pleasure⁴⁶”.

- 28 Subsequently, Bell observed a number of other patients in the institute’s courtyard, including small groups playing games, practicing dance steps to the sound of a guitar and tambourine, and practicing speeches. He observed that both the mentally handicapped and the insane seemed different from their British counterparts, noting:

I saw nothing like those starts, of wild, but grand and powerful imaginations, which often momentarily illuminate the mind of the maniac in our country. Their gait was listless, and even in dancing, their movements were languid. I observed however, that when the tarantalla [sic] struck up, it acted on some with electric force.⁴⁷

- 29 Two patients, whom Bell nicknamed “the tragedian”, and “the geometrician”, seemed highly affected by the tarantella:

The geometrician [...] threw himself into various attitudes, with a degree, of mirth, glee, and drollery, that, even in such circumstances, was nearly irresistible; while in the meantime the tragedian unheeding and unheeded, yet evidently excited by the general gaiety, tossing and flinging his arms energetically, stalked majestically, but with the unerring tact, attributed to the somnambulist among the dancers.⁴⁸

- 30 The mere hint of the tarantella, it seems, transforms these men into puppets or automata, in which each enacts a theatrical version of his particular mania. The “geometrician” poses and clowns, while the “tragedian” is akin to a sleepwalker, at once excited and completely unaware of his surroundings.

- 31 To summarize, both proponents and critics of the Aversa asylum understood the establishment in terms of national stereotypes, ranging from the tarantella to games, opera, and the *commedia dell’arte*. In some cases, the trope of comparing patients to children was used to argue for the inherent innocence of the former, but in others it was mapped onto contentions regarding the immaturity of the Italian nationality. For example, Bell believed the theatrical productions to be harmless because the childlike minds of the Aversa lunatics were incorruptible, while the *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal* regarded such entertainments as symptomatic of the inherent puerility of Italians. These claims intersected with, and amplified, debates about the value of theatrical productions in the treatment of mental illness.

The madhouse of Palermo

- 32 In 1824, nearly a decade after the establishment of the madhouse at *Casa dei Matti* Aversa, Baron Pietro Pisani took over the directorship of the madhouse in Palermo. Although this institution had long been in existence, Pisani decided to use his position to completely restructure it, basing his reforms upon the newest trends in European psychiatry⁴⁹. Pisani was exceptionally well suited to this task. An accomplished administrator and philanthropist⁵⁰, he had firsthand experience with mental illness: his beloved son Antonino, a talented composer and writer on music, had suffered from “a kind of absence

of mind” which “rendered him insensible to any external sensation⁵¹”. This state may have stemmed from any number of psychological or neurological conditions which could have been considered grounds for institutionalization at the time. Following his son’s premature death, Pisani attempted suicide, and fell into a profound depression⁵². He eventually recovered in part due to his passion for music and archeology, as well as his immersion in various philanthropic projects⁵³. The combination of personal experience with madness as well as the therapeutic effects of external activities and hobbies left Pisani with a particular empathy for lunatics. He also maintained a deep-seated belief in the healing powers of distraction through arts and physical activity.

- 33 Pisani’s initial encounter with the Palermo mental institution was harrowing. A decade later, he described the institute’s former method of psychiatric treatment in a letter to Dr. Moore (1835):

The first time that I entered there, the awful sight horrified me. I had the heavy iron chains that the subjects were tied to from the neck downwards removed without hesitation. I also had the clubs that the guards used to hit the insane whenever they wished burnt together with the chains [...] the pale, emaciated and unhappy creatures stood up and with eyes full of tears extended their skinny arms towards me to embrace me. Others embraced my knees, others were unable to express their gratitude in any way because they were too weak to do so and cried profusely.⁵⁴

- 34 Relying perhaps on the trauma of losing his son, Pisani regarded his patients “as perverted children to be lovingly brought up⁵⁵”, and required that his charges address him as “father”. He also persuaded them to voluntarily participate in the upkeep and construction of the asylum’s grounds. Having noticed that the patients were generally well behaved when occupied in conversation, Pisani hoped that physical employment would constitute a permanent form of distraction⁵⁶. This was accomplished by the following scheme: the baron threw a party that featured various forms of entertainment, including music, games, dances and singing. He writes:

At the end of the fun I left the company and went for a walk alone as if I were immersed in troubling thoughts. After a little while the most courageous joined me and were followed by others, who asked me when the violins would return. Never! I replied [...] how could I pay for dances and parties with the money that I had to use to pay for clothes and to provide for the needs of so many dissolute and slothful adults? I could organize parties and dinners if they would decide to work and obtain the things that they needed with their hands [...] This we would certainly do, all the others said. Order us to do it and you will be blindly obeyed. Then I embraced them and promised them that the violins would return regularly every Sunday.⁵⁷

- 35 This tale lies somewhere between a pious fraud and the carrot-and-stick approach. Although Pisani’s dilemma was only for show, the incentive of music every Sunday successfully motivated the asylum patients to work throughout the week. Within a few years, his male patients had constructed new living quarters and expanded the establishment considerably, while “the insane women ha[d] provided clothes for all members of the family⁵⁸”. Even though Pisani never mentioned Aversa explicitly, he seems to have modeled his therapeutic treatments, which incorporated music and theatre, on the methods made famous by Linguitti’s establishment. However, there were differences as well, not least the fact that Pisani’s patients were consistently involved in the building and maintenance of their facilities. A subsequent report in *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* (1835) noted that the patients had built a small Greek theater on the

asylum's grounds entirely by themselves, and that the activity of manual labor had proven so therapeutic for the inmates, that it seemed probable that "these ornaments will go on increasing, until every angle of the buildings will present, to the curiosity of visitors, some eccentric or elaborate workmanship, by the hands of industrious lunatics⁵⁹".

