

“Ambi al ceppo!”* The unfinished history of Petrella’s *Caterina Howard

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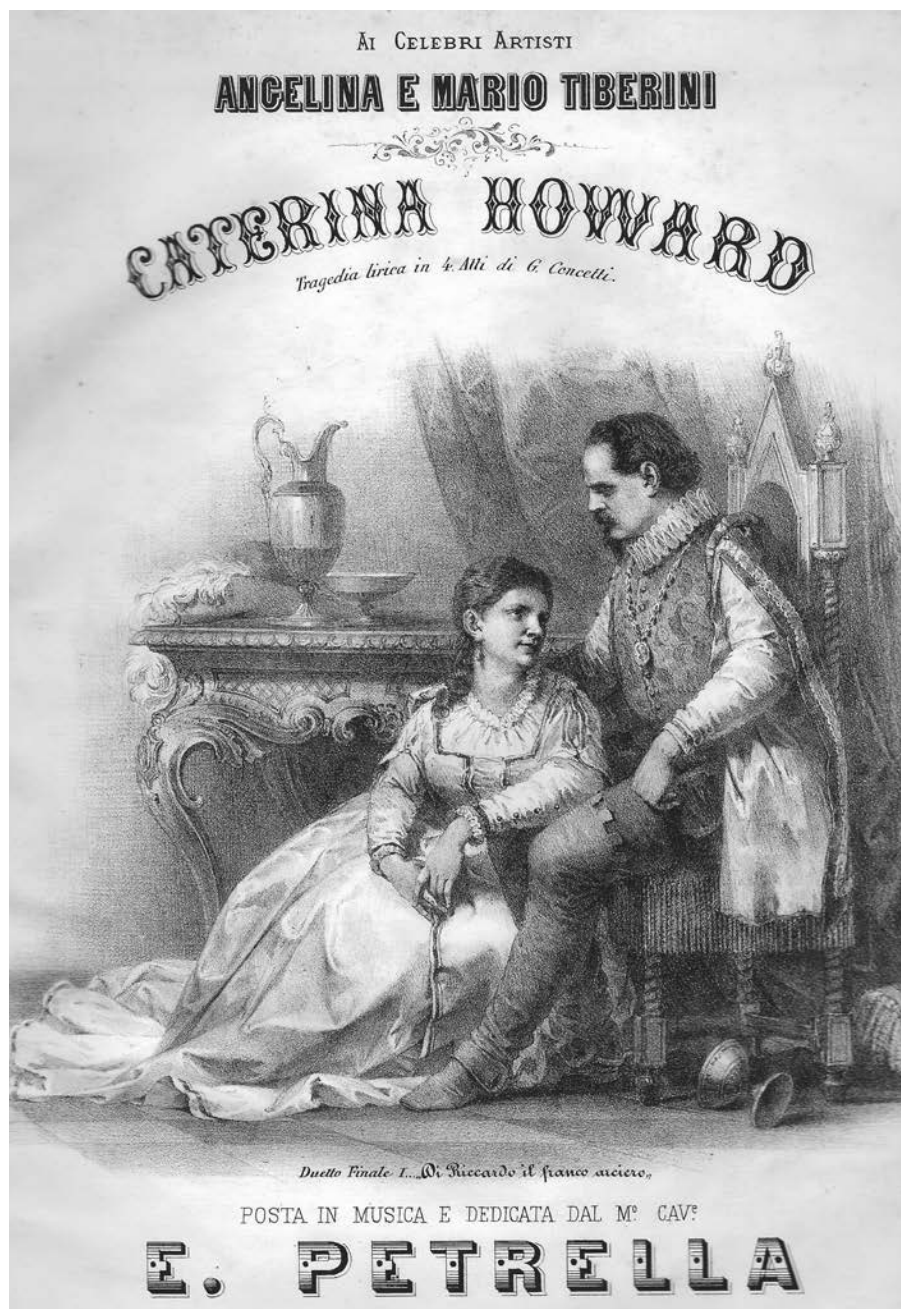
Cencetti’s utterly improbable libretto for Petrella, with its convoluted argument - not simply derived abjectly from that of Giorgio Giachetti for Matteo Salvi and Giuseppe Lillo¹ and based upon the anglophobe *Drame en cinq actes et en huit tableaux ‘Catherine Howard’* by Alexandre Dumas père first performed at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin in Paris on 2 June 1834 - shares precisely the same strange relationship with the text by Ranieri De’Calzabigi for the *Elfrida* of Giovanni Paisiello [S.Carlo Naples 4 November 1792] Not just in terms of reference to Elfrida herself (in the ballata ‘Del Franco arcier Riccardo’ sung by Caterina in Act I Sc. V of Lillo’s opera re-appearing as ‘Riccardo, il franco arciero’ as sung by Caterina in Act I Sc. VIII in that of Petrella - both rooted in the *Deuxième Tableau* of the Dumas play) but most notably in respect of *Elfrida*’s hoary plot and tortured historical credentials. Above all in respect of the foolish anglo-saxon *prenome* given to the tenor anti-hero: the romantically confused ‘Etelvoldo, duca di Dierkan’.²

Such flagrant archaism makes reference too to a contemporary *Elfrida*, this time that of Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne, *livret* by Nicolas-François Guillard whose opportunist *Drame héroïque* - staged in the Paris of the Terror in 1792 with its eager indulgence in royal decapitation - was derived from "*un épisode de la vie d’Edgar, roi d’Angleterre en 959*".

