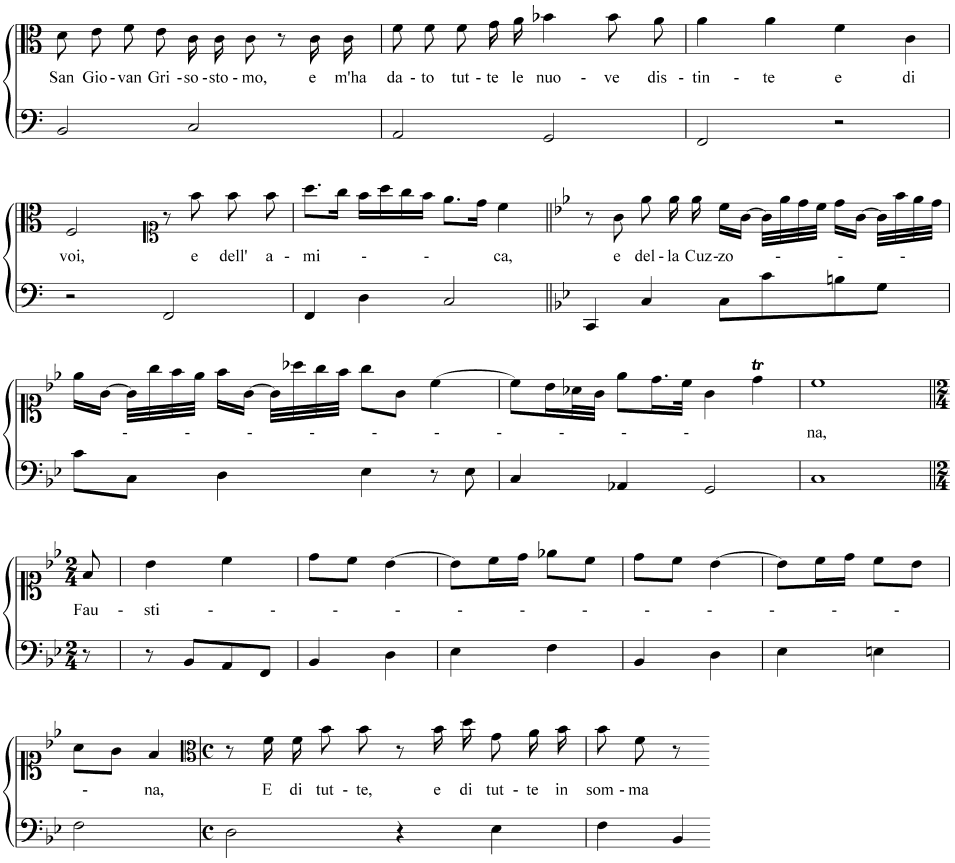
Introduction

Among opera's grand narratives, the discourse of excess is perhaps most persistent. Indeed, one of the genre's enduring myths is that emblem of superfluity, competing *prime donne*. This curious phenomenon, the leaven of so many pop-opera volumes, can be found even in *commedia dell'arte* precursors to the genre, and continues among opera (and other) divas to the present day.[1] Neither has it eluded musical representation. We might think of the 'Duetto buffo di due gatti', that recital bonbon spuriously but tenaciously attributed to Rossini, which metonymically reduces female singers to cats who sing not sense but pure cattiness. This duet (and our reaction to it), which defines the singers by their competition, is emblematic of the function of sparring divas within the stories surrounding opera. These narratives have generally portrayed such rivalries as mere self-serving narcissism and accordingly have treated them to superficial assessment at best, often viewing them with amused contempt. Such responses hardly shed much light on this long-lived phenomenon, working (one presumes) on the assumption that these shallow competitions offer little worth exploring. By contrast, I think that these rivalries have much to tell us, not just about the circumstances of singers' antagonism, but about how we approach opera. In this study I hope to demonstrate the potential for insight offered by such rivalries by focussing on one in particular – perhaps the prototype for the popular theme and critical idea.

