

# Introduction: opera studies today

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*In all art the road to appreciation lies through reflection.* (STENDHAL, *LIFE OF ROSSINI*)<sup>1</sup>

In 1860 the French poet Charles Baudelaire heard a concert performance of excerpts from Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*. Writing about the overwhelming impact that the music had upon him he expressed his desire to understand better its 'mysterious intentions and method, which were all unknown to me. I resolved to make myself master of the why and wherefore, and to transform my pleasure into knowledge.'<sup>2</sup>

We could have no better account of why we might be led to study something, most particularly something that gets under our skin, as Wagner had got under Baudelaire's skin, and as opera gets under many people's skins. We study something firstly because we want to understand 'the why and wherefore' of it: why it is, and why it is as it is. We want to understand its constituents: how they are put together and why they are put together in that way. And, secondly, we want to understand why it has the effect that it has upon us, so as to know better the values that form our own subjectivity; to gain understanding of the basis of our own pleasures or displeasures, as individuals and members of particular groups and communities. And, finally, we study something for the light it casts upon the society and culture within which the object of our study exists (or existed). Even if Baudelaire didn't express this last concern immediately, he was certainly one of the first critics to have understood how works of art tell us about their specific historical moment. These three modes of explanation broadly provide the map by which this book has been put together, indicating what I take to be the three main fields of interest in current opera studies.

Their methods are not mutually exclusive: explanations of the formal 'what?' soon lead (as Baudelaire recognized) to questions about artistic intention ('why and wherefore?'), which in turn inevitably raise questions about performance, institutional, cultural and social contexts; subjectivities themselves are culturally constructed. Nonetheless, time was when opera studies might have considered its remit to be the first of these activities in isolation, examining the formal 'what?' of operatic works as represented by their scores alone. For the British opera historian Robert Donington,

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writing as late as 1978, the components of opera are simply ‘the words that articulate the drama, and the music that expresses it.’<sup>3</sup> Insofar as opera was studied as an academic subject the focus was on describing the musical and dramatic principles of operatic works, and perhaps supplying some kind of critical judgement of their quality according to probably unexamined criteria (as Joseph Kerman concedes in the passage from *Opera as Drama* on p. 8 below), or offering a historical account of opera’s formal or stylistic development through a select handful of canonical composers and works. All that was necessary to know about an opera was assumed to be contained in the closed text and the fictive world it represented; everything else was deemed to be contingent. A statement of method by the German critic Siegmund Levarie, who sought to bring the rigour of formalist analysis to the operas of Mozart, makes this clear: ‘Emphasis on the score will banish from the staked limits any primary consideration of Mozart’s life and experience. Only rarely and incidentally will the historical devices of the scholarly mode of criticism be admitted.’<sup>4</sup> For Levarie, this method was justified because ‘In the case of music, meaning and grammar are identical.’<sup>5</sup> But Levarie cannot avoid discussion of non-musical events since he is analysing opera and is aware that the formal properties of the music must in some way relate to dramatic action, so he issues a caveat that is more than usually revealing: ‘The terminology will thus not be able to avoid loans from universal thoughts and aspirations, not necessarily musical, which are shared by all mankind but given particular expression by the composer.’<sup>6</sup>

This is more than usually revealing since it is an explicit statement of what has come to be called ‘liberal humanism’ – the basing of critical interpretation upon unquestioned assumptions of ‘universal’ human values. It is explicitly unhistorical (that which is universal by definition excludes historical or cultural particularity), implicitly assumes that the values of one’s own culture are universal, and takes no account of the different subject positions that people occupy as the result of culture, gender, class, race, sexuality and so forth. It is exemplified by the kind of criticism that can discuss the theme of sexual jealousy (a ‘universal’ theme) in Verdi’s *Otello* without mentioning the issue of Othello’s race and how the issue of race played out in the context of early seventeenth-century English society and late nineteenth-century Italian society. The development of opera studies since the early 1990s may be charted as a move away from these kinds of formalist and liberal humanist approaches towards modes of study that consider the social and historical contexts of a work, and engage not only with dramatic texts but with the materiality of performance practices and events, and with the institutions and cultural discourses that sustain them. To study opera we have to study more than operas.

## Dissolving walls and boundaries

The study of opera has been a late entrant to the academic disciplines, mainly because of opera's own uncertain generic combination of theatre and music, which led to its being marginalized by both musicology and theatre studies. It could, of course, be argued that since music and theatre are inseparable in most of the world's performance traditions this is a false distinction that has only come about due to the separation of theatre and music in European culture, and the resultant separation and reification of their study as disciplines. But the effect of this is that in the development of opera studies as an academic discipline in its own right we can observe two apparently contradictory tendencies at work. The first is the tendency for any new academic discipline to want to demarcate its terrain firmly, and to establish its own rules and procedures. New academic subjects tend to be defensive about their status, with the effect that they often seek to out-rigour older disciplines in an effort to prove that the new subject is indeed worthy of academic attention. This phase of discipline formation is often exclusionary in its determination to draw the line between its own procedures and what is perceived to be the amateurish dilettantism that has gone before. As the historian Michel Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish*, 'Discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogenous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected space of disciplinary monotony.'<sup>7</sup> The second tendency, which usually follows as a reaction to the 'disciplinary monotony' of the first, is to throw the subject open to wider disciplinary enquiry. The belatedness of the academic study of opera has had the effect of compacting these two tendencies so that they often seem to occur alongside each other, for at the same time that the claim for disciplinary rigour was being made it was recognized that a form like opera is inherently interdisciplinary, and therefore demands a wide range of critical approaches. At the very least, the critic of opera needs to understand the history, practices and theories of theatre as well as those of music, although these days few theatre scholars or musicologists believe that the study of either theatre or music can be contained within these disciplinary boundaries alone, as I discuss further in Chapter 3. These two tendencies towards methodological rigour and methodological openness can perhaps be seen to crystallize, symbolically at least, in two publications that appeared in 1989 (a year when walls and boundaries were dissolving more widely): Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker's book *Analyzing Opera*, and the launch by Parker and Arthur Groos of the *Cambridge Opera Journal*. If *Analyzing Opera* set out to establish some methods for the rigorous analysis of opera according to its own terms, the *Cambridge Opera Journal* set out quite explicitly to open opera studies to multidisciplinary approaches.