¹ *Caterina Howard, melodramma tragico in quattro atti* by Giuseppe Lillo, Real Teatro di S. Carlo, Napoli, *poesia del Signor Giorgio Giachetti* [26 September 1849]. Giachetti’s text had originally been conceived for Matteo Salvi whose *Caterina Howard* [10 June 1847] staged at the Kärntnertortheater in Vienna had fallen from grace thanks largely to the turmoil of 1848. Important changes had been introduced both to the roles and to the text by its poet and the local censors in the version set by his Neapolitan successor

² Paisiello calls him “Adelvolto”, Dumas calls him ‘Ethelwood’, in history his name was Ethelwald. [See] A. Weatherson *Giuseppe Lillo and Gaetano Donizetti (le disgrazie di un bel giovane)* [in] *L’altro melodramma. Studi sugli operisti meridionali dell’Ottocento*, a cura di Pierfranco Moliterni (Bari 2008), 102-111. The strange name "Dierkan" is derived from the "Dierham" of Dumas and no doubt intended to represent the city or county of Durham

A number of incongruous sources have come together to give rise to the many eccentricities purporting to reflect the tragedy of Queen Catherine (or Katheryn) Howard.



While the neglect of the fourth and sixth wives of Henry VIII by composers is not exactly surprising, in regretting such a slight (if such it is) those concerned with operatic renown can concentrate instead on the unhappy fate of his fifth wife. But her main impediment to musical survival was lack of dramatic substance. Her reign was over in a trice consisting as it did of little more than

marriage and decapitation. This penultimate queen only momentarily captured the attention of the fickle Tudor and has never really captured that of anyone else since. She was eighteen-years-old at the time of her accession to the throne ³ and twenty when she lost her head.

Such fleeting prominence gave very little scope to Parisian playwrights – potboiling source of disreputable British history for a credulous European public - to conjure-up enough momentum to gain the attention of librettists. Dumas, like Calzabigi before him, with an indulgence in romantic confabulation almost beyond belief took refuge in a fictional parallel with that of the anglo-saxon queen ⁴ who died in the year 1000. Neither poet nor librettist quite succeeded in overcoming the abuse of credibility this entailed. Even though Giuseppe Cencetti's *melodramma tragico in 4 atti* as set by Errico Petrella with its eye on pontifical approval took a dutifully sanctimonious view of spurious royal legend it was sadly unavailing in the face of such unswerving improbability. As a result an immense quantity of attractive music and some considerable ingenuity led to a success as momentary as that of the unfortunate Caterina in history. Rather less indebted to Donizetti, Petrella was no luckier than any of his predecessors, or indeed any of those Tudor queens they chose to celebrate.

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The first performance of the Sicilian composer's *Caterina Howard* took place at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on 7 February 1866. A maximum publicity featured the soprano Angiolina Ortolani-Tiberini (1830-1913) in the title-role, her husband Mario Tiberini (1826-1880) in the tenor role of Etelvoldo, and with Francesco Pandolfini (1836-1916) later to be Verdi's choice in several of his operas in the baritone role of Enrico VIII. The conductor was Emilio Angelini and the staging was directed personally by the composer. This *melodramma tragico*, the only one by Petrella composed expressly for the future capital of the Kingdom of Italy made an appearance

³ Her exact date of birth is unknown. She was decapitated in 1542

⁴ Elfrida was the daughter of Ordgar, Ealdorman of Devon, and widow of Ethelwald, Ealdorman of East Anglia, who became the second wife of the sanguinary King Edgar (959-975) and mother of the more celebrated (and incestuous) King Ethelred the Unready. The legend of Edgar's infatuation with his friend Ethelwald's wife, and the husband's execution, forms the nucleus of the Calzabigi plot

subsequently in two further Italian cities.⁵ Its vocal score dedicated to the Tiberini duo was published many years later in a distinctly misleading edition by Giudici e Strada of Turin [Pl. Nos 9000-9024].

Giuseppe Cencetti (1811-1875), one of Giovanni Pacini's faithful band of librettists,⁶ was *Poeta Direttore di scena* at the Teatro Apollo. He broke no new ground whatsoever for Petrella, the plot of *Caterina Howard* has all the inevitability of contemporary cliché: an English queen is fatally drawn to illicit lovers and comes to full-scale disaster. This was a recipe lovingly cherished throughout Europe at a time when industrial supremacy and the imperial presence of the British Isles needed to be countered, Rossini's *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* took such an argument round Europe; its topos was promptly sauced by Auber in Paris with his *Leicester ou Le Chateau de Kenilworth* (1823); Donizetti revamped the plot with *Il castello di Kenilworth* (1829), and then further embellished it with *Anna Bolena* (1830) and *Roberto Devereux* (1837); together with these came an ostinato from Carlo Conti (*Giovanna Shore* 1829); Mercadante (*Il conte di Essex* 1833); and Vaccai (*Giovanna Gray* 1836). As an inevitable topic it may be said to have reached its apogee with Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* (of 1835-6) but was retouched, quite as memorably (and under the more imposing auspices of Victor Hugo), by Giovanni Pacini with his *Maria regina d'Inghilterra* (of 1843).

The Roman venue may have been the true impulse behind Petrella's choice of plot. The fifth wife of Henry VIII - like her *consorella*, Maria Stuarda - offered a suitably Catholic heroine on the altar of Roman virtue, in this instance sandwiched comfortably between two distinctly uninteresting protestant queens, but sadly, both for the poet and the composer, nothing very edifying or saintly on the part of Queen Katheryn could be scraped up to endorse their choice. By the time all the historical sources had been thoroughly examined it was probably too late to reconsider the emotive value of the project. Even though the plot of the opera had been under review for almost twelve months⁷ there is a distinct impression that time was very short, hence the reusing of a bizarre librettistic gambit (ie the

⁵ At the Teatro Grande, Bescia on 8 August 1868 with a second posthumous appearance at the Teatro Alfieri in Turin a decade later in August 1878 after which it vanished completely

⁶ He supplied part of the text for *Lidia di Bruxelles* (1858) and the entire libretto for *Il mulatiere di Toledo* (1861) and was much in demand for additional verse throughout Pacini's mature years

⁷ Sebastian Werr *Die Opern von Errico Petrella* (Vienna 1999), letter 17, 206

unconvincing tomb scene) only recently absent from the stage. But Petrella was not inclined to postpone his Roman début, its commission was due to the Apollo's notable impresario Vincenzo ("Cencio") Jacovacci⁸ long a faithful champion of Verdi's more frustrated rivals.

