

Britain Goes to the Opera: Discourses of Nation in Late
Georgian Music Drama

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**Britain Goes to the Opera: Discourses of Nation in
Late Georgian Music-Drama**



JOHN BULL AT THE ITALIAN OPERA.

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Abstract

Music and drama remain largely neglected fields in the wider discipline of nineteenth-century British history. Equally, the kinds of home-grown music-drama so prevalent in Britain during the decades between the French Revolution and the Reform Act of 1832, have been overlooked by musicologists and theatre historians in terms of how they stimulated new ways of thinking about 'Britishness'. My aim with this thesis therefore will be to investigate how exactly the genre of English Opera can be used to illustrate contemporary discussions of 'Nation' taking place in Late Georgian Britain. By examining the textual aspects of these music dramas, I will look at how the medium of opera, particularly its musical elements bring a fresh mode of representation to topical issues central to the lives of Britons living in a war-faring, reform-conscious society. Equally, the problems presented by this genre, in terms of its foreign character, remediation of treasured literature and effects upon public taste, will be considered within frameworks of 'national' thinking then developing in the theatre-going society of Georgian London. By focusing on four key areas: war, union, bardolatry and developments in the genre of English opera itself, the ways in which these tropes both influenced and were influenced by the performance of music drama will take centre stage.

Cover Illustration: Thomas Rowlandson, 'John Bull at the Italian Opera' (1811)

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of York or any other institution.

Introduction

National Overtures

No opera in Late Georgian Britain could begin without an overture, its purpose to familiarise an audience with the work's key melodic themes and structures; as the title suggests, the following introduction will attempt to do exactly the same, only with historical ones. For historians investigating the early nineteenth century, the nation is a perennial favourite. The way in which this entity is imagined, whether historically, geographically, politically or culturally, is a constant process of redefinition shaping the experiences of its inhabitants¹. Like a symphonic theme, the nation acts as a recurring motif, manifesting in a more nuanced sequence of variations and developments, at times obvious and others disguised within a transformation, change in tempo or surprising modulation. It is the nation's ubiquitous yet malleable character that causes such difficulties for those seeking to define it. Within the context of nineteenth-century Britain, debate has surrounded the exact nature, social locale and political import of 'the nation'.² Whilst there will be no attempt at such a definition here, the focus will nevertheless be upon how operas and music dramas both contributed to and were influenced by contemporary discussions of the British 'nation'. In recent decades, scholars (most notably John Brewer), have looked to culture, specifically the arts, not only as a vital prism through which ideas of the British nation during the eighteenth century can be viewed, but as a formative influence upon national definition in itself.³ They have identified a multifaceted process, driven by an unlikely alliance of competing social and commercial groups, the influences of private patronage and intellectual pressures, which combined to produce what is now widely considered to be Great Britain's national cultural heritage. Whilst this resulted ultimately in the widespread institutionalisation of the arts in museums, galleries, theatres, and of course print, what has been preserved for posterity in

¹ See G. Cubitt, ed. *Imagining Nations* (Manchester, 1998) pp.1-17.

² See Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation*, Newman, *English Nationalism* & Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, for traditional historiography on these issues.

³ Brewer, J. *Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 2000)pp. 521-2.

stone and ink has also come to neglect those cultural activities whose fluid and in many cases, fleeting existences helped to reflect and determine imaginings of the British nation in the Late-Georgian era. For one such art form, English opera of the early nineteenth century, it was an unequivocal concern for national discourses of patriotism that drove the shaping of a now all but forgotten genre.

This particular specimen of drama has fallen largely under the radar of many important studies exploring the theatrical and musical cultures of early nineteenth century Britain. This is in part due to the fact that it is a rather difficult genre to pinpoint. The influential research in the field such as that by Jane Moody in *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (2000), Gillian Russell's *Theatres of War* (1995) and David Worrall's *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787 – 1832: The Road to the Stage* (2007) all discuss the social and political contexts of stage works, which either implicitly or explicitly deal with contemporary patriotic thought and ideas surrounding the nation. There is as yet however, no dedicated study of how the genre of English opera, in its dramaturgical, musical and textual aspects contributed towards imaginings of the British nation. The development of English opera in the eighteenth century has been painstakingly examined by Roger Fiske's *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (1973) and more recently explored in terms of its cultural exchange with continental equivalents by Christina Fuhrmann. How English opera's musical aspects helped, intentionally or subconsciously to define ideas of Britishness and is less understood. Through combining both Historical and musicological approaches, this study will attempt the place English opera within the context of time and place, examining the ways in which discourses of nation both shaped, and were shaped by the genre.

The unique arrangement in Britain, where rather than directing theatrical life through ownership, the state instead maintained control by a system of legislation and patents, had a vital effect upon the way English opera and its messages were disseminated.⁴ The 1737 licensing act had prohibited spoken (also known as 'legitimate') drama from all but two houses, who legally at least, reserved the sole rights for producing the spoken repertory.⁵ These patent theatres were supplemented by a number of 'minor' houses, who instead provided entertainments whose basis was fundamentally musical, visual and unspoken.⁶ The development of operatically-influenced dramaturgies was always going to be a natural product of this dichotomy. By the late eighteenth century however, the genre of English-opera (or 'music drama'), a part-spoken, part sung form of drama came to dominate the stage of the patent theatres too as the most popular of contemporary entertainments, sharing

⁴ Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge, 2000) p. 16

⁵ Moody, J. "Fine Word Legitimate!": Toward a Theatrical History of Romanticism', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 38 (1996) pp. 9-11.

⁶ Worrall, D. *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787 – 1832: The Road to the Stage* (Palgrave, 2007)p.11.

the limelight and even infiltrating the porous boundaries of legitimate spoken drama. Seen by many as the product of theatrical proprietors, desperate for commercial success, the result of this situation was a genre at times original and topical, at others infused with traditional authors and narratives familiar to all. It was always however the subject of popular discussion.

Where the aristocratic Italian Opera at the Haymarket simply imported continental works for its fashionable audiences⁷, the English houses created their own theatrical idiom; one designed to appeal to native tastes. For foreign observers, watching an English opera could be a unique if rather unusual experience. One German visitor to Drury Lane described the shock that greeted him upon seeing the English adaptation of Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*,

what then was my astonishment at the unheard-of treatment which the master-work of the immortal composer has received at English hands! You will hardly believe me when I tell you that neither the Count, the Countess, nor Figaro sang; these parts were given to mere actors . . . to add to this, the gardener roared out some interpolated popular English songs, which suited Mozart's music just as pitch-plaster would suit the face of the Venus de' Medici . . . The whole opera was moreover 'arranged' by a certain Mr. Bishop, that is, adapted to English ears by means of the most tasteless and shocking alterations.⁸

That English opera as an entertainment was unique is undeniable. Its confluence of popular and foreign cultures through various genres and dramaturgies, made it digestible only to a well seasoned, native theatrical palate, as displayed by disgruntled foreign reactions to its idiosyncrasies. Consequently, its individuality raises important questions about the value of such performance cultures as reflections of contemporary tastes and attitudes in Late Georgian London. Unlike their European counterparts, cultural institutions in the British Isles were characterised mainly by their lack of support, both financial and political from the state.⁹ In France, the revolutionary and later Napoleonic regimes ensured state sponsorship for its national drama and opera, their British counterparts proving far more reluctant to do the same. Throughout the eighteenth century, as John Brewer has noted, the rise of the arts in Britain was linked to the peculiar social and political conditions of the country itself. It was, as Brewer explains:

the triumph of a commercial and urban society, not the achievement of a royal court. It was the political as well as economic condition of England – its weak monarchy, free

⁷ Hall-Witt, J.W. *Fashionable acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

⁸ Puckler-Muskau, H. *Tour in England, Ireland, and France: in the years 1826, 1827, 1828, and 1829* (Philadelphia, 1833) p. 49-50

⁹ Blanning, T.C.W. *Unity and Diversity in European Culture c.1800* (Oxford, 2006)

constitution and rule of law – which helped to create literature and performing arts that aimed for a public and were organized commercially rather than being confined to a few.¹⁰

This understanding of the arts' place in British society meant that patriotic spectacle became the business of private impresarios, whose symbiotic relationship with the ideological aims of the Ministry, presented a lucrative realm for capitalizing upon public enthusiasm for war with France. This is not to say that they were given unadulterated licence over what they produced, the Lord Chamberlain and his Assessor of Plays kept tight rein upon the content of works produced for the stage of legitimate and patent theatres¹¹. Nevertheless, without the programmatic input found in the court based theatres found elsewhere, the commercial onus of the types of dramas performed, notably on patriotic and contemporary themes, gave the relationship between stage and the wider public a particular importance.¹²

There is no doubt that for the leisured classes, theatre and concert attendance was the lifeblood of the aristocratic social scene. A great number of the growing concert series were dependent upon 'gentlemen amateurs' who provided both their homes and purses for the performance of new and 'antient' musics. As late as the mid-nineteenth century the Duke of Edinburgh, in spite of reputedly possessing little aptitude for music, remained as leader of a major concert orchestra.¹³ Equally, the subscriptions of noble houses and their acolytes continued to provide a substantial proportion of the revenue taken at patentee theatres well into the 1840s. These in turn acted as the stage for political intrigue and social scandal with gossip, dandies and prostitutes passing freely from one box to another.¹⁴

A wider glimpse at the audience of a patent theatre however, would have shown a more representative reflection of London's social sphere. By the mid 18th century, around 12,000 Londoners were attending the theatre each week¹⁵ and, as Jim Davis describes, these 'Audiences comprised a cross-section of society: the more aristocratic, fashionable patrons in the boxes; intellectuals, less affluent gentlemen and professionals in the pit; tradesman and their wives in the middle gallery and servants, footmen and sailors among the inhabitants of the upper gallery.'¹⁶ This hierarchy, more or less a reflection of the status of its various constituent 'social groups' outside of the theatre, in its own unusual way provided an egalitarian arena, in which the opinions of those groups could be articulated (often

¹⁰ Brewer, J. *Pleasures of the Imagination* (Harper Collins, 1997) p.7.

¹¹ Conolly, L.W. *The Censorship of English Drama, 1737-1824* (California, 1976).

¹² Burden, M. 'Opera in the London Theatre' in *British Theatre: 1730-1830* in J. Moody & D. O'Quinn Eds. (Cambridge, 2007).

¹³ Ehrlich, C. *The Music Profession in Britain since the Eighteenth Century: A Social History* (Oxford, 1985) p. 129.

¹⁴ Hall-Witt, J.W. *Fashionable acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

¹⁵ H.W. Pedicord, *The Theatrical Public in the Time of Garrick* (Carbondale, 1966) p. 16.

¹⁶ Davis, J, 'Spectatorship' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Theatre*, J. Moody & D. O'Quinn Eds. (Cambridge, 2007)p. 57.

rowdily) without censure. As the German Pückler-Muskau noted with disapproval, ‘The most striking thing to a foreigner in English theatres is the unheard of coarseness and brutality of the audiences . . . English freedom here degenerates into the rudest license.’¹⁷ This liberty found within the opera-house was also increasingly asserted without. The period spanning the parliamentary struggles of the 1780s, through to those electoral and religious reforms some fifty years later, saw the boundaries of these performing cultures in the context of their content and audiences change as markedly as the on-going political reforms that paralleled them. This took on added significance with the decline of the aforementioned aristocratic subscription culture; notoriously difficult to manage in a financial sense, the late Georgian stage was obliged to attend to the demands of its public, an often unmanageable quantity in itself. The Old-Price riots surrounding the rebuilt Covent Garden Theatre and its performer-impresario John Kemble, demonstrated just how precarious this balance of theatrical economy and audience expectation could be¹⁸.

One of the highest grossing works in early nineteenth century London was Dibdin and Braham’s ‘The English Fleet of 1342’(1803)¹⁹, an opera whose content, patriotically and historically evocative, long outlived the conflict which its allegory alluded to. As in Linda Colley’s seminal work²⁰ on the forging of a British identity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the long standing English and increasingly ‘British’ antipathy to France that held a grip upon the discourse of national identity in dramatic terms, had undoubtedly solidified by the end of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. Following Gillian Russell’s theatrical explorations of the period of warfare between 1793 and 1815, new efforts have been made to investigate further the responses of the wider British public.²¹ The opportunities presented by music dramas tapping in to discourses of chauvinistic patriotism, could not only provide a wide-array of subjects acceptable to censors but find commercial success through their topicality, often galvanising potentially fractious audiences.

The opposition Great Britain posed to France became one of historical dimension, presented through the thinly veiled metaphors of music-drama; aside from Gallic antipathy, interest in the past could illuminate other issues relevant to contemporary Britain. Although nationalism is often discussed as an ostensibly nineteenth century phenomenon, the foundations of these developments in Britain were set in the eighteenth century. As will be examined, eighteenth century discourses of patriotism championing the ideological and

¹⁷ Puckler-Muskau, H. *Tour in England, Ireland, and France: in the years 1826, 1827, 1828, and 1829* (Philadelphia, 1833) p. 43.

¹⁸ Taylor, G. *The French Revolution and the London stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge, 2000).

¹⁹ Dibdin, T. J. *The English Fleet in 1342*, Larpent Coll. 1393.

²⁰ Colley, L. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (Yale University Press, 1992) p. 5.

²¹ Russell, G. *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 2011) Ch. 1

moral superiority of Britain over its enemies, gradually evolved into theories of natural, even biological difference. This manifested not only in discourses which looked to an inherent national aversion as a defence against the consumption of foreign artforms such as opera, but also led to new ways of representing these differences on the stage itself. It is no coincidence that the same decades seeing the formation of modern historicist tradition, founded in the grand narratives of Macaulay, Michelet and von Ranke²², ran parallel to the rise of an ideological, self-conscious assertion of the nation state across the European continent. For generations of historians, who were led to believe nationalism's claim that the past belonged to its political mission within the present, their enthusiastic response became a series of prophetic histories, charting the hallowed path of each 'national' peoples from its genesis. Far from the exclusive preserve of historians, they found their widest dissemination first in the literary romances of Scott, Stendhal and Schiller, and later within the performing arts and the proliferation of historical drama.²³

For the stage, this became a rich source of visually imaginative subjects, taking advantage of public enthusiasm for other historical genres. The result of this was twofold. Evocation of 'England' and its recurring message of liberty were consigned to the past for performance purposes (particularly the 'olden time'); consequently that past became fundamental to conceptions of 'the nation' in the present. Stage works by English composers dealing with the Celtic 'other' often used this backdrop to emphasise harmony between the English and their compatriots elsewhere in Britain. Attwood's *St. David's day* (1801) most obviously stressed this theme in which the honesty of a Welsh peasant is rewarded by the marital union of his daughter to an English gentleman²⁴; an uncompromisingly lucid metaphor for contemporary debates surrounding political acts of union. For Scotland, its historical image was to become vital, theatrical depictions aided by a very particular musical idiom, combining to signal a new confidence in coexistence with England's formerly troublesome neighbour to the north.

The musical language employed by these music-dramas and operas were themselves vital elements in these often nationalistically inclined discourses. Whether helping to colour textual elements and embellish the narrative, or provide samples of the latest continental innovations, they acted to represent issues central to late Georgian Britain. Claire Mabilat's work on the representation of the exotic 'other' in British Music, particularly the stage works of Sir Henry Bishop (a composer who will occupy a leading role in this study), provides an interesting dissection of the various elements contributing to stereotypes of 'native'

²² See Stern, F. *The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present* (Meridian, 1973), for examples of each.

²³ Lindenberger, H. *Historical Drama; The Relation of Literature and Reality* (Chicago, 1975)

²⁴ Hughes, M. 'Attwood's *St. David's Day*: Music, Wales and War in 1800' in *Europe, Empire and Spectacle in Nineteenth-Century British Music*, R. Cowgill & J. Rushton eds. (Ashgate, 2006).

characters in British culture.²⁵ How these same characteristics came to help forge the dramatis personae of envisaged ‘others’ much closer to home, notably in the rustic Celtic fringe and the subculture of the British military, provides an insight into the gulf between the metropolitan culture of late Georgian London and those existing elsewhere. Ideas of noble savagery and inherent violence came to encapsulate imaginings of Rob Roy and Highland culture as much as the inhabitants of South America or the Far East.

What was clear therefore was how English opera and its various dramaturgical cousins in the form of burletta and melodrama, became effective ways of staging these differences. The addition of a musical vocabulary to an already spoken one, was central to crafting (if at times rather crudely and indifferently) nations, peoples and even social groups. Indeed, Henry Bishop’s particular talent for doing so was noted by his contemporaries. Born in 1786, Henry Rowley Bishop became Britain’s most eminent native composer during the early decades of the nineteenth century and in 1842, on the instigation of Prince Albert, became the first musician ever to be knighted.²⁶ Fellow composer George Alexander Macfarren famously described Bishop’s compositional skill as one ‘of a theatrical, not a dramatic nature, enabling him to represent groups but not persons, dispositions but not feelings, customs but not passions; your forester, your toper, your gypsy, your bandit, your serenader, and your mourner.’²⁷ With Bishop, characters were increasingly products of their environments, whether they were Scottish rustics, Arab Sultans or English sailors, their actions dependent upon prescribed theatrical identities.

If English opera provided both a novel and lucrative framework for representing British national identities, the practical effects it had upon the listening habits of the London public were far reaching. By the late 1820s, performing concert music had become subject to what has been described by William Weber, as a ‘cultural explosion’.²⁸ Though more recent scholarship has pointed to the earlier formation of institutions such as the Philharmonic²⁹ and the Royal Academy as examples of a concert culture of permanency, until this point, like standing armies, the standing orchestra was always subject to cuts, restructuring and even disbandment. The forging of a musically discriminating middle-class concert audience, was indelibly linked to the new and expanded role played by the middling classes in society. In one respect this was a matter of social definition, focussing on social milieu, and notions contrasting the respectability and propriety of middle England, with the ancient vices of an

²⁵ Mabilat, C. *Orientalism and Representations of Music in the Nineteenth Century British Popular Arts* (Ashgate, 2008).

²⁶ Nicholas Temperley and Bruce Carr. "Bishop, Sir Henry R.." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press

²⁷ Macfarren, G. A. ‘Bishop’s Glees’, *Musical Times* 11 (1864), 409.

²⁸ Weber, W. *Music and the Middle class: The Social Structure of Concert life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1838 and 1848*, 2nd Ed. (Ashgate, 2004) Ch. 2.

²⁹ Taylor, I. *Music in London and the Myth of Decline: From Haydn to the Philharmonic* (Cambridge, 2010).

ignorant and decadent aristocracy.³⁰ In a practical sense however, the foundations of this shift were shaped in the theatre, where as later chapters will examine, developments in the genre of English opera helped to mould the preferences of a self-consciously ‘tasteful’ listening public.

Whilst contemporary English composers, primarily Sir Henry Bishop have now been studied in depth by scholars such as Christina Fuhrmann, these explorations have tended to focus upon the composer’s great flair for adaptation in bringing continental works to the London stage.³¹ When it comes to those operas and music dramas owing chiefly to his originality as a composer, musicologists tend to skirt around the issue without actually looking at the effects of his music in itself. Bishop’s development of English opera through the appropriation and remediation of fashionable and canonical English subjects such as Shakespeare and Scott, were combined with efforts to advance the national taste for foreign musical forms, by incorporating them within native dramatic models. The responses to these innovations however prompted many to examine the morality of an alien genre such as opera, and most importantly its encroachment upon the national tradition of legitimate spoken drama. Whilst in a textual sense English opera could provide commentary upon the ongoing wars with France and the state of the Union, it also therefore encouraged fierce debate surrounding the health of the nation through its tastes and cultural productivity.

The kind of primary evidence for this process is highly varied and widely dispersed. The scores and libretti for most of the operas and music dramas discussed exist in a detached or inconsistent form. Many of the texts can be found in the Larpent Collection, an assemblage of plays and operas submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for censorship purposes. Often in the handwriting of the playwright or dramatist, the extent of music in the work can only usually be discerned by the markings for songs, some even neglecting to provide this information. The scores on the other hand, are taken mainly from vocal reductions published for sale to musically-literate members of the British public. In some cases, the manuscript scores themselves have been consulted, however these are occasionally inaccurate reflections of what might actually have been performed, works subject to constant alteration and adaptation.

As for nationalistically concerned responses to these music dramas, written accounts of performances found in newspapers, periodicals and memoirs are themselves a vast pool of colourful yet problematic information on contemporary operatic productions. These

³⁰ Hall-Witt, J. ‘Representing The Audience In The Age Of Reform: Critics And The Elite At The Italian Opera In London’ in *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914* Bashford & Langley Eds. (Oxford, 2000).

³¹ Fuhrmann, C, ‘*Adapted And Arranged For The English Stage’: Continental Operas Transformed For The London Theatre, 1814-33* Phd. Diss. (Washington University, 2001).

individual critiques often present opinion in a most unequivocal form, and though the recollections of composers and critics may present very different views, their use in conjunction with playbills and box-office receipts allow us to construct revealing comparisons of these opinions with those of the London theatregoing public itself; the most obvious evidence of this being the financial success of a work.

This is not a history of opera, more a cultural investigation into its ability to reflect a historical moment: how the individuality of a genre can illuminate the concerns, tastes and prejudices of a society: that of late Georgian Britain. That both temporally and geographically, English Opera is so bound to London of the early nineteenth century, grants it a particular agency in examining the period, both as a reflection of and influence upon the historical moment. The first chapter looks at the theme of patriotism in its most direct form by analysing operas and music dramas that made explicit use of patriotic discourses to capitalise on the wartime climate of the period 1793 to 1815, whilst simultaneously helping to reinforce notions of patriotism amongst the British public. The second chapter develops the more nuanced trajectory of nationally-associated music in English operas, specifically those linked to Scotland. The consequences of the theatricalised image given to a national culture will be examined in terms of not only its influence upon political images of Scotland, but the greater effect of musical antiquarianism on historical thinking, as seen most figuratively in the work of Sir Walter Scott. The third chapter will turn this notion of national culture on its head as it looks to how musical influences threatened the inheritance of old England – Shakespeare - in a series of new productions ‘operatizing’ the bard for modern consumption. The formation of a national corpus of drama and literature prompted critiques of the opera as an ‘alien’ importation and unsuitable medium for the works of the national poet. The fourth and final chapter expands upon this matter of national taste to look at the final developments in the genre of English opera, which though decried by critics, managed to change the musical and dramaturgical tastes of the wider British public, and allowed for the increased viewing of works formerly considered elitist and foreign by London audiences.

1

Sea Songs and Spectacle: Minors, Majors and the British Military

This chapter will examine how commercial imperatives in late Georgian theatre used musical entertainments to both serve and subvert notions of patriotism during Britain's ongoing wars with France. It will emphasise how those establishments licensed for legitimate (spoken) drama, came to adopt the legislatively enforced dramaturgical frameworks found in illegitimate theatres to represent these issues. Most importantly however, it will explain the way in which a cross-institutional consensus developed, championing a very British genre of music, the nautical ballad. The ways in which sea songs were used not simply as popular modes of performance, but, as will be discussed, part of a state-sponsored propaganda campaign, played an important role in forming civilian attitudes towards the British military. The genre's creation of a musical template allowed composers to invoke character types, through an acknowledged and replicable style of music.

During July of 1794, cannon shot sounded across London as British and French fleets engaged in fierce combat. Though not in any military history of Britain's War with France, these engagements were skirmishes fought both within and between London's playhouses, integral to a campaign of escalating theatrical response in a new age of continental warfare. Containing all manner of spectacular nautical machinery, London's auditoriums filled with the heat and haze of gunpowder and flame. Martial airs and raucous sea songs were chanted by boatswains, Commodores and even Britannia herself as all around mayhem and destruction ensued. At the start of each performance warships and sailors, otherwise wrecked or fallen the night before were revived and brought back to fight again. This chaotic state of affairs continued for almost a month as theatres sought to exalt and capitalize upon Britain's first major victory in the war against revolutionary France. The real action had taken place a month earlier between British and French forces operating in the Atlantic Ocean, at the Third Battle of Ushant.³² Seen by many as an unexpected triumph for the British fleet under Lord Howe, it marked a significant advance in a conflict both increasingly prolonged and, since the execution of the French King Louis XVI, against an

³² *The Glorious First of June 1794: A Naval Battle and Its Aftermath* edited by M. Duffy and R. Morris (Exeter, University of Exeter Press, 2001)

ever more sinister enemy.³³ Within days of the news reaching the British capital, managements at both the Drury Lane and Sadler's Wells theatres released stage works celebrating Howe's triumph. The sensual appeal of these stage works, attempting to recreate the aura of battle, more importantly, served as acts of national communion. Their music, drawing from the traditions of naval balladeers and theatrical composers of patriotic song, became hymns to the nation, ranging from cacophonies of chauvinistic xenophobia, to more muted tones of sentiment and romance.

Since the work of Linda Colley and Gillian Russell, the period of warfare between 1793 and 1815, previously researched extensively in terms of its military and political aspects (notably its diplomatic history), has received far greater consideration in terms of understanding the responses of the wider British public.³⁴ In many ways the theatre of these decades provides a rather good gauge of this opinion. For although, as many scholars are keen to point out, censorship was tightened and access to legitimate drama severely restricted, many of the minor theatres managed to present works laden with topical political comment, in spite of the arbitrary demands of genre found in the wartime regulation of media, theatrical and otherwise. Their productions, not spoken dramas in any conventional sense, were instead imaginative affairs of music, dance and visual indulgence. Invariably selecting themes from a range of contemporary subjects, so powerful were the effects of these multi-faceted entertainments upon audiences that their methods were soon replicated by those theatres with no need to resort to such measures, the Royal Patentees. What David Worrall terms the 'plebeian'³⁵ character of these minor theatres, allows us to glimpse how exactly certain sections of the British public came into contact with representations of their own nation. They strike a particular contrast with those audiences of the patent theatres and concert-going societies, whose self-affirming notions of taste and erudite listening became increasingly important as a mode of middle-class definition.

How works were received by different elements of an audience acted as an indicator of social position, separating plebeian from polite society. In wartime, theatres remained as volatile environments as ever and far from the silent obedience of modern custom, audiences reacted with unabashed emotion and violent passion to the works they saw. It is no coincidence that during the twenty years of war with France one of the country's most prolonged periods of public dissent involved a theatre and its public. The Old-Price Riots of 1809, launched in opposition to John Kemble's increased ticket prices for the rebuilt Covent

³³ Rodger, N.A.M. *The Command of the Ocean: A Naval History of Britain, 1649 – 1815* (Penguin, 2006) pp. 429-30.

³⁴ Russell, G. *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 2011) Ch.1 & Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992), p. 3

³⁵ Worrall, D. *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787 – 1832: The Road to the Stage* (Palgrave, 2007) p.1.

Garden Theatre, lasted for months as the proprietor and his lackeys clashed with London theatregoers in a series of disruptions and brawls.³⁶

What is significant, given the very public nature of these responses to theatrical performance, is that by the time war had begun in 1793 the productions found at the populist minor theatres became an integral part of the nation's patriotic discourse, at once reflecting the audience's imaginings of the war whilst reinforcing them as an almost subconscious organ of government propaganda. This was not simply a statist loyalism, as seen in the patent theatres, but as will be discussed, a more interesting reflection of a fluid, audience defined patriotism that could at times verge on loyalist, pro-ministry notions of the word (more so in some respects than the works staged in the Theatres Royal themselves), and in others show Jacobin sympathies. Whilst the ever-looming threat of a revocation of licence by the Lord Chamberlain may have ensured that those minor theatres looking to survive would never push the limits of discretion too far, it does little to explain why the musical entertainments presented there so frequently outdid the majors at their own patriotic game. More than anything, the implication of this dynamic system was that in an 'illegitimate' market not dependent upon the beneficence of aristocratic box-owners and moneyed patrons (as the patentees had recourse to do) the commercial viability of a production was always the prime consideration.³⁷ In most cases this viability was dependent on patriotic themes and content. With interpolated ballads and airs, momentarily changeable and unknown to the censor, the minors developed a new style of 'national drama', distinct from the long touted monologues of Shakespeare and Dryden, uniquely dependent upon the vitality of national song. The following chapter will discuss not simply how music drama expressed patriotic sentiments but how the genre of theatrically conceived nautical balladry acted in itself to reinforce these messages and help shape public opinion towards the British military.

Burletta as the National Drama

The widespread cross-fertilization between theatre and music in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was chiefly the result of the 1737 licensing act prohibiting the spoken

³⁶ Baer, M. *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford, 1992) p. 202.

³⁷ Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge, 2000) p. 34.

word in all but the two patent-holding establishments³⁸. As productions in both minor and major houses attest however, the presence of song and music within the burlettas of the independents was mirrored by its permeation of the venues for 'legitimate' drama, represented by the ever expanding popularity of melodrama and English opera.³⁹ In cases of particular national significance such as those celebrations surrounding the Glorious First of June, the difference between the entertainments found at the two types of playhouses became less distinguishable than ever, exhibiting the extent to which contemporary performances relied upon a particular dramaturgical vocabulary to rhapsodize the successes of the nation.

Sadler's Wells celebratory productions in honour of Howe's success were on the whole dramaturgically quite different affairs from those usually seen at the patent theatres. Not subject to the same level of scrutiny by the censor, but strictly prohibited from staging pure spoken drama by law, Sadler's Wells specialised in all manner of extravaganzas, pantomimes and spectaculars. Originally opened over a century earlier as 'Mr. Sadler's Musick-House'⁴⁰, the theatre had become known for its unusual combinations of bizarre animal acts, patriotic pageants and plentiful supplies of free-flowing wine for its audiences⁴¹. Under the auspices of the genre known as 'burletta', it thrived on producing topically oriented musical performances which might be as varied as melodramatic scenes taken from the prints of Hogarth to a Ballet representing Marie Antoinette's imprisonment.⁴² Most interestingly these productions, though treating subjects which might otherwise have induced censorial wrath were almost universally patriotic in tone, more so than even the patent theatres who complained to their royal trustees of the minors having set up on their doorsteps. The fact of the matter was that Sadler's Wells and other 'illegitimate' houses could not rest upon centuries-old decrees for survival. This made them by necessity more inventive in their endeavours for self-sufficiency; in turn many became very successful as a result (Sadler's Wells, with the exception of a decade's hiatus in the early twentieth century, boasts an unbroken history of performance since its opening in the late 17th century)⁴³. What the patentees must have resented most of all was that this new level of creativity fostered in the minors (ironically deriving from their own monopoly on legitimate drama), actually highlighted the limitations of spoken drama itself, hindering the capacity of those with a royal patent to appeal to wider public taste. Equally, the lack of jurisdiction by the examiner of plays over spectacular elements of their entertainments often meant that many of the

³⁸ Connolly, L.W. *The censorship of English drama, 1737-1824* (Huntington Library)

³⁹ Worrall, D. *The Politics of Romantic Theatricality, 1787 – 1832: The Road to the Stage* (Palgrave, 2007)p.24-5.

⁴⁰ Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.) Ch.1.

⁴¹ Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.) p. 41.

⁴² Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.) p. 41.

⁴³ Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.)

minors could in fact be more patriotic, certainly in a popular, more John Bullish sense of the word, than the majors in their ability to represent subjects too sensitive to survive a censorial reading.⁴⁴

Throughout the entire revolutionary period in France, Sadler's Wells staged productions representing events such as the fall of the Bastille (Frederic Reynolds' equivalent at Covent Garden being struck off by Larpent⁴⁵) and the uprising of Tipoo Sahib in India⁴⁶, displaying the relative freedom of subject that in fact came from not possessing a royal patent.

Treatments of these incendiary episodes were set within a patriotic discourse reflecting most reactively the dynamic changes in public attitudes towards such events, particularly those taking place in France. It could even assist in shaping these sentiments. Where *Gallic Freedom: or, Vive La Liberte*, of 1789, a representation of the assault on the Bastille, was favourable to the revolutionaries and stoked ill-feeling towards the Bourbon monarchs, a year later *The Champs de Mars, or, Loyal Foederation*, solicited calls of 'Vive le Roi' from London audiences⁴⁷. This sense of demagogy, carefully attuned to public feeling relied upon an ability to engage with the most contemporary of issues in the most direct manner.

Combined with the technological and imaginative innovations born from the 'burletta' form, this meant that by the time conflict did ensue with revolutionary France, it was Sadler's Wells and the minors who were best equipped to represent martial spectacle and rouse the patriotic and often xenophobic instincts of the theatregoing public.

