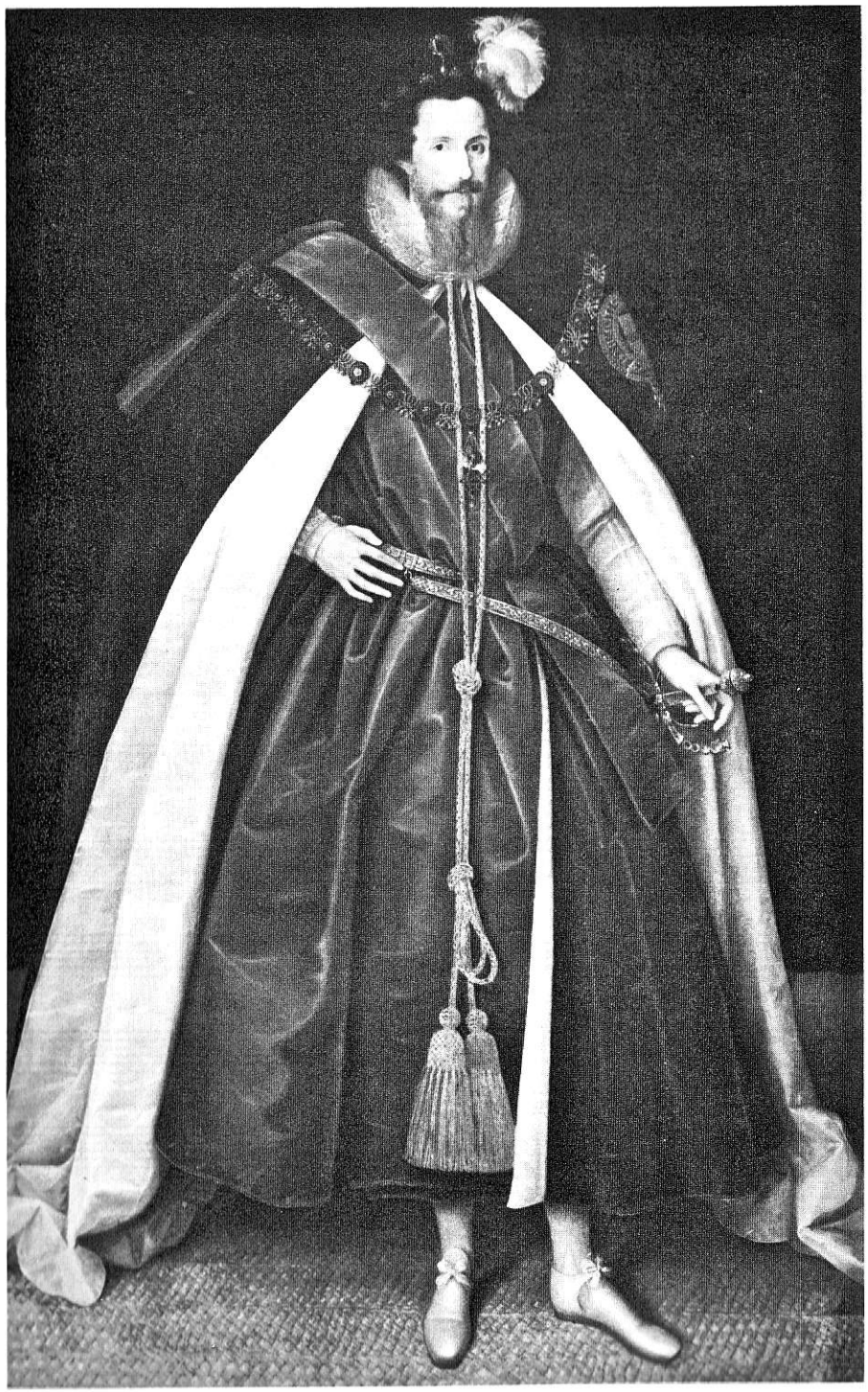


ÉLISABETH D'ANGLETERRE, IL CONTE D'ESSEX, & ROBERTO DEVEREUX

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John Black

The search for the literary source of a libretto is rarely as simple as it may appear at first sight. Even when the source is identified, it becomes important to see how the librettist embarked on his task of moulding the basic material into a form compatible with the conventions of the times and the specific requirements of censors, composer and singers available. Donizetti's ROBERTO DEVEREUX (libretto by Salvadore Cammarano, first performed at the Teatro S. Carlo in Naples on 28 October 1837) is particularly instructive, not only because of its close relationship to its source (Ancelot's 5 act verse tragedy "Élisabeth d'Angleterre", first given at the Théâtre Français in Paris on 4 December 1829), but also because of an earlier use of the same source by Felice Romani, IL CONTE D'ESSEX (music by Mercadante, first performed at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan on 10 March 1833). The existence of this earlier libretto has led to confusion over the immediate source of Cammarano's libretto for Donizetti, even to accusations of plagiarism being levelled against him. Thus while a comparison of two libretti on the same subject is in itself of great interest, in this case there is the additional "bonus" of clarifying the origins of Cammarano's text.

For once, Romani did not write a Preface to IL CONTE D'ESSEX, and at no point does he mention the source of his plot. Cammarano acknowledges that his libretto is based on historical events, but adds "non deve però tacersi, ch'esso è parte imitato dalla tragedia di Ancelot, Élisabeth d'Angleterre". Ashbrook, in his pioneering book of 1965, notes "A comparison of this libretto with Romani's ... lends justification to Romani's complaints of Cammarano's plagiarism", and refers to the passage in the book by Romani's widow (Emilia Branca) in which Cammarano is described as a "gran pirata letterario" - though no particular reference is made there to IL CONTE D'ESSEX. In his 1981 book, Ashbrook is more circumspect, though no less slighting to Cammarano - "Cammarano's libretto had the advantage of being derived at least in part from Romani's 1833 text ... and that source may help to account for the clearly motivated and well-paced plot". Finally, Franca Cella, in her important study of the French sources of Donizetti's libretti, is almost totally dismissive:
"... Cammarano non cercò lontano le sue fonti: s'impadronì d'un libretto di Felice Romani: IL CONTE D'ESSEX, identico d'argomento

e situazioni, e lo mutò abilmente proprio nei punti che si prevedon cari alla sensibilità donizettiana, senza ricercare, nè confrontare i modelli".

