

Un exilé lyrique *Achille de Lauzières*

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On the momentous day of 8 February 1457 the young Dieudonné de Lauzières set foot in the Quercynois village of Espédaillac for the first time in his life to receive his *serment de fidélité*. He had inherited his fief from his uncle Raymond de Cardaillac who had died without an heir. He stood – a little unsteadily - where cars are now parked and lavender bushes perch on the edge of the plateau in front of the church with his kinsman Guillaume de Thémines at his elbow for moral support. The donjon behind him and a row of expectant faces before him.

Four centuries on, on the equally momentous day of 19 January 1839 the young Achille de Lauzières, his direct descendant sat - a little unsteadily – for the first time in his life in an official capacity among the rowdy spectators in the teeming Teatro Nuovo of Naples with a cohort of critics behind him and row upon row of expectant faces before him. It was his baptism as a librettist, in this instance for the première of an operatic romp by the current favorite, Vincenzo Fioravanti, for which he had supplied the text. This maestro had made a tremendous reputation with his *Il ritorno di Pulcinella da Padova* on that same stage two years earlierⁱ - a perfectly hysterical offering that would prove irresistible in Naples for years and years with its gags, transvestite spoofs and xenophobic fervour. Now, scarcely beyond adolescence, the trembling poet had been given the task of supplying a sequel: *La larva ovvero Gli spaventati di Pulcinella*, three-acts of disreputable comedy to enliven the carnival of 1839. Did it succeed? Well it lasted for six evenings so his ordeal was short – despite the efforts of an expert cast almost identical with the original. Prudently as it turns out the débutant had hidden his blushes behind the pseudonym “Andrea de Leone” so his lyrical *serment de fidélité* could be postponed. But it was a hopeful beginning to an important career as you will see, even if his actual identity would be subject to many guises and disguises in the years to comeⁱⁱ.

Ancient history? The family of Thémines-Lauzières had risen and fallen the social ladder in the centuries between these two dates. In 1208 the warrior-priest Guillaume de Cardaillac, Bishop of Cahors, had emerged both as a crusader and a huge landowner - as a result his descendants, barons de Saint-Cirq-Lapopie, became *sénéchals de Quercy* - the highest representatives of the king on those rocky heights, the last off them, Jacques de Cardaillac in the early 1500's. Curiously this in no way put a term to religious caprice on the part of various branches of the family, but after the Wars of Religion had come to a messy end their kith and kin, the Lauzières-Thémines, took over in their place.¹ Both Pons de Lauzières-Thémines-Cardaillac and his son received the post of *sénéchal de Quercy*, initiating a loyalty that would survive innumerable conflicts and revolutions until eventual exile in Naples:

¹ “Lauzières”, according to the Comte de Toulouse, denoted a territory dominated by a large number of lizards [See: Guillaume Lacoste *Histoire Générale de la province de Quercy* (Cahors 1884) Vol II, 257-8] appropriate both to the rocky terrain of the fief of this noble clan as well as to that of a music critic in Paris and Naples.

“Après l’assassinat d’Henri III, Thémines prend la tête du parti royaliste, rallié à Henri IV, où se réunissent hugenots assagis et catholiques loyaliste, secondant l’armée royale du maréchal de Matignon, puis infligeant de sérieux revers aux ligueurs menés par Villars...Ses succès allaient en faire pour longtemps l’homme-lige de la Couronne en Quercy.”

[*Histoire du Quercy* ed. Jean Lartigaut (Toulouse 1993), 146]

Under the regency of Marie de Médicis, in fact, Thémines became the *bras armé* of the Queen Regent, his triumph over Condé (who was arrested by Thémines in person) earned him the baton of *maréchal*. He specialised, subsequently, in putting down rebellions of all kinds and persuasions, often involving the kind of bloodletting his musical descendant reserved exclusively for those composers he did not like.