The sopranos Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778) and Faustina Bordoni (1697–1781), who rose to fame in the 1720s, became notorious as rivals in London between 1726 and 1728. Indeed, their notoriety turned them into that cliché, legends in their own lifetimes, which suggests not only the spotlight of fame but also the selective blindness of fiction. These singers of extraordinary and diverse abilities were, despite their diversity, inseparable in the public imagination; satirists and scholars alike

[1] Anne MacNeil notes that the Gelosi company 'made a practice of pitting actress against actress' in the sixteenth century, and discusses in particular the contest of Vittoria Piisimi and Isabella Andreini for the Medici wedding of 1589; see *Music and Women of the Commedia dell'Arte*, 32–76 (at 33). At the same time as the Bordoni–Cuzzoni rivalry, there was antagonism in Paris between Marie Pélissier and Cathérine-Nicole Le Maure and their supporters, 'mauriens' and 'pélissiens'; see Sadler, 'Pélissier, Marie'. Spats between singers and actresses were legion in eighteenth-century London, including Kitty Clive and Susannah Cibber over the part of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera* in the 1730s, and Peg Woffington and George Anne Bellamy over dresses in *The Rival Queens* in 1756. Rupert Christiansen describes 'a great line of rival *prime donne* which includes Grisi and Viardot, Lehmann and Jeritza, Tebaldi and Callas'; *Prima Donna*, 13–14.



Ex. I An extract from Benedetto Marcello's satirical recitative, 'Lettera del Sig[r]. Carlo Antonio Benati Scritta alla Sig[ra]. Vittoria Tesi à Venezia' (1718), naming Faustina and Cuzzoni and employing their respective vocal styles.

represented theirs as complementary talents. From their earliest appearance together, in Antonio Salvi's and Carlo Francesco Pollarolo's *Ariodante* in Venice (1718), the opposition between Faustina and Cuzzoni (as they were known) could be represented in musical terms alone, their names apparently sufficient guarantee of meaning.[2] That year, Benedetto Marcello wrote the satirical recitative 'Lettera del Sig[r]. Carlo Antonio Benati Scritta alla Sig[ra]. Vittoria Tesi à Venezia', which suggested Benati's smug self-importance by dropping the names 'Cuzzona [and] Faustina' into his list of Venice's newsworthy figures (Example I).[3] Here, their appropriate musical styles – Cuzzoni's

[2] See further discussion of the singers' Italian roles, below pp. 3, 28–9. As this study is focussed on the singers' reception, I will use their popular, stage names throughout.

[3] There are two slightly different versions in La Biblioteca Comunale, Liceo Musicale di Bologna, MSS GG.144 and GG.146; this extract comes from GG.146. On the manuscripts, see: Ferand,

filigree and Faustina's rhythmic assertiveness – are presented as sufficient evidence of Benati's *au courant* knowledge to ensure that no further comment is needed.[4]

Faustina was already a known quantity in Venice: having been born a Venetian (the child of a 'camarier', or chamber servant), she had made her debut there in Salvi's and Pollarolo's *Ariodante* in 1716, and continued to sing for a number of leading composers in the city until 1725.[5] In the early 1720s she extended her sphere of activity, performing in other Italian cities, in Munich, and eventually in Vienna, in 1725–6.[6] Faustina's early career was not without incident: archival documents refer to her release from a Venetian prison in 1714 when a mere seventeen-year-old (the crime is not specified), and to abduction by a patron.[7] She also probably first encountered Francesca Cuzzoni in Venice. Cuzzoni, the daughter of a violinist, made her debut in her native Parma in 1714, and then in Bologna in 1716. Her appointment as 'virtuosa da camera' to Grand Princess Violante Beatrice of Tuscany in 1717 appears to have extended her performing opportunities in the north, and after her Venetian debut with Faustina in *Ariodante* (1718), she continued to sing in northern Italian cities until her departure for London in 1722.[8] Faustina and Cuzzoni appeared together in five operas in Venice and one in Milan between 1718 and 1721.[9] Each went on to have significant careers, not only in England but on the Continent, where Faustina in particular maintained her standing (in part through a mutually astute marriage to famed composer J. A. Hasse).

As Marcello's 'Lettera' suggests, the singers' vocal styles were consistently subject to scrutiny, often in comparative terms. From the outset of her career, it would seem that Faustina established a distinctive 'modo Faustinare' based on her extraordinary, 'instrumental' vocal agility, which other singers were quick to copy and critics as

'Embellished "Parody Cantatas"'; Selfridge-Field, *The Music of Benedetto and Alessandro Marcello*, 73–4 (Item A.51).

[4] Ferand suggests that the embellished passages assigned to the names of singers in this letter represent their characteristic modes of ornamentation in 'Embellished "Parody Cantatas"', 45.

