

The Dream of a Madman: Constructing the Male Opera Singer in Nineteenth- Century Britain

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My days among the Dead are past;
Around me I behold,
Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
The mighty minds of old:
My never-failing friends are they,
With whom I converse day by day.

Robert Southey

‘The Scholar’, *Poetical Works of Robert Southey* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847), p. 143

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ABSTRACT

In the nineteenth century, British men who sang continental opera found themselves in a uniquely problematic position. This is because opera had long been entangled in a web of negative ideas about music, performance, national identity, and gender. It was an art form that was seen as both foreign and effeminate – a profession for Italians, and not Englishmen.

Nevertheless, over the course of the long nineteenth century, a handful of British men succeeded in clawing their way onto the operatic stage and establishing successful careers. This study focuses on the four men who were most successful: John Braham (1777-1856), Henry Phillips (1801-1876), Sims Reeves (1821-1900), and Charles Santley (1834-1922). In order to succeed, these four men had to find methods through which they could present themselves to the public as respectable and professional British men.

This thesis will argue that they did this in four key ways: negotiating their place within networks, forging a relationship with the Navy, capitalising on the rapidly expanding celebrity industry, and writing autobiographies. Their efforts proved remarkably successful. Over the course of the century, the cumulative efforts of these men gradually wore down negative attitudes towards their profession in Britain. By 1907 Charles Santley had become the first ever singer to be knighted in Britain – a development that would scarcely have been conceivable a decade earlier.

Using a wide range of hitherto neglected sources, this thesis will demonstrate that Braham, Phillips, Reeves, and Santley were key cultural figures who were amongst the foremost celebrities of their age. It will argue

that an understanding of these singers and their unusual careers can unlock an important new perspective on nineteenth-century culture.

INTRODUCTION

In *Daniel Deronda*, George Eliot's novel of 1876, the eponymous protagonist is "stung to the quick" by the suggestion that he could become like the great Italian tenors Mario and Tamberlik.¹ He is so offended because an operatic career "was not thought of among possible destinations for the sons of English gentleman".² These sentiments are no mere fictional invention. Instead, they reflect an idea which was widely held in nineteenth-century Britain: that opera was a particularly unsuitable profession for an English man. This notion arose from a complex web of long-held assumptions which characterised opera as both dangerously foreign and feminine. As Eliot recognised, this was not an appropriate domain for an Englishman.

Opera is, of course, an art form that originated in Italy. Although other countries had established their own distinctive operatic traditions by the nineteenth century, Italian singers remained the art form's most eminent exponents.³ Despite opera's popularity with British audiences, its foreign associations had historically inspired suspicion. This had much to do with both a perceived link to sexual deviance, and the way in which opera blurred and breached normative gender roles. Operatic practice had long embraced cross-dressing, most notably in travesti roles.⁴ The ultimate symbols of operatic gender bending, though, were the celebrated castrati of

¹ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2003), 140. This quotation refers to the celebrated Italian tenors Giovanni Matteo De Candia (known as Mario, 1810-1883) and Enrico Tamberlik (1820-1889).

² Eliot, 140.

³ Deborah Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians, 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 13; John Rosselli, *Singers of Italian Opera: The History of a Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3.

⁴ Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

the eighteenth century. They had caused some to blame the Italian opera for an alleged rise in the practice of sodomy in Britain – one infamous pamphlet imagined that the influence of depraved Catholic sexuality was spreading from Italy to England through the medium of opera, infecting English men with effeminacy.⁵ This link between opera and Catholicism was also problematic for a staunchly Protestant country, particularly as Catholicism was linked to effeminacy.⁶ The castrati cast a long shadow, and were still viewed as dangerous and emasculating figures in nineteenth-century Britain.⁷ A general moral suspicion about theatrical lifestyles also meant that opera was tainted in a way that other sorts of music were not. Furthermore, the historic idea that performance was linked with prostitution added yet another complicating layer to the identity of those who performed opera.⁸ In addition to these explicit links between opera and problematic sexualities, music was also seen as a feminine art form.⁹ The emotive, melodramatic nature of opera fell far short of conforming to nineteenth-century notions of

⁵ For further reading, see: Anon., *Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy in England* (London: A. Dodd and E. Nutt, 1728).

⁶ Corissa Gould, 'Aspiring to Manliness: Edward Elgar and the Pressures of Hegemonic Masculinity', in *Masculinity and Western Musical Practice*, ed. Ian Biddle and Kirsten Gibson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 161–81; Byron Adams, 'Elgar's Later Oratorios: Roman Catholicism, Decadence and the Wagnerian Dialectic of Shame and Grace', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, ed. Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81–105; David Alderson, *Mansex Fine: Religion, Manliness and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 5, 15.

⁷ J. Q. Davies, "'Veluti in Speculum": The Twilight of the Castrato', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 3 (November 2005): 271–301.

⁸ Gilli Bush-Bailey, 'Revolution, Legislation and Autonomy', in *The Cambridge Companion to The Actress*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15–32.

⁹ For further reading, see: Gould, 'Aspiring to Manliness'; Benjamin Walton, 'Rara Avis or Fozy Turnip: Rossini as Celebrity in 1820s London', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 81–102; Annemarie McAllister, *John Bull's Italian Snakes and Ladders: English Attitudes to Italy in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007); Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*; Derek B. Scott, 'The Sexual Politics of Victorian Musical Aesthetics', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 119, no. 1 (1994): 91–114.

‘manliness’, which were increasingly characterised by restraint and repression of emotion.

This network of overlapping assumptions about gender, sexuality, and national identity made opera a uniquely problematic profession for an English gentleman to choose, because it was seen as neither English nor gentlemanly, as George Eliot’s protagonist recognised. As Deborah Rohr has argued, these ideas about music “automatically put male practitioners of the art on the defensive about their masculinity, their morality and respectability, and even their Britishness.”¹⁰ This is why one writer described the operatic ambitions of a Victorian English tenor as “the dream of a madman”.¹¹ It is precisely because of this problematic status that British male opera singers of the nineteenth century are so interesting. While plenty of British men performed exclusively in English ballad opera, very few pursued careers in continental opera. In order to succeed in this profession, an English man would have to successfully negotiate prejudices and assumptions about opera and performance, as well as competing with the Italian singers who dominated the industry. This was no easy feat. Nevertheless, over the course of the long nineteenth century, a handful of men succeeded in clawing their way onto the operatic stage and establishing successful careers. This study focuses on a small group of English men who achieved this, and asks the central questions: how did these men construct their public identities in a way which negotiated the problematic nature of their profession? By which means did they attempt to do this? How were

¹⁰ Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*, 20.

¹¹ Charles E. Pearce, *Sims Reeves: Fifty Years of Musical Life in England* (London: Stanley Paul & Co Ltd, 1924), 62.

these identities received? In what ways did widely-held ideas about opera and its singers affect this reception? And what place did these singers occupy within the broader cultural landscape of contemporary Britain?

In answering these questions, this study is interested in the ways in which singers interacted with nineteenth-century culture outside of the opera house. While a different approach might consider the ways in which singers presented themselves musically or dramatically on the stage, the present study will instead seek to place these men within broader cultural contexts, considering, for example, the ways in which they interacted with the worlds of literature, art, and celebrity culture. It will also consider their place within the wider social milieu of the period, as well as their association with specific historical moments such as the Napoleonic Wars. By considering the ‘performance’ of these men in such diverse arenas, this thesis will demonstrate that their unique professional status caused them to interact with these broader contexts in interesting and important ways. It will argue that, through these interactions, the singers in this study acquired a far-reaching cultural importance that scholars have so far failed to recognise. This approach will offer a lens through which we can examine the interaction between opera and nineteenth-century culture more broadly; an area which has, as we will see, been under examined.

This study focuses on four singers: John Braham (1777-1856), Henry Phillips (1801-1876), Sims Reeves (1821-1900), and Charles Santley (1834-1922).¹² The decision to profile this group of men is far from random.

¹² Braham’s birth date has been contested by scholars, none of whom have identified firm evidence for this. However, there is a letter from the Alliance Assurance Company used by

Though their careers spanned a period of more than a century, these men (all of whom enjoyed unusually long careers) were perceived as belonging to the same professional group. So unusual was their professional success that critics and commentators repeatedly imagined these four singers as forming a chain which stretched from the late eighteenth century into the early decades of the twentieth. As Chapter Two will demonstrate, each new singer was hailed as the successor to his elder colleague; an idea that singers themselves also endorsed. It is significant that the careers of these men correlate almost exactly with the era that historians have identified as ‘the long nineteenth century’; the distinct cultural period which stretched from the late Georgian age to the outbreak of the First World War.¹³ This thesis will also call upon a ‘supporting cast’ of other prominent singers in order to draw comparisons with its main protagonists. These are men whose careers do not correlate with the parameters of this study, including the tenors Michael Kelly (1762 – 1826) and Charles Incledon (1763 – 1826). The former was an Irish opera singer of the eighteenth century, whilst the latter only performed in British opera. The careers of these men can nevertheless be useful when considered as precedents or parallels to our four main singers, and will therefore be discussed where relevant. Although other less illustrious British men sang opera in the nineteenth century, none achieved a

Braham. This letter states that Braham himself was uncertain of his age, but predicted that his birthday was 20th March 1777. This study will use Braham’s own estimation, instead of those offered by other scholars. The letter was written to a Miss Middleton who was researching a biography of Braham in 1919: Alliance Assurance Company, ‘Letter to Miss Middleton’, 25 September 1919, DD/SH/46/15, Somerset Heritage Centre. The biography was never published.

¹³ The recognition and naming of this distinct historic period was pioneered by Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in his seminal trilogy which examines the period: Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875-1914* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987).

level of success comparable to that of the four central figures in this study. In newspapers and music journals you can often find the names of minor singers in cast lists and reviews, but more often than not these names prove impossible to trace further.

This idea of ‘trace’ is crucial. The four subjects of this study achieved such a level of fame that they have left a significant footprint in archives and libraries. This simply does not exist for other British male opera singers of the period. The footprint is formed of a wide range of multimedia sources including portraits, autobiographies, sheet music, press coverage, letters, diaries, and other ephemera. The decision to focus on the four singers in question was, therefore, influenced in part by the wide range of sources on offer – the vast majority of which were hitherto untouched by scholars. These sources are especially useful for the purposes of the present study, as so many were written by the singers themselves. This means that we are able to form a very detailed understanding of how these singers wished to present themselves. Although several opera singers of the nineteenth century wrote autobiographies, and the correspondence of various other singers has survived, the range of surviving sources written by the subjects of this study are particularly substantial. Most significant are the extensive collections relating to John Braham held at Somerset Heritage Centre (containing correspondence, diaries, business documents and other ephemera), and the equally important Charles Santley collections at

Liverpool Record Office (which contain correspondence, contracts, and a fascinating range of the singer's personal effects).¹⁴

Of equal importance are the number of literary works produced by our singers, who between them wrote twelve volumes: a significant body of literature. This includes several autobiographies; three of the singers in this study (Phillips, Reeves and Santley) wrote two volumes of autobiography apiece.¹⁵ The remaining singer (Braham) also produced a brief autobiography which formed the basis for his entry in Sainsbury's *Dictionary of Musicians*.¹⁶ Far from conforming to the conventions of musical or theatrical biography, these works are often surprising. Singers adopted unique and unusual literary methods in order to formulate particular identities for themselves. As Chapter Five will demonstrate, they turned to forms as diverse as gothic fiction and travel writing. Some singers also produced more unexpected types of publication, including a treatise on angling and a translated volume of religious meditations.¹⁷ The scope and strangeness of the works written by these men demands the scholarly

¹⁴ 'Collection of the Strachie Family of Sutton Court, Pensford', Somerset Heritage Centre, DD\SH. (The Braham material forms part of this larger collection.); 'Charles Santley Collection' (Liverpool Record Office), 920 SAN.

¹⁵ Henry Phillips, *Musical and Personal Recollections During Half a Century*, 2 vols (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1864); Sims Reeves, *Sims Reeves: His Life and Recollections* (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co, 1888); Sims Reeves, *My Jubilee: Or Fifty Years of Artistic Life* (London: The London Music Publishing Company, 1889); Charles Santley, *Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley* (New York and London: Macmillan & Co., 1892) (Note that this was originally published in the UK by Arnold. This study works from the American Macmillan edition, published in the same year.); Charles Santley, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1909).

¹⁶ Braham's original draft survives: John Braham, 'Short Biographical Sketch of John Braham' c 1824, THM/35/12, V&A Theatre Archives, London; Anon., *A Dictionary of Musicians from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time* (London: Sainsbury & Co, 1824), 111–13.

¹⁷ Henry Phillips, *The True Enjoyment of Angling* (London: William Pickering, 1843); Charles Santley, *Meditations for Each Day of the Month of June* (London: R. & T. Washbourne, 1910).

attention that they have so far failed to attract; the vast majority of these works have received none at all.

Scholarship has (as we will see below) greatly favoured the study of female singers over their male counterparts. Implicit in this trend is a suggestion that male singers are in some ways less interesting, less important, or less culturally significant than prima donnas. This thesis hopes to challenge this assumption, instead demonstrating that scholars have failed to recognise the historical, cultural, and social significance of male singers. The men who inhabit this study appeared on the front pages of newspapers, performed across four continents, and were amongst the most well-known men of their day. They were singers, of course, but they were also composers, managers, adventurers, artists, sportsmen, authors, translators, and teachers. They socialised and collaborated with other important historic figures and artists: to take the case of John Braham alone, he had a significant relationship with Lord Nelson, a friendship with King William IV, and collaborated with both Lord Byron and Charles Dickens. These men were not supporting characters, lurking in the wings; they had a starring role on the stage of nineteenth-century culture. Scholarship has so far failed to acknowledge this, and our understanding of nineteenth-century opera (and culture more broadly) cannot be complete without recognising their importance.

Cowgill and Poriss have argued that the study of singers whose careers predated recording technology is especially problematic, forcing scholars to face the “obstacle” of voices which have vanished, relying instead on (written) secondary sources that can offer only a poor approximation of a

singer's art.¹⁸ While the present study is not concerned with a singer's musical performance or vocal style, it adopts a different perspective from that described by Cowgill and Poriss. Rather than being preoccupied with a lack of recordings and putting secondary sources to the service of filling this gap, it instead interrogates these secondary sources on their own terms. Because many of these sources (autobiographies, letters, and diaries, for example) were written by the singers themselves, this methodology might paradoxically be seen as an alternative means of reconstructing a crucial element of a singer's art which has not been lost – not his musical performance, but his performance of self. In some ways this element of a singer's performance might even be considered more important than his performance of opera. This is because, unlike operatic performance, writing offered singers a means with which they could speak to their audience as themselves, in their own words. As this study will demonstrate, the way in which a singer communicated directly with his audience through these kinds of written sources could have just as much of an impact as his operatic performances – at times, even more. A singer's autobiography serialised in a popular newspaper could reach a far wider audience than that which filled an opera house, for example. This is not to say that these secondary sources written by singers will be accepted without question. They will be interrogated and evaluated in their appropriate contexts, rather than accepted at face value. As we will see in Chapter Five, autobiographies often contain omissions and untruths which reveal much about the image that a singer sought to construct for himself.

¹⁸ Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, 'Introduction', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xxix.

As this thesis is essentially a case study of four individuals who had atypically successful careers, it does not seek to extrapolate a broader narrative about male opera singers out of this. Others have worked on the changing status of singers over the course of the century, considering patterns such as the increasing professionalisation of singing as a career choice, the rise of the tenor, and the so-called ‘death of the opera singer’ in the late nineteenth century.¹⁹ This study will situate its four singers within such wider contexts, sometimes suggesting new perspectives on these contexts in the process. However, it does not offer a definitive assessment of the position of British opera singers of the period, as this would be especially difficult to achieve when examining a period of over a century. Furthermore, to do so would run the risk of forcing narratives out of evidence. Instead, it will consider the nuances and ambiguities of the four careers in question, whilst also comparing these critically in order to draw out similarities and analyse differences. It is also important to note that this thesis in no way intends to offer either definitive biographies of its singers or lists of their appearances. As each of the careers in question was so lengthy and the singers as a group performed across at least four continents, this would prove an arduous (if not impossible) undertaking. However, brief biographical sketches of each singer have been included as appendices. These contain details of family life and training, as well as key performances and life events. They are designed to give enough of an

¹⁹ Rosselli, *Singers*; Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*; David Kennerley, “‘Flippant Dolls’ and ‘Serious Artists’: Professional Female Singers in Britain, 1760-1850’ (University of Oxford, 2013); Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

overview of each singer's career to place the thesis into context, as well as helping to avoid repetition from chapter to chapter.

Opera studies as a discipline began to emerge in the 1990s. Nicholas Till has argued that its relatively late development can be attributed to opera's uncertain generic origins as an art form which combines music with drama, literature, and design.²⁰ This, Till explains, led to it being overlooked by both musicologists and theatre historians. Influenced by the New Musicology of the 1980s, opera studies sought to move away from a focus on the great composers and their scores, instead seeking to situate opera within its wider social, historical and artistic contexts. This broad focus was underlined by the emergence of the *Cambridge Opera Journal* in 1989, edited by Arthur Groos and Roger Parker. In an introduction to the first issue, the editors explicitly stated their intention to encourage the interdisciplinary study of opera.²¹ This new approach subsequently heralded a burgeoning body of work concerning singers, which might be imagined as a sub-discipline of opera studies. As Cowgill and Porris have noted, this is often referred to as 'prima donna studies' or 'diva studies', belying the gender bias of the field.²² Despite this bias, the field continues to produce a rich body of work on singers which is characterised by its interdisciplinarity. The work of John Rosselli has been a key influence; his seminal study *Singers of Italian Opera* analyses the history of the operatic

²⁰ Nicholas Till, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies*, ed. Nicholas Till (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

²¹ Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, 'Editorial', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 1 (March 1989): iii.

²² Cowgill and Porris, 'Introduction', xxxii.

profession, placing it within its social and cultural contexts.²³ Although this work does not focus solely on female singers in the way in which other works do, it nevertheless exhibits a predominant focus on female performers. It is notable, for example, that his chapter on male performers ('The Age of the Tenor') digresses from the topic suggested by the title, instead consisting largely of a discussion about Italian immigration and the exportation of Italian culture.²⁴ Nevertheless, this study contains valuable perspectives on the changing status of the operatic profession and social attitudes towards singers. It has therefore had a significant influence on later work, including the present study.

Aside from the work of Rosselli, there are two key texts which collectively form the cornerstone of 'prima donna studies'. First is Susan Rutherford's study *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930*.²⁵ Explicitly acknowledging the influence of Rosselli's sociological approach, Rutherford's work sets out to consider the social, cultural and economic position of the prima donna over a lengthy period.²⁶ Taking a feminist approach, she challenges the historically predominant notion of prima donnas as "decorative, naive creatures", instead arguing that they were hardworking businesswomen who wielded significant power in the opera house.²⁷ This influence, Rutherford argues, diminished over the course of the nineteenth century as a result of the increasing predominance of conductors and directors.²⁸ The second key

²³ Rosselli, *Singers*.

²⁴ Rosselli, 176–95.

²⁵ Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

²⁶ Rutherford, 2.

²⁷ Rutherford, 217.

²⁸ Rutherford, 179.

text is a collection edited by Hilary Poriss and Rachel Cowgill entitled *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*.²⁹ This interdisciplinary collection of essays examines the figure of the nineteenth-century prima donna from a wide range of cultural and historical perspectives. It includes case studies which variously consider operatic portraiture, fictional representations of singers, the reception of particular performances, the influence of recording technology, and the singer's construction of her own public identity. It is this work, with its broad interdisciplinary focus on the nineteenth century, which has most influenced the present study. This thesis aims to adopt and adapt the approaches found within this volume, turning the focus instead to the representation and reception of the male opera singer within nineteenth-century culture.

Other key works on prima donnas that have influenced this thesis include George Biddlecombe's work on Jenny Lind's public image, and Alexandra Wilson's work on the promotion of singers in early twentieth-century Britain.³⁰ Biddlecombe explores how Jenny Lind was transformed into a cultural icon through a range of multimedia tactics, but his approach differs from the present study as his focus is less on the singer's own agency and more on the ways in which the press mediated Lind's identity. Wilson's work is more closely linked to the current thesis, as it considers the representation of the prima donna within society, considering the ways in

²⁹ Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, eds., *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁰ George Biddlecombe, 'The Construction of a Cultural Icon: The Case of Jenny Lind', in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, ed. Peter Horton and Bennett Zon, vol. 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 45–61; Alexandra Wilson, 'Prima Donnas or Working Girls? Opera Singers and Female Role Models in Britain, 1900-1925', *Women's History Magazine* 55 (2007): 4–12.

which singers mediated their own identities; for example through autobiography and philanthropy.

Despite the pre-eminence of scholarship on female singers, work on their male counterparts is not non-existent. Key pieces of work exist in various guises, though comprehensive studies which focus solely on the male singer (in a manner comparable to that in which the two aforementioned key texts focus on female singers) simply do not exist. It is only relatively recently that operatic scholarship has turned its attention from the feminine to the masculine. This is a trend that is not confined to opera studies, or even musicology. As John Tosh notes in the introduction to his seminal work on nineteenth-century manliness, the study of historic masculinities was “inconceivable” to many as late as the 1990s.³¹ This is partly because decades of work on gender, largely confined to the study of women, had contributed to the false sense that masculinity was somehow monolithic. Furthermore, after an increased emphasis on feminist scholarship, it seemed to some potentially problematic to make the male once again the central focus of scholarly studies.³² However, work (including that of Tosh) has steadily sought to redress this balance, demonstrating that masculinity is as much of a social and cultural construct as femininity. Opera studies is beginning to recognise this wider scholarly turn. Most notably, Philip Purvis has attempted to address this gap with his recent volume *Masculinity in Opera*, the introduction of which notes that the study of gender in opera has

³¹ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 1.

³² Kate Whittaker, ‘Performing Masculinity/Masculinity in Performance’, in *Masculinity in Opera: Gender, History and New Musicology*, ed. Philip Purvis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.

“almost exclusively” turned towards the feminine.³³ He goes on to note that, while musicology has moved on from the gender-orientated work of the 1990s, these by now somewhat stale debates might be applied to the study of masculinities in order to produce a fresh perspective on opera.³⁴ The articles in Purvis’s volume demonstrate that this is true, offering a range of studies which concern both singers and representations of male characters within operas. The present study shares the aim of this volume in its intention to add a fresh perspective to ideas about gender which by now might be regarded as somewhat passé.

Turning from masculinity in opera studies to masculinity in the subfield of singer studies, the amount of existing scholarship is yet smaller. A notable exception is the significant body of work which concerns the castrato; a figure who, for obvious reasons, has long invited fascination. Scholarship devoted to this topic encompasses both broader histories and more interdisciplinary case studies; the former category is best exemplified by Patrick Barbier’s history of the castrati, and the latter by Daniel Hertz’s art historical study of Farinelli’s portraits.³⁵ Moving from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, the only work dealing with singers and masculinity is that of Karen Henson. She has considered the relationship between Verdi and the baritone Victor Maurel, also examining the career of tenor Jean de Reszke in the context of Wagnerian performance.³⁶ It is

³³ Philip Purvis, ‘Introduction’, in *Masculinity in Opera: Gender, History and New Musicology*, ed. Philip Purvis (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3.

³⁴ Purvis, 3.

³⁵ Patrick Barbier, *The World of the Castrati: The History of an Extraordinary Operatic Phenomenon* (London: Souvenir Press Ltd, 2010); Daniel Hertz, ‘Farinelli Revisited’, *Early Music* 18, no. 3 (August 1990): 430–43.

³⁶ Karen Henson, ‘Verdi, Victor Maurel and Fin-de-Siècle Operatic Performance’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19, no. 1 (March 2007): 59–84; Henson, *Opera Acts*, 122–53.

notable, however, that her work on both of these male singers concerns either their relationship with a composer or their mode of operatic performance; the broader cultural significance of these singers is not scrutinised.

In 2007, the *Cambridge Opera Journal* published an issue focusing on the male performer entitled: “The Divo and the Danseur: On the Nineteenth-Century Male Opera and Ballet Performer”. As this title suggests, the focus of this issue is on ballet dancers as well as opera singers; an unusual departure for a journal ostensibly devoted to opera studies. This is indicative of both a lack of scholars engaging with male opera singers and a belief that these singers are not sufficiently interesting to warrant an exclusive study. The way in which this issue’s introduction (written by Karen Henson) opens and concludes with an extended reflection on the balletic film *Billy Elliot* supports this interpretation.³⁷ Nevertheless, this introduction also addresses the way in which the study of the prima donna has dominated the field of singer studies, highlighting the by now almost clichéd depiction of “pained/transfigured sopranos” on the cover of various studies.³⁸ Henson goes on to lament “the tendency of opera studies to continue to gravitate towards women”, which has made much recent scholarship appear “oblivious to male operatic vocality, male bodies, divos.”³⁹ Aside from the work of Henson, work on male opera singers of the nineteenth century is scarce indeed. One exception is David Conway’s work on John Braham,

³⁷ Karen Henson, ‘Introduction: Divo Worship’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19, no. 1 (March 2007): 1–9.

³⁸ Henson, 3.

³⁹ Henson, 5.

which forms part of his wider study of Judaism and music.⁴⁰ In this, he explores Braham's life and career in a Jewish context, arguing that the tenor was the "most famous English Jew" of the period.⁴¹ Although Conway does offer a valuable assessment of Braham's broader cultural reception, he is concerned solely in aspects of this which relate to his Judaism. Looking ahead to the twentieth century, there is also a small body of work on prominent male singers of the recording era. Enrico Caruso is, unsurprisingly, the key figure here. This work varies in quality, and consists mainly of biographies and studies of his status as the first great recording artist.⁴² However, two notable studies have adopted a broader, more interdisciplinary approach: David Suisman's social historical study of Caruso's trial for sexual assault of 1906, and Alexandra Wilson's ongoing research into the tenor's book collection.⁴³

As there is such an absence of scholarship on male opera singers of the nineteenth century, this thesis draws upon a wide range of interdisciplinary work concerning alternative groups of artistic professionals. In this respect, work concerning the nineteenth-century actor has been particularly useful. This is because the actor had to negotiate a set of problems that were similar

⁴⁰ David Conway, 'John Braham - from Meshorror to Tenor', *Jewish Historical Studies* 41 (2007): 37–61; David Conway, *Jewry in Music: Entry to the Profession from the Enlightenment to Richard Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 78–91.

⁴¹ Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 85.

⁴² Andrew Farkas and Enrico Jr Caruso, *Enrico Caruso: My Father and My Family* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 2003); Howard Greenfeld, *Caruso: A Life* (London: Collins & Brown, 1991); Dorothy Caruso, *Enrico Caruso, His Life and Death* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945); Peter Martland, 'Caruso's First Recordings: Myth and Reality', *ARSC Journal* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 192–201; Barry R. Ashpole, 'Caruso on Records, a New Discography', *ARSC Journal* 34, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 33–47.

⁴³ David Suisman, 'Welcome to the Monkey House: Enrico Caruso and the First Celebrity Trial of the Twentieth Century', *The Believer* 2, no. 6 (June 2004): 15–20; Alexandra Wilson, 'Caruso's Books: Opera, Biography and Material Culture' (Conference Paper: Royal Musical Association Conference, Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, 2016).

to those of the singer, including widely-held prejudices about performers and their lifestyles, and careers that were financially precarious. Most useful have been Michael Baker's work on the rise of the actor in Victorian Britain, and Helen Margaret Walter's work on the actor's use of portraiture as a tool for self-representation in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁴ Similarly, work on both the figure of the author and the (visual) artist have provided useful models. The former category is best exemplified by Florian Schweizer's work on Dickens and authorship, and the latter by the various contributions to a special issue of *Visual Culture in Britain* entitled "Visualizing Identities: The Male Artist in Nineteenth-Century Britain".⁴⁵ These studies represent useful parallels, as they explore how other groups of creative men forged professional identities and negotiated their masculinity in nineteenth-century Britain. Most pertinent to the present thesis, however, is work which concerns the constructed identities of other musical men. Especially useful are studies of Elgar, which have considered how he constructed his public identity in a manner designed to combat the notions of effeminacy and foreignness which clung to music, and were applied to the composer especially sharply due to his Catholicism.⁴⁶

The wide range of sources discussed in this thesis (encompassing, for example, portraiture, novels and autobiographies) demand the provision of a

⁴⁴ Michael Baker, *The Rise of the Victorian Actor* (London: Croom Helm London, 1978); Helen Margaret Walter, 'Artist, Professional, Gentleman: The Actor's Offstage Portrait (1875-95)', *Visual Culture in Britain* 16, no. 3 (2015): 267-84.

⁴⁵ Florian Schweizer, 'Authorship and the Professional Writer', in *Charles Dickens in Context*, ed. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 117-24; Amelia Yeates, ed., 'Visualizing Identities: The Male Artist in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Visual Culture in Britain* 16, no. 2 (2015).

⁴⁶ Gould, 'Aspiring to Manliness'; Adams, 'Elgar's Later Oratorios'; Meirion Hughes, "'The Duc d'Elgar': Making a Composer Gentleman", in *Music and the Politics of Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 41-68.

broad range of scholarly contexts. In order to provide these, much interdisciplinary scholarship has been drawn upon. As the quote from *Daniel Deronda* which opens this thesis might suggest, there was an important relationship between music and literature in the nineteenth century. In recent years, scholars have focused increasingly on this synergy, though they have only started to scratch the surface of what remains a vast topic with much untapped potential. The work of Phyllis Welliver has explored the representation of female musicians in Victorian fiction, while a recent edited collection has sought to advance this burgeoning field of study further by presenting a range of case studies concerning the relationship between music and literature of the period.⁴⁷ Work on literature and opera is best exemplified by Cormac Newark's study *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust*, which deals with the representation of opera in a range of French novels by authors including Flaubert and Leroux.⁴⁸ Newark is interested in the ways in which these authors represent and interpret (or reinterpret) the experience of listening to opera, also exploring the role of opera as a plot device. We might, Newark ultimately suggests, view such novels as a form of reception. Although the present study shares his thesis, using novels as a way of accessing contemporary attitudes towards opera, its approach differs from that of Newark as it focuses specifically on singers.

Existing scholarship on opera and literature has so far failed to produce a comprehensive study of the role of the singer. However, work on the prima

⁴⁷ Phyllis Welliver, *The Woman Musician in Victorian Fiction: Representations of Music, Science and Gender in the Leisured Home* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Phyllis Welliver and Katharine Ellis, eds., *Words and Music in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

⁴⁸ Cormac Newark, *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

donna has touched on this topic in various important ways. Susan Rutherford's work considers fictional representations of the female singer in the work of authors including George Sand, George Eliot and Willa Cather.⁴⁹ More recently J. Q. Davies and Grace Kehler have written on the prima donna in the work of Gautier and George Moore respectively.⁵⁰ Existing work on the representation of male singers in fiction is far scarcer, though brief analyses can be located in scholarship on the castrati. A notable example is Naomi André's extended consideration of Balzac's 1830 novella *Sarrasine* and its author's representation of the eponymous castrato.⁵¹ Any substantial work on the male opera singer in nineteenth-century literature is yet to appear. Chapter One of the present study attempts to address this gap in scholarship, whilst building on the aforementioned work concerning literary representations of the prima donna and castrato. However, this chapter is concerned exclusively with the depiction of Italian singers in a representative selection of Victorian novels. It is therefore not conceived as an exhaustive analysis of this topic.

Other work more pertinent to the present study includes two articles that address the relationship between male opera singers and literary figures. These form useful precedents, as they attempt to situate their operatic subjects within a wider cultural milieu outside of the operatic arena. First is an article by Judith Harrington which examines James Joyce's interest in the

⁴⁹ Rutherford, *The Prima Donna*, 58–89.

⁵⁰ J. Q. Davies, 'Gautier's "Diva": The First French Uses of the Word', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 123–46; Grace Kehler, 'Artistic Experiment and the Reevaluation of the Prima Donna in George Moore's Evelyn Innes', in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 147–66.

⁵¹ André, *Voicing Gender*, 21–27.

tenor Giovanni Matteo Mario, who appears several times in the author's *Ulysses*.⁵² Even more relevant is the work of Joseph Slater, who has written on the literary relationships of John Braham, exploring his associations with figures such as Wordsworth, Thackeray and Byron.⁵³ These works, however, are primarily interested in how literature has been influenced by singers, instead of considering how the singers themselves might be thought of as literary figures. As previously discussed, the vast majority of texts written by the singers in this study have received no scholarly attention at all.

Moving from literature to art, Helen M. Greenwald has suggested in her recent work on operatic images that singers are the most “imaged” figures in the world of opera.⁵⁴ Despite this, scholarship on the remarkable range of operatic portraits that exist is relatively scarce. An important exception is the work of Roberta Montemorra Marvin, who has written about the portraits of prima donnas that often appeared in the *Illustrated London News*.⁵⁵ As Marvin notes in this article, there has been a real lack of scholarship engaging with operatic portraiture.⁵⁶ However, she goes on to claim that this is a result of the “relative dearth” of visual material relating to prima donnas who existed in an age before photography. This thesis seeks to challenge this assumption, demonstrating that an extraordinarily wide

⁵² Judith Harrington, ‘Mario: The Tenor of His Times’, *James Joyce Quarterly* 38, no. 1/2 (Fall 2000): 219–26.

⁵³ Joseph Slater, ‘A Literary Life of John Braham’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (December 1949): 475–89.

⁵⁴ Helen M. Greenwald, ‘Operatic Images’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 944.

⁵⁵ Roberta Montemorra Marvin, ‘Idealizing the Prima Donna in Mid-Victorian London’, in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21–41.

⁵⁶ Marvin, 21.

range of operatic portraits survive (including many which precede photography), and that these are key to unlocking our understanding of singers and their public image.

As this study deals often with ideas about both Britishness and masculinity, it draws upon broader work concerning these topics. In the former category, the work of Linda Colley has been most influential.⁵⁷ Colley argues that the Napoleonic Wars formed the context in which the concept of nineteenth-century Britishness was forged, contending that British identity was defined against the idea of the ‘other’: a Protestant, rational and masculine British identity formed in opposition to the French, who were imagined as Catholic, fickle and effeminate.⁵⁸ This mirrors the predicament of our four singers in a particularly useful way. There has been an increasing number of works on nineteenth-century masculinities in recent years, but (like many others) this study is especially indebted to the aforementioned work of John Tosh.⁵⁹ His analysis of changing notions of manliness in the nineteenth century has enabled a more nuanced understanding and contextualisation of singers’ self-representation. Other key texts on masculinity in this period include those of Joseph A. Kestner, Herbert Sussman and James Eli Adams.⁶⁰ More broadly, Judith Butler’s influential work on gender and performance (and

⁵⁷ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ Colley, 33–35, 252.

⁵⁹ Tosh, *Manliness*.

⁶⁰ Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in British Adventure Fiction, 1880-1915* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Joseph A. Kestner, *Masculinities in Victorian Painting* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995); Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Manhood* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

gender *as* performance) has additionally influenced the thinking of this thesis.⁶¹

Some clarity is needed on the use of the words ‘English’ and ‘British’. All of the singers in this study most often referred to themselves as English rather than British. However, they also self-identified as British at times – especially when performing internationally, which each of them did. The term English has therefore been used most frequently to describe these men, although this study places them in a British context – for example, drawing on extracts from the Scottish press and considering performances in Ireland. However, despite these slightly different resonances, these terms have also been deployed interchangeably for stylistic purposes.

When initially conceived, this thesis was going to be arranged in four chapters, each one dealing with a case study of a different singer. Ultimately, however, it proved far more effective to arrange this work into thematic chapters. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, on a stylistic level, it enables the avoidance of repetition when discussing scholarly and cultural contexts. Secondly (and most importantly), it provides far greater scope for drawing out patterns and comparing the careers of the singers in question. Although thematic chapters can clearly not be arranged by date, some effort has been made to fit each theme into best chronological order. For example, a chapter concerning singers and the sea (in which the bulk of interest is Georgian material) comes before a chapter on autobiography (in

⁶¹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 519–31; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Female Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

which the majority of sources are Victorian). As this begins to suggest, each chapter will not assess the entirety of the long nineteenth century; the chronological orientation of each chapter responds to the periods in which the theme in question was most pertinent and pervasive.

The first chapter will begin by setting out the problems faced by our four protagonists. In order to do this, it will first turn our attention to the figure of the Italian male singer, as he was the most typical exponent of opera in nineteenth-century Britain. Using a wide range of sources, including portraits and novels, it will assess the various stereotypical ways in which Italian singers were imagined: effeminate, sexually dangerous, villainous and comedic. This chapter will then move on to consider the ways in which these tropes were problematic for the British singers who performed opera, before examining the different methods that critics and audiences used to negotiate these issues. We will see that they drew careful distinctions between the different elements of our singers' repertoires, showering praise on the elements that were more safely 'British', whilst criticising or even erasing their associations with continental opera. Finally, we will see what tactics singers themselves employed in order to differentiate themselves from their Italian rivals.

Chapter Two will move on to consider the ways in which our singers participated in various networks. It will argue that they negotiated the negativity surrounding their membership of the operatic profession by becoming members of far less problematic groups. We will see that these groups fell into two categories. On one hand were formal membership organisations like the Freemasons and the Garrick Club, whilst on the other

were imagined communities of fellow artists. This chapter will demonstrate that singers cleverly negotiated their place within these networks in an attempt to raise their social status, lay claim to manliness, and forge a professional identity.

Chapter Three will focus on the crucial relationship that British singers forged with the sea. It will argue that singers of the nineteenth century repeatedly turned to the figure of the sailor in order to project a potent model of respectable British masculinity. It will begin by exploring the context of the Napoleonic Wars, in which John Braham thrived by performing music which tapped into the patriotic fervour of the age. It will then trace how subsequent singers adapted Braham's template, adopting models of maritime masculinity that were more pertinent to their own age – ending with Charles Santley's self-presentation as a sailor and explorer in the late-Victorian age of Empire. This chapter will demonstrate that the relationship between British opera singers and the sea was perhaps the most crucial component of their identity, and one that scholarship has so far failed to recognise.

The fourth chapter of this study will move on to a consideration of our four singers as celebrities. It will place these men into the context of contemporary celebrity culture, using a wide range of multimedia sources to demonstrate that they were amongst the foremost celebrities of their age. In doing so, the chapter will also argue that the unique position in which British singers found themselves meant that they were more invested and involved in the management of their public personas than other types of celebrity.

Finally, Chapter Five will assess the substantial body of literature produced by our singers. It will demonstrate that these men turned to autobiography with surprising frequency, as this medium offered them a unique opportunity to cultivate their identities, answer their critics, and forge a lasting legacy – something that was a particular concern for singers in an age before recording technology. However, we will also see that the literary efforts of these men extended far beyond life-writing, encompassing many other diverse genres. This chapter will argue that these varied publications cumulatively represent a significant and interconnected body of work which was used to forge a professional group identity.

These chapters, considering five key aspects of our singers' identities, will reveal how these four extraordinary men negotiated the difficult nature of their profession in order to make "the dream of a madman" become a reality.

CHAPTER ONE

“A Mongrel at Best”: Male Opera Singers and National Identity

In 1823, a critic writing in *John Bull* opined that: “an English singer Italianized is but a mongrel at best.”¹ Though it is perhaps not surprising to find such sentiments in a patriotic newspaper, this idea of Italian opera as a corrupting influence was often in evidence in nineteenth-century Britain. This chapter seeks to examine why continental opera was so imagined, focusing especially (like the critic in *John Bull*) on the ways in which these ideas about opera were problematic for male singers. In other words, whilst the subsequent chapters in this thesis will look at various ways in which British singers attempted to negotiate these problematic ideas about their profession, this first chapter will unpick what these problems were. What exactly did our critic mean by “Italianized”?

In order to answer this question, this chapter begins by turning our attention to the figure of the continental male opera singer. As we have seen, the operatic stage in Britain was dominated by singers from mainland Europe – most typically Italy. Due to their pre-eminence, it was these continental singers who most frequently found their way into contemporary discourse and popular culture. As the first half of this chapter will show, these men were imagined in a variety of stereotypical ways which were often contradictory and frequently problematic: sexually alluring yet effeminate, heroic yet villainous, servile yet ostentatious. Because these stereotypes were so widely associated with male singers of continental opera, they

¹ Anon., ‘Theatres’, *John Bull*, 24 November 1823, 374.

would also prove problematic for the minority of singers who were British, threatening to compromise their masculinity, their Britishness and their respectability. It is these ideas to which the critic of *John Bull* referred, and an exploration of them is vital if we are to fully understand the place of our four protagonists in nineteenth-century Britain. In order to explore these ideas, the first half of this chapter will draw upon a wide range of sources that relate to real-life singers. These include portraits, journalism and musical commentary. However, it will also focus at length on the fictional male opera singers who populate four key Victorian novels. As we will see, the singers depicted in these works provide much insight into the various ways in which male opera singers were imagined.

Having established the range of problems that were associated with male opera singers, the second half of this chapter will move on to consider the ways in which these problems were discussed and negotiated by contemporary audiences. More specifically, it will consider the ways in which these audiences negotiated conflicting urges to celebrate the victories of British singers, whilst also expressing distaste for their performances of non-British opera. We will see that they did this by distancing these native singers from their continental counterparts, and presenting their successes as British victories in an imagined battle with Italy. It will also explore the ways in which commentators drew careful distinctions between the palatable and unpalatable elements of British singers' repertoires, in some cases even erasing any associations with Italian opera from these singers' biographies.

Before considering attitudes toward Italian singers specifically, it is worth briefly surveying British attitudes to Italy and Italians more generally. Scholars have long discussed Britain's relationship with Italy over the course of the nineteenth century.² While all agree that this relationship was in a state of flux, opinions differ as to how this changed over time. Brand argues that "the fashionable interest in Italy was at its height" during the first forty years of the century.³ This was the period of Romanticism, when Italy was perhaps most associated with the Grand Tour and the Romantic poets who so famously patronised the country. After this period, Brand argues, a growing interest in Germany meant that the fashion for Italy was "at an end" by 1850.⁴ McAllister takes a different view, arguing that great British interest in the Italian struggle for liberation and the popularity of Italian subjects in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites are symptomatic of a vogue for Italy which endured to the end of the century.⁵

Despite this enduring interest in Italy, British attitudes towards Italians (and specifically Italian men) were complicated. Italians were imagined in a limited range of stereotypical ways, many of which were directly contradictory. Annemarie McAllister has examined this conflicting use of stereotypes. She explains that Italian men were variously depicted as:

cowards yet brave patriots, effeminate yet potent seducers, dirty peasants yet sophisticated artists, simple and childlike yet cunning and manipulative, morally bankrupt yet primally innocent, and

² C. P. Brand, *Italy and the English Romantics: The Italianate Fashion in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*.

³ Brand, *Italianate Fashion*, x.

⁴ Brand, x.

⁵ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 5–6.

inheritors of the glory of Rome and the Renaissance – yet incapable of ruling their own country.⁶

McAllister argues that this somewhat confused range of stereotypes stemmed from a conflicted British sense of self. If the construction of identity depends on the construction of an ‘other’, she explains, then the dizzying range of Italian stereotypes can be understood as reflecting an “ambivalence about the [British] self”.⁷ She also argues that historical novels and, notably, Italian opera, offered a complex “fund of powerful images” of Italian men that would potentially require containment within stereotypes.⁸

The various ways in which Italian singers were imagined converge largely with the range of stereotypical Italian men laid out by McAllister. The representation of Italian singers, however, was influenced by additional factors: their feminised musical profession, their status as hired entertainers, and the dangerously heightened emotions to which Italian singers were believed to be especially susceptible. All of these factors coloured the depiction of Italian singers in a way that did not apply to Italian male stereotypes more generally. The two most dominant stereotypes of the Italian opera singer in the nineteenth century were the sexually alluring singer and the effeminate singer. Paradoxically, singers were often presented as both of these things at once.

⁶ McAllister, 2.

⁷ McAllister, 2.

⁸ McAllister, 4.

Sexuality and Effeminacy

The idea of an opera as both a feminising and sexually dangerous influence had a long history. In the eighteenth century, Italian opera had been cited as one of the causes of the alleged rise in the practice of sodomy in Britain. In the pamphlet *Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy*, a chapter entitled ‘The Italian Opera’s [sic], and Corruption of the English stage and other Publick Diversions’ presents Italy as a land of sexual deviance.⁹ This chapter begins, “How famous, other rather, how infamous *Italy* has been in all ages, and still continues in the odious practice of *sodomy* needs no explanation.”¹⁰ The author ties this sexual deviance explicitly to Rome and the Catholic Church; the clergy of Rome, he argues, “have little else in their heads or mouths than *casto* and *culo*.”¹¹ This Catholic and Italian influence is imagined as invading Britain through the operatic stage. We are told, “since the introduction of ITALIAN OPERA’s [sic] here, our Men are grown insensibly more and more *Effeminate*; [...] they sit indolently and supine at an OPERA, and suffer their Souls to be sung away by the Voices of *Italian Syrenns*.”¹² The Italian voices of the operatic stage are imagined as seductive sirens, luring men into dangerous effeminacy. Revealingly, this emasculation is imagined as having a direct effect on the national identity of these men, and their ability to defend their Empires. The chapter continues:

’twas just the same in *Greece*, when they left their noble warlike
Moods, and ran into soft Compounds of *Chromatic Musick*; of this

⁹ Anon., *Plain Reasons*, 17–21.

¹⁰ Anon., 17.

¹¹ Anon., 17.

¹² Anon., 18.

the Philosopher complains, and to this attributes the Loss of so many Battles, and dwindling of the *Grecian Glory*. *Rome* likewise sank in Honour and Success, as it rose in *Luxury* and *Effeminacy*; they had Women Singers and Eunuchs from *Asia*, at a vast Price: which so softened their Youth, they quite lost the Spirit of Manhood, and with it their Empire.¹³

The music of ancient Greece and Rome is imagined as a feminising force which ultimately accounted for the fall of these great empires. It was widely understood that homosexuality was practised (and even institutionalised) in Ancient Greece and Rome, and the author links these ‘deviant’ sexual practices directly to music.¹⁴ These sentiments underline the way in which masculinity and nationality are two sides of the same coin; music (specifically opera) is credited here with the ability to corrupt both. While this pamphlet is, at times, almost hysterical in its hyperbole, it nevertheless demonstrates that suspicions about the corrupting force of opera in Britain were well established by the turn of the nineteenth century.

The infamous figure of the castrato, so popular in eighteenth-century Europe, also played a significant role in attitudes towards opera in Britain. Around him, ideas about opera, Italy, Catholicism, effeminacy and dangerous sexuality converged and congealed. By the turn of the nineteenth century the age of the great castrati was in its twilight years, but the castrated stars of the preceding century cast a long shadow. The last castrato to attain success and celebrity in Britain was Giovanni Battista Velluti, who

¹³ Anon., 18.

¹⁴ Wayne R. Dynes and Stephen Donaldson, eds., *Homosexuality in the Ancient World* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1992).

performed in London until the 1820s. In his work on the British reception of Velluti, J. Q. Davies has shown that the singer was seen as a dangerous, emasculating figure.¹⁵ He quotes a critic of 1825, who condemned Velluti as attacking “the manliness of our British national character.”¹⁶ As well as a feminising force, the castrato was also imagined as a distinctly Catholic figure. Although the castrati came to prominence on the operatic stages of Baroque Europe, the practice of castrating singers had originated in the Catholic Church.¹⁷ As the earlier quotation lambasting promiscuous Roman clergymen suggests, there was a long British tradition of viewing the Catholic Church as both sexually suspect and feminising.¹⁸ This sense endured into the early decades of the twentieth century, where it continued to be problematic for Catholic British musicians including Edward Elgar and (as we shall see in the next chapter) Charles Santley.¹⁹

It is clear why the castrato would be imagined as effeminate, but his status as sexual predator is somewhat paradoxical. Rosselli has argued that “the sexual lives of castrati were matter for gossip right through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Many were said to have affairs, homosexual or heterosexual.”²⁰ He goes on to describe how the castrati, being eunuchs, were “thought safe and hence available for sexual intrigue.”²¹ There were also high-profile cases which involved the sexual misadventures of the castrati. Most infamous was that of the castrato Tenducci, who eloped with

¹⁵ Davies, “Velluti in Speculum”, 286.

¹⁶ Davies, 286.

¹⁷ John Rosselli, ‘The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550-1850’, *Acta Musicologica* 60, no. 2 (August 1988): 147.

¹⁸ Alderson, *Mansex Fine*, 5, 15.

¹⁹ Gould, ‘Aspiring to Manliness’; Adams, ‘Elgar’s Later Oratorios’. For more on Catholicism, see Chapter Two.

²⁰ Rosselli, ‘Castrati’, 176.

²¹ Rosselli, 176.

his student; a fifteen-year-old English girl from an affluent family. Helen Berry has vividly described how this episode scandalised Britain in the 1760s.²² Such tales, heady concoctions of compromised masculinity and sexual intrigue, clung to the figure of the Italian opera singer in nineteenth-century Britain, even after the castrati fell from fashion and favour.

As many scholars have shown, the tenor replaced the castrato as a vocal type on the operatic stage.²³ André argues that: “the castrato’s influence in the nineteenth century extended beyond their mere presence as retired opera singers and curiosities of Roman church choirs”, going on to suggest that the legacy of their voices “haunted and shaped the development of opera singing into the nineteenth century.”²⁴ Rosselli similarly describes how a preference for dominant high voices depicting heroes and lovers evolved into the “newly masculine sexuality” of the tenor voice.²⁵ If the castrato handed over his place on the operatic stage to the tenor, then, it is easy to imagine that he also handed over elements of his public persona: the taints of effeminacy and sexual danger, both of which were tied specifically to Italy. These changes in operatic culture were of course reflected on British stages. In the eighteenth century, the castrato was the male opera singer who came to represent the elements of opera which were seen as problematic. As the castrato faded into obscurity in nineteenth-century Britain, we will see that his problematic image transmuted and came to apply more generally to male opera singers who were Italian.

²² Helen Berry, *The Castrato and His Wife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²³ André, *Voicing Gender*; Rosselli, *Singers*.

²⁴ André, *Voicing Gender*, 17.

²⁵ Rosselli, *Singers*, 177.

Sexuality and Effeminacy in Operatic Fiction

Conflicted (and conflicting) ideas about singers are reflected by the divos who populate nineteenth-century novels. These fictional singers are stereotypes brought to life. Operatic novels of the period therefore provide valuable insight into the place of the singer in contemporary British society. It is significant that male opera singers appear in a number of Victorian novels, including two particularly well-known examples: Ouida's *Moths* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent*.²⁶ Both of these works were contemporary bestsellers. Their wide popularity and dissemination means that they played a role in reflecting and shaping ideas about singers in the popular imagination. While it has been possible to locate literary representations of Italian and French opera singers, there is an apparent absence of British male opera singers in fiction of the period. The dearth of such characters reflects the unusual minority position that the British singer of opera found himself in. Therefore, whilst fiction cannot illuminate our understanding of the British male opera singer, its representation of his continental counterparts can reveal much about the place of singers in contemporary Britain more broadly.

Of particular interest are the novels of Catherine Maria Grey, in which male singers loom especially large. Though Grey was a prolific author of fiction, she remains something of a shadowy figure in the landscape of Victorian literature, as little of substance is known about her.²⁷ In a meticulous study

²⁶ Ouida, *Moths*, 3 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880); Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Trail of the Serpent* (London: Ward and Lock, 1861).

²⁷ The limited information we do have can be found in: Patrick Spedding, 'The Many Mrs. Greys: Confusion and Lies about Elizabeth Caroline Grey, Catherine Marie Grey, Maria

entitled ‘The Many Mrs. Greys’, Patrick Spedding demonstrates that there was a confusing web of female writers who shared the same surname in nineteenth-century Britain.²⁸ As many of their volumes were attributed merely to ‘Mrs. Grey’ or ‘By the Author of...’, the works of these women have become impossibly tangled. This process was aided by later biographers who failed to conduct sufficient research and even (in one case) fabricated information.²⁹ Due to this confusion, the two operatic novels written by Catherine Maria Grey have been incorrectly attributed in various library catalogues and reference books. However, Spedding’s work demonstrates that Catherine Maria Grey was indeed their author. These works are: *The Young Prima Donna: A Romance of the Opera* (1840) and *Aline: An Old Friend’s Story* (1848).³⁰ The latter volume was subsequently republished for both the British and American markets under the name *The Opera Singer’s Wife*.³¹ While reviews of these novels were apparently limited, it is clear that they were popular. *The Young Prima Donna* was printed in varying editions into the late 1870s, and even formed part of Routledge’s popular ‘Railway Library’ series, designed to provide cheap novels for travellers on Britain’s rapidly expanding rail network.³² Furthermore, a slew of Grey’s future works were advertised as being “By

Georgina Grey, and Others’, *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 104, no. 3 (September 2010): 335–37.

²⁸ Spedding, ‘Many Mrs. Greys’.

²⁹ Spedding, 325–28.

³⁰ Catherine Maria Grey, *The Young Prima Donna; or A Romance of the Opera*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley, 1840); Catherine Maria Grey, *Aline; or An Old Friend’s Story*, 3 vols (London: TC Newby, 1848).

³¹ Spedding, ‘Many Mrs. Greys’, 312; Catherine Maria Grey, *The Opera Singer’s Wife* (London: Ward, Lock & Co, 1885).

³² Mrs Grey, *The Young Prima Donna* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1877); Anon., ‘Railway Library’, *The Times*, 25 November 1854, 760.

the Author of *The Young Prima Donna*”, suggesting its popularity.³³ *Aline* also appears to have circulated widely; it was one of the books stocked by ‘H. and R. Morrow’s Circulating Library’ in Dublin, where it shared the shelves with the works of Thackeray, Bulwer-Lytton and Acton Bell (the pseudonym of Anne Brönte).³⁴ It is clear that these novels (and the fictional male opera singers who populated them) reached a substantial audience.

Grey’s *Aline* features an Italian tenor called Angelo who vividly embodies stereotypical ideas about male opera singers in Victorian Britain. The novel centres on the eponymous protagonist; a young aristocratic girl called Aline. She elopes with her music teacher, the famous Italian tenor Signor Angelo. This causes her family much shame and embarrassment. Aline then follows her husband on to the stage, becoming an opera singer herself. She eventually grows to regret her actions. Angelo eventually dies at a relatively young age, which can be read as Aline’s ‘punishment’ for transgression. The plot is highly reminiscent of the castrato Tenducci’s aforementioned elopement which scandalised eighteenth-century Britain, demonstrating the residual image that the eighteenth-century castrato imprinted on the nineteenth-century opera singer. Though Signor Angelo is not a castrato, he is described in a paradoxical manner which evokes this figure: he is both extremely effeminate and sexually alluring. Angelo, we are told, possesses an “effective contrast of black and white effeminate grace, or bandit-like fierceness, so charming to the eye of the fair sex.”³⁵ His heart, we are told, is

³³ See for example: Anon., ‘Mrs. Gray’s [Sic] New Novel’, *John Bull*, 5 June 1841, 268.

³⁴ Anon., ‘Circulating Library’, *Freeman’s Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, 13 July 1848, 1.

³⁵ Catherine Maria Grey, *Aline; or An Old Friend’s Story*, vol. 1 (London: TC Newby, 1848), 13.

“tender as a woman’s.”³⁶ Here we find the contrasting combinations of black and white, effeminacy and fierceness, united in the character of this opera singer. The handsomeness of Angelo is also remarked upon; the narrator tells us that “most Italians” are handsome.³⁷ This is reflective of a broader nineteenth-century tendency to view Italian men as sexually attractive, described by McAllister.³⁸ This physical beauty is seen as a threat to English ladies. Angelo is, for example, described as “the angel who is turning all the ladies’ heads”.³⁹ Again, the term ‘angel’ suggests an unusual middle ground between feminine innocence and male beauty. Angelo’s good looks are also presented as a threat to British men; a character remarks that “all our young men will be jealous of him.”⁴⁰ McAllister has discussed how the Queen Caroline trial of 1820 contributed to the image of “licentious and rakish Italians”, as the scandalous story of the Queen’s affair with her Italian servant coloured attitudes towards Italy.⁴¹ The Italian male star witness in Queen Caroline’s trial, McAllister explains, was especially “vilified” and his “superb mustachios” were seen as “the deliberately cultivated equipment of a seducer.”⁴² McAllister argues that the “sordid stories of stained bedsheets and naked dancing clung, by association, to those uttering them and the environment in which they were enacted.”⁴³ In other words, this trial seemed to validate the stereotype of Italians as a sexual threat. These ideas

³⁶ Grey, 1:94.

³⁷ Grey, 1:13.

³⁸ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 27–53.

³⁹ Grey, *Aline*, 1848, 1:58.

⁴⁰ Grey, 1:88.

⁴¹ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 31.

⁴² McAllister, 31–32.

⁴³ McAllister, 31.

are reflected in the character of Signor Angelo, whose dark looks are presented as dangerously alluring to British women.

In 1880, thirty-two years after the publication of *Aline*, another work of literature would both reflect and reinforce the stereotype of continental male opera singers as sexually alluring. This was best-selling novel *Moths* (1880), which featured as its hero a tenor called Corrèze.⁴⁴ This work proved immensely popular, selling so many copies that demand could not be met, and inspiring a raft of theatrical adaptations which toured the country for many years.⁴⁵ Though Corrèze is French, Ouida based this character on the celebrated Italian tenor Giovanni Matteo Mario (1810 – 1883), with whom she was passionately obsessed. This novel therefore represents both an insight into how a real-life singer was imagined, and an opportunity to analyse a fictional construction of an idealised singer. Both of these facets of the novel can inform our understanding of the way in which singers could be seen as objects of sexual desire. Ouida first became infatuated by the famous tenor after reading about him in continental publications and seeing his portrait.⁴⁶ She was excited by the announcement of his appearance at Covent Garden in 1871, and began concocting methods through which she

⁴⁴ Ouida, *Moths*, vol. 1, 3 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880); Ouida, *Moths*, vol. 2, 3 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880); Ouida, *Moths*, vol. 3, 3 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880).

⁴⁵ For an illuminating examination of these theatrical adaptations, see: Hayley Jayne Bradley, “‘A Hack as Harmful as He Is Brainless and, One, Moreover, Who Stabs Where He Steals.’” Ouida, the Victorian Adaptor and *Moths*’, in *Ouida and Victorian Popular Culture*, ed. Jane Jordan and Andrew King (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 73–90. It is worth pointing out that Ouida’s other works inspired five operas. As Andrew King has noted, these have been neglected by scholars: Andrew King, ‘Introduction’, in *Ouida and Victorian Popular Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 2 n.8. Ricordi purchased the copyright to *Two Little Wooden Shoes*. Puccini wished to adapt the opera, but this was eventually done by Mascagni: Andrew King, ‘Ouida 1839-1908: Quantities, Aesthetics, Politics’, in *Ouida and Victorian Popular Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 35.

⁴⁶ Eileen Bigland, *Ouida: The Passionate Victorian* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1950), 72.

could meet him. Though Mario was by now sixty-one years old to Ouida's thirty-two, she became convinced that he was destined to be her lover. Her biographers have suggested that it was Mario's Italianness that appealed to the author. Bigland, for instance, describes her distaste for English men as romantic partners: "How could she, indeed, even so much as think of any Englishman? – a horrid breed, the English, with their false and excessive sense of propriety which masked their native dishonesty"⁴⁷ In contrast, Mario was a passionate virtuoso and a fellow artist. Here we find the familiar stereotype of Italy as a land of art and passion – the opposite of a more austere and reserved Britain.

On the evening of 19th July 1871, Mario made his final appearance in Donizetti's *La Favorita*. Ouida was watching from a box, and as Mario took his final bow she threw an elaborate bouquet containing an ivory cigar case on to the stage. On a card she had handwritten a quotation from Dante, which translates as: "With indulgence – quoth the gods – let the earth hear for once the music of heaven – and they have touched the lips of – Mario."⁴⁸ She was devastated to have no response from the tenor. Straight after Mario's London appearances, Ouida fled to Italy in a move that biographers have suggested was a direct result of her failure to meet the singer. She eventually settled in Florence, and though it appears that she never saw Mario again, an "enormous portrait" of him hung over her desk for many years.⁴⁹ It was this portrait Ouida sat in front of as she turned Mario into Corrèze – a hero who is a thinly-veiled reconstruction of her beloved tenor.

⁴⁷ Bigland, 71.

⁴⁸ Bigland, 73.

⁴⁹ Bigland, 93, 123.

The story of Ouida's obsession with Mario demonstrates that the idea of singers as sexually alluring was not abstract – this is indeed how singers were seen by some. Most importantly, however, it demonstrates that fictional representations of opera singers did not exist in a vacuum. Instead, they were undoubtedly influenced by their authors' experiences of (and knowledge about) real-life singers.

Moths is a sharp social satire which presents a scathing assessment of the contemporary marriage market. It recounts the story of a pure and innocent young girl called Vere. Her mother, Lady Dolly, is a frivolous and mean-spirited woman who cares only for fashion and seducing wealthy men. Vere, who has been brought up by her grandmother in England, goes to visit Lady Dolly in France where she is shocked and disgusted by the immorality of her mother's circle. In France Vere meets the famous tenor Corrèze and the pair quickly fall in love. Lady Dolly, however, has other plans and forces Vere to marry a sadistic Russian aristocrat (Prince Zouroff) who abuses her sexually, mentally and physically. Vere soon works out that her husband has several mistresses, and when she threatens to reveal this he banishes her to a remote Polish estate. Corrèze makes several attempts to negotiate her return to society and protect her from malicious gossip, eventually entering into a duel with Zouroff. The singer is shot by the Russian, so Vere courageously travels to his bedside. Zouroff eventually lies in order to have his marriage to Vere annulled, and although (as a separated woman) she is now an outcast, she retires to the Alps with Corrèze, and they are happy together at

last. The novel's description of abuse and marital rape were shocking subject matter for a novel of 1880 – especially one written by a woman.⁵⁰

In the character of Corrèze we find the familiar union of the sexual and the effeminate. The tenor is a great lover; we are told he has “a hundred love affairs in every capital he enters.”⁵¹ This model of free sexuality is at odds with the contemporary masculine ideal in Victorian Britain where, as Herbert Sussman has suggested, manliness was often contingent on the control of sexual energy.⁵² The singer's sexuality is presented as a threat; Lady Dolly describes him as “the most dangerous man in the world” as “everybody is in love with him”, and later warns Vere that “an hour or two alone with a man like that ruins a girl's name for ever.”⁵³ The exact way in which Corrèze could pose a threat is also made explicit. We hear of women who have fallen victim to his charms, including a German Grand Duchess who “made herself conspicuous by her idolatry of [Corrèze]; so conspicuous that he had been requested to leave Germany.”⁵⁴ Other grand women attempt to seduce the tenor, and he keeps “love-letters and impudent avowals” from them locked in a cabinet at his home.⁵⁵ The narrator explains: “when his voice had captured Europe there was barely any folly, any madness, any delirium, any shame that women had not been ready to rush into for his sake, or for the mere sight of him and mere echo of his song.”⁵⁶ His immense sexual appeal is clearly linked to his performance of

⁵⁰ Jane Jordan, ‘Ouida: The Enigma of a Literary Identity’, *Princeton University Library Chronicle* 57 (Autumn 1995): 96.

⁵¹ Ouida, *Moths*, 1880, 1:122.

⁵² Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, 73.

⁵³ Ouida, *Moths*, 1880, 1:145, 320.

⁵⁴ Ouida, 1:257–58.

⁵⁵ Ouida, 1:130.

