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Source Studies and Opera History

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In their editorial in volume 1, no. 1 of *Cambridge Opera Journal*, the founding editors stressed the 'interdisciplinary' nature of the journal as they envisioned it, calling it 'basic to the present enterprise', which was 'to broaden the scope of discourse about opera'. After ten years, a new scholar, taking over as editor of the journal, reiterated this point of view in an editorial in volume 10, no. 2, insisting that 'if opera is multivalent, the methods used to study it, as they are represented in this journal, have been commensurately inter- and multi-disciplinary', and that, in *COJ*, 'biography, source-study, analysis, history, semiology, narratology, psychology and philosophy rub shoulders with each other'. Indeed, it is interesting that in their farewell (volume 10, no. 1) the founding editors noted that, if the journal seemed to have 'acquired a reputation for favouring one type of scholarship (judging by the number of times we are fobbed off with the 'my-stuff's-not-trendy-enough-for-you-guys' excuse) . . . we at least *feel* that we always tried to include as broad a range of approaches as the quality of submissions allowed'. One might suggest, however, that judging the quality of submissions is not always easy to separate from the kind of scholarship one finds congenial.

In volume 15, no. 2, a third set of editors began their work by insisting in turn on their delight to be associated with a journal that 'has developed an identity very much of its own', featuring 'lively new work on opera'. Now that we have another shift of editors, one can only hope that the new team is willing to look afresh at the journal's identity, the nature of its 'lively new work', and, in particular, at the importance of 'source studies'.

For, in my opinion, *Cambridge Opera Journal* has sometimes fostered opera criticism based on a careless handling of sources. When I pointed out to one set of editors that a contributor was misusing a term with a well-defined history, I was told that this was just a 'figurative use'; and when I objected that the author of an essay about a specific opera did not have enough control over similar operas to avoid making claims that were unjustified, the objection was set aside.

Please notice that I am *not* objecting to the subjects that have been treated by contributors to *Cambridge Opera Journal*, nor to the notion that opera is 'a place where anxieties – and certainties – about life, death, disease, sex, gender, race, ethnicity and class are played out' (although the list does seem discouragingly familiar to anyone who paid attention to literary studies during the 1970s and 1980s). All this is a

Because this essay is intended as a position paper by a scholar who has spent most of his life concerned with source studies and the making of critical editions, I am not providing footnotes or naming as many names as I could: the issues I am raising are quite independent of what I may take to be the sins of certain writers and I do not want my remarks to be viewed as complaints about particular individuals.

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continuation of Joseph Kerman's polemic in *Contemplating Music*, in which – having eliminated from consideration anything but the music he was prepared to have enter into his personal pantheon – he disparaged serious research into sources and editions by labelling it 'postivistic'. To its great credit, *Cambridge Opera Journal* has always shown itself more catholic in its tastes, and does seem to understand why one might want to know something about the 'Dark Ages' of opera history or might even do serious research on *shabby little shockers*.

Now, as I said in the preface to my *Divas and Scholars*, I fully understand this point of view, and when I began my work on Italian opera in the mid-1960s, I was resolved to ignore the teachings of that arch-positivist, with whom I studied at Princeton, Arthur Mendel, as he finished his fearsome edition of the *St John Passion* for the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*. Off I went to Paris in the mid-1960s to do a dissertation that dealt with BIG HISTORICAL PROBLEMS (we didn't know about 'criticism', let alone race, class and gender back then). Unfortunately, my project got immediately side-swiped by the nature of the sources. Every time I picked up another score of a Rossini opera I found yet different material. Without understanding the nature of the sources I was looking at, there was no way I could make any sense of the historical issues I sought to explain. And so, despite myself, I was cast into the role of a believer in source studies and the maker of (tremble, o ye planets) critical editions.

