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together with the extract from the libretto that appeared in the original article)

In the wake of *L'esule di Roma*
'Ogni tormento'

Alexander Weatherson

Gilardoni's libretto is very strange. In the original version of the opera Settimio - in the title-role - has nothing at all to sing after Act 1, just one line of recitative ex-lion. This is odder even than *Belisario* where the primadonna soprano makes her mark only in the genesis of the action and in the extended finale.[i]

And then, even more remarkably, most of Argelia's attention is focused on her father rather than on her lover. Did her heart belong to Daddy? It is quite possible. Maybe it was simply a matter of a weak tenor in the original production at Naples (when "Daddy" was Luigi Lablache) but Donizetti, it should be observed, wrote the first of the Dungeon Scenes he was to insert into Act II to boost the role of this same "weak" tenor - Berardo Calvari Winter - for the opera's second production at Milan. Once the score has been heard it is perfectly clear why: it was not just to concede the neglected Settimio a foothold at a climactic moment in the second part of the action but also to give the hard-pressed Argelia a moment of respite before her *gran'scena finale* of such enormous vocal exertion.

Publio is another stillborn character. In the initial version of the score the baritone had quite a lot to sing - much more in fact than in the version revived in London in 1982 for its first modern showing. Publio is the only character with a real Donizettian future as he is a sort of *Sévère avant-la-lettre* [ie in *Les Martyrs*] but his fame was short-lived in *L'esule di Roma*, it was the maestro himself who slashed his role, again for the second production. The original Publio was Celestino Salvadori (or Salvatori) who had a very high baritone register (the role of Belisario was written specifically for him), in this second staging of *L'esule di Roma* at La Scala Donizetti was obliged to accept Domenico Spiaggi as his second-baritone and unimpressed by his singing cut his contribution to a few perfunctory (if stratospheric) interventions. Thus putting a damper not only on the plot but on the entire *Introduzione.* One or two of the later-inserted Dungeon scenes into Act II, however, in compensation, give Publio a stretch of *arioso,* and in one of the versions, a *duettino*.

This pruning, nonetheless, only contributes to the lopsided distribution of the whole opera. We know what Donizetti sought at this time in terms of "*taming the yoke*" of operatic formulae, but he unhesitatingly tempered Gilardoni's limited operatic experience in reapportioning the weight of the roles to the sovereign voices at his disposal. In this way, needless to say, his two stars - Adelaide Tosi as Argelia and Luigi Lablache as Murena - got the lion's share (this is not a pun) of the music.

Such changes inadvertently conferred something of a *Prologue* upon the

opening scenes of the opera, to such an extent indeed that some old-fashioned staging's might have wanted to offer all of Act I before the cavatina of Settimio behind a gauze, the plot warms-up only with the first ensemble, the breathless duet 'Fia ver! Oh Ciel! Settimio!' This, as we soon learn, is an *opera of ensembles*. All the militaristic to-ing and fro-ing at the beginning of Act I, especially in concert form deprived both of setting and *banda sul palco*, proved rather deficient. Lost, in particular, was a sense of the physical presence of the City of Rome itself, which, uniquely, plays a tangible role in this *melodramma eroico* (Roma being high on the composer's own agenda at the time of composition thanks to his wife Virginia). The coro in particular needed to be visibly festive to make any real theatrical sense.



Is it too cynical to suggest, as others have done several times before that Donizetti had a cold-start in all the operas before *Anna Bolena*? Or that - in the absence of a *sinfonia* (Naples never warmed to them) and knowing that as his audience would still be traipsing to their seats for many disruptive minutes after the music had begun - that an excess of subtlety at this point would come to nothing? Most of those familiar with earlier Opera Rara revivals will

have registered the “chunks” of *Gabriella di Vergy* in Act I of *L’esule di Roma* (though no one in Naples at its S.Carlo prima on 1 January 1828 could have done anything of the kind as *Gabriella* had never been performed). Until our day all you would have heard would have been the triumphal rejoicings of *L’esule di Roma*. We experience these things in a dimension more appropriate to "*Doctor Who"*. Acuter ears will have registered an advance-warning of *Anna Bolena* in the *tempo di mezzo* ‘Qual fragor!’ before the aria finale - which is a ‘Qual festivo’ in embryo - and in precisely the same position before the utimate soprano vocal-fling, in this particular instance with a more positive outcome. Those with the acutest ears of all will have registered the *Andante* of the irresistible baritone/soprano duet in Act II as being the *Larghetto* of Donizetti's elusive Sonata for Flute and Harp. This casts an interesting light on the emotional nous of this work. Could there be any significance in its re-use?[ii]

Argelia, at least can cap her ordeal with a triumphant:

Ogni tormento
Qual nebbia al vento
Si dileguò!
Svani, cessò!

