



sumida en un complejo y prolongado proceso de recomposición'; 586), alluding to the aftermath of the 1701–1714 War of the Spanish Succession. So while the Valencian people had been exposed to Italian musical forms that were assimilated into their musical tradition – in both devotional and secular works – they were deprived of direct contact with the genre that most represented Italian culture: opera.

Synthesizing more than a decade of research, this authoritative study provides a detailed, descriptive and richly documented account of Valencian music. In examining Valencia's transition from tradition to modernity, Bombi opens up a rich cultural context that includes such neglected aspects as consumption, production and civic identity. To paraphrase an earlier observation by Tim Carter, the author's accomplishment is twofold: his (re-)examination of the privileged institutions and genres favoured by traditional musicology offers an enticing view of 'the tip of the iceberg', while his insightful contextualization of devotional and profane music in its urban environment goes on to reveal a 'large portion of that submerged iceberg' (Carter, 'Urban Musicology' (conference report), *Early Music* 28/2 (2000), 313). Aside from a few editorial weaknesses – inconsistencies in the punctuation of titles, for example, together with such slips as incorrect page numbers in the Table of Contents, mislabelled figures and occasional omissions from the Bibliography – this study is an excellent one. The reader is smoothly guided through a complex maze of documents and issues. Translations into Spanish of the many Catalan excerpts in the body of the text would have particularly aided non-native Spanish speakers, helping to make the documents more accessible to those who do not read Catalan. Still, the documentation provided here is invaluable. Bombi, whose expertise on Valencian music is unsurpassed, has once again enriched the field of Spanish musicology.

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THOMAS MCGEARY
THE POLITICS OF OPERA IN HANDEL'S BRITAIN
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Students of music in Georgian London have long been waiting for a book that provides guidelines for defining the political resonances of its Italian operas. Robert D. Hume's influential article concerning an earlier period ('The Politics of Opera in Late Seventeenth-Century London', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10/1 (1988), 15–43) was followed by his invaluable handbook on ascertaining contemporary meanings in verbal art, *Reconstructing Contexts: The Aims and Principles of Archaeo-Historicism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999). For *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain* Thomas McGeary takes from Hume's article the phrase 'generic expectation' and uses it repeatedly to decry the (alleged) approaches of other scholars to his topic. I wish that as a methodological starting-point he had instead used *Reconstructing Contexts* (cited only twice), which could have saved him a lot of space and this reader considerable confusion.

McGeary explores politics, journalism, opera management, spoken drama and Italian opera librettos of the period 1705–1742. After the Introduction and a long chapter on the methodology of political interpretation of librettos, individual chapters interleave political and theatre history of the period 1714–1742 with expositions of political writing in other genres (journalism, especially opposition journalism using opera stars and management as analogies; ballad operas; plays) and rebuttals of previous interpretations of Handel's operas. A final chapter enumerates, with copious examples, the civic and monarchical principles enunciated in the librettos. Appendices give the known political affiliations and offices of Royal Academy shareholders, list directors of the Opera of the Nobility with political allegiances in June 1733, and usefully compile thumbnail synopses of operas premiered by the Royal Academy and the Opera of the Nobility and music theatre works provided for royal events.



There is plenty here to interest the student of British cultural politics of the first half of the eighteenth century. To the opera historian the last chapter is likely to be the most fertile, for it draws on librettos, including *pasticcis*, of all the opera companies of the period and points up an aspect of the operas that has generally been undervalued in the scholarship to date, the importance of agreed moral-political apothegms. Here, as throughout the book's discussions of the librettos, the expert reader is likely to be engaged at the 'yes, and' or 'yes, but' level. But new joiners are likely to have difficulty on first reading, since the ordering of chapters puts the cart before the horse. Chapter 2 proposes criteria for justifiably finding political meaning in the operas, but on the basis largely of material in later chapters (page 30 refers us on to chapters 4, 5 and 7 for evidence), so the whole book has to be read before the value of its criteria, and of its methodological arguments, can be gauged.

In this and other respects I'm not clear who the book is aimed at. It faces the usual problems of interdisciplinary studies: some readers need to be given facts that others know well, and material may become oversimplified or restricted in its exposition. In the present instance the canvas is so wide that scholars of English literature are likely to be dissatisfied with the *explications de texte* (not all levels of irony are noticed); historians will read many pages of familiar material (and some rather simplistic deductions from it); musicians and musicologists will find no account of the music; opera historians will be tantalized by the brevity of the summaries of non-Handelian librettos (there is no account of any entire opera or its libretto). Some readers may wish that the book included fewer of the 'many squibs remaining unused' from previous work (ix) or expounded them less extensively, allowing room for the material scheduled for the projected sequel, 'Opera and Cultural Politics in Britain, 1700–1742'. But the author's decades of reading of eighteenth-century source materials yield some instructive finds (though fewer that are new to scholarship than is implied), and his dissections of contemporary journalism and other political polemic could be stimulating in graduate seminars on Handel's London.