[5] Woyke, 'Faustina Bordoni-Hasse', 220.

[6] Dean, 'Bordoni, Faustina'.

[7] The patron who kidnapped Faustina was Isabella Renier Lombria; see Woyke, 'Faustina Bordoni-Hasse', 222.

[8] Dean and Vitali, 'Cuzzoni, Francesca'.

[9] The operas were: A. Salvi and C. F. Pollarolo, *Ariodante* (Venice, 1718), in which Faustina was the princess Ginevra and Cuzzoni her waiting woman Dalinda; B. Pasqualigo and G. M. Orlandini, *Ifigenia in Tauride* (Venice, 1719) with Faustina as Ifigenia and Cuzzoni as Teonoe; D. Lalli and M. Gasparini, *Il Lamano* (Venice, 1719), with Faustina as Altile and Cuzzoni as Tamira; A. Zeno, P. Pariati, G. Vignati, C. Baliani and G. Cozzi, *Ambleto* (Milan, 1719), with Faustina as Veremonda and Cuzzoni as Gerilda; A. Zeno and A. Pollarollo, *Lucio Papirio dittatore* (Venice, 1721) with Faustina as Papiria and Cuzzoni as Rutilia; A. Piovene and G. M. Orlandini, *Nerone* (Venice, 1721), with Faustina as Ottavia and Cuzzoni as Poppea. See Sartori, *I libretti italiani a stampa dalle origini al 1800*, VII, 106, 219. For discussion of the women's appearances in *Ariodante*, see Termini, 'From Ariodante to Ariodante', xxxiv, lxxvii.

quick to censure.[10] The first detailed description of the women's talents was provided in 1723 by the famous singing teacher Pier Francesco Tosi, in his *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*. Tosi's account demonstrates the process of definition (and deification) by opposition:

> The one [Bordoni] is inimitable for a privileged Gift of Singing, and for enchanting the World with a prodigious Felicity in executing, and with a singular Brillant [i.e. coloratura] … which pleases to Excess. The delightful soothing *Cantabile* of the other [Cuzzoni], [joins] with the sweetness of a fine Voice, a perfect Intonation, Strictness of Time, and the rarest Productions of a Genius … The *Pathetick* of the one [Cuzzoni] and the *Allegro* of the other, are the Qualities the most to be admired respectively in each of them. What a beautiful Mixture would it be, if the Excellence of these two angelick Creatures could be united in one single Person![11]

Within the context of the *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* as a whole, there is an implicit distinction in Tosi's description between Cuzzoni as representative of the older, 'pathetic' style (which Tosi evidently preferred), and Faustina as marking out the technical virtuosity of the new.[12] While Tosi expresses a desire to see these singers 'united in one single Person', as a paragon of vocal beauty, he also warns that they 'make us sensible, that two Women would not be equally eminent if the one copy'd the other'.[13] This tension between a Pygmalion-like vocal ideal and the limitations of (female) corporeal reality continued to inform appreciation of the singers. Following Tosi, J. J. Quantz, Vincenzo Martinelli, Giambattista Mancini, John Hawkins and Charles Burney also talked about the divas as a pair, and specifically as a pair of opposites.[14]

[10] See Durante, 'Alcune considerazioni', 454. Vincenzo Martinelli described the 'modo Faustinare' under which, despite lack of appropriate capacity and talent, foolish singers chose to imitate Faustina, rather than the 'più naturale' style of Cuzzoni; see also Luigi Riccoboni's similar critique in *Réflexions historiques*, trans. *An Historical and Critical Account*, 79–80. Both are discussed in Durante, 'Alcune considerazioni', 455–6.

[11] Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*, trans. Galliard, 171–2; ed. Pilkington, 79. It is Galliard who identifies the singers to whom Tosi alludes.

[12] Tosi's commentary is often pointed in its attack on the 'new' style (in both singers and composers), though not in this particular comparison of Faustina's and Cuzzoni's vocal characteristics. Durante notes that Tosi was diplomatic in his published accounts, but in private was not in favour of Faustina's vocal style; see 'Alcune considerazioni', 456. Riccoboni also distinguishes Faustina as instigating the Italian fashion in which the 'bizarre' 'is sought instead of *beautiful Simplicity*', and complains 'that it is unreasonable to force a Voice to execute what is too much even for a *Violin* or a *Hautboy*'; *Réflexions historiques*, trans. *An Historical and Critical Account*, 78.