⁵⁶ Ouida, 1:133.

opera. Indeed, the identity of Corrèze is often conflated with the characters he portrays on stage. His “magic” eyes, for example, are described as “those eyes that were the eyes of Romeo and Faust.”⁵⁷ Despite this, the novel also hints at his effeminacy. This is suggested when we hear of his kind heart and charitable acts. In just one example, we are told of the great lengths he has gone to in order to support the family of a blind musician.⁵⁸ One benefactor of his kindness says: “he is an angel, that beautiful Corrèze.”⁵⁹ In *Moths*, then, a range of operatic stereotypes are evident.

Visual Codes: Darkness and Display

The opera singers who populate Victorian novels conform to a sort of visual code that was widely understood as denoting an Italian male: they are repeatedly described as having dark curls and distinctive facial hair. In just two typical examples, Grey’s Signor Angelo is described as the “whiskarandoed Italian” and Ouida’s Corrèze looks “line for line like the young Sebastian of Del Sarto” (a muscular figure with prominent dark curls).⁶⁰ Molly Harrison has explained that, in the early nineteenth century, curly hair was the favoured style of the fashionable dandies; the cultural descendants of the Italianate ‘Macaroni’ of the preceding century.⁶¹ Curly hair on a man, then, was suggestive of both frippery and Italy. A portrait of the real-life Italian tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini (1794-1854) is suggestive of this stereotypical Italian appearance [see Figure One]. It must be noted that these dark features were understood to denote all Italian men, and not

⁵⁷ Ouida, 1:86.

⁵⁸ Ouida, *Moths*, 1880, 2:123–27.

⁵⁹ Ouida, 2:127.

⁶⁰ Grey, *Aline*, 1848, 1:8.

⁶¹ Molly Harrison, *Hairstyles and Hairdressing* (Chester Springs: Dufour, 1968), 34.

just singers. However, there is an additional aspect to this stereotypical image of Italians that seems to apply specifically to singers and musical men: they were often described as wearing ostentatious jewellery and fine clothes. Such exotic and frivolous trappings are suggestive of both a feminine temperament and the idea of ‘display’ upon which their profession relied. Fashion historian Valerie Steele has explained that “vivid colours, luxurious fabrics, decoration and changeability” were associated with female fashion in this period, whilst the masculine idea was a “plain, dark, uniform three-piece suit”.⁶² The representation of continental male singers was often suggestive of the female model described by Steele. This is evident in the portrait of Rubini, who wears a heavily embellished costume. Though he is in character (as the royalist Arturo from Bellini’s *I Puritani*), other opera singers were imagined as dressing in a similar way, even when they were not on the stage.

In Grey’s first operatic novel, *The Young Prima Donna*, the villainous bass singer Signor Gabrielli has “black bushy locks, and enormous whiskers” and “hands, which although constantly begrimed with snuff, were covered with sparkling rings.”⁶³ In Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839) we find a remarkably similar visual code: Dickens describes “the dark complexioned men who wear large rings, and heavy watch-guards, and bushy whiskers, and who congregate under the opera colonnade, and the

⁶² Quoted in: Varda Burstyn, *The Rites of Men: Manhood, Politics and the Culture of Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 94.

⁶³ Catherine Maria Grey, *The Young Prima Donna; or A Romance of the Opera*, vol. 1 (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), 87.

box-office in the season”.⁶⁴ It is not clear if Dickens is referring to singers, audience members, or men who were involved in the music business in some other way, but these dark Italians are explicitly tied to the opera, which makes a link between opera and ostentation. Intriguingly, this is a stereotype that at least one British singer conformed to. The diarist Henry Crabb Robinson describes a coach ride he shared with Charles Incledon. He describes the Cornish tenor as having “Seven rings on his fingers, five seals on his watch-ribbon, and a gold snuff-box”.⁶⁵ He goes on to express his distaste for Incledon, finding him a vulgar and “dirty, low-lived fellow”.⁶⁶ Here we find a British singer criticised for the Italianate and effeminate trappings of his profession. This is especially interesting as, unlike the main protagonists of this study, Incledon only performed in English opera.

Visual representations of real-life singers often reflect stereotypical ideas about Italian singers. Many surviving portraits present the viewer with a combination of alluring male beauty and effeminacy. McAllister has drawn attention to portraits of male Italian opera singers that appeared in popular periodicals such as the *Illustrated London News*, arguing that such illustrations depicted Italian singers and dancers with “few, or revealing clothes”, which meant that their nationality became “linked” with “sexual availability or appetite” for a reader.⁶⁷ Such portraits do indeed belie a preoccupation with the bodies of these Italian singers, but while they evoke a sense of sexuality they equally depict effeminacy.

⁶⁴ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2014), 14. This was originally published in serial form by Chapman and Hall, 1838-1839.

⁶⁵ Henry Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1872), 179.

⁶⁶ Robinson, 179.

⁶⁷ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 38.

Just one example of this sort of representation is a group portrait of Italian Rubini, Donzelli and Lablache which appeared in fashionable periodical *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons* in 1836 [see Figure Two]. This ladies' magazine was, its headline declared, "Dedicated expressly to high life, fashionables and fashions, polite literature, fine arts, the opera, theatres, &c, &c."⁶⁸ By placing portraits of three Italian opera singers alongside images of continental fashions and society gossip, these singers themselves were turned into a fashionable and frivolous form of cultural capital.

The most striking aspect of these three portraits is the similarity of the men; they all have dark features and dark, curly hair. This homogeneity supports the idea that Italian singers were seen as stereotyped characters, all of whom shared similar features. It is telling that other portraits of these three men do not suggest such a similarity of appearance; in fact, quite the opposite is true. Both Rubini and Lablache stare coquettishly out at the viewer, and Rubini glances pensively upwards. The dark, bold and direct stares of these singers could be interpreted as sexually alluring, especially when the intended viewers were young females. It is also possible to detect a femininity in these depictions, though; each of the three singers has well-defined eyebrows, dark eyes and pouting lips, all typically feminine characteristics.

The attire of these singers also suggests ostentation; Rubini wears a fur collar, and there is delicate brocade on his jacket. Donzelli and Lablache

⁶⁸ Anon., 'People Who Sing', *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 February 1836, 1.

also have carefully arranged neck ties and collars, with precise detailing visible on their jackets. The way that these portraits are laid out on the page is reminiscent of an illustration in a natural history book, which might depict three slightly different specimens of the same bird, for example. This is emphasised by the way each singer is shown at a slightly different angle, and each portrait is numbered and labelled, as scientific specimens might be. This sense becomes even stronger when the portraits are seen in the context of other illustrations in this issue, which accompany a feature entitled 'Newest London and Paris Fashions'.⁶⁹ Figure Three replicates one of these fashion plates which is typical of the others in this issue (and indeed other issues) of the periodical. These illustrations consistently depict three women in differing dresses, each from a slightly different angle. The women are clearly laid out as specimens of fashionable dress, to be examined, lusted after and possibly purchased. The singers in Figure Two, it is clear, are laid out in a similar way; as exotic specimens who invite both curiosity and desire.

The World of Fashion very seldom included images of any men, with the vast majority of its visuals being fashion plates featuring women in elaborate dresses and hats. The men who were occasionally depicted tended to be either members of the royal family (such as Prince Albert) or actors and singers who were portrayed in action, on stage. In contrast, our trio of Italian singers are not shown in the midst of performance; instead, they are presented in a manner which is highly reminiscent of the aforementioned fashion plates. This suggests much about how Italian male singers were

⁶⁹ Anon., 'Newest London and Paris Fashions for February, 1836', *The World of Fashion and Continental Feuilletons*, 1 February 1836.

imagined: effeminate, exotic, luxurious, and alluring. This must, of course, be understood in the context of the broader relationship between fashion and the opera house. As Sumiao Li has argued, the Italian opera house was, in the early nineteenth century, a space where affluent society ladies could flaunt their fashionable attire.⁷⁰ It is clear that this association between opera and fashion also filtered through into representations of male singers.

Farcical Hirelings

Like the dresses in Figure Three, singers were also available for purchase. This aspect of their professional identity begins to suggest another way in which the continental opera singer was imagined in nineteenth-century Britain: a servile object of curiosity and display. This stereotype of Italian singers was demeaning; it cast them as hired entertainment, and bestowed upon them little of the prestige that was afforded to those who attended their fashionable performances. Their reliance on patrons also meant that these singers were unable to fulfil what Tosh has argued was a key component of nineteenth-century manliness: the ability to earn a living that was “free from any suggestion of servility or dependence on patronage”.⁷¹ As Jennifer Hall Witt’s work has demonstrated, opera was situated firmly in the domain of the upper classes in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain.⁷² Furthermore, it was predominantly the domain of aristocratic women, whose patronage was so influential in this period. This patronage manifested itself not just within the opera house, but in the private sphere beyond: aristocratic

⁷⁰ Sumiao Li, ‘Fashionable People, Fashionable Society: Fashion, Gender, and Print Culture 1821-1861’ (University of Michigan, 2008), 50.

⁷¹ Tosh, *Manliness*, 37.

⁷² Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880*, Becoming Modern (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007).

families favoured foreign musicians (German as well as Italian) for private performances and the fulfilment of teaching roles.⁷³ This had two effects on the image of opera singers: on the one hand they were seen as servile entertainers rather than autonomous artists, and on the other they were imagined as something of a fashionable frippery. As Hall-Witt demonstrates, opera's relationship with class evolved significantly in Britain over the course of the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ The growth of the middle classes and shifting ideas about gender all played a role in operatic audiences becoming less aristocratic and more democratic. Despite this, ideas about singers as both servile and fashionable curiosities endured to some extent across the nineteenth century, and were reflected in both literature and portraiture.

McAllister explores descriptions of female Italian opera singers Persiani and Grisi in the *Illustrated London News*, arguing that the juxtaposition of these descriptions with a report about Moroccan acrobats suggests that “both sets of foreigners are merely entertainers, remarkable for their mere physical achievement and thereby bracketed as creatures to be marvelled at.”⁷⁵ She goes on to argue that this juxtaposition “puts the opera house or the theatre on a continuum which ends with the zoo.”⁷⁶ Indeed, in popular culture opera singers are repeatedly presented in this way. In *Aline* the aristocratic Lord Mervyn expresses his disapproval of Italian singers; he compares “those gabbling Italian people” to “a set of parrots”, thus conflating opera singers

⁷³ Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*, 12–14.

⁷⁴ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*.

⁷⁵ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 118–19.

⁷⁶ McAllister, 119.

with pets that perform vocal tricks for the amusement of their owners.⁷⁷

Mervyn then goes on to make it clear that singers are hired entertainment, and should not presume any social standing:

It is a dreadful nuisance, this mania just now, for everything with an Italian name, that can sing. Every house in London one enters, is infested by Signor this, or Signora that [...] I do not mean to say that they should not sing – it is their trade, and they are fit for nothing else.⁷⁸

Lord Mervyn sees singers not as refined artists, but as band of hired entertainers who are no better than tradesmen. The idea of infestation, furthermore, suggests that they are not parrots but vermin. In a serialised story, printed in fashionable ladies journal *La Belle Assemblée* from 1811-1812, we find another version of this sentiment. A society lady, discussing the prospect of banning foreigners from Britain, exclaims, “What should we have children do without bears, monkeys, apes, Italian opera singers and dancers [...] They all contribute to make up the farce of life, and to shorten the tedium of a winter’s eve.”⁷⁹ This places Italian opera singers in the same category as zoo animals, again denoting the low status that many imagined they held as entertainers. The form of entertainment they offer is nothing which inspires respect or reverence; they are a “farce” for children. This is a sense that real-life subjects of this study had to contend with, as we will see later.

⁷⁷ Grey, *Aline*, 1848, 1:79.

⁷⁸ Grey, 1:79–80.

⁷⁹ Anon., ‘Hymanaea in Search of a Husband’, *La Belle Assemblée; Or, Bell’s Court and Fashionable Magazine*, 1 December 1811, 285.

The Greed of Singers

While male opera singers, then, were often depicted as servile performers, there was another side to this depiction. The popularity of these continental entertainers was often perceived as a very great threat to both British performers and British musical culture more generally. This attitude had its roots in the very real popularity of foreign musicians amongst wealthy British patrons; an issue which received much attention in musical discourse of the period. Deborah Rohr has explored this issue, demonstrating that the fear of foreign musical competition dated back to at least 1720, when the Italian Opera was founded in London.⁸⁰ This is when a number of Italian musicians affiliated with the opera began working in Britain as performers, composers and teachers of music. Rohr goes on to argue that the fear of competition from these (predominantly Italian) musicians intensified in the early nineteenth century, when competition for private patronage peaked: “In this atmosphere”, she says, “the resentment of British musicians was deepened further by the apparent advantages some foreign musicians enjoyed in obtaining aristocratic patronage. Each year during the 1820s, the musical press reported unprecedented gains by foreign musicians.”⁸¹ As Rohr recognises, these attitudes must be understood in a broader context of xenophobia and cultural anxieties about national identity, class and gender roles.⁸² These fears about foreign competition coloured the reception and representation of real-life singers, and also filtered through into other forms of popular culture.

⁸⁰ Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*, 13.

⁸¹ Rohr, 13–14.

⁸² Rohr, 14.

In the eighteenth century the actor and playwright George Alexander Stevens was famed for his satirical performance entitled *A Lecture on Heads*.⁸³ This work parodied the trend for physiognomy by presenting comedic descriptions of various different types of heads. These included, for example, the heads of a Quack Doctor, an Old Maid and a Learned Critic. This production was immensely popular throughout the eighteenth century and into the succeeding century, as multiple nineteenth-century editions of the text demonstrate. Many other actors performed parts of this text, sometimes adding their own material to that of Stevens. One such early nineteenth-century adaptation of *A Lecture on Heads* was delivered by the comedian Charles Lee Lewes. A version of Lewes' performance, printed in 1802, reveals additions to Stevens' original material made by a man called 'Mr. Pillon'.⁸⁴ In this adapted version a new character is added: 'An Opera Dancer, or Singer'. Lewes introduces this figure by asking: "Is it not a pity that foreigners should be admitted familiarity into the house of the great, while Englishmen, of real merit, shall be thrust from their doors with contempt?"⁸⁵ Here we find the accusation that foreign talent is compromising the fortunes of Englishmen. This idea is painted in surprisingly extreme terms. The dialogue imagines "an OPERA DANCER, or SINGER, maintained by us all in the luxury of extravagance."⁸⁶ Again, we find the suggestion that opera singers are synonymous with ostentation and frippery. We are then offered a glimpse of two new figures: "in the background" behind the singer, we are told there is "a maimed soldier and

⁸³ George Stevens, *Celebrated Lecture on Heads* (London: J. Pridden, 1766).

⁸⁴ George Alexander Stevens, *A Lecture on Heads, With Additions by Mr. Pilon, As Delivered by Charles E. Lewes* (London: T. Bensley, 1802).

⁸⁵ Stevens, 44.

⁸⁶ Stevens, 44–45.

sailor, who were asking alms, and thrown down by the insolence of the opera singer's chairmen; yet the sailor lost his arm with the gallant Captain Pierson, and the soldier left his leg on the plains of Minden."⁸⁷ These wounded British veterans (of the Seven Years War and American Revolutionary War respectively) are prime examples of heroic British masculinity. Such figures would be especially sympathetic to an audience of 1802, who were experiencing the immediate aftermath of the French Revolutionary Wars. These heroic characters therefore form a stark and pointed contrast to the ostentatious Italian opera singer. The singer's "chairmen", or his patrons, are accused of insolently ignoring the British heroes who are begging alms. This is clearly an attack on wealthy British families who patronise Italian singers; their actions, this sketch suggests, are having a detrimental impact on Britain and its military heroes. The fact that a soldier and sailor are presented as the antithesis of the Italian singer is telling; in Chapter Three we will see that British singers repeatedly forged associations with British sailors and soldiers in order to strengthen their claims to British masculinity. Lewes' presents Italian singers as a greedy and pretentious group; "these dear creatures condescend to come over here, to sing for us for the trifling sum of fifteen hundred or two thousand guineas yearly, in return for their condescension, we cannot do too much for them, and that is the reason why we do so little for our own people."⁸⁸ The greed of the Italians is, again, seen as detrimental to the British.

Although Stevens' *Lecture on Heads*, and Lewes' performance of it, was satirical and intended to produce comedic effect, the sentiments expressed in

⁸⁷ Stevens, 45.

⁸⁸ Stevens, 45.

the work suggest attitudes towards singers that were prevalent well into the nineteenth century. We find this same sentiment, for example, reflected in popular fiction. In *Aline* the narrator admits to “a true John Bull’s prejudice against foreigners and an especial grudge against that class who annually monopolize so large a portion of British wealth, interest and patronage, to the prejudice of national merit, industry and talent.”⁸⁹ These sentiments might usefully be compared to those of Sir Charles Santley, who stated in his autobiography of 1892: “I do not share the opinion of many that a foreigner has no right to come to England to take the “bread and butter” out of the mouth of the native. I do not believe any foreign artist has ever deprived me of an ounce of food.”⁹⁰ It is clear that ideas about foreign singers as a threat endured to the final decade of the nineteenth century and beyond, as Santley considered them worthy of comment. His (perhaps unexpected) perspective on this topic is especially interesting, as he deploys the stereotype in order to underscore his own status and professional confidence with the suggestion that he has no cause to fear foreign competition.

Villainous Singers

These ideas begin to suggest a final stereotypical incarnation of the Italian opera singer: that of the villain. McAllister has demonstrated that Italians were frequently figured as “dirty, disreputable and villainous” in nineteenth-century Britain.⁹¹ In operatic novels, this Italian villainy is often associated with opera and its singers. This is especially evident in Catherine Maria

⁸⁹ Grey, *Aline*, 1848, 1:5.

⁹⁰ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 182.

⁹¹ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 159–92.

Grey's first operatic novel, *The Young Prima Donna*, which relates the tale of a young English girl, Rosalie, whose father has died. Rosalie and her mother move to a genteel village where the aristocratic Belmont family take the young girl under their wing. Rosalie sings at one of the Belmonts' parties, where she attracts the interest of the sinister Italian Signor Gabrielli, a famous operatic bass. Gabrielli spots an opportunity to profit from the young Rosalie's talents and contrives to marry her mother, thus becoming Rosalie's stepfather. He then takes Rosalie to Italy, where he trains her as an opera singer before returning to Britain, where he forces her to make her operatic debut on the London stage. Rosalie is presented as an angelic young English girl, and her forced operatic career is presented in the direst terms, as a fate almost worse than death itself; an operatic career is her ruin. Indeed, her career is short lived; she dies only a short time after her debut, from a lung condition exacerbated by her singing. She nevertheless manages to resist the sins and temptations of the operatic stage, and is presented almost as an angel upon her death. This is due to the virtue she has demonstrated by rejecting the proposal of the Belmont's eldest son. Although Rosalie is in love with the young Lord, she sacrifices his love in order to save his reputation, as she realises it would be his ruin to marry an opera singer.

There are two male Italian opera singers in this novel, each typifying a different version of the operatic villain. Signor Gabrielli represents the dark and sinister villain, motivated by greed. A typical description of Gabrielli refers to him as a "dark-looking, odious foreigner" and we are told of his

“slyness”, “odious manners, and sinister countenance”.⁹² His villainy is repeatedly emphasised an overwrought manner: he is variously described as a “sordid ruffian”, an “avaricious Italian” and possessing “a countenance upon which revenge and hatred were most plainly depicted.”⁹³ His darkness is given an almost demonic quality; in a typical description the narrator describes the “dark countenance of the Italian, the malignity which constantly overspread his features [...] I could imagine that his passions might impel him to the perpetration of almost any crime, howsoever hideous.”⁹⁴ It is notable that Gabrielli (a villain) is the only fictional male opera singer who is a bass rather than a tenor. This is reflective of nineteenth-century operatic practice, in which heroic roles were typically given to tenors and villains were of lower voice types.⁹⁵

A second operatic villain can be found in this novel: the Italian tenor Arturo. He sings alongside Rosalie and is in love with her, although his feelings are not returned. This love is initially presented as passionate, yet pure. However, the unrequited nature of his love eventually drives Arturo to madness, and he attempts to murder an aristocratic dandy who he sees as a rival for Rosalie’s love. His move from lover to villain is motivated, therefore, by love rather than greed; an alternative model of operatic villainy. Again, these dark emotions are seen as typically Italian. Arturo’s passion for Rosalie is presented as natural for an Italian, and metaphors of Italian fire, heat and volcanoes are repeatedly invoked. He is, for example,

⁹² Grey, *Young Prima Donna*, 1840, 1:71; Grey, 1:36; Grey, 1:74.

⁹³ Grey, *Young Prima Donna*, 1840, 1:113.

⁹⁴ Grey, 1:171–72.

⁹⁵ Don Michael Randel and Don Michael Randel, ‘Opera’, in *The Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 468.

described as: “a fiery young man, whose blood flowed with the vehement warmth of his climate”.⁹⁶ Again, this contrasts with the contemporary British ideal of manly restraint. Arturo’s love distorts him, and turns him into a murderous villain: “His unfortunate love for Rosalie burnt, in his nature, with a fierce and unquenchable fire. All the softness which had mingled in his disposition seemed scorched and withered. Nothing appeared to be left but dark revenge, and torturing despair.”⁹⁷ Arturo is thus transformed into “a fiend of darkness” and a “blood-thirsty wretch, gasping for revenge”.⁹⁸ This villainy is described as dark and devilish: “His countenance was, absolutely, unearthly - every demoniac passion seemed painted upon it.”⁹⁹ Both Signor Gabrielli and Arturo, then, are stereotypical operatic villains; the former motivated by greed and the latter motivated by passion. In both cases this villainy is presented as fundamentally Italian, and imagined in terms of heat and darkness.

It might be tempting to view the characterisation of Gabrielli and Arturo as somewhat extreme. One could argue that they are overwrought villains designed to populate a melodramatic novel, rather than realistic reflections of contemporary attitudes towards male opera singers. However, the evidence suggests otherwise. A detailed review in *The Times* makes the exact opposite point, singling out the novel’s two singers as its most realistic characters.¹⁰⁰ The reviewer first spends much time discussing how the

⁹⁶ Grey, *Young Prima Donna*, 1840, 1:172.

⁹⁷ Catherine Maria Grey, *The Young Prima Donna; or A Romance of the Opera*, vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), 15.

⁹⁸ Catherine Maria Grey, *The Young Prima Donna; or A Romance of the Opera*, vol. 3 (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), 189–90.

⁹⁹ Grey, 3:87.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., ‘Mrs. Grey’s “Young Prima Donna”’, *The Times*, 12 August 1840, 6.

virtuous characters of the novel, including the protagonist Rosalie, appear somewhat unbelievable; they are: “virtuous to the extent of becoming no character at all” and “perhaps too good for nature”.¹⁰¹ The critic then continues:

If, in some of the characters, the authoress has indulged too much in the over-good, in some of the minor personages she has shown much skill. The despicable Italian, who is brutal to the Prima Donna before her success, and afterwards as cringing as a spaniel, a young Italian tenor singer, whose love consumes him, and urges him to frightful acts of desperation [...] are well and naturally drawn.¹⁰²

This suggests that the characterisation of these singers aligned neatly with widely-held notions about real-life male opera singers. It is also notable that this review echoes the novel’s horror at a young British girl being forced onto the operatic stage: it notes the “tortures and humiliations” of Rosalie, describing her strength for “moving uncontaminated through the unhealthy atmosphere” of the operatic world, and “preserving her dignity through every physical and moral evil”.¹⁰³ This novel, then, also reflected wider attitudes towards the operatic world, presenting it as a contaminated and dangerous sphere which was no place for a respectable Briton.

Another popular Victorian novel, Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Trail of the Serpent* (1860), is also suggestive of a link between opera singers and

¹⁰¹ Anon., 6.

¹⁰² Anon., 6.

¹⁰³ Anon., 6.

villainy.¹⁰⁴ Like *Moths*, this best-selling novel was subsequently adapted for the stage; a testament to its popularity.¹⁰⁵ In this sensation novel, filled with the genre's typical themes of murder, seduction and duplicity, we find a French operatic tenor called Gaston de Lancy. In this tale de Lancy falls victim to a villain, rather than being a villain himself. Nevertheless, Braddon's story is revealing of negative attitudes towards male opera singers; indeed, such attitudes are central to the plot. The story's villain (at this point going by the name Raymond de Marolles) visits the Italian Opera House in Paris, where he sees de Lancy in the role of Elvino in Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. He also notices a wealthy Spanish heiress called Valerie de Cevennes in the audience, and deduces that she is secretly married to the tenor. With the help of a mimic he recruits from the operatic chorus (notably, another fictional example of a duplicitous male opera singer), Raymond convinces de Cevennes that her husband has been unfaithful to her. She consequently decides to kill de Lancy by administering poison to him. The tenor succumbs to this poison while on stage, in the midst of his appearance as Gennaro in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*. Raymond de Marolles is now free to marry de Cevennes himself. Though all assume de Lancy is dead, it is later revealed that he in fact survived. He is eventually reunited with his wife, and de Marolles is exposed as a villain.

Despite de Lancy's status as victim rather than villain, a range of stereotypes about opera and its singers abound in this novel. Firstly, the tenor is described along familiar lines: he is dark and attractive, and typically

¹⁰⁴ This was first published in 1860 as *Three Times Dead; Or, The Secret of the Heath*. This original text was revised and republished as *The Trail of the Serpent* the following year: Braddon, *Trail of the Serpent*.

¹⁰⁵ Bradley, "A Hack as Harmful", 79.

described as a “southern beauty”.¹⁰⁶ He is also presented as ostentatious in his dress: phrases such as “elegantly-dressed young man” and “fashionable tenor” are used in quick succession.¹⁰⁷ We do not learn the singer’s name for some time, as the narrator refers to him only as ‘Elvino’, with de Lancy also repeatedly calling him “Monsieur Don Giovanni” in a sarcastic manner.¹⁰⁸ This suggests that the tenor’s identity is subsumed by the characters he plays on stage, having the effect of blurring drama with ‘real life’. The references to *Don Giovanni* are especially notable. Mozart’s opera is referred to several times by the narrator, though this is not one of the roles we see de Lancy perform on stage. When the villain covertly follows the tenor down a street, he hears the singer whistling ‘*Là ci darem la mano*’.¹⁰⁹ This duet, performed by Mozart’s promiscuous nobleman (and the character Zerlina) is somewhat ironic, as it places de Lancy unwittingly in the role of philanderer, foreshadowing the marital infidelity he is about to be framed for. The villain also uses the character of Don Giovanni to convince de Cevennes of her husband’s supposed infidelity; he tells her (a brunette): “No doubt Monsieur Don Giovanni admires blondes”.¹¹⁰ By conflating the personalities of Don Giovanni and de Lancy, de Marolles draws on negative stereotypes about opera and its singers in order to frame the tenor. The plot of this novel therefore hinges on the deployment of these stereotypes.

The use of *Lucrezia Borgia* in this story is also significant. As Andrew Mangham has argued, its plot and performance “gives Valerie [de

¹⁰⁶ Braddon, *Trail of the Serpent*, 135.

¹⁰⁷ Braddon, 110.

¹⁰⁸ Braddon, 98–99, 122, 135.

¹⁰⁹ Braddon, 110.

¹¹⁰ Braddon, 135.

Cevennes] both the inspiration and the occasion for murder.”¹¹¹ The singer’s poisoning takes place in parallel: as the character he is portraying dies on stage after being poisoned, so (we are made to believe) does the singer.¹¹² Therefore, in the same way in which character (Elvino/Don Giovanni/Gennaro) is blurred with singer (de Lancy), the plot of the opera is blurred with events that are happening in ‘real life’. With these blurrings, the opera house is imagined as a perilous place where dramatic stories might converge with reality and come to life. This fear is articulated explicitly by a member of Braddon’s operatic audience. The Marquis de Cevennes (Valerie’s uncle) laments the dangerous influence of operas like *Lucrezia*: “I don’t like these subjects [...] there is something to be said on the score of their evil tendency. They set a dangerous example”.¹¹³ The opera is presented as a natural site for duplicity, murder and intrigue. Indeed, this has been noted by Braddon scholars, who have recognised the “vital role” of the opera house as an ideal location for the sinister drama to unfold.¹¹⁴

It is worth noting that Ouida’s beloved Mario was perhaps the best known interpreter of the role of Gennaro in mid nineteenth-century Britain, having made his celebrated London debut in the role in 1839. A popular print of the tenor in character as Gennaro also circulated widely, as is evidenced by its survival in various collections.¹¹⁵ It is possible, then, that Braddon could

¹¹¹ Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 98.

¹¹² Mangham, 98.

¹¹³ Braddon, *Trail of the Serpent*, 146.

¹¹⁴ Beth Palmer, *Women’s Authorship and Editorship in Victorian Culture: Sensational Strategies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 53. See also: Mangham, *Violent Women*, 111.

¹¹⁵ This includes the National Portrait Gallery: Unknown artist | Giovanni Matteo de Candia (Mario) as Gennaro in *Lucrezia Borgia* | Chromolithograph | c. 1839 | 248 x 176 mm | NPG D42716

have had the template of this real-life singer in mind, much like Ouida would twenty years later. Further evidence for this interpretation might be found in the description of de Lancy's origins: "Of his origin, different stories are told. Some say he was originally a shoemaker, others the son of a prince."¹¹⁶ This is suggestive of Mario's own background, as he had been born into the Sardinian nobility.¹¹⁷ Due to his father's vehement disapproval of his operatic ambitions, he had adopted the stage name Mario to conceal his noble origins and protect his family from ridicule. A parallel can be drawn here with the uncertain social origins of de Lancy, and rumours of his noble lineage. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to imagine that Braddon's tenor would have been suggestive of Mario to her readers.

Generic allowances must be made when assessing the wider significance of this novel and what it reveals about attitudes towards opera. It is a Grand Guignolesque sensation novel which revels in its themes of death and deception. Beth Palmer has described it as a parody of stage melodramas; a dramatic genre familiar to Braddon who had herself worked as an actress.¹¹⁸ While it must therefore be recognised that this story is a sensational (and sensationalised) melodrama, the way in which it presents opera is nevertheless significant. This novel, by one of the period's best-selling authors, reflects a wide range of problematic ideas about opera. It reinforces a range of stereotypes about singers (swarthy, ostentatious, promiscuous, duplicitous) and suggests that the opera house (specifically the Italian opera house) was a potentially dangerous site. More broadly, this novel is also

¹¹⁶ Braddon, *Trail of the Serpent*, 108.

¹¹⁷ For more on Mario, see: Mrs Godfrey Pearse and Frank Hird, *The Romance of a Great Singer: A Memoir of Mario* (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1910).

¹¹⁸ Palmer, *Women's Authorship*, 53.

very operatically literate. It demonstrates Braddon's detailed knowledge of opera, and her confidence that readers would be familiar enough with the genre to understand her clever references to it. *The Trail of the Serpent*, then, is a prime example of the way in which ideas about opera and its singers seeped into the popular culture of the period.

Braddon uses her novel and its dashing tenor to explore gendered responses to opera and its male singers. In *Moths* Ouida puts objections about opera into the mouths of morally repugnant characters like Lady Dolly (who, as we have seen, repeatedly describes Corrèze as a threat) thus implicitly challenging their negative and hypocritical attitudes towards opera and its singers. Braddon employs a similar tactic, but instead of placing moral objections to opera into the mouths of objectionable characters, the vocal detractors of opera in her novel are all men. More specifically, it is male characters who express fears about the sexual allure of male opera singers. When convincing de Cevennes of her husband's infidelity, de Marolles accuses her: "Bah! madame, after all, you are only the fool of a chiselled profile, and a melodious voice. You are not the first of your sex so fooled – heaven forbid you should be the last!"¹¹⁹ Later, at the fateful performance of *Lucrezia*, Valerie's uncle discusses the potentially dangerous impact of the opera on women specifically: "Lurectia [sic] Borgia in black velvet avenging an insult, according to the rules of high art, and the music of Donizetti, is very charming, no doubt, but we don't want our wives and daughters to learn how they may poison us without fear of detection."¹²⁰ His

¹¹⁹ Braddon, *Trail of the Serpent*, 124.

¹²⁰ Braddon, 146.

(male) companion responds: “Entirely [...] The representation of such a hideous subject is a sin against beauty and innocence”.¹²¹

This begins to suggest the way in which gender could have an impact on the representation and reception of male opera singers. To what extent were negative perceptions of singer forged and fuelled by men, and did women perhaps experience male singers in a very different way? It is extremely difficult to tackle these questions, as so few candid female responses to male opera singers survive. The accounts that do survive are, for obvious reasons, unlikely to elaborate on the sexual feelings that male singers might have inspired. We are offered only allusions to such sentiments. Perhaps most famous is Queen Victoria’s assessment of Mario (“very handsome”), which she recorded in her diary after seeing him perform in *Lucrezia Borgia*.¹²² In this context, the operatic novels of female authors acquire greater importance, as they provide a glimpse into the gendered and sexual responses that singers might have inspired in their female audiences.

All of the authors discussed in this chapter describe female sexual responses to continental male opera singers. Grey’s Aline has a sensual response when she sees Angelo perform for the first time: “She was entranced! wrapped in an elysium of sound [...] Aline was all absorption, excitement flushing her cheek and kindling her eye.”¹²³ She is scolded by her mother when, on a number of occasions, the music spontaneously compels her to “rise and bend eagerly forward”, a “conspicuous” action which “turned not a few

¹²¹ Braddon, 146.

¹²² Queen Victoria, ‘Queen Victoria’s Diaries (Lord Esher’s Typescripts)’ 8 June 1839, 33–34, Royal Archive, <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org>.

¹²³ Grey, *Aline*, 1848, 1:56–57.

opera glasses in [her] direction”.¹²⁴ Aline’s response to Angelo is both physical and visceral. Braddon’s de Cevennes has a similarly sensual response to de Lancy’s performance: “one faint quiver, and then a firmer compression of [her] thin lips”.¹²⁵ When Ouida’s Vere first sees Corrèze, the famous singer, we are told “her eyes opened in a blaze of eager wonder, and the colour rose in her pale cheeks.”¹²⁶ On first hearing him sing, “[Vere’s] eyes dilated, she scarcely breathed, every fibre of her being, everything in her, body and soul, seemed to listen.”¹²⁷ When he stops singing, she draws “a great breathless cry”.¹²⁸ Again, this is an intensely physical (and even climactic) response to the singer.

In an article on eroticism in the works of Braddon and Ouida, Natalie Schroeder argues that these two authors utilise descriptions of sensuality and eroticism in order to rebel against the establishment and resist “conventionally prescribed social roles.”¹²⁹ She quotes Monica Fryckstedt, who describes the way in which sensation fiction is reflective of repressed Victorian women, who “perhaps entrapped in loveless marriages, dreamed about passionate lovers, capable of arousing their slumbering emotions.”¹³⁰ It seems significant that, in two of the best-selling novels by these two best-selling authors, male opera singers are both the inspiration for, and nexus of, female sexual desire. It is through these male singers (prime embodiments of Fryckstedt’s “passionate lovers”) that sexuality is explored and

¹²⁴ Grey, 1:57.

¹²⁵ Braddon, *Trail of the Serpent*, 109.

¹²⁶ Ouida, *Moths*, 1880, 1:55–56.

¹²⁷ Ouida, 1:71.

¹²⁸ Ouida, 1:72.

¹²⁹ Natalie Schroeder, ‘Feminine Sensationalism, Eroticism, and Self-Assertion: M. E. Braddon and Ouida’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 87.

¹³⁰ Quoted in: Schroeder, 87.

Schroeder's "conventionally prescribed roles" are challenged. Perhaps displacing these taboo female passions into the sphere of the Italian opera house and its male singers provided female authors with a relatively 'safe space' in which to explore female sexual desire. This is because, as we have seen, the opera had a long history of being associated with deviant and dangerous sexualities. Unpacking this issue fully reaches somewhat beyond the focus of the present study, but it is clear from the assessment of the novels in this chapter that male opera singers could be employed as powerful tools which enabled women to articulate aspects of female sexual desire – a desire which, as Schroeder notes, rebelled against prescriptive Victorian attitudes to womanhood. It is also worth noting that this was not necessarily an abstract, fictional response to singers. These women drew upon their own experiences of real-life singers in these novels, as we have seen with Grey's references to the Tenducci affair and the way in which Braddon's de Lancy is suggestive of Mario. Of course, we know for certain that Ouida's *Corrèze* was inspired by Mario, whom she described as "a singularly handsome man" who "possessed a magical seduction for women."¹³¹ These novels thus demonstrate the sexual feelings that real-life singers could inspire in their female audiences. Most crucially for the purposes of this study, however, they also demonstrate the ways in which nineteenth-century culture co-opted real-life singers in various significant ways.

Emphasising Britishness

This chapter has now laid out a range of problematic ways in which the Italian opera singer was seen and imagined in nineteenth-century Britain:

¹³¹ Ouida, 'O Beati Insipientes!', in *Views and Opinions* (London: Methuen, 1895), 74.

sexually alluring, effeminate, ostentatious, servile, greedy and villainous are the attributes most typically attached to this figure. As we have seen, manifestations of these characteristics are easily located in popular culture of the period. These stereotypical personality traits were often interlinked; for example, greediness led to villainy, as did sexual potency, as demonstrated respectively in the characters of Signor Gabrielli and Arturo. These singers' supposed traits came together to make them out as 'other' and different. This idea of continental singers as 'other' came to be a powerful tool for those who wished to make a clear distinction between British and Italian singers. When British singers achieved success on the operatic stage, it was the natural instinct of the British press to appropriate these singers as symbols of British artistic superiority over southern Europeans. This, though, left these British critics with a problem. How were they to negotiate the inconvenient fact that these new British heroes were performing opera, an Italian form of music which, as we have seen, carried problematic resonances in the nineteenth century? This problem is something which caused much anxiety amongst British audiences. These audiences therefore created a series of tropes and discourses which they employed to distance British singers from their Italian contemporaries, enabling them to praise these British singers at a safe distance from problematic associations with Italy. There were three main ways in which they did this. Firstly, southern European singers were presented as fundamentally 'other' to their British contemporaries. Secondly, critics repeatedly expressed a preference for British singers performing British music; careful boundaries were drawn around the sorts of music that it was

acceptable to sing, and problematic associations with Italian music were frequently written out of these singers' biographies. Finally, British singers were imagined as national heroes, and their successes on the stage were reported as nationalist victories in a battle against Italy for musical supremacy.

Italians and southern Europeans more generally were widely believed to be fundamentally different from northern Europeans during this period; this idea was persistent and can be found repeated in a wide range of nineteenth-century sources. Again and again we find the idea that the hot climate of southern Europe made Italians more liable to passion, sensuality and the sort of music that reflected these characteristics. Northern Europeans, in contrast, were seen as more restrained, 'scientific' and measured in their approach to music. The equation of northerners and southerners with certain characteristics can be found reflected in British fiction of the period. This has been noted by McAllister, who has shown that the warmth of the Italian climate was frequently adopted as "a metaphor for passion".¹³² These characteristics were also applied specifically to Italian singers in novels. In *Aline* we are told that the tenor Angelo is typical of "the souls of the children of the south" who "are quick and fiery – the passion is soon kindled therein."¹³³ Similarly, in *The Young Prima Donna* the tenor Arturo is described as "quick and violent in his feelings, like all Italians" and an Italian character tells the British narrator "you English, calm – even in your temperaments, can faintly estimate the fiery nature of one born under the

¹³² McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 37.

¹³³ Grey, *Aline*, 1848, 1:94.

scorching influence of an Italian sky!”¹³⁴ In both cases, this fiery passion translates into the profession of these men; the singing of passionate opera.

This idea of a deep-seated difference between northern and southern sensibilities also informed musical commentary during this period to a remarkable degree. In his work on the celebrity of Rossini in 1820’s London, Benjamin Walton has noted how the idea of a fundamental difference between northern and southern Europeans coloured the composer’s reception.¹³⁵ He quotes one reviewer who stated that “your Italian has a musical, your Englishman a political, constitution.”¹³⁶ Walton goes on to discuss how Rossini was compared to Haydn, arguing that Haydn was “portrayed as the opposite of a Rossinian archetype” as he was “German, and therefore ‘scientific’ in his composition”.¹³⁷ In contrast, he argues, Rossini was seen as “the stereotyped Italianate opposite to Haydn’s Germanic qualities.”¹³⁸ These ideas were also reflected in discourse surrounding particular singers. George Biddlecombe has noted this in his work on the British reception of Jenny Lind in 1847.¹³⁹ He explains that the ‘Swedish Nightingale’ was presented as the opposite of her Italian contemporary, Giulia Grisi. Whereas Lind was presented as a pure, chaste and Protestant northern European, Grisi was spoken about as a promiscuous, swarthy and Catholic southern European.¹⁴⁰ As Biddlecombe’s example makes clear, by comparing the northern European Lind to a southern

¹³⁴ Grey, *Young Prima Donna*, 1840, 1:135; Grey, *Young Prima Donna*, 1840, 3:18.

¹³⁵ Walton, ‘Rara Avis’.

¹³⁶ Walton, 86.

¹³⁷ Walton, 88.

¹³⁸ Walton, 88.

¹³⁹ Biddlecombe, ‘Construction of a Cultural Icon’.

¹⁴⁰ Biddlecombe, 51–52.

European ‘other’, Lind could be imagined as relatively safe and respectable. This is a tactic that was also employed to distance male British opera singers from their Italian rivals.

In contemporary discussions of singers we find the recurrent idea that British singers are biologically different from their Italian brothers. In his theatrical memoirs of 1846, William Robson proclaims that “the northern organ is not calculated to sing the strains of the south”, arguing that this fact accounts for the relative lack of British male opera singers.¹⁴¹ The British climate was also presented as being less conducive to the operatic voice than that of Italy. This idea is evident in an article in fashionable journal *La Belle Assemblée; or, Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*. In a discussion of British singers, the author argues that “It has indeed been often said, that the changeableness of the English climate must always operate against the human voice”.¹⁴² These two examples begin to suggest a further problem for British audiences who sought to distance British singers from Italians; the suggestion that Italy was somehow more conducive to the singing of opera implicitly concedes that Italians were superior to British singers. Critics and commentators combated this issue by drawing a clear distinction between the types of music sung by British singers, all of whom performed British opera and oratorio in addition to Italian opera. These critics repeatedly praised British singers for their talents in more ‘native’ music, but frequently attacked them for their Italian performances. This created a distance between British singers and their Italian rivals. The tactic

¹⁴¹ William Robson, *The Old Play-Goer* (London: Joseph, Masters, 1846), 212.

¹⁴² Anon., ‘Mrs Dickons’, *La Belle Assemblée; Or, Bell's Court and Fashionable Magazine*, 1 June 1812, 283.

employed by these commentators was reflective of broader attitudes towards operatic styles in contemporary Britain, which were particularly evident in the first half of the century. Michael Burden has described the “binary opposition” between continental and English opera:

To say that a greater part of the English audience was suspicious of continental opera is an understatement. They [...] treated opera with suspicion because it was ‘foreign’. To such an audience, a genre with spoken dialogue called ‘English Opera’ (as opposed to opera in English) was decidedly preferable.¹⁴³

These sentiments saturated discourse about British opera singers. In music journalism of the period we find constant references to the perceived difference between northern and southern European musical styles. Italian music is repeatedly presented as extravagant, over-wrought and uncouth. In contrast, the British or English style of music is imagined as refined, scientific and noble. In a letter to the musical journal *The Harmonicon* in 1827 a correspondent identified only as ‘Cantor’ discussed the differing Italian and English styles of singing. He argued:

As to whether the Italian or English style of singing is best adapted to the English stage, I think there can be no question. The good English style, founded on the Italian, when this latter was in a much purer stage than at present is more suited to our national theatres

¹⁴³ Michael Burden, ‘Opera in the London Theatres’, in *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre, 1730-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 205.

than the extravagant, frippery manner which now prevails in Italy, where music of all kinds is fast hastening to decay.¹⁴⁴

Although this anonymous correspondent acknowledges the debt that British singing owes to the Italian style, he clearly imagines the English style as an improved, elevated form of the original. His letter continues, arguing that the Italian style is symptomatic of a “love of novelty” rather than “judgement and better taste.”¹⁴⁵ Here we find the idea that the Italian style is extravagant and excessive, while the British style is more restrained and pure. In this imagining, the Italian style disrupts the purity of English music. This sentiment is strikingly similar to those espoused by *John Bull*, in the quotation that opens this chapter.¹⁴⁶ But what exactly did commentators mean by an ‘English’ or ‘British style’?

In his theatrical memoirs the commentator William Robson offers lengthy discussions on the nature of British music and how it differs from the Italian style.¹⁴⁷ Though Robson’s memoirs were published in 1846, they recount his memories and opinions of the London theatrical and musical world from around the turn of the nineteenth century up until his time of writing. His opinion is that music has seen a change over his lifetime; he argues that the great ‘English’ style has given way to an increasing Italian influence that he finds distasteful and damaging to national prospects. He begins by making clear what he means by ‘English’ music; he tells us, “The music prevalent at the time of which I am writing was principally what would now be called

¹⁴⁴ Cantor, ‘On Italian Singing as Adapted to the English Style’, *The Harmonicon*, 1827, 217.

¹⁴⁵ Cantor, 217.

¹⁴⁶ Anon., ‘Theatres’, 374.

¹⁴⁷ Robson, *Play-Goer*.

ballad music.”¹⁴⁸ He is looking back to a period in which, he argues, English ballad music was most prevalent and celebrated. Although, he says, it is also “true that we had a highly encouraged Italian Opera”, he argues that “singers of our national theatres were essentially English, and we had then a great quality of national feeling and taste to encourage them.”¹⁴⁹ Robson goes on to argue that this English ballad style is now compromised, “being so generally diffused.”¹⁵⁰ He advocates for a response to this problem, stating: “I boldly assert that the music which we, England, Ireland, and Scotland, possess within ourselves, is better worthy of our national cultivation than that which is now the rage.”¹⁵¹ Later in his discussion he draws a sharp distinction between the English and Italian styles. He says: “The character of English musical is perfectly national, and not to be mistaken – it is marine and pastoral – and every step it takes to approximate the Italians emasculates it [...] We are still a nation – and what are the Italians?”¹⁵² Robson imagines the Italian style as an emasculating force, diluting British sentiment and rendering it effeminate. Notably, he links this effeminacy to the political turmoil that Italy was experiencing in this period, drawing upon the familiar trope of opera as a threat to British stability.

Robson hinges his arguments on a discussion of two particular singers: Charles Incedon and John Braham. These two men were frequently and repeatedly deployed as pawns in arguments about the relative merits of British and Italian music in the first half of the nineteenth century. Charles

¹⁴⁸ Robson, 202.

¹⁴⁹ Robson, 202.

¹⁵⁰ Robson, 202.

¹⁵¹ Robson, 202–3.

¹⁵² Robson, 217.

Incedon was a tenor from Cornwall who had previously served in the Royal Navy. He sang British ballads (particularly sea songs), performed frequently in English operas, and made occasional appearances in oratorio. He performed no continental opera. This repertoire built him a reputation as a genuine English singer; a figure who represented pure and untarnished British music and feeling. This sense was much aided by his reputation as a brave British Tar, which will be explored in Chapter Three. John Braham shared a large amount of his repertoire with Incedon; he, too, sang British ballads and sea-songs, also performing in English opera and oratorio. Crucially, though, Braham also performed in many Italian operas. Furthermore, his Italian training and his early successes in Italy were widely reported.¹⁵³ This Italian influence meant that Braham was frequently seized upon by those who sought to argue against Italian music; and presented as a symbol of all that was wrong with continental opera.¹⁵⁴ The ways in which Robson imagines Incedon and Braham are typical.

Incedon, Robson rhapsodises, is a singer who is “superior to any our Britain has produced.”¹⁵⁵ He goes on, “I care not for fashion – I care not for the freaks of taste; I repeat that no English public singer has ever had so fine a voice, taken in all its qualities and powers, as that of Incedon [...] there never was a sound, so rich, so powerful, so sweet an English voice as Incedon’s.”¹⁵⁶ Braham, on the other hand, is described as Incedon’s opposite; Robson tells us, “No two singers could be more unlike; the voice

¹⁵³ Incedon, in fact, had the same Italian vocal coach as Braham: Veneziano Rauzzini.

¹⁵⁴ Braham’s Judaism was an additional factor that sometimes coloured his early reception. For a full examination of this topic, see Chapter Two.

¹⁵⁵ Robson, *Play-Goer*, 216.

¹⁵⁶ Robson, 216.

seemed to flow from Incledon as from a copious spring, whereas, with Mr. Braham it was brought up as if it were by a forcing pump, and with, apparently, unpleasant efforts.”¹⁵⁷ Incledon is imagined as possessing a natural, English, voice, while Braham’s is described as false and forced. In musical commentary of this period these two singers are frequently imagined in this way; Incledon was a representative of a pure, natural and British style, while Braham was seen as symbolic of the forced, overwrought Italian style. A consideration of Braham’s reception reveals the regularity with which such sentiments were expressed. In an especially explicit account, a review of 1802 informs its readers that,

The fact is, that those who prefer [...] the fascinating strains of English simplicity, will prefer Incledon; those who admire the most extraordinary efforts of the Italian school, in which very difficult passages are executed to the surprise of the audience, will be unbounded in their plaudits of Braham.¹⁵⁸

Despite the binary way in which these two singers are presented here, descriptions of Braham were seldom so clear cut. It is not true that critics painted him solely as a symbol of negative Italian influences. Indeed, there were also positive reviews of his performances in continental opera. Nevertheless, the urge to praise Braham’s rare success as an English opera singer and to appropriate him as a national hero was especially strong. Critics and commentators were, therefore, sometimes torn between praising Braham for his English music and castigating him for his Italian influence.

¹⁵⁷ Robson, 219.

¹⁵⁸ Anon., ‘Public Amusements’, *The Lady’s Monthly Museum*, 1 March 1802, 200.

These conflicting urges account for a trope that is repeatedly found in contemporary discussions of Braham; he is continually imagined as two singers, united in one body. By making a distinction between the types of music Braham sang and marking his Italian efforts as distasteful, it became comparatively 'safe' to praise the types of music he performed that were deemed to be 'British'.

Earl Mount-Edgumbe put this explicitly, claiming: "The fact is, Braham is two people".¹⁵⁹ This idea of Braham as a dual vocalist was remarkably persistent. The repeated suggestion is that Braham sometimes sang in an overly-florid and vulgar way, in order to appeal to certain 'lower' elements of his audience. This type of singing was seen as 'Italian', and much criticised. On the other hand, Braham was also reputed to have a more 'British' style, one that was often referred to as 'scientific' and associated mainly with his performance of religious music, like that of Handel. Handel was often presented as being the ideal music for Braham the British singer. Of course, although Handel was not British, there was a legacy of regarding him as an adopted 'British' composer. A miniature portrait of Braham from the mid-1830s shows him with the score of Handel's *Messiah*, attesting to his positive and popular association with this composer [see Figure Four].

The Reverend Julian Young (son and biographer of actor Charles Mayne Young) described Braham's two styles in a revealing assessment:

¹⁵⁹ Quoted in: John Mewburn Leven, *Six Sovereigns of Song* (London: Novello, 1900), 14.

Braham was not merely a scientific vocalist, he was a scientific musician. No man understood better, or more thoroughly appreciated in others, purity of style, yet no man oftener violated the canons of good taste by florid interpolations when singing before a miscellaneous audience. I have heard him sing the best sacred music at the house of a friend whom he knew to be refined and fastidious musicians and then his rendering of Handel had been glorious and worthy of his theme. I have heard him, at an oratorio at the theatre the very next night, sing the same air to a miscellaneous audience and so overlay the composition with florid interpolations as entirely to distract the listener's attention from the simplicity and solemnity of his theme.¹⁶⁰

Although Young does not use the word "Italian", this is undoubtedly his suggestion with the use of the word "florid"; this word was used persistently to describe the Italian style. Earl Mount-Edgcumbe offers just one example of this, when he describes Braham's "over-florid and frittered Italian manner".¹⁶¹ It is clear that issues of class are at play when Young continues: "a display of flexible vocalization always brought down thunder from the gods in the gallery", meaning that Braham "was tempted by the greed of clap-trap applause to sacrifice his own convictions of propriety to the demands of the vulgar and unenlightened."¹⁶² These comments are typical, as critics often divided Braham's repertoire into two distinct categories that straddled lines of class as well as taste. Hall-Witt has shown that the

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in: Levien, 14–15. Unfortunately no date is given for this quotation.

¹⁶¹ Earl of Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences of an Old Amateur for Fifty Years, from 1777-1823* (London: W. Clarke, 1824), 97.

¹⁶² Quoted in: Levien, *Six Sovereigns*, 15.

operatic audience underwent a steady change in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the middle classes taking up a growing portion of the seats in the pit and galleries.¹⁶³ These assessments of Braham's talents are clearly overlaid by an element of class anxiety, as they characterise this newer element of the audience as unrefined individuals whose tastes threaten to contaminate a purer, more refined style.

Braham himself appears to have acknowledged the duality in his musical style. A report in a contemporary newspaper offers an illuminating anecdote. After a private performance in which Braham adopted a simple style, he was asked why he sings in a different style for public audiences. He reportedly responded:

'If [...] I could have my own way, I would always sing as I have to-day, but it is impossible. The public are fond of boisterous passages and rapid execution, and would not be satisfied without them. If I were to sing in public the style which you have just heard everybody would say – Where is Braham? And if Braham lost his attraction, he would lose his engagements.'¹⁶⁴

This idea that Braham's more sensational, Italian style was calculated to gain commercial profit is also persistent. It links back to the stereotype of the Italian opera singer as a greedy character, motivated by profit. It is clear that critics drew distinctions between Braham's 'Italian' and 'British' styles in order to negotiate the problematic notion of a British singer performing Italian opera. They outlined exactly which parts of Braham's repertoire were

¹⁶³ Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*, 146–84.

¹⁶⁴ Anon., 'Untitled', 27 September 1809, n.p., DD/SH/168, Somerset Heritage Centre.

problematic, and supported this with the suggestion that the duality in his styles also represented a division of class. By clearly outlining exactly which parts of Braham's repertoire were problematic, audiences were free to imagine this regulated version of Braham as a British hero.

Heroes

On a stage dominated by Italians, it is not surprising that the relatively small number of British singers were hailed as home-grown heroes. By bestowing British singers with the qualities of national heroes, they were presented as fundamentally in opposition to their southern European counterparts. The victories of British singers on the Italian stage were reported as victories over the Italians, whom British singers heroically beat at their own game. John Braham's successes in Italian opera were repeatedly imagined as nationalist victories over Italy. This idea was typically reflected in anecdotes which involved Italians being forced to admit the superiority of Braham's talents. Many such stories can be found in biographies of the singer. Society chronicler Mrs Byrne records two such instances:

[A]t Florence, Tacchi-Nardi [...] who, till he heard Braham, had never recognised a rival, listened, entranced, to his first performance, and then exclaimed, enthusiastically – "There are now two tenors in this world; I and this Englishman." A similar story is told of David, who met him in Venice [...], and being asked his opinion as to who

was the greatest living tenor, he replied, with characteristic self-consciousness: “*Dopo di me, l’Inglese.*”¹⁶⁵

While these anecdotes may very well have been true, Byrne’s language hints that their truth is questionable; they are referred to as “stories”, and she acknowledges that they are “similar”. This begins to suggest that these anecdotes are careful constructs, designed above all to emphasise British musical superiority. Along similar lines is the claim found in an 1827 biography of Braham: “Foreign singers”, it claims, “pay his talents the highest compliments, by saying, “*Non c’è tenore in Italia come Braham.*”¹⁶⁶

Braham’s performances in Britain were also imagined as patriotic acts. An article of 1832 explains that though Braham “every year has received the most tempting proposals to return to Italy, he prefers his “*cara patria*”, endeared to him by every grateful tie that can bind the human heart.”¹⁶⁷ Here the British hero refuses the Italians begging him to return, instead bestowing his talents upon his fellow countrymen. Some went even further, using references to classical or mythological heroes when describing the tenor; an article of 1836 typically describes Braham as “an Athenian of old”¹⁶⁸ This instinct is especially evident in obituaries that were written on the tenor’s death in 1856. A typical example hails Braham as “the nestor of English

¹⁶⁵ Mrs William Pitt Byrne, *Gossip of the Century; Personal and Traditional Memories - Social, Literary, Artistic &c.*, vol. 2 (London: Ward and Downey, 1892), 10.

¹⁶⁶ Anon., *A Dictionary of Musicians from the Earliest Ages to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (London: Sainsbury & Co, 1824), 112.

¹⁶⁷ Anon., ‘Mr. Braham’, *The Morning Post*, 22 November 1831, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Anon., ‘People Who Sing’, 46.

song”, ascribing Braham an equivalence with the warrior-hero of ancient Greek mythology.¹⁶⁹

The urge to present the successes of British singers as national victories remained evident in the latter half of the century, though perhaps with a little less force and frequency. When British singers performed in Italy, their successes were still reported as British victories. This has been recognised by McAllister, who has discussed British reports of performances given in Rome by Sims Reeves and Irish soprano Catherine Hayes.¹⁷⁰ She suggests:

For an English singer to be so encored and applauded for her singing of an Italian opera, in Italy, was an event fraught with resonance. The magnitude of a triumph at Rome, in the enemy’s camp, so to speak, was perhaps a sign of future victories.¹⁷¹

1850 saw an especially unusual performance in London, as *Lucia di Lammermoor* was performed by two British singers: again, Reeves and Hayes. A reviewer in *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* suggested that if newcomer Hayes proved to be as successful as Reeves, this performance would represent “another refutation to the oft-repeated opinion, namely, that the natives of this country can never reach the same pitch of excellence that continental artists acquire.”¹⁷² *The Era* also imagined this rare event as a victory over foreign rivals, claiming it was a “triumph achieved by our

¹⁶⁹ Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 63.

¹⁷⁰ Though McAllister dates these performances to 1850, they in fact took place in 1846: Basil Walsh, *Catherine Hayes 1818-1861* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), 69–71.

¹⁷¹ McAllister, *Italian Snakes and Ladders*, 110.

¹⁷² Anon., ‘The Forthcoming Easter Entertainments’, *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, 31 March 1850, 10.

native vocalists.”¹⁷³ Charles Santley’s successes in Italian opera were reported along similar lines. In a review of his 1862 performance of *Il Trovatore*, his “thorough mastery” of Italian was noted, suggesting British dominance of the Italian style.¹⁷⁴

The obituaries of British singers evidence a further tactic which was employed in order to distance these men from problematic associations with ‘foreign’ music. These obituaries memorialise singers in a way that removes Italian opera from their biographies. Their continental associations are effectively ‘written out’ of their life stories while their association with British music is emphasised. This happens consistently in obituaries of Braham. A typical example in *The Lady’s Newspaper* states that Braham “will long live in the memory of Englishmen as the greatest of English singers. It was John Braham who, beyond any other man, excited in this country knowledge and love of the highest musical art.”¹⁷⁵ The author continues: “but the unbounded popularity which he so long enjoyed was derived not so much from the Italian opera, as from the fact that he expressed, in the form of his well-known songs, with wonderful force and fire, the national feelings of his time.”¹⁷⁶ The author specifically makes that point that it is not “Italian” opera that gained Braham his fame, but his British “national” musical.¹⁷⁷ Even in death, Braham is presented as in opposition to his Italian rivals. Many obituaries failed to refer to Braham’s performance of non-English opera at all, while others focused on his

¹⁷³ Anon., ‘Theatres, &c’, *The Era*, 7 April 1850, 10.

¹⁷⁴ Anon., ‘Mr. Santley in Italian Opera’, *Liverpool Mercury*, 17 April 1862, 3.

¹⁷⁵ Anon., ‘Death of Mr. Braham’, *The Lady’s Newspaper*, 23 February 1856, 119.

¹⁷⁶ Anon., 119.

¹⁷⁷ Anon., 119.

contributions to British music, emphasising, for example “his proficiency in singing Handel’s music”.¹⁷⁸ When Henry Phillips died in 1876 (twenty years after Braham) similar sentiments were evident, with overviews of his career focusing on English opera and very few referring to his performances of continental opera.¹⁷⁹ However, this may in part be accounted for by the fact that Phillips did perform in less continental opera than the other singers in this study.

In obituaries of Sims Reeves and Charles Santley (produced on their deaths in 1900 and 1922 respectively), the instinct to emphasise the favourable elements of a singer’s repertoire remains clearly evident. When Reeves died, obituaries tended to focus on his ‘British’ roles. A typical example explains that “one of his best original parts was in [...] Robin Hood.”¹⁸⁰ Along similar lines, another obituary recalled especially his “First Warrior in ‘King Arthur’, and [Reeves’ performance of] Purcell’s ‘Come if you dare’, which he made his own by his dramatic interpretation of this war song.”¹⁸¹ It is clear that the persistent urge was to emphasise Reeves’ impersonations of British heroes, despite the fact that he had been so well known for his performances of Italian opera. Such obituaries effectively papered over the element of Reeves’ repertoire that did not fit their narrative. Obituaries of Santley reveal the same urge. On his death in 1922 *The Times* said: “He imbibed all that was best in the Italian tradition of song

¹⁷⁸ Anon., ‘Death of Mr. John Braham’, *Liverpool Mercury*, 20 February 1856, 2.

¹⁷⁹ See for example: Anon., ‘Foreign and Colonial Intelligence’, *Jackson’s Oxford Journal*, 18 November 1876, 7.

¹⁸⁰ Anon., ‘Famous Tenor’s Career Ended’, *The Courier and Argus*, 26 October 1900, 4.

¹⁸¹ Anon., ‘Death of Sims Reeves’, *The Leeds Mercury*, 26 October 1900, 5.

and used it to found one for his native tongue.”¹⁸² The obituary continued, stating that, “When the name of SANTLEY is mentioned we think at once of the oratorios of HANDEL”.¹⁸³ As late as 1922 we again find the instinct to emphasise the difference between British and Italian styles, and the desire to tie British musical heroes to a non-operatic form of music that was seen as suitably northern European.

This chapter has established that the male opera singer stood at the centre of a complex web of ideas about gender, national identity, sexuality, religion, and music. Though all male singers found themselves caught in this web to some extent, it was British singers who were uniquely ensnared. This is because their status as British men was so at odds with their Italianate profession and all of the connotations this brought with it. We have seen that contemporary commentators adopted a range of methods in order to negotiate these adverse attitudes. But what of the singers themselves? How did they seek to untangle themselves from this problematic web? The next chapter will argue that they did this by placing themselves at the heart of new networks. Braham, Phillips, Reeves and Santley used these networks – professional and personal, public and private – in order to craft reputations as respectable British men.

¹⁸² Anon., ‘A Great English Singer’, *The Times*, 23 September 1922, 9.

¹⁸³ Anon., 9.

CHAPTER TWO

“Noticed by Kings and Princes”: Patrons, Clubs and Networks

The previous chapter explained that membership of the operatic profession was problematic for the protagonists of this thesis, leaving them vulnerable to charges ranging from immorality and excess to foreignness and effeminacy. One key way in which they attempted to negotiate this problem was to place themselves into far less problematic groups. These included both literal clubs and imagined communities. The former category is best exemplified by formal arrangements including royal honours and membership of gentlemen’s clubs, while the latter consists of more figurative groups such as family dynasties and professional networks. Membership of these groups had the potential to raise the status of singers and improve their public image for two main reasons. Firstly, it offered them potential access to wealthy and influential society figures. Mixing in such circles could raise the social status of singers by association, whilst also offering them economic opportunities to win work and gain patrons. Secondly, membership of these clubs allowed singers to present themselves to the public as respectable professionals and upstanding members of society.