L’esule di Roma represented a breakthrough all of its own but not without torment. In this opera the popularist mode - which until then had diluted his *opere-serie* with jaunty cori, light-weight *cabalette* and mood-swings in the wrong places - is tamed if not quite squeezed-out of the real substance of the score. *L’esule di Roma* achieves single-mood status almost throughout culminating in an epic vocal odyssey that is finely judged and no way jarring (something that cannot be said of the happy-endings imposed unwillingly on some of his later operas). Thus in 1828 this opera paralleled those revolutionary-seeming operas of Bellini without emulating them. The Bergamasc opted-for a melodrama that was classical in garb, static, decorous, its romantic intimations under every restraint, but pulled-about by the slings and arrows of vehemence and passionate declamation. A sparsely-scored, economical offering with no lush moments, a minimum of convention and no self-indulgent *concertato, Anna Bolena* would be the next opera in his long list to maintain such a consistency (which is why Bellini could summon-up a modicum of faint praise for these two operas).

Was it was the austerity of the plot that invited so many changes once the composer himself decided to repair the deficiencies of the libretto? Few of his successful operas have ever been so tormented.

These changes can be itemised as follows:

1, 12 July 1828	La Scala, Milano	Modified verses in the aria-finale (Argelia); NewAct II Scena (Settimio); 'Nudo terren, muto silenzia' 'S'io finor, bell'idol mio' 'Si scenda alla tomba'[iii]
2. 27 December 1828	S.Carlo, Napoli	New Act II Scena (Settimio);Enhanced recitative 'S'io finor, bell'idol mio' [new music] 'Quand'io son de l'ombre in seno'[iv]
3. 19 January 1833	T.Grande, Trieste	New Act II Scena (Settimio); [Revised recitative] 'Vanne ad Argelia, e dille' 'La sorte d'un misero' 'Ch'io sia vendicato'[v] New recitative before aria-finale(Argelia), The finale itself is abbreviated.
4. Primavera 1838	T.Cavalieri Compadroni, Pavia	New Act II Scena (Settimio); 'Vanne ed Argelia e dille' 'Amici! che dite?' 'La sorte d'un misero' 'Quell'anima fiera'[vi]

5. 12 August 1840	T.Riccardi, Bergamo	Inserted cavatina (Argelia); 'L'amor suo mi fe'beata' 'Ah! ritorna qual ti spero' [both from *Roberto Devereux*] New Act II Scena (Settimio); 'Come ti resse il core' 'Io quel di rammento ognor' 'Mi rende più forte' New aria-finale (Argelia); 'Senti il core amato bene'[vii]

The input of *Roberto Devereux* into *L'esule di Roma* in this last *rifacimento* is especially revealing. Owing to the (perhaps) enforced changes to the latter both operas feature the tenor in a dramatically sealed *vignette* towards the close of the action - a distinctly old-fashioned contrivance for such forward-looking scores. Both hark-back to the eighteenth century *cliché* where the castrato-hero appears in chains for his "big scene" (in prison in this instance), elaborately decked in a feather headdress. It was a retro image which Donizetti attempted to dispel by supplying in each instance a romantically-appealing orchestral prelude, replete with delicious wood-wind obbligato, evocative and atmospheric, sometimes extending the vocal layout with extraneous voices - maybe Publio, maybe Lucio, or perhaps Fulvio - together with a choral backing. It can be argued that not one of these Dungeon scenes was ever regarded as completely satisfactory by the composer, all disrupt an otherwise seamless drama, hence the constant changes.

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Certainly they gave an opening for singers to make changes of their own. At Macerata for example in the carnevale of 1833 the Teatro dei Signori Condomini contrived a version of the opera which must have been remarkably tormenting; retitled *Settimio* it nonetheless omitted completely the Dungeon Scene and ended blandly, after his safe return from the circus, with 'Alla gioia del piacer' ie the aria finale of Bellini's *Bianca e Gernando* (of 1826). Worse was to come elsewhere. The most fabulous version of *L'esule di Roma* was the one given at the Teatro Comunale of Modena that very same year. In order fully to appreciate its sophistry we have to note the comment made by a dispassionate witness, Charles de Bériot [viii](Malibran's

husband to be) in 1834, when he pointed out that in Naples two operas only had *never* been whistled in that city, they were Giovanni Pacini's *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei* (of 1825) and Donizetti's *L'esule di Roma*.

