

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PERGOLESÌ:  
MYTH CREATION IN ROMANTIC IDEOLOGY

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Le premier verset du Stabat de Pergolèse, *Duo* la plus parfait & le plus touchant  
qui soit sorti de la plume d'aucun Musicien.

–Jean-Jacques Rousseau<sup>1</sup>

Me l'hanno pagato dieci ducati, mentre non vale dieci bajocchi.

–Giovanni Battista Pergolesi<sup>2</sup>

The figure of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi is one of the most elusive and controversial in the history of Western music. To this day, three hundred years after his birth, many historians and musicologists are scrambling to define the profile of a figure who Dario Della Porta defines as a 'ghost' (1986, 47). The two quotations above neatly encapsulate the chasm that exists between the bleak perception that the composer had of his own work, and the posthumous fame which, from Rousseau onward, propelled Pergolesi into the Olympus of musical genius. For this reason, the main challenge facing modern musicology has been to reconstruct a realistic portrait of Pergolesi in order to position him somewhere in between such apparent extremes. In *Pergolesi tra mito e storia* (*Pergolesi Between Myth and History*) Francesco Degrada, one of the most eminent researchers of Pergolesi, asked the following questions:

Why has this musician in particular been elevated as a symbol not only of a period of Italian music, but as a symbol of music itself, of its capacity to express the history and destiny of man? Why a myth of Pergolesi? We must not forget that the myth of Pergolesi is also a historic reality. (1986a, 16)

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<sup>1</sup> "The first duet of the *Stabat* [*mater*] by Pergolesi is the most perfect and touching to come from the pen of any composer." Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique*, Genève (1781), 252.

<sup>2</sup> "They paid me ten *ducati* [\$200] for [the *Stabat mater*] even though it's not worth ten *bajocchi* [\$2]." Quoted in Dario Della Porta, "G.B. Pergolesi: breve storia di una biografia," 49.

Hence, this short study on the figure of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi is, in part, a study of the manner in which historiography in general and musicology in particular arrives at constructing a narrative that, aside from elucidating the particulars of a given historical figure or event, is ultimately meant to serve the ideology of the individual historian or musicologist.

The controversial nature of Pergolesi is exemplified by the divergent biographical accounts of the composer. On the one hand, Hucke and Monson, while acknowledging how the “highly romanticized accounts of Pergolesi’s life written in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries distorted his career and influence,” maintain that “he was clearly among the most successful and respected composers of his generation.”<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Walker, recounting the disastrous failure of Pergolesi’s *L’Olimpiade* in Rome in 1735, where the composer was supposedly struck by an orange thrown from the audience, writes how Pergolesi, at the time of the performance, supposedly confessed to fellow composer Egidio Duni that except for his comic intermezzi, all his operas had been received with indifference (1949, 297). By the same token, Della Porta seems to corroborate Pergolesi’s self assessment when he writes that

the construction of Pergolesi’s biography has been directly proportional to his overwhelming fame. The sentimental late eighteenth century and the romantic nineteenth century seemed to consider as almost unacceptable this ineffable, opaque figure, this gray life divided between chapel master for a couple of Neapolitan aristocratic families and an operatic activity which had a few mediocre successes and some major failures. (1986, 47)

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<sup>3</sup> Helmut Hucke and Dale E. Monson. “Pergolesi, Giovanni Battista.” In *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*.

Another element that may lend credence to this latter thesis is the fact that by the time he died of tuberculosis at the young age of 26, Pergolesi's career had spanned slightly over six years. During this time, according to the tabulations of the most recent critical edition directed by Barry S. Brook, director of The Pergolesi Research Center at the City University of New York, he composed approximately 36 works. In addition, had Pergolesi been as successful during his lifetime as Hucke and Monson would like their readers to believe, it would be hard to explain why, upon his death in 1736 in a Capuchin Monastery in Pozzuoli, near Naples, his body was buried in the common pit next to the cathedral. While this type of burial was the norm for a commoner at this time, it goes to show that that the composer died without honors. Finally, as if to confirm this, no biographer had shown any interest in Pergolesi until July 1772, when Boyer published his "Notices sur la vie et les ouvrages de Pergolèse" in the *Mercure de France*, thirty-six years after the composer's death (Della Porta 1986, 48).

