

1 Introduction

DAVID CHARLTON

There is no more astonishing evidence of the power of grand opera than *A Life for the Tsar*, first given at St Petersburg in 1836. Glinka's extraordinary genius was able to exploit most of the elements we still recognise in the genre: historical crisis, a personal tragedy, regional character (focused through musical local colour), active choruses, dance, and political imperatives refracted from the distant past towards the composer's present. Yet in 1836 grand opera was still a new phenomenon, originating in Paris. Glinka's opera clearly demonstrates that this genre rose to worldwide importance in the decade following Beethoven's death in 1827. Alongside contemporary advances in piano music – Chopin, Liszt, Schumann – grand opera was probably the most significant musical development of the 1830s and 1840s.

Because of its various musical challenges and Tsar-centred narrative, Glinka's opera was harder to export than those grand operas showing more nuanced leading figures, but the fact remains that this masterpiece dates from the same year as the more widely exported *Les Huguenots* by Meyerbeer. Had Carl Maria von Weber lived longer and written German equivalents to *A Life for the Tsar*, the 'map' in Table 1.1 would have required less emphasis than it presently does.¹ As this book shows, the genre of grand opera (taken as a nexus of properties: dramatic, formal, vocal) was sufficiently powerful to continue developing in time and space: through the 1840s and beyond, and across an increasing number of countries.

In Table 1.1, dividing opera history into fifty-year intervals, grand opera's dominance is seen as part of the increasing globalisation of opera: the multiplication of genres seems to reflect a shrinking world (one that has known industry, advertising, railways and mass media for 150 years now), as well as to express it psychologically.

Lyric theatre history can be defined by place and stage tradition, rather than by composer: by certain styles of acting and singing, and the delivery of the sung or spoken text. As the world industrialised, national types travelled faster, finding audiences further away. From Table 1.1 we can guess why Wagner was affected by grand opera (before and after 1850 – see Chapter 16) and how Gluck's reform operas played their role in the evolution of the same genre.

In this chapter, themes relevant to the present book are introduced through a discussion of particular topics, with special mention being made

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Table 1.1 A simple 'map' of the opera world

Dates	Dominant types	Places of origin and export
1600–1650	Monteverdi etc.	Mantua, Venice, Rome
1650–1700	Cavalli to Scarlatti: evolution of opera seria and Lully's <i>tragédie en musique</i>	North and South Italy → southern Europe and Paris
1700–1750	Opera seria; comic intermezzo	Italy → rest of Europe/S. America
1750–1800	Reform (French-influenced) opera; opera buffa, <i>dramma giocoso</i>	Italy and France → wider Europe and Americas
1800–1850	Dialogue opera (French and German); grand opera ; 'Italian opera'	France, Germany, Italy → world
1850–1900	Opéra-lyrique; Wagnerian types; 'Italian opera'; operetta	France, Germany, Italy → world

(The table does not show the gradual emergence of given types during the years preceding their appearance in the middle column, or the corresponding decline of dominant types during succeeding decades.)

of recent research. Useful shorter orientations for grand opera have been written by Dennis Libby in *History of Opera* (New Grove Handbooks), by M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet in *New Grove/2* ('Grand opéra') and by Janet L. Johnson, whose 'The Musical Environment in France' is found in *The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz*. Single-composer issues in grand opera studies include new critical editions of the music of major composers (most recently Meyerbeer and Rossini); various composer monographs (e.g. Diana Hallman on Halévy); and in-progress documentary publications such as Robert Ignatius Letellier's English translation of Meyerbeer's diaries and journals, or Berlioz's music criticism (issued in French).² The expansion of knowledge about historical staging techniques is epitomised in an important chapter by Karin Pendle and Stephen Wilkins. This and other writings are individually listed in the select Bibliography at the end.

One special factor lies behind all work on grand opera: that of language. German has been the language of the majority of post-war articles and books. This was quantified when in 1987 Anselm Gerhard published a complete classified bibliography of grand opera research.³ Of 276 items listed, c. 21 per cent were published in French, c. 28 per cent in English and c. 40 per cent in German. There is now an unavoidable and problematic time-lag in assimilation, since important and numerous writings by, for example, Heinz Becker, Sieghart Döhring, Herbert Schneider, Michael Walter and Matthias Brzoska have for the most part not been translated; Jürgen Schläder's 1995 history of the nineteenth-century duet is not even referred to under 'Duet' within *New Grove/2*.⁴ Although we have translations of Carl Dahlhaus's comments on grand opera within both his *Nineteenth-Century Music* and *Realism in Nineteenth-Century Music*,⁵ the major exception that proves the language rule is Mary Whittall's translation of Anselm Gerhard's *Die Verständerung der Oper* (1992) as *The Urbanization of Opera* (1998), a study which is mentioned many times in the present Companion.

