

PIO ENEA DEGLI OBIZZI (1592-1674): POWER AND AUTHORSHIP¹

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When a spectacle was to be produced in Ancient Athens, a wealthy individual was appointed by the archon magistrates to pay personally for the expenditure of the hiring, training and dressing of the chorus and aulos players, items not covered by the municipal government. In exchange for the enormous burden, he was promised political glory: he might be given a special place in the procession or his name be put first even before that of the poet. He was called the 'choregos' (χορηγός)².

The glorified status of the choregos has interesting parallels with that of aristocratic patrons during the Baroque era, who made their 'power' manifest through financial means – either employing renowned musicians and/or commissioning extravagant spectacles. The Medici in Florence, the Gonzaga in Mantua, the Este in Ferrara, the Barberini in Rome are cases in point. This article, however, is concerned with a complex and artistic manifestation of such power relations, and a more subtle one: that between artists and aristocrats as revealed through the authorship issues of musico-dramatic works in mid-17th century Italy. Moreover, aspects of this issue are intriguingly related to early modern views of the choregos role as we will see.

The central figure upon whom this particular investigation is based is Marchese Pio Enea degli Obizzi (1592-1674) who was born into one of the most illustrious families of Padua and Ferrara, and contributed to the early history of opera³. The Marquis is already a well-known figure to music historians⁴. There are two oft-quoted passages of 17th-century literature concerning him. The first passage is taken from *Minerva tavolino* – a chronicle of early Venetian operas published first in 1681 by Cristoforo Ivanovich. There, Ivanovich described his encounter with Obizzi as follows:

In 1664, when I visited the beautiful residence of Marquis Pio Enea Obizzi in Battaglia⁵, I saw in ground-floor chambers a series of paintings of 'theatrical machines' with cavaliers on horseback. Upon my request, the marquis explained courteously to me as follows: 'this is when, requested by my friends in Padua, I held a tournament there, and presented a story of Cadmus as an introductory musical entertainment. It was set to music and eventually [the libretto] appeared in print for public eyes. For the purpose of using floats dragged by horses, we set a spacious enclosure adjacent to the Pra della Valle Square. As you see in these paintings, it was a perfect spectacle with grandeur. A good number of groups of Venetian noblemen, cavaliers from the mainland, students came to see it, even if the production happened to be in the month of October, which is usually the holiday season⁶... It was the very next year under the protection by the noble that several virtuoso musicians got together and inaugurated Teatro San Cassiano [in Venice] with *L'Andromeda* by Benedetto Ferrari, the poet, musician and excellent theorbo player'. Thus, it was this great cavalier and intellectual who should be given the credit of introducing opera to Venice⁷.

¹ Preliminary research for this article was funded by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas foundation. An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 14th Biennial International Conference on Baroque Music, July 2010 and another appeared in print in the Japanese language (MATSUMOTO 2011).

² WALTON 1991, pp. 66-72.

³ This Pio Enea was a grandson of the nobleman with the same name (1525-1589) who built the Castello del Catajo in 1570 and became *Collaterale Generale* of the Republic of Venice in 1576. For a genealogy and a history of the Obizzi family up to the mid 17th-century, see: PRIORATO 1658, pp. 156-168.

⁴ For previous studies of Pio Enea degli Obizzi, see: DI LUCA 1993; BADOLATO 2013; and VOLPONI 2014.

⁵ Most likely the Castello del Catajo, Obizzi's residence in Battaglia Terme on the outskirts of Padua.

⁶ This seems to be an error as the printed libretto of *Ermiona* reports that the performance took place in April.

⁷ IVANOVICH 1688, pp. 390-391: «Mi portai sino l'anno 1664 ad osservare il bellissimo luogo del Marchese Pio Enea Obizzi alla Battaglia; dove in alcune stanze terrene vi erano inquadriati diverti disegni di Machine Teatrali con Cavalieri a Cavallo, e chiedendo al Marchese la loro notizia cortesemente mi rispose: L'anno 1636 nacque generoso desiderio in alcuni miei amici, e compagni in Padova, di ordinar un Torneo; onde io per nobilitarlo maggiormente, presi per mano la Favola di Cadmo, e ne composi l'Introduzione, che fu poi posta in Musica nella forma, che comparve stampata in publica vista. Si fece a questo oggetto serrar un luogo spazioso contiguo a Pra della Valle, e con machine a Cavallo; come si vede in questi disegni, si perfezionò un pomposo spettacolo. Fu numeroso il concorso di Nobiltà Veneta, di Cavalieri di Terraferma, e di Scolari dello Studio; mentre seguì la comparsa il mese d'Ottobre, destinato per ordinario al

The so-called ‘introductory work’ involving the story of Cadmus discussed here was identified by Pierluigi Petrobelli as *Ermiona*⁸. It was performed in Padua in 1636, and Obizzi authored the libretto⁹. The tableaux Ivanovich witnessed in Obizzi’s residence may well have been the originals of twelve vignettes inserted in the published libretto of *Ermiona*¹⁰.

The second often-quoted passage is found in the preface to the printed scenario of *Le nozze d’Enea con Lavinia*¹¹, Claudio Monteverdi’s opera premiered at the SS Giovanni e Paolo Theatre, Venice, in the 1640/41 season, for which the music is lost. The anonymous librettist of *Le nozze*¹² came to know that Obizzi had written an opera based upon the same story when he was about to finish his work and commented upon Obizzi in the preface:

As the subject, I decided to choose the wedding of Aeneas and Lavinia, not knowing that it had been dramatised by others...the fact that the same material was found in the hand of the noblest and most virtuous Cavalier [Obizzi] demonstrated that I had had good judgment in my choice¹³.