For the Glorious First of June, Sadler's Well's programme consisted of two main fixtures. The first of these *Sons of Britannia, or, George for Old England* was a depiction showing 'the Triumph of British Loyalty over Gallic Madness', described in an advertisement as a 'contrasted picture of MODERN FRANCE and OLD ENGLAND.'⁴⁸ Though no published version exists, the shape of the piece can be roughly determined by the brief review found in the following day's *Sun*;

it opens a wide field of pleasing amusement through the medium of sound taste and true loyalty, aided by the occasional whim and humour of Dance and Song, and the Supplemental Procession and spectacle, instead of an unmeaning display of the Theatrical Wardrobe on Walking Figures, comprehends a beautiful allegory, in which every spectator, as in a mirror, may see the genuine features, the very age and body of the times.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Taylor, G. *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 42.

⁴⁵ Taylor, G. *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 42.

⁴⁶ Taylor, G. *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 43

⁴⁷ Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.) p. 47.

⁴⁸ Advertisement, in *World*, June 4, 1794.

⁴⁹ *Sun*, June 7, 1794.

This sequence of singing, dancing and pantomimic action was typical of the mixed-form entertainments at the Wells and whilst its dialogue may have been restricted to the occasional couplet, rhetoric was conveyed through its various musical numbers. The success with which the piece expressed its patriotic sentiments was highlighted by the same critic who described the piece as;

‘likely to wear well, and do the state some service-unlike the usual flimsy compositions hastily spun and put together on such occasions.’⁵⁰

The notion of an entirely politically independent and financially unsupported institution such as Sadler’s Wells providing a service for the state was a rather curious one. However, where it had shown fortuity in sympathising with the early French revolutionaries, its proprietors must have realised that in providing a service for the state they were also doing themselves a favour. Unlike productions at the Theatres Royal, the works performed at Sadler’s Wells were never intended to reach canonical artistic status and even in such occasional pieces as *Sons of Britannia* and its successor *Naval Triumph*, qualitative comparisons between those dramas (and by implication the taste of respective audiences) staged at the major and minor theatres were ever present in the press. As one aside from the *Sun* confirms;

‘The “Glorious First of June” at New Drury, and the “Naval Triumph” at Sadler’s Wells, by a curious coincidence, have each in their service an old superannuated Commodore, as the main agent of the Dramatic Action. If there be truth in the saying, that “Great Wits jump,” the Poet of the Wells may, in this instance, claim Fellowship with the first Wits of the age!’⁵¹

The now forgotten writer of *Naval Triumph* and other Wells entertainments Mark Lonsdale could find some solace in such a review, even if it was a poorly disguised insult to his usual dramatic output. What was most ironic however about the critic’s observation was the fact that many of the tools used by Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s afterpiece at Drury Lane, were essentially the techniques found in the burletta spectaculars of the minor theatres; for audiences, these were the elements that managed to cross institutional boundaries and drew them in most effectively.

Sheridan’s afterpiece at Drury Lane was mostly a makeshift affair, hastily put together by a conglomerate of authors and composers (including not only the librettist Cobb, but poetry from Lord Mulgrave, Mrs. Robinson and the Duke of Leeds, a prologue by Joseph Richardson and additional scenes by Sheridan himself⁵²), each edified by the opportunity to do their part for the patriotic cause. Just how quickly this happened with *The Glorious First*

⁵⁰ *Sun*, June 7, 1794.

⁵¹ *Sun*, July 12, 1794.

⁵² *The Times*, July 3, 1794.

of *June*, was evident from the fact that the censor's wife, Anna Larpent recorded her husband reading the work on the date of its first performance (2 July 1794), having only been submitted to him earlier the same day.⁵³ Sheridan's biographer claimed that the piece was 'written, rehearsed and acted in three days.'⁵⁴ In reality the work was, like Sadler's Wells' productions, simply intended as the vehicle for a string of nautical and patriotic songs and of course, a grand and spectacular battle scene. What was unique however about Sheridan's drama was that in spite of this, it had managed to present a highly topical and multifaceted discourse on the after effects of war upon the families of servicemen, and the moral dilemmas of those involved in waging it.

The action of the *Glorious First of June* centres on the tribulations of William, a sailor whose promise to support the family of a dead shipmate causes his desertion from the navy. Whilst working on the Russet farm, he must contend with the scheming lawyer Endless and his attempts both to shut-down the holding for unpaid rent and force the family's daughter Susan into marriage. This is made no easier by Endless' spiteful revelation to the landowner, an ex-naval man, Commodore Chace (sometimes referred to as 'Broadside' in published copies of the songs) that William has absconded from his duties. Returning to sea, the 'Glorious First of June' soon makes William a hero and Chace cancels the Russets' debts, punishing Endless for his ill-spirited connivance.⁵⁵

Whilst Sheridan's work has often been viewed in terms of its more obvious appeal to patriotic values, emphasising themes of brotherhood and philanthropy amongst the military,⁵⁶ Timothy Jenks' unearthing of critical reviews detailing scenes otherwise unsubmitted to the censor (diverging from the copy of the play found in the Larpent collection) reveals a work open to new interpretation. In this version of events, Sheridan is shown not simply to exhibit patriotic sentiments, but ones belonging to a specifically Whiggish vision of the patriotic cause and an opposition to the policies of the Pittite government⁵⁷. His inclusion of an impressment scene in which the protagonist is subject to re-enlistment by a roving press-gang touched upon a source of widespread public dissatisfaction and drew on Sheridan's own investigations into the dubious recruitment practices of the infamous 'crimp houses'⁵⁸. The extent to which any subversive undercurrent can be accurately discerned should not be overestimated due to the brevity and sketchiness of the newspaper reviews cited by Jenks (only the *London Chronicle* explicitly mentions the involvement of a 'press

⁵³ Conolly, L.W. *The Censorship of English Drama 1737-1824* (The Huntington Library, 1976) p.20.

⁵⁴ Moore, T. *Memoirs of the Life of Richard Brinsley Sheridan* ()p. 252.

⁵⁵ Cobb, *The Glorious First of June* (Larpent Collection)

⁵⁶ Russell, G. *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 1995) Chp. 3.

⁵⁷ Jenks, T. *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793 – 1815* (Oxford, 2006) p.37.

⁵⁸ Jenks, T. *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy 1793 – 1815* (Oxford, 2006) p.47.

gang'). Framing the particular incident as an active criticism of impressment may of course be the result of figurative, politically partisan description by contemporary critics and conjecture from the modern historian rather than the dramatist's actual intent. Other reports from contemporary newspapers of the time point more to the recruiter Robin's persuasive powers as William's close friend, rather than any role as a 'violent' press gang 'lieutenant'; depicted as a preacher of national sentiment, able to awaken the 'glow of patriotism' in William, the honourable stray. Robin's financial gift to the Russet family sees him as the charitable beneficiary of those otherwise disenfranchised by the demands of war, and not the sinister cause of that deprivation found in Sheridan's own political enquiries into impressment.

Nevertheless, *The Glorious First of June* clearly contained ambiguous messages allowing audiences, like newspaper critics, to construe the actions of the press gang in several different ways. This ambiguity separated it from the more staunchly loyalist productions of Robert Benson's *Britain's Glory; or, A Trip to Portsmouth* at Covent Garden and James Robert's *Rule Britannia* at the Haymarket. Both of the latter dramas were concerned more with domestic enthusiasm for the military, rather than any real political comment upon the war, *Britain's Glory* being little more than a recycled piece originally dedicated to George III's naval review of 1774.

Equally novel was the work's initial staging as a benefit performance for those very people whose troubles it so evocatively dramatized. Charitable events were not uncommon affairs in Georgian England, particularly where philanthropic concert organisations were concerned. In the theatre however, they were more usually mounted for the benefit of a particular performer or member of the house company. During 1759, as the Seven Years War reached its most intense, Arne's *Alfred* had been given as part of Drury Lane's oratorio season, its profits going "towards collecting clothing and equipping the distressed who are inclined to serve in the Navy."⁵⁹ *The Glorious First of June* was however an entirely altruistic act designed to bring relief to 'the Widows and Orphans of the brave Tars who fell in the action'. This shift of patriotic philanthropy from aiding the proceeds of war itself to instead benefitting those affected by its wider destructive impact was unlike any seen on the London stage before. This recognition that the sacrifice made by the families of servicemen was as significant as those of their fallen fathers and husbands indicated a more familial notion of the nation, beyond that of a politically defined national ideology. The great success of this venture was reported by the *Morning Chronicle*,

⁵⁹ Aspden, S. *Arne's Paradox: National Opera in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Word and Music Studies, 2002)p.201.

‘The receipts of Drury Lane Theatre, on Wednesday night . . . amount to thirteen hundred pounds- the greatest sum ever taken at any theatre in the world; and still more extraordinary, as this concourse was in a burning evening of July.’⁶⁰

The scale of this fundraising was unprecedented and in many ways represented the beginnings of an insoluble link between British audiences and charitable performance, which was to result in the great philanthropic stage and concert series so prevalent in late-Georgian and early Victorian England. More importantly for the public of 1794, was the fact that this was an enterprise inherently supportive of national solidarity, converting the slippery business of patriotic feeling into the concrete commitments of the King’s Sterling. Financial contribution to an act of staged patriotism was also one directly benefiting the welfare of the nation’s needy. For Sheridan’s own public image therefore this had to be anything but a reserved and conscientious affair, and rather as accounts attest, the most patriotically conspicuous of coups de théâtre. Described by one journalist as a ‘national fete’⁶¹, another recounted the final scene;

‘Here we have songs and dances in abundance . . . at the close some beautiful fireworks were played off, and RULE BRITANNIA flamed in front with letters of gold.’⁶²

No expense or effort was spared by the proprietors of Drury Lane and any cynical assumption that the motive might have been to capitalize financially upon the unanimously favourable reputation of the opening night by cashing in on following performances, must be negated by the year’s short theatrical calendar as alluded to by one critic,

‘We lament for the public that the season is so near a close as to prevent a tenth of the metropolis from seeing it.’⁶³

Perhaps therefore the famously miserly Sheridan, known for his tactics in using seasonal protocol to minimise royalties given to playwrights⁶⁴, was using this end-of season lull for another more political purpose. It is certainly intriguing that Sheridan was given some room for political liberties which otherwise might have been treated with more discrimination by the Examiner had the work not been a benefit piece. This assumption makes some sense within the context of Sheridan’s role as the lessee of a Royal Patent. If dissidence was to be introduced, it had to be done subtly, particularly in a work that was in essence designed to celebrate an event which was a publicity coup for the British ministry.

⁶⁰ *Morning Chronicle*, July 4, 1794.

⁶¹ *Sun*, July 3, 1794.

⁶² *Oracle*, July 3, 1794.

⁶³ *Morning Chronicle*, July 3, 1794.

⁶⁴ Donkin, E. *Getting into the Act; Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829* (Routledge, 1995)

Exploration of the various interpretive contestations found within the narratives of docudramas such as *The Glorious First of June* reveals the potentially more complex ways in which Georgian theatres could act as the disseminatory devices of their impresario masters' personal, political agendas. Equally, the way in which these semaphoric allusions were dramaturgically framed was also an important element in the overarching message and appeal of a piece; in spite of being at full liberty to produce a 'serious' spoken drama, Sheridan, the literary man, chose to set his drama as a form of musical afterpiece, the kind so popular at the legislatively and financially inhibited minor playhouses. In part, the dramaturgical ease of spinning a few verses of text and interspersing with numerous songs and recitations, was a natural move, given the limited time available for production. The fact that famed singers such as Michael Kelly requested musical roles from Sheridan, and the aristocratic patrons of the piece submitted lyrics specifically for songs, does suggest that pressure was exerted on impresarios to shape works in a manner accommodating to noble patrons and influential performers⁶⁵. It was equally the case however that that this was simply the popular choice for a piece of celebratory theatre. If Sheridan had intended to invest the otherwise loyalist topic of Howe's victory with his own personal critique of the government's recruitment policies, then the musical components of the pieces must have helped to emphasise that it was nevertheless patriotic. In the case of productions commemorating the Glorious First of June and other military victories, boundaries of genre usually existing between the various patent and minor theatres became more porous than ever. For although productions at Drury Lane and Covent Garden used narratives to frame their spectacles, fundamentally they were only sideshows to a variety of sensual entertainments, rather than legitimate dramas in their own right. The substantive elements, such as songs, patriotic monologues and battle scenes, were all vital components of the 'Burlettas' found in the minor theatres (even if the monologues were sung or visually represented instead of spoken)⁶⁶.

This did reveal however the extent to which competing musical productions, notably burletta and its melodramatic spin-offs, could present a theatre of debate for issues surrounding British patriotism during a decade presenting more nuanced and oppositional definitions of the term. How music-dramas, even in the wartime climate, questioned the acceptance of blindly statist notions of patriotism, not only in their content (such as allusions to impressment) but also in the social duties their production adopted (in this case, philanthropic donations taken from box office receipts), allowed them to highlight the deficiencies of government policy in these areas, whilst rather than undermining, in fact strengthening the nation itself. Although Sheridan's piece could never be painted as a true

⁶⁵ Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly of the King's Theatre and Drury Lane* (Colburn, 1826)

⁶⁶ Taylor, G. *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 43

defiance of government policy, its tempered loyalism and political allusions are thrown into sharper relief by comparison with those productions found in the minor theatres; the playhouses with few official institutional considerations and greater liberty to select their political subtexts. The surprise therefore is that not just Sheridan's afterpiece, but in fact many of those performed at the patent playhouses were amongst the least patriotically fervent of historical productions. The 'illegitimate' theatres with their greater onus on commercial practicality, presented a more pragmatic relationship with the taste of much of London's less fashionable population. Their focus upon producing works thought to be 'populist' by their proprietors resulted in a more direct theatrical language; one that was invariably plain spoken, xenophobic and more often than not, proven financially profitable. For the events of 1794, this showed the patriotic sensibilities of Sheridan and Drury Lane to be rather timid by comparison.

Song as Semaphore: Xenophobic Discourse & Patriotic Tropes in Lyric Texts

The gritty language and the simple narrative framework employed by dramatists at Sadler's Wells appealed to the proprietor's John Bullish stereotyping of its audience. Thanks to the quality and continued popularity of the patriotic songs found in *Sons of Britannia* and *Naval Triumph*, many were printed both in programme material and later that year in a compilation of popular airs and ballads. It is from these that we can discern to some extent the works' content and narrative thrust. With the characters of the *Sons of Britannia* including a Recruiting Sergeant, Chelsea pensioner and Countryman, it becomes clear that the sense of 'true loyalty' described by one reviewer, unlike the relatively equivocal messages of Sheridan's piece, was present in a very overt and unmistakable sense: as a direct call to arms. In one case, this manifests as a chauvinistic and at times grizzly song sung by the sergeant who in one bombast-filled verse appeals to two of his compatriots' (and certainly those frequenting Sadler's Wells) favourite pastimes: drinking and violence,

'Let the Pamper'd Glutton, gorging, On Turtle dine, or drink french Wine,

Till he bursts with overcharging, And quits the field with shame:

We Soldiers keep our station, 'Spite of French intoxication;

Our foes we slash, into Calves head hash, And a surfeit, boys, is fame!'⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *Sons of Britannia* (Larpent Collection)

The Francophobic vein, associating the French with self-destructive indulgence, was combined with an alluded inability to hold drink, suggestive of French weakness or effeminacy. Unsurprisingly, this sort of brash xenophobia was peppered throughout the piece, particularly when it came to notions of a self-afflicted and slavish revolutionary France, even employing an ex-patriate-French character to denounce the Gallic enemy. Fleeing his native country for want of sustenance, in another gastronomic reference, he pleads;

‘I am now come to England to beg your relief, And instead of no victual, to manger roast beef.

Ah! bless on your faces, so plump and so clear, ‘Tis de right sort of Freedom, I see, flourish here.’⁶⁸

The prostration of the enemy before the national dish, though evidently meant for the amusement of the audience, was equally a sign of an ultimate rejection of French culture. Freedom was thus synonymous not with the sophisticated foreign tastes of Britain’s political elite, but the culinary emblem of Britain’s healthy, uncomplicated middling orders: roast beef. This reference to Henry Fielding and Richard Leveridge’s patriotic ballad ‘The Roast Beef of Old England’, so well-known amongst eighteenth century theatre audiences⁶⁹, must have represented a celebration of good-old fashioned British culture in the battle against the Francophile establishment. This was certainly a sentiment present in many of the dramas, including Benson’s *Britain’s Glory*, which poked fun at the establishment’s preferences for foreign culture in the Italian opera-loving killjoy character of Lady Hectic, her prudish protestations being drowned out by the patriotic merriment and singing of the masses.⁷⁰

Whilst employing light hearted metaphors, the sergeants’ song also contained a more important message in the form of a portentous warning against any Jacobin sympathies that may have be forming in London at the time,

‘Ye Briton, who wish like de French to be free, Take warning from Citizen Paine, and by me
—

Pauvre Tom say we’re free like be bird in de air – Yes – be Gar dey have cage him, and I am plucked bare.’⁷¹

⁶⁸ *Sons of Britannia* (Larpent Collection)

⁶⁹ Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson. "Leveridge, Richard." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16511>.

⁷⁰ Benson, *Britain’s Glory* (Larpent Collection)

⁷¹ *Sons of Britannia* (Larpent Collection)

The reference to Paine, whose defence of the French revolution in the *Rights of Man* (1791), had made him first a member of the French National Convention, but soon after a political prisoner by Robespierre and the Montagnards⁷², was a grave reminder of the fickleness of the revolutionaries. Though earlier promoted by Sadler's Wells' Bastille productions, the cause had by now turned sour in the eyes of London audiences. Fear of poverty and political recriminations by an oppressive regime were thus compared with the freedoms of British liberty. By inserting these stridently political messages into comic songs, burlettas managed to circumvent the censorial scrutiny which might have treated their subjects more stringently had they been presented in one of the patent theatres as a dramatic monologue. Even where these statements were explicitly loyalist, their potential to provoke political debate, or even fracture amongst audiences was enough to warrant restriction, as seen by the prohibition of Richard Cumberland's *Richard II* at Covent Garden in 1792.⁷³ Still, the pigeon-English of the French exile contained allusions which were made all the more powerful by their low-tone, plebeian articulation.

Sons of Britannia also employed another favourite device of the Burletta: pageantry. In order to make the dichotomy of moral and ideological traits between the British and their French counterparts clearer, a procession was included in which figures representing amongst others 'War', 'Discord', 'Commerce', 'Mirth', 'Peace' and 'Discord', aligned themselves with one of the warring peoples.⁷⁴ It is not difficult to guess on which side of the national comparison each of these personifications stood. Their visual elements were directly inherited from the popularity of satirical prints such as those by Thomas Rowlandson and James Gillray which played upon the physiognomic qualities of the French enemy to caricature their profligate and licentious moral qualities.⁷⁵ The remediation of this print tradition provided a common point of reference for London's metropolitan society, central to shaping attitudes towards the Gallic foe.

The use of musical processions was thus a vital element in the dramaturgical toolkit of minor theatres, and whilst they were in part determined by the prohibition of speech, by no means did this unwritten law get in the way of conveying their narrative to audiences. In the case of the 'Historical and scenic display of the most renowned British Admirals'⁷⁶ found in the second of Sadler's Well's celebratory performances, if the theatre wasn't permitted to use the spoken word, their performers would have to sing it instead. For this a ballad of no less than eight verses, recalled by the character of an 'Old Seaman', was used to accompany the

⁷² Conway, M.C. *The Life of Thomas Paine* (Cambridge 2012) Vol II.

⁷³ Sova, D. *Banned Plays: The Censorship Histories of 125 Stage Dramas* (Facts on File, 2004) p. 230.

⁷⁴ *Sons of Britannia* (Larpent Collection)

⁷⁵ Hunt, T. *Defining John Bull Political Caricature and National Identity in Late Georgian England* (Ashgate, 2003).

⁷⁶ Lonsdale, M. *Naval Triumph* (Larpent Collection)

parade of naval commanders from Drake and Raleigh to Rodney, Hood and Howe himself. Unlike the operatic airs more usual to music dramas, the songs which accompanied pageants, and increasingly common to many wartime entertainments, more closely resembled broadside ballads, with their multitude of verses and topical subject matter. Such historically concerned pageants were clearly affecting and powerful assertions of patriotic zeal, as increasingly the patent theatres themselves began to replicate them, notably Covent Garden's procession of English Kings staged in 1798 as fears of French invasion were reaching their most intense.⁷⁷ Knight's 'musical farce' *The Sailor and Soldier* (1805) showed just how widespread and enduring this tradition had become within wartime productions. Knight's piece, played at Hull, included a broadside style ballad appealing to the patriotic resilience of the area's population. It described the hostile reception the French could expect to receive dare they invade the north east and made reference to a number of local landmarks.⁷⁸ The ballad's particular emphasis on the ale house, naming upwards of thirty different taverns and public houses, again emphasised the link between the wider nation and its favourite recreation, drinking.

If these broadside-processions utilized the existing framework of a very English sort of musical genre then the use of national songs themselves in military spectaculars and theatrical celebrations was a more direct use of the patriotic vocabulary. On the occasion of the Glorious First of June even the King's Theatre in the Haymarket interrupted its Italian programming for the inclusion of a patriotic air sung in the English vernacular by its Prima Donna, Brigitta Banti. As W.T.Parke describes,

'Madame Banti, who had become extremely popular, sang our national song 'Rule Britannia,' in which she was vociferously encored, although her bad English amounted almost to Burlesque! This clearly shows that fashion, like love, is blind.'⁷⁹

Apart from the obvious sense of absurdity involved in an Italian singing a British national song, Parke's comments are interesting in two other major respects. Firstly, his comparison of Banti's performance to the form of theatre so popular in the minor playhouses, burlesque, reveals how, in spite of their expensive foreign tastes, even the most exclusive of London audiences resorted, in a moment of national revelry, to what was widely considered to be the most base genre of theatrical display to express patriotic sentiment. Whilst acknowledging 'Rule Britannia' as a national song, the implication is that it was also, like its singer, fashionable. That it was not sung as a solemn hymn, as in its earliest performances, but in the form of a bravura aria, displayed not only the extent to which national sentiment had permeated musical culture as a commodity in itself, but that they were most popular when

⁷⁷ Russell, *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 1995)

⁷⁸ Knight, *The Sailor and Soldier* (Larpent Collection)

⁷⁹ Parke, *Musical Memoirs Vol. 1.* p.190.

enacted theatrically. This currency of national song was traded in by all theatres in one way or another and, as the calls from the gallery attest, many audiences came to expect their performance as a result.

It was quite natural therefore that Sheridan chose this most favourite of patriotic airs as the dénouement for his *Glorious First of June*. Whilst recent scholarship by Oliver Cox has suggested that the ode from Thomas Arne's *Masque Alfred* (1740) was in fact commissioned as an oppositional piece by Frederick Prince of Wales against his own father George II⁸⁰, the Jacobite rising several years later ensured that it was quickly appropriated for a strictly loyalist purpose thereafter.⁸¹ From its inception, the ode was infused with Bolingbrokean notions of naval Patriotism⁸², emphasising the importance of monarchy and military success to national pride.⁸³ Its popularity largely owed to theatrical performance outside of *Alfred*. The decision to end *The Glorious First of June* with 'Rule Britannia' and not, as was more typical, the national anthem, was indicative of its metonymic relationship with the Royal Navy.

The choice of patriotic songs, particularly those based upon already popular national melodies, was always a conscious decision and could equally become points of contention between impresarios and their audiences. The reviewer for the *Sun* was indignant that one particular air by Mrs. Robinson was not included in Sheridan's piece, devoting an entire column in the *Sun* to the matter,

'She adapted the words to the old National Tune of *Hearts of Oak* – an Air that we doubt not will ever possess an animating influence over every British heart.

Her song thus produced in the moment of honest exultation and national triumph, she sent to Drury-Lane Theatre. It was received by the Manager, and was to be incorporated in the new Piece that was there to be brought forward upon the occasion. *Why* it was *not* sung, we will not take upon us to say: but to prove that it was well worthy of being so, we now submit it to the candid perusal of the public.'⁸⁴

The song itself was filled with the usual rhetoric of divinely granted 'Freedom' and 'Glory' as expected. But most interesting was the critic's understanding of the canonical importance of *Hearts of Oak* as a national melody. This allusion to an existing 'national' songbook, relied upon the perceived power of purely musical elements (regardless of lyrical alteration)

⁸⁰ 'Letters shed new light on Rule Britannia'

http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_stories/2012/121005.html

⁸¹ "Rule, Britannia!" *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed September 1, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5814>.

⁸² Armitage, D. *Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000) p. 185.

⁸³ Armitage, D. 'A Patriot for Whom? The Afterlives of Bolingbroke's Patriot King' *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol 36. No.4. (Oct. 1997) p. 398.

⁸⁴ *Sun*, July 4, 1794.

to rouse British audiences through natural inclination. The minors were equally receptive to the importance of this patriotic catalogue in declaring their own loyalist standpoint: when war with France was declared on 1st February 1793, the Wells' Easter opening began with the singing of a medley including 'God Save the King', 'Rule Britannia', 'Britons strike Home', and 'The Wooden Walls'.⁸⁵ Whilst discussions of art music remained focussed on the dearth of a home grown 'national music', at a more elemental level, ideas were certainly circulating which envisaged an organic link between Britons and their national melodies. Many critics described the proliferation of performing the national anthem within plebeian spheres with condescension:

Ballad singers bawl it forth at the corner of every street, and babies scream it in our nurseries. At "the West end" it is warbled by MADAME CATALANI in the Opera House, while "at the East" it is chorused by Sir WILLIAM CURTIS in the London Tavern. Add to all this, gentle reader, that it is ground upon the agonizing ear by hand organs and hurdy-gurdies, scraped upon fiddles, blown into German flutes and Pan's pipes⁸⁶

If the exhibition of this 'songbook' did not meet the aesthetic standards of many in the musical establishment, its frequency of performance in theatrical, particularly celebratory entertainments was unmatched (perhaps with the exception of the old enemy France) across Europe.

The role of 'sea songs' within these productions was an equally interesting notion, given that, few actually came from the sea itself. The 'Ballads' and 'Shanties' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were more often than not the results of commercial interest in the sea arising from naval conflict, most produced exclusively by theatrical composers.⁸⁷ In the case of the *Glorious First of June*, the songs were the only element which had any sort of potential to create commercial longevity for the work. As salient points within the narrative the musical numbers, often prepped for audience participation and largely taken from the melodies of Linley and Reeve (orchestrated by the then-predicted 'saviour' of English opera Stephen Storace), provided a cultural afterlife for the piece through publication in the press, vocal reductions and as pamphlets available for purchase in the theatre. Described by one critic as 'the most affecting we have ever beheld', the grafting of this heterogonous bag of ballads and airs onto the naval spectacle furnished the work with a more meaningful and coherent effect than seemingly possible. It is interesting however that from a score which (unlike other melodramas based upon the event) not only included a selection of sea songs, but also romantic arias and ensemble pieces, only the more patriotic naval numbers went on to see publication in vocal scores.⁸⁸ Such topical pieces were not usually intended for repeated performance runs, but luckily for *The Glorious First of June* it

⁸⁵ Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.) p. 41.

⁸⁶ Quarterly musical magazine and review; Jan 1822; 4, pp.90-1

⁸⁷ Hughill *Shanties & Sailors Songs* (Jenkins, 1969) p. 23.

⁸⁸ See J. Dale Catalogue of Vocal Scores.

was reincarnated in March of 1797 as *Cape Saint Vincent, or, British Valour Triumphant* to celebrate Admiral Jervis' defeat of the Spanish fleet (in which the disobedience of one Commodore Nelson was instrumental)⁸⁹. The differences between the two printed versions of the piece provide an insight into how musical-dramatists adapted the work for an evolving wartime audience. The action and dialogue were suitably altered for the new circumstances, however many of the female vocal numbers were omitted altogether. This didn't seem to matter to the audience however, who greeted the alterations with approbation,

'The loyal sentiments and sea songs were well received, as was also a representation of the action between the British and Spanish Fleets. The house was very crowded.'⁹⁰

This editorial process, both in terms of publication and for the stage itself was a very simple yet reliable indication of what the public demanded from their national pageants, and how publishers rated the worth of its music. For both, it would seem that the music of patriotic naval affairs was best kept patriotic and naval.

As in *The Glorious First of June* those musical numbers described as 'sea songs' had their own part to play in the extended cultural life of the pieces performed at Sadler's Wells. Just how successful some of these airs were in establishing themselves within the patriotic repertory is evident from the fact that over half a century later 'The Old Commodore' by Lonsdale and Reeve, was still being printed in collections of 'National Songs'.⁹¹ In three verses, the ballad is typical of the eighteenth century shanty as produced by land-bound art song writers,⁹² its jocund tone much less fustian than many of the airs found in Sheridan's work. The more popular nature of these songs can be seen from the fact that within contemporary song collections such as 'The Whims of the Day', those included are almost exclusively taken from 'illegitimate' theatrical performances. Unlike the *Glorious First of June*, the songs of which are found in various scores and piano reductions printed for the musically literate middle and upper classes, Sadler's Wells songs were only released in lyric form. This suggests that either the music from the numbers was well-known enough by the general public to be sung without need for musical prompting, or that they used already popular melodies to which new lyrics could be sung. One such example in Sadler's Wells' *Sons of Britannia*, 'Come Brother sailor, Lend an Ear', is marked as to be sung to the well known tune of 'The Hardy Tar' in a printed version of the lyrics.⁹³ This emphasis on producing popular nautical songs and ballads was to have an unparalleled impact on the way in which naval personnel were viewed by the general public.

⁸⁹ *True Briton*, March 6, 1797.

⁹⁰ *True Briton*, March 7, 1797.

⁹¹ Dibdin, T. *Songs, Naval and National of the Late Charles Dibdin* (John Murray, 1841)

⁹² *Hughill Shanties & Sailors Songs* (Jenkins, 1969) p. 7.

⁹³ *The Whim of the day (for 1793) of the choicest and most approved songs* (J. Roach, 1793) pp. 67-8.

Whilst the lyrics for the musical numbers found in *Sons of Britannia* and *Naval Triumph* still exist due to publication, their scores do not. Unfortunately, apart from where markings indicate the use of an existing popular song, we have no exact way of knowing how they might have sounded melodically. The style of these compositions can be determined to some extent however from the knowledge that William Reeve was the theatre's de-facto house composer at the time; like most men in his position, Reeve made good use of the style, if not the actual melodies of existing sea songs. The fact that Reeve also supplied music for the *Glorious First of June*, suggests that the musical idiom of the sea song and their composers, if not their texts, crossed institutional boundaries quite readily. There is good reason to believe that many of the songs produced for nautical productions recycled the melodies of a few recognised writers such as Reeve, William Shield and at their head, Charles Dibdin 'the great Naval Balladeer of the eighteenth century'.⁹⁴ Interestingly the season of 1794 saw Thomas Dibdin, son of the latter, employed by the Sadler's Wells theatre as a writer and performer of burlettas and songs.⁹⁵ Whether Reeve and his new colleague were inclined to 'borrow' from the Dibdin inheritance is unknown. In any case, Dibdin's style would have had had a profound impact upon the compositional technique of the British sea-song, to the extent that later in his career he was to become the first nationally-employed writer of them.

The Navy's Composer: Charles Dibdin and the British Tar

Composer to several of London's most prominent theatres, Sadler's Wells, Covent Garden and the Haymarket amongst them, Charles Dibdin is a peculiar case within the history of music in Britain.⁹⁶ Entrusted with an undertaking of national importance, from 1803 onwards he was awarded an annual pension of two hundred pounds by the British government.⁹⁷ His task was to produce, publish and perform concerts of 'War Songs' at his Sans Souci theatre in Leicester square. In Britain, the practice of the Government itself employing a composer was wholly unprecedented. The monarchy's hiring of musicians as court and chapel composers had existed since the very early days of medieval monarchy, but this was a matter of personal service to the ruler's household, not to the nation itself. Even in the eighteenth century, with George III's patronage of the Handel Commemoration Festivals and his Great- Grandfather's involvement in the 'Royal Academy of Music' (essentially a

⁹⁴ Hughill *Shanties & Sailors Songs* (Jenkins, 1969) p.17

⁹⁵ Arundell, D. *The Story of Sadler's Wells, 1683-1977* (David & Charles Ltd.) Ch. 5.

⁹⁶ Roger Fiske and Irena Cholij. "Dibdin, Charles." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 15, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/07733>.

