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*Abstract*

The paper explores the tension between the idea of a “critical” edition of an opera (which serves to fix its text, giving it the stamp of a composer’s authority, as well as the authority that institutional scholarship might still command) and the idea of operatic mobility: of the fact that the work in question was often subject to multiple revivals, multiple re-imaginings (both with and without that composerly authority), multiple reinterpretations, multiple meanings. The case of Donizetti, the most widely disseminated operatic composer from the mid-1830s to the mid-1840s, and amongst the most prolific, brings these issues into sharp focus; as does my choice of a “case study” in his late opera *Caterina Cornaro*, which for many reasons had an extremely complex genesis and exodus. So much about this composer, and this opera, challenges the rhetoric that conventionally accompanies critical editions, perhaps even challenges the very basis on which such editions make their small ripples in today’s vast musical-industrial complex. But what is also challenged is the manner in which we think of composers’ operas more generally, particularly their status as “works” as they migrated from one urban centre to another.