ÉLISABETH ossia OTTO OPERE IN UN ANNO

Alexander Weatherson

The most relevant comment on the Donizetti find of 1984, the jumbled manuscript of *Élisabeth/Elisabetta* recovered by a modern Orpheus from the dusty inferno under the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in London, comes from as long ago as the composer's centenary, from 1897; Arthur Pougin supplied a text for "Numero Unico," published in Bergamo, which contains some rare comments by contemporaries only just out of Donizetti's orbit.

Pougin's are the most fascinating:

Précisément quatre jours après... le 31 Décembre 1853, le Théâtre Lyrique offrait à son public un opéra en trois actes intitulé Élisabeth, dont le poème portait les noms de Leuven et Brunswick, et la musique celui de Donizetti, et qui n'a pas été catalogué par Cicconetti dans sa Vita di Gaetano Donizetti. Ceci appelle quelques éclaircissements.

Le 13 Mars 1819 un de nos dramaturges les plus fameux, Guilbert de Pixérécourt, donnait au théâtre de la Gaîté un mélodrame intitulé La Fille de l'exilé ou Huit mois en deux heures, dont il avait tiré le sujet d'un roman célèbre alors de madame Cottin, Élisabeth ou les Exilés de Sibérie. Le succès de ce drame fut énorme, et c'est sans doute ce succès qui inspira à Gilardoni l'idée d'en faire un livret d'opéra auquel il donna pour titre Otto mesi in due ore. On sait que cet opéra, mis en musique par Donizetti, fut représenté à Naples en 1827. Or, c'est précisément une nouvelle édition de cet ouvrage qui parut au Théâtre-Lyrique sous le nouveau titre d'Élisabeth. Mais je dis bien une nouvelle édition, et non pas une traduction, car je sais pertinemment que Donizetti, bien longtemps auparavent, avait eu l'idée d'adapter pour la scène française sa partition d'Otto mesi in due ore, qu'il y avait fait des changements importants et qu'il avait même écrit pour cette nouvelle version plusieurs morceaux nouveaux. Mais lorsqu'il fut question de monter cette Élisabeth au Théâtre-Lyrique, Donizetti était mort, la partition n'était pas en ordre, et l'on crut bien faire en chargeant Fontana de la mettre en état de paraître à la scène. Fontana en prit à son aise, sans grand respect et sans grand souci pour la mémoire de Donizetti, rognant par-ci ajoutant par-là, mêlant sans scrupule sa propre musique à celle du maître, en faisant, en somme, une sorte de pastiche, dans lequel il avait une part un peu trop importante. Malgré tout, cette Élisabeth fut bien accueillie du public et obtint un nombre fort honorable de représentations. Elle avait interprêtes Tallon, Junca, Laurent, Colson et Mme Colson.[i]

So much for the extra-theatrical reappearance of the composer's score in the Covert Garden vaults. Unknown? Not in the least. Merely forgotten like Pougin's expert witness of the Paris of his day. He can be corrected on three counts only: Madame Cottin's book was not a "*roman*"; Pixérécourt (who wrote so many plays his friends called him Shakespiérécourt) launched his play on 19 March 1818; and Donizetti was not writing for the Théâtre-Lyrique:

"....provo intanto all'Opera Comique e là andr frà giorni, e subito dopo prover per Mal Garcia (tradotto in francese) 8.mesi in 2.ore. Ecco dunque l'ordine delle cose Comique: La Fille du Régiment, La fille de l'exilé! - Renaissance: L'Ange de Nisida et apres Martyrs - tutto ci per la fine di marzo sarà fatto." [ii]

Thus, in the composer's own idiosyncratic mixture of French and Italian, we know that the opera was being prepared as early as 1 January 1840, that it was intended for the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique and its intended star was Pauline Viardot ("Mal Garcia")[iii] then eighteen years old (she had made her début in London in 1839).

