

‘true Merit always Envy rais’d’: the *Advice to Mr. Handel* (1739) and *Israel in Egypt*’s early reception

This is a revised chapter of my dissertation ‘Early reception of Handel’s oratorios, 1732–1784: narrative – studies – documents’ (Stanford University, 2004). Additional research was conducted on a John M. Ward Fellowship in Dance and Music for the Theatre at Harvard’s Houghton Library, whose generous and learned staff I wish to thank. David Hunter’s strong position on Lady Brown, and its partisan defence in some quarters, did have an impact on my approach to this topic. However, my disagreement with Professor Hunter stands on a foundation of collegial gratitude for his courage and efforts to probe long-held views on Handel.

THE FIRST RUN of *Israel in Egypt*, in April 1739, was a perilous moment in Handel’s career. In just three performances, the oratorio enacted the story of Exodus, swerving from certain drowning to unexpected rescue. At the 4 April premiere of the work, reports a witness, Handel ‘did not have twenty people in the pit’.¹ The second performance (11 April) of a hastily revised *Israel* did not fare better, ‘for though it was a polite & attentive audience, it was not large enough [...] to encourage [Handel] in any future attempt’. Supporters of the composer mobilised and an open letter in the press urged him to ‘perform [*Israel*] again in some time next week’.² Sufficiently motivated, Handel scheduled a third performance for 17 April. That very day newspapers reported the scheduled appearance at the event of the Prince of Wales,³ whose latest reconciliation with the King and newborn son had attracted wide attention. With such a publicity boost, *Israel* finally reached the shore of success. As the London correspondent to *The Scots Magazine* wrote, ‘the oratorio was performed, to the surprize of myself and many more, to a very numerous audience’.⁴

If princely clout helps explain the success of the 17 April performance, what made *Israel* to ‘f[a]ll resoundingly flat’ two weeks earlier?⁵ Structure and subject matter is the consensus among scholars. Unlike any previous

1. Giambattista Gastaldi to Prince Cantemir, 9 April 1739; Lowell Lindgren: ‘Musicians and librettists in the correspondence of Gio. Giacomo Zamboni (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Rawlinson letters 116–138)’, in [RMA] *Research Chronicle* 24 (1991), p.173.

2. ‘Philharmonica’ to James Harris, 12 April 1739; Donald Burrows & Rosemary Dunhill, ed.: *Music and theatre in Handel’s world: the family papers of*

James Harris, 1732–1780 (Oxford & New York, 2002), p.69; printed in *The London Daily Post, and General Advertiser* no.1391, Friday 13 April 1739, p.[2] [henceforth *LDP*]; reprinted in Otto Erich Deutsch: *Handel: a documentary biography* (London, 1955), p.480.

3. ‘the Prince and Princess [of Wales] will be at the King’s Theatre in the Hay-Market [...] to see *Israel in Egypt*’: *LDP* no.1394, Tuesday 17 April 1739, p.[1]; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.480. Remarkably, his household

accounts show that he attended the oratorio’s premiere (Carole Taylor: ‘Handel and Frederick, Prince of Wales’, in *The Musical Times* vol.125 (1984), p.92); the note ‘the Prince Alone’ may suggest, however, a non-publicised visit.

4. *The Scots Magazine* 1 (1739), p.181; reported here for the first time. This is the only source to describe public support to Handel in 1739 as a hype: ‘The art of puffing increases beyond belief: and even the great

Handell himself has been accused of conforming to this prevailing folly, in an instance where (I cannot help speaking with some concern) there was the least cause for descending to such mean arts’ (ibid.). As the entire passage indicates, the author reacts to the publicity campaign of Handellians in the press. He is clearly unaware of the *Advice* and the efforts to derail Handel’s season.

5. Winton Dean: *Handel’s dramatic oratorios and masques* (London, 1959), p.313.

6. Donald Burrows: *Handel* (New York, 1994), p.247. The first part of the oratorio alone comprises a symphony and 12 choruses in direct succession.

7. For the libretto and the question of authorship, see Ruth Smith: *Handel's oratorios and eighteenth-century thought* (Cambridge, 1995), p.291; and Georg Friedrich Händel, ed. Annette Landgraf: *Israel in Egypt*, 2 vols. (Kassel, 1999), vol.1, pp.xxix–xxx.

8. The passage 'the stupid, senseless *Exceptions* that have been taken to [...] *this*, in particular, and the other *Oratorios* [...] from the *Place* they are exhibited in' appears only in the revised version of the letter dated 18 April [1739], in *LDP* no.1696, Tuesday 1 April 1740, pp.[1–2]. Deutsch erroneously identifies and dates the original paper as the *London Daily Post* of 18 April (*Handel*, p.482); it was published in *The Daily Advertiser* of the following day (see my essay 'Handel at the crossroads: new contributions on his 1738 and 1739 seasons', forthcoming in *Music & Letters*).

9. Edward Holdsworth to Charles Jennens, 21 February 1743; Smith: *Oratorios*, p.422, n.16.

10. See *The London Evening-Post* no.1777, Tuesday 3–Thursday 5 April 1739, p.[1]; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.479.

11. Katherine Knatchbull to James Harris [5 December 1738]; Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel's world*, p.66. For the innovative features of the work, see Burrows: *Handel*, pp.246–49; and Händel: *Israel*, pp.xxvi–xxvii.

oratorio, *Israel* comprises 'a vast span of largely undifferentiated choral music[, which] was beyond the scope of London's relatively impatient theatre audience.'⁶ In other words, one did not need to pay half a guinea to hear anthems at an opera house. *Israel's* textual content further compounded the problem. This was the first Handelian oratorio to use a substantial amount of biblical text.⁷ The onstage performance of a scriptural anthology naturally raised objections ('stupid, senseless *Exceptions*', according to a Handelian in 1740) in ecclesiastical circles.⁸ In 1743, *Messiah's* librettist Charles Jennens would be reminded of a certain cleric who in the past 'took offence at Exodus [i.e., *Israel in Egypt*]'.⁹ It is also possible that, in the charged political climate of early 1739, the story of a persecuted people could have invited anti-governmental readings.¹⁰

The above explanations consider the oratorio's music and text (and, by necessity, allude to Handel's poor decision-making), but they leave critical questions unanswered. For instance, how did opera goers know of *Israel's* problematic features ahead of the premiere? Advertisements hardly go beyond the title of the work and no open rehearsal was announced in the press. On the contrary, we *do* know that as early as Autumn 1738 Handel himself began touting those features of *Israel* that could easily fill his theatre: 'he says the storm of thunder is to be bold and fine, & the thick silent darkness is to be express'd in a very particular piece of musick.'¹¹ Word of mouth alone could have led many to the King's Theatre on 4 April. How can we explain the opposite outcome at *Israel's* premiere?

The poem

A possibility that has escaped serious attention, if only for a lack of sources, is that *Israel* suffered a boycott by anti-Handelian circles. This scenario emerges from a unique document, the *Advice to Mr. Handel* (fig.1).¹² Surviving in a single copy at Harvard's Houghton Library, it offers a poetical defence of *Israel in Egypt*.¹³ Its anonymous author claims that Handel became the target of a theatrical ambush organised by a character named 'the Fiend', whose predator tactics he decries, while comforting the artist.

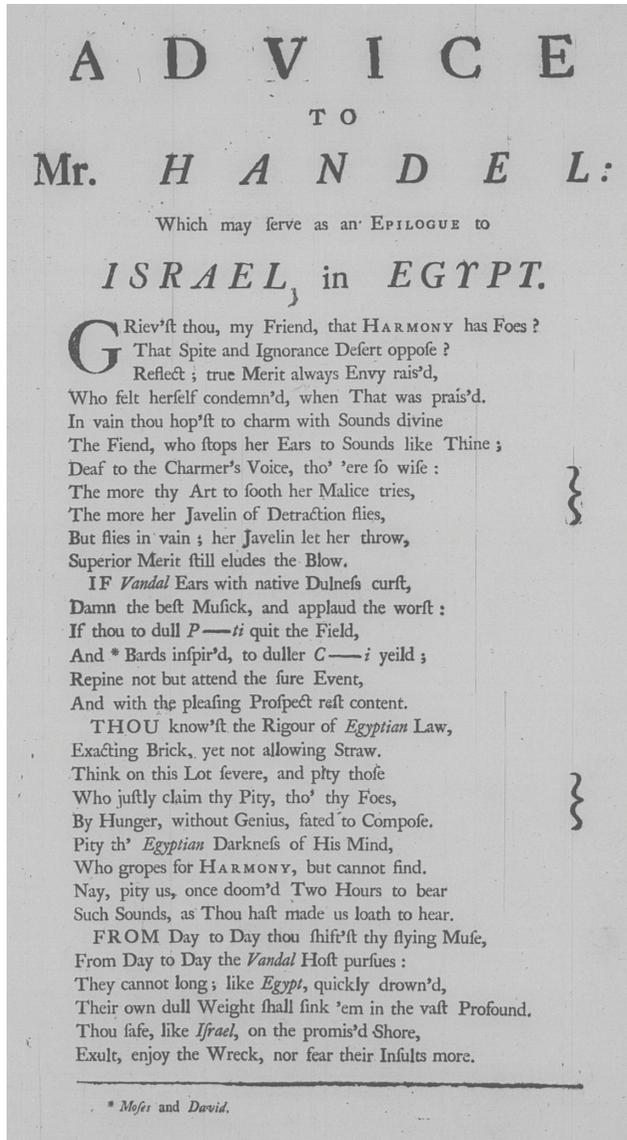
12. David Hunter: 'Advice to Mr. Handel', in *Newsletter of the American Handel Society* 12:3 (December 1997), pp.3, 6; as Hunter acknowledges, the poem is listed in two bibliographical sources: DF Foxon: *English verse 1701–1750: a catalogue of separately printed poems with notes on contemporary collected*

