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A. Wood. University of Adelaide. The Poetics of Libretti
Errata Sheet

For the digital version of a thesis for the Master of Arts

THE POETICS OF LIBRETTI: READING THE OPERA WORKS OF
GWEN HARWOOD AND LARRY SITSKY

Alison J E Wood
University of Adelaide
2008

The following third party copyright material is to be removed from this thesis (all of the material is contained in Appendix A):

- Libretto, *Fall of the House of Usher*, pages 95-99
- Libretto, *Lenz*, pages 101-112
- Libretto, *Voices in Limbo*, pages 127-132
- Libretto, *De Profundis*, pages 154-155

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ABSTRACT

Gwen Harwood is one of Australia’s most celebrated poets. Her longstanding collaboration with composer Larry Sitsky produced six substantial operas between 1963 and 1982: *Fall of the House of Usher* (1965); *Lenz* (1970); *Fiery Tales* (1975, based on Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and excerpts from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*); *Voices in Limbo* (1977); *The Golem* (1980, first performed in 1993); and *De Profundis* (1982, a setting of Oscar Wilde’s letters). Both Harwood and her critics acknowledge the libretti as some of her best writing (Harwood cites her libretto for *Lenz* as her ‘selected poem’); to date, there has been no major study of these works.

This thesis engages with Harwood’s opera texts, arguing for readings that are neither atomist nor reductive but jointly focused on both the effect of the text and the mechanics of its production. It begins by outlining the theoretical terrain of words and music studies and establishes an approach to Harwood and Sitsky’s operas based on the idea that opera’s textual exaggeration is a function of its multiple critical components; that is, the intersection of words and music, collaborative authorship, and dramatic language.

The thesis then offers focused studies of each of these aspects in Harwood and Sitsky’s works, constructing a literary picture of the opera texts. Primary sources include the scores of the operas (usually copies of the composer’s autograph), selected correspondence between Sitsky and Harwood, drafts and typescripts of the libretti (held in the National Library, Canberra, and the Fryer Library, University of Queensland), and selected essays by Harwood on her words for music.
DECLARATION

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university of tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

SIGNED:

DATE:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to the staff in the Manuscript Room at the National Library of Australia and the Fryer Library, University of Queensland; Opera Australia, Sydney; Sebastian Clark, Manning Clark House, Canberra; Kath McLean; and Antony Ernst for their generous assistance. I am also grateful to Professor Larry Sitsky for allowing me to view his papers at the National Library of Australia and to Dr John Harwood for granting access to Gwen Harwood’s libretto and letters in Tony Riddell’s papers, held at the Fryer Library, University of Queensland.

The Discipline of English at the University of Adelaide has allowed me the privilege of developing the ideas in this work through seminar presentations and papers; thanks particularly to Dr Phillip Butterss, Associate Professor Tom Burton, Dr Dianne Schwerdt and Dr Lawrence Warner. I am also indebted to Mr Paul Wilkins, Deputy Librarian and Mr Ray Choate, Librarian, University of Adelaide, for our many lively conversations about Gwen Harwood.

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Parts of this thesis have appeared in conference papers: ‘Uneasy Libretti: Gwen Harwood and the Operas of Larry Sitsky’ (Symposium of the International Musicological Society, Melbourne, July 2004); ‘Is this your Golem?: Retelling Textual History in the Operas of Larry Sitsky and Gwen Harwood’ (Writing Across Cultures: Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Australia Literature, Adelaide, July 2005); ‘From Libretto to Score: Textual Transformations in Voices in Limbo’ (Multimodal Texts: Engaging Sign Systems, Portsmouth, UK, October 2005); ‘Opera Crafting and the Manuscripts of Gwen Harwood and Larry Sitsky’ (Bibliographic Society of Australia and New Zealand, Adelaide, October 2006).

For Alison Gent, Douglas Muecke, Kevin Magarey,
Graham Nerlich and Barbara Wall,
who very kindly let me read poetry with them.