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Sandra Pietrini

SPANISH THEORETICAL WRITINGS ON ACTING IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURIES*

The First Studies. Italian and French Influence

The subject of this investigation is theoretical writings on acting in Spain dating back to the late eighteenth century, with developments during the nineteenth century, when Spanish treatises became widespread and interacted with the Italian, French and German theatrical milieu. Rather than attempt to give a comprehensive account of Spanish production or go into the enormous variety of topics covered, I merely wish to put forward some preliminary considerations, pointing out certain issues which have perhaps not received as much attention as they deserve.

The earliest observations on acting in Spain occur in more generic pieces of writing or projects for the reform of the theatre, which were already appearing with a certain regularity by the end of the eighteenth century. Over the course of this century neoclassicism had attracted increasing attention, with Spanish theatre being brought into line with the principles regulating French theatre. This impulse toward “normalization” and distancing from the Baroque tradition went hand in hand with the pursuit of naturalness, which emerged as an essential principle in theoretical writing. In terms of acting it was associated with the opposition to the artificial, rhetorical style of the high Baroque. The persistent heritage of the *siglo de oro* provoked a backlash amongst the exponents of the Enlightenment, who identified in theatrical illusion and truth to life the main antidotes to the extravagance of a theatre in which artifice reigned supreme. During the eighteenth century truth to life was to become a genuine aesthetic imperative, applied primarily to dramaturgy. In three short essays entitled *Desengaños al teatro español* (1762-1763), Fernández de Moratín spoke out against the exaggerations of both Baroque and religious theatre, insisting on truth to life as an indispensable criterion, above all for dramaturgy. For Moratín, an advocate of neoclassical principles and regulation, there could be no sense in actors striving to make a fiction appear true if the author had filled his work with absurdities and extravagances.¹

Closely associated with truth to life, naturalness too was increasingly invoked as a necessary prerequisite for the theatre and acting, and it began to be considered as the basic component of representation. It is worth recalling that, for the first

* Translated by Mark Weir, Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”.

¹ See Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, *Desengaños al teatro español*, ed. by D. Th. Gies and M. A. Lama, Madrid, Castalia, 1996, p. 151. The three essays have been dated to 1762-1763. See also D. Th. Gies, *Nicolás Fernández de Moratín*, Boston, Twayne, 1979. For an overview of the theatre and public tastes at this time, in particular concerning dramaturgy, see R. Andioc, *Sur la querelle du théâtre au temps de Leandro Fernández de Moratín*, Tarbes, Saint-Joseph, 1970.

campaigners for theatrical reform, naturalness was bound up with the aim of ridding the stage of the Baroque legacy and thus – paradoxically – with the move to introduce the principles of neoclassicism. This trend too had repercussions on acting. While during the 17th century the actor could be no more than a figurative element in the overall spectacle, valued only for his use of the vocal register (in fact theatre goers went to *oír*, or listen to, a play), in the following century acting began to receive greater consideration as a means of expression also from the visual viewpoint. Once the curtain had finally come down on the lengthy season of Baroque illusionism, with its aesthetic of the marvellous and the spectacular virtuosity of scene changes, the staging came to be perceived as a framework, while the essential core of the drama lay in the text, with the actor as the prime means of communication of the poetic content, through declamation but also gesture. For example, Ignacio de Luzán, who held a number of public offices, insisted on the absolute necessity for theatrical illusion. As an advocate of neoclassicism, Luzán campaigned for the introduction of Aristotle's three unities to the Spanish stage in his *Poética ó reglas de la poesía* (1737).² He returned from a period spent in Paris with a series of observations on French practices, on artistic, literary and philosophical developments and also on progress in the sciences and technology. In the *Memorias literarias de París* (1751) he gave a predominantly positive account of French theatre, which its Spanish counterpart would do well to take as a model.³ Luzán criticised the stylistic approach of French dramaturgy, based on a magniloquent and sententious affectation, which he labelled 'false sublime' and considered a dangerous departure from naturalness. However, when he came to deal more specifically with current practice in the theatre he was full of praise for French actors' training, for unlike their Spanish counterparts they knew their parts by heart and rarely had recourse to the prompter.⁴

Ignacio de Luzán clearly took the trouble to keep up with the latest cultural developments, and was *au fait* with theoretical output concerning the actor's craft, in particular Rémond de Sainte-Albine's *Le Comédien*, which had appeared a few years previously.⁵ He states that he read it carefully but failed to find 'either the desired method or clarity', and preferred the treatise on the art of theatre written by François Riccoboni, some pages of which he reproduced.⁶ Ignacio de Luzán in fact paved the way for translations and dissemination of European theoretical treatments of the actor in Spain. To give one example, in 1763 the first six chapters of Luigi Riccoboni's essay *De la reformation du théâtre* came out in a Spanish translation edited by Francisco Mariano Nifo.⁷

² Ignacio de Luzán, *Poética ó reglas de la poesía*, Zaragoza, Francisco Revilla, 1737.

³ Ignacio de Luzán, *Memorias literarias de París*, Madrid, Don Gabriel Ramirez, 1751.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95 and pp. 115-116.

⁵ Pierre Rémond de Sainte-Albine, *Le Comédien*, Paris, Desaint & Saillant et Vincent fils, 1747. The second edition dates from 1749.

⁶ Ignacio de Luzán, *Memorias literarias de París*, pp. 118-119 ff. These pages deal with the arm movements which the actor should perform naturally, without any effort, ensuring they start from the shoulder.

⁷ Luigi Riccoboni, *De la reformation du théâtre*, Paris, 1743. The first six chapters translated by Francisco Mariano Nifo were printed in *Diario estrangero* between 7 June 1763 and 19 July 1763. Taking Parisian periodicals as its model, the weekly included play reviews and accounts of performances, the first time these began to be published in Spain.

The new aesthetic culture of the Enlightenment required a new acting style, both in tragedy and in comedy: less affected and bombastic for the former, less vulgar and clownish for the latter. In the final decades of the century the traditional theatrical conventions began to be seen as antiquated and inadequate with respect to the new demands for truth to life. One of the contradictions of theatrical illusion on the Spanish stage was in fact the behaviour of the actors. In 1784 an anonymous article appeared entitled 'Reflexiones sobre el Estado de la Representación ó Declamación en los Teatros de esta Corte'.⁸ Although it is only an outline it contains interesting observations on contemporary stagecraft and raises questions which would be taken up in subsequent discussions of acting. The author criticises various questionable practices, such as the actors' habit of acknowledging spectators with greetings or signs of complicity, the presence in the wings of actors and theatrical personnel, and the lack of any proper coordination on stage, with actors talking among themselves instead of paying attention to whoever is speaking, or on the contrary listening all too intently to what was supposed to be a soliloquy.⁹

Furthermore the author deplored the absence of proper acting schools, such as existed in France. He maintained that it was precisely the lack of a series of hard and fast rules which was denying acting recognition as an art. Rather than attempting to establish expressive categories on which it should be based, he put forward a series of practical suggestions dictated by common sense, ranging from the need to make the manner of acting conform to the character's social standing to avoiding historical incongruity in costumes. Betraying a decidedly modern approach, he also criticised the lack of a unitary style in performances, which should involve not only costumes but also the actors' interpretation.¹⁰

One other crucial question is brought up in the 'Reflexiones' and became of increasing importance throughout the nineteenth century: whether acting should be characterised by emotional involvement or, on the contrary, be based on self-control. In reality there was nothing new in these early Spanish reflections on the topic. The problem had reared its head in France with Diderot's reaction to the 'emotionalist' position attributed to Rémond de Sainte-Albine, and it soon took on considerable complexity.¹¹ In the rest of Europe the question of identification with the character

⁸ 'Reflexiones sobre el Estado de la Representación ó Declamación en los Teatros de esta Corte', *Memorial Literario*, (March, 1784), 117-129. This article was republished in José Antonio de Armona y Murga, *Memorias cronológicas sobre el origen de la representación de comedias en España (año de 1785)*, ed. by Ch. Davis and J. E. Varey, Tamesis, Woodbridge, 2007, pp. 282-287. Not only did Armona y Murga take an intellectual interest in dramatic literature and the history of theatre but he also held the office of "Juez Protector", with responsibility for regulating theatrical activity in Madrid. He supervised performances, safeguarding law and order and verifying repertory, the formation of companies and the conduct of actors.

⁹ See Ch. Davis, Introduction to *Memorias cronológicas sobre el origen de la representación de comedias en España (año de 1785)*, p. 8.