This chapter will begin by exploring the more formal groups joined by our four singers. It will first examine their complex relationship with royal patronage, considering both the opportunities and anxieties that this most prestigious form of networking could inspire. Our attention will then turn to two important formal organisations of which our singers were members: the

Freemasons and the Garrick Club. Their membership of these networks (hitherto unacknowledged by scholars) afforded them a golden opportunity to cultivate advantageous relationships and gain societal influence. After considering the important religious affiliations forged by some of our singers, the chapter will then move on to consider their place within more nebulous, imagined communities, including family dynasties and artistic professional networks. Finally, the chapter will also consider the way in which all four of our singers adopted alternative professional identities. Braham, Phillips, Reeves and Santley all pursued additional professions in what we will see was an attempt to mediate their problematic status as singers. This chapter will predominantly draw on press sources, organisational records and singers' autobiographies in order to build a picture of the clubs and communities of which they were members. However, where possible, it also seeks to assess the impact that their membership of these networks had on their public image and, consequently, their place within nineteenth-century British society.

Royal Patronage

A key network within which our singers operated was that of royal and aristocratic society. Braham, Reeves and Santley all performed for a British Monarch multiple times. In her work on the relationship between the nobility and musicians in late Georgian and early Victorian Britain, Deborah Rohr predominantly uses the term 'patronage' to refer to occasions on which a patron directly employed a musician – for example, as a member of

the King's band, or a music teacher for an aristocratic family.¹ This chapter, however, will examine patronage in a broader sense, focusing less on this sort of direct employment by patrons and instead considering forms of support such as endorsements, personal associations and royal honours. It will therefore explore the various types of relationships our singers had with royalty and the aristocracy, focusing specifically on how they courted, collected and (later in the century) recoiled from these associations with the nobility. We will see that in the first half of the century, Braham and Phillips actively cultivated royal patronage in a similar manner, recognising both the cachet it would lend their image and the marketing potential of a royal endorsement. Braham went further, seeking to create more concrete links between his family and that of the King. However, his efforts would prove too audacious and ultimately backfire. In the second half of the century there was a shift, and Reeves and Santley exhibited ambivalence towards royal patronage, as it threatened to cast them as subservient hirelings rather than autonomous artists. Santley even hesitated to accept a knighthood which, on his eventual acceptance, made him the first ever singer to become a 'Sir'.

Before analysing these royal relationships in depth, it must be noted that the royal family (and Queen Victoria in particular) played a role in improving public attitudes towards opera in the nineteenth century. This is an area which deserves more scholarly attention than it has so far attracted.² The Queen was a great fan of the opera and often attended performances, also

¹ Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*, 40–51.

² An exception is the work of Hall-Witt, who has discussed various aspects of Queen Victoria's relationship with the opera: Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts*.

hosting performances at her royal residences. She employed the Italian star Luigi Lablache as her singing teacher, and was even depicted in a box at Drury Lane in an important portrait of 1837 which was reproduced widely for the commercial market.³ The Queen's love of opera was well-known by contemporaries. A 1901 article in *The Musical Times* entitled 'Queen Victoria and Music' discussed the recently deceased monarch's love for opera.⁴ It described how she delighted in Italian opera, debated the relative merits of various prima donnas, and had an "absolute devot[ion]" to Bizet's *Carmen*.⁵ Therefore, while relationships with the royal family had the potential to advance the image of our singers, it must be recognised that the tastes of the royal family also played a role in changing attitudes towards opera more broadly. Where the Queen went, popular tastes would follow.

The best that singers could hope for with regard to royal patronage was an invitation to join the exalted ranks who had been awarded a knighthood. Membership of this group provided its members with both a title and a public seal of royal approval, as well as the aura of manful patriotism which was suggested by a knighthood. It is clear what a singer stood to gain should he be lucky enough to join this most prestigious of clubs: social status, royal patronage and a tangible claim to British masculinity. However, this was obviously not a club which singers could simply elect to join; membership had to be bestowed upon them, and for the duration of the nineteenth

³ Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*, 44; Anon., 'Queen Victoria at the Drury Lane Theatre, November 1837', Royal Collection, 2017, <https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/405577/queen-victoria-at-the-drury-lane-theatre-november-1837>.

⁴ Anon., 'Queen Victoria and Music', *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 1 June 1901, 374–75.

⁵ Anon., 374–75.

century this would have seemed a remote possibility at best. This is not to say that singers sat idly by waiting for this honour to fall into their laps. Instead, they actively cultivated royal rapport with a view to gaining the ultimate seal of approval. We can best map the relationship between singers and the palace by considering two key events which took place in 1833 and 1907. These two markers provide us with a compelling picture of how the status of singers changed over the course of the intervening years.

In 1833 John Braham wrote a letter to King William IV, which was eventually tucked away in one of the tenor's household account books.⁶ In this letter Braham quite remarkably asks the King for a royal honour. It is worth quoting in full:

Private

The Grange – Brompton

Sunday May the 12th 1833

Sir

Emboldened by your Royal Highness's [sic] notice and patronage of my humble Talents for more than Thirty years, I venture to address you on a subject which though I have attempted several times to have written to your Royal Highness upon – yet fearing I might have been thought intruding I have thrown the pen down in despair – until lately encouraged by His Grace the Duke of Gordon and Lord Berghersh, and also confiding in the nobleness and more than human goodness of your character – I will boldly state my wish – It is this –

⁶ John Braham, 'Letter to King William IV' 12 May 1833, DD/SH/45, Somerset Heritage Centre.

Majesty has conferred honours upon almost every profession but the musical – may I venture to hope, that as an Englishman – an artist – a vocal performer – noticed by Kings and Princes – and upheld by the public applause for a series of years absolutely without parallel in musical history – that through the powerful interposition and influence of your Royal Highness I might have the Guelphic order bestowed upon me? Such a mark of distinction would guild with happiness the remainder of my Days, and would form the crowning kindness to the many already bestowed upon me by your Royal Highness.

I am you Royal Highnes's [sic]
ever devoted and humble servant

John Braham⁷

The many marks and corrections on this page (as well as its presence amongst Braham's surviving personal papers) make it clear that this letter is a draft. Whether or not this was yet another of the tenor's aborted attempts to write to the King remains unclear, but this document is nevertheless extraordinarily revealing. The Guelphic Order was established by the Prince Regent in 1815. It was a Hanoverian (and therefore foreign) honour, awarded for "personal services to the monarchy".⁸ During the decade in which Braham wrote this letter, the King had begun to bestow the Guelphic Order upon scientific and cultural figures for the first time, though artists

⁷ Braham.

⁸ Lt. Cdr. J. H. B. Bedells, *The British Honours System* (London: The Heraldry Society, 1974), 6.

and musicians were not amongst the newly recognised professions.⁹ These new members of the Order were instead representatives of fields including natural philosophy, botany and mathematics.¹⁰ Despite the lack of artistic representation, Braham perhaps spotted an opportunity and hoped that the widening scope of the Order might be extended to musicians. There was a mistaken public understanding that the award of the Guelphic Order amounted to an automatic Knighthood, thus allowing the title ‘Sir’ to be used.¹¹ This was most likely because those appointed to the highest classes of the tiered Guelphic Order were indeed often automatically knighted. However, this practice was not extended to lower-class recipients. This was not widely understood, and those of this lower class were often dubbed ‘Sir’ nonetheless. Most notably, the astronomer Herschel (appointed to the lowest class of the Guelphic order) was known widely as ‘Sir William’.¹² Furthermore, several others who were appointed to the same order mistakenly believed themselves to be ‘Sirs’.¹³ This confusion was clearly widespread even amongst recipients, so it is probable that Braham believed an appointment to the Order would earn him the title ‘Sir John’.

It is also significant that the Guelphic Order had strong Napoleonic associations. It had originally been established to celebrate the victory at Waterloo, and was bestowed upon several notable Napoleonic veterans.¹⁴ As we will see in the next chapter, Braham cultivated an important personal

⁹ Bedells, 120–22.

¹⁰ Bedells, 120–21.

¹¹ Andrew Hanham, ‘Regency Knights: The Royal Guelphic Order, 1815-1837’, *The Coat of Arms* IV (Part II), no. 216 (2008): 113.

¹² Hanham, 113.

¹³ Hanham, 113.

¹⁴ Hanham, 117.

association with Napoleonic heroes that raised his own status by association. A Guelphic honour could therefore bolster this self-image in a powerful way. It is clear that Braham's letter represents a carefully considered effort to seek an honour which would have a significant impact on both his public image and social standing. Whether or not it was ever sent is a moot point, as the document clearly indicates that Braham was aware of how valuable a royal honour could prove to be. It also demonstrates that the tenor was actively pursuing this royal relationship. Of course, his pursuit was in vain.

Even if Braham did eventually send a version of this letter to the King, it is unlikely to have proved successful. Singers were yet to attain the more secure social standing they enjoyed at the end of the century, and the prospect of Braham rising to such a high social rank would have caused outrage. We can find evidence for this claim in a row which erupted as a result of Braham's earlier efforts to form a tangible connection with the royal family. The tenor had become acquainted with the Duke of Sussex; a brother of the King. As we will see later, this friendship most likely had its origins in the networking opportunities Braham was able to access through club membership. In 1821 Braham asked the Duke to serve as godfather to his first-born son. As a biographer of Braham's daughter later noted, Braham's wife was unrelenting in her quest to raise the social status of her family by cementing ties with the aristocracy; for example, by courting nobility and seeking affluent suitors for her daughters.¹⁵ The tenor's invitation to the Duke was in a very similar vein, and represents another significant attempt to forge concrete royal connections. This was recognised

¹⁵ Osbert Wyndham Hewett, *Strawberry Fair: A Biography of Frances, Countess Waldegrave 1821-1879* (London: John Murray, 1956), 1–23.

by many, who interpreted Braham's actions as the presumptuous behaviour of an audacious opera singer. Although the Duke graciously accepted the invitation, a furore erupted in the press. These newspaper debates offer us a glimpse into attitudes towards the status of singers in this period. The key antagonist was the nationalist newspaper *John Bull* which led an attack on the tenor that lasted several months. "Is it to be believed", they asked:

that his Royal Highness the DUKE OF SUSSEX, fourth brother of the King, and heir presumptive to the Crown of these realms, has gone publically from the palace, in which (by the grace and Favour of his Majesty) he resides, to stand Godfather, in person, to the infant child of MR. BRAHAM, the singer.¹⁶

The attack continues, with the author arguing that Braham is "in his proper sphere, deserving of public patronage."¹⁷ The clear insinuation is that Braham's social status was too low to justify his presumptuous invitation to the Duke. Some months later *John Bull* published further criticisms of the christening, this time claiming that a sinister individual called Haywood had been present as a guest.¹⁸ Between the time of the christening and the publication of this report, Haywood had been hanged for burglary. The newspaper was evidently keen to underscore Braham's low social status with an accusation that he cavorted with known criminals – and that he had knowingly brought the Duke into this disreputable company. Braham was so infuriated by these accusations that he wrote to the *Morning Chronicle* in order to defend himself, although it is notable that he did not explicitly deny

¹⁶ Anon., 'His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex', *John Bull*, 13 August 1821, 278.

¹⁷ Anon., 278.

¹⁸ Anon., 'Some Time', *John Bull*, 17 December 1821, 421.

Haywood's attendance at the christening.¹⁹ He said, "I solemnly declare that I never knew of the existence of that unfortunate man, but through the medium of the public press; yet the Editors had the cruelty to call him my especial friend."²⁰

Despite Braham's refutation, the accusations levelled at him by *John Bull* would have had another resonance for contemporary readers. Just five years earlier, Braham had faced his own criminal trial. An understanding of this event gives context to Braham's quest for remedial royal approval, and also aids an understanding of the negative attitudes towards singers upon which the *John Bull* accusations played. Before his own marriage, Braham had been having an affair with a married woman called Mrs. Wright. Her husband (a sailor) had been working abroad, but when he returned to London he found that his wife had absconded with Braham, abandoning her children in the process. Most shockingly, she was pregnant with a baby that was understood to be the singer's. Mr. Wright promptly took Braham to court for 'criminal conversation', a legal mechanism that effectively allowed cuckolded husbands to claim damages. However, this backfired somewhat and Braham got away with a small fine. This was because he successfully (and quite brazenly) argued that the affair was Mr. Wright's fault for allowing his wife to socialise with Braham and his common-law wife, fellow opera singer Nancy Storace. His defence argued: "it is impossible for a virtuous woman to be frequently in the company of a kept-mistress, and not to catch some portion of the profligacy that necessarily

¹⁹ John Braham, 'To the Editor of the Morning Chronicle', *The Morning Chronicle*, 25 June 1822, 4.

²⁰ Braham, 4.

belongs to such a state of life.”²¹ With the repeated use of words such as “corruption”, “contagion” and “contamination”, Braham’s defence was effectively playing negative stereotypes about performers to his advantage.²²

The suggestion was that his status as a profligate singer made him a dangerous friend to respectable folk. This was, of course, the same suggestion that *John Bull* would later make when attacking Braham’s friendship with the Duke of Sussex.

Not surprisingly, this court case involving a well-known singer attracted much attention from the press. Cheap pamphlets also circulated reporting the events in court verbatim. One example which was sold for two shillings featured an introduction in which the anonymous author railed against the bad behaviour of theatrical personalities: “Few and evil are the days of most Theatrical Characters”, it declared.²³ These sentiments might have been styled to fit a sensational account of this scandalous court case, but (like Braham’s defence) they are suggestive of negative attitudes towards singers during this period. As we will see elsewhere, the characterisation of Braham as a “Theatrical Character” is typical of the early nineteenth century, when singers were frequently imagined as inhabiting the same professional group as actors and other stage folk. Braham, as a performer, was therefore imagined as having a predisposition towards irresolute behaviour. After this scandal, the tenor quickly married and settled into a conventional family life. As we will see later, this marriage also represented the end of his

²¹ Anon., *The Report of the Trial for Criminal Conversation, Wright versus Braham, of the King’s Theatre, in the Common Pleas, London, July 23, 1816; Containing All the Evidence, Speeches of Counsel, Charge to the Jury, and Remarkable Defence, Verbatim* (London: W. Hone, 1816), 27.

²² Anon., 26–27.

²³ Anon., iii.

identification as a Jew. This respectable, married image created a favourable contrast to his previous domestic arrangements. It is therefore reasonable to argue that Braham's invitation to the Duke a mere five years after this scandal was conceived as something of a bandage to cover the reputational wounds wrought by a very public humiliation. However, his past came back to haunt him and the spectre of criminality was invoked by the press in order to pour scorn on his courting of the Duke. This suggests that Braham's past behaviour would likely have made his pursuit of a knighthood unsuccessful, even if he did petition the King to this effect. Nevertheless, some biographers have reported an occasion upon which the King was so impressed by one of Braham's private performances that he "was with difficulty prevented from knighting him both then and there".²⁴ There is, however, no proof for this claim and it must be viewed with some suspicion. It is also notable that, according to this story, the King's advisors had to prevent him from following through with his wishes – presumably because a knighthood for Braham would have caused a scandal. Braham's efforts to forge connections with the royal family demonstrate that such relationships offered singers an attractive opportunity to present themselves to the public as respectable members of society. It is clear that Braham knew this, and went to great lengths to pursue favour in royal circles.

Our second significant event is Charles Santley's receipt of a knighthood in 1907. This made him the first ever British singer to receive such an honour. In light of Braham's letter of 1833, it is surprising to learn that Santley did not welcome this honour particularly warmly. In his autobiography of 1909,

²⁴ Hewett, *Strawberry Fair*, 5.

he discussed his receipt of the knighthood in an aloof manner, which accentuates his gravitas. He was not grovelling and grateful like Braham. He tells us:

On the morning of the 4th November, 1907, the first letter I opened was from the late Premier, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman; it was to ask me “in case His Majesty were pleased to bestow on me the honour of knighthood, would I accept it?” I had only one, a family objection to propose.²⁵

It is unclear what this objection was – possibly something to do with Santley’s conversion to Catholicism which, as we will see below, became an important facet of his identity. It is also possible that he was selecting his words carefully, as he had attacked the concept of royal patronage in his autobiography of 1893. In this he said: “I have seen that monstrous incompetency, aided by ‘backsheesh’ of one kind or another, is more than a match for titanic genius, and that a pat on the back from a royal hand is of more avail than consummate talent.”²⁶ He had therefore publically acknowledged that royal recognition did not equate with musical talent; words which could potentially come back to burn him after he accepted his own “pat on the back from a royal hand” in a manner more spectacular than any singer who preceded him. Santley nevertheless accepted the honour, becoming the first singer ever to be knighted in Britain. It appears that there was no backlash to this, with press reports merely noting the novelty of the

²⁵ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 308.

²⁶ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 16.

occasion: *The Times* named Santley (along with the actor John Hare) as “the most interesting of the new knights”.²⁷

In considering these two key events, Braham’s wish for an honour and Santley’s receipt of one, we might see a shift in social attitudes towards singers. Unlike Braham’s courtship of the Duke of Sussex, Santley’s knighthood inspired no backlash but only warm congratulations. Of course the baritone’s more respectable and well-liked public persona (constructed through his capitalisation on autobiography and the burgeoning cult of celebrity, as we will see in subsequent chapters) is likely to have made this event more palatable to many. However, it would be too simplistic to see Santley’s knighthood as representing the arrival of the singer as a respected figure in society. Here we might draw a useful comparison with the first-ever actor to receive the honour: this was, of course, Henry Irving in 1895. In his work on the rise of the acting profession in Victorian Britain, Michael Baker is cautious of a simplistic interpretation of this event, implying that it does not indicate the decisive arrival of the actor in 1895.²⁸ He points out that Irving had turned down an earlier offer of a knighthood made by Gladstone in 1883, most likely because the thespian’s separation from his wife and rumoured affair with fellow actor Ellen Terry caused some members of the Cabinet to feel that this honour was out of the question.²⁹ As we saw in the case of Braham earlier in the century, the performer’s private life seemed to play into negative stereotypes about his profession, and this stood in the way of a royal honour. This suggests, as is the case with

²⁷ Anon., ‘Birthday Honours’, *The Times*, 9 November 1907.

²⁸ Baker, *Victorian Actor*, 14.

²⁹ Baker, 198–199 (endnote 3).

Santley, that a performer's personality and reputation were key factors in his perceived suitability for a knighthood. Baker also explains that he has not singled out 1895 (the year of Irving's knighthood) as the end point of his study, opting instead to conclude this in 1890.³⁰ His work, which consequently offers only brief mentions of Irving's knighthood, therefore suggests that this event is not the landmark it might be tempting to suggest. In a similar way, Santley's knighthood can be viewed as symptomatic of a more positive attitude towards singers, but should not be overstated.

We might also read something into the fact that Irving's knighthood occurred twelve years earlier than Santley's (twenty four if we consider Gladstone's first offer). Like Santley, Irving had carefully cultivated a respectable public image. Though the Terry affair complicated this somewhat, he had also taken on a significant role as theatrical manager alongside his acting. Most importantly, though, he was a dramatic actor best known for his Shakespearean roles. The actor could therefore lay claim to a British and masculine form of artistic heritage that was denied to a man like Santley. Even despite his disreputable private life, the actor was still awarded a knighthood far earlier than any of his operatic colleagues. Nevertheless, Braham's letter of 1833 and Santley's knighthood of 1907 illustrate a shift: in the early decades of the nineteenth century Braham scrambled and grovelled for royal recognition in vain, whereas Santley felt comfortable enough to exhibit a dignified ambivalence towards his knighthood by the early twentieth century.

³⁰ Baker, 14.

In between these two key events of 1833 and 1907, there were other interactions between the palace and our singers which shed further light on the role of royal patronage. Santley's unease at accepting a royal honour was a sense shared by Reeves. In his own accounts of performing for the Queen, Reeves exhibits a surprising reluctance to adhere to royal requests. He explains that the Queen asked him to sing a particular song that he did not wish to perform, as it was too taxing for his voice.³¹ He requested a change of song several times, even after the Queen made it quite clear that she would not budge.³² Reeves' repeated contradiction of the monarch's wishes suggests an irreverence which can be interpreted as Reeves asserting his autonomy. Certainly the tenor frequently reported his distaste for patronage. When describing the aristocrats who watched his youthful performances in a church choir, he characterises them as "patronising" saying that their praise "savoured too much of patronage".³³ This extremely self-conscious aversion to patronage, even at a young age, demonstrates that it had the potential to bruise as well as bolster a singer's reputation. Even if Reeves had been grateful for this early support, he felt the need to signal to his readers that he did not lap their praise up gratefully, thus asserting his professional dignity.

As this last example suggests, aristocratic support represented another form of networking which could have a profound influence on a singer's career. Henry Phillips' accounts of his attempt to establish a career in Georgian Britain are full of references to networking with important patrons. In a

³¹ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 175–78.

³² Reeves, 175–78.

³³ Reeves, 6–7.

typical passage he describes attending society parties at the home of an influential friend called Mr. Cartwright: he describes the “charming and intellectual meetings at his house on Old Burlington Street” where he “met those members of the aristocracy who were patrons of our art, such as Lord Westmoreland, Lord Cawdor, the late Duke of Gordon, Lord Lennox, &c., &c.”.³⁴ Phillips is clearly aware of the potential importance of such connections; in another instance he describes society parties which “did much to advance the rising talents of the day”, as the high-profile guests had influence as leading members or directors of musical societies such as the Antient Concert series.³⁵ While this type of aristocratic patronage clearly had the ability to directly influence a singer’s career by helping him secure prestigious engagements, it also lent the singer an element of cachet. As in the example cited above, Phillips gives the address of his influential friend and name checks several aristocratic individuals in a manner which signals his presence in these exalted circles to the reader. This contrasts with the attitudes exhibited by singers like Reeves in the latter decades of the century.

We have seen that Santley explicitly attacked royal patronage several years before his own knighthood. However, in this revealing section of his first autobiography he attacks not only royal patronage, but aristocratic patronage more broadly. He begins by discussing the notion of “cant”.³⁶ He says that this type of empty talk manifests in musical circles in various

³⁴ Henry Phillips, *Musical and Personal Recollections During Half a Century*, vol. 1 (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1864), 313.

³⁵ Henry Phillips, *Musical and Personal Recollections During Half a Century*, vol. 2 (London: Charles J. Skeet, 1864), 20.

³⁶ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 16.

ways, but “very commonly” in the arena of patronage.³⁷ He explains that this is:

bestowed on the deference paid to a patron, rather than on the merit of the patronized; patronage, the destruction of many young people who might have been usefully and profitably employed in trade and commerce, but who, carried away by the flattery of would-be patrons of Art, have dared to pass in at the door of her temple, only to be shouldered out and left to starve by the roadside.³⁸

Despite this characteristically bombastic statement, Santley had himself benefitted from the support of patrons; most notably the influential critic Henry Fothergill Chorley, who had effectively engineered Santley’s successful London debut. This is evidenced both in Santley’s memoirs and surviving correspondence held at Liverpool Central Library. This latter collection contains various caches of letters between Chorley and Santley, and a particularly revealing letter in which Santley’s father William thanks Chorley for the critical support he had given his son.³⁹ Santley’s damnation of patronage may therefore be read as a form of sleight of hand, attempting to divert attention from the manner in which he himself rose to fame. This is especially marked when we consider that Santley himself was “profitably employed in trade and commerce” before a period of training in Italy which resulted in exactly the sort of desperate poverty he alludes to. Chorley rescued him from these dire straits by advising his return to London and providing him with introductions and recommendations that effectively

³⁷ Santley, 17.

³⁸ Santley, 17.

³⁹ Santley, 151–63; ‘Charles Santley Collection’.

launched his career in Britain. Perhaps the aversion that both Reeves and Santley displayed towards behaviour that smacked too much of aristocratic patronage can be explained in part by the gradual shift away from this form of relationship in the nineteenth century. As Rohr has explained, the expanding commercialisation of the artistic market in this period led musicians to rely less on individual patronage and increasingly on the broader, more anonymous market force of the expanding middle class audience.⁴⁰ This form of anonymous support formed a favourable contrast to the types of aristocratic patronage which had “conferred only a dependent status-by-association, not necessarily the status and respectability of an independent professional.”⁴¹ In other words, a move away from aristocratic patronage was a move towards a more stable form of professional respectability.

Clubs and Societies

If aristocratic support could be a one-sided relationship potentially fraught with negative associations for singers, then club membership was an appealing alternative which afforded them the opportunity to socialise with the upper classes on a more equal footing. The four men in this study were all members and supporters of multiple clubs and societies, including many which were musical. For instance, Braham’s surviving diaries record his attendance at meetings of the Royal Society of Musicians, the Melodists’ Society and the Melephonic Society, amongst others.⁴² However, as this

⁴⁰ Rohr, *Profession of Artisans*, 40–61.

⁴¹ Rohr, 60.

⁴² John Braham, ‘John Braham Diaries’ 1844 1810, DD/SH/52/130, Somerset Heritage Centre.

study seeks to locate our singers' place in wider society outside of the musical sphere, this chapter will focus instead on two non-musical clubs: the Freemasons and London's Garrick Club. Both of these organisations counted several British singers amongst their members.

The idea of musicians being Freemasons is not a new one. It has been demonstrated that illustrious composers including Mozart, Haydn, Liszt and Puccini were Freemasons, and musicologists have also noted that Masonic themes were sometimes evident in the music composed by such members.⁴³ Especially pertinent to the present study is Simon McVeigh's work on overlapping networks of musicians and Masons in eighteenth-century London.⁴⁴ Singers of the nineteenth century, however, have yet to be considered in the context. The only one of our four singers who we can say with certainty was a Freemason is Braham. No scholar has previously identified him as a Mason, but records prove that he was indeed a member the fourth Masonic lodge in London: the Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge. He became a member very early in his career. The lodge records for 27th March 1797 state that Braham, "a Gentleman of eminence in the Musical Profession", was proposed for initiation as an honorary member, and was "unanimously assented to on a show of hands".⁴⁵ At the next meeting on 8th May he was initiated and passed. The lodge that Braham joined had a strong association with both music and professional

⁴³ Malcolm Davies, 'The Muse of Freemasonry: Masonic Songs, Marches, Odes, Cantatas, Oratorios and Operas, 1730-1812', *The Canonbury Papers* 2 (2005): 85–103.

⁴⁴ Simon McVeigh, 'Freemasonry and Musical Life in London in the Late Eighteenth Century', in *Music in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. David Wyn Jones (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 72–100.

⁴⁵ Rev. Arnold Whitaker, *No. 4: An Introduction to the History of the Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge* (London: Bernard Quartich Ltd, 1928), 126.

performers.⁴⁶ This was partly due to its tradition of transforming into a glee club after official business was concluded, with members singing glees and madrigals.⁴⁷ Whitaker explains that: “Many celebrated musicians were honorary members of the lodge, paying no fees, even for initiation, and of course no subscriptions. Besides singing after supper, they also sang during the lodge ceremonies”.⁴⁸ It was under this type of honorary arrangement that Braham entered the club. He would have performed at dinners and celebrations in return for paying no subscription fee, but was nevertheless a fully initiated member.

It is not clear how Braham become involved in Freemasonry, but he did have a close relationship with another man who records reveal was also a Mason. This was his mentor, Myer Lyon (c. 1750 – 1797). We will see below that the young Braham was trained by Lyon, who served as hazzan (a type of cantor) at the Great Synagogue of London.⁴⁹ Lyon left London for Jamaica in 1797, as a result of financial difficulties. This was the same year in which Braham became a mason. It is possible, then, that Braham’s introduction to Freemasonry came (like his introduction to the stage) via Lyon. The elder singer possibly secured his young protégée’s membership in order to ensure he was not left without a support network when he emigrated. However, records show that Lyon was a member of a different lodge, the Moderns Grand Lodge, which he joined in 1782.⁵⁰ Braham was joined at his own lodge by another one of his associates, the tenor Charles

⁴⁶ Whitaker, 34.

⁴⁷ Whitaker, 34.

⁴⁸ Whitaker, 34.

⁴⁹ For more on Conway and Braham, see: Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 75–91.

⁵⁰ Moderns Grand Lodge, ‘Register of Members, London’, 1813 1768, Vol 1, Fols 1-597, Ancestry Online.

Incedon. Records do not indicate when Incedon became a member (so his membership could have pre-dated Braham's) but he is referred to as one of the lodge's "brethren" in minutes of 1813, the same year in which records show he sang for lodge members.⁵¹ This suggests that Incedon had an honorary membership like Braham's. In 1811 Incedon's son was also initiated, despite being under age – another indication that his father was already a member.⁵²

Although it is certain that Braham, Lyon and Incedon were Freemasons, it is possible that other British male singers were also members. However, the fragmentary nature of Masonic records, coupled with the fact that men did not advertise their status as masons, makes this difficult to prove with certainty. Nevertheless, it is probable that Braham's eighteenth-century predecessor Michael Kelly was a Freemason. Again, scholars have not previously noted this. The searchable Masonic archives indicate that someone with his name joined the Antients Grand Lodge in London lodge around the 6th of December 1786.⁵³ This is slightly earlier than the date Kelly gives for his return to London after years on the continent: March 1787.⁵⁴ However, there are several inconsistencies in Kelly's autobiography, including erroneous dates, so it is entirely possible that the tenor gave the wrong date for his arrival in London. It is also possible that the archival record (itself a copy of the original lodge record) has been transcribed incorrectly. This would have been an easy mistake to make, as the narrow

⁵¹ Whitaker, *No 4*, 202–3.

⁵² Whitaker, 193.

⁵³ Antients Grand Lodge, 'Membership Registers: London Lodges', 1787 1786, Vol F, #2-280, Ancestry Online.

⁵⁴ Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*, vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 289.

‘6th December 1876’ column which is populated for Kelly is next to the column for the 7th of March 1877: the exact time Kelly reportedly returned to London. Furthermore, the Antients Grand Lodge had a tradition of welcoming Irish members like Kelly; it was comprised “almost entirely” of Irish masons.⁵⁵ It therefore seems reasonable to conclude that Kelly was a mason, though it must also be noted that his was a common Irish name. There are also several masons with the name Henry Phillips registered at lodges in London’s West End in a period that is consistent with Phillips’ time living and working in the City. Though his is another fairly common name, it is possible (if not probable) that one of these men was our baritone. Similarly, we cannot rule Reeves out as a member as it is possible he is listed in records under ‘John Reeves’ (his birth name was John Sims Reeves) instead of ‘Sims Reeves’ – and the number of members with the former name is extensive. It appears that Santley was not a member. It is therefore notable that it was during the earlier decades of the nineteenth century that singers seem more likely to have been Freemasons.

Though Braham is the only one of our singers whose status as a Mason can currently be proved, it is clear there was a pattern of membership amongst British singers. This is not surprising when one considers the many advantages Freemasonry could offer these men whose professional and social status was so problematic. Most importantly, the Masonic agenda was openly egalitarian. Although the royal family and members of the aristocracy were amongst its leading figures, any respectable, literate man

⁵⁵ Robert Cooper, *Cracking the Freemason’s Code: The Truth About Solomon’s Key and the Brotherhood* (London: Rider Books, 2006), 138.

was able to join, providing that he could afford to pay his dues.⁵⁶ Consequently merchants, tradesmen, bankers and men of letters who joined the Freemasons found themselves mixing with members of the aristocracy “in a way scarcely conceivable elsewhere.”⁵⁷ As McVeigh has noted, the potential for social mobility that this arrangement offered was especially attractive to musicians:

In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that musicians should have taken to freemasonry with enthusiasm, their professional status uncertain, rather uneasily embracing the educated organist with a cathedral or university background, the virtuoso with pretensions to acceptance in high society, the manufacturing and commercial world of instrument making and music selling, the artisan who scraped a living in the playhouse pit.⁵⁸

As McVeigh’s stratified summary of types of musician might begin to suggest, our singers would fall some way down this hierarchy, as freelance performers of opera. This is especially true of the period in which Braham was a member, as he was still at a very early stage of his career and was yet to achieve the great fame and success he would later enjoy. His membership, then, offered him a particularly golden opportunity to exploit his Masonic status in order to win influential friends and important patrons. As a singer, he had a better opportunity to gain distinction in Masonic circles than other members. This is because he was often called upon to

⁵⁶ McVeigh, ‘Freemasonry’.

⁵⁷ McVeigh, 77.

⁵⁸ McVeigh, 77.

entertain his fellow members, therefore attaining a particular visibility amongst those who would applaud his performances.

The sort of music Braham was performing at Masonic meetings is also significant. McVeigh notes that the masons had a semi-puritanical preference for “moderation” in music which contrasted with “the sensual frivolity of West End concerts and Italian opera”.⁵⁹ Instead, they preferred music which drew upon religious or antiquarian themes.⁶⁰ This is evidenced in the significant collection of music that Braham’s lodge acquired, which comprised glees, ballads and Masonic anthems.⁶¹ This antipathy towards operatic music could have been problematic for singers who were masons, as their profession was potentially incompatible with the customs of the club. However, this could also have worked in their favour. By joining an organisation which had a clear preference for more ‘serious’ music, and performing this sort of music for members, they could imply their sympathy for such tastes and thus rise above their own status as opera singers. Another element of Freemasonry which would have appealed to Braham was its religious tolerance. McVeigh has explained that Masonic acceptance of Catholics and Jews “provided a welcome sense of inclusion in British society” for musicians who were foreign and Catholic.⁶² As we will see below, Braham was especially associated with Judaism during the early period of his career in which he became a Mason. His membership of the Freemasons could therefore be understood as a way of mediating the

⁵⁹ McVeigh, 75.

⁶⁰ McVeigh, 75.

⁶¹ This collection is catalogued in: Whitaker, *No 4*, 298–301.

⁶² McVeigh, ‘Freemasonry’, 78.

contentious nature of his religious identity, by placing him within a network where his religion was of little consequence.

Due to the secretive nature of Freemasonry and the organisation's lack of detailed records, it is very difficult to trace the scope and influence of networks amongst its members. However, it is possible to make some deductions in Braham's case. In 1813 the Duke of Sussex, Braham's later friend and patron, became Grand Master of the Freemasons. His path must have crossed with that of Braham on several occasions at lodge dinners and meetings, many of which the tenor performed at. Eight years later, the Duke served as godfather to Braham's first-born son; an event which, we have seen, caused so much scandal. In 1813 the influential architect Sir John Soane became an active freemason. Braham forged a close friendship with Soane and in 1825 named his fourth son 'Ward Soane' after him. These examples suggest the sort of networking that the Freemasonry could offer; not just sociability with the upper echelons of society, but the possibility of forging tangible links with them. It is notable that in the case of the Duke and the architect, Braham attempted to forge some sort of pseudo-familial tie by designating them godfather and namesake respectively.

Freemasonry did not represent Braham's only link with the Duke. Both men were also founding members of the Garrick Club, which Henry Phillips and Sims Reeves would also go on to join. This Club offered these singers another sphere in which they were able to socialise with influential men as equals, whilst also conferring upon them the social prestige of being a member. Historians have long noted that the 'clubland' of nineteenth-century London had its origins in the coffeehouse culture of the preceding

century.⁶³ Over time, patronage of particular coffee houses (or taverns) evolved into a formalised system of clubs which men paid to access. These clubs played an important role in the formation of masculine identity in the period. Black has argued that “[a]s an institutional culture”, clubland “operated on fraternal ideologies to construct a public, professionalised masculinity reliant on a set of shared cultural practices and male bourgeois sociality”.⁶⁴ It is clear why membership of such clubs would be particularly attractive to our singers, for whom the acquisition of a professional and masculine identity was particularly difficult. In clubland, they were able to present themselves as part of a respectable professional network away from the opera house. Furthermore, their membership became part of their public identity. Black has noted that “social identity is a matter of public performance and display”, and that membership of clubs “where gentility and acceptability reigned supreme” bestowed members with a particular cachet.⁶⁵ Club life was also dominated by what black calls “masculinizing rituals” such as drinking, smoking and gambling, which helped to underscore the manliness and homosociality that membership encouraged.

One of the oldest gentleman’s clubs was the Beefsteak Club. Although it was founded by the actor Richard Estcourt in 1705, it had ceased to permit performers membership by the nineteenth century.⁶⁶ The Athenaeum, founded in 1826, shared a similar history. Although it had been conceived as a meeting place for actors, writers and painters, it quickly attained a

⁶³ Barbara Black, *A Room of His Own: A Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 112.

⁶⁴ Black, 11.

⁶⁵ Black, 14.

⁶⁶ Geoffrey Wansell, *The Garrick Club: A History* (London: The Garrick Club/Unicorn Press, 2004), 7–8.

prohibitive air of exclusivity. Of this club it was later said: “It was not enough to be an artist, one must be a member of the Royal Academy; it was not enough to be a writer or scientist, one must have written a book, and – further – one must have published it.”⁶⁷ It was in response these clubs and their prejudice against the theatre that The Garrick was established in 1832. This was to be the club for actors, as is evidenced by its choice of name, which paid tribute to celebrated thespian David Garrick who had died in 1779.

Despite its namesake, the club was intended not just for actors, but for theatrical professionals of all sorts – members would eventually include singers, impresarios, mesmerists, scene-painters and comedians. As Geoffrey Wansell explains, the Garrick was designed to provide a meeting place for the sorts of theatrical folk “who were not considered to be entirely respectable in the London of George IV.”⁶⁸ Because of this, the clubs’ founders decided that its membership would be less exacting than clubs like the Beefsteak and the Athenaeum.⁶⁹ Most importantly for our purposes, it was the express objective of the club to provide a place for “actors and men of distinction to meet on equal terms”.⁷⁰ As the club’s first historian Percy Fitzgerald explained: “Easy intercourse was to be promoted between artists and patrons... patrons of the drama and its professors, and a rendezvous offered to literary men.”⁷¹ The club, then, proactively encouraged and facilitated networking between performers and influential patrons. The latter

⁶⁷ Wansell, 7.

⁶⁸ Wansell, 7.

⁶⁹ Wansell, 7–8.

⁷⁰ Wansell, 9–10.

⁷¹ Quoted in: Wansell, 10.

were in ready supply at the Garrick. Braham's patron the Duke of Sussex was designated Patron, and a number of men were invited to become founder members. Many illustrious figures were amongst those who accepted the offer:

The original membership included two dukes, five marquesses, six earls and twelve barons, as well as the poet Samuel Rogers, the dramatist John Poole, the librettist James Planché, the musician Sir George Smart, as well as the actors Charles Kemble, William Macready, the comic actor Charles Matthews and his son Charles James Matthews. There were also the publishers John Murray and Richard Bentley, who were quickly joined by the king's printer, William Spottiswoode. There were even nine MPS, and two Royal Academicians.⁷²

Braham was amongst these founder members.⁷³ It is possible that the Duke of Sussex might have been behind his invitation, but this is impossible to prove. However, the tenor was certainly there for the grand dinner which christened the club, and sang a song specially written for the occasion. Shortly after this he was joined by Henry Phillips, who became a member in March 1832 - a month after the club opened.⁷⁴ In the 1830s and 1840s the club became an institution where aristocrats, actors and artists of all stripes socialised and conducted business.⁷⁵ Braham and Phillips were fully ensconced in this milieu. In 1848 Sims Reeves also became a member after

⁷² Wansell, 10.

⁷³ Braham is listed as a founding member here: Anon., *Rules and Regulations for the Government of the Garrick Club* (London: J. Moyes, 1832), 14.

⁷⁴ His name can be found under a mis-spelling ('Philipps') in: Garrick Club, 'Candidate Book, 1832-2017', 1832, Garrick Club Library.

⁷⁵ Wansell, *Garrick Club*, 25.

being proposed by the actor Charles Kean.⁷⁶ His fellow members included Dickens and Thackeray (whose rivalry famously played out on the battlefield of the Garrick), and Pre-Raphaelite artists including Rossetti, Millais and Hunt. Though it is difficult to assess the impact that their membership might have had on the reputations and careers of singers, it is clear that the Garrick allowed them access to a wide circle of influential aristocrats and leading cultural figures with whom they could fraternise on an equal footing. However, Reeves' membership also serves as an example of how club membership could backfire. In 1897 his membership was revoked when he was declared bankrupt.⁷⁷ It is unclear whether bankruptcy would automatically have resulted in a loss of membership, but club rules made it clear that members would be removed if they could not pay their subscription.⁷⁸ Reeves' membership of the Garrick compounded the embarrassment of bankruptcy, then, as he faced the additional humiliation of losing access to the Club network which had given him access to both influence and status.

We might ask why Santley was the sole singer of the group who was not a Garrick member. A possible explanation for this is the shifting image of the gentleman's club in late-Victorian Britain. During this, the age of the dandy, clubs came to be associated with the 'swell' and the 'lounger'.⁷⁹ This foppish identity was in tension with the more traditional idea of the 'clubbable gentleman'.⁸⁰ Masculinity was also experiencing a widely-

⁷⁶ Garrick Club, 'Membership Book, 1845-1856', November 1845, Garrick Club Library.

⁷⁷ Garrick Club, 'Candidate Book, 1832-2017'.

⁷⁸ Anon., *Rules and Regulations*, 7-8.

⁷⁹ Black, *Room of His Own*, 16.

⁸⁰ Black, 16.

recognised crisis during this period. Increased numbers of women were joining the workforce, the British Empire was sliding into decline, and lower birth rates raised questions about male productivity.⁸¹ In this context, the degenerate dandy could be a potentially dangerous figure. Furthermore, there was a distinct association between clubland and homosexuality.⁸² This was infamously manifested when, in 1895, the Marquess of Queensberry left a calling card at the Albermarle Club to accuse Oscar Wilde of being a sodomite. As is well-known, this set into motion a chain of events which concluded with Wilde's trial and incarceration. An understanding of this context might go some way towards explaining Santley's non-membership of the Garrick Club. For an opera singer, this association with effeminacy might be especially dangerous.

Religious Affiliation

While he does not appear to have joined the Garrick, Santley did become a prominent member of a very different type of network – not a gentleman's club, but a religious group. Three of our four singers were in some way affiliated to a religion that deviated from the English Protestant norm: John Braham was born into the Jewish faith, Henry Phillips had a Jewish mother, and Santley converted to Catholicism. In his seminal study *Jewry in Music* (and an associated article), David Conway has offered a detailed examination of Braham's status as "the most famous English Jew" of his period.⁸³ Conway ultimately argues that his Judaism played a key role in Braham's reception until around 1816, when the tenor converted to

⁸¹ Black, 14.

⁸² Black, 201–8.

⁸³ Conway, *Jewry in Music*; Conway, 'John Braham', 44.

Protestantism. As Conway has addressed this topic in such authoritative detail, this study does not attempt to offer a similarly comprehensive analysis of Braham's status as a Jew. It does, however, offer a summary of Braham's early association with Judaism, adding new detail to Conway's research, in order to assess how his place within this religious network had an impact on his public image. Furthermore, it is important to establish the Jewish facet of Braham's early identity here, as the next chapter will argue that his performances of naval music played an important role in mediating (and ultimately eclipsing) his problematic religious identity.

A brief summary of Braham's early life reveals the crucial role that Jewish networks played in the establishment of his career. As a young orphan Braham was (as we have seen) taken under the wing of a cantor at the Greater London Synagogue called Myer Lyon.⁸⁴ Some sources claim that Lyon, who also achieved success on the operatic stage under the name Leoni, was Braham's uncle.⁸⁵ The young Braham himself sang at the synagogue for a period, as well as making some minor appearances on the stage.⁸⁶ After Lyon became bankrupt and fled to Jamaica, Braham came under the patronage of the influential Goldsmids – a family of Jewish financiers who were most likely instrumental in gaining him an apprenticeship with the noted music teacher Rauzzini.⁸⁷ In Bath Braham made an important decision which mediated his Jewish identity: though his name had been 'Abraham', he dropped the first letter in order to become 'Braham'. As one contemporary commentator explained: "by the simple

⁸⁴ Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 75–82.

⁸⁵ Conway, 'John Braham', 39.

⁸⁶ Mollie Sands, 'John Braham, Singer', *Jewish Historical Studies* XX (1963): 205.

⁸⁷ Conway, 'John Braham', 41–42.

expedient of dropping the A at the beginning of his name, he got rid of the patriarchal appellation and Christianized himself.”⁸⁸ After several years under Rauzzini’s tutelage in Bath, Braham performed in London before touring extensively in Europe. On his return to Britain he established himself as the most famous singer in the country. It is clear that Braham’s Jewish networks gave him access to the training and financial support that enabled his transformation from orphan into opera singer.

Braham’s Judaism also played a role in linking him to some of the most famous writers of his age. This is because, as Conway has discussed at length, literary men including Charles Lamb and Leigh Hunt wrote (somewhat patronisingly) about Braham with reference to his Judaism.⁸⁹ Most significant of the literary connections that arose from Braham’s Judaism, however, was his collaboration with Lord Byron – a project that arose as a direct result of his status as a Jew. In 1815 the tenor was involved in the publication of Lord Byron’s *Hebrew Melodies*.⁹⁰ This was a volume of songs by the composer Isaac Nathan, purportedly based on ancient Jewish melodies. Byron wrote the lyrics for these songs, which have been divorced from Isaac’s music over time and are now amongst his best-known poems. Though it is unlikely Braham was involved with the composition of these songs, he was nevertheless named alongside Nathan as their composer.⁹¹ It is most likely that he lent his name to the volume in return for

⁸⁸ Quoted in: Conway, 43.

⁸⁹ Conway, 51–54.

⁹⁰ Lord Byron, Isaac Nathan, and John Braham, *Hebrew Melodies* (London: John Murray, 1815).

⁹¹ David Conway, *Jewry in Music: Entry to the Profession from the Enlightenment to Richard Wagner* (Cambridge, 2012), 95.

a cut of the proceeds, but his involvement in this important work is still notable.⁹²

We have seen how literary circles responded to Braham's status as a Jew, but what of other audiences? Conway argues that, during his early career, Braham's Jewishness was a 'prominent feature' of his identity.⁹³ To illustrate the tone of some of this early reception, a satirical cartoon of 1802 entitled *Family Quarrels* is useful [see Figure Five]. The title of this cartoon was taken from an English opera of the same name, also produced in 1802.⁹⁴ The cartoon depicts Braham (right) alongside fellow British singer Charles Incledon (left). As we saw in the previous chapter, Incledon did not perform continental opera, meaning that he was often compared favourably with the Italianate Braham. These sentiments are reflected in the cartoon, but they are overlaid with an intensely anti-Semitic take on Braham's religion identity. Whilst Incledon appears masculine and upright, Braham is depicted as hunched over and grotesque, with the exaggerated nose of the cartoon Jew.⁹⁵ These noses are also evident in Braham's audience who exclaim, in caricature Jewish accents, 'Mine cod, how he shing.' In contrast, however, Incledon's more genteel audience offer a conventional 'Encore, encore.' We are clearly meant to see a contrast between the Christian, British Incledon and the Jewish Braham, and this difference is intended to reflect badly on the latter. This is reflected in the subtitle of the cartoon, which is 'The Jew

⁹² Conway, 'John Braham', 58.

⁹³ Conway, 44.

⁹⁴ Conway describes how this opera had incited small-scale riots amongst Jewish audiences who objected to Braham's inclusion of a musical parody of a Jewish prayer: Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 92.

⁹⁵ For more on this trope, see: Melvin Konner, *The Jewish Body: An Anatomical History of the Jewish People* (New York: Schocken Books, 2009).

and the Gentile.’ This cartoon also highlights an important point about the musical style of these two men. While the musical score above Incledon’s head is a relatively simple tune, that depicted above Braham’s head is far more complex. It is marked ‘Allegro Squeakando’. This is explicitly tying the more florid style of continental opera to the Jewish Braham, suggesting that both his religion and his art form united to make him uniquely ‘other’. Although it is clear that Braham’s Judaism solicited attacks from some corners, Conway suggests that on a broader level traditional anti-Semitic attitudes “did not take root in the case of Braham”, as he was able to enjoy much popular success.⁹⁶ In other words, his Judaism was not the defining facet of his identity.

This is due in part to the way in which Braham actively removed himself from his Jewish networks. Conway believes that the year 1816 heralded an end to his tenor’s Jewish identification.⁹⁷ As we have seen, 1816 was the year that saw Braham face a damaging public trial, in which he stood accused of committing adultery with the wife of a sailor. After this trial Braham quickly married a young Protestant woman, converting to his new wife’s religion. There has been some confusion surrounding the manner in which Braham publically declared his conversion to Protestantism. Conway has discussed the severe criticism Charles Lamb levelled at Braham in 1816 due to his public declaration that he had converted.⁹⁸ However, Conway was unable to identify any statement made by Braham in 1816 that could have elicited such a reaction from Lamb. He notes that Mollie Sands refers to a

⁹⁶ Conway, ‘John Braham’, 57–58.

⁹⁷ Conway, 59.

⁹⁸ Conway, 53.

letter Braham wrote to a newspaper in 1826, stating that he had “long been a member of the Protestant Church”.⁹⁹ Conway suggests that the date given by Sands is a misprint, and that the letter must have been printed in 1816, thus explaining Lamb’s reaction at the earlier date. However, this letter referred to by Sands was indeed published in 1826.¹⁰⁰ It appears that Braham made no earlier public declaration of his Protestantism before this date. As Conway notes, however, the ‘declaration’ that Lamb so objected to might merely have been Braham’s symbolic marriage to a Protestant woman (an event that was widely reported) rather than any sort of public statement. As well as this conversion, Conway argues that 1816 saw Braham “[bring] to a close his overt identification with Jewish causes and the Jewish community”, for example, ending his association with Jewish charities.¹⁰¹ It is clear that Braham made a significant attempt to remove himself from Jewish circles. What Conway fails to consider, though, is what this study will argue was the most important factor in Braham’s changing identity in this period: his association with the Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. We will see in the next chapter that Braham’s canny self-presentation as a patriot mediated and even eclipsed his identity as a Jew.

Henry Phillips also had a Jewish mother, but it appears that neither she nor her son ever practised their faith. Consequently, Phillips appears not to have identified as Jewish. Nevertheless, he shares an insightful anecdote about a concert he gave with Braham at York Minster. After their much applauded performance, he says, Braham “suddenly seized my arm, and said, ‘Phillips,

⁹⁹ Quoted in: Conway, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., ‘Mr. Braham’, *The Age*, 19 February 1826, 325.

¹⁰¹ Conway, ‘John Braham’, 58.

the two Jews have done them this morning.’”¹⁰² This is a revealing comment, though it was evidently made in jest. The two singers clearly found humour in the fact that they had performed at a Protestant cathedral. Furthermore, their Judaism also served as a link between the two singers, casting them as fellow conspirators and placing them in the same religious group.

Whilst Braham converted from Judaism to the Protestant norm, Santley’s religious identity underwent a change in the opposite direction, as he unaffiliated himself with Protestantism and placed himself into another problematic religious group. The baritone converted to Catholicism in the twilight years of his career, but well before his final public performance of 1915. He soon became a respected and well-connected member of the Catholic community. Within this network, Santley enjoyed a privileged status. Outside of this community, however, he played down his religious affiliation in order to avoid the problematic connotations it could carry in late-Victorian Britain. An examination of Santley’s status as a Catholic is therefore especially illuminating, as it reveals how a singer negotiated his place within a specific religious network. Both contemporaries and biographers of Charles Santley have dated his Catholic conversion to 1880.¹⁰³ The reasons behind this conversion are unknown, as it is something Santley appears never to have discussed publically. This is not to say, however, that he attempted to divert attention from his religion entirely. He was so active in the Catholic community that in 1887 Pope Leo XIII made

¹⁰² Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:64.

¹⁰³ John Warrack, ‘Santley, Sir Charles’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2014, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35945>.

him a Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great.¹⁰⁴ This papal honour was bestowed upon prominent Catholics in recognition of their service to the church. Santley was so proud of this honour that ‘K. S. G. G.’ was inscribed prominently on his gravestone.

Whilst references to Santley’s Catholicism in the mainstream press are minimal, limited to a few brief mentions of his religion in obituaries, he appeared very frequently in the Catholic press. In 1908, for example, we find reports of him taking a leading role in a public meeting of Catholics which was organised in protest at the government’s education policy. During this period a new Education Bill was being debated in Parliament. The Catholic community was outraged at new measures which they saw as an “assault upon the citadel of our Catholic education”.¹⁰⁵ Protest meetings were quickly arranged by Catholics up and down the country, one of the largest taking place in Manchester. By the time this public meeting convened, the government had thrown out the Bill, but leading delegates nevertheless proposed a motion to record their opposition to the policy which they saw as discriminatory. The meeting was led by a group of prominent Catholics, who addressed the crowd from a platform. These men included Santley, who stood alongside a number of high-ranking clergymen. He addressed the meeting last, recording his support for the motion. After much applause, the motion was immediately passed.¹⁰⁶ In this example we find Santley positioning himself as a leading figure in a minority group, leading a protest against government policy. He was clearly not afraid to

¹⁰⁴ Warrack.

¹⁰⁵ Anon., ‘Great Meeting in Manchester’, *The Tablet*, 12 December 1908, 953.

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed account of this meeting see: Anon., ‘Great Meeting in Manchester’.

identify himself as both a vocal and leading member of his religious community.

The Catholic press were not only interested in Santley's religious activities. They also reported on his musical career and other professional activities, for example reviewing his autobiography of 1909. This autobiography was interpreted by *The Tablet's* critic as the memoirs of an upstanding Catholic: "In these picked stories from a life of very varied experience we perceive a good picture of the author himself, the great singer, the good comrade, the thorough Christian gentleman."¹⁰⁷ Notably, this review also picks up on Santley's references to his Catholic networks. Although Santley does not discuss his religion in this autobiography, the critic provides a list of prominent Catholics who feature in it, such as "Cardinal Moran (who gave a lunch in [Santley's] honour at Sydney)".¹⁰⁸ This indicates that, though non-Catholic readers might not necessarily have noticed this, Santley was nevertheless describing his movement within a network of prominent Catholics. Some of these Catholics were even playing a role in his career, as the example of Cardinal Moran suggests. *The Tablet's* review of his autobiography also demonstrates the manner in which Santley was esteemed by the Catholic community:

Sir Charles Santley's fellow-Catholics in many places have reason to be grateful to him for his many distinguished services, and all of them in every place are proud of him because he himself has always been proud of the flag of religion and honour, whether on the stage

¹⁰⁷ Anon., 'Sir Charles Santley', *The Tablet*, 12 June 1909, 929.

¹⁰⁸ Anon., 929.

or the concert platform, and in whatever company he might be found.¹⁰⁹

The idea of Santley as a flag-bearer for his religion (even whilst on stage) appears to be something of an overstatement, as Santley made little reference to his religion outside of the Catholic community. This keenness to appropriate him as a Catholic mascot suggests that his religion was just as keen to claim this high-profile convert as he was to join them.

As previously suggested, Santley's Catholicism is conspicuous in its absence from his two autobiographies. The only reference he makes to it is one humorous description of an old cousin who disapproved of his Catholicism.¹¹⁰ Given the role that religion clearly played in his life, his failure to mention it is significant. This might be explained by contemporary attitudes towards Santley's religion. As we saw in Chapter One, the Catholic Church was (like opera) associated with Italy and southern European sensibilities, thus rendering it suspect. Catholicism had long been synonymous with effeminacy in Britain, but by the latter decades of the century the religion came to be especially associated with the decadent movement, complementing its proponents' interests in degeneracy, sexuality, and mysticism.¹¹¹ By the latter years of the century, however, this association between Catholicism, effeminacy and degeneracy had hardened into something more sinister.¹¹² After Oscar Wilde's infamous trial of 1895,

¹⁰⁹ Anon., 929.

¹¹⁰ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 207.

¹¹¹ Adams, 'Elgar's Later Oratorios'; Alderson, *Mansex Fine*, 5, 15.

¹¹² Alderson, *Mansex Fine*, 5, 15.

effeminacy came to be linked increasingly with homosexuality.¹¹³ As Adams has argued, these associations had a particular impact on English musicians of the late nineteenth century who were Catholic.¹¹⁴ Men like Elgar, he suggests, became especially keen to avoid producing music that might be perceived as effeminate. Adams argues that the poor reception of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* was inextricably tied up with dangerous accusations that the work was Catholic, effeminate and immoral: Charles Villiers Stanford famously claimed the oratorio “stank of incense”, while Hubert Parry said it was “revolting”, adding “Debased and craven religion, hysteric and morbid.”¹¹⁵ This reception had a tangible impact on Elgar's perceived masculinity. As Gould has recognised: “his Catholic faith was undoubtedly a [...] hindrance, as Catholics were frequently considered unmanly at this time: manliness was intrinsically bound up with protestant notions of muscular Christianity.”¹¹⁶ Understood in this context, it appears likely that Santley sought to downplay his Catholicism in an age where his religion might have attracted accusations of effeminacy – or something far worse. For a man whose profession also attracted such claims, this religious association could be doubly dangerous. However, though he did not mention his religion in his life-writing, he did author his own Catholic volume.¹¹⁷ This was a translation of an Italian religious text which was published in 1910. Santley's production of this book (discussed further in

¹¹³ Adams, ‘Elgar's Later Oratorios’, 88.

¹¹⁴ Adams, ‘Elgar's Later Oratorios’.

¹¹⁵ Charles Edward McGuire, ‘Music and Morality: John Curwen's Tonic Sol-Fa, the Temperance Movement, and the Oratorios of Edward Elgar’, in *Chorus and Community*, ed. Karen Alquist (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 134; Adams, ‘Elgar's Later Oratorios’, 89.

¹¹⁶ Gould, ‘Aspiring to Manliness’, 169.

¹¹⁷ Santley, *Meditations*, 1910.

Chapter Five) publically identified him with Catholicism, which might suggest he had no qualms about this. However, as we will see in Chapter Five, this volume was printed in a very limited quantity by a Catholic publisher. It would therefore have remained off the radar of those outside of the Catholic community. Indeed, this was the case; the only (brief) review of this volume appeared in a Catholic newspaper.¹¹⁸

The caution with which Santley negotiated his religious affiliation appears to have proved successful. Outside of the Catholic community, little heed was paid to it. Some perhaps found his Catholicism irrelevant, whilst for others it might have been an inconvenient truth which failed to tally with their idea of the baritone as a national hero. Santley's obituaries might be seen as evidence of this latter interpretation: *The Times* was the only newspaper who described Santley as a Catholic, dedicating one sentence to his conversion and papal honour of 1887.¹¹⁹ *The Observer* offered one reference to Santley's religion (without specifying what this was), while another obituary in *The Times* referred to him merely as a "Christian".¹²⁰

These examples could be read as the Protestant establishment trying to claim Santley as one of their own. Santley's place within the Catholic network was therefore complex. While he enjoyed status and support from this community, his membership of it could also be problematic. Santley's negotiation of his status as a Catholic, and the responses to his membership of this religious group, demonstrate the impact (both favourable and

¹¹⁸ Anon., 'Meditations for June', *The Tablet*, 18 June 1910, 11.

¹¹⁹ Anon., 'Sir C. Santley', *The Times*, 23 September 1922, 10.

¹²⁰ Percy A. Scholes, 'Music and Musicians: Santley', *The Observer*, 24 September 1922, 10; Anon., 'A Great English Singer', 9.

unfavourable) that a singer's place within a religious network could have on his public image.

Successions and Dynasties

There was another way in which singers forged an important network. Rather than an established society or physical clubhouse, however, this was an imagined network comprised of those few British men who achieved success with their performances of continental opera. Membership of this network was therefore limited to our four singers. Throughout the nineteenth century there was a widely recognised process of succession, whereby the most famous singer of the day was understood to pass his crown on to a successor. This was especially true for British male opera singers, as so few were successful, meaning that it was natural for them to be imagined as an interconnected group. This sense was amplified when these men performed alongside each other, either in operas or on the concert stage: Braham appeared with both Phillips and Reeves on several occasions, whilst Reeves also performed alongside Santley many times. This idea of a network added legitimacy to a singer's reputation, as each new singer could capitalise on the reputation of his successor in order to compound his own. The very idea of succession was also suggestive of a royal precedent, casting the singer in the privileged role of ruling monarch. The phrase which was commonly used to describe this process of succession was 'assuming the mantle'. This expression was used so frequently that by 1892 Santley was able to employ it sarcastically. He recalls that critics anticipated the debut of Christine Nilsson, who was advertised as being the singer to

assume the mantle of Jenny Lind. Santley said: “She wore a mantle handsomely trimmed and lined, but it was not Jenny Lind’s!”¹²¹

In his autobiography Phillips explains that he was often associated with the elder Braham; something he found strange due to their age gap of twenty-four years and their differing styles. He said: “By some strange want of calculation, which I could never understand, the public seemed always to class me with Mr. Braham”.¹²² As Phillips notes, this comparison was frequently made, despite the fact that he was a baritone whilst Braham was a tenor. This suggests that the novelty of these singers being British was a defining facet of their public identity, linking the two men together despite their differing voice types. Although Phillips was often compared with Braham in this way, the ‘mantle’ of the latter singer was widely understood to have been assumed by fellow tenor Sims Reeves. Phillips recognised this, stating that Reeves was the “legitimate heir” to Braham’s “glorious throne”.¹²³ Reeves himself also acknowledged this idea, though perhaps with a tinge of resentment. He said: “Braham, like myself, had a success which was many sided; indeed it is not a little remarkable, that Braham took his farewell of the public in the very year, 1839, in which I appeared before the public for the first time”.¹²⁴ It is notable here that he says Braham is “like myself”, rather than stating his own likeness to the elder tenor. In this subtle way he is positioning himself as the originator rather than the successor, suggesting an egotistical displeasure at the notion of being Braham’s heir. This sense is amplified when Reeves later offers a somewhat condescending

¹²¹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 269.

¹²² Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:58.

¹²³ Phillips, 2:317.

¹²⁴ Reeves, *Recollections*, 213.

account of a performance he gave alongside the elder tenor which clearly belies his belief that he is the greater vocalist.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, Reeves is also keen to point out that his career began in the same year that Braham retired, thus tapping in to the mythology of singer succession in order to carve out a legitimate place for himself within this network. He does this again in his second autobiography when he quotes a review in which he is described as a gentleman “on whom it seems now to be understood that the mantle of Braham is destined to fall”.¹²⁶ This idea was widely repeated in the press, and Reeves’ reputation as the elder tenor’s heir endured for the duration of his career. For example, in 1890 a critic in *The Guardian* shared an anecdote about his uncle, who was a “worshipper of Braham”.¹²⁷ This uncle, we are told, “had been on the lookout for years for a tenor worthy to fill Braham’s place”.¹²⁸ Though he heard several contenders, each of these men was deemed “not a Braham”.¹²⁹ Eventually, however, he heard Reeves perform. Before the new tenor had sung two lines, the uncle “jumped up exclaiming, ‘That’s the only lad to step into Braham’s shoes’”.¹³⁰

Despite the fact that Reeves was a tenor and Santley was a baritone, these two singers were often imagined as a pair. Their relationship is therefore reminiscent of the aforementioned association between Braham and Phillips. Reeves was thirteen years older than Santley, who records in his autobiography that the elder singer had offered him useful advice at the start

¹²⁵ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 88.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Reeves, 87.

¹²⁷ Pearce, *Sims Reeves*, 67.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Pearce, 67.

¹²⁹ Pearce, 67.

