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Handel's crossing borders: the interplay of music, politics, and religion in Saul oratorio

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

Thesis

**HANDEL'S CROSSING BORDERS: THE INTERPLAY OF MUSIC,
POLITICS, AND RELIGION IN *SAUL* ORATORIO**

by

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“O LORD, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Psalm 8:9, KJV)

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Boston University School of Theology, 2019

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines one of the works of English Baroque composer, George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), namely *Saul* (1738), a dramatic oratorio that depicted the biblical story of the fall of King Saul. By looking into this particular work, a specific attention is given to Handel’s practice of modifying styles in three distinct aspects of the oratorio which would be the music, politics, and religious aspects underlying the work. A vital component of this study would be the emphasis on the interconnectedness between the three aspects and the different ways on which the composer crossed the different borders within and between these three areas. The study begins with an assessment on the origins of the English oratorio genre itself that was formed through different challenges and circumstances faced by Handel and not by the composer’s own willful design. Thus, it also observes the diverging ideas from influential Handelian scholars who have done significant research on the English oratorio such as Winton Dean and Ruth Smith, primarily in addition to other scholars. By using the paradigm of Handel as a composer who often does creative practices and modifications, the English oratorio can no longer be seen as a fixed musical genre but rather a flexible one, especially in the case of *Saul*. Moreover, the

study continues to examine three specific features in *Saul* oratorio where this practice took place. The first one would be from the standpoint of musical style and compositional process, then the aspect of patronage and societal borders, and lastly the borders of religious and ecclesiastical boundaries. This study finds that while *Saul* oratorio possesses several dramatic qualities and properties that can be found in any Italian *opera seria* at that time, Handel also purposely crossed a new territory of musical works as he disregarded some of the important qualities of the above genre. Furthermore, as Handel was largely known as the royally appointed composer of the British Hanoverian court, this particular work became his first collaboration with Charles Jennens (1700-1773). He was known a Jacobite sympathizer who compiled the libretto of *Saul* that was loaded with socio-political allusions. In this particular oratorio, Handel also crossed the political and societal borders. Lastly, as Ruth Smith highlighted Handel's deployment of certain early music instruments in *Saul*, it became apparent that these instruments have their own symbolism and significance in the Jewish religious tradition, hence the practice of crossing the borders of religion.

These practices have shown that in *Saul* oratorio, there is a sense of fluidity of the genre itself that Handel seemed to refuse to be confined within certain bounds and limits of expression. The dramatic qualities of the work enabled both the librettist and the composer to develop ideas that departed from its original musical genre (the Italian *opera seria*) and literary genre (the biblical text and storyline).

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- HCD* Burrows, Donald, Helen Coffey, John Greenacombe, and Anthony Hicks. eds. *George Frideric Handel, Collected Documents, Volume 3: 1734-1742*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- HHA* Händel, Georg Friedrich. *Hallische Händel-Ausgabe im Auftrage der Georg-Friedrich-Händel-Gesellschaft, Series I: Oratorien und große Kantaten, Volume 13: Saul*, edited by Percy M. Young. Kassel: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1968.
- HS* King, Richard G., ed. *Handel Studies: A Gedenkschrift for Howard Serwer*. Hillsdale: Pendragon, 2009
- HTC* Sadie, Stanley and Anthony Hicks, eds. *Handel Tercentenary Collection*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987.
- JRMA* *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Almost fifty years ago, on the opening of their summary of the then current state of Handelian scholarship, musicologists Alfred Mann and J. Merrill Knapp wrote the following:

Scholarship devoted to the work of the great eighteenth century masters is necessarily based on a different set of facts in each case. One of the principal facts that distinguishes the Handel tradition from the Bach tradition, as well as from the Mozart tradition, is the extraordinary recognition that the composer received both in his lifetime and immediately thereafter. This has had both favorable and adverse effects on the perpetuation of his work. Equally important is the fact that Handel's work is founded on a remarkable coordination of highly developed national styles, as much of an asset and challenge to its appreciation by posterity as it was to its reception by the original audience.¹

The two musicologists asserted a very important point about the significance of Handel's life and oeuvre which have had already been documented during his own tenure and even beyond. Nevertheless, they also argued that at the same time this feature also became a challenge in itself as he was highly esteemed by Britain in the eighteenth century as much as he was cherished by German, his own native country, in the nineteenth century.² At the same time, they also said an intriguing statement that invoked further questions, "the

¹ Alfred Mann and J. Merrill Knapp, "The Present State of Handel Research," *Acta Musicologica* 41, no. 1/2 (1969): 4.

² *Ibid.*, 5; see also Peter Kivy, "Mainwaring's 'Handel': Its Relation to English Aesthetics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 17, no. 2 (1964): 178; Claudia L. Johnson, "'Giant HANDEL' and the Musical Sublime," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19, no. 4 (1986): 515-533; Donald Burrows, "Sources, Resources, and Handel Studies," in *HTC*, 19-42; Bernd Baselt, "Handel and his Central German Background," in *HTC*, 43-60.

critical investigation of Handelian style is obviously one of the largest tasks with which Handel scholarship is faced.”³ In the light of diverging approaches of perpetuating and appreciating the composer’s oeuvre, one would simply ask, “How does the Handelian style is being expounded into a set of principles and according to whom they are defined?” Approximately thirty-five years later, Suzanne Aspden raised a somewhat similar concern when she addressed the unconscious tendencies of provincialism, speculation, or romanticization in portraying Handel:

Taken together, these studies suggest that, while our continued desire to ‘know’ the composer can take remarkably different forms (depending, it seems, on our ontological frame of reference), we still seek that knowledge – or evidence for our conjectures about it – in the reports of those who knew him at first hand.⁴

Aspden was intrigued by music philosopher Peter Kivy, who had noted Handel’s predilection for making and breaking rules as part of his natural yet seemingly transcendent virtuoso.⁵ In retrospect, while the above question is related to the issue that was raised by Mann and Knapp fifty years ago, one can see that it is still relevant, especially as Aspden noted that there are different representations or images of Handel. In this case, the second important question would be, “How does a representation or

³ Ibid., 20

⁴ Suzanne Aspden, “Desiring Handel: Biography and the Strategies of Possession,” *Music & Letters* 85, no. 1 (2004): 67-72. She also reviewed the work of Ellen T. Harris, who presented arguments about looking into Handel’s sexual orientation from his works. While the former did not necessarily refute the thesis of the latter, she challenged some of its thought processes by asserting, “It is, perhaps, the desire for narrative coherence that pushes readers into looking for Handel biography in Harris’s analysis of the cantatas’ creation” (81). See Ellen T. Harris, *Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁵ Peter Kivy, *The Possessor and the Possessed: Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and the Idea of Musical Genius* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 45.

image of Handel as a composer would serve to characterize him in the most accurate way? Still, scholars are facing various challenges in the undertaking of Handelian research studies of his life and oeuvre. The three scholars noted above were not the only ones who have raised these issues. The same questions have been raised by scholars in exploring Handel's oratorios for more than sixty years. In his seminal work, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*, Winton Dean emphasized the idea of the Handel's oratorio in English as a musical drama, hence ruling out the separation between operas and oratorios and dismissing the notion of the oratorio as a distinct genre, even when the stories were depicted from the biblical narratives.⁶ Years later, Ruth Smith challenged his position by elaborating a very important subject on how Handel's oratorios are distinctive as the librettos reflected the eighteenth-century Protestant England with all the intricacies and convolutions of politics and religion at that time.⁷ In many ways, the works of the two respected scholars have been influential and formative in constructing a well-informed Handelian scholarship on his oratorios. With that in mind, this study will take one work from Handel to be discussed throughout subsequent sections, namely *Saul* (1738), a biblical oratorio other than *Messiah* (1741) that continues to be performed quite frequently to the present time. It is interesting that in recent years, *Saul* has been

⁶ Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).

⁷ Ruth Smith, *Handel's Oratorio and Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Other scholars have attempted to moderate these two positions with the concept of the religious or cultural sublime in Handel's oratorios. For further reading, see Alexander H. Shapiro, "'Drama of an Infinitely Superior Nature': Handel's Early English Oratorios and the Religious Sublime," *Music & Letters* 74, no. 2 (1993): 215-245 and Andrew Shryock, "Handel and the Sublime: Crafting Librettos, Composing Oratorios, and Transfixing Audiences in Eighteenth-Century England" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2012).

performed not only as an oratorio but also a fully-staged opera, not only in a church building but also in theatres.⁸ Thus, the complexity of this subject remains to incite curiosities as one would be able to see how the ideas presented by the two scholars in many ways are still equally valid.

Purpose of Study

As it has been said, this study raises two questions. The first one is, “How does the Handelian style is being expounded into a set of principles and according to whom they are defined?” and the second one, “How does a representation or image of Handel as a composer would serve to characterize him in the most accurate way?” These two questions are very much relevant in the studies of Handel’s oratorios, especially *Saul*. Despite the different angles in their scholarship and the debates around the subject, there is no doubt that both Dean and Smith have given significant contributions to the studies of Handel’s oratorio. The approaches of musico-dramatic and literary studies that they employed, respectively, have helped readers, scholars, and performers in appreciating and perpetuating his music. As often times the challenges come from the vast extent and complexities of his life and oeuvres, even diverging ideas and conceptions can still

⁸ For example, the Glyndebourne Opera and Theater an der Wien both performed *Saul* as fully-staged opera productions for the past few years. See Glyndebourne Opera, “Barrie Kosky’s sensational staging of Handel’s oratorio marries spectacle and psychology,” accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.glyndebourne.com/tickets-and-whats-on/events/2018/saul/>; and Klassik Begeistert, “Atemberaubend: Händels „Saul“ im Theater an der Wien,” accessed April 28, 2019, <https://klassik-begeistert.de/georg-friedrich-haendel-saul-theater-an-der-wien-17-februar-2018-1/>. On the other hand, Göttingen International Handel Festival picked a church building (St. Blasius Church) for their performance venue of *Saul* this year. See their official website, Internationale Händel Festspiele Göttingen, “Saul [HWV53],” accessed April 28, 2019, <https://www.haendel-festspiele.de/de/programm/festspielkalender/hauptprogramm/saul-hwv-53.html>.

inform one another, while they are not necessarily to be reconciled. One approach that can be employed would be to highlight the multifaceted dimension of Handel's oratorios that incorporate the Italian forms of *opera seria* and *oratorio volgare*, as noted by Howard Smither.⁹ Winton Dean, on the other hand, had already remarked about Handel's synthetic feature in his oratorios as they consisted of elements of the German passion, French classical drama, the English masque, and choral music.¹⁰ In summary, these accounts on the distinctiveness of Handelian oratorio reflected at least two things. The first one would be to realize its foreign origin and later adopted and modified creatively. There was no corresponding terminology that would suffice to describe this particular type of musico-dramatic work in the entire canon of the English lexicon. Thus, it seemed that Handel did not hesitate to borrow a Latin term that had already been adapted in German (*oratorium*) and used 'oratorio' in his autograph and public performances.¹¹ Secondly, it is as important to note that Handel was a composer who had been exposed with different musical forms and styles outside of his own German roots. Hans Maier specifically wrote about this particular distinctiveness of Handel who has been crossing a lot of territorial borders during his lifetime, more intensively before he devoted much of

⁹ *Oratorio volgare* refers to Handel's previous choral compositions of Latin psalms during his work in Italy. See Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio, Vol. 2. The Oratorio in the Baroque Era: Protestant Germany and England* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 178.

¹⁰ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 36.