It will not do to oversimplify the story. Much fine work had been undertaken in the field of opera studies before 1989. Most of this work had taken place in relation to individual composers (e.g. Winton Dean on Handel, Julian Budden or David Kimbell on Verdi, John Warrack on Weber, to list only British examples), although such studies often viewed the works in isolation of anything but biographical context, or introduced historical contexts as backgrounds that never seriously impinged on discussion of the composers and their works. One of the first substantial attempts to offer an overarching theory of the dramaturgy of opera was Joseph Kerman's *Opera as Drama*, first published in 1956, a book whose influence remains widespread, and to which I shall return later in this introduction. But Kerman's study is even more resolutely unhistorical than the others mentioned. Newer disciplinary approaches had included the perspectives of sociology (Jane Fulcher's work on French grand opera,<sup>8</sup> or John Rosselli's on the nineteenth-century Italian opera industry,<sup>9</sup> both from earlier in the 1980s) or literary theory (Peter Conrad's *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* from 1977;<sup>10</sup> Herbert Lindenberger's *Opera the Extravagant Art* from 1984).<sup>11</sup> But it was from the 1990s that opera studies really took off as a discipline that was able to recognize both the material and institutional specificity and the broader cultural complexities of the form.

As an object of musicological study, opera has always been problematic for critical methods derived from the historical hegemony of German instrumental music. As Abbate and Parker suggest, 'Traditionally, [musicology] treated opera in a stepmotherly fashion, preferring older or purely instrumental music for establishing canonical norms, often abandoning the study of nineteenth-century opera to amateurs.'<sup>12</sup> And this applied not just to nineteenth-century opera, of course, despite the valiant efforts of scholars like Winton Dean or Donald J. Grout to restore the reputations of composers such as Handel or Scarlatti, or the work of the German scholar Reinhard Strohm on eighteenth-century Italian opera.<sup>13</sup> Writing in 1949 the Scottish musicologist Donald Francis Tovey notoriously dismissed the whole history of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera as an irrelevant bywater of 'the mainstream of music', judging that 'at the beginning of the seventeenth century [the mainstream] enters into regions partly mountainous and partly desert and becomes choked with weeds'. For Tovey the only redemption for opera was to regard it as 'ultimately a pure form of music' with 'a capacity to rise almost as high as absolute music can rise'.<sup>14</sup> Lest we are tempted to dismiss Tovey's discomfort with opera as being a relic of the past, it is worth noting that the twenty-four chapters of Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist's *Rethinking Music* of 1999,<sup>15</sup> a compendium of what were judged to be the main issues in musicology at that date, confine themselves almost exclusively to the discussion of non-operatic music, even

though paradoxically the purpose of the book was to demonstrate the wide range of disciplinary approaches now being taken by musicology. Similarly, Alastair Williams's 2001 survey *Constructing Musicology* dedicates a mere five pages to opera, discussing it in relation to the representation of women and the orient in music, issues over which opera has proved particularly vulnerable to contemporary forms of social and cultural critique, and issues which merit two chapters to themselves in this book.<sup>16</sup>

Yet for much of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'music' meant, for most people, opera. Countering Tovey, William Austin proposes that 'Between Monteverdi and Mozart we may infer . . . that Italian opera constituted the mainstream of music.'<sup>17</sup> For many composers who are remembered today primarily for their instrumental music (or songs), such as Haydn, Schubert or Dvořák, opera constituted a substantial part of their output, whilst, of course, many major composers such as Gluck, Verdi, Wagner, Massenet and Puccini worked almost exclusively in opera. Traditional accounts of the musical development of opera tend to see it in relationship to the 'progress' of canonical forms of instrumental music. A composer like Mozart, one of the few composers to have been an absolute master of operatic and non-operatic genres alike, is therefore supposed to have deployed the inherently dramatic and developmental structures of instrumental sonata form to allow opera to develop a properly dramatic language (although this doesn't explain why Haydn, another master of sonata form, was, by our lights, much less successful in opera). But, as Austin and Abbate have both suggested, this argument may be tautologous. Abbate suggests that our concept of what is 'dramatic' in music is, in the first place, derived from opera, and Austin argues even more broadly that 'Our basic ideas about the orchestra, about keys and chords and modulations, about rhythms and forms and musical expression, were shaped by opera.'<sup>18</sup> It may in fact be the case that sonata form developed from *opera buffa* rather than the other way round. And Abbate has also suggested that the hermeneutic turn in contemporary critical musicology, the tendency to interpret music in relation to its constructions of, say, gender or nation, has its roots in opera aesthetics insofar as it is opera that affirms music's 'signifying capacity'.<sup>19</sup>

Although Wagner claimed that his music dramas were symphonic, perhaps a reflection of his own status anxiety about working in the medium of opera, they deliver no meaningful symphonic method for the analyst; definitions of what might constitute symphonic thinking have to be rendered very vague and abstract to include Wagner. Perhaps the best-known example of this kind of approach was the work of the Wagnerian critic Alfred Lorenz who, in the 1920s and 1930s, rejected the prevalent obsession with labelling and interpreting the thematic leitmotifs of Wagnerian

drama, identifying instead the larger-scale harmonic structures underlying the surface of the music. In doing so he reduced Wagner's operas to a series of purely formal, tonal processes entirely divorced from dramatic meaning.<sup>20</sup> Typically, critics rooted in the tradition of formal analysis often prefer their operas unperformed; Mozart scholar Julian Rushton finds the music of *Don Giovanni* to be so perfect that 'in truth [the opera] needs no staging'.<sup>21</sup> Kierkegaard preferred to listen to performances of *Don Giovanni* with his eyes closed; the advent of recording technologies made that unnecessary, re-enforcing the tendency to listen to opera as a primarily musical experience which has almost certainly contributed to the dominance of the conductor in opera during most of the twentieth century. The arrival of video, notably much more popular for opera than for spoken theatre, has redressed this balance somewhat.

Parker and Abbate's *Analyzing Opera* addresses the problem of formalism directly, staking a claim for the importance of analytical methods, but proposing new approaches: 'All too often the practitioners of musical analysis labor doggedly to discover the hallmarks of autonomous structure, or coherence, or organic unity in a work. By doing so, they may ignore a hundred rich contexts for their object, including those we might regard as historical: the conditions of its invention, its intertextuality.'<sup>22</sup> But although Parker and Abbate suggest that their mode of analysis opens opera to social and historical forces, and they reference poststructuralist views that the text is not self-contained – that meanings arise in relation to other texts and contexts (see Chapter 10 of this volume) – the essays in the collection in fact offer few examples of such historically informed analysis. Abbate's highly original (and influential) work on opera has demonstrated that poststructuralist methods of analysis often dispense with the historical contextualization that she refers to above, although more recently she has sought to consider the effect of performance more carefully, leading her to question the methods of close textual interpretation.<sup>23</sup> Historically informed analysis is, in fact, much more evident in the articles found in the *Cambridge Opera Journal*. In an editorial to the first 1989 issue that is admirable for its restraint from polemic Parker and Arthur Groos claim a simple purpose for the journal: to open opera studies to interdisciplinary approaches from scholars outside the discipline of musicology. 'We hope, in short, to broaden the scope of discourse about opera', pointing out with evident satisfaction that contributors to the very first volume of the journal include an economic historian, a musicologist, a literary critic, a philosopher and an opera scholar 'unfettered by academic ties'<sup>24</sup> (even if, under other circumstances, such writers might have been labelled by Parker himself, wearing his analyst hat, as 'amateurs'). In earlier editions of the journal contributors still feel obliged to do a little pre-emptive throat-clearing to

justify their disciplinary solecism; by the millennium it had become evident that opera scholars were revelling in their disciplinary promiscuity.