Novices, however, will find many terms unexplained. 'Ars historica' receives seventeen endnote references, but there is no definition of 'standing army', '[the] quality', 'Country [party]', 'the Persian letter technique', '[Holy Roman] emperor', 'sturdy beggars', 'the Pretender', 'realist-mode operas' or the distinction between a director and a subscriber and a shareholder of the Royal Academy. Others besides novices may have difficulties with terminology. I very much wish that the apparently crucial (and apparently not synonymous) terms allegory, application, parallel and personation had received clearly distinguishing definitions. 'Application', for example, occurring sixty-one times in chapter 2 alone, is frequently used without clarifying whether it means authorial application then, or audience application then, or reader application now. (The index is no help: 'application' has a mere five entries under 'application, reader' and another five under 'parallel and application'.) Likewise, 'partisan' is not defined. McGeary repeatedly asserts that there is no partisan political reference in the librettos, and he agrees with the scholars who think there was no party politics in the modern sense during his period, so we need to be told what 'partisan' means here, especially when it is used so often (forty-two times in the first fifty-six pages alone). Methodology and the methodological defects of other scholars being major concerns of the book, such vagueness is problematic.

McGeary picks up from Hume the gauntlet of extrinsic evidence and tries to shape it for opera between 1721 and 1742, making inferences from other periods (four pages on the late seventeenth century, when the recent political experience was very different), from other forms of writing (where the controlling influences of tradition, patronage and audience were often very different) and from writings on other art forms, such as drama, by contemporary commentators (whose agendas would need to be carefully examined before being taken as gospel). This leads to internal contradiction, for example, as to whether or not an old text can have political meaning when revived (20, 22, 50–56, 182). The attempt to make a glove that will fit over a hundred operas produced in the course of twenty years also necessitates exclusions, scrupulously made – in the case of operas celebrating Hanoverian events, seven times in forty-nine pages.

The dominant thesis with regard to the operas themselves is that 'there is no basis for the generic expectation that the librettos of individual Italian operas on historical subjects are, or were intended *and* received as, allegorical or allusive of contemporary topical politics' (5; my italics): to entitle us to suggest topical political meaning, contemporary audience response to a trope is not sufficient; probable authorial intention



needs to be demonstrated. (Unlike Hume, McGeary does not allow greater freedom to *suggesting* an interpretation than to *stating* one.)

There are two similar lists, one of ‘circumstances and textual features that mark these works as intended and received as political’ (30–31), the other of proposed ‘criteria that can be used to identify works that, on historical grounds, were likely intended, written, and received as topically political using techniques such as allegory, personation, or parallel and application’ (48–50). These and a statement at the end of the list on page 50 seem to dismiss the validity not only of speculations by readers now about audience interpretations then, but also of any audience interpretations then that cannot be shown ‘likely’ to have been authorially intended.

Given this emphasis on authorial intention, I’m not sure why much of the book is subsequently given to contesting other scholars’ suggestions of audience application, and worrying about ‘the dilemma of trying to decide whether the politics is “really there” or is “in the eye of the interpreter”’ (181; also 50). If fathoming authorial intention is the goal, the notion that the applauding audience members at *Floridante* were expressing political sentiments is simply irrelevant, and doesn’t need six pages of rebuttal (81–86). I would rather have learned more about what is in the operas.

However, we are also told on page 4 that ‘An opera on a historical subject could be made topical or relevant to politics of the day by the technique of parallel and application. A London opera-goer (or libretto reader) could draw from the episode represented on stage a universal lesson or precept of political wisdom; then the opera-goer could apply the precept to the circumstances of the day to illuminate, advise, or judge a specific person or situation’ (similarly pages 6, 48, 214, 244). And on page 13 the aim is ‘to recover political meanings as possibly designed by librettists *or* as members of Handel’s audiences would likely have sought or understood them’ (my italics).