So much for the legend. Now let us look at the facts. Ancelot's play is a neatly constructed piece of no great literary merit but dramatically effective - a long way from the "blundering plot" ("spropositate azione") which it was called in the newspaper polemics which followed the failure of BEATRICE DI TENDA (Romani/ Bellini, Venice 1833). It is dominated by the figure of Queen Elizabeth, and there is a tenuous political background touching on the succession to the English throne. The story is false to history on a number of points, which is not perhaps surprising, and deals with the Queen's unrequited love for Robert Devereux, the Earl ("Conte") of Essex; his love for Sara, Duchess of Nottingham, which she returns; the scorned Queen's determination to repay Essex, leading to her willingness to accept the Peers' recommendation that he should be condemned for treason; her expectation that he would seek her pardon; his failure to do so and his death. The story is complicated by the position of the Duke of Nottingham, her principal adviser and Essex's friend, who, once his eyes were opened to his wife's behaviour, turned on Essex and abandoned him to his fate. The mechanism of the plot turns on the exchange of tokens between Essex and Sara - he gives her the ring which the Queen had given him as a guarantee of royal protection in times of need, and she gives him a scarf she had embroidered for him. The ring has a vital place in the dramatic construction, for Sara cannot use it to obtain his safety without revealing herself to the jealous Queen as her rival for his love. The scarf is equally important since its discovery is the means by which Nottingham is turned from friendship of Essex to enmity. Consequently by delaying Sara's appeal to the Queen, once she had decided to use the ring regardless of the consequences, Nottingham was able to prevent a reprieve. The handling of these tokens in the play is secure, and one of the tests by which the two libretti may be judged is the way in which they are used.

Romani set out his libretto in 3 acts, as was by 1833 becoming customary. Four years later, rather surprisingly, Cammarano drafted his in 2 acts, but at a late stage - probably after the libretto had come back from the censors - re-numbered the scenes and accepted the 3 act format. There is clear evidence in Donizetti's autograph score that he, too, began to write a 2 act version and only later changed to 3 (Cammarano's autograph manuscript libretto, and his 'programma', a preliminary prose outline of the plot, are extant, and are available in the Conservatorio S. Pietro Majella in Naples. Donizetti's autograph is there too, and has recently been published by Garland). The libretto for the first performance of ROBERTO DEVEREUX, printed by the firm of Flautina, as usual, was laid out in 3 acts, but other productions elsewhere reverted to the 2 act format, and we can assume that the format adopted was more a matter of practical convenience than of artistic convention. The discussion which follows is based on the 3 act version.