Genre

As Herbert Schneider emphasises in Chapter 10, the phrase *grand opéra* was never used systematically as a genre description by the French. But that does not signify that it had no meaning. Hervé Lacombe, for one, has clarified such meanings for French opera, teasing out the way that reference books approached terminology.⁶ Generic descriptors are important because they traditionally help define audience expectation in terms of a work's ambitions, tone, relation to earlier works, relation to foreign traditions, balance or distribution between text and music, and possibly a connection with an institution. Of course this is not an exact science and it is essential (guided by Shakespeare) to be able to laugh at genres, especially when Polonius announces the players in *Hamlet*.⁷ The writer Pierre Nougaret used 'grand opéra' in 1768 when referring to all-sung operas (which by legal imperative could be seen in Paris only at the Opéra), and also when referring to works characterised by 'marvels, variety, theatrical splendour', including ballets.⁸ Fifty years later the musical dictionary *Encyclopédie méthodique* (1818) constructed the phrase along the same lines.⁹ 'Grand opera' there is defined by the space itself (the Paris Opéra as theatre, providing luxury, patronage and a certain image) and, by extension, as comprising any work accepted for performance in that space by that company – whether historical, tragic or even comic – and sung throughout. In other words 'grand opera' was endowed with consistent meaning more by reason of the institution promoting it than by the dramatic content of the work.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 the restored monarchy was keen to maintain subsidy for 'official' theatres (alongside a licensing system for new ones), so the Paris Opéra was maintained *de facto* as the place where the 'grandest' category of theatre could be seen.¹⁰ The French continued to use *grand opéra* as a phrase to refer to any opera sung from end to end (as distinct from *opéra comique*) or, generically, evincing a certain elevation of tone.¹¹ In the following chapter Hervé Lacombe quotes in detail from the directorial schedule of the Paris Opéra, showing that *grand opéra* was enshrined legally as a term while remaining, necessarily, loosely defined. Continuity with past genres was seen in the schedule as important, i.e. the grandeur of *tragédie lyrique*. But a *grand opéra* could, technically, be written in one or two acts only, as well as in three, four or five acts. However, the die had been cast by Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (five acts) and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (four acts).

In any case, the Romantic age had no respect for genre as such. Gounod's *Faust* (1859) deserves mention for its immense popularity and yet ambiguity of genre. With five acts, a tragic heroine, a chorus and obviously elevated tone, this opera nevertheless began as part of a different line of French works, closely modelled on single works of literature. It was premiered at

the Théâtre-Lyrique and contained some scenes in spoken dialogue. By 1869 it had moved into the camp of grand opera, both physically and generically: having lost its dialogues and gained recitatives, it was received into the bosom of the Paris Opéra where it now sprang a ballet (and some other music): its medieval setting and strongly etched choral writing happily echoed grand opera tradition, while its subject-matter resolutely remained faithful to Goethe's drama of individuals.

There is another facet: it is useful to recall the penchant of the nineteenth century for the word 'grand', whether as a sign of belief in progress and expansion, or of value as inhering in size: see p. 298. Berlioz published a *Grand traité d'instrumentation* and a *Grande messe des morts*, Francesco Berger a *Grande Fantaisie brillante sur l'Opéra Masaniello* and Chopin a *Grande polonaise* for piano and orchestra. Or perhaps we are simply dealing with a by-product of the advertising industry.

The evolution of grand opera in the 1820s

Opera historians have been uncovering the 1820s, a complex decade, and one already finely described by David Kimbell in respect of Italian opera.¹² 'The Age of French Romanticism' is still being defined in properly musical terms. Recent foundation opera studies include Janet Johnson's work on the Théâtre Italien, on Rossini and on Stendhal; Mark Everist's articles on the origins of Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* and the French version of Weber's *Euryanthe*; and dissertations by Maribeth Clark, Sarah Hibberd, Michael Mitchell, Cormac Newark and Ben Walton (see Bibliography on p. 470). All recent studies acknowledge (explicitly or otherwise) Karin Pendle's path-breaking publications on Scribe and French opera, and her work on the influence of popular theatres on grand opera,¹³ as they also rely on Heinz and Gudrun Becker's work on Meyerbeer and Michael Walter's and Anselm Gerhard's work on the same composer and on Spontini.

In this volatile decade Louis XVIII died, Charles X was crowned (1825) and Victor Hugo, Eugène Delacroix, Hector Berlioz, Stendhal, Lamartine, Rossini, Saint-Simon, Benjamin Constant, Mme de Staël, Géricault, de Vigny and others were at some stage active in the capital. Charles Kemble's company brought Shakespeare in English to Paris in 1827. Giacomo Meyerbeer arrived in Paris in 1826: his diaries show that in January 1827 he met the writers Scribe, Castil-Blaze, Sauvage, the singer Giuditta Pasta and composers Cherubini and Boieldieu. Amid a mushrooming of newspapers and journals François-Joseph Fétis founded the *Revue musicale* in the same year and the work of the earlier German Romantic writers and philosophers first came to notice in their pages. There emerged 'by about 1827 or

1828 . . . a relatively coherent and self-conscious set of “Romantic doctrines”. This was, in short, the period of what has long been termed *la bataille romantique*.¹⁴

The evolution of grand opera at the same point in the 1820s contains a yet more international element, however: a freshness and breadth of outlook that Walter Scott startles us with when in Chapter 4 of his novel *Rob Roy* (1818) its protagonist announces:

I was born a citizen of the world, and my inclination led me into all scenes where my knowledge of mankind could be enlarged.