¹³⁰ Pearce, 67.

of his own career.¹³¹ The two men grew close; Santley described them as “intimate friends” and Reeves later described Santley as his “comrade”.¹³² In addition to their warm personal relationship, these men were also closely associated professionally. This was in large part due to their unusual shared status as British opera singers, but also because their careers overlapped for several decades, meaning that they were both very much in the public eye at the same time. Perhaps the best summary of their perceived relationship can be found in the pages of a Canadian newspaper, which stated in 1891: “Mr. Santley is to the baritone world what Mr. Sims Reeves is among tenors”.¹³³ This critic recognises their difference in voice type, but nonetheless draws a close parallel between their careers. It is clear that our four singers inhabited their own network, which was perceived as a closely interconnected professional group. Singers recognised that this group identity could bolster their status as professionals. We will see in Chapter Five that they used their autobiographies in an attempt to solidify this imagined network of which they were each a part, using their words (and sometimes quoting each other’s) in order to strengthen this sense of shared identity.

Another way in which this imaginary network was perpetuated was through singer’s families. Chapter Five will explain that some singers used their autobiographies in order to present themselves as part of a musical dynasty. Reeves does this most notably by emphasising his father’s status as a musician.¹³⁴ On the first page of his autobiography Phillips also describes

¹³¹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 40.

¹³² Santley, *Reminiscences*, 88. See message from Reeves (dated 1889) pasted into Santley’s Jubilee Album, Liverpool Record Office: 920 SAN/7.

¹³³ Anon., ‘Unknown’, *Grip*, Unknown 1891, 209.

¹³⁴ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 4–5.

how his mother was a singer and his father was a theatrical manager, whilst Santley describes his own father's position as an enthusiastic amateur organist.¹³⁵ The latter singer also describes the close bond he formed with the celebrated Kemble acting dynasty.¹³⁶ This connection was forged through his marriage to Gertrude Kemble, who had herself enjoyed minor success as a singer before her marriage to Santley.¹³⁷ Gertrude was the granddaughter of actor Charles Kemble, who was himself the brother of actor Sarah Siddons. Though Santley claims he was connected to this family "by a very slender tie" only, he nevertheless details his relationships with its various prominent members; most notably his wife's formidable aunts, the opera singer Adelaide Kemble and the actor Fanny Kemble.¹³⁸ Santley was, in this way, positioning himself as a minor player in this celebrated family dynasty.

While each of our four singers were members of musical or theatrical families through birth or marriage, all of these men extended these musical dynasties through their children. At least three of Braham's four sons (Augustus, Hamilton and Charles) followed him on to the stage, even performing alongside him on a number of occasions.¹³⁹ In the closing pages of his autobiography, Phillips explains that his two daughters (Florence and Alice) have become singers, and expresses his hope that they will "preserve my name in the annals of the musical world."¹⁴⁰ He explains that he first introduced them to the stage on the occasion of his own farewell concert,

¹³⁵ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:1; Santley, *Student and Singer*, 6–8, 12–13.

¹³⁶ Anon., 'Sir Charles Santley', 35, 45–51.

¹³⁷ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 165.

¹³⁸ Anon., 'Sir Charles Santley', 39–40, 48–49, 56–62.

¹³⁹ For further details on the careers of Braham's sons, see: Hewett, *Strawberry Fair*.

¹⁴⁰ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:323–24.

effectively handing over the baton in a very public manner. Reeves also had two children who followed him onto the concert stage: Herbert and Constance Reeves, both of whom achieved modest success. Finally, Santley's daughter Edith also worked as a professional singer for a brief period. None of these operatic offspring came close to reaching the dizzying heights of their fathers' careers, but it is nevertheless significant that all of our four singers in some way perpetuated their names and reputations through their children; in the cases of Braham and Reeves, even performing alongside their offspring in a manner which represented a clear attempt to establish a successor.

Critics were seldom able to discuss our singers' children in isolation from their famous fathers, demonstrating how powerful ideas about family dynasties could be. Reviews of Charles Braham's performances almost all compared his voice to John Braham's. One critic typically described him as "carefully educated in his father's school", while another claimed he was "inspired by the genius of his father" to make a "strenuous effort to approach his unrivalled excellence."¹⁴¹ However, reviewers also frequently noted that his voice fell far short of his father's, typically describing it as "inferior" and "not highly cultivated".¹⁴² Nearly forty years later, the reception of Herbert Sims Reeves followed a very similar pattern. Critics repeatedly referred to his father when reviewing his performances. A review of 1880 is typical.¹⁴³ It opens with the line: "Believers in the "hereditary of

¹⁴¹ Anon., 'St. James's Theatre - Mr. Braham', *The Standard*, 10 February 1843, 3; Anon., 'St. James's Theatre - Mr. Braham's Second Concert', *The Standard*, 17 February 1843, 2.

¹⁴² Anon., 'St. James's Theatre - Mr. Braham', 3.

¹⁴³ Reproduced in: Anon., 'The Times on Sims Reeves' Son', *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 17 June 1880, 7.

genius” must have been delighted when they saw Mr. Herbert Reeves appear”.¹⁴⁴ The critic then reviews the young Reeves’ performance in detail, systematically comparing each element of his voice to that of his father – despite the fact that Reeves senior was not performing on this occasion. The son’s career was clearly inextricably tied to (and even overshadowed by) that of his father. This not altogether complimentary review closes with the lines: “If [Herbert Reeves] will realise that the applause lavished on him was due to his descent rather than to his individual merits, there is every chance he may be among the few who have borne an illustrious name with impunity.”¹⁴⁵ Herbert clearly could not escape the shadow cast by his father. Whilst Braham and Reeves might have hoped that their sons could perpetuate their celebrated names, their offspring’s failure to do so actually underscored their own victories in an unexpected way. By falling short of their familial precedents, their sons cast the successful careers of their fathers in sharp relief.

At the same time, however, these musical offspring clearly benefitted from their familial ties to the industry. They were in many ways the primary beneficiaries of their musical dynasties, as they were able to cash in on their fathers’ names in order to generate publicity, as well as gaining privileged access to training and industry contracts. Herbert Sims Reeves clearly recognised this. At the start of his career he was introduced as Herbert Reeves (as is evidenced in the aforementioned review), but by the 1890s he was using his full name: Herbert Sims Reeves.¹⁴⁶ It is probable that,

¹⁴⁴ Anon., 7.

¹⁴⁵ Anon., 7.

¹⁴⁶ See for example: Anon., ‘Mauritius Hurricane Relief Fund’, *The Times*, 18 July 1892, 3.

achieving only modest success, he adopted the name of his father in order to capitalise on his familial link to the most famous tenor of the age. He also did this through the medium of two publications. In 1909 he authored a singing manual entitled *The Art of Singing*.¹⁴⁷ This was the same name as the singing manual his father had published in 1895.¹⁴⁸ The younger Reeves introduced his work with a Preface that explains it “[embodies] the principles as taught by my father”.¹⁴⁹ He thus refers back to the career of his father in an attempt to solidify and perpetuate a sense of dynasty, whilst also profiting from it. We will see in Chapter Five that Herbert Reeves additionally played a key role in the publication of a 1924 biography of his father, exercising an element of control over this volume and therefore serving as guardian of his father’s legacy.¹⁵⁰ Through these two publications, then, Herbert Reeves sought to bolster his family dynasty and secure his place within it. However, he was not only securing his place within this family group. In 1880 a feature in *The Illustrated Household Journal* described the singer as “an almost exact reproduction of his father”.¹⁵¹ The anonymous author of this piece concludes with a revealing statement: “Our other great English tenor, John Braham, had three sons, all distinguished by the possession of great vocal talent”.¹⁵² This suggests that, whilst each singer created his own musical dynasty, these dynasties collectively formed part of a broader network of dynasties.

¹⁴⁷ Herbert Sims Reeves, *The Art of Singing* (London: Novello and Company, 1909).

¹⁴⁸ Sims Reeves, *The Art of Singing* (London: Chappell and Co, 1895).

¹⁴⁹ Reeves, *Art of Singing*, 1909, n.p.

¹⁵⁰ Pearce, *Sims Reeves*.

¹⁵¹ Anon., ‘The Son of Mr. Sims Reeves’, *The Illustrated Household Journal and Englishwoman’s Domestic Magazine*, 26 June 1880, 45.

¹⁵² Anon., 45.

Rita Jallinoja, historian of family dynasties, offers a useful perspective on artistic families which speaks to the experiences of our four singers and their children. She discusses how difficult it is for children to replicate the success of parents who were celebrated artists:

Dynasticity [...] starts with this person and reaches its heyday with his or her rising fame. The descendants can prolong this heyday by entering the arts as professionals, but also by treasuring the legacy of the family's protagonist. The length and kudos of the extended legacy is very much dependent on the achievements of the celebrated artist.¹⁵³

This reflects the experiences of singers like Herbert Sims Reeves, who failed to replicate the success of his father, but nevertheless attempted to extend his legacy by adopting his name and profession, and participating in publications that perpetuated the family dynasty. Jallinoja then goes on to explain that, because it is difficult to produce offspring who possess the same level of talent as their parents, artists are more inclined to build “intragenerational bonds” with partners and friends who belong to the same generation, instead of focussing on building family dynasties.¹⁵⁴ It is useful to consider the relationships between our four singers as representing these sorts of horizontal intragenerational bonds, as opposed to the vertical dynasties singers created through their children. Both of these types of relationship represent a different form of network, and this chapter has now examined both. We might conclude from these analyses that Jallinoja's

¹⁵³ Rita Jallinoja, *Families, Status and Dynasties: 1600 - 2000* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 255.

¹⁵⁴ Jallinoja, 255.

assessment holds true, as the close relationship between our four singers (aided by its own process of succession) created a sense of dynasty that proved far more potent than their family dynasties ultimately proved to be.

Artistic Networks

A further network within which our singers operated was that of the wider artistic community. Through the medium of their autobiographies, these men attempted to negotiate their place within this group in two key ways. Firstly, they likened singing to other artistic professions including writing, painting and acting. In this way they sought to elevate the status of singers by presenting them as equal members of a professional artistic network. Secondly, they assumed alternative professional identities themselves by taking up new forms of artistic employment; our singers variously turned their hands to painting, fiction writing, music teaching and theatrical management. Whilst these new careers were typically taken up for financial reasons, they often had an impact on a singer's public image as well as his wallet. Singers who were successful in these secondary endeavours reaped the financial and reputational benefits, whilst a failed new career proved nothing short of disastrous for others.

We often find singers talking about their profession in a manner which conflates singing with other forms of artistic practice. In a typical example, Henry Phillips discusses the instability of artistic careers which were vulnerable to both fluctuations in public taste and the shifting sympathies of patrons.¹⁵⁵ He says: "We have our seasons of poets, painters, architects,

¹⁵⁵ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:100.

sculptors, musicians, actors, singers, and inventors, rolling in and ebbing out with a high tide now, and then a barren sand”.¹⁵⁶ Phillips thus presents singers as equal members of a wider artistic network who share the same professional concerns. He ranks singers alongside architects and inventors; men whose careers did not carry the complicated connotations of his own. By conflating these professions with singing, Phillips seeks to paper over the problems inherent in his profession and raise its status by association. But he is also doing something else. Historians of nineteenth-century masculinity have long noted that work was a crucial component of manliness in this period.¹⁵⁷ John Tosh has argued that masculinity was dependent on a man’s ability to earn an income through a “dignified” profession.¹⁵⁸ In order to qualify as dignified, he suggests, this work “had to be absolutely free from any suggestion of servility or dependence on patronage”.¹⁵⁹ The perceived masculinity of singers (already problematic) was rendered even more fragile in this context, as their work was very much reliant on public taste and the sympathies of theatre managers and patrons. However, by noting that these various unpredictable factors affect the fortunes of other types of artist, Phillips was suggesting that the professional status of the singer was not uniquely problematic.

Santley employs the same tactic with similar effect almost thirty years later. He says: “The painter’s perspective, colour, grouping; the surgeon’s anatomy; the sailor’s ropes and sails; the soldier’s gun, sword and bayonet exercises, and so on throughout the range of human occupation, are no other

¹⁵⁶ Phillips, 1:100.

¹⁵⁷ See especially: Tosh, *Manliness*.

¹⁵⁸ Tosh, 37.

¹⁵⁹ Tosh, 37.

than scales and *solfeggi* in another form”.¹⁶⁰ Again, we find singing presented as equal to other professions which are more conventionally respectable. Most notable, though, is Santley’s comparison of the singer to the sailor and the soldier. We will see in the next chapter that each of all of our singers (but especially Braham and Santley) drew on models of naval masculinity in order to present themselves as respectable British men.

Reeves adopted a different tactic to Phillips and Santley, presenting singers not as equal to other artists, but as superior. As we will see in Chapter Five, his first autobiography contains many fictional short stories.¹⁶¹ One of these features a penniless bohemian writer who is an alcoholic and a gambler.¹⁶² This character forms a contrast to Reeves, who himself features in this story as a respectable operatic professional. He takes the writer’s poverty-stricken son under his wing, helping him to establish his own career in opera. Singers in this story, then, are pointedly presented as more respectable than writers. However, this suggestion is significantly complicated by the fact that it appears in a work of fiction written by Reeves, thus casting the tenor himself in the role of writer. As we will see in Chapter Five, Reeves did indeed make a concerted effort to adopt the professional identity of a writer through the authorship of his strange, semi-autobiographical fiction. He even used the career of Charles Dickens as a blueprint. Whilst he attempted to suggest the superiority of singers over writers on the one hand, then, he simultaneously attempted to transform himself into a celebrated writer on

¹⁶⁰ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 72.

¹⁶¹ Reeves, *Recollections*.

¹⁶² Reeves, 22–31.

the other. The confused and contradictory nature of these efforts is suggestive of the tenor's anxiety about his complicated professional status.

Whilst Reeves implies that singers might be superior to writers, Santley suggests that actors are superior to singers. However, rather than employing this argument to the detriment of singers, he uses this idea to elevate his own profession. He does this by repeatedly suggesting that singers are actors as well as musicians. In his autobiography Santley describes his early love for the dramatic stage, suggesting that he would prefer to be an actor than a singer:

My ambition and delight were the stage; the concert-room, save under exceptional circumstances, had little attraction for me. I believe I would have preferred being an actor of moderate fame to being the most renowned singer on earth.¹⁶³

This suggests that the actor, in his opinion, holds a privileged status over the singer. However, he goes on to make it clear that he considers himself to be an actor of sorts, this benefitting from the higher status he has himself bestowed upon acting. Most notably, he explains that he favours operatic singing over concert singing because he prefers to “embody a part” and “have my attention riveted [...] on the delineation of a character I was representing” rather than singing a series of disjointed songs to concert audiences.¹⁶⁴ He thus emphasises the dramatic qualities of his operatic performances. This sense is underscored elsewhere, when he writes at length of the “dramatic genius and versatility” of the celebrated opera

¹⁶³ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 305.

¹⁶⁴ Santley, 306.

singers Madame Viardot Garcia and Giorgio Ronconi.¹⁶⁵ In the midst of this section, he notes that he has “often heard actors remark, “He is not a bad actor for a singer!””, adding “What condescension!”¹⁶⁶ He concludes that he has never seen the performances of Garcia and Ronconi equalled by “any actor”.¹⁶⁷ The singing actor is therefore presented as superior to the straight dramatic actor, as their performance embodies both music and drama.

Two of our singers worked as visual artists. Henry Phillips describes his early talent for art and the profitable business he established in his youth, selling sketches in order to help support his family.¹⁶⁸ Santley also describes a period in the middle of his career in which he pursued art, taking lessons in painting and even exhibiting his work.¹⁶⁹ He explains that he began studying art in an attempt to fill his time whilst earning some extra money from it.¹⁷⁰ However, he eventually abandoned painting due to both a lack of time and the smell of paint, which he believed had compromised his health.¹⁷¹ It is clear that both Phillips and Santley worked as visual artists for reasons that were primarily financial, but their discussion of these ultimately failed careers is significant. They describe stints as artists in order to suggest the versatility of their artistic talents, whilst perhaps also claiming some of the arguably more secure cachet enjoyed by the artist in nineteenth-century Britain. In his work on masculinity and visual artists in Victorian Britain, Herbert Sussman notes that art was perceived by many (including Samuel

¹⁶⁵ Santley, 28.

¹⁶⁶ Santley, 28.

¹⁶⁷ Santley, 28.

¹⁶⁸ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:27–29.

¹⁶⁹ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 162–69.

¹⁷⁰ Santley, 162.

¹⁷¹ Santley, 169.

Smiles) as an industrial pursuit, thus rendering it a profession that conformed to the masculine ideal far more than singing.¹⁷² Sussman also explains that several key aspects of contemporary artistic practice contributed to a sense of the artist's masculinity in this period; for example the Pre-Raphaelite focus on religious art and scientific observation.¹⁷³ Crucially, Sussman also points out that that unlike authors (and, indeed, singers), visual artists were not compelled to compete with women.¹⁷⁴ In these key ways, then, Phillips and Santley could perhaps lay claim to some of these masculine components of the artist's identity by describing their own stints in this alternative profession.

As Braham is the sole singer who did not write an autobiography, his opinions on the place of the singer within a broader artistic community are less clear. He did, however, adopt two alternative artistic professions himself. Firstly, he worked as a composer, writing the music for several of the English operas he appeared in. In his work on Braham's status as a Jew, David Conway has examined some of these operas written by the tenor, with a particular emphasis on his use of Jewish music.¹⁷⁵ In the next chapter we also see that Braham's most important composition (a ballad entitled 'The Death of Nelson') formed the very cornerstone of his career. Outside of these two elements of the tenor's compositional output (Jewish and naval music respectively) very little work on his music has been done. An evaluation of Braham's compositions is therefore much needed. However, this falls far outside the parameters of the present study, requiring musical

¹⁷² Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities*, 116.

¹⁷³ Sussman, 115, 117.

¹⁷⁴ Sussman, 114.

¹⁷⁵ Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 85–88.

analysis and a sharp focus on musicological concerns. This chapter will therefore only note that Braham's status as a composer did indeed have an impact on his public image, as the analysis of his nationalist music in the next chapter will make clear.

Braham's second alternative professional identity was that of theatrical impresario. He stepped into this role when he built the St. James's Theatre in 1835.¹⁷⁶ He also purchased a stake in The Colosseum, a venue within Regent's Park, at the same time.¹⁷⁷ Hewett suggests that Braham was pressured into these risky ventures by his socially ambitious wife, who was determined to raise the status of her family.¹⁷⁸ This conclusion is certainly borne out by the spouses' surviving correspondence, in which it is clear that Frances Braham pressured her husband into making questionable financial decisions.¹⁷⁹ She recognised that her husband could improve his professional and social status if were able to transform himself from a mere singer into a businessman and manager. However, though these ventures initially seemed to fare well, it was not long before they started to unravel. Braham was frequently away from London on tour, and he entrusted the running of his venues to managers and the interfering Mrs Braham.¹⁸⁰ Braham was soon plunged into financial crisis, and compelled to undertake a gruelling American tour in an attempt to recoup his funds. His finances never entirely recovered; Hewett describes periods in which the elderly tenor had to flee to

¹⁷⁶ Hewett, *Strawberry Fair*, 10–11.

¹⁷⁷ Hewett, 10–11.

¹⁷⁸ Hewett, 11.

¹⁷⁹ See the extensive collection of Braham's correspondence with his wife here: John Braham, 'Correspondence: John Braham to Fanny Braham' n.d., DD/SH/60, Somerset Heritage Centre.

¹⁸⁰ Hewett, *Strawberry Fair*, 13.

Brussels in order to avoid creditors.¹⁸¹ The failure of these ventures had a negative impact on Braham's reputation; he was mocked in the press for the state of his finances. For example, *The Age* ran a comical feature in 1841 in which it imagined what different theatrical figures should be given as Christmas presents. It suggested that Braham was in need of "a fortune".¹⁸² The following year the same newspaper (and several others) carried a report stating that Braham was proclaimed an outlaw in the Sheriff's court due to his outstanding debt.¹⁸³ This legal action meant that lenders could seize his assets. Though he had hoped this new professional identity would advance his social standing, it had the opposite effect.

There is, however, one unexpected way in which Braham's ill-fated stint as an impresario placed him into a celebrated artistic network. This is a result of his collaboration with a young Charles Dickens. The tenor played a key role in bringing the early work of Dickens to the stage, producing both his operetta *The Village Coquettes* and burletta *The Strange Gentleman* at St. James's Theatre in 1836.¹⁸⁴ In this way, Braham played a role in what biographer Michael Slater describes as Dickens' 'breakthrough year'.¹⁸⁵ Consequently, references to the tenor can often be found in work on Dickens (including Slater's aforementioned biography). In a way he could not have predicted, Braham has found a place in the footnotes of British cultural history through his professional relationship with the great author of the age.

¹⁸¹ Hewett, 71.

¹⁸² Anon., 'New Year's Gifts', *The Age*, 3 January 1841, 6.

¹⁸³ Anon., 'Proclamations of Outlawry', *The Age*, 3 July 1842, 7.

¹⁸⁴ Slater, 'Literary Life', 62, 79.

¹⁸⁵ Slater, 59–83.

It is clear that our singers adopted a range of alternative artistic identities in an attempt to improve and augment their status as singers. Perhaps most significant was their self-representation as writers, which will be explored in detail in Chapter Five of this study. This chapter will also reveal that, though their authorship of singing manuals (which represented the public performance of professional expertise) these men additionally assumed the identity of teachers. However, the most significant new professional identity adopted by our singers was not artistic at all. The next chapter will argue that singers across the century repeatedly assumed the identity of the sailor in order project a potent model of British masculinity. Whilst Braham's link with Dickens has become a small part of his legacy, it was his connection with another great hero of the age that formed its cornerstone. This was the tenor's relationship with Lord Nelson and his Navy.

CHAPTER THREE

“All the gallantry and noble feelings of a British tar”: Singers and the Sea

In 1868 the third Exhibition of National Portraits was held at the South Kensington Museum in London. This was the final instalment in a series of exhibitions that aimed to depict the history of Britain through portraiture. At the heart of this spectacle was the Central Hall, which a contemporary guide described as displaying “a collection of arctic and naval heroes generally”.¹ Here, in the midst of these famed men, hung a portrait of British opera singer John Braham who had died twelve years previously. This type of memorialisation was remarkable for a man who started life as a Jewish orphan in London’s poverty-stricken East End, before becoming a practitioner of an Italian art form; a profession which was, as we have seen, frequently perceived as both feminine and foreign. Against the odds, however, Braham had earned a place upon the walls of the South Kensington Museum, standing shoulder to shoulder with the greatest national heroes of the age. Of the twenty other portraits in this room, over half depicted naval and military men. Amongst the remainder were engineers, statesmen, and explorers. The only other artistic figures represented in the room were the maritime novelists Captain Frederick Marryat and Edward Howard, both of whom had also served in the Navy. How did Braham find himself in such esteemed company? Perhaps a degree of nepotism had something to do with it. Braham's son-in-law, the MP

¹ A. C. D., ‘The National Portrait Gallery’, *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings for Members of the English Church*, 1 July 1868, 65.

Chichester Samuel Parkinson-Fortescue, was on the committee of the exhibition. But family ties do not tell the whole story: the committee would surely not have accepted a portrait of a member's relative who did not reflect their stated aim of representing persons who have “attained eminence or distinction in England”.² This chapter will argue that Braham’s memorialisation as a Briton of note was no accident, but rather a direct result of his clever and careful cultivation of a very particular public image.

In nineteenth-century Britain, one figure symbolised nationalistic masculinity more than any other. This was of course Jack Tar: the British sailor. Keen to bolster their own claims to patriotism and manliness, British singers of the nineteenth century repeatedly turned to this figure of the naval hero and found many different ways of adopting and appropriating elements of his heroic persona. The establishment of this trend can largely be traced back to John Braham and his virtuosic exploitation of the nationalist sentiments that abounded in Britain during the Napoleonic Wars. He translated this patriotic fervour into popular musical theatre which celebrated British naval victories and heroes. These performances allowed the tenor to present himself to the public as a sort of ‘poster boy’ for nationalist pride, thus creating an identity which accentuated both his masculinity and his Britishness; traits that would not ordinarily have been attributed to a male opera singer. This new persona also eclipsed Braham’s status as a Jew; an element of his identity which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was sometimes seized upon by critics in the earlier stages of his

² Science and Art Department of the Committee of the Council on Education, *Catalogue of the Third and Concluding Exhibition of National Portraits* (London: Strangeways and Walden, 1868), ix.

career. Braham's efforts were remarkably successful. For the remainder of his life he enjoyed the reputation of a patriot; an identity which endured long after his death in 1856.

The success of Braham's efforts formed a blueprint for the British male opera singers who followed in his wake. Henry Phillips and Sims Reeves picked up where Braham left off, performing many of his sea songs and capitalising on the same patriotic sentiments. However, they also developed this naval persona in their own ways; most notably through their autobiographies, in which they described their own voyages by sea. At the end of the century, Charles Santley took this autobiographical trend to its extreme. In his two autobiographies he presented himself not as a singer but as a gentleman sailor and daring adventurer. In other words, Santley evolved Braham's model of operatic naval masculinity from the brave Georgian Tar to the Victorian man of Empire, thus ensuring contemporary relevance. As we will see, this shift correlates with the changing patterns of masculinity that have been identified by historians of the nineteenth-century Navy. Whilst these broader historical patterns inform an understanding of our singers' naval personae, the reverse is also true: an examination of operatic naval masculinities can add a valuable new perspective to our understanding of naval culture in contemporary Britain.

This chapter will explore the naval persona of each of our four singers in turn, thus forming a clear picture of the ways in which their appropriation of naval masculinities evolved across the century. This chronological approach reveals that this naval operatic trend was something of a cumulative effort, with each singer adopting and adapting the efforts of his predecessor. The

chapter will also focus (where possible) upon the reception of this naval self-representation in an attempt to understand how these efforts were received, and the impact they had on each singer's identity.

John Braham

In order to contextualise Braham's relationship with the Navy, it is worth a brief look backwards. Britain is, of course, a maritime nation. In the eighteenth century, the country's pride in its Navy was expressed through well-known compositions including Arne and Thomson's famous 'Rule, Britannia' and Boyce and Garrick's 'Heart of Oak'. Both anthems became part of Britain's naval identity, and remain so to the present day. The nautical music of Charles Dibdin (1745 – 1814) also played an important role in the creation of Britain's naval identity in the eighteenth century. Isaac Land has recently shown that Dibdin's music played a key role in popularising the figure of the sailor, suggesting that: "[Dibdin's] achievement was to successfully merge the traits of the 'English tar' with the nobler qualities of the national hero."³ Land discusses the popularity of Dibdin's naval compositions, such as 'Poor Jack', which the composer himself described as being "sold in every music-shop, seen of every lady's pianoforte, and sung in every company."⁴ Such was the popularity and potency of Dibdin's music that William Pitt commissioned him to write patriotic sea songs in return for a government pension.⁵ We will see that Dibdin also exerted a strong influence on our four singers. His eighteenth-

³ Quoted in: Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 95.

⁴ Land, 95.

⁵ Land, 96.

century tradition of naval music set an important precedent upon which Braham was able to build.

Linda Colley has famously argued that the wars against France in the early nineteenth century formed the context in which the concept of Britishness was forged.⁶ She contends that British identity was defined against the idea of the ‘other’: a Protestant, rational and masculine British identity formed in opposition to the French, who were imagined as Catholic, fickle and effeminate.⁷ Though some scholars have subsequently challenged Colley’s formation of ‘the other’ (arguing that the picture was, in reality, far more nuanced), it remains clear that this was a period of intense patriotism.⁸ Braham’s nationalistic musical performances both responded to and reflected this political and social context. But there is a further synergy here. In the same way that Colley’s Britons defined themselves in opposition to the foreign and feminine French during this period, Braham was attempting to define himself in opposition to the foreign and feminine taint of opera. It is not difficult to understand why the brave British Tar was an aspirational figure for a man in his position.

Despite such synergies, scholarship has been slow to recognise the theatre as a political site in Georgian Britain. This is partly due to the assumption that strict censorship required theatre to be apolitical.⁹ Scholars including Susan Valladares and Gillian Russell have challenged this notion, demonstrating that the theatre was often an intensely political space where

⁶ Colley, *Britons*.

⁷ Colley, 33–35, 252.

⁸ Catriona Kennedy, *Narratives of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars: Military and Civilian Experience in Britain and Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3–4.

⁹ Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics, and Society, 1793–1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 16.

the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were represented, reflected and responded to.¹⁰ However, the role of music in Britain during this era has received relatively little attention. Notable exceptions include Oskar Cox Jensen's recent study of Napoleonic song and Isaac Land's work on popular naval ballads.¹¹ A co-authored section on music and politics in *Resisting Napoleon* has also begun to consider the potential of this field, arguing that music "played a crucial, but thus far little discussed role" in the "struggle for the loyalty of the British public."¹² Despite this work, the operatic stage in the context of the Napoleonic Wars is yet to be considered. This is perhaps unsurprising, as opera is thought of as a continental art form and is therefore perhaps not a site where one would expect to locate British patriotism in this period. As this chapter will show, however, this assumption is flawed.

As we saw in Chapter One, there were two distinct forms of opera in this period: English opera and continental opera. Our singers appeared in both. English operas, considered more 'safely' British, were not 'sung-through'.¹³ Instead, they tended to employ spoken dialogue interspersed with songs and ballads. During the Napoleonic Wars, these English operas frequently reflected political feeling. However, scholarship examining this relationship is scarce. Valladares has offered an insightful examination of Braham's opera *The English Fleet in 1342* in the context of the Peninsular Wars, but

¹⁰ Susan Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres 1807-1815* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Russell, *Theatres of War*.

¹¹ Oskar Cox Jensen, *Napoleon and British Song, 1797-1822* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Land, *War, Nationalism*, 77–104.

¹² Mark Philip, 'Music and Politics, 1793-1815: Introduction', in *Resisting Napoleon: The British Response to the Threat of Invasion, 1707-1815*, ed. Mark Philip (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 173.

¹³ Burden, 'London Theatres'.

this is focused on the dramatic elements of the opera rather than its musical context.¹⁴ Scholarship has also addressed Napoleonic ballads taken from such operas, but has largely divorced them from their political and operatic contexts.¹⁵ A consideration of English opera during the Napoleonic Wars is therefore timely.

Following the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, Britain became fearful that turmoil in France would make its way across the English Channel, threatening long-established British order and stability.¹⁶ This fear was exacerbated when Napoleon's forces grew in strength over the early part of the nineteenth century; increasingly hysterical reports of Napoleon's growing fleets in the English Channel were in wide circulation.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, British patriotism also ran high during this period. James Davey has described this outpouring of intense public feeling, which was manifested in popular support for the navy and "almost unanimous loyalty to the crown."¹⁸ From 1803 to 1815 Britain was almost continuously engaged in the Napoleonic wars. British naval forces saw much action, including such famous battles as that of Trafalgar in 1805 and the final Battle of Waterloo in 1815. This climate offered Braham fertile ground upon which he could construct his reputation as a British patriot. Indeed, during this period his public image changed; by the end of the war he was very rarely perceived as a Jewish singer, instead being largely seen as a

¹⁴ Valladares, *Peninsular War*, 176–84.

¹⁵ Derek Scott, *The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989), 8–10.

¹⁶ James Davey, 'Mutiny and Insecurity', in *Nelson, Navy & Nation*, ed. Quintin Colville and James Davey (London: Conway, 2013), 134.

¹⁷ Davey, 145–51.

¹⁸ Davey, 148.

British hero, synonymous with nationalist, naval pride. This change occurred as Braham was able to capitalise on political events and intense public feeling.

Before examining Braham's efforts in detail, however, it is pertinent to briefly consider another British opera singer who was synonymous with the Navy in this period. This is Charles Incledon, whom we encountered in the previous chapter where he appeared alongside Braham in the anti-Semitic *Family Quarrels* cartoon [see Figure Five]. As we saw in Chapter One, Incledon did not perform in continental opera, limiting himself to English opera, concert singing and the occasional oratorio. The most important element of Incledon's repertoire, however, was his sea songs. These were especially popular as audiences knew that the singer had himself served in the Royal Navy; he had seen action in and around the West Indies during the American Revolutionary Wars of the 1780s.¹⁹ The tenor never failed to remind audiences of his naval service; in a biography he drafted for the *Theatrical Inquisitor* in 1817 he offered a wildly romanticised account of his time in the West Indies.²⁰

Upon leaving the Navy, Incledon established a career on the stage where he became best known for roles and ballads which played upon his status as an authentic embodiment of Jack Tar. Naturally, such material proved immensely popular during the Napoleonic Wars, when Incledon also

¹⁹ Philip H. Highfill, Kalman A. Burnim, and Edward A. Langhans, 'Charles Incledon', in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 - 1800*, vol. 8 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 88.

²⁰ Charles Incledon, 'Biographical Memoir of Mr. Incledon', *Theatrical Inquisitor*, August 1817, 85–94.

appeared in various productions celebrating British naval victories.²¹ He was especially celebrated for his performances of George Alexander Steven's ballad 'The Storm', in which he portrayed a sailor praying for salvation from a wild storm.²² Incledon always dressed as a sailor for this piece, performing in front of an elaborate backdrop [see Figure Six.] This dramatic spectacle proved extremely popular, especially as Incledon's own experiences at sea lent it a powerful air of authenticity. 'The Storm' came to be Incledon's 'greatest hit'.²³

Very little work has been undertaken on Incledon, and it falls outside the parameters of this study offer a detailed examination here.²⁴ Nevertheless, an understanding of his career is much needed, as it offers us a lens through which to examine both Napoleonic performance culture and the representation of masculinity on the Georgian stage. This chapter will only note that Incledon set an important precedent for Braham, who knew the elder singer well. He would have seen the success of Incledon's naval persona, and it is likely that this inspired his own. However, Braham could not claim to be an authentic Tar. This meant that he adopted a slightly different model of naval masculinity; whilst Incledon presented himself as a literal sailor, Braham positioned himself as more of a patriotic herald, singing the praises of real-life heroes such as Lord Nelson. He did this in three main ways: through the composition of naval themed operas, through

²¹ For more on Incledon's involvement with nationalist productions, see: Terence M. Freeman, *Dramatic Representations of Soldiers and Sailors on the London Stage, 1660 - 1800* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1995).

²² Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, 'Charles Incledon', 90–91.

²³ Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, 91.

²⁴ The most substantial work on Incledon to date is his entry in the following biographical dictionary: Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, 'Charles Incledon'.

his involvement in theatrical tributes to Nelson, and through his own musical tributes to fallen military heroes.

The first example of Braham's musical nationalism is his opera of 1803, entitled *The English Fleet in 1342* [see Figure Seven]. Notably, this was the same year in which the aforementioned *Family Quarrels* cartoon appeared. While Braham composed the music, the words were written by his friend Thomas Dibdin. Thomas was the illegitimate son of Charles Dibdin who was, as we have seen, so renowned for his sea songs in the eighteenth century. The symbolism of this collaboration was therefore significant. For an audience who were all too familiar with the naval music of Dibdin the elder, the family name would have had some resonance, adding a sense of authenticity to the opera. Braham appeared in *The English Fleet* as a sailor called Valentine. He shared the stage with his real-life partner Nancy Storace and Charles Incledon. The plot of this opera, depicting a historic English naval victory over the French, was a thinly-veiled attempt to appeal to the nationalistic feelings of an audience that lived in fear of attack from Napoleon's forces. The opera told the story of Jane of Flanders whose husband, the ruler of Brittany, had been held in captivity by French pretenders to his throne. Jane appealed to the British for help, before raising an army against the French intruders. This resulted in a long siege which almost compelled Jane to surrender, but at the last moment the British navy appeared and saved the day; Jane and the English navy are victorious and the French are defeated.

It is quite obvious that this plot was a calculated appeal to nationalist fervour. This was noted by a critic at *The Times*, who said: "Many of the

situations are applicable to the present state of this country; and the sentiment, without any great straining, may not be deemed inappropriate to the ardent zeal and enthusiastic patriotism by which all ranks of people are animated in defence of their dearest rights.”²⁵ This critic went on to explain that the contemporary relevance of the plot gave the audience a strong sympathy for the plight of the protagonists, stating that: “we feel ourselves making, as it were, one cause with a people determined to maintain their own and their sovereign’s independence and interests, by the voluntary sacrifice of their lives.”²⁶ These sentiments were echoed in the *Morning Post*, whose critic said the opera was “prominently adapted for a train of pointed, patriotic sentiments.”²⁷ The *Times* review gives us details of the naval imagery employed in this production: the character ‘Mainmast’ was a sailor, described as possessing “all the gallantry and noble feelings of a British tar” and the set for one scene featured “a range of vessels, both in their heads and sterns”.²⁸ The reception of this particular naval scene was unsurprisingly very favourable, the reviewer stating that: “Such were the emotions of the audience in consequence of this scene, that after the finale was sung, [...] it was found necessary to yield to the general call for another view of it, and for ‘Rule Britannia’, which was given amid reiterated plaudits by INCLEDON and BRAHAM.”²⁹ This opera represented not just a great professional success for Braham, still in the infancy of his career, but an important first step in his transformation into a nationalist icon. He appeared for the first time in character as a sailor. One of his pieces in the

²⁵ Anon., ‘Theatre Royal, Covent Garden’, *The Times*, 14 December 1803, 3.

²⁶ Anon., 3.

²⁷ Anon., ‘Theatre’, *Morning Post*, 14 December 1803, 3.

²⁸ Anon., ‘Theatre Royal, Covent Garden’, 3.

²⁹ Anon., 3.

opera was ‘Vive Le Roi’ (long live the King); he was before the public as a visual, audible symbol of nationalist pride.

The Battle of Trafalgar occurred just two years after *The English Fleet* was produced. Following the heroic death of Lord Nelson, patriotic feeling in Britain came to a head. Britons had lived in fear of invasion for so long that it is clear why this victory over the French was such a monumental occasion. Nelson was already a hero before Trafalgar, but his death in battle cemented his status as one of Britain’s greatest military icons. Robert Southey, recalling the public feeling from the later viewpoint of 1813, recalled that: “The death of Nelson was felt in England as something more than a public calamity: men started at the intelligence, and turned pale; as if they had heard of the loss of a dear friend. An object of our admiration and affection, of our pride and of our hopes, was suddenly taken from us.”³⁰ This was a public outpouring of grief on a colossal scale. There was a huge demand for mementoes of Nelson; Colin White has spoken of how the public mood “manifested itself in a voracious demand for commemorative material. Prints, ceramics, glassware, jewellery, enamel boxes, textiles, and even furniture were hurriedly mass-produced – all with a mourning theme.”³¹ It was into this environment that John Braham ventured with his own tributes to Nelson. While his efforts were undeniably a canny effort to capitalize on the strength of public feeling, they were not merely a cynical

³⁰ Robert Southey, *Life of Nelson* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co, 1896), 295–96.

³¹ Colin White, “‘His Dirge Our Groans - His Monument Our Praise’: Official and Popular Commemoration of Nelson in 1805-6”, in *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005*, ed. Holder Hoock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 27.

ploy to build his reputation on a national tragedy. He had moved in the same circles as Nelson and almost certainly met him on multiple occasions.

It is difficult to gauge the true extent of Braham's relationship with Nelson; sources are contradictory and several stories have undoubtedly been exaggerated into legend. However, we do know that it was most probably through his patrons the Goldsmids that Braham made the acquaintance of the famous Admiral.³² Nelson was a neighbour and good friend of the Goldsmid family; he often dined with them and even spent his last night in England at their house.³³ Braham lived with the Goldsmids for a period and often attended their parties to provide musical entertainment.³⁴ It is therefore very likely that Braham met Nelson at the Goldsmid home. Braham also knew both Lady Nelson and Emma Hamilton; he taught the former Italian songs while he was studying in Bath and eventually formed a close friendship with the latter.³⁵ This friendship is evidenced by an extraordinary item held at the Folger Shakespeare Library. This is a portrait of Emma Hamilton as Titania, painted by George Romney. It is the frame of this portrait that is of most interest, however, for it contains one of the Nelson mourning rings; only 58 were made for Nelson's closest friends and acquaintances after his death. An inscription next to the ring reads, 'THIS PICTURE WITH THE MOURNING / RING IN MEMORY OF LORD NELSON / WAS GIVEN TO JOHN BRAHAM / BY LADY

³² Conway, 'John Braham', 41.

³³ Paul H. Emden, 'The Brothers Goldsmid and the Financing of the Napoleonic Wars', *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 14 (1935): 236.

³⁴ Levien, *Six Sovereigns*, 9–11.

³⁵ Levien, 13.

HAMILTON.’³⁶ The fact that Hamilton gave Braham her portrait and one of the coveted rings is suggestive of the extent of their friendship.

There was one particular encounter between Braham and Nelson, however, which has been repeated by countless biographers. Though it is most likely based on an event which actually took place, it is clear that it has been wildly exaggerated and romanticised. Nevertheless, this anecdote was so widely reported that the public clearly believed it to be evidence of Braham’s personal connection to Nelson, adding yet more weight to his association with the heroic Admiral. The famous meeting between these two men purportedly occurred in Leghorn (modern-day Livorno) while Braham was touring Italy with Storace. Just one version of this story can be found in an 1852 newspaper biography of Braham:

At Leghorn Braham was much noticed by the hero of the Nile. He was almost every day at Nelson’s residence, and generally dined with the Admiral twice a week. One morning his Lordship requested Braham to play a march, which Nelson intended should be his funeral march. Whilst Braham was playing over and examining the composition, the hero of Alexandria, General Abercrombie, was announced. Nelson told Braham not to leave the room, and to continue his task, during which the two illustrious commanders were walking up and down the saloon, keeping up an animated conversation in an under tone. Strange destiny of the tenor. He had no presentiment, at the time, that he should first compose the scene,

³⁶ William A. Pressly, *A Catalogue of Paintings in the Folger Shakespeare Library* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 110.

“The Death of Abercromby,” and, lastly, the air, “The Death of Nelson,” and that he should hereafter sing these two compositions to thousands and thousands of excited listeners.³⁷

As this author states, Braham was eventually to compose musical tributes to these famous military heroes, who were both to die in action. Sir Ralph Abercromby was a Lieutenant-General of the British Army who was a casualty of the Napoleonic wars before Nelson; he died in Alexandria in 1801. In 1805 Braham composed ‘The Death of Abercrombie’, with words once again by Thomas Dibdin. This song did not achieve the success that Braham was later to enjoy with ‘The Death of Nelson’, but several versions of the printed music exist and these come from multiple publishers, demonstrating a modest success.³⁸ This was another important step in the evolution of Braham’s public image; once again the public were given an opportunity to associate him with nationalist feeling. Although no record appears to exist of Braham performing this song in Britain, it must have been performed as it had entered public consciousness; this is evidenced by the fact that Braham’s later tributes to Nelson were compared to this song by critics. Of course, Nelson died in this same year, and it is Braham’s tributes to the fallen Admiral, most famously his composition ‘The Death of Nelson’, that really cemented his nationalist reputation.

‘The Death of Nelson’, composed six years after the Admiral’s death, was not Braham’s first tribute to him. In the immediate aftermath of Trafalgar, Braham was involved in several other tributes to his fallen friend. As we

³⁷ Anon., ‘John Braham’, *Illustrated London News*, 20 March 1852, 245.

³⁸ For example: John Braham, *The Death of General Sir Ralph Abercrombie* (London: Joseph Dale and Son, 1805).

have seen, Nelson's death produced a public outpouring of grief on a huge scale. The theatres of London offered a variety of dramatic acts in tribute to the lost hero. In Colin White's analysis of Nelson's commemoration, he discusses the many theatrical performances that were produced in the Admiral's honour, each theatre attempting to out-do the other, with "increasingly spectacular tributes."³⁹ Braham was involved with at least three such productions.

These productions mark a defining step in the progression of Braham's public image; one more time he stood before audiences as a visible symbol of patriotism, dressed as a sailor and allying himself with his lauded, fallen friend. The first of Braham's dramatic tributes, *The Victory and Death of Lord Viscount Nelson*, was performed at Drury Lane Theatre in mid-November 1805. This took the form of a short melodrama that was performed after the evening's main entertainment. Braham had composed the music alongside M.P. King and also took a starting role in the production. This was performed at least two times. A review in *The Times* describes the performance which took place on 11 November 1805:

A figure of Fame descends, and a scroll, on which appear the words, "England expects every one will do his duty." After some pathetic lines, recited by ELLISTON, and a most affecting song by BRAHAM [...] An illuminated figure of LORD NELSON then rises

³⁹ White, 'His Dirge', 26.

from the stage, and the compliment concludes with “Rule Britannia”.⁴⁰

Once again Braham appeared before London audiences in character, this time not just as a common sailor, but as a naval officer. Furthermore, the song that he performed on this occasion was one he had composed himself; *The Times* noted that “BRAHAM was loudly encored in the song, which is, we understand, of his own composition.”⁴¹ This song was not ‘The Death of Nelson’, but another song which has not previously been identified by scholars. Its sheet music gives this piece the same title as the production itself: ‘The Victory and Death of Lord Viscount Nelson’.⁴² It is a sombre piece which demonstrates an almost morbid fascination with the dead hero’s body. Lines include, “In Death’s dark house the Hero lies, Cold his Heart and clos’d his Eyes” and “his dead body trenched with Scars”.⁴³ Despite this morbidity, the song also has an air of defiant victory: “His flag that to the Foe ne’er bow’d, his signal once but now his shroud”.⁴⁴ Despite the positive reception of this song, Braham’s next attempt at honouring his lost friend was not so successful.

This second tribute to Nelson took the form of a ballet and was performed at the King’s Theatre on 7 December 1805. It was entitled *Naval Victory and the Triumph of Lord Nelson*. It is not absolutely clear whether Braham performed in this piece, but he was publically acknowledged to be its author, as we shall see. The first scene of this drama depicted the battle of

⁴⁰ ‘Drury-Lane Theatre’, *The Times*, 12 November 1805, 3.

⁴¹ ‘Drury-Lane Theatre’, 3.

⁴² John Braham and R. Cumberland, *The Victory and Death of Lord Viscount Nelson* (London: D. Corri, 1805).

⁴³ Braham and Cumberland, 4.

⁴⁴ Braham and Cumberland, 4.

Trafalgar; a review in *The Times* tells us that this part of the performance was “rapturously applauded”.⁴⁵ However the following scene, depicting the moment of Nelson’s death, caused an outcry. *The Times* review describes that: “when the immortal Nelson was introduced in the cabin of the *Victory*, in the convulsions of his last moments, the representation became too strong for the feelings of the audience, and a general cry of ‘off, off’ prevailed.”⁴⁶ It became necessary for Braham, the author of this drama, to step forward and address the audience. *The Times* recounts that Braham told the audience:

that the Ballet was brought forward with the best intentions; that the Proprietors were anxious to pay every tribute in their power to the memory of the Hero who had gained the greatest victory that had ever been obtained by the English navy; that they trusted the most polite and enlightened audience in the world would give them credit for their intentions.⁴⁷

This dramatic depiction of Nelson’s death was clearly misjudged. As the reviewer observed: “Many, if not all, the Persons of Fashion present, were honoured with the acquaintance of that great character, and of course must be deeply affected at seeing the object of their veneration and respect thus pouring out his soul for his country, even through the medium of dramatic representation.”⁴⁸ As we have seen, circumstances compelled Braham to step forward, out of character, and address the audience directly in

⁴⁵ Anon., ‘King’s Theatre’, *The Times*, 9 December 1805, 2.

⁴⁶ Anon., 2.

⁴⁷ Anon., 2.

⁴⁸ Anon., 2.

passionate praise of Lord Nelson. This is yet another circumstance that served to underline his association with both Nelson and patriotic fervour. Despite this, it is clear that the production was not well received and it must have been obvious to Braham that the graphic depiction of Nelson's death was a step too far.

Braham was involved in one more tribute to Nelson, *A Solemn Tribute to the Memory of THE IMMORTAL NELSON*, which was performed at Drury Lane on 10 January 1806. There is a lack of reviews for this performance, but the inclusion of the word 'solemn' in the title suggests that this production was cautious not to cause yet further offence by being too graphic in its portrayal of Nelson's demise.

It was not until 1811 that Braham's famous composition 'The Death of Nelson' appeared. It is possible that Braham waited six years before attempting another musical tribute to his friend as he was cautious of inspiring further outrage amongst audiences. White supports this interpretation; he has questioned why Braham's later tribute to Nelson was such a success when his initial effort caused such offence. He concludes that by 1811 it had become "permissible, even popular" to depict Nelson's death, as the "immediate, instinctive, and subtly nuanced response to Nelson's demise had already begun to solidify into the Nelson Legend."⁴⁹ It is also important to note that the graphic representation of Nelson's death which caused outrage was very different from Braham's rousing, celebratory anthem of 1811.

⁴⁹ White, 'His Dirge', 47.

‘The Death of Nelson’ made its first appearance in Braham’s opera *The Americans*. The libretto was by M. P. King, with whom Braham had already collaborated on *The Victory and Death of Lord Viscount Nelson* in 1805. However, King did not write the words for ‘The Death of Nelson’; these were taken from a poem written by S. J. Arnold. The plot of *The Americans* followed the fate of a troupe of British men who sail to America, where they experience difficulties with both Native Americans and Quakers. Braham once again portrayed a naval captain who falls in love with the wealthy ward of a Quaker. The plot was rather unconvincing and factually inaccurate; a review in *The Times* found a catalogue of errors in the way that the geography and culture of America had been portrayed.⁵⁰ Had it not been for the introduction of Braham’s most famous song, *The Americans* would be a quite unremarkable opera. *The Times* stated:

The chef-d’oeuvre of the evening was a song on the *Death of Nelson*, which presented us with a splendid counterpart to Braham’s *Death of Abercromby*. The burthen,

“England expects that every man

“This day will do his duty,”

which was varied in *tense* in the other verses, would have ensured success and popularity to a much worse composition.⁵¹

This critic clearly recognized the popular appeal of ‘The Death of Nelson’ and, interestingly, recognized that its predecessor was ‘The Death of

⁵⁰ Anon., ‘King’s Theatre’, *The Times*, 29 April 1811, 3.

⁵¹ Anon., 3.

Abercromby'. This demonstrates the process by which Braham was, step by step, becoming known to the public as a purveyor of musical nationalism; the critic realized that this was yet another of Braham's numerous nationalist tributes.

'The Death of Nelson' was so important to Braham's career that it is worth quoting the words to its rousing first verse:

'Twas in Trafalgar's bay,
We saw the foe-men lay;
Each heart was bounding then;
We scorn'd the foreign yoke,
For our ships were British oak,
And hearts of oak our men.
Our Nelson mark'd them on the wave,
Three cheers our gallant Seamen gave,
Nor thought of home or beauty,
Nor thought of home or beauty,
Along the line the signal ran:
"England expects that ev'ry man,
This day will do his duty,

This day will do his duty.”⁵²

In his analysis of this song, Scott has drawn attention to Braham’s use of well-timed musical fanfare to arouse patriotic feeling, contrasted with more tranquil music accompanying words such as ‘England’, ‘home’ and ‘beauty’.⁵³ He also points out the repeated use of the word ‘our’, for example ‘our ships’ and ‘our Nelson’, arguing that “[o]stensibly this is because it is sung by a participant in the Battle of Trafalgar”.⁵⁴ Interpreted in this way, Braham is presenting himself as a heroic veteran of Trafalgar. However, Scott also explains: “notice the lines ‘*His* ship the “Vict’ry” named’ (not *our* ship), and ‘Three cheers *our* gallant seamen gave’ (not *we* gallant seamen).”⁵⁵ He argues that these turns of phrase demonstrate that the song was aimed at those who did no fighting, “[inviting] them to bask in the glory of victory, sharing the pride of being part of a nation which has produced such a hero as Nelson.”⁵⁶ This song, then, presents Braham as both as a heroic veteran of Trafalgar and an equal member of the patriotic audience. Both of these sentiments could only reflect positively on the public image of Braham. ‘The Death of Nelson’ was clearly a well-executed and successful attempt to inspire nationalist pride. Its success can hardly be overstated.

As Mollie Sands has amusingly put it: “Braham was to sing *The Death of Nelson* upon every suitable and unsuitable occasion for the rest of his life, and always with tremendous effect; it was his signature tune from 1811 until

⁵² John Braham, ‘The Death of Nelson’, *Augener’s Edition* (London, 1905).

⁵³ Scott, *Singing Bourgeois*, 9.

⁵⁴ Scott, 10.

⁵⁵ Scott, 10.

⁵⁶ Scott, 10.

his death in 1856.”⁵⁷ This piece was, unsurprisingly, particularly popular with coastal audiences; society hostess and social commentator Julia Clara Byrne recalls Braham performing in Brighton in front of a ‘marine audience’ who were ‘determined to have’ Braham perform his sea-songs.⁵⁸ She goes on to note that “Braham’s sea songs, even when *not* at the seaside, were always captivating to the million, and he so well knew their effect on the masses.”⁵⁹ The enduring success of ‘The Death of Nelson’ was extraordinary. It was printed in music books and on song sheets too numerous to mention, and continued to be performed by subsequent generations of British singers, including (as we will see) Sims Reeves and Sir Charles Santley. White has noted that, one hundred years after the Battle of Trafalgar, ‘The Death of Nelson’ was “sung frequently during the 1905 centenary celebrations, and even enjoyed a modest revival during the bicentenary ‘Trafalgar Festival’ in 2005.”⁶⁰ Again, the example of this song demonstrates that Braham’s nationalistic music reached a large and diverse audience over a sustained period of time.

In 1812 a volume of naval music was compiled, entitled *Braham’s Whim; or, Songster’s Delight: Comprising all the Modern Fashionable and Sea Songs now singing at the Theatres of London and Convivial Clubs*.⁶¹ This volume featured a portrait of Braham, and contained the words to several of his nautical songs: pieces from *The English Fleet*, *The Americans* and, of

⁵⁷ Sands, ‘John Braham’, 208–9.

⁵⁸ Byrne, *Gossip*, 1892, 2:7.

⁵⁹ Byrne, 2:7.

⁶⁰ White, ‘His Dirge’, 48.

⁶¹ Various, *Braham’s Whim, Or; Songster’s Delight: Comprising All the Modern Fashionable and Sea Songs Now Singing at the Theatres of London and Convivial Clubs* (London: Knevett, Arliss and Baker, 1812).

course, ‘The Death of Nelson’ were all included. Several other nautical songs associated with artists such as Charles Incledon also featured. Just ten years earlier, in the cartoon *Family Quarrels*, Braham had been represented as a caricature Jew, in negative contrast to the upright, British Incledon. It is revealing, then, that only ten years after this, it is Braham and not real-life sailor Incledon who is chosen as the ‘poster boy’ for a collection of British, patriotic songs. This example encapsulates the important change that Braham’s identity had undertaken by 1812. Four years before the date suggested by Conway, Braham had ceased to be seen as a Jew and had instead been adopted as a symbol of British naval pride.⁶²

Throughout Braham’s career he was to add many more naval-themed songs to his repertory, just one example being ‘Stand to your guns’. In 1843 a reviewer described this as a “truly national song” going on to explain that it was “calculated to keep alive a due feeling for the maintenance of England’s naval supremacy.”⁶³ Braham also continued to portray naval and nautical characters on stage. These roles were very popular with the public, as is evidenced by a print of Braham in the role of ‘Tom Tug’ the boatman in Charles Dibdin’s opera *The Waterman* [see Figure Eight].

The Napoleonic Wars ended in 1815, but Braham’s career endured for another thirty-seven years. Even though the wars had become a memory, Braham’s association with this period persisted; for the rest of his life, and even after his death, he was remembered as a symbol of British naval pride. This is evidenced in the many obituaries that flooded newspapers upon his

⁶² See discussion in Chapter Two: pp 142-143.

⁶³ Anon., ‘Mr. Braham’s Concert’, *Berrow’s Worcester Journal*, 4 May 1843, 4.

death in 1856. A typical example in *The Lady's Newspaper* stated that: “the unbounded popularity which he so long enjoyed was derived not so much from the Italian opera, as from the fact that he expressed, in his well-known songs, with wonderful force and fire, the national feelings of his time.”⁶⁴ As late as 1879, twenty-three years after his death, he was still being remembered in this way. An obituary of Braham's eldest daughter Lady Waldegrave (who had married into the aristocracy and become a noted society hostess) recalls that: “in the ultra-patriotic times of the early part of the century, his songs, composed and sung by himself, roused the excitable people who denounced Bonaparte to almost frantic enthusiasm. Of these songs the renowned “Death of Nelson” is a well-known specimen.”⁶⁵ It is telling that only a small minority of Braham's obituaries referenced the fact that he had been Jewish, while they almost unanimously praised him as a British icon.

In his memoir of 1846, avid theatre-goer William Robson looked back to the period of the Napoleonic Wars. He recalled that: “we were engaged in war, and principally that part of it in which our naval heroes took precedence: no wonder, then, that their representatives were always made welcome on the stage [...] They – both songs and characters – made a grateful nation love Jack Tar the better.”⁶⁶ This is true of Braham; he had a very visible, public role in the dramatic celebration of the Napoleonic Wars and the memorialisation of its heroes. As Robson recognised, performers such as Braham helped to popularise the British sailor; the British hero. However, in

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⁶⁵ G. R. E., ‘The Hatchment at Strawberry Hill’, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, 1 August 1879, 78.

⁶⁶ Robson, *Play-Goer*, 160.

the case of John Braham, the reverse is also true; his depiction of sailors and British heroes made a grateful nation love him all the better. It was this popularity, forged at a time of national crisis, which led to Braham's memorialisation on the walls of the South Kensington Museum in 1868: an opera singer standing shoulder to shoulder with naval heroes and Napoleonic veterans.

Henry Phillips

In his lengthy autobiography Henry Phillips offers much insight into his own relationship with the sea. His volumes reveal that, in the early years of his career, he sought to appropriate the same type of naval masculinity that his friend Braham had drawn upon so successfully. However, it soon became clear that Phillips was performing in a very different age. The Napoleonic Wars had become a memory and the elder singer's model of naval heroism was no longer fit for purpose in the new age of steam. In an attempt to tackle this problem, Phillips adopted a different type of naval identity by employing two key tactics: he emphasised his role in keeping traditional naval music alive, whilst also detailing his own experiences on the sea. In doing so, he created a powerful new model of operatic naval masculinity that subsequent singers would replicate.

At the start of his autobiography Phillips describes his very first appearance on the stage.⁶⁷ He was still a young boy when he donned an oversized sailor's costume and stood in front of a dramatic naval backdrop in order to perform 'The Bay of Biscay'; a sea song that had also been much-performed

⁶⁷ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:9–12.

by Braham.⁶⁸ He explains that this performance “laid the foundation stone of my future fame.”⁶⁹ By describing this event at the start of his career at the beginning of his autobiography, Phillips doubly foregrounds the important role that naval music has played in his career. He goes on to make references to the many sea songs that he has performed over the course of his career, including the well-known ballad ‘The Sea, the Sea, the Open Sea’.⁷⁰ This was composed expressly for him by Haydn’s student Chevalier Neukomm (1778-1858), with words taken from a poem by Barry Cornwall (the pseudonym of poet Bryan Waller Proctor, 1787-1874). Phillips explains that this song was a great sensation which (to his dismay) reached a very wide audience:

My great horror always was, that a song should become so popular as to be sung in the streets. This result unfortunately followed the success of [‘The Sea’]; and my first intimation of the fact was not the most agreeable. I am sure I had not sang it anything like through the season when, walking one fine day in the Regent’s Park, I heard at a little distance behind me some one humming what I thought must be the song of ‘The Sea’. The voice came nearer and nearer; I slackened my pace, to be the more certain, when there overtook me a butcher boy, with a tray on his shoulder, and a halfpenny ballad in his hand, singing at the top of his voice ‘I’m on the sea – I’m on the

⁶⁸ Braham’s performance of this song is discussed here: Roy Johnston and Declan Plummer, *The Musical Life of Nineteenth-Century Belfast* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 183.

⁶⁹ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:12.

⁷⁰ Phillips, 1:231–35.

sea.’ Shall I confess that at that moment I was uncharitable enough to wish he had been at the bottom of it?⁷¹

This amusing anecdote is extraordinarily revealing. Through the medium of cheaply reproduced sheet music, this working-class boy had become intimately acquainted with Phillip’s famous sea song. Though Phillips attempts to assert a sense of professional dignity by distancing himself from working class street music, it is clear that his sea songs (like those of our other singers) could reach vast audiences beyond the opera house. He later explains that another of his naval songs (‘The Return of the Admiral’) was “soon caught up by the vulgar, and vended in the street.”⁷² This begins to suggest the way in which the naval music performed by our singers not only reflected contemporary ideas about masculinity and the sea, but helped to formulate them through their wide dissemination.

We have seen that Braham forged an association with Charles Dibdin by performing his songs and collaborating with his son. Phillips also drew greatly from the elder Dibdin’s prestige in the field of British naval music. He explains how, in an attempt to earn money, he gave concerts of Dibdin’s sea songs.⁷³ This venture did not prove lucrative, but Phillips spins this failure to his advantage by comparing himself directly with Dibdin: “The similarity between Charles Dibdin’s experiences and my own were most extraordinary. The same lack of success, [...] the same annoyances and insults he so everlastingly experienced, were all repeated during my

⁷¹ Phillips, 1:235.

⁷² Phillips, 1:238.

⁷³ Phillips, 1:267.

career.”⁷⁴ In this way he suggests that he is Dibdin’s successor. Later, Phillips describes his attempt in the 1840s to compile a volume of Dibdin’s letters.⁷⁵ This effort further positions him as the caretaker of Dibdin’s legacy. His endeavours to perpetuate this legacy lead Phillips to make an incredibly astute observation on the way in which public taste has shifted from Braham’s heyday.⁷⁶ He explains that technological changes within the Navy have lessened the appeal of naval themes:

the mode of naval warfare being so altered, there is not the same incentive to such themes; and I much fear that the national character may also lose much of its freshness under existing circumstances. An English sailor does not like skulking behind iron plates, or delight in the sinking of an enemy’s ship, without daring the show his face.⁷⁷

The advent of steam ships and their modern weaponry had heralded an end to the age of jolly Jack Tar. The old model of naval masculinity adopted by Braham had therefore ceased to resonate with audiences in the same way—especially when they were no longer living under the threat of French invasion. Because this Georgian model of naval masculinity was no longer potent, an updated version was required. Unlike Braham, who positioned himself as a patriotic herald, Phillips adopted key elements of Incledon’s naval persona – he presented himself as a literal sailor. He did this through

⁷⁴ Phillips, 1:272–73.

⁷⁵ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:12.

⁷⁶ For more on this, see Isaac Land’s timely study of Phillips’ relationship with Dibdin. This will be published in 2018: Isaac Land, “‘Each Song Was Just like a Little Sermon’: Dibdin’s Victorian Afterlives”, in *Charles Dibdin and Late Georgian Culture*, ed. Oskar Cox Jensen, David Kennerley, and Ian Newman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 204–19.

⁷⁷ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:16.

his autobiography, in which he describes several voyages taken to fulfil engagements overseas. He often romanticises these accounts, also using them to emphasise his bravery. Furthermore, Phillips draws a clear connection between these voyages and his performance of sea songs; he presents himself as a singing sailor, sharing his real-life experiences with his audience.