Above all we know that he intended to call this French version of *Otto mesi in due ore* by the new title of *La Fille de l'exilé.* This Parisian sport would have been Donizetti's tenth or so edition of this particular opera,[iv] a spectacular offering to the Naples stage of 1827, which, twinned with *L'esule di Roma* of 1828, was destined to become an operatic ostinato in that both these plots were permanently on his desk throughout his maturity.

Maybe it was the topicality of the plot that proved so irresistible. Few operas were based on real events in the early nineteenth century and it was rare indeed that an act of heroism of so recent a date should appear before the footlights. Madame Cottin's Élisabeth, ou Les exilés de Sibérie, however, was an unique exercise in contemporary verismo. Sophie Risteau (1770-1807) was born and died in Paris while remaining essentially a lady of the provinces. Married very young to the son of a rich banker, Paul Cottin, she enjoyed an opulent lifestyle until the Revolution undermined both her happiness and her fortune obliging her to live by her pen.



Her husband died in Paris in 1793 not long after both had returned from a badly-handled "escape" to England. She published very little during her short

life and only during her widowhood - between 1799 and her death leaving an unfinished novel but the few works she produced were successful and admired: Claire d'Albe (1799); Malvina (1801); Amélie Mansfield (1803) and Mathilde (1805) were all published widely, several in English and other languages and giving rise to operas by a number of composers. Her death was obscure but suitably melodramatic: she was reported to be seriously ill which may indeed have been the case but Sainte-Beuve maintains that she shot herself in her garden at Palaiseau "*like a man*" and that this was the real reason for her sudden disappearance from the literary horizon.[v] Her passionately sensitive prose puts her in a special category, semi-epistolary in an eighteenth century mode, somewhere between the searching clarity of Mme de Lafayette and the shrewd observation of Jane Austin but without achieving the simplicity or taste of either. Élisabeth, ou Les exilés de Sibérie, published in Paris and London in 1806 was ostensibly her last work and her only essay in biography. However romanticised in its cinematic unfolding Élisabeth really existed, her name was Prascovie Lopouloff and she really did walk all the way from Siberia to St. Petersburg (not Moscow) to plead for clemency for her exiled father. It was a plan she had been hatching since her fifteenth birthday and at the age of eighteen (the age, that is, of Pauline Viardot) she accomplished it. All this took place during the reign of Paul I. No one knows why her father was exiled but he was freed as a result of her intervention. Mme Cottin wrote her moving account of this heroine a few years after the event and turned her into an instant celebrity, but Prascovie, disregarding, took the veil and died a few years later. Two operas followed swiftly in the wake of the publication: *Élisabeth ou L'heroisme filial* with music by F.C. Lanusse and a text by Aude and Thuring was given at the Théâtre de la Gaieté in Paris on 20 October 1806; and another, scarcely a week later, *Élisabeth ou Les exilés en Sybérie* with music by Alexandre Piccinni and a text by a certain Dorvo was staged at the Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin in Paris on 28 October 1806. Neither made much of an impact and both had vanished from all but very long memories when Pixérécourt wrote the successful play described by Pougin which formed the basis of the libretto for Donizetti.[vi]

The steps towards Domenico Gilardoni's text for Donizetti's *Otto mesi in due ore* are clear and distinct which is more than can be said for those the composer used for *Élisabeth*. Mme Cottin's account was translated into Italian in 1812 by M. Santagnello, as Elisabetta ossia Gli esiliati nella Siberia and published by Colburn in London (the first words of the Prefazione: "*Non favolosa è la seguente storietta"* make all too apparent its factual basis); another, and anonymous translation appeared in Venice that same year, published by Giuseppe Molinari; these were followed by the *mélodrame* of René-Charles-Guilbert de Pixérécourt (which was entitled La fille de l'exilé

ou Huit mois en deux heures and not quite as indicated by Pougin); in turn, this was succeeded by one of Luigi Marchionni's pulp dramatic confections called La figlia dell'esiliato, ossia Otto mesi in due ore (based, in all probability, on the Venice translation) which was staged at the Teatro de' Fiorentini in Naples in 1820 and promptly upstaged by a ballet by Gaetano Gioja in 1822 which was danced at La Scala as *Il trionfo dell'amor filiale* (with music by several composers). In all a long series of titles which provide both a consensus of the plot and furnish some of the various alternatives under which Donizetti's repeated settings would be known.