Following his death in 1824 at Missolonghi, Greece, Lord Byron’s substantial literary popularity had been boosted in Europe, amid fervent popular support for the Greek War of Independence by which Turkish rule was ended in 1827. As Mark Everist well puts it, ‘The Greek War of Independence was as much a part of cultural life in European intellectual circles in the 1820s as the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s or the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s.’¹⁵ Not by chance was Christian–Muslim conflict depicted in two pre-grand operas of these years: Meyerbeer’s *Il crociato in Egitto*, dating from 1824 and mounted in Paris the following year; and Rossini’s *Le Siège de Corinthe* (1826) at the Paris Opéra. We must try and account for the important effect of these Italian works.

Their most important ancestor was an opera written by Gaspare Spontini (1774–1851), one of many Italian-born composers forming part of French tradition: a historical opera on the conquest of Mexico entitled *Fernand Cortez* (1809). It is, coincidentally, one of the few French operas of the period to have been recorded since the advent of compact discs (Accord 206612, conducted by Jean-Paul Penin), and it is fortunate that this recording consists of the opera’s extensively revised version of 1817. This version continued to hold the stage, and was practically the only all-sung French opera originating from 1810–20 to be a lasting success: it gained 248 performances which stretched into the 1839–40 season.¹⁶ Much later, in the nationalistic 1870s, when the new home of grand opera, the Palais Garnier opera house, was nearly finished, *Fernand Cortez* was memorialised by that institution’s librarian and historian, Théodore de Lajarte. He referred to *Cortez* as ‘the germ of grand opera’ by reason of its ‘elevated dramatic feeling’, with ‘startling oppositions of strength and tenderness’, not to mention its spectacular elements.¹⁷ Further, it painted the exotic Mexicans in strong visual and musical colouring and it opposed two cultures and two religions (Aztec/Christian) with a cross-cultural love-match at the centre (*Cortez* the conqueror loves and is loved by Amazily), while also remaining faithful to the outlines of history.

If all this anticipates grand opera, so does the ethos of historically accurate staging, which Lajarte's evidence proves as having been in place: the following letter of 17 May 1809 contains a report from the *Cortez* scene-painting workshop:

Four painters were brought in from the start of May and have been tracing and applying ink to the stencils. One of them is employed to conduct research in the Imperial libraries to become familiar with the type of monuments in Mexico in the days of Cortez, especially for the type of ships and the design of weapons at that time. He has discovered Charles V's portrait and hopes to locate that of Cortez. M. Ciceri, landscape painter, retained by the Opéra, is commissioned to go to the Botanical Garden *every day*, to sketch trees and plants of Mexican origin . . .¹⁸

Even this was not the first documentation of French costume research in action, for eleven years before, the press reported of Dalayrac's *Primerose* that 'the costumes are of 13th-century style; sumptuous and numerous, they were copied from the Bibliothèque nationale with exactitude'.¹⁹

In 1809 the appearance of Ciceri's name was significant: his career came to dominate scene-painting in the 1820s and early 1830s (see below). Lajarte's evidence for *Cortez* also shows that fourteen horses and riders were contracted to appear in the opera (costing 6,000 francs for each of the first six nights).

Much more deserves our notice in *Fernand Cortez* and there is a great deal to enjoy in Dennis Libby's dissertation 'Gaspere Spontini and his French and German Operas' (Princeton University, 1969): no other full-length study is available. Libby showed how frequently Spontini's solos and duets are cast in slow-fast forms inherited from the old century but especially associated in the new one with Italian opera and grand opera (see Chapter 10 below). He also notices that in 1817 Spontini tended to prune shorter arias and duets so that 'The omission of these [1809] pieces from the 1817 version shifts the emphasis, already strong in the original, still more toward the side of the chorus and ensemble and away from solos, particularly in Acts I and II' (*ibid.*, 163). Such tendencies were noticed later in grand opera's first phase in a telling comment by Hector Berlioz:

Today, everything tends towards massed musical forces. See at the Conservatoire concerts how unfavourably vocal or instrumental solos are greeted . . . At the Opéra, even in new works, solos get fewer every day: I know plenty of people who cannot tolerate arias in whatever shape or form.²⁰

In the year 1824, Rossini settled in Paris and became musical director at the Théâtre Italien. But the following extract from a forgotten 1824 pre-grand

opera by Rodolphe Kreutzer (*Ipsiboé*) reveals that the ground had been tilled already: a positive desire both for dramatic novelty and the assimilation of Italian (Rossinian) musical particulars is most notable:

For a long time now, most literary journals accuse *tragédie lyrique* of being out of step with current taste and musical progress in France . . . In fact [operatic] tragedy cannot offer the things demanded by music: sudden transitions, abrupt and frequent oppositions. Italian scores have greatly influenced us; we are no longer happy with well-declamed phrases and a few expressive arias – we want *morceaux d'ensemble*, *finales* and so on.²¹