The main voyage described by Phillips is his journey to America, where he spent an extended period touring in the 1840s. He offers a lengthy account of his outward journey, describing life on the ship in vivid detail.⁷⁸ Most important, however, is the way in which he links this journey directly to his sea songs, suggesting that his music is inspired by real-life events. He explains how he used his time on his outward journey to set to music a poem by journalist and popular writer Martin Tupper (1810-1899) entitled ‘The Emigrant Ship’.⁷⁹ On its completion, he had his pianoforte brought onto the deck of the ship in order to perform the new song to “the two hundred emigrants on board”.⁸⁰ His description of this event is wildly romanticised:

Surrounded by these men, women, and children, I sat down to the instrument, the last rays of the sun gleaming on my face, and sang, for the first time in public, ‘The Emigrant Ship’. Its effect no words can describe. I was universally encored, and on looking round not a dry eye was visible. In a few minutes I was serenaded, by the whole

⁷⁸ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:82–97.

⁷⁹ Phillips, 2:90–91. Tupper was best known for his Proverbial Philosophy.

⁸⁰ Phillips, 2:91.

group [...] The voices echoed and rolled over the water, till the scene altogether seemed like one in Fairyland.⁸¹

Phillips thus presents himself as a singing sailor, chronicling the experiences of his fellow passengers. He also offers an appealing ‘back story’ for this latterly well-known song. By explaining that it was composed on the sea under such romantic circumstances, he endows it with a claim to authenticity. In another instance, Phillips recalls how the ship’s captain announced that they were a thousand miles from land.⁸² The singer then called out to his fellow passengers: “‘Come down into the saloon, and I’ll tell you all about it in music’”, continuing “Away we went; I sat down to the pianoforte, and sang – ‘A thousand miles from land are we, /Tossing about on the roaring sea.’”⁸³ The song he refers to here is another of his well-known sea songs, ‘The Stormy Petrel’.⁸⁴ Again, this anecdote casts Phillips in the role of singing sailor, whilst also suggesting the authenticity of songs which reflect his real-life experiences.

While Phillips sang some of the same celebrated sea songs as Braham and positioned himself as a successor to Charles Dibdin, it is clear that his efforts did not prove effective in the new age of steam. He was therefore required to evolve the Georgian model of naval masculinity adopted by Braham. Notably, Phillips used his autobiography in order to do this. We will see that Charles Santley took this idea even further at the end of the century.

⁸¹ Phillips, 2:91.

⁸² Phillips, 2:93.

⁸³ Phillips, 2:93.

⁸⁴ Like the aforementioned ‘The Sea’, this was composed for Phillips by Neukomm with words by Cornwall: Phillips, 2:93.

Sims Reeves

Reeves had a less developed relationship with sea than our other singers. It is possible that this was due in part to his desire to distance himself from his predecessors in order to assert his originality; we saw in the previous chapter that he was somewhat uncomfortable with his reputation as Braham's successor. Reeves certainly makes disparaging remarks about the celebrated sea songs of earlier singers, referring to Incledon's famous ballad 'The Storm' as "a lengthy and tedious song".⁸⁵ Nevertheless, he does make some allusions to his continuation of the naval tradition. Most notable is his statement in his first autobiography: "I may mention [...] it was my own experience of a terrible storm between St. Katherine's dock and New-castle-on-Tyne, which suggested the energy and expression, wherewith I have usually sung the 'Bay of Biscay.'"⁸⁶ This is, as we have seen, a ballad that was also much performed by both Braham and Phillips. Furthermore, Reeves suggests that he performs this sea song with an air of authenticity that is reminiscent of Incledon and Phillips. This claim is almost immediately followed by one of the fictional short stories that populate the tenor's first autobiography. Entitled 'The Shipwreck', it recounts the sad story of a lighthouse woman who believes she has lost her husband at sea.⁸⁷ Although he has actually deserted her, he is eventually drowned at sea during a storm – despite his wife's efforts to save him. As we will see in Chapter Five, Reeves incorporates fiction into his autobiography in an attempt to adopt a new professional identity – that of an author. The fact that

⁸⁵ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 156.

⁸⁶ Reeves, *Recollections*, 235.

⁸⁷ Reeves, 234–41.

Reeves relates this sea story immediately after his reference to ‘The Bay of Biscay’ suggests that, through this tale, he is incorporating something of the naval operatic tradition into his fiction.

While Reeves makes very few references to his performance of sea songs, it is nevertheless clear that he was an active participant in the tradition of British male opera singers performing naval music. This is made clear by subsequent biographers, press reviews and sheet music. In his 1924 biography of Reeves, Charles Pearce refers to many occasions upon which the tenor sang sea songs made famous by his predecessors. For instance, he describes his popular performances of ‘The Bay of Biscay’, which Braham had also performed widely.⁸⁸ Even more noteworthy is the fact that Reeves frequently performed Braham’s celebrated anthem ‘The Death of Nelson’. Scott refers to this (alongside ‘The Bay of Biscay’) as being amongst the tenor’s “standard encores for thirty years”.⁸⁹ Reeves was so associated with Braham’s ballad that it appears as the first song in a popular volume of sheet music entitled *Sims Reeves’ Ninety Tenor Songs*.⁹⁰ A similar volume entitled *Sims Reeves’ Six Celebrated Tenor Songs* also includes ‘The Death of Nelson’ alongside another of Braham’s naval songs: ‘The Anchor’s Weighed’ from his aforementioned opera *The Americans*.⁹¹ To the score of the latter piece is attached a note, describing Braham as “the great English tenor”.⁹² It is clear that Reeves’ performances of Braham’s songs were a continuation of the elder tenor’s legacy. In a rare allusion to his own

⁸⁸ Pearce, *Sims Reeves*, 285–86.

⁸⁹ Scott, *Singing Bourgeois*, 128.

⁹⁰ Various, *Sims Reeves’ Ninety Tenor Songs* (London: C. Sheard, 1860), 1–2.

⁹¹ Various, *Sims Reeves’ Six Celebrated Tenor Songs* (London: Dicks and Co, 1873).

⁹² Various, 11.

performance of sea songs, Reeves describes his appearance as Tom Tug in Dibdin's opera *The Waterman* as his amongst his greatest ever successes.⁹³ He notably makes the point that this role offered him greater success than those he enjoyed with his performances of Italian opera.⁹⁴ As is evidenced in Figure Eight, Tom Tug is a role that Braham was also associated with. It is therefore clear that Reeves played a significant role in perpetuating the legacy of naval music that had been established by his predecessor Braham. However, in an apparent attempt to assert his autonomy, he played this connection down in his two autobiographies. Santley took the opposite approach, using his autobiographies to emphasise his place in the naval tradition.

Charles Santley

The two autobiographies of Charles Santley might best be described as travel writing. The baritone uses his volumes to present himself as an explorer and a man of Empire; models of naval masculinity that align with the late Victorian ideal. Santley's efforts should be viewed as a continuation of the relationship between singers and the sea that Braham had established at the start of the century. As we saw in the case of Phillips, the new age of steam had heralded the end of Georgian naval ideals. This meant that, around mid century, he had to adapt the model of naval masculinity Braham had drawn upon so successfully. Santley found himself in the same position at the end of the century. In 1891, the year before he published his first autobiography, a volume entitled *Real Sailor Songs* was published. In its

⁹³ Reeves, *Recollections*, 252.

⁹⁴ Reeves, 252.

preface the author John Ashton stated: “The day of Real Sailor Songs is long since past and gone. They died out with the old French war, and its consequent peace.”⁹⁵ Like Phillips, then, Santley was compelled to find a new model of naval masculinity which was fit for his own era – and like Phillips, he turned to autobiography in order to do this.

The new age of steam brought with it a new model of naval masculinity. Colley describes this: “representations of naval manhood, both afloat and ashore, began to assert a cohesive masculinity that was endowed with self-restraint, respectability and bravery.”⁹⁶ The new naval man was also a man of empire. John Tosh has argued that, during the late-Victorian period: “empire was seen as a projection of masculinity [...] There was a striking convergence between the language of empire and the language of manliness: both made much of struggle, duty, action, will and ‘character’”.⁹⁷ In this context, the explorer was a celebrated figure. Land has spoken of the contemporary popularity of boy’s adventure fiction, and has described how Arctic exploration played a particularly significant role in the identity of the navy in this new age: the age of Franklin.⁹⁸ All of these ideas about contemporary naval masculinity are reflected in Santley’s two volumes.

Revealingly, the baritone explicitly states his love for the type of adventure literature discussed by Land. In *Student and Singer* he tells us: “At an early age my greatest pleasure consisted in reading the adventures of great travellers, such as Bruce’s ‘Travels in Abyssinia,’ Captain Cook’s

⁹⁵ Quoted in: Cyril Tawney, *Grey Funnel Lines: Traditional Song and Verse of the Royal Navy, 1900-70* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 1.

⁹⁶ Colley, *Britons*, 3.

⁹⁷ Tosh, *Manliness*, 193.

⁹⁸ Land, *War, Nationalism*, 131–38, 153–58.

‘Voyages,’ Franklin’s ‘Expedition to the North Pole,’ and Ross’s in search of him”.⁹⁹ It is exactly this sort of literature that Santley attempts to emulate with his own life-writing. He repeatedly describes his adventures on the sea, over the desert and even across the ice in a way that is reminiscent of these great travellers he admires. By doing this, he is able to craft a persona as a bluff, rugged British man. In his work on adventure fiction and masculinity, Joseph Kestner quotes H. Rider Haggard’s protagonist Allan Quartermain in *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), who states: “This is what Englishmen are, adventurers to the backbone”.¹⁰⁰ By presenting himself as such an English adventurer, Santley sought to combat the criticism he could receive for being an Italianate male opera singer.

Santley makes a notable statement early in his first volume: “I may say that all my travelling by sea has been for pleasure; the voyage was my chief inducement to accept engagements in America and the colonies”.¹⁰¹ This is a remarkable claim, but also very astute. With this statement Santley presents himself as an adventurer first, and a singer second. He also implies that money was not an inducement to perform overseas. It is clear, then, that Santley is attempting to present himself as a gentleman traveller, rather than a far less masculine figure, a professional singer. This statement encapsulates the aim of Santley’s memoirs; he repeatedly gives precedence to accounts of travel and adventure, instead of focussing on the details of his musical career, as would have been expected by contemporary readers. The idea of travelling by sea is at the heart of Santley’s travel writing; he

⁹⁹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Kestner, *British Adventure Fiction*, 1.

¹⁰¹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 5.

repeatedly talks of his love for the sea and recounts the many voyages he has taken. Indeed, his first volume opens with the words “I’m on the sea! I’m on the sea!” before explaining that he is, in fact, writing this work while sailing from Auckland to Wellington in New Zealand.¹⁰² This immediately establishes Santley as an adventurer at the very frontiers of Empire. Significantly, this opening line is taken (as Santley notes) from the song ‘The Sea’, with which (as we have seen) Phillips was especially associated.¹⁰³ Santley opens his autobiography, then, with a line that directly references the tradition of British opera singers performing sea songs. This first chapter then goes on to describe, at length, his relationship with the sea and his childhood desire to become a sailor. He recounts a recent conversation with an old sailor friend, who told him: “Charlie, you’re a good sailor spoiled! You ought to be ordering your men on board ship, instead of bawling and squalling your voice away in that stuffy theatre!”¹⁰⁴ This anecdote, appearing at the start of Santley’s first volume, establishes the idea that the baritone is capable of a more masculine occupation than singing; he should be “ordering” other men, instead of “bawling and squalling”. Santley also describes his “great attachment” to “open-hearted” sailors, before recounting his first ever voyage at the age of seven.¹⁰⁵ Only after this lengthy discussion of sailing and the sea does Santley’s volume begin with a more conventional account of his childhood and upbringing.

Over the course of Santley’s two volumes, he gives vivid accounts of everyday life on board ships around the world, recounting the characters and

¹⁰² Santley, 1.

¹⁰³ Santley, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Santley, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Santley, 3.

circumstances he has encountered and offering his thoughts on topics such as dining, lodging and tipping. A recurrent theme is his preference for sail rather than steam, and carriage rather than motorcar. In his first volume, he states: “I should like [...] to try the real thing in a sailing-ship; for on board a steamer I do not find the perfect repose I expected.”¹⁰⁶ By continually expressing a preference for older forms of travel, Santley attempts to distance himself from modernised, mechanical and relatively comfortable modes of travel. Instead, he invokes heroic travellers of the past, who struggled without the conveniences of modern transport. In a typical passage, he reflects upon knights who travelled to the Holy Land “on horseback, or afoot, through unexplored regions [...] among hostile people, and deprived of most of the necessities which make life bearable”.¹⁰⁷ He then considers Columbus, “exposed to drenching rain, freezing cold and fiery heat; driven beyond the power of guidance by raging storm”.¹⁰⁸ These heroic explorers are then contrasted with modern travellers, “provided with luxurious coaches, furnished with lavatories and dining-rooms”.¹⁰⁹ Santley’s reader is left in no doubt which model of travel their author prefers. Indeed, Santley gleefully recounts his own travelling privations, such as his tolerance of dirt and his ability to share a bunk with cockroaches.¹¹⁰ In this way he aligns himself with the masculine adventurers of the past.

Santley also presents himself as a specifically British traveller. He clearly identifies as a Briton who is not afraid to stand up for his values and

¹⁰⁶ Santley, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Santley, 60.

¹⁰⁸ Santley, 60.

¹⁰⁹ Santley, 61.

¹¹⁰ Santley, 236, 327.

challenge foreign deviance. This reflects the imperial belief that Britain and her men were the moral guardians of the Empire. In one chapter he discusses the various unsavoury characters he has encountered on his travels, including a man who attempted to rob him in Suez and vendors of fake and overpriced goods in Egypt and Ceylon.¹¹¹ Santley describes confronting such characters in a masculine and respectable fashion, successfully ensuring that these immoral foreign characters are unsuccessful in their schemes. It is interesting to note that reviewers of Santley's autobiography repeatedly seized upon these relatively minor anecdotes. A reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, declared: "Whoever has heard Santley sing 'Why do the nations?' will understand that the singer was not the man to stand nonsense from foreign curio-vendors".¹¹² This comment demonstrates the success of Santley's approach to autobiography. The reviewer has clearly interpreted Santley's anecdote as proof of his very British masculinity. Crucially, they link these favourable personality traits directly to Santley's musical career, claiming that whoever has heard him sing a particularly rousing and powerful piece from Handel's *Messiah* will understand his brave and respectable actions. For this reviewer at least, Santley's accounts of travel were successful in cultivating a persona that presented his singing career in a favourable light.

Santley also hints at the Franklin model of late-Victorian naval identity described by Land.¹¹³ Whilst he draws no direct parallel between himself

¹¹¹ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 250–52.

¹¹² J. E. A., 'Reminiscences of Charles Santley', *Manchester Guardian*, 4 February 1909, 14.

¹¹³ Land, *War, Nationalism*, 153–58.

and Franklin, he describes his perilous journey through the Alpine St. Gothard's Pass in a manner that is reminiscent of the hero he so admires:

When I returned to take my place in the diligence I found in its stead a number of small sledges like children's go-carts, each capable of carrying two persons face to face, drawn by one horse, with a man to guide the machine. It began to snow afresh, and soon grew dark. We were requested to keep the weight of our bodies directed towards the side opposed to the declivity, in order to avoid the possibility of an upset into the deep snow, from which rescue would have been difficult if not impossible. I felt the cold penetrating into my bones. I was not provided with wraps; I had only an ordinary overcoat, and my clothes were not of the thickest material; but I was exhilarated with the mountain-air and the novelty of the drive, and took little notice of the cold until we halted at Airolo.¹¹⁴

This account, full of danger and excitement, would surely have had some resonance in the age of Arctic exploration.

While it is clear that Santley's naval identity was predominantly constructed through his autobiography, it was also supported by his perpetuation of the sea song tradition established by Braham. However, he did not participate in this to the same extent as Reeves for two key reasons. Firstly, the appeal of Braham's models of naval music was (as we have seen) less potent at the end of the century. Secondly, unlike Braham and Reeves, Santley was a baritone. This meant that he could not perform the same roles as his

¹¹⁴ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 55–56.

predecessors. Nevertheless, Pearce explains that in 1870 Santley started as Tom Tug in a production of Dibdin's ballad opera *The Waterman*.¹¹⁵ This traditional tenor role, famously portrayed by both Braham and Reeves, had been transposed to baritone for the occasion. Santley's appearance was so well-received that one critic quipped: "[the cheering] might have been heard at Greenwich".¹¹⁶ This comment underscores the naval associations of this role. Four years after this, a volume was published contained the sheet music for six of Santley's best-known pieces.¹¹⁷ Half of these were sea songs, two of which were composed by Charles Dibdin: 'The Lads of the Village' and 'Tom Bowling'.¹¹⁸ This suggests that sea songs formed a substantial portion of Santley's repertoire. Like the three singers before him, Santley also played a role in keeping the legacy of Dibdin alive.

In a discussion of Braham's famous Napoleonic anthem, Derek Scott has posited:

Many Victorians expected the tenor aria 'The Death of Nelson', from the opera *The Americans* of 1811, to confer immortality on the name of Braham. Instead he acquired the anonymity which Auden said all great artists should aspire to, when, in 1931, the editor of *The Oxford Song Book* included this by now traditional song with the composer given as unknown.¹¹⁹

Whilst it may be true that the name of Braham has latterly faded from memory, it is clear that he can be largely credited with establishing a

¹¹⁵ Pearce, *Sims Reeves*, 269.

¹¹⁶ Quoted in: Pearce, 269.

¹¹⁷ Various, *Charles Santley's Six Popular Baritone Songs* (London: Dicks and Co, 1873).

¹¹⁸ The remaining piece was 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep' by J. P. Knight.

¹¹⁹ Scott, *Singing Bourgeois*, 8.

powerful relationship between British singers and the sea that endured from the Georgian period into the Edwardian age. The three singers who came after him each played an important role in perpetuating his legacy. They did this by updating his model of naval musicality to better suit changing masculine ideals. Whilst the question falls outside the parameters of the present study, future scholars might ask what impact this tradition had on Gilbert and Sullivan's famous operetta *HMS Pinafore* (1878), which satirised exactly the sorts of naval musical dramas performed by Braham, Phillips, Reeves and Santley.¹²⁰ However, the influence of these men and their sea songs reached far further than the Savoy. Through performance, popular portrait prints, and cheaply reproduced sheet music, the naval personae adopted by our singers reached a diverse audience – from the aristocrats at Drury Lane who watched Braham's tributes to Nelson, to the butcher's boy singing Phillip's famous ballad on his walk through Regents Park. In his recent work on popular Napoleonic song, Oskar Cox Jensen has argued that: "songs were employed actively to construct and contest identity and opinion, by writers, publishers, singers and buyers."¹²¹ As popular public figures whose musical performances and compositions reached substantial audiences, our singers not only reflected contemporary ideas about nationality, gender, music and the Navy – they played an important role in constructing and disseminating them.

¹²⁰ For more on this, see: H. M. Walbrook, *Gilbert and Sullivan Opera: A History and a Comment* (London: F. V. White & Co, 1922), 50.

¹²¹ Jensen, *Napoleon*, 2.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Known in some measure to everybody”: Singers and Celebrity Culture

On the 11th of September 1836, John Braham found himself at the Swan Hotel in Manchester, following a long and “very disagreeable” coach journey. He wrote to his wife, describing this trip:

I was just congratulat[ing] myself (when I arrived halfway) that nobody knew me, and awakening from one of my usual travelling slumbers – when a gentleman staring me full in the face – asked me “how Mr Bolton was” and hoped all my family was well – and a Lady who sat next to me promised herself much much pleasure in hearing me at the Liverpool Festival.¹

Braham initially feels a sense of surprise and relief that he has not been noticed by anyone, suggesting that such public recognition is both a frequent and an unwelcome occurrence. However, he only makes it halfway through his journey before being recognised by both a gentleman and a lady. He goes on to describe several others who also recognise him before he finally reaches his destination. The gentleman shows an interest in Braham’s private life, asking after “Mr. Bolton”, a relative of the tenor’s wife, while the lady shows an interest in his public life, discussing his forthcoming performance in Liverpool. How did these strangers recognise Braham in an age before photography? Why did they feel such an interest in his life, both private and public? How were they so well-informed about Braham’s family connections and professional engagements? Why did they feel the right to

¹ John Braham, ‘Letter to Frances Braham’ 11 September 1836, DD/SH/60, Somerset Heritage Centre.

address him, when he was trying to indulge in his “usual travelling slumbers”? The answers to these questions lie in Braham’s status as a celebrity. As we will see, the tenor was not the only singer so afflicted.

As Tom Mole has forcefully demonstrated, celebrity in the modern sense is a phenomenon that originated in Britain during the Romantic period.² He argues that this was a result of the rapidly expanding publishing industry, which presented the public with an almost dizzying array of new personalities, competing for their attention through books and newspapers. This competition, Mole suggests, created an “an urgent need” for celebrity, which allowed “certain individuals to rise to prominence above the Romantic surfeit of public personality.”³ Through celebrity, then, audiences were able to distinguish between the glut of new public figures whose works were available for purchase. Mole illustrates his understanding of celebrity with a case study of Lord Byron, demonstrating that the poet’s fame (or infamy) can be explained and understood in this context. This is not to say, however, that celebrity culture peaked during the early nineteenth century. As the century progressed, the mechanics of celebrity developed. An ever-multiplying range of newspapers and journals reported on celebrities and printed their portraits. Celebrity autobiographies became increasingly popular, and famous figures were used to endorse a wide range of products. As Richard Salmon has demonstrated, the popularity of collectible

² Tom Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity: Industrial Culture and the Hermeneutic of Industry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

³ Mole, 10, 22.

photographs and the advent of the interview were manifestations of celebrity culture in the late nineteenth century.⁴

The study of nineteenth-century celebrity is a burgeoning, interdisciplinary area which is still in its infancy. The majority of existing scholarship deals with the celebrity of literary figures such as Lord Byron, Walt Whitman and Oscar Wilde.⁵ The celebrity of sportsmen and military heroes has also been considered.⁶ Of the few works which have begun to address theatrical celebrity, most notable is the edited collection *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660 – 2000*.⁷ Offering a broad range of perspectives, this volume offers valuable insight into the mechanics of theatrical celebrity. As the editors of this collection note in its introduction: “despite its ubiquity, the nature of celebrity on and off stage has scarcely begun to be addressed.”⁸ In the case of operatic celebrity this is all the more true. Of the little work that has been done in this area, the majority focuses on composers and female singers. Furthermore, this work tends to parallel a trend identified by Luckhurst and Moody in existing scholarship on theatrical celebrity; they talk of: “a well-established tradition which plots the life of a famous individual” whilst “pay[ing] little attention to the markets and institutions

⁴ Richard Salmon, ‘Signs of Intimacy: The Literary Celebrity in the “Age of Interviewing”’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 25, no. 1 (April 1997): 159–77.

⁵ Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity*; David Haven Blake, *Walt Whitman and the Culture of American Celebrity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); David M. Friedman, *Wilde in America: Oscar Wilde and the Invention of Modern Celebrity* (New York: W. Norton, 2014).

⁶ Peter M. Briggs, ‘Daniel Mendoza and Sporting Celebrity: A Case Study’, in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 103–19; Jason Goldsmith, ‘Celebrity and the Spectacle of Nation’, in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21–40.

⁷ Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody, eds., *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain, 1660-2000* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁸ Luckhurst and Moody, 1.

through which their fame was produced.”⁹ Exceptions include the work of Benjamin Walton, who has examined Rossini’s welcome as a celebrity in London, and George Biddlecombe who has traced the construction of Jenny Lind as a cultural icon.¹⁰

Male opera singers, however, have yet to be considered as celebrities. This is a glaring oversight, as these singers are central protagonists in the story of nineteenth-century celebrity culture. These men appeared on the front pages of a variety of newspapers and populated gossip columns with reports of their public performances and private lives. Images of singers circulated in prints, cartoons and, later in the century, photographs and *cartes de visite*. Singers were used to advertise products and were frequently interviewed, while a surprising number penned their memoirs for publication. Singers were not passive celebrities, however; these men actively managed their fame. They wrote to newspapers to defend themselves and cultivated their public image through portraiture and autobiography. It was precisely because of this involvement with the mechanics of celebrity that singers like John Braham found themselves to be public property. As he discovered during his coach journey to Manchester in 1836, he was recognisable to the public and the circumstances of his life were common knowledge.

This chapter will explore how the British male opera singer interacted with the machine of celebrity culture in the nineteenth century, considering what is unique about the celebrity of singers as distinct from that of the literary figures and actors who have previously been studied. It will trace the

⁹ Luckhurst and Moody, 1.

¹⁰ Walton, ‘Rara Avis’; Biddlecombe, ‘Construction of a Cultural Icon’.

process by which an opera singer became a celebrity, whilst also mapping the development of operatic celebrity onto the history of nineteenth-century celebrity more generally. This will demonstrate that singers were absolutely central to the celebrity culture of the long nineteenth century. The importance of male operatic celebrities has so far been overlooked; this chapter will argue that it is essential to examine this form of fame if we wish to gain a complete understanding of nineteenth-century celebrity culture.

Mole understands celebrity as an apparatus consisting of three elements: an industry, an individual and an audience.¹¹ His case study of Lord Byron's celebrity illustrates this understanding; he argues that Byron was an individual who acted as a conduit, linking the newly-industrialised publishing industry to an audience. In this case, Mole explains, "Industrial publishing functioned as the primary industry", whilst a "secondary industry" consisting of newspapers, gossip columns and prints also disseminated and profited from Byron's fame.¹² In this chapter I take Mole's understanding of celebrity as a starting point. Singers, like writers, also connected audiences to an industry, but in their case the primary industry was not a publishing house, but an opera house. As in the case of writers such as Byron, however, singers also fuelled secondary industries consisting of newspapers, gossip columns and prints. The key difference central to the celebrity of singers, therefore, is their primary industry; this was not publishing, but opera. This chapter will consider how this differing primary industry influenced the construction of our singers as celebrities.

¹¹ Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, 3.

¹² Mole, 10.

As Mole explains, the newly industrialised publishing industry created an influx of writers who were available for audiences to choose from.¹³ Faced with this staggering range of choice, audiences turned to celebrities in order to feel a sense of intimacy with a particular writer. This familiarity enabled the audience to interact with the publishing industry by purchasing the works of the writer in question. Mole uses the phrase “the hermeneutic of intimacy” to describe this intimate relationship between a celebrity and an audience.¹⁴ In the case of Lord Byron, he argues that the poet actively cultivated this sense of intimacy with his readers, by placing suggestions in his texts and hinting that they could discover the ‘real’ Byron encoded in his works. Within the primary industry of opera, we also find a selection of names and options that audiences were free to choose from. While the range of choices open to operatic audiences were far smaller than those offered by the world of publishing, they were still able to select which opera house they attended or which touring company they patronised – especially as these touring companies became increasingly numerous in the latter half of the century. Audiences could also decide which composers’ operas they would attend, and pick which singers they would go to see perform. As in publishing, therefore, there was competition within the opera industry. Opera companies and singers competed against each other for supremacy and, most importantly, British singers competed against their foreign contemporaries. In the world of opera, then, celebrities were able to serve as a bridge between industry and audience, just as they did in the case of publishing.

¹³ Mole, 10–16.

¹⁴ Mole, 22–27.

Unlike writers, however, singers lacked the apparatus to cultivate a sense of intimacy with their audiences through their primary industry. Whilst men like Byron were able to select the words they presented to the public and were free to encode suggestions within these words, male singers performed the words and music of other people while in character as other men. Although singers of course had artistic agency in their performances, they were not able to communicate with their audiences through their primary industry in the personal and direct way that an author like Byron could. This means that singers had to rely more heavily on their secondary industries than was the case for literary figures and other types of celebrity. Singers repeatedly turned to newspapers, portraits and interviews to forge and mediate relationships with their audiences, while taking care to construct particular public identities for themselves in the process. In other words, whilst writers like Byron were able to actively manage their celebrity through their primary industry, singers were only able to do this through their secondary industries.

This is not to say, however, that the primary industry of opera did not lend itself to the cultivation of intimacy between singer and audience at all. Those who attended the opera saw a singer in the flesh, whereas readers would typically only know what an author looked like if they saw a portrait. On the other hand, a reader would interact with an author like Byron on a one-to-one basis, generally reading his own words in the privacy of their own homes. In contrast, singers performed publically to audiences that numbered in their hundreds or even thousands. Whilst an audience might be more familiar with a singer's physical appearance, then, the nature of public

performance could also create a lack of intimacy. These dynamics had the effect of making a singer at once a familiar figure, but also something of an enigma; audiences became all the more intrigued by the men who existed behind the operatic characters they were so spectacularly portraying on stage. This curiosity about celebrity singers created a great appetite for information about their lives, which led to the aforementioned proliferation of press profiles, portraits, interviews and memoirs. These sorts of materials helped to turn singers into familiar public characters, even when they were out of character. We will see that singers themselves participated in this process, taking every opportunity to manage their public identities. This chapter will argue, then, that the celebrity of opera singers was primarily cultivated and negotiated through these secondary industries.

Private Lives and Public Image

Materials pertaining to singers' private lives were produced with increasing frequency as the century developed. In the first half of the century, information provided in the press tended to focus on the factual details of singers' lives, such as key dates and events. As the century progressed, however, such sources revealed an increasing preoccupation with a singer's personal life. This was part of a broader cultural shift. David Vincent has suggested that: "Public curiosity about private affairs and private inquiry into public matters defined a new sense of modernity" in the late Georgian era.¹⁵ He argues that the issue of 'inquiry' (as such interest was typically dubbed) inspired much debate, and was borne from two contrasting factors.

¹⁵ David Vincent, *I Hope I Don't Intrude: Privacy and Its Dilemmas in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 117.

The first, he suggests, was “a response to the expanding consumer economy and the accelerating flow of innovation” in this period, in which greater connectivity resulted in a “knowledge explosion”.¹⁶ In this context, he argues: “Inquiry was a form of entertainment. Curiosity underpinned a proliferating consumer market in the nineteenth century. It sold tracts, miscellanies, newspapers, images, plays, and novels to an increasingly literate population.”¹⁷ The second factor identified by Vincent is: “the need to bring into the public arena behaviours and conditions that threatened the moral health of the nation.”¹⁸ Opera singers of the early nineteenth century such as John Braham were caught up in this growing trend for curiosity about private affairs. Braham’s personal business was circulated in gossip columns as entertainment, and his right to privacy was debated in newspapers.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Braham’s trial of 1816 was widely reported in cheaply produced accounts of the court case. Although a scandalous affair was always a fruitful topic for the press and publishers to exploit, the addition of a celebrity singer made the case even more appealing: in reports Braham was referred to as ‘Braham, of the King’s Theatre’.¹⁹ The circulation of these reports correlates with Vincent’s argument that the growing trend for ‘inquiry’ was both a form of commercial entertainment and a way of holding immoral behaviour to account; the sordid details of Braham’s affair offered the public titillating entertainment, a glimpse into

¹⁶ Vincent, 118.

¹⁷ Vincent, 118.

¹⁸ Vincent, 118.

¹⁹ Anon., *The Report of the Trial for Criminal Conversation, Wright versus Braham, of the King’s Theatre, in the Common Pleas, London, July 23, 1816; Containing All the Evidence, Speeches of Counsel, Charge to the Jury, and Remarkable Defence, Verbatim.*

the singer's private life, and a chance to moralise about the conduct of theatrical professionals. One report on the trial, which also featured a biography of Braham and commentary on the case, explicitly referenced the fact that its discussion of Braham's private life was part of a growing trend.²⁰ The anonymous author stated: "To disturb the serenity of domestic life by animadverting on the private conduct of public characters has been of late somewhat the fashion, but it is a practice that, however curiosity may be gratified, few will applaud."²¹ It is clear, then, that this discussion of Braham's private life is part of the growing interest in the private lives of public figures that Vincent has located during this period. At this point, however, this interest was clearly still seen as somewhat distasteful; something that "few will applaud." Later in the century this distaste was no longer typical.

As we also saw in Chapter Two, the patriotic periodical *John Bull* launched an attack on Braham and his friendship with the Duke of Sussex in 1821. This controversy once again raised the question of whether or not the private life of an opera singer was fair game for public debate. In one of numerous articles on this matter, an anonymous author for *John Bull* argued:

It is painful to rake up private character, and we hold the doctrine that the public have nothing to do with the private characters of public performers, *quoad* their public performances. When Punch's puppets are put into their box, it matters little to us whether they be

²⁰ Anon.

²¹ Anon., 11.

made of wood or leather, if they have served the purpose of amusing us; but if Punch's puppets be held up to us as beautiful copies of human nature, or symmetrical models of men and women, it becomes our duty, before we allow them our praise, to handle and examine, and inspect them closely.²²

This suggests that an audience is morally obliged to examine the private conduct of a public performer before offering them praise. Scrutiny of a singer's private life is being presented as a necessary prerequisite for public approval. The author continued:

So long as MR. BRAHAM remained in his place and sang for our entertainment we should have been quite satisfied to have criticised his performance, and the green curtain which separated us at the end of the opera, should have been an inviolable barrier between us; but, when MR. BRAHAM's conceit and presumption lead him, as an individual, to solicit so striking a mark of royal favour, as that which he has begged and obtained from the hands of the DUKE OF SUSSEX; and when his coxcombry and folly induce him to paragraph it in the papers, he volunteers the exposure; he steps from the stage into the *publicity of private life*, and courts observation on points which, while he *knew* and *kept* his place in society, would have been held sacred.²³

Here we find the suggestion that Braham himself has invited interest in his personal affairs by publicising his friendship with the Duke of Sussex. The

²² Anon., 'His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex', 278.

²³ Anon., 278.

author argues that if singers presented themselves to the public and invited applause, then they also necessarily invite scrutiny. It must be noted that this discussion formed part of *John Bull*'s attack on Braham and can therefore not be read as a completely impartial discussion about the question of privacy. It is clearly calculated to belittle Braham's status as a public performer, with demeaning comparisons made between the singer and Punch's puppets. Nevertheless, this piece demonstrates the growing interest that the press and the public took in singers' private lives in the early nineteenth century. As the century developed this interest continued to grow, and was increasingly reflected in the media. Throughout the century, singers were frequently profiled in the press. As the century progressed, the nature of these profiles evolved too. In the first half of the century they were typically very factual, and concerned themselves with the key dates and roles in a singer's career. By the end of the century, however, they tended to focus instead on a singer's private life and personality. This latter style of profile reached its zenith with the advent of the interview in the final two decades of the century. Through this new journalistic mechanism, a singer would seemingly lay his own personality bare before his audience.

These profiles usually took the form of short biographies, often accompanied by a portrait. A typical example is an 1843 biography of John Braham which featured on the front page of *Cleave's Penny Gazette*.²⁴ This was a weekly renowned for its coverage of "romance, sensation and radical

²⁴ Anon., 'Braham', *Cleave's Penny Gazette of Variety and Amusement*, 25 March 1843, 1.

politics”.²⁵ This profile is introduced with an explicit acknowledgement of the public’s great interest in Braham’s personal life: “Every lover of Art takes an interest in the Artist; and no lover of music can ever hear with indifference the name of JOHN BRAHAM.”²⁶ It goes on to describe “a more than ordinary curiosity regarding his personal history; of which, therefore, we give our readers the following brief sketch.”²⁷ The profile then goes on to give a detailed account of Braham’s life and career in the style that was typical of early nineteenth-century singer biographies of this sort. The focus is on key dates, events and professional relationships, rather than detail about Braham’s private life and character. Notably, the newspaper acknowledges that this biography has been reprinted from *Mainzer’s Musical Times* (a periodical which later evolved into the *Musical Times*).²⁸ Publications frequently recycled and reprinted this sort of material from their competitors, meaning that information about singers reached an even greater audience. Material was even reprinted internationally.²⁹ Most notably American newspapers often recycled information about singers from British newspapers.³⁰

²⁵ Anon., 1; Caroline Reitz, ‘Cleave, John’, in *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism*, ed. Laurel Brake and Marysa Demoor (Gent: Academia Press and the British Library, 2009), 127.

²⁶ Anon., ‘Braham’, 1.

²⁷ Anon., 1.

²⁸ For more on Mainzer, see: Stefan Manz, ‘Joseph Mainzer and the Popularisation of Choral Singing in Britain’, *Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 30, no. 2–3 (November 2012): 152–70.

²⁹ For more on the practice of international reprinting practices, see: Bob Nicholson, “‘You Kick the Bucket, We Do the Rest’: Jokes and the Culture of Reprinting in the Transatlantic Press”, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 17, no. 3 (September 2012): 273–86.

³⁰ Just one example is the following interview with Reeves, which originally appeared in the *London Daily Chronicle* before being recycled in an Australian newspaper: Anon., ‘An Interview with Sims Reeves’, *The Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser*, 1 December 1892.

The Age of the Interview

Richard Salmon has discussed a growing interest in the personal lives of literary figures in the second half of the nineteenth century.³¹ He argues that curiosity about author's homes, the use of photography, and (especially) the advent of the interview are characteristic of literary and artistic celebrity of the 1880s and 1890s in particular. Although the interview had been introduced in the American press of the 1860s, Salmon suggests that it was during these two decades in which this form of journalistic technique became "widespread".³² This shift is equally evident in operatic celebrity. British male singers of this period were, like authors and artists, photographed and interviewed extensively, as we shall see. Salmon argues that the interview was conceived: "as a medium through which both the journalist and the reader might hope to discover "the "authentic" nature of famous individuals."³³ This urge is evident in interviews with Reeves and Santley, both of whom were interviewed on numerous occasions. These interviews frequently revealed an attempt to locate the authentic personality of these singers. This format of reporting allowed readers to forge a more familiar relationship with singers, whilst also offering the singers themselves yet another opportunity to shape their public identity.

A typical example is a 1907 interview with Santley which appeared in illustrated weekly *The Graphic*.³⁴ This combines all of the features of late nineteenth-century literary celebrity that Salmon has identified: it is an

³¹ Salmon, 'Signs of Intimacy'.

³² Salmon, 160.

³³ Salmon, 162.

³⁴ J. Douglas Hoare, 'A Chat with Mr. Santley', *The Graphic*, 13 April 1907.

interview conducted in Santley's own house, accompanied by a large photograph of him. This interview also conforms to Salmon's aforementioned assertion that the interview was designed to offers readers a chance to discover the "authentic nature" of celebrities.³⁵ The piece is entitled 'A Chat with Mr. Santley', and is introduced with an explanation from the author J. Douglas Hoare: "It was with a view to hearing some of his experiences and to learning his opinion of the trend of music in the present day that I paid him a visit at his house in St. John's Wood."³⁶ The title and premise of this interview, then, suggest a casual and candid personal communication between Santley and the reader who (through the surrogate of Hoare) is 'invited' into his home – the neighbourhood of which is also disclosed. The chatty tone of the piece accentuates this sense; it is seemingly unedited and appears to quote Santley verbatim, vividly evoking the speech and personality of the singer. In a typical passage he is asked for his opinion on modern singers and Hoare describes his response: "'Well,' said Mr. Santley 'I hardly like to say but --'. His elegant aposiopesis was more elegant than words."³⁷ During the course of the interview Santley reveals other personal details in his characteristically open style, for example discussing his time as a poverty-stricken student in Milan, his thoughts on modern transport and his ambitions for the future. Notably, the baritone is consulted as an authority on extra-musical matters, indicating an interest in his off-stage persona. The sense of intimacy being constructed

³⁵ Salmon, 'Signs of Intimacy', 162.

³⁶ Hoare, 'A Chat', 535.

³⁷ Hoare, 535.

between the singer and his readers (via the secondary industry of the press) is reminiscent of the “hermeneutic of intimacy” described by Mole.³⁸

A great number of similar interviews were conducted with singers including Reeves and Santley in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Santley describes being hounded by journalists around the world. Notably, he refers specifically to “interviewers”.³⁹ He recounts, for example, being pursued by a “tormentor” within hours of arriving in Australia, before asking this interviewer what he wished to know.⁴⁰ He replied: ““Upon my word, I don’t know; I was sent here to interview you, but I have no idea how to begin.””⁴¹ This increased interest in singers’ personalities was not just reflected in interviews, however, but also in gossip columns and newspaper reports which often included seemingly inconsequential bits of gossip about singers’ lives. This had the effect of turning singers into familiar personalities. Santley repeatedly speaks of this type of reporting in his autobiographies. For example, he recalls: “[A reporter] got hold of a remark I made in jest at table, and informed its readers that ‘Santley says squash pie is the best thing he knows!’”⁴² This sort of reporting occurred so often that Santley had to become cautious. He recalls: “[An American reporter asked] if I would like to live in New York. I incautiously [...] replied I would prefer a lodging in the Strand, London, with an income of £100 per annum, to the

³⁸ Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity*, 22–27.

³⁹ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 197.

⁴⁰ Santley, 197.

⁴¹ Santley, 197.

⁴² Santley, *Student and Singer*, 331.

best house in Fifth Avenue with £10,000 a year; this was also published, so I thought it was high time to study to keep my own counsel.”⁴³

Santley felt that singers were especially susceptible to this sort of gossip reporting:

It is a great pity that people, otherwise charitably disposed, are not more on their guard against accepting as facts and retailing them as such, foolish and scandalous stories they hear of public men and women from those who, while professing to be on intimate terms, have not even a passing acquaintance with them. Vocalists seem to be especially singled out as the victims of these story-tellers.⁴⁴

This singling out of singers is suggestive of the way in which opera (unlike some other art forms) struggled to produce a sense of intimacy between performers and their audiences. Readers were especially curious to know more about the men behind the costumes. Santley explicitly recognises that these “foolish” stories can effectively cultivate a sense of intimacy: they make people feel that they are on “intimate terms” with singers. Again, we find Mole’s “hermeneutic of intimacy” constructed by secondary industries.⁴⁵ Of all the ways in which singers were able to create this sense of intimacy with their audiences, one was by far the most effective. This was the autobiography – a medium of which all of our singers took advantage to some extent. These volumes should be considered as yet another form of secondary industry. Whilst for a literary celebrity like

⁴³ Santley, 331.

⁴⁴ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 94–95.

⁴⁵ Mole, *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity*, 22–27.

Byron writing functioned as a primary industry, in the case of singers their autobiographies represented a secondary industry. This is because opera remained their primary industry, with the autobiography being used to negotiate and discuss their operatic fame. These men were thought of primarily as singers, and not writers, and it was only due to their operatic fame that their memoirs were deemed worthy of publication.

Work on literary celebrity of the early nineteenth century has highlighted the recurrent belief, found especially in the works of Romantic authors, that lasting and posthumous fame was superior to fame attained within one's lifetime.⁴⁶ Claire Brock has also explored the feminisation of fame in the Romantic period, arguing that fame achieved within one's lifetime was seen as a distinctly 'feminine' and frivolous form of fame, as opposed to the more 'masculine' and respectable fame of posterity.⁴⁷ In the case of an author or composer, this would be achieved by entering the literary or musical canon. This conceptualisation of fame left singers with an automatic disadvantage. In an age before recording technology, there was nothing that a singer could do to leave to posterity. The fame of the nineteenth-century opera singer was transient by its very nature. This meant that they were in possession of a distinctly 'feminine' type of fame, which had the power to compromise their perceived masculinity even further. This is a problem which was shared by actors.⁴⁸ Although several singers explicitly

⁴⁶ David Higgins, 'Celebrity, Politics and the Rhetoric of Genius', in *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*, ed. Tom Mole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 41–59.

⁴⁷ Claire Brock, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁴⁸ Baker, *Victorian Actor*, 32.

acknowledged this disadvantage of their chosen career, Charles Santley explained this most eloquently:

The singer has a difficulty to contend with which does not affect any other artist [...] The singer's work is a picture painted on air. No sooner is it depicted than it is gone; while the poet's, painter's, sculptor's and architect's works remain.⁴⁹

There was one method, however, through which opera singers could perhaps hope to achieve lasting renown and join the ranks of those who possessed the more masculine form of nineteenth-century fame. This was the autobiography. The final chapter of this study will explore the life-writing of these singers in depth, but the present chapter will consider these works in the context of their importance as a tool in the construction of operatic celebrity. Through these works singers could communicate directly with their public in a way that they were not able to on the stage, constructing a sense of familiarity between themselves and their audiences.

Autobiography and Celebrity

In her study of eighteenth-century theatrical autobiography, Cheryl Wanko has referred explicitly to the ways in which these works were especially conducive to constructing this intimacy between performers and audiences. She argues that they “[produced] a familiarity that encourages a feeling of intimacy with the celebrity.”⁵⁰ This is equally true of the autobiographies written by our four singers. As well as constructing intimacy between their

⁴⁹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 19.

⁵⁰ Cheryl Wanko, *Roles of Authority: Thespian Biography and Celebrity in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 12.

author and the audience, these autobiographies also fuelled other manifestations of operatic celebrity. They became the standard source of information about a singer; their stories and anecdotes were recycled endlessly in biographies, newspapers, gossip columns and even obituaries. It must be noted that singers wrote their autobiographies towards the end of their careers, so the impact of these works was felt only after the peak of their career had passed. Nevertheless, they had an extremely strong influence on how a singer was remembered: they constructed his legacy.

Singers deliberately attempted to construct a sense of familiarity with their readers through their writing. The very act of recounting events in the first person produced this effect, but some singers in particular were remarkably open and frank. This created the sense that the singer was confiding in a reader, strengthening the sense of shared intimacy between the two parties. Each singer did this to some extent, but Charles Santley did this most explicitly and effectively. This is perhaps reflective of the fact that his career was at its peak in the late nineteenth-century, the period in which coverage of celebrities' private lives was at its zenith. He included many frank discussions throughout his two volumes, many of which would have been surprising to a reader. Examples include his confession that he considered suicide as a student in Milan.⁵¹ Although this admission might be interpreted as unmanly by some, the sense of full disclosure that such a confession created actually strengthened his celebrity and public image.

Reviews of Santley's memoirs repeatedly seized upon particular anecdotes as evidence of his honesty and personal character. A typical example of

⁵¹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 145.

such reception is the review of *Student and Singer* which appeared in *The Athenaeum*.⁵² The critic says that this volume bears “the stamp of hearty sincerity”, arguing that this marks Santley as “a typical North-country Englishman”.⁵³ Here Santley’s openness is explicitly recognised as symptomatic of his British masculinity, demonstrating the success of his approach. Identifying Santley as a typical Northerner was a trope that recurred in reviews of his memoirs. As evidence for these claims of Santley’s blunt sincerity, this review reproduces two paragraphs from the singer’s volume. Introducing the first of these, the review talks of the: “bold, bluff nature of the artist [...] which well expresses itself in this quotation”, then quoting from Santley’s text:

I did not know that pinchbeck was frequently preferred to gold, impudent sham to modest reality; and I had not read ‘Sartor Resartus’, not meditated on the *fact* that man is not only a gullible animal, but that he prefers to be gulled. I have learned all this in the course of my career, as greater men than I have done. I have seen that monstrous incompetency, aided by ‘backsheesh’ of one kind or another, is more than a match for titanic genius, and that a pat on the back from a royal hand is of more avail than consummate talent. And I have learned that fuss and talk about Art, Poetry, Painting, Architecture, and Music, is mostly cant and hypocrisy.⁵⁴

⁵² Anon., ‘Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley’, *The Athenaeum*, 31 December 1892.

⁵³ Anon., 929.

⁵⁴ Anon., 929.

Here we can see that Santley's scathing assessment of contemporary culture is being interpreted as evidence of his openness. This tirade may have been surprising to a reader, who would perhaps not have expected to hear a singer be so openly critical of the cultural landscape within which he has established himself. This sense of openness, however, reinforces the intimacy between Santley and his reader, as the reader is seemingly privy to his opinions and feelings, no matter how shocking. The fact that reviews repeatedly focused on this sense of honesty proves how successful Santley's tactic was in fuelling his celebrity: he made himself a more familiar public figure, but also strengthened his image as an honest and respectable man.

The autobiographies of male opera singers were endlessly recycled in newspapers, periodicals and even concert programmes. Extracts from these works were serialised, enabling them to reach ever greater audiences, whilst they were also quoted at length in reviews and biographies. This recycling of operatic memoirs occurred across the century, though it gained momentum and reach as the publishing industry developed and popular interest in celebrities grew. Michael Kelly, the celebrated Irish tenor of the eighteenth century, published his two volume memoir in 1825.⁵⁵ Extracts from these volumes were serialised extensively in the press. *The European Magazine* featured substantial extracts across twenty pages, with an introduction that encouraged readers to purchase the full volume: "we hope the sample we shall submit will induce [our readers] to purchase the

⁵⁵ Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*, 2 vols (London: Henry Colburn, 1826) As explained in the following chapter, this was first published in 1825. No first editions appear to have survived.

piece.”⁵⁶ This introduction, which also lavished praise on the memoir, was clearly an attempt to publicise the volume, but it also had the effect of publicising Kelly. His memoir was circulated in other publications too. These included regional newspapers like the Scottish *Caledonian Mercury* as well as London-based papers.⁵⁷ Kelly’s memoirs were serialised to such an extent that one newspaper quipped: “on the subject of KELLY’s Memoirs, we candidly confess we have seen enough in the papers to suppress the least desire to read any more.”⁵⁸ In addition to serialisation, singers’ autobiographies were often afforded substantial reviews in the press. These almost always included lengthy quotations from the memoirs, allowing a singer’s own words to reach an ever-greater audience. The quotations that were selected tended to be those which offered some insight into the singer’s personal character, as we saw in the example of Santley and the curio vendor in the previous chapter.

Later in the nineteenth century the afterlives of operatic memoirs took more elaborate forms. For instance, the programme for Santley’s Jubilee concert of 1907 printed selected highlights from his autobiography over two pages.⁵⁹ The extracts which were chosen reveal much about the image that Santley wished to project: roughly a quarter concern his affinity with the sea, strengthening his relationship with the tradition of British singers and the sea yet further. The remainder concern his early love for Shakespeare, his relationship with his father, amusing anecdotes from his operatic tours and

⁵⁶ Anon., ‘Reminiscences of Michael Kelly’, *The European Magazine*, November 1825, 257.

⁵⁷ Anon., ‘Reminiscences of Michael Kelly’, *Caledonian Mercury*, 21 November 1825, 4.

⁵⁸ Anon., ‘Notices to Correspondents’, *The Age*, 20 November 1825, 220.

⁵⁹ Anon., *Charles Santley Jubilee Concert: Souvenir Programme* (Royal Albert Hall, 1907), 16–17.

his move from the operatic stage to the concert stage. For the most part, however, these anecdotes brush over details of his musical career and instead focus on Santley's personal character in the style that was typical of this period. Though these extracts are clearly adapted from Santley's autobiographies, and in places quote them verbatim, they are printed "by kind permission of the proprietors of *The Tatler*."⁶⁰ Santley's autobiography, then, was serialised in *The Tatler* before being reproduced in a concert programme.

Through the act of penning their memoirs, singers were (as we will see in Chapter Five) consciously entering a wider network of celebrity autobiographies in the nineteenth century. There is much work to be done on the fascinating ways in which the memoirs of singers, writers, actors, comedians and theatre managers reference and interconnect with each other. Sometimes a singer quoted a contemporary's autobiography in order to support a point he was making, and at other times they contradicted or defended themselves against claims made in another memoir. One amusing example comes from Reeves' second autobiography. He said:

Mr. Mapleson, in his racy, entertaining Memoirs, recently astonished the world, and particularly myself, by the assertion that I could not sing unless I had previously swallowed, in a dressing room hung with a particular kind of chintz, a basin of soup prepared at Birch's in Cornhill. Now, to take the assertion for one moment in earnest, the particular kind of chintz might have been everywhere at my disposal; but how on earth, when singing, for instance, at the Theatre

⁶⁰ Anon., 16.

Royal in Dublin, or still less on my lengthened Italian tour, could I have obtained the requisite supply of soup, prepared at Birch's in Cornhill?⁶¹

Here Reeves is defending himself against a claim made in the memoirs of opera impresario Mapleson. Singers, then, actively sought the opportunity to participate in this network of celebrity memoirs, as it gave them the opportunity to shape their reputation and answer their critics. As we will see in the next chapter, Kelly deliberately drew attention to his presence within a wider network of celebrities. Later in the century other singers did the same; Santley for example discussed his friendships with Dickens and the “lion” Dante Gabriel Rossetti.⁶²

Gossip and Group Biographies

British male singers also featured prominently in the autobiographies of others which were also marketed explicitly as volumes of gossip about celebrities. Just one example is the lengthy two-volume memoir of author Julia Clara Byrne, entitled *Gossip of the Century*.⁶³ In the introduction to her first volume Byrne states her aim to cater to the “sympathetic interest” the public have in “information concerning celebrities” that comes “from those to whom they were personally known.”⁶⁴ Chapter titles include ‘Court Gossip’, ‘Social, Literary and Political Celebrities’ and ‘Legal Celebrities’. A lengthy section on Braham was included in this work, which also profiled

⁶¹ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 152–53.

⁶² Anon., ‘Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley’, 319–20, 48–49.

⁶³ Mrs William Pitt Byrne, *Gossip of the Century; Personal and Traditional Memories - Social, Literary, Artistic &c*, 4 vols (London: Ward and Downey, 1892).

⁶⁴ Mrs William Pitt Byrne, *Gossip of the Century; Personal and Traditional Memories - Social, Literary, Artistic &c*, vol. 1 (London: Ward and Downey, 1892), v.

members of the royal family, politicians, military heroes, scientists and authors.⁶⁵ Volumes such as these helped to strengthen the familiarity between singer and audience, but they also played a more important role. Through these publications, singers could enter the pantheon of celebrated nineteenth-century men: their lives were recounted alongside those of other masculine heroes. In one of Byrne's chapters concerning the Duke of Wellington, for example, this hero's fondness for Braham is referenced: "Braham revelled in the sunshine of the great man's cordial approbation."⁶⁶ Notably, Byrne argues in the introduction to her first volume that her form of gossip should not be seen as feminine. She argues: "The word gossip conveys *prima facie*, a frivolous idea; and is generally associated in our minds with what is supposed to be a congenial pastime of the more talkative if not the more reflective sex: but *all* gossip is not merely frivolous".⁶⁷ Byrne goes on to posit that "History owes most of what little truth it contains, to the gossip of diarists and annotators", citing Boswell on Johnson as an example of this type of record.⁶⁸ She is ultimately arguing that her work should not be seen as feminine gossip about those who possess fleeting, so-called 'feminine' fame. Rather, she suggests that her anecdotes constitute an important historical source providing valuable information on predominantly male subjects who possess the favoured variety of enduring celebrity. It is therefore revealing that British opera singers were included within these ranks.

⁶⁵ Byrne, *Gossip*, 1892, 2:1–45.

⁶⁶ Byrne, *Gossip*, 1892, 1:312.

⁶⁷ Byrne, 1:v–vi.

⁶⁸ Byrne, 1:vi.

Aside from their own autobiographies and their appearances in the memoirs of contemporaries, the inclusion of British male opera singers in collective biographies is also a revealing lens through which we can examine their status as celebrities. The cataloguing of singers amongst other prominent contemporaries helped them to attain a respectable status and lasting recognition. These biographies also represent yet another channel through which the celebrity of singers was disseminated. Across the nineteenth century there was a growing trend for collective biographies of celebrities. In his work on the Victorian literary profession, Richard Salmon has argued that this trend arose in the second decade of the nineteenth century, gathering momentum in the 1820s and 1830s. He suggests that this cataloguing of living authors was a notable departure from traditional group biographies, which had tended to focus on the famous deceased. In the case of authors, Salmon argues that “the enumeration and cataloguing of contemporary writers forms one strategy for achieving professional recognition”.⁶⁹ In the same period that Salmon has identified, Sainsbury’s ambitious two-volume *Dictionary of Musicians* was published.⁷⁰ Although this included biographies of many deceased musical figures, it explicitly noted on its title page that it included “upwards of a hundred original memoirs of the most eminent living musicians”.⁷¹ A substantial biography of Braham was included.⁷² As we will see in Chapter Five, Braham drafted this himself; another instance of a singer actively managing his celebrity.

⁶⁹ Richard Salmon, *The Transformation of the Victorian Literary Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

⁷⁰ Anon., *Dictionary of Musicians*, 1824.

⁷¹ Anon., *Dictionary of Musicians*, 1824, 1:n.p.

⁷² Anon., 1:111–13.

As Salmon has highlighted in the case of authors, this type of collective biography strengthened Braham's claim to a professional status; his biography was listed alongside those for the likes of Handel, Mozart and Beethoven. Moreover, the tenor's inclusion in this volume also had implications for his identity as a British man. The anonymous editors state their intentions for this volume in the opening 'Observations', in which they note that similar works have been published in German, Italian and French. In a blistering attack on such works, they claim that the musical contributions of England have been overlooked: "disgusted with this prejudiced and ignorant appreciation of British talent", they say, they intend to "give due honour to the character of British artists."⁷³ In this context, the inclusion of Braham takes on an additional importance as he represents Britain in this line up of illustrious musical celebrities. This work, then, strengthens the tenor's status as a professional British and masculine celebrity,

Later in the century another volume containing collective biographies of famous living musicians was published. This was *Musical Celebrities* which appeared in 1889.⁷⁴ A large 'coffee table-style' book, it contained profiles of eighteen musical celebrities, alongside high-quality portraits. Sims Reeves was one of the eighteen musicians who were featured and was the only male opera singer in the collection.⁷⁵ Sixteen of those profiled were male and the vast majority were instrumentalists. Only three opera singers were featured: Patti, Sembrich and Reeves, meaning that he was also the only British

⁷³ Anon., 1:ii–iii.

⁷⁴ Frederick H Buffen, *Musical Celebrities* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1889).

⁷⁵ Buffen, 86–93.

singer to feature. The inclusion of Reeves' biography amongst these ranks served to underline his status as a musical celebrity, whilst the profile of his life and career served to familiarise him to the public yet further. This biography itself clearly drew on Reeves' own autobiography. Furthermore, all of the biographies in this volume had previously featured in *The Lady* magazine, meaning that Reeves' own account of his life had journeyed from autobiography, to magazine, to this group biography. This is yet another illustration of the many afterlives of operatic memoirs in nineteenth-century culture. The appearance of Reeves' biography in a magazine which catered to a female readership is also significant, demonstrating yet again the many different demographics to which operatic celebrity was disseminated.

Perhaps more important, however, is the inclusion of singers in collective celebrity biographies that were not specifically musical. Through such works we might gauge the status of operatic celebrities in relation to other types of celebrity. In some cases singers were not represented at all. An example from mid-century is *The Men of the Time*.⁷⁶ The introduction to this work states that its aim is to focus on "The Men of their Time – the class who in their several walks of life tread in advance of the multitude" rather than focussing on the royals, statesmen, clergymen and military heroes who are so often catalogued in other works.⁷⁷ There is no place for singers amongst these men. The title page offers a list of the types of men that this volume profiles; this includes engineers, preachers, monarchs, capitalists, travellers and politicians.⁷⁸ From the artistic world, the following

⁷⁶ Various, *The Men of the Time* (London: David Bogue, 1852).

⁷⁷ Various, vi.

⁷⁸ Various, n.p.

professions are listed: authors, poets, architects, artists, composers and dramatists. Stage professionals are not included in this list or in this volume: the focus is on the creator (composer or playwright) rather than interpreter (singer or actor). The inclusion of singers amongst the great celebrities of the age, then, was not universally assured at mid-century.

An example from the latter decades of the nineteenth century presents a different picture. In 1890 an ambitious volume entitled *Celebrities of the Century* was published.⁷⁹ In the preface of this volume the editor states that the work: “attempts to make good a real deficiency – existing at any rate in this country – namely, that of a fairly adequate and exhaustive Dictionary of Recent and Contemporary Biography, including foreign as well as national celebrities.”⁸⁰ Revealingly, this same introduction also states that: “The greater lights of the century have been treated with some fullness; in the case of those of minor importance, it was unnecessary to do more than give a concise summary of the leading events of their lives.”⁸¹ From the lengths of their biographies, then, we might gauge the perceived relative importance of the singers who are included in this volume. The longest biographies in the book are those of aristocrats, statesmen and royals, as well as literary figures such as Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and the Brontë and Rossetti siblings. Biographies of Braham, Reeves and Santley all feature. Compared with other biographies in the book, these are of shorter to average length, each taking up approximately a quarter of a page. Italian male singers, including Mario, Tamburini, and Lablache were also profiled. With the

⁷⁹ Lloyd C. Sanders, ed., *Celebrities of the Century, Being a Dictionary of Men and Women of the Nineteenth Century* (London: David Bogue, 1852).

⁸⁰ Sanders, v.

⁸¹ Sanders, v.

exception of Mario, whose biography took up half a page, the biographies of these singers were of roughly the same length as those of their British contemporaries. The biographies of female opera singers also feature. These are typically slightly longer than those of their male contemporaries: Patti's, Lind's and Grisi's biographies are nearer to half a page in length. This would appear to suggest that female opera singers had greater appeal as celebrities than their male counterparts, as their biographies were around double the length.

Operatic Celebrity and Gender

The celebrity of female opera singers differed significantly from that of their male counterparts. Their greater visual appeal is perhaps the most obvious difference; men could appreciate sometimes titillating portraits of female singers, whilst women could admire their dresses and hairstyles. These dynamics did not function to the same extent in reverse – though of course there would have been same-sex desire within the audience, this is not something which could easily be expressed. The difference between male and female operatic celebrity is perhaps most evident in the ways in which singers were appropriated to market commercial goods. While prima donnas were used to advertise a huge range of products, male opera singers were seldom employed in this way. The use of singers in advertisements is a phenomenon that developed in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, when it first became possible to reproduce more elaborate adverts in print, such as those featuring portraits of celebrity endorsers. Furthermore, the trend for these endorsements arose in the latter half of the century when, as we have seen, public interest in celebrity was greater than it had been at the start.

Adelina Patti most notably endorsed a huge range of goods; from clothing and cigarettes to face creams and pianos. She was used especially to advertise products aimed at women, for example featuring prominently in a series of high-profile adverts for Pear's Soap, many versions of which featured her image and a reproduction of her signature. Indeed, she endorsed so many products that she earned the nickname 'Testimonial Patti'.⁸² Male opera singers were not appropriated commercially in the same way. They were occasionally used to sell products, but these largely tended to be related to music: Braham provided an endorsement for an edition of Handel's works, for example.⁸³ Only very occasionally were male singers used to advertise non-musical products. A rare example is a series of adverts for a medicinal product called 'Abbey's Effervescent Potash' which used Sims Reeves' name and portrait, printed alongside his endorsement of the solution: "This preparation is a great boon, simple, refreshing, and efficacious."⁸⁴ Female operatic celebrity, then, was evidently considered more commercially viable than that of male singers.

It was not just in the field of advertising that female singers were exploited to a greater extent. They also attained greater celebrity on the operatic stage. This is something that Sims Reeves addressed at length in his two memoirs, in which he offered several scathing attacks on the greater popularity of his female colleagues. Indeed, he concluded his first memoir with such an

⁸² Madeleine Marsh, *Compacts and Cosmetics: Beauty from Victorian Times to the Present Day* (Barnsley: Remember When, 2009), 40.

⁸³ Anon., 'Now Ready - The People's Edition of "Messiah"', *John Bull*, 17 March 1855, 161.

⁸⁴ 'Abbey's Effervescent Potash', *The Ladies' Monthly Magazine Le Monde Elegant, or the World of Fashion*, 1 September 1889, sec. 148.

attack, underlining the strength of his feeling on this matter.⁸⁵ He felt that male singers had previously enjoyed greater popularity than their female counterparts, but had been gradually overtaken by prima donnas:

Once the spoilt children of the Italian lyric drama, these unhappy vocalists are now of no account whatever. Their chief airs, their final scenes, are either omitted by the conductor, or, worse still, are neglected by the public. When, as they frequently do, commit suicide on the stage, they die, if not in silence, at least in solitude.⁸⁶

Here we find the idea that the celebrity of male singers has been gradually eroded. The idea that the public leave the theatre before the tenor's key scenes is echoed in his second memoir, where he uses the example of *Lucia de Lammermoor* to illustrate his point:

Lucia is an opera in three acts; but in order to give greater prominence to the *prima donna*, the curtain is made to fall after her principal scene, to the great detriment of the work as a whole. If the *prima donna* be a star of the first magnitude, the public, knowing that she will not appear again, and not caring to sit out the third long entr'acte, go home; and Edgardo is left to sing to empty benches a most dramatic scene.