But however successful this opera, and *Otto mesi in due ore* - despite an ultra--spectacular setting which must always have militated against revival and a set-back or two on the Italian circuit – was successful and admired, the composer was never really happy with the plot. The first two acts (these multiform sources had early established the drama as a three-act sequence) were colourful and had a forward momentum, but Act III never quite escaped convention – most especially the creaking *lieto fine* in which the Emperor, called for convenience sake "Pietro il Grande" for the simple reason that he was the only Russian ruler known to Italian audiences improbably manages to summon the heroine's forgiven parents back to Moscow as if with a wave of a fairy wand. As early as 1834 Donizetti had asked for a new text from Jacopo Ferretti in which Elisabeth's father could have come back furtively to Moscow to find his errant daughter and thus be on the spot for Imperial forgiveness. Though this improvement seems not to have been performed it was an urgent requirement for the Paris *rifacimento* of 1840, a year of unprecedented operatic activity.

The sinister vault under Covent Garden Opera House was the last resting place of ballet music that had fallen on hard times, Italian versions of Herold and Massenet, French versions of Flotow and Weigl, bundles of loose pages, worn and dirty with faded ink, battered and scorched, mostly an Aladin's chest of manuscript music dating from long before the existing theatre had been built, some of it well before two of its predecessors on the same site; in these heaps were complete operas by Gnecco, Generali, Guglielmi and Mayr whose provenance could only have been some other theatre whose archives had been transferred to this noisome tomb and then forgotten. That autograph music by- say - Rossini or Bellini or even by Verdi - should have turned-up in London would not have been a complete surprise as all three stayed briefly, the latter on more than one occasion, but Donizetti never set foot in England. In 1841, it is true, he had given-in to repeated invitations from Benjamin Lumley, Director of the enormous (and far more important) Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket to compose an opera with a libretto by Felice Romani for a staging in London with a fee of 12.000 Francs. Its subject was to have been *Circe*, an odd choice surely but Romani wrote to Donizetti

confirming his acceptance of the commission on 23 December 1841. As so often with the infuriating Romani, however, he seems not to have made any effort to supply the text. The composer waited in vain, and finally was obliged to renounce all hope of his huge fee and London lost all hope of ever seeing the famous maestro.

The Covent Garden manuscript consisted then[vii] of a collection of discoloured sheets in oblong folio in various formats made of the characteristic rag-paper favoured by Italian composers of the day. Not all the pages were intact, some were torn, some cut in two, others pasted together, many with candle-wax stains and scatterings of the fine sand used for drying ink. In the main a disorderly bunch of gatherings of bifolios of different sizes and dates and originally unnumbered. On discovery they were in conjectural order with only a helpful prefacing now and then from the composer with headings such as "*Dopo la cavatina Michele*" or similar supplying a sequence of sorts, otherwise they were totally reliant upon textual scrutiny for their sequence and meaning. Much of this material was holograph, but not all, some of the gatherings were readily identifiable as copyist pages from early editions of *Otto mesi in due ore* but the bulk of this treasure trove, autograph or not, was overlaid with a later scribbled Italian libretto in Donizetti's hand.

