

THE FALL OF VENICE: WITNESSED, IMAGINED, NARRATED

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e-mail: david.laven@nottingham.ac.uk**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the manner in which British commentators responded to the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797, and how this shaped subsequent attitudes to the destruction of the Serenissima at the hands of Bonaparte's Army of Italy. The work focuses first on the narrative offered by Richard Worsley, the last British resident and representative to the Republic of Saint Mark, before then turning to accounts in British newspapers. It shows that the former – while prioritising his own interests and those of other British subjects – emphasised the aggression of the French, and degree to which they set about deliberately provoking the Venetian authorities in the hope of legitimating war against the neutral state. The second – reflecting contemporary journalistic practice – consisted largely of "cut and paste" journalism, which during the spring of 1797 became increasingly dependent on echoing the French press. The article argues that it was the French perspective that assumed dominance in British accounts of the fall of Venice.

Key words: Richard Worsley, British press, Venice, Republic of Saint Mark, Bonaparte, 1797

LA CADUTA DI VENEZIA FRA TESTIMONIANZA,
IMMAGINE E NARRAZIONE**SINTESI**

Il presente articolo esamina come i commentatori britannici reagirono alla caduta della Repubblica di Venezia nel 1797 e come ciò contribuì a dare forma ai successivi atteggiamenti nei confronti della distruzione della Serenissima da parte dell'esercito napoleonico d'Italia. Il lavoro si focalizza anzitutto sul racconto offerto da Richard Worsley, ultimo rappresentante britannico presso la Repubblica di San Marco, per poi passare ai resoconti della stampa britannica. Nel primo caso, mentre si dà priorità agli interessi propri e di altri soggetti britannici, l'enfasi è posta sul-

l'aggressione da parte dei francesi e sul grado in cui questi ultimi cercarono deliberatamente di provocare le autorità veneziane nella speranza di legittimare la guerra contro uno stato neutrale. Nel secondo caso, che riflette le pratiche giornalistiche dell'epoca, si tratta in buona parte di giornalismo "copia e incolla", che nel corso della primavera del 1797 divenne sempre più dipendente dagli echi della stampa francese. L'articolo argomenta la tesi secondo cui fu la prospettiva francese ad assumere un ruolo di dominanza nei resoconti britannici della caduta di Venezia.

Parole chiave: Richard Worsley, stampa britannica, Venezia, Repubblica di San Marco, Bonaparte, 1797

In 1802, the English romantic poet William Wordsworth wrote "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic". But while Wordsworth was unequivocal in mourning the fate of "the eldest child of Liberty", he did not attempt to explain the fall of the *Serenissima*. No mention was made by name or implication of Napoleon Bonaparte or the armies of the Directory, to whose actions alone the collapse of the Republic can be directly attributed.¹ Yet while Wordsworth studiously avoided any observation on contemporary political developments, his verses placed him within a distinguished and longstanding British literary tradition of writing about Venice without ever having set foot there. This fascination with a purely "imaginary" Venice – a tradition perhaps most famously exemplified by Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* and

¹ Wordsworth's "On the extinction of the Venetian Republic" was probably written in August 1802, but was not published until 1807. The poem was reproduced in full on p.41, in a review of Wordsworth's Poems (Longman and Co., 1807) in Article iv of *The Eclectic Review* vol. IV, part 1, January to June 1808, pp. 35–43. The reviewer remarked that "The following contains a noble thought, which is carried through to the last word, and is a rare example of excellence either in Mr. Wordsworth or any other English Sonneteer [sic]" (p. 40).

"Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee, / And was the safeguard of the West; the worth / Of Venice did not fall below her birth, / Venice, the eldest child of Liberty. / She was a Maiden City, bright and free; / No guile seduced, no force could violate; / And when she took unto herself a mate, / She must espouse the everlasting Sea. / And what if she had seen those glories fade, / Those titles vanish, and that strength decay,— / Yet shall some tribute of regret be paid / When her long life hath reach'd its final day: / Men are we, and must grieve when even the shade / Of that which once was great has pass'd away."

Othello, Jonson's *Volpone*, Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*, Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* –, which made use of Venice as an exciting and exotic setting or as a useful trope or symbol, was continued after the Congress of Vienna by Byron. That Byron chose to locate himself so squarely within such a heritage is curious because he did, of course, spend three years in the city. There is little doubt that he remains the most famous ever British resident of the *città lagunare*. It is certainly true that during the many months Byron spent in Venice, he resolutely sought out its periphery – the Lido, San Lazzaro, the Brenta. At the same time he also explicitly boasted of knowing the city intimately, stressing the advantage that this gave him over other men of letters who wrote on Venice from a position of ignorance. Nevertheless, in Canto IV of *Childe Harold* – Byron's most famous, albeit one of his briefer, engagements with Venice, in which he echoed the same sentiments of loss as had Wordsworth – the city he describes is not that of past grandeur or the place of "dying glory" in which he resided, but a fictitious "fairy city", "the greenest island of my imagination". The Venice about which Byron wrote was essentially the resilient, literary creation of earlier authors: thus "the dogeless city's vanished sway" is contrasted with the durability of "Shylock and the Moor,/ And Pierre" who "cannot be swept or worn away." The message of his poetry is clear: literature lasts, while political, even mercantile power crumbles. "... Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakespeare's art" had "stamp'd her image" onto Byron before he ever arrived; the city continued to enchant him from this perspective. This was true even when he turned to the city's former glories. For all his intermittently assiduous research on the Republic's past for his historical plays, *The Two Foscari* and *Marino Faliero*, they were first and foremost works of homage to Otway rather than works of place. Despite his readiness to engage with old chronicles, his view of Venice's past was shaped above all by the monumental work of Pierre-Antoine-Noël-Bruno Daru, which in large part constituted a prolonged attack on the practices and institutions of the late Republic, legitimating its destruction by Bonaparte (Daru, 1819). Thus for Byron, while the Venice of his letters, plays and poems was principally, and self-consciously, literary, the historical Venice he constructed was a place of decadence, a "Sea Sodom" or "Gehenna of the Waters", that deserved its sorry fate.²