Disciplinary restraint and disciplinary promiscuity side by side. We could not have a more apt critical paradigm for opera itself, which has always been confined and constrained by the institutional structures and discourses that hold it in place, and yet still manages to be messy, elusive and sometimes even surprisingly subversive.

## Opera as drama

Although the study of opera has historically been led by musicology, it is also to some extent informed by whatever is the current state of drama and theatre studies – itself a belated presence in the academy. Drama studies emerged from within literary studies with the study of dramatic texts as literature. Given the predominant formalism of literary studies at the time that drama was becoming accepted as an academic discipline in post-war Europe and America, it is not surprising that the formal aspects of dramatic texts were often exaggerated. And to some extent this might have given legitimation to approaches to opera that similarly focused on the formal properties of the music of opera: the kind of organic textual unity sought by musical analysis is paralleled by the way in which Cleanth Brooks, one of the best-known members of the school of formalist literary criticism known as New Criticism, sought to reduce the meaning of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to a single metaphor in the play, as if it were no more than an extended poem.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the formalism of both musicological analysis and New Criticism was in accord with the reductive approach of a critical modernism committed to the pursuit of what is essential to an art form. The aesthetic philosopher Suzanne Langer, for instance, insisted that 'Each of the great orders of art has its own primary apparition which is the essential feature of all its works . . . there can be no hybrid works, belonging as much to one art as to another.'<sup>26</sup> This left opera in a sticky spot, and the modernist theatre critic Eric Bentley duly dismissed forms such as opera in his book *The Playwright as Thinker*, stating that 'every dramaturgic practice that subordinates the words to any other medium has trivialized the drama without giving full rein to the medium that has become dominant'.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, if opera has proved a troublesome stepchild for conventional musicology, which sidesteps the problem by pretending that opera is not theatre, it has proved no less delinquent to conventional theatre studies, which has consistently ignored opera as a theatrical form. My Thames and Hudson *Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Theatre*, still on my shelves from when I was a student in 1977, has no entry for opera, whilst its entry under 'Chorus' says simply



that from the Renaissance onward the collective chorus ‘was taken over by one character who acted as commentator and observer of the main action’, as if four hundred years of the operatic chorus had never happened.<sup>28</sup> Such solecisms are replicated in standard histories of theatre to this day.

It was the laudable intention of Joseph Kerman in *Opera as Drama* to challenge both Bentley’s dismissal of opera from the perspective of drama, making a claim for opera to be taken seriously as a dramatic genre, and the kinds of musical formalism demonstrated by Lorenz and Levarie, insisting that any analysis of the music of an opera should do so in the light of its dramatic function. *Opera as Drama* is feisty and opinionated, but limited by its liberal humanist premises. In the revised edition of the book, issued in 1988, Kerman reflected on the lack of an explicit methodological or theoretical framework in the original book:

The ‘theory’ is exceedingly slight and is presented in a conspicuously roundabout fashion. After a not so hidden reference to Aristotle and a rejection of naturalistic criteria, the argument proceeds immediately by analogy . . . Only afterwards . . . is theory set forth or adumbrated. Drama is or entails the revelation of the quality of human response to actions and events, in the direct context of those actions and events. Opera is drama when it furthers such revelations.<sup>29</sup>

The premises of Kerman’s humanist psychologism continue to inform everyday operatic criticism. The pages of a magazine such as *Opera* are littered with critical judgements that assume that dramatic characters have an essential being, with statements such as: ‘like many Americans, X failed to capture the aristocratic quality of the Count’; ‘Y successfully brings out the essential passivity of Melisande’s character’. As a callow young opera director keen to make a mark I once proposed to the director I was assisting on Rossini’s *Il barbiere di Siviglia* that the opera was ‘all about money’. ‘No’, said the director, it’s ‘all about people’.

Where for Kerman the presumption that drama entailed humanist psychology meant that baroque opera was disqualified as drama, Winton Dean attempted a defence of baroque opera based on precisely the same premises of humanist psychology, presenting a case for interpreting Handel as a great dramatic psychologist. Handel’s Cleopatra is ‘the equal of Shakespeare’s’,<sup>30</sup> and, writing of Handel’s portrayal of sorceresses such as Armida and Alcina, Dean states that ‘Handel’s music transcends the libretti; the magic element, designed perhaps as an excuse for diversion and the titillation of the senses, becomes a vehicle for profound truths about human nature.’<sup>31</sup> Dean here makes a number of familiar assumptions. Firstly, he assumes that there is such a thing as human nature, and by implication that it is timeless and universal in that it transcends the specific context of the opera in question.



Secondly, he assumes that it is the music that reveals ‘profound truths about human nature’, and that these truths are, again, transcendent. This belief in the power of operatic music to convey truths beyond those given in the text is very evident in mainstream operatic criticism; as Carolyn Abbate notes, ‘We generally assume that the message conveyed by that music – whatever form it takes – possesses absolute moral authority.’<sup>32</sup> But Abbate also questions this assumption when she insists that the possibility of musical meaning arises from context; there is no essential realm of ‘truth’ to which music has privileged access. ‘When the Countess pardons the Count in act 4 of *The Marriage of Figaro*, it is not that Mozart’s music simultaneously gives voice to some more profound statement of or about forgiveness. Rather, it is the fact that there is a Countess, a Count, a specific dramatic situation, and ordinary words like “Contessa, perdono” sung out loud that has in quite precise ways predetermined the meaning to attach to Mozart’s musical moment.’<sup>33</sup> And Abbate goes on to insist that ‘Such phenomena undermine romantic notions about music’s overriding force, seen as the power to do more than the verbal and the visible, to convey something beyond them, to transcend and survive their limits.’<sup>34</sup>