Thanks to this unexpected find we are now able to complete the original score of this enigmatic opera for the simple reason that the missing autograph sections are to be found here.[viii] Thus the textual questions surrounding this early work can be answered. Obviously Donizetti had left Naples with the manuscript under his arm with the intention of reviving it elsewhere. But these pages also provoke further questions: even a cursory glance reveals that it is music that has been scrambled together in indecent haste. However can this be? Three periods identify themselves instantly: Italian sections which belong to the earliest editions of *Otto mesi* are combined with a sizeable collection of large format pages with a French text of circa 1839-40, plus an assortment of oddments on scraps of paper, mostly recitatives, and with an extra-large *aria-finale* on oblong folios which seems to date from the composer's final years. Some of these pages are exceptionally moving (as the terrifying calligraphy makes clear) and may well be the very last music to which the stricken maestro turned his struggling hand.

In 1984, two acts of a composite version of an opera based on Mme Cottin's *"storietta"* were thus uncovered. It had to be presumed that Act II - missing in toto - could be performed in one or another of the earlier versions of the opera in that this middle section was the core matrix of the whole - including Elisabetta's Siberian "walk to freedom" with its challenges, scenic marvels and sensational ending, largely orchestral and not in need of urgent

Frenchification. This was the most successful, novel, and musically remarkable heart of the whole score. But this presumption was overturned in 1988 when another rumble through the deposit of dusty papers uncovered the missing Act II. It was a belated find that duly added another layer of questions: wherever did this music come from? Why was it in London? Why should it have been deposited in a forgotten tomb? For whom was it intended?

The little evidence we have is not conclusive. An obvious hypothesis suggests that the terminally ill composer, in his last days of clarity, making one final attempt to furnish an opera for Benjamin Lumley handed over the disparate pages willy-nilly at his request. This is an attractive thesis: Lumley was in Paris in 1845, he passed through the city *en route* for Milan where he was attempting to contact Verdi, and in 1846 he paused briefly in the opposite direction.[ix] Unfortunately, Lumley himself gives scant support to this hypothesis. A bound volume of Donizettian libretti[x] coming from the vanished library of Her Majesty's Theatre and providentially saved from its celebrated conflagration is annotated throughout in Lumley's handwriting with comments, addresses and notes. On the end paper of the front cover jotting down a remarkably provocative list of the composer's operas from *Enrico di Borgogna* onwards. The list includes *Rita* with the correct date of its première after Donizetti's death, and both *Le Duc d'Albe* and the Naples *Gabriella di Vergy* revealing that he was thoroughly up-to-date with Donizetti's incomplete projects of his last years (he gives what can only be projected performance dates for these abortive operas of "Naples 1844" information that must have come from the maestro himself). But there is no mention either of *Otto mesi in due ore* or of *Elisabetta,* which would be very odd indeed if music from these operas was actually in his hands. Instead, and dramatically enough, on the flyleaf of the volume is written: "*Mme Cottin's Exiles of Siberia: Elisabeth opera in 3 actes: Brunswick and de Leuven: Théâtre Lyrique 31 Dec 1853*"

It would thus seem that Lumley knew only of the opera fabricated by Fontana as described by Pougin and had no knowledge of earlier and more portentous issues of this tale. In this musical *whodunit* we have the body, so to speak, but no plausible reason for its being where it is. Was it perhaps Andrea Donizetti, the composer's somewhat too adroit nephew, who decided to take the initiative and pre-empt its delivery? He could even, no doubt, have been the person responsible for "*chargeant* Fontana" with putting the partition "*en ordre"* subsequently disposing of the original manuscript to the first buyer without another glance? Also in the cellar was a score of *Rita* otherwise thought to be under lock and key (until first performed in 1860) and a signed score of *Poliuto* likewise *inedita* (together with an autograph manuscript libretto by Cammarano). How could these unperformed pieces have been sent to, or taken to, London, unless someone close to the ailing composer

had got hold of them and understood their monetary worth. Or were they stolen? Did some interested person – a singer say – manage to acquire them for a cash sum as a memento of the great maestro? Maybe they simply drifted into the Royal Opera House basement by way of a forgotten bequest or by unthinking dereliction?