It is, however, a mistaken belief that the opera had an unhappy prima. The review in *La Fama* after the first performance was not less than ecstatic :

ROMA -Teatro Apollo - *Caterina Howard* del maestro Petrella. - Completiamo il breve cenno dell'esito di fanatismo sortito dal nuovo parto della fecondissima musa dell'illustre Napolitano colla seguente relazione, possibilmente accorciata :
"Grande era l'aspettativa di quest'opera, ricordandosi le bellezze singolari della *Celinda*, e con tutti ciò successo eziando più clamoroso, pei tre primi atti: l'ultimo non fu veramente gustato ed inteso che alla seconda rappresentazione. I pezzi che destarono entusiasmo e fruttarono acclamazioni e chiamate al maestro (30 volte ridomandato la prima sera) ed ai cantanti, furono:- Atto primo: Barcarola di marinai e brindisi nell'introduzione; romanza di Etelvoldo (il Tiberini) e duetto fra questo e Caterina (Angiolina Tiberini) che per condotta e per novità di forma fece grande impressione, -Atto secondo. Scena della Tombe, romanza d' Enrico VIII (Pandolfini), duetto fra I conjughi Tiberini e il gran duetto fra la Tiberini e Pandolfini, pezzo di Massimo effetto che suscitò immense entusiasmo.- Atto terzo notturnino fra la Tiberini e Pandolfini, ed il gran finale in cui Tiberini fu veramente impareggiabile e levato a cielo fra' segni del maggiore fanatismo, fra I qual il maestro Petrella fu ridomandato solo e cogli artisti ben sette volte, - il quart atto, che alla seconda rappresentazione ha susciato entusiasmi non minori del resto, contiene il pezzo più caratteristico dell'opera, un duetto fra' conjughi Tiberini, tutto passione e canto scritto col cuore ed eseguito inimitabilmente. Che diremo dell'esecuzione? Che fu perfetta ad onore dei Tiberini e del Pandolfini. La signora Tiberini nella lunga e faticosissima parte della protagonista si appalesò eminente artista drammatica e superò le maggiori difficoltà nel canto e nell'azione. Tiberini, insuperabile Etelvoldo, artista di cuore e di slancio, riunisce in sè tutte le più ambite qualità artistiche ed ebbe momenti maravigliosamente sentiti. Pandolfini, un Enrico VIII modello, emerse ed avrà in quest'opera il più glorioso trionfo, com'ebbe qui, venendovi festeggiato ad ogni tratto. Tutti e tre questo grandi artisti furono degni interpreti dell'insigne creazione del maestro. Cori, orchestra, decorazioni tutto bene, tutto bello, e lodato il melodrama del Cencetti. Lo spartito fu già acquistato con vistoso prezzo degli editori torinesi Giudici e Strada".

La Fama 20 February 1866 (p30)

For a composer to be called out thirty times was convincing proof of any triumphal operatic reception in the nineteenth century, and it is for this reason no doubt that Giudici e Strada purchased the opera⁹ in

⁸ Vincenzo Jacovacci (Roma 1811- Roma 1881) impresario at different times of the Valle, Argentina and Apollo theatres

⁹ *La Fama's* insistence that the score had "already" been purchased from Petrella is not supported by the printed libretto which makes clear that *Caterina Howard*, at the time of the prima, was exclusively the property of the composer

the first place and that Petrella remained committed to the score to the very end of his life. Even if the long series of vocal items that received a fanatical reception in Rome would not be duplicated later three of them would survive the vagaries to come, most notably the Act I tenor romanza, the Act II baritone ditto, and most especially the Act III Gran scena e finale which was “*veramente impareggiabile e levato a cielo*” – a comment which if anything was an understatement and after which Petrella was called out seven times.

It was the fourth act that emerged as the problem. It would remain a problem but was boldly reconsidered before *Caterina Howard* resurfaced on the Italian stage.

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Even if received opinion has never particularly favoured this opera by Petrella with its preposterous plot, the notable interest in the score and its re-publication by the torinese publisher after Petrella's death, offers a rather different view of its potential, few judgements of intrinsic merit were ever likely to be more “streetwise” than those of *Giudici e Strada*. This interest was not solely commercial it would seem and was clearly activated by a positive opinion upon the real merit of the music. The *Dizionario degli editori musicali italiani 1750-1932* a cura di Bianca Maria Antolini (Pisa 2000), 180, supplies the following note upon the publishing ventures and local success of the Torinese editor in respect of Errico Petrella:

“A little later it was the turn of E. Petrella with the *Contessa d'Amalfi*. Given a first staging at the Teatro Regio on 8 March 1864 with uncertain success, the opera was re-proposed in November of the same year revised by the composer at the Teatre Vittorio Emanuele with better results. On a commission from *Giudici e Strada*, Petrella then composed *Celinda* first staged in Naples (1865) and then in Turin (1866). For the 1868-69 stagione the editors proposed *Caterina Howard*, also by Petrella, but the conditions imposed by the impresario of the Regio, Martinotti,¹⁰ were vexatious and unacceptable, and the opera was substituted by that of another author.”

