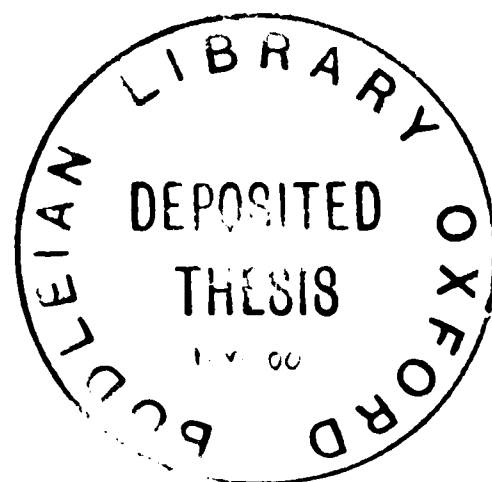


A Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
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**Opera and Nationalism
in mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain**

Suzanne Elizabeth Aspden
St Hilda's College

Trinity Term 1999



Abstract

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Italian opera gained an odd resonance in eighteenth-century British sensibility. By turns loved and hated, it acted on the British imagination as a catalyst both for some of the age's most brilliant satire, and for some of the century's most unusual musical extravagances. This dissertation argues that, despite (or in some ways because of) the eventual failure of Italian serious opera and its English hybrid forms to attain status within the musical canon, the progress of opera played a vital role in shaping and reflecting the formation of British national identity, and that, reciprocally, attempts to find a national identity played a large part in opera's fate in Britain.

For the competing forces and factions of Italian and English opera in 1730s London, the bid for supremacy was inevitably linked with an appeal to authority (whether that of royalty, the nobility, the populace, or ideologies of the nation) that involved stressing their link with the national interest. The first chapter examines the relationship between the consistently politicised language used to discuss opera and the mode of civic action and public spiritedness still requisite amongst the Nobility, charting ways in which aristocratic support of this foreign genre might be reconciled to British concerns. The second chapter looks to a particularly problematic instance of opera's apparent politicisation in the 1730s—Lord Hervey's analysis of the division between Handel and the 'Opera of the Nobility'—to propose a possible 'solution' through the two *Ariannas* of 1734. In so doing, it shows opera's role within a culture of emulation, emphasising the flexibility and social contingency of operatic interpretation.

Coterminous with Italian opera, but of a lower status, were ballad and burlesque opera, their critique of national cultural identity all the sharper for their role as cultural and formal boundary markers. Chapter three demonstrates though exploration of the curious and much-criticised English 'opera', *Hurlothrumbo* (1729), that British dislike of opera was bound up with the deep-seated fear of luxury. While 'Hurlothrumbo' was used as a derogatory epithet until the end of the century, this operatic work also provides a fascinating example of how opera producers might try to negotiate British unease. Chapter four examines the concerted attempt in the 1730s to associate English opera and musical theatre with topics of national interest through composers' and playwrights' appropriation of the stories of historical British ballads as the local equivalents of the venerable texts of Italian opera. The fact that many of the works discussed are 'problem pieces', considered generically, authorially or hermeneutically unstable, points not only to the reason for indigenous opera's failure to achieve canonical status, but also to a more fundamental problem with the role of opera (and, indeed, music in general) in the still-forming British identity. In the final chapter I turn from the problems of opera to the undoubted success of Handel, who himself made the transition from opera to oratorio; I evaluate the composer's apotheosis as a national hero through examining manifestations of his image in the 1730s and at the time of his death.

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Abbreviations and notes on source presentation

<i>Biographical Dictionary</i>	Philip H. Highfill, Jr., Kalman A. Burnim and Edward A. Langhans, <i>A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800</i> , 16 vols (Carbondale, Ill., 1973-1993).
Deutsch	Otto Erich Deutsch, <i>Handel A Documentary Biography</i> (London, 1955).
<i>EM</i>	<i>Early Music</i> .
Gibson	Elizabeth Gibson, <i>The Royal Academy of Music 1719-28: The Institution and its Directors</i> (New York, 1989).
Gerrard	Christine Gerrard, <i>The Patriot Opposition to Walpole: Politics, Poetry, and National Myth, 1725-1742</i> (Oxford, 1994).
<i>ML</i>	<i>Music and Letters</i> .
<i>MQ</i>	<i>The Musical Quarterly</i> .
<i>MT</i>	<i>The Musical Times</i> .
<i>JAMS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Musicological Society</i> .
<i>The London Stage</i>	<i>The London Stage 1660-1800: A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces, together with Casts, Box-Receipts and Contemporary Comment</i> , 5 parts, 11 vols; Part 2: 1700-1729, ed. Emmett L. Avery, 2 vols. (Carbondale, Ill., 1960); Part 3: 1729-1747, ed. Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale, Ill., 1961); Part 4: 1747-1776, ed. George Winchester Stone, Jr., 3 vols. (Carbondale, Ill., 1962).
Taylor	Carole Mia Taylor, ‘Italian Operagoing in London, 1700-1745’ (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1991).

Dates: During this period, the ‘old style’ Julian calendar applied and the year officially changed on 25 March (Lady Day), although many used 1 January to mark the new year. Where a work was published after 1 January with the old year’s date, I have added the new date in square brackets for clarity’s sake.

Presentation of primary sources: When quoting primary sources I have, where practicable, tried to preserve textual ‘accidentals’, including capitalization, italicization, underlining, punctuation and spelling. I have not, therefore, indicated original spelling or grammatical ‘infelicities’ or errors with ‘*sic*’, either in published or manuscript sources. In presenting manuscript quotations, I have used the following sigla: square brackets [] indicate authorial deletion; diagonal slashes \ / indicate authorial insertion; angle brackets < > indicate editorial interpolation. As almost all my primary sources were published in London, unless a pre-1900 work was published elsewhere, I have not indicated place of publication.

Introduction

Nationalism and politics

When Winton Dean published *Handel and the Opera Seria* in 1970, he observed, with some resignation, the dearth of studies and performances of the operas for which the composer was best known in his day:

Posterity placed his monument in the pantheon and hung this tribute round its neck, but omitted to examine the evidence on which it was based. Most of his works were buried, and it seemed that scholars were too much in awe of the monument—or perhaps too familiar with it—to disinter them.¹

The appearance of Dean's and John Merrill Knapp's magisterial volume *Handel's Operas, 1704-1726* in 1987 contributed substantially to the process of amending history's judgment of Handel as a composer. More sketchy, however, was Dean's assessment of the reasons for this curious lacuna: incomprehension and inaptitude on the part of the performers, inertia and ineptitude on the part of scholars were to be blamed for our incomplete historical appreciation.² As other, more recent studies have demonstrated or implied, however, Handel's subsequent career as inventor and composer of English oratorios largely eclipsed his work in Italian opera—even by the end of the eighteenth century—to a great extent because the oratorio was a genre more appealing to British sensibilities.³ As Ruth Smith explains, 'the Israelite

¹ Winton Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria* (London, 1970), ix.

² Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria*, 2; Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp, *Handel's Operas 1704-1726* (Oxford, 1987, rev. edn, 1995), vi, 1-3. For a fuller assessment, though one reaching substantially the same conclusions, see Dean's essay 'Scholarship and the Handel Revival, 1935-85', in *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London, 1987), 1-18.

³ See, for example, Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), particularly 41-170; William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1992), 103-42; although Weber sees the success of oratorio primarily within the context of civic ritual, he acknowledges the oratorio's ideological bent (120-3); Carole Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London, 1987), 165-81; Howard E. Smither, 'Messiah and Progress in Victorian England', *EM* 13 (1985), 339-48.

librettos take precedence among [Handel's] works ... as a distinct group of compositions portraying the life of a nation'.⁴

The continuous tradition of Handel oratorio performances defines the oeuvre as 'classic' in the sense that, as Frank Kermode puts it, they 'possess intrinsic qualities that endure, but possess also an openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under enormously varying dispositions'.⁵ Those 'varying dispositions' were and are, of course, contingent on changing social, political, economic and aesthetic conditions. William Weber demonstrates this link in his study of the creation of 'musical classics' in eighteenth-century England—encompassing Handel's oratorios as well as other forms and composers—and finds the process as a whole to be a political one. He concludes that:

the movement for ancient music was closely associated with the rise of the modern state.... in a society where different aspects of life were not highly segmented, musical questions had to have political meaning.⁶

If Weber is right, then what political meaning has opera's absence from the musical classics? If a range of musical works and indeed, as we will see, a variety of other art forms could be harnessed to the creation of the modern state or, I suggest, the ideology of British national identity, then why not also opera? This question is the subject of my dissertation, and its answer is twofold, involving the 'why' (and how) and the 'why not', both profoundly political. While the following chapters address specific instances of the troubled politicisation of opera, here I want to provide some context for my understanding of the political relationship between a number of eighteenth-century cultural developments and the ideology of nationalism or

⁴ Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 173.

⁵ Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (London, 1975); cited in Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism, 1730-1830* (Oxford, 1989), 5.

⁶ Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics*, 244. For philosophical background to the concept of the musical canon, see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, 1992).

national identity. Two key concepts need here to be defined, those of nationalism and of politics.

Political origins of nationalism

I should begin by justifying my use of the term nationalism in a country of such disparate regional identities and for a period traditionally deemed anterior to the conceptual nascence of the modern nation-state and nationalism.⁷ Although definitions of the ideology of nationalism are often vague and sometimes contradictory, it is broadly agreed that nationalism must be generally and systematically expressed, encompassing the interest and active involvement of all levels of the populace. Unlike patriotism, which is generally seen as the simplest of home-loyalties, focussed almost exclusively on antipathy to the other, nationalism builds—chiefly through cultural networks—a sense of national community in peace as in war.⁸ Even here, however, doubts abound, and as ‘patriotism’ was the term commonly used (‘nationalism’ had not been coined) to express sentiments patriotic as well as nationalistic in the 1730s to 1740s, it too will be employed regularly in this study.

⁷ Gerald Newman, though citing traditional authority that nationalism is at best a late eighteenth-century phenomenon, begins his account of its ‘rise’ in 1740 and could by his definition easily have started earlier. He does not do so, I suggest, because he reads signs of nationalism only through canonical cultural figures, rather than the pre-existent nationalist environment that ‘canonised’ them; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (London and New York, 1987), 54, 63. See also, for example, Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990). Others recognise the problems; see, for example, K. R. Minogue, *Nationalism* (London, 1967), 17, 20, though British nationalism is brushed aside (29). See, however, Alan G. R. Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State: the Commonwealth of England 1529-1660* (New York, 1984), in the revisionist series Foundations of Modern Britain.

⁸ Distinguishing between patriotism and nationalism is particularly problematic. To give one example, Newman explains patriotism as ‘a group-oriented feeling or psychological predisposition which exists *universally* ... [and is] primarily an attachment to the country’s prestige in a context of foreign relations’, while nationalism is a ‘programmatic and historically conditioned elaboration of this simple feeling into *patterns and demands of actions* deeply affecting group policy ... [requiring] the historic growth of a sense of active participation or citizenship’ (Newman’s italics). But Newman cites several authorities on the subject who explain that the spur to nationalist activity is anxiety at the

Belief that nationalism was a concept tied chiefly to the early nineteenth century is, then, partly the result of the perceived cultural and political dominance of the aristocracy during the eighteenth century, for how could national solidarity be expressed when only the voices of the few mattered and could be heard? Partly also it is believed that only with the infrastructural developments of the late eighteenth-century Industrial 'Revolution' could national identities be formed.⁹ Writing about nationalism with regard to the latter point, Benedict Anderson has described the 'imagined community of the nation' as one sustained through shared appreciation of the importance of temporal simultaneity across the geographical entity of one's country: though no-one knows more than a fraction of his or her fellow citizens, all know that they receive the same 'national' newspapers.¹⁰

Eighteenth-century Britain in fact fulfilled both criteria necessary for the development of nationalism. A Britain that had to survive a succession of wars throughout the century had also to ensure the infrastructural (fiscal and military) solidity of the state 'machine'.¹¹ As Jürgen Habermas has shown in his normative

threat of a perceived enemy, his earlier definition of simple patriotism; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 52, 53, 54, 56.

⁹ Immanuel Wallerstein, for example, concludes that 'It was not because England was more democratic than France, but because in some sense it was less that the English state waxed strong and the English entrepreneur went on to conquer the economic world'; Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System II*, 3 vols (New York and London, 1974-1989), vol. 2: *Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750* (1980), 286; Wallerstein demonstrates Britain's 'rise' to economic dominance (245-89). For aristocratic hegemony, see also John Cannon, *Aristocratic Century: The Peerage of Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1984); J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge, 1985). Even a Whig historian like J. H. Plumb argues that 'single-party government; the legislature firmly under executive control; and a sense of common identity in those who wielded economic, social, and political power' ensured British stability after 1715; Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England 1675-1725* (London, 1967), xviii.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), 24, 26, 47. Making a similar point with regard to the development of citizenship, Charles Tilly reminds us that 'the phenomenon of identity is not private and individual but public and relational'; Tilly, ed., *Citizenship, Identity and Social History*, International Review of Social History Supplement 3 (Cambridge, 1996), 7; see also Isaiah Berlin, 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power', in *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Oxford, 1979, rpt. 1989), 333-55 (341-2).

¹¹ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (London, 1989).

study, growth of infrastructural networks encouraged varied forms of cultural and political participation from a broad cross section of society; in Britain, this meant that public life was neither as stable nor as aristocratically dominated as many have argued.¹² Habermas particularly proposed that newspapers and journals initially used by the state to address a thus constituted general ‘public’ increasingly served as forums for anti-administration public sentiment; others working on news networks of eighteenth-century Britain have amply demonstrated the complex interaction between people and politicians via the medium of the press.¹³

If infrastructural development encouraged people to express their difference, the cause of that development—Britain’s many wars—also required the nation’s leaders and ideologues to win support from its divergent populace through establishing ideologically unifying constructs.¹⁴ As Linda Colley and others have

¹² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger (assisted by Frederick Lawrence) (n.p., 1989). Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989). On popular movements, see, in particular, Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715-1785* (Cambridge, 1995); Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II. Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge, 1987); Nicholas Rogers, *Whigs and Cities: Popular Politics in the Age of Walpole and Pitt* (Oxford, 1989); E. P. Thomson, *Whigs and Hunters: The Origin of the Black Act* (London, 1975); George Rudé, *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest* (1952, rpt. London, 1970), 1-60, 201-340; idem, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (1964, rev. edn, London, 1995), *passim*. On the involvement of the people in government, see particularly H. T. Dickinson, *The Politics of the People in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1995).

¹³ Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 21. Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II*; Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*; John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), esp. 139-60, 219-39; Bob Harris, *Politics and the Rise of the Press: Britain and France, 1620-1800* (London, 1996). See also James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford, 1992); Hannah Jane Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁴ Gianfranco Poggi states that ‘some aspects of the development of “public opinion on public affairs” were compatible with absolutist policies and constituted ideological endorsement of them.... [T]he bourgeois public.... was quick to endorse [the ruler’s] declared commitment to national greatness’. He singles out ‘ideas of nationality and national sovereignty’ as helping to resolve the ‘increasing tension between ... the bourgeoisie and the late-absolutist *ancien régime*’; Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction* (London, 1978), 83, 86. See also Linda Colley, ‘Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830’, *Past and Present* 113 (1986), 97-117 (105-9).

demonstrated, patriotism and nationalism provided that coalescent impetus.¹⁵

Colley turns to English opera and that famous paean to Britishness, 'Rule, Britannia', to show that it was antipathy to foreign rivals (especially the French), that defined the British: 'Britishness was superimposed over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other'.¹⁶ Of course, national identity was not simply 'imposed' on an unsuspecting populace. People and government could work cooperatively and, as several writers have observed, nationalist rhetoric was as often deployed against the ruling elite as used by them. British artists in particular gave vent on behalf of the citizenry at large to a general frustration at aristocratic support of foreign—rather than local—manufacture and culture.¹⁷

As commercial society created what we now think of as the public sphere, print culture and indeed culture in general were essential to conception of the nation; indeed, nationalism is primarily a cultural ideology.¹⁸ For the majority of early-eighteenth-century Scots, Welsh and English, with little or no means of long-distance travel or communication, the geopolitical nation of 'Great Britain' created by the 1707 Act of Union must have seemed truly fictional.¹⁹ 'English' and 'British' are both used in this dissertation not because (generally) there was a distinction that needs to be maintained, but for precisely the opposite reason: both terms ('Britain' in particular) were used apparently indiscriminately throughout this

¹⁵ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London, 1992); Wilson, *The Sense of the People*; Robert Harris, *A Patriot Press: National Politics and the London Press in the 1740s* (Oxford, 1993); Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge, 1993); Gerrard.

¹⁶ Colley, *Britons*, 11, 6. For a similar point, see Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 75.

¹⁷ Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 54, 57. See also Berlin, *Against the Current*, 346-50; Marc W. Steinberg, "'The Great End of All Government ...': Working People's Construction of Citizenship Claims in Early Nineteenth-Century England and the Matter of Class", *Citizenship, Identity and Social History*, ed. Tilly, 19-50. For a more complex view, see Wilson, *The Sense of the People*; Harris, *A Patriot Press*. On the people and government, see Dickinson, *The Politics of the People*.

¹⁸ Anthony D. Smith, 'Introduction', in *Nationalist Movements*, ed. Smith (New York, 1976), 21-3; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 55-6.

¹⁹ Colley, *Britons*, 11-18.

period, attracting a range of definitions and varying degrees of inclusivity or exclusivity. Indeed, as the name ‘Britain’ itself indicates in its derivation from pre-Roman times, and from a variety of (sometimes conflicting) histories, national community was imagined as much on a mytho-historic as an economic basis.²⁰ As Anthony Smith explains, apparently populist attraction to a ‘nostalgia for ... simplicity’ combined with scholarly research to provide nationalism with an air of legitimacy: ‘It is history, and history alone, which can furnish the bases of ethnic identity and the psychic reassurance of communal security that goes with it’.²¹ To conceptualise the nation in mytho-historic and legendary terms was by no means atypical: the profoundly ungeographical idea of historical ‘prefiguring and fulfilment’ was still the most meaningful way of understanding one’s place in the greater order, emblem and allegory still the most common way of representing it.²²

This form of historical understanding is particularly relevant to the party political rhetoric of this period, the late 1720s to early 1740s, when the ubiquity of political debate ensured the widespread dissemination of their key patriotic and

²⁰ Anderson sees the notion of ‘prefiguring and fulfilment’—a ‘mediaeval conception of simultaneity-along-time’—as the precursor of ‘simultaneity ... cross-time’, one that had to give way to the latter notion before nationalism could make its mark; *Imagined Communities*, 22-36. The *OED* gives the following range of definitions for ‘Briton’: ‘In History and Ethnology: One of the race who occupied the southern part of the island at the Roman invasion, the “ancient Britons”. A Welshman. Since the union of England and Scotland: A native of Great Britain, or of the British Empire.’

²¹ Smith, *Nationalist Movements*, 8.

²² Bibliomancy and stichomancy were widely practised in eighteenth-century Britain, as on the Continent, according to the Eighteenth-Century Interdisciplinary List (c18-l@lists.psu.edu) discussion on ‘Vates and text flipping’, 14.9.99. For one example of the history and dominance of this principle, see Roy Strong, *Britannia Triumphans: Inigo Jones, Rubens and Whitehall Palace*, 12th Walter Neurath Memorial Lecture (London, 1980). Further discussion of this hermeneutic practice can be found in chapter one. The following titles are particularly useful for their focus on two or more aspects of the four-fold (literal, allegorical, typological and anagogical) interpretations of the text: Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia, or, A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London, 1681); Harold Fisch, *Jerusalem and Albion: The Hebraic Factor in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (London, 1964); Steven N. Zwicker, *Dryden’s Political Poetry: the Typology of King and Nation* (Providence, 1972); Vincent Carretta, *The Snarling Muse: Verbal and Visual Political Satire from Pope to Churchill* (Philadelphia, 1983); Michael F. Suarez, S.J., ‘Bibles, Libels, and Bute: The Development of Scriptural Satire in the Eighteenth-Century Political Print’, *The Age of Johnson, a Scholarly Annual* 5 (1992), 341-89; John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: ‘The Body of the Public’* (New Haven and London, 1986); Paul Korshin, *Typologies in England, 1650-1820* (Princeton, 1982); Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*.

nationalistic ideas. At this time the epic and long-standing struggle for Britain between Roman Catholic and Protestant monarchs was an ever-present concern, and the tenuous existence of various political Opposition groups required legitimisation through historical precedent if their hostility to the King's Ministry was not to be seen as a treasonable innovation.²³ It is significant that in the period 1725 to 1742 one particular loose grouping of discontented Whigs and Tories described itself and came generally to be known as the 'Patriot' Opposition, and was active in promoting Britain's (mythical) 'Ancient Constitution' of King, Parliament and People.

This patriot policy was in part a response to the manifest successes of Robert Walpole's administration. With Britain's relative stability and prosperity to his credit, Walpole could best be challenged with allegations that these very benefits were in fact signs of Britain's dive into luxury, and that his unseemly dominance of government merely indicated the extent to which bribery and corruption—rather than freedom and love of the country—had permeated the political structure.²⁴ Britain's martial reputation was being undermined by Walpole's pacific policies, said the Opposition, and her enemies (particularly the Spanish) laughed at her as they attacked British merchants at sea. What we now see as jingoism, a cynical exploitation of British xenophobia for political ends, at the time also had serious

²³ On opposition as treasonable and damaging to the constitution, see H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977), 154, 178-81; Hugh Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism', in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. Raphael Samuel, 3 vols (London, 1989), I, 57-89 (58). As Shelley Burtt points out, oppositional affiliations throughout the early eighteenth century needed legitimacy because their central tenet—that government was corrupting—by definition meant they could not seek power; Burtt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740* (Cambridge, 1992), 25; see also J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), 409; Archibald S. Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition 1714-1830* (Oxford, 1964), 6-7. On the lack of real, unified oppositions in the first half of the eighteenth century, see, for example, Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 166-9, 177-8; Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition 1714-1830*; Gerrard, 4-6, 10-12, 19-45. For the most recent and systematic argument against oppositional unity during the period, see Alexander Pettit, *Illusory Consensus: Bolingbroke and the Polemical Response to Walpole, 1730-1737* (Newark and London, 1997).

²⁴ Charges of corruption were a well-established pretext in England on which to call into question the validity of the government; see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 401-22.

ideological underpinning in the form of the ancient discourse against luxury, and it chimed with the constant (and very real) fear of Jacobite revolution. So the opposition hero, Admiral Vernon, berated his countrymen: 'We have for years past betrayed our king by strengthening France to put on us the son of a whore; while our fleets lay idle'.²⁵

Several studies of the language and strategies of opposition during this period demonstrate how creatively and continuously national 'history' was deployed to vituperate Walpole's Government.²⁶ These studies also demonstrate the way in which party-political patriotic ideology consistently sought expression and justification through cultural sources; as Christine Gerrard has shown, the political patriotism of the 1720s to 1740s took a literary turn characterised by an 'imaginative engagement with British myth and legend'.²⁷ The opposition's commitment to patriotic rhetoric and national myth was boosted by the Prince of Wales's support; he in turn provided further focus for their nationalist ideals.²⁸ Partisan polemic reached fever pitch at least twice in the 1730s, first in 1733 with the Excise crisis and then building again to the declaration of war against Spain in 1739. Throughout this period, the Opposition's campaign sought not just to attack Walpole and his policies, but also to put forward positive alternatives, demonstrating their commitment to the nation through the Prince's support for national arts and manufacture. As Gerrard points out, Prince Frederick was the 'people's prince' and

²⁵ Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont. Diary of Viscount Percival afterwards First Earl of Egmont*, 3 vols (London, 1920), II, 17; cited in Gerrard, 13.

²⁶ Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 24-30, 137-80, 230-5; Carretta, *The Snarling Muse*; Gerrard; Herbert M. Atherton, *Political Prints in the Age of Hogarth: a Study of the Ideographic Representation of Politics* (Oxford, 1974).

²⁷ Gerrard, 101. Thomas Cleary similarly notes that the so-called 'Broad-Bottom' faction, led by Lord Cobham from 1735, recognised the importance of literary propaganda in their oppositional campaigns; Thomas R. Cleary, *Henry Fielding: Political Writer* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1984), 4.

²⁸ In supporting an heir to the throne, the opposition could not be accused of disloyalty, as Walpole had himself recognised; see Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 37; Gerrard, 14.

might have become ‘a “Patriot King” in the national, British, rather than political sense of the term’.²⁹ Through a range of political and cultural factors, then, the language and concepts of patriotism and nationalism were highlighted in the 1730s.³⁰

National identity and culture

Endorsement of national myth, while often instigated for partisan ends, inevitably stimulated and interacted with less obviously institutional (but still political) attempts to create a national corpus of art works.³¹ In this sense—and particularly in terms of the important steps taken in several fields to form artistic canons during the century—interest in English or British culture and history was not merely patriotic (endorsing English- or Britishness against the threat of the Other), but nationalistic, in that it attempted to define and shape the nation’s identity.³² One means of achieving national ‘representation’ was through a focus on certain ideal historical figures such as Shakespeare, Spenser, Alfred the Great and Elizabeth I; another, quite distinct, technique was through turning to the cultural works of those figures.³³

The *Works of the English Poets* (68 vols., 1779-81) for which Johnson prepared his *Lives* was one of many publications competing to shape national self-image. John Bell stated in a prospectus for his *Poets of Great Britain* (109 vols.,

²⁹ Gerrard, 42, 14, 82, 194-8, 212, 14-15; see also 46-67. I’m indebted to Gerrard’s succinct analysis of ‘Patriots and Patriotism’ (3-18).

³⁰ Wilson makes the point that the oppositional campaigns against Walpole—particularly surrounding the Excise crisis—permanently reconfigured political debate towards populist and nationalist strategies; *The Sense of the People*, 134-6.

³¹ Gerrard points out that even poets with opposition alignment were committed to general cultural patriotism (48-57). In a political context, Wilson observes that patriotism was an important and often apolitical concept in the mid-century; *The Sense of the People*, 14.

³² For the importance of scholarship and history in development of the nation, see Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 109-15.

³³ On King Alfred, Elizabeth I, Spenser and other mytho-historic figures, see Gerrard, 116-17, 150-84.

1776-82) that he would present a publication of 'English classics' in answer to the energy that had been lavished on the classical tradition and to the French and Italians who had already 'rewarded the memories of their illustrious countrymen'.³⁴ The most famous example of the process of canon-formation is the creation of Shakespeare as 'the Bard' in the eighteenth century, a reinvention of his plays (and often representations of his person) both on the stage and as literature in a way that was profoundly contingent on eighteenth-century concerns.³⁵ In 1747 William Warburton prefaced his edition of Shakespeare with comments on the desirability of forming a fixed, pure national language, to be based on appropriate editions of canonical works:

the greatest men of Antiquity never thought themselves better employed than in cultivating their own country idiom.... Nor do we want Examples of the same good sense in modern Times, even amidst the cruel inroads that Art and Fashion have made upon Nature and the simplicity of Wisdom.... But the *English* tongue, at this Juncture, deserves and demands our particular regard. It hath, by means of the many excellent Works of different kinds composed in it, engaged the notice, and become the study, of almost every curious and learned Foreigner, so as to be thought even a part of literary accomplishment. This must needs make it deserving of critical attention: And its being yet destitute of a Test or Standard to apply to, in cases of doubt or difficulty, shews how much it wants that attention. For we have neither GRAMMAR nor DICTIONARY, neither Chart nor Compass, to guide us through this wide sea of Words. And indeed how should we? since both are to be composed and finished on the Authority of our best established Writers.... It is with pleasure I observe, that these things now begin to be understood among ourselves.³⁶

³⁴ Advertisement in Dryden's *The Spanish Fryar* (1777); cited in Thomas F. Bonnell, 'Bookselling and Canon-Making: The Trade Rivalry over the English Poets, 1776-1783', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 19 (1989), 53-69 (57). See also idem, 'John Bell's *Poets of Great Britain*: The "Little Trifling Edition" Revisited', *Modern Philology* 85 (1987), 128-52 (130). Bonnell lists eleven explicitly 'national' poetic collections of the latter half of the eighteenth century in 'Speaking of Institutions and Canonicity, Don't Forget the Publishers', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21 (1997), 97-9.

³⁵ See, among many others: Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions*; Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford, 1992); Margareta De Grazia, *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus* (Oxford, 1991); Simon Jarvis, *Scholars and Gentlemen: Shakespearean Textual Criticism and Representations of Scholarly Labour, 1725-1765* (Oxford, 1995); Jean Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text: Shakespeare, Adaptation, & Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Kentucky, 1995); Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York, 1989); Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing: the Beginnings of Interpretative Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1997).

³⁶ *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. William Warburton, 8 vols. (1747), I, xxiv-vi.

The enthusiasm Warburton describes for creating a national language—one recognised and admired by foreigners—from the works of a national poet is also present elsewhere, however, as other writers and artists aspired to attain similar recognition. The sense that contemporary writers—and readers—took pride in a developing national literary heritage in which they, too, could play a part was tied to the gradual triumph of the ‘moderns’ and creative or emulative practice over adherence to imitation of the classical ‘ancients’.³⁷ Similarly, in the visual arts William Hogarth was simply the most prominent among a number of painters attempting to establish a name for British art through the formation of academies (most notably the St Martin’s Lane and Royal Academies) and, particularly in Hogarth’s case, the forging of a defiantly demotic indigenous artistic repertoire.³⁸

It is not paradoxical that belief in the continual refinement and improvement of modern literature and the fine arts also meant pride in the national artistic heritage. Most mid-century artists could only assert that their own art was in a state of improvement—rather than in constant decline from the pinnacle of ancient achievement—by eschewing the perfection of the ancients in favour of that of their own forebears: Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare were, after all, relatively ‘modern’ for the eighteenth century when compared to Homer and Virgil.³⁹

Not only artists, but also the general public participated in the creation of national self-image. To give just a few examples, the Society for the Reformation of

³⁷ Weinbrot, *Britannia’s Issue*; Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (London, 1991). Even those who were optimistic about historical ‘progress’ and believed the moderns superior to the ancients still maintained the cyclical nature of history; see chapter one, note 130.

³⁸ Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1992-93), particularly volume 3; Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (1959, 3rd edn., New Haven and London, 1997); Sir Walter R. M. Lamb, *The Royal Academy: A Short History of Its Foundation and Development* (London, 1951).

³⁹ Ronald Paulson even suggests that, with no indigenous artistic heritage of their own, fine artists based the national development of their work on the English literary tradition; *Book and Painting. Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible: Literary Texts and the Emergence of English Painting* (Knoxville, Tennessee, 1982).

Manners, which campaigned for general improvement in the nation's morals, was highly active in the early eighteenth century; the Society for the Encouragement of Learning was founded in 1735; the Anti-Gallican Association was founded in 1745 'to promote British manufactures, to extend the commerce of England, to discourage the introduction of French modes and oppose the importation of French commodities'. Although many of these societies were initiated and dominated by the middle classes, aristocratic interest was also present; for example, the Shakespeare Ladies' Club was founded in the late 1730s to champion Shakespeare over Italian opera and other supposedly licentious theatre.⁴⁰ At the same time Aaron Hill suggested establishing a national dramatic academy, while Alexander Pope and a number of prominent Opposition figures began a campaign to commemorate Shakespeare in Westminster Abbey, which in turn helped instigate the plan to turn the nave of the Abbey as a whole into a tribute to British worthies.⁴¹ Although this project began as a partisan 'Patriot' initiative, the appropriation of its programme by a diverse community of interests (the Opposition's Shakespeare was also perceived as a monument to Jacobitism, female patronage and the common people) ensured its

⁴⁰ D. G. C. Allan, *William Shipley: Founder of the Royal Society of Arts* (London, 1968, repr. 1979), 16; Allan briefly discusses improving Societies in general (6-19), as does Colley in *Britons* (85-98). See also Allan, 'The Society of Arts and Government, 1754-1800: Public Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1974), 434-52; idem and John L. Abbott, eds., *'The Virtuoso Tribe of Arts and Sciences': Studies in the Eighteenth-Century Work and Membership of the London Society of Arts* (Athens, Ga. and London, 1992). On the Society for the Reformation of Manners, see Dudley W. R. Bahlman, *The Moral Revolution of 1688* (New Haven, 1957); T. C. Curtis and W. A. Speck, 'The Societies for the Reformation of Manners: A Case Study in the Theory and Practice of Moral Reform', *Literature and History* No. 3 [Vol. 2] (1976), 45-64. On the Society for the Encouragement of Learning, see Gerrard, 54-7. On the Shakespeare Ladies' Club, see Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 146-58. For the Societies' impact on concepts of political virtue, see Burt, *Virtue Transformed*, 39-63. On the role of clubs in eighteenth-century society, see John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), 34-50; Robert J. Allen, *The Clubs of Augustan London* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933). Gerald Newman notes the importance of various cultural institutions to the formation of national consciousness in *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 67, 125-6, 163, 193.

⁴¹ On Hill, see Gerrard, 51-4 (52). On the Abbey campaign, see Morris R. Brownell, *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England* (Oxford, 1978), 329, 339-56; David Bindman and Malcolm Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument: Sculpture as Theatre* (New Haven, 1995), 9-23; see further discussion in Chapter 6.

enduring national relevance.⁴² Similarly, according to Ruth Smith, oratorios, which premised a relationship between the biblical Israelite and the modern Briton, helped to fulfil a programme to reform and revitalise the morality, religious belief and patriotism of the nation, but maintained their popularity in part because they were open to multiple—often conflicting—interpretations.⁴³ Opposition policy in the 1730s specifically attempted to foster patriotism on a partisan level; but the appropriation or reinterpretation of Governmental and Oppositional propaganda, and of non-partisan national works by both political parties and by a range of other groups ensured that development of a national identity was far from being just a partisan project.⁴⁴

Politics, ‘Public Spirit’ and national arts

Why was it that the search for national cultural identity managed to outlast the 1730s’ ‘Patriot’ Opposition and, indeed, maintain such valence and influence? The ubiquitous appropriation of nationalist endeavours reminds us of the range of levels on which the political could operate.⁴⁵ For a gentleman in the first half of the eighteenth century in particular, every action could be deemed political. In part, as Habermas shows, this depended on a pre-existent conception of the ‘public’: when medieval ‘publicness’ was claimed for the lord, the publicness of representation

⁴² Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 134-64. On appropriation as the lifeblood of artistic heritage, see Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, 1982).

⁴³ Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, 52-3; Smith demonstrates numerous interpretative conflicts in the oratorios (210-334, *passim*).

⁴⁴ Probably the most famous example of multiple partisan interpretation is the reception of Addison’s *Cato*, but all literature and theatre was open to misreadings (often deliberate) or reinterpretation; see John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford, 1963), *passim*; Bertrand Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (Lincoln, Nebraska and London, 1976), *passim*; Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party 1714-1760* (Cambridge, 1982), 92.

⁴⁵ G. E. C. Catlin defines politics as ‘concerned with the relations of men, in association and competition, submission and control, in so far as they seek, not the production and consumption of

‘was not constituted as a social realm, that is, as a public sphere; rather, it was something like a status attribute’.⁴⁶ In a sense this still applied in the eighteenth century, in which, as J. C. D. Clark has shown, the hegemony of the British ‘*ancien régime*’ continued: for much of the century only a few men were enfranchised citizens, and only they could truly be called ‘the public’.⁴⁷ The aristocracy’s privilege to retain their land in the teeth of financial ruin was enshrined in law until 1914, giving rise not only to the old saw about ‘an Englishman’s Home’, but also to a strong sense among the aristocracy of their importance in maintaining a particular national identity rooted in continuity of land ownership and the myth of the ancient constitution.⁴⁸ In this older sense, if gentlemen were the *polis*, their public acts were political.

This understanding of what was properly ‘public’ and ‘political’ was also mediated by another important system for defining the social order, the concept of civic humanism. The history of this ideal of active citizenship, traced by J. G. A. Pocock, shows that the Florentine humanists re-ignited interest in an ancient pattern of thought in which ‘only as a citizen, as political animal involved in a *vivere civile* with his fellows, could [the individual] fulfill his nature, achieve virtue, and find his world rational’.⁴⁹ The civic humanist ethos of public virtue—eschewing unnecessary private gain or pleasure, which led to corruption, in the interest of moral probity and support of one’s country—was key to the debate between virtue

some article, but to have their way with their fellow men’; Catlin, *Science and Method of Politics* (New York, 1927), 262; cited in Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State*, 12.

⁴⁶ Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 7.

⁴⁷ Clark, *English Society 1688-1832*. Although Clark’s views on the supremacy of the aristocracy are considered extreme, he has provided a useful foil for the many progress-oriented ‘Whig’ histories of the period.

⁴⁸ David Sugarman and Ronnie Warrington, ‘Land Law, Citizenship, and the Invention of “Englishness”: The Strange World of the Equity of Redemption’, *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London and New York, 1995), 111-43.

⁴⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 114.

and passion that, Pocock asserts, dominated much of eighteenth-century social thought, and that also defined the rhetoric of nationalism.⁵⁰ In simple terms, as formulated in the early eighteenth century by Shaftesbury and others, the practice of civic virtue meant above all possession of a ‘Public spirit’ or passion for the ‘*Sense of Publick Weal, and of the Common Interest*’: ‘To love the Publick, to study universal Good, and to promote the Interest of the whole World, as far as lies within our power, is surely the Height of Goodness, and makes that Temper which we call *Divine*.’⁵¹ By the eighteenth century it was also felt that only those without particular private interests—and therefore supposedly incorruptible—could determine what was in the ‘common interest’. Such ‘independence’ was possessed by those who had a physical, fixed stake in the country, and the leisure to work in public office and consider their nation’s good—in other words, the male landed gentry; as Pocock puts it, ‘God’s Englishman was now *zoon politikon* in virtue of his sword and his freehold’.⁵² As those opposed to the government constantly reminded the country from 1675 onwards, such citizens would express their virtue by working

⁵⁰ Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 462; chapters thirteen to fifteen (pp. 423-552) particularly discuss this debate. Elsewhere, Pocock states that ‘What we used to think of as the Age of Reason may just as well be called the Age of Virtue’; Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1985), 66. Newman notes the importance of virtuous opposition to the moral ruin brought about by (luxurious) foreign cultural influence, but, strangely (given that he cites Pocock elsewhere), fails to tie this argument to civic humanist ideas of virtue, finding it instead to be ‘an illogical tribalistic jumble of beliefs’; Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 67.

⁵¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, 3 vols (1711, 4th edn, 1727), I: 104, 37; the former is cited in Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, 5. See also James Thomson, *Liberty* (1735-6). This definition is still supported in the mid-century; in his *Dictionary* Johnson in part defines ‘public’ as ‘regarding the good of the community’; cited in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 96. See also Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* (Cambridge, forthcoming), chapter one.

⁵² Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 386. David H. Solkin, ‘Great Pictures or Great Men? Reynolds, Male Portraiture, and the Power of Art’, *Oxford Art Journal* 9 (1986), 42-9; John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London, 1983), 17-50, and *passim*.

for the national good and eschewing the self interest encouraged by Governmental corruption, which would ultimately lead only to the decline of Britain as a whole.⁵³

As we might infer from Habermas's and others' studies of the developing public sphere, political concern for the nation became nationalism as the polity itself expanded. With newspapers and other, physical spaces of social contact forming a bridge between old and new forms of civic consciousness, so, as both product of and response to hostility towards growing State control of daily life, the ideology of the nation seems to have become a primary means of reinforcing what Habermas calls a 'publicity of representation';⁵⁴ what was now being represented was not courtly individuals, as had been the case in earlier centuries, but national types.⁵⁵ Thus the creation of nationally recognised literary canons from the late seventeenth century onwards was a manifestation of the burgeoning—and highly commercial—public sphere. The distribution networks of booksellers and circulating libraries not only ensured but encouraged the development of literary canons, as consumers and producers alike sought a way through the bewildering array of texts by creating distributional hierarchies.⁵⁶ These hierarchies were particularly necessary for the ubiquitous 'rise' of the middle class, which was effected as much through cultural

⁵³ Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, entries on corruption; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 401-22 (see notes 22 and 23 above); Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 102-18, 169-75.

⁵⁴ Habermas's study focusses in particular on the coffee house. For the importance of London's coffee houses to the political, commercial and social infrastructure of the country, see Bryant Lillywhite, *London Coffee Houses; a Reference Book of Coffee Houses of the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, [1963]), 17-27.

⁵⁵ Habermas notes that 'In English the development from "opinion" to "public opinion" proceeded via "public spirit"; *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 93. A prime (but by no means isolated) example of public hostility to new State controls during this period is the Excise crisis of 1733. On popular political movements, see note 12, above. See also John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England 1700-1832* (London, 1979). Although focusing on the nineteenth century, one authority on nation building, Charles Tilly, makes the case for just such an interaction of social movements and political contexts; Tilly, 'Social Movements and National Politics', *Statemaking and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory*, ed. Charles Bright and Susan Harding (Michigan, 1984), 297-317.

⁵⁶ Bonnell, 'Bookselling and Canon-Making', 51-69; James Raven, 'From Promotion to Proscription: Arrangements of Reading and Eighteenth-Century Libraries', *The Practice and Representation of*

attainments as through material acquisition.⁵⁷ In order to assure their cultural practices were appropriate to their newly gentrified state, the ever-expanding middle classes had to have well defined standards to which to adhere.

Canons were then established as concepts of taste also began to be defined. As with the formation of national identity generally, the regulation of taste was a political process.⁵⁸ The notion of polite society championed particularly by Addison and Steele in the *Spectator* showed that, while some degree of refinement and wealth was deemed necessary to cultivate polite taste from the mere enjoyment of natural feelings open to all, a 'Man of Polite Imagination' no longer had to be a man of property.⁵⁹ Further, taste and politeness were to be cultivated as part of a commercial attempt at 'virtuous sociability'.⁶⁰ Against the civic humanist perception of the mercenary and socially disruptive threat of commercial society, the polite culture advocated by the *Spectator* and other papers—and by later Court Whig propaganda of the 1730s—was built on a virtuous commercial world, where industry and diversity (rather than a feared over-specialisation) produced a prosperous, hard-working society, one constantly seeking interaction and improvement for self and

Reading in England, ed. James Raven, Helen Small and Naomi Tadmor (Cambridge, 1996), 175-201; see also the essays by Naomi Tadmor, Jan Fergus, and John Brewer in this volume.

⁵⁷ On the importance of nascent capitalism for social and political development, see, for example, Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J. H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1982); and volumes from the Luxury Project: John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London, 1993); John Brewer and Susan Staves, eds., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, (London and New York, 1995); Ann Bermingham and John Brewer, eds., *The Consumption of Culture, 1600-1800: Image, Object, Text* (London, 1995).

⁵⁸ John Brewer provides an excellent introduction to the concept and importance of 'taste' in eighteenth-century life, and the process of negotiating and denying access to its realm for those traditionally excluded from discourses of cultivated learning (women and the lower classes); Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 56-122 (esp. 87ff.).

⁵⁹ See Joseph Addison's 'Pleasures of the Imagination' essays in the *Spectator*, and Richard Steele's comment in the *Tatler* no. 207 that 'The Appellation of a Gentleman is never to be affixed to a Man's Circumstances'; cited in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 90-1. Pocock describes the eighteenth-century progress from the civic humanist ideal of 'virtue' to the more commercially sensible interest in 'manners'; Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History*, 37-50.

⁶⁰ David Solkin, 'ReWrighting Shaftesbury: The *Air Pump* and the Limits of Commercial Humanism', *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, 234-53 (241).

society.⁶¹ Shaftesbury illustrated the attempt to reconcile civic humanist thinking and politeness when he said that ‘A public spirit can only come from a social feeling or sense of partnership with human kind’.⁶² The most obvious aspect of this sense of partnership was, of course, national identity.

In various forms, the older concepts of civic virtue and the newly emergent notion of taste were active throughout the eighteenth century, and their influence on the arts was profound. All artists who aspired to respectability—and particularly those who aspired to the status of gentlemen, as artists increasingly did—had in some way also to represent their art as of public benefit.⁶³ For those in the mechanic arts (such as painting and music), access to such status was particularly problematic under the civic humanist system, as the skill specialisation their art required debarred them from the rounded, general appreciation of society necessary for participating in assessment of the common good.⁶⁴ Although mechanic artists increasingly managed to achieve the status of gentlemen, apparent artistic autonomy

⁶¹ Elizabeth A. Bohls, ‘Disinterestedness and Denial of the Particular: Locke, Adam Smith, and the subject of aesthetics’, *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick, Jr. (Cambridge, 1993), 16-51; Lawrence E. Klein, ‘Property and Politeness in the Early Eighteenth-Century Whig Moralists: The Case of the *Spectator*’, *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, 222-33; Solkin, ‘ReWrighting Shaftesbury’, 240. Bohls, Klein and Solkin all point out how important it was for the new proponents of politeness to reconcile their ideas with the hegemonic discourse of civic humanism; indeed, Bohls suggests aesthetics helped proponents of civic virtue rechannel their ‘disinterested’ world view. See also David H. Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere* (New Haven and London, 1993). On the principled civic humanist distaste for ‘change’ see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 402. Shelley Burt further complicates the picture with her study of early eighteenth-century ‘privately oriented civic virtue’, which serves as a link between the older ethos of civic humanism and incipient liberal capitalism; Burt, *Virtue Transformed*, 64-86, 110-27; see also Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, History*, 47-50, 105-23. Use of conduct books particularly exemplifies the culture of ‘improvement’; see Jan Fergus, ‘Provincial servants’ reading in the late eighteenth century’, *The Practice and Representation of Reading in England*, 202-25 (214-6).

⁶² Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), ed. John M. Robertson, 2 vols in 1 (Indianapolis, In., 1964), I, 72; cited in Solkin, ‘ReWrighting Shaftesbury’, 240.

⁶³ For enlightening accounts of the difficult process by which a range of artists negotiated their independent status see, for example, John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*; Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 165-222 (on David Garrick); Paulson, *Hogarth*, Vol. 3, *passim*; Solkin, *Painting for Money*. By contrast, for an account of one writer’s attempt to win patronage, see David Nokes, *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship* (Oxford, 1995).

⁶⁴ Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt*, 10-18.

from noble patronage simply demonstrated increasing dependence on new quasi-institutional frameworks.⁶⁵ Again, concepts of national identity seem to have helped eighteenth-century artists and craftsmen bridge the gap between the ideal that their art would be cultivated by and for an elite and the reality that they worked in a competitive marketplace. If their manufacture was in some way representative of or ennobling for the nation or, indeed, if it served to advance national prosperity and well-being, why should they not hold their heads as high as any who had been recognised by nobility?⁶⁶

Nationalism and opera

The attraction for any artist or patron of establishing him (or her)self as a figure contributing to the national good is, I hope, by now apparent. How, then, might eighteenth-century opera be read in this light? The many nationalistic (we might even say jingoistic) statements propounding the creation of indigenous opera are, of course, familiar. Indeed, the desire to find a national operatic voice is a constant in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century commentaries on the state of music in

⁶⁵ Robert Campbell in *The London Tradesman* (1747) specifically aims to help his reader 'make his Son a Gentleman' (93). See J. H. Plumb, *The Commercialization of Leisure in 18th-Century England* (Reading, 1973); McKendrick, Brewer, and Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society*. Lawrence Lipking suggests we should see historians such as Walpole, Reynolds, Burney, Hawkins, and Johnson in this light; Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England*, 19. On the new frameworks, see Paul J. Korshin, 'Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1974), 453-73; Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 74-5; on the importance of the audience at large in the theatre, see Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin, Texas, 1971). Older patronage systems continued to play an important part in artistic production throughout the century, however; see Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England 1650-1800* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁶⁶ Defoe and Hogarth are signal examples of the artist-manufacturer of the people; for Defoe's many writings on commerce and trade, see P. N. Furbank and W. R. Owens, *A Critical Bibliography of Daniel Defoe* (London, 1998). On this subject see also Stephen Copley, 'The Fine Arts in Eighteenth-Century Polite Culture', *Painting and the Politics of Culture: New Essays on British Art 1700-1850*, ed. John Barrell (Oxford, 1982), 13-37; Solkin, 'ReWrighting Shaftesbury', 242-9; Solkin, *Painting for Money*; Ronald Paulson, 'Emulative consumption and literacy: The Harlot, Moll Flanders, and Mrs. Slipslop', *The Consumption of Culture*, 383-400. Newman discusses the artist's 'emancipation' from aristocratic patronage in nationalist terms in *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 91-100, though again he oversimplifies artistic hostility to this apparent servitude and to the noble

Britain, from Matthew Locke's and John Dryden's prefatory sallies on nations and opera, to librettist and composer Henry Carey's call for the British to restore their 'antient Native Nobleness ... And let the World a BRITON's Name revere'; from Aaron Hill's plea to Handel for a new, native 'species of dramatic Opera', to William Mason's lament in 1795 that, had they paid due attention to Addison in the *Spectator*, 'earlier English Composers, might have produced, what we shall now probably ever want, a true national Recitative'.⁶⁷ For several reasons, however, it seems that the nationalist emphasis of these statements has not been linked to the efforts of contemporary opera makers.

The reasons for this are, I suggest, fourfold. First, and most simply, as statements of nationalist intent are generally seen to originate from critics of opera—or at best unwilling practitioners—voicing their antipathy not just to foreign opera but to the genre as a whole, their relevance to operatic practice is therefore seen to be circumscribed. Dryden may have contributed substantially to the Restoration opera libretto, but he disliked having to act as a 'doggerel Rhymer';⁶⁸ Addison may have written *Rosamond* (1707), but his attacks on opera are more long lived. When, however, we couple the critiques of men like Dryden, Addison, Jeremy Collier, John Dennis and John Brown, to name but a few, to those of committed operaphiles like Hill and Carey, and to the practice of many English opera librettists and composers, we might—as I attempt to show in chapters three and four—begin to see a pattern of positive application as well as one of negative criticism.

patron. For reappraisals of artist-patron relationships, see Korshin, 'Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage'; Griffin, *Literary Patronage*.

⁶⁷ Matthew Locke, Preface to *The English Opera* (1675), ed. Michael Tilmouth in *Matthew Locke: Dramatic Music*, Musica Britannica 51 (London, 1986); John Dryden, Preface to *Albion and Albanius* (1685); Henry Carey, 'Satyr on the Luxury and Effeminacy of the Age', *Poems on Several Occasions* (3rd edn, London, 1729), 28; Aaron Hill, Letter to Handel, 5 December 1732; cited in Deutsch, 299; William Mason, *Essays, Historical and Critical, on English Church Music* (1795), 5.

⁶⁸ Dryden, Preface to *Albion and Albanius*, in *The Works of John Dryden* vol. 15 ed. Earl Miner (Berkeley and London, 1976), 10.

Secondly, if a focus on opera criticism leads us to treat the operas themselves as ideologically empty vessels, so too can concentration on the individual musical work. Eighteenth-century English opera and related forms, musically so much in the shadow of their more illustrious Restoration cousins, have fallen under an interpretative umbrella that regards works from that earlier period as ‘occasional treats’.⁶⁹ At the same time, Italian opera in London is largely viewed from the heights of Handel’s genius, his contemporaries and context given scant attention.⁷⁰ To the twentieth-century opera lover—or even scholar—who views opera as primarily an aural entertainment, the musical self-sufficiency of most eighteenth-century Italian operas requires that we look no further for our interpretation, while the musical insufficiency of most English operas of this period means we avert our gaze altogether.⁷¹ Examination of opera on a purely musical or generic basis, while invaluable, tells only half the story, and obviously it is almost invariably only the half that we, with the advantage of hindsight and within the strictures of our disciplinary and institutional frameworks, think worth telling. It is as a consequence of such generic, musical and composer-oriented assessments that the story of

⁶⁹ Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, I: The King’s Theatre, Haymarket, 1778-1791* (Oxford, 1995), 3.

⁷⁰ The several groundbreaking studies of opera management in the first half of the eighteenth century obviously provide a less Handel-orientated view, as do studies like those of Reinhard Strohm, founded on an understanding of the international movement of libretti and music; see Taylor, Gibson, the various articles by Milhous and Hume (cited in the bibliography); of Strohm’s work see, for example, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera* (Cambridge, 1985); idem, *Dramma per Musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1997). Nonetheless, books like that of Price, Milhous and Hume on the King’s Theatre in the 1780s (see previous note) are notably lacking for the early eighteenth century.

⁷¹ Unsurprisingly—and not very helpfully—when attention is devoted to English opera composers, the prime interest is to demonstrate their musical quality (and therefore their unjustified neglect); see, most recently, Jane Girdham, *English Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London: Stephen Storace at Drury Lane* (Oxford, 1997).

eighteenth-century English opera has largely been seen as one of blunders or, in Roger Fiske's words, of a 'lack [of] purpose and direction'.⁷²

Thirdly and more seriously, when considering Italian opera in London, we might ask why this genre should be understood in a parochial, nationalist light at all. As Reinhard Strohm explains, it was a supremely international genre:

it was characterized by aesthetic attitudes and practical conditions which then formed a continuous tradition all over Europe.... And its heroic-historical *sujets* themselves illustrated the importance of supranational dynasties and their interactions.⁷³

The British aristocracy, established francophiles, required only the Grand Tour to ensure that they equally emulated their Italian contemporaries.⁷⁴ As the founders of the first Royal Academy of Music in 1674 had self-consciously imitated the French, so those who created the second Academy and successive ventures sought to launch the King's Theatre as one of the premier Italian opera venues of Europe.⁷⁵ Surely Gerald Newman is right to propose that members of the aristocracy revelled in their internationalism, defining themselves as a civilised, cosmopolitan elite? As such, was Italian opera not simply another sign of their conspicuous consumption?⁷⁶

It would seem not. Colley points out that most of the aristocracy travelled and bought abroad only to confirm their 'prejudices and position', using foreign

⁷² Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (1973; rev. edn, Oxford, 1986), 127; see also pp.580-4. Fiske speaks with resignation of the century as a whole and the period of 'English opera' and burlesque in particular.

⁷³ Strohm, *Dramma per Musica*, 2, 7.

⁷⁴ Gibson, 51-107; Jeremy Black, *The British Abroad: the Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (New York, 1992); Christopher Hibbert, *The Grand Tour* (London, 1987); Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bignamini, *Grand Tour: the Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1996). For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century background to the eighteenth-century love of Italy's classical heritage, see Edward Chaney, ed. *The Evolution of the Grand Tour: Anglo-Italian Cultural Relations since the Renaissance* (London, 1998).

⁷⁵ Pierre Danchin, 'The Foundation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1674 and Pierre Perrin's *Ariane*', *Theatre Survey* 25 (1984), 55-67. For the second Academy's proposal, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'New Light on Handel and the Royal Academy of Music in 1720', *Theatre Journal* 35 (1983), 149-67 (165-7).

⁷⁶ Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 1-47, esp. 21ff. William Weber, 'Handel's London—Social, Political and Intellectual Contexts', *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge, 1997), 45-54 (47-50).

culture, dress, food and manners (rather as Britons today might use a suntan) to demonstrate their superiority through the fact that they really *had* been abroad, but displaying their *hauteur* when abroad just as openly.⁷⁷ Aristocratic ‘prejudices’ were often as vehemently patriotic as those of their plebian compatriots. However much British satirists might protest otherwise, Italy was primarily of interest to young gentlemen not for modern mores but for militaristic, empire-building classical heritage, to which Britons deemed they—not ‘degenerate’ modern Italians—were the true successors.⁷⁸ While young ‘milords’ certainly came back from Italy with trunks full of music and minds full of their own operatic ventures, the modernity of Italian opera as a genre should not mask the classicism of many of its subjects, and the import of those subjects for British national consciousness.

Fourthly and most importantly, then, we miss the national (and nationalist) import of opera in Britain because we generally fail to understand sufficiently opera’s relationship to politics. We have, of course, a range of studies—of Restoration opera in particular—which lavish energy on mining the major works for their (often amazingly full) store of topical and political allusion (in *Dido and Aeneas*, from the state of the royal marriage to the weather).⁷⁹ But these individual political readings present only discrete interpretations of individual works; the sense of an ideological overview, or of the possibility that the practicalities of opera might be linked to patterns of historical polemic, is limited.⁸⁰ In other words, such studies

⁷⁷ Colley, *Britons*, 166.

⁷⁸ For the importance of the Grand Tour to a young man’s classical education see, for example, Bignamini, ‘Grand Tour: Open Issues’, *Grand Tour*, 31-6.

⁷⁹ The ‘weather’ evidence is used for *Dido*’s dating by Bruce Wood and Andrew Pincock, “‘Unscarr’d by turning times’?: The Dating of Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*”, *EM* 20 (1992), 372-90. The current politically oriented debate about the dating of *Dido* goes back to John Buttrey, ‘Dating Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas*’, *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 64 (1967-8), 51-62.

⁸⁰ Curtis Price and, more recently, Andrew Walkling have provided some sense of a broader perspective for the Restoration and very beginning of the eighteenth century, as have James Jacob and Timothy Raylor for a slightly earlier period. See, for example, Curtis Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge, 1984); idem, ‘Political Allegory in Late-Seventeenth-Century English

seldom attempt to grapple with the general import of the politics of reception for a genre that is, as Lorenzo Bianconi and Thomas Walker put it, ‘compromised ... by the society that produces and consumes it’.⁸¹ That process of compromise means not only that individual operas might reflect particular events in high politics, but also that opera—as with all other art forms—is implicated in, affected by and has the power itself to influence broader cultural politics. This is especially so in a period that was, as Ruth Smith reminds us, ‘obsessively political in its outlook’.⁸² While pioneering studies by Konrad Sasse and Reinhard Strohm in particular have indicated the potential for political exploration of Handelian opera, and while Smith’s examination of the composer’s oratorios shows just how important nationalist sentiment was to their reception history, little more has been done to place Handel’s operas in a national politico-cultural context in Britain.⁸³ This dissertation then aims to deepen our understanding of what the political could mean for opera by examining the presentation and reception of both Italian and English branches of the genre in London during a decade crucial to the development of theatre music and national identity in Britain.

The 1730s was a decade that saw challenges to both the musical and political order. On the political front, as we have seen, the dominance of Robert Walpole’s

Opera’, *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, ed. Nigel Fortune (Cambridge, 1987), 1-29; Andrew R. Walkling, ‘Politics and the Restoration Masque: The Case of *Dido and Aeneas*’, *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History*, ed. Gerald Maclean (Cambridge, 1995), 52-69; idem, ‘Masque and Politics at the Restoration Court: John Crowne’s *Calisto*’, *EM* 24 (1996), 27-62; James R. Jacob and Timothy Raylor, ‘Opera and Obedience: Thomas Hobbes and *A Proposition for Advancement of Morallitie* by Sir William Davenant’, *The Seventeenth Century* 6 (1991), 205-50.

⁸¹ Lorenzo Bianconi and Thomas Walker, ‘Production, Consumption and Political Function of Seventeenth-Century Opera’, *Early Music History* 4, ed. Iain Fenlon (Cambridge, 1984), 209-96 (211). The seminal normative account of artistic-social interaction is, of course, Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

⁸² Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, 173.

⁸³ Konrad Sasse, ‘Die Texte der Londoner Opern Händels in ihren gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen’, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg* 4 no. 5 (1955), 627-46; Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 34-79. Thomas McGeary is preparing a book on opera and politics in early eighteenth-century Britain.

Ministry inspired a concerted campaign from varied oppositional forces, which mobilised history and myth in the cause of patriotism, and ensured a general culture of reading for broadly political allegory and allusion. Musically, the 1730s was the decade in which, following the success of *The Beggar's Opera*, English opera proponents mounted their most concerted challenge to Italian opera; it was also the decade in which rival Italian opera companies vied for a (limited) audience, and which ultimately saw Handel shift—albeit gradually—from opera to oratorio. For the competing forces and factions of Italian and English opera, the bid for supremacy was inevitably linked with an appeal to authority (whether royalty, the nobility or the populace) that, I suggest, involved stressing their works' link with the national interest.

Italian opera was much reviled in 1730s London. I begin by exploring whether opera directors and supporters seemed to care about that hostility, and how they might have countered and assuaged it. My first chapter examines a range of discussions of opera from the 1730s, to suggest that the consistent politicisation of language surrounding opera reflects not only on the division between warring companies, but also on unease over the triviality of their operatic concerns. This discourse can be read as offering an attempt (sometimes ironic) to vindicate directors' interest in opera through an association with politics. A cursory survey of opera libretti during the period of rivalry between Handel and the so-called Opera of the Nobility (1733-37) reveals some ways in which these anxieties could translate into texts, allowing the latter also to be read in terms of national politics.

The second chapter focuses on a particularly problematic instance of opera's supposed politicisation in the 1730s, and proposes one possible 'solution' that also offers some indication of the flexibility and social contingency of operatic

interpretation. While historians have long espoused John Lord Hervey's famous suggestion that the 1730s rivalry between Handel and the 'Opera of the Nobility' was biased on grounds of institutional politics, current consensus among Handelians adduces financial and political evidence to give the lie to Hervey. My chapter proposes a reconciliation of modern findings and Hervey's account through close examination of Hervey's narrative and of the social and political events of 1733-34, the latter forming a background to the performance of the first two truly 'rival' operas, Handel's *Arianna in Creta* and Rolli's and Porpora's *Arianna in Nasso*. I seek to demonstrate that political allegory and emulation of society as well as each other played a part in the companies' rivalry. Understanding emulation's importance allows us to see the politicisation of opera not simply as a game of allegory, but also as a matter of cultural analogy, one positing opera as a nexus for social change.

Italian opera's potential to effect social change was precisely what many Britons feared. Although many of the attacks on the genre are well known, most seem to have been valued more for the piquancy they add to narratives of opera history, or as indicative of British xenophobia, than for their ideological content.⁸⁴ In chapter three an exploration of several of the mock singer's epistles from the 1720s to 1740s will be used to demonstrate that satirists' difficulties with Italian opera were concerned particularly with the then ubiquitous luxury problem. Samuel Johnson's bizarre 'opera' *Hurlothrumbo* (1729) is the focus, as it represents both the problem of unmanning and unmeaning Italian opera, and operaphiles' attempts to

⁸⁴ Dennis Arundell, *The Critic at the Opera* (London, 1957); Eric Walter White, *The Rise of English Opera* (1951, repr. New York, 1972), 47-51; Frederick C. Petty, *Italian Opera in London, 1760-1800* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1972); 69-85; James E. Wierzbicki, 'Burlesque Opera in London: 1729-1737' (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1979). Two studies that attempt productively to place British opera criticism (and operatic practice) in a cultural context are Thomas Nelson McGeary, 'English Opera Criticism and Aesthetics 1685-1747' (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1985), and John T.

assuage critical concerns. The degree of fascination with *Hurlothrumbo* as indicative of all that was wrong with opera is demonstrated by the longevity of the name: ‘Hurlothrumbo’ was used as a derogatory epithet till the end of the century. Johnson’s operatic work also provides a fascinating example of how opera producers might try to negotiate British unease, however. *Hurlothrumbo* is in English; it has an overtly heroic plot with strong political overtones; it contains a large element of (albeit unwitting) parody; and, most importantly, like all Johnson’s works it draws heavily on one increasingly canonical figure—Milton.

When giving papers on this and related topics I have more than once been challenged over my use of one particular term. The vexed issue of what constitutes ‘English opera’ and the continued polemic for or against the genre are inevitably related to the question of establishing national culture. In the fourth chapter, I turn from the difficulties besetting Italian opera and its adherents in a climate of increasing nationalism to examine whether Britishness could be expressed in indigenous examples of the genre. Chapter four examines the concerted attempt in the 1730s to associate English opera and musical theatre with topics of national interest through composers’ and playwrights’ appropriation of the stories of historical British ballads as the local equivalent of the venerable texts of Italian opera. While apparently successful at the time, these ballad-based operas were still problematic. British opera’s reflection of changes in popular sensibility ensured that it continued to play a part in shaping cultural identity, while enabling that culture to reject it as merely ephemeral.

The most famous of the ballad-based works covered in the fourth chapter is Henry Carey’s and J. F. Lampe’s burlesque opera *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737).

Winemiller, ‘Handel’s Borrowing and Swift’s Bee: Handel’s ‘Curious’ Practice and the Theory of Transformative Imitation’, (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1994).

Roger Fiske's antipathy to burlesque opera seems in part to be a reaction to the eighteenth century's apparent propensity for it, but his reaction also chimes with the genre's paradoxical status as tainted and low-brow, and with earlier English dislike for burlesque as an explicitly foreign genre. *The Dragon of Wantley*, as a successful burlesque opera, both describes the stereotypical British hostility towards alien Italian opera through its reductive treatment of generic conventions, and at the same time illustrates the disquiet that indigenous forms could only ever be hyper- and hypocritical ciphers of the original, buffoons mimicking the monarch.

Of course, the real monarch was not Italian opera, but Handel. The cultural 'monument' to Handel of which Dean spoke thirty years ago still exists, but it was not raised on the foundation of his operas (even in 1999, undergraduates can express puzzlement—and concern—that a course about Handel should contain 'so much opera'). The dearth of studies on the cultural politics of English opera during the Handelian heyday may prompt us to announce, with John Merrill Knapp, that 'The Italians had conquered'.⁸⁵ Yet, however much musically we might feel this to be so, historically Italian opera's absence from the canon gives this statement the lie. The process of canon formation in the arts was intimately bound up with the coterminous constitution of national identity in Britain. The emergence of a musical canon in Britain—discussion of which has been initiated by William Weber—certainly merits more attention than I can give it here. Nonetheless, the final chapter offers a contribution towards such a study by examining just three aspects of Handel's apotheosis from successful entrepreneur and opera composer to national hero and progenitor of that successful national genre, English oratorio. Taking Dean's reflection on our Handel 'monument' literally, I examine the composer's image in

⁸⁵ J. Merrill Knapp, 'Eighteenth-Century Opera in London before Handel, 1705-1710', *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (London, 1984), 92-104.

the late 1730s—a time pivotal in his career—through its manifestations in the 1738 Roubiliac statue for Vauxhall Gardens and *Alexander's Feast*, and in Roubiliac's final monument in Westminster Abbey.

As 'the society that produces and consumes' a cultural product expands, so the political sphere that influences and is influenced by that product also dilates. Opera in eighteenth-century Britain, it seems, remaining either an aristocratic diversion or declining into English-language farce and pantomime, similarly failed to be integrated into the political manifestation of culture, the canon. Yet, the varied approaches to making or reading opera in a national political light can tell us as much about the faltering steps towards formation of national identity as can the evolution of more successful genres. It's my purpose here to explore some of those steps. Although it may seem that this dissertation is largely concerned to demonstrate the negative—how nationalism contributed to opera's failure to make the canon—I hope it also shows that, at a time when Britons were powerfully aware of the politics of nationhood, at least some of those who loved opera sought ways in which it, too, might contribute to the nation's good.

One

The politics of opera patronage

... while the people of this country continue vigorous enthusiasts for the maintenance of their religion, liberty, and the honour of the crown; the Stage must float on public favour, as the mirror of a nation's virtue, and the enlightened and polished school of a free people.

Thomas Gilliland, *A Dramatic Synopsis* (1801)¹

Looking back on eighteenth-century theatre from the vantage point of 1801, Thomas Gilliland could afford to be proud and positive. Not all had shared his viewpoint, however, and throughout the century critics of the theatre—most particularly of Italian opera—were many. Critics of opera expressed their opposition in specifically nationalist terms: the genre was one of the chief foreign encroachments by which British artists felt threatened, and against which they defended and defined themselves and their country. In 1727 Leonard Welsted used the male characters in *The Dissembled Wanton* to complain that ‘we daily import the Vices of Foreigners without their Virtues; and ... are sing-song’d at once out of our Senses, and our Money’. Ten years later the foolish ladies in Francis Lynch’s *The Independent Patriot: or, Musical Folly* were still asserting that ‘An *English* Song makes me sick to Death’.² James Miller’s several satires of contemporary society found artistic decay through dependence on foreigners at the heart of national stagnation; Britain had become ‘in thy State of Reprobation,/ [the] mere *Milch-cow* to ev’ry foreign Nation’.³

¹ Thomas Gilliland, *A Dramatic Synopsis, containing an Essay on the Political and Moral Use of the Theatre* (1801); cited in John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), 422.

² Welsted, *The Dissembled Wanton; or, My Son get Money* (1727), I.i; Lynch, *The Independent Patriot: or, Musical Folly* (1737), 24.

³ [James Miller], *Seasonable Reproof, A Satire in the Manner of Horace* (1735), 3. Although he initially included Handel in his criticism, Miller was later to revise his opinion and write the libretto for *Joseph and His Brethren* (1743).

In 1747 Robert Campbell provided a detailed and earnest assessment of the danger of Italian music for the British nation. It is worth quoting at length for its indication of how literally supposed national characteristics could be mapped onto those of music:

... the Spirit of most Nations may be learned by the Nature of the Music with which they are delighted: Florid sprightly Airs denote a fierce, hardy, and valiant People; but soft, delicate, and harmonious Notes bespeak the effeminate, lazy, and voluptuous Coward. While the Music of *Italy* was full of discord, and consisted more in Noise than Harmony, then was she the Mistress of the World: Her hardy Sons fought to the Tune of their rude artless Instruments with Courage and Intrepidity, and courted Death in the most distant Climes; but since she refined in her Taste of Music, and has been polished out of her rustic Melody, by degrees she has degenerated into what she is, a Nation of Priests, something less than Women; into a Race of mere effeminate Cowards.... a Refinement of our Taste into a Love of the soft *Italian* Music, is debasing the Martial Genius of the Nation; and may one Day be a Means to fiddle us out of our Liberties. I would chuse, if we are to be improved in Music, that the Composers would keep to the old *British* Key, and let us sing *English* as well as speak it...⁴

As Campbell's diatribe indicates, most satires of Italian opera were not opposed to music *per se* (though Campbell had his doubts about it as a useful profession), but wished to see it serve the nation's interest—something they argued it could not do in its Italianate form. Campbell's anthropomorphising of musical styles into representations of natural character accords with Gerald Newman's assessment that mid-eighteenth-century Britons sought to define themselves against the stereotyped menace of foreigners.⁵ As Newman observes, it is when the alien infringes most on home territory that we feel most imperilled. Italian opera in London was an obvious target for opprobrium. Still more threatening, however, were those Britons who themselves endorsed foreign mores and manners.

Pamphleteers and playwrights satirising opera consistently and vigorously criticised male and female aristocrats alike for their sponsorship of a genre

⁴ Robert Campbell, *The London Tradesman. Being a Compendious View of all Trades, Professions, Arts, both Liberal and Mechanic, now practised in the Cities of London and Westminster* (1747), 90, 92.

⁵ Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (London, 1987), 54-7.

apparently so antithetical to the ‘public spirit’: gentlemen had been reduced to ‘tattling Babes’, and not even that. Foreign fashion had so much debased the British noble that he was ‘By Art an Insect, [though] by Nature Man’; the opera Beau was a ‘gaudy Silkworm’, a ‘Bawble’ or ‘Butterfly’; his female counterparts were ‘Stale Virgins, and un-accommodated Prudes’. Britain could only ‘Blush to behold what Arts your Offspring grace’, for ‘Each fopling Heir now marks his Sire’s Disgrace’:

An Embrio Breed! of such a doubtful Frame,
You scarce could know the Sex, but by the Name:

...

Unhumaniz’d in Dress, with Cheek so wan!
He mocks GOD’s Image in the mimic Man:
Great Judge of Arts! o’er Toilets now presides,
Corrects our Fashions, or an *Opera* guides;
From Tyrant HANDEL, rends th’ Imperial Bay,
And guards the *Magna Charta* of— *Sol-fa*.⁶

No longer interested in enforcing the true constitution of their country, these noble lords can manage only a musical Magna Carta.

Although Newman does not discuss opera, this last sally might have bolstered his argument that criticism of the nobility as ‘seducers’ of their ‘ordinary, innocent’ countrymen into foreign vice and ultimate moral ruin was a crucial aspect of British nationalism (which was necessarily committed to ‘assisting the attack upon traditional society’).⁷ Newman’s reading is, perhaps, rather too influenced by subsequent, revolutionary expressions of nationalism. As Linda Colley has shown, the political radicalism of the 1780s and ’90s did target the aristocracy, but at a time when the aristocracy was in turn both consolidating its power and redefining its public image in patriotic and nationalist terms.⁸ Equally, Newman forgets that his

⁶ *The Modern Englishman. A Satire* (1738), 10, 7; Bawble and Butterfly are two fops in James Miller’s *The Coffee-House* (1737); Welsted, *The Dissembled Wanton*, I.i (p.2); Mr. Whitehead, *Honour. A Satire* (Dublin, 1747), 17-18.

⁷ Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 54.

⁸ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London, 1992), 152-5, 164-93.

aristocratic straw men already had an established tradition of service to the (admittedly proscribed) nation in the ancient civic humanist model, naturalised by James Harrington and Shaftesbury.⁹

A role of civic or public virtue—involving the active maintenance of national religion, liberty, and the honour of the crown—remained the ideal of every gentleman, and even woman. To recall one particularly public example from our period, mentioned in the Introduction, it was ‘Ladies of Quality’ who banded together to form the Shakespeare Ladies’ Club in the 1730s; their aim in reviving Shakespeare (both plays and Bard) was ‘to stop th’exotick flood,/ [and] wake, by *Shakespeare’s* nervous lays,/ The manly genius of *Eliza’s* days’.¹⁰ For such organisations, the sense of impending cultural doom from ‘th’exotick flood’ was specifically associated with opera. In Mary Cowper’s unpublished poem ‘On the Revival of Shakespear’s Plays by the Ladies in 1738’ a marginal note makes it clear that ‘Italian Operas’ were the ‘Sound’ responsible for Queen Dullness’s domination over contemporary Britain: ‘Then in our Verse, no *Energy* was found,/ And as we sunk in *Sense*, we rose in *Sound*’.¹¹ Appropriately, Pope’s attack on the reign of Dullness in the *Dunciad* is invoked in this poem, for Pope too equated the death of native literary talent and the decline of the taste of British patrons with the rise of opera.¹²

In 1737 Aaron Hill, like James Miller a would-be reformer of the London stage and sometime adherent of the ‘Patriot’ Opposition, wrote *The Tears of the*

⁹ On the influence of civic humanism on British (and American) political thought, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), 423-552; cited in the Introduction, note 50.

¹⁰ George Lillo, *Marina* (1738), ‘Epilogue’; cited in Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford, 1992), 154.

¹¹ Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 150-1.

¹² Pat Rogers has suggested that opera was a key metaphor of Dullness throughout *The Dunciad*; ‘The Critique of Opera in Pope’s *Dunciad*’, *MQ* 59 (1973), 15-30.

Muses, an impassioned lament for the state of the nation and its arts. His criticism of music assails the aimlessness of opera: ‘Near *Opera*’s fribling *Fugues*, what Muse can stay?/ Where wordless Warblings winnow *Thought*, away!’ Hill’s paean to his utopia, in which ‘concurring Keys and Chords’ work to improve ‘The Heart’s soft social Tyes’, echoes his famous earlier request that Handel compose English-language operas to ‘charm the *ear*, and hold fast the *heart*, together’.¹³ In promoting—rather than undermining—civic pride and national strength, it clearly speaks to contemporary political understanding, focussed on the culture of polite, rational intercourse discussed in the Introduction.

In short, ideals of civic virtue and the general improvement of society encouraged by the Shakespeare Ladies and others seemed to sit ill with the active participation of so many nobility in the promotion, administration and consumption of Italian opera. Were the aristocracy conscious of the incongruity between their actions and the principles of civic virtue? Did it bother them? Did they disguise their discomfort by seeking to ignore it? Or could they attempt to reconcile opera to virtuous ideals? This chapter seeks to answer these questions in three stages. First I examine what ideological space could be created for opera which might reconcile its patronage to contemporary mores. Then I test the viability of this ideology against opera’s representation in both public and private domains, asking how and why opera was represented as it was. Finally, I turn to the operas themselves, to ask how they might bear this ideological trace.

¹³ Aaron Hill, *The Tears of the Muses; in a Conference between Prince Germanicus, and a Male-content Party* (1737), 24-25; idem, letter to Handel, 5 December 1732; cited in Deutsch, 299.

The tactics of 'Taste'

In eighteenth-century civic humanism all arts were potentially corrupting.¹⁴ As John Brewer points out, diatribes against moral decline often singled out interest in the fine arts as particularly debilitating. In 1761 the Covent Garden preacher Thomas Cole railed against '*the virtuoso arts ... giving their instruction how to gratify the lust of the eyes, and to display the pride of life ...* There is always something in the delights they afford, which renders them rather dangerous with respect to their moral influence.'¹⁵ But for modified Shaftesburian civic virtue the arts were definitely an important, if problematic, site for the expression of public spirit.¹⁶ In the Introduction we saw that with the mid-century's increasing social mobility came a flowering of general public interest in national improvement and the arts; that interest needed directing, however. After all, it was only through promotion of correct taste that individuals could be taught to appreciate beauty rather than merely luxuriate in it.¹⁷ And who better to advance public taste than those for whom the leisure and education necessary to establish a firm grounding in taste was a birthright?¹⁸ Lord Kames's *Elements of Criticism* (1762) made it clear that guidance was incumbent on social rulers:

The Fine Arts have ever been encouraged by wise Princes, not simply for private amusement, but for their beneficial influence in society. By uniting the different ranks in the same elegant pleasures, they promote benevolence: by cherishing love of order, they enforce submission to government, and by

¹⁴ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 492-3, 499.

¹⁵ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), 72.

¹⁶ For an insightful discussion of some of these problems as specifically related to Shaftesbury, see David Solkin, *Painting for Money: The Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London, 1993), 1-26.

¹⁷ John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora and the Division of Knowledge* (London, 1992), 64. *The Prompter* of 14 November 1735 contemplates this problem with regard to music: 'Musick, like Beauty, is an *Object of Sense*, and creates a *Passion*. It is to the *Ear*, what the other is to the *Eye*. NEITHER *speak* to the *Understanding*. The pernicious Effects of Beauty, where the Understanding measures *not what its Influence should be*, are too well known not to be expatiated on here.'

¹⁸ The aristocratic control of images of the landscape is a key example of this governance of taste; see John Barrell, *The Birth of Pandora*, 41-61.

inspiring a delicacy of feeling, they make regular government a double blessing ... To promote the Fine Arts in Britain, has become of greater importance than is generally imagined.... To prevent or retard such fatal corruption [of society by commercial luxury], the genius of an Alfred [the Great] cannot devise any means more efficacious, than the venting opulence upon the Fine Arts; riches employed, instead of encouraging vice, will excite both public and private virtues.¹⁹

This role for the aristocrat required more than the connoisseur's fleeting, acquisitive interest in art for art's sake.²⁰ Other members of the aristocracy expressed these ideas in practical proposals: John, Duke of Bedford's name led the list of peers in the 1765 petition to the King to establish an Academy of Arts 'for the improvement of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture; with a view to establish a *correct* Taste in those arts throughout Your Majesty's Dominions' (italics mine).²¹ This echoes the proposal for the foundation of the Royal Academy of Music:

As the Operas themselves will be in greater Perfection that [*sic*] what have hitherto appeared (Joyning what is excellent both in the French and Italian Theatre) so they will undoubtedly procure better Audiences And by the Constancy and Regularity of the Performance the Taste rendered more universall.²²

Appropriately controlling and sanctioning cultivation of taste was, then, the best way of countering the charge of aristocratic self-indulgence in the arts. In opera, of course, with works drawing so strongly on classical myth, history and codes of conduct, and on French and Italian literature, who but the educated (male) aristocracy could provide correct interpretation?

Aristocrats were obvious instigators of cultural refinement, but they also required an appropriate forum for this development. The consistent complaint of the 'wits' opposed to Walpole in the 1720s and '30s was that the new Administration

¹⁹ Cited in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 24-5.

²⁰ On the culture of connoisseurship and the Royal Academy directorate, see Gibson, 40-51; Gibson's discussion does not address issues of national moral 'improvement'.

²¹ 'Petition to George III for a site for an Academy of Arts circa 1765', BL Egerton MS 2134, ff.45r.

²² For the full proposal, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'New Light on Handel and the Royal Academy of Music in 1720', *Theatre Journal* 35 (1983), 149-67 (165-7).

failed to maintain the court-centred system of patronage for the brightest and the best.²³ In fact, since before the reign of Queen Anne, the Court had gradually divested itself of many aspects of patronage.²⁴ Those wealthy members of the aristocracy who wished to support enhancement of the nation's cultural standing had thus to find other venues for promoting artistic excellence. At the same time, as taste became cemented in public consciousness, so it required some sense of civic definition through the founding of national institutions or academies.²⁵

The early eighteenth century was notoriously the time for public schemes and projects—joint stock companies—aiming to make money in the name of progress.²⁶ In such projects the anticipation of economic gain was only part of a more general optimism that personal and national improvement would come through the exploration of nature and development of man-made resources. The proliferation of profit-making companies then went hand in hand with the foundation of other 'improving' societies.²⁷ William Shipley's proposal for

²³ Bertrand Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (Lincoln, Nebraska, and London, 1976), 3-19. But see Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England 1650-1800* (Cambridge, 1996), whose central argument is that older forms of patronage remained important throughout the eighteenth century. Michael Dobson notes that Westminster's Shakespeare was in part a pointed 'monument to ... lost royal patronage', *The Making of the National Poet*, 139.

²⁴ R. O. Bucholz, *The Augustan Court: Queen Anne and the Decline of Court Culture* (Stanford, California, 1993).

²⁵ In 1757, the satire the *Tryal of the lady Allurea Luxury* alluded to the founding of public institutions for national regulation of taste: 'a few good Pictures in a public School, always ready for the perusal, study, and imitation of the Youth of the Nation, would ... contribute more to the Increase of good Painters amongst us, than ten thousand private Collections'; cited in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 86.

²⁶ See particularly P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (London, 1967), 90-156; and John Carswell, *The South Sea Bubble* (London, 1960). On John Law, the father of speculation mania and founder of the Mississippi Company, see Antoin E. Murphy, *John Law: Economic Theorist and Policy-Maker* (Oxford, 1997).

²⁷ Of course, chief among such organisations was the Royal Society, as its name indicates; see T. Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (1667). The 'Memoirs of the Society for the Encouragement of Learning' note the need for it to support itself by subscription, in order 'to institute a republic of letters for the promoting of arts and sciences, by the necessary means of profit, as well as by the noble motives of praise and emulation'; BL Add. MSS. 6185, f.1; cited in Jacques Carré, *Lord Burlington (1649-1753): le Connaisseur, le Mécène, l'Architecte* (Clermont-Ferrand, 1993), 225. A number of the manuscript quotations discussed in this chapter also appear in Taylor. Where I have not sighted the source myself, I note my reliance on

founding the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce in 1753 saw commerce as the foundation of development in the arts, and his was one of many similar organisations.²⁸

Of course, as Colley points out, the great expansion of ‘improving’ and patriotic societies in mid-century Britain was led by the ‘middling classes’, out of commercial as well as patriotic motives; but the aristocracy also had a role to play, even if often chiefly as figureheads.²⁹ Shipley’s Royal Society of Arts (as it came to be known) was also seen in ideological terms; a friend enthusiastically described it as ‘A Design that when carried into Execution will not only unite in one common Band all real Patriots, or as I should then call them the Patrons of the Nation, but will in time, I hope utterly extirpate all Party distinctions ... [as] the aim of all Partys is the public good’.³⁰ This expectation was partly fulfilled, as a range of leading political figures joined the Society.³¹ The Prince of Wales, with his links to the ‘Patriot’ Opposition, voiced his support for the Society, as he did for Sir Hans Sloane’s collection—one of the founding collections of the British Museum—which he apparently found ‘an ornament to the nation’, to be preserved for public use.³²

Taylor or any other source (‘cited in’); I note where a quotation is also available in Taylor or another published source, and when my reading of a source differs from that already published (‘cf.’).

²⁸ For discussion, see D. G. C. Allan, *William Shipley: Founder of the Royal Society of Arts* (London, 1968, repr. 1979), 6-19. See also idem, ‘The Society of Arts and Government, 1754-1800: Public Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 (1974), 434-52; idem and John L. Abbott (eds.), *The Virtuoso Tribe of Arts and Sciences: Studies in the Eighteenth-Century Work and Membership of the London Society of Arts* (Athens, Ga. and London, 1992).

²⁹ For example, George II and, as Prince of Wales, the future George III were the two largest contributors to the Marine Society; Colley, *Britons*, 88-100. Colley hypothesises that commercial men partly became involved in founding such societies in order to forge closer ties with members of the aristocracy (94-5).

³⁰ Charles Powell to Shipley, 1754; cited in Allan, *William Shipley*, 17.

³¹ Sir H. T. Wood, *The History of the Royal Society of Arts* (London, 1913), 28-46; cited in Allan, *William Shipley*, 17.

³² *Gentleman’s Magazine*, July 1748, 301-2 (302).

Frederick followed the Countess of Middlesex in discouraging the wearing of any but British-made clothing at his Leicester House court.³³

Others overrode party affiliations in their sponsorship of the arts and academies. Charles Lennox, Second Duke of Richmond, for example, is one of the many who wielded cultural rather than political authority. Richmond was described by his biographer as ‘a safe [Court] Whig without being a party man at all’, a ‘creditable pawn’ more interested in his seat at Goodwood, opera and architecture than what Richmond called the ‘cursed, stupid, and insincere compliments’ necessary to courtly preferment.³⁴ Richmond maintained connections with the arts and *belles lettres* on many levels: as a young man, he was a member of the Kit-Kat Club; later he patronised not only opera, but also the playwrights Colley Cibber (a Court Whig) and Henry Fielding (an anti-Walpole Cobhamite),³⁵ as well as attending meetings of the Royal Society. He was active as a magistrate, and president of the London Hospital from 1741. In 1736, to his surprise, Richmond was elected president of the Society for the Encouragement of Learning. The Society secretary’s response to Richmond’s astonishment indicates the crucial role members of the nobility played in civic life: ‘there is no doubt but your Grace’s example will soon be followed by others, in an affair, which may so greatly contribute to the public good, and rescue men of genius from the hardships and difficulties, under which they at present labour’.³⁶

³³ Colley, *Britons*, 92-3; Gerrard, 15.