¹⁰ See 'Reflexiones sobre el Estado de la Representación ó Declamación en los Teatros de esta Corte', p. 285.

¹¹ Diderot had only an indirect knowledge of the treatise by Rémond de Sainte-Albine, through Sticcotti's translation of the English edition made by John Hill. On formulations of the opposing theories of self-identification and dispassionate detachment in eighteenth century theoretical writings, see C. Vicentini, 'Teorie della recitazione. Diderot e la questione del paradosso', in *Storia del teatro moderno e contemporaneo*, ed. by R. Alonge and G. Davico Bonino, 4 vols., Torino, Einaudi, 2000, II, *Il grande teatro borghese: Settecento-Ottocento*, pp. 5-47.

was to become widely debated following the publication of Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1830). In late eighteenth century Spain disparate opinions were expressed concerning the process of interpretation, with the actor seen as the essential medium between the dramatic text and its representation.

The author of 'Reflexiones' maintains that the fundamental premise underlying acting is 'the understanding of the text and the exact imitation of what it contains'.¹² This almost suggests making a distinction between the actor's conception of his role, which is assigned to rationality and intelligence, and the moment of performance, based on the exterior imitation of the gestures and attitudes which correspond to the nature of the character. Nonetheless the objective, as he himself specifies, remains to arouse emotions in the spectators, and ideally this is best achieved when the actors identify themselves totally in their part. In fact this vision of the craft of acting, with its reference to Quintilian's account of seeing an actor coming out of the theatre shedding real tears after performing in a tragedy, dominated commentaries in Spain for a long time to come, alongside more complex and articulated reflections. Furthermore a footnote relates some anecdotes concerning actors of the day, including María Ignacia Ibañez and Vicente Merino, who identified themselves in their character to such an extent as to reproduce the involuntary symptoms of emotions such as weeping and turning pale.¹³

The final years of the eighteenth century also marked a crucial turning point in terms of how actors behaved on stage. The movement to bring the theatre into line with the principles of neoclassicism, which up until then had made little headway, became increasingly active, drawing on a broader, firsthand knowledge of the French system. Increasingly attention began to be paid in Spain to what was being published in the rest of Europe concerning the theatre. If Diderot's *Paradoxe sur le comédien* came out there in 1830, the year of its publication in Paris, other French, Italian and German treatises had been circulating in translation for some time, notably those of Luigi Riccoboni (1763), François Riccoboni (1783),¹⁴ Francesco Milizia (1789),¹⁵ and Lauriso Tragiense (1798).¹⁶ A decisive impulse in the development of the theories of acting in Spain came from Johann Jacob Engel's *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, partially

¹² 'la inteligencia del papel y exacta imitación de lo que encierra'. 'Reflexiones sobre el Estado de la Representación ó Declamación en los Teatros de esta Corte', p. 282.

¹³ See *ibid.* and note.

¹⁴ François Riccoboni, *L'art du théâtre à Madame ****, Paris, Simon et Giffard, 1750. *El arte del teatro, en que se manifiestan los verdaderos principios de la declamación teatral, y la diferencia que hay de esta a la del púlpito y tribunales, etc.*, Spanish trans. by José de Resma, Madrid, Ibarra, 1783. José de Resma is a pseudonym for Ignacio Meras y Queipo de Llano.

¹⁵ Francesco Milizia, *Del teatro*, In Venezia, Giambatista Pasquali, 1773 (second edition). *El teatro*, Spanish translation ed. by José Francisco Ortíz y Sanz, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1789. José Francisco Ortíz y Sanz was a scholar, academic and librarian who took a particular interest in Italian culture and the architecture of theatres.

¹⁶ Lauriso Tragiense, *De i vizj, e de i difetti del moderno teatro e del modo di correggergli, e d'emendarli*, In Roma, Pagliarini, 1753. The Spanish translation, by Santos Díez González and Manuel de Valbuena, is entitled *Conversaciones de Lauriso Tragiense, pastor arcade, sobre los vicios y defectos del Teatro moderno y el modo de corregirlos y enmendarlos*, Madrid, Imprenta Real, 1798.

translated and published in 1789 and 1790 in a series of articles entitled ‘Cartas sobre el gesto, la pantomima y la acción teatral’.¹⁷

In terms of acting, the pursuit of naturalness takes on a more precise stylistic sense in the Spanish treatises produced in the first half of the nineteenth century. The mainly implicit starting point was the excess of rhetoric and bombast that characterised tragedy. Naturalness, as the actor Carlos Latorre pointed out in a brief commentary on acting published in 1839, *Noticias sobre el arte de la declamación*, does not preclude a certain amount of embellishment and elevation of reality. But above all, rather than being seen as a quality inherent in an actor’s behaviour, it must be part and parcel of the character.¹⁸

Latorre was renowned above all for his roles as a tragic hero, and he is a perfect embodiment of the intrinsic contradictions in the romantic actor, caught between neoclassical idealization and pursuit of the realistic detail.¹⁹ He created the eponymous hero in José Zorrilla’s *Don Juan*, and made a name for himself playing violent, tortured characters. Nonetheless in his brief treatise, which went into at least two reprints, the latter in 1883, we see him pursuing a middle way between the opposing poles, advocating a stylistic equilibrium which corresponds to the attempt to mediate between self-identification and detachment.²⁰ One can see a predominant influence of French theatre, which he had come to know during several stays in Paris, and in particular of the great actor François-Joseph Talma. In fact much of the *Noticias* is a faithful translation of the latter’s *Réflexions sur Lekain et sur l’art dramatique*, first published in 1825.²¹ Both works subscribe to the quite widespread idea that the actor serves as the author’s interpreter (Talma goes so far as to use the word *traducteur*), completing his thought by means of his acting.²² Many passages from the *Réflexions* are reproduced verbatim, as for example the observations that when leading characters are in the thrall of passion they use an elevated language, which nonetheless corresponds to that of nature; that the same sentiments will be expressed differently in the various social classes; and that the actor must be able to combine intelligence and sensibility.²³ In fact a complete list of the “borrowings” would be very long: Latorre’s treatise is in practice a partly revised translation of Talma’s work, with the omission of the passages referring explicitly to Lekain. Besides, it was standard practice to make very free with sources in Spanish theoretic writings. Talma was repeatedly cited by treatise writers, including Andrés Prieto, who worked for a

¹⁷ Johann Jakob Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, 2 vols., Berlin, Mylius, 1785-1786. The first 25 letters were printed in *Éspiritu de los mejores diarios literarios que se publican en Europa* between 24 August 1789 and 8 November 1790.

¹⁸ Carlos Latorre, *Noticias sobre el arte de la declamación*, Madrid, Yenes, 1839. Recently republished in *Maestros del Teatro*, ed. by Á. Martínez Roger, Madrid, RESAD, 2006, pp. 123-133. See p. 125.

¹⁹ See J. Dowling, ‘El anti-don Juan de Ventura de la Vega’, *Actas del VI Congreso Internacional de Hispanistas*, ed. by A. M. Gordon and E. Rugg, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1980, pp. 215-218.

²⁰ See F. Doménech Rico, ‘Introducción’ to *Noticias sobre el arte de la declamación*, by Carlos Latorre, p. 118.

²¹ François-Joseph Talma, *Réflexions sur Lekain et sur l’art dramatique*, Paris, Tenré, 1825.

²² ‘Associés aux grands auteurs, les acteurs sont pour eux plus que des traducteurs; le traducteur n’ajoute rien à la pensée de l’auteur qu’il traduit; le comédien, en se mettant fidèlement à la place du personnage qu’il représente, doit compléter la pensée de l’auteur dont il est l’interprète’. I quote from François-Joseph Talma, *Réflexions de Talma sur Lekain et sur l’art théâtral*, Paris, Fontaine, 1856, p. 4.