The belief that music has access to realms of truth beyond the dramatic situation is invariably also supported by the common view that truth is reached through the abandonment of received schemata and conventions. This presumption clearly underpins the entry on ‘Mozart’ in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (1987 edition), which describes Mozart’s operatic career as a progressive liberation from conventional forms to represent his characters with increasing lifelikeness and truthfulness. The incomplete opera *Zaide* is ‘a clear step forward’; *Idomeneo* ‘has the power to transcend old forms’; *Le nozze di Figaro* is ‘an enormous advance on its predecessors’; *Don Giovanni* ‘severs almost the last connections, still present in *Figaro*, with set types’; finally, *Die Zauberflöte* shows Mozart’s ‘lifelong care for the truthful observation of human character’.<sup>35</sup> Yet this routine narrative is patently absurd in the case of Mozart. If Mozart blurs the stereotypes of *opera seria* and *opera buffa* to challenge class distinctions in *Figaro*, the characters in *Don Giovanni* clearly revert to earlier types from *opera seria* (Anna and Ottavio) and *opera buffa* (Leporello and Zerlina), for reasons that I tried to suggest in my *Mozart and the Enlightenment*.<sup>36</sup> It is nonsense to imply that the obviously generic characters of *Die Zauberflöte* represent the consummation of Mozart’s movement towards ‘truthful observation of human character’. If they appear truthful it is because Mozart knows how to deploy particular musical and dramatic conventions that have become naturalized in such a way that they *seem* truthful. As Ronald J. Rabin puts it, ‘Rather than assume that Mozart’s genius invariably led him to transform genre conventions, we might enquire instead how Mozart *exploits* them

to suit his dramatic aims.<sup>37</sup> There is no simple opposition between convention and truth. As late as *Aida* in 1871 Verdi knew that conventions of Italian opera that went back to Rossini could still be relied upon since, as Harold Powers put it, conventions create 'a framework of expectations' for an audience.<sup>38</sup> Alessandra Campana's chapter on operatic genres addresses this issue of genre and convention across the history of opera.

The problem with Kerman's reliance on such a narrow definition of drama is that it excluded huge areas of the operatic repertory on the grounds that these works failed to meet his stringent criteria: most seventeenth-century opera, all eighteenth-century Italian *opera seria* and French opera, most early Romantic opera. The exclusionary tightness of Kerman's category of drama led Peter Conrad in *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* to offer a provocative rebuff when he suggested that opera might more usefully be associated with genres such as the epic, romance, Shakespearean lyric poem, allegory, novel, dance and even painting – anything but drama! Kerman's method is also typical in that it ignores the theatrical experience of opera in performance; his analytical method is rooted in the notion of the text as something self-sufficient. Remedying this is not just a matter of considering 'staging' as an additional component of opera (a position that Donington conceded in a later book);<sup>39</sup> it involves an understanding that musical and theatrical works are, to a significant extent, conceived and shaped according to the musical, theatrical and social systems for which they are created.

## Nietzsche to the rescue

Kerman's claims for opera as drama had already perhaps been pre-empted in the nineteenth century by Friedrich Nietzsche, who so often anticipates later twentieth-century modes of thought. Nietzsche's first major work *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* of 1872, written under the influence of Schopenhauer and Wagner, places the problem of opera at the centre of a philosophical enquiry into the nature of being. In this book Nietzsche suggests that those elements that Kerman rejects as inessential to opera as drama ('the lyrical, spectacular or ritual elements'<sup>40</sup>), or that Winton Dean considered to be 'an excuse for diversion and the titillation of the senses', might actually be what make the form valuable. For Nietzsche, in his famous distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian aspects of art and life, the main characteristic of the Dionysian is that whereas the Apollonian spirit attempts to impose order and meaning on the world through idealized representation, the Dionysian accepts the underlying flux and meaninglessness of life, sometimes celebrating it, at other times

accepting its tragic futility. Music and dance as physically expressive arts are the characteristic arts of the Dionysian spirit, and they combine with the more representational form of drama to create Athenian tragedy. In *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche appears at first to denigrate opera, describing the rational, Socratic culture which destroyed the spirit of tragedy as ‘the culture of opera.’<sup>41</sup> But this is because, in his view, the historical forms of opera were essentially misguided, based on the mistaken belief that the function of music in opera is to convey the words of the drama clearly (‘It was truly unmusical listeners who demanded that the words be understood above all else.’<sup>42</sup>) or to illustrate the emotions of the characters. The Dionysian aspect of tragedy directly negates Aristotle’s dramatic precepts, and hence, by extrapolation, those of a critic like Kerman. The Dionysian is opposed to the principle of action since it recognizes the futility of goal-oriented action. It is also opposed to the principle of psychological coherence, or, indeed, to the function of the individual as protagonist; Nietzsche specifically regrets the development of ‘character portrayal and psychological refinement that occurs in Sophoclean tragedy.’<sup>43</sup>

The Dionysian aspects of drama may well be recognized as those aspects of opera (lyric, spectacular, ritual) which Kerman fears will subsume the properly dramatic. The term spectacular is, of course, deliberately chosen for its negative connotations of ‘showy’ or ‘empty’: Wagner’s critique of Meyerbeer’s ‘effects without causes’.<sup>44</sup> Yes, we may all agree that there is a lot of showy spectacle in opera, and that knowing the spectacular politics of fascism and the effects of today’s media-dominated ‘society of the spectacle’ we are right to be wary of such spectacle. Indeed, in a 2007 essay on *Turandot* the authors note that the first production of Puccini’s opera was staged by a stage and film director who became a notorious fascist, and suggest that ‘*Turandot* delivers opera to spectacle. The power of spectacle obliterates the moral conflict that the surviving characters would have exhibited in a Verdian universe . . . The delivery of opera to spectacle is also its delivery to fascism, to its aesthetic of power through spectacle.’<sup>45</sup>

Spectacle is often identified with the visual. But Nietzsche believed that the visual was an essential aspect of theatrical communication, writing that ‘myth does not find its adequate objectification in the spoken word. The structure of the scenes and the visible images reveal a deeper wisdom than the poet can convey in words and concepts.’<sup>46</sup> Kerman’s and Dean’s strictures against spectacle reveal the typically Protestant iconoclasm of Anglo-Saxon theatre cultures, which tend to distrust the visual – a tendency that goes back to the dispute between the writer Ben Jonson and the scenic designer Inigo Jones over the primacy of their respective roles in the Stuart court masques on which they collaborated. But for the first two hundred years of its life spectacle, associated in particular with stage

technology – referred to as ‘machines’ in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theatre – was assumed to be an essential component of opera; indeed, as essential as music. In his *General History of Music* of 1766–89 the English historian Dr Burney stated that opera consisted of three key elements – music, singing and machines – that were always vying for precedence, claiming that during the first century of opera ‘the distinct and characteristic charm of opera was not the Music but the machinery’.<sup>47</sup> Purcell’s semi-opera *The Fairy Queen* (1692) was originally advertised as being presented with ‘Singing, Dancing and Machines interwoven, after the manner of an opera’; as late as 1791 Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* could be announced as ‘a comedy with machines’.<sup>48</sup> For the seventeenth-century French philosopher Pierre Bayle opera was a microcosm of the universe, the hidden machinist of the opera being like the hidden God of Cartesian philosophy who operates the cogs, levers and counterweights of nature.<sup>49</sup> Burney, on the other hand, was more ambivalent about operatic machines, which he described as ‘expensive and puerile toys’<sup>50</sup> (he was another Anglo-Saxon Protestant, after all). He also considered that eighteenth-century opera had in turn given too much prominence to singing, and that it was time to redress the balance in favour of musical values.