¹¹ John H. Roberts, "Handel, Charles Jennens, and the Advent of Scriptural Oratorio," in *Music in the London Theatre from Purcell to Handel*, ed. Colin Timms, and Bruce Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 222. See also Anthony Hicks, "Handel and the Idea of an Oratorio" in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145-163.

his time and effort to write and perform the biblical oratorio.¹² In the same manner, this study will be focused on Handel as a composer who has been ‘crossing different borders’ or in other words, breaking some conventional, existing practices in developing the oratorio genre. This will be done particularly by looking into *Saul* (1738), an oratorio which he created in the earliest years of his transition from writing Italian operas into the English oratorio. Dean was using this work as an example to build his case for an entirely musico-dramatic nature of an oratorio by giving the following opinion about *Saul*, “No music ever written more imperatively demands the stage for its full effect.”¹³ On the other hand, Eva Zöllner aptly described several important features of the English oratorio which bear similarities and differences with the opera as summarized in a comparison table below.¹⁴

English oratorio	Features	18th- century Italian opera in England
three acts	length - division	three acts
aria, recitative, ensemble	musical forms	aria, recitative, ensemble
religious, biblical drama	libretto	secular, war and love
theatres, concert halls	venue	theatres, concert halls
chorus	predominance	acted drama
concertos	intervals	-

Table 1.1: Features of English oratorio and Italian opera

¹² Hans Maier, “Händels Internationalität,” *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 9 (2002): 1-20.

¹³ Dean, *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 282.

¹⁴ Eva Zöllner, “Handel and English Oratorio,” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Music*, ed. Simon P. Keefe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 542.

As one would notice the similarities and differences between the two genres, it is no surprise that any discussions about the distinctiveness of Handelian oratorio will remain to be interesting and challenging at the same time. With that in mind, this study will focus itself to one particular aspect relevant to the larger subject of the distinctiveness of the English oratorio, namely Handel's creative practices that go beyond conventional patterns. Thus, specific attentions will be given to at least three different aspects of the work, namely his musical and compositional styles, theological and religious aspects, and the aspect of patronage of his music. In that regard, this framework will be applied with the understanding that even within each of these aspects, some 'sectional border crossings' happened in such a way that they prevent musicologists accurately using a monolithic description of "Handelian style" or "Handelian representation."

With that in mind, the second chapter will discuss the historical background of Handel's practice of border crossings that is connected with his transition from writing opera into the English oratorio, specifically *Saul*. I shall argue that in writing and performing *Saul*, Handel was crossing different borders of concepts and understanding within each three aspects of the work as previously described. In the chapter that follows, which would comprise a significant part of this study, attention will be given to each of the three aspects in which Handel purposely did those as a way to develop his music. At the end, a summary and conclusion will be given.

Scope and Delimitations

It is important to note that this study does not seek to repeat what has been done by different scholars in their excellent and thorough analysis of the music and libretto of *Saul*, especially Winton Dean, Anthony Hicks, Minji Kim, Ruth Smith, Ralph Webb, to name a few, in addition to other names as well.¹⁵ While some of the discussions in this study will be drawn from small parts of their works, it will be focused to the characteristic of border crossings that is evident in this particular work, the life of Handel around the writing and performance of this oratorio, as well as his ongoing relationship with his patronages and the larger society. Attention will also be given to the idea of change and continuity in his works, especially before and within this oratorio. It is equally important that this study will be focused upon the composer and it will not draw much attention to the person and works of the librettist since this is more about former rather than the latter. Nevertheless, certain aspects within the relationships between the two will be incorporated in the discussion as they are significant in the attempt to build a well-informed representation of the composer.

¹⁵ Rüdiger Bartelmus, "Handel and Jennens' Oratorio 'Saul': A Late Musical and Dramatic Rehabilitation of the Figure of Saul," in *Saul in Story and Tradition. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 47*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich and Marsha C. White (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 284-307; Winton Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*; Anthony Hicks, "Handel's Saul," in *Handel Studies: A Gedenkschrift for Howard Serwer*, ed. Richard Glenn King (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2009), 247-251; Idem., "Handel, Jennens, and Saul: Aspect of a Collaboration," in *Handel*, ed. David Vickers (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 247-271; Minji Kim, "The Amalekite Case and the Portrayal of Saul in Handel and Jennens' Oratorio *Saul*" *Journal of Musicological Research* 35, no. 1 (2016): 45-60; Ruth Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," *Händel Jahrbuch* 52 (2006): 89-104; Idem., "Early Music's Dramatic Significance in Handel's *Saul*," *Early Music* 35, no. 2 (2007): 173-190; Ernst-Joachim Waschke, "Die Beurteilung Sauls im Spannungsfeld des 'Gesanges Derfrauen' (ISam 18,6f.) und der 'Klage Davids' (2Sam 1,17-27)," *Händel Jahrbuch* 52 (2006): 105-117; Ralph T. Webb, "Handel's Oratorios as Drama," *College Music Symposium* 23, no. 2 (1983): 122-144.

CHAPTER TWO

HANDEL'S QUEST FOR NEW TERRITORIES

The Crossing of Borders and the Origins of Handel's Biblical Oratorio in English

In studying Handel's development as a virtuosic composer, one extricable aspect that cannot be overlooked would be his frequent travels. Musicologist David Hunter highlighted the importance of Handel's travels in his recent biographic work, *The Lives of George Frideric Handel*. He noted that the composer was not traveling on his own all the time but often those travels were actually undertaken with some form of contract, invitation, or specific arrangements.¹⁶ Robert L. Marshall once briefly noted one differentiating aspect between Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and Handel, both lived during the same era. He used the phrase "a profound sense of rootedness" in describing the former as to highlight the fact that he was unlike the latter who had taken a significant number of travels far from home during his lifetime.¹⁷ Handel spent most of his life outside his place of origin (Halle). His travels as a professional musician did begin with a trip to Hamburg in 1703, but even during his childhood years he had already been involved in different trips to Weissenfels, Berlin, and Leipzig. During his professional career, he continued his transnational journey to Florence, Venice, Rome, and then returned to Hanover, before he ultimately arrived in London and stayed

¹⁶ David Hunter, *The Lives of George Frideric Handel* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2015), 422.

¹⁷ Robert L. Marshall, "Toward a Twenty-First-Century Bach Biography," *The Musical Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (2000): 508.

thereafter.¹⁸ In many ways, his musical endeavors involved frequent interactions with different nationalities. He has crossed different national territories such as German, Italy, France and England, thus appropriated his stature in becoming the free-spirited ‘European’ musician, as argued by Paul Henry Lang.¹⁹ Even in the domestic context of Britain itself, his penchant for crossing borders is no less apparent as the performance and reception of his works transcended different levels of society. At the opening part of her recent biographic work on Handel, Ellen T. Harris wrote:

Handel’s compositions were hardly restricted to royal occasions, however. In London, the sound of his music reached from court to theater, from cathedral to tavern, and was performed by the greatest virtuosi of the era as well as the lonely spinster sitting at her keyboard. It served not just coronations but as a background to daily life. His operas held the London stage for thirty years, from 1711 to 1741. In 1738, a marble statue by Louis-Francois Roubiliac, representing Handel as a divinely inspired Orphic figure, was placed in the very popular public gardens at Vauxhall, where his music was a staple: a remarkable tribute to a living composer.²⁰

It can be inferred that within twenty-eight years since his first arrival in 1710, the German-born composer received such considerable recognition from a wide range of audiences in London. Furthermore, recent scholarship in Handel’s biography has demonstrated even more about the composer’s dynamic and multifaceted networking in different circumstances although his personal life remained to be private.²¹ It is not an

¹⁸ Donald Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 507-517.

¹⁹ Paul Henry Lang, *George Frideric Handel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 686.

²⁰ Ellen T. Harris, *George Frideric Handel: A Life with Friends* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 2. See also Burrows, *Handel*, 263-265.

²¹ Several notable biographies in the twentieth-century that have some emphasis on this subject would be those compiled by Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed.; Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*; David Hunter, *The Lives of George Frideric Handel*, among others. At the same time, one still cannot ignore the

overstatement to say that Handel's works and career were characterized by numerous traverses and even at times breaking norms or customs that have had already existed in his era. It can be recognized not only from the context of his relationships with different layers of patrons but also ecclesiastical affiliations. Although he was raised as a Lutheran he also wrote musical settings for the biblical story of Christ from the Catholic perspective, *La Resurrezione* (1708), and the German Lutheran tradition, *Brockes Passion* (1716). In many ways, it was not really surprising that he eventually took the oath of allegiance to the Church of England also in 1727.²² On the other hand, this practice of crossing different borders was not only evident from his societal interactions but also his musical works, particularly the aspect of cross-national compositional style and the development of newer vocal music genre, known as the English oratorio. For that reason, the advent and earliest development of this new vocal music genre (in Britain) remains a subject of many discourses of Handelian scholarship. In that case, it is equally important to realize the complexities in further developments of this particular genre that one would find it difficult to define its 'final form' as Eva Zöllner remarked the following:

In the 1730s and 1740s Handel gradually developed an entirely unique English variant, skilfully combining elements taken from Italian opera and oratorio, the English anthem and other sources. The end result – if Handel can be said ever to

significant contribution of earlier major works such as Dean's *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques* and Smith's *Handel's Oratorio and Eighteenth-Century Thought* as these two also incorporated some aspects of Handel's crossing of the borders that will be discussed further below.

²² Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 121, 266-269.

have arrived at a ‘final’ version of the form – was so different from contemporary oratorio on the Continent that it has to be considered on its own.²³

While historians have diverging views, a more recent studies have indicated that the creation of the English oratorio was not a matter of Handel’s specific intention.²⁴ British-Israeli historian Murray Roston even went so far as to assert that Handel was greatly reluctant to depart from his beloved opera and turn into the biblical drama.²⁵ Similarly, Anthony Hicks remarked that the exact reasons which led to the creation of oratorio remain obscure.²⁶ Consequently, it is reasonable to say that the birth of this new musical genre was an inevitable result of different circumstances, or the most logical solution for some challenges and difficulties which Handel encountered. One may realize that there is no single, unitary rationale that would suffice to explain the emergence of oratorio into the musical scene of England. From this standpoint, Winton Dean, Ruth Smith, and Carole Taylor seemed to agree in presenting a strong case that Handel’s departure from writing and performing Italian operas was largely prompted by the ever-increasing complexities in the realm of musical theatres in London during early 1730s. Not only the soaring expenses and the volatility of its market and public subscriptions, but also more importantly the highly artistic vocal demands of operatic works which

²³ Zöllner, “Handel and English Oratorio,” 541.

²⁴ Roberts, “Handel, Charles Jennens, and the Advent of Scriptural Oratorio,” 234.

²⁵ Murray Roston, *Biblical Drama in England: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 183.

²⁶ Hicks, “Handel and the Idea of an Oratorio,” 150.

necessitated the involvement of Italian singers that are costly to maintain.²⁷ According to Smith, this particular matter has its own intricacies especially as he was involved a personal conflict with one of his stars, Senesino (1686-1758), an Italian castrato who did part ways with Handel in 1733, in addition to other Italian singers who left as well.²⁸ The intermingling of these conditions seemed to compel Handel to write a new style of dramatic works that would expose the virtuosic aspects of his only remaining singers who were available for him to work with, the English soloists and chorus.²⁹ From a different angle, David Hunter brought another case in correlating Handel's new interest in the English oratorio with his ailments during the late 1730s. He argued that Handel's rheumatic pains, paralysis, and other debilitating symptoms possibly caused by lead poisoning drew him to switch gears from writing and producing operatic works into the oratorio.³⁰ It is important to note that Hunter's argument does not necessarily imply a

²⁷ Winton Dean, "The Recovery of Handel's Operas," in *Music in Eighteenth-Century England: Essays in Memory of Charles Cudworth*, ed. Christopher Hogwood and Richard Lockett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 107-108; Carole M. Taylor, "Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera," in *Handel Tercentenary Collection*, ed. Stanley Sadie and Anthony Hicks (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1987), 174.

²⁸ Smith, *Handel's Oratorio and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 18-20; Ilias Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads: His 1737-1738 and 1738-1739 Seasons Re-Examined," *Music & Letters* 90, no. 4 (2009): 599.

²⁹ Smith, 20-21.