²³ Cf. Carlos Latorre, *Noticias sobre el arte de la declamación*, p. 125 ff., and François-Joseph Talma, *Réflexions de Talma sur Lekain et sur l’art théâtral*, p. 23 ff. and p. 34.

long time alongside his teacher Isidoro Máiquez and who also benefited from a knowledge of French theatre in developing his complex and innovatory theory of acting. One of the earliest interpreters of Shakespearean heroes in Spain, Prieto was familiar with Talma's *Réflexions sur Lekain*, making frequent references to it in his *Teoría del arte dramático*.²⁴

Julián Romea was a pupil of Latorre and belonged to the next generation, dealing with a different repertoire in which bourgeois dramaturgy had a much greater part to play. His *Manual de declamación* met with considerable success, at least to judge by the various editions it went through.²⁵ The first, dated 1859, was produced for the students of the Real Conservatorio in Madrid. There can be no mistaking the work's didactic intent, and in fact the traditional approach used in the genre is here significantly altered. Romea begins by stating that he had no intention of writing a treatise on acting because he believes them to be useless. Instead he proposes a pedagogic manual in the form of questions and answers, both in the historical overview and when it comes to more specific matters concerning the resources of expressivity, the voice and gesture. Although various additions and modifications were made, this basic layout remained unchanged in the successive editions. Romea's manual is particularly interesting because it features a classic contradiction which recurs to a lesser degree in other treatises. To the question whether it is possible to teach acting, the author replies in the negative, maintaining that the actor, like the poet, must possess natural gifts.²⁶ At the same time, however, he states that these are not enough in themselves, since it is necessary to be guided, meaning to have further knowledge that can be acquired in a school of acting. In this intrinsic contradiction we can see an attempt to reconcile the myth of the creative actor, endowed with natural talent, and the new requisite to regulate the actor's activity through teaching. In fact even the actors who were most attached to the mythology of their calling came to accept the idea of institutions giving a training in the art of acting, and by the middle of the century this idea had become preponderant.

Projects for Reform at the End of the Eighteenth Century

There seems to have been a close link between the emergence of theoretical writings intended for actors and the setting up of specific schools.²⁷ The need for a reform of theatres overseen by public bodies had become particularly pressing, and from the end of the eighteenth century various projects for acting schools were put forward, based on the French model. The first school we know of was founded in Seville in 1768 by Pablo de Olavide, which led on in 1770 to the Teatros de los

²⁴ Andrés Prieto, *Teoría del arte dramático*, ed. by J. Vellón Lahoz, Madrid, Fundamentos, 2001. The complete title of the manuscript conserved in the Biblioteca Nacional di Madrid reads *Teoría del arte cómico y elementos de oratoria y declamación para la enseñanza de los alumnos del Real Conservatorio de María Cristina*.

²⁵ Julián Romea, *Manual de declamación para uso de los alumnos del Real Conservatorio de Madrid*, Madrid, F. Abieroso, 1859. The third and fourth edition came out in Madrid in 1865 and 1879. Romea also published *Ideas generales sobre el Arte del Teatro*, Madrid, F. Abienzo, 1858, and *Los Héroes en el teatro. Reflexiones sobre la manera de representar la tragedia*, Madrid, F. Abienzo, 1866.

²⁶ See *ibid.* (1879), p. 107.

²⁷ See G. Soria Tomás, 'La Escuela de Declamación Española: antecedentes y fundación', in *Maestros del Teatro*, ed. by Á. Martínez Roger, pp. 33-75.

Reales Sitios, set up with the assistance of Conte di Aranda.²⁸ In about 1790 a project was presented by Aguirre for a residence-cum-studio for actors which does not seem to have ever become reality.²⁹ We also find reference to the need to improve the professional standing of actors by providing for instruction in the dramatic art in ‘Memoria para el arreglo de la policía de los espectáculos y diversiones públicas y sobre su origen en España’ by Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, a first version of which appeared in 1790.³⁰

But on the whole the much vaunted reforms failed, and the attempts to create a repertoire of canonical plays respecting the principles of neoclassicism also came to nothing, not least because the common theatre goers were not at all enamoured of the results. One striking example of such an attempt was the ban imposed in 1788 on performances of plays “of magic”, which were so popular that they had to be reinstated in 1801. At the same time the resistance to the introduction of a neoclassical repertoire and style was due in part to the widespread nationalist sentiment, which rebelled against the idea of a “theatre *afrancesado*”, and deprived of its traditional identity. It was in fact the incommensurable gap between the demands of the public and the idealistic rigour of the literati, who wished to ban spectacle and entertainment from the stage, which was the main cause of the failure of all attempts at reform.

In the second half of the eighteenth century various projects were put forward, some of which also dealt with the question of acting, albeit in a casual rather than a systematic manner. Between 1767 and 1807 some thirty projects are known to have appeared in print.³¹ In a note he appended to his translation of the treatise by Luigi Riccoboni, Nifo called on the government to intervene, and repeated this request with greater insistence in a project for reform which did not see the light of day entitled *Idea política y cristiana para reformar el actual teatro de España*, as well as in other articles on the subject which appeared in the weekly *Diario extranjero*.³² The first part of this reform project featured the training of actors and details concerning the material resources for theatres, including stage sets and costumes.³³ Ensuing projects in the last three decades of the century had in common an insistence on the necessity of educating actors in a wide array of disciplines ranging from history to geography and dancing to fencing – and we find these same subjects listed in the treatises on acting written for students in drama schools.³⁴

²⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁹ See F. A. Piñal, *Sevilla y el teatro nel siglo XVIII*, Oviedo, Universidad de Oviedo, 1974, and more specifically J. Álvarez Barrientos, ‘Plan de una casa-estudio de teatros del siglo XVIII’, *Dicenda. Quadernos de Filología Hispánica*, no. 6 (1987), 455-471.

³⁰ See M. C. Millán, ‘Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos: Memoria para el arreglo de la policía de los espectáculos y diversiones públicas y sobre su origen en España’, *Epos: Revista de filología*, no. 7 (1991), p. 366.

³¹ See J. Herrera Navarro, ‘Los Planes de reforma del Teatro en el siglo XVIII’, in *El mundo hispánico en el siglo de las luces*, Madrid, Editorial Complutense, 1996, II, pp. 789-803.

³² Francisco Mariano Nifo, *Idea política y cristiana para reformar el actual teatro de España*. Drawn up on 14 October 1769, the project has never been published. See L. Domergue, ‘Dos reformadores del teatro: Nifo y Moratín’, *Coloquio internacional sobre Leandro Fernández Moratín, Bologna, 27-29 October 1978*, Abano Terme, Piovan, 1980, p. 97.

³³ See *ibid.*

³⁴ See J. Álvarez Barrientos, ‘El actor español en el siglo XVIII: formación, consideración social y profesionalidad’, *Revista de Literatura*, no. 100 (1988), p. 457.

In 1797 a document was published entitled *Idea de una reforma de los teatros públicos de Madrid que allane el camino para proceder después sin dificultades ni embarazos hasta su perfección*.³⁵ Its author was Santos Díez González, a scholar with a sound humanist background who advocated severe reforms and who was an official censor for the Madrid theatres. It dealt with both the content of plays and their staging, and prescribed that the actors should be recruited by a Giunta charged with seeing to their training.³⁶ Santos Díez González, who had translated the treatise of Lauriso Tragiense into Spanish, was also an adherent to neoclassicism, but on account of his rigidly traditionalist outlook he had little in common with the youthful Moratín. The latter nonetheless declared himself in favour of the project, and played an active part in setting up the Giunta, being appointed its Director.³⁷

In addition to a “director of theatres”, Díez González’s project provided for a “master of declamation”, introducing a function which reflected the new importance attached to actors’ education and giving instruction in acting.³⁸ Without going into their duties, it also provided for masters of music and dancing.³⁹ It is significant that it did not prove easy to appoint a “master of declamation”: the first time the post was advertised, no suitable candidate was forthcoming.

Following the approval of the project drawn up by Mariano Luis de Urquijo, who had previously produced a *Discurso sobre el estado actual de nuestros teatros y necesidad de su reforma*, and the creation of the Giunta in 1799, Moratín resigned from his position.⁴⁰ The role attributed to him cannot have corresponded to what he had in mind when he put himself forward as “absolute director” of theatres, and it is likely that he found himself with all too little scope, if not actually powerless, in the company of the authoritarian president Gregorio de la Cuesta and the intransigent censor Santos Díez González.⁴¹ In recognition of his important dramaturgical activity, in January 1800 he was appointed *Corrector de comedias antiguas*, a post created specifically for him, but he was never given an autonomous role in applying the intended reform.

The Giunta was responsible for directing and administering the Madrid theatres, taking over the functions which had previously been carried out by the municipal authorities. At the turn of the century, with the setting up of the Giunta the

³⁵ Santos Díez González, *Idea de una reforma de los teatros públicos de Madrid que allane el camino para proceder después sin dificultades ni embarazos hasta su perfección* (Madrid, 1797), published in C. E. Kany, ‘Plan de reforma de los teatros de Madrid aprobado en 1799’, *Revista de la Biblioteca, Archivo y Museo del Ayuntamiento de Madrid*, 23 July 1929, 245-284.

