

9 Genre and poetics

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The question of genre might appear more attuned to the interests of the natural sciences than to opera studies: to the need to identify a specimen in terms of genus and species, and to name and list each item into ordered sets, with thoroughness and precision. And yet such laborious collecting and classifying is unavoidable in the realm of opera too, as attested by the copious and disparate typologies offered by musicological dictionaries.¹ So, what is opera in terms of genre? Since the concept of genre refers quite simply to kind or sort, then we have to ask first of all what sort of art (and craft) is opera? How does it define itself: as a kind of music? Or, perhaps, as a kind of theatre? Then, a second question emerges as soon as we try to account for a specific work from the past, or if we decide to compose or produce an opera: which sort of opera is this opera?

These basic questions already invoke a theory of opera (or what historically has been described as a ‘poetics’, after Aristotle’s own genre-defining text of that name on literary and dramatic theory). Genre, in other words, is a term that pertains to abstract conceptualizations of opera whose coordinates may not necessarily coincide with specific cases. Rather than retracing the exhaustive paths of musicological dictionaries in enumerating all the genres of opera, these pages will instead offer a transversal historiographical and theoretical account. Also, rather than adopting the literary discourse of genre theory in a search for how it can be relevant to opera, this chapter will pose the problem the other way around and ask what opera can do for genre theory. The first section returns to the questions above in order to introduce theoretical issues invoked by the term ‘genre’. This is followed by a historiographical outline of generic definitions in opera. The closing section returns to theoretical discourse on genre and maps out some possible intersections between concerns typical to opera studies and their relevance more broadly for genre theory, in particular in relation to performance.

The first question concerning the definition of opera as a genre already poses a problem. The temptation of course is to defer generalizations, and look at the considerable variety of possibilities in their singularities. After all, the entire corpus of operas ranges over four centuries, many countries and

languages, not to mention hugely diversified economic and sociocultural conditions. Indeed, the multiplication of generic categories evidenced in the dictionaries is a clear indication of this reality. But this specific context – this chapter in this volume – demands a starting definition and a commitment to a set of delimitations. Thus this chapter adopts the following broad definition: opera as a genre is the staging of an encounter between music and theatre, an encounter that demands that the borders between the two arts are continually redefined. In the course of opera's history these borders, norms and limits have taken the shape of clusters of conventions. Conventions can in turn be defined as the connection between the artefact of opera and the practical, specific conditions of its production and reception. Conventions regulate all aspects of opera and all procedures in the making of opera. They can be observed in the formal components of the music, such as recitatives and arias, in the number and ranking of singers, in the shape of theatre buildings, in the topics and titles of libretti, in the way a composer proceeds when setting a text to music, and then of course in the audience's behaviour, patterns of dissemination and so forth. Indeed, opera and, especially, the making of opera imply the labour and creativity of so many talents that a certain standardization of procedures and distribution of tasks arise out of sheer necessity. Conventions originate as answers to the contingent, practical needs of making opera recognizable, communicable, viable and enjoyable; as imaginary solutions to real problems, they are the interface between artistic endeavour and ideology, between aesthetics and politics. In responding to historically concrete necessities, such as the changing conditions of operatic production, availability of new technologies for the stage and so on, these conventional clusters are always flexible. Genre, then, is an abstraction or, better, a conceptualization of the conventions that respond to these historical contingencies (and poetics are usually attempts to codify and justify such conventions for the benefit of both producers and consumers). Going back to the initial question – what kind of artefact is opera? – the answer is ultimately an ever-changing solution to the perceived necessity for opera to maintain its own identity, to preserve its status as a recognizable, autonomous specimen.

The second question about the genres of opera is perhaps too easily dismissible as an enterprise worthier of the collector than the historian. Deciding what the genres of opera are seems to imply a self-indulgent cataloguing and naming bliss: like the work of Borges's geographer, whose obsession for detail makes the map as large as the land it aims to describe, the epistemological system would exceed and misunderstand what it tries to describe. The pedantry of such an operation is celebrated even in *Hamlet*, in the comic vignette of Polonius's catalogue of the forms of drama:

'tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene individable, or poem unlimited'.²

However, it is obvious that genre is inherent to opera, especially in view of its acknowledged conventionality. Thus, if we return to our working definition, whereby the artefact and event of opera are the result of negotiations between music and theatre, these negotiations necessarily give rise to multiple and flexible solutions, which often demand very different kinds of categorization. Among the sixty or more operatic genres listed in music dictionaries, ranging from 'azione teatrale' to 'Zeitoper', from 'grand opera' to 'semi-opera', some terms are more useful than others. Moreover, some labels seem to indicate formal properties (e.g. 'opéra comique', which describes both a form combining singing and speech and the institution which presented such works), others relate to subject matter (e.g. 'Zeitoper', which refers to operas produced in Weimar Germany whose plots dealt with contemporary sociopolitical issues), and some define medium (e.g. 'radio opera'). Terms such as 'Romantic opera' appear both as general historiographical category and – in the writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Carl Maria von Weber and Wagner – as a definition of German opera on supernatural subject matter. In general, the sheer number of generic labels gives a clear sense of the impossibility of thinking of opera, either historically or systematically, without the category of genre.

The enigma of exemplarity

It is already clear that both questions – opera as a genre and the genres of opera – contain the seed of a paradox that threatens to undo the whole matter from the inside. Firstly, any definition of genre invokes the tracing of a clear-cut model, of an ideally pristine and stable conceptualization that can act as a stencil, a paragon. As Derrida famously put it, 'genres are not to be mixed', thus also manifesting the tendency of genre discourse to become a law, a law that aims at preserving the purity of a genre, avoiding the dissolving of its borders, the diluting of what matters most for its specificity and recognizability.³ Opera's identity as a genre, however, relies from the start on mixing, as a contamination of music and theatre, music and word, singing and acting, showing and telling. Thus it defines itself historically and systematically as a hybrid, challenging at the outset the foundational law of genre discourse.

Secondly, in an essay that has become seminal for literary genre theory, Tzvetan Todorov argued that genres are inescapable on the basis of two sets

of considerations: 1. any transgression from generic convention requires (and reinforces) a generic norm that can be transgressed, and 2. a work that transgresses generic norms in turn becomes an example, another variation to the genre's conventions, itself establishing a norm.⁴ Opera *semiseria* ('half-serious opera'), for instance, appeared in the later eighteenth century possibly as a result of influences from the new sentimental literature as well as bourgeois drama. Opera *semiseria* borrowed as much from *opéra comique* as from Italian models, and eventually crystallized to become a new genre in its own right, with its own conventions. For, despite the differing attitudes of composers, librettists and producers towards conventions, it is impossible for artistic invention not to rely on standardized, tested solutions. Each single opera then refers somehow to a larger group of operas in several of its constituent parts, despite moments in the history of a genre when composition seems to be ruled by the centrifugal tendency to elude genre boundaries, the obvious example here being the Wagnerian music drama.