Our fledgling librettist, Achille de Thémines, *marquis* de Lauzières et Thémines (born in Naples in 1818 - died in Paris in 1894) was heir by direct descent of this Pons de Lauzières-Thémines-Cardaillac (1553-1627), created *marquis* de Thémines as well as *maréchal de France* in 1616 under Marie and Louis XIII, a title passing in the next century into the hands of the illustrious d’Estréesⁱⁱⁱ and thus *stirpe* of a noble clan that won most of the honours at court before fleeing France during the Revolution – judiciously transferring its mortal coil from the Bourbon kingdom of France to that of Naples. From Versailles it had indeed been a traumatic step from unquestioned privilege to the flowery realities of the Riviera di Chiaia on the most celebrated bay in the world. But as far as young Achille was concerned, the pen was mightier than the sword so he unsentimentally consigned his ancestors to the past and without hesitation set himself up as poet and critic writing copiously under yet another pseudonym of “Elias de Rauze” an anagram of his surname, and sometimes, with quirky humour, under that of “Mark de Thémines” (*anglo-saxon* take upon *Marquis* de Thémines). He soon made his mark, in due course contributing with the Gallic vitriol that was his birthright to such Parisian publications as “La Patrie” and “L’Art musical” (Paris 1860 – 1894) the latter, widely popular, and founded by Léon Escudier and Oscar Comettant^{iv} as well as to “La Gazette musical” and an extensive swathe of similar French and Parthenopean publications. He was a workaholic, as well as a fearless traveller. He turned himself to every literary challenge from his earliest years and made himself useful to a representative collection of authors and musicians dead and alive throughout a long career. From his desk would emerge the Italian translation of *Don Carlos* for Verdi for example; of *Dinorah* for Meyerbeer; of *Faust* and *La Reine de Saba* for Gounod, and *Marta* for Flotow; even making a viable Italian version of Shakespeare’s Hamlet - “Amleto” published in Treviso in 1875. Conversely he made the French editions of a number of Italian operas. He was a multilinguist counting English, German and Spanish in his repertoire. He succeeded in defying travel restrictions, reviewing Parisian productions for Naples, and Neapolitan productions for Paris, as though independent of any sea or mountain barrier. It is as if he alone could be in both cities at once. Delighted with his Neapolitan credentials he was a perfect boulevardier, somehow invariably managing to rise above the régime changes that plagued his generation.

His list of operatic libretti is fascinating and polyglot. If he never supplied the most momentous composers of all with his operatic verse it is probably because he was never willing to submit to the literary abasement that would entail:

1. *La larva ovvero Gli spaventati di Pulcinella* (Vincenzo Fioravanti)
T.Nuovo, Naples 19.1.1839 (poets given as Andrea de Leone and Raffaele d'Ambra)
2. *Riccardo Moor* (Francesco Gallo)^v
T. Nuovo, Naples 9.11.1843 (as Achille de Lauzières)
3. *Clarissa Visconti* (Giuseppe Winter)
T.Re, Milan, 19.6.1844 (as Achille de Lauzières)
4. *Il gemello* (conte Nicola Gabrielli)
Teatro del Fondo, Naples 21.5.1845 (as Achille de Lauzières)
5. *Mortedo* (Vincenzo Capecelatro)^{vi}
T.San Carlo, Naples 3.9.1845 (as Achille de Lauzières)
6. *Chi cenere?* (Vincenzo Fioravanti)
T.Argentina, Rome carn.1845 (as Andrea de Leone and Marco d'Arienzo)
7. *Mazepa* (Fabio Campana)
T.Comunale, Bologna 6.11.1850 (as Achille de Lauzieres (sic))
8. *Ulrico e Lidia* (Salvatore Palumbo)
T.del Fondo, Naples 16.7.1851 (as Achille de Lauzières)
9. *Zaffira o La riconciliazione* (Giovanni Pacini)
T.Nuovo, Naples, 14.11.1851 (as A de L)
10. *L'avventuriero* ((Teodulo Mabellini and Luigi Gordigiano)
T.Rossini, Livorno 4.1851 (as Achille de Lauzières)
11. *Il cid* (Giovanni Pacini)^{vii}
T. La Scala, Milan 12.3.1853 (as Achille de Lauziers (sic))
12. *Adriana Lecouvreur o La duchessa di Bouillon* (Edoardo Vera)
T.Argentina, Rome 26.11.1856 (as Achille de Lauzières)
[A variety of sources list an opera "*I portughesi al Brasile* by Pacini" as performed in Rio de Janeiro in 1856 with a text by Achille de Lauzières, but it is non-existent, the confusion is with Pacini's cantata *L'alleanza* which celebrates the Portuguese in Brazil and was written for the birthday of Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil in 1851]
13. *Arabella* (Carlo Emanuele Barbieri)
T. D'Argennes, Turin 20.5.1857 (as Achille de Lauzières)
14. *Estella di San Germano* (Gaetano Braga)
Kârntnertortheater, Vienna 29.5.1857 (as "Lanzières" (sic))
15. *Il ritratto* (Gaetano Braga)
T. del principe di Siracusa, Naples 6.3.1858 (as A. de Lauzières)
16. *Almina* (Fabio Campana)^{viii}
Her Majesty's Theatre, London 26.4.1860 (as Achille de Lauzières)
17. *Il figliuol prodigo* (Paolo Serra)
T.San Carlo, Naples 23.4.1868 (as Achille de Lauzières)
18. *Piccolino* (Clémence de Grandval)^{ix}
Th.Italien, Paris 5.1.1869 (as Achille de Lauzières)
19. *Rosellana* (Friedrich von Flotow)^x
T.V. Emanuele, Turin 18. 11.1876 (as Achille de Lauzières-Thémines)
Also a revised vsn (original text by Jules-Henri Vernoy de St. Georges) of Flotow's *L'esclave de Camoëns* (1843)^{xi} as
Alma l'incantatrice
Th.Italien, Paris 9. 4. 1878 (with a new Italian text by Achille de Lauzières)
20. *Wallenstein* (Gustave-Raphaël Ruiz)^{xii}
T.Com. Bologna 4.12.1877 (as Achille de Lauzières and Enrico Panzacchi)