I have argued elsewhere that this Byronic Venice – reinforced by the archly distorted canvases of Turner (who barely knew and who artfully reconfigured the city as historicized, mist-shrouded, oneiric, and, perhaps above all, as either Shakespearean or Byronic) – dominated the British imaginary until at least 1848. Drawing heavily on the Byronic vision of Venice, British commentators on the fall of the Venetian Republic – whether poets and painters, or historians, politicians and diplomats – in

2 Still the best analysis of Byron's engagement with Venice, amid a vast literature on the subject, remains the work of Tony Tanner (Tanner, 1992, 17–66).

the decades after Napoleon held that it had perished on account of its own weakness and decadence. But as the work of John Eglin has persuasively demonstrated, such a position reflected a change in British outlooks (Eglin, 2001). Eighteenth-century Englishmen engaged with Venice much more ambivalently. Some British observers were distinctly positive about the Venetian state. For example, neither the rather earnest East Anglian farmer Arthur Young, nor the foppish and extremely wealthy William Beckford, both of whom had first encountered the city in the 1780s, despised it as decadent or weak, even though the former was unimpressed by the power of the Republic's fleet (which had so astonished Goethe). It is in trying to understand this gap between the views of eighteenth-century Englishmen and those of the early nineteenth century that I have been led to ask what British contemporaries actually knew about the fall of Venice in 1797.

I do not believe that the sole reason that the British were ready to put the blame for the collapse of the Venetian Republic on the Venetians themselves can be explained purely in terms of the information available to them. It is a banally obvious reflection, but one that still needs to be made, that there were many other political and cultural factors at work in encouraging the British to attribute culpability to the *Serenissima* and its patrician rulers. Yet equally it strikes me that, by looking at different contemporary accounts of the fall of Venice, it is possible to offer some tentative observations regarding why the British in the post-Napoleonic period accepted more or less unquestioningly the myth of Venice's decadence, rather than recognising the far more obvious fact that the Republic fell purely as the victim of French aggression. In the process, I want to highlight the way in which the isolation of Britain from much of continental Europe during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars helped to create a climate of ignorance in which the subsequent distortions of Daru – or Byron and Turner – could receive a fertile reception. In doing this, I shall examine two different British narratives concerning the fall of the city. On the one hand, I want to look at the testimony of the last British minister to the Republic, Sir Richard Worsley, a baronet and famous collector of antiquities, who, after a notorious and very public separation from his habitually adulterous wife, gave up his far from distinguished parliamentary career in pursuit of one in diplomacy. On the other hand, I want to focus on the descriptions of the fall of Venice in the English press. The gap between the two is vast. Significantly the official correspondence of the British envoy – a rare Anglophone eyewitness to the last days of the Republic of Saint Mark, from his arrival in February 1794 until the very eve of its final collapse – seems scarcely to have penetrated public consciousness, still less to have had an effect on the way in which the fall of Venice was narrated by historians in the aftermath of 1797. In sharp contrast with Worsley's first-hand experience, the picture painted by the British press was, as we shall see, almost wholly dependent on French sources,

and uniformly uncharitable towards the doomed Republic.³ The position adopted by newspapers seems to have helped contribute forcefully to British contempt for the Venetian state.

The narrative of the fall of the Republic that emerges from Worsley's letters is striking because of the different levels at which it operated. Throughout 1797, his detailed account of the gradual French penetration of the Venetian mainland and threat to the *Dominante* itself makes quite clear the determination and rapaciousness of the French forces. Worsley's reports provided a remarkably accurate commentary of the military conflict, and in particular of the jockeying for dominance between the youthful Archduke Charles, perhaps the one Habsburg military commander of real talent to emerge during the Napoleonic wars, and his Corsican rival, almost equally precocious and destined to become the greatest military commander of the nineteenth century. The details of troop manoeuvres, not to mention an intimate knowledge of developments in Venetian policy, which are displayed in Worsley's extensive correspondence with Lord William Grenville, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, reveal that the British resident was possessed of extremely good contacts within the Venetian Senate, as well as a network of correspondents and informers in both the capital and across the *Terraferma*.⁴ Yet if Worsley was well-informed about the movements and deployment of troops by the two warring armies, he initially miscalculated the military situation in believing in the fundamental security of Venice. It was not until 29 March 1797 that he wrote to Grenville suggesting, with the curious disregard for punctuation that characterised most of his letters, that "*Things have come to such that unless the Archduke Charles can obtain a decisive Victory over General Bonaparte and his army which will afford him the means of returning into Italy with Triumph Venice as far as I can judge will follow the fate of the rest of Lombardy and lose her present form of Government*" (NA-FO, 81/12, 29.3.1791).