- 36 Pisani's institution soon became a sightseeing attraction, much like the asylum at Aversa, and was featured in numerous tour guides and travel memoirs. While both institutions boasted luxurious grounds and gardens as well as patient-produced theatricals, concerts, and artworks, the presence of Pisani himself was a particular draw. Tourists were eager to meet the "Sicilian nobleman [...] [who] renounced a life of ease and pleasure to devote himself to the amelioration of the condition of this portion of his fellow-creatures⁶⁰"; a man who "abandoned a brilliant position in society and withdrew to this house of mourning to become the father and comforter of its inmates⁶¹". Some visitors compared him to a saint⁶², while others regarded him as no less mad than his patients⁶³. Pisani was even the subject of phrenological speculation: a writer in *The Boston Medical Journal* praised the Baron's "finely formed head and features so common among the Italians, and a countenance beaming with benevolence, clearly indicative of the pure fountain within⁶⁴". In contrast, the French physician Prosper Ménière described Pisani as possessing "one of the most singular heads that I have encountered", emphasizing that he had frequently "observed the bizarre form of individuals that administer to, and live with, the insane; it seems that this cohabitation has something contagious⁶⁵".
- 37 Reports on Palermo consistently praised Pisani. John Butler, the Marquis of Ormonde, spent an afternoon at the asylum in 1832, and recalled, "the Baron, with whom we had a good deal of conversation, appeared most kind and judicious in his manner towards the invalids⁶⁶". The Reverend Charles Rockwell visited the establishment in 1835, and was moved by seeing Pisani joining his patients in an outdoor dance, commenting on the "kind and affectionate authority and persuasion [with which] he strove to arouse the sad and the sorrowful to join in the lively and active joy of those around⁶⁷". The American author Nathaniel Parker Willis recalled the love of the patients for their "father", and described how a madwoman "came stealing up behind the trees on tiptoe, and putting her band suddenly over the baron's eyes, kissed him on both sides of his face, laughing heartily, and calling him by every name of affection⁶⁸". Recovered patients also expressed similar sentiments: an anonymous former patient wrote a guidebook for tourists to the asylum, and called Pisani his "beloved second father⁶⁹".
- 38 In addition to Pisani himself, the asylum's weekly concerts were also a significant attraction. Visitors to the *Casa dei Matti*, who were barred from interacting with the patients directly, could attend these performances on Sundays⁷⁰. It appears, however, that tourists of high standing were sometimes allowed some supervised contact. A distinguished Swiss diplomat, Jean Huber-Saladin, arrived at the *Casa dei Matti* on a Monday, and expressed his regret at having missed the festivities of the previous day. Pisani promised him a small performance:
- He led him into the room of the most manic patient of all, who was howling frightfully. The madman calmed down when he saw the baron, and the latter, addressed him, saying: "What is with you, my friend? Are you feeling ill today? Do you wish for some momentary distraction, a little dancing of the tarantella?" The patient agreed, and they immediately sent for one of the most furious female patients of the institution; another patient brought his violin and dancing began. When they were exhausted, they were sent back to their rooms.⁷¹

- 39 Huber-Saladin's report makes it clear that while the patients agree to dance the tarantella, its primary use in this case was to entertain onlookers. It is notable, however, that Pisani asked the patient whether he wished for some distraction in the form of music and dance.
- 40 In other cases, however, Pisani appears to have staged pious frauds in order to entertain important visitors. For example, when the Duke of Buckingham and Chandos visited the institute in 1827, the aristocrat took part in a pious fraud of sorts involving a furious patient confined to a padded cell. Pisani instructed the Duke to request the man's freedom as a personal favor:
- This of course I did, before the other patients: it was to have its effect upon them. The door was partly opened, and out rushed the maniac. The Baron fixed his eyes upon him, and saying two or three words quietly to him, the maniac's violence ceased for the moment. The Baron told him he owed his liberty to S. E., meaning me, and that I trusted he would merit my indulgence. For the moment the poor wretch was quite quiet, thanked me, called me a good Muscovite (he fancied himself Czar of Muscovy).⁷²
- 41 Buckingham noted, however, that the man soon began roaring again, and had to be returned to his cell.
- 42 The notion of pious frauds loomed large in visitor reports of Pisani's madhouse. According to a surgeon writing in *The Boston Medical Journal*, the Baron successfully cured a deranged female patient frozen into a crouching position for over ten years using unconventional means:
- [He] went to visit her one morning, and told her that he had come to the determination no longer to lead a life of celibacy, and had now come to ask her hand in marriage. She was at first indignant and requested him not to make fun of her. He pressed his suit with so much earnestness and with so many compliments, that at length [...] she became more cheerful, laughed a little, and finally consented to marry him.⁷³
- 43 Pisani then set up a mock wedding at the asylum, and threw a great party for the inmates:
- She was dressed and decorated like a bride, and then carried to an elegant arbor where a feast was prepared for all the guests. One of the keepers was dressed as the Padre, a counterfeit ceremony was performed, and they all paid her the most particular marks of respect and congratulation, giving her the title she had acquired of Baroness. [...] [S]he is now an intelligent and respectable lady of Sicily, who often laughs with the Baron, whom she calls her *esposo*, at the amusing freak of the marriage ceremony.⁷⁴
- 44 A different account of this case was penned by Willis, who identified the patient as a Greek, and reported that she had refused to leave her bed for seven years. Brought to the Palermo asylum, her situation improved after the Baron "addressing what he considered the master-passion in all female bosoms [...] offered himself to her in marriage⁷⁵". Following a mock ceremony at the institution, the woman gradually regains "the use of her limbs, her health is improved, and excepting an occasional paroxysm [...] she is quiet and contented⁷⁶".
- 45 Both Willis and Dumas used their experience of visiting the Palermo asylum as seed material for fictional works. Their tales rely on pious frauds, music, dance, and theatre to create a heterotopia in which reality seems entirely malleable to the designs of the asylum director. In both stories, Pisani is presented as a benevolent puppet master adored by his charges. There is no incredulity in this universe, nor any negative