While Pergolesi's biography and lifetime success is obviously still a matter of contention, there is unanimous agreement among musicologists on the unprecedented posthumous fame he enjoyed. According to Degrada, "Pergolesi was the first composer that fostered an interest in his biography aside from his music" (1986a, 10). This sentiment is shared by Hucke and Monson when they write that "the almost universal fame he attained posthumously represented a new phenomenon in music history."<sup>4</sup> But if it wasn't because of the fame and success Pergolesi enjoyed during his lifetime, as Della Porta and Walker strongly suggest, what exactly could have been the cause that prompted

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<sup>4</sup> Helmut Hucke and Dale E. Monson. "Pergolesi, Giovanni Battista." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*.

such an unprecedented reversal of fortune for a composer apparently “not quite important enough (in the world’s eyes) to warrant a yearbook”?<sup>5</sup>

Most modern musicologists would agree on 1752 as the year that marked the resurgence of Pergolesi as a composer. In that year, a dispute erupted in Paris, which lasted for the subsequent two years, over the respective merits of French *tragédie lyrique* and Italian comic opera (*opera buffa*) commonly known as the *Querelle* (or *Guerre*) *des Bouffons*. The two major antagonists in this *querelle* were French composer and theorist Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) and French philosopher and writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). The catalyst for this musical and political controversy, which had been brewing in France since the early years of the eighteenth century, was the performance of an Italian operatic company led by director Eustachio Bambini and known as the ‘Bouffons’. Among the works performed by the company was Pergolesi’s comic intermezzo *La serva padrona*. The peculiar aspect of the *Querelle* is that all the leading anti-Establishment intellectuals – also known as the *philosophes* – sided with Rousseau, while all the pro-Establishment intellectuals sided with Rameau. At the time the *Querelle* erupted, Jean-Philippe Rameau was considered the most prominent exponent of French music. For this reason, when Rousseau and the *philosophes* attacked Rameau’s music, the pro-Establishment intellectuals perceived it as an attack on France itself.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Talbot, *Music & Letters*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Aug., 1990), 391, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/736769> (December 14, 2010).

The performances of Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*, while not the opening salvo in the *Querelle*, prompted Rousseau to write a *Lettre sur la musique française* (*Letter on French Music*) on November 1753 in which he

reasoned that French music was not only inferior to Italian music, but that as music and as drama it was totally worthless. French music, he argued, did not match the sentiments it attempted to express – the sentiments were not genuine anyway – the melody was concealed under a mass of complicated harmony and counterpoint, and, he peremptorily concluded, “the French nation has no music and can never have any.” (Paul, 1971, 397)

By the end of 1754, more than sixty letters and pamphlets had been written in which numerous *ad hominem* attacks were exchanged. Rousseau was labeled as a “frantic madman about to burn the temple of art” (398) afflicted with a “sick brain, an equivocal heart, and a dangerous and false mind.”<sup>6</sup>

The vehemence of the argument between the two factions, and its political and ideological underpinnings, has led many historians to treat the *Querelle* as a prelude to the French Revolution of 1789 (399). Neapolitan historian Gianni Race, among others, has suggested that the enthusiasm of Rousseau and of the other *philosophes* toward the music of Pergolesi cannot simply be ascribed to musical aesthetics alone but, in addition, by the presence in his music of sentiments which could be seen as anticipatory of the ideas of the Enlightenment (1986, 122). It was such sentiments, perhaps, that Rousseau was alluding to in his *Lettre* when he criticized French music for lacking genuine sentiments. For this reason, we must spend a few words on the historical context within

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<sup>6</sup> “Mais d’un cerveau malade, d’un cœur équivoque, & d’une intelligence? dangereux & faux.” Jacques Cazotte, *Observations sur la lettre de J.J. Rousseau au sujet de la musique française* (1753), 6. <http://ia700105.us.archive.org/15/items/observationsurl00cazo/observationsurl00cazo.pdf> (accessed on December 10, 2010)

which the music of Pergolesi emerged, particularly in relation to Neapolitan *opera buffa*, since it was this type of music, as exemplified in *La serva padrona*, that prompted the *Querelle des Bouffons*.