Since Burney was writing at the time of Gluck’s reforms in favour of vocal and dramatic simplicity, to be followed by the rich musical complexity of Mozart, it might have seemed that purely musical values had won out. But Italian Romantic *bel canto* opera and French grand opera reaffirmed that the pleasures of singing and spectacle cannot be expunged from opera. Well into the nineteenth century the advertisement of spectacular scenic effects was as important as information about the composer or singers in selling an operatic performance.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the German critic Theodor Adorno noted that, despite its pretensions to transcendence, opera has always relied upon advanced technologies to achieve its effects of immateriality.<sup>52</sup> Adorno cited Wagner as the epitome of this contradiction, although it is well known that Wagner’s experiments in stage technology were as frustrating to him as to his audiences: George Bernard Shaw tells us that Bayreuth smelled like a steam laundry because of Wagner’s overindulgence in smoke effects.<sup>53</sup> Wagner’s own imprecations against operatic spectacle, encapsulated in his famous paradox that during the seventeenth century ‘the Musical Drama became, in truth a *peepshow* (*Schauspiel*) whereas the *Play* (*Schauspiel*) remained a hear-play (*Horspiel*)’;<sup>54</sup> suggest a guilty conscience. That spectacle and technology have throughout much of its history been considered as essential to opera, and that today opera is experienced by the majority of its audience via technological apparatuses of dissemination, justifies a chapter on this aspect of opera in the book (see Chapter 7).

Nietzsche considered that the producer of early opera had ‘forced the mechanic and the decorative artist into his service’ precisely because he lacked true visionary understanding. Nietzsche similarly believed that the early composers had succumbed to the ‘voluptuous sensuality of vocal music’ because they failed to understand the ‘Dionysiac depths of music.’<sup>55</sup> But in fact the voluptuous sensuality of the lyrical could be described as the excessive element of opera which cannot be contained within the bounds of plot or character. It is perhaps where the Dionysian bursts through most powerfully; indeed, Carolyn Abbate and others have seen singing as a kind of uncanny possession.<sup>56</sup> When he dismissed the lyrical Kerman was trying to make people take opera seriously, and presumably deplored the kind of canary fancying that many operatic devotees indulge in. But nonetheless it again betokens a kind of puritanism to overlook this aspect of opera, which is, after all, an art designed for lyric performance. As so often, Adorno’s dialectical approach to opera enabled him to see that operatic ‘coloratura’ was ‘an extreme in which the idea of opera emerges most purely’, arguing that Alban Berg ‘was inspired by the genius of opera’ when he wrote the role of Lulu for a coloratura soprano.<sup>57</sup>

As a Dionysian element the lyrical is also the vehicle for one of the essential components of the tragic experience in drama: Aristotle’s ‘pity and terror’. These were the Dionysian elements of tragic drama that even Aristotle could not ignore. In opera our experience of these extreme emotions is almost always received through the agency of singing, and when communicating extreme emotions the lyrical does often transcend the immediate justification offered by character or situation. As Bellini famously said to the librettist of *I puritani*, ‘Carve in your head the adamantine letters: “The opera must draw tears, terrify people, make them die through singing.”’<sup>58</sup> The sexual connotations of Bellini’s terminology cannot be overlooked (to ‘die’ is a well-known euphemism for sexual orgasm), for he describes exactly the mixture of pleasure and pain that is combined in the condition of Dionysian ecstasy. Like many more high-minded critics Kerman and Dean overlook the importance of sensual pleasure in aesthetic experience. The term ‘aesthetic’ itself, we should remember, means ‘of the senses’; it is extremely rash to neglect the aspect of pleasure in music since desire and pleasure are the strongest motivators for much human action, and we need to be alert to how they are being aroused in works of art. Susan Rutherford considers the importance of singing and singers in Chapter 5.

The third component of opera which Kerman wishes to hold at bay is that of ‘ritual’. But I would suggest that this component might be considered even more fundamental an aspect of the dramatic event than the function of representation put forward by Aristotelian theory. When Kerman referred to

the ritualistic aspect of opera he was thinking of things like the stately temple scenes in *Die Zauberflöte*, the pseudo-religious tableaux of *Parsifal* and *Tosca*, or the Coronation Scene in *Boris Godunov*. Such rituals can indeed add a kind of pompous dignity and solemnity to an opera. But ritual is a theatrical form which certain kinds of music serve very well, since ritual foregrounds atmosphere, pattern and repetition over action, development and character. Some opera composers, such as Stravinsky, Harrison Birtwistle and Philip Glass, have deliberately set out to emphasize these attributes in whole operas. But we might also note that opera does not just represent rituals. It also serves as a focus for social rituals, just as the occasion of the performance of Greek tragic dramas served as a focus for the community of Athens to affirm its social and ethical ideals. Indeed, for Nietzsche there was ‘no fundamental opposition between the audience and the chorus’ in Attic drama.<sup>59</sup> If we judge the operas of Lully, Mozart’s *La clemenza di Tito* or Smetana’s pageant-like opera *Libuše* by the precepts of Aristotelian dramatic theory we are probably missing the point. Such operas have a specific social function (respectively: to affirm the power and glory of Louis XIV; to facilitate political reconciliation between the Austrian emperor Leopold II and the Bohemian nobility; to provide the emergent Czech nation with a suitable self-image by which to fight for its independence from Austria); they should be judged by their success in relation to these aims. As a historian of ritual in early modern Europe suggests, the core question is not ‘what does it mean?’ but ‘what emotions does it evoke?’<sup>60</sup> Carl Dahlhaus’s call for a methodological procedure to challenge Kerman’s consignment of baroque opera to the dustbin of history by attempting to ‘reconstruct the specific idea of the dramatic that really underlay earlier *opera seria*’<sup>61</sup> is to this extent misguided if the primary purpose of *opera seria* was not, ultimately, dramatic, an issue that I will take up further in Chapter 3.