consequences: the patients seem perpetually delighted to do their master's bidding, and the dangers inherent in pious frauds – already described by Pinel in 1801 – are wholly ignored.

- 46 Willis adapted the aforementioned “mock marriage” into a short story entitled “The Madhouse of Palermo” (1835), in which the “Baron Pisani” describes participating in an imaginary wedding with his patient, a beautiful Greek princess. Dumas, who visited the *Casa dei Matti* on September 27, 1835, left verses in the asylum guestbook portraying specific patients whom he encountered during his stay. These included Placido de Luca, a prominent lawyer from Catania who had sustained a head injury. A character named “Lucca”, whose symptoms closely resemble those of de Luca, appears in the first chapter of Dumas’s travel memoir, *Le Capitaine Aréna* (1842), which includes a fanciful account of a visit to Pisani’s madhouse at Palermo⁷⁷. Dumas also borrowed Huber-Saladin’s aforementioned account of patients dancing the tarantella at the baron’s behest, ascribing the remarkable effect of this tarantella upon these characters to their Sicilian nationality⁷⁸.

Illustration from “A Mad Bridal: Strange Experiences Among Palermitan Lunatics”, in *The Illustrated American* (11 July 1891), p. 359



Source: Google Books, <https://books.google.fr/> Willis is not credited, and the story is published anonymously.

- 47 Dumas’s fictional account of the Palermo madhouse ends with a remarkably surreal image:

The sound of the violin had drawn together, from various parts of the garden, a number of patients, male and female, and the quadrille was formed. Among the most conspicuous figures in the group were the son of the Emperor of China, and the man who believed himself to be dead. The former wore on his head a splendid crown, made of gilt paper; and the latter, who was enveloped in a white sheet, stalked about with the grave and solemn air which he conceived to be common to a ghost. [...] The scene was indescribable; it was like one of those fantastic visions which are sometimes conjured up in a dream.⁷⁹

48 This whimsical depiction is remarkably similar to Fiorentino's anecdote of the patients surrounding Malibran at Aversa. Recall that the singer was encircled by lunatics "dressed in weird outfits, with colorful scraps of cloth [...] wearing large cones of gray paper that they had stolen from the kitchen⁸⁰". With conical gray hats alluding to Pulcinella's stereotypical costume, Fiorentino's image clearly expresses a *commedia dell'arte* trope. The resemblance between these two tales might not be entirely accidental: shortly after visiting Palermo, Dumas persuaded Fiorentino to move to Paris and become his assistant and ghostwriter⁸¹. At some point during their early acquaintance they may have compared notes about Italian asylums, possibly inspiring Dumas to borrow the image of the dancing madmen of Aversa, just as he appropriated Huber-Saladin's tale of the tarantella⁸².

Malibran at Aversa

49 The recurrence of specific motifs across depictions of the Aversa and Palermo institutions informs us about explicit cultural fantasies regarding the sensitivity of Italian minds and bodies. These tropes migrate across genres including medical writings, first-person accounts, and fictional stories. Thus, for example, evidence of the tarantella's power over mental patients appears in Bell's 1824 medical report, Huber-Saladin's anecdote, and in Dumas's short story. Although the first is set in Aversa and the latter two in Palermo, all of these depictions focus on the way in which a specific kind of music purportedly altered the behavior of a pair of patients. It is small wonder therefore, that Fiorentino's aforementioned anecdote about Malibran's visit to the asylum at Aversa described the power of her voice causing a dramatic change in the inmates' persons.

50 In an unexpected twist, this feature of Fiorentino's account of Malibran at Aversa can also be regarded as a trope: there are at least two additional reports of her visit to the institution⁸³. The earliest of these appeared in a posthumous biography of the singer compiled by María de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo, the Countess of Merlin, in 1838. Merlin, like Fiorentino, recalls that the singer's carriage broke down between Naples to Rome near a town she calls Avezza⁸⁴. While waiting for her conveyance to be repaired, the singer decided to visit the local insane asylum. She asked the director of the establishment whether any of the patients would like to hear her, and learned that one of them loved music. The director warned her, however, that this man was romantically obsessed with the queen, and would fall into a frenzy whenever he saw any woman whatsoever. Malibran remained unafraid:

"As to that", replied she, "I shall pass for a little boy, (she was dressed in male attire.) Let me see him". Her wish was complied with. She entered the apartment in which the young man was confined. For a moment he gazed on her with evident curiosity. Madame Malibran approached a piano which stood in the chamber, and ran her fingers over the keys. In an instant the poor maniac was all attention. She sang the romance in *Otello*. "Is this divine?" exclaimed the young man, and he appeared violently excited. "No", he added, "this is the voice of a woman": then bursting into tears, he threw himself into a chair and sobbed aloud.⁸⁵

51 This story corresponds to Fiorentino's anecdote in featuring a lovesick male patient moved to tears by Malibran's performance of the Willow Song. There is a further resemblance in that both sources emphasize that other patients in the asylum also wanted to perform for Malibran. Here the stories diverge: according to Fiorentino, the

lunatics encircled the singer, frolicking in strange costumes. In contrast, Merlin notes, “several of the lunatics wished in their turn to sing to Madame Malibran, who very patiently listened to them, although the discordance of their tones was indescribably disagreeable⁸⁶”.

- 52 A third account of Malibran’s visit was penned by Jules Bertrand in 1864. He relates that Fiorentino, along with numerous other Neapolitan dignitaries, joined Malibran’s entourage, and that they stopped by the insane asylum of Aversa⁸⁷. In this tale the superintendent of the lunatic asylum begs Malibran to visit his institute and sing for his patients. The diva agrees, and performs in a large room for the assembled crowd:

The encounter produced a prodigious effect. These poor unfortunates, in a transport, kissed the hands and clothes of she who so moved them. They understood, they felt, they sensed that they lived at last! One man, whose manner betrayed noble lineage, leant on the arm of a doctor, abundant tears streaming down his face. He approached the great artist, and exclaimed: “Ah! Madame, your genius makes me recover my reason.” [...] A few days later, the official journal of Naples announced that Prince of St. A— had been returned to his family and friends.⁸⁸

- 53 In all three stories, Malibran’s performance has a powerful effect on a single male patient, a stable feature suggesting a possible shared origin. Her voice is consistently presented as a panacea: Fiorentino writes that Malibran’s “divine voice calmed the patient’s fever and pain⁸⁹”, while Merlin recalls that the asylum director expressed “his firm conviction of the salutary effect [Malibran’s singing] had produced on the mind of the unfortunate young man⁹⁰”. Echoing Merlin, Bertrand emphasizes that the establishment physician assured Malibran that she had “achieved a great cure⁹¹”. However, he also includes a disclaimer of sorts, blaming the propagation of this tale on a local penchant for magical thinking:

We do not present this tale as authentic, far from it; but we should note that at that same time a nobleman was in fact discharged from the madhouse of Aversa. The Neapolitan spirit, which loves and seeks the miraculous even where it is not to be found, naturally attributed this cure to the great artist.⁹²

- 54 Regardless of the nature of the historical Malibran’s visit to the asylum at Aversa, the flourishing of these hagiographic vignettes testify to the importance of both the diva and the madhouse in the public imagination. The public was eager to fantasize about the transformative power of Malibran’s voice by projecting their own expectation of emotional experience even onto a population that was regarded as alien. Moreover, the vaguely physical threat posed by the lunatics – ranging from the lovesick youth barred from seeing women to the mad patients surrounding the singer and falling into fits – added a scintilla of danger representing the erotic power of music as embodied by Malibran’s voice and person⁹³.

Conclusion: music, theater, and the mind

- 55 This essay has explored the role of music and theater in the *Case dei Matti* of Aversa and Palermo, two of the most important Italian mental institutions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Examining archival sources as well as works of fiction reveals that the debate over theatrical productions in lunatic asylums took a particular shape with respect to Italy. Whereas patient theatricals were generally regarded as dangerous by psychiatrists in northern Europe, an exception was frequently made for Italians, for

whom such entertainments were regarded as essential. The writings of these physicians are united by the assumption that Italians could enjoy far higher quantities of music, theater, and dance without becoming dangerously overexcited; indeed, the very absence of these entertainments would cause them to wither and decline.

- 56 Both fictional and factual accounts of the asylums of Aversa and Palermo consistently invoke a number of familiar elements – role playing, the tarantella, and the *commedia dell'arte* – in service of implicit or explicit arguments for the special power of music and theater over the mind. The fantasy behind many of these accounts reflects the belief that mental illness might be cured by a suitable physical, aesthetic, or psychic shock. These stories thus display the extent to which early nineteenth-century understandings of mental illness differ from subsequent and contemporary approaches. Rather than a chronic condition to be medicated or managed, cures by means of pious frauds, patient theatricals, or musical performances reveal a remarkable optimism in the power of the arts to restore health and reason.

NOTES

1. P. A. FIORENTINO, *Comédies et comédiens*, Paris, Michel Lévy frères, 1866, p. 42: “Ils formèrent peu à peu un cercle autour de la cantatrice, sans trop s’approcher, comme pour lui témoigner leur déférence. Ils étaient affublés d’accoutrements bizarres, de lambeaux d’étoffes bariolées, le visage noirci, les cheveux tressés de brins de paille ou coiffés de grands cornets de papier gris qu’ils avaient dérobé à la cuisine. Dès que l’artiste eut fini de chanter, ils voulurent lui montrer aussi leur savoir-faire. Les voilà qui se mettent tous à sauter et à gambader comme des furieux qu’ils étaient ; les uns faisaient des cabrioles, les autres se roulaient dans le sable ; celui-ci déchirait sa veste et celui-là s’arrachait les cheveux [...] – Eh bien ! dit l’un de nous, en prenant congé de la grande artiste, vous demandiez ce que c’était qu’une alellane ; vous venez d’en avoir un échantillon ; du chant, de la danse, des rires stridents, des phrases décousues, des soubresauts, des cabrioles, et par-dessus tout cela la Folie, tantôt douce et tantôt exaspérée, agitant sa marotte et faisant tinter ses grelots.” All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

2. See B. SIMON, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980.

3. See M. FOUCAULT, “The Birth of the Asylum”, in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard, New York, Routledge, 2002, pp. 229-264; J. E. GOLDSTEIN, *Console and classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1990.