editions, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1975; 2nd printing, New Castle, Delaware & London, 2003), vol.1, p.9 (item A82), and in the *English short-title catalogue* (ESTCN1604).

13. US-CAh, *EB7. A100.739a; the document is also available in the

microfilm collection 'The eighteenth century' (Woodbridge, CT, 1985), reel 1013, no.5; and in the 'Eighteenth century collections online', Gale Group (<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>), Gale Document Number CW3324696057.

Fig. 1: *Advice to Mr. Handel*
(by permission of Houghton
Library, Harvard University)



Published by David Hunter in 1997, the poem has received little scrutiny so far. Its date of 1739 remains tentative (or at least a borderline); and there is no real discussion of its authorship. Still more, the identification of the 'Fiend' as Lady Margaret Brown is based on her notorious fame during the mid-1740s, half-a-decade after *Israel's* premiere. Given the absence of a detailed context, it is premature to claim as 'less likely that Israel [*sic*] itself was the particular occasion for the poem, but that its production offered the author of the broadsheet an opportunity to decry the actions of "The Fiend".'¹⁴ Even less secure is to use the *Advice* as 'evidence' of prejudice

14. Hunter: 'Advice', p.6.

15. David Hunter: 'Margaret Cecil, Lady Brown: "Persevering Enemy to Handel" but "Otherwise Unknown to History"', in *Women & Music* 3 (1999), pp.43–58.

16. On 26 July 1738, Heidegger announced that 'the Opera's for the ensuing Season at the King's Theatre in the Hay-Market, cannot be carried on as was intended, by Reason of the Subscription not being full [...] I therefore think myself oblig'd to declare, that I give up the Undertaking for next Year': *LDP* no.1167, Wednesday 26 July 1738, p.[1]; Deutsch: *Handel*, pp.464–65.

17. Robert D. Hume: 'Handel and opera management in London in the 1730s', in *Music & Letters* 67 (October 1986), pp.356–57. For an updated account of Handel's career in the 1730s, see Donald Burrows: 'Handel and the London opera companies in the 1730s: venues, programmes, patronage and performers', in *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 10 (2004), pp.149–65.

18. *The Daily Advertiser* no.2417, Monday 23 October 1738, p.[1]; not in Deutsch.

19. The first testimony of Handel's intentions appear in Charles Jennens's letter to Lord Guernsey, 19 September 1738: Deutsch: *Handel*, p.466. On 30 November, Thomas Harris wrote to his brother James that 'Mr Handell [...] intends to introduce into his performances several old instruments used in the time of K[ing] David':

against Lady Brown (thus reversing the poem's claim).¹⁵ In this essay, I present an historical frame for the *Advice*, and probe motives and actions surrounding its genesis. Revisiting London's theatrical scene in the spring of 1739, I offer new information about the poem's date and authorship, and establish Lady Brown as the closest match for the 'Fiend'. The document throws new light on the reception of *Israel in Egypt* – a thriller of sorts actually – and deepens our insight on Handel's faltering career in the late 1730s.

Dating an advice – Handel's season in 1739

The poem is undated, but its subtitle and content allude to events traceable in time, namely the disheartening reception of *Israel in Egypt*. Considering the oratorio's performances both in 1739 and in 1740, and the chronic frustration with the Fiend suggested in the poem ('ere so wise', 'The more', 'From Day to Day'), a thorough reexamining of Handel's 1739 season is needed before we accurately date the *Advice*. The following survey, which incorporates newly discovered or previously unused sources, situates the poem in the unique circumstances of that year.

With the collapse of Italian opera in summer 1738,¹⁶ Handel remained the only purveyor of quality music entertainment in London. Eager to shine in the absence of competition – let alone to recover after years of financial strain¹⁷ – he wrote in quick succession two oratorios, his first ones since 1733. He also booked a venue and fed acquaintances and the public with appetising details ('Mr. Handel will entertain the Town with several Oratorios [...] two Organs being fitting up at the Opera-House in the Hay-Market for that purpose').¹⁸ The innovative aspects of *Saul* and *Israel in Egypt* marked a new stage in the development of the genre. *Saul*'s monumentality and marvellous orchestral effects captured the attention of fashionable London.¹⁹ Enormously successful at the 16 January premiere,²⁰

Burrows & Dunhill: *Handel's world*, p.65. A more detailed description came from Katherine Knatchbull [5 December 1738]: *Handel's world*, p.66. To top his experiments in orchestration, Handel managed to borrow 'a pair of the largest kettle-drums in the Tower': Lord Wentworth to the Earl of Strafford, 13 January 1739, in James J. Cartwright, ed.: *The Wentworth Papers, 1705–1739* (London, 1883), p.543; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.472.

Following the premiere of *Saul*, William Kent reported 'some stops in the Harpsicord that are little bells, I thought it had been some squerrels in a cage': William Kent to Lord Burlington, 27 January 1739, in George Sherburn, ed.: *The correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1956), vol.4, p.163. For a comprehensive examination of this topic, see Ruth Smith: 'Early music's dramatic significance in Handel's *Saul*', in *Early Music* 35

(2007), pp.173–89.

20. Performed in the presence of the King and the Royal family, it 'met with general Applause by a numerous and splendid Audience': *LDP* no.1317, Wednesday 17 January 1739, p.[1]; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.473. According to Giambattista Gastaldi, it had attracted 'a prodigious concourse of people': letter to Prince Cantemir, 9 April 1739, in Lindgren: 'Zamboni', p.173.

the oratorio did not sustain its commercial drive for long.²¹ Within a month, Handel moved to older repertory.²²

Meanwhile, supporters of Italian Opera were hard at work to revive the genre. The return from Italy of young Lord Middlesex,²³ who had acquired fame as a producer of musical entertainments, must have galvanised their efforts. Within weeks, the press announced that ‘Signior Caristini, and other *Italian Strollers*, are expected over here in a few Days, when Opera’s will be perform’d at the Hay-Market.’²⁴ One of them was undoubtedly Signora La Muscovita, ‘a virtuosa supported by Mylord Middlesex’.²⁵ By 26 February plans for a production were set, though the venue changed to Covent Garden theatre: ‘a new Serenade compos’d by Signor Pescetti, will in a few Days be acted, in the same manner as an Opera, at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden; Part whereof will be perform’d by Signora Moscovita just arriv’d from Italy, by Signora Marchesina, and others.’²⁶ This was *Angelica e Medoro* by Giovanni Battista Pescetti and Angelo Maria Cori, the creative pair lambasted in the *Advice*.²⁷ La Muscovita’s participation aside, there is no evidence that Middlesex produced the work; indeed, Pescetti had been earmarked as house composer for the ‘Nobility’ opera a year ago.²⁸

Unstable enough, particularly on the vocal front,²⁹ *Angelica e Medoro* yielded a fleeting run of three nights (10, 17 and 24 March). Where it succeeded, however, was in derailing Handel’s season,³⁰ which already had shown symptoms of fatigue. The composer’s promised biweekly concerts (‘intends to entertain the Town twice every Week with Oratorios’³¹) never materialised and, furthermore, Handel exchanged Tuesday for Saturday after only two performances. With the premiere of *Angelica* scheduled also for a Saturday, he had no choice but to withdraw (the following two

21. A report from 14 February states that ‘*Saul*, a new oratorio, by Mr. Handel, has been perform’d twice [actually, four times], to splendid but thin audiences’: *The Scots Magazine* 1 (1739), p.89, not in Deutsch; and Giambattista Gastaldi recalled on 9 April that ‘the other evenings [of *Saul*] have been as bad as any that you have ever seen’: Lindgren: ‘Zamboni’, p.173. Lack of vocal talent had much to do with this outcome: ‘I observed at the *Oratorio of Saul*, and other of HANDEL’s compositions, that the great concern of the audience was that he had not voices capable of doing him right’: [Thomas] Cooke: *The Mournful Nuptials, or Love the Cure of all Woes, A Tragedy* (London, 1739), p.xiii; not in Deutsch.

