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Andreas Giger, *Verdi and the French Aesthetic: Verse, Stanza, and Melody in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). x + 294pp. £52.00

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of audiences. He is right to alert readers to the assumptions built into terms such as 'appropriation', but given the unequal relations of cultural and economic capital that existed – and continue to exist – between, say, the vanished music of eighteenth-century Hungarian 'gypsy' musicians and Joseph Haydn's 'rondo in the gypsies' style', much about the term remains relevant.

In a position familiar from arguments against censorship, Locke invites us to be more tolerant of musical images we find expressive of intolerance, to forgo dismissal of exotic masterworks on the basis of offended sensitivity, and to trust in listeners' ability to reflect critically on the artwork before them. Such admonitions will probably not prove contentious in an Anglo-American context, given the book's particular focus on images of the Muslim Middle-East and of Hungarian and Spanish 'gypsies', though one wonders if they would be so freely offered, or accepted, had the subject been representations of (say) African Americans or Jews. Why is there no entry for 'race' in the index to a book that seeks to lay out the cultural work of exoticism? And can the history of empire be so reassuringly contained within European culture before the Second World War? Locke's tone of liberal neutrality, his reluctance to speak about power, and his lack of self-consciousness about contemporary relationships between his home country and the Middle-East render his book just as provocative as the 'injudicious and extreme' critiques against which he writes. Perhaps one day the dust will settle and we will achieve a balanced appraisal of exoticism. Until that time, Locke's book will remain a valuable, but not impartial, contribution to the debate.

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Andreas Giger, *Verdi and the French Aesthetic: Verse, Stanza, and Melody in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). x + 294pp. £52.00

To start where this book leaves off: there is an old adage in the operatic world that to get from Verdi to Puccini (or, at least, their musical styles), you have to go via Massenet. In his concluding pages, Andreas Giger affirms that characteristics traditionally associated with French opera – more varied melodic styles and realistic declamation, gradual abandonment of parallel and regular phrasing, the intensity of tremolo chords, and so on – play a prominent role in *verismo* opera and that the exact connections between Verdi, French opera and *verismo* require further investigation. But his book painstakingly examines a slightly earlier period, and not only examines how Verdi, in spite of himself, set the stage for the *verismo* movement, but also demonstrates that to get from *La traviata* to *Aida* and beyond, you have to go via *Les vêpres siciliennes* and *Don Carlos*.

Verdi's collaborations with the Paris Opéra are generally well documented. Three of them are under study here: *Jérusalem*, adapted at short notice from *I lombardi* in 1847, just after Verdi had arrived for a long sojourn in the French capital; *Les vêpres siciliennes*, a collaboration on a new libretto by Eugène Scribe that was mounted in 1855; and *Don Carlos*, Verdi's most mature Parisian collaboration for a new opera, premiered as national and international visitors poured into Paris to visit the grand *Exposition universelle* of 1867 (although Giger does not tell us as much). Giger sets out very clearly (in his introduction) that his book focuses on Verdi's gradual mastery of French melody, the mechanics of French

verse and stanza and the ways in which they serve to illuminate Verdi's musical development. He is right when he says that we do not yet have an adequate understanding of the melodic style nineteenth-century critics considered to be distinctly French, however much vague description and even prevarication has been going on by theorists since the mid-eighteenth century. Indeed, what Giger proposes is nothing short of an academic unpacking through careful attention to versification and prosody – as well as other musical aspects such as melodic rhythm and phrasing, accompaniment patterns and attention to dramatic situation (what he calls 'dramatic accuracy') – of aspects of the controversy of the *Guerre des bouffons* and the argument between the Gluckists and the Piccinists.

Because French versification allowed for accents in a greater variety of positions within the verse, French melodies featured greater rhythmic variety, Boito identifying 'a meanness and poverty of rhythm within the musical phrase' born of Italian versification and prosody.¹ Giger's aims are therefore scientific and rigorous: he demonstrates the ways in which French stanzaic forms suggest a melodic style flexible in phrasing and rhythm, and postulates a 'rhetoric of prosody' – the identification of Verdi's use of similar prosodic approaches for similar dramatic situations – thus his use of prosody as another dramatic tool, of prosodic choices being attributed dramatic meaning.