A brief schematic outline of the contents of each scene of Ancelot's play and the corresponding scenes in both operas provides an opportunity for comparing the two librettists at work. The same main characters are used in all three, and for convenience will be referred to in what follows as the Queen; Essex; Sara; Nottingham; Raleigh.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Ancelot	Romani	Cammarano
Élisabeth	Elisabetta	Elisabetta
Roberto Devereux, Comte d'Essex	Conte d'Essex	Roberto Devereux, Conte d'Essex
Lord Duc de Nottingham	Duca di Nottingham	Lord duca di Nottingham
La Duchesse de Nottingham	Duchessa di Nottingham	Sara, duchessa di Nottingham
Sir Walter Raleigh	Raleigh, Pari	Sir Gualtiero Raleigh
Lord Robert Cécil	-	Lord Cecil

Lords, Ladies, Soldiers, Ushers, etc.

To make comparison easier, the scenes have been described as far as possible in the same words, though this does not always do justice to the authors. Only in one place was the scene order so transposed as to make cross reference difficult, and the correspondence is indicated by a broken line (Cammarano, at the beginning of his act II).

ANCELOT	ROMANI	CAMMARANO
I.1. The Ladies quiz Sara about her sadness.	I.1. The Ladies quiz Sara about her sadness.	I.1. The Ladies quiz Sara about her sadness.
	I.2. The Queen is announced.	
I.2. The Queen muses about Essex, then upbraids the Ladies over their jewels.	I.3. The Queen upbraids the Ladies over their jewels.	
I.3. The Queen talks with Sara about the jewels. The Lords are announced.	The Lords are announced.	I.2. The Queen tells Sara of Essex's return and her fears of a rival.
I.4. The Lords discuss the succession with the Queen, and ask that Essex be brought to justice.	I.4. The Lords ask that Essex be brought to justice.	I.3. The Lords ask that Essex be brought to justice.
I.5. Essex enters. The Lords are dismissed.	Essex is announced.	I.4. Essex is announced.
I.6. Essex pleads with the Queen, who refers to the ring. He does not respond to her and she turns against him.	I.5. Essex pleads with the Queen, who refers to the ring. He does not respond to her and she turns against him.	I.5. Essex pleads with the Queen, who refers to the ring. He does not respond to her and she turns against him.
		I.6. Nottingham consoles Essex, and refers to Sara's illness and the scarf.
		I.7. Cecil calls Nottingham to a meeting of the Peers.
I.7. The Queen determines to punish Essex.	I.6. The Queen determines to punish Essex.	
I.8. The Queen orders the arrest of Essex, despite Nottingham's intervention.		
	I.7. The Lords comment on the situation.	
		I.8. Sara, alone, is anxious for Essex.
II.1. Sara and Essex; the exchange of the ring and the scarf.	II.1. Sara and Essex; the exchange of the ring and the scarf.	I.9. Sara and Essex; the exchange of the ring and the scarf.
II.2. Sara alone, remorseful		
II.3. Sara, apprehensive, and Nottingham, loving. He tells her the Queen's orders for Essex. She collapses.	II.2. Sara, apprehensive, and Nottingham, loving. He tells her of the Queen's orders for Essex. She collapses.	
II.4. Nottingham is summoned to Westminster.		
	II.3. The Queen and Ladies come to Sara's assistance. Comment from all.	
III.1. The Queen and her advisers discuss the political situation.		
III.2. Raleigh reports to the Queen the arrest of Essex and the discovery of the scarf.	II.4. Raleigh announces the arrest of Essex. Further comment from all.	
	III.1. The Lords and Ladies reflect on the situation.	II.1. The Lords and Ladies reflect on the situation.
III.3. Nottingham announces the death sentence passed on Essex.		II.2. Cecil announces the death sentence passed on Essex.
		II.3. Raleigh announces the arrest of Essex and the discovery of the scarf.
Nottingham intercedes for Essex.	III.2. Nottingham intercedes for Essex.	II.4. Nottingham intercedes for Essex.

