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Beyond *Verismo*: Massenet's *La Navarraise* and 'Realism' in *Fin-de-siècle* Paris

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'Colour, passion, a *mise en scène* with a powerful *réalisme*, a perfect *artiste*; to set it all in relief, a poignant story, rapid, breathless, full of tragic frissons and swooning tenderness. Voilà *La Navarraise*!' So enthused Charles Formentin in *Le jour* on 5 October 1895.[1] Two evenings earlier, Massenet's opera, to a libretto by Jules Claretie and Henri Cain, had received its belated Parisian première at the Opéra-Comique. Following its first appearance at London's Covent Garden on 20 June the previous year, the work joined the European operatic circuit, with performances in Budapest, Brussels and The Hague in 1894, and in Bordeaux early in 1895.[2] The plot was an intensely dramatic rendering of a short story by Claretie entitled *La cigarette*; in the operatic adaptation, an orphaned girl, Anita, attempts to secure the hand of a soldier by murdering an enemy general during the Third Carlist War (1872–6). Culminating in the death of Anita's beloved, Araquil, and her subsequent descent into madness, *La Navarraise* was a 45-minute whirlwind of a work.

This *épisode lyrique*, as Massenet labelled it, immediately won over the Parisian public, but its critical reception in the city was notably mixed; the 'réalisme' that had so impressed Formentin emerged at the heart of the critical disagreements about the work across the full spectrum of the Parisian press. So, too, did it go on to shape the opera's enduring reputation, with almost all biographies of Massenet claiming *La Navarraise* as the French composer's take on the emerging style of *verismo* opera. And *verismo* was certainly on Parisian critics' minds in the 1890s; or, rather, one *verismo* opera in particular: Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*.

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[1] 'De la couleur, de la passion, une mise en scène d'un réalisme puissant, une artiste parfaite; pour mettre en relief tout cela, une histoire empoignante, rapide, haletante, pleine de frissons tragiques et de tendresses pâmées. Voilà *La Navarraise*!' Charles Formentin, 'Les premières', *Le jour*, 5 October 1895. All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

[2] For more on international performances of *La Navarraise*, see Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera, 1597–1940*, 3rd edn (London: J. Calder, 1978), col. 1177.

Cavalleria rusticana reached Paris in 1892, and it was by 1895 still the only *verismo* opera that had been performed in the city. Its performances at the Opéra-Comique generated the same public acclaim as the opera had received all over Europe, but the Parisian press had been predominantly critical about the work and its accompanying publicity campaign.[3] Even in a populist paper like *Le petit Parisien*, for example, the music critic Paul Ginisty complained that Mascagni's work was altogether too superficial for French operatic tastes, calling it 'more artifice than inspiration'.[4]

La Navarraise inevitably drew comparisons with *Cavalleria rusticana*: both works were startling in their brevity and in their intense drama; both received their Parisian premières at the Opéra-Comique; and both featured the soprano Emma Calvé in the lead role. Henri Gauthier-Villars even went so far as to observe wryly in *L'écho de Paris* that Massenet might as well have given *La Navarraise* the title *Cavalleria espagnola*.[5] But although Massenet enjoyed a close and influential relationship with various members of the *giovane scuola* in the 1890s and *La Navarraise* doubtless sought to capitalize, to some extent, on the popular success of *Cavalleria rusticana* in Paris, the relationship of *La Navarraise* with *verismo* is more complex and multifaceted than such straightforward connections would suggest.[6]

A number of scholars have already laid out the problems inherent in any attempt to establish in a concrete fashion what might define or even constitute operatic *verismo*: it has proved hard, for example, to pinpoint a relationship between a set of common stylistic features and their dramatic ends. As Arman Schwartz has suggested: 'Although it is possible to isolate a number of stylistic features shared by the composers of the *giovane scuola* – jagged vocal declamation, a tendency to conclude acts with massive orchestral groundswells – it is harder to describe these techniques as shared responses to their subject matter.'[7] In the specific case of *La Navarraise*, meanwhile, Steven Huebner has highlighted the difficulty of identifying a unified *verismo* musical style against which to judge the opera and, through a comparison with *Pagliacci*, has complicated the accepted order of influence between Massenet and *verismo* by suggesting that Massenet's musical style might have influenced Leoncavallo's own development as a composer.[8]

[3] For more on the early Parisian reception of *Cavalleria rusticana*, see Matteo Sansone, 'Verga and Mascagni: The Critics' Response to "Cavalleria rusticana"', *Music and Letters*, 71 (1990), 198–214 (esp. pp. 207–8).

[4] 'On y trouve, en réalité, plus d'artifices que d'inspirations.' Paul Ginisty, 'Les premières représentations', *Le petit Parisien*, 20 January 1892.

[5] Henri Gauthier-Villars (writing as 'L'ouvreuse'), 'La soirée parisienne', *L'écho de Paris*, 5 October 1895.

[6] For more on Massenet's relationship with the *giovane scuola* and the Italian publishing house Sonzogno (which published *Cavalleria rusticana* and bought the rights to many of Massenet's works in Italy), as well as the composer's visits to Italy, see Matthew Franke, 'Massenet's Italian Trip of 1894 and the Politics of Cultural Translation', *Massenet and the Mediterranean World*, ed. Simone Ciolfi (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, 2015), 161–71.

[7] Arman Schwartz, *Puccini's Soundscapes: Realism and Modernity in Italian Opera* (Florence: Olschki, 2016), 49.

[8] Steven Huebner, '*La Navarraise* face au *vérisme*', *Le naturalisme sur la scène lyrique*, ed. Jean-Christophe Branger and Alban Ramaut (Saint-Étienne: Université de Saint-Étienne, 2004), 129–50.

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Furthermore, the adjective 'vériste', which certain critics had used to describe *Cavalleria rusticana* in 1892 (even if it was by no means as ubiquitous then as it later became), was entirely absent from the reviews of *La Navarraise*. Instead, critics wrote less specifically of 'réalisme', and did not make reference to literary realism of any sort in order to elaborate on their ideas.[9] This is not necessarily surprising in itself, since various scholars, such as Andreas Giger, have argued that there is little correspondence between literary and operatic *verismo* (categories which have in themselves not been understood as particularly coherent in terms of style): judged against the criteria of its literary counterpart, operatic *verismo* can appear to be a more diffuse – perhaps even watered-down – response to the original literary impulse.[10]

More striking, perhaps, is the fact that *naturalisme* was also not a major point of reference for these critics.[11] Even Alfred Bruneau – a former pupil of Massenet whose operas based on Zola's novels were finding success by 1895 – was not tempted to compare *La Navarraise*, favourably or otherwise, with his own beloved French *naturaliste* agenda.[12] And unlike Charpentier, whose *Louise* would be much discussed in naturalist terms after its première in 1900, Massenet left no indication of his own thoughts on the matter. In any case, the difficulties of distinguishing clearly between realism, *naturalisme* and *verismo* are manifold; writings on theatre, literature and art have mapped the distinctions much more closely, but have not translated well into musicological studies, especially given opera's belated turn towards such ideas.[13]

In this article, then, I want to propose a reading of *La Navarraise*'s realism and the critics' response to it that is not bounded by *verismo* or any other established 'school' of realism, be it musical or literary. Clair Rowden has ably begun this process, by investigating aspects of the wider cultural context for *La Navarraise*'s conflicted

[9] That any critics at all used the term 'vériste' in relation to *Cavalleria rusticana* is interesting in itself, as it shows that at least certain critics of the period were thinking in terms of the realist frameworks that have so preoccupied later scholars. For an example of a Parisian critic using the term, see Ginisty, 'Les premières représentations', *Le petit Parisien*, 20 January 1892. A *dossier de presse* of the Parisian reviews of both *Cavalleria rusticana* and *La Navarraise* can be found on the Francophone Music Criticism website: <http://www.fmc.ac.uk> (accessed 18 July 2016).

[10] Giger goes so far as to suggest that *verismo* could be better understood as a period in Western music history that emerged after Romanticism than as any coherent style. See Andreas Giger, '*Verismo*: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 60 (2007), 271–315. Sansone has also, in 'Verga and Mascagni', examined the problems of relating operatic *verismo* to its literary counterpart.

[11] The fact that Jules Claretie (1840–1913), author of the short story on which *La Navarraise* was based and co-author of the opera's libretto, wrote a number of naturalist novels over his career makes the total absence of references to naturalism in the reception of *La Navarraise*'s realism somewhat striking.

[12] For biographical information on Bruneau, as well as a discussion of his *naturaliste* operas, see Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 395–425.

[13] See, for example, Manfred Kelkel, *Naturalisme, vérisme et réalisme dans l'opéra, de 1890 à 1930* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1984), 1–17.