22. He gave two performances of *Alexander’s Feast* (17 and 24 February), a reworking of his older Italian oratorio *Il trionfo del Tempo & della Verità* (3 March) and repeats of *Alexander’s Feast* and *Saul* (20 and 27 March).

23. ‘The Earl of Middlesex is arriv’d at Knowle in Kent from his Travels’: *LDP* no.1307, Friday 5 January 1739, p.[1]; not in Deutsch.

24. *The London Evening-Post* no.1746, Saturday 20–Tuesday 23 January 1739, p.[1]; not in Deutsch.

25. Giambattista Gastaldi to Prince Cantemir, 9 April 1739: Lindgren: ‘Zamboni’, p.173.

26. *LDP* no. 1351, Monday 26 February 1739, p.[2]; first reported in Charles Burney: *A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period [...]* Volume the Fourth (London, 1789), p.429.

27. [English title of the bilingual word-book:] *Angelica and Medorus. An Opera. Composed by John Baptist Pescetti. As performed at the Theatre Royal in Covent-Garden* (London, 1739); Cori’s name appears only in the dedication of the libretto. According to Burney, Pescetti’s style was ‘too meagre and simple for our ears, which had been

long accustomed to the rich food with which they had been fed by Handel’: Burney: *History* 4, p.540.

28. See my forthcoming ‘Handel at the crossroads’.

29. For Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni, the ‘abominable success’ of the work ‘was not because of the composition, which was generally approved, but because of the singers, who are insufferable’: Lindgren: ‘Zamboni’, p.172. Gastaldi also confirms that La Muscovita ‘sings out of tune’: Lindgren: ‘Zamboni’, p.173. The full cast is listed in the bilingual libretto:

‘Mrs. Lucia Panichi, call’d the *Muscovite*’ (*Angelica*); ‘Mrs. Antonia Marcesina, call’d *Lucchesina*’ (*Medoro*); ‘Mrs. Cecilia Arne’ (*Licora*); ‘Mr. Rochetti’ (*Thyrsis*); ‘Mr. Waltz’ (*Orlando*); and ‘Mr[.] Reinhold’ (*Titirus*) (*Pescetti: Angelica*, p.7).

30. John H. Roberts: ‘The story of Handel’s *Imeneo*’, in *Händel-Jahrbuch* 47 (2001), p.355.

31. *The Daily Advertiser* no.2475, Friday 29 December 1738, p.[1]; reprinted in Arthur H. Scouten, ed.: *The London stage, 1660–1800 [...]* Part 3 (Carbondale, 1961), p.751.

Tuesdays had been reserved for highly anticipated benefits).³² Vulnerable in the box office, he could not afford clashing performances with a staged production whose premiere enjoyed royal attendance.³³ (In a similar clash with Pescetti's *Demetrio* [1737], Handel had sought refuge in Lenten Wednesdays and Fridays.³⁴) Not only was he pushed out of the Saturday slot, but his pattern of weekly presentations also collapsed. An interval of two-and-a-half weeks would pass before his next performance, *Alexander's Feast*, on Tuesday 20 March. This, however, was 'for the Benefit of a Fund establish'd for the Support of decay'd Musicians and their Families', with Handel having had 'generously given the Use of the Opera-House.'³⁵ (Curiously, his first commercial performance since 3 March, a revival of *Saul* on 27 March, coincided with a theatrical benefit 'At the particular Desire of several Ladies of Quality.'³⁶ In other words, by April, Handel had 'lost' three performances because of *Angelica e Medoro*, Pescetti and Cori, and whoever sponsored their scheme. The toll on his finances must have been heavy: on 28 March, he withdrew the last £50 from his checking account at the Bank of England (a war chest of £2300 in 1732).³⁷

The premiere of *Israel in Egypt* was critical, then, for the stability (perhaps even continuation) of Handel's season. The subject matter and structure of the oratorio limited its commercial appeal to the weeks before Easter. In the context of Handel's weekly performances, *Israel* had most likely three to four shots to make money (the weeks of 2, 9 and 16 April). Its disappointing premiere (4 April) made Handel's second attempt even more urgent. Exactly at this moment, on 6 April, the *London Daily Post* announced that *Angelica e Medoro* would be revived as an oratorio on 11 April. Only a table can capture something of the heated race that followed. A casual reading of fig.2 indicates that *Israel's* revival was a response to that of *Angelica*, thus contradicting the claims in the *Advice*. This is exactly the suggestion that would have enraged a Handelian and motivated the writing of the poem. Documentary records are by nature incomplete, being traces of past actions and events; without proper context (i.e., knowledge about the participants' history, behavioural patterns, and motivation), they can lead to partial or even erroneous conclusions. Only by considering the options of the two competitors can we arrive at the heart of truth here.

The announcement of 6 April came after two weeks of silence from the opera party (*Angelica's* last performance was on 24 March) but just over a day after *Israel's* disappointing premiere. Even if this was coincidental, an operatic production like *Angelica* should be offered on a Tuesday or a Saturday. The decision to perform it without staging is curious, to say the least: eliminating visual representation would have exposed its modest vocal talent thus further restricting its commercial appeal. What makes the decision suspicious is, however, its subject matter. A pastoral on 'Angelica's

32. Tuesday 13 March was Mrs Clive's benefit in Drury Lane theatre 'By Command of their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of WALES'; and Tuesday 20 March was reserved for the annual Musicians Fund benefit: *LDP* for the respective dates, both on p.[1].

33. 'Angelica and Medora [...] has been honour'd with his Majesty's Royal presence': *The Scots Magazine* 1 (1739), p.132. Interestingly, the headline 'By HIS MAJESTY'S COMMAND' in the production's advertisements appeared only the day of the premiere: *LDP* no.1362, Saturday 10 March 1739, p.[1].

34. Burney: *History* 4, p.403.

35. *LDP* no.1358, Tuesday 6 March 1739, p.[1]; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.477.

36. *LDP* no.1376, Tuesday 27 March 1739, p.[1].

37. Ellen T. Harris: 'Handel the investor', in *Music & Letters* 85 (2004), pp.538–39, 565. According to John Hawkins, 'At the time of his contest with the nobility he had ten thousand pounds in the funds, and of this he sold out the last shilling, and lived upon his pensions': *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 5 vols. (London, 1776), vol.5, p.411.

Fig.2: The *Israel-Angelica* publicity 'race' in April 1739

[Wed. 4	<i>Israel in Egypt</i> premiere]
Fri. 6	<i>Angelica e Medoro</i> (hitherto a 'Pastoral opera') is advertised for 11 April as 'Serenata' presumably to evade theatrical prohibitions during Lent ³⁸
Sat. 7	Handel advertises <i>Israel in Egypt</i> for 11 April 'With Alterations and Additions, and the two last new Concerto's on the Organ./ (<i>Being the last Time of performing it.</i>)'; the two ads are juxtaposed, <i>Israel</i> appearing on top
Mon. 9	juxtaposed ads; addition for <i>Angelica</i> : 'With a new Interlude, call'd L'ASILIO D'AMORE.'
Tue. 10	juxtaposed ads; addition for <i>Israel</i> : 'Which will be shortned and Intermix'd with Songs.' ³⁹
Wed. 11	juxtaposed ads; addition for <i>Angelica</i> : '(<i>Being the last Time of performing it this Season.</i>)' ⁴⁰

38. '[B]eing on a Wednesday in Lent, the piece was called a *serenata*, and probably performed as an oratorio, without action': Burney: *History 4*, p.430.

39. The additions were actually some recycled arias for soprano, which are reproduced in Händel: *Israel*, vol.2, pp.413–54.