He also suggests that for the prima donna exclusively "is reserved the admiration which was formerly shared by the *prima donna*, contralto, tenor, baritone and bass."⁸⁷ It is not just on the stage that Reeves felt the prima

⁸⁵ Reeves, *Recollections*, 265–68.

⁸⁶ Reeves, 265–66.

⁸⁷ Reeves, 267.

donna dominated. He also discussed the greater celebrity of female opera singers outside of the opera house:

In these matters there is no dictating to the public; but, whatever the fact may signify, a fact it is, that whereas Madame Patti, Madame Nilsson, Madame Albani, and Madame Gerster are sought for in all countries, and travel in the character of stars to the most distant lands, none in any part of the world seem to care much for the voice of any tenor, baritone, or bass now on the Italian operatic stage. [...] Tenor, baritone, and bass are still desirable and almost necessary, though perhaps not absolutely indispensable, for her complete success. But she – her singing, her acting, and in some measure her personal appearance – seems to be accepted as the chief end and object of operatic performances; and insensibly the delusion is gaining ground, that instead of the *prima donna* having been educated to sing in operas, operas have been composed for *prima donnas* to sing in.⁸⁸

Notably, Reeves refers to *prima donnas* as “stars” and specifically mentions the growing importance of their “personal appearance”. Furthermore, he feels that the appeal of female singers has begun to exceed the appeal of opera itself; he imagines opera existing to service the celebrity of *prima donnas*, rather than the reverse being true. Male singers are also imagined as merely “almost necessary”; again, they serve primarily to fuel the *prima donna*’s popularity. In this version of events, Reeves implies that female operatic celebrity has become so potent that it actually overshadows opera

⁸⁸ Reeves, 267–68.

itself. In other words, secondary industries have so successfully cultivated operatic celebrity, that it now supersedes the primary industry it exists to service.

Reeves' feelings toward female celebrity are also reflected in one of the fictional short stories in his first memoir, which concerns a celebrity actress.⁸⁹ Significantly, Reeves launches into this story immediately after a (non-fictional) discussion in which he notes the greater popularity of female operatic characters. This suggests that we might interpret the story as an extension of his discussion about celebrity and gender. The protagonist of this story is called 'Stella L'Estrange', reinforcing her status as a star. We are told: "Her reputation was phenomenal, and her portrait adorned the principal shop windows".⁹⁰ Reeves goes on to explain how L'Estrange's celebrity was perpetuated: "It was announced that a new play was in rehearsal of which Miss L'Estrange would create the chief role: on its production she achieved her greatest triumph: indeed she surpassed herself in this her latest effort: premiums on the prices of the seats were obtained easily by enterprising spectators, all the best places being booked far in advance, while everything, from a shirtbutton to a steam-engine, was christened after Stella."⁹¹ Despite this, Stella remains aloof from her fame; she lives in "strict retirement".⁹² However, this only increases her celebrity: "this sphinx-like reticence seemed only to increase her popularity."⁹³ Here Reeves is again acknowledging the commercial appeal of female

⁸⁹ Reeves, 166–74.

⁹⁰ Reeves, 166.

⁹¹ Reeves, 167.

⁹² Reeves, 167.

⁹³ Reeves, 168.

performers. Furthermore, the story demonstrates a clear understanding of the mechanics and cultivation of nineteenth-century celebrity culture: it is fuelled by the press and the performer's strategic behaviour, and manifested in a range of secondary industries and commercial endorsements. Reeves also specifically refers to portraits of Stella L'Estrange in shop windows.⁹⁴ Portraiture was a crucial tool in the cultivation of operatic celebrity across the nineteenth century. It had the effect of making a singer recognisable to audiences beyond the opera house, even in an age before photography.

Portraiture

Scholars have examined the role of portraiture in the cultivation of theatrical celebrity. This has tended to focus on celebrities from the dramatic stage rather than the lyric stage. Examples include Shearer West's work on portraits of the actor, in which he examines representations of eighteenth-century actors including Garrick and Kemble.⁹⁵ Much work has also explored visual representations of female actors, most notably Sarah Siddons.⁹⁶ The ubiquity of the theatrical portrait in the eighteenth century has led some to argue that it was this century which saw the birth of celebrity, rather than the Romantic period, which is identified by Mole. In his work on Byron, however, Mole offers an elegant consideration of these conflicting viewpoints. He does this by describing a portrait of Garrick by Reynolds, which was reproduced as a popular print. He explains that, in Paris, this portrait was marketed not as a portrait of Garrick, but was given

⁹⁴ Reeves, 166.

⁹⁵ Shearer West, *The Image of the Actor: Verbal and Visual Representation in the Age of Garrick and Kemble* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

⁹⁶ Robyn Asleson, ed., *A Passion for Performance: Sarah Siddons and Her Portraitists* (Los Angeles: Paul Getty Museum, 1999).

the title with the title 'L'homme entre la Vice et la Virtu'. He argues that the publishers:

detached the picture from the individual in order to promote it in abstract terms to a wider audience. In celebrity culture, the opposite approach will dominate. Texts that do not originate with the celebrity individual will be associated with him or her in order to enhance their circulation and boost their market value.⁹⁷

Mole concludes that the three elements of which celebrity consists (an industry, an individual and an audience) "were not yet working in concert" in the eighteenth century.⁹⁸ As we have seen, he instead locates the origins of modern celebrity in the Romantic period. Indeed, it was during this period that operatic portraiture began to fuel celebrity in a remarkably modern and sophisticated way. The only significant existing scholarship which addresses the role of portraiture in the construction of operatic celebrity is that of Roberta Montemorra Marvin, who has explored the representation of female opera singers in the *London Illustrated News*.⁹⁹ Although Marvin acknowledges that her work is merely a preliminary examination of a substantial topic that requires much more research, she vastly underestimates the scale of the market for operatic portraits. She claims there was "a relative dearth of visual as opposed to verbal material for most prima donnas who were active in the era before widespread use of commercial photography for publicity purposes."¹⁰⁰ This implies a lack of

⁹⁷ Mole, *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, 9.

⁹⁸ Mole, 9.

⁹⁹ Marvin, 'Idealizing the Prima Donna'.

¹⁰⁰ Marvin, 21.

operatic portraits in the first half of the nineteenth century. This simply was not the case. Both male and female singers were visually represented in a huge variety of ways: in collectible prints and portraits, in newspapers and journals (often on the front page), on sheet music and even in toy theatres aimed at young audiences. As was illustrated in the case of Braham, it was even possible for a singer to be recognised in public before the advent of photography. The ways in which singers were visually represented evolved significantly across the century.

In the early nineteenth century there was a huge market for theatrical prints and portraits, which was catered for by shops specialising solely in theatrical prints, toy theatres and other ephemera.¹⁰¹ These are yet more examples of secondary industries which fuelled operatic celebrity; singers were depicted in these products alongside actors from the dramatic stage. Such materials disseminated operatic celebrity to a section of society that would otherwise have been beyond the reach of the opera house: they were aimed largely at the young. These products were designed for youthful audiences to collect, colour in and embellish. Through this process, singers became familiar to youngsters who may never even have visited the opera. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote an essay entitled ‘A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured’ which describes his childhood love for this type of theatrical memorabilia.¹⁰² His title refers to the range of portraits that were available: plain, cheaper versions to colour in, or more expensive pre-coloured versions. There was also a craze for ‘tinselling’ portraits. Tinselled

¹⁰¹ George Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: MacDonald & Co, 1946).

¹⁰² Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured’, in *Memories and Portraits* (Glasgow: Richard Drew Publishing, 1990).

portraits were images of actors and opera singers in character, which an audience (primarily of young boys) would embellish with tiny foil accessories, which were also available in print shops. Shiny guns, buttons, hats and boots could all be purchased and affixed to the portrait. A remarkable collection of these tinselled portraits survives at the Museum of London and John Braham is featured amongst these.¹⁰³ A tinselled portrait of Braham dressed as a sailor (in the role of Tom Tug) also exists at the Garrick Club [see Figure Nine]. Braham was amongst the very first theatrical celebrities to be depicted in this way; his portrait was amongst the original set of six produced by the trader Dighton in 1802.¹⁰⁴

Stevenson also describes toy theatres in his essay. These were miniature theatres which youngsters could buy, decorate and assemble in order to re-enact their favourite plays and operas. These sets were produced for a specific play or opera and consisted of a stage with backdrops and characters. They often came with a guide outlining the plot, so that the play could be performed accurately. Again, these were primarily aimed at young male audiences.¹⁰⁵ The most popular toy theatres were based on plays and operas featuring imagery which would appeal to young boys. *Der Freischütz* was especially popular, with its imagery of snakes, spectres and skeletons. Specific actors and singers were depicted, though more often than not the character (and not the performer) was named. Nevertheless, Braham was featured in at least two toy theatre sets that were sold during the early nineteenth century. These sorts of materials helped to construct familiarity

¹⁰³ Unknown, 'Theatrical Tinsel Portrait of Mr. C. Kean, Mr. Shepherd, Mr. Harding and Mr. Braham' 1841, 99.132/288, Museum of London.

¹⁰⁴ Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre*, 17–18.

¹⁰⁵ Speaight, 115–29.

between singers and young audiences. Stevenson vividly describes how these sorts of activities helped him to form an attachment to certain performers, and describes the “physical pleasure in the sight and touch of [these portraits]”, which he would “jealously prolong” colouring in.¹⁰⁶ These materials were clearly a powerful way of disseminating operatic celebrity – and to an audience which is perhaps, to our eyes, quite unusual.

Aside from these forms of portraiture, opera singers were also repeatedly depicted in newspapers and magazines. Typically portraits accompanied a short biography or review. In the first half of the nineteenth century, these were most frequently (though by no means exclusively) images of singers in operatic character. By the mid to late nineteenth century, however, newspapers and periodicals tended to feature portraits of singers as themselves. This shift reflects the growing interest in singers’ personalities, but it is also partly due to the nature of photography which lent itself more naturally to singers posing as their ‘authentic’ selves.

Braham’s anecdote which opens this chapter makes it clear that a singer could become visually familiar to the public – even before the advent of photography. Portraits were disseminated so widely that this was possible. Evidence of this can be found in an intriguing review of Henry Phillips’ autobiography, printed in 1860. The reviewer took exception with the portrait of Phillips that was reproduced in this volume:

the portrait prefixed to the first volume is simply disgraceful. It is the very worst lithograph we ever saw. It is neither a picture nor a

¹⁰⁶ Stevenson, ‘Penny Plain’, 151–52.

portrait of the pleasant face of a public favourite for fifty years; and Mr. Phillips when he sees it will surely enter an action against his publisher for flagrant defamation – of his well-known features.¹⁰⁷

The reviewer concludes this article by expressing the desire that future editions of the work include a better portrait of Phillips. The strength of feeling this portrait inspires is remarkable, especially in an age before photography. Not only is it clear that the author (and by extension, the public) have an extremely clear idea of what Phillips looked like, this familiarity was so strong that a poor likeness could inspire such a scathing reaction; the bad portrait is “flagrant defamation” of the features that are so well-known. Notably, this engraving was derived from a portrait of Phillips by the artist J. A. Knight, who exhibited it at the Royal Academy – another way in which Phillips would have become visually familiar to audiences.¹⁰⁸ Soon after this, printed, drawn, etched, or cut portraits would give way to photography and its associated technologies (though, of course, the use of older technologies did not cease entirely). This made singers yet more readily identifiable to the public.

When photography was first introduced in around the 1860s there were a few photographs taken of singers in character. Most notable are photographs of Charles Santley. However, the vast majority of photographic portraits did not feature singers in character. Instead, these photographs are carefully curated portraits. They tended to feature singers in very conventional poses and respectable attire; another example of a way in which a singer could

¹⁰⁷ Anon., ‘Musical Memoirs of Henry Phillips’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 23 June 1864, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:269. This is the portrait of Phillips in angling attire, discussed in the next chapter.

manage his celebrity and public image.¹⁰⁹ Singers usually made their own appointments with photographic studios, and it was sometimes written into their contracts that they had to supply the opera house with a certain number of photographs for publicity purposes. For example, Santley's contract of 1875 with Carl Rosa specified that Santley was to provide his employer with two hundred large lithographic portraits of himself.¹¹⁰

These photographs were also widely sold and collected as souvenirs of operatic performances and favourite singers. As well as prints, they were reproduced as *cartes de visite* and cigarette cards. These images made singers even more familiar and recognisable to audiences. They were so frequently reproduced that many would have instantly recognised Reeves' wavy hair and Santley's moustache. In their autobiographies, Reeves and Santley frequently discuss their photographs being taken. Reeves enjoys discussing the young ladies who collect and display his photographs: he describes how "the young ladies make such exclamations and the middle age ladies were equally enthusiastic."¹¹¹ Santley also described how "every Tom Dick and Harry is photographed these days."¹¹² But this is not to say that photographs of these men always had the effect of making them familiar to audiences: Santley recounts an amusing incident in which a bailiff saw his photograph hanging in a friend's house. The friend asked the

¹⁰⁹ For more on photographic portraits of Victorian performers, see: David Mayer, "Quote the Words to Prompt the Attitudes": The Victorian Performer, the Photographer, and the Photograph', *Theatre Survey* 43, no. 2 (November 2002): 223–51.

¹¹⁰ 'Contract Between Charles Santley and Carl Rosa' 16 February 1875, 920 SAN/1-17, Liverpool Record Office.

¹¹¹ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 70.

¹¹² Santley, *Student and Singer*, 136.

bailiff if he recognised the man in the photo. “Oh yes,” the tradesman replied; “it’s Oliver Cromwell!”¹¹³

Musical Celebrity

Portraits of singers, and thus their celebrity, were also disseminated through sheet music and song sheets. Such material included the lyrics to popular songs and aria texts, either with or without musical notation. Throughout the century many publishers produced collections of music named after British male opera singers. These typically included a portrait of the singer in question, alongside the words and/or music for a selection of his popular pieces. Such collections encompassed both ends of the market; from cheaply printed song sheets sold for a penny, to leather-bound volumes of sheet music. In the earliest decades of the century, several such collections were named after Braham. *Braham’s Whim* of 1812 was a collection of lyrics for Braham’s most popular sea songs, and featured a high quality portrait of him as a frontispiece.¹¹⁴ In 1815 another publisher produced *The Brahamian Songster*, a collection of lyrics to 20 of Braham’s popular songs.¹¹⁵ This collection, printed on low quality paper, retailed for a mere penny. A poor quality portrait of Braham featured on the front page; it is too unclear to suggest any real likeness. Unlike many of the portraits of Braham that were in circulation during this period, he did not appear in character in the portraits featured in these two collections. This might reflect the fact that both collections featured many nationalistic songs, rather than operatic arias.

¹¹³ Santley, 222.

¹¹⁴ Various, *Braham’s Whim*.

¹¹⁵ Various, *The Brahamian Songster, Being a Choice Collection of the Newest Songs Now Singing at All the Places of Amusement* (London: J. Pitts, 1815).

More importantly, however, it demonstrates that these volumes were being marketed through their connection with a specific singer and his celebrity; they bore Braham's name so it was fitting that they also bore his own image, and not that of one of his characters.

Later in the century several similar collections were named after Sims Reeves. Again, these were produced in differing qualities for different sections of the market. A leather-bound volume of sheet music to many of Reeves' most famous arias was produced in 1860 with the title *Sims Reeves' Ninety Tenor Songs with Piano Accompaniment*.¹¹⁶ An engraved portrait of Reeves featured on the title page. In 1870 another collection was produced in Reeves' name, this time entitled *Recollections of Sims Reeves*.¹¹⁷ This autobiographical name is unusual; the collection appeared before Reeves' own memoirs were published. The title, however, reflects that the collection was being marketed to those who wished to have a souvenir, or reminder, of this celebrated singer. This collection featured the scores for six of Reeves' songs, divided into two halves: three secular and three sacred pieces. This mixed material ensured that the collection would have a wide appeal. The collection, retailed for four shillings, was clearly aimed at comfortable, middle-class buyers who could afford such souvenirs.

Impersonators

One more unusual manifestation of operatic celebrity of the nineteenth century is that of the impersonator. Henry Phillips describes how singers pretending to be him frequently performed in more rural locations around

¹¹⁶ Various, *Ninety Tenor Songs*.

¹¹⁷ Various, *Recollections of Sims Reeves* (London: Ranford and Son, 1870).

the country, masquerading as the genuine article. Phillips performed in an era before photography, so it would have been easier for an imposter to get away with this scheme. It appears to have been quite well known that such imposters existed. Phillips explains that audiences were often suspicious that he himself was an imposter. He recounts:

in many a town people have declared that I was not the celebrated Henry Phillips, or they would have attended my concert. On one occasion a person under this impression, said, "I know it isn't he, and to be quite sure, I'll go and hear him." He did, and at the end of my first song, said – "I knew I was right. It's very like his voice, but it's not he. When I last heard him he was bald, and now he's got plenty of hair." There was little wisdom in my wig on that eventful night.¹¹⁸

What this amusing incident demonstrates is that the celebrity of Phillips had reached so far that it became lucrative for someone to risk passing themselves off as the genuine article. Moreover, this practice was so widespread that audiences did not always believe that they had the genuine article in front of them. There are no records of these sorts of imposters operating in the late nineteenth century. By this stage photographic portraits and a better connected press would have made such a pursuit difficult, if not impossible.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, then, there were an ever-expanding number of ways in which a singer's celebrity could be cultivated,

¹¹⁸ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:273–74.

managed and maintained. British male opera singers actively participated in this process to a surprising degree, capitalising on developing technologies such as the advent of photography, and cultural shifts, such as the growing interest in celebrities' personal lives. These men were visible at the highest level of nineteenth-century society. In his memoir Santley described Reeves as "a 'household god'".¹¹⁹ This was a fitting title for Reeves, but could equally be applied to other British male singers across the century. They were indeed 'household names'; their faces, their public performances, and their private lives were familiar to an extremely wide audience. As is evidenced by the appearance of our singers in such diverse locations as the pages of ladies' magazines, the walls of the Royal Academy, and the cardboard stages of young boys' toy theatres, this audience cut across lines of gender, class and age.

¹¹⁹ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 97.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Pickled and preserved”: The Literature of Singers

In a review of Sims Reeves’ first autobiography, a critic writing in *The Standard* memorably stated: “every tenor should be his own biographer”.¹ This statement might have been extended to all singers regardless of voice type, as a remarkable number of British male opera singers agreed with this sentiment – tenors or otherwise. Henry Phillips penned a two-volume work, while Sims Reeves and Charles Santley each wrote two different autobiographies.² Singers who did not write formal volumes at least drafted a biography for the musical press; this was true of Braham, who wrote a short biography of himself for Sainsbury’s *Dictionary of Musicians* (1824).³ The literary efforts of singers were not limited to biography, however. Several of these men also wrote singing manuals which contained elements of life-writing.⁴ Others produced works of literature that were entirely non-autobiographical, but which still offered insight into their lives and careers.⁵ For singers, such literary works became sites where critics could be answered, rivals could be discredited and legends could be cultivated. But they also had another role: through writing, singers could construct their identity. The aforementioned reviewer went on to note that: “after the record

¹ Anon., ‘London, Saturday, September 29’, *The Standard*, 29 September 1888, 4.

² Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864; Reeves, *Recollections*; Reeves, *Jubilee*; Santley, *Student and Singer*; Santley, *Reminiscences*.

³ Braham, ‘Short Biographical Sketch of John Braham’, THM/35/12, V&A Theatre Archives, London. This is Braham’s draft of the biography that appeared in: Anon., *Dictionary of Musicians*, 1824, 1:111–13.

⁴ Henry Phillips, *Hints on Musical Declamation* (London: J. Surman, 1848); Reeves, *Art of Singing*, 1895; Charles Santley, *Santley’s Singing Master*, 2 vols (London: Chappell and Co, 1895); Charles Santley, *The Art of Singing and Vocal Declamation* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1908).

⁵ Phillips, *True Enjoyment*; Santley, *Meditations*, 1910.

of [Reeves'] life has been attempted more than once by other hands, [he] has at length taken up the subject himself with a praiseworthy determination to do justice to it".⁶ This critic rightly recognised that the singer's literary efforts represented an attempt to seize control of his own life story, wresting back control from others who wrote about him in the press. Although any autobiographer might have a similar motive, we will see that, for our singers, this urge was especially strong.

A key problem faced by nineteenth-century singers was the transient nature of their art form. Before the advent of recording technology, they lacked means by which they could leave behind any sort of lasting legacy. This transience compromised their status as artists because, unlike painters, poets or composers, they could leave nothing to posterity. This problem is one which singers frequently lamented. Henry Phillips, for example, said: "How often I have wished I had selected a career less ephemeral, less exposed to caprice, more solid, and longer remembered than that of the utterer of a passing song, whose reputation lasts but for a season, and whose memory dies with the succeeding generation."⁷ As we saw in the previous chapter, Charles Santley also addressed this problem. Almost thirty years after Phillips had discussed this issue, Santley memorably stated:

The singer has a difficulty to contend with which does not affect any other artist, except, in less degree, the actor. The singer's work is a picture painted on air. No sooner is it depicted than it is gone; while the poet's, painter's, sculptor's and architect's works remain, and

⁶ Anon., 'London, Saturday, September 29', 4.

⁷ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:95.

can be examined and analyzed at leisure. Delicacy of treatment is the quality which is slowest to make an impression on the public eye or ear. The delicacy of a poem, a picture, a statue, or an edifice, though it may not strike at a first reading or view, will gradually impress itself on further acquaintance. The aerial picture of a singer, on the other hand, vanishes, and there it remains nothing more than a dim shadow, insufficient to recall any impression of its merit.⁸

As Santley highlights, singers were unable to leave behind a legacy of lasting value. This compromised their status as respectable men, as the idea of useful production was an important component of Victorian masculinity to which singers could not easily lay claim.⁹ This idea is reflected in Samuel Smiles's influential work *Self Help* (1859) in which the author encouraged men to strive in order to improve themselves.¹⁰ In a chapter entitled 'Workers In Art', Smiles praises composers as well as artists and architects, whose works are lasting.¹¹ He does not extend his praise to musicians and singers. Actors, as Santley notes, shared the same difficulties. Baker has described "the assumption, which was widespread among mid-century intellectuals, that the actor was inferior to the writer, just as the singer or musician was inferior to the composer".¹² As Baker hints, this problem equally applied to other types of musician, such as pianists or violinists. The distinction between inferior and superior artists here centres on the notion of creation. While the composer might be seen as a creator, the singer was

⁸ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 19–20.

⁹ Tosh, *Manliness*, 15.

¹⁰ Though first published in 1859, an expanded edition was published in 1866: Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (London: John Murray, 1866).

¹¹ Smiles, 154–201.

¹² Baker, *Victorian Actor*, 32.

merely an interpreter: he sang the music of great composers and the words of poets in a character that was not his own, and was seen merely a vessel for someone else's art.

Of course this was not the whole story, as singers have historically incorporated varying degrees of creative licence into their interpretations. We find evidence of this in the practice of 'aria insertion', defined by Hilary Poriss as "the practice that allowed singers to introduce arias of their own choice into opera productions."¹³ There was also a long tradition of improvisation in opera, especially in Handel's era when singers were expected to embellish the repeat section of a da capo aria. As Lydia Goehr has argued, the increasing shift away from music as event towards the 'work concept' meant that this practice began to change from around 1800; she cites the example of Rossini notating his arias as symptomatic of this change.¹⁴ Despite this, Poriss argues that the practice of insertion arias endured to some extent until around 1850, though it was in decline from the beginning of the century.¹⁵ Furthermore, she crucially notes that the insertion arias of female singers were seen as far more important than those of male singers which were "quickly forgotten, isolated events that made little impact on future performances or on other singers."¹⁶ Male singers, then, had a decreasing autonomy over their performances in the nineteenth century, and certainly far less than that enjoyed by their female

¹³ Hilary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas and the Authority of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁴ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay on the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 29.

¹⁵ Poriss, *Changing the Score*, 5.

¹⁶ Poriss, 8.

counterparts.¹⁷ This idea of singers as mere reproducers diminished the perceived professional masculinity of these men even further. Though it is true that actors also suffered from this assumption, they had advantages that singers could not claim. Firstly their work was strictly dramatic, meaning they did not lay themselves open to the doubly feminising taint of operatic music. Secondly, they performed works in English, which were often those of figures such as Shakespeare, who was of course a national and cultural hero. Their work was therefore more safely ‘British’ than that of operatic singers.

A literary work, then, could be the singer’s remedy to the affliction of impermanence, as it allowed him to leave behind an enduring legacy with which posterity could judge his merits. Many contemporary readers of operatic autobiographies recognised this. A reviewer of Kelly’s *Reminiscences*, for example, described how the work had “pickled and preserved” the singer for posterity, ensuring that he would not “pass away like [...] the insect tribes to whom a single summer’s day supplied the beginning and the end of their existence”.¹⁸ This entomological metaphor perceptively draws on the contemporary interest in collecting insects, a practice which became “part of the apparatus of rational and institutional knowledge production” in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ This is a pertinent metaphor for the operatic autobiography, vividly suggesting the way in which a singer could preserve himself for posterity with carefully organised

¹⁷ For more on this idea see: Henson, *Opera Acts*.

¹⁸ Anon., ‘Literary Notice’, *The Examiner*, 18 December 1825, 800.

¹⁹ Cannon Schmitt, ‘Victorian Beetlemania’, in *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 36.

words; much like a natural historian might preserve the aforementioned insects.

Autobiographies by their very nature are usually written towards the end of an individual's life. This is certainly the case with the works discussed in this chapter.²⁰ Though their authors had not all said farewell to the stage for the last time when they penned their memoirs, they were nevertheless in the twilight years of their careers. This means that the impact that these autobiographies had on a singer's reputation came late; a lot would already have been written about the singer in the press before he put pen to paper himself. Nevertheless, the impact of these works was still significant. They had a particular impact on obituaries and later profiles of singers, thus forming the cornerstone to their lasting legacies.

Chapter Two has described the ways in which singers adopted alternative professional identities in an attempt to shape their public image. When singers wrote autobiographies and other works of literature, they were effectively adopting the professional identity of the writer. This chapter, therefore, might be read as an in-depth exploration of the most important alternative identity which singers appropriated. It could, of course, be argued that this literary professional identity might equally be applied to anyone who wrote an autobiography. However, as we will see, a number of singers did not write straight autobiography. Instead, they appropriated literary forms including fiction and travel writing, therefore taking on the

²⁰ Later singers would opt to write an autobiography during the peak of their career. Maria Jeritza authored her autobiography at the age of 37: Maria Jeritza, *Sunlight and Song: A Singer's Life*, trans. Frederick H. Martens (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co, 1924).

identity of author to a greater extent than more conventional autobiographers. This chapter will examine the different ways and extents to which singers fashioned themselves as men of letters. By doing this, it will show, they could lay claim to the greater professional status enjoyed by writers in nineteenth-century Britain. Florian Schweizer has discussed the changing status of the writer in nineteenth-century Britain.²¹ He argues that by the 1830s writing had (largely due to the success of figures such as Lord Byron and Walter Scott) attained a celebrated role in British society. Schweizer explains:

Authorship played a central role in the awareness and imagination of the English public. Aspects of writing were discussed widely, enhancing the profile of writers and changing the social, cultural and economic determinants of literary production. In Parliament, politicians fought over the material and ideological ramifications of authorship during lengthy copyright debates. In the drawing-rooms of fashionable society, writers became the centre of attention and literary lionism emerged as common practice [...] In fiction and non-fiction, literary characters peopled books and magazines in a vogue for writings about writers. Literary celebrities of the previous generation [...] continued to be adulated, serving as role models for an entire generation.²²

This aim of this chapter is to examine the literary output of singers, assessing the autobiographies, singing manuals and other works of literature

²¹ Schweizer, 'Authorship'.

²² Schweizer, 117–18.

produced by these men. It will consider the various ways in which singers used writing in order to shape their identity, identifying the key methods and tropes that they employed in their works. It will also analyse critical responses to singers' literary efforts, as these sources reveal much about wider attitudes towards their profession. By analysing the literary works of singers in this way, this chapter will demonstrate that the volumes written by these men represent a significant and culturally important body of work which has thus far been forgotten and neglected. In doing this, the chapter will contest the long-held view of theatrical autobiography as a suspect source that is unworthy of scholarly attention.

The autobiographies of performers (actors as well as singers) have been widely regarded with scepticism, mainly due to their "suspect reliability" and "self-promoting agendas".²³ It is perhaps understandable that the life-writing of performers should be seen as especially suspect, as their profession entails the performance of fictional identities. However, an acknowledgement that such works are subjective constructs rather than objective records should not prefigure the assumption that they lack scholarly value. In *New Readings in Theatre History*, Jacky Bratton attempts to outline possible new approaches to understanding theatrical history of the nineteenth century.²⁴ An exploration of theatrical autobiography is one of the case studies she offers. In this work, she explains that performers' autobiographies have tended to be used solely by

²³ Thomas Postlewait, 'Theatre Autobiographies: Some Preliminary Concerns for the Historian', *Assaph C* 16 (2000): 157.

²⁴ Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

historians who trawl them for objective and verifiable facts.²⁵ Other than this, Bratton argues, these works have been relegated to the realms of theatrical advertising materials and gossip columns.²⁶ She explains that such sources “tend not to be regarded by historians as the authentic histories of the profession, but rather as publicity material and media hype that forms a distorting background noise to real research”.²⁷ An example of the way in which autobiographies have been dismissed by historians can be located in the work of Benjamin McArthur, who has examined the status of the actor in late nineteenth-century America.²⁸ He argues that the autobiographies of these performers are “largely chatty accounts of plays and actors, generally lacking in professional self-scrutiny”.²⁹ He goes on to state that “with patience once can uncover a great deal about theatrical institutions and ways of life” in these works.³⁰ In other words, these works are only seen as sources that, when qualified, yield factual information about theatrical institutions and practices. What he fails to recognise is what these works say about the performer who has written them. Bratton advocates for a reassessment of such materials. While she acknowledges that autobiographies should be handled critically, she argues that “a world of historical meaning” can be located in the ways that performers chose to present themselves.³¹

²⁵ Bratton, 95.

²⁶ Bratton, 95.

²⁷ Bratton, 95.

²⁸ Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000).

²⁹ McArthur, 272.

³⁰ McArthur, 272.

³¹ Bratton, *New Readings*, 131.

This is the approach upon which this chapter will draw. Singers' autobiographies, it will argue, should not be viewed as objective records of their lives or completely accurate representations of the musical and dramatic worlds they describe. Rather, they should be read as constructs which were designed to shape and negotiate the identities of these men. This approach is supported by Paul John Eakin's seminal assertion that all autobiographical efforts are fundamentally works of subjective fiction, rather than objective fact.³² This, he suggests, is because all autobiographies are essentially constructs and products of the imagination. Like other autobiographies, it is clear that those written by performers frequently contain factual inaccuracies and omissions. However, rather than interpreting these as evidence of their unreliability, this chapter will instead argue that these problems can reveal much about the ways in which performers attempted to present themselves. Value can lie in their inaccuracy, and these inaccuracies can at times be more revealing than the truth. In his analysis of late nineteenth-century composer biographies, Christopher Wiley has also drawn attention to the importance of representation over accuracy. His examination, he explains, "hinges not so much on the factual information offered by authors as on the precise ways in which those details are expressed."³³ Given the vast majority of theatrical autobiographies which have been written (Postlewait claims there are several thousand in the English language alone) it is surprising that so few

³² Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

³³ Christopher Wiley, "'A Relic of an Age Still Capable of a Romantic Outlook': Musical Biography and The Master Musicians Series, 1899-1906", *Comparative Criticism: An Annual Journal* 25 (November 2003): 162.

scholars have examined them seriously.³⁴ This, as Postlewait has recognised, is largely down to the idea they are unreliable.³⁵ By reassessing this suspect reliability, however, this chapter might be thought of as establishing a blueprint with which future scholars can assess (or reassess) the multitude of neglected theatrical autobiographies which were written by performers in the nineteenth century.

This is not to say that no other scholar has interpreted a performer's autobiography as site of self-representation. However, examples remain few and far between. Cheryl Wanko has explored the ways in which the identities of performers were negotiated through biography in eighteenth-century Britain, but her focus is on biography rather than autobiography.³⁶ In an approach which is far closer to that used in this chapter, Victoria Tietze Larson has analysed the nineteenth-century actor Sarah Bernhardt's autobiographical accounts of her first American tour.³⁷ Larson reads Bernhardt's text closely, analysing the language and tropes the actor draws upon in order to cast herself in roles including 'mythic hero' and 'romantic dreamer'. More pertinently for the purposes of this chapter, some scholars have considered the role of female operatic autobiography. For example, Alexandra Wilson has argued that the soprano Maria Jeritza used autobiography in order to create a favourable persona that differentiated her from the *femme fatales* she portrayed on the stage.³⁸ In addition, Joy H.

³⁴ Thomas Postlewait, 'Autobiography and Theatre History', in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. Mc Coachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 252.

³⁵ Postlewait, 'Theatre Autobiographies', 157.

³⁶ Wanko, *Roles of Authority*.

³⁷ Victoria Tietze Larson, 'Across Oceans, Mountains, and Spaces: Sarah Bernhardt's American Tour', *Studies in Travel Writing* 14, no. 2 (2010): 159–78.

³⁸ Wilson, 'Prima Donnas', 6.

Calico has written on the Austrian mezzo-soprano Ernestine Schumann-Henk, arguing that she employed autobiography in order to construct a domesticated and patriotic public image.³⁹ Nevertheless, despite the number of examples which exist, the autobiographical efforts of male opera singers have been overlooked thus far.

This chapter will examine the literary output of each of our four singers, dealing with these men in chronological order.⁴⁰ This will build a clear picture of how each individual attempted to construct an identity through writing. This chronological method will also enable this chapter to map changes in approaches and responses to operatic autobiography across the century. However, though this chapter will examine works individually, it is important to recognise the ways in which these works cumulatively formed a significant network of literature. In her work on masculinity and life-writing in the literary circles of Victorian Britain, Trev Lynn Broughton has theorised networks of auto/biography. One of the key figures in her study is Sir Leslie Stephen, the first editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Broughton describes the place of Stephen and his work within a web of other biographers and biographies: “His work for the *Dictionary of National Biography* linked him horizontally to a generation of historians and literary scholars trained [...] in the art of biography, and vertically to robust biographical pedigrees a century old and longer”.⁴¹ We might see the literary

³⁹ Joy H. Calico, ‘Staging Scandal with Salome and Elektra’, in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72.

⁴⁰ Note that though singers are examined in chronological order, it did not follow that their works were published in chronological order. For example, though Braham is the younger singer, the biography he drafted was published before the *Reminiscences* of the older Kelly.

⁴¹ Trev Lynn Broughton, *Men of Letters, Writing Lives: Masculinity and Literary Auto/Biography* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 10.

works of singers as existing in a similar network. On the one hand, singers' autobiographies were linked vertically to those of other singers who penned a memoir either before or after them. Horizontally, their autobiographies are linked with those of their contemporaries. Autobiographies, then, were another way in which singers could forge the sorts of networks discussed in Chapter Two. This understanding is not abstract. Singers often referenced the memoirs of their predecessors and colleagues in a manner that self-consciously cultivated the sense that these works might be seen as a network. This chapter will argue that the deliberate creation of this interconnected body of literature is one way in which singers used their writing in order to create their identities and cement their status.⁴² By supporting and echoing the thoughts and ideas of other singers, they were forging a group identity. Bratton has recognised the way in which nineteenth-century performers used life-writing to forge group identities in this manner. She argues that the use of anecdote was key:

The stories that these theatre people tell around their own biographies are [...] an attempt to construct a group identity, in which their individuality is seated. This the recounting of anecdotes, which are the building blocks of theatrical memoir and biography, may be understood not simply as the vehicle of more or less dubious or provable facts, but as a process of identity-formation that extends

⁴² Other groups of professionals also used writing to forge professional identities in nineteenth-century Britain. See Jan Crosser's work on literature produced by female physicians: Jan Crosser, 'And She Shall Be Called Doctor: Tracing the Print Culture of Female Physician-Writers of the Nineteenth Century' (Oxford Brookes University, 2008).

beyond individuals to the group or community to which they belong.⁴³

This chapter will demonstrate that singers repeatedly used anecdote in this way.⁴⁴

As the preceding discussion has made evident, this chapter is largely influenced by scholarship which concerns theatrical (rather than musical) autobiography. There are three main reasons for this. Firstly, there is limited scholarship on musical autobiography, and that which does exist largely concerns composers' biographies rather than performers' *autobiographies*. A notable example is the work of Christopher Wiley. In his study of late nineteenth-century composer biographies, he has identified a number of key tropes – many of which can also be found in the autobiographies of singers, as we will see.⁴⁵ However, aside from this work, the vast majority of scholarship on musical biography focuses on case studies of individual composers rather than addressing broader trends.⁴⁶ Secondly, as previous chapters have suggested, singers were performers who in many ways had more in common with actors than with composers. Both groups, for instance, shared the problem of an impermanent art form. Finally and

⁴³ Bratton, *New Readings*, 102.

⁴⁴ In this context 'anecdote' refers to a story which an autobiographer shares about a well-known contemporary.

⁴⁵ Wiley, "'A Relic'".

⁴⁶ Christopher Wiley, 'Mythological Motifs in the Biographical Accounts of Haydn's Later Life', in *The Land of Opportunity: Joseph Haydn in Britain*, ed. Richard Chesser and Jones (London: The British Library, 2013), 195–211; William Stafford, 'The Evolution of Mozartian Biography', in *The Cambridge Companion to Mozart*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 200–211; Wiley, "'A Relic'"; Christopher Wiley, "'When a Woman Speaks the Truth About Her Body': Ethel Smyth, Virginia Woolf, and the Challenges of Lesbian Auto/Biography', *Music and Letters* 85, no. 3 (August 2004): 388–414; Maynard Solomon, 'Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 443–70; Elizabeth Wood, 'Women, Music and Ethel Smyth: A Pathway in the Politics of Music', *The Massachusetts Review* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 125–39.

perhaps most importantly, is the fact that singers were frequently imagined to inhabit the same professional group as actors – especially in the earlier decades of the century. More specifically, operatic autobiographies were often received by contemporaries as theatrical autobiographies rather than musical autobiographies during this period. This will become evident in the responses to singer's autobiographies that this chapter will discuss.

With these reasons in mind, it is pertinent to consider the typical conventions of theatrical memoir before examining the autobiographies of singers in depth. Thomas Postlewait has described these conventions:

Autobiography has often followed a pattern of narrative development from childhood through journey to crisis, conversion, and confession. Theatre autobiographies have some of these features, but they are usually more committed to vocational narration than to introspection and self-judgement. [...] the conventional patterns are regularly apparent: a life of innocence (or enclosure), paradise lost (or confinement escaped), struggle, journey and quest, discovery and appreciation by others (which in turn, often leads somewhat later to a moment of self-assessment), success, public glory (usually at the price of personal hardship), and abundant recompense, as viewed retrospectively.⁴⁷

We might measure the uniqueness of each singer's approach to autobiography against this description of the prominent standard.

⁴⁷ Postlewait, 'Autobiography', 256.

Before considering the literary output of our four central protagonists, it is necessary to consider an important precedent: the two-volume autobiography of tenor Michael Kelly.⁴⁸ Although this was published in 1825, it falls outside the parameters of this study as it largely concerns Kelly's eighteenth-century career.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognise the importance of this work. *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly* is the earliest example of a full autobiography written by a British male opera singer. It is also by far the most well-known example of British operatic autobiography – or, indeed, perhaps any autobiography written by an opera singer: King refers to it as “a minor classic of its period”.⁵⁰ This is largely due to Kelly's inclusion of anecdotes about key cultural figures such as Mozart and Sheridan, which have ensured that his work has often been mined by historians and musicologists. His extensive discussion of contemporary celebrities is perhaps the most notable feature of Kelly's autobiography. These stories are central to the text, and its full title reflects this: *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly of the King's Theatre, and Theatre Royal Drury Lane, including a Period of Nearly Half a Century; with Original Anecdotes of Many Distinguished Persons, Political, Literary and Musical*. This work was quite deliberately calculated to place Kelly within a wider network of distinguished and celebrated individuals, raising his profile by association. This recalls Bratton's aforementioned assertion that theatrical

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826.

⁴⁹ Scholars have unanimously claimed that Kelly's work was published in 1826. This was in fact a second edition, as is made clear by a newspaper report of November 1825 which said that the work was published ‘last week’: Anon., ‘Kelly's Reminiscences’, *The Bury and Norwich Post*, 23 November 1825. The 1826 publication was therefore a second edition, as is evidenced by report of December 1825 which said that a second edition of the volume was soon to appear: Anon., ‘A Second Edition’, *The Morning Post*, 2 December 1825. No copies of the 1825 edition appear to have survived.

⁵⁰ Alec Hyatt King, ‘Introduction’, in *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), vi.

personalities used anecdote in order to construct a group identity.⁵¹ Although a full examination of Kelly's autobiography falls outside the scope of this study, it is important to note that it deploys many tropes and tactics which later singers would also adopt. It will therefore be referred back to throughout this chapter where it informs an understanding of the operatic autobiographies that followed.

John Braham

John Braham is the only singer in this study who did not author a book of any description. However, he did draft his entry for Sainsbury's *Dictionary of Musicians*.⁵² As explained in Chapter Four, the introduction of this *Dictionary* made it clear that living persons were consulted regarding their entries.⁵³ David Conway has searched for Braham's draft in Sainsbury's archive to no avail.⁵⁴ The document is in fact now part of the Victoria and Albert Museum's Theatre Archive.⁵⁵ This undated manuscript might not be the final version that Braham sent to Sainsbury. It is written in note form and some areas have been crossed out or amended, whilst other parts are illegible. However, when comparing this document to the entry in Sainsbury's volume, it is clear that the latter was unquestionably derived from the former source. They are remarkably similar, though Braham's account was written in the first person and Sainsbury's in the third. The structure of both accounts is the same, though Sainsbury's article is significantly longer than Braham's draft, going on to include more general

⁵¹ Bratton, *New Readings*, 102.

⁵² Anon., *Dictionary of Musicians*, 1824.

⁵³ Anon., *Dictionary of Musicians*, 1824, 1:iii.

⁵⁴ Conway, 'John Braham', 38.

⁵⁵ Braham, 'Short Biographical Sketch of John Braham'. I am very grateful to Uri Erman for making me aware of this source.

information about Braham's career, embellished with quotations from newspapers and other sources. Braham's draft is brief, consisting of four short manuscript pages. Given this length, and the fact that he was writing something for a prescribed dictionary format, Braham clearly did not have the scope to be as inventive and detailed as singers who wrote complete autobiographies. It is also notable that, unlike all of the other autobiographies assessed in this chapter, Braham wrote this draft during the heyday of his career and not in its twilight years. This means that to some extent it can be seen as a piece of marketing. A brief assessment of this source reveals something of how Braham wished to portray himself auto/biographically. All of the quotations that follow are taken from Braham's manuscript draft and not the final version published in Sainsbury's *Dictionary*.

Braham's account begins with the words "I lost my parents in my infancy".⁵⁶ Though it is not surprising that an autobiography begins with the circumstances of its author's birth, Braham's decision to foreground his status as an orphan suggests that he is presenting something of a 'rags-to-riches-tale'. This arc is completed by the last lines of Braham's document, which emphasise his professional victories and status as the "first tenor singer in Italy".⁵⁷ This is clearly an account which documents Braham's ascent to success. The tenor also emphasises his innate musical ability and aptitude for hard work. He states:

⁵⁶ Ibid., fol. 1, r.

⁵⁷ Ibid., fol. 2, v..

As a boy had a wonderful voice – sung all the Bravura songs of Mara with the greatest of ease – I did not begin to learn music until I had attained my 12th year. But then I was so remarkably fond of it that I used to study for any hours in the day at the Piano Forte and forget my dinner hour.⁵⁸

Braham is drawing on the trope of child prodigy here. In their work on the ‘heroization’ of the artist in biography, Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz have described the “universal interest” in “the childhood and youth of exceptional persons.”⁵⁹ They describe the urge to present evidence of an artist’s talent becoming evident in childhood, tracing the trope of the child genius back to antiquity.⁶⁰ More pertinently, Christopher Wiley has identified childhood precocity as one of the typical characteristics of composers’ biographies of the late-nineteenth century.⁶¹ He rightly identifies Mozart as the most common subject of such writings.⁶² Just one example of an early Mozartian biography which foregrounded the trope of the child genius is that written by Daines Barrington and published in London in 1771.⁶³ Braham, then, taps into a historically potent trope in a way which specifically invokes the ghost of Mozart, conjured up by the idea of a young boy obsessively playing the piano. This additionally suggests Braham’s willingness to study and work hard.

⁵⁸ Ibid., fol. 1, r.

⁵⁹ Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist, A Historical Experiment* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), 13.

⁶⁰ Kris and Kurz, 13–38.

⁶¹ Wiley, “‘A Relic’”, 168.

⁶² Wiley, 168.

⁶³ Daines Barrington, ‘Account of a Very Remarkable Young Musician’, in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, vol. 60 (London: Lockyer Davis, 1771), 54–64.

The tenor also repeatedly emphasises his own popularity. He describes his reception in Paris, where he performed with Storace: “We gave several concerts there at a Louis a ticket – a price never given before (the usual sum being 6 Livres) which was crowded with the first ton”.⁶⁴ The underlined unit of currency emphasises the high price. Later he states: “We have repeatedly since our return to England rec’d letters from abroad offering us engagements from the first theatres in Italy and Vienna”.⁶⁵ Braham is clearly emphasising his professional success and alluding to the profitable nature of his performances. This can be read as marketing puff, signalling his great profitability. Despite this self-promotion, Braham attempts to suggest his own modesty. Revealingly, he twice uses the same phrase to indicate his great surprise at the success he has enjoyed: “beyond my most sanguine expectation”, and later: “beyond our most sanguine expectations”.⁶⁶ This repetition on neighbouring pages of a short document suggests the contrived sincerity of this phrase. While Braham’s draft is very different to the other sorts of autobiography discussed in this chapter, it nevertheless offers some insight into how the tenor sought to represent himself through published work. It is also notable that Sainsbury published the biography based on Braham’s autobiographical draft the year before Kelly’s autobiography appeared. This technically makes Braham’s draft the earliest surviving example of an autobiographical text written by a British male opera singer, though it is not a full autobiography.

⁶⁴ Braham, ‘Short Biographical Sketch of John Braham’, 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid., fol. 2, v.

⁶⁶ Ibid., fol. 2, r., fol. 2, v.

Though Braham produced the smallest literary output of the singers in this study, it must be noted that he arguably possessed the most significant literary networks. This is largely due to his collaborations with Lord Byron and Charles Dickens, both of which are discussed in Chapter Two. Braham's broader literary significance has been noted by scholars. Joseph Slater's work attempts to place Braham within a wide literary network, describing the way in which a range of prominent writers (including Leigh Hunt and William Makepeace Thackeray) wrote about the tenor.⁶⁷ The example of Braham therefore demonstrates that singers did not necessarily have to produce a body of literature themselves in order to forge and profit from literary networks. Through canny collaborations, Braham was able to create the most enduring connection with the world of literature.

Henry Phillips

Henry's Phillips' first publication was, unusually, a volume on fly-fishing: *The True Enjoyment of Angling* was published in 1843.⁶⁸ Fishing had long been a hobby of Phillips', but his primary motivation for writing this volume is likely to have been financial, as his later memoirs explain that successful roles had not been forthcoming for the singer during this period. The volume represents as unusual conflation of angler and singer. There are seven chapters in this book, each one dedicated to a month in the angler's calendar. Each chapter is accompanied by an appropriate song, and Phillips includes scores for these. While this volume was certainly a money-making exercise, it is clear that Phillips wanted to identify himself publically as an

⁶⁷ Slater, 'Literary Life'.

⁶⁸ Phillips, *True Enjoyment*.

angler. This meant that he could exploit the connotations that came with this pastime, which was widely understood to be a hobby pursued by the leisured, aristocratic classes.⁶⁹ This sense is underlined by the volume's inclusion of a portrait of Phillips in angling attire [see Figure Eleven] which was (as he explains in his subsequent autobiography) later displayed to the public at the Royal Academy.⁷⁰ As we will see, this image is one which Phillips also projected through his later autobiography.

Henry Phillips' next publication was a singing manual, which appeared five years later in 1848.⁷¹ Phillips was the first of several singers in this study who produced such a volume. These manuals can be seen as the public performance of professional expertise; singers were presenting themselves to the public as experts, deploying specialist knowledge. Notably, this was shortly after the publication of "the most famous treatise of the nineteenth century": Manuel Garcia's *Traité complet de l'art du chant* (1842/47).⁷² However, despite this important precedent, it was not until the later decades of the nineteenth century that the market for singing manuals would really take off.⁷³ Phillips acknowledges this in his introduction, which states that "no book on the art of singing exists which is not high priced".⁷⁴ His manual is therefore presented as an attempt to democratise art and bring it to the masses; he explicitly says he wants to put his work "into the hands of all

⁶⁹ Alison Locker, 'The Social History of Coarse Angling in England AD 1750-1950', *Anthropozoologica* 49, no. 1 (2014): 99–107.

⁷⁰ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:269.

⁷¹ Phillips, *Hints*.

⁷² For more on the publication history of Garcia's treatise see: David Mason, 'The Teaching (and Learning) of Singing', in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 211. Note that Garcia did not invent the laryngoscope until 1854. He later published an updated singing manual incorporating the discoveries that the laryngoscope had enabled him to make.

⁷³ Rosselli, *Singers*, 107.

⁷⁴ Phillips, *Hints*, 4.

parties” rather than “beyond the means of hundreds”.⁷⁵ Phillips also acknowledges in his preface that this work represents his second attempt at authorship:

This is my second attempt at book writing. I wrote a treatise on angling, where I fished for *trout*; I now pen a tract on singing, where I may be thought to fish for *compliments*: I would rather hook the *former* than the *latter*, and am not vain enough to boast great skill in *either*. However, as far as it goes, my suggestions will be found the most common-place observations of a man who has served a long and rigid apprenticeship, and tried at least to raise his little intellect to the highest power he was able to attain.⁷⁶

This reference to his previous book suggests that the manual has a place amongst a wider network of volumes that Phillips had produced. He is indicating his status as an author to his readers. However, he is almost apologetic for his audacity at writing a vocal manual here, which is indicative of wider social attitudes towards singers in evidence during the mid-nineteenth century. In the concluding lines of this volume he states that he had wished to publish it anonymously. He says: “so tenacious am I of appearing in print, that I would fain have adopted a fictitious name”.⁷⁷ This perhaps reflects, in part, that Phillips was not a singer who attained fame at the high level of Reeves and Santley. This reluctance could also have been derived from the baritone’s awareness that Garcia’s manual was published

⁷⁵ Phillips, 4.

⁷⁶ Phillips, 4.

⁷⁷ Phillips, 15.

only a short time previously, meaning that his own work was implicitly in competition with this celebrated precedent.

Phillips does, however, exert his authority to some extent by drawing attention to his expertise as a singer. He notes the “strange practice” of singing teachers who have never been singers themselves, consequently highlighting his professional advantage over these “eminent teachers”.⁷⁸ In this way he is exerting his professional status. The manual is a largely technical volume, including musical hints and tips which are illustrated with scores and diagrams. The accompanying text reveals many instances of Phillips presenting his profession in a very particular way. He seeks to present vocalists as artists, rather than mere interpreters. He argues that a singer should show “that he can appreciate the inspired mind, which exalts the vocalist next to the poet himself” because this would “[annihilate] the proverb that fiddlers have no brains”.⁷⁹ Here he is clearly asserting the dignity of the singer, and arguing that he possesses equal status to the poet. This idea takes on a nationalist slant when Phillips imagines this ideal singer as British, and contrasts him positively against the Italian singer. A typical passage reads: “The Italian cares little about the words, and has but rarely any poetry to express”.⁸⁰ The singer as thinker and creator, then, is specifically British. Phillips’ concluding words in this volume also carry nationalist connotations. He says he hopes his work will “add my mite to the general health of our community”.⁸¹ He is presenting his authorship of this guide as a patriotic act. Though this manual was ahead of its time, Phillips’

⁷⁸ Phillips, 4.

⁷⁹ Phillips, 7–8.

⁸⁰ Phillips, 8.

⁸¹ Phillips, 15.

hesitant approach to publishing it can be read as proof of the singer's precarious social standing in the first half of the century. Reeves and Santley would later offer no equivalent apologies for the publication of their own singing manuals.

Phillip's *Recollections* appeared sixteen years later, in 1864.⁸² This substantial two-volume autobiography might be best characterised by its (purported) candour. The singer paints a seemingly honest picture of his career for the reader, chronicling his misfortunes as well as his successes. There are two potential reasons for this. First is the fact that Phillips did not enjoy the same level of success as other singers in this study. His accounts of professional disappointments might therefore be seen as a reflection of his frustrated ambition. Secondly, these candid accounts can be interpreted as a plea for sympathy. He depicts himself as a hard-working artist who did not attract the success and recognition that his efforts deserved. By doing this, he can present the singer as a figure who is treated unfairly by a fickle and sometimes unfeeling public. By presenting himself as a somewhat unfortunate figure, Phillips' style might be compared to that of Kelly, who often discussed embarrassing episodes such as his arrest in Sicily and his trial for paying insufficient income tax.⁸³ However, while Kelly plays such unfortunate episodes for laughs, Phillips plays them for sympathy. This sense of candour is underlined by the frontispiece, in which the singer stares directly out at his reader [see Figure Twelve]. This is comparable with that

⁸² Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864.

⁸³ Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 1:88–89; Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly*, vol. 2 (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), 189–91.

in Kelly's autobiography [see Figure Ten] which also produces a sense of direct intimacy.

This candid urge is evident in the striking first sentence of Phillips' autobiography, which reads: "Born to a fortune, I was penniless before five years of age."⁸⁴ He goes on to explain that his father was a wealthy man who swapped his lucrative job in law for a career on the provincial stage, to the financial detriment of his family. Phillips is clearly foregrounding his misfortune. The chapter continues in a similar vein, with Phillips explaining that he did not receive a formal education.⁸⁵ We might contrast this type of self-representation with singers who would come later; these men were keen to present themselves as educated men from respectable families. Like Kelly and Braham before him, Phillips invokes the idea of the child prodigy.⁸⁶ In place of a formal education, he describes how he was instead thrust into the world of the theatre by his father and mother (the latter of whom was also a singer.) Phillips describes his first appearance on stage in some detail, concluding: "I was the great lion of the evening. Thus I made my first appearance in public, and laid the foundation stone of my future fame."⁸⁷ Phillips is therefore tapping into the trope of innate musical genius which singers would adopt unanimously. Furthermore, by explaining that his parents valued the stage over a formal education, he is suggesting that he is a consummate performer and that the theatre is the only world he has ever known.

⁸⁴ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:1.

⁸⁵ Phillips, 1:1.

⁸⁶ Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 1:2.

⁸⁷ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:11.

Over the course of his two volumes Phillips continues to be surprisingly candid about his financial misfortunes and professional disappointments. For instance, he describes his various failed attempts to mount lucrative entertainments and his tour of America which was characterised by financial disaster.⁸⁸ In a typical passage Phillips explains that he returned from his American tour to find he had lost his status in Britain:

I proceeded to London, in the full hope of resuming my profession, and former position; but alas! how vain a dream. Let my experience be a warning to others, and induce them to believe that if they once gain a position, and leave it, but for ever so short a time, it will never be wholly restored to them again. Their talent, their powers, are no arguments in their favour. The public so soon forget, so soon become accustomed to other faces, other styles, and other voices, that the manner, and appearance of an artist are all but obliterated, and in place of being patronized and praised, a man's merits are doubted, condemned and unheeded. Under such circumstances, if an *Englishman*, you had better be a blacksmith than a vocalist.⁸⁹

This typical account presents the singer as a tragic character who is treated unfairly by society and is therefore deserving of sympathy. The striking last line in particular hints at an English sense of utilitarianism in a way that emphasises the singer's insecure status in a country where his art is not valued. It is clear that Phillips is making a plea for commiseration from his

⁸⁸ For an example of Phillips describing his unsuccessful attempts to mount popular entertainments, see: Phillips, 1:Chapter Sixteen. For his description of the American tour, see: Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:Chapters Five-Eight.

⁸⁹ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:209.

reader, whom he indicates might potentially be guilty of fickleness themselves. Such accounts can be read as a defence of Phillips and his fellow professionals.

As well describing many professional and financial failures, Phillips also refers to the impact these had on his health – both physically and mentally. In one case he explains that extended periods of coach travel made him ill, until he started to lose his voice.⁹⁰ He says that these physical symptoms were a result of his nervousness, which suggests the professional pressure he was under. His psychological state is further alluded to by a vision he has while he is laid up with this nervous illness. He believes he sees two balls of electric fire which he feels “[portend] evil”, so therefore goes straight to London to get back to work.⁹¹ In another similar passage later on, Phillips again describes the impact that touring has on his health. He says: “Anxiety and disappointment had long been undermining my constitution, and I became weak and nervous. My whole system was undergoing a change.”⁹² He starts shaking and sweating on stage, before being diagnosed with an enlarged liver.⁹³ These candid accounts are somewhat surprising, as they present the singer as a somewhat weak character who is rendered ill by gruelling work. As we will see, this forms a stark contrast to the accounts of later singers who instead emphasise their robust masculinity and endurance in the face of demanding schedules. We can read Phillips’s accounts of illness and anxiety as another attempt to invite sympathy from his public by making them aware of the slings and arrows that singers must suffer.

⁹⁰ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:259.

⁹¹ Phillips, 1:261–62.

⁹² Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:248.

⁹³ Phillips, 2:248–49.

Passages like this are littered throughout his two volumes and are one of the most notable features of *Recollections*.

Somewhat paradoxical, however, is the next key feature of Phillips' life-writing. This is his self-presentation as a brave and outdoorsy character. His accounts of travel and outdoor pursuits are somewhat at odds with his descriptions of illness and anxiety, but present an image which is more consistent with that adopted by other signers. Kelly also describes his travels and adventures at length, but he presents these as amusing escapades told in a jovial manner. In contrast, Phillips describes his travels in a way that presents him as an active and respectable man rather than a raconteur. This image is an extension of that which he presents in his first publication, *The True Enjoyment of Angling*. Notably, this earlier volume's portrait of Phillips in angling attire [see Figure Eleven] is reproduced as the frontispiece to *Recollections* [see Figure Twelve]. However, in this latter version Phillips' fishing rod has been omitted and the background has largely been erased, so there remains only an impressionistic suggestion of the foliage that surrounds the singer in the original portrait. Nevertheless this foliage, coupled with the singer's thick coat, hint at the nature-loving and sporting persona that he projects through his writing.

Phillips primarily projects this hardy persona through his detailed accounts of travel; most notably a lengthy description of his American tour. Several pages are (as we saw in Chapter Three) devoted to his voyage across the Atlantic.⁹⁴ His descriptions of other incidents that take place in America stand out as equally significant. First is Phillips' account of his visit to a

⁹⁴ Phillips, 2:84–95.

Native American tribe. He describes watching the strange and drunken war dance of a native tribe.⁹⁵ This account presents Phillips as a brave traveller at the frontiers of civilisation, spending time with a tribe who were often depicted as the archetypal savages in British culture of this period; a period in which Indians frequently populated works of adventure fiction.⁹⁶ This underlines the singer's self-representation as an adventurer. His description of a dangerous encounter with a wild bear also serves a similar function. During a hunting trip Phillips shoots at a bear who then turns on him. He describes:

The bear [...] immediately made for me, and I as instinctively endeavoured to climb the tree, but I could not get up an inch. Whether it was that I was unused to climbing, or that the tree was slippery with the moss which grew upon it, I cannot tell: whatever it may have been, the greater efforts I made to reach the top, the nearer I came to the root. The bear came within two or three paces, reared up on her hind legs, and was in the very act of grasping me, when my neighbour fired, and shot her in the neck.⁹⁷

It might perhaps have been a more heroic story had Phillips shot the bear successfully himself, but he nevertheless describes how he turned this experience into a song which dramatises the moment of peril. This, he

⁹⁵ Phillips, 2:184–85.

⁹⁶ Kate Flint, *The Transatlantic Indian, 1776-1930* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 136–66.

⁹⁷ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:180.

explains, “became one of my most popular songs both abroad and at home”.⁹⁸ He wrote words and music. One verse reads:

Hit, again; now, then, she runs to the tree;

Hit, again, bravo! she flies now to thee.

Another shot! down she goes; seize on your prey,

And then on our shoulders we’ll bear her away.⁹⁹

Unlike his real-life encounter, Phillips (as narrator) presents himself as the hero of this song. Like angling, Phillip’s association with hunting and hunting songs serve to present him as a brave and sporting gentleman.

Much like his career, Phillip’s autobiography did not meet with great acclaim. Neither has it endured like that of Kelly’s. Limited reviews describe it as possessing little literary merit. The *Birmingham Daily Post*, for instance, wrote:

Musical men are notoriously sectarians. They are rarely men of much culture or catholic in taste. Music seems to be a mistress and a tyrant who “bears no brother near the throne.” Our chief musicians, composers, and instrumentalists have been men of one phase – only this and nothing more [...] musical men rarely excel in any art but their own, and rarely sympathise with any branches of study which lie beyond these lines. Hence these volumes have no claim, and lay no claim, to literary merit. They profess merely to be the

⁹⁸ Phillips, 2:187.

⁹⁹ Phillips, 2:188.

recollections of a busy man, engaged for fifty years in an absorbing profession which led him into the society of the most notable men of his time.¹⁰⁰

Phillips attempts at presenting the singer as an honourable and sympathetic character were clearly not successful in this case. The reviewer instead views the singer unsympathetically, imagining “musical men” as uneducated and unliterary and making it clear that they should stick to their own art form, rather than venturing into another. The suggestion that the volumes can lay no claim to literary merit also underlines the sense that the singer’s sphere is far removed from that populated by genuine men of letters. In other words, it is presumptuous for singers to present themselves as writers. The reviewer also sees Phillips as existing in separate sphere to “the most notable men of his time”; it is only through his work that he has been thrust into their company. This contrasts with the reception of Kelly’s autobiography, which was praised for its inclusion of colourful anecdotes about contemporary men of note.¹⁰¹ Though Phillips does describe some famous individuals (most notably pen portraits of Domenico Dragonetti and Nicolò Paganini) this is not a key feature of his work.¹⁰² Perhaps consequently, the reviewer imagines Phillips as being relatively insignificant and existing far down the social scale. Placed in the context of attitudes towards singers at this time, this reception is perhaps not surprising. Phillips’ autobiography had little impact on his image or legacy.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., ‘Musical Memoirs of Henry Phillips’, 6.

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Walter Scott’s detailed review of Kelly’s autobiography: Walter Scott, ‘Article XI: Life of Kemble - Kelly’s Reminiscences’, in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, vol. XX (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1835), 152-244.

¹⁰² Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 1:129–36, 155–59.