This leaves me genuinely unsure whether the ‘dilemma’ that concerns McGeary is the need to determine probable authorial intention as against potential audience application, or the difficulty of being definite about plausible audience application, or indeed only of determining what is meant by ‘allegory’. All these had already been raised as a ‘dilemma’ by Suzanne Aspden (‘Ariadne’s Clew: Politics, Allegory, and Opera in London (1734)’, *The Musical Quarterly* 85/4 (2001), 735–770), and for me, McGeary doesn’t clarify. I think McGeary means (though he does not consistently say so) that it is misguided to look for or claim thoroughgoing one-to-one correspondence between an opera character and a figure in the audience’s recent or current political experience; to claim that because it is an opera, there probably is such correspondence, intended by the author(s); or to assume that the audience expected such correspondence to be intended. I agree; few serious scholars now make such bold claims.

McGeary aims to understand the operas according to criteria of their own time, but he seems to have double standards. While noting that in journalism, plays and ballad operas ‘the parallels occasionally shift slightly’, and ‘are not consistently carried out’, he reproaches any Handel scholar proposing an allegorical likeness that is a less-than-perfect match. ‘It is the lack of textual cues or distinctive features given to Cato beyond his thumping for liberty that allows him to be opportunistically identified with Marlborough or Oxford’ (31). Yet McGeary takes that same lack of one-to-one correspondence between dramatized and real-life characters as grounds for denying potential identification of the one with the other in operas, Hanoverian celebratory pieces excepted: ‘the opera stage was not where one expected to find topical partisan allusion and allegory’ (6). I don’t understand why McGeary considers loose identification plausible for *Cato* and *Atalanta* and implausible for *Sosarme* (for example).

Privileging authorial intention over audience reception is fair enough, and being aware of the difference is essential. But there is a middle ground, neglected here. If contemporary application is rife for other genres, as many quotations in this book show it to have been, it seems unlikely that an opera librettist, or a composer as savvy as Handel, would be unaware of potential applications of a familiar trope. So can one always draw a firm line between author and audience in suggesting the resonances of a work? In an age when Gay writes to Swift that everyone will impose meanings on *Gulliver’s Travels*, when Swift’s own career was jeopardized by interpretations of *A Tale of a Tub*, when the 1717 Preface to *Cato* testified that Whig and Tory factions both claimed to be endorsed by the play, when journalists’ routine accounts of the evils of



too-powerful chief ministers were routinely understood to attack Walpole (facts well known to McGeary), it would seem strangely naive to produce – at the height of the opposition to Walpole's Excise Tax – an opera (Handel's *Sosarme*) which shows that a too-trusted chief minister can ruin the state, and not expect the audience to make a connection to Walpole; especially when the same season featured an oratorio with the identical *donnée* of an evil chief minister (*Esther*). McGeary reports that Haman, the villainous chief minister in the *Esther* story, was used as an analogue for Walpole (189), but he considers *Sosarme* only to dispute a more elaborate allegorical reading (8).

For McGeary there has to be a distinct political answer to 'cui bono' for a political meaning to be allowable, and he doesn't consider that filling seats by appealing to a diversity of audience opinions might be a sufficient bonus for a cash-strapped opera company. Multifariousness of audience opinion, wishful allegorizing, selective application and the authorial get-out 'but I didn't mean it like *that*' are not admitted when McGeary considers other scholars' interpretations of the operas. Rather, 'our goal in the first instance must be' the 'common, broad, context-specific meaning' a work had for an undefined 'general audience' (51).

Looking in the operas for multiple and contradictory meanings is, according to McGeary, evidence of poor theorizing (56; see also 91) and reflects a modern preference for 'ambiguity, pervasive irony, subversive readings, reader response, and textual instability. The approach flies in the face of the spirit of early eighteenth-century neoclassical art and criticism that stressed clarity and explicitness of meaning, representation of general nature, universality over personal expression, verisimilitude and decorum, and adherence to rules and genres' (51). By all means let us recognize the principal surface meaning and acknowledge that the work may be only surface (and a lot of dramatic emotion). But we should also beware muddling principles with practice. *The Rape of the Lock*, *The Tale of a Tub*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Rasselas* weren't thought in their own time to have the meaning only of their surface narratives and moral apothegms, or even to have agreed perspicuous meanings. To McGeary multiple meanings spell contradictoriness or relativism, both bad. Maybe this explains his treatment of *Muzio Scevola* (not, by the way, an opera just by Handel). He shows, but does not acknowledge, that it has a remarkable dedication, deploying the theme of Roman Republican liberty fleeing north to Britain, which McGeary identifies as an opposition topos. *Muzio Scevola* is dedicated to George I. So what is the librettist saying to the king, by invoking an opposition topos? A question not considered. Dedication is one of McGeary's criteria for evidence of authorial intention, but on page 80 he states that for this opera the fact of the dedication to George I is 'not especially significant' (although only two Royal Academy operas were so dedicated).