From these references, we learn that Obizzi was instrumental in the establishment of early opera and was in contact with Monteverdi and other prominent figures in the industry. The prime aim of this article is to examine the exact nature and extent of the Marquis’ power and control over the musico-dramatic works that he produced during the 1630s and 40s; a crucial period when ‘public opera’ commenced and was developed in Venice with the inauguration of Teatro San Cassiano in 1637.

The role of Obizzi was not simply that of a financial patron. Recently his role has been characterised as that of ‘corago’¹⁴, a notion generated from the Choregos but developed more directly from its Latin derivative ‘Choragus’, meaning something more akin to ‘director’ in the modern sense¹⁵. An anonymous manuscript treatise from c. 1630, aptly entitled *Il corago*¹⁶, explains that ‘il corago’ is the person «whose task [is]... to find, maintain and set up when needed all the decorations, devices and equipment pertaining to plays and other shows and entertainment» and «will have to know something of all those faculties [such as carpentry, architecture, perspective paintings, costumes, acting, music, fencing, dancing, machines, and lighting] so that he can exercise command over them»¹⁷. On the whole, although authoritative, *il corago* was expected to govern ‘behind-the-scenes responsibilities’ at a court theatre.

villeggiare... Di qui venne, che l’anno addietro con la protezione di più Nobili, s’unirono diversi Virtuosi professori della Musica, mediante i quali comparve l’anno 1637 nel Teatrdo di S. Cassiano l’Andromeda di Benedetto Ferrari Poeta, Musico e Suonatore eccellente della Tiorba. Ed ecco i favori di questo gran Cavaliere, e letterato, che si degnò d’onorarmi della sudetta notizia vagliono d’autorizzare l’origine, e’l tempo, che ha avuta l’introduzione de’ Drami in Venezia».

⁸ PETROBELLI 1965.

⁹ For the influence of the *Ermiona* production on ballet in Venetian theatres, see: HELLER 2011.

¹⁰ BARTOLINI 1638. For reproductions, see: PETROBELLI 1965, between pp. 128 and 129.

¹¹ *Argomento*, [1640].

¹² The librettist of *Le nozze* is never named in the original sources, and modern scholarship is still debating who it was. The proposed candidates are Giacomo Badoaro (see: WALKER 1992) and Michelangelo Torcigliani (see: MICHELASSI 2007). Michelassi has proposed Torcigliani, the person to whom the libretto of another opera *Ulisse errante* (1644) was dedicated, because: (a) the prefaces of *Le nozze d’Enea* and *Ulisse errante*, both of which discuss Aristotelian unities in libretto-writing, should be taken as a form of debate or exchange; and (b) that L’Assicurato (the author of *Ulisse errante*), in the preface to that work, tells us that Torcigliani once showed to him some scenes of his drama – and Michelassi suggests that that drama might have been a draft of *Le nozze d’Enea*, which would make Torcigliani the author of the libretto. However, Michelassi’s arguments are somewhat speculative.

¹³ *Argomento*, [1640], p. 5: «Per soggetto poi stimai d’ellegger le nozze d’Enea in Lavinia, non sapendo che d’altri fossero state drammaticamente trattate... l’esser la stessa materia in mano di nobilissimo, et virtuosissimo Cavalliere, mostrava, ch’io havea havuto buon giudicio nella scielta».

¹⁴ VOLPONI 2014.

¹⁵ SAVAGE – SANSONE 1989, p. 496.

¹⁶ I-MOe: MS γ. F.6.11. For a modern edition, see: FABBRI – POMPILIO 1983.

¹⁷ SAVAGE – SANSONE 1989, p. 499. Cf. FABBRI – POMPILIO 1983, pp. 21-22.

It is true that Obizzi sometimes fulfilled such a role in the spectacles in which he was involved. However, unlike the Greek Choregos, *il corago* and the Latin choragus in themselves bore no honorific implication. It was another role – outside the usual capacities of *il corago* – through which Obizzi made his aristocratic power manifest: that is as ‘l’ideatore’ i.e. ‘plot devisor’. Such manifestations have significant implications for our understanding of not only aristocratic discretion in relation to the public acknowledgement of literary activities, but also the whole notion of ‘Authorship’ in early modern operas.

OBIZZI’S WORKS FROM THE 1630S/40S

During his life, Obizzi was involved in various capacities in many musico-theatrical productions (see Table 1). From them, this article will discuss three works which illustrate the changes in Obizzi’s status and roles. They are: *I furori di Venere*; *L’Amor pudico*; and *Il pio Enea*. Of the three works, only *Il pio Enea* is a fully-fledged opera, while the remaining two belong to the genre of ‘opera torneo’.

‘Torneo’ or tournament here does not mean a military competition pure and simple, but rather a stylized battle introduced by, or enframed by, musico-dramatic entertainment. The musico-dramatic ‘frame’ tended to be in the operatic style, while the stylized battle was usually accompanied by dance music or trumpets and drums. Both the operatic frame and the stylized battle often had an allegorical purpose, but it is only in the operatic frame that we find dialogue, characterization and fully worked-out plots. Even so, the battles would frequently at least have identifiable settings, participants, and locally significant allusions. The opera tourney was particularly popular at North Italian courts and elsewhere in the seventeenth century¹⁸, and the aforementioned *Ermiona* by Obizzi based upon the Cadmus story, is also an example of this genre. Musicology sometimes refers to the tourney as a ‘*sotto-genere*’ of opera, since its content developed alongside opera and allowed mutual influences to flow between the two genres¹⁹. However, as Ivanovich’s report above concerning *Ermiona* shows, the distinction between an operatic frame attached to a tourney and an opera proper does not seem to have been perceived clearly during the seventeenth century.

As we will see, the forthcoming analysis of three works by Obizzi not only enables us to understand the issues concerning aristocratic authorship but also to uncover in a little more detail the crucial transition from aristocratic and civic spectacle to public opera in the 1630s and 40s.

