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HANDEL'S BORROWING TECHNIQUES: SOME FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS
DERIVED FROM A STUDY OF "AGRIPPINA" (VENICE, 1709)*

Winton Dean, in his "New Grove Dictionary" article, laments the fact that much ink has been spilled over discussions about Handel's borrowings of music from himself and from other composers. True it is that the issue of Handel as borrower, as well as Handel the plagiarizer, has run a course through most of the critical writings about Handel and his music, beginning already in his own lifetime. The history of these fascinating and important issues touching upon aesthetic, sociological, and even moral concepts has not as yet been analyzed in any depth¹. And while the search for Handel's sources of musical ideas in other composers' music began in the early 19th century, the quest continues unabated as the list of Handel's indebtedness to others grows ever longer².

Only in the past decade, however, has a new attitude evolved towards Handel's borrowings, especially in the writings of Walther Siegmund-Schultze³, Bernd Baselt⁴, and more recently Reinhold Kubik⁵, John Roberts⁶, and others. The issue, for the first time, begins to take on a positive dimension in a critical stance that sees in Handel's extensive and manifold adaptations of his and other composers' works vital clues to defining the unique genius of his compositional craft and his stylistic individuality.

We stand on the threshold of what should be illuminating new approaches to the study of Handel's oeuvre. The examination on "Agrippina" outlined here substantiates this writer's belief that before more progress can be achieved in changing what has been an abiding issue of curiosity and even embarrassment into a new line of inquiry for Handel's music, we must ask some important and often difficult questions, seek at least tentative answers, press forward for a better methodology, and above all, become a closer community of Handel scholars. The purpose in this paper, then, is to present some of the results of working with the concept of borrowings in Handel's opera "Agrippina" and to discuss problems of terminology and analysis.

Handel exemplified the temperament of the German Baroque composer, for he embodied the pre-Romantic ideal of the composer as craftsman. It is well known that to compose music in the Baroque era meant working as much as a craftsman as an artist. The basis of German music before the end of the Baroque seldom depended primarily on originality. Rather it was usually the composer's aim to show what could be achieved with one or more musical ideas. This artistic ideal was not, of course, valid just for music. For in all of the arts constructive principles - creating the new out of models, out of imitations, out of ideas from the past or more recent times - were part of the still flourishing humanism linked solidly to the forces of Greek and Latin guidelines for rhetoric and oratory, which in turn influenced all forms of expressive creativity.

We do not know why Handel, apparently more than any other composer, adopted a method of composing that often emphasized the craft of reworking, revising, adapting, and transcribing musical ideas of his own and of others. None of these procedures was new to music⁷, and actually Handel's art stands as a culmination of these traditional values of compositional craft. Also, no one with an intimate knowledge of his music will deny Handel's prodigious genius for originality, most particularly melodic originality. But the ever-growing weight of evidence does suggest that Handel resorted more frequently than other composers to his own previously composed scores and to those

by other composers in order to implement a musical thought, an "invention" or 'Erfindung', which then stimulated his creative imagination. Rather than judging this fact a problem, or as a weakness of his genius, one can now see the advantage in being able to look into Handel's musical development by tracing various employments and re-employments of musical ideas, in some cases through most of his career.

"Agrippina", Handel's most important public success in the opera house before his triumph with "Rinaldo" in London, was warmly received in Venice with reportedly 27 performances during the carnival season 1709-1710. As Chrysander showed already in the last century and as Baselt⁸ has proved with more extensive evidence, "Agrippina" is astonishingly rich in illustrating Handelian techniques of borrowing. In combining work of the former with that of Hans Joachim Marx⁹, John Roberts¹⁰, and my own, for identifying sources employed in "Agrippina", one cannot but come to the startling conclusion that little if anything in his opera is not based on a pre-existent "invention" by either Handel himself or another composer. 85 percent of the arias (41 out of total of 48) are traceable directly to another source, and considering the loss of scores by Keiser, Mattheson, and Handel himself, one can say without fear of exaggeration that the entire opera "Agrippina" was in a sense borrowed, and that we lack only the ability now to identify sources for the remaining seven arias. Yet this is not to say that "Agrippina" is a pasticcio, and it would be misleading to conclude that the opera in its entirety is simply a parody of models found in a variety of pre-existent sources.

