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Battlestar Galactica and Space Opera: Transforming a Subgenre

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Abstract

Ron Moore, creator and producer of the reimagined Battlestar Galactica *television series, outlined his proposed show's aesthetic in a manifesto aptly titled "Naturalistic Science Fiction or Taking the Opera out of Space Opera." The title of this essay took a stand against the science fiction subgenre of space opera, asserting that it was outdated, overdone, and unrealistic. Moore's vision for his series revolutionized iconic elements of classic television space operas. Though Moore resisted the stigma of space opera, his reimagined series holds an inherent "operaticness"—a term first coined by opera scholar Marcia Citron.* Battlestar Galactica *has many operatic qualities, particularly in its narrative structure, cinematography, characters, and music. After analyzing* Galactica's *explicit evocations of opera, this article will explore the operatic features of the soundtrack and evaluate the characters intimately tied to the opera by tracing the tropes of gendered opera as outlined by Susan McClary and Catherine Clément. Through a detailed analysis of three episodes, I will demonstrate how Moore successfully constructed a series that relied deeply upon operatic qualities and resonances.*

Battlestar Galactica revolutionized science fiction television. The series, which ran from 2004 to 2009, synthesized commentary on politics, gender, race, and religion in a story of warring humans and machines. Created in the shadow of 9/11, Ronald D. Moore's reimagining of the eponymous 1978 series won critical praise and still endures as a cult classic. *Battlestar Galactica* (henceforth referred to as *BSG*) also revolutionized "space opera." Moore invoked this subgenre of science fiction explicitly in his manifesto "Naturalistic Science Fiction, or Taking the Opera out of Space Opera." He repudiated the traditional space opera—shows like *Star Trek* and *Doctor Who*—asserting that it was outdated, overdone, and unrealistic:

> Our goal is nothing less than the reinvention of the science fiction television series. We take as a given the idea that the traditional space opera, with its stock characters, techno-double-talk, bumpy-headed aliens, thespian histrionics, and empty heroics has run its course and a new approach is required. That approach is to introduce realism into what has heretofore been an aggressively unrealistic genre.[1]

BSG revised iconic elements of the classic space opera, including plot, characters, editorial style, and cinematography. And while Moore neglected to mention music in his essay, composer Bear McCreary would revolutionize the soundtrack with exotic timbres and rhythms that departed from the traditional brassy fanfares.

And yet, for all of Moore's assertions that his show was "not just another space opera," *BSG* embodies many of the subgenre's defining characteristics.[2] Space opera traces its origins back to the 1930s and 1940s when books and radio serials

[1] Ronald D. Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*: *Series Bible,* December 17, 2003, 2 https://www.harvardwood.org/writers_resources.

[2] Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*.

dominated entertainment. The term, coined by magazine journalist Wilson Tucker in 1941, draws from other popular genres of the time: "In these hectic days of phrase-coining, we offer one. Westerns are called 'horse operas,' the morning housewife tearjerkers are called 'soap operas.' For the hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn space-ship yarn, or world-saving for that matter, we offer 'space opera.'"[3] Tucker clearly intended the label in a derogatory swipe at the formulaic, mediocre products he regularly encountered. The use of "opera" within the label refers not to the musical genre, but rather to an overarching concept of melodrama and intense emotions. Furthermore, Tucker suggested that space opera must possess certain key characteristics, including a spaceship, journeys through uncharted realms, and an exciting narrative often resolved with violence.[4] Brian Aldiss subsequently expanded the criteria to include the question of reality, limitations of knowledge, and some form of exile.[5] Furthermore, space operas often took on Ruritanian traits, that is, transferring terrestrial traits (often from medieval Europe) to alien worlds.[6]

Space opera adapted to the Cold War era, adding social commentary and updated technology, but it retained its less-elevated standing compared to other science fiction subgenres. Critical opinion of space opera changed drastically in 1977, however, thanks to George Lucas's stunningly popular space adventure, *Star Wars*.[7] The film, which ushered in a new era of space opera, was lauded by Jerome Winter as a "sophisticated reharnessing of conventional pulp-era trappings."[8] New Space Opera, as modern critics dubbed it, also challenged the substandard qualities of previous decades. As Jerome Winter explained,

> Prior to the emergence of the New Space Opera, this subgenre had long been in disrepute within the field not only for its aesthetic failings but also for its ideological tendencies: its quasi-fascistic fascination with supermen and super weapons, its abiding racism, sexism and class bigotry, as well as its juvenile wish-fulfillment fantasy . . . but it was not until the late 1980s and especially the 1990s and 2000s that coordinated attempts were made . . . to systematically rehabilitate the ideological presumptions of space opera.[9]

Winter primarily cited novelists as pioneers of New Space Opera, but the revolution continued throughout television and film as well. Today, New Space Opera continues to be a dominant and respected subgenre that produces international

[3] David G. Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer, "Space Opera Redefined," in *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, ed. James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005), 260.

[4] Gary Westfahl, "Space Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 197–208.

[5] Hartwell and Cramer, "Space Opera Redefined," 260.

[6] Westfahl, "Space Opera," 206.

[7] Producer Lester Del Rey and his wife Judy Lynn are widely credited with this reversal of opinion after working hard to push *Star Trek: The Original Series* and *Star Wars* as poster children for new space opera. Hartwell and Cramer, "Space Opera Redefined," 263.

[8] These improved narratives introduced a sympathetic hero, an optimistic tone, wars of the future, Byzantine intergalactic diplomacy, and doomsday devices. Jerome Winter, *Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism: Nostalgia for Infinity* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), 2.

[9] Winter, *Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism*, 2.

blockbusters (*Guardians of the Galaxy*, 2014) and nuanced social commentaries (*Firefly*, 2002–2003) on early twenty-first century culture.[10]

BSG occupies an uncomfortable position between New Space Opera and the traditional subgenre. The original 1978 *BSG* followed the rules of an orthodox space opera: After the twelve colonies of humanity are obliterated by warrior robots, the Cylons, the survivors flee in spacecrafts. Throughout the rest of the short-lived series, the Colonial Fleet, protected by the one remaining battlestar, attempts to find Earth while pursued by the Cylons. The American Broadcasting Company canceled the series after one season, although it returned for a limited ten-episode run a year later in *Galactica 1980*. Two decades passed before Moore decided to reimagine the series, during which the New Space Opera movement gained traction.

As he made clear in the *Series Bible* (an outline of the show's rules and narrative), Moore wanted his *BSG* to defy stereotypes of space opera. Moore never mentioned New Space Opera, perhaps because he did not yet know of its existence, but he and the writing team made several changes that align the show with the updated subgenre. The reimagined series continued the same basic narrative as the original except that the story now included humanoid Cylon models to add intrigue. The swashbuckling, cigar-smoking, man's man Starbuck, for example, was recast as a female in the 2004 miniseries.[11] Similarly, the 1978 villain Gaius Baltar became considerably more sympathetic in the new series and followed a redemption arc worthy of a hero. Social issues from the 1970s remained, including sexism, racism, and classism, but *BSG* reframed them as a nuanced commentary on the post-9/11 United States.[12] Moore emphasized a desire for relatable characters in his manifesto: "We want the audience to connect with the characters of Galactica as people. Our characters are not super-heroes. They are not an elite. They are everyday people caught up in an enormous cataclysm and trying to survive it as best they can. They are you and me."[13] Moore's fight against space opera, particularly popular shows like *Star Trek* and *Stargate SG-1*, mimicked the literary movement towards New Space Opera. Unwittingly or not, Moore created one of the first New Space Opera television series.