⁹⁷ Dibdin, T. *Songs, Naval and National of the Late Charles Dibdin* (John Murray, 1841)p.xii

private opera company and not the educational institution we know today), these were private acts of investment on the part of the King.⁹⁸

Continental Opera houses and Theatres on the other hand had always received State-support, particularly those in the cosmopolitan capitals of more precariously placed Empires such as the Habsburg and Bonapartist courts⁹⁹. Unlike the system of Royal Patents granted to private parties and operating as independent businesses, up until the mid-nineteenth century many continental 'court' opera houses were controlled by an officialised system of state sponsorship. This was fundamentally the result of a monarchical absolutism which hadn't existed in Britain since the events of 1688.¹⁰⁰ The political regimes that inherited this close alliance of art and state, notably Bonapartist France, could in turn rely upon an affirmative promotion of their ideology, made available most potently through the musical stage. During the height of the Peninsula war, Napoleon himself commissioned the then celebrity composer Gaspare Spontini to produce a work based upon the Spanish conquest of Mexico. The title character, Fernand Cortez was a patently allegorical representation of the French Emperor, whilst Aztec Priests acted as metaphors for the superstitious Catholic Church and its oppressive Spanish inquisition.¹⁰¹ Holger Hoock's research into the British state's role in national culture identifies how, following the defeat of Napoleon, the Prince Regent, later George IV, came to emulate his old adversary in his patronage of the arts, and stimulation of state sponsored national commemoration.¹⁰² Parliamentary-inquiries into the previously limited encouragement given to certain arts (when compared to many continental countries), helped to reshape the state's attitude towards the formative impact of the arts (particularly visual and architectural) upon national definition, resulting in their widespread codification within national institutions.¹⁰³ In spite of this shift however, the performing arts, notably music and drama, remained much neglected by such state-lead schemes.

Until Dibdin's case, the British government had few pretensions of putting the entertainment industry into its own employment, making very little contribution to the maintenance of the theatrical world at all. As discussed, The Examiner of Plays was quite willing to censor anything deemed inappropriate for performance, judiciously scribbling through entire passages of text but the commissioning of a work was rarely if ever the initiative of a

⁹⁸ Anderson, N. 'Music' in Boris Ford ed. *The Cambridge guide to the Arts in Britain Vol. 5* (Cambridge, 1991) pp.275-303.

⁹⁹ Hall-Witt, J. *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (University Press of New England, 2007)

¹⁰⁰ Blanning, T.C.W. *Unity and Diversity in European Culture c. 1800* (Oxford, 2006)

¹⁰¹ Anselm Gerhard. "Fernand Cortez, ou La conquête du Mexique." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed August 29, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O007192>.

¹⁰² Hoock, H. *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850*, (London, 2010) pp. 353-4.

¹⁰³ Hoock, H. *Empires of the Imagination: Politics, War, and the Arts in the British World, 1750-1850*, (London, 2010) pp. 354-5.

government minister, and never in his official capacity. The growing censorial prudence brought upon the theatre industry by the turbulent political movements of the 1790s had made impresarios and dramatists more receptive to both the necessity of and the opportunities made available by producing works dealing with patriotic themes. This obviously sparked a new direction in the Pittite government's cultural policy. Given, that in 1805, contemporary parliamentary records show the British armed forces as the largest of any European power, in proportion to population¹⁰⁴, its reputation amongst the British people was vital to military-civilian relations. The idea of the ministry in 1803, though relatively modest, to place a composer in the service of the nation was not simply an indication of the desperate times, but great testament to just how powerful a propaganda weapon this theatrical music, primarily in the form of the English National Song, was seen to be in the war against the French. It was also necessary for a rehabilitation of the Tar's public image following the naval mutinies of 1797-8, which had fundamentally questioned the loyalty of British sailors and reinforced their negative stereotypes amongst many land dwellers.¹⁰⁵

A number of composers used public perceptions of the sailor's life both to build their own reputation and consequently that of the navy itself and whilst the selflessness of this enterprise was perhaps not always clear (in one collection of Dibdin's songs, his biographer is keen to stress the fact that he was 'instructed'¹⁰⁶, by which we might read *forced*, to compose the ballads by the ministry), the fact that in spite of his annuity from the government, Dibdin undertook the task at great personal financial loss, would suggest that duty had no small part to play. If his songs essayed the contribution of naval servicemen to the war effort, their impact upon the minds of ordinary Britons, persuading them to open up their pockets must also have had some importance. As one number, 'Freedom's Constitution'¹⁰⁷ suggests;

Example 1.1

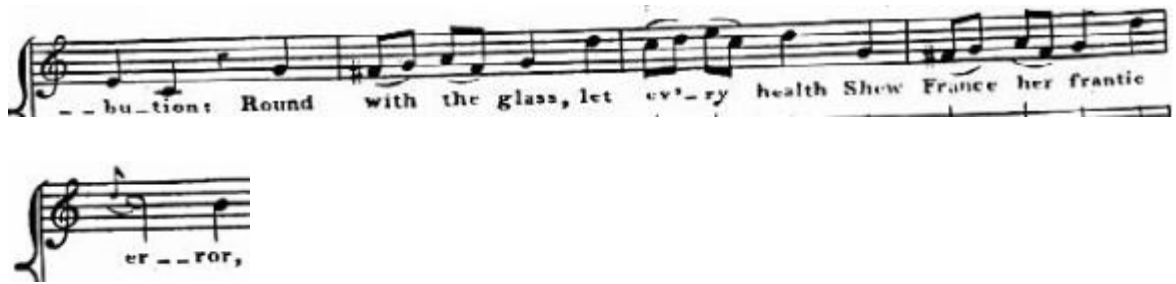


¹⁰⁴ Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates March 8, 1805 (London, 1812) p.808.

¹⁰⁵ Land, I. *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp. 97-100.

¹⁰⁶ Dibdin, T. *Songs, Naval and National of the Late Charles Dibdin* (John Murray, 1841)p.xii

¹⁰⁷ Kitchiner, W. *The Sea Songs of Charles Dibdin* (G AND W.B. WHITTAKER, 1823) 1.



Whilst some of the songs were quite obviously financial appeals, their central purpose was primarily to lift the nation's spirits. Estimated to have written over 1400 hundred of these popular numbers throughout his lifetime¹⁰⁸, Dibdin's work was in essence a Napoleonic forerunner of later propagandistic military organisations designed to boost the morale of troops and British public alike. His songs were simple and melodic, and as a later writer for the *Musical Times* condescended, 'show his want of science'.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless, their 'manly' nature was well tailored to the military cause they represented. In the words of one biographer, they were designed as 'irresistible appeals to the heart – inspiring the most illiterate with brave and generous sentiments, and exciting to acts of loyalty, bravery and patriotism, which (in the most arduous of her struggles) assisted to maintain the honour and glory of the British Empire.'¹¹⁰ It is a little ironic that in spite of this noble epitaph, the reality was that many of these nautical ballads were probably never sung by the average sailor, and were, instead, confined to the officer's mess or land-dwellers, the lower decks opting for contemporary shore- songs.¹¹¹

At heart Dibdin was a composer of the theatre. To this end, many of his most famous sea-songs were best known on the London stage long before they were ever heard on the decks of the Royal Navy. The same can be said of those penned by his contemporaries such as William Shield whose *The Heaving of the Lead* and *Saucy Arethusa* (the melody thought to be taken from an earlier song of the 1730s) were both made popular by comic operas first performed in London.¹¹² The process of theatrical songs taking on a recognisable national importance began foremost with their popularity amongst the civilian population; only this could guarantee assimilation into patriotic culture. The very Englishness of the ballad itself with its uncomplicated strophic form and rich melody made it the staple vocal genre of the London stage and in turn the favoured recreational music of drawing rooms across the nation.¹¹³ For the British theatre goer, however, they were also pivotal to the vision of the

¹⁰⁸ Dibdin, T. *Songs, Naval and National of the Late Charles Dibdin* (John Murray, 1841)

¹⁰⁹ Barrett, in *Musical Times*, Feb 1, 1886

¹¹⁰ Dibdin, T. *Songs, Naval and National of the Late Charles Dibdin* (John Murray, 1841) p xiv

¹¹¹ Hughill *Shanties & Sailors Songs* (Jenkins, 1969) p. 23.

¹¹² Fiske, R. *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1986) p.556.

¹¹³ Fuhrmann, C. 'Der Freischutz in London, 1824' in *Nineteenth-century Music Review* (Ashgate, 2004) p. 122.

sailor and Navy which their country prided itself on¹¹⁴. When Lord Grenville resolved to end Dibdin's pension in 1808, the decision came as a shock to many, not least to the composer himself. One concerned member of the public even wrote to the *Morning Chronicle*, stating;

the Auditorship of the Exchequer would have been better disposed of, and more in unison with the wishes of the country, if it had been given to Mr. Dibdin, whose lyric Muse had so much contributed to arouse the valour of our Seamen and Soldiers in the day of Battle, - to warm their hearts in the hours of merriment, - and to console their nights in the gloom of a dungeon, when prisoners of an implacable enemy.'¹¹⁵

Even though in practice most sailors and soldiers had little contact with Dibdin's work whilst on active duty, the idea that they somehow did was important to the consciousness of the civilian British public during times of war; that public and military were thought to indulge in the same entertainments presented a vital, if imagined connection between the two. So much so that The Duke of Portland's coming to office brought solace to Dibdin's troubled devotees by restoring the annuity.

This resumption of Dibdin's contract revealed just how central the presentation of rousing ballads and tales of the high seas to the London theatre-going public was to the government's campaign to maintain support for the war. Dibdin's sons were also committed to continuing this tradition through their own theatrical ventures. Famed for the genre of naval spectacular, his eldest Charles Jr. went on to become manager of Sadler's Wells in 1800 and by 1804 had staged his first 'Aqua-drama' there, *The Siege of Gibraltar*.¹¹⁶ The image cultivated by the Dibdin family pictured the hardy Tar as ever jovial and ready for action. Intimately connected with this vision, was his character as a balladeer and performer of the national song. When Dibdin's younger son Thomas wrote *The English Fleet in 1342* for Covent Garden (incidentally the highest grossing London production of all time up to this point), his songs encapsulated this fusion:

'British Sailors have a knack, Haul away! Yeo Ho! Boys!

Of pulling down a Frenchman's Jack, 'gainst any odds you know, boys.

British sailors Love their King, Haul away! Yeo Ho! Boys!

¹¹⁴ Russell, G. *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 1995)

¹¹⁵ Dibdin, T. *Songs, Naval and National of the Late Charles Dibdin* (John Murray, 1841)pp. 26-7.

¹¹⁶ 'Water Drama' Derek Forbes in Bradby, *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama* (Cambridge, 1980)

And round the [bowl] they love to sing, and drink his health you know boys!¹¹⁷

This mixture of Loyalty, drink and chauvinistic pride, like earlier productions at Sadler's Wells and the minor houses, became increasingly prominent in the rhetoric of the majors too, previously more straight-laced in their showings of loyalty. In many ways this was the natural result of a war that had continued for over a decade. How this was expressed in song however was centrally the product of Dibdin and his successors. Phrases such as 'yo ho' and references to the 'muses' or classical themes were almost never found in what might be termed 'genuine' sea-songs and naval ballads.¹¹⁸ The colloquial and yet poetic tone of many songs by land-bound composers was an artistic device used to reinforce the political purpose of Dibdin's patriotic mission. Far from representing the wearing and often enforced life of a sailor, the songs helped to obscure its drudgery within rollicking lyrics and hearty tunes. In these ballads, the Sailor relishes hardship and tempts death. Take Dibdin's 'Tis Said We Venturous Die-Hards'¹¹⁹.

Example 1.2



'Tis said we venturous die-hards

when we leave the shore Our friends should mourn lest we re-turn To

bless their sight no more, But this is all a no-tion Bold

Jack can't un-der-stand Some die up-on the o-ccean, And

some die on the land. Then since 'tis clear How e'er we steer No

¹¹⁷ T. Dibdin, *The English Fleet in 1342* (Larpent Collection).

¹¹⁸ Hughill *Shanties & Sailors Songs* (Jenkins, 1969)

¹¹⁹ Hogarth, G. *The Songs of Charles Dibdin, Chronologically Arranged* (G.H. Davidson, 1848)



The song makes clever reference to sailors' bold reputation amongst land-dwellers, whilst then confirming it by the singer's (by implication, a sailor) incomprehension of the concern shown by others for their life. The result of this disregard for danger was an almost superhuman elevation of status; in this context, it is easy to understand why upon seeing and hearing the performance of such a ballad, young disenfranchised men from the lower orders of society (the sort frequenting the galleries of Sadler's Well's) could be persuaded that they too could become such specimens of admiration. This impressionability was noted by a later critic observing a Wells audience: 'There sit our working classes . . . It is hard to say how much men who have had few advantages of education must in their minds and characters be strengthened and refined when they are made accustomed to this kind of entertainment.'¹²⁰ The compelling effect of Dibdin's work was even described by one author as bringing 'more men into the navy in war time than all the press-gangs could.'¹²¹ Whilst this may have been an ambitious boast, in propping up the rhetoric of Dibdin's songs, the government at least helped to suppress those earlier ballads reminding the public of the terrors of impressment continuing to take place in Britain.

This recruitment drive must have been enhanced somewhat by Dibdin's fondness for beer-swilling choruses. Drinking, like the eating of roast beef, was a matter of national importance. Beer was especially linked with the image of John Bull, his populist patriotism and by proxy the superiority of the English people over their French adversaries. When the Sergeant in Sadler's Wells' *Sons of Britannia* spoke of gluttons 'gorging' on 'French Wine'¹²², his language drew from this terminological palate contrasting the weak refinements of France with hardy English simplicity. Songs such as 'The Beer Drinking Britons' and 'For I Can Drink and Fight a Little', worked within the same metaphoric framework, their lauding of the tolerance of the English to drink becoming popular rebuttals of Napoleon and his armies during the days of threatened invasion¹²³. Dibdin's Ballads more specifically fused an enjoyment of the national beverage with those of Britain's triumphant Navy, and drink and song were natural partners in the business of celebration. In one of

¹²⁰ Morley, *Journal of a London Playgoer*, p. 138.

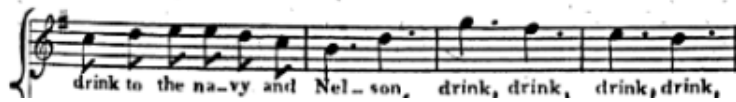
¹²¹ C. H. Firth, *Naval Songs and Ballads*, (Navy Records Society, 1907) p. cvi.

¹²² *Sons of Britannia* (Larpent Collection)

¹²³ Gammon, V. *Desire, Drink and Death in English Folk and Vernacular Song, 1600-1900* (Ashgate, 2008) p. 146.

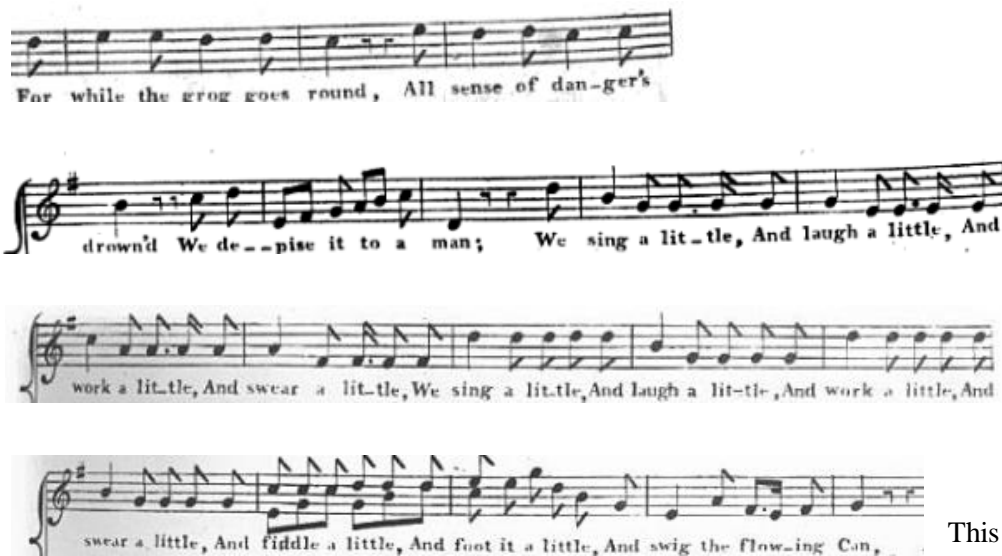
Dibdin's ballads hailing Nelson's victory on the Nile¹²⁴, at the end of each verse the chorus implores the company to join in their toast;

Example 1.3



Dibdin's drinking songs such as 'Nothing like Grog' and 'The Flowing Can' were central to glamorising the hedonistic potential of naval life, juxtaposing the warrior-like exploits of the fearless tar with the image of the Royal Navy Ship as a place of partying and indulgence. 'Grog' was at the heart of the sailor's sensibilities and in 'The Flowing Can'¹²⁵, beer was to be thanked for both his boldness in battle and frivolity on deck;

Example 1.4



This merry veneer coating many of Dibdin's songs had been a popular image of the sailor since Garrick's famous performances of the tar almost fifty years previous. By making the life of the sailor theatrical this image could, as Gillian Russell discusses, also release the theatrical amongst tars in the audiences of these performances.¹²⁶ John O'Keefe recalled one famous incident at Portsmouth, in which sailors took to the stage during a performance,

¹²⁴ Kitchiner, W. *The Sea Songs of Charles Dibdin* (G AND W.B. WHITTAKER, 1823) 29.

¹²⁵ Kitchiner, W. *The Sea Songs of Charles Dibdin* (G AND W.B. WHITTAKER, 1823) 4.

¹²⁶ Russell, *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 1995)

enthusiastically partaking in the combat scene to widespread applause from the audience.¹²⁷

Whilst such staged exploits could serve both to bolster the caricature of the tar, other incidents, notably those of violence could and at times damage it. Conviviality was at times a sure safeguard against the mutinous activities of 1797, such as those at Spithead and Nore. It was this less congenial side that was undoubtedly remedied by the more subtle and varied character of the sailor found in many of Dibdin's sentimental ballads. As Isaac Land has noted, Dibdin's songs on the one hand provided a sturdy bulwark for the British public, against the political import of the sailor's actions. On the other, they provided a linguistic framework for the sailor's demands to operate in, with which the public had sympathy.¹²⁸ Where 'Tis said we are venturous die-hards' in a way dehumanised the tar as a method of idolising him, other songs such as 'The Sailor's Journal'¹²⁹ transformed him into the romantic lead;

Example 1.5

And now while
At sev'n up

en - e - my ap - pear'd And daunt-less we pre-pard for bat - tle And now while
M. dis-covered day And England's chalk-y cliffs to - geth - er At sev'n up

some lov'd friend or wife Like light-ning rush'd on ev-'ry fan-cy To prov - i -
Chan - nel, how we bore While hopes and fears rush'd on my fan-cy At twelve I

- dence I trust - ed life Put up a pray'r and thought on Nan - cy.
gai - ly jump'd a - shore And to my throb - ing heart press'd Nan - cy. This

rounding of the sailor's character, showed him as both daring and romantic, enforced the idealisation of his persona. It was this dichotomy that was so vividly present in the naval dramas surrounding the Glorious First of June and other portrayals of the Navy on stage. Unlike the soldier, an ever present menace lurking in some nearby barracks, the sailor was a distant figure whose brief excursions to ports and cities for pleasure provided a silhouette

¹²⁷ Russell, *Theatres of War* (Oxford, 1995)

¹²⁸ Land, I. *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp. 97-100.

¹²⁹ Hogarth, G. *The Songs of Charles Dibdin, Chronologically Arranged* (G.H. Davidson, 1848)

ready to be filled out by the positive stereotypes of the dramatist and his composer. The respective songs of the Soldier and Sailor in Sadler's Wells *Sons of Britannia* displayed this most palpably. Where the soldier is a grim, single-minded plunderer who 'lives by fighting', adores the God of 'iron ore' and has love for 'no mistress ... but fair renown', his sailor counterpart is more jocund in his duties;

'It was neither the Girls, nor drink, nor debts,

Drove me to Sea – now was it Bet? –

I said so then – and I says so yet,

It was all to save my King'¹³⁰

In reality, it was quite likely that philandering and financial mismanagement had forced many sailors into military service rather than any burning sense of loyalty. This was well-hidden however by Dibdin's extensive musical portraits of them. In contrast, soldiers were rarely viewed as anything but dangerous. When Thomas Dibdin wrote his own smash-hit naval drama of 1805, *The English Fleet*, he chose to end the finale with the line 'Our Army is British as well as our Fleet'¹³¹, the implication being that patriotically inclined librettists were by this point making efforts to mitigate the caricatural divide between the men of the two military establishments. The fact that the tar waged his wars far from the everyday lives of most Britons however, allowed naval combat to become the romantic arena of heroism that the terrible business of armies and land battles could never be. The loss of a sailor in a distant ocean was scenically more picturesque than dead bodies strewn across Europe's scorched battlefields. The sense of a physical loss of the body itself was a surrender to the sailor's other enemy, the sea. Dibdin essayed this theme in a personal eulogy to his own brother lost at sea: the perennial favourite *Tom Bowling*¹³².

Example 1.6



¹³⁰ Songs, &c. in the Sons of Britannia; Or, George for England: A Loyal Divertisement. Of Song, Dance, Nnd [sic] Spectacle, Performed at Sadler's Wells

¹³¹ T. Dibdin, *The English Fleet in 1342* (Larpent Collection).

¹³² Kitchiner, W. *The Sea Songs of Charles Dibdin* (G AND W.B. WHITTAKER, 1823) 21.



Whilst Tom Bowling was not the carefree invincible other ballads may have suggested sailors to be, he was virtuous, dutiful and most importantly, willing to die in the service of his country.

The success of Naval musical-spectaculars, first stemming from productions surrounding the glorious first of June and later pioneered so successfully by the Dibdins at Sadler's Wells, made them one of the dominant forms of illegitimate performance in London for much of the twenty years of conflict with France. They were in essence acts of the highest patriotic symbiosis. For the theatres, they provided spectacular backdrops to dramaturgically simple, lucrative musical pageants, and for the government they were patriotic advertisements for a long, costly war which might otherwise have found theatrical recrimination (not least by illegitimate playhouses). Whilst some productions such as Sheridan's *Glorious First of June* may have presented scenarios open to less than-loyalist readings, the overwhelming trend, particularly amongst those theatres with little accountability to the state, the minors, was one of a popular patriotism, not always sympathetic to the character of Britain's political elite, but nevertheless robustly pugnacious in the defence of its war with France. The extent to which these productions helped to foster the popularity of naval –ballads and patriotic songs with lives beyond the theatre auditorium was shown by the recognition of Pitt's government in its provision of financial aid to those producing them. How helpful they were in raising the spirits of the average sailor in battle remains debatable, however the significance of Dibdin's catalogue of ballads was more its collective ability to take the malleable figure of the sailor and shape its form to the expectations of the nation.

The unrivalled influence upon the image of that potentially unsavoury character ‘the tar’ amongst the British public, was at least judged compelling enough to licence the musical propaganda campaign undertaken so prolifically by Charles Dibdin and his imitators. This was in many ways a recognition by the political establishment that the fruits of the theatre (the musical tradition emanating from the burlettas of the minors and their melodramatic counterparts at the patentees), possessed a strong enough grip upon the thinking of the metropolis’ public, both high and low to be actively encouraged by the ministry, rather than as tradition would have it, merely censored. Without the balladeer-sailor of the musical stage, it would not be tendentious to suggest that the navy’s reputation could have been quite different; drawn instead more forcibly towards the vices of Sheridan’s press ganging allusions than the free-spirited virtue of Dibdin’s Jolly Jack Tar. What had therefore been indisputably established was the ability of a musical-genre to help forge an identity. The idiom of the sea song was a transferable template thereon for those theatrical composers looking to create their own character types, recognisable as much from their musical characterisation as their physical appearance. The effects of this technique in an age ever more preoccupied with national differences and self-conscious attempts to consolidate national cultures became far more than simply a wartime propaganda tool.

The role of the musical stage as a mediator between the British public and their military, at all levels of the London theatregoing scene and with surprising conformity, helped to consolidate public attitudes towards the nation’s armed forces. Though in Dibdin’s case, the government had seen an opportunity to promote what was to them a valuable cultural tool, for most theatrical institutions, staging military, musical-spectaculars was a commercially sound decision regardless of state patronage. This unusual (and occasionally uneasy) partnership ultimately facilitated a symbiosis between the formerly antagonistic spheres of theatre and politics, setting aside their long held differences to serve the financial needs of proprietors and the ideological demands of the British government.

2

Scotland in Song: A National Music?

This chapter will explore how a musical style came to define the image of a nation, in this case Scotland. Perhaps more than any other European culture, the musical inheritance of the late eighteenth century has imprinted itself upon how Scottish identity is imagined from both inside and without, its bagpipes, dances and folk songs being evocative of Caledonian culture to this day. By the mid eighteenth century, elements of Scottish folk song had pervaded all manner of musical entertainments in England's leading metropolitan centres. Whether as Hook's ballads designed to please the ears of Vauxhall Garden's masses, or the more sophisticated arrangements found in the movements of J.C. Bach's piano concerti, Scottish music saw an unprecedented popularity spanning audiences high and low. This was a language which through its simple and highly recognisable compositional techniques could readily be replicated by admirers and more easily still, repudiated by its critics. The messages conveyed by this phenomenon were from the outset both mixed and complex.

I will first attempt to disassemble the various ways in which this musical idiom came to dominate the London stage; the place of Scottish musical culture as a focal point for growing interest in antiquarianism, contrasted with the relative dearth in an historical English music tradition (if not in its lyric poetry¹³³), will be shown to have laid the foundations for retrospective imaginings of Scotland so popular in the nineteenth century. I will then go on to examine how exactly music dramas developed from vehicles for Scottish music, to more integrated interpretations of the Scottish past, inspired by Sir Walter Scott's popular historical romances. By focussing on both the textual and musical elements of these works, I will explain how this combination helped in one sense to portray Scotland as a fundamentally rustic entity, whilst through its depiction of characters sensitive to London metropolitan audiences and their concerns, diminished Scotland's previously threatening image and helped to instil a new confidence in the Union of Scotland and England.

In many ways, Scotland of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries presented Europe's first age of national music. This is not to say that musics had not previously been associated with certain peoples and cultures. However in Scotland's case, the process by which Scottish song and dance was produced and replicated during this period, in particular, bridged the gap which had previously existed between art and folk music. The result was the

¹³³ Connell, P. 'British Identities and the Politics of Ancient poetry in Later Eighteenth-Century England' in *The Historical Journal* Vol. 49: 01 (Cambridge, 2001).

production of a musical form which closely and consciously allied itself with the image of a nation rather than merely being typical of a particular peoples or region. The image of Scotland's nationhood which resulted from this process was consequently set deep within its own imagined past. The rage for folk musics from the Celtic fringe, particularly of the Caledonian sort had been going strong for almost a century before the stage was given the opportunity to properly match them with dramatic materials. The relationship between artistic antiquarianism and the evocation of Scottish independence during the eighteenth century were by their historical implication, intertwined. Allan Ramsay's publication of *The Tea-Table Miscellany* in 1724 was the first in a long string of collections dedicated to re-introducing the tradition of epic Poetry found in late medieval Scotland to eighteenth-century reading audiences.¹³⁴ Ramsay's re-crafting of the texts was in many cases extensive, altering everything from verse form and lexical choices to entire passages; overtly patriotic poems clearly from the pen of Ramsay himself, were wrapped in the safety of mock-scots and attributed to long-dead authors in order to (cautiously) rail against the oppressive English and call longingly for Scottish independence.¹³⁵ James Macpherson, the man variously remembered as the restorer and forger of the ancient bard Ossian, followed Ramsay with his own more subtle brand of 'highland chauvinism', lauding the virtues of ancient Scottish culture without rejecting the advantages of British union in the present¹³⁶. Now viewed with ironic amusement, at the time of publication, the works of Ossian not only inspired a generation of Romantic thinkers across Europe, Goethe, Beethoven and Chateaubriand amongst them, but ignited fierce debate over the veracity of the national epic.

In turn, dialogues surrounding a Scottish national music itself became far more heated. Whilst Ramsay in the 1720s had meshed the meter of words and lyric as freely as he did conceptions of lowland and highland cultures, the growing historical consciousness of the later decades of the century expounded 'authenticity' and preservation as its bywords. Joseph Ritson, the antiquarian famed partly for his contention of Macpherson's discoveries and later collaborations with both Scott and Shield in their own employment of the Gaelic lyric tradition¹³⁷, was the unequivocal voice of this new approach. As for Ramsay, Ritson saw his efforts as nothing but 'reprehensible' for the liberties taken with the 'ancient and original words' of ballads which should otherwise have remained intact for posterity.¹³⁸ In the commercial field however, Ramsay paved the way for all manner of compilations, from favourite selections by star singers of the day including Domenico Corri and Peter Urbani, to

¹³⁴ Daiches, D. *The Paradox of Scottish culture: The Eighteenth Century Experience* (Oxford, 1964), p.27.

¹³⁵ Gelbart, M. 'Allan Ramsay, the idea of 'Scottish Music' and the beginnings of 'National music' in Europe' in *Eighteenth Century Music*, Vol.9 (March, 2012).

¹³⁶ Hall, S.T. 'James Macpherson's *Ossian*: Forging Ancient Highland Identity for Scotland' in *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth*, A. Wawn Ed. (Brepols, 2007) pp.24-6

¹³⁷ Fiske, R. *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1986).

¹³⁸ Ritson, J. *Ritson's Scottish Songs*, (1794) pp. 60-1.

the sham Jacobite songs of Scottish violinist James Hogg and even arrangements by continental composers such as Ignaz Pleyel¹³⁹, who either through indifference or distaste for Scotch harmony and meter made even the crudest highland ditty sound like a rigidly classical arietta. What Ramsay had achieved so successfully and left for others to inherit was the fusion of various localised song cultures into a ‘Scottish’ whole¹⁴⁰.

The tradition of looking to Scotland’s past for cultural inspiration soon became the central activity of several industrious and patriotic individuals with more discriminating techniques of musical scholarship, keen to ensure that melody figured equal with lyric. Most prominent amongst these was George Thomson, the government clerk committed to the elevation of the Scottish national song; a task he pursued with little financial reward for over forty years.¹⁴¹ Enlisting Robert Burns’ lyric assistance and the musical talents of Europe’s most eminent composers, Haydn, Beethoven and Weber included, Thomson produced five lavish volumes of *Original Scottish Airs* (1793-1841).¹⁴² The works were plagued by numerous complications, namely Thomson’s habit of altering Burn’s verse and the tendency for some of his continental composers to fall into the aforementioned trap of reworking and tonicizing (eliminating any dissonance from) the signature endings of several well-known airs, in a manner not readily applicable to Scotch song. Those whose arrangements were more successful, notably Beethoven or Haydn, were often involved in producing variations for multiple publishers at any one time¹⁴³. This proliferation of what can only be described as a conscious national style was for a time unparalleled. It was not however, like later ‘nationalist’ musics looking to culturally galvanise and assist in projecting their respective nations towards a political goal. Instead, it was part of a process by which Scottish culture in the early decades of the nineteenth century became increasingly located in the past, its music an outmoded curiosity for the pleasure of outsiders and collectors, made appealing by its wistful innocence in an age where upheaval questioned the old order of musical form and political establishment alike.

The vitality of the Scottish song tradition was felt by many highland Scots to be lost the moment that such compilations and collections came into vogue. They were seen to stilt the oral traditions which had allowed for their reinterpretation and continuity amongst indigenous Scottish communities, instead binding them with ink and paper. Margaret Laidlaw (mother of James Hogg) reproached Sir Walter Scott for this fact;

¹³⁹ Johnson, D. *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenthcentury*, (Mercat, 2003) p. 146.

¹⁴⁰ Gelbart, M. ‘Allan Ramsay, the idea of ‘Scottish Music’ and the beginnings of ‘National music’ in Europe’ in *Eighteenth Century Music*, Vol.9 (March, 2012).

¹⁴¹ David Johnson and Kirsteen C. McCue. "Thomson, George." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 16, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27883>.

¹⁴² Johnson, D. *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland*, p.145

¹⁴³ Fiske, R., *Scotland in Music*, (Cambridge, 1983) Ch. 3.

‘There war never ane o’ my sangs prentit till ye prentit them yoursel’, and ye hae spoilt them awthegither. They were made for singin’ an’ no for readin’; but ye hae broken the charm noo, and they’ll never (be) sung mair. An’ the worst thing of a’ they’re nouter richt spell’d nor richt setten down.’¹⁴⁴

Whether the musical arrangements and lyrics of such songs were centuries old or entirely contemporary, the emphasis of publishers was almost uniformly upon the antiquity and age of the product, for this was the representation which sold Scotland as a place to read of, to tour and most importantly for them, to sing and dance about.

