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Bard in the Gondola, Barred in the Ghetto: Operatic Adaptations of Shakespearean Text and Italian Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century

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Bard in the Gondola, Barred in the Ghetto:
Operatic Adaptations of Shakespearean Text and Italian Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for Highest Honors
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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Dedicated to my family,
who never lets me forget the joys of being Sicilian.

Molti abbracci, baci e grazie.

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Abstract

This thesis, *Bard in the Gondola, Barred in the Ghetto: Operatic Adaptations of Shakespearean Text and Italian Identity in the Late Nineteenth Century*, is based on the comparison between two texts. The first is William Shakespeare's first quarto edition of *The Merchant of Venice*. The second is the 1873 vocal score and libretto of Ciro Pinsuti and G.T. Cimino's opera, *Il Mercante di Venezia: un melodramma in quattro atti*. The contrast between the two works is made within the context of Italian unification, nationalism and identity juxtaposed with the literary and philosophical trends of the nineteenth century that impacted the way in which the opera was created and received by Italians.

Central to the work is the theme of identity. After its final unification in 1871, Italy was nominally one country, a nation strong and cohesive. However, there were several cultures within the society that had to form a new national spirit by either rejecting their old, local traditions and beliefs and molding an entirely new identity or shaping together bits and pieces from each Italian experience that reflected the division of powers present in the peninsula for centuries. Religion, gender and ethnicity all factor into an individual's Italian-ness and are all examined in the Pinsuti opera. The use of theatre as a means of shaping this discussion continued into the twentieth century of Italy, as the nation still struggles to unite a divided culture of north and south, of progress and tradition.

Introduction

“Are you Jewish,” she asked me with great concern in her eyes. “No,” I answered, “but why should that be a problem?” This woman, whom I had known for all of four hours, was about to make me question all that I believed about identity and the privilege of speech. She and her husband, the art history professor, were hosting a final gathering for our Florence study abroad group. Once I discovered she is an admirer of Shakespeare’s work, we began a conversation about this study. Upon learning that I am not Jewish, she immediately told me to stop work on the thesis at once. I have never seen such a serious look in a stranger’s eyes. She told me that I could not talk about *Merchant of Venice* if I was not Jewish. I explained that the paper would not only cover the anti-Semitism debate surrounding the piece, but would be focusing on the socio-political landscape of the nineteenth century in Italy and include anti-Semitism but also many other realities. She still warned against it. I walked home along the Arno, wondering whether her advice was as good as the view of the river glowing in the moonlight.

The incident certainly jarred me and made me think about the work in a whole new way. At first, my approach was examining the Italian tradition of using theatre as a means of propaganda. In fact, I discovered the opera while researching Mussolini’s manipulation of theatre. Now, I was thinking about identity and who was allowed to talk about any given topic. What does it mean to be one nationality or another? To be one race or another? To be one gender or another? To practice one religion or another? And so I integrated these questions into the way I addressed the opera. This thesis examines the importance of history, politics, religion, and other factors in the construction, definition and projection of identity especially as it relates to the newly unified Italian nation in the year 1873 and the role which opera played in the communication of these ideals.

The structure and methodology of this thesis is its development of a cultural history. It examines an Italian national culture or the formation thereof through the lens of a cultural event, namely, Pinsuti's opera. The first chapter will explore the intricacies of the political and social situation surrounding Italian unification, so as to fit the complexities of regional relationships within their proper temporal place. The second chapter establishes opera as an authentically Italian art form that was not just shaped by the society it was in, but also in turn shaped the society. The third chapter traces the reception of Shakespeare's work in the Italian peninsula during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It investigates the various local and foreign factors at play, the way in which the transmission of the literature related to political power changes and the obstacles that the Italians faced not just with Shakespeare but with creating a national canon of literature and language. The fourth chapter analyzes the opera in terms of comparison to the original text and in relation to the biographical information of Ciro Pinsuti. The fifth and final chapter follows the trajectory of Shakespeare's place in the Italian national theatre of the twentieth century, continuing through to contemporary society.

Chapter One: Historical Context

Discussing the formation of a national Italian identity demands an exploration of the Italian nation itself. At the time of the production of Pinsuti's opera, the Kingdom of Italy was a new construct following a period of reunification, also referred to as the Risorgimento. The turn of the nineteenth century opened on a conglomerate of states within the peninsular area on the Mediterranean coast. Though relatively steady in geographical boundaries, these separate nations were under the control of various powers. The end of the Renaissance and years proceeding into the modern era witnessed a period of constant succession struggles, territorial conquests and economic alliances that determined the course of the continent's history.

Before discussing the events which shaped this world, it is essential to examine some of the philosophical trends and schools of thought which directly influenced the historical actions that developed Italy and the nationalism examined in this paper. The first of these is the general phenomenon of the Enlightenment, a movement that spread throughout many countries, but had a notably strong hold in England and France. Works were appearing continuously about a new social order which was argued to be most natural. Logic and reason are emphasized over the old ways of blind faith and customs. The individual is placed at a higher level of being than in prior years and is an idea that can transcend classes. In Germany, the self, morality and the idea of experience as it relates to reality were topics of constant debate between thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Schelling, Fichte and Marx. By examining the self, the social consciousness of identity, both personal and national, was heightened by the general study of their writings. The works were published in serial and book form and their ideas spread across the continent, which was undergoing geopolitical changes and unrest with several revolutions beginning in 1848. People were fighting against the constant competition between governments which took a toll on the

material and human economy of the lands. Rulers hungry for empire and wealth followed their neo-mercantilist ambitions to gain land not only in the continent but abroad in places such as Africa, Asia and South America. It is within this political and philosophical context that Italy transformed from a collection of states to a unified country.

The strongest and longest lasting power in the peninsula was the House of Savoy. Originating from Roman and Celtic roots, the dynasty began ruling in an area now annexed into Switzerland. Through savvy marriages and expansive conquests it came to control a large part of northern and central Italy. Gaining control of the Alpine mountain pass and the communities of Turin, Piedmont and Sabaudia rendered it a stronger presence and a recognizable power in the eyes of France, England and Spain. The Holy Roman Emperor elevated the leader, Amadeus VIII, to the title of Duke of Savoy, demonstrating his rising imperial power.

Power can breed great jealousy in others and did so in the hearts of the French, who invaded Piedmont during the Renaissance, influencing the development of arts, ideas and sciences that was flourishing in the southern territories of Florence, Milan and Rome. Charles VIII of France pushed the Savoy back to Turin, profiting from their mountain passes and border control. Charles, though, was the arch-enemy of Hapsburg King Philip II of Spain. Both powers saw a threat to their sovereignty in the other's control of the area. Philip's bankrupt Spain depended on money trade and loans with the Genoese. His nobles and clergy were beginning to see their power run short and his more reserved governing style was shielding him from direct communication and confrontation with them. Thus a dynamic of anxious caution and distrust began to wedge the powers apart. Phillip also had to maintain and expand his control of the Netherlands, a prime source of industry and economy due to the port location ripe for trade. He appointed Savoy leader Emmanuel Philibert as Governor of the Netherlands. Philibert led a

victorious invasion into Southern France under Philip and was rewarded with the land which had been taken from his ancestors.

The seventeenth century was a time of great economic development. Adhering to the need for ports and trade for healthy economies, Charles Emmanuel II built up Savoy finances with infrastructure such as the port of Nice and a road through the Alps to France. This lessened their dependence on the growing networks of Spanish roads. Loss of this toll for the Spaniards accompanied yet another setback in their progress as the War of Spanish Succession tore across western Europe. Due to the leadership of Victor Amadeus on the side of the Hapsburgs, Savoy was rewarded at the Treaty of Utrecht with provinces in north eastern Italy and Sicily, though the latter addition would only remain under Savoy power for seven years. Sicily was valuable for the economic boost provided by the trade and business of Palermo, but it was traded in 1720 for the even more strategic Sardinia.

The new territory joined forces with Piedmont and in 1792 formed a coalition which fought against the invading forces of the French First Republic. After four years of turmoil, Napoleon finally beat them back and gained French control of the passage through Piedmont, which in turn meant open access to the central portion of the peninsula and an eased access for further invasions and conquests. Anglophobia began to take root around 1800 in the occupied territories because of French and English rivalry and continued expeditions of expansion.

One conquest was that of the French General Joubert who invaded Turin under Napoleonic command in 1798. This pushed back Charles Emmanuel IV's domain to Sardinia, isolated from the mainland activity yet open to all sea trade and activity. Naval opportunities were aplenty, but would not be necessary by 1814, when the Congress of Vienna restored him to his throne and land while coupling it with the Republic of Genoa. After the fall of Napoleon in

1814 and the Restoration of European Peace in 1815, Hapsburg control dominated most of Italy. Territory included Piedmont, Sardinia, Savoy, Nice, Genoa, Naples, Sicily, southern lands, Tuscany, Parma and Modena. Lombardy and Venezia remained under Austrian control of Klemens, Fürst von Metternich.

Charles Albert, the Savoy king of Sardinia, was not pleased with his power structure and declared war on Austria. The new king had attended school in Geneva and Paris, and there underwent a series of liberal indoctrination that his father, Charles Felix's court attempted to remove from his politics and philosophy. He supported the arts, a vehicle to capture the public attention and favor. Self-declared "Liberator of Italy," he led the efforts to form a constitutional monarchy for the Kingdom of Italy. However, his goal was to regain territory for his monarchical seat, not to increase the democracy of his society. He did so through a war against Austria with a militia composed of citizens from various areas of the peninsula, not merely his own domain. While he was being defeated, republics in Rome, Venice and Tuscany were also being conquered in 1849. Having lost papal and popular support as well as several battles, Charles Albert abdicated his throne to his son Vittorio Emmanuelle II and exiled himself to Portugal.

The leader of the political fervor was Giuseppe, "the beating heart of Italy"¹ Mazzini. Mazzini was a revolutionary who believed that Italy needed to fight for unification as an independent integrated republic. He was a journalist and lawyer who fought for a democratic state to protect the rights of the lower classes. He took an interest in the literary culture of the Italian tradition, writing a treatise named "Dell'amor patrio di Dante" in which he examines the patriotism of one of the greatest Italian writers. Facing open opposition to his support of unification, in 1831 Mazzini developed the secret society La Giovane Italia (Young Italy), which

¹ Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall. *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth Century Italy*. (New York, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 72.

sought the goal of “one, independent and free republic...of God and the People.”² After building a base of nearly sixty thousand followers in two years, Mazzini developed plans for a revolt, but they were discovered and foiled by the House of Savoy. This did not stop Mazzini. He organized another for the following year, but this too failed even with the help of Garibaldi and his troops. That same year, Mazzini formed an organization dubbed “Young Europe.” It was comprised of exiles from Italy, Germany and Poland and demonstrated the concept of individual liberty, the need for national liberty and foresaw a loosely federal Europe, the proposed power structure of which is arguably reflected by the modern European Union.³ Viewed as a threat to existing powers, Mazzini was jailed and exiled to Paris, where he was again jailed by the French powers and exiled to London. In 1840, he reformed *La Giovane Italia* and called for uprisings in his letters, *Apostolato Popolare*. All of these revolts failed and Mazzini focused his efforts on the Italian exiles living around him in London. Continuing his earlier work with the lower classes, Mazzini founded an Italian school for the poor in London.⁴ This is not to imply that he ceased all direct involvement in the work of revolution. Through written correspondence, he was leading an 1843 riot in Bologna, the failure of which resulted in the execution of the famous Bandiera brothers. The riot was crushed because the British had intercepted Mazzini’s letters and alerted local authorities to the threat. Their admission of guilt in reading private correspondence turned liberal favor toward Mazzini’s cause.⁵ Thus Mazzini provides a human example of the impact that foreign influences made on the minds, actions, and history of the Italian peninsula.