The Queen shows Nottingham the scarf. He recognizes it and seeks personal vengeance.	The Queen shows Nottingham the scarf. He recognizes it and seeks personal vengeance.	II.5. The Queen confronts the arrested Essex with the scarf. Comment from all. Nottingham seeks personal vengeance.
		II.6. The Queen relentless. Further comment from all.
	III.3. Soldiers talk of Essex in prison.	
	III.4. Raleigh brings the sentence of death to Essex.	
	III.5. Essex sends soldier with message to Sara.	
IV.1. Sara talking with Ladies.	III.6. Sara talking with Ladies.	
IV.2. Sara, alone, anxious for Essex.		III.1. Sara, alone, anxious for Essex.
IV.3. Soldier brings Sara message from Essex.	III.7. Soldier brings Sara message from Essex.	III.2. Soldier brings Sara message from Essex.
IV.4. The Queen tells Sara about the ring.		
IV.5. Sara, alone, realizes she must use the ring.	III.8. Sara, alone, knows she must use the ring.	Sara, alone, knows she must use the ring.
IV.6. Nottingham reveals that he knows about letter and scarf. He prevents Sara's departure as Essex is led to the Tower.	III.9. Nottingham reveals that he knows about letter. He prevents Sara's departure as Essex is led to the Tower.	III.3. Nottingham reveals that he knows about letter, scarf and ring. He prevents Sara's departure.
		III.4. Essex alone in his cell.
		III.5. Raleigh summons Essex to execution.
V.1. The Queen waits for a message from Essex.		III.6. The Queen waits for a message from Essex.
V.2. Raleigh seeks confirmation of the sentence on Essex.		
V.3. The Queen, alone, reflects.		
		III.7. Cecil confirms that Essex has sent no message.
V.4. Sara rushes in with the ring. The Queen realizes who her rival is. She sends reprieve.	III.10. The Queen enters. Sara gives her the ring; she realizes who her rival is and sends reprieve.	III.8. Sara rushes in with the ring. The Queen realizes who her rival is. She sends reprieve.
V.5. Nottingham announces death of Essex. The Queen blames Sara, but Nottingham accepts responsibility and they are arrested.	III.11. Raleigh announces death of Essex. Nottingham accepts responsibility and he and Sara are arrested.	III.9. Nottingham announces death of Essex. The Queen blames Sara, but Nottingham accepts responsibility and they are arrested.
V.6. The Queen r[illegible]ts bitterly. She announces t[illegible]ames Stuart is to succeed her.		III.10. The Queen gives way to rage. She announces that James Stuart is to succeed her.

p134. Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, by M. Gheeraerts the Younger. (National Portrait Gallery, London).

It is obvious that both Romani and Cammarano followed Ancelot very closely. The compression of the five act tragedy gave the librettist an opportunity to vary the emphasis of the plot; Romani wisely omitted the political element altogether, but Cammarano retained, clumsily, the final line of the play ("Jacques est roi d'Angleterre ... adressez-vous à lui") as his own curtain line, "Dell'angelica terra sia Giacomo il re" - a remark which, if it was ever heard in the theatre, must have mystified the audience completely. The main burden of each libretto is transferred from Elisabeth to Essex - indeed, both operas are called after him rather than the Queen. Consequently the role of Sara becomes more important; Donizetti, in a letter to Lanari in November 1837, wrote that he had written the opera for Almerinda Granchi, the first Sara, showing how important he considered the role. The operas are not built around the man-between-two-women motive, nor on the woman-between-two-men, but on both; Essex is loved by the Queen, but loves Sara; Sara loves Essex but is loved by her husband. The situation may be represented thus:

Queen ⟶ Essex ⟷ Sara ⟵ Nottingham

If the complicated set of relationships illustrated in this scheme is to be kept under control, it is obviously important to keep in proper balance the scenes in which the characters confront each other. This is no easy task, remembering that 'entrance' arias and other solos had to be provided for. Similarly the plot has to have a central pivot, and had to take care of Nottingham's change of attitude to Essex.