- 21 *Cleopatra* (Felipe Pedrell)
T.Principal, Barcelona 1878 rev.1885 (as Lauzières de Thémimes)
- 22 *Inèse e Bianca* (Marcial del Adalid y Gurréa)^{xiii}
Barcelona (unperformed 1881) (as Lauzières de Thémimes)
- 23 *Aben Hamet* (Théodore Dubois)^{xiv}
Th.Italien,Paris16.12.1884 (as de Lauzières-Thémimes and Léonce Détroyat)
- 24 *Tasso a Ferrara* (Felipe Pedrell)
T.del Liceo, Barcelona 1885 (as Lauzières de Thémimes)
- 25 *Alonso Garcia il rinnegato* (Tommaso Giribaldi)
T.del Liceo, Barcelona 6.6.1885 (as Lauzières)
- 26 *Renaud* (Gilbert des Roches [*baronne* Legoux])
Th.Boulogne-sur-Mer 8.9.1888 (as Achille de Thémimes-Lauzières)

This list tells us a lot of things: in Naples he was not a member of Mercadante's coterie, he kept aloof. His affiliation with Giovanni Pacini (even though disguised by the skeletal "*A de L*") alone reveals his refusal to align himself with the rancorous caucus of enemies of this latter, and indeed he did not feature among any of those who eagerly took sides of any kind^{xv} a vestigial *désinvolture* still influenced his actions – now-and-then at least.

His emergence on the musical scene crossed tragically with the departure of Donizetti from Naples, but this did not prevent the famous maestro from setting a poem or two by the barely emergent Achille de Lauzières in the period just before and just after his exit for France in October 1838. This juvenile *érudit* must indeed have made an impression.

These songs include:

- 1 *Il pescatore* "Era l'ora che i cieli lente, mandan l'ombre sfumate" (based on Schiller)
- 2 *La ninna nanna* "Dormi fanciullo mio" (both the above published in 'Un hiver à Paris' of 1838-9)
- 3 *Il sospiro* "Malvina la bella sull'arpa sciogliea" ("parole di Andrea de Leone") pub. 1843

Though *Il pescatore* and *La ninna nanna* compete for attention it is his *Il sospiro* (despite its date of publication possibly the first Donizetti setting of a text by Achille de Lauzières) that attracts the most emotion with its triple time, rippling scales and poignant climax. But significantly, *Il pescatore* too is a litany of farewell and departure. All three evoke the Neapolitan genius mixing precocious maturity on the part of the poet with a frank and undisguised nostalgia on that of the maestro. The empathy and dismay shared by a companion in exile is very marked in these songs. The "*hiver*" in question was that of 1838, when Donizetti regretted Naples most. Was it the Bergamasc maestro who recommended the untested Achille as poet for the T.Nuovo in the fading months of 1838? It is a reasonable guess.