What Nietzsche’s formulations on the Dionysian aspects of art adumbrate is a map for the outward move that has taken place in opera studies from the assumption of the self-sufficiency of musical form and musico-dramatic representation to a broader consideration of musical and theatrical performance, and from here to a consideration of the social contexts of the dramatic event, and of the cultural contexts that create systems of meaning and effect for work, performance and event. Such a move also demands a re-engagement with history.<sup>62</sup>

## Opera and history

Histories of opera in the past usually consisted of narratives of the development of the different forms and styles of opera, usually constructed in

a teleological fashion as a story of progress, ‘treating one kind of opera as merely the precursor of another’, as Carl Dahlhaus once put it.<sup>63</sup> Works, composers or even whole periods that diverged from the mainstream grand narrative were either ignored or characterized as being, say, exemplary of ‘national’ schools of opera, which placed them (somewhat condescendingly) outside the main (usually Germanic) march of history – although in 1814 a now canonical opera like *Fidelio*, first performed in its definitive version in that year, would have seemed decidedly marginal, a belated instance of a genre once popular in France in the 1790s. Or history might be offered as ‘background’ to the stories and themes of particular operas (the French Revolution as background to Beethoven’s representation of the theme of liberty in *Fidelio*; the Italian Risorgimento as background to Verdi’s portrayal of the Hebrews in captivity in *Nabucco*).

But as Mary Hunter and James Webster have insisted, this latter approach to historical contextualization often ‘permits the historical and aesthetic imaginations to operate in different, even unrelated realms; one is invited to exercise one’s historical imagination in acts of homage to a set of essentially or potentially a-historical aesthetic experiences.’<sup>64</sup> And although, as Victoria Johnson notes in a recent interdisciplinary study of opera in Italy and France, there have in the past been critics who have worked with a ‘history of ideas’ approach to opera, they have thereby chosen to study the intellectual content of opera without coming to terms ‘with the importance of opera as a site of social, cultural, and political interaction.’<sup>65</sup> History of ideas approaches often fail to consider the complex processes by which ideas are mediated by specific institutions and agents, or to deal with the particular materialities and codes of theatrical and musical performance, or of the performance event.<sup>66</sup> And our understanding of what constitutes the ‘political’ is now greatly expanded. Where once historical interpretation might have involved simply reading operatic narratives as political allegories – for example, arguing over whether Purcell and Tate’s *Dido and Aeneas* was an allegory of James II as Aeneas abandoning England as Dido to build a Roman (Catholic) empire, or of Dutch William III as Aeneas being reminded of his responsibilities to English Mary – Anthony Welch now insists that the meanings of this opera must be read through a much wider ‘matrix of cultural forces that give shape to its ideology and form; among them, critical debates over the meaning and legacy of the classical past, shifting models of heroism and of gender relations, the changing make-up of theatre audiences and the evolution of their tastes, and the protocols of genre that organized *Dido*’s relationship with earlier works and families of works.’<sup>67</sup> A nice example of the way in which the politics of a form like opera may not always be explicit, and will depend upon careful consideration of the relationship between formal and aesthetic choices and historical contexts,



is given in an essay by Jane Fulcher in the collection just cited. Here Fulcher suggests that the stylistic pluralism of a work as apparently innocent as Colette and Ravel's fairytale opera *L'Enfant et les sortilèges* (1925) may have been intended as a deliberate retort to the nationalist stylistic 'purism' advocated by the reactionary anti-semitic composer Vincent d'Indy (who was not the first artist to equate aesthetic and racial purity).<sup>68</sup>

This emphasis upon the historical context for the understanding of a work of art (what we might call 'synchronic' historiography) has had a direct impact upon historiographical narratives that attempt to offer explanation of artistic forms unfolding over time ('diachronic' historiography). As theatre historian Bruce McConachie puts it, in the past theatrical performances tended to 'be viewed essentially as "art objects" stuck on a stage, rather than as events occurring between live actors and audiences'.<sup>69</sup> Broadening of the synchronic historical context of an object of study means that that object's apparent solidity is dissolved. The critical theorist Elizabeth Deeds Ermath notes that the tendency to see things in diachronic rather than synchronic terms tends to separate art from politics,<sup>70</sup> but that the expanded frame of reference of synchronic historiography means that the 'work' can no longer be isolated from its context to be paraded in a diachronic narrative. For if we are talking not only about works of art (and, as we shall see in Chapter 10, even this concept presents us with epistemological difficulties) but also about the economic conditions of their production, their inter-textual relations, their critical reception, the social events in which they participated and so forth, then a diachronic narrative of even something as apparently well defined, and as strongly institutionalized, as opera is indeed problematic. And, as Fabrizio della Seta has pointed out, institutions, systems and structures tend to serve sameness and continuity rather than the distinctiveness and change sought in the 'great works of art' approach to historiography.<sup>71</sup>

Yet diachronic historiography cannot be abandoned altogether since one of the key tasks of historical understanding is, indeed, to show how things are similar to, or different from, each other, and to explain why things are similar and why they differ, and how and why change occurs. Our frame of reference for understanding any entity is based on the categories of similarity and difference, and as critical theorist Fredric Jameson insists, 'we cannot not periodize' in our effort to map continuities and changes.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, we are often also dealing with spatial as well as temporal 'periods', seeking explanations for why forms are similar or different in one place from another (for example, why nineteenth-century Russian opera is both similar to and different from French grand opera). Sometimes we need the broad canvas to gain an understanding of the bigger picture of historical development. A recent example of diachronic historiography

that combines temporal and spatial models proposes three main periodizations of opera that offer evidence of changing geopolitical structures in the history of modern Europe: an initial period of two hundred years during which Italian opera (a linguistic/formal rather than geographical category, since both Italians and non-Italians wrote ‘Italian’ operas both inside and outside of Italy) predominated, reflecting the tendency for emergent modern European cultures to fashion themselves on exemplary models (in this period classical or Italian); a subsequent period of one hundred years during the nineteenth century when the development of indigenous schools of opera was a part of the formation of modern nation states; and a third period described as the ‘Europeanization’ of opera, in which works travel freely across borders from all parts of Europe to establish an international repertory, reflecting the increasing universalization and homogenization of political and cultural values during the course of the twentieth century.<sup>73</sup> These and related issues are discussed in Suzanne Aspden’s chapter on opera and national identity (Chapter 12).