³⁶ On the content of the project and Moratín’s interventions see J. Subirá, ‘La Junta de Reforma de teatros. Sus antecedentes, actividades y consecuencias’, *Revista de la Biblioteca Archivo y Museo*, 9, no. 33 (January, 1932), p. 26 ff.

³⁷ José Subirá maintains that his collaboration was decisive, and sets him on a par with Díez González. See *ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁸ As well as insisting that actors should specialise as much as possible, Nifo’s project also envisaged them attending lessons in declamation, dancing and fencing, taking painting and sculpture as models in assimilating a nobility of gesture. See L. Domergue, ‘Dos reformadores del teatro: Nifo y Moratín’, pp. 102-103.

³⁹ See J. Subirá, ‘La Junta de Reforma de teatros. Sus antecedentes, actividades y consecuencias’, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Mariano Luis de Urquijo, *La muerte de César: tragedia francesa de Mr. de Voltaire, traducida en verso castellano y acompañada de un discurso del traductor sobre el estado actual de nuestros teatros y necesidad de su reforma*, Madrid, Blas Román, 1791, pp. 1-87.

⁴¹ This was the opinion of E. Cotarelo y Mori, *Isidoro Máiquez y el teatro de su tiempo* (1902), Madrid, Asociación de Directores de Escena de España, 2009, p. 147.

management of the Madrid theatres underwent a radical change, in which the latent conflict between the authorities and the actors came to a head. According to the advocates of a neoclassical theatre, the actors were reluctant to put on French works and when they did so, they deliberately performed badly so as to be able to claim that the public did not like these works.⁴² Certainly the new regulations enforced by the Giunta meant that the figure of the leading actor was practically abolished, while the actors lost any say in the choice of repertoire or even in the part they were to play. A number of actors and actresses refused to sign the contract, and managed to have some clauses of the new statute changed, but in the end they had to submit to the Giunta's rod of iron.⁴³ Thus the reform of the theatres was imposed from above rather than arising from any choice in the matter on the part of the artistes. And in fact, from the point of view of acting it was not a real reform. On his return from Paris Moratín asked to be taken on by the new companies, but he was only allowed to go and work in the provinces, and in fact he chose to go back to France. The reform undertaken and led by Díez González failed in the space of a few years, not least because it met with opposition from the Madrid city council, and in February 1803 the Giunta was definitively disbanded.

In general, in addition to the problem of unruly audiences, which encouraged irresponsibility on stage, commentaries on the theatre insisted that actors should have a more elegant and decorous behaviour and seek to nurture the spectators' level of culture rather than simply entertaining. Thus educating actors came to be seen as an integral part of theatrical reform, and received increasing importance in the projects produced in the 1790s. The execrable social and moral standing of actors, common to several European countries, was closely linked to the activity's organization as a craft and particularly evident in Spain.⁴⁴ The initiatives to regulate the behaviour of actors reinforced the call to introduce hard and fast principles for the dramatic art, based on reliable branches of science such as the physiology of the emotions. In fact, as we shall see, the main factor behind the production of a volume of theoretical writings on acting was precisely the fusion of reflections on the actor's art with a different line of study, closer to researches into anatomy, on one hand, and philosophy, on the other: the concept of the universality of the passions.

Thus the training of actors was closely bound up with their professional upgrading, and a parallel was often drawn between acting and the art of oratory. Besides, the very notion of acting had a large compass, including the art of delivery and all forms of declamation of a literary text, whether for entertainment or for other motives. Even a simple public reading could thus become the object of an aesthetic codification which ideally combined various figures and professional specialisations, since acting had not yet acquired its own specific standing. The first treatises in particular were aimed at a broader based public which included aspiring orators, amateur actors and anyone interested in acquiring a certain skill in public speaking. Thus declamation and eloquence were incorporated into a model course of education for young people of a certain standing, while being seen as indispensable accomplishments for future lawyers just as much as for professional actors.

⁴² See *ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴⁴ On this point see J. Álvarez Barrientos, 'Plan de una casa-estudio de teatros del siglo XVIII', in particular pp. 458-459.

The association between actor and orator recurs in several Spanish treatises which however, with just a few exceptions, do not address a very wide range of professional figures, but are restricted to stage artistes.⁴⁵ Unlike the situation in other European countries, in fact, the first Spanish commentaries on acting were specifically aimed at actors, and it was only when the genre became fully established that its scope was significantly broadened. One reason may well lie in the fact that treatises on acting began to be published in Spain with a specifically didactic purpose, associated with the setting up of schools designed to train actors. In other countries, such as Italy, the schools maintained a broad-based vocation and were mostly designed for amateurs rather than professionals. Furthermore, while in Spain the project of placing acting on a professional footing was undertaken from the top downwards, meaning by the government, the development of Italian schools of acting was mostly the result of initiatives at grass roots level (also for obvious reasons of political jurisdiction).

If acting was often associated with the tradition of oratory, the inverse was also quite common, a clear sign of the powers of attraction and assimilation which the stage had acquired. And whereas in the treatises dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century references to the prestigious art of oratory were designed to confer greater dignity on the theatre, the extension of acting theory to other contexts revealed a clear awareness of the importance of theatricality in the sphere of relationships. In other words, the expressive codes pertaining to the art of acting were often reused in other, related contexts.

Instruction in both acting and other forms of declamation had a common theoretical grounding in the study of the expressive forms of the passions, tending to a definition of a gestural and vocal code based on observation and codified in a series of descriptions of gestures or illustrative plates. The passions were the essential paradigm at the heart of theoretical reflection in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, concerning not only the interpretation of character but also the possibility of manifesting an interior state with the emotional involvement of onlookers. Since the expression of every passion consists in a natural process, the idea took hold that it can be the object of a precise recognition, based primarily on the physiology of the emotions and to a lesser extent on cultural factors, which determine some of its specific characteristics. In general it was the former aspect which received the most attention.

One example is *l'Ensayo sobre el origen y naturaleza de las pasiones, del gesto y de la acción teatral* (1800) by Fermín Eduardo Zeglirscosac.⁴⁶ This is the first genuine Spanish treatise on acting, and one of very few featuring illustrations. The text is a bizarre collation of two existing works: *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1668) by Charles Le Brun, which is also the source for the illustrations (in some cases the

⁴⁵ For example Lorenzo Badioli, *Declamación sagrada, forense, académica, popular, militar y teatral*, Madrid, Manuel Galiano, 1864.

⁴⁶ Fermín Eduardo Zeglirscosac, *Ensayo sobre el origen y naturaleza de las pasiones, del gesto y de la acción teatral*, Madrid, Sancha, 1800.

costumes or poses have been modified) and *Ideen zu einer Mimik* by Johann Jacob Engel, which as we have seen had been partially published in a series of articles.⁴⁷

The first part of the *Ensayo*, which is in practice a faithful translation of Le Brun's *Conférence*, is based on some principles of physiology of the emotions which the French painter had evolved drawing on Descartes's treatise on the passions. The second part consists in lengthy extracts from Engel's *Ideen*, with observations and descriptions of gestures and poses typical of the principal states of mind. The *Ensayo*, which represents a surprisingly coherent combination of the two sources, is based on the idea that the expression of the passions can be the subject of scientific enquiry, providing a normative classification for use in a teaching situation. This principle was to be taken over more or less explicitly by most subsequent theoreticians. Even the commentators who paid most attention to the origins of the dramatic art, such as Andrés Prieto, devoted a good deal of space to the expression of the affects, dividing up the various passions into categories and dwelling on descriptions of their visible effects.⁴⁸

But who was Fermín Eduardo Zeglirscosac? It has been suggested that this bizarre name was a pseudonym for the famous playwright Leandro Fernández de Moratín.⁴⁹ However, it is more probable that it is the anagram for a friend and collaborator of his, Francisco Rodríguez Ledesma, a lawyer, printer, translator and passionate disciple of the Enlightenment, who was appointed secretary to the Giunta for the direction of theatres – which had Moratín as one of its members and was presided over by Santos Díez González.⁵⁰ Moreover the attribution of the treatise to Rodríguez Ledesma is perfectly compatible with the choice of Francisco de Paula Martí to prepare the accompanying illustrations, since this artist was an unsuccessful candidate for the post of “master of declamation”. In all likelihood ‘Martí was the favourite candidate of some members of the Giunta and failed to secure the post on account of internal disagreements’, but the fact that he took part in the production of an acting manual precisely when efforts were being made to set up a school for actors is surely significant.⁵¹

It is likely that the publication of such an original work with respect to contemporary reflections on the theatre was seen by the author and Moratín as something of a risky business, almost a provocation to the other members of the Giunta. In fact it set out to found a new theory of acting, and the choice of sources was crucial. The *Ensayo sobre el origen y naturaleza de las pasiones* maintained that the dramatic art was based on the physiology of the emotions, and this proved to be a

⁴⁷ Charles Le Brun, *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière*, Paris, Picart, 1698. On Le Brun's publication and its cultural influence see J. Montagu, *The expression of the passions. The origin and influence of Charles Le Brun's "Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière"*, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1994. See also S. Ross, ‘Painting the passions: Charles Le Brun's “Conférence sur l'expression”’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 45, no. 1 (1984), 25-47.