Rosina & the Rage for Rustic Opera

Early incorporation of Scottish melodies within the music of the stage most frequently explored subjects involving pastoral themes, a popular context for many dramas of the mid-century which sought to portray to a contemporary society increasingly subject to the demands of urbanization, the immemorial serenity of traditional country life in the nether-regions of Old-England and its highland neighbours. The effects of the enclosure movement which had taken place since the mid seventeenth century can have played no little part in this. Whilst the country’s rural population continued to increase until 1851, there was a clear sense of injustice felt by many pastoral dwellers that their rights had been irreparably encroached upon.¹⁴⁵ The capacity of the stage to recreate what was thought to have been lost, resulted in a succession of highly successful operas and afterpieces which chose country living as their contextual backdrop. William Shield’s *Rosina* of 1782 presents the apotheosis of the genre, setting the tribulations of a rustic love triangle (though of a rather sedate sort by operatic standards) within the provincial surroundings of the composer’s native Northumbrian landscape¹⁴⁶. Throughout the opera, whilst composing ten of the eighteen musical numbers, Shield relied heavily upon the borrowing of melodic material from others, notably an aria from Sacchini’s relatively recent *Rinaldo* (1780) in addition to five melodies marked variously as French, Scottish and Irish.¹⁴⁷ The process by which these musical numbers acquired their ‘national’ characteristics was in most cases varied. Many songs depended upon the importance of simplistic and recognisable dance rhythms and in spite of their specious derivation, the character of such airs and ballads was to become the staple of operas presenting national themes for much of the next half-century. Both those numbers marked as ‘French’ in *Rosina*’s score display a common rhythmic pattern based

¹⁴⁴ Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*, p.138.

¹⁴⁵ Snell, K.D.M, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England 1660-1900* (Cambridge, 1985)pp.219-227.

¹⁴⁶ Drummond, J. ‘Introduction’ in W. Shield, *Rosina* (Musica Britannica, 1998).

¹⁴⁷ W. Shield, *Rosina* (Musica Britannica, 1998).

upon the repeated succession of phrases in an AAAB pattern, played in duple time and carried over the space of eight bars¹⁴⁸, akin to the popular French contradanse. In terms of the music's lyric content however, their derivation on national lines had little substantive support; this particular air sung by the character simply known as 'Rustic', who is joined by a chorus of reapers, hails the work of the rural peasant and warns against the demise of their agricultural system.

'What would gilded pomp avail,

Should the peasant's labour fail?'¹⁴⁹

Though embedded within the text of an otherwise upbeat musical number, this message served as a reminder to patrician members of the audience of how fragile the agricultural system could be if those at its base were to be driven from their age old customs.

The overture is of note for containing the first known fully orchestrated arrangement of what would become the melody for Robert Burns' now folkloric and traditionally 'British' '*Auld Lang Syne*'.

Example 2.1



¹⁴⁸ W. Shield, *Rosina* (Musica Britannica, 1998) pp. 39-40.

¹⁴⁹ W. Shield, *Rosina* (Musica Britannica, 1998) pp. 39-40.

Shield's score gives specific directions for the wind instruments to 'imitate the bagpipe', achieved by combining the melody carried by the oboes (using the nine tone mixolydian scale with additional low g natural¹⁵⁰ and its consequent sequence of unusual harmonic intervals peculiar to the bagpipes), with a sustained tonic played in unison by the horns and bassoons, thus creating a remarkably accurate reproduction of the instrument's distinctive bass and tenor drones. When played in conjunction with the gapped pentatonic scale characteristic of many Scots tunes, it is not too conjectural to assume that Shield's melody could easily have been inspired by the well-known and equally well-published strathspey *The Miller's Wedding* upon which a number of Scots songs of the later eighteenth century (including the popular *Comin' through the Rye*) were based. Shield's familiarity with antiquarian publications of ballads is confirmed by his use of the popular Broadside, 'Nanny O' printed in both Ramsay and Thomson's collections of a half century previous¹⁵¹, directly transposed into the key of C minor for one of the opera's second act arias, 'When bidden to the wake or fair'.

Example 2.2

As other commentators have less than convincingly pointed out, Shield's close proximity to the Scottish border as a child may have exposed him to such melodies, from whose experience he may simply have borrowed the tune.¹⁵² The inclusion of Shield's 'bagpipe' arrangement in Gow's Collection of Reels under the title of *Sir Alexander Don's Strathspey*, undoubtedly contributed to the antiquarian reputation of the melody¹⁵³ which may have been taken up later by Burns' publisher, George Thomson without him ever having realised its complicated if not pseudo-Scottish origins. Whatever the truth of *Auld Lang Syne's*

¹⁵⁰ Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*, (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966) p. 183.

¹⁵¹ Simpson, *The British Broadside Ballad and its Music*, p.506-7.

¹⁵² Fiske, R. *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1986) p. 458.

¹⁵³ Stenhouse, W. *Illustrations of the lyric poetry and music of Scotland*, p.24.

melodic provenance, its perceived ‘Scottishness’ rendered by Shield in both harmonic method and instrumental texture was quite intentional. Scotland’s largely peasant-based and subsistence oriented farming communities, which remained even in the later eighteenth century¹⁵⁴, readily lent to this vision of their supposedly rustic culture. Therefore, *Rosina* is an interesting example of pastoral opera as whole if only for the fact that it displays how the simple use of melodic forms and imitative instrumentation from varying folk traditions could quite easily create generically rustic soundscapes without showing any real discrimination over their differing national origins. What is clear however is that the authenticity which some later composers looked for in order to create regional tinta (the Italian term used for bringing local ‘colour’ to a musical setting) for their operas was not a major concern in this case, where only the impression of a pastoral setting was necessary. Shield’s opera was in this sense a juncture between the eighteenth century vogue for folk traditions which sought to capture the imaginative preoccupation with Arcadian landscapes and rural lifestyles, and those later works influenced by Sir Walter Scott, dealing with the topography of a specifically placed and contextually ‘accurate’ national past.

Staging Scotland: British Music Drama and its Continental Alternatives

It was not long before the theatrical circuit began to see the production of stage works keen to capitalise upon the growing popularity of Scott’s novels and the attractively lucrative business they had brought to his publishers. For Italian Opera of the following decades Scott both as first-hand imaginative source and, in Stendhal’s words, literary ‘father’¹⁵⁵ of a new model of historical novel, became indispensable. Subjects of much later musical works for the stage including those composed by Giuseppe Verdi (notably, *Un Ballo In Maschera* (1859) with text by Scribe, the author of the libretto for Boieldieu’s much earlier adaptation of *Guy Mannering*, *La Dame Blanche*(1825)¹⁵⁶), owed much to the pseudo-historicism of the Scottish bard, even coining their own word, ‘tinta’ for the historical flavour brought to a medium formerly dominated by the classical subjects of opera-seria. More contemporarily Rossini, undisputed master of the bel-canto school produced his own *Donna Del Lago* (1819) to great acclaim some nine years after Scott’s poem of the same name. This was followed by pasticcios of both *Ivanhoe* and *Kenilworth*, largely comprised of borrowed

¹⁵⁴ Evans, E. ‘National Consciousness? The Ambivalences of English Identity in the Eighteenth Century’ in *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* Ed. C. Bjorn, A. Grant & K. Stringer (Copenhagen, 1994).

¹⁵⁵ Lindsay, Maurice. *History of Scottish Literature* (Hale, 1992).

¹⁵⁶ Georges Favre and Thomas Betzwieser. "Boieldieu, Adrien." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 16, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03422>.

material from other Rossini operas, set to newly conceived French libretti.¹⁵⁷ His successors in the genre, Donizetti and Bellini also appropriated Scott's work for their own compositions. The former setting both *Kenilworth* (the librettist Tottola also providing the libretto for Rossini's *Donna*) and more famously still *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1835), with Bellini adapting Scott's *Old Mortality* (1816) to compose what is now regarded as his magnum opus, *I Puritani* (1835).

The historical fabric of Italian Opera of the period was however far from the exacting detail found in Scott's novels, the political alignments of English and Scottish history having little notable impact upon the plot other than their provision of the necessary conflict upon which love triangles and family feuds could be transposed. *I Puritani* displaces the dispute of the Presbyterian Covenanters from its historical context on the banks of the Clyde to the battlefields of the English civil war, omitting much of the religious and political context altogether. Whilst Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* adheres more closely to the general premise of Scott's novel, in one scene of the work Enrico, the villainous operatic amalgam of Lord, Lady and Henry Ashton, appeals to his sister's conscience by recalling the grave consequences for the family should Maria (Mary Stuart) succeed William III to the throne of England. Of course, as any reader of the novel will note, it is the deposition of James II which in fact empowers the Ashton family; historically William and Mary succeeding as co-regents, the former outliving his spouse by almost a decade. It is clear that Donizetti's librettist was less than familiar with the novel and by implication, British history more widely; a slip up that was unlikely to be tolerated in an English vernacular work for a public familiar with the history of the Glorious Revolution and tales of Jacobite bogeymen.

What distinguishes vernacular Walter Scott operas in a dramaturgical sense and gives them a particular significance, is their relative and unsurprising fidelity to the original novels upon which they are based. Where Donizetti and Bellini sacrifice the dense layers of character interaction found in the literary works to the conventions of Italian opera, British dramatists were far more sensitive to the contextual elements which conferred the aura of historicity upon Scott's writings. The Farley-Bishop adaptation of Scott's *Old Mortality*, *The Battle of Bothwell Brigg*, produced at Covent Garden in the summer of 1820, makes this particularly evident with its extensive cast list detailing over twenty principal members¹⁵⁸, when compared to the mere handful found in the later Bellini opera derived from the same source. The practical considerations which arose from Italian Operatic protocol, stipulating that composers took the lead was not such a sticking point in British theatre music where dramatists found their primary concern not the adaptation of novel to the musical needs of

¹⁵⁷ Mitchell, J. *The Walter Scott Operas: an analysis of operas based on the works of Walter Scott* (University of Alabama Press, 1977).

¹⁵⁸ Farley, T. & Bishop, H. *The Battle of Bothwell Brigg* (Larpent Collection of Plays).

the composer but rather the theatrical demands of the stage¹⁵⁹. Where Bishop could employ a variety of actors and singers to accommodate for the extensive cast list required by Scott's novel, his Italian counterpart was restricted to the conventional practice of four principals, a chorus and the odd comprimario. The difficulty this arrangement made for translation of continental works into English form becomes all too apparent in the press' vehement criticism of Covent Garden's 1827 production of Boieldieu's two-act opera *La Dame Blanche* (based on *Guy Mannering*). According to Ayrton the dramatist involved, American actor and author of *Clari* (1825, and now known only for Bishop's song "Home Sweet Home") John Howard Payne, was "so scrupulous in not altering a single note, that he found himself under the necessity of apologizing for the badness of his verses"¹⁶⁰. The critic for the Times was equally disparaging of Scribe's dramaturgical handling of Scott's material:

'It is impossible to comprehend the connexion of any two scenes, or scarcely the import of one, from one end of the opera to the other . . . [The author] would seem to have selected a single incident, or character, from every one of the Waverly novels . . . and then to have jumbled all these well-known personages and materials – placed in new situations [with] a disregard of all common reason.'¹⁶¹

As Christina Fuhrmann has shown, *La Dame Blanche*'s 'Englished' productions at Covent Garden and Drury Lane produced a backlash of uneasiness in which foreign efforts to reinterpret Scott were viewed as 'threatening or misguided'¹⁶². When the aforementioned *I Puritani* was eventually staged at Covent Garden in 1835, Pocock's adaptation returned the Opera to its original covenanter setting and introduced 'several very pretty Scotch airs', for good measure.¹⁶³ It is evident therefore that foreign works wishing to see production outside of the Royal Italian Opera House at the Haymarket and to audiences other than its fashionable haut-ton elite, would have to be more judicious in their use of much-loved national literary sources, and seek a form of native adaptation more suited to the London standard. The main consequence of this being that the elementalised plots found in bel-canto opera were rarely mirrored to the same extent by London dramatists even if their musical techniques were quite often pillaged by the composers involved. In many ways this formed part of a symbiotic interchange in which Italian and French composers freely borrowed from British literary sources with a disregard for their aesthetic code as did British composers the Italianate operatic form itself.

¹⁵⁹ *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain; The Romantic Age* (Oxford, 1981)

¹⁶⁰ Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois University, 1994).

¹⁶¹ Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois University, 1994). p. 495.

¹⁶² Fuhrmann, C. 'Scott Repatriated?: *La Dame Blanche* crosses the English Channel' in *Romanticism and Opera* (Praxis series, 2005).

¹⁶³ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)p. 151.

This is not to say however that such English Operas were wholly faithful adaptations, as the practical limitations of the stage could not possibly reproduce the lengthy serials and hefty novels whose inimitable detail and character interactions the performance culture of the early nineteenth century theatre would not allow. William Hazlitt, never shy in his criticism was vociferous if sympathetic about this particular point,

‘So it is with these theatrical adaptations: the author shines through them in spite of many obstacles; and about a twentieth part of his genius appears in them, which is enough. His canvas is cut down, to be sure; his characters thinned out, the limbs and extremities of his plot thinned away (cruel necessity!), and it is like showing a brick for a house. But then what is left is so fine!’¹⁶⁴

He was under no illusion however that in most cases Scott provided easy money for theatres by simply mounting his name on the bill of a number of musical-plays, even if their lyric quality and musical merit often passed without comment.

‘It argues little for the force or redundancy of our original talents for tragic composition, when our authors of that description are periodical pensioners on the bounty of the Scottish press . . . Mr Walter Scott no sooner conjured up the muse of old romance, and brings us acquainted with her in ancient hall, cavern, or mossy dell, than Messrs Harris and Elliston [the proprietors of Covent Garden] with all their tribe, instantly set their tailors to work to take the pattern of the dresses, their artists to paint the wildwood scenery or some proud dungeon-keep, their musicians to compose the fragments of bewildered ditties, and their penmen to correct the author’s scattered narrative and broken dialogue into a sort of theatrical join-hand . . . it fills the coffers of the theatre for a time; gratifies public curiosity till another new novel appears’¹⁶⁵

For the period covered by this study, the music-dramas and Operas concerned were produced almost exclusively for the theatres of London, which for numerous reasons - patents, localised musical talent and financial limitations amongst them - meant that all but the most popular remained confined to the capital; in some cases seeing but a few performances before being consigned to the dramaturgical scrap heap. The consequence of this is quite clear: the music and tableaux of the Celtic fringe found upon the stage were designed primarily for the eyes and ears of a predominantly English, metropolitan audience¹⁶⁶, a great deal of whom in relative terms also belonged to society’s elite. Like Edward Waverley crossing the unfamiliar territory of Scotland’s picturesque and at times bleak countryside, this cosmopolitan public expected complete immersion of their senses in

¹⁶⁴ Hazlitt, W. *Criticisms and Dramatic essays of the English stage* (Routledge, 1854)p. 78.

¹⁶⁵ Hazlitt, W. *Criticisms and Dramatic essays of the English stage* (Routledge, 1854)

¹⁶⁶ Burden, M. ‘Opera in the London Theatres’ in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, J. Moody, ed. (Cambridge, 2007).

the Caledonian image Scott had embedded within their imaginations. Garrick had first introduced an element of realism to the stage in 1773 by playing Macbeth in Scottish dress¹⁶⁷ rather than the standard bewigged classical costumes then common to most dramas; the lengths gone to by later productions, to ensure Scott's own visualisations were fulfilled, is made evident by various published versions of the dramatic texts, many describing in great detail the numerous costumes of each character, in Rob Roy's case all manner of apparel from deerskin shoes to feathered caps.¹⁶⁸

In musicological terms however, staging Scotland was a far more indiscriminate task, often making little distinction between lowland and highland cultures, and so inheriting the methods begun by Ramsay almost a century previous. For those across the border, it was quite apparent that there was much to distinguish these two strands of musical practice; the geography of differing Gaelic and English language ballad production, variations in instrumental traditions, notably the development of the bagpipes and appreciation of the medieval harp but most centrally, the dichotomy between the practice of 'folk' and 'art' music (or indeed, that lack of erudite practice which characterised the classical music scene of the early nineteenth century).¹⁶⁹ For theatrical composers in London, this was of little concern, so long as what they produced had at least an impression of authenticity. The stage with its great ability to paraphrase and homogenise such divisions helped, within the early decades of the long nineteenth century, to present a vaguely unified but increasingly distant Scottish identity, not simply rooted but in fact located somewhere in the hazy, romantic construction of its past.

Performing Scott: Waverley and its Theatrical Influence

The first Scott novel to see operatic form was an adaptation of *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* by Dibdin and Reeve, entitled, *The White Plume; or the Border Chieftains* (1806). Whilst its production was a failure (no doubt in part due to the logistical crisis Kemble's Covent Garden was facing at the time, resulting later in the Old Price riots) its run lasting just six nights before being cut down into a minor farce for the following three.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, this short lived work was the first in a long string of music-dramas inspired by Scott's highland legends. Bishop and Morton's adaptation of the *Lady of the Lake* saw more success, and

¹⁶⁷ Fiske, R. *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1986 p. 255).

¹⁶⁸ Pocock, I. & Bishop, H. *Rob Roy* (Larpent Collection of Plays).

¹⁶⁹ Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*

¹⁷⁰ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)

unlike Rossini's came hot on the heels of Scott's poem of 1810. Produced at Covent Garden a year later, *The Knight of Snowdon* received mixed reviews, the main criticism by the typically polemic Thomas Barnes of *The Times* being that Morton and Bishop had 'engrafted' their names 'upon the celebrity of another'¹⁷¹. Whilst Barnes undoubtedly saw the adaptation of Scott to the stage as an insult to the poetic material from which it derived, it is clear from *The Chronicle's* account of the same performance that Morton's text commanded respect from many critics for the 'laudable fidelity' shown to Scott's original.¹⁷²

Even before the Waverley novels therefore, evidence existed of the growing sense of Scott's importance to the national literary tradition and how it was best employed. In the same way that Garrick had sought to sacralise Shakespeare a generation previous, a task he largely achieved for his lifetime and beyond¹⁷³, so Scott's work, though far more contemporary, became the subject of a debate in which it was discussed not simply as the product of a gifted national literary figure but as property of the nation itself. It shouldn't be assumed however that this was necessarily a one directional flow of ideas from Scott to the stage, indeed as Marc Baer is keen to emphasise, Scott's Historical romances 'very likely had as powerful an impact on the theatre as the especially melodramatic theatre of his day had on him.'¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Scott evidently had no love for the theatre industry and its constituent parts; this he made clear to Southey, 'I shall not fine and renew a lease of popularity upon the theatre. To write for low, ill-informed, and conceited actors, whom you must please, for your success is necessarily at their mercy, I cannot away with'.¹⁷⁵ Clearly contemptuous of performers and with little more time for their audiences, he vowed never to write for the stage, of whose disreputability lead him to believe that 'the character of the audience in London is such that one could have the least pleasure in pleasing them.'¹⁷⁶ For a novelist from the more respectable medium of print, it is interesting that Scott should have not simply allowed, but practically encouraged such theatrical hack work to be carried out on his beloved writings, even if they were undertaken by close friends such as the playwright Daniel Terry. Its role in publicising his work amongst the largely non reading public must have played a great part in allowing these transgressions; had copyright laws also existed in the early nineteenth century, the source of revenue provided by performance royalties would doubtless have been an attractive proposition to the self-made laird whose architectural ambitions at Abbotsford required some expensive hack work of their own. His works' adaptation for the musical stage must have presented an interesting proposition for an author

¹⁷¹ Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois University, 1994)

¹⁷² Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois University, 1994)

¹⁷³ Price, C. *Theatre in the Age of Garrick* (Oxford, 1973).

¹⁷⁴ Baer, M. *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford, 1992) p. 197.

¹⁷⁵ Lang, A. 'Introduction' in *The Heart of Midlothian*, W. Scott (Boston, 1893).

¹⁷⁶ Lang, A. 'Introduction' in *The Heart of Midlothian*, W. Scott (Boston, 1893).

whose earliest literary interests had involved the collecting of ballads.¹⁷⁷ Their incorporation of Scotch song in particular was to add an extra dimension of perceived aural historicity to the descriptive flourishes found in the novels, contributing to the increasingly antiquated image of Scotland's culture.

Bishop's Scott-based dramas are brimming with the sorts of folk melodies expected, many containing the characteristic features of Scottish music found in earlier works by Hook and Shield. Like the latter, Bishop was inclined to introduce highland colour to his overtures; the third movement of His *Knight of Snowdown* Sinfonia labelled as an Andantino Scozzese, is followed by a dance-like Allegro Vivace passage dominated by a recognisable rhythm common to the highland fling, giving the raucous effect of a rugged Caledonian dance.

Example 2.3



Bishop was also prone to using the distinctive Scotch-snap, that is, the quick succession of semi-quavers and dotted quavers, which was itself already a well-known idiom of Scottish music, popular with contemporary composers and derided by their critics in posterity as being less than authentic¹⁷⁸. Nevertheless, its association with the Strathspey, so popularised throughout the eighteenth century both in popular and art musics (notably in compositions by the Scottish composers James Oswald¹⁷⁹ and John Reid¹⁸⁰), meant that by the early nineteenth century its musical dialect was unmistakably Scottish. This simple but highly effective method was not limited to instrumental passages by Bishop, but also formed the basic rhythmic pattern for many of his opera's arias, such as the heroine's ballad,

¹⁷⁷ Lockhart, quoted in *The Antiquary*, A. Lang ed

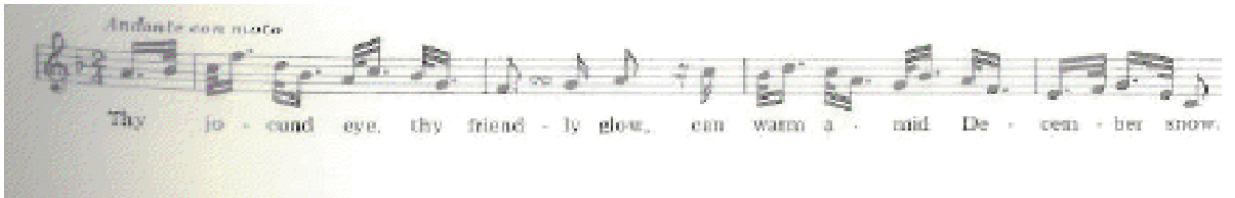
¹⁷⁸ Oxford Companion to Music; Scotch Snap.

¹⁷⁹ David Johnson and Heather Melvill. "Oswald, James." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed May 17, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20554>.

¹⁸⁰ David Johnson. "Reid, John." *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed May 17, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23106>.

‘Hospitality’, sung nostalgically before the rustic visual backdrop (as noted in the stage directions) of a ‘Highland Village’.¹⁸¹

Example 2.4



This aria also includes that other typically Scottish device, the harmonic double tonic sequence¹⁸², in which the discernibly triadic phrase of the exposition is immediately repeated, but transposed downwards by a full tone, the tonic and subtonic thus alternating to produce the necessary dual-tonal catenation.

Perhaps the most successful adaptations of Scott were those based upon the Novels of *Guy Mannering* and *Rob Roy*, in combination, totalling well over a third of the almost five thousand known stage performances of the writer's works.¹⁸³ In the case of the former, this was largely due to the success of one particular dramatic duo; that of author Daniel Terry and the aforementioned Sir Henry Bishop. *Guy Mannering; or, The Gipsy's Prophecy*, first staged at Covent Garden on 12 March 1816, was an instant success, featuring in every theatrical calendar for the next decade and performed in houses both across the English Channel and the Atlantic. Its popularity was such in the US that it remained a staple of the repertory throughout the nineteenth century, seeing production in New York as late as 1904¹⁸⁴, long after British interest in the piece had ceased. The extent to which Terry's play captured the dramatic *Zeitgeist* can be surmised from the prefatory remarks found in a volume of contemporary English dramas published a few years after the work's premiere, 'This piece belongs to a class of composition utterly unknown to the regular drama of our country *Guy Mannering*, like all his brethren, is a very near kinsman of the melo-drama; pathos, comedy, music, incident, are skilfully blended; and, however rigid taste may condemn it, this sort of drama is infinitely more popular than any classical composition

¹⁸¹ Morton & Bishop, *The Knight of Snowdoun* (Larpent Collection of Plays).

¹⁸² Collinson, *The Traditional and National Music of Scotland*

¹⁸³ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)p. 56.

¹⁸⁴ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)

If too, popularity is a test of excellence, Guy Mannering stands in the first rank; for no drama has been a more universal favourite'¹⁸⁵

Terry, a close friend of Scott himself, and one of the few companions with whom the latter was open about his authorship of the Waverley novels, receiving not simply assistance with the reworking of the dialogue of the novel, but even contributions in the form of song lyrics¹⁸⁶, to which Bishop skilfully set music in an appropriate regional style. His setting of the lyric 'Caledonia, Native Land!' is characteristic of this style, with its uncluttered orchestration and simple melodic line, lacking the florid cadenzas typical of the usual operatic airs.

Example 2.5



In his memoirs W.T. Parke, oboist and sometime house composer of Covent Garden, confirms the 'superior order' of the Opera's musical sections (compiled and orchestrated by Bishop), which it would seem through their malleability provided one of the central reasons for the work's success.¹⁸⁷ In addition to his overture, which found continued use as a concert piece and entr'acte, the many interchangeable airs, ballads and parlour songs, both original and borrowed, provided the vehicle for a whole host of singers, singing-actors and who liked to think of themselves as such, eager to perform the piece. The predominance of Scottish Border Ballads is however notable, with prominence often given to a particular air or song

¹⁸⁵ *Oxberry's New English Drama, Vol. XII* (London, 1820) p. 63.

¹⁸⁶ D. Buchanan, Popular Reception by Dramatic Adaptation: The case of Walter Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, in *European Romantic Review*, 22:6

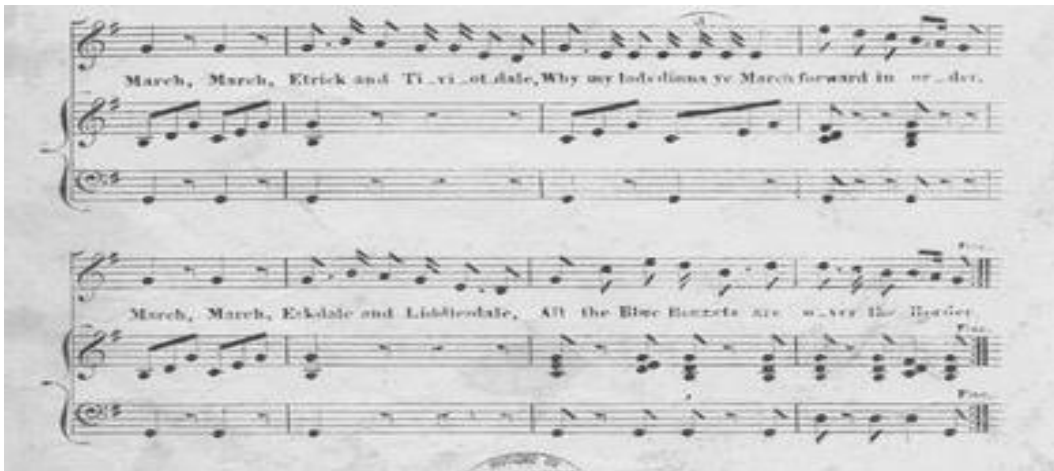
¹⁸⁷ Parke, W.T. *Musical Memoirs, Vol. II* (Colburn & Bentley, 1830) p.119.

on the bill of any given performance. This was even more so the case for the most popular of all Scott's subjects, *Rob Roy*.

Rob Roy and Historicising Highland 'Savagery'

Exactly two years after the premiere of Terry's *Guy Mannering*, Isaac Pocock opened Covent Garden's new season with his own Scott opera, also in collaboration with Bishop. Ever the astute man of the theatre, Pocock, not content in having just one Scottish bard on his playbill, adroitly subtitled his play *Auld Lang Syne*. As previously discussed, Robert Burns' famous ditty had by this point become the essence of nostalgic Scottish folk tradition, disseminated through growing incorporation within stage performance, antiquarian publication and public ceremony. The several hundred other airs known to have been included within productions of the opera at one point or another, include another Burns classic, 'Comin' thro' the Rye', Jacobite songs such as 'Charlie's Drums are Sounding' and even a nationalist ballad from the pen of Scott himself in the form of 'Blue Bonnets Over the Border'¹⁸⁸.

Example 2.6



The reviewer for *The Times* praised both the principal female singer, Miss Stephens for doing 'great justice to the beautiful national airs of Scotland' and Bishop for his 'great taste' in arranging such numbers¹⁸⁹. It was as Parke notes, Bishop's unparalleled talent for selecting the 'most popular Scotch airs'¹⁹⁰, matched by his great ability as an arranger adept in catering for contemporary taste which made him the most prolific of native composers to work on Scott-inspired operas.

¹⁸⁸ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)

¹⁸⁹ Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois University, 1994)

¹⁹⁰ Parke, W.T. *Musical Memoirs, Vol. II* (Colburn & Bentley, 1830) p. 135.

Though quite often billed as a ‘Scottish Romance’ or (particularly in Scotland) ‘national opera’, the nationalist element was carefully tempered, placing the Scottish nation firmly in the past. This was a point Scott had always been quite adamant about from his earliest writings. The Postscript to *Waverley* reads as such:

There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745 – the destruction of the patriarchal power of the Highland chiefs – the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions of the lowland nobility and the barons – the total eradication of the Jacobite party, which, averse to intermingle with the English, or adopt their customs, long continued to pride themselves upon maintaining ancient Scottish manners and customs, - commenced this innovation. The gradual influx of wealth, and extension of commerce, have since united to render the present people of Scotland a class of beings as different from their grandfathers as the existing English are from those of Queen Elizabeth’s time ... But the change, though steadily and rapidly progressive, has, nevertheless, been gradual; and like those who drift down the stream of a deep and smooth river, we are not aware of the progress we have made until we fix our eye on the now distant point from which we have drifted. Such of the present generation as can recollect the last twenty or twenty-five years of the eighteenth century, will be fully aware of the truth of this statement.¹⁹¹

Whilst, as Colley suggests, some Lowland Scots still saw their highland neighbours as little more than ‘savages’ or ‘aborigines’¹⁹², Scott’s romances had done much to make this image a largely historical rather than contemporary one. Characters such as Rob Roy, made appealing by his rustic chivalry and dogged resilience, whilst often compared allegorically in song with England’s own outlaw-hero Robin Hood, verged closer to the image of the noble savage ready for domestication than that of a dangerous political freedom fighter threatening the status quo of English dominance. The insularity of this ancient and dying breed is highlighted by Roy’s firm rebuke of Bailie Jarvie’s offer to teach his sons the ways of a city-dwelling merchant; the former preferring all of Glasgow be burnt down before their introduction to such a lifestyle.¹⁹³ Roy’s educational syllabus is simple and hardy;

‘Hamish can bring down a black-cock on the wing with a single bullet; and his brother drive a dirk through with a two –inch deal board’¹⁹⁴

It is nevertheless one whose future seems to pale in comparison to the new economic order represented by Jarvie’s urban bourgeoisie. This dichotomy between two very distinct cultures, that of the middling (often theatre going) metropolitan and the rustic ways of those found in Britain’s geographical and social fringes, was one that both Bishop and Pocock were clearly at home with whilst penning *Rob Roy*; their other works increasingly focussed upon the exploits of Empire elsewhere on the globe, routinely depicting caricatures of exotic

¹⁹¹ Kerr, *Fiction Against History: Scott as Storyteller* (Cambridge, 1989).

¹⁹² Colley, ‘Britishness and otherness: an argument’, in *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.31. p.314.

¹⁹³ Pocock, I. & Bishop, H, *Rob Roy* (Larpent Collection of Plays).

¹⁹⁴ Pocock, I. & Bishop, H, *Rob Roy* (Larpent Collection of Plays).

natives and nomadic tribesman, the image of the ‘noble savage’ integral to their narrative.¹⁹⁵ Whilst developed from the pastoral operas of Shield’s time which idealised the simplicity of provincial life, these works, like *Rob Roy* often focussed upon the cultural redemption of ‘savage’ characters who were essentially good-hearted, innocent beings. It is unsurprising that an almost parallel production of *Rob Roy* by an anonymous playwright which presented the title character as practically genteel, his language eloquent and manners refined, was never revived at the Olympic.¹⁹⁶ Late Georgian audiences evidently preferred their highlanders coarse and brusque, in sharp contrast to the anglicised Scots whose urbanity they encountered daily in most major English towns and cities. Indeed, many Scots themselves (as indicated by the popularity of such works north of the Border) acknowledged this development imposed largely by her Anglo-Saxon neighbours, holding the civilising process as one of necessary progress as opposed to any destruction of an ancient civilisation of which Ossianic myth had by the early nineteenth century day failed to establish recognition of.¹⁹⁷ For Scott, who was obviously gratified by the civilising process he described his nation as having undergone, the clansman was the ‘distant point’ from which Scotland had long since (and with but the slightest of sentimental regret) drifted;¹⁹⁸ his most successful theatrical adapters were equally glad and astute to accommodate this interpretation in their works.