A plausible culprit is Sir Michael Costa. Also in the archives of the Royal Opera House is a score of Donizetti's *Maria di Rohan* which Costa conducted at Covent Garden on 8 May 1847 four years after its Vienna prima in 1843. The interest of this score is that it incorporates manuscript pieces of music written for the Paris revival of 1843 in the composer's autograph. Clearly Donizetti had been asked to write them out legibly for interpolation into the conductor's score to be used for London (they are interleaved among the pages). *Michele* Costa had known Donizetti since student days in Naples, they had become almost cronies over the years and Costa was often in Paris. Could it be that either the sick composer – or his nephew later when the composer had become totally incapable – offered *Elisabetta, Rita* and *Poliuto* (someone has noted '*never finished or performed'* on the bundle of the manuscripts of Elisabetta) to the naturalised maestro for use at Covent Garden? If so, it would explain their presence in the cellar. Reference to Lumley and Her Majesty's et al would be completely unnecessary. Whether sent on their travels by the unhappy Donizetti, by his nephew in need of cash, or by whatever unknown agency, s*omeone* worked on these manuscript sources before their dispatch elsewhere. Over and above the hurried composite version of various disparate sections and editions of *Otto mesi in due ore* these pages frequently display comments, attempts at numbering and insertions (the tardy recitatives?) which reveal that *someone* other than the maestro took a hand at attempting to make the whole into a workable proposition. Could it have been Uranio Fontana? If so, surely the opera he masterminded and claimed to have put "*en ordre*" and to which he gave the title of *Elisabeth ou La Fille du proscrit* and staged at the ThéâtreLyrique in 1853 shows remarkably little evidence! That Fontana actually *saw* Donizetti's original is reasonably clear, but why his version differs so widely is extremely unclear. Perhaps he was allowed only a glance and made a few notes? [xi]

Whoever it was would have had a difficult task: "*Il y a erreur: les paroles du Gen. doivent être dites par Elisab.*" an unknown hand has written despairingly at one point.[xii] To be able to make such a complaint a French libretto of some sort must have been at hand. But which one ?

For this particular conundrum we must take up the game of Snakes and Ladders and go back to 1 January 1840. As indicated in his letter to Persico

(above) Donizetti wryly proposed that "*La fille de l'exilé"* would follow shortly upon *La Fille du régiment* whose première would take place on 11 February 1840 at the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique, that rehearsals were imminent ("*andr frà giorni e subito dopo prover* ", and that the preparation of a score for "*La fille de l'exilé"* by pasting slips of paper with a translated French text and transposed vocal line on to the Italian pages of *Otto mesi in due ore* - had already begun. But this was never finished and Pauline Viardot was deprived of a role supremely tailored for her voice and stage presence. The strips of paper were never attached to the pages, bundles of them survive in the Malherbe Collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale still tied together (Ms 4055 "*morceaux de divers formats d'un opéra inédit*"). A few sample pages only were readied for rehearsal and they do indeed reflect the tessitura required for a mezzo-soprano Élisabeth. Maybe it proved too challenging a task, interminable technical headaches could have obliged him to abandon so deft a solution, to rethink the whole project, postpone all *rifacimenti* and commission a brand new livret shaped to fit the extant music. Certainly, at an unspecified date, he set about reconstructing the whole opera with a levy of new pieces and a text fit for purpose surviving pages of which are spread between the cache brought to light in the cellars of Covent Garden and a similar holding in the great French National Library. Music which Pougin cannot fail to have seen.