⁴⁸ See in particular Andrés Prieto, *Teoría del arte dramático*, chap. X.

⁴⁹ This attribution relies above all on two indications: the attention paid to the figure of the “scene director”, which overlapped with the project of reform proposed in the same years by Moratín, and the fact that the playwright is known to have paid two visits to the publisher Sancha at the end of 1799 and early in 1800, this not being one of the houses with whom Moratín published his works. See J. A. Hormigón, *Trabajo dramático y puesta en escena*, Madrid, ADE, 2002, I, p. 46.

⁵⁰ See F. Doménech Rico, ‘Zeglirscosac desvelado o el abogado sensible’, *Dieciocho. Hispanic Enlightenment*, 27, no. 2 (Fall, 2004), 219-231.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

turning point in theoretical considerations of the theatre. In many respects it was diametrically opposed to the verbose treatise of Tragiense, translated by González, whose moralistic attitude identified the contagion of emotions produced by drama as the most deleterious element in theatre. Tragiense's work virtually sought to rid the concept of theatre of the materiality of the stage, and in particular of actors, who had been the object of reproofs and condemnation for centuries. Instead the *Ensayo* advocated a "scientific", category-based approach to the question of acting, singling out the passions as the chief elements of analysis. It was highly significant that the author looked to the French model, and thus to a more up-to-date and unconventional approach, rather than the Italian school, which was more historiographical and far removed from the crucial questions facing the acting world (one has only to think of the work cited above by Milizia). The two works – the *Ensayo* and the translation of Tragiense's treatise – were in practice incompatible. In an embryonic theoretical framework they ideally vied for the role of founders of the new discipline, as if they were the grammars of a language which was still to be invented.

Treatises and Manuals for the New Schools of Acting

Although there had been a few previous attempts, the first real schools for actors were not created in Spain until 1830, when the Real Conservatorio de Música y Declamación de María Cristina was inaugurated in Madrid. By this time instruction in theatre and music had become a priority in politics and government circles, and other establishments soon followed, not only in Madrid but also elsewhere. Treatises on declamation came to play an integral part in this evolution, becoming essential tools in a curriculum which aimed to combine theory and practice.

The 1830s were a crucial moment for the creation of official courses in acting, and the production of treatises underwent a substantial development, based on a clearly defined conceptual approach. 1833 saw the *Tratado de declamación o Arte dramático* by Vicente Joaquín Bastús y Carrera, announced as being of benefit for the instruction of actors and teachers in the fine arts.⁵² It was immediately adopted for the courses taught at the Real Conservatorio. In 1837 a Sociedad Dramática de Aficionados was formed in Barcelona, and from the following year courses were taught in acting, singing and Italian. In Barcelona this institution was flanked by the Liceo Filarmónico Dramático de S. M. la Reina Isabel II, and instruction in drama began to feature regularly in grammar schools too: in 1841 Luis Lamarca published *Apuntes sobre el arte de representar, dedicados a los individuos de la Sección de declamación del Liceo Valenciano*.⁵³

In 1839 Bastús was appointed Professor of acting in the Liceo di Maria Cristina, Madrid, three years after being designated an honorary member of the Accademia Filodrammatica in Milan. His treatise was first adopted for teaching purposes at the instigation of Enciso Castrillón. In various respects the work of Bastús, which is well documented in the recent study of Guadalupe Soria Tomás and Eduardo Pérez-

⁵² Vicente Joaquín Bastús y Carrera, *Tratado de declamación o Arte dramático*, Barcelona, Por los Herederos de A. Roca, 1833.

⁵³ Luis Lamarca, *Apuntes sobre el arte de representar, dedicados a los individuos de la Sección de declamación del Liceo Valenciano*, Valencia, López y Cía, 1841.

Rasilla, constitutes an exemplary progression from the fine arts to the theatre.⁵⁴ From the time of his appointment to the board of governors of the Real Academia de Buenas Letras, Barcelona, in 1835, he began to specialise in teaching dramaturgy. During the session held on 24 February 1837 he read a paper entitled *Utilidad de establecer un curso de enseñanza de historia aplicada a las bellas artes*, intended also for aspiring actors and directors, who in certain respects were associated with painters and sculptors.⁵⁵ The aim of the course was to transmit the knowledge required to correct the shortcomings of incoherence and historical inaccuracy that marred the theatre. Thus on one hand the theatrical profession was related to the prestigious tradition of the liberal arts, safeguarding it from the ingrained disdain for a craft learnt exclusively “on the job”, while on the other particular attention was paid to visual representation (in particular costumes and stage sets), associating the theatre with the figurative arts and hence raising its status. In other words, the teaching of acting and stagecraft was brought under the ennobling aegis of the fine arts. The course featured a broad selection of subjects, ranging from so-called “Theogony” to theatre, although the latter came to occupy an ever greater place, as can be seen from the title of an address given by Bastús ten years later, on 26 January 1847: *Memoria sobre la utilidad de publicar un curso de historia para los profesores de las bellas artes y directores de escena*.⁵⁶ The explicit reference to *directores*, to which we shall return later, gives a clear indication of the trend in instruction in acting. In setting up schools the aim was not only to free the acting profession from the tradition of firsthand apprenticeship but also to contrast the protagonism of the actors, bringing them under the tutelage of a centralised authority.

From 1830 onwards, schools of acting were inaugurated in Madrid and Barcelona and also in other Spanish cities, in which the acting course was in some cases taught by famous actors, such as Carlos Latorre, Andrés Prieto and Antonio Pizarroso.⁵⁷ As we have seen, Prieto’s *Teoría del arte dramático* was also written in the mid-1830s, coinciding with the creation of the Real Conservatorio de María Cristina.

Thus many treatises and manuals dealing with acting were written specifically for teaching purposes, often by famous actors like Prieto or Julián Romea or by less eminent colleagues. In other cases, rather than producing full blown treatises, actors such as Manuel Catalina and Antonio Vico left some written considerations on the

⁵⁴ See G. Soria Tomás y E. Pérez-Rasilla, ‘Biografía personal e intelectual de V. J. Bastús y Carrera’, in Vicente Joaquín Bastús y Carrera, *Tratado de declamación o arte dramático*, ed. by G. Soria Tomás y E. Pérez-Rasilla, Madrid, Fundamentos, 2008, pp. 11-48.

⁵⁵ Vicente Joaquín Bastús y Carrera, *Utilidad de establecer un curso de enseñanza de historia aplicada a las bellas artes*, Barcelona, Archivo della Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres, Lligall 18, 4, fol. 862.

⁵⁶ Vicente Joaquín Bastús y Carrera, *Memoria sobre la utilidad de publicar un curso de historia para los profesores de las bellas artes y directores de escena*, Barcelona, Archivo della Reial Acadèmia de Bones Lletres, Llibre segon de les Actes de les sessions de la Acadèmia de Bones Lletres de Barcelona, 1838-1858.