The national implications conveyed by a work such as *Rob Roy* seem a little confused at times; whilst the title character spends much of the Opera waxing lyrical about the tyrannous English and the wrongs done towards him and his people, some of the rhetoric found in the libretto transmits a quite different and in many ways contradictory message, notably that found in the piece’s finale:

‘Scots can for their country die, Ne’er from Britain’s foes they fly’¹⁹⁹

This is obviously an allusion to the sheer number of Scots who in the previous decades had come to swell the ranks of the British Army and its Highland regiments: by 1830, twelve regiments bore Scottish titles, where only two had in the previous century.²⁰⁰ It seems an unusual, if not entirely inappropriate statement therefore for a piece in which its Scottish protagonist conspires against the British state and its emphatically English martial presence. In many ways, this eclectic mixture of textual subjects, with their enigmatic, eponymous hero, and his strongly anti-Hanoverian vein, illustrates the growing comfort of post-

¹⁹⁵ Burden, M. ‘Opera in the London Theatres’ in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830*, J. Moody, ed. (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁹⁶ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)p.167.

¹⁹⁷ Kidd, C. *Subverting Scotland’s Past* (Cambridge, 1993) P.279.

¹⁹⁸ Lincoln, A. *Walter Scott and Modernity* (Edinburgh, 2007) pp. 122-7.

¹⁹⁹ Pocock, I. & Bishop, H. *Rob Roy* (Larpent Collection of Plays).

²⁰⁰ Cookson, J.E. *The British Armed Nation, 1793-1815* (Oxford, 1997)pp.150-152.

Napoleonic Britain with representations of the formerly anxious fractures found in the politics of national union. That English audiences revelled so enthusiastically in Roy's exploits depicted vividly on the stage, confirms this view. The sensitivity towards such subjects, particularly during the much maligned earlier period of George III's own unpopularity and even the previous decade of war, had been lessened by the triumphant experience of victory on the continent, ushering in a more confident and reassured attitude towards topics previously marginalised as taboo. Nevertheless, the brief juxtaposition of 'British' rhetoric in a work not simply devoid of but presenting a hero in overt opposition to any unionist sentiment, seems a little odd, perhaps betraying the necessity felt by dramatists, even in the optimistic climate of the regency, to reinforce a patriotic message which placed the events firmly within their historically fictive context. Whether they did so for the peace and comfort of the late-Georgian public whose forefathers had just been berated by the clansman, or in response to the demands of a conservatively-minded censor, this not entirely discernible. Whichever way we should interpret the work's language, the dramatic inclusion of Scotch airs in a context which allowed their implicit political messages to be heard with clarity, had evidently become perfectly acceptable, indicating that within contemporary discourses of nation they no longer possessed the potent threat of earlier decades.

Class Consciousness and the Theatrical Taste for Topicality

Much more pertinent to discussions of British identity, was another contested idea of national definition surrounding issues of social status. For Scotland's urban population who formed Rob Roy's lasting audience, in many cases it was not the Highland Chief, but more often the endearing figure of Bailie Nicol Jarvie who captivated their interest²⁰¹. A caricature of Edinburgh's bourgeois classes, Jarvie's financial prudence and social propriety represented their own middling, day to day concerns both sympathetically and with humour. One contemporary reviewer of Charles Mackay's performance of the role (a veteran interpreter of Jarvie on stage) summed up the view,

'it is not acting; it is reality. It is the very Bailie Jarvie who lived in the Saltmarket some hundred years ago, with all his eccentricities, and his warmth of heart'²⁰².

The ability of the audience to identify with characters sympathetic to their own position was as essential to the urban theatre goers of the early nineteenth century as the mythological heroes of earlier opera-serie had been to the aristocratic patrons of court establishments in the eighteenth. The movement from elite-centric establishments to more commercially

²⁰¹ Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992)

²⁰² Bolton, H. *Scott Dramatized* (Mansell, 1992) p. 164.

egalitarian ones, dependent upon the financial support of Britain's expanding middle classes had cemented this shift. Where Giulio Cesare and Orpheus had by bold example helped to inspire a generation of ancien regime princes, Nicol Jarvie was the unlikely hero of a new economically driven social order. In this sense, he was not simply a 'Scottish' character but one who for English urban audiences mirrored both the anglicised Scots who formed a substantial part of London's population, and the capital's society and its bourgeois interests more widely. This juxtaposition of Roy, the semi-feral highlander and Jarvie the urbane, modern Scot was one which clearly equated economic modernism within notions of collective 'British' identity in the same way that pastoral backwardness was associated with Scotland's independent past. For Scottish and English audiences alike, it may have been easy to forget that Jarvie was historically conceived at all, and whilst Roy was enigmatic and daring, the Bailie was in essence a reflection themselves.

Such class stereotypes were not always used to merely flatter the audience. David Buchanan's research into the various stage adaptations of Scott's *Heart of Midlothian*, demonstrates how contrasting dramatic renderings of the same work could act both to reinforce the conservative class-associated assumptions of London's theatre going audiences, whilst also playing upon volatile social issues found at all levels of contemporary society. His comparison of the music dramas offered by Dibdin at the Surrey Theatre and Terry at Covent Garden displays this stark contrast. Though provided with an advanced copy of the novel by his friend Scott, Terry's *Heart of Midlothian* took both longer to produce and diverges more obviously from its literary source,²⁰³ excluding a number of minor and peripheral characters representing the working classes and their disreputable aristocratic champions. This conservative approach taken by Terry was very much in line with his associate, Scott's theatrical opinions, and undoubtedly resulted from the close collaboration of the two men in 'Terry-fying' numerous Scott novels for the stage.²⁰⁴ Given his aforementioned dim-view of theatre audiences, Scott realised that what was appropriate for a readership was not quite suitable for the more tentative atmosphere of the playhouse auditorium; his *Life of Kemble*, was emphatic in his beliefs regarding the social-role of theatre as a forum of good-natured condescension serving to level the elite's pretensions on stage whilst in reality making them more socially robust;

a full audience attending a first-rate piece may be compared to a national convention, to which every order of the community, from the peers to the porters send their representatives . . . The good-natured gaiety with which the higher orders see the fashionable follies which they practice treated with light satire for the amusement of the middling and

²⁰³ D. Buchanan, Popular Reception by Dramatic Adaptation: The case of Walter Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, in *European Romantic Review*, 22:6, p. 752

²⁰⁴ Lang, A. 'Introduction' in *The Heart of Midlothian*, W. Scott (Boston, 1893).

poorer classes, has no little effect in checking the rancorous feelings of envy which superior birth, wealth and station are apt to engender . . . In short, the drama is in ours, and in most civilized countries, an engine possessing the most powerful manners of society.²⁰⁵

Scott's own characters certainly catered for this purpose. The figure of the eccentric and amorous laird Dumbiedykes sends up the authority of provincial gentry and their failed attempts to woo social inferiors. His various entanglements also allow for the mockery of the delicate aristocratic disposition; the scene with the unhinged Madge whose advances result in a brush with the law, ending comically with the pair being dragged to prison, and forming the musical finale to Terry's second act.

Example 2.7

The image displays four staves of musical notation in G major, 2/4 time. The first staff is for Ratcliffe & Sharpitlaw, with lyrics: "Away, Away! to prison bear them. Away, Away! to prison". The second staff is for Dumbiedykes, with lyrics: "bear them This it is to speak one's mind! This it is to speak one's". The third staff is for Madge, with lyrics: "mind! Come, my cho=sen do not fear them, Come, my cho=sen do not fear them,". The fourth staff is for Dumbiedykes, with lyrics: "Let me go, I'm not in=clind Let me Let me go, I'm not in = = clind".

Whilst Dumbiedykes is subject to the chiding and trickery of others throughout the opera, it is important to remember however that in the end, his security and privileged position is never questioned; by virtue of birth he, unlike Madge, always finds his way out of the prison cell.

Terry's amalgamation of several characters (including the rector, Willingham) symbolic of local Scottish civic and ecclesiastical authority within the single personage of the English Magistrate Oakdale, displays a quite different and indeed less nuanced conception of ultimate authority from that found in Scott; for Terry, this is vested in a single, secular,

²⁰⁵ Bolton, *Women, Nationalism and the Romantic stage*, pp.16-17.

Anglo-Westminster centric body more congenial to the cosmopolitan but nevertheless rather conservative London audience which frequented theatres such as Covent Garden, with its cherished royal patent.²⁰⁶ With Scott's known collaboration on the work, allowing the omission of such characters can only indicate a form of acquiescence by the author on grounds of his more conservative ideology regarding theatrical productions, and Terry's own pragmatic approach to legitimate London audiences.

This also explains to some extent Terry's elimination of the feminine monarchical role embodied by Queen Caroline and her Royal prerogative as found in the novel, which in contemporary terms could only have alluded to the Prince Regent's tempestuous relations with his own queen-to-be, Caroline of Brunswick. Dibdin's production for the Surrey obviously had no such qualms with upsetting the corpulent Prince, even elevating of the consort in theatrical terms in a way that could only have acted as an unambiguous metaphoric endorsement of her namesake, the Princess of Wales. From the sympathetic portrayal of the 'insane' Madge Wildfire to the expanded role of Jeanie Deans, Dibdin's production was as a whole less willing to follow the conventional character types and scene structures readily found in Terry's version. This was of course more easily achieved at the Surrey which hadn't the same practical restrictions of royal censorial jurisdiction and prudish audiences found at Covent Garden.²⁰⁷ Scott himself compared the riots which broke out in support of Caroline to the Popish Plot of Charles II's reign, and though Scott tackled this very issue in his later *Pevekil of the Peak* (1823), his interest in varieties of popular agitation was not to be encouraged in the more socially far-reaching surroundings of the London theatre.²⁰⁸ Where Dibdin, true to Scott's novel depicted 'society broadly and in transition', in Buchanan's words, 'Terry presents his audience with a portrait of Britain as his audience wishes to see it', that is, true to Scott's theatrical ideology, if not his literary method. Either way, it is clear from the numerous productions of Dibdin's work which continued to be staged (compared to just sixteen nights of Terry's) that for contemporary audiences, it was the former which proved more popular.

Scotland could therefore act in a multitude of metaphoric modes. As a location it could serve not only as a place of dissidence and revolt, but as the arena in which different and sometimes competing notions of centrally based British authority could be exercised, its wild landscapes and hardy peoples representing a stark contrast to the excesses of regency society and its debauched goings on. For Scottish and English audiences alike to witness this multiplicity of themes enacted out upon the stage, and without the conflict which evidently

²⁰⁶ D. Buchanan, Popular Reception by Dramatic Adaptation: The case of Walter Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, in *European Romantic Review*, 22:6, p. 752

²⁰⁷ D. Buchanan, Popular Reception by Dramatic Adaptation: The case of Walter Scott's *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*, in *European Romantic Review*, 22:6,

²⁰⁸ McMaster, G. *Scott and Society* (Cambridge, 1981) p.130.

characterised earlier instances of theatrical integration (notably the ‘Culloden Riot of 1749²⁰⁹), in many ways signalled the reconciliation of cultures, Highland and Lowland, Scottish and English, under the umbrella of an accepted ‘British’ imagining of staged Scottish History, represented by Scott’s dramatist adapters.

Composing Scotland’s Landscape: A New Musical conception

The export value of Scott’s histories and their effect upon foreign composers are well known. Mendelssohn, touring Scotland in 1829, included amongst his stops the famed ‘Cave of Ossian’ and by order of his mother, an impromptu call upon Walter Scott at Abbotsford (which from the Bard’s known irritation with adulatory foreign visitors proved less than successful).²¹⁰ His trip to the western Isles was more fruitful, inspiring his most famous tonal explorations of the country’s topography, first in his tempestuous Hebrides Overture, followed by the later ‘Scottish’ symphony with its sprightly *vivace non troppo* and stately final movement coda. The interest in Caledonian themes nurtured by Scott was both widespread and long lived. The romantic fascination with Scotland’s dark history, wild landscapes and hardy peoples found fresh articulation in symphonic works including Berlioz’s tormenting Rob Roy and Waverly Overtures, the former with its unashamed borrowing of the melody from ‘Scots wha hae wi’ as an opening fanfare.²¹¹

Example 2.8

209 W. J. Lawrence, *Old Theatre Days and Ways*. (George G & Harrap, 1925)

210 F. R. Falkner, *Scotland in Music*. (Cambridge, 1983)

211 Berlioz *New Edition of the Complete Works*, ed. D. Bickler, p. xi.

Dramatic works from continental sources upon original but obviously Scott influenced subjects, also began to find their way back to source through production on the British stage in English language form. The now little known French Composer Louis Herold created the highly popular *Marie*, a Vaudeville piece; the work was met with equal acclaim across the channel when it was later adapted by the Italian Giovanni Liverati to an English text by Planche under the title *Carron Side* (1828). The critic for the *New Monthly* was for one convinced of its Celtic authenticity, noting in his review that ‘The Scottish part of Signor Liverati’s music is as truly Scotch as if it came from north of the Tweed’, but nevertheless ‘should have been better pleased if the whole of the music had been written in the manner of the Italian school.’²¹² Whilst this strange cocktail of French, English and Italians were seen to reproduce Scotland in music with some authenticity, one does detect a prelude to the increasingly wearied attitude of critics and public alike to the seemingly endless and hackneyed use of Scotch tunes on stage; a view which had started to take hold by the mid-1830s, mirroring wider musical trends found in Scotland itself. As David Johnson describes:

Publications of folk-songs increased in number up till 1828. It seems finally to have struck the upper classes, however, that the whole idea was futile, and that they were trying to glue dead leaves back on to a tree; and after Sir Walter Scott’s death in 1832 the antiquarian folk song movement abruptly fizzled out.²¹³

The corresponding plummet in the number of new Scott-based English Operas produced during the following decade attests to this fact. If the occasional Waverly Opera with the usual sprinkling of Scotch airs and dances did appear, then its gimmickry was only made obvious by having gone largely unnoticed in the accounts of critics and public alike, who by this point were far more interested in the symphonic poetry of continental composers which chose to flatter rather than imitate Scotland’s increasingly stifled cultural heritage. It is not unusual for an artist’s work to meet with widespread indifference during the period immediately after his or her death. In Scott’s case however, his musical inheritance was left largely to the Italian Bel-canto tradition in whose Operas, unlike the English Melodramas which had in Hazlitt’s words allowed his genius ‘to shine through’, left little of his imprint. The aesthetic found in his novels, furnishing even the most minor of contextual details with lengthy observational prose, was reproduced only in terms of visual verisimilitude, though subsequently even that largely lost its appeal.

Continental interest in Scotland outlasted domestic enthusiasm, but became increasingly centred around external ideas of the country rather than those produced from within. In the case of European composers such as Mendelssohn, who articulated his own distaste for

²¹² Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois University, 1994)

²¹³ Johnson, D. *Music and Society in Lowland Scotland in the Eighteenthcentury*, (Mercat, 2003)

national songs from Britain's fringes as 'the most infamous, vulgar, out-of-tune trash . . . bellowed out by rough nasal voices and horribly accompanied'²¹⁴, Scotland came more to represent a visual inspiration for symphonic canvases, than a source of melodic quotation. Where settings of Scottish lyrics continued, such as Schumann's numerous lieder based upon Burns and Ossian, the influence of Scottish music is almost always absent, their texts subject to translation. Probably the most acclaimed arrangement of Scott's poetry was set in the German language by Schubert in his *Liederzyklus vom Fräulein vom See*, famous for its *Ellens Gesang III*, otherwise known as 'Ave Maria'; incidentally one of the few major composers Thomson never thought to engage himself.

Example 2.9

The image shows a musical score for Schubert's 'Ave Maria' from the 'Liederzyklus vom Fräulein vom See'. The score is in G minor, 3/4 time, and consists of three staves of music with German lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: 'A - - - ve Ma - ri - - - a! Jung - - - frau mild! Er - hö - re - ei - ner Jungfrau Fle - - hen! Aus die - sem Fel - sen, starr und wild, soll mein Ge - bet - zu dir hin - we - - - hen.'

For the English, who (with the assistance of Scottish loyalists) had so ruthlessly suppressed political uprisings from north of the border during the early eighteenth century²¹⁵, in the early nineteenth, found their bookcases and stages subject to what appears as an unstoppable invasion of Scottish cultural hegemony. The relationship was however one more patronising than edifying for Scotland's culture. That every ballad or reel either claimed provenance from the past or at least resembled supposedly age-old forms in an imitational sense, only highlighted the bankruptcy of Scottish culture in the present. The Scotch strains sung to London theatregoing audiences by a Rob Roy or Rosina were as much an indication of their rustic, backward existence as any celebration of the national song. This was in turn an approach which largely prefigured the popular representation of noble (and ignoble) savages found in orientalist operas later in the century. Whilst the English ballad faced near extinction for much of the period, when 'Renaissance' did occur, its re-emergence was

²¹⁴ Fiske, R., *Scotland in Music*, (Cambridge, 1983)

²¹⁵ Coupland, R. *Welsh and Scottish Nationalism: A Study* (Collins, 1954). p151.

resolutely as part of a wider musical nationalism²¹⁶; Scotland's instead remained bound in the commercialised antiquated volumes and nostalgic traditions so lovingly cultivated by Scott and his Waverley novels. That English audiences flocked to see works with subjects thought too risqué for performance only a few decades previous, was indicative of the wider level of comfort within the union, emerging from many years of continental warfare. The dated nature of the 'Scotch' music that characterised such operas made this process somewhat easier. When interest in Scotia finally subsided, the musical establishment was charged with the more pressing concern of fostering a newly invigorated British music tradition, in which Scottish musicians such as Alexander Mackenzie were instrumental but indistinct. For this movement Scott remained a central literary source, though it was his chivalric romances set in Medieval England, with Balfe's *Talisman* and Arthur Sullivan's *Ivanhoe* that came to excite the imagination of later audiences.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Hughes, M 7 Stradling, R. *The English Musical Renaissance, 1840-1940* (Manchester, 2001).

²¹⁷ White, E.W. *A History of English Opera* (Faber, 1983).

3

Composing for the National Poet: Operatized Shakespeare and Musical Appropriation in Late Georgian Britain

It is impossible to underestimate the symbolic value of Shakespeare for the national culture of early nineteenth century Britain. The long process of ‘canonisation’ that took place during the eighteenth century meant that Shakespeare both the dramatist and the man found hallowed status within patriotic thought. And certainly all those who thought ‘patriotically’ would have had an opinion on their national poet. How then did British audiences react when his works were adapted for the musical stage? I will consider on the one hand, the way dramatists and composers in the first decades of the nineteenth century selected, adapted and ‘musicked’ Shakespeare, and how in turn this sparked furious debate amongst critics about the propriety, taste and patriotic implications involved in making the national poet musical. This will involve two central strands: firstly an exploration of the ‘operatized’ Shakespeare of Frederic Reynolds and Henry Bishop, and secondly how contemporary music was utilised to reinforce nationalist sentiment in spectacular productions of the bard’s legitimate History plays.

Imagining the National Poet

It is difficult to capture William Shakespeare’s role in late Georgian society better than the genteel surroundings of Jane Austen’s *Mansfield Park*. Sat in the drawing room the protagonist Fanny Price reads *Henry VIII* aloud to her aunt before being interrupted by her cousin Edmund and his guest Henry Crawford:

“Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman’s constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches them everywhere; one is intimate with him by instinct. No man of any brain can open at a good part of one of his plays without falling into the flow of his meaning immediately.”

"No doubt one is familiar with Shakespeare in a degree," said Edmund, "from one's earliest years. His celebrated passages are quoted by everybody; they are in half the books we open, and we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions ...to know him in bits and scraps is common enough; to know him pretty thoroughly is, perhaps, not uncommon."²¹⁸

To Austen's characters the bard was innately English and all Englishmen were natural consumers of Shakespeare by virtue of birth. The salon of an English country home, with its shelves of lavish bound volumes was far from the raw intensity of the Jacobean Globe for which Shakespeare's works had originally been intended. His characters, carefully crafted for the talents of his troupe's performers, were now more present in the imagination of a reading audience than the immediacy of the stage. That Britain's reading public almost quintupled from one and a half million to over seven between 1780 and 1830²¹⁹ was largely responsible for this shift. Shakespeare was increasingly viewed, amongst the critical circles of Hazlitt and Coleridge at least, as an author best read and less suited to the types of dramatic rewriting and editorial work that had taken place half a century previous by the likes of Garrick and his contemporaries.²²⁰ Indeed, his dramas had gained a scriptural value, seen by many as an extended gospel of the English Constitution and by the early decades of the nineteenth century, the reverence felt by theatre and reading audiences alike had reached something of national proportions.²²¹

The elevation of Shakespeare from literary figure to national cultural icon was closely entwined with the commercial success and growing economic might found in eighteenth-century Britain. As a marketable product, the prosperity that characterised Britain's place as a leading trading power, naturally lead to the proliferation of goods capitalising upon the image of the bard. The visual depiction of his works, in History painting, as the basis for satirical sketches and even images of their printed form provided a powerful emblem for the English language and the values of the English people. In turn the rhetoric of public figures and politicians freely appropriated Shakespearean oratory both for its familiar eloquence and more importantly the potency of its patriotic provenance. That portraiture of Garrick²²² and other artistic figures such as Hogarth invariably included Shakespeare's works within their own allegorical imagery, was a sign not simply of how the bard symbolised the value of English theatrical tradition but was more widely perceived as being quintessentially English.²²³ This link between English national expression and Shakespeare became so

²¹⁸ Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Dent, 1906) p.350

²¹⁹ Pirie, D.B. *Penguin History of Literature: The Romantic Age Vol. 5.* (Penguin, 1994).

²²⁰ Cunningham, V. *Shakespeare and Garrick* (Cambridge, 2008) p. 167.

²²¹ Dobson, *The making of the National Poet*

²²² Cunningham, V. *Shakespeare and Garrick* (Cambridge, 2008) Conc.

²²³ Taylor, G. *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present Day* (Vintage, 1991) pp.124-5.

solidified abroad that amongst French theatre audiences he became known as ‘*un lieutenant de Wellington*’, his works still subject to exclusion from the Parisian repertoire as late as 1822.²²⁴ On the English stage, the preservation and presentation of his plays was taken most seriously. Given the strict regulations upon legitimate drama and the heightened role of music in the theatre during the early nineteenth century, there was however even the works of the Bard could not escape the drive to musical adaptation intrinsic to the late-Georgian stage. Several prominent authors set their hand, with varied success, to the task of ‘musicking’ Shakespeare’s hallowed corpus in these years. Most renowned amongst them was the dramatist Frederic Reynolds, whose career in many ways reflected the changes in attitudes to the musical appropriation of Shakespeare in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Kind Kings and Questionable Censure: Shakespeare-less Operatic Histories in the age of the Examiner

One of the central reasons for Shakespeare finding a continued and in many ways strengthened potency during the years after the French Revolution was the fact that his dramas, perhaps more than any other playwright before or since, dealt overwhelmingly with kings. And more importantly, English ones at that. The place of the monarch as a divinely ordained ruler whose authority, in Britain at least, lay in their constitutional rights began instead to see cultural depictions which in the words of Jane Moody left the institutions of monarchy ‘to be interpreted as vulnerable, even precarious’²²⁵. How any particular Shakespeare production chose to adapt or manipulate the protean malleability of the text or use directional codes of physical interaction to envisage power relationships was highly dependent upon variables of venue, audience and proprietor. Performances of monarchically concerned Shakespeare works were consequently either deeply allied with or opposed to the activities of Britain’s royal family. For the Hanoverian monarchs, given the dramatic political changes taking place on the continent, even the most frivolous of entertainments could present either a deeply cutting slight upon their Kingship or a much appreciated mark of popular approval. Where the national bard was involved this was even more poignant given that for much of England’s theatregoing and reading populations his plays were collectively seen as a kind of history of the English people itself. The understanding of the national past which became increasingly important within discourses of nation, allowed various idiosyncratic interpretations of Shakespeare to act as commentary upon the politics

²²⁴ Bogerhoff, J, *Le Theatre Anglais a Paris sous la Restauration* (1912), 14.

²²⁵ Moody, Jane, *Illegitimate Theatre, in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge, 2000) p. 122.

of the present. It is therefore intriguing that few if any of Shakespeare's works dealing with glorious (and not so glorious) episodes from the nation's past saw operatized forms during these decades. The glaring lack of music-dramas based upon Shakespeare's history plays was in one sense understandable in respect of their dramaturgical unsuitability (frequently thought too dark and serious to be sung) and in equal measure the need to produce works congenial to the censor. This was also compounded by the fact that the reigns of George I and II had seen the crown's preference for Italian opera frequently incurring the wrath of the patriotically inclined supporters of spoken drama, epitomized most acutely by the works of Shakespeare²²⁶. In an operatic sense, what later became a rich source of material for many romantic composers was instead a dead-end for musicians and dramatists under the conventions of early nineteenth century British theatre.

Richard II, an opera intended for production at Covent Garden in December of 1792, was one of the first works to fall foul of the new censorial assiduity characterising theatre during the final decade of the eighteenth century²²⁷. The work in question was not however as one might assume an adaptation of Shakespeare's play of the same name, but an entirely new dramatic text penned by the author and sometime diplomat Richard Cumberland. Had an operatic version of Shakespeare's then rarely performed tragedy been proposed, its themes of civil strife, deposition and eventual regicide uncomfortably parallel to events taking place in France may have made its silencing seem fully justified. Instead, Cumberland's opera did quite the opposite, portraying the fateful monarch as a figure of unassailable courage and clemency; the King pardons the opera's humble blacksmith protagonist, both for the murder of a corrupt and reviled tax collector and his later involvement in Wat Tyler's rebellion. Even this rosy image of English Kingship with its unfavourable representation of the uprising's conspirators could not prevent Cumberland's opera from strict prohibition. The elements pointing towards public unrest, notably the removal of local governmental authority in the form of the tax official was dangerously subversive in itself and the rhetoric found in the rebels' choruses with incantations lauding being 'set free from our Taxes, law and order', proved too much for the authorities, resulting in a prompt banning by the Examiner of Plays²²⁸. Whilst unable to silence the less congenial themes found in the works of the national poet, the censor could prevent contemporary dramatists from providing new and equally troublesome approaches to the historical subject matter. For the moment there was only one *Richard II* and that was Shakespeare's neglected History play, almost forgotten until Wroughton's version some twenty years later.²²⁹

²²⁶ Brewer, J. *Pleasures of the Imagination* (Harper Collins, 1997) p. 370.

²²⁷ Sova, D. *Banned Plays: Censorship Histories of 125 Stage Dramas*, p.230.

²²⁸ See R. Cumberland *The Armourer* for the sanitised version of the play.

²²⁹ Odell, G.C.D, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, pp.72-3.

The lack of English operas taking themes not only from Shakespeare, but British history more widely was in essence a product of Larpent, the censor's, conservative approach to exercising his prohibitive powers. It was also reinforced by the view that there was already a national history for the stage, and that was unquestionably Shakespeare's. In the climate of the war decades even the bold figure later coming to define the genre of Shakespearean opera, Frederic Reynolds, was found to be uncharacteristically mute on the subject. His confidence had no doubt been tempered by issues surrounding an almost abortive work *The Bastille* of 1790, which had quickly become *The Crusade* after Larpent caught wind of the idea²³⁰. Any work containing even the semblance of a political message inciting dissidence amongst theatre audiences was thereon to be placed far in the past and preferably one that was anything but British.

In this climate of unrest and civil disorder it was natural, given the great pertinence and sensitivity of the History plays, that musical adaptation was less than appropriate for the bard's serious dramas. Operatizing a Shakespearean tragedy or History play was something that even Reynolds dared not attempt. To apply his highly successful operatic formula to the Bard's comedies was however far more plausible. The products of a prolific partnership with composer Henry Bishop, his works were by no means the first English operas to be staged using Shakespeare's 'comedies' as their subject matter. More than a century previous, Purcell's 'restoration spectacular' *The Fairy-Queen* (1692) took a *Midsummer Night's Dream* as its basis and neglected during its time has since been unearthed as an early masterpiece of Baroque opera²³¹. Garrick's tenure at Drury Lane saw the great Shakespearean of his generation produce two all-sung Operatic adaptations of his own, again with *Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1755, and *The Tempest* a year later.²³² Using a similar dramaturgical template as Purcell, he was careful to preface the latter with a dialogue lauding the virtues of English song in order to stymie any accusations of foreign and Francophile tampering with the works of the national poet.²³³ It was this awareness of an almost inquisitorially pursued critical discourse fusing the aims of patriotic propriety with those of the English dramatic tradition that came to plague all those who sought to bring Shakespeare to the musical stage for the best part of a century. In the 1810s and 20s, when Reynolds came to adapt the bard's comedies his works found no exemption from this scrutiny. Opposed by playhouse purists, Reynolds' Shakespeare operas were at the centre of

²³⁰ Taylor, G. *The French Revolution and the London Stage, 1789-1805* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 42.

²³¹ Curtis Price. "Fairy-Queen, The." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. *Grove Music Online*. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed July 22, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009948>.

²³² Burden, M. Shakespeare & Opera in *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century*, F. Ritchie & P. Sabor Eds. (Cambridge, 2012) p. 214.

²³³ Dobson, *The making of the National Poet*, p.204.

a fierce contest between the expectations of critical arbiters of ‘national taste’ and the realities of the nations’ theatrical consumption.

‘Vilely done’; Frederic Reynolds’ Shakespeare Comedies and the Ruin of National Taste

Posterity has not been kind to Frederic Reynolds. Described variously by critics and historians as a ‘Bastardiser’, ‘mauler’ and ‘degrader’ of Shakespeare’s works²³⁴, his adaptation of the English Bard’s comedies for the operatic stage provided a cornerstone of dramatic and musical production during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Reynolds choice to dramatize the comedies was itself surprising from the outset. From a logistical standpoint the genre of three-act music drama for which Historical operas such as *The Edict of Charlemagne* were suited, were in his words ‘infinitely less laborious in composition ... [and] far more lucrative’²³⁵ than the farces and comedies lampooned by press and censor alike. Nevertheless, the businessman behind the dramatist must have had at least some premonition that with the comedies of the immortal bard himself, this might be a somewhat different matter. Indeed, Reynolds’ who later expressed guilt at his appropriation of Shakespeare’s work for personal gain, was evidently not contrite enough to lose sight of the fact that the nation’s obsession with their poet was too commercially fortuitous to be ignored;

‘When Miller, the bookseller, at the second rehearsal of the piece, gave me one hundred pounds for the copyright of it, and bound himself to pay me another fifty pounds, conditionally, I almost fancied that Shakspeare stood frowning before me, and that I heard him mutter, “Why, you modern dramatist, are you not ashamed to get out of my brains, more money by one play, than the original ever gained by five?” I was ashamed; but I am afraid, for no very considerable length of time; as it will be seen, that very soon afterwards, with the same unblushing impudence, I again began to draw large draughts on the *Stratford-on-Avon Bank*.’²³⁶

He went on to write no less than six Shakespeare operas in the decade following the end of the Napoleonic wars, all of which brought at least some financial success. He never agreed however with his critics in that he had somehow devalued the Bard’s cherished works. In fact his claim was quite the opposite, citing the fact that many of the dramas he went on to

²³⁴ Odell, G.C.D, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, p. 131.

²³⁵ *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds*, p.387.

²³⁶ Reynolds, F. *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds*, p.406.

adapt had been little performed in recent times and were instead enhanced by their musical elements.