3 In 1935 Cecil Roth published an article on Worsley's account of the fall of Venice as a companion piece to a two part article by Giovanni Sforza published 22 years earlier. (Sforza, 1913a; 1913b; Roth, 1935; see also Pillinini, 1998).

4 Worsley identified amongst his informants an unnamed Spanish former Jesuit. He was most probably the Seville-born Venetian "oriundo", Cristoforo Tentori (1745–1810). Tentori, a well-established historian and polemicist subsequently published a *Raccolta cronologico-ragionata di documenti inediti che formano la storia diplomatica della rivoluzione e caduta della repubblica di Venezia: corredata di critiche osservazioni, complete with a brilliant rhetorical defence of the institutions and policies of the Republic* (Tentori, 1799). The rôle of clerics as contacts and confidants of foreign representatives, as well as informers and spies for the Venetian authorities seems to have been marked in the later eighteenth century. See, for example, the case of Abate Giovanni Conte Cattaneo (sometimes rendered Cataneo) who, until his death in 1796, was variously in contact with the ambassadors, envoys or residents of France, Russia, Prussia, the Holy Roman Empire, Britain, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Sardinia, Tuscany, the Papal States, Naples, Malta, and various other minor powers. (ASV-IS, 187, 569, 570-582).

By early May Worsley was rightly pessimistic, informing the Secretary of State that "*if Government does not use vigourous [sic] measures it will be finally dissolved after an existence of near 1400 years*" (NA–FO, 81/12, 10.5.1797). Worsley was not only providing an eye-witness account of the imminent fall of the oldest and most enduring republic in human history, but he was also offering extremely detailed intelligence on an area of pivotal strategic significance in the struggle against the revolutionary régime in Paris. Yet any rôle Worsley might have had in shaping British policy was extremely limited. This was not simply because British priorities lay elsewhere. It also reflected the effect of power relationships on the nature of information gathering and its reporting through diplomatic sources. Worsley's informative reporting on the military, diplomatic and political situation in the Venetian Republic had limited impact because of the formalised structures for feeding information back to central government in effect disempowered British representatives. Worsley's obligation to defer to the superior judgement and knowledge of the Secretary of State prevented him from urging action or making critical evaluation of the situations he observed. Worsley not only expected Grenville to evaluate, judge, even dismiss the information he provided, but also to give him the lead in how he should be interpreting the affairs he witnessed first-hand. Thus emerged the paradoxical situation, which informs so much diplomacy to this day, of an ignorant centre not only interpreting the reports it receives from the informed periphery, but also imposing expectations that shape those reports.

Besides seeking to furnish central government with the type of information it wanted and, perhaps vainly, trying to influence its actions from afar, albeit with scant chance of success, Worsley's correspondence reveals a clear hierarchy of concerns, in which the most important part of his job was to protect the interests of individual British citizens. Thus in a letter of 11 January 1797, a relatively brief mention of the Austrian evacuation of Padua, is sandwiched between, on the one hand, a passage in which Worsley congratulates himself on successfully intervening to overturn the Venetian decision to deny entrance to the city to a British naval captain, when the same had been recently permitted to four French officers, and, on the other hand, a discussion of the best way to secure compensation for London-based silk merchants apparently defrauded by their Venetian business partners (NA–FO, 81/12, 11.1.1797). When it came to defending the interests of British subjects, the British resident had an especially acute sense of the importance of one individual: his own wealth, safety, and welfare were his top priority.⁵ For example, a large section of a letter of 4 February and almost all of four despatches, penned between 13 and 15 February 1797, consist of complaints about the way in which French soldiers had commandeered his

5 Stefano Pillinini draws attention to Worsley's tendency to view matters from the perspective of his personal interests in his introduction to the reprint of Sforza and Roth (Pillinini, 1998, 1).

own property on the *Terraferma* near Treviso. While smug that he had transferred most of his furniture to Venice, and that Bonaparte's troops had failed in to steal his horses, which had been whisked from under their noses by one of his servants as they lay "asleep oppressed with fatigue and wine" (NA-FO, 81/12, 4.2.1797), he was furious that "every thing which they found upon the spot has been plundered and carried off", that *his* staff had been ill-used and his country house damaged (NA-FO, 81/12, 13.2.1797). The resident's priorities were especially clear in his letter to Lord Grenville of 15 February: it is quite clear that for Worsley the significance of the advance of Archduke Charles lay as much in the fate of his rural retreat as in the security of Venice's immediate mainland provinces.

"He [Charles] is exceedingly active in re-organizing a debilitated Army, His presence in this vicinity has given temporary Courage to the Republic and the Troops that were at Treviso and in the neighbourhood fled from these quarters in consequence of hearing of His Royal Highness [sic] arrival at Congeliano, my House in the Country is likewise liberated, but not without being despoiled of every article that remained in it, the order for their evacuation was so sudden and the fear which they had of His Royal Highness [sic] passing the Piave so great that they had not time to do me further mischief" (NA-FO, 81/12, 15.2.1797).

