

Reviews

In the Beginning

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The two following reviews greet the arrival of the first two volumes in the series *Studies in Musical Genesis and Structure*, under the general editorship of Lewis Lockwood.)

JAMES A. HEPOKOSKI

Philip Gossett. *Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985. xvii, 183 pp.

Philip Gossett's compact book, the first offering of Oxford's new series, is an important and welcome addition to the published literature on early *ottocento* opera. For those who have not yet caught up with the recent gains and concerns of Italian opera scholarship, or who might be indifferent to or unsympathetic with the enterprise in general, it will doubtless appear to be an extravagant book: how can it be that Donizetti merits such an intensely concentrated, serious study? In his preface Gossett shows initial amusement with this anticipated point of view, and much of the ensuing work reads like a passionate defense—or slightly impatient explanation—of the technical and structural issues within Donizetti's art for the persistently skeptical. This the author accomplishes by a strict

insistence on the soberest of methods: the amassing of archival evidence, the concern for full documentation whenever possible, and the curbing of potentially further-ranging, more speculative matters in favor of direct, essentially formal considerations. The result is a concise, single-minded monograph, a cornerstone on which others will be building for some time.

The utility of Gossett's book may be best suggested by locating its main concerns within the larger scope of Italian opera research. At the heart of this still relatively new field of inquiry is the perhaps unsuspectedly grand narrative of the rise and fall of Italian operatic conventions: the nearly eighty-year road from, say, Rossini's *Tancredi* (1813) to Verdi's *Otello* (1887)—and beyond. Although this panoramic tale is simple in its large design—the continuous reshaping of formulaic structures to adapt to the *ad hoc* idiosyncrasies of individual plots and character-psychologies—it is actually charged with nu-

merous complexities of detail and terminology, along with many pitfalls for the nonspecialist. Moreover, the whole process has aesthetic and sociological resonances: what was initially perceived as purely Italian and “melodic” becomes inexorably more internationalized, “symphonic,” and declamatory under the impact of the *ultramontani*, or, better, through the unstoppable intrusion of the “modern” world itself (for the process is not unrelated to the fortunes of nineteenth-century Italy, changing from a collection of occupied, separate, “old-world” states to a more unified modern nation).

The story’s “plot” begins in the 1810s and 20s with Rossini’s codifying of the conventional, “static” structures that would become normative and widely imitated among Italian composers. It continues in the 1830s and 40s with Bellini, Donizetti, the early Verdi, and several others far less known: here new artistic paradigms (most notably those of “Italian Romanticism” and the *Risorgimento*) begin to seep into the “old-world” forms to introduce more flexibility and force.¹ Accompanied now by ever fiercer polemical struggles—one sideline packed with Italian “progressive” cheerleaders, the other by conservative grumblers bawling a traitorously compromised *italianità*—the tale surges aggressively onward with Verdi’s reworking of old models in the 1850s, 60s, and 70s. In the 1880s and 90s, due in large part to the growing internationalism of the repertoire and an increased concern to compete with “modern” operatic models outside of Italy, the new aesthetic paradigms of plasticity, individuality, and motivic-orchestral sophistication virtually replace the old *ottocento* conventions. With Verdi’s *Otello* and *Falstaff* the old Italian *melodramma* finally yields to *dramma lirico* and *commedia lirica*—volatile and free-flowing, yet Mediterranean and “melodic” alternatives to a threatening Wagnerism—before plunging into the dying gasps of desperate *verismo*, Puccinian hyperlyricism and *decadentismo*, and the now little-remembered instances of Italian *Literaturoper*.

¹See, e.g., the useful summary of information in Gary Tomlinson, “Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera: An Essay in Their Affinities,” this journal 10 (1986), 43–60, a study that provides a convenient complement to Gossett’s book.

