

GIUSEPPE BARDARI 1817 - 1861

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By

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In books and articles that have been written on Donizetti, very little information will be found on Giuseppe Bardari, the librettist of Maria Stuarda. Donizetti turned to him only when he failed to secure the services of the much more famous poet, Felice Romani. They worked together this once only, and Bardari does not appear to have collaborated with any other composers, either before or afterwards. In the world of music, he has been until recently a virtually unknown figure, and has even been described as 'the most obscure librettist of the 19th century'.

Donizetti's voluminous collected correspondence provides us with a little, but only a little, further information. At the end of September 1834, in a letter concerning a commission for Milan[1], he proposed that 'the same poet who has served me now for Maria Stuarda' should write a libretto on the story of Giovanna I of Naples, but it was a proposal that came to nothing. There is, in the whole collection, only one letter addressed to Bardari himself[2], written by Donizetti in Naples and directed to the Calabrian town of Pizzo. It tells the librettist of the unfortunate outcome of Maria Stuarda when, after being prohibited in Naples, it eventually reached the stage in Milan in December 1835:

Dear Bardari,

Here I am, arrived home yesterday! - Stuarda after 6[3] evenings at Milan was prohibited, and at the very moment when it was at its happiest. They didn't want 'bastarda', they didn't want [Mary to wear the Order of]the Golden Fleece around her neck, they didn't want her to kneel to Talbot for the confession. Malibran said: I don't trust myself to think of so many things... so, prohibited.- It will be given in London[4]. - The libretto for you is here, the wine for me is with you. Come, bring the wine,

or at least the cask, empty, and, either way, I shall always be very willing to see you. Excuse the jest, and believe me

Your affectionate
Donizetti

Today 8 or 9 March [1836]

I left your verses on poor Bellini with a journalist, and don't even know if they were published or not. I'll make enquiries.

My Belisario at Venice was extremely successful.

And there, at least until recently, the generally known facts of Giuseppe Bardari came to an end.

Who, then, was he? Was he, as some have suggested, a hack whose unsatisfactory efforts at versification Donizetti was willing to suffer once but never again? Was he some elderly colleague of Tottola, Schmidt, and other poetasters who churned out verses for the theatres of Naples? My own discoveries, bringing us, I hope, rather closer to a true picture, are sufficiently different from these suggestions, and result (1) from a visit to Pizzo in 1973, when an instructor in a naval college there[5], an enthusiast for local history, drew my attention to accounts of Bardari in two older histories of the fall of the Kingdom of Naples[6]; (2) from researches in the once-secret police files of Naples, now preserved in the State Archives; and (3) from a meeting, which has since developed into a much-valued friendship, with the librettist's descendants in Naples.

Pizzo, a town of the Calabrian coast, is perched high on cliffs above the sea. In the 18th century it was notorious as a stronghold of brigands and cut-throats, and in the early 19th century its lawless character had not much changed. Joachim Murat, the brother-in-law of Napoleon, landed there in 1815 when he was trying to recover the crown of Naples, and was promptly seized and shot. This was the town where, two years after the death of Murat, Giuseppe Francesco Luigi Bardari was born, the son of Domenico Bardari and his wife Francesca Giulia de Sanctis. He was baptised at the church of S.Giorgio on 27[7] May 1817.

At the time he wrote the words of Maria Stuarda, therefore, Bardari was only seventeen years of age, a

mere stripling beside the thirty-six-year-old Donizetti. He was making his first venture at a theatrical work, and the fact that he did not continue a literary career was certainly the result, not of any ineptitude as a versifier, but of his turning to law as a career.

His subsequent history, even though it may not add to our knowledge of Maria Stuarda, is of considerable intrinsic interest and deserves to be known. By public examination in 1840 he gained entry to the magistracy as a Second-class Circuit Judge (Giudice di Circondario di Seconda Classe). Subsequently, 'for his profound learning... for his zeal in administering justice, [and] for good conduct'[8], he was recommended for promotion to the position of First-class Judge in a provincial capital (Prima Classe Capoluogo di Provincia). And then, in May 1848, he was appointed Investigating Judge (Giudice Istruttore) or Crown Judge (Regio Giudice), presiding over what was clearly a continuing Commission of Enquiry (Commissione Censoria) in Vibo Valentia, then known as Monteleone, a town a few miles south of Pizzo. Although the exact nature of this Commission is never stated in the documents I have consulted, in view of what follows it seems reasonably certain that it existed to enquire into cases of political disaffection.