From a historical perspective, Pergolesi's music falls in a transitional period for Italy in general, and the city of Naples in particular. Francesco Degrada writes that

the music of Pergolesi and of his generation must be situated within the tensions which Italian and southern Italian society lived during the turbulent transition from the Austrian rule to that of the House of Bourbon: from a social order based on the brutal preservation of privilege by purely parasitic classes to a modern conception of the state endorsed and supported by intellectuals, the most enlightened sector of the aristocracy and the productive classes. From a purely hedonistic idea of music to the social function of art and theater in particular. (1986a, 14)

It is within this context that Neapolitan comic opera emerged and, with Pergolesi, reached the heights of a national and international art form. The salient features of the Neapolitan *opera buffa* are that it was set in the city itself and that the characters spoke solely in the local dialect instead of Italian. In fact, while dialect was utilized in serious opera, it was generally done as a way to highlight the distinction between the erudite classes and the populace. Piero Weiss points out that, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, everyone spoke their local dialect and Italian was only used in writing. The fact that the local dialect was what people used in their everyday life meant that in addition to the erudite Italian literature there was also a sizeable literature written in dialect. And because the erudite literature primarily dealt with 'serious' matters, the dialect literature was primarily comic in nature (Weiss 1986, 126). For this reason, it was not as if the librettists of the time decided, point blank, to write in the local dialect but, rather, it was

the composers who began to set the existing dialect literature to music. And since such literature dealt primarily with comic matters, it would simply follow that the resulting musical output would be primarily comic in nature.

The use of the local settings and dialect gave Neapolitan comic opera an aura of realistic immediacy which must have appealed to the emerging bourgeois classes. In addition, the new bourgeoisie had probably an easier time identifying with the popular, everyday themes of the *opera buffa* – as opposed to the remote themes of serious opera which often dealt with mythological or historical figures. As a matter of fact, the main difficulty which eventually led to the fading of the genre, was that with its nationalization first, and internationalization second, these two features of dialect and setting could not be retained as it would be impractical for any opera to be translated into the local dialect and adapted to the locality in which it was performed (Weiss 1986, 126). As a matter of fact, after tracing the historical voyage of Pergolesi's intermezzo *Livietta e tracollo* from Naples to Paris, Gordana Lazarevich concluded that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the existence of a comic opera was possible

primarily as a series of transformations of itself. In other words, the composer of comic operas and intermezzi was entirely at the mercy of the buffo singers. Once the work was removed from its original performance location, its home territory, so to speak, it became the property of the singers who transformed it into a hybrid form. This combinative form is defined as the *pasticcio*. The history of 18th-century comic opera and intermezzi, therefore, is to a great extent a history of the *pasticcio*. (1986, 158)



Seen in this light, one might wonder what it was that Rousseau and the rest of the *philosophes* actually saw in Paris as we will probably never know how much of it was from the hand of Pergolesi and how much was from Bambini's. In any case,

the confrontation in 1752 between Pergolesi's *La Serva Padrona* and Rameau's *tragedies lyriques* gave the Encyclopedists the opportunity to plead in defense of their own and others' musical grievances. They demanded a change from the bombastic to the simple, from the abstract formulation of reality to a concrete and direct imitation of nature, and from insipid mythological libretti to realistic *bourgeois* plots. (Paul 1971, 402)

By the time the French Revolution erupted in 1789, Rousseau, Rameau, and most of the other intellectuals who participated in the *Querelle* were no longer living. Nevertheless, as the Revolution enshrined the ideals of the *philosophes*, one of the consequences was the exponential increase in popularity of Pergolesi and his music. The problem was that by that time Pergolesi was dead, and because of his particularly short career, his limited output could not meet the public's thirst for his music that had been spurred by the combined publicity of the *Querelle* and the French Revolution. And so, it was only a matter of time before forgers began to work in order to meet the demand for Pergolesi's music. While this phenomenon is nothing new in music history – one only needs to look at the current state of the research on Josquin Des Pres<sup>7</sup> – what is unprecedented in the case of Pergolesi is the scope and the scale of the level of misattributions. In this regard, Brook did not mince words when he wrote that “probably there is a higher percentage of

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<sup>7</sup> Joshua Rifkin, “Problems of Authorship in Josquin: Some Impolitic Observations, with a Postscript on *Absalon, fili mi*,” in the *Proceedings of the International Josquin Symposium*, Utrecht 1986, ed. Willem Elders (Utrecht, 1991), 45-52. In this now famous, and then controversial, paper presented at the 1986 International Josquin Symposium in Utrecht, Joshua Rifkin called for the re-attribution “of *all* the works known to us under Josquin's name.”