Here I am, always at my desk, he had written during his first complete Parisian season. And here he was: *La Fille du régiment* was duly followed by *Les Martyrs; Le Duc d'Albe* was begun; so was *Adelia*; he worked on a *rifacimento* of *Il furioso all isola di S.Domingo* which was intended should become "*La Fiancée du Tyrol*;" and also *L'Ange de Nisida*, which subsumed into *La Favorite* ended 1840 in style. Including the projected *"La fille de l'exilé"* eight operas more-or-less gushed from his pen. No less than four were *rifacimenti* of sorts, *Les Martyrs* was *Poliuto* in a French dressing; *L'Ange de Nisida* had been bent to incorporate some sections of his unfinished *Adelaide* (another operatic manuscript carried from Naples under his arm). Both *Il furioso* and *Otto mesi in due ore* were Neapolitan successes put aside for French exploitation in that both incorporated the spoken dialogue the composer believed could be transformed into Parisian *opéra comique*. In Paris there was no shortage of adept librettists able and willing to make the necessary changes to Italian libretti to conform to French taste. Apart from his early contacts with Eugène Scribe (for *Les Martyrs, Le Duc d'Albe* and *La Favorite*) his easy affability and companionable relations with composers like Adam and Auber had brought him the friendship of a league of wordsmiths specialising in spoken dialogue. This, no doubt, is how he came into contact

with Adolphe von Ribbing pseud. Adolphe de Leuven and the latter's close associate Léon Lévy or Lhérie pseud. Brunswick - the adept librettists of Adam's *Le Brasseur de Preston* (Paris 1838). In von Ribbing's case putting the Bergomasc composer into close contact with operatic legend. [xiii] No doubt Paris itself was sufficient to amend his original intentions, its musical *andamento* urgent enough to assure a swift change of plan once the full impact of the city had been appreciated (Paris was worth any number of *rifacimenti!*) Both de Leuven and Brunswick must have played a significant role, at what point exactly they began to be associated with a French version of *Otto mesi in due ore* cannot now be determined. The composer seems to have had at least *some* of their text well before 1840, in fact, as it transpires, there are no less than four French texts for *Élisabeth* in all her manifestations, all slightly different: that used for Donizetti's original 1839 project [written by the composer with some help from de Leuven and Brunswick?]; a second entirely the work of de Leuven and Brunswick which Donizetti appears to have commissioned for his mature French version; a third, with drastic changes which was used by Uranio Fontana for his *Élisabeth ou La Fille du proscrit* attributed to de Leuven and Brunswick; and the printed edition published belatedly in 1854 [xiv] after Fontana's opera had been staged ostensibly in support of the latter but differing materially in many significant ways. Together with these must be mentioned the last tragic Italian translation to be seen on almost all the Covent Garden pages which must be the work of the composer himself. These various texts and their differences can most strikingly be understood by examining the roles in the succession of versions. The initial project of 1839 seems to have favoured a simple Gallic version of the cast of the standard version of *Otto mesi in due ore*: that is with a *comte* Stanislao Potoski (Élisabeth's father); his wife the *comtesse* Fedora; a *Grand Maréchal* and an *Empereur* - the remaining important characters: Alterkan, Iwano/*Ivan*, Michele/*Michel*, and Maria/*Marie* being constant. The enhanced version of 1840 retains Potoski and Fedora and so on but has a *lieto fine* conceded by a mere *Grand Duc*; Fontana's version of 1853 has a *le comte* Vanikof, *a comtesse* (who is Élisabeth's elder sister, and not her mother), there is neither a *Maréchal* [xv] nor a *Général* but there is an Ourzack [xvi] (instead of an Alterkan) and there are two new roles, Kisolof and Nizza; while the definitive printed livret of 1854 is similar to the foregoing except that there is now a differently spelled *comte* Alexis *Vaninkof*,[xvii] an *Ourzac,* a *Kisoloff* – described as a *pécheur*, and a Nizza – described as a *jeune aubergiste, fiancée de Michel*. While the anti-climactic terminal Covent Garden composite goes back to the beginning Snakes and Ladders-wise with the original cast!

It has to be admitted that this is an unusually confusing situation – even for Donizetti who freely took a hand in writing his own verses and amending plots as and when he pleased. It must be presumed that once the composer was out

of the way de Leuven and Brunswick fabricated a radically changed opera for Fontana irrespective of any verses they had earlier supplied; after its stage appearance, however, dissatisfied with the effect of their poetry, or the plot (or with Fontana) they decided to publish their text themselves.