³⁴ The Earl of March, *A Duke and His Friends: The Life and Letters of the Second Duke of Richmond* (London, 1911), xiii, xvi-xvii, xviii.

³⁵ Fielding dedicated his comedy *The Miser* (1733) and his poem ‘Of Good-Nature’ (*Miscellanies*, 1743) to Richmond, and was later involved with him in the prosecution of some Sussex smugglers; see *The Correspondence of Henry and Sarah Fielding*, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Clive T. Probyn (Oxford, 1993), 81-2.

³⁶ Richmond to the Secretary, 20 June 1736; the Secretary to Richmond, 29 June 1736; BL Add MSS 6185, ‘Memoirs of the Society for Encouragement of Learning’, f.97r. Lovell was also a member of the Society.

The Trustees of the British Museum—like Shipley’s Society founded in 1753—also largely comprised leading members of the government and aristocracy aware of their importance in shaping the public good.³⁷ For example, in his ‘Observations on the Plan for shewing the British Museum’, Charles Cadogan was insistent that the principle of public access be maintained:

[If] even Two Hundred Persons come on the same day; the inconvenience must be tolerated; in order to satisfy People’s impatience to view the Museum, at its first opening.... For although due restrictions are to be observ’d in general; it was the design of Parliament, founded on the Intentions of the Original Proprietors, to whom the Books and other Curiosities did belong; to have their Collections shewn as generally as Possible.³⁸

In his *Discourses*, delivered for twenty years at the annual prizegiving for the Royal Academy of Art from its institution in 1769, Joshua Reynolds repeats the old conviction that ‘the good and virtuous man alone can acquire [a] true or just relish even of works of art’.³⁹ The foundation of the Royal Academy was for Reynolds fitting recognition of the role that painting—chiefly the virtuous and ennobling art of history painting—could play in helping the citizen define his relationship to the state.⁴⁰ Establishing such national institutions inevitably focussed attention on serving and shaping the nation’s public; the Trustees of the Museum explained that ‘being a national establishment, founded by authority of Parliament ... the advantages accruing from it should be rendered as general as possible’.⁴¹ Even the

³⁷ Edward Edwards, *Lives of the Founders of the British Museum*, 2 vols (London, 1870; rept. 1996), I, 320-1.

³⁸ Birch Collection, Lord Cadogan’s Observations on the Plan for shewing the British Museum, 12 Dec. 1756; BL Add MSS 4302, f.12ff (14v). Cadogan was, however, concerned to maintain proper social distinctions, not wishing ‘low & improper Persons’ (13v) to enter the Museum register with respectable people.

³⁹ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark (New Haven and London, 1959, 3rd edn, 1997), 134; Wark says that in status and nature the *Discourses* ‘were tantamount to a statement of policy for the young institution’ (xiv).

⁴⁰ John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: ‘The Body of the Public’* (New Haven and London, 1986), 71.

⁴¹ J. Mordaunt Crook, *The British Museum* (London, 1972), 54.

theatre, newspapers suggested, could usefully come under the regulation of wise heads.⁴² The formation of institutions not only of industrial or infrastructural utility, but also of cultural importance, demonstrates a general awareness that cultivation of the arts was an index of the degree of civilization found in a state.⁴³ By participating in the establishment of such cultural barometers, the aristocracy safeguarded their own continued status within society as promulgators of public good.

The Act to incorporate the British Museum stated that ‘all arts and sciences have a connection with each other’. Could opera then also find a place in the scheme for national improvement?⁴⁴ As we shall see in chapter four, promoters of English opera certainly thought so; but what of Italian opera? On one level, the development of serious opera in Italy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was founded on the ethos that protocols of good conduct should be enacted and encouraged in this most aristocratic of art forms.⁴⁵ As we have observed, the directors of the Royal Academy also aimed to educate their audience in principles of

⁴² For example, *The Political State of Great Britain* July-December 1733, opined that ‘a Superintendency [of theatres] I must say ought to be not only in the Hands of Gentlemen, but in the Hands of some of the wisest Men in the Nation, and in every Nation there ought to be a well pickt Set of such Superintendents’; (p.349—October). On 21 March 1734 the *Grub-street Journal* proposed an ‘academy’ to review all plays, funded by Parliament, with the power to award £2000 per annum to deserving authors; Robert D. Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre, 1728-1737* (Oxford, 1988), 197 n.99. Hume observes that ‘More such proposals could be cited.’

⁴³ The most recent exposition of these ideas is found in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*. See also Ruth Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), 52-80; Paul Mattick, Jr., ‘Introduction’, *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Mattick (Cambridge, 1993), 1-15; Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 93-5, 106, 155-6, 173-81, and *passim*; Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, 9-16, *passim*; Gerrard, 48-57, *passim*; Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*, 2-3, *passim*; Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*, *passim*; Colley, *Britons*, 90-2, 174-6. National institutions were not, however, open to all. The Academy of Arts’ site was chosen especially to ‘prevent the number of common people who now frequent the Green Park from approaching too near the said Building’.

⁴⁴ Crook, *The British Museum*, 39.

⁴⁵ Robert S. Freeman, *Opera Without Drama: Currents of Change in Italian Opera, 1675-1725* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1981); Piero Weiss, ‘Metastasio, Aristotle, and the *Opera Seria*’, *Journal of Musicology* 1 (1982), 385-94. See also idem, ‘Teorie Drammatiche e “Infranciosamento”: Motivi della “Riforma” Melodrammatica del Primo Settecento’, *Antonio Vivaldi: Teatro Musicale Cultura e Società*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giovanni Morelli (Florence, 1982), 273-96.

good government and appropriate decorum.⁴⁶ In addition, as their original proposal and instructions to Handel explain, the opera directors wished to establish their opera house as an acknowledged centre for excellence, a demonstration of British financial might and good breeding, and a venue in which ‘Taste [might be] rendered more universall’.⁴⁷

By supporting opera, therefore, the directors could also be seen as shaping and improving society. But which society? The directors noted that operatic ventures ‘carry along with them some Marks of Public Magnificence and are the great Entertainment which Strangers share in’: ideals of good government and a desire to broadcast British taste imply that opera’s lessons worked chiefly for the benefit of international ‘high society’, the aristocracy. If supporters wished to counter the gibes of those who saw the genre’s foreignness as its chief threat, opera had to be seen as a positive part of national self-definition. Opera directors such as those already mentioned (Bedford, Richmond, Cadogan) patronised other institutions explicitly because they were beneficial to the nation. Were British sponsors of opera also interested in promoting its national relevance? How could this relevance be demonstrated? There are no recorded discussions of the ideological status of opera from the opera directors of the 1720s and ’30s (a point to which we will return), but we might infer what place opera could have had by briefly examining the general pattern of one director’s cultivation of the arts.

⁴⁶ See Gibson, 286; idem, ‘The Royal Academy of Music (1719-28) and its Directors’, *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London, 1987), 138-64 (138, 149-51).

⁴⁷ ‘A Proposall for carrying on Operas by a Company and a Joynt Stock’: ‘Opera’s are the most harmless of all publick Diversions. They are an Encouragement and Support to an Art that has been cherished by all Polite Nations. They carry along with them some Marks of Public Magnificence and are the great Entertainment which Strangers share in. Therefore it seems very strange that this great and opulent City hath not been able to support Publick Spectacles of this sort for any considerable time.’ (P.R.O. LC 7/3, ff.46-7); cited in Milhous and Hume, ‘New Light on Handel and the Royal Academy of Music in 1720’, 165; Holles Newcastle, ‘Instructions to Mr Hendel’ (1719); cited in

Lord Burlington

Richard Boyle, the Third Earl of Burlington, is perhaps the best known patron of the arts in the mid eighteenth century. Jacques Carré, author of the most significant and substantial book on Burlington to date, says that he ‘occupe une position centrale dans la vie culturelle’ in the first half of the eighteenth century not only because of his support for so many important artists, ‘mais aussi parce qu’il illustre d’une manière presque caricaturale les attitudes de son groupe social à l’égard de la culture’.⁴⁸ The subject of Pope’s eponymous Epistle (subtitled ‘Of Taste’) and dedicatee of several operas as well as many books (particularly on architecture), Burlington has recently been described as expressly responding to the challenge in Shaftesbury’s *Essay on Design* (1712), concerning improvement of the nation’s taste through patronage of the arts.⁴⁹ Pope’s glowing praise of the young patron specifically links his cultural concerns to his maturity as a citizen:

His Gardens flourish, his Structures rise, his Pictures arrive, and (what is far nobler and more valuable than all) his own good Qualities daily extend themselves to all about him: Whereof, I the meanest (next to some *Italian* Chymists, Fiddlers, Bricklayers, and Opera-makers) am a living Instance.⁵⁰

Deutsch, 90. The Academy’s foundation as a joint stock company also demonstrates the directors’ participation in the mania for speculation; Gibson, ‘The Royal Academy of Music’, 139, 140-1.

⁴⁸ Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 14. Carré’s first two ‘books’ on Burlington as connoisseur and patron are particularly useful to this brief study.

⁴⁹ Dana Arnold, ‘It’s a wonderful life: Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington and 4th Earl of Cork (1694-1753)’, *Belov’d by Ev’ry Muse*, ed. Dana Arnold (London, 1994), 5-14 (5). Carré also describes Burlington’s indebtedness to Shaftesburian thought, *Lord Burlington*, 59-79. On Burlington’s sponsorship of books in general, see Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 195-220, 522-4; Timothy Connor, ‘Burlingtonian Publications’, *Lord Burlington and His Circle: Papers given at a Georgian Group Symposium at the Victoria and Albert Museum on the 22nd May 1982*, ed. Roger White (s.n., 1992), 52-9. The libretto of *Antioco* (1711) was dedicated to Burlington’s mother by J. J. Heidegger; Nicola Haym’s *Teseo* (1713), *Amadigi di Gaula* (1715, dedicated by Heidegger), Paolo Rolli’s *L’Astarto* (1720), and Henry Carey’s *Teraminta* (1732) were dedicated to the Earl. Interestingly, Lynch’s *Independent Patriot* (cited in note 2, above) was also dedicated to Burlington. Carré notes that Burlington was an important patron of Italian artists; he discusses the opera librettists Haym, Angelo Cori, and Rolli, and others in *Lord Burlington*, 202-9. On the significance of Pope’s naming and renaming of his Epistle to Burlington, see also Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 130-2.

⁵⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford, 1956), I, 347.

Awareness of the need for national development of taste was inevitably concerned with the development of specifically national taste. Architecture was seen as particularly important in this regard, as buildings were instrumental in the transaction of civic discourse, and it was here that Burlington particularly led the way.⁵¹

Through his researches in Italy and his designs and buildings in Britain, Burlington is credited with fostering Palladianism. Palladio had strongly influenced Inigo Jones, an architect associated with the English monarchy in the glory days of the early seventeenth century; Burlington's Palladian revival was a deliberate archaism, a reaction to the English Baroque of Hawksmoor, Vanbrugh and Wren, which was thought to rely too heavily on ornate contemporary French and Italian design.⁵² Burlington's publications on architecture, then, were concerned not with promoting his own designs, but with re-establishing the classical lineage to which Palladio and Jones were deemed successors. His most famous building, his villa at Chiswick, demonstrates his apparent obsession with classical authority.⁵³ Even before Burlington entered the scene, however, Palladio's classicism caused his style to be associated with a new British ideal. Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus, or the British Architect* (1715-25) and Giacomo Leoni's English translation of Palladio's *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (1715-16) were both dedicated to George I, and both flatteringly assert that Britain was the heir apparent to the classical

⁵¹ Carré observes that Burlington subscribed to the 'conception élitiste de l'architecture comme activité spirituelle' (*Lord Burlington*, 208). For Pope's explication of an ideal of national architecture in *Windsor Forest* (1713), and for Pope's and Burlington's involvement with a national project for public buildings, see Jacques Carré, 'Burlington's Public Works', and Howard Colvin, 'Lord Burlington and the Office of Works', in *Lord Burlington and His Circle*, 60-71 and 96-100 respectively; Morris R. Brownell, *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England* (Oxford, 1978), 294-305.

⁵² See principally John Harris, *The Palladian Revival: Lord Burlington, His Villa and Garden at Chiswick* (London, 1994).

⁵³ Harris, *The Palladian Revival*, 115.

tradition.⁵⁴ The implication is clearly that the British nation were also successors to Roman might and virtue.

The best indication of Burlington's attitude towards the social role of art is found in the house at Chiswick, a building on which he lavished much attention after his retirement from court—and apparently from Court Whig politics—in 1733. Burlington's villa, constructed piecemeal from his 'paper museum' of classical precedent, is rich in allegory. In a building where every aspect of design is deliberate, every feature seems redolent with significance: the sphinxes on the gatepiers, for example, led through a series of associations to freemasonry and music; the orange tree garden was linked to the Garden of the Hesperides and the Golden Age.⁵⁵ Such a mine of meaning has led scholars such as Jane Clark to speculate on a specific political agenda. While Burlington is usually seen in this period as a disaffected Whig, it has recently been argued that he was one of the circle of covert Jacobites: Burlington's interest in antique culture may well have been an effort to divorce himself from sordid political realities, or the house may itself have been a political expression, using allegory to target the perceived moral shortcomings of public life.⁵⁶

The attempt to escape faction and the desire to animadvert on those factions' shortcomings are, of course, inextricable, and clever Jacobitical readings of a variety of architectural features convince one less of Burlington's partisan intent than of his general belief in the didactic efficacy of historical precedent—an interpretative principle that applies as well to operatic as to architectural design. The many

⁵⁴ Arnold, 'It's a wonderful life', 9-10.

⁵⁵ Richard Hewlings, 'Chiswick House and Gardens: Appearance and Meaning', *Lord Burlington: Architecture, Art and Life*, ed. Toby Barnard and Jane Clark (London, 1995), 1-149 (134-5, 144).

⁵⁶ Hewlings, 'Chiswick House and Gardens', 132-33. Barnard's and Clark's volume aims to relocate Burlington in a Jacobitical context.

symbols of support for a 'rightful but excluded king' and 'benevolent government' restored after 'political chaos' that Richard Hewlings reads as signs of Jacobitism could equally indicate allegiance to the opposition Whigs grouped around the (incumbent) Prince of Wales.⁵⁷ Hewlings must finally admit that the 'lowest common denominator is an allegory of good government'.⁵⁸ No matter what their party colours, all members of the aristocracy could find common interest in love of good government and their country, as expressed through patronage of artistic endeavour. One of Burlington's good friends and a fellow designer and noted collector was the senior Court Whig Lord Lovell, who enlisted the aid of Burlington and William Kent—an architect they both patronised—in designing his new house at Holkham in the 1730s.⁵⁹

As we have seen, members of the aristocracy were active in promulgating civic ideals in public as well as private spaces. In 1738, Burlington was one of several noblemen to subscribe to 'a Society for Encouraging the writing of an History of England (of a like Nature with the Society lately formed for the Encouragement of Learning)'; in 1741 a committee including Pope and Burlington unveiled a statue of Shakespeare in Westminster Abbey, in what would seem an explicitly partisan appeal to 'Patriotism'.⁶⁰ Intertwined with images of government

⁵⁷ Hewlings, 'Chiswick House and Gardens', 136, 137, 138; Gerrard, 13-14, 194-5. Whichever side he supported, we could say of Burlington, with Jane Clark (though with different emphasis): 'No one could be blamed for hedging their bets'; Clark, 'Lord Burlington is Here', *Lord Burlington: Architecture, Art and Life*, 251-310 (285). For a similar point about the principled (rather than practical) commitment to Jacobitism, see John, Lord Hervey, *Some Materials towards Memoirs of the Reign of King George II*, ed. Romney Sedgwick, 3 vols (1931, rpt. New York, 1970), I, 4.

⁵⁸ Hewlings, 'Chiswick House and Gardens', 145. Even specific symbols are ambiguous in meaning: 'The oak leaf festoons over the Bedchamber doors ... and the Prince of Wales' feathers ornamenting the overmantel' were certainly not exclusively Stuart, as Hewlings suggests; indeed, the Hanoverian Prince Frederick was known for his strategic adoption of traditional Stuart emblems. See Gerrard, 107, 194-5, 205-7.

⁵⁹ Charles Warburton James, *Chief Justice Coke, His Family and Descendants at Holkham* (London, 1929), 226, 225.

⁶⁰ T. Carte, *A General Account of the Necessary Materials for an History of England* (1738), 5; cited in Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 226. Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 137-46;

throughout Chiswick are invocations of patronage of the arts, especially of music in the figures of Amphion, Pan, Apollo and the Muses; Apollo was often adopted by rulers keen to claim association with the father of harmony.⁶¹ The importance of music to Burlington—particularly in his patronage of the Royal Academy of Music in the 1720s—is well known, but the ideological rather than aesthetic aspect to his patronage is not generally remarked.⁶² Carré thinks it no accident that all the important positions within the newly-formed Royal Academy went to artists patronised by Burlington, for by this means he could demonstrate his pre-eminence as patron of opera and of the arts in general. Indeed, Carré sees Burlington's patronage of the arts as part of a patriotic programme to end Britain's cultural isolation and backwardness.⁶³ Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that in the 1730s, Lady Burlington should subscribe to the opera written to celebrate the Prince of Wales's wedding, *Atalanta* (1736), and to *Alexander's Feast* (1738), and that her husband should show particular interest in Handel's oratorios.⁶⁴ Carré notes the parallel between the Palladian architectural style Burlington promoted and the

Brownell, *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England*, 329-56. See discussion of the nationalist appropriation of Westminster Abbey in chapter six.

⁶¹ Hewlings, 'Chiswick House and Gardens', 134, 139-42.

⁶² The degree to which music permeated the Burlingtons' daily life is evinced by the frequent mention of music in the couple's few extant letters; for a published description of much of the musical discussion of interest, see Lindsay Boynton, 'Lord Burlington at Home', *Belov'd by Ev'ry Muse*, 21-28. A brief general survey of Burlington's musical interests can be found in James Lees-Milne, *Earls of Creation: Five Great Patrons of Eighteenth-Century Art* (London, 1962), 85-151, esp. 85-97. On Burlington and the Academy, see in particular Gibson, 62-9 and *passim*. Carré notes that Burlington seems to have supported Handel against Bononcini in 1721, and that his wife was seen as chief supporter of Faustina, against Lady Pembroke's championing of Cuzzoni (*Lord Burlington*, 230), although Gibson makes no mention of such alliances, and Lowell Lindgren only says that Burlington did not subscribe to Bononcini's *Cantate e Duetti* (1721); see Lindgren, 'A Bibliographic Scrutiny of Dramatic Works Set by Giovanni and his Brother Antonio-Maria Bononcini' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1972), 274-6. Carré provides the most comprehensive and up-to-date account of Burlington's support for Handel (and other musicians) within the context of London's patronage networks.

⁶³ Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 228-9, 280.

⁶⁴ Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 179.

aesthetics of the Italian opera librettists he also patronised: as with the architects ‘les librettistes étaintent eux aussi animés d’une volonté de retour aux sources’.⁶⁵

Like Burlington’s creation of Chiswick, aristocratic patronage of opera might also be read, for those inclined, as concern for good government. Certainly, members of the nobility (as of other classes) appreciated that all aspects of the arts—not just architecture—interwove to create the fabric of a healthy society. Burlington adopted stage design techniques in creating his garden at Chiswick, using scenic perspective and theatre-going conventions to turn the garden’s visitors into both spectators and actors.⁶⁶ The relationship between stages and gardens (established most famously at Stowe, Chiswick and Kew) implies a recognition that observers of cultural objects were also participating in the fictions those objects created, and that this recognition applied in all aspects of life.

Burlington’s pattern of involvement in the arts suggests that, beginning with the Royal Academy’s foundation, opera was meant to be part of Britain’s cultural infrastructure. Letters concerning opera management by Giuseppe Riva, Paolo Rolli and Owen Swiney indicate directorial control over choice of libretti and directorial concern for appropriately serious and heroic plots.⁶⁷ But what value was this serious opera to have in a national context? Its patrons, even those as committed to national improvement as Burlington, do not tell us.

⁶⁵ Carré, *Lord Burlington*, 204.

⁶⁶ Cinzia Sicca, ‘Burlington and Garden Design’, *Lord Burlington and His Circle*, 73-96 (73). For the same point concerning gardens in general, see chapter six, and also John Dixon Hunt, *Vauxhall and London’s Garden Theatres* (Cambridge, 1985); Brian Allen, ‘The Landscape’, in *Vauxhall Gardens*, ed. T. J. Edelstein, (New Haven, 1983), 17-24.

⁶⁷ For directors’ involvement in choice of libretti, see Rolli’s letter to Riva of October 1720 and Riva’s October 1726 letter to Muratori, both cited in *Händel Handbuch 4* (Bärenreiter Kassel and London, 1985), 93-4, 143-4. Although Swiney largely dealt with the acquisition of singers for the Academy, in his letters to the Duke of Richmond he does discuss libretti; they are judged partly on their suitability for the cast, and partly on aesthetic grounds; for his concern for appropriately heroic operas, see letters of 28 December 1725 and 13 August 1726 in Gibson, 361, 369.

Opera and the political message

While we might plausibly incorporate opera within the broad ethos of teaching good taste or the rigorous ideals of Italian academicians, as we have seen, opera in Britain lacks the body of aesthetic or educative writing that makes painting (not to mention poetry) in Britain and opera in Italy and France so amenable to didactic interpretation.⁶⁸ Of course, it was only in the mid eighteenth century that music began to find a place in newly-formed hierarchies of the philosophy of aesthetics.⁶⁹ It is for this reason that, although discussions of opera in letters of the first half of the eighteenth century frequently speak in terms of taste, it is always on a personal, ephemeral level.⁷⁰ Evaluation of the didacticism and ideology of the libretto, such a consistent feature of continental academicians' discourse, may have been absent in print in Britain largely because few Italian libretti were written explicitly for London. Paolo Rolli, one librettist of some distinction in London at this time, felt himself to be doing hackwork amongst hacks.⁷¹ If lack of aesthetic language restricted discussion of music, and lack of opera librettists working in London

⁶⁸ In his doctoral dissertation Thomas McGeary deals with aesthetic responses to opera, but points out that critical expectations were based on neo-classical literary and dramatic traditions and conditions in Britain, which opera failed to satisfy; Thomas Nelson McGeary, 'English Opera Criticism and Aesthetics 1685-1747' (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1985). John Winemiller similarly has to draw largely on writings about poetic and painterly aesthetics in Britain to find a suitable theoretical pattern for Handel's borrowings; John T. Winemiller, 'Handel's Borrowing and Swift's Bee: Handel's "Curious" Practice and the Theory of Transformative Imitation', (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1994). On painting, see particularly Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*.

⁶⁹ Peter Kivy makes the point that Mainwaring's discussion of Handel is one of the first to elevate practical music aesthetically, 'Mainwaring's *Handel*: its Relation to English Aesthetics', *JAMS* 17 (1964), 170-78; William Weber also discusses Handel's importance to British music aesthetics; 'Intellectual Bases of the Handelian Tradition, 1759-1800', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 58 (1981-82), 100-14. Charles Avison in his *An Essay on Musical Expression* (1752), particularly compares music to painting (23-31). See also Lawrence Lipking, *The Ordering of the Arts in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1970); William Weber, 'The Contemporaneity of Eighteenth-Century Musical Taste', *MQ* 70 (1984), 175-94.

⁷⁰ As the contributors to a Paul Mattick's volume on aesthetics show, patterns of thought about aesthetic issues are profoundly influenced by the language available; Mattick, ed. *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*.

⁷¹ In *Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle in London, 1715-1744* (The Hague, 1967), George Dorris describes Rolli's 'considerable reputation' in Italy (124-132), and his high standards and reputation in Britain (143-5), but also that Rolli found his libretti to be unsatisfying 'Dramatic Skeletons' (167) and that he disliked his fellow librettists (42-3, 142-3, 165).

limited discussion of the status of the libretto, nevertheless, opera could be understood in socio-political terms. There is some indication not just of awareness of the ideological difficulties surrounding London's Italian opera, but also of opera's potential ideological impact in pamphlet and newspaper response to the genre.

A thread politicising opera in the contemporary press runs throughout the 1720s to '40s, and later. The *Universal Spectator*'s persona, Sir Jaspar Truby, for example, is a 'true *Englishman*' concerned for the financial and moral heart of London; he writes:

lately on the *Exchange* the Policy of the Players and the Revolutions of the Theatre [are] as warmly contested, as (one wou'd have expected there) the Truth of some private Intelligence from *Poland* or the *Rhine*: But what can one expect, when your Traders, instead of amusing themselves of an Ev'ning as we did over a Pipe and a Dish of Coffee, are running to the *Play*, the *Opera*, or the *Ridotto*....⁷²

Sir Jaspar's concerns were voiced late in 1733, at the time when speculation about competition between Handel and the 'Opera of the Nobility' was intensifying.

Another journal published a fake set of legal 'Articles' for resolving the differences between the patentees and principal players of the Drury Lane theatre, supposedly prepared by the leaders of the respective opera companies: 'The most potent Count H---d---r and the most renowned Lord S-----o do engage for themselves, their Heirs and Successors, to guarantee this Treaty to all Intents and Purposes.'⁷³ As the mocking titles 'Count' and 'Lord' and reference to 'Heirs and Successors' indicate, casting the opera managers as the arbiters of dispute aligned them with the aristocracy. The implication is that the vast sums opera stars were paid, as well as the degree to which they associated with Peers, had led to affectation and hubris on

⁷² *The Universal Spectator, and Weekly Journal* 262 (13 October 1733).

⁷³ *The St. James's Evening Post*, 2823 (24-27 November 1733). For another version of this mock-notice, with Handel as 'prince Palatine of the Hay-market', Heidegger as 'Count of the most sacred and holy Roman Empire', and Senesino as 'little duke of Tuscany', see the *Grub-Street Journal*, 10

their part, and to folly in allowing foreigners to manage British affairs on the part of both the British players and the nobility themselves.

Partisan bifurcation—this time explicitly aligned with the institutional politics of ‘Court’ (government) and ‘Country’ (opposition)—and satirical representation of a singer as some sort of grandee is also found in a mock letter from ‘Senesino’ to ‘the Inhabitants of the City of Westminster’ published late in 1733. The singer thanks the Citizens (traditionally anti-Monarchist) for their ‘kind Invitation to *Sing upon the Country Interest*,’ and for their assistance in fending off an attempt against ‘the TRADE and WELFARE of *Opera*’s’. On the one hand, it shows Senesino as proud and arrogant, even daring to call himself a ‘Fellow Citizen’! On the other, the native population appears foolish: even though Senesino acknowledges that ‘I have spent a great part of my Time in *Italy*, and have frequently convers’d with the *Pretender*’, nonetheless, ‘as you, Gentlemen, who are my proper Judges, are so wise as to lay aside all Names of Distinction, to you I submit my past Behaviour’.⁷⁴ Designed to incite readers’ antipathy towards Italian singers, this epistle emphasises the way in which opera could impact on the lives of ordinary citizens, even those like London’s common citizenry who had little interest in theatrical art forms.

That satirical point remained even after the demise of the company rivalry; in October 1738 the *London Magazine* reprinted an article from the partisan *Common Sense* journal on ‘The Power of Music’, in which the author offers the old speculation that Lilliburlero helped play James II out of England, ‘and that *Somebody* else would have been fiddled into it again, if a certain treasonable, *Popish, Jacobite* Tune had not

January 1734; cited in Deutsch, 342. The players’ dispute was itself politicised; see the *Craftsman*, 16 March 1734; *The Stage Mutineers; Or, A Playhouse to be Let* (1733).

⁷⁴ *The London Journal*, 24 November 1733.

been timely silenced by the unwearied Pains and Diligence of the Administration'. He then asks:

... Persons wiser than myself, what is to be done in this important *Crisis*, [viz. the Cessation of *Operas*.] I look upon *Operas* to have been the great *National Establishment of Music*, and I am persuaded that innumerable *Sects* will rise from their Ruins, and break into various *Conventicles* of Vocal and Instrumental, which if not attended to, may prove of ill Consequence. But in this, as in every Thing else, I put my Trust in the Wisdom of the Ministers, who daily shew, that nothing is above their Skill, or below their Care.⁷⁵

A 'great *National Establishment of Music*' may have been what at least some opera directors intended, but it would seem that the Royal Academy and Italian opera in London had the opposite effect, drawing attention to just how alien the genre was. The politics of foreign opera in London, the authors of these various satires implied, should be of interest to everyone.

What did this politicisation of language surrounding Italian opera mean? It did not necessarily indicate the existence of institutional partisan backing for the opera. *The Craftsman*'s famous extended parallel between Handel and Walpole, the Oratorio and the Excise, demonstrates the potential for musico-political alignment. The coincidence of Handel's raised prices and Walpole's attempt to raise additional taxation revenue in 1733, combined with their common enjoyment of George II's patronage, encouraged the paper's satirical invention that Handel was another Walpole. To suggest the two were actually in league was absurd, but to focus the *Craftsman*'s usual system of allegorical parallel on a contemporary rather than historical event clearly made good copy.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *The London Magazine*, October 1738, 505-6; reprinted from *Common Sense* 89, 14 October 1738.

⁷⁶ *The Craftsman*, 7 April 1733; cited in Deutsch, 310-3. For discussion of this publication's provenance, see Dorris, *Paolo Rolli*, 102-13, esp. 110-2. Dorris, on the basis of the presence of an Italian version of this letter in the Rolli-Senesino correspondence in Siena, puts forward a not entirely convincing case for Rolli's authorship. Dorris's own points that the English version is too colloquial for Rolli, that the Italian version is a fair copy, but the language is awkward and is missing many accents (and his uncertainty as to whether the manuscript hand is even Rolli's), all point either to a translation from English to Italian for Senesino's benefit (as Dorris himself suggests), or at the very least to a joint effort between Rolli and an Opposition figure. See also Deutsch, 313.

The *Craftsman*'s account is clearly fictional, but it brings into play the lasting, semi-symbolic association between Handel and the government on the one hand, and his Italian rivals and any form of political opposition on the other. More difficult to dismiss than such a facetious story is the traditional assumption—still perpetuated in cultural histories of the period—that the efflorescence of political commentary surrounding the rivalry between Handel and the Opera of the Nobility in the mid-1730s indicated a genuine party-political division. The theory goes that the increasingly bitter rivalry between Frederick, Prince of Wales and his parents that had already led the opposition to court the Prince, was given a cultural twist by Frederick's (and by extension the Opposition's) support of the 'Nobility' company against Handel and the King. For musicologists and historians concerned to dig deeper, however, little evidence has been found. Following from the work of Alan Yorke-Long and Carole Taylor, Thomas McGeary and Judith Milhous have demonstrated recently (and separately) that the Prince and his parents supported both companies to some degree.⁷⁷ These assessments are based on the recovery of additional historical evidence: McGeary has found that the opera directors of both companies had evenly spread party-political allegiances; Taylor and Milhous have shown that the companies' financial records indicate a similar even-handedness in royal patronage. While current research seems to give the lie to the old partisan conjecture, the conjecture clings on.⁷⁸ The tenacity of this supposition is accounted

⁷⁷ Alan Yorke-Long, 'The Opera of the Nobility' (dissertation presented for the Osgood Memorial Prize, University of Oxford, 1951), 8-11; Taylor, 229-31; idem, 'Handel and Frederick, Prince of Wales', *MT* 125 (1984), 89-92; Judith Milhous, 'Händel und die Londoner Theaterverhältnisse im Jahre 1734', *Gattungskonventionen der Händel-Oper: Bericht über die Symposien 1990 und 1991*, ed. Hans Marx (Laaber, 1992), 117-37; idem, 'Opera Finances in London, 1674-1738', *JAMS* 37 (1984), 567-92; Thomas McGeary, 'Handel, Prince Frederick, and the Opera of the Nobility Reconsidered', *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 7, ed. Hans Joachim Marx (Göttingen, 1998), 156-78.

⁷⁸ Even a writer as well informed about opera as Christine Gerrard states that Frederick patronised the Opera of the Nobility between 1733 and 1737 against Handel and the King and Queen, before citing Taylor (p. 61).

for in large measure by John, Lord Hervey's famous story of this operatic battle royal in his *Memoirs of the Reign of King George II*. Hervey explains that

The King and Queen ... were both Handelists, and sat freezing constantly at his empty Haymarket Opera, whilst the Prince with all the chief of the nobility went as constantly to that of Lincoln's Inn Fields.... An anti-Handelist was looked upon as an anti-courtier, and voting against the Court in Parliament was hardly a less remissible or more venial sin than speaking against Handel or going to the Lincoln's Inn Fields Opera. The Princess Royal said she expected in a little while to see half the House of Lords playing in the orchestra in their robes and coronets; and the King ... often added at the same time that he did not think setting oneself at the head of a faction of fiddlers a very honourable occupation for people of quality.⁷⁹

Hervey's unrivalled access to court gossip, joined to his analytical skills and colourful prose, have long made him the darling of historians chronicling the Walpolean era, but, as McGeary reminds us, he was hardly unbiased when it came to discussing his erstwhile friend and then rival in love, Prince Frederick.⁸⁰

Although belief in the political nature of the rivalry between the two companies had its roots in the slippery soil of Lord Hervey's *Memoirs*, it was also firmly embedded in contemporary report. How, after all, are we to read an apparently straightforward report like that in the *London Journal* for 17 November 1733?

On Monday the 12th Instant, at a Meeting held at the *Bedford-Head-Tavern* in *Covent-Garden*, of Nobility, Gentry, and Clergy, all true Lovers of Musick, It was unanimously agreed, to desire Signor S——o to sing this Winter at the Theatre in *Lincoln's-Inn-Fields*, on THE COUNTRY INTEREST, in Opposition to Signor H—l, who, as we are credibly inform'd, designs to perform in the *Hay-market* on THE COURT INTEREST.⁸¹

The *London Journal* was a Walpolean paper, but there is no indication here of any satirical intent. Then too, Lady Betty Germain's timid account to her brother, the

⁷⁹ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 273-4.

⁸⁰ McGeary, 'Handel, Prince Frederick, and the Opera of the Nobility Reconsidered', 164-5. On the partial view provided by memoirs, Hervey's in particular, see also Aubrey Newman, *The World Turned Inside Out: New Views on George II* (Leicester, 1988), 6-7.

⁸¹ *The London Journal*, 17 November 1733.

Duke of Dorset, at the beginning of the companies' rivalry in early 1734 is unambiguous in its equation of party faction and opera:

The report goes that Dodington [the Prince's chief advisor] has made up all differences with the King and Prince.... You know I am a little cowardly, and it frights me out of my wits to see party grow fiercer and fiercer every day. Even about operas 'tis outrageous, and the delight of everybody's heart seems to be sett upon the King's setting by himself at the Haymarket House, ... and t'other day at Dodington's the Prince was as eager and pressed me as earnestly to go to Lincoln's Inn Fields opera as if it had been a thing of great moment to the nation, but by good luck I had company at home.⁸²

Statements like these have no doubt encouraged the assumption that partisan operation of the two companies would rigidly follow the partisan structure of contemporary politics, and, like Hervey's *Memoirs*, they seem directly to contradict the findings of Taylor, Milhous and McGeary. The accounts of these scholars in turn seem neither to acknowledge nor to make accommodation for such reportage.

The sheer quantity of discussion insisting on the partisan nature of the companies' rivalry indicates, if nothing else, a desire to read company machinations as political. Contemporary newspaper commentary thus might justifiably be seen as factually misleading: seeking to capture the readers' attention or whet their appetites for the coming opera season by suggesting quasi-political imbroglios between the companies, they are offering theatre-goers (and modern scholars) not 'fact', but advertisement. Nonetheless, publicity inevitably reflects broader truths about how society constructs itself, always under its own refining gaze. While the next chapter takes steps towards one possible explanation for Lord Hervey's bald assertion that 'An anti-Handelist was looked upon as an anti-courtier', the general climate in which such a declaration could be made is the subject of the following analysis.⁸³

There were particular pragmatic reasons for articulating the rivalry between the

⁸² Lady Betty Germain to her brother the Duke of Dorset (Jan or Feb 1734), Sackville MSS 36. Cited in part in Deutsch, 343-4, and in Yorke-Long, 'The Opera of the Nobility', 99.

⁸³ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 273-4.

Italian and Handelian factions in the Academy, and then between Handel and the Nobility Opera, through political metaphor.⁸⁴

Opera and hegemony

In an environment of nationalism, Italian opera might seem a hedonistic example of upper class cosmopolitanism, a club established by and for the aristocracy as their most important social meeting space outside Court and Parliament.⁸⁵ Here Lady Burlington could escape the *ennui* of the Court to be with her husband.⁸⁶ Here Whigs and Tories could and did meet on equal terms: although most Directors of the Royal Academy were Whigs, many Subscribers were Tories.⁸⁷ But the opera house's role as playground of the aristocracy, regardless of their party allegiance, did not render it neutral as a political space; quite the opposite. As we saw in the satires at the beginning of this chapter, it was the very fact that representatives of the nation were so thoroughly involved in the workings of the opera that made it a site for troubled discussion of the politics of nationhood.⁸⁸

Opera was clearly tied to those who exercised most power in the country, the royal family. While royalty no longer controlled lavish spectacles—as they had at the beginning of the previous century and did in other countries—they continued to act as highly influential patrons. Their influence was partly expressed through the founding of a *Royal Academy of Music*, partly through the financial stake they held

⁸⁴ On the Italian faction in the Academy see Dorris, *Paolo Rolli*, 80-3; Donald Burrows, *Handel* (Oxford, 1994), 112-6. Owen Swiney was highly suspicious of Nicola Haym and others, and clearly believed there was in London 'a Sett of Interested Italians, who think they have a right to dispose of the Academy's purse among their own Creatures &c.', letter to the Duke of Richmond, 11 May 1725, Goodwood MS 105/390; cited in Gibson, 353-6 (354).

⁸⁵ William Weber, 'Handel's London—Social, Political and Intellectual Contexts', *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge, 1997), 45-54 (47-50).

⁸⁶ Boynton, 'Lord Burlington at Home', 22.

⁸⁷ Weber, 'Handel's London', 50.

⁸⁸ Newman points out that nationalism focuses initially on those areas where foreign culture encroaches on native soil; *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 54-7, 67.

in the opera companies' operation—the bounty paid at the end of every season.⁸⁹

Anne the Princess Royal's role as chief royal patron to Handel, even when not of great financial significance, was necessary as both an effective guarantor of his quality and a passport to other royal courts.⁹⁰ Equally, the physical presence of the Royal family on special occasions was vital to a house's survival as it boosted attendance figures; their presence at any public entertainment might attract a 'splendid and numerous' audience.⁹¹ Although, as Judith Milhous and Robert Hume note, the presence of royalty could not always assure good houses, they clearly realised the importance of their physical (as well as financial) patronage. For instance, a struggling Handel was favoured with royal attendance on the opening night of his first season against the Opera of the Nobility, 30 October 1733, which was also the King's birthday—a sure sign of royal favour, as the King did not hold his usual ball that night.⁹² Handel and Heidegger seem to have acknowledged and capitalised on the popularity of special royal occasions by not admitting regular subscribers on their season tickets.⁹³ Benjamin Victor, writing to Matthew Dubourg in May 1736, suggests the degree of the monarch's influence by predicting a decline in opera's fortunes without the King to serve as 'prop':

As to the Operas, they must tumble, for the King's presence could hardly hold them up, and even that prop is denied them, for his majesty will not admit his royal ears to be tickled this season. As to music, it flourishes in

⁸⁹ On the founding of the Academy, see Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'The Charter for the Royal Academy of Music', *ML* 67 (1986), 50-8. On royal financial support, see Donald Burrows and Robert D. Hume, 'George I, the Haymarket Opera Company and Handel's *Water Music*', *EM* 19 (1991), 323-41; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'Handel's Opera Finances in 1732-3', *MT* 125 (1984), 86-9; idem, 'New Light on Handel and the Royal Academy of Music in 1720', *Theatre Journal* 35 (1983), 149-67; Carole Taylor, 'Handel and Frederick, Prince of Wales', *MT* 125 (1984), 89-92.

⁹⁰ Taylor, 148-189. See also Richard G. King, 'Handel's Travels in the Netherlands', *ML* 72 (1991), 372-86; idem, 'Two New Letters from Princess Amelia', *Händel-Jahrbuch* 41 (1995), 169-71.

⁹¹ At Drury Lane Theatre for *The Island Princess*; *The London Evening-Post*, 14-16 February 1734.

⁹² The attendance figures are given in Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'Box Office Reports for Five Operas Mounted by Handel in London, 1732-1734', *Harvard Library Bulletin* 26 (1978), 245-66 (256). But see Milhous's and Hume's other four box office reports from 1732-4 for indications of poor attendance on other nights members of the royal family were present.

⁹³ Milhous and Hume, 'Box Office Reports for Five Operas', 260.

this place more than ever, in subscription concerts and private parties, which must prejudice all operas and public entertainments.⁹⁴

Indeed, London itself could be subject to population fluctuation at times of special events, at least as far as 'polite society' was concerned. So Charles Stanhope complained to Essex at the beginning of the 1732 season that

on Monday the kings birthday there was a very great appearance of nobility at Court but most people return'd to the Country the next day, so that the town is at present very empty and t'is thought will continue so till near Christmas the opera begins to morrow which will be \the/ cheif diversion I shall have in London for this good while.⁹⁵

Although Stanhope may have found solace in the opera, it is doubtful whether the opera management found much comfort in the 'emptiness' of the town. At the same time Stanhope writes, Essex's business agent, Thomas Bowen, comments on the variety and quality of entertainment available in London, and on the thinness of the audiences, much as Victor did four years later.⁹⁶

If the theatres benefited as the town filled for special events, usually those events were related to the Court calendar. The major event of the 1733-34 year was the wedding of Princess Anne and the Prince of Orange. When what Thomas

⁹⁴ Benjamin Victor, *Original Letters, Dramatic Pieces, and Poems*, 3 vols (1776), I, 15. Victor dates this letter 'November 1738'; for redating, see Deutsch, 409.

⁹⁵ 3 November 1732; BL Add MS 27732, f.42r. Donald Burrows observes that the 1727-8 opera season probably began early (on 30 September) in order to capitalize on the large numbers of the nobility in town for George II's coronation; Burrows, *Handel*, 124.

⁹⁶ 'The Operas have begun, but are yet very empty; thô they have gott a New Woman (Caestina I think) whose person and Voice both please, but yet cannot fill the House. The death of Wilks & Mrs. Oldfield, and the inability of Booth and Mrs Parker have left Drury Lane House in great distress, they have very empty Houses; Miller, who upon a Quarell was retired to Goodman's Fields, is returned; and was received last Wensday, with such Joy as I never saw in the Play-house. Rich's New house is in so great forwardness that they say it will be opened next Week.' undated [1732]; BL Add MS 27738, f.32v. 'I am extreamly sorry Turin is a place where there is so little Diversion: indeed We have but very little here, thô promoted in more places than ever. We have at present Six play houses on foot, the Opera, the little playhouse in the Haymarket - Drury Lane, and Rich's in the Piazza; the New one in Lincoln's Inn fields, and that in Goodman's fields. and are nevertheless threatned with another in Southwark. But, I do not know how it is, or whence, the best of them are but thinly fild: and even the Novelty of Rich's cannot draw a full house. I have not been able to account for this any other wise than, as fear it does not proceed form any reformation in our Morals, I am apprehensive it really does proceed from a want of money to lavish as we have done for some years past.' 19 December 1732; BL Add MS 27738, f.37r.

Bowen calls Senesino's new house in Lincoln's Inn Fields opened in December 1733 with 'an Opera of Ariadne',

the whole Royal Family was there, and the House so Crowded that many of the Ladies could not get to their Coaches till eleven a Clock and came home so late that some of their Husbands I believe thought 'em otherwise Employed.⁹⁷

As a spectacle, the royal family no doubt proved an additional attraction for many in opera and theatre audiences.

On a less prosaic level, the family's presence marked out the opera house as royally sanctioned; it was therefore one of the forums for expression of nationhood. If the monarch used sacred or occasional music in other contexts to help delineate his reign (as even the 'philistine' George II used Handel's *Music for the Royal Fireworks*), then it is certainly possible that the opera house could be similarly employed.⁹⁸ Indeed, appearance at the opera was a significant means of mediating the royal image to the public at large. George I and his errant son made their first joint visit to the Royal Academy after years of enmity on the opening night of *Radamisto* (27 April 1720), Handel's first opera for the Academy.⁹⁹ On George II's 50th birthday, *The London Journal* reported 'the greatest Appearance of the Nobility and Quality ... as has been known' at St James's, but it also noted that 'there was no Ball at Court, on the Occasion; but their Majesties and the Royal Family went to the Opera House in the Hay-market, and saw a new Opera call'd SEMIRAMIS.'¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ To the Earl of Essex, 31 December 1733; BL Add MS 27738 (f.95r); cf. Taylor, 204.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Burrows, *Handel*, 290-2, on *Judas Maccabaeus* as a celebration of victory against the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, and Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 92-107, on the politics of Handel's anthems (Smith also points out the equivocal nature of *Judas Maccabaeus*'s triumph, pp. 299-300).

⁹⁹ Donald Burrows points out the significance of this event; Burrows, *Handel*, 107. In the next chapter, we will see that the opera house was also a principal means for public expression of the courtship between Princess Anne and the Prince of Orange, and that their semi-staged interactions in this public venue both helped to channel their relationship into almost mythical patterns, and emphasised the mutability of 'performance' space within the theatre.

¹⁰⁰ *The London Journal*, 3 November 1733

Aristocratic involvement in opera sponsorship and production was no doubt partly an expression of solidarity with the Monarch—that which he valued, they necessarily also found important.¹⁰¹ It is then unsurprising that a split in the ranks of the opera company could also be read—whether true or not—as an institutional ‘political’ breach, indeed as a direct reflection of the escalating tension between the ‘Court’ and ‘Country’ parties.

As we have seen, opera under the Royal Academy had established its parallel with contemporary government, aiming to improve society, and having a creative figurehead (Handel/Walpole) obviously patronised by the King. In 1733 this parallel was extended. Handel, already closely linked to the Royal family through patronage and nationality, was obviously seen as the ‘Court’ composer. In its nature as the ‘breakaway’ group, and in the lingering taint of Jacobitism (and therefore Catholicism) accompanying figures like Lord Bolingbroke, the avowedly patriotic ‘Country’ party could be tied to the new Opera of the Nobility, which, throughout its lifetime, was defined as much on the basis of its control by (Catholic) singers as by members of the nobility dissatisfied with Handel.

The two companies in the 1730s were also easily compared to the contemporary two- (or three-) party political system on the grounds of their vaunted aims.¹⁰² Those in power claimed that, with a government/management ostensibly designed to run for public benefit, there was no rationale for competition, as any contending party/company undermined the benefit to the public by dividing or distracting the original organisation. The opposition of course countered this

¹⁰¹ Courtiers were, for instance, obliged to go hunting with the King (or play cricket with Prince Frederick), whether or not they enjoyed such pastimes; see Boynton, ‘Lord Burlington at Home’, 21.

¹⁰² Caspar Wilhelm von Brocke makes this very comparison in his letter to the King of Prussia of 1 [12] January 1734, writing on the 1730s rivalry: ‘In this the *genius* of the nation has shown itself, namely, how very inclined it is to *novelties* and *factions*’; cited in Deutsch, 341.

position by averring that they were the true defenders of the public benefit, and that their party-political existence was a necessary curb to the licenses taken by the established organisation.¹⁰³ We might see the Nobility company's existence justified as a response to Handel's reputation for being 'proud and saucy', and to the furore about Handel's prices for *Deborah* in the 1732-33 season.¹⁰⁴ If Handel was, like Walpole, a corrupt Minister working not to serve King and Country but for personal gain, the formation of an opposing company to challenge his excesses was, that opposition would argue, in the public interest. The *Craftsman*'s masterly misreading of Handel's motivations and the circumstances surrounding the oratorio's performance as an allegory for Walpole's Excise scheme was thus presented as a letter from Paolo Rolli, one known to be opposed to Handel at this time.¹⁰⁵ The widely circulated accompanying epigram cast Walpole and Handel as conspiring 'projectors' in an Excise or taxation duet.¹⁰⁶

If, as we see with the *Craftsman*, political elements in discussion of Italian opera were sometimes viewed metaphorically, to some extent they could also be understood literally. The strength of association between Handel and the monarchy was demonstrated after Walpole's Ministry had fallen, and at the time of the

¹⁰³ George Bubb Doddington, writing to the Prince of Wales on whether he should forge links with the opposition, explained this situation: 'The narrow measure of governing by a party, which has, unfortunately, attended the frequency of Parliaments ... seems to have been the occasion, that opposition has, too frequently, changed its views, from the redress of grievances, (its ancient, and *only justifiable object*) to a pursuit of preferment, or private resentment. Let us take them separately, and see, if a Prince of Wales can appear at the head of either, consistent with his true greatness.' (my italics); *The Diary of the Late George Bubb Dodington ... from March 8, 1748-9 to February 6, 1761*, ed. Henry Penruddocke Wyndham (1784), 475.

¹⁰⁴ On Handel's reputation, see Sir Henry Liddell to Henry Ellison, 27 November 1735, and others cited in Carole Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London, 1987), 165-81 (169); on *Deborah* see William Coxe, *Anecdotes of George Frederick Handel and John Christopher Smith* [1799], 19; cited in McGeary, 'Handel, Prince Frederick, and the Opera of the Nobility Reconsidered', 162-3.

¹⁰⁵ The attribution was sufficiently newsworthy for the whole letter to be reprinted in the *London Magazine*, beginning 'A new Opera Scheme. One who signs himself Paolo Rolli, in a Letter to Mr. D'Anvers [the pseudonymous editor of *The Craftsman*], says...'; *The London Magazine*, April 1732 [1733]; cited in Deutsch, 313. For attribution issues, see note 76, above.

¹⁰⁶ See also *The Bee: or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet*, 24 March 1733; cited in Deutsch, 309.

Hanoverian monarchy's greatest danger, in 1745. 'Orator' John Henley, in one of his popular, satirical and topical weekly 'Lectures', spoke of George II's misfortunes:

he cannot well carry on y^e War, nor leave it off—the Topicks for his speeches are worn thread-bare; his Great Hats begin to be out of fashion; [his] his favourite, Handel, last season—was almost thrown out of y^e [season] \Consert of Music/ & packing up his Pipes.¹⁰⁷

As nationalism and/or patriotism assumed a central role in cultural life in general in the 1730s—both through party politics and through an extension of the ideas of civic humanism and 'taste'—this ideology politicised outlook on the two opera companies, as one particular example might demonstrate. A rising tide of nationalism could help explain John Rich's puzzling decision to admit Handel's productions to his theatre in 1734. Rich, known for his ruthlessness in theatre management on the one hand, and his championing of popular pantomime on the other, hardly seems the most likely defender of Italian opera. Confusion at Rich's support for Handel is focussed on the manager's financial hard-headedness; Taylor is right, however, to point out that Handel by this juncture was not simply a loss-maker for Rich, but also a figure of some local and even international standing.¹⁰⁸ Taylor touches on Handel's possible association with 'Englishness' in mentioning both his opposition to Senesino (who meant 'popery and effeminacy' to some sections of the public), and his increasing use of English singers; these associations merit further consideration.

As mentioned earlier, by working in opposition to the Italian singers seen as leading the Opera of the Nobility, Handel (albeit undesignedly) improved his own

¹⁰⁷ BL Add MSS 10349, f.25r: Henley's Lectures 1745-46, 7 July 1745. On Henley, see Graham Midgley, *The Life of Orator Henley* (Oxford, 1973), though Midgley neglects the manuscript sources.

¹⁰⁸ On Rich's business acumen, see Robert D. Hume, 'Handel and Opera Management in London in the 1730s', *ML* 67 (1986), 347-62 (352); Taylor, 209-11.

artistic credentials. For instance, Lord Lovell cast his patronage of the two opera companies (but particularly that of Handel) as the act of a virtuoso—one known for the furtherance of knowledge and good taste—in a letter to Burlington in 1736: ‘I am sorry to hear Operas do so badly, you know as a virtuoso I encourage both, & have subscribed to Hendell, for w^{ch} I have been severely reprimanded by my brethren.’¹⁰⁹ On another level, the Earl of Albermarle’s following letter to Duke of Newcastle balances slighting equation of the modishness of pantomime and opera stars with mention of the departure from Britain of Handel’s leading royal sponsor. Albermarle satirically demonstrates the waning of the Italian star:

The Princess Royal went to Colchester last Saturday morning & saild from Harwich yesterday at two o’clock in y^e afternoon. Harlequin & Farinelli are much in vogue and gain ground with the Princess Amalia wich gives me hopes of your Grace joining with the well wishers to them both.¹¹⁰

Handel the Hanoverian was therefore Handel the anti-Jacobite and anti-Italian.¹¹¹ It was only a short step from there to create Handel the British Patriot, as we shall see in chapter six.

Rich seems to have acknowledged nationalist considerations in 1727, when he commented that ‘there are many essential Requisites still wanting [in Italian opera] to establish that Entertainment on a lasting Foundation, and adapt it to the Taste of an English Audience’.¹¹² Rich appreciated that in order to achieve a degree of permanence, rather than the financially shaky system of fickle aristocratic

¹⁰⁹ 20 December 1736, BL Althorp MSS B8 (unbound), (cf. Taylor, 233; James, *Chief Justice Coke*, 228). Lovell doubtless knew he was writing to a sympathiser. Burlington considered himself above such allegiances and would not even side with his peers where an artist under his patronage was concerned: when Senesino declined to sing at a concert in the York Assembly Rooms unless his patron asked him, Burlington supported the singer’s autonomy, ‘and the company was “mightily disobliged”’; Boynton, ‘Lord Burlington at Home’, 24.

¹¹⁰ BL Add MSS 32689, f.479r: Earl of Albermarle to the Duke of Newcastle, 5 Nov 1734.

¹¹¹ The antipathy to Handel of the probable Jacobite Samuel (‘Hurllothrumbo’) Johnson suggests this association. In his preface to *The Blazing Comet* (1732) he contrasted the music of his favourite Bononcini with the loathed ‘*High-Dutch* [i.e. German] Taste’ of Handel; preface partially cited in Deutsch, 300.

¹¹² Cited in Hume, ‘Opera Management in the 1730s’, 354; Taylor, 210-211.

patronage operating throughout the eighteenth century, opera had to appeal to the whole nation, which meant employing appropriate ideology as well as music. His emphasis on 'the Taste of an English Audience' implies that patriotic considerations played a defining role in the well-being (financial and otherwise) of a genre, its 'lasting Foundation'. Rich's own concern for patriotic appeal to his public was apparently expressed not only through his pantomimes (many of which exploited the audience's xenophobia), but also in the patterns established in the early 1730s' seasons, when Rich was one of the most noted promoters of Shakespearean plays.¹¹³ To have adopted opera, Rich must have felt that at least some of the requisites for English appreciation of the genre were being established, and established by Handel.

One small indication of Handel's awareness of the need to cater to his audience's 'Englishness' may be found in H. Corry's letter to the Earl of Essex of 9 March 1736, in which he notes the changeable fortunes of opera in London following Handel's success with *Alexander's Feast*:

you know wee are in a very Uncertain Climate that the sweetest Guggle of an Eunuck is soon tyresome. however Handel has gott 5 or 600 guinniys clear w^{ch} is more than the Academy have yet offerd him. & he tells me he intends a New thing soon fitt for the Tast at lest<?> of the Wealthy Citizens.¹¹⁴

Interestingly, Taylor here misreads 'Worthy' for 'Wealthy'. 'Worthy' was the sort of epithet often attached to Citizens at this time: a Citizen was not simply a member of the public, but a 'Cit', a member of the increasingly affluent and influential merchant class, and traditionally of Protestant, even Puritan inclinations. Corry's

¹¹³ The authors of *The London Stage* note that the Shakespeare Ladies particularly succeeded in encouraging Rich to mount Shakespeare's plays; *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 679; see also Paul Sawyer, 'John Rich's Contribution to the Eighteenth-Century London Stage', *The Eighteenth-Century English Stage*, ed. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (London, 1972), 85-104 (97-8). Rich's interest apparently lay in tragic roles; Thomas Davies commented that 'Though he could not read ten lines with propriety, yet he had constantly a Richard, a Hamlet, or a Lear, in training for the stage'; Davies, *Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Esq.* (1780), I, 325; cited in C. F. Burgess, 'Some Unpublished Items of John Rich and Something of a Puzzle', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 7 no. 2 (1968), 37-47 (41).

¹¹⁴ BL Add MS 27738, ff.235v-236r, Corry to Essex, 9 March 1735 [1736]; cf. Taylor, 222.

report that Handel designed to write something for ‘Wealthy Citizens’ is probably not the statement of the obvious we might now take it to be; it instead implies a break with tradition. Handel, it seems, intended to compose not just for the aristocracy, but also for the wealthy members of the merchant class, those who identified themselves most strongly with a new Whiggish vision of a prosperous and (therefore) powerful Britain, the nation of hardworking shopkeepers, a group traditionally hostile not just to opera, but to all forms of theatre. Was opera really the right genre for these honest citizens? If the aristocracy also aspired to these ‘honest’ attributes, was opera the right genre for them?

By examining a number of unpublished responses to Italian opera in the official and domestic correspondence of the aristocracy (particularly those involved in opera production) in the mid-1730s, I want now to address in more detail the depth of opera’s politicisation in contemporary discourse. The ubiquity of these exchanges does not necessarily unseat other scholars’ demonstrations of a lack of consistent party-political bias in the two companies. Rather it reinforces a sense of opera’s need for justification through a broader ideology, encouraging us to read these narratives not just for factual detail but also for intellectual and cultural context.

Desire for definition

We have seen an obsession with politicising the opera companies’ relationship in public communication; the language of party also saturates private discourse. It has been noted, for example, that a militaristic analogy is used consistently in correspondence about opera during this period.¹¹⁵ Even the Duke of Richmond’s old

¹¹⁵ Taylor, 190n., 205n.

tutor, Tom Hill, becomes absorbed in the infighting while relaying information on activities in London, describing the Nobility company's theatre as '*our house*'.¹¹⁶ Of course, from the outsider Count Heinrich von Büнау's query about the '*contre-opéra*', to the Duke of Newcastle's concern that Handel 'might gett the better of His enemies', to the Duchess of Leeds's catty declaration of being 'in top spirits wth y^e y^e [*sic*] certainty of haveing a very good opera here next winter in opposition to Handell', the factionalism between companies stood on its own terms, rather than (necessarily) forming an aspect of contemporary political sparring.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, it seemed to gain added vitality in the eyes of its chroniclers through the reflected glory of the contemporary political scene, as we have seen already in the letters of Lady Betty Germain and Caspar von Brocke, as Mary Pendarves complaints to Swift indicate, and as several letters to Lord Essex also suggest. Thomas Bowen invokes standard metaphors, mixing political 'discord' and the 'State' of harmony to introduce the opera in his letters to Essex at the end of 1733: 'When all the world is in discord, and your Lordship so near a great part of the bustle of it, perhaps it may not be unwelcome to you to hear how the State of Harmony (I mean the Operas) goes on here.'¹¹⁸ In Charles Delafaye's correspondence with Essex, the analogy stretches from politics into religion—another area of discourse both deeply contentious and heavily politicised. His account recalls and recasts recent English history:

¹¹⁶ Earl of March, *A Duke and His Friends*, 235-6.

¹¹⁷ Count Heinrich von Büнау, letter to Zamboni, 22 December 1733; cited in Lowell Lindgren, 'Musicians and Librettists in the Correspondence of Gio. Giacomo Zamboni', *R.M.A. Research Chronicle* 24 (1991), 154; Thomas Holles, Duke of Newcastle, letter to the Earl of Essex, September 1733, BL Add MS 27732, f.246r (*cf.* Taylor, 195); Duchess of Leeds, unaddressed letter, 7 July 1733, BL Add MS 28050, f.217r.

¹¹⁸ 31 December 1733, BL Add MS 27738, f.95r (*cf.* Taylor, 204). For Germain and Brocke, see notes 82 and 102, above. Mary Pendarves (née Granville, later Delany), wrote to Jonathan Swift: 'Our Operas have given much cause of dissension; men and women have been deeply engaged; and no debate in the House of Commons has been urged with more warmth'; cited in *Händel Handbuch* vol. 4, 254.

Here is like to be a Schism in y^e Musical World. Handel is become so arbitrary a Prince, that the Town murmurs, Senesino not being able to submit any longer to his Tyranny threatens to revolt and in conjunction with Cuzzona to set up a separate Congregation at Lincolns Inn fields.¹¹⁹

Lord Limerick's jocular letter, written to Essex in mid-1735, extends the level of metaphor still further:

There is an extraordinary peice of news which I believe has not reach'd you, Lord Delawar laid down his place of director the other night because we complyd with a faction of Ladies in giving them two operas more than were intended, you may imagine that his resigning just at this time has occasion'd various speculations, some attribute it to a secret dislike he has long had to our Russian princess Bertolli, and others to a private treaty between him and the Ally'd powers of Covent garden, but all agree, that the reason he gives was only a pretence, and we expect that next season he will secretly concur with our enemies, if he does not openly espouse their cause. if this shou'd prove to be the case, we must beg your Lordship's good offices in procuring some fresh troops, for we must make all our efforts for the next campaign, which we think will be decisive.¹²⁰

There is no indication that Delaware did any such thing, but Limerick's parody of a diplomatic communiqué is true enough in tone apparently to confuse Taylor into treating it as entirely serious. Its description of Bertolli as a 'Russian princess'—a reflection on the war of the Polish succession—gives the game away.¹²¹

This clever approximation of political negotiation is more than just a joke, however, for it leaves us wondering who the joke is on. The letter's extended foray into the world of foreign affairs ensures that the (modern) reader is unsure not only of where truth begins (was Delaware really disgruntled and, if so, why?), but also where mockery ends. The diplomatic language marks out incongruities in the tale—why should those profoundly unpolitical animals (so it was thought), 'Ladies', form

¹¹⁹ 24 May 1733, BL Add MS 27732, f.172v. Delafaye's account can be read in reference to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, of course, but also recent concerns over Walpole's overweening political dominance.

¹²⁰ 16 June 1735, BL Add MS 27733, ff. 190r-191r, (cf. Taylor, 219-220).

¹²¹ For a succinct contemporary assessment of the Polish succession crisis and what it meant to Britain, see Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 210-20.

factions? And how could a ‘faction of Ladies’ be seen as forcing compliance from unwilling directors over an extra performance or two?

Such extended political allegory might remind us of the politico-religious concerns voiced in (what appears to be) similarly satirical vein in contemporary pamphlets. In *Do you know what you are about? or, a Protestant Alarm to Great Britain*, published in 1733, the prolix title page hurries to tell all: *Proving our late THEATRIC SQUABBLE, a Type of the present Contest for the Crown of POLAND; and that the Division between Handel and Senesino, has more in it than we imagine. Also That the latter is no Eunuch, but a Jesuit in Disguise; with other Particulars of the greatest Importance.* This desire to turn everything into something of significance is ridiculous even to the modern reader; to call the notoriously ugly impresario Heidegger ‘his Adonis-ship’ and suggest that he and Senesino are competing for women, or to suggest the singer is a Jesuit, ‘as cunning as the devil, ... no more an Eunuch than Sir *Robert Walpole* ... [and] his Holiness has promised him the first Cardinal’s Hat’, could be nothing but facetious.¹²² Yet, the point of the satire’s hysterical tone is clearly that some people were making similar accusations.¹²³ Henry Carey, poet, playwright, and sometime composer, was one of many to assign a chief role in the apparent degeneration of society to the catholicism of Italian opera singers, suggesting in his bombastic *Satyr, on the Luxury and*

¹²² *Do you know what you are about? or, a Protestant Alarm to Great Britain* (1733), 16-17. Walpole publicly kept a mistress, Molly Skeritt, a fact satirised in *The Beggar’s Opera*, as elsewhere.

¹²³ The tone of this pamphlet is remarkably similar to that adopted by ‘Orator’ Henley in his sermons and addresses made throughout this period; see, for two rather mild examples of his style, his comments on George II above, and on Henry Carey in chapter four, or the following example from a lecture on languages: ‘was English perfected yⁱ way by M^r Handel, it would make all Conversation a Compleat Opera, w^{ch} w^d excell y^e French, [&] put a stop to y^e Exorbitant power of France, & sing y^e Balance of Europe to an Even Scale, by y^e Gamut’; ‘Henley’s Lectures’, 25 October 1744, BL Add MSS 19923, ff.6-7.

Effeminacy of the Age (1726) that the singers ‘for aught I know ... might be singing Mass’ on stage.¹²⁴

Though Carey’s poem and the whimsical *Protestant Alarm* inevitably assume self-conscious postures under the public gaze, these thoughts were also expressed privately. In a letter written in 1733 to the Duke of Newcastle, then the Secretary of State, ‘P.P.P.’ expresses fears for the safety of the royal family at the opera. As an indication of the way in which even ordinary people could see national—and international—political concerns operating on a local level, this letter is worth extracting at length:

My concern for the safety of the persons of theyr sacred Majesties and of theyr Royal children, obliges me to give your Grace the trouble, to acquaint you, that there are two persons having immediate imployment about the persons of the whole Royal family at certain times, who may become instruments of some detestable and desperate attempts, if the Encouragement which may be taken from theyr being in those employments be not timely prevented; My lord there are two brothers both papists, whose place it is the one; to let in the King and Queen, into theyr lodge or box at the opera in the haymarket, and the other to let in theyr Royal highnesses into theyr box or lodge at the same playhouse; they were in actual possession of those trusts, I may call em such; last winter; and in all likelihood will be next winter also:

Mylord when I reflect, how the playhouse at Copenhagen in Denmark, was set on fire, or otherwise burnt down about thirty years since or longer, three hundred persons being burnt killd or hurt; when tis rememberd, that the papists did heretofore contrive by the gunpowder plot to destroy the Royal family and the best families of the kingdom without any other prospect to themselves, but to be generally massacred throughout the kingdom, in the full fury of an enraged nation; that they find the city of London without any prospect of doing theyr party any great good; that the two last henrys of france, were openly and barefacedly murderd by desperate popish bigotts; that those forementiond persons have no doubt a free access at other times to those boxes or lodges besides that there may be other papists [<concern>d] imployd in that house all unknown to the master; all this seriously reflected on, one may tremble to think, that theyr sacred [persons] \Majesties/ and other Royal persons; may be at any time in the power of such desperate persons, as all papists are, or may be easily deluded by theyr priests to be; especially at this time that the inducements, to some such diabolical undertakings from theyr wishes and designs in behalf of a

¹²⁴ Henry Carey, *Faustina: or the Roman Songstress, a Satyr, on the Luxury and Effeminacy of the Age* [1726].

pretender of theyr own religion, are much greater than they could be at those other times.¹²⁵

Written in a neat and legible hand, with much thought and care apparent in both style and execution, its author is neither paranoid, nor posturing for an audience.¹²⁶

The concern expressed in this letter, easy to parody, was less easy to assuage: however facetious Limerick or the anonymous author of the *Protestant Alarm*, however manufactured the stentorian tones of Carey's verse, they all reflected the worries of many of their contemporaries. Such concerns might explain the tone of Limerick's letter, as well as the ubiquity of political analogy in discussions of opera in general. The letter suggests a degree of unease at the juxtaposition of foreign affairs and domestic entertainment, while at the same time implying through its extended use of metaphor that such comparison is entirely accepted, at least in the opera world. Lord Limerick's heavy-handed diplomatic skulduggery shows an awkward awareness of the fears many had about opera, and in turn the opera lover's need to establish some sort of credibility for the operatic establishment. It also seems to indicate a recognition that discussion of the detail of operatic infighting amongst the more pressing, 'masculine' matters of diplomacy and business was an indulgence only justifiable by creating a political context in which opera might seem to matter. In short, through their public and private statements, these various voices provided a framework for the development of patterns of thought about the role and relevance of opera in and for society as a whole.

¹²⁵ Newcastle Papers vol. III, August 20, 1733; BL Add MS 32688, f.151r-v,

¹²⁶ He even goes so far as to disclaim all interest in the positions and to hope that 'those persons were not losers in the main through this information, which they might not be, by theyr exchanging theyr places, for such of the same advantages, as may be held by protestants, whether in that playhouse or in another', 151v.

The allegorical rationale

The politicised approaches to opera so far discussed have, in a variety of ways ranging from the purely metaphorical to the apparently literal, all offered the parallel between State and stage that was both one of the clichés and one of the principal satirical tools of contemporary theatre.¹²⁷ This analogy indicated the degree to which all people in public life were actors required to play their part with propriety; we saw an instance in Lord Bolingbroke's garden design. Lord Hervey's letter of January 1733 to his friend Henry Fox provides a further example, describing the several 'Theatres' he had attended in the day: Walpole's levee was a 'farce', involving 'Kissing, whispering, bowing, squeezing Hands &c. ... all acted there as usual by the political Pantomimes who officiate at those weekly Performances', while the House of Commons was the 'Grand Theatre'. He then went to 'the Theatre at St. James's, where the Tragedy of a Cabinet-Council was acted to the Sorrow of sixteen poor Malefactors, & a Comedy of a privy Council ... [where the] Lord President perform'd his Part in this Scene with a great deal of dull Dignity & becoming Formality, his Hands full of Papers, his nose full of Snuff, & his Mouth full of Nonsense'. He attended the King that evening to Drury Lane, and finally went to Lady Strafford's, to see a 'medly Farce call'd a modern Assembly', where 'every Body play'd something, & most People play'd the Fool'.¹²⁸ Humour aside, the State/stage parallel indicated an active relationship between the two: art could have powerful lessons for life, contemporary theatre reflected as well as influenced the state of the nation. The theatre thus not only satirized society, but was constantly

¹²⁷ Leo Hughes, *The Drama's Patrons: A Study of the Eighteenth-Century London Audience* (Austin, Texas, 1971), 3-5; J. Paul Hunter, *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (Baltimore and London, 1975), 62-3; Maynard Mack, *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* (Toronto and Oxford, 1969), 158-161; Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, 7-8.

¹²⁸ Robert Halsband, *Lord Hervey, Eighteenth-Century Courtier* (Oxford, 1973), 150.

encouraged (or brow-beaten) to take a positive didactic stance. In this sense the theatre had its patriotic role to play.

The encouragement of national virtue through opera's exemplary plots might have been the very context directors and patrons needed to justify continuance of their patronage. Chapter four will show that the spirit of patriotism (and politics) had its impact on English opera, turning the genre into a forum for discussion of national issues, and therefore for a time lending importance to indigenous opera. Italian opera, obviously, was not domestic, but in its classical plots it did employ stories of acknowledged stature and significance for a Britain still concerned to demonstrate its inheritance of supposedly classical values. There are two ways in which we might see Italian opera's appearance justified in a specifically British context: first, through stories that in some way reflected national themes or concerns, and second, through narratives that could have particular relevance to topical events.

These categories derive from a broader tradition. Robert Hume describes the two principal means by which political issues were purveyed in contemporary theatre as 'topical allusion' and 'application'.¹²⁹ In the former, current events were openly discussed, the individuals involved barely veiled. Application dramas, on the other hand, used historically or physically distant events and persons to allow an audience to draw parallels with the contemporary world. Hume points out that the usually tragic application plays were taken more seriously by the authorities than topical allusion pieces, which were generally comic.

No doubt the authorities were more concerned by application plays because an audience well versed in the concept of cyclical history also took these pieces

¹²⁹ Robert D. Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre, 1728-1737* (Oxford, 1988), 78.

more seriously, as lessons to their present age. This understanding of history is vital to our comprehension of eighteenth-century appreciation of the arts. Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88) was simply the most famous in a long line of Roman histories designed to serve as models for and warnings to Britain. Joseph Levine points out in his study of the battle over history and historiography between the 'ancients' and 'moderns' that even those who adopted a 'modern' approach to their work—philologists and antiquarians—still essentially believed, with Dryden, that 'mankind being the same in all ages all history is only the Precepts of Moral Philosophy reduc'd into Examples'.¹³⁰ History of all types, then, could be used as a set of moral precepts.

The practice of typology—applying historical precedent as a way of understanding the significance of later events—of course came from ancient traditions of biblical exegesis, later also applied to classical texts.¹³¹ For successive precarious regimes during the political upheavals of the seventeenth century, invoking biblical authority as a means of legitimising their rule was vital, and further fostered biblical typology as an important mode of understanding.¹³² In the

¹³⁰ Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (London, 1991), 274-5 and *passim*. *Plutarch's Lives in Eight Volumes ... To which is prefixed, The Life of Plutarch, Written by Mr. Dryden* (1749), I, 33, 37. Dryden's approach to history was certainly still current in the mid-eighteenth century; see, for example, the collected essays from *The Universal Spectator* (1728-46), 2 vols (1756), II, 169: 'Biography has ever been allowed one of the most useful Branches of History, because it is, of all others, the easiest to reduce to Practice.'

¹³¹ To take two standard examples, Moses is the type, Christ is his antitype or fulfilment; similarly, Virgil's *Aeneid* was often read as 'proof' of Christian doctrines, with Aeneas as the type of Christ; see, for example, Paul J. Korshin, *Typologies in England, 1650-1820* (Princeton, 1982). Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, which paired ancient Greek and Roman figures as examples for modern behaviour was popular throughout the eighteenth century. For a brief analysis of strict biblical typology (and its difference from allegory), see Steven N. Zwicker, *Dryden's Political Poetry: the Typology of King and Nation* (Providence, R.I., 1972), 1-27.

¹³² Michael F. Suarez, S.J., 'The Mock Biblical: A Study in English Satire from the Popish Plot to the Pretender Crisis, 1678-1747', (D.Phil. diss., University of Oxford, 1999), 19-24; Thomas Jemielity, 'A Mock-Biblical Controversy: Sir Richard Blackmore in *The Dunciad*', *Philological Quarterly* 74 (1995), 249-77; Henning Graf Reventlov, *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia, 1985); D. E. Nineham (ed.), *The Church's Use of the Bible, Past and Present* (London, 1963); Thomas R. Preston, 'Biblical Criticism, Literature, and the Eighteenth-Century Reader', *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel

eighteenth century, the use of Bible, myth, and history as authority and guide was common to all walks of life: Hogarth's prints and his and others' history paintings drew modern morals from religious and historical precedent, as did the librettos of Handel's oratorios. Modernised transliteration of the classics was standard practice in schools, and was the staple work of many professional writers; the two dominant satirical modes of the eighteenth century—the mock biblical and the mock epic—similarly attest to the currency and value of the lessons of history.¹³³ Books of emblems and maxims ensured that even the illiterate could understand their relationship to historical patterns.¹³⁴

The theatre, then, was just one of many media in which political or other allegories could be presented, the ubiquity of secularised typological designs reflecting a general mode of discourse and conception.¹³⁵ Indeed, the theatre's tendency for reflexivity encouraged focus on the relationship between world and stage; certainly, purveyors of opera realised this link as surely as anyone else in eighteenth-century Britain. The Royal Academy was concerned with the didactic

Rivers (Leicester, 1982), 97-126; Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London, 1993).

¹³³ For the importance of the classics in schooling, see, for example, M. L. Clarke, *Classical Education in Britain, 1500-1900* (Cambridge, 1959); George C. Brauer, Jr., *The Education of a Gentleman: Theories of Gentlemanly Education in England 1660-1775* (New York, 1959). For a fuller list of titles, see Richard King, 'The Composition and Reception of Handel's "Alessandro" (1726)', (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1992), 131; King also discusses the importance of classical learning for appreciation of Handel's *Alessandro* (130ff). Demonstrating the pervasive general influence of classical precedent on Pope and his peers, for example, is Mack, *The Garden and the City*, esp. 3-115. Dryden's translation of Virgil and Pope's of Homer are the two most famous instances of the value of translation even for established writers in this period; on the political message of Dryden's *Aeneid*, see Steven N. Zwicker, *Politics and Language in Dryden's Poetry: The Arts of Disguise* (Princeton, 1984), 177-205. On the mock-Biblical and mock-epic, see Suarez, 'The Mock Biblical'; Ulrich Broich, *The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem* (Cambridge, 1990); Gregory C. Colomb, *Designs on Truth: The Poetics of the Augustan Mock-Epic* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992).

¹³⁴ Kevin L. Cope, 'Directions to Signify: Exploring the Emblems of Enlightenment Allegory', *Enlightening Allegory: Theory, Practice, and Contexts of Allegory in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Kevin L. Cope (New York, 1993), 171-218.

¹³⁵ John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford, 1963). See also Gerrard, 113-21 on the Patriot opposition's historical drama. For a detailed analysis of the ubiquity of moral and political allegory, particularly as it relates to Handel's oratorios, see Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 202-32, *passim*.

role of opera and with plots ‘simple, tender, and heroic—Roman, Greek, or possibly Persian’.¹³⁶ The anonymous author of *The Touch-stone* (1728), in his whimsical and sometimes facetious account of London’s entertainments, must have reflected a commonplace when he observed that ‘a compleat OPERA is a regular musical DRAMA, and approaching very near to the excellency of POETRY, (because Virtue may be there inculcated by a proper Fable)’.¹³⁷ At least some auditors (or readers) found virtue in opera’s ‘fables’ as well as in oratorio’s more obviously moral narratives; one writer to the *Universal Spectator* in 1735 commended *Alcina* for its ‘beautiful and instructive Allegory’ (concerning the dangers of youthful passions).¹³⁸

How were these historical lessons written and read? The scholar in search of political allegory could be forgiven for uncertainty as to where the interpretative line ought to be drawn: particularly in ‘application’ plays, which relied on audience interpretation, how can one be sure of authorial intention and its significance? For writers with potentially controversial, even seditious, agendas, historical parallels were doubly useful: not only could they be sure their audience would know how to ‘apply’ the parallel, they could also claim themselves innocent of any pernicious intention.¹³⁹ It was, after all, up to individual audience members and governmental ministers if they chose to make unflattering applications, as opposition playwrights and newspapers gleefully reminded their opponents time and again, while at the same time encouraging readers to make those very applications.¹⁴⁰ As Henry

¹³⁶ Riva’s letter to Muratori; cited in *Händel Handbuch* vol. 4, 143-4, and (in English) in Dorris, *Paolo Rolli*, 42-3.

¹³⁷ *The Touch-stone, or, Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological Essays on the reigning Diversions of the Town* (1728), 3.

¹³⁸ *Universal Spectator*, 5 July 1735; cited in *Händel Handbuch* vol. 4, 255-6.

¹³⁹ See, for instance, Henry Brooke’s aggrieved preface to his banned play *Gustavus Vasa: or, the Deliverer of His Country* (1739); discussed in Gerrard, 79. Despite—or because of—lack of performance, the play sold extremely well.

¹⁴⁰ Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, 7; Mack, *The Garden and the City*, 136. Robert Hume provides several examples of the process of free application: *The Craftsman* advocated ‘application’ in its issue of 8 March 1728/9; *The History of Mortimer, Being a Vindication of The Fall of Mortimer*.

Fielding explained via his characters in the 1737 *Historical Register*, the best subject for a successful play is:

First Player. Why no subject at all, sir; but I would have a humming deal of satire, and I would repeat in every page that courtiers are cheats and don't pay their debts, that lawyers are rogues, physicians blockheads, soldiers cowards, and ministers——

Second Player: What, what, sir?

First Player: Nay, I'll only name 'em, that's enough to set the audience a-hooting.¹⁴¹

As Fielding's shrewd player demonstrates, by the early 1730s opposition newspapers had established such a network of satirical types, for which Walpole, George II and Caroline, amongst others, were the fulfilment or antitype, that even fleeting allusion to a single figure could set off networks of association and inference.¹⁴²

We might think that, given the range of newspaper coverage in the eighteenth century, political or other allegorical messages intended in a play would be confirmed by published reports. As Robert Hume gloomily observes, however, we can take neither apparent authorial intention nor audience reaction as voiced in newspapers as altogether reliable.¹⁴³ Unsurprisingly, there were occasions when

Occasioned by it's having been presented as a treasonable libel. (1731) pretended to vindicate the shameless anti-Walpole play *The Fall of Mortimer. An Historical Play* (1731), attributed to William Hatchett, against the earlier *Remarks on an historical play, called, The fall of Mortimer* ([1731]) which itself affected horror at the satire; cited in Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 83, 81. Aaron Hill wrote to Henry Fielding with a concern that an allegorical reading might *not* work in *A Rehearsal of Kings* (1737): 'the necessity your prudence was under, to disguise your design with *caution*, has so perplexed it with *doubtfulness*, that I am fearful, in the hurry of action, some of the *most meaning* allusion, in your piece, may be mistaken for scenes, which want any meaning at all; while, on the other side, among the few, who can penetrate purpose, and unravel the *satire*, as fast as they hear it, you will find *some* persons malignantly disposed, upon a supposition, that royalty, in general, should never be the mark of contempt; and others, because they will conclude, you have levelled your aim against particular objects, at whose expense they must incline to be diverted', letter of 28 February 1736 in *The Works of the Late Aaron Hill, Esq.*, 4 vols (1753), I, 239-41 (239); cited in Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 230.

¹⁴¹ Thomas R. Cleary suggests this discussion exemplifies Fielding's approach to satire in the 1730s; Cleary, *Henry Fielding: Political Writer* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1984), 21.

¹⁴² Mack, *The Garden and the City*, 128-34.

¹⁴³ Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 77. Nonetheless, elsewhere Hume warns against the practice of making applications and applying parallels without evidence; see his 'The Politics of Opera in Late Seventeenth-Century London', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10 (1998), 15-43.

journalists chose to put a particular slant on a play for their own purposes; as we will see in chapter three, the partisan interpretations of *Hurlothrumbo* by Samuel Johnson (not the lexicographer) provide one very clear example, and responses to *The Beggar's Opera* supply another, somewhat more opaque instance.¹⁴⁴ Almost certainly, there were also occasions when newspapers did not discuss the political content of a play, perhaps because it was unsuccessful, or because more interesting matters were afoot.¹⁴⁵

Although we should beware confusing authorial intention with (contemporary or modern) reader response, we ought also to realise that both writers and readers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could manipulate their texts to reach a desired meaning. While authors using history to draw modern parallels ‘conveyed the present by adapting the past to suit it’, readers could ignore literary contexts, freeing words to apply to whatever suited them and atomising a text to turn it into metaphor, understanding their mythology—as the *Gentleman's Magazine* put it—‘in a figurative Sense’.¹⁴⁶ In Rolli's *Arianna in Nasso*, discussed in the next chapter, we see an example of the former custom, in which episodes of the Theseus myth are rearranged to paint the character (and possibly contemporary persons) in an unfavourable light. Two straightforward examples from the theatre may demonstrate the latter practice: in 1713 Addison's political play *Cato* was acclaimed by both Whigs and Tories, though Addison was himself a Whig; with Handel's

¹⁴⁴ *The Craftsman* for 17 February 1728 described *The Beggar's Opera* as ‘the most venomous allegorical Libel against the G—t that hath appeared for many Years past.’ Their commentary was republished as *A Key to the Beggar's Opera in a Letter to Caleb Danvers, Esq.* Writers for Walpole claimed the extraordinarily successful ballad opera had been deliberately misinterpreted by the opposition press as an attack on the Ministry; see Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 77.

¹⁴⁵ Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 77.

¹⁴⁶ Alan Roper, ‘Drawing Parallels and Making Applications in Restoration Literature’, *Politics as Reflected in Literature*, Papers presented at a Clark Library Seminar, 24 January 1987 (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, 1987), 51, 44, 37, 39. See the *Gentleman's Magazine*, September and November 1732, 945, 1072, for ‘figurative’ presentations of myth which parallel contemporary circumstances.

Floridante (1721), a section of the audience read the story of a jealous father's attempt to deprive his son of the throne as a reflection on the tense relationship between George I and the Prince of Wales, the future George II, applauding wildly when the son was recognised as the rightful heir.¹⁴⁷

There was, of course, no single interpretation of most historical events or figures (something we might remember when forming our own allegorical readings).¹⁴⁸ Some playwrights—particularly those espousing the scrupulously virtuous cause of patriotism—could pretend to rectitude while writing stringent anti-governmental satire. Christine Gerrard points out that, as opposition sympathisers adapted the vow ‘O B[ritain], O my country, yet I’ll save thee’ from Henry Brooke’s banned play *Gustavus Vasa* (1739) to greet one another, ‘ministerialists must have despaired of finding a foothold on the smoothly unimpeachable surface of Patriot literature’.¹⁴⁹

Others relied on ambiguity in their presentation of ministerial turpitude or royal stupidity, shifting the focus of satire from one character to another, or layering their presentation of a character so that (s)he could represent one person or vice, or many. To take a well-known example, would the opposition have found Walpole represented in *The Beggar’s Opera* by Macheath—like Walpole, a master thief with two women in tow? Or does Peachum, the leader of a gang of thieves and, at the same time, corrupt thief-taker general, stand for Walpole? Or is he best seen in the character of the gaoler, Lockit, who pretends to be the standard bearer for justice and

¹⁴⁷ On *Cato* see Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber* ed. B. R. S. Fone (Ann Arbor, 1968), 196. For the infamous Tory-Whig competition to see who could most applaud the play’s sentiments, see Pope’s letter to John Caryl, *Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 5 vols (Oxford, 1956), I, 174-6; see also Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England*, 56-61. On *Floridante*, Gibson, 155-6; Winton Dean and John Merrill Knapp, *Handel’s Operas 1704-1726* (Oxford, 1987, rev. edn, 1995), 389-90.

¹⁴⁸ Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, 211-13, *passim*.

¹⁴⁹ Gerrard, 79.

probity, but fills his pockets by enjoining his charges to further crimes, thus inflicting misery on the populace at large? When it comes to that, is *The Beggar's Opera* a satire of the follies of opera, of government, of the justice system, or of society at large? All and none is, of course, the answer: as we know, the piece's brilliance lies in its multiple (and continuing) applicability.