Parisian reception: her explorations of differing responses to *verismo* opera in London and Paris at the *fin de siècle* led to her positioning the critics' observations about *La Navarraise* in relation to concerns about artistic and social decline in the period.[14] I want to go in a different direction, to suggest a more complex set of ways in which modernity and the modern world shaped the critics' perceptions of and responses to realism. Identifying a number of different realist facets within *La Navarraise* and its wider cultural and technological contexts, I will examine the ways in which critics both resisted and actively embraced aspects of the realism they perceived, revealing in their reviews a variety of preoccupations and anxieties about their position as operatic spectators which were generated by this new work. I suggest that we can use their perceptions of realism in *La Navarraise* as a vital means through which to explore the changing and contested nature of critical perception and subjectivity in Paris in the final years of the nineteenth century.

'La musique perd ses droits'

Nowhere in the Parisian critics' reviews was the term 'réalisme' more present or more loaded than in their discussions of Massenet's score. While some of them praised it heartily ('M. Massenet has written a superb score', wrote the anonymous reviewer for *Le Gaulois*),[15] many more of the Parisian reviewers were fiercely critical of the composer's musical intentions in the work: 'Oh! beautiful music for the deaf!' proclaimed Charles Demestre in *La justice*.[16] While Demestre's comment undoubtedly raises some larger aesthetic questions about *La Navarraise*, it is not hard to identify the musical features at which his criticism was aimed, at least on the most straightforward level. Massenet's score made extensive use of 'sound effects', in the form of gunfire and tolling bells: these immediate and most obviously 'realist' effects proved to be particularly divisive among the critics.

Such sounds were by all accounts an unforgettable feature of the experience of *La Navarraise*. Both the London and Parisian premières of the work included lengthy cannonades, for instance: more than simply being 'for the deaf', the work was quite literally deafening. They also made use of specially cast bells that were rung continuously throughout the final four or five minutes of the piece to announce the death of Zuccaraga, the enemy commander (murdered by Anita).[17] Novel as these

[14] Clair Rowden, '*La Navarraise* face à la presse', *Le naturalisme sur la scène lyrique*, ed. Branger and Ramaut, 106–28. See also Rowden, '*Werther*, *La Navarraise*, and Verismo: A Matter of Taste', *Franco-British Studies*, 37 (2006–7), 3–34.

[15] 'M. Massenet a écrit une superbe partition.' 'Intérim', 'Musique', *Le Gaulois*, 4 October 1895.

[16] Oh! la délicieuse musique pour sourds!' Charles Demestre (writing as Charles Martel), 'La soirée d'hier', *La justice*, 5 October 1895.

[17] Some went on to outline the great efforts that had been taken in the production to achieve the most striking realist effect possible, with Alphonse Franck writing in *L'événement*: 'The bells are, apparently,

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effects might have been, for many critics they raised the concern that music had been replaced 'by mere sonorities and even by noise'.[18] For the critic writing in *Le soleil*, 'music loses its rights' in the work in favour of these non-musical sounds.[19] In fact, a number of critics commented that even the vocal writing in the work suffered as a result of this fascination with sound effects, becoming a species of monotonous recitative. Gauthier-Villars in *L'écho de Paris*, for example, passed the following tongue-in-cheek judgment on a passage sung by the protagonist, Anita: 'Mademoiselle Calvé invokes the Virgin on a single note (*mi, mi, mi, mi*); for those who like that particular note, it must be extremely pretty.'[20] The inclusion of non-musical sound, an unmediated form of extra-theatrical reality, therefore, was to the detriment of the entire score.

This, of course, was not a problem unique to *La Navarraise*. Indeed, in his exploration of the reception of Puccini's *Tosca* after its première in Rome in 1900, Schwartz has illustrated well one of the principal issues involved in creating (or listening to) realist opera in general. Puccini made pervasive and exact use of bells throughout his score to recreate an immersive Roman soundscape, but, as Schwartz so memorably puts it, these sound effects were understood by the work's earliest critics as 'simply, stupidly, real'.[21] That is to say, they perceived the bells as lacking an artistic purpose within the score, instead calling attention to themselves as real and highlighting the fiction of the surrounding drama. Such realist efforts, then, for all their sonic immediacy, created a rupture in the operatic experience. These criticisms and the ones made of *La Navarraise* seem to speak of a kind of superficiality: of a sonic realism that fails to cohere as part either of a larger musical fabric or of a deeper realist aesthetic.

Perhaps a more fruitful way to address the question of *La Navarraise*'s problematic association with realism – and the corresponding conundrum that this seems to have presented to the critics – is to examine it not purely for its stylistic features, but also on the level of poetics. Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, in seeking a way of understanding the relationship between literary and operatic *verismo*, has suggested that for all their

installed in the underbelly of the theatre and weigh 1,500 kilograms. We bought them from Spain, no doubt' ('Les cloches sont, paraît-il, installées dans les dessous du théâtre et pèsent quinze cents kilogs. On les fait venir d'Espagne, sans doute'). Franck (writing as 'Sarcisque'), 'Soirée parisienne', *L'événement*, 5 October 1895. Massenet's autograph score, held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (and available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10308909p/f1.image.r=Massenet%20La%20Navarraise>, accessed 1 December 2017) contains detailed instructions about the positioning of the bells and the way in which they should be played.

[18] 'Il a peut-être un peu trop sacrifié la musique à cet effet, la remplaçant par des sonorités et même par des bruits.' Victorin Joncières, 'Revue musicale', *La liberté*, 6 October 1895.

[19] 'La musique perd ses droits.' Auguste Goullet, 'La musique à Paris', *Le soleil*, 4 October 1895.

[20] 'Mademoiselle Calvé invoque la Vierge sur une seule note (*mi, mi, mi, mi*); pour ceux qui aiment cette note-là, ça doit être fort joli.' Gauthier-Villars, 'La soirée parisienne', *L'écho de Paris*, 5 October 1895.

[21] Arman Schwartz, 'Rough Music: *Tosca* and *Verismo* Reconsidered', *19th-Century Music*, 31 (2007–8), 228–44 (p. 234).

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differences they share 'a poetics as well as a practice of anti-subjectivity';[22] Schwartz, meanwhile, has argued that '*verismo* operas refuse musical transcendence, insisting on the objectivity of unmediated sound, and they do so in terms that seem inseparable from the new technology of phonographic transcription'.[23] Both visions offer in their own way a reconfiguration of the role of authorial voice (whether that of the literary author or of the composer) in realist works. While Schwartz writes of objectivity, Guarnieri Corazzol argues for 'anti-subjectivity': both suggest that the primacy of the authorial voice in the text is reduced, but while Schwartz stresses a kind of scientific (or, at least, technological) documentary aspect, Guarnieri Corazzol suggests a deliberate kind of alienation.

Both of these readings offer compelling and highly suggestive avenues of exploration for *La Navarraise* in terms of how we understand realist aesthetics and also of how developing technologies in the late nineteenth century might affect our understanding of them. I do not want to suggest here, however, that Massenet sought to develop a radically new style of operatic composition in *La Navarraise*, for while Puccini (as Schwartz points out) was both fascinated by and prepared to agonize over the possibilities of 'acoustic innovation',[24] the circumstances of *La Navarraise*'s composition imply that Massenet had little time to ponder any large-scale aesthetic re-evaluation. The work was written at speed at the request of Calvé, who wanted a new opera with which to win over the public at her planned series of engagements at Covent Garden, in a year in which Massenet had already been occupied with preparations for the premières of *Thaïs* and *Le portrait de Manon*. Rather than focusing in detail on Massenet's vision for *La Navarraise*, then, I want instead to turn questions of subjectivity and anti-subjectivity away from Massenet as the author of the work towards its reception and the historical moment in which it operated.

Fredric Jameson's provocative approach to literary realism in *The Antimonies of Realism* might be productive for our understanding of *La Navarraise* in this respect. In his accustomed dialectical fashion, Jameson constructs a series of binaries to illustrate the inner workings of literary realism from its nineteenth-century origins through to the present day.[25] His principal opposition contrasts narrative modes (the 'telling' of an event, traditional description, and so on) and experiential ones (the 'showing': the affective response in the present moment). From this he unfolds a broader set of binaries: destiny versus affect, event versus presence and so on. Jameson's schema unpacks realism as necessarily contradictory and dialectical. For him, realism is not characterized simply by any one side of his numerous binary oppositions (either simply by telling or showing, event or presence), but by the tensions between them. The tension between narrative- and experiential-type opposites is a productive one,

[22] Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, 'Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation', trans. Roger Parker, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 5 (1993), 39–53 (p. 42).
[23] Schwartz, *Puccini's Soundscapes*, 8.
[24] *Ibid.*, 4.
[25] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013).

and realism dramatizes its own dialectic, necessitating compromise on both counts. Ultimately, this tension, and the unsatisfactory or unstable nature of the compromise, feeds the realist impetus for both author and reader. While such a totalizing theory of literary realism by its nature risks flattening out historical particulars, Jameson's point about the way in which these binaries operate offers us an insight into some of the flaws critics perceived in *La Navarraise*.