The Bergamasc was not alone in turning his attention to him, Rossini subsequently set one known text by de Lauzières: *La vedova andalusa* "Fiero ocean rispondimi" [published in Paris by Léon Escudier as *La Veuve andalouse*]^{xvi} and Pacini's interminable vocal output contains a whole series of fleeting songs with his texts, most all of them quasi- unidentifiable today. It is in fact Giovanni Pacini who earned his longest period of fidelity, there was clearly some sort of rapport between the precocious savant and the cynical manipulator of audience responses, they were alike

both in terms of restless prodigality, and perhaps in outlook too. For a year or two there was almost a collaboration,^{xvii} between 1851 and 1855 emerged two important joint operas, *Zaffira* and *Il cid*, together with a cantata and a major *rifacimento*, all with texts by de Lauzières. This last is probably the most fascinating: Pacini had carefully selected this insider/outsider to mastermind the huge changes he proposed to make to his beloved *Gli arabi nelle Gallie* to survive a momentous plunge into the Parisian maelstrom; on 30 January 1855 there appeared at the Théâtre Impérial-Italien in Paris an entirely new version of this opera, a third of it recomposed, entirely re-orchestrated, and with some seven new pieces by Achille de Lauzières. Now a *dramma lirico in quattro parti* starring Angiolina Bosio as Ezilda and Adelaide Borghi-Mamo as Leodato and given a momentous staging at the express request of Napoléon III, it was a success, it was applauded, but fickle Parisian audiences soon turned their attention elsewhere, for four gilded days only did he get the international recognition he craved.

The earlier cantata too had been equally imperial, this was *L'alleanza*, a cantata for the birthday of Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil with its libretto by the *marchese Achille de Lansieres* (sic) and given its first performance on 1 September 1851 at Petropolis (Rio). Pacini had known the Empress Teresa Cristina of Brazil as a child in Naples and the cantata was commissioned at her request.

Imperial Brazil? Imperial Paris? Did he have a longing for empire? It seems very likely. Although in 1855 he took part in publishing a lavish '*Descrizione della città di Napoli e delle sue vicinanze: divisa in XXX giornate*' together with Gaetano Nobile and his former collaborator Raffaele D'Ambra, affiliation with his birthplace was declining, the French capital and the lure of exotic travel began to beckon irresistibly. Nothing happened very quickly but some five years later Achille de Lauzières abandoned Naples for good. The Risorgimento and the collapse of the Bourbon kingdom of the Two Sicilies was a point of no return. No fidelity remained now. He could go home... But once there the restlessness of a confirmed expatriate survived intact - the Hispanic past of his native city remained a constant it would seem and there were repeated excursions to Spain. The Iberian peninsula had always been on the agenda, there were incessant reminders – from *Il cid* to the Andalusian fervour of his song for Rossini, even a Bourbon kingdom in disarray – as Spain had been for decades – was irresistibly tempting, for part of several years in succession he took up regular residence in Barcelona as a quartet of opera texts written later in life bear witness. But at no time was there any question of actual exile and the critical flood continued unabated from wherever he was living.

There is no doubt too that, even in Paris, the allure of Naples stayed fresh in his mind, his review of Federico Ricci's *Une Folie à Rome* in "La Patrie", after its triumphant Parisian appearance in 1869, is a case in point:

Frédéric Ricci a gardé la tradition du *bouffe* italien dans tous ce qu'il a de plus vif et de plus élégant; cette verve toujours distinguée, cet entrain de belle tenue, qui ne va jamais plus loin ni surtout plus bas que la gaieté, qui se grise de sa folie, mais qui n'en paraît jamais ivre, qui s'amuse de toutes les allures, se plait à toutes les danses, depuis la *polka*, jusqu'à la *forlane*, depuis la *valse*, jusqu'à la *tarentelle*, mais qui s'arrête juste au *cancan*.

C'est de la musique de gentilhomme qui, en pirouettant à ravir dans tous les sentiers, ne met pas une seule tache de crotte à son talon rouge.