Space opera was not named for the musical genre, but Moore's reimagined series is inescapably operatic. Indeed, it exemplifies "operaticness," a term coined by Marcia Citron: "Operaticness implies that opera is foregrounded, that it is present in an obvious way that makes it recognizable."[14] Throughout *When Opera Meets Film*, Citron detailed the operatic qualities of cinematic works, such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy (1972, 1974, 1990), Norman Jewison's *Moonstruck* (1987), and Mike Nichols's *Closer* (2004). Though Citron only analyzed

[10] Winter, *Science Fiction, New Space Opera, and Neoliberal Globalism*, 8–16.

[11] The Sci-Fi cable channel (now SyFy) first released a ninety-minute miniseries introducing *Battlestar Galactica* and, following its success, went on to begin season 1 in 2005.

[12] Lincoln Geraghty, *American Science Fiction Film and Television* (New York: Berg, 2009), 118–22. Brian L. Ott, "(Re)Framing Fear: Equipment for Living in a Post-9/11 World," in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2008), 13–26.

[13] Underline in original. Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*, 3.

[14] Marcia Citron, *When Opera Meets Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 246.

films that have direct references to opera within them, she expanded the definition in a subsequent study, arguing that "operaticness" applies to any film that inherits operatic tendencies.[15] This new interpretation broadens the limits of her terminology, as now any film with operatic qualities—with or without the intention of the writers—has an implicit "operaticness."

Citron's works belong to an expanding body of research on the intersection of opera and cinema. Although critics of the Hollywood system such as Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler noted the affinities between the two mediums, film scholarship did not explore them seriously until Jeremy Tambling's 1987 study of cinematic adaptations of opera.[16] Citron continued Tambling's discussion of filmed opera in *Opera on Screen*, while Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa analyzed the use of opera arias in narrative films.[17] Michael Grover-Friedlander then followed with a study that explored the way cinema accesses a general cultural knowledge of opera without actual operatic scenes or music.[18] These scholarly works advance an ever-changing and evolving field but neglect to delve into other mediums. As television creators draw upon operatic tropes and music, new avenues for study continue to develop for opera scholarship.

Building upon this groundwork, this article will explore the operatic qualities of *BSG*'s narrative, cinematography, editing style, music, and characters. After analyzing the show's explicit evocations of opera, notably an Opera House that reappears throughout the series, we shall investigate the soundtrack.[19] Finally, we will relate the characters most intimately tied to the Opera House to operatic stereotypes, particularly the trope of the madwoman. While the *BSG* writers clearly did not model the series on opera, operatic resonances nevertheless permeate the script and score. Moore may have intended to "take the opera out of space opera," but he succeeded instead in constructing a series profoundly connected to the classical genre.

The Opera House

The "operaticness" of *BSG* appears most strongly in the revolutionary arc of the series narrative. In the *Series Bible*, Moore outlined how the reimagined world would differentiate itself from contemporary science fiction television series:

> In order to maintain and sustain this tension, we will be emphasizing a continuing storyline which will literally continue the Cylon threat to the Colonials as established in the pilot. . . . This format breaks down into three layers: 1. Series Arcs 2. Multi-Episodic Arcs 3. Stand

[15] Citron, *When Opera Meets Film*, 246.

[16] Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947); Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1987).

[17] Marcia Citron, *Opera on Screen* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000); Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa ed., *Between Opera and Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[18] Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[19] The *BSG* script uses Opera House as a title and always capitalizes the term. This article will similarly follow suit.

> Alone Arcs. The three-tiered format avoids the pitfalls of *Star Trek*'s episodic structure . . . without turning our show into a true serial.[20]

This "narrative complexity," as Jason Mittel termed it, entails "a redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration—not necessarily a complete merger of episodic and serial forms but a shifting balance. Rejecting the need for plot closure within every episode that typifies conventional episodic form, narrative complexity foregrounds ongoing stories across a range of genres."[21] *BSG* relied heavily on narrative complexity, a result of Moore's frustration during his time as writer for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.[22] The multi-episodic and standalone arcs of *BSG* often featured typical space opera plots (a Cylon attack, for example), but its serial arc elevated the show through a focus on interpersonal relationships and the "never-ending Cylon pursuit of the Galactica and her fleet."[23]

It is within *BSG*'s serial arc that the show's operatic qualities become apparent. In the season 1 finale, scientist Gaius Baltar is stranded among the ruins of Kobol—the original planet of the twelve colonies where humans and gods communed. None of the ruins are recognizable structures, but Baltar soon finds himself in the Kobol Opera House, restored to its original splendor.[24] Baltar is accompanied by his ubiquitous companion, a hallucinatory version of the Cylon Number Six.[25] The Opera House is immense and beautiful, unlike anything seen previously on *BSG*. Together, Head Six and Baltar walk down the aisle toward the stage and Head Six comments on the immensity of this moment: "Life has a melody, Gaius. A rhythm of notes that become your existence once played in harmony with God's plan. It's time to do your part and realize your destiny."[26] Six's words resonate throughout the rest of the scene as she leads Baltar onto the stage and shows him his fate. In a twisted version of the classic opera trope of love versus duty, Baltar finds himself confronted with the choice between self-love and duty to a higher power. Baltar's choice, a decision that he does not fully embrace until the series finale, is forevermore linked to the Opera House.

[20] Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*, 30.

[21] Jason Mittell, "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *The Velvet Light Trap* no. 58 (Fall 2006): 32.

[22] Steve "Frosty" Weintraub, "Interview: *Battlestar Galactica* Creators Ron Moore and David Eick," Collider, January 7, 2009, http://collider.com/interview-battlestar-galactica-creators-ron-moore-and-david-eick/.

[23] Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*, 30.

[24] Originally, showrunners intended for Gaius to walk into a temple and meet God, which they discuss in the commentary. They felt that this would blatantly betray the show's trajectory, however, and opted instead to replace the temple with an Opera House, further underlining correlations between religion, music, and narrative in the show. Michael Rymer, dir., "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 2," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired April 1, 2005 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 5.

[25] There are twelve known Cylon humanoid models, and Baltar regularly interacted with Number Six before the Cylons destroyed the twelve colonies. Throughout season 1, Baltar communicates with an apparition of Six, whom he assumes is a hallucination. For sake of differentiating his hallucinated companion from the actual Number Six he knew previously, I will call them Head Six and Caprica Six respectively.

[26] Rymer, dir., "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 2."

The Kobol theater explicitly injects opera into the narrative of *BSG*, but the cinematography of the scene further enhances the "operaticness" of the series. Kobol stands in stark contrast to the oppressive visual world of the battlestar. The landscape of the planet is saturated in color—natural sunlight, green forests, clear blue water. On the windowless, dimly lit Galactica, by contrast, dull blacks and grays dominate, complementing the dark green, gray, and black of the military uniforms.

Moore discussed the visual portrayal of the fleet in the miniseries commentary, noting that he aimed to create an aura similar to those found in documentaries.[27] In this style, one finds natural colors unfiltered by editing. Camera instability is even more characteristic; though the production qualities of recent documentaries have improved, handheld cameras and shaky movements are still synonymous with the style. Moore, the writing team, and miniseries director Michael Rymer embedded these realistic factors into the show from the miniseries. On board Galactica the camera is unstable, shifting perspectives abruptly and shaking with the movement of the ship. Even the shots are characteristic of documentaries: rarely does an episode feature any shots requiring camera rigs. Instead, each shot remains near eye level, as if an amateur camera operator were following the crew around the ship. As Kevin McNeilly explained, the camera work enhances the sense of materiality:

> The series eschews a stable perspective, preferring the feel of embedded points of view, and the textures of improvisational immediacy and documentary presence that a handheld camera offers. We're reminded in every scene that perspective is contingent and temporary, that someone is taking these pictures, making these images. The aperture constantly jingles, drifts, redirects its attention, pulls, and readjusts its focus . . . the documentary textures of *BSG*'s visuals serve as reminders of a corporeal, human materiality, that informs the whole aesthetic of the program. The handheld, quasi-documentary camera introduces into the screen-image material traces of hands and eyes—two key tropes, the tactile and the visual, that parade nearly every episode.[28]

By enhancing the realism of the series, the documentary style defuses the quintessential space opera. On Kobol, by contrast, the cinematography embraces the ideal and theatrical. Abandoning the eye-level documentary manner, the camera indulges in sweeping establishing shots of the planetary landscape and multiple bird's-eye shots that slowly zoom in on Baltar. As if accentuating the otherness of this world, the camera shots and angles create a new cinematographic world.