Opera's normal mode of presentation is of a narrative sort: a temporally directed process of unfolding in line with a goal-orientated plot. The elements of *La Navarraise* that the critics found most troubling, however, can perhaps be seen to correspond with the experiential side of Jameson's binaries, and 'presence' is a word that seems particularly useful here.[26] Indeed, the critics' reaction to the realist sounds in the work suggests that they invited a kind of bodily response, as opposed to a cerebral one. It seems that the work veritably assaulted the senses: a number of critics described not only the intense sounds of the performance but also the smells (gunpowder, it seems, was particularly overwhelming in the confined space of the theatre).[27] Camille Bellaigue in the *Revue des deux mondes*, for example, having complained about the work's use of 'sound effects', wryly observed: 'It was not the music that stank; it was just the gunpowder.'[28] In London, too, George Bernard Shaw wrote of the all-encompassing psychological and physical toll the experience took on audiences, saying that the opera 'did heavy execution among the ladies and gentlemen who cultivate their nerves on tea and alcohol'.[29] In his eyes, both tea and alcohol appeared to be delicate stimulants in comparison with the sensory bombast of *La Navarraise*.

In the critics' reviews, then, we have a tension between narrative and presence modes not only of operatic expression but also of operatic reception. The 'narrative' mode of reception requires mental interpretation, while a 'presence' mode generates a visceral, bodily response. Of course, the former mode was what critics relied upon in their métier: their primary role was to interpret and evaluate the works they reviewed. However, if a work's full impact relied upon the bypassing of its audiences' interpretative faculties on numerous occasions in favour of a more instinctive response, it would pose a challenge

[26] Jameson invokes 'presence' at various points in his book; see, for instance, Jameson, *The Antimonies of Realism*, 22, where he writes of the 'two modes of *récit* and presence'. Notions of presence have recently been a source of interest in the humanities more broadly, such as in the work of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, which positions presence against hermeneutics. See Gumbrecht, *Production of Presence: What Meaning Cannot Convey* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). In musicology, too, issues of presence have been raised in various ways, as for example in Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), 505–36.

[27] See, for example, M. de Saint-Geniès (writing as 'Richard O'Monroy'), 'La soirée parisienne', *Gil Blas*, 5 October 1895.

[28] 'L'autre soir à l'Opéra-Comique, ce n'était pas la musique que cela "puait"; ce n'était que la poudre.' Camille Bellaigue, 'Revue musicale', *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 October 1895.

[29] George Bernard Shaw, '*La Navarraise*', *The World*, 27 June 1894. Published in *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes*, ed. Dan H. Laurence, 2nd edn (London: Bodley Head, 1989), iii: *1893–1950*, 248–51 (p. 248).

for the critics (and as the critics saw it, it deliberately courted favour with a general public seeking sensory pleasure). It was not that *La Navarraise* gave the critics nothing to work with (they praised lyrical moments in the love duet between Anita and Araquil and in the nocturne at the start of Act 2), but rather that the juxtaposition of and the tension between interpretation and sheer bodily impact wrong-footed them. *La Navarraise*, then, seems to have posed a particular challenge to the critics' engrained modes of evaluating an opera, as it demanded that they should respond to this work with a variety of senses, rather than privileging the music as arbiter of the quality of the whole.

A few critics, of course, heartily embraced the opera's realism, writing with great enthusiasm of the impact of *La Navarraise*'s music as one part of the multimedia whole.[30] So, too, did audiences, and the work achieved considerable public acclaim everywhere it went, including in Paris. Many of the more musically erudite Parisian critics, however, still sought to respond to the work primarily from its score. Victorin Joncières, for instance, commented on the 'very striking realism' he perceived in the B minor trumpet call interrupting the soldiers' chorus in D major.[31] Others, too, their patterns of reception shaped by Wagnerian discourse, attempted to make sense of *La Navarraise* by reference to 'leitmotifs' and other musical features. But such critics, who sought to interpret and rationalize *La Navarraise* in musical terms, repeatedly found their efforts frustrated.

Among all the critical judgments, perhaps the shrewdest and most cutting assessment of the matter came not from a Parisian, but from Shaw, who wrote after the work's London première that Massenet 'has not composed an opera: he has made up a prescription'.[32] Shaw effectively accused Massenet of bringing together in the opera a series of tropes intended to signify realism, but in such a way that it was the techniques themselves, rather than any wider realist effect, that became the critics' focus in the work. The Parisian reviewer for the literary periodical *Gil Blas*, too, wrote not of any musical or artistic vision in relation to *La Navarraise*, but simply of its 'signification musicale'.[33] That is to say, he felt that the work lacked any broader musical conception: instead, it was simply a collection of signifiers to be 'decoded'

[30] While these reviewers were in the minority, there is no easy way of categorizing them as a group. It is certainly not the case that the critics for the mass, 'populist' papers praised the score while the critics for more highbrow or conservative newspapers disliked it. For example, the politically conservative and self-styled paper for the nobility and *haute bourgeoisie Le Gaulois* praised Massenet's score at length, while the mass-circulated *Le petit Parisien*, which had a predominantly lower-middle-class and literate working-class readership, presented a much more critical review of the work. See 'Intérim', 'Musique', *Le Gaulois*, 4 October 1895, and Paul Ginisty, 'Les premières représentations', *Le petit Parisien*, 4 October 1895. Audiences, too, seem to have resisted less, and the opera achieved significant popularity with the Parisian public.

[31] 'Et tandis que les soldats répètent le refrain en *ré* majeur, le clairon lointain fait entendre sa sonnerie en si bémol, sans souci de la tonalité. C'est d'un réalisme très hardi, mais aussi très saisissant.' Joncières, 'Revue musicale', *La liberté*, 6 October 1895.

[32] Shaw, '*La Navarraise*', *The World*, 27 June 1894; *Shaw's Music*, ed. Laurence, iii, 250.

[33] 'Intérim', 'Premières représentations', *Gil Blas*, 5 October 1895.

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by its audiences. The critics, then, attempted both to resist the 'presence' effects of the opera's realism and to rationalize them, with the result that the tension between such effects and the more traditional, 'narrative' aspects of the work became the focus of certain critics' attention, to the point of shattering their immersion in the musico-dramatic experience.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the critics should have complained that music had 'lost its rights' – that is, its primacy in the operatic experience – in *La Navarraise*. For many of them the work seemed closer to the realms of lowbrow musical theatre than to opera. Bellaigue, of the *Revue des deux mondes*, for example, was not alone in wondering whether 'it really is an opera that we have just heard, or merely a *mélodrame*',[34] while Auguste Goullet in his review for *Le soleil* likened the opera to the works presented at the popular Théâtre Porte-Saint-Martin.[35] *La Navarraise*'s relationship with *Cavalleria rusticana* also doubtless contributed to the critics' inclination to draw a comparison between the opera and lowbrow theatre. Having achieved astonishing success across Europe with its intensely melodramatic tendencies, Mascagni's work was widely seen as the extreme of operatic populism.[36]

Rowden has argued that this idea of popular theatre impinged upon the critics' understanding of *La Navarraise* in a way that they found disquieting; she ties this in with wider debates about *verismo* in the French press that revealed an elite critical preoccupation with the 'democratization' of opera. Furthermore, she goes on to read Shaw's comments about *La Navarraise*'s impact on its audiences' nerves (and similar ones by other critics) as expressions of concern about decadence at the *fin de siècle*, seeing them as a reference to the damage a work like *La Navarraise* could do to public health (and, by extension, morals).[37] Such explorations provide a convincing context for interpreting such concerns. Nonetheless, I suggest that the critics' recourse to what we might call an 'end-times' rhetoric in various reviews also reveals their efforts to compensate for specific insecurities the work provoked in them, insecurities which had a basis in contemporary society and which extended beyond concerns either about operatic taste or general moral decline.

Performing realism

Having positioned *La Navarraise*'s musical realism in relation to Jameson's dialectic, I now want to build on his approach, drawing out various sets of binaries and paradoxes from the critics' words, in order to elucidate a number of other aspects of the work's

[34] 'On doute, ce petit opéra terminé, si vraiment c'est un opéra qu'on vient d'entendre, ou seulement un mélodrame.' Bellaigue, 'Revue musicale', *Revue des deux mondes*, 15 October 1895.