We cannot not periodize. But what has changed is our understanding that the historical determinants of change are much wider than the parameters of style or form alone; that they cannot be attributed solely to the genius of individual composers; and that they cannot be reduced to monolithic intellectual ‘Zeitgeists’ (‘the Age of Reason’) that explain everything and nothing. Once we recognize the importance of engaging with systems and structures as well as artists and works, then the determinants of change are clearly multifarious, being contingent as much upon changes in political or economic circumstances, institutional structures, performers, technologies or ideologies, as upon the volition of individual creative artists. Indeed, the monumental Italian *Storia dell’opera italiana*, originally planned in six volumes in the 1980s, has got no further than three volumes elaborating the ‘sistema’ (systems) of opera before even reaching composers or their works. Clearly, nothing claiming to be a history of opera can any longer confine itself to a diachronic account of the handful of great works that survive in the repertory today, and must also acknowledge the historical situatedness of our own experience of the works we encounter or study.

### **The death of opera?**

There are many ways of jointing a chicken. Some books of this nature divide their topic by historical period, national schools, or artists. Others separate out the constituent components of the subject (for opera this might include theatre buildings, singing, staging and so forth), whilst another approach is to distinguish different methodologies that can be employed (such as

reception history, media theory or psychoanalysis). This study has combined the second and third approaches, offering chapters that analyse the social and institutional frameworks of opera in the first section, the material constituents of opera in the second, the formal aspects of opera in the third section, and specific methodological and theoretical issues in the last section. No method of division is entirely satisfactory. The book might have included, for example, a chapter devoted exclusively to the methods of reception history, or a chapter on technological remediations of opera. Instead the reader will find that the methods of reception history, discussed directly in Chapter 10, are to be found in several different chapters (such as in the discussion of literary and filmic representations of opera in Chapter 13), or that a number of authors include discussion of the impact of new media for the production, dissemination and reception of opera in relation to their particular topic. And, of course, not all authors will agree with each other in their approach or in their evaluation of the relative importance of their topic: inevitably Susan Rutherford writing about singers and singing (Chapter 5) believes that singing is the 'defining feature of opera', whilst Simon Williams, writing about theatrical production (Chapter 6), argues that opera must be understood as an essentially theatrical form. Both may be right, to the extent that philosophers since Aristotle have recognized that essence and definition may not be coterminous, but their different emphases also highlight the complex and multivalent nature of opera.

This book is a companion to opera studies rather than a companion to opera. In this regard it makes no claim to offer a comprehensive account of operatic history or of operatic practice today. The book also takes a broadly institutional definition of opera, which is to say that although its contributors have been encouraged to draw on as wide a range of examples as possible, most of these exemplify the representative rather than the exceptional or marginal (always recognizing that one person's exceptional or marginal may be another person's norm or centre). In particular, although operatic institutions survive and even flourish (albeit mostly in culturally highly conservative forms) few people would want to argue that opera itself has been a vital or culturally central art form during most of the twentieth century, let alone today, and this is perhaps reflected in the book. Opera houses commission only a tiny number of new works, and few of these obtain any permanent place in the repertory. The most dynamic forms of music theatre today (and I am not referring to popular musical theatre) are created outside the forms and institutions of opera, which is essentially now a museum art form. Pronouncements of the death of opera are not new; Wagner declared that 'with Rossini died the opera'<sup>74</sup> (although it seems that when he wrote those words French opera was already dead – a

garish corpse<sup>75</sup>). Brecht also pronounced opera to be dead, and dismissed attempts to make it more relevant through modernist musical techniques or the paraphernalia of *Zeitoper* (operas dealing with modern issues and incorporating fashionable modern elements such as divorce or telephones), instead insisting that the only valid method was to rework the essentially ‘culinary’ nature of opera to expose its ideological premises.<sup>76</sup> On this, as on few things, Brecht was at one with Adorno, who claimed after World War II that opera was an ‘eviscerated’ art form that didn’t know that it had died,<sup>77</sup> and like Brecht dismissed superficial attempts to modernize the form.<sup>78</sup> Other moments of opera’s demise have more symbolic value: Toscanini laying down his baton at the point where Puccini left *Turandot* unfinished in 1926 as the end of the glorious history of Italian opera; Schoenberg’s inability to complete *Moses und Aron* as the moment that marked the impossibility of any further German opera in the twentieth century. Or, less canonical, the three-hundred-year-old operatic diva who does not (perhaps cannot) sing in Janáček’s *The Makropulos Case* (also 1926). Here, Jennifer Shepherd suggests, Emilia Marty’s final lament for her own life might also be a lament for opera itself. ‘Having sung for the duration of opera’s history, Marty would, in fact, seem to embody opera. Shared births, perhaps also shared deaths. Janáček staged Marty’s demise with an abrupt surge of song. The rest of *Makropulos*’s modern conversational singing, on the other hand, might represent another expiration, in which the diva’s swan song is opera’s last gasp.’<sup>79</sup> John Corigliano’s *The Ghosts of Versailles* of 1992 can only mourn a dead form that plays to those who are maybe no less dead: ‘At the Met, Ghosts Come to Applaud “Ghosts”’ was the caption of a review in *The New York Times*.<sup>80</sup>

Reflecting on the broader ‘morbidity’ of classical music, Joseph Kerman wants us to believe that opera could perhaps become ‘the lifeline for classical music.’<sup>81</sup> But for Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, it is precisely opera’s death that makes it interesting as a subject of study. Indeed, for Žižek and Dolar opera was dead from the beginning: a new art form based on an attempt to restore the past. Moreover, opera lives on as the un-dead: ‘If opera were simply over’, Dolar writes, ‘it could be assigned a neat place in cultural archaeology and thus properly buried. The astounding thing is the enormous operatic institution’s stubborn, zombielike existence after its demise . . . The more opera is dead, the more it flourishes . . . Opera remains a huge relic, an enormous anachronism, a persistent revival of a lost past, a reflection of the lost aura, a true postmodern subject par excellence.’<sup>82</sup> It is perhaps no surprise, then, that recently some of the giants of the current intellectual scene, Žižek himself but also the French philosopher Alain Badiou and the American Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, have turned their attention to opera (although predictably, perhaps, to Wagner, who believed

that his own works had superseded opera).<sup>83</sup> Opera may be dead, but its ghosts continue to provoke and challenge, and we still want to know the why and wherefore of it.