In a chart published in the "Göttinger Händel-Beiträge", volume II, I trace many of the direct sources of the arias in "Agrippina", and also attempt to summarize the nature of Handel's employment of these sources. Some important conclusions about Handel's early career as a composer in Italy can be derived from this evidence, but also a series of difficult questions arise from this analytical profile of an opera's musical antecedents. We see that Handel's debt to the music of Keiser and to a lesser extent to his Hamburg friend, Mattheson, is significant. There are 13 known borrowings from Keiser, six of them from "Octavia", as Chrysander discovered. Since the operas of Keiser and especially Mattheson are in part lost or otherwise unavailable, one can conjecture further still untraced relationships between these Hamburg colleagues and Handel's early works.

It is clear, however, that Handel turned most of the time to his own music when writing "Agrippina", but this conclusion is compromised by the qualification that some of his earlier works can be shown to have origins in music by other composers. Nevertheless, the tally is impressive: he draws upon two motets and 18 cantatas, and from the cantatas uses one of them twice, one of them three times, and one, four times as a source. He takes musical materials four times from "Il trionfo del tempo e del disinganno", three times from "La Resurrezione", four times from "Aci, Galatea e Polifemo", and five times from his immediately preceding opera "Rodrigo". There is one citation from his first opera "Almira". Even these sources often have what can be called a "musical lineage", one might say a family tree. In tracing the development of musical idea along these lines there are difficulties, especially at this early period of his career, the greatest being the need for a more precise chronology for the cantatas. It should be stressed that the picture may not be entirely accurate as to compositional relationships between the major works written in close time proximity, the cantatas in relationship to the oratorios, the opera "Rodrigo", and also "Aci, Galatea, a Polifemo", and the interrelationships of the latter works as well. There is some help,

of course, in the music itself, but it will require a considerable refinement of style analysis before one will be able to see clearly Handel's developing musical style in many of these earlier reuses of the same musical materials.

Nevertheless, it is surprising to find an instance in "Agrippina" where the composer seems to have created an aria as a kind of patch-work quilt (No. 10 - "Vaghe, perle"), and this example of composing with blocks of pre-existent materials suggests further difficulties of both analysis and comprehension, problems of a type that do not become less important in his later works. For in this example Handel has put together an aria with musical elements of five layers of previous scores, beginning with an aria from Keiser's "Octavia", and including two different cantatas, the opera "Rodrigo" and "Aci, Galatea e Polifemo."¹¹

Even before attempting to describe Handel's various techniques of adapting source materials for further development in his own works, there are basic questions of terminology and definitions that must be clarified. The Handel literature is burdened with such terms as parody, borrowings, plagiarism, and even these words are often employed in a variety of meanings and with varying degrees of accuracy. Often the terminology seems to stand between the musical facts and attempts to describe the musical achievements. It would be helpful to abandon the imprecise and often misleading word "borrowing" ('Entlehnung'), although it is so engrained in Handel scholarship that we shall undoubtedly have to retain it. Of course in a strict sense of the word, Handel did not "borrow", but rather he takes over motives, themes, ritornellos, fugue subjects, and sometimes longer passages or even - rarely - entire works. The majority of these cases can be described as reworkings, adaptations, and very often newly derived compositions based on some previous invention or musical idea. Much of the Handel literature has misled and continues to mislead scholars, musicians, and amateurs alike by calling all of these compositional practices "borrowings"¹². Some of the Handel literature has suggested and continues to suggest to the uninformed that his music is a conglomeration of reused scores, patched together with scissors and glue.

The first task, if we wish to expand our comprehension of Handel as composer, is exceedingly complex and even controversial: to attempt to determine when a musical relationship is relevant and meaningful. That is, how can we distinguish between Handel's conscious or subconscious use of previously composed musical materials and his absorption of common musical idioms of Baroque music, those commonplaces of motives and thematic passages, engrained in early 18th century language. Regrettably, we still function on a rather primitive level of analytical sophistication when discussing features of Baroque musical style, and yet we do recognize that Baroque music shares melodic, textural, and harmonic commonplaces. Some would describe them as clichés; Handel's Hamburg colleague and later distinguished German composer-theorist, Johann Mattheson, referred to them as 'moduli'¹³. Within this commonality of Baroque musical language there are numerous 'topoi' occurring in Handel's music and the music of contemporaries, such obvious ones as string agitations and vocal coloraturas for rage arias, the fluttering wind instruments and string passages for imitating birds, running water, gentle breezes, and numerous others, sometimes more subtle and related to rhetorically-inspired figures and actual word emblems. The Handel literature on borrowings has not always been careful to distinguish between superficial musical similarities and clearly obvious connections between works based on identifiable and musically unique resemblances.