[13] Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*, trans. Galliard, 172, 154, ed. Pilkington, 79, 69.

[14] Quantz, 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', trans. Nettl, 312–13. Quantz's comments on the women are quoted in Burney, *General History of Music*, II, 745–6. Martinelli, *Lettere familiari e critiche*, 359–61; cited in Durante, 'Alcune considerazioni', 455. Mancini, *Riflessioni pratiche sul canto*

The repeated pairing, which for Tosi (and presumably Marcello) was based on grounds of vocal style and talent, and formed during their repeated appearances together in Venice, subsequently gained the tincture of rivalry only after the women's appearances together in London, singing for the Royal Academy of Music between 1726 and 1728.[15] There, it is generally maintained, the battle for supremacy between Faustina and Cuzzoni precipitated a social furore that, on 6 June 1727, abruptly halted the performance of Giovanni Bononcini's *Astianatte* and thence the season, and may even have hastened the demise of the Royal Academy of Music in 1728.[16] Responding to and inflaming popular perception of the rivalry, contemporary pamphleteers represented the singers as warring protagonists, who (in stereotypically 'catty' female fashion) descended from insults to hairpulling and scratching during the performance.[17] Somewhat surprisingly, given the obviously fictional nature of the satirical pamphlets, opera historians have been happy to follow the satirists' lead, spicing their narratives by repeating such tales of the singers' onstage misbehaviour as fact. In these later re-tellings, the women's London encounter has frequently been related less for its historical importance than for its moral value: these female 'petty jealousies' have both served as a lesson in the dangers of self-aggrandising divas, and provided piquant illustration of the difficulties with which the 'great' Handel had to contend.[18] As the women have been co-opted to

figurato, 29–35; Hawkins, *General History of the Science and Practice of Music*, 873; Burney's own description draws particularly on Mancini; see Burney, *General History of Music*, II, 736–9. Burney prefaces both accounts with a description of the women as 'rival singers' (745) and 'rival sirens' (736) respectively.

[15] It has been suggested that in Italy it was accepted practice to have two equal (or nearly equal) leading women in a cast; the rivalry thus appears to have been peculiarly a London phenomenon; see Ograjenšek, 'From *Alessandro* (1726) to *Tolomeo* (1728)', 28–70. On the widespread practice of pairing or balancing operas (and elements within them), see Strohm, 'Dramatic Dualities'. The singers' Italian appearances together will be discussed further below.

[16] The Royal Academy of Music continued subsequently in a different managerial guise. According to Quantz, Tosi himself was present in London at this time; 'Herrn Johann Joachim Quantzens Lebenslauf', trans. Nettl, 314.

[17] *The Devil to pay at St. James's*; *The Contre Temps; or the Rival Queans*. For further discussion of these pamphlets see chapter 2. pp. 68–70, below.

[18] Otto Erich Deutsch says that there was 'a scuffle between the two singers themselves', but does not cite his sources; *Handel*, 209. Winton Dean says there was a 'scuffle on stage' and 'an exchange of blows' in the *New Grove* entries on the singers: 'Bordoni, Faustina' and 'Cuzzoni, Francesca'. More recently, James Wierzbicki has claimed that 'Cuzzoni and Faustina actually came to blows', but again provides no evidence for this assertion; 'Dethroning the Divas', 181. On the 'petty jealousies', see Hogarth, *Memoirs of the Opera*, I, 362. Hogarth does attribute the 'foolish violence' to the 'leaders of fashion', and suggests that the singers' 'petty jealousies … never would have been indulged in, had they not been so absurdly instigated and abetted'. Nonetheless, his discussion also condemns the singers for carrying the 'spirit of rivalry … to an extravagant pitch' (297), and highlights stories of their bad behaviour, such as Cuzzoni's 'pertinacious' refusal to sing one of

serve ideological ends, they have suffered what Roland Barthes has identified as an essential feature of the process of mythologisation: they have disappeared into their role as signs of operatic excess.[19]