⁵⁷ Antonio Pizarroso, *Discurso pronunciado el 1º de octubre de 1872 en la apertura de la clase de declamación instalada en el Teatro Español*, Madrid, José M. Ducázcal, 1872.

theatre of their day which are rich in references to acting.⁵⁸ In this context the expressive codification of the passions naturally had a decisive function and tended to be normative rather than descriptive. The treatises on acting published in Spain during the nineteenth century are however very heterogeneous, ranging from simple pamphlets containing reflections on acting to weighty manuals which deal systematically with all the various aspects associated with acting, ranging from physiology to the history of theatre.⁵⁹

One also finds more or less generic observations on the art of acting in histories of the theatre, like the one published in 1848 by the playwright Ramón de Valladares y Saavedra.⁶⁰ The author gives a brief overview of the various skills required by the actor, from correct pronunciation to appropriacy of gesture. Significantly, for all its brevity, he devotes some pages to the expression of the basic passions (sympathy, antipathy, love, jealousy, ambition, avarice, pride and scorn), which had come to be seen as the fundamental categories for interpretation (viewed as a figurative representation of the affects). Manuel Bretón de los Herreros was also a playwright, and his *Progresos y estado actual del arte de la declamación en los teatros de España* is based on a more modern conception of the art of acting, going beyond the conventional relationship between expression and sentiment.⁶¹ He attacked the idea that acting could be based on a repertoire of gestures derived from physiology, which risked lapsing into a caricatured representation of the passions. Bretón was also an attentive and demanding critic whose satirical descriptions of acting in the early years of the nineteenth century provide us with particularly interesting stylistic insights. In his article entitled ‘Charlatanismo escénico o arte de agradar a la multitud con poco trabajo’, for example, he offers actors a series of ironic pieces of advice.⁶²

In fact treatises dealing with gesture and declamation had become in vogue all over Europe, with actors, literati and scholars of theatre all contributing to the genre. In Spain many such works concentrated on the theatre’s state of decadence, calling on the government to bring in legislation.⁶³ Some even took a medical or scientific

⁵⁸ Manuel Catalina, *El teatro. Los actores*, Madrid, Imprenta Central à cargo de V. Saiz, 1877, a brief 36 page long essay in which the author laments the decadence in the dramatic art and invokes a specific legislation for the theatre, outlining the history of developments to date. Then there is a work which focuses more on the actor’s craft and recitation: Antonio Vico, ‘Isidoro Máiquez, Carlos Latorre y Julián Romea. La escena española desde comienzos de siglo. La declamación en la tragedia, en el drama y en la comedia de costumbres’, *La España del siglo XIX. Colección de conferencias históricas*, Madrid, Ateneo, 1886.

⁵⁹ In addition to full-blown treatises throughout the century short, practical manuals were published, such as the pamphlet of only 16 pages by Juan de Alba, *Tratado de declamación y semblanzas de los emperadores y reyes que stán mas en juego en las tragedias y dramas de nuestros autores antiguos y contemporáneos, y nociones de literatura y poesía*, Valencia, Casa de Beneficiencia, 1886. At the same time short reflections on theatrical reform continued to be published, such as Julio Nombela, *Proyecto de bases para la fundación de una escuela especial del arte teatral*, Madrid, Imprenta del Hospicio, 1880.

⁶⁰ Ramón de Valladares y Saavedra, *Nociones acerca de la historia del teatro desde su nacimiento hasta nuestros días; antecediéndola de algunos principios de poética, música y declamación*, Madrid, Imprenta Publicidad, 1848, pp. 38-46.

⁶¹ Manuel Bretón de los Herreros, *Progresos y estado actual del arte de la declamación en los teatros de España*, Madrid, Mellado, 1852. See also P. Miret, *Las ideas teatrales de M. Bretón de los Herreros*, Logroño, Instituto de Estudios Riojanos, 2004.

⁶² See P. Miret, *Las ideas teatrales de M. Bretón de los Herreros*, p. 280.

⁶³ For example Manuel Catalina, *El teatro. Los actores*.

approach, in particular when they were also written for singers.⁶⁴ Most however tended to give a comprehensive panorama, ranging from an outline of the history of theatre to precise indications on acting. One example is the *Ensayos sobre el arte de la declamación* by Antonio Barroso, published in 1845, which gives some negative examples of acting and makes many references to dramaturgy.⁶⁵ One particularly voluminous and ambitious work is the *Curso completo de declamación* by Antonio Guerra y Alarcón, written for the association of playwrights and artistes of which he was a member. Running into some 450 pages, it gives an account of a series of disciplines ranging from grammar in general to metrical composition, world history, physiology and psychology, as well as music, aesthetics, archaeology and gesture.⁶⁶

As the century progressed, expressive codification became a fundamental element in teaching: on a par with, if not more than, painters and sculptors, actors had to be familiar with the signs which manifest emotions so as to be able to reproduce them on stage. We can identify the origin of this development in Zeglirscosac's *Ensayo*, which focused attention definitively on facial expressivity and gesture, paving the way for further reflections. Some treatises took this approach to extremes, postulating a one-to-one correspondence between sentiment and the kinaesthetic sign which expresses it and formulating a list of passions and states of mind which have correspondences in certain expressions and sentiments. One example is the treatise by Lorenzo Badioli, *Declamación sagrada, forense, académica, popular, militar y teatral*, published in 1864, which gives a sample repertoire of gestures and attitudes that can be immediately deciphered. Thus for example placing the head on the right hand indicates attention and meditation, while spreading the right hand and placing it on the chest indicates taking an oath and giving assurance; again, covering the eyes with the palms of the hands, slightly turning the head and placing the open palms on an object or raising the arms is a clear sign of terror, horror and aversion.⁶⁷

The second part of the *Consejos sobre la declamación* (1865) by Antonio Capo Celada, a famous actor and professor at the Real Conservatorio de Maria Cristina, also features a sort of dictionary of the passions.⁶⁸ He offers a particularly wide spectrum, ranging from friendship to jealousy and fright to artistic fanaticism, giving explanations of their nature and physiognomic observations interspersed with indications on how they are to be expressed. Acting tends to be classified in a series of categories defined in terms of expressivity: in the case of Capo Celada this covers the different human types and even ages. In general, the second half of the century marked the high point of the tendency to create specific categories of gestures and

⁶⁴ For example Louis Auguste Segond, *El libro de los oradores y actores. Causas principales de la debilitación de la voz y del desarrollo de varias enfermedades y modo de precaverlas, precedido de la higiene para conservar la salud de todas edades, por medios fáciles y al alcance de todo*. Trans. and ed. by Juan de Castro. Madrid, Don Pedro Montero, 1856. More specifically for singers (at the Conservatorio de Música y Declamación, Barcellona) is Antonietta Tschudy, *Tratado de declamación italiana y de la mímica unida al canto*, Barcelona, Jaime Jepús, 1892.

⁶⁵ Antonio Barroso, *Ensayos sobre el arte de la declamación*, Madrid, Colegio de Sordo-Mudos y Ciegos, 1845.

⁶⁶ Antonio Guerra y Alarcón, *Curso completo de declamación ó enciclopedia de los conocimientos que necesitan adquirir los que se dedican al arte escénico*, Madrid, F. Maroto é Hijos, 1884.

⁶⁷ See Lorenzo Badioli, *Declamación sagrada, forense, académica, popular, militar y teatral, con un apéndice sobre el canto en general*, pp. 40-41. See also Gaspar Gomez Trigo, *La declamación*, Madrid, Francisco García Padrós, n.d.

⁶⁸ Antonio Capo Celada, *Consejos sobre la declamación*, Madrid, Colegio de Sordomudos y Ciegos, 1865.

poses. The author of the *Compendio de declamación*, for example, gave some ‘Indicaciones sobre fisiología y anatomía pictórica aplicables á la escena’, drawing up a sort of representational alphabet for the principal passions (such as ‘Desire: high pitched voice; rapid, ecstatic delivery; an avid look, eyes fixed on the object of desire; movements towards this object’).⁶⁹ Similarly, in his *Mímica melodramática* Eduardo Minguell y Tey distinguishes between various types of love, each with their own mode of expression described in detail.⁷⁰

It is significant that this trend persisted through to the end of the century. Authors of treatises became so enamoured of descriptive classification that they would even list a series of phrases and expressions accompanied by the relative movement or pose, as in the bizarre work by Lorenzo Prohens y Juan, *Indicaciones sobre la declamación*.⁷¹ The idea of establishing hard and fast rules for representation led to the compilation of authentic dictionaries of the passions, as well as actors’ handbooks, even though these actually contradict the principle of “naturalness”, meaning the pursuit of expressive spontaneity which was supposed to go hand in hand with self-identification on the part of the actor. Although various theorists, such as Bretón de los Herreros, took a different approach to the question, criticising the absurd codifying tendency which characterised many treatises, the fact that this trend persisted at least through to the end of the century shows that it undoubtedly responded to a specific need in terms of instruction and dissemination.

