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Introduction

THOMAS BAUMAN

The essays included in this volume cover the history of opera from Monteverdi to Prokofieff, from the sinfonia to the finale, from the chorus to the ballet, yet they are anything but a dutiful chronological survey of opera. Rather, they offer examples of some of the multifarious ways we have come to think about what is perhaps the most troubling and rewarding musical genre in the long history of Western art music.

The volume was conceived as a way of honoring one of the major figures in operatic research and criticism during the second half of the twentieth century, Daniel Heartz, who retired this year after over three decades of service on the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley. His work and personality are strongly imprinted on each of the essays in the present volume, contributed by colleagues, students, and friends.

It is perhaps not simply a matter of chance that opera during the Enlightenment forms the focal point of these essays. Today, thanks in no small part to the scholarship and teaching of Professor Heartz, the eighteenth century has re-emerged not only as an area of serious scholarly inquiry, but as an ever more important part of the repertories of our varied operatic institutions. Although Mozart is by no means absent, the emphasis throughout falls on opera during the era of Handel and Gluck – a period once regarded as unknown territory, of interest neither to scholars nor to performers and directors. In this context, one cannot forbear acknowledging the parallel impact of the century's first great champion of the half-forgotten world stretching from Scarlatti to Mozart, Edward J. Dent. The fact that a book like this can center on that world rather than on the one extending from Rossini to Puccini is owing largely to the successive championship of eighteenth-century opera – and especially of eighteenth-century opera seria – by these two gifted writers.

The perspectives provided by the following fifteen essays indicate how varied were the cultural and intellectual crosscurrents within the lifeworld of the eighteenth century – and how varied are the present-day responses they evoke. As Gary Tomlinson's inaugural essay explains, opera's beginnings at the time of Monteverdi were already ambiguous. Its first exemplars were still steeped in the mentality of an era very distant from our own. But opera, unlike the pastoral drama of the Renaissance, found the resources to negotiate the turn to a modern, "scientific" spirit that came to full flower in the Enlightenment.

Three iconographic studies touch on the multi-leveled interconnections of opera, the visual arts, and their audiences during the seventeenth and

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eighteenth centuries. My essay on the effective history of Poussin's *Et in Arcadia ego*, or more precisely of the ambivalent theme it embodied, examines the intersection of the Horatian concern that a work of art edify with art's innate sensual proclivities in a series of paintings, novels, and operas on the theme of death in Arcadia. Kerry Grant finds abundant, fascinating cultural commentary and innuendo embedded in an engraving by Charles Burney's nephew that confronts the English cult of Handel and "ancient music," and he points up its unhappy consequences for the career of Burney himself in Georgian England. Anthony Newcomb casts an account of the cultural debt owed by Weber's famous Wolf's Glen Scene to a battery of popular spectacles spawned by a combination of technological advances, entrepreneurship, and a coalescing mass audience at the turn of the nineteenth century. The deeper affinity linking Weber's finale to these contemporaneous entertainments (and to the modern cinema as well), Newcomb explains, lies in its realistic rather than symbolic mode of presentation, yet another abiding ambivalence in the history of opera.

The dismissive attitude of earlier eras toward eighteenth-century opera before Mozart was in many ways a direct reflection of their dismissive attitude toward serious opera. In contrast, serious genres occupy a central position here, particularly in a group of essays whose common theme is the reassessment of many received notions. Reinhard Strohm calls into question a traditional source of critical disdain, the tendency of Italian composers such as Pergolesi, Vinci, and Vivaldi to redeploy both arias and overtures from opera to opera in the first half of the century. The practice, he suggests, does not necessarily imply the absence of large-scale cohesion, nor unconcern for dramatic relevance. Mary Cyr offers a related argument reassessing evidence for the reported gestural ineptitude of the French chorus on the tiny stage of the Opéra. And Marita McClymonds delivers the coup de grâce to the withered claim that opera seria ossified into a tired and sententious sterility after Metastasio by examining the innovative librettos of Mattia Verazi and the young Italian librettists who followed his lead during the century's last decades.