Yet, what most blatantly offsets the logic of exemplarity underlying the definition and enumeration of opera's genres is the way each is always the product of a combination of several practices, deeply invested in its own set of conventions: text and performance, but also writing and event, composition and interpretation. Whether we consider a unique text (the score) and its multiple performances, or a number of textual traces (different versions of the score and libretto, but also staging instructions, commentaries, reviews, etc.) and multiple performances, it is quite obvious that the score and libretto's generic label does not necessarily coincide with their performance and reception. Tragic, serious opera could easily become comedy or farce in performance. Even more so than literary genres, the hybridity of opera, and its dialogue with the demands of production and performance, contains the possibility of genre being disrupted.⁵ The operation at the core of genre definition is always fundamentally undermined precisely by the very terms that make opera a genre.

Reinventions and rebirths

The first two centuries of opera are generally narrated in terms of opera's 'genrification' – that is, of its crystallization into a specific, identifiable genre. The very beginning in particular is marked, according to some accounts, by the invention of a proper musical idiom: opera emerges as a distinct genre 'when a kind of music appropriate for dramatic dialogue was invented'.⁶ Around the turn of the seventeenth century a series of 'favole in musica'

[fables in music] were staged at the courts of Florence, Parma and Mantua, often occasioned by official weddings and celebrations. In these new musical dramas mythological characters such as Eurydice, Orpheus and their bucolic cohorts of musical shepherds and nymphs expressed their predicaments in sung declamation, at times giving way to elaborate and ornate singing.

There couldn't be a more appropriately elegant beginning: the subject matter, inherited from literary pastoral and tragicomedy, solved several issues at once. By thematizing music-making in the character of Orpheus this new kind of drama licensed not only characters singing at each other, but also the prerogative of celebrating the rhetorical, performative, affecting power of music. Paradigmatic in this regard is the Prologue from Monteverdi and Striggio's *Orfeo* (Mantua, 1607), where 'Musica' herself appears on stage to declare from the outset a poetics of opera as the combination of the power to stir emotions with the desire to narrate a story.⁷ Thus, self-reflectively, opera from the start *is* a mix and is *about* the mixing: an alchemic combination and an erudite experiment after the manner of the Ancients that accesses the world of the gods. The beginning of opera is indissolubly linked with the economic system and the cultural politics of late Renaissance courts, thus embracing the ritual celebration and validation of princely power, and consolidating a cultural capital whose legacy was forcefully traced back to classic antiquity. This propensity for myth is, for Mladen Dolar, central to opera in general: 'On the one hand [opera] presents a fabulous past transcending time, beyond time, a past raised to the temporality of the fantasy; on the other hand it invents new forms by means of which the myth can find a dramatic realization and a corresponding new social function and hence, in its very above-time nature, introduce a new temporality.'⁸

These first musical dramas of course did not emerge out of nowhere: precedents can be traced in the *intermedi*, choruses, dances and songs that were part of dramatic spectacles and of improvised comedies throughout the sixteenth century, as well as in musical experiments in dramatic recitation, or in dramatic expression in madrigals. Little music has survived, but evidence of this wealth of music on the stage is provided by the rich corpus of commentaries, treatises and theoretical pronouncements that circulated during this period. With few exceptions, these writings shared their concerns with the broader discussion about literary genres, which were defined and measured against sets of norms extrapolated from classic antiquity, and in particular Plato and Aristotle – the latter's *Poetics* remaining the touchstone for any dramatic theory for the next two centuries.⁹ Despite a declared longing for the lost perfection of classic tragedy, however, these first instances of opera consist of anything but a return to Greek tragedy in an antiquarian or archaeological sense. 'Tragicomedy', 'pastoral feast',

'fable in music' are but a few of the generic labels invented, foregrounding how hybridization affected several traits at the same time, ranging from subject matters, endings and dramatic structure to poetic forms and styles. The irretrievable, impossible past to which these early operas aspire is swiftly dealt with early on: in the Prologue to *Euridice* (1600) the poet Rinuccini has Tragedy herself declare from the outset that 'No longer of blood shed by innocent veins . . . unhappy spectacle to human sight, do I sing now on a gloomy and tear filled stage. . . Behold I change my gloomy buskins and dark robes to awake in the heart sweet emotions.'¹⁰ Appropriately for the celebration of a royal wedding, tragic myth is given a happy ending.

Seventeenth century: public and *métier*

If the beginning of opera is best described as a series of experiments spanning the course of several decades, then the decisive shift is identified with a precise event, in the way of a birth. For the carnival season of 1637, the S. Cassiano Theatre in Venice offered to the paying audience not the usual improvised comedy, but rather *L'Andromeda*, a poetic drama on a classical topic fully set to music. The oft-noted novelty was that the theatre opened to a paying public of much broader sociocultural composition. What is even more remarkable about *L'Andromeda* – the aspect that has elevated this event of 1637 to the status of the beginning of the genre – is how it started a new economic model, a feat celebrated in the preface to the libretto, printed a few months later in order to commemorate the premiere.¹¹ Thus the beginning of opera as a public spectacle is marked as the elaboration of a poetics (a drama on an elevated subject matter, fully set to music) in conjunction with an economic system. The latter remained more or less unchanged over the whole history of the genre, and can be described at least at this stage as a functional cohabitation of bourgeois market economy with aristocratic cultural policy.¹² This is also the time when Italian opera acquires a relatively stable formal outline, one that will survive for another couple of centuries.¹³

Venice was obviously a fertile terrain: in the decade after *L'Andromeda* three more theatres were devoted to the new genre, with about fifty new productions. And yet from this moment opera also became a transnational cultural phenomenon. The circuits of dissemination were diverse and wide: from royal and aristocratic circles, to itinerant professional companies, from Jesuit colleges to academies. Opera spread throughout Europe both as an 'Italian' product and also as a 'native' musical theatre. Thus in France enthusiasm for the new form along with resistance to cultural imports made necessary the creation of a legitimately 'French' opera. The first 'comédie française en musique' performed in France, *La Pastorale*

d'Issy (1659) represents, in the declaration of the librettist Perrin, a deliberate effort at providing the model for a future French opera. Despite the librettist's lengthy critique of Italian opera, the influence of earlier Italian pastorals is unmistakable.¹⁴ Just a decade later Louis XIV charged Perrin with the direction of the Académie d'Opéra, a role that was soon taken over by the composer Jean-Baptist Lully, who fully institutionalized opera in France as both public and courtly entertainment, and fixed the conventions of an exclusively French genre, the *tragédie lyrique*, sanctioned by the centralizing cultural policies of French absolutism.