³⁰ David Hunter, "Miraculous Recovery? Handel's Illnesses, The Narrative Tradition of Heroic Strength and the Oratorio Turn," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 3, no. 2 (2006): 253-267. See also idem, "Patronizing Handel, Inventing Audiences: The Intersections of Class, Money, Music and History," *Early Music* 28, no. 1 (2000): 32-36, 38-49. For other accounts on Handel's illness, see idem, *The Lives of George Frideric Handel*, 249-306 (Chapter 6, "Self and Health."); idem, "Handel's Ill Health: Documents and Diagnoses," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 41, no.1 (2008): 69-92; Stefan Evers, "Georg Friedrich Handel's Strokes," *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 5, no. 3 (1996): 274-281; Donald L. Blanchard, "George Handel and His Blindness," *Documenta Ophthalmologica* 99 (1999): 247-258; Hansjörg Bänzner, "Georg Friedrich Händel: A Case of Large Vessel Disease with Complications in the Eighteenth Century," in *Music, Neurology, and Neuroscience: Historical Connections and*

dismissal of the aforementioned perspective about the exorbitance of theatre music, rather to see those circumstances as subsidiary to the aspect of Handel's deteriorating health.³¹ On the other hand, contemporary Handelian scholar Ilias Chrissochoidis highlighted the turbulent societies around Handel just before he started to write English oratorios from the biblical stories. One notable circumstance would be Handel's intense competition with the Opera of the Nobility (1733-1737), a rival company that produced Italian operas, sponsored by several royal family members.³² This particular situation was already preceded by the collapse of the Royal Academy of Music in 1728 and subsequently the sudden death of the wife of King George II, Queen Caroline (1737). As the latter was a great benefactor to the Haymarket theater, her death led to the decline of the theater and caused financially difficult times for Handel.³³ Furthermore, it is also important to note that the heightened competition with the Opera of the Nobility impelled Handel to surpass them by organizing another large scale program at Covent Garden in the 1736-1737 season. Burrows remarked about this undertaking as the "most ambitious season he had ever attempted single-handed" with an overall production of twelve works (eight

Perspectives. Progress in Brain Research, Vol.216, ed. Eckart Altenmüller, Stanley Finger, and François Boller (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2015), 305-316.

³¹ Hunter, "Miraculous Recovery? Handel's Illnesses, The Narrative Tradition of Heroic Strength and the Oratorio Turn," 262.

³² Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads: His 1737-1738 and 1738-1739 Seasons Re-Examined," 599-603. The ongoing rivalry with the The Opera of Nobility gave Handel a hard time as they were competing not only in terms of audience but also in hiring his virtuosic Italian singers. See also Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Taylor, "Handel's Disengagement from the Italian Opera," 165-81; Burrows, *Handel*, 227-229; Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 156.

³³ Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads," 599.

operas and four oratorios).³⁴ From these standpoints, it seemed to be reasonable to see how Handel aspired to turn away from Italian operas and began to venture into musical dramas in English. By looking all the above circumstances, it can be inferred that all the diverging perspectives are not necessarily in conflict while in fact they inform one another. Hence, in the light of Hunter's remark about the superiority of his argument over others, it is reasonable to consider Handel's worsening health condition and decrease in vigor *not* as a *prima causa* for his shifting into oratorio as a whole, but rather as a parallel circumstance to his heightened musical undertakings at that time. These conditions were also augmented with the current state of affairs in Britain's intensified political tensions with Spain to the point that they were ready for another war and anti-Catholic protests were increasingly common.³⁵ For that reason, it is no surprise that the Old Testament dramas on the Israelite kingdom portrayed in the biblical oratorios resonated well with the public sentiment in the eighteenth-century Protestant England.³⁶ In the subsequent sections there will be further discussions about how politics play a role in the development of Handel's oratorios and how conversely the composer was able to make use of political circumstances that he encountered. In this particular context, Ellen Harris noted that in the earliest years since Handel wrote his first oratorio, *Esther* (1732), he

³⁴ Burrows, *Handel*, 254-257. It was not at all surprising that eventually Handel suffered a paralytic disorder that cost him the loss of function of his right hand that compelled him to go to Aix-la-Chapelle for medical spa treatment in 1737.

³⁵ Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads," 603.

³⁶ Tim Blanning, "Nation-Building through Music? Music in English National Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century," *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 15 (2014): 25-26. See also Jonathan Rhodes Lee, "Virtues Rewarded: Handel's Oratorios and the Culture of Sentiment" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2013), 1-2.

received strong support for the production of oratorio in the theaters from Princess Anne, the wife of Prince William of Orange, for whom Handel wrote a wedding anthem and serenade.³⁷ In the early 1730s, Handel had already written and performed three biblical oratorios namely *Esther* (1732); *Deborah* (1733); and *Athalia* (1733).³⁸ Unfortunately, Princess Anne's temporary departure to the Netherlands forced Handel to stop writing biblical oratorios after 1733 as he lost one major support for his oratorios. Therefore, it is reasonable to see how the intricacy of the above circumstances became the precursors that left the composer in financial and physical distress in the late 1730s.³⁹ Nevertheless, in that same year, another important event gave an impetus to the awakening of the English oratorio, which will be discussed further below.

Saul, Another Crossroads in Handel's Musical Ventures

Saul occupies an extraordinarily important position in the English oratorio tradition that Handel brought to perfection.⁴⁰

In July 1733, Handel performed his first three oratorios at Oxford University's degree ceremony (or the Encaenia) concert series.⁴¹ Among those who attended the

³⁷ Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 155-156, 190-193. It is important to note that Handel had already written and performed three biblical oratorios in the early 1730s, which would be *Esther* (1732); *Deborah* (1733); and *Athalia* (1733). See Howard E. Smither, *A History of the Oratorio, Vol. 2. The Oratorio in the Baroque Era: Protestant Germany and England* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 188-210.

³⁸ Interestingly, in the *dramatis personae* of these three, the main character was female (particularly soprano), and the two of them were portraying the figure of a queen in the Old Testament stories.

³⁹ Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 155-156, 190-193.

⁴⁰ Percy M. Young, "Preface," in *HHA* I/13, iii.

⁴¹ Burrows, *Handel*, 224-226.

occasion was a wealthy nobleman from Leicestershire, namely Charles Jennens (1700-1773), who was known to have been subscribing to Handel's operas in previous seasons. Although there were no specific records concerning how and when they started to become acquainted, their meeting in Oxford is probably the earliest documented encounter.⁴² Smith particularly mentioned Jennens' fascination with *Athalia* that may have had inspired him to write a libretto for Handel.⁴³ This claim could not have been groundless, given the overwhelming success of Handel's performances in Oxford as Johnstone particularly had noted.⁴⁴ Smither even remarked that it was the most mature amongst Handel's first three biblical oratorios, composed of almost entirely new music with a large orchestral accompaniment.⁴⁵ Thus, there was a record about Handel's letter to Jennens dated in July 28, 1735 which acknowledged the receipt of the libretto of an unnamed 'Oratorio,' which has often been presumed as *Saul*. Nevertheless, notable Handelian scholars who have explored *Saul* in their discussions are mostly skeptical, if not indifferent, about this particular matter.⁴⁶ Almost three years after that date, however,

⁴² Nonetheless, Handel seemed to have had earned Jennens' trust that the former had borrowed musical scores belonged to the latter at that time. See Amanda Babington and Ilias Chrissochoidis, "Musical References in the Jennens-Holdsworth Correspondence (1729-46)," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 45, no. 1 (2014): 81; Ruth Smith, "The Achievements of Charles Jennens (1700-1773)," *Music & Letters* 70, no. 2 (1989): 164-165.

⁴³ Ruth Smith, *Charles Jennens: The Man Behind Handel's Messiah* (London: Handel House Trust, 2012), 49-50.

⁴⁴ H. Diack Johnstone, "Handel at Oxford in 1733," *Early Music* 31, no. 2 (2003): 256-257.

⁴⁵ Smither, *A History of the Oratorio, Vol. 2*, 202-210; For further reading on *Athalia*, see also Philip Brett and George Haggerty, "Handel and the Sentimental: The Case of 'Athalia'," *Music & Letters* 68, no. 2 (1987): 112-27.

⁴⁶ Hicks, "Handel's *Saul*," 247; see also idem, "Handel, Jennens and *Saul*: Aspects of a Collaboration," 203-204; Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 274; Smith, "Biblical Heroes

Handel began to write his composition in July 23, 1738 and the draft score was completed in September 27, 1738.⁴⁷ It was premiered at the King's Theatre in Haymarket on January 16, 1739, and it was attended by the King, the Duke of Cumberland, and several royal family members.⁴⁸ The oratorio libretto itself is divided into three Acts. Act I consisted of 41 movements preceded by a rather extensive overture known as the *Epinicion, or Song of Triumph for the Victory over Goliath and the Philistines*, which incorporated four smaller movements (Allegro, Larghetto, Allegro, and Andante Larghetto). The first scene in Act I begins with a chorus, "How excellent thy Name, O Lord," and concludes with a choral movement, "Preserve him for the glory of Thy name."⁴⁹ Act II has 27 movements and it is also begun with a chorus, "Envy, eldest born of hell," while it is concluded with another chorus, "Oh, fatal consequence of rage." Act III is slightly different with the previous ones as it is opened not with a chorus but with an *accompagnato* by Saul, "Wretch that I am," and it culminates in its eighteenth movement, a chorus that concludes the entire oratorio, "Gird on thy sword, thou man of might." The

Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 89; Kim, "The Amalekite Case and the Portrayal of Saul in Handel and Jennens' Oratorio *Saul*," 45.

⁴⁷ Burrows, et. al., *HCD*, 420, 430-431.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 450-451.

⁴⁹ The selection of Ps. 8:1 (traditionally interpreted as the psalm of David) for the opening chorus section in the oratorio in many ways supported the idea that there is a contrast, especially between the absence of Saul as the main character and the chorus itself which pointed to the person of David. See Ernst Joachim Waschke, "Die Beurteilung Sauls im Spannungsfeld des 'Gesanges der Frauen' (1 Sam 18,6f.) und der 'Klage Davids' (2 Sam 1,17-27)," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 52 (2006): 114-115; Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 88; and Kim, "The Amalekite Case and the Portrayal of Saul in Handel and Jennens' Oratorio *Saul*," 47.

main role, Saul, is written for a bass while the role of David is written for a countertenor.

The rest of the roles and their vocal classifications are listed in a table below:

Role	Vocal classification
Saul, king of Israel	bass
Merab, daughter of Saul	soprano
Michal, daughter of Saul	soprano
Jonathan, son of Saul	tenor
David	countertenor
Apparition of Samuel	bass
High Priest	tenor
Witch of Endor	tenor, (later modified into alto)
Abner	tenor
Amalekite	tenor
Doeg	bass
Chorus of Israelites	

Table 2.1: Roles in *Saul*⁵⁰

In many ways, as it will be discussed in subsequent discussions, *Saul* became Handel's starting point for developing new ideas and crossing new territories in his venture as the English oratorio composer. Zöllner even noted that *Saul* was "conceived and planned as an entirely new dramatic piece destined for the theatre."⁵¹ *Saul* was his

⁵⁰ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 299-300; Percy M. Young, "Preface," in *HHA* I/13, ii. There is one discrepancy in the assignment of the role of Abiathar. In the *dramatis personae* of the 1739 edition of the wordbook, the roles of Abiathar and the High Priest existed. Nevertheless, the former has never appeared in any versions of the autograph or performing scores, while it has never been appeared in any modern performances and recordings. The character of Abiathar as the Israelite high priest during the time of Saul and David itself has been a subject of different interpretations due to several different Scriptural account. Hence, Natassa Varka specifically raised this issue as she argued that Jennens attempted to avoid religious controversy by substituting fidelity to the Scripture for practical, dramatic purposes. See Natassa Varka, "'Departed ghosts in living forms appear': Abiathar, Doeg, and Jennens's Conception of Saul," *Early Music* 45, no. 4 (2017): 629-630.