In the four studies on Handel and Gluck included here, new discoveries inspire additional layers of speculation on the tangled world of eighteenth-century operatic production and reception. Winton Dean's essay on Handel's *Serse* finds affinities both with its operatic past (in earlier settings by Cavalli and Bononcini) and with Mozart's master comedies. John Roberts and Bruce Brown add new dimensions to our picture of Gluck's early career: Roberts discusses two arias borrowed from Handel, both to reinforce Michael Kelly's testimony on Gluck's veneration for the older master and to bring into relief the creative side of the process of borrowing – including self-borrowing; and Brown's study of a newly identified early ballet by Gluck and Gasparo Angiolini enlarges our understanding of the changes that their collaboration underwent during the years of the Viennese reform operas. Gluck's ripest works and their impact on future operatic practice figure in the essay of Julie Cumming. In assessing the great Iphigenia operas, she shows how Gluck and

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his French librettists relied not simply on disembodied literary ideals but on the rich stage history of the tales, on Parisian intellectual currents, and on Gluck's own earlier serious operas, ballets, and opéras comiques.

John Rice develops an array of links between Mozart's two valedictory operas and the works of his last years in the employ of Colloredo, paralleling the more explicit links Leopold II sought to forge with a past Golden Age of Habsburg absolutism and artistic patronage. Three Berkeley colleagues of Professor Heartz offer other provocative insights into operas of the post-Gluckian era. Walter E. Rex interprets the storm music to Beaumarchais' *Barbier de Séville* from deep within the character of Bartholo, spinning out strands directly relevant to both Paisiello's operatic version of the play and Mozart's *Figaro*. Joseph Kerman, with characteristic acumen, draws our attention to unsuspected resonances and hidden riches in one of the defining numbers in Mozart's "Oper aller Opern," the duet of Anna and Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*. And by way of epilogue, Richard Taruskin harnesses Prokofieff to the age of Mozart and Goldoni in order to show some of the continuities of eighteenth-century operatic traditions into our own very different era.

The problems and issues raised in the following essays are not matters of interest solely to eighteenth-century specialists; they are broadly typological ones embedded in the nature of opera throughout its varied history. Opera has always confounded neat categorization. And as modern chaos theory is beginning to teach scientists, the rapid development from simple beginnings to dizzying levels of complexity – everywhere discernible, not only in nature but in human culture as well – is not a barrier to understanding but rather one of its most fascinating objects. To approach opera in the interdisciplinary spirit that runs through the essays in this volume is to exonerate its multivalent nature of the compound charges of improbability, unnaturalness, and absurdity with which it has been so often reviled, and to open new insights into the many ways it has enriched our complex and ambivalent world.

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Prologue

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1

Pastoral and musical magic in the birth of opera

GARY TOMLINSON

Of all our dramatic arts, opera demands the most of us. It asks us to accept it as dramatic representation, to immerse ourselves in a sequence of imitated actions far more specific and complex than those offered by the gestural arts of dance or mime. Yet because it is sung it requires, if it is to be taken seriously as drama, a leap of imagination longer than that needed for spoken theater, a suspension of disbelief more uncompromising. Perhaps this explains why opera is so often not taken seriously: we have all encountered the superficial allegiances of opera buffs, their cults of divas and heldentenors, and we all have also known people who on some visceral and unselfconscious level reject altogether the notion of sung drama. But difficulty in appreciating opera as serious drama is not the burden of sycophants and the naive alone. Instead we each contend with it, reaching our own more or less uneasy compromises with the genre. We struggle in some part of ourselves to restrain the skepticism that can shatter the spell of its music drama. We strive to accommodate the breach of verisimilitude inherent in its singing talk.

This is not a stance unique to the twentieth century. The history of opera could almost be written as a chronicle of such accommodations, of the varying means by which skepticism has been repressed. The frequent reform initiatives in this history (no artistic genre, it seems, has more often called for purgation) amount to little other than repeated readjustments of strategy in the face of the fundamental unbelievability of drama in song. This is as true of Gluck's or Wagner's famous refashionings as it is of countless less marked and less clearly self-proclaimed alterations in the genre. Opera places us, Voltaire wrote, "in a land of fairies," and because of this "we suffer [its] extravagances, and are even fond of them."[1] It sits just beyond the frontier of our rational, scientific world. It inhabits an unverisimilar, unreal, and finally magical realm that Western culture long ago repudiated but cannot quite shake. From this ambivalent mix of forbearance and immersion arises our enduring fascination with the genre.