## Notes

- 1 Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, trans. Richard N. Coe (London: John Calder Press, 1970), p. 7.
- 2 Charles Baudelaire, 'Richard Wagner and Tannhäuser in Paris', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964) pp. 111–46; 117–18.
- 3 Robert Donington, *The Opera* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978), p. ix.
- 4 Siegmund Levarie, *Mozart's Le nozze di Figaro: A Critical Analysis* (University of Chicago Press, 1952) p. vi.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. vi.
- 7 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 141. This is a tendency that can clearly be seen with the claiming by musicology of popular music as a legitimate terrain of study. One of the first steps was to seize popular music from the domain of cultural studies, where it had hitherto resided. Musicology will show that the methods of rigorous musical analysis are essential to understanding of how popular music works; the non-technical approach of cultural studies writers such as Hebdige, Frith or Straw must be superseded by the methodological rigour of Middleton, Walser, McClary or Moore.
- 8 Jane F. Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).
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- 10 Peter Conrad, *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1977).
- 11 Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera the Extravagant Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).
- 12 Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (eds.), *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1989), p. 9.
- 13 Reinhard Strohm, *Die italienische Oper im 18. Jahrhundert* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1979).
- 14 Donald Francis Tovey, 'The Main Stream of Music', in *The Main Stream of Music and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), pp. 330–52; 350.
- 15 Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist, *Rethinking Music* (Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 16 Alastair Williams, *Constructing Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).
- 17 William W. Austin (ed.), *New Looks at Italian Opera: Essays in Honour of Donald J. Grout* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), Introduction, p. 3.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Carolyn Abbate, 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30/3 (Spring 2004), pp. 505–36; 522.
- 20 Alfred Lorenz, *Das Geheimnis der Form bei Richard Wagner. Published in four volumes: Der musikalische Aufbau des Bühnenfestspiels 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'* (Berlin, 1924); *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners 'Tristan und Isolde'* (Berlin, 1926); *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners 'Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg'* (Berlin, 1931); *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagners 'Parsifal'* (Berlin, 1933).
- 21 Julian Rushton, W.A. Mozart: *Don Giovanni* (Cambridge University Press, 1981/1994), p. 76.
- 22 Abbate and Parker (eds.), *Analyzing Opera*, p. 3.
- 23 See Abbate, 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?'
- 24 Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, 'Editorial', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1/1 (March 1989), p. iii.
- 25 Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947), pp. 22–49.
- 26 Suzanne Langer, 'Deceptive Analogies: Specious and Real Relationships Among the Arts', in *Problems of Art* (New York: Scribner, 1957), p. 82.
- 27 Eric Bentley, *The Playwright as Thinker* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946), p. 87.
- 28 Martin Esslin (ed.), *Illustrated Encyclopedia of World Theatre* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 62.

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- 29 Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, new and revised edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), p. xiv.
- 30 Winton Dean, *Handel and the Opera Seria* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969), p. 60.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 82.
- 32 Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 156.
- 33 Carolyn Abbate, 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?', p. 522.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 524.
- 35 Harold Rosenthal and John Warrack, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera*, 2nd edn (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 337–8.
- 36 Nicholas Till, *Mozart and the Enlightenment: Truth, Virtue and Beauty in Mozart's Operas* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 204.
- 37 Ronald J. Rabin, 'Figaro as Misogynist: On Aria Types and Aria Rhetoric', in Mary Hunter and James Webster (eds.), *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 232–60; 233.
- 38 Philip Gossett, 'Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and "Aida": The Uses of Convention', *Critical Inquiry*, 1/2 (December, 1974), pp. 291–334; Harold Powers, "'La solita forma" and "The Uses of Convention"', *Acta Musicologica*, 59 (January–April 1987), pp. 65–90; 45.
- 39 Robert Donington, *Opera and its Symbols: The Unity of Words, Music, and Staging* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1990).
- 40 Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, p. 226.
- 41 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 89.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–4.
- 44 Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 95.
- 45 Michael P. Steinberg and Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, 'Fascism and the Operatic Unconscious', in Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher and Thomas Ertman (eds.), *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 267–88; 276. Richard Taruskin has suggested that Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* represents an alternative, stripped-down fascist aesthetic. Richard Taruskin, 'Un cadeau très macabre', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 72(4), (2003), pp. 1–16.
- 46 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 81.
- 47 Charles Burney, *A General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period (1789)* (London: G.T. Fowks, 1935), Vol. II, p. 554.
- 48 *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, Berlin 1791, quoted in Otto Erich Deutsch, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*, trans. Eric Blom, Peter Branscombe and Jeremy Noble (London: Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 409.
- 49 Quoted in Philippe-Joseph Salazar, *Idéologies de l'opéra* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), p. 14.
- 50 Burney, *General History of Music*, p. 554.
- 51 Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 93.
- 52 Theodore W. Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', in Theodore W. Adorno, *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 15–28, p. 18.
- 53 George Bernard Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), preface to the fourth edition (1923), p. ix.
- 54 Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 135.
- 55 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 92.
- 56 Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 57 Adorno, *Bourgeois Opera*, p. 26.
- 58 Quoted in Herbert Weinstock, *Vincenzo Bellini: His Life and His Operas* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), p. 170.
- 59 Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 41.
- 60 Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 158.
- 61 Carl Dahlhaus, 'The Dramaturgy of Italian Opera', in Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (eds.), *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 73–146; 114.
- 62 Nietzsche, of course, later abjured the Wagnerism of his theory of opera, preferring Bizet's *Carmen* for its music that is 'wicked, subtle and fatalistic'. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner, Nietzsche Contra Wagner, The Twilight of the Idols, The Antichrist*, trans. Thomas Common (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1899), p. 6.
- 63 Dahlhaus, 'The Dramaturgy of Italian Opera', p. 114.
- 64 Hunter and Webster, 'Introduction' to *Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna*, p. 7.

- 65 Victoria Johnson, 'Introduction' to Johnson, Fulcher and Ertman (eds.), *Opera and Society*, pp. 1–26; 3–4.
- 66 I include my own *Mozart and the Enlightenment* within this critique.
- 67 Anthony Welch, 'The Cultural Politics of *Dido and Aeneas*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 21/1 (2009), pp. 1–26.
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- 72 Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), p. 29.
- 73 See Philipp Ther, *In der Mitte der Gesellschaft: Operntheater in Zentraleuropa, 1815–1914* (Vienna and Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006).
- 74 Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, p. 46.
- 75 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 76 Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willetts (London: Methuen, 1978), pp. 33–42.
- 77 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. and trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 18.
- 78 Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', p. 17.
- 79 See Jennifer Sheppard, 'Janáček's *Makropulos* and the Case of the Silent Diva', *New Opera Quarterly*, 25/1–2 (2009), pp. 51–72; 69.
- 80 Edward Rothstein, 'At the Met: Ghosts come to applaud "Ghosts"', *New York Times*, 5 January 1992.
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- 82 Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.
- 83 Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons in Wagner*, trans. Susan Spitzer (London and New York: Verso, 2010); Fredric Jameson, 'Regie Opera, or Eurotrash?', *New Left Review*, 2nd series, 64 (July–August 2010), pp. 111–29.