There are in the literature connections made between Handel's music and frequently vague thematic constructions, which might be described in more recent terminology as 'Grundgestalten', in which often the simplest of Baroque melodic formulas are interpreted as having a direct line of relationship between works often separated by decades. And the clearly formulaic, even if distinctive, aspect of Handel's own musical style has been little observed in these presumed borrowing relationships. There is also a growing tendency to find isolated measures from one composer's work within the interior texture of Handel's music. That Handel employs the latter practice at times seems clear enough, but caution here as in all other cases of identifying actual reuses of musical materials must be maintained. What is needed, above all, is first to bring recognition and order to an already large number of more easily discerned and analyzed relationships that are indisputable aspects of Handel's creative compositional technique.

The question, then is: When is a thematic equality between two works evidence of a commonality of musical language and when does it illustrate Handel's adoption of a musical idea or passage from another work? Several examples will assist in illustrating the problem. In Example I, the opening to aria No. 22, "Cade il mondo", is followed by the obviously related model, the aria "Caddi, è ver", from "La Resurrezione". Roberts¹⁴ has proposed that his aria from "La Resurrezione" is borrowed from one in Keiser's opera "Nebucadnezar" (1704), and Example Ic gives the opening section of "Fallt ihr Mächtigen". The opening motive is clearly inspired by a 'topos' of "the fall" in the text, and Handel probably recalled Keiser's aria because of the similarities of the texts. That Handel did borrow this idea from Keiser and did not simply hit upon a similar 'Grundgestalt' for the 'topos' of falling is seen perhaps most convincingly (as Roberts has shown) by the harmonic sequence followed in the two works. Yet, it is also true that the original aria from "La Resurrezione" used in "Agrippina" is a magnificently expanded concept of an original Keiser "invention" and fully justifies the classification of a "new work", certainly not a "parody". The same opening motive also occurs in the aria "Chi già fù del biondo crine consigliere" from "Il trionfo del tempo" (see Example Id), but here the opening motive is embedded in quite a different aria from the one in "Agrippina", sharing only the opening motive with the other works.

However, other resemblances found between Handel and other composers are often too vague in musical terms to give incontrovertible proof of direct adaptations and developments of specific musical ideas from work to work. It would be helpful, at least at this stage in the study of Handel's musical style, to avoid the too vague, the too general, and the too brief relationship that is easy to find in his music. Decisions of this kind will not be easy, and in many cases a question of relevance will remain, but we must be more careful in proclaiming Handel's "borrowings" in so many instances where the relationship is based solely on a melodic motive or a measure of similarity and nothing more. Otherwise, the explosion of citations for borrowings which are beginning to appear in recent articles will inundate all of us in a flood of undigestible minutiae.

Two additional cases will illustrate this point. The aria No. 38, "Spererò" is, according to Baselt¹⁵, connected as a borrowing to the aria from "Rodrigo", "Empio fato". But as a comparison of these two compositions reveals, the only similarity between them would appear to be the initial motive in the voice part, a melodic fragment endemic to numerous melodic ideas from throughout Handel's oeuvre; but this does not in this case make for a true relationship, since the aria in "Agrippina" is totally different in every other aspect from the one in "Rodrigo". The opening of aria No. 45,

"Bel piacere" Baselt lists as a borrowing from "Un leggiardo giovinetto" in "Il trionfo del tempo". But again the relationship seems insufficient to be characterized as a borrowing. It is true that the opening motive in each is almost identical in pitches, but everything in the case of the aria in "Agrippina" suggests a new musical conception (or at least a different one as yet unidentified); actual melodic continuity, the remarkable rhythmic concept, the harmonic basis and the bass pattern, and the overall musical substance are far removed from the aria in "Rodrigo", and this kind of musical similarity is too imprecise to be endorsed as a direct connection between the two works.

Another aspect of all discussions involving questions of Handel's compositional procedures concerns terminology, especially the application of the term parody to his music. In Baselt's distinguished article on parody techniques¹⁶, he defines three forms of parody used by the composer:

1. The use of an entire piece or movement, sometimes with the same text in another work.
2. The use of an especially expressive musical movement with a pregnant theme, subjecting it to a new creative process, with insertions, extensions, and detailed modifications, which achieves a "quasi new piece".
3. The use of individual themes, accompaniment figures or other characteristic short melodic motives, to build a fully new movement.