Within this grand narrative of evolving structures may be found in one of its purest, most compact manifestations the playing-out of a critically important process for the entire nineteenth century: the gradual displacement of the “old-world” generic aesthetic by that of the personal and individual. In these years Italian opera underwent a gradual aesthetic shift comparable, one might argue, to that of nineteenth-century instrumental music in general, whose implications have been so cogently identified and carried into the present by Carl Dahlhaus:

The transition to autonomy, the emancipation from imposed purposes, was bound up with a reversal of the rankings of individual works and their genres. . . . In older, functional music, a work was primarily an example of a genre. . . . A work formed not so much an isolated, closed whole, an individuality enduring in itself, as, rather, it exemplified a type, feeding on the historical substance of this type . . . and requiring listeners to connect the work with the type in order to understand it. . . . But since the late eighteenth century all genres have rapidly lost substance. . . . The concept of a genre is no longer established in advance for individual works. . . .²

The idea [of aesthetic judgment] prevailing almost undisputed in recent decades, that a work of art must be understood on its own terms and judged according to its own inner measure, which it shares with no other work, implies, if viewed historically, the decline or enervation of types and genres.³

Remaining over a long period relatively unpersuaded by Austrian and German “symphonic” currents, however—hence the effect of purity (or “naïveté,” in the healthy sense of the word) that *primo ottocento* opera can have on us—Italian music retained and prized the preponderance of the generic over the peculiar, the unrepeatable, and the individual rather far into the nineteenth century. This is one reason why those coming to it with Germanic-Romantic expectations and criteria so often miss the point and object to a quality of prevailing sameness or simplicity, or a lack of complication and sophisticated “originality”;⁴ and, one suspects, this is

²*Esthetics of Music* [1967], trans. William W. Austin (Cambridge, 1982), p. 15.

³Dahlhaus, *Esthetics of Music*, p. 90.

⁴See, for instance, the comments on *Anna Bolena* in Leon Plantinga’s recent textbook, *Romantic Music: A History of Musical Style in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (New York,

why so many have been eager to portray Italian operatic history as the struggle of a few individual personalities to rid themselves of the stultifying shackles of a mindless tradition. Such perspectives are remarkably short sighted. What is actually required is a relishing of the point of view expressed more than once by Northrop Frye in quite different contexts:

In an intensely formulaic composer . . . the effect is not monotony but the release of a self-propelled energy. One of the keenest sources of pleasure in listening to poetry or music is the fulfilling of a *general* expectation, of a sort that is possible only in highly conventionalized art. . . .⁵

[In the proper appreciation of a largely generic work of art] we are led very quickly from what the individual work says to what the entire convention it belongs to is saying through the work.⁶

Anna Bolena (1830) is essentially such a conventional work. For valid reasons of his own—having to do, as might be expected, with the historical “story” that the opera may at times be seen to presage—Gossett chooses to focus on its elements of deviation from the established norms. Yet the aspects of individuality that emerge are for the most part mildly provocative ripples on a larger, far more palpable sea of convention. Put another way, if *Anna Bolena* cannot be savored on primarily “generic” grounds, it probably cannot be savored at all.

1984), p. 140, a passage cited here not to single out Plantinga but to represent a point of view that Italian opera scholars (and Italian opera lovers) hear frequently:

The arias proper in *Anna Bolena*, and throughout Donizetti's operas, are often stereotyped and musically less satisfying. Orchestral introductions end on *sforzato* dominant chords with considerable predictability, and many accompaniments effect a strumming resembling the proverbial ‘big guitar.’ Donizetti's melodies themselves, whatever their dramatic surroundings, often sound much the same. . . . That inevitable curtain-raising dominant stroke in the orchestra, the obsessive dotted-note rhythms, the absolute regularity of periodization, and the primitive harmony of this example [Percy's “Nel veder la tua costanza”] suggest that at this point, at least, attractive singing was more the objective than dramatic veracity.

For a provocative critique of this type of commentary, see Janet M. Levy, “Covert and Casual Values in Recent Writings About Music,” *Journal of Musicology* 5 (1987), 3–27.

⁵*The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism* (Bloomington, Ind., 1971), p. 40.

⁶*The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), p. 60.