Music, it seems, was seeking a new voice to match advances in literature or painting. But to be successful, everything in an opera must work together, and *Ipsiboé* proved unequal. A much more prominent step was taken in *Il crociato in Egitto* (compact disc: Opera Rara ORC 10, conducted by David Parry). Derived from a French *mélodrame* (only recently identified: see note 15) this opera gave new life to Italian forms and to choral and orchestral writing, as well as foregrounding religious division and historical sources and colour. Sieghart Döhring has written memorably of its importance for the 1820s:

If Meyerbeer went [from his native Germany] to Italy to learn, it was during that time that he became a teacher. *Crociato*, whose profound traces have long lain unnoticed in the Italian opera between Bellini and Verdi, shows that Meyerbeer finally found, in the idiom of an alien genre, his own musical language and personal style. With the world-wide success of this single opera, he rose to become the leading composer of Italian opera after Rossini.²²

Indeed the general proximity of opera to *mélodrame* must never be forgotten, for Romantic theatre owed it a comprehensive debt which is often obscured by our unfamiliarity with the French originals, though was famously exposed in Peter Brooks's study *The Melodramatic Imagination*.²³ Sarah Hibberd explores more of these connections in Chapter 9 below, especially visual ones: for grand opera's desire for visual authenticity essentially rested on the way popular Revolution theatre expanded its visual resources. Consider this report from February 1799 which interpreted that cult in terms of excess:

'On "Scenic" Plays [*pièces à décorations*]' : Our theatres seem to compete in spending the most money on sets and costumes: if it continues, this abuse will hasten the decline of dramatic art still further . . . Heaven, hell, settings apt for all genres, costumes apt for all climates, blazing buildings, shipwrecks, people snatched into the air, tournaments, hand-to-hand combat, mounted combat, etc.: we have seen everything.²⁴

However, *mélodrame* at this time was a fiercely moralistic as well as stagey genre, and it remains to be seen whether grand opera's new use of the tragic ending also derives from it. Tragic endings in opera were not unknown (Cherubini's 1797 *Médée* is a rare and monumental example) but when in 1826 Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe* used one, it transformed the effect of the cross-cultural conflict in opera. Rossini's work centres on the Turkish-Muslim defeat of one of the last strongholds of the Christian Eastern Empire of Byzantium in 1458, by Sultan Mehmed II.²⁵ There was obvious political urgency to this theme at a moment when for the first time since 1461 the definitive Greek struggle for independence was in progress: the tragic ending amounted to an aesthetic statement as shocking as Delacroix's analogous canvases *Scenes from the Massacres at Chios* (1824) or *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi* (1826). Betrayed by the fact that she has been wooed by Mahomet (= Mehmed) himself in disguise, the Greek heroine Pamira kills herself as the work ends and Corinth goes up in flames: she will not survive the defeat of her people. This important opera (seen 103 times up to 1844), Rossini's first to be staged at the Paris Opéra, was followed by *Moïse et Pharaon*, *Le Comte Ory* (a fine comedy) and *Guillaume Tell* (described in Chapter 14).

In another respect, too, *Le Siège* is a turning-point, for Rossini had been brought to the capital specifically to reform French singing not just with younger artists but by more generally imposing Italian principles of voice-production. This revolution had itself been prepared for at the Théâtre Italien, Paris's most fashionable venue, under Rossini as musical director. But the Opéra actually shared its management with the Théâtre Italien from 1818 until 1827 and so links were particularly close for much of the 1820s, as Janet Johnson has pointed out: 'The two theatres were to be deeply and mutually conditioned by an alliance that for nearly ten years provided a unique institutional arena for the interaction of French and Italian operatic traditions.'²⁶ And she cites Edouard Robert, the Italien's joint director from 1830 to 1838, drawing up in 1832 a balance-sheet which is essential for understanding the origins of grand opera:

From the artistic point of view the Théâtre Italien works powerfully towards musical progress in France. It cannot be denied that it has served as a model for French composers, by reason of the character of its melodies, its ensembles, its finales and musical development in general which, previously, was found to such a notable degree only in the Italian school . . .

Had Paris not had its Théâtre Italien, Rossini, Meyerbeer and others would probably never have composed for the Opéra. And has not the singing of [Manuel] Garcia, [Gaetano] Crivelli, [Nicola] Tacchinardi and [Giovanni] Rubini, [Luigi] Lablache, [Caterina] Barilli, [Henriette]

Sontag, [Giuditta] Pasta, [Maria] Malibran and [Giuditta or Giulia] Grisi, had a powerful influence on the success of our French artists? Mme [Laure Cinti-] Damoreau, M. [Nicolas] Levasseur, Mme [Gosselin-] Mori, have sung at this theatre. [Adolphe] Nourrit can be regarded as a pupil of the Italian school, since he was finally taught by Garcia. Most of the Opéra's orchestral musicians have worked at the Théâtre Italien, which has constantly acted as a nursery for the former institution.²⁷