Understanding and controlling sources does not preclude serious intellectual engagement with operatic material. But failing to understand and control sources *does*. Not every subject one studies requires a complete understanding of musical sources, but far too many scholars publishing in the pages of our major periodicals courting contributions about opera, such as *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *19th Century Music*, or the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, or doing research in the field are content to allow approximation to take the place of hard work. When I read an article about Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* with musical examples using an Italian text, I freeze. That means: (a) the author knows absolutely nothing about the history of the opera; (b) the author is unaware that there exists a critical edition of the score by an esteemed scholar, the late Elizabeth Bartlet; (c) the author doesn't care. I admit to having begun a polemic a few years back about the nature of citations of musical examples in these periodicals, in which I suggested that we would not dream of accepting an article for publication where the footnotes were not clear and transparent, but we appeared to think nothing of publishing articles in which the musical examples took no heed whatsoever of scholarly work on musical texts. *JAMS* immediately adopted a policy that reversed its previous standard. I regret to say that similar efforts with *19th Century Music* (which published an article on the Verdi *Requiem* with an example copied from an edition with an English text) and *Cambridge Opera Journal* were basically ignored.

Let me offer some examples where similar problems seem to occur. Several operas written by important Italian opera composers working in the period between the 1860s and the 1880s exist in many different vocal scores. I happen to have collected as many of them as I could over the years (without being a particular fan of the music of Arrigo Boito or Amilcare Ponchielli), and when I come across a

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vocal score – most published by Casa Ricordi – with a different number of pages than the ones I already own, I hurry to acquire it. (There are likely to be other editions of importance, of course, but the number of pages is a simple way to identify immediately one that is going to have significant changes: this principle works not only for Boito or Ponchielli, but also for Puccini or even late Verdi – *Falstaff*, to be precise.) Now, authors engaged in studies of *Mefistofele* or of the Ponchielli operas (and similar things could be said of other contemporary Italian composers) may not be primarily interested in sources or editions, nor do I think they should be. But the questions they may be asking, pertaining to the nature of the Italian repertory in the years between Verdi's *Aida* of the early 1870s and his *Otello* of 1887, require them to look carefully at the scores. Boito's *Mefistofele* and Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*, for example, both had their premières at the Teatro alla Scala of Milan, on 5 March 1868 and 8 April 1876, respectively. But both exist in multiple authorial versions, usually represented by significantly different vocal scores. (To take one example, the Furlana in Act I of *La Gioconda* and the revised cabaletta 'O grido di quest'anima' were both added to the score when Ponchielli altered the opera for a revival in Venice on 18 October 1876.)

But a similar situation exists for other works by Ponchielli, including his *I promessi sposi* of 1856 (revised in 1872) or *I Lituani* of 1874 (revised in 1875). On the one hand, the last thing I would want is for a scholar to spend an enormous amount of time sorting out the compositional history and all the sources for the works of Ponchielli, but, on the other, it is difficult to know what is being discussed in treatments of these scores. Some work needs to be done on the subject and that has to be clearly spelled out in any serious writing about the operas. While it might be honest simply to say 'I am consulting score X', such a response would be insufficient without knowing anything about the history of score 'X'.

Whatever one chooses to think about the early operas of Verdi, it is fair to say that – given the number of performances of these works in opera houses around the world – we want to have good control over their textual history. If this means, as it does, that we must produce critical editions of them, so be it. I am not afraid of the term, and neither should there be any hesitation on the part of readers of *Cambridge Opera Journal*. After all, many people believe that the most important event in the entire field of English literature for 2007–8 was the publication by Oxford University Press of *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, edited by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino. Most of these plays had not been available for more than a generation, and whatever argument one may have wanted to make about the significance of Middleton as a playwright in Jacobean England depended on frankly sub-standard and antiquated texts.

Much the same could be said about Verdi. The opera house in Parma opened its Verdi Festival in Autumn 2008 with Alberto Rizzuti's new edition of *Giovanna d'Arco*. Now, whether one loves the opera or not (and there are some of us who do indeed love it, even though it is 'early' Verdi), studying it from early vocal scores is a serious error. Thanks to a recent essay by Francesco Izzo, 'Verdi, the Virgin, and the Censor: The Politics of the Cult of Mary in *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* and *Giovanna d'Arco*', we know that the text of *Giovanna d'Arco* was devastated by the

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censors, who objected to the presentation of Mary in the context of the story of the Maid of Orleans. Close examination of the autograph manuscript of *Giovanna d'Arco* was fundamental to that revelation, for the influence of the censor's hand is everywhere apparent, removing text of a 'suspicious' nature and replacing it with anodyne sentiments. Had it not been for these source studies by Izzo and editorial work by Rizzuti, *Giovanna d'Arco* would continue to be known as nineteenth-century censors wanted it to be known, instead of with the libretto that Verdi actually set to music. Similar comments could have been made about Verdi's *Stiffelio*, up to the moment that its critical edition, edited by Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell, was published in 2003. No longer must we hear 'il Giusto' when Verdi wrote 'Cristo'. And the appearance of the new edition has generated an important series of articles by scholars of Lutheran theology. That is another kind of interdisciplinary work worth encouraging.

