Adapting *Phaëton*;

Quinault's 'role' in reform opera on the London stage[1]

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The term 'operatic reform' is well understood by music historians. In essence, it suggests a particular movement in which opera is consciously modified, and at the same time, supposedly improved. It particularly refers to two main periods in opera history: the Arcadian reforms at the end of the 17th century, in which the comic and pastoral scenes were removed from the genre, and the later 18th-century reforms, usually attributed to the librettist Calzabigi, and to a lesser extent, the composer Gluck, which put them back again. I have no intention here of debating the merits of this crude model or the use of the term; suffice it to say that research over many years has added nuances of all sorts to our understanding of the historical picture, but has not undermined the main trends, and we gain little by trying to ignore them.

In this picture, London stands out as an exception to other European opera centres, for there was no intellectual move toward reform. The 17th-century English equivalent of the Italian and the elaborate French operas, were the dramatick operas

[1] Material used in the paper is drawn from work on a number of different projects. The material on Vanneschi draws on research for a forthcoming RMA monograph, *The Mingotti: Diva and Impresario Regina Mingotti at the King's Theatre, London*. The material on the libretti is drawn from 'The Italian Opera Aria on the London Stage 1705-1801', an ongoing project discussed in Michael Burden and Christopher Chowrimootoo, 'A movable feast: the aria in the Italian libretto in London before 1800', *Eighteenth-Century Music*, iv/2 (2007), 285-289, and two articles derived from this project, 'Dancers at London's Italian Opera House as recorded in the libretti' and 'Stage and Costume designers working at the Italian Opera in London: the evidence of the librettos', both forthcoming.

with spoken dialogue, with texts written by authors such as John Dryden, and provided with music by composers such Henry Purcell. Some elements of the genre fared well; dance, with a nod to the English masque (from which many of the genre's characteristics were drawn), fulfilled a very clear function, in which it gave expression to the emotions generated by the previous scene; or, advanced the plot in its own right; or, reflected on the action.[2]

Dramatick opera met its end as a genre through the reorganisation of the London theatres by the Lord Chamberlain, apparently for sound administrative reasons, but in fact, to promote Italian opera.[3] In the end, the sophisticated integration of English dramatick opera, gave way permanently to a genre that had few characters on the stage, [4] in which the orchestra was confined to a pit, and where fantastical scenes such as 'a mountain in the canaries', 'a Chinese Garden', and 'a strange supernatural world', became (more prosaically) 'the camp', 'the grove', and 'the palace'.[5] Elements such as dance became largely optional, add-ons to be seen in divertissements between the acts, or in afterpieces at the end of an evening's entertainment.

[2] See among other authors, Roger Savage, 'The theatre music' in The Purcell Companion, ed Michael Burden (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 313-384, and Curtis A. Price, '"…to Make amends for one ill dance"; conventions for dancing in Restoration plays,' *Dance Research Journal*, x/1 (1977), 1-6.
[3] Curtis Price, *Music in the Restoration theatre: with a catalogue of instrumental music in the plays 1665-1713* (Ann Arbor, Mich: UMI Research, 1979), 117-134.
[4] Michael Burden, 'Where did Purcell put his theatre band', *Early Music*, xxviii/3 (2009), 429-443.
[5] The sort of effects that were on offer can be gauged from Frans Muller, 'Flying dragons and dancing chairs at Dorset Garden: staging *Dioclesian*', *Theatre Notebook*, xlvii/2 (1993), 80-95.

A few of the Italian operas written for London in the first decade retain some effects. Their presence in works such as Handel's *Rinaldo* has been attributed to the need of the promoters to please a public familiar with dramatick opera.[6] But the economic attractions of pasticci, [7] a set company of six (or five, or seven) solo singers, no substantial chorus, and stock scenes, seems to have ended even these limited efforts. In fact, the subsequent focus by scholars on the musical excellence of Italian opera's main proponent in London, Handel, obscures just how boring operas in England (including those by Handel) did, in fact, become.