Worsley would continue to grumble not only about the treatment of his rural property, but also about the failure of the Venetian Senate to address his requests for compensation for the damage it had suffered (NA-FO, 81/12, 3.3.1797).⁶ Two things are perhaps especially striking about this stance. First, that Worsley believed, war notwithstanding, that both the Venetian government and the British Secretary of State should consider the fate of a villa near Treviso, regardless of its ownership, of some special importance. Second, that nowhere in his long-winded whining about his personal loss does Worsley show much by way of anxiety for the fate of the wider population, beyond some rather general, if certainly well-informed, remarks about the depredations visited on the mainland by the French, and the occasional more specific anecdote.⁷ In a letter of 11 March 1797 he provided two such stories. Having made much of the fact that the Governor of Treviso had been forced to open the city's theatres during Lent (scarcely the worst outrage committed by the Army of Italy!), he turned later in the same letter to an unpleasant but, in the general context of the war,

6 It is interesting that Worsley's successor, the considerably poorer and rather more sympathetic John Watson, in a despatch sent from Vienna after his flight from the second French occupation of Venice, requested compensation for the loss of "a small possession in the Venetian Terraferma", which he "had inconsiderately purchased" with his savings from 43 years in Venice (NA-FO, 81/14, 31.1.1806).

7 One exception to this generally rather matter of fact approach is in his description of French excesses against peasant partisans in the Tyrol, who had their arms and legs hacked off when taken prisoner (NA-FO, 81/12, 19.4.1797).

relatively trivial incident in which drunken French officers forced their way with swords drawn into the house of Trevisan nobleman; the latter fled leaving his wife to be "insulted". It is unclear whether the noblewoman was actually raped (although this was a fate which befell thousands of women at the hands of Bonaparte's troops). What is striking about Worsley's brief recounting of this tale is that it does not seem designed solely to vilify the French; rather its purpose is to highlight the ignoble and cowardly conduct of *both* Italian aristocrat *and* hated invader, juxtaposing two types of uncivilised masculinity. Worsley appears to be implicitly holding up a British model of gallantry, courtesy and appropriately courageous male behaviour as superior to that of either the craven Italian or the bullying and boorish French. Behind this lies a good deal of hypocrisy, given both Worsley's determination to save his own skin in the event of Bonaparte's occupation of Venice (as early 18 February, long before he judged Venice to be seriously under threat, he was planning his escape from Venice should the situation deteriorate),⁸ and the fact that he was systematically profiting from panic amongst Venetian aristocrats to purchase art works at significantly reduced prices.

Yet while Worsley focused his energies on helping individual Britons, and helping himself to what he could extract from terrified Venetians, he nevertheless also continued to provide the Secretary of State with regular and detailed accounts of the movement of troops, and to furnish insights into other matters of importance. For a man with such a keen sense of his own financial position, he evidently also had an eye for the immense fiscal difficulties faced by the Republic in trying to maintain some sort of defence, and to meet the excessive demands made by the French at a time when the state was increasingly unable to raise any sort of revenue from its mainland possessions, and when what remained of its commerce was ravaged by the effects of hostilities on both land and sea.⁹ More interesting still for the historian is both Worsley's account of the systematic attempts made by the French to undermine the Venetian state from within the capital itself, and the resident's remarkably judicious assessment of Bonaparte's utter want of scruple, general untrustworthiness, and intense vanity.

8 "[...] although I am not one of those who is inclined to be intimidated I trust Your Lordship will have the goodness to obtain His Majesty's Permission for me to retire into Germany in case of necessity as I am certain that I should be one of the first objects of their [ie French] resentment" (NA-FO, 81/12, 18.2.1797).

9 For example, on 3 March he wrote of the Senate's plans "to suppress all the Female Convents in the Republic and to dispose of all the Estates belonging to them, calculated to produce about Six Million of effective Ducats"; then again on 22 March 1797 he remarked on plans to confiscate "all the plate belonging to all the Churches and Religious houses of all denominations", which would be melted down at the mint, with a 2% compensation paid until such time as the Republic could reimburse the whole sum. See NA-FO, 81/12, 22.3.1797.