A friendly letter from Livorno to Filippo Cicconetti in Rome of 29 November 1867 including much news of mutual acquaintances,¹¹ discloses that he was then actually *en route* to restage *Caterina Howard*

¹⁰ Francesco Martinotti, who régime at the Teatro Regio extended between the years 1864-5 and 1871

¹¹ In the Mary Carey Flagler collection at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York

in Turin. Promoted by Giudici e Strada ¹² it was a *torinese* restaging that did not materialise at that time for the reasons indicated above. Instead the opera re-emerged under the same ægis at the Teatro Grande di Brescia in the *fiera* of the following year with some bold changes.

This check to their immediate plans may have laid the seed to the confusion that plagued both the composer and this innovative publisher in respect of the destiny of the opera. Though a famous and successful rival to Ricordi and owners both of *La contessa d'Amalfi* and *Celinda* by Petrella (neither of which opened brilliantly but both of which survived unscathed for many decades) the handling by Giudici e Strada of *Caterina Howard* proved fatal to the score. This confusion even affects the note in the *Dizionario degli editori* which not only fails to indicate that a libretto and a vocal score of *Caterina Howard* would be published by Giudici e Strada in the 1870's but that neither, in fact, would represent fully or even partially the intentions of the composer.

That the composer was being bounced around like a tennis ball at this time is very clear. The *Gazzetta Musicale di Napoli* was keen to involve him in its North/South divide campaign against Verdi:

L'atteggiamento della "Gazzetta" nei confronti della musica di Verdi può di fatto essere esemplificativo della politica condotta dal giornale. Per tutti gli anni in cui il periodico aveva invocato Errico Petrella (le cui opere erano tutte pubblicate dallo Stabilimento Musicale Partenopeo) come il nuovo portavoce della tradizione musicale napoletana, aveva utilizzato sempre toni alquanto cauti nei confronti delle opere verdiane.

The above was a musico-political mindset that continued virulently until Petrella stepped out of line in 1857 and began to sell his new operas to the milanese publisher Lucca ¹³. He was as much a victim of his day and age as the operatic rivalry we now can see it encapsulated. His concession of the Roman version of *Caterina*

¹² Giudici e Strada had investigated the possible revival of *Caterina Howard* immediately following the prima according to the composer, notably in Siena, Faenza, Carpi etc but nothing had been forthcoming. Werr op cit letter 19 (26 April 1866), 207

¹³ Cfr Tiziana Grande *Dalla "Gazzetta Musicale di Napoli" al "Archivio musicale"* [in] Francesco Florimo e *L'ottocento musicale*, Atti del convegno (Reggio Calabria 1999), 502-3

Howard to the torinese Giudici e Strada refutes any partisan involvement of this kind, Petrella was perfectly aware of the role he played the musical gulf now yawning between North and South but his creative needs and priorities lay firmly in his own court.

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Though the original impulse to write *Caterina Howard* almost certainly came about as a result of the highly successful revival of *La contessa d'Amalfi* by the Tiberini couple that had opened the season on 26 December 1864 at the Teatro Pergola in Florence the Cencetti/Petrella libretto proved far more daring than that of this high-profile predecessor. They were offered far more challenging music to sing. Petrella's cast differs notably from that of the opera by Lillo. While the principal roles are much enhanced there is no genuine *seconda donna* in Cencetti's libretto (Giachetti - faithful to Dumas - has a Margherita Tudor - the spurned sister of Enrico). In her place is the *nutrice* Kennedy in the tradition of *Maria Stuarda*, while the roles of the Conte di Sussex and Melvil of Giachetti have been subsumed into a "new" Sir Tommaso Cramner (sic) ¹⁴. The Cencetti verses are new throughout, yet the key items of almost every act remain in place. Thus it is the soprano/tenor duet that is the focus of Act 1 in all editions of the opera, and the bizarre tomb-scene at the start of Act II where Caterina feigns death and seduces Enrico remains intact in both Giachetti and Cencetti. But whereas Lillo looks backwards to Vaccai for his Juliet imposture, Petrella looks forward to Gounod for his - a version much more colourful and extrovert at the same time more dependent upon the painfully descriptive exactitudes of the Victorian era. Act III, for example begins with the identical courtly festivities of both the previous versions of the plot but Cencetti has a *Torneo* recalling *Ariodante* ¹⁵ and a lot of picturesque local colour. More importantly, whereas Lillo's Act III is mostly focussed upon the relations between Caterina and Etelvoldo, that of Petrella is far more concerned with those between Caterina and Enrico. Act IV of both operas opens with Caterina in the Tower of London and her terrified scena, followed by

¹⁴ "Le comte de Sussex" exists in the Dumas source, "Melvil" was an invention. "Cramner" too is derived from Dumas. (where his name is correctly spelled)

¹⁵ In a retro glance at an operatic theme of the eighteenth century Caterina is obliged to present a prize to her champion who raises his visor and turns out to be Etelvoldo, this *Torneo* is present in the Dumas play

a sinister encounter with the tenor, but whereas Enrico is totally absent at this point in Lillo, Petrella makes him the dominating presence of the dénouement. His menace and threats are the entire focus. With Lillo it is Etelvoldo and his twisted personality that is the *point de repère* of the entire opera, with Petrella it is Enrico and his pride.

Cencetti's plot for Petrella far more reflects the taste of a later generation. There is much more incidental music in Petrella's score, much more emphasis upon scenography and setting. There are more visual coups and much more descriptive indulgence, all of which points to the way Petrella's operatic ambitions were evolving at this time and perhaps explains the ultimate motive of Giudici e Strada in keeping this opera before the public. There is even a feeling sometimes that both Petrella and Cencetti are ready to throw everything at the plot - not content with borrowing the "Calzabigi" flashback from Giachetti/Lillo, the Giulietta-like borrowings, the *Torneo* "Ariodante" scene, the *ballabile* and so on there is more than a hint of a perfectly deliberate and calculated rejection of the concision associated with Verdi (and his milanese publishers) in favour of the visual and vocal excesses of the celebrated Opéra so far away above the Alps.