The interior of Kobol's Opera House provides even more contrast to Galactica. As Gaius enters the theater, the camera whirls around him from every angle, registering his awed reaction to the immense Opera House. The deep reds of the velvet seats introduce a color rarely seen, except by Baltar. Head Six's seductive (perhaps devilish) red dress normally draws the eye as a contrast to other Galactica clothing; on Kobol, though, she dons an angelic white. This heavenly color dominates the

[27] Michael Rymer, dir., *Battlestar Galactica: Miniseries*, aired December 8–9, 2003 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 1.

[28] Kevin McNeilly, "'This Might Be hard for You to Watch': Salvage Humanity in 'Final Cut,'" in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2008), 186.

Opera House. The reds and golds frame glowing white objects that immediately draw the eye. Three objects are white, and each stands as essential to the overarching narrative of the show: Head Six, long banners draped from the stage ceiling, and a cradle center stage. Like the illuminated sword on stage in *Die Walküre* to which Siegmund remains oblivious, both Baltar and the show's viewers cannot comprehend the importance of the glowing objects surrounding him.

The music throughout the Opera House vision further emphasizes the significance of this scene. Until this episode, the soundtrack of *BSG* eschews the symphonic style of John Williams and the classic Hollywood orchestra. McCreary commented on his unique instrumentation in his weekly blog: "My initial concept for the score was to use instruments as ancient as possible, hence the heavy reliance on percussion and vocals."[29] McCreary's innovative use of instruments included using pots, pans, and toasters in scenes with the Cylons, winking at the derogatory "toaster" nickname given to them by those on Galactica. The percussive sound of *BSG* provided the show with a timbre unlike any other science fiction series, which was always the intent of the show's producers and directors:

> When initially discussing the music for the miniseries with composer Richard Gibbs and myself, [director Michael Rymer] knew he wanted something that would totally stand out from the traditional orchestral science fiction score. As the series developed throughout the first season, I continued where the miniseries left off, scoring each episode with a mixed ensemble of ethnic soloists and percussion. When Rymer returned to direct the season finale, *Kobol's Last Gleaming Parts I and II*, he again wanted a score that would stand out . . . and this time it meant bring the orchestra back. In setting *Passacaglia* against the opening montage of *Kobol's Last Gleaming Part I*, it suddenly felt fresh and new. Were the whole show scored with orchestra, an impact like this would be totally impossible.[30]

Expanding on McCreary's comments, Eftychia Papanikolaou noted the coding of symphonic music, rather than percussion and "ethnic soloists," as exotic: "Rather than forming a stereotypical mood-creating, aurally unobtrusive, nondiegetic matrix, symphonic music is now meant to startle."[31] The orchestra, hinted at during the first episode of the two-part season finale, takes center stage in the Opera House. By emphasizing this orchestral sound, which by now sounds foreign to viewers acquainted with *BSG*'s soundscape, McCreary effectively highlights the importance of the theater and subverts space opera's stereotypical musical conventions.[32]

[29] Bear McCreary, "Instruments of *Battlestar Galactica*: Duduk," *Bear McCreary Official Site* (blog), September 28, 2006, http://www.bearmccreary.com/#blog/blog/battlestar-galactica-3/instruments-of-battlestar-galactica-duduk/.

[30] Bear McCreary, "Themes of *Battlestar Galactica*, Part IV," *Bear McCreary Official Site* (blog), February 4, 2007, http://www.bearmccreary.com/#blog/blog/battlestar-galactica-3/themes-of-battlestar-galactica-pt-iv/.

[31] Eftychia Papanikolaou, "Of Duduks and Dylan: Negotiating Music and the Aural Space," *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2008), 227.

[32] The episode's early scripts called for Gaius to enter the Opera House and discover an orchestra on stage. He would then walk down the aisle, climb to the stage, discover a violin placed on an empty chair, and join in with the orchestra. The writers most likely intended this scene to allude to his acceptance of his destiny, but scrapped the plan in favor of a nearly empty stage with an illuminated cradle. Gaius's participation in the orchestra linked him to the larger narrative of music at play throughout the

The music in this climactic scene plays into an operatic narrative that would stretch the entire show while simultaneously foreshadowing the series finale. A key phrase that permeates *BSG* alludes to its cyclical nature: "All this has happened before, and all this will happen again."[33] First uttered by the Cylon Leoben during his interrogation by Starbuck in *Flesh and Bone*, the phrase echoes throughout the series and is crucial to the show's epilogue. At first, the phrase seems to break the fourth wall in a wink at the original *Battlestar Galactica*, but its significance deepens as it becomes increasingly entwined with the destinies of Starbuck (a Galactica pilot) and Baltar.[34] By the end of the first season Starbuck's fate is still unknown, but the Opera House scene prefigures key elements of Baltar's destiny.

Though Head Six never states "all this has happened before" during the Kobol vision, the accompanying orchestral music reminds listeners of the phrase and foreshadows the series' conclusion. The orchestra reintroduces "Passacaglia," first heard in "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 1," which then transforms into "The Shape of Things to Come."[35] Following the release of season 2, McCreary noted that he named the former cue after the baroque form, and it serves as a leitmotif for the Kobol Opera House: "This theme, named after the Italian musical form it fits, was composed for the opening montage of *Kobol's Last Gleaming Part I* and re-appeared during Baltar's vision of the Opera House in *Part II*. . . . The events of *Kobol's Last Gleaming* continue to haunt us throughout Season Three and beyond, so I wouldn't be surprised if this theme re-surfaces from time to time."[36] Though McCreary does not state whether or not he was aware of the Opera House's essential role in the series and the importance of "all this has happened before," the use of a passacaglia seems more than coincidental.

The passacaglia form, which dates back to the sixteenth century, features a set of variations over a repeating bass. The form is often conjunct, set in triple meter, and set at a slow tempo.[37] McCreary's "Passacaglia" fulfills most of these characteristics, setting a moderate, meditative tempo to accompany Baltar's entrance into the Opera House. As "Passacaglia" transitions in "The Shape of Things to Come," the repeating bass line continues but changes meter (Figure 1). Moving from 3/4 to 6/8, McCreary retains triple meter but adds a pastoral flavor to the passacaglia. McCreary's motivation is unclear, but he perhaps intended the change of meter to create a sense of ambiguity and reinforce the mystery of the Opera House.

series, but the cradle knit his fate together with Hera, the cyborg child of Sharon and Helo. Rymer, dir., "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 2."

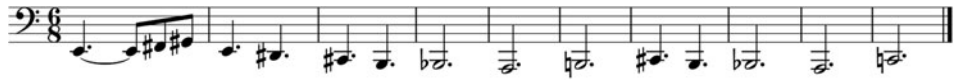
[33] Brad Turner, dir., "Flesh and Bone," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired February 25, 2005 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 3.

[34] Leoben first states the phrase when telling Starbuck of her crucial role in the fate of humanity, and Six reiterates it to Gaius when discussing his redemption arc as an instrument of God. Turner, dir., "Flesh and Bone"; Jeff Woolnough, dir., "The Hand of God," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired March 11, 2005 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 4.

[35] Michael Rymer, dir., "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 1," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired March 25, 2005 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 4.

[36] McCreary, "Themes of *Battlestar Galactica*, Part IV."

[37] Alexander Silbiger, "Passacaglia," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000021024.



Example 1. "The Shape of Things to Come" leitmotif. Used with the permission of NBCUniversal Media, LLC.