DE THÉMINES

But everything was about to change. Napoléon III was soon to disappear and *post-Imperial* French tastes did not meet with his approval. As with many legitimists who had found the Emperor to be eminently worthy of his endorsement he viewed those of his compatriots who flourished outside the pale of imperial favour with contempt, their musical tastes were discarded with the current derogatory term of “*musique de l’avenir*”. The upstart Bizet of course fell foul of his own glossy portrait of a country he adored, with *Carmen* - and *his* Spain seen through the eyes of a vulgar Parisian tourist - he felt that the entire peninsula was being defiled: Achille’s indignantly “Victorian” slaughter of *Carmen* in 1875 is truly memorable:

Une fois qu’on s’est engagé dans l’égout social, on est forcé de descendre [...] Carmen, c’est la « fille », dans la plus révoltante acception du mot [...] une bohémienne ! une sauvage ! moitié égyptienne ou gitane, moitié andalouse, se chargeant d’endormir sous ses caresses vénales la vigilance des douaniers...^{xviii}

The stage [in general] is given over more and more to women of dubious morals. It is from this class that people like to recruit the heroines of our dramas, our comedies, and now even our comic operas. But once they have sunk to the sewers of society they have to do so again and again; it is from down there that they have to choose their models... They think they always have to "improve" on what has gone before. Marion Delorme, Manon Lescaut, Marguerite Gautier step along this sorry path, are now past and gone ... Carmen is the daughter [of these] in the most revolting sense of the word ... the veritable prostitute of the gutter and the street-corner.^{xix}

[but maybe Queen Victoria herself, who expressly commanded a private performance of *Carmen* at Windsor Castle, would not have been so amused]

His last years were full both of success and appreciation. Occasional critical bile was to be expected and a certain *réclame* sustained him worldwide thanks to his translations. His contacts with the prickly Giuseppe Verdi were warm and protracted (despite the snide comment he had made about Marguerite Gautier). They had first met in Bologna in 1867 at the time of the translation of *Don Carlos* into Italian^{xx} and contact was renewed (at a distance) when he supplied the text for a song by Auber ‘L’esultanza’ which formed part of the album of songs, masterminded by Verdi (1869), to add to the finances of his stroke-ridden colleague Francesco Maria Piave. In fact they remained in touch to the final years of his life.^{xxi}

The incessant reviewing continued to the very last, he supplied letters from Paris almost every week to the Ricordi “Gazzetta musicale di Milano”, caustic, witty and learned commentaries from 1866 to 1893 always signed “A.A.” (for “Aldino Aldini” yet another pseudonym)^{xxii}

Although it is true that “*no one erects a statue to a critic*” an exception might be made for a librettist, poet and translator. This epigone of the defrocked was an important cog in the international operatic machine of his day. And not simply a mechanical ingredient but destined to oil the wheels of a difficult and challenging juggernaut without whom the transference of skills could never have been so smooth or so universal. As an activist and entrepreneur he was in demand till the pen fell from his hands. Anyone who could link Vincenzo Fioravanti, Gioacchino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Giovanni Pacini, Giacomo Meyerbeer,

Giuseppe Verdi and Charles Gounod with so many others large and small at a creative level should never be overlooked.

De Lauzières died suddenly in the same year that Debussy's 'L'après midi d'un faune' was first to be heard. Could it have been from shock? That there was a personal confrontation between the Pulcinella of his début and Debussy - as wide a gulf as conceivable between proletarian farce and elitist frisson - must have urged him to throw down his pen. Here was a challenge beyond the reach of any critical norm. Had his world changed for good? Achille de Lauzières must long have reflected. But this musical exile knew very well that his Pulcinella would bounce back again, disreputable, dismissive, caustic and sceptical, an eternally recurrent critical exemplar that would always win hands down.

ⁱ Revamped in various guises, for example as *Il ritorno di Columella da Padova* or *Il ritorno di Genneriella dagli studi di Padova ossia Il pazzo per amore*, it kept the ribald backstreet theatres of Naples in stitches interminably, with its leading role a basso buffo of very indeterminate status and sex and with its North/South divide, this delicious comedy was revived every year until 1848. In 1838 it was given no less than 61 times (variously at the Nuovo, S.Ferdinando and Fenice theatres), and in 1839 - the year of Achille's sequel - 68 times (at the Nuovo, S.Ferdinando, Fenice and Partenope theatres). Its distinctly more expert librettist was Andrea Passaro