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The Brescia edition of the Cencetti/Petrella score was the first revision the composer was to consider, on 14 December 1866 he wrote to the editors "Riguardo al nuovo finale ultimo da farsi nella *Caterina*, ho cominciato già ad occuparmi" though it is not clear how long was spent on the task as many months were to intervene before its emergence, but the opera was not to be the overwhelming success it had been in Rome:

BRESCIA

La *Catterina Howard* di Petrella, ci scrivano, contiene bensì alcuni buoni pezzi, belli, cioè, più che buoni, ma in complesso non può dirsi, almeno dopo una sola udizione, degna sorella di *Jone* e di *Celinda*. L'esecuzione, per quanto da alcuni si voglia asserverare il contrario, fu buonissimo per parte della Siebs. La sua indisposizione della prima sera non le impedì di cantar bene, e di farsi applaudire. Chi però maggiormente emersero furono tenore e baritono. Quintili-Leoni dovette ripetere la sua aria e Valentini Cristiani che cantò squisitamente tutta la sua parte, venne in più punti acclamatissimo. Nel ballo la Conti danzò bene ma non fece certa impressione. Anche il Rivera passò inosservato

Il Mondo artistico 17 agosto 1868

Petrella was called out three times. This Brescia revival on 8 August 1868 – now under the ægis of Giudici e Strada - replaced that anticipated by the composer *en route* to Torino with an initially indisposed Marietta Siebs in the title role, Giovanni Valentini-Cristiani as Etelvoldo and Vincenzo Quintili-Leoni as Enrico. Petrella once more took responsibility for its direction. Changes to the whole of the score were not extensive: small amendments to the Act II Sc 7 duet between Enrico and Caterina (correcting censorial diktats at Rome no doubt), the Act III Sc 2 duet between the same two protagonists had been given a slightly longer stretta, while the splendid *Gran Scena e Finale 3°* was very slightly cut (despite being praised in Rome). But it is the end of the opera that was most changed. The original *Finale ultimo* in Rome had been as follows, swift, sudden but scarcely a summation, indeed leaving any truly dramatic realisation hanging in mid-air...

S C E N A U L T I M A

(Odesi un rollo di tamburro a lutto. Si apre la gran porta del fondo dalla quale discendono i ministri di giustizia ed il Capitano. Nell' andito attiguo alla porta veggonsi Guardie reali con fiacole. Contemporaneamente dalla porta laterale entra KENNEDÌ che corre desolata ad abbracciare CATERINA) seguita da CRAMNER, DAME e CORTIGIANI)

ENR. Questo è di morte il suono.
ETE. Mira tranquillo io sono.
CAT. Oh madre! *(gettandosi nelle braccia di Ken.)*
ENR. Or or vedremo
 Se in faccia a morte hai cor.
ETE. Tu l'odi! *(a Cater.)*
CAT. Ambo l'ayremo *(risolutamente)*
ETE. } L'ultimo addio. *(stringendosi le mani)*
CAT. }
ENR. *(Oh furor!)*
HENN. } Or la mente ergete al cielo,
GRAM. } Ed il ciel con voi sarà.
DAME }
CORTIG. } *(Qual ardir!... Di morte il gelo*
 No, smentirlo non potrà.)

(Il Capitano ad un cenno di Enrico divide i rei. Caterina è guidata al supplizio sostenuta da Kennedy. Cramner abbraccia Etelvoldo, che dà l'estremo addio a Caterina, mentre le Dame s'inginocchiano ed i Cortigiani restano commossi intorno al re.)

For Brescia, it would seem would seem, the composer proposed to take a backward step in the direction of the Giacchetti libretto. Abandoning this modish Roman dénouement whose breathless envoi had fallen on stony ground the composer opted for a far more mannered conclusion - at once more predictable and yet more credible - in the form of a quasi-vaudeville stretta prefaced by a wild dramatic cry from the prima donna soprano.

This Brescia Scena ultima has all the spacious deployment familiar in the Naples of his day with everyone on stage to witness an imposing dénouement. Supplied with an ominous orchestral diminuendo, Caterina moves to the centre of the stage, her

SCENA ULTIMA

Odesi un rullo di tamburo a tutto. Si apre la gran porta del fondo, dalla quale discendono i ministri di giustizia ed il capitano. Nell'andito attiguo alla porta veggonsi Guardie reali con fiaccole: contemporaneamente dalla porta laterale entra Kennedy che corre desolata ad abbracciare Caterina, seguita da Gramner, Dame, e Cortigiani.

ENR. Questo è di morte il suono.
 ETEL. Mira, tranquillo io sono.
 CAT. Oh madre! *(gettandosi nelle braccia di Ken.)*
 ENR. Or or vedremo
 Se innanzi al ceppo hai cor.
 ETEL. Tu l'odi! *(a Caterina.)*
 CAT. Ambo l'avremo...
 Ne darà forza amor.
 DONNE Pietà signor... *(inginocchiand. presso Enr.)*
 ENR. Scostatevi.
 TUTTI Oh giorno di terror!
 CAT. Non di lui che non vedeva *(indicando Enr.)*
 Sì crudel, le leggi infrante;
 Il delitto ond'io son rea
 Fu il tradir si fido amante, *(indicando Etel.)*
 Ma se a te mi dà la morte, *(ad Etel.)*
 Se m'invola al rio tiranno
 Benedico la mia sorte,
 Vado intrepido a morir.
 Non piangete, a quell'affanno
 Sento il ciglio inumidir. *(alle Donne)*
 ETEL. A te suddito son io, *(ad Enrico)*
 Tu puoi togliermi la vita;
 Ma quel cor, l'udisti, è mio *(indicando Cat.)*
 Là non giunge il tuo poter.
 Alla sua quest'alma unita
 Va con gli angeli a goder.
 ENR. Quell'ardir nell'ora estrema
 Che v'invade, o scellerati,
 Su voi chiama l'anatema,
 Il disprezzo, il disonor.
 Piomberete detestati
 Nelle bolge del dolor.
 TUTTI Ei si prode, al rege sposa,
 Essa bella, e giovin tanto...
 E la scure sanguinosa
 D'ambo il capo troncherà!
 Chi frenar potrebbe il pianto?
 Spezza il core la pietà.
 ENR. Ambi al ceppo...
 CAT.)
 ETEL.) Insieme in cielo
 Te il rimorso punirà.
 TUTTI Qual ardir!.. di morte il gelo
 No smentirlo non potrà.

