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Sarah Hibberd

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During the July Monarchy, French grand operas, with their plots drawn from historical events, tended to be received as metaphors for current political themes. Previous studies have usually underestimated the role of music and the visual dimensions in articulating an alternative message to that offered by the libretto, and have instead focused on single political interpretations. In this study, five operas – Auber's *La Muette de Portici* and *Gustave III*, Niedermeyer's *Stradella*, Halévy's *Charles VI* and Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* – illustrate the complex, contested nature of political meaning during this period. By setting these operas in the context of the emerging liberal historiography pioneered by Jules Michelet, and analysing the manner in which audiences and critics constructed 'meanings' with reference to their personal and collective experience and memories, this study reveals the central position that grand opera occupied in the period, bringing the past alive.

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Note on sources

I have indicated the primary published and manuscript sources for each opera in the bibliography. Generally, the published librettos (usually printed before the final rehearsals and first performance) contain lines that were subsequently cut; often, there is no sign that these lines were ever set to music (see comments in chapters on *Gustave III*, *Stradella* and *Charles VI* in particular). Although the *mise-en-scène* was sometimes published, this was not always the case, and there is no extant *mise-en-scène* for *Stradella* at all. The *mises-en-scène* are often undated, and although they generally include cuts made to the libretto before the first performance, they also often incorporate changes introduced in subsequent performances (that of *Charles VI* is a case in point).

Published vocal scores are available for all of the operas under discussion, though some were produced sometime after the premiere, and do not necessarily correspond with the first performance version. ‘Fair copy’ orchestral score manuscripts (including cuts), are available for all the operas under discussion, and seem to have been made shortly after the premiere; they often include cuts or extra performance markings in red or blue crayon and in some cases incorporate substantial changes introduced in revivals later in the century. They bear the date of the opera’s premiere on the title page, and the stamp of the library (with their date of acquisition by the Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, 1854). The *matériel* boxes contain all the vocal and instrumental parts, and a *partition de chant*, for each opera, and they generally match the manuscript orchestral scores. Changes subsequently introduced in revivals (e.g. *Stradella*, reduced from five to three acts in 1840), are incorporated in the *matériel* parts – inserts, cuts, marks in red and blue crayon, and stitched-together pages – and it is often difficult to reconstruct the premiere, or specific subsequent performances.

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