This pivot, the central Finale and its placing in the opera, is better handled by Cammarano than by Romani. ROBERTO DEVEREUX is slower to get started than IL CONTE D'ESSEX, but by the end of the second act Cammarano has got further on than Romani, and by extending Ancelot's scene in which Nottingham is confronted with his wife's scarf by having Essex present, he is able to build up to a full scale finale with which to bring down the curtain on Act II. The only defect of this scene in ROBERTO DEVEREUX is the inevitable absence of Sara. By contrast, Romani uses Sara's illness as an opportunity for his finale, so that Nottingham's recognition of the scarf is placed at a relatively insignificant place early in Act III. One result of this is that Romani's third act is very long, accounting for nearly half the text, whereas Cammarano's third act moves more swiftly to the end, and comprises about a third of the whole. Cammarano's solution also gives him space to include the almost obligatory prison scene for Essex, at a central position in the last act, a scene which has no counterpart in Ancelot. Romani's handling of Essex in prison is less conventional and more related to the development of the plot, though there is no dramatic need to see Essex's desperate message to Sara being sent as well as being received.

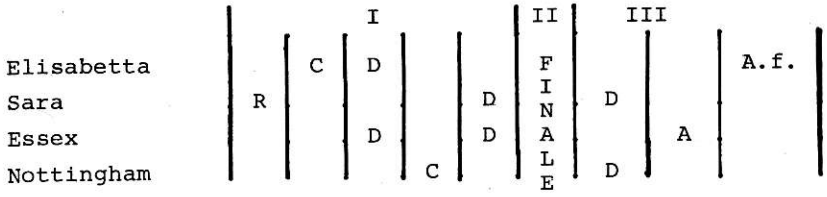
The balance of scenes in the two libretti is similar, except that Cammarano writes an original scene for Essex and Nottingham in Act I. This scene achieves two purposes; it highlights the friendship between the two men, significant against the background

of Sara's love for Essex, and it provides an opportunity to Nottingham to mention the scarf which he has seen Sara embroidering.

Cammarano's 'distribuzione', the allocation of numbers between the singers, is listed in his 'programma', and is as follows:

(Act I)	1. Coro e Romanza di Sara
	2. Cavatina d'Elisabetta
	3. Duetto di Elisabetta e Roberto
	4. Cavatina di Nottingham
	5. Duetto di Sara e Roberto
(Act II)	6. Finale
(Act III)	7. Duetto di Sara e Nottingham
	8. Aria di Roberto
	9. Aria finale di Elisabetta

Donizetti's enumeration in his autograph score follows this, except that he seems to run Nos. 1 and 2 together, without indicating the beginning of a new number for Elisabetta's cavatina, which scarcely does justice to Sara's romanza "All' afflitto è dolce il pianto". Since this is a study of the libretti I propose to adhere to Cammarano's ground-plan, which can be summarized in diagrammatic form thus:-



where R = Romanza, C = Cavatina, D = Duetto, A = Aria,

A.f. = Aria finale.

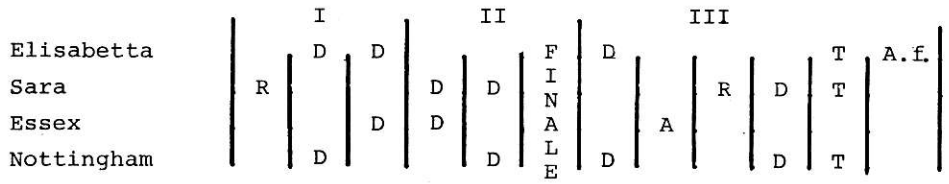
Romani's ground-plan was somewhat different. For a start it contained more numbers than Cammarano's, reflecting a typical difference in the working methods of the two librettists It is not clear from the libretto whether Romani intended the stanza "Sventurata, invan lo spero" at the end of Act I scene 2 to be set as a Romanza for Sara, but to facilitate comparison I am assuming that he did. The distribuzione of Romani's IL CONTE D'ESSEX is thus:-

(Act I)	1. Coro e Romanza di Sara
	2. Duetto di Elisabetta e Nottingha
	3. Duetto di Elisabetta e Essex
(Act II)	4. Duetto di Sara e Essex
	5. Duetto di Sara e Nottingham
	6. Finale