⁵¹ Zöllner, "Handel and English Oratorio," 545.

first oratorio that portrayed a male monarch as its leading character, whereas in the previous oratorios they were queens (*Esther* and *Athalia*) and a female judge (*Deborah*). For the first time, as Anthony Hicks and Percy Young also highlighted, Handel received a libretto which incorporated different materials, such as the First Book of Samuel (for the most part), a poem from Abraham Cowley's *Davideis*, Purcell's dramatic scene, "The Witch of Endor" (in *Harmonia Sacra*, 1693), Joseph Trapp's *The Tragedy of King Saul* (1703), and the unfinished and unpublished *Saul: A Tragedy*, by Aaron Hill (1736).⁵² It clearly illustrated how the predilection for innovation was not only the case for Handel but also for Jennens as he developed new styles and approaches in the writing of this libretto, as Smith has noted.⁵³ Moreover, the compositional process of this oratorio can also be said as groundbreaking as the librettist played a more significant part in his collaboration with the composer.⁵⁴ For instance, Jennens' famous letter to his great-nephew Lord Guernsey (dated September 18, 1738), mentioned the former's frustration and rejection of Handel's approach in placing the "Hallelujah" at the conclusion of the oratorio, and eventually the position of this chorus section was changed. Such was the case for Jennens' significant interference in the revisions of this oratorio.⁵⁵ Furthermore, from the perspective of dramaturgy, this particular work was also Handel's first oratorio

⁵² Hicks, "Handel's *Saul*," 247; Percy M. Young, "Preface," in *HHA* I/13, iii.

⁵³ Smith, *Charles Jennens*, 58-59.

⁵⁴ Hicks, "Handel's *Saul*," 248; Idem, "Handel, Jennens and Saul: Aspects of a Collaboration," 205.

⁵⁵ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 277; Hicks, "Handel, Jennens and Saul: Aspects of a Collaboration," 205-207; Burrows, et. al., *HCD*, 427.

where the juxtaposition between the two main characters (Saul and David) became one of the dominant themes, as the two represented vice and virtue, respectively. This is one area where Old Testament scholar Deborah Rooke together with Handelian scholars Ruth Smith and Minji Kim all agreed in their review of the libretto by Jennens.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, there are diverging ideas from scholars in terms of the overall thrust of the libretto. Rooke and Kim emphasized Saul's fate as the fallen Israelite king in the light of a retributive theology based on his disobedience to Yahweh while Smith highlighted the 'humanizing' aspects of the biblical drama (such as the idea of friendship, love, hatred, and jealousy, to name a few) that were purposely tailored by Jennens and Handel to fit their audience's expectations.⁵⁷ Accordingly, it is no surprise that Jennens included an epigraph in the title page of the libretto, citing Cicero's *De amicitia* to express his sentiments with the idea of virtuous friendship as portrayed in the relationship between David and Jonathan.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Anthony Hicks, another Handelian scholar who had focused his research on *Saul*, underlined the framework of the libretto

⁵⁶ Deborah W. Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti: Sacred Drama and Biblical Exegesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85; Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 92-94; Kim, "The Amalekite Case and the Portrayal of Saul in Handel and Jennens' Oratorio *Saul*," 49-52.

⁵⁷ Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 95-97; Kim, "The Amalekite Case and the Portrayal of Saul in Handel and Jennens' Oratorio *Saul*," 45-47; Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 95.

⁵⁸ "Qui autem in virtute summum bonum ponunt, praeclare illi quidem, sed haec ipsa virtus amicitiam et gignit et continet, nec sine virtute amicitia esse ullo pacto potest." (Now, there are those who locate the "chief good" in virtue, and that is a noble doctrine. But this very virtue is the parent and preserver of friendship, and without virtue friendship cannot possibly exist.) See Smith, *Charles Jennens*, 28-29.

with what he called as “the true tragedy in music.”⁵⁹ His standpoint is by no means groundless as diverging perspectives about Saul also occurred among Old Testament biblical scholars and the idea that Saul’s life story resembled a Greek tragedy can be found among them.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, as Smith argued, this particular interpretation was a twentieth-century reading which has some remoteness from the cultural milieu in Handel’s time.⁶¹ Furthermore, German Old Testament scholar Ernst-Joachim Waschke pointed out another important feature that Jennens did not necessarily incorporate the corresponding verses from the Old Testament canon in the same way like he did later with *Messiah*. It is worth to note that out of the 670 verses in the corresponding Old Testament accounts on Saul (1 Sam 8 to 2 Sam 1), Jennens only quoted 60 verses directly and they were even included in 19 movements out of the entire 86 movements in the oratorio.⁶² This approach, however, did not necessarily suggest that Jennens disregard the Christian Scripture, rather, it was largely because of the familiarity of Handel’s audience with the biblical Israelite stories which were understood as popular literature in the context of eighteenth-century Protestant England, as argued by Murray Roston and Ruth

⁵⁹ Hicks, “Handel and the Idea of an Oratorio,” 156; idem., “Handel’s *Saul*,” 251.

⁶⁰ For instance, Yairah Amit, a Hebraic biblical scholar also took this position, while Hanna Liss even went as far as to assert that Saul was portrayed rather positively in the rabbinical tradition. See Yairah Amit, “The Delicate Balance in the Image of Saul and Its Place in the Deuteronomistic History,” in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, ed. Carl S. Ehrlich and Marsha C. White (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 71-74; Hanna Liss, “The Innocent King. Saul in Rabbinic Exegesis,” in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, 249-260.

⁶¹ Smith, *Handel’s Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 58.

⁶² Waschke, “Die Beurteilung Sauls im Spannungsfeld des ‘Gesanges der Frauen’ (1 Sam 18,6f.) und der ‘Klage Davids’ (2 Sam 1,17–27),” 105.

Smith.⁶³ Minji Kim also remarked that the biblical passages from which the story of Saul's coronation to his rejection was taken (1 Sam 12, 13, 15) is customarily assigned for the proper lessons on the fourth and fifth Sundays after Trinity in the Book of Common Prayer (1662).⁶⁴ Meanwhile, Winton Dean also highlighted the popularity of the story of Saul and David not only among the audience but also the early eighteenth-century dramatists and musicians in Europe and England as well.⁶⁵ These underlying circumstances provided some advantages to both the librettist and the composer in their creative process of writing the oratorio that the former did not necessarily have to provide a text with liturgical or devotional nature to portray the biblical story. Jennens' mastery of dramatic principles and his awareness of the composer's virtuoso paved a way that *Saul* became not just a mere oratorio but a dramatic oratorio in which Handel was able to exercise his "musico-pictorial genius" (a term coined by prominent musicologist Donald Burrows).⁶⁶ In many ways, this oratorio is a perfect example of interweaving and crossing borders between the presumably secular visual theatre and the sacredness of biblical stories, the free-spirited artistic expressions and the meticulous formal arrangement of different elements involved, as Dean further remarked:

⁶³ Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 11; Roston, *Biblical Drama in England*, 185.

⁶⁴ Kim, "The Amalekite Case and the Portrayal of Saul in Handel and Jennens' Oratorio *Saul*," 46.

⁶⁵ For instance, William Boyce (1711-1779) and John Christopher Smith (1712-1795), who was known as Handel's secretary and amanuensis, both collaborated to compose the music of a libretto from John Lockman (1689-1771), *David's Lamentation over Saul and Jonathan*, which was completed three years before *Saul*. See Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 276.

⁶⁶ Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 322.

Saul, like *Athalia*, is an integrated musical drama. No music ever written more imperatively demands the stage for its full effect. This judgment is inspired not by the weakness but by the strength of the design. It is a mark of the great musical dramatist to satisfy the conflicting demands of the two arts at the same time, so that each stroke, instead of serving one at the expense of the other, contributes to an overriding unity greater than the sum of the parts. This interlocking is one of the supreme qualities of *Saul*, but half its virtue may be lost outside the theatre. The design, for which there is no model in Handel's work or anyone else's (though certain elements are adumbrated in *Athalia*), is so powerful and original in its musical aspect alone that we might never suspect that it fills another dimension as well.⁶⁷

While the commercial success of the initial performances of this oratorio has been a subject of a recent debate, there is no doubt that *Saul* represents a pivotal point in the artistic development of Handel's oratorios as scholars agreed.⁶⁸ One important issue that marked the significance of *Saul* would be the question of how much does it represent a characteristics of an oratorio itself? Historian Murray Roston pointed out that the incorporation of subtitles bearing the phrase, "An Oratorio, or Sacred Drama" on the front page of the libretto was intended to inform the audience that the performed music comprised of a dramatization of a biblical story, more than to indicate oratorio as a particular musical genre.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, even with the incorporation of such trifling direct Scriptural quotations in *Saul*, this work is still exceptionally remarkable as has been argued by German Old Testament scholar Rüdiger Bartelmus because it "set forth for the first time on the path that allows him to be viewed today as one of leading musical

⁶⁷ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 282.

⁶⁸ Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads: His 1737-1738 and 1738-1739 Seasons Re-Examined," 617. Cf. Dean, 298; Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 242; Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 89.

⁶⁹ Roston, *Biblical Drama in England*, 187-188.

theologians of his time.”⁷⁰ On the other hand, Handel’s oratorios are often perceived as complex and multifaceted as the composer himself was not always consistent in following his patterns (if such things existed). In this regard, Winton Dean remarked that “in Handel’s grasp the English oratorio was a flexible and potent form.”⁷¹ Thus, it can be inferred that the achievement of Handel in *Saul* cannot be separated from his creative practices in modifying forms and going beyond existing principles in its composition and performance in order to solidify its reception in the midst of a crucial time and period in his career. Accordingly, there was an interplay of at least three major aspects and also the crossing of the borders within those factors by which Handel was adroit to make full use of every opportunity he had in making *Saul* came with such great success. The practice of going beyond the borders apply in at least three important aspects of this oratorio, namely the musical style and compositional technique, the theological dimension of the work which encompassed Handel’s own religiosity and ecclesiastical background, and lastly the commercial and patronage aspect of the work. Furthermore, the following section will discuss those practices.

⁷⁰ Bartelmus, “Handel and Jennens’ Oratorio “Saul”,” 289.

⁷¹ Dean, *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 44.

CHAPTER THREE

SAUL ORATORIO AS HANDEL'S PRACTICE OF CROSSING BORDERS

Crossing over Musical Styles and Compositional Borders

In the study of the life and oeuvres of Handel, there has been significant attention given to the subject of his creative practices from the compositional angle. In many ways, it is a fascinating study for many Baroque music historians as they analyzed his vocal works (predominantly operas and oratorios) in the attempt to answer at least two important questions. The first one would be in what ways did Handel develop his music based on the preexisting musical ideas from other works (either by himself or other composers), hence the idea of his borrowing or reworking. In that case, a more important and challenging question that has been raised would be, "Why did Handel do these practices?" These two questions generated a rather extensive voyage of intellectual and academic ventures among Handelian scholars in satisfying a lingering curiosity especially during the past two decades.⁷² Nevertheless, even as there has been an immeasurable

⁷² Several literatures that surveyed the topic, to mention a few (in alphabetical order), George J. Buelow, "The Case for Handel's Borrowings: The Judgment of Three Centuries," in *HTC*, 61-82; Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorios and Masques*; Ellen T. Harris, "Integrity and Improvisation in the Music of Handel," *The Journal of Musicology* 8, no. 3 (1990): 301-15; David Ross Hurley, *Handel's Muse: Patterns of Creation in his Oratorios and Musical Dramas, 1743-1751* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Mark Preston Risinger, "Handel's Compositional Premises and Procedures: Creative Adaptation and Assimilation in Selected Works, 1733-1744. Volume One" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1996); John H. Roberts, *Handel Sources: Materials for the Study of Handel's Borrowing* (New York: Garland, 1986); idem, "Why did Handel Borrow?" in *HTC*, 83-92; Maria Anne Lisa Szeker-Madden, "The Use of Logic and Rhetoric in Handel's Selection and Adaptation of Source Material" (Ph.D. diss., University of Victoria, 2002); John T. Winemiller, "Handel's Borrowing and Swift's Bee: Handel's 'Curious' Practice and the Theory of Transformative Imitation" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Chicago, 1994); idem, "Recontextualizing Handel's Borrowing," *The Journal of Musicology* 15, no. 4 (1997): 444-470.

wealth of discourses on this particular subject, the challenge to provide a comprehensive answer to the perplexing question of Handel's creative practices remains to subsist.