For those attracted to a study of the Italian structural and aesthetic narrative outlined above, Gossett's book is deeply significant. Here we have fully laid out one of the first decisive ticks of the clock away from the Rossinian formulas. Most important, this nascent flexibility and individualism is demonstrated through the marshalling of concrete, compositional evidence obtained from the autograph score, now located in the Ricordi Archive in Milan, as well as from other sources, such as The Pierpont Morgan's two early “particelle” of the cabaletta of the act II Anna-Giovanna duet, “Va, infelice, e teco reca”—a composition with a particularly “tortured history” (p. 108) of revisions—and various early impressions of the original Ricordi edition of the opera. This matter of demonstrable evidence is crucial for Donizetti research, which is only in its infancy. Many of the operas, especially those among the two dozen before *Anna Bolena*, are virtually unknown, as Gossett laments (p. 15), and many others are available only in flawed or misleading editions. Given the scarcity of hard-edged source studies concerning this prolific and pivotal composer, the author is obliged to remind us that it is difficult even to assess the true position of *Anna Bolena* among Donizetti's works.⁷ The generally hazy state of knowledge about these operas makes Gossett's “factual” contribution all the more welcome. It is a fundamental book.

What, then, is the nature of Gossett's evidence and argumentation? Following a few introductory chapters to set up the immediate context and larger structural divisions of *Anna Bolena* and eight more chapters of examples of compositional modifications, erasures, cross-outs, and relatively large revisions—illustrations ranging in size from the quirks of an individual measure to the design of an entire piece—he concludes:

In practically every case examined, Donizetti's instinctive formal decisions return to Rossinian

⁷The standard introduction to the composer is currently William Ashbrook's *Donizetti and His Operas* (Cambridge, 1982). Ashbrook, too, notes in his preface that his study is anything but definitive: “There is a great need for scholarly editions of his major scores. . . . There are corners of his life, details concerning his use of sources, his compositional processes, his non-operatic works, a wealth of topics that need further study” (p. vii).

models, the common denominators of Rossini's style. . . . His [subsequent] alterations express impatience with these models: he upsets the proportions, runs sections into one another, and avoids the larger structural imperatives. . . . Though the opera is conceived and executed under the formative influence of Rossini, we can watch Donizetti tentatively pressing against his boundaries. In some cases he is extremely successful in personalizing the structures within which he is working; in others he lashes out at them without escaping their hold (p. 182).

We should linger on the methods and apparatus summarized here by Gossett's conclusions, for they furnish the main logical paths through which his discussion moves. The thrust and validity of the book depend most often upon his repeated appeals to a three-phase procedure of argumentation. In the first phase—the laying-down of generic axioms—Gossett draws on his vast experience with the music of Rossini, particularly as exemplified in several of his earlier articles,⁸ and posits as normative a set of relatively invariable musical models: typical melodic and phrase contours, characteristic manners of phrase-succession, habitual tonal choices, large-scale designs, and the like. In this manner the reader is introduced to the details of Rossinian compositional practice. This might be described as a kind of square-cut geometry or faceting, at times even mechanization through parallelism and phrase repetition (as in the "Rossinian crescendo," within which an initial statement and two repetitions are the norm). Much more than the ideal of individualized content, "symmetry and balance are crucial in defining musical proportions . . . [which is] why internal cuts in a Rossini composition are so destructive" (p. 59). Because of the frequent calling upon this "first phase" to provide the ground on which we are to perceive the Donizettian figure, one of the book's most helpful features, particularly for those new to the subject, is the detailing of many of the *ottocento* conventions in their earliest stages: aria, duet, and ensemble forms, introductory cho-

rases, and so on. Although the book is not primarily "about" the establishing of the paradigmatic structures of Italian opera ca. 1820–50—Gossett disavows any intention of providing "a general *Formenlehre* for the period" (p. 23)—with a little effort much of this information may be extracted from it.

In many instances Donizetti happily embraced the Rossinian archetypes. Nine of the thirteen cabalettas written for the opera, for instance, "are formally regular, with two full statements of the theme separated by a short middle section" (p. 99). As indicated above, however, Gossett's concern is less with the opera's many regularities than with its divergences from conventional practice. Thus, in a "second phase" of argumentation Gossett demonstrates that for several of these divergences Donizetti first wrote a standard phrase or piece into the autograph score. Their remains are still completely or partially recoverable, typically under erasures or cancellation-lines, and many of the examples in the book are transcriptions of just such rejected readings. And then, in a "third phase," he shows how the composer deliberately altered his habitual first thoughts in the directions of asymmetry, varied repetition, or dramatic surprise.