4. For an overview see L. C. CHARLAND, “Science and Morals in the Affective Psychopathology of Philippe Pinel”, *History of Psychiatry*, 21.1 (2010), pp. 38-53.

5. M. DE YOUNG, *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics, 1750-1950s*, Jefferson, NC, McFarland, 2015, pp. 344-345.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 342. See also M. FOUCAULT for an in-depth theorization of what he terms “theatrical realizations”, which are analogous to pious frauds. M. FOUCAULT, *History of Madness*, trans. J. Murphy and J. Khalifa, London and New York, Routledge, 2006, pp. 329-334.
7. A. of TRALLES, *Therapeutica* 1, p. 607 as described in M. AHONEN, *Mental Disorders in Ancient Philosophy*, Frankfurt, Springer, 2014, p. 22, see also É. ESQUIROL, *Mental Maladies; a Treatise on Insanity*, trans. E. K. Hunt, vol. I, Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1845, p. 229.
8. P. PINEL, *A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. D. D. Davis, Sheffield, W. Todd, 1806, p. 227.
9. J. C. REIL, *Rhapsodien über die Anwendung der psychischen Kurmethode auf Geisteszerrüttungen*, Halle, Curtsch, 1803, pp. 209-210: “Ich bemerke bloss im Allgemeinen, dass jedes Tollhaus zum Behuf ihrer imposanten Anwendung und zweckmässigen Zusammenstellung ein für diese Zwecke besonders eingerichtetes, durchaus praktikables Theater haben könnte, das mit allen nöthigen Apparaten, Masken, Maschinerien und Dekorationen verfehen wäre.”
10. See C. RAZ, “Operatic Fantasies in Early Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry”, *Opera and Nineteenth-Century Science*, ed. D. TRIPPETT and B. WALTON, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
11. The debate was summarized by Roller in C. F. W. ROLLER, *Die Irrenanstalt nach allen ihren Beziehungen dargestellt*, Karlsruhe, Müller, 1831, pp. 203-206.
12. É. ESQUIROL, “Folie”, in *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, vol. XVI, Paris, Panckoucke, 1816, pp. 228-9, adapted from the translation by E. K. Hunt in É. ESQUIROL, *Mental Maladies*, *op. cit.*, p. 81: “Les maniaques ne pouvaient assister aux représentations théâtrales de Charenton [...] il y avait peu de représentations qui ne fussent signalées par quelque explosion violente de délire, ou par quelque rechute.”
13. A. K. F. H. KLAATSCH, “Bemerkungen ueber einige italienische Irrenanstalten”, *Archive für medizinische Erfahrung*, July 1824, p. 60: “Es giebt kaum dramatische Arbeiten, die, nicht ihr ganzes Interesse durch die Darstellung von Leidenschaften und Verhältnissen erhielten, die dem Irren fremd bleiben müssen.”
14. *Ibid.*
15. J. GUISLAIN, *Traité sur les phrénopathies, ou Doctrine nouvelle des maladies mentales*, Bruxelles, Établissement encyclographique, 1835, p. 397: “Un spectacle devant un auditoire d’insensés !”
16. *Ibid.*: “Quel bien veut-on attendre d’un moyen qui, agissant sur des individus si différents eu égard à la nature de leur maladie, exalte l’esprit et remue si fortement le cœur ?”
17. Theatrical productions were brought into use in the Bicêtre hospital in Paris from ca . 1842, and in the Scottish Dumfries Lunatic Asylum from ca. 1843.
18. See also M. LUPO, “Reorganization of the Public Education System in the Kingdom of Naples During the French Period”, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 4.3 (1999), pp. 329-349.
19. Domenico Gualandi reported there were 429 patients during his visit, of which 269 were male. D. GUALANDI, *Osservazioni sopra il celebre Stabilimento D’Aversa*, Bologna, Fratelli Mais, 1823, p. 34.

