

Michael Ching's *Buoso's Ghost*: Directing Ghosts and the Impossibility of Canonizing Interpretation

Michal Grover-Friedlander (Tel Aviv University)

"Interpretation of a work" is always subordinated to "work." Could a work enter the canon as a result of directorial interpretation? Could an opera be canonized not on the basis of the "work" but on the merit of an insightful, provocative, radical or beautiful staging of it? Does staging allow canonization?

A staging first and foremost refers to other stagings. It is haunted by other performances of the same work, other stagings by that director, that choreographer and that designer, previous roles sung by those singers and so on. A performance is always inhabited by ghosts from its past. This sense of what in theatre studies is referred to as "ghosting" undermines the possibility of canonization: the work's pasts are stronger than other works it might be compared with. Indeed I would argue that focusing on directorial interpretation destabilizes the use of concepts of canonization (unless we absurdly alter the pace of canonical reformulation to the passage of time between one performance and another and to the fleeting moment of singing itself).

These questions can be raised by considering Michael Ching's opera *Buoso's Ghost: Comic Sequel in One Act After Puccini's Gianni Schicchi* (1996). Ching's composition is a sequel to Puccini's opera (which itself is a one act opera within *Il Trittico*). *Buoso's Ghost* employs music from *Gianni Schicchi*, quotes and reworks it, and at the end of the piece asks forgiveness for this appropriation. In so doing, Ching replicates the gesture in *Gianni Schicchi*'s epilogue in which Puccini, through the intermediary of the character of Gianni Schicchi asks for extenuating circumstances from Dante on whose work the opera is based.

Two main issues I would like to stress in my talk. One is the employment of Puccini as prequel to secure a performance of Ching's opera (they are intended to be performed as a double bill replacing *Gianni Schicchi*'s other customary pairs) and to negotiate an interesting (and rather comic) way of entering the operatic canon through another work: another's music and another's plot - Puccini's, Forzano's, Dante's. The second issue is the thematization of the ghostly in Ching's opera. The dead corpse dominating the set in *Gianni Schicchi* becomes in *Buoso's Ghost* a ghost. In so doing, the opera takes the problem of ghosting inherent in the relation to past performances and introduces it as a theme to be addressed by the opera itself. Thus I suggest that the very tension between canonization and staging is played out and becomes central to a director's interpretation of it.