To cite a typical category of examples, the autograph score displays many crossed-out phrase repetitions, most not within the "thematic" material proper, but rather within introductions, codas, retransitions, reprises, cadential figures, and the like—operatic areas in which the Rossinian schemata had reigned supreme. For instance, in a cabaletta for Smeton in act I, "Ah! pareo che per incanto" (in the current Ricordi score, pl. no. 45415, p. 94), Donizetti first "instinctively" began the middle section—following the concluding cadence of the cabaletta theme proper, the normative preparation for the cabaletta repeat—in the conventional Rossinian manner, with a nonmodulatory four-measure phrase sounded three times (3 x 4). At a later compositional point he deleted the third statement of the phrase, and the printed score now begins this section with only twice four measures (2 x 4; pp. 96/4/1–97/1/2). And similarly, after the conclusion of the cabaletta reprise proper Donizetti at first began the subsequent cadential phrases (or coda) with an eight-measure phrase sounded twice (2 x 8), the

⁸These include: "Gioachino Rossini and the Conventions of Composition," *Acta Musicologica* 42 (1970), 48–58; "The 'Candeur virginale' of 'Tancredi,'" *Musical Times* 112 (1971), 326–29; "Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and *Aida*: The Uses of Convention," *Critical Inquiry* 1 (1974), 291–334; "Le sinfonie di Rossini," *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi* (1979), 5–123; and "The Overtures of Rossini," this journal 3 (1979), 3–31.

customary procedure before proceeding to repetitions of shorter cadential phrases. He eventually canceled both appearances of the eight-measure phrase to plunge directly into the shorter phrases (p. 99/2/1), a cut that Gossett's Rossinian sensibilities (in this case, "generic" sensibilities) judge to be abrupt and blunt (p. 63).

Throughout his treatment of Donizetti's compositional cuts Gossett, with an ear attuned to the future history of Italian opera, claims that Donizetti's aim was not merely to write more concisely but "to alter [the music's] proportions and produce a more continuous musical and dramatic surface" (p. 63). At times such cuts within an already written piece can be quite bold, as the author shows occurred in the opening chorus of the act I *introduzione*. Here Donizetti sheared the composition from its original 137 measures, conceived with extreme invention and "thoroughly in the Rossinian mold" (p. 89), back to an astonishingly concise eighty-one. And again in this case Gossett argues that the results were mixed. On the one hand, there was a clear gain in dramatic speed, something that would be increasingly prized by composers and something to be noted and admired elsewhere in *Anna Bolena*. But on the other hand, Donizetti's use of generic material in an ultimately unconventional way (unconventional, that is, after the massive cuts) upsets the original sense of proportion within the piece, the very proportional sense that presumably had given rise to the conventions in the first place. Donizetti's cuts often seem experimental, even "willful" (p. 90); and Gossett's point is to call our attention to formal strains that are too easily overlooked.

Somewhat related and probably more successful are Donizetti's recompositions—often also involving cuts and overlappings. In his reworkings of the transition passages between the various sections of the act II Anna-Giovanna duet, for example, he apparently wanted to erase the effects of the standard breaks and rapid changes of texture between the sections. Thus the first movement of the duet proper, Giovanna's *maestoso* "Sul suo capo aggravi un Dio" originally had three measures of normative orchestral introduction separating the preceding recitative from the closed number. The removal of the formal divider, the introduction, argues

Gossett, is again one of the many instances of "the search for continuity" (p. 53).

In a separate chapter, "Wrestling with the Cabaletta," Gossett confronts Donizetti's tinkering with the perennial problem child of Italian operatic structures. He first details three instances in which the composer, again with mixed results, strove for increased dramatic motivation or content within this normally static form and then concludes with a fourth, mentioned again below, in which he abandoned a more experimental form in favor of a more conventional one. Another chapter is devoted to a study of Donizetti's recomposition of the entire Anna-Percy duet in the finale of act I, two different versions of which are to be found in the autograph score. The second of these, the little-known "Sì, son io che a te ritorno," composed in 1831 after the opera's premiere (printed scores invariably contain the first version, "S'ei t'abborre, io t'amo ancora"), is said by Gossett to illustrate most of the themes of the book and to be "a superb composition" besides (p. 176). (Donizetti apparently also thought so: portions of this difficult "duetto rifatto" eventually found their way into *Marino Faliero* five years later.) And another chapter, "Making Form Responsive to Content," deals with Donizetti's reshaping of the entire *introduzione* to act I, the opening chorus of which has already been mentioned above.⁹