We saw earlier how the tragic arrangement of personal relationships in *Le Siège de Corinthe* exists within a plot which has notable similarities with Spontini's *Fernand Cortez* (which Rossini admired and conducted in Naples): invasion and defeat of a less powerful culture by a more powerful one, and a cross-cultural love theme. But by analysing the individual dynamics, an essential difference between the two operas is shown up. Scott L. Balthazar's method, expressed in the concept of 'love-triangles', has been derived from a range of theatre research.²⁸ Indeed this helps all the better to explain why Pamira's tragic end acted as a catalyst in grand opera's development, and fructified nineteenth-century opera in general:

Type 1: 'false triangles': the lovers feel helplessness, confusion and misery; this is the earlier, eighteenth-century pattern of Metastasio and *opera seria*. No infidelity occurs, for the lovers 'realise that their problems originate elsewhere', for example through social rank. Because in Spontini's opera *Cortez* and Amazily's mutual love is threatened by her physical safety alone (in the first version, especially) or only indirectly through the Aztecs' possible reprisals, it conforms on the personal level to an older-fashioned pattern.

Type 2: 'misconstrued triangles': again, no infidelity occurs, this time because 'the subject of the rivalry is blameless, having ended previous affairs, or been forced into an unwanted betrothal', but at the same time 'exonerating information is absent or ignored and infidelity is presumed'; 'a misconstrued love-triangle multiplies and intensifies conflicts . . . increasing the justification for a tragic ending' but also allowing reconciliation. This is the pattern of *Il crociato in Egitto* where two triangles operate: both can be resolved because the central lovers are secretly married (the Egyptian Palmide and the Christian knight Armando).²⁹ Plots in this category, showing even aggression and physical pain, had been used in French dialogue opera for a long time,³⁰ so it was hardly surprising that Paris criticism dismissed the plot of *Il crociato* as 'uncommonly absurd' and unworthy of current taste.

Type 3: the 'true triangle': in which, by an unwanted tie of alternative marriage or some other loyalty, the main lovers are 'irrevocably estranged' making reconciliation or happiness 'impossible'. Think of *Romeo and*

Juliet, so admired in 1827 Paris, as well as *Le Siège de Corinthe* or, later, Verdi's *Don Carlos*. Grand opera prefers this level of personal conflict, sometimes writ large against opposing social or religious movements. One would have to say that Meyerbeer's 1831 *Robert le Diable* resembles Type 2, but it is focused exceptionally upon familial rather than sentimental ties of loyalty, and evokes Faustian struggle rather than History.

History, politics

Conceived and born in a liberal era, grand opera's messages of religious, social and erotic freedom were often too strong for censors outside France: Nicholas White and Simon Williams effectively provide us with responses in this book to Carl Dahlhaus's observation, 'grand opera was always political'.³¹ On the other hand, different generations naturally differ in their approach to hermeneutics. Matthias Brzoska in Chapter 11 presents recent thinking on Meyerbeer's engagement with theories of human progress as such. Sarah Hibberd's reading of Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828) recounts in Chapter 9 the meticulous way that Scribe's libretto evolved so as to inscribe politics at every structural level of the drama. Research by Herbert Schneider here and in Chapter 10 on *La Muette* illuminates a work universally known and famously admired by Wagner, yet which does not find mention in Dahlhaus's *Nineteenth-Century Music*, first issued in 1980. Evidence of wide familiarity with Auber's opera is found in various chapters following, including 18 and 20, and this evidence points to an essential vitality born out of a spirit of liberalisation in France. Although the July Revolution was still some time away,

Towards the end of Charles X's reign, particularly under the liberal ministry of Martignac, a greater laxity crept into the functioning of the censorship. Plays and operas centring on popular heroes and national uprisings, such as Delavigne's *Marino Faliero* (1829), which so impressed Stendhal's Julien Sorel, and Auber's *La Muette de Portici* . . . were allowed with some misgivings and shown with great success . . . There remained only two subjects still considered strictly taboo: plays evoking the memory of the Napoleonic era, and plays portraying a former monarch.³²

This and other grand operas can be seen as part of an active theatrical critique of society, the best of whose products went on to provide inspiration up to the end of the century. Music history in the years following 1980 was to look more carefully at grand opera structure, its social context and reception history. Maybe there was no direct connection, but Patrice Chéreau's

influential staging of Wagner's *Ring* cycle in 1976 at Bayreuth was predicated on the belief 'that [its] mythological setting . . . heightens rather than diminishes the social and historical dimensions of the work', causing Chéreau to depict elements of the industrial revolution, such as the Rhine as a hydro-electric dam, and emphasising 'the extent to which the work was conceived as a political allegory', as Barry Millington puts it ('Chéreau' in *New Grove/2*). In 1980, as in 1830, the thinking public's image of itself naturally found current concerns expressible through the metaphorical languages of art, served by the use of historical fiction. An important difference is that in the 1830s these enriched languages were adopted in earnest not simply by makers of opera but by professional historians themselves in order to represent the past as newly inclusive and newly realistic. 'It could be said that the idea of the people [bound] together the virtues of the erudite historian and the visions of the prophet, the novelist and the rhetorical militarist'.³³ Not just 'the people' but also their struggle for self-determination occupied many minds. No better place to understand this exists than the historical novels of Walter Scott, whose totally new style and approach captivated all readers from about 1817. His novels have numerous connections with opera, something to which Stendhal presciently drew attention in *The Life of Rossini* (1824) with his memorable and extended comparison between Rossini's orchestral writing and Scott's descriptive techniques.³⁴ The musicologist Ludwig Finscher, writing in the 1980s, re-explored similar links.³⁵ The way that Scott foregrounded social groups is easily seen in *Rob Roy* (1818), for example, where he makes the oppositional consciousness basic to the mind of the narrator (and thereby the reader). Indeed it is Francis Osbaldistone's Northumbrian nurse who imbues this model within Francis's receptive young ears:

Now, in the legends of Mabel, the Scottish nation was ever freshly remembered with all the embittered declamation of which [she] was capable . . . And how could it be otherwise? Was it not the Black Douglas who slew with his own hand the heir of the Osbaldistone family the day after he took possession of his estate . . .? All our family renown was acquired, – all our family misfortunes were occasioned, – by the Northern wars. Warmed by such tales, I looked upon the Scottish people during my childhood as a race hostile by nature to the more southern inhabitants of the realm . . .³⁶

and to this distinction will be added the Protestant–Catholic divide, constantly present in various ways, and made more vivid at one point by Scott's historical detailing of ancient anti-Catholic laws, albeit amusingly placed in the mouth of a pettifogging official who is addressing the novel's striking young Catholic heroine, Die Vernon:

– good evening ma'am; I have no more to say, – only there are laws against papists . . . There's third and fourth Edward VI, of antiphoners, missals, grailes, processionals, manuals, legends, pies, portuasses, and those that have such trinkets in their possession, Miss Vernon; and there's summoning of papists to take the oaths . . .³⁷

This detailing and archaic language exactly correspond to a pervasive search for historical immediacy in other fictional spheres at the time, for example easel-painting or indeed grand opera, both of which employed the idea of 'local colour' for this purpose; such a technique is obvious here in Scott both in the weird vocabulary and in the speaker's grotesque character. Sectarian religious and social conflict was never far from the grand opera agenda, as Chapter 5 amply explains.

In the post-Chéreau search for the 'mentalities' and force-fields surrounding grand opera Jane Fulcher published *The Nation's Image* in 1987 and Anselm Gerhard completed in 1985 the thesis that would eventually become *The Urbanization of Opera*.³⁸ Fulcher sought to uncover 'the emergence of the [Paris] Opéra as a politically contestatory realm', analysing the power and control over art in the institution itself and the ways that the public's reaction fed from both the operas and the political forces in play at the time. Her book brings together work on theatre economics, the production details and various documents of reception as revealed in the press reviews, squarely facing the reality that opera texts do not reside solely in the libretto, score, production-book or visual effects, but in the theatre, before an audience. In Fulcher's translated extracts from reviews we can read the engagement between French politics and grand operas set in the past, the operas being seen as mediated, performative historical texts in themselves.

Disagreements with Fulcher's book arose not least from her view that the Opéra after 1852 'was a tightly, indeed a rigorously controlled institution, run more or less directly by officials or bureaucrats of the French state . . . [T]he aim of this control was to ensure a certain kind of theatre.'³⁹ Hervé Lacombe, in Chapter 2 below, asserts the distance between artists and officials, denying that the former were 'the spokesmen of the State', employed to create propaganda.

Gerhard's *The Urbanization of Opera* was yet more culturally centred than Fulcher's study, but far more concerned with social and existential questions than party allegiances; we might even claim him as a precursor of musicologists now linking arms with 'urban historians' who publish in the journal *Urban History* or books like *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*.⁴⁰ His was, however, so comprehensive a project that it is not possible to encapsulate it except in remembering its scope: an avowed attempt

to produce a totally new and valid perspective of grand opera. Gerhard's technique is to weave together a series of enquiries into opera's perceptual and material nature. Grand opera, he says, already betrays a modern sensibility – its dramaturgy anticipates the cinema, its great contrasts correspond to life-impressions in the modern city; its ambiguities result from cultural tensions with which we can identify today. Encompassing even terroristic violence, the opera crowd or chorus can sometimes allegorise the public assemblies that condition political change. For example in an 1844 journal article Gerhard finds proof that Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* 'reflected nineteenth-century fears' at a moment when street crime was rife: it contains the sentence, 'Every intimate evening party ends [nowadays], as the fourth act of *Les Huguenots* begins, with the blessing of weapons' (*Urbanization*, 231).

But historical opera in France related to public understanding of history at a deeper level too, by containing the illusion of cause and effect. Gerhard's enquiry into such operatic texts typically looks outside conventional operatic sources in order to gain a stronger foothold and alights upon a mid-eighteenth-century best-seller by A. R. Richer which 'showed' how great human events arose from 'little details multiplied'.⁴¹ One can actually see this thesis displayed in a pre-grand opera in 1783 which set out to dramatise, using history, how crucial events are brought about by the actions of common people and not the traditional rulers usually depicted. This was *Péronne sauvée*, seen briefly at the Paris Opéra and set by the composer Dezède. The librettist, Billardon de Sauvigny, took as subject the known figure of Marie Fouré, a baker's wife, who at a critical moment in history (in 1536) acted with quick-witted courage to save her town from the English invader.⁴² Sauvigny's preface explains his purpose: to show that 'the greatest events have always been the effect of little causes multiplied'.