The bass line in "Passacaglia" descends chromatically, harkening back to the operatic *lamento*. Ellen Rosand has studied early operatic examples of the descending tetrachord, as in Monteverdi's *Arianna* and "Lamento della ninfa," noting that composers often did not distinguish between major and minor modes.[38] McCreary's lamento bass primarily implies E major, with the notable exception of the altered fifth scale degree, B-flat. The supporting harmony, however, oscillates between E major, C major, and A minor, further enhancing the passacaglia's historical context.[39] McCreary's use of a lament here initially seems suspect, as this is a moment of destiny. Rosand argued, however, that the lament was often the "central affective climax" of an opera, a description that ideally suits the Opera House scene.[40] The lament does not reflect Baltar's awestruck response to the Opera House, but instead foreshadows the trials and tribulations he must endure before the culmination of his prophesied fate.

The operatic qualities of "Passacaglia" and "The Shape of Things to Come" heighten Baltar's vision from abnormal to transcendent. The music begins the instant the Kobol Opera House scene begins, starting quietly with sustained low strings and gradually swelling in the oscillating violins. A simple, conjunct, and beautifully consonant melody rises out of the orchestra as Head Six transports Baltar from Kobol's ruins to the full splendor of the Opera House. The strings climb higher and higher as he looks around in wonder, and the melody plays once more as Head Six leads Baltar down the aisle. Uniting music with his destiny, Head Six proclaims that "life has a melody, Gaius. . . . Come, see the face of the shape of things to come."[41] The strings circle each other over the passacaglia bass line until finally whirling into their higher ranges as Baltar and Head Six gaze at the glowing cradle, overwhelmed by what they find inside. "The Shape of Things to Come" fades as the scene changes to Galactica, but as intercuts between the two locations begin, the orchestral passacaglia weaves together with the sounds of Galactica—uniting the two distinct aural and visual worlds in a dramatic, operatic conclusion to the season.

The Temple of Five

The Opera House continues to play a significant role in *BSG,* particularly as the Cylon Number Three, D'Anna, grows increasingly desperate to know the names

[38] Ellen Rosand, "The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament," *Musical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (1979): 353.

[39] The piano score is not from McCreary's original score for *Battlestar Galactica* but from his piano songbook. In the foreword, however, McCreary wrote that he preserved the music's integrity: "I have personally arranged each of these pieces, ensuring the ideal translation from orchestral score to solo piano." Bear McCreary, *Battlestar Galactica* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard, 2010), 6, 16.

[40] Rosand, "The Descending Tetrachord," 356.

[41] Rymer, dir., "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 2."

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of the forbidden "Final Five" Cylon models. According to legend, the Final Five were descended from the lost thirteenth tribe of Kobol and created the humanoid models. Cylon law forbids any pursuit of their identities, but D'Anna begins an earnest quest to uncover the truth of her creators. D'Anna's undertaking dominates the Cylon storyline in season 3, particularly as she holds Baltar captive. Together, D'Anna and Baltar travel to the fabled Temple of Five in which she rapturously has a vision of their forbidden identities. In her trance, which is set on the stage of the Opera House, D'Anna discovers that the illuminated banners from Baltar's Kobol experience represent the Final Five. The lighting of the scene and camera angles obscure their features; only D'Anna knows who the Final Five are. In an operatic twist, however, she dies as a result from acquiring this knowledge. The music that accompanies D'Anna's vision is mysterious and wistful, suggesting the elusive identities of the Final Five through three interwoven leitmotifs.

Leitmotifs have a long cinematic history and became synonymous with space opera soundtracks after the premiere of *Star Wars* in 1977. John Williams's score revived the use of leitmotifs and the orchestra to Hollywood and went on to stretch over four decades and nine Skywalker saga films. Bribitzer-Stull noted the influence of Wagner on these innovators:

> One can debate the chicken-and-egg question of whether it was director George Lucas or composer John Williams who was ultimately responsible for the leitmotivic ethos of the *Star Wars* soundtrack. Certainly, Lucas knew he wanted an orchestral, nineteenth-century style for *Star Wars* . . . how much of their approach Lucas and Williams attributed to Wagner in the mid-1970s is not clear, but much of the language both men used to describe the music of the *Star Wars* film (not to mention the music itself) is strongly suggestive of Wagnerian influence, in particular, its ineffable, mythic quality.[42]

Williams emphasized a Wagnerian mythic past in many of *Star Wars* leitmotifs. "The Force" theme, in particular, has drawn much discussion, analyzed in depth by scholars such as James Buhler, Frank Lehman, and Kathryn Kalinak.[43] While participation in these debates is outside the scope of this article, the one consistent conclusion among scholars is that *Star Wars* revitalized the use of leitmotifs in film and began the second coming of the Classic Hollywood score.

Star Wars returned leitmotifs and the orchestra to the silver screen, but the multiple *Star Trek* series' and films' opening themes created the stereotypical sound of space opera on television. Ron Rodman argued that, much like in *Star Wars*, the title sequence for *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966–1969) functioned as a leitmotif:

> The two *Star Trek* motifs . . . were used week after week in the series and thus became leitmotivic through weekly repetition. The viewer recognizes these motifs as signatures (or signals) of the program and these themes serve to structure the program in discursive space. . . .

[42] Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 272–73.

[43] James Buhler, "*Star Wars*, Music, and Myth," in *Music and Cinema*, eds. James Buhler, Caryl Flinn, and David Neumeyer (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 33–57. Frank Lehman, "Transformational Analysis and the Representation of Genius in Film Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 35, no. 1 (2013): 1–22. Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press), 1992.

> In other words, these motifs provide a point of narrative stability or reference within each episode and help to structure the narrative.[44]

The bold, brassy fanfare of *Star Trek: The Original Series* resonated throughout each subsequent series and film, reinforcing the orchestral timbre of space operas. As Neil Lerner pointed out in his analysis of the many different title themes from *Star Trek*, the sound of each series, although produced over decades, is remarkably similar: "When viewed as a set, the six title themes in fact provide a rather consistent group of European and U.S. musical styles and codes drawn mostly from the cultivated tradition."[45] The title themes from both *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* linked brass and space opera for viewers—a sound that the producers of *BSG* resisted.

Noting the stereotypical orchestral sound and leitmotivic use of these space opera soundtracks, Moore and other *BSG* producers initially resisted a thematic score. McCreary recalled early discussion with producers:

> I get asked pretty frequently about the use (or lack thereof) of "themes" in *Battlestar Galactic*a. The word "theme" was something that the producers wanted to avoid as they re-launched *Galactica*, I think because they felt that strong, orchestral fanfare had been done to death in science fiction. . . . However, a musical theme is more malleable and subtler than many people realize. *Star Wars* and S*tar Trek* have defined "theme" for more than a generation. In reality, many of those "themes" are full-fledged songs, with a unique A-section, B-section and coda. A theme can be much simpler and more minimal, consisting of the smallest amount of musical information necessary to form identity. This is the model I've based *Battlestar* on.[46]

McCreary only uses the term "theme" to describe his musical signifiers, showing how leitmotif and theme are often used synonymously. David Butler, however, argued the two have essential differences in his analysis of another popular television space opera.[47] Discussing composer Murray Gold's selective use of leitmotifs versus recurring themes in the new *Doctor Who* (2005–present), Butler distinguished the two. A theme, he wrote, often features little development while a leitmotif "will seldom remain the same throughout the drama but will transforms in structure, key, instrumentation, and so on in relation to the unfolding narrative."[48] Much of McCreary's music for *BSG* fits Butler's guidelines for the leitmotif, tracing the show's narrative through the music's evolving forms, instrumentation, keys, meter, and more.

McCreary's use of leitmotifs permeates the series and creates moments of transcendence. The Temple of Five vision in season 3 stands as an exemplary model

[44] Ronald W. Rodman, *Tuning In: American Narrative Television Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125.