Current work on *I due Foscari* by Andreas Giger, for performance in Parma last October, is identifying similar problems. In Rome to say 'Maledetto' was considered unacceptable, and so all such phrases were ruthlessly modified within Verdi's autograph manuscript by another hand. Printed editions (textual or musical) *only* have the censored texts. Is this really good enough? Are we prepared to allow Roman censors from 1844 to determine what we are allowed to hear today? Do we want to know Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* from an Italian translation in which the word 'liberté' has been struck out over and over again? Do we want to know Donizetti's *La Favorite* from an Italian translation that cannot bear the presence of a wayward priest and so modifies all the relationships among the characters until we simply do not know who anybody is.

I have been working for several years now on the critical edition of Verdi's *La forza del destino*, hardly a small work. There had been earlier efforts with the opera by the late scholar, William C. Holmes, but Mr Holmes was not given access to the autograph manuscripts (over 400 pages) owned by the Carrara-Verdi family in St Agata. Thanks to the support of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani and its director, Pierluigi Petrobelli, I was able to have access to the autograph manuscripts of most of the music Verdi eliminated from the St Petersburg version of *Forza* (1862) when he revised it for Milan (1869). But I was also treated to hundreds of pages of sketches and of cancelled skeleton scores. From the latter it was possible to understand exactly how Verdi had originally planned the opera in 1861 (its première was postponed for three-quarters of a year because of the illness of the prima donna: and, no, she was *not* pregnant!). Not only was this material crucial in and of itself, it also made it possible finally to understand the parts preserved in the archive of the Marinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. Bill Holmes had studied those parts, but without access to the St Agata materials, no one could have understood them fully. Now we know that the vocal parts were entirely copied during the winter of 1861–2 and revised in the autumn of 1862. Verdi himself intervened heavily in the parts during the autumn of 1862, so we have autograph evidence for his work with the singers. We also know that the orchestral parts were not copied before the autumn of 1862, but that Verdi made modifications in them during the course of the rehearsal period. (The wind parts doubling the vocal parts in the Prayer within

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the Osteria scene were all added during rehearsals, presumably because the St Petersburg singers could not stay in tune.) Most of the time he entered his changes also in his autograph manuscript, but we are now in a position to unravel the entire history. The resulting information about Verdi's evolving judgements about his material and the structure of the entire work forces fundamental revisions in our conception of the opera as a whole. (To take just one extraordinary example, as he originally planned the Osteria scene, Leonora never appeared on stage: instead of her beautiful participation in the prayer, the Alcade sang a pretty little ditty about the beautiful eyes of a young woman from Hornacuelos.)

There are fundamental issues being considered right now about the works of Puccini. Ricordi has announced publication of a complete edition, under the direction of Gabriele Dotto and Roger Parker, and the Italian government seems to be coming aboard with its moniker of 'edizione nazionale', but many significant questions have yet to be answered about sources and editorial techniques. After all, it was just a few years ago that Ricordi commissioned the accomplished scholar Linda Fairtile to orchestrate a rejected act of Puccini's early opera, *Edgar*, which Dr. Fairtile proceeded to do, only to learn after her work had been completed that Puccini's autograph manuscript of that act survives (although not in the Ricordi Archives). When it was made available again, Dr Fairtile's work was set aside and Puccini's original orchestration (as edited by Dr Fairtile) was performed in Turin. Knowing the sources again proved essential. (In this case it was through absolutely no fault of her own that she did not know the location of Puccini's autograph: it was owned by a private individual who made it available very late in the process.)