As these production shortcuts and economies suggest, London opera was not a financially stable business, and any novelty or development that could be introduced was of interest to that season's impresario, especially if a whiff of the exotic could be added by bringing the performers over from the Continent.[8] And it is in this context that the activities of Francesco Vanneschi, the difficult, short-tempered, and over-bearing impresario, are of interest. Vanneschi's undoubted shortcomings have obscured his inventive approach to opera promotion in London: he knew well the importance of dancers to the success of the season; he attempted to

[6] Robert D. Hume, 'Aaron Hill', *Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: MacMillan, 1992), IV, 715-716.
[7] For a discussion of some of the issues of pasticcio in London, see (among others) Curtis A. Price, 'Unity, originality and the London pasticcio,' *Harvard Library Bulletin* 2/4 (1991): 421-44; and Michael Burden, 'Metastasio's 'London pasties': curate's egg or pudding's proof?' in Hg. von Elisabeth Th. Hilscher und Andrea Sommer-Mathis eds., *Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782), 'uomo universal'* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000), 293-309.
[8] Performers were obviously booked in a number ways; Vanneschi, the impresario under discussion here, was met by Walpole when returning from his 1741 'journey to Italy to pick up dancers and performers'. HW to Horace Mann, 6 November 1741; Walpole, XVII, 140-141.

vary the unrelenting diet of *opera seria* by introducing comic opera to London audiences; and in the 1746-47 season, when manager for the impresario, the Earl of Middlesex, he attempted to introduce London to a new style of serious opera.

The 1746-47 season came at a time when the theatres were settling down after the uncertainties caused by the political unrest of 1745. Middlesex and Vanneschi imported as their house composer (and probably also musical director) the Spanish composer, Domingo Terradellas (1711-1751), who, sponsored by the Prince of Belmonte, had studied with Francesco Durante in Naples in the 1730s.

As Table 1 on pages 1 and 2 of your handout shows, the season consisted of only five operas. Four of these were new to London: the pasticcio *Annibale in Capua*; Terradellas's *Mitridate*; Paradies's *Fetonte*; and Terradellas's *Bellerofonte*. The fifth opera, *Rossane*, was an old work by Rolli that had been set by Handel in 1726 under the title *Alessandro*, and which had been revived in 1743.[9] Published arias of all five operas survive in collections in John Walsh's *Favourite Songs*, as does a libretto of each opera, all published by George Woodfall in Charing-Cross.[10] *Fetonte* is the only

[9] See Larpent copy US-SM La 41 of the 1743 *Rossane*, labelled 'An old Opera by Mr Handel'. However, Burney, *General History*, IV, 456, attributes this version to Lampugnani, presumably suggesting that it was a revival of his 1746 setting. *Grove VII* lists Lampugnani contributing songs for *Roxana, o Alessandro nell'Indie* of 1743, but omits any mention of Lampugnani's own setting of 1746.
[10] Copies consulted for this paper: *Annibale in Capua*: GB-Lbl 639.d.22.(6.); *Mitridate*: GB-Lbl 907.i.5.(7.); *Fetonte*: US-SM La 182 and GB-Lbl 639.d.22.(7.); *Bellerofonte*: GB-Lbl 907.i.5.(8.).

new work from the season that appears to survive in full score, a not uncommon state of affairs for most of the London versions of Italian operas.[11]

The unusual text of *Fetonte* is credited to Vanneschi on the title page, and on the basis of it, by scholars since, but the truth of the matter is that Vanneschi simply stole much of it from Quinault's 17th-century opera, *Phaëton*, of 1683. *Phaëton* had been set Lully, and was a major machine drama with sets and costumes by Jean Berain. It had been well received on its premiere at Versailles, welcomed even more warmly when it was staged in Paris later that season, and was revived in (but not limited to) 1692, 1702, 1710, 1721, 1730, and 1742, this last date being just a few years before our opera was heard in London. *Phaëton* was clearly had enough currency for it to be an obvious choice for the light-fingered Vanneschi.

Table 2 on pages 3 and 4 of the handout demonstrate the kind of relationships that exist between the texts. They are close enough to establish the relationship between *Phaeton* and *Fetonte*, but not quite close enough to argue that Quinault's text was the *direct* source. It does seem likely that an Italian version intervened, and Vanneschi's own behaviour raises the question of whether it was his, or even if he was responsible for the final adaptation. It seems more than likely that the opera text set for London made its way there via some other route, perhaps from Naples in

[11] And this score seems to owe its survival to the financial difficulties of the opera's composer, Paradies, who sold a number of his manuscripts to the Earl Fitzwilliam; it is now in the collection of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Terradellas's suitcase. I mention this only as a possibility here; as we will see below, there is another solution to this puzzle.