In order to accomplish this task, Part 1 of Giger's book (over 80 pages) presents a rather heavy-going methodological explanation of versification, prosody, melodic conventions and phrasing in both French and Italian opera of the mid-nineteenth century. That said, there are copious examples and clear explanations of everything from how to count syllables in French verse (with their confounded mute e endings) as opposed to Italian verse, to scansion and prosodic distortion of tonic accents for comic effect in operas as obscure as Adolphe Adam's *Le Brasseur de Preston* (1838), the knowledge of such repertoire putting many a scholar of French opera (myself included) to shame! Giger draws his discussion of versification from a number of treatises published in France, Italy and Germany from 1787 to 1912,² by Antonio Scoppa, Louis-Marie Quicherat, Otto Lubarsch and Eugène Landry, to name but a few, and doggedly compares and contrasts the various concordances and discrepancies between them. Indeed, this chapter is of as much use to literature specialists as it is to musicologists and, whilst these tasks have been undertaken with regard to more 'noble' literary genres, rarely has this work been done in such detail with regard to the libretto.

Once we have been equipped with tools to describe Verdi's French operatic achievements, Part 2 of the book investigates Verdi's responses to French prosody and melody and their influence on his Italian works in chapters based around the three operas under study. The differences between *I lombardi* and *Jérusalem* have traditionally been explained in terms of the adapted libretto and changes to dramatic situations and moods evoked. Yet here Giger pays close attention to prosody and melody to suggest new reasons for certain musical decisions. While Giger concludes that Verdi was overly concerned with reflecting every tonic accent in his French prosody and was not yet in command of the variety of options that he later possessed and that later helped renew his style, he

¹ *Il Figaro* (11 Feb. 1864): 2, quoted in Arrigo Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, ed. P. Nardi (Milan: Mondadori, 1942), 1119, and translated in J. Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols, vol. 2, *From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 16–17.

² Details of the principal theoretical texts cited are given in an appendix (Giger, *Verdi and the French Aesthetic*, 229–31).

nevertheless demonstrates how many of the reworked portions, including the rejection of highly accentuated and noisy formulaic accompaniment patterns, more direct vocal lines, or dramatic accuracy, were the result of Verdi's response to French aesthetics.

Giger's discussion of the differences between French and Italian melodic construction is not necessarily the most revolutionary in his book, but nevertheless clearly demonstrates the perceived 'tensions' between the two approaches and highlights the links to formulaic aria structure and 'dramatic accuracy'. Despite the dramaturgical innovations of *Rigoletto* or *La traviata*, Giger sees *Les vêpres siciliennes* as a turning point in Verdi's *œuvre* with regard to melody. Even in Gaston's Act III aria, 'O mes amis', from *Jérusalem* Verdi introduces a new melodic idea (based on augmentation of the first) with a new accompaniment pattern in the French manner, before having developed the first idea according to Italian principles. The resulting sense of breadth of melodies, such as the prayer section of Hélène's Act I aria from *Vêpres*, 'Viens à nous, Dieu tutélaire', can be seen to be constituted by melodic grandness born of more tripartite lyric prototypes, a tranquil flow created by a correspondence of pulse and harmonic rhythm, and a broadened accompaniment pattern. Thus the Italian manner of the development of a theme created a unified melodic structure, and the French technique of 'stitching together' contrasting (but often linked) melodies (a term used by Giger *d'après* nineteenth-century critics) allowed for adjustments in the changing emotions. For the Italians, French melodies were seen to be lacking unity and as fragmented, whilst the French saw Italian melody as monotonous and lacking in dramatic contrast. Whilst the French wanted greater dramatic contrast of melody in order to better suit the libretto, they were adverse to the stark dramatic contrasts inherent in the cavatina-cabaletta aria structure, and thus the French accused the Italians of a lack of dramatic unity within the aria: the Italian aria model presented small-scale melodic unity within contrasting dramatic sections; the French aria model presented contrasting melodic movements in sections where the dramatic situation remained relatively constant. These preoccupations, of course, resulted from literary traditions of libretto writing: chains of stanzas with distinct poetic metres almost always lead to the chains of distinct melodies in French arias, whereas stanzas written in *versi lirici*, separated by transitions in *versi sciolti* or non-stanzaic verse gave rise to *tempo di mezzo* transition passages that, dramatically, were not to French taste. Hélène's aria, 'Viens à nous, Dieu tutélaire', of traditional multi-movement Italian design but with melodic themes that make up a chain of loosely related ideas in the French manner, combines the two forms.