‘So many of Shakspeare’s fine comedies having been performed no more than once, in two, or three seasons, and others having been altogether withdrawn from the stage, I thought, as in the instance of the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, that they might be restored to it (with the assistance of a few alterations, and the addition of music,) advantageously to the managers, and without injury to the immortal bard. The introduction too of Shakspeare's own lyrical compositions into these pieces, - as most of them had never been sung on the stage,-gave a most promising appearance to this rich Shakspearean treat. . . Yet, I was censured as an interpolator, and the manager, pronounced a mountebank, because, he allowed Shakspeare’s comedies to be converted into operas. But, as our inspired poet’s partiality for music is so evident (by his introduction of it, not only in the *Midsummer Night’s Dream*, in *As you like it*, and in *The Tempest*, but, in most of his tragic, and comic plays) we may have reason to presume, that since I did not mar the regular disposition of his fable, Shakspeare would have regarded this musical arrangement, this restoration of his sonnets, rather, as an *embellishment* to, than, as a *mutilation* of, his pieces.’²³⁷

The popularity of the operas at the time was evidentially undeniable. All of the works were revived at least once, the *Comedy of Errors* seeing over forty performances in a single run alone. What is equally clear however is the extent to which Reynolds’ adaptations have since been condemned by critical circles; there was even disagreement between the dramatist and subsequent commentators over the longevity of the productions. In the case of *The Tempest* for example, contemporary theatre Historian John Genest recalled only eleven performances in total, whilst the author cited more than thirty in the space of two seasons; theatre playbills from the period would seem to support latter. This erroneous nit-picking was however only the tip of a much larger and more complex critical iceberg. In Genest’s case, his *Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830*, holds Reynolds in particularly low esteem. Of *The Comedy of Errors* he remarks,

‘Reynolds in his advertisement, hopes that his additional scenes will be readily pardoned as being absolutely necessary for the sake of introducing the songs- Reynolds may be assured that the only sentiments which the real friends of Shakespeare can feel towards him are- indignation at his attempt and contempt for the bungling manner in which he has executed it.’²³⁸

²³⁷ Reynolds, F. *Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds*, p. 410

²³⁸ Genest, J. *Some Account of The English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830* (Carrington, 1832)

And with Reynolds' *Merry Wives of Windsor*, in spite of never actually having seen the opera, he was no kinder;

'Shakspeare's play [was] made into an opera by Reynolds – he has not ventured to print it, but a gentleman who was present on the first night assured me that it was vilely done'²³⁹

This sort of conjectural disdain towards operatized Shakespeare typifies the reaction Reynolds found from theatrical critics. Through representing this group in its most virulent form, Genest has ironically managed to perpetuate the reputation of the very productions he hated so much. Nevertheless, the venom directed at *The Merry Wives* was obviously not felt by theatre audiences more widely who continued to watch performances of Reynolds' opera up until the end of the nineteenth century.²⁴⁰ Even the most sceptical of contemporary theatre critics, such as the reporter for *John Bull*, could make the admission the works were at least popular with the theatregoing public.

'no proof can be stronger of the success of the new experiment of harmonising Shakespeare, than the satisfaction expressed by a succession of audiences, at once brilliant and overflowing.'²⁴¹

Genest's personal distaste for Reynolds' handling of Shakespeare was only one facet of an increasingly heated exchange over the justification for and authenticity of operatic reworkings, which in turn came to underline just how important Shakespeare's intellectual property had become for imaginings of the nation more widely. For Genest and other contemporary commentators, the significance of theatre in society had implications of decency and propriety beyond the stage itself and Shakespeare as the national poet was naturally at the forefront of this debate. Fundamental to the critical chorus of disapproval were competing notions of how the bard could be appropriated 'legitimately' by those in the present. And for many, this was certainly not in the form of an opera.

One satirical sketch from the *Theatrical Inquisitor* entitled 'The case of Mr. John Bull set forth by the Covent Garden Physicians', depicts 'Dr. Frederic Reynolds' prescribing an 'abusive pill' for the theatrical ailments of John Bull. However, the final effect of the medication is the total destruction of 'the patient's palate.'²⁴² This metaphor could not be a more emphatic jibe at the propriety of Reynolds work as a dramatist, placing him within a narrative of calculated adulteration. As Genest again relays, it was this matter of

²³⁹ Genest, J. *Some Account of The English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830* (Carrington, 1832) p. 234.

²⁴⁰ Odell, G.C.D, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, p. 140.

²⁴¹ *John Bull*, Issue 9, March 1, 1824.

²⁴² *Theatrical Inquisitor*, May 1815: 6.

jeopardising public taste which provided the undercurrent for all manner of subsequent abuse thrown in his direction.

‘Of all the English dramatic writers who ever existed, Reynolds has done the most towards debauching the public taste – for many years he annually brought out a comedy that was generally successful, but which any respectable dramatist would have been ashamed to own – from the manner in which Reynolds speaks of his pieces, it is evident that he considered success as the criterion of merit – but fortune is fickle – and 5 of his pieces were coolly received – in this reverse of affairs he bethought himself of a noble expedient – this was to turn Shakspeare’s Comedies into Operas – fortune again smiled, and under her encouragement he proceeded, step by step, till on this evening he reached the acme of dramatic infamy by degrading the best Comedy in the English language into an Opera.’²⁴³

The idea that adapting the work of the national bard in such a manner was to undermine the decency of the nation itself was a recurring theme in commentaries upon the operas. One of the central reasons was the fact that opera, even in the peculiarly English form found at Covent Garden was still an essentially foreign affair and as in Garrick’s time, the introduction of foreign ways into the works of the national poet met with stiff resistance. In this matter, Reynolds’ critics were unequivocal. His operas not only defamed the National poet but had tainted the sensibilities of the British public as a result.

As shown in ‘The case of Mr. John Bull’, satire was fundamental to this vein of theatrical condemnation and during the late eighteenth century, traditions of caricature began to grow from the pens of satirists such as James Gillray²⁴⁴ employing the bard which both reflected his status as a fashionable commodity whilst drawing from his literary position as an expression of national sensibility. Shakespeare became the voice through which patriotic pasquinades could be delivered against those who threatened the nation’s moral and political good health.

Shakespeare was not simply a tool in the national struggle against the French politically, but one that could wage war with foreign cultural aesthetics more widely. As early as the 1740s the bard found use as the symbolic figure for artistically concerned mercantile pressure groups such as the Anti-Gallican Society, formed ‘to extend the commerce of England . . . and oppose the insidious Arts of the French nation.’²⁴⁵ As explained above, the national poet and national economy went hand in hand, and where the latter was found to be in danger, the former could be relied on to speak out. The totality of Shakespeare’s image as a figure in opposition to the Gallic threat allowed his very reputation to be questioned in a way readily

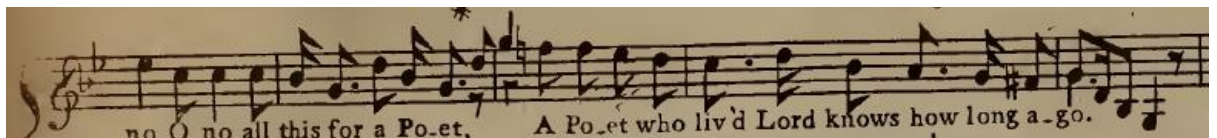
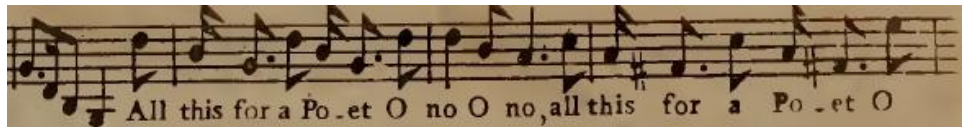
²⁴³ Genest, J. *Some Account of The English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830* (Carrington, 1832) p. 234.

²⁴⁴ Bate, J. *Shakespearean Constitutions* (Oxford) p. 20.

²⁴⁵ Dobson, *The making of the National Poet*, p.200.

interpreted as a contest between British propriety and the influence of depraved foreign cultures. When Garrick produced his famed Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford in 1769, the framing drama included a debate amongst its characters in which one satirical ‘frenchified’²⁴⁶ dandy questions Shakespeare’s importance, berating the bard in song;

Example 3.1



Naturally, the fop is easily rebuffed and Shakespeare’s reputation held intact for the nation. For the opera houses that had long promoted foreign fashions and the ‘effeminate’ practices of aristocratic elites, Shakespeare was more at home poking fun at their continental pretensions than pampering to fleeting foreign tastes. Transforming the indigenous literary stronghold of patriotic Britons into opera, the most reviled of all disreputable indulgences enjoyed by the fashionable clique, was met with the bitterest of responses. It is not difficult to detect the same arguments used to rail against the Italian opera house and its foreign prima Donnas as those found in *John Bull’s* review of Reynolds’ *Tempest*

‘The *Tempest* has been revived at Covent Garden with equivocal success, at which we are not surprised; the system of making Tragedies Operas, and singers actresses, is an absurd one, and only serves to shew how much in the way of combination is required, in these times, to make a house; in this instance, however, the effort has failed, for the audiences have not increased in number at all since this revival, so that getting up *The Tempest*, even with additional airs, has failed “to Raise the Wind”.’²⁴⁷

The dismay clearly felt by the reviewer at the lowly state of taste in his time, is balanced by the gratification shown towards the perceived failure of an otherwise uncongenial and ‘absurd’ form of entertainment. Leigh Hunt too was under no illusion that drama in Britain

²⁴⁶Brewer, J. *Pleasures of the Imagination* (Harper Collins, 1997) p. 412.

²⁴⁷ *John Bull*, Issue 24, May 28, 1821.

was anything but at its lowest ebb, which in many cases was represented foremost by English opera. Like Genest, Hunt pulls few punches where Reynolds is concerned;

‘Upon the whole, it does not seem that the present state of drama will last a great while longer. Mr. Reynolds has already dropped from tragedy to comedy, from comedy to afterpiece, from afterpiece to melo-drama, and I know not at what straw he will catch in his next fall.’²⁴⁸

Some theatre critic’s directly linked this decline in public taste to the role of music itself. After seeing Reynold’s *Twelfth Night*, the reviewer for the *Chronicle* predicted a regrettable operatization of the entire Shakespearean canon

‘Surely this is a Comedy that might be allowed to stand on its own merits . . . without being driven to those aids, the toleration of which either impeaches the judgement of the public, or calls in question the character which our great dramatic bard has so long maintained. Should this inclination for *harmonizing* Shakespeare continue, we must ere long to expect to hear *Hamlet* his philosophical soliloquy in a *cavatina*, and *Lear* vent his passion in a *bravura*.’²⁴⁹

Whilst the critic may have been spared the experience of Thomas’ *Hamlet* or the threat of a Verdian *King Lear*, the concerns that even English language opera could pose a threat to the nature of Shakespeare’s works, was ever present. It does seem however that the dramatist rather than his musical co-conspirator was held largely responsible for this unwholesome theatrical condition. More often than not the composer is praised, if with a note of condescension, for his accomplished efforts. Portrayed as a talented outsider wooed by the Svengali-like figure of the impresario Reynolds, goaded into putting his skills to the task of simultaneously degrading both his own musical art form and that of the English Theatre itself. Of this William Hazlitt was certain, and after seeing Reynolds’ adaptation of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* wrote;

‘The spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled; but the spectacle was fine: it was that which saved the play . . . ye musical composers, ye men in the orchestra, fiddlers and trumpeters and players on the double drum and loud bassoon, rejoice! This is your triumph, it is not ours.’²⁵⁰

The composer hailed by Hazlitt was Sir Henry Bishop. Though little known today, Bishop was the most eminent British composer for much of the first three decades of the nineteenth century, and the first musician ever to receive a knighthood for his services to native musical tradition (an honour not awarded even to Purcell, Arne or Handel). Whilst his compositions

²⁴⁸ Fenner, T. *Leigh Hunt and Opera Criticism: The Examiner Years, 1808-1821* (University of Kansas)p.78.

²⁴⁹ Fenner, T. *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830*, p.453.

²⁵⁰ *The Examiner*, 20 January 1816.

have suffered in the eyes of posterity due to his association with the increasingly unfashionable types of musical theatre so common to early nineteenth century Britain, amongst contemporaries his fame and talents were widely acknowledged. In a lecture given to the London institution in 1858 by the composer and later director of the Royal Academy of Music, William Sterndale Bennett, Bishop was described as:

the truly English composer . . . who sustained the national school of music for upward of a quarter of a century, and who during that time produced about five and thirty original works beside assisting in many others. Bishop's music is so well known to English people that I need not take up your time expatiating upon its merits.²⁵¹

As Bennett emphasises in the lecture notes, aside from the quality of Bishop's music, the sheer quantity of his output was quite exceptional and within this compositional oeuvre, the setting of Shakespearian lyric (often in distilled forms) and sonnets for 'operatised' versions of Shakespeare's plays accounted for a quite sizeable proportion.

That Shakespeare's words permeated the fabric of these 'operas' is undeniable, the musical adaptation was however far from a straightforward reworking of the drama into the libretto for a musical score. Rather, it was a process of cherry-picking text from Shakespeare's wider canon to meet the requirements of an English music-drama. Indeed all of the songs Bishop composed for *The Comedy of Errors* take their lyrics from his verse, the fact however that none actually derive from the title work does however seem a little unusual. In this particular case, its musical numbers take texts from no fewer than eleven different Shakespeare plays in addition to numerous sonnets. This compilation of what amounts to a catalogue consisting of many of the bard's most famous passages did little to abate accusations of Bishop and Reynolds as pillagers rather than sensitive adapters of the former's beloved dramatic material. Leigh Hunt, whose reservations about Shakespeare's play were well known, cared even less for the patchwork nature of Reynolds adaptation;

The original is not an opera, where everything, being to be sung, is made to be sung, and the very discords become concordant. It is a play of endless puzzle and confusion, with characters anything but harmonious . . . [and a plot that has] neither time, nor temper, nor anything, nor anything else, to be dallying with duets and sostenutos.²⁵²

In the case of Reynolds' and Bishop's *Twelfth Night* however, it is interesting that Hunt should have equated suitability for musical adaptation with a play's existing popularity. The use of operatized form was apparently more sanctioned if the work was less treasured.

Twelfth Night, though calculated to be more popular than the *Comedy of Errors* and quite able to stand alone, must also be allowed to be more fitted for the introduction of

²⁵¹ Bennett, W.S. *Lectures on Musical Life*, ed. N. Temperley (Boydell Press, 2006) p. 65.

²⁵² Fenner, T. *Leigh Hunt and Opera Criticism: The Examiner Years, 1808-1821* (University of Kansas) p.118.

songs. In short, with all our criticism and objections, we have been upon the whole much pleased.²⁵³

The *Times*' review of *The Comedy of Errors* makes a similar assertion, explaining that the work was given 'a licence to be treated with greater indulgence; as the play never before kept possession of the stage; and becomes, therefore, a fair subject for experiment.' That Reynolds and Bishop followed this piece with a reworking of the *Tempest*, which was thought 'already sufficiently damaged' by the alterations of Dryden and Davenant²⁵⁴, was unsurprising and when *The Taming of the Shrew* was performed for the first time in eighty years, critics responded with unprecedented approval. This operatic version, concocted by the joint powers of the famed tenor John Braham and composer Thomas Cooke, was received with unsullied praise (and characteristic fickleness) by the critics.

This, indeed, is the first time for we believe 70 years, that its stage qualifications have met with a proper opportunity of being duly appreciated. In the present dearth of good dramatic compositions, it is a matter of surprise that theatrical managers should no oftner have recourse to these productions of our greatest bard . . . when, especially, as has often been the case of late years, his plays and comedies receive the interest of musical additions, their power of attraction cannot, we should conceive, fail to be effective . . . The performance met with a most favourable reception, from a very numerous and highly respectable audience.²⁵⁵

It would seem that finally some critics had begun to appreciate, like audiences, the restorative powers of Reynolds' operatic template for the Shakespearean canon. Whilst Reynolds had shown how to upset the nationally inclined concerns of critical sensibilities most effectively, he also provided a commercially solid formula for other Shakespearean operas in the vernacular. He and his successors did so however in the climate of post-Napoleonic Europe, and more importantly with those plays widely recognised as comedies. That even after these successes, he never did so with a Shakespearean history play or tragedy represented the fact that there were still limits to public taste and a reluctance to defy the sensibilities of Shakespeare's literary guardians.

Henry Bishop and the 'Englishness' of Shakespearean Song

Reynolds' leading detractors, spearheaded by Hunt, Hazlitt and Genest were primarily cultural commentators, with little real musical concern other than that pertaining specifically to the hindrance of their love for the spoken (and written) word. Richard Mackenzie Bacon, the editor and founder of *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, was in many ways their antithesis. Interested primarily in the music of the operas, Bacon became a firm

²⁵³ Examiner, 12 November 1820.

²⁵⁴ Odell, G.C.D, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, p. 137.

²⁵⁵ The Times, May 15, 1828.

champion of Bishop and his Shakespearean collaborations with Reynolds. His attitude toward their output is best seen in the fact that unlike his contemporaries at the *Times* and *Examiner*, he makes little if any mention of Reynolds at all in his reviews. Instead Bacon supports the dramatist in the assertion that musical adaptation could not only augment Shakespeare's dramas but alleviate the state of music more widely,

The musical world, it appears to us, has no reason to be dissatisfied with the direction towards the embellishment of Shakespeare's plays, which has thus been given to Mr. Bishop's genius. Something like a new and better style of writing has been elicited from him. In aiming to produce a species of composition according with the age of the words, their simplicity and strength, he has blended much of the purity and character of the music of an earlier time with the beauty of modern melody, and upon the whole Mr. Bishop has never been so completely successful as in these productions . . . It may truly be averred that no composer for the theatre, since the days of Arne and Linley, has brought forward more original composition of equal excellence.²⁵⁶

Not only does Bacon see the distinction of Bishop's compositional work drawing from the context of Shakespeare's own time but he goes on to articulate, much in opposition to the theatrical critics, an innately native charm imbued within the music of his operas.

Mr. Bishop rarely reaches either the heights or sinks into the depths which it is given to Rossini to explore – but his genius is more in accordance with the equability of English habits of thinking and English affections, informing them, however, with a grace that, as it is not absolutely foreign, is more certainly his own.²⁵⁷

This comparison with Rossini, byword of the aristocratic Italian Opera House, rebukes the unswerving intolerance of literary critics towards the form of opera itself whilst highlighting the necessity of producing works which provided for the national temperament. Attempts to synthesize a Shakespearean plot into conventionally Italian schemata often met with disgruntled opposition. The last time *The Comedy of Errors* had seen any serious attention as the subject of a new stage production had been in the form of the English born composer Stephen Storace's Italian opera *Gli Equivoci*. With a libretto by Da Ponte (Mozart's most illustrious collaborator), the work was an entirely Italian affair set in the 'buffa' tradition. However, after seeing its first production at the Burgtheater in Vienna, the opera was quickly shunned by aristocratic audiences at London's Haymarket for the exact reason that its composer was an English compatriot.²⁵⁸ Even in English opera, where Hunt complained of the artifice involved in grafting songs upon the dramaturgical face of *The Comedy of Errors*, in reality the practical expectations of a Covent Garden composer who catered for the specifically English taste of his audience allowed for nothing else. This primarily stemmed from the need to produce a variation in song style which would provide the musical diversity demanded by London audiences; something in a textual sense *The Comedy*

²⁵⁶ *The Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review*, Jan 1822: 4, p. 80.

²⁵⁷ *The Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review*, Jan 1822: 4, p.83.

²⁵⁸ Platt, R. 'Introduction' in *Gli Equivoci* (Musica Britannica, 2007) p. xxviii.

of *Errors* lacked in its original form. *Twelfth Night*, adapted for Covent Garden by Bishop and Reynolds, was however particularly suited to the collaborators' style of interpolation, as the uncharacteristically forgiving review of Leigh Hunt describes,

The successful introduction of music into the *Comedy of Errors* has given rise to a similar lyrification of this delightful play. It is interspersed with songs, glees and duets, taken from the German and English masters; and Mr. Bishop, besides adapting to the scene with his scientific hand, has added some composition, of which though a high, it is no undeserved praise to say, that a hearer must be nicely acquainted with the varieties of musical style to distinguish it from the rest.²⁵⁹

It is clear that most playgoers did not wish to endure an endless string of Rossinian patter arias, for which some of Shakespeare's works were ideal, but sought the satisfaction of their wider musical needs, the theatre being their central supplier. This necessity also encouraged the inclusion of English folk songs, which though taken from Shakespeare's sonnets and poetic writings, followed popular musical taste more readily than the author's plot.

Regarding this the critics (more interested in dramaturgy than commercial demand) if not his buying-audience, were typically indignant.

Mr. Bishop, the composer to the theatre, has added a few airs, and harmonized several others that before only existed in the simple form of melody; he deserves praise for all that he has done, whether the taste of the selection or the spirit of the composition is considered. The choice of the poetry has been less fortunate, and not a few absurdities have crept in through the medium, which a little care might have avoided. What can be more absurd, for instance, than to put songs into the mouth of an Ephesian that relate solely to English customs or English superstitions?²⁶⁰

How discriminating Bishop actually was in selecting the very best of Shakespearean lyric to display his talents was often questionable, not simply in terms of dramaturgy or taste but straightforward common sense. In the case of *Twelfth Night*, the songs taken from the original play amounted to just two; 'Cesario, by the roses of the spring', sung by Olivia and the Clown's finale 'When that I was a little tiny boy'. As one later critic noted, this scarcity of original verse verged upon the nonsensical.

"True to his ideals, Bishop does not use "Come away, Death," or "O mistress mine," two of the loveliest lyrics in the language—I suppose because they happen to occur in *Twelfth Night!*"²⁶¹

In most cases however, Bishop proved himself an acclaimed selector of the best verse for his musical numbers and not so dissimilar in that respect to the bard so many accused him of pillaging; indeed, Shakespeare's own place as the source of the songs found in his plays is subject to debate. It has been suggested that in many cases, particularly those found in *As*

²⁵⁹ Examiner, 12 November 1820.

²⁶⁰ The Times, (Dec. 13, 1819,) p. 3.

²⁶¹ Wilson, C. *Shakespeare and Music* (1922) p. 155.

You Like It, the lyrics may have been taken from existent popular songs.²⁶² This age-old recycling effect was also the case with the Shakespeare operas; two of Bishop's most enduring compositions for Shakespeare productions, the arias 'Lo here the gentle lark' (*The Comedy of Errors*) and 'Should he Upbraid' (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*), became favourites of leading sopranos and found a continued place in the coloratura repertoire, often interpolated within the operas of others and sung as staple concert pieces.

His [Bishop's] works have found ready way, and particularly of late, into the orchestras of concerts. During last winter . . . a very elegant ballad in the modern style, from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has been repeatedly performed at the first concerts in the metropolis, and since transferred to the provincial meetings. We know of no similar instance. More of his music, we are persuaded, would be done at concerts, were it not for the prohibition the words lay upon them.²⁶³

The lifespan of these songs was clearly intended to outlast the popularity of the stage adaptations for which they were composed. We can be sure however that Bishop and his publisher's intentions were not simply to provide scores for concert orchestras, but to sell piano reductions to the same audiences who already filled their drawing room shelves with Shakespearean dramas. As the above reviewer notes, traditionally the lyric supplied for most theatrical music was given relatively little value, seen mainly as a necessity rather than a key point of collaboration, in some cases hindering the musical enjoyment of a piece. The capital worth of an English operatic text was therefore negligible, as Carl-Maria von Weber's librettist J.R. Planche describes,

It has been a custom of long standing for an author to allow the composer of his opera to publish the words with the music. They were not considered of any value, and in a literary point of view there might, in too many instances, have been some truth in the assertion. Still, without the words, however poor they might be, the music of a new opera could not be published. The fact never appeared to have occurred to any one, or, if it had, no author had thought it worth his while to moot the question.²⁶⁴

In Shakespeare's case however words were far from a restrictive element, as Reynolds rationale for producing the operas had shown, they were the main selling-point. Having been a publisher and music-seller in his youth²⁶⁵, Bishop ensured that all of the music composed for the Shakespeare adaptations (with the exception of *The Tempest*, of which only two numbers were printed) went on to full publication, first in dedicated volumes printed shortly after performance, and later in ad-hoc form within larger collections and compilations.²⁶⁶ Bishop was of course the case-in-point for Herbert Rodwell's later dictum that 'in England, the composer, by being rewarded by the publisher only, must study what will be most likely

²⁶² Lindley, D. *Shakespeare and Music*, (Arden, 2006) p.198.

²⁶³ Bacon, *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 1 (1818).

²⁶⁴ Planche, *Recollections and Reflections*, p.106

²⁶⁵ Humphries & Smith, *Music Publishing in the British Isles* (Blackwell, 1970) p. 333.

²⁶⁶ Nicholas Temperley and Bruce Carr. "Bishop, Sir Henry R.," *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed June 26, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40027>.

to sell' and in Late-Georgian Britain Shakespeare was always a name ready to be sold.²⁶⁷

The effect of this more considered inclusion of the lyric had more profound effects upon the artistic direction of English song than its commercial viability however. It was the manner in which Bishop set the songs to music which presented the most interesting case in point for those critics who saw the development of a new, revived manner of English song facilitated by the anglicising effects of the national poet. Taking the example of the Clown's Epilogue from *Twelfth Night* finale 'When that I was a little tiny boy'. Bishop's scoring for the number, with its stormy minor key and staccato figure found in the woodwind at once reflects the subject of the lyric whilst clearly finding inspiration from the more delicate aspects of contemporary Italian technique, notably those found in Rossini (compare for example to the 'storm' intermezzo from *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*). It achieves this compositional sophistication whilst most importantly still managing to maintain a declamatory vocal line which both suits Shakespeare's text and the less-florid English vernacular style of singing. The overall result of this new 'Shakespearean' style of song pioneered by Bishop extended beyond the limits of the Shakespeare operas themselves. Critics saw in those works which followed not only an increasing attention given to episodes of English history and folklore neglected during the long war with France, but a novel approach to the types of 'national' song employed within them. Bacon's *Musical Quarterly* was quick to highlight this particular convergence of musico-historical tropes in Bishop and Planche's, *Maid Marian; or the Huntress of Arlingford* of 1822.

The revival of several of Shakespeare's plays, and the introduction of music, we have already remarked appears to have turned Mr. Bishop's attention strongly to the compositions of an early age, and if not the absolute and sole directing cause of his forming and correspondent style, has yet given a more visible and durable form to his adoption of an English manner of writing, if there be such a thing as originality in English composition. We were called upon to demonstrate the characteristics, we should say it is a style formed on the madrigalists and the early dramatic writers; that it is more syllabic in melody than melismatic; more compact, more vigorous, than the compositions of our own time, and indeed of any time since Arne. . . Mr. Bishop in his adaptations to Shakespeare, and in this piece at least, has left the Italians pretty much out of his view, and with a classical propriety has turned to Matthew Lock and Purcell, and the madrigalists, as presenting the national objects – not of direct imitation – but of remembrance and regard, and this, as we esteem it, is the exercise of a sound judgement and of good taste.²⁶⁸

Whilst the critic makes the usual self-deprecatory asides regarding originality in English composition, he emphasises the possibility of a traditional national style, and one based around the English vernacular in both a descriptive and a practical sense. He goes on to describe one aria as 'perfectly English . . . for it is vigorous and tense in its phrases, simple in its harmonies and modulation, with such passages as our soundest composers used – yet fresh withal, and bracing and playful as the breeze from the element concerning which it

²⁶⁷ Herbert Rodwell, *A Letter to the Musicians of Great Britain* (London, 1833), 6.

²⁶⁸ *The Quarterly musical magazine and review*; Jan 1823; 5, pp.91-3.

descants.’ This musicological analysis describing Bishop’s rejection of the verbose vowel sounds found in Italian melisma in favour of a melodic declamation more suited to his native tongue was a thinly veiled metaphor for the growing confidence in a national style which resulted from Bishop’s works more widely. Whilst in many cases the style present in the Shakespeare operas was compositionally ‘native’, in others it could also be said that this was more a matter of literary perception than musical reality. Aforementioned soprano arias such as ‘Lo! here the Gentle Lark’ have since gained such diverse exponents as Joan Sutherland, Jean-Pierre Rampal and Miss Piggy, variously championed or parodied more for their opulent melodies and one must say unmistakably Italianate-coloratura grandiloquence than any Shakespearean Englishness.

Example 3.2



Nevertheless, the fact that British contemporaries saw these compositions as part of a tradition belonging to the musicians of their own country reveals the gradual change in national psyche beginning to take place in the decades after the Napoleonic wars, setting the foundations for those who would later extol a native musical ‘renaissance’. Billed as a ‘Legendary Opera’, *Maid Marian* with its plot centred around the tale of Robin Hood no doubt gave many the idea that that Britain was coming closer to its own ‘English’ form of opera both in compositional and textual terms. The *Musical Quarterly* for one entreated Bishop to lead the way in a national operatic enterprise.

Why does not Mr. Bishop endeavour to prevail on his principal in the National Airs to join him [Planche] in a regular opera? It would be an experiment upon national taste, well worth their combined powers, and might afford them the glory of completing what Arne began, but what his age was not sufficiently ripe to receive and establish.²⁶⁹

In spite of this call to musical arms, Bishop did not respond with the national opera Bacon and his fellow music critics longed for. It was only with the following generation that they

²⁶⁹ The Quarterly musical magazine and review; Jan 1823; 5, p. 93.

would find composers such as Balfe and Macfarren who were willing to try their own hand at a fully-sung English alternative to Italian opera, the latter producing his own three-act opera of *Robin Hood* in 1860. Nevertheless, Bishop's Shakespearean songs, which as dramaturgical elements had seen such derision by the theatrical press, had in reality contributed to a widely popular trend in popular demand. They opened up the possibility that the English language's rich literary heritage could assist in reviving what was seen by many as a nationally waning musical tradition. *Maid Marian's* librettist Planche on the other hand would go on to create many of the century's most lavishly historical Shakespearean productions (in addition to writing the libretti for a great many operas). Whilst these history plays were not operas or music-dramas in themselves, the treatment by Planche and his contemporaries attempted to attain a level of sensual verisimilitude which in many ways drew from the operatic form of spectacle and grandeur. This often included the permeation of such works by musical anthems, which through their performance within metaphorically powerful theatrical situations told their own narrative of the state of the British nation.

English Past, British Present: Shakespeare's History Plays and the Soundtrack to Late-Georgian Patriotism

Like most plays of the period, the use of 'incidental' music in early nineteenth century Shakespeare productions was quite commonplace. Composers had been providing musical accompaniments to Shakespeare's works since the time of the bard himself, and in a tradition stretching as far back as ancient Greek drama. Following the Restoration, the impresario Sir William Davenant began to reintroduce Shakespeare to English audiences, but with the Lord Chamberlain's caveat that they should somehow be 'reformed'.²⁷⁰ This prompted a number of highly successful musical productions, notably *The Tempest* of 1673, and Matthew Locke's series of airs and dances for *Macbeth*, becoming integral to stagings of the Scottish play for the next two centuries.²⁷¹ By the time of Bishop's Shakespeare operas, the serious application of a composer's faculties to the production of incidental music had been confirmed by the works of German musicians creating musical backdrops for their own national dramas. Beethoven's incidental music to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Egmont* and Joseph Heinrich von Collin's *Coriolan*, though written for specific theatrical performances have since become staples of the concert-hall repertory, providing a prototype for the descriptive symphonic poems of later romanticism. With a literary giant of Shakespeare's stature, English composers were surprisingly reluctant to set the national poet

²⁷⁰ Christopher R. Wilson, et al. "Shakespeare, William." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed July 16, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25567>.

²⁷¹ R. Fiske: 'The *Macbeth* Music', *ML*, xlv (1964), 114–25

to their own incidental scoring. The most famous Shakespearean incidental music of the period was in fact that of a foreigner, and a German one at that. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1826) Felix Mendelssohn, still a teenager when composing the overture, managed to create possibly the most enduring piece of Shakespeare's musical legacy to date. In Britain however, the music most commonly provided for London productions of Shakespeare seem on the whole to have overlooked the new symphonic approach to descriptive, subject specific theatrical music. Instead, the growing pageantry associated with historically 'accurate' productions looked to the existing national-patriotic musical idiom as the source for their tonal scenery.

In celebration of George IV's accession, spring of 1821 saw Kemble's Covent Garden production of *Henry IV* part II. This included an extensively choreographed coronation scene, designed with the most rigorous verisimilitude in mind. The periodical *John Bull* reviewed the procession;

'A more splendid pageant never graced a Theatre; it reflects the highest credit on the proprietors for their liberality, and on those to whose particular care the arrangement of the processions has been confided.'²⁷²

Central to the spectacle was its musical backdrop; playbills for this particular occasion detail a performance of 'The Coronation Anthem', to 'be sung by all the Principal Performers of the Theatre, assisted by a Numerous Choir'. Whilst the lack of information found on Playbills for the performances precludes absolute certainty, we can assume that this was composed by George IV's favourite, Thomas Attwood. The fact that Attwood (organist to the King), was tasked with producing a new work for his patron George IV's coronation the very same year²⁷³, strongly suggests that it was his anthem and not simply the usual Handelian fare alone that was performed. Attwood's *I was Glad*, with its fanfares and melodic quotation of 'God Save the King' drew principally from the theatrical mode of composition; its inclusion within the opulent scenes one finds described in printed versions of the play, was therefore quite natural²⁷⁴. The unmistakable ritualistic parallels Covent Garden thus sought to portray with the use of patriotic music was strictly in keeping with the conservative, monarchist stance held by the patent theatre under the Kemble family's management. For their purposes, music played a role of formalistic conformity. Though entirely anachronistic, an anthem such as *I was Glad* could, when compounded with patriotic imaginings of its 'historical' Shakespearean subject matter, serve to form an ultra-nationalistic cultural expression of quintessential 'Britishness'. Most importantly for the

²⁷² Odell, G.C.D, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving*, p. 169.

