

Introduction

Migrations and Transformations

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Recent years have witnessed an acute awareness of the nature of scholarship about opera. And those who have reflected on the issues surrounding the genre's study have changed the course of scholarship in significant ways. Some writers from disciplines beyond music, frustrated by musicology's (previous) myopia, have bemoaned the discipline's (perceived) failure to deal with critical approaches to the study of opera. But the new perspectives on opera scholarship coming from literary criticism and comparative literature, cultural history, philosophy, feminist criticism, film studies, political science, and medicine have encouraged musicologists to employ varied methodologies, to ask broader questions, and to seek answers to those questions through different avenues, thereby bringing together the best of both musical and non-musical criticism.¹ As a result, however, many musicians now decry the neglect of music in interdisciplinary approaches to studying the genre.² Indeed, in scholarly writings about opera today, music, the element that distinguishes opera as opera, can and often does take a back seat to non-musical concerns. But, important as music is to opera, it is only one element in a complex synthesis of means of artistic expression. The works in their entirety and in their realisations encompass much more.

The new trajectories in opera studies should not come as a surprise, as Herbert Lindenberger has noted: 'Since opera has thrived from its beginnings as a collocation of otherwise distinct art forms, it seems only appropriate that diverse intellectual disciplines join each other to promote its understanding.'³ Operatic works were and are created in and for an era, a place, a people; they are not autonomous entities that exist in, of, or for themselves. Yet as the present volume demonstrates, opera is a historically situated synthesis of means of artistic expression that can mediate and transcend temporal, geographical, and social boundaries.

It was in this spirit of a more comprehensive interrogation of opera that the research seminar 'Opera in Context: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Creation, Performance and Reception', sponsored by The University of Iowa Obermann Center for Advanced Studies, was conceived. In summer 2001 in the inauspicious venue of Iowa City, a small mid-western American college town, a group of fifteen scholars, both established and upcoming, gathered to address a wide range of subjects associated with the conception, creation, performance, and reception of opera across the centuries. The focus was on the various types of relationship

between opera and the social worlds in which, and for which, it is created: specifically, the ways in which individual operas or operatic traditions shape, and are shaped by, the cultural circumstances and ideologies in which they exist. A principal aim of the seminar was to bring together scholars from various disciplines to investigate new angles that might allow fresh visions of opera, including intersections between stage representation and social contexts, realisations of aesthetic ideals within opera, transformations of single works for different venues and audiences, and operatic or other works that spawn or respond to other operatic or non-operatic works, as well as reception issues that bear on historical and contemporary comprehension of the genre as a communicative mode of utterance and representation.

All such undertakings, no matter how precisely conceived or how carefully organised, run the risk of being so varied in topic that nothing meaningful results from them. As it turned out, however, the ‘Opera in Context’ seminar was productive and focused. As the seminar progressed, not only did it quickly become apparent precisely how beneficial the intersections of disciplinary approaches would be to each member, but, of greater importance, unanticipated themes emerged from among the topics. The projects dealt with works or ideas that have been transformed or translated in some way, migrating from one medium to another, one era to another, one culture to another, one genre to another. And thus *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries* came into being.

Among the topics addressed in the following pages, the reader will find those treating temporal, geographical, ideological, theoretical, and cultural transformations, migrations, and translations (figurative and literal). The subjects discussed are diverse, encompassing the design of opera, in particular its conventions, as well as transformations of its meanings over time; theoretical issues contingent on the transformation of ‘speech’ into ‘song’; the translation of spoken theater to lyric theater; transformations of literary sources and their migration into operatic genre; works that migrate across geographical or social boundaries into different cultural contexts and resulting stylistic and communicative transformations of various kinds; the transformational effects of aesthetic considerations as they bear on opera; and translations between media and/or genre as well as translations through interpretation and performance of the composer’s creation.

The volume proceeds more or less chronologically. To situate opera historically, the collection begins at the beginning with ‘Venice: Cradle of (Operatic) Convention’, in which Ellen Rosand addresses the reasons for the rise of conventionalities in opera in seventeenth-century Venice. Pointing to three crucial conditions that existed in the political and social structure of the city – regular demand, dependable financial backing, and a heterogeneous audience – she focuses on the ways in which opera produced in the Serenissima in this period developed virtually all of the most recognisable characteristics of the genre we know today.