It is notable that this reviewer characterises Phillips as one of a group of “musical men”. This contrasts with the critics of Kelly’s autobiography almost forty years earlier, who received the elder singer’s work as a distinctly theatrical one, repeatedly referring to Kelly as a theatrical man rather than a musical man.¹⁰³ This suggests that by the latter half of the century, singers were increasingly recognised as a distinct and separate type of performer.

Phillips’ three volumes constitute a small but significant network of publications. The singer emphasises this sense by referring explicitly to his previous works in later volumes, thus making the reader aware of them. His autobiography, for instance, describes his angling volume as his “first public appearance of an author”, going on to explain that this proved a great success, attracting a “great number of subscribers”.¹⁰⁴ Phillips also considers the possible impact that his publications might have on his public image. In his autobiography he acknowledges that his angling book risked compromising his reputation as a singer: “I fear many [...] will say, I much doubt Mr. Phillips’ celebrity as a vocalist, for by his own confession he did so many things, that he appears to be a Jack of all trades and master of none.”¹⁰⁵ While publications allowed a singer to shape his identity, Phillips was clearly aware that they could also be detrimental to it if a singer appeared to be diluting his area of primary professional expertise with forays into other arenas. A varied literary output could therefore be problematic. We will see that this is an issue which Reeves would later face,

¹⁰³ This urge is evident in a number of reviews, including: Anon., ‘Literary Notice’; Scott, ‘Article XI: Life of Kemble - Kelly’s Reminiscences’.

¹⁰⁴ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:268.

¹⁰⁵ Phillips, 2:269.

when his own writing veered into the realms of sensation fiction. Phillips, however, pre-empted such criticism, giving a defence of his own varied literary output:

In defending myself from such an imputation, I must beg it to be understood that my various employments and hobbies arose from a horror of being idle; I must be doing something, if it was only mischief; and as to hobbies, few men are contented with the art by which they have rendered themselves popular. Too frequently they fancy they were by nature intended for something else; and thus work hard at other things, in which they sometimes become respectable amateurs, until they imagine they are equal, if not in some points, superior to professors.¹⁰⁶

Here Phillips is emphasising his manly desire to work hard and learn, while also suggesting that he is something of a polymath. Notably, he also states that he is not “contended” by singing; the art by which he had “rendered himself popular”. This can be read as a reference to the problematic nature of his primary profession. More crucially, though, it demonstrates that Phillips was actively adopting alternative professional identities in order to combat this. This is singer explicitly acknowledging that he used a network of literature in order to shape his public image.

Sims Reeves

The next of our singers to write an autobiography was Sims Reeves. While Kelly and Phillips had each written a two-volume work, Reeves curiously

¹⁰⁶ Phillips, 2:269–70.

opted instead to write two separate autobiographies. The first of these is particularly unusual. *Sims Reeves: His Life and Recollections* was published in 1888. This work does not conform to any of the established conventions of theatrical autobiography, instead consisting largely of fictional short stories. These stories are best characterised as works of gothic or sensation fiction. However, despite it being clear that these stories are fictitious, Reeves curiously presents them as events that he has actually experienced. Indeed, he takes a starring role in many of these short stories. These tales draw repeatedly on tropes from gothic literature: the tyrant, the deranged woman, ruined abbeys and castles, and the supernatural.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, these stories feature several of the hallmarks of the Victorian gothic style: they are short stories which display an interest in psychology, and they bear the influence of sensation fiction.¹⁰⁸ This latter form is characterised by a preoccupation with secrets, servants, false identities and dominant female characters – all themes which reoccur throughout Reeves’ stories.¹⁰⁹ Though it may at first appear counterintuitive that such subject matter could be used to create a respectable persona for their author, these stories frequently feature Reeves himself as an honourable hero. Eakin’s aforementioned assertion that autobiographies are essentially fictional constructs therefore

¹⁰⁷ For an outline of the typical features of gothic fiction, see: Jerrold E. Hogle, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2–3.

¹⁰⁸ Sue Chaplin, *Gothic Literature* (London: York Press, 2011), 81–103.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Mangham, ‘Introduction’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Steere, *The Female Servant and Sensation Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Pamela K. Gilbert, ‘Introduction’, in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Pamela K. Gilbert (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1–10.

applies especially to Reeves, whose work we might situate towards the end of this fictional scale.¹¹⁰

The very first chapter of *Recollections*, entitled ‘A Dark Record’, graphically relates the fictional tale of a grisly murder, in which a drunken maid murders her boss and his young family.¹¹¹ These sad events, Reeves tells us, occurred at the start of his career, and he claims to be acquainted with several of his story’s protagonists. In the following chapter, however, Reeves temporarily abandons creative writing and launches into a more conventional autobiographical style, relating the date and circumstances of his birth. This is the pattern that the rest of the autobiography follows: it switches back and forth between fiction and autobiography. Reeves describes this form early in *Recollections*, stating that he would share “the practical details of my life: occasionally pausing to draw aside the curtain which shrouds some strange experiences I have encountered.”¹¹²

Many of Reeves’ fictional tales can be read as a coded defence of his profession and his social status as a British male singer of opera. The story most revealing of Reeves’ intentions is ‘The Bishop’s Daughter’, the protagonist of which is a thinly-disguised version of the author himself.¹¹³

This story concerns a promising and respectable young British tenor called Harry Sherstone. Like Reeves, Sherstone is from Kent and received his early musical education in a local church choir. Readers are immediately aware of this parallel, as an account of Reeves’ youthful service in a Kentish

¹¹⁰ Eakin, *Fictions*.

¹¹¹ Reeves, *Recollections*, 1–13.

¹¹² Reeves, 15.

¹¹³ Reeves, 36–50.

church choir was given three chapters previously.¹¹⁴ Sherstone falls in love with the beloved daughter of the local bishop, who we are told is an “obstinate and aggressive” man.¹¹⁵ The bishop forbids his daughter from seeing Sherstone, who he feels is “drifting into evil courses” as his singing career progresses.¹¹⁶ The bishop’s disapproval of Sherstone’s career is presented as unjust and hypocritical; the singer defensively reminds him: “I am a gentleman’s son”.¹¹⁷

The story continues in a second chapter entitled ‘La Scala’.¹¹⁸ Reeves himself appears in this chapter, where he comes across the bishop’s daughter in Milan. Due to her heartbreak she is suffering from melancholia, which her father fears will prove fatal. Reeves is able to reunite her with Sherstone, who by now is coincidentally performing at La Scala under the Italianised name of Signor Certoni. This makes Sherstone an even closer parallel to Reeves, as both men are in the unusual position of being Englishmen singing Italian opera at La Scala. Of course Reeves famously made his own Italian debut here, and readers would have read his account of this event in the chapter immediately preceding ‘The Bishop’s Daughter’. As a result of Reeves’ intervention, the bishop repents and allows the young couple to marry. Through this story, Reeves attempts to demonstrate that it is unjust and hypocritical to exclude singers from polite society. By using a thinly disguised version of himself as the wronged protagonist of this story, Reeves is effectively launching a coded defence of his own social standing

¹¹⁴ Reeves, 15–16.

¹¹⁵ Reeves, 37.

¹¹⁶ Reeves, 44.

¹¹⁷ Reeves, 49.

¹¹⁸ Reeves, 51–59.

and an attack on those who feel that opera singing is not a respectable profession. It must also be noted that this chapter effectively contains two fictional representations of its author, in the forms of Sherstone and the fictional Reeves. Perhaps the tenor was attempting to present two versions of himself: the respected (and eventually accepted) young singer he wanted to be, and the more conflicted man that he was. Alternatively, by presenting the character with his own name as the hero helping to combat prejudice against singers, Reeves might have been suggesting his own keenness to challenge and combat problematic attitudes towards his profession.

Reeves makes an additional attempt to paint himself as a respectable professional through another fictional story, entitled “‘Mephisto’ Behind the Scenes’.¹¹⁹ This chapter tells the tale of a theatre manager who allows a dastardly lord to take advantage of young performers backstage. One evening Reeves sees the lord preying on a promising young singer, before discovering that he has left the theatre with her. An alarmed Reeves runs after the lord’s carriage and liberates the frightened young girl. On freeing her from the predator’s clutches, Reeves dramatically tells the lord: “I do not fear you or any man, and if you have any grievance in the matter, bring it into a court of law.”¹²⁰ Through this story Reeves is acknowledging the weak morals that were popularly understood to be part of theatrical life backstage.¹²¹ However, by casting himself as the hero of this story, actively fighting against such immorality, Reeves was attempting to distance himself from the negative connotations which were synonymous with a theatrical

¹¹⁹ Reeves, 101–9.

¹²⁰ Reeves, 109.

¹²¹ Baker, *Victorian Actor*, 44–61.

profession. Furthermore, in making a lord the villain of his tale, Reeves highlights the hypocrisy that would exclude a respectable opera singer from polite society, whilst accepting an immoral lord. Through this story Reeves is again attempting to defend his profession and advocate for his own respectability. Furthermore, he portrays himself as the manly hero of this story, saving the archetypal 'damsel in distress'. It is notable that Reeves repeats this anecdote in his second autobiography, which features no fiction.¹²² This could suggest that this story alone is based, at least in part, on true events.

While stories such as 'The Bishop's Daughter' and "'Mephisto" Behind the Scenes' are clearly attempts to elevate the moral status of his profession, Reeves used other tales to respond to more specific accusations he faced in the press. Most notable were his reputation for failing to appear on stage and his rumoured drinking habits. Reeves denied these allegations directly in the more conventional sections of his autobiography, but also used fiction to support these repudiations. For example, several of his stories are designed to defend their author against accusations of alcoholism. These moral tales, warning of the dangers of alcohol, are intended to indicate Reeves' distaste for excessive drinking. Most notable is the opening chapter of *Recollections*, entitled 'A Dark Record', which relates the harrowing tale of a multiple murder.¹²³

The story's protagonist is Sarah Webb, a violent woman with a drinking habit, who is in the service of a great house. One evening she begins to

¹²² Reeves, *Jubilee*, 42–47.

¹²³ Reeves, *Recollections*, 1–13.

drink whisky excessively, becoming progressively more deranged and demonic as she continues to drink, eventually attempting to rob her sleeping master. The master awakens as she is stealing his watch, causing her to grab a dagger and “remorselessly bur[y] it in her master’s throat!”¹²⁴ She then smothers her master’s wife with a pillow before killing their two young sons – one of whom is a baby. Reeves’ story is shocking on many levels: it is a graphic account of a woman murdering a family. More alarming, though, is the fact that this chapter opens the autobiography. A reader, expecting a musical memoir, is likely to be bemused as to why they are instead plunged into a gruesome tale of murder. However, by introducing his volume with a vivid warning about the dangers of alcohol, Reeves is signalling to his readers at the outset that he does not approve of excessive drinking. Through this shocking subject matter, then, it would appear that he is attempting to defend himself against accusations of alcoholism. We might compare Reeves’ motive here with that of the prima donnas who, as Calico and Wilson have demonstrated, used autobiography in a similarly remedial manner.¹²⁵

Though it at first appears that Reeves has chosen a particularly surprising theme with which to do this, the topic of murder by servants was selected to tap into a contemporary fear. As Judith Knelman has shown, there was a spate of high-profile murder cases in nineteenth-century Britain which involved female servants killing their masters.¹²⁶ In 1845 a Martha Brixely killed a baby for which she was nursemaid, nearly severing its head from its

¹²⁴ Reeves, 11.

¹²⁵ Calico, ‘Staging Scandal’; Wilson, ‘Prima Donnas’.

¹²⁶ Judith Knelman, *Twisting in the Wind: The Murderess and the English Press* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 188–98.

body.¹²⁷ This incident became known as ‘The Greenwich Tragedy’ and inspired a ballad of the same name.¹²⁸ Four years later in 1849, an 18-year-old servant called Sarah Thomas killed her mistress with a blow to the head.¹²⁹ This became “one of the most sensational stories of the century”.¹³⁰ It was not until 1879, however, that fears about murderous female servants reached their zenith.¹³¹ Notably, this was a mere nine years before the publication of *Recollections*. In this year two notorious cases came to court, including the particularly savage murder committed by Irishwoman Kate Webster. She had thrown her mistress down the stairs before cutting off her head, boiling it and selling the resulting liquid as ‘best dripping’.¹³² She then burnt the rest of the body and threw it into the Thames. This story was covered widely in the press, including the *Illustrated Police News*, which featured many illustrations depicting the case.¹³³ Two elements of Reeves’ story suggest that the tenor had this real-life precedent in mind. Firstly, ‘A Dark Record’ is set in the Irish town of Kildare, so it is reasonable to assume that his protagonist was also an Irish woman. Secondly, the name of this protagonist (Sarah Webb) bears a resemblance to that of the real-life murderess (Kate Webster). These facts suggest that Reeves is deliberately invoking the horrors of this well-known tale in order to underscore his warning about the possible consequences of excessive drinking. In other words, he is tapping into a contemporary anxiety in an effort to connect with his readers. Furthermore, as Elizabeth Streere has shown, the female servant

¹²⁷ Knelman, 189–90.

¹²⁸ Knelman, 190.

¹²⁹ Knelman, 190–93.

¹³⁰ Knelman, 191.

¹³¹ Knelman, 197–98.

¹³² Reeves, *Recollections*, 197.

¹³³ Reeves, 198.

was a recurring trope in Victorian sensation fiction; she argues: “female servant characters represented one of the most ‘sensational’ aspects of sensation fiction: its largely unprecedented description of power for women and the servant classes.”¹³⁴ Just one example of sensation fiction which prominently features female servants is Wilkie Collins’ bestselling novel *The Moonstone* (1868).¹³⁵ In this context, Reeves’ choice of topic demonstrates an awareness of the conventions of popular sensation novels. Furthermore, it is suggestive of a commercial motive. Due in part to their domestic subject matter, sensation novels were particularly popular amongst the class inhabited by female servants. This trend was so prevalent that the genre was dubbed ‘kitchen literature’ by some commentators.¹³⁶ Reeves, then, was perhaps attempting to appeal to the class who were most likely to buy his stories.

Another story which reinforces the message of Reeves’ respectability is his longest, spanning four chapters.¹³⁷ This initially begins as a story of young love. A young man called Willard O’Neill is fishing in the countryside and falls into a river, before being rescued by a young girl called Norah Leslie who nurses him back to health. Willard and Norah eventually go their separate ways. The story then moves to Dublin, where Reeves inserts an account of one of his career highlights; true events, which actually took place in 1849. This was the famous occasion on which Reeves was in the audience to watch the Irish soprano Catherine Hayes make her debut in

¹³⁴ Steere, *Female Servant*, 4.

¹³⁵ Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone; A Romance*, 3 vols (London: The Tinsley Brothers, 1868).

¹³⁶ Steere, *Female Servant*, 1–13.

¹³⁷ Reeves, *Recollections*, 110–48.

Lucia di Lammermoor. The tenor for this performance was Paglieri (a minor singer), who was so lacklustre that audiences heckled relentlessly. Realising that Reeves was in the audience, and knowing that Edgardo was his most famous role, the crowd protested until he agreed to take to the stage and finish the performance himself. He eventually capitulated, to much acclaim. After his account of these events Reeves switches back to fiction, explaining that he was introduced to the fictional Willard O'Neill at the theatre after his famous impromptu performance. The two men decide to go for dinner together, but as they are leaving a woman is run over. Willard recognises her as Norah.

The story then concludes with a chapter entitled 'A Star of Bethlehem', this title hinting both at the religious imagery it contains and its Christmas theme.¹³⁸ The tale jumps forward in time; Norah has married Willard and they now have had a child. However, Willard has become a gambler and abandoned his family, leaving them destitute. The story is set on Christmas Eve, when Norah realises she is dying and so decides to look for her absent husband. She begins a long journey through the snow with her child, eventually finding her way to the grand house of Willard's father. Believing her to be a beggar, her father-in-law turns Norah and his grandchild away. However, early on Christmas morning he is awoken by what he believes to be a fire in his barn. He and Willard run to look, and realise it is instead a bright star shining over the barn. The story concludes with the men realising to their horror that Norah and her son have frozen to death inside the barn. This story, with its unsubtle inversion of religious imagery, is clearly a

¹³⁸ Reeves, 138–48.

morality tale. It vividly highlights the dangers of a dissolute lifestyle, demonstrating that the author is disapproving of such behaviour. Furthermore, it casts Reeves in the role of wise moraliser. Significantly, the tenor weaves this story around an account of one of his own career highlights, which evidences his success and popularity with audiences. This real-life anecdote, placed in the middle of an otherwise fictional tale, serves to set the author up as a direct and favourable contrast to the immoral Willard O'Neill.

Reeves' strange works of fiction were clearly presented in the format of an autobiography, with a title that conforms to the genre. Nevertheless, his inclusion of so much fiction suggests that he attempting to present himself to the public as an author. There is evidence that he used the work of Charles Dickens as a blueprint. Reeves' story entitled 'A Railway Tragedy' strongly supports this interpretation.¹³⁹ In this tale, Reeves tells of his fictional chance encounter with a railway signalman whose children have been killed by a train. This train now haunts the signalman's dreams; he tells Reeves: "at night I seem to follow its course into the darkness, and when the gleam of its accursed lamps has passed, I trace its black outline and I curse it. I know, too, that one day I shall either find the means to destroy it, or it will kill me".¹⁴⁰ This story is strongly reminiscent of Dickens' own short ghost story, *The Signalman*.¹⁴¹ Published in 1866, Dickens' story predated Reeves' by twenty-two years. It is widely acknowledged that this story was influenced by Dickens' first-hand

¹³⁹ Reeves, 70–79.

¹⁴⁰ Reeves, 79.

¹⁴¹ Charles Dickens, 'The Signalman', *Mugby Junction*, December 1866, 20–25.

experience of the Staplehurst rail crash of 1865, in which ten people died.¹⁴²

While the railway was not an uncommon theme for Victorian fiction, the similarities between the two stories are significant; they both feature a haunted and ill-fated railway signalman, tortured by his experience of rail accidents. Moreover, both stories also end ambiguously, with the reader left to decide whether the hauntings are supernatural or psychological in origin. It is also notable that Reeves' aforementioned tale 'A Star of Bethlehem' is a gothically-tinged morality tale set at Christmas, strongly suggesting the influence of Dickens' celebrated novella *A Christmas Carol* (1843).¹⁴³

We have already seen that Charles Dickens was at the forefront of a campaign to raise the social status of writers in Victorian Britain.¹⁴⁴ By adopting the style of Dickens, therefore, Reeves was perhaps attempting to adopt the gravitas and professional prestige enjoyed by this most celebrated of Victorians – he was presenting himself to the public as an author. Other stories within *Recollections* support this interpretation, as they contain far less of the heroic self-representation and unsubtle self-defence which characterise stories such as 'The Bishop's Daughter'. They appear to exist primarily to entertain the reader. Examples include 'An Astral Double', a tale in which a young singer Reeves has taken under his wing accurately predicts his death, before appearing to Reeves in a vision at this exact moment.¹⁴⁵ Another such story is 'The Ring', in which Reeves helps a friend to sensationally reveal the true identity of a famous actress who turns out to

¹⁴² Michael Foley, *Britain's Railway Disasters: Fatal Accidents from the 1830s to the Present Day* (Barnsley: Wharncliffe Transport, 2013), 73.

¹⁴³ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843).

¹⁴⁴ Schweizer, 'Authorship', 121.

¹⁴⁵ Reeves, *Recollections*, 22–31.

be the friend's scorned ex-lover.¹⁴⁶ With these stories, full of the characteristic features of gothic and sensation fiction, Reeves is positioning himself as an author of popular fiction and, perhaps, making a bid for the commercial success which had been so lucrative for Dickens and other celebrated contemporary authors. An illuminating parallel might be drawn between Reeves' *Recollections* and Michael Kelly's memoirs. The earlier tenor's volumes present stylised (and purportedly true) accounts of his own adventures in a manner which emphasises the author's innate theatricality. Examples include the story of his dramatic escape from Italian assassins mid-performance, and his account of a narrow escape from a violent gang in Revolutionary France.¹⁴⁷ Reeves, in contrast, has gone one step further than Kelly and inserted himself into dramatic adventures which are fictional. He (strangely) hoped that his stories would distance himself from the taint of the theatrical sphere, whereas Kelly was seeking to situate himself firmly within it.

The non-fiction chapters of *Recollections* also reveal much about the way in which Reeves sought to present himself. Throughout this volume (and, later, in *My Jubilee*) he repeatedly quotes at length from favourable reviews. This might be seen as reminiscent of Kelly's autobiography which also included supplementary materials, including a score for a melody he wrote which was arranged by Mozart, and a substantial list of productions for which he composed the music.¹⁴⁸ Reeves uses materials in a similar way. *Recollections*, for example, features an appendix in which a hyperbolic

¹⁴⁶ Reeves, 166–74.

¹⁴⁷ Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 1:165–72; Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 2:25–26.

¹⁴⁸ Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 1:224–25; Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 2:324–25.

review from the *Aberdeen Journal* is reproduced in its entirety, across ten pages.¹⁴⁹ However, it is not just favourable critics that he quotes; he also reproduces a lengthy poem written by one of his supporters that praises him as a British hero.¹⁵⁰

Reeves' singular attempt to blend autobiography and fiction was, perhaps unsurprisingly, met largely with confusion. Critics found the fictional portions of the volume strange and even distasteful. A reviewer in *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* found the "strange romances" to be "unduly tragic".¹⁵¹ The more gothic chapters were singled out for criticism: "We could spare the first chapter, with its description of a four-fold murder [...] also the harrowing recital of the death of two children on the railway before the eyes of their father; and some other mournful fatalities".¹⁵² Along similar lines, a reviewer in *The Observer* felt that these stories were of "an unpleasing character", regretting that these "irrelevant" episodes took up "more than two-thirds" of the book.¹⁵³ What is most interesting about this lengthy review, however, is the fact that it does not refer to the fictional majority of the volume until the penultimate paragraph. The reviewer is clearly unsure what to make of these stories, concluding only that they are irrelevant and expressing the wish that they be withdrawn from future editions of the volume. Notably, this review fails to make clear that Reeves' stories are in fact fictitious, suggesting that there may have been some confusion surrounding their veracity.

¹⁴⁹ Reeves, *Recollections*, 269–78.

¹⁵⁰ Reeves, 203–5.

¹⁵¹ Anon., 'Recollections of Sims Reeves', *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, 7 October 1888, 5.

¹⁵² Anon., 5.

¹⁵³ 'The Life of Sims Reeves', *The Observer*, 7th October 1888, 3

Most damning by far was a review in *The Spectator*.¹⁵⁴ Notably, this review was entitled “Mr. Sims Reeves as a Novelist”, demonstrating a recognition that the tenor was attempting to assume a new professional identity.¹⁵⁵ However the scathing review that followed made it clear that this attempt had been unsuccessful. Like other reviewers, its critic expressed regret that the work consisted largely of “sensation novels condensed” instead of focussing on the details of Reeves’ musical career.¹⁵⁶ This explicit reference to sensation fiction is notable, demonstrating that the singer’s attempt to conform to this genre was recognised. Despite its negativity, this is the only review that attempted to engage with Reeves’ fiction in a substantial way. Instead of attempting to interpret this fiction, however, it merely lampooned it. The review quoted mockingly from several of Reeves’ stories, selecting lines that highlighted his overwrought style and ridiculing the names he had chosen for his characters. It quoted at length from one particular story, which included a description of a “circling kingfisher”.¹⁵⁷

A student of natural history will not fail to notice the singular originality of the epithet ‘circling’, as applied to the flight of the kingfisher. It is as if one should speak of the lightning rapidity of the snail, the melodious note of the peacock, or the modesty of the operatic tenor.¹⁵⁸

This review both mocks Reeves’ attempt to be a writer, and diminishes his status as a singer; the typical tenor is characterised as immodest. Even the

¹⁵⁴ Anon., ‘Mr. Sims Reeves as a Novelist’, *The Spectator*, 10 November 1888, 1558–1559.

¹⁵⁵ Anon., 1558.

¹⁵⁶ Anon., 1558.

¹⁵⁷ Anon., 1558.

¹⁵⁸ Anon., 1558.

sections of the work that were not fictitious were criticised for the author's repeated references to praise he had received. The review concluded with the damning lines:

Such a book as this leads one to the conclusion that it is rash to expect a singer to be able to reveal in writing the secret of the almost magical power he exercises over the hearts of men. At any rate, such expectations will be grievously disappointed by these memoirs. Their egotism would be intolerable if it were not so naive. But at best they do no more than constitute an addition to the annals of conceit.¹⁵⁹

This is not to say that this volume's reception was entirely negative: a more generous critic at *The Musical Times* describes how they were "entranced" by Reeves' "literary powers".¹⁶⁰ However, they still expressed the wish that Reeves should not include any further fiction in future autobiographical efforts. Not a single review of Reeves' *Recollections* attempted to engage with or interpret his fiction in a serious way. Most reviews ignored it or dismissed it, while at least one reviewer seemed to be uncertain as to whether or not the stories were fictitious. These reactions are not surprising, given the highly unusual form that Reeves adopted.

Contemporary attitudes towards gothic and sensation fiction go some way towards explaining the spectacular failure of Reeves' literary efforts. As Isabella von Elfern has noted, gothic fiction is a "flamboyant style"

¹⁵⁹ Anon., 1559.

¹⁶⁰ Anon., 'Sims Reeves: His Life and Recollections', *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 1 October 1888, 620.

characterised by an excess of “metaphors, adjectives and mood”.¹⁶¹ As we have seen in Chapter One, flamboyance and excess were seen as the primary characteristics of feminised Italian opera and its native singers. For a singer like Reeves, then, who wanted to project a masculine and respectable persona, this style was uniquely incompatible with his aims. Sensation fiction also carried unfortunate connotations. It was seen as an especially female form in the nineteenth-century, as it often focused on dominant female characters and was frequently penned by female novelists.¹⁶² Furthermore, detractors of the genre also saw it as a distinctly working-class form of literature, due to its proliferation in affordable periodicals and penny fiction. As Andrew Mangham has argued, it was consequently criticised for being a “low” form of literature which threatened more respectable forms of literature with “contagion”.¹⁶³ If Reeves sought to achieve respectability through his fiction, he had alighted upon a particularly unfortunate genre. The style in which Reeves chose to write, then, coupled with wider cultural attitudes towards these styles, can go some way towards explaining the poor reception of *Reminiscences*. However, this volume received so little serious attention that it did not cause significant damage to his public image.

The work was soon forgotten, especially after the publication of his second autobiography, which was far more successful. This included no fiction. It is curious that Reeves’ first volume has been air-brushed out of his history. For instance, a substantial biography of Reeves written by journalist and

¹⁶¹ Isabella von Elferen, *Gothic Music, The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012), 12–13.

¹⁶² Mangham, ‘Introduction’, 4.

¹⁶³ Mangham, 8.

author Charles E. Pearce discusses the tenor's second autobiography, but completely fails to refer to his first.¹⁶⁴ This may in part be due to the involvement of Reeves' son in the production of this volume, which was published in 1924. It is unsurprisingly a largely flattering (and, in parts, defensive) overview of the tenor's life. In this context, the omission of Reeves' ill-fated literary career is less surprising. Like Pearce's biography, Reeves' second autobiography would fail to refer to his first. This is a notable omission, as *Reminiscences* concludes with a promise that another volume of memoirs would be published the following year.¹⁶⁵ This second volume, however, presents itself as Reeves' first attempt at autobiography. It starts with the lines:

SEVERAL of my friends have done me the honour to make me the subject of biographical sketches, and even of full biographies. These, however, have all in some respects been incomplete; and now that I am entering upon the fiftieth year of my professional career, it may possibly interest a portion of that public from which I have received so many marks of favour to hear, as it were, from my own lips, the true story of my life.¹⁶⁶

Reeves, then, also attempted to erase his first unusual autobiography from the record. In this introductory section he also foregrounds his inclusion of anecdotes about fellow performers. He tells the reader: "My fate has naturally thrown me among the greatest singers of the first half of the

¹⁶⁴ Pearce, *Sims Reeves*.

¹⁶⁵ Reeves, *Recollections*, 268.

¹⁶⁶ Reeves, *Jubilee*, 3.

century, nearly all of whom have been personally known to me.”¹⁶⁷ Reeves then explains that he will be sharing anecdotes of these fellow singers, as well as composers, conductors and managers.¹⁶⁸ In a style that is reminiscent of Kelly before him, Reeves is also placing himself conspicuously amongst a network of celebrated professionals.

The name of this second autobiography, *My Jubilee, Or Fifty Years of Artistic Life*, foregrounds Reeves’ long and celebrated career, also alluding to a royal precedent with the use of the word ‘jubilee’; Queen Victoria’s golden jubilee was lavishly celebrated only two years before its publication. The tone of this second autobiography is best characterised as defensive. This might be contrasted with the earlier style of Phillips, who candidly describes his misfortunes in manner which invites sympathy. Reeves is more combative, explicitly answering his critics and glossing over any professional misfortunes. As we have seen, Reeves’ career was dogged by negative reports in the press about his repeated cancelled appearances, as well as frequent accusations of alcoholism, financial greed and professional vanity. *My Jubilee* attempts to answer these critics, while also seeking to present the tenor as a musical genius. He explicitly answers accusations that have been made against him. The volume begins with an introduction, penned by Thomas Ward; the Managing Director of the London Publishing Company who produced the volume. In this he acknowledges that the book serves as a defence of Reeves. He explains that “much concerning [Reeves] that was apocryphal has passed into popular currency” before continuing: “The myth as to the cause of his repeated non-fulfilment of professional

¹⁶⁷ Reeves, 3.

¹⁶⁸ Reeves, 4.

engagements has now received its quietus, never again, it is hoped, to be whispered with bated breath even by the most unreflecting part of the public.”¹⁶⁹ Reeves indeed tackled such accusations directly. As we saw in Chapter Four, he explicitly addresses claims made in another contemporary theatrical autobiography – the memoirs of the impresario James Henry Mapleson:

Mr. Mapleson, in his racy, entertaining *Memoirs*, recently astonished the world, and particularly myself, by the assertion that I could not sing unless I had previously swallowed, in a dressing-room hung with a particular kind of chintz, a basin of soup prepared at Birch’s in Cornhill. Now, to take the assertion for one moment in earnest, the particular kind of chintz might have been everywhere at my disposal; but how on earth, when singing, for instance, at the Theatre Royal, Dublin, or, still less, on my lengthened Italian tour, could I have obtained the requisite supply of soup, prepared at Birch’s in Cornhill?¹⁷⁰

Reeves was clearly engaged in the network of contemporary theatrical autobiographies, as he had presumably read Mapleson’s *Memoirs*. By explicitly referring and answering to this work, Reeves himself was actively participating in this network, thus placing himself into a professional network that was supported by this interconnected web of autobiographies.

¹⁶⁹ Reeves, vi.

¹⁷⁰ Reeves, 153.

This sense is amplified when Santley later refers to Reeves' autobiography, expanding this web even further.¹⁷¹

As in the non-fictional elements of *Recollections*, Reeves reproduces much information that flatters him, including lengthy quotations from positive reviews. His own accounts of his professional successes verge on the egotistical; describing his debut in oratorio he claims: "I could scarcely fail to make some impression on the public."¹⁷² This self-representation as a genius is most evident in the tenor's description of his early musical education. Like both Kelly and Phillips before him, he evokes the trope of the child genius.¹⁷³ He offers extremely minimal descriptions of his musical training, instead presenting his talents as an innate and effortless gift. For instance he states: "My father was a musician and it is said that at an early age I used my voice with no little skill."¹⁷⁴ The images of both the musical father and the naturally gifted child suggest the template of Mozart, which Reeves surely had in mind here, hinting to his readership that he might share some of the great composer's cachet. There is some evidence that the adoption of this trope was successful: one obituary of Reeves would later make explicit the parallel with Mozart which Reeves was reaching for. In a biographical sketch of Reeves, the *Leeds Mercury* stated that the "father of the famous tenor was an excellent musician, and, like the father of the immortal Mozart, he recognised very early his son's genius."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 36.

¹⁷² Reeves, *Jubilee*, 85.

¹⁷³ Reeves' description of his early life and training is extremely brief in his first autobiography, but also hints at the trope of the child prodigy: Reeves, *Recollections*, 15–16.

¹⁷⁴ Reeves, 15.

¹⁷⁵ Anon., 'Death of Sims Reeves', *The Leeds Mercury*, 26 October 1900, 5.

Another notable feature of Reeves' second autobiography is its inclusion of visual sources. This is explicitly referenced on the title page, which declares that the book "features six plates".¹⁷⁶ In this context, the inclusion of the plates serves as a marketing tool, allowing the publisher to advertise the fact that the book is illustrated. However, the selection of images it includes is revealing. We have already seen that the autobiographies of both Kelly and Phillips include frontispieces of the singers out of costume, staring directly at the reader. Reeves also includes a portrait, which again serves to cultivate a sense of intimacy with his reader. However, his gaze is not the direct stare of Kelly or Phillips; instead, he looks into the middle distance. This perhaps subtly underscores the singer's self-representation as a lofty genius, which contrasts with the more down-to-earth personas adopted by Kelly and Phillips. It is notable that, like Phillips, Reeves also appears to be wearing an outdoors coat which is perhaps designed to denote the same type of robust masculinity. A reproduction of the tenor's signature is printed beneath his portrait. This could be read in two ways. On one hand, it adds a personal touch, being an affectation that the reader has a signed copy and thus forming a sense of intimacy with the author. On the other, it could be seen as presumptuous, indicating the singer's belief that he is a man whose autograph the reader would covet. This latter reading again underscores his self-representation as a celebrated genius. Aside from this frontispiece, the work contains three illustrations depicting scenes and locations from Reeves' childhood, and two portraits of him in full operatic costume; as Edgardo in the first and Fra Diavolo in the second.

¹⁷⁶ Reeves, *Jubilee*, n.p.

It is interesting that several critics were clearly aware that Reeves' works were defensive. They recognise that the tenor's volume represents an attempt to seize control of his identity from those who had written negatively about him in the press. One reviewer perceptively noted:

Mr. Reeves has published an autobiography, a very sensible thing to do, because by doing so you prevent many a fibbing monolith being erected about you with its urticaceous exaggerations, by the polypodian order, whose biographies are frequently machiavellian bulbs going far to prove that a lie will travel twenty miles before truth can get its shoes on.¹⁷⁷

Other reviews echoed these sentiments, suggesting both a ready awareness that Reeves' works were careful constructs and a wider understanding that autobiography was a tool used by public figures as a means of controlling their identity. Though critics recognised his self-aggrandisement, they felt this was called for. A typical review in *The Times* stated:

Like most artists, he has drawn inspiration from popular applause and has carefully preserved all laudatory notices. It is only natural that any depreciatory criticisms should have been ignored or casually adverted to as outbreaks of splenetic envy. We should fancy it must have been trying to a modest man to reprint so many extracts of rapturous eulogy, but when a gentleman becomes autobiographical he is bound to be as candid as may be.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Anon., 'Notes and Comments', *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser for Lancashire Westmorland, and Yorkshire Lancaster*, 25 September 1889, 2.

¹⁷⁸ Anon., 'Mr. Sims Reeves's Reminiscences', *The Times*, 24 September 1889, 7.

In an almost amusingly uncritical vein, this review continues:

Mr. Reeves maintains that his faults of character with which he has been credited were really virtues, or scarcely to be distinguished from virtues. What enemies condemned as irritable susceptibility was self-respect or manly indifference; and when he got into trouble with *impresarios* or managers he was invariably in the right or misled by some unlucky misunderstanding.¹⁷⁹

This reviewer's characterisation of Reeves as "Like most artists" is revealing. We have seen that Kelly's memoirs were received as a theatrical work, where those of Phillips were seen as a musical work. Here Reeves is being placed into a more general category of 'artist'; a category that singers like Reeves would have found preferable.

There is one response to *My Jubilee* that Reeves would not live to see: Pearce's aforementioned biography of Reeves.¹⁸⁰ This substantial book is useful as a reception document, as Pearce finds many notable omissions and manipulations of truth in the tenor's own works. Although, as we have seen, he entirely ignores *Recollections*, he says of the later work: "*My Jubilee* is fragmentary, and owing to the paucity of dates and for other reasons it cannot be accepted as authoritative."¹⁸¹ Just one example is Reeves' failure to mention that his father had been in the Royal Artillery Band, instead erasing the military association and describing him solely as a "musician";

¹⁷⁹ Anon., 7.

¹⁸⁰ Pearce, *Sims Reeves*.

¹⁸¹ Pearce, 7.

Pearce describes this as “somewhat singular”.¹⁸² It is possible that Reeves omitted this fact in order to make his family sound wealthier than they were. Alternatively, he might have wished to evoke the precedent of Mozart more prominently, as the great composer’s father was also famously a musician. In other instances Pearce finds that Reeves claimed to make his debut at eighteen years old when he was in fact twenty, also neglecting to mention lowly early roles at insalubrious venues.¹⁸³ Pearce’s findings prove the extent to which Reeves’ memoirs are carefully constructed texts, designed to present a very particular image.

Reeves’ final literary effort was a singing manual, entitled *The Art of Singing*.¹⁸⁴ This might be compared to the earlier singing manual of Phillips, published over half a decade earlier. While the elder singer was tentative and apologetic about his audacity at publishing a singing manual, Reeves had no such concerns. He displays his professional expertise with confidence. An Editor’s note printed at the front of this guide declares: “OUR greatest tenor – certainly one of the greatest the world has known in natural gifts, and in the culture, art, and passion of his rendition – needs to introduction to the readers of this little work.”¹⁸⁵ Reeves is therefore being presented with an authority that Phillips was modestly reluctant to claim. Again, this represents the increased recognition and respect for singers in the latter years of the nineteenth century.

¹⁸² Pearce, 18.

¹⁸³ Pearce, 30–33.

¹⁸⁴ Reeves, *Art of Singing*, 1895.

¹⁸⁵ Reeves, n.p.

The Art of Singing is a largely technical volume, containing a beginner's guide to vocal types and singing technique. The volume was produced along with the scores for several of Reeves' most famous songs. Though the majority of the text concerns the technique of singing, it is also clear that Reeves took every opportunity to underline the respectability of his profession, in the same way that Phillips had earlier. A passage entitled 'On The Platform' reads as follows:

Many concert singers, especially ladies, come upon the platform all smiles and smirks, with other little fetching tricks of deportment. No artist indulges in such inanities. A singer should not appear frigid to an audience; but the simpering conduct of some performers is quite incompatible with the dignity of art, and cannot atone for vocal deficiencies.¹⁸⁶

The "dignity" and gravitas of the singer, who Reeves pointedly refers to as an "artist", is clearly being emphasised here. As we saw in Chapter Two, this singing manual was reincarnated nine years later by Reeves' son, Herbert Sims Reeves.¹⁸⁷ It is clear that Reeves' singing manual placed him into a network of other such works written by British singers in an attempt to publically and permanently evidence their professional expertise.

Charles Santley

Charles Santley was the final singer in this study who produced a literary output. His efforts were by far the most successful. This is largely because

¹⁸⁶ Reeves, 28.

¹⁸⁷ Reeves, *Art of Singing*, 1909.

he appropriated the form of travel writing and consequently drew upon a model of masculinity that was especially popular in late nineteenth-century Britain; not only did he present himself as a writer; he presented himself as an explorer. Santley's two volumes appeared seventeen years apart. Whilst Chapter Three offered a detailed analysis of Santley's self-representation as a sailor and explorer in detail, the present chapter will turn our attention to other key elements of the baritone's life-writing. In between the publication of his two autobiographies, Santley published two singing manuals (which will be discussed subsequently). However, despite the gap between these two autobiographies, and their differing titles, the second volume is effectively a continuation of the first. Santley makes this explicit: the first line of *Reminiscences* is: "In my book, *Student and Singer*, I gave the place and date of my birth".¹⁸⁸ Because of this, the two volumes will be discussed here as one body of work. This can be contrasted with Reeves, whose first autobiography was stylistically very different from his second.

Santley's autobiographies share several key characteristics with that of Henry Phillips, although there is no firm evidence that Santley read the work of the elder baritone. The most notable shared characteristic is the precedence each singer gives to accounts of travel. As well as this, Santley adopts the candid tone of Phillips. He discusses disappointments and periods of difficulty, instead of avoiding awkward truths like Reeves does. Kelly shared his misfortunes in a way that was intended to solicit the reader's amusement, while Phillips shares his own disappointments in a plea for sympathy. Santley takes a different approach, presenting his difficulties as

¹⁸⁸ Santley, *Reminiscences*, 1.

obstacles which he has manfully overcome. Although Santley does not explicitly reference the work of either Kelly or Phillips, he does refer to the autobiography of Reeves at one point, indicating an awareness that his work exists within a wider network of operatic and theatrical autobiographies.¹⁸⁹

At the start of his first volume, Santley explains that there is one key influence on his work. This, somewhat surprisingly, is Renaissance artist and soldier Benvenuto Cellini. In the introduction to his first volume Santley claims he “never had any intention of submitting my memoirs to the public”, going on to state that: “it is only at the solicitation of numerous acquaintances I do so now.”¹⁹⁰ Taking this idea further, Santley continues:

I have no pretension to sufficient literary qualification for book-writing; I have an antipathy to autobiographies, with one exception, that of Benvenuto Cellini.¹⁹¹ His style is not polished, at times uncouth; he records his merits and his failings. I have heard him called egotistic; but surely, a man possessing talents of such a rare order as he did is entitled to the appellation, if he states unmistakable facts concerning his artistic skill, adventures, and exploits. Some of his own failings he might have suppressed with advantage to his memory, but no doubt, in recording them, he has shown his intention to give an honest account of himself.

I have endeavoured to follow Cellini’s plan of jotting down any reminiscences and reflections plainly, to the best of my ability, and I

¹⁸⁹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 36.

¹⁹⁰ Santley, vii.

¹⁹¹ At this point Santley includes a footnote which states: “I speak of Cellini’s own work, not any translation.” Santley, vii.

will be quite satisfied if they, to whom I have dedicated them, find them sufficiently interesting to wade through.¹⁹²

Santley's purported aversion to autobiography and lack of literary experience present him as a rough and ready character who has no pretentious airs. This is certainly the image that Santley projects consistently across his two volumes. However, Santley's claim to be an unliterary man is somewhat undermined by his reference to reading Cellini's autobiography in the original Italian, which suggests that he is more inclined to literature than he is claiming. This hints at the conceit of Santley's self-presentation as a rugged and somewhat uncultivated character. Santley's claim that he breezily jotted down his autobiography reflects Michael Kelly's introduction to his own memoirs; the tenor claimed these were somewhat casually "thrown together".¹⁹³ Both singers were hoping to suggest that their works were not careful constructs, while also defending themselves against potential accusations of arrogance.

We have seen that Reeves glossed over the need for hard work and study in descriptions of his early musical education, instead presenting his talent as natural musical genius. Santley, on the other hand, emphasises the youthful training and hard work that was necessary to achieve his professional success. Contrast, for example, the one sentence which Reeves devotes to his period of training in Milan with the seven lengthy chapters in Santley's first volume which chronicle his own period studying in the city.¹⁹⁴ Santley's hard work is also reflected in the title of his first volume, *Student*

¹⁹² Santley, vii–viii.

¹⁹³ Kelly, *Reminiscences*, 1826, 1:1.

¹⁹⁴ Reeves, *Recollections*, 32; Santley, *Student and Singer*, 46–155.

and Singer, which itself modestly foregrounds the importance of his education. Christopher Wiley has identified the trope of hard work as one characteristic of late nineteenth-century composer biographies. He argues that these men (never women) were described as doing “indefatigable hard work” showing “dedication to their cause”.¹⁹⁵ He suggests that this was “a concept eminently consistent with the Protestant work ethic”.¹⁹⁶ Wiley also argues that the concept of innate genius could run “contrary to the work ethic, since no effort is involved in its realisation.”¹⁹⁷ Unlike Reeves, Santley does not fall in to this trap, instead making it explicit to the reader that hard work and extensive training were required to gain professional eminence. It is this sense of full disclosure instead of idealisation that suggests the influence of Henry Phillips.

His lengthy account of his time as a student in Milan best typifies both Santley’s emphasis on hard work and his candid style. He describes a period of training characterised by study and deprivation. His description of financial struggle taps into a long-established motif within the genre of artistic biography; Margaret and Rudolf Wittkower have traced this trope back to Renaissance Italy.¹⁹⁸ When Santley was not taking lessons, he was living in a modest room with little money for food or heating. He describes: “The weather was bitterly cold, and as I had no means of warming my room, it was impossible to remain indoors reading or studying with any

¹⁹⁵ Wiley, “A Relic”, 168.

¹⁹⁶ Wiley, 168.

¹⁹⁷ Wiley, 169.

¹⁹⁸ Margot Wittkower and Rudolf Wittkower, *Born Under Saturn: The Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2007), 253–80.

comfort.”¹⁹⁹ Instead, he soon realised that “for the price of a cup of coffee I could enjoy the warm shelter of a *caffè* the whole evening.”²⁰⁰ Santley’s cafe of choice, he explained, was patronised by other artists and musicians who used it as “a Great Musical Exchange” where musical business was conducted.²⁰¹ The lifestyle Santley is describing here has a distinctly bohemian flavour: a starving artist in his garret making financial sacrifices in the name of his art and seeking refuge amongst like-minded friends in a cafe. The cafe was of course a particularly prominent motif of bohemia. In her work on Bohemianism, Elizabeth Wilson has described how: “In the nineteenth-century world of freezing garrets the cafe was a cosy alternative, a ‘home for the homeless.’”²⁰² In 1840s Paris, Murger and his friends “sat for hours in the upstairs room of the Cafe Momus for the price of a single coffee”.²⁰³ She goes on to say that “The cafe, however, was more than a substitute home. It performed different and contradictory functions simultaneously. One of the most important of these was its role as a labour exchange for intellectuals and artists.”²⁰⁴ It is clear that Santley’s description and even his choice of vocabulary mirror these stereotypes of bohemia. Of course Puccini’s opera *La bohème* would immortalise exactly this kind of lifestyle just four years after the publication of *Student and Singer*. This opera was inspired by the composer’s own experiences of being a student

¹⁹⁹ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 87.

²⁰⁰ Santley, 87.

²⁰¹ Santley, 87.

²⁰² Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (London: Taurisparke, 2003), 34.

²⁰³ Wilson, 34.

²⁰⁴ Wilson, 35.

(like Santley, he studied in Milan).²⁰⁵ Two years after this, Leoncavallo would retell the same story with his own operatic version of *La bohème*. In presenting his student lifestyle as one that was typically bohemian, then, Santley is ascribing his student self a model of bohemian artistic masculinity.

One surprising revelation shared by Santley takes this idea further. Describing one period of particular financial difficulty in which no engagements were forthcoming, he explains that he contemplated suicide: “At times I felt my situation so keenly that I contemplated putting an end to my existence.”²⁰⁶ The trope of the young, struggling artist committing suicide in his modest rooms brings Thomas Chatterton immediately to mind. The story of the eighteenth-century poetic genius who killed himself at the age of seventeen was well-known in contemporary Britain. Chatterton had been referenced by poets including Coleridge, Wordsworth and Keats, his story consequently representing “a myth intimately connected with the birth of English Romanticism.”²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Henry Wallis’ striking painting vividly depicting Chatterton’s suicide was displayed to much acclaim in the 1850s, and would have remained familiar to many at the end of the century. We might read Santley as hinting at such a precedent and trying to present his youthful self as the archetypal romantic artist. This seems somewhat at odds with the bluff and manly persona which he sought to cultivate through the remainder of his memoirs. However, he navigates this tension by

²⁰⁵ Linda B. Fairtile, *Giacomo Puccini: A Guide to Research* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc, 1999), 121.

²⁰⁶ Santley, *Student and Singer*, 145.

²⁰⁷ Alexander Sturgis et al., *Rebels and Martyrs: The Image of the Artist in the Nineteenth Century* (London: National Gallery Company, 2006), 84.

making it clear that this difficult bohemian period of his life was one which he successfully overcame. Wiley has argued that this theme of surmounting struggle is one which can be found in composer biographies of the late nineteenth century. He describes this as the trope of “strength through suffering”, going on to explain that “One common theme was the poverty that composers experienced (and overcame) both during their formative years and throughout their life, which demonstrated how, in exemplary fashion, they sacrificed quality of life in pursuit of their art.”²⁰⁸ Santley deploys his accounts of misfortune in the same way – they serve to underline the sacrifices he has made and the obstacles he has bravely surmounted. Readers of Santley’s autobiography would be aware of the singer’s great fame and success, so they knew his story was always going to be one with a victorious ending. This is particularly true of Santley’s second volume, which was published after the award of his Knighthood.

One final notable feature of Santley’s autobiographies are their images. *Student and Singer* features portraits of Santley in Auber’s *Fra diavolo* and Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. *Reminiscences*, on the other hand, produces far more images. These serve to place Santley within a wider network of contemporaries. The volume contains fourteen illustrations, only one of which is a frontispiece of the author [see Figure Fourteen]. As with the frontispieces of Phillips and Reeves, Santley is depicted wearing an outdoor coat suggesting a sense of robust masculinity. The other images in this volume are predominantly portraits of contemporary musical celebrities such as Luigi Lablache and Sir Michael Costa. A portrait of the tenor Mario

²⁰⁸ Wiley, ““A Relic””, 170–72.

is printed above a facsimile of a message that the Italian wrote to ‘his friend’ Santley, explicitly signalling Santley’s close relationship with other prominent musical figures.²⁰⁹ Other illustrations include a portrait of Santley’s mother and a depiction of Lake Como, which Santley describes visiting.

Most interesting, however, is a group portrait entitled ‘The Toy Symphony’ which depicts Santley amongst the musicians at a performance of Haydn’s ‘Toy Symphony’. Other musicians depicted include Arthur Sullivan and Charles Hallé [see Figure Fifteen].²¹⁰ This group portrait works on several levels. Firstly, it presents Santley amongst a group of fellow musical professionals, thus emphasising his place within a wider professional network and also supporting this wider group identity. Secondly, it depicts this group sat beneath a collection of theatrical portraits. One is clearly discernible as Samuel de Wilde’s late-eighteenth-century painting *Mr Bannister Junior and Mr Parsons as Scout and Sheepface in ‘The Village Lawyer’*.²¹¹ The image is therefore a portrait of theatrical professionals sat beneath a collection of portraits depicting earlier theatrical professionals. This suggests the group’s place within a historic lineage of fellow professionals. The image therefore serves as a visual representation of the way in which singers use their autobiographies to forge a group identity: they flag up their presence in both a horizontal and vertical network of predecessors and peers.

²⁰⁹ Santley, *Reminiscences*, opposite 146.

²¹⁰ Santley, 136.

²¹¹ I am grateful to Tessa Kilgariff for her identification of this portrait.

Reviews of Santley's two volumes were overwhelmingly positive. They repeatedly lauded Santley's openness and honesty, describing him as a man of honour and a patriot. Although no reviewers discussed Santley's accounts of travel in any great depth, his status as a traveller was repeatedly cited as evidence of his good character. In one typical example, the *Manchester Guardian* describes Santley's second volume as:

the bluff and hearty record of a life enjoyed to the full, and an inexhaustible energy spending itself in vigorous denunciation of bad cooking, the tipping evil [...] and equally vigorous praise of staunch friends, remembered bottles of Clos de Vougeot, the hospitality of "The Bell" at Leicester, and music with no nonsense about it.²¹²

This reviewer references several of Santley's accounts of travel, such as his discussions of food, wine, tipping and lodging. These anecdotes clearly indicate to the reviewer that Santley is a man of "vigour", suggesting strength and masculinity. Furthermore, the use of the words "bluff" and "hearty" are distinctly sailor-like, suggesting the success of Santley's attempt to invoke this figure. *Student and Singer* was extremely successful. A biographer of its publisher records that the book proved "extraordinarily popular"; it was first published in October, went through second and third editions in November and reached its fourth edition by December.²¹³

In between the publication of his two autobiographies, Santley published two singing manuals. The first of his two efforts appeared in 1895. This

²¹² J. E. A., 'Reminiscences of Charles Santley', 14.

²¹³ Anthony Hamilton and Bryan Bennett, *Edward Arnold: 100 Years of Publishing* (London, Melbourne and Auckland: Edward Arnold, 1990), 15.

work, *Santley's Singing Master*, appeared in two parts, each of which cost four shillings.²¹⁴ This was published in the style of sheet music rather than as a bound book; it consists mainly of scores for vocal exercises in which Santley instructs his reader. This work underlines Santley's celebrity status; only his last name was needed in the title, as it was assumed audiences would know who he was. Furthermore, a reproduction of his signature was printed underneath his preface, underlining at once both his celebrity endorsement of this guide and the sense of his personal connection with the reader. This can be contrasted with the work of Phillips, who was reluctant to put his name to his manual, lest he should be viewed as presumptuous. The way in which this guide was so heavily linked to Santley and his celebrity appears to be atypical for singing guides produced during this period. We might compare it, for instance, to a J. G. Veaco's *Seven Daily Exercises*, published two years later.²¹⁵ The copy of this work in the British Library is bound in a volume along with Santley's. Though we are told in small font that Veaco is a licentiate of the Royal Academy of Music, this is the extent of our connection with him. Unlike Santley, his first initials are deemed necessary, despite his unusual surname. He offers no preface, and his signature does not feature.

Santley's work is broken into two sections, the first addressing the student and the second addressing the master. This latter section is in itself an assertion of Santley's status and authority; he is instructing the 'masters' themselves. In the section addressed to students, Santley underlines his

²¹⁴ Santley, *Singing Master*, 1895.

²¹⁵ J. G. Veaco, *Seven Daily Vocal Exercises for Forming the Voice* (London: Weekes and Co, 1897).

authority by telling his reader: “I have founded the work I now offer to you on experience”.²¹⁶ He offers no apology for presuming to share his knowledge. Though the majority of this work consists of scores for a series of vocal exercises, elements of text again underline the singer’s need for hard work; Santley recommends “industry and perseverance” as well as warning readers against “excesses of eating or drinking”.²¹⁷ This guide was well-received by the press. *The Athenaeum* stated: “Any words emanating from a master of vocal art as Mr. Santley are worth of consideration”.²¹⁸

Santley’s final singing manual might be viewed as evidence that his professional and social status was assured by 1908, when it was written.²¹⁹ Indeed, Santley had by this point received his knighthood: ‘Sir Charles Santley’ is emblazoned on the front cover. This lengthy work was not published in the form of pamphlet or sheet music, like those of other singers had been previously. Instead it was a volume bound in red leather with gold detail. We might apply Genette’s theory of paratexts here, as the materials that surround Santley’s main text (red leather, gold detail) signal a sense of prestige to a reader, conceivably affecting the way in which they interpret the text itself.²²⁰ This text is particularly interesting, as its focus is as much on general life advice for singers as it is on vocal technique. Through his frank and chatty advice to singers, Santley again paints a very particular image of his profession. A chapter entitled ‘The Sister Arts’, for example, argues that a singer should be acquainted with literature, prose, poetry and

²¹⁶ Charles Santley, *Santley’s Singing Master*, vol. 1 (London: Chappell and Co, 1895), 4.

²¹⁷ Santley, 1:4.

²¹⁸ Quoted in an advert reproduced in: Reeves, *Art of Singing*, 1895, n.p.

²¹⁹ Santley, *Art of Singing*.

²²⁰ Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

painting.²²¹ Again, this raises the singer to the status of artist/creator, rather than mere interpreter. He also reconfirms the dignity of the artist in a section disavowing the idea of a bohemian life:

Many students, and professors too, consider that Bohemian life, so-called, is the only artistic existence. I beg to deny it! Bohemian life may suit Bohemians, another name for “would-be’s”; they who adopt it, or affect to adopt it, never rise [...] I never yet encountered a great artiste who led a Bohemian life, or was unsystematic in his work.²²²

Here he is distancing the true artist from the decadent bohemian – an interesting decision, given the description of his own bohemian student days in *Student and Singer*. Furthermore, it is notable that he refers to singers as “artistes” (rather than mere ‘artists’) throughout this work, again adding an air of gravitas to his profession.

Santley produced one final work of literature. The book in question is entitled *Meditations for Each Day of the Month of June* and was published in 1910 by both a British and American publishing house.²²³ This was a Catholic religious work translated from Italian into English by Santley. The publisher is one who produced several other Catholic publications during this period.²²⁴ *Meditations* is clearly a work aimed at a small, Catholic

²²¹ Santley, *Art of Singing*, 40.

²²² Santley, 42–43.

²²³ Santley, *Meditations*, 1910; Charles Santley, *Meditations for Each Day of the Month of June* (New York: Benzinger, 1910).

²²⁴ Philip Waller, ‘Roman Candles: Catholic Converts among Authors in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, in *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain, Essays in Memory of Colin Matthews*, ed. Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201 (Footnote 7).

readership rather than aimed at the general market like his best-selling autobiographies. However, Santley had several potential motives to produce such a volume. As we saw in Chapter Two, Santley was made a Knight Commander of St. Gregory the Great by Pope Leo XIII; an honour of which he was very proud. Devotion to the Sacred Heart is a cult within Catholicism which “focuses attention on the physical heart of Jesus Christ as the symbol of his redemptive love”.²²⁵ This form of worship was associated especially with Pope Leo XIII, who called it “the most excellent form of religion” and raised the status of this form of worship with a decree that subsequent popes renewed annually.²²⁶ Santley might therefore have produced his volume as a form of tribute to the Pope who had honoured him. But as well as this, this work also demonstrates Santley’s skill with language – it is an impressive feat to have translated a text from the original Italian. The limited circulation of this work, however, indicates that this volume should be understood more as an act of personal worship rather than a tool with which Santley hoped to influence his public identity.

Autobiography in the Age of Recording

In a 1924 review of Pearce’s biography of Reeves, *The Musical Times* considered the problematic nature of singer’s autobiographies.²²⁷ Its critic ‘H.G.’ argued that (unlike the memoirs of composers) such volumes contained “little of interest”, being largely filled with tales of “success and

²²⁵ C. J. Moell, ‘Sacred Heart: Devotion To’, in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. XII (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 818.

²²⁶ Moell, 819–20.

²²⁷ H. G., ‘Sims Reeves by Charles E. Pearce’, *The Musical Times*, 1 August 1924, 705.

squabble” with some “sordid” memories thrown in for good measure.²²⁸

This demonstrates that, well into the twenty-first century, some still regarded singer’s autobiographies as suspect or even sordid trifles. This review delves deeper however, suggesting that the advent of recording technology would alter the landscape of operatic autobiography: “The gramophone will improve matters, because it will help us to reconstruct a great singer’s success [...] a life of Caruso can be made a vivid affair by means of a score or so of his best gramophone records”.²²⁹ In other words, a recording would come to be seen as a far better representation of a singer’s career than an autobiography (or two) could ever hope to be.

There are some crucial implications here. Firstly, the review suggests that a singer’s personal life (characterised by squabble and sordidness) was of far less consequence than their vocal art. The record as legacy would therefore be preferable to an autobiography, as it preserved the singer’s art rather than his suspect personality. Linked to this is the second key point: a recording might enable a singer to record his voice for posterity, but also provides him with far less autonomy and scope for self-expression. Phillips could not have described his travels on record, and Reeves could not have answered his critics by gramophone, even had the technology been available to them. While later singers could record their voice for posterity (as, indeed, Santley did), this medium could not enable them to exercise the sorts of significant and creative means of self-representation that autobiography allowed them. It could be argued, then, that in some ways an autobiography is a more important legacy than a recording.

²²⁸ H. G., 705.

²²⁹ H. G., 705.

Of course the advent of recording technology did not render the operatic autobiography obsolete; singers continued (and continue) to write their memoirs. Both forms of media are, in fact, capable of complementing each other; autobiographies drive sales of recordings and vice versa. However, recording technology did alter the contexts in which singers' autobiographies were created and received. This is because autobiography became just one of an increasing number of tools with which a singer could construct an enduring legacy. The gramophone and, later, the radio and television, meant that the singer's art was no longer 'written on air'. In this context, we might see the volumes produced by nineteenth-century singers as the 'last hurrah' of this genre. The works of Braham, Phillips, Reeves and Santley represent the concerted and highly creative efforts of four men endeavouring to leave a lasting legacy by the only means available to them: not their voices, but their words.

CONCLUSION

In the nineteenth century, then, British male opera singers found themselves in a uniquely problematic position. This is because their profession had long been entangled in a web of negative ideas about music, performance, national identity and gender. Such attitudes fed into a series of pernicious stereotypes about male opera singers which were manifested in press reports, musical discourse, portraiture and fiction. It was against these stereotypes that John Braham, Henry Phillips, Sims Reeves and Charles Santley had to battle. These four men had to find methods through which they could present themselves to the public as respectable and professional British men. As we have seen, they did this in four key ways: negotiating their place within networks, forging a relationship with the Navy, capitalising on the rapidly expanding celebrity industry, and writing autobiographies. As a result of their efforts over the course of the nineteenth century, these singers cumulatively achieved a far more secure standing for themselves. For evidence of this we need look no further than Charles Santley's knighthood of 1907, a landmark event that would scarcely have been fathomable a century earlier. To conclude, it is worth considering the broader patterns this study has identified, and assessing the ways in which its findings might have implications for future scholarship.

First, let us consider the relative success of our four singers, in order to assess which models of self-representation proved the most effective. There are various ways in which we might measure this success: level of fame, social status, financial success, and legacy are all indicators of how successful a singer proved to be. John Braham has loomed particularly large

in this study, and there are several reasons for this. First and foremost, his great fame is especially significant during a period in which, as we have seen, modern celebrity was still in its relative infancy. Even in an age before photography and the popularity of the interview, Braham's appearance, career and personal life were familiar to many; a fact that is especially surprising as he is the only singer who failed to write a formal autobiography. These facts mean that Braham's celebrity is not only significant in an operative context, but in the context of early nineteenth-century celebrity more broadly. His links to other prominent celebrities of the time, including Lord Byron and Charles Dickens, make it clear that Braham was a key figure within a cultural network that extended far beyond the musical sphere. But just how did he attain such a level of fame?

The answer lies primarily in his virtuosic exploitation of contemporary politics and public feeling. The context of the Napoleonic Wars provided him with a platform from which he could perform a particularly potent model of British masculinity. Unlike Charles Incledon, Braham was not an authentic British Tar; he was a Jewish singer of continental opera. This makes it all the more remarkable that his method of self-representation proved so successful. Indeed, this naval persona effectively eclipsed his Jewish identity. His relationship with Lord Nelson was perhaps the decisive factor here, allowing him to pay tribute to the hero in a manner which was seen as personal. This sense of authenticity added to the power and popularity of 'The Death of Nelson'. It is clear that Nelson and the Napoleonic Wars played the most important role in Braham's public

identity. This role was so important that it is surprising that scholars have so far failed to recognise it.

Another crucial factor that determined Braham's success was his canny manipulation of networks. Through the Freemasons and the Garrick Club, he was admitted into the company of many important and influential figures who went on to act as patrons and supporters. We have seen that the tenor was not shy to capitalise on and consolidate these connections, for example inviting the Duke of Sussex to stand as Godfather to his son, and brazenly requesting a knighthood from the King. Although this latter ambition was never realised, it seems clear that (despite the criticism his networking attracted from some) the way in which Braham utilised his connections allowed him to elevate his social status significantly. For evidence of this we might look to his daughter, Frances, who married into the aristocracy four times.¹ She eventually became Countess Waldegrave, and found herself in possession of extensive estates – including her primary residence, Horace Walpole's gothic palace at Strawberry Hill. The Countess became an influential society figure, hosting salons, dining with Queen Victoria, and playing an important role in contemporary Liberal politics. Her prominent place at the highest level of society attests to the successful social climbing of her father, which is all the more marked given his extremely modest origins.