I FURORI DI VENERE (1639)

I furori di Venere was produced in June 1639 in Bologna. It was the second opera-torneo where Obizzi took the initiative, *Ermiona* being the first. Five primary sources associated with this work survive (Table 1, A-E). As all the prefaces to the surviving manuscript libretti (A-C) reveal,²⁰ *I furori di Venere* was planned to celebrate the occasion that Bologna welcomed to the city the newly appointed papal legate, Giulio Sacchetti (1586-1663). The production was supported by several Bolognese academies: the overall director was Cornelio Malvasia, a member of the Gelati²¹, and an active contributor to the development of Bolognese theatre in general²². The libretto was co-authored by Bernardino Mariscotti, the director of the Gelati²³, and Carlo Possenti, a member of the Confusi. The official report of the performance was written by Giovanni Battista Manzini, a member

¹⁸ TIMMS 1990, p. 707.

¹⁹ FABBRI 1999, pp. VII-VIII.

²⁰ All of those MS libretti are neat copies with very few corrections. All are dated ‘October 1639’ and refer to Manzini’s published report, implying that Manzini’s work was published after the premiere (June 1639) but before October of that year.

²¹ For the Gelati academy, see: ZANI 1672.

²² BIANCONI – WALKER 1975, p. 426.

²³ ZANI 1672, p. 32.

of the della Notte Academy. Likewise, Obizzi was a member of the Gelati, and was known as 'il Rigenerato' (see Fig. 1)²⁴.

I furori di Venere was performed in 'La sala del senato cittadino nel Palazzo del Podestà'²⁵. It consisted of two parts which respectively acted as the prelude and the postlude to a stylised tournament, between 'Roma' and its allegorical challenges, 'Mare', 'Selva' and 'Neve'. The story of *I furori* was set in Sicily, and the subject matter is mythological, concerned with the conflict between Venere and Giunone and the resultant chaotic situation amongst Gods which gave rise to the Trojan War. Manzini's official report of the production tells us that 'those events unfolded in this entertainment in the end brought about the wedding between Aeneas and Lavinia'.²⁶ Therefore, *I furori di Venere* as a whole can be considered a preamble to Obizzi's work of two years later, *Il Pio Enea*, whose subject matter features that very wedding between Aeneas and Lavinia.

Regrettably, no musical sources regarding *I furori di Venere* seem to survive and we do not know who the composer was. Yet, music must have played a vital role in the production and the work may even have been sung throughout because: (1) the margin of a page in the libretto (C) (see Table 1) contains a memorandum concerning the voice types and provenances of persons who acted the roles of the gods such as 'Castrato di Colonna', 'Basso di Ferrara'. as well as cues for the commencement of 'sinfonias' and 'ritornellos'; and (2) Manzini in his report comments upon the music, and particularly on the singers' superb techniques, and the brilliance of the vocal music²⁷. Table 2 is a full list of the roles of *I furori di Venere* and their designated singers. Identifying those singers is not easy as usually only their voice types and provenances are given in the source. However, 'Venanzio di Colonna' who sang the role of Irade must be Venanzio Leopardi (d. c. 1658)²⁸ and 'La Romana' (assigned for the role of Diana) may well have been either Maddalena Manelli or Giulia Paoelli who came from Rome and were to sing the roles of Minerva and Penelope respectively for Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* in Bologna in the following year 1640²⁹.

The details of the contribution that Obizzi made to *I furori di Venere* are not clear at first glance. The front pages of all the manuscript libretti give us the title '*I furori di Venere, Favola del Sig.^{re} Obizzi*', which seems to imply his responsibility for the text. However, Obizzi was not the librettist in the modern sense and he was neither the director nor the promoter as other names were specified for those roles as we have seen – the librettists were Mariscotti and Possenti, and the director was Malvasia. In fact, on Obizzi's recommendation, Malvasia employed for the production the Ferrarese scenic designer, Alfonso Rivarola (known as il Chenda)³⁰. Obizzi had already worked with il Chenda for *Il campo aperto* (1635) and *Ermiona*. Most likely, Obizzi was the 'ideatore' (that is plot-deviser) as Source (E) indicates.

Source (E) is entitled the *Introduz.^{ne} alla festa* and is currently found in the Pio Enea degli Obizzi collection in L'Archivio Stato di Padova. This seems almost certainly to be a working manuscript for the construction of the plot of *I furori*. It is written in prose, bearing numerous corrections and deletions³¹. There is no clear indication of the source's provenance, but the fable is set in a 'Sicilian forest' and commences with the scene where Astrea gives blessings to a 'Roman Senator' and declares that she will bestow her benefits on the city of Bologna. There then follows the story of Venus, who rebels against Jove which leads the subsequent conflict between Venus and Juno and the involvement of the other gods. Thus, this sketch for the opening of *I furori* is highly significant, given that quite a few operas from the 1640s and 50s contain hints that the activity of

²⁴ ZANI 1672, p. 354.

²⁵ MONALDINI 1999, p. 126.

²⁶ G. B. MANCINI: 1639, pp. 69-70: « Accennavansi le future nozze d'Enea e di Lavinia».

²⁷ MANCINI 1639, p. 34.

²⁸ For Leopardi, see: SADIE 1998, p. 85.

²⁹ Cf: *Le glorie*, 1640, pp. 9-10.

³⁰ G. B. MANZINI 1639, p. 14.

³¹ For a complete transcription of this source, see: VOLPONI 2014, pp. 385-7.

libretto writing tended to be a collaborative effort – one person devised the plot and others versified it. More specifically, it seems that ‘devising plots’ was the acknowledged role of aristocrats in such productions, while the detailed labour of versification, stage adaptation and musical realisation fell to others of lesser status. And *I furori* is a clear case where the evidence points to Obizzi devising the plot while others effected the versification. Obizzi’s other functions become clearer in the case of *L’Amor pudico*, as we shall now see.