40. Compiled from the respective issues of *LDP*; all advertisements appear on the front page.

41. Pescetti: *Angelica*, p.6.

42. Deutsch: *Handel*, p.479; Händel: *Israel*, vol.1, p.xxv; Pescetti: *Angelica*, p.7.

43. *Angelica*'s first advertisement had appeared on a Handel performance day (Saturday), before he was able to announce his next concert: *LDP* no.1356, Saturday 3 March 1739, p.[1]; see fig.1.

becoming enamoured of Medorus, and the excessive passion Orlando had for that princess, for whom he, at length, lost his senses',⁴¹ exacerbated with an afterpiece titled *L'Asilio d'Amore*, were the least expected material for a Lenten Wednesday. Everything about this revival seems contrived and out of context, as if a hidden purpose (say ambushing Handel) overrode theatrical common sense. By contrast, Handel's expected choice for the repeat of *Israel* was 11 April: a ban on theatrical performances on Lenten Wednesdays protected non-staged oratorios from competition, and the composer needed a break from rivalries and poorly attended concerts. The sponsors of *Angelica* could easily have known his moves a day in advance from Reinhold and Waltz, who sang in both productions.⁴² Besides, Handel's regular advertising pattern made Saturday 7 April a safe guess for the announcement of *Israel*'s next performance (fig.3).

Preemptive action generates temporal confusion, as the line between cause and effect becomes ambiguous. A sight reading of the advertisements above can be misleading unless we understand the background and motivation of the two rivals. The reconstruction of events proposed here helps, at the very least, to explain the content and language of the *Advice to Mr. Handel*. For its author, who certainly knew more about the event than we can recover from a few documents, *Angelica*'s resurrection aimed at Handel and *Israel*. It was an attack against the composer, forcing him either to abort in humiliation the Wednesday performance (what very likely had happened with *Angelica*'s premiere⁴³); or to clash with a production that would inevitably damage his box office. In either case, Handel would lose, especially because Reinhold

Fig. 3: Handel's season in 1739

<i>First advertisement</i>	<i>Performance</i>	<i>Interval</i> (Sunday excluded)	<i>King's Theatre</i>	<i>Covent Garden Theatre</i>
	Monday 8 January		<i>Saul</i> (public rehearsal)	
Tuesday 9 January	Tuesday 16 January	6	<i>Saul</i> (season premiere)	
Saturday 20 January	Tuesday 23 January	2	<i>Saul</i>	
Wednesday 31 January	Saturday 3 February	3	<i>Saul</i>	
Wednesday 7 February	Saturday 10 February	3	<i>Saul</i>	
Wednesday 14 February	Saturday 17 February	3	<i>Alexander's Feast</i>	
Wednesday 21 February	Saturday 24 February	3	<i>Alexander's Feast</i>	
Wednesday 28 February	Saturday 3 March	3	<i>Il trionfo del Tempo & della Verita</i>	
Saturday 3 March	Saturday 10 March	6		<i>Angelica</i>
Tuesday 13 March	Saturday 17 March	4		<i>Angelica</i>
Saturday 10 March	Tuesday 20 March	8	<i>Alexander's Feast</i> (benefit)	
Wednesday 21 March	Saturday 24 March	3		<i>Angelica</i>
Friday 23 March	Tuesday 27 March	3	<i>Saul</i>	
Saturday 31 March	Wednesday 4 April	3	<i>Israel in Egypt</i> (premiere)	
Saturday 7 / Friday 6 April	Wednesday 11 April	3 / 4	<i>Israel in Egypt</i>	<i>Angelica</i>
Saturday 14 April (news) Monday 16 April (advert)	Tuesday 17 April	2	<i>Israel in Egypt</i>	
Wednesday 18 April (<i>Israel in Egypt</i>)	Thursday 19 April	1	<i>Saul</i> ['not ISRAEL in EGYPT (as by Mistake was advertised)']	
Thursday 26 April	Tuesday 1 May	4	<i>Jupiter in Argos</i>	
Wednesday 2 May	Saturday 5 May	3	<i>Jupiter in Argos</i>	

and Waltz, two of his soloists, were also performing in *Angelica e Medoro*.⁴⁴ The opera party was determined to follow Handel even in the harbour of a Lenten Wednesday and ambush him at any cost. This explains the lines ‘FROM Day to Day thou shif’st thy flying Muse,/From Day to Day the *Vandal* Host pursues’. It was classic guerrilla warfare.

Once we realise the brewing tension towards 11 April, mapping the *Advice to Mr. Handel* in time becomes an easier task. The poem was undoubtedly composed in early April 1739. Its tone of rage and desolation fully matches the events described above. Still more, this was the only instance in 1739 when Handel might possibly have ‘to dull *P[escet]ti* quit the Field’. Triggered by an evident effort to knock out *Israel in Egypt*, the poem could date any time from 6 April (first announcement of *Angelica*’s revival) to 11 April. The ‘Epilogue’ in the subtitle certainly captures a moment of deep anxiety and low morale among Handelian. By 12 April, on the contrary, they were active in lobbying for a third performance of the oratorio.⁴⁵ Its unpredicted success on 17 April rendered the *Advice to Mr. Handel* obsolete, and hence unnecessary to circulate in public. And if its strong content may serve as an indication, no one must have been happier to suppress it than its author.

44. See Roberts: ‘*Imeneo*’, p.355. We do not know which of the rival performances on 11 April featured Waltz and Reinhold. In the absence of evidence about their contractual obligations and given that *Israel in Egypt* has just a single number for solo bassi (the later popular duet ‘The Lord is a man of war’), it would certainly have been more profitable for them to appear in *Angelica*. Waltz, for one, who had performed the lead character in *Saul* (Deutsch: *Handel*, p.473), must have felt disappointed with his restricted participation in *Israel*.

45. *LDP* no. 1391, Friday 13 April 1739, p.[2]; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.480.

46. See his letter to James Harris, 26 April 1737: Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel’s world*, p.26.

47. James Harris to the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury, 5 May 1737: Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel’s world*, p.28.

A motivated advisor

No information survives about the poem’s creator, which is enough for the defeatist scholar to abandon the subject. Yet the attribution of authorship for 18th-century ephemera always has been a difficult but not impossible task. In this case, there is data unused and even textual links that make the quest worthwhile. For the strongly politicised culture of the era, one would not have taken the pen – still more have engaged a typesetter – for a cause to which he was not deeply committed. We know of several Handelian who had the means and desire to protect the composer’s interests. In 1737, for instance, the 4th Earl of Shaftesbury had lobbied to grant lifelong copyright to authors and composers.⁴⁶ Lords Hervey and Delawar, presumably for personal reasons, managed to kill the ‘Author’s Bill’ in Parliament, causing James Harris to bemoan: ‘Tis a bad proof w[ha]t remains of Gothic barbarity we have still amongst us that the Bill should have been opposed on account of Mr Pope & Handel.’⁴⁷ Charles Jennens could have been another candidate: as the author of *Saul* and most likely compiler of *Israel*’s libretto, he had the strongest motivation to defend Handel in 1739. The image of the ‘Fiend’ throwing her Javelin certainly recalls Saul’s attempt against David (Act 1, Scene 5), but the oratorio was successful enough for others to have picked up the same representation. Both Shaftesbury and Jennens were members of the James Harris circle, which also included James’s brothers Thomas

and George. In November 1744, the latter would paraphrase Psalm 58 to describe a similar crisis in Handel's career: 'to charm the deaf adder, let the charmer charm never so wisely',⁴⁸ which reminds of the Fiend's portrayal as one 'who stops her Ears to Sounds like Thine;/Deaf to the Charmer's Voice, tho' 'ere so wise'. Harris, of course, was not the only Handelian with a theological background; he could just have been one of the few readers of the *Advice*.

Among potential authors, I would single out Newburgh Hamilton. In 1736, he had arranged the text of *Alexander's Feast*, the most successful of Handel's non-operatic works, and later he would produce the librettos of *Samson* (1741), the *Occasional Oratorio* (1746),⁴⁹ and possibly *Joshua* (1747).⁵⁰ The author of the *Advice* has dramaturgical interests – and probably experience, too. For he uses the subtitle 'an EPILOGUE' in more than a metaphorical sense. In contemporary theatre, the Epilogue was supposed to transfer the viewer from the stage's fictional world to the reality of the auditorium. As the play concluded, one of the actors would remain on stage and deliver this monologue, commenting and moralising on the plot. In similar fashion, the ending of the *Advice* consoles Handel by mapping the Exodus story onto his misfortunes: 'They cannot long; like *Egypt*, quickly drown'd,/[...]/Thou safe, like *Israel*, on the promis'd Shore'. Hamilton was not only familiar with the world of theatre, but had also had a short career as a playwright in the mid and late 1710s: two of his comedies – *The Doating Lovers: or, The Libertine Tam'd* (1715),⁵¹ and *The Petticoat-Plotter* (1720)⁵² – had been performed at Lincoln's-Inn-Fields and Drury Lane theatres.