Further evidence of Braham's effective manipulation of networks is his successful negotiation of his religious identity. He removed himself from his Jewish networks, effectively becoming a Protestant through his marriage.

¹ For more on Countess Waldegrave, see: Hewett, *Strawberry Fair*.

Despite attacks from some individuals, this transition seemed remarkably seamless – especially given that this occurred in the immediate aftermath of his embarrassing trial. Crucially, he had already established his naval identity by this point, perhaps meaning that these indiscretions were easier for the public to swallow. Though others have examined Braham's changing religious identity, they have hitherto overlooked the way in which his naval persona influenced this.²

Braham's long career endured for many decades after Trafalgar. Nelson and the Wars soon became a distant memory. The tenor did not maintain his level of fame in this changing context, often being seen as a relic of the Napoleonic past. This, coupled with his disastrous stint in theatrical management, meant that he spent his latter decades attempting to recoup funds on a gruelling American tour and (on his return) moving around frequently in order to avoid creditors. His greatest legacy, however, was not fame, wealth or status. Instead, it was the trail he blazed for the singers who followed in his wake. As we have seen, he was at the head of a chain of succession that endured into the early twentieth century. As the first British singer to attain success in continental opera at the highest level, he established a tradition that Phillips, Reeves and Santley were able to follow. The relationship he forged with the Navy was especially influential. Braham created a model of operatic naval masculinity that later singers replicated and perpetuated in their own unique ways. Without this naval relationship, we might ask, would Braham and his successors have attained the same level of success? Chapter Three supports the answer that this is unlikely. It

² Conway, *Jewry in Music*, 78–91; Conway, 'John Braham'.

was through this nationalistic, naval identity that these singers were able to repackage their profession as one that was safely British.

Of all the singers in this study, Henry Phillips was by far the least successful. His initial success was relatively short lived and, as his autobiography makes clear, he struggled to maintain this in later years. His American tour played a decisive role in his changing fortunes; Phillips later reflected that he left Britain during a successful period, and returned to find that he had been forgotten: “The public so soon forget”, he lamented.³ He had effectively removed himself from the networks in which he had proved to be so successful. For Phillips, then, his autobiography (published when he was a much older man, earning a living from giving lessons) was designed not to disseminate his fame, but to recapture it and construct some sort of legacy – whilst perhaps earning money from sales. Whilst the success of his *Recollections* was modest, they did have an important influence on the operatic autobiographies that followed. Most notably, his candid tone and focus on travel was later duplicated by Charles Santley, to greater effect. Phillips was also the first British singer both to write a singing manual and turn his hand to a non-musical form of literature (his treatise on angling.) These are both patterns also followed by Reeves and Santley.

For Sims Reeves, his autobiography fulfilled a very different function. His fame was substantial. His atypical success in Italian opera coincided with the period in which the celebrity industry was rapidly developing: he was the first singer in this study to be interviewed and photographed. The problem for Reeves was therefore not fame, but its flipside: whilst some

³ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:209.

praised him in the press, others attacked him. These attacks were not unfounded. As we have seen, he very frequently cancelled appearances at the last minute. His refusal to give encores and the high fees he commanded all combined to give him a reputation as something of a ‘prima donna’, also leading to suggestions of alcoholism. This negative image tapped into many of the stereotypical ideas about male opera singers outlined in Chapter One – particularly singers as effeminate, greedy and arrogant. It is also worthy of note that his dark curls and prominent moustache conformed to the established ‘look’ of the Italian opera singer. For Reeves, then, his autobiography was remedial. Through his writing, he sought to construct a reputation as a respectable professional man. As we have seen, his autobiographies did not enjoy the unqualified success that Santley’s later would. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, his life-writing seemed to feed into his perceived arrogance – especially as they were far from modest in style, quoting extensively from fawning reviews. Secondly, the strange fiction in his first volume caused much confusion and distaste. Despite its poor reception, however, this volume represents a particularly noteworthy example of nineteenth-century life-writing, due to its original fusion (perhaps, in places, *confusion*) of fiction and memoir. In this context, Reeves’ autobiographies deserve to be better known.

The unique nature of Reeves’ autobiographies, and the immodesty they belie, point towards another key aspect of his identity. He was a somewhat unwilling participant in the succession of singers, reluctant to embrace his image as Braham’s successor. He was also the singer who engaged the least with the naval connection, and was at pains to suggest his superiority and

unwillingness to appear subservient – even going so far as to contradict the Queen. Reeves clearly wrestled with his identity, and his repeated failures to appear (which Santley insisted were down to his friend's nerves and not his fondness for alcohol) suggest that he was a man who sincerely struggled with fame. His attempt to branch into fiction, in many ways a less high-pressured form of art, perhaps represented an attempt to escape the limelight. Though Reeves continued to enjoy an element of success in his later career, he was (like Braham and Phillips before him) dogged by financial difficulties. These were compounded by his failure to fulfil engagements, which cost him dearly.⁴

By many measures, Santley was the most successful of our four singers. Most obviously, he was knighted – not only the first of our singers to receive this honour, but the first singer ever. He also appears to have had most financial success. Though we have seen that he was extremely candid about times when he was impoverished as a student, there is no evidence that Santley was ever declared bankrupt or compelled to return to the stage in later life as a result of his bank balance. But what was behind this success? Santley was photographed and interviewed in newspapers from New York to Sydney, he performed on more continents than any of our other singers, and his two autobiographies were transatlantic bestsellers. Many of these factors reflected the growing technological developments that Santley's generation enjoyed: photography, the advent of rail and steam, and the expanding press. These were not tools available to Braham or Phillips. Unlike Reeves, who had the swarthy look of the stereotypical

⁴ George Biddlecombe, '(John) Sims Reeves', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23308>.

Italian, Santley's appearance also conformed to a more northern European ideal: one commentator said he had "the frame of a Cumberland wrestler".⁵

Another key factor in Santley's success was his place within the succession of singers. As he came at the end, he was able to cherry pick those elements of his predecessors' personae which had proved especially successful; most notably, Braham's naval identity. As we saw in Chapter Three, Santley drew upon this model just as much as the elder tenor had. The baritone did this through performance but, more prominently, through his two autobiographies. In these, he quite remarkably suggested that he was a sailor first and a singer second. But he does not merely replicate Braham. Like the elder tenor, he constructed a model of naval masculinity that chimed with the spirit of his age. For Santley, this meant tapping into the figure of the Imperial adventurer – perhaps inspired, in part, by the memoirs of Phillips. The great commercial success of Santley's autobiographies, and the fact that they were widely interpreted as evidence of his robust British manliness, attest to the effectiveness of his naval self-representation. It must be noted that these autobiographies appeared towards the end of Santley's career. This means that their contribution to his career should not be overstated, as he had already attained success before they were published. Nevertheless, these volumes played a key role in amplifying and disseminating the singer's fame, shaping his public image, and crafting his legacy.

Santley was also adept at managing his place within various networks. He negotiated his religious status so that he could enjoy prominence within the Catholic community whilst simultaneously dodging the negative attitudes

⁵ Levien, *Six Sovereigns*, 65.

directed towards his religion outside of it. Whilst Santley is the only singer who does not appear to have been either a Freemason or a member of the Garrick Club, we have seen that this in itself might have represented an attempt to avoid the dangerous connotations that club membership and homosociality could invite in the age of Oscar Wilde. In a way, then, Santley's ability to avoid problematic networks and associations was as important as his membership of them. Having said this, his relationship with Henry Fothergill Chorley and his circle clearly played a decisive role in establishing his career in Britain.

What might this assessment of our four protagonists and their relative successes tell us about the way in which the status of singers changed across the century? As explained in the introduction, this study does not seek to extrapolate a broader narrative out of four case studies. Nevertheless, some key patterns can be detected. The trend that emerges perhaps most strongly is that of the enduring relationship between singers and the sea. Braham originated this trend, and every single singer in this study adopted and adapted his template in significant ways. All four men performed sea songs and presented themselves as sailors. As Chapter Three made clear, this relationship played a key role in the reputations of Braham and Santley especially, but also, to a lesser extent, Phillips and Reeves. This type of self-representation not only strengthened singers' claims to British masculinity, but underscored the idea that they were representing their country on the battlefield of the operatic stage. As we saw in Chapter One, critics and audiences were keen to claim our singers as national heroes and draw

attention to the victories they won over Italy. The invocation of the brave British tar complemented this sense perfectly.

Secondly, it is clear that there was a growing interest in singers' private lives over the course of the century. As we saw in Chapter Four, the focus of press reports and biographies moved increasingly from a singer's musical career towards his personal life during our period. There was, in other words, a shift in focus from the public to the private. Linked to this is the way in which singers turned to autobiography with increasing frequency. In the first half of the century, Braham merely drafted a short biography of himself – and one which focused on his professional success rather than his private life. It was not until the second half of the century (1864) that Phillips' candid two-volume autobiography appeared. Both Reeves and Santley would go on to write two separate volumes each, creating a sense of intimacy with their audiences through their words. As interest in their private lives grew, then, singers found life-writing an increasingly appealing prospect. Perhaps this is because it enabled them to mediate and influence the ever-expanding amount of coverage they were receiving in the press. In this way, autobiography can be seen as a symptom of (and response to) the expanding celebrity industry.

As the century progressed, singers were also increasingly recognised as a distinctive professional group. Chapter Five explained that, in the 1820s, Michael Kelly's autobiography was seen as 'theatrical', whilst, in the 1860's Phillips' was seen as 'musical'. An earlier tendency to imagine British singers as belonging to a broad network of theatrical personalities (including, for example, actors and comedians) was eventually eroded. This

is because, as the century progressed, the succession of British opera singers eventually created a new professional network. At the start of the century so few British men had succeeded in opera that it is not surprising to find them grouped with other types of performers. However, by mid-century, Reeves was not seen as belonging to a miscellaneous band of theatrical folk. Instead, he was received as the successor to Braham. As the celebrity industry expanded and new journalistic techniques (including the interview) were developed, singers were afforded more opportunities to communicate with the public about their careers, explaining the difficulties they faced and the dedication their art required. This also led to an increased understanding of their profession and a growing recognition of their unique professional status. A parallel shift can be detected in the attitudes of singers themselves. As the network of British male opera singers expanded, so did its members' confidence. The best evidence of this lies in the contrast between Braham's grovelling letter requesting a knighthood with Santley's distinguished ambivalence at the receipt of one. These two events belie a significantly increased sense of professional dignity. By 1907, the cumulative efforts of these four men had made it possible for a monarch to recognise a male opera singer as a respectable British professional. By the 1910s, the case for British singers versus that of foreign singers was being made in stridently nationalistic terms.⁶

On the occasion of Santley's jubilee, a journalist in *The Times* looked back over the previous fifty years and reflected on the ways in which attitudes towards singers had changed in Britain:

⁶ Cecil Forsyth, *Music and Nationalism: A Study of English Opera* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911).

To look back over the last fifty years of any special form of activity is to take a review of changes and note the course of evolution, which in few cases can be more remarkable than in the attitude of English people towards music and musicians. When Mr. Charles Santley, whose jubilee was celebrated in a concert given at the Albert Hall yesterday afternoon, made his first appearance, he had to convince a public of so artificial a temper that it was even matter for surprise that a singer should appear in opera under a name which was frankly English. This small fact speaks of a long history of false standards and vitiated taste, of a time when singers were applauded because they were Italian, neglected because they were English; a time from the evils of which we still suffer, partly through the conventional traces it has left, partly by the reaction which now tends to exalt the English artist merely for remaining an Englishman, as Mr. Gilbert has it. But whatever may be the shortcomings of our present artistic outlook, there is no doubt that it is a clearer and more national one than it was in 1857, and Mr. Santley has done a man's share in producing a saner attitude on the part of the public towards singers in particular.⁷

This critic acknowledges the great difficulties that British singers faced in the earlier decades of the century, when Italians dominated the industry and national prejudices were rife. The piece goes on, however, to sketch a picture of a steady change in fortune; a move towards respectability, albeit one that is not yet decisive. Crucially, Santley is presented as the figure who

⁷ Anon., 'The Santley Jubilee', *The Times*, 2 May 1907, 7.

holds the “man’s share” of responsibility for this move towards a “saner attitude”. These sentiments were echoed and amplified later the same year when the baritone received a knighthood. However, we must be wary of apportioning Santley too much credit here. His royal honour did not only reflect his personal achievements – great though they were. Instead, it was an honour that owed as much to the victories of his predecessors. Across the course of the long nineteenth century, our four singers constructed careful identities, negotiated their place within social and cultural networks, capitalised on current affairs, and embraced changing technologies. The efforts of each singer made it easier for his successor to succeed. This was a process of accumulation from which, Santley (at the end of our period) reaped the rewards. It was, therefore, the combined efforts of Braham, Phillips, Reeves and Santley that paved the way to the palace. By 1907 these four men had, together, made ‘the dream of a madman’ become a reality.

A number of musicologists working on the history of opera singers have argued that the late nineteenth century saw ‘the death of the opera singer’. Although the arrival of recording technology and early film made stars of singers like Enrico Caruso and Nellie Melba, the suggestion is that, on the stage, singers were afforded far less control. Rutherford and Rosselli have argued, for example, that the creative agency of singers was gradually eroded as emphasis was increasingly given to the figure of the composer and the idea of the musical ‘work’.⁸ Karen Henson explains:

⁸ Rutherford describes the ‘downward path’ of singers: Rutherford, *The Prima Donna*, 168; Rosselli speaks of the profession’s ‘decline’: Rosselli, *Singers*, 6.

From around 1850 changes in compositional styles and practice, the spread of Romantic ideas about music, practical and commercial changes (including the growth of music publishing and copyright), and larger socio-cultural trends gradually transformed singers from powerful creators to [...] something more subordinate, subservient, merely flawed and human.⁹

Singers were no longer to insert favourite arias, or embellish a composer's score. However, Henson has recently challenged this narrative in her work on opera of the late nineteenth century. She argues that *fin-de-siècle* singers "enjoyed their own kinds of freedom and creativity" that centred around "words and textual expression, acting, and physicality".¹⁰ Henson points to an increased focus on the visual; most notably the medium of acting, but also the use of other media including photography. Henson's primary focus (as her title suggests) is on performance. This differs from the approach of the present study, which has instead examined the singer's place in broader nineteenth-century culture, outside of the opera house. Nevertheless, it is clear that the pattern identified by Henson resonates somewhat with the findings of this thesis. In the late nineteenth century it is indeed true that our singers found new ways to express themselves creatively, along with an increased confidence to do so. Evidence of this can be found in Reeves' fiction and Santley's travel writing, the frequency with which these two singers were interviewed, and the way in which they sat for so many photographic portraits; all developments that chime with Henson's argument that there was an increased focus on text and visuality. These case

⁹ Henson, *Opera Acts*, 2–3.

¹⁰ Henson, 1–3.

studies, then, suggest that as a singer's agency was perhaps altered or eroded on the stage, their status grew in extra-musical arenas outside of the opera house.

There are several broader implications arising from this study. First and foremost, it redresses the balance of scholarship which has almost exclusively concerned itself with female singers. We have seen that the field of prima donna studies has embraced interdisciplinary perspectives to analyse the place of the female singer in nineteenth-century culture.¹¹ At the same time, attempts to examine the male singer have failed to display the same level of sustained interest and imaginative interdisciplinarity. The implicit suggestion is that male singers are somehow less interesting; a charge that can be confidently refuted by this thesis. It has demonstrated that male singers were key cultural figures, international celebrities, and individuals who wrestled with issues of gender and national identity just as much as their female counterparts. Furthermore, it has shown that an understanding of male singers can have implications beyond the field of opera studies. This study, for instance, offers a new lens through which constructions of Britishness and masculinity can be interrogated. Such a perspective feeds into the growing body of work concerning nineteenth-century masculinities.

Whilst this thesis has primarily focused on four individuals, there is much scope to broaden its outlook and apply a similar approach to other male singers. Michael Kelly and Charles Incledon, both of whom have appeared as supporting characters, are particularly ripe for examination. Kelly's

¹¹ Cowgill and Poriss, *Arts of the Prima Donna*.

autobiography is especially interesting as the first written by a British (Irish) singer of Italian opera. What influence did this have on musical auto/biographies that followed? Incedon is an intriguing character due to the conflict between his identity as an authentic British Tar and his reputation for being an ostentatious and dissolute character. An examination of his identity would further inform an understanding of music, masculinity and national identity in late-Georgian Britain. One could also consider the reception of individual foreign singers in Britain. Perhaps most obvious is Mario, who has loomed especially large as an influence on the authors examined in Chapter One. What could we learn from a broader assessment of his influence on British culture? As a prominent Italian, how did he influence ideas about Italy? What impact might the context of the Risorgimento have had on his British reception?

Moving away from male singers to the study of singers more generally, the idea of succession posited by this thesis could also prove a useful model in other contexts. Considering this sort of chronological connection between singers could illuminate an understanding of singers in a range of different genres – including popular music – leading to a greater understanding of how musical trends and groups of performers are established, imagined and received. Though they do not specifically articulate the concept of succession, two works have previously adopted a comparable approach: Bryan A. Karman's study which traces a legacy from Walt Whitman to

Bruce Springsteen via Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan, and Angela Y. Davis' extraordinary work on three female blues artists.¹²

Whilst the present study has sought to employ visual sources where they are pertinent to its themes, there is still much work to be done on operatic portraiture. Such a study might consider how singers were portrayed visually; how this representation changed across the century; to what extent singers were involved in the production of portraits; and how these images were disseminated and utilised. A study that takes portraiture as its primary focus (rather than a corollary) could answer these questions, unlocking a new understanding of singers and opera – as well as portraiture more broadly.

Life-writing is another area which demands further interrogation. Chapter Five explained that theatrical autobiography has often been viewed with suspicion, due to its perceived unreliability. This study has presented a model with which such works might be approached: it focuses less on the facts that they present, and more on the way in which these 'facts' are presented. Examined in this way, autobiographies can tell us much about how an individual wished to be seen and remembered. A similar approach could be applied to the life-writing of actors, composers and other types of performers. The function of travel-writing within such theatrical life-writing appears a particularly fruitful avenue for further investigation. As this study has demonstrated, singers frequently devoted a significant portion of their autobiographies to recording their international travels. This pattern is

¹² Bryan K. Garman, *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, n.d.); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

replicated in the works of other performers to such an extent that theatrical and musical autobiographies could be considered an untapped repository of nineteenth-century travel writing.¹³ An exploration of theatrical travel writing has vast potential to unlock a new understanding of international artistic networks and cultural interactions. For instance, in the works of Henry Phillips alone we find a fascinating description of his attendance at a concert of sacred music performed by enslaved African-Americans in Richmond (Virginia), and an account of his meeting with a Native American tribe.¹⁴ What might the autobiographies of performers who travelled to India, Africa, and Australia tell us? The implications of such a project could reach far beyond performance history or literary studies, being of potential interest to historians, geographers, and postcolonial scholars.

The present study has shown that nineteenth-century British culture was saturated with opera. Its singers appeared on the front pages of newspapers; their portraits were sold in shops; their arias were sung around pianos and whistled in the streets; they featured in novels and on the stages of toy theatres; they advertised goods; their autobiographies were best sellers; and, of course, they performed to thousands. Despite this, opera (and music more broadly) has historically been somewhat absent from the interdisciplinary field of nineteenth-century studies. Whilst historians are comfortable quoting from a novel, and literary scholars are happy to analyse a painting, there has been far less cross-disciplinary dialogue with scholars of opera (and, indeed, music more broadly.) This is illustrated by the fact that those

¹³ Victoria Tietze Larson has examined the travel writing of Sarah Bernhardt: Larson, 'Across Oceans'.

¹⁴ Phillips, *Recollections*, 1864, 2:141–51, 184–87.

who attempt to create a dialogue between (for example) opera and literature have tended to be musicologists.¹⁵ The present study challenges this trend, demonstrating that opera is a multimedia art form which lends itself particularly well to interdisciplinary approaches. It is also accessible – even for those who are perhaps not able to analyse a score.

However, this work only begins to scratch the surface of the significant relationship between opera and nineteenth-century culture. In order to gain a better understanding of this, scholars must find a way to bring those from outside musicology into the fold in order to address the many different facets of contemporary operatic culture. This study perhaps points at various ways in which this might be possible; for example, through the study of networks, celebrity culture, portraiture, and life-writing. The analysis of Braddon and Ouida's novels in Chapter One suggests the value of such an approach; whilst the works of these authors can inform our understanding of operatic culture, an applied understanding of operatic contexts can also offer a new reading of these well-known novels. Opera could unlock a similarly original understanding of many different facets of nineteenth-century culture.

There is currently no such field as singer studies. Though there are several groups of scholars working on singers within different disciplines (prima donna studies as a subfield of opera studies, for example) there appears to have been little attempt to synthesise our understanding of singers as cultural figures across disciplines, genres, and time periods in any

¹⁵ A recent example: Newark, *Opera in the Novel*.

meaningful way.¹⁶ This remains true despite the fact that a broader cultural interest in singers has become increasingly evident in recent years. In 2015 documentaries on Amy Winehouse (directed by Asif Kapadia) and Nina Simone (Liz Garbus) won an Academy Award and Emmy Award respectively, whilst a critically acclaimed documentary on Janis Joplin (Amy J. Berg) was released in the same year. These films concern themselves with far more than a singer's music; *Amy* functions as a study of celebrity and addiction, *What Happened, Miss Simone?* chronicles the singer's civil rights activism, and *Janis: Little Girl Blue* considers Joplin within a broad range of contexts including race, gender, addiction and the counterculture of the 1960s. In the same year, the centenaries of both Frank Sinatra and Billie Holiday were celebrated, inspiring a glut of articles and studies reappraising these singers as important cultural figures.¹⁷ In May 2016 the Victoria and Albert Museum announced that their exhibition on David Bowie was the most visited show in their history.¹⁸ A few months later the world of literature was rocked by the announcement that Bob Dylan was to become the first ever singer-songwriter to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. This sparked furious debate about whether or not a singer should be eligible for such an honour.¹⁹ Bruce Springsteen was not

¹⁶ A possible exception is the work of Potter and Sorrell, though this focuses more on singing than the broader significance of singers: John Potter and Neil Sorrell, *A History of Singing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Spencer Neil, 'Frank Sinatra Centenary Books Review', *The Guardian*, 24 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/24/sinatra-the-chairman-james-kaplan-sinatra-100-review>; Richard Brody, 'The Art of Billie Holiday's Life', *New Yorker*, 3 April 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-art-of-billie-holidays-life>.

¹⁸ Troy Nankervis, 'David Bowie Exhibition Smashes All-Time Records', *Metro*, 9 November 2016, <http://metro.co.uk/2016/11/09/david-bowie-exhibition-smashes-all-time-records-6246946/>.

¹⁹ Anna North, 'Why Bob Dylan Shouldn't Have Gotten a Nobel', *New York Times*, 13 October 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/13/opinion/why-bob-dylan-shouldnt->

deterred by this, releasing his autobiography shortly afterwards. *Born to Run* debuted at the top of the *New York Times* bestsellers list.²⁰ It was also in 2016 that *Nina*, a biopic on Simone (directed by Cynthia Mort), caused widespread controversy due to its casting of light skinned actor Zoe Saldana, who added insult to injury by donning a prosthetic nose for the role.²¹ In 2017 an exhibition on Amy Winehouse returned to London following an immensely successful tour of Jewish Museums around the world.²² This exhibition considers the singer in a range of contexts, including that of her Judaism. At the time of writing, the run of the Victoria and Albert Museum's immersive retrospective on Pink Floyd has been extended. *Pink Floyd: Their Mortal Remains* has proved to be a blockbuster that looks set to rival the box office success of *David Bowie is*. There has also just been an announcement that a Michael Jackson exhibition will be opening at the National Portrait Gallery next year. This will specifically "explore the cultural impact of a unique figure through contemporary art".²³ The next big musical exhibition opening at the Victoria and Albert Museum is *Opera: Passion Power and Politics*. A sign that this growing trend is soon

have-gotten-a-nobel.html?mcubz=1; Richard Williams, 'Why Bob Dylan Deserves His Nobel Literature Win', *The Guardian*, 13 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/oct/13/bob-dylan-deserves-to-win-nobel-prize-literature>.

²⁰ Melinda Newman, 'Bruce Springsteen Is The Boss Of The New York Times Best Sellers List With "Born To Run"', *Forbes*, 5 October 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/melindanewman/2016/10/05/bruce-springsteen-is-the-boss-of-the-new-york-times-best-sellers-list-with-born-to-run/#4556188b39f0>.

²¹ Mahita Gajanan, 'Zoe Saldana Faces Criticism over Dark Makeup in Nina Simone Film Trailer', *The Guardian*, 2 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/mar/02/zoe-saldana-nina-simone-black-makeup-film-trailer>.

²² Oliver Keens, 'The Amy Winehouse Exhibition Is Coming back to London', *Time Out*, 3 February 2017, <https://www.timeout.com/london/blog/the-amy-winehouse-exhibition-is-coming-back-to-london-020217>.

²³ Rashid Razaq, 'King of Pop Art', *Evening Standard*, 20 September 2017, 11.

to embrace opera singers? Perhaps it is time for our four protagonists to step into the spotlight once again.

It is clear from this sketch that a great interest in singers has been building in recent years. Crucially, this is an interest that stretches far beyond their music. There is a growing concern about the broader cultural contexts within which singers operate: their role in cultural (and countercultural) movements; their relationship with gender, race and religion; their interaction with other forms of art, including painting, fashion and literature. Whilst Frank Sinatra and David Bowie might seem chronologically and stylistically very far removed from John Braham and Charles Santley, it is clear that the same contexts can be applied to both groups of singers: questions about image, self-representation, gender, national identity, and broader cultural influence could equally be directed at each.

Singers embody a variety of art forms: music, fashion, poetry, performance, art.²⁴ A joined-up scholarly approach, offering a space in which to explore different types of singers in a wide variety of interdisciplinary contexts, would offer much-needed insight into these figures who have long been at the forefront of popular culture. Such an effort would begin to answer the sorts of questions that it is difficult for case studies to answer comprehensively. To what extent do singers reflect or shape their contemporary cultures? How important are the relationships between singers and other forms of art, including literature, visual art and fashion? How do singers figure within a broader understanding of gender and race? Such an approach would allow us to examine the careers of John Braham,

²⁴ The same is of course true for opera itself.

Henry Phillips, Sims Reeves and Sir Charles Santley in a broader context, and enable us to assess the influence that the careers of these extraordinary men might have had on the generations of singers who followed in their footsteps.

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APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Braham (1777-1856)

The exact date of John Braham's birth is unknown, but the singer estimated that he had been born in 1777. Orphaned at a young age, he sold pencils on the streets of East London in order to survive. He was eventually taken under the wing of a cantor at the Greater London Synagogue called Myer Lyon. Under Lyon's guidance, the young Braham became a hazzan (a choirboy of sorts) at the Synagogue. He also made some minor appearances on the stage. He later studied in Bath under the noted music teacher Rauzzini. After several years of training he returned to the London stage briefly, before embarking upon an extensive European tour. He performed extensively across Italy with the soprano Anna Storace (1765 – 1817), who became his common-law wife. On his return to Britain in 1801, Braham established himself as the most famous singer in the country.

Braham starred in several English operas for which he wrote the music; amongst these were *The Cabinet* (1802) and *The English Fleet in 1342* (1803). In 1806 he played the role of Sesto in Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*; the first British performance of a Mozart opera. Following the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, Braham was involved in several theatrical tributes to Lord Nelson, who had been an acquaintance. Most famous was his song 'The Death of Nelson', which first appeared in the opera *The Americans* in 1811.

In 1816 Braham faced an embarrassing public trial following an affair with a married woman. Storace was devastated by this betrayal. Braham left her and their illegitimate son, quickly marrying a young woman called Frances Bolton. This marriage represented his effective conversion from Judaism to Protestantism – the religion of his new wife. The couple went on to have six children.

In 1824 Braham starred in the first full English production of Weber's *Der Freischütz*. Throughout the 1820s he started to perform increasingly in oratorio, though he also played the title roles in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Rossini's *William Tell*. In 1825 he opened the St. James's Theatre in London, which he had built himself. Here Braham produced a number of works, including some written by a young Charles Dickens. The venture proved to be a financial disaster, and Braham was forced to leave for America in 1840. He toured the country until 1843 in a gruelling attempt to recoup his funds.

On his return to Britain he continued to perform – often with his sons, three of whom also sang. The singer was compelled to move around in order to avoid creditors, despite the financial support offered by his daughter (Frances) who had married into the aristocracy. John Braham died in London in 1856 and is buried at Kensal Green Cemetery.

APPENDIX II

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Henry Phillips (1801-1876)

Henry Phillips was born in Bristol in 1801. His father was an actor, whilst his mother was an actor and singer. He made his first appearance on stage at the age of eight, appearing as a sailor. Soon after, he had some minor roles on London stages at the Haymarket and Drury Lane. Later he studied under Broadhurst and Sir George Smart. During this period of training he performed in several operas in Bath, including Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *Il turco in Italia*.

In 1824 he had his first significant success in the same production of Weber's *Der Freischütz* that Braham had starred in – the first ever English production of this work. In 1825 he became the principal bass singer at the Ancient Concerts in London. During the 1830s Phillips sang in a range of British operas, notably including the premiere of Michael Balfe's *The Siege of Rochelle*.

In 1844 Phillips travelled to America. He was hopeful of success, but the trip proved a great financial disappointment. He wrote extensively about these travels in his two-volume autobiography of 1862: *Musical and Personal Recollections During Half a Century*. On his return to England in 1845 Phillips was disappointed to find that he had been forgotten, and work was not forthcoming. Over the next two decades Phillips made several attempts to earn a living by putting on series of musical lectures, and touring

with different collectives of singers. These schemes met with modest success at best. After various stints living in Yorkshire and Manchester, Phillips eventually returned to London and became a teacher of music. He had two daughters (Florence and Alice) who were also singers. Henry Phillips died in 1876 and was buried at Brookwood Cemetery in Surrey.

APPENDIX III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sims Reeves (1821-1900)

John (Sims) Reeves was born in Woolwich in 1821. His father had been a military bandsman, and supervised the young Reeves' musical education. The family moved to North Cray (at the time part of Kent) where Reeves became choirmaster and organist in the local church. In the late 1830s and early 1840s he made appearances on provincial stages and in minor London theatres. From 1842 – 1843 he was with Macready's company at Drury Lane, where he was given minor roles in works by Weber and Handel. In 1845 Reeves went to Milan where he studied under Alberto Mazzucato. Such was his success in the city that he starred as Edgardo in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* at La Scala in 1846 – an unusual feat for an Englishman. This was the role he would become most associated with.

On his return to London Reeves was hailed as a hero, and soon joined Jullien's company at Drury Lane. Here he performed in an English language version of *Lucia* in 1847. In 1848 he joined Lumley's company at Her Majesty's Theatre, where he starred in a range of operas, including Donizetti's *Linda di Chamounix*. In 1850 Reeves married the soprano Emma Lucombe. The couple went on to have five children together.

In the 1850s Reeves increasingly turned his attention towards festivals and concerts, also giving acclaimed performances of Handel at Crystal Palace. He made the occasional return to the operatic stage, for instance appearing

in Gounod's *Faust* in 1864. In the late 1860s Reeves led a public campaign to lower the musical pitch in Britain. In the late 1860s and early 1870s Reeves often cancelled performances with little notice. This, along with the high fees he commanded, led to attacks in the press. Some accused him of alcoholism. He continued to appear in concerts throughout the 1870s.

In 1888 Reeves wrote his first autobiography, *Sims Reeves: His Life and Recollections*, which was a strange blend of memoir and fiction. A second effort followed in 1889 entitled *My Jubilee*. This year marked the fiftieth anniversary of his first appearance on the stage. He made his farewell appearance on stage at the Royal Albert Hall in 1891. After his wife died in 1895, Reeves quickly married a young pupil called Maud Madeline Richard. He toured South Africa in 1896. Sims Reeves died in Worthing in 1900. He was cremated at Woking, and in 1932 his ashes were interred in the floor of All Saints Church in Upper Norwood. The ashes and a memorial stone appear to have been lost as a result of bomb damage in World War Two.

APPENDIX IV

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Charles Santley (1834-1922)

Charles Santley was born in Liverpool in 1834. His father was an enthusiastic musical amateur, and the young Santley was involved in many local music groups. He joined the Liverpool Philharmonic Society as a bass on his fifteenth birthday. Although he had begun an apprenticeship with a merchant's company in the city, Santley wished to pursue a career in music. In 1855 he left Liverpool for Milan where he began studying under Gaetano Nava. In 1857 he made his operatic debut in a production of *La traviata* in Pavia. He soon found himself in great financial difficulty due to a lack of work, and was urged to return to London by influential critic Henry Fothergill Chorley.

Chorley helped to engineer Santley's London debut in Haydn's *Creation* in 1857. This was a success, and the singer appeared in Handel's *Messiah* shortly after. In 1858 Santley joined the Pyne-Harrison Company, appearing in Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* and Verdi's *Il trovatore*. In 1859 Santley married the singer Gertrude Kemble, who was a member of the famous Kemble acting dynasty (her Grandfather was Charles Kemble.) The couple went on to have five children. In 1862 he joined Mapleson's company at Her Majesty's, starring in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. In 1863 he starred as Valentine in the English premiere of Gounod's *Faust*. In 1870 he starred in an Italian language production of

Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer* (*L'Olandese dannato*). This was the first performance of a Wagner opera in England.

From the 1860s Santley appeared with increasing regularity at festivals, also performing at the Crystal Palace Handel Festivals. In 1872 he went to America, making many appearances in both English and Italian operas in New York and other northern cities. In the 1880s and 1890s he travelled extensively, returning to America and touring Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. After Gertrude's death in 1882, Santley married Elizabeth Mary Rose-Innes. They had one son. In 1892 Santley published his first autobiography, *Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley*.

1907 saw the celebration of Santley's jubilee, marking the fiftieth anniversary of his first appearance on the stage. The occasion was marked with a gala concert at the Royal Albert Hall. Later the same year he was awarded a knighthood, which made him the first ever singer to be so honoured in British history. In 1909 he released a second autobiography entitled *Reminiscences of My Life*. In 1915 he came out of retirement to perform at a fundraising concert for the Belgian refugees of the First World War. Charles Santley died at home in St. John's Wood in 1922. He was buried at St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Kensal Green.

APPENDIX V

PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED WORK

Anna Maria Barry, “‘The Singer’s Work is a Picture Painted on Air’:

Operatic Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century’, *Peer English* 10

(2015): 57 – 72.

‘THE SINGER’S WORK IS A PICTURE PAINTED ON AIR’: OPERATIC AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

ANNA MARIA BARRY

In his autobiography, the British opera singer Charles Santley wrote:

The singer has a difficulty to contend with which does not affect any other artist.... The singer’s work is a picture painted on air. No sooner is it depicted than it is gone; while the poet’s, painter’s, sculptor’s and architect’s works remain. (SS 19)

As a performative act, singing, like acting, leaves no concrete legacy aside from newspaper reviews, perhaps a few portraits, and the comments of contemporaries; none of which a singer has any substantial control over. This was especially true in the nineteenth century, before the advent of recording technology. It is therefore not surprising that a number of Victorian opera singers attempted to take charge of their own legacies by writing their autobiographies. These works became a site where critics could be answered, rivals could be discredited and legends could be cultivated. But for those opera singers who were both male and British, the autobiography performed an additional role: it was able to shape their public identity.

In George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876), the eponymous protagonist is ‘stung to the quick’ by the suggestion that he could become like the great Italian tenors Mario and Tamberlik, believing that opera singing ‘was not thought of among possible destinations for the sons of English gentleman’ (140). These views were widely held in Victorian Britain, where opera singing was not considered to be a respectable profession for a British man. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, opera attracted prejudice as a foreign art form, thus compromising the perceived Britishness of its singers. Secondly, music was widely believed to be a feminine pursuit, compromising the masculinity of British singers in an age when manliness was the most important trait for a respectable gentleman.

Evidence of this perceived femininity can be found in a range of Victorian fiction.¹ Just one example is Catherine Maria Grey’s novel *Aline* (1848), in which the opera singer Angelo is repeatedly described as

feminine. He has ‘effeminate grace’ (13), for example, and a heart as ‘tender as a woman’s’ (94). As his name would suggest, Angelo is also Italian. The vast majority of male opera singers on the Victorian stage were indeed Italian, and these men were repeatedly characterised as dangerously foreign, both in fiction and in other contemporary discourse. In another operatic novel written by Grey, *The Young Prima Donna* (1840), the opera singer Signor Gabrielli, who preys on an innocent young English girl, is described as a ‘dark-looking, odious foreigner’ (1:71) and an ‘avaricious Italian’ (1:113). These literary examples demonstrate the ways in which male opera singers were imagined in Victorian Britain. Across the nineteenth century, Italian singers dominated the operatic stage; British singers were in a small minority. Their status, then, was problematic, as they were left open to the same accusations and prejudices as their Italian colleagues. It therefore became imperative for British, male opera singers to find ways in which to negotiate these prejudices and forge reputations as respectable, masculine and British men. Writing autobiographies offered them an ideal means by which to construct such identities.

The nineteenth-century female opera singer, or *prima donna*, has been the focus of much academic attention. Recent work has included examinations of female operatic autobiography, and has highlighted how *prima donnas* used this medium. Alexandra Wilson, for example, has argued that singers such as the Czech soprano Maria Jeritza (1887–1982) used autobiography in order to construct charitable, domestic personae for themselves, which stood in favourable contrast to the *femme fatales* they depicted on stage (6). Joy H. Calico has also discussed how the Austrian mezzo-soprano Ernestine Schumann-Heink (1861–1936) used memoir to create a ‘gregarious, homespun, patriotic persona’ (72). The male opera singer, however, has been almost entirely neglected by scholars, despite the fact that many male singers also wrote autobiographies. These fascinating and often unusual works are ripe for examination.

The works of two British male singers are particularly interesting from the perspective of identity construction. The tenor Sims Reeves (1821–1900) was a star of the Victorian stage, as was his younger friend, the baritone Charles Santley (1834–1922). Both of these men wrote two autobiographies, but these works do not conform to the conventions of the standard theatrical memoir. Theatrical autobiographies typically recount the early life of a performer and trace the development of their career, with a particular emphasis on professional highlights and plaudits. Whilst Reeves and Santley did cover these topics to an extent, they each drew heavily upon an altogether different style of writing.

While Reeves turned his hand to fiction, Santley adopted travel writing. The four volumes written by these men contain much that is worthy of deeper examination, offering an insight into the construction and negotiation of public image in Victorian Britain. They also paint a vivid picture of the cultural landscape of the period. This article, however, will focus solely on Reeves' and Santley's creative approach to life writing, arguing that each man blended his adopted literary format with autobiography in order to construct a very particular public image for himself.

Sims Reeves was the most famous English tenor of the Victorian era. His career lasted over fifty years, from around 1839 through to 1891. He made his debut in Italian opera at no less a venue than Milan's La Scala, the most prestigious opera house in Italy and, arguably, the world. It was rare indeed for an English singer to claim such an achievement in opera's native land. Towards the end of his career Reeves wrote two autobiographies. The first, *Sims Reeves: His Life and Recollections*, was published in 1888. The following year he published a second volume, *My Jubilee*, which was released to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of his first appearance on stage. The first volume is a particularly unusual example of autobiography: the majority of its chapters take the form of fictional short stories, most of which are gothic or sensational in tone. However, despite it being clear that these stories are fictitious, Reeves curiously presents them as events that he has actually experienced. Moreover, he takes a starring role in many of these short stories. These tales are full of tropes from gothic literature: the tyrant, the deranged woman, ruined abbeys and castles, and the supernatural. Though it may at first appear counterintuitive that this subject matter could be used to create a respectable persona for their author, these stories frequently feature Reeves himself as an honourable hero. Furthermore, several of these tales can be read as a coded defence of his profession and social status as an opera singer.

The chapters of this autobiography switch between fiction and more conventional memoir. The first chapter recounts a grisly tale of murder, whilst the second launches into a more conventional autobiographical style, relating the date and circumstances of his birth. This is the pattern that the rest of the work follows, switching back and forth between fiction and autobiography. Reeves described this form early in *Recollections*, stating that he would share 'the practical details of my life: occasionally pausing to draw aside the curtain which shrouds some strange experiences I have encountered' (SR 15). Through this unique and unusual blend of autobiography and fiction, Reeves attempted to negotiate his public identity.

One of Reeves' stories entitled 'The Bishop's Daughter' (SR 36–50) concerns a promising and respectable young British tenor called Harry Sherstone. This protagonist is a thinly disguised version of his author as, like Reeves, he is from Kent and received his early musical education in a local church choir. Sherstone falls in love with the beloved daughter of the local bishop, who is presented as an 'obstinate and aggressive' man (SR 37). The bishop prevents his daughter from seeing Sherstone, who he feels is 'drifting into evil courses' as his singing career progresses (SR 44). The bishop's distaste for Sherstone's career is presented as unfair and hypocritical; the singer tells him: 'I am a gentleman's son' (SR 49). The story continues in a second chapter entitled 'La Scala' (SR 51–59). Reeves himself appears in this chapter, where he comes across the bishop's daughter in Milan. Due to her heartbreak she is suffering from melancholia, which her father fears will prove fatal. Reeves is able to reunite her with Sherstone, who is coincidentally performing at La Scala under the Italianised name of Signor Certoni. This makes Sherstone an even closer parallel to Reeves himself, as both men are in the highly unusual position of being Englishmen singing Italian opera at La Scala. The bishop repents and allows the young couple to marry. Through this story, Reeves demonstrates that it is unjust and hypocritical to exclude singers from polite society. By using a thinly disguised version of himself as the wronged protagonist of this story, Reeves is effectively defending his own social standing, but also launching an attack on those who feel that opera singing is not a respectable profession.

Through another fictional story, entitled "'Mephisto" Behind the Scenes' (SR 101–109), Reeves makes an additional attempt to paint himself as a respectable professional. This chapter tells the tale of a wicked theatre manager who allows an immoral lord to take advantage of young female performers backstage. One evening Reeves sees the lord attempting to seduce a promising young singer, before discovering that he has been seen leaving with her. Reeves chases after the lord's carriage, liberating the frightened young girl. On freeing her from the predator's clutches, Reeves tells the lord dramatically: 'I do not fear you or any man, and if you have any grievance in the matter, bring it into a court of law' (SR 109).² Through this story Reeves is acknowledging the weak morals that were popularly understood to be part of theatrical life backstage (Baker 44–61). However, by casting himself as the hero of this story, actively fighting against such immorality, Reeves was able to distance himself from the negative connotations that came with a theatrical career. Furthermore, in making a lord the villain of his tale, Reeves highlights the hypocrisy that would exclude a respectable opera singer from polite society whilst accepting an immoral lord. Through this

story Reeves is again attempting to defend his profession and advocate its respectability.

While stories such as ‘The Bishop’s Daughter’ and ‘Behind the Scenes’ are clearly attempts to defend his own profession, other tales see Reeves defend himself against more specific accusations. He had a reputation for failing to appear at his own performances: this happened so often that rumours of a drinking problem soon gained wide currency. An article in *The Hornet* (1871) is typical of this speculation, lampooning the tenor’s drinking habits in an unsubtle fashion and claiming that he drinks ‘more wine than a respectable artist had any right to drink’ (364). While Reeves addresses and denies these accusations directly in the more conventional sections of his autobiography, he also uses his fiction to defend himself against these claims. We are told that Harry Sherstone of ‘The Bishop’s Daughter’, for example, often turns down invitations to sing. While the villagers assume this is due to his vanity and arrogance, Reeves tells us that this was due to his ‘bashfulness’ (SR 39). We are told that

instead of being vain he was retiring and shy,
possessing little confidence in himself, and it required a
great effort on his part to screw up his moral courage to
the point of appearing in society. (SR 39)

Through Sherstone, then, Reeves was attempting to justify his own failures to appear in public.

Several of Reeves’ stories are also moral tales, warning against the dangers of alcohol. Most notable is the opening chapter of *Recollections*, entitled ‘A Dark Record’ (SR 1–13). This chapter relates the tale of a mass murder. The central figure is Sarah Webb, a violent woman with a drinking habit, who is in service at a great house. One evening she begins to drink whiskey excessively, becoming progressively more deranged and demonic as she continues to drink, eventually attempting to rob her sleeping master. The master awakens as she is stealing his watch, causing Webb to grab a dagger and ‘remorselessly bur[y] it in her master’s throat’ (SR 11). She then smothers her master’s wife with a pillow before also killing their two young sons. Reeves’ story is shocking on many levels: it is a graphic narrative of a woman murdering a family, including a baby. More shocking, though, is the fact that this chapter opens the autobiography. A reader, expecting a theatrical memoir, is likely to be puzzled as to why they are instead plunged into a gruesome tale of murder. However, by introducing his volume with a vivid warning about the dangers of alcohol, Reeves is signalling to his

readers that he does not approve of excessive drinking. Through this shocking subject matter, then, he is attempting to defend himself against accusations of alcoholism.

The stories of Sims Reeves also had additional role. By writing fiction, he was trying on a new public identity; one not of an opera singer, but of an author. Thomas Carlyle's influential work, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History* (1841), argues that 'the man of letters', or the writer, is the great heroic figure of the Victorian age. Florian Schweizer has noted that Carlyle painted the author as a 'quasi-religious' figure (121). He goes on to explain that Carlyle's work influenced Charles Dickens, who was himself the 'leader and champion' (117) of a campaign to raise the social status of writers. It stands to reason, therefore, that an opera singer might be able to raise his own status if he positioned himself as an author, rather than a singer. Indeed, Reeves attempted to invoke the heroic 'man of letters' through his fiction. He was clearly not attempting to write straight fiction, as his work was sold as autobiography with a title that conforms to this genre. Nevertheless, his stories suggest a desire to turn his hand to this art form, and there is evidence that he used Dickens as a blueprint. Reeves' story entitled 'A Railway Tragedy' (SR 70–79) strongly supports this interpretation. In this tale, Reeves tells of his fictional chance encounter with a railway signalman whose children have been killed by a train. This train now haunts the signalman's dreams; he tells Reeves:

At night I seem to follow its course into the darkness,
and when the gleam of its accursed lamps has passed, I
trace its black outline and I curse it. I know, too, that
one day I shall either find the means to destroy it, or it
will kill me. (SR 70)

This story is strongly reminiscent of Dickens' own ghost story, 'The Signalman'. Published in 1866, Dickens' story predated Reeves' by twenty-two years. While the railway was not an uncommon theme for Victorian fiction, the similarities between the two stories are significant; they both feature a haunted and ill-fated railway signalman, tortured by his experience of rail accidents. Moreover, both stories also end ambiguously, with the reader left to decide whether the hauntings are supernatural or psychological in origin. By closely imitating Dickens' story, Reeves perhaps hoped to forge a pathway to literature by following in the footsteps of one the period's greatest authors.

Opera singers, by nature, were interpreters of other's work. They sang the works of the great composers, and told stories penned by great

writers in words that were not their own. Although, of course, a singer had artistic agency in his interpretation of an opera or ballad, what he did not do was create his own lasting work. He was primarily a public performer. As Santley said, the work of a singer was ‘painted on air’ (SS 19). This idea is reflected in Samuel Smiles’ influential 1859 work *Self Help*, in which the author encouraged men to strive in order to improve themselves. In a chapter entitled ‘Workers In Art’ (98–130), Smiles praises composers as well as artists and architects, whose works are lasting. He does not, however, extend his praise to musicians or singers. Actors were placed in the same category, as has been noted by Baker, who describes ‘the assumption, which was widespread among mid-century intellectuals, that the actor was inferior to the writer, just as the singer or musician was inferior to the composer’ (32). Baker explains that this was due to acting (or singing) being seen as intellectually inferior to writing or composing. Reeves as a singer, therefore, lacked both the means to create his own lasting art and the ability to be respected and recognised for it. As an author, however, Reeves could perhaps hope to create work that would endure; work that would invite the respect of the public in a way that opera could not.

Despite his repeated attempts to use a blend of autobiography and fiction in order to project a very particular image, Reeves’ volume was largely met with disapproval and confusion. Critics found the fictional portions of the work strange and even distasteful, instead tending to focus their reviews on the more conventional minority of the text. For example, a reviewer in *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* found the ‘strange romances’ to be ‘unduly tragic’ (5). The more gothic chapters were singled out for criticism:

We could spare the first chapter, with its description of a fourfold murder...also the harrowing recital of the death of two children on the railway before the eyes of their father; and some other mournful fatalities. (5)

Similarly, a reviewer in *The Observer* felt that these stories were of ‘an unpleasing character’, regretting that these ‘irrelevant’ episodes took up ‘more than two-thirds’ of the book (3). What is most interesting about this lengthy review, however, is the fact that it does not refer to the fictional majority of the volume until the penultimate paragraph. The reviewer is clearly unsure what to make of these stories, concluding only that they are ‘irrelevant’ and expressing the wish that they be withdrawn from future editions of the volume. Notably, this review fails to make it

clear that Reeves' stories are in fact fictitious, suggesting that there may have been some confusion surrounding their veracity.

Most damning by far was a review in *The Spectator*. Like other reviewers, its critic expressed regret that the work consisted largely of 'sensation novels condensed', instead of focusing on the details of Reeves' musical career (1558). Nevertheless, it is the only review that attempted to engage with Reeves' fiction in a substantial way. Instead of attempting to interpret this fiction, however, it merely lampooned it. The review quoted mockingly from several of Reeves' stories, selecting lines that highlighted his overwrought style and ridiculing the names he had chosen for his characters. It quoted from one particular story at length, which included a description of a 'circling kingfisher' (1558). The critic then commented:

A student of natural history will not fail to notice the singular originality of the epithet 'circling', as applied to the flight of the kingfisher. It is as if one should speak of the lightning rapidity of the snail, the melodious note of the peacock, or the modesty of the operatic tenor. (1558)

As well as mocking Reeves' fiction, this reviewer criticised his repeated references to praise he had received. The review concluded with the damning lines:

Such a book as this leads one to the conclusion that it is rash to expect a singer to be able to reveal in writing the secret of the almost magical power which he exercises over the hearts of men. At any rate, such expectations will be grievously disappointed by these memoirs. Their egotism would be intolerable if it were not so naïve. But at best they do no more than constitute an addition to the annals of conceit. (1559)

This is not to say that the reception of Reeves' fiction was entirely negative: a more generous critic at *The Musical Times* described how they were 'entranced' by Reeves' 'literary powers' (620). However, they still expressed the wish that Reeves should not include any further fiction in future autobiographical efforts. Reeves heeded this advice; his second autobiography included no fiction.

Not a single review of Reeves' *Recollections* attempted to engage with or interpret his fiction in a serious way. At best, reviews ignored or

dismissed it, while at least one reviewer seemed to be uncertain as to whether or not the stories were fictitious. At worst, Reeves' fiction was mocked and interpreted as evidence of his vanity. These reactions are not surprising, given the highly unusual form that Reeves adopted. His peculiar approach to autobiography seems ultimately to have been a failure in the eyes of the critics. While it is clear that Reeves' inventiveness represents a unique creative effort to forge a respectable identity for himself, his public persona was ultimately unaffected by his literary efforts. The fictitious elements of this work received so little critical attention that they did not go so far as to damage his reputation. Despite the limited impact that his stories created, however, Reeves' fiction nevertheless offers us a fascinating glimpse into the anxieties, intentions and imagination of a celebrated Victorian cultural figure. These stories remain a unique example of Victorian life writing.

This is not to say, however, that other Victorian opera singers did not also attempt innovative approaches to autobiography. Sir Charles Santley was another British opera singer who achieved great success in Victorian Britain. The first singer to be knighted, he had a long and distinguished career which he sustained, like Reeves, for over fifty years. During this time he achieved great international success. Santley was close friends with Reeves and the two men occasionally appeared on stage together. Like his older friend, Santley also wrote two autobiographies. The first, *Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley* appeared in 1893, while *Reminiscences of my Life* was published in 1909. Following a similar pattern to Reeves, Santley's second volume was released shortly after his fifty-year jubilee. Santley's memoirs, too, deviate from the conventional theatrical memoir: while Reeves adopted fiction, Santley turned to travel writing.

Santley's career took him across the globe; he toured Europe, America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. His autobiographies are packed with tales of adventure in the farthest corners of the world. While these are true accounts of Santley's travels, they are presented in a very particular way. In the late nineteenth century, British masculinity was perhaps best represented by the popular figure of the adventurer, bound up with the imagery of imperialism. Joseph Kestner quotes H. Rider Haggard's protagonist Allan Quartermain in *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), who states: 'This is what Englishmen are, adventurers to the backbone' (1). John Tosh has argued that, during the late Victorian period

empire was seen as a projection of masculinity.... There was a striking convergence between the language of

empire and the language of manliness: both made much of struggle, duty, action, will and ‘character’. (193)

Men of the British Empire were heroic figures, popularised through fiction and literature concerning real-life explorers. This is a trend that Santley deliberately drew upon; he explicitly states his love of adventure literature of this type. In *Student and Singer* he tells us:

At an early age my greatest pleasure consisted in reading the adventures of great travellers, such as Bruce’s ‘Travels in Abyssinia,’ Captain Cook’s ‘Voyages,’ Franklin’s ‘Expedition to the North Pole,’ and Ross’s in search of him. (SS 3)

It is exactly this sort of literature that Santley attempts to emulate. He repeatedly describes his adventures on the sea, over the desert and even across the ice in a way that is reminiscent of the great travellers he admires. By appealing to the imperial feeling of the age, he is able to craft a masculine and British identity that protects him from any criticism he could receive for being a male opera singer. Santley makes a notable statement early in his first volume: ‘I may say that all my travelling by sea has been for pleasure; the voyage was my chief inducement to accept engagements in America and the colonies’ (SS 5). This is a remarkable claim, but also very astute. With this assertion Santley presents himself as an adventurer first, and a singer second. He also implies that money was not an inducement to perform overseas. It is clear, then, that Santley is attempting to construct himself as a gentleman traveller, rather than a far less masculine figure: a professional singer. This statement encapsulates the aim of Santley’s memoirs; he repeatedly gives precedence to accounts of travel and adventure instead of focussing on the details of his musical career, as would have been expected by contemporary readers.

The idea of travelling by sea is at the heart of Santley’s travel writing. He repeatedly talks of his love for the sea and recounts the many voyages he has taken. His first volume opens with the words ‘I’m on the sea! I’m on the sea!’ (SS 1) before explaining that he is, in fact, writing this work while sailing from Auckland to Wellington in New Zealand. This immediately establishes Santley as an adventurer at the very frontiers of Empire. The same chapter then goes on to describe, at length, his relationship with the sea and his childhood desire to become a sailor. He recounts a recent conversation with an old sailor friend who told him: ‘Charlie, you’re a good sailor spoiled! You ought to be ordering your

men on board ship, instead of bawling and squalling your voice away in that stuffy theatre!’ (SS 3). This anecdote, appearing at the very beginning of his first volume, establishes the idea that Santley is capable of a more masculine occupation than singing; he should be ‘ordering’ other men, instead of ‘bawling and squalling’. By presenting himself as a born sailor, Santley attempts to redeem himself from his feminised career. Santley describes his ‘great attachment’ to ‘open-hearted’ (SS 3) sailors before recounting his first ever voyage at the age of seven. Only after this lengthy discussion of sailing and the sea does Santley’s volume begin with a more conventional account of his childhood and upbringing.

Santley’s preoccupation with the sea should be viewed as part of a wider cultural relationship between British male opera singers and the sea during the long nineteenth century.³ During the Napoleonic Wars male opera singers successfully appropriated the figure of the sailor in order to project masculine and British identities. Most notable was John Braham (1777–1856), who often appeared on stage as a sailor and performed many naval-themed songs, including his famous composition ‘The Death of Nelson’ (1811). The popularity of such songs endured, and they were sung by successive generations of British opera singers, including both Reeves and Santley. Santley also appeared on stage in character as a sailor, for example in the role of Tom Tug in Charles Dibdin’s ballad opera *The Waterman* (1774). Santley’s preoccupation with the sea, then, can be interpreted as an attempt to feed into the long-established relationship between British singers and sailors, which had historically proved successful at creating masculine, patriotic reputations for British male opera singers.

Over the course of Santley’s two volumes, he gives vivid accounts of everyday life on-board ships around the world, recounting the characters and circumstances he has encountered and offering his thoughts on topics such as dining, lodging and tipping. A recurrent theme is Santley’s preference for sail rather than steam, and carriage rather than motorcar. In his first volume, he states: ‘I should like...to try the real thing in a sailing-ship; for on board a steamer I do not find the perfect repose I expected’ (SS 5). By continually expressing a preference for older forms of travel, Santley attempts to distance himself from modernised, mechanised and relatively comfortable modes of travel. Instead, he invokes heroic travellers of the past, who struggled without the conveniences of modern transport. In a typical passage, he reflects upon knights who travelled to the Holy Land ‘on horseback, or afoot, through unexplored regions...among hostile people, and deprived of most of the necessities which make life bearable’ (SS 60). He then considers Columbus, ‘exposed to drenching rain, freezing cold and fiery heat;

driven beyond the power of guidance by raging storm' (SS 60). These heroic explorers are then contrasted with modern travellers, 'provided with luxurious coaches, furnished with lavatories and dining-rooms' (SS 61). Santley's reader is left in no doubt which model of travel their author prefers. Indeed, Santley gleefully recounts his own travelling privations, such as his tolerance of dirt and his ability to share a bunk with cockroaches (SS 236, 327). In this way he aligns himself with the more masculine adventurers of a bygone age.

Isaac Land has described how industrialisation created a sense of nostalgia for the age of sail in the Victorian period. The heroic sailor of Nelson's navy was recollected with affection, and was romanticised in fiction (131–58). It is possible to interpret Santley's repeated eulogies for the age of sail as an invocation of a more romantic period of bravery and adventure. Through this process, he allies himself with these past models of heroic masculinity. Land has also drawn attention to the Victorian interest in Arctic exploration, most notably Franklin's expedition, arguing that this is where 'the spirit of Nelson's navy remain[ed] alive and relevant in the age of steam' (153). Santley, who explicitly expresses his interest in Franklin's expedition to the North Pole, also draws upon this trend. He offers several accounts of journeys made across ice, but most notable is his account of crossing St Gothard's Pass as a young student. He recounts how he made this perilous journey in a sledge during a snowstorm in the middle of the night:

We were requested to keep the weight of our bodies directed towards the side opposed to declivity, in order to avoid the possibility of an upset into the deep snow, from which rescue would have been difficult if not impossible. I felt the cold penetrating to my bones. (SS 55)

It is clear that, in this instance, Santley is attempting to project his bravery and spirit for adventure in a way that invokes the legend of his hero, Franklin.

Repeatedly, Santley presents himself as a specifically British traveller, who is not afraid to stand up for his values and challenge foreign deviance. This reflects the imperial belief that Britain and her men were the moral guardians of the Empire. In one chapter he discusses the various unsavoury characters he has encountered on his travels, including a man who attempted to rob him in Suez (*RML* 250) and vendors of fake and overpriced goods in Egypt and Ceylon (*RML* 251–52). Santley describes confronting such characters in a masculine and

respectable fashion, successfully ensuring that these immoral foreign men fail in their schemes. It is interesting to note that reviewers of Santley's autobiography seized upon these relatively minor anecdotes. A reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, declared, 'Whoever has heard Santley sing "Why do the nations?" will understand that the singer was not the man to stand nonsense from foreign curio-vendors' (14). This comment demonstrates the success of Santley's approach to autobiography. The reviewer has clearly interpreted Santley's anecdote about the curio-vendor as proof of his British masculinity. Furthermore, the reviewer links his favourable personality traits directly to Santley's musical career, claiming that whoever has heard him sing the rousing and powerful 'Why Do The Nations?' from Handel's *Messiah* (1741) will understand his brave and respectable actions. For this reviewer at least, Santley's accounts of travel were successful in cultivating a persona that presented his singing career in a favourable light: one that accentuated his British masculinity and respectability.

Reviews of Santley's two volumes were overwhelmingly positive. They repeatedly lauded Santley's openness and honesty, describing him as a man of honour and a patriot. Although no reviewers discussed Santley's accounts of travel in any great depth, his status as a traveller was repeatedly cited as evidence of his good character. Santley's second volume is described as

the bluff and hearty record of a life enjoyed to the full, and an inexhaustible energy spending itself in vigorous denunciation of bad cooking, the tipping evil...and equally vigorous praise of staunch friends, remembered bottles of Clos de Vougeot, the hospitality of 'The Bell' at Leicester, and music with no nonsense about it.
(*Manchester Guardian* 14)

The *Manchester Guardian* reviewer references several of Santley's accounts of travel, such as his discussions of food, wine, tipping and lodging. These anecdotes clearly indicate to the reviewer that Santley is a man of 'vigour', suggesting strength and masculinity. Furthermore, the use of the words 'bluff' and 'hearty' are distinctly sailor-like, suggesting the success of Santley's attempt to invoke this figure.

It is difficult to evaluate the relative successes of both Reeves and Santley's unique approaches to autobiography. While this article has examined their use of adopted literary formats, the more conventional sections of these memoirs, dealing with their musical careers, also had a

bearing on how these works were received. It is clear, however, that Santley's travel writing had a greater and more positive impact on critics than Reeves' fiction. Critics seized upon Santley's stories of travel, interpreting them as evidence of a respectable and masculine personality. On the other hand, Reeves' fiction was met largely with confusion and even distaste. It is notable that Santley was the first singer ever to be knighted in Britain, an honour that many British male opera singers before him had hoped for in vain.⁴ While many other factors contributed to him receiving this honour, it is arguable that Santley's successful attempts at writing autobiography went some way towards making this possible, as they were so effective at creating a respectable public persona for their author.

Despite Santley's greater success, the autobiographies of these two great singers remain as remarkable examples of Victorian life writing. These texts represent highly unusual and extremely creative efforts to blend autobiography with other literary styles in order to craft very specific public personae. Furthermore, these works demonstrate the great richness of nineteenth-century theatrical memoir, a great many examples of which remain neglected and unexplored by scholars. They also demonstrate that the works of male performers can be every bit as rich and rewarding as those written by their female counterparts. While Sims Reeves and Charles Santley may have been forgotten by most and their 'pictures painted on air' are sadly no longer with us, we are still able to read about the lives of these remarkable men in their very own words.⁵

NOTES

Abbreviations

<i>MJ</i>	<i>My Jubilee, Or Fifty Years of Artistic Life</i>
<i>SR</i>	<i>Sims Reeves: His Life and Recollections</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Student and Singer: The Reminiscences of Charles Santley</i>
<i>RML</i>	<i>Reminiscences of My Life</i>

¹ The representation of male opera singers in Victorian fiction is covered extensively in my PhD thesis (in progress), at Oxford Brookes University.

² It is worth noting that Reeves repeats this story in his second autobiography, which features no fiction (*MJ* 42–47). This suggests that this story alone might be true.

³ I am developing this topic further in my PhD thesis.

⁴ In 1833 John Braham drafted a letter to King William IV, asking to be knighted. It is unclear whether this letter, which resides in his personal papers, was ever sent (see Braham).

⁵ Towards the end of his career, Charles Santley did make some recordings that are widely available online. These recordings were, however, made when Santley's voice was past its prime and therefore do not offer an accurate representation of his vocal skill.

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