This promising career was rudely interrupted by events which took place at the time of the 1848 Revolution. After several months of unrest, during which Ferdinand II had been induced to grant a Constitution, Naples erupted into rebellion on the night of 14/15 May. Barricades were erected in the streets, firing broke out in the course of the morning of 15 May, and the royal troops eventually restored order only at the end of a day of appalling slaughter. A royal courier was despatched to announce these events to the representatives of the government in Calabria, but when he reached Monteleone he was waylaid by a mob of unruly citizens who relieved him of his message, broke the seals and read the contents aloud. And the person who actually read the message was, surprisingly, none other than Giuseppe Bardari.

In the days that followed, several Calabrian towns set up revolutionary Committees of Public Health (Comitati di Salute Pubblica). Two statements dealing

with Bardari[9] state that Monteleone did likewise, but a third[10] makes it appear more accurate to say that the radical elements of the citizenry did their best to influence an already existing governmental Council, and perhaps succeeded in changing its title, by infiltrating their representatives into its ranks. Again the name of Bardari appears, for, either newly joining the Council/Committee, or retaining his seat when other sitting members resigned, he was considered one of the radical representatives.

The radical initiative in Monteleone was, however, short-lived, for on 6 June General Ferdinando Nunziante, the commander of the royal troops in Calabria, landed in Pizzo with his forces. Bardari found himself severely reprimanded. His conduct became the subject of an official enquiry, at which Nunziante, testifying against him, accused him of being responsible for the affair of the King's courier, of having promulgated an anti-governmental proclamation, and of having done nothing to protect a number of ill soldiers, who, left behind in Monteleone as the army moved on, had been exposed to the insults of the townspeople. In July 1848 Bardari was stripped of his office and dismissed as 'immoral and unprincipled, the author of a subversive proclamation, and an excitable demagogue'[11].

Thus publicly disgraced, he moved to Naples, where, a suspected person under surveillance by the police, he practised law 'with discreet fortune'[12]. It cannot have been very difficult to gather information to his discredit, for the professional middle classes of the time were riddled with men of liberal sympathies. Much earlier, in his youth, he is reputed to have been a friend of one Michele Bello, who was shot at Reggio Calabria in 1847, and now, in Naples, he became intimate with the lawyer-politician Liborio Romano, who had already, in the 1820's, suffered banishment for his participation in one of the secret societies of that time[13]. Although a still-extant police file on Bardari[14] makes no mention of these particular friendships, it does contain information of his association with a number of other liberal dissidents of the day, most of them from Calabria like himself, and several of them ex-officers of the National Guard, the citizen militia which had been disbanded after the events of 15 May because so many of its members had sided with the

insurgents. Their activities are vividly sketched. Of one of them, ex-Guardsman Diomede Marvaso of Casalnuovo, we read that 'he held the floor every evening at the noted Caffè di Buono, and... was often, as the result of the impact made by his words, carried shoulder-high by the excitable students who frequented that meeting-place'. Or, to give another example, the flamboyance of two brothers from Catanzaro, Cesare and Salvatore Corea, is recalled at the time when they, too, were members of the National Guard, 'one as hot-headed as the other, conspicuously distinguishing themselves in all the liberal demonstrations, and carrying the most gaudy banners of those days'[15].

At the same time that this evidence was accruing, efforts were being made to exonerate Bardari from the charges of which he had been found guilty. The first to come forward in his defence was a certain Field Marshal Casella, who asserted that 'after 1847 Judge Bardari had pronounced himself very zealously in favour of the cause of order, and of the Sacred Person of the King'[16]. His participation in the Council or Committee of Public Safety, Casella suggested, had been 'through fear, perhaps, but not through wickedness'. This was the first of the imputations levelled against Bardari from which he was cleared, for an official enquiry, remarking that the Committee had resisted the pressures put upon it and had distinguished itself 'for prudence and firmness'[17], declared that there was no call for legal proceedings against its members.