But there are even more troubling matters being discussed. It is my understanding (directly from the general editors, with whom I engaged in a lengthy dialogue during and after a conference in Milan about editing Puccini in November 2008) that they believe it is their duty to present Puccini's music as it is found in later printed editions, editions that were certainly approved by Puccini even if they did not always pass through his hands. This may be a reasonable decision, but what I do not find reasonable is their apparent position that the readings of the Puccini autograph manuscripts were so profoundly changed during the production process that it is no longer incumbent upon the editor to provide anything but the scantiest information about what is to be found there. This is a highly controversial position. Indeed, recently scholars in Vienna, taking advantage of the fact that the company which until last year was known as BMG Ricordi had published a very expensive facsimile of the autograph manuscript of *Tosca* (otherwise Ricordi would surely not have made this manuscript available), have issued their own 'critical edition' of *Tosca*, basing their text primarily on the autograph manuscript and insisting that we really *do* care what Puccini thought, even if he was willing later to have his score 'socialised' (to use the textual critic Jerome McGann's very useful expression). Indeed, the Viennese editors insist that the resulting score presents the opera in a new and – to their mind – far more interesting way. I am not here prepared to take a stand between these positions (although I do feel that to ignore completely the readings of the autograph because they are "superseded" is not a good idea), but I raise the issue simply because it is a good example of just how contested editorial

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matters can become even for composers whom we believe to be part of a very standard canon. I gather that the same team has just published an edition of Verdi's *Falstaff* based exclusively on the autograph manuscript, which is also available in facsimile. If such an approach is inappropriate, we need to understand *why*. Surely there would be little debate that the approach of ignoring later sources would be inappropriate to an edition that styles itself as critical. It seems equally questionable to ignore the autograph in editions based on later sources.

Nor am I the only scholar who raises questions of this kind. While to some, 'interdisciplinary' research means 'race, class, gender', I prefer to think of other directions, too. No one who is interested in opera history should be ignorant of Paul Eggert's remarkable *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature* (Cambridge, 2009), although source and editorial problems in music are clearly not Professor Eggert's own area of expertise. Yet we have all lived through the death of the author and, wonder of wonders, he or she is still around thirty years after Roland Barthes. We may not be able to idealise or treat as unproblematic the author, as our predecessors sometimes did, but we cannot get rid of him or her. It would certainly be welcome if, alongside Butler, Bhabha and Jauss, the names of scholars such as Tanselle, Zeller or Gabler occasionally surfaced in the pages of *Cambridge Opera Journal*, as well as movements associated with the groups that favour the preparation of *éditions génétiques* in France, or those who have done such remarkable work with Hölderlin or Kafka in Germany.

Yes, we want a new critical look at the operas of Massenet or Gounod, but just what *are* these operas? How are we to approach them? Do we pluck a volume off our library shelves at random and assume that it will give us the information we need. If so, we may find that Thomas's *Hamlet* has exclusively an ending that shows Hamlet alive and named the new king, even though it is widely known that for a later performance of the opera, Thomas reintroduced the Shakespearean death of the protagonist. We may relish Juliette's opening waltz in *Roméo et Juliette* of Gounod, but we really had better know that this piece was added to meet the needs of the wife of the head of the theatre, Madame Carvalho, who found the extraordinary aria Gounod wrote as Juliette takes Frère Laurent's potion not to her liking, and hence omitted it. The recent revival of Bellini's *La sonnambula* at the Metropolitan Opera has given yet another opportunity for those who insist that Bellini prepared a version of the opera for Maria Malibran to mouth off. But we know this to be false: yes indeed, there is a Malibran version, but it was prepared in English by an English composer (Henry Bishop) for a heavily revised and cut presentation of the opera in London, as Emanuele Senici has demonstrated. If someone has tried to figure out just what Malibran sang or didn't sing later in her career, I have yet to hear about it. The pages of *Cambridge Opera Journal* would be a wonderful place to address such questions, if the journal made clear that it was really interested in questions of that kind.

The whole concept of 'performance studies' has been compromised by scholars who seem to believe that those interested in 'sources' and 'critical editions' seek to produce a *correct* text without any modifications of that text representing the contribution of performers. Balderdash. No serious scholar of opera believes such

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a thing. In the nineteenth century, at least, Italian composers all treated singers as their *partners*, not their antagonists. What Rossini wrote on the page was not what he thought a singer would perform: *guai* if anyone sings those naked cadenza opportunities without interpolating a proper cadenza. But too many performers are ignorant of history, and it behoves scholars and *Cambridge Opera Journal* at least to make an effort to assist them, whether or not they themselves read the *Journal* and whatever they may ultimately decide to do (they have absolute freedom of choice, of course, working in collaboration with the other performers and coaches).