[35] Auguste Goullet, 'La musique à Paris', *Le soleil*, 4 October 1895.

[36] For information on the genesis of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, see Sansone, 'Verga and Mascagni'. Certain Italian critics clearly shared this view, as Sansone illustrates (p. 206).

[37] Rowden, '*La Navarraise* face à la presse', 116–21.

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reception. These extend not only beyond the score but also beyond the walls of the theatre, revealing that the realism critics perceived in *La Navarraise* was not confined to characteristics located within the music or setting of the opera, but was created in a much wider sphere of emergent technologies that affected not only performance decisions but also the ways in which critics and audiences were newly able to encounter the work.

The soprano Calvé must sit at the heart of any question of performance in *La Navarraise*. She created the role of Anita in London, reprising it not only for the Parisian première, but also for its first performance in New York in December 1895: for audiences in these three major cultural centres, she *was* Anita. Indeed, Massenet had written the part for her and it was at her insistence that the work received its première in London, since she was determined to have something new to perform for her annual visit to the city.[38] The role's emotional intensity and Anita's descent from despair to madness offered Calvé plenty of scope to exercise her vocal prowess as well as her remarkable talents as an actress. At the Parisian première, she drew almost universal acclaim.[39]

By the mid-1890s she was at the height of her fame, following a slow start to her career the previous decade. Calvé was particularly well known in Paris for her role as Santuzza at the Opéra-Comique première of *Cavalleria rusticana* in 1892, and for playing Carmen in a revival of Bizet's opera there in 1894. With such a combination of works in her repertoire, it is little wonder, perhaps, that critics made an association between Calvé and roles they considered 'si réaliste'.[40] Huebner has emphasized the 'almost "scientific" rigor of her preparations' and desire to bring accurate historical and emotional detail to all of her roles;[41] Calvé's biographer Jean Contrucci also points out that she made a research trip to Spain before playing Carmen, in order to observe and make notes on local customs, commenting that she even went so far as to befriend a gypsy woman named Lola.[42]

And yet the kind of realism the reviewers observed in relation to her performance as Anita does not seem necessarily to have equated to a 'realistic' performance, at least in the modern sense. They did not praise Calvé for her accurate, true-to-life depiction of actions or emotions, for example. Instead, they commented on her 'disorderly pantomime gestures'[43] and suggested that she 'overuses the same facial expressions',[44] concluding, however, that such gestures were ultimately used to good

[38] Demar Irvine, *Massenet: A Chronicle of his Life and Times* (Portland, OR: Amadeus, 1974), 185.

[39] For information on Calvé as a singer and actress, see Steven Huebner, 'La princesse paysanne du Midi', *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 361–78.

[40] See, for example, Albert Renaud, 'Premières', *La patrie*, 5 October 1895.

[41] Huebner, 'La princesse paysanne', 371.

[42] Jean Contrucci, *Emma Calvé: La diva du siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1989), 164–8. See also Calvé's autobiographical writings: *My Life*, trans. Rosamond Gilder (New York and London: D. Appleton & Co., 1922), and *Sous tous les ciels j'ai chanté: Souvenirs* (Paris: Plon, 1940).

[43] 'Ces jeux déréglés de pantomime'. Alfred Bruneau, 'Les théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 4 October 1895.

[44] '[Elle] abuse les mêmes effets de physionomie.' Alexandre Biguet, 'Premières représentations', *Le radical*, 5 October 1895.

effect in the work.[45] We have, therefore, the implication that she used a kind of melodramatic overacting to create a sense of immediacy – a kind of 'emotional realism' which spoke to an audience directly and viscerally, perhaps in a manner analogous to the bells and sound effects in Massenet's score.[46] The description of Calvé as 'si réaliste' seems to have been at least partly to do with this sense of emotional immediacy and transparency in her performances. Again, we might seem to have an indication of the 'presence' effects of realism.

It is doubly interesting, therefore, to find Bruneau, among others, writing that Calvé's performance, and in particular her gestures, gives the work 'its true physiognomy'.[47] As Karen Henson has explored, the use of this term in late nineteenth-century opera reviews links to the pervasive pseudoscience of *physiognomonie* (which added an extra syllable to the French word *physionomie*), through which it was believed that both an individual's emotional state and their essential moral character were reflected in their physical bearing.[48] Physiognomy implies more than a simple emotional transparency, though; instead, it is a way of understanding that the physicality of a person – their features, facial expressions and postures – revealed their core emotional and, more important, moral traits. In the context of theatre of the period, physiognomy became

[45] Rowden has suggested that these were a feature of a particular style of acting associated with *verismo*; indeed, Jean-Christophe Branger has written of Calvé as 'la Duse lyrique', drawing a comparison with the Italian actress Eleanora Duse, whose acting seems to have had many of the same characteristics. See Rowden, '*La Navarraise* face à la presse', 115–16, and Jean-Christophe Branger, 'Massenet et Emma Calvé: La "Duse lyrique"', *Sapho–La Navarraise*, L'avant-scène opéra, 217 (Paris: Editions Premières Loges, 2003), 50–3. Since the Parisian critics did not themselves draw such connections in their reviews of *La Navarraise*, and since they had little experience with *verismo* in its operatic form outside Calvé's performances in *Cavalleria rusticana*, they may well have associated these characteristics explicitly with Calvé herself.

[46] This consideration of how realistic Calvé's acting was is an important one, since the French term 'réaliste' can be translated either as 'realist' or 'realistic'. It is also an interesting possibility that Calvé's acting as Anita was linked to conventions of theatrical representations of madness, although the critics' comments are not explicitly connected with Anita's descent into madness in the opera. Rowden ('*La Navarraise* face à la presse', 118) mentions that Calvé visited Charcot's theatre at Salpêtrière hospital. An interesting parallel also emerges here between the descriptions of Calvé and what Melanie Gudesblatt has pointed to when she discusses turn-of-the-century Viennese responses to the 'truthful' performances of the soprano Marie Gutheil-Schoder. See Melanie Gudesblatt, 'Origins of a *Menschendarstellerin*: Characterization and Operatic Performance in *Fin-de-siècle* Vienna', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association,* 144 (2019), 55–82 (pp. 63–6).

[47] 'J'affirme qu'ils donnent à l'œuvre sa véritable physionomie.' Bruneau, 'Les théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 4 October 1895. A number of critics besides Bruneau also used the word 'physionomie' in describing Calvé's performance: Ernest Reyer, 'Revue musicale', *Journal des débats*, 12 October 1895; Biguet, 'Premières représentations', *Le radical*, 5 October 1895; and 'Intérim', 'Premières représentations', *L'Estafette*, 5 October 1895 are but three examples.

[48] Karen Henson, *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), esp. pp. 7–9. Massenet and his operas feature prominently in Henson's book, in relation not to Calvé, but to Sybil Sanderson, another of the composer's favoured prima donnas. Henson explores the relationship between composer and performer in the context of contemporary visual culture and its emergent technologies (see pp. 88–121).

a means through which viewers were able to decode features as the key to more fundamental (and, of course, essentialist) characteristics.

Henson links the period's obsession with physiognomy with wider changes (among them technological developments) in urban society at the *fin de siècle*, changes that Jonathan Crary has argued fundamentally altered the nature of observation during the period.[49] As the observer's sphere of daily experience grew through unavoidable encounters with new technologies, their perceptual field became increasingly vast, overwhelming and fractured. Crary himself posits an important shift in the nature of perception in response to such changes, and it is in this climate of reconfigured perception that Henson therefore situates the growing interest in *physiognomonie*. One response to these fundamental alterations in daily experience, she suggests, was a desire to 'put a new emphasis on being able to understand one's environment not from personal, gradually acquired knowledge, but from rapid assessments of external appearance'; during a period in which the position of the observer had come to be formulated as highly permeable to external influences on both a psychological and a physiological level, it was no longer seen as possible to rely wholly on one's senses to understand the world. Rather, such personal understanding was mediated by a multitude of processes involving the interpretation of external features as 'signs'.[50] As such, this appeal to quasi-scientific physiognomy is an example not of any 'objectivity' of realism, but of an 'anti-subjectivity' that bypasses individual interpretation and allows human nature to be read from sets of documented signs or physical characteristics.

The realism the critics perceived in Calvé's performance, then, was one inextricably linked with the changing conditions of the period: Calvé's movements could signify realism to an audience viewing the work in such conditions, without necessarily equating it to a particular type or school of naturalistic performance. As the illustrated mass press and the wider dissemination of photographs came to dominate a burgeoning media scene in this period, for example, readers were compelled to sift through ever larger volumes of visual information and to make judgments based upon the superficial, and immediately inferred, representations of this ever-widening sphere of everyday reality, rather than necessarily through their own personal experience of the things they saw. The focus on Calvé's physical bearing in *La Navarraise*'s early reception, then, is perhaps to do less with any overtly realistic impetus than with a wider desire during the period to come to terms with and to comprehend the modern world. By introducing the term 'physionomy' into their reviews, therefore, the critics signalled an engagement with new trends in viewing, even if they were not necessarily consciously aware of the forces that were shaping their perception.