Musicologist Mark Risinger made an important point when he explored Handel's borrowing practices in several operatic works:

In all likelihood, we will never arrive at a single, completely satisfactory answer to the question of why Handel borrowed, in part because he probably had different reasons for doing so at different times. His was a long and fruitful career, and we have seen in this study that even over the course of a single decade there could be noticeable shifts of compositional approach and procedure on a specific occasion or across a broader stretch of time.⁷³

This statement has brought an attention to the complexities in Handel's superior craftsmanship that it is almost impossible to identify a single overarching pattern that would serve well to describe his work as a whole. In this regard, Winton Dean argued that Handel's borrowing works ought not to be associated with plagiarism as he also noted that *Saul* was Handel's first oratorio in which he borrowed from other composers, most notably Francesco Antonio Urio (1631-1719) and Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722).⁷⁴ Furthermore, Handelian scholar George Buelow attempted to elucidate the matter by suggesting the term 'borrowing' itself as misleading because 'it does not adequately convey how Handel treats pre-existing musical materials' (both from his own and other composers). Conversely, he argued for a better term, which is, "reworkings" or "adaptations."⁷⁵ Thus, in explaining the rationale of these practices in *Saul*, Risinger

⁷³ Risinger, "Handel's Compositional Premises and Procedures", 266.

⁷⁴ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 284.

⁷⁵ Buelow, "The Case for Handel's Borrowings: The Judgment of Three Centuries," in *HTC*, 78-79.

argued that Handel used pre-existing sources on the premises that this particular oratorio was fully dramatic in nature.⁷⁶ The work itself stood in contrast with another oratorio which was composed around the same time, namely *Israel in Egypt*.⁷⁷ The rationale of dramatic nature in oratorio as a basis to determine a distinctive compositional process is also supported by musicologist David Hurley as he emphasized that the process involved not only the music but also the structure of the libretto, the dramaturgy, and characterizations in the story. There were intricate relationships among proportion balance, plot and they compelled Handel's craftsmanship that would bring him to break free from certain boundaries imposed in a libretto in order to create a dramatic impact, nonetheless, those revisions were not mere cut-and-paste job, as Hurley and Smith argued.⁷⁸

In many ways, as this section will discuss concurrently, *Saul* oratorio was a perfect example to see the dramatic feature in a Handelian oratorio as it was the first oratorio on which Handel applied his past experience in writing and performing operas to the full extent.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, as musicologist Ralph Webb argued, in *Saul*, one can also see how Handel wanted to break free from the confines of the musico-dramatic principles in the Italian *opera seria*, a particular genre that was often associated with his previous

⁷⁶ Risinger "Handel's Compositional Premises and Procedures," 195-196.

⁷⁷ Minji Kim argued that its style bore much resemblance to the nature of the English anthem instead of a dramatic oratorio as it was rich with Scriptural quotations and allusions. See Kim, "Handel's Israel in Egypt: A Three-Anthem Oratorio. An Analytical and Interpretive Study of the Original 1739 Version, Volume I of II" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2005), 21-24.

⁷⁸ Hurley, *Handel's Muse*, 214-215; Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 89.

⁷⁹ Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 319.

works.⁸⁰ This evaluation matches well with the description from Winton Dean who highlighted Handel's treatment and variance from one oratorio to another, aligned with the presupposition that Handel viewed the oratorio itself as a flexible genre.⁸¹ On this particular matter, both Dean and Smith seemed to come together in an agreement that Handel's variation in each oratorio was applied not just for the sake of variety but to animate the drama and fine-tune its suitability with the intended audience.⁸² Perhaps this is one of the main differences between Handel and his other Baroque contemporaries, such as J. S. Bach. The latter seemed to focus his attention much more to the text in elucidating the sacred Scripture through his compositional technique rooted in the German Baroque style. It is reasonable that German-American musicologist Alfred Mann argued about the appropriation of the term 'oratorio' as a sacred genre which was largely based upon the works of J. S. Bach rather than Handel, especially as the former adopted the terminology in performing his church cantatas since the Christmastide of 1734.⁸³ In a striking contrast with his German Lutheran contemporary, Handel did not place his priority to the exposition of the Scripture but none other than the audience as he worked toward stirring their emotion(s) through his musico-dramatic approach influenced by the

⁸⁰ Ralph T. Webb, "Handel's Oratorios as Drama," *College Music Symposium* 23, no. 2 (1983): 140-141.

⁸¹ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 43-44. While there were other Western European works that could be classified as forebearers of oratorio, Dean argued that it was unlikely for Handel to have known those works. See 10-12.

⁸² *Ibid.*; Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's Saul," 91-92.

⁸³ Alfred Mann, "The Sacred Element in Handel's Music," in *Reflections on the Sacred: A Musicological Perspective*, ed. Paul Brainard (New Haven, CT: Yale Institute of Sacred Music, 1994), 20.

Italian school. In this context, music historian Dietrich Bartel argued that there is a vast difference between these two approaches in the following remark:

Italian rejection of music's numerological and cosmological significance in favor of its direct affective and aesthetic effect led to a form of musical expression which focused on a modern aesthetic principle of expressing and stirring the affections rather than explaining the text. Although the text was central to musical composition, it became the springboard for musical expression rather than the object of the composition. The expressive musical devices which characterize the Italian *nuove musiche* were developed with an aesthetic rather than exegetic principle in mind. Instead of introducing an intermediate level of linguistic and theological significance to the musical phenomena as was done in Lutheran Germany, the Italian sought to speak directly and immediate to the sense.⁸⁴

Aligned with this idea, Smith asserted that Handel's dramatic technique in *Saul* even crossed the borders of the narrative approach in the Holy Scripture where conversations are usually between only two people, while the oratorio allows more people to interact within the same scene (see Ex. 3.1 below).⁸⁵

Furthermore, it is reasonable to think that Handel saw the dramatic potential of the recitatives in captivating the audience as he was using *accompagnato* as what Dean called as "musical vehicle" in this particular oratorio. He went so far as to argue that the five accompanied recitatives in *Saul* are among the finest in Handel's entire work.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 59.

⁸⁵ Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 92

⁸⁶ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 283.

8. Recitative

ABNER

Be - hold, O King, the brave vic - to - rious Youth, And in his
Sieh da, o Herr, den tap - fern jun - gen Held, in sei - ner

Continuo
(Violoncello,
Cembalo)

4

SAUL

Hand the haugh - ty Gi - ant's Head. Young Man, whose Son art thou?
Hand des stol - zen Rie - sen Haupt! Sag an, wes Sohn bist du?

7 DAVID

The Son of Jes - se, Thy faith - ful Serv - ant, and a Beth - le - mite.
Ein Sohn von Jes - se, dein treu - er Die - ner, und aus Beth - le - hem.

Example 3.1: Handel, *Saul*, Act I, no. 8, mm. 1-9

In this oratorio, the characterization of Jonathan was effectively and dramatically accomplished with Handel's use of the *accompagnato* (see Ex. 3.2 below). Handel purposely deployed this particular recitative to portray the torn and conflicted Jonathan in his personal dilemma upon knowing his father's hatred toward David. Ruth Smith noted that Handel altered the character of Jonathan as the Book of Samuel never indicated any signs of his volition to defy his father.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 98.

38. *Accompagnato*
Lento

Violino I

Violino II

Viola

JONATHAN

Bassi
(*Violoncello, Violone, Cembalo*)

O Fil-ial Pi - e - ty! O Sa-cred Friend-ship!
O heil'-ge Kin-des-pflicht! O trou - e Freund-schaft!

5

How shall I rec - on - cile you? Cru - el Fa-ther! Your just Com-mands I
Wie soll ich euch rev - söh - nen? Har - ter Va - ter! Stets war dein Wort Ge-

Example 3.2: Handel, *Saul*, Act I, no. 38, mm. 1-8

As it is shown in the example, Handel masterfully composed an accompanied recitative that induces the emotional effect of torn and personal dilemma. The biblical character of Jonathan that once merely sympathetic to the cause of David was turned into his ally, thus establishing the virtue and goodness of the former through this musical device, as Liam Gorry has remarked:

Furthermore, the allocation of accompanied recitative solely to Jewish or Christian characters is revealing, as it suggests that Handel used the medium not only to enhance

the musical characterisation of these participants but also to connect them more closely with their God and indeed to confirm His very existence. By enriching the musical characterisation he also enhanced the dramatic effectiveness of his oratorios in the theatre.⁸⁸

For that reason, it can be inferred that the presence of the *accompagnato* is much more significant in Handel's oratorio, especially *Saul*, in contrast with the Italian *opera seria* genre that placed a primary importance on the arioso.

18

What shall I call it? - 'Tis an Act of Du-ty To God - to Da-vid - nay, in deed, to You.
 was wir' es an-ders als die Pflicht der Lie-be zu Gott, zu Da-vid und, fürwahr, zu dir!

Example 3.3: Handel, *Saul*, Act I, no. 38, mm. 18-22

In addition to the composer's intentional practice of elevating the significance and presence of the *accompagnato*, Handel also crossed the stylistic borders of the Italian *opera seria* in another feature. Webb remarked how the composer reconstituted "the social order" of soloists that had already been established in that genre in addition to reducing the *da capo* arias. In that regard, it was not surprising that Saul, the main character, only sang three arias while the oratorio itself did not present any 'favorite star'

⁸⁸ Liam Gorry, "Accompanied Recitative and Characterisation in Handel's Oratorios," in *Music in the London Theatre from Purcell to Handel*, ed. Colin Timms and Bruce Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 215.

who sang an extremely long aria, as it was the tradition in the *opera seria*.⁸⁹ Winton Dean noted that in *Saul*, the arioso are often terse and the messages are clear.⁹⁰ This characteristic is particularly evident in Jonathan's aria. Handel once again

16

Da - vid's Life a - way! No, no, cru - el Fa - ther, no!
Hand in Da - vids Blut? Nein, nein, grau - sa - mer Va - ter, nein!

Allegro

25

Ardito

No, no; with my Life I must de - fend A - gainst the World my best, my dear - est
Nein, nein, nein, ich muß, muß ret - ten ihn vor der Ge - fahr, den lieb - sten, be - sten

Example 3.4: Handel, *Saul*, Act I, no. 38, mm. 16-28

demonstrated this finesse as the piece begins in B minor (*Larghetto*) with 3/8 time and ends in G major (*Allegro*) with 4/4 meter. He skillfully employed this sudden change in the middle of the aria to indicate Jonathan's willful decision to change sides as David's ally.⁹¹ In many ways the combination of the *accompagnato* and aria was both dramatic

⁸⁹ Webb, "Handel's Oratorios as Drama," 140-141.

⁹⁰ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 283.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 289.

and efficient in delivering its message. Hence, Ruth Smith argued that it was one of Handel's rare invention.⁹² While the musical pieces of the individual characters in this oratorio seem to be more concise in comparison to the Italian operatic arias, it does not necessarily imply that Handel condenses everything including the personnel involved. On the contrary, Andrew Shryock noted that *Saul* has the largest cast among all of the composer's oratorios.⁹³ Correspondingly, another example that indicated Handel's breakthrough in relation to the dramatic and colossal natures of this oratorio would be the involvement of the chorus, as Dean asserted:

But the most important character, on a par with the King himself, is the chorus. Nothing could be wider of the mark than the notion that the chorus in *Saul* stand outside the action. They take part in everything: the celebration of David's victory, the betrothal of David and Michal, Saul's feast, the elegy, the final gaze into the future.⁹⁴

Handel may have adapted the dramatic features of Italian opera into this oratorio, but the elevated importance of the chorus suggested that he also wanted to break free from the very same genre. In the dramaturgy, the chorus became just as important as the King himself. From the musical standpoint, the chorus movements stood in the same degree of significance with the arias and recitatives to a point that the ongoing story plot incited curiosity to the audience about what will come next, as Burrows and Webb pointed out. Thus, one can find that Handel creatively departed from the existing forms

⁹² Smith, "Biblical Heroes Amended in Jennens' and Handel's *Saul*," 98.

⁹³ Shryock, "Handel and the Sublime," 156.

⁹⁴ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 284.

and reconstituted the elements in what previously known as the Italian opera in order to create a dramatic synthesis in the biblical oratorio.⁹⁵

77. March

Grave

The musical score is for a full orchestra. It includes parts for Flauto I and II, Trombone I, II, and III, Timpani, Violino I and II, Viola, and Bassi (Violoncello, Violone, Fagotto, Organo). The tempo is marked 'Grave' and the dynamics are 'p' (piano). The score shows the first six measures of the piece.