Although most of Gossett's illustrations involve modifications of structural design, matters of tonal structure are by no means absent. Here, once again, the discussion centers around Donizetti's alterations of conventional Italian

⁹Since the writing of Gossett's book, another important source for this *introduzione* has apparently turned up. This is an early *particella* for the original Anna, Giuditta Pasta, which contains no entrance aria for Anna after the initial chorus, but rather "an elaborate duet for Anna and Giovanna with Smeton's song (which remains the same) functioning as part of an extended *tempo di mezzo*": see Edward Downes, rev. of Gossett, *Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti*, Notes 42 (1986), 534.

With regard to the further historical development of *introduzioni* in general, see also the penetrating recent study by David Rosen, "How Verdi Operas Begin: An Introduction to the Introduzioni," in *Tornando a Stiffelio: popolarità, rifacimenti, messinscena, effettismo e altre "cure" nella drammaturgia del Verdi romantico*, ed. Giovanni Morelli (Florence, 1987), pp. 203–21.

tonal patterns. In the chapter on "Tonal Closure" we learn that almost all of the individual numbers of *Anna Bolena* follow the Rossinian practice of beginning and ending in the same key—a tradition that would be loosened up by subsequent Italian composers. The most provocative exception is to be found in Percy's act I cavatina, whose *cantabile*, "Da quel dì che, lei perduta," is in G minor (score, p. 55) and whose cabaletta, "Ah! così nei dì ridenti" is in C major (score, p. 60). Gossett begins by pointing out a complicating factor: in the autograph score the entire cavatina appears up a minor third, with a B \flat -minor *cantabile* and an E \flat -major cabaletta. By means, then, of a close argument involving measure-cancellation, folio-substitution, and timpani notation in the autograph score, Gossett is able to suggest that Donizetti might originally have written the cavatina to begin and end on the same tonal level, B \flat . Whether or not this was the case, with the mere presence of this cavatina "the opera as sung and printed proclaimed that tonal closure within an individual number was no longer sacrosanct" (p. 98). And the larger historical point, of course, is that "the gradual dissolution of [the principle of tonally closed pieces] played an important role historically in weakening the boundaries between distinct musical numbers in Italian opera of the nineteenth century" (p. 92).

Given an opera so thoroughly conventional and yet tipped so provocatively if slightly toward the personal, it is difficult to find a reasonable and consistent single set of criteria with which to judge it. With regard to his own selection of material and subsequent commentary, Gossett's strategy is to isolate Donizetti's rejection of his earlier, generic decisions and then to exhort his readers not only to sense in these rejections the faint glimmerings of the structural urges that will eventually overpower the generic totally in Italy, but also to feel in them a "biographical" struggle within Donizetti himself: a dramatic playing-out on a small scale of the Romantic myth of the emerging sense of individuality. This is clearly still a much favored postulate of modern musicology. Much of the book uses charged wording to persuade us to admire Donizetti in the act of "forging a personal style" (p. 16; cf. p. xvii, p. 15, etc.), or devoted to

the task of "personalizing the structures within which he is working" (p. 182), or heeding the demands of "his critical faculty [which] rebelled against [repetitive cadential conventions]" (p. 63), or sensing himself "constantly at war with the traditional cabaletta design" (p. 140), or willing to "throw off tonal closure in individual numbers" (p. 98), and so on: all of these are diagnosed as symptoms of "artistic maturity." The values appealed to in the language choices of this "personal" aspect of the book are Romantic-individualistic ones. And when Gossett discusses an example that contradicts his general conclusion—an instance in which Donizetti settled on a cabaletta structure more conventional than that of his earlier version of it, "Salirà d'Inghilterra sul trono" from the act II terzetto—he acknowledges that the final version is "probably the more effective composition," but claims that in its ultimate preference for the structurally conservative "the 'new' cabaletta, for all its obvious strength, is practically a cry of defeat" (p. 140).