(Il capitano ad un cenno di Enrico divide i rei. Caterina è guidata al supplizio, sostenuta da Kennedy, Gramner abbraccia Etevoaldo, che dà l'estremo addio a Caterina mentre le donne s'inginocchiano, ed i cortigiani restano commossi intorno al Re.

declamatory outburst 'Non di lui che non vedeva' is the focus of a histrionic set-piece encompassing the entire cast, at once violent and vitriolic and designed to tie all the loose-ends. Who supplied the text? It could well have been Cencetti but a series of modifications in the autograph manuscript are in the hand of the composer.

To deprive a nineteenth century audience of even a semblance of an aria finale - even of a genuine resolution as in Rome - had been hazardous, but this revised *Scena ultima* would cause him even more problems. It is true that the press was not especially eloquent about its reception but it was his own reservations, it would seem, that led to near-chronic doubts about the final status of the whole opera.

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How to execute a Queen? The dilemma of the *terminus quo*.

In all probability Petrella's irresolution stems from the far too bold conclusion to the Dumas play. So many of the absurd fantasies upon the fate of this insignificant heroine came into existence as a result of the searing climax to his barnstorming melodrama where the anonymous axeman who finally decapitates the discarded queen is none other than her rabid lover wearing an executioner's mask! This suggested a *Finale ultimo* quite enough to make any Italian composer (or any Italian opera house) take fright.

The following is the list of manuscript and printed material relating to Petrella's *Caterina Howard* to be found in the Biblioteca del Conservatorio Giuseppe Nicolini di Piacenza (Fondo Giudice e Strada)

1. A 4-volume autograph manuscript of the full score of the entire opera in very large folio format dated 7 February 1866 (each volume of which is marked "Originale"). This is the score of the first version [Roman edition] of the opera [A]

**2. An autograph manuscript in full score of Act 4 with copious additional music (also marked "Originale") which would seem - if only initially - to reflect those changes specifically made for Brescia [B]
[This manuscript bears witness to the most extraordinary struggle, the libretto has all the appearance of having being supplied by the composer himself]**

3. A printed vocal core (undated) of the opera (marked "Suggeritore")

4. A collection of vocal parts some of which have the names of the artists using them at the Teatro Alfieri in 1878 together with and a score for banda. Much of this material supplies evidence of cuts made during that performance [for example Marietta Giunti made a huge cut in the concertato that ended the opera in 1878]

5. Associated is a copyist manuscript full score in 4 volumes of the entire opera that is in a nominally complete form [C]

It is clear that their surrender to convention in order to mitigate the unacceptable Dumas dénouement, both by Giorgio Giachetti and by Giuseppe Cencetti, was found deeply unsatisfactory by Petrella. The lame Roman *finale ultimo* was only partly rectified at first however, but the principal changes made to the opera after the Roman début do include this elaborate final *scena* with its imposing new quadro for Caterina - the first strophe of which she hurls at Enrico and the second at Etelvoldo with a two line sweetener addressed to her attendants. That the actual genesis of this particular music seems to have been painful in the extreme as is made clear by the material at Piacenza - most of the proposed changes did not survive and few, if any, into the final manifestation of the opera on the stage.

Large sections of [B] are concerned with the actual evolution of this climactic tableau. Parte Quattro opened originally with the important *preghiera* for Caterina [A] with the text:

*A te mi volgo ed umile
Gli altri decreti adoro*

A "donizettian" moment it was present in both the Roman and Brescia versions of *Caterina Howard* but did not appear in the Torino material. It is followed by a duetto with Etelvoldo which became abbreviated at Brescia, but whereas Enrico is almost excluded in the in Roman Finale Ultimo he makes a substantial appearance in the Brescia revision where he is not only more aggressive but is also subject to contemptuous dismissal on the part of the lovers. This said, not one of the versions of *Caterina Howard* has a completely identical text for the end of this opera. The printed vocal score largely corresponds with the copyist score C, sometimes with the autograph B, but not with the printed libretto of 1875. Amendments, it would seem, were made after Petrella ceased work upon his opera. It is the autograph B which offers the greatest perspective of the changes Petrella had in mind for the final realisation of *Caterina Howard*: there is a new and more forceful instrumentation, the

vaudeville/cabaletta for Caterina - originally conceived for Brescia - which now begins with the words 'Non di lui che non credeasi' (two words compacted?) but ends like the printed vocal score with the words of Etelvoldo 'Caterina - la rivedremo in ciel', while the printed libretto of 1875 ends with a unison cry from Caterina and Etelvoldo 'Insieme in cielo, Te il rimorso punirà'.

If it was changes made to the Brescia score that supplied a model for the final realisation of *Caterina Howard* they were subsequently put to flight. In general it is the role of Enrico that is highlighted in the later versions. All along his role has been subject to a species of dramatic indecision. In the original conception of the opera Enrico is simply naive, not much more than indignant at the behaviour of his erstwhile friend Etelvoldo. Mid-term in the evolution of the opera he becomes virulent and aggressive, directing his fury at Etelvoldo of course but more strongly at the shameless lack of repentance on the part of his queen. In the posthumous appearance of the opera (1878) Enrico is a tyrant.