Despite recent scholarly interest in the operas written for this pair of singers, it would seem that to many modern operaphiles the 'rival sirens' are redundant, and therefore ridiculous.[20] Yet their joint signification of musical surfeit, in effacing their individuality, registers the problematic relationship between identity and meaning that appears in opera of this period on many levels. In my exploration of the nature of the women's rivalry, issues of identity are central: who were these women and how did they come to be seen as they were through the mechanisms of performance on and off stage? My study of the representation of the women's London encounter between 1726 and 1728 begins with the hypothesis that they were not – or at least not entirely – authors of their own reputations. Even a cursory examination of sources describing the 1727 *Astianatte* debacle reveals that audience factions, not the singers, were responsible for the melee halting the performance; the singers themselves seem to have had no part in the fighting.[21] This being the case, we might ask to what extent their antagonism may have been manufactured by others. In answering these questions, I will look to local cultural background, contemporary report and the operas themselves to assess how and why the women gained the identities they did, speculating that the operas written for them were shaped by the exigencies of the rivalry.[22]

In the process of examining the creation of the singers' rivalry, we will see the paradoxes of performer identity – the link between superfluity and lack – multiplied and compounded, as a complex of social negotiations comes into play.[23] Indeed, problems of identity and meaning will be as much my subject as the intricacies of the

Handel's arias (301). A similar focus on gossip is found in discussions of actresses; see Howe, *The First English Actresses*, 30.

[19] Barthes, 'Myth Today'.

[20] Consideration of the women's rivalry often forms part of the study of particular operas; more infrequently, it is treated as the subject in itself. The most significant studies are: Baselt, 'Zur Gestaltung des Alcestes-Stoffes in Händels Opera "Admeto"'; Knapp, 'Die Opern *Alessandro* und *Admeto*: Händels dramatischer Balanceakt zwischen drei Starsängern'; King, 'The Composition and Reception of Handel's "Alessandro"'; LaRue, *Handel and His Singers*, 144–81; Clausen, 'Händels *Admeto* und Bononcinis *Astianatte*: Antike Tragödie an der Royal Academy of Music'; Ograjenšek, 'From *Alessandro* (1726) to *Tolomeo* (1728)'. On the women's earlier roles together, see Termini, 'From Ariodante to Ariodante'.

[21] See the newspaper and other accounts cited in chapter 1, pp. 47–50, below, where this topic is further discussed.

[22] Reinhard Strohm notes that 'Not only individual roles, but whole works were conceived for individual singers'; 'Towards an Understanding of the *opera seria*', 98.

[23] In this respect the singers conformed to what Berta Joncus identifies as the eighteenth-century manufacture of a 'star' persona; see 'Producing Stars in *Dramma per musica*'.

rivalry between Cuzzoni and Faustina. As the following chapter suggests, this was a period when performers' on- and offstage behaviour was closely connected, yet the modern (psychological) idea of the self was only just developing and was cause for much debate.[24] It was, as subsequent chapters will show, a century in which gender roles in society at large were increasingly sharply defined (and strictly policed) and thus one in which individual identity was often (not entirely paradoxically) either subsumed to gender or evaporated altogether.[25] The dominant operatic genre, *opera seria*, provoked abiding audience fascination with gender and sexual identity through its convention of employing castrati (and powerful women); yet, while its plots emphasised archetypal male heroism, men could take women's roles and women (particularly in London) men's, leading satirists to characterise the genre as 'Music, without Distinction of Sexes'.[26] Then too, as we will see, the ornamentation that most strongly reflected the talents peculiar to individual singers also created a disjunction between sound and sense that was profoundly troubling for an age in which the philosophy of self was rooted in rational, moral consciousness.[27]

[24] Locke's theory of personal identity, propounded in the chapter 'Of Identity and Diversity' in the second edition of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1694), has been described as the 'earliest systematic treatment of the problem of personal identity in the history of modern philosophy', and was the particular cause of early eighteenth-century debate; see Allison, 'Locke's Theory of Personal Identity', 105; Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians*; Fox, 'Defining Eighteenth-Century Psychology'. The eighteenth century's invention of the modern 'subject' has been treated in particular depth in studies of the novel, following Ian Watt's seminal *The Rise of the Novel*. Deidre Shauna Lynch suggests that the distinction between 'round' and 'flat' characters (or a version thereof) 'first became available to readers' in the 1780s; see *The Economy of Character*, 3.
The extent to which a psychological conception of the self applies to the eighteenth-century stage is questioned; see, for example, Freeman, *Character's Theater*, 12–17; Wilson, 'Garrick, Iconic Acting', 376.