(Act III)

7. Duetto di Elisabetta e Nottingham
8. Aria di Essex
9. Romanza e Preghiera di Sara
10. Duetto di Sara e Nottingham
11. Terzetto di Elisabetta, Sara e Nottingham
12. Aria finale di Elisabetta

This distribuzione can similarly be illustrated in diagrammatic form, thus:-



The difference in the construction of the two libretti stands out clearly; Cammarano provides each of the four characters with a solo number (Elisabetta with two), and there are 3 duets, Elisabetta/Essex, Sara/Essex, and Sara/Nottingham. Romani provides solo numbers for Elisabetta, Sara and Essex, although Sara has two romanzas, one in the first and one in the third act, the solo numbers for Elisabetta and Essex are both in the third - there are no cavatinas. The first two acts are really a string of duets.

By careful planning, Cammarano avoids the problem, inherent in Ancelot's structure, of two big scenes between Sara and Nottingham. In this respect, Romani follows Ancelot, and the result is a more diffuse libretto. Cammarano's is more economical and much better paced, and it suggests that he put more thought into recasting the material into suitable form than did Romani. It refutes Ashbrook's suggestion that the success of Cammarano's libretto lay in his ability to rely on Romani's earlier work.

One example of this will suffice. At the end of the opera, when Sara is finally able to give Elisabetta the ring, there is little time left for her to order a stay of execution. At this point, Romani launches into a Terzetto (8 lines each for Elisabetta, Sara and Nottingham) before Elisabetta sends a reprieve. Cammarano has the Queen seize the situation in a flash, and she sends a messenger at once.

On the two important elements of the plot manipulation, the scarf and the ring, both librettists deal well with the ring, but Romani throws away the possibilities inherent in the scarf by not preparing for Nottingham's recognition of it. Cammarano's preparation may be contrived, but at least the audience is aware that Nottingham recognises at once whose scarf it is that has been found next to Essex's heart.

Where Romani scores, as usual, is in his understanding of the psychology of his characters, and the incidents he chooses to take from Ancelot to illuminate them. To take just two examples: when (I.5.) Essex throws himself before the Queen, Nottingham tells him, in a quick aside, that he has already interceded for him. Essex's response is immediate - "Egli per me intercede!... oh miei rimorsi!" - a reply which, though the direct equivalent of Ancelot's "C'est vous qui prenez ma defense! Quel supplice!" tells us all we need to know about the situation in which the two men find themselves, something which Cammarano takes a whole scene to develop. Similarly, Romani's use of Ancelot's passage where Sara recounts to Essex her emotions when the Queen reveals to her her feelings for him shows an understanding which Cammarano was not able to achieve; Cammarano's scene between Essex and Sara is a conventional love-and-farewell duet, and is placed (as elsewhere in Cammarano) to close the first act. The worst feature of Cammarano's libretto is without question the final scene where Elizabeth flies into an excess of rage and grief - a good final fling for the singer, perhaps, but out of keeping with the rest of the text. Romani's Queen is more dignified, nearer to Ancelot's where one of her distinguishing features is the determination not to appear weak before her subjects.

From this summary it is evident that we are dealing with two distinct treatments of common material. There can be no doubt whatsoever that Romani had Ancelot's tragedy in front of him when he drafted his libretto - there are far too many points of detail in common for any other explanation. The only place where he departs from his source - setting aside the inevitable simplification and condensation - is his treatment of Essex in prison. He uses this scene as an opportunity to give Essex a double aria, which the singer would certainly have expected. But if Romani used Ancelot, what did Cammarano use? Did he work directly from Ancelot, did he work solely or mainly from Romani, or did he rely on Ancelot, borrowing occasionally from Romani?