[Thus casting a revealing light on the mythology handed down to credulous generations by "musical historians" ever since - for instance Francesco Florimo's unprincipled insistence that "*The only composer who never had any success in Naples was Pacini*"]

This Modena version indeed proved innovative: Argelia has an inserted *aria di sortita* which turned out to be a sort-of cobbled-together version of the tenor Vanoldo's cavatina from *La rosa bianca e la rosa rossa* (1813), but this at least was composed by Donizetti's beloved maestro Simon Mayr; the insignificant comprimario Lucio dug-up an insert aria for himself from somewhere or other (by an unknown); but the real innovation was elsewhere: in place of the true *point de repère* of the whole score - the duetto between Murena and Argelia in Act II - appeared a real novelty with a text no longer beginning 'O cari oggetti' but now 'Deh! taci/ Quel dolce nome' - in other words Donizetti's famous duet has been replaced by Pacini's equally celebrated duet 'Ah! sposo mio!' from *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei.* The ease of this substitution was simply breathtaking - a perfectly cynical reversal of roles, instead of the heartbroken Sallustio confronting a guilty Ottavia as in Pacini's original, the heartbroken Argelia confronts a guilty Murena while singing Ottavia's music - in response to his singing that of Sallustio!

The perverse ingenuity of this librettistic feat is quite frightening.

L'esule di Roma Modena 1833

Mur. *Deh! taci*
Quel dolce nome
Che mi fea lieto un dì, non osi
Il labbro pronunziar.
Arg. *Quai detti*
È Murena che parla?
Mur. *Alcun non ci ode?*
Il tuo Settimio or'ora
(Più non resiste) un'alma palpitante
Che fra il delitto, e la virtude ondeggia
Corre a morir; e se fu reo Muena
Piena vendetta a far di se s'appresta.
Arg..
Che dici? Padre, ah! Padre mio t'arresta
Squarciami il core svenami
Togli a me pur la vita
Come potrò più vivere
Se perdo il Genitor.
Mur. *Ma un sol momento...incauta!*
Costar ne può sua vita
Vano è quel pianto, lascimai
In tempo giungo ancor.
Arg. *Ah! pria su me la folgore*
Vibri l'irato Ciel.
Mur. *Lo sposo tuo Settimio*
Ami cosi crudel?
Arg. *Fui pria che amante, figlia*
Salvarti e mio dover.
Risolsi... ah! corrasi
Voce del Cielo ispirami
Al pianto mio Tiberio
Non fia che il nieghi.
Mur. *Argelia*
M'inganni tu?
Arg. *No, credilo*
A queste amare lacrime
Vivi di me sicuro,
E l'innocente il giuro,
Sapro salvar con te.
Mur. *Che ascolto! oh! raggio amico*
Sei tu che al cor mi scendi,
Sei tu che all'alma rendi
Qualche speranza almen.
Arg. *Settimio dal nemico*
Pietoso ciel difendi
Il fato suo sospendi,
E sarò lieta appien.
Mur. *Ah! sia il tuo labbro*
Nunzio verace
Di bella pace,
Al mesto cuor.
Arg. *Vedrai Settimio*
Reso al tuo seno
E lieti appieno
Saremo allor.
Mur. *Dunque innocente?*
Arg. *Lo renderò.*
Mur. *Al cuor dolente.*
Arg. *Calma darõ.*

L'ultimo giorno di Pompei Napoli 1825

Sall. *Taci!*
Quel dolce nome,
Che mi fea lieto un dì, non osi il labbro
Di pronunziar, se l'alma è rea.
Ott. *Che sento!*
È Sallustio che parla?
Sall. *Alcun non ti ode...*
Il tuo giudice è lunghi...a te favella
Lo sposo palpitante,
Che fra le accuse, e fra le speme ondeggia
Che apri il tuo cor se ad oltraggiarmi, o donna
Vile ardor ti sedusse, ah! mel palesa...
Ott,
Sedurre Ottavia un vile ardor, che offesa!
Squarciami il core, o barbaro!
Vi troverai scolpita
La tua diletta immagine
Che sol v'impresse Amor.
Sall. *Ma un sol momento, incauta!*
Forse ti avrà rapita
Quella virtù,.che l'anima
Ti fea leggiadra ognor.
Ott. *No...so mancai, la folgore*
Vibri al mio crine il ciel!
Sall. *Pubblio smentisci, e Clodio,*
Mostrati a me fedel.
Ott. *Ambi spergiuri, e perfidi*
Compri da un uom crudel.
Sallustio, ah! sappilo...
Di Appio alle nere insidie
Resse quest'alma, e l'empio
Giurò vendetta...
Sall. *Ottavia!*
M'inganni tu?
Ott. *No...credilo*
A queste amare lagrime...
Vivi di me sicuro...
Sono innocente...il giuro
Ai Numi, al figlio, a te!
Sall. *(Che ascolto! oh raggio amico!*
Sei tu, che in sen mi scendi?
Se tu, ch all'alma rendi
Qualche speranza almen?)
Ott. *Dal tradiitor nemico*
La sposa tua difendi...
Che fida o son comprendi...
E sarò paga appien!
Sall. *Se fu il tuo labbro*
Con me verace,
Tremi l'audace
Che ti oltraggiò!
Ott. *Vedrai, se il vile*
Saprò smentire
Se impallidire
L'empio farò.
Sall. *Dunque innocente...*
Ott. *Trionferò.*
Sall. *Al cor dolente...*
Ott. *Calma darò.*