² Patriarca 73.

³ Patriarca 74.

⁴ Patriarca 74.

⁵ Patriarca 74.

Mazzini's letters provide a clear glimpse into his beliefs on the work he was doing. Echoing some of the sentiments of Manifest Destiny, he writes "it is time that Italy should enter the great arena for the progressive development of the law of God."⁶ He wanted to create a state that could reclaim its place as a leader of civilization, as in the days of ancient Rome and the Renaissance. This time, though, it would be a divine mission. The motto of his Young Italy, "God and the People," should not be mistaken as an allegiance with the spiritual power of the Catholic Church. Mazzini rather promoted Christianity free from the trappings of the Church, corrupt with tainted involvement in secular politics.

Mazzini was not the only leader of rebellion in Italy. Camillo Count of Cavour was the prime minister of the Kingdom of Sicily in 1852. In an attempt to throw off Austrian power, Cavour allied himself with Napoleon who pushed Austria to demand the disarmament of the Piedmont region. Cavour did not succumb to this, therefore placing Austria as oppressive to the Italians and failing to the French and surrendering it to the power of the two forces. France and Italy gained the territories of Lombardy. By 1860, the Kingdom of Sardinia comprised all of the north except Venetia. Fearing the domination of the Italian powers after the transferral of Savoy and Nice to France, the pope asked that French troops be stationed in Rome.

Rome was to be the project of another man, Giuseppe Garibaldi. Garibaldi was raised in the ideas of Mazzini's movement. An avid follower from the start, he fled to South America following his thwarted attempt to take over a warship. While in the western hemisphere, he joined in rebellions against Brazil and the Uruguay civil war. He migrated north to the United States in 1848, gained his citizenship, and then returned to his native land. He served under Charles Albert and aided Mazzini in Rome in 1849. After which defeated, he fled. In 1854 he

⁶ Giuseppe Mazzini and Nagendranath Gangulee, ed. *Selected Writings*. (London: L. Drummond, limited, 1945) 3.

broke ties with Mazzini and collaborated with Vittorio Emmanuele II and Cavour. By 1861, the triumvirate had acquired lost territory and five years later gained Venice. The Kingdom of Sardinia became the Kingdom of Italy ruled by the House of Savoy, with Rome as the capital by 1871.

One in name, the country still remained a divided nation especially in the realm of gender relations. Leading up to this date, women in Italy had a “subordinate status.”⁷ It was not due to lack of proactive approaches, as women had attempted to become a more respected part of society especially in the Renaissance. One woman, Laura Cereta, identifies herself as being part of a long tradition of intelligent women who are just as learned and active as men, yet are overshadowed by their male counterparts. Cereta summarizes the situation beautifully with the phrase she addresses to men, “yours is the authority, ours is the inborn ability.”⁸ Her ability to read and write allowed her to teach herself various topics and engage in higher topics of conversation involving philosophy, mathematics and history proving that “literary knowledge...was recognized as a vehicle for interpreting experiences of life and society.”⁹ She was accompanied in her community of exemplary figures by women in various professions and states of life from various historical eras. Even so, Italian society in general limited women to the domestic sphere up to the Risorgimento. There was a high infant abandonment rate in Italy during these few centuries and several orphanages and homes were built to address the issue. Yet

⁷ Claudia Gori. "Women and the World of Knowledge. Four Collections of Love Letters in Nineteenth-Century Italy." *Women's History Review* 20.4 (2011): 641-50. 643.

⁸ Laura Cereta. *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*. Trans. Diana Maury Robin. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997) 79.

⁹ Gori 644.

actually continued a cycle of putting women in situations where they were being viewed as uncontrollable and likely to become pregnant.

While abandoned males were raised and then sent to work for a family, the girls were raised to learn domestic trades and then, in the case of the institution of Rome, were literally paraded through town for the young men looking to marry. It was the equivalent of a “meat market.”¹⁰ Thus women born into and raised by families of a higher class and reputation were automatically given a certain privilege. Many were still used as bargaining tools for marriage as a business between families, but many were given an education that enabled them to read and write well. This led to an “emergence of strong women writers in late nineteenth century Italy.”¹¹ A turning point occurred in the 1860’s when “the women’s movement began to campaign for the widening of women’s right to education.”¹² Thus the Risorgimento created a country united in name, but comprised of divided genders, various cultures and peoples that would struggle to define themselves through language, literature, art and other forms of culture, such as opera.

¹⁰ David I. Kertzer. "Gender Ideology and Infant Abandonment in Nineteenth-Century Italy." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 22.1 (1991).

¹¹ Susan Briziarelli. "Book Review: the Woman Writer in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy: Gender and the Formation of Literary Identity." *Italica*. 71.2 (1994): 240-241. 240.

¹² Gori 643.

Chapter Two: Opera as an Italian Art Form

In exploring the power of a production to influence the politics of an audience, it is important to understand the nature of the production itself and recognize its points of power. Opera was first developed in Tuscany under the Medici family in the fifteenth century. It was moved to Rome, Florence and Venice, where it truly turned into a public art form rather than one reserved for the domestic confines of the elite courts. The reasons for its success as a public entertainment include a regular demand by a large and predictable audience and dependable financial marketing by patrons of great wealth. This patronage actually led to competition between the elite. It was beneficial for them to support it for several reasons. First of all, the economic staple of international trade was suffering a setback in profits and people needed onshore investments to grow their capital. Opera houses provided opportunities for investment and thus marks a notable point in Italian history in which there is a commercialization of entertainment. Furthermore, the first operatic stages offered a public platform for Counter-Reformation thought. Alongside the growth in republicanism and intellectual politics that was occurring notably in Venice at the time, opera facilitated a discussion of topics and arguments left abandoned for too long.

Women also took on a new role through opera. In the midst of tales about mythology and ancient history there emerged a leading lady, a prima donna on whom the show depends. Though castrati were initially responsible for the vocalization of higher soprano and alto roles, women began to sing and tread the boards professionally in the seventeenth century. The first professional actresses were mostly within the ranks of Commedia dell'Arte companies, including women such as Isabella Andreini. The prima donna's voice filled the house, and her characterization transformed the woman's lease on power and agency in the development of plot

and history. The use of Amazon women in the stories being performed at the opera houses not only militarized a contemporarily non-combative gender, but brought out the possibility of a new type of woman by looking to women of old. Some scholars argue that such a choice would have signaled female endorsement of military conquest in which they could not directly partake. There is also the argument that this really was a re-discovery of women independent of the effects which an oppressive patriarchal society would impose.

There is an argument that women were in fact increasingly subjugated by the operatic art form. Michel Poizat claims that prima donnas were made to deliver a certain “jouissance” to the audience that translates to an ecstasy inherently sexual, their ability to reach high notes as giving the audience a “moment of oneness and ecstasy.”^{13, 14} His point is accompanied by Betsy Wing, who argues that women are ruined by suffering and death in opera, where they “perpetually sing their own undoing.”¹⁵ While these arguments are interesting, they do not represent the entire canon of opera and make general statements that are due some more caution. Moreover, in the opera examined in this thesis, while the prima donna is made to suffer by the will of her father, she also takes on a role which ends in her display of great education and sharp intellect rather than death or suffering. With this art form, it is necessary to investigate the entirety of the work before immediately subscribing it to these general theories on subjugation, value and significance though they may potentially align.

¹³ Of course, it is important to note then that the oneness argued for also relates to the oneness that Italians were seeking to create in their country through the operatic art form.

¹⁴ Raymond Monelle. "Book Review: the Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera." *Music and Letters*. 74.3 (1993): 453-455. 454.

¹⁵ Catherine Clément, Betsy Wing, and Susan McClary. *Opera, Or, the Undoing of Women*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 5.

Opera is a total art form that includes drama, spectacle and music. Many musicians, including German composer Richard Wagner, used this principle of “*gesamtkunstwerk*” (total art form) in the creation of operas. It reflected the neoclassical trends of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in its attempt to follow the example of the ancient Greeks with the importance of unities.

Opera was a vehicle for social change in the nineteenth century. It could reach a large amount of the highly illiterate population with important messages of liberty and rebellion. There were tangible consequences of its effect and manifestations of its fervor. For example, the Bandiera brothers who were executed for rebellion, chose as their final words “*Chi per la patria muor, vissuto è assai!*” *He who has died for the fatherland, he has lived long enough!*¹⁶ The two men had incited a rebellion demanding unification in Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The governing Bourbon powers maintained control by crushing any subversion. These words from Mercadante’s opera *Donna Caritea* defiantly sallied forth with the Bandieras’ last breaths. The choice of last words is extremely telling as to the power of the dramatic arts, specifically opera, in the peninsula at the time. Use of these words transformed an individual execution into a public matter. They brought the composer, the librettist, and all people who had any experience whatsoever of *Donna Caritea* to the forefront of the moment. Bourbon police killed these two people, but they faced a populated culture of opposition. Several composers such as Giuseppe Verdi, Luigi Ricci, and Gioachino Rossini fermented a spirit of national fervor through patriotic operas despite the obstacle of political and ecclesiastical censorship. Verdi was especially significant in terms of nationalistic opera, which this thesis explores, and will thus be discussed at greater length than others later in this chapter. From melodies and lyrics, citizens found a

¹⁶ Philip Gossett. “Becoming a Citizen: The Chorus in ‘Risorgimento’ Opera,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2 (1990): 53.

source of strength and unity to make their case and demand social reform. Opera was not merely a reflection of changing social structure but a catalyst of unifying reform and nationalist activity in nineteenth-century Italy.

This role was extremely important in a society in which there was an illiteracy rate of seventy three percent.¹⁷ The power of theatre then was that it could breach the education gap present at the time. Saverio Salfi, librettist and composer, wrote that theatre “should be regarded as the greatest of the public schools since it was the only one capable of rendering public instruction a thing of pleasure.”¹⁸ It thus makes sense that opera became popular in the increasingly prevalent national theatres of the peninsula. Italians attempted to implement developments of theatre from Germany and the steadily growing era of Romanticism on the stage.¹⁹ Friedrich Schiller, Schlegel and Lessing promoted from Germany the idea of a “civil and educational...National Theatre.”²⁰ Such a theatre in the Italian states would force the question of whose ‘nation’ was running the show, and reformers recognized their opportunity. Ruling powers were also aware of the role of theatre in the lives of their people. Smaller theatres began to appear in rural areas, allowing the country folk to engage in the urban culture of their time. “Only in recent times has the word *teatro*, theatre, stopped being synonymous with *opera* for Italian theatergoers,” so much was the art form of opera a central part of the construct of Italian

¹⁷ Spencer M DiScala. *Italy: From Revolution to Republic, 1700 to the Present*. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2009) 153.

¹⁸ Sorba 402.

¹⁹ Francesco Izzo. “Comedy between Two Revolutions: *Opera Buffa* and the Risorgimento 1831-1848,” *The Journal of Musicology* 21 (2004): 123.

²⁰ Carlotta Sorba. “National Theater and the Age of Revolution in Italy,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17 (2012): 401.

theatre.²¹ There was a higher density of opera houses “towards northern and central Italy.”²² These publicly and privately funded theatres offered free performances occasionally and had low ticket rates for other performances. This allowed for a greater exposure to the arts for all the locals.