On the strength of Casella's testimony, the Minister of Grace and Justice on 28 November 1851 again questioned General Nunziante. Predictably, the General reiterated his earlier assertions, so that on this occasion the case was dropped, and no further action was taken towards Bardari's reinstatement. Nunziante's new evidence did, however, to all intents and purposes exonerate him on yet another charge: that of having issued a seditious proclamation. 'I remember,' the General now said, 'that I tore up a proclamation which some asserted to be written by the Judge, but which I annulled, not being able to believe that he had drawn it up since it was so ineptly written.'[18]

Before the case was next reopened, Nunziante died. Significantly the man on whose evidence the entire case rested was thus removed. Moreover Orazio Mazza, who,

as Subintendent of Police in Monteleone in 1848, had been Bardari's colleague, at this juncture became Prefect of Police in Naples[19]. The Hon. Sir William Temple, brother of Lord Palmerston and British Minister at Naples, reported that Mazza was 'a most violent and active partisan of the reactionary policy' and ascribed Nunziante's resignation and death 'in great measure to the mortification he suffered in consequence of having been prevented from carrying out the amnesty [in Calabria], which he had promised in the King's name, by the opposition of Monsieur Mazza'[20]. Where Bardari was concerned, however, their roles would seem to have been reversed, for if Nunziante had been responsible for his dismissal, it was Mazza who appears to have eventually secured his pardon.

The occasion for Mazza's good offices arose when Bardari's father, Don Domenico Bardari, writing from Pizzo and referring to his 'long-standing and constant devotion to the August Dynasty of Your Majesty', supplicated the King for the reinstatement of his son as First-class Circuit Judge. The King referred the matter to the Prefect's office, and a report was duly submitted to him on 13 November 1852, summarising the case as it stood at that date. What decision the King came to at this stage is not clear, but seven months later, on 28 June 1853, all relevant documents in the case were gathered together and reassessed in a memorandum - the key-memorandum on which much of this present article is based - prepared in Mazza's office and clearly intended for his future guidance. It is here we find, in concise third-person summary, what was certainly Bardari's version of the affair of the King's courier:

> The common people of Monteleone, guided by the agitators Ciaccio, Galati and others, had already stopped the courier and taken charge of the despatch, which they wished to destroy once they had read it. By chance, coming down from the college where he had been to visit one of his sons, Bardari found himself unavoidably in the midst of that tumultuous crowd, who insisted that the [task of] reading the already unsealed despatch should be given to him. The judge bowed to necessity, both because there was no way in which he could counter it, and because he had the healthy idea of preventing the destruction of the despatch. And so it happened that, once their curiosity was satisfied, the crowd dispersed, and the correspondence arrived at its destination.

The memorandum further argues that 'if the liberals hated Bardari, and had manifested this hatred in every possible way, with words, and with libels pasted on street-corners by night in which he was described as "the betrayer of his country", he certainly was not to be found in that crowd with the purpose of encouraging them in their disorders'. Throughout the period March to June 1848, it is added, Bardari had been seeking leave to withdraw from Monteleone, and had even proposed that the Commission of Enquiry over which he presided should be transferred to Cotrone, both for political reasons and for his own personal safety, since he was being persecuted by the liberals. On the question of his failure to defend Nunziante's incapacitated troops from insult, it is stated bluntly that it was none of his business to do so, and that he knew nothing of the incident until the General's eventual return to Monteleone. The whole memorandum, in fact, reads as a brief for Bardari's defence. Here is its eloquent peroration:

> But more than this logical train of arguments, it is the memory of those wretched days which must contend, in the soul of the Signor Director [Mazza], in favour of Bardari. He may recall how many times, uncertain of the morrow and imperilling his own safety and that of his children, Bardari betook himself to the office of the Subintendent of Police to ask in the name of Friendship for those comforts and counsels which the Authorities, almost in a state of dismay, were by that time unable to give him. The Signor Director may also recall the extremity matters reached after his own departure for Naples: with the gendarmerie disarmed, the telegraphs disrupted, and the presumption of the rabble growing overbearing, it was necessary for Bardari, who had gone to Pizzo under the colour of illness, to return [to Monteleone] since he was the only functionary left capable of maintaining a shadow of control in the face of onrushing anarchy.

After all this, it is disappointing to have to admit that we do not know the date on which Bardari was

finally pardoned. But that he was so, and that his career resumed the course it had been following before 1848, is certain from the fact that on 20 August 1860 - or perhaps just before, for that was the date of his inaugural public statement - he was promoted to the very post we have already seen occupied by his friend Mazza: that of Prefect of Police in Naples.

