Naomi Matsumoto

Abstract

Plagiarism is not only an aesthetic «sin», offending against originality and the creative responsibilities of artists; it also has moral and cultural dimensions. In social and human terms it offends against both truth and trust, and it provides a weapon for rival factions and those for whom knowledge is power. Most importantly it reaches to the heart of the question about how a culture can have an artistic identity when the representative works must allude to common traditions while remaining unique. This paper explores those issues in relation to a much maligned opera in early nineteenth-century London – Balfe's *The Siege of Rochelle* (1835). It places the charges of «borrowing» lodged against it within their historical context, and it exposes the cultural role that plagiarism can play in the search for artistic identity.

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