[49] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 1999).

[50] Henson, *Opera Acts*, 8.

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Consuming realism: the influences of technology

In pursuing a non-theatrical, quasi-scientific mode of viewing in relation to Calvé's performance, once again the critics chose to evade or at least to ground the 'presence' effects of *La Navarraise* through a more rational, interpretative form of response. But even a 'scientific' approach was unable to mitigate entirely the problems surrounding realism in *La Navarraise*'s performance. In fact, new technological advances reinforced the tensions that existed. Calvé was very much a star of her time in the sense that she was widely photographed, and her face was familiar outside the theatre as well as within. As Huebner has pointed out, the poster for the Parisian première of *La Navarraise* (see Figure 1) was remarkable for the fact that it was one of the very earliest examples of the use of photography in a mass-produced theatre advertisement.[51] A woman in a simple dress and slippers stares wildly out of the frame. The poster seems to have posed the viewer a question: was the figure they saw Anita, or Calvé herself?

The image, of course, blurs the lines between the two: the viewer was looking both at Calvé and at her character. Comments from the time suggest that on some level viewers were conscious of this blurring and, moreover, that it was something particular to Calvé, since an article published in the 1890s stated: 'She is always and every moment an actress, and Calvé is the most wonderful role she plays. All her parts are tinctured with that one role "as the wine must taste of its own grapes".'[52] Calvé might have brought realism to the character of Anita through her acting and by lending the character her face in the advertisement, then, but she simultaneously became a fictionalized version of herself through the realism she imbued in her characters.

This blurring of diva and character was a feature of Calvé's career more broadly: she became inseparable not just from Anita, but also from Santuzza and Carmen. These characters had much in common with each other and, moreover, it appears that they also shared much with Calvé's own personality, as she was noted for her headstrong independence.[53] A series of photographic character portraits taken during the 1890s (see, for example, Figures 2 and 3) helped to immortalize her in these roles and offers another perspective on the critics' perception of her as 'si réaliste'. Each of these photographs distorts the classical ideals that had been favoured in earlier diva photography, as explored by Flora Willson.[54] The twist of her body in Figure 2,

[51] Huebner, 'La princesse paysanne', 373. For more on the history of advertising posters, see Mark S. Micale, 'France', *The Fin-de-siècle World*, ed. Michael Saler (London: Routledge, 2015), 93–116 (p. 94). For an exploration of operatic realism and photographic mediation, see Ellen Lockhart, 'Photo-Opera: *La fanciulla del West* and the Staging Souvenir', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 23 (2011), 145–66.

[52] *The Home Monthly*, 6 (June 1897), 13, available online via the Willa Cather Archive, <http://cather.unl.edu/nf021.html> (accessed 19 May 2015).

[53] Contrucci, *Emma Calvé*. Calvé's independence is evident throughout the book, and Contrucci writes in particular of her 'tempérament volcanique' (p. 167).

[54] See Flora Willson, 'Classic Staging: Pauline Viardot and the 1859 *Orphée* Revival', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 22 (2010), 301–26. For more on the importance of the statuesque to mid-nineteenth-century perceptions of the diva, see Susan Rutherford, '"La cantante delle passioni": Giuditta Pasta and the Idea of Operatic Performance', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 19 (2007), 107–38.

Figure 1. Poster for *La Navarraise*'s Opéra-Comique première, Paris, 1895. Image courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

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Figure 2. Emma Calvé as Carmen, *c*.1894. Image courtesy of the Granger Historical Picture Archive, New York.

Figure 3. Emma Calvé as Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana*, 1893. Image courtesy of the Metropolitan Opera Archives, New York.

both hands raised to her left side and her head tilted downwards, moves away from the calculated, statuesque proportions of earlier diva portraits, as well as giving the figure portrayed (this semi-real, semi-fictional blurring of Calvé and character) a much greater sense of personality. The photograph of Calvé as Santuzza (Figure 3) achieves a similar effect, with her lowered chin and fisted hands (positioned defiantly just a little too high on her hips) disrupting the sense of line. Both, therefore, show a realist move away from an ideal of fixed and permanent beauty towards an 'unbeautiful', character-driven portrait.

These photographs also reveal another aspect of realism in that they create a sensation of movement for the viewer: the physical awkwardness of the body positions and the exaggerated tilt of the head in all three seem to imply that the postures are fleeting and not designed to be held for any great period of time.[55] Thus they might reflect a

[55] Indeed, there was a growing interest in acting theory at the time about the way in which performers (including singers) moved between gestures on stage. One such example of this was the work of François Delsarte, which developed as a response to the unnatural poses of classical acting. While Delsarte himself did not write a book, one of his students, Genevieve Stebbins, employed his ideas in *The Delsarte System of Expression* (New York: E. S. Werner, 1886). The body positions Calvé adopts are

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desire to capture a 'slice of life' rather than a constructed moment posed especially for the photograph.[56] But at the same time, paradoxically, the implication of movement draws attention to the unavoidable and unnatural stasis of a portrait photograph, reminding us that we are looking at a contrived and artistic interpretation of the real.

Such images reflect the long-standing complexity of ideas of realism in relation to photography. Their content helped to create a remarkable blurring between the aesthetic sphere and everyday life: the fictional and the real. As a result, we can begin to understand that the real and the unreal in this period might not have been antithetical concepts at all, but an entwined and mutually influencing pair. The advent of new media technologies made the line between stage and everyday life increasingly permeable, as experiences that had previously been accessible only within the opera house were now available not only outside, but also to publics who might never have attended an operatic performance. All of this had a fundamental effect on the way in which critics and audiences alike could view *La Navarraise*: the exterior world influenced their perceptions of the material on stage, bringing it into the realm of the everyday or the 'real', while at the same time the exterior world potentially came to seem somewhat theatrical and 'unreal'. The realism discussed in relation to the work, therefore, is inseparable from wider societal processes which, especially when it came to Calvé, gave *La Navarraise* a realist frame of reference that was far larger than had been available to many earlier operas.

The critics did not write expressly of the influence of photographic technologies on their perspectives of *La Navarraise*. But one review, although doubtless intended ironically, does give us an indication of how developing technologies might have had an impact upon the way in which its author responded to *La Navarraise*. The critic reviewing the opera for *Le jour*, who signed himself Méphisto, laid out his review in a particularly remarkable format. After a very brief introduction to the work (which praises Claretie and Cain as dramatists, but makes no mention at all of Massenet), he states: 'Their *épisode lyrique* lasts exactly 46 minutes, 25 seconds. This is a record for opera.'[57] From then on, his article is structured as a note of the time (taken presumably from his watch), followed by a brief report on the action at that moment: '10:46 – The Carlists attack the village', for example.[58] Certain timings are even more peculiarly exact, even to the second. Such an approach was, of course, far from usual in operatic criticism, as running times of productions naturally varied according to the particular

hard to correlate exactly with the Delsartean expressive positions, but the idea of a body in movement is very much in keeping with his thoughts.

[56] For accounts of the interactions between photography, realism and fiction, see Daniel Akiva Novak, *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[57] 'Leur épisode lyrique dure exactement quarante-six minutes, vingt-cinq seconds. C'est le record de l'opéra.' 'Méphisto', 'Soirées parisiennes', *Le jour*, 5 October 1895.

[58] '*10 h. 46'*. – Les Carlistes attaquent le village'. *Ibid*.

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musical decisions made by performers on the night and the audience's responses to them. Such a precise approach to the timing of one performance, then, is as striking for its individuality as for the sarcasm with which the reviewer's words drip when he writes of this 'record for opera'.