The dramatis personae page from the libretto of *Fetonte* on page 4 of your handout immediately indicates that we are dealing with a very different work than a run-of-the-mill *opera seria* of Handel and the like. The cast is large, and includes Gods and Goddesses rather than the historical or heroic characters of Zeno, Metastasio, and Roccaforte. The overall structure of the work, shown in the handout on pages 5 and 6 contains, what was, for the 1740s, an extraordinary number of dances and choruses in the middle of the acts. They both drive the action forward, and reflect on the results of the dramatic incidents.

Inter-relationships between the action, the choruses and the dancers seem complete. In Act 1 scene i, for example, we find that 'The Indians and Ethiopians, after performing a ballet, expressive of joy, sing the following'. As the table shows, there are various phrasings of this instruction, which are of different orders of ambiguity, but we do find in Act III the instruction 'one of the priestesses enters, after which they all sing (dancing at the same time.)'[12] Not only is it clear that both singing and dancing took place at the same time, but the score shows that the same music was

[12] Francesco Vanneschi, *Fetonte* (London: G. Woodfall, 1747), 47.

used for both: the ballet 'expressive of joy', performed by the Ethiopians and Indians, was danced to the music that they then sang.[13]

The instructions were copied into the score, and illustrate that the musical action was to flow from dance to chorus, and, as shown in page 7 of the handout, the chorus, hardly used in *opera seria* at this date, is clearly designed to have a varied musical texture, dropping back from full chorus to four voices, and then two voices.

The question is, of course, is all this just happenstance? Clearly, Vanneschi intended to put on this opera with these characteristics, but did he really see it as representing a new way of operatic writing? As it happens, the answer is 'no', it was not just happenstance, although it is unclear whether Vanneschi's own motives extended much beyond profit.

When the libretto of *Fetonte* was published, the opera's text was preceded by 'A discourse on the operas, humbly inscrib'd to the Right Honourable the Earl of Middlesex'. This essay was written by John Lockman (1698-1771), presumably to the order of Vanneschi, perhaps on the basis of the poet's 'Some Reflections on the opera…' from his earlier 1744 *Rosalinda*, set by Veracini, and based Shakespeare's *As*

[13] See Michael Burden, 'To repeat (or not to repeat)?; dance cues in Restoration English opera', *Early Music*, xxvi/4 (2007), 609-622.

you like it.[14] And it is important to note that Lockman would be involved with Vanneschi for some years to come, including writing the impresario's repudiation of his role in the attempted plot to blow up the King's Theatre in 1755.[15]

Like most authors of such prefaces, Lockman appealed to history for authority, and after a number of general remarks on the history of opera, his narrative arrives in 17th-century France, where he posits that 'among other Improvements made by the *French*, in Operas, is their interweaving (if I may so speak) *Choruses* and *Dances* in the Body of Them'. Lully, he believed, added them as an 'Embellishment to Operas', and that the composer had gone on to add

> Airs (to which Dances were made) expressive of the Character of certain Nations; and even of fabulous Deities, and other imaginary Persons, such as *Pluto*, *Polyphemus*, &c. Till near this Period, very little Distinction or Difference was seen in the Dances of *Shepherds*, *Satyrs*, *Cyclops*, *Tritons*, &c. But the Stage-Dancers in question working upon *Lully's* hint, threw a Variety and Grace, till then unknown, into *Ballets* or theatrical Dances.[16]

Such dances did not stand on their own:

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[14] See Winton Dean, 'Shakespeare and Opera,' in Phyllis Hartnoll ed., *Shakespeare in Music* (London: MacMillan, 1964; rep. 1966), and Michael Burden, 'Shakespeare's plays into opera', in Fiona Ritchie and Peter Sabor, eds., *18th-century Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), forthcoming.
[15] John Lockman, *A faithful narrative of the late pretended gunpowder plot* (London: for the author, 1755). He also may have been the anonymous author of *The voice of discord, or the battle of the fiddles. A history of a seditious and unnatural attempt upon the lives and properties of fifty singers and fiddlers* (London: W. Owen and T. Snelling, 1753), which was reply to Giuseppe Baretti's *A scheme for having an Italian opera in London, of a new taste* (London: printed for W. Owen, and T. Snelling, 1753); see Michael Burden, *The Mingotti: Diva and Impresario: Regina Mingotti at the King's Theatre*, London, forthcoming.
[16] John Lockman, preface to Vanneschi, *Fetonte*, v-vi.