The repellent character of Bonaparte and many of his lieutenants is revealed both in generalised descriptions of his behaviour, and in telling anecdotes. From the earliest reports in 1797 Worsley highlighted the high-handed and threatening conduct of the French. Thus in a letter of 11 January, he speaks of how Baraguay d'Hilliers has intimidated the population of Bergamo: "*in the same breath that he is desiring the inhabitants of Bergamo not to fear the Republican Bayonets, tells them that he hopes he shall be not under the necessity of making use of them*" (NA-FO, 81/12, 11.1.1797). Nine days later Worsley wrote of the demands made by Bonaparte that the Venetian government refund the fortune of the Duke of Modena who had sought refuge in the Republic from the violation of his territory, continuing to comment on the abject terror inspired by the young general, now effectively independent from control by the Directory: the overwhelming fear that any denial of his wishes "*will afford Buonaparte [sic] an opportunity of plundering their subjects of the little which he has left them in the places where the French Army has been quartered*" (NA-FO, 81/12, 20.1.1797). Worsley was painfully aware that the conduct of the French was uniformly exploitative, arrogant, and destructive wherever they trespassed. Despite an absence of opposition in the northern Papal States, the general had no compunction about imposing crippling exactions. Worsley soon understood that those cities that sought accommodation rather than resistance were just as likely to experience the locust-like horrors of French military presence, although they might be spared the worst violence: when the principal citizens of Faenza welcomed Bonaparte with the keys of the city, it "*did not prevent his seizing all the effects of the Monte di Pietà [...] and laying an immediate contribution of 25,000 Roman Crowns on the Inhabitants*" (NA-FO, 81/12, 13.2.1797). Bonaparte's readiness to strip Italy of its cultural heritage had also become clear (NA-FO, 81/12, 25.2.1797). At the same time, so did the pettiness of the Corsican: arriving in Conegliano, he fussed over acquiring the same quarters as had been occupied by Archduke Charles, insisted on sleeping in the same bed, and even paid the inn keeper a hundred gold sequins for the privilege. But the story did not end there: Worsley related how an hour later French hussars, returned, sacked the inn, and stole the owner's money, suggesting, quite plausibly, that Bonaparte must have been fully aware of their actions (NA-FO, 81/12, 22.3.1797). The fate of the inn keeper serves virtually as a parable about the dangers of treating with Revolutionary France.

Worsley also kept Lord Grenville fully informed of the machinations of the French within Venice. Any protestations that the Venetians in some sense provoked attack were manifestly absurd. In his despatch of 18 February, Worsley had recognised that plenty of Venetians had recognised "*that General Bonaparte will sooner or later find some pretext to quarrel with the Republic for the express purpose of plundering Venice*", and that "*most of the French Generals have lately been here and several of them have been permitted into the Arsenal so that they are thoroughly*

masters of the strength and weakness of the Place" (NA–FO, 81/12, 18.2.1797). Throughout March he reported on the schemes of the French minister in Venice to smuggle arms into the city for use by fifth columnists. Brought into the port under the unlikely pretext of being sugar, some 37 cases of firearms (originally sent by the Austrians to Ancona and destined for Papal forces, but seized by the French) were eventually impounded by Venetian customs, although two sacks of gold, presumably destined to induce popular revolt through bribery were made over to Lallement. Even the 4000 confiscated muskets were eventually delivered up by the Venetian authorities to the French forces occupying Treviso (NA–FO, 81/12, 15.3.1797). Nor did the tale end here: on 29 March, Worsley was able to report that Venetian magistrates accompanied by some hundred *sbirri* (constables) forced Lallement to hand over keys to an outhouse in his garden, in which they found at least 2000 muskets together with ammunition and hand grenades (NA–FO, 81/12, 29.3.1797).¹⁰ Rather than actually arming a rebellion, the French seem to have been seeking systematically to provoke the Venetians in order to find some more legitimate reason to attack a government that had equally systematically sought to appease Bonaparte and his men.¹¹

If Worsley was both unimpressed by the lack of will displayed by the Venetian government in resisting Bonaparte, and by the inadequacy of the Republic's troops (with the honourable exception of some of the "Schiavonians"), then he was absolutely clear in his assessment that it was nevertheless Bonaparte who were responsible for the collapse of the *Serenissima*; and he was also clear that the popular classes of Venice at least had only sentiments of hate for the French and their few sympathisers.¹² Yet Worsley's reports seem hardly to have entered the consciousness of government ministers, still less penetrated that of the nation.

How then did the British learn of Venice's defeat and the end of the Republic of Saint Mark in 1797? The answer to this question would appear to be quite simple: by means of the articles in newspapers published in both London and, to a lesser extent, the provinces. Throughout the early months of 1797, the British press reported regu-

10 This was not the first time that the Venetian authorities had had problems with the Lallement's penchant for firearms in his garden. On 12 July 1795 Giovanni Andrea Fontana had written to Giovanni Cattaneo asking that he bring up with the French envoy the latter's practice of discharging rifles in the grounds of his house, as he had broken the windows of a chapel attached to the church of the Madonna dell'Orto (ASV–IS, 187, 335).

11 Worsley recounts both the events of the so-called "pasque veronesi" (when Veronesi loyal to the Republic and exasperated by the oppressive and high-handed conduct of the French successfully rose against their tormentors, only for the Venetian government to disown and help crush the rebellion), and the attempt made by the inappropriately named Libérateur d'Italie to penetrate the lagoon, only to be boarded by Slav auxiliaries (NA–FO, 81/12, 29.4.1797).