In emphasizing the extreme brevity of the opera, Méphisto inadvertently expresses a critical perspective that was very much shaped by contemporary understandings of time. As scholars such as Stephen Kern have argued, the final two decades of the nineteenth century, in the wake of the development of the telephone and the wireless, among other technologies (all of which built on processes begun with the advent of the railway earlier in the century), saw a shift in the way in which people understood the present: time and space seemed to have been condensed.[59] Philosophers such as Henri Bergson explored newly formulated ideas of time and consciousness (Bergson proposed his theory of *durée* in 1889), while scientists conducted experiments to understand the duration of the present ('the interval of time that can be experienced as an uninterrupted whole', as Kern puts it).[60]

Although results differed from fractions of a second up to spans of several minutes, this new focus on the present and how it could be experienced (and captured) seems to find its ironic critical equivalent in Méphisto's review. In particular, the review's focus on recording the visual (rather than the aural) experience of the opera in temporal terms reveals a shared preoccupation with burgeoning film technologies in this period[61] – just two months after the première of *La Navarraise* in Paris in October 1895, the Lumière brothers gave their first public screening of *Sortie de l'usine Lumière de Lyon*, which was both captured and projected using the cinematograph camera (which had been invented in 1892).[62] Méphisto's review seems to position the 'bite-sized' *La Navarraise* within the general context of these ideas rather than aligning it with more traditional patterns of reviewing associated with longer operas. He offers a glimpse of the way in which the critics' perceptions of realism may well have been filtered through the influence (conscious or unconscious) of contemporary technological developments – developments which created increasingly permeable boundaries for the operatic work.

[59] Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1983: repr. with a new preface 2003), 65–88. For an account of how the railway changed perceptions of time, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization and Perception of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*, 3rd edn (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2014), esp. pp. 33–44.

[60] Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space*, 82–3. Bergson's ideas are explored throughout Kern's book.

[61] It was not unusual in itself for reviews of this 'soirée parisienne' type to say little of music, of course, but the link this review makes between the visual aspects of the opera and exact timings is remarkable.

[62] For more on the early history of cinema, see Rémi Fournier-Lanzoni, *French Cinema: From its Beginnings to the Present* (New York and London: Continuum, 2002) and H. Mario Raimondo-Souto, *Motion Picture Photography: A History, 1891–1960* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2007).

Imaginative realism

The blurring of the work's boundaries seems to have emerged in other respects, too. When it came to the critics' discussions of *La Navarraise*'s Spanish location and *mise en scène*, it seems that it was the familiarity of this setting, both inside and outside the theatre, that served as a catalyst for the critics' reorientation of their position as operatic spectators. Some critics commented explicitly on the 'powerful realism' of the *mise en scène*, while others, such as Morandès in *La patrie*, went so far as to suggest that 'one believes oneself really to be in Spain' during a performance.[63] Méphisto reported in *Le jour* that '*La Navarraise* will become a great success *because* she is Spanish.'[64] The reviewers positioned the Spanish setting as fundamental to their understanding and appreciation of the work.

Works depicting Spain were by no means a novelty in French theatres by this point in the nineteenth century.[65] A glut of them appeared in Paris in the years surrounding *La Navarraise*'s première, as the critics themselves pointed out through their frequent allusions to established works such as *Carmen* and Massenet's *Le Cid* (which had been regularly performed in Paris since its première in 1885), as well as new works such as Vidal's *Guernica* (1895). The Opéra-Comique in particular had something of a reputation for playing host to large numbers of operas featuring Spain.[66] Extending beyond the operatic stage, Samuel Llano has shown just how pervasive 'Spanish' music – whether imported or written by Frenchmen in a 'Spanish' style – had become in Paris by the final decade of the nineteenth century: in street performances and *cafés-concerts* and everything in between, as well as on the stages of theatres of all levels, musical evocations of Spain were ever present.[67]

A critical tradition had developed over the preceding decades in response to such copious amounts of 'Spanish' material. This often amounted to discussions of Spain as exotic (drawing upon the image of the gypsy as the epitome of orientalized Spain), or at the very least as an 'internal Other' – exotic enough to generate a frisson of excitement, but safely contained within European norms.[68] But there was another side to the French characterization of Spain, more important for discussions of realism,

[63] 'L'on se croirait vraiment en Espagne.' Morandès, 'Soirée parisienne', *La patrie*, 5 October 1895.

[64] 'La *Navarraise* deviendra un très grand succès *car* Elle est espagnole!' Méphisto, 'Soirées parisiennes', *Le jour*, 5 October 1895 (emphasis added).

[65] Kerry Murphy explores the prevalence of Spanish works in all areas of French artistic life from as early as the Napoleonic period. Murphy, '*Carmen*: *Couleur locale* or the Real Thing?', *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer*, ed. Fauser and Everist, 293–315 (pp. 295–306).

[66] This trend in fact continued long after *La Navarraise*, as Samuel Llano has shown in *Whose Spain? Negotiating 'Spanish Music' in Paris, 1908–1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 192–235.

[67] *Ibid.*, xv–xxii. Of course, there were also myriad representations of Spain in literature and visual art, many of which (such as Renoir's *The Spanish Guitarist* (1894)) portrayed musicians and musical performances.

[68] For a discussion of the idea of the 'internal Other', see Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150–74, and James Parakilas, 'The Soldier

which Kerry Murphy begins to open up when she asks the following questions: 'Was *Carmen* "a fantasy about Gypsies … "? Or did it represent "the real Spain" for the audience of its day?'[69] For her, the question hinges on the obsession with *couleur locale* displayed not only in *Carmen* but also in so many other 'Spanish' works. Was the quest for authentic detail (whether it be musical or in terms of costumes, scenery and so on) about presenting an image that signified Spain for audiences without really being Spanish, or did it accurately reflect French–Spanish cultural interactions?

Such questions were played out in contemporary operatic discourse, with Jules Guillemot complaining in his review of *Carmen* in 1875 that attempts to create 'authentic' Spanish detail were 'not a true realism, just a lack of logic'.[70] In wider culture, paintings on Spanish themes had long been understood within the context of realism: Manet's *The Spanish Singer* (1860), for example, as well as Courbet's *Gypsy in Reflection* (1869), among very many others, were described as 'realist' by contemporary critics, even if they portrayed and perpetuated a stereotyped (and often gypsy-centred) image of Spain.[71] By using a series of widely understood Spanish tropes, these works projected a kind of paradoxical 'exotic realism'.

La Navarraise's claim to such 'exotic realism' is by no means certain. Indeed, there is little in the work that could be incontrovertibly identified as Spanish *couleur locale*, besides the soldiers' chorus in which harp arpeggios perhaps evoke strumming guitars. Instead, the Spanish location of *La Navarraise* (nominal as it might be for most of the work) seems to have encouraged the critics to access a particular imaginative realm, enabled by their understanding of established images of Spain. For Ernest Reyer, reviewing *La Navarraise* for the *Journal des débats*, Spain once again became a place of fantasy, as he demonstrated through the long-winded and highly personal rhapsody describing a visit he had made to the Pyrenees with which he began his review. To quote just a fragment:

> I saw poetic valleys smoking from steam tramways […]. I saw, on the high mountains, funiculars winding upwards, and in the churches of the tiny villages, peasants in Sunday dress, all very ugly and very ridiculous, with huge hats draped with ribbons and flowers. I also saw in a gorge through the Pyrenees a reverend picnicking on the grass, who, cheerfully distracting himself from the cares of his ministry, was launching empty bottles into the foaming torrent.[72]

and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part 1', *Opera Quarterly*, 10 (1994), 33–56.

69 Murphy, '*Carmen*: *Couleur locale* or the Real Thing?', 293.

70 'Ce n'est pas du vrai réalisme: ce n'est que du manque de logique.' Jules Guillemot, 'Revue dramatique', *Le soleil*, 9 March 1875.

71 For more on the early reception of *The Spanish Singer*, see Jane Mayo Roos, 'Manet and the Impressionist Moment', *Perspectives on Manet*, ed. Therese Dolan (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 73–96 (p. 77).

72 'J'ai vu de poétiques vallées enfumées par des tramways à vapeur […]. J'ai vu, sur de hautes montagnes, serpenter des funiculaires, et dans les églises des plus petits villages des paysannes endimanchées, toutes

While this is not an exotic fantasy of gypsies, Reyer's half-remembered, half-imagined musings present a fantasy of a rural idyll upon which the trappings of the industrialized world are only just beginning to impinge (indeed, the way the steam from the tramways obscures his vision of the pastoral scene serves as a fitting reminder of the fact). Spain, for him, was not confined to the set of Spanish signifiers of conventional *couleur locale*, but was an imaginative realm in which a desire for escapism could be expressed and temporarily indulged.

And yet Reyer punctures his reverie with a suggestion that by the end of the century the escapism offered by an imagined Spain was diminishing:

> Of customs and costumes once specific to certain countries there is no trace anywhere. The piano has reached all the villages and each little house has its roman-feuilleton, so that when one believes oneself to be 300 leagues from Paris one has actually gone no further than Levallois-Perret.[73]

Reyer seems to suggest that even in the rural depths of the country one might as well be in Paris for all the cultural difference one will encounter; he bursts his own escapist bubble with a worry that is simultaneously about cultural homogenization and the proliferation of an image to the point where it loses its very essence. *La Navarraise*'s portrayal of Spain seems, therefore, to have encouraged the critics to access a liminal realm in their imaginations, poised on the cusp between theatrical nostalgia on the one hand and everyday reality on the other. The opera's setting in the Pyrenees is entirely appropriate in this context, for it occupies a somewhat ambiguous region between France and Spain, sitting as it does on the border. *La Navarraise*'s setting did not evoke so much a sense of 'exotic realism' as a paradoxical and peculiarly modern 'escapist-realist' aesthetic, as contemporary concerns about globalization and industrialization intruded upon Reyer's rural idyll.