20. ANONYMOUS, "Medical Institutions of Naples: A Review of Domenico Gualandi's Osservazioni sopra il celebre Stabilimento D'Aversa", *The North American Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. XI (1831), p. 36.
21. A. VON SCHÖNBERG, "Ein Wort über die Irrenanstalt in Aversa", *Julius und Gerson's Magazin der ausländischen Heilkunde*, 9 (1825), p. 469-470.
22. *Ibid.*; see also D. GUALANDI, *Osservazioni*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
23. *Ibid.*
24. G. B. DE FERRARI, *A New Guide of Naples, its Environs: Procida, Ischia and Capri*, Naples, Glass, 1847, p. 528.
25. ANONYMOUS, *Naples*, London, Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1853, p. 89.
26. ANONYMOUS, *Notes on Naples and its Environs, and on the Road to it from Rome*, London, James Bohn, 1838, p. 67.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.
28. M. GARDINER, *The Idler in Italy by the Countess of Blessington*, vol. II, London, Henry Colburn, 1839, p. 435.
29. G. Z., "Theater im königlichen Hause der Narren in Aversa", *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, 29 (1823), p. 231: "Ich gebe zu [...] dass die theatralischen Unterhaltungen ohne Auswahl, und ausgeführt ohne Unterschied von allen Wahnsinnigen, für alle ihres gleichen sehr oft von; traurigen Folgen seyn könnten; wenn man aber die Behuthsamkeit beobachtet, solche Stücke zu wählen welche dem Zustande der Geistesabwesenden angemessen sind, wenn man die Vorsicht gebraucht, dass jeder aus ihnen nur solche Charaktere vorstelle, die seinen vorherrschenden Ideen entgegengesetzt sind, dann sind diese Vorrstellungen [...] sind das beste und wirksamste Heilmittel, das mir die Erfahrung und mein Nachsinnen durch fünfzehn Jahre gegen diese schreckbare Krankheit an die Hand gegeben hat."
30. D. GUALANDI, *Osservazioni*, *op. cit.*, p. 189: "Insomma per concludere non v'è una sillaba nel discorso del Signor Cavalier Linguiti, la quale non dimostri ch'egli non è medico, ch'egli non s'è ancora formata una giusta nozione della pazzia, e delle sue varietà."
31. É. ESQUIROL, "Note statistique sur la maison des insensés de Matti, à Aversa, dans le royaume de Naples", *Archives générales de médecine*, 12 Oct. 1826, pp. 195-202; as translated in "Statistical Account of the Lunatic Asylum at Aversa in the kingdom of Naples", *The New York Medical and Physical Journal*, 6.3 (1827), p. 462.
32. *Ibid.*
33. A. BRIERRE DE BOISMONT, "Des établissements d'aliénés en Italie", *Journal complémentaire des sciences médicales*, 13 (1832), pp. 179-180, as cited in Jean BOUILLAUD, *New Researches on Acute Articular Rheumatism in General*, trans. James Kitchen, Philadelphia, Haswell, 1837, p. 67.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. ANONYMOUS, "Review of Account of the Present State of Medicine in Italy, by Fr. W. Oppenheim", *Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. 25.149 (1825), p. 451.
37. *Ibid.*

38. ANONYMOUS, "Medical Institutions of Naples: A Review of Domenico Gualandi's Osservazioni sopra il celebre Stabilimento D'Aversa", *The North American Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. XI (1831), p. 34.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
40. G. VON NOSTITZ UND JÄNCKENDORF, *Beschreibung der königl. Sächsischen Heil-und Verpflegungsanstalt Sonnenstein: mit Bemerkungen über Anstalten für Herstellung oder Verwahrung der Geisteskranken*, vol. I, Dresden, Walther, 1829, p. 342: "die als vorzüglich gerühmten."
41. J. BELL, *Observations on Italy*, vol. II, Naples, Fibreno, 1835, p. 241.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
43. For example, Bell described a moving performance at the pianoforte by a young woman, "in the ordinary class of life, [who] had entered the Asylum labouring under total derangement... [she] was shortly to return to her family, after an absence of two years, during which period she had acquired a fine proficiency in vocal music, with which on her entrance she was wholly unacquainted." *Ibid.*, p. 243.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 250.
48. *Ibid.*
49. I could find no direct links between Pisani and Linguiti, but it seems very likely that the restructured Palermitan institution was modeled to some extent upon the reforms in Aversa.
50. "Il Barone Pisani", *La Ruota*, 2.5 (1 March 1841), p. 32.
51. D. BERTOLOTTI, "Antonino Pisani", *Serie di vite e ritratti de' famosi personaggi degli ultimi tempi*, vol. II, Milano, Battelli e Fanfani, 1818, unpaginated: "Una specie di assenza di mente per qualche tempo lo fece inaccessibile ad ogni exterior sensazione."
52. See L. SCIASCIA, trans. J. de Pressac, "Le baron Pisani", *Les Lettres nouvelles*, 5 (1974), pp. 76-83.
53. Pisani played an important role in the discovery of the Metopes of Selinunte, first excavated in Sicily by Samuel Angell and William Harris in 1823; see P. PISANI, *Memorie sulle opere di scultura in Selinunte Scoperte*, Palermo, Abbate, 1823.
54. P. PISANI, "Letter to Dr. Moore of London about Moral Treatment of Insanity", in *Anthology of Italian Psychiatric Texts*, trans. ed. M. Muj and F. M. Few, Hoboken, NJ, John Wiley & Sons, 2008, p. 57.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
59. "Description of the Royal Hospital for the Insane at Palermo", trans. W. Tullidge, *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 12.3 (1835), pp. 40-41.
60. "Palermo: Casa de' Matti", *The Handbook for Travellers in Sicily*, London, John Murray, 1864, p. 105.