Whilst Giger is dealing with the nuts and bolts of versification, prosody, accompaniment patterns and phrase structure, his conclusions are sophisticated and telling. What I like less about this book is the way it uses contemporary citations in a rather unreflexive way, taking from them what is of use to the technical argument presented, but not taking into account their wider aesthetic, social and even political contexts. This is particularly noticeable in the discussion of *Don Carlos*, given at the Opéra in the year of the *Exposition universelle*, and in global competition with Offenbach's *La Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein* at the Théâtre des variétés (which opened one month later) and Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette* at the Théâtre lyrique (which opened another two weeks after that). For instance, this chapter is headed by two very short yet unexplained citations referring to *Don Carlos* as both Meyerbeerian and as a true French opera, both of which beg to be unpacked but are left as anecdotal asides. The critical notion of

Verdi having sold out to Wagnerian techniques is also evoked, and Giger rightly identifies the use of the 'wagnerism' label as a convenient way to condemn the less four-square, more declamatory, more realistic nature of Verdi's melodies. And yet he never sets the Wagnerian rhetoric into its (highly complex) Parisian context, compounded by the nationalist event that was simultaneously taking place in the city: were the French distancing themselves in this way from what was perceived as the 'official' opera of the *Exposition*, the work of an Italian, a privilege that, in the minds of many, should have been given to a Frenchman? Giger also cites Hippolyte Prévost's hyperbolic review in *La France* in which he acknowledges that Verdi had created 'an exclusively French work', but what he gives us of Prévost's review can equally be read as a paean to French cultural and operatic institutions with which Verdi, rather anecdotally, had had the luck to associate himself. My other quibble of a similar order is the sometimes facile statements that arrive in concluding sections. At the end of Chapter 4, Giger affirms that 'Emphasis on refinement was, of course, characteristic of French opera at the time' (p. 181). But how much of this is actually true of the music and how much is merely a rhetorical argument to do with French aesthetic ideals? What does he actually mean by musical/operatic refinement? And is the 'of course' not a give-away that this is just a hackneyed idea that needs the sort of treatment given to aspects of Verdi's composition in this book, yet naturally well beyond the scope of this study, in order to discover what it really means?

Yet, by 1867, Verdi had fully mastered French prosody, even if the rhythmic structure of verse or stanza was irregular. Giger shows us how Verdi begins to use different prosodic tools for expressive purposes to create greater variety and subtlety, Giger's 'rhetoric of prosody': the scanning of verse against tonic accents to convey lightheartedness and local colour in Eboli's Act II aria, 'Au palais des fées', or the increasing prosodic irregularity (propounded in Paul Pierson's 1884 treatise) to suggest agitation in the Grand Inquisitor's Act IV aria, 'Dans ce beau pays'. Moreover, each time Verdi composed to a French libretto, he significantly broadened his melodic vocabulary. This carried over into his later operas: *Aida* contains arias that abound with new melodies and, for *Otello*, Boito continued the work Ghislanzoni had accomplished in collaboration with Verdi, providing verses of rhythmical and metrical variety in order to break down the boundaries between aria, parlante and recitative. But by this time, stylistic developments could be as much attributed to the development and maturity of Verdi's style in his knowledge of the works of Wagner, Massenet and early Puccini. And yet, in this book, Giger sets out a convincing and thorough examination of how Verdi familiarized himself with and mastered French prosody. Think of a bewildered Richard Strauss who, when writing his French version of *Salomé*, and in response to the prosody of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, wrote: 'Why do the French sing differently to the way they speak?'³ Romain Rolland's answer was hardly succinct or comprehensive. Giger's review of French prosodic treatises and their application to Verdi's *œuvre* goes a long way to answering that question, and extends beyond to its implications for melody and musical dramaturgy by one of the nineteenth-century's most important operatic composers.

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³ Letter to Romain Rolland, 15 July 1905, in Rollo Myers, ed., *Richard Strauss & Romain Rolland: Correspondence* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1968): 35.