Hamilton's candidacy gains more weight through textual evidence. Just weeks before the premiere of *Israel in Egypt*, he had prefaced the second edition of *Alexander's Feast's* wordbook (for the work's forthcoming revival) with a dedicatory poem.⁵³ Like the 'ADVICE TO Mr. HANDEL', this poem was titled 'TO Mr. HANDEL'. Both conclude in Handelian triumph:

Thou safe, like *Israel*, on the promis'd Shore,/Exult,
Whilst fam'd Timotheus yields to you the Prize.

Observe also the similar vocabulary used to describe opposition to Handel:

That Spite and Ignorance Desert oppose?
Reflect; true Merit always Envy rais'd,
That Ignorance and Envy vanquish'd see.

Moreover, the structure and tone of familiarity of the first line in the *Advice*

48. George Harris to James Harris, 6 November 1744: Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.203.

49. 'Handel has made a new oratorio of words of Miltons [sic] Psalms & Spencer putt together by Hamilton with something of his own': Thomas Harris to James Harris, 6 February 1746: Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.222.

50. See Smith: *Oratorios*, p.410, n.1.

51. [Newburgh Hamilton]: *The Doating Lovers: or, The Libertine Tam'd. A Comedy* (London, 1715); this was Hamilton's first play, as he himself acknowledges: 'I might here plead the common Excuse of a young Beginner' ('Dedication', p.[iii]).

52. [Newburgh Hamilton]:

The Petticoat-Plotter; A Farce of Two Acts (London, 1720); according to Hamilton the play 'has appear'd upon the Stage several Years ago, and since it's [sic] first

Appearance has been often acted at both Theaters' ('Preface', pp.[i-ii]).

53. [John Dryden]: *Alexander's Feast; Or, The*

Power of Musick. An Ode. Wrote in Honour of St. Cecilia, by Mr. Dryden. Set to Musick by Mr. Handel (London, 1739), pp.[5]-6; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.476.

resemble the beginning of the second stanza in Hamilton's piece:

GRIev'st thou, my Friend, that HARMONY has Foes?
*Be ever Your's (my Friend) the God-like Art.*⁵⁴

A letter of Hamilton to the Earl of Strafford from early 1738, detailing a royal quarrel over Handel's services, 'gives the clearest proof of the closeness of his contact with Handel'.⁵⁵ In fact, Hamilton would be one of the beneficiaries in Handel's will.⁵⁶

These connections become even stronger in light of Hamilton's documented enthusiasm for Handel: 'we are to be so happy, to goe to the opera next Tuesday [*sic*]', Lucy Wentworth wrote on 7 January 1738; 'tis mightily liked, twas so applauded that Mr Hamilton who would not doe less than another body, when Mr Handel was in ye [?] Cass, clap'd till his arms aked.'⁵⁷ And we should remember that Hamilton would be the first to publicly decry Handelian opposition in 1743: 'As we have so great a Genius among us, it is a pity that so many mean Artifices have been lately us'd to blast all his Endeavours, and in him ruin the ART itself.'⁵⁸ While not proving his authorship, these observations are weighty enough to create an aura of plausibility and even offer him an edge over other potential candidates. Hamilton, moreover, would have had a strong reason to suppress his authorship, had the 'Fiend' in the poem been a certain London socialite.

A lordly Lady: revisiting Margaret Cecil Brown

Unlike the specific references to Pescetti and Cori, the first part of the *Advice* alludes to a pseudonymous individual as the culprit for Handel's woes.⁵⁹ The poem's militant tone and the events I have already described suggest that this was a living person rather than an allegorical figure. Contextual evidence points heavily towards Lady Brown, *née* Margaret Cecil.

The author clearly understands the 'Fiend' as a female character ('her Ears', 'her Malice') possessing strong authority and power (the line 'her Javelin let her throw' invites a comparison with Saul). From a letter dated 15 March 1739, we know that 'Some ladies, in addition to vigorously instigating an operatic subscription for next year, are attempting to implement something for the remainder of the present season.'⁶⁰ Lady Brown must have been one of them: her leading role in the subscription drive for 1738–39⁶¹ made her participation more than desirable, and its embarrassing failure motivated her to succeed this time. Besides, she had a long and rich history of attachment to Italian Opera. As the wife of banker and 'his Majesty's

54. 'the warmth of his [i.e., Hamilton's] feeling for the man and the composer, which repeatedly strikes the reader of these [i.e., Wentworth] letters, amply justifies his apostrophizing of Handel as "my friend" in the prefatory poem to *Alexander's Feast*': Ruth Loewenthal [= Smith]: 'Handel and Newburgh Hamilton: new references in the Strafford papers', in *The Musical Times* 112 (1971), p.1065.

55. Loewenthal [= Smith]: 'Hamilton', p.1066.

56. 'The First Codicil to Handel's Will, 6th August 1756', in Ellen T. Harris: 'Handel and his will', in Donald Burrows, ed.: *Handel's will: facsimiles and commentary* (London, 2009), p.14; facs. in pp.39–40.

57. Lucy Wentworth to Lord Strafford, 7 January 1738: Loewenthal [= Smith]: 'Hamilton', p.1065.

58. [Newburgh Hamilton]: *Samson. An Oratorio. As it is Perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden. Alter'd and adapted to the Stage from the Samson Agonistes of John Milton. Set to Musick by George Frederick Handel* (London, 1743), p.[iv]; partially reprinted in Deutsch: *Handel*, p.559.

59. The last paragraph refers to all three in the plural, thus allowing their comparison with the multitude of pursuing Egyptians.

60. Gio. Giacomo Zamboni

to Prince Cantemir, 15/26 March 1739, in Lindgren, 'Zamboni', p.172.

61. Carole Taylor: 'From losses to lawsuit: patronage of the Italian opera in

London by Lord Middlesex, 1739–45', in *Music & Letters* 68 (1987), p.2.

62. LDP no.67, Monday 20 January 1735], p.[2]; *The Country Journal: Or, The Craftsman* no.447, Saturday 25 January 1735, p.[2]; see also, *The English Baronetage*, 4 vols. (London, 1741), vol.4, p.235; John Chamberlayne: *Magna Britanniae Notitia: Or, The Present State of Great Britain. [Part II] A General List, or Catalogue, of all the Offices and Officers employed in the several Branches of His Majesty's Government* (London, 1735), p.[265]. Brown is listed as resident also in the 1736 edition of the latter publication. Although his appointment is acknowledged in the *Oxford dictionary of national biography* (vol.8, p.105) in 2004, the online version of the entry (May 2007) states 'there is no evidence that [...] he held the office of British resident in the republic.' The confusion is owing possibly to multiple royal appointments to Venice. In 1727–28, for example, George II renewed the appointments of Elizeus Burges as 'Resident to the Republick of Venice' and of Neil Brown as Consul: *The London Gazette* no.6621, Saturday 4–Tuesday 7 November 1727, p.[1]; no.6646, Tuesday 30 January–Saturday 3 February 1728], p.[1]. I thank Eleanor Selfridge-Field for consultations on this matter.

63. Lord Chesterfield to his son, 19 April 1749: *Letters written by the late Right Honourable Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield, to His Son, Philip Stanhope, Esq.*, 2 vols. (London, 1774), vol.1, p.407.

64. Margaret Brown to [Thomas Coke], 3 August 1725: *The Manuscripts of the*

Resident with the Republick of Venice' Sir Robert Brown[e],⁶² Margaret had spent a full decade in a country where 'singing, fiddling, and piping, are not only the common topics of conversation, but almost the principal objects of attention.'⁶³ In 1725, she was lamenting Faustina's departure: 'I suppose you know that you are to have opera in great perfection next winter, and to our loss, for Mr. Sweng has agreed with the Faustina to go to England.'⁶⁴ It was likely in Venice that she also came to know Farinelli,⁶⁵ whose arrival in London would coincide with the Browns' repatriation.⁶⁶ Settling in the metropolis, Margaret became a leading patroness of Italian Opera. In late 1737, Prince Cantemir advised a friend 'When you speak of Caffarielli with her, tell her, if you please, much that is good, for he is her favourite.'⁶⁷ Her patronage of all things Italian would reach a peak in the mid-1740s with her Sunday soirées, 'the great mart for all travelling and travelled calves [i.e., Italian singers and visitors].'⁶⁸ This strong partisanship, however, would generate complaints: 'Lady Brown and such fine Italian ladeys [*sic*], will bear nothing but Italian singers, and composers', wrote the 4th Earl of Radnor.⁶⁹ And Charles Jennens mentioned 'a certain Anglo-Venetian Lady' spearheading opposition to Handel⁷⁰ (the Venetian ambassador frequented her house⁷¹). The description of the 'Fiend' as having '*Vandal Ears with native Dulness curst*' fits well her Anglo-Italian profile.⁷²

Earl Cowper, 3 vols. (London, 1889), vol.3, p.129.