Such dramatic remarks can lead one mistakenly to conclude here and there that Gossett's sympathies must be entirely on the side of the reformers, or at least that in certain portions of the book he wishes to encourage us to prize *Anna Bolena* principally for its antinormative elements. One may be encouraged even further along this line when one reads in a discussion of Donizetti's cabalettas such a disparaging comment as, "with a period so generic in quality, it is not surprising that Donizetti sought a new musical setting" (p. 115); or, later, "Giovanna's part is not particularly effective, however, nor do the cadences rise above the generic" (p. 121; here the generic is explicitly relegated to a lower aesthetic plane).

To counterbalance such assessments one must also recall Gossett's critical judgements of many of Donizetti's experiments on largely conventional grounds. One might further note his early insistence that "one can hardly read into [the composer's letters] a picture of Donizetti the reformer striving to free himself from oppressive chains" (p. 19). And near the beginning of the book he explicitly insists that "using the term 'conventional' as one of opprobrium is simply unacceptable: much of Donizetti's finest music (not to mention Verdi's or, for that

matter, Mozart's) is worked out within the most rigidly conventional boundaries" (pp. 14–15).

That there are apparent contradictions here is evident. But such contradictions may be deeply embedded in the nature of *ottocento* opera itself, and all students of the subject seem to find themselves inevitably struggling with them. The fact is that in *Anna Bolena* and in most of its successors for many years to come there are two contradictory aesthetics at work: a larger, conventional or generic aesthetic dominating the major musical choices of the opera (an aesthetic, one supposes, appropriate to the time and place in which these works were writ-

ten) and a lesser, personal aesthetic beginning to search for increased intensity, idiosyncrasy, and uniqueness. Although we need to note their radical differences, it would appear that the clearest observers will overvalue neither aesthetic system at the expense of the other. It is true that for most modern listeners, with our own historically conditioned biases, the second is far easier to grasp than the first. But to confront *Anna Bolena* adequately we need to be able to sympathize with both, and we need to keep them in the proper proportional balance. Gossett's book helps to keep the tensions between them nicely alive—unresolved and disturbing.



NICHOLAS MARSTON

William Kinderman. *Beethoven's Diabelli Variations*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987. xx, 220 pp.

In an influential article published in this journal in 1978, Douglas Johnson called into question the relevance of sketch studies to the analysis of completed works.¹ The article stimulated an immediate barrage of replies aimed at defending sketch studies from Johnson's criticisms. Ten years on these criticisms are regularly cited and discussed, a fact which itself bespeaks the continuing fascination of the sketches for Beethoven scholars.

William Kinderman claims in his Introduction to the volume under review that "a primary concern of my study is the finished piece apart from the sketches," but he also makes clear that his view of the Diabelli Variations "is in crucial ways indebted to Beethoven's sketches." He likens the revelation of the genesis of the work to a ladder which might be thrown away once it has been climbed, but adds: "nevertheless, I should not like to throw away the ladder" (p. xvi). And at the very end of the text he reminds

us that "the overall structure of the Diabelli Variations bears . . . an intimate relation with the story of its genesis" (p. 130).

Certainly, the heart of this book is to be found in part II ("The Compositional Style"), in which Kinderman presents what is the most cogent explanation of the large-scale structure of the Diabelli Variations that I have read. And Kinderman's reading of the work is indeed intimately related to his study of its genesis, which occupies part I of the text. His major achievement here has been to reconstruct, from sources in Paris, Berlin, and Montauban, a draft for the Variations which together with related sketches in the Wittgenstein sketchbook and other manuscripts shows that two-thirds of the variations, including the penultimate fugue, had been conceived in 1819 before Beethoven abandoned the work. Kinderman shows that when Beethoven took it up again in 1822–23 he retained the order of the variations in the PLM (Paris-Landsberg-Montauban) draft but added two variations at the beginning, one in the middle, and substantially expanded the end of the set. Three of these new variations (nos. 1, 15, and 25) are direct parodies of the waltz theme, by means of which "Beethoven established a se-

¹"Beethoven Scholars and Beethoven's Sketches," this journal 2 (1978), 3–17.