Example 3.5: Handel, *Saul*, Act III, no. 77, mm. 1-6

Nevertheless, Handel's practice of crossing borders in terms of musical style and composition did not end there. Winton Dean had remarked that the most well-known piece from *Saul* even up to this day was actually neither an aria nor a choral movement but the "Dead March," a sinfonia (see Ex. 3.5).⁹⁶ This particular piece came at the conclusion of David's rage toward the Amalekite who had killed Saul and Jonathan (no.

⁹⁵ Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 322; Webb, "Handel's Oratorios as Drama," 141.

⁹⁶ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 300-301; Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 320.

76, “Impious wretch”). The movement itself can be said to be jarring as it was begun in the tonality of C major, the *affekt* of solemnity which supported the dramatic effect.⁹⁷ Accordingly, in *Saul*, one can also see Handel’s growing penchant for the lavish use of musical instruments as a defining characteristic of his oratorio as Dean had noted about the superiority of the orchestration in this oratorio among eighteenth-century music.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, his notable innovation can be recognized not from a symphonic movement but from the use of a particular instrument that sparked some controversy, namely the ‘carillon’, in addition to the fact that the opening part of that movement was reworked and adapted from *Te Deum*, written by a Milanese Catholic composer, Francesco Urio.⁹⁹

The image displays two musical excerpts for comparison. The top excerpt is from Urio's *Te Deum*, featuring the organ part. It is written in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked 'Tutti.' and the dynamics are 'D. 5.'. The notation shows a complex, rhythmic pattern with many beamed notes. The bottom excerpt is from Handel's *Symphony*, specifically the 'Carillons' section. It is marked 'Andante allegro' and 'in F'. The dynamics are 'f'. The notation shows a similar rhythmic pattern to the organ part above, but with a different melodic contour. The instruments listed are 'Carillons in F' and 'Violino I, II Organo tasto solo'.

Example 3.6: Comparison of Urio’s *Te Deum* and Handel’s Carillon Symphony

⁹⁷ Ibid., 60-61, 295.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 275, 285, 298; Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 319; Ruth Smith, “Early Music’s Dramatic Significance in Handel’s *Saul*,” *Early Music* 35, no. 2 (2007): 175.

In a summary, it can be inferred that Handel developed his own synthesis of musical styles in the process of composing *Saul*. For that reason, this oratorio becomes distinctive because of the convergence of different styles and characteristics. The composer purposely utilized musical aspects that were beyond the bounds of conventional approach both in the worlds of Italian opera and his earlier oratorio works. There were several notable practices of creative synthesis in terms of his musical style and compositional process. Handel purposely crossed the boundaries of the Italian *opera seria*, of which he was most familiar, by diminishing the much adored virtuosic arias and emphasized recitatives and concise arias as important musical vehicles. At the same time, he also deployed chorus movements and instrumental music which became just as important as the arias while they were all interleaved to create a dramatic synthesis in his English oratorio. Moreover, the following section will discuss other significant borders which Handel crossed.

Crossing over Patronage and Societal Borders

One of the most important aspects to be explored in the development of Handel's compositions and performances would be the reception of those works. For that reason, the issue of Handel's musical patronage remains to be a subject of academic discourses for some time. David Hunter remarked that there has been a popular notion about Handel's patronage, particularly the idea that the composer's financial support shifted from royal family or ecclesiastically-affiliated patrons into the subscription of a more popular and wider burgeoning middle class. British historian Murray Roston even went so far as to argue that the rise of the middle class became a major appeal for Handel's

oratorio productions and performances to the point that these burgeoning people somewhat had the idea of attending Handelian oratorio as a religious experience in the same way they attended the church.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, music historian David Hunter refuted the notion of Handel's attraction to the middle class people by highlighting the fact that Handel's employment under the English monarchy has never been discontinued as he remained to be guaranteed of a large sum of annual pension (£600, especially in the second half of 1720s).¹⁰¹ He argued that Handel would have preferred to have a wide reach of audience and financial supporters that would include both the ancient landed patrician and modern, commercial subscribers. Nevertheless, he also pointed out a caveat that there was a striking difference between the contemporary world and the economy operated in the eighteenth-century England as a monarchically-oriented society where musicians were not independent economic agents in the marketplace. Thus, he concluded that relying solely upon subscriptions outside the traditional patronage would not yield the financial gain which he desired.¹⁰²

Another misconception in the issue of Handel's traditional patronage would be the idea of a strained relationship with his royal employer instigated by his initial travel

¹⁰⁰ Roston, *The Biblical Drama in England*, 186.

¹⁰¹ Hunter, "Patronizing Handel, Inventing Audiences," 42; Idem., "Royal Patronage of Handel in Britain: The Rewards of Pension and Office," in *Handel Studies: A Gedenkschrift for Howard Serwer*, 127-154. See also Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads: His 1737-1738 and 1738-1739 Seasons Re-Examined," 599-635. The latter contended that Handel's performance season in 1738-1739 was not as successful as often assumed. Hence, his decision in maintaining a good standing relationship with the traditional patrons in the midst of a growing possibility of expanding into a more public patronage would be considered as a strategic measure as well as another evidence of his crossing border practice, which will be discussed further.

¹⁰² Hunter, "Patronizing Handel, Inventing Audiences," 41-42.

to England which often said to cause the Elector of Hanover (who later became George I) to be upset. Conversely, British historian Ragnhild Hatton argued that the travel was actually sponsored by the monarch with a purpose to expose the composer with operatic performances which were non-existent in Hanover at that time. In that regard, Hatton remarked that there was no need for reconciliation even after the latter became George I of England, as proven by the fact that Handel became the music teacher for his two younger daughters and the daughters of the Prince and Princess of Wales from 1714 onward.¹⁰³ This achievement has been considered noteworthy, especially in the light of the socio-political turmoil and conflicts over ideology and religious interests which took place not too long before Handel's arrival in England in the year 1710.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, musicologist Paul Monod went so far as to argue that Handel's early London operas became the unexpected arena for a meeting point between the opposing conservative and liberal camps in the British aristocracy. Known as the Tories and the Whigs, respectively, they both sought to gain control of the theatre music through different means of influence.¹⁰⁵ Thus, Handel seemed to gain much benefit in the ascendancy of George I and the establishment of the Hanoverian monarchy in 1714 in the light of a collapsed

¹⁰³ Ragnhild M. Hatton, "New Light on George I of Great Britain" in *England's Rise to Greatness, 1660-1763*, ed. Stephen B. Baxter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 235. See also William Weber, "Handel's London – Social, Political, and Intellectual Contexts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46-47.

¹⁰⁴ Weber, "Handel's London," 45-47. See also Paul Monod, "The Politics of Handel's Early London Operas, 1711-1718," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 3 (2006): 445-472.

¹⁰⁵ Monod, "The Politics of Handel's Early London Operas, 1711-1718," 448-452; Weber, "Handel's London," 50. For further reading in this topic, see Thomas McGeary, *The Politics of Opera in Handel's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.)

Stuart regime with the death of Queen Anne (1665-1714). Nevertheless, as Handelian scholar Donald Burrows pointed out, Handel still managed to survive and even thrive in working under the Stuart and the Hanoverian monarchs consecutively. This survival was indicated by three important works produced during his career in the British court from 1713-1737.¹⁰⁶ The full extent of Handel's aptitude in maintaining good standing relationship with his royal patron came about in 1727 as he was naturalized into British citizenship and promoted as the Director of the Royal Academy of Music.¹⁰⁷ Sometime later in that same year, George II was crowned as his father's successor, accompanied by his consort, Caroline of Ansbach, both known to be closely acquainted with Handel.¹⁰⁸

On the other hand, the intricacy of politics among British nobilities did not recede after the Hanoverian took the monarchy. For Handel as a royally appointed composer, the position may not always be as auspicious as there were times when he did not get adequate support that he needed to keep his music running. For instance, the sudden death of Queen Caroline in 1737 gave an impetus to Handel's venture in collaborating with other patron(s) outside the palace. Few years preceding to this unexpected tragedy, Handel had already lost another supporter of his oratorios with the departure of Princess

¹⁰⁶ The three major works were the Utrecht *Te Deum* (1713), commissioned by Queen Anne; the Coronation Service for George II and Queen Caroline (1727); and the Funeral of Queen Caroline (1737). See Donald Burrows, "Handel, Stuarts and Hanoverians: Handel's English Church Music and the Image of the British Monarchy," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 49 (2003): 95–103.

¹⁰⁷ Donald Burrows, "The English Chapel Royal as the Intersection of Religion and Personal Politics for Handel and the British Monarchy," *Händel Jahrbuch* 59 (2013): 189; idem., "Handel and the 1727 Coronation," *The Musical Times* 118, no. 1612 (1977): 469.

¹⁰⁸ Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 73.

Anne of Orange to the Netherlands.¹⁰⁹ By looking into his traverses around the perimeters of Western European Christianity since the dawn of the eighteenth-century, it would not be an overstatement to say that Handel attempted to make a full use of every opportunity and support that he could get from diverging parties in politics and religion. Just as he had received support from the Stuart Queen Anne and the Hanoverian monarchs, from the Tories and Whigs, as well as the sympathizers of both regimes.¹¹⁰ These are important precursors of Handel's collaboration with Charles Jennens as his librettist in *Saul*, especially by considering that the English oratorio became an intersection between the arts, religion, and politics, as several Handelian scholars asserted.¹¹¹ Jennens, a wealthy nobleman from Leicestershire, is particularly important in examining Handel's crossing borders in the aspect of patronage. He was known to represent a different political side with the Hanoverian, being a Nonjuror who refused to take the oath to abjure loyalty to the deposed (Catholic) Stuart James II and pledge obedience to the new king.¹¹² While none of his ancestors seemed to have any affiliation with this political position, he

¹⁰⁹ Chrissochoidis, "Handel at a Crossroads," 599; Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 155-156, 190-193.

¹¹⁰ David Hunter, "Handel among the Jacobites," *Music & Letters* 82, no. 4 (2001): 547.

¹¹¹ While Winton Dean Smith argued against the idea of religiosity within the oratorio, other scholars took the position of seeing Handel's oratorios as a meeting point of the three aspects. See Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 7-8; Weber, "Handel's London," 50. See also Shapiro, "'Drama of an Infinitely Superior Nature,'" 215-245. Ruth Smith is particularly important within the scholarship of the biography of Handel's librettists, particularly Jennens, being one of very few scholars who have done research in this subject. For a comparative reading list in Jennens' collaboration with Handel, see Hicks, "Handel, Jennens, and *Saul*: Aspects of a Collaboration," 203-227; John H. Roberts, "Handel, Charles Jennens, and the Advent of Scriptural Oratorio," 222-243.

¹¹² Smith, *Charles Jennens: The Man behind Handel's Messiah*, 13; idem., "The Achievements of Charles Jennens (1700-1773)," 172-173; Harris, *Handel: A Life with Friends*, 271.

attended Balliol in Oxford, a school that was notorious with certain influence of pro-Stuart movements known as Jacobitism. Although Nonjurors often regarded with their exclusion from careers in public office and political subversion, or even treason, Jennens was known to be rather passive in his subversion and still honored by his peers as their leading patron.¹¹³ In that regard, Handelian scholar Ruth Smith highlighted Jennens' complicated political and religious dilemma as the killing of Saul was somewhat theologically and politically equated with the sacrilege in the killing of the Catholic Charles I (preceded by the overthrow of James II), the rightful yet apostate regime. At the same time, they were also considered as backsliders from the true Christian faith, hence the Church of England, of which Jennens was its devout member.¹¹⁴ Smith also held to the notion that both the Stuart and Hanoverian houses politicized the biblical story of Saul and David to buttress their position, especially in the nationwide, liturgical service of penitence which was held annually in the occasion of the anniversary of Charles I's execution with a political agenda to make amends for his murder by incorporating David's lament for Saul and Jonathan as the Old Testament reading.¹¹⁵ As Weber has argued for and highlighted Handel's independence from the bounds of religious and political ideas, it is equally important to see how Handel realized the dramatic capacity of religious elements in the midst of its intricate convolutions with politics, from the

¹¹³ Ruth Smith, "Handel's English Librettists" in *The Cambridge Companion to Handel*, ed. Donald Burrows (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 96-97.