65. Hunter: 'Brown', pp.44–46.

66. On 18 January 1735, OS, Robert Brown was leaving Paris along with Lord Essex and other MPs for the opening of the Parliament: *The Daily Journal* no.4371, Thursday 16 January 1735, p.[1]; he reached London in mid-January: LDP no.67, Monday 20 January 1735], p.[2].

67. Prince Cantemir to Marchioness Monconseil, 3 November 1737: Lindgren: 'Zamboni', p.169.

68. Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, Sunday 13 February 1743: WS Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith & George L. Lam, ed.: *Horace Walpole's correspondence with Sir Horace*

Mann, II (New Haven & London, 1954), p.166. See also Vincenzo Martinelli: *Lettere Familiari e Critiche* (London, 1758), pp.10, 13.

69. Letter to [James Harris], 6 November [1744]: Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.204.

70. Charles Jennens to Edward Holdsworth, 21 February 1745: Walter Eisen & Margret Eisen, ed.: *Händel Handbuch, Band 4: Dokumente zu Leben und Schaffen* (Kassel, Basel & London, 1985), p.386.

71. Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, Monday 11 June 1744: *Horace Walpole's correspondence with Sir Horace Mann II*, p.459.

72. 'Vandals' and 'Goths' were common allusions to declining theatrical standards ('Now Dullness re-asserts

her ancient Right, / And pours her *Goths and Vandals* to the Fight': *Of the Use and Improvement of the Stage. An Epistle to Charles Fleetwood, Esq* [London, 1737], p.8) and were regularly used by Handelians for the Nobility Opera ('Handel's agreement with the Goths' [11 June 1737], in Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.31). In certain cases, they also incorporated geographical references. In 1736, for instance, opera director Lord Delawar 'had been sent to Gotha as the King's representative to collect Princess Augusta and bring her back to London for the marriage to the Prince of Wales [...] "Goths" clearly had a double reference to Gotha and to the "Gothic barbarity" that had contributed to the downfall of the Roman empire': Burrows: 'London opera companies in the

1730s', p.161, and n.45. Similarly, the italicising of only personal ('Pescetti' and 'Cori') and ethnic/geographic ('Israel' and 'Egypt') names in the *Advice* might suggest that 'Vandal' spills over its metaphorical sense. According to contemporary definition, Vandals were 'an antient People of *Scandinavia*, as also *Germany*, famous for their remarkable Conquest even to the Subversion of the *Roman Empire*' (N. Bailey: *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary*, 5th edition [London, 1731], no pagination). Like them, Lady Brown moved from northern Europe down to Italy ('having a great curiosity to see a place I have heard and read so much of': Margaret Cecil to Thomas Coke, 16 March 1725: *Cowper* 3, p.127) by way of conquering the heart of Robert Brown, a wealthy merchant in Venice ('Mr. Brown has money in private hands in Venice, that he says would be difficult to get without his being there': Margaret Cecil to Thomas Coke, 16 March 1725: *Cowper* 3, p.127). Venice had emerged after the fall of the Roman Empire and because of the descent of Germanic tribes. Knowledgeable people would have little trouble putting together these connotations and map 'Vandal Ears' directly onto Lady Brown.

73. Margaret Cecil to Thomas Coke, 13 February 1725: *Cowper* 3, p.125.

74. Margaret Cecil to

The *Advice* also describes Handel's pursuer as wicked and obsessive ('The Fiend, who stops her Ears to Sounds like Thine; Deaf to the Charmer's Voice'). All available documentation from the 1730s and 1740s show Lady Brown to be a willful, calculating, and arrogant person. Born to the powerful Cecils, Margaret naturally expected the best in her life. Financial problems, however, led her to Paris in search of a wealthy husband: 'my fortune is not so well as you imagine, having been obliged to lessen it by paying part of what my uncle Cecil left me to persons I had long been indebted to.'⁷³ By the end of 1724, she was still unsuccessful: 'I have not yet been able to touch the heart of a Marquis. But I shall not quite despair, till I have tried my fortune in a white curled tower stuck with flowers, which is worn here with great success.'⁷⁴ The breakthrough came in a marriage proposal by Robert Brown, who, according to her brother, 'has more than forty thousand pounds in the funds in England, besides some effects of considerable value in Italy.'⁷⁵ As Margaret herself estimated, 'was Mr. Brown to die, the third of his fortune which would then be mine would be much more than I shall have otherwise.'⁷⁶

Venice was an ideal city for Mrs. Brown. Her fondness for spectacles nearly cost her a pregnancy: 'My curiosity carried me to the top of St. Mark's Church on Christmas Eve to see the ceremony there, and the many stairs I went up was not very suitable to a gentlewoman in my then sad circumstances: so that I was taken ill as soon as I came home.'⁷⁷ In fact, at 'about four in the morning [she was] brought to bed.'⁷⁸ It was a premature birth. Thanks to her husband's position, Margaret developed a strong interest in politics. In 1734, she confessed to Lord Essex that 'if Lady Essex and I, had been of the Conference at Vienna, I believe we should have given fewer Pensions to the Spaniards, and others, and apply'd that money to maintain in Italy the Troops that would have been sufficient for the preservation of more Countreys [*sic*]. your [*sic*] Lords^p sees what a great Politician I am.'⁷⁹ Returning to London in 1735 as Lady Brown (her husband had been created Baronet on 11 March 1732⁸⁰), she acquired a reputation as a calculating and opinionated person: 'Lady Brown is become a great friend of Madam Walmuds [i.e., George II's mistress] [...] she is one thought to study her own interest as cleverly as any one.'⁸¹ An assertive and headstrong lady of

Thomas Coke, 15 December 1724: *Cowper* 3, p.124.

75. Charles Cecil to Thomas Coke, 18 January 1725: *Cowper* 3, p.125.

76. Margaret Cecil to Thomas Coke, 16 March 1725: *Cowper* 3, p.127.

77. Margaret Brown to [Thomas Coke], 12 April 1726: *Cowper* 3, p.130.

78. Charles Cecil to Thomas Coke, 28 December 1725: *Cowper* 3, p.130.

79. Lady Brown to Lord Essex, 3 April 1734: BL,

Add.27733, fol.47v.

80. *English Baronetage*, vol.4, p.235.

81. Katherine Knatchbull to James Harris, [22 November 1739]: Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel's world*, p.79.

82. The humiliations these artists/intellectuals suffered by British aristocrats are evident in the following episode: 'last week [Catherine, Duchess Dowager of Buckingham] sent for Cori, to pay him for her opera ticket; he was not at home, but went in an hour afterwards. She said, did he treat her like a tradeswoman? She would teach him respect to women of her birth [...] and bad him come the next morning at nine. He came, and she made him wait till eight at night, only sending him an omelet and a bottle of wine, and said, as it was Friday, and he a Catholic, she supposed he did not eat meat. At last she received him in all the form of a princess giving audience to an ambassador: "Now," she said, "she had punished him": Horace Walpole to Horace Mann, Thursday 24 December 1741, in WS Lewis, Warren Hunting Smith & George L. Lam, ed.: *Horace Walpole's correspondence with Sir Horace Mann I* (New Haven & London, 1954), p.254.

83. Mrs Donnellan to Elizabeth Montagu, 9 April 1740: US-SM, MO 744 (Box 2) 2r; Emily J. Climençon, ed.: *Elizabeth Montagu: The queen of the Blue-Stockings: Her correspondence from 1720 to 1761*, 2 vols. (New York, 1906), vol.1, p.44; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.500. Her bluntness finds confirmation also in a handwritten note by Horace Walpole: 'One day that [Lady Townshend] was very severe on the royal family, Margaret Cecil Lady Brown said to her, "Lady Townshend, it was very well, while you was [sic] only affected; but now that you are disaffected, it is intolerable"',

distinction would have had little problems imposing her will on submissive characters like Pescetti and Cori.⁸² A year later, Anne Donellan would comment on 'the fine lady, who admires & hates to excess, she doats on the dear little boy, that dances, she detests Handels Oratorios'.⁸³ The reference is generally understood to target Lady Brown. It certainly matches similar ones from the 1740s:

In Fashions fly not first, nor halt the last,
Alike they err, who go too slow or fast;
Nor strive t' impose your Judgment on the Town,
Nor head a Party, like my Lady B----⁸⁴

There are two details suggesting Brown's leading role in the production of *Angelica e Medoro*. First, the topic had special meaning for close friends of Farinelli like Margaret. The original production of 1722, set by Porpora, had launched the singer's career ('Metastasio and Farinello plucked the first laurels of their immortal fame').⁸⁵ At a time of post-Farinelli depression in London ('nothing will go down after Farinello'⁸⁶) exacerbated by failure to revive Italian Opera, *Angelica* was a good omen and, presumably, evoked the regenerative properties of the original production, which had delivered the miracle of Farinelli to the world. This would help account for the second detail, the libretto's dedication to 'THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE Lady MARGARET CECIL'.⁸⁷ The youngest daughter of James Cecil, 5th Earl of Salisbury, she was Lady Brown's first cousin.⁸⁸ She was also 15, and for a woman so young a 326-word dedication – and one that concludes 'I am writing to a Lady whom all admire, yet none dare acquaint how much she commands our veneration' – has little conviction.⁸⁹ We do know that Cori typically addressed his dedications to dignitaries from whom he had derived personal benefit.⁹⁰ It may also be likely that he offered Italian lessons to young

in Horace Walpole, ed. John Brooke: *Memoirs of King George II*, 3 vols. (New Haven & London, 1985), vol.3, pp.58–59n.