Audiences at the opera were not limited by class, wealth, education or gender. Opera was “no longer...the toy of princes.”²³ Audiences were composed of young and old, men and women, rich and poor, landowners, farm-workers, artisans, merchants, bankers, politicians, military leaders, and every other type of profession at the time.²⁴ Giuseppe Verdi’s humble rural upbringing and education in various cities allowed him to identify with his audiences and speak to both country and city people. This conversation was important because audiences came to the theatre for socialization. “Playing chess, discussing politics, eating and drinking were all common practices,” surrounding the actual performance at the theatre.²⁵ Structural and seating design was based on a hierarchal model, but the vocal volume of audiences made it easy for the sentiments of one section to be heard in another. Giuseppe Garibaldi, general and Risorgimento leader, used the opportunity theatre presented him to rally people to his cause. “On June 28, in 1862, when Garibaldi proclaimed his ideal of the unification of Italy with the cry ‘o Roma

²¹ John Francis Lane. “Shakespeare in Italy,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Spring, 1979) 306.

²² Nicholas Till, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 27.

²³ John Patrick Rindo. “A Structural Analysis of Giuseppe Verdi’s Early Operas and Their Influence on the Italian Risorgimento.” PhD diss., (University of Oregon 1984) 10.

²⁴ Rindo 10.

²⁵ Rindo 12.

o/morte' (Rome or death), it was from box ten of the second tier of the theatre."²⁶ He had a captive audience, the one he needed to begin building a unified Italy.

While Garibaldi directly shouted his intentions from the boxes of theatres, artists proclaimed them through the productions onstage. Saverio Salfi set a precedent for politicization of the theatre in 1797 with his *Il Ballo del Papa* (Dance of the Pope). The show featured papal support of the revolution. Showing a man whom people looked to for direction and guidance in support of one political move or another could potentially garner the support of many viewers. This was an example of a "militant theatre addressing the audience of citizen-spectators."²⁷ The emotions and thoughts developed in the theatre were not checked at the door. They were not bland as words on paper of a political pamphlet. They were not violent in and of themselves. Patriotism not only changed the situations being presented in the operatic plots, but in the "equally characteristic national expression in their music."²⁸ Thus the spiritual result of political theatre, which was lasting and passionate, was harnessed by several Italian artists in the nineteenth century.

Giuseppe Verdi mastered the technique of turning plays into political rallies. Giuseppe Giusti, an Italian poet, called on Verdi, writing that "the kind of pain that now fills the souls of us Italians is the pain of a people who feel the need of a better fate. Accompany, my Verdi, this lofty and solemn pain with your noble harmonies."²⁹ So he did. His setting of ideas to music makes them not only more powerful, but seemingly more real. John Patrick Rindo outlines the structure of Verdi operas as follows:

²⁶Rindo 15.

²⁷Sorba 5.

²⁸Donald Jay Grout. *A Short History of Opera*. Second ed. Vol. 2. (New York: Columbia UP, 1965) 455.

²⁹Gossett 42.

Verdi operas feature...the problems or concerns of a group of people...private love is placed in a secondary position to the problems of society. Personal happiness is not as important as the well-being of the community...oppressed people were shown that God was on their side. This element told the audience to be aggressive and bold in ridding themselves of the foreign invader...the operas feature generally a docile people who must be led by a strong advocate. ...the central conflict is the Italians versus the foreign invaders...the emotional experience is one of jubilation: despite the difficulties encountered, political unity is worth the effort.³⁰

This analysis provides insight into the values of a revolutionary state. By placing the social story of the larger populace at the forefront of the action, the needs of the country are put first. Placing personal love interests or subplots in a lesser position subjects personal desires to community needs. "Individuals and their society were caught, often helplessly, between the demands of the status quo and individual passions."³¹ While this surface interpretation is interesting, it can be pushed farther. Personal desires can be related to regional loyalties and conflicts which can be sacrificed for the common needs of a unified nation. The next element of placing God on the side of the oppressed is an electrifying call to action. Although Italians at the time were not all necessarily faithful members of the Roman Catholic Church, there was a strong current of Christianity and God-fearing in the territories. Knowing that the divine power was on one's side would render a greater sense of ability and strength. It also justifies the actions that one might take if they are approved and encouraged by God, the highest standard and very definition of

³⁰ Rindo 20.

³¹ Robert Cannon. *Opera*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 128.

morality. Verdi does not shy away from portraying the hardships of war and the demands which it will place upon society. However, the various foreign ruling powers were not thrilled with the messages he was sending to the people and thus strictly censored his and others' work.

Local authorities did not want their subjects to immediately identify with the oppression shown on the stage. They hoped that distance of time and location might somehow make the audience fail to realize how much it related to the society in which they lived. Verdi minimized censorship disputes by preemptively using stories from the history or literature of previous centuries. A prime example of this is his *La Battaglia di Legnano* (Battle of Legnano), which takes place “in the twelfth-century, when...the Lombard League...pushed the invading Germanic hordes of Frederick Barbarossa back over the Alps.”³² Though having taken place many years prior to the production, this tale shows the power of a united Italy. The Lombard League was a collection of individual states that formed a larger entity for the pursuit of a common goal of protection. Their success would be an inspiration to the contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the Germanic heritage of the invaders could remind them of the Austrian, German-language-speaking, conquerors of the north. These shows were performed throughout the territories. The opening words of the opera were censored from time to time depending on the region in which the production was being done. The chorus begins, “Viva Italia! un sacro patto tutti stringe i figli suoi: Eppo alfin di tanti ha fatto un sol popolo d'Eroi!” (*Long live Italy! A sacred pact binds her sons together. It has finally made of them a single people of heroes!*)³³ It is clear from just these four lines that Verdi is a proponent of unification rooted in tradition of cooperation.

³² Chianese Luciano. “Risorgimento Sentiments Resurrected.” *Financial Times (London)*, March 2, 1999. 13.

³³ Giuseppe Verdi, *Battle of Legnano*

The chorus thus takes on a crucial role in the development of political ideas in an opera. Luigi Ricci used the chorus in his 1847 *Il Birrajo di Preston* as a “patriotic display,” while they cry “*Corriamo all’armi, alla vittoria; la patria gloria ne infiamma il cor!*” (Let us run to our weapons, to victory; the fatherland’s glory inflames the heart!)³⁴ In that same year, Verdi had his chorus in *Macbeth* echo the same sentiments with the words “*Alla guerra, alla guerra, corriamo, della patria l’onor difendiamo!*” (*To war, to war let us run to defend the honor of the fatherland!*)³⁵ Both Ricci and Verdi are echoing the lyrics of Gioachino Rossini’s 1813 *L’italiana in Algeri*, in which the chorus sings “*Pronti abbiamo e ferri e mani Per fuggir con voi di qua. Quanto vaglian gl’italiani Al cimento si vedrà.*” (*We have ready our weapons and hands to escape with you from here. You will see how much Italians are worth in the struggle.*)³⁶ Ricci uses a British setting, Verdi uses a Scottish, and Rossini uses a distant Italian-Algerian setting, but all use the chorus to rally the patriotic militarism of a revolutionary Italy. The importance of the choral presence is that the large group takes on a collective identity with purpose and intent. They are no longer a passive background, but serve to foment the emotion and action of the opera. They represent the public at large taking on a public opinion and mobilizing to effect change. Being part of a group saves one from the fear of being politically alone.

One year following the first production of Verdi’s *Macbeth*, revolution broke out in Milan. Verdi himself was not in Italy at the time, but it can be sure that his revolutionary spirit was. His inflammatory words and works certainly had an impact, for “in a culture where opera was the most popular, most pervasive art, it may also have been the most important rhetorical

³⁴ Izzo 161

³⁵ Izzo 159.

³⁶ Izzo 140.

form.”³⁷ Most of the population, which was highly illiterate at the time, would have seen and been spurred onto action by the aggressive operas being produced. On April 21, 1848 Verdi wrote to his librettist and friend, Francesco Maria Piave, “honor to these brave men! Honor to all Italy, which at this moment is truly great...There is, and should be...the music of guns!”³⁸ Thus from these two letter excerpts do we see that members of the theatre community were unquestionably aware and involved in the political life of the Risorgimento.³⁹

Pinsuti therefore was not the first Italian composer to set Shakespearean plays in operatic form. Others include Anthony Thomas, whose 1774 *Hamlet* opera was the first of such works produced in the Italian peninsula. It was presented at the San Giovanni Grisostomo Theatre of Venice during the celebration of Carnevale.

Carnevale is an Italian tradition with roots in Venice that precedes the Catholic liturgical season of Lent. It is a time when a certain leniency in morals allows for excess, debauchery and a contrast to the stark life of stringent morality called for by the Church at the time. Mikhail Bakhtin, a Russian philosopher and literary critic, analyzed the phenomenon of “carnival” extensively in his study “Rebalais and His World.” He notes its active communal nature, finding that “everyone is an active participant...participants *live* in it.”⁴⁰ One did not have to attend an event to experience carnival. It is a way of living. There is no dependence on normal class division or hierarchy. As a “world standing on its head,” it allows for “free and familiar contact

³⁷ Rindo 17.

³⁸ Izzo 165.

³⁹ Anne Kehrli. “Harmony and Discordance: Nineteenth Century Opera and the Unification of the Italian Peninsula”. May 2013.

⁴⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, "Carnival and the Carnavalesque." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. Ed. John Storey. (Taylor & Francis, 2009) 250.

among people.”⁴¹ Those usually marginalized in society are placed in positions of power, notably the clown king, whose later deposition symbolizes the importance of time as a cycle of change. There are certain eccentricities and the connection of extreme opposites that unite in a sacrilegious form. Though this celebration of “life turned inside out” lost its medieval prominence and presence around the seventeenth century, it continued to be a practice into the time of these operas. Thus, introducing the opera *Hamlet* during this period was an incredibly poignant statement. It is the unity of English dramatic literature and Italian dramatic music. It explores a world of opposites, a world turned upside down and the relativity of morality in actions. The very words, beyond famous to the point of overuse, “to be or not to be,” highlight the place of the opera. It expressed the universality of the human experience and emotion through art. The other operas that were based on Shakespearean works were inherently doing the same by uniting two art cultures.

In 1816 Naples, Gioachino Rossini’s *Otello, ossia Il Moro di Venezia* opened. Another opera to premiere in Venice, this time in 1830 at the Fenice theatre, was Vincenzo Bellini’s *I Capuleti e I Montecchi*. It is based on the ever famous *Romeo and Juliet*. Accompanying them was the work of the prolific Giuseppe Verdi.

Verdi had a great respect for the original texts with which he worked. He played a very large role in writing of lyrics, not just the score, of his works. Seeing, what was in his opinion, a butcher job done to the play *Hamlet* by the opera’s librettist, Verdi wrote “poor Shakespeare! How they have mistreated him!”⁴² He believed the opera had misrepresented the Englishman’s work to a populace that was not yet familiar with all of his plays, let alone a proper Italian translation of them. In an effort to restore the integrity of the plays in Italian operas, “Verdi was

⁴¹ Bakhtin 252.

⁴² Gary Wills, *Verdi’s Shakespeare: Men of the Theater*. (New York: Viking, 2011) 1.

the first Italian composer who worked hard to get back to Shakespeare's authentic text."⁴³ His work can be seen in his Shakespearean operas, which include *Macbet*, still produced commonly throughout Italy and internationally, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*. Excluding the work of Verdi, musicologist and historian Garry Wills comments that "most of the many operas made from Shakespeare's plays are failures," in the sense of strict adherence to the text exemplified by Verdi.⁴⁴ As noted previously, his *Macbet* was a clearly patriotic opera.