McGeary's reading in political historiography is extensive and up to date, and his narratives of political and operatic history are detailed and clearly written. But he has a distinct historical bias, evident in his quoting the identical passage from J. H. Plumb's *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675–1725* (London: Macmillan, 1967) on page 69 and again on his final page. He wants to believe that Britain enjoyed stability between 1721 and 1742, even calling Jacobite invasion (which occurred in 1715 and 1745) 'possible – though distant and unlikely' (233). The Jacobites and their French and Spanish outfitters did not take over Britain, but in 1722 or 1742 no one knew that that was going to be the case, and, as McGeary notes, Walpole considerably inflated the public's anxiety that they might. He scarcely needed to: if you were a Londoner and woke up one morning, a year after the country had been 'plunged into a financial crisis' lasting more than six months (66), to find that the Dean of Westminster and two peers were deeply involved in a terrorist plot to bring down the government and open the country to hostile foreign nations who had managed to invade seven years previously, would you be persuaded that 'the political nation was successful in maintaining stability and cohesion' (10)? As McGeary himself stresses, works of art were written and responded to by people living at the time, not future historians.

In note 6 on page 2 McGeary dismisses politics in the sense of 'the ideologies which permeate every level of human existence' as 'too abstract to be of use for this study'. Yet such ideologies – even ideals – are the focus of his chapter 8. McGeary could have brought out more strongly the point that many of the familiar moral-political precepts he enumerates there not only carried a strong political charge but were also themselves fought over by political groups for definition and possession. McGeary gives an excellent account of the opposition's anti-Walpole platform, which took the moral high ground (96), but omits to mention that



ministry writers' responses laid claim to the same principles of liberty, justice, integrity, civic duty and so on (see Reed Browning, *Political and Constitutional Ideas of the Court Whigs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982)). In the 1720s and 1730s particularly, the big question in moral-political discourse was not which principles were valid, but whether they were being truly upheld and implemented in real public life, and if so, by whom? The principles were fought over by the opposed groups, so one could say that works which extolled them (as McGeary shows operas to have done) supplied ready grist to partisan mills, just as *Cato* did. The contractual principles of rulership that McGeary quotes from *Numitore* gain colour when we consider that this was the opening opera of the Royal Academy patronized by the king. The promulgation of an extreme version of divine right by the villain in *Muzio Scevola*, an opera dedicated to the king, boldly jangles contemporary nerves. McGeary rightly adverts to the sensitivity of treating monarchy on the London stage, but does not make the connections.

As students of the period well know, its operas are particularly difficult compositions in which to discern received meanings because their audiences were less interested in their verbal content than in their vocal performance, possibly because they were all-sung and in Italian. That in itself provoked ironic suggestions that they were vehicles of politically subversive elements, but audiences did not come home and write in their diaries 'attended ye tendentious opera of Mr Hendell, which glances at ye ministry's conduct in ye affair of Gibraltar'. Nevertheless, I am persuaded by, for example, the connection of Gibraltar's importance in foreign affairs (lengthily expounded by McGeary) with the focus on British mastery of a Mediterranean island in Handel's *Riccardo Primo*, a connection made by Ellen T. Harris ('With Eyes on the East and Ears in the West: Handel's Orientalist Operas', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36/3 (2006), 419–443) and Katie Hawks ('Looking for Richard: Why Handel Wrote *Riccardo Primo*', *Handel Institute Newsletter* 23 (2012), 5–7). This is an opera that McGeary continually excepts from his dismissal of specific political resonance in the librettos (13, 22, 31, 48, 49), yet his discussion considers it only as romantic drama, despite its dedication to the new king.

This is a very combative book. Punches are thrown out so generally that all contributors to the field will feel reprimanded (for example, all unreferenced, 49–50: 'Interpreters of the politics of Italian operas generally avoid enquiring . . .'; 'Modern interpretations of operas, however, tend to have strained and tenuous engagement . . .'; 'No corroborating evidence . . . has been offered by modern interpreters'; 'Political interpreters of Italian operas have failed to show . . .'). Some of the targets seem scarcely worth the effort, exhumed from as far back as 1909. Often the chief offenders are pioneers of the 1980s who would, I imagine, write more precisely now. A number of the specific criticisms seem wide of the mark; for example, I cannot find Donald Burrows saying that the founding of the Royal Academy opera was related to the mending of the schism in the royal family, or that the Prince of Wales was a founder of the Opera of the Nobility, and for political reasons. Brickbats are dispensed more freely than bouquets, forerunners seldom receiving their due. For example, in arguing that opera management was not organized on partisan political lines, the thirteen pages defining the Prince's engagement with the Opera of the Nobility (155–168) could have been beneficially reduced by acknowledging Frances Vivian, *A Life of Frederick, Prince of Wales: A Connoisseur of the Arts*, ed. Roger White (Lewiston: Mellen, 2006), and Carole Taylor, 'Handel and Frederick, Prince of Wales', *The Musical Times* 125 (February 1984), 89–92 (which McGeary cites, but not on this point).