Mur. *A questa braccia ritornerai.*
Arg. *Mi stringerai degna di te.*
Mur. *Nume tu mitiga*
a 2 *Il nostro affanno*
Arg *Tu l'aura dissipa*
Del fiero inganno
E rendi all'anima
Smarrita, e oppressa
La pace istessa
Che amor le diè.

Sall. *A questa braccia ritornerai?*
Ott. *Mi stringerai degna di te...*
Sall. *Nume! tu mitiga*
a 2 *Il nostro affanno!*
Ott. *Tu l'ombre dissipa*
Del nero inganno
E rendi all'anima
Smarrita, oppressa
La pace istessa
Che Amor le diè.



The opera had a very long run, together with his *Otto mesi in due ore* it was scarcely ever out of the composer's portfolio. But why such a discordant history, why such a challenge to the maestro, why so very many adjustments? Why is the libretto so odd and why did the hero, the tragic Settimio, vanish almost completely after the sensational *trio finale* to Act I?

The answer is painfully simple. *L'esule di Roma* was conceived in *one act.* Gilardoni had been commissioned to supply another of the abbreviated festive operas in vogue at the Court of the Two Sicilies - like that of Pacini's *Amazilia* in 1825 for instance, or that of Donizetti's *Elvida* in 1826 – for the birthday of Queen Maria Isabella who preferred short operas for this sort of occasion. In its projected one-act form, the hero of *L'esule di Roma* remained a presence on stage even if attending his fate elsewhere. Composed in 1827 *L'esule di Roma* was intended to fill such a slot in the season but had been put aside thanks to a change of programme. When a more substantial opera was required early in 1828 the music was considerably extended and outgrew its libretto. It was this later enhancement and division into two acts that led to the involuntary promotion of the brilliant central *terzettone* of the one-act opera to its new status of *trio-finale* in a two-act version, thus bringing the newly emergent Act I to its celebrated close.

Serendipity: who can doubt it? But the real loser was the poet, the music-drama he had conceived, one of the most bold of its day for which Donizetti had supplied exceptionally fluent music, was factually trivialised in every subsequent staging. The maestro too had lost the plot, whatever the celebrity of his *trio-finale*. The audience now had to wait for *Anna Bolena* for a real revelation

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[i] Both *Belisario* and *Marin Faliero*, equally neglectful of the primadonna soprano, can claim that the true emphasis of the opera should devolve upon the title-role, but in *L'esule di Roma,* Settimio, upon whom also the true emphasis of the plot also devolves, has the smallest role of the principal trio

[ii] Or was this elusive sonata a spin-off from *L'esule di Roma?*

[iii] This is the initial version of the Dungeon Scene for the tenor, placed between Scenes V and VI of Act II. It was performed in the London revival of 18 July 1982 and was published, rather mysteriously, by Francesco Lucca as "*Eseguita dal Sigr.Ignazio Pasini*" [Pl. No 2119] when in fact it had been sung by Winter. Pasini did not sing the role of Settimio until 21 September 1833 at the Teatro Principe in Madrid. Lucca was probably attempting to evade the printing rights of rival publishers by this attribution. But Winter does not appear to have regretted his Dungeon Scene, in the revivals in which he took part the scene was often omitted. Maybe he gladly relinquished it to Pasini?

[iv] This second Dungeon Scene was composed for Giovanni Battista Rubini, it was published by Girard [Pl.No 885]. Girard advertised the publication of '*L'opera intera per canto*' [Pl.No 689] but it does not appear to have materialised. Rubini's version seems never to have been revived, almost certainly because the quite frantic elaboration of the vocal line proved intimidating to less gifted tenors

[v] Manuscript scores of this version exist both in Naples and Bologna. Settimio was sung by the veteran Claudio Bonoldi

[vi] In this revival, Settimio was sung by Eugenio Musich, and Publio, surprisingly, by the tenor Gaetano Fraschini

[vii] This final Dungeon Scene was composed for Domenico Donzelli and was the least taxing of all in view of his age and vocal condition. The new aria-finale was composed for Eugenia Tadolini who liked it so much that later she elected to interpolate it into *Linda di Chamounix* (to its very considerable detriment)

[viii] *Cfr* Donizetti Society Newsletter 79 (February 2000), 12