Atto quarto begins with a shortened *Preludio* [the introductory Andante Mosso has been cut]. Opening with an Allegro agitato there is no *preghiera*, the *Scena e recit* with Cramner (sic) and Kennedi (sic) remains, then follows the *Scena e duetto* 'Invan tornasti a pascere' with a cut after 'pregherò' (the last two bars) so that the stretta leads without a break into the *Scena e Finale IV* with Enrico's 'Che veggo!...Iniqui..!' in which he reveals the true colours of his tyranny.

The very elaborate Tempo di Marcia Lugubre with its rolls of Tamburri and farfares is most elaborately delineated in the autograph B (the NB of p219 has been written by the composer at the foot of the autograph) and the ensuing *duetto* and *trio con coro* remain as printed in the vocal score, with Caterina's 'Non di lui che non credea' at its heart leading to a *concertato* - except - as the vocal parts reveal - that in performance there was a big cut (pages 234- 239). The opera resumes with Enrico's 'Ambi al ceppo' followed by the 'Insieme in cielo' as printed in the vocal score but ending on p241. (The final pages 242-3 have been removed)

The autograph B offers a sophisticated musical sequence, in this ultimate section Cramner together with Caterina's ladies pleads for the lives of the lovers, Etelvoldo and Caterina cry in unison that Enrico will be punished by remorse, Caterina throws herself in the arms of Etelvoldo 'Mio Etelvoldo - l'ultimo amplesso' With a *terzettino* in 6/8 partly unisone Caterina/Etelvoldo 'Ah! dell'alma / casto amore / La! nel cielo esulterà / La! nel ciel' underpinned by a repeated cries from Enrico 'Ite al ceppo / fra l'infamie / degno premio a voi darà / Si', and cries of 'Pietà' from Caterina's ancelle and 'quale ardir' sotto voce from the courtiers. The

ultimate climax is marked by Caterina's violent cry 'Là nel cielo!' and Etelvoldo's 'Caterina! La rivedremo in ciel' behind which Enrico repeats his 'al ceppo' 'al ceppo' and Cramner and the ladies 'Ah! in ciel'. The opera concludes with sustained fortissimo of grinding chromatic scales from the contrabassi and a long diminuendo from the strings.

Very little of this elaborate operatic articulation appears to have emerged either in the printed libretto of 1875, or in the opera as performed in 1878. In its 1878 form the Scena Ultima has abandoned the static, rather decorous declamatory statements and accusations of the principal trio as represented by the Brescia edition, as well as the unfinished experimental melodrama indicated above, in favour of a whispered *concertato*, complex in structure, enshrining most of the Brescia text but arriving at the highly conventional quadro as represented by the vocal score.

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Only a very summary understanding of the manuscript changes proposed by Petrella can be determined from these various manuscripts, their confusion demonstrates only too graphically an indecision that was never to be resolved. Neither the published libretto, not the published vocal score and not even the late autograph manuscript supplies any real guide to the opera's ultimate musical guise. As far as both the Roman version and the Brescia version are concerned it was not a regal but an editorial dismissal "*Ambi al ceppo*" that prevailed as the opera emerged posthumously at the Teatro Alfieri, both the initial versions had been subject to musical decapitation. Equally clearly, it was not an edition made wholly by the composer. There is a real loss here. It is the letter written to Giudici e Strada from Albano on 12 September 1872¹⁶ that most clearly explains Petrella's attitude to this opera:

Ai Signori Giudici e Strada

Ho ricevuto la vostra gradita.

Voi mi accusate che io vi ho abbandonati, mentre ciò dovrei dirlo io, che mai mi date vostre nuove. Per altro potere star più che sicuri che io sarò sempre uguale con voi, ed avrò sempre il medesimo affetto.

Sono più di voi dolente do non veder girare la Celinda, e la Caterina Howard! Ma io lo attribuisco alle circostanze e alle

¹⁶ Werr op cit letter 65, 226

combinazioni. Per parte mia non manco nelle occasione farle prevalere tanto perchè sono due opere che non meritano stare ne'scaffali ed il 2° perchè comprenderete ci ho anche dell'interesse.

Speriamo almeno per l'avvenire. Anche voi non mancate di cooperarvi efficacemente. Forse ci vedremo per pochi giorni in questo carnevale. Intanto volermi bene e vivete sicuri sull'amicizia del vostro amico per la vita.

Errico Petrella

The composer never misses an opportunity in his letters to stress the value he attributed to *Caterina Howard*. "*Son persuaso che non darete certamente ad un teatro di second'ordine una Caterina Howard! Quest'opera ha bisogno ora un bel successo su scene cospicue e importanti, e con buoni artisti*" (letter of 13 November 1870).

All that is clear is that this overlooked but factually important opera in Petrella's compositional orbit must be accounted incomplete - with a fate as truncated as that of its heroine.

Appendix

A resumé of the variants and changes represented in the manuscripts and printed material to be found in the Fondo Giudice e Strada at Piacenza

This Giudice e Strada cache consists of a 4 volume autograph manuscript of the full score of the entire opera in very large folio format dated 7 February 1866 (each volume of which is marked "Originale") and is indeed the original score of the first version [Roman] of the opera [A]. There is also a later autograph manuscript in full score of a revision of Act 4 with copious additional changes (also marked "Originale") which would seem to reflect those changes specifically made for Brescia, but this does not prove to be entirely the case [B]. This latter manuscript, however, bears witness to the most extraordinary struggle to reinvent the conclusion of the opera,

the text of which has all the appearance of both being unresolved and being supplied by the composer himselfⁱ.