[45] Neil Lerner, "Hearing the Boldly Goings: Tracking the Title Themes of the *Star Trek* Television Franchise, 1966–2005," in *Music in Science Fiction Television*, ed. K. J. Donnelly and Philip Hayward (New York: Routledge, 2013), 69.

[46] Bear McCreary, "Themes of *Battlestar Galactica*, Pt I," *Bear McCreary Official Site* (blog), September 13, 2006, http://www.bearmccreary.com/#blog/blog/battlestar-galactica-3/themes-of-battlestar-galactica-pt-i/.

[47] David Butler, "The Work of Music in the Age of Steel: Themes, Leitmotifs and Stock Music in the New Doctor Who," in *Music in Science Fiction Television*, ed. K.J. Donnelly and Philip Hayward, 168 (New York: Routledge, 2013).

[48] Butler, "The Work of Music in the Age of Steel," 168.

of this, as McCreary intertwines three distinct leitmotifs to explain D'Anna's vision as well as foreshadow the future of the Final Five. During D'Anna's vision, McCreary combines the "Baltar" leitmotif, the "Temple of Five" leitmotif, and the "Roslin/Kobol" leitmotif to shroud the moment in mystery and wonder.

The first leitmotif to occur in this scene is new to *BSG*. McCreary introduced "Temple of Five" only an episode before D'Anna and Baltar discover the temple in "Rapture" (3.12). The leitmotif is full of energy and excitement, depicting the Cylon's joy at finding the temple and creating anticipation for the Final Five reveal. McCreary scored this leitmotif with a dramatic percussion ensemble—including chimes, bells, temple bowls, glass marimbas, tines, and gamelan ensembles—to emphasize the intensity and spirituality of the Temple of Five. McCreary described the leitmotif as "mantra-like," and it continues like a heartbeat as D'Anna finally experiences her vision (Figure 2).[49]

McCreary's use of percussion for the "Temple of Five" leitmotif demonstrates the dichotomy present between the leitmotifs of the humans and the Cylons. Both use *BSG*'s distinctly non-Western instrumentation, but McCreary relies on exotic and primitivist tropes to effectively "Other" the Cylons. In a scathing review of the mishandling of race in *BSG*, Christopher Deis argued that the show "is driven forward by a conception of racial difference where the Cylons are a carefully constructed Other."[50] Building on the work of Edward Said and many others following him, Sandra Govan further expands on the attempt to elevate humanity in space operas: "Science fiction implies that the knots of terrestrial racism will eventually loosen because Terrans will have to unite against aliens, androids, and BEMs [bug-eyed monsters] of the galaxy."[51] In *BSG*, the humans unite against the Cylon Other and McCreary uses percussion to accentuate their differences. The Cylon leitmotifs, such as "Temple of Five," lack melodic complexity. Instead, their leitmotifs are simple, rhythmic, without harmony, and always played by percussive instrumentation.

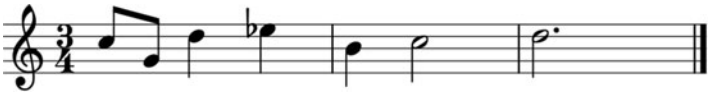
Unlike the primitivist "Temple of Five," the "Baltar" leitmotif uses harmony and a melancholy melody to evoke the scientist's humanity. Originally occurring in season 1's "Six Degrees of Separation," this minimalistic melody stands as a "musical identity for Baltar's loneliness and misery."[52] As Baltar battles suspicion and finds himself abandoned by Head Six, McCreary features an Armenian *duduk*. He employed the duduk throughout *BSG* and found the instrument uniquely suited to the series' soundscape: "I was shocked at how quickly the timbre of the duduk communicated both lyrical melancholy and bittersweet sadness,

[49] Bear McCreary, "Rapture," *Bear McCreary Official Site* (blog), January 26, 2007, http://www.bearmccreary.com/#blog/blog/battlestar-galactica-3/bg3-rapture/.

[50] Christopher Deis, "Erasing Difference: The Cylons as Racial Other," in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2008), 157.

[51] Sandra Govan, "The Insistent Presence of Black Folk in the Novels of Samuel R. Delany," *Black American Literature Forum* 18, no. 2 (1984): 44; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[52] Michael Angeli, dir., "Six Degrees of Separation," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired February 18, 2005 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 3. McCreary, "Themes of *Battlestar Galactica*, Pt I."



Example 2. "Temple of Five" leitmotif. Used with the permission of NBCUniversal Media, LLC.

without being overtly sentimental."[53] The small building blocks of the "Baltar" leitmotif certainly call for melancholy, as the scientist often finds himself despised and alone. This characterization continues throughout the series, which the duduk conveys throughout subsequent iterations of the leitmotif. In the Temple of Five scene, however, McCreary turns away from the duduk. Instead, this scene features the *yayli tanbur*, a bowed lute that was commonly used for court music in the Ottoman Empire.[54] The reason for McCreary's shift from the duduk to the yayli tanbur is ambiguous, but this choice of instrumentation is clearly purposeful.

Furthermore, the harmonic elements of "Baltar" underline the character's destiny. The leitmotif consists of two chords that allude to a lament: the chordal accompaniment sighs as it descends a half-step from C minor to B major (Figure 3). This leitmotif embodies David Lewin's SLIDE relations, which he defined as an operation that "preserves the third of a triad while changing its mode."[55] Associated with neo-Riemannian theory, Lewin introduced SLIDE through a detailed analysis of Wagner's "Tarnhelm" and "Valhalla" leitmotifs in *Götterdämmerung*, highlighting the extra-musical connections between the two and their "relationship which is difficult to express in words."[56]

Much like Wagner's leitmotifs interconnect, McCreary uses "Baltar" as a building block for future musical relationships. For example, the first four notes of "Baltar" echo "The Shape of Things to Come": the latter reads E–F#–G#–E while the former sits down a half step (see Figures 1 and 3). This seems to be significant: "The Shape of Things to Come" appeared five episodes after McCreary introduced "Baltar" and, as previously explored, alludes to the scientist's destiny and redemption arc. With this in mind, we could read the half-step rise in "The Shape of Things to Come" as a motivic development of "Baltar" that depicts his transformation from anti-hero to prophesied hero.

While McCreary makes subtle changes to "Baltar," the "Roslin/Kobol" leitmotif remains almost identical to its first iteration. The leitmotif initially occurred in "Kobol's Last Gleaming" as the Fleet discovered the mystical planet and featured a boy soprano singing in Latin: "Omnia illa et ante fiebant, Omnia illa et rursus fient" ("All this has happened before, and all this will happen again").[57] The melody

[53] The duduk is a double-reed instrument that is played using circular breathing. McCreary, "Instruments of *Battlestar Galactica*: Duduk."

[54] Eliot Bates, *Music in Turkey: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 43–44.

[55] David Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 178.

[56] Lewin, *Generalized Musical Intervals and Transformations*, 178. For further details on SLIDE relations, see David Kopp, *Chromatic Transformations in Nineteenth-century Music*, Cambridge Studies in Music Theory and Analysis, 17 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 175.

[57] McCreary, "Rapture."

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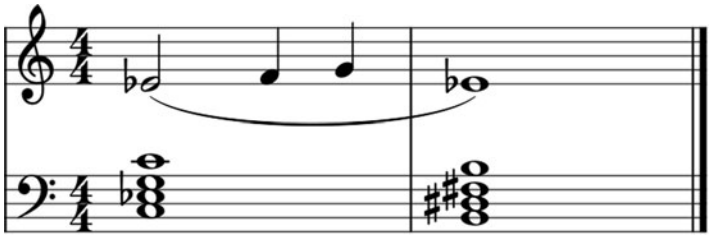

Example 3. "Baltar" leitmotif. Used with the permission of NBCUniversal Media, LLC.

rises and falls in an exoticized G major scale including an augmented second, full of mystery and wonder (Figure 4). McCreary's choice reinforces the aural world he crafted for *BSG*, which is built around modal scales and sparse instrumentation. The leitmotif repeats almost exactly in "Rapture," though performed by vocalist Raya Yarbrough rather than a boy soprano. Unlike the "Baltar" leitmotif, McCreary makes little to no changes in instrumentation or affect.