The history of opera in England on the other hand includes from the outset both the staging of Italian and French imports and attempts at creating native hybrid genres. The cosmopolitan and mercantile society of London, where the monarchy held less cultural sway than in France, offered a fecund milieu for the coexistence of multiple influences and for the intersection of a variety of staged entertainments, including a genre known as 'semi-opera'. A deftly English invention, in semi-operas the musical setting affects only subplots involving characters of lower standing, whereas the core plot is realized as spoken drama carrying the legacy of Shakespearean theatre, pretty much unaffected by the extravagancies of singing. Semi-operas survive in opera historiography as the one indigenous, if short-lived, contribution of the English stage, in particular thanks to the success of Purcell's *Fairy Queen* and *King Arthur*.¹⁵

Eighteenth century: rules and reforms

By the end of the seventeenth century, the models and conventions of opera that had been established so quickly appear to reach the exhaustion of their communicative power. In Italy, for example, the emergence of an extensive critical literature evidences the fundamental instability of the genre. Much operatic practice was shaped by its adherence to a market economy, and hence to a constant search for variety and novelty, whilst upholders of opera as a genre sought to counter this with an aesthetic validation often measured against classical ideals. The poet and critic Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, a leading figure in the reformist Arcadian movement of late seventeenth-century Italy, declared that opera had obliterated the development of a true Italian tragedy based on the Aristotelian distinction between tragedy and comedy: 'In order to charm with novelty the jaded taste of the audiences, sickened equally by the baseness of comedies and the gravity of tragedies, the creator of operas put the two together, monstrously combining kings, heroes, and other illustrious characters with jesters, servants, and men of the lowest rank. This confusion of characters was the reason for the complete breakdown of the rules of poetry . . . which lost its purity, being required to serve the music.'¹⁶ More generally, academicians and literati

lamented the excessive intricacies of plots and idiotic multiplication of arias, repeatedly spoke of corruption and decline, and urged reform of the genre.¹⁷ Corruption was instantiated at first in this mixing of comedy and tragedy, and later in the way singing obliterated the meaning of the words in the singers' exhibitionist demands over the integrity of the drama and of the music. Opera survived because of its capacity continuously to adapt its hybridization of theatre and music; but this capacity is contained by a parallel normative discourse that defines its purpose in terms of purity and integrity.

Viable reconfigurations of opera emerged during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, in particular with the work of the poet and librettist Pietro Metastasio. Seeing his own work as part of the movement to reform opera according to classical principles, Metastasio contributed to the shaping of so-called *opera seria* ('serious opera'), a genre defined by its tragic register (although not tragic outcomes) and historical subjects. His twenty-seven libretti came to constitute a reservoir for hundreds of *opere serie* produced all over Europe during the course of more than a century.¹⁸ In his cogent review of the history of criticism and theory of Italian opera, Di Benedetto has observed that as soon as Metastasian *opera seria* became an accepted model it also generated criticism from literati and academicians. The canonization of the model, favoured by the position of Metastasio himself as Caesarian poet at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor in Vienna, coincided with charges of obsolescence. The main objections concerned the very features that made these libretti so successful: the historical subject matter is often abstruse; the split between recitative and aria ends up undermining any sense of continuity; the two-stanza aria text, commonly set in music as a 'da capo', leads to an excess of vocal ornamentation, cadenzas, word repetition, and an overall musical extravagance deemed detrimental to the drama.¹⁹

The extraordinary dissemination throughout Europe of *opera seria* was accompanied by the progressive polarization of serious and comic genres, and not only in Italian opera. It might be claimed that at this time operatic genres came to be defined mainly identification of content, form and sociocultural milieu. A typical *opera seria* and *opera buffa* (but also a *tragédie lyrique* and an *opéra comique*) by mid-century appear as very different artefacts, fully institutionalized within their own specialized theatres, companies, professional practices, production systems and audiences.²⁰ *Opera seria* (as well as the French *tragédie lyrique*) is the province of kings, heroes and gods, sung by virtuoso star singers and castratos mostly at court theatres. Comic opera instead develops as a predominantly bourgeois entertainment for a paying audience: it inherits the legacy of improvised spoken comedy both in the social realism of subject matter and in the less stylized,

acting-based performance and singing, its libretti structured on a more flexible usage of recitative and set pieces.²¹ What the two had in common, at least until the end of the century, are the composers, who would obviously treasure a commission in any genre. During the second half of the century critiques of Metastasian opera were accompanied by an increase in the production of comic opera. Comic genres – *opera buffa*, but also vernacular varieties such as *burlletta* or ballad opera in Britain, *Singspiel* in German-speaking lands, and *opéra comique* in France – flourished in part because of the topical relevance of their language and stories, but also because of their openness to hybridization. All these comic genres absorbed and re-utilized thematic, formal and performance trends taken from a range of models and sources – spoken theatre, art music and popular song, popular and court dance and, in the rich corpus of opera-within-opera, even academic criticism.²²

The performance of an *opera buffa*, Pergolesi's *La serva padrona* (1733) by an Italian troupe in Paris in 1752, is usually considered to be the occasion starting one of the most boisterous critical debates of the eighteenth century, involving some of the doyens of the French Enlightenment such as Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The so-called *Querelle des Bouffons* was fought over Italian and French opera. The debate can be summed up as different perceptions of the weight of music versus that of theatre – both an aesthetic and an institutional weight. Italian opera was accused of favouring the pleasurable excesses of music at the expense of the clarity and communicability of drama and of the verisimilitude of acting and staging. The same institutional organization of opera was therefore accused of being subservient to the pleasing of the audience, to the star power of the singers, and to the selling of subscriptions. The *da capo* aria – stylistic and formal pillar of the repertoire – was in fact deemed the culprit in its privileging of vocal virtuosity over the credible unfolding of the drama. The other side of the diatribe predictably accused French opera and its regard for classic tragedy as dull and lifeless. Ultimately what was lamented as dreary lack of musical invention and uninteresting singing was the by-product of the attempt at salvaging 'drama' in its institutionalized manifestation, which meant classic tragedy. But promoters of Italian *opera buffa* such as Rousseau and Diderot praised its naturalness and directness, contrasting its simple tunefulness to the lifeless declamatory style of the singing in French opera.²³ The Encyclopédistes' preference for the natural style found an advocate in the Italian writer and critic Ranieri de' Calzabigi, who in Vienna set out to reform the conventions of *opera seria* in collaboration with the court composer Gluck. The two operas that testify overtly to this programme were *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762) and *Alceste* (1767), both accompanied by a set of declarations that critique, in more or less veiled terms, the crucial

elements of Metastasian dramaturgy. These elements are identified with the high-flung rhetoric of Metastasio's similes, and the stylization of *da capo* forms and of chains of exit arias.²⁴ The preface to *Alceste* has come to represent one of the rare manifestos of operatic poetics and, as such, a capstone in opera historiography, often quoted as a precedent to Wagner's theoretical writings a century later. Read another way, however, this polemical stance was retracing the well-trodden path of criticism levelled against opera for over a century. After the usual list of abuses enacted by singers and by the music, it advocates the primacy of dramatic intent and Aristotelian verisimilitude, and all in the name of 'good sense', 'reason' and 'beautiful simplicity'.²⁵ The declared goal, once again, is to restore some purity of dramatic purpose. Various historians have suggested that Gluck's and Calzabigi's reform, especially in light of the dramaturgical novelty of their two operas, is consistent with a specifically Viennese, 1760s hybridization of Metastasian models. Both Gluck and Calzabigi at the time were involved in projects of adaptation of French *tragédie lyrique*, Italian opera, and dramatic ballets choreographed by Gasparo Angiolini, and worked with singers such as the castrato Guadagni, renowned for his uncommon attention to acting.²⁶ Moreover, despite the enthusiasm that a word such as reform might inspire, the ideological thrust of this operatic reform is hardly progressive in sociopolitical terms, and not only because it was financed and backed by the theatre director of the Austrian Empire. Rather, it might be argued that, shaped into a less stylized and more approachable theatrical register, opera more efficiently consolidates its ritualized celebration and validation of aristocratic order – all this, once again, in the name of reason and of the beautiful simplicity of the classics.²⁷

Nineteenth century: invention and convention

The history of opera as genre and of the genres of opera during the nineteenth century is often described as a progressive and unstoppable detachment of operatic forms from pre-existing generic conventions. Both the repertory of operas composed at this time and the apparatus of critical writings, declarations and poetics, manifest an increasing tension between the specificity of the artefact and its generic label.

