

nel tempo», in dem uns «alles zurück in vergangene Zeiten führen» soll (23). Ein fiktiver Brief Verdis «A Sua Maestà la Principessa Imperiale» beschließt die kulinarische Traumreise. Und deren fiktiver Ausruf: «Il figlio che avrei voluto», Verdi sei «der Sohn» gewesen, «den sie sich gewünscht hätte», lässt der Autorin wohl ganz warm ums Herz werden.

Anselm Gerhard

Gloria STAFFIERI, *Musicare la storia. Il giovane Verdi e il «grand opéra»*, Parma, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 2017 (Premio internazionale Rotary club Parma Giuseppe Verdi, 8), XX + 417 pp.

Over twenty years ago Fabrizio Della Seta criticized an insular approach to the study of *Primo Ottocento* Italian opera, a methodology where this repertory was cast as a kind of Other sharply separated from mainstream European practice that was driven by principles of aesthetic autonomy, ideals of progress, and claims for ideological depth.¹ Since then, many others have joined Della Seta to challenge the old epistemological model, and with her new book Gloria Staffieri drives a new nail into its coffin. To be sure, the young Verdi was immersed in local operatic culture; the construct of his *italianità* has both very deep historiographical roots and strong implications for nationalist thinking. The premise of Staffieri's study, however, is that he was also thoroughly aware of developments in French opera from the beginning of his career, particularly French grand opera, and that this knowledge impacted his musico-dramatic practice early on. It was a point that Julian Budden made from time to time in his three-volume study of the Verdi operas. Staffieri now offers a systematic and magisterial examination of the question.

The first step that she takes, one that fills over a third of the volume, is a thorough consideration of the spread of French grand opera on Italian soil in the 1830s and 40s, building in a significant way on earlier exemplary work by Fiamma Nicolodi. Staffieri puts forward a broad view of cultural transfer because she considers not only the time and place of Italian performances of Meyerbeer, Halévy, Auber, but also the vehicles by which

¹ Fabrizio DELLA SETA, "Some Difficulties in the Historiography of Italian Opera", *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10, 1998, p. 3-13; Italian version: "Difficoltà della storiografia dell'opera italiana", «... non senza pazzia». *Prospettive sul teatro musicale* (Roma: Carocci, 2008), 135-148.

these works were disseminated, including the roles of impresarios, singers, librettists and critics enamoured of French romanticism. In short, she treats the Italian dissemination of French grand opera not only with a view to its aesthetic appeal but also to its institutional infrastructure and processes of socialization. An essential question is how French grand opera imports were rearticulated according to the norms of the receiving culture, most obviously in the rewriting of libretti to take into account new sensibilities and censorship constraints. For example, in Italy *La juive* was transposed from Constance in 1414 to first-century Antioch under the Emperor Vespasian. The cultural distance created by an ancient, quasi-biblical setting where Romans confronted Jews erased the anti-Catholic implications of the work. Censorship issues also informed approaches to translation into Italian at the local level. A notorious example is the rewriting of the concluding lines of *Guillaume Tell* from “Liberté redescends des cieux, | Et que ton règne recommence!” to “Quel contento che in me sento | Non può l’anima spiegar.”

In the next phase of her study Staffieri considers the impact of French grand opera on four Verdi operas *Nabucodonosor*, *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, *Giovanna d’Arco*, and *Attila*, always with an eye to generic cross-fertilization. For instance, the antecedent sources for *Nabucodonosor* were the boulevard drama *Nabuchodonosor* by Auguste Anicet-Bourgeois and Francis Cornu premiered at the Théâtre de l’Ambigu-Comique in 1836 as well as a historical ballet by Antonio Cortesi given two years later at La Scala. Staffieri argues that the boulevard play in turn shows the unmistakable impact of the world of opera, Rossini’s *Moïse et Pharaon* and Halévy’s *La juive*. Zacharie of the play evokes Moïse, and the moment when Nabuchodonosor returns to reason upon hearing the distant cries of fanatical Assyrians while Phénenna is being led to her death is redolent of the moment when Eléazar hears the no less fanatical shouting of Christians from outside his prison cell. Soon Rachel and he will be led to their deaths as well. And coming full circle back to *La juive*, Staffieri shows how the Italian adaptation of Halévy’s opera unveiled in 1844 borrowed elements from the *Nabucodonosor* libretto premiered just two years before. Other details that draw *Nabucodonosor* into the orbit of French grand opera in a more general way are the treatment of the chorus as a collective character, a division into four acts, and the addition of a descriptive title to each act, which suggests a dramatic focus around the concept of the tableau. The same might be said of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*; here Staffieri also points

out the similarity of the Crusaders' chorus in Act 2 to Meyerbeer's *Bé-nédiction des poignards* in *Les Huguenots*. It is the shadow of *Robert le diable* that extends over *Giovanna d'Arco*, also a medieval subject coloured by the supernatural. The epic historical background of *Attila* involving the clash of civilizations surely led to Verdi's exclamation: "Come sarebbe bello l'*Attila* pel *Grand Opéra* di Parigi! Vi sarebbero soltanto da aggiungere poche cose, e tutto il resto andrebbe bene."²

Beyond these four operas, Staffieri also explores techniques ultimately derived from French grand opera as they play out in other early Verdi operas less obviously connected to the massive display of rival historical and political imperatives. An interest in a drama of individuals who are buffeted by forces they cannot control is felt in *Ernani* and *I due Foscari*. Like *Giovanna d'Arco*, the supernatural music of *Macbeth* owes some of its instrumental and choral effects to *Robert le diable*. Another point of contact that Staffieri amplifies is thematic recurrence, especially in *I due Foscari*, already described by Verdi's contemporary Abramo Basevi as a learned and weighty device attributable to French grand opera. Finally, Staffieri settles on both *La battaglia di Legnano* and especially *Jérusalem* as prime examples of the impact of grand opera. The latter of course was an outright French-language *rifacimento* of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*, now brought much further into line with Parisian practice by a tightening of the plot and the addition of ballet and new ritual scenes. Throughout, Staffieri's analysis is nuanced, alert to historiography, thoroughly engaged with the primary source record, and clearly organized and expressed. In short, a major contribution to Verdi studies, indeed to musicology at large.

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Antonio TARANTINO, *Giuseppe Verdi a Napoli*, a cura di Sandra DE FALCO e Renzo FRANCABANDERA, Imola, Cue, 2017, 34 pp.

La figura di Giuseppe Verdi è stata in diverse occasioni oggetto di lavori teatrali. Un certo successo lo ottenne negli anni Ottanta *After Aida* di Julian Mitchell, che metteva in scena la tortuosa genesi di *Otello* e i rapporti fra Verdi e Boito. In tempi più vicini e venendo all'Italia, nel 2013 è andato in scena alla Terme di Caracalla a Roma *Un bacio sul cuore, le donne nella vita*

² Verdi to Escudier (12 September 1845), in *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano CESARI e Alessandro LUZIO (Milano: Stucchi Ceretti, 1913), 439.