61. L. PIALE, *Guide to Naples and Sicily, with a Map part 1*, Rome, L. Piaale, 1847, p. 120.
62. A writer in *The Boston Medical Journal* applauded the “halo of moral sublimity now surrounding a modest and humble individual in Palermo, which not even the glories of Archimedes could shed.” “Baron Pisani’s Treatment of the Insane: Extract from the Journal of an American Surgeon”, *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 12.8 (1835), p. 123.
63. The Sicilian consul introduced Pisani as “the greatest madman in Palermo.” P. DE JULVÉCOURT, *Mes souvenirs de bonheur, ou neuf mois en Italie*, Paris, Silvestre fils, 1832, p. 257: “Voilà le premier de tous les fous.”
64. ANONYMOUS, “Baron Pisani’s Treatment of the Insane”, *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, 12.8 (1835), p. 117.
65. P. MÉNIÈRE, *La captivité de Madame la duchesse de Berry à Blaye*, vol. II, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1882, p. 390: “J’ai visité un bel établissement de fous, dirigé par le baron Pizani. Ce personnage a bien l’une des plus singulières têtes que l’on puisse rencontrer, même dans une maison d’aliénés. Ce n’est pas la première fois que je note la bizarrerie de forme des individus qui s’occupent des fous et qui vivent au milieu d’eux ; on dirait que cette cohabitation a quelque chose de contagieux, comme si la vue de ces infortunés portait à les imiter, comme si ces extravagances perpétuelles devenaient un exemple que les témoins saisissent à leur insu.”
66. J. BUTLER, *An Autumn in Sicily... by the Marquis of Ormonde*, Dublin, Hodges and Smith, 1850, p. 233.
67. C. ROCKWELL, *Sketches of Foreign Travel and Life at Sea*, vol. II, Boston, Tappan and Dennet, 1842, pp. 106-107.
68. N. P. WILLIS, *Pencilings by the Way*, New York, Morris and Willis, 1844, pp. 104-5.
69. Pisani is described as “mio secondo affezionatissimo padre” by the author of the *Guida per la Real Casa de’ matti di Palermo, scritta da un Frenetico nella sua convalescenza*, Palermo, Muratori, 1835, pp. 7-8.
70. As the English writer William Rae Wilson recalled, guests were by no means “permitted to address any of the patients [...] lest, by so doing, they should incautiously touch upon any remark that might agitate them”. W. R. WILSON, *Records of a Route through France and Italy; with Sketches of Catholicism*, London, Longman, 1835, p. 272.
71. As told in M. PALMIERI DE MICCICHÉ, *Pensées et souvenirs historiques et contemporains*, Paris, Palmieri de Micciché, 1830, pp. 231-232: “Il le mena dans la chambre du plus furieux de tous, qui poussait des hurlements affreux dans ce moment-là : il se calma en voyant arriver le baron, et celui-ci, lui adressant la parole, lui dit: “Qu’as-tu, mon ami ? tu es donc bien mal aujourd’hui ? Veux-tu, pour te distraire un moment, danser un peu la tarantella ? – Oui, dit le malade. On fit venir aussitôt une des folles les plus furieuses de l’établissement ; un autre fou prêta les accords de son violon et la danse commença. Lorsqu’ils furent rendus de fatigue, on les fit rentrer dans leurs chambres, où ils ne crièrent plus.”
72. R. TEMPLE-NUGENT-BRYDGES-CHANDOS-GRENVILLE, *The Private Diary of Richard, Duke of Buckingham and Chandos*, London, Hurst and Blackett, 1862, p. 98.
73. ANONYMOUS, “Baron Pisani’s Treatment of the Insane”, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
74. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

75. N. P. WILLIS, *Pencillings*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

76. *Ibid.*

77. This short story was subsequently translated into English, and published in abbreviated form in Charles Dickens's weekly *Household Words*. See "A Lunatic Asylum in Palermo", *Household Words*, 33 (9 Nov. 1850), pp. 151-155.

78. See M. PALMIERI DI MICCICHÉ, *Pensées et souvenirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

79. *Ibid.*

80. "Ils étaient affublés d'accoutrements bizarres [...] les cheveux tressés de brins de paille ou coiffés de grands cornets de papier gris qu'ils avaient dérobé à la cuisine." P. A. FIORENTINO, *Comédies et comédiens*, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

81. In a pamphlet published in 1845, Eugène de Mirecourt accused Fiorentino of ghostwriting *Le Speronare* (1842) and *Le Corricolo* (1843), as well as *The Count of Monte-Cristo* (1844). By 1858, Fiorentino was considered to have also authored *Maître Adam le Calabrais* (1839) and *Jeanne de Naples* (1841), which were published under Dumas's name. See E. DE MIRECOURT, *Maison Alexandre Dumas et compagnie*, Paris, Mirecourt, 1845, p. 40; *Dictionnaire universel des contemporains contenant toutes les personnes notables de la France et des pays étrangers*, ed. G. VAPERAU, vol. I, Paris, Hachette, 1858, p. 667. Pisani's establishment also appears in *The Count of Monte Cristo* in a conversation between Dantès, disguised as the Abbé Busoni, and the immoral prosecutor Gérard de Villefort, in which Busoni describes the "lunatic asylum [...] founded by the Count of Pisani at Palermo [...] [as] a magnificent institution." A. DUMAS, *The Count of Monte-Cristo*, vol. II, London, Chapman and Hall, 1846, p. 114.

82. The backstory of a patient named "Costanza" was actually lifted from E. D. Baynes's short story, "Sicilian Sketches", published in the *Metropolitan Magazine* (January, 1834): pp. 25-27, and subsequently translated in the *Revue britannique*. See also H. TUZET, "Les deux voyages d'Alexandre Dumas en Sicile", *Revue de littérature comparée*, 25 (1951), p. 199.