L’AMOR PUDICO (1643)

L’Amor pudico was premiered on the evening of 15 June, 1643 in Padua, as part of the wedding celebrations for Elisabetta Landi, a daughter of the former mayor of that city, and Bartolomeo Zeno, a son of the Capitano. The venue of the event was La Piazza dei Signori, which was surrounded by medieval buildings. The space had been frequently used from the sixteenth century as a venue for spectacles owing to its attractive setting and spaciousness³². Following the event, Obizzi directly asked Luigi Manzini, a Bolognese Count and a member of the Gelati to write an official report³³. Manzini’s report contains not only the libretto but also several illustrations which show the stage set of each act and the disposition-plans of cavaliers participating in the tournament.

From Manzini’s description, we can certainly tell that singers and instrumentalists were involved but we cannot assign music to particular sections of the text nor say in what style or for which forces the music was written. However, *L’Amor pudico* bears the same generic title as *Ermiona* (torneo), and both took place in the same city and with the same patron, and also name a composer (Sances for *Ermiona* and Padre Antonio dalle Tavole, the maestro di cappella of Il Santo for *L’Amor pudico*), hence we can surmise that the most likely scheme for *L’Amor pudico* was: (1) a prologue sung by Amore; (2) four scenes called ‘Invenzioni’ (on the four seasons: Primavera, Estate, Autunno, Inverno) interspersed with stylized battles; and (3) a postlude sung by Amore and the chorus³⁴. In the battles, Obizzi himself took the role of Primavera and led a squadron of three cavaliers who personified the three Spring months.

The libretto of this work was co-authored, based upon a plot devised by Obizzi, which is now surviving only as a fragment (Source (F) in Table 1)³⁵. In addition to the plot, Obizzi himself wrote the opening verses for Amore and Invenzione 1, while Invenzioni 2 and 3 were written by Bartolini, who had previously published the official report of the 1636 premiere of *Ermiona*. Invenzione 4 was the work of Michelangelo Torcigliani (1618-1679).

Both Bartolini and Torcigliani seem to have been acting under Obizzi’s guidance. In fact, I have discovered that letters from Obizzi to Torcigliani survive in Torcigliani’s posthumous collection of letters and poems³⁶. Moreover judging by the dates given to the letters, it seems clear that they are concerned with the *L’Amor pudico* production, although the title of the work being discussed is never mentioned. In the first of those letters, dated 2 June 1642 (roughly a year prior to the premiere of *L’Amor pudico*), Obizzi requests Torcigliani’s poems («gran neccessità di quelle Poesie») and urges Torcigliani to come to Padua³⁷. After this letter, it seems that Torcigliani did send at least some of the requested work. The following letter dated 23 April thanks Torcigliani for his *poesie*. Obizzi then quotes lines from ‘il poeta nostro ferrarese’, (that is Ariosto) with words from his *Orlando furioso* requests Torcigliani’s immediate arrival at Padua: «Né più la cara poi, che presa vede; E sol dietro a chi fugge affretta il piede»³⁸. However, the subsequent letter dated 28 April 1643 complains that «although time is passing, why don’t I see you nor the compositions for

³² MANCINI – MURARO – POVOLEDO 1988, p. 85.

³³ L. MANZINI 1643, p. 3

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

³⁵ For a full transcription of Source (F), see: VOLPONI 2014, pp. 480-481.

³⁶ TORCIGLIANI 1680.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 39. Although not identified in the letter, this phrase was taken from Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso* (Canto X, 7). The phrase ‘la cara’ in the letter is ‘l’estima’ in the original.

the Torneo? The verses must be set to music now otherwise musicians cannot start rehearsals. Please, at least, reply to me»³⁹. Moreover, Obizzi's trouble with Torcigliani did not end there: a desperate last and brief letter survives from Obizzi, dated on 17 July 1643 – that is after the premiere.

Per l'amore di Dio, per pietà, i versi subito; altrimenti non si può stampar l'opera, presto, presto, Amen⁴⁰.

It seems that Obizzi was preparing for the publication of the official report of the event including the text, and requested revised verses from Torcigliani, who was not about to meet the deadline.

Although not specified in these letters, the sources of the libretto show that Obizzi's major role in *Amor pudico* was again that of 'l'ideatore' but the letters do demonstrate that he also acted as a coordinator and producer. Further in relation to the role of 'ideatore', in the contemporary textual sources of *I furore di Venere* and *L'Amor pudico*, Obizzi is actually identified as 'l'autore' (the author). This seems to suggest that in mid-seventeenth century musico-dramatic works, 'ideazione' (the devising of the main plot) took precedence over 'versificazione' (rendering those ideas into verse). Also, such a division of labour directly reflected social hierarchy – it was Marquis Obizzi who was a governing figure in the production of the text as well as within the production of the communal event. This kind of hierarchical division of labour in respect of writing a musico-dramatic text during the early modern era was perhaps more ubiquitous than we have hitherto suspected, and a complicating factor seems to have been the tendency deliberately to conceal in many cases the involvement of persons of high status.

'CO-AUTHORSHIP' IN EARLY MODERN LIBRETTO WRITING

This tendency is demonstrated by several examples from Venetian operas of that time (see Table 3). The first comes from the libretto of Francesco Cavalli's opera, *Amore innamorato*, produced at Teatro St Moisè, Venice in 1642. The music is lost but the libretto was published with a dedication by Giovanni Battista Fusconi, a member of the Incogniti Academy⁴¹, dated the first day of 1642. In the preface, Fusconi tells us that «I have had a hand in many parts of this work»⁴². However, as for the others parts, we need to turn to some interesting information provided by Nicolo Bertini in the preface to *Rime* of Pietro Michiele – another Incognito – published in 1643:

Psyche, a little tale for music was constructed [by Michiele] following the order of a scenario given to him by the illustrious Signor Giovanni Francesco Loredano, whom he did not know how to refuse because they were on such good terms. The work can be seen as equal to those that are more famous. This *Psyche* under the title of *Amore innamorato* was printed some days ago, without the author's [Michiele's] knowledge. This has a prologue and 3 or 4 other acts full of ideas for jokes which attracted the plebeians of the audience when it was recited⁴³.