Verdi is known for the patriotic fervor of his work, usually disguised from the censor through use of historical tales or distant cultures. Wills does cite this in his interpretation of *Otello*, referencing the clear lines that Verdi drew between races and his glorified presentation of Venetians.⁴⁵ He creates a villain worthy of all the audience's disdain. For his *Otello* "the only sympathy he creates for this forlorn man allows us not to despise him."⁴⁶ While the integration of Shakespeare into the peninsula will be discussed in the following chapter, it is important to note here that Pinsuti's use of *Merchant of Venice* as a nationalistic vehicle was part of a growing interest in Shakespearean opera and use of Italian identity in the plays.

⁴³ Wills 1.

⁴⁴ Wills 2.

⁴⁵ Wills 100.

⁴⁶ Wills 158.

Chapter 3: Shakespearean Presence in Italy

“Don’t you know that the very word Shakespeare is hard for us to pronounce?”⁴⁷ Praised as a literary genius in his own country, Shakespeare did not gain popularity in Italy until well into the nineteenth century. The transmission of his work to the peninsula was halted by many factors. They include language and translation obstacles, opposing schools of thought on theatrical genres at the time, and the actual transmission of the scripts. His work eventually gained great recognition and respect from the Italians, so much so that some Italians would claim him as their own in the twentieth century.

The interconnectedness of Italy and England really centered around the ports and markets of Venice, which allowed the northern English to trade with Mediterranean countries as well as those farther to the east. To provide for business stability, many English people settled permanently in the Venetian lagoon in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁸ It was still not until 1726 that the first Italian written reference to Shakespeare appeared. In a letter to an Italian dramaturge and playwright, Jacopo Martelli, Antonio Conti writes, “‘Sasper’ is full of great ideas and noble sentiments.”⁴⁹ Conti was a physicist working in England on the Leibniz-Newton debate regarding who was the first and true inventor of calculus. He would have encountered the work of Shakespeare during his time there. So this example provides an instance only of knowledge abroad.

The French were at the time still a strong presence in the Italian peninsula, governing territories in primarily the northern and central zones. They held a strong sway over the culture of the area, acting as a filter of sorts for literature and art. Thus it was important to have a French

⁴⁷ Ernesto Rossi

⁴⁸ Lacy Collison-Morley. *Shakespeare in Italy*. (New York: B. Blom, 1967) 1.

⁴⁹ Collison-Morley 7.

opinion, good or bad, become widespread in order to arouse interest in any work among the citizens. Shakespeare was made known through the “interest of a Frenchman of sufficient standing in the world of letters to command attention. – Voltaire...[who] was invariably listened to with the utmost respect, and nowhere more so than in Italy.”⁵⁰ Voltaire did not find great value in Shakespeare’s work, though basing his opinion that Shakespeare “ruined the English theatre,” on his analysis of a French translation of the plays which did not capture the wit and creative use of language.^{51, 52} To create such an analysis of work in such a bastardized manner is inaccurate, for “to compare Voltaire’s characters with Shakespeare’s is like comparing pretty ivory figures with Michelangelo’s David.”⁵³ He did not approve of Shakespeare not following the classical form of a play. He broke the unities of time, place, and action with plays spanning over the course of days, weeks, months, years that could switch from location to location between one scene and another, combining the use of comedy and tragedy all at once. This style would not be welcome at the time of Voltaire’s criticism when there was a neoclassical emphasis on adhering to the classical rules, including those set out by Aristotle.

The Voltaire dynamic introduced another obstacle. Voltaire was interpreting a French translation of the works. Italians were using that as a template for translation and thus receiving

⁵⁰ Collison-Morley 15.

⁵¹ Collison-Morley 16.

⁵² It behooves me at this juncture to address the connection of Voltaire’s critiquing process to this paper based on the use of translated work for interpretive analysis. Voltaire was using a French language translation of English work that is prized for the skilled use of words, meter, poetry and other such conventions that are easily lost in translation. Furthermore, Voltaire’s criticism was on the theatrical value of the plays and the writing therein. My analysis is formed upon my interpretation of the Italian language opera, which I have translated in my own notes and for purposes of elucidating the nuances of language and meaning of the words which are key to any non-Italian literate reader’s understanding of the work. Moreover, my analysis of the opera is not an evaluation of its theatrical or musical value so much as it is a study of the nature of the developing spirit of nationalism in the newly formed Italian state, the influence of English culture within it, and the role of theatre within this political current.

⁵³ Collison-Morley, 51.

misconstrued text. Here however lies another problem. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Italian peninsula was still communicating in several different dialects, all influenced by the linguistics of the foreign powers that had held power in any respective region. As the Risorgimento came into its full force, the need for a unified language became apparent and more immediate. In 1769, Alessandro Verri, an author from Milan, raised this point by writing that “this author is so difficult that not even half the English understand him properly, just as few Italians understand Dante.”⁵⁴ Thus even within the Italian translations there would be contradiction and conflict between different interpretations of the nuances and relationship of Elizabethan English to any given form of Italian, whether it be Napolitano, Sicilian, Calabrese, Venetian, or Tuscan, to name only a few.

There is evidence that Voltaire’s ideas carried great weight in Italian criticism of Shakespearean work and the determination of the pace at which it would grow in popular consciousness. By giving the plays a review, even a negative one, he had already given Shakespeare a promotion into the theatrical and literary discussions of the time outside of England. Many Italians followed in his suit, including Count Francesco Algarotti who in the mid-eighteenth century criticized Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* for “faults innumerable and thoughts inimitable.”⁵⁵ Algarotti was a Venetian philosopher, scientist and poet who took an interest in French culture and the work of Sir Isaac Newton. He travelled throughout Europe in very high social circles, including a personal rapport with Jean-Baptiste Voltaire, living abroad for quite some time in England, France, Germany, and Prussia before returning to Italy. He was well-versed in the literary culture of the time and trends in opera. Algarotti argued that the dramatic plot should be the primary focus of an operatic work, so that the music would not

⁵⁴ Collison-Morley 57.

⁵⁵ Collison-Morley 18.

distract from the story. Echoing Horace's idea that "it is not enough that poems have beauty; if they are to carry the audience with them, they must charm as well,"⁵⁶ Algarotti wrote that "performance should delight the eyes and ears, rouse up and affect the hearts of an audience, without the risk of sinning against reason or common sense."⁵⁷ This latter emphasis on reason and logic being present echoes the reasoning behind his dismissal of Shakespearean texts for their dalliance from the natural order of the world as preserved by the unities of form.

Shakespeare was however now a recognizable enough figure for Italians to be making critiques of his work. He is mentioned in a 1743 Italian written theatre history text, although the entry still adheres to the Voltaire criticism.⁵⁸ It was not until a few decades later that he is given a more positive review by the Italians. A Jesuit acquaintance of Voltaire's by the name of Saverio Bettinelli who taught rhetoric and poetry in Italy and Germany wrote that "Scespir... is an author wonderful, immortal, divine, original and a great tragic poet."⁵⁹ His indirect dismissal of Voltaire's work signals that there were reputable Italians making positive reviews of the poet. It is not a complete turning point though. There were still several points that worked against Shakespeare in the Italian peninsula. Pietro Napoli-Signorelli, in his *Storia Critica de Teatri Antchi e Moderni* and *Elementi di Poesia Drammatica* is an example. He takes issue with the fact that Shakespeare doesn't follow unities, for "he was ignorant of art and drew vigorously from nature...[his tragi-comedies heighten the language] of servants, soldiers, women and shepherds to express themselves with mythological, historical and learned pedantry as we see

⁵⁶ T.S. Dorsch, ed. *Classical Literary Criticism. Aristotle: on the Art of Poetry. Horace: on the Art of Poetry. Longinus: on the Sublime*. (London: Penguin Books, 1965) 82.

⁵⁷ Francesco Algarotti, *Essagio sur Operai: Letter to Orrey*. L. Mannini: 1779.

⁵⁸ Francesco Saverio Quaderio. *Della Storia e della Ragione d'ogni Paesia*. (Rome: F. Pisarri, 1741) 19.

⁵⁹ Collison-Morley 22.

them doing in Shakespeare.”⁶⁰ Class division was still very much a part of the Italian landscape as was gender division.

In fact, Algarotti wrote a guide to the concepts of Newton’s physics especially for women. The goal of the work, making the difficult concepts more comprehensible for women, signals to two different realities. The first is that there is an attempt to engage women in the educational progress that was occurring in the mid-eighteenth century. The second reality though is that there was an education gap that led to the perception that women needed simplified instruction. As noted in Chapter One, there was still a great education gap at this time in history. This is an interesting point especially when juxtaposed with the role of Portia in her learned disguise.

Although there was an ongoing divide in public opinion of Shakespeare, he still retained a good share of support. In 1757, Giuseppe Baretti, a “genuine Italian admirer of Shakespeare,” argued that the shift in the work from those of the past should not be a point of dismissal, urging his contemporaries, “consult your heart rather than Aristotle when you read Shakespeare.”⁶¹ Thus he recognizes here that there is a theatrical value to the contested plays. They are able to evoke emotion, relate to the human spirit, and present an interesting story. Lorenzo Pignotti, an Italian poet and historian, wrote in a 1779 letter echoing Baretti, “when the poet succeeds in moving, in delighting his hearers by violating the rules, we must condemn the rules and not the poet.”⁶² Pierantonio Meneghelli, an Italian historian and literary critic, goes a step further and in 1795 praises the naturalism of Shakespeare’s combining tragedy and comedy, writing, “but do we not every day meet people who make the tears stream from our eyes...and yet a moment later

⁶⁰ Collison-Morley 25.

⁶¹ Collison-Morley 46.

⁶² Collison-Morley 59.

force us to laugh by an ill-timed joke?”⁶³ This movement was a reflection of the changing schools of thought on the theatrical genre of literature.

In Germany, Gotthold Lessing was arguing for a greater appreciation of Shakespeare and an incorporation of works that did not fall within the French style. His *Hamburg Dramaturgies* did still regard the value of traditional Aristotelian forms of theatre, but within the context of a more open-minded scope. The treatise worked in support of a national theatre. German literary critic and poet Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel wrote that “literature...must be as free as man. All nations have a right to intellectual equality.”⁶⁴ As established in the prior chapter, this move towards public drama was also taking hold in Italy. Romanticism was beginning to travel through the continent and the use of supernatural elements became more widely used by Italian authors, including Vincenzo Monti. Monti “had set the fashion, ghosts were rapidly becoming a recognized feature in the tragedies of the day for symbolizing the tortures of a guilty conscience.”⁶⁵ This device was used frequently, though for many other reasons, by Shakespeare and thus familiarized the Italians to that aspect of his work, making it more approachable and known. In 1839, “Professor Jean of Parma brought out a blank verse rendering of the *Merchant of Venice*, which was considered too faithful to the English to be truly Italian.”⁶⁶ Thus the language could not be too precise nor too inaccurate. This held true even into the mid-twentieth century. John Francis Lane notes in 1979, over one hundred years after Professor Jean of Parma’s work was published, that “great liberties are often taken with the translation of

⁶³ Collison-Morley 66.

⁶⁴ Collison-Morley 98.

⁶⁵ Collison-Morley 76.

⁶⁶ Collison-Morley 132.