The frontier itself, the borderline between real and unreal realms, between verisimilitude and its absence, has not shifted much since the mid-seventeenth century, the period of opera's establishment as a more-than-sporadic manner of entertainment. Complaints about the artifice of sung drama sprang up soon after the opening of the first public opera theater in Venice in 1637, as research by Ellen Rosand has shown. They are recorded for us in several librettists' tendency to justify their dramatic procedures, irregular from the perspective of Aristotelian guidelines for spoken drama, by citing the general unreality of the

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sung drama in which they were collaborating. Francesco Sbarra's defense of a libretto of his from 1651 is typical:

> I know that the *ariette* sung by Alexander and Aristotle will be judged contrary to the decorum of such great personages; but I also know that musical recitation is improper altogether, since it does not imitate natural discourse and since it removes the soul from dramatic compositions, which should be nothing but imitations of human actions. Yet this defect is not only tolerated by the current century but received with applause.[2]

Statements like this one constitute an acknowledgment of the peculiarly emphatic suspension of disbelief that opera required already by the middle of the seventeenth century. And this has been a requisite of operatic appreciation ever since.

But such statements seem not to have emerged much earlier than the 1640s. In particular they are not associated with the works music historians consider the first operas, the music dramas produced from 1590 to 1610 at the courts and in the salons of Florence, Mantua, and other north Italian cities. Historians from Solerti on have amassed hundreds of pages of contemporaneous accounts concerning these works, accounts that range from the fulsome and propagandistic to the vituperative and jealous and that were penned variously by the poets and composers themselves and by members of their audiences. But from all these accounts there seems to emerge no selfconscious acknowledgment of the unreality of sung drama. Their typical tone, rather, is one of unquestioning acceptance, as in this matter-of-fact report from the Estense ambassador to Mantua on Monteverdi's *Arianna* of 1608:

> Then they put on the Comedy in music ... and all the well-dressed reciters played their parts very well, but best of all [was] the comedienne Ariadne. The story was of Ariadne and Theseus, [and she,] in her lament in music accompanied by viols and violins, made many weep at her sorrow. There was a [musician named] Rasi who sang divinely, but Ariadne was best, and the eunuchs and the others were awful.[3]

The first operas, in other words, seem to have been received in an atmosphere not noticeably tinged by the skepticism and aesthetic distance that has colored operatic reception almost ever since. They seem to have answered to a different conception of dramatic verisimilitude than the one that has dominated operatic appreciation since around 1650. The border between real and unreal realms seems, in short, to have been set differently for them than for later music dramas.

With this hypothesis of a shifted border in mind we may reconsider one of the arguments Nino Pirrotta advanced in his "Early Opera and Aria," a virtuosic essay that has guided all students of early opera since its first publication in 1968. There Pirrotta noted that the early Florentine and Mantuan music dramas again and again featured legendary musicians among

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their protagonists (especially Orpheus, in three operas, and Apollo, in two more). He asserted that the creators of these works, in particular the Florentine poet Ottavio Rinuccini, the librettist of most of them, chose such mythical singers in a selfconscious attempt to justify the musical medium of their dramas.[4] In saying this, of course, Pirrotta implied the felt need around 1600 for such justification, the need, in other words, to help the audience along in its suspension of disbelief. But, as I have said, I see no evidence that the audience in 1600 required this sort of justification for music drama. The closest thing I know to such evidence is a passage in *Il corago*, an anonymous Florentine treatise on dramaturgy brought to light since Pirrotta wrote, that recommends ancient gods, heroes, and especially mythical musicians as the most appropriate protagonists for sung drama.[5] Here the issue of the verisimilitude of sung speech is clearly raised. But *Il corago* was written no earlier than 1628, and perhaps, for all we know, some years later.[6] It was written, that is, at least a generation after the early court operas. It can just as easily be adduced as evidence for the emergence of new operatic values – for the emergence of views anticipating those of Venetian librettists of the 1640s and 50s – as it can be linked to the positions of the creators themselves of the first operas some thirty years before.

Pirrotta's contention about the protagonists of the early court operas, in sum, imputes to the creators and audiences of those works reactions for which we have documentation only from later operatic history. (It poses, by the way, the additional difficulty of accounting for *Arianna*, Rinuccini's libretto for Monteverdi that features, like his *Dafne* and *Euridice*, the characters of Ovidian myth but unlike them includes no legendary musicians in its *dramatis personae*.) I will return below to suggest a different interpretation from Pirrotta's for the preponderance of musicians among the protagonists of the first operas.