Thus, we learn what the compositional process of the text of *Amore innamorato* was: Loredano – the founder of the Incogniti – devised the scenario upon which Michiele wrote the libretto, which was revised further by Fusconi (who perhaps added the 'jokes') – with the intention that initial steps would remain hidden to protect the social standing of the originators.

We have similar evidence for the construction of the libretto of *Argiope*, which was, with music by Alessandro Leardini, premiered at the SS. Giovanni e Paolo Theatre in 1649⁴⁴. Although

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 39: «Il tempo passa, e perchè non veggo nè V.S., nè le compositioni per il Torneo, che devono mettersi in musica, & impararsi a mente, La prego ad avisarmi (sic) qualche cosa almeno».

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

⁴¹ Founded by the Venetian patrician, Giovan Francesco Loredano, with members including important librettists such as Giulio Strozzi and Francesco Busenello, the Incogniti Academy was one of the most influential academies for early modern opera. For the Academy, see: MIATO 1998. For a list of the members, see: LOREDANO – BRUSONI 1647.

⁴² [FUSCONI] 1652, p. 5: «io tengo tanta parte in quest'opera».

⁴³ MICHIELE 1643, p. 10: «La Psiche Favoleta per musica composta sopra l'ordine d'uno scenario dattagli dall'Illustriss. Signor Gio: Francesco Loredano, a cui non ha saputo negare di farlo, essendo tra loro congiunti di tale strettezza d'Amicitia; che si puo agguagliare ad ogn'una delle più famose. Questa Psiche i giorgi a dietro fu stampata, senza, che l'Autore lo sapesse sotto nome di Amore Innamorato, col prologo, e con altre tre o Quattro scene piene di concetti di burla per al lettore la plebe de gli Auditori quando si recitò».

⁴⁴ ROCHE (2001, p. 418) indicates that this opera may have been composed for Carnival 1646.

Ivanovich in his list of Venetian works gave credit only to Fusconi as the librettist⁴⁵, the title page of the printed libretto⁴⁶ indicates that this work was written by an anonymous person – only specified as ‘N’ – as well as Fusconi⁴⁷. And this fact was also noted in the first edition of Allacci’s *Drammaturgia* of 1666⁴⁸. In the preface to the *Argiope* libretto, Fusconi wrote:

Constructing this fable was hastened by the pleading of friends. The story was devised in fourteen nights by the pen of that most famous ‘Swan of Adria’, who maintains the vivacity of Italian poetry in our century: but because he was then on leave and awaiting the discretion of the wind, which would open for him the road for a long voyage, he could not apply himself to the work, which nearly robbed our dreams. When he departed, the unfinished work he left to me with ample licence, not for me to lick into shape something formless in the manner of a bear with its newborn,⁴⁹ but to handle it as if a midwife at an abandoned birth-process, nourishing and increasing the work, not so as to accord with her own qualities [i.e. those of the midwife], but so as to conform with its proper strengths, being regulated by good will⁵⁰.

Fusconi thus took over from the ‘Swan of Adria’⁵¹ (the person indicated on the title page as ‘N’) and developed his work, but the details here are rather interesting. Clearly ‘N’ was a well-respected poet, but in this case he devised the plot. However, he also seems to have discussed with Fusconi how the plot might be developed, and instructed him not to take it outside the agreed boundaries, but rather to enhance the strengths it already had – only in this sense did Fusconi have ‘ample licence’.

Further on in the Preface Fusconi makes it clear that things did not go as planned. ‘Various accidents’ caused by ‘Fortune’ impeded the arrangements for the first performance, and the original ‘inventor’ – ‘N’ – came back to finish the libretto. Bearing a grudge, Fusconi wrote: «because this second trouble occurred to me ... it seemed as if no more than a few vestiges of the effigy which were given by the first sketch remained»⁵². In other words, Fusconi had stuck to his brief and preserved the form of the original narrative, but ‘N’ seems to have had the authority to abandon it without Fusconi’s permission. The plot, then, was devised by, and under the control of, a more famous and prestigious person, who gave instructions to Fusconi and who (on the evidence of the libretto and Preface) wished to remain anonymous.

When it comes to the identity of this mysterious person, from accounts found in two eighteenth-century sources – (BONLINI 1730) and (CENDONI – ZENO – ALLACCI 1755) – we have traditionally understood him to be Pietro Michiele⁵³. The evidence for this is far from conclusive⁵⁴,

⁴⁵ IVANOVICH 21688, p. 435.

⁴⁶ FUSCONI 1649. The preface to this publication states that the work was set to music jointly by Giovanni Rovetta and Leardini but the final page of the same publication corrects that. See: *Ibidem*, pp. 6 and 96.

⁴⁷ The ‘N’ here does not necessarily signify the initial of the name but the abbreviation of *nomen* [name] which was often used to hide a person’s real identity. See: GLIXON 1996, p. 123. Also the ‘N’ might designate ‘Il Signor Non si sà’ or ‘Non ignoto’.

⁴⁸ ALLACCI 1666, p. 36.

⁴⁹ This phrase seems to refer to an early belief (found in medieval bestiaries, for example) that bear cubs are born formless and the mother bear licks them into shape.