Once it was accepted that such elaborations of narrative complexity were possible in opera, the way lay open for the Romantics to emulate the colour and sweep of Scott's novels, for example, or to re-create his effects of insecurity, of not being in control, of being part of a larger picture (social and geographical): again *Rob Roy* provides a convenient example. In Chapter 16 Francis Osbaldistone is suddenly informed by Die Vernon of highly disturbing news:

'Have you heard from your father lately?' 'Not a word,' I replied . . . 'That is strange . . . Then you are not aware that he has gone to Holland to arrange some pressing affairs which required his own immediate presence?' 'I never heard a word of it until this moment.'

Here, as in contemporary opera, the audience may 'know' more than the characters do, just as in reading a history book we sympathise with past

dilemmas but also enjoy all the benefits of knowledge gained in hindsight. The protagonist of grand opera may well be tricked, but the reasons must fit into the broader scheme. In 1823 the great Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni published an essay about the need for drama to forget classical convention and become ‘the work of the historian’. Historians, he says, like any dramatist or novelist, should allow audiences ‘to understand, between the events shown, the connections of cause and effect, of anteriority and consequence’. Both types of writer ‘must, so to speak, sort out the events in order to attain a unity of perspective’.⁴³

However, it is one thing to identify such techniques but another to interpret their reception in practice: thus the debate raised by Jane Fulcher’s book has continued, and reviews of Gerhard’s book produced analogous questions.⁴⁴ In a recent short study Mary Ann Smart concludes that no straightforward correspondences may be drawn between ‘history lessons’ in grand opera, and the public’s reactions: the effects of stage presentation, and indeed of sheer chance occurrence, were yet more decisive.⁴⁵

Recent research

The location of grand opera within cultural perspectives is proceeding in diverse ways: at one extreme, work on race and gender, at the other, work on statistics and institutions. A simple example of the rewards of further investigation is that of role-types. Recently a start has been made on thinking about the cross-dressed phenomenon of the ‘page’, whose presence in grand opera was preceded by cross-dressed pages in other stage genres, when set in the Middle Ages. In 1790s opéra comique Mlle Carline had acted a prominent page-role in *Primerose* (mentioned earlier); in the ballet-pantomime *Alfred le Grand* (1822: see Fig. 10) Mlle Bigottini at the Opéra was cast as Olivier, ‘young page’ to the English king. Heather Hadlock duly notes that Meyerbeer’s *Les Huguenots* Act II contains a doubly voyeuristic example of this female-as-young-male convention, where Urbain’s function is ‘to conduct the adult man [Raoul de Nangis, but obviously the audience too] into a forbidden female realm’.⁴⁶ Admittedly there were purely vocal reasons for including the type, for which the excellent level of detail in Jean-Louis Tamvaco’s new study concerning performers (see note 57 below) provides some insight. (Page-roles in 1836–38 were particularly taken by Louise Flécheux and Dolorès Nau, who were rivals; less expectedly, Rosine Stoltz took the page-role of Ascanio in Berlioz’s *Benvenuto Cellini*.) Nevertheless an 1851 caricature in *L’Illustration* (see Fig. 1) sharply reduces the convention to upper-class ogling, as purporting nothing more than a kind of demeaning entertainment act.



Figure 1 'Handsome page! my handsome page! what a shapely costume!': one of a set of operatic caricatures drawn by Marcelin, featured in the weekly news-magazine, *L'Illustration*, on 22 November 1851.

Great nineteenth-century singers have continued to generate some re-evaluation of the hoary myths and hazy photographs by which we remember legendary names. Foundation studies in the 1980s investigated the interpretations of the singers themselves.⁴⁷ Mary Ann Smart's scrutiny of Rosine Stoltz formed a noted contribution to the debate on 'voice' in past operas.⁴⁸ Alan Armstrong looked at two tenors in their effect on evolving grand opera⁴⁹ while Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* inspired two very different investigations of its exotic, mythical and formal aspects.⁵⁰ Race, religion and orientalism were addressed by James Parakilas in 1993⁵¹ and Mark Everist in 1996, issues that also informed Cormac Newark's scrutiny of Halévy's *La Juive*.⁵² Sarah Hibberd has related grand opera to phenomena such as the notion of Scotland, the supernatural, staged mime and the burgeoning Faust legend.⁵³

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La grande partition et les parties d'orchestre du PROPHÈTE sont à la disposition des théâtres de France, et seront expédiées dans l'ordre des demandes.