Here, then, we have something of the opposite of what we saw in the critics' response to *La Navarraise*'s score. There, they sought to resist its 'presence' effects, its immediately experiential aspects, seeking to rationalize it and ultimately finding themselves left with an empty set of signifiers. Here, however, it seems as if Reyer, not content with established Spanish signifiers, seeks to create for himself a highly personal experience of Spain (albeit expressed in narrative form for his readers). Ultimately, however, he finds it impossible: his Spanish fantasy ends in bathetic uncertainty.

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fort laides et fort ridicules, avec de vastes chapeaux surchargés de rubans et de fleurs. J'ai vu aussi dans une gorge des Pyrénées un ministre déjeunant sur l'herbe, et qui, pour se distraire allègrement des soucis de son ministère, lançait des bouteilles vides dans le torrent écumeux.' Reyer, 'Revue musicale', *Journal des débats*, 12 October 1895.

73 'Des habitudes et des costumes autrefois particuliers à certains pays, il n'y a plus trace nulle part. Le piano a pénétré dans tous les villages et chaque chaumière a son roman-feuilleton. De sorte que, lorsqu'on se croit à trois cents lieues de Paris, on n'est pas allé beaucoup plus loin que Levallois-Perret.' *Ibid*. Levallois-Perret is a north-western suburb of Paris.

Negotiating plural spectatorship

Reyer's rhapsodic article shows that it was not just in their responses to the score that critics found their established modes and techniques of criticism inadequate for expressing the potential resonances of a work like *La Navarraise* in the modern world. Some critics took advantage of an emerging self-consciousness about their role, not just as interpreters of the work, but as creators of meaning, to reformulate their critical position. They did this in particular through the way in which they frequently attempted to present the perspectives of diverse imagined and real spectators and to negotiate between these in their reviews of *La Navarraise*.

The idea that reviewers might present their perspective and contrast or compare it with that of the audience was hardly unusual at the time. In fact, it was a familiar trope that a reviewer would emphasize the difference between his own perspective and that of the audience on a certain point in order to display how his critical faculties clearly surpassed those of the general public. Critics were acutely aware of the important role they played in shaping a work's future. Their reviews of *La Navarraise*, however, show a move away from this earlier certainty about the privileged position of the critic and instead reflect growing concerns about their sovereignty as spectators.

This critical uncertainty can be seen first of all in the way they began to reformulate their presentations of the audience's perspective. That is to say, some critics not only took care to report on how the public *en masse* responded to the work, but also recorded the responses of individuals. When Méphisto made the comment quoted above, that *La Navarraise* would achieve success '*because* she is Spanish', he was not simply stating his own thoughts; instead, he was ostensibly presenting those of a female audience member, which he claims to have overheard as she left the theatre with her companions after the performance.[74] While such remarks are far outweighed in number by general comments about the audience's response to key moments in the work, the fact that they exist at all is important, especially in light of Alessandra Campana's recent discussions of operatic spectatorship in this period and the changes that took place. She argues that the final years of the nineteenth century saw the rise of the self-consciously multifarious and 'emancipated' operatic spectator, who was interpellated in the theatrical experience and the creation of its meaning in diverse ways: 'affectively, mimetically' and, most importantly for the purpose of this discussion, 'critically'.[75] It is critical mobility of this sort that provides another key way of understanding *La Navarraise*'s Parisian reviews.

Indeed, a number of critics sought to construct several layers of spectatorship, through which they could negotiate the diverse and often contradictory elements of their responses to the work. Some, for example, attempted to convey the perspective

[74] Méphisto, 'Soirées parisiennes', *Le jour*, 5 October 1895.

[75] Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 193. Although Campana's discussion focuses on specifically Italian contexts, there is much to be said for her ideas in a French context, too.

of an 'ideal' spectator who always responds to the work as its creators, to whom they always refer in the third person, intended (or, rather, as the critics imagined that its creators intended). For example, Bruneau in *Le Figaro* complains that the work tries to impose the sights and sounds of war on 'the spectator',[76] while others talk of the way particular moments of the work keep 'the spectator' on the edge of their seat.[77] Alongside these, the reviewers posited their own personal views, but these constantly interacted with the other spectatorial positions they put forward. Instead of formulating a sense of their own subjectivity by presenting various aspects of the inner self (in the manner in which Romantic critical personalities have been understood, for example), they therefore constructed their subjectivity through a much wider frame of reference: to other individuals and to ideal spectators.

Vanessa Schwartz has explored similar ideas of subjectivity, characterizing them in response to what she calls the 'spectacular realities' of *fin-de-siècle* mass culture.[78] She argues, for example, that the advent of the mass press fundamentally reconfigured the everyday person's sense of self: it introduced the idea that normal people and their lives could be in the news and, reciprocally, that the newspapers consisted of their lives, not just those of the high bourgeoisie and upper echelons of society. This critical desire to mediate between personal subjectivities and 'ideal spectators' finds further resonance in the theories put forward by Crary, who suggests that at the *fin de siècle*, observers faced an enormous challenge to negotiate between ever-increasing demands to pay attention (as scientific study and aesthetic concentration became fetishized) and constant distractions to their attention (from ever-growing material culture, for example).[79] These observers had both to participate in this process and to adopt a reflexive position towards it; thus their subjectivity could not take a purely interiorized form, but had to be reimagined so as to acknowledge the ways in which their perspectives were susceptible to manipulation by external factors, such as, for example, the aforementioned mass press.

In this light, the Parisian reviewers' multi-perspectival responses to *La Navarraise* point towards such a self-consciously 'modern' awareness of the construction of their position as critics. They seem to have become, in certain respects, acutely aware of the ways in which their understanding of various aspects of the work was mediated (especially when it came to their positioning of a partly real, partly theatricalized Spain as a 'realist' setting), and their formulation of multiple and diverse spectators (again, both real and imagined) can be seen as a way of reinventing their role as

[76] 'A quoi bon, dès lors, courir la chance de perdre aujourd'hui une bataille […] en essayant d'imposer à des spectateurs toujours hasardeux des trouvailles, des hardiesses dont on suspecte l'effet foudroyant?' Bruneau, 'Les théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 4 October 1895.

[77] See, for example, Albert Montel, 'Chronique musicale', *Le rappel*, 5 October 1895: 'le tout enfin merveilleusement agencé et organisé pour tenir le spectateur toujours en haleine'.

[78] Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-siècle Paris* (Berkeley, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1998).

[79] Crary sets out these challenges particularly clearly in *Suspensions of Perception*, 11–79.

critics in acknowledgement of such an altered critical position. Indeed, *La Navarraise*'s setting presented them with a number of apparent contradictions, between themes of exoticism and ideas of the real, and between fictional renderings of Spain and everyday reality, among others. Rather than serving as a means of reconciling these apparently contradictory perspectives, however, the diverse spectatorial positions the critics put forward crystallized the contradictions as key to their understanding of *La Navarraise*'s 'Spanishness': they became constant negotiations between familiarity and exoticism, between present and past, and between the everyday and the fictional. The realism of which they spoke – existing in the form of the negotiation of the 'real' Spain through the prism of the theatrical Spain – drove a shift in their critical perspectives, as they attempted to reposition themselves as 'multifarious' spectators (to borrow Campana's phrase) through the creation of a series of more or less real spectatorial positions.

The national resonances of realism

La Navarraise was not, of course, the first opera that had sparked doubt in the minds of Parisian critics as to their role, nor was it the only instance in which critics actively performed or explored their critical role in their reviews. Annegret Fauser, for instance, has illustrated how the Parisian reception of Wagner's *Tannhäuser* served as an occasion for reviewers 'to perform deliberately their role as French writers and critics', as a way 'to validate music criticism as a vital arbiter of national culture'.[80] The Parisian reviews of *La Navarraise* did not, I suggest, have such a lofty collective aim, however; in fact, many of the reviews seem to speak of a lack of confidence in the power of operatic criticism. Nonetheless, questions of nation – both in musical and non-musical terms – were inseparable in their reviews from issues of realism, and indeed the relationship between them formed an important part of the significance of *La Navarraise*'s realism for the critics.