Opera studies has consistently supported this narrative. For instance, after an initial phase marked by a certain embarrassment at the utter conventionality of early nineteenth-century Italian opera, Verdian scholarship (especially in its Anglo-American configuration) has been mostly preoccupied with demonstrating the composer's unique ability to suggest, but in the end defy, expand or refute, generic conventions.²⁸ The culmination of this process, and the tacit premise of a historiography of originality and genius, is represented by Wagner's musical and critical output, where

music drama is emancipated both from existing genres and from having to be a genre itself. In addition to employing the term *Musikdrama* to oppose to opera in the theoretical treatise *Oper und Drama*, Wagner incessantly sought for appropriate terms for each of his works: ‘romantische Oper’ for *Der fliegende Holländer* and *Lohengrin*; ‘Handlung’ for *Tristan und Isolde*, ‘Bühnenfestpiel’ (‘stage festival play’) for the *Ring*, and ‘Bühnenweihfestspiel’ (‘stage-consecrating festival play’ or ‘sacred festival drama’) for *Parsifal*.²⁹ Composers and librettists following Wagner would adopt a similarly eclectic range of categorizations to avoid pre-constituted generic moulds: for example, Massenet’s operas are variously identified as *saynète* (theatrical interlude), *opéra romanesque*, *épisode lyrique*, *miracle*, *haute farce musicale*, *comédie chantée* and *opéra féerie*.

Some find explanations for this widespread historiographical trend in the continued influence of Romanticism: its aesthetics of subjective expression, and its insistence on originality and uniqueness as the defining values of artistic endeavour.³⁰ ‘Every poem is its own genre’, the early Romantic critic Friedrich Schlegel insisted.³¹ However, one might also privilege a different story of operatic genre in the nineteenth century: one that looks at the changing economic structures of Europe and North America where opera, as an ‘authored’ commodity, is increasingly included in bourgeois public rituals of ‘conspicuous consumption’. Despite or because of the increasing complexity and professional specialization of the labour required by operatic productions, the composer is now accorded status as the sole maker of the work; the guarantor of its artistic authenticity. Originality thus ensures both the work’s status as art, autonomous from the demands of the market, and, at the same time, its exchange value. By the second half of the century, theatres around Europe and the Americas also regularly offered old works, thus initiating the practice of repertoires including new compositions next to old favourites: as operas from the past slowly but steadily made their way back onto the stage they operated a shift in the meaning of genre. Repertoire does not only shape singing styles and pedagogy, casting and in general the professional formation of composers and librettists. Also, most importantly, it comes to constitute a reservoir for the writing of national art histories and a receptacle of staged geopolitical traits, ritually enacted and reiterated in opera theatres.³²

A closer look at the repertoire itself might reveal how the pervasive and irreversible dissolution of clear generic borders, demarcations and definitions runs parallel to different conceptions of the cultural and syntactical significance of generic conventions. James Hepokoski has juxtaposed the century-long process of dissolution of genres in nineteenth-century Italian opera to the persistence of conventional small-scale ‘fixed forms’, such as *cabaletta*, *romanza*, *racconto*, mad scene, *couplet*, prayer and so forth.³³

Verdi, the case in point, famously invoked Shakespeare as inspiration for a ‘fusion of genres’; his search for dramatic variety brought him to advocate the accumulation and juxtaposition of dramatic effects regardless of their generic connotation.³⁴ Meanwhile, however, he continued for most of his long career to rely on conventional ‘fixed forms’, which according to Hepokoski carry dramatic significance precisely because of their deliberate adoption. Expanding a little on Hepokoski’s point, it might be argued that ‘fixed forms’ inherit the symbolic baggage of genre: rather than defining and ‘labelling’ a whole opera, now clusters of musico-dramatic conventions regulate smaller units or even scenes, assuming a function similar to that of genre. Prayers, mad scenes, narratives, oaths and curses, to name just a few, traverse the nineteenth-century repertory, from Italy and France to Germany and Russia, irrespective of generic labels, but not merely as musical forms. Their conventionality embraces acting, singing and staging, as well as text and music, and renders them recognizable, recyclable and citable.

In Germany Wagner’s theoretical disavowal of the very idea of genre was accompanied by the elaboration of what he constructed as a novel and revolutionary poetics. The programme of a mythic reunification of the art of the future with the arts of the ancients, possible only through the reuniting of all the aspects of the music drama under the creative vision of the composer, is elaborated around the 1850s, soon after the composition of works rooted in the ways of German Romantic opera (*Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*). Wagner’s writings shape the story of his creative output into an evolution:

With *Rienzi* I still only intended to write an ‘opera’ . . . Then of necessity I was obliged . . . to progress gradually to the total abolishment of the operatic form I had inherited. The unconscious knowledge of those traditional forms so influenced me still in my *Fliegende Holländer* that an attentive observer will recognize how it affected my arrangement of the scenes; only gradually, with *Tannhäuser*, then more decisively with *Lohengrin*, in other words with my growing awareness of the nature of my material and its necessary means of representation, did I free myself wholly from that formal influence.³⁵

Thus the early works’ necessary dependence upon inherited conventions and recognizable idioms (‘an arbitrary conglomeration of single, small song forms’) would be gradually effaced in the name of present and future freedom of expression and radical autonomy. The lasting contribution of Wagner’s programme to the aesthetic and history of opera will be this crude staging of an opposition of truthful expressive means, naturally springing out from the very poetic material, against the artificiality of pre-existing musical forms, forcefully and haphazardly overlaid onto the ‘drama’. Such an ideal might still be seen at work in the writings of Hugo von Hofmannsthal

in the twentieth century. Working on the libretto for *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, his fourth collaboration with Richard Strauss, he wrote to the composer drawing his attention to the generic uniqueness of each of the operas of Mozart and Wagner. Disparaging Meyerbeer and Puccini for producing 'a series of works in the same genre', he urged Strauss not to repeat himself in their new collaboration.³⁶

The most powerful validation of the Wagnerian programme – of its philological and philosophical claims but also, unwittingly, of the role of the composer as prophet of the art of the future – was Nietzsche's 1872 *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*.³⁷ Nietzsche's enthusiasm soon turned into feverish disapproval, but *The Birth of Tragedy* has remained an influential text, especially for its central historiographical argument: the connections between music drama and Greek tragedy. Similarly to the 'inventors' of opera in Renaissance Italian courts, Nietzsche designates Greek tragedy as the aesthetic model for modern art,³⁸ achieved through the conjunction of theatre and music, of the power of representation (the Apollonian) and the absorbing, all-encompassing force of expression (the Dionysian). Still under the spell of *Tristan und Isolde*, he surrenders his far-reaching vision for the future of music drama to Wagner. The spell will be broken just a few years later, possibly in fact by the new Festival theatre in Bayreuth: by the very machinery of make-believe that was put in place, like an embarrassing materialization of bad faith. His provocative glorification of Bizet's *Carmen* is particularly revelatory: not so much as an alternative ideal of music drama, but rather as the occasion to include considerations of generic conventions in his aesthetic programme. An antidote to Wagnerian mystifications, this 1875 *opéra comique* becomes evidence of his full absolution of operatic conventions as necessary to a modern, anti-metaphysical art: 'Every mature art possesses a host of conventions as a basis: in so far as it is a language, Convention is a condition of great art, *not* an obstacle to it . . . Every elevation of life likewise elevates the power of communication, as also understanding of man.'³⁹