Within the latter two types of parody one will, of course, find an enormous variety of adaptations, repetitions, and new musical materials. And as a needed step towards greater clarification in the Handel literature, we need an expanded, more precise, and separate terminology for these quite different concepts of compositional procedures. In any case, 'parody' should be restricted to only those literal or almost literal reuses of a musical model, with a different text, in which any modification is minor and does not disturb either the structure or the musical substance of the original. This seems to be a more accurate and useful application of the word 'parody', although in a Baroque historical context, we should probably better employ the term 'contrafactum'. To distinguish the relatively rare, literal repetition of the same piece, retaining the text from a previous work as well, the obvious term "Reuse" should be maintained.

For Baselt's second type of parody, I would use instead simply "reworking". Finally, the last classification would best be labelled a "new work", based on a previous musical idea. For those arias for which a clear decision can be made, one finds in "Agrippina" 2 reuses, 11 parodies, 12 reworkings, and 15 new compositions, which is obviously a more accurate and meaningful view of the work than to state there are 41 "borrowings". In the case of the parody movements, a few of them have newly composed B sections when this section is present, another consideration that needs to be stated when one has called an aria a "parody"¹⁷. These examples of Handel's compositional procedures, of course, do not begin to suggest the almost limitless variety of creative techniques and impulses found in numerous other approaches to composing which lie before us like a great encyclopedia of Handel's unique genius. We have as yet only a glimpse into this wealth of new knowledge about Handel's musical achievements.

Notes

- *) This paper appears in a considerably expanded form, with related illustrative chart and music examples in: Göttinger Händel-Beiträge II, Kassel etc., 1986, p. 105-128.

- 1) See the author's article, *Originality, Genius, Plagiarism in English Criticism of the Eighteenth Century*, presented at the 50th Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society, Philadelphia, Pa., October, 1984. This paper appears in summary in the author's *The Case for Handel's Borrowings: The Judgement of Three Centuries*, in: *The Conference Report of The Handel Tercentenary Conference*, London, 1985 (London, 1987). It appears in its entirety in *Florilegium musicologicum, Festschrift Hellmut Federhofer*, Tutzing 1987.
- 2) Friedrich Chrysander is often credited with the first discussions of Handel's borrowings, first in his articles in the *AmZ* 13 (1878/1879), showing Handel's indebtedness to the music of Francesco Urio, and later (1880) with the supplementary volumes to the complete Handel edition, including many scores Chrysander found Handel had borrowed from extensively. However, knowledge of Handel's practice was already well-documented, with references to it in the 18th century by Mattheson, Scheibe, Burney, and Hawkins, as well as in the earlier 19th century by Crotch, Novello, George Macfarren, Schoelcher in his biography of Handel, Ebenezer Prout, and others. In the early part of the present century two works of considerable impact in these discussions were: Sedley Taylor, *The Indebtedness of Handel to Works by Other Composers*, Cambridge 1906, and Percy Robinson, *Handel and his Orbit*, London 1908.
- 3) Walther Siegmund-Schultze, *Zu Händels Schaffensmethode*, in: *Händel-Jb.* 7/8 (1961/1962), Leipzig 1962, p. 69.
- 4) Bernd Baselt, *Zum Parodieverfahren in Händels frühen Opern*, in: *Händel-Jb.* 21/22, (1975/1976), Leipzig 1977, p. 19. This documentation of Handel's borrowings is incorporated into Baselt's *Händel-Handbuch* 1, Kassel etc. 1978. Further evidence of Handel's borrowings is contained in Volume 2 of the *Händel-Handbuch*, Kassel etc. 1984, also by Baselt.
- 5) Reinhold Kubik, *Händels Rinaldo, Geschichte, Werk, Wirkung*, Neuhausen-Stuttgart, 1982.
- 6) John H. Roberts, *Handel's Borrowings from Telemann: An Inventory*, in: *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* I, Kassel etc. 1984, p. 147.
- 7) See for example: Werner Braun, *Zur Parodie im 17. Jahrhundert*, in: *Kgr.-Ber.* Kassel 1962, Kassel etc. 1964, p. 154; and Lewis Lockwood, *On 'Parody' as Term and Concept in 16th-Century Music*, in: *Aspects of Medieval and Renaissance Music. A Birthday Offering to Gustave Reese*, ed. Jan LaRue et al., New York 1966, p. 560.
- 8) Baselt, "Zum Parodieverfahren".
- 9) Hans Joachim Marx, *Ein Beitrag Händels zur Accademia Ottoboniana in Rom*, in: *Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1976), p. 69.
- 10) John H. Roberts, *Handel's Borrowings from Keiser*, in: *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* II, Kassel etc. 1986, and also from numerous valuable personal communications.
- 11) *Ibid.*, for Roberts detailed examination of his aria.
- 12) See for example Winton Dean's appendix so labelled in his *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, London 1959, as well as the recent two volumes of the '*Händel-Handbuch*', one for the operas, one for the oratorios, vocal chamber works, and church music, where 'Entlehnungen' are listed for a majority of Handel's works,