‘spuriousities’ bearing Pergolesi’s name than that of any other composer” (1986, 143). Approximately within the two centuries that went from the *Querelle des Bouffons* of 1752-54 up until the publication of the first *Opera Omnia* in 1939-42 edited by Duke Filippo Caffarelli, the number of works attributed to Pergolesi had inflated to roughly 330. Since the number of works that can be considered authentic or possibly authentic today stands at around 36, it follows that 89 percent of Pergolesi attributions is currently considered spurious by musicologists – proportionally, a staggering number. To put the matter into perspective Brook cites the spuriousity ratio in Haydn, to whom have also been misattributed a large number of works, and which he puts at approximately 586 out of 1160, or 51 percent (143). The unprecedented ratio of false attributions in the *Opera Omnia* prompted Walker to publish his research entitled *Two Centuries of Pergolesi Forgeries and Misattributions*, where he describes the 26-volume set as “an edition which, if it cannot challenge comparison with the other *Gesamtausgaben* in matters of scientific method, textual criticism, etc., goes far beyond any of them in one thing – the number of spurious compositions which it includes” (1949, 301). But while the *Opera Omnia* put the seal of approval on many falsely attributed works, it is also believed to be the catalyst of modern scholarly research on Pergolesi. Of all the Pergolesi forgers, it is worth spending a few words on the colorful figure of Tobia Nicotra<sup>8</sup>, especially because his actions are, in my opinion, emblematic of a problematic issue within musicology.

Brook and Paymer write that

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<sup>8</sup> Or Copyist No. 2, as identified by Brook and Paymer in their painstaking *The Pergolesi Hand: A Calligraphic Study* (1982, 555).

Nicotra's forgeries were not limited to Pergolesi. His output includes at least five Mozart "autographs" and others attributed to Handel, Wagner, Palestrina, and Gluck. In addition, Nicotra forged letters purportedly signed by Abraham Lincoln, Christopher Columbus, George Washington, the Marquis de Lafayette, Warren G. Harding, Tadeusz Kosciuszko, Martin Luther, Lorenzo de Medici, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo. And if that were not enough, he impersonated Riccardo Drigo, two years after the death of that composer-conductor, in a tour of the United States in 1932. (1982, 555)

In 1934 Nicotra was eventually apprehended, tried in Milan, Italy, and sentenced to two years in prison. According to the testimony of the Milanese librarians at the trial, Nicotra's *modus operandi* was to steal old manuscripts from the Milan library and then add the autographs of famous musicians<sup>9</sup>. This would seem to give credence to the thesis advanced by Degrada in trying to explain the peculiar brevity of some of the sacred music attributed to Pergolesi. In his view, such brevity could be explained by the difficulty experienced by Nicotra in finding large quantities of old manuscript paper (1966, 42).

In 1977, the Pergolesi Research Center was established at the City University of New York. Its main goal was to publish the first critical edition of Pergolesi's works. The first volume of the *Giovanni Battista Pergolesi Complete Works* edition was published in 1986, but after publishing several volumes the edition was all but halted in 1996 and no further volumes have been published since<sup>10</sup>. The main goal of the edition, as stated by

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<sup>9</sup> George Childs Kohn, *The New Encyclopedia of American Scandal*, New York (Checkmark Books, 2001), s.v. "Tobia NICOTRA: Autograph Faker Fooled Library of Congress."

<sup>10</sup> A new 20-volume *National Edition of the Works by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi* by the Pergolesi Spontini Foundation in Jesi, Italy, has been in the works since 2002, with its first volume to be published on the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pergolesi's birth this year. The remaining volumes will be published over the next ten years.