Despite his critique of generic normalization, Hofmannsthal knowingly drew on eighteenth-century opera in his collaborations with Strauss on *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911) and *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1912/1916). The latter, for instance, juxtaposes *opera seria* and *commedia dell'arte* in a witty homage to the early eighteenth-century practice of inserting comic interludes derived from *commedia dell'arte* between the acts of an *opera seria*. Hofmannsthal's turn to historical genres can be considered an anticipation of broader tendencies in early twentieth-century opera, particularly associated with neoclassicism. Paradoxically, this restoration of historical genres is often associated with modernism's tendency towards artistic self-referentiality.

Twentieth and twenty-first centuries: the long ending

In reviving historical genres the works in question were no longer associated with living conventions of musical or dramatic language or performance. If a general trend can be detected at all for the generic history of opera composed in the last one hundred years, it might be described as the further dissolution of the conventions that had regulated the presentation of opera so far, and of the defining traits of opera itself as a genre. Opera's identity is primarily consigned to the intentions of the composer and librettist who chose to assign the generic label of opera to their works. But the weakening of stylistic, formal and idiomatic conventions does not entail a corresponding weakening of the institutional conventions related to the production system. Opera, author-based and often experimental, is founded more and more on a system of production and dissemination organized according to industrial models.⁴⁰ Moreover, new technologies such as sound recording and playback, film, live broadcasting and digital technologies have impacted the world of opera as soon as they have become available. With each attempt at fixing the transient in opera they modify conventions of dissemination, consumption, production and composition.⁴¹

The sense of opera's progressive dissolution and even death as a genre is what informs most historiographical accounts of this past century. William Ashbrook and Harry Powers started and ended their influential study of *Turandot* with the claim that Puccini's last and unfinished work coincides with the end of (Italian) opera: '*Turandot* occupies a special place in the Italian repertory, for it is indeed the end of the Great Tradition; it is aesthetically and culture-historically inconceivable that genuinely new works still mining that vein can be created.'⁴² If this 'Great Tradition', restricted as it is to the lineage Rossini–Bellini–Donizetti–Verdi–Puccini, might look exceedingly narrow as a historiographical category, one need only look at Adorno's oft-quoted 1955 essay on 'Bourgeois Opera', in which he states that 'opera in and of itself has, without considering its reception, come to seem peripheral and indifferent.'⁴³ More recent accounts have inherited these tropes of end and crisis as a way to account for opera's broader relation in the twentieth century with its own past and past-ness. Heather Wiebe takes this 'end' as a starting point for a meditation on obsolescence and museum collecting in the context of Stravinski's and Auden's *The Rake's Progress* (1951).⁴⁴

Paul Griffith's account for the *Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* demarcates this crisis in more practical terms: the history of twentieth-century opera is therefore 'only very partially a history of twentieth-century opera, i.e., of the genre's life during the century.'⁴⁵ According to Griffith, the end of the 'great tradition' is followed by sparse modernist experiments that

idiosyncratically and self-reflexively explore the dramatic yield of musical syntax, technique, language and conventions of the past (Debussy, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Berg). If Griffith writes about post-war experiments in opera mostly as ‘opera’ in quotation marks – an ironic iteration of the old genre, a way to revive it ‘in a kind of life after death’⁴⁶ – many European post-war avant-garde composers tended to shun the category of opera altogether as historically compromised, preferring labels such as music theatre, ‘scenic action’ (Nono), ‘musical action’ (Berio), ‘anti-opera’ (Kagel) or even ‘anti-anti-opera’ (Ligeti), although the aesthetic experiments of these composers remained constrained by the institutional apparatus of opera. A somewhat innocent reappropriation of the term ‘opera’ will be possible on the other side of the pond and a bit later, such as in Philip Glass and Robert Wilson’s 1976 *Einstein on the Beach*, or Robert Ashley’s 1970s ‘television operas’.

With its own end in sight, however, opera as a genre has maintained, even after World War II, a strong hold on cultural public life, firstly by way of new productions of titles from the repertoire, but also with a continuous if scant stream of new operas. More recent works seem to test the very possibility of belonging to the genre of opera, to the point that the label often refers just to its institutional identity – in other words, to a commission from a prestigious opera house. So for instance Mark-Anthony Turnage’s *Anna Nicole* for Covent Garden (2011) subverts any obvious expectation of dramatic content and, as an experiment in hybridization of musical theatre with reality TV, incorporates tabloid news and celebrity gossip. Tod Machover’s *Death and the Powers* (2011), also labelled as opera, challenges one of the core tenets of operatic performance of the previous four hundred years by replacing the singers’ bodies on stage with robots.⁴⁷ Even more radically, Fausto Romitelli and Paolo Pachini’s ‘video-opera’ *An Index of Metals* (2003) does away with the stage altogether and places the voice in the midst of an intensely dramatic web of sonorities, in dialogue with abstract video images.⁴⁸

More interesting perhaps nowadays is the question of performance and medium, which interacts with production and consumption in ways similar to genre conventions in, say, the eighteenth century. Thus Emanuele Senici has suggested that for modern-day audiences different styles of theatrical production have assumed the identificatory function once accorded to genres:

The traditional-decorative genre (Zeffirelli at the Met), the ‘back-to-the-ancient’ or better to ‘the original’ (the recovery of old set designs such as Sanquirico’s or the little theatre in Drottningholm), the actualizing-modernist genre (especially in Germany: Berghaus, Kupfer, Friedrich, but also Chéreau at Bayreuth), the abstract genre (from Wieland

Wagner to Bob Wilson), the gestural-postmodern (Morris, Sellars, Carsen) and so forth.⁴⁹

The emphasis on directorial vision in contemporary productions is also matched by novel patterns of distribution and consumption: *Regietheater* is no longer a national-cultural event, but is distributed worldwide by DVD recordings, live broadcasting, streaming, YouTube clips. New modes of spectating (the laptop screen in an airport lounge) have expanded but not supplanted old ones (a gallery seat in a theatre). Similarly, this expansion and diversification do not supplant or subvert the inherent conventionality of opera. The issue of genre, then, seems to have irrevocably shifted from the work to the patterns and conventions of production, distribution and consumption. It is now a matter of understanding which new sets of imaginary solutions to real questions are posed as interfaces between art and ideology, aesthetics and politics.

Opera – genre – theory

At just over four hundred years old, opera is a relatively young and short-lived genre, especially if compared to, say, the illustrious millennial histories of tragedy and comedy. Predictably, then, declarations of opera's poetic intent, but also delimitations of its confines and its medial specificity as a genre, have intersected with larger arguments about genre and poetics in the fields of literature, theatre, music, the visual arts and more recently film and TV.