83. A fourth description of Malibran's visit to Aversa appears in *La Passion de la Malibran* (1937) by the French novelist Henry Malherbe. This version seems to be abridged from Merlin's anecdote, with the addition of Bertrand's detail regarding the prince's subsequent recovery.

84. There is no Italian town called Avezza between Naples and Rome, a fact not lost on the English translators, who corrected the name with "Arozzo", in 1840, which also does not appear to exist. M. DE LAS MERCEDES SANTA CRUZ Y MONTALVO, comtesse de MERLIN, *Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran*, vol. I, London, Colburn, 1840, p. 194.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

86. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

87. Bertrand hazily recalls the name of the town as Versem, but this undoubtedly refers to Aversa, as he describes it as the "Charenton" – Paris's largest madhouse – of Naples. J. BERTRAND, *La Malibran: Anecdotes*, Paris, Librairie du Petit Journal, 1864, p. 16.

88. *Ibid.*, p. 17: "Elle produisit un effet prodigieux sur cette assemblée. Ces pauvres infortunés, dans leurs transports, baisaient les mains et jusqu'aux vêtements de celle qui venait de les émouvoir. Ils comprenaient, ils sentaient, ils jugeaient, ils vivaient enfin ! Un surtout, qui était resté appuyé sur le bras d'un médecin ; ses manières décelaient un homme de haute lignée. Des pleurs abondants coulaient sur son visage. Il s'approcha gravement de la grande artiste, s'agenouilla devant elle : "Ah ! madame, dit-il, votre génie

m'a fait recouvrer la raison. [...] Quelques jours après, le journal officiel de Naples annonçait que le prince *** venait d'être rendu à sa famille et à ses amis."

89. P. A. FIORENTINO, *Comédies et comédiens*, op. cit., p. 42. « Cette voix divine qui calmait leur fièvre et leurs douleurs. »

90. Comtesse de MERLIN, *Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran*, op. cit., p. 195.

91. J. BERTRAND, *La Malibran*, op. cit., p. 17: "Vous venez de faire une bien grande cure".

92. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18: "Nous ne donnons pas cet événement comme chose authentique, loin de là; mais à cette époque un grand seigneur sortit en effet de la maison de fous de Versem. L'esprit napolitain, qui aime et recherche le merveilleux, même où il n'est pas ne trouva rien de mieux que d'attribuer cette guérison à la grande artiste."

93. For more on the dynamics of spontaneous encounters between Malibran and her public see C. FRIGAU MANNING, "Les divas dans les rues: récits de performances improvisées ou imposées", *Revue ReCHERches*, special issue on "Théâtralisation de l'espace urbain", ed. M. CHOPIN-PAGOTTO and F. D'ANTONIO, 2018.

ABSTRACTS

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Casa dei Matti in Aversa and Palermo were renowned throughout Europe for using music to treat the insane. In an innovative approach to mental illness inspired by Pinel's moral treatment, patients took regular part in theatrical productions, operas, and musical performances. This paper investigates the methods used at Aversa and Palermo in light of contemporary medical debates. I argue that the use of music and theater in these institutions should be understood not only within the context of the emerging field of psychiatry, but also as interacting with popular notions of the national characteristics of Italians. Relying on both historical accounts and fictional narratives, I end by considering how depictions of musical-theatrical treatment expressed the assumption that Italian minds and bodies had a special sensitivity to the arts.

Dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle, la Casa dei matti d'Aversa et celle de Palerme sont connues dans toute l'Europe pour leur recours à la musique. Dans une approche innovante à la maladie mentale inspirée du traitement moral de Pinel, les patients prennent part à des représentations théâtrales, opératiques et musicales. Il s'agit ici d'enquêter sur les méthodes mises en œuvre à Averse et à Palerme à la lumière des débats médicaux contemporains. Nous montrerons que la musique et le théâtre, tels qu'ils sont employés dans ces institutions, doivent se comprendre non seulement dans le contexte du champ émergent de la psychiatrie, mais aussi dans leurs interactions avec des conceptions communément répandues au sujet des Italiens. La mise en dialogue de témoignages tant historiques que fictionnels sur l'usage de la musique et du théâtre dans ces institutions permet d'éclairer la façon dont le traitement musical et théâtral s'appuie sur l'idée que le corps et l'esprit d'un Italien présenteraient une sensibilité particulière aux arts.

Nella prima metà dell'Ottocento, le Case dei matti di Aversa e di Palermo sono famose in tutta Europa per l'impiego della musica nel trattamento dell'alienazione. In un approccio innovativo

alla malattia mentale ispirato al trattamento morale di Pinel, i pazienti partecipano a spettacoli teatrali e musicali. Si tratta qui di analizzare i metodi utilizzati ad Aversa e a Palermo alla luce dei dibattiti medici contemporanei. L'uso della musica e del teatro in queste istituzioni non va inteso solo nel contesto del campo emergente della psichiatria, ma anche nella sua interazione con nozioni comuni del tempo sulle caratteristiche nazionali degli italiani. L'analisi di testimonianze storiche e di finzioni concede di misurare quanto il trattamento musico-teatrale in queste istituzioni si fondi sull'ipotesi che le menti e i corpi italiani avrebbero una particolare sensibilità per le arti.

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Mots-clés: Aversa, Palerme, baron Pisani, histoire de la psychiatrie, thérapie musicale

Parole chiave: Aversa, Palermo, barone Pisani, storia della psichiatria, terapia musicale

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