Initially associated with Kobol's discovery, the leitmotif soon became intrinsically tied to President Laura Roslin as the second season progressed. Throughout "Kobol's Last Gleaming" and season 2, Roslin's religious beliefs developed from skepticism to certainty. The spiritual texts, called *The Scrolls of Pythia*, suggest that the promised land of Earth could only be found through the aid of a dying leader. Roslin, suffering from terminal breast cancer, self-identified with this prophesied leader. McCreary confirmed his associations with Kobol and Roslin in his blog: "The mystery of finding Kobol was directly linked to the mystery of Roslin's undying belief in prophecy."[58]

Why, then, would McCreary use a leitmotif tied to Roslin in the Temple of Five scene? The President does not appear in the scene nor is her divine importance mentioned by either D'Anna or Baltar. We can only speculate as to why McCreary chose this particular leitmotif, though he confirms this was an intentional decision.[59] Roslin herself does not appear during D'Anna's vision, but her intense devotion to divine prophecy mimics that of the Cylon's pilgrimage to the Temple of Five. Both women—one human and one Cylon—find themselves part of a larger, divine plan and seek knowledge as to their purpose. For Roslin, the discovery of Kobol and subsequent pursuit of Earth seem to fulfill her destiny. D'Anna similarly pursues her fate and, after achieving her goals, dies in a moment of peace and rapture. By using the "Roslin/Kobol" leitmotif in this moment, McCreary could be foreshadowing narrative twists yet to come. The producers of *BSG* had not yet mapped out the series finale, but their inclusion of "dying leader" in the prophecy suggests that they always intended Roslin to pass away once achieving her goals. As a result, D'Anna's death directly foreshadowed Roslin's death through the use of the "Roslin/

[58] Bear McCreary, "Themes of *Battlestar Galactica*, Part II," *Bear McCreary Official Site* (blog), November 10, 2006, http://www.bearmccreary.com/#blog/blog/battlestar-galactica-3/themes-of-battlestar-galactica-pt-iv/.

[59] Discussing his use of "Roslin/Kobol" in "Rapture," McCreary writes, "I have used these lyrics once before, during the discovery of Kobol in the first season, and intentionally tried to connect these two moments with music." McCreary, "Rapture."

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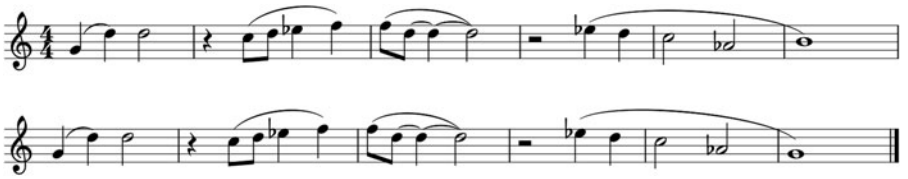

Example 4. "Kobol/Roslin" leitmotif. Used with the permission of NBCUniversal Media, LLC.

Kobol" leitmotif and stood as a narrative example of the text: "All this has happened before, and all this will happen again."

The Mad Women

Just as "Rapture" revealed the meaning of the illuminated banners, the season 3 finale "Crossroads" emphasized the importance of the final two figures from Baltar's Kobol vision.[60] The episode opens with a dream: Roslin finds herself wandering the halls of the Opera House and encounters Cylon Number Eight, Sharon Agathon. Laughter floats through the air and the women see Sharon's daughter, Hera, running unaccompanied through the halls. As the women grow more panicked and chase Hera, the child runs to Caprica Six. Roslin then jolts awake from her hazy dream, later discovering that Sharon, Hera, and Caprica Six all shared in this collective vision of the Opera House.

Though these dreams are hazy, two figures radiate light: Caprica Six and Hera. The child replaces the cradle that Head Six and Baltar gazed upon, marveling at "the face of the shape of things to come."[61] Caprica Six similarly replaces the angelic Head Six in the "Crossroads" Opera House dream. Not only do Caprica Six and Head Six share a face, but they are both clothed in pure white in each subsequent vision. Caprica Six's role in Baltar's destiny is yet unknown, but her presence is undeniable.

Before proceeding to the specifics of this dream, we must first review the connections between *BSG* and gendered opera. The feminization of opera reaches back to the era of the castrati. Historically, scholars have often considered the castrato a void—a sexless, hollow, emasculated, feminine performer.[62] Even though the castrati fell out of vogue, women *en travesti* continued to play important roles in opera. Corrine E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith pointed to the purposeful feminization of these male characters, discussing the popular example of Cherubino from Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*: "The visual and vocal presence in this comic opera of a clearly female singer performing the part of the highly libidinous and ostensibly male page provides, as a matter of course, considerable

[60] Michael Rymer, dir., "Crossroads, Part 1," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired March 18, 2007 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2008), DVD, disc 6.

[61] Rymer, dir., "Kobol's Last Gleaming, Part 2."

[62] Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, "Shunning the Bearded Kiss: Castrati and the Definition of Female Sexuality," *Prose Studies* 15 (1992): 154; Joseph Roach, "Power's Body: The Inscription of Morality as Style," in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 106.

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titillation, much of it intentional."[63] Catherine Clément argued that nineteenth-century opera revolved around the "undoing of women" who were often victimized, fetishized, and portrayed as hysterical.[64] Ralph P. Locke expanded Clément's thesis, suggesting that opera is naturally voyeuristic: "the audience is placed in the position of gazing admiringly, sometimes judgingly, at a woman displaying her attributes."[65] Summarizing the gendering of opera, Peter Brooks suggested that the genre is intrinsically linked to melodrama through both body and voice: "The hysterical body is of course typically, from Hippocrates through Freud, a woman's body, and indeed a victimized woman's body, on which desire has inscribed an impossible history, a story of desire at an impasse."[66] In identifying these concepts, these operatic scholars argue the same underlying thesis: opera is inherently gendered female by Western culture. Whether the male characters are gender-bending, the narrative emphasizes the victimized woman, or the entirety of the genre relies on voyeurism and feminine melodrama, opera is gendered.

There is no evidence that the writers of *BSG* intended to evoke specific operatic tropes in *BSG*, but the Opera House clearly calls upon the larger cultural knowledge of opera as feminine, dramatic, and hysterical. In particular, this vision seems to evoke the operatic mad woman. This well-known trope occurs throughout popular culture, such as the colloquialism "It's not over until the fat lady sings" or cinematic allusions. In the cult-classic space opera *The Fifth Element* (1997), for example, the Diva Plavalaguna sings Lucia's mad aria in a moment of heightened drama. Science fiction lovers might not realize that they are watching a typical operatic mad scene unfold but they learn to equate the hyperemotional female with an insecure mental state and exaggerated coloratura.

In *BSG*, the Opera House visions draw upon audience associations and create three different archetypes of the operatic mad woman. Roslin, for example, initially seems the antithesis of a mad woman, but her sanity soon erodes. As she grapples with her newfound responsibilities as President throughout the first season, she struggles to hide her breast cancer diagnosis by relying on hallucinogenic drugs. Roslin's dependence on them grows, and in moments of withdrawal, her reason erodes as she fails to recognize those around her and frantically mutters about prophecies under her breath.[67]

A strong matriarchal figure on *BSG,* Roslin's credibility suffers a fatal blow in "Crossroads, Part 1"—the same episode in which she first has an Opera House

[63] Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, "Introduction," in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 10.