Were there not already 150 pages of end matter to 250 pages of text, I would have suggested that the rebuttals of others' interpretations might have sat better in footnotes, or in an article. In fact the notes are used, too often, for continuation of the arguments and evidence provided in the text, splitting the discourse. The notes are so extensive partly because they do the work of literature surveys; only for the historiography of the period is a literature survey provided in the text. They are evidence of enormous reading – which commendably includes the German Handel literature, often neglected by Anglophone scholars, and scrupulously quoted in both original and translation – but they made me wish that some bibliographical lists (for example, a whole page itemizing debates as to whether Burlington, Swift and Pope were Jacobite) had been sacrificed to fuller examination of the operas. Cambridge University Press's insistence on endnotes rather than footnotes will be especially excruciating to readers of this book, and the value of the bibliographies in the notes is diminished by the sad fact that the notes are not indexed (had



they been, some failures of connection between note indicators and note contents would have shown up). A generous and logical index is especially desirable in an interdisciplinary book. The index of this book is neither, and is maddeningly inconsistent. More thorough indexing might have caught and precluded the verbatim repetitions in the text, in one case of fully half a page (235, 238). Doubtless the subeditor did sterling invisible work, but too often faulty syntax meant I had to read the text twice in order to understand it, and didn't always even then.

Given the importance of McGeary's view of authorial intention as a test of meaning, it would have been interesting to have examples of changes from Italian source libretto to libretto for London, and thence to libretto as altered and set by the composer. But words-and-music is outside the scope of this book. *The Politics of Opera* contains some helpful accounts of opera management and contemporary political events, and dissects some entertaining primary sources, but I find the arguments and the deductions built on them contradictory and questionable. We still await a book on London Italian operas of this period that takes into account all aspects of their drama and the ideas of their time.

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ROBERT G. RAWSON

BOHEMIAN BAROQUE: CZECH MUSICAL CULTURE AND STYLE, 1600–1750

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In his Introduction Robert Rawson states that this book will correct three myths concerning music in Bohemia during the Baroque: 'first, that the period after 1618 until the early phases of the national revival at the end of the eighteenth century is a "dark period" for Czech-language literature and arts. Second, that the use of the Czech language practically died during this period and was replaced with German. Third, that the notion of a specifically Czech identity was invented in the nineteenth century' (1). As the author makes clear, while this is not a general history of music in Bohemia and Moravia during this time, 'the central focus . . . is the Czech-language milieu' (2). In contrast, however, to studies of the nationalist traditions of the nineteenth century, Rawson's examination of musical 'Czechness' combines a clear sensitivity to the earlier musical sources and a broad understanding of the complex multicultural environment in which the composers worked. He establishes as a foundation the formative importance of the rural cultural institutions, the village church and schools, and the significant role of the Catholic Counter-Reformation in promoting Czech-language publications, especially the cantionals of spiritual songs that were of clear importance to the native composers.

Important to his discussion are musical characteristics of the *stylus rusticanus*, which include 'short and repeated melodic cells; the prevalence of triadic motifs; instrumental character in vocal music; the use or evocation of *alternatim praxis*; melodic writing in parallel thirds, sixths, tenths, unisons and octaves; paucity of counterpoint; extreme contrasts of style (usually from mixture of high and low styles within a single work); emphasis of the first beat; and parallel minor–major keys' (48). Rawson rightly points out that the presence of these markers in a composition does not create true 'folk music' since such works were often composed for courtly celebrations, especially during Carnival, when the intent is more likely to have been to promote humour than to offer respectful imitation. These stylistic elements are most evident in the tradition of Christmas *pastorellas* prominent throughout Central Europe. Rawson examines closely the examples by native composers, such as Pavel Josef Vejvanovský, which are often marked by quotation of the Central European carol *Resonet in laudibus / Josef lieber, Josef mein / Hajej, můj andilku*. He also clarifies the transition from the predominantly instrumental *pastorella* of the seventeenth century to the vocal