Shakespeare into Italian, usually to satisfy the whims of the director.”⁶⁷ Dr. Domenico Valentini, professor of Ecclesiastical History at University of Siena, in 1756 translated into the Tuscan dialect *Julius Caesar*, a play based on well known Roman history. At a time of heightened interest in the ancients, in a setting where Rome was an important and politically contested city, *Il Giulio Cesare* was remarkably accurate in translation with considerable pains taken to reproduce the word-play.⁶⁸ However, this attempt was not met with encouraging reception due to the fact that it strayed too far from the actual course of events and the language was still not entirely perfect.

Eighteen years later, another operatic attempt was made to make Shakespeare part of the Italian theatrical culture. Poets may not have been pleased with his rejection of form, translators with his intricate use of language, but actors were intrigued by his characters. This time it was a performance of Francesco Gritti’s and Jean Francois Ducis’ *Hamlet* based opera, *Amleto*,⁶⁹ in the San Giovanni Crisostomo Theatre of Venice during Carnevale 1774.⁷⁰ This version did allow for some modification. It was revived in 1795, but did not receive an overwhelmingly positive response. Monti, noted earlier for his own use of phantoms which are quite a large part of *Hamlet*, wrote five years later that “*Romeo and Juliet* was the play of plays for Italy. The quick, hot blood of Italian passion is here seen at its purest and its best...*Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* appeal to the national feeling...a genuinely Italian character of the jealousy and the love they

⁶⁷Lane 306.

⁶⁸ Collison-Morley 40.

⁶⁹This is not to be confused with the 1706 Gaspari opera, *Amleto*, which did not reflect the Shakespearean play much at all. To say it was loosely based on the play is to be generous. It is arguably a case of the title being the only borrowed aspect of the original. The 1774 opera is actually taken from the original.

⁷⁰ Collison-Morley 79.

depict is at once recognized and appreciated.”⁷¹ This statement signifies an incredible amount of information about the self-perceived Italian identity, but in terms of English literature. Fairly, this was English drama that frequently made use of “Italian” settings or characters and thus would have held greater meaning and interest for the “Italians.” This was taken to another level in the early nineteenth century when “Sackspeare” was reviled as a thief of Italian literature, specifically that of Cintio and Bandello, due to his use of popular themes, plotlines and familiar settings such as Venice, Mantua, Verona, Padua, Rome and Messina.⁷² This accusation still held strength in the twentieth century as John Francis Lane wrote in 1979 using the present tense and thus making a statement about a present reality, that “maybe Italians feel they have a right to ‘borrow’ from Shakespeare, seeing that the Bard himself had pilfered a good deal from Italian sources.”⁷³ This was not helped by his use of characters that strongly resembled stock characters of the Italian theatre form of *Commedia dell’Arte*, such as the obvious *Innamorati* features of *Romeo and Juliet*.⁷⁴ One century later though, he would be claimed as a compatriot, not as a thief.

The comment also shows that a notable amount of time has been spent analyzing Shakespearean works, enough so that one play can be chosen over the other as a reflection on an entire nationality. Monti’s “Italian experience” was that of an educated middle class male from a northern central region of the peninsula, Ravenna. However, as a man who had traveled through

⁷¹ Collison-Morley 80, 164.

⁷² Collison-Morley 85.

⁷³ Lane 306.

⁷⁴ *Innamorati* references the two stock characters of *Innamorato* and *Innamorata* who were young lovers with beauty, virtue, and a perfectly standard Tuscan dialect.

other regions, internationally, and regularly interacted with people from outside his own territory, he would have had exposure to the popular ideas on the subject of the time.

Monti and other Italians argued about the value of language and structure as opposed to substance and merit. These debates developed Shakespeare into a point of popular conversation. By 1815, Shakespeare is a widely known poet, playwright and “historian” in the Italian peninsula.⁷⁵ Widely-known does not mean well-loved though. While Shakespeare’s plays rapidly grew in popularity in Germany, Francesco Benedetti dismissed them entirely. Benedetti was born to a poor family in the hill town of Cortona, studied at and then left the seminary, earned a degree in law and was made head of the Carbonari, a secret group of nationalist revolutionaries, all while writing plays regularly. He dismissed Shakespeare, writing that

this kind of thing may give pleasure to the English and the Germans and to people all together Northern; but we who possess a more refined sense of beauty, who love to imitate Nature when she is noble, not when she is uncouth, can have no sympathy with such abuse of imagination, such improbabilities and to speak plainly, such indecencies.⁷⁶

Here, like Monti, Benedetti uses English literature as a means of analyzing the Italian nation especially as it compares to its northern neighbors. Michael Leoni translated compilations of Shakespearean works and called him the “Michelangelo of tragedy.”⁷⁷ This idea reverses the counter-cultural comparison and classifies Shakespeare in terms of Italian art and culture.

Alessandro Manzoni, famed author of *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed), a novel significant for

⁷⁵ Collison-Morley 95.

⁷⁶ Collison-Morley 108.

⁷⁷ Collison-Morley 122.

its determinant place in the development of a defined Italian language, was an admirer of Shakespeare. He wrote in 1845 that “anyone who wants to write must read Shakespeare! How he understands all of our [Italian] feelings!”⁷⁸ This general comment about the entirety of Shakespeare’s work does not allow for the analysis of specific themes or emotions as he used arguably every emotion of the human experience. Thus this comment would lend the Italians a certain human universality of spirit. Manzoni self-admittedly modeled much of his work after Shakespeare and was criticized by other Italians for this non-classical structure. So it is clear that fame did not bring the Bard absolute approval.

Francesco Ambrosoli, an Italian literary critic, tried to explain this with his argument in the early nineteenth century that a “playwright must be national to be popular and thus Shakespeare can never be in Italy.”⁷⁹ This of course is disproved by the fact that Shakespeare had international fame as did and do many playwrights throughout the world over the past centuries.

Alessandro Mazzini, the revolutionary leader discussed at greater length in the chapter on the historical context of Italian Unification, was also a great admirer of Shakespeare. In 1830, he wrote that “Shakespeare was an individualist. Shakespeare’s men possess life and movement as if they came from the hand of God.”⁸⁰ It is important to recall though that Mazzini spent a great deal of time in London in exile. One can argue that his opinion would have been greatly influenced by the time he spent there. However, his Italian-ness is not degraded at all by his time abroad, and thus his opinion is still as valid as Italian writer Carlo Tedaldi-Fores’. He praised Shakespeare by writing that “no one knew better than Shakespeare how to project himself into

⁷⁸Collison-Morley 111.

⁷⁹ Collison-Morley 135.

⁸⁰ Collison-Morley 132.

the past, adapt himself to all subjects, obtain a thorough grasp of the natures of historical characters and set them before us in contrast with the manners and customs of the age...[turning] it into poetry.”⁸¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, Shakespearean plays were being performed in communal theatres, so that a vast majority of the population was indubitably exposed to them. Not only were plays by Shakespeare being produced, but so were plays about Shakespeare. L. Gualtieri wrote a five act play, *Shakespeare*, which was produced at Milan in 1858.⁸² Thus by the nineteenth century, Shakespeare had gained a place in the Italian literary canon and influenced the work of many Italians into the following centuries.

⁸¹ Collison-Morley 147.

⁸² Collison-Morley 159.

Chapter Four: Pinsuti, His Opera, and Liberties Taken in Translation

While Shakespeare grew in popularity on the Italian stage, the cultural exchange between England and Italy continued. A large part of this study revolves around these intertwined cultures. The opera itself is a case in point; in this situation, an Italian opera of an English play. Over the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the British perception and opinion of the Italian culture changed as the economic and cultural landscape shifted. After the Elizabethan dramatists⁸³ highlighted a certain Italophobia in their work, there arose a new “contempt for the Italian,”⁸⁴ which was softened by the growing sense of romanticism and Italy became “a female goddess...a *topos* of spiritual illumination,”⁸⁵ for the wealthy British tourists who sought the beauty and aesthetic of the peninsula as an escape from the city. By the nineteenth century, the English had an ideal of “the Romantic Italian...as an alternative to commercialized Britain.”⁸⁶ Mary Shelley, was using characters that promoted the Englishman who had been “Italianized” by living in the peninsula as “an exemplary intellectual who combines high culture, fine taste and the authentic experience that stems from his/her immersion in Italy’s local color.”⁸⁷ Political and cultural leaders of the Italian Risorgimento, Mazzini specifically, spent a great deal of time in England, a “land where they could be politically free,” while many English people posted themselves in Italy for purposes of trade oversight and

⁸³ Including Shakespeare. Though many argue that his use of Italian characters and setting was a form of admiration, others contend that it is actually a form of criticism. In his *King Richard II*, he wrote “proud Italy, whose manners still our tardy-apish nation limps after in base imitation.” (II, I, 20-23) This directly criticizes both nations.

⁸⁴ Maria Schoina. *Romantic 'Anglo-Italians': Configurations of Identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle*. (Farnham, England: Ashgate Pub., 2009) 27.

⁸⁵ Andrew Wilton and Ilaria Bignamini. "Memories of Italy." *Grand Tour: The Lure of Italy in the Eighteenth Century*. (London: Tate Gallery Pub., 1996) 286.

⁸⁶ Schoina 31.

⁸⁷ Schoina 25.

financial security.⁸⁸ Given the tumultuous political landscape in the peninsula and the prevalence of revolt and rebellion, on-site presence lent them a more direct link to safeguarding their business and trade interests. Not all took up permanent residence in port cities, but rather visited regularly and for longer periods of time. One of these men was Henry Drummond, a conservative member of the British Parliament who had longstanding business ventures that not only demanded his ability to personally visit his Italian interests, but also allowed him the wealth to enjoy a longer and culturally enriching stay. His visit in 1830 introduced him to the talent of a young Italian prodigy, Ciro Pinsuti, whose training and housing in England Drummond personally supplied for the next decade.

Pinsuti was born in Sinalunga, a *commune* of Siena approximately 100 kilometers outside of the grand and, for a time, Italian capital city of Florence. Sinalunga at the time of Pinsuti's life was a type of zone that could compare to a modern idea of a middle-class suburb, filled with people of various occupations. It was here that in 1867 King Vittorio Emmanuelle II would capture Garibaldi. Pinsuti studied music under the tutelage of his father for eleven years and excelled to such an extent that the Academia Filarmonica of Rome made him an honorary member, which was unusual for a child of his adolescent age.⁸⁹ He was discovered by Drummond, who paid for his instruction in pianoforte under Cipriano Potter and violin under Balgrove as well as providing him housing within the family home and greater London area over the next fifteen years. Over the next few decades, Pinsuti went back and forth between England and Italy. He studied under Rossini, taught at the Royal Academy of Music (hereafter Royal Academy), wrote three operas and several pieces, gave voice lessons and kept himself an active

⁸⁸ Schoina 31

⁸⁹ *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*. (New York, NY: Schirmer Books, 1910), 848.

member of the English and Italian music cultures. He was named to the Order of the Italian Crown, in other words, knighted “Cavaliere,” with a title created in recognition of military and civilians who contributed to or in some manner supported the unification of Italy. His greatest action in this respect being the composition of a version of “Te Deum” as a glorifying thanksgiving for the unification of the central Tuscan zone to the Kingdom of Italy, combining religion and politics. Along with librettist G.T. Cimino, of whom there are few existing records, Pinsuti composed the opera *Il Mercante di Venezia* in 1873.⁹⁰ The theatre in Sinalunga was named in his honor.