[25] Michel Foucault propounds the idea of the period as one of bodily surveillance and submission in both *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. Increasing distinction of gender roles is discussed in Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*; Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*; Brown, 'The Defenseless Woman and the Development of English Tragedy', 437–41. Character 'types' also became more sharply distinguished; see Smeed, *The Theophrastan 'Character'*. Still more radically than Locke, David Hume undermined the idea of the self in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), 259: 'The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies.'

[26] Welsted, *The Dissembled Wanton*, I.i. On the socially problematic nature of the role of castrati and powerful women in opera, see my 'An Infinity of Factions'.

[27] The sound/sense dichotomy is one frequently invoked in contemporary criticism of opera. The dissolution of identity when the rational mind ceases to function was already addressed by Locke in the first edition of his *Essay* (1690): 'if we take wholly away all Consciousness of our Actions and Sensations, especially of Pleasure and Pain, and the concernment that accompanies it, it will be hard to know wherein to place personal Identity'; *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 110; cited in Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians*, 28.

Contemporaries were well aware of the paradoxes entailed in notions of identity (as the abiding popularity of the masquerade in this period indicates). They looked, perhaps, to the theatre and the theatrical (in entertainments such as the masquerade) more than anywhere else to explore identity's hinterland.[28] Opera also participated in these explorations. In the works prepared for the 'rival sirens' during the period 1726–8, when distinctions between performers became particularly pressing, we might expect especially to trace such concerns. Seeing this altercation through the lens of wider contemporary concerns will wrest significance from the (apparently) inconsequential realm of thespian bickering, and may also aid in revitalising our appreciation of a musical genre which many, while admiring individual works, nonetheless also find trivial.

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My exploration of Cuzzoni's and Faustina's appearance together in London necessarily focusses on works for which the music survives substantially intact, namely those operas prepared by Handel and his (sometimes anonymous) librettists: *Alessandro* (1726), *Admeto* (1727), *Riccardo primo* (1727), *Siroe* (1728) and *Tolomeo* (1728). These were also the most successful of the works staged in these years of the Royal Academy of Music (1719–28), as Table I indicates. Indeed, Handel's general popularity is attested by the fact that his operas, and his alone, were revived during this period.

However, some discussion of London's other composers is also necessary, for they played a significant role in structuring the women's competition. It was in Giovanni Bononcini's *Astianatte* (1727) that the audience factionalism came to a head; an exploration of the libretto and surviving music in chapter 2 suggests why it might have provoked such disputes. Attilio Ariosti's *Lucio Vero* (1727) suggests, in turn, the problematic view of the operatic hero which, in a different way (as we will see in chapter 5), was further explored in Handel's *Siroe* and *Tolomeo*. Then too, the libretti and collections of 'favourite songs' from other operas by Bononcini and Ariosti contribute to our understanding of Cuzzoni's and Faustina's dramatic and vocal characteristics.

The first chapter explores the nature of persona and identity construction on the early eighteenth-century London stage, and in particular the contradictions

[28] The assumption of such an awareness lies behind Castle's *Masquerade and Civilization*; the 'theatricalisation of social relations' through the period's economic exigencies is examined in Agnew, *Worlds Apart*; and the central thesis of Lisa Freeman's *Character's Theater* is that play with the nature of the self and personal character was at the heart of the eighteenth-century English theatrical enterprise. Contemporary philosophical discussions of identity make significant use of theatrical reference: David Hume in *A Treatise of Human Nature* used the theatre as the metaphor for the mind's operations: 'The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations …'; cited in Burns, *Character*, 196.

Table I: *Operas in which Faustina and Cuzzoni appeared, London 1726–8*

Librettist/composer	Work	Premiere	No. of performances*
Rolli/Handel	*Alessandro*	May 1726	13
Haym/Ariosti	*Lucio Vero*	January 1727	7
Anon./Handel	*Admeto*	January 1727	19
rev. Handel	*Ottone*	*April 1727*	2
rev. Handel	*Floridante*	*April 1727*	2
Haym?/Bononcini	*Astianatte*	May 1727	9
rev. Handel	*Admeto*	*October 1727*	6
Anon./Ariosti	*Teuzzone*	October 1727	3/4
rev. Handel	*Admeto*	*November 1727*	*1*
Rolli/Handel	*Riccardo primo*	November 1727	11
rev. Handel	*Alessandro*	*December 1727*	4
rev. Handel	*Radamisto*	*January 1728*	c.7
Haym/Handel	*Siroe*	February 1728	18
Haym/Handel	*Tolomeo*	April 1728	7
rev. Handel	*Admeto*	*May 1728*	3