While most acting manuals were written by actors, playwrights or scholars with a particular passion for the theatre, some were published by contemporary directors, like *El Arte en el Teatro* (1875) by José Manjarrés.⁷² In his introduction the author states that the work draws on his study of the practice of theatrical directing. Although the Spanish stage in the nineteenth century, like its Italian counterpart, was dominated by the leading actors, from the second half of the eighteenth century the need emerged for a figure wielding authority to supervise the production. The fact that reformers and treatise writers frequently appealed to the “director” is closely linked to the process of institutionalization in the art of theatre. The first advocates of theatrical reform, such as Mariano Nifo, proposed the institution of a general theatre director, responsible for repertory, distributing the parts and all matters of organization.⁷³ As has been pointed out, in Nifo’s project the director was supposed to be present at rehearsals, ‘noting and correcting faults in the actors, giving them a clear idea of the sentiments and passions contained in the text’: functions which, in certain aspects, do indeed prefigure the figure of the director as we know it.⁷⁴ In practice, the director was not supposed to restrict himself to matters of organization

⁶⁹ ‘Deseo: Voz aguda; pronunciación rápida y arrebatada; ojos avidos y fijos en el objeto deseado; la acción en dirección al objeto’. F. D. y R., *Compendio de declamación*, Valencia, 1882, p. 20.

⁷⁰ Eduardo Minguell y Tey, *Mímica melodramática. Bocetos didácticos*, Barcelona, Luís Tasso Serra, 1888.

⁷¹ Lorenzo Prohens y Juan, *Indicaciones sobre la declamación*, Palma, Umbert y Mir, 1899.

⁷² José Manjarrés, *El Arte en el Teatro*, Barcelona, Juan y Antonio Bastinos, 1875. This work is not in fact a treatise on acting for actors, but an essay on various aspects of the dramatic art, giving an overview of its history and paying particular attention to the various components (genres, scenery, lighting and stage machinery, recitation and costumes).

⁷³ See J. Herrera Navarro, ‘Los Planes de reforma del Teatro en el siglo XVIII’, p. 791.

⁷⁴ ‘notar y corregir los defectos que se adviertan en los comediantes, dándoles una clara idea de los sentimientos y pasiones que haya el papel que se represente’. L. Domergue, ‘Dos reformadores del teatro: Nifo y Moratín’, p. 100.

and discipline, but also to serve as a link between playwright and actors. Other authors who called for the institution of a director were José de Resma, in the introductory note to his translation of the treatise by François Riccoboni (1783), Aguirre in his project for a residence-cum-studio for actors and Juan Francisco Plano in the *Ensayo sobre la meyoría de nuestro teatro* (1798).⁷⁵ Plano attributed to the director tasks relating to instructing the actors in the art of expression: ‘under the direction of an accomplished Director, [the actors] have to learn to declaim with finesse, and understand that each passion has its own gesture and tone of voice, and that the expression of the same passions varies between people of different social classes’.⁷⁶

In fact the importance which the figure of the theatre director took on from the end of the eighteenth century transpires quite clearly from the projects for reform. It reveals a lack of confidence in the playwrights who took charge of managing the companies, even though they had just received from the magistrates the responsibility for those functions which were being identified as specific to an autonomous figure.⁷⁷ The project for the reform of the Madrid theatres proposed in 1797 by Santos Díez González envisaged the creation of the new figure of “director of theatres”, who was to play a major role in exercising official authority.⁷⁸ The same approach was taken by Leandro Fernández de Moratín, who on his return from several trips through Europe was among the leading promoters of a radical reform of the stage. Following the performance of his *Comedia nueva*, featuring a satire of the theatrical world which was also a manifesto for his own conception of dramaturgy, in 1792 Moratín produced a *Plan de reforma de los teatros españoles*. He denounces the lack of instruction and professionalism among actors as one of the chief causes of the disastrous conditions of the theatre: ‘there is nobody who instructs the actors in the art of acting, so that they are all ignorant about how to go about their calling, and even if, thanks to their extraordinary talent, they should manage to have some success, this would be so much effort in vain since no proper recompense has been laid down, in proportion to the progress they might make’.⁷⁹ A few months later, in an attempt to set instruction in acting on an institutional footing, he petitioned the king to create the position of “director of Spanish theatres”, confidently putting

⁷⁵ See François Riccoboni, *El arte del teatro, en que se manifiestan los verdaderos principios de la declamación teatral, y la diferencia que hay de esta a la del púlpito y tribunales, etc.*, pp. XII-XIII. See also J. Á. Barrientos, ‘Plan de una casa-estudio de teatros del siglo XVIII’, pp. 463-470.

⁷⁶ ‘baxo el gobierno de un *Director* hábil, deben aprendere á decir con finura, y endender que cada pasión tiene su gesto y tono de voz propio, y que aún la misma pasión lo tiene diferente en cada clase de persona’. Juan Francisco Plano, *Ensayo sobre la meyoría de nuestro teatro*, Segovia, Espinosa, 1798, p. 98.

⁷⁷ See L. Domergue, ‘Dos reformadores del teatro: Nifo y Moratín’, p. 101.

⁷⁸ Santos Díez González, *Idea de una reforma de los teatros públicos de Madrid que allane el camino para proceder después sin dificultades ni embarazos hasta su perfección*, pp. 245-284. Cf. J. Herrera Navarro, ‘Los Planes de reforma del Teatro en el siglo XVIII’, p. 801.

⁷⁹ ‘No hay quien instruya a los Cómicos en el arte de la declamación, de donde resulta que todos ellos son ignorantes en su ejercicio, y si tal vez, por un efecto extraordinario del talento, llegasen a acertar en algo, serían inútiles estos esfuerzos: puesto que no hay establecida una recompensa justa, proporcionada a sus adelantamientos’. Leandro Fernández de Moratín, *Plan de reforma de los teatros españoles*. Dated 18 February 1792, it was published in P. Cabañas, ‘Moratín y la reforma del teatro de su tiempo’, *Revista de Bibliografía Nacional*, 1944, pp. 75-84.

himself forward for the job.⁸⁰ The position was evidently one of great prestige and responsibility, and it may be that Moratín's youth counted against him. In any case he did not get the job, and indeed his proposal was disdainfully rejected by the *corregidor* Juan de Morales Guzmán y Tovar, who denounced it as suffering from the “mal de moda”, meaning the passion for everything French.⁸¹

In treatises dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century the role and functions of the director were spelt out and applied to the more limited context of a specific company. One example is the *Ensayo sobre el origen y naturaleza de las pasiones, del gesto y de la acción teatral*, where in his preliminary remarks Zeglirscosac describes in detail the qualities and responsibilities pertaining to the director. Revealing a decidedly modern approach, the figure of the director is intended to guarantee the “unity” and homogeneity of the production, with all its constituent elements. In practice the director is given the role of supervising the performance, taking charge in particular of the coherence of the staging and costumes, even to the point of directing the work of the *pintor*. In other commentaries dating from this period “director” refers to the set designer, but Zeglirscosac's description corresponds to what we refer to as a director, at least in outline. From the early years of the nineteenth century in Spain, projects for theatrical reform went hand in hand with the determination to have proceedings on stage put under a figure of authority who had no involvement as an actor. To a greater extent than in Italy, Spanish treatise writers and reformers sought to contrast the prevalence of the leading actors, which reflected a tradition based on firsthand apprenticeship and ingrained mechanisms for casting, which made for unassailable privileges concerning repertory and hierarchies. It is no coincidence if both Nifo and Santos Díez González proposed the abolition of such privileges, distributing the parts to actors on the basis of genuine ability.⁸² Although it was based on an individualistic concentration of power, Moratín's ill-fated project also pursued precisely this objective. But the inveterate habits of the actors prevailed even over the limitation of their autonomy which was imposed a few years later by the Giunta.

Brief Considerations on the Question of Emotional Participation

One crucial question which emerges in the Spanish treatises even before the onset of the nineteenth century concerned “sensitivity”, meaning whether an actor should participate emotively in the passions he expresses. This topic would require a lengthy treatment, and here I shall merely outline it in order to complete this account. As we have seen, in the ‘Reflexiones sobre el Estado de la Representación’ the ability to identify oneself with the character is considered an essential gift for an actor. Similarly the *Manifiesto por los teatros españoles y sus actores* (1788) refers to the question of self-identification, and the topic was extensively developed in successive treatises

⁸⁰ Leandro Fernández de Moratín, *Proposición a su Majestad sobre la creación de una plaza de Director de teatros*. Dated 14 December 1792, the document was published in P. Cabañas, ‘Moratín y la reforma del teatro de su tiempo’, pp. 74-75.

⁸¹ Juan de Morales Guzmán y Tovar, *Informe del Corregidor sobre el Plan de Moratín*. Dated 28 October 1793, the document was published in P. Cabañas, ‘Moratín y la reforma del teatro de su tiempo’, pp. 88-95.