⁵⁰ FUSCONI 1649, p. 5: «L’orditura di questa Favola venne a preghiere d’Amici più tosto precipitata, che tessuta in quattordici sere della penna di quell famosissimo [sic] Cigno dell’Adria, che mantiene al nostro secolo in vita la Poesia Italiana: poiche essendo egli allhora di partenza, & in aspettatione della discretione de’venti, che gli aprissero la strada per un lungo viaggio maritimo non potè applicarvisi, che a momenti rubati al sonno. Partitosi adunque nella sconciatura di quest’opera, me la lasciò con amplissima licenza, non di riformarla a guisa d’Orsa i suoi parti; ma di trattarla quasi Raccoglitrice di Parto abbandonato, che l’alimenta, e cresce non secondo al suo merito, ma conforme alle proprie forze regolate da una buona volontà».

⁵¹ The word ‘Adria’ may mean either ‘Adriatico’ or the city with that name in the Polesine region. See: CORTELAZZO 2007, p. 25.

⁵² FUSCONI 1649, p. 6: «...perhce a me ancora tocasse questo secondo fastidio, e mi reusci la facenda in guisa, che non vi restò quasi più vestigio datale dal primo schizzo».

⁵³ BONLINI 1730, p. 50: «In questo Drama ha avuto anche parte Pietro Michiel N. V.»; and CENDONI – ZENO – ALLACCI 1755, p. 105: «Argiope:...Nella poesia di questo Dramma ebbe parte Pietro Michieli, Patr. Ven.».

⁵⁴ Interestingly the phrase ‘Cigno dell’Adria’ reminds us of the similar one ‘da una musa, e da un cigno, ch’entrambi abitando l’arene dell’Adria’ used by Federico Malipiero in relation to Monteverdi’s *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria* in his

but the implications in the preface that 'N' was called away on official business would fit well with Michiele's duties as a high-ranking patrician of the Republic⁵⁵. Clear evidence of other collaborations survives for at least another three libretti around c. 1650 in Venice – *Alessandro vincitor di se stesso*, *Gl' amori di Alessandro Magno*, and *Cesare amante* (all from 1651) (see Table 3)⁵⁶.

That some of the above matters are speculative is inevitable, given the desire for secrecy on the part of patrician writers. For Loredano and Michiele, hiding their involvement in operatic publications may have been a way not only of conforming to the motto of the Incogniti – 'ex ignoto notus' (out of the unknown comes the known)⁵⁷, but also of protecting their 'refined' status. As Ellen Rosand has argued, writing a libretto for a commercially oriented opera house – rather than for a courtly entertainment – seems to have been viewed as a rather dubious, somewhat demeaning enterprise⁵⁸.

PRACTICES AND THE THEORIES OF ARISTOTLE

The picture that is emerging of a hierarchy between the plot devisers of early modern Italian opera, and the versifiers of the libretti (not to mention, further down the social scale, the composers and those in charge of the scenery) may well have as its social cause the particular social structure, but there is a further justification for exactly this hierarchy, and one which many of those involved must have known – the discussion of tragic drama in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

What is interesting about the *Poetics* here is the way in which Aristotle justifies a particular hierarchy of the ingredients of tragedy. First, he says, comes the plot which is the 'most important' part, since Tragedy is a representation 'not of human beings but of action and life' (1450^a15)⁵⁹. This view was certainly noted by seventeenth-century authors including Francesco Pona, another Incognito. Pona, in his treatise on the *Poetics* (1636) wrote:

The plot is, to discuss this briefly today, the principal part of tragedy, which, Aristotle says, no other part can be, apart from this arranging of matters or, as we should like to say, the proper constitution of actions. This is so because the subject is the thing upon which all happenings of tragedy have to rely, and if it were defective, tragedy would immediately become imperfect and out of proportion. I said it is the principal part, because the plot is the main part in tragedy precisely as the soul is in the body, without which it cannot have life; likewise without the plot tragedy cannot exist⁶⁰.

Aristotle goes on to tell us that for the above reason 'a poet must be a composer of plots rather than of verses' (1451^b26), and because that which is terrifying and pitiable can arise 'from the structure of the incidents itself; this is superior and belongs to a better poet. For the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome' (1453^b1-5). It is not difficult to imagine that the early librettists saw in this statement a justification for the literary publication and dissemination of opera texts, since the reader of a well-formed work could be moved 'even without seeing it' on the stage.

Aristotle then proposes that plots should be constructed in at least two stages: first the poet 'should set them out as universals' (i.e. in outline, by gathering together certain types of events

La peripezia d'Ulisse overo la casta Penelope. However, whether the 'Cigno dell'Adria' in the two occurrences indicates one and the same person is unclear.

⁵⁵ For a brief description of Michiele's status as a patrician, see: LOREDANO – BRUSONI 1647, p. 373.

⁵⁶ Also VENDRAMINO (1639, p. 6) thanks Manelli for his help, and in the same breath sends his regards to Pietro Michiele, but the reason for this salutation is unclear.

⁵⁷ For debates concerning the motto of the Incogniti, see, for example, CALCAGNO 2003.

⁵⁸ ROSAND 1991, esp. p. 38. Also see: GLIXON, B. – GLIXON, J. 2007, p. 110.

⁵⁹ All the translations of *Poetics* are taken from: JANKO 1987.

⁶⁰ PONA 1636, pp. 33 [bis] and 34: «La Favola dunque (per ragionar hoggi di questa con brevità) è la parte principale della Tragedia: la quale, dice Aristotele che altro non è salvoche l'ordinazione delle cose; o vogliam dire la costituzione convenevole dell'Azione. Hor questa; perchè'l soggetto, in cui tutti gli accidenti della Tragedia s'hanno ad appoggiare, quando fosse diffettosa, renderebbe di primo lancio la Tragedia imperfetta e sproporzionata. Dissi parte principale, perche la Favola è appunto nella Tragedia, come l'anima nel corpo; senza la quale ei non può vivere, si come senza la Favola, non può sussistere la Tragedia».

illustrative of human situations and proclivities) ‘and only then introduce episodes; that is, extend them’ (1455^a34-1455^b1), but taking care that any such episodes ‘are particular to the story’ (1455^b14). Here we may perhaps find a clue to the tensions between Fusconi and Michiele discussed earlier, particularly if Michiele, as the ‘true’ poet (in Aristotelian terms), constructed the ‘universalising’ outline plot, and then had to leave before the episodes (perhaps agreed in principle) were developed by Fusconi – but perhaps not in a manner ‘particular to the story’, and designed to display his own merits (contrary to Michiele’s instructions) rather than the strengths of the narrative as handed to him by Michiele.