The broadened view of musico-dramatic verisimilitude around 1600 that I will advocate here may also help to explicate a suggestion I made, I fear somewhat cryptically, in *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*:[7] the suggestion that we rethink our general assumptions about realism in Monteverdi's surviving operas. These operas fall into two pairs, *Orfeo* and the fragmentary *Arianna* presented in Mantua in 1607 and 1608, and *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* staged in Venice in the early 1640s: one pair, in other words, from each side of the shift in operatic perceptions that I am suggesting separates early court opera from later Venetian opera. Received musicological wisdom holds that the later operas (especially *Poppea*) display a sort of dramatic realism not evident in the earlier ones.[8] At one level this is true. Their subjects are historical – if distantly so in the case of Ulysses – instead of mythical, and many of the situations and actions they depict have a down-to-earth, everyday quality not found in earlier court operas. But, keeping in mind the skeptical distance from sung drama that I see emerging by the 1640s, we might well suspect that this superficial realism of subject and action conceals a deeper unreality in Monteverdi's last operas. As I put it in *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*, in these works

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> musical speech as a matter of accepted convention, little touched by the demands of verisimilitude, has replaced music as a rhetorical heightening of speech credible in its well-defined mythical context. The humanist ideal of music and poetry as two sides of a single language ... has given way to a modern suspension of disbelief in the face of the anti-rational anomaly of characters speaking in song. (p. 218)

In Monteverdi's late operas realistic acts and situations can be seen to accentuate the unreality of the medium in which they are presented. I believe this dilemma was a deeply felt one in the 1640s and that it was symptomatic of a manner of perceiving music drama that was then new. Musical speech had solidified into a convention that could either be considered to stand outside criteria of dramatic verisimilitude or be judged according to those criteria; in the latter case it had either to be accepted as whimsy or to be rejected altogether. In 1600, I think, the situation was different. At that time musical speech and dramatic verisimilitude were not yet mutually exclusive. Musical speech could still be viewed as an authentic representation of some aspect of reality, a mimesis embodied in a world-view that would begin to seem much less credible only a few decades later. In the remainder of this essay I will outline this world-view and suggest how early court opera participated in it.

The dramatic genre practiced around 1600 in which musical speech most naturally pressed its claim to verisimilitude, music historians have long believed, was the pastoral play. Pirrotta insisted upon the ease of music's admission to the pastoral realm.[9] He quoted Giambattista Guarini's words in his *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* of 1601 on ancient shepherds' musical and poetic prowess. Guarini asserted "that the Arcadian shepherds ... embellished their speeches with poetic ornaments," that they were all poets, and "that their principal study and their principal activity was music."[10] The Florentine theorist Giovanni Battista Doni echoed this view in his *Trattato della musica scenica*, written in the 1630s. He noted that pastoral dramas "represent gods, nymphs, and shepherds of that most ancient century when music was natural and speech almost poetic." For this reason more than any other, he said, "true song ... is suitable to pastoral plays."[11]

But we should tread carefully here. For though it may be true that the pastoral play was uniquely congenial to music among the spoken dramatic genres of the late sixteenth century, this does not warrant a number of further conclusions about early opera commonly drawn in musicological writings and elsewhere. These include the notion that the creators of opera chose pastoral subjects and settings for their works in order to revive onstage the shepherds who had once sung in Arcadia (and thus, again, justify their presentation of drama in music), the simpler idea that opera is a genre derived from late sixteenth-century pastoral drama, and the more grandiloquent idea that early opera represents nothing less than the pastoral play confronting its eternal musical essence (here especially the Hegelianism of De Sanctis lives on: "The word," he wrote of Italian literary history around 1600, "no longer being

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anything more than music, had lost its *raison d'être* and cedes the field to music and song").[12]

All these conclusions are more than a little questionable. In the first place there is little evidence that the literati who created opera and theorized about it or their audiences believed that shepherds had once spoken in song. Guarini and Doni, after all, said no such thing, but only held that the Arcadians' speech was closer to poetry than present-day talk and that they often sang as well: in Arcadia, as Doni put it, "music was natural and speech almost poetic." The picture of ancient shepherds that emerged from such writings, as we should expect, was not so much an anticipation of Metastasio's singing heroes as it was a recollection of the rustics of Vergil and Theocritus, who had easily enough distinguished their normal if poetic speech from their full-fledged song. Surely no historical belief that shepherds once sang instead of speaking served in any important way to legitimize the continuous song of the first operas. Nor did such a belief provide a decisive impetus for the creators of these works to choose pastoral stories and characters.