All that can be added with complete confidence is that all the various texts incorporated the improvement that Donizetti had requested from Ferretti as long ago as 1834, that is, that the heroine's father should himself set off on an icy journey to Moscow in search of her.

One turns to the music with relief, in that its evolution is somewhat clearer. It is the overture, discovered at Covent Garden, that gives a precise chapter and verse to his 1840 *rifacimenti* of this opera. First supplied to replace the earlier Preludio for a staging at Rome in 1832, Donizetti – though making no effort to update the title from '*8 mesi in due ore'* – now adds on the first page '*Corretta, riveduta, e ritoccata dall'Autore nel 1840'*. This overture contains thematic material from within the opera (from the Acte II Chœur de Tartares) [xviii] and maintains a species of ghostly relationship with that used by Fontana for his opera (supporting the conjecture that the "*élève*" may have kept an overture copy of his own). But before any schedule of the existing portions of this "lost" opéra comique can be attempted, it should be stressed that the three central roles are all much modified in respect of earlier versions: where Elisabetta was (usually) a soprano *Élisabeth* is a mezzo-soprano; where Michele was a basso-buffo *Michel* is a ténor;[xix] where Potoski was (if not quite invariably) a *tenore* in previous editions, he is now a *ténor de grace* with some very Gallic music to sing. Thus, the celebrated central trio of *Élisabeth* or of *La Fille de l'exilé,* to give the opera the title the composer apparently intended - the moving and highly emotional *point de repère* of the whole opera - has a quite different impact from that of its first appearance, more mellifluous, more beguiling, with added intervention from outside and distinctly more tense and alarming. The scoring is lighter and more lyrical, superfluous brio has gone, the romantic mood - already strongly in evidence even in 1827 and throughout the series now masterly with closer attention paid to an orchestral clarity that might have gone for nothing in the teeming theatres of his homeland. In all these versions the spoken dialogue is of course completely missing, but can be recreated thanks to the livret published to complement the version by the purported "*elève*" so very providentially in 1854.

[i] Arthur Pougin, Les Opéras de Donizetti en France (in) Numero Unico nel primo centenario della Sua Nascita (Bergamo 1897), 21: Donizetti's melodramma romantico in tre atti, Otto mesi in due ore, with its libretto by Domenico Gilardoni, had first been staged at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples on 13 May 1827

[ii] Studi donizettiani 4 (Bergamo 1988), 47 Letter from Donizetti to Tommaso Persico of 1 January 1840

[iii] Pauline Garcia married Louis Viardot, Director of the Théâtre-Italien in Paris, on 16 April 1840. Newspapers later encouraged the idea [See: Annalisa Bini and Jeremy Commons, Le prime rappresentazioni delle opere di Donizetti nella stampa coeva (Milano 1997), 747 et al] that the title role might have been written for Eugénie Garcia, her sister-in-law, and that rehearsals had begun. These reports hint only at one good reason for its nonappearance especially as no rehearsal was possible given the incomplete state of the score. Eugénie Garcia then a light soprano could never have sung music written for a near contralto. She was pathologically jealous of the Garcia clan into which she had married as well as notorious for suggesting that she could replace any of them to an avid press. Pauline Garcia-Viardot was a special target for her claims

[iv] See: Annalisa Bini, Otto mesi is due ore ossia Gli esiliati in Siberia: Vicende di un'opera donizettiana (in) Rivista Italiana di Musicologia Vol. XXII (Olschki, Firenze 1988), 183-249.