⁸² See L. Domergue, ‘Dos reformadores del teatro: Nifo y Moratín’, p. 105.

during the nineteenth century.⁸³ The author of this latter work, Manuel García de Villanueva y Parra, nephew of the actor José García Ugaldá and himself an actor, reaffirmed the classic image of the actor who has all the more success if he is a prey to the sentiments he is expressing, citing the famous Horatian dictum *si vis me flere dolendum est primum ipsi tibi*.⁸⁴ In fact what counts is to stir up emotions in the audience, as Juan Francisco Plano affirms in the *Ensayo sobre la meyoría de nuestro teatro* (1798): ‘the art of performing is the art of feeling, and expressing sentiment by means of gesture, voice and action, so that it is impressed on the hearts of the spectators’.⁸⁵

Nonetheless the translation of Diderot’s *Paradoxe*, and prior to this the *Mémoires d’Hippolyte Clairon*, helped to spread different opinions on the matter.⁸⁶ Madame Clairon also believed, in fact, that acting was the outcome of an art, meaning a know-how based on imitation rather than on sensibility.⁸⁷ Her reflections did not have a great influence on Spanish treatises, probably because many of her observations were too specific, referring to roles and characters of the French stage. Besides, the great actress maintained that schools of acting served no purpose, while in Spain the elaboration of dramatic theory went hand in hand with the institution of the conservatories.

At first sight it might seem as though there can only be hard and fast rules for instruction in acting if it is considered an art of imitation. But the principle behind the theories of acting in the nineteenth century held that the passions speak a universal language which is bound to emerge if the actor identifies himself with his part. As is well known, for Diderot the actor had to realise an ideal model based on the observation of reality, implying truth to life, but re-elaborated in the light of an aesthetic, idealising conception. Hence his expressive capacity is the outcome of personal invention or artistic creation, but nineteenth century theorists failed to grasp the full implications of this view. They did not understand that, far from reducing the actor to a mechanical puppet, this conception gave him the status of a creative interpreter. Whereas according to the emotionalist theory, the actor’s creativity is realised in his identification with the character, triggering the expression of sentiments which are in fact universal and universally comprehensible. The paradox is that the codification of the passions and the drawing up of repertoires of gesture derive precisely from the principle of universality and the expressive immediacy of the passions. While for Diderot the artiste has to mediate, calling on the intellect, between truth to life and aesthetic content, the advocates of self-identification subscribe to a sort of principle of expressive transparency. They recognise that nature can be embellished by art, but insist on the naturalness of expressivity, without granting to acting the status of an artistic phenomenon endowed with its own expressive rules which can differ from those informing reality. At least this was the

⁸³ Manuel García de Villanueva y Parra, *Manifiesto por los teatros españoles y sus actores*, Madrid, En la Imprenta de la viuda de Ibarra, 1788.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸⁵ ‘El arte de representar es arte de sentir, y explicar el sentimiento con el gesto, la voz y la acción, de modo que se imprima en el corazón del espectador’. Juan Francisco Plano, *Ensayo sobre la meyoría de nuestro teatro*, p. 84.

⁸⁶ Hippolyte Clairon, *Réflexions sur l’art dramatique*, in *Mémoires d’Hippolyte Clairon*, Paris, Buisson, 1798, pp. 22-61. *Reflexiones de Mma. Clairon, actriz de la comedia francesa sobre el arte de la declamación*, trans. by J. D. M., Madrid, Gerónimo Ortega, 1800.

⁸⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 30.

theory, since in practice nineteenth century actors were perfectly conscious of the divergence, and exploited it for example by indulging in the most far-fetched flights of poetic licence which were sure to produce an effect. Nonetheless the majority of treatise writers, while making various concessions and distinctions, adhered to an idealistic stance which denied this divergence.

Thus the possibility of codifying gesture does not derive from a detached, rational mode of acting but rather, however absurd this may appear, from the model of the instinctive, passionate actor, who gives expression to his conception of the character in his emotive participation. It is precisely because the sentiments are dictated by nature that the sensitive actor can express them without altering their essential character. The extreme and paradoxical consequence of this outlook based on the myth of self-identification was the production of manuals and handbooks for actors.

In nineteenth century treatises the question of the actor's sensibility recurs repeatedly and coexists with the principle of a codification of gesture for teaching purposes. Most treatise writers also sought to maintain a difficult equilibrium between the two different outlooks: the necessity of arousing emotions by identifying with the character, and the advisability of making measured use of one's own emotivity, mediated by judgement and reason. In general it was nonetheless the idealised conception of a profession based on emotive sensitivity and inspiration which prevailed. To give just a few examples, Barroso believed that the one indispensable endowment for an actor was sensitivity, even arguing, by means of an assimilation which is indeed debatable, that the actor must be as easily carried away as the playwright, since a cold, impassive person cannot be a good interpreter.⁸⁸ The association of two such different functions and professions as author and interpreter is further proof of the fact that the much lauded sensibility was considered an indispensable quality in the creative process *tout court*, according to the ingenuous but firmly rooted idealization that had much in common with the romantic spirit. Theorists oscillated between the romantic idea that genius is part and parcel of the artist ('genius cannot be learnt', as Carlos Latorre, for example, asserted) and the idea that instruction in acting is necessary to raise the art to the desired level of perfection.⁸⁹

The reflections of Guerra y Alarcón on this subject are more complex. He believed that to find the right inspiration it can suffice to grasp a detail, the memory of an episode from personal experience, the presence of a close friend or relative in the theatre. This in itself will elevate the actor, making him a superior being. There is no need for rules, or Diderot's capacity to conceive of the character as a whole, since once again inspiration is the keystone for everything.⁹⁰ Then again, even though Andrés Prieto favoured a pragmatic approach to the question and maintained that one of the most important qualities for an actor is to have keen powers of observation, he also to some extent denied the validity of Diderot's theory.⁹¹ Almost

⁸⁸ See Antonio Barroso, *Ensayos sobre el arte de la declamación*, p. 49, *passim*. On p. 69 he even states that 'the good actor does not make believe, he feels'.

⁸⁹ Carlos Latorre, *Noticias sobre el arte de la declamación*, p. 124.

⁹⁰ See Antonio Guerra y Alarcón, *Curso completo de declamación ó enciclopedia de los conocimientos que necesitan adquirir los que se dedican al arte escénico*, pp. 414-415.

⁹¹ See Andrés Prieto, *Teoría del arte dramático*, p. 82, *passim*.

as if to offset the emphasis placed on the spirit of observation, he insisted on the importance of sensibility.⁹²

When all is said and done, the oscillation between the emotionalist and anti-emotionalist positions was a constant feature of Spanish treatises, as was the case elsewhere. In his *Manual de declamación*, Julián Romea argued for example that one of the natural gifts required in an actor is sensibility, meaning ‘the facility, characteristic of the heart and mind of the artiste, to be impressed by everything they hear or see’.⁹³ Nonetheless he goes on to observe that it is useful for the actor to have a certain natural instinct for observation, enabling him to identify in everyday life those specific traits, attitudes and expressions which can be revived in his memory and used on stage.⁹⁴ We find an even more striking ambivalence in Bastús’s treatise. According to some of his assertions, he would seem to be a confirmed advocate of the necessity for self-identification. At the same time, however, he states that the actor must display the passions *as if* he felt them, but without actually feeling them because otherwise he would lose the ability to express them.⁹⁵ The actor must not let himself be carried away on the tide of sentiment, he states echoing Engel, but at the same time, when representing a passion he must nonetheless feel acute emotion, and here he seems to be closer to the position of Lessing.⁹⁶

As can be seen even from these few examples, Spanish writing on the theatre is inscribed in the complex theoretical paradigm that had been elaborated elsewhere in Europe, and adopted its fundamental elements. Even when it shows a greater propensity for categorization, it seeks to set the descriptive and normative principles, based on the equivalence between passion and expression, in a theoretical framework which elevates the actor to the status of a creative artist. And the only feasible way to attribute a creative function to the actor appears to be through sensibility and self-identification, paradoxically combined with the formulation of hard and fast rules to establish the principles of an art which is in the process of being forged.

⁹² See *ibid.*, p. 86.

⁹³ ‘la facilidad de impresionarse que tienen el corazón y la mente del artista con todo lo que oyen ó miran’. Julián Romea, *Manual de declamación para uso de los alumnos del Real Conservatorio de Madrid* (1879), p. 108.

⁹⁴ See *ibid.* (1879), p. 109.

⁹⁵ See Vicente Joaquín Bastús y Carrera, *Tratado de declamación o Arte dramático*, p. 51.

⁹⁶ Cf. Johann Jakob Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, I, pp. 10-11, and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, 2 vols., Leipzig, J. Dodsley und Compagnie, 1767-1769, I, pp. 19-20.