> Having added these Perfections to Dances, they introduc'd them into the Body of their Operas… and this in so artful and happy a manner, that they sometimes (as indeed they ought always to do) form so many constituent and necessary parts of the Drama… The *French*, at the same time, made considerable Improvements with regard to *Choruses*, which, when harmoniously adapted to the Words, and blended with expressive Dances, animate the Entertainment considerably; and give great Pleasure, if made so essential to parts of the Drama.[17]

In contrast to the French, Lockman wrote, the Italians introduced intermezzi between the acts which were 'afterwards… justly expell'd, and their Place supply'd by *Dances*; which, however, being merely introduc'd between the Acts, without bearing the least relation to the Subject of the Drama, where, therefore, are far from answering the Purpose.'[18] And his final proscriptive shot in support of the 1746-47 season was the suggestion that opera could be improved by 'calling in more extensively the Aid of Painting, Machinery and Dances', and by bowing to the authority of the ancients by intermixing the present drama with choruses 'which, tho' they may not imitate those of the *Greeks* and *Romans*, may perhaps remind many Spectators of them'.[19]

[17] Ibid., vi.
[18] Ibid., v.
[19] Ibid., xvi.

Whether the historical picture so developed by Lockman (much of it without specific examples or precise chronology) can be held to be accurate is not important: his consequent arguments concerning the extent of the integration of dance and scenery into the action, though, are. Given that Lockman's preface is such a rallying cry, it is a surprise to find it appearing so late in the season; *Annibale in Capua* and *Mitridate* had both closed. However, neither of these works was as revolutionary as *Fetonte*. It seems likely that the opera was in fact the product of a collaboration between the heads of the main departments of the company: the choreographer, Pierre Aloar, the designer of the scenes, Antonio Jolli, and Teradellas, and obviously, Vanneschi and Lockman must also have colluded. And the trend being set by *Fetonte*, last work in the season, *Bellerofonte*, follows its model, at least, in the absence of the score, as far as can be determined from the libretto.

This newly-recognised importance of the integration of all the dramatic elements of an opera is indicated by the inclusion of Aloar's and Jolli's names in the libretti. Prior to this season, there are only four mentions of scene painters in London libretti:[20] two are of Marco Ricci in 1710 and 1712 for same scenes in *L'Idaspe fedele*;[21] one of a M. W. de al Cour, who provided a new scene in 1740;[22] and the other of Jolli himself

[20] See Michael Burden, 'Stage and Costume designers working at the Italian Opera in London: the evidence of the librettos', forthcoming.
[21] GB-Ob Vet. A4 e.832 (2) [CS: 12643; ESTC: N7663] and GB-Lbl 639.d.17.(1.) [CS: 12644; ESTC: T36971].
[22] *Busiri overo in van si fugge amore* (1740) GB-Lbl 907.i.3.(8.) [CS: 4297; ETSC: T89957].

in 1744.[23] The choreographers had fared worse; Aloar is the first to be mentioned in any London libretto.

Jolli was a painter of somewhat lush, spectacular scenes - one is on the page 8 of the handout - and he was active in the London for one or two seasons. The Frenchman Pierre Aloar[24] was active for much of the century, and his work in Turin and Milan in the 1730s and 1740s has been calendared, as has his work period around 1759-60 in Rome, Florence and Venice. His period in London, however, has been neglected[25] and he is omitted from the Highfill, Burnham, and Langhans *Biographical dictionary of the London Stage*. But his importance cannot be overestimated; he was, in fact, one of the earliest dancers to move beyond mere divertissements, and to attempt to produce ever more elaborate narrative and pantomimed dance sequences.[26]