[64] Catherine Clément, "Through Voices, History," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 22.

[65] Ralph P. Locke, "What Are These Women Doing in Opera?," in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, ed. Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 65. This concept of voyeurism, particularly the audience's focus on women and the "male gaze," has a long history in film theory as well.

[66] Peter Brooks, "Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 120–21.

[67] Sergio Mimica-Gezzan, dir., "Fragged," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired July 29, 2005 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 1.

vision. Standing in the Galactica CIC, Roslin demands to see Caprica Six and states that "she has a feeling" the Cylon would do anything to protect Hera.[68] The men surrounding her scoff at this vague comment while Captain Lee Adama sniffs at her coffee cup. Soon thereafter, Roslin sits as a trial witness and rationally presents her argument before being cross-examined by the opposing team led by Captain Adama:

Lee Adama:	During your illness, what sort of medication were you on?
Roslin:	I was taking a lot of medications at the time and I don't remember all their names.
Lee:	Did you take something called chamalla extract?
Roslin:	Hm. Yes.
Lee:	Isn't it true that one of the side effects of taking chamalla is a propensity to experience hallucinations?
Roslin:	Yes, that is one of the possible side effects of chamalla.
Lee:	And isn't it also true that the visions that you once described as messages from the gods were actually the result of a pharmacological reaction from taking chamalla?. . . If she is on drugs it goes to her credibility as a witness.[69]

In this brief moment, Lee calls Roslin's authority, credibility, and even sanity into question. She no longer appears presidential, but displays the irrational, hallucinatory behavior of an operatic mad woman.

The Cylon Sharon similarly degenerates into an operatic mad woman. Sharon experiences the same with the Opera House visions; unlike Roslin, however, Sharon's panic for Hera's safety comes from her traumatic history with her daughter. A Cylon captive on Galactica, Sharon spent the majority of her pregnancy incarcerated, and her unborn child posed an unknown threat to the Fleet. As a result, Roslin commanded the Galactica doctor to terminate Sharon's pregnancy (a decision she later reversed) and had the child kidnapped upon birth, declared dead, and raised in secret. Only after proving her allegiance to the Fleet does Sharon discover the truth and recover her child. Sharon's frantic concern for Hera, then, arises from a brutal past of deception. Furthermore, her panic in the Opera House dream related to her sense of identity, humanity, and purpose. Robert W. Moore argued in his detailed analysis of Sharon's personhood that her identity is intrinsically tied to love and motherhood.[70] Juliana Hu Pegues furthered this concept, arguing that Sharon fulfills the role of Cio-cio San in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* by sacrificing her well-being and identity for that of her child.[71] Without Hera, Sharon is without humanity.

[68] Rymer, dir., "Crossroads, Part 1."
[69] Rymer, dir., "Crossroads, Part 1."
[70] Robert W. Moore, "'To Be a Person': Sharon Agathon and the Social Expression of Individuality," in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, ed. Tiffany Potter and C. W. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2008), 113–14.
[71] Juliana Hu Pegues, "Miss Cylon: Empire and Adoption in 'Battlestar Galactica,'" *MELUS* 33, No. 4, Alien/Asian (Winter 2008): 203–4.

The overprotective mother archetype has a long history in opera and often leads to correlations between motherhood and madness. Michel Poizat, for example, suggests that the voice often functions as a "voice-object" in opera, drawing attention away from narrative and scenery due to its extreme power and emotion.[72] In defense of his argument, Poizat cited perhaps the best-known mad mother in opera, Mozart's Queen of the Night (*Die Zauberflöte*). In his analysis of the Queen's second aria, "Der Hölle Rache," Poizat argued that the voice-object sounds like a series of piercing cries similar to those posited by philosopher Jacques Lacan.[73] The Lacanian cry—filled with excess emotion—fits the larger cultural knowledge of opera as hyperemotional and melodramatic. Carolyn Abbate expanded on Poizat's claims, asserting that the Queen becomes an "irrational nonbeing" during this aria.[74] Kristi Brown-Montesano's examination of the Queen of the Night suggests a new reading of the hyperemotional aria. The Queen's cries are evidence not only of her gender but of her complicated relationship with motherhood: "Pinning down the Queen hermeneutically is not easy, especially because she presents two seemingly incompatible 'faces' in her two arias. The first time we see her she is a bereft mother pining for her stolen daughter; when she reappears, she is a jealous matriarch who breaks off relations with this same cherished child, screaming threats of revenge."[75] Brown-Montesano later concludes that the Queen's fiery aria is not meant to break ties with her daughter Pamina as many assume, but is rather intended as a fight for their survival.[76] The Queen is not a villain but a victim, a dispossessed matriarch stuck in a society that diminished her power and negated her significance.

Sharon Agathon shares many similarities with Mozart's feisty mother. Like the Queen, Sharon's purpose constantly revolves around her daughter, but her power is stifled. The humans on Galactica remain suspicious of Sharon throughout the first two seasons, assuming that she is using her pregnancy to manipulate and kill the humans. As a result of their suspicions, they temper Sharon's power by placing her in a heavily-guarded cell and stealing away Hera. Sharon despairs, fights, and manipulates others (much like the Queen uses Tamino) to get her daughter back. She often screams for Hera, reminiscent of the Queen's Lacanian cry. The humans of Galactica see a mad Cylon, but Sharon is simply a mother doing everything she can to reunite with her daughter.

Both Roslin's and Sharon's perceived insanity escalates over the series and reaches its pinnacle within the Opera House visions. The two women find themselves separated from Hera and wield their voices with increasing power to summon the lost child. But the child does not understand, hear, or care. In the Opera House, as

[72] Michel Poizat, *L'Opéra ou le cri de l'ange* (Paris: A. M. Métailié, 1986), 98–100.
[73] Poizat, *L'Opéra ou le cri de l'ange*, 98–100.
[74] Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11. See also Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 86.
[75] Kristi Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 83.
[76] Brown-Montesano, *Understanding the Women of Mozart's Operas*, 97–98.

Baltar and Caprica Six close the hall doors, the women's voices are powerless. Clément described a similar occurrence in operatic mad scenes:

> A frantic, abandoned madwoman, her body displayed before an audience glued to their seats, she sings words that make sense only to her. That is called delirium, an 'unreading.' . . . The madwomen who sing are stubborn and determined in their song, and their intertwining voices scale the walls of reason, reaching higher than what is sensible, far higher than reality.[77]

The soundtrack underpinning Roslin's and Sharon's desperate pleas similarly underlines their helplessness and lack of voice. Instead of setting the women's frenzy with pertinent leitmotifs, McCreary leaves the sonic landscape open, opting for subtle drones and feminine choral wailing. Describing his choice, McCreary wrote in his blog that he "chose to bombard the viewer with a chaotic choir singing angular clusters. Wailing electric violin and dissonant synthesizers were also tucked into the texture."[78] The lack of words in the music during their vision emphasizes the truth of the Opera House: no matter how much Roslin and Sharon yell, their words are meaningless. By all appearances, these women are mad.