¹¹⁴ Smith, *Charles Jennens*, 67-69.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

perspectives of both a Christian believer and an artist.¹¹⁶ Therefore, it is no surprise that he decided to end the oratorio in an unexpected manner. Just as a triumphant ending with usual instruments such as timpani and drums was anticipated, the entire instruments and the choir with the exception of the strings and *continuo* suddenly receded two measures before the final end. Bartelmus related this peculiarity with the argument of seeing this oratorio as a form of Greek tragedy (see Ex. 3.7 below).¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, it is compelling to see this practice as an approach that Handel took in the attempt to avoid (or perhaps reconcile) the controversial, diverging interpretations on the death of Saul (both from the perspective of Hanoverian and Jacobites).

With that in mind, it is worth to note Donald Burrows' remark that Handel was not only skillful in maintaining his ongoing identification with the Hanoverian court in order to secure his tenure but also in continuing his relationship with Oxford University, known as an intellectual stronghold for Jacobites.¹¹⁸ Conversely, Handel's refusal to accept their conferral of the Doctor of Music degree can also be understood as one way for the composer to move freely between the two polarizing political spectrum.¹¹⁹ This is one important practice of crossing the societal borders in Handel's patronage. In the light of these arguments, one can also see that his partnership with Jennens and the dramatic

¹¹⁶ Weber, "Handel's London," 48-50.

¹¹⁷ Bartelmus, "Handel and Jennens' Oratorio 'Saul'," 304-305.

¹¹⁸ Donald Burrows, "Handel, the British Court and the London Public," *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 15 (2014): 117-118. See also Johnstone, "Handel at Oxford in 1733," 256-257.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

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173

own thy righteous Sway, shall crowd to own thy right-eous Sway.
 schau dein neu-es Reich, sich drängt, zu schau dein neu-es Reich.

own thy righteous Sway, shall crowd to own thy right-eous Sway.
 schau dein neu-es Reich, sich drängt, zu schau dein neu-es Reich.

own thy righteous Sway, shall crowd to own thy right-eous Sway.
 schau dein neu-es Reich, sich drängt, zu schau dein neu-es Reich.

own thy righteous Sway, shall crowd to own thy right-eous Sway.
 schau dein neu-es Reich, sich drängt, zu schau dein neu-es Reich.

senza Org.
 The End of the Oratorio
 Ende des Oratoriums

Example 3.7: Handel, *Saul*, Act III, no. 86, mm. 173-181

use of the biblical story of Saul in this oratorio was his adroit measure of breaking out from the confinement of his identification with the increasingly unpopular regime yet without having to fear losing his job. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that Handel's collaboration with the Jennens in *Saul* described not only his penchant for expanding musical patronage outside the bounds of the British court but also as a way for the composer to prove his unswerving allegiance to the reigning monarch as his current tenure and livelihood were still much depended to them.

Crossing over Religious and Ecclesiastical Borders

In her portrayal about Jennens, Smith noted how the librettist lived during the time and era when devout Anglicans feared at least two ever-increasing threats. The first one came from the Nonconformists who opposed the Church of England while the next one would be the influx of rationalism and the Enlightenment that cast doubt on the integrity of the Holy Scripture and the truth of Christian revelation.¹²⁰ Thus, it is no surprise that Jennens implanted his own agenda to defend the Christian faith in his libretto of *Saul* as demonstrated in the opening section of Act I when he referred to Goliath as the "Monster Atheist" (see Ex. 3.8 below) and Handel composed this part to be sung by a trio. While Jennens' religiosity and spirituality were quite evident in his works, these aspects in Handel were not as clear-cut and apparent. Consequently, religiosity has been regarded as one particular dimension in the life of Handel which is somewhat challenging to be explored due to the scarcity of its materials. Nevertheless,

¹²⁰ Smith, *Charles Jennens*, 14-16.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system shows the vocal line with German and English lyrics. The second system shows the vocal line with German and English lyrics and the basso continuo line. The lyrics are: 'A-long the Mon-ster A-theist strode With more than Hu-man Pride, Es trat das Un-ge-tüm ein- her mit fre-vel-haf-tem Spott,'.

Example 3.8: Handel, *Saul*, Act I, no. 4, mm. 9-13

the private aspects of the composer, especially his religion, has rarely been discussed, unlike those of his German contemporary, J. S. Bach. The latter's works, especially his oratorios, clearly portray this aspect. Conversely, this element in Handel's life and oeuvre remains to be relevant and important to be explored as his works have transcended religious and denominational barriers. In their recent essays, Michael Lloyd and Hans Joachim Marx attempted to describe Handel's theology and spirituality in the midst of a dearth of reliable evidences.¹²¹ Marx concluded that the composer was a Lutheran Pietist at heart. He took this position especially by taking consideration of Handel's response concerning his mother's death in a letter to Michael Dietrich Michaelsen (1681-1748), his brother-in-law in Halle, on February 12, 1731. In the letter, he expressed his own belief in the afterlife, in accordance to his faith in God, which would be a strong tenet of Christian orthodoxy.¹²² In addition, he also took the consideration of the inscription of the

¹²¹ Michael Lloyd, "Towards an Outline of Handel's Theology," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 59 (2013): 151-166; Hans Joachim Marx, "Händels Religiosität im Kontext der europäischen Konfessionen," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 56 (2010): 79-99.

¹²² Marx, "Händels Religiosität im Kontext der europäischen Konfessionen," 98-99.

well-known aria title from *Messiah*, “I know that my Redeemer liveth,” which is written on Handel’s grave monument in Westminster Abbey.¹²³ On the other hand, Lloyd argued that Handel’s religiosity was also rooted in what has been known as German Lutheran Pietism but with a slant toward pacifism. In this context, he strongly presumed that Handel embraced “cruciform theology” which seemed to be more at ease with the portrayal of Christ as the Suffering Servant, or “the Lamb that was slain” than with the “all-conquering Lion.” He particularly took Handel’s interest in the theme of taming the tyrant as depicted in the latter’s musical dramas. Thus, in asserting a concise description of Handel’s theology, Lloyd remarked, “he presents the Cross as the refusal to impose or dictate.”¹²⁴ While these accounts may seem to be speculative in nature, a sharper analysis that would help to shed some light on Handel’s religious background came from musicologist Alexander Ringer in his essay several decades preceding the two above authors.¹²⁵ Ringer based his argument on the idea that German Lutheranism was divided into two contrasting ideals during the time of Bach and Handel, one that leaned toward traditional dogmatism and the authority of religious establishments and the other pole, the Pietists who dedicated a life of mercy, devotion and striving for the well-being of the community. Halle, the central-eastern German city where Handel grew up and attended college (University of Halle), had been known as one of the centers of Pietism in the

¹²³ Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, 1868), 328.

¹²⁴ Lloyd, “Towards an Outline of Handel’s Theology,” 163.

¹²⁵ Alexander L. Ringer, “Handel and the Jews,” *Music & Letters* 42, no. 1 (1961): 17-29.

seventeenth century. While the name of this particular idea or stream of Christianity may sounded parochial, Ringer argued that the spirit of religious tolerance and the love of humanity were deeply embedded in Halle Pietism. Bearing all these in mind, the two ideas pointed out by Marx and Lloyd seemed to be harmonious with Ringer.

Furthermore, it is equally important to note that Handel, the Lutheran, once took the position of organist at the Domkirche, a large Reformed church in Halle (1702).¹²⁶ Even in the earlier years of his career as a composer, Handel had had written biblical stories about Christ in Roman Catholic tradition, *La Resurrezione* (1708), and also the German Lutheran tradition, *Brockes Passion* (1716). Previously, he also composed an oratorio in 1707, *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno* (*The Triumph of Time and Truth*), a work that was initially commissioned by a Roman Catholic librettist, Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili (1653-1730). This work was later revised in 1757, as it became a form of collaborative work with an Anglican clergyman, Thomas Morell (1703-1784).¹²⁷ Despite Handel's practice of ecumenism, John Roberts and Liam Gorry gave an important note about the attitude of the Anglicans in England, who were suspicious toward oratorio as a new genre during its earlier development. They associated theatres with profanity and immorality, at the same time, the singing of the sacred texts in this particular venue would be considered as a sacrilege.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Ibid., 17-19; Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 381.

¹²⁷ Burrows, *Handel*, 2nd ed., 59-79; Katie Hawks, "Handel's Timely Triumphs," *Händel-Jahrbuch* 59 (2013): 195-202; Ruth Smith, "Thomas Morell and His Letter about Handel," *JRMA* 127, no. 2 (2002): 191-225. Further dealings between Handel and Morell will be discussed in the subsequent section.

¹²⁸ Roberts, "Handel, Charles Jennens, and the Advent of Scriptural Oratorio," 222-223; Gorry, "Accompanied Recitative and Characterisation in Handel's Oratorios," 214-215.

Nevertheless, from the standpoint of religious aspect, Handel's practice of crossing borders in *Saul* did not necessarily take place within the streams of Christianity as described above in his previous works. Aligned with Ringer's argument, Ruth Smith presented a compelling argument on Handel's fascination with the Jewish religious tradition.¹²⁹ The case that Smith brought up was quite compelling as the previous section on Handel's patronage already discussed some form of tensions that existed between Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism in England, as represented by the Stuart and Hanoverian regimes, respectively. In that regard, one ought to realize that Handel, who had just been naturalized into British citizenship in 1727 and declared loyalty to the monarch and the Church of England, was already affixed into this religious tradition. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that the court composer will never do anything that would harm his position, let alone changing his religious affiliation. Moreover, politico-religious conflicts had occurred in Britain since the Glorious Revolution in 1689 and its aftermaths left Handel with almost no choice but to embrace Anglicanism. Nevertheless, Smith's explorations were mainly based on the two famous letters sent to James Harris (1709-1780), one of Handel's supporters in Salisbury. The first letter was sent by his brother, Thomas, in November 30, 1738, while the second came from his half-sister, Katherine (Lady Knatchbull), in December 5, 1738.¹³⁰ Both letters gave references to

¹²⁹ Smith, "Early Music's Dramatic Significance in Handel's *Saul*," 173-189.

¹³⁰ The following are the letter of Thomas Harris to his brother:

"Mr Handell, as I am informed, intends to introduce into his performance several old instruments used in the time of K[ing] David, when, as old Ashe [Vice-President of Salisbury Musical Society] says, musick was in its greatest perfection. I mean sackbutts, timbrells and tubal cain's. How they will succeed in these degenerate days I won't determine, but you will in Lent have an opportunity of judging yourself." Burrows, et. al., *HCD*, 440.

musical instruments that were considered as peculiar in the eighteenth-century musical scenery in England, namely timbrells, Tubalcain, and sackbuts.

Smith concluded that what Harris had mentioned as “timbrells” would refer to the English translation (in the King James Bible) of a Hebraic instrument, namely *toph*, a portable percussion often used for religious observance and festivals.¹³¹ Dean and Smith connected this particular instrument with the fact that Handel borrowed kettle drums from the Tower of London, as confirmed by the letter from William, Lord Wentworth, to the Earl of Strafford in January 13, 1739.¹³² The next instrument, Tubalcain, would refer to carillon.¹³³ Winton Dean remarked about this instrument, “The most exotic stroke in the dramatic oratorios is the introduction of a specially constructed carillon or glockenspiel, which transposed down a fourth.”¹³⁴ This instrument was used in the Carillon Symphony (Act I, no. 20, see Ex. 3.6 above) and reinforced in the welcome song (Act I, no. 22)

The letter from Lady Knatchbull that mentioned about similar instruments as follows: “He has had an instrument made after the manner of Tubal Cain’s the inventor of musick[.] He also has introduced the sackbut[,] a kind of trumpets, with more variety of notes, & it [is] 7 or 8 foot long & draws in like a perspective glas[s], so may be shortend to 3 foot as the player chuses or thrown out to its full length[;] despise not this description for I write from his own words.” Ibid., 441.

¹³¹ Smith, “Early Music’s Dramatic Significance in Handel’s *Saul*,” 173-175.

¹³² Burrows, et. al., *HCD*, 449; Dean, *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 79; Smith, “Early Music’s Dramatic Significance in Handel’s *Saul*,” 175.