As for the other ingredients of Tragedy, Aristotle’s hierarchy is rather clear. ‘Diction’ (i.e. the specific words and versifications) must come after the plot since, if the author ‘puts in sequence speeches full of character, well-composed in diction and reasoning’, he will not achieve only by these means ‘what was agreed to be the function of Tragedy’, because the plot ‘will achieve it much more’ (1450^a30-34). Song, for its part, is only ‘the most important of the embellishments’ of the genre, and ‘Spectacle is something enthralling, but is very artless and the least particular to the art of poetic composition’ (1450^b15-16). It would be difficult to find a closer parallel than this to the relative social standing of patrician plot devisers, versifiers, composers and scenery designers in the theatrical world of seventeenth century Italy.

Given this background, it is hardly surprising that quite a few musico-dramatic spectacles from the first half of the seventeenth century seem to exemplify the hierarchical relation between the plot deviser and the versifier as we have seen. And that hierarchy had effects beyond the signalling of ‘Aristotelian’ ideas. The high social status of the plot deviser must have made deference towards him obligatory, and it doubtless also had a strong influence on any assessment of the work. Moreover, in relation to the commercially oriented opera industry (a dubious venture), the situation was more complicated. When the plot deviser wished to remain anonymous, his name would not appear anywhere in print – exactly as we have seen in the cases of Loredano and Michiele. Interestingly, Obizzi, devising the plots of academico-aristocratic entertainments, did disclose his name as that of the author, but his manner changed, although subtly, after he acquired a permanent theatre.

OBIZZI’S OPERA: *IL PIO ENEA* (1641)

On 10 February 1641, on the occasion of the arrival of Marzio Ginetti, the new Papal Legate to Ferrara, the city saw two celebratory musico-theatrical works⁶¹. One was *Gli amori di Armida* (the libretto by Ascanio Pio di Savoia and the music by Marco Marazzoli) performed at La Sala Grande, and the other was *Il pio Enea*. Four sources associated with *Il pio Enea* survive (see Table 1): the published libretto of 1641; the printed scenario (undated); a manuscript libretto; and a neat copy of the music (undated)⁶². Although in none of the sources does the composer’s name come down to us, all the sources as well as a manuscript chronicle of Ferrara between 1598 and 1643 indicate clearly that Obizzi was ‘il compositore’ of the work⁶³. There is no evidence of co-

⁶¹ MONALDINI 2002, p. 68.

⁶² The MS libretto is dated 8 April 1641 (the date added by a different hand from the main copyist’s and the proofreader) and the published libretto 4 May of that year. The MS seems to have been made in relation to preparing the libretto for publication. This is because the MS is a neat copy and its text conforms largely with that of the printed libretto but when mistakes occur, they are corrected by the proofreader and the corrections are reflected in the published libretto.

⁶³ I-FEc Collezione Antonelli, n. 294c., on 1641 [not paginated]: «Dell’ anno 1641 nel fine del carnevale che fu a di 10 feb. la nobiltà fer[rare]se conforme al suo solito per onorar la venuta del nuovo Legato fece due feste, una nella sala grande delle comedie, e l’altra nel teatro su la via grande. D. Ascanio Pio compose quella della Sala grande, che fu intitolata gli amori di Armida opera molto bella e dilettevole, la quale fu recitata musicalm.te in una scena fatta a posta... ; Pio Enea Obizi [sic.] figlio del march.e Roberto fu compositore dell’ altra festa, la quale fu intitolata il Pio Enea, e fu musicalm.te da musici famosi fatti venire a questo effetto recitata nel sud.o teatro risarcito a spese di dodici altri cavalieri....». For a longer transcription, see: MONALDINI 2002, pp. 68-69.

authorship, even though this does not prove that Obizzi was the sole responsible ‘author’ in the modern sense.

Il pio Enea marked the re-opening under a new management of ‘il teatro di San Lorenzo’ in Ferrara. Built by Giovanni Battista Aleotti in 1605, it had been known as Teatro degli Intrepidi, under the control of Marquis Enzo Bentivoglio, the director of the Intrepidi academy. But in 1640 Bentivoglio passed away, and Obizzi’s father purchased the theatre⁶⁴, and renamed it the Teatro Obizzi⁶⁵. Hence, *Il pio Enea* was not only designed to celebrate the Papal legate but the Obizzi family. This was made manifest through the (almost shameless) title of the work itself, which extols none other than the Marchese himself.

The acquisition of a permanent theatre changed the nature of Obizzi’s subsequent work. However, the change was still rather subtle in the case of *Il pio Enea* as it is fundamentally an ‘intellectually oriented’ opera, not commercially oriented. This becomes clear when we compare it with Monteverdi’s *Le nozze d’Enea in Lavinia*. As we have seen, these two works share their topics and plot source: the wedding between Aeneas and Lavinia from Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Moreover, since Monteverdi’s opera was premiered towards the end of 1640 in *more Veneto* (that was most likely in February of 1641 in the modern calendar)⁶⁶, *Il Pio Enea* and *Le nozze d’Enea* are ‘twins’ as it were in terms of the premiere date and their shared topics. These two Enea/Lavinia operas seem to emerged from conditions of mutual influence and competition.