Sharon's perceived hysteria as a mother and Roslin's assumed insanity as a disgraced matriarch represent two different incarnations of the operatic madwoman, but Caprica Six (as well as her non-corporeal counterpart Head Six) embodies the stereotype through their overt sexuality. Viewers first meet the Number Six model in the opening scene of the *BSG* miniseries as she dramatically seduces a Colonial Fleet officer before murdering him. Number Six later appears on the colony Caprica and reveals her illicit relationship with Gaius Baltar. Moore's "Bible" described their liaisons in detail:

> [Caprica Six] was beautiful, intensely sexual, funny, smart, and with an intuitive sense of Baltar's every mood and thought. . . . She knew he also liked aggressive women in the bedroom, so she made a habit of pouncing on him. She understood how secret affairs both titillated and challenged him. . . . Their personal life revolved around pushing the boundaries of sexual experience.[79]

Caprica Six is not a demure ingenue, but rather a bold, sexually confidant woman. Baltar's hallucination, Head Six, possesses the same traits. The Sixes' promiscuity remained a key feature of *BSG*: Head Six wears a revealing, skintight, provocative red dress throughout season 1 and regularly engages in public intercourse with Baltar. Furthermore, both Head Six and Caprica Six rarely separate narratively from Baltar, which highlighted their character dependence on seduction and reinforced the frustratingly brief description of the Number Six personality in Moore's Bible: "The Woman as Machine."[80]

The trope of the hypersexual female runs through numerous genres and dates back centuries. In *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter described the perception

[77] Clément, "Through Voices, History," 87–88.
[78] Bear McCreary, "Crossroads, Part 1," *Bear McCreary Official Site* (blog), March 18, 2007, http://www.bearmccreary.com/#blog/blog/battlestar-galactica-3/bg3-crossroads-part-i/.
[79] Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*, 39.
[80] Moore, *Battlestar Galactica*, 29.

of madness in the nineteenth-century as a "manifestation of excess feminine sexuality."[81] Michel Foucault analyzed madness on stage, suggesting insanity was used as a form of entertainment.[82] In *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary linked these concepts through her study of operatic mad scenes.[83] McClary argues that sexuality often develops as a key element of madness in opera, using the mental deterioration of Donizetti's Lucia (*Lucia di Lammermoor*, 1835) and Strauss's Salome (*Salome*, 1905) as prime examples. In particular, McClary noted that the women's excess of sexuality emerged in their music: diatonicism and lyricism transformed into "coloratura delirium" and a "collaged fantasia."[84] Reality slipped away from these mad women as unchallenged eroticism lead to "a realm of fantasy, illusion, nostalgia, unreason, or the sublime."[85]

The transition from reality to fantasy begins in Roslin's dreams but unfolds most clearly in the final vision of the Opera House in "Crossroads," which unexpectedly transpires from Caprica Six's point of view. The camera pans in on Caprica Six's exposed back as she lays sleeping. Even now, in her unconscious state, the camera focuses on her latent sexuality. The scene shifts to the Cylon's dream and viewers find themselves standing once more in the hall of the Opera House. Caprica Six holds Hera and stands alongside Baltar as "The Shape of Things to Come" passacaglia returns. The Opera House leitmotif soon corrupts, however, as McCreary layers the descending line with tonal clusters and the chaotic vocal line first heard accompanying Roslin's and Sharon's hysteria. Much like Lucia, the wordless female choir wails, transcending speech and abandoning the strict passacaglia structure for a delirious collage of forms. Caprica Six stands in the Opera House—clothed in a provocative, nearly see-through white dress—as the music betrays her terror and confusion.

The women's visions of the Opera House would later come to fruition, but their occurrences through "Crossroads" depict three of *BSG*'s leading ladies seemingly on the brink of madness. Though linked together in their collective dreams, each of these women presents a different variation on the trope of feminine madness. Sharon, the frantic mother, abandons her military training out of desperation to save her child. By contrast, Roslin finds herself discredited after using hallucinatory drugs and questions the purpose of the visions. Both Caprica Six and Head Six start as alluring and charismatic but descend into the stereotype of the promiscuous madwoman. These layers of madness combined with the frenzied, disjointed music of the "Crossroads" Opera House visions further underline the inherent "operaticness" of *BSG*. The women's visions are the show's mad scenes, occurring at the tail end of season 3 and setting up a spectacular series finale in the fourth and final season.

[81] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 81; Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985).

[82] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

[83] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 80–81.

[84] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 92.

[85] McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 93.

Conclusion

Following the series finale, one question resonated through the *BSG* fandom: why an Opera House?[86] Introduced in season 1, the mysterious theater dominated the series' narrative and created tantalizing cliffhangers. The writers layered the Opera House throughout the entirety of *BSG*. Season 1's "Kobol's Last Gleaming" introduced the theater through Baltar's perspective. In season 3, "Rapture" and "Crossroads" transferred the operatic visions to women. All four—Baltar, Roslin, Sharon, and Caprica Six—unite in the series finale to finally "understand the truth of the Opera House."[87] Under attack from enemy Cylons, Hera runs through the halls of Galactica with both Sharon and Roslin chasing after her. In a moment of epiphany, the stunned women see their vision coming to fruition. Caprica Six and Baltar find Hera and scoop her up, taking her to safety as strains of the passacaglia accompany their actions. The theme grows louder and stronger as Baltar, Caprica Six, and Hera reach the Central Information Center (CIC)—the heart of Galactica. It is in this control room that the mystery is finally understood as Baltar realizes that the CIC is the Opera House and all three illuminated elements from his vision in "Kobol's Last Gleaming" are present.

This dramatic finale unites the operatic elements strewn throughout *BSG* and reasserts the "operaticness" of the show. I would suggest that the finale also offers a new lens through which to view the series. I posit that the *BSG* writers unintentionally created an opera, integrating operatic elements throughout the narrative, cinematography, and music. Galactica serves as the operatic stage on which these characters play, as the climactic scene in the CIC reveals. We might even venture more specific operatic analogies with *BSG*. The show pulls its narrative from Biblical and mythological sources, uses a three-act structure, employs leitmotifs, marshals the trope of the madwoman, and features an actual Opera House. Baltar, the over-sexualized but surprisingly feminine antihero could be viewed as the castrato of this production. His prima donna, Number Six, is similarly sexualized and uses her voice to both support (Caprica Six) and manipulate (Head Six).

I am not the first to suggest that film could be considered opera. Composer Howard Shore once famously said that "opera *is* film music" and used his score for Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* as an example: "The *Lord of the Rings* is an opera in concept. And what I mean is, it's three acts. It's three films. And it has the complexity and the relationships of what we think of as opera music, because it so goes beyond what you think of as a film score."[88] Indeed, film has often been analyzed as an opera. Both Citron and Franco Sciannameo, for example, viewed Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy—which also ends in an opera house—through

[86] The comment sections in many *Battlestar Galactica* finale recaps, for example, are filled with debate over the purpose and need of the Opera House. Chris Dahlen, "*Battlestar Galactica*: 'Daybreak (pt. 2)'," A.V. Club, March 20, 2009, https://tv.avclub.com/battlestar-galactica-daybreak-pt-2-1798205876.

[87] Michael Nankin, dir., "Faith," *Battlestar Galactica*, aired May 9, 2008 (Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD, disc 3.

[88] Michael Schelle, *The Score: Interviews with Film Composers* (Beverly Hills, CA: Silman-James Press, 1999), 341, 347, as found in Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif*, 261.

an operatic lens, noting the epic narrative needed to make such comparisons.[89] A television series perhaps affords even greater temptations to the operatic imagination, since it provides multiple seasons to build epic grandeur and complexity. New Space Opera, a subgenre devoted to providing social awareness and hyper-emotionality, provides the opportunity to be even more intricately connected to opera.

Perhaps calling it an opera is a step too far—the television show is not sung throughout, and its creators laid no claim to the genre. Yet its inherent "operaticness" cannot be denied. Moore wanted to "take the opera out of space opera" and remove the melodramatic, formulaic aspects of the subgenre. And yet the narrative importance of the Opera House throughout all four seasons of *BSG* inherently forges connections to the musical genre. Its mere presence, combined with the other (perhaps inadvertent) operatic styles and tropes, profoundly impacted this New Space Opera. The operatic nature of *BSG* revolutionized televised space opera, which resulted in a show unlike any other science fiction series.

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[89] Marcia Citron, "Operatic Style and Structure in Coppola's Godfather Trilogy," *Musical Quarterly* 87, no. 3, (October 2004): 423–67; Franco Sciannameo, *Nino Rota's* The Godfather *Trilogy: A Film Score Guide* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2010).

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