[http://www.fondazionepergolesispontini.com/fps/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2562&Itemid=3145&lang=en](http://www.fondazionepergolesispontini.com/fps/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2562&Itemid=3145&lang=en) (accessed December 14, 2010).

one of its editors, was the “validation of the name and art” of Pergolesi, because “only when the world knows *all* of Pergolesi’s music will his true stature emerge and his name – long besmirched – be vindicated” (Brook 1986, 7, 4). Upon commencement of the edition Degrada wrote that “without doubt, the image of Pergolesi that will issue from this process of revision will not only be more correct, but it will finally be more commensurate to the greatness of a fame too often usurped by obscure hacks or outright forgers” (1986b, xiv). And so, the new edition supposedly achieved its stated goal by cutting the number of works attributed to Pergolesi by a factor of 10. While this could be seen as the aim of any respectable *Gesamtausgabe*, one cannot help wonder about the fate of the music left on the cutting room floor which, with all probability, will end up in the dustbin of history even though, up until recently, it had been part of the repertoire for over 200 hundred years. And so the questions arise: is the “true stature” of a composer worth the cost of erasing, for all practical purposes, hundreds of musical works from the repertoire? Plus, what exactly is this “true stature” and, most importantly, what type of methodology is used to determine it?

The editors of the new Pergolesi edition claim the forged works to be patently inferior to those of the composer. Writing about some of the alleged Nicotra forgeries, for example, Degrada describes the hymn *O salutaris hostia* as a “dull sequence of progressions, lacking any internal unity and any attempt at dignity of writing” (1966, 39). In discussing the *Agnus dei*<sup>11</sup> in B minor, Degrada notes that “the voice leading is so

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<sup>11</sup> Despite the scholarly research, most of the so-called Pergolesi forgeries are still sold, performed, and recorded around the world. I could easily find the *Agnus Dei* in question at an online sheet music retailer with the following description:

absurd that one would refrain from attributing such a passage to any beginner student in composition, let alone to Pergolesi” (38-9). Or, regarding the aria *Non mi negar signora* he asks: “Who would attribute a passage of such extravagant monstrosity to Pergolesi?” (40). Naturally, the question is ironical, given the fact that some of this music, as we have seen, has been in the repertoire for over 200 years. According to Lessing, “considering a work of art aesthetically superior because it is genuine, or inferior because it is forged, has little or nothing to do with aesthetic judgment or criticism. It is rather a piece of snobbery” (2002, 87). To this extent, Harry Haskell disagrees with Degrada’s assessment when, referring to Nicotra’s forgeries of Pergolesi as a “musicological imbroglio” he described them as “convincingly executed” (1996, 74-5).

The dismissive attitude expressed above by Degrada is symptomatic of the approach taken by the editors of the new *G. B. Pergolesi Complete Works* edition. For this reason, it is worth quoting at length from Brook. In his view,

we must use scholarly editions that represent a critical examination of the sources and one designed to achieve the closest approximation of the composer’s intentions. Those are the keywords: *the composer’s intentions*. By doing all in our power to be faithful to them, we will do justice, at last, to the name of Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. (1986, 9)

For this reason,

what is needed in an objective, scientific method of internal analysis that involves the careful examination and statistical tabulation of various specific

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Agnus Dei (For S.A.T.B. Chorus and Keyboard). By Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736). Edited by Richard Franko Goldman. Arranged by Richard Franko Goldman. SATB chorus. For SATB, Organ, Spinnet. Choral. Piano/Vocal Score. Standard notation. Composed 1742. 8 pages. Published by Theodore Presser Company (PR.352001320). <http://www.sheetmusicplus.com/title/Agnus-Dei/1863107> (accessed December 12, 2010)

characteristics of a composer's personal style – genre by genre and period by period – plus the close comparison with the same specific aspects of the works of other composers of the same generation and milieu. This method ... is based on the hypothesis, in which I firmly believe, that every great composer develops a personal profile, even early in his career, one that is different from that of all other composers; and we can learn to define and describe that profile – including its varying aspects in different periods and genres – by precise, statistical measurement and comparison. (7)

According to Brook, then, a composer's personal style can be reduced to a set number of discreet elements which can be scientifically identified and measured. Once the authenticity has been confirmed with scientific precision the musicologist can then approximate the composer's intentions.