This technique was far from exclusive to Gay, however; it had been a standard weapon in the satirist's armory throughout the early eighteenth century, and the most noted theatrical satirist of the 1730s, Henry Fielding, consistently superimposed his satirical targets to achieve his plays' most humorous effects.¹⁵⁰ By this means, playwrights could perhaps avoid prosecution or the banning of their plays. In addition, as J. Paul Hunter observes, layering the objects of satire had a 'tendency to cross-reference surrogates and build an over-whelming claustrophobic sense of impingement by the Enemy'. Of course, if the 'Enemy' was the government, it sometimes struck back by banning a play (and eventually struck for good with the 1737 Licensing Act), but what could not be acted on stage could still be published, and some playwrights clearly relied on reaching their audience in the private home rather than the public theatre.¹⁵¹

British identity in Italian opera

Summing up his study of political theatre in 1720s and 1730s London, John Loftis finds that, while there is plenteous wit, 'the political themes are on the one hand

¹⁵⁰ Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England*, *passim*; Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, *passim*. Maynard Mack provides an extended analysis of satire through innuendo and allusion in Pope's poetry in *The Garden and the City*, 134-62; also 163-87, *passim*. J. Paul Hunter observes the technique in Swift (particularly *Gulliver's Travels*) and Pope; Hunter, *Occasional Form*, 63.

¹⁵¹ Hume notes that the satire in Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731) would have appeared more overtly political to readers than to viewers; Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 90. Loftis similarly mentions several pamphlets of the 1730s in dramatic or ballad opera form that were obviously not designed to be staged because (Loftis assumes) they would have been banned for their satire; Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England*, 112-3.

narrowly partisan and on the other generalised to the point of being platitudinous'.¹⁵²

We should not, however, forget that 'platitudes' were just as important as specific policies to contemporary political—particularly patriotic—rhetoric.¹⁵³ More significantly, in a forum reliant on attractive products, lofty ideals—then as now—were appealing to virtually all. We might also bear this in mind when examining the stories of opera of the 1720s and '30s.

The following sampling of opera plots makes no pretence to be an exhaustive study of the circumstances surrounding these works; chapter two attempts such an examination of one pair of operas. Rather, my survey highlights some of the features that would have resonated with political ideology. I do not claim any definitive partisan commitment for or interpretation of any opera—all my readings are speculative. Rather, I draw attention to the patterns and ideas in certain operas that we know contemporary viewers and readers noted in contemporary theatre.

Epic and tragedy were two genres particularly favoured by patriot writers in the 1730s. Aaron Hill wrote of tragic drama in his *Advice to the Poets* (1731) that 'there is no Part of Learning, in its own Nature, so capable, as *This Branch of Poetry*, to serve the Wise, and the National, Views, of a Great, and Able, Politician'.¹⁵⁴ Given similarity in material between epic, tragedy and contemporary Italian opera, similar encomium could have applied. The 'simple, tender, and heroic—Roman, Greek, or possibly Persian' plots that Riva described in his letter to Muratori could easily have matched particular British interests in, for example, civic

¹⁵² Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England*, 154. Hume similarly suggests that after 1731 the theatres 'stuck to fairly general parallels and ideology'; Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 86.

¹⁵³ Smith points out how useful oppositional ideology in general is for 'didactic literary semi-fictions such as oratorio'; Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 337.

¹⁵⁴ Aaron Hill, *Advice to the Poets* (1731); cited in Gerrard, 78. See Gerrard (76-81) for patriotism, epic and tragedy.

humanism, which was of course tied to the ideal of the classical Republic, or the broader question of the nature of leadership. Richard King provides detailed discussion of one such opera, Handel's *Alessandro* (1726), concluding that the historical aspects of Alexander's mythical heroism portrayed on the operatic stage were of considerable interest to the London public.¹⁵⁵ Perhaps because of his interest in the opera as 'a fabulous series of *tableaux*, rather in the manner of Baroque historical painting', King neglects the point that opera might also have an instructive role, finding simply that *Alessandro* is 'about' Alexander the Great.¹⁵⁶ As John Barrell demonstrates, however, history painting was no mere series of *tableaux*, but was itself intended to instil a proper understanding of virtue.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, *Alessandro* would have been read as a reflection on the qualities of Alexander the Great and, by extension, any statesman; as Ruth Smith and, to some extent, King himself show, Alexander was a much discussed and contentious figure in the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁵⁸

Handel's *Alessandro* reflects the problematic nature of Alexander's character, as King points out: Alexander is seen as supremely heroic and on occasion magnanimous, but at the same time as despotic and convinced of his own divinity. King shows that the libretto and music of *Alessandro* place particular weight on Alexander's relationships with the fawning Cleone and the valiant Clito, who refuses to worship his friend and king, Alexander.¹⁵⁹ While the 1690 source libretto has love as a motivating factor for both Cleone's adulation and Clito's

¹⁵⁵ Richard Glenn King, 'Handel's "Alessandro"', 152-88, esp. 165-7, 186-8.

¹⁵⁶ King, 'Handel's "Alessandro"', 189, 204.

¹⁵⁷ Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting*; Barrell suggests that only in the early nineteenth century 'did the doctrine that self-interest was natural, necessary, and even laudable, have any serious appeal to writers on painting' (50). See also Solkin, *Painting for Money*, *passim*.

¹⁵⁸ Ruth Smith, 'The Argument and Context of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*', *Studies in English Literature* 18 (1978), 465-90; King, 'Handel's "Alessandro"', 152-204.

¹⁵⁹ King, 'Handel's "Alessandro"', 159-60, 163-5, 178-9.

defiance, Rolli eliminates such motives from his plot. Compared to the source libretto, Rolli's reworking heightens Clito's nobility by adding lines and by making him the sole object of Alexander's persecution, so that he becomes 'a symbol of injustice'; Rolli's text similarly enhances Cleone's adulation of Alexander—a move that King interprets as 'a comic gesture'.¹⁶⁰ For a British audience in the early eighteenth century this would have been more than mere comedy, however.

The question of the divine right of monarchs and the passive obedience of the people was one of the most contentious issues of the period, and one of the most complex. In simple terms, Whig propagandists alleged that the Tories' adherence to principles of divine right and unquestioning popular obedience of the monarch made them dangerous Jacobites, and it is true that a number of Tories were at least non-Jurors, unable to support the Hanoverians who had, they felt, been handed the throne by the people when it was not theirs to give.¹⁶¹ Whigs, on the other hand, in principle held that the people were right to defend the established Church and the inherent sovereignty of the nation against James II's despotic threat to return it to catholicism, even if that defence meant usurping the monarch's prerogative.¹⁶² In practice, matters were somewhat different. The primary Tory loyalty to the Anglican Church meant that most uneasily accepted the deposition of the (Papist)

¹⁶⁰ King, 'Handel's "Alessandro"', 165, 160.

¹⁶¹ This is a highly simplified summary of the arguments; for a range of more detailed (and, indeed, conflicting) theories, see G. V. Bennett, *The Tory Crisis in Church and State 1688-1730* (Oxford, 1975); J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge, 1985), 119-98; Linda Colley, *In Defiance of Oligarchy: The Tory Party 1714-1760* (Cambridge, 1982), 101-4, 115-17; H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977), 130-2, 136-7; J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston and Montreal, 1983), 120-93; J. P. Kenyon, *Revolution Principles: The Politics of Party, 1689-1720* (Cambridge, 1977); Paul Kléber Monod, *Jacobitism and the English People, 1688-1788* (Cambridge, 1989), esp. 15-44.

¹⁶² What Kenyon calls 'a succinct exposition of Whig principles under Queen Anne—what later came to be known as "Revolution Principles"', is found in the published declaration of 'The Nobility, Gentry and Commonalty at the Rendezvous at Nottingham' on 22 November 1688: 'We assure ourselves that no rational and unbiassed person will judge it rebellion to defend our laws and religion, which all our princes have sworn [to do] at their coronations ... *We own it rebellion to resist a king*

James in favour of William's and Mary's *de facto* reign.¹⁶³ Once the Protestant succession was established, it was in the interests of stability for successive governments (Whig or Tory) to reassert obedience to the monarch, exchanging indefeasible for providential divine right. Yet, increasingly it was felt that such 'rights' were limited and contractual; as even the arch-Tory, Lord Bolingbroke, put it in *The Idea of a Patriot King* (written 1738, published 1749), the monarch holds 'a divine right to govern well, and conformably to the constitution at the head of which they are placed'.¹⁶⁴ To portray in Alexander a heroic, charismatic, but ultimately dictatorial ruler who—like James II—believed his divine rights as God's anointed were indefeasible and demanded obedience from his subjects even where that submission went against religious belief and good sense, was to contribute to contemporary political debate.¹⁶⁵

Another, related instance of a story of general public interest might be *Lucio Papirio, Dittatore*, mounted in 1732. As with *Alessandro*, the opera's origin in history is stressed in the Argument to the libretto. Lucio Papirio, the dictator of Rome in the year of Rome 430, sentenced to death Quinto Fabio, who had disobeyed orders by going into battle against the Samnites without Papirio present, but who nonetheless achieved glorious victory. The repeated willingness of Fabio, of his father and even of his wife (who is also daughter of Papirio), to 'put on the Roman' (II.iv and v) and accept their fate and the justice of Roman law with nobility represents the epitome of the civic virtue that British aristocrats were to imitate,

that governs by law, but he was always accounted a tyrant that made his will his law; and to resist such a one we justly esteem no rebellion, but a necessary defence'; Kenyon, *Revolution Principles*, 6.

¹⁶³ On Church difficulties with James II at his accession and deposition, see, for example, Bennett, *The Tory Crisis in Church and State*, 8-10.

¹⁶⁴ Bolingbroke, *The Idea of a Patriot King*, in *Works* (1844), II, 379; cited in Clark, *English Society*, 181.

¹⁶⁵ Reinhard Strohm adds another interpretative layer by pointing out that Alexander could also have been a homage to George I; Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 54.

while Papirio's decision to bless Fabio and allow him to go to his death as a hero rather than a criminal shows the magnanimity of the ruler (III.vii). The final *volte face* in which Papirio relents and pardons Fabio is inevitable, of course, but the method by which it is achieved, with the people first declaring that 'The Sentences of a Dictator are for ever sacred' (III.v) and only then suing for clemency, declaring their 'Love in Submission' (Ult.), instantiates the propriety of a wise ruler's absolute power and the glory of Roman justice. This is a plot that could be tied to 'Patriot' opposition values, with their constant endorsement of republican virtue as opposed to Walpolean corruption. Espousal of the balanced constitution, in which King, Parliament, and People all had a role to play, was a particular theme of the Opposition Whigs, who often represented the people, as here, as the classical *guardia della libertà*.¹⁶⁶ Constitutional politics were of immense general interest following the Glorious Revolution, however, with all parties to varying degrees upholding the balanced Constitution and, as we have seen, almost all supporting the monarch's providential divine right.¹⁶⁷ Republican virtue was embraced by all; in this sense, *Lucio Papirio, Dittatore* recalls Addison's *Cato* (1713) in that it concerns, as Cibber puts it, 'the noble Spirit of Patriotism', the sacrifice made by one individual in the name of Roman liberty. *Cato*, as we've seen, was loudly hailed by both Whigs and Tories when first performed, and the continued popularity of its message of civic virtue is attested by its longevity on the London stage, with others—for example, Prince Frederick in 1739—endorsing its message to gain

¹⁶⁶ Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), 137-87; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 472.

¹⁶⁷ Walpole's publicists claimed the balanced constitution in its present state originated only in 1688, and they were its glorious upholders, while Bolingbroke and other opposition strategists claimed the freedoms of the ancient constitution were being whittled away by the present corrupt government; Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, 127-36, 137-87; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 140-2. On the universal importance of divine right, see note 161, above. On the importance of the balanced constitution in both practical and ideological terms, see Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 142-59; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 479-82.

political points.¹⁶⁸ It would seem *Lucio Papirio, Dittatore* was designed to exploit similar sentiments.

Clearly, with despotic monarchs figuring on some level in the plots of so many operas, we should beware assuming that all bear particular significance for the British situation. *Alessandro* and *Lucio Papirio, Dittatore* are good examples for the political reading of opera because issues of government of interest to Britons are so central to both that they could not have been overlooked by contemporaries; indeed, as we saw, in *Alessandro* these issues were heightened. Donald Burrows similarly suggests that the Royal Academy chose *Giulio Cesare* and *Tamerlano* with an eye to their political relevance and consequent appeal the British market. *Giulio Cesare* suggested favourable comparison between Rome and Britain (perhaps paralleling Caesar with William of Orange, with Cleopatra as Mary, forced to stand up to the despotic ambitions of her brother/father Ptolemy/James II); *Tamerlano* employed a story already well known to a London audience in Nicholas Rowe's extremely popular *Tamerlane*, another tale of deliverance from tyranny.¹⁶⁹

Another opera in this mould might be *Aeneas in Latium* (1734), an Opera of the Nobility production, the Argument of which again suggests parallels with William and Mary:

Aeneas, the Trojan, arriving at Latium, was received by Evander the Arcadian, King of Palatin, and by Latius King of Laurentium: By the Interposition of Evander, he was elected King of the Tyrrhens, who had expelled the Tyrant Mezentius: He overcame Turnus King of the Rutulans, and the other Kings of Ausonia his Enemies; and at length obtain'd of Latius his only Daughter Lavinia, and the Kingdom in Dower.¹⁷⁰

Aeneas's story had been famously paralleled to the British situation by the loyal catholic, Dryden, whose 'translation' applied the exile of Aeneas to that of James II.

¹⁶⁸ For Frederick and *Cato*, see Gerrard, 79; see also note 147, above.

¹⁶⁹ Burrows, *Handel*, 119.

¹⁷⁰ *Aeneas in Latium* (1734), argument.

Notably, Dryden's publisher, Jacob Tonson, had the brass plates that were to illustrate the edition (originally designed for a 1654 translation) retouched in order that Aeneas might have William III's hooked nose, in compliment to the new monarch.¹⁷¹

Stories of national significance were not confined to political matters, however. Several libretti from the Royal Academy period have been read as complementary to more general British interests. For example, *Numitore*, which began the Royal Academy's first season, concerns Romulus and Remus and so was probably, Burrows suggests, designed to parallel the founding of the Academy with the founding of Rome, parading the pretensions of aristocratic directors like Burlington, the 'Maecenas of the Arts', to establish Britain as a new Rome.¹⁷² Even the love intrigue of the Opera of the Nobility's *Adriano in Siria* (1735)—in which, in this London version, Adrian becomes entangled with three princesses—is ultimately concerned with moral conflict, and incorporates what Britons would have recognised as the rhetoric of civic virtue.¹⁷³ The opera begins with a chorus welcoming Adrian as victor and emperor—'Long, for the Empire and the Romans Good, [*sic*]/ Long may the great Augustus live'—which, in the early eighteenth century, could equally be read as a paean to the modern 'Augustans', the Hanoverians.¹⁷⁴ In the English translation, Adrian replies in words that would have warmed the heart of any Opposition politician (always opposed to 'corruption') and particularly impressed those disgruntled with the high-handedness of George II, who

¹⁷¹ Zwicker, *Politics and Language in Dryden's Poetry*, 177-205 (on Tonson, p.190).

¹⁷² Burrows, *Handel*, 106.

¹⁷³ In Metastasio's original libretto (first set by Antonio Caldara in 1732), the role played by Idalma—who plots to frustrate Adriano's engagement to his betrothed, Sabina, and his newly beloved, Emirena, employing "all Arts which her amorous Passion can suggest"—is originally taken by the male character, Aquilio.

¹⁷⁴ Howard D. Weinbrot, *Augustus Caesar in "Augustan" England: The Decline of a Classical Norm* (Princeton, c.1978).

was famously dismissive of the British citizenry and, it often seemed, British interests.¹⁷⁵

At least, in this high Trust, I'll so behave,
That none of you, in me, shall find a Change.
Me, none shall serve, but all, as hitherto,
Will serve together, for the Publick's Hope,
For your own Honour, and the Roman Glory.

The message of this moment of patriotic rhetoric is highlighted by its placement at the beginning of the opera.

Censure of the Hanoverian reign in the opera house would, of course, only ever have been oblique; praise was more common. While comparison of ancient Rome and Britain might be one form of flattery, another could be found in libretti such as those for Handel's *Ottone* (1723) and *Arminio* (1737), which presented a German ruler defeating the Italians.¹⁷⁶ Duncan Chisholm has even suggested that Handel's *Giustino* (1737) was a compliment to the Hanoverians (and by extension the British people) as it presented Giustino's rise to glory as a reflection of his merits, not his hereditary rights—Giustino, like George I and II, eventually becomes Emperor 'because he is the right man for the job'.¹⁷⁷

Libretti likely to inspire general British interest—rather than just appealing to Hanoverian loyalists—were those employing well-known stories with established appeal. Of course, the classical history or myth that formed the basis for many libretti was usually familiar to the aristocracy (as King has demonstrated with *Alessandro*), but tales with peculiar popular and nationalist resonance also made

¹⁷⁵ Gerrard, 192-3.

¹⁷⁶ Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 47-8, 73. Arminius was an established German folk hero; S. J. Klinger, *The Goths in England: A Study in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 56-7; cited in Gerrard, 115. Interestingly, this story from Tacitus was also used as an anti-administration satire in William Paterson's *Arminius* (1740); Gerrard, 115-6. Reinhard Strohm says the couple Arminio and Tusnelda should be understood as the Prince of Wales and his bride, the Princess Augusta; Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 73.

¹⁷⁷ Chisholm, notes to G. F. Handel, *Giustino*, Freiburger Barockorchester dir. Nicholas McGegan (Harmonia Mundi France, 907130.32, 1995), 15-16.

their appearance. *Tamerlano* has already been mentioned; the London public would also have been acquainted with the plot of Bononcini's *Griselda* (1722) through the popular ballad of 'Patient Grissel'—as we will see in chapter four, ballads assumed particular significance in the shaping of indigenous opera at this time.¹⁷⁸

In the 1732-33 season, when Handel was competing with Arne's and Lampe's essays in English opera, he began his season with the pasticcio *Catone*. 'The opera of "Cato" is not Mr. Handel's' announced *The Daily Post*.¹⁷⁹ Donald Burrows takes the newspaper's interest to indicate criticism of the pasticcio process; but any (implicit) criticism is only part of a larger interest in an opera on the story of Cato, which Joseph Addison had already popularised.¹⁸⁰ Handel's opening gambit was a sensible one in a season when other composers were attempting to woo the public with music theatre in English—Arne's opera *Rosamond* and De Fesch's oratorio *Judith* both used popular stories. In this context, it is not surprising that Handel chose to revive his own *Acis and Galatea* and, subsequently, Bononcini's *Griselda* to end the season. In Handel's second season against the Opera of the Nobility, when he was working in Rich's Covent Garden theatre, it was sound planning to match Rich's many popular favourites and an ever-increasing number of Shakespeare performances with *Ariodante* (1735), an opera set in Scotland the central conceit of which would have been known to lovers of Shakespeare from *Much Ado About Nothing*.¹⁸¹ As one of his final efforts for the Opera of the

¹⁷⁸ *Griselda* must also have assumed an odd resonance in the public imagination at this time as the singer performing the title role, Anastasia Robinson, also played a *Griselda* in real life; Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (1789), ed. Frank Mercer, 2 vols (London, 1935), II, 691-3.

¹⁷⁹ *The Daily Post* (15 November 1732); cited in Deutsch, 297.

¹⁸⁰ Burrows, *Handel*, 172 n.16.

¹⁸¹ Shakespeare's tragedies and history plays dominated the stage at this time, and there is no record in *The London Stage* of *Much Ado* having been played in the 1730s until 1737 (2 December), following James Miller's adaptation of it, *The Universal Passion* (first staged, 26 March 1737); *London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 689, 642; nonetheless, high-profile editions of Shakespeare's plays like

Nobility, Rolli prepared *Sabrina* from Milton's *Comus* in 1737. Similarly, it was sensible that during their rivalry both the Opera of the Nobility and Handel should attempt to woo their audiences with varied programmes of oratorios as well as operas.

This brief discussion of potential political meaning in London's Italian opera makes no pretence to be exhaustive, or even systematic; rather, it has offered a survey of the range of ways in which Italian opera could have national relevance. Of those operas that do contain elements of political applicability, it is clearly more useful to think of that engagement in terms of broad national ideals than topical partisan polemic. Certainly, given the poor attendance for both Handel and the Opera of the Nobility in the 1730s, it would have been in the interest of neither permanently to alienate either the King and Queen or the Prince of Wales and their respective adherents, at that time on opposing sides of the political divide.

Nonetheless, there are a few operas for which a topical political—rather than generally nationalistic—reading was made or may have been appropriate.

Floridante, discussed above, is, of course, the most famous example. This story of oppositional appropriation is significant for two reasons: first, because although it is unlikely that the Academy intended a political interpretation, clearly at least some of the audience were willing to read Italian operas as they did contemporary theatre. Secondly, it is of interest because we only know of this response from one piece of private correspondence; that there is no (extant) newspaper coverage indicates, if nothing else, how greatly our understanding of opera's contemporary reception is circumscribed. We have no contemporary response, for instance, to the probable topical political message of *Riccardo Primo* (1727), even though Rolli's dedicatory

that of Pope (1725) with its ensuing criticism (see Lewis Theobald, *Shakespeare Restored* [1726])

sonnet to the work draws an unambiguous parallel between the newly crowned George II and 'il tuo guerriero/ Predecessor, Cuor di Leon Riccardo'.¹⁸²

Probably the clearest instance of an opera with manifest topical political meaning is *Sosarme* (1732).¹⁸³ In brief, the Prince and heir Argones has led a rebellion against his father, King Haliates, suspecting that Haliates wishes his much-loved natural son, Melus, to succeed to the throne rather than Argones himself. While Haliates' wife and daughter, Erenice and Elmira, watch and grieve, alternately angry and despairing at the son's defiance of the father, Elmira's lover, Sosarmes, King of Media, attempts to resolve the crisis. It transpires that, although Haliates is certainly angered by Argones, both father and son have been deceived by the King's 'Counsellor and Favourite', Altomarus. Parallel with the British royal family could not have been clearer: Prince Frederick suffered under the irrational hatred of both his parents, and was certainly little esteemed by his father compared to his bluff and warlike younger brother, the Duke of Cumberland, who was cast more in George II's mould. Although Frederick had not (and would not) openly rebel, many feared that the Prince's decision to side with the political Opposition could lead to just such a crisis, especially as he was as assiduous in courting public favour as his father was in spurning it. Many also feared that certain courtiers close to the King—most notably Walpole and Hervey—were doing all in their power to maintain the rift, as Frederick's association with the Opposition ensured that group's continued exclusion from political power.¹⁸⁴ As John Loftis notes, this situation is

ensured that the plays were widely read.

¹⁸² Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 55-6 (55).

¹⁸³ Strohm also notes the reflection on the troubled royal father-son relationship; Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 64. Winton Dean finds political reasons for changes in the opera's setting and character names, but related to foreign, not domestic, matters; Winton Dean, 'Handel's *Sosarme*, a Puzzle Opera', *Essays on Opera and English Music: in Honour of Sir Jack Westrup*, ed. F. W. Sternfeld, Nigel Fortune, and Edward Olleson (Oxford, 1975), 115-47.

¹⁸⁴ In September 1732, the *Gentleman's Magazine* published a short piece 'On Mythology', mentioning that 'The Quarrel between *Jupiter* and his Father *Saturn* is imputed to the Machinations

portrayed many times in plays throughout the 1730s.¹⁸⁵ *Sosarme* then offers a dire warning of where the division between King and Prince could lead, often using the Prince Sosarmes as the mouthpiece for public concern (see, for example I.vii, in which Sosarmes pleads clemency against the King's 'Rage', 'Barbarity' and thirst for 'Revenge' on his son). Although the opera is critical of internecine strife within the royal family, it clearly does not blame the family itself: father and son are justly angry at the perceived faults in each other, while mother, daughter and second son are models of nobility and generous anxiety. Fault lies wholly with the vicious Counsellor. Here, then, is an example of a topical and highly political opera—one demonstrating real concern for the nation's wellbeing—which at the same time would have alienated none of the Royal family, as it suggested all were equally right, all equally injured.

of *Pan*, who is charged as having proved false to both. However he grew a Favourite on a sudden, when *Jupiter* and *Juno* came to the Throne' (945). Walpole demonstrated his interest in maintaining a rift after the Prince's last minute removal of his heavily pregnant wife from his parents control in 1737 (when Walpole was old enough that he need not worry about the reversionary interest); Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), 37. Even the loyal Lord Egmont worries at Walpole's dominance, writing on 2 December 1733 that his cousin: 'was very sorry I had gotten a letter from the Prince to engage him in election matters, the breach between him and the King being so great that he has not spoken this twelvemonth to his sister the Princess Royal, which must be supposed the order of the King. That we are in a sad situation, and the French King is now actually in a treaty of marriage for one of his daughters with the Pretender's son. That the King is so attach'd to Sr. Robert, that he even endangers himself'; *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont. Diary of Viscount Percival afterwards First Earl of Egmont*, ed. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 3 vols (London, 1920), I, 454.

¹⁸⁵ See, for example, *MAJESTY MISLED: Or, The Overthrow of evil Ministers. A Tragedy*, 'As it was intended to be acted at one of the Theatres, but refus'd for certain Reasons', advertised in the *St. James's Evening Post*, 9-12 February 1734. Another example is *The Fall of Mortimer* (1731), about an evil minister who misleads his monarch and abuses the constitutional rights of his people, and also Henry Fielding's *The Welsh Opera* (1731); Loftis notes that *The Fall of Mortimer* 'anticipates many opposition plays of the decade', *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England*, 105. The anonymous *The King and Titi: or, The Medlars* (advertised in 1737), was based on the *Histoire du Prince Titi* (Paris, 1735), attributed to Hyacinthe Cordonnier de Saint-Hyacinthe, which suggests the King and Queen would disinherit Frederick in favour of his younger brother; see John B. Shipley, 'James Ralph, Prince Titi, and the Black Box of Frederick, Prince of Wales', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 71 (1967), 143-57. See also Gerrard (61n.), who suggests the Prince authored or co-authored the *Histoire*.

The balancing act all opera companies had (and still have) to perform in ensuring the satisfaction of their patrons was heightened in a period when opera was so delicately poised financially between (meagre) success and ruin, and politically between the sparring of Court and Country as well as King and Prince. The political (as well as musical) value to the royal family of a composer such as Handel might be demonstrated by evidence of continuing rivalry between father and son, even as the battle between Handel and the Nobility company was in its dying stages. One of Lord Bathurst's staff wrote to him at the beginning of 1738 with—amongst other things—news from London of an altercation:

The P-- design'd to have a concert every friday night & desir'd M^r Handel to make one, which he readily agreed to; but it came to the K--'s ears, & he sent M^r Handel an order, not to go near the P: I did not beleive it, till I had it this morning from his own mouth.¹⁸⁶

However we might see this account in relation to the stories of partisan rivalry between Handel and the Opera of the Nobility, it seems to mark an awareness on the part of both King and Prince that art could and should constitute part of royal self-presentation and by extension, I suggest, presentation of the nation. In fighting over the composer of the moment—one identified increasingly with British, rather than Italian or even Hanoverian interests—the royal antagonists were proclaiming how broadly political music, including opera, could be.

¹⁸⁶ Mr Hamilton to Lord Bathurst, 3 January 1737/38 [1738]; BL Add MS 31142, f.202r.

Two

Allegory, emulation, and London's Ariadnes (1734)

At the end of the previous chapter I tendered several potential political interpretations of a number of operas from the 1720s and '30s, charting their possible relevance to contemporary ideology and positing in turn opera's potential for relevance to the nation. Perhaps the best way to appreciate the potentialities of this hermeneutic process, however, is by exploring in detail the pleasures and the perils of *allegoresis*, how it operated and what significance it held. The two *Arianna* operas performed in London in 1734 will be the focus of this investigation, in part because of the puzzlement they caused then, and still seem to cause now. Our point of departure is a discussion that, as we recall from the previous chapter, has similarly occasioned much puzzlement among Handelians in recent years: John, Lord Hervey's account in his *Memoirs* of the apparently political liaison between Prince Frederick and the Opera of the Nobility in the mid-1730s. It is worth quoting here at length, as we will return later to several details of its narrative:

One of [the Prince of Wales's] wise quarrels with the Princess Royal was her "daring to be married before him", and consenting to take a portion from the Parliament, and an establishment from her father, before those honours and favours were conferred upon him.... Another judicious subject of his enmity was her supporting Handel, a German musician and composer (who had been her singing master, and was now undertaker of one of the operas), against several of the nobility who had a pique to Handel, and had set up another person to ruin him; or, to speak more properly and exactly, the Prince, in the beginning of his enmity to his sister, set himself at the head of the other opera to irritate her.... The King and Queen were as much in earnest upon this subject as their son and daughter, though they had the prudence to disguise it, or to endeavour to disguise it, a little more. They were both Handelists, and sat freezing constantly at his empty Haymarket Opera, whilst the Prince with all the chief of the nobility went as constantly to that of Lincoln's Inn Fields. The affair grew as serious as that of the Greens and the Blues under Justinian at Constantinople. An anti-Handelist was looked upon as an anti-courtier, and voting against the Court in Parliament was hardly a

less remissible or more venial sin than speaking against Handel or going to the Lincoln's Inn Fields Opera. The Princess Royal said she expected in a little while to see half the House of Lords playing in the orchestra in their robes and coronets; and the King ... often added at the same time that he did not think setting oneself at the head of a faction of fiddlers a very honourable occupation for people of quality.... The Princess Royal ... spoke of Lord Delaware, who was one of the chief managers against Handel, with as much spleen as if he had been at the head of the Dutch faction who opposed the making her husband Stadtholder.¹

The memorable royal anecdotes Hervey supplies add veracity to his vitriol, turning into 'fact' the oppositional allegiances of the Nobility company in countless modern renderings of this period's history. Handelians' recent conclusions dismissing Hervey's account are undeniably factually correct but, as we have seen, they bypass a wealth of contemporary report. More importantly, as I am to demonstrate in this chapter, these studies define too rigidly the role of politics in opera. They seem unable to take into account the fluidity of form and function in eighteenth-century political and operatic culture, in particular the full implications of the State/stage metaphor: that one of serious opera's key functions was didactic, and that public life shaped itself in quasi-theatrical fashion, with one eye turned to historical and allegorical precedent. The *Memoirs* form part of this public life and should be read in that light, the puzzle Hervey presents us today understood through precisely that merging of fact and fashioning characteristic of contemporary society.

It is possible, then, simply by taking his account in context, both to reconcile Hervey with modern findings and to understand why he might have couched the opera companies' rivalry in a political reading of contemporary events. This context is twofold: on the most immediate levels of chronology and narrative it juxtaposes operatic factionalism with the apparent national harmony surrounding the royal marriage between Anne and Prince William. On a broader level, it continues the

¹ John, Lord Hervey, *Some Materials towards Memoirs of the Reign of King George II*, ed. Romney Sedgwick, 3 vols. (London, 1931, rpt. New York, 1970), I, 273-274.

exploration begun in the previous chapter of the role of political allegory in opera, considering the importance of its relationship to the burgeoning cultural phenomenon of emulation, which helped shape social identity and national consciousness in this period.² By offering an analysis of political *allegoresis* in the *Arianna* operas of 1733-34, then, I aim to add another perspective to our appreciation of the hermeneutical principles according to which eighteenth-century opera functioned.

Emulation

Hervey's *Memoirs* come to us, through several editorial layers, as a curious assemblage, the author speaking of himself in a mixture of first and third person that evinces a highly conscious self-fashioning. As Hervey selects and omits, recording an intimate, detailed, and often barbed view of the Court, and recreating himself as a product for posterity, he takes part in an emulatory process which—in the eighteenth century as never before—allowed almost all levels of society to shape and redefine themselves according to increasingly consensual normative ideals.

Perhaps the defining characteristic of the many and varied authors Howard Weinbrot includes in his mammoth *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* is an 'ambition to excel'. For Weinbrot, the development of the concept of emulation is the key characteristic of eighteenth-century literary endeavour. It was a growing positive view of Classical emulation—'a theory of literary creation as a contest and healthy rivalry'—that encouraged the eighteenth-century British author to step forward with confidence, asserting the right to help shape a distinctively national identity rather than constantly looking over his

² On use of the concept of emulation in general in this period, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature* (Baltimore, 1961), esp. 129-245.

shoulder to the Classics in earlier, imitative fashion.³ Thus Edward Burnaby Greene could remark in 1770 that ‘Emulation is the spur to glory’.⁴ As Weinbrot points out, however, these glories had been a long time coming: it was only in the mid century that emulation managed to extricate itself from the mire of envy, hitherto its lot, and fully displace Classical imitation as the creative norm.

The ‘ambition to excel’ requires a certain consciousness of one’s place within the larger spheres of creative discipline and the market. In many ways the ‘rise’ or ennobling of emulation reflects the more widely remarked rise in status of trade and those who practised it.⁵ ‘Trade’, ‘Commerce’, ‘Intercourse’, and ‘Conversation’, as J. G. A. Pocock has recently pointed out, are nearly interchangeable catchwords of the eighteenth century, terms which—in binding one to another—display all the excitement and risk of the Enlightenments they helped facilitate.⁶ Through the diverse means of communication conjured up by these words, society in eighteenth-century Britain also consciously bound and defined itself. Commercial society’s recreation became emulative re-creation: poets, novelists, and playwrights vied with the past and with each other until their creations slipped the moorings of fiction to sail under the colours of fact, and (as exemplified by Ossian) created history and identity anew. This understanding of the richly

³ Howard D. Weinbrot, *Britannia’s Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge, 1993), 99, 113.

⁴ Edward Burnaby Greene, *Critical Essays* (1770), 57; cited in Weinbrot, *Britannia’s Issue*, 104 (see also 91-95). Competition’s role in encouraging genius was also noted by David Hume: ‘Opposition not only enlarges the soul; but the soul, when full of courage and magnanimity, in a manner seeks opposition’; *A Treatise of Human Nature* II.iii.10; cited in John Hope Mason, ‘Thinking about Genius in the Eighteenth Century’, *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick (Cambridge, 1993), 210-39 (214).

⁵ See James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England, 1750-1800* (Oxford, 1992).

⁶ J. G. A. Pocock, ‘The history of ideas and the question of enlightenment’, 4th lecture in the series ‘The Politics of History and the English Enlightenment’, given 6 November 1997, at the University of Oxford.

variable power of literary, historical, and political commerce shaped the action of emulation.

Similarly, to comprehend the processes of eighteenth-century allegory—of allusion, application, emblem, parallel and personation—we need to perceive it as a mode of interpretation contingent on contemporary patterns of reading, in which the text is a commodity, something that passes hands (and perhaps changes uses) between creator and user, writer and reader. In its transactional nature, the process of *allegoresis* might follow the same broad patterns as emulation. Certainly, as Hogarth was quick to point out, the allegorist's path is as hazardous as the way of emulation. Yet, like emulation, *allegoresis* was an essential part of life: as we have seen, from statesman and satirist to sailor and sempstress, Britons made sense and order of their lives and their society through processes of biblical and historical typology and analogy. Indeed, allegory promoted emulation.

In his seminal article on political allegory in Restoration literature, John Wallace reminds us that those who interest themselves in society and wish to learn from history must read in a circular process, from particulars to precepts and back to particulars.⁷ Those who could read only the particulars—the superficial characteristics—without understanding or valuing the precepts were worthy of contempt, as Pope, Hogarth, Fielding, and other satirists showed time and again. So the author of the letter to the *Universal Spectator* on *Alcina*, who we met briefly in the previous chapter, not only commended the opera for its moral allegory, but also castigated those who failed to appreciate its message.⁸ Allegory, then, helped audiences and readers understand where important precepts lay: by highlighting

⁷ John M. Wallace, 'Dryden and History: A Problem in Allegorical Reading', *English Literary History* 36 (1969), 265-90 (271).

⁸ *Universal Spectator*, 5 July 1735; cited in *Händel Handbuch* vol. 4, 255-6.

parallels and patterns, allegorical technique taught its users to find continuities between the worlds of fiction, religion and history and their own world. It was but a short step from there to the user's realisation that the parallels of allegory contained lessons worthy of emulation. As operas like *Alcina* could supply allegories for personal moral application, political allegories would provide national lessons.

The beginnings of an answer to modern puzzlement about 1730s opera politics in particular and allegorical readings in general might be found in the connections and ellipses of Hervey's narrative. Hervey began compiling his *Memoirs* in 1733/4, starting with the accession of George II in 1727 but only achieving detailed narrative after 1733—just as the stories of the wedding and the *Arianna* operas were unfolding—when he could rely on notes, journals, and (in 1737) his diary.⁹ His general approach is therefore vaguely chronological, interrupted and filled out with skips from topic to topic through free association. Hervey is undoubtedly our chief source of information about the wedding of Anne and William of Orange, but his frank account of the process of the marriage is inserted into a more general progress through the year. So it is 'in this interval', after detailed discussion of political wrangling between Walpole and the Bishop of Salisbury (in which Hervey played a part) and 'before the South Sea debate came on in the House of Lords ... that the King communicated by a message to both Houses the intended marriage of his eldest daughter, the Princess Royal, to the Prince of Orange' (8 May 1733), and that Hervey devoted some space to consideration of the match.¹⁰ As he progresses through the year's political events, the story of the marriage appears again, at the beginning of November, when the Prince at last arrives in London. When he comes to give his account of the wedding itself, he

⁹ Robert Halsband, *Lord Hervey, Eighteenth-Century Courtier* (Oxford, 1973), 151-2.

¹⁰ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 192-196; the King communicated his intentions to Parliament on 8 May 1733.

apologises that ‘I ought to have [given it] previously to the account of the vote of confidence [in the Crown’s power to augment land and sea forces], as it preceded it by about three weeks’.¹¹

Such punctiliousness over the ordering of events seems curiously breached once again during his account of the wedding’s aftermath. After nine pages of close description of the nuptials (including four pages devoted to the procession, clothes, and order of service), Hervey suddenly breaks into a splenetic analysis of the Prince of Wales’s dissatisfaction with his lot, which includes a proposal that Prince Frederick ‘set himself at the head of the other [Nobility] opera’. After several more pages of character assassination regarding the other members of the royal family, Hervey prods himself ‘to return to the chapter of [Anne’s] marriage’ as if nothing had happened, no deviation had occurred.¹² Perhaps in some ways there was no deviation. Once we understand that, generally speaking, Hervey follows a chronological path supplemented by association, we can look again at his apparent switch from wedding to operatic rivalry, and see that the two may be linked. The political nature of the Prince’s support for the Nobility company may deserve to be seen as temporary, but was almost certainly topical, joined to Hervey’s preceding point that ‘one of his wise quarrels with the Princess Royal was “her daring to be married before him”’, with all the ‘honours and favours’ that accompanied such an event.¹³ Why then might Hervey have associated the marriage and the operatic rivalry so directly? What had theatre and reality to do with each other?

¹¹ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 263. On the vote of confidence, see Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 258-60.

¹² Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 278.

¹³ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 273. Hervey’s timings seem to be confirmed by Lord Egmont, as he notes on 2 December 1733 that ‘the breach between [the Prince of Wales] and the King [is] so great that he has not spoken this twelvemonth to his sister the Princess Royal’; *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont*.

‘a husband and no husband’

We might find some answer to our question about Hervey’s process of association in the circumstances of the wedding. One of the most recent accounts offers the following gloomy picture:

Such is the mystique of a royal marriage that only a very few witnesses of the splendid ceremony saw a woman of twenty-five, badly marked by smallpox and ‘with a great tendency to fat’, being escorted to the altar by her two brothers, with whom she was barely on speaking terms, to join a political nonentity whose physical deformity made her mother weep.... The majority were right to ignore such details.¹⁴

Such is the mystique of royal hagiography that this description represents perhaps the most complete modern statement available on attitudes to the royal match. That it is vastly oversimplified manifests the energy and sophistication of eighteenth-century myth-making, which sought to turn William IV of Orange into his illustrious forbear, William III, only because a hero was what he so manifestly could never be.¹⁵

The poetic tributes and epithalamia flowed in the months leading up to the wedding with unanimity amazing in a nation so hotly engaged in political sparring. One excerpt will serve to illustrate the whole. Stephen Duck, the ‘thresher’ poet favoured by Queen Caroline, offered this in 1734:

NASSAU has long enrich’d the Book of Fame,
And ANNA now adorns the Noble Name.
Nations who saw the Light of ORANGE rise,
With awful Splendor, in the Belgian Skies;
Shall soon behold it with new Lustre shine,
Join’d to a glorious Star of BRUNSWICK’s Line.

...
Paternal Virtues in their Bosom roll,

Diary of Viscount Percival afterwards First Earl of Egmont, ed. Historical Manuscripts Commission, 3 vols (London, 1920), I, 454.

¹⁴ Veronica Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover, Princess Royal* (Leiden, 1995), xi.

¹⁵ William Charles Henry Friso (William IV) was the grandson of William III’s cousin, Count Henry Casimir II; see Herbert H. Rowen, *The Princes of Orange* (Cambridge, 1998), 145, 151; also *The History of the House of Nassau, from its earliest known Origin, continued down to the Present Times* (1734), 299-321.

Ally'd in Love by Nobleness of Soul;
 Hence Thrones and Scepters shine neglected Things,
 Hence Royal ANN prefers NASSAU to Kings;
 While Britons with united Hearts rejoice,
 And willing Senators applaud the Choice,
 To see their King (to Honour ever true)
 Discharge the Debt to sacred WILLIAM due.
 Immortal WILLIAM! by whose prudent Cares,
 We yet enjoy the Fruits of all our Wars;
 Our Laws, Religion, Liberty, and Peace,
 And ev'n the Blessings of the BRUNSWICK Race.¹⁶

Duck, like Anne, was making the best of the match. William IV of Orange was sickly (the wedding had to be postponed from 12 November several times to—eventually—14 March while he recovered from illness), hunchbacked, and apparently unlikely ever to wield power even in the Dutch states. It seems that he could only be displayed in the decorous fictions of complimentary verse if he were cloaked in the mantle of his great ancestor, who had staged the 1688 ‘Glorious Revolution’ to oust James II and ensure the Protestant succession and modern constitution.¹⁷

Lord Hervey, as confidant of Queen Caroline, was able to make a full and frank assessment of this ‘miserable match’, showing that Britons were all too aware of the bridegroom’s deficiencies. The Prince, as well as being ‘almost a dwarf’, and ‘as much deformed as it was possible for a human creature to be’, was blessed with offensive breath and modest means. Hervey cynically summed up:

There is one of two inconveniences that generally attends most marriages;
 the one is sacrificing all considerations of interest and grandeur for the sake

¹⁶ Stephen Duck, *A Poem on the Marriage of His Serene Highness the Prince of ORANGE, with ANN, Princess Royal of Great-Britain. To which are added, Verses to the Author, By a Divine* (1734).

¹⁷ This device was almost universal: for example, see also, Rev. Tipping Silvester, *Original Poems and Translations [...] With a poem on the approaching marriage of the Prince of Orange with the Princess Royal* (1733 [1734]); [Mary Chandler], *A Description of Bath, A Poem* (1734); William Dunkin, ‘The Lover’s Web’, *The Contest: Being Poetical Essays on the Queen’s Grotto ... The Gift of Pallas, and the Lover’s Web, Two Poems on the Fine Piece of Linen made in Ireland, and presented by the Trustees of the Linen Manufacture to the PRINCESS ROYAL. Also an Epithalamium on the Marriage of the Prince and Princess of Orange* (1734). On the Orange dynasty’s uneasy relationship with the Dutch Republic, see Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover*, 39-40, 50-1; Hervey, *Memoirs*, 282-3.

of beauty and an agreeable person; and the other, that of sacrificing all consideration of beauty and person to interest and grandeur. But this match most unfortunately conciliated the inconveniences of both these methods of marrying, and consequently without the advantages of either.¹⁸

Why marry at all? As Hervey explained, ‘good courtiers’ suggested and ‘good subjects’ believed that the match was undertaken by the King ‘for the sake of this country’, and by his daughter ‘to ingratiate herself with the people’, strengthening the Protestant succession through connection with a family line much loved by Britons. There was doubtless an element of truth in this, as both the King’s and the Ministry’s standing with the country was at an all-time low.¹⁹ Hervey makes it clear, however, that this was by no means the full story. Put simply, the rules of the Protestant succession allowed so few men to be eligible that ‘Her Royal Highness’s option was ... between a husband and no husband’. Thus, Hervey reported (second hand) that the Princess, who publicly espoused the match for national and popular motives, had privately claimed she would have the Prince ‘if it was a monkey’.²⁰

It appeared, however, that the Prince’s disadvantages were not enough to make him similarly leap at the match. Over the months leading to the wedding, newspapers barely contained their puzzlement at what seemed the Prince’s coolness over the honour Britain was bestowing: he was not even prepared to travel to Britain to receive the Order of the Garter!²¹ Once William did arrive, it became clear that the real problem was the King; not prepared to be upstaged by ‘a nothing’ who seemed to have inspired patriotic fervour merely by dint of his ancestry, George II

¹⁸ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 192, 194-195.

¹⁹ Hervey claims himself to have attempted improving the King’s status with Parliament through the marriage; *Memoirs*, 202-3; Hervey, Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover*, 40. On the chief reason for Hanoverian and Walpolean unpopularity, see Paul Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole* (Oxford, 1975).

²⁰ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 193, 231, 194.

²¹ Hervey, probably more accurately, put delays in arrangements down to ‘the dilatoriness of the King, the indifference of his Ministers, and the tardy phlegm of the Dutch negotiators’; Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 230. William was installed as a Knight of the Order of the Garter at his own palace on 25

treated his future son-in-law with barely disguised contempt.²² The Prince fell ill the day before the wedding and, after some weeks at death's door, recovered sufficiently to take a lengthy convalescence trip to Bath, to take the waters. Again the London newspapers and even members of the nobility were reduced to third-hand report and speculation, with many contradictory rumours circulating about the Prince's return to London and the wedding.²³ As weeks spun out to months, one senses that the question in the air was not when the wedding was to take place, but whether it would happen at all, whether—as Thomas Bowen put it—the Prince would be 'able to look Matrimony in the face'.²⁴ Even the day before the wedding, Lord Egmont reported, there was general annoyance amongst the aristocracy at the royal family's poor communication:

several of the English nobility, Lords and Ladies, would not be at the procession, because no summons had been sent them and they would not be treated as porters to be sent for at a minute's warning.... Several had sent back their tickets to the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and others gave them to

July 1733. For an account, see *The Whitehall Evening-Post*, 21-24 July 1733, or *The St James's Evening Post*, 21-24 July 1733 (obviously published well after the dates concerned!).

²² Hervey explains 'The maxim the King seemed to have laid down ... was that the Prince of Orange was a nothing till he had married his daughter', and the King treated him accordingly; Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 230-232, 282-3. Lord Egmont reports on the King's slights to the Prince: for example, the King 'would have had the Prince to stand behind his chair while he was at dinner among the English noblemen, ... [saying] "What is the Prince of Orange till he has married my daughter?"'; and after the wedding supper 'the Princess and Prince were to sit up in their bed to receive the compliments of the nobility ... but the Prince was to have a curtain drawn before him by way of distinction, as being only a Prince of Orange'; *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont*, II, 58-59.

²³ 'God knows when the wedding will be', reported Lady Bristol to her husband on 3 November, Lord Hervey, *Letter-Books of John Hervey, First Earl of Bristol ... 1651 to 1750*, [ed.] S. H. A. H. [Syndenham Henry Augustus Hervey], 3 vols (Wells, 1894), III, 108. On Saturday February 23, 1734, for example, *The Weekly Register* and *Applebee's Original Weekly Journal* offer two conflicting itineraries. *The Weekly Register. Or, Universal Journal*, says that 'By Letters receiv'd Yesterday from *Bath*, we have Advice, that the Prince of *Orange* will certainly go as this Day to *Bristol*, and will lie there one Night; on Tuesday his Highness sets out from *Bath* for *London*.' *Applebee's Original Weekly-Journal*, on the other hand, carries a statement come from Bath on the 16th: 'All the Reports of the Prince of Orange's leaving this Place have been without Foundation. The Time is now fix'd, and his Highness will set out on Tuesday the 26th Inst. and is to lye that Night at the Earl of Hertford's at Marlborough, and next Day sets out for Oxford to see that famous University: so that the Reports of his Highness's Marriage on the Queen's Birth-Day are not true, for he will not be in London till afterwards.'

²⁴ Bowen is quoting Congreve; BL Add. MS 27738, f.89r; [Essex Letters,] Thomas Bowen to Essex, 18 November 1733. Hervey's regular correspondent, Stephen Fox, apparently even suggested there was 'finesse [i.e., deceit] in the Prince of Orange's illness', something Hervey refutes; *Lord Hervey and his Friends, 1728-38: based on letters from Holland House, Melbury, and Ickworth*, ed. the Earl of Ilchester (London, [1950]), 181.

scrub people. A footman last night was selling tickets at St. James' Coffee-house.²⁵

When the wedding eventually did occur, on 14 March, Hervey reports that the King spared no expense on the ceremony, and was in pleasant mood, though the Queen and other princesses behaved as though the bride were a second Iphigenia.

Thereafter, until they left the country (and most extraordinary of all to Hervey's eyes), '[Anne] always behaved to [William] as if he had been an Adonis, [while] he hardly ever took any notice at all of her nor gave her one look'.²⁶

In this tale of uncertainty and misreport, the one constant would seem to be a desire to mythologise the match: from Duck's public enthusiasm to Hervey's private cynicism, William and Anne conform to larger emulative patterns, he represented as William III or Adonis, she as Britannia or, more ominously, Iphigenia. This description, and in particular the allegorical treatment of the couple, might also help us understand possible references to the match in contemporary theatre and literature, in particular in *Arianna in Creta* and *Arianna in Nasso*, the two operas with which Handel and the Opera of the Nobility first vied for a London audience.

Ariadne: myth and opera

Although the operas barely received attention during their runs, newspaper coverage while the Prince of Orange was in London indicates that the Opera was an important social space for him to display courtly and proper behaviour towards his intended bride, her family, and the public at large. Soon after his arrival, *The Weekly Register* reported with satisfaction:

On Saturday in the Evening the Royal Family were at the Opera; his Highness the Prince of *Orange* was there likewise in a Box next to that of the

²⁵ 13 March 1734, *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont*, II, 58; see also his comments of 27 January (II, 15) and 2 March (II, 40).

²⁶ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 271, 272.

Princess Royal: Their Highnesses on every Occasion give Proofs of possessing the most finish'd Qualifications, and render themselves admir'd by their polite and amiable Behaviour. After the Opera was over, the Prince of *Orange* entertain'd her Royal Highness for some Time in her Box, and afterwards handed her to her Coach.²⁷

Thomas Bowen similarly described in detail the Prince of Orange's reception by the public at the opera (probably on the same night) for the Earl of Essex:

He has been twice or thrice with Our princess at S^t James's, and in the next Box to her, the night before he fell ill, at the Opera. When he came into the House he was saluted thrice with a very loud Clap, which, at first, a little Disconcerted him: but when he was told that it was that way approbation was testified in that place, he made a very gracefull Bow to the Audience: and both he and the princess Royal were in very high Spirits through the whole performance.²⁸

After the wedding, Hervey reported that, on his appearance in the opera box, William was greeted with greater applause than King George, something not likely to endear him to the monarch.²⁹

The opera house was, then, an important space for royal display. Further, as a place that mediated public image, the theatre in general had an acknowledged (and much discussed) role in bridging the gap between the ideal and the everyday, providing models that created discourse between representation and self. Thus, as we saw in the previous chapter, one of the aims of the directors of the Royal Academy was to provide an example both of good taste and good behaviour.³⁰ As appearance at the Opera was part of self-presentation, so the opera and theatre in general sought to present (and problematise, and normalise) particular heroic versions of the public persona. Frederick, Prince of Wales was aware of this

²⁷ *The Weekly Register: or, Universal Journal*, 17 November 1733.

²⁸ 18 November 1733; BL Add. MS 27738, f.89v.

²⁹ Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 282.

³⁰ Gibson, 285-87. As Barrell has shown, the same theories applied with regard to the Fine Arts; Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: 'The Body of the Public'* (New Haven and London, 1986); see also idem, 'Sir Joshua Reynolds and the Political Theory of Painting', *Oxford Art Journal* vol. 9, 2 (1986), 36-41.

function, and not above using it to make a point. On 18 March, only four days after the wedding, he took the Prince of Orange to see a performance of Colley Cibber's play, *The Careless Husband*. At the denouement the title character, the philandering Sir Charles Easy, asks his wife how

a Woman of your Restraint in Principles, Sedateness, Sense, and tender Disposition, [could] propose to see an happy Life with one (now I reflect) that hardly took an Hour's Pains ev'n before marriage, to appear but what I am: A loose unheeded Wretch absent in all I do, Civil, and as often Rude without Design, unseasonably thoughtful, easy to a Fault, and in my best of Praise, but carelessly good-natur'd; ... How shall I reconcile your Temper with having made so strange a Choice?³¹

Princess Anne's 'strange choice' in husband was reflected in pointed fashion through Prince Frederick's careful choice of play. To some contemporary theatre- and opera-goers, it might have seemed that choice of the Ariadne stories was as pointed. Ellen Harris has pointed out that the two opera companies offered a number of works based on the same stories at the same time during their opening seasons, but this rather curious (and obvious) method of competition has received little further attention.³² In one sense, there is little that could be construed as competitive about the two operas. For Handel's *Arianna*, his company chose a libretto by Pietro Pariati in a version that had previously been set by Leonardo Leo for the Teatro della Pace in Rome during the 1729 Carnival.³³ True, Nicola Porpora, the Opera of the Nobility's newly acquired composer, had set the same libretto, and

³¹ Colley Cibber, *The Careless Husband* (1704, 8th edn., 1734), 81. Interestingly, performances of this play went from around one a month (or every few months) to two or three a month over the period January to April 1734.

³² Harris observes that, as well as the two *Arianna* operas, Handel's *Arbaces* (5.1.1734) was followed at the other house by a work to the same libretto, Hasse's *Artaserse* (29.10.1734); Handel's oratorio *Deborah* was mounted (2.4.1734) in response to the oratorio *Davide e Bersabea* (12.3.1734); performances of *Acis and Galatea* (7.5.1734, 24.3.1736) countered the opposition's *Polifemo* (1.2.1735); and Handel's pasticcio *Oreste* (18.12.1734) answered Porpora's *Iphigenia* of May 1734; Ellen T. Harris, ed., *The Librettos of Handel's Operas*, 13 vols (New York and London, 1989), vol. 7, viii-ix.

³³ Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 67-8.

as it was known by the 16 June that Porpora had been ‘sent for’, Handel certainly had enough time to prepare his setting as a response to this choice of composer, but there is no direct evidence Handel chose the libretto with Porpora’s setting in mind.³⁴ Nor did Porpora mount another production of his old opera in answer to Handel. Indeed, the new works were based on quite different myths, one the story of the Minotaur and the labyrinth on Crete, the other of Ariadne abandoned on Naxos. Equally, although the two operas appeared in the same season, they were played on the same nights only six times.³⁵ Handel’s completion date of 5 October 1733 placed *Arianna in Creta* early enough to have opened or run at any point in his season. Instead, the composer seems to have bided his time, beginning the season with three *pasticci* (challenging Porpora with operas in modern style) and a revived opera of his own; his *Arianna* was premiered only on 26 January 1734, nearly a month after the rival *Arianna in Nasso* had opened at Lincoln’s Inn Fields, on 29 December 1733.³⁶

Should we couple these operas at all, then? Our answer comes from a variety of sources. Reinhard Strohm has demonstrated that there was an internationally established pattern of ‘opera pairs’; London’s operatic world, as ‘a

³⁴ Porpora had last mounted a production of his *Arianna* in 1728 in Florence; see Giovanna Gronda, ‘Das “Arianna”-Libretto und seine Vorlagen’, *Gattungskonventionen der Händel-Oper: Bericht über die Symposien 1990 und 1991*, ed. Hans Marx (Laaber, 1992), 139-157 (153). Taylor speculates that Handel suspected Porpora would compose for the opposing company, and chose to challenge him (200). The Earl of Delawarr wrote to the Duke of Richmond on 16 June 1733 after the first meeting of the new opera directors, stating that ‘There is a Spirit got up against the Dominion of Mr. Handel, a subscription carry’d on, and Directors chosen, who have contracted with Senesino, and have sent for Cuzzoni, and Farinelli.... Porpora is also sent for’; cited (with the wrong date) in Deutsch, 303-4.

³⁵ The operas were played on the same nights on 26 and 29 January, 2, 19 and 23 February, 20 April 1734; see *The London Stage* pt. 3, vol. 1, 362-4, 369, 371, 388.

³⁶ On Handel’s *pasticci* for the 1733-4 season, see Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 182-96. Handel’s season began on 30 October with the Royal family present for the King’s Theatre production of the pasticcio *Semiramide*; his seasons typically began with revivals, perhaps because the aristocracy were still drifting back to ‘town’ after spending summer at their country estates; see Charles Stanhope’s complaint at the emptiness of London at the beginning of November 1732, cited in the previous chapter, note 95.

breeding-ground for pairs and contests' was well acquainted with this tradition.³⁷

The contest between the two *Arianna* operas appears to have been acknowledged by the contemporary newspapers' habit of referring to both operas simply as 'Ariadne', using only the venue to distinguish between them.³⁸ Lady Sarah Cowper, too, described Cuzzoni's voice after her visit to Porpora's 'Opera of Ariadne' in terms of Handel's music, clearly registering her desire that the singer return to the composer with whom she had previously worked.³⁹ It seems strange that the choice of different episodes in Ariadne's story could be construed as competitive, but this is clearly what happened: the King supported Handel's production while the Prince of Wales visited the other house. Frederick had accompanied his family to *Caius Fabricius* at the Haymarket early in the season—their first attendance at any theatre since the Queen had fallen ill⁴⁰—but he clearly tied himself to the Nobility company's venture by hosting a rehearsal of their 'new Opera' (presumably *Arianna in Nasso*) at his house, for the 'Nobility and Quality'.⁴¹ The whole Royal family went together to this company's first performance of *Arianna*,⁴² but when Handel

³⁷ Reinhard Strohm, 'Dramatic Dualities: Metastasio and the Tradition of the Opera Pair', *EM* 26 (1998), 551-61. Strohm particularly discusses the opera pairs *Crispo* and *Griselda* (both 1721), staged in London in 1722, and recognised at the time as a pair, and the competitive *Elisa* and *Scipione*, which appeared in 1726 (p. 556); he suggests the pair *Tolomeo* and *Orlando* (1711) were considered for transfer to London (p.555). Versions of Metastasio's *Ezio* and *Catone in Utica*, another suggested pair (p.557), were also performed in London in 1732 (though in different seasons).

³⁸ Even music publishers were confused: an aria belonging to Teseo (Senesino) is represented as Anthiope's in the collection *The Favourite Songs in the Opera call'd Ariadne by Sig^r Porpora* [1734], [1].

³⁹ Diary, 20 April 1734, Hertfordshire Record Office, 'Sarah Cowper's family books', D/EP.F234, vol. 7 (October 1729-35), f. 306; cited in Taylor, 200-01. Taylor is greatly discomforted by this reference, and goes so far as to suggest that the Opera of the Nobility in fact *may* have used Handel's music in their opera, slighting Porpora in the process! There is a simpler solution: Cowper's reference to Cuzzoni's 'manner being adapted to Hendel's musick' is a qualitative judgement and a reminiscence of the singer's previous appearances in London rather than a reference to the work she was performing in at that time.

⁴⁰ *The Daily Post-Boy*, 17 December 1733.

⁴¹ *The London Evening-Post*, 22-25 December 1733; the rehearsal was apparently held on 24 December 1733.

⁴² *The Daily Post-Boy*, 31 December 1733. Dates of performances of the two *Arianna* operas barely overlapped, however royal rivalry is still observable. According to the newspapers, Prince Frederick attended three performances of *Arianna in Nasso* (1, 5, 12 January 1734); on the latter two dates the King, Queen and three princesses attended Handel's production of *Arbaces*. The King, Queen and

brought out *Arbaces* against the Nobility's *Arianna*, the King, Queen, and three eldest princesses attended *Arbaces*, and the newspapers noted that the Prince of Wales continued to support the opposing company.⁴³ It is hardly surprising, then, that one contemporary pamphlet should suggest the operas helped foment political faction, leaving musical London 'in an uproar'.⁴⁴ Musicologists have looked in vain for some sort of musical clue to competition.⁴⁵ Far more obvious is the plot divergence. A brief exploration of the ways in which these works employed their texts suggests that the two interpretations could not stand happily side by side.

We now know that the stories of Ariadne and the Minotaur, and Ariadne abandoned on Naxos are distinct, drawn together only by the character of Theseus. For eighteenth-century audiences, however, such disjunction between the stories was questionable—they were, perhaps, episodes (with a few key divergences) in the same narrative. The major classical sources for the myths employed were Plutarch, Ovid and Catullus. Although Ovid was not popular in the eighteenth century—Dryden's dictum that he was too frivolous and indecorous for serious study still standing—his *Metamorphoses* would have been generally known from Samuel Garth's 1717 English edition, which was reprinted often throughout the century.⁴⁶ In Ovid, Theseus' defeat of the Minotaur and his abandonment of Ariadne are treated as one continuous story. Most translators agree that Ovid's Theseus is 'cruel', and Garth has him leave Ariadne 'quickly cloy'd, ungrateful, and unkind'; but

other members of the royal family are recorded as visiting Handel's *Arianna* six times (29 January; 2, 12, 19 February; 5, 12 March). The Prince attended *Arianna in Creta* once (12 February); the King, Queen and other members of the royal family (except Princess Amelia) also attended *Arianna in Nasso* only once, on the opening night.

⁴³ *The General Evening Post*, 5-8 January 1734; *The Daily Post-Boy*, 9 January 1733 [1734]. See also *The London Stage* for 12 January 1734 (pt. 3, vol. 1, 357).

⁴⁴ 'Hurliothrumbo Johnson', *Harmony in an Uproar* (1734).

⁴⁵ Taylor, 201-2.

⁴⁶ Lee T. Percy, *The Mediated Muse: English Translations of Ovid, 1560-1700* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1984), 139-40.

we gain little sense from Ovid of relationships behind the deeds.⁴⁷ Though Catullus focuses on Ariadne's emotional turmoil at her abandonment, there were few eighteenth-century English translations available.⁴⁸

Plutarch, however, was a source with whom all schoolboys were familiar. His 'Parallel Lives' clearly demonstrate the principle that history was to be read as a series of precepts or lessons; it was in his preface to the collection of Plutarch's *Lives* most familiar to the eighteenth-century reader that Dryden explained history as 'the Precepts of Moral Philosophy reduc'd into Examples', a 'Prospective-Glass' that 'informs the Understanding by the Memory [and] helps us to judge of what will happen, by shewing us the like Revolutions of former Times'.⁴⁹ Plutarch pairs Theseus with Romulus because they were 'Both Warriors; that by all the World's allow'd' and, among other things, had founded 'the two most famous Cities of the World, the One built *Rome*, and the Other made *Athens* be inhabited'. Plutarch recounts the many confusions and variations surrounding the stories of Theseus and Ariadne, but nonetheless links the tale of the Labyrinth to that of Ariadne's abandonment on Naxos (for whatever reason she was abandoned) in his continuing narrative of Theseus's life. In the final comparison between Theseus and Romulus,

⁴⁷ Samuel Garth, ed. *Ovid's Metamorphoses in Fifteen Books. Translated by the most Eminent Hands*. 2 vols (1717, 3rd edn, 1727), 52. See also Mr. Sewell, *Ovid's Metamorphoses. In fifteen books. Made English by several hands*, (3rd edn, 1733); John Clarke, *Ovid's Metamorphoses. With an English translation, as Literal as possible* (2nd edn, 1741). One early translator of Ovid's 'Love Epistles' felt the need to add an answer from Theseus to Ariadne 'which [is] wanting in Ovid's Epistle'. In it the Athenian excuses his desertion—Aeneas-like—as beyond his control, undertaken at the instruction of a heartless Bacchus, who has told him that fame, glory, and another wife are his destiny; David Cravford, *Ovidius Britannicus: or, Love Epistles. In imitation of Ovid. To which are added.... Theseus [sic.] answer to Ariadne, which are wanting in Ovid's Epistle* (1703), 134-5.

⁴⁸ Most useful are *Ariadne Forsaken. A Poem*. [anon. trans. from Catullus] (1772), and *The Poems of Caius Valerius Catullus, in English verse: with the Latin text revised, and classical notes* (1795). Interestingly, the former poem describes Theseus as 'with a patriot zeal possest' in his mission to Crete (3).

⁴⁹ *Plutarch's Lives in Eight Volumes ... To which is prefixed, The Life of Plutarch, Written by Mr. Dryden* (1749), I, 37, 33. See note 130, previous chapter. 'Dryden's Plutarch', as it was known in the eighteenth century, was reprinted frequently throughout the century.

although commending the former for his many valiant acts, Plutarch condemns him for ‘the Rapes of Women [which] admit of no plausible Excuse’.⁵⁰

Ariadne, of course, already had a venerable operatic history. The best-known operas focus on Ariadne’s tragic response to her abandonment. But the labyrinthine entanglements of the Minotaur’s fate on Crete also had obvious attractions for the eighteenth century. Pariati’s libretto, which was set several times during the century, revolves around the dichotomy of love and honour typical of opera in this period. It entwines love and jealousy among the already twisted threads, adding Carilda’s unrequited love for Theseus and Alcestes’ for her, but ensuring a happy ending for Theseus and Ariadne, whose marriage is blessed by King Minos. The real focus is not love intrigue, however, but the atmosphere of ‘*Political Enmity*’ between the Athenians and Cretans, which jeopardises both nations. Thus by defeating the Minotaur, Theseus ‘gain’d at last his dear *Ariadne*’, but, more importantly, he put ‘a glorious End to the Calamities of his Country’.⁵¹ Similarly, while Theseus’s love for Ariadne is never in doubt (despite the inevitable complications and misunderstandings), he is adamant that even love will not distract him from ‘My Country’s Cause’.⁵² As Minos’ final gratitude indicates, there is a largely implicit sense—which audience members would have understood from their Plutarch—that Theseus is freeing not only the Athenians but also the Cretans from the monstrosity represented by the unseen Minotaur and expressed visibly through the human machinations of the ever-present general Tauris—the monstrosity of political turmoil.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Plutarch’s Lives*, I, 67-71, 129-31, 133.

⁵¹ *Ariadne in Crete* (1733 [*sic.*, 1734]), 2; cited in Harris, ed., *The Librettos of Handel’s Operas*, 56.

⁵² *Ariadne in Crete*, 10; cited in Harris, ed., *The Librettos of Handel’s Operas*, 64.

⁵³ Plutarch says it was because Tauris’s ‘Power grew grievous and insupportable by reason of the Insolence of his Manners’ and because of his over-familiarity with the Queen that Minos allowed the

Rolli's *Arianna in Nasso*, by contrast, races through the part of the story on which Pariati's work dwelt. It begins with Ariadne's anxious wait outside the labyrinth and beside Theseus's ship for the safe return of her lover, moving swiftly through Theseus's display of the (already dead) Minotaur, to his reminder that Ariadne should accompany him home to Athens, and to their departure from Crete. Ariadne's doubts about her lover's faithfulness—expressed as irrational jealousy in Pariati—remain in Rolli's libretto, and here prove well founded. Significantly, she expresses her misgivings from the first: 'E che dirassi in Creta ed in Grecia di mia fuga?', to which Theseus responds with emotional blackmail: 'E tanto si pensa, quando tanto s'ama? io torno, se tu meco non vieni, torno, senza il tuo fil, nel più intricato centro del laberinto. Vuoi, crudel, la mia morte?''⁵⁴ As this exchange suggests, Ariadne has also become the focus for the honourable sentiment of patriotism in Rolli's libretto. Later, in despair, she upbraids herself for treachery to her country.⁵⁵ On the other hand, Theseus's interaction with the other characters shows a man at home with dissimulation, one happy to lie both to the wife he already had (Anthiope) and to the one he has just gained.⁵⁶ Although the audience is not denied a happy ending, the couple celebrated at the end are Ariadne and Bacchus, not Ariadne and Theseus.

combat between him and Theseus, and that the King was in the end 'extremely pleas'd' at Theseus's victory; *Plutarch's Lives*, 67.

⁵⁴ Paolo Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos ... composed by Nicholas Porpora for the English Nobility* (1734), 10; Ariadne: 'And what wou'd be said in Crete and in Greece of my flight?'; Theseus: 'And can so much thought agree with so much love? I return, if thou dost not accompany me; return, without they Clew, to the most intricate center of the labyrinth. Cruel; dost thou wish my death?' (11).

⁵⁵ Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos*, 42: 'Quanto veggo mi sgrida/ Et alla patria e al padre/ Infida mi rampogna'; ['All I see, exclaims against me and reproaches me with treachery to my country, and my Father' (43)].

⁵⁶ He proves his cunning with his wife, Anthiope: 'Arianna Cagion del nostro scampo/ E della mia vittoria,/ Fugge il paterno odioso regno, e vuole/ Far suo soggiorno Atene....' and when Anthiope asks 'E non giurasti amor e fe?', he replies: 'Giurai Fedeltà, non amore.... (L'arte mi giovi.) Ella il dirà.', Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos*, 34; ['Ariadne, the means of our escape, and of my victory, flies her father's hated kingdom, and designs in Athens to reside.... Ant: 'Didst thou not swear love and fidelity? Thes. 'Fidelity I swore, not love.... (Art assist me.) She will tell you the same thing.' (35)].

As this outline indicates, it is the machinations of Theseus—not the plight of Ariadne—that prove central to the plot; the title role is a curiously minor character. Indeed, though Ariadne is finally safely paired with Bacchus, the *deus ex machina* has a particularly abrupt, almost makeshift feel. Bacchus can only offer oblivion to the past—and even to her identity—as the means of assuaging Ariadne’s grief both for Theseus and for her country:

[Bacchus:] Copra l’oblio quel che passò: l’amore ecco solo per me
t’accende il core.

[Ariadne:] Sono Arianna? son l’istessa? è vero, un nuovo ardor dolce
m’infiamma il petto.⁵⁷

Musically too, Ariadne is an inferior creature, with few exit arias, several fewer arias than Theseus, and a number that are either not *da capo* or are interrupted. In part this reflects her nervous, introspective character, in part simply the status of different singers: Ariadne was initially given to Maria Segatti, and though the role went to Cuzzoni on her arrival, even she does not seem to have had much impact on the size of the part. As at the other house, where the part of Theseus was taken by their leading attraction, the new castrato Carestini, at the Nobility’s house this role was Senesino’s. The castrato’s dominance was reflected in the type and number of arias and his centrality to the opera.

One brief example will illustrate the point: the beginning of Act Two, where Anthiope reveals Theseus’s duplicity to Ariadne by means of a message carved into two trees, is a crucial juncture and, one would imagine, a key to Ariadne’s emotional state. Anthiope’s message, engraved in the bark, is also embedded in the musical text, the relationships of its varied repetitions reflecting the characters’ interactions. It is not so much the permutations of each textual repetition that bear meaning as the

⁵⁷ Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos*, 65; ‘Let oblivion veil the past: see, love for me alone, enflames thy heart. Ar. Am I Ariadne? am I the same? it is true, that a new pleasing ardor glows within my breast. I love thee, O God of joy, and of delight!’ (67).

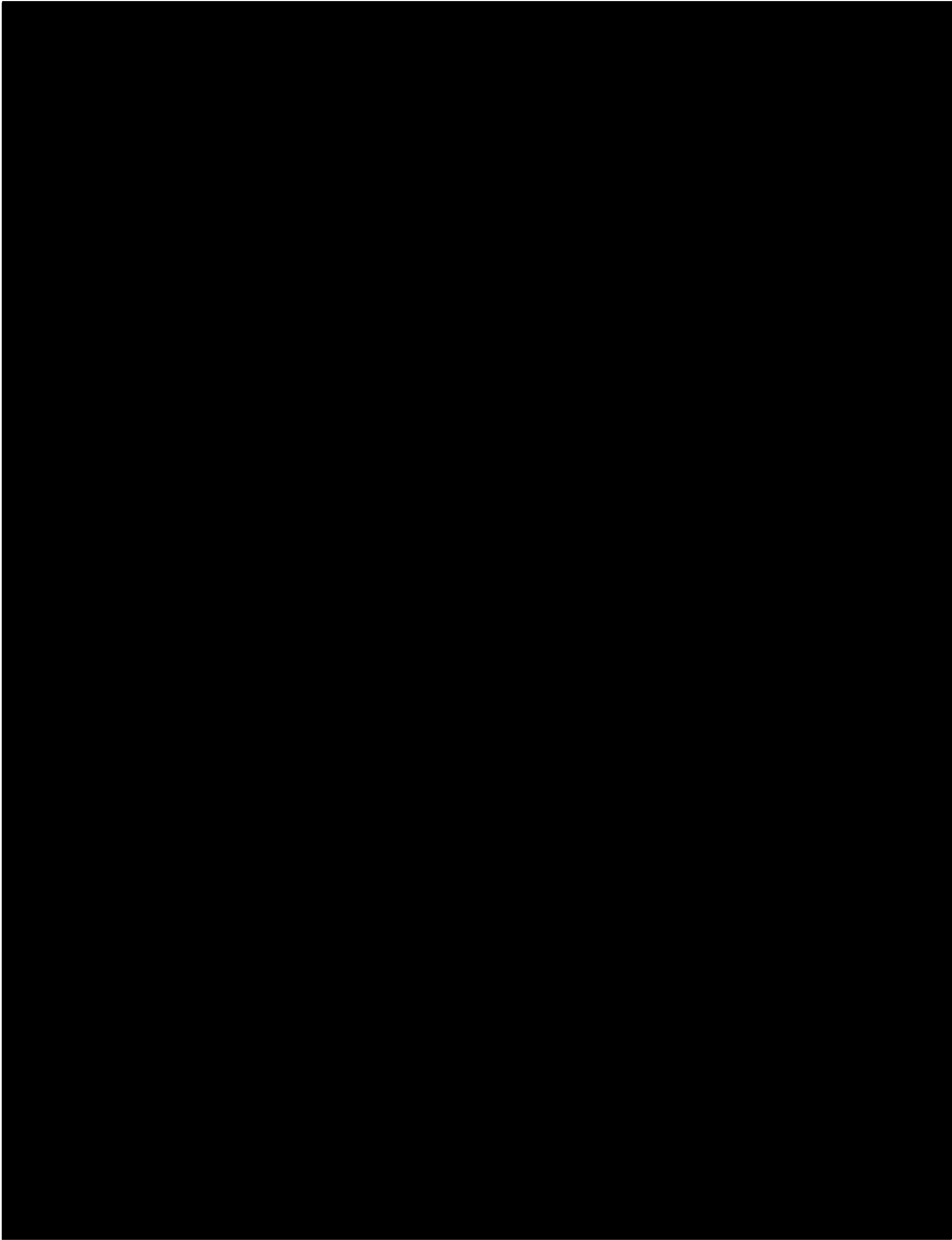
key shift from one to another. The symbolism of key relationships for eighteenth-century theorists is well known, and although we must, of course, be wary of mapping the theoretical onto the practical too simply, in Porpora's setting much is made of the contrast between Anthiope's F major rendition of the text, and Ariadne's G major/g minor interpretation that follows it (see Example 2.1).

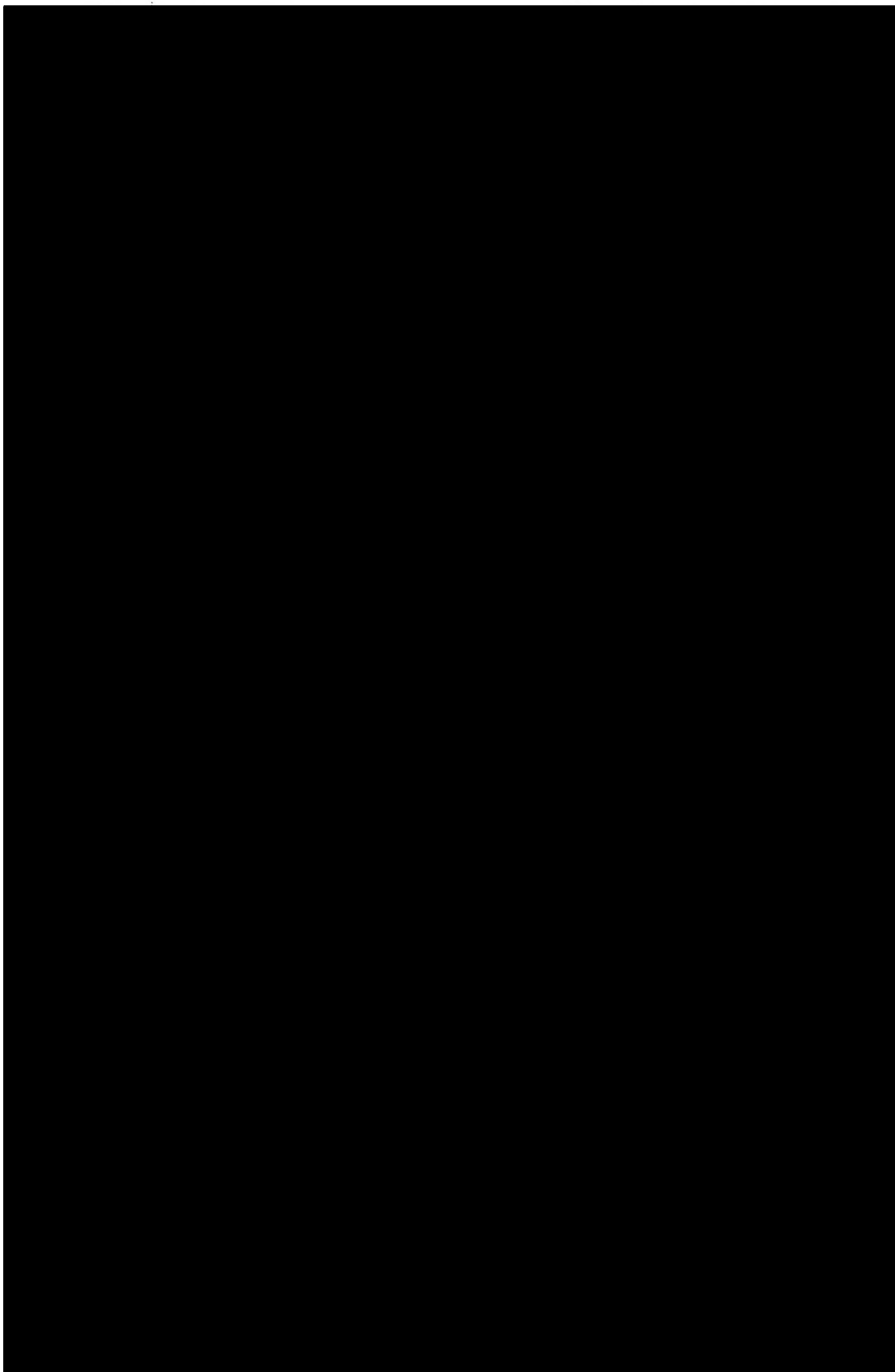
Repeated over and over again in the two scenes, carried from character to character as if an intaglio, this message embeds itself in our remembering of the opera. Anthiope's carved message is not obviously directed to Ariadne: 'Non fidarti o core amante/ Di chi già mancò di fe.'⁵⁸ Nonetheless, as Ariadne appears on cue (Anthiope says she comes 'to my wish'), it is clear that she will know how to read the lines' meaning. So, although she initially reads the message in a G major repetition of Anthiope's setting, her realisation that it may apply to her is rendered not as recitative, but as a g minor 'B' section to the inscription's 'A', in effect an internalisation of the message, not a commentary on it: 'Leggo inciso in queste piante/ E l'avviso è forse a me.'⁵⁹ Ariadne's imitation of Anthiope's message becomes emulative, as she learns to apply to her own situation the generic message of advice to a betrayed lover. This moment, and this emulative practice is pivotal to the scene and her relationship with Theseus. Immediately, she tries to dissuade herself from this realisation—after all, she says, perhaps the lines belong to 'Qualche invidiosa Pescatrice' (which the libretto translation simply renders as 'some envious female', suggesting that Ariadne may not be shifting the import of the lines as far from herself as the Italian reference to 'fisherwomen' implies). In any case, her apparent reappraisal of Anthiope's message does nothing to quell her

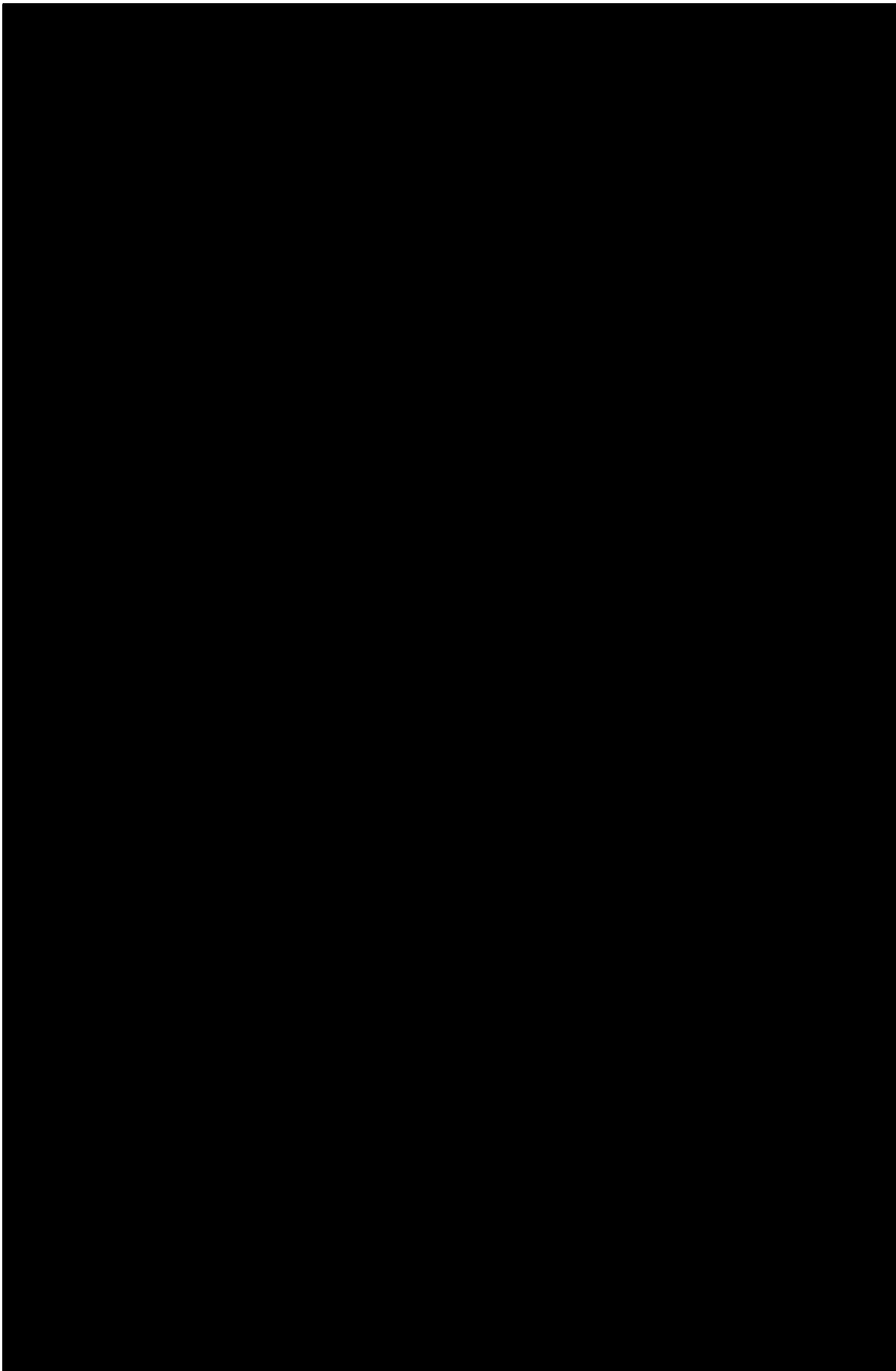
⁵⁸ Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos*, 29; 'Trust not, O fond heart,/ To him who has already broke his faith' (28).