Literary studies, and now especially film and television studies, continue to offer new elaborations and theorizations of the significance of genre. Opera historiography instead has so far manifested a cautious attitude towards overarching accounts of genre. The overall tendency is to study particular cases, texts, works, places or times. That is to say, the field has quite uniformly privileged the historical contingencies of opera and its genres, the fluidity and ephemerality of its texts and performances, the exceptional rather than the normative, shying away from those macro-historical, long-term comparative surveys demanded by the study of genres.⁵⁰ On the other hand, especially in investigations of operas from the past, genre has operated as a silent, barely acknowledged premise against which a work's value is measured. It might even be claimed that the historiography of opera has unswervingly relied upon genre definition as a foundational category. Genre definition ostensibly underlies a variety of considerations, ranging from musical-analytical to dramaturgical, from broader accounts of spectacle and ideology, to production systems and institutions, patterns

of dissemination, printing and so forth. However, it would appear that the most complex and nuanced historical accounts seldom manifest the need to go back to the genre categories from which they stemmed, in order to modify, confirm or refine them in the newly elaborated historical terms. Thus genre is perilously on the verge of becoming the abstract receptacle of social, economic and aesthetic conventions, with the function either of an originating principle, or of the foil against which the creativity of a composer is celebrated. For example, Mozart operas traditionally appeared both to depend upon and to outclass, musically and dramaturgically, ideologically and aesthetically, the genres to which they belong. In turn, these genres – usually *Singspiel*, serious and comic opera – are circularly defined in terms of those common and repeatable traits that the composer managed both to evoke and overcome.⁵¹ Furthermore, research focused on generic convention often suffers from scarcity of source material: to return to the previous example, it is extremely difficult to gather a general sense of the phenomenon of mid-eighteenth-century comic opera in Europe – the patterns of its circulation and dissemination, and the reasons and ways the genre branched into several micro-variants and forms of entertainment. All we are left with are pale traces of what it might have been: sources such as manuscript scores (where they even survive) and printed libretti, when read in conjunction with commentaries and reviews, appear to stand in distant relation to their performances.

Emanuele Senici has exposed the tendency of opera studies to dwell on a work's peculiarity, to insist on its rupture with norms and conventions, as the inheritance of a nineteenth-century philosophy of art.⁵² But if we include considerations of the performative aspect of opera, then we might see this search for novelty also in terms of broader medial and communicative issues, not to mention economic ones. In this sense, novelty is also dictated by the imperative to counter the progressive loss of signification brought about by over-familiarity, and thus to avoid so-called automatization, or, in other words, the audience's boredom with an obsolete commodity. The inclusion of singers' improvisation and ornamentation may be explained as the means whereby opera has addressed the danger of such automatization, by containing the ever new. Moreover, the little changes introduced into the very texture of a genre performance after performance, night after night, are often undetectable from the distant point of view of the historian, centuries later. What we see now are only faded traces of bigger shifts and changes, of what we like to call departure from conventions.

Despite all these difficulties, some genres of opera have received dedicated in-depth studies. For example, Stefano Castelvechi and Emanuele Senici have written extensively about the genre of sentimental opera, which flourished in Italy (and France) between the end of the eighteenth and the

early nineteenth century. Their scholarship not only testifies to the distinctive identity of the sentimental genre in works such as Paisiello's *Nina*, rather than its being an occasional hybrid of serious and comic, but also traces its complex genealogy throughout eighteenth-century English, French and Italian bourgeois literature and drama and, most cogently, reads it in its historic context for its sociocultural significance.⁵³ Another example is the multi-authored volume dedicated to eighteenth-century *opéra comique*, a genre that is as extensive and influential to the history of opera as it is indefinable – ‘un genre qui ne l'est pas’ (a genre that is not) as a contemporary critic disparagingly remarked.⁵⁴ The editor and contributor Philippe Vendix declares in the opening pages that the goal is to make sense of the world of eighteenth-century *opéra comique* at large rather than delving into particular cases. This generalizing effort, the attempt to create a panoramic view, is cleverly compensated by the multiplicity of approaches offered by different scholars, and by the organization of the chapters both historically and systematically: in the end *opéra comique*, rather than being chiselled with a hatchet, is subtly and vividly evoked through a complex web of narratives and examples.

So how can opera studies contribute to the theoretical debate on genre? As mentioned at the outset, opera's constitutive hybridity and its ephemerality seem to offset any attempt at finding stable generalizations. But, as these next closing paragraphs try to outline, opera's contribution might lie elsewhere, and in particular in the way it brings to the fore, in its very mixture of music and theatre, a peculiar sort of historicity.

The shelf life of genre: from artefact to event

The emergence of opera in late sixteenth-century Italian courts appears to coincide, perhaps most fortuitously, with music printing. Since its inception opera is therefore also a textual practice; although scores and parts were most commonly simply handwritten well into the nineteenth century, libretti have existed and have been disseminated in print almost continuously during the whole genre's history. How opera's formation and development were related to print culture and economy is seldom discussed, but the point here is that the definition of opera as a genre has relied on specific textual practices, in part supplemented by printing (editions, specialized publishers, etc.). The same operation of composing an opera has come to coincide with its writing – that is, with the compilation of text and score. Conversely, all that has been traditionally reserved to oral practice and transmission (gestures, vocal delivery, staging) is situated at the margin of opera as a genre, considered somewhat complementary but not constituent of the work.⁵⁵

This writing, however, like that of any musical score, is of a peculiar kind, insofar as it is always at the service of its performance, or better performances. Thus, whichever generic markers are inscribed in the operatic texts, they are also continuously reinterpreted in performance. For example, what might be broadly defined as, say, a comic opera could a few years later become a quintessential Romantic tragedy, as in the case of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, which followed a *sui generis* trajectory from farce to tragedy.⁵⁶ Less notorious but possibly more widespread are cases such as Auber's *Le Cheval de bronze*, which, premiered at the Opéra-Comique in 1835, was defined from the outset in terms of multiple generic traits (*opéra comique* but also *opéra bouffe*, and *opéra féerie*) and then, years later, transformed into an *opéra-ballet*.⁵⁷ Moreover, the accidental character of performance at times adds unanticipated generic contaminations, or even, in the way of the Marx Brothers, subversive deviations from the expectations delineated by an opera's genre. Tosca's final jump off the ramparts of Sant'Angelo fortress is the prepared and expected tragic ending, one of the most obvious generic traits of Puccini's operas. And yet, the famous instance when stagehands miscalculated the elasticity of the landing surface for the soprano means that tragedy can suddenly end in slapstick comedy.

Genre theory, elaborated initially in the context of literary studies, is concerned with genres primarily as practices of textualization. Despite the widespread acknowledgement that genre always entails a process (as Todorov put it, 'it is a system in constant transformation'), the foundational theories of genre are bound to text.⁵⁸ Writing is thus seen as what provides material evidence of the process of genre, and a text is the container of all the written traces of this continual transformation. As a mix of orality and writing, opera brings to the fore how textuality is the very boundary and limitation of genre theory. Itself another praxis of writing, genre theory in turn cannot conceive of anything outside itself. But performance is not reducible to a text. It might be said, therefore, that the event-ness and the reiteration of performance constitute the only space outside the circular workings of genre and genre theory: a space that guarantees the possibility of creative and transgressive alterations of generic norms. Opera studies could contribute to genre theory by foregrounding opera's fundamental difference from itself as a genre: that is, by making evident the internal instabilities of each artefact, in which textuality is but one component and is often dependent on other more powerful forces, such as medium and production system. In turn, genre theory might facilitate a reopening of the discussion on matters of operatic conventions: of how imaginary solutions shape opera's production and consumption, in its contingent, historical manifestations.