[v] She was buried at Père Lachaise with some pomp, but somewhat ignominiously among the protestants as a consequence of having committed suicide

[vi] Some of Piccinni's music, however, appears to have been reused in Pixérécourt's mélodrame

[vii] The manuscript has since been restored, pages remounted, boxed and handed to the British Library

[viii] The 1827 autograph is conserved in the Biblioteca del Conservatorio di S. Pietro a Majella at Naples and was long known to be incomplete

[ix] Benjamin Lumley, Reminiscences of the Opera (London 1864), 83-163. Also: William Weaver and Martin Chusid A Verdi Companion (London 1980). That an invitation to go to London was extended as late as 16 january 1845 is confirmed by a letter to Sofia Loewenstein published in Bergomum.
Anno XCIV-1999-n. 1,165 (Bergamo 1999): Amedeo Pieragostini, Lettere inedite riguardanti Gaetano Donizetti conservate in una collezione privata francese: "J'ai refusé d'aller a London pour composé [un] opéra". This may plausibly have provoked the very final, tragic, hurried revision at this
music as Elisabetta in 1845

[x] In the possession of the author

[xi] Uranio Fontana (1815-1881) is an elusive figure. That he was an acquaintance, if not an "élève" of Donizetti is confirmed by a brief comment from the composer in a letter to Michele Accursi (Studi donizettiani 1 [Bergamo 1962], 79) written in January 1842 when he says "E ringrazia Fontana della pena che si dà..."; whether this refers to work he had done on Élisabeth - or to a period in which he had been able to study its music - is not certain. He was connected with the Théâtre de la Renaissance in 1840. There are at least three Italian operas to his credit: Isabella di Lara (Rome 1837), Giulio d'Este (Padua 1842), and I Baccanti (Milan 1847); only one French work seems to be recorded, a dim Zingaro, opéra en deux actes, précédé d'un prologue, musique de M. Uranio Fontana, pantomime et divertissemens de M. Perrot staged in Paris in 1840. Will Crutchfield (A Donizetti Discovery [in] The Musical Times [London 1984], 487-90) discusses pertinently the puzzling nature of his setting which was given as by "G. Donizetti" on 31 December 1853, an opéra comique in which snippets of Donizetti's melodies come and go in the form of imperfect reminiscences, sometimes out of sequence as if, in Crutchfield's words "an uncertain effort to use what memory has retained of a tune heard years earlier". Even more oddly, Élisabeth ou La Fille du proscrit was not unsuccessful, though its travestied nature was common knowledge, it seems, at the time, in musical circles [xii] On a page of recitatives in Act III

[xiii] He was a direct descendant of one of the assassins of Gustave III of Sweden, brought to Parisian notice recently in 1833 with the staging of Auber's grand opéra on this theme

[xiv] Élisabeth ou La Fille du Proscrit; drame lyrique en trois actes; Tiré du roman de Mme Cottin: par MM A. de Leuven et Brunswick: Musique de G. Donizetti: Mise en ordre par M. Fontana, son élève: Représenté pour la première fois, à Paris, sur le Théâtre Lyrique le
31 Décembre 1853: Paris: Michel Levy, Fréres. Libraires- Editeurs; Rue Vivienne, 2 bis: 1854

[xv] He is mentioned, nonetheless, at the start of the Acte III trio 'O ciel! le maréchal!' (which in Donizetti's mature 1840 version is 'Oh ciel... le général')

[xvi] This character had existed as long ago as the first Naples version of 1827, in the meanwhile he had mostly been missing from cast lists, but now he reappears in place of Alterkan

[xvii] The vocal score of Fontana's opera [Élisabeth ou La Fille du Proscrit / Drama Lyrique en trois actes / Poeme de M.M. de Leuven et Brunswick / Musique de G.Donizetti / Paris Léon Escudier / 21 Rue Choiseul (1853) Pl.No.1418] makes reference however to Alexis Vaninkof (p. 90) and to
Ourzak (pp. 106 and 114) irrespective of the spelling on the table of contents

[xviii] Bini, op cit
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[xix] Fontana had recast Donizetti's ténor Michel as a baryton