* The source for performance information is *The London Stage, 1660–1800. Part 2: 1700–1729*, with the exception of the revival of *Radamisto* in 1728; this information and performance figures for Handel are drawn from: Burrows, *Handel*, 388–9.

contained within the rival singers' oppositional characterisation. Although Italian opera was by this time an international genre, local theatrical context could inflect its meaning and hence influence its structure in fundamental ways, as this chapter will demonstrate. Thereafter, I will pursue the negotiation of the performers' identities through a close examination of different aspects of several operas. In coming to understand how *Astianatte* ignited factional hostilities, chapter 2 looks first to Cuzzoni's earlier London roles, considering how characterisation strategies might have differed before and after Faustina's arrival. In particular, examination of alterations Handel made to the title role in *Rodelinda* (1725) suggests that the operatic tradition for variety of affect in representation of character could at times be used to focus on certain antitheses within Cuzzoni's roles, antitheses which held wider social significance. Such focus recalls the 'point' or 'hit' that constituted a primary semiotic mechanism of contemporaneous spoken theatre, designed to highlight key moments in the action and at the same time foreground the actor as didactic envoy. The 'pointing' deployed after Faustina's arrival, however, emphasised antithesis between rather than within characters. No work demonstrates this better than *Astianatte*, in which the dramatic catastrophe deploys a tableau that heightens and distills Cuzzoni's and Faustina's conflict, in their portrayal as the epitomes of good and bad womanhood respectively.

'Pointing' as a device underscores the fragmentary multivalence which twentieth-century theorists have rediscovered as central to the theatrical event, but which eighteenth-century audiences simply took for granted. The third chapter further pursues the combinative power of the fragment, examining the means by which both singers' alienation from fixed, self-sufficient identities was explored and exploited in their joint operas. Starting with a consideration of Handel's *Alessandro*, but taking his *Admeto* as its principal subject, the chapter will show that the opera management's artful manipulation of the women's appearance on stage encouraged the atomising and thus the commodifying of their attributes. In employing the miniature portrait and female disguise as its two central plot devices, *Admeto* explicitly plays with notions of authenticity and identity, with female mutability, and with anxiety and disavowal. The deliberate visual and musical muddling of the two women leads me to suggest that we might see this opera as itself a disavowal of the individuality of each singer and of her power as an autonomous professional woman.

If my third chapter seems to portray the opera management as manipulating the trope of female rivalry to the women's detriment, the fourth suggests an alternative view. Exploring the impact on the company's plans of the factionalism as it spun out of control, the chapter examines the rationale behind the substantial changes made to Handel's *Riccardo primo* between May and November 1727. Handel completed the first version of this opera just a few weeks before the season collapsed so spectacularly over *Astianatte*, and thus had to defer the opera's premiere. It seems logical to assume that this collapse would have had some impact on subsequent works; indeed, in order to alleviate factional hostilities, it seems that the next operas were structured not on a principle of provocation but on one of equality. The numerous alterations made to *Riccardo primo* between May and November then suggest the power of a singer (or at least of her supporters) to affect the course of an opera, but at the same time, as we will see, they also return us disquietingly to the realisation that the singers' equality too easily becomes interdependence.

As the women's relationship was emphasised and their actions took precedence in the audience's minds, so they attained precedence in the plots as well, where the key indicator of prestige was a woman's relationship to the *primo uomo*. In the triangular dynamic established between Faustina, Cuzzoni and the company's *primo uomo*, Senesino, librettists initially (as we will see) used the issue of relationship primacy to maintain suspense for as long as possible. Thus, chapter 5 will suggest, the love interest often became a central issue, while, at the same time, the *primo uomo* was denied the option of making a quick, decisive choice: forthright heroism was not necessarily rescinded, but the plot's ultimate goal (and the audience's key point of interest) was the resolution of romantic attachment. Curiously, the company appears to have thematised this difficulty, casting Senesino as weak or ineffective in more than one work. This chapter focusses on perhaps the clearest dramatic enunciation of