12 On the desire of the Venetian popular classes to lynch Jacobin sympathisers, their desire to burn down the "liberty tree" erected by the French, and to launch an insurrection to restore the Republic, see NA–FO, 81/12, 13.5.1797.

larly, if unsystematically, on the conduct of the war in Italy and on the fate of the *Serenissima*. Thus, in early March, the London-based *Telegraph* told of news circulating in Vienna in early February that "The Republic of Venice is determined to defend her neutrality arms in hand".¹³ At the same time other London papers reported the worsening situation of the Republic: *Lloyd's Evening Post* wrote of the French blockade by sea, and the seizure of Udine and Palmanuova;¹⁴ *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* described the Venetian government as "seriously apprehensive of the danger from the French",¹⁵ and the *General Evening News* hinted ominously at the consequences of a blockade from the land side of the city.¹⁶ On 7 March the *Telegraph* reported news directly that "The Republic of Venice, a circumstance of infinite regret, is totally at their [the French] mercy".¹⁷ As spring progressed, the *Evening Mail* wrote of the Senate's vain protests against "the union of the Venetian districts of Bergamo, Verona, Brescia, &c, with the Republic of Lombardy";¹⁸ the *Star* described the spread of French-sponsored revolution across the *Terraferma*,¹⁹ the evacuation of foreigners from the city, and that "the greatest precautions had been taken for the preservation of good order and tranquillity";²⁰ and the *Times* alerted its readers to the activities of foreign ministers and residents in Venice anxious to achieve "a general pacification" (*Times*, 13.4.1797), and also wrote of the Venetian government's insistence that foreigners quit the city (*Times*, 24.4.1797). Meanwhile, *E. Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor* remarked that "In the Venetian territories the spirit of revolution appears to be at its height. The partizans [sic] of the French are constantly extending their projects, and the revolutionists have proved victorious in some bloody contests" (*E. Johnson's British Gazette and Sunday Monitor*, 16.4.1797). By May, however, the tenor of the reporting had begun to change dramatically. As Bonaparte tightened his grip on the Venetian mainland and brought more and more pressure to bear on the government of the *Serenissima* in April 1797, so the British press became increasingly reliant on French sources for news of events, previously often filtered through Vienna or derived directly from Venice itself. Thus the almost identical reports of the *pasque veronesi* carried in the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Times*, and *The True Briton* reflected not only the eighteenth-century journalistic practices of cannibalisation, lifting text from other papers, and recycling with scant changes, but also the fact that the account

13 *Telegraph*, 2.3.1797: Vienna, February 8.

14 *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 3.3.1797: London.

15 *St. James's Chronicle*, 4.3.1797: London: Tuesday – One o'clock.

16 *General Evening Post*, 4.3.1797: Foreign Intelligence.

17 *Telegraph*, 7.3.1797: From the French Papers. Army of Italy.

18 *Evening Mail*, 10.4.1797: Frontiers of Suabia, March 27.

19 *Star*, 12.4.1797: Milan, March 21.

20 *Star*, 22.4.1797: Milan, March 28.

was little more than a direct translation from the Parisian *Éclair*.²¹ Within days, a host of British papers, both provincial and metropolitan had also published a translation of Bonaparte's aggressive ultimatum to the Doge of 8 April 1797.²²

Throughout May and early June the reports of the fall of Venice and the establishment of a French satellite municipality assumed a very different complexion from those published earlier in the year. Following the pattern established in reports on Bonaparte's ultimatum, the British newspapers had now become almost entirely dependent on official French proclamations (including straightforward translations of Bonaparte's own self-aggrandising prose), and on reports in the Parisian press. Thus reports on the *Libérateur d'Italie* incident, when Bonaparte ordered a flotilla to force entry into the lagoon, did not describe what had happened as an act of blatant and provocative aggression by Bonaparte, or mention the bravery of the Venetian defence. The identical reports in the *General Evening Post* and the *Star* were relatively matter of fact were;²³ meanwhile, the *Lloyd's Evening Post* published the "Manifesto of General Buonaparte against Venice" of 3 May 1797 in full: there was no gloss given on the French general's lurid and mendacious fictions about the brutality of the Venetians, including the allegation that the commandant of one of Venice's forts had hacked off the hand of a wounded French officer with an axe.²⁴ By the end of May, an identical article in both the *London Chronicle* and the *London Evening Post* was referring to the *Serenissima* as "the atrocious Government of Venice" (*London Evening Post*, 23.5.1797),²⁵ while the *Times* was justifying Bonaparte's conduct as "revenge on the Venetian insurgents".²⁶ Similarly, *The Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, echoing what it referred to as "French intelligence" described the success of the French in retaking Verona as serving to "develope [sic] the Seeds of Liberty which are sown in Italy".²⁷ An article of the following day in the *Observer* suggested that Venice remained "well-secured against any attack of the French", but nevertheless undermined by widespread internal "dissatisfaction and disturbances" (*Observer*, 28.5.1797); but one day later, the *Morning Post and Fashionable World*,

21 *Morning Chronicle*, 3.5.1797: Paris, Aprile, 28; *Star*, 3.5.1797: Paris, 9 Floréal, April 28; *Times*, 3.5.1797: Paris, April 28, Army of Italy; *True Briton*, 4.5.1797: Paris, April 28. For the original version of this see the *Éclair*, 28.4.1797.

22 *Whitehall Evening Post*, 6.5.1797: Paris, April 30; *Evening Mail*, 8.5.1797: Army of Italy; *Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, 13.5.1797: Satisfaction demanded from the Doge of Venice. News of the Doge's submissive response to Bonaparte's threats was reported with identical text in a number of papers. See, for example: *Evening Mail*, 12.5.1797; *London Evening Post*, 13.5.1797: Postscript; *Star*, 15.5.1797: Frontiers of Italy, April 30.