ⁱⁱ He divided the challenge of supplying the verses for this frightening operatic début with Raffaele D'Ambra who was scarcely more experienced

ⁱⁱⁱ Louis-Armand d'Estrées de Lauzières-Thémines (1682-1723) 4th duc d'Estrées, marquis de Coeuvres, Thémines et Cardaillac, Pair de France, vicomte de Soissons, baron de Gourdon-Labouriane, Gouverneur d'Ile de France, Laon, Noyon et Domme, married to Diane-Adelaide de Mazarin-Mancini, had no children and the marquisate reverted to Lauzières cousins

^{iv} "In addition to the editors' contributions, one of the journal's most prolific is Achille de Lauzières de Thémines. His over four-hundred contributions treat numerous subjects (e.g., the influence of Italian music in Egypt, the role of the orchestra in opera, the administration of lyric theaters, Lully and the recitative, nationalism in the works of Verdi and Wagner, and the letters of Joseph Haydn)" according to Wikipedia.

^v The plot is based upon Schiller's "Die Räuber" anticipating Verdi

^{vi} The *marchese* Capecelatro was widely feared as a *jetattore* (ie believed to have the "evil eye") so the poor attendance at his opera even in the utterly resplendent Real Teatro di S. Carlo (*Mortedo* survived for two-and-a-half performances only - did the audience run out half-way-through?) was understandable. They would have been too scared to buy tickets in any case, something nasty might happen to them! The opera's title will not have helped

^{vii} After Corneille

^{viii} The title-role was sung by Maria Piccolomini who attracted sufficient press attention for the opera to be included in French dictionaries that normally chose to consider operas written for London to be of no import whatsoever

^{ix} After Sardou. Marie-Félicie-Clémence de Reiset, *vicomtesse* de Grandval wrote a handful of operas between 1859 and 1892, no dilettante she composed a substantial list of instrumental and vocal works

^x Friedrich von Flotow (1812-1883)

^{xi} Both music and plot being a saccharine challenge to *Dom Sébastien roi de Portugal* of Scribe and Donizetti of that same year of 1843

^{xii} After the trilogy by Schiller

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- ^{xiii} Marcial del Adalid y Gurréa died on 16 October 1881, his death seems to have been responsible for the abandon of this opera for Barcelona
- ^{xiv} After Chateaubriand's "Le dernier des Abencérages" it had the most astonishing cast including Victor Maurel, Edouard de Reszké and Emma Calvé
- ^{xv} As a sign of his neutrality, at least one song text was written with/for Francesco Florimo, an inveterate apologist for Mercadante. This was a 'Tarantella' of 1845
- ^{xvi} There would be many contacts with Rossini in later life. It is in a memoir by Achille de Lauzières that a substantial description of the aging Rossini is to be found: "*Memorie di un giornalista*" [in] 'Capitan Fracassa' (Rome, September issue 1885)
- ^{xvii} Pacini even managed to spell his name correctly – a sure sign of utter devotion
Cfr *Le mie memorie artistiche* (Firenze 1865) 117
- ^{xviii} "La Patrie" 1875
- ^{xix} English translation of the same review as quoted from the internet. This rude judgment did not prevent de Lauzières from supplying a *versione ritmica italiana* of the text of Henry Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy for *Carmen* at the request of the publisher Sonzogno!
- ^{xx} The prima of the Italian version of this opera took place on Sunday 27 October 1867 at the Teatro Comunale of Bologna, Achille clearly felt exceptionally honoured by the event as quite untypically in Italy his name was printed in full for the occasion as Achille de Lauzières-Thémines in tandem with that of his co-poet Angelo Zanardini. Antonio Ghislanzoni further adapted this translation in 1884.
- ^{xxi} An autograph letter from Verdi to Achille de Lauzières sent from St Agata and dated 5 October 1891 regarding the composer's *Falstaff* was sold at Christies in 1992. The catalogue claims, with a certain amount of fantasy, that the translator was "*a friend of Verdi*" and that he was keen, conjecturally, "*to find out what was going to be next after Otello*"
- ^{xxii} It was far from being the last of his literary disguises, he wrote also under the bizarre name of "*Ralph*" in "Le Courrier franco-italien" (but he might have shared this pseudonym with others it would seem)