The similarity of Cammarano's plot to Ancelot's is close, but it is equally close to Romani's, and could be ascribed to Cammarano working either from Ancelot or Romani. A study of some sixty or so incidents, allusions and references in Cammarano's text show that all of them can be traced back to the French tragedy, though not always to the same point in the plot, with one or two exceptions. The first of these comes when Essex accuses Sara of betraying him by marrying Nottingham; she replies that following her father's death she was forced into marriage by the Queen, despite her own preference for a convent. There is no suggestion of this in Ancelot, but the use of bereavement in plot manipulation is a device Cammarano often made use of. Possibly in this instance he was seeking to forestall the censors' expected objection of immoral behaviour. The second of these departures from Ancelot comes when Essex, confronted with the scarf, refuses to reveal who had given it to him. (Perhaps Cammarano wanted to give Essex more backbone than he would appear to have from the rest of the libretto). Neither of these two incidents appear in Romani's libretto either, so that both can be ascribed to

Cammarano's own inventiveness. As would be expected, many of these 60 incidents and remarks are common to Cammarano, Romani and Ancelot; the test is whether any of them can be found only in Cammarano and Ancelot, since these could not be derived from Romani. There are, indeed, a number of these, too many for all to be quoted. A selection follows:

a) In Cammarano Act I scene 2, the Queen refers to the time Essex spent in Ireland "D'Irlanda in riva/Lo trasse un cenno mio". This can be traced back to a remark in Ancelot Act I scene 4.

b) In his first interview with the Queen, Essex refers to his wounds "Il petto mio/Pieno di cicatrici" - a direct transfer from Ancelot, Act I scene 6 (the same occasion) "Vous faut-il aujourd'hui montrer mes cicatrices?"

c) In Act II scene 5, the Queen refers to her father, the "tremendo ottavo Enrico". There is no mention of this monarch in Romani, though two in Ancelot - though it is just possible that Cammarano knew enough English history to insert this reference himself, but I doubt it. He may of course have looked up the background in a history-book, but after a full study of his life and work I think this is unlikely.

d) Act II scene 3. When Raleigh tells the Queen how he arrested Essex and found the scarf on him, Cammarano follows Ancelot in detailing how Essex was not at home, but returned at dawn, how he was seized, disarmed and searched for incriminating papers, when the scarf was found hidden about his person; how it was taken from him only with great difficulty. All this comes directly from Raleigh's account of Essex's arrest in Ancelot Act III scene 2, but, like all these instances, is not mentioned by Romani.

e) The scene - Act III scene 6 - when the Queen waits impatiently for Essex to send the ring so that she can pardon him is not to be found in Romani, but is in Ancelot.

f) Finally, nowhere in Romani is the Conte d'Essex referred to as Roberto Devereux. Unless Cammarano knew it from a background reading of English history, he could only have found it in Ancelot.

These half-dozen examples are sufficient in my view to show that Cammarano worked directly from Ancelot. There is little in his text that cannot be traced back to Ancelot, and those elements which are not to be found there are not in Romani's libretto. Similarly there are numerous elements which can be traced back to Ancelot which do not appear in Romani and must have come directly from Ancelot. It would be stretching co-incidence too far to suggest that Cammarano invented all these details independently himself.

This is not, of course, to say that Cammarano did not have access to Romani's earlier libretto, but rather that there is no need to

postulate any intermediary between Ancelot and himself; the whole of Cammarano's text could have been derived from Ancelot without h his being aware of the other libretto. The only place where a borrowing could reasonably be claimed is the scene showing Essex in the Tower of London, when Essex receives the death sentence, which is found in the two libretti but not in the French tragedy (which does however make it clear that Essex was held in the Tower). The two librettists place this scene differently, Romani before and Cammarano after the scene in which Nottingham confronts Sara over the letter and ring. A prison scene such as this is a very obvious departure from Ancelot, given the romantic opera's fixation with subterranean and claustrophobic settings, and might well have occurred to both of them separately. The balance of the evidence leaves little if any doubt that it is quite unnecessary to claim Romani as an intermediary between Ancelot and Cammarano; even if at points Cammarano may have had Romani's libretto in mind the bulk of his text came independently from the French play.

There is now no way of being more precise. There is no proof that Cammarano had a copy of Romani's libretto or that he had not. All that can be said with certainty is that he need not have had a copy. Mercadente's opera only survived 5 performances in Milan in 1833, and does not seem to have been performed elsewhere: it was certainly never given in Naples. There is no doubt that Donizetti knew the earlier libretto, since in 1834 he suggested that Romani might be able to rewrite it for him, if he had not time to write a new one. Even if Donizetti had not kept a copy of Romani's libretto, there would have been no difficulty in sending for a copy from Milan if there was not one in the S. Carlo

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