84. *Plain Truth: A Satire* (London, 1747), p.10.

85. See 'Broschi (Carlo)', in *A New and General Biographical Dictionary. Vol. III* (London, 1798), p.100; also, Giovenale Sacchi: *Vita del Cavaliere Don Carlo Broschi* (Vinegia, 1784), p.8; and Charles Burney: *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Abate Metastasio. In which are Incorporated, Translations*

of his Principal Letters, 3 vols. (London, 1796), vol.1, pp.26n, and 194.

86. The 4th Earl of Shaftesbury to James Harris, 2 November 1737: Burrows & Dunhill, ed.: *Handel's world*, p.38.

87. Pescetti: *Angelica*, pp.2, 5.

88. Arthur Collins: *The Peerage of England*, 3rd edition, 6 vols. (London, 1756), vol.2, p.185. Lady Brown's father, Robert Cecil, was the younger brother of James; for the genealogical tree of the

Cecils, see Alexander Jacob: *A Complete English Peerage*, 2 vols. (London, 1766), vol.1, pp.492/493.

89. Pescetti: *Angelica*, p.5.

90. Of the eight dedications Cori signed in the years 1735–38, five were addressed to noblewomen he had either taught Italian or received patronage from: Xavier Cervantes: 'History and sociology of the Italian opera in London (1705–45): the evidence of the printed librettos', in *Studi musicali* 27 (1998), p.354, n.38.

91. In his copy of Chesterfield's letters, Horace Walpole annotates the phrase 'Pray make my compliments to Lady Brown' with 'Margaret Cecil wife of Sr Rob. Brown': *Letters*, vol.2, p.200 [in Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University].

92. The arrival of Lord Middlesex, who was young, enthusiastic, and strong-willed, might have created tension with old-timers like Brown (she would not subscribe to his first season in 1739–40). Interestingly, Zamboni's correspondence, a major source on operatic affairs at this time, is silent on Middlesex, and the arrival of Carestini is linked to 'Some ladies': Gio. Giacomo Zamboni to Prince Cantemir, 15/26 March 1739; Lindgren: 'Zamboni', p.172.

93. See Robert D. Hume: *Henry Fielding and the London theatre, 1728–1737* (Oxford, 1988), pp.240, 249.

94. For the political connection between *Gustavus Vasa* and *Israel in Egypt*, see Smith: *Oratorios*, pp.289–90; and Ilias Chrissochoidis: *Early reception of Handel's oratorios, 1732–1784: narrative – studies – documents*, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor, 2004 [Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2004]), pp.129–31. 'Yesterday during the Rehearsal of the New Tragedy, call'd *Edward and Eleonora*, at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden, an Order came from the Lord Chamberlain, forbidding the Representation of the said Play': *LDP* no.1377, Wednesday 28 March 1739, p.[1].

Margaret Cecil. On the other hand, his extensive reference to 'the illustrious character of your ancestors' and their 'wisdom, humanity, courage, probity, and public spirit, as well as [...] beauty, candour, charity, affability, and universal benevolence' shifts attention to her family, a member of which Lady Brown was (even after her marriage to Brown she was still known as Margaret Cecil).⁹¹ At a time when she was actively promoting Italian opera in London, Cori's dedication was more than hinting at her without openly acknowledging her role in *Angelica e Medoro*.⁹² To put it otherwise, Lady Brown was emotionally involved in the production and, very likely, had a significant role in decision-making, such as reviving *Angelica* as an oratorio against *Israel in Egypt* on 11 April 1739.

The mask of allegory

But why all these cryptic and generic allusions to the 'fine lady' or the 'Fiend'? The 1730s was a period of political turmoil and saw an overwhelming rise of anti-government sentiment, particularly against Sir Robert Walpole. The most powerful outlet for this wave of protest was London's stage, where things came to a head in 1737. 'Between the end of January and late May', writes Robert Hume, 'approximately 100 performances of plays openly hostile to the ministry were staged at three of London's four theatres – an average of nearly one per night.' Reacting to this threat, Walpole introduced the Licensing Act, which made 'virtually impossible' the staging of political plays.⁹³ The first casualties of the legislation occurred in 1739, when productions of *Gustavus Vasa* and *Edward and Eleonora* were prohibited by the Lord Chamberlain's office.⁹⁴ It was a time that the government flexed its muscles against anti-Whigs. Publications, too, were scrutinised for libellous material. In early 1739, Paul Whitehead published the poem *Manners*, which contained the following passage:

I name not *W----e* [i.e., Walpole]; You the Reason guess;
Mark yon fell Harpy hov'ring o'er the Press.
Secure the Muse may sport with Names of Kings,
But Ministers, my Friend, are dang'rous Things.⁹⁵

Both Whitehead and his printer were arrested and copies of the poem confiscated.⁹⁶ The *Advice* may not target Walpole, but Lady Brown's husband, Sir Robert, was a close associate of his. The Earl of Egmont, who had leased an apartment to the Browns upon their return from Venice, described Brown as being 'a devoted man to Sir Robert Walpole, and

95. [Paul] Whitehead: *Manners. A Satire* (London, 1739), p.16.

96. Thomas McGeary: 'Farinelli in Madrid: Opera, politics, and the war of

Jenkins' ear', in *The Musical Quarterly* 82 (1998), p.404.

every day with him (for I'm told he manages money for him in the public funds).⁹⁷ (In 1740, Walpole would trust him to conduct secret negotiations with Spain.⁹⁸) As their proximity to the kingdom's most powerful figure was widely known ('Sir Rober Brown [...] gave a grand Entertainment, to the Right Hon. Sir Rober Walpole [...] at his House in Pall-mall'),⁹⁹ naming Lady Brown (let alone attacking her) in the press was highly inadvisable.

The political power of the Browns could explain, then, why Newburgh Hamilton, my preferred candidate for the *Advice's* authorship, would have been reluctant to name her. Hamilton began his publishing career in 1711, with *The Changes: or, Faction Vanquish'd*, a passionate attack against the Whigs following the assassination attempt against Lord Edward Harley:

Now uncontroul'd the Rampant Whigs did reign,
The Kingdom all their own
[...]
THUS Noble Peers, ye've seen how Whigs did reign,
And if Supreme Command they e'er obtain,
The same curs'd Footsteps they will tread again.¹⁰⁰

Since at least the 1720s, Hamilton had been moving in Tory and pro-Jacobite circles. His 'Cecilian Ode' was dedicated to the Tory Marquess of Carmarthen, 'whose father, the second Duke of Leeds, was from 1716 to 1723 admiral and commander-in-chief of the Pretender's fleet.'¹⁰¹ Far more consequent, his longtime employer, the Earl of Strafford, had been a 'leading conspirator in both the Atterbury Plot (1720–2) and the Cornbury Plot (1731–5) to restore the Stuarts,' and had been made a Duke and Lord Regent in the Jacobite peerage.¹⁰² As Strafford's steward, 'a position of considerable responsibility and hard work,'¹⁰³ Hamilton must have been aware of this connection, which warranted caution. Exposing in public the name of a close Walpole associate might have led to trouble. Interestingly, Hamilton would openly decry the 'mean Artifices' used against Handel in 1743, after Walpole's political fall, and in a libretto dedicated to the Prince of Wales, the aspiring Patriot King and enemy of Walpole.¹⁰⁴ Note, too, that the first instance of naming Lady Brown as an anti-Handelist appears in a private letter from 1744.¹⁰⁵ And when Burney named her in his *General History of Music*, Margaret Cecil Lady Brown had been dead for several years.¹⁰⁶ Recent claims that she fell victim to Handelian enmity find no

97. *Manuscripts of the Earl of Egmont: diary of the First Earl of Egmont (Viscount Percival), vol. II: 1734–1738* (London, 1923), p.286.