Notes

- 1 The entry for opera in *Grove Music Online*, for example, without any ambition of thoroughness, refers to more than sixty generic labels: *azione teatrale*, ballad opera, *ballet de cour*, *ballet-héroïque*, burlesque, burletta, chamber opera, *comédie-ballet*, divertissement, *drame lyrique*, *dramma giocoso*, *dramma per musica*, *entrée*, extravaganza, *farsa*, *favola in musica*, *festa teatrale*, film musical, *grand opéra*, *intermède*, *intermedio*, intermezzo, *Lehrstück*, *Liederspiel*, madrigal comedy, *Märchenoper*, masque, medieval drama, melodrama, *melodramma*, monodrama, musical, music drama, music theatre, number opera, *opéra-ballet*, *opéra bouffon*, *opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, *opéra-féerie*, *opera semiseria*, *opera seria*, operetta, pantomime, *pasticcio*, pastoral, *pastorale-héroïque*, posse, puppet opera, puppet theatre, *rappresentazione sacra*, rescue opera, *sainete*, *Schuldrama*, *Schuloper*, semi-opera, *sepulcro*, serenata, *Singspiel*, *Spieloper*, *tonadilla*, tourney, *tragédie en musique*, vaudeville, *zarzuela*, *Zauberoper* and *Zeitoper*. Howard Mayer Brown et al., 'Opera (i)', in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40726. Even more comprehensive if at times overzealous is the list in Wikipedia, which includes about 116 entries: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_opera_genres.
- 2 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene 2.
- 3 Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', trans. Avital Ronell, *Critical Inquiry*, 7/1, *On Narrative* (Autumn 1980), pp. 55–81.
- 4 Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. C. Porter (Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 13–26.
- 5 On the dilemma of genre in literary theory see in particular the debate issued since the 1970s around the journal *Poétique*, to which contributed especially Gérard Genette, Tzvetan Todorov and also Jacques Derrida. Excerpts of some of these contributions are collected in David Duff (ed.), *Modern Genre Theory* (Harlow and New York: Longman, 2000).
- 6 Brown et al., 'Opera (i)'. See also Tim Carter, *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), especially Chapter 2, 'Music on the Late Renaissance Stage'. Peri's preface to *Euridice* is quoted in translation in Tim Carter, *The Seventeenth Century*, in Roger Parker (ed.) *Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 11.
- 7 The libretto, with English translation, is included in the score *L'Orfeo: favola in musica SV 318 / Claudio Monteverdi*, ed. Claudio Gallico (New York and London: Eulenburg, 2004).
- 8 Mladen Dolar and Slavoj Žižek, *Opera's Second Death* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002) p. 6.
- 9 Amongst the most influential early essays are Leone de' Sommi, *Quattro dialoghi in materia di rappresentazioni sceniche* (MS, 1556); Battista Guarini, *Il Verrato* (1588); Angelo Ingegneri, *Della poesia rappresentativa e del modo di rappresentare le favole sceniche* (MS, 1598); Giovan Battista Doni, *Trattato della musica scenica* (1630). On Renaissance genre theory see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (University of Chicago Press, 1961). For more exhaustive bibliographies see especially Renato Di Benedetto, 'Poetics and Polemics', in Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (eds.), *The History of Italian Opera*, Part II, Vol. VI: *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth*, trans. Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 1–71.
- 10 Iacopo Peri, *Euridice: An Opera in One Act and Five Scenes*. Libretto by Ottavio Rinuccini, ed. Howard M. Brown (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 1981), p. xvi.
- 11 'L'Andromeda Del Signor Benedetto Ferrari. Rappresentata in Musica in Venetia l'Anno 1637. Dedicata all'Illustrissimo Sig. Marco Antonio Pisani' (Venice, 1637). For a contextualized account see in particular Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991).
- 12 Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 182.
- 13 A more detailed account of issues of dramaturgy and versification is provided in Laurel Zeiss's chapter in this volume, Chapter 8.
- 14 Pierre Perrin, the librettist and main 'author' of this Pastoral, wrote a lengthy declaration of poetics first as a letter to Cardinal Della Rovere (April 1659), then included in a reprint of the libretto as a preface. The letter is reproduced in Arthur Pougin, *Les Vrais Créateurs de l'opéra français* (Paris, 1881), pp. 56–68.
- 15 For a thorough and synthetic account, see Curtis Price and Louise K. Stein, 'Semi-opera', in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*,

www.oxfordmusiconline.com

/subscriber/article/grove/music/25392.

16 Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni, *La bellezza della volgar poesia* (Rome, 1700), quoted in Di Benedetto, 'Poetics and Polemics', p. 17.

17 Di Benedetto, 'Poetics and Polemics', pp. 15–23; the protagonists of this flurry of critical activity were, among many others, Saint-Évremond in France, Giovanni Mario Crescimbeni and Ludovico Antonio Muratori in Italy.

18 On the formal and prosodic features of Metastasian libretto see Paolo Fabbri, 'Metrical and Formal Organization', in Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (eds.), *The History of Italian Opera*, Part II, Vol. VI: *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth*, trans. Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 178–84.

19 Di Benedetto, 'Poetics and Polemics', pp. 42–3, with reference in particular to Francesco Algarotti, *Saggio sopra l'opera in musica* (1755), Esteban de Arteaga, *Le rivoluzioni del teatro musicale italiano* (1785), Saverio Mattei, *La filosofia della musica* (1781?), and then Ranieri de' Calzabigi's criticism.

20 The generic labels adopted in Italy undergo a wide array of changes and variations, depending on place and time. To simplify, a Metastasian libretto is often labelled *dramma per musica*, while a comic opera on a libretto by Carlo Goldoni is often labelled *dramma giocoso per musica*.

21 The ideological qualifications of this generic division are both obvious and much too complex historically to find room in this context. Two seminal studies provide the necessary conceptual coordinates: on *opera seria*, see Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty* (University of Chicago Press, 2007); on *opera buffa* see Mary Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa in Mozart's Vienna* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

22 On 'meta-operas' see Alice Bellini, 'Music and "Music" in Eighteenth-Century Meta-Operatic Scores', *Eighteenth-Century Music*, 6/2 (2009), pp. 183–207. Well-known eighteenth-century meta-operas are for example the double bill of Salieri's *Prima la musica poi le parole*, and Mozart's *Der Schauspieldirektor*, both premiered in 1786.

23 Denise Launay (ed.), *La Querelle des bouffons*, 3 vols. (Geneva: Minkoff, 1973). A summary of the debate is in Di Benedetto, 'Poetics and Polemics', pp. 29–30, and in Thomas Bauman, 'The Eighteenth Century: Comic Opera', in Roger Parker (ed.), *The*

Oxford Illustrated History of Opera (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 91–4.