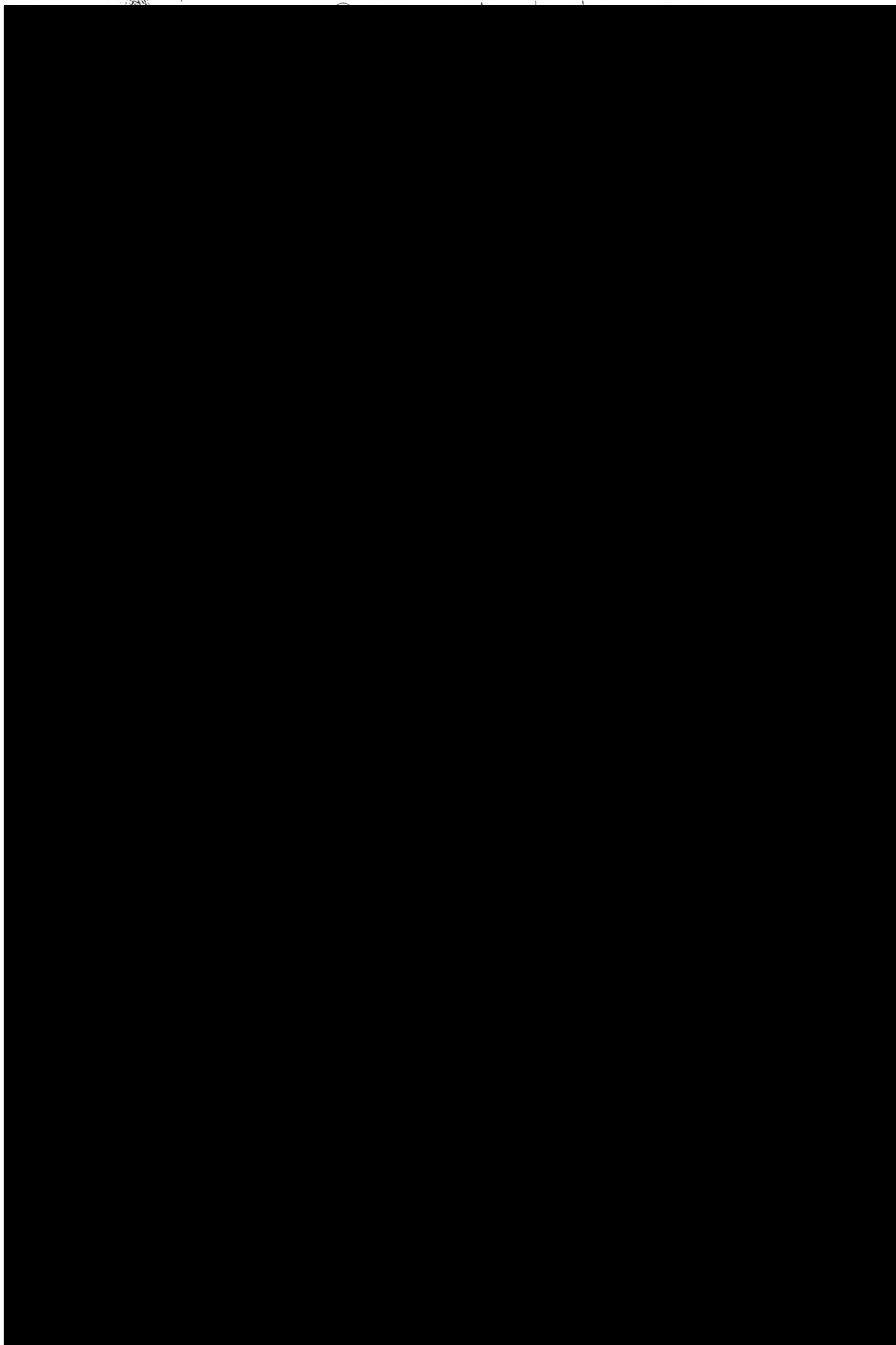
⁵⁹ Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos*, 29; 'I read carved in these trees,/ And, perhaps, the advice is to me' (28).

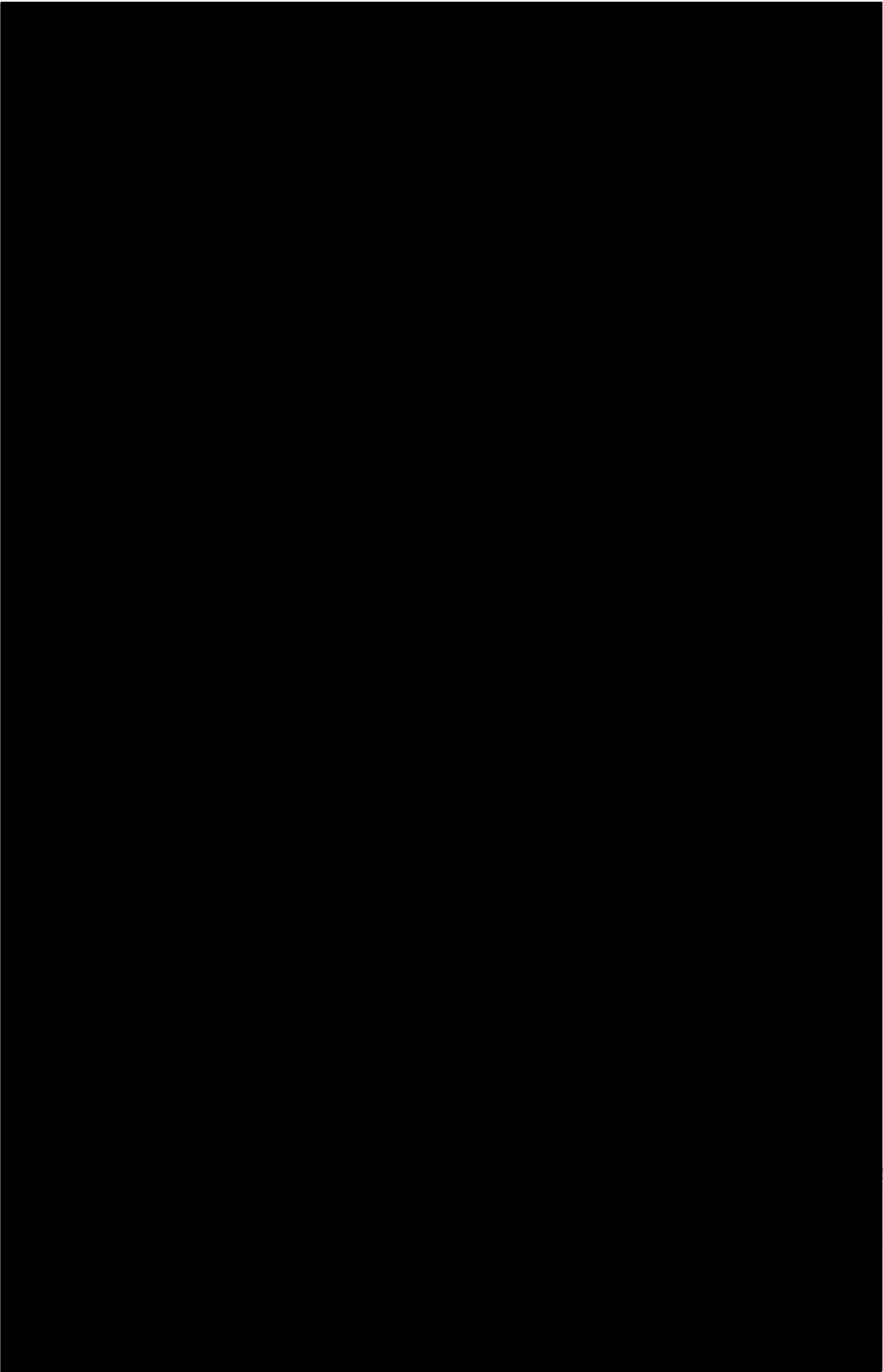
Example 2.1: Giovanni Porpora, ‘Non fidarti’, [‘Arianna in Nasso’], BL RM 22.m.29-31 (1734), vol. 2 (m.30), ff.2-6.











fears, for having ostensibly made the decision that the lines are not intended for her, she reinterprets them in F major. Perhaps this indicates a move away from her original fears, but here it is also the message's original key when sung by Anthiope, and thus allows Anthiope herself to burst in and add her own mocking 'B' section, a parody of Ariadne's first, fearful reading: 'E l'avviso è certo a te'. In theoretical terms, Anthiope's G major and Ariadne's F major were linked by C major, the key in which Theseus will shortly present his version of the message: as with the casting, Theseus's pivotal role indicates his centrality.⁶⁰ The importance of these scenes is underscored by the repeated revisions Rolli made to Act II scene ii.⁶¹ Indeed, judging by the presentation manuscript copy of Porpora's setting for the Prince of Wales, it was known in some circles at least as 'La clava di Teseo' (referring to the club with which Theseus batters down the doors of the labyrinth, but also perhaps to devastation he later wreaks on Ariadne's emotions). The libretto Handel used, by Pariati, also had previously been entitled *Teseo in Creta* or *Arianna e Teseo*.⁶² Why, then, were both operas publicly named for Ariadne? One explanation might be a desire to explain opera—as with the other arts—through association with contemporary events.

'The Lovers' Web'

'Am I Arianna? am I the same?' asks the heroine at the end of Rolli's and Porpora's opera. As she becomes Bacchus's tabula rasa, she might well wonder. She has never quite been 'the same' Ariadne; inevitably, she differs from opera to opera,

⁶⁰ Joel Lester, *Compositional Theory in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1992), 214-17.

⁶¹ Paolo Rolli, *Paolo Rolli: Libretti per Musica*, ed. Carlo Caruso (Milan, 1993), 300-301.

⁶² On *Arianna in Nasso*, see Paolo Rolli, ed. Caruso, 298, who also notes 'il curioso titolo'; see also Reinhard Strohm, *Dramma per Musica: Italian Opera Seria of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1997), 220-36. On *Arianna in Creta*, see Gronda, 'Das "Arianna"-Libretto', 139; idem,

reshaped according to occasional needs; Handel's and Porpora's works are no exception. There are also continuities, however. One image enfolds the narrative in *Arianna in Nasso* as it has in many other ancient and operatic presentations of the myth: the opera ends as it began with Ariadne bemoaning her lot on the seashore. This image is powerful not so much for what it says as for what it suggests to the viewer or listener, whether that be female suffering or triumph, a woman learning submission to fate (and men) or gaining artistic mastery. It is, in other words, important for its plasticity, its capacity to be rewritten and to be written over.⁶³

In the largest sense, Ariadne's plasticity is simply the malleability of myth. Robert Parker suggests that '[t]o speak of a myth's "meaning" is legitimate only as a shorthand way of referring to the sum of the qualities that cause people to listen to it with interest and remember it'.⁶⁴ So it is with Theseus and Ariadne as with the many other figures used in opera: their story varies, but the myths do not deteriorate because some of their links are weak. Quite the contrary: the capacity for change is almost a condition of life; and, in myths as in organisms, changes effected are a response to the environment. The Theseus myth, with which Ariadne was linked, developed as part of the Athenians' political self-creation, part of the 'invention of tradition' through which they forged their sense of collective identity.⁶⁵

A similar process of invention, one which describes the relationship between

'Le peripezie di un libretto', in G. Gronda, ed., *La carriera di un librettista. Pietro Pariati da Reggio di Lombardia* (Bologna, 1990), 289-737; Strohm, *Essays on Handel and Italian Opera*, 67.

⁶³ For the continuing plasticity of this mythical image, see Suzanne G. Cusick's article in *Early Music* 1994 and the responses to it in the latest (August 1999) edition of *Early Music* (edited by Tim Carter), which represent the varied views of the lament mentioned here; Suzanne G. Cusick, "'There was not one lady who failed to shed a tear": Arianna's lament and the construction of modern womanhood', *EM* 22 (1994), 21-41; Tim Carter, ed., *EM* 27 (August 1999).

⁶⁴ Robert Parker, 'Myths of Early Athens', *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, ed. Jan N. Bremner (London, 1987), 187-210 (188). For a useful general discussion of the role of myth, and particularly its exemplary nature, see Lowell Edmunds, 'Introduction: the Practice of Greek Mythology', *Approaches to Greek Myth* ed. Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore and London, 1990), 1-20.

⁶⁵ Parker, 'Myths of Early Athens', 187.

allegory and emulation in eighteenth-century society, can be seen in approaches to the royal wedding in contemporary imaginative works other than the *Arianna* operas. My earlier description of the wedding, uncovering the detail of events, will help us understand references to the match in contemporary ‘fiction’ and commentary. It also shows how the couple were themselves fictionalised, turned into the stuff of ‘myth’, as if their present persons and actions could only be explained as part of an historical pattern. A further examination of this process might help explain the potential for allegorical readings.

In a mix of biblical and classical typology, the heady prose of one sermon preached on the Sunday after the wedding ‘in Honour of the Nuptials’, makes clear just how much the past could eclipse the present:

In this critical time [the reign of James II] did our *fathers* cry to God from *this house*, *this land of bondage*; and he heard their groaning, remembered them in mercy, and raised up the *great WILLIAM* to be their deliverer. He *came*, he *saw*, he *conquered* all difficulties; and was the *instrument* of bringing about that *salvation* we now rejoice in the blessings of.... judge whether we have not reason to triumph in the same language: “*Happy art thou, O Britain!* a people saved of the Lord; what one nation is like unto *thee* whom God has thus *gone forth to redeem* for a people unto himself, to do *great* and wonderful things for you; to deliver you from *popish nations*, from their *superstitions*, and *their gods*?”⁶⁶

The sense of (catholic) menace evident in this sermon was, of course, not completely dispelled even by the happy prospect of a (protestant) royal wedding; ‘popish plots’ were still suspected, and connived at. At the same time, the idea of a nation in toils was current on other levels, particularly with Walpole’s attempt to impose the new Excise in 1733, which the opposition trumpeted as a threat to British liberty.

In the frequent visual representations of Britain in the mid-century, the nation most often appeared as Britannia, a noble, warlike woman, associated with

⁶⁶ William May, *The Past and present Appearances of divine Providence for Great Britain, considered as an Encouragement to our future Hopes and Expectations. In a Sermon Preach'd at*

the sea from the earliest. Britannia was also regularly employed by satirists and propagandists in prints which, according to Herbert Atherton 'Again and again ... show her as an innocent, abused, insulted, cozened'.⁶⁷ Images of Britannia by the sea were also associated with Anne and the circumstances of her wedding. Perhaps in response to the lengthy and uncertain wait, as well as in recognition of William's foreignness, and as a reminder of his ancestry, many of the contemporary verses on the marriage show a princess or Britannia in waiting, sometimes in trouble, rescued or at least relieved at the arrival of her prince:

BRITANNIA pleas'd the best Alliance views,
Which in her Thought the grateful Scene renews,
Where WILLIAM, with Heroick Virtues warm'd,
Dispell'd the Fears her anxious Breast alarm'd,
Broke the vile Chains Tyranick Pow'r design'd,
And Shackles fram'd the free-born Soul to bind.⁶⁸

The sea as both conveyer of and potential threat to the beloved (and the conjoining of rivers as symbols of the pair's union) appears several times in poetic commemorations of the match.⁶⁹ The sea was also, of course, the means by which William III reached England in 1688; even more importantly, it was the cause of much anxiety to Queen and Country whenever George II took one of his (frequent) trips to Europe, to visit his Electorate and his mistress.⁷⁰

Gravel-Lane, Houndsditch, On March 17, 1733-4. In Honour of the Nuptials of the Princess Royal with his most serene Highness the Prince of Orange (1734).

⁶⁷ Herbert M. Atherton, *Political Prints in the Age of Hogarth: a Study of the Ideographic Representation of Politics* (Oxford, 1974), 91, 95-6, 97, 102.

⁶⁸ J. Duick, 'An Epithalamium', *The Contest*; see also 'Verses to the Author, In Imitation of Horace's Ode on Pindar. By a Divine. Applied to the Marriage of his Highness the Prince of Orange with ANN Princess-Royal of Great-Britain', in Stephen Duck, *A Poem on the Marriage* (1734), 5; 'On the Prince of Orange's Sickness', *The London Journal*, 1 December, 1733; Mr. Carey, 'The Recovery. An Eclogue, written in November last', *The Whitehall Evening-Post*, 12-14 March 1733/4.

⁶⁹ Duck; *A Poem on the Marriage*; 'Verses to the Author ... By a Divine. Applied to the Marriage'; 'An Ode on the Marriage of the Prince of ORANGE', *The Honey-Suckle* (1734), 75-77. Interestingly, the prologue to the English version of Perrin's and Cambert's *Ariane* (1674) also examines Britain's relationship to Europe by having the Tiber, Seine and Po pay tribute to the Thames against a backdrop of London.

⁷⁰ His stormy journey back to Britain in 1736 after a prolonged absence probably marked the lowest ebb in the King's popularity; see Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1989), 35-36; Gerrard, 118, 196.

While most of the many masques written in celebration of the marriage show Britannia at her ease, graciously accepting the attentions of the newly arrived Dutch prince, *Britannia and Batavia* by George Lillo shows a Britannia under siege by ‘Tyranny attended with Slavery and Want’, and rescued by Batavia against the backdrop of ‘the Prospect of a calm Sea with a Fleet of Ships at Anchor’, a clear reference to the Glorious Revolution. This theatrical invocation of history reinforced its message with a climactic ‘Scene [of] the Procession of the Marriage of the Princess Royal with his Highness the Prince of Orange in the same Order, and as near as possible with the same magnificence, as it was really perform’d’, but Lillo’s masque was never staged.⁷¹ As the masque bound itself to the shape of history, so also history defined itself with one eye to the theatre: in his commission to design the lavish chapel decorations for the wedding, William Kent’s theatrical instinct was amply expressed.⁷²

The universality of this transformation from history to myth can also be seen in the ladies’ fans published to celebrate the marriage. The fan itself operated in the interstices of allegory, its opening and folding governed less by need for cover or coolness than by the elaborate system of gestural language employed by eighteenth-century etiquette. Layered over this general social significance, each fan’s particular pictorial detail indicated personal (often political) allegiances. In Figure 2.1 the portrait busts of Anne and William occupy central ground, framed in order to highlight them within their surroundings.⁷³ Above are two ‘fames’ trumpeting the marriage. On one side is Britannia, sitting in front of the sort of classical buildings

⁷¹ Michael Burden, ‘The Wedding Masques for Anne, the Princess Royal’, *Miscellanea Musicologia* 17 (1990), 87-113 (100-1). On the popularity of ceremonial processions on stage, see Paul Sawyer, ‘John Rich’s Contribution to the Eighteenth-Century London Stage’, *The Eighteenth-Century English Stage*, ed. Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (London, 1972), 85-104 (92-3).

⁷² Michael Wilson, *William Kent: Architect, Painter, Gardener, 1685-1748* (London, 1984), 133.

⁷³ Lady C. Schreiber, *Fans and Fan Leaves*, 2 vols (1888, 1890), 325.

that sprang up during the Palladian revival, designed to indicate Britain's affinity with the glory of classical Greece and Rome. Britannia looks towards Liberty and the British lion on the other side of the picture, but also to the sea, where the ship being greeted represents the arrival of William III. The framing of Anne's and William's portrait both draws attention to them and separates them from their allegorical surroundings.

In the second fan (Figure 2.2),⁷⁴ the royal couple is incorporated into the allegory. Not all of the many figures surrounding the couple are identifiable, but as courtiers and a priest in modern dress intermingle with the allegorical figures, it is apparent that all function on the same plane of meaning. So too, the oak stumps so prominent in this drawing—replacing the orange groves found in other versions of this fan—are present on a purely allegorical level, representing the death of the old Stuart reign, and emphasising the consolidation of the Protestant succession. Anne and William themselves change from fan to fan, as if to stress the ease with which allegory and history could be intertwined: although they are dressed here in classical costume, other versions have them in modern dress, though all the allegorical figures are still present.

Although there are no pictures of the happy couple in Figure 3.3 the allegory would have been clear to contemporaries, connubial union symbolised by the pairing of an orange tree and an English rose.⁷⁵ In the central background, a ship sails between the Netherlands and London, representing the Glorious Revolution. Underneath the orange tree, a tiny George does battle with the dragon—a reminder of England's proud military past. Overhead flies the dove of peace, a harbinger of the symbolic order and prosperity brought by this match.

⁷⁴ Schreiber, *Fans and Fan Leaves*, fan leaf 27.

⁷⁵ Schreiber, *Fans and Fan Leaves*, fan leaf 28.

Figure 2.1: Fan to celebrate the marriage of Anne, Princess Royal of Britain and William Prince of Nassau and Orange, depicting Liberty and Britannia [1733/4]. By Permission of the British Library.



Figure 2.2: Fan to celebrate the marriage of Anne, Princess Royal of Britain and William Prince of Nassau and Orange, depicting an allegorical wedding scene with blasted oaks [1733/4]. By Permission of the British Library.

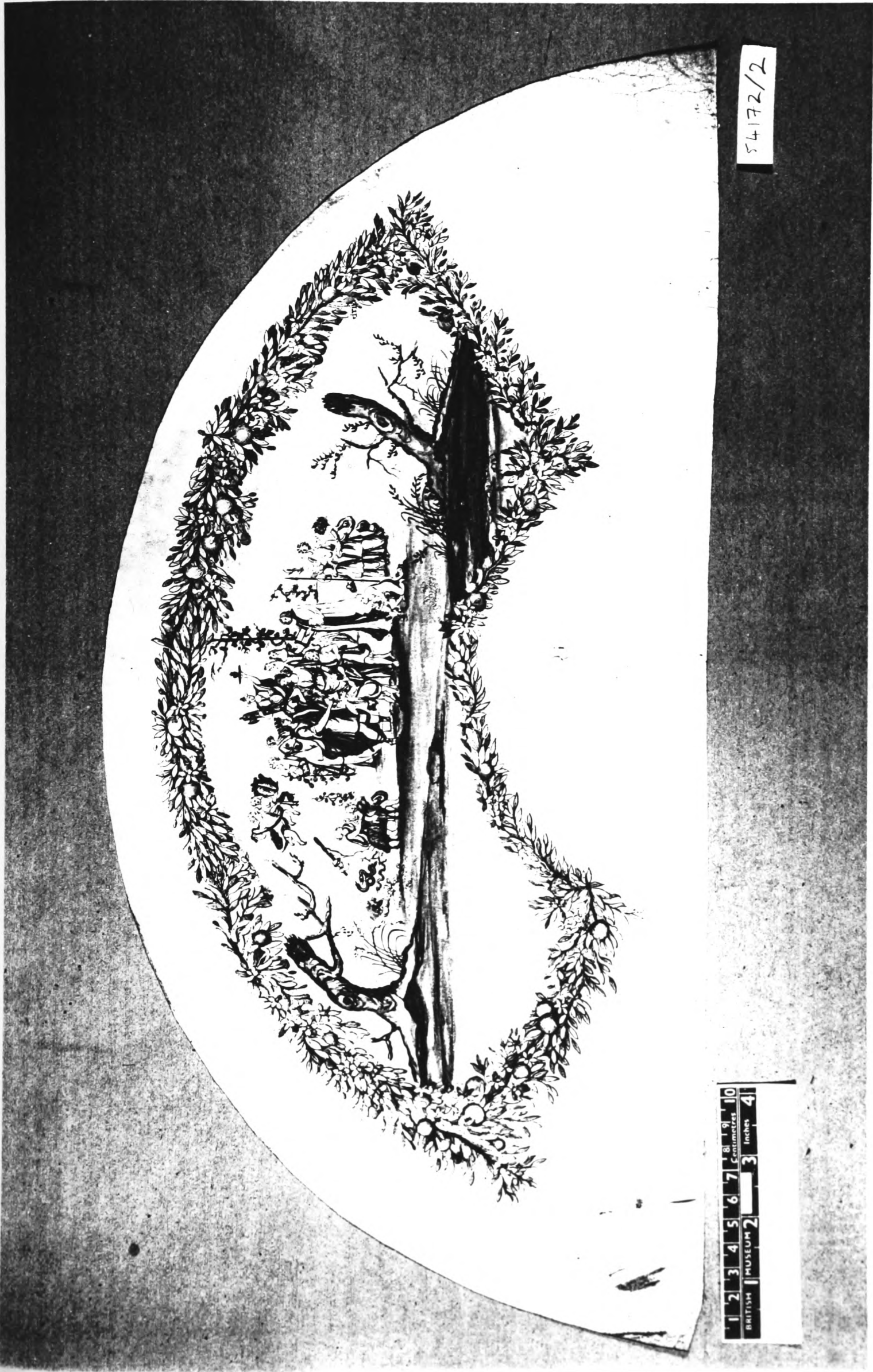


Figure 2.3: *The Orange Fan with an Ode set to Music* [1733/4] (fan leaf). By Permission of the British Library.



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Balance and order are the initial impressions created by the fan leaf. Barely noticeable at first are the note round the dove's neck and the verses that frame the picture. We might expect these lines to provide some—similarly framing—explanation of the scene, but they too are allusive and allegorical. The note is an address 'To the lovely she who has more than 80000 charms', a reference to the dowry the Princess had been granted by Parliament. The verses refer to the skill of 'Holland's Gardners' who combine the orange and the delicate rose. Though they ostensibly praise, both are ambiguous in tone, for the verses warn that the English rose's 'Prime is quickly Over/ All its charms are soon decayed'. The note's backhanded compliment, putting a cash value on the Princess, is still more dubious when we know that the dowry and settlement had been a cause of contention in Parliament.⁷⁶ A 'straightforward' tribute becomes not more, but less easy to read the more deeply we delve into the labyrinths of history and allegory.

Emulation in the theatre

As the ambiguities and allegories of the fan leaves might suggest, when even the astute Hervey could only conjecture reasons for the match, it becomes clear that the repeated invocation of the Prince's ancestry in contemporary gratulatory prose and poetry was as much an attempt to suggest motivation for the marriage as a necessary cloak for William's inadequacies. It was this very need for disguise, however, that allowed (and provoked) satirical political comment. Reference to William III could be a sore point for George II, as the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of London seem to have realised with their speech on the wedding, in which William was recalled as having 'delivered these Kingdoms from the imminent Dangers of Popery

⁷⁶ The dowry was problematic partly because the Prince of Wales's annual settlement was still very low, and partly because the Princess's was very high; Hervey, *Memoirs*, 196, 286

and Arbitrary Power, ... established the Constitution, and secured our liberties in such a Manner that he seems to have left nothing more to be done'. As well as explicitly criticising the less-than-glorious reigns of the Georges through comparison with the illustrious actions of William III, they implicitly called their present King to account for his government's less than popular taxation and pacific maritime policies.⁷⁷ A similar rationale was probably behind the enthusiastic reception for the Prince of Orange on his trip to Bath, Bristol and Oxford.⁷⁸ Hervey noted that 'The City of London, the University of Oxford, and several other disaffected towns and incorporated bodies, took the opportunity of the Princess Royal's marriage to say the most impertinent things to the King, under the pretence of complimentary addresses, that ironical zeal and couched satire could put together.'⁷⁹

As Hervey's statement implies, the windows of allusion opened by the circumstances of the marriage meant satire was encouraged by the impending 'celebrations'; and that satire was expressed—perhaps particularly—within arenas open to the royal gaze. One Captain Powell, writing to Lord Strafford in early November, gives an invaluable account of the buzz surrounding the Prince's arrival:

I am just come from the Beggars Opera, & meeting a handfull of mob I thought his Hs^s was arrived & had the curiosity to enquire at Sommerset house & found out a false alarm. but tis said he is landed, & whenever he arrives 'twill be by water from Greenwich. I dind tete à tete to day with <...> Lansdowne who assures me that if he comes to morrow he will be married

⁷⁷Printed in *The Political State of Great Britain*, Vol. 47 [Jan-June 1734], 327-28. There was no love lost between the King and the City: it was noted in the newspapers that the King refused to let the Mayor and Aldermen kiss his hand after the wedding. *The London Evening-Post* for 16-19 March 1734, conveys the tone of outrage: 'Yesterday the Right Hon. the Lord Mayor, together with the Court of Aldermen and Common-Council, met at Guildhall, and thence proceeded in great Order to St. James's, where being introduc'd to his Majesty ... the Recorder, read the following Address, congratulating his Majesty on the Marriage.... No one was Knighted, neither had they the Honour to kiss his Majesty's Hand.' The Queen and Princess were apparently more gracious.

⁷⁸The West Country were even more direct in their criticism of George II in comparison with William III: 'Remember George when this set led to dance,/They sent a greater King than you to France.' Quoted in Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover*, 43. Parallels between William III and William IV were reinforced on a ceremonial level; Dr Gregory of Christ Church, Oxford, reported (3 March 1733) to the Duke of Newcastle that on the Prince's reception in Oxford, 'He had the same honours paid him as the Prince of Orange had in the year 70'; BL Add. MSS 32689, f.168.

⁷⁹Hervey, *Memoirs*, I, 280.

on Friday & will return in 3 or 4 days after. if so the poor Ladys will loose a sight. tis not yet decided if the Peers & Peeresses are to walk, but the \Irish/ Peers have certainly been refusd at w^{ch} the are in a great huff at. <....> the King is resolv'd to have a Masquerade w^{ch} the Q is much ag^t & many others for fear he shoud be affronted, for indeed they are hellishly rude wth pamphlets & songs.[....] <Postscript:> I fancy he is come by some illuminations.⁸⁰

Some of the humour in the 'pamphlets and songs' Powell mentions was fairly harmless, if not in the best taste: the bawdy *Kick him Nan: Or, a Poetical Description of a Wedding Night*, replaces chaste allusions to Hymen with a down-to-earth view of events.⁸¹ Much was more pointed: a spate of plays and other works published in the run-up to the wedding revealed attitudes far from delighted about the match.

The Wedding: or, the Country House-Wife. A ballad opera of three acts (1734) burlesqued the interminable delays leading up to the wedding, with Britain reduced to a parish, and the characters of the royal family and Walpole clearly recognisable in the local squire's family: Squeesal, 'a peevish Country Justice'; Cantwell, 'his Clerk, a knavish Fellow, pretending to much Cunning'; Sir Harry Heartfree, 'the Bridegroom, a young Gentleman of a Family, but of small Fortune'; Madam Squeesal; and Blouzella, the daughter. The peasants' chitchat reveals the general state of play: although the countryfolk know their squire's family only too well, they are at a loss to understand this new pairing. To the serving-girl's report that the bridegroom has still not arrived 'tho' every Thing else is ready', Dame Driver replies

A my Mind, it would be a perfect Tragedy, as they call it, if the young Man should not come at all; why Miss Blouze would certainly run mad ... but

⁸⁰ BL Add. MS 31142, f.108r-v; 6 November 1733.

⁸¹ *Kick him Nan: Or, a Poetical Description of a Wedding Night. By the author of Kick him Jenny* (1734). For a more scurrilous sexual satire, see *The Disappointed Marriage, or, Hue and Cry After an Outlandish Monster* (1734).

what does my old Lady say to the Matter? It seems this Match was of her Making, and partly against his Worship's Will.⁸²

Squeesal and his wife bicker about who wears the pants, with the Justice accusing his wife of overtaxing their tenants to pay for their daughter's wedding to a man who cannot 'make a Jointure suitable to a fifth Part of the Portion you force me to give her'.⁸³ At the same time, Blouzella complains that she 'had rather never be made a Lady, than marry a Man, who shews so little Respect' in his lack of enthusiastic pre-nuptial address. Squeesal even satirises contemporary verse, singing an air on the 'HEROE' who is too timid to approach love's fire, echoing Thomas Bowen's and Stephen Fox's cynical observations.⁸⁴ Madam Squeesal, however, pays more heed to her priest than her husband, and later explains to her daughter that her control of Squeesal's estate is only right and fair return for ceding her husband's person to his many mistresses.⁸⁵ Conversation between Blouzella and her maid, Dorcas, makes it clear that, however much Dorcas may try to put a brave face on matters, Blouzella is certain that her mother has devised the match to make her unhappy, and is determined to dislike a husband who has thus far hardly exerted himself on her behalf. All turns out well in the end, though, with Sir Harry finally appearing, apparently happy with his bride though taken aback at her family.

⁸² *The Wedding: or, the Country House-Wife. A ballad opera of three acts* (1734), 1-2.

⁸³ The Queen's reputed dominance of George II in political matters is reported in the *DNB* (Vol. 7, 1049), supported by Hervey, *Memoirs*, eg. 68-70, 151-3 (see also Lady Mary Wortley Montagu), and maintained by his few modern biographers (all heavily reliant on a few sources like Hervey and Montagu); see, for example, John Van der Kiste, *King George II and Queen Caroline* (Stroud, 1997), 102-6. For a much-needed reappraisal of George II as a politician, however, see Aubrey Newman, *The World Turned Inside Out: New Views on George II* (Leicester, 1988). Caroline's close relationship with Walpole is similarly poorly treated; see, for example, Van der Kiste, *King George II and Queen Caroline*, 104-5. On the Queen and Walpole, see Hervey, *Memoirs*, 47-9, 151-3, 166, 177.

⁸⁴ See note 24, above.

⁸⁵ On Queen Caroline's much-satirised reputation for learning in the fields of religion, philosophy and antiquity, see Gerrard, 143, 172, 178-9; Van der Kiste, *King George II and Queen Caroline*, 45-6, 122-4. See entries on Lady Howard and Baroness von Walmoden, the King's two principal mistresses in Hervey, *Memoirs*, *passim*.

Another ballad opera, *The Court Medley: or, Marriage by Proxy*, of 1733, was updated for the wedding to become *The Fortunate Prince: or Marriage at Last*.⁸⁶ Here, responsibility for planning the marriage to 'Prince Flavius' is transferred from the ineffective (and entirely absent) parents of 'Seraphina, Princess of Delos' to the transparently titled 'Sejanus, Prime Minister to the King of Delos', who behaves as though 'he was King of Delos himself'.⁸⁷ The author, however, is primarily interested in second-guessing what was least explicable to contemporaries: the apparent lethargy of the groom. The device of spending much of the plot in Prince Flavius's court is cleverly used, with frequent compliments to the prosperity of Delos and the legendary beauty of its ladies, and historical detail of the real marriage negotiations (such as awarding of 'Badges of the highest Honours'⁸⁸) interwoven to give a realistic aspect to speculation about the Prince's motives. The Prince is certainly considering the match, although what little enthusiasm he can muster arises from mercenary interests rather than his courtiers' flattering words about Delos: he 'must consult what Advantage I can make of this Bargain: Was ever one of our Nation known to postpone that?'⁸⁹ The real reason for his apathy is revealed as a secret interest in the lady of one of his courtiers, but this paltry passion makes him no more likeable; he ends the 1733 edition by grudgingly agreeing to make the 'very disagreeable' trip to Delos. The additional few pages tipped in at the

⁸⁶ *Marriage at Last: or, the Fortunate Prince* was advertised in anticipation of the original date set for the wedding (12 November) in *The Daily Post-Boy* on 10 November 1733.

⁸⁷ *The Court Medley: or, Marriage by Proxy* (1733), 9. Sejanus was one of the many corrupt kings' favourites and/or politicians—including Wolsey, Gaveston, Dudley and Villiers, as well as Clodius and Verres—treated as types, which Walpole so ably fulfilled as antitype in this period. For Sejanus, see, for example, *C---- and Country. A Play of Seven Acts. In which will be Reviv'd, the Entertaining Scene of the Blundering Brothers. To which is added, the Comical Humours of Punch ... [and] the grand masque, call'd, The Downfall of Sejanus* (1735). Maynard Mack briefly discusses these, and types for the King and Queen, in *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* (Toronto and Oxford, 1969), 129-34.

⁸⁸ *The Court Medley*, 8. The 'badge' is, of course, the garter.

⁸⁹ *The Court Medley*, 2.

end to ‘update’ the story for *The Fortunate Prince*—the Prince finds Delos a ‘delightful Land’, and a ‘ravishing’ Princess worth traversing the globe for—are hardly convincing.

In attempting to comfort the Princess in *The Court Medley*, the maid Hamilla offers her mistress a recently published novella as a parallel to her own case. To dispel doubts the reader might have as to the existence of this work, it is also advertised at the back of the play. *The Secret History of Mama Oello, Princess Royal of Peru. A New Court Novel* (1733) exemplifies the fluidity of boundaries between fiction and fact, the created and the discovered. Peru becomes a country introduced as a vehicle for the satirical message (like the lands visited in *Gulliver’s Travels*); the story’s disguised truths are presented as ‘a Novel form’d from true History found some time ago ... amongst the Royal Commentaries of Peru, and wrote originally by *the Inca Garzillasco de la Vega*’, and its form shifts between novel and play. Garcilaso de la Vega’s *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* (1609-17) does indeed provide at least the names of the characters, though their relationships are fictional.⁹⁰ The work is divided into four chapters, their synopsis on the title page adequately outlining the plot:

- I. The Inca’s Proposal to his Daughter of marrying her to Atabalipa, Prince of Quito.
- II. Her Aversion to the intended Match.
- III. The Curaca Robilda endeavours to reconcile her to it by Promises of a large Dowry out of the publick Revenues.
- IV. The Princess’s Reflections upon it. In which is contain’d the Character of Atabalipa, Prince of Quito.

On the verso of the title page, a later hand has attempted a key to the names of the characters. All the expected people are there: Robert Walpole takes his place as

⁹⁰ Garcilaso de la Vega, *El Inca, Royal Commentaries of the Incas and General History of Peru*, 2 parts (Lisbon, 1609, Córdova, 1616-17), trans. Harold V. Livermore (Austin, Texas and London, 1966).

starring villain (Curaca Robilda—one name notably absent from Garcilaso's *Commentaries*, although a Curaca is a headman), but change is rung with the addition of 'Ino. Ld. Carmichael afterwd. E. of Hyndford' for the character of Cacique Loque Yupanki. This character has the important—and surprising—role of lover to the Princess, surprising because no hint of a relationship between Carmichael and Anne is offered elsewhere, whether in fact, Hervey, or fiction. Indeed, the circumstances of Loque Yupanki's life described in the novel—his being a Noble of the Bed-Chamber, dismissed from service shortly before the marriage—do not correlate with those of Carmichael. Though closer matches could be suggested (Lord Bedford, for example), none seems likely. But perhaps this is the point, however, part of the fiction needed to weave together the many puzzling strands in this match.

Like the plays, the story is inconclusive (or unconcluded), 'to be continued as soon as the Remainder comes to Hand', a transparent reminder of the tale's basis in 'fact', and of its precarious reliance on reportage.⁹¹ Indeed, the most striking aspect of these varying hypotheses on the background to this curious marriage is their evident desire to explain what was happening and why. The gaps left by the Court and Royal Family, either through carelessness or a need for political secrecy, allowed commercial society to trade in its own created histories. By narrating the story as they hypothesised it, bodying it out on stage or telling it over in 'fiction', these authors sought to intertwine their fancies with daily reality as they imagined history would tell it.

⁹¹ Cf. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (London, 1996).

The Cuckoo and the Nightingale

To return against to the Ariadne operas, we might also see them as answering public desire for knowledge, also plying their stories as solutions. The competition between the companies, which seems to have been tailor-made to cause confusion, might in some ways also have served to direct attention to distinguishing detail, heightening understanding of opera's possible allegorical readings and emulative potentialities by demanding a reason or context both for variant interpretations and for puzzling similarities. Certainly, Strohm suggests the phenomenon of opera pairs should attract our interest because they could 'reveal the cultural or political biases of their users', acting as 'amplifiers of underlying cultural messages by duplicating, contrasting, paralleling or balancing them'.⁹² We can see the power of variation and detail at work in the ways these operas reflect their social context; and, more particularly, returning to our earlier narrative, the way in which circumstances of their stories parallel those of the royal marriage.

The motto for Rolli's and Porpora's *Arianna in Nasso*—'Major rerum nascitur ordo', which literally translates as 'A greater order of things is born'—implies comparison and demands context from the outset.⁹³ When taken in the context of Book Seven of the *Aeneid*—which virtually all readers would have known—however, the motto assumes much wider import. Here it signals the narrator's contemplation of Aeneas's work ahead in founding Rome; in Dryden's translation, the best known at this time, it reads: 'A larger Scene of Action is

⁹² Strohm, 'Dramatic Dualities', 551. Giovanna Gronda has also drawn attention to the way in which various operatic presentations of Ariadne's story acknowledged not only different presentations of the myth, but also differing cultural (and even political) interests in 'Varianti di un Mito Classico nella Librettistica Settecentesca', *I Vicini di Mozart I: Il Teatro Musicale tra Sette e Ottocento*, ed. Maria Teresa Muraro (Florence, 1989), 3-18.

⁹³ 'Aeneid Lib. vii. V. 44', Rolli, *Ariadne in Naxos* (1734).

display'd,/ And rising hence, a greater work is weigh'd'.⁹⁴ The motto was appropriate to an opera about Theseus; the founder of Athens was fittingly paralleled with the founder of Italy (who also abandoned his beloved), and with the founder of Rome, as we recall from Plutarch.⁹⁵ Might a parallel with William III, the much-vaunted founder of 'modern' Britain, also have been possible? A link could have been made by audience members, in the context of the webs of myth at this time being woven round his ancestor, William IV.

Associating the operas with the wedding is tempting, given the historical connection between operas about Ariadne (or other lamenting women) and the celebration of royal nuptials.⁹⁶ Even in Britain, the 1674 production of Pierre Perrin's and Robert Cambert's *Ariane, ou Le Mariage de Bacchus* (1659, revised 1671-2, and for the 1674 production) was presented in celebration of the marriage of James, the Duke of York and Mary of Modena, and provides an allegory of their marriage and of the 'marriage' of Britannia and her king, Charles II.⁹⁷

Ariadne/Britain, abandoned by the 'Theseus' of monarchical government, fears the wild beasts of the commonwealth and resolves to die, but is persuaded by Venus that if she accepts him, the god Bacchus will remain faithful to her: 'Conjugal vows, he's now ready to give,/ As soon as he thy consent shall receive'.⁹⁸ Rolli owned a copy

⁹⁴ Virgil, *Aeneid VII*, trans. John Dryden (ll.66-7), in *The Works of Dryden in English*, gen. ed. Alan Roper (California, 1987), VI, 573.

⁹⁵ Gronda also reminds us of the links with Aeneas and Romulus; Gronda, 'Varianti di un Mito Classico', 12-13. I'm indebted to Thomas McGeary for reminding me of the importance of this motto.

⁹⁶ Anne MacNeil, 'Weeping at the Water's Edge', *EM* 27 (1999), 407-17 (407, 411); see also Leofranc Holford-Stevens, '"Her eyes became two spouts": Classical Antecedents of Renaissance Laments', *EM* 27 (1999), 379-93. MacNeil cites Rush Rehm, *Marriage to Death: the Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, 1994).

⁹⁷ Interestingly, in view of other parallels with the circumstances of the later *Arianna*, the Duke of York's and Mary of Modena's marriage was greeted with hostility by the English, something noted in the prologue. The opera generally was replete with topical allusions; Christina Bashford, 'Perrin and Cambert's *Ariane, ou le Mariage de Bacchus* Re-examined', *ML* 72 (1991), 1-26 (8, 21).

⁹⁸ *Ariadne, or, the Marriage of Bacchus* (1673/4), 38. The dedication elucidates the parallel: 'Whilst all Europe besides, now lies groaning under the Weight of a Cruel War, and sees on every side her Cities sack't and spoiled ... England alone, by Your Royal Care, does now enjoy a happy Tranquility

of this libretto, and it has been suggested that he drew on it for *Arianna in Nasso* (particularly for the final scene), an association that would have been doubly fitting, as Perrin's *Ariane* was linked with the foundation of a Royal Academy of Music in 1674.⁹⁹

The parallels between the story of Theseus and Ariadne and the royal marriage of 1734 are then several and obvious. Britain, like Crete, was an island that in recent days had become a major maritime power.¹⁰⁰ William of Orange (the Third, of course, but also the new William, for those heartily disaffected with the present rule), like Theseus, was both the rescuer of a nation threatened by a hidden monster (Catholicism,¹⁰¹ the Minotaur, the Excise, Walpole's government in general), and the enlivener of nation and constitution. Anne (and Britannia), like Ariadne, was concerned for her lover, waiting interminably, even fearing abandonment.

On this level it is possible to make a very basic political reading of Handel's *Arianna in Creta*: it echoes the circumstances of the 'Glorious Revolution' effected in England by William and Mary in 1688 in that the ruler of the Dutch territories married a daughter of the former English king, sailed for his wife's country as an

and sees Peace and Justice reign in all her Borders'. William IV is seen as Mars and Anne as Venus in a poem by George Ireland, 'On the Coming of the Princess of Orange into England' (11 October 1734); Bodleian MS. Eng. Misc. e. 240, pp.58-9.

⁹⁹ Rolli, *Paolo Rolli*, ed. Caruso, 298. Pierre Danchin, 'The Foundation of the Royal Academy of Music in 1674 and Pierre Perrin's *Ariane*', *Theatre Survey* 25 (1984), 55-67.

¹⁰⁰ For example, a student at Oxford at this time, George Ireland, considered the parallel between Britain, Crete and Greece in his commonplace book: 'To what else but a sense of the great advantages of Government is to be ascrib'd, that Veneration paid by Antiquity to those great names Minos, Lycurgus, Solon? Men, who by their wise Institutions rais'd their several States as much above the rest of Greece, as Greece itself was above the rest of the World. 'Twas this that made the small Republicks of Athens and Sparta, in their Turns, a match for the whole Power of Persia.... But what need we search abroad for examples of the admirable effects of Government, when we may furnish ourselves with an illustrious instance at home? Here Pallas more particularly \presides/ and teaches us as well to excel in a good order and œconomy in civil Government, as in Arts & Arms'; 24 August 1734, Bodleian MS. Eng. Misc. e. 240, pp.9-10.

¹⁰¹ Rome was often associated with the Beast of Revelations 13 in this period; see Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1971), 4, *et infra*.

emissary of peace and defeated the Beast of Catholicism once and for all, putting ‘a glorious End to the Calamities of his Country’ (his country now of course being England as well as the Dutch States). This is not the aspect emphasised in Pariati’s libretto, however. His is essentially a standard tale of masculine heroic and civic virtues triumphing over selfish female jealousy; there is no immediate reason why contemporaries should have applied this story to the impending marriage.

The bare bones of a political reading of Handel’s opera are instead exposed by the historical excavations of the opposing company. In reminding their audience of an alternative reading of Ariadne’s story, Rolli and Porpora inevitably drew attention to the process of selection and manufacture of an operatic plot, and therefore to that plot’s meaning. The potential for a political reading is, I think, more thoroughly fulfilled in the Nobility Company’s production in any case, but it is exploited not merely by nature of the plot parallels with circumstances of public discussion surrounding the marriage. The relationship between the two productions of Ariadne’s story, with all that it implied for standards of accuracy and manipulation of moral and mythical truths, is also crucial to this political interpretation.

Indeed, read in this light, the rival company’s choice of story reflects badly on Handel’s company: in a general sense by reminding the audience that the *Arianna in Creta* ‘version’ had not told the full story—a story, like Plutarch’s, that shows Handel’s hero in a less than glowing light—the Nobility production seems to imply that both character and company are deceptive, manipulating the listener to achieve ends of their own. On a topical level, Rolli’s and Porpora’s opera could evoke thoughts of William’s and Anne’s marriage through a network of associations with contemporary literature. Theseus’s and Ariadne’s conversation at the beginning of

Arianna in Nasso is clearly a foreshadowing. In contrasting his reluctant Ariadne so dramatically with Pariati's heroine, Rolli turns the audience's thoughts to consideration of the suitability of the coupling in the *Arianna in Creta*. It is a short step from there to contemplation of the prospect that similar matches—no matter how mythically attractive the Prince—may not always end happily. In this, *Arianna in Nasso* echoes several other works that dealt with the impending royal marriage as, time and again, uncertainties were expressed: did William really want to wed Anne, or was he marrying for mercenary advantage? Was his apparent coldness due to his love for another woman? How would Anne fare when removed from customary splendour in London to the barren wastes of Holland?¹⁰² In order to raise these questions, Rolli twists important details, so that Theseus has already met and married Anthiope, Queen of the Amazons—something which, in traditional presentations of the myth, did not take place until after the Cretan episode.¹⁰³

It is with the closing scene that, deliberately or not, Rolli and Porpora deliver their *coup de grâce*. If the rest of the opera might lead the audience to doubt the advisability of the marriage of William and Anne as it was prefigured in that of Theseus and Ariadne, the Opera of the Nobility's apparent slight on Prince William's name is now redressed by replacing Theseus with Bacchus. Pariati's demi-god, who turns out to be a philanderer, is replaced by Rolli with a real god, who will immortalise Ariadne in the stars! This association would have reflected even more poorly on Handel's libretto. In the contemporary climate, when a correlation between Anne and Ariadne might well have been drawn, Handel at best

¹⁰² Anne herself was mightily reluctant to relinquish the comforts of the British Court; Baker-Smith, *A Life of Anne of Hanover*, 53, 55-56. Hervey even reports that Anne asked the Queen to use her influence to prolong the War of the Polish Succession so that she might return to England sooner; Hervey, *Memoirs* I, 291.

¹⁰³ Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources* (Baltimore and London, 1993), 282-5.

chose his story unwisely. By more hostile interpretation, Handel's enemies could allege he was being disloyal to the Royal Family by implying William's disastrous unsuitability through parallel with the duplicitous Theseus. But Rolli's and Porpora's apparently obsequious presentation is not the full story either: precisely because of its suddenness, *Arianna in Nasso's* *volte-face*—like that of *The Fortunate Prince*—does not entirely convince of its sincerity; it does not simply glorify the match, but rather itself casts doubt on it.

This, then, is one possible explanation for several historical puzzles—the similar naming of the two operas; the intensity of the rivalry between not just the companies, but also the King and the Prince of Wales; and Hervey's partisan diagnosis of this battle royal—the operas play out problems of the wedding of Anne and William. Although there is no 'proof' that such a topical reading is intended, its plausibility is suggested circumstantially, in the traditional association of Ariadne operas with weddings, in the interesting contrast between the public and private titles of Rolli's opera (*Arianna in Nasso* for the public and *La clava di Teseo* for Prince Frederick), in other stories of the marriage, and in other accounts of the rivalry between the two companies.

In his discussion of Porpora, Hawkins interestingly singles out the Ariadne opera:

The operas of Porpora, as musical compositions, had little to recommend them: that of Ariadne was looked upon as inferior to the Ariadne of Handel, in which, excepting the minuet at the end of the overture, there is scarce a good air.¹⁰⁴

Hawkins's comparison of the two composers through their Ariadne operas seems to signal the works' roles as primarily comparative, exercises in artistic and cultural

¹⁰⁴ Sir John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 2 vols (1776, repr. 1875) II, 877.

fingerpointing. As already suggested, such a reading might be supported by contemporary literature. *Harmony in an Uproar*, mockingly ascribed to ‘Hurlothrumbo’ [Samuel] Johnson and written in his bombastic style, is a sophisticated satire on the current state of opera, clearly biased towards Handel. The *Arianna* competition apparently spurred on this pamphlet’s creation: early in the narrative the author-persona cites the motto to *Arianna in Nasso* (an opera by ‘my Cousin Rowley Powley’), but suggests the line: ‘Major ferarumsinus [*sic*] nascitur turdo’ might have been more appropriate, ‘which ... is as much to say, that the Braying of an Ass makes a greater Noise than the Whistling of a Thrush’.¹⁰⁵ At its centre is a mock-trial of Handel, in which he is

here brought to answer to the several following high Crimes and Misdemeanours, committed upon the Wills and Understandings, and against the Peace of our Sovereign Lord the Mobility of *Great-Britain*, particularly this Metropolis: To which you shall make true and faithful Answer—So help you Music—Swear him upon the two Operas of *Ariadne*, *alias* the *Cuckoo* and the *Nightingale*.¹⁰⁶

Though the author does not state which is the cuckoo and which nightingale, the context makes it clear that the Ariadne-shaped egg of Handel the Nightingale is ousted by that of the Cuckoo ‘Mobility’. The author-persona’s mispronunciation of the latter title is also the author’s fusion of mob with nobility. The creation of such an ungainly mongrel surely shows the piece’s partisan colours, and indeed, the author-persona trying Handel can only accuse him of the insolent imposition of ‘good Musick and sound Harmony’. The ‘Mobility’, on the other hand, as their title suggests, have a more populist motivation; there is a clear (oppositional) political cast to these, ‘our most noted Spirits of Sense and Patriotism’, for ‘like true Patriots, they interpos’d, and ventur’d Lives and Fortunes to save us’. Their association with

¹⁰⁵ *Harmony in an Uproar*, 5-6.

¹⁰⁶ *Harmony in an Uproar*, 10.

‘patriotism’ seems more than metaphorical, as the opera ‘parties’ (or at least that of the ‘Mobility’) are explicitly linked with political process:

Your [i.e., Handel’s] Party very confidently, and with an Air of Wisdom, give out, that you are all very much surpriz’d, that so weighty a Part of the Grand Leg----ure should employ both their Time and Money so ill, as in setting up one O--ra-H--se to ruin another, without ever giving the Appearance of a formal Reason for acting so; when their precious Hours and vast Parts, might, at this critical Juncture, be of infinite Service to their Country; when we are almost at a Loss how to behave.¹⁰⁷

It is precisely at this time, when the country is ‘almost at a loss how to behave’ the author implies, that the opponents of government see their chance, and exploit the opera as a means of asserting alternative modes of political expression.

In its instability of plot and argument, *Harmony in an Uproar* is clearly a ‘mad’ work, taking advantage of its supposed author’s insanity (and love of Bononcini) to launch a critique of Handel’s rivals; why should we believe its political reading of these companies’ motivations any more than we believe Hervey’s or indeed my own reading of the two *Arianna* operas? There is, of course, no answer: in this instance, no ‘proof’ is available.¹⁰⁸ But this lack of evidence is pleasing rather than troubling; it forces us to examine interpretation of eighteenth-century opera not as an open and shut case of question and answer, but rather as contemporary listeners (and viewers) perceived it: a matter of potentiality, not proof.

The emulative interplay between theatre and society demonstrated by the many poems, plays, satires and commentaries reviewed here reminds us that to read productively was, to a certain extent, to read appropriately. Interpretations need not be univocal to have validity, as we might see if we return again to the nature of allegory and emulation in the eighteenth century, and for one last time to the

¹⁰⁷ *Harmony in an Uproar*, 18, 17.

¹⁰⁸ We can only observe that Handel’s undoubted sadness at losing his pupil and most ardent Court patron to a husband of dubious merits is probably reflected in the admonitory tone of address to that husband in *Parnasso in Festa*, the masque designed to celebrate the marriage.

Ariadne operas. In a detailed discussion of emblem and maxim, Kevin L. Cope draws our attention not only to allegory's immense popularity as a mode of understanding in everyday life for ordinary people, but also to its essential elements of fragmentation and repetition.¹⁰⁹ Engravings, maxims and well-known stories gained meanings (rather than losing them) as they broke down into the purest, essential signifiers, and were recycled again and again until they became common cultural currency. Operatic plot, like many instances of contemporary cartography, sets the historical map inside a semi-fictional narrative, linking past and present through emblem and allegory, emphasising both the familiarity and the strangeness of history by turning it to ever-new didactic purposes.¹¹⁰

It was social instability that supporters of opera sought to combat through the genre's exemplary moral plots, but instability was inherent—even necessary—in a genre relying on allegory to convey meaning. The two *Ariannas*' fleeting parallels with contemporary life rely for their significance on seeing operas not primarily as single, unified works, but rather as comprised of discrete scenic units, musical *tableaux vivants*. Indeed, the constantly surprising fluctuations and excesses of opera's discrete musical moments might have been said to constitute its chief joy. Something of this appreciation both of opera's effect and of its emulatory approach to history and society through the fragment, the unit rather than the whole, might explain the curious nature of a final example.

We know from Burney and Hawkins that neither *Arianna* opera was especially popular; the only piece to live on significantly was the 'minuet' from Handel's overture. One of the forms in which it survived was as the song 'How is it

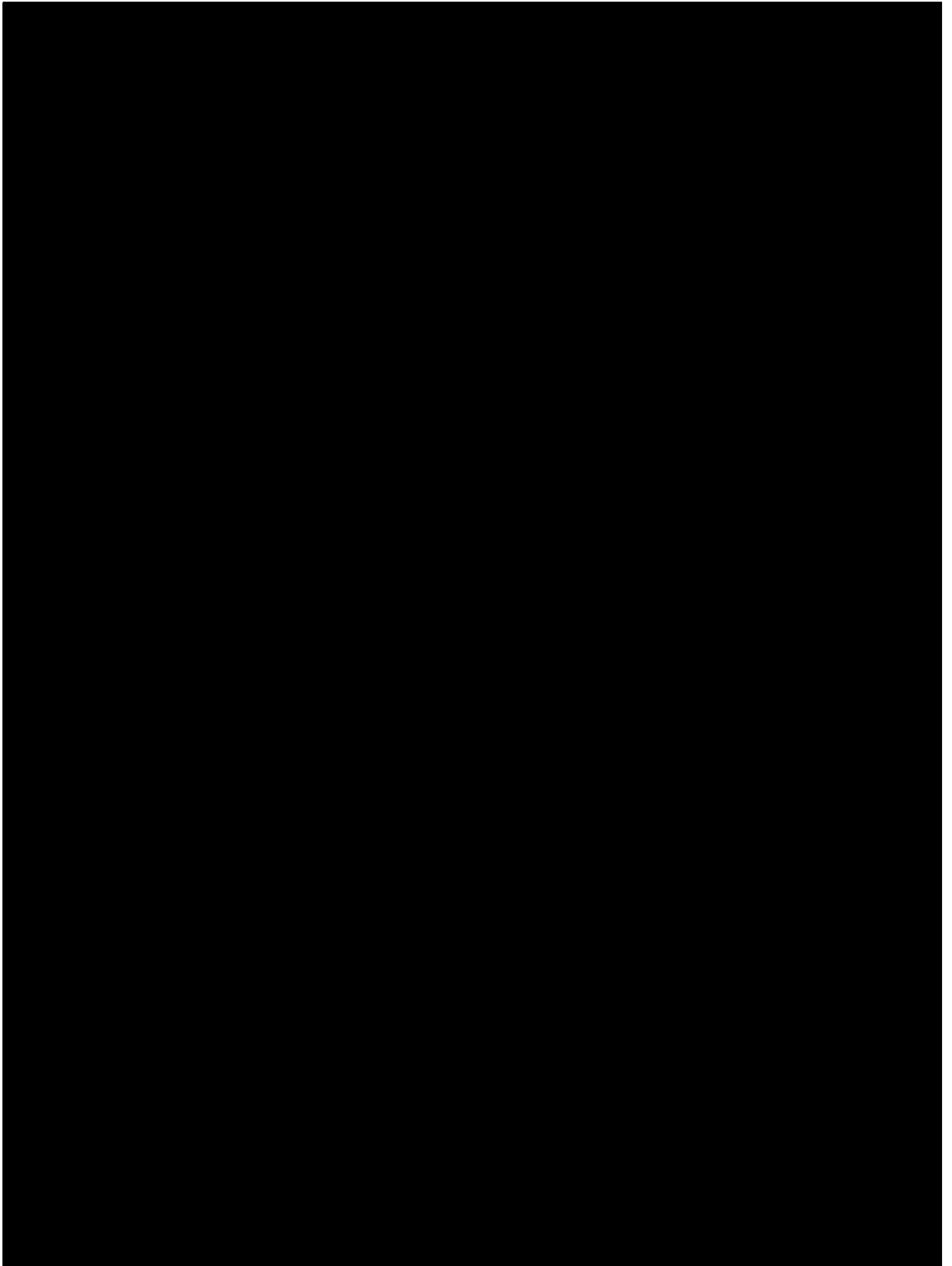
¹⁰⁹ Kevin L. Cope, 'Directions to Signify: Exploring the Emblems of Enlightenment Allegory', *Enlightening Allegory: Theory, Practice, and Contexts of Allegory in the Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Kevin L. Cope (New York, 1993), 171-218.

¹¹⁰ Cope, 'Directions to Signify', 207-11.

possible, how can I forbear?', which speaks—perhaps gallantly, perhaps wistfully—of the charms of a beloved denied to his or her lover (see Musical Example 2.2). Uncertainty as to the song's affect is compounded by the music, for while the marking 'very slow' (which is, of course, appropriate to a minuet) inclines the song to plaintiveness, the D major tune rather suggests an air of lighthearted courtly gallantry. Then again, we might ask how either the pleasant or the plaintive is to be properly expressed in a tune covering two octaves; and with such lamentably poor wordsetting that it seems as if the words were to be thought over the tune rather than sung to it. As a single sheet song it is, apparently, without context, and yet its strangeness cries out for explanation. Is there one in Handel's opera? There, the minuet's D major follows two stormy d minor movements, the first tyrannically regal, the second fugal. A suggestion that this pattern is designed to prefigure the opera's transition from tyranny to matrimony would hardly be startling; it would also hardly explain the maudlin character of the song sheet's realisation of the minuet.

The relationship of overture to opera might be emphasised, however, by the apparent plan (quoted in Chrysander) to open the scene during the last part of the overture—that is, during the minuet—'showing the ship with the offerings from Athens landing on the coast of Crete'. This image of ships arriving into—or departing from—a harbour belongs not only to both operas, but also to the many writings surrounding the wedding of the Princess Royal and William of Orange. Perhaps, then, it is this image that provoked the attempt to give literal meaning to the music that accompanied the scene's unveiling. That it is Carilda—Theseus's would-be lover, of whom Ariadne is constantly jealous—rather than Ariadne herself, who steps off the ship first, and with whom this minuet may have been associated, only

Example 2.2: G. F. Handel arr. Anon., *A favourite Minuet in Ariadne* (n.d.).



adds to the layers of confusion for the contemporary opera-goer who would surely have expected the leading woman to appear first.¹¹¹ We are thus no nearer to the meaning of this song, but our ignorance speaks not so much of inability or even unwillingness to reconstruct the allegory, but rather of the equivocal nature of its ‘meaning’, both in practice and in essence: like all emblems, this musical moment is inescapably polyvalent.¹¹²

Understanding the way in which opera and its audience could multiply meanings is, I think, crucial to realising that the range of contradictory messages offered by opera in this period could have a generative rather than degenerative effect. In many ways of which we have now nearly lost sight, serious opera could maintain a level of social relevance disproportionate to the size of its audience. For the majority of the population in Britain, of course, opera chiefly remained a dangerously alien, elitist entertainment. On the other hand, as opera texts were repeated across Europe, they united an international community of aristocratic and often idealistic interests, while the variant detail of individual productions ensured peculiar local—often political—meaning. On each of these levels, as these two chapters have variously demonstrated, it was the emulative interplay between art and (public) life permeating all strata of society that made opera—like other forms of art—not merely an entertainment, but also a potential force for shaping the nation’s image and performance of itself.

¹¹¹ Strohm, *Dramma per Musica*, 233-35.

¹¹² For the importance of poetic polyvalence, see William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (2nd edn, London, 1947).

Three

The problem of Italian opera

So little value there is to be given to the common cry, that nothing but Madness can please Mad-men, and a Poet must be of a Piece with the Spectators, to gain a Reputation with them.

John Dryden, *The Spanish Fryar* (1681), Epistle Dedicatory¹

It is, as we have seen, common to demonstrate British hostility towards Italian opera in early eighteenth-century society by examining the many contemporary satirical writings that found public favour in their excoriations of opera.² Such antipathy is quite rightly presented as a combination of jealousy and jingoism—after all, many of the fiercest satirists were (hopeful) local literati who saw in opera's popularity their own demise.³ Yet, as the previous two chapters have shown, opera directors were aware of ideological pitfalls, and there were ways in which Italian opera could be turned to patriotic purposes. Particularly in the rare instance when a libretto was written specifically for London (*Rinaldo* or *Sabrina*, for instance), attempts were made to fit Italian opera to British cultural ideals.⁴

Manifestly, however, efforts to integrate Italian opera within the corpus of British art failed. Although contemporaries may have read operas like *Floridante* in terms of national politics, newspaper reports of such interpretations are virtually non-existent. Does this simply indicate that politicised interpretations were rarely made? Not necessarily, if the (unpublished) response to *Floridante*, discussed in

¹ John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Vincent A. Dearing, Vol 14 ed. A. Dearing and Alan Roper (Berkeley, 1992), 101-2.

² See the Introduction, note 84.

³ As noted in the introduction (note 18), the typical model for nationalism shows that it originates with artists or members of the intelligensia who feel threatened by foreign culture; see Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 54-7, *passim*.

⁴ For *Rinaldo* (1711), see Curtis Price, 'English Traditions in Handel's *Rinaldo*', *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London, 1987), 120-35. *Sabrina* (1737) was based on Milton's *Comus*.

chapter one, is anything to go by. I suggest two other very simple explanations for this lacuna: on the one hand, newspapers have to discuss matters which interest and involve their readers, and the detail of individual Italian operas in the eighteenth century was beyond the experience or interest of most. On the other, newspaper publishers and pamphleteers were, as we have seen, endlessly interested in opera politically, but as a generic sign for the alien, not as a body of ideologically coherent artistic works. For newspapers to have allowed that individual operas might have some message relevant to contemporary British concerns, they would also have had to allow the genre some value in British society. Why could they not do this? In this chapter, I suggest that the reasons extended beyond nationalism. I wish here to approach opera's problematic reception through a concept that has received much recent attention in other areas of intellectual and cultural studies, but which has until recently lain virtually unexplored in music. Opera's status as a product of and for conspicuous consumption sited it within a debate about the nature and role of luxury in society which was to last for much of the century.⁵

In attempting to understand the reasons for the link between opera and luxury, it is to the hoard of pamphlet literature—much of it, like the music and singers it criticised, of uncertain parentage and ephemeral status—that we will for the most part direct our attention. But my starting point is a puzzle: the curious success of one English opera composer who seemed to manifest singular enthusiasm for the absurdities of his genre is in a way a key to understanding the disjunctions of opera and society. This composer's moment of endorsement of and engagement

⁵ For a listing of some of the publications on consumption and luxury, see note 60, below. For a valuable and pioneering analysis of luxury and opera, see Lawrence Woof, 'Italian Opera and English Oratorio as Cultural Discourses within Eighteenth-Century English Literature, with particular reference to the Novels of Samuel Richardson and Fanny Burney' (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1994). See also my "'An Infinity of Factions': Opera in Eighteenth-Century Britain and the Undoing of Society', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9 (1997), 1-19. Thomas McGearry also briefly mentions the

with operatic ritual helped to crystallise objections to the form, and now serves to distil eighteenth-century British understanding of operatic ‘meaning’.

As Gay discovered in 1728, it was possible both to attack Italian opera and to capitalise on its fashionability by travestyng its representation on an alternative stage. Just a year later another Englishman sought to engage with opera’s fantasies in a rather more eulogistic manner. The marginal figure of ‘mad maggoty’ Samuel Johnson⁶ weaves through this discussion much as he wove through early eighteenth-century theatre history, teetering between acclaim and ridicule, nonsense and insight until his presence itself came to signal a fundamental social absence.

In May 1729, John Byrom wrote to his wife of the Town’s latest fashion:

The Westminster scholars at their election, I hear, made verses on Hurlothrumbo. I see here a new book against Mr. Pope, with a dialogue in it between Hurlo and Death; and in short, who but Hurlothrumbo at present? If people talk of a thing as inconsistent in any manner, the word is now, “In short, mere Hurlothrumbo.”⁷

Society’s interest in the delights of the absurd might explain the otherwise unaccountable success of the 1729 ‘opera’ *Hurlothrumbo*, which for a short time rivalled *The Beggar’s Opera* in popularity on the London stage. The Little Theatre in the Haymarket, previously home to foreign companies and itinerant actors, found in *Hurlothrumbo* its first genuinely indigenous hit, with an initial run of seventeen nights and a total of 36 performances in the 1729-30 season.⁸ The play was also popular in print, published in two authorised and one pirated edition in its first

concept of luxury in critical discourse; Thomas Nelson McGeary, ‘English Opera Criticism and Aesthetics 1685-1747’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1985), 123-5.

⁶ The epithet comes from David Erskine Baker, *A Companion to the Play-House*, 2 vols (1764).

⁷ Byrom made this comment in a letter to his wife, written around 15 May 1729, shortly after the premiere of the work. John Byrom, *Private Journal and Literary Remains*, ed. Richard Parkinson, 2 vols (Manchester, 1854), Vol. 1 Pt. 2, 355.

⁸ The best analysis of the hazy history of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket is Robert D. Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre, 1728-1737* (Oxford, 1988), 37-9, 52-61, 200-62 *passim*. The extraordinary success of this work is noted in *The London Stage*, pt. 2, vol. 2, 987.

month.⁹ At this historical remove, our principal impression is of disorder. Perhaps it was the oddity of the piece that sustained public interest, for even John Byrom, as a close friend of Johnson, described it as an ‘unaccountable thing’.

Given *Hurlothrumbo*’s evident popularity, it is unfortunate—but hardly surprising—that it has received little recent critical attention. Theatre and music historians Roger Fiske and Jean Kern note its impact, suggesting that it was responsible for ‘the fashion for burlesque in the 1730s’ and that it ‘profoundly stirred the theatrical world’. Unable to determine, however, whether it is ‘total nonsense’, or whether there is ‘a fascinatingly original mind behind it all’, scholars carry discussion of the play no further.¹⁰ In the spring of 1729 John Byrom grumpily acknowledged that ‘you would hardly be qualified for conversation... if you han’t seen Hurlothrumbo’.¹¹ Perhaps modern critics of eighteenth-century English opera and, in particular, students of the 1730s revivification of the genre also lack qualification for conversation if we do not ‘see’ *Hurlothrumbo* in its proper light.

In essence, the plot of *Hurlothrumbo* revolves around a rebellion at court, with all the questions of good government such stories necessarily entail. Such brief description hardly does the piece justice, however: its political machinations and complex love intrigues offer elements of both tragedy and Italian opera that would

⁹ Thomas Wotton and J. Shuckburgh, the original publishers, brought out a quarto available with and without the music (5s. and 2s.6d. respectively), and an octavo (1s.6d.). J. Jones published the pirated edition for the more usual price of one shilling. The play had premiered on 29 March 1729; subscriptions for the quarto editions were requested on 26 April (*London Evening-Post*); the octavo was advertised from 17 May in the same paper; and J. Jones’ pirated edition emerged on 21 May (*Daily Post Boy*). This edition was angrily denounced by Wotton and Shuckburgh on 24 May (*London Evening-Post*).

¹⁰ Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (1973; rev. edn, Oxford, 1986), 146; Jean B. Kern, *Dramatic Satire in the Age of Walpole, 1720-1750* (Ames, Iowa, 1976), 117; John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford, 1963), 103-4; Robert D. Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 60; James Eugene Wierzbicki, ‘Burlesque Opera in London: 1729-1737’ (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1979), 167; Peter Lewis, *Fielding’s Burlesque Drama: Its Place in the Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1987), 89.

¹¹ Byrom, *Private Journal*, Vol. 1 pt. 2, [22 April 1729], 351.

have been familiar to audiences, but it veers in tone between Miltonic sublimity and schoolboy obscenity, punctuating heroic bombast with slapstick humour. If the continually shifting register made comprehension difficult, this was compounded by the character of Lord Flame, played by Johnson himself, whose regular intrusions and manic railings—both sung and spoken—confused and frustrated plot and characters alike. One example, which might well have been a speech Byrom was thinking of when he commented that ‘some passages ... make it an entertainment not quite so proper for the ladies’, exhibits both the intemperance and illogicality of Flame’s rantings, and his preoccupation with sex and a curiously visceral form of sublimity.¹² This speech from Act IV precedes Lord Flame’s attack on the rebels, his single act in furtherance of the plot:

My Soul is outrageous in pursuit of my Rivals, and mounts my Body upon the Wing; flies through the Woods, rips up the lofty Oaks, splits the Rocks, ploughs up the Seas. Oh this scandalizing World! disgrace the noble Oliver, and say, that he is Gunpowder-maker to the Devil; and that Lucifer reads the Scriptures, that he may plead against Mortals. See, see these two Glow-worms how they glitter; there are Cleopatra’s radiant Eyes, just scall’d up from her Body, ambitious to vie against the Stars: How vain is Woman! veil thy Bosom, those heaving Monsters fire me: oh that I was a Child again that I might suck!

Such speeches explain why descriptions of Johnson’s performance emphasise an impression of unpredictable fluctuation, with claims that he performed ‘sometimes in one key, sometimes in another, sometimes fiddling, sometimes dancing, and sometimes walking on high stilts’, like a performer in one of London’s many freak shows.¹³ It would seem, however, that it was precisely this element that attracted audiences, intrigued by the possibility that this purportedly mad Cheshire dancing master was merely playing himself. Indeed, the author apparently was not averse to

¹² Byrom, *Private Journal*, vol. 1 pt. 2, (2 April 1729), 349.

¹³ Stephen Jones, ed., *Biographia Dramatica* (3rd edn, 1812), 406.

sponsoring this conflation of persona and person: while the name ‘Hurlothrumbo’ itself gained currency as another word for madman, one biographer asserts that in later life Johnson chose to be known as Lord Flame.¹⁴

As the latter anecdote might suggest, Johnson took himself more seriously than others did: an examination of his complete œuvre shows that he thought his works to be operas worthy of the highest critical accolade.¹⁵ The title-page of *Hurlothrumbo* addresses all critics as ‘Ye Sons of Fire’ and, as the work’s brilliance and originality clearly leave no room for comment, they are challenged to

... read my Hurlothrumbo,
Turn it betwixt your finger and your thumb,
And being quite outdone, be quite struck dumb!

A closer examination of the play suggests that critics may not have been ‘struck dumb’ with admiration: the original of this epigraph, which came from Johnson’s disapproving friend John Byrom, was addressed not to the ‘Sons of Fire’, but to the ‘Sons of Nonsense’.¹⁶ Others must have agreed with him, for the original epigraph was published with the pirated version of the play. Byrom was also responsible for the Epilogue, in which a puzzled critic asks the author questions that have doubtless conditioned subsequent readers’ responses:

Cr. Pray, Sir, which is the *Hero* of your Play?
Au. Hero? Why they’re all Heroes in their Way.
Cr. Why here’s no *Plot*! or none that’s understood.
Au. There’s a *Rebellion* tho’; and that’s as good.¹⁷

¹⁴ For ‘Hurlothrumbo’: Advertisement for Henley’s oratory, *The Daily Post*, 29 April 1729; Pope Alexander’s *Supremacy and Infallibility examin’d* (1729); *Harmony in an uproar: a letter to F-d-k H-d-l, Esq ... from Hurlothrumbo Johnson* (1733); *The fortune-teller* (1785); *A curious letter from a mountebank doctor to a Methodist preacher* (1797). For ‘Lord Flame’ see ‘C.L.’, Letter to the Editor, *The Monthly Magazine* [vol. 5], no. 32 (1798), 415-18 (416).

¹⁵ Johnson’s other extant published works are: *The Blazing Comet* (1732); *Court and Country* ([1737?]); *A Vision of Heaven* (1738). Johnson reiterated high regard for his works at the end of his career, according to the posthumous memoir; ‘C.L.’, Letter, *Monthly Magazine*, 415-18 (416).

¹⁶ Byrom, *Private Journal*, vol. 1 pt. 2, 355.

¹⁷ A friend commented to Byrom that his Epilogue had ‘made Hurlothrumbo immortal’; Byrom, *Private Journal*, vol. 1 pt. 2, (c. 15 May 1729), 355. An earlier version of the Epilogue, which achieved a far more emphatic denunciation of *Hurlothrumbo*, apparently came out several weeks before the play itself was published; see the *Universal Journal*, 26 April 1729. *The London Evening-Post*, 15-17 May 1729 advertised the play’s publication as ‘this day’.

For Byrom, who thought ‘all stage entertainments stuff and nonsense’, *Hurlothrumbo*’s rebellion consisted of its being ‘a joke upon ’em all’. For others, the rebellion was of a more fundamental and personal nature. Byrom sourly noted that an acquaintance ‘said he had read Hurlothrumbo to some ladies till he was mad, and they were mad, and they were all mad’.¹⁸ On one level, such a response suggests an audience alive to comic, ridiculous or satiric possibilities, an attitude fostered by—and fostering—both the ballad opera and the political journalism flourishing at the time. On another level, as actor merged with character and author with work, audiences seem to have delighted in allowing the drama to lead them into the corrupting realm of extra-rationality.

For Byrom’s acquaintance at least, the merging of personalities and text was celebrated with an exuberant revelling in folly. Contemporary notices also suggest awareness of the play’s absurdity, couching their descriptions in terms of other polemical attacks on public mores. A dialogue ‘between Hurlo and Death’, for example, appeared in the publication *Pope Alexander’s Supremacy and Infallibility examin’d* (1729), an attack on Pope’s *Dunciad*. Another link between the 1729 Variorum edition of the *Dunciad* and Johnson’s piece is found in *Fog’s Weekly Journal*, where a mock-advertisement for ‘*Hurlothrumbo cum Notis Variorum*’ appeared. Similarly, *The Daily Post Boy* contained an advertisement for the equally notorious Oratory ‘lectures’ of John Henley, stating that ‘Tomorrow, at Seven o’Clock, will be held forth Tom o’Bedlam’s *Dunciad*; or a Wager, who makes the best Hurlothrumbo, I, or Pope Alexander the Pig?’¹⁹ Perhaps the best known example of the appropriation of the play’s name occurs in the 1733 pamphlet,

¹⁸ Byrom, *Private Journal*, vol. I pt. 2, (2 April 1729), 349; (22 April 1729), 351.

¹⁹ *The Daily Post*, 29 April 1729. Listed in J. V. Guerinot, *Pamphlet Attacks on Alexander Pope, 1711-1744* (London, 1969), 170. For the ‘*notis Variorum*’ advertisement, see *Fog’s Weekly Journal*, 31 May 1729.

mentioned in the previous chapter, *Harmony in an uproar: a letter to F-d-k H-d-l, Esq;... from Hurlothrumbo Johnson*, where, in a gnomic attack, the persona of Johnson is used to ridicule Handel's opponents.²⁰ The title *Hurlothrumbo* was still known at the end of the century; in 1785 *The Fortune-Teller* was published by 'the renowned Doctor Hurlothrumbo, chief magician and astrologer to the king of the cuckows', and *A curious letter from a mountebank doctor to a Methodist preacher* came out in 1797 with the signature 'Hurlothrumbo'. As these publications indicate, *Hurlothrumbo* became a by-word for confusion. Adolphus Ward, editor of Byrom's *Poems*, notes that

Bailey's Dictionary, 1731, defines "Hurlo-Thrumbo" as "a bawling, noisy preacher, orator, &c., who lays about him violently, using much action and gesture; also one who uses many extravagant expressions and rants."²¹

But 'Hurlothrumbo' was a composite term that already had a variety of unflattering interpretations available to it.²²

Delight in the play's nonsensical nature was not the only response, however. For others, fearful of just such reactions, Johnson and his work became the target of opprobrium. Mrs Delany seems to have classed *Hurlothrumbo* with *The Beggar's Opera* when lamenting the demise of her favourite entertainment: 'The present [Italian] opera is disliked because it is too much studied, and they love nothing but minuets and ballads, in short the Beggar's Opera and Hurlothrumbo are only worthy of applause.'²³ Parodying what seemed to her the absurdity of current fashion, Mrs Delany also advised her sister to 'introduce the Beggar's Opera at Gloucester' and

²⁰ See Deutsch, 344-57, who cites it for its references to Handel's battles with the Opera of the Nobility.

²¹ John Byrom, *The Poems of John Byrom*, ed. Adolphus William Ward, 2 vols (Manchester, 1894), Vol. 1/1, 142.

²² 'hurly': 'Commotion, tumult, strife, uproar, turmoil, confusion'; 'thrum': 'monotonous' or 'unskilful' playing (*OED*).

²³ Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, *The Autobiography and Correspondence Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, ed. Lady Llanover, 3 vols (1861), I, (20 December 1729), 229.

‘sing it everywhere *but at church*, if you have a mind to be *like the polite world*’.²⁴

In a similar parodic move, several plays of the 1730s both exploited and ridiculed Hurllothrumbian bombast, most notably Henry Fielding’s *Tom Thumb* (1730) and its expansions as *The Tragedy of Tragedies* (1731) and *The Opera of Operas* (1733), and Henry Carey’s *Chrononhotonthologos* (1734).²⁵ Like Mrs Delany, pampheteers decried the decline in public taste from high to low art (though their ideals were English, not Italian):

From *Shakespear*, *Cheshire-Bard* should bear the Bell,
One *Writes*, ’tis true, but ’tother *Fiddles* well.
Thus *Sing-Song* only can be sure of Praise,
And *Congreve* must to *Johnson* yield the Bays.²⁶

Journalists commented sarcastically that the popularity of the work gave a fair indication of the height to which the Town’s ‘Politeness’, ‘Wit’ and ‘good Sense’ had soared, for a time directing at Johnson the hostility usually reserved for Italian opera.²⁷

We need not see the attack on Johnson as a distraction from critiques of Italian opera, however. Although *Hurllothrumbo* is today commonly designated as ‘burlesque’, Johnson’s defence of his work’s operatic pedigree reflects more than the large amount of music included, some of it borrowed from Giovanni Bononcini.²⁸ *Hurllothrumbo*’s success suggests that Johnson’s reaction to Italian opera was a powerful reflection of popular appreciation of the genre. The disruptive quality of this ‘inconsistent’ work is, in other words, neither simply a consequence

²⁴ Mrs Delany, *Autobiography*, I, (14 March 1727/8), 163.

²⁵ ‘Hurllothrumbo’ also makes an appearance in Fielding’s *The Author’s Farce* (1730), and the play seems to have influenced his *Don Quixote in England* (1733), as well as a number of other works from the 1730s. See note 10, above.

²⁶ Charles Coffey, *The Beggar’s Wedding* (1729), Prologue.

²⁷ *Fog’s Weekly Journal*, 5 July 1729; see also the issue of 7 June 1729, and *The Craftsman*, 22 August 1730. No doubt following their example, one later biographer speculated that *Hurllothrumbo* was a ‘means of imposing a trick upon the public’; ‘C.L.’, Letter, *Monthly Magazine*, 415.

²⁸ On Johnson’s high self regard, see note 15, above.

of authorial eccentricity, nor contingent to its design, but rather is a key to understanding contemporary response to opera.

Governing Gender

The curious success of *Hurllothrumbo* can direct our attention to a more critical paradox, in which the very singularity of Italian opera in eighteenth-century Britain is predicated on its ambiguity and multiplicity. This antithetical understanding of opera is seen most clearly in the problem of gender. Eighteenth-century London's audiences were fascinated with the gender of the singers of Italian opera; this much is shown by contemporary commentaries. Yet, gender distinction does not seem to have been perceived in the music. As a critic of the form reminded his readers, in condemnatory tone, 'the Castrati were introduced into all Sorts of Characters ... and still continue to represent Heroes and Statesmen, Warriours and Women'. On the commercial stage, utility rather than social propriety dictated that women take men's roles, and (occasionally) vice versa.²⁹ While in other periods gender had a profound impact on musical characterisation, the great divide was here easily crossed. Voices of the male and female professionals blended imperceptibly, their very abilities declaring their individuality by placing them beyond technical and social constraints.

What may seem to us a sign of emancipation could also be viewed as obfuscation, a troublesome (if intriguing) lack of definition. That the relationship of music to its performers, especially in opera, mattered very much to eighteenth-

²⁹ John Brown, *A Dissertation on the Rise, Union, and Power, the Progressions, Separations, and Corruption, of Poetry and Music* (1763), 206. In a play from 1727, Leonard Welsted's *The Dissembled Wanton; or, My Son get Money*, Colonel Severne comments sarcastically: 'So far, at least, we are got towards Heaven—We have Music, without Distinction of Sexes.' (I.i). On the interchangeability of roles see C. Stephen Larue, *Handel and His Singers: The Creation of the Royal*

century British society, and perhaps even more to doleful analysts of society, is in part a result of this musical gender ellipsis. In other words, Italian opera's apparent lack of gender distinction signals not the 'enlightenment' of equality, but the reinforcement of a fundamental problem. British fixation with the gender of its opera singers comes into focus if we look on gender not simply as a reflection of socio-sexual boundaries, but rather as a quite literal human grammar, a system for ordering which places people in functioning interrelatedness. It is, then, opera's relationship to the social order, and more specifically its apparent capacity for breaking down social structures, that causes it and the gender of its singers to occupy such a central place in social criticism.

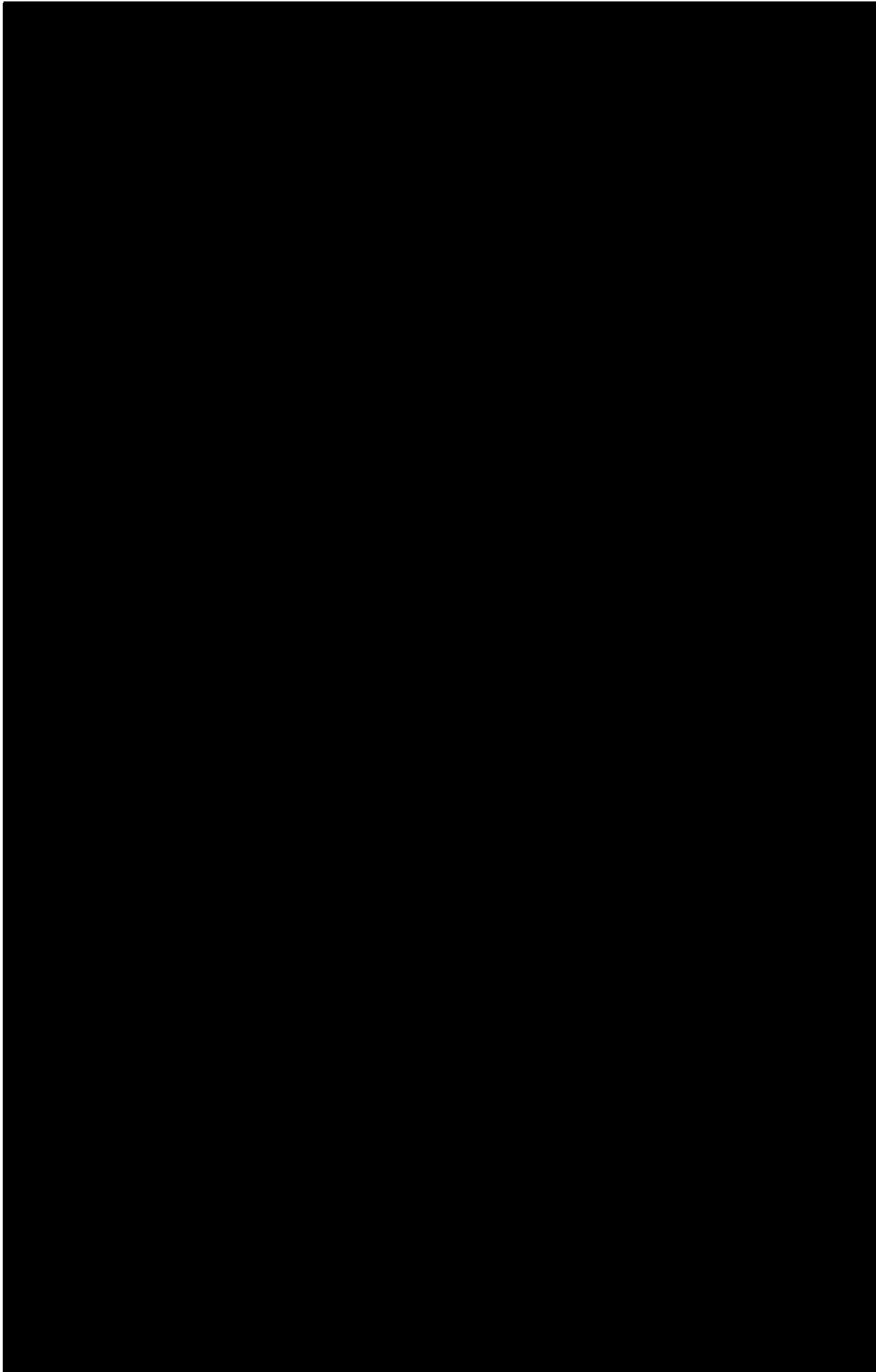
In *Hurlothrumbo* the ordering of sexuality plays a primary role as a sign of general structuring, the larger order. In keeping with a plot of heroic proportions, all the characters are heroi-tragic archetypes: the noble ruler, the arch-fiend, the virtuous princess in distress. Although most of the characters thus conform to the patterns of both spoken and operatic high drama, Johnson's nonsensical Lord Flame seems especially operatic. Indeed, in his practice of singing the finale to each act, and with an obsessive need to talk or sing about either his sexual desire or lust for battle, Flame seems a satirist's stereotype of the operatic protagonist.