²⁷³ Nicholas Temperley. "Attwood, Thomas." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/01484>.

²⁷⁴ W.J. Gatens: 'Thomas Attwood (1765–1838), forefather of Victorian Cathedral Music', *Victorian Cathedral Music in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, 1986) pp. 98-9.

Kembles however, was the fact that this kind of densely orchestrated ritual drew in the crowds. For the thousands of theatregoers who might not have had the opportunity to witness such a spectacle in the surroundings of Westminster Abbey, Covent Garden's auditorium provided an arena in which the same messages could be imparted, wrapped in its own ecstatic, sensual treatment of the national past.

The inclusion of Handel's music was equally important as a kind of stock programme for Shakespearean pageantry; present in Kemble's *Henry IV*²⁷⁵, it was a powerful allusion not only to coronation proceedings, but a body of works from a composer who himself represented a somewhat peculiar figure of Britishness. Although a naturalized British citizen, Handel's music came to symbolise the royal household more than any composer before or since. Imported by George I from his native Hanover as the new monarch's Kapellmeister, Handel's eminence cemented in his lifetime by the enormity of both his character and talents, was continued if not superseded by the dedication to his works fostered during the following half-century.²⁷⁶ The Handel festivals which began in 1784 would become ever more magnificent throughout the following decade. In 1791, the celebrations even received royal patronage and the grandest of all venues in the form of Westminster Abbey.²⁷⁷ Presided over by George III himself, these events, whose performers numbered the thousands and congregations greater still, equated to something of a national celebration and Handel the German-born composer became a British 'institution'²⁷⁸. Whilst Handel never composed any Shakespearean Music himself,²⁷⁹ within the context of *Henry IV*, his music like other anthems placed the present ceremonial of British Kingship within the English past. There was no more potent symbol of the Hanoverian dynasty's direct influence upon the course of British art in the later eighteenth century than its patronage of Handel, and to have one of their distant monarchical ancestors processing to the very music composed specifically to exalt their own modern kingship was a powerful reminder of their historical legitimacy.

Where Bishop had been hailed as the bringer of a new, traditional style of English composition in his Shakespeare operas, they were after all comedies, and ones that had little to do with a specifically English setting at that. The music which had become associated with legitimate Shakespeare productions was of a specifically British age, and yet whilst finding itself deeply set within Shakespeare's English past managed to project messages of British modernity in the present. The Handelian themes and anthems of a coronation scene

²⁷⁵ Examiner, July 1, 1821.

²⁷⁶ Brewer, J. *Pleasures of the Imagination* (Harper Collins, 1997) pp. 404-5

²⁷⁷ H.C. Robbins Landon, 'Music' in *Cambridge Guide to the arts in Britain*, pp.231-3.

²⁷⁸ G.B Shaw

²⁷⁹ Cudworth, C 'Settings of Shakespeare's Lyrics, 1660-1960.' in *Shakespeare in Music* P. Hartnoll ed. (Macmillan, 1964) p. 65.

bore no resemblance to the rituals of ancient English Kingship, and certainly had nothing in common with the insular values of Shakespeare's Elizabethan England. They were absolute symbols of Hanoverian Monarchy and British Union, composed for and championed by George III. Included in national festivals, fetes and coronations alike, their fusion within Shakespeare's historical setting, was a statement of legitimacy for the Royal household. For the theatre proprietors who included them within Shakespeare productions, they were clear signs of their own loyalty to the benefactors of their Royal patents. This cross-fertilization between the ceremonies of the playhouse and those of state was in part, as many theatre historians are keen to point out, the result of a wider theatricalization of society ('King John' Kemble's proprietorship of Covent Garden was often likened to that of an absolutist tyrant)²⁸⁰. Equally, it was an alarming reminder of how surreptitiously the values of monarchy and its British national agenda had managed to infiltrate the formerly questioning medium of theatre, which now looked to commercial potential as its *raison d'être*.

In this sense, historians such as Linda Colley may be justified in arguing that Shakespeare's representation within a 'British' national culture of late Georgian Britain, 'remained variable, sporadic, and at the mercy of local and private interest groups'.²⁸¹ What should also be acknowledged is that theatrically speaking this representation became invariably, if not uniformly, one operating within a discourse of nation and more often than not that nation was indisputably British. In the case of London playhouses, the bard's image was closely allied to wider notions of Britishness, both in how his works were presented and in turn received. For managements of the Patent theatres their position as legitimate institutions not only depended on the production of Shakespeare, but allowed them to use their exclusive rights to his work in its appropriation for their own agendas, political and financial. Whilst the years of war with France and its censorial influence had managed to all but silence tampering with the national poet, the decade and a half of peace which followed opened up a new arena of contention surrounding the increasing number of new ways that Shakespeare could be produced. This fiercely fought over theatrical terrain saw its combatants more often than not employing the language of nation as their weapon of choice. Whether in the case of the patriotic pageantry found in the historical productions of the early 1820s or the affront to national taste many accused Frederic Reynolds' operas of having perpetrated, the articulation of opinions and ideas surrounding Shakespeare were never far from those involving the state of the British nation itself.

²⁸⁰ Baer, M. *Theatre and Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford, 1992) pp.10-12.

²⁸¹ Colley, L. *Shakespeare and the Limits of National Culture* in the Hayes Robinson Lecture Series No. 2 (1999) p.18.

Native Operas and Foreign Sources: A Crisis of Genre

The following chapter examines those works composed by Sir Henry Bishop during the years leading up to his departure from Covent Garden Theatre. Though the early 1820s marked the height of his powers and popularity, by the end of the decade Bishop was increasingly dismissed as a creative talent and left sorely regretting the move to Drury Lane that had in many ways signalled the beginning of the end for his career as Britain's most eminent theatrical composer. Using the operas and music dramas of Bishop as a focal point, I will examine how the adaptation of foreign operas and introduction foreign compositions and styles to original English texts, made continental music previously thought too intellectual or elitist for the audiences of the patent theatres, the mainstream affair that in subsequent decades allowed them to palate Italian and German compositions in their original form. Where historically, English audiences of these decades have been stereotyped as unsophisticated and unappreciative listeners, by looking at the methods Bishop and his collaborators used to construct his English Operas, I will delineate a more nuanced state of affairs, in which prejudices towards the seemingly alien dramaturgical framework of Opera were broken down both by genre and ultimately to the demise of English Opera itself.

The result of Bishop's final years as House composer at Covent Garden represented a breaking point for the much maligned tradition of English Opera. Increasingly drawn into borrowing from and adapting continental operas for the London stage, Bishop and his literary collaborators went from bearing the brunt of accusations branding them as bastardizers of the national drama to gaining a reputation as poor imitators of their foreign operatic counterparts, themselves becoming ever more consumed in their original form.²⁸² By 1824, changing proprietorship and a number of pay disputes with the management caused Bishop to leave Covent Garden for its patentee neighbour and direct competitor, Drury Lane. The arrival of Carl Maria von Weber's music in London and resultant pressure from his new theatrical overlords soon pushed Bishop in the direction of German dramaturgical models, with disastrous effects for the latter's career. His opera of Aladdin,

²⁸² Fuhrmann, C, *'Adapted And Arranged For The English Stage': Continental Operas Transformed For The London Theatre, 1814-33* Phd. Diss. (Washington University, 2001).

produced at Drury Lane in April of 1825 was a fiasco.²⁸³ Commissioned to claim box office receipts back from Weber's new work *Oberon* at Covent Garden, Bishop found his talent for musical set-pieces quickly overstretched in his attempt at a more musically dominant composition, unable to compete with the ascendant celebrity of Weber and his melodramatic development of the German singspiel. The widespread effect of *Der Freischutz* upon the theatregoing inclinations of the London public was, as Christina Fuhrmann explores so exhaustively in her research into its adaptation, inestimable.²⁸⁴ The sensation of this musical cause celebre, with its supernatural effects and heightened melodrama, was both long lasting and central to Weber's subsequent reputation, ultimately eclipsing any of his works either preceding or following it. How this represented a distinct turning point in terms of English musical taste however, is less obvious.

The many years Bishop had spent interpolating continental music had laid all of the groundwork for the following decades in which fidelity to original scores grew in importance. Though adaptations of *Der Freischutz* may have whetted the taste for the fantastic and macabre, by no means did they change musical predilections in England overnight. Indeed, it was almost twenty three years to the day before Madame Vestris at Covent Garden managed to replace Bishop's 1819 adaptation of *Le Nozze de Figaro* with an English vernacular version of the opera in which Mozart's music remained unadulterated.²⁸⁵ Equally, many of the elements that made English operas significantly different from their foreign cousins were being reduced even before the advent of Weber. The predominance of the all-spoken male role had already been diminished prior to adaptations of *Der Freischutz*, in both *The Huntress of Arlingford* and *Native Land*, with principal male characters singing in both.²⁸⁶ The scores of these works were seen as owing to a mixture of self-plagiarism and foreign imitation. What manifested as widespread bemoaning of Bishop's loss of a personally idiosyncratic musical signature²⁸⁷ was instead a greater service to the operatic consumption of the London public than first obvious. What many saw as the loss of a potentially groundbreaking English composer to a pursuit of imitation, was in fact instrumental in familiarising the public outside of the King's Theatre with many of the greatest operatic talents then known, from Mozart to Rossini, without exhausting their tolerance for foreign tastes.

²⁸³ Northcott, R. *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920) p. 81.

²⁸⁴ Fuhrmann, C. 'Continental Opera Englished, English Opera Continentalized: *Der Freischutz* in London, 1824', *Nineteenth-century Music review* (2004).

²⁸⁵ Beard, H. 'Figaro in England; Productions of Mozart's opera, and the early adaptations of it in England before 1850' in *Maske Und Kothurn: Vierteljahrsschrift fur Theaterwissenschaft* (Herman Bohlaus Nachf., 1964) p. 512.

²⁸⁶ See Larpent Collection, *Huntress of Arlingford & Native Land*.

²⁸⁷ Bunn, Alfred. *The Stage: Both before and behind the Curtain* (London, 1840). 3:7.

The years leading up to Bishop's ill-fated move to Drury Lane were amongst his most productive.²⁸⁸ Where he was free to pick and choose numbers for an original English libretto, the results were perhaps closest to a truly English framework of musical-theatre seen since John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* of almost a century previous. The proportion of musical content found in these dramas, came closest to conventional understandings of opera, whilst not inhibiting the vital importance and complexity of spoken dialogue, avoiding the same sort of plot reduction found in most continental operas. If critics were rarely amused by Bishop's integrating of Italian opera, the extent to which the English theatregoing public more generally took this view was far more limited. Amongst many, not just those with an agenda pitting good English decency against the degeneracy of Italianate and Francophile aristocratic tendency, a sense of pride and self-affirming idiosyncrasy manifested in a robust defence of the native music drama against those who said otherwise. In one letter to the editor of the *Quarterly Musical Magazine* of September 1826, the writer, under the provocative penname 'UN GIOVANE', described the unfavourable reception his argument for the superiority of French Opera over the English was met with at one social event.

'This declaration, which I really thought would be implicitly received, produced a burst of indignation, which was followed by a contemptuous laugh. Imagine, Sir, my surprise . . . I was obliged to give up the point, and listen to a string of sentiments about "Love of country," "Native genius," "True British feeling," &c. All brought up in a clap trap which would have done honour to the school of the Dibdins.'²⁸⁹

Though receiving the sympathy of Bacon, the Magazine's editor, in the matter, the water separating the magazine's (largely musical amateur) readership from the tastes of the wider British public indicated, alongside box-office receipts, the fact that the English were still by the mid-1820s, largely content with the native musico-dramatic idiom performed on the London stage. The past misinterpretation of this genre, accusing London audiences of musical primitivism, is far from the reality as found in the the musical content of those operas given by Bishop to the socially heterogeneous audiences of Covent Garden.

In these years, Bishop proved himself as a (rather successful) mediator between the British public and foreign musical forms. This was largely due to the fact that he could do so in a peculiarly British manner, that is, he well understood the conventions of the British theatre and where and when to push its limits, or conversely, follow its strictures rigorously. Bishop also managed, with the assistance of his playwright collaborators to operatize themes and subtexts previously unseen in continental works, inherited more from the realm of English

²⁸⁸ Corder, F. 'The Works of Sir Henry Bishop', *Musical Quarterly* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan. 1918).

²⁸⁹ 'Opera - to the Editor' *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 1822, cited in M Burden Ed. *London Opera Observed, 1711-1844: Volume 5* (Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

spoken drama. In addition to adapting a number of foreign operas such as *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* for their English-language London premieres, the original English operas he produced not only number amongst his best, but also saw an increasing synthesis of music and drama both owing to the borrowing from and influence of Italian models. His final ‘opera’ for Covent Garden, *Native land; or the Return from Slavery* of 1824, heavily appropriated from then popular composers such as Rossini, Boieldieu and Zingarelli²⁹⁰, and rather than ‘Englishing’ the overall composition where possible, as had been the case with Mozart’s operas, took the bel-canto of Rossini’s opera-serie, and transformed them into an altogether more native affair; English musical-comedy.

Musical Distillations for English Consumers: A Matter of Taste

Knowing that high-blown metastasian drama was not what London audiences expected from English opera, *Native Land* presented the opportunity to take the musical elements found in opera seria and introduce them to the English public as light hearted comedy. Set in the same medieval habitat as Rossini’s *Tancredi* of a decade previous, Bishop’s collaborator, William Dimond, transferred the focus of the plot not simply from Syracuse to Genoa, but, in spite of the claims made by some scholars (including Bishop’s biographers) away from Rossini’s narrative altogether.²⁹¹ Apart from the fact that one of the characters happens to be Tancredi, little else of the dramatic action resembles anything found in Rossini. The story, which at face value amounts to a mixture of perennial buffa characters and plot types, exotic disguises and scheming guardians, is fundamentally derived from the comedies of the mid eighteenth century London playhouse, notably those by David Garrick.

Whilst *Tancredi* had been a popular choice for Bishop’s past borrowings, its musical presence in *Native Land* was surprisingly barren. None of the compositions in Bishop’s work appear to be taken from the opera. This was a common pattern in the production of English opera in the 1810s and early 1820s, which saw the extensive appropriation of Rossini’s music for all variety of seemingly incoherent texts. The composer even substituted Mozart’s now canonical ending to *Le Nozze di Figaro* for *Tancredi*’s finale ‘Fra quai soavi palpiti’²⁹², over a year before the English premiere of Rossini’s opera in its entirety at the King’s Theatre²⁹³. Such inclusions undoubtedly dissuaded further use of already exhausted

²⁹⁰ Bishop, H. *Native Land or Return From Slavery: Opera in three acts* (Goulding & D’Almaine, 1824).

²⁹¹ Dimond, W. *Native Land or the Return from Slavery* (London, 1824).

²⁹² Fuhrmann, C, ‘*Adapted And Arranged For The English Stage*’: *Continental Operas Transformed For The London Theatre, 1814-33* Phd. Diss. (Washington University, 2001).pp. 264-5.

²⁹³ Hall-Witt, J.W. *Fashionable acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).p. 55.

pieces from the opera such as the favoured “Di tanti palpiti,” then all the rage in fashionable theatre programmes.²⁹⁴ *Native Land* did however owe almost a quarter of its music to Rossini’s wider catalogue, including recent favourites such as “Riedi al Soglio” (adapted to the words ‘Hours of Sorrow’), a bravura piece for soprano, and the entire overture to *Matilde di Shabran*, a typically sparkling if lengthy example of the Italian’s middle-period work. This inclusion of what was for many London theatre audiences, a taxing piece of symphonic writing, became ever more common in the English operas Bishop composed following his adaptations of Mozart’s *Figaro* and Rossini’s *Barbiere*, also borrowing the majority of melodic content for his overture to *The Huntress of Arlingford* from *La Cenerentola*²⁹⁵. This determination to include the most spectacular examples of Rossini’s work, whilst being ever mindful of the expectations and limitations of London audiences and performers, can no doubt have had a beneficial effect, even if through attrition alone, in attuning the ears of the London public to the latest in Italian operatic composition. Though at the time, his detractors saw little of merit in his work, Bishop managed to look back upon the period more positively.

‘By some I have been censured for introducing into our theatres operas by Rossini and Mozart, but my sole object in doing so was to improve national taste for opera by rendering English audiences more familiar with dramatic music . . . I venture to believe that all persons who judge with candour will do me the justice to admit that my exertions at least led the way to a proper appreciation in the public for music of a more intellectual kind.’²⁹⁶

Whilst the effect of Bishop’s inclusion of the then masters of contemporary opera may have been seen more favourably by posterity, its more nuanced effect upon Bishop’s own compositions has been less acknowledged. Indeed, even where Rossini was not appropriated directly his style managed to rub off upon Bishop who looked to the structure of the Italian Overture as the template for his own. The lengthy largo passages that characterise the exposition of many overtures composed by Rossini and his contemporaries are also detectable in those produced by Bishop during the early 1820s. As a reviewer of his 1823 opera *Cortez, or The Conquest of Mexico* noted,

‘The slow opening of the overture shews the master; the rest of it, an *allegro molto*, is prodigal of physical sound, but very sparing of musical effect; the first part is addressed to the people of taste, the second to people in the galleries.’²⁹⁷

Though the overture had in the critic’s opinion fallen short of its Rossinian prototype, the fact that Bishop was managing to integrate a more sophisticated compositional structure

²⁹⁴ Parke, W.T. *Musical Memoirs*, (London, 1830) p. 149.

²⁹⁵ *The Harmonicon*, (Feb, 1823) p.24.

²⁹⁶ Northcott, R. *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920) p. 33.

²⁹⁷ *The Harmonicon* (1824) p. 5.

whilst not deviating from the conventions of English opera, represented an increasing permeation by more challenging musical forms within what was widely perceived as an ostensibly anti-intellectual genre. By the end of the decade, the structure of his overtures was practically indistinguishable from those by Rossini. Take his *Yelva* (1829), which shows the clear influence of Rossini's *Guglielmo Tell*, (an opera Bishop had adapted for the English stage a few years earlier); with six distinct motivic sections, it climaxes in an animated tutti, *piu moto*.²⁹⁸

In many ways the success of Bishop's integration of continental music has irrevocably damaged his own reputation as a composer of original works, which included for every *Yelva*, perhaps a dozen seemingly trivial songs, ballads and glees. For a long period of time, it has been assumed that this inconsistency was largely due to English musical primitivism. That is, a desire by the London public to restrict Bishop's evident talents to a shadow of their potential. We should however be a little more sceptical of this notion. The fact that many of Bishop's original compositions fall into the simplistic, strophic song types more closely associated with the music hall than the opera house, has in many ways been misinterpreted as an indication of this narrow and unsophisticated musical taste without taking into proper consideration the more precarious financial situation of the house composer. Between 1809 and 1824, Bishop's salary at Covent Garden had risen from a meagre £1.5 a week to £9, a still paltry amount compared to the £20 a week Drury Lane offered him the same year.²⁹⁹ Given that he could earn anywhere between £40 and £1000 for the copyright of one of his scores alone³⁰⁰, the dependency of the composer upon producing work suitable for publication, was central to his output.

'I assure you that simplicity has been the principal study: not only in the melody and harmony, but also in the arrangements of the parts . . . there is no part of the accompaniment of this work that is not perfectly within the ability of any tolerable amateur of the present day . . . In the accompaniments . . . you will perceive I have constantly retained the melody, so as to render them fit for the pianoforte even without voice.'³⁰¹

Always mindful of the dilettante, his own compositions were targeted at the middle class consumers of sheet music who possessed pianofortes, their simplicity fundamentally a commercial ploy pandering to the musical limitations of the amateur, rather than, as is often assumed, the rudimentary tastes of the British audiences who in fact also lapped up much of

²⁹⁸ Manuscript score as reproduced in *The Overture in England, 1800-1840* N. Temperley, M. Greenbaum. (Garland, 1984).

²⁹⁹ Nelson & Cross, *Drury Lane Journal: Selections from James Winston's Diaries 1819-1827* (London, 1974) p. 98.

³⁰⁰ Fuhrmann, C, '*Adapted And Arranged For The English Stage*': *Continental Operas Transformed For The London Theatre, 1814-33* Phd. Diss. (Washington University, 2001).p. 73.

³⁰¹ Northcott, R. *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920) p. 38.

the Italianate music performed at Covent Garden. For Bishop as arranger and adapter, it was a careful balancing act between original and borrowed work, which in some cases meant that his own music became sorely outweighed by the inclusion of Rossini's. By the time of his adaptation of *La Gazza Ladra, Ninetta* (1830), the management of Covent Garden saw it fit, after having Bishop rearrange the whole opera, only to include Rossini's music in the production, thus eliminating any chance of publication,

'From what source did I hope that my sacrifice of time and labour and money would be in any way returned to me? Why, from that source which by the arrangements of yesterday . . . is now entirely cut off from me! I mean the profit likely to accrue from my own music in that opera. That music is now taken away, and the chance of its profit to me destroyed.'³⁰²

If the English were not well accustomed to continental styles in the first decades of the century, by the mid 1820s, Bishop had made its more complex musical language essential. His operas, increasingly packed full of compositions taken from Italian contemporaries (those from which he gained no print royalties at all), displayed the widening gulf between what theatre audiences demanded and what was practicable for the theatrical composer as a publication-dependent profession. In some cases Bishop was even unfortunate enough to compose his own ensembles thought too sophisticated for reduction and publication, as one reviewer of *Cortez, or The Conquest of Mexico* (1823) lamented,

'two or three of the best [compositions] are not published. One of the finales which is very striking on stage, is among the latter: this is too long and too complicated for private use, and could not, with any chance of sale, have been printed.'³⁰³

The dilemma Bishop faced pitted the production of music suitable for commercial reproduction against that which was meant to advance the technical demands placed on theatre orchestras. Nowhere is this problem seen more clearly than in the scores of his later operas. Where critics may have seen an erratic talent, at times producing near sublime original music, others complacently snatching the work of others, or worse still pandering to the lowest tastes, it is clear that Bishop's position was far more complex. His duties were hopelessly conflicted; to the audiences who through his perseverance were ever more ready to digest increasingly sophisticated foreign-influenced theatrical music, and to himself, whose livelihood depended on the catchy, un-erudite tunes, which lived on in the Victorian parlours, forever associated, to detrimental effect, with his reputation as a serious composer. Nevertheless, his real legacy was in laying the groundwork for a new appreciation of the

³⁰² Bishop to George Bartley, 27 January 1830, quoted in Northcott, *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920)p. 84.

³⁰³ *The Harmonicon*, Jan, 1824, p. 6.

latest in continental opera which, far from being too sophisticated for English audiences, was in fact relished.

Exorcising Continental practices in English Opera

The audiences who heard these arias, ensembles and overtures were far from simply the aristocratic attendees and well-to-do-middle classes of the King's theatre. The diversity of Covent Garden's west-end crowd meant that all manner of peoples from the petty bourgeoisie residing in the pit, to the servants and ruffians in the galley, were exposed to much of the same level of musical content as their fashionable counterparts at the Italian opera. As Bishop himself noted,

'people might now have had frequent opportunities of listening to the various combinations of harmony which may be displayed in vocal part music . . . or more particularly those concerted pieces and choruses in which the exertion of a composer's ingenuity, added to a considerable share of musical science, is indispensable. Could not people have heard all this class of composition before? Yes. But where? Only in the concert-room, or at private parties, or at the Italian Opera.'³⁰⁴

Whilst Bishop had in many ways democratised musical consumption by bringing more sophisticated techniques to the patent houses, this was only half of the task in hand. His role as an elevator, mediator and facilitator of national musical taste was only made possible by a detachment of the music of Rossini and the Italian school from the more unsavoury traditions of the Italian operatic genre. Bishop's ability to successfully introduce Rossini's music, which through long-held prejudices might otherwise have been branded too highbrow, unnatural or effeminate, was dependent on collaboration with authors who eliminated and even subverted the elements of Italian opera that were most problematic for most London audiences.

Foremost in this task was the retention of spoken dialogue as the main form of action. When dramatic sections were too deeply embedded in music, audiences quickly became restless, as J.R. Planche recalled, 'a dramatic situation in music was 'caviare to the general,' and inevitably received with cries of 'cut it short!' from the gallery, and obstinate coughing or other significant signs of impatience from the pit.'³⁰⁵ Even worse than this was secco recitative which was seen as the most irrational of operatic malformations. The concept of

³⁰⁴ Northcott, R. *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920) p. 11.

³⁰⁵ Planche, J.R. *Recollections and Reflections: A Professional Autobiography* (London, 1901) p. 55.

characters singing unaccompanied sections of dialogue, that might more easily and sensibly be spoken was not a possibility often entertained by the audiences of the patent theatres.

‘John Bull is still too contemplative . . . to enter without some previous argument into the full enjoyment of unmixed musical drama. For though he can allow a character to sing a song every now and then, no matter in what situation, he will yet perhaps think it absolutely out of nature, that all the business of life should be conducted in musical phrases.’³⁰⁶

Almost all composers of the genre up until Balfe in the 1840s kept to this mantra. Since Arne’s *Artaxerxes* in 1762, only a handful of all sung English operas had been composed, most of which were failures.³⁰⁷ Even the most talented native composers of the day who studiously anglicized recitative passages, could not convince English audiences of their inclusion; Storace’s *Dido* of 1792³⁰⁸ and Horn’s *Dirce* of 1821 both proved to be major flops³⁰⁹.

Equally important was the removal of those Italian conventions which for many Englishmen, transgressed common gender norms and reinforced their suspicions of opera’s effeminacy. Breeches parts were the most obvious example of this affront to national sensibility. The common practice, by which heroic parts in Italian opera were assigned to the velvet tones of lower female voices such as contraltos and mezzo sopranos (Tenors only developing as the conventional leading male in the first decades of the nineteenth century), was often the cause of such parts being excluded from English operas altogether, instead being given to male actors as spoken roles. There was also a sense of impropriety surrounding these parts which required actresses and singers to don racy and tight-fitting outfits. As such, the abundance of trouser roles in Rossini and Mozart were rarely used as the composers intended; for the clarity of the female voice. When Covent Garden cast Miss Beaumont as Cherubino in Bishop’s adaptation of *Figaro*, it was more for the voyeuristic opportunities afforded by an attractive young actress in breeches, than any vocal ability (of which she was reportedly lacking).³¹⁰ Prudery surrounding this implication formed the basis of Leigh Hunt’s aversion to the practice, ‘It is at all times unpleasant to see a woman performing in the dress of a man

³⁰⁶ ‘On the Means of Giving an Opera to the English’ *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 1822, cited in M Burden Ed. *London Opera Observed, 1711-1844: Volume 5* (Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

³⁰⁷ Carr, B. ‘The First All-Sung English 19th-Century Opera’ *Musical Times* 115 (1974).

³⁰⁸ Jane Girdham. "Storace, Stephen." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed July 23, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/41410>.

³⁰⁹ Nicholas Temperley. "Horn, Charles Edward." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed June 17, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13354>.

³¹⁰ Fuhrmann, C. *Mozart’s Marriage of Figaro: Adapted for Covent Garden, 1819* (A-R Editions, 2012) xiii.

even without his character.³¹¹ In *Native Land* however, Dimond and Bishop used the ambiguity surrounding the continued use of trouser roles in operatic performance to great effect by subverting audience assumptions. The supposed antagonist of the piece, Coelio, a male suitor played by Miss Tree, would at first have appeared to audiences as the traditional adolescent lead found in most Italian opera-serie of the eighteenth century. However, when in the final scene of the opera Coelio is revealed to be Biondina, a female co-conspirator, normality is restored to the English stage with all the characters being returned to their gender norms.³¹²

This hostility towards trouser roles was accompanied by ideas surrounding the ‘natural’ faculties of the voice, themselves enveloped within the semantics of gender and masculinity. In one review of *Native Land*, the critic railed,

‘A duet for Miss Tree and Mr. Sinclair, “Sir! Stranger,” is very common, and has a *cadenza* at the end as long as the piece to which it is added. In this *cadenza* Mr. Sinclair carries his notes far above those of Miss Tree, who sings base to him. Perhaps this is because the lady is in male attire, but then the gentleman should have a dress corresponding to his feminine tones. If Mr. Sinclair will confine himself to his natural voice, which, though not so sweet as it was, is very good, and if he will sing with a little more feeling and animation, he will please, without having recourse to his falsetto, which betray him into very wanton derivations from his airs, and is anything but inviting to good critics, and rational people.’³¹³

The tenor’s use of falsetto in his upper range was common practice in Italian opera up until well into the mid-nineteenth century, before subsequent attempts by leading males to replicate the stentorian tone of Gilbert-Louis Duprez and his famous high Cs sung directly from the chest.³¹⁴ English audiences and their English operas were far less receptive to this continental practice which harkened back to the age of the castrati and the dissolute tastes of the British ruling classes. These musical conventions were perpetually ridiculed by members of the press, who saw Italian practices as an unnecessary indulgence, corruptive of the ‘truth’ behind the music.

Particularly florid passages of coloratura were also viewed in this vein; the reviewer for *The Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* objected specifically to the length of the *cadenzas* in *Native Land*,

³¹¹ Hunt, L. *Critical Essays on the performers of the London Theatres, including general observations on the practice and genius of the stage by the author of the theatrical criticism in the weekly paper called the news* (London, 1808) p. 45.

³¹² Dimond, W. *Native Land or the Return from Slavery* (London, 1824).

³¹³ *The Harmonicon* (1824) p. 54.

³¹⁴ Sandro Corti. "Duprez, Gilbert." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed May 26, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/08364>.

‘The cadence for *three* voices would appear to our sober senses most lamentably absurd, had we not discovered that Mr. Bishop, tired of these excesses, must have done this to bring such things into ridicule. It is indeed a fine vein of irony. Perhaps if he had written, a-la Dr. Bull, a cadenza in forty parts, it would have been more striking, and could not have been more nonsensical.’³¹⁵

If Bishop, like the critics, was in fact tired of exhausting fioratura and falsetto passages, we can be certain that it was not simply Rossini, but the whims of star singers that was the central cause of his frustration. Bishop complained that some singers even ‘objected, nay, refused to sing Rossini’s or Mozart’s songs, giving as a reason that they were not likely to be “effective”.’³¹⁶ Prima donnas holding productions to ransoms over the inclusion of favourite bravura airs or even the composition of new signature showpieces to make their own, was an ever present distraction for those composers at the top of their game. The power of the star performer was nevertheless a convention shared by both Italian and English opera industries and as the house composer of a patent theatre, Bishop had the fortune (or displeasure some might say) of working with many of the grandest performing artists of the age. If in some cases he had intended to parody the most wanton musical excesses of Italian opera, then it was a practice most probably lost upon the singers who carried them out, and one which continued much to the annoyance of those ‘rational’ English observers whose views on opera’ still largely owed their definition to that found in Johnson’s dictionary.³¹⁷

Where possible, Bishop did however manage to mitigate the over-extension of vocal passages, even if under the pretext of benefiting the less dexterous singers in the cast. In the case of ‘Fra quei soavi palpiti’, he had been careful to omit the succession of complex coloratura runs written by Rossini in the solo parts, instead leaping straight into a much less taxing chorus finale. Compare the following corresponding extracts; Rossini’s original and Bishop’s adaptation.

Example 4.1 *Tancredi*, Finale Amenaide & Argirio, ‘Fra quei soavi palpiti’³¹⁸

³¹⁵ *The Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review* (1824) pp. 145-6.

³¹⁶ Northcott, R. *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920) p. 34.

³¹⁷ ‘Opera: an irrational and exotic art form’, Johnson, S. *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755).

³¹⁸ Rossini, G. *Tancredi: Melodramma Eroico in Due Atti* (Ricordi, 1991)

AME:
mia fe-li-ci-tà.