98. Philip Woodfine: *Britannia's glories: the Walpole ministry and the 1739 war with Spain* (Woodbridge & Rochester, NY, 1998), p.228.

99. *The Daily Journal* no.5498, Thursday 9 October 1735, p.[2].

100. [Newburgh Hamilton]: *The Changes: or, Faction Vanquish'd. A Poem. Most humbly Inscrib'd to those Noble Patriots, Defenders of their Country, and Supporters of the Crown, The Not Guilty Lords* (London, 1711), pp.8, 16.

101. Smith: *Oratorios*, p.192.

102. Smith: *Oratorios*, p.192.

103. Loewenthal [= Smith]: 'Hamilton', p.1063.

104. *Samson*, 'Preface', p.[iv].

105. 'a strong party against him supported by Lady

Brown &c': John Walsh to James Harris, 27 November 1744: Burrows & Dunhill, edd.: *Handel's world*, p.207.

106. 'The first [private concerts offered by the nobility and gentry] I

remember were at Lady Brown's [...] Her Ladyship distinguished herself as a persevering enemy to Handel, and a protectress of foreign musicians in general, of the new Italian style': Burney: *History 4*, p.671.

support in contemporary documents.¹⁰⁷ Ideology and sexism may have darkened her posthumous fame, but the fame itself was the creation of a powerful woman who, at least in April 1739, appears to have sought Handel's professional ruin. This is why the *Advice to Mr. Handel* was written in the first place, and is the best way to account for its exceptional content. Far from a curiosity, the poem now emerges as a central document in the early reception of *Israel in Egypt*.

Closure to an 'Epilogue'

Handel enjoyed one of the most extensive careers in London's theatrical history and probably the longest among major composers in Georgian Britain. His merit as an artist compares only with his astonishing resilience against changing fashions and arduous trials. Much like *Rinaldo* in 1711, *Esther* in 1732 was a success that no one could have foreseen.¹⁰⁸ The scandalous premiere of *Deborah* a year later – with Handel, in high capitalist gear, doubling admission prices – rendered it an effigy of Walpole's doomed 'Excise Bill'.¹⁰⁹ *Deborah* survived, however, and so did Handel in the 1730s, both professionally and physically. The front of noblemen supporting Senesino's rival company failed to knock him off the opera market, and a stroke he suffered in 1737 was not enough to suspend his activities for more than a few months. From this perspective, *Israel in Egypt* was yet another story of catastrophe thwarted in Handel's career. Its appearance marked, however, a critical point in the reception of English oratorio. The exclusive use of scriptural text and a politically sensitive subject (the liberation of the Israelites from the Egyptian yoke) drew strong attention, turning *Israel* into something more than dignified musical entertainment. And the extraordinary public letters of support define the beginning of oratorio as an ideologically charged genre.

In this context, the significance of the *Advice to Mr. Handel* far exceeds its modest length and questionable circulation. It is the first document to explain *Israel's* troubling career in 1739 on external factors, thus rendering a reception angle equally valid to textual criticism in studying the oratorio

107. For David Hunter, 'Lady Brown's behavior was highly disruptive to the assumptions of male superiority that predicated masculinity': Hunter: 'Brown', p.56. Surely, fashionable entertainment was one of very few areas at the time where ladies could have exercised leadership (wise or disastrous). And given Handel's longstanding image as a modern-day Orpheus, a female opponent could better fit allegorical descriptions of anti-Handelism. The fact remains, though, that Lady Brown was wealthy, politically powerful, and emotionally excessive; however stubborn Handel may have been, he commanded limited resources and could hardly cope with malicious attempts to shrink his clientele. Who was suffering here? Who exactly was threatening whom? Hunter's claim that 'The costs of *portraying* Lady Brown as an enemy [...] include a *disregard for the truth*, a *distortion of her life and Handel's*, and an exposure of male prejudice' (Hunter: 'Brown', p.57; emphasis mine) has no grounding in 18th-century documentation; it also bypasses the social distance between an artist exposed to the rough waters of London's entrepreneurial theatre and a fabulously rich member of the aristocracy. Ironically, it was the 'male prejudice' reviled by Hunter in 1999 that had helped him identify the 'Fiend'

as Lady Brown in the first place ('Lady Brown's efforts deriving from her personal animus against Handel': Hunter: 'Advice', p.6).

108. See [?Aaron Hill]: *See and Seem Blind: Or, A Critical Dissertation on the Publick Diversions, &c. Of Persons and Things, and*

Things and Persons, and what not. In a Letter from the Right Honourable the Lord B— to A— H— Esq (London, [1732]), pp.14–16; and 'Colman's Opera Register', 29 May 1732: Konrad Sasse, ed.: 'Opera Register from 1712 to 1734 (Colman-Register)', in *Händel-Jahrbuch* 5 (1959), p.220.

109. See the well-known satirical epigram in *The Bee: Or, Universal Weekly Pamphlet* 1 (1733 [Saturday 17–Saturday 24 March]), p.303; also, Lady A. Irwin to [Lord Carlisle], 31 March [1733]: *The Manuscripts of the Earl of Carlisle, preserved at Castle Howard* (London, 1897), p.106.

as historical artifact. The poem also demonstrates that in April 1739, only a year after fashionable London united to celebrate Handel,¹¹⁰ the composer was becoming again a controversial figure. His joining the former Nobility opera during 1737–38 proved to be a marriage of convenience; Handel was truly determined to follow an independent career as composer-manager. His unavailability, along with the concurrent shortage of creative and vocal talent, brought London's opera party to a deadlock. Their despair over the genre's decline blended with class pride: ever since 1719, Italian Opera had been a cultural emblem of British Nobility.¹¹¹ A year after the loss of Farinelli,¹¹² Handel's refusal to compose for them was understood by some as an insult, an act of defiance to their social rank. The *Advice* confirms that their leader at this time was a certain lady of extreme anti-Handelian feelings; we can safely identify her as Margaret Cecil Brown. It also clearly indicates that the 11 April revival of *Angelica e Medoro* was an effort to hurt *Israel in Egypt*'s second performance, and reinforces suspicion that the premiere itself of the oratorio was subject to a boycott. (The comparison of *Israel* with the anti-governmental play *Gustavus Vasa*, for instance,¹¹³ certainly suited the agenda of Lady Brown, a strong supporter of Walpole.)

From another perspective, the *Advice to Mr. Handel* demonstrates (and probably marks the beginning of) a new relationship between the composer and a vital constituency of his admirers. The radical anti-Handelism of Lady Brown forced Handelians to explore different ways of supporting their hero. Poetic exultation of his Orphean powers now turned into consolation over his misfortunes; passive adulation into friendly advice; and pagan enthusiasm into Christian solidarity. Most crucial of all, they sought to neutralise a conspiracy against Handel through direct appeals to the public. The *Advice* may not have circulated widely, if at all, but it is unmistakably a statement for others to read: by presenting the composer as a noble victim of malice, it seeks to invoke sympathy for his miseries. The poem also blends fiction and reality, past and present, and maps the Exodus story directly onto Handel's trials. Given the Britons' strong identification with biblical Israel,¹¹⁴ it promotes Handel as a British worthy suffering in the hands of Italophile aristocrats. In its conclusion, finally, the poem actually foresees the reversal of fortune that would occur in the 1740s, from Handel's mini exile to Ireland to the triumphs of *Judas Macchabeus* at Covent Garden theatre and *Messiah* at the Foundling Hospital. In 1739, at the lowest point in the composer's career, the *Advice* offered more than relief: it predicted Handel's reaching 'the promis'd Shore' of immortality.

110. For this significant event, see Donald Burrows: 'Handel's 1738 oratorio: a benefit pasticcio', in Klaus Hortschansky & Konstanze Musketa, edd.: *Georg Friedrich Händel – ein Lebensinhalt: Gedenkschrift für Berndt Baselt (1934–1993)* (Kassel & Basel, 1995), pp.11–38.

111. '[A]n odd amalgam of royal household entertainment and publicly held joint stock company', the Royal Academy of Music was controlled by the Lord Chamberlain and a Board of Directors mostly comprised of noblemen. Indeed, 'the Academy protected its exclusivity by insisting that any prospective shareholder should be personally recommended by a member and approved by the directors before he was allowed to buy in': Judith Milhous & Robert D. Hume: 'The charter for the Royal Academy of Music', in *Music & Letters* 67 (1986), p.57.

112. For the full context of this remarkable event, see McGeary: 'Farinelli', pp.383–421.

113. *The London Evening-Post* no.1777, Tuesday 3–Thursday 5 April 1739, p.[1]; Deutsch: *Handel*, p.479.

114. See Smith: *Oratorios*, pp.213–29.