24 Some of Calzabigi's writings can be read in Piero Weiss (ed.), *Opera: A History in Documents* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 115–20.

25 Preface to *Alceste* (1769 version), published and translated in Weiss (ed.), *Opera*, pp. 119–20.

26 Daniel Hertz, *From Garrick to Gluck*, John Rice ed. (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2004); Bruce Alan Brown, *Gluck and the French Theatre in Vienna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

27 A similar point is made by Richard Taruskin, according to whom operatic reforms (including Gluck's and Wagner's) are yoked to a project of conservative royalist politics: 'like those [reforms] of the Florentine Camerata in the sixteenth century or Gluck in the eighteenth, Wagner's was now no revolutionary exploit but a neoclassical revival under the protection of a crown, about as socially conservative a concept as the history of music provides'; in *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Ch. 10: 'Deeds of Music Made Visible (Class of 1813, I)';

<<http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/view/Volume3/actrade-9780195384833-div1-010005.xml>>, retrieved February 2011.

28 See James Hepokoski, 'In the Beginning', review of Philip Gossett, *Anna Bolena and the Artistic Maturity of Gaetano Donizetti* (Oxford University Press, 1985), *19th-Century Music*, 12/1 (Summer 1988), pp. 74–8; Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: "Addio del passato" (*La traviata*, act III)', *The Cambridge Opera Journal*, 1/3 (November, 1989), pp. 249–76.

29 See Lydia Goehr, 'From Opera to Music Drama: Nominal Loss, Titular Gain', in Thomas Grey (ed.), *Richard Wagner and His World* (Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 65–86.

30 See Carl Dahlhaus, 'The Dramaturgy of Italian Opera', in Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (eds.), *The History of Italian Opera*, Part II, Vol. VI: *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth*, trans. Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 73–150.

31 Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks: 1797–1801*, ed. Hans Eichner (Toronto University Press, 1957), p. 116.

32 For opera and national identity see Chapter 12 in this volume; more specifically for the nineteenth century, see Jann Pasler,

- Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Stephen Meyer, *Carl Maria von Weber and the Search for a German Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).
- 33 Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi'. For an account of French operatic genres in the context of urban culture see Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 34 Piero Weiss, 'Verdi and the Fusion of Genres', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 35 (1982), pp. 138–56.
- 35 Richard Wagner, *A Communication to My Friends* (1851), quoted in English in Weiss (ed.), *Opera* (Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 197–9.
- 36 Letter of 18 August 1919, *The Correspondence between Richard Strauss and Hugo von Hofmannsthal*, arranged by Willi Schuh, ed. Franz and Alice Strauss, trans. Hanns Hammelmann and Ewald Osers (London: Collins, 1961), p. 331.
- 37 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 2000), pp. 1–144.
- 38 On this see Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, p. 169, fn. 10.
- 39 Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Will to Power in Art', in *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Random House, 1968), No. 809. On *Carmen* see Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, in *Basic Writings*, pp. 609–53. See also Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song*, pp. 109–26.
- 40 For opera production and the culture industry see for instance Mark Clague, 'The Industrial Evolution of the Arts: Chicago's Auditorium Building (1889–) as Cultural Machine', *The Opera Quarterly*, 22/3–4 (2006), pp. 477–511; and James Steichen, 'The Metropolitan Opera Goes Public: Peter Gelb and the Institutional Dramaturgy of *The Met: Live in HD*', *Music and the Moving Image*, 2/2 (Summer 2009), pp. 24–30.
- 41 On opera's remediation see the issue of *The Opera Quarterly* on 'Mediating Opera', edited by Melina Esse (26/1, Winter 2010), and in particular Christopher Morris, 'Digital Diva: Opera on Video', pp. 96–119.
- 42 William Ashbrook and Harry Powers, *Puccini's Turandot: The End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 164.
- 43 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Bourgeois Opera', in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. and trans. David Levin (Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 25.
- 44 Heather Wiebe, 'The Rake's Progress as Opera Museum', *The Opera Quarterly*, 25/1–2 (Winter–Spring 2009), pp. 6–27.
- 45 Paul Griffith, 'The Twentieth Century: To 1945', and Griffith, 'The Twentieth Century: 1945 to the Present Day', in Roger Parker (ed.), *Oxford Illustrated History of Opera* (Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 279–349, here p. 279.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 336.
- 47 <http://opera.media.mit.edu/projects/deathandthepowers>.
- 48 Details of *An Index of Metals* can be found on the catalogue of Cypres Records at www.cypres-records.com.
- 49 Emanuele Senici, 'Typologie des genres dans l'opéra', in Jean-Jacques Nattiez (ed.), *Musiques: une encyclopédie pour le XXI siècle*, Vol. IV (Paris: Actes Sud, 2006), p. 518. For a synthetic critical history of twentieth-century opera production see David Levin, 'Issues and Trends in Contemporary Opera Production', in Stanley Sadie and Laura Macy (eds.), *The Grove Book of Operas*, 2nd edn (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. xi–xviii.
- 50 A most felicitous case of this macro-historical ambition is the two-volume study of the novel, which traces the genre's histories, disseminations and transformations spanning over millennia and the globe. Franco Moretti (ed.), *The Novel*, Vol. I: *History, Geography, and Culture*; Vol. II: *Forms and Themes* (Princeton University Press, 2006).
- 51 Several exceptions are represented by recent studies, most notably Hunter, *The Culture of Opera Buffa*.
- 52 Emanuele Senici, 'Genre', in Helen Greenwald (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Opera* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 53 Emanuele Senici, *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera* (Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Stefano Castelvechi, 'Sentimental Opera: The Emergence of a Genre, 1760–1790' (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1996); Castelvechi, 'From *Nina to Nina*: Psychodrama, Absorption and Sentiment in the 1780s', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 8/2 (July 1996), pp. 91–112.
- 54 Philippe Vendrix (ed.), *L'Opéra-Comique en France au XVIIIe siècle*, (Liège: Mardaga, 1992); 'a genre that is not' is from Jean Auguste Julien [Desboulmiers], *Histoire du theater de*

l'opéra comique (Paris, 1769), p. 1, quoted in Maurice Barthélemy, 'L'opéra-comique des origines à la Querelle des Bouffons', p. 9.

55 Printed staging instructions became increasingly common throughout the nineteenth century, especially in France and Italy, but they have never been deemed crucial enough to the status of the artefact to be included in modern critical editions. See on this James Hepokoski, 'Staging Verdi's Operas' in Alison Latham and Roger Parker (eds.), *Verdi in Performance* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 11–20.

56 See Nicholas Till, Chapter 10 in this volume.

57 This specific case of multiple genres is illustrated in the study by Hervé Lacombe, 'De la différenciation des genres: réflexion sur la notion de genre lyrique français au début du XIX siècle', *Revue de Musicologie*, 84/2 (1998), pp. 247–62.

58 Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, p. 15; on the inherent textuality of genre theory see Jeff Collins, 'The Genericity of Montage: Derrida and Genre Theory', in G. Dowd, L. Stevenson and J. Strong (eds.), *Genre Matters: Essays in Theory and Criticism* (Bristol and Portland, OR: Intellect, 2006), pp. 55–68; and Stephen Heath, 'The Politics of Genre', in Christopher Prendergast (ed.), *Debating World Literature* (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 163–74.