Indeed the stories and characters they chose were not pastoral at all, if we define that adjective as they may well have defined it, by reference to the plots and protagonists of spoken pastoral drama in the late sixteenth century. The early court operas, that is, were not pastoral dramas, but rather dramatized myths that happened to be set in the country (and how many myths are set in the city?). This distinction is worth pausing over. Louise Clubb has shown, in one of the few studies that attempts an ecumenical overview of the Italian pastoral play in the decades of its most famous exemplars, Tasso's *Aminta* and Guarini's *Pastor fido*, that the genre depended on regular *cinquecento* comedy for its plot structures and for some of its stock characters. Its typical plot was built of the intertwined multiple love affairs, the disguises and mistaken identities, and the intrigues of comedy. Its typical protagonists were mortal rustics ranging in refinement, often in the same play, from barely countrified nobility to satyr-like bestiality and Bottomed-out buffoonery.[13]

The first operas showed none of these features. Their protagonists were not Arcadian mortals but instead the gods, demigods, and heroes of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: Orpheus and Euridice, Daphne and Apollo, Ariadne, Theseus, and Bacchus, Cephalus and Aurora. Their plots were utterly straightforward in structure, relating their simple, affective tales without peripeties, disguises, recognitions, or intrigues. For this reason, no doubt, the most common generic designation their authors applied to these works was not the *favola pastorale* or *favola boscareccia* so frequent in the tradition Clubb has described but rather a stripped-down epithet nowhere to my knowledge found on the title-pages of late sixteenth-century pastoral plays: *favola*, meaning simply "myth," "fable," or "story."

Add to all this the fact that the first librettos differ utterly from spoken pastoral dramas in their typical length – much less than half that of even shorter pastoral plays like *Aminta* – and in their characteristically lyric prosody – madrigalian for the most part, interspersed with *ottave*, *terze rime*, and

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canzonette in Gabriello Chiabrera's novel metric arrangements – and the hypothesis of opera's derivation from pastoral drama crumbles. The early operas were not *favole pastorali* "musicked"; on the surface the two genres share little more than their rural settings. If there is a significant connection between them, it lies not in borrowed dramatic techniques or even in broader patterns of intergeneric influence but at a deeper level of cultural substructure and the expressive aspirations arising from it – at what we may call, with Michel Foucault, an archaeological level of meaning.

To unearth this level we need first to realize that in creating the opera libretto Rinuccini looked back not on the pastoral play but instead on an earlier genre foreign to the climate of Aristotelian definition and constraint in which the pastoral play tenaciously grew. This is the mythological *favola* or *fabula* of the late fifteenth century, most famously represented by Agnolo Poliziano's *Fabula di Orfeo*. This *Orfeo*, written probably in the mid-1470s, gave rise to a miniature tradition of mythological plays, barely dramatized versions of stories drawn from Ovid, by such poets as Niccolò da Correggio, author of a *Fabula di Cefalo*, Gian Pietro della Viola, probable creator of a *Representazione di Dafne*, and Antonio Tebaldeo, to whom a revised and enlarged version of *Orfeo* has been ascribed.[14] These works share with the librettos of the first operas all the features in which those librettos differed from late-cinquecento pastoral plays: their Ovidian stories and mythological protagonists, their extreme brevity, their simplicity of plot, their use of lyric verse-forms in a dramatic context, and even, in some cases, their unqualified generic designation, *favola*.

Literary historians have since the eighteenth century routinely described Poliziano's *Orfeo* as music drama, and since the days of Romain Rolland music historians have recognized the general likeness of the work to the Orpheus librettos of the court operas: the Italian title of Pirrotta's classic collection of essays on Renaissance theater music, *Li due Orfei: da Poliziano a Monteverdi*,[15] is only one recent token of this recognition. But musicologists have consistently stopped short of attributing to the early librettists knowledge of Poliziano's work and of the genre it helped to establish. In this their historiographical caution has gotten the better of them. For there can be little doubt that Rinuccini, at least, was cognizant of Poliziano's *fabula* and perhaps of other similar works. I have developed the case for this assertion elsewhere[16] and will retrace only its outlines here.

In the first place, Rinuccini lived in a grand ducal Florence that looked back with nostalgic and self-promoting pride on the city's achievements in the days of Lorenzo the Magnificent, Poliziano, Botticelli, and Marsilio Ficino. In the literary realm Florentine publications like *Tutti i trionfi, carri, mascherate ò canti carnascialesche andati per Firenze, dal tempo del Magnifico Lorenzo vecchio de Medici* of 1559 and the many collections of *Canzone a ballo* by Lorenzo, Poliziano, and their contemporaries printed in the 1550s and 60s bear witness to this retrospective pride.

In the second place, Poliziano's little play was by no means a forgotten work

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