His work at the Royal Academy included several individual pieces. He tended to write romantic works that could range from a soprano solo to a full SATB arrangement for choruses, quartets, trios, duets. What is notable is the prevalence of English text bases for his compositions, including Shakespearean pieces. He composed settings for several poems and monologues, including “All the World’s A Stage” and “Where Is Fancy Bred,” suggesting a familiarity with the Bard’s canon. In 1871, he was commissioned by the committee overseeing the grand opening of Royal Albert Hall to create an anthem representative of the national Italian spirit. Rather than select a traditional piece of Italian literature to set to music, Pinsuti chose a poem entitled “O People of This Favoured Land,” by the British Richard Rockton Milnes Lord Houghton. The poem celebrates progress of an initially powerful people away from a time of war into a time of peace. It is arguable that one can trace an history of the peninsula in the poem, starting with the “good days...[when] all was pleasure, power and praise, the fair reward of toil and skill,” as a reference to the once extensive powers of the Roman empire. The next stanza of

⁹⁰ A paucity of information exists regarding Sig. Cimino. His name appears in reviews of the opera, but there appear to be no sources regarding his personal life. The analysis does not suffer greatly from this absence, as there are reports that suggest Pinsuti was actually more of a co-librettist and composer of the work, thus having as much influence over the text of the book as Cimino.

“later woe... blood-red clouds... [and] fiery hail,” could be a direct reference to the literal fiery hail that buried Pompeii and Herculaneum, destroying and yet preserving for later generations the culture of the ancients. It could also be a reference to the wars and invasions that from the dark ages plagued the peninsula through to the nineteenth centuries. The final stanza is one that captures Italy at the moment in history during which this anthem was composed. It is looking to the future based in “Industry and Art... Powers that know no end and no Despair,” this work being an example of the role art was to play in the formation of this hopeful identity. Even with this interpretation of the poem as a veiled history of the Italian peninsula, it is still significant that Pinsuti was speaking of Italy in English literary terms, just as his forerunners mentioned in the previous chapter classified the Italian spirit in terms of the themes in Shakespearean plays.

Pinsuti did not entirely abandon the Italian canon though. He wrote a piece, “Beatrice,” based on the salvific figure of Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*. It was hailed as “un certo successo” (*a certain success*).⁹¹ His achievements brought him significant respect and praise in Italy. The internationally famous Gioachino Rossini not only taught Pinsuti, but later in life wrote him letters asking that Pinsuti instruct people Rossini sent his way. The letters begin, “Caro Pinsuti... Carissima college Pinsuti,” (*Dear Pinsuti... Dearest colleague Pinsuti*). The fact that he had enough of Rossini’s respect to be referred to as his “dearest colleague” reveals that the two were not only close, but that Pinsuti was being treated as an equal by one of the most noted composers of his and all time.

Thus when he brought his opera, *Il Mercante di Venezia*, back to Italy, he was not returning to unwelcoming territory. Though physically he was “mingherlino, zoppo e timida” (*skinny, lame and timid*), he was regarded to be a “valente compositore,” (*talented composer*)

⁹¹ Arnaldo Bonaventura. *Dante e La Musica*. (Livorno: Raffaello Giusti Editore, 1904) 252.

whose work was well received by the Bolognese and then Florentines four years later.⁹² The records of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna where the opera premiered describe the 1873 season as directed towards ushering in “il nuovo genere di musica...il repertorio musicale italiano... scuoteva deliziosamente l’orecchio ed il cuore delle masse,” (*the new generation of music...the Italian musical repertoire... deliciously shaking the ear and the heart of the masses*).⁹³ Thus the theatre, which was a “teatro comunale” or a government supported municipal organization, recognized Pinsuti’s opera for its quality of “new Italian-ness” in the music itself and the words set to it. The records of the Florentine festival at which the revival was featured in 1878 even more explicitly state that it was chosen to bolster an agenda of nationalism. This festival of Santa Maria del Fiore was one “dell’arte, ci parlava di Dio, del popolo, della libertà...perche la libertà era fatta più sicura e più serena nella indipendenza e unità della nazione,” (*of art, there was speaking of God, of the people, of liberty...because liberty had been made more secure and more serene independence and unity of the nation..*)⁹⁴ Rome had just replaced Florence as the capital of the Kingdom of Italy, and thus Florence was eager to re-establish itself as a fortress of flourishing culture. All of the works displayed during the festival were supportive of this vision of national unity, and thus it can be safely argued that Pinsuti’s opera was perceived as a nationalistic opera by his contemporaries. It was in this city that Pinsuti would die ten years later, while his opera continued to influence public opinion and sentiment.

⁹² Giovanni Massuto. *Maestri di Musica Italiani del Secolo XIX: Notizie Biografiche, Raccolte*. (Venice: Stabilimento Tipografico di Gio. Cecchini, 1882) 72.

⁹³ Alfredo Testoni. *Bologna Che Scompare*. (Bologna: 1905), 6.

⁹⁴ Aurelio Gotti. *Narrazione delle Feste Fatte in Firenze nel Maggio 1887 per lo Scopridiento della Facciata di Santa Maria del Fiore*. (Florence: Tipi di Salvatore Landi, 1890), 10.

Though not expected to be a literal and verbatim translation of the original Shakespearean text, *Il Mercante di Venezia* features several liberties taken by Pinsuti and Cimino.⁹⁵ The main plotline of the original play is maintained but is created with variations in dialogue and sequence. It is plausible that some changes were made for the sake of condensing the plot down to the essential story, recognizing the lengthening effect that adapting the play to opera form would make on the production. The time taken to sing melodies rather than recite monologues has the potential to be significantly longer. Looking at the score, it is evident that such is the case with this work. However, though it may well be that it was necessary to edit for the sake of time, it does not suffice to leave it at that. In looking at the process of editing, it is important to examine the aspects left untouched. It demonstrates what the artists believed the story was about, or what they wanted to make it about, and how they believed they could best communicate it to the audience.

Pinsuti and Cimino changed character names, removed subplots, removed characters and changed the ending of the story entirely. The Italian names which Shakespeare anglicized are Italianized, for instance, Portia becomes “Porzia.” Every name but that of Shylock, which is an English name, is Italian. It can be argued that these changes were made for the sake of simplifying the opera. However, all of these changes have far too much significance in and of themselves but also in relation to each other as a means of making statements about identity and culture to ignore them as simply tools for time. It is a general trend that these changes directly influence the Shylock narrative.

Shylock’s role as father is presented differently in the opera. We never see him interact with his daughter, Jessica, who is removed as a character from the opera. Shylock does have a

⁹⁵ For purposes of reference and clarity, the texts I am using as primary source materials are the first quarto edition of William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and the book and vocal score of Ciro Pinsuti and G.T. Cimino’s 1873 *Il Mercante di Venezia: un melodramma in quattro atti*.

solo in which he bemoans the loss of his daughter, but she is never seen or heard. He calls for her with a line that reads like a prayer, full of allusions to ancient Jewish history, “O mia Rebecca, a me ritorna! Dio, Dio di Giacobbe, santo Lume di Sinai, a me la reca,” (*O my Rebecca, return to me! God, God of Jacob, holy Light of Sinai, return her to me!*)⁹⁶ It is not clear whether this was intended as a name change or an allusion, as she is never referenced by any other name, including “Jessica.” In light of all the other names being Italian, it is significant that if this is a name change, the character is given a Hebrew name.

The name “Rebecca” translates into Hebrew as “connection.” By renaming Jessica, (which is an allusion to the stem of Jesse and Jewish lineage), to Rebecca and still removing her from the life of her father, Pinsuti and Cimino not only emphasize the idea that Shylock is in an isolated position, they also establish a link to another story of family and marriage. Rebecca was the daughter of Bethuel, (meaning “house of God” in Hebrew), and the sister of Laban, who took over as head of household for his father. Abraham sought a wife for his son Isaac and sent his servant supplied with riches in search of a woman. She who offered water to not only the servant but also the camel would be the chosen one for Isaac to marry. Rebecca did so without hesitation, and thus passed the test with her generosity. Given malicious stereotypes that were strongly present in Europe regarding Jews as avaricious and the miserly character of Shylock himself, a Pantalone based man driven by greed and love of money, it is significant that the name chosen for his Christian convert daughter is an allusion to a Jewish woman prized for her generosity.⁹⁷ Rebecca’s family agreed to the marriage, but was hesitant to let her go. They wanted her to stay, but she chose instead to leave and meet her husband. Thus another parallel is

⁹⁶ Ciro Pinsuti and G.T. Cimino. *Il Mercante di Venezia: Melodramma in Quattro Atti*. (Siena: Regio Stabilimento Ricordi, 1873) 14.

⁹⁷ Pantalone is a stock character of the Commedia dell’Arte. He is a miserly Venetian merchant who usually is portrayed as a horrible husband or father, (Henke, *Commedia dell’Arte*).

drawn between the two women. Theirs are stories of bittersweet love. They had to abandon the past, the old, and move onto the new, the future.

While pregnant with her sons, Jacob and Esau, Rebecca was told that her offspring would be continuously at war with each other. It came to be that this was true, and Rebecca herself took part in the feud between the two. She favored Jacob, the younger of the two, and disguised him so that he might receive the birthright blessing intended by the sacred tradition of primogeniture for his elder brother Esau. Outraged and betrayed, Esau vowed revenge on his brother. So began lineages of discord and rivalry. Similarly, the daughter of Shylock deceived not her husband, but her father, and helped her betrothed, Lorenzo, to material rather than spiritual riches that were not rightfully his. This narrative is preserved in Shylock's solo. Thus the name change or allusion emphasizes the Jewish identity of Shylock and Rebecca. Yet the removal of the character isolates Shylock, and adds to Shakespeare's denying him a lineage through the Christian conversion of his daughter, as the Jewish faith is traditionally passed through the female line, which also means that Jessica has lost some connection with her "Jewish soul" by her mother's absence in her life.⁹⁸ Due to the removal of Jessica, the character Lorenzo is rendered somewhat superfluous and thus removed from the opera.⁹⁹

Rebecca is not the only biblical allusion made in this solo regarding Jessica's flight. At the end, once Shylock has bemoaned loss of his daughter, loss of his riches and the betrayal in Jessica's choice to leave for "un maledetto Cristiano" (*damned Christian*) he turns against her.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Why Aren't Jewish Women Circumcised? Gender and Covenant in Judaism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005) 5.

⁹⁹ It is interesting to note that only a few decades later, another opera was written based on *The Merchant of Venice*, but featuring Jessica as the titled character. Given the importance of the primadonna in the opera, it is not so much that a female is made the central character as it is that Portia was not the selected title woman. Josef Bohuslav Foerster's 1905 opera, *Jessika*, premiered at the Prague National Theatre.

¹⁰⁰ Pinsuti 14.

He completes the solo by comparing her to one of the most reviled women in the Old Testament. Shylock says “e come Iezabella, darne dei cani e vil ludibrio l’ossa,” (*and like Jezebel, her bones given to the dogs and vile derision!*)¹⁰¹ Jezebel was the queen of north Israel and wife of King Ahab. Known for her wicked deeds, she made constant attempts to turn Ahab away from God and towards the false prophets she followed. Servants are alleged to have defenestrated her, and once she had died from the fall, dogs came and ate away her flesh. Thus by comparing his daughter to this woman Shylock is giving her the ultimate insult, and it is left to the audience to decide whether this reaction is entirely justified or he is being a bad father, for perhaps this entire situation could have been prevented. Daughters do not just run away from home with inheritance in tow without a reason. Shylock’s compromise and understanding of her relationship prior to the flight, which to a Christian Italian audience might seem rational as the man Jessica leaves him for is not some wild vagabond, but rather an upstanding Christian, could have kept her close to home and his fortunes secure. This admittedly is subjective speculation but as it is a theatrical event, the audience mindset would have had shaped by the environment and society around it, is an important factor.