The parody becomes uncanny with the report that Johnson performed the part of Wildfire (and possibly Lord Flame as well) 'sometimes walking on high stilts': the author of *See and Seem Blind* (1732) noted this to be a popular innovation for *The Blazing Comet* (1732) (see Figure 3.1).³⁰ By the end of the eighteenth

Academy Operas, 1720-1728 (Oxford, 1995), particularly chapter four, 'Margherita Durastanti as Leading Man and Leading Woman', 80-104.

³⁰ Stephen Jones seems to think Johnson always employed stilts; Jones, ed., *Biographia Dramatica*, 406; the author (possibly Aaron Hill) of *See and Seem Blind* (1732) states that the stilts were a 'novelty' added for *The Blazing Comet* (16-17).

Figure 3.1: Wildfire wooing Lady Flame; frontispiece to *The Blazing Comet* (1732)



century, the stilts had become an icon of his eccentricity, and it is easy to see why: stalking the stage with fiddle in hand, Johnson's deformed figure cut across boundaries of convention on many levels. In Figure 3.1, the *Blazing Comet* character, Wildfire, uses his height to spectacular advantage in wooing Lady Flame at her balcony. But while this trickery allows him to approach his beloved, that same characteristic betrays him as physically abnormal, isolated from his companions on stage, who can only wonder and admire. Indeed, like some Bosch nightmare come to life, man has merged with machine, stilts have become legs; coat, breeches, and even violin seem to have enlarged to match his new stature. From such a perspective, it is tempting to view this engraving of Johnson not just as a record of one man's theatrical oddity, but also as a response to those other musical 'Blazing Comets' of the London stage, the often abnormally large castrati who also, it was thought, could use their physical deformity to approach the fairer sex by unfair means.

Were we to follow much current scholarship on opera's reception in Britain, the search for *Hurlothrumbo's* significance would need go no further than an interpretation of Johnson as would-be castrato.³¹ Implicit in such studies, which chiefly focus on the literature discussing society's fascination with the castrato, is the belief that the abundance of this material proves the sociology of Italian opera to be the sociology of the castrato. In this view, opera's social valences operate wholly

³¹ Recent studies include Jill Campbell, "'When Men Women Turn': Gender Reversals in Fielding's Plays", *The New 18th Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York, 1987), 63-83; Xavier Cervantes, "'Tuneful Monsters": Les Castrats et le Public Lyrique Londonien au début du XVIIIe Siècle', *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Angllo-Américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* 39 (1994), 227-54; Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, 'Shunning the Bearded Kiss: Castrati and the Definition of Female Sexuality', *Prose Studies* 15 (1992), 153-70; Thomas McGeary, 'Gendering Opera: Italian Opera as the Feminine Other in Britain, 1700-1742', *Journal of Musicological Research* 14 (1994), 17-34; idem, "'Warbling Eunuchs": Opera, Gender, and Sexuality on the London Stage, 1705-1742', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theater Research*, 2nd ser., 7 (1992), 1-22; Woof, 'Italian Opera and English Oratorio'. McGeary has also written persuasively on opera and politics; see 'Shaftesbury on Opera, Spectacle and Liberty', *ML* 74 (1993), 530-41.

at the level of one of its constituents: as Thomas McGeary maintains, it was because ‘the castrato was so disdained and seen as such a source of moral corruption that opera could herald ... universal darkness’.³² Is the castrato, then, the ultimate villain in opera’s story? Perhaps not. Perhaps, indeed, this reliance on the castrato as a paradigm of serious Italian opera is a little too neat.

Although corruption brought about by the castrato’s ambiguous sexuality features prominently in attacks on opera, fears for the sexual virtue of English women and the virility of English men were part of larger concerns that the popularity of opera heralded a much broader social malaise, one destructive of the fabric of society. The significance of the singer’s sexuality for this malaise is understandable only when we realise that opera worked within a society that repeatedly linked gender to matters of ‘government’.³³ Government at all levels of society—from the body politic to the personal body—required a network of regulation that opera was perceived to threaten with a battery of instruments, of which the castrato was just one. To say that castrati were only the most potent symbol of opera’s perverted social order, rather than its cause, does not diminish their significance for our understanding of Italian opera; but it does realign this understanding. By examining other ways in which contemporary critical literature presented opera’s disruption of society, we can reach some understanding of the castrato’s importance, while also discerning a more likely common ground for perceptions of opera’s allegedly malign influence. Undoubtedly, the castrato dominated eighteenth-century satires treating opera’s role in promoting sexual degeneracy, and it is to these pamphlets that we should now turn for evidence that

³² McGeary, ‘Warbling Eunuchs’, 1.

³³ See Jill Campbell, ‘When Men Women Turn’, 63. For issues of gender in the theatre generally, see Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth-Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (Princeton, 1992).

the social perversions effected by opera were perceived to be of a more general nature.

When Johnson presented London with the first performances of *Hurlothrumbo*, the Town was still buzzing with the success of *The Beggar's Opera*. The new 'ballad opera' exploited some old grievances, including the feud between the *prime donne* Faustina and Cuzzoni, which had prompted several pamphlets following their famous onstage fight in Bononcini's *Astianatte* (1727). These anonymous pamphlets capitalised on the singers' rivalry both by re-staging the battle—in *The Contre Temps; or the Rival Queans* (1727)—and by penning imaginary epistles between Faustina and Senesino. Surprisingly, these pamphlets do not emphasise the battle so much as the divas' voracious sexual appetites.³⁴ Not only do Faustina and Cuzzoni thirst for each others' blood, they also lust for the services of upstanding Englishmen, and Faustina is variously importunate in her seduction of Senesino and of an unnamed gentlewoman. To her female lover she confesses that before they met 'Inconstant as the Wind, free as the Air,/ I rang'd from Man to Man, from Fair to Fair'.³⁵ The strident, powerful, manipulative *prima donna* could turn the tables and act the man, but her fickleness proclaimed her still to be woman, loyal to neither opera company nor lover.

Although satires that spoke of women (on and off stage) as sexually predatory undoubtedly encouraged male fear of female independence, sexual

³⁴ *The Contre Temps; or the Rival Queans* (1727); *An Epistle from S---r S---o to S---a F---a* [1727]; *An Epistle from Signora F-a to a Lady* [1727]; *F-NAs Answer to S-NO* [1727].

³⁵ *An Epistle from Signora F-a to a Lady*, 7. Another example of this gender role reversal is found in *An Epistle from the Platonick Madam B-ier, To the Celebrated Signor Car-ino* (1734). Jane Barbier, the putative protagonist, sang on the London stage from about 1712 until the 1730s. An additional gender ambiguity in this pamphlet (and the reason for the 'platonick' epithet) is that Barbier died a 'spinster', and her acknowledged 'specialty' was singing male roles; *Biographical Dictionary* I, 281-4 (283, 281).

autonomy extends still further.³⁶ Masturbation is a means of sexual gratification associated with opera in several pamphlets. Faustina's letter to Senesino, for example, describes the audience response to their amorous duet as one of similarly illicit pleasure, for 'The Fair have wish'd their Lovers warm as me/ The Men themselves caress'd instead of Thee'.³⁷ Heterosexual coupling is thus explicitly travestied in as many ways as possible: while on stage Faustina attempts (or pretends to attempt) to seduce the castrato Senesino, off stage the female audience members choose Faustina's services over those of their lovers, and the men, unable to attain their desire in the person of Senesino, gratify themselves in solitary splendour.

Common to all these pamphlets, as well as to others that deal exclusively with the threat posed by the castrato, is the association of opera singers not just with sex, but with non-reproductive sex. As 'Faustina' says of the castrati: 'Safely they give uninterrupted Joys,/ Without the genial Curse of Girls and Boys'.³⁸ She could equally have spoken of homosexuality, or of masturbation. A link with such 'deviance' had, indeed, already been made; in an early issue of *The Intelligencer* (1728) the writer (purportedly Jonathan Swift) reported the prescient apprehensions of an elderly gentleman, for 'many Years ago, when the Practice of unnatural Vice grew frequent in *London* that many were prosecuted for it, he was sure it would be the Fore-runner of *Italian opera's* and Singers'.³⁹ Although the criticism implicit in these accounts of sexual deviance may seem lighthearted, it was not always so.

³⁶ On the problem of women breaching gender norms on stage, see Kristina Straub, 'The Guilty Pleasure of Female Theatrical Cross-Dressing and the Autobiography of Charlotte Charke', *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, ed. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York and London, 1991), 142-67.

³⁷ *F-NAs Answer to S-NO*, 7.

³⁸ *F-NAs Answer to S-NO*, 6.

³⁹ *The Intelligencer*, nos. 1-19 (Dublin, repr. London, 1729), no. 3, p. 25.

Doctors advised young men to visit ‘a Bagnio lewd or Tavern’, rather than continue that ‘ungenerous, selfish, solitary Joy’; in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, to which Swift contributed, the protagonist warns that, if not cured, a narcissistic young man may ‘run to the next pond to get rid of himself, the Fate of most violent Self-lovers’.⁴⁰ The author of the treatise *Onania: or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* was clear that this sin was an offence against God and civil society, for it ‘perverts and extinguishes Nature, and he who is guilty of it is labouring at the Destruction of his Kind, and in a Manner strikes at the Creation itself’.⁴¹ The enormous popularity of *Onania* is attested not only in its frequent reprinting throughout the century, but also by its ever-increasing length: swollen by a succession of testimonial epistles from repentant sinners, successive editions indexed the sexual nonconformity that seemed to many a growing threat to society.

The ‘destruction’ of one’s kind was, as always, achievable in a variety of ways, as the gradual expansion of this treatise indicates. Less sensational than sexual deviancy was the decline in manners and morals that many thought opera was abetting. Not, of course, outwardly visible, and therefore not spectacular in itself, moral degeneracy was figured metaphorically in the destruction of the physical body of the individual. Although the causal link between moral and physical corruption was losing hold by the early eighteenth century (or at least being reinvented in terms of new science⁴²), the old strategy of graphically displaying one as the other retained

⁴⁰ John Armstrong, *The Oeconomy of Love* (1736); Jonathan Swift, et al., *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller (New Haven, 1950), 134-36; both cited in Christopher Fox, ‘The Myth of Narcissus in Swift’s *Travels*’, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 20 (1986), 17-33 (18, 21).

⁴¹ *Onania: or, the Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution* (16th edn, 1737), 7.

⁴² See Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg’d Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London, 1987), for an excellent discussion of the way in which evolving medical and scientific thought accommodated itself to older concepts like the ‘humours’. The idea that moral ugliness was reflected in physical appearance is, of course, also ancient. See also Porter, ‘Consumption: disease of the consumer society?’, *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John

its force, as much of the period's satire shows.⁴³

For opponents of opera, the bodies of castrati must have seemed a grotesque outward sign of the immorality of the times; hence the satirical engravings that emphasise their height and awkward, knock-kneed posture. Not so much the targets of visual satire, the women of Italian opera were instead poetically re-created as misshapen; and when heterosexuality is figured in pamphlets on opera, it is often devalued by altering the body. In *The Contre Temps; or the Rival Queans*, Faustina's vulgar description of Cuzzoni attempts to dehumanise its object:

Let not one inch of merit pray be lost;
Her pipe I think is all that she can boast;
And poor S[a]nd[o]ni finds, when e'er 'tis try'd,
That she's all over pipe, from side to side;
Her body looks as from the fairies stole,
Enough of carcass to make one large hole;
Where he in love's wide Bay of Biscay tost,
Hard plys the oar; but ne'er can touch the coast.⁴⁴

Equation of the female genitalia with the larynx was, as Thomas Laqueur has shown, a feature even of medical textbooks.⁴⁵ The voice—the singer's identity—thus also becomes her physical embodiment, and the instrument that enables her to achieve fame is also disabling. The moral degeneracy of the opera singer, so obviously represented by a physical lack in the body of the castrato, could similarly be figured as a lack in the body of the female singer.

That this physical and moral lack was most visible in personal relationships

Brewer and Roy Porter (London, 1993), 58-81, for analysis of the metaphorical and physical effects of luxury and consumption on the physical body.

⁴³ The most extended and explicit figuring of a bestial humanity in the works discussed here appears in *The Connoisseur. A Satire on the Modern Men of Taste* [1735]. Leon Guilhamet, in *Satire and the Transformation of Genre* (Philadelphia, 1987) presents a sophisticated study of the 'monstrosity' of satire, as do Peter Stallybrass and Allon White in 'The Grotesque Body and the Smithfield Muse: Authorship in the Eighteenth Century', *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (London, 1986), 80-124.

⁴⁴ *The Contre Temps*, 11.

⁴⁵ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 36, 37.

is reiterated when we return to Samuel Johnson and his troubled characterisations. As a singer, Johnson apparently had a tolerable voice, but according to contemporary report the contortions he underwent for his art 'were so hideous' that when singing he had to 'stand with his face close to a wall, and to cover each side of it with his hands, in order to prevent every possible chance of its being seen'.⁴⁶ His grossness of appearance thus rendered necessary the attempt to disembodify his voice. Similarly, Johnson acknowledged that the quasi-Miltonic sublime rant in his characters' speeches rendered them absurd even to other characters in the plays; one of Lord Flame's nonsensical speeches, for example, meets with the desperate invocation: 'Oh ye Powers inspire me with Madness, that I may answer him in his own Language!' (Act IV). The intemperate, incomprehensible Flame and Wildfire are unable to communicate even with their own kind; the relish with which Faustina describes the hapless lovers' sexual frustrations finds an echo in Johnson. While stilts enable Johnson's character to reach his beloved in the balcony scene from *The Blazing Comet*, it is not his gawky physical aspect, but their mutual madness that prevents the tryst from reaching physical fruition. Wildfire and Lady Flame decide not to indulge their passion, feeling that sexual consummation would spoil their sublime and separate enjoyment of frustrated desire.

For the critics, however, madness and distortion were more important than the sublime in deciphering opera's effect on its admirers. The monster that the Faustina persona made of Cuzzoni translated to the level of audience and society as opera became part of a social system carrying degenerate metempsychosis to its logical conclusion, returning an ignorant and uncaring humanity to its former bestial nature. It is, one pamphlet on 'taste' implied, only a small step for a young woman

⁴⁶ 'C.L.', Letter, *Monthly Magazine*, 417.

to move from preferring a castrato to a man, to preferring a lapdog to a man. The same pamphlet suggested that men had degenerated so far that it made little difference, for 'If Men are Monkeys, Monkeys may be Men'. Men who aped fashions and passions as singers of opera did were reduced to mere husks of humanity.⁴⁷ Samuel Johnson on stilts, the polymorphous man-machine-puppet, must have seemed an ironic literalising and emblematising of this degeneracy.

Chains of being

As we saw, Johnson's antics in *Hurlothrumbo* exercised the critics chiefly because the work's popularity signalled for them a decline in public taste. Critics of Italian opera had greater grounds for concern, however. Like gender, opera had implications for 'government' at more than just the personal level: the physical degeneration engendered by the form was not merely metaphorical. Many pamphlets describe the way in which opera had a domino effect on an economic level, whereby profligate lords or ladies who heaped gifts on a favourite singer effectively starved their more deserving financial dependants.⁴⁸ In a pamphlet of 1735 called *The Happy Courtesan*, the prostitute author-figure defines the extent of her love for the castrato, Farinelli, by her rejection of normal social relations:

Let Children starve, let Fathers, Husbands break,
'Tis all well done, if done for thy dear sake.

...

Your glit'ring Equipage the Ring shall grace,
And to no Man of Quality's give place.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *The Connoisseur*, 18, 11.

⁴⁸ For an explanation of the rationale behind appropriate communitarian behaviour by a member of the aristocracy, see Donna T. Andrew, 'Noblesse oblige: Female Charity in an Age of Sentiment', *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, ed. John Brewer and Susan Staves (London and New York, 1995), 275-300.

⁴⁹ *The Happy Courtesan: Or, the Prude Demolish'd. An Epistle from the Celebrated Mrs C----- P----- to the Angelick Signior Far-n--li* (1735), 8, 13.

A lack of concern for social distinction is not only a theme of this work, but also its structuring principle. The Happy Courtezan's epistle is a recomposition of the 1727 letter from Faustina to Senesino quoted above; it commandeers sentiments and phrases from the original, transposing ideas and effects from old characters to new, regardless of sex, and providing a final indicator that the castrato *per se* is not at fault. The singer's unilateral power is not dependent on gender, for Faustina's description of herself—'My Voice shall throw all Hearers in a Trance,/ The very Stones shall at my Musick dance'—passes easily to Farinelli, for whom the Courtezan recasts the phrase: 'Your Voice shall cast all Mortals in a trance,/ Ev'n Things inanimate to that shall Dance'.⁵⁰ As the voice that casts trances over its English listeners transfers from Faustina to Farinelli, we realise—paradoxically—that in the collapse of the social distinctions of class, gender and morality, the one thing to emerge intact is the autonomy of the individual. The singer who becomes the nation's 'Idol Saint' is merely the logical telos for a people who have forsaken social ties and their true God to worship at the shrine of personal pleasure.⁵¹ While an apotheosis of the singer may be the final achievement of such a society, the catalyst for the sexual, physical, economic and moral breakdown of the individual (and therefore society) in all these pamphlets is selfishness, a selfishness that drives people to prefer private pleasure to public benefit.

Why selfishness? Opera critics' concern can briefly be explained in the context of a larger pattern. The ontology of the self, or the belief that truth to one's own values came prior to adherence to social values, was a complex but gradually

⁵⁰ *F-NAs Answer to S-NO*, 8; *The Happy Courtezan*, 13. Both, of course, refer to the power of Orpheus.

⁵¹ After Farinelli's triumphant debut season for the Opera of the Nobility in 1734-5, many satirists pilloried the singer, including Hogarth, who in the *Rake's Progress* (1735), plate two, includes a picture (on the floor) of Farinelli enthroned and idolised.

spreading concept in eighteenth-century Britain.⁵² Its popularity was attested by developments as diverse as the rise of sentimental literature and the growth in varieties of religious thought. For opponents of this new ontology, however, the valorisation of the self was profoundly solipsistic.⁵³ According to long-established theories of sex and gender, in which men were by definition active and outgoing and women inherently vain and self-interested, a preoccupation with oneself was also undeniably feminine.

John Dennis's 'Essay on Operas' (1698), polarising female and male as sense and reason respectively, provides a foundation for the denunciation of opera in consequence of its femininity. 'Musick', Dennis writes

that is not subservient to Reason, especially if it be soft and effeminate, is a mere Delight of Sense.... since 'tis natural to Sense to bring a Man home to himself, and confine him there, as 'tis natural to Reason to expand the Soul ... and throw it out upon the Publick. And as soft and delicious Musick, by soothing the Senses, and making a Man too much in love with himself, makes him too little fond of the Publick; so by emasculating and dissolving the Mind, it shakes the very Foundation of Fortitude, and so is destructive of both Branches of the publick Spirit.⁵⁴

⁵² An overarching (though now somewhat simplistic) view may be found in Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1977). See also Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, 1976). On the political implications, see H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977); J. A. W. Gunn, *Beyond Liberty and Property: The Process of Self-Recognition in Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Kingston, 1983); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975), 423-505; Isaac Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968). On the individual in literature and philosophy, see, for example, Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, 1990), 23; J. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988); John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, 1982); G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago and London, 1992); Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Imagining a Self: Autobiography and Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1976).

⁵³ Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle*, provides the best discussion of early eighteenth-century opposition to individualism. For the philosophical discussion of pride and self-esteem in the period, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature* (Baltimore, 1961), esp. 153-245. For the ubiquity of philosophical and literary disquiet over 'self-love', see Frederick M. Keener, *The Chain of Becoming: The Philosophical Tale, the Novel, and a Neglected Realism of the Enlightenment: Swift, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Johnson, and Austen* (New York, 1983), 55-85.

⁵⁴ John Dennis, 'An Essay on the Operas after the Italian Manner' in *Select Works*, 2 vols (1718), I, 457-62.

These ideas of ‘Sense’ that Dennis describes as self-centredness, vanity and effeminacy play their part in an extensive Augustan literature fixated on the disintegration of society: as Dennis put it, the ‘Publick Spirit’ of the people is eroded by the corrupt forces of avarice and self-interest. Gloomy prognostications about the influence of opera on social coherence found favour throughout the century. Even the author of the tongue-in-cheek pamphlet *Do you know what you are about?* (1733) observed that many theatrical disputes of the day (including Handel’s ‘War with *Senesino*’) had a serious side, for ‘I ... find the real Cause of all this Heat,/ Self-Int’rest, blended with dear Self-Conceit’.⁵⁵ Some sixty years after Dennis’s sombre assessment, John Brown, a cleric and critic of musical taste, also wrote on the decline of society in general. In his popular and influential *Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Time* (1757), Brown found that ‘the ruling character of the present Times is that of “a vain, luxurious, and selfish EFFEMINACY”’, adding later that ‘Nothing is so natural to Effeminate minds as *Vanity*’.⁵⁶

Such concerns took their place within a larger debate on the role of Public Spirit in a rapidly changing society for which vanity and, above all, luxury were key integers. Speaking in favour of the new commercial society in his essay ‘Of Luxury’, David Hume related an evolving modern economy to the Great Chain of Being, the Renaissance principle by which social order was merely one confirmation of the supernatural order of things:

industry, knowledge, and humanity are linked together, by an indissoluble chain, and are found ... to be peculiar to the more polished, and, what are commonly denominated, the more luxurious ages.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Do you know what you are about? or, a Protestant Alarm to Great Britain* (1733), Prologue.

⁵⁶ John Brown, *An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Time* (1757), 67, 158.

⁵⁷ David Hume, ‘Of Luxury’, *Political Discourses* (1752), cited in James Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature, 1700-1789* (London, 1986), 106. Hume’s argument here follows a version of Bernard Mandeville’s famous and provocative argument that any vice that kept the economy growing was good; see the latter’s *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1714-29). Mandeville’s impact on economic and political thinking is discussed by M. M. Goldsmith,

In the burgeoning capitalist economy of eighteenth-century London, however, critics saw an increasing orientation towards the intangibles of paper money and credit, rather than the more solid realities of land and trade, as part of a larger pattern in which individualism and greed replaced the 'Public Spirit' necessary to hold together a functioning society.⁵⁸ In his *Estimate*, John Brown responded to Hume, decrying the modern fascination with money as a corruption of the ancient Chain of Being:

a *Chain of Self-Interest* is indeed no better than a *Rope of Sand*: There is no *Cement* nor *Cohesion* between the Parts: There is rather a mutual *Antipathy* and *Repulsion*; the Character of *Self-Interest* being in a peculiar Sense ... wrapt up wholly in *itself*; and unconnected with others, unless for its own Sake. Here then, we see even this Chain itself ready to fall in Pieces, and on any sudden Thwart or Concussion, break into an Infinity of Factions.⁵⁹

This new chain was not only illusory, it was contradictory; its effect was one of disintegration.

Luxury was the key to this process, and it might be seen as the negative counterweight to the positive model provided (for the aristocracy at least) by civic virtue. While today luxury is a limited term, describing external realities, until the eighteenth century it was a powerful concept for internal regulation of the individual and society. Like the Chain of Being a way of describing metaphysical relationships, it was, according to John Sekora, 'one of the oldest, most important, and most pervasive negative principles for organizing society Western history has known'.⁶⁰ The British understanding of luxury, inherited jointly from the Hebraic

Private Vices, Public Benefits: Bernard Mandeville's Social and Political Thought (Cambridge, 1985). On the Great Chain of Being, see Lovejoy, *Reflections on Human Nature*.

⁵⁸ Kramnick, *Bolingbroke and his Circle*. See also notes 52 and 53, above.

⁵⁹ Brown, *Estimate of the Manners ... of the Time*, 111-12.

⁶⁰ John Sekora, *Luxury: The Concept in Western Thought, Eden to Smollett* (Baltimore and London, 1977), 1-2, 5-6. I am indebted to Sekora's account of the progress of luxury for much of the following paragraph; however, I take issue with his thesis that 'Almost all writers on luxury blamed The People' (9): where opera is concerned, at least, criticism for luxurious behaviour is uniformly (though not exclusively) levelled at the aristocracy. See also Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: a Conceptual and Historical Investigation* (Cambridge, 1994), esp. 126-76; James Raven, 'Defending Conduct and Property: The London Press and the Luxury Debate', *Early Modern*

and Hellenistic traditions, defined as luxurious anything that breached the rigours of necessity and, concomitantly, hierarchy: to focus on individual gain or pleasure inevitably led to the rupture of accepted societal relationships, to usurpation of the natural order, and therefore to the weakening and eventual destruction of the community. Such, many argued, had led to the downfall of ancient Greek and Roman civilization; so it would be with any society that did not heed their example. Obviously, then, luxury could be seen in consumption of physical goods, but its more potent manifestation was in the breach of social roles and conventions; indeed, the former was always a sign of the latter.⁶¹ Development of a capitalist and, ultimately, socially mobile society during Britain's financial 'revolution' of the late-seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries was—according to this model—an alarming instance of the rise of luxury. It is for this reason that, Sekora suggests, luxury was probably 'the greatest single social issue and the greatest single commonplace' of the century, the subject of continuous polemic.⁶² Many campaigners against luxury were not driven by the desire for a more equitable or altruistic society, but by a fear that the spread of luxury would destabilise traditional hierarchies.⁶³ Advocates of the new culture of politeness, which was based on the supposed advantages of a developing commercial society, were doubly anxious to maintain a distinction

Conceptions of Property, 301-19, for the degree to which charges of luxuriousness were levelled against the aristocracy and for the delicate negotiation of the concept in the later eighteenth century. On negative reaction to luxury and the growing consumer society, see also Joyce Appleby, 'Consumption in early modern social thought', *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 162-73; for a analysis of the similar problems in Dutch society, see Simon Schama, 'Perishable Commodities: Dutch Still-Life Painting and the "Empire of Things"', *Consumption and the World of Goods*, 478-88; idem, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (Berkeley, 1988). Sennett's *The Fall of Public Man* deals with the problem of civic disintegration over two centuries from a sociological perspective—his 'broad brush' approach, though insightful, should be treated with caution.

⁶¹ The relationship between dress and status is exemplary of the reach of luxury; Sekora points out that sumptuary laws were maintained throughout the eighteenth century; Sekora, *Luxury*, 61. See also James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses to Commerce in England 1750-1800* (Oxford, 1992), 157-182.

⁶² Sekora, *Luxury*, 75.

⁶³ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, for example: 430-6, 464-5, 492-3.

between appropriate employment of wealth—that which encouraged communication, learning and enhanced the nation—and luxury, which encouraged nothing but dissipation and the rupture of social ties.⁶⁴

What had economic disintegration to do with opera? It is significant that when Hume's essay 'Of Luxury' was republished in 1760, he changed its title to 'Of Refinement in the Arts'.⁶⁵ Polemicists like Hume and John Brown, who found an ethical causality reminiscent of the Great Chain of Being in society, saw evidence for their theses in areas other than politics and economics. And no ideological arguments were fiercer than those concerned with the stage, the forum in which national sensibility was most forcefully expressed and most easily shaped.⁶⁶ As we have seen, the battle royal between the incumbent native theatre and invading foreign entertainments had a particularly nationalistic flavour. More specifically, it was thought that the British fascination with opera—genre of the degenerate Italians, not the mighty Romans—was proof that the new commercial order and its espousal of self-interest were gaining a stranglehold on British society.

Luxury was the vice that defined operatic deviance. In modern discussions, the vast amounts of money spent on opulent sets, and on fees and gifts for singers, along with the sexual perversions imagined to spread from singers to audience, define luxury as the wasteful extravagance of a commercial society fascinated with the foreign. We tend to forget, however, that luxury is not only manifested in opulence. It is also a quite literal 'spending': dissipation, a scattering or dispersal, disintegration. For critics concerned with the link between the practical and

⁶⁴ We recall Shaftesbury's point that 'A public spirit can only come from a social feeling or sense of partnership with human kind.' See notes 60-62 in the introduction.

⁶⁵ Sambrook, *The Eighteenth Century*, 106. For discussion of Hume's work, see Berry, *The Idea of Luxury*, 142-52.

⁶⁶ Jonas Barish, *The Anti-Theatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1981).

ideological, the luxury of Italian opera resided not only in singers' fees or the lavish superficiality of sets, rendering the genre an adjunct to the lifestyle of economic excess; it was also signalled, as we have seen, in the potential fragmentation of systems of government. Luxury and Self Interest travel hand in hand along Brown's road to the dispersal of society into 'an Infinity of Factions'.

'Unmeaning Divisions'

In one sense, as Sekora points out, luxury as the curious combination of excess and disintegration can only be reconciled if seen as progress, part of the pattern of growth and decay.⁶⁷ Yet, as with the castrato, who could have it both ways and neither, the danger and the fascination of luxury in music lay in the possibility of simultaneity. Opera's particular association with luxury derived from the fact that extravagance and fragmentation came together at the most essential level, in the performed musical text.

If hostile voices consistently described luxury in terms of dissipation, corruption and aimlessness, it requires little effort to descry the principal object of critics' musical animus. As the *Happy Courtezan* put it, addressing Farinelli:

Your Voice shall cast all Mortals in a Trance,
 Ev'n Things inanimate to that shall Dance:
 The well-drest Warriour, with the Lady gay,
 At ev'ry Trill shall faint and die away;
 And 'stead of facing Cannon, or his Foes,
 Shall hold a Smelling-Bottle to his Nose;
 And he that would not start at Death, or Fire,
 Shall like a Girl at thy soft Trill expire.⁶⁸

It matters little whether this passage describes the voice of Farinelli or, as in the original pamphlet of 1727, that of Faustina: substance belongs not to the singer, but

⁶⁷ Sekora, *Luxury*, 68-69.

⁶⁸ *The Happy Courtezan*, 13.

to the almost palpable softness of the trill. From *The Prompter*'s criticism of 'those soft *Thrillings*, that cause a Suspension of every sensible or reflective Quality in the Soul' (1735), to Brown's dislike of 'unmeaning Division'; from an anonymous pamphlet on operas during a time of war, which demands 'the loud Trumpet' rather than 'an enervate Trill' to the fear of 'the irresistible Power of one of *Farinelli*'s *Closes*, which I find too hard for the *tenderest* Love-Scenes of the best wrote *Tragedy*', the singer's ornamentation animates the critics as readily as—they feel—it enervates and confuses the listener.⁶⁹ As a single example from extensive continental commentary on this topic, at the beginning of the century Lodovico Antonio Muratori put ornamentation at the top of his list of modern music's corrupting characteristics:

Whether this effeminacy is caused by an excessive use of eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and the smallest rhythmic values, which break the solemnity of the melody, or is produced by the voices of the singers, who are all either naturally or artificially womanlike, and consequently inspire undue tenderness and languor in the souls of the audience; or whether it stems from the use of ariettas in operas, which induce excessive enjoyment in anyone who listens to them, or from the words, which often lack integrity and abound in lasciviousness, or from the practice of using women singers in the theaters; or from all these reasons put together: it is a fact that modern theatre music is exceedingly harmful for public mores, in that people become ever baser and prone to lasciviousness when listening to it.⁷⁰

A recent commentator has described the trill as luxury's smallest unit, characterising it as the means by which a castrato commodified himself, a means that became an end.⁷¹ It seems more likely, though, that vocal ornamentation in general—rather than the trill alone—was the principal sign of opera's luxury, not

⁶⁹ *The Prompter*, 14 November 1735; Brown, *Dissertation on ... Music*, 205; *On Operas*. 'These lines were written, during the Dispute whether such Entertainments ought to be exhibited, in a time of actual Rebellion.' [n.p., n.d. 1715?]; *The Prompter*, 4 December 1734.

⁷⁰ Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *On Perfect Italian Poetry* (1706); cited in Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe: A Source Book*, ed. Bonnie J. Blackburn (Chicago and London, 1994), 41.

⁷¹ Lawrence Woof, 'Italian Opera and English Oratorio', 88. Woof's discussion of opera and luxury is useful and original, although it also focuses on the castrato as signifier of luxury.

primarily because the singer could thereby become a commodity, but because it represented the ultimate solipsism and consequent fragmentation that defined luxury. A form of display that catered to the performer's vanity, ornamentation was also seen as promulgating a self-interest that broke down social ties on the practical level. As writers on music noted throughout the century, music oriented towards the soloist inevitably reduced the participation of others, particularly in a passage of free ornamentation which, as Roger North put it, 'makes the course of the musick stay till such a trifler is pleased to come up with it'. Viol player that he was, North thought the soloist 'unsociable and malcreate', and lamented the demise of the 'respublica among the consortiers' as a social and musical evil.⁷² Late in the eighteenth century, William Jones was one of several writers to put ornamentation's disruption of social structure into a grammatical framework, describing good music on the same regulated basis as good poetry. If 'Air' was the equivalent of the subject in poetry, ornamentation disrupted its presentation, for while 'the *ad libitum* Cadence has Melody', it 'is always without the formality of Measure'.⁷³ The soloist who disregarded the government of beat or barline and disrupted the music's meaning was always going to be the 'malcreate' of society, unable and unwilling to conform to printed notes by disciplining the self.

Of course, an appreciation of the self-centredness of ornamentation—particularly cadential ornamentation—resided in part in aesthetic responses. These responses, as we might expect from the critical fascination with selfishness and sex in opera discussed earlier, seem to associate the ungoverned thrills of ornamentation

⁷² Roger North, *Roger North on Music*, ed. John Wilson (London, 1959), 222, 162.

⁷³ [William Jones], *A Treatise on the Art of Music* (Colchester, 1784), 42-43. George Horne, D.D., Dean of Canterbury, *The Antiquity, Use & excellence of Church Music, A Sermon preached at the opening of a New Organ in the Cathedral Church of Christ, Canterbury* (1784), 9-10; William Mason, *Essays, Historical and Critical, on English Church Music* (1795), 48. Charles Avison

with those of orgasm. Faustina's rapture at her 'feign'd transports' in *F-NAs Answer to S-NO* (1727) has a double meaning, while that standard metaphor of sexual release, death, comes into play in the Happy Courtezan's epistle, where both 'The well-drest Warriour, with the Lady gay,/ At ev'ry Trill shall faint and die away'.⁷⁴ The problem, of course, was that this metaphorical death also signalled the death of rationality: Italianate ornamentation's decadent masking of both the meaning of the words and the progress of the music ensured that the auditor (especially the man) who succumbed to music's overwhelming charms halted his active mind, becoming a simple receiver of the music in a way that reinforced the ancient tie between passion and passivity.⁷⁵

Even this vicarious sex life was not without its problems: outlining the socio-sexual dangers of interpretative impropriety, *The Woman of Taste* (1733) advised newcomers to the opera to 'beware, lest list'ning to the song,/ Your transport, or your sorrow, shou'd be wrong'.⁷⁶ For *The Woman of Taste*, the embarrassment attendant on a poor (or unacceptable) reading helped to maintain fashionable (and therefore spurious) social hierarchies, keeping the supposed social upstart in check through the fluidity and intangibility of both music and etiquette. Correctly deciphering meaning became a perilous task. Through the passion of music, passivity became the master; as men lost their rationality, women took control, and self-expression was, paradoxically, encumbered by the fear that fluidity of meaning rendered truth an impossibility.⁷⁷ So, one newspaper gleefully reported, a young

similarly describes music in terms of spoken or written language; Avison, *An Essay on Musical Expression* (1752), 'advertisement', 62.

⁷⁴ See also, for example, *An Epistle from the Platonick Madam B—ier*: 'For me—at ev'ry Close, quite lost in Joy/ I murm'ring—Sigh—Mon chere—encore—une Fois.'

⁷⁵ Ecstasy after all derives from ec-stasis—being taken out of oneself.

⁷⁶ *The Woman of Taste* (1733), 7.

⁷⁷ See also Barthes's representation of the trope of metaphoric sexual release as dissipation and disjunction in *S/Z*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1974), 109-10.

woman in love with a castrato was able to communicate her passion for his performance only by means of a 'Bravo!'.⁷⁸ Ornamentation, which distorted the message of the music and rendered the text incomprehensible, inhibited communication between performers and audience alike; narcissism and empty gesture replaced a shared social language.

This idea of sterile gesture rather than meaningful communication takes us back, once more, to Samuel Johnson's confused attempts at operatic communication. Johnson, who thought himself something of a visionary, found music the most useful means of accessing a sublimity that transcended normal language, as he demonstrates most thoroughly in his *Vision of Heaven*:

in a Female Voice I sung *Minsegna amor l'inganno*, that Tune in Style, that Angels Chaunt, that can express their Passions vast, of Adoration vast and Holy Love, more than mortal Words can do, and darts the Soul up higher on a stronger Thought to Heaven, and with a vulgar Voice inchant.⁷⁹

This work, from which *Hurlothrumbo* partly derived, but on which Johnson continued to work until its publication in 1738 sums up his obsessions with women, with music, and with his own deluded, heavenly rapture. Yet, just as his ranting speeches render his characters incomprehensible, so Johnson's operatic compositions are similarly fragmentary; his 'arias' are characterised by ornamental melodic lines underpinned by harmonies that are reduced either to formula or nonsense.

Indeed, in music as in literature, Johnson used borrowed voices, mimicking others to realise his quest for divine truth. While his songs in *Hurlothrumbo* were merely formulaic—too poor to belong to anyone else—the song treated so reverentially in the passage quoted above was not his own. 'M'insegna amor l'inganno', like other songs that Johnson 'translated' in the *Vision*, was by

⁷⁸ *The Plain Dealer*, 19 June 1724; cited in Woof, 'Italian Opera', 60.

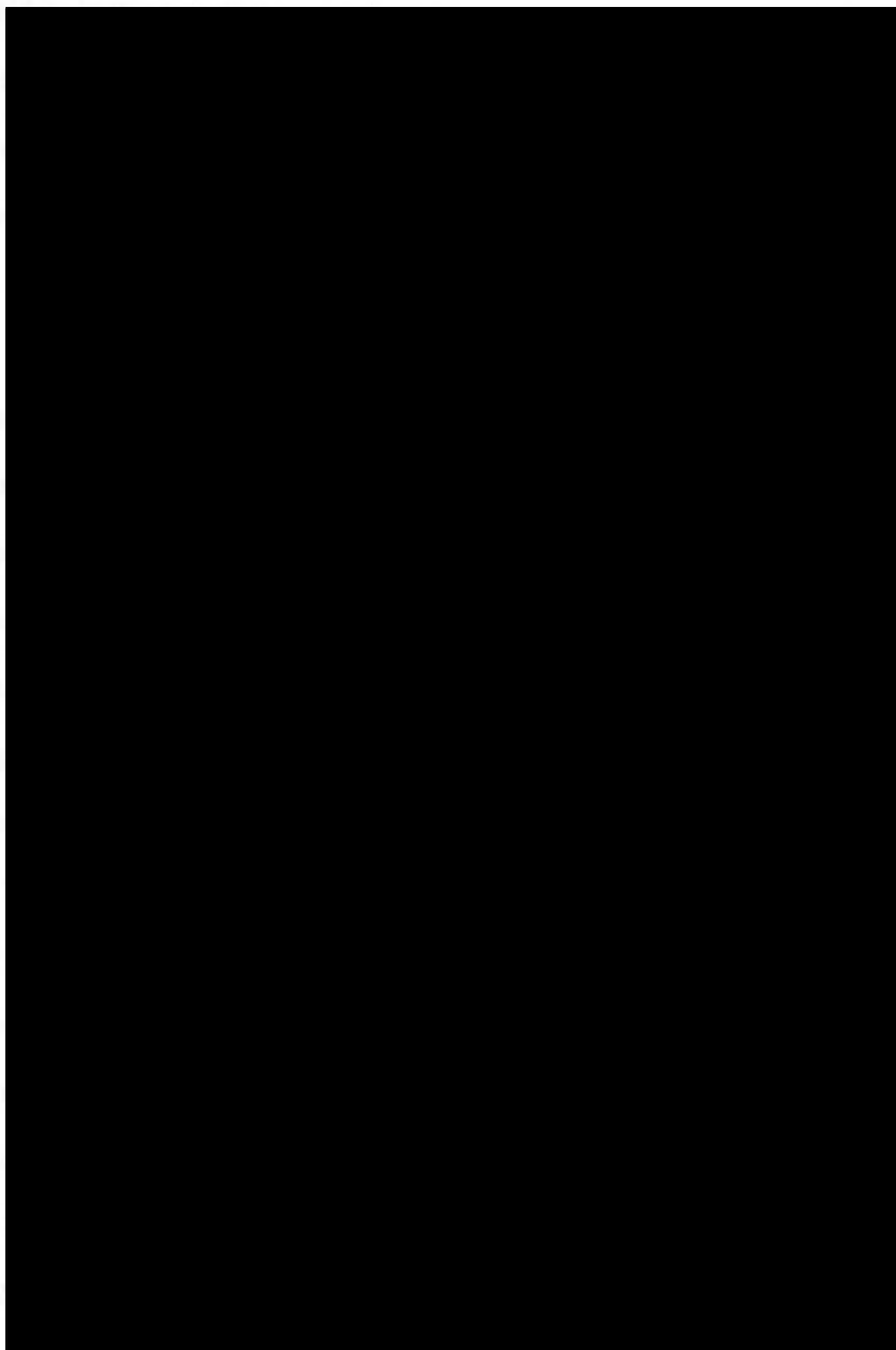
⁷⁹ Johnson, *A Vision of Heaven*, 32.

Bononcini, a composer whom Johnson evidently admired so much that his fulsome praise was parodied in the pamphlet, *Harmony in an Uproar* (1733). A brief glance at Johnson's pattern of reworking in one of the most startling songs from the *Vision*, an adaptation of 'Care pupille' from Bononcini's *Astarto* (1715), will show why his admiration earned only ridicule (see Example 3.1). Johnson's new text (no translation, this) is itself a representative example of his poetic motley: 'Oh how my heart goes pit a pat a, pat a pit a, pit a pat a, pat a pit a when I gaze upon thee, those lips, those Eyes, oh how they fill my soul with lovely Joys'. But it is in his treatment of the music that Johnson reveals the true limitations of his 'translation'.

Unable or unwilling to match Bononcini's vocal writing (on this occasion at least), Johnson derived his inspiration from that which was peripheral to the original, for the tune to which his text is set is not Bononcini's vocal line, but a simple repetition of the violins' opening ritornello. Indeed, the conventional ornamental figure in bar two prompted the most distinctive feature of Johnson's song; the repeated 'pit a pat a'ing heart is a naïvely onomatopœic evocation that could sum up Johnson's approach to opera, a crudely literalistic attempt to give meaning to ornament. In its fascination with the physical—those lips, those eyes, that beating heart—Johnson's song is a distillation of the contemporary fixation with an erotic conjoining of the operatic voice and body. But his curiously visceral attempt at the sublime is nothing more than musical and textual cliché, as if intended to demonstrate that the solipsism generated by opera could only mistake gesture and mimicry for content and creativity.

Paradoxically, Johnson's earnest attempts to raise his voice on others' musical foundations only diminished his stature. When, in the final act of *Hurlothrumbo*, King Soarethereal calls for music to represent 'the Languish of

Example 3.1 'Oh how my heart', Giovanni Bononcini arr. Samuel Johnson,
A Vision of Heaven (1738). By Permission of the British Library;
shelfmark: 12357.d.12.



Angels, the Eccho of Heaven', Johnson turns to Bononcini's *Astarto*. Offering only an imitation of his favourite composer, Johnson is, like the young woman in love with the castrato, able to give nothing more than a parrot-like 'Bravo!' to his own operatic idol. In this and other works, Johnson's ecstatic attempts at 'translating' Bononcini, cutting and pasting the composer's works to fit to his own words, seem only to render a puppet-like ventriloquism, reducing creativity to a mechanical compound, as a castrato becomes a man on stilts.

'Poetaster' and politician

I suggested at the outset that the fractures that run through *Hurlothrumbo* could act as a metaphor for the processes of rupture and fragmentation eighteenth-century critics saw in opera and society, the processes that made a man on stilts a metonym for the castrato. Is our only continuity, then, one of contradiction, of nonsense and dissolution? Perhaps not. For the other aspect of Johnson's 'opera' that drew contemporary attention was the thread not of poetical sublimity but of political subterfuge.

Topical allegories are no easier to follow in *Hurlothrumbo* than is Johnson's attempt at transcendent truth. Yet this does not devalue their existence. Like many potentially seditious plays of the 1720s and 1730s, as we have seen, different layers of meaning could be 'written in' by the playwright or 'read out' by playgoers, according to prejudice or predilection. With the 'Patriot' opposition campaign against Robert Walpole gaining momentum both in the press and on the stage in the late-1720s, anti-Ministerial writings and attempts to read (or misread) theatrical pieces politically were legion.⁸⁰ *Hurlothrumbo*, like many popular literary works,

⁸⁰ Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (Lincoln, Nebraska, and London, 1976), 64-86; Hume, *Henry Fielding and the London Theatre*, 81, 83, 230,

some innocent of partisan content, was exploited for political advantage by the press. The oppositional *Fog's Weekly Journal* denied that the play could have any anti-establishment content, but thereby drew attention to the potentially subversive nature of the plot:

I know there are some would insinuate that this Piece was design'd as a seditious Libel against certain Persons in Power, and that my Lord *Flame* is no better than an *Incendiary*; but sure the Folly and Malice of such an Aspersion can have no Weight with those that have either seen or read it.⁸¹

Hurlothrumbo quite naturally gives rise to possible anti-Ministerial or even Jacobitical interpretations as it depicts an uprising against a king (Soarethereal) who has paid insufficient attention to the practicalities of government: 'if he despises this World, and resides in the Climes above, how must we fill our empty Troops below?' (Act I). Urlandenny, one of the conspirators, complains of the aptness of imagery used in a paean to Soarethereal: the sun-like king burns the plants nearest to him, giving life only to those farther off (Act I). His observation that 'foreigners are most encourag'd' (Act I) by the king could also be construed as a jibe at either George I's or II's Hanoverian interests.⁸²

On the other hand, the exuberance of characters' speeches in praise of Soarethereal—perhaps a satire on Hanoverian panegyric—is mitigated by Johnson's seemingly genuine encomium of George I in *A Vision of Heaven*.⁸³ Similarly, in his final, clement sentences for the rebels, Soarethereal mirrors George I's lenient treatment of the Jacobites in 1716. As a probable Jacobite himself, however, Johnson was hardly likely to cast his friends as the villainous and unsuccessful

discussed in note 140, chapter one. John Loftis, *Politics of Drama*, 1, sees Augustan literature as 'immersed in political controversy', in contrast to other periods' relegation of politics to 'sub-literary ephemera'.

⁸¹ *Fog's Weekly Journal*, 5 July 1729.

⁸² Similarly satirical panegyrics can be found in Henry Brooke's *Gustavus Vasa* (1739) and James Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora* (1739), which were prohibited. See Loftis, *Politics of Drama*, 150. See also Gerrard, 114-18, 192.

⁸³ Johnson, *Vision of Heaven*, 20.

usurpers. Indeed, the invading forces are Dutch, rather than French, Irish or Scottish, suggesting the play could be a restaging of the Glorious Revolution, with triumph rather than ignominy for James II.⁸⁴

Ultimately, a pro-Court interpretation of the play seems to have been more readily adopted than any subversive reading. *Fog's* animadversions sourly note the popularity *Hurlothrumbo* achieved in spite of its apparent absurdity. This they saw as an indictment of theatregoers' taste and a mark of artistic decline under Walpole's neglect. At a time when complaint about Walpole's lack of patronage of merit had become a trope, his son's purchase of 30 copies of *Hurlothrumbo* was seen as ironically significant.⁸⁵ An earlier number of *Fog's Weekly* had mockingly encouraged Johnson as Administration sycophant:

Practice will make thy tow'ring Muse Experto,
Riches and Power revere, — n'er mind Deserto,
Thy next Task be the Praises of *Roberto*.⁸⁶

No doubt buoyed by such reports, in the second edition edition of the *Biographia Dramatica*, Isaac Reed embellished:

It is said that Sir Robert Walpole promoted the success of his piece as far as lay in his power, making it serve to engage the attention of the public from some state designs of his own, which were at that time ready to be put into execution.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ John Byrom was a known Jacobite. So also was the Duke of Wharton, apparently one of Johnson's early patrons (Johnson, *A Vision of Heaven*, preface). Interestingly, Byrom notes the presence of Henry St John Bolingbroke (Lord Oxford) amongst the audience on the first night—Bolingbroke had been a known Jacobite and was by this time nominal leader of the Patriot opposition, a grouping which was also to attract Prince Frederick to the cause: 'We had seven or eight Garters they say in the pit; I saw Lord Oxford they say the Prince has been told of *Hurlothrumbo* and will come and see it'; Byrom, *Private Journal*, Vol. 1 pt. 2 (2 April [1729]), 349.

⁸⁵ Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits*, 9-19. The list of subscribers to *Hurlothrumbo* was published in the second edition (1729).

⁸⁶ *Fog's Weekly Journal*, 7 June 1729.

⁸⁷ Isaac Reed, ed., *Biographia Dramatica* (1782), 259.

Such speculation persists in John Loftis's comment that there might have been a 'flirtation between the Little Theatre in the Haymarket and the Minister'.⁸⁸ Yet, like Addison's *Cato* (1713), which had created such a stir on both sides of the partisan divide, *Hurlothrumbo*'s politics remain enigmatic.⁸⁹

Johnson's political peregrinations may be opaque and of no relevance to contemporary partisan developments, but they do, once again, reflect the status of opera in British society. The dislike of unmeaning folly on the stage, which Johnson's 'operas' helped crystallize, was as we have seen itself political, associated in contemporary criticism with the degeneration of civil society in a welter of luxury. *Hurlothrumbo* and its successors were the antithesis of the true, 'manly' national heritage represented by Shakespeare and Congreve. At the same time, contemporaries recognised Johnson's political aspirations, one anonymous pamphleteer even suggesting that *The Blazing Comet* was plagiarised from that arch-political tract, *Cato*.⁹⁰

Johnson was participating (in his own deluded way) not only in the efflorescence of satirical ballad operas and afterpieces that followed *The Beggar's Opera*, but also in an operatic tradition which, as we have seen, focussed on the 'political' in the broadest sense and chimed with the contemporary nationalist climate. This thread of potential 'meaning' could help create the aura of gravitas of which, critics felt, so much contemporary theatre was in need. As the next chapter will show, others trying their hand at English opera in the 1730s ably exploited national themes that the Cheshire dancing master had also attempted. Johnson was

⁸⁸ Loftis, *Politics of Drama*, 104. This theory has largely been discounted by Hume, *Henry Fielding*, 80.

⁸⁹ Loftis, *Politics of Drama*, 57, 56-61 *passim*.

⁹⁰ '...behold her BLAZING-STAR./ Rise from the vast *profound*, and hang in air.../ And CATO, to a *Ballad-Opera* change:/ With smooth-fac'd Doggrel, burnish bright the Verse,/ And knead the

no Addison, of course: if his 'opera' initially achieved success similar to that of Addison's Roman drama, to many that only indicated how far Britain had slumped from the Spectatorial summit of virtue into luxury and nonsense. My examination of 'Hurlothrumbo' Johnson, the madman on stilts, as emblem of that decline has served to remind us of Italian opera's similarly emblematic role in British society. While contemporary report attests that Johnson's opera-cum-play-cum-pantomime medley could be read on several, conflicting levels, no such plurality seems to have existed for Italian opera in the minds of its antagonists. Corrupt even in its smallest, ornamental unit, Italian opera could be nothing other than the embodiment of foreign luxury in London.

Four

Ballads and Britons:

Imagined Community and the Continuity of 'English' Opera.

In this allegorizing Age, when all the real Persons of ancient and modern
History are exhausted, it is happy we can have Recourse to known Fables...
Gentleman's Magazine, November 1732, 1072

May not, to give a pleasing fancy scope,
And chear a patriot heart with patriot hope;
May not some great extensive genius raise
The name of Britain 'bove Athenian praise
Charles Churchill, *Rosciad* (1761)

Joseph Addison's *Spectator* is perhaps the best known early eighteenth-century periodical, its title a byword for the period's acute critical sensibility, its pages of enthusiastic enquiry fitting monument to what some call the Age of Reason.¹ Of the many commentaries on opera included in its pages, *Spectator* No. 5 (6 March 1711), critiquing the inadequacy of attempts at scenic verisimilitude on London's operatic stage, is justly renowned. Addison's tale of the undesirable (and wholly unmusical) results of releasing quantities of sparrows inside a theatre derives much of its pungency from the consequences of what Addison feels to be an improper juxtaposition of 'shadows and realities': sparrows and castrati alike escape pastoral fantasy to invade more sordid reality, penetrating 'a lady's bed-chamber' or perching 'upon a king's throne'.

As an example of the British suspicion of Italian opera, Addison's ridicule of the castrato Nicolini's exploits on the high seas of theatrical 'paste-board' is very familiar, but his *coup de grâce*—the penultimate section of his essay—is usually

¹ Maximillian Novak describes the influence of the *Spectator* on English manners and taste as 'only slightly less than that of the Bible' in his 'Introduction' to Edward A. and Lillian D. Bloom, *Educating the Audience: Addison, Steele, & Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Los Angeles, 1984), iii. This chapter derives from an article by the same title, published in the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 122 (1997), pp.24-51.

overlooked.² Here he reports on being ‘credibly informed, that there was once a Design of casting into an Opera the story of *Whittington* and his cat’. The theatre manager who has been offered this work rejects the libretto for its potential problems with vermin control (all those mice!)—proof, Addison seems to adduce, that native common sense will always triumph over Italianate posturing. This story does more than bear witness to British chauvinism, however. In suggesting the staging of an English folktale as the homespun antithesis to the pretensions of Italian opera, Addison strikes a chord that resonates throughout early eighteenth-century attempts to control operatic representation in Britain. This chapter addresses the scope and nature of that resonance, charting the part played by popular history and particularly the ballad in shaping the ideal of a theatrical and operatic form that—unlike Italian opera—could speak for the nation.

Inevitably, when ballad and opera are mentioned in the same breath, it is *The Beggar’s Opera* and its progeny that spring to mind. While not the focus here, Gay’s opera proves a useful point of departure. We are, perhaps, rather too used to the idea that *The Beggar’s Opera* was a work without precedent: as musicologists or theatre historians we mark with relief its formal originality in a period characterised by the experimental and the formally ambiguous.³ Paradoxically, as a musically uninspired work created chiefly as an act of rebellion (against Italian opera, the government, society), Gay’s enormously successful opera has come to stand for the general ‘failure’ of opera—Italian, but also English—in the eighteenth century.⁴

² See for example, *Source Readings in Music History: From Classical Antiquity to the Romantic Era*, ed. Oliver Strunk (London, 1952), 511–7.

³ Calhoun Winton, *John Gay and the London Theatre* (Kentucky, 1993), 109. Much excellent work on backgrounds to *The Beggar’s Opera* only reinforces its isolation, though Lowell Lindgren makes a strong case for the work’s stylistic similarity to Giovanni Bononcini’s *Camilla* (1696); Lindgren, ‘*Camilla* and *The Beggar’s Opera*’, *Philological Quarterly* 59 (1980), 44–61.

⁴ On the success of Gay and the failure of ‘genuine’ opera in English, see, for example, Donald Grout, *A Short History of Opera* (2nd edn, New York, 1965), 263; Richard Platt, ‘Theatre Music I’, *Blackwell’s History of Music in Britain: The Eighteenth Century*, ed. H. Diack Johnstone and Roger

This chapter will suggest that it may be as fruitful to see *The Beggar's Opera* within a tradition that encompassed more of the British musical theatre than ballad opera alone—namely, an intermarriage of popular history and theatre that was part of what Roger Fiske describes as the ‘fashion for delving in the past’ of the first half of the century.⁵

The century's haphazard practice of ‘character migration’—of appropriation of much-loved or ‘classic’ personas for new stories—was, as one commentator has recently demonstrated, a widespread phenomenon in large part responsible for the creation of a broad-based ‘imagined community’ of readers during this period.⁶ In the case of ballads and English opera, I suggest, this migratory pattern not only led eventually to the formation of a ‘reading’ community, but was also generated by the ideology of nationhood that, as we have seen, assumed such importance in other areas of the arts. Ideology, indeed, may have had as much influence on the fortunes of ‘English’ opera as the musical merits of the individual works apparently did. Although, in musicological terms, an investigation of the relationship between ballad and theatre might be rationalised by the light it sheds on the period's musical theatre, it is the manifestation of the ideology of nationhood, not the works or composers themselves, that is initially the focus of my discussion. To put it another way, if we begin, not with the principle of entertainment under which so many of these works have failed (to our ears at least), but with the ethic of cultural education, it may be possible to discern some coherence in a period that has often seemed one of miscalculation and aimlessness. Returning in the final section of this chapter to one extraordinarily successful piece, Henry Carey's and J. F. Lampe's *Dragon of*

Fiske (Oxford, 1990), 96-158.

⁵ Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (1973; rev. edn, Oxford, 1986), 180.

⁶ David Allen Brewer, ‘Imaginative Expansion and the Afterlives of Texts in Eighteenth-Century Britain’ (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999); see in particular, chapter three,

Wantley (1737), we can perceive the musical and ideological not as contradictory impulses in the work of eighteenth-century English opera, but rather as complementarily complicit in its fate.

Given the patterns of national identity generated in other art forms, it is appropriate that we look for an interest in harnessing history to ideology in the creation of 'English operas'. How and why this interest manifested itself through popular history and balladry should gradually become clear; it will also become evident why history seems to have masked the traces of this manifestation. In this, Addison's *Spectator* essay proves a touchstone. The ambiguity that characterises his treatment of the Whittington tale—a third-hand story of 'once upon a time'—is simply a manifestation of the linking of past to present and myth to reality that inevitably gives a fluidity to formal, factual and temporal boundaries, as we saw in chapter two. But, as this fluidity finds expression not only in the interpretative malleability of the texts, but also in authorial anonymity and ambivalence, Addison's principal misgiving and concern—for the blending of shadows and realities—configures itself within the discourse surrounding English, as well as Italian, opera.

Uses of the ballad

In *Spectator* No. 5, Whittington and his cat served simply as counterbalance to the excesses of Italian opera, but Addison was not averse to using a ballad tale for more serious, even polemical purposes. The foray he himself had made into the realm of opera with the highly politicised *Rosamond* (1707) used a story already extremely well known, both as a historical ballad, and as a 'droll' or popular theatre piece

performed at the London fairs. In 1707, the ancient tale of Henry II hiding his beautiful mistress, Rosamond, in a bower at Woodstock, Oxfordshire provided the perfect vehicle for complimenting the Duke of Marlborough, who was rewarded for his recent victory at Blenheim with a palace built on the same site in Woodstock. Addison's opera alludes both to the new palace and to the Duke's victory through the reassurance of a dream sent to the similarly warfaring Henry.⁷ His espousal of the native tradition of balladry was more than an expeditious form of political flattery, however. Addison dedicated an entire *Spectator* essay to consideration of the literary merits of the famous old ballad 'Chevy Chase', justifying his decision by asserting that 'it is impossible that any thing should be universally tasted and approved by a multitude, though they are only the rabble of a nation, which hath not in it some peculiar aptness to please and gratify the mind of man'.⁸ As a 'professed admirer' of his country's literary tradition, Addison felt that the 'antiquated song' of his forbears could stand the test of comparison with the heroic poems of the ancients. His suggestion was not greeted with universal enthusiasm; indeed, one 'William Wagstaffe' took him up on the challenge, publishing a satirical *Comment upon the History of Tom Thumb* that same year.⁹ Addison must have known that to mention the works of Homer, Virgil and Milton in the same breath as the 'ordinary song or ballad' would lay him open to the ridicule of his classically minded peers.

The proposition that these old tales merited consideration as works of historical (and aesthetic) interest was not to be lightly dismissed, however. Some twelve years later, in 1723, the first volume of the anonymously edited *Collection of*

⁷ The opera was 'the most graceful dramatic compliment' of many made to the Duke that season; John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford, 1963), 37.

⁸ *The Spectator*, 21 May 1711. The (dangerous) universality of the basic principles of taste is well discussed in John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), 87-121.

⁹ *Addison and Steele: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (London,

Old Ballads, attributed to the poet Ambrose Philips (1674-1749) was published.

Although clearly designed as a response to (or continuation of) Addison's work, the editorial tone was ambivalent. The *Collection*'s title-page advertises its contents as 'Corrected from the best and most Ancient Copies Extant'—an early claim to historical fidelity that signals the work's self-importance—but also entices the reader with the promise of 'Introductions Historical, Critical, or Humourous'. The frontispiece and preface similarly offer light-hearted and over-literal interpretations of Addison. The plate facing the title page assembles the busts of ancient and modern poets—Cowley and Suckling take their place alongside Homer, Pindar, Anacreon and Horace—watching over a reclining muse, from whose pen flows a succession of ballads enthusiastically taken up by four musical putti (see Figure 4.1). While Addison raised his balladeer to the level of Homer, in the preface to this first volume, Philips lowers his 'old *Homer*' to

nothing more than a blind *Ballad-singer*, who writ Songs of the Siege of *Troy*, and the Adventures of *Ulysses*; and playing the Tunes upon his Harp, sung 'em from Door to Door, til at his Death somebody though fit to collect all his Ballads, and by a little connecting 'em, gave us the *Iliad* and *Odysses* [*sic*], which since that Time have been so much admired.¹⁰

Yet Philips's attention to detail in the introductions to the ballads themselves (some longer than the pieces they accompany) proves more lasting than his forced humour, and by the third volume, the approbation his edition had met with—not least from the King himself—prompted Philips to recant his earlier jocular tone, averring that he was 'not very fond of the Title of a Buffoon'.¹¹ From the outset,

1980), 232-47.

¹⁰ [Ambrose Philips], *A Collection of Old Ballads*, 3 vols (1723, 1724, 1725), I (3rd edn, 1727), iii-iv. I am grateful to Roger Savage for pointing out that Philips's description of 'old Homer' had precedent in the form of John Gay's Sixth Pastoral, 'Saturday, or the Flights' in *The Shepherd's Week* (1714). Gay not only parodies Virgil's Eclogue VI, but also provides his tawdry balladeer with a resume of popular ballads not dissimilar to those included in Philips's *Collection*. Addison had criticized Cowley as 'gothic' in *Spectator*, 21 May 1711.

¹¹ [Ambrose Philips], *A Collection of Old Ballads* III (1725), ii. Volume and page numbers for the *Collection* will hereafter be given in the body of the text.

Figure 4.1: Title-page and frontispiece to the first volume of *A Collection of Old Ballads* (1723). By Permission of the British Library; shelfmark: 238 h.17.



Vol. I.

J. Pine inv. & Sculp.

A
COLLECTION
OF OLD
BALLADS.
Corrected from the best and most
Ancient COPIES Extant.
WITH
INTRODUCTIONS
HISTORICAL, CRITICAL,
OR HUMOROUS.

Illustrated with COPPER PLATES.

*Let no nice Sir despise the hapless Dame,
Because Recording BALLADS chaunt her Name.
Those Venerable Ancient Song-Enditers
Soar'd many a Pitch above our modern Writers.
With rough Majestick Force they mov'd the Heart,
And Strength and Nature made amends for Art.*

ROWE.

The THIRD EDITION.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. Roberts in Warwick-Lane; D. Leach,
in Black and White-Court in the Old Baily; and
J. Battely, at the Dove in Pater-Noster-Row.
M DCC XXVII.

Philips's apparent desire to find a place for balladry in the nation's heritage seems to prefigure the later eighteenth-century 'ballad revival'. In the preface to the third volume Philips gives both antiquarian and aesthetic significance to ballads, when he justifies his *Collection*:

our old Songs I think ought to be preserv'd, and some of them are really valuable. But I was determin'd not to give a bare Collection of Ballads, but chose to illustrate them with Historical Introductions for the particular Instruction of the younger, and the general Benefit of my Readers.... History, especially our own, has for many Years been too much neglected, and the generality of *English*-Men are such strangers to ancient facts and the Customs of their Kingdom, that they are easily misled by any Six-penny Pamphleteer. (III, iii-iv)

In emphasising his restitutive role, Philips moves the ballads beyond the merely antiquarian, placing them in the realm of history, where, as we have seen, relevant interpretation took precedence over mere authenticity in an author's attempt to find the most useful application and meaning for his readers. With his provision of both information and interpretation, Philips attempts to guide his audience to a proper understanding of the value of their history.

It seems curious, then, that Philips belies his emphasis on the broad educative value of his work by starting the first volume not with the plentifully available stories of England's great monarchs, but rather with the two ballads 'Rosamond's Overthrow' and 'Fair Rosamond and King Henry II'. We do not have to seek far for a reason: in his introduction to these ballads, Philips notes not only Addison's success with his opera, but also that

Mr. *Addison* (than whom no one could be suppos'd to be better acquainted with History) seems in his Opera of *Rosamond*, to have as much Regard to the Authority of these Old Songs, as to that of the best Historians' (I, 11).

Was the decision to give these works pride of place simply a marketing tactic, a way for the editor to ensure sales and promote his work through association with the

famous Addison? Quite probably it was. But this is not the only work in the *Colleciton* linked to the theatre: later in the first volume, for instance, Philips introduces 'The Lamentation of Jane Shore' by pointing out that Nicholas Rowe, in his highly popular play *Jane Shore* (1714), has 'a great Regard to the Authority of this old Ballad, and has follow'd it more nearly than any History we have extant' (I, 147). In these and other citations, Philips seems to suggest that analagous stage productions could confirm the ballad's relevance to contemporary society as a means of determining the import of history.

More curious to us is the possibility that this relationship could work the other way: that contemporary theatre could justify its place in society by production of ballad stories. The contents of the *Collection*, listed in Table 4.1, show a number of tales that also appeared in some guise on the stage. As the proportion of what we could call historical narrative ballads declined in the subsequent two volumes, giving way to drinking songs and Scottish ballads, these volumes include fewer stage-related works. However, many of the tales in all three volumes maintained a tenacious hold as drolls or street theatre performed at the London Fairs. Other plays with ballad associations, like Rowe's *Jane Shore* (cf. I, 145) and Nahum Tate's Shakespeare adaptation, *The History of King Lear* (1681, cf. II, 8), achieved repeated performance in the major theatres throughout the early part of the century. There is also a particularly strong showing of ballad-related works in the 1720s to 1730s, several of which have important musical content.

The contents of the first volume show the relationship between ballad and theatre in a striking light. Fourteen of the first twenty ballads bear some relation to stage works. In his introduction to 'Cupid's Revenge' (I, 138), Philips linked the ballad (I, 140) to his own tragedy, *Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester* (1723), mounted

Table One: A Collection of Old Ballads, Vol. 1 (London, 1723), and eighteenth-century British theatre

A Collection of Old Ballads, vol 1:Contents	Stage works	Playwright/Librettist; Composer	Date
1. Rosamond's Overthrow	'Fair Rosamond'	[London Fairs ¹]	
2. Fair Rosamond and King Henry II	<i>Rosamond</i>	Joseph Addison; Thomas Clayton	1707
		Joseph Addison; Thomas Arne	1733
	'Rosamond' [unpublished]	John Alcock; John Alcock	[1743]
	<i>Henry and Rosamond. A Tragedy</i>	William Hawkins, M.A.	1749
3. Queen Eleanor's Confession			
4. St. George and the Dragon	'St. George and the Dragon'	[London Fairs]	
5. The Seven Champions of Christendom			
6. The Dragon of Wantley	<i>The Dragon of Wantley. A Burlesque Opera</i>	Henry Carey; J.F. Lampe	1737
7. King Alfred and the Shepherd	<i>Alfred: a masque</i> ²	James Thomson & Alfred Mallet; Thomas Arne	1740
	<i>Alfred the Great; Deliverer of his Country. A tragedy.</i>	'By the author of The friendly rivals.'	1753
	<i>Alfred. A tragedy</i>	[John Home]	1777
	<i>The Patriot King; or, Alfred and Elvida. An historical</i>	Alexander Bicknell	1788

¹ Although it is difficult to tell how much continuity exists between one fairground production and the next, for clarity's sake, the many variant titles on the same subject have not been listed, unless the different titles are of particular interest. References for all productions listed as 'London Fairs' can be found in Sybil Rosenfeld, *The Theatre of the London Fairs in the 18th Century* (Cambridge, 1960). See also *The London Stage*.

² For details of the later 'Oratorio' and 'Opera' adaptations of this work, see Michael Burden, *Garrick, Arne and the Masque of Alfred: A Case Study in National, Theatrical and Musical Politics* (Lewiston, 1994).

	<i>tragedy</i> <i>Alfred. An historical tragedy</i> <i>Sketch of Alfred the Great: or the Danish invasion. A grand historical ballet of action</i>	[Ebenezer Rhodes] 'As performed at Sadler's Wells.'	1789 1797
8. King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield: Part I Part 2	<i>The King and the Miller of Mansfield</i> <i>Il Re alla Caccia, a new comic opera, taken from The miller of Mansfield</i> <i>Sir John Cockle at Court</i>	Robert Dodsley Giovanni Gualberto Bottarelli; Felice Alessandri Robert Dodsley	1737 1769 1738
9. Robinhood's Wedding, &c 10. Robinhood and Little John 11. Robinhood and the Tanner 12. The Rescue of Will Stutly by Robinhood	'Robin Hood and Little John' <i>Robin Hood. An Opera</i> <i>Robin Hood. A New Musical Entertainment</i> <i>Robin Hood; or Sherwood Forest: A Comic Opera</i>	[London Fairs] 'As it is Perform'd at Lee's and Harper's Great Theatrical Booth in Bartholomew-Fair.' [Moses Mendez; Charles Burney] Leonard MacNally; William Shield	1730 1751 1784
13. The Fall of Queen Eleanor	<i>Edward and Eleonora</i>	James Thomson	1739
14. Chevy-Chace	<i>Chevy Chace; or, Douglas and Percy; a 'new historical pantomime'</i>	'As performed at Sadler's Wells'	1795
15. The Banishment of the Dukes of Hereford and Norfolk			
16. Sir Richard Whittington's Advancement	'Whittington, Lord Mayor of London'; 'The True and Ancient History of Sir Richard Whittington'	[London Fairs]	
17. Cupid's Revenge	<i>Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester. A Tragedy</i>	Ambrose Philips	1723
18. The Lamentation of Jane Shore	<i>The tragedy Jane Shore</i>	Nicholas Rowe	1714

19. King Edward and Jane Shore				
20. Sir Andrew Barton's Death				
21. Johnny Armstrong's last good Night				
22. Armstrong and Musgrave's Contention				
23. Prince of England's Courtship to the King of France's Daughter				
24. The Life and Death of Thomas Stukley				
25. Queen Elizabeth's Champion				
26. The London Prentice	'Amurath the Great, Emperor of Turkey: Containing the Distress'd Loves of Achmet and Selima; or, The London Prentice's Glory' <i>The Christian Hero</i> 'The Turkish Court, or The London Prentice' [unpublished]	[London Fairs] George Lillo Laetitia Pilkington	1735 1748	
27. Lady Arabella and lord Seymour				
28. The Scotchman outwitted				
29. The Lady turn'd Serving-Man				
30. The Children in the Wood	'A Poppy Play called Patient Grissell and the Babes in the Wood' <i>The Children in the Wood, an Opera</i>	[London Fairs] [Thomas Morton:] Samuel Arnold	1793	
31. The Devonshire Nymph				
32. The Bride's Burial				

33. The unfortunate Love of a Lancashire Gentleman				
34. The Lady's Fall				
35. Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinor				
36. Patient Grissel	'Patient Grizill' <i>Griselda</i>		[London Fairs] Paolo Rolli; Giovanni Bononcini	1721
37. Jerman's Wife, or Bateman	'Bateman's Ghost'; 'Bateman, or the Unhappy Marriage': 'a dramatic opera', ³		[London Fairs]	
38. The Suffolk Miracle				
39. Gilderoy				
40. Bonny Dundee				
41. Slighted Jockey				
42. Jockey and Jenny				
43. Jockey's Courtship				
44. The Scotch Lass's Complaint				

³ Rosenfeld, *London Fairs*, 31.

the same year the first volume was produced. The story of 'Patient Grissel' (I, 252) was another that had received recent treatment, in Giovanni Bononcini's opera *Griselda* (1722), which contemporary report had linked explicitly to the ballad original.¹² 'Patient Grissel', like other popular ballads, including 'St George and the Dragon' (I, 23) and 'Sir Richard Whittington's Advancement' (I, 130), is also recorded as a fairground droll.¹³ Perhaps most interesting are some of the earliest titles. The 'Rosamond' story, as we have seen, appeared as an opera in 1707, revived with new music by Thomas Arne in 1733. 'The Dragon of Wantley' (I, 37) was given a setting by Henry Carey and J. F. Lampe as a 'burlesque opera' in 1737; 'King Alfred and the Shepherd' (I, 43) first reached the stage as *Alfred* in a private performance for the Prince of Wales in 1740, when it was given the title of 'masque'. *The King and the Miller of Mansfield* and *Sir John Cockle at Court* were popular afterpieces by Robert Dodsley, based on the ballad 'King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield' (I, 53, 58) and performed in the 1737-38 theatrical seasons. Finally, various *Robin Hood* stories were cobbled together: an 'Opera' in 1730, a 'Musical Entertainment' in 1751, and a 'Comic Opera' in 1784.

Concordances between ballad and theatrical work do not always extend much beyond their titles. It would be far-fetched to imagine that the link between the *Collection* and the 1730s' efflorescence of ballad-related drama is much more than fortuitous. The *Collection of Old Ballads* is, after all, itself a rather haphazard selection, leaving out other historical narrative ballads that were evidently the basis for stage productions (such as the tale of Guy of Warwick), and including a number of ephemeral ballads featuring the ubiquitous Jockey, Jenny, Pattie and Peggy. This

¹² Lowell E. Lindgren, 'A Bibliographic Scrutiny of Dramatic Works Set by Giovanni and his Brother Antonio-Maria Bononcini' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1972), 260-1.

¹³ Details of fairground productions can be found in Sybil Rosenfeld, *The Theatre of the London Fairs in the 18th Century* (Cambridge, 1960).

is no British *Orlando furioso*, or *Gerusalemme liberata*, no perpetual source for dramatic inspiration. Why, then, did so many playwrights and composers turn to the ballad or the folk story for inspiration?

Inspiration is perhaps the wrong word. Taking a cue from the collector himself, we discover from both his frontispiece with its busts of ancient and modern poets and his (albeit humorous) preface and introductions that what was sought was not originality but precedent. There was nothing new in this: as we saw in chapter one, a belief in the uniformity of human nature and in cyclical patterns of history underpinned contemporary historiography and religion; classical and biblical history were regarded as models for (and warnings to) modern British society throughout the eighteenth century. What was new was the type of history being promoted. The collector of *Old Ballads* was not alone in his enthusiasm to assert that knowledge of popular native history was a necessity for the proper development of British consciousness. Howard Weinbrot's recent study, *Britannia's Issue*, traces the growth of a national (literary) identity through the eighteenth century. In his introduction, Weinbrot alights on the frontispiece to another collection—Matthew Pilkington's *Poems on Several Occasions*—that, like Philips's frontispiece, allows modern British authors to share the laurels with their classical forbears, to illustrate the way in which British authors were beginning to loosen the shackles of their classical past.¹⁴ In history, as in literature, Britons were turning away from the classics: even so vehement a supporter of the ancients as Sir William Temple commented that 'I have often complained that so ancient and noble a Nation as ours, so renowned by the Fame of their Arms and Exploits abroad, so applauded and envied ... should not yet have one good or approved general History of England.'

¹⁴ Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, 4-5.

Such attitudes of course assumed political overtones, and therefore political agency: Temple's comment came from his *Introduction to the History of England*, which dwelt largely on the reign of William I, apparently as a compliment to that other invader, Temple's friend William III of Orange.¹⁵

The widespread fervour for war with Spain in the late 1720s and 1730s gave an ever-present but fluid national spirit the chance for consolidation under the banner of the loosely assembled 'Patriot' opposition. This consolidation inevitably involved defining the nation through links forged with the indigenous past. In his *Remarks on the History of England*, Henry St John Bolingbroke, intellectual leader of the 'patriot' group, called for a return to 'the true old English spirit, which prevailed in the days of our forefathers, and which must always be national, since it has no direction but to the national interest'.¹⁶ Bolingbroke's *Remarks*, first published in the weekly journal *The Craftsman* (1730-1), naturally offered a highly partisan interest in the promotion of the nation's spirit of liberty. Indeed, what one modern commentator has described as the 'politics of nostalgia' was crucial to formation of a political opposition that sought to justify its appeal to the populace, not on partisan, but on nationalistic grounds.¹⁷

In this context it is hardly surprising that, as Christine Gerrard and others have shown, the patriotically-minded Briton should also find an interest in the literary reproduction of popular national history. When *Gustavus Vasa*, Henry Brooke's highly partisan play about the eponymous Swede, was published in 1739, the Countess of Pomfret commented that as 'the customs, actions, and fortunes, that

¹⁵ William Temple, *An Introduction to the History of England* (1695), sig. A2; cited in Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (London, 1991), 293, with further discussion on 292-302.

¹⁶ Gerrard, 7.

¹⁷ Isaac Kramnik, *Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole* (London, 1968), 24-5.

most resemble our own, must be the most interesting to us ... I have often wondered why so many of our English heroes should lie forgotten?’¹⁸ Lady Pomfret’s query, as we have seen, articulated a wider concern. Though few had the skill, time or courage to embark on a history of England (or Britain) as a whole, many political writers were to attempt a history or an epic eulogising past monarchs for the further education and gratification of the public. Those in Opposition endeavouring to create Frederick the Prince of Wales as a new ‘English hero’ were mindful that these stories could provide an example both to the people and to a future monarch. When George Lyttelton, friend to the Prince and an Opposition leader, wrote to Pope in 1741 describing plans for his *History of the Life of Henry the Second*, he emphasised a desire to appeal to his countrymen and his prince, hoping that for both it would be ‘a Work of some Instruction and Pleasure’.¹⁹ But the *History* Lyttelton eventually produced was mammoth—hardly the most accessible of studies. Though a growing print culture was granting access to the printed word for more people, the money, or indeed the reading ability required for such partisan histories as Lyttelton’s *Life of Henry the Second*, or Rapin de Thoyras’s enormously popular *History of England*, translated in 15 volumes, would have been beyond all but a relatively small segment of the population.²⁰

Those with limited education and spending power were, nonetheless, interested in reading: there was a large variety of chapbooks and ‘penny histories’ available for the lower end of the market.²¹ The term ‘penny histories’ gives some indication of the mytho-historical character of many of the stories published in this

¹⁸ *Correspondence between Frances, Countess of Hertford ... and Henrietta Louisa, Countess of Pomfret*, 3 vols, [ed. W. Bingley] (1805), I, 89-90; cited in James Sambrook, *James Thomson (1700-1748): a Life* (Oxford, 1991), 193.

¹⁹ Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 205.

²⁰ Rapin’s *History* was translated by Nicholas Tindal between 1725 and 1731.

²¹ Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Education in Eighteenth Century England* (London, 1971), 115-25.

format, but Pat Rogers has shown that there was also some attempt to cater for expanding tastes with abridgements of popular modern ‘classics’ such as *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*; and it would seem that publishers were also aware of the public’s attraction to the theatre.²² Tiny duodecimo histories were prepared for publication at the same time as the appearance of historical plays, for example *The Life and Character of Jane Shore... Humbly offer’d to the Readers and Spectators of her Tragedy Written by Mr. Rowe* (1714), *The Memoirs of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester; (As they relate to the Story of Mr. Phillip’s [sic.] Tragedy of that Name)* (1723), or *The History of the Life and Reign of the Valiant Prince Edward ... and his Princess Eleonora. On which History is founded a Play, written by Mr. Thomson, call’d Edward and Eleonora* (1739). The authors of these little histories might be the ‘Six-penny Pamphleteers’ that the collector of *Old Ballads* had railed against, but, like him, they espoused an educative purpose. The author, or rather compiler, of the *Life ... of Jane Shore* designed to save those who knew little of history from ‘the Trouble of seeking after Books, which are not very common, and turning o’er large Volumes to find out those Passages, which lye together here in a little compass’.²³

Of course, these pamphleteers were simply reclaiming material already theirs in the form of ballads.²⁴ The dialogue between popular literature and the theatre is worth noting, however: as students of eighteenth-century theatre have acknowledged, the diversification of theatrical entertainment offered in the late

²² Pieces linked to theatrical performance include the tales of Guy of Warwick and of the Seven Champions, both derived from medieval romances; Neuburg, *Popular Education*, 116; Pat Rogers, ‘Classics and Chapbooks’, *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (Leicester, 1982), 27-45.

²³ *The Life and Character of Jane Shore. Collected from our Best Historians, chiefly from the Writings of Sir Thomas More ... Humbly offer’d to the Readers and Spectators of her Tragedy Written by Mr. Rowe. Inscrib’d to Mrs Oldfield* (2nd edn, 1714), sig. A2v.

²⁴ A point Rogers makes with regard to the chapbook adaptation of Thomas Deloney’s works; Rogers, ‘Classics and Chapbooks’, 27.

1720s and 1730s indicated an equivalent broadening in the theatre-going public.²⁵

As it happened, Lady Pomfret's query about forgotten 'English heroes' was already well answered in the repertory of the theatre booths of London's summer fairs. If British writers were to nurture the virtue of their countrymen or stir up their fighting spirit, they needed to employ just such popular forms and accessible media. One of the best ways to overcome contemporary individual and societal differences was to appeal to a mythical shared past. We might recall that it was in this spirit that the Ladies' Shakespeare Club was founded in the late 1730s, designed to bring pressure to bear on theatrical managers to mount the works—particularly the histories and tragedies—of the man then coming to be seen as the national author *par excellence*.²⁶

Those aspiring to the creation of English opera also partook of this ethos. Henry Carey, who lambasted his fellow Britons for the 'luxury and effeminacy' of their Age, may have been the most vocal of the composers and librettists attempting to break the hegemony of Italian opera, but he was by no means alone, nor was he the most prolific. The comic potential for aligning popular stories with opera was realised by Eliza Haywood and William Hatchett with their adaptation of Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb; or, the Tragedy of Tragedies* as *The Opera of Operas* in 1733. Thomas Arne's use of indigenous subjects seems to have begun that same year with the resetting of Addison's *Rosamond* as part of the 'English opera' campaign of 1732-33. His song 'Was ever Nymph like Rosamond?' proved a lasting attraction, and Arne continued to employ topics of 'national' interest throughout his career, including Milton's *Comus* (1738, perhaps prepared in answer

²⁵ *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 1, cxlvii; Milton Percival, *Political Ballads Illustrating the Administration of Sir Robert Walpole* (Oxford, 1916), xxvii.

²⁶ Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford, 1992), 146-58.

to Rolli's *Sabrina* of 1737), the ballad opera *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* (1741), *Eliza* (1754) and *Britannia* (1755). Another revival that proved extremely popular in the 1730s was *King Arthur*, mounted by Henry Giffard as *Merlin: Or The British Enchanter. And King Arthur, The British Worthy* at the end of 1735. The 1735 production converted Dryden's politically ambiguous original into an encomium to the House of Hanover, adding patriotic material in which Merlin unfolds before Arthur 'A glorious scene of future Amity ... Where from the German shore a stately Horse/Advances joining to our British Lyon'.²⁷ Some measure of this work's success is its appearance (presumably in modified form) at Southwark Fair in 1738, as *Merlin, The British Enchanter; or, St. George for England*. Giffard's production enticed viewers in with the inclusion of imaginative new scenes, one of which was 'an Exact Representation of Merlin's Cave, as in the Royal Gardens at Richmond'. Thomas Gray described this scene to Horace Walpole as 'a British temple enough to make one go back a thousand years; & really be in ancient Britain'.²⁸

Giffard was a clever manager whose inspired scenic embellishment delighted theatregoers with the conceit of a mythical England, transplanted and flourishing under the benign auspices of the present dynasty. As we might recall from discussion of *Ariadne* in chapter two, he was not alone in recognising that an image or idea from popular history could resonate within a broader cultural consciousness; as Benedict Anderson puts it, 'It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny'.²⁹ For the early eighteenth century, when history was already destiny,

²⁷ Published under a variant title: [John Dryden], *King Arthur; or, Merlin, the British Inchanter. A Dramatic Opera, As it is performed at the Theatre in Goodman's Fields* (1736), Act 5, lines 25ff. Gerrard notes that even this production could have been a political two-edged sword (119-20).

²⁸ *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 727; vol. 1, 537, 541.

²⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983), 12. For investigation of the shared iconography of visual and literary satire, see Vincent Carretta, *The Snarling Muse: Verbal and Visual*

chance came in the opportune alignment of contemporary and historical events. The realisation that the very contingency and mutability of their ballad heritage could allow writers to improvise continuities between past and present and between varying social strata seems to have coloured the responses of many who brought ballad stories to the theatre. This shaping of popular apocrypha gave it, in Addison's words, the 'peculiar aptness' to legitimise ideals of nationhood.

Three ballads in the theatre

Addison's and Philips's interest in ballad stories may have gone largely unremarked; that of another author has not. In 1728, more than fifteen years after the *Spectator's* musings on Dick Whittington, and five years after Philips published his first volume of the *Collection*, the anonymous author of that facetious commentary on London's entertainments, *The Touch-stone*, took note of Addison's jocular suggestion, embellishing on the story thus:

A late eminent ingenious Author propos'd to the then Master of the OPERA-STAGE, *Whittington and his Cat*; and went so far in the Design, as to procure a Puss or two, who could pur tolerably in Time and Tune: But the Inconveniencies arising from the Number of Vermin requisite to be destroy'd, in order to keep up to the Truth of the Story, blasted that Project.³⁰

The author of *The Touch-stone* also took the idea to heart, however: the popular tale that Addison had offered as a moral became in *The Touch-stone* a subject for genuine, if mocking, consideration. The author, fulfilling a promise to satisfy those 'True Britons, and staunch Protestants' who rail against Italian opera, devoted a quarter of his discussion of theatre music to the idea that the English fable

Satire from Pope to Churchill (Philadelphia, 1983).

³⁰ *The Touch-stone, or, Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological Essays on the reigning Diversions of the Town* (1728), 22. While the old attribution of *The Touch-stone* to James Ralph has been discredited, Lowell Lindgren has recently put forward Robert Samber as another candidate for authorship; Lowell E. Lindgren, 'Another Critic named Samber whose "Particular historical significance has gone almost entirely unnoticed"', *Festa Musicologica: Essays in Honor of*

or ballad story could serve as the basis for a nationally distinctive opera. His proposals for embellishment on a variety of ballad stories are detailed and entertaining, but the only suggestion known to have been put into effect was that for 'The Dragon of Wantcliff'.³¹ *The Touch-stone's* outline, beginning with 'a Chorus of Men, Women, and Children, whose Bread and Butter, Milk-Pottage or Relations the Dragon had devour'd' and ending with 'the Combat ... the Dragon's Death, and a grand Chorus of the whole Country' was followed closely by Henry Carey and J. F. Lampe for their 1737 *Dragon of Wantley*.

The extent of *The Touch-stone's* critical enterprise has made it the subject of regular scholarly notice, but the generally facetious tone has deterred most from considering his ruminations.³² A belief that the author of this commentary was speaking with tongue planted firmly in cheek has only been encouraged by the fact that Carey's *Dragon* was produced in similarly satirical vein, as a burlesque opera.³³ But if, as Ruth Smith has recently shown, other of *The Touch-stone's* hints could have meaning for the creation of oratorio, its advice on the subject of English opera and balladry may also need to be reassessed: whatever the sincerity of the author's suggestions, it is possible that the ideas raised in his pages reflected genuine preoccupations.³⁴ Certainly, an investigation of the way in which a cluster of ballad-

George J. Buelow, ed. Thomas J. Mathiesen and Benito V. Rivera (Stuyvesant, New York, 1995), 407-34.

³¹ *The Touch-stone*, 21, and discussion on pp. 21-30. The author's suggestions included 'St George and the Dragon', 'Tom Thumb', 'The Children in the Wood', and many others; he clearly knew the *Collection of Old Ballads*, a work compiled by a 'judicious Antiquary, with learned Observations and Annotations, by which means many remarkable Transactions are preserv'd in those Sing-song Annals, which History has neglected' (24).

³² Dennis Arundell, *The Critic at the Opera* (London, 1957), 241-9; Irving Lowens, 'The Touch-stone (1728): A Neglected View of London Opera', *MQ* 45 (1959), 325-42; Dennis Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe* (Detroit, 1985), 44-7. Lowell Lindgren, assigning authorship of *The Touch-stone* to Robert Samber, takes his praise of Italian opera in the first chapter at face value, but also notes Samber's favour for the didactic value of ballad stories; Lindgren, 'Another Critic named Samber', 429.

³³ Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 45-6.

³⁴ Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge, 1995), 64-6.

related works from the late 1730s—including that supposedly light-hearted burlesque opera, *The Dragon of Wantley*—used their ballad links will suggest that balladry's influence on the theatre should be taken more seriously.

Satire: *The Dragon of Wantley*

Carey's and Lampe's comic masterpiece announced its theatrical contingency in the qualifying title 'burlesque opera': a willingness to 'lop', 'chop' and 'eke out' its sources was part of the process of satirical re-creation. The authors had time to work up their burlesque; *The Dragon of Wantley* had apparently been waiting some years for performance at Drury Lane before it was mounted at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, and then Covent Garden.³⁵ Although there is no single target for the satire, Carey, as others have pointed out, seems to have worked freely from both the ballad and from *The Touch-stone*'s suggestions.³⁶ It has not been noted that he also used the *Collection of Old Ballads*, from which he mockingly purloined Philips's introduction to *The Dragon*, giving the author the title 'Mr. Rousillon'.³⁷

Carey's and Lampe's burlesque humour seems to have been aimed primarily at Italian opera. *The Dragon*'s imaginative interpretation of its ballad progenitor exploited the operatic furore between Faustina and Cuzzoni (as Gay had done some years previously), by supplementing a battle tale of Yorkshire squire and local dragon with the more bitter combat between Squire Moore's past and present

³⁵ In his preface to the sixth edition of *The Dragon of Wantley* Carey complained that Fleetwood, manager of Drury Lane 1734-46, had promised production of *The Dragon* for some years before he and Lampe took matters into their own hands.

³⁶ In addition to similarities of plot between *The Touch-stone*'s and Carey's approach to the 'Dragon' ballad, the important sixth edition of *The Dragon* bears the motto 'Ridiculum acri Fortius & melius' ('Ridicule often settles an important affair better and more effectively than severity', Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 52), also used on the title page of *The Touch-stone*.

³⁷ A concise discussion of concordances between the ballad, *The Touch-stone*'s commentary and the burlesque opera can be found in Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 44-7. Carey also mimics Philips's prefatory style, recommending his work for the enlightenment of children; Carey was no friend to Philips, for whom he had already coined the graceless nom de plume 'Namby Pamby' in a poem by that title (1725).

mistresses. In production, the story was evidently enhanced by sartorial and perhaps musical attacks on individual singers.³⁸ Advertisements for the first production in the Little Haymarket theatre alluded to the castrato, ‘the Divine Farinello’, and the ‘two beautiful Rivals’.³⁹ In its brief discussion of *The Dragon, The Usefulness of the Stage* (1738), one of many pamphlets following the 1737 Licensing Act to continue the debate over control on the vices of the stage, apparently saw such personal attack as fundamental.⁴⁰

I know not how the Author of that tip top Piece of Wit, Humour, and Satyr, will come of [*sic.*] in respect of the Italian Caponiers, for I am informed it has noited them to a Purpose; and he being a Singer himself, I know no better Way than to go and Sing with them, as he is heavier than either of them by two S[enesino]s, he may chance to drown their Voices.⁴¹

The excess and agility of an operatic voice was, as we have seen, equated with inverted or monstrous behaviour in such works as Johnson’s *Hurllothrumbo*, Henry Fielding’s *Eurydice* (1737), and Carey’s *Chrononhotonthologos* (1734).⁴²

As the comments in *The Usefulness of the Stage* suggest, an equation of the corporeal and vocal also structures *The Dragon*. Rich’s decision to mount *The Dragon of Wantley* in October 1737 confirms the association. Although some of his older audience members would savour, no doubt, the recollection of Rich’s own dragon in his first pantomime, *Harlequin Doctor Faustus* (1724), many more would have seen a target closer to hand.⁴³ Handel’s *Giustino*, which had premiered in

³⁸ See the engravings in George Bickham’s *Musical Entertainer* for apparent reference to the figures of Senesino, Faustina, Cuzzoni and Farinelli; *The Musical Entertainer*, 2 vols ([1738, 1740]), I, 96, 100; II, 4, 8, 12, 24, 28, 32.

³⁹ *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 672.

⁴⁰ Of course, argument against both types of production and the stage itself was age-old. The basis for the contemporary argument was Jeremy Collier’s *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, 1981).

⁴¹ *The Usefulness of the Stage* [1738], 18.

⁴² See Campbell for discussion of opera and the castrato’s role in other Fielding works; Campbell, ‘“When Men Women Turn”: Gender Reversals in Fielding’s Plays’, *The New 18th Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York, 1987), 63-83.

⁴³ In Rich’s pantomime, the capering Doctor is finally devoured by a monstrous airborne dragon. According to *The Touch-stone* (23), Rich’s dragon itself sang—perhaps a reference to the sound of

February of that year also featured a dragon defeated at the hands of the hero. Of course *The Dragon*, antedating *Giustino* in composition if not performance, was not simply a reaction to Handel's opera, but Rich's adoption of the piece certainly suggests that he was prepared to acknowledge and exploit the link.

Modern scholarship's understanding of 'burlesque' as an affectionate parody of a single target has caused a number of Handel operas, including *Giustino*, to be separately espoused and dismissed as targets of *The Dragon*'s satire. As we have seen, however, the need for uni-focal, author-orientated burlesque is illusory in a society attuned to the complex layering of targets or paradigms in both literary and theatrical satire. The burlesque could parallel a number of contemporary Handelian operas: the plots of those works composed between 1733 and 1737 feature an impressive contingent of animals and monsters, including a lion in *Alcina*, the Minotaur in *Arianna*, a wild boar in *Atalanta*, a bear and the dragon in *Giustino*.⁴⁴ Thus, although *Giustino*'s "horrid Monster" who rises from the sea to attack Ariadne' was especially apposite to *The Dragon*, there was no lack of precedent.⁴⁵ Furthermore, bearing in mind that three of the four opera stars—Farinelli, Senesino and Cuzzoni—invoked in advertisements for and engravings of the burlesque performed together briefly for the 'Opera of the Nobility', a range of non-Handelian operas become possible targets. The fragmentary resemblances between *The*

the stage machinery needed to raise and lower it. Fascination with the pantomime dragon extended to the (obviously satirical) suggestion in *The Universal Spectator* (9 February 1724) that the dragon from the pantomime was to be used as a costume for one of Heidegger's masquerades; see Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: the Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford, 1986), 23. The pantomime was cleverly satirised by Edward Ward in *The Dancing Devils: or, the Roaring Dragon. A Dumb Farce. As it was lately Acted at Both Houses, but particularly at one, with unaccountable Success* (1724).

⁴⁴ Handel's 'monster' operas are discussed briefly by Ellen T. Harris, ed., *The Librettos of Handel's Operas*, 13 vols (New York, 1989), VIII, ix.

⁴⁵ *Giustino* should not be immediately discounted as a source for the burlesque, however. Hellmuth Wolff uses passages from this opera to demonstrate stylistic similarities and differences between Handel and Lampe. His selection of examples from the original Covent Garden piece misses the greater similarities which occur between sections of *Giustino* and the sections of *The Dragon* that were added between the second and sixth textual editions; Hellmuth Christoph Wolff, 'Eine

Dragon and any number of other operas are fundamental to this burlesque's shape-changing nature.

Nor are targets limited to opera. The same early advertisements that name Farinelli and 'the Rival Queens', also describe *The Dragon* as 'a Grand Oratorio'.⁴⁶ Reference is also made to the 'Roratorio' in the final chorus of the burlesque itself. Popular confirmation of *The Dragon*'s satire of oratorio can be found in George Bickham's *Musical Entertainer*, which contains engravings of several shorter songs from *The Dragon*. Like several of Bickham's engravings, that used for 'The Merry Gregs' (II, 64) is borrowed. It is in fact a copy of Hogarth's engraving 'A Chorus of Singers', originally published as the ticket for 'A Midnight Modern Conversation' in 1732.⁴⁷ Hogarth's print satirised singers in the Huggins/De Fesch oratorio, *Judith*; in Bickham's version, the chorus members stare intently at pages from *The Dragon* (the title is found on the choirmaster's copy).⁴⁸

Carey's and Lampe's use of a ballad as the basis for their story bears satirical fruit in fields other than the theatre, however. The ballad 'Dragon of Wantley' was already a burlesque on that most famous of English monster stories, 'St George and the Dragon', as the proximity of the two ballads in Philips's *Collection* reminds us.⁴⁹ It debased the myth of St George's battle into a fight between Moore the uncouth Yorkshireman and a local dragon, in which the former's sense of fair play and chivalry extended to hiding in a well, killing the dragon with a kick up the arse, and

Englische Händel-Parodie: "The Dragon of Wantley" (1737)', *Händel-Jahrbuch* 29 (1983), 43-54.

⁴⁶ *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 672.

⁴⁷ See Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 1992-3), vol. 2: *High and Low* (1992), illustrations 4 and 5. 'A Midnight Modern Conversation' is also copied by Bickham, appearing in the *Musical Entertainer* I, 10, as 'The Relief; or Pow'r of Drinking'.

⁴⁸ Lampe's music similarly plays on the store he set by the sublimity of the Chorus. In *The Art of Musick* (1740), 11, he describes choruses as 'the most noble Pieces human Nature is capable of, to show Musick in its full Strength'.

⁴⁹ At its appearance circa 1685 this broadside was one of a network of topical ballads based on the legend of St George. The author of *The Dragon* ballad may well have gleaned several phrases or ideas from these other ballads; for example, one St George ballad speaks of 'Proving that a Saint may

demanding a sixteen-year-old girl as his reward. St George had long been an important part of what one might call the national consciousness; his position as queller of all that was dangerous to England had, indeed, been affirmed by parodies from the 1650s or 1660s that had retold his deed as the slaying of the Rump parliament.⁵⁰ In 1737 the rich network of political and quasi-religious associations that made the story of St George and his dragon such fertile soil for British satirical invention was reconfigured for Carey's and Lampe's *Dragon of Wantley* to align the two heroes as defenders of the new nation.

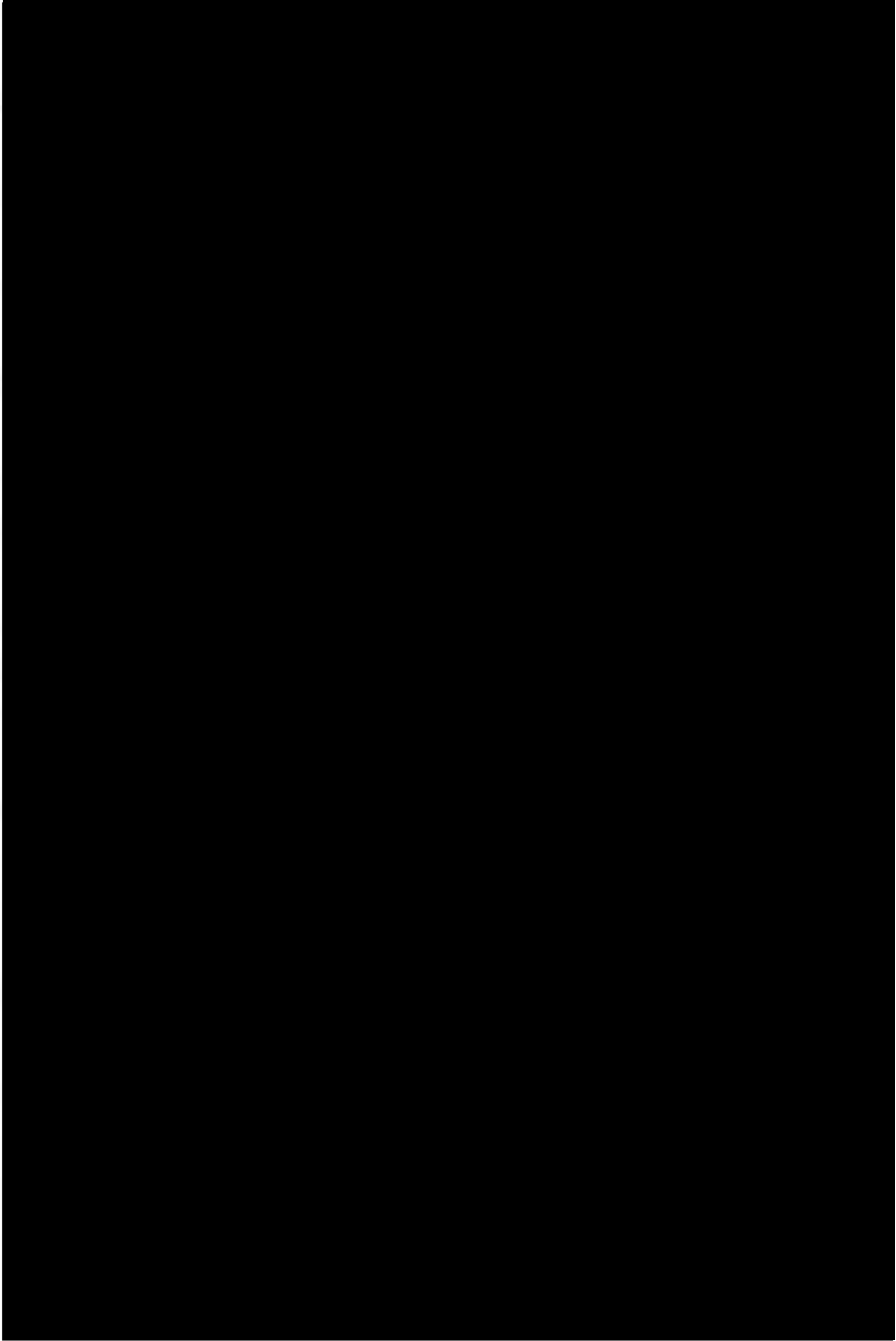
The climax of Carey's opera, as well as of the ballad, is the battle scene between the hero, Squire Moore, and the Dragon, in which Moore resorts to the unconventional but effective technique of killing the Dragon by a well-applied boot. An illustration of this scene appearing with the ballad in the 1723 *Collection* was also used as the frontispiece in at least one edition of the opera. In contrast to the depiction of St George's more mannerly slaying of his dragon, appearing just a few pages earlier in the *Collection*, the engraving of Moore's battle shows the awkwardly mechanical figure of the Squire, resplendent in spiked armour and with toe aimed tailwards, as decidedly unchivalrous (see Figure 4.2). The attraction of this earthy scene, and therefore in part of the entire opera, resides in the way parallels could be drawn not merely with St George, but also with more contemporary issues.

Four years before the production of Carey's and Lampe's *Dragon*, the ballad

be the Son of a Whore', an epithet that appears in *The Dragon* ballad.

⁵⁰ General Monck is George in *Saint George, and the Dragon, Anglice, Mercurius Poeticus: To the Tune of, The Old Souldjour of the Queens, &c* (n.p., n.d.) and *The Second Part of Saint George for England, To the Tune of To drive the Cold Winter away* (n.p., n.d.). The method of the 'Rump' parliament's destruction resembles that of the Wantley Dragon. The dragon was also an important mytho-historical figure; Jonathan D. Evans, 'The Dragon', *Mythical and Fabulous Creatures: A Source Book and Research Guide*, ed. Malcolm South (New York, 1987), 39-49.

Figure 4.2: Frontispiece to *The Dragon of Wantley* (1742).



‘Dragon of Wantley’ had already made its appearance in topical satire.⁵¹ In 1733 at the height of the Excise crisis, when it seemed that the entire country was rebelling against the Walpole government’s proposal to extend taxation powers to necessities like wine and tobacco, a number of ballads had appeared depicting Walpole’s unpopular tax as a dragon ravaging the British countryside.⁵² The most famous, *Britannia Excisa*, was accompanied by an engraving showing a many-headed dragon harnessed to a coach holding Sir Robert; as the dragon gobbles ‘Beef, Bread and Bacon’ it throws gold back to the minister. The Dragon of Wantley, also famed for devouring comestibles, was a natural analogue. After the defeat of the Excise bill, the triumphant *Excise Elegy or The Dragon Demolish’d* asks

Oh! have you not heard of the *Wantley* great Dragon,
Which poor helpless Children did not leave a Rag on?

....
This Monster *Excise*,
For so say the Wise,
More fierce would have been, and occasion’d more Cries.⁵³

Walpole’s corpulence and apparent avarice meant that the dragon analogy stuck.⁵⁴ In the 1737 *Festival of the Golden Rump*, an engraving mocking court corruption in allegorical terms, Walpole is depicted wearing a jerkin with dragons embroidered on it, and carrying a staff that could apparently also change into a dragon at its master’s command.⁵⁵ The focus of attention, however, is the statue all

⁵¹ The ballad’s very origins seem to be satirical: according to Ambrose Philips, the story was taken from an historical incident in which a Yorkshire squire (Moore) successfully sued a corrupt lawyer (the Dragon) who had deprived three children under his guardianship of their estate; Phillips, *A Collection of Old Ballads* I, 37-38; reprinted in *The Dragon* under the pseudonym ‘M. Rousillon’; Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 44-45.

⁵² Percival, *Political Ballads*, 61-76; Paul Langford, *The Excise Crisis: Society and Politics in the Age of Walpole* (Oxford, 1975).

⁵³ Percival, *Political Ballads*, 74.

⁵⁴ Opposition journals commonly depicted Walpole as ‘a bloated monster, an avaricious steward enriching himself at the expense of his master’; Bertrand Goldgar, *Walpole and the Wits: The Relation of Politics to Literature, 1722-1742* (London, 1976), 116.

⁵⁵ Maynard Mack, *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731-1743* (Toronto, 1969), 145.

are worshipping (see Figure 4.3). According to Maynard Mack, the statue's large rump and the kicking action of one leg would have marked it out as a satire of George II, who by 1737-38 had gained notoriety for his habit of either turning his back on or kicking those with whom he was upset. The *Common Sense* newspaper even suggested that 'nobody should have the Honour of being kicked by the Sovereign, except the first Minister'.⁵⁶ To see Moore dispatching the Dragon in the climactic scene of *The Dragon of Wantley* as satirical fulfilment of the Opposition wish that King George remove Walpole from office may explain something of the work's popularity: to place one's monarch and first minister in the context of a knockabout fight from an old ballad or tawdry operatic travesty would—for the disaffected—have been particularly satisfying.⁵⁷ As JoAnn Taricani has pointed out, one pamphlet published the same year as the burlesque opera, *De Calcationibus Veterum* ('Of the Kicks on the A[rses] of the Antients') (1737) by 'the Learned Vanhoofius', seems to confirm this application:

The Stage is a Representation of the World, and certainly a Man may know the Humours and Inclinations of the People, by what is liked or disliked upon the Stage; and I have often observ'd a Kicking to be the most diverting Scene in a modern Comedy ... I am very well persuaded, if an Author was to introduce a King kicking a first Minister, it would have a very good Effect: Such an Incident must certainly give great Pleasure to the Audience and contribute very much to the Success of the Play.⁵⁸

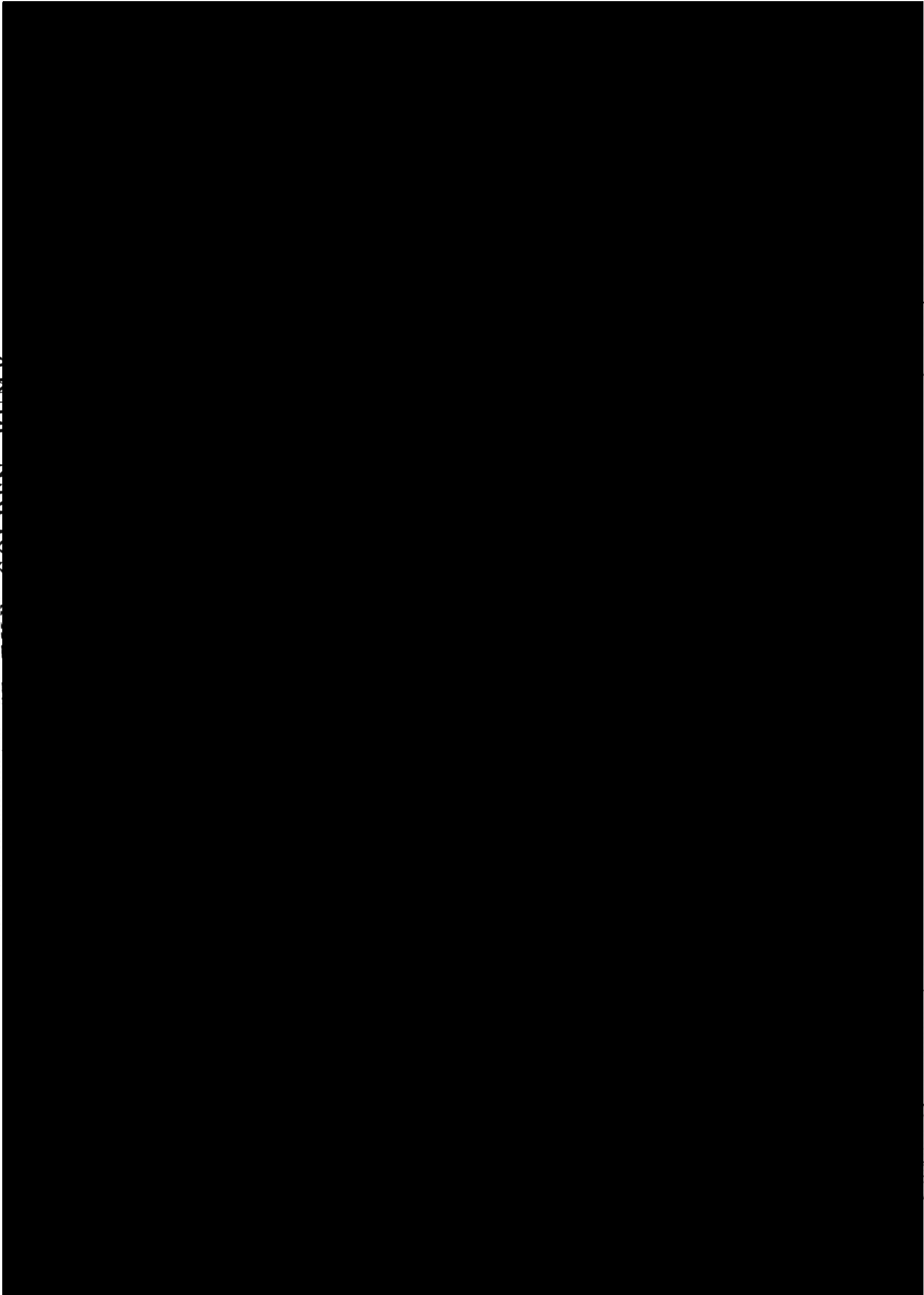
Similarly, a 1738 pamphlet attributed to Henry Fielding discusses the laughter generated by *The Dragon of Wantley*, with glancing reference to the Excise crisis and the political 'Innuendoes' of a 'disaffected People'. The image works still more

⁵⁶ *Common Sense*, 11 June 1737; cited in Mack, *The Garden and the City*, 138.

⁵⁷ JoAnn Taricani has plausibly suggested that Moore could also be read as Walpole, on the basis of other Excise material; 'Behind the Dragon's Mask: Hidden Political Music of Restoration and Early Georgian England', paper given at the International Musicological Society conference, 14-20 August 1997 (19 August).

⁵⁸ Cited in Taricani, 'Behind the Dragon's Mask', handout. I am indebted to JoAnn Taricani for this and the following reference: [Henry Fielding, attr.], *Democritus in Vindication of Laughter* (1738). (I have been unable to find *De Calcationibus Veterum* in any form.)

Figure 4.3: *The Festival of the Golden Rump*, ‘Designed by the Author of *Common Sense*’ (1737).



powerfully through echoes of the St George legend, with all that it stood for in terms of England's proud history of firm and forthright governance: from St George to King George, the example was there to be taken. If such a lesson was intended, it missed its mark, for the King both loved the burlesque opera and retained his first minister: after all, for all its pungency the satire was only a fleeting image, and Squire Moore, with his womanizing, swearing and drinking, was hardly a chip off the St. George block.⁵⁹

Platitude: *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*

The ideal of downright, honest peasant folk preserving the true British spirit receives more straightforward endorsement in another popular 1737 afterpiece, Robert Dodsley's *King and the Miller of Mansfield*. Like Carey's opera, Dodsley's afterpiece and its successor, *Sir John Cockle at Court* (1738), drew on a ballad which Philips had placed early in his *Collection*, 'King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield'.⁶⁰ This afterpiece was no satire, however. As with Dodsley's first dramatic work, *The Toy Shop* (1736), and like his later *Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* (1741)—another work based on a ballad—*The King and the Miller of Mansfield* was a moral fable, designed to contrast the virtues of a plain countryman's life with the debauchery of the court. Dodsley's touch is not light, and he paints his characters in the stark and rather two-dimensional colours we might associate with modern pantomime: his message, he felt, needed drumming home from the outset. The king, losing his way while out hunting, begins the play

⁵⁹ According to Lord Hervey, George II was so taken with the work that it was still diverting him shortly before his wife's death; John, Lord Hervey, *Some Materials towards Memoirs of the Reign of King George II*, ed. Romney Sedgewick, 3 vols (1931, rpt. New York, 1970), III, 877-8.

⁶⁰ I am grateful to Michael Suarez for pointing out that Dodsley probably knew another version of 'The King and the Miller of Mansfield', published anonymously in *A Collection of Miscellany Poems, Never before Publish'd* (1737), 180-7. This modernized ballad is much closer to Dodsley's afterpiece in both tone and plot than the *Collection*'s version is; however, as this new poem does not include the second part of the old 'Miller of Mansfield' ballad, which Dodsley turned into *Sir John Cockle at Court* (1738), he cannot have worked from the 1737 *Miscellany* alone.

by remonstrating with himself. 'What advantage' he asks

is it now to be a king? Night shews me no respect: I cannot see better, nor walk so well as another man. What is a king? ... when lost in a wood, alas! what is he but a common man? His wisdom knows not which is north and which is south; his power a beggar's dog would bark at; and his greatness the beggar would not bow to. And yet how oft are we puffed up with these false attributes? Well, in losing the monarch, I have found the man.

While the king may have discovered himself to be human, Dodsley's specimen of the 'common man'—the Miller—is far from common. In his political scepticism and moral probity, he represents a considerable sanitising of the ballad original, whose rustic simplicity extended to stealing the king's deer. The play's message can be encapsulated in the words of the song performed, in the best tradition of the English theatre, by a walk-on character:

How happy a state does the miller possess?
Who would be no greater, nor fears to be less;
On his mill and himself he depends for support,
Which is better than servilely cringing at court.⁶¹

For Dodsley, the ballad's representation of the meeting of king and countryman was a worthy tale that only wanted its rough edges smoothed to make it suitably didactic, a piece to educate both the more and the less refined of his countrymen in matters of civic responsibility. In this work, as in Dodsley's other two pieces based on ballads, one senses that the medium was part of the message: the afterpiece steers well clear of the harlequinade and dancing that had debased the fine tradition of English theatre to the level of mere entertainment. Thus the sententious words of *The King and the Miller of Mansfield's* song are supported by the simplicity of its ballad-like form; there was no place for the servile cringing of an Italianate aria here.

⁶¹ One measure of this song's popular success was its adoption as the basis for a contemporary ballad satirizing the court: *The Miller of Essex, a new song, to the tune of The miller of Mansfield* [1735?]: 'How happy a State did the Miller possess,/ Till he wish'd to be greater, which makes him still less:/ On his Interest he vainly depends for Support,/ And he longs to be servilely cringing at court.'

Patriotism: *Alfred*

From the ‘Patriot’ opposition’s point of view at least, that the proud but lowly form of ballad should transmit these kingly precepts was fitting confirmation of the people’s responsible participation in an ancient, balanced constitution. For the new breed of patriot poets who took up the pen in the 1730s, it was important to forge ties not only with the venerable subject matter but also with British literary forms of the past. Thus George Lyttelton—mentioned earlier as a politician—and two literary stalwarts of the Opposition, Richard Glover and David Mallet, all wrote, or were reputed to have written, successful ballads.⁶² As part of the late 1730s campaign of patriot drama, James Thomson wrote his tragedy *Edward and Eleonora* in 1739, uniting popular history with a prestigious British theatrical form in his use of a well-known apocryphal story about Edward I.⁶³ It is perhaps significant that when Thomson came to join with David Mallet to devise a musical entertainment to celebrate the patriotic responsibility of their future monarch, they, like Dodsley, should look to traditional forms to produce not an opera, but a masque on the subject of King Alfred the Great.⁶⁴

Designed for the private birthday celebrations of the Prince and Princess of Wales’s daughter, Augusta, *Alfred* also proved a long-lived and popular work on the public stage, undergoing many revisions and, it would seem, prompting the creation

⁶² Lyttelton’s apparent penchant for political balladry remained anonymous; Percival, *Political Ballads*, lv. Glover’s ‘most enduring Patriot poem was not the pseudo-classical epic *Leonidas* (1737) but the sentimental seafaring ballad *Admiral Hosier’s Ghost* (1740)’; Gerrard, 17. Mallet’s extremely popular but decidedly new ballad ‘William and Margaret’ was even published in the third volume of the *Collection of Old Ballads*, for which reason it was suggested in the nineteenth century that Mallet was the editor of the *Collection*!

⁶³ Philips mentions the story of Edward and Eleanor in his introduction to the ballad ‘The Fall of Queen Eleanor’; *Collection*, I, 97-9. The popularity of this story was attested by the publication of the pamphlet ‘history’ (mentioned above) designed to accompany the play: *The History of the Life and Reign of the Valiant Prince Edward ... and his Princess Eleonora. On which History is founded a Play, written by Mr. Thomson, call’d Edward and Eleonora* (1739).

⁶⁴ For discussion of the political significance of *Alfred*, see Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, 260, 294-5.

of several other works based on the same episode throughout the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ Like *The Dragon of Wantley* and *The King and the Miller of Mansfield*, *Alfred* seems to have been drawn from several sources. Unlike *The Dragon*, however, *Alfred*'s debt to its ballad original is not transparent. In part, it is *Alfred*'s impeccably Whiggish credentials that have obscured its ballad elements. As A. D. McKillop and others have shown, much of the plot for the masque was drawn from Rapin's *History of England*, which was one of the many works dedicated to the young Prince Frederick with the design of educating him in British history and liberty.⁶⁶ Its preface stressed that

above all, you will Here see the Origin and Nature of our Excellent Constitution, where the Prerogatives of the Crown, and Privileges of the Subject are so happily proportioned, that the King and the People are inseparably united in the same Interests and Views.⁶⁷

The simple plot essentially derives from the *History*'s description of Alfred's retirement to a shepherd's hut, having suffered a general revolt because of war with the Danes. After some time, news of the Earl of Devon's successes in battle spurs Alfred to leave his place of hiding in search of greater victory. Thomson and Mallet do not follow Rapin to the letter, however: the central scene—a vision of the future glories of the English monarch, presented to Alfred by a hermit—is lightly dismissed by Rapin as a 'pretended' revelation from St Cuthbert, the 'idle Tale of Monks'.⁶⁸ This scene would instead seem to be derived from another mammoth work, Richard Blackmore's partisan epic poem about the young Alfred's travels around Europe, written in 1723. Here, in the first book, a hermit holds discourse

⁶⁵ For a detailed study of the work's history, see Michael Burden, *Garrick, Arne and the Masque of Alfred: A Case Study in National, Theatrical and Musical Politics* (Lewiston, 1994).

⁶⁶ Alan D. McKillop, 'The Early History of *Alfred*', *Philological Quarterly* 41 (1962), 311-24 (313); Burden, *Garrick, Arne and the Masque of Alfred*, 7-9; Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 200-3.

⁶⁷ Paul Rapin de Thoyras, *The History of England*, trans. Nicholas Tindal, 2 vols (2nd edn, 1732), I, sig. A1^v. Gerrard (101n.) notes that Lord Hervey described Rapin as 'the *Craftsman*'s own political evangelist'. On the Prince's education see Gerrard, 198-205; Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 203.

⁶⁸ Rapin, *The History of England*, I, 92.

with Alfred and his companions about ‘the Advantages of a private Life, and the prudent Forms of Civil Government’, while in the eighth book an angel shows Alfred a vision of heaven and then ‘takes Occasion ... to let Alfred know what Revolutions and various Changes of the royal Lines shall happen in Albion till the present Times’.⁶⁹

In demonstrating that Thomson’s and Mallet’s masque drew from the immense works of Blackmore and Rapin, however, we are brought to the problem of their choice of material. Alfred’s importance to British history lay in his enlightened establishment of the constitution; describing Thomson’s and Mallet’s reasons for choosing Alfred as their model monarch, Gerrard points out that it was Alfred, as ‘great Saxon law-giver’, who was Thomson’s hero and, indeed, enjoyed general prestige, rather than the barbarians of Britain’s gothic past.⁷⁰ Yet, Thomson and Mallet did not choose to show Alfred the law-giver, and even contemporaries complained that the work lacked action.⁷¹ Why should the authors choose a passage from Rapin’s lengthy chapter on Alfred showing him as a monarch-in-waiting, rather than as the patron of learning and arts that he later became—a role to which Frederick also aspired? Why choose for their celebration of Prince Frederick’s fitness for rule an incident that, according to Rapin’s *History*, shows Alfred at his despairing weakest? In choosing the episode from the *History* in which Alfred retires to the shepherd’s hut, Thomson and Mallet were, it would seem, also choosing the topic of the ballad ‘King Alfred and the Shepherd’.⁷²

⁶⁹ Richard Blackmore, *Alfred. An Epick Poem. In Twelve Books* (1723), 2, 251. Smith also points out the link to Blackmore; Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios*, 294.

⁷⁰ Frederick had himself already commissioned a statue of Alfred; Gerrard, 116-17.

⁷¹ Aaron Hill wrote to Mallet, making numerous suggestions for alteration when the work was first submitted for performance on the public stage; Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 204. McKillop declares that ‘the masque form itself made impossible the dramatic presentation of Alfred as an active and beneficent monarch’, ‘The Early History of *Alfred*’, 315.

⁷² Thomson and Mallet would surely have known this popular and ancient ballad: apart from anything else, Mallet must have been aware that his own ‘William and Margaret’ was included in the third

The 'Alfred' ballad, which occurs early in the first volume of Philips's *Collection*, is the homely and humorous tale of an encounter between a shepherd, his wife, and King Alfred, who has gone disguised as a peasant to seek out some of his citizens. The King has to do battle with the shepherd before being allowed to share his food and shelter; then, on returning home with him, receives rough words from the shepherd's wife, 'Old Gillian', who says that he is 'A Fellow, I doubt, will cut our Throats;/ So like a Knave looks he'. It is the peasant characters' transition from ballad to masque that is particularly interesting. While, in the ballad, the shepherd and his wife are more lively and interesting than the King himself, in the masque the pastorally renamed Corin and Emma seem to serve not as characters, but as emblems. Corin's opening words are designedly prophetic:

Modest of carriage, and of speech most gracious,
As if some saint or angel, in disguise,
Has grac'd our lowly cottage with his presence,
He steals, I know not how, into the heart,
And makes it pant to serve him. Trust me, Emma,
He is no common man.

So throughout, in contrast with the Shepherd and 'Old Gillian' who converse of sheep hooks and burnt cakes, worrying that Alfred is a common thief, Corin and Emma talk of the plight of their country and the loyal faith that is 'fled from hall and bower,/To dwell with village-swains!' Emma's reminder that the Danes have promised to punish those who harbour English captains, but reward those who betray them, prompts a tirade from Corin:

Now, just heaven forbid,
A British man should ever count for gain,
What villainy must earn. No: are we poor?
Be honesty our riches. Are we mean,
And humbly born? The true heart makes us noble.

The contrast between the colloquial speech and rough sentiments of the ballad folk,

and the blank verse and high morals of the masque's arcadians, could not be greater; yet this serves only to accentuate the ballad's relevance for the masque. Both revolve around establishing the importance of good relations between king and commons; both begin with fear and suspicion and close with expressions of loyalty and brotherhood. At the end of the ballad, when Alfred reveals his identity, the Shepherd and Gillian fear that after their rough treatment of him they will be hanged. The King forgives them, however, noting that

... 'tis thy Country Guise, I see,
To be this bluntish still;
And where the plainest Meaning is,
Remains the smallest Ill.

Corin and Emma, similarly, ask the King's pardon for the 'poor, unequal entertainment' that they have offered him. Alfred again readily complies:

Thy rural entertainment was sincere,
Plain, hospitable, kind: such as, I hope,
Will ever mark the manners of this nation.

In his reference to the futurity of the British nation, Alfred signals the real reason for the difference in temperament between the ballad's original peasants and the masque's 'enlightened' versions. Thomson and Mallet, like Dodsley, had refined the coarse spirits of the ballad's peasants to the point where the very quality of their utterances became political. Indeed, with both works it seems that the authors had politicized the cautionary note the collector finds in the ballads, for Philips points out in the preface to 'King Henry and the Miller of Mansfield' that 'Our Poets, I believe, had an Intent to hint at the Hospitality used here in Days of Old, common to the English in general, now confin'd to Rusticks only' (I, 53). While Dodsley's afterpiece seems to suggest that there is still a long way to go before the honesty of the peasantry wins out over the corruption of the court, Thomson's and Mallet's masque has a more positive outlook. As with the

ultimately reflexive scene in which Alfred's wonderment at the hermit's vision of future ages is staged for the greater glory of Frederick, so the polished manners and loyal expressions of the masque's peasants reflect the degree to which, under Frederick's tutelage, modern commoners have advanced from the days of the ballad. In his preface to the ballad 'King Alfred and the Shepherd', Philips finds that the King

could venture himself amongst his own Subjects; especially considering how much he was belov'd by them all, and how little Risque he ran amongst them; for he was a just, wise, and pious Prince, of a very liberal Education ... And besides the Arts of War and Government, he understood several of the Sciences; and, amongst other, Musick and Poetry to a Perfection. (I, 44)

If this sounds uncommonly like the man Prince Frederick was being moulded to be, it should come as no surprise. Rapin's advice to the Prince that he would see 'that the King and the People are inseparably united in the same Interests and Views' was constantly reiterated in the Patriot press and literature.⁷³ What more appropriate way to unite the 'Interests' and 'Views' of prince and people than in a story that reinforced this bond through reference to popular history?

Alfred is fitting confirmation of the success with which popular history could be harnessed for nationalist ideals. The Alfred story's availability as a vehicle for political expression continued to be exploited as it was adapted, by Arne, by Mallet, and by others throughout the century. The work, which started life as *Alfred* the masque and, in one of Arne's several stage versions, became *Alfred* the oratorio, spoke clearly of the need to buttress British nationalism through identifiably British art forms—the ballad, the masque, the oratorio. Yet, the importance of artistic and political interaction between high and low culture implied by the link between masque and ballad was slowly eroded: starting with Arne, the characters of Corin

⁷³ Rapin, *The History of England*, sig. A1^v.

and Emma gradually lost their significance, becoming simply the representatives of an increasingly bucolic fantasyland of dancing shepherds and shepherdesses. In 1788, some fifty years after Thomson and Mallet had conceived their work, and at a time when Britain was again facing war with Spain, Alexander Bicknell looked back to those days and named his play, after Bolingbroke's famous treatise, *The Patriot King; or Alfred and Elvida*. How ironic, then, that Corin and Emma, those characters seemingly so integral to the message of the original production, were all but effaced from the landscape in Bicknell's work, leaving only a vestigial cottage behind.

This ultimate removal of the ballad characters from the political landscape does not imply that their presence was merely fortuitous, a slip of the author's pen or sleight of (modern) academic hand. It rather signals the problematic nature of their intrusion from ballad onto the serious stage. Contemporaries were clearly aware of the relationship between ballad and masque, but they were not necessarily appreciative. In the Countess of Hertford's correspondence with Lady Pomfret, Lady Hertford wrote disparagingly of the masque in its published version, finding against it not only because of its partisan content, but also because it breached eighteenth-century notions of decorum, for 'The clown and his wife are made to speak the dialect of a hero and heroine in a court. The whole conduct of the piece is incorrect'.⁷⁴ With a satirical élan worthy of Addison himself, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu commented sceptically on Alfred as:

a hero in distress whose je ne scai quoi heroical fashion, in taking a walk, or sitting down on a bank [could] betray an air of majesty that you know may be a compliment to our countrymen to show how sagacious they are, or that,

⁷⁴ *Correspondence between Frances, Countess of Hertford ... and Henrieta Louisa, Countess of Pomfret*, II, 125-6; cited in Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 204. Here I must disagree with Michael Burden, who takes the 'clown' to be Alfred himself; Burden, *Garrick, Arne, and the Masque of Alfred*, 10.

like lions, they can smell the blood royal.⁷⁵

It should not surprise us that Montagu, like Addison, focused her complaints on the illogicality of mixing fact and fiction. The force of Addison's objection to the ill-judged consequences of loosing sparrows (or castrati) on stage lay in his belief not that shadows and reality should not mix, but rather that they inevitably did, as life, art, and history intertwined. To find appropriate ways to demonstrate and validate these connections was vital to the right ordering of an emerging 'Great Britain'; but it was also necessary to reject the inappropriate.

The new nation, formed from a patchwork of historical and ideological shadow and reality, also reinforced its creation through myths of 'national' artistic endeavour. It seemed in the 1730s that English opera had also found a way to weave into the national pattern through use of traditional stories. Why, then, did Montagu and others object to the presence of these ballad elements in *Alfred*? Why were these elements gradually effaced? Could English opera, in other words, successfully be both 'English' and 'opera' at the same time? The coterminous incongruities and success of *The Dragon of Wantley*—and particularly of its music—suggest an answer.

Burlesque opera

Our appreciation of the *Spectator* essay with which we began is predicated on the understanding that, because (to our eyes) eighteenth-century English opera was largely a 'failure', intellectual opposition to Italian opera was mostly literary. Musicians' participation in the polemic is generally seen to be circumscribed—if not precluded—by the lack of any 'major' English composers working in the operatic

⁷⁵ *Letters of Mrs Elizabeth Montagu*, ed. Matthew Montagu (1809), cited in McKillop, 'The Early History of *Alfred*', 315.

genre. The nature of such participation would in any case be difficult to define: could works of music themselves take part in cultural debate on the role of music in society, or could they only be a foil to the text? And could they be of any merit if polemic was openly displayed? The nature of anti-opera operas of this period, most of which were ballad operas, is largely seen to answer both queries in the negative. The sophisticated satire and music of *The Dragon of Wantley* forces us to re-examine these questions.

Contemporaries associated *The Dragon of Wantley*'s enormous popularity with the demise of Italian opera.⁷⁶ Henry Carey, author of the libretto, had already pinned his anti-Italian colours to the mast with poems like 'Blunderella' and 'Faustina; or, The Roman Songstress' [1726], both satirising 'the Luxury and Effeminacy' of an Age fascinated with Italian opera and opera singers.⁷⁷ He and Lampe had worked together on the 'English Opera' experiments of the early 1730s, offensives on the stronghold of their Italian rivals of which *The Dragon* was clearly a continuation. Yet the very success of their attack in *The Dragon* is seen by modern critics as mitigated by the quality of Lampe's music. Recent discussions of the music have assumed that Handel is the prescribed standard and high-operatic achievement explicitly aimed at. For Hellmuth Wolff *The Dragon* is simply 'Eine Englische Händel-Parodie', while for Dennis Martin 'its fine music demonstrated that English vernacular opera could compete on an artistic level with opera seria'.⁷⁸ Under such considerations, even music's passive role as foil for the verbal burlesque is under question.

⁷⁶ For example, see Lord Wentworth's letter of 19 January 1738, in *The Wentworth Papers, 1705-1739*, ed. James Cartwright (1883), 539.

⁷⁷ Carey, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1729), 12-21, 28-37.

⁷⁸ Wolff, 'Eine Englische Händel-Parodie', 43; Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 43. See also Fiske's brief discussion in *English Theatre Music*, 149-54; and Roger Fiske, 'John Frederick Lampe', *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 20 vols (London,

Carey was himself aware of this ‘problem’. In his preface to the sixth edition of *The Dragon*’s libretto, he acknowledges the ‘delight’ created by Lampe’s music, but at the same time suggests other readings.⁷⁹ Playing on the paradox that ‘Lowness (figuratively speaking) is the Sublimity of Burlesque’, with mocking self-effacement Carey agrees with his critics that his work is ‘very low’, and therefore concludes it ‘the tip-top Sublime of its Kind’. He subsequently introduces Lampe’s music as ‘on the other hand ... as grand and pompous as possible’, playing on that ambiguity. Such an introduction is surely designed to prompt the reader’s curiosity: if Lampe’s music is ‘grand and pompous’, can it also be ‘sublime’ in the context of a burlesque? and is its pomposity then virtue or vice? How did it contribute, in other words, to Carey’s desire ‘to display in English the Beauty of Nonsense, so prevailing in the Italian Operas’?

Although the title ‘burlesque’ was commonly used during the eighteenth century by both poets and critics attempting to define a selection of comic and satiric works, what exactly the title meant, and what response Carey and Lampe sought to generate in their audiences through this designation, is vexed.⁸⁰ If, as we saw earlier, the author of *The Usefulness of the Stage* was inclined to read Carey’s and Lampe’s piece as stage polemic, a satire of opera liable to incur the castrati’s anger, then modern perception of the work tends to see *The Dragon* as jocosely good-natured.⁸¹ This interpretation largely owes its existence to V. C. Clinton-Baddeley’s

1980), X, 419-21, where he states that the *Dragon* has ‘some good satirical touches, aimed mainly at Handel’ (420).

⁷⁹ The sixth edition (1738) is the first to have full prefatory matter, and appears to have been used as the basis for subsequent editions.

⁸⁰ On genre and the relations of burlesque and satire, see Ian Jack, *Augustan Satire* (London, 1952, rpt. 1978), 1-14; Howard Weinbrot, *The Formal Strain* (Chicago, 1969), 1-31; Margaret Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 1985), 30-83; Vincent Carretta, *The Snarling Muse: Verbal and Visual Political Satire from Pope to Churchill* (Philadelphia, 1983); Leon Guilhamet, *Satire and the Transformation of Genre* (Philadelphia, 1987), 16.

⁸¹ Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 52.

influential, affable, but limited assessment of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century 'burlesque' drama.⁸² For Clinton-Baddeley, burlesque is a genteel form of satire: while 'satire [is] violent and angry', 'burlesque is never angry, because its criticism is directed not against faults of virtue, but against faults of style and humour'.⁸³ This interpretation unfortunately essentialises, casting earlier burlesque in the mould of twentieth-century pantomime and failing to recognise the disturbing power of the continuing—though marginalised—current of Medieval and Renaissance grotesque and carnivalesque, famously described by Mikhail Bakhtin, which coloured eighteenth-century reception.⁸⁴

As its etymology suggests, burlesque's French and Italian derivation ensured that its introduction to England (*circa* 1656) was almost invariably associated with foreign forms.⁸⁵ Definitions of 'burlesque' in the long eighteenth century tended to validate as much as chart the term's history, for burlesque was not often critically favoured, ambivalence towards it being frequently indicated by metaphorical

⁸² V. C. Clinton-Baddeley, *The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660* (London, 1952). The pioneering study of English burlesque is Richmond Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry, 1700-1750* (n.p., 1925). Clinton-Baddeley's definition is used as the basis for genre assessment by, for example, Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 51-2; Fiske, *English Theatre Music*, 145-6 (Fiske provides a brief discussion of 'burlesque' opera, pp.145-60); James E. Wierzbicki, 'Burlesque Opera in London: 1729-1737' (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1979). Peter Lewis takes his appreciation of burlesque somewhat further in *Fielding's Burlesque Drama: Its place in the Tradition* (Edinburgh, 1987).

⁸³ Clinton-Baddeley, *The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre*, 1-2. Margaret Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge, 1993), contends for a similar teleological misunderstanding for parody. See Rose (54-68) for the argument against a generic equation of 'parody' and 'burlesque'. In her focus on parody, however, Rose fails to do justice to the frequency with which burlesque occurs as a generic term in literary discussions of early eighteenth-century England. Bond similarly fails to ask why a word that so recently entered the English language (as Rose points out) should either be so generally used in this period or so readily adopted (and adapted) for his study.

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (New York, 1965), 11, 34-58. See also Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*.

⁸⁵ In France, Scarron's *Le Virgile Travesty* (1648-53) spawned a host of classical travesties. In England, Charles Cotton's translation of this work joined Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* to create a similar interest, expanding subject matter from the strictly classical to accommodate poetic travesty or mock-heroic presentations of other targets. Blount, *Glossographia* (1656); cited in Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry*, 19; Rose, *Parody*, 55. Bond documents the entry of terms 'Burla', 'burlare' and 'parodia' into the language in 1598. A fair indication of *Hudibras*' popularity is the use of 'Hudibrastic' as a generic definition, both during the period and by Bond (3-17).

manifestations of its alien nature. Of course, alignment of a target with the alien is characteristic of all satire; yet, given burlesque's etymology, it seems more than coincidental that the subjects playfully attacked in these works are those genuinely perceived as belonging to alien or threatening groups.⁸⁶ In its foreignness, burlesque was to be feared for the restrictions that 'Boyishness' or effeminacy of both material and style would place on the 'Manly' style of the English. In his seminal essay, the *Discourse concerning the Original and Progress of Satire* (1693), Dryden gives a striking description of the discomfort burlesque engenders:

It tickles awkwardly, with a kind of pain, to the best sort of Readers; we are pleas'd ungratefully, and, if I may say so, against our liking.... It makes a Poet giddy with turning in a Space too narrow for his Imagination.⁸⁷

Still more grotesque are the figurings of burlesque verse (tetrametric or octosyllabic rhyming couplets) as deformed animals or monkey-like women:

I would rather here speak of the Laws of *Burlesque*, (if I knew any it had:) It stands indeed upon Four Feet; but its Liberties and Privileges are unbounded ... it is part of its Excellency some times to have Two, Three, or Four Syllables (like so many Claws) crowded into the Time of One Foot.... Its Nature is to Ridicule, Flatter, Huff, and Banter, by turns; to Scratch and Claw now, and anon to Grin and Bite like a *Satyr*.... *Burlesque* may be likened to [a] wanton Chamber-maid, with her Petticoats tuck'd up, in her Masque and Pattens, who walks, runs, shambles, stops, looks about, and laughs, and perhaps all in less than a Minute.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Guilhamet, *Satire and the Transformation of Genre*, 11. See, for example, J. Ozell's dedication to his translation of Boileau's *Le Lutrin*: 'it has been thought by some as rash an Attempt to translate this French Author, as for an English General to attack an Army of theirs. The late Successes of some former Campaigns have sufficiently prov'd that their *Heroes* are not *Invincible*; and the happy Imitations of some of their best Pieces, that their *Writers* are not *Incomparable*.... But certain it is, the *French Genius* may be match'd (if not surpass'd) in both, the *Pen* as well as the *Sword*; whatever exalted Notions to the contrary Some among us may have, who cou'd relish *Slavery* it self, if it were but *French*'; Boileau, *Boileau's Lutrin: A Mock-Heroic Poem. In Six Canto's. Render'd into English Verse*, trans. J. Ozell (1708), [1-1^v].

⁸⁷ When John Dennis, in his preface to the *Miscellanies in Verse and Prose* (1693) wished to defend burlesque, he suggested that the double rhyme 'shows the power and plenty of the English Tongue'. See Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry*, 18-63, for sources that, especially in the early part of the period, show a great concern with the relative national merits of verse.

⁸⁸ The preface to *Pendragon; or, the Carpet Knight* (1698); quoted at length in Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry*, 34-36. See also Dryden's preface to *Annus Mirabilis* (1667), where the contrast between 'heroick Poesie' and burlesque is likened to that between a beautiful woman and one 'deformed... a Lazar, or... fool with distorted face and antique gestures, at which we cannot forbear to laugh, because it is a deviation from Nature' (Bond, *English Burlesque Poetry*, 30-31); and Thomas Shadwell's Preface to *The Sullen Lovers* (21) in *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed J. E. Spingarn (Bloomington, 1957), 150; cited in Raymond Immerwahr, "'Romantic' and Its Cognates in

In such descriptions we observe both the nervous veer away from the carnivalesque as described by Bakhtin, and the mixture of fascination and loathing that characterised the eighteenth century's reaction to monsters and freaks of all kinds.⁸⁹

'Burlesque', as the surviving expression of a carnivalesque efflorescence, engendered a complex of possible approaches in both writer and reader. If the vestiges of cultural free play so prevalent in previous centuries were still visible for the early eighteenth century, experience and portrayal of such inversion was both tightly controlled and greatly feared, the miasma of misrule proscribed to the domain of the alien and the bestial.⁹⁰ Much early eighteenth-century burlesque displays both this fear and this inversion, attacking the foreign in a way that implies not only the belittling of a grand target, but a re-forming of a target already deformed, and a turning of the tables through use of the subject's own faults. As recent work and the previous chapter on Italian opera in eighteenth-century England shows, the anxiety promoted by a perception of the 'otherness' of that genre was a crucial element in British reactions, both of fascination and disgust.⁹¹

Dryden's *Discourse concerning Satire*—in which his discomfort with the burlesque is so strikingly depicted—was a defining work in the history of English

England, Germany, and France before 1790', *Romantic and its Cognates: The European History of a Word*, ed. Hans Eichner (Manchester, 1972), 17-97.

⁸⁹ Indeed, the author of *Pendragon* accuses critics of 'browbeating' burlesque 'because they themselves are afraid of it' ([A2]; Bond, 4). Richard D. Altick, *The Shows of London: a Panoramic History of Exhibitions, 1600-1862* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 34-49; Bakhtin, 34-58; Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*; idem, *The Female Thermometer* (New York, 1995), 3-20.

⁹⁰ See Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, and *The Female Thermometer*, 82-100, for discussion of the taboos surrounding the masquerade.

⁹¹ See for example, Xavier Cervantes, "'Tuneful Monsters": Les Castrats et le Public Lyrique Londonien au debut du XVIIIe Siècle', *Bulletin de la Société d'Etudes Anglo-Américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* 39 (1994), 227-54; Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, 'Shunning the Bearded Kiss: Castrati and the Definition of Female Sexuality', *Prose Studies* 15 (1992), 153-70; Thomas McGeary, "'Warbling Eunuchs": Opera, Gender, and Sexuality on the London Stage, 1705-1742', *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research*, 2nd ser. 7 (1992), 1-22; idem, 'Shaftesbury on opera, spectacle, and liberty', *ML* 74 (1993), 530-41; Richard Leppert, 'Imagery, Musical Confrontation and Cultural Difference in Early 18th-Century London', *EM* 14 (1986), 323-45.

satire.⁹² Aaron Hill's similarly self-conscious attempt to define his vision of English opera in his famous letter to Handel is also noteworthy for the concern that English freedom was suffering from the constraints of Italian opera:

My meaning is, that you would be resolute enough, to deliver us from our *Italian bondage*; and demonstrate, that *English* is soft enough for Opera, when compos'd by poets, who know how to distinguish the *sweetness* of our tongue, from the *strength* of it, where the last is less necessary.⁹³

Casting opera and burlesque, both foreign forms, as a threat to English liberty was undoubtedly a patriotic reaction. Yet the restrictive imagery employed by both men registers a lingering anxiety that formal (lack of) constraint could translate to a physical level.⁹⁴ The foreign form was a figurative tyrant or monster in its restrictive control over the minds of the populace and in its licentious behaviour; the English literary champion sallying forth into battle was thus concerned both to break those fetters by emphasising the form's deformity or excess and to confine and harness the beast by defining or restricting its structure.⁹⁵

The bathetic, grotesque or often bestial distortion of humanity runs as a theme through Carey's and Lampe's work. By the year of *The Dragon's* production, three of Carey's ballad operas had been staged—*The Contrivances* (1729) adapted from an earlier play, *Betty, or The Country Bumpkins* (1732), and *The Honest Yorkshireman* (1735), called a 'ballad farce'—and in *Chrononhotonthologos* (1734) he had disabled heroic tragedy by taking rant to its illogical limits. When Fielding's *Tom Thumb* (1729), another attack on rant, was turned into *The Opera of Operas* (1733), Lampe provided the music. He had already composed the opera *Dione* (1733). This last, possibly prepared by Carey,

⁹² Weinbrot, *The Formal Strain*, 60, 65-75.

⁹³ Hill to Handel (5 December 1732); cited in Deutsch, 299.

⁹⁴ See Thomas McGeary, 'Shaftesbury on Opera, Spectacle and Liberty', for an explication of these fears.

⁹⁵ Pressure applied by literary knights such as Hill was partly responsible for Handel's shift from

adapted Gay's tragedy of the same name, which was in turn taken from that most famous of picaresque novels, *Don Quixote*.⁹⁶ Lampe's music for John Hewitt's *The Fatal Falshood* (1734) was advertised as including 'a new Grand Dance in Grotesque Characters, proper to the play'.⁹⁷ His greatest success in the 1733-34 season, however, was the pantomime, *Cupid and Psyche*, which became known as *Columbine Courtezan*. This piece featured, and no doubt derived a large part of its popularity from, the appearance of 'Mynheer Cajanus', a German giant reputed to have been over seven feet tall.⁹⁸ *The Dragon* was, then, simply a continuation of Carey's and Lampe's work not just against Italian opera, but on and with freaks.⁹⁹ Perhaps confirming this status, Drury Lane pirated the work later in the 1737-8 season, using a company of 'Lilliputians' (children).¹⁰⁰ Appropriately, for the 1762 performance the dragon was played by 'the Giant'.¹⁰¹ As a dragon could be played by child or giant—and, indeed, in the sequel the former heroine became a metaphorical 'dragoness'—so for Carey and Lampe it would seem that such mutability and incongruity was an abiding fascination.

It is not coincidental that Carey and Lampe worked so consistently on opera. Grotesquerie was, as we have seen, as much a part of the English perception of opera as of burlesque at this time. Xavier Cervantes' use of the rubric 'tuneful Monsters' in his study of the castrato is entirely appropriate; yet his title is taken

opera to oratorio; see Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 41-170.

⁹⁶ *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 1, 273.

⁹⁷ Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 31.

⁹⁸ According to the *Universal Spectator* (23 February 1734), 'Since Monsieur Harlequin has conjur'd up his Gargantua at Drury-Lane, the Town have flock'd to that Theatre they just before deserted When the Tall Man's time which he is contracted for is expired, I have been inform'd, his Part is to be supplied by a fat Man; and that a Treaty is now on the Carpet to bring on the strong Man of Islington, when Custards and Pokers are to be demolish'd in great Number'.

⁹⁹ Continuity with their other outlandish pieces is still more plausible when we recall that *The Dragon* apparently waited some years before it was staged; see note 35, above.

¹⁰⁰ *The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 721. They also performed at Bartholemew Fair (*The London Stage*, pt. 3, vol. 2, 726). They followed their first performance with Nathaniel Lee's *The Rival Queens*, a title which also became attached to Faustina and Cuzzoni.

¹⁰¹ *The London Stage*, pt. 4, vol. 2, 926. First performed on 30 March 1762; other parts: Moore,

from Charles Burney's description of *The Dragon of Wantley*. This appellation of course reflected Italian singers' disproportionately large salaries and followings. But contemporary engravings also transferred the metaphor to the person of the singer, showing the ungainly posturing of grossly misproportioned figures, with tiny heads atop inflated or unnaturally squat bodies.¹⁰² Such shape-changing was reflected in the multiple targets of *The Dragon*'s satire, as we have seen. In this sense, the satire plays on the formal rigidities of opera, testing weaknesses by changing attack.¹⁰³ As a burlesque, *The Dragon of Wantley* subverts *opera seria*'s high-art purity, shifting formally from opera to ballad to oratorio, while images cluster and regroup around different targets and sources: Farinelli and King George, *Giustino* and *Judith*; Molly Skerritt¹⁰⁴ and Cuzzoni, *The Beggar's Opera* and the *Excise Elegy*.

The burlesque's formal confusion can most readily be identified in textual re-presentations of *The Dragon of Wantley*, and in particular in the deconstruction of that icon of *opera seria* formalism, the *da capo* aria. Variations in the many editions of the libretto and music were generated by the success of *The Dragon*, and should be considered as an index of attempts at defining the piece.¹⁰⁵ In their playful self-

Beard; Gubbins, Shuter; Mauxalinda, Mrs Vernon; Margery, Miss Brent.

¹⁰² See John Vanderbank's famous engraving of *Senesino, Cuzzoni and Berenstadt* (1723) and John Clarke's engraving *The Landing of Senesino* (n.d.) in which 'The Rival Queens Signora Faustina and Signora Cuzzoni [are] contending for this Charming Demi-Man'. See Leppert, 'Imagery, Musical Confrontation and Cultural Difference', for discussion. For Burney's description of *The Dragon of Wantley*, see Charles Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, 4 vols (1776-89), ed. Frank Mercer, 2 vols (London, 1935), II, 1004.

¹⁰³ The oddly-titled *Pigeon-Pye ... To be performed opposite The Dragon of Wantley* (1738), by 'Christopher Columbario' confirms this perception of *The Dragon* in its own jumble of narrative forms (it combines opera libretto, novel and compendium of popular musical taste) and endless listing of musical styles and composers' names, which would have rendered any attempt at actual performance a nonsense.

¹⁰⁴ Molly Skerritt was Walpole's mistress, as was generally known; competition between Mauxalinda and Margery (like that between Polly and Lucy) could be linked to Walpole's problems with his two women.

¹⁰⁵ The first edition is not extant, but as substantial alterations were apparently made between the two-act Little Haymarket afterpiece and the three-act production Rich took on for Covent Garden, and as none of editions two to five advertise such alterations, it seems likely that the first edition was

consciousness these definitions tend often towards stereotype or parody. So, for example, by the sixth edition (1738) the authors' use of the *da capo* form appears to be standardised, with B sections added to several airs, and ten of the fifteen airs and duets indicating a repeat of the A section, compared with only five *da capos* out of thirteen arias in the second edition. At the same time, however, several of the B sections and *da capos* are marked as unperformed; so, according to the text, only half the airs actually had the *da capo* form in performance. The 1742 edition conforms to the spirit, rather than the letter, of the previous editions. Here, all recitative is tagged as such, 'air' becomes 'aria', 'duet' becomes 'duetto'. However, only one 'aria' has retained a 'da capo'; all others are left with their A section only.¹⁰⁶ If we look to Lampe's music for resolution, the printed score of *Songs and Duetto's in the Burlesque Opera, call'd, The Dragon of Wantley* (1738) gives almost all the arias, including those not indicated as such in the libretti, as *da capo*. However, the manuscript full score, clearly written at some stage after the Covent Garden season had started, does not conform fully to any of the printed libretti, omitting several arias and *da capo* sections.¹⁰⁷

In assessing the effect of Lampe's stylistic approach in *The Dragon*, Martin suggests that it is his consistent use of the *da capo* aria that defines the work as a burlesque of opera.¹⁰⁸ How are we then to understand the significance of the variations in form that a closer reading of libretti and music reveals? The structure of Carey's text and Lampe's music should not be seen to indicate a lack of understanding of operatic conventions: both—particularly Lampe—were well

also prepared for Covent Garden.

¹⁰⁶ Moore's 'Zeno, Plato, Aristotle' is the song retaining its *da capo*.

¹⁰⁷ London, Royal College of Music, MS. 927. It generally seems closer to the sixth than the second edition of the libretto, including Gubbins new air, 'Poor Children three', and Moore's 'Fill, fill' and omitting Moore's and Margery's final duet and the closing ballet.

¹⁰⁸ Martin, *The Operas and Operatic Style of John Frederick Lampe*, 43, 102-3.

versed in the genre.¹⁰⁹ It rather implies a deliberate pattern of distortion in keeping with the nature of burlesque; types are invoked only to be fragmented or subverted. An examination of Lampe's music undertaken on the premise that the burlesque's critical engagement with its targets seeks to subvert through deformation may suggest that Lampe and Carey did not simply set out to contrast 'sublime' music with bathetic words, nor to parody specific, but now forgotten works by others. Rather, consideration should be given to a third possibility, that they made nonsense of Italian opera by fragmenting and deforming the very conventions on which it was reliant, encouraging listeners to question their conditioned understanding of the genre.

Stylistic mimicry played an important part in several singers' performances.¹¹⁰ One of the few concrete examples remaining of this practice is Gaffer Gubbin's 'Poor children three'—the song added to the burlesque for Laguerre—given with his own ornaments in Bickham's *The Musical Entertainer* (II, 24). In its original form this, the first air in the manuscript full score, would have been doubly familiar to an English audience. Establishing a relationship between balladry and burlesque at the outset, the text is drawn almost verbatim from the *Dragon* ballad, while the tune is distantly related to the ballad 'The Children in the Wood'. Lampe provided a simple setting for Carey's bathetic text:

Poor Children three
Devoured He,
That could not with him grapple.
He ate them up,
All at one sup,

¹⁰⁹ The enthusiastic Lord Wentworth found 'the musick ... excessive pretty', *The Wentworth Papers*, (19 January 1738), 539. For the King's response, see note 59, above.

¹¹⁰ Burney observed that Lampe had 'burlesqued a fine passage of [Gustavus Waltz's aria 'Impara ingrata' in *Atalanta*] in, *Oh! Oh! master Moor*, of *The Dragon of Wantley*, at the word *before*' Burney, *General History of Music*, II, 802—appropriately, as Waltz also sung this song, as the Dragon; Burney also comments on the abilities of one of Lampe's company, the young Shuter who 'took off all the performers', perhaps suggesting that this form of personal satire was part of the company's mode of behaviour (II, 1007).

As one would eat an apple.

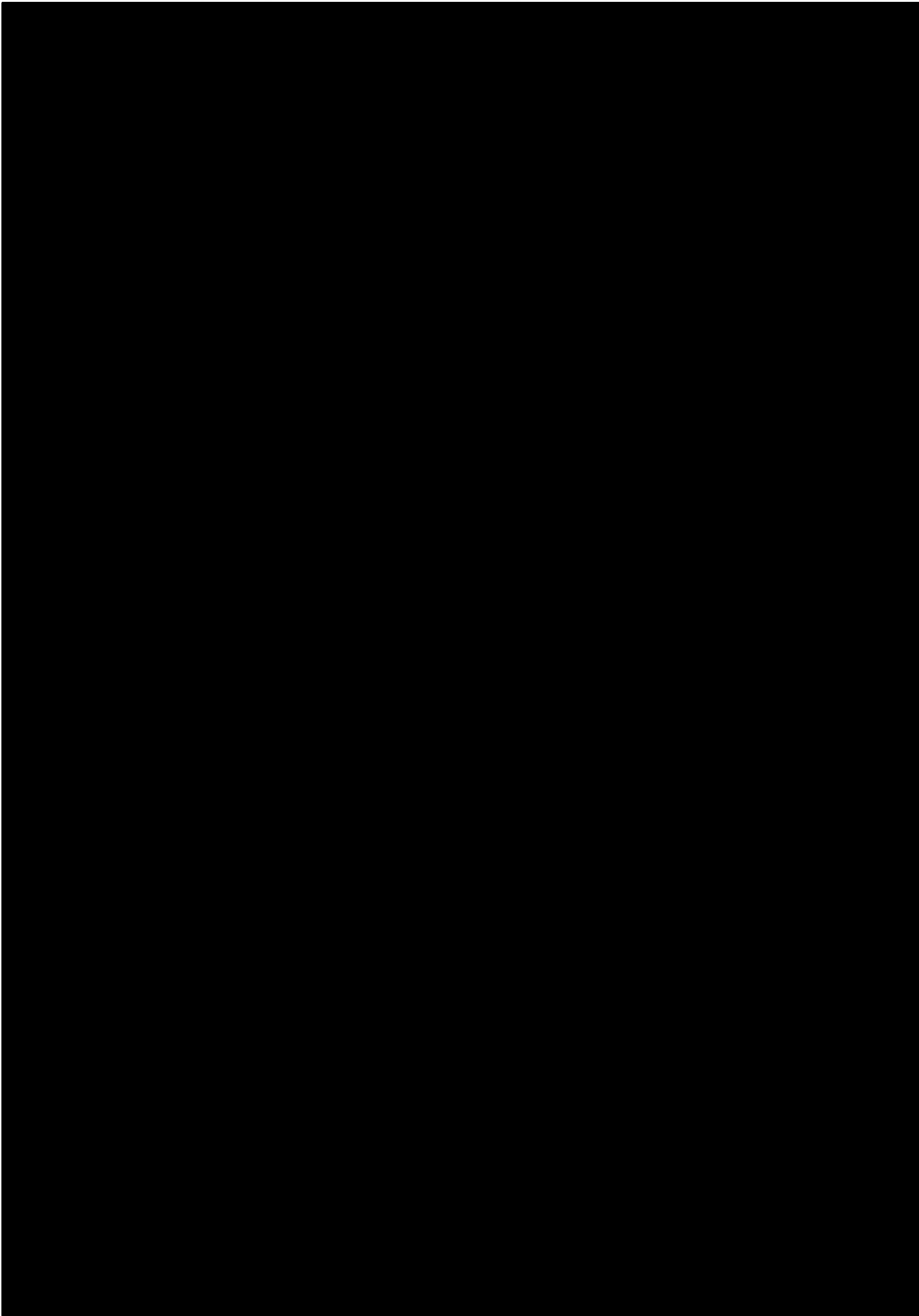
In amusing reflection of—as well as comment upon—contemporary practice, Laguerre embellished the line and text beyond audible recognition—destruction accepted in incomprehensible Italian opera, but peculiarly frustrating for an audience acquainted with the simple originals in this instance. His ornaments break all rules of good taste, even for the time, with inappropriate emphasis of unimportant words or syllables, and insensitive over extension of the cadenza (Example 4.1). His musical excesses not only render the song's ballad form a nonsense but, in so doing, suggest that embellishment itself is improper, if not absurd.

It is at points where, quite literally, the line is broken, or the balance is tipped, that the musically grotesque is displayed. One wonders to what extent Lampe and Carey themselves encouraged or suggested such licentiousness. Pushing the singers beyond their capabilities, asking them to distort or extend their voices in presentation of Italian ornamentation styles and vocal display would have been rendered still more ridiculous by the use of ballad-style airs.¹¹¹

The rupturing of the musical/textual compound in this instance is striking, but was perhaps not as surprising as we might expect—Laguerre was apparently well-known for his musical mimicry. Indeed, the roguery of minor or marginal characters—Laguerre only had one song, inserted at request—has always been used to reinforce perceived cultural verities. In *The Dragon*, however, such elements do not remain on the periphery, but rather disrupt the attempt at synthesis that must be sustained in the portrayal of major characters. Three examples—one for each of the principals—demonstrate this disjunction both within the musical text and between

¹¹¹ If not equal to the Italian stars, Lampe's singers were obviously capable: the Young sisters (Cecilia and Isabella) and Henry Reinhold all regularly performed minor roles for Handel. There was no special need to limit any of the roles to simple ballads.

Example 4.1: J. F. Lampe, ‘Poor Children three’, from *The Dragon of Wantley* (1737), published in George Bickham, ed., *The Musical Entertainer*, 2 vols (1737-38), II, 24.



words and music. All three involve melodic and textual hiatus, hesitance which calls structure and resolution into question.

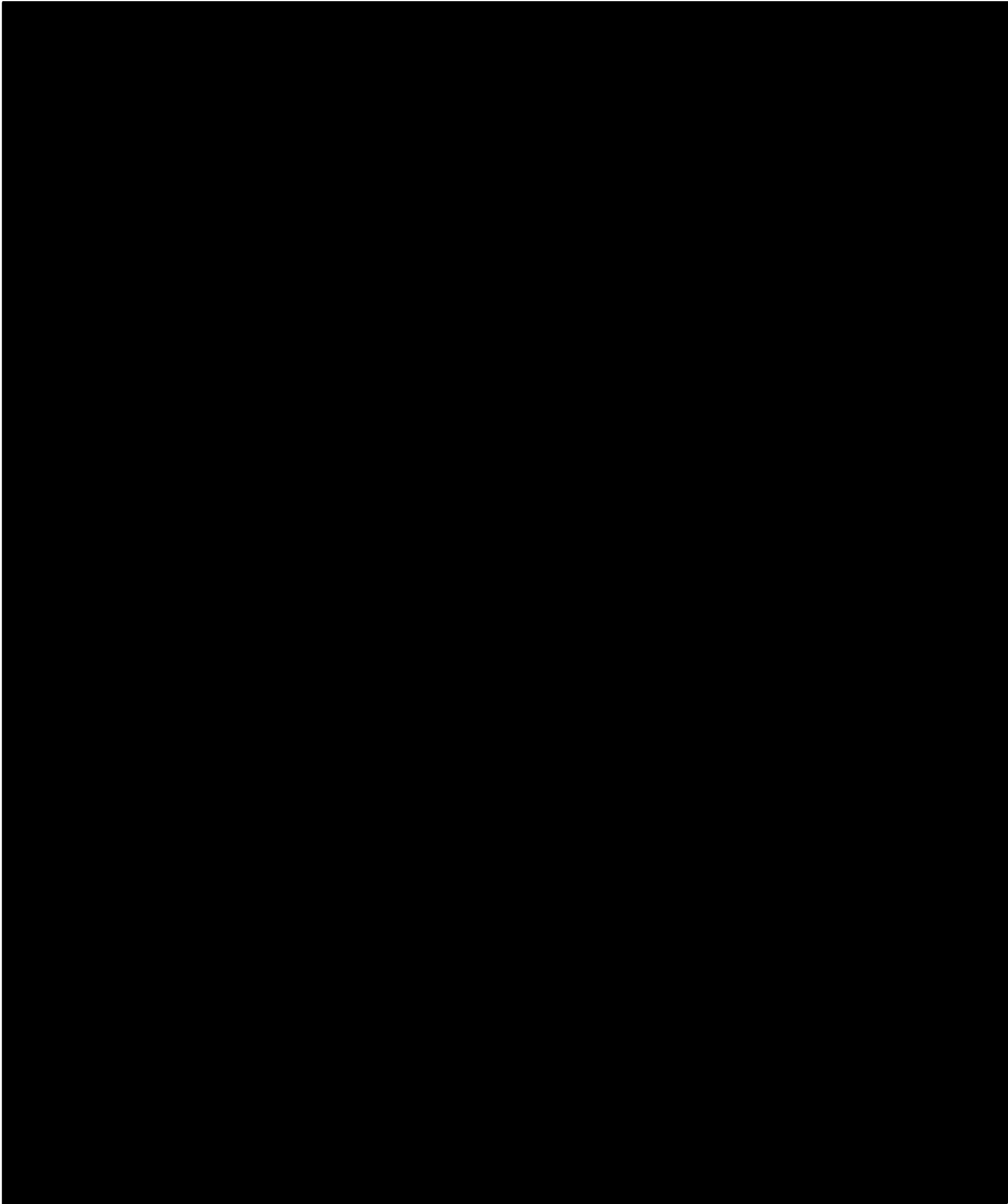
A series of disjunct leaps similar to those Burney noted as expressive of character in the dragon's aria serves as the burlesque focus in Mauxalinda's first air, 'He's a Man ev'ry Inch'. Here, however, the convention itself is lampooned. Mauxalinda's songs are generally short, with a flowing melodic line supported only by continuo; this skeletal, ballad-like framework serves to emphasize musical hesitations or infelicities. 'He's a Man ev'ry Inch, I assure you' she sings

Stout, vig'rous, active and tall;
There's none can from Danger secure you,
Like brave gallant Moore of Moore-Hall.
No Giant or Knight e'er quell'd him;
He fills all their hearts with Alarms;
No Virgin yet ever beheld him,
But wish'd herself clasp'd in his Arms.

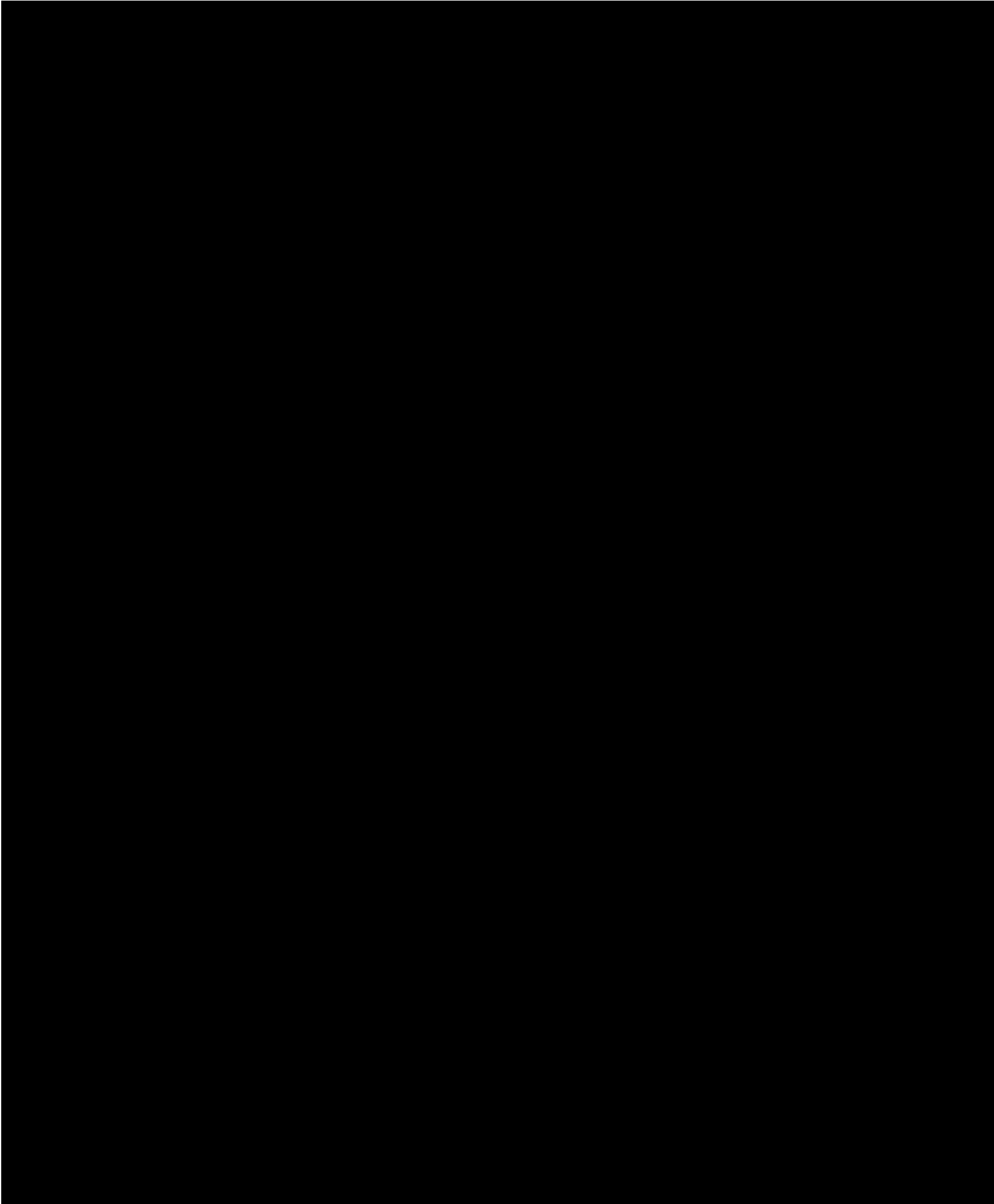
The contours of this through-composed, melodically conjunct song are disrupted in the penultimate line, 'no virgin yet ever beheld him'. Here the sudden drop of an octave on the unstressed word 'him' is emphasized by the unusually static setting of the preceding words (Example 4.2). This line is sung three times, its attempt to incorporate the phrase within the song only highlighting its difference from the flow of the rest of the text. Pushing the singer into a different register would only have added emphasis to this offbeat word; the less-than-chaste aspirations of at least this admiring 'virgin' are made apparent.¹¹² Harmonically and melodically as well as textually, the line also seeks resolution, as we wait to hear what the 'virgin' wants. In both senses, then, the listener expects conclusion; the formulaic final line and its setting only emphasise the preceding melodic and interpretative gap.

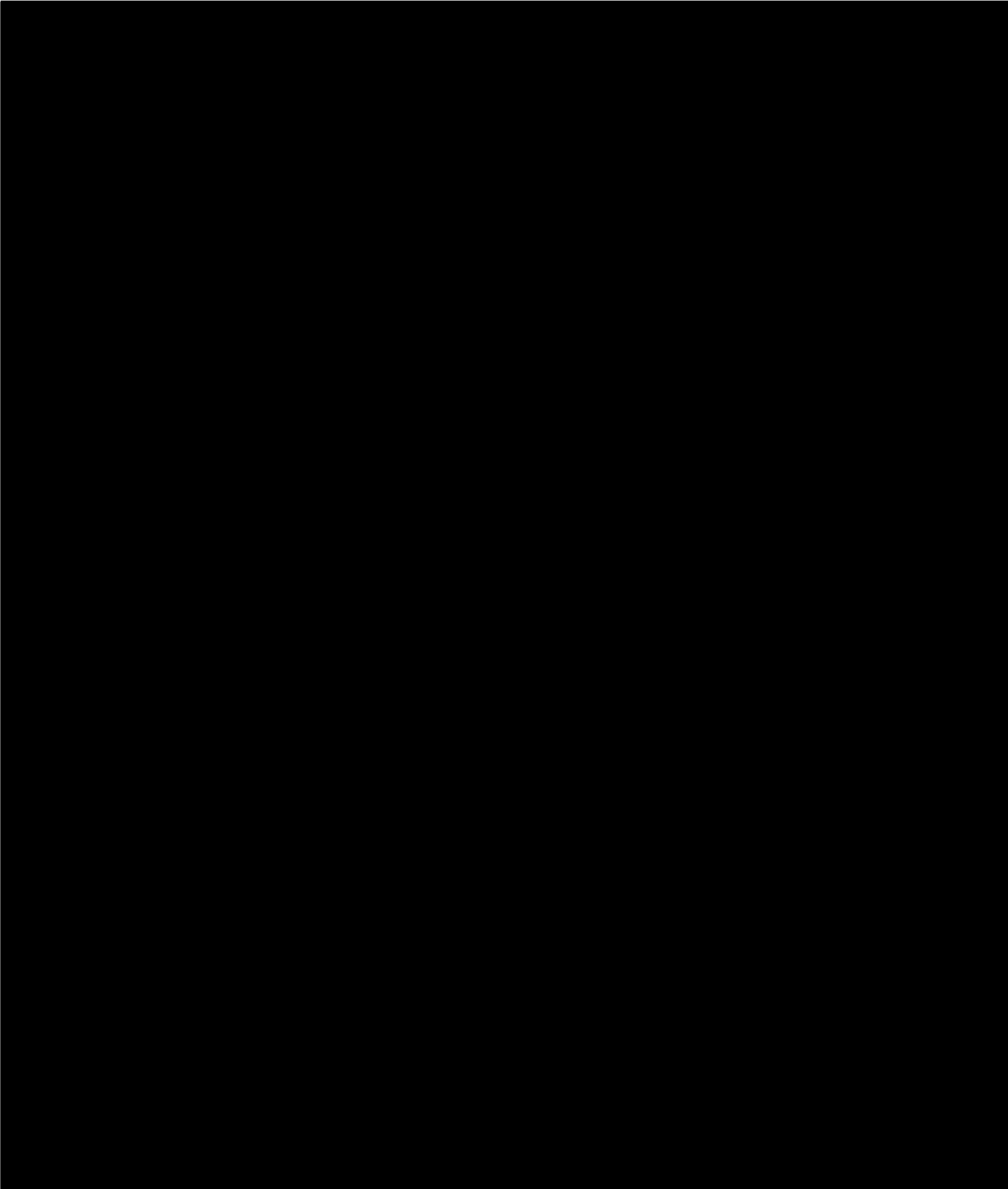
¹¹² In the manuscript the piece is a fourth lower, in d, not g minor. Thus Mauxalinda's bottom note would have been a—in chest voice.