From all that has been said, it could well be assumed that the allegations of his association with noted liberals were mere calumny and hearsay, and that he was, in reality, a loyal supporter of the royalist régime. History, however, has recorded otherwise. Capialbi[21], describing him as a 'patriot who had not awaited the day of victory to give proof of his patriotism', asserts that at the time of Nunziante's landing at Pizzo in 1848 Bardari 'did not hesitate to incite and direct the populace to descend to the beach... to prevent the disembarkation of the Bourbon troops'. The account that has been quoted from the police files - the memorandum that was prepared for Mazza in June 1853 - was certainly not the version of his activities and loyalties that remained alive in Calabria.

Even after his reinstatement, his liberal sentiments never seem to have been far beneath the surface. Letters which he exchanged with Garibaldi were in the possession of his descendants until the time of the Second World War, and when Garibaldi crossed from Sicily into Calabria in August 1860, both his sons, Luciano and Giovanni, were among those who flocked to join his banner.

Bardari himself was destined to play a part in the events of 1860.

The period during which he occupied the position of Prefect of Police was, if the dates given by De Cesare are correct, of the briefest possible duration: a bare three weeks, from 20 August, or just before, until 8 September. And yet they were as crucial and as eventful as any three weeks Naples had ever known. Garibaldi had crossed from Sicily to the mainland on 18/19 August. On 6 September the young King Francis II, who had succeeded his father in May 1859, withdrew from his capital and set up his garrison at Gaeta. On 7 September Garibaldi entered Naples. The three weeks of Bardari's tenure of office thus saw the events which effectively decided the fate of the Kingdom of Naples.

During these momentous days, Bardari was one of the men at the hub of events. On 5 September, when Francis II informed his ministers of his intention of quitting the capital, he commissioned his Prime Minister, Antonio Spinelli, to compose a farewell proclamation to his subjects. Although Liborio Romano, by this time Minister of the Interior and Police, later claimed that he had written it, Harold Acton remarks that 'the style is too clean'[22], and refers his reader back to De Cesare's assertion that its author was Bardari. De Cesare's account, indeed, is too authentic to admit questioning: 'I myself have seen the draft of that proclamation in the hand of Bardari, religiously preserved by his son Luciano.'[23]

Moreover Bardari's dismissal on 8 September implied no new disgrace, as in 1848. On 19 September Garibaldi issued a decree abolishing the rights of Pizzo which had been granted in recognition of its inhabitants' capture and execution of Murat in 1815: it was Bardari who dictated the announcement with which it was presented to the people, explaining the patriotic motives which lay behind it.

Subsequently he was appointed a Councillor of the Court of Accounts (Corte dei Conti), a body which to this day deliberates on the expenditure of government funds. But his days were now numbered, for he died, aged only 44, on 22 September 1861. One of his last public utterances was a vigorous defence, dated 14 March 1861 and published in the newspaper L'Indipendente four days later, of the activities of an Administrative Commission on the disposal of Jesuit property (Commissione Amministrativa de' Beni Gesuitici) over which he presided.

His career was thus a short one, and fraught with mixed fortunes. It is little wonder that he had little time for literary activity. De Cesare describes him as the author of 'melodramas including Maria Stuarda', but no other libretti have come to light, either in printed or manuscript form. The Biblioteca Nazionale in Naples catalogues only two other literary works: a funeral oration for Field Marshal Pronio[24], who in 1848 had held a garrison in Messina for the King while the rest of the town - indeed the rest of Sicily - was in revolt; and 'economic and legal reflections' in defence of one Professor Manfrè, for his part in the planning of a railway from Naples to Brindisi[25].

In all this account there has been no indication of Bardari's private life and character, and unfortunately little survives that can throw light on this. According to family tradition he was unhappily married. His wife, Carlotta Salomone, is said to have been of such a temper that when he came to Naples he left her behind in Calabria. Rumours of her husband's activities filtered back to her, and were of such an alarming character that she took ship with all her family to Naples, where she arrived in time to prevent a second, and necessarily bigamous,marriage.

Only one portrait of Giuseppe Bardari survives. There is, in fact, no documentary proof that it is his portrait, but his descendants, in whose possession it remains, confidently believe that it is. Signed 'Fran[ces]co Basile', it must have been painted towards the end of Bardari's life, for it is easier to see the Prefect of Police than the librettist of Maria Stuarda in the features it displays.