The next two characters edited and removed are Old Gobbo and Launcelot. Even at a nominal level, these characters are significant. Gobbo translates to “hunchback” in Italian and Launcelot is a French version of the English Lancelot, meaning “god-like, servant.” The name is typically associated with the lover of Guinevere, the knight Lancelot of King Arthur’s Round Table. He is a symbol of strength but also Christianity, his pursuit of the lady being likened to a crusade of faith.¹⁰² Launcelot in the original Shakespearean text thus throws off the oppression of the Jew and lives his faith more freely. Yet the name is dispensed of in an arguably symbolic

¹⁰¹ Pinsuti 14.

¹⁰² http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/columency/launcelot_sir/0

dismissal of French culture as it is a French name and the character of Launcelot was used widely in medieval French literature such as the *Lais of Marie de France*. Furthermore, the father and the son are of, at best, mediocre intelligence. By removing this father and son pair, Pinsuti and Cimino remove a subplot which in the original text serves to add to the betrayal and hurt that Shylock experiences. It is arguable that this edit is actually lessening the injury endured by Shylock. Nonetheless, there is still an isolating effect by removing characters that are very much a part of Shylock's story, of his household, of his world. Furthermore, in the opera, Shylock no longer has named or referenced servants. Thus the opera does not allow for Christians to be at a lower social standing than an alien Jew. It also removes the picture of stupid Italians. Even more than that, removing "Gobbo," which Italian audiences would have heard as "hunchback," removes a physically deformed Italian. Thus the operatic team uses character removal to isolate Shylock, remove power of Jews over Christians, and omit the presentation of mentally and physically handicapped Italians.¹⁰³ Thus there is another instance of English culture influencing the opera as this choice reflects the principle of Social Darwinism, or the idea that the superior humans will outlast the inferior.¹⁰⁴

Tubal, friend of Shylock and a Jew, is also removed from the opera. His removal is hugely effective in the solitary presentation not only of Shylock, but of the diminished status given to the presence of a Venetian Jewish community in the opera. In the original play, he serves as not only as Shylock's friend but also his informer. By only including one individual Jewish character, Pinsuti and Cimino not only emphasize Shylock's misanthropy, further

¹⁰³ Though it is not the focus of this thesis, it is important to grant this choice its due significance. There were eugenic studies taking hold of society at the time of this opera and this reflection of the growing emphasis on physical attributes as definition of human quality is significant, especially considering the course of the approaching Second World War.

¹⁰⁴ http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ebconscience/social_darwinism/0

isolating and other-ing Shylock, but also present the Jewish community as being small and disconnected. In contrast, the rest of the individual characters, all Christians, are connected to each other and circulate information efficiently. Other direct contacts that Shylock loses include Salerio and Solanio. The two men are not so much as referenced in the opera. Referenced but not cast are the doctor Balthazar and the attendant Ballario, whose names Porzia and her maid don in court.

This is not the only alias for Porzia's lady's maid, called Nerissa in the play. In the opera she is named Anna. It is essential to investigate this choice on two levels. First is the examination of the reason to change the name at all. It could be justified by the opening vowel "a" of the new name allowing for an easier sound than and "n" to create for the singers. There is also the possibility that Pinsuti and Cimino were attempting to make a statement about the definition of beauty, specifically Italian beauty at the time. The name "Nerissa" translates to "black haired." By giving her a name that did not dictate physical attributes, they were able to allow her to adhere to the more Nordic ideals which Porzia's blonde hair does. It creates an idea that Italians, Venetians specifically, have Nordic looks and beauty, connecting them to a genetic heritage far different from the stereotypical darker Mediterranean coloring and more akin to the image of Botticelli's *Venus*. It could also be that the name "Nerissa" is a derivation of "Nerus," Greek god of the sea, meaning "sea nymph." The sea takes on an important role in the play but even more so in the opera. The fate of Antonio and of Bassanio's treasure are all at its mercy. It was the instrument by which characters are brought to or taken away from Venice. Thus, allowing her to keep a name that would invoke a certain heritage of power while remaining in a servant role is somewhat paradoxical for Pinsuti and Cimino, so they altered Shakespeare's name choice and called this character "Anna."

Thus it could be a choice based on appearance aesthetics or merely musical and vocal reasoning. There are other possibilities though. Anna is an Italian form of the Hebrew name, “Hannah/Channa,” most associated with the mother of the prophet Samuel but also connected in Catholicism with Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary. It does not seem that there is an intended direct connection with the latter, but it is possible to entertain a link with Hannah. Hannah is credited with a canticle, or song, in the Book of Samuel which praises the nation that shall soon throw off its oppressors, and much resembles the Magnificat of Mary in the New Testament in its reverence and praise of God.¹⁰⁵ The Magnificat is the response that Mary gave to the archangel Gabriel accepting her vocation as mother of God. She identifies herself as “the maidservant/handmaiden of the Lord.”¹⁰⁶ Given Anna’s role as maidservant to Porzia, this connection is worthwhile examining. These women all identify themselves in song, as do the characters of any opera. While the reference to Hannah could be interpreted as a link between the Jewish community and Porzia’s Christian Belmont, it does not seem that Hannah is the primary goal of this allusion. Of course, her patriotic fervor for her nation is a reflection of the national spirit surrounding Italy as the country threw out invaders and foreigners. That is not to be dismissed, but it should be viewed in connection with Mary, as a reformed Hannah. She is Jewish, yet converts to Christianity at the moment of her son’s conception in the sense of it being a natural progression of faith, not as a change of state.

There is yet another way of interpreting this name choice. “Anna” translates to “she who is full of grace.” The Italian word for grace is “grazia”. In the original play, the character Nerissa is given a plot beyond aiding Portia in her romance and court appearance. She is also given a lover of her own. Removed entirely from the opera, his name in Shakespeare’s play is Gratiano

¹⁰⁵ Holy Bible, 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

¹⁰⁶ Holy Bible, Luke 1:46-55.

(anglicized form of Italian “Graziano”). It is possible that due to the change in Nerissa’s name, Pinsuti and Cimino are identifying her by her male counterpart, as though the women here are more recognizable if presented in terms of men.

Unlike Gratiano, the Princes of Morocco and Aragon are not removed from the opera. They come on stage and are seen. However, they are not given the power of speech. They do not talk. They do not sing. These two are the only individual characters forbidden vocal power. While Shylock is an alien, he has established himself as at least attempting to integrate with Venetian society. These two princes are simply foreigners and as such are not given the privilege of Italian language. In light of the Italian unification, the Prince of Aragon being speechless seems to be a commentary on the removal of the Spanish powers from the peninsula and the attempts being made to ensure that the new standard Italian language was devoid of Spanish linguistics. Though Moroccan rulers never held power over Italy, the silence of the prince seems to be the denial of the Islamic culture in this Christian society. This is quite ironic considering the influence that stereotypical Islamic visual culture had on Venetian architecture. The iconic Venetian landmark, the Catholic Basilica di San Marco, features a blend of western, Byzantine and middle eastern architectural features all in one building. Regardless, the prince’s silence is an embargo on the spread of Islam in Christian Italy.

However there are foreigners who are granted vocal power through the presence of several choruses. There is a “General Chorus” which is composed of Venetians in various trades and stations of life. There are merchants and sailors and tradesmen. There is also a “Chorus of the People” which later on in the work absorbs the “Chorus of Christians” through the combination of their vocal parts in opposition to the exiled “Chorus of Jews.” The fact that these choruses are divided as such blatantly states that the Jews are not part of the “People” of Venice.

Referring back to the chapter on the art form of opera, the chorus in the nineteenth century had taken on a new role as a catalyst pushing forward the action. Their size connotes not only widespread beliefs, but also strength in numbers. As the peninsula dealt with their new cohesive politic as a nation, this statement about popular identity is very powerful.

The strongest moment in which the choruses are used to make this point is in the final scene. Unlike the Shakespearean ending in which Shylock is sentenced to conversion, this Shylock is not given that option. After stating that he was in fact born and raised in Israel and the trial concludes, he is immediately exiled from Italy and is sent away on a ship full of other Israelites while the Chorus of Citizens, which is the renamed Chorus of Christians, rejoices in the glory of their Venice. This has a twofold implication. First, it can be garnered that Christian baptism and religion is valued here as a privilege, not a right. It allows for a distinction and hierarchy between people. It also shows the complete removal of Jews from the nation as a solution to the need for a uniform identity and also as a means of peace-keeping, so as to avoid future discord as between Shylock and Antonio. Given that Venice was the first municipality to force Jews into a ghetto, the history of exiling Jews from other Italian locations such as Bologna, and the “final solution” to take place approximately sixty years following the opera, this is a chilling ending full of nationalistic xenophobia in what was the meeting place of the trading world.

Chapter Five: Continued Trends in the Twentieth Century

Political regimes seeking popular support depend on varying approaches to reaching the hearts, minds and votes of the masses. Economic policies that allow citizens greater financial freedoms, bureaucratic developments that create easier access to government assistance and other such tactics draw on the appeal of people's desire for more practical needs. Also important is a collective identity, usually inspired by a spirit of nationalism, in creating a sense of belonging for those within the party. This process relies heavily on popular culture, as evidenced by censorship of literature that criticized the state or by manipulation of artists to promote ideologies. The fascist regime of early twentieth century Italy took advantage of this tactic specifically through the manipulation of drama. While other productions such as film, written word, music and advertising were effective in opening a dialogue with the people, theatre in 1920-30's Italy became nationalized and explicitly converted into a tool of the government in winning over the masses. Mussolini complemented the theatricality of his regime with exploitation of Shakespeare works as media of fascist propaganda.

To explore how theatre was turned into fascist propaganda, it is essential to establish the definition and goals of the party as it was in this place and era. Fascism is not merely a theory or ideology but a system of government that has concrete effects on the people and an idealized leader with excessive power. Mussolini's motto for his dictatorship was "*Il Duce ha sempre ragione,*" which translates to "the Duce is always right."¹⁰⁷ Utter abandonment to the will of the dictator renders the people incapable of forming themselves without the guidance of a regime. Fascists developed a curriculum of progressive collectivism which broke from traditional powers of religion and republican government. It emphasizes the importance of the wellbeing of the

¹⁰⁷ Stanley Longman. "Mussolini and the Theatre." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60.2 (1974): 212.

collective over the needs of the individual. Ethno-nationalism in this context is taken beyond a nationalistic spirit of pride and camaraderie, into a racist xenophobic discrimination against the “other.” Extermination of Jews and other targets of the Nazis was accompanied by Italian civilization conquests into Ethiopia which inherently assume a racial superiority. Mussolini used para-theatricality in his campaigns, being sure to capture the public eye with ostentatious show and performativity surrounding even the smallest government event, such as a parade.¹⁰⁸ He even gave his actor-soldiers a costume of a black shirt, arranged for musical accompaniment and colorful banners and flags. The glorious spectacle would turn the attention of the masses from the reality of the policies to the glory of the regime, “[transforming] the brutality of Fascist violence into a crusade for the redemption of the country.”¹⁰⁹ Confidence in the government was lacking in early twentieth century Italy because the employment, economy and global status of the country were threatened. Mussolini’s re-building of the people’s confidence was aided tremendously by these events. His recognition of the theatre as a “vehicle for strong emotions” would service him well in forming a renewed spirit of nationalism among his people.¹¹⁰

Mussolini took this idea of a vehicle quite literally with the play *18BL*, an overtly fascist piece titled for the name of its central character, a tank. The presentation of military success and strength directly in front of the audience was not met well, however, due to poor staging and presentation.¹¹¹ In terms of text and themes, this was “as close as anyone had come to fulfilling Mussolini’s dream of a Teatro di Masse (theatre of the masses).”¹¹² This is due to themes of

¹⁰⁸ Longman 212.