Example 4.2: J. F. Lampe, ‘He’s a Man ev’ry Inch’, *Songs and Duetto’s in the Burlesque Opera, call’d, The Dragon of Wantley* (1738), 6.



Example 4.3: J. F. Lampe, ‘Zeno, Plato, Aristotle’, *Songs and Duetto’s in the Burlesque Opera, call’d, The Dragon of Wantley* (1738), 7-11 (7-8).





In Mauxalinda's ballad-style air, musical repetition serves to emphasize the incongruities of her textual representation. In Moore's first song such repetition—this time in the continuo line—illustrates the humble origins of this operatic hero. Like the eponymous hero's early arias in *Giustino*, Moore's 'Zeno, Plato, Aristotle' seems in its lack of ornamentation and simple melodic line to suggest the plain country man. The honest and forthright *Giustino* develops musically and dramatically throughout the opera to become the ideal nobleman. In Moore's aria (Example 4.3), however, we sense that this simplicity is rather indicative of a paucity of spirit and imagination. Thus for four bars at the end of each phrase in the first part of the A section, the continuo hiccups through an undignified and undeveloped pedal. Where Mauxalinda's leaping vocal line opened musical and emotional doors, Moore's bass shuts them. The phrase, indeed, is already closed; rather than exploring new ground, bass and violins simply echo Moore's final clause.

Margery, the ballad's original 'fair maid of sixteen', is the opera's undisputed prima donna. While most of Moore's and Mauxalinda's airs could be described as ballads, all of Margery's arias were (at some stage) in *da capo* form, and are long, melismatic, highly ornamented pieces.¹¹³ A clear contrast musically with Mauxalinda, Margery also has difficulty maintaining or conforming to operatic formal expectations. Her own perception of her queenly status causes problems for all concerned in the sequel, *Margery; or a worse plague than the Dragon* (1738) which became known as *The Dragoness*. Her aria 'If that's all you ask' in *The*

¹¹³ Three of the five additional pieces for solo voice in sixth edition are B sections for Margery's arias. These additions may have been made on an extra-musical or dramatic initiative: Lampe had married Isabella Young—Margery—during that season. In the second edition *da capo* arias seem to have been given either as identifying tags for the hero and heroine—thus Margery and Moore's first arias are both *da capo*, as is their first duet—or at moments of conventional operatic anger, for Margery and Mauxalinda's spat, and at Moore's challenge to the dragon.

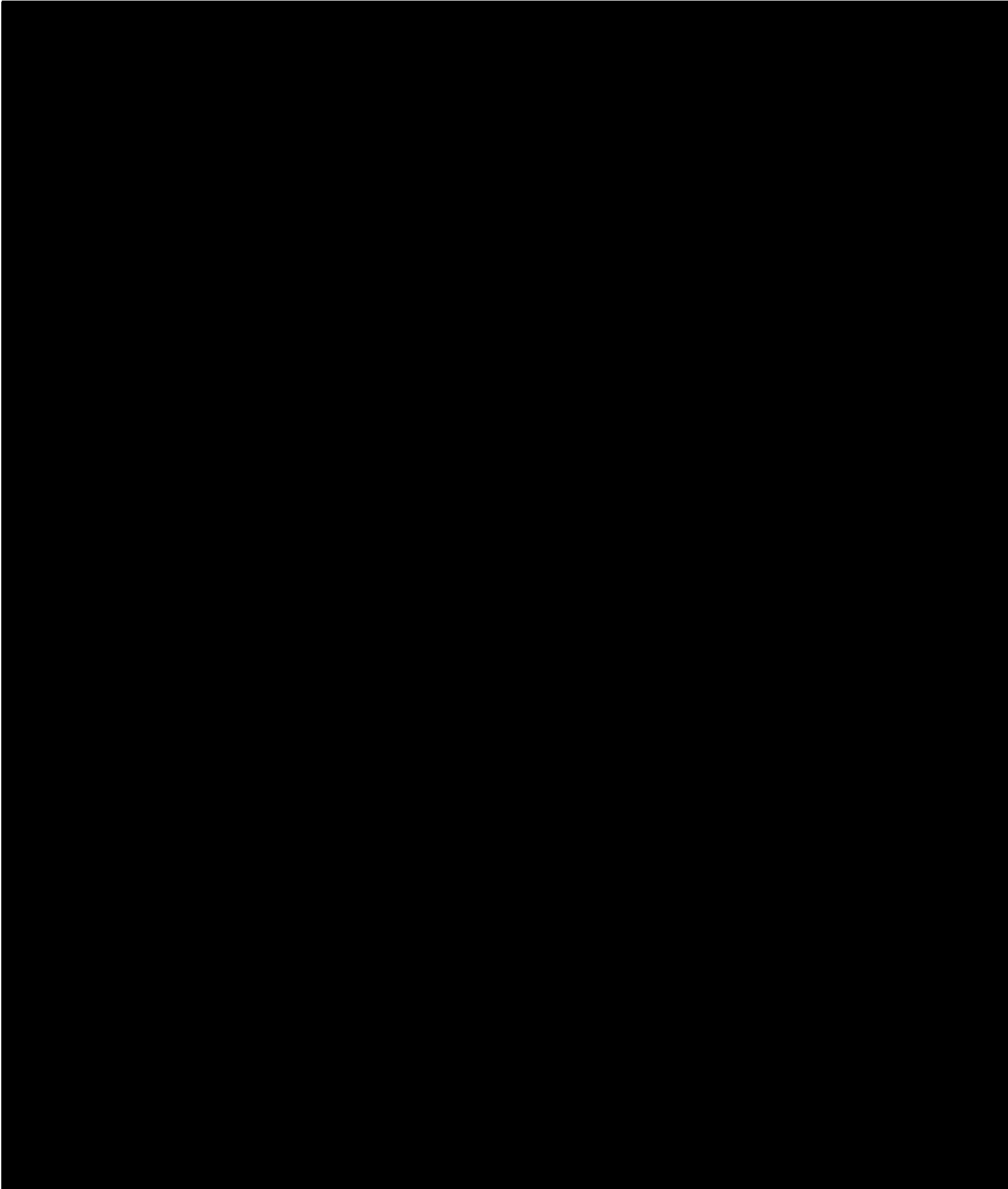
Dragon suggests the Margery of the later work. In Act I she responds to Moore's suggestion of reward for his knightly prowess:

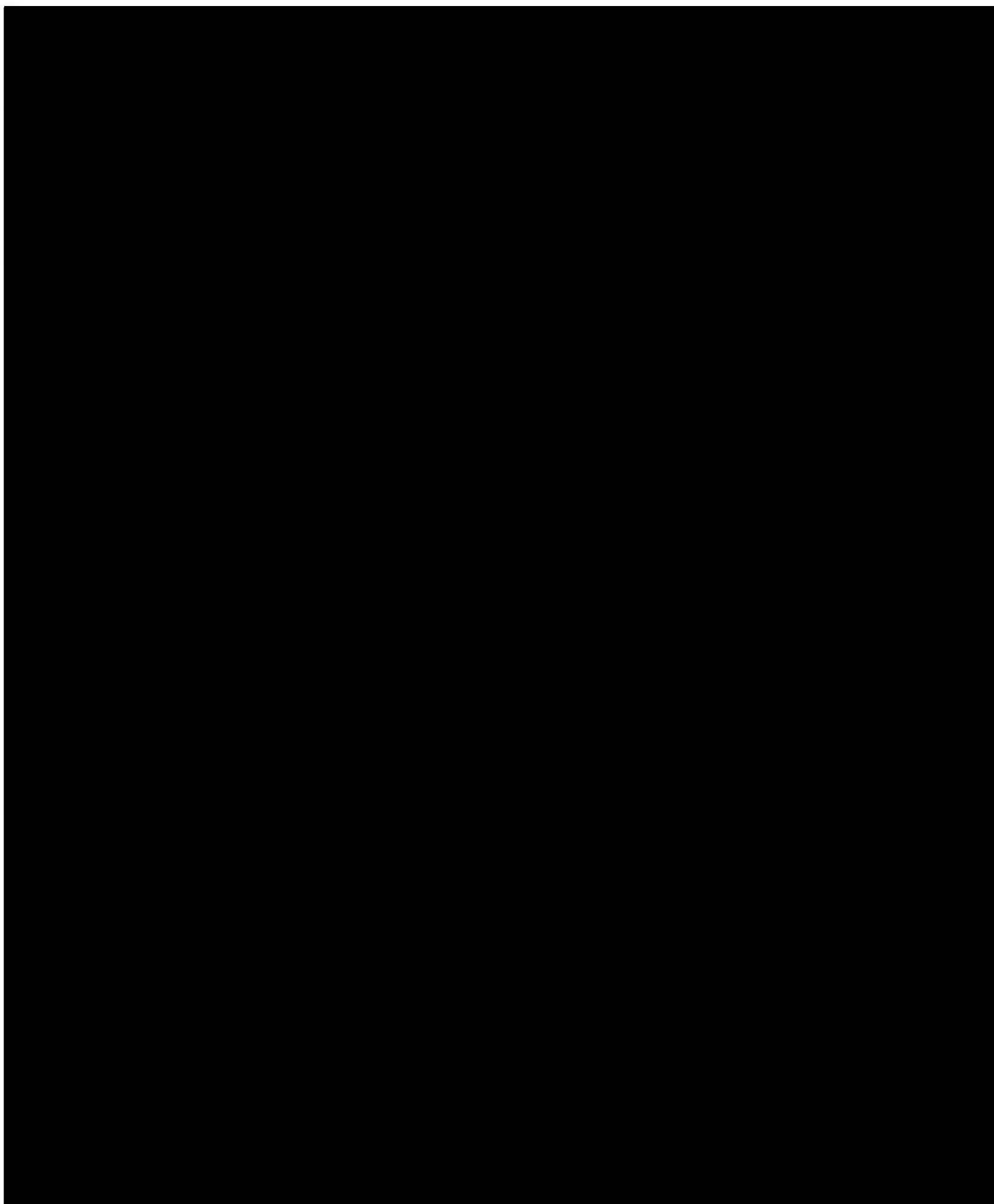
If that's all you ask,
My Sweetest,
My Featest,
Compleatest,
And Neatest,
I'm proud of the task.
Of Love take your fill,
Past measure,
My Treasure,
Sole Spring of my Pleasure,
As long as you will.

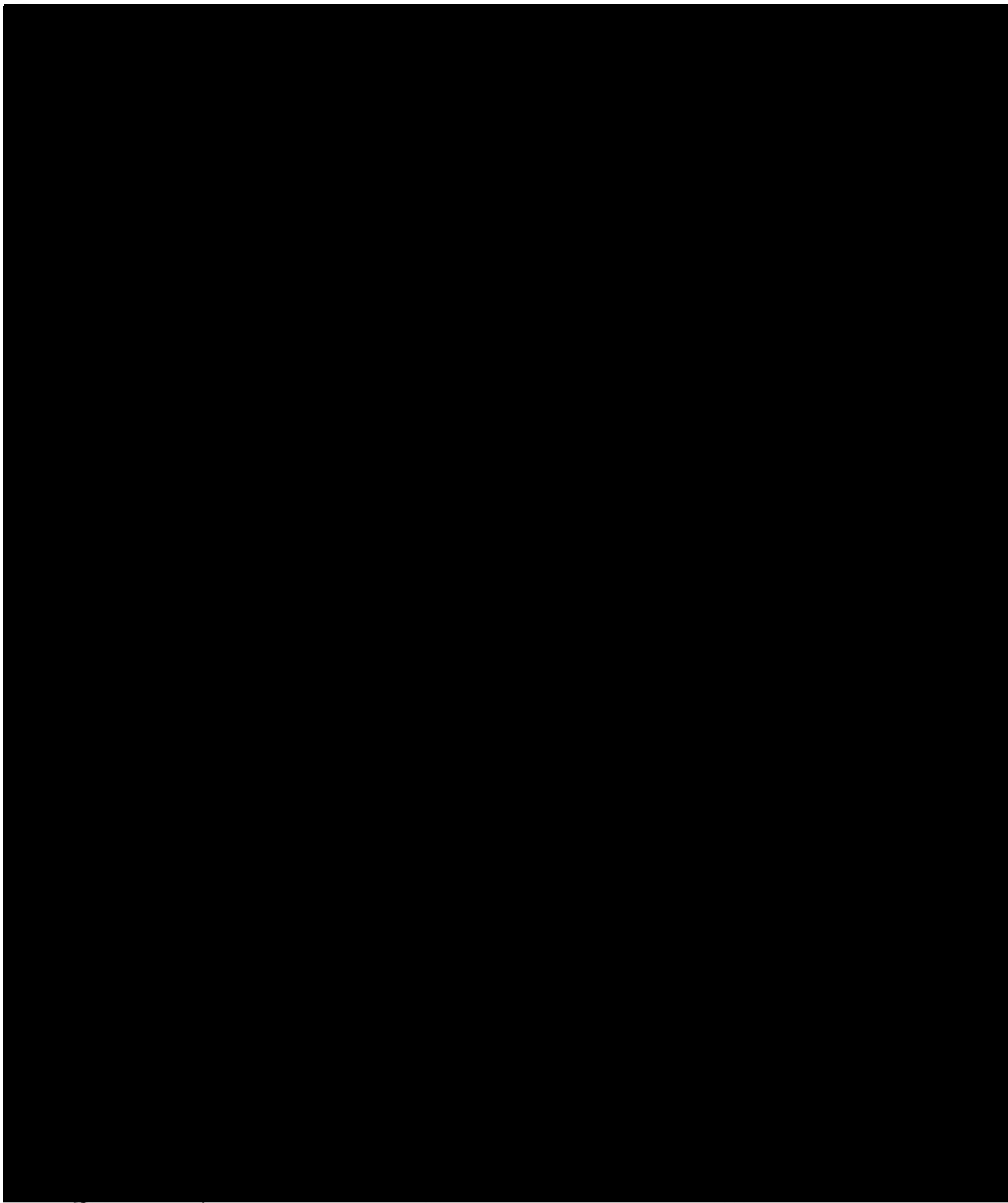
Like Mauxalinda, in her closing phrase Margery signals a disjunction between character and musical/textual structure; the climactic repetition of the word 'long' in the final line amuses in its antithesis of words and music, with punctuating rests expressive of Margery's unsung delight (Example 4.4).

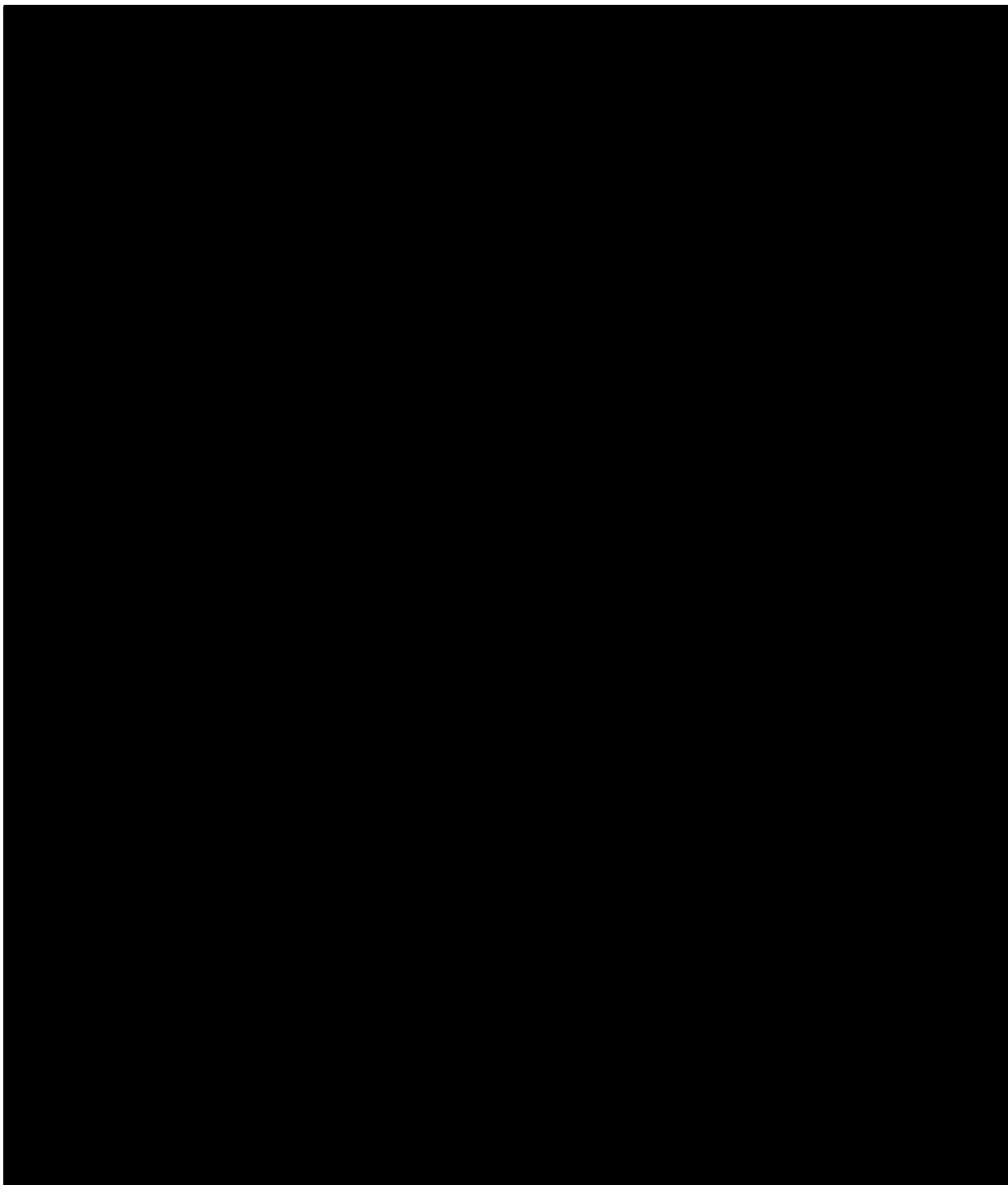
Her struggle with restriction can also be seen on a formal level, however. This final disjunct line and the brevity of the 'B' section as a whole are cast into relief by the aria's attenuated 'A' section. Carey's text, with its short lines and repetitive rhyme scheme, suggests a breathless enthusiasm on the part of the young Margery. Taking advantage of this, Lampe sets the song in similarly repetitive manner, emphasising her impatience still further both by allocating the strong beat to the unstressed first word or syllable of each sentence and by allowing the singer no pause for breath. This rhythmic and melodic ungainliness is strikingly reminiscent of the monkey-like chambermaid, used as a descriptive analogy for the behaviour of burlesque. Such measures are not enough, however, to allow the character full vent to her passion; the structure of the aria as a whole is stretched to breaking point. If the typical pattern in the *da capo* aria at this time (and in the rest of the arias in this work) was A A' B A A', this aria could be described as A A' A'' A''' B A A' A''

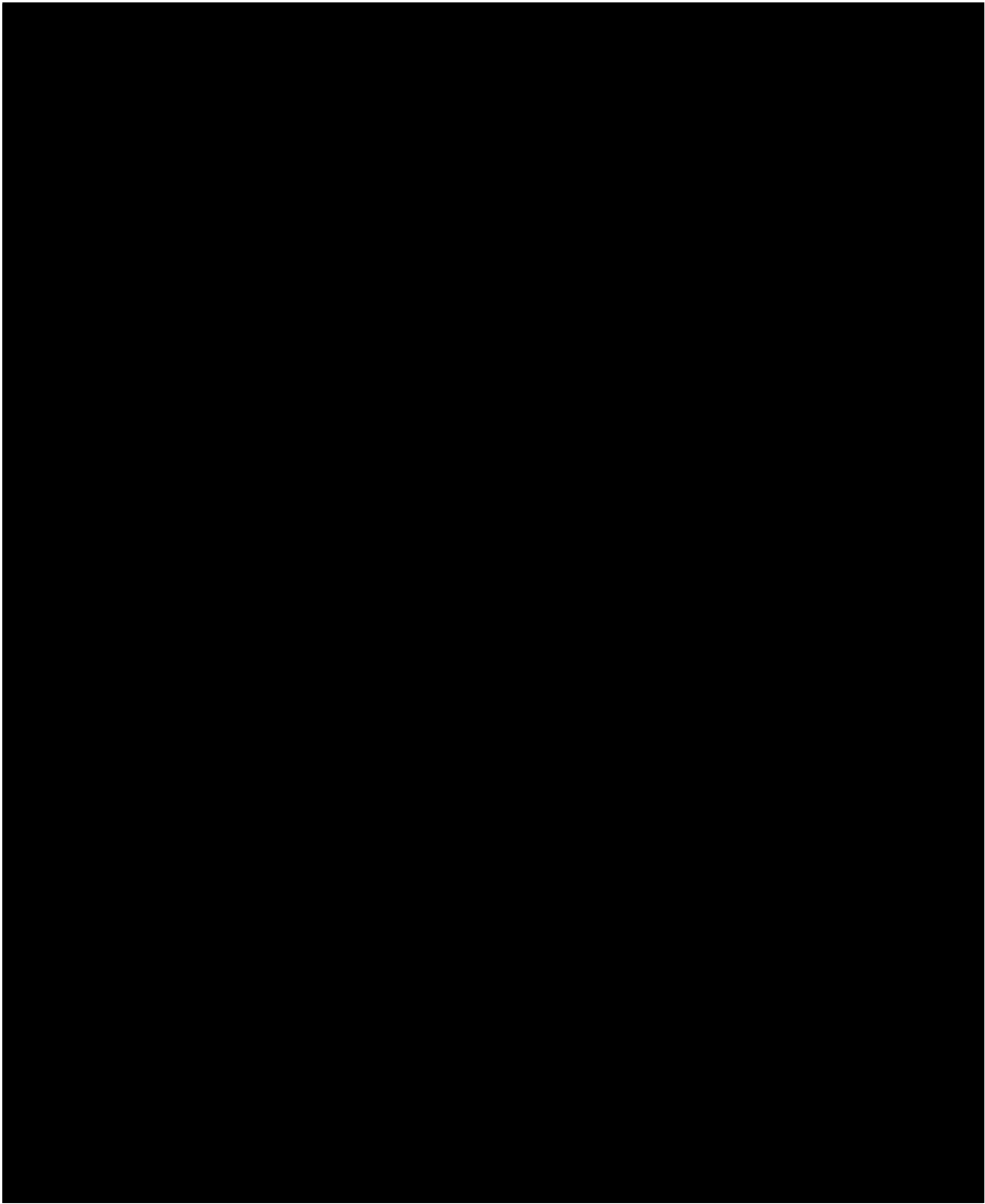
Example 4.4: J. F. Lampe, ‘If that’s all you ask’, *Songs and Duetto’s in the Burlesque Opera, call’d, The Dragon of Wantley* (1738), 17-21.











A'''. Margery's enthusiasm and volubility override expected ritornellos, as the music itself expresses contradictory impulses. Stylistically, a pause at the end of the third repetition of text promises an end to the A section; but the cadence is on the dominant, and Margery outstays her welcome, continuing for a further repetition and adding an unaccompanied adagio last phrase 'I'm proud of the Task', before acquiescing to the return of the tonic. Within the context of her *da capo* aria, Margery's attempts at expression cast both her character and the song itself in a grotesque, faintly disreputable light. Her overweening desire or ambition creates structural imbalance and melodic ugliness that almost suggests the composer himself was not in control of his materials, for not only is the singer's part awkward, ungrateful, but a listener attuned to the niceties of the heroic aria would surely not have anticipated the 'A' section's return with much pleasure: not only is it overlong, its already breathless patter leaves little room for the embellishment that audiences so loved.

It is, paradoxically, by denying the audience their expected pleasures that the burlesque attains its real success. With *The Dragon of Wantley*, Carey and Lampe sought to reform not only—or even primarily—opera, but their listeners. Musical monstrosity was not, after all, the exclusive domain of the professional performer: contemporary engravings make much of the musical amateur whose pretensions and posturings were unfailingly satirized, often with the representation of bestial features.¹¹⁴ Carey and Lampe, like others who attempted regain a national heritage in the face of popular foreign forms, recognized a need to challenge not only authors but audience as well.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ See, for example, the satirical ballad 'Two Nymphs, the most Renown'd, Sir' in *The Stage Medley* (1728) where the adjudicating auditors all have asses ears. For a range of prints see Richard Leppert, *Music and Image* (Cambridge, 1988).

¹¹⁵ Aside from their obvious attempts to capture a market with both libretto and song books, many of

English opera as burlesque

The Dragon of Wantley achieved a level of success that its more ‘serious’ operatic siblings never rivalled.¹¹⁶ But what price that success? Certainly, neither librettist nor composer attained any greater level of acceptance for their own serious operas, though Carey’s patriotic interlude *Nancy* (1739) was popular. The debt-ridden Carey’s suicide in 1743 was explicitly linked by one commentator—‘Orator’ Henley—to his disappointment in musical matters:

Mr Carey—an Eminent, & truly English, Master of Music; unaccustom’d to foreign Notes—& whose sudden Death was caus’d by—his Vexation—that ye German Flute is more valu’d than ye English Trumpet & Ho-boy—& that—Foreign singers & Musicians have been so much Imported, as that—an English-Master—has little to do—but—to end [—& dye with an allegro] with an Unhappy Cadence—& dying Fall¹¹⁷

Carey’s and Lampe’s ploy of using a foreign form such as burlesque to attack another foreign form was inspired but, as we have noted, the ploy worked so well precisely because burlesque was itself somewhat disreputable. Audiences were prepared to accept and enjoy burlesque of opera, but it does not seem they were prepared to take its entertaining message too seriously—its form was, after all, a joke in and on itself. Did not even the choice of an indigenous story, then, raise the thoughts to more weighty, national concerns?

The author of *The Touch-stone*, who foresaw the changing shape of dramatic music in the form of oratorio, also recognised that if indigenous opera were to flourish, it too would have to harness itself to the new national ideology. Composers and librettists like Carey, Mallet, and Arne realized this and tried. Why did they

Carey’s works inveigh against an uninformed and undiscerning public; see, for example, his *Blunderella*.

¹¹⁶ Reprints were numerous until the 1780s. *The Dragon* also inspired two (very different) late nineteenth-century publications, neither of which bear much resemblance to the original: Edward Litt Leman Blanchard’s *The Dragon of Wantley: or, Harlequin and Mother Shipton* (1870) and George Wister’s burlesque novel, *The Dragon of Wantley* (1892).

¹¹⁷ Orator John Henley, ‘Henley’s Lectures, 1742-1743’, 9 October 1743; BL Add. MSS 10577, ff.204-5.

fail? Perhaps we can turn to Charles Burney—judge, jury, and influencer of later opinion on so much of the period’s theatre music—for an answer. It was with characteristic candour that he related the tale of Arne’s second Italian opera, *L’Olimpiade*, performed at the King’s Theatre in 1765: after the success of his *Artaxerxes* at Covent Garden (1762), Arne had persuaded the managers of the Italian opera company to take his next work, but it sank after just two nights. Burney knew why: Arne had simply overreached himself. With the ‘common play-house and ballad passages, which occurred in almost every air’ it was apparent to all that he had ‘written for vulgar singers and hearers too long to be able to comport himself properly at the Opera-house’.¹¹⁸ Tides of taste in polite society had changed little, for even *The Beggar’s Opera* had been greeted with *hauteur* by those who knew what ‘real’ opera was like.¹¹⁹ For British composers seeking a niche for opera in the national consciousness, it was a case of damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don’t. The combination of opera and popular history was never likely to succeed. Both, after all, compromised as much as contributed to the ordering of the new British society, threatening as they did the invasion of those quintessentially unreasonable forces: music’s ‘unmanning’ emotionalism, opera’s unintelligible foreigners, the ballad’s unquiet proletariat.

The interpretative malleability that characterised the use of ballads in the theatre thus had another layer, an ambiguity that came from the authors’ self-deprecatory realisation of the status of their work. The ambivalence characteristic of so much of *The Touch-stone*’s disquisition on opera and theatre in general was also a crucial element in Philips’s ‘Historical, Critical, or Humorous’ treatment of his

¹¹⁸ Burney, *A General History of Music*, II, 868; Fiske, *English Theatre Music*, 310-11.

¹¹⁹ Mrs Delany, one of Handel’s most loyal supporters, disliked *The Beggar’s Opera* for its detrimental effect on Italian opera, but even the author of *The Touch-stone* thought badly of it. Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, *The Autobiography and Correspondence*, ed. Lady Llanover, 3 vols (1861), I,

Collection of Old Ballads. *The Dragon of Wantley* burlesqued not only Italian opera and politics, but also the pretensions and limitations of English opera, and even the practice of using ballad stories. By taking a broadside ballad instead of an episode from classical history or myth as his subject, Carey implies that times are such that theatre-goers—perhaps especially opera-goers—could not be expected to have any further education than a knowledge of London's ballad hits. The ballad was, after all, an even lower, less learned form than burlesque itself. Although balladry and music continued to combine in the theatre, by 1793, when the next marked success came with a production of *The Children in the Wood*, children's stories and sentiment had supplanted polemic in a way that suggested modern pantomime more than English opera.¹²⁰

If it seems demeaning to suggest that the 1720s' and 1730s' idealistic attempts at creating an indigenous opera were to come to nothing more than pantomime, it also testifies to the resilience of that ideal. Nation-building was a complex and often fickle process: even Burney, stalwart of all things Italian, began composing for the theatre with the 'Musical Entertainment' *Robin Hood*.¹²¹ The mixing of balladry and 'English' opera that started as a rebellion and seems to have ended as an escape, nonetheless bore witness to a need for national myth. Thus Samuel Johnson, who liked neither opera nor political patriotism, recalled to his friend Mrs Piozzi that when Charles James Fox had talked to him 'concerning Catiline's conspiracy ... I withdrew my attention, and thought about Tom Thumb'.¹²²

163, 229; *The Touch-stone*, 16.

¹²⁰ Fiske, *English Theatre Music*, 520-1.

¹²¹ Burney masked his authorship under the (entirely fictional) auspices of the 'Society of the Temple of Apollo'; Fiske, *English Theatre Music*, 223. Moses Mendez, author of *Robin Hood*, was a close friend of James Thomson's; Sambrook, *James Thomson*, 166.

¹²² William Shaw, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of ... Samuel Johnson [and] Hester Lynch Piozzi. Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D. During the Last Twenty Years of his Life*, ed. Arthur Sherbo (London, 1974), 88; cited in Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue*, 21. In his dictionary, Johnson defines patriotism as 'the last refuge of the scoundrel'; Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 409.

From Dick Whittington to Tom Thumb, the continuity of that proudly British critical tradition serves to remind us that, even if English opera's flirtation with balladry did not contain the answer to Italian opera, it was part of a process that turned historical shadow into cultural reality.

Five

‘Fam’d Handel breathing, though transform’d to stone’:

the composer as monument

We are informed from very good authority; that there is now finished a Statue of the justly celebrated Mr. Handel, exquisitly done by the ingenious Mr Raubilliac ... which is to be placed in a grand Nich, erected on purpose in the great Grove at Vaux-Hall-Gardens, at the sole Expence of Mr. Tyers, Undertaker of the Entertainment there; who in Consideration of the real merit of that inimitable Master, thought it proper, that his Effigies should preside there, where his Harmony has so often charm’d even the greatest Crouds into the profoundest Calm and most decent behaviour; it is believed that the Expence of the Statue and Niche cannot cost less than Three hundred pounds.

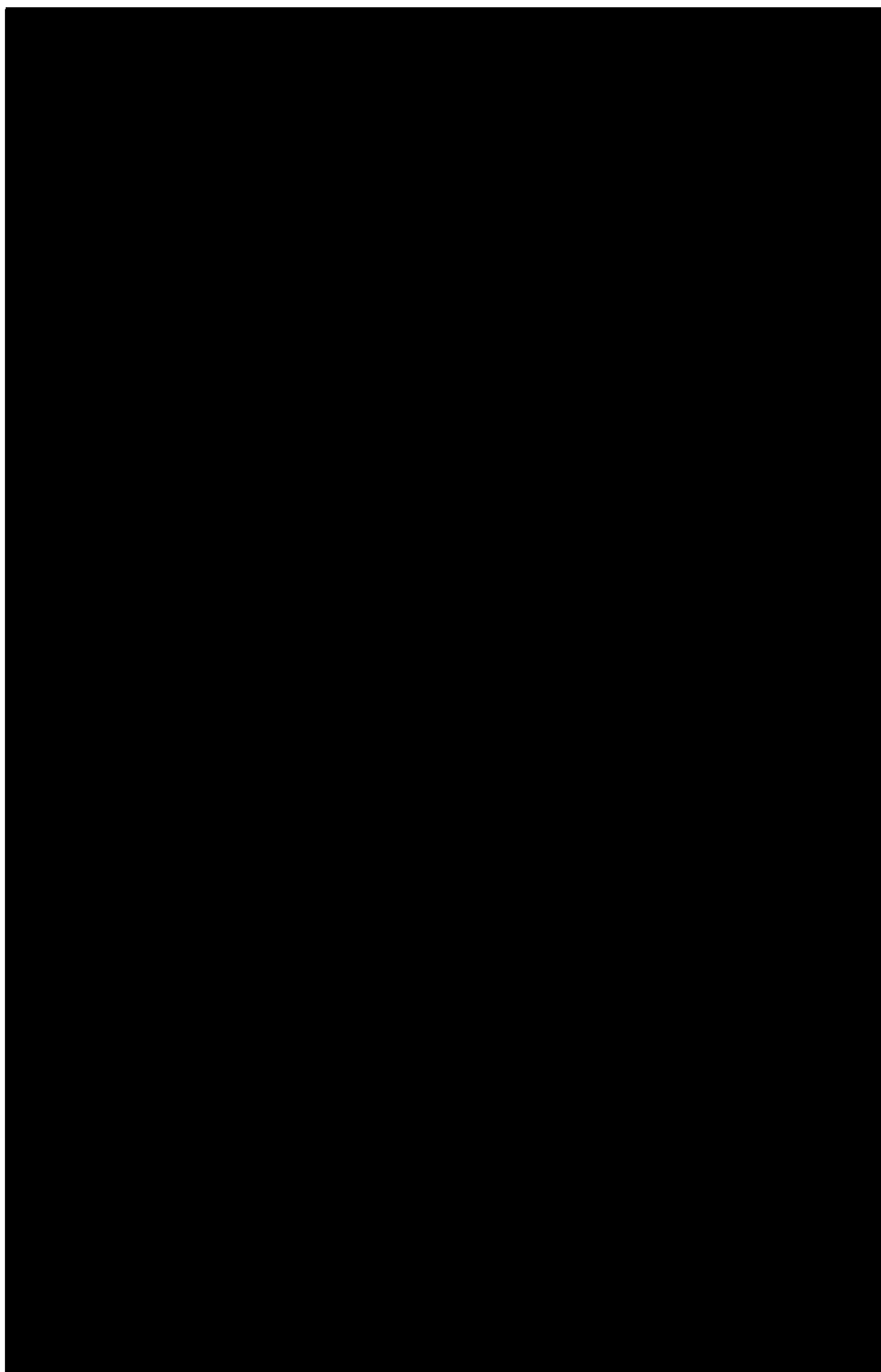
London Daily Post, 18 April 1738.

The installation of Roubiliac’s *Handel* in Vauxhall Gardens was in many ways without explanation (Figure 5.1). The owner of a public pleasure garden commissioned a statue of an opera composer from a previously unknown sculptor; the statue produced was extraordinarily different from contemporary British statuary; contemporaries and critics were uncertain even of the figure’s symbolic association; all this adds to the statue’s curiosity.¹ Its singularity has often been remarked upon: it was the first time a living artist had been memorialised in this way, and its example was not followed for many years.² For most commentators this unprecedented event is explicable only as mark of the composer’s genius, although this genius was as yet scarcely acknowledged by the London public. As such, it takes its place among a number of extraordinary events in the composer’s

¹ For Roubiliac’s career and its British context, see Margaret Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain, 1530-1830* (London, 1964, rev. Physick, 1988); David Bindman and Malcolm Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument: Sculpture as Theatre* (New Haven, 1995). On Roubiliac’s commission, see note 33, below. On the statue’s mythological associations, see note 47, below.

² Terence Hodgkinson, *Handel at Vauxhall* (Victoria and Albert Museum Bulletin Reprints 1, London, 1969), 7.

Figure 5.1: Statue of George Frederick Handel, by Louis François Roubiliac, 1738 (Victoria and Albert Museum).



life which serve as convenient justification of his progress to immortality.³ The contradiction inherent in such a position is apparent in even the most recent study, David Bindman's assessment of the statue's role in fostering public order in Vauxhall Gardens. Bindman presents a teleological view endemic to accounts of 'great' artists when he says that 'the statue shows the great composer in mid-career, two years before he was to write *Messiah*', as if this would have been a consideration at the time for commissioner, sculptor, or viewers; he only later observes that Handel's popularity was then precarious to say the least.⁴

Bindman's account does point in the right direction, however: unique in other regards, Roubiliac's *Handel* takes its place in a growing range of public structures designed to create an ordered, integrated society through appeal to, among other things, national pride. Some, as we have seen, hoped opera (English and perhaps Italian) would form part of this new social order. It did not; but one opera composer did. As studies like those of Ruth Smith, Claudia Johnson and William Weber have shown, Handel took his place in the pantheon of British worthies, but in the process his operatic triumph was subsumed under his pedigree as the inventor of that supremely national genre, English oratorio.

A nation, if it is truly to be such, has to have some sense of identity, a rallying ideal represented in the figures and actions of past heroes. If the nation is

³ The most famous example of apparently 'inexplicable' but portentous change is Handel's shift from opera to oratorio, which Ruth Smith helps to explain in *Handel's Oratorios in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (1995). Coterminously, Handel moved from patronage to apparent self-reliance; discussed in Carole Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (London, 1987), 165-81. Mainwaring's *Life of ... Handel*, as the first full-length composer biography, is also deemed auspicious; see Claudia L. Johnson, "'Giant HANDEL" and the Musical Sublime', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19 (1986), 515-33 (520). For a list of Handel's 'firsts' as demonstration of his status, see Michael F. Robinson, 'The Decline of British Music', *Studi Musicali* 7 (1978), 269-84.

⁴ David Bindman, 'Roubiliac's Statue of Handel and the Keeping of Order in Vauxhall Gardens in the Early Eighteenth Century', *The Sculpture Journal* 1 (1997), 22-31 (25). Bindman's is the most sophisticated study of the statue, and we will return to his premise that its installation related to concerns for public order.

principally an *imagined* community or an artistic projection, its superstructure, as we have seen, has to bury itself in myth and invented history, shedding its shadowy light on the figures of its created heroes to make them in its own image.⁵ In Britain, according to Gerald Newman and others, the image of national ‘character’ formed from the mid eighteenth century onwards was one of sincerity.⁶ Expanded from the early eighteenth-century concept of the ‘noble savage’, sincerity came to encompass the traits of innocence, honesty, originality, frankness and moral independence, traits which found endorsement in countless fictions, epistles, and verses of the later eighteenth century, and which were personified in a variety of ways. The validity of these characteristics as nationally representative was demonstrated not only through their application to past heroes, but also in their contemporary relevance. By examining the evolving image of one eighteenth-century ‘great’, we might see the formation of national identity in action.

Of course, for Handel’s contemporaries, the composer’s public image was most readily perceived through his appearances at and participation in opera, oratorio and other performances. But the trace of this image is barely perceptible to the historical gaze; accounts are lost or embellished. We must rely instead on fixed, material semblances, the representations produced by art. Ironically, recordings of public figures made for posterity in the eighteenth century were almost invariably private, intended for the privileged few. As it happens, though, at least two public images of Handel were made during his lifetime or at his behest—two stone statues

⁵ Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York, 1987), 124, 126. On creating a sense of community through revival of past heroes, see in particular David Allen Brewer, ‘Imaginative Expansion and the Afterlives of Texts in Eighteenth-Century Britain’ (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1999).

⁶ On sincerity as the British national trait, see Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 127-33; Guilhamet, *The Sincere Ideal: Studies on Sincerity in Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Montreal and London, 1974). Newman of course acknowledges that characteristics of sincerity, honesty, purity, simplicity, and so forth, were almost universally claimed as each nation’s exclusive, defining characteristic!

which bodied the composer out in lifelike detail. The creation of these images for the public is, I suggest, no coincidence, but rather a vital part of the formation of the composer's place in national culture. I shall begin and end, then, with the two Roubiliac statues, sited in spaces particularly critical for national self-definition, and part of the developing genre of portraiture in which the conflict between public and private was particularly acute.⁷ As images of Handel they are powerful not only in themselves, but also for the patterns of resonance they establish. The dubious network of report, which we might discount for its historical 'accuracy', attains meaning, of course, as the forging of posterity. Reports and re-presentations of the Roubiliac statues testify to the currency and significance of these images, and explicate some ways in which Handel was figured in the public imagination.

Equally, accounts of the composer and responses to his music reveal evolutions in reception history. We might expect these accounts to be most acute in the late 1730s and early 1740s, a time at which Handel was himself most energetically engaged in forging his image, often in defiance of others' assumptions.⁸ Perhaps most revealing of the delicate relationship among the composer's performance of a public self, his music and popular reception is *Alexander's Feast*, which was both an immediate popular success and a key factor in Handel's lasting fame. The importance of the composer's appearance at and performance in the *Feast* for the success of the work, and equally the importance of the work's representation of the composer for the successful development of his image, show a degree of contiguity between Handel's theatrical self-presentations

⁷ As David Solkin points out: 'given the extent to which ideologies of politeness had by now so thoroughly aestheticised social relations, portraits were bound to play an especially important role in constructing a subjectivity suited to the needs and conditions of the emerging public sphere'; Solkin, *Painting for Money: the Visual Arts and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, 1993), 32.

⁸ See Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera', 165-81.

and Roubiliac's more lasting monuments. Through an examination of these works and their reception, we might see part of the process by which the composer was transformed from an outsider—a Hanoverian writing Italian operas—to a truly British worthy.

The Vauxhall Gardens Handel

In the Introduction we saw how Habermas's description of the evolving 'public sphere' could be linked in a variety of ways to nationalism. For Habermas the emergence of the public sphere in the eighteenth century occurred particularly through freely available and widely distributed newspapers. There were also other, more physical constructions of publicness; the pleasure gardens of London, in particular, were forums for self-display and social intercourse.⁹ Understanding a little of the Gardens' function and significance will help us appreciate the role Roubiliac's first Handel statue played in shaping civic life and the composer's reputation.

While places such as Vauxhall and Ranelagh Gardens were publicised as catering to polite society, anyone able to afford admission could enter; their popularity may have stemmed in part from the democratization of a previously elite experience of the landscape.¹⁰ Like the theatre, the pleasure garden was a meeting

⁹ Habermas particularly acknowledges the role of the coffee house, which fostered the exchange of news and ideas through its egalitarian (though entirely male) structure; Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), trans. Thomas Burger (assisted by Frederick Lawrence) (n.p., 1989), 32-33. See also J. Money, 'Taverns, coffee houses and clubs', *Historical Journal* 14 (1971), 13-47; John Brewer, 'Clubs, Commercialization and Politics', *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, ed. N. McKendrick, J. Brewer and J. H. Plumb (Bloomington, Indiana, 1982), 197-262. The eighteenth-century garden was in a sense an index of developments in psychological understanding; see John Dixon Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: Poetry, Painting, and Gardening during the Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore and London, 1976), xi, *passim*.

¹⁰ Brian Allen, 'The Landscape', *Vauxhall Gardens*, ed. T. J. Edelstein, (New Haven, 1983), 17-24 (17); John Dixon Hunt, 'Theatres, Gardens, and Garden-theatres', *Essays and Studies* 33 (1980), 95-118 (114); David Coke, *The Muse's Bower: Vauxhall Gardens 1728-1786* (exhibition catalogue, Gainsborough's House, Sudbury, Suffolk, 1978), [2].

ground for all sorts and orders of humanity; indeed, both ‘garden’ and ‘theatre’ could denote collections or compendiums.¹¹ More than this, eighteenth-century gardens were theatres, spaces in which the visitor was entertained as both spectator and actor.¹² Under its proprietor, Jonathan Tyers, Vauxhall Gardens was progressively theatricalised from the 1730s onwards, with ‘Gothic’ and ‘Chinese’ booths of *exedra* seating arranged in semi-circles, and a succession of statues, manufactured ‘vistas’ and scenic backdrops or mechanical fountains allowing the visitor to progress through the landscape as a participant in its constantly changing dramas.¹³ The role-playing encouraged by fantasy-land public spaces like the theatre and the pleasure gardens is attested by the masquerades held there, and by the frequent appearance of the gardens in the intrigues of contemporary fiction and comedy.¹⁴ Writing in the 1750s, the author of the *Sketch of Spring-Gardens, Vaux-Hall* eulogised the way in which the visitor was incorporated into the unfolding spectacle:

One great Pleasure felt in this *Grove*, by an intelligent, contemplative Spectator, is for him to observe, in how beautiful a Variety the several Objects of it group, as he moves through the different Parts of this magical Spot ...

*In this blest Grove, how oft have We
Observ'd the different Objects play?
A Statue, Tent, Alcove, or Tree,
Now seem to join, now break away.*

...

*One Step, and we the Picture change,
For other Objects group'd we view:
Wond'ring, from Scene to Scene we range,
Ever delightful! Ever new!*¹⁵

¹¹ Hunt, ‘Theatres, Gardens, and Garden-theatres’, 99-100.

¹² John Dixon Hunt, *Vauxhall and London's Garden Theatres* (Cambridge, 1985).

¹³ Allen, ‘The Landscape’; Hunt, ‘Theatres, Gardens, and Garden-theatres’.

¹⁴ Hunt, ‘Theatres, Gardens, and Garden-theatres’, 108-118; Hunt, *Vauxhall and London's Garden Theatres*, 17-18, 27-28, 40-42.

¹⁵ [John Lockman], *A Sketch of the Spring-Gardens, Vaux-Hall. In a Letter to a Noble Lord* [1752], 17. New Spring Gardens was the old name for the Gardens; Tyers eventually renamed them Vauxhall, after their location; Hunt, *Vauxhall and London's Garden Theatres*, 17. The *Sketch* was probably written by Tyers’ publicist, John Lockman; Allen, ‘The Landscape’, 17.

Although this writer suggests that true appreciation of the Gardens' effects is achieved by the refined, discerning individual, within such a setting Londoners were peculiarly aware of the power of their collective, staged behaviour: by its nature, role-playing required an audience. As another admirer of the Gardens commented, 'This Stage, how can it fail to move the Heart,/ Where all who see the Play perform a Part'.¹⁶

The aggregated reflexivity of the 'Gardens experience' made them particular sites of awareness of both the public sphere and national development. In papers and commentaries throughout the eighteenth century, discussions of one of the best-known and best-loved London resorts, Vauxhall Gardens, emphasise (if often mockingly) the air of conscious improvement and general contemporaneity.¹⁷ Vauxhall was representative of a newly affluent and polite Britain, a nation whose mercantile and imperial aspirations were similarly expressed in the ostentatious eclecticism of the pleasure gardens. The proprietors' awareness of their gardens' role as indices of public taste was reflected in the exotic and topical assemblage of features on display. It follows that part of the gardens' definition involved not (necessarily) exclusiveness, but instead a sort of social representativeness: 'The Young, the Old, the Splenetic and Gay:/ The Fop emasculate, the rugged Brave,/ All jumbled here, as in the common Grave'.¹⁸ John Brewer points out that Tyers's

¹⁶ *The Turkish Paradise or Vaux-Hall Gardens last Summer. The Prince and Princess of Wales, With many Persons of Quality and Distinction being in the Gardens* (1741), 5.

¹⁷ See, for example, S. Toupee, 'An Evening at Vaux-Hall', *The Scots Magazine*, July-September 1739, 332, 409; 'Of the luxury of the English; and a Description of Ranelagh Gardens and Vaux-hall, in a Letter from a Foreigner to his Friend at Paris', *The Champion*, 5 August [1742?], repr. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, August 1742, 420; *Connoisseur*, 15 May 1755, 250; all cited in T. J. Edelstein, 'The Gardens', in *Vauxhall Gardens*, ed. Edelstein, 11-16 (12-13). See also Lockman's various publications. Brian Allen discusses Tyers's never-ending process of modernisation in 'The Landscape', *passim*. David Coke suggests the lighting in the Gardens was considerably better than that provided for the London streets, and that the Rococo architectural style may well have been launched there; Coke, *Muse's Bower*, [4, 5].

¹⁸ *A Trip to Vaux-Hall: or, a General Satyr on the Thames* (1737); cited in Hunt, *Vauxhall and London's Garden Theatres*, 75-78.

Vauxhall Gardens was ‘in many ways a natural successor to *The Beggar’s Opera*, a living embodiment of the play’s values’, offering a setting where all classes and all music could mingle.¹⁹ As both the contemporary and the modern commentaries indicate, however, this intermingling—however useful as an index of broader social change—was by no means unproblematic: as we saw in the previous chapter, *The Beggar’s Opera* was for many a sad indictment of the decay in public entertainment to the level of fairground or balladeer’s amusements.²⁰

In part because of their apparent licence for social misrule, the Gardens were criticised as one of the prime exponents of the luxury that, as we saw in chapter three, many felt was overrunning a frivolous, pleasure-seeking nation. The Gardens’ visitors’ intense interest in novel and pleasurable effects was seen by some as hedonistic. One of the first songs about Vauxhall, while apparently praising its delights, offers a critique of a place where the fine folk ‘with lace dawb’d over’ frolic like ‘grasshoppers’, indulging their appetites heedless of the wants of others, for they ‘love only dear themselves’.²¹ Indeed the ‘fairyland’ invoked by so many writers suggests ambiguous, even sinister pleasures, and an improper enjoyment of the illusory and the temporal. For example, though praising the beauty of both Ranelagh and Vauxhall Gardens, the author of an essay on ‘*the Luxury of the English*’ ends with a stern moral warning. At Vauxhall

The whole together, with so many Groupes of happy People, gratified in almost every Sense at once ... made me fancy that another *Armida* was the Goddess of the Place, and had exhausted all that Art and Nature had to boast of, in order to rival Paradise itself, and render us frail Creatures thoughtless

¹⁹ John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1997), 377-78.

²⁰ Mary Granville, Mrs Delany, *The Autobiography and Correspondence of Mary Granville, Mrs Delany*, ed. Lady Llanover, 3 vols (1861), I, 163, 229; *The Touch-stone, or, Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological Essays on the reigning Diversions of the Town* (1728), 16.

²¹ ‘Colin’s description to his wife, of Green-Wood Hall, or The Pleasures of Spring Gardens’; cited in W. S. Scott, *Green retreats: the Story of Vauxhall Gardens, 1661-1859* (London, 1955), 67-68.

of an Hereafter.... See here the Taste of *Britain!* And reason like a Philosopher and a Politician upon the Consequences!²²

Faced with such attacks, the author of a puff called *Sketch of the Spring-Gardens, Vaux-Hall*, felt obliged to offer a lengthy defence. The best way to justify the Gardens was by defining their usefulness in nationalistic terms:

Those serious Persons who look upon [Vauxhall Gardens] as One of the great Instruments of Luxury, (the Extremes whereof are very fatal to a Nation, and which makes too rapid a Progress among us) may please to reflect, that Multitudes, who inhabit this vast City, will take a Bottle, somewhere or other, every Evening ... and that it is far more healthy, for such Persons to rove about, and take a Glass in these *Gardens*, than to be coop'd up every night, in a *Tavern* in *London*; *Diversions*, of one sort or another, are absolutely necessary to Mankind; and therefore, the great Wisdom of Legislators seems to be, to make choice of such *Diversions* as may polish; without corrupting the Minds, or enervating the Bodies, of the People whom they govern. The wise, rich Men among the Antients us'd to recreate their Spirits, after the Fatigues and Toils of the Day, with a Concert of *Music*; but never in a Morning, as is the Custom crept in lately among us; a Custom extremely illaudible, since it may (especially) prevent many of our Superiors, from discharging the Duties they owe to their native Country; and transform them to so many *Sybarites*. Farther, it seems not proper, that even these Summer-Evening *Entertainments* should be permitted to multiply, (especially the pedling ones;) because such lessen the Industry, and promote the Expence, and consequently impoverish the common People, who are well known to be the Basis of a State. Let all Ranks among us be more or less industrious, but let us not be *Goths*.²³

Similarly, another contemporary pamphlet satirically represents the creation of Vauxhall Gardens as a financial revolt of the 'oppress'd and harrassed ... Poor' against the impositions of the 'Rich People' (who complain, amongst other things, of popular ingratitude for 'the *sweet Singers* which we have brought over').²⁴

Tyers, as proprietor of Vauxhall, also responded. Since taking over the Gardens in 1728 and opening them in 1732, Tyers had launched a succession of

²² 'Of the luxury of the English', *The Gentleman's Magazine* August 1742, 418-20. This conclusion has—mistakenly in my view—been read favourably by others; see, for example, Allen, 'The Landscape', 18. For a more explicit indication of the problems of this 'paradise', see the letters concerning the Gardens from Matthew Bramble and Lydia Medford in Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771), cited in Hunt, *Vauxhall and London's Garden Theatres*, 85-86.

²³ [Lockman], *A Sketch of the Spring-Gardens*, 28-30.

²⁴ *The Evening Lessons. Being the First and Second Chapters of the Book of Entertainments* (1742), 3.

‘improvements’.²⁵ As quickly became apparent, these alterations were intended not only to render the Gardens more visually attractive, but also to provide an ‘improving’ focus for his customers. The Prince of Wales—already noted for his leanings to the ‘Patriot’ cause, which placed heavy emphasis on the civic humanist view of public virtue—was Tyers’s official landlord and, it would seem, also his patron.²⁶ In the Prince of Wales’s pavillion were four scenes from Shakespeare, painted by Francis Hayman, which may have referred to contemporary politics, and which certainly encouraged contemporary viewers to elevated cultural considerations.²⁷ Hayman was commissioned to add further patriotic paintings for the new music Rotunda in 1760.²⁸ Balancing the overt fantasy and expense of the playground atmosphere were a number of moral messages conveyed through images, particularly the paintings that formed the background to the conspicuous consumption of the supper-boxes.²⁹ The force of Tyers’s reforming zeal was not lost on contemporaries, as an epitaph published on his death in 1767 illustrates:

Here sleeps the master builder of delight,
 Who charm’d to truth and taste the ear and sight;
 Who wrought at home to spread his fame abroad,
 And made th’astonish’d foreinger applaud;
 Who drew by moral craft th’attentive throng,
 And bade his minstrels play to virtue’s song;
 Who still the reader of the canvas calls,

²⁵ The importance of gardens as ‘improving’ spaces was a general theme of the time; see, for example, Pope’s *An Epistle to the Right Honourable Richard Earl of Burlington* (1731), and the discussion of Burlington’s architectural and gardening programmes in chapter one, above. See also Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape*, *passim*. Batty Langley commented in his *New Principles of Gardening* (1728) that ‘The End and Design of a good Garden, is to be both profitable and delightful’; cited in *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820*, ed. John Dixon Hunt and Peter Willis (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), 178.

²⁶ The centre of Francis Hayman’s conversation piece of the Tyers family is a medallion bust of Frederick; T. J. Edelstein, ‘The Paintings’, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 31. Lockman’s *Sketch of the Spring-Gardens* was apparently addressed to Lord Baltimore, Frederick’s Treasurer; Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 285 n.7. Solkin has discussed at much greater length the delicate balancing act Tyers had to perform in ridding Vauxhall Gardens of its vicious connotations; Solkin, ‘Vauxhall Gardens; or, The Politics of Pleasure’, *Painting for Money*, 106-56. I cannot agree with Solkin’s essentialising view of musical activity in the Gardens, however.

²⁷ Edelstein, ‘The Paintings’, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 31-32; Solkin, *Painting for Money*, 150-6.

²⁸ T. J. Edelstein, ‘The Gardens’, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 13.

²⁹ T. J. Edelstein, ‘The Paintings’, *Vauxhall Gardens*, 25.

As British glory beams upon his walls,
 If then the zealot of his country's cause,
 Friend of her king, and pupil of her laws,
 If such an Englishman in peace shou'd lye,
 Weep not;—'tis immortality to die.³⁰

The epitaph suggests Tyers was concerned that, as well as indulging in the Gardens' pleasures, visitors to Vauxhall should grasp its didactic message. As we saw in chapter one, the ability to 'read' works of art, and thereby demonstrate taste and understanding, had been defined by that arch-Whig Addison as one of the chief characteristics of nobility, and therefore as one of the first acquisitions of aspiring gentlemen. As such, it was a prime index of the state of the nation.³¹ Tyers, like many purveyors of 'culture' in early eighteenth-century Britain, realised the tension between appreciation of 'art' as an indicator of taste and possession of artworks as an indicator of luxury. Like others, he attempted to reconcile the two camps by ensuring that his artworks invoked not luxurious, but serious and martial subjects, ones designed to bring the nation together ideologically as the Gardens did physically.³² Many of Tyers's early improvements reflect the national pride enjoined in the *Sketch*. One of the earliest indications of this policy was his 1738 commission of Roubiliac's statue of Handel.

How might the statue be read as 'nationalistic'? The design does not immediately provide an answer. Tyers's choice of Roubiliac was, of course, a leap in the dark, as the sculptor was apparently an unknown in London;³³ but even when

³⁰ 'Epitaph on Jonathan Tyers, Esq', *The Gentleman's Magazine*, September 1767, 472.

³¹ Addison, *Spectator*, 409, 411; cited in this context in Paul Mattick, Jr., 'Introduction', *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics and the Reconstruction of Art*, ed. Paul Mattick, Jr. (Cambridge, 1993), 5.

³² 'According to a news report in 1732 the opening ridotto [after Tyers's facelift] was adorned with "Temples, Obelisks, Triumphal Arches, Grotto Rooms, etc.", and there were didactic inscriptions everywhere to inspire, as a satirist remarked with some irony, "a love of Wisdom and the Spirit of Bravery of the Old Romans"', David Bindman, 'Roubiliac's Statue of Handel', 24.

³³ Bindman suggests John Lockman—active in opera circles and as publicist for Tyers—was the link, and that, at his suggestion, Roubiliac had already made busts of Farinelli and Senesino; Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 65-68.

his reputation was established, Roubiliac was recognised as an innovator, the herald of the new, 'rococo' style that Vauxhall Gardens was so much to champion. The Handel statue displays all the hallmarks of the rococo: the emphasis is on movement and detail, on intricacies of texture rather than grandness of design.³⁴ This full-size statue was repeatedly described in terms of its lifelike appearance: 'Fam'd *Handel* breathing, tho' transformed to stone'.³⁵ Naturalism rather than nationalism, then? In fact, the two were not antithetical.

Roubiliac's sculpture demonstrated in physical terms the marriage of personal detail and quasi-mythical status that was essential for the creation of a canon of modern British worthies—figures the public could both identify with and revere.³⁶ Blending the factual detail of dress with the pure fiction of lyre and putto, Roubiliac created an image combining an assertion of the composer's 'classic' status with a sense of urbane humanity emphasised by his state of relaxed (and thoroughly modern) undress, and his nonchalant, cross-legged posture. In keeping with the intermingling of illusion and reality through the rest of the Gardens, this statue on its

³⁴ On the rococo style, statuary, and Handel's statue, see Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530 to 1830*, 198-9. The statue, in keeping with rococo art in general, displays the qualities of (what came to be known as) the picturesque, while managing to retain elements of classicism, if not classical beauty. Uvedale Price provided the standard definition for the qualities of the picturesque: 'variety' and 'intricacy', 'roughness', 'sudden variation' and 'irregularity'; Price, *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful; and, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*, 2 vols (1796), I: 25-26, 61. Of course, at this stage Handel's music was discussed in terms of the sublime (Price, 55).

³⁵ John Lockman, 'Seeing the Marble Statue (carv'd by Mr. Roubiliac) representing Mr. Handel, in Spring Gardens, Vauxhall', *London Magazine*, May 1738; cited in Deutsch, 462. The conceit that the statue was alive and playing—presented as a tribute to the skills of Roubiliac, as well as to those of Handel—is common to many of the verses on the statue; see, for example, 'The Invitation to Mira', in George Bickham, *Musical Entertainer*, 2 vols [1738, 1740], II, 5 (Fig. 5.4); 'Colin's description to his wife, of Green-Wood Hall, or The Pleasures of Spring Gardens', cited in Scott, *Green Retreats*, 67-68. For fuller discussion of this effect in the context of Roubiliac's technical development and reputation, see Bindman, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 70-81. For the politics of contemporary as opposed to the (more popular) classical dress, see Joan Coutu, 'Eighteenth-Century British Monuments and the Politics of Empire' (Ph.D. diss., University College London, 1993), 60-66.

³⁶ Howard Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge, 1993), 78-141, *passim*. One interesting example of this process comes from Vauxhall: in the Rotunda sixteen busts of 'eminent Personages, antient and modern' alternated with sixteen

pedestal and, originally, theatrically ‘framed’ in an alcove complete with carved curtain, is both Orphic or Apollonian genius and three-dimensional, approachable man.³⁷ Roubillac’s statue of Handel abstracts the composer from the specifics of his craft—potentially demeaning, at least in civic humanist terms—instead elevating him to the role of generic model, while emphasising the down-to-earth, relaxed nature of the English private gentleman.³⁸

The living yet legendary iconography of Roubillac’s sculpture was evidently meant to hold significance for the Gardens as a whole. The statue was a prominent symbol of Vauxhall: it appeared on the back of the medallion of admission to the grounds.³⁹ In one contemporary songbook, the statue even seemed to suggest the entertainment value of pleasure gardens in general; in George Bickham’s beautifully engraved *Musical Entertainer*, ‘The Pleasures of Life’ speaks of the delights of ‘Women & Wine’ (II, 21) and was designed to be ‘Sung at new Sadler’s Wells’ (Figure 5.2). In part, then, the statue’s inclusion in the accompanying illustration reflects the song, in part the venue, another popular health and pleasure resort. The engraving also emphasises the fluidity of illusionistic boundaries, for the Handel statue at one side of the scene is watched (or perhaps listened to?) by the foremost of the two couples seated at a table in the centre, as if he were a living musician.

mirrors, allowing viewers to see themselves as one of these noble figures; Hunt, *Vauxhall and London’s Garden Theatres*, 34.

³⁷ On the theatrical implications of the statue’s different placements, see Hunt, *Vauxhall and London’s Garden Theatres*, 22-23.

³⁸ On the status of mechanic arts within a civic humanist conception of the world, see John Barrell, *The Political Theory of Painting from Reynolds to Hazlitt: ‘The Body of the Public’* (New Haven and London, 1986), 10-18. There was no need for this self-made man to emphasise his social status by over-dressing, as Tyers was himself to do for his family portrait (Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 64). In this respect, it is remarkably similar to Roubillac’s statue of Shakespeare completed 20 years later for David Garrick’s Temple of Shakespeare at Hampton; see Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford, 1992), 179-83. For Tyers’ personality and policies, see in particular Bindman, ‘Roubillac’s Statue of Handel’; T. J. Edelstein (ed.), *Vauxhall Gardens*; Brian Allen, ‘Jonathan Tyers’s Other Garden’, *Journal of Garden History* 1 (1981), 215-38.

³⁹ Hodgkinson, *Handel at Vauxhall*, 7.

Figure 5.2: Illustration for ‘The Pleasures of Life’, George Bickham, *The Musical Entertainer*, 2 vols (1737-38), II, 21. By Permission of the British Library; shelfmark: K.10 B.12.



Sung at new Sadlers Wells.

G. Bickham, junr. sculp.

21

THE PLEASURES OF LIFE.

To the Right Hon^{ble} Earl of SCARBOROUGH These four Plates are humbly Inscr^{ibed}.

Save Women & Wine, there is nothing in Life, that can Bribe honest Souls to en-
dure it. Save Women & Wine, there's nothing in Life that can Bribe honest Souls to endure it.
When y^e Heart is perplex^t & surrounded with care, dear Women & Wine only cure it. When y^e
Heart is perplex^t & surrounded wth care, dear Women & Wine, dear Women & Wine, dear Wo. & Wine only cure it.

Come on then my Boys well have Women & Wine. Our Wine shall be Old bright & sound my dear Jack.
And wisely to purpose employ them. To heighten our Amorous Fires.
Come on then &c. Our Wine &c.
He's a Fool that refuses such Blessings Divine. Our Girls young & sound, & shall kiss with a smack.
Whilst Vigour & Health can enjoy them. And shall gratify all our Desires.
He's a Fool &c. Our Girls &c.
As Women & Wine, dear Women & Wine. The Bottles well Crack, & the Girls we will Smack.
Whilst Vigour & Health can enjoy them. And Gratify all our Desires.

FLUTE.

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The statue might well have taken an (almost) active part in creation of the Gardens' landscape. David Bindman has suggested that Tyers's introduction of the Handel statue was meant to harmonise the socially disparate visitors to the Gardens, fostering polite and genteel behaviour and stabilising an atmosphere of 'social precariousness' in which strumpets as well as nightingales were common birds.⁴⁰ Hence the puff publicising the statue's arrival eulogises Handel by remarking that 'his Effigies should preside there, where his Harmony has so often charm'd even the greatest Crouds into the profoundest Calm and most decent Behaviour'.⁴¹ Bindman sees the statue, with its relaxed, urbane posture and classical evocations, as Vauxhall's *genius loci*: 'emblematic of the hoped-for effect of Vauxhall to bring peaceful and reflective interludes into the lives of its visitors, and of music's power to induce civilized behaviour in a potentially disorderly crowd'.⁴² Interestingly, the statue of Milton that Tyers later commissioned for the Gardens was placed in the hermit-like solitude of the 'Rural Downs', where he appeared 'as drawn by himself in his *Il Penseroso*'. Handel's statue, on the other hand, occupied a place in the Grove, the social focus of the Gardens.⁴³

The suggestion that Handel's music might be employed as a means of inducing social order is one that (on one level, at least) William Weber has explored with regard to the success of his oratorios. Perhaps, then, we might extend John Brewer's parallel between *The Beggar's Opera* and Vauxhall to suggest that Handel's presence in the Gardens reflected a more general cross-fertilization between theatre and public life, in which the theatrical (or musical) came to take on

⁴⁰ Bindman, 'Roubiliac's Statue of Handel', 25.

⁴¹ *London Daily Post*, 18 April 1738; cited in Deutsch, 456.

⁴² Bindman, 'Roubiliac's Statue of Handel', 29, 30.

⁴³ [Lockman], *A Sketch of Spring-Gardens*, 20; the Milton statue's placement and pose is mentioned in Allen, 'The Landscape', 20. For the significance of the hermit in the eighteenth-century garden,

broader cultural significance. Although, as Bindman emphasises, in this case the traditional symbolism of the ordering power of music (*harmonia mundi*) is invoked, I would suggest the Handel statue's importance for Vauxhall also derives from the process of ordering the national psyche through instatement of canonical images.

Brewer suggests Handel may have felt ambivalent about the statue's presence 'in a place of vulgar entertainment',⁴⁴ but the composer was a man of astute commercial sensibilities. Indeed, some suggestion of his involvement might be found in another representation of him, produced only a few days prior to the installation of the statue. Published as a frontispiece to the 1738 full score of *Alexander's Feast*, an ode to the power of music, was the well-known portrait of Handel designed by Jacob Houbraken and engraved by Hubert Gravelot (Figure 5.3). Underneath the portrait is a depiction of the 'scene' for Alexander's feast, in which the poet-musician Timotheus entertains Alexander. Timotheus, on the left-hand side of the print, is surrounded by other musicians, but is distinguished from them by his position atop a pedestal. This position is hardly necessary from a musical perspective, and seems instead deliberately to echo the similar design of the Handel statue (also holding a lyre), which was just then being put into place in Vauxhall Gardens.⁴⁵ Association between the statue and the Timotheus figure might again be found in Bickham's *Musical Entertainer* (Figure 5.4). 'The Invitation to Mira, Requesting Her Company to VauxHall Garden' (II, 5), illustrates its

see Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape*, 1-57; and for the significance of isolation in literary history, see John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, 1982).

⁴⁴ Brewer, *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 376.

⁴⁵ This association does not appear to have been noticed by any other students of Handel or of portraiture, except, possibly, Margaret Whinney, who makes oblique reference to the similarities between statue and plate, mentioning Roubiliac's link with Gravelot; Whinney, *Sculpture in Britain 1530 to 1830*, 199.

Figure 5.3: Frontispiece to *Alexander's Feast* (1738), designed by Jacob Houbraken, engraved by Hubert Gravelot.

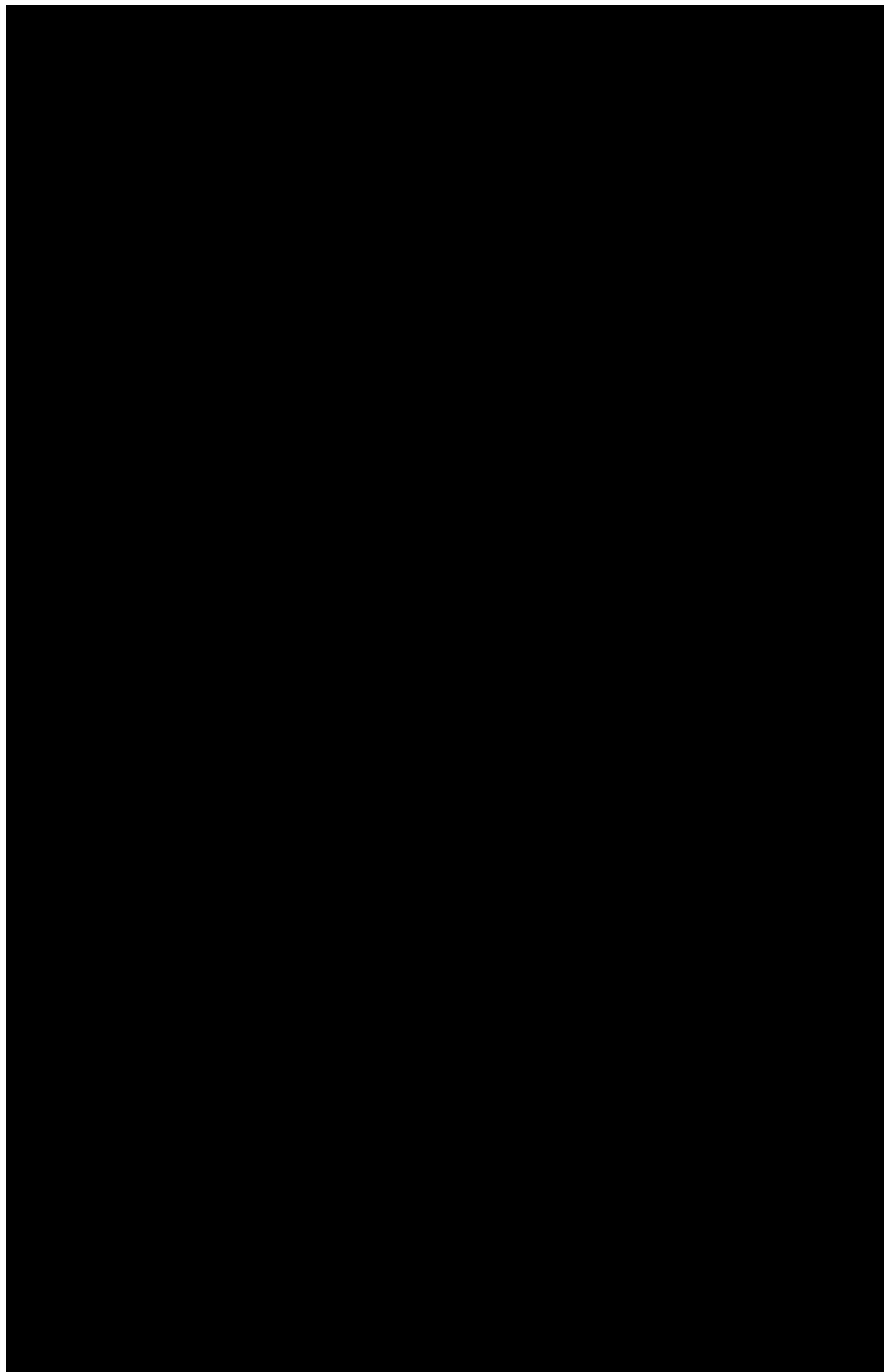


Figure 5.4: Illustration for ‘The Invitation to Mira, Requesting Her Company to VauxHall Garden’, George Bickham, *The Musical Entertainer*, 2 vols (1737-38), II, 5. By Permission of the British Library; shelfmark: K.10 B.12.



The Invitation to Mira
REQUESTING

Her Company to VauxHall Garden.

To the Right Hon.^{ble} the Lady FRANCES SEYMOUR, These four Plates are humbly Inscriv'd.

Affettuoso.

Come, Mira, Idol of y^e Swains (So green y^e Sprays, The Sky so fine) To Bow'rs where

heav'n-born Flora reigns, & Handel warbles Aires divine: & Handel war.....les Aires divine.

Come, ev'ry sprightlier Joy to taste, That rural Art & Nature boast: Fly thither with y ^e Lightning's haste, And be y ^e universal Toast.	A Scene so beauteous can't be shown, Tho' thou should'st ev'ry Realm survey, As all, wher'er thou com'st must own: Thy Graces claim the highest Inay.

‘invitation’ with an engraving not of laughing couples but of the Handel statue, carefully copied from the original. The first verse of the song confirms this focus: ‘Come, Mira, Idol of ye Swains (So green ye Sprays, The Sky so fine)/ To Bow’rs where heav’n-born Flora reigns, & Handel warbles Airs divine.’ This is no statue, the song implies, but the real Handel performing for your pleasure, and the illustration demonstrates the claim by surrounding the statue with Arcadian musicians, some of whom play on instruments similar to those of the performers thronging Timotheus in the *Alexander’s Feast* frontispiece. This connection would seem also to be reinforced by a close inspection of the Vauxhall statue, for supporting its left arm are four volumes entitled ‘LESSONS’, ‘OPERAS’, ‘ORA[torio]S’ and—on the top of the pile and the only volume with an individual work title—‘ALEX FEAST’.⁴⁶

What is the meaning of this link between the Vauxhall Gardens’ Handel and *Alexander’s Feast*? Why is it this work that is singled out for notice in the inscription on the statue itself? Bindman believes the statue’s allegory represents Handel as Orpheus (not Apollo), and so points out that ‘[t]he story of Orpheus ... and Dryden’s account of Timotheos, are effectively interchangeable as paradigms of the classical power of music to affect the mood and actions of an audience’.⁴⁷ It is this association, he feels, that proves Tyers’ desire to foster public order through the statue. *Alexander’s Feast* is not just a key to the immediate symbolism of the Gardens’ statue, however; it was written at a crucial time in Handel’s turn from opera to oratorio. As such, we may be able to see not just the *Feast*’s frontispiece,

⁴⁶ Terence Hodgkinson, *Handel at Vauxhall*, 4, 8.

⁴⁷ Bindman, ‘Roubiliac’s Statue of Handel’, 30. While Bindman believes a correct understanding of the statue’s significance can only be derived from reading it as Orpheus, Terence Hodgkinson and Katharine Esdaile think Handel is symbolically represented as a second Apollo; Bindman, ‘Roubiliac’s Statue of Handel’, 29; Hodgkinson, *Handel at Vauxhall*, 6; Katharine Esdaile, *The Life*

but the whole work's historical presentation as an aspect of Handel iconography, part of the imaginative representation that ultimately ensured the composer's canonical status.

Alexander's Feast

Dryden's 'Alexander's Feast' was written in 1697 as the annual St Cecilia's Day Ode. Although at the time Dryden apparently found the task onerous, he later described the piece as 'the best of all my poetry'.⁴⁸ Eighteenth-century writers felt similarly, and Handel's librettist for the project, Newburgh Hamilton, pointed out in his Preface to the 1736 libretto that 'all Admirers of polite Amusements, have with Impatience expected its Appearing in Musical Dress', for Dryden's Ode was 'universally allow'd to be the most excellent of its Kind'.⁴⁹ Why should this text be chosen by a composer to demonstrate the summit of his achievement? Ruth Smith's outline of the Ode's historical reception emphasises Dryden's role in its pre-eminence; the poem itself suggests more elementary reasons for its role as vehicle for compositional prowess. Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* ostensibly presents the poet as essential to the vitality of the state and the ruler: the artful Timotheus governs the passions of Alexander himself! Any composer's re-envisioning sets the musician in the same position, and in associating himself with the monumental figure of Dryden the composer would inevitably seem to make a claim for similar seniority.

and *Works of Louis François Roubiliac* (London, 1928), 36, 39. John Lockman also read the statue as Apollo, in *A Sketch of Spring-Gardens*, 8.

⁴⁸ John Dryden, letters to his sons (3 September 1697), and to Jacob Tonson (undated), in *The Letters of John Dryden*, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham, N.C., 1942), 93, 98; cited in Ruth Smith, 'The Argument and Context of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*', *Studies in English Literature* 18 (1978), 465-90 (465).

⁴⁹ Newburgh Hamilton, Preface to *Alexander's Feast* (1736); cited in Ruth Smith, 'Alexander's Baggage', unpublished paper given at the 'Handel in the 1730s' Handel Institute Conference, 1993. Perhaps the best indicator of *Alexander's Feast*'s significance was its full publication in 1738, the first of Handel's works to be so produced as previous publications had included solo and orchestral movements, but not complete recitatives or choruses.

Understandably, perhaps, few had demonstrated such hubris, or such talent.⁵⁰

Handel, however, was musician to monarchs: the list of subscribers to the 1738 edition of *Alexander's Feast* featured all seven of the royal children.⁵¹ As Hamilton pointed out in his Preface, after repeated unsuccessful attempts to set the Ode, Handel was the composer 'who only is capable of doing it Justice'; only the 'united Labours and utmost Efforts of a *Dryden* and a *Handel*' could ensure perfection.⁵²

So, Handel was a modern Timotheus, and the equivalent of Dryden to boot. Or was he? Smith's studies of Dryden's poem were in fact designed to lay to rest the puzzlement that has surrounded this work, for despite Dryden's own assessment, modern commentators have found perplexing the Ode's inclusion of St Cecilia as if an afterthought. Smith points out the ambivalence the author demonstrates about 'the power of music', a power which can be used for ill as well as good.⁵³ Dryden's Timotheus plays on the emotions of his King in such a way as to render Alexander impotent and foolish before his assembled soldiers; Timotheus's venal (though skilful) employment of his art renders him a definite second to St Cecilia, who, we

⁵⁰ Previous settings of *Alexander's Feast* had been made by Jeremiah Clarke (for St. Cecilia's Day, 22 November 1697); Thomas Clayton (libretto arr. John Hughes, 24 May 1711); Benedetto Marcello (*Timoteo* a cantata for 2 voices, the libretto trans. Abbé Conti, 1720); cited in Robert Manson Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton* (London, 1956), 26, 27, 30. On Marcello's setting, see Michael Talbot, 'The effects of music: Benedetto Marcello's cantata "Il Timoteo"', in C. Madricardo and F. Rossi, eds, *Benedetto Marcello: la sua opera e il suo tempo* (Florence, 1988), 103-25. Charles Gildon lamented the settings of his contemporaries in the *Laws of Poetry* (1721), 84; cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton*, 30; Smith, 'Alexander's Baggage', 2. Most of the primary sources cited in this section are also cited (and quoted) in Myers.

⁵¹ Deutsch, 453. Their subscription was obviously noteworthy, for Horace Walpole remarked that, by contrast: 'I believe King George would have preferred a guinea to a composition as perfect as *Alexander's Feast*'; cited in Deutsch, 454.

⁵² Hamilton, Preface to *Alexander's Feast*; cited in Deutsch, 399.

⁵³ For a comprehensive critique of other modern commentators, and for contemporary ambivalence over the power of music, see Smith, 'Argument and Contexts of Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*', 466-68 and 478-85. See also Smith, 'Alexander's Baggage', *passim*. At least some contemporary commentators appear to have been aware of Dryden's apparent aim: James Beattie observes that 'I am also pleased to find, for the honour of music, and of this criticism, that history ascribes the burning of Persepolis, not to any of the tuneful tribe, but to the instigation of a drunken harlot'; *Essays on Poetry and Music as they affect the Mind* (Edinburgh, 1776), 168; see also *The Prompter*, 14 November 1735. Others, however, were critical of Dryden; see, for example, John Brown, *A Dissertation on ... Poetry and Music* (1763), 236-37; [Robert Maddison, attr.], *An Examination of the*

are reminded in the last verse, uses music for its only true purpose, to venerate God. By this assessment, Smith shows that Dryden is in accord with eighteenth-century clerics who, preaching on St Cecilia's Day, consistently warned of the danger of music if misused. If Smith convincingly posits Dryden's likely poetic design, she is more troubled by Handel's intentions: 'Handel constantly refuses opportunities in the text to give musical expression to the harsher aspects of Dryden's portrayal of Alexander'; his Alexander is human and vigorous, sometimes silly, but never nasty, and his Thais is charming.⁵⁴ Obviously, Smith concludes that Handel—adept and involved in most forms of music—was not prepared to endorse Dryden's limiting thesis. Looking closely at *Alexander's Feast*, we can further extend Smith's conclusion to see how, in Handel's presentation of this vexed issue, questions of his own status also come to the fore.

Most obvious in a musical re-presentation of this text on Timotheus will be a composer's attempt to have the effect of a Timotheus.⁵⁵ This Ode about Timotheus's powers was also, as we have seen, about the powers of any poet or musician, and in a sense the artist grappling with this topic is invoking Timotheus almost as a Muse. Handel employs varied orchestral and vocal forces to illustrate the affective power of music, displaying bacchanalian joviality with prominent horns and woodwind and a lurching pedal, and rousing Alexander and the audience at the beginning of the second part with terraced entries of strings, woodwind, trumpets and timpani suitable for the subsequent incitement to revenge. It seems likely that this scene inspired William Hayes's satire of contemporary composers

Oratorios which have been Performed This Season at Covent-Garden Theatre (1763), 48; Samuel Johnson, cited in Smith, 'Argument and Context for Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*', 485.

⁵⁴ Smith, 'Alexander's Baggage', 9-10.

⁵⁵ One writer to the *Universal Spectator* certainly thought Handel another Timotheus, writing that: 'I defy any one, who is attentive to the Performance of [*Alexander's Feast*], to fortify himself so well,

who dislike Handel's heroic music: 'what can be more disagreeable and impertinent, than when you are soothed and lulled into a pleasing *Reverie*, to be roused, to be awakened ... by one of those manly Things?'⁵⁶ Certainly, *Alexander's Feast* was cited approvingly in the journal *Common Sense* for excelling 'in the *Ortios*, or *Warlike Measure*' necessary to inculcate manly virtue in the nation, though again the commentator expressed concern that 'the Impressions which it was observed to make upon the *Audience* soon gave Way to the *Phrygian*, or *Lascivious Movement*'. 'Giant HANDEL' as Pope dubbed him, must have been well-acquainted with the public (and princely) espousal of his music on militaristic grounds.⁵⁷

We should not, however, assume that Handel was unaware of Dryden's reservations about music's power—as Smith has pointed out, sermons on this topic continued throughout the early eighteenth century, and Handel's librettist, Newburgh Hamilton, introduces Handel in his Preface as an improved Timotheus. Similarly, in his 1733 *Encaenia Ode*, Henry Buckeridge compared Handel to Timotheus, but said that Handel's sacred compositions made him the better.⁵⁸ How, then, was Handel to reconcile his demonstration of Timotheus-like powers with an eschewal of Timothean motivation? The answer comes in the subtle layering of

as not to be mov'd with the same Passions, with which the *Hero* is transported'; *The Universal Spectator* (1728-46), 4 vols (1747), IV, 183.

⁵⁶ Hayes, *The Art of Composing Music* (1751); cited in Deutsch, 715.