The cache includes a printed vocal core (undated) of the opera (marked "Suggeritore"); a collection of vocal parts some of which have the names of the artists that used them at the Teatro Alfieri in 1878, and a score for banda. Associated is a copyist full score in 4 volumes of the entire opera in tentatively finalised guise [C]. Many of the parts supply evidence of cuts made during performance [Marietta Giunti made a huge cut in the concertato that ended the opera in 1878]. Of all the musical manuscripts at Piacenza only the Roman autograph is dated and the sequence of the projected changes are in every instance conjectural.

The principal changes to the opera after the successful début in Rome were made in 1868 for the staging at Brescia. They include, most notably, a new cabaletta finale for Caterina 'Non di lui che non vedeva'ⁱⁱ the first strophe of which she hurls at Enrico - the second strophe at Etelvoldo - with a two line sweetener address to her attendants. The genesis of this concluding music seems to have been painful in the extreme as is made clear by much of the Piacentino material. Almost all the additional music concerns the evolution of this climactic final scene which he was not alone in finding unsatisfactory.

Parte Quattro opened originally with the important *preghiera* for Caterina [A] with the text:

A te mi volgo ed umile
Gli altri decreti adoro

a somewhat "donizettian" moment it was present in both the Roman and Brescia versions of *Caterina Howard* but was omitted in the Torino edition; it is followed by a duetto with Etelvoldo, abbreviated at Brescia; but whereas Enrico was almost excluded in the Finale Ultima in Rome he makes a substantial appearance in the Brescia revision where he is both more aggressive and subject to considerable dismissal and contempt on the part of the lovers. Indeed, not one of the versions of this opera has a completely identical text for the very end of this score. The printed vocal score largely corresponds with the copyist score C and mostly with the autograph B, but not with the printed libretto of 1875. Amendments, it would seem, were made until the very last moment. It is the

autograph B that offers the greatest perspective of the changes Petrella had in mind for his final realisation of this opera: there a new and more forceful instrumentation; the cabaletta for Caterina - originally conceived for Brescia - now begins with the words 'Non di lui, che non credeasi' (two words compacted?) introducing a finale that ends with the words of Etelvoldo 'Caterina - La rivedremo in ciel' unlike the printed libretto of 1875 which ends with a unison cry from Caterina and Etelvoldo 'Insieme in cielo/ Te il rimorso punirà'.

If it is the Brescia changes that supplied the model for the final realisation of *Caterina Howard* they have been considerably modified in the subsequent decade. In general it is the role of Enrico that is highlighted in the last texts. It has been subject to a species of dramatic indecision. In the original conception of the opera Enrico is simply naive, not much more indignant at the behaviour of his erstwhile friend Etelvoldo. Mid-term he becomes virulent and aggressive - directing his fury at Etelvoldo of course but especially at the shameless lack of repentance of his queen.

In the 1878 form of the opera Atto Quarto began with a shortened Preludio [the Andante Mosso cut]. Opening with the Allegro agitato; there is no preghiera, the Scena e recit with Cramner (sic) and Kennedi (sic) remains, then follows the Scena e duetto 'Invan tornasti a pascere' with a cut after 'pregherò' (last two bars of p214) so that the stretta of the duet leads without a break into the Scena e Finale IV (p216) Enrico 'Che veggo!...Iniqui...' in which Enrico reveals his true colours of tyranny

The very elaborate Tempo di Marcia Lugubre with its rolls of Tamburri and farfares is as elaborately outlined in the autograph B (the NB of p219 has been written by the composer at the foot of the autograph) and the ensuing duetto and trio con coro remains as printed in the vocal score, with Caterina's 'Non di lui, che non credea' at its heart leading to a concertato except that in performance there was a big cut (pp234-239). The opera resumes with Enrico's 'Ambo al ceppo' 'al ceppo' Followed by Caterina's 'La nel cielo' as printed in the vocal score and with Etelvoldo's 'Caterina! La rivedremo in ciel' but ending on p241 (the final 2 pages 242-3 were cut)

The autograph B offers a far more sophisticated musical sequence, in this ultimate section Cramner and Caterina's ladies plead for the lives of the lovers, Etelvoldo and Caterina cry in unison that Enrico will be punished by remorse, Caterina throws herself in the arms of Etelvoldo 'Mio Etelvoldo - l'ultimo amplesso'

With a *terzettino* in 6/8 unison Cat/Etel 'Ah! dell'alma / casto amore / La! nel cielo esulterà / La! nel ciel' underpinned by a repeated 'Ite al ceppo / fra l'infamie / degno premio a voi darà / Si' with cries of 'Pietà' from Caterina's ancelle and 'quale ardir' sotto voce from the courtiers. The climax is marked by Caterina's violent cry 'Là nel cielo!' and Etelvoldo's 'Caterina! la rivedremo' under which Enrico repeats his 'al ceppo' 'al ceppo' and the donne, Cramner et al "Ah! in ciel'. The opera concluding with sustained fortissimo grinding chromatic scales from the contrabassi and a long string diminuendo.

Not much of this elaborate operatic articulation appears to have emerged either in the printed libretto of 1875, or the opera as performed in 1878.

In its 1878 form the *Scena ultima* has abandoned the static, rather decorous declamatory statements and accusations of the principal trio as represented by the Brescia edition, as well as the unfinished experimental melodrama indicated above, in favour of a low profile, almost whispered concertato, complex in structure, enshrining most of the Brescia text but arriving at the highly conventional *quadro* as represented in the vocal score.

ⁱ There are numerous etererographic flaws and misspellings due to haste

ⁱⁱ 'Son di lui di non credea

si crudel le leggi ha infrante' [in version C]

The variations in the word "credea" replacing "vedeva" are never in fact quite resolved