ARG:
Ah! di pia_cer quest'a_nima re_spi_ra o maine se_ no: fra voi fe_lice appie_ no, fi_gli il mio cor sa_

No, non vi posso esprimere la mi_a fe-li-ci-tà.....la

-rà. No, non vi posso esprimere la mi_a fe-li-ci-tà, no, non vi pos-so vi posso esprime_re

mia fe-li-ci-tà..... la mia fe-li-ci-tà.

la mia fe-li-ci-tà, no, non vi pos-so vi posso esprime_re la mia fe-li-ci-tà.

Example 4.2 *The Marriage of Figaro*, Finale Antonio, Figaro & Fiorello, ‘Each doubt and fear now ending.’³¹⁹

Antonio,
While

Figaro,
Men and Maidens min-gle, O let the glas-ses jingle jin-gle And Lads who now live

Fiorello:
single Get Wives without de-lay! Each doubt and fear now ending O

crowns the marriage day O crown the marriage day!

Rossini provides a variation upon the melodic exposition, sung by the tenor voice, over which the soprano re-joins by repeating the final bars of the initial theme. Bishop does away

³¹⁹ Bishop, H. *Marriage of Figaro* (Goulding D’Almaine, 1819).

with this variation altogether, instead reapportioning the equivalent (much condensed) section amongst three male voices, each singing their part in solo and sequentially, thus eliminating the more difficult nature of Rossini's ensemble writing. This was also more akin to the London playhouse in which soloists, rather than singing together would alternate with the chorus as a finale to many spoken comedies.³²⁰

The nature of the English libretto bearing no relation at all to the subject matter of the original verse found in Rossi's Italian text, is typical of the colloquial phrasing found in English comedies. This ability of Bishop to match continental music to even the most incongruous of English vernacular settings was yet another vital element in bringing the music to the English stage, whose audiences were less receptive to directly translated texts. A susceptibility to bawdiness and irreverence had always been the case with English music drama of the late Georgian period. As seen in the naval dramas examined in the first chapter, the mischievous burlettas of the illegitimate theatres and rowdy satirical songs that filled them were quite different to the witty but more staid librettos of Rossinian opera buffa whose music Bishop had been determined to filter through to English audiences. The same voices who chose to see English drama in a state of lowly deprivation, had little doubt that English Opera suffered because its dramaturgy pandered to the lower order's most primitive tastes. As one reader of Bacon's *Musical Quarterly* wrote in,

Our comic songs are all vulgar. If an actor presents us with any thing of this sort, the language and manners of the lowest classes are the objects of description. O'Keefe's and Dibdin's were almost all of this fashion . . . Our comic songs like our comic operas are very coarse attempts to blend a jargon of vulgarities with music, wholly unfitted to such a purpose.³²¹

One of the problems Bishop faced in adapting Italian opera buffa into English comic opera was the fact that talents of composers such as Rossini involved the skilful use of music and text to initiate humorous moments within the drama. The type of comedy found in English music-dramas descended from Gay's *Beggars Opera*, often dependent upon the matching of a self-contained piece of lyric satire, to a popular melody or simple strophic air. What Bishop managed to achieve was a mixture of original songs adhering closely to this template, whilst also refashioning continental music, as in the above example. In the case of the former, jovial themes, notably drinking and womanising, appealed to Britons most and thus dominated texts, even in those operas set within far-removed cultures. 'In early life I took a wife'³²² and 'An old man would be wooing',³²³ were included within his adaptations of *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, whilst *Native Land*, in spite of being set in

³²⁰ Fuhrmann, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro: Adapted for Covent Garden 1819* p. xiii.

³²¹ 'On the Means of Giving an Opera to the English' *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 1822, cited in M Burden Ed. *London Opera Observed, 1711-1844: Volume 5* (Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

³²² Bishop, H. *Marriage of Figaro* (Goulding D'Almaine, 1819).

³²³ Bishop, H. *The Barber of Seville* (Goulding D'Almaine, 1818)

Genoa included the very English ballad, ‘My own Native Isle’.³²⁴ The German visitor Pückler-Muskau described the flavour of these interpolated songs, ‘The English national music, the coarse heavy melodies of which can never be mistaken for an instant, has, to me at least, something singularly offensive; an expression of brutal feeling both in pain and pleasure, which smacks of ‘roast beef, plum-pudding, and porter.’³²⁵ There was however a fine line between the triviality seen in the texts of many popular comic operas, and what amounted to a careless disregard for poetic form. This roughshod approach did little to enamour critics with Payne and Bishop’s *Clari* (1823), though it did make them appreciate the difficult task the theatrical composer often faced in setting this verse to music.

We were never more sensible of the superiority of the Italian over the English poetry than in this trifle. – It constitutes all the difference between elegance and vulgarity – though it is true the sense is not the same. But how Mr. Bishop makes anything out of such trash is marvellous – to wit –

“All these presents – all this fuss,

“For a good for nothing puss.”

And this they call opera! And yet the music is not unpleasing!!³²⁶

If the ‘vulgar’ nature of English texts or the Anglicization of foreign libretti into ‘tastless’ English songs had divided critical and public opinion over many of Bishop’s operas, the origins of some works raised questions about the propriety and morality of presenting alien subjects on the English stage. Whilst Bishop had managed to render the music of foreign operas palatable through his trimming of continental conventions and considered accommodation to English taste, it was the process of remediation that at times revealed an underlying vein of xenophobia towards the influx of foreign sources in English Opera. Reactions to *Clari* (1823), the opera from which the above text is taken, and its American writer exemplified how this distrust of alien influence on the London stage manifested on several different levels.

An American in Soho: John Howard Payne, French Morality & British Xenophobia

³²⁴ Bishop, H. *Native Land or Return From Slavery: Opera in three acts* (Goulding & D’Almaine, 1824).

³²⁵ Puckler-Muskau, H. *Tour in England, Ireland, and France: in the years 1826, 1827, 1828, and 1829* (Philadelphia, 1833)p. 90.

³²⁶ *Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review* (1823) p. 546.

Prejudice towards American culture amongst English theatregoing society of the early nineteenth century, was akin to the literati's own derision of English opera. For many Europeans, a lack of civility, backwardness of aesthetic and deficiency in taste, characterised the young nation across the Atlantic. By the time John Howard Payne reached London in 1813, war with the US had intensified and the young actor whose talents had earned him the title of the 'American Roscius' back home, was keen to suppress any pretensions that might have drawn hostility towards his status as an American Citizen.³²⁷ Immediately after arriving in Liverpool, his first experience of England was interment at his majesty's pleasure,³²⁸ he soon however embarked for London and was quickly accepted by proprietors excited by (unsubstantiated) rumours of his being the illegitimate son of his namesake, Tom Paine. Whilst critical reception of his early performances were largely positive, many British audiences were less accepting of this American intruder, as one account of his 1813 performance of Romeo attests.

During the actual performance of this tragedy, we were much disgusted with the ill-timed exclamations of some persons in the upper tier of boxes, who seemed to labour to disconcert this modest stranger . . . [and] designated Mr. Payne as "a damn'd Yankee"³²⁹

This kind of hostility toward foreign performers in the London theatre had sturdy foundations. The backlash from Covent Garden's price hike in 1809 hit the theatre's Italian soprano Angelica Catalani hardest. The exorbitant fees commanded by an internationally acclaimed prima donna were seen as an insult to the London public, whose purses had taken the brunt of the financial burden following the theatre's reconstruction. As Marc Baer has examined, reactions from all sides of the political spectrum focussed upon the singer's alien position in British society, as an uncongenial influence upon audiences. Henry Redhead Yorke, the loyalist commentator described her variously as 'an avaricious foreign cormorant', a 'rapacious and cunning Italian . . . pickpocket.', 'murdering our native tongue with broken English.'³³⁰ This final notion, which like criticisms of operatic Shakespeare adaptations, equated a desecration of the English language with an attack upon the nation itself, was something with which many commentators concurred. Leigh Hunt welcomed Catalani's exit from Covent Garden, 'Such a person has not the least pretence for appearing on an English stage, if it is only for one reason – that one *great* object of the drama is, or at least ought to be, *the improvement and ornament of the ENGLISH LANGUAGE.*'

³³¹Though Payne was not quite so poorly treated by the British, in spite of the fact that his

³²⁷ Payne, J.H. *Memoirs of John Howard Payne, The American Roscius* (London, 1815) p. 16-17.

³²⁸ Harrison, G. *John Howard Payne, Dramatist, Poet, Actor: His Life and Writings* (Nabu Press, 2011)p. 58.

³²⁹Harrison, G. *John Howard Payne, Dramatist, Poet, Actor: His Life and Writings* (Nabu Press, 2011) p. 110.

³³⁰ Baer, M. *Theatre & Disorder in Late Georgian London* (Oxford, 1992) p. 210.

³³¹ *Examiner*, (1 Oct. 1809)

homeland was still at war with theirs, jibes towards his ex-patriot status persisted for years to follow.

Like most things, Payne's precocious talent for the stage began to lose much of its charm with age and by the mid-years of the decade his acting career faltered, causing him to turn towards theatre management and playwriting.³³² First acting as the impresario at Sadler's Wells, by the end of the decade Payne had produced two 'legitimate' spoken dramas, in *Brutus* (1818) and *Therese, Orphan of Geneva* (1821). As with Catalani, there was a particular sensitivity by critics towards what was perceived as a maltreatment of the English language. Payne's verse was certainly an aspect drawing a great deal of scrutiny, throughout his career. It was with his work for the operatic stage however that the critics began to detect a serious deficiency in his literary abilities. As the Librettist for an adaptation of Boileau's *La Dame Blanche*, he even felt compelled to make a public apology for the 'badness' of his verse, following widespread critical condemnation.³³³ In his collaboration with Henry Bishop, *Clari* (1823), the paucity of his text was something drawn upon by many London reviews of the work, *The Morning Chronicle* described the dialogue as hanging 'rather heavy'³³⁴, whilst *John Bull* saw it as 'bungling' and 'trashy'.³³⁵ It was the way in which the critics referred to Payne's national origins as somehow explanatory of this ineptness that was most cutting. *John Bull* mockingly branded the opera 'this bud of genius . . . from the pen of an American Body'³³⁶, and the critic from *The London Magazine* was no less biting in his description of the piece's author. '*Clari* is the work of Mr. Howard Payne, the American Roscius; and, certainly to adapt an expression of Mr. Coleridge, in this instance a *very American Roscius* . . . Parisian dullness done into English by an American.'³³⁷

The work itself centres on the peasant girl Clari, who leaves her pastoral home for the palace of the Duke Vivaldi, a nobleman who entertains her thoughts of marriage. When the Duke reneges on his promise, Clari returns home in disgrace. Reproached by her father for her besmirched honour, Clari is soon vindicated by the Duke's change of mind.³³⁸ In a textual sense, Payne's crimes against the British stage were worsened by the fact that the opera's subject had been taken from, of all things, a French Ballet.³³⁹ This was considered a particularly morally degenerate art form, whose leering gentleman patrons and promiscuous performers in many ways paralleled the lustful relationship between the opera's characters. *The London Magazine*'s review was so vitriolic in this respect that it almost deserves full

³³² *Watson's Arts Journal*, Vol. 7 No. 12, (Jul 13, 1867) pp. 178-180

³³³ *The Harmonicon* (Feb. 1827)p. 38.

³³⁴ *The Morning Chronicle* (May 9, 1823)

³³⁵ *John Bull*, (May 12, 1823)

³³⁶ *John Bull*, (May 12, 1823)

³³⁷ *London Magazine* Vol. 7 (1823) p. 705.

³³⁸ Payne, J. H. *Clari: or, The Maid of Milan* (Boston, 1856)

³³⁹ Corder, F. 'The Works of Sir Henry Bishop', *Musical Quarterly* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan. 1918).

reproduction. Its virulent allergy to foreign forays into the English musical stage forms the crux of its objections.

‘A serious opera from the French is a serious evil. The light gossamer pieces which are woven from that source, on sultry summer nights, look bright and glittering for their hour, and then pass away ... But when the extravagance and pestilent pathos of the French come to be forced upon us for three hours, we beg leave to dry our eyes, pocket our cambric buckets – button up our pockets, and protest as stoutly as we can, against our tears and money being so plentifully drawn upon.’³⁴⁰

The innate dishonesty of French drama, and its surreptitious emptying of English pockets through a deceptive emotional attrition, was unlike earlier complaints equating English Opera with the bastardizing of the English spoken drama, in fact a defence of the former. The honest simplicity of the English musical stage was somehow being hijacked by the disingenuous mode of French dramatic models.

In many ways *Clari* was the precursor to a long line of alpine virgins cluttering operas from Bellini’s *La Sonnambula* (1831) to Catalani’s *La Wally* (1892),³⁴¹ however, her deflowering bears darker similarities to much later operatic subjects, notably the aristocratic abuse of lower class females in Verdi’s *Luisa Miller* (1849) and *Rigoletto* (1851). Whilst none of this was wildly radical in comparison with the kinds of spoken (or read) dramas penned by contemporaries, notably Shelley’s un-played *Cenci* (1819), it was at least untypical. For a licensed Royal Theatre such as Covent Garden, yet to abolish the aristocratic box-holding system, its allusions must have caused the more illustrious members of the audience to squirm a little more than usual. Without the saccharine denouement necessitated by the genre conventions of English opera, *Clari* would undoubtedly have drawn more than criticism from Francophobe moralists; amongst the aggrieved and volatile audiences of reform age Britain, it had the potential to spark class-conscious uproar.

Viewing at the Italian Opera in the Haymarket, a few streets away, stuck more readily to conventional plot types. Rossini’s opera Buffe such as *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* may have been taken from the same author as the scandalous *Mariage de Figaro*, but there was little of the same socially volatile social comment found in the latter. The predominance of aristocratic heroes and their sharp witted servants was much the same as those found in comedies prevalent throughout the eighteenth century, more critical of those in the ascendant than the condescending, well entrenched elite. The different stratas of society whilst acting in conjunction or against each other essentially remained confined to their own spheres. *The*

³⁴⁰ London Magazine Vol. 7 (1823) p. 705.

³⁴¹ Senici, E. *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera; The Alpine Virgin from Bellini to Puccini* (Cambridge, 2004) p. 3.

Maid of Milan however subverted this idea, clarifying this social divide through a prism of sexual intrigue. Whilst Rossini's Rosina is a schemer more determined than even her Romantic lover the Count to free herself from the miser Bartolo, Clari the peasant girl is the one deceived and exploited by her noble lover. Clari's lesser social status, with all of its rustic virtue and innocence, throws the nobleman's presumptuous and immoral dealings into sharp relief.

Poking fun at the ruling classes had always been light hearted in nature. Colman's *John Bull, or an Englishman's Fireside*³⁴² some fifteen years earlier had, like Beaumarchais *Figaro* presented the upper orders as scoundrels and philanderers. Colman's comedy however also framed this as a comparison of national decency, for him, the honest straight talking character of Job Thornberry represented the salt of England and the country's real national character. Job's daughter like Clari, had also been abandoned by a lover of higher social status, who in the end returns her. In both cases the unfaithful lovers cite this disparity of social standing as the reason for avoiding nuptials. For Job's daughter, the gentleman is barred by his Baronet father from the union. What is different about the Duke Vivaldi in *Clari* is that he spurns the peasant girl of his own accord. *John Bull* sees a prevalence of rational sense and natural order in the changing of the Baronet's mind, overcoming the injustices of social inequality. Payne's Duke does so out of a romantic fit of passion. Whilst many audiences were clearly affected by this change of heart, some critics were not convinced by the Duke's repentance; the Times confessed that 'we do not well understand the morality or the pathos of this scene.' For them the abuse of aristocratic power had already been carried out and its implications could not be undone. As one reviewer bleakly surmised, 'The plot turns on the beguilement, sufferings, and sorrow of a meek and beautiful girl, and the hasty guilt and tardy penitence of a high and wealthy nobleman.'³⁴³

Clari had brought forth a web of xenophobic reaction to the nationality of its author and the source of its text. Added to this, the crux of its narrative was problematic for many observers who saw it as an apology for aristocratic transgressions. With Payne's weak verse and questionable plot, there was little to commend the opera's success. In spite of this however, *Clari* was Covent Garden's fourth most performed work of 1823, and the most popular opera of the season, seeing a run of 23 nights (the following year it exceeded this, becoming the House's third most performed work, with a 34 night run).³⁴⁴ *Clari's* success owed itself primarily to one song alone, whose appearance permeates not only the opera but the history of the English ballad itself. 'Home Sweet Home', is undoubtedly Bishop's most enduring melody. Its effect was like that of other nostalgic depictions of rural life, both in the

³⁴² Colman, G. *John Bull: or, an Englishman's Fireside* (Dublin, 1803).

³⁴³ *Theatrical pocket Magazine* Vol.4 (1823) p. 248

³⁴⁴ Fuhrmann, C, 'Adapted And Arranged For The English Stage': *Continental Operas Transformed For The London Theatre, 1814-33* Phd. Diss. (Washington University, 2001).pp. 363-4.

romantic evocations of Scotland and the Celtic fringe found in the Scott music-dramas, and earlier still, rustic operas such as *Rosina*. On the one hand, it appealed to the imagined pastoral origins of the urban theatregoing public, who purchased over 100,000 copies of its score in the first year alone.³⁴⁵ As a melodic device, it functioned in an almost leitmotivic fashion throughout the opera, appearing in various permutations.³⁴⁶ This was certainly a novel idea in musical terms and this simplistic but dramatically nuanced use of a single melody to underscore an entire opera, brought the work closer to English melodrama. The critical disparagement received by the opera thus bore little relation to its success with the public, who saw this remediation of a morally dubious French ballet as redeemed by Bishop's musical adaptation. It was this division between the inhabitants of critical circles and those ordinary consumers of English opera that characterised the concerns of composers and dramatists in the production of the genre.

Dramaturgical Dilemmas in English Opera

It is evident that metropolitan audiences did not share in the indignation critics expressed for many English operas, more likely seeing the humour involved in Bishop's verbose cadenzas or overlooking the tawdry texts of his collaborators. The tension between the producers of English Operas and those who claimed to be arbiters of dramatic taste was an ongoing struggle that characterised the precarious position of both professions: the critic and the creative. It was a dichotomy that for those involved in bringing new Operas to the stage separated theoretical idealism from practical reality. The contempt felt by many dramatists towards the cultural commentators who derided them, stemmed from the impossibility of the latter's demands. As William Dimond, Bishop's collaborator in *Native Land* railed:

It has now been a *fashion* in this country, of nearly a century's growth, among the never-dying race of hyper-critics – those skilful masters of the ugliest art – to bastion, be-pummel, and be-devil, without mercy or remorse, each devoted author of an *Opera*, purely on the grounds of his not accomplishing objects which never were, nor ought to have been, within his contemplation to attempt. These awfully erudite persons are for ever informing the obsequious, “that such serious scenes and characters lack the due elevation and intensesness of *Tragedy*” – whilst “such humorous efforts are gross violations of Aristotelian rule, and incompatible with the refinement of perfect *Comedy*.” That is, they abuse an *Opera* because it is *not* that which it makes no pretension to be, and because it *is* precisely the very thing it calls itself.³⁴⁷

Dimond's statement highlighted the fundamental irony behind the argument of those who called so vociferously for a school of 'English Opera'. What they wanted was not a home-grown style of Opera deriving from the demands and sensibilities of English theatregoing

³⁴⁵ Northcott, R. *The Life of Sir Henry R. Bishop* (London, 1920) p. 76.

³⁴⁶ Bishop, H. *Clari, or The Maid of Milan: an opera in three acts* (Goulding & D'Almaine, 1823).

³⁴⁷ Dimond, W. *Native Land or the Return from Slavery* (London, 1824) v.

taste (which was in essence what Bishop and his contemporaries were providing), rather Operas composed by Englishmen but taken from a fundamentally foreign model. As Dimond notes in frustration, the criteria with which many critics judged the English language operas produced at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, were the same used for the Italian Operas seen at the King's Theatre, the sort of which would never be tolerated at the patent theatres without adaptation. Dimond did however acknowledge the need for English opera to develop more closely along Italian lines, while remaining mindful of the intolerance of the London public for laboured dramaturgy:

In its plot, it may be either serious or sprightly, or it may combine both qualities, *ad libitum*, with just a sufficient interest to excite attention and to banish ennui during the necessary spaces between song and song, but never so vividly to stimulate the feelings of an Audience, as to make the recurrence of Music be felt as an impertinent interruption. . . Above all, the MUSICAL SITUATIONS ought to spring with spontaneity out of the very necessities of the Scene.³⁴⁸

Whilst Bishop and his dramatists had not really managed to foster the idea of drama through music inherent within the best known continental operas, they had managed to produce a template for English opera in which musical sections had greater relevance to the plot and were increasingly Italianate in their musical language, without seeming dramatically extraneous to English audiences. This in many ways ensured a much smoother transition for the introduction of foreign operas adapted to the English language that dominated the market of the mid 1820s onwards. The sacrifice that was made by the writers and composers of English Opera however, was that of the genre itself.

When the critics got what they wanted, the result was *Oberon*, an Opera by the German creator of the sensational *Freischütz*, Karl-Maria von Weber. However, as the composer was determined to emphasise, even this was fundamentally restrained by the demands of the English for spoken dialogue:

The intermixing of so many principal actors who do not sing, the omission of the music in the most important moments – all these things deprive our *Oberon* the title of an opera, and will make him unfit for all other Theatres in Europe; which is a very bad thing for me, but – *passons la dessus*.³⁴⁹

Even for musical celebrities from the continent, composing original operas for the English stage was still largely dictated by a national distaste for continental dramaturgies. The difficulties this caused foreign composers meant that Weber was the only notable one to have done so until Mendelssohn's failed attempt to make an opera of J. R. Planche's libretto

³⁴⁸ Dimond, W. *Native Land or the Return from Slavery* (London, 1824) vi.

³⁴⁹ Weber to Planche, Feb 19, 1826.

for Edward III, in 1837.³⁵⁰ Whilst Weber was not content with *Oberon*, at least it was received with public acclaim, unlike Bishop's response, *Aladdin*, a short lived fiasco,

Aladdin did not prove successful; after it had been performed a few nights it was entirely withdrawn . . . It displays great labour and but little invention; every part of it exhibits the experienced musician, while it betrays the vexatious inactivity of the composer's imagination. . . so far as our knowledge of his work extends, he has never produced an entirely new opera with so few claims to originality as the present.³⁵¹

The years Bishop had spent successfully adapting the work of foreign composers (including Weber), had fundamentally shaped his own compositional development as seen in the overtures and ensembles produced for his later Covent Garden operas. The more damaging effect of this process was that from a critical standpoint, when held up in direct comparison with work produced by a continental musician for the London stage, they appeared as little more than lacklustre imitation. Many reviewers of the work made direct comparisons with Weber's *Oberon*, particularly the chorus sections,³⁵² and traces of that composer's style were hinted at throughout the opera. Note this extract from Bishop's Overture, a section of instrumental writing whose unusual progression in the bass bears a striking resemblance to the technique employed by Weber in his stormy overture to *Der Freischütz*.

Example 4.3



In effect, both composers had been required to be more like the other in their approach to constructing an opera; Weber's dramaturgy was forcibly made more Bishop-Like and Bishop's music required to be Weberian. Ultimately the fallout of this tussle was in one way or another disastrous for both. Weber's fragile health soon declined, resulting in his death less than two months after *Oberon*'s premiere.³⁵³ Bishop thereon ceased almost all purely original composition for the stage.³⁵⁴ As late as 1840 the theatrical impresario Alfred Bunn wrote, 'if he will be but HIMSELF, the stuff is still in Bishop: but trying first to be Rossini,

³⁵⁰ Mercer-Taylor, P. *Cambridge Companion to Mendelssohn*, (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 216-217.

³⁵¹ *The Harmonicon*, Vol. 4, (1826) pp. 222-3.

³⁵² *Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review* Vol. 8 (1826) p. 249.

³⁵³ Clive Brown. "Oberon." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed October 25, 2013,

<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O003858>.

³⁵⁴ Corder, F. 'The Works of Sir Henry Bishop', *Musical Quarterly* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan. 1918).

and after that to be Weber, knocked it all out of him.³⁵⁵ Bishop's creativity however remained largely limited to his niche in providing 'Englished' versions of continental operas. The results of this experiment in making English opera more musically dramatic were clear. Whilst audiences had been familiarised with foreign composition throughout the last decade in Bishop's pasticcios and music-dramas (undoubtedly allowing them to appreciate Weber's work), their tolerance for continental dramaturgy had not; whether done by a foreigner or not. Bishop's confidence had been severely knocked but many of his operas continued to be played in the patent theatres throughout the next decade. Even the *Giovane* who had earlier branded his native opera inferior, conceded that Bishop towered 'like a giant above his feeble dramatic contemporaries'³⁵⁶, for in Bishop, whilst many could not stomach the idea that his works were operas, they could appreciate them as the best Britain had to offer.

³⁵⁵ Bunn, Alfred. *The Stage: Both before and behind the Curtain* (London, 1840). 3:7.

³⁵⁶ 'Opera - to the Editor' *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review*, 1822, cited in M Burden Ed. *London Opera Observed, 1711-1844: Volume 5* (Pickering & Chatto, 2013).

Conclusion

Curtains for English Opera: The End of a National Idiom

It seems fitting for an entertainment so varied and inconsistent as late Georgian music-drama, that to conclude with any simplistic explanation of its impact upon discourses of nationalism would be as unrepresentative of its multifaceted effects, as trying to provide a strict definition of the genre itself. Its role in the lives of London theatregoers was as much the subject of national debate as English opera acted as a commentator upon the nation itself. For a people whose national identity was, and remains, so recognisable through its tradition of patriotic music, particularly song, the debates surrounding the place of music in its drama, specifically in opera, were nowhere more vociferously contested than in Britain. On the one hand, the music developed for the demands of London theatre audiences, notably the naval ballads of Dibdin and Scots songs of Thomson, helped to define British identity through normalising those on the margins of society. British servicemen, so often seen as loathsome rogues endangering civilian populations, were idolised by musical depictions, their more dangerous qualities trivialised by hearty airs and drinking songs. Scotland, a region that only a few decades earlier had caused so much anxiety for Britons south of the border, was stripped of its most unsettling qualities and neatly historicised in unthreatening dramas set to equally docile music, itself helping to shape antiquarian investigations into the national past. Both cases displayed music-drama's potent use of both the authentic and the invented to represent those on the edge of British society, and most importantly, help to mould and galvanise the theatregoing public's imaginings of them. Where these textual and musical aspects had simplified and sanitised the identities of Britain's social fringes for a metropolitan London audience, the dramaturgical questions of genre had tested the limits of that audience's cosmopolitanism.

Whilst the enlightened champions of Shakespeare worked so diligently for the bard's canonisation, the threat posed by intrusions from foreign dramatic models such as opera, prompted a series of exchanges between dramatists and critics on how the national poet best reflected the national temperament. For the former, this was by embracing the modes of modern popular entertainment in the form of musical adaptation, whilst the latter could only tolerate unadulterated fidelity to the masterwork. This clash of tastes characterised a most striking tug-of-war fought on the contested ground of national definition, the critics championing their ideal of British sensibility, whilst the dramatists and composers catered

for its realities. This was not merely a matter of art appreciation; it questioned the moral and intellectual side-effects of musical entertainments for the nation as a whole. In a time of great political and social change, it is perhaps true that little biting commentary in the vein of Gay's *Beggars Opera* could be found on the stage of the Theatres Royal in any work-oriented sense. The patent theatres, though with the resources and legal status to present legitimate spoken drama, were textually bound and gagged by the oversight of a judicious censor. The largely uncensored burlettas of the minor theatres, though often topical and scathing, could not be made into coherent, lasting works due to the prohibition of the spoken word and their inherent financial instability. It was the commercial fortuity of producing music-dramas concerned with national themes, particularly conflict, that had made them so profitable during the years of war with France. That impresarios were willing to lavish funds on military spectacles allowed the state, in most cases, to maintain its traditional distance from the entertainment industry, and was as much an indication of financial imperatives as any patriotic duty.

It was not however the remonstrations of critics or limitations of the London theatrical scene that wholly undermined English opera's continued predominance. The climax of this process, as examined in the final chapter, was one which in an ironic turn, the success of composers such as Bishop in developing musical appreciation actually eliminated the need for English opera's place in the theatrical equation at all. If both English drama and music were accused of being at low-ebb during the first decades of the nineteenth century, then the public's lack of enthusiasm for the medium of opera in an Italian sense was undoubtedly in some part responsible. Bishop's endeavours to advance English opera at a pace not testing of London audiences' existing prejudices towards Italian opera, was a vital stepping stone for the wider consumption of foreign opera (albeit adapted into the English language). This in turn signalled a move away from 'operatizing' English texts and more importantly, ended the prolific remediation of dramas from the treasured English dramatic canon such as Shakespeare. Even before the new Licensing Act of 1843, allowing the production of legitimate drama in what were previously illegitimate playhouses, the minor theatres had largely abandoned sung dramas in favour of works which circumvented the ban by employing sparse musical accompaniment in largely spoken performances.³⁵⁷ The patent theatres who maintained large orchestras increasingly produced the works of foreign composers, and the few successful operas by English musicians by now largely resembled their continental counterparts in all but name.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Moody, J. 'Dictating to the Empire: Performance and theatrical geography in eighteenth-century Britain' in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830* (Cambridge, 2007) p. 25.

³⁵⁸ Biddlecombe, G. *English Opera from 1834 to 1864 with Particular Reference to the Works of Michael Balfe* (Garland, 1994).

It was a process that had in many ways produced what composers like Bishop had hoped for, the reconciliation of English audiences to continental music, the result however was that native theatrical musicians like Bishop became largely expendable. The Victorian music scene that followed, though honouring him with a knighthood, largely fell out of sympathy with Bishop's music, acquiring a particular disposition, as in Europe, for concert series and the ever more socially diverse Royal Italian Opera³⁵⁹ - by 1847 based at the former home of English opera, Covent Garden.³⁶⁰ Though he had helped to achieve this 'elevation' of national taste, the cross-genre appeal that had characterised both his works and those of his contemporaries, came to signify the peculiarity of the time in which they were composed.

Commercial necessity and a relative cultural insularity underpinned the business of producing music-dramas in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The political volatility of the period made themes of war and national definition impossible not to allude to, and if they could be dealt with in a way congenial to the censor, they could also be highly profitable. The Naval dramas of the 1790s had shown how effective musical entertainments were in the enterprise of patriotism. Unlike European counterparts, the British State not only remained reluctant to become involved in theatrical sponsorship, but due to the financial success of patriotic subjects, was allowed to continue its neglect of the arts. The commerciality of promoting nationally unifying music dramas acted as a self-sustaining relationship, devoid of the need for any pro-active state involvement. What developed later however with the remediation of Walter Scott and Shakespeare, possessed more nuanced national undertones which spoke to the uncertainties of the post-Napoleonic period more than the bombastic pride of wartime. Debates over taste and content had supplanted the relative consensus of earlier decades. The slow death of English opera in the 1820s and 30s represented the growing resolution of these debates. The shift in genre took English opera from an original source of drama dealing with specifically British issues, to one which simply provided a stepping stone to the 'work-oriented'³⁶¹, universally targeted operas of foreign composers. The rowdy crowds, that had previously brought performances to a halt through their demands, were eventually replaced by discriminating listening audience, whose silent observance reflected their newfound preoccupation with musical aesthetics and tasteful representations. The unique mixture of verse, pageantry and song that had looked so bizarre to foreign observers, now seemed equally absurd to native ones.

³⁵⁹ Hall-Witt, J.W. *Fashionable acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

³⁶⁰ Rosenthal, H. *Opera at Covent Garden: A Short History* (Gollancz, 1967). P. 40.

³⁶¹ Cowgill, R. 'Mozart Productions and the Emergence of *Werktreue* at London's Italian Opera House, 1780-1830'. In *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing Thomas. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) 145-86.

By 1840 English Operas of this kind had all but disappeared from the stages of the patent theatres, and with them, the ability for the medium of opera to reflect the concerns, politics and prejudices of English audiences. That few if any of the works penned by Bishop have been revived since their hey-day in the early nineteenth century, is without doubt because they have borne very little relevance to the aesthetics or political concerns of later generations. That in other respects they deal with subjects which remain within the national consciousness, Shakespeare and Scott amongst them, yet present such unfamiliar incarnations, reflects not just how different their values are from those in the present, but more importantly, what fruitful indicators they are of distinctively contemporary discourses of nation. Though it is doubtful that the kinds of English opera produced for regency audiences will ever entertain Britons again, the very constraints that consign its performance to the past, in fact grants it an unassailable permanency in posterity's understanding of Late Georgian London.

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