There is much more than one would wish to know of Giuseppe Bardari. His private life remains shadowy, while the record of his public life contains such paradoxes that it almost invites us to judge him with some irony as a man who both ran with the liberal hares and hunted with the royal hounds. Such an interpretation would, however, almost certainly be unjust, for it is to overlook the predicament in which so many educated and politically conscious Italians found themselves at the time. Irrespective of whether they wished to remain loyal to their King, or were liberal in sentiment, they had to contend with an authoritarian administration which was riddled with graft and corruption. Those who openly threw in their lot with the liberals not only invited persecution, but found themselves members of an amorphous and disunited movement, in which opinions ranged from the responsible to the fanatic. Whatever a man's political colouring, a degree of compromise was necessary if he was to survive and pursue his career and everyday life. There seems little doubt that Bardari was liberal in sentiment,but, as a man of law, not to the point of encouraging anarchy. Insofar as history has remembered him, it is as a patriot, and the present writer sees no reason to disturb this established judgment.

Notes

1. G. Zavadini, Donizetti: Vita - Musiche - Epistolario (Bergamo, 1948), letter no. 146, p. 358.
2. op.cit., letter no. 199, p.400.
3. Donizetti says six performances, later commentators seven. The first act, given on its own, was performed four further times thereafter.
4. This expected production never took place, since Maria Malibran died in 1836.
5. Dr.Franco Cortese, to whom my grateful thanks are due.
6. E. Capialbi, La Fine di un Re (Monteleone di Calabria, 1894), and Raffaele De Cesare, La Fine di un Regno (1895).
7. Or 21 May: the hand-written entry in the register of baptisms at S. Giorgio is not at all easy to decipher.
8. Report of 13 November 1852, prepared in the office of the Prefect of Police and submitted to King Ferdinand II. This report is quoted at length in a memorandum of 28 June [1853], prepared for the guidance of Orazio Mazza, Prefect of Police. State Archives, Naples: Alta Polizia, Fascio 49, containing Fascio 472: Bardari.
9. Alta Polizia, Fascio 49, containing Fascio 472: Bardari. The testimony of Field Marshal Casella and the second testimony of General Nunziante, both quoted in the memorandum of 28 June [1853].
10. Alta Polizia, Fascio 49, containing Fascio 472: Bardari. A comment by the unnamed author of the memorandum of 28 June [1853].
11. Ministero della Polizia, Fascio 895 (Anni 1851-1853), Espediente 2347.
12. De Cesare, op. cit. (3rd ed., 1909), p.328.
13. Harold Acton, The Last Bourbons of Naples 1825-1861) (London, 1961), p. 26.
14. Ministero della Polizia, Fascio 895 (Anni 1851-1853), Espediente 2347. The remaining quotations in this paragraph are from the same source.

15. Cesare Corea was a lawyer, and Salvatore an ex-official of the Ministry of Public Instruction, dismissed for suspect political opinions. Other names linked in the same file, with the implication that they were all intimate, are Cesare Marini of Cosenza, an ex-parliamentary deputy who 'currently brings together in his house many young men of liberal sentiments to instruct them in law'; Francesco de Luca, a lawyer 'noteworthy for the intimacy in which he lives with the Corea brothers'; and Giuseppe Settembrini, who, though scarcely remembered himself, was the brother of the renowned Luigi Settembrini, the author of the anonymous Protest of the People of the Two Sicilies (1847), described by Harold Acton as 'the source of all subsequent libels' against Ferdinand II, and of the even more famous and still widely read Ricordanze (published posthumously, 1879-1880).

16. Alta Polizia, Fascio 49, containing Fascio 472: Bardari. This and the following quotation come from Casella's testimony as quoted in the memorandum of 28 June [1853].

17. From the same memorandum: comment by the author himself.

18. From Nunziante's statement, as quoted in the same memorandum.

19. Not 'presiding judge over such cases', as stated in the notes accompanying the Decca recording.

20. Acton, op. cit., p. 321.

21. Capialbi, op. cit.

22. Acton, op. cit., p. 481.

23. De Cesare, op. cit., p. 328.

24. Elogio del Maresciallo di Campo Cav. Gran Croce D. Paolo Pronio (Naples, 1853).

25. Della Commanditâ per la ferrovia pugliese da Napoli a Brindisi. Riflessioni economico-legali a difesa del prof. Pasquale Manfrè (Naples, 1857).