Three essays related to eighteenth-century French opera treat transformations

of various sounds into music. Downing A. Thomas's "'Je vous répondrez au troisième couplet": Eighteenth-Century *opéra comique* and the Demands of Speech" seeks to bring attention back to modes of expression, integrating theoretical issues and thematic concerns to effect a better understanding of the place and meaning of *opéra comique* within French culture. Thomas argues that, through its particular mixture of forms of speech and song, *opéra comique* sought to foster an emotional self-awareness on the part of the listener-spectator. The temporal and affective shifts and conjunctions that this mixture produced were crucial to the success of the new genre because they contributed to a more capacious understanding of the role of feeling in the social order that was central to Enlightenment ideals. Tili Boon Cuillé's 'From the Comédie-Française to the Opéra: Figaro at the Crossroads' approaches similar concerns of the transformation of spoken and sung utterances through the writings and theatrical works of Beaumarchais. Drawing on Beaumarchais's aesthetic ideals and proposed reforms of the spoken and lyric theaters, as expressed in the prefaces to several of his works, Cuillé suggests that the dramatic function of music in these comedies facilitated the transition of these particular spoken works to the operatic stage. She focuses on Beaumarchais's Figaro comedies and his opera *Tarare* as indicative of two different turn-of-the-century conceptions of opera representing an interface between an eighteenth-century French conception of opera, which sought an ideal balance between words and music, and a nineteenth-century European conception, which viewed opera as dramatic work. In 'Ideological Noises: Opera Criticism in Early Eighteenth-Century France', Charles Dill examines the denigration of certain musical sounds or styles, often categorised in eighteenth-century French discourses as 'noise'. Centering on commentators who continuously questioned the role of opera in society, Dill analyses these more conservative, nostalgic discourses as a form of cultural denigration, focusing specifically on the characterisation of certain kinds of music as noise, animal cries, or sounds made by savages, and arguing that such discourses go beyond simple polemical devices to show the hegemonic culture defining itself over and against what it was not and what it was afraid of becoming.

Crossing geographical and stylistic boundaries, two additional essays treat opera in the eighteenth century, weighing migrations between countries and eras. The first of these, Waltraud Maierhofer's 'Transformations on Stage Only: Anfossi's *Circe* in Weimar', addresses reception and translation issues in opera specifically as they bear on the transformation of a single work – Pasquale Anfossi's *La maga Circe* – as it migrated from the Italian to the German stage. Drawing on various topics – mythological figures, Weimar classicism, musical patterns, *opera buffa*, translation, Goethe, and the history of German theater, as they apply to issues of gender and national character reflected in Goethe's aria verses and Vulpius's recitative texts – Maierhofer evaluates the cultural transformations reflected in the characters, the dramatic situations, the performances, and the reception of the Italian work after its migration to Germany. The second essay in this group, 'Roman Republicanism and Operatic Heroines in Napoleonic Italy: Tarchi's *La congiura pisoniana* and Cimarosa's *Gli Orazii e i*

Curiazi' by Robert Ketterer, takes up ideas of cultural context and the portrayal of women on the late eighteenth-century Italian stage. Addressing both temporal and cultural migrations, Ketterer examines two operas with classical Roman republican themes – Cimarosa's *Gli Orazi e i Curiazi* (Venice, Teatro la Fenice) and Tarchi's *La congiura pisoniana* (Milan, Teatro alla Scala) – produced in Italy for Carnival season 1796–97 at the time when Napoleon was pushing out the Austrians on behalf of the French Republic. Drawing on an innovative combination of musical and dramatic changes in operatic production during the 1790s in Italy and republican ideas about heroism and female virtue imported from France, Ketterer argues that the two operas celebrated the French Revolution.

The next three essays consider conceptual topics associated with opera. The first two touch on transitional issues between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries as they bear on various kinds of transformations. Anne Williams's 'Ghostly Voices: "Gothic Opera" and the Failure of Gounod's *La Nonne sanglante*' deals with the concept of opera in relation to the transformation of its literary sources. By studying the migration of Gothic fiction into *grand opéra*, focusing on Scribe's libretto for Gounod's *La Nonne sanglante* (based on Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk*), the author attempts to uncover how the irrational and the extravagant migrated from one source to another, eventually becoming conventionalised in the latter genre, and explores the relation between Gothic fiction and opera, especially with regard to the conventions of *grand opéra*. A conceptual shift and its effect on opera production is addressed by Rachel Cowgill in 'Mozart Productions and the Emergence of *Werktreue* at London's Italian Opera House, 1780–1830'. Through archival documents bearing on London's Italian opera company between 1780 and 1830 and a study of performances of Mozart's operas at the time, Cowgill traces the history of the shift from the concept of 'opera as event' to 'opera as work', that is, as a musico-dramatic entity in its own right. The process, which entailed vacillation and extreme tension between the two approaches, can be observed clearly in productions of Mozart's operas. Drawing on surviving performance materials, archival documents, newspaper reports, and critical commentary, Cowgill highlights two events as crucial moments marking new territory in this value shift: the engagement of respected musical manager and administrator William Ayrton as the King's Theatre's 'musical director', in place of the traditional 'house composer', and his production of the London premiere of *Don Giovanni*. The conceptual focus of Grace Kehler's 'The Mirror of Art and Scenes of Recognition: Wagner and Mann' is the issue of mimesis and the place of the artist in Romantic and post-Romantic art. Kehler explores a few of the complications involved in Richard Wagner's endeavor to make culturally critical words and transcendent music work together by examining the literary writings of Thomas Mann, in particular the novella *Wälsungenblut*, which draws on Wagner's aesthetic ambitions to comment on the composer's confluences of the particular with the transcendent in his 'mirror scenes'. Kehler scrutinises the problems associated with art as mirror, particularly when that mirror is turned onto the artist.