⁵⁷ *Common Sense*, 14 October 1738. Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, Book IV, ll.65-68: 'Strong in new Arms, lo! Giant Handel stands,/ Like bold Briareus, with a hundred hands;/ To stir, to rouze, to shake the Soul he comes,/ And Jove's own Thunders follow Mars's Drums'; *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, gen. ed. John Butt, Vol. V, *The Dunciad*, ed. James Sutherland (London, 1943, 3rd edn, 1963), 348. Mainwaring, in particular, established the notion of Handel as a 'rough and martial' composer on aesthetic grounds; John Mainwaring, *Memoirs of the Life of ... Handel* (1760; facs. rept. 1964), 159-68. On the reception history of Handel's music as 'bold' and 'daring', 'truly *Great and Heroic*', and 'sublime' see Peter Kivy, 'Mainwaring's Handel: its Relation to English Aesthetics', *JAMS* 17 (1964), 170-78; Johnson, "'Giant HANDEL" and the Musical Sublime'; Smith, *Handel's Oratorios*, 108-126, *passim*.

⁵⁸ Henry Buckeridge, 'Musica Sacra Dramatica, Sive Oratorium (Carmine Lyrico)' (7 July 1733), trans. Henry Gifford; cited in Deutsch, 320-22. Smith herself notes that Handel must have been aware of the problems inherent in Dryden's *Alexander*, as he had already dealt less than favourably with him in *Alessandro* (1726); Smith, 'Alexander's Baggage', 6. I am grateful to Ruth Smith for bringing Buckeridge to my attention.

representation in general and Handel's self-representation in particular within the performance of *Alexander's Feast*.

Handel's identification with Timotheus was made explicit through the 1738 frontispiece, and was expressed through the affective power of the music itself. This association must have been reinforced by the composer's physical appearance in the theatre, (presumably) leading the assembled forces from the keyboard—an enacting of Timotheus's power that went beyond the fleeting musical representations of Alexander and Thais. Winton Dean points out that the simple exchange of 'Behold' for 'He sung' in the chorus 'Behold Darius' makes the chorus participants in the action, Alexander's soldiers in fact.⁵⁹ Other choruses confirm this suggestion: the chorus 'The list'ning crowd' juxtaposes soprano description ('The list'ning crowd admire the lofty sound') with bass statement ("A present deity!" they shout around'); the drinking chorus is sung only by the men (altos, tenors and basses). At the same time, however, Handel avoids an overtly dramatic presentation of the main 'characters': Timotheus, Alexander and Thais are not represented by single voices, but are instead shared among soprano, tenor and bass, according to *Affekt*. The closest Handel comes to the representation of a single character is in the change from *secco* to accompanied recitative as the poem moves from description of the scene to Timotheus's persuasive playing; for example, in the transition from 'Timotheus, plac'd on high' to 'The song began from Jove', or from 'Sooth'd with the sound' to 'He chose a mournful Muse'.⁶⁰ In these instances, it is the mode of instrumental accompaniment as much as the singer's voice that represents Timotheus. Handel's design that a harp concerto be placed after the apostrophe to

⁵⁹ Dean, 'Handel's "Alexander's Feast": A Fruitful Encounter with English Poetry', sleeve notes to Handel, *Alexander's Feast*, dir. John Eliot Gardiner (Philips, 1987: 422053-2), 17.

⁶⁰ At least one eighteenth-century critic particularly praised Handel's accompanied recitatives as more emotionally affecting even than his arias; [Maddison], *An Examination of the Oratorios*, 41.

Timotheus emphasises the way in which the orchestra itself embodies Timotheus's power:

Timotheus plac'd on high,
Amid the tuneful Quire,
With flying fingers touch'd the Lyre:
The trembling Notes ascend the Sky,
And heav'nly Joys inspire.⁶¹

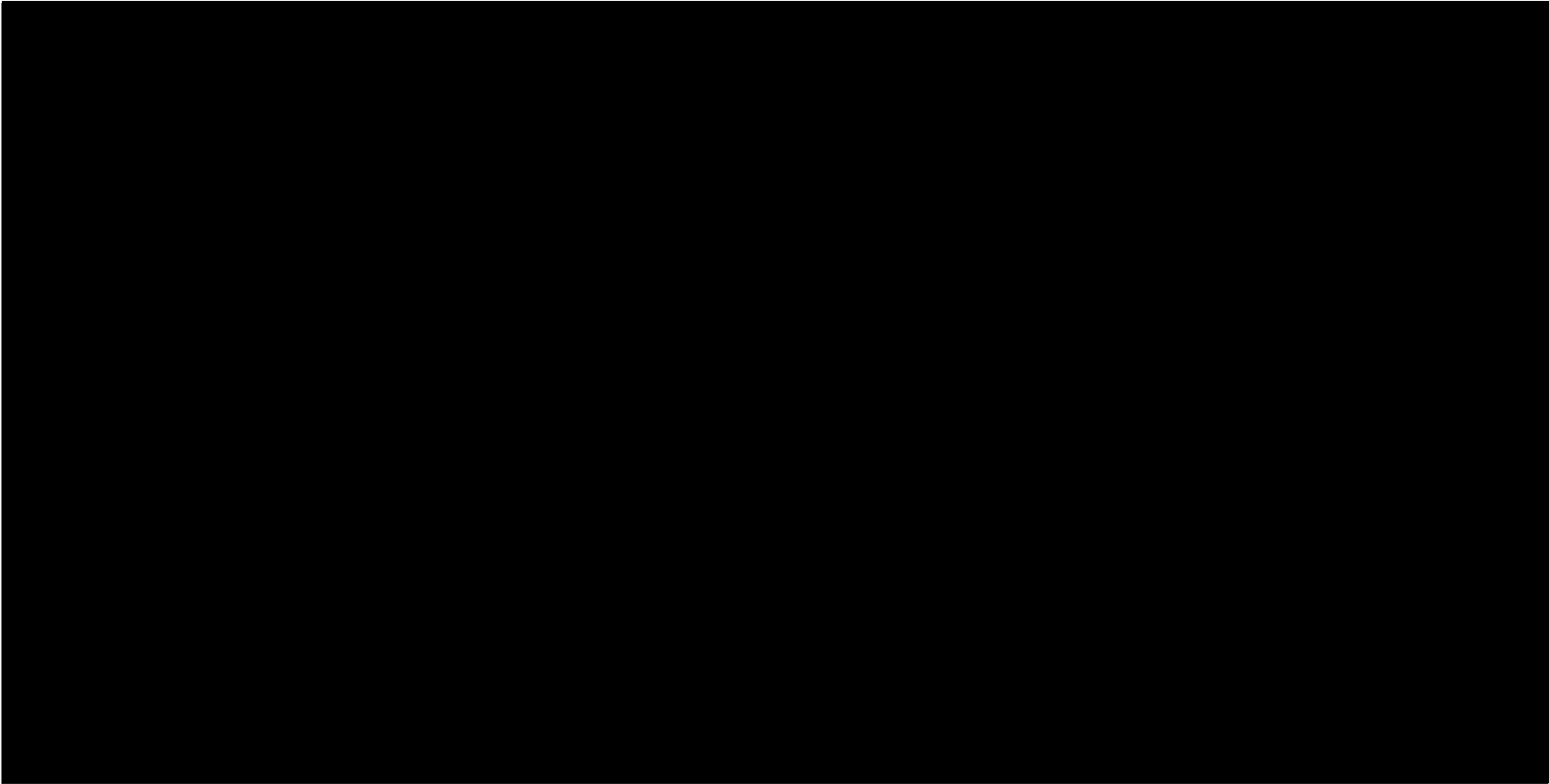
The description of the concerto in the 1736/7 libretto as being 'for the Harp, Lute, Lyrichord, and other Instruments [i.e., orchestral ripieno]' and a manuscript ascription of the concerto as 'per il Liuto e L'Harpa' suggests conscious archaism in Handel's choice of instruments, and an attempt to characterise Timotheus's 'sound'.⁶² Handel's orchestration for the harp concerto certainly suggests intentional 'difference', with accompaniment of muted strings and recorders underpinned by pizzicato bass. This association is reinforced by the first 'Timothean' aria, 'He sung Darius, great and good', in which the muted staccato strings (imitating a plucked lyre?) announce it to be Timotheus's (Example 5.1).

Timotheus's link with the orchestra both disembodies his power and, because of that disembodiment, associates it more closely with Handel as the 'master' of the orchestra. Yet, at the same time, in the theatre the composer distanced himself from Timotheus. Handel was not playing Timotheus to other performers' Alexander and Thais because, as already mentioned, there were no assigned 'roles', arias being allocated on the basis of *Affekt*. Audiences were therefore to listen for *Affekt*, not character, the emphasis shifting from 'plot' to

⁶¹ William D. Gudger, 'Handel's Harp Concerto', *American Harp Journal* 6, pt. 3 (1978), 14-22 (15); Gudger, 'The Organ Concertos of G. F. Handel: A Study based on the Primary Sources' (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973), 139.

⁶² Though the lyrichord was a thoroughly modern 'sustaining harpsichord' (see *Grove*), it must have been used as a support to the muted sounds of harp and lute. Gudger suggests Handel was trying to achieve an 'exotic' sound; Gudger, 'Handel's Harp Concerto', 16. See Gudger also for discussion of the sources for and problems associated with this concerto.

Example 5.1: G. F. Handel, ‘He sung Darius, great and good’ (bars 1-10),
Alexander’s Feast ed. Donald Burrows (Novello, 1982), 48.

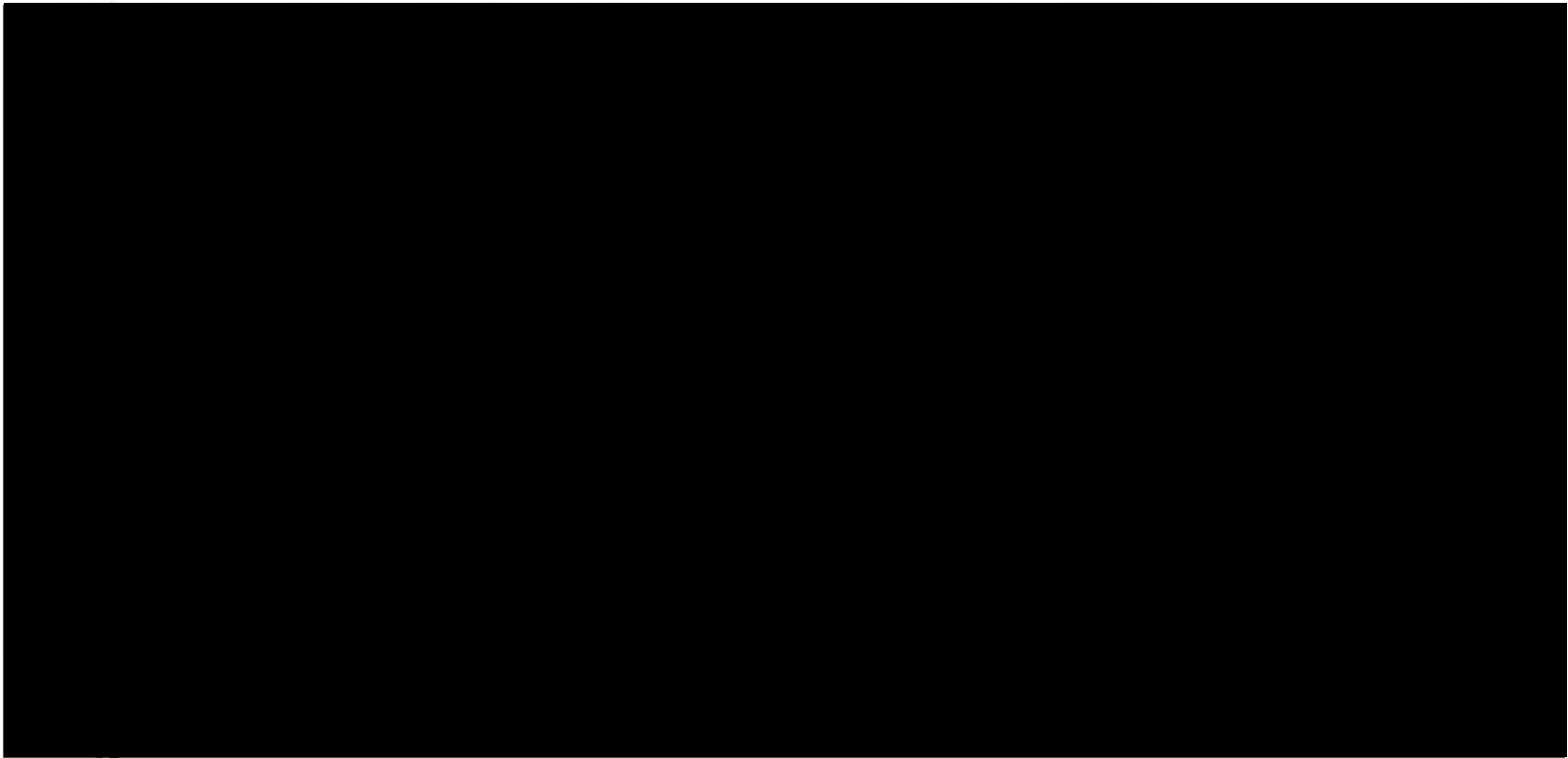


‘theme’. Of course, this can heighten the composer’s affective power, as the listener savours the emotional evocativeness of individual arias, not (primarily) their place within the narrative. On the other hand, there are apparent ironies.

The aria ‘War, he sung’, for example, has a martial air—to match the idea of ‘fighting still, and still destroying’—which ought to make it unsuitable for the (female) soprano voice to which it is assigned. This forces the listener, however, to confront the underlying irony that the ‘War’ being sung is ‘toil and trouble, Honour but an empty bubble’. While ‘war’ initially may be suitably illustrated by the melody, the drudgery of ‘fighting still and still destroying’ is quite literally monotonous, emphasising (by the standards of the time) the underlying self-interested, effeminate sentiment appropriate to the assigned voice (Example 5.2).⁶³ In the previous aria, the reverse is the effect: as a description of Timotheus’s efforts to woo Alexander to love, it is properly assigned to the soprano. The ‘love’ Timotheus invokes, however, is not joyful but narcotic: to the lines ‘Softly sweet in Lydian measures soon he sooth’d the soul to pleasures’—already endowed with snakelike sibilance—Handel provides an equally mesmeric lilt and sway that beguiles but is melodically impotent, going nowhere (Example 5.3). It is hardly surprising that, in the next aria, the drunken Alexander can do nothing but look, sigh and collapse on Thais. What is superficially attractive in the aria is for this reason problematic; Alexander’s affection for Thais is also affectation induced by Timotheus, and as such is both cloying and transient. We can perhaps even see the hypnotic lilt of this musical trochee traced back from ‘love’ through its ‘next degree’—the ‘pity’ for Darius—to the tedious tub-thumping of the bacchanalian

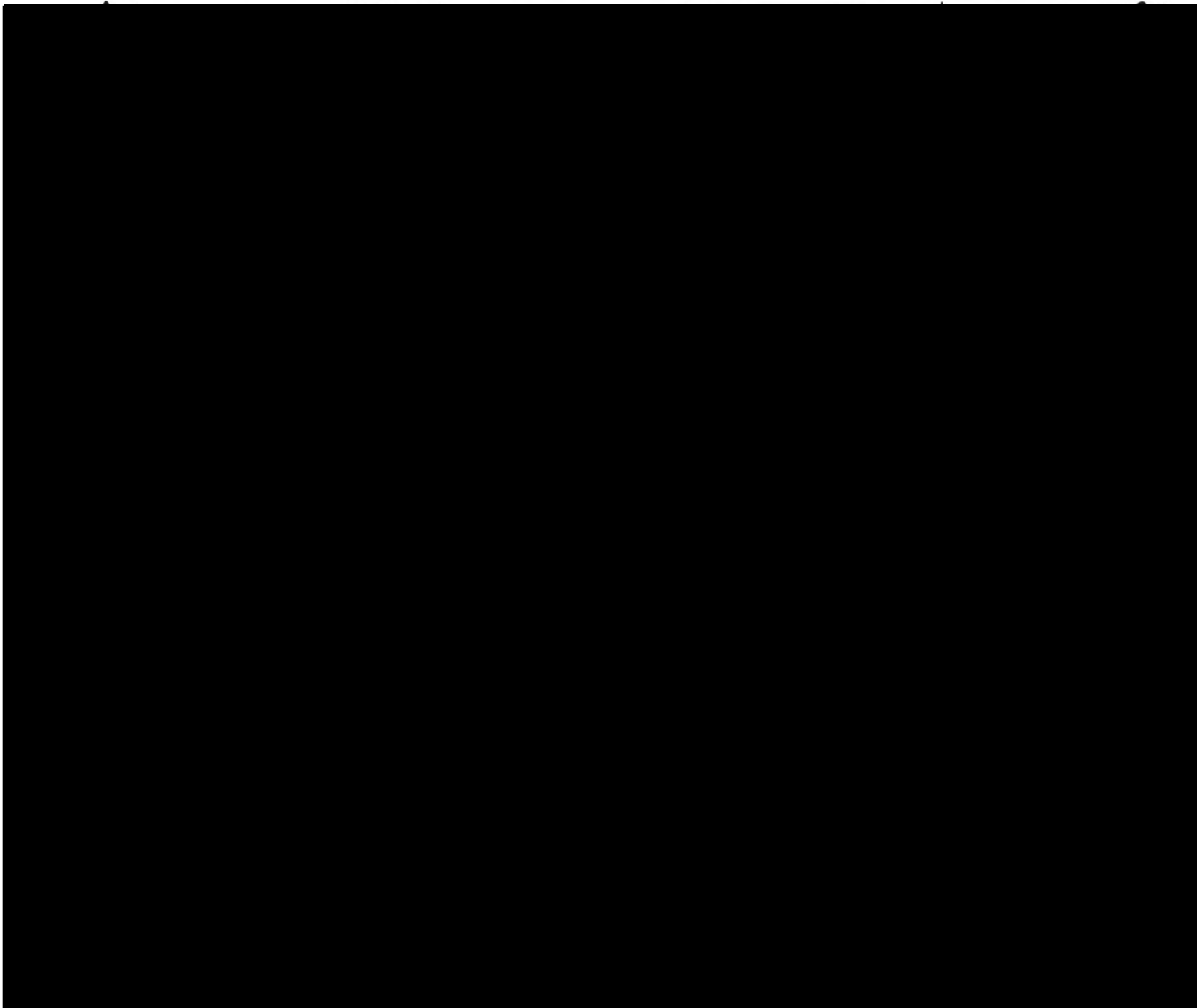
⁶³ An association between effeminacy and the soprano voice would, as we saw in chapter three, apply whether the singer was a woman or a castrato.

Example 5.2: G. F. Handel, ‘War, he sung, is toil and trouble’ (bars 16-19),
Alexander’s Feast ed. Donald Burrows (Novello, 1982), 64-5.

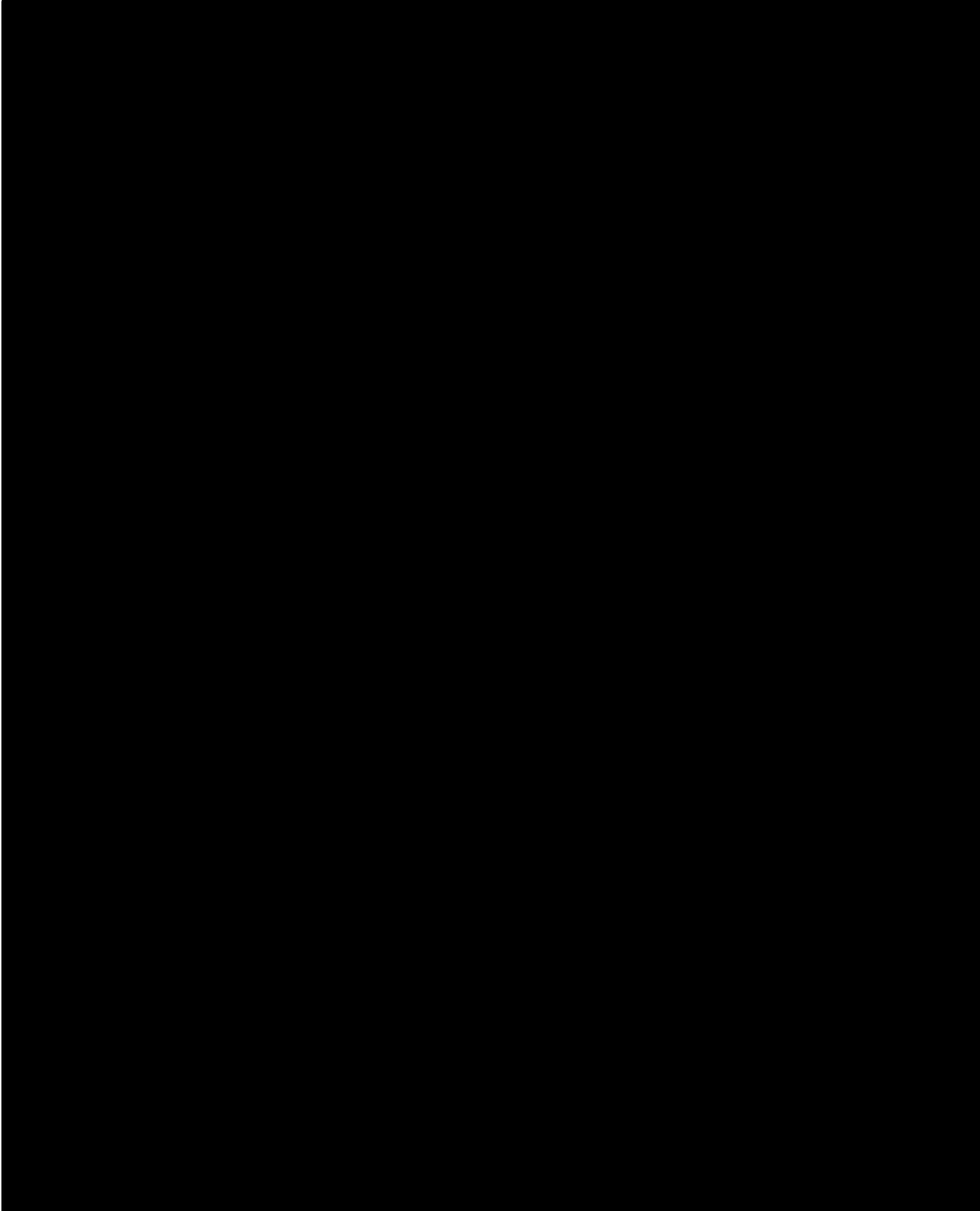


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Example 5.3: G. F. Handel, ‘Softly sweet in Lydian measures’ (bars 9-13),
Alexander’s Feast ed. Donald Burrows (Novello, 1982), 58-9.



Example 5.4: G. F. Handel, ‘He sung Darius, great and good’ (bars 15-20),
‘Bacchus’ blessings are a treasure’ (bars 172-84), *Alexander’s Feast*
ed. Donald Burrows (Novello, 1982), 48, 43-4.



chorus (Example 5.4).⁶⁴ Alexander's drunkenness could explain the much-admired, unpredictable entries of 'fall'n' in the lament for Darius. However noble or pleasing the later songs may seem, drink is the origin of both Alexander's maudlin mood and his belated prurience.

The response in *An Examination of the Oratorios* (1763), attributed to Robert Maddison, perhaps indicates that this pair of arias was meant to inspire unease. Here the author points out that the aria '*Softly sweet, to Lydian measures*', '*Dryden* certainly meant for *recitative*, because it is a narrative, and ... the next lines, *War he sung was toil and trouble, &c.* should have been expressed by the *Lydian measures* he had just mentioned.' Handel is not, he implies, paying close enough attention to the words. More vehement still is Maddison's criticism of the aria 'With ravish'd ears':

'Who ... would not expect either a striking accompanied *recitative*, from so spirited a narration; or a great imitative chorus, from so sublime a picture as the words contain. Instead of either of these ... we have a trifling treble air, whose subject is an airy imitation of *nod* and *shake*, made more ridiculous by long divisions upon *shake*.⁶⁵

Maddison, in other words, takes both Dryden and Handel at face value, failing to see the irony in Dryden's portrait of an arrogant monarch who only '*assumes* the god' and '*affects* to nod', and Handel's matching emphasis not on the godlike, but on the 'trifling' droop of Alexander's nod (emphasised by the appoggiaturas in the violin line) and his tenuous, tremulous influence over the spheres.

The falsity of Alexander's mood swings is finally emphasised by the last three numbers of this Timothean section. 'The princes applaud with a furious joy, and the king seiz'd a flambeau with zeal to destroy' is less militaristic than erratic,

⁶⁴ Dryden too rendered the Bacchanalian entry in 'a sing-song that approaches doggrel'; Smith, 'Argument and Context for Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*', 470.

⁶⁵ [Maddison], *An Examination of the Oratorios*, 42.

with an opening theme irregular in both melody and pulse. By contrast, the next aria, 'Thais led the way', is so sweetly limpid that the setting cannot fail to draw ironic attention to its lines: 'Thais led the way, to light him to his prey, and, like another Helen, she fir'd another Troy'. Though the closing chorus opens with Alexander's 'zeal to destroy', it holds out only eight bars before capitulating to Thais's words and melody. Again, the author of the *Examinations of the Oratorios* expresses his unease that these two texts 'are vainly attempted to be rendered affecting by being set to *air* and *choir*, and a poor endeavour to express *furious joy*, and *firing*'.⁶⁶ The 'poor endeavour' is just the point. Alexander is effectively silenced, and led not in manly glory but in effeminate submission to the burning of Persepolis.⁶⁷

If Handel generally avoids assigning character in the Timothean section, the mode of expression is still highly soloistic. By contrast, his invocation of St Cecilia is notable for its absence of solo arias.⁶⁸ The chorus, of course, predominates, in display of Cecilia's 'arts unknown before'. But the sections of recitative are assigned in tenor-bass duet; the soprano voice is notably absent. Even the solo voices that appear in the context of quartet integrated into chorus ('Let old Timotheus yield the prize, or both divide the crown') would, Donald Burrows suggests, have been sung by the full chorus, as there was no alto soloist for the first performances.⁶⁹ Interestingly, when Handel came to make alterations to *Alexander's Feast* in 1751 to accommodate the two altos he then had available, in

⁶⁶ [Maddison], *An Examination of the Oratorios*, 43.

⁶⁷ It is interesting to note a contemporary attack on Italian opera mirroring this image: 'Lo! throngs of Females, big with Eunuchs Song,/ Leading Mankind like tattling Babes along'; *The Modern Englishman. A Satire* (1738), 10.

⁶⁸ The author of the *Examination* again criticises Handel for his overuse of the da capo aria in the first half of *Alexander's Feast*, *ibid.*, 38.

⁶⁹ G. F. Handel, *Alexander's Feast*, ed. Donald Burrows (Sevenoaks, Kent, 1982), iii.

the Cecilian section he adopted text from an earlier final chorus to create an alto recitative and a soprano-alto duet ('Let's imitate her notes above').⁷⁰ The principle of sharing which justifies these multi-voice settings is opposed to the solipsistic, soloistic and ultimately destructive ideals of Timothean music-making. As the antepenultimate movement, the soprano-alto duet provides a suitable structural balance to the duet that appeared early in the Timothean section; their themes also seem similar (and appropriate to the duet scoring), as the 'happy pair' sung at the beginning is matched by the call that 'this ev'ning ever prove sacred to Harmony and Love'. However, the 'Love' of this duet (and, previously, the final chorus) is very different from the lust inspired by Timotheus and wine—the association of this 'sacred ... Love' with 'Harmony' defines it as the divine ordering of all creation, which could not be farther from the disorder, effeminacy and devastation Timotheus has fostered.

Handel physically distanced himself from Timotheus through his most identifiably personal moment of involvement in the piece, his performance of an organ concerto. Contemporary newspaper report suggests that Handel's introduction of the organ concerto to London in the 1734-35 season was an innovation designed to reinvigorate the composer's flagging fortunes through heightening his own role in the oratorios.⁷¹ The air of theatricality that must have surrounded these performances is emphasised by Mrs Pendarves, who noted after a rehearsal of *Alcina* that 'Whilst Mr. Handel was playing his part, I could not help thinking him a necromancer in the midst of his own enchantments'.⁷² That magic

⁷⁰ He also altered the aria allocations in the rest of the work, assigning the sections concerning Darius and 'Behold a ghastly band' to the female alto and gave 'The mighty master smil'd' and 'Softly sweet' to the male alto; Handel, *Alexander's Feast*, ed. Burrows, iv.

⁷¹ *The Old Whig* (20 March 1735); cited in Deutsch, 384.

⁷² Mrs Pendarves to Mrs Mary Granville, 12 April 1735; cited in Deutsch, 385-6.

was also more orthodox, however, for the organ was generally recognised as the instrument most appropriate to the praise of God.⁷³

Handel's inclusion of an organ concerto in *Alexander's Feast* fulfils both the dramatic and quasi-religious functions. The organ concerto, appearing at the end of the piece, is a representation of St Cecilia's—not Timotheus's—glory, explicitly opposed to the harp concerto Handel had written for Timotheus. The three-movement harp concerto has two fast outer movements in binary form flanking a slower movement. William Gudger comments that the length of the first slow movement of the organ concerto may have been designed to 'surpass in seriousness' the harp concerto. As the placement of Timotheus's concerto was textually appropriate, so the organ concerto was to follow the chorus 'The Princes Applaud', thus ushering in the reign of St Cecilia.⁷⁴ In the 1737 revival, however, the concerto was moved to follow the chorus 'Let old Timotheus yield the prize', which marked the end of Dryden's Ode (though not of Handel's work, as Hamilton had composed some additional text). This shift seems finally to countenance Handel's role as the link between Timotheus and Cecilia: here was a man able to demonstrate the affective power of music in a truly moral context, reconciling one to the other, and so carrying off the prize.⁷⁵ This process of balance and reconciliation was still further emphasised in the 1751 production, in which *The Choice of Hercules*—the standard classical story of the choice between right and wrong—was added to *Alexander's Feast*. Only through Hercules' endeavours to 'pursue thy Country's

⁷³ Smith, 'Argument and Context for Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*', 479-80.

⁷⁴ Gudger, 'The Organ Concertos of G. F. Handel', 147, 142-44. Gudger discusses the concertos in *Alexander's Feast* on pages 137-54. Baillie in his *Essay on the Sublime* notes that the 'Hautboy, the Trumpet, and Organ' are instruments suitable to the Sublime in music; see Johnson "'Giant HANDEL" and the Musical Sublime', 524.

⁷⁵ Recognition of Handel's role as reconciler of music and sense is probably indicated in the Prince and Princess of Wales's command that Handel repeat the concerto at the performance on 16 March 1737; *The London Daily Post and General Advertiser*, 17 March 1737; cited in Donald Burrows, *Handel* (Oxford, 1994), 193.

Good', Virtue exhorts, will he 'gain immortal Praise ... And 'mid the Gods enroll thy Name'.⁷⁶ Similarly facing such admonishments, Handel surely also recognised his Herculean role.

Reactions to *Alexander's Feast* heightened appreciation of mythic and moral resonances in Handel's role. Understandably, some early responses compare Handel to Timotheus. Hamilton's poetic address to Handel in the 1739 Preface to *Alexander's Feast* predictably states that 'fam'd *Timotheus* yields to you the Prize', and others made similar comparisons.⁷⁷ More pertinently, many later critics describe Handel's efforts in *Alexander's Feast* (and sometimes in general) in terms that recall Dryden's description of Timotheus, a musician able to turn emotions in an instant.⁷⁸ *Alexander's Feast's* epigraph, from Pope's *Essay on Criticism* (another canonical writer thus being used to bolster Handel's status), defines this image of the mythical figure:

*Hear how Timotheus' various Lays surprise,
And bid alternate Passions fall and rise;
While, at each Change, the Son of Libyan Jove
Now burns with Glory, and then melts with Love;
Now his fierce Eyes with sparkling Fury glow,
Now Sighs steal out, and Tears begin to flow;
Persians and Greeks like Turns of Nature found,
And the World's Victor stood subdu'd by Sound.*⁷⁹

As Joseph Warton pointed out, the poem was tailor-made for composers, 'as Dryden has here introduced and expressed all the greater passions, and as the transitions from one to the other are sudden and impetuous'. Handel then realises

⁷⁶ John Dryden [and Newburgh Hamilton], *Alexander's Feast* (1751), 17.

⁷⁷ Hamilton, prefatory poem to *Alexander's Feast* (1739); cited in Deutsch, 476. See Buckeridge's *Encaenia Ode*, cited note 58, above; *An Ode to Mr. Handel* (1745); cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton*, 36.

⁷⁸ To describe Handel, Mainwaring invokes Longinus's account of Demosthenes, an account which also emphasises the orator's power to move the passions instantaneously; Mainwaring, *Life of ... Handel*, 192-93; the passage from Longinus is given by Peter Kivy in 'Mainwaring's *Handel*', 172-73.

⁷⁹ Cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton*, 32.

the opportunity Dryden offers, though Warton gives qualified praise

The symphony, and air particularly, that accompanies the four words, “fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen,” is strangely moving, and consists of a few simple and touching notes, without any of those intricate variations, and affected divisions, into which ... this great master hath sometimes descended.⁸⁰

These ‘sudden and impetuous’ imitative transitions that Warton singled out for praise also earned Handel censure, however. James Beattie used examples from the *Song for St. Cecilia’s Day* (another Dryden ode, which was performed with *Alexander’s Feast* in 1739) to demonstrate that, despite his greatness, Handel is ‘subject to fits of trifling, and frequently errs in the application of his imitative contrivances’.⁸¹ Maddison’s critique puts it most bluntly, praising Handel’s recitative ‘Hark! hark! the horrid sound’ for ‘The uncommon force and expression of the instrumental accompaniment [which] raises at once the strongest ideas of horror and amazement’, but at the same time blaming Handel for ‘*too much division on single syllables*’ (‘Happy, happy pair’, ‘War he sung was toil and trouble’), and ‘*fugues and canons* calculated only for a *display of the composer’s art*’ (‘The many rend the skies’).⁸²

Handel’s contemporaries were obviously ready to promote a comparison with Timotheus through their reading of the musical effects employed in *Alexander’s Feast*; auditors also read Handel’s composition in a moral context, however. In responses to *Alexander’s Feast*, Orpheus figured as prominently as Timotheus. Hamilton begins his prefatory eulogy of Handel with this comparison; the author of verses *On hearing ALEXANDER’s Feast*, L’Allegro ed il Penseroso,

⁸⁰ Joseph Warton, *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Pope* (1756), 63-64.

⁸¹ Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music*, 137-8; cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton*, 37n. See also William Jackson, *Thirty Letters on Various Subjects*, 2 vols (1783), I, 50-51.

⁸² [Maddison], *An Examination of the Oratorios*, 41, 37, 38.

&c. similarly begins with Arion and Orpheus.⁸³ Obviously, this association would have identified *Alexander's Feast* still more strongly with the Vauxhall Gardens statue, but it also emphasised the musician's holistic and beneficial influence rather than his limited (and problematic) manipulation of a silly tyrant. So the opening lines of *On hearing ALEXANDER's Feast* recall (among other things) the close of Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*, where proper management of Britain's physical resources (her forests and seas) ensures continuing military and cultural supremacy for the Imperial nation:

If e'er *Arion's* music calm'd the floods,
And *Orpheus* ever drew the dancing woods;
Why do not *British* seas and forest throng
To hear the sweeter notes of *Handel's* song?
This does the falshood of the fable prove,
Or seas and woods, when *Handel* harps, wou'd move.

Handel may not have the mythical control of inanimate objects, but his powers far outreach those of his contemporaries:

How comes it we those artless masters bear,
Who slight the heart, and only court the ear?
....
But *Handel's* harmony affects the soul,
To sooth by sweetness, or by force controul;
And with like sounds as tune the rolling spheres,
So tunes the mind, that ev'ry sense has ears.⁸⁴

⁸³ *To Mr. HANDEL. On hearing ALEXANDER's Feast*, L'Allegro ed il Penseroso, &c. (1740); cited in Deutsch, 500-01. Notably, the author of these verses describes Handel as a harpist, reinforcing the link with the Vauxhall statue.

⁸⁴ I am grateful to Roger Savage for pointing out the similarity of this passage to one on Purcell in Charles Gildon's *The Life of Thomas Betterton* (1710), 167-8, where Gildon similarly contrasts contemporary Italianate musicians, who have power only to 'tickle the Ear', with Purcell, who 'move[s] the Passions as he pleases ... and verifies all that is said of *Timotheus*'. For the previous passage, see Alexander Pope, *An Epistle to the Right Honourable Richard Earl of Burlington* (1731), ll.187-204: 'Whose rising Forests, not for pride or show,/ But future Buildings, future Navies grow:/ Let his plantations stretch from down to down,/ First shade a Country, and then raise a Town.... Bid Harbours open, public Ways extend,/ Bid Temples, worthier of the God, ascend;... Back to his bounds their subject Sea command,/ And roll obedient Rivers thro' the Land;/ These Honours, Peace to happy Britain brings,/ These are Imperial Works, and worthy Kings.' *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, gen. ed. John Butt, Volume III.ii, *Epistles to Several Persons*, ed. F. W. Bateson (London, 1951, 2nd edn, 1961), 155-56.

For those who listen, Handel's music surpasses that of others precisely because it reaches not just the ears but 'ev'ry sense', attuning the whole and therefore ensuring an individual's sense of balance. It was the balanced individual who, as we saw in the Introduction and chapter one, contributed most to the regulation of the socio-political order. Hamilton expresses this more clearly when he depicts Handel as, in some senses, the opposite of Timotheus—the moderator rather than the inciter of passions (militarism being the notable exception):

Let others charm the list'ning scaly Brood,
Or tame the savage Monsters of the Wood;
With magick Notes enchant the leafy Grove,
Or force ev'n Things inanimate to move:
Be ever Your's (my Friend) the God-like Art,
To calm the Passions, and improve the Heart;
The Tyrant's Rage, and Hell-born Pride controul,
Or sweetly sooth to Peace the mourning Soul;
With martial Warmth the Hero's Breast inspire,
Or fan new-kindling Love to chaste Desire.

Handel the 'improver', Hamilton suggests, offers his *Alexander's Feast* to demonstrate (as Cecilia does) how far musicians have advanced from their ancient exemplars; their art no longer consists of 'charm' and 'magick' suitable for taming savagery, but instead affects the social virtues appropriate to a modern nation. Crucially, Hamilton and other writers suggest, it is only for the nation-building exercise of war that Handel uses his music to enflame rather than control the passions.⁸⁵

In this sense, *Alexander's Feast* assumes broader significance as one of Handel's most important forays into the English literary canon. The eighteenth-century conceptualisation of the canon was, as we have seen, always bound up with the creation of a sense of collective pride and national propriety. Handel was not

⁸⁵ See the range of virile adjectives used in the *Ode Sacred to the Genius of Handel* (1784), cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton*, 15; Buckeridge closes his Ode by observing that 'For Vict'ries, Triumphs, Poms/ No Bard can sing so well'; 'Musica Sacra Dramatica'; cited in Deutsch, 322.

alone among Italian opera creators in recognising the value of association with an unfolding literary canon—as previously mentioned, in 1737 the failing rival opera company mounted *Sabrina*, which vaunted its genesis in Milton's *Comus*. For Handel the gambit paid off: not only was *Alexander's Feast* itself an immediate success but, along with *Samson* and *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*, it served to link his name to two of the most important figures in recent English literary history.⁸⁶ That Handel thus became not just part of the British canon but was himself almost anglicised demonstrates the inextricable association of the cultural canon and national identity.⁸⁷ For a 'Gentleman of Oxford' writing to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1740 to complain of 'our late TASTE in MUSICK', Handel's willingness to participate in popular national culture—exemplified by the Vauxhall statue—was sufficient to establish his British identity:

Britons! away with the degenerate pack!
 Waft, western winds! The foreign spoilers back!

 See *Handel*, careless of a foreign fame,
 Fix on our shore, and boast a *Briton's* name:
 While, plac'd marmoric in the vocal grove,

⁸⁶ For links to Dryden and Milton, see Thomas Maurice, *Ode Sacred to the Genius of Handel* (1784); Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music*, 162-3; Anna Seward, *Letters*, ed. A. Constable (Edinburgh, 1811), VI, 47-48; Rev. John Langhorne, *The Tears of Music. A Poem to the Memory of Mr. Handel* (1760), 9; all cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, & Milton*, 15, 21, 47, 80. The author of *The Devil on Crutches* (1755) implicitly links Handel to the literary canon when he castigates lovers of Italian opera: 'They prefer the Scraping of a foreign Fiddle, to all the Beauties of Poetry in their own Tongue, aided by Music that would not disgrace the greatest ancient Masters of that Art. The *L'Allegro* and *Penseroso* of your own *Milton*, are proofs of what I assert. There was a Time, when the Patrons of their Country, were the Patrons of Merit, when the homely Compositions of *Shakespeare*, *Jonson* and *Fletcher*, were the delight of all Degrees of People'; cited in Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination*, 85-6.

⁸⁷ See George Horne, D.D., Dean of Canterbury, *The Antiquity, Use & excellence of Church Music, A Sermon preached at the opening of a New Organ in the Cathedral Church of Christ, Canterbury* (1784), 9, who lists Handel as one of 'our English classics', in opposition to 'the effeminate and frittered music of modern Italy'; Handel is paired with Purcell as the best 'genuine' and 'adopted' English composers by Rev. William Mason, *Essays Historical and Critical, on English Church Music* (1795), 72. Smith points out how useful Handel was as a vehicle for national unity; *Handel's Oratorios*, 288-9; see also William Weber, *The Rise of Musical Classics in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in Canon, Ritual, and Ideology* (Oxford, 1992), 103-42, 223-42. Eric Walter White includes Handel in his *History of English Opera* (London, 1983), though he elsewhere states that *Italian opera* is not a subject of the book! (170). Michael F. Robinson acknowledges the historicity of the canon and, implicitly, Handel's 'elevation' to Britishness, but does not link the two; Robinson, 'The Decline of British Music', 269-84.

He guides the measures listening throngs approve.

William Coxe's assertion that 'An English audience should estimate [Handel's] abilities, by English compositions' easily becomes Myers's conclusion that Handel was 'the greatest composer England has produced'.⁸⁸

Even Handel's apparent infelicities could be used to demonstrate his greatness: his lack of 'correctness' or propriety was compared to Dryden's and Shakespeare's untamed genius.⁸⁹ The composer of *Alexander's Feast* as the raw original, the untamed genius, the musical iconoclast, not only fits with contemporary representations of Handel the man—gruff, overbearing, willing to offend both singers and patrons rather than compromise his musical standards—it also marries with the national character of sincerity with which we began. As Newman reminds us, 'a truly sincere man' was not only an innocent, honest, original and frank, he was also 'morally independent, unafraid to oppose the opinions, styles, ceremonies and inhibitions imposed by society if these did not square with his inner sense of what

⁸⁸ *Gentleman's Magazine*, October 1740, 520; William Coxe, *Anecdotes of George Frederick Handel and John Christopher Smith* [1799], 32; cited in Myers, *Handel, Dryden, Milton*, 17, 80. In the *Essay on Musical Expression* (1752), Avison talks of 'our illustrious HANDEL' (p.53). *Alexander's Feast* apparently played an equally large part in Handel's posthumous reputation abroad; see Theophil Antonicek, *Zur Pflege Händelscher Musik in der 2. Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, in Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 250/1 (Vienna, 1966), esp. 37ff.

⁸⁹ Charles Avison commented that 'Mr. HANDEL is in Music, what his own DRYDEN was in poetry; nervous, exalted, and harmonious; but voluminous, and, consequently, not always correct. Their abilities equal to every Thing; their Execution frequently inferiour. Born with Genius capable of *soaring the boldest Flights*; they have sometimes, to suit the vitiated Taste of the Age they lived in, *descended to the lowest*. Yet, as both their Excellencies are infinitely more numerous than their Deficiencies, so both their Characters will devolve to latest Posterity, not as Models of Perfection, yet glorious Examples of those amazing Powers that actuate the human Soul.' Avison, *Reply to the Author of Remarks in the Essay on Musical Expression* published with *An Essay on Musical Expression* (1753); cited in Johnson, "'Giant Handel" and the Musical Sublime', 519. Maddison, the supposed author of *An Examination of the Oratorios* concludes his criticism of *Samson* and *Messiah* by comparing minor infelicities in these works to the puns and gibes of Shakespeare: '... the respective talents of these *heroes of Parnassus* bear as strong a resemblance as their errors and successes.—They are the darling sons of the sister sciences, poetry and music; they both have faults, but they are the faults of genius; they both abound in *beauties*, but they are the beauties which art cannot reach. Criticism may blame both, but taste must admire them equally; and envy must praise their invention, even where she brands their judgment: in a word, tho' these sons of genius sometimes dazzle, sometimes scorch, their light will always be [p]referred to the frigid moon-shine of art and imitation.' (p.36). Johnson points out that Avison 'grants a dignity to Handel which no previous composer had ever enjoyed' by applying to him aesthetic qualities never before attached to music; cited in Johnson, "'Giant Handel" and the Musical Sublime', 520.

was right'.⁹⁰ The many anecdotes relating Handel's faults and foibles were perhaps testimony not so much to his way of making music as to the nation's way of making him, and itself.

Handel in Westminster Abbey: to draw an angel down

The creation and reception of *Alexander's Feast* may represent the beginnings of an apparent stifling of Handel's foreign, operatic persona in favour of an English and overtly religious representation; they certainly show the process of canonisation at work, and perhaps also the composer's participation in that process. Handel's efforts for posterity would have been supported by a larger move apparent among artists in the 1740s and '50s to be seen as figures of authority in their own right, rather than merely as supplicants for the patronage of the nobility. At this time in the fine arts, as observed in the Introduction and chapter one, exhibiting associations and eventually the Society of Artists were formed; the Royal Academy followed. On a broader level, organisations like the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufacture and Commerce, founded in 1745, fostered artistic endeavour within the context of national commercial wellbeing.⁹¹ The Society might have taken its lead from artists like William Hogarth, whose battle for recognition and appreciation as a creative artist (rather than simply a mechanic engraver), led him to fight for an Engraver's Act (1735), establish his St Martin's Lane Academy, and eventually produce a treatise *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753) in

⁹⁰ Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 133.

⁹¹ Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 70. See also notes 38 and 40-2 in the introduction on the Societies, and note 43 in chapter one on national taste. On architects' changing status, see also Malcolm Baker, 'Portrait Busts of Architects in Eighteenth Century Britain', *New light on English Palladianism*, Papers given at the Georgian Group Symposium, 1988, ed. Charles Hind (London, 1990), 14-30.

which he set out to (amongst other things) establish the primacy of the artist's commonsense view of the world over the rules of supposed connoisseurs.⁹²

Handel's self-gentrification was multi-faceted. Donald Burrows has shown that even before the installation of the Vauxhall Gardens' statue, the composer would have been well known to the London public not just through his operas, but also through music for events like George II's coronation and the royal weddings of Princess Anne and Prince Frederick in 1734 and 1736 respectively.⁹³ Carole Taylor points out that Handel's gradual separation from Italian opera in the late-1730s to 1740s was an essential aspect of his attempt to substantiate his own entrepreneurial credentials.⁹⁴ More importantly, through his involvement in the annual Sons of the Clergy Festival charity services held in St Paul's Cathedral from 1731, and his role in founding the Fund for the Support of Decay'd Musicians in 1738, Handel established himself as socially responsible and a patron in his own right.⁹⁵ Privately, his investment in fine art reinforced the image of the gentleman, with sufficient money—and taste—to make wise artistic investments.⁹⁶

The benevolent patron, the great man—such a description belonged to members of the aristocracy, not to an artist. To such a view Handel himself seems to have subscribed in leaving £600 in his will for a monument to be erected in Westminster Abbey.⁹⁷ Yet, by the 1760s the Abbey was recognised as the chief

⁹² Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: Volume 2: High and Low, 1732-1750* (Cambridge, 1992), 35-47, 74-6, *passim*; *Volume 3: Art and Politics, 1750-1764* (Cambridge, 1993), 54-5, 58, 65-72, *passim*.

⁹³ Burrows, *Handel*, 200-1.

⁹⁴ Taylor, 'Handel's Disengagement from Italian Opera', 174.

⁹⁵ On Handel's involvement in the Sons of the Clergy, see Burrows, *Handel and the English Chapel Royal*, ii, Appendix 4; cited in Burrows, *Handel*, 167 n.5.

⁹⁶ Taste was, as we saw in the introduction and chapter one, a vital attribute of the gentleman; see Richard Steele's comment in the *Tatler* no. 207, cited in note 59, introduction. For an itemised list of Handel's extensive painting collection auctioned after his death, see Hugh McLean, 'Bernard Granville, Handel and the Rembrandts', *MT* 126 (1985), 593-601; Jacob Simon, ed., *Handel: A Celebration of his Life and Times, 1685-1759* (London, 1986), 289-90. Donald Burrows comments that the extent of the collection was 'hardly compatible with the modest wall-area of Handel's Brook Street home'; Burrows, *Handel*, 369.

⁹⁷ The fourth, and last, codicil to Handel's Will, 11 April 1759; cited in Deutsch, 814.

repository of tributes to national excellence. Bindman memorably describes the Abbey as a body—with the Henry VIII chapel as its head, the Confessor's shrine as a heart, and the nave as the limbs and torso, the public body—which during the eighteenth century saw its limbs begin to operate independently.⁹⁸ The potential of this space for public display was recognised by the 'Patriot' Opposition in the 1730s, following Alexander Pope's involvement in the design for a monument to James Guelfi in 1727.⁹⁹ While the private monument was often tainted by the intimations of luxury inevitably accompanying costly sculpture, Pope and members of the Opposition sought to turn the nave—in contradistinction to the private royal chapels of the Abbey—into a pantheon of national figures worthy of admiration and emulation. Like Cobham's 'Temple of British Worthies' at Stowe, this began as a partisan political exercise in defining national heritage, but unlike Stowe the Abbey was genuinely open to all.

Since the 1730s, then, the nave of this ancient house of monarchs had been progressively developed as a site of 'popular' patriotic expression (not necessarily just Oppositional sentiments), a place in which the public could celebrate their history. Foreign visitors—the French in particular—recognised the Abbey's significance in national terms, and sought to imitate its success. One visitor who passed through the Abbey after the Handel statue had been erected noted that:

Westminster [Abbey] est le grand dépôt des monumens érigés à la gloire de la nation. Si tous ces monumens, considérés en eux-mêmes, si tous ceux à qui on les a consacrés ne sont pas d'un mérite égal, l'intention en est également louable. On revoit là comme dans l'Elisée de Virgile, ceux qui, par differens genres de mérite, ont illustré ou servi la patrie.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 12-13. The next few paragraphs are indebted to David Bindman's excellent discussion of the Abbey (pp.9-23).

⁹⁹ For Pope's interest in sculpture in general, and involvement in establishing monuments in Poets' Corner in particular, see Morris R. Brownell, *Alexander Pope and the Arts of Georgian England* (Oxford, 1978), 329-56.

¹⁰⁰ Pierre-Jean Grosley, *Londres I* (Lausanne, 1770), 355-6; cited in Coutu, 'Eighteenth-century British monuments and the politics of Empire', 27. For other responses, see John McManners, *Death*

This growing awareness of a shared past, encouraged by the erection of statues of artists and scientists—Shakespeare, Milton and Newton, amongst others—as well as military heroes, was evinced by contemporary commentaries on the way in which visitors—‘common people’—actively studied the monuments.¹⁰¹ As such, the Abbey became not only a site of common cultural interest but, concomitantly, a focus of modern commercial and self-publicising sensibilities, so that by the time the monument to Handel was installed guide books were being written, new monuments were being designed to be as dramatic and eye-catching as possible, and wealthy members of society actively sought a place in the Abbey for themselves or their loved ones.

Westminster Abbey’s Handel monument, then, took its place in what was by the 1760s a self-consciously public sphere (Figure 5.5). That self-consciousness in turn is shown in a variety of ways in the monument itself. In this period, Bindman suggests, all monuments ‘made the claim ... that the deceased was of exceptional or exemplary virtue’. But particularly in Roubiliac’s later monuments, there was less interest in glorification of private virtue, and more concern both to communicate a moral lesson to the general public and to emphasise the inspired genius of great creative figures.¹⁰² In this sense, the Abbey’s statuary reflected the nationalist turn of mind that saw the apotheosis of individual heroes as a sign of the nation’s own redemption.¹⁰³

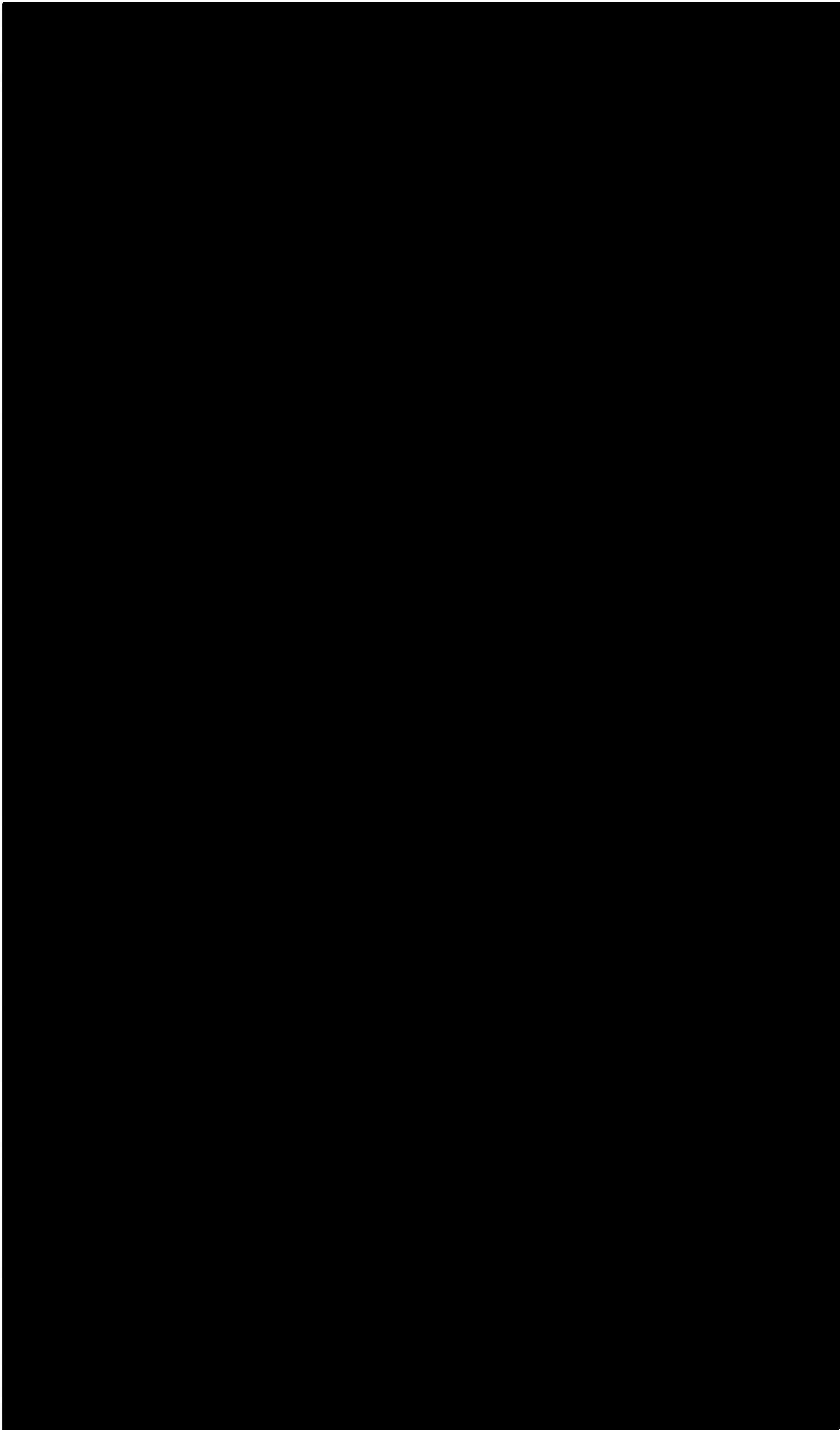
and Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death in Eighteenth-Century France (Oxford, 1985), 327-31.

¹⁰¹ For the political implications of Peter Scheermakers’ monument to Shakespeare, see Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 134-84, esp. 134-46. For mention of the commentaries, see Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 11.

¹⁰² Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 2, 32, 77-80. On development of the modern concept of ‘genius’, see John Hope Mason, ‘Thinking about Genius in the Eighteenth Century’, *Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*, 210-39.

¹⁰³ Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism*, 125.

Figure 5.5: Monument to George Frederick Handel, by Louis François Roubiliac, 1762 (Westminster Abbey).



We can see this redemptive ideal closely tied to the creation of the composer as a public figure (within public space) in the apparent progress from model to finished product. There were evidently (at least) two models for the monument: that now held in the Gerald Coke Collection, and that in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Figures 5.6 and 5.7).¹⁰⁴ The former is smaller, and rougher in design, the latter larger, apparently a presentation piece. In the Coke model, the composer wears a cap, as does the Vauxhall Gardens statue; most other elements of the final design are present (though the horn is absent). Most significant is the composer's posture, his status within the overall conception. More obviously than in the final Monument, this figure of Handel is in the act of composition, the score turned towards him and his face obviously, momentarily, lifted from the page, while his right hand is still poised to write and his left clutches the page. The angel figure looks down on the composer, lips parted, as if prompting Handel to write through its heavenly playing. Handel, whether listening to the angel or to his thoughts, is wrapped up in the music.

Compare this to the more finished model and to the Monument and the difference is striking: as the addition of the horn and the composer's foot dangling outside the composition draw the passer-by's attention in, so the figure's own gaze and the angle of the sheet of music are directed outwards. Although in some ways the composer's rapt, inspired visage makes the final version more profoundly personal than the early, workmanlike representation, at the same time it is also more public.¹⁰⁵ As if to confirm an awareness of the public eye—more particularly the

¹⁰⁴ As is apparent from the 1762 sale catalogue of Roubiliac's studio, at the time of the sale there were four 'designs' (possibly drawings or models) for the Handel Monument; Malcolm Baker, in Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 233.

¹⁰⁵ The public expression of private emotion was, of course, very much in vogue by this time; see J. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: the Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1988).

Figure 5.6: Terracotta model of the monument to George Frederick Handel, by Louis François Roubiliac, 1762 (Gerald Coke Collection).

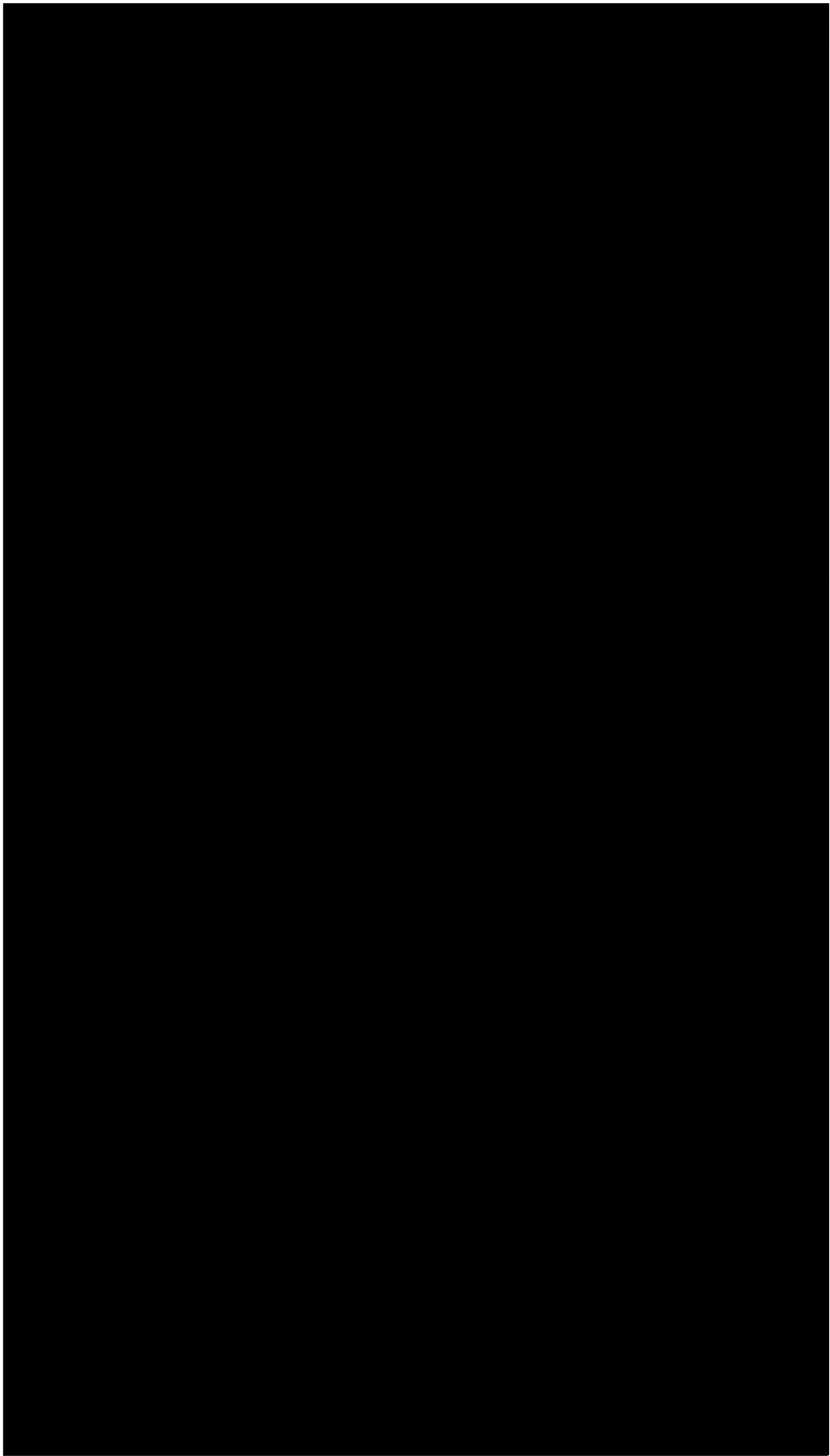
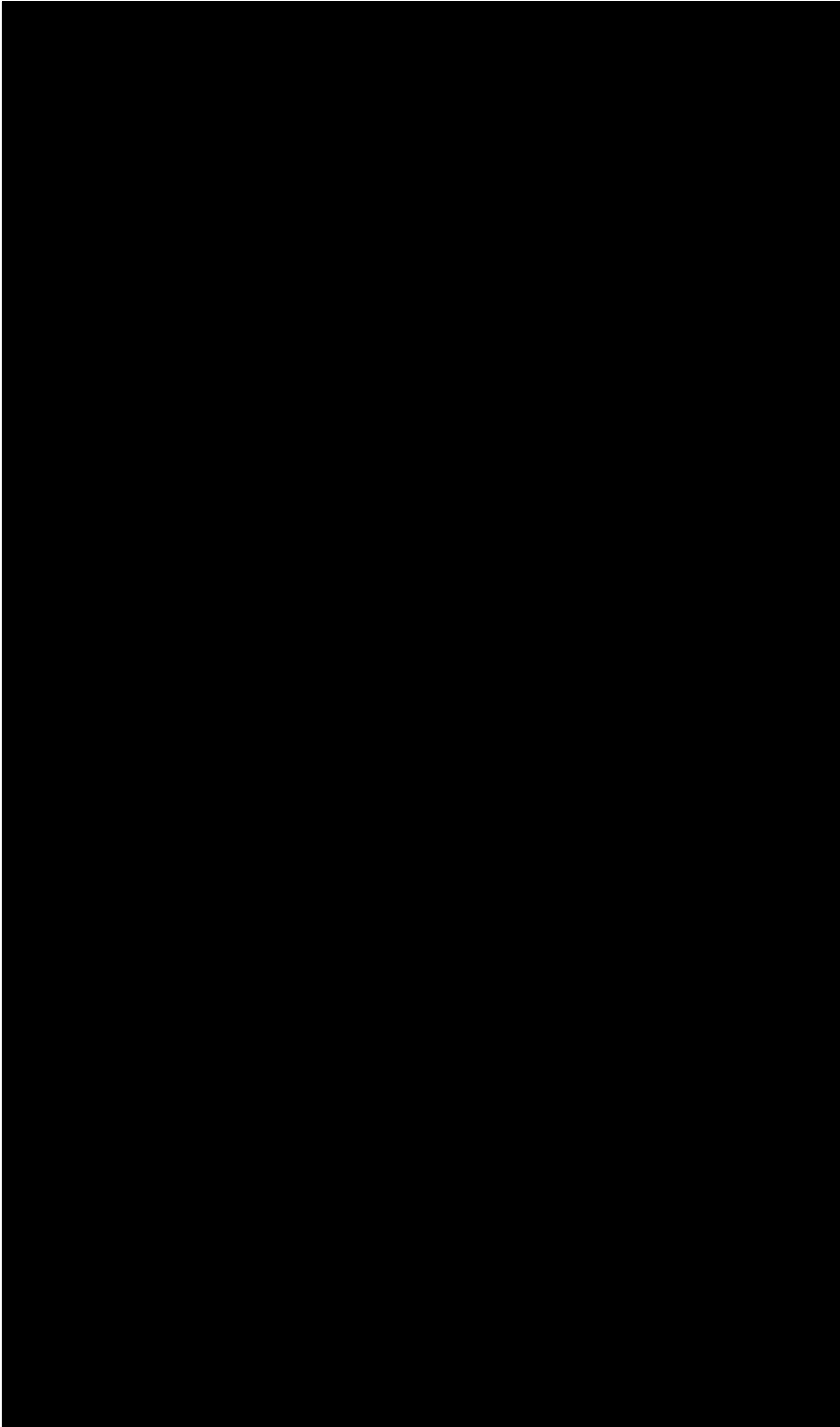


Figure 5.7: Marble model of the monument to George Frederick Handel, by Louis François Roubiliac, 1762 (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).



eye of posterity—one final item has been added to the Monument which is not included even in the presentation model, namely the opened score behind the displayed page with the title ‘Mesiah’ inscribed at the top. The desire to remind the spectator of the source of ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth’, though one evidently felt at the last minute (otherwise someone would surely have spotted the misspelling), clearly reflected awareness of the lasting, universal status of Monument and composer: though an ignorant or foreign viewer might not know the source of the aria, they could not forget that most famous of oratorios.

This change in status might, as already mentioned, be seen in the alteration of sightlines within the composition. The viewer’s attention is drawn in; Handel looks out; and the angel figure no longer looks down on Handel but, placed higher up, gazes serenely into the middle distance. Such divergence in focus needs something to synthesise the creation, something particularly to link the lower and upper halves, which otherwise so neatly and symbolically divide into corporeal and ethereal. Equally symbolic, then, is the most significant alteration to Handel’s posture and gesture between the two models: his left hand is now removed from the score to point upwards as if (in the Ashmolean model) rending the clouds, directing the eye to the arc of the David’s harp. This significant, signifying finger (now lost from the monument itself) invokes the conception’s symbolism, but does not necessarily clarify it or unify the whole. Is the pointing finger merely the gesture of momentary realisation? Or does it define the angel as the composer’s inspiration? Or perhaps it defines the religious design of the music? Or Handel’s assurance in the literal truth of the text and therefore (given his outward gaze) his encouragement that we should believe likewise?

The angel provides no assistance in untangling this riddle, for its separation from Handel and its neutral expression and directionless stare only promote further uncertainty: is it inspiring the music or is it rather a representation of the music or of Handel's prodigious musical power, an emanation from the organ which so prominently frames the composition? Contemporaries seemed similarly uncertain. The *Royal Magazine* for June 1763 notes that Handel 'seems diverted from his performance [i.e., composition] and thrown into an extasy, on hearing David playing on his harp'. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, on the other hand, registered the didacticism of the model, rather than the interruption by inspirational 'ecstasy', describing Handel as 'pointing to the back of the monument, where *David* is playing on the harp'.¹⁰⁶

It is understandable that in probably the most famous contemporary re-inscription of this image, alterations were made to clarify the message. In Plate II of Charles Burney's *Commemoration of Handel* the composer's head is tilted noticeably further back, angling towards the angel in a gesture that indicates his satisfaction in his own redemption and his reminder that others should follow his example (Figure 5.8). In the frontispiece to the June 1763 *Royal Magazine* the message is even more didactic: the page in front of Handel is no longer a work-in-progress, half-blank with an empty stave awaiting inspiration (Figure 5.9). Instead, it is filled; the composer's right hand quill-less (though the accompanying narrative notes the pen's presence), and holds the bottom of the page merely to display it more fully. Confirming that this re-presentation is not simply a matter of engraving error or exigency, the score behind this loose sheet—still featuring the title 'Messiah'—has 'improved' this pragmatic gesture to a didactic one, exchanging

¹⁰⁶ *The Royal Magazine*, June 1763, 283; *The Gentlemen's Magazine*, July 1762, 340.

Figure 5.8: Plate 2 Charles Burney, *An Account of the musical Performances in Westminster-Abbey, and the Pantheon, May 26th, 29th; and June the 3d, and 5th, 1784. In Commemoration of Handel (1785)*. By Permission of the British Library; shelfmark: G. 2664.



Figure 5.9: Frontispiece to the *Royal Magazine*, June 1763. By Permission of the British Library; shelfmark: P.P. 5441



the rows of blank staves for two words (seen twice) from another aria: ‘Comfort ye’ is the inscription. Handel’s compositional ‘genius’, which for much of the century was seen to have implications for the wellbeing of the nation, also became his musical ‘divinity’, elevated above sordid political realities. So Burney misquoted the original puff for the Vauxhall statue, changing Handel’s power to instill the ‘profoundest Calm and most decent behaviour’ for which Tyers hoped, to a purely musical ‘most profound silence and attention’.¹⁰⁷

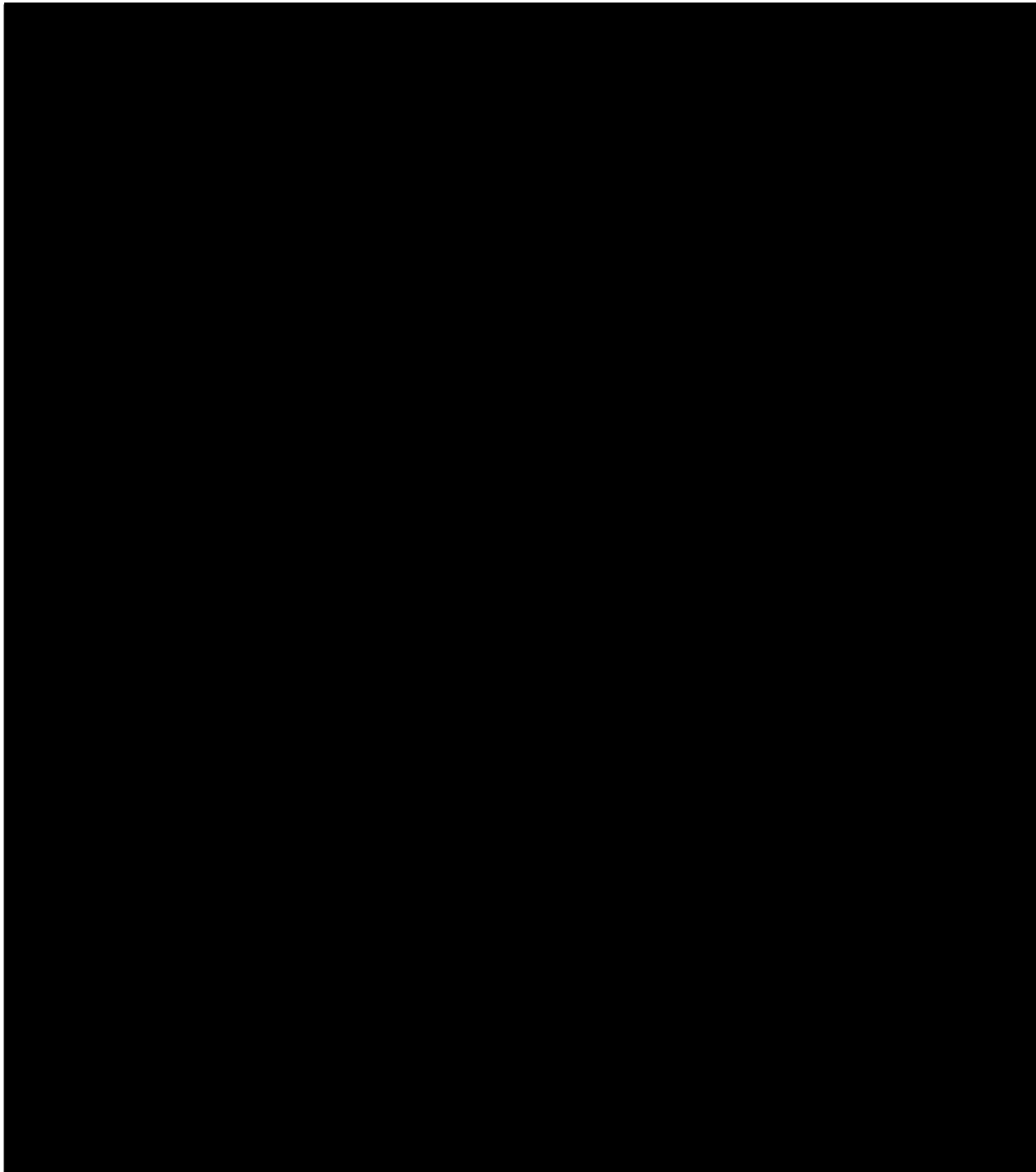
The example that Roubiliac had followed was clearly that of one of the other great artists and national figures represented in the Abbey (Figure 5.10). The Shakespeare monument had been designed by William Kent and Peter Scheemakers as part of the ‘Patriot’ campaign for the nave of the Abbey, and it was installed amidst great public interest in 1741. The figure stands, legs crossed, leaning one elbow on several volumes, while pointing with the other hand to what was initially an empty scroll. Iconographically this figure (and therefore also that of the Handel monument) drew on the traditional cross-legged, leaning pose of Melancholy—a figure which by then had strong associations with creative genius; the pose also echoed that of the famous Farnese Hercules, the hero who chooses virtue over pleasure.¹⁰⁸ With its pedestal bearing the heads of three monarchs and a laurel wreath crossed by a dagger, this monument is, as Michael Dobson points out, the Shakespeare of the histories and tragedies, not of the comedies, but it was the empty scroll that caused public comment and concern.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Burney, *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period*, 4 vols (1776-89), ed. Frank Mercer, 2 vols (London, 1935), II, 825.

¹⁰⁸ For a brief account of the Shakespeare monument’s similarity to figures of Melancholy and Hercules, and for other progeny of this monument, see David Piper, *O Sweet Mr. Shakespeare I’ll have his Picture: the Changing Image of Shakespeare’s Person, 1600-1800* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1964), 22-31. On creative isolation, see Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*; Sitter, *Literary Loneliness*.

¹⁰⁹ Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 143-6.

Figure 5.10: Monument to William Shakespeare, by William Kent and Peter Scheemakers, 1741 (Westminster Abbey).



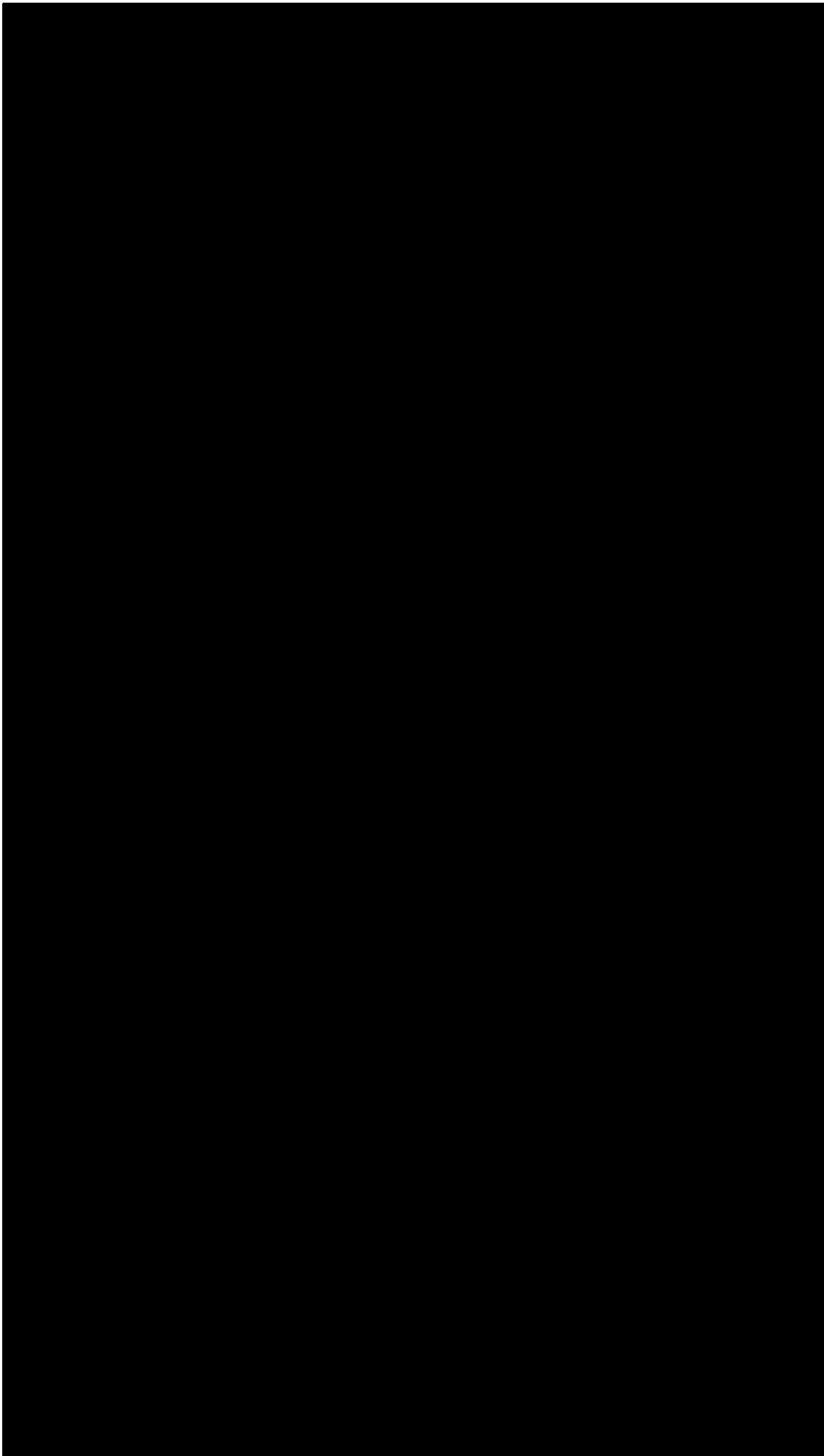
It was the scroll's suggestive blankness (wittily appropriated by contemporary commentators) that Roubiliac so clearly remedied in his own statue of Shakespeare, commissioned by (and apparently modelled on) David Garrick for his private temple to the Bard on his Hampton estate, and completed in 1758 (Figure 5.11). This statue has obvious affinities with Roubiliac's earlier portrait of the inspired Handel: waistcoat unbuttoned, stockings rumped and shoe half off, the artist is heedless of external realities. But it also prefigures Roubiliac's last representation of the composer for, like the later statue, Roubiliac's Shakespeare leans over a (blank) page, quill poised to write, but head turned away, out to the viewer, and hand raised to chin in the moment of inspiration.¹¹⁰ Broadly speaking, then, the Handel monument shares the expression of the ideal of creative genius found in the representations of Shakespeare. Baker and Bindman suggest it might have been seen as a natural development of Scheermakers' nearby Shakespeare monument in more than sculptural terms: 'the Shakespeare may have been interpreted as English artistic achievement under the Tudor dynasty and the Handel as its counterpart under the Hanoverians, signifying not only the naturalisation of the composer but of the monarch himself by the 1760s'.¹¹¹

If the Abbey's Handel monument reflects these famous mid-century representations of Shakespeare, it also serves as a counterweight to the urbanity of Roubiliac's earlier statue of the composer. Fittingly, this monument was Roubiliac's last for the Abbey ('opened' to the public six months after his death), as the Vauxhall Gardens statue had been his first 'public' commission in London.

¹¹⁰ For a reading of Garrick's Shakespeare statue in the context of contemporary bardolotry, see Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 179-84. In yet another parallel between Shakespeare and Handel, Sir Samuel Hellier erected a temple to Handel on his Wodehouse estate at Wombourne in 1768. See Hugh McLean, 'Granville, Handel and 'Some Golden Rules'', *MT* 126 (1985), 662-65 (663).

¹¹¹ Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 333.

Figure 5.11: Statue of William Shakespeare, by Louis François Roubiliac, 1758 (British Library).



Parallels and symmetries are evident on other levels. Just as the Gardens' Handel was noted for its verisimilitude, so the Westminster statue affected realism in its representation of minutiae. Equally, both statues elevated the composer above the everyday by according him emblematic status through integration of ahistorical elements into the design. The framing figure of the angel in the Abbey memorial confirms the composer's devotional credentials, and effectively authorises his monument's position amongst the teachers and divines as a teacher himself (who knows that his redeemer lives), able to offer comfort and wisdom to the people. With striking similarity, the Vauxhall Gardens' Handel was also originally framed by an arch surmounted by the figure of Harmony, playing her viol.

This emphasis on the composer's role in the cosmic ordering of things leads, then as now, to the multivalent symbolism that characterises great art. So the figure of Handel in the Gardens was described at the time as both Apollo and Orpheus, and questions of the 'correct' designation still trouble historians.¹¹² So the relationship between the Abbey's figure of Handel and the harp-playing angel remains ambiguous. Indeed, this figure was itself described not just as an angel but also, on occasion, as David—another ancient musician, whose inspirational powers had been invoked in describing Handel's influence on the national psyche as early as 1733.¹¹³ Given the significance *Alexander's Feast* appears to have had in forming Handel's reputation, it is confusingly fitting that in 1762—the year of the Abbey monument's unveiling—a commentary on Vauxhall Gardens should be issued describing the figure of Harmony as 'St. Cecilia, the goddess of music'.¹¹⁴ Perhaps the author of

¹¹² See note 47, above.

¹¹³ 'An Ode, on the Occasion of Mr Handel's Great Te Deum, at the Festival of the Sons of the Clergy', *Gentleman's Magazine*, February 1733, 94.

¹¹⁴ *A Description of Vaux-Hall Gardens* (1762), 37. Equally, in Burney's *Commemoration of Handel*, one of the engravings represents 'HANDEL composing sacred Music; the Genius of Harmony crowning him'.

this pamphlet took his cue from another admirer of Vauxhall, who praised the Gardens in specifically nationalistic terms, invoking the power of St Cecilia and the martial sound of the trumpet to rouse the soul.¹¹⁵ Appropriately, it is John Lockman—the Vauxhall Gardens’ publicist who described the first statue in Apollonian terms—who in 1765 provided another poetic assessment that indicated just how different the two pieces were, how radically appreciation of Handel had changed:

To mourn o’er thee, I not invoke the *Nine*:
Nor wait for Influence at Appollo’s Shrine.
Vain Fictions!—O for David’s Sacred String!
Who, but a Muse divine, of thee shou’d sing?¹¹⁶

Ultimately, of course, the identities of the angel/David/Cecilia/Harmony figures were of little significance; they appeared in the background, as symbolic confirmation of Handel’s power. Likewise, the composer’s association with such emblems itself receded into the background, his significance measured not within his alcove but by his place within the embrace of the national pantheon to British glory which Westminster Abbey had become. ‘Samuel Johnson said of Abbey burial that it was peculiarly fitting for great men (such as himself), who have no bond elsewhere.’¹¹⁷ The bond of Westminster’s bounds was the encompassing one of national identity, its ties intangible as well as adamant, but far from transient in either case. Though Johnson’s observation has an air of wistfulness, it is precisely the ‘release’ from local, personal bonds that created such powerful symbols—witnesses to and confirmation of apparently eternal verities—the cultural icons of the past two hundred years. The detail of Roubiliac’s statues (matched by the

¹¹⁵ *The Turkish Paradise*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Lockman, ‘To the Manes of Mr. Handel’, *Public Advertiser* 27 March 1765; cited in Bindman and Baker, *Roubiliac and the Eighteenth-Century Monument*, 378 n.41.

¹¹⁷ Edward Carpenter, ed., *A House of Kings: the History of Westminster Abbey* (London, 1966), 247.

increasing detail and particularity of contemporary historians and satirists¹¹⁸) was what was chiefly remarked upon at the time. It represents not merely an artistic ploy, however, but also a telling desire to render the illusion that private persons could be public property, could be intimately knowable by all. In so doing, of course, however subtle and detailed that representation may be, however much fam'd Handel appears to breathe, that breath is still caught, still fixed in stone. So too, the verities to which such a pantheon as Westminster Abbey bears witness inevitably ossify, as tradition becomes truth.

Eternal 'truths' such as the nation state are, of course, creations of the cultural moment, manmade rather than natural, however much their creators might protest otherwise. In the edifice of nationalism, we make monuments of some prized forms of art and artists, and are content to use the rest merely as building material, essential but indistinguishable and undistinguished. So Italian opera in the early eighteenth-century is reduced simply to Handelian opera, and that only a precursor to his true *metier*, the oratorio; so too English opera is merely the fool before the King. By restoring some of the social ties that originally articulated the construction of nationhood, I have not tried to create (or endorse) new monuments, nor even to topple old ones. Rather, I hope, as did Winton Dean, simply to breathe a little new life into some of our more hardened beliefs.

¹¹⁸ Vincent Carretta has written about the move from emblematics to personal characterisation in mid-eighteenth-century satire, finding this to be part of a general historical shift from 'uniformitarianism' to 'relativism' in the mid-eighteenth century; Carretta, *The Snarling Muse: Verbal and Visual Political Satire from Pope to Churchill* (Philadelphia, 1983), 211. This is also, of course, the opposition between 'ancients' and 'moderns', with the 'moderns' eventually winning out; see Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (London, 1991).

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