Figure 2 Press advertisement in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* for numerous derivatives of a grand opera, offering a large variety of instrumental combinations, down to two cornets, and arranged in a variety of musical forms: fantasias, marches, waltzes, suites, more straightforward arrangements. See Chapter 16, p. 325 and 327, n. 15, for information about Richard Wagner's short-lived role in preparing this type of publication.

interest: cultural imperatives are, after all, not so hard to relate to power-centres, patronage and financial exigency. John Drysdale's new thesis is a fiscal and legal re-evaluation of the Paris Opéra during the later Restoration and under Dr Véron: while not the first archival analysis of the economics of grand opera (the work of Dominique Leroy and Yves Ozanam⁵⁴) Drysdale's work points a bright and revealing searchlight at the murky foundations of an obstinate institution unwilling to cope with reform, let alone

Table 1.2 *Separate editions of music and text deriving from Auber's La Muette de Portici.*

Full score editions, deriving from a single set of plates: 2

Type	France	Austria/Germany	UK/USA	Italy	Other
Piano scores (with or without vocal parts)	8	40	12	8	2
Librettos	36	76	28	24	23 (in 8 languages)
Collected excerpts	5 (1 Belgian)	5	3	1	1
Arrangements of the overture	11	65	50	4	8

Printed vocal arrangements with newly translated or composed texts (all countries): c. 215

Printed instrumental arrangements including fantasias, pots-pourri, dances, counting all combinations of players: c. 532.

revolution.⁵⁵ Through its analysis of Véron's methods, it suggests (paradoxically) how he did more to swell audiences and his own income than than he did to forward grand opera as a genre. He implemented ideas already tried unsuccessfully or merely suggested, and he was obliged to obey the spirit, if not always the letter, of his State-ordained schedule (or *cahier des charges*: see the next chapter). Equally revealing is Drysdale's meticulous unpeeling of Ciceri's *de facto* monopoly as chief scene-painter in the 1820s, and the relatively peripheral role of the new staging-committee set up in 1827. All this inevitably makes Véron's predecessor, Emile Lubbert, a more fascinating creature.

Because audience access remained on a privileged social level, grand opera was diffused to others by various manifestations of the mass market, plus excerpts given in concerts or salons: sheet-music or piano-vocal scores for the home, band-arrangements for the street, virtuoso arrangements for piano celebrities, simpler ones (or 'reminiscences') for the modest amateur (Fig. 2). In Herbert Schneider's extraordinary 1994 catalogue of the works of Daniel Auber,⁵⁶ we now have the *prima facie* evidence to plan very different future histories of grand opera, centring on these arrangements: their availability, price, poetic or functional nature, parodic content and ability to suggest an interpretation of the operas. To list the sheer numbers of surviving editions, especially those deriving from representative popular operas, is truly sobering: see Table 1.2.

The sheer impact of Auber's music, therefore, resonated far and wide beyond the many theatres where his operas were acted and sung, attaining perhaps the status of popular music in our sense of a universally known musical object specifically distributed and promoted by commercial interests.

At the very source of this network the Paris Opéra was and remains a place of cultural fascination, a 'machine' or 'great empire' to use some early metaphors. Most notable among recent publications is an edition of

a manuscript journal kept in secret by an administrator at the Opéra between 1836 and 1838, with some subsequent entries: *Les Cancans de l'Opéra: Chroniques de l'Académie Royale de Musique*.⁵⁷ For those who read French, a substantial resource has been released, a kind of spy-hole optic on the day-to-day moralities and scandals of the 'machine' but also a wealth of assorted information on musicians, finances, preparatory stages of new operas, with set-piece descriptions of life in the theatre: its studios, technical resources, rehearsals, music copying, chorus, cashiers and those – like the Halévys, and the journal's author, Louis Gentil – who actually resided within the building. The high quality and rarity of the illustrations in this publication deserve special notice, as does the level of biographical annotation.

Grand opera re-created

We have defined grand opera as a set of French works, a collection of adaptations of them, and as a repertory produced in response to them in various countries. The scope of this Companion permits essays on some but not all these countries. Those not covered include Germany (see note 1); New Zealand, for which Adrienne Simpson has published an account;⁵⁸ and Greece, for which research is starting to amass details of operatic performances and composers unmentioned in *Grove Opera*, like Iossif Liberalis (1820–99), Nikolaos Metaxas (1825–1907) and Pavlos Karrer (1829–96).⁵⁹ Just as the identity of grand opera in France was subtly modified in the second half of the century, including by what Steven Huebner calls 'heightened sensitivities to nationalism' (Chapter 15), so the importance of the genre to other countries will have been tied up with their own political aspirations. In France, says Huebner, 'the defenders of grand opera celebrated its national characteristics'. But the way in which each country understood its own situation *vis-à-vis* grand opera themes remains to be fully explored. In the Czech lands (see Chapter 18) the opera competition sponsored by Count Jan Harrach in 1861 made sure that entries 'should be based on the history of the lands of the Czech crown'. In Russia (see Chapter 17) 'French grand opera always enjoyed the special attentions of the censor', and even the title of *La Muette de Portici* was disguised in order, it was hoped, to quell any possibility of social unrest being inspired. Since grand opera frequently depicted localised groups of people in choruses, musicological tales presumably remain to be told about the way that various adapters constructed their notions of the exotic Other, faced with such pressures. All this simply bears upon the point made at the start of this Introduction: that opera from less familiar traditions must be taken into account in order to arrive at a more appropriate view of the music history of which it forms a part.