23 *General Evening Post*, 18.5.1797: Frontiers of Italy, April 30; *Star*, 18.5.1797: Frontiers of Italy, April 30.

24 *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 22.5.1797: France. Council of Five Hundred. Sitting of May 10.

25 *London Chronicle*, 23.5.1797: London.

26 *Times*, 26.5.1797: Hamburgh, May 16.

27 *The Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, 27.5.1797: French Intelligence, Paris, May 12.

citing the Parisian journals as its source, pointed not only to the total abolition of the Venetian Republic but also to the conclusion that "her territories, together with the City of Venice, will be given to the Emperor" (Morning Post and Fashionable World, 29.5.1797). Reports of transfer of Venetian territory to Austria show that the contents of the peace of Leoben of 17 April 1797 were widely known not only in France but in Britain long before the Treaty of Campo Formido of 17 October definitively transferred both the *Dominante* and the lands to the east of the Mincio to Habsburg rule. It was Habsburg connivance with Bonaparte that perhaps lay behind the relatively uncritical reports of French conduct that occasionally came through Vienna, supplementing those from Paris. For example, the *Star* of 30 May reported from Vienna, without any hint of condemnation for French conduct, that "a *complete revolution* took place in Venice. The Senate and Council of Ten have been abolished, and the three State Inquisitors, and the Commandant of the *Lido* (or sea shore, where there is a fort two Italian miles from the city) arrested. Immediately afterwards the Grand Council sent a second deputation to General BUONAPARTE to inform him of the change that had taken place and inform him that they were ready to confer with him on the future constitution of the Republic" (Star, 30.5.1797).

The fact that a neutral state, which had existed for over a thousand years, had fallen victim to the illegitimate aggression of a rogue general notionally serving a revolutionary régime that was currently at war with Britain seemed utterly unworthy of comment.

It is quite clear from the way in which papers continued to report on the sorry fate of Venice in the ensuing months that the British press was perfectly happy to rely on French sources. Of course, this in part reflected the simple fact that Paris remained the hub of an international information network. Yet the reliance of British newspapers on French material seems at first glance extremely strange because, whatever the political persuasion of a paper, the dependence on French sources resulted almost without exception in the *uncritical* repetition of what was published in the French press, quite regardless of the fact that Britain was at war with the revolutionary régime. In some senses this reflects a paradox about the nature of the eighteenth-century press. On the one hand, eighteenth-century editors across Europe were aware that their readership was neither unintelligent nor ill-educated. In consequence they attributed to it an ability to read critically the articles they chose to publish. This permitted British editors to perm material from French publications, such the *Éclair* or even Joseph Michaud's often-persecuted royalist *Quotidienne*,²⁸ without adding

28 Michaud's *La Quotidienne* may have had royalist sympathies, but when quoted by the British press regarding the end of the Republic of Venice, it seemed, nevertheless, to have supported the conduct of the French. See, for example, *Evening News*, 22.5.1797. On the politics of the *Quotidienne*, see Hatin, 1859–1861, 295–298.

any form of gloss regarding the partisan perspective of the information conveyed. On the other hand, it was not lost on contemporary observers that, anxious to provide copy and reasonably wide coverage, and quite simply to fill their pages, editors were also lazy about what they included in their newspapers.²⁹ Thus a mixture of contempt and respect for potential readers encouraged distinctly uncritical recycling of French journalism. Yet it remains curious that British editors, despite occasionally borrowing from the *Quotidienne*, did not avail themselves more of the material produced by the rightwing press from the other side of the Channel. As Jeremy Popkin has demonstrated, royalist and reactionary papers all regularly criticised Bonaparte's self-aggrandising policy (Popkin, 1980). Indeed, it is striking that British papers seem to have made no use at all of Jacques Mallet du Pan's articles in the *Quotidienne*, which focused on the hypocrisy of the Directory's treatment of Venice and the other maritime republic, Genoa. Nor for that matter did they cite the anonymous article in the same paper of 12 April 1797 that questioned why Venetians should be driven to hate a régime under which they had lived happily and peacefully for six centuries (Popkin, 1980, 160–163).³⁰ In fairness, it must be remarked that the British press apparently made no effort to avail itself of Bonaparte's blatantly self-promoting *Journal de Bonaparte et des hommes vertueux* launched in February 1797 with the sole purpose of carrying propaganda in favour of the general, or even of more moderate pro-Bonpartist publications, such as *L'Ami des Lois* (Hanley, 2002). Nevertheless, with the exception of information deliberately provided to the British government, during the War of the First Coalition, the British press remained, as had been the case during the earlier decades of the eighteenth century, essentially dependent on foreign newspapers, and above all those from France, for its news. The rivalry between editors to "obtain copies of the French papers as speedily as possible", not least to retain their primacy within the increasingly crowded newspaper market (Black, 1987, 284), seems to have led to a rather indiscriminate publication of news from the continent. Given the readiness of newspapers to copy material more-or-less wholesale from their rivals and competitors, and the relatively low priority given to events in Venice by the British government, it becomes less perplexing that newspapers in London and the provinces, echoing their Parisian counterparts, should have dominated coverage and shaped British views of the fall of the *Serenissima*.