Nation and the national existed principally in the reception of *La Navarraise* in implicit rather than explicit form. To generate one last Jamesonian binary, it was in the critics' discussions of the highly local (whether that be in terms of the geographical evocation of Spain or simply the specificity of musical realism) and the global or globalized (such as Reyer's concern that everywhere was becoming the same) that the idea of the national emerged, as a mediating point between these two poles. And at the heart of the discussions sat Massenet's role as a French composer and *La Navarraise*'s status as a French opera.

Although Massenet had been no stranger to ambivalent press reviews in the years leading up to *La Navarraise* (*Esclarmonde* (1889) and *Werther* (Paris première: 1893)

[80] Annegret Fauser, '*Cette musique sans tradition*: Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and its French Critics', *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer,* ed. Fauser and Everist, 228–55 (pp. 240–1).

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had been deemed too Wagnerian in style for some critics), any criticisms had been balanced by the immense and enduring success of works like *Manon* (1882) and *Le Cid* (1885).[81] Set against the arguments between his more outspoken colleagues that were rocking the French musical establishment in this period (such as the acrimonious split between Saint-Säens and Franck in the Société Nationale de Musique in 1886), Massenet had remained a relatively uncontroversial figure and had even achieved something of the status of 'national treasure' by the 1890s.

And yet *La Navarraise* drew harsher criticisms than previous works, with Bruneau labelling Massenet's musical style in the opera 'a very dangerous practice, were it to become more generalized'.[82] Some of the criticisms were to do with *La Navarraise*'s 'Frenchness' or lack thereof. Bruneau, once again, captured the concerns of a number of critics when he stated: 'It even seems to me that M. Massenet would have done well to leave to foreign theatres this work which was too obviously written for them.'[83] While *La Navarraise* was written for London, it does not seem to have been this fact alone that drew such a response from the critics; besides, it was not the first of Massenet's operas to have received its première somewhere other than Paris, as his *Hérodiade* had premièred in Brussels (1881), and *Werther* had first been heard in Vienna (1892). Instead, the link with *Cavalleria rusticana* becomes important again here.

No matter how critical the reviewers were of *La Navarraise*, they were quick to argue that Massenet's score was of a much better quality than Mascagni's.[84] Rowden has written more broadly on tensions in the Franco-Italian national relationship at the *fin de siècle*, and I do not wish to retread ground that she has already covered.[85] But it seems to me that the critics' concerns with *La Navarraise*'s relationship with *Cavalleria rusticana* extended beyond dyadic national tensions. It was not simply a question of whether *La Navarraise* was an Italian-style work presented on one of France's national stages or whether it was a work that had come second-hand from London, but rather about the image it presented of Massenet, their national master. Indeed, as Matthew Franke has shown, Massenet was regarded in many circles in Italy as a cosmopolitan

[81] See Steven Huebner, 'Massenet and Wagner: Bridling the Influence', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 5 (1993), 223–38.

[82] 'D'un usage très périlleux, si elle se généralisait'. Bruneau, 'Les théâtres', *Le Figaro*, 4 October 1895.

[83] 'Et il me semble même que M. Massenet eût bien fait de laisser aux théâtres étrangers cette pièce trop visiblement écrite pour eux.' *Ibid*.

[84] To give but one example, the reviewer for *Gil Blas* wrote of the score: 'Certainly, this creation leaves *Cavalleria* far behind it' ('Certainement cette création laisse loin derrière elle celle de *Cavalleria*') 'Intérim', 'Premières représentations', *Gil Blas*, 5 October 1895. Others, such as Joncières, even claimed that the musical style of the opera was entirely different from Mascagni's: 'I hasten to say, however, that, despite its violence and brutality, its score is of a whole other style than that of the Italian composer' ('J'ai hâte de dire, cependant, que malgré ses violences et ses brutalités, sa partition est d'un tout autre style que celle du compositeur italien'). Joncières, 'Revue musicale', *La liberté*, 6 October 1895.

[85] See Rowden, '*La Navarraise* face à la presse', 120–1.

composer rather than simply as a French one.[86] This, combined with the work's rapid international success and Calvé's appearance in the leading role in both the London and Paris premières (and then the New York one), risked diluting Massenet's image as French.

And it seems that in 1895 French critics might have been keen to reach out for artistic stability as new hairline cracks started to appear in the politics of the Third Republic. The previous year, Alfred Dreyfus, a young artillery officer of Jewish descent, had been arrested and accused of passing French military intelligence to the Germans. His trial, imprisonment and deportation in the early months of 1895 had filled the press (and the mass press in particular). The affair, when it exploded fully in 1896, deeply divided the French public and harmed French international relations, but even the events of 1894–5 had shaken public confidence in the military, while also encouraging considerable anti-Semitism in many quarters.[87]

As an opera pervaded by the military on every level (plot, spectacle, music and – if Bellaigue in the *Revue des deux mondes* was to be believed – smell, too), *La Navarraise* doubtless brought the affair to critics' minds. Indeed, the plot of the opera itself involves a breaking of military protocol, whereby Anita sneaks into the enemy camp and kills the general, much to her beloved's distress. Coming close on the heels of a glut of new military operas that had appeared at the Opéra-Comique (Demestre wryly observed in *La justice* that 'the Opéra-Comique [had] definitely adopted a military state' in recent years), *La Navarraise*'s subject matter, presented through sensory bombardment, surely did little to ease niggling concerns about French national stability.[88] Coupled with the fact that the opera appeared to undermine Massenet's role as a French master, the critics' self-doubt in response to the opera seems to have been provoked on a number of fronts.

La Navarraise, therefore, struck critics in many respects as a thoroughly modern opera, not through any avant-garde musical traits or superficial topicality, but rather through the fundamental integration of the theatrical and the everyday, which was promoted by new mass-media technologies. To understand it, critics attempted to negotiate between

[86] Franke explores Massenet's Italian reception in this period in detail in Matthew Franke, 'The Impact of Jules Massenet's Operas in Milan, 1893–1903' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2014).

[87] For more on the Dreyfus Affair and its political and social consequences, see Leslie Derfler, *The Dreyfus Affair* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood, 2002).

[88] 'L'Opéra-Comique a décidément adopté l'état militaire.' Demestre, 'La soirée d'hier', *La justice*, 5 October 1895. He was not alone in commenting on the popularity of military operas at the Opéra-Comique; reviews in *Le petit Parisien* and *Le journal* (both 4 October 1895), *L'intransigeant*, *La gazette de France*, *La liberté*, *Gil Blas*, *Le temps* (all 5 October 1895) and *La revue des deux mondes* (15 October 1895) all remark on the fact. Soldiers had long since occupied an important place across the spectrum of French stages, and in recent years Benjamin Godard's *La vivandière* (1885), Bruneau's *L'attaque du moulin* (1893) and Paul Vidal's *Guernica* (1895) had all premièred at the Opéra-Comique.

the demands *La Navarraise* made on them to reassess their critical position and the demands of their commitment to traditional operatic spectatorship. *La Navarraise* was not so unrecognizable to them as an opera (particularly, of course, when such an establishment figure as Massenet was so closely involved with it) that they were forced to find an entirely different means of reviewing it, but it was by no means as straightforward a work as they might have expected. The opera's music, Calvé's performance and public image, and the opera's Spanish setting all presented them with the familiar on the one hand and, simultaneously, with the new on the other. Their reception, then, bears the evidence of a constant (and ultimately unresolved) process of negotiation between tropes of conventional operatic reception and the novelties that *La Navarraise* brought forth.

The idea of 'realism', in all its guises, formed a kind of pivot point in this negotiation, I would argue, in a way that ultimately extended far beyond *La Navarraise*'s resemblance to *Cavalleria rusticana*. It became nothing less than shorthand for the way in which Parisian critics sought (or failed) to explore these apparently conflicting issues of modern spectatorship and its operatic counterpart, and encompassed the relationships between performers, authorial figures and audiences (as a group and as a body constituted of individuals), between art and consumer culture, and between technology and opera. Realism here, therefore, emerges not as a set of musical or textual techniques, but as a mode of both authorial design and reception that was at once rooted in the present moment and in the conventions of theatre, in the specifics of a particular locality and in shared concerns that could be international in their reach. The tensions within these pairs were surely not formulated so consciously in the critics' minds, but their effects emerge in their words, as they watched and wondered, grumbled and puzzled about *La Navarraise*.

ABSTRACT

The 'réalisme' of Massenet's *La Navarraise* divided critics at its belated Parisian première on 3 October 1895. While the opera has typically been read as a straightforward attempt at French *verismo*, this article suggests a more complex set of ways in which modernity and the modern world shaped critical perceptions of and responses to realism. Placing *La Navarraise* within its wider cultural and technological contexts, I argue that the critics' ambivalence to its realism provides insight into the changing and contested nature of critical perception and subjectivity in Paris in the final years of the nineteenth century.