Three years prior to Brook's writing, Jerome J. McGann had already deconstructed the theory of "final authorial intention" in the literary work. According to McGann, the theory of textual criticism as expressed by Brook is "founded in a Romantic ideology of the relations between an author, his works, his institutional affiliations, and his audience" (1983, 42). Summing up McGann's thought, Grier writes that the work of art is not some kind of autonomous archeological artifact that can be uncovered, dissected, and studied but, rather, a "social phenomenon" (1996, 16). Rather than being a historical undertaking, the editor's attempt to determine the author's intentions is a "psychological endeavor" (17). Seen from McGann's perspective, it is easy to see the ideological nature of Brook's approach no matter how he tries to give it the appearance of a scientific pursuit. As a matter of fact, Brook admits his ideological bias when he writes that his entire scientific method is predicated on the belief that every great composer has an unmistakable style (1986, 7). The ideological nature of this belief is evident in the fact

that Brook is apparently undeterred by his own findings – the fact that 89 percent of the works attributed to Pergolesi are allegedly forgeries and that yet for over 200 years no one has ever questioned their authenticity. Bruce Haynes writes that “we know only the failures of forgers. Fakes that have succeeded are still uncovered, and remain attributed to other, more famous artists. That is what a successful fake is, by definition” (2007, 125).

Regardless of the success or failure of a fake, the idea that works of art are indeed a social phenomenon applies to both authentic works and forgeries alike. For this reason, the procedure of excising such a large amount of music from the repertoire in order to manufacture an elusive canon for a particular composer is tantamount to cultural revisionism driven by ideology. Such ideology is brought to light by Brook as he quotes musicologist Luigi Ronga stating that

'In the history of music, Pergolesi joins the ranks of the few creators sharing an exceptional sense of moderation, temperance and intensity of mood, an ideal in a short series [of composers] with its highest example in Mozart'. Ronga also refers to the richness that would ensue in 'teaching the study of *all* his works, not mutilated and summarized in a few pages of an anthology', adding that 'the result would show a Pergolesi worthy of his fame'. (1986, 142)

And so we are back full circle. Rather than trying to reconstruct a realistic portrait of Pergolesi, the ideological intent of the new *G. B. Pergolesi Complete Works* edition appears to be an effort to put the academic stamp of approval on the Romantic myth of Pergolesi as it originated with Rousseau. Not for nothing, in writing about the relationship between music and ideology at the time of the *Querelle* Paul points out how most of the historians and musicologists who write on either Rameau or on the *Querelle*, “interpret the musical events of 1752-54 in light of their own preference for the political

events of 1789-99, and thus carry into music history, biography, and criticism the ideological war waged by historians over the French Revolution and Rousseau” (1971, 396). It seems to me that just as Rousseau’s Romantic ideology helped with creating the myth of Pergolesi, the Romantic ideology of the Pergolesi Research Center, as exemplified by Brook’s belief in authorial intentions and style, is one of trying to reestablish a myth that he and the other editors believe has been corrupted and “usurped by obscure hacks” (Degrada, 1986b, xiv).

To conclude, all the evidence discussed thus far seems to suggest that the myth of Pergolesi may not be easily ascribable to any individual cause but, rather, to the unusual convergence of several factors. First, the fact that Pergolesi lived on the verge of the Enlightenment and that he was, according to Degrada, the first composer to conceive music as a mirror of *nature*, as the portrayal of genuine and spontaneous human concerns (1986a, 10). Second, and because of Pergolesi’s enlightened aesthetic, Rousseau and the rest of the *philosophes* chose him as the standard bearer in their ideological battle against French music and the *Ancien Régime*. Third, just as Pergolesi’s scant musical output spurred a barrage of false attributions, his ‘ghostly’ biography lent itself particularly well to the creation of a larger than life Romantic mythological figure. And so, for example, his mundane death from tuberculosis was transformed into either death by consumption or by unrequited love, depending on who did the telling (Della Porta 1986, 47). The unlikely convergence of these factors can thus be viewed as a sort of ‘perfect storm,’ which took a somewhat obscure and underappreciated composer and catapulted him into the pantheon of Romantic genius. In this perspective, the myth of Giovanni Battista



Pergolesi can be seen as a sort of narrative that emerged from the intersection of culture and ideology in a particularly tumultuous historical period. Rather than trying to re-inflate the Pergolesi myth by insisting on constructing a canon that can fit the ideological purposes of this or that editor, a more worthy pursuit for scholars of Pergolesi may be that of trying to figure out what it is about modern culture that creates the need for this type of mythological narratives.

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