In the new critical edition of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, issued by Bärenreiter in March 2009 (although with a 2008 date) and edited by Patricia B. Brauner, for example, there is a seventy-five page chapter in the Critical Commentary by the critic and conductor Will Crutchfield, in which the edition offers an ample selection of *early* ornamentation that is attributable to singers. So, it is possible to know what Joséphine Fodor-Mainvielle sang in 'Una voce poco fa' and what Fodor-Mainvielle and Jacopo Pellegrini sang in 'Dunque io son' in Paris at the Théâtre Italien in 1821; it is possible to know what Henriette Sontag sang for 'Una voce poco fa' at Covent Garden in 1827; it is possible to know what Laure Cinti-Damoreau taught her students for this cavatina during the 1830s and what Giuditta Pasta taught Adelaide Kemble during the 1830s. It is possible to know precisely what his son asserts that Manuel García sang in 'Ecco ridente in cielo' in Rome in 1816. All this information, and more, is offered as examples of what *singers* who were familiar with Rossini, who worked with him, and who were active in the theatre in the coming decades actually performed. *That* is performance studies with a vengeance. One can, of course, continue to sing what I consider to be the abominations published by Estelle Liebling at the turn of the twentieth century, based not on Rossini style but on the antics of late nineteenth-century divas who thought that Rosina was a mechanical doll (like Offenbach's Olympia in *Les Contes d'Hoffman*). What the new *Barbiere* edition seeks to accomplish, however, is to make it impossible for singers to pretend that adopting the Liebling approach (with its coloratura shenanigans) has anything whatsoever to do with what singers who worked directly with Rossini would have done. After singers learn this, of course, they still have the right to do whatever they wish, but at least they will not do so in ignorance of sources and history.

Guai if anyone sings Donizetti without appoggiaturas: it is simply musically as ignorant as neglecting to continue to observe an accidental throughout a bar. (To one conductor who insisted that no appoggiaturas should ever be added to operas by Donizetti, I once responded with a voice dripping with unrecognised sarcasm that he had finally convinced me why Verdi was a great composer: it was because Verdi *invented* the appoggiatura in 1842 with *Nabucco*, an opera in which just about every possible appoggiatura is written explicitly. So, according to this conductor we went from Donizetti during the 1830s with NO appoggiaturas, to Verdi in 1842 with practically every one of them present.) Verdi loved Victor Maurel's practice of repeating 'Quando ero paggio' and railed against those who found this practice excessive. But that did not mean that he considered everything that Maurel did to be appropriate: he repeated again and again that *Falstaff* had one composer, and it was he, Giuseppe Verdi. He wrote it for Maurel, but Maurel did not have the right

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to do whatever he chose. There was one creator, Verdi, and even talking about an artist 'creating' a role was anathema to that composer.

Yes, Virginia, there are composers, and however much we should want to problematise the concept, it is not going away. Eggert insists that we look at the 'document' as opposed to the 'text' or the 'work', when referring to sources. He recognises fully that postmodern criticism has made us hesitant about assuming that words such as 'text' or 'work' have unambiguous meanings. I meant something similar when in *Divas and Scholars* I identified 'Verdi's *Rigoletto*' with the composer's autograph manuscript. We know nothing else. My *Rigoletto*, your *Rigoletto*, Ricordi's *Rigoletto*, Martin Chusid's *Rigoletto*, Bruson's *Rigoletto*, Nucci's *Rigoletto* all have their place in the panoply, but all of them ultimately go back to the same document, the one I have called 'Verdi's *Rigoletto*'. Getting from there to here (wherever here may be) is a matter that requires our best thinking and it is anything but trivial. *Cambridge Opera Journal* should have a role to play in helping us to understand this passage.

And my examples have been chosen almost exclusively from the nineteenth-century opera I know best of all. Look at the seventeenth century, and think of Ellen Rosand's remarkable treatment of Monteverdi's *three* Venetian operas from around 1640, her ability to make us understand the significance and context of an opera for which we don't have a note of music. Or the eighteenth century, where one could invoke Martha Feldman's transformation of the kinds of questions we need to be asking about *opera seria*, while not losing track of the textual history of the operas being performed in various sites. The pages of this journal should be the place where one first encounters such work. Whatever work is published in future issues, no one should be permitted to imagine that *any* valid historical or interpretative work is possible without serious involvement with editions and sources.

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