The legacy left by Aloar was to emphasise the role of the choreographer in the production of the ballets; the dances were not simply the casual result of the dancers themselves, but were the product of a choreographic overview required by the

[23] *Rosalinda* (1744) GB-Lbl 907.i.4.(8.) [CS: 20146; ESTC: T69041].
[24] Gloria Giordano and Jehanne Marchesi give Alouard, Allouard, Alovar, Aloardi, Alonard, Loard, Louvair, and Lovar as alternative spellings in 'Gaetano Grossatesta: an Eighteenth-Century Italian Choreographer and Impresario, Part One: The Dancer-Choreographer in Northern Italy', *Dance Chronicle*, xxx3/1 (2000), 150; Salvatore Bongiovanni adds Alnardi in 'Gennaro Magri : a grotesque andcer on the European stage' in *The grotesque dancer on the eighteenth-century stage: Gennaro Magri and his world*, ed. Rebecca Harris-Warrick and Bruce Alan Brown (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 37.
[25] See, for example, Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell, 'Theatrical ballet and Italian opera', in Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, *Opera on Stage*, trans Kate Singleton (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2002), 202, n. 68, which gives details of all his choreographic appointments, except his London one.
[26] Bongiovanni, 'Gennaro Magri', 34.

integration of dance and drama. But after this season, no choreographer would again be listed in a London Italian libretto until Giovanni Gallini was described as 'composer of the dances' in the libretto for *Antigono*, which opened on 8 March 1757. And the dancers at the opera were not themselves acknowledged by name until Gallini and Vincenza Lucchi were listed in the libretto of *Alessandro nell' Indie* for the run of performances which started on 11 December 1756. In Continental terms, though, even in the 1750s, such acknowledgement was comparatively early; Neapolitan librettos, for example, did not give the names of the dancers until after 1763.[27]

The significance of the use of Quinault's *Phaeton* as a basis for *Fetonte* has, in the past, been ignored. Lockman's case for the use of French opera as the way forward for the reform of Italian opera would become a familiar topos, and would be vigorously promoted by one of the most influential figures of the later reform movement, the Francofile, Giacomo Durazzo (1717-1794). But it was not until 1748, when on a diplomatic mission to France with his compatriot Agostino Lomellini, 'that he conceived a plan to rework Quinault and Lully's *Armide* as an Italian opera on reformed principles.' And his plan would not be realized until 1761, when it was versified by Giovanni Migliavacca (*c.*1718-1797?) and set by Tommaso Traetta (1727-1779). Another librettist who can be counted as a mover and shaker was Carlo Frugoni (1692-1768) at the court of the Duke of Parma, where Guillaume du Tillot,

[27] Giordano and Marchesi, 'Gaetano Grossatesta', 150.

the duke's theatrical director, was interested in producing French operas. Du Tillot was interested an amalgam of French and Italian opera which was essentially reform opera, and Frugoni duly obliged with adaptations of two of Rameau's operas, *Ippolito ed Aricia* in 1759, and *I tindaridi* of 1760 (an adaptation of *Castor et Pollux*). Quinault's *Phaeton* would itself be used as a model for Niccolò Jommelli's last opera for the Duke of Württemberg, written for the newly constructed theatre at Ludwigsburg in 1768, and regarded by Marita McClymonds as an early 'reform opera'.[28]

This chronology emphasises the extent to which our received picture of early reform postdates the London developments outlined above. Unfortunately, though, the 1746-47 season made little difference to the writing and staging of opera in the English capital.[29] Change, when it came, would be re-imported to London from the Continent at a much later date. But for a moment in the 1740s, there was the possibility that all the elements of opera including dance and scenic design, would be given a meaningful integrated dramatic role in Italian opera in London. Had the move been successful, 'operatic reform' would have arrived much earlier in Italian opera, and in the repertory in London, not in Vienna or Paris. But this was a chance that was, sadly, almost immediately snuffed out.

[28] See Marita P. McClymonds, 'Fetonte', *Grove Dictionary of Opera*, II, 177-178.
[29] Its exact relationship to developments on the stage are as yet unclear, but Garrick's 'reforms' started around this time; see, among others, Daniel Heartz: 'From Garrick to Gluck: the Reform of Theatre and Opera in the Mid-Eighteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, xciv (1967–8), 111–27.