The story of *Il Pio Enea* as a whole, despite its contrived *lieto fine* ending with the double wedding of Enea/Lavinia, and Turno/Camilla, is substantially more faithful to the original (Books 7-12) than Monteverdi’s *Le nozze*, since the latter may have been based upon Dolce’s paraphrasing poetry entitled *L’Achille et Enea* of 1570⁶⁷. The perspectives of the two operas differ significantly. *Il Pio Enea*, like Virgil’s original, mainly features the political shrewdness of Enea, while *Le nozze*’s theme lies in the complicated love story between Enea and Lavinia, and particularly the changing emotions of Lavinia, which are made conspicuous in her monologue (Act III, Scene 3). Also, *Le nozze* adds not only the new characters Elmino and Silvia who do not appear either in Virgil or in Dolce, but also a few comic-relief scenes with Numano (Numa in Virgil) who appears only once in the original (Book v, 459). Clearly the librettist was aware of «the disposition of most audiences who favour jokes like this more than serious things»⁶⁸. By contrast, *Il pio Enea* has only one comic scene where Ascanio, the son of Enea, teaches Cupid about the nature of love (V, 6). (See Table 4 for the structures of the printed libretto and the music of *Il Pio Enea* in comparison to the printed libretto of *Le nozze* and Virgil’s original). The differences between *Le nozze* and *Il pio Enea* seem to have arisen from the demographic contrast between their targeted audiences: that is, paying audiences of mixed social strata (*Le nozze*), as distinct from groups of the aristocratic and the learned (*Il pio Enea*).

In his theatre, Obizzi’s role gravitated towards that of a modern impresario. For the *Il pio Enea* performance, Obizzi negotiated with the Duke of Modena concerning the employment of the singer ‘Don Tommaso’. A surviving letter dated 20 August 1640 tells us:

For an *opera in musica*, which will be performed in Ferrara during this, forthcoming carnival, we need a bass singer who is beyond any others that can be found. I implore Your Highness to grant me Don Tommaso⁶⁹.

⁶⁴ See: (ZIOSI 2002, pp. 226-228) for the expenditure of the theatre purchase (I-FEas).

⁶⁵ Pio Enea Obizzi also opened a theatre in Padua in 1652 (another ‘Teatro degli Obizzi’), but the Paduan theatre was designed mainly for comedy performances and did not put a *Dramma per musica* until 1670. See: MANCINI – MURARO – POVOLEDO 1988, p. 112.

⁶⁶ Cf: Argomento, 1640, p.1: «Già s'avicina il finir dell’anno....».

⁶⁷ ROSAND 2007, pp. 146-149.

⁶⁸ Argomento 1640, p.18: «... sapendo l’umore di molti Spettatori, a quali più così fatti scherzi, che le cose serie».

⁶⁹ I-MOe Archivio per materie, Letterati b. 49 bis, dated 20 August 1640: «Per un’ opera in musica, che deve questo prossimo carnevale recitarsi in Ferrara, v’è neccessità d’un basso, oltre gli altri che si sono trovati. Supplico umilmente V.A. a conceermi d. Tommaso». For a transcription, also see: ZIOSI 2002, p. 239. However, Ziosi gives the date of the letter wrongly as 21 August of 1640.

Most probably, Don Tommaso sang either or both of the two bass roles in *Il pio Enea* which require vocal proficiency and presence: Eolo (Aeolus), the Wind God, who sings in the prologue an aria accompanied by three low-ranged instruments (most likely trombones, the instrument associated traditionally with the Wind God); and Giove who has a few important items including an duet with Cibeles which includes florid passages (III, 3). Subsequently, Obizzi imported for his theatre operas from Venice including Cavalli's *Giasone* and P. A. Ziani's *Le fortune di Rodope e Damira*.

Among his own works some deliberate obfuscation began to occur concerning his authorship. Three other works for the Teatro degli Obizzi in Ferrara which modern scholarship has attributed to Obizzi are: *Dafne* (1660) which was published under his anagrammed pseudonym (Azzio Epibenio); *Il ratto di Proserpina* (1672), the title page of which bears no author's name but tells us only that the work was performed «nel teatro degli Pio Enea degli Obizzi»; and *L'Amor rinformato* (1671), which seems to buck the trend by clearly giving Obizzi as the 'author, but, in fact, was not an opera proper but an 'invenzione' introducing tournaments, versified by Francesco Berni.

CONCLUSION

In aristocratic entertainments a person of high rank such as Pio Enea degli Obizzi led the group as the 'plot-deviser' and was given the credit of being the 'author' of the work, although the work may have been completed by others of lower station. His other duties seem to have included those of the coordinator, or 'il corago', but his status extended well beyond such a 'behind-the-curtain' role. For example, his taking the lead position in squadrons on horseback in *L'Amor pudico* is clearly reminiscent of the ancient role of the 'Choregos' with its prestigious 'headline' function. After the acquisition of a permanent theatre, Obizzi's role changed: from *l'ideatore* to *l'impresario*. This transition was not only indicative of a subtle democratization of the aristocracy but also inevitable once the genre of opera entered fully into the public domain.

Once opera took the path of commercialisation, aristocrats including Obizzi shied away from advertising their artistic participation in this somewhat dubious venture, but instead tended to take on the occasional role of impresario. The constant need for new works also caused a gradual transformation from educated professionals who happened to be librettists (such as Busenello who wrote opera libretti while pursuing the profession of lawyer) to professional librettists who drew on their education for that main purpose (such as Giacinto Andrea Cicognini (1606-1651)). Moreover, the need to earn a living also marked the eventual establishment of the modern notion of 'authorship' – the credit began to be given to an individual in charge of the whole of a work who thereby could claim the financial reward, rather than to a person of a high status who devised a plot at a distance primarily for intellectual pleasure.

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