but with no critical apparatus to distinguish the various kinds of compositional techniques employed.

- 13) Johann Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister*, Hamburg 1739, p. 123.
- 14) See footnote 10.
- 15) See Baselt, *Händel-Handbuch I*.
- 16) Baselt, "Zum Parodieverfahren".
- 17) For music examples illustrating Handel's compositional techniques of reworking and adapting musical "borrowings", see the expanded version of this paper in *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge II*, Kassel etc. 1986, p.

Example Ia: Agrippina, "Cade il mondo" (No. 22)

Violini
CLAUDIO

Bassi

Ca-de il mon-do, ca-de il mon-do sog-gio.

-ga-to e fà ba-se al Ro-man so-glio, e fà ba-se al Ro-man so-glio, etc.

Example Ib: La Resurrezione, "Caddi, è ver"

Violini unisoni
LUCIFERO

Bassi

6 8

C'ad-di, è ver, cad-di, è

Soll.

ver, ma nel ca - de - re non per - de - i for - sa ne ar - di - re, non per - de -

- - - - i for - sa ne ar - di - re.

etc.

Example 1c: Keiser, Nebucadnezar (1704) Act I/Aria 1

Unisoni

Nebucadnezar

Fallt ihr Mäch - ti - gen auf Er - den,

fal - let, fal - let, fal - let und er - nie - drigt euch. Fallt ihr Mäch - ti - gen auf Er - den,

fal - let.

Example Id: Il Trionfo del Tempo, "Chi già fù del biondo crine"

unisoni.
DISINGANNO.

Chi già fù del

biondo crine così - gliero al suo radrà,
etc.

Werner Braun:

HÄNDELS TRAGISCHE KANTATE: "LUCREZIA"

1. Meinungen

In der "Exemplarischen Organisten-Probe" (1719) beruft sich Johann Mattheson im Zuge seines Interesses an 'modernen' Tonarten wie f-Moll auf Händels Lucrezia-Kantate, die - obwohl nicht gedruckt - "in vieler Leute Händen" sei. Er bringt dann aus der zweiten Arie (c-Moll) den Beginn des Mittelteils (9 Takte), der As-Dur herausstellt¹. In der Neuauflage 1731 - in einer der beiden Ausgaben der "Großen Generalbaß-Schule" - bezieht er sich darüber hinaus auf es-Moll und auf Des-Dur und "andere Tone" der monologischen Generalbaß-Kantate². Dabei will er keineswegs das Werk erläutern oder es auch nur empfehlen, sondern er benutzt dessen große Verbreitung und den berühmten Namen Händels, um einen Aspekt seiner eigenen Theorie zu stützen.

Erst seit dem 19. Jahrhundert wollte man sich in Musik versenken. Friedrich Chrysander erklärt die Beliebtheit der Kantate aus ihrer ästhetischen Qualität. In dem Stoff des unbekanntem Dichters habe Händel "einen wirklichen großen Gegenstand" vor sich gehabt, der seine Phantasie mächtig in Gang setzte³. Wie das geschah, wird jedoch nicht gesagt. Später - angesichts des Larghetto-Ostinatos - rügt der Gelehrte sogar seinen Helden; der Gang sei allzu instrumental⁴.

Keine Händel-Monographie kommt an "Lucrezia" vorbei. Doch es blieb beim lobenden Erwähnen oder beim Verwechseln von Ästhetik mit Biographik. Schon Chrysander vermutete, daß Händel das Stück für eine Florentiner Sängerin Lucrezia d'André geschrieben hat, "die ihm ihre besondere Zuneigung schenkte"⁵. Paul Henry Lang griff dieses "Gerücht von einer Liebesaffäre" freudig auf, weil es seine Polemik gegen die Sakralisierung Händels