¹³³ Jennens’ letter to Lord Guernsey in September 19, 1738, has been known as one particular letter that gave many references to *Saul* oratorio. In addition to expressing his anger and frustration over Handel’s initial placement of Hallelujah in the oratorio, Jennens also loathed several peculiar instruments that Handel used in *Saul*. A portion of the letter is as follows: “Mr. Handel’s head is more full of Maggots than ever: I found yesterday in his room a very queer Instrument, which He calls Carillon (Anglice a Bell,) & says some call it a Tubalcain, I suppose because it is both in the make & tone like a set of Hammers striking upon Anvils. ‘Tis play’d upon with Keys like a Harpsichord; & with this Cyclopean Instrument he designs to make poor Saul stark mad.” Burrows, et. al., *HCD*, 427.

¹³⁴ Dean, *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 75.

where the famous tribute was heard ('Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands'). The third instrument in that letter, sackbut, referred to the use of three trombones in "Dead March" (see Ex. 3.5 above) as the word itself has similar meaning with the Italian trombone or German *posaune*. Smith maintained about this particular instrument, known as *shofar* in its Hebrew word, as Handel would have understood it from his German Lutheran Bible that translated the word as *posaune*.¹³⁵ Smith also pointed out that *shofar* was the only instrument that was allowed to be used in Jewish service after the siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and the instrument that Handel could have heard while encountering Jewish communities in his numerous traverses.¹³⁶

In addition to the usage in the "Dead March," the three trombones were added by Handel into the symphonic movement that marked Saul's new moon festival in the Second Act. Furthermore, Smith brilliantly found the connection between this inclusion and the allusion from *Davideis'* poet Cowley to Saul's new moon feast, as well as the biblical account in 1 Sam 20:5, 24.¹³⁷ By looking to the historical uses of *shofar* in the Old Testament, Smith concluded that Saul's Feast of the New Moon in the oratorio referred to the Jewish observance of New Year, known as Rosh Hashanah, where this instrument is to be played repeatedly.¹³⁸ For the Jewish people, this particular day is important as it

¹³⁵ Smith, "Early Music's Dramatic Significance in Handel's *Saul*," 179.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 178-179.

¹³⁸ Ibid. See also Malcolm Miller, "The Shofar and Its Symbolism," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 14 (2002): 83-113; T. C. G. Thornton, "Jewish New Moon Festivals, Galatians 4:3-11 and Colossians 2:16," *Journal of Theological Studies* 40, no. 1 (1989): 97-100; Solomon B. Freehof, "Sound the Shofar: 'Ba-Kesse' Psalm 81:4," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 64, no. 3 (1974): 225-228.

65. Symphony
Allegro

Oboe I
Oboe II
Fagotto
Tromba I
Tromba II
Trombone I
Trombone II
Trombone III
Timpani
Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Bassi
(Violoncello, Violonc., Cembalo, Organo)

Example 3.9: Handel, *Saul*, Act II, no. 65, mm. 1-3

will begin in a series of penitence within ten days leading to the Day of the Atonement, known as Yom Kippur. Thus, Smith hypothesized how the *shofar* was incorporated in Handel's symphonic movement (see Ex. 3.9 above), especially in the third bar when the oboe and violin played the rapid ascending demisemiquavers that she interpreted as the *shofar*.¹³⁹ While these ideas may be just a conjecture, one can only rely on the basic notion that both *shofar* and Rosh Hashanah are inseparable for the Jewish people.

On the other hand, in recent years there have been contrasting ideas which understood Handel's writing the biblical Israelite oratorio (such as *Messiah*) based on Jennens' libretto that includes the intention to repudiate Judaism, as popularized by Michael Marrison.¹⁴⁰ His idea about the Anti-Semitic motive in Jennens' *Messiah* libretto may have its own appeal and quite intriguing, especially with the fact that Handel wrote numerous biblical Israelite oratorio with different themes. Nonetheless, the interpretation of the Israelite biblical oratorio has often been understood in the light of the eighteenth-century British cultural idealization as a modern Protestant kingdom, hence the larger picture instead of an embedded, specific motive.¹⁴¹ It is reasonable to see that the use of

¹³⁹ Smith, "Early Music's Dramatic Significance in Handel's *Saul*," 181.

¹⁴⁰ Michael Marrison, "Rejoicing against Judaism in Handel's *Messiah*," *The Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 2 (2007): 167–194. See also idem., *Tainted Glory in Handel's Messiah: The Unsettling History of the World's Most Beloved Choral Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014). This particular issue has generated a heated debate during the American Handel Festival in 2007 at Princeton. The panel included Marrison himself, Ruth Smith, and Wendy Heller, Princeton's Scheide Professor of Music History. See James R. Oestreich, "Hallelujah Indeed: Debating Handel's Anti-Semitism" *The New York Times*, April 23, 2007.

¹⁴¹ See Blanning, "Nation-Building through Music? Music in English National Consciousness in the Eighteenth Century," 25-26; Rooke, *Handel's Israelite Oratorio Libretti*, 228; Roston, *Biblical Drama in England*, 185; and Smith, *Handel's Oratorios and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 11.

shofar (both in sounds and instrumental symbolism) in the symphonic movement at Saul's Feast of the New Moon (no. 65) carries a strong allusion to the understanding of Rosh Hashanah. It may well incite the suggestion that Handel was sympathetic to the Jewish cause, being a foreigner in the strange land himself. Moreover, there were at least two important notes that may help to shed some light on Handel's further dealings with the Jewish community in England as Alexander Ringer highlighted. The first one would be the positive responses of *Judas Maccabeus* (1746) whereas Handel's business involvements with the Jewish were increasing. Ringer even argued that Handel's works had opened up avenues for social and political engagements for the Jews, hence they became subscribers to his concerts.¹⁴² The second important note would be a tribute given from the Jewish community that was given seven years after the composer had died. Ringer also noted that in August 29, 1766, a dedication ceremony of the Great Synagogue in Duke's Place was held and the event was attended by prominent Rabbis from the Sephardic Jews. One of the highlights of this ceremony was the performance of Handel's Coronation Anthem, of which Ringer conjectured that it was "Zadok the Priest." Whatever that particular piece may be, the decision to perform a non-Jewish music in such important religious occasion was truly an exception.¹⁴³ It can be inferred that in the midst of complicated interreligious sentiments within eighteenth-century England Christianity, Handel did not hesitate to use his music as a bridge to cross over different religious borders, even to certain areas beyond Christianity itself.

¹⁴² Ringer, "Handel and the Jews," 28-29.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

Cosmopolitan or Trans-genre: Handelian Style in *Saul*

This study has discussed a dramatic oratorio that in many ways offers both exciting and perplexing features. In *Saul*, Handel has successfully transformed a biblical story plot that contained moral and political sentiments into a form of public entertainment that drew its own audience in multiple performances in London and Dublin, followed by a revival in the latter, as Winton Dean noted. Moreover, in maintaining his conviction that *Saul* gained an overall successful outcome, he referred to the May 22, 1742 edition of *The Dublin Journal* in their comments about the rehearsal during the Dublin revival. The news writer remarked about the rehearsal that “it was agreed by all the Judges present, to have been the finest Performance that hath been heard in this Kingdom.”¹⁴⁴ With the continuous performance of this oratorio even to the present time, it only adds to the idea that the dramatic impact and musical features of Handel’s *Saul* ought not to be underestimated. In this oratorio, Handel’s music was able to transcend over boundaries and borders of style, patronage, and religious symbolism.

From the standpoint of musical style and compositional process, Handel reworked pre-existing musical materials and combined his adaptations into an exciting and surprising piece (at that time) by using an early music instrument, hence the Carillon Symphony. His choice to eliminate any notion of operatic stardom in prime arioso

¹⁴⁴ Dean, *Handel’s Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 298; Burrows, et. al., *HCD*, 830.

generated another level of sophistication in the oratorio genre by the deployment of accompanied recitatives, chorus, and instrumental ensemble interleaved in the same level of importance in order to create a sense of curiosity and the unpredictability of ‘what comes next’ among the audience.

In the aspect of patronage and society, the libretto of *Saul* came just right in time when Handel had just lost support with the departure of his royal benefactor. Furthermore, the ambiguity embedded in the content of the dramatic material allowed Handel to move freely between the two opposing political spectrums in England, the Jacobite and the Hanoverian without being suspected of betrayal from either one. In that regard, Handel was careful enough in taking consideration of Jennens’ requests without compromising his musical principles, especially portrayed by the placement of the Hallelujah in Act I instead of at the very end of the oratorio.

Furthermore, from the perspective of religious and ecclesiastical tradition, Handel purposely used several early music instruments that had strong association with the Jewish tradition. Despite the fact that he had to work out further logistics in acquiring these instruments, he insisted on using them as Dean remarked that the use of finest instruments was a perfect replacement for Handel in the absence of finest singers during that time.¹⁴⁵ While the instruments added the dramatic feature of the oratorio, it also allowed Handel to go beyond the boundaries and bifurcations of the so-called Protestants and Catholics or the Anglicans and the Nonconformists. By adding the sinfonia that

¹⁴⁵ Dean, *Handel's Dramatic Oratorio and Masques*, 175.

preceded Saul's Feast of the New Moon with the sounds that gave hints to the solemnity and penitence in the observance of the Jewish holy days (Rosh Hashanah).

In the light of these realizations, *Saul* oratorio became a distinctive work that possesses rich qualities and strong associations into different musical and socio-religious aspects. It can be inferred that Handel crossed different borders in this work. There is a complex interwoven relationship between the libretto and its music with all the three aforementioned aspects of the oratorio. While questions about the Handelian style still exist, it is still difficult to determine whether *Saul* can be said as an oratorio or a sacred musical drama. Similarly, was Handel simply trying to formulate a cosmopolitan style of oratorio, or did he attempt to create a work that somewhat has what can be called as 'trans-genre' (a very flexible musical genre that possesses more than one distinctive characteristic)? This confusion is shared with Ruth Smith as she remarked in the following:

Variety of emotional affect had after all been the essence of all his operas, and Handel chooses to highlight the differences between the operas which he has given up composing and his oratorios, which have unprecedented elevation and grandeur. His statement that English is peculiarly capable of expressing 'sublime sentiments' and that these in turn are peculiarly suited to his kind of 'solemn' music refers to and builds on current aesthetic polemic, and he was shrewd to proffer his music as the perfect vehicle for lofty concepts. But modern critics have found him frequently disregarding or overriding the import of the text in his musical setting of it, and there is no oratorio in which we can feel sure that the finished work was the outcome of a common aim of textual and musical author.¹⁴⁶

I would like to argue for the second idea that Handel (though not deliberately) was trying to create a very flexible genre that could be adapted into his own context and environs which were no easy during the creation of *Saul*. The previous chapters have discussed

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *Handel's Oratorio and Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 38.

different grave circumstances and challenges he had to face, which were costly. Nonetheless, finding strong and reliable grounds for that claim is not the aim and purpose of this study. The main purpose of this study is to describe in what ways Handel's creative practice of navigating between musical principles and boundaries took place in *Saul* oratorio and my findings have been elaborated in the previous sections. It can be said also that these findings have suggested further about the religious nature of Handel's oratorios. While Winton Dean and Ruth Smith may have diverging views around this matter, it is important to note that both of their conclusions and positions are derived from the underlying context in the eighteenth-century Britain, particularly in positioning the dramatic oratorio from the sociocultural and politico-religious context at that time. Handel did write different works for the sole purpose of church music (e.g. his Latin church music and English anthems), yet his oratorios were not intended as church music and this particular idea needs to be reiterated. *Saul* demonstrated that the amendments of materials and departure from biblical fidelity are common practice in that musical genre in order to pursue its dramatic impact. In that regard, Handel's creative practices brought the idea of the eighteenth-century oratorio not as a solely biblical drama or a distinctive style in church music, but a form of musical interdisciplinary encounter between the arts, religion, sociocultural studies, and last but not the least, economics. Handel certainly possessed a good knowledge in some of these features, if not all, and masterfully crafted his oratorio in such finesse and combination that no other composer may have done it on the same level to which he had come.

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