¹⁰⁹ Berghaus, Günter. *Fascism and Theatre: Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945.* (Providence: Berghahn, 1996) 77.

¹¹⁰ Berghaus 97.

¹¹¹ Longman 220.

aggrandizement of state, glorification of military power and dedication of soldiers to their leader were made accessible to a larger audience through a more open seating plan situated on a hill along the Arno River broke away from traditional theatre houses. The dictator attempted more traditional theatrical writing after *18BL*. In the early 1930's he collaborated with Giovacchino Forzano, the stage director at La Scala Opera house in Milan, for three plays: *A Hundred Days*, featuring Napoleon as he combats a hostile parliament and public that has rejected him, *Caesare*, centering around Julius Caesar's fall from power, and *Villa Franca*, revisiting the unification of the Italian peninsula.¹¹³ Like fascism, all of these plays highlight a strong central leader to whom the people must surrender their trust, as the leaders supposedly are wise and had only the well-being of the people in mind. To relate these history productions to modern Italy, there was an "unmistakable image of Mussolini in the central characters: Napoleon, Julius Caesar and Cavour...the only character with vision, serenity and sense of purpose."¹¹⁴ The April 1936 opening performance of *A Hundred Days* in Berlin was attended by Hitler, Goebbels, and Goering. This presence demonstrated publicly a united front of the respective leaders with Mussolini behind his use of theatre as propaganda. The performance gave the impression of "an act of state" connoting German support of the Italian ideals therein promoted.¹¹⁵ Audiences would leave the show with security in international support and an enhanced trust in their ruler whose supposed qualities had been encompassed by the main hero.

Confidence in the right intentions of Mussolini grew in importance as the regime took on more controversial policies. Racism surfaced in areas of education, housing, and employment,

¹¹² Longman 222.

¹¹³ "New Play By Mussolini." *New York Times* [Florence] 23 Feb. 1932: 23.

¹¹⁴ Longman 221-222.

¹¹⁵ Trask, Claire. "Mussolini's Play in Berlin." *New York Times* [New York] 29 Apr. 1934: X2.

most notably in the laws of September 1938 which resulted in Jews being dismissed from certain occupations including but not limited to banking, medicine and law, being evicted from housing, expelled from schools and turned out of their own businesses by the Italian police. These measures were explicitly anti-Semitic and caused a negative reaction among the people, though limited by fear of police repercussion. The ghettoization and eventual extermination of Italian Jews, to whom Italians of various other faiths were married, in business with, friends with, and merely accustomed to naturally living with, would test the popular enthusiasm for the fascist government even further. The regime needed to increase the national fervor of the country. Once more a distraction was needed, one in which the state could make itself “compelling, fascinating, mystifying, and charismatic.”¹¹⁶ It renewed the earlier glorification campaign in celebration of Italian culture through literature and art. Mussolini wanted “a resurgence of the glory of Ancient imperial Rome” when the peninsula was the center of the western political world.¹¹⁷

Included in this expression of patriotism was the extension of Italian heritage to masters of culture such as William Shakespeare. Theories based upon his recurring use of Italian settings, character names and language bolstered an argument that he was not truly English. Such a claim had many implications. These ranged from a shared national identity with a renowned poet and playwright indicating an intellectual and artistic power in Italian blood, to the recognition of the grandeur of the country through the use of the land as setting, language as derivation of character names, and local spirit as theme.¹¹⁸ This continued to the extent of Luigi Bellotti, an Italian medium, claiming in 1936 to have communicated with the playwright who verified his Italian

¹¹⁶ Longman 212.

¹¹⁷ Longman 218.

¹¹⁸ Bossi, Shaul. "Guglielmo and Benito: Shakespeare, Nation, and Ethnicity in Fascist Italy." *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* 11 (2011) 212.

legacy during the visitation.¹¹⁹ Mussolini drew his strongest connection to Shakespeare in a shared appreciation of Ancient Roman “values of power and discipline, military prowess, imperial enterprise and transition from republic to dictatorship in times of crisis.”¹²⁰ Promoting the private production of Shakespearean works as cultural enforcement of government policies served to further the power of Mussolini’s rhetoric.

Works arguably containing evidence of Shakespeare’s anti-Semitism were particularly potent production materials. *The Merchant of Venice* attracted audiences in Germany and Italy alike, “Nazis adored Shylock.”¹²¹ The theatre cultures of both countries were juxtaposed in a 1936 production of the play in Venice under the German director, Max Reinhardt. Reviews of the work reported that “the setting overshadowed the acting...the hero, the center, the heart and essence of the performance was Venice...Jewish suffering [was] only a dissonant note.”¹²² There are several observations to be made from this record. Firstly, the nationalist spirit had pervaded the country successfully enough for a private production, without government orders, to emphasize the grandeur of an Italian setting being host to such a drama. Secondly, the focus on the play as a whole and not on specific characters reflects the Fascist ideal of the collective over individuals, which further demonstrates the effective spread of regime rhetoric. Thirdly, if the speculation that Shakespeare was an Italian was in fact reality, then any interpreted anti-Semitism in his works would add a level of approval and justification in modern Italian anti-Semitism as it would be a cultural tradition with deep-rooted history and also a view adopted by a globally praised master of the written word. Lastly, the dismissal of Jewish suffering

¹¹⁹ Bossi 205.

¹²⁰ Bossi 204.

¹²¹ Bossi 210.

¹²² Bossi 211.

foreshadows the eventual degradation of prejudice and discrimination to extermination of Jews in the name of preservation and extension of Axis powers in the coming years.¹²³

In the years directly following the end of the war, Shakespeare was a popular choice for production in Italian theatre. Luchino Visconti produced a 1949 *Troilus and Cressida* in the Boboli Gardens, the once private estate of the Medici family at the Pitti Palace. Given the bellicose and victorious reputation and history of the Greeks, this is an interesting choice. Representing the story of the victors to a society that had just been majorly defeated, and even more, victors who were the ancestors of a land which Italy unsuccessfully attempted to invade several times, does not seem to be the most obvious choice for entertainment. It did not run very long due to the unsustainability of high salaries being paid to the actors.¹²⁴ It is fitting that this play, which centers on war, was chosen so shortly after the close of the Second World War. It creates an immediate link between the world of modern Italy and Shakespeare, between the struggles of the twentieth century and the ancient Mediterranean populations. A few years later, Salvador Dali designed the sets and costumes for *Rosalinda*, an adaptation of *As You Like It* in Rome. The Teatro di Roma (Theatre of Rome) produced Shakespeare shows known for their high quality and caliber. *Hamlet* was produced several times over in the fifties, followed by the popular *Romeo and Juliet* in the sixties.¹²⁵ Beginning in 1978, the Teatro Romano in Verona, the setting of *Romeo and Juliet*, began an annual summer Shakespeare and dubbed itself the “Italian Stratford-upon-Avon.”¹²⁶ Thus the nineteenth century embrace of the Bard’s works not only

¹²³Anne Kehrli, “Il Duce’s Drama: Fascist State on Stage,” 2012.

¹²⁴ Lane 307.

¹²⁵ Lane 307.

¹²⁶ Lane 307.

continued into the later twentieth century but blossomed into an fascination and obsession with his plays.

This ownership was not entirely irrational. Shakespeare used Italy as a setting, Italians as characters and even the Italian language itself. A prime example of this is “the dialogue of *The Taming of the Shrew*, in particular, [which] is sprinkled here and there with Italian words and phrases [such as]...ben trovato, mi perdonato, basta...Si fortune me tormente, sperato me contente.”¹²⁷ Thus Shakespeare was incorporating several aspects of Italian culture into his work and therefore it makes sense that Italians would feel some identification with the work. But there were and are many other playwrights that used and use settings that are not their own country or even part of their heritage, so it is not conclusive evidence at all.

Some Italians however took it to an extreme level. Researchers at the University of Palermo carried out research from 1920-1950 that provided the basis for a 2002 book. Sicilian professor Martino Iuvara wrote *Shakespeare Era Italiano* (Shakespeare Was Italian) in which he claims that Shakespeare was actually a Sicilian. The leading piece of his argument is a play written in the Sicilian dialect, *Tanto Traffico per Niente* (Much Traffic for Nothing) which predates the title of a play by Shakespeare which is set in Messina, *Much Ado About Nothing*. The rest of his case is weak and does not merit credence. However his argument is not the significant aspect for this study.

The important part of this phenomenon is the trajectory which the Italian relationship with Shakespeare followed over the course of three centuries. In the eighteenth century, Voltaire manipulated the Italian perception of the work based on his critique of the French and thus inferior versions of his plays. The nineteenth century ushered in an age of not only accepting Shakespeare’s work or tolerating it, but actually appreciating it and taking pains to translate it

¹²⁷ Harry Levin. “Shakespeare’s Italians,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 4 (1990): 44.

well so that it might become a popular part of the Italian theatrical literature canon. By the twentieth century, it was used for propaganda and a continuing sentiment of nationalism and xenophobia.

Conclusion

The opera *Il Mercante di Venezia* is a reflection of the socio-political changes occurring in nineteenth century Europe. After years of invasions, rebellions and civil war, the Italian peninsula was united as one nation in 1871. United in name, Italians sought to create a new national identity and culture. Local cultures were shaped heavily by foreign powers. In a land of many regional dialects, they needed to set a standard form of language. They embraced opera as a genuinely Italian art form that allowed for the transmission of patriotic themes to a larger audience. They were not so quick to welcome Shakespeare's work to their literary circle. Over the course of three centuries, the Bard's work was rejected due to Voltaire's criticism and the resemblance that his work bore to Italian literature, then tolerated, then praised for its naturalistic approach to the human experience in combining tragedy and comedy. By the twentieth century, Italians were attempting to prove that Shakespeare was actually an Italian. This connection between the English and Italian worlds also surfaced in Pinsuti's opera, in which several liberties were taken to tailor the work to the composer's world. He was not the first nor the last to modify Shakespeare's plays to fit the Italian audience, a practice that was prevalent in the 1900's but continues even today.

The opera reflects the importance and means of identity for the newly united Italian state. There is a certain Italo-anglo-italian circular transfer of culture present in this work, since the Italian opera is taken from the original English play which was based on Italian culture through use of Venetian setting, Commedia dell'Arte characters, and linguistic elements. Thus it can be surmised that the Italian identity that was created at the end of the nineteenth century reflected influences from many other European countries, but notably from the English who had defined

their own identity in terms of levels of connection to the Italian lead in Renaissance developments and then from a more removed position as the two nations grew apart.

It is crucial to look at history as not the change over time, but similarities despite time in this case. Identity is a concept that we continue to grapple with as a society. We use various media to express who we are as individuals and collectives through music, art, literature and theatre just as our predecessors did. If taken to an extreme extent, projection of identity in entertainment is manifest in immediately accessible programs such as *Mob Wives*, *Jersey Shore*, and *Real Housewives of New Jersey*, to only name a few which propagate an image of the modern Italian-American in a world where the first name that is associated with Italian politics is Silvio Berlusconi. I find myself in a community that is tired of being defined by tanning beds, alcohol abuse, mafia connections and table throwing. As our world changes, so too does our understanding of other and self. The challenge lies in our ability to celebrate the culture we come from through integrating it with the experience we live.

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