Transformations and migrations of works from one medium to another, one century to another, and one cultural setting to another are the subjects of three

essays dealing with nineteenth- and twentieth-century works. In 'Burlesques, Barriers, Borders, and Boundaries', Roberta Montemorra Marvin ponders parodic adaptations of foreign operas performed in nineteenth-century London as they comment on Victorian pretenses, values, and aesthetics for audiences outside the traditional theatrical venues. Against a backdrop of Victorian pretenses and values, Marvin assesses the symbolic meaning and social relevance of the adaptations both textually and musically to investigate the manner in which burlesque interpreted the foreign art form of Italian opera in a self-conscious English society, to enquire into the mode of understanding these works according to the cultural codes of their time, and to interrogate the manner in which these works traversed class differences in an evolving social milieu. The remaining two essays in this group deal with interpretative strategies and media of representation for operas written in one era and reconceived in performance in the twentieth century. In 'Local Color: The Representation of Race in *Carmen* and *Carmen Jones*', Robert L.A. Clark examines transformed meanings of racial encoding in those two works as they moved to new cultural contexts and were presented through differing media. Starting with Bizet's *Carmen*, by way of a comparison with the title character in Mérimée's novella, he first discusses how two performers negotiated the complex othering of Carmen. The larger part of the essay is devoted to post-World War II and Civil Rights era incarnations of the opera's title role, especially in Oscar Hammerstein II's musical comedy *Carmen Jones* (1944) and Otto Preminger's screen adaptation of Hammerstein's Broadway show (1954). The essay concludes that *Carmen* is the site of intense ideological interrogation and negotiation of the category of race, itself always contingent on the immediate cultural, social, and political contexts. 'Operatic School for Scandal' by David J. Levin deals with opera directed by filmmakers using Atom Egoyan's staging of Strauss's *Salome*, first mounted by the Canadian Opera Company in 1996 and remounted with a new cast in 2002, as his case in point. Through discussing the transfer of Egoyan's filmic techniques to the operatic stage, as well as the interpretative strategies of differing casts, Levin discusses the implications of radical stagings for the 'translated' meaning of the work in performance.

Finally, Herbert Lindenberger's 'Why (What? How? If?) Opera Studies?' brings us full circle, interrogating the very possibility of 'opera studies' as an academic field at the beginning of the twenty-first century and suggesting an agenda for future research and teaching. This essay, which takes the form of a dialog, seeks to establish a rationale and to present an agenda for opera research and teaching, advocating interdisciplinary programs in opera studies to prepare students not only to pursue serious scholarship on opera but also to teach and, just as important, to speak knowledgeably about opera to the general public. Downing A. Thomas's Epilogue reflects on the nature of the operatic 'work' and its constituent transformations and migrations.

The rich and varied selection of approaches – addressing sources, works, audiences, performers, creators, culture, and theory – deals with operatic works as historical and contemporary entities with aesthetic and ideological complexities. Each essay attends to crossovers or migrations between genres, cultures, modes of

expression, media of presentation, literary and musical works, and aesthetics, but the directions the general topic takes are diverse. In particular, the collection abandons notions of the supposed singular nature of the operatic work, strongly asserting that works are meaningfully transformed by the manifold circumstances of their creation and reception, and that these circumstances have an impact on the life of those works in their many transformations and on a given audience's experience of them.

Although the essay collection might be deemed guilty of the cardinal sin of interdisciplinary opera studies in that all other aspects of opera – textual, aesthetic, visual, social, historical, theoretical – are privileged over music, the element that makes opera opera, it in fact suggests the contrary. Precisely because the approaches they take subordinate music and its functions, they negotiate the operatic experience and the works in fresh ways.

Notes

- 1 Among these are Anthony Arblaster, *Viva la libertà: Politics in Opera* (London: Verso, 1992); John Bokina, *Opera and Politics: From Monteverdi to Henze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, repr. 1995), among other writings; Peter Conrad, *Romantic Opera and Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Peter Conrad, *A Song of Love and Death: The Meaning of Opera* (New York: Poseidon, 1987); *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Disease, Desire, Death* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000); Peter Kivy, *Ossin's Rage: Philosophical Reflections on Opera, Drama, and Text* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Paul Robinson, *Opera and Ideas: From Mozart to Strauss* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985); Gary Schmidgall, *Literature as Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977); Jeremy Tambling, *Opera, Ideology and Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987). New views are evident in the work of numerous musicologists, among which can be counted Carolyn Abbate, Mary Hunter, Susan McClary, and Mary Ann Smart.
- 2 See, for example, the introductions to Lindenberger's *Opera: The Extravagant Art* and *Opera in History* and Ellen Rosand's reviews of various books about opera in *19th-Century Music*, 14, no. 1 (1990): 75–83.
- 3 Lindenberger, *Opera in History*, 10.