This reliance on prejudiced French perspectives was not without consequences for the later reading of the event by the British public. Embarrassed by its failure to act to protect the neutral state from both French aggression and, after Campo For

29 For an interesting, if slightly earlier, Venetian reflection on this tendency, see Chapter 9 of Giovanni Cattaneo's manuscript, "Regole in pratica per quello che ha l'onore di servire l'eccelso supreme tribunale presso i ministry esteri e nelle pubbliche occasioni" (ASV-IS, 569).

30 On Jacques Mallet du Pan see Burrows, 2000, *passim*.

mido, from Austrian expansionism, neither the British government nor the public ever contemplated restoration of the *Serenissima*. It became convenient to believe the prejudiced views propounded by the French authorities that Venetian independence was lost not on account of the unbridled aggression of a ruthless invader, but because the Republic had become craven, decadent, corrupt. Even if this version of events was not always universally accepted by the English, in the years after the fall of the Republic it gradually became more and more of an orthodoxy. That this was the case was facilitated both by a long-standing "black myth" of Venice, to which a few English writers had long subscribed, as well as by a desire to repudiate British guilt: by the restoration era Byron was a rare voice in Canto IV of *Childe Harold* when he suggested that "*and thy [Venice's] lot/Is shameful to the nations, – most of all, /Albion! to thee: the Ocean queen should not/Abandon Ocean's children; in the fall/Of Venice think of thine, despite thy watery wall.*" The prevalence of hostile sentiments – derived in large part from the French press in the late 1790s – towards the former Republic, made it in turn much easier to accept the version of events, peddled by Daru: namely to suggest that Venice collapsed in 1797 because of internal failings. In reality it fell because of Bonaparte who, over the course of the period 1796 to 1812, would prove almost invincible. In this engagement with the story of the death of the world's longest-lived republic, Worsley's perceptive, if self-centred, eye-witness accounts were ignored; those of the French privileged. With Venice no longer of any diplomatic significance, the British had no need to think critically about its past. No one thought to remark that Bonaparte also crushed every other state in the Italian peninsula, and defeated the Low Countries, Bourbon Spain, Hohenzollern Prussia, and Habsburg Austria, and that he came close to vanquishing Russia too. Yet the response of the British was not simply to vilify these states as inherently deserving of defeat; in contrast, Venice, despite the testimonies of Worsley, was imagined through the eyes and words of the French who destroyed the *Serenissima*. It was precisely because of this that the city could remain so long a symbol for corruption, decadence and decay.

PADEC BENETK: PRIČEVANJA, PREDSTAVE IN PRIPOVEDI

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POVZETEK

Članek temelji na dveh nasprotujočih si sklopih virov, ki obravnavajo padec Beneške republike. Po eni strani preučuje pisma Richarda Worsleyja, zadnjega britanskega diplomatskega predstavnika v Serenissimi, ki jih hranijo v Narodnem arhivu v Kew (pred tem Public Records Office). Po drugi strani pa preučuje poročanje britanskih časopisov o dramatičnih dogodkih spomladi leta 1797, ko se je končala doba najdlje živeče republike v zgodovini. Worsleyjeva korespondenca je predvsem odraz osebnih interesov britanskega rezidenta (ne nazadnje njegove vznemirjenosti glede usode lastne vile v bližini Trevisa) in njegove vloge pri prizadevanju za zaščito dobrobiti britanskih prebivalcev Benetk. Kljub temu pa so njegova pisma pogosto bogata s podrobnostmi o političnih, diplomatskih in vojaških dogodkih, zlasti pa nudijo poseben vpogled v spletke francoskega odposlanca Lallementa in Napoleona Bonaparteja v njunem prizadevanju provocirati beneški odpor do take mere, da bi bilo moč upravičiti kršitev nevtralnosti republike. Worsleyjeva pisma podajo tudi občutek čiste groze pred francosko invazijo in pričajo o stopnji lokalne sovražnosti. Prikaz, ki ga predstavi Worsley v svojih pismih, je veliko pravičnejši in bolj nepristranski opis dogodkov od navedenega v britanskem tisku, čeprav je bila diplomatova pripoved v veliki meri prezrta, tako v tistih časih kot tudi pozneje. Nasprotno pa je od marca do maja 1797 tako londonsko kot provincialno časopisje postalo vse bolj odvisno od francoskega tiska in uradnih razglasov pri svojem poročanju o dogodkih v severni Italiji. To pa je ponavadi propagiralo verzijo dogodkov, ki je stremela k omalovaževanju beneške države in upravičevanju Napoleonove agresije. Prav ta slednja različica dogodkov se je izkazala za veliko bolj trajno v britanski javnosti in prav ta poročanja so v največji meri oblikovala britansko dožemanje propada beneške neodvisnosti v prihodnjih desetletjih. To pa je vodilo k britanski odzivnosti na poročanje o padcu v dobi restavracije, predvsem z Darom in njegovim delom *Histoire de la République de Venise*, ki je pridobilo ključno vlogo pri oblikovanju "črne legende" o Serenissimi v Britaniji v začetku devetnajstega stoletja.

Ključne besede: Richard Worsley, britanski tisk, Benetke, Republika Svetega Marka, Napoleon Bonaparte, 1797

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