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Review Article
Operatic Stories

Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Hilary Poriss, eds, *Fashions and Legacies of Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Cormac Newark, *Opera in the Novel from Balzac to Proust*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Herbert Lindenberger, *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

In view of the fascination that opera holds for an increasing number of people, I am confident that this is the time for a serious book on the subject.[1]

The year was 1984, and Herbert Lindenberger, Professor of Comparative Literature and English, was writing his first book on opera. Since then, of course, Lindenberger's confidence has been thoroughly vindicated, and, as he puts it in his new work, *Situating Opera*, in typically colourful fashion, 'opera's been exploding all over the place' (1). As an academic who has been working in the humanities for over half a century, Lindenberger is particularly well placed to provide a résumé of developments in opera scholarship over the last thirty years. But his sweeping retrospective view of changing attitudes to the discipline is also a useful reminder of just how young a field it is, and of the historical contingency of our scholarly obsessions. A key feature of this recent history of opera studies has, of course, been the impetus provided by voices from outside musicology – Lindenberger's central among them – which have opened up new avenues for understanding opera through interdisciplinary research. The three books under review here all embrace and advance the possibilities offered by such interdisciplinary approaches. Working in different ways to broaden our conception of what opera and its reception might entail, they show, if further evidence were required, just how far opera scholarship has come.

(Un)telling tales

The thirteen chapters in *Fashions and Legacies of Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*, edited by Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Hilary Poriss, bring together a very distinguished cast of writers, including the conductors Will Crutchfield and John Mauceri. The refreshing decision to include music practitioners is perhaps not surprising given that the book is dedicated to Philip Gossett, whose 'influence extends worldwide into opera houses through the critical edition projects, as well as through his unparalleled gift for translating this scholarship from the page to the stage by working directly with singers, conductors, and directors' (7). Although it is inevitable with a volume such as this that many readers will pick and choose chapters of particular interest, when read together they amount to more than the sum of their parts, working in conversation with each other to develop closely connected themes from a variety of perspectives.

As the book's title makes clear, the main focus is nineteenth-century Italian opera – though the boundaries are stretched to make room for Handel. Less clearly stated is

[1] Herbert Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art* (Ithaca, 1984), 10.

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the fact that, apart from a couple of very brief forays into *ottocento* opera's reception in America, the essays concentrate on the legacies and fashions of Italian opera in Europe: it would have been interesting to see the net cast more widely. Yet while the repertoire and geography of reception are fairly circumscribed, the general aims of the book are much broader:

> Of primary interest is what happens to these operas once they have escaped the control of their authors [...]. This book does not aim toward comprehensiveness, but rather it seeks to contribute an additional layer to the growing body of scholarship dedicated to expanding the notion of the operatic work-concept and to exploring the manner in which the taste for, and reception of, Italian opera has been influenced, transformed, and adapted by individuals and institutions (3).

Fashions and Legacies thus clearly positions itself among the increasing number of studies displacing traditional work- and composer-centred histories, and turning instead to the complicated network of forces that create and shape operas, their shifting meanings, and their afterlives.[2] It is in part this change in perspective that has spurred intensified discussion of the place of operatic works in the work-concept debate.[3] This is a particularly knotty issue: as Roger Parker has noted, 'opera routinely involves the dictates not of an authorial intention but of multiple (often vigorously competing) authorial intentions', consequently 'considered at all closely, almost all operas become problem works so far as establishing a definitive text is concerned'.[4] A number of essays in *Fashions and Legacies* engage with this conundrum, building on the growing attention to visual aspects of opera in order to posit new ways in which we might expand our notion of what makes up an operatic 'text'. In the volume's only essay dedicated to *opera buffa*, Francesco Izzo examines Luigi Ricci's striking use of stage directions, illustrating the composer's concern to control visual as well as aural matters, and making clear the value of paying closer attention to these textual details, where they exist. Using Verdi's *Otello* as a case study, Andreas Giger offers a detailed analysis of the *disposizione scenica*, to reveal the symbiotic relationship between the musical form and the form created by onstage blocking.

Much of the rest of the volume deals with different degrees and kinds of transformation of opera's multiple texts, continually calling on the reader to revise previously held assumptions. Ellen T. Harris and Fabrizio Della Seta, for example, explore modifications to musical scores (among other issues). Harris considers the relatively minor matter of reorchestrating Handel arias; Della Seta addresses the more serious matter of musical piracy, and a 'false' version of *I Puritani* that masqueraded as the real thing (potentially robbing Bellini of the initial success he might otherwise have enjoyed). In his chapter on Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz, Mark Everist shifts attention from specifically musical alterations to the art of translating Italian opera for the Académie Royale de Musique in the 1830s. This was a complicated process that involved far more than straightforward

[2] See, for example, *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago, 2009); *Operatic Migrations: Transforming Works and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Downing A. Thomas (Aldershot, 2006); and *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford, 2012). It should come as no surprise that at least four of the authors featured in *Fashions and Legacies* have also contributed to these similarly themed volumes.

[3] Lydia Goehr's seminal *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford, 1992) largely leaves operatic works out of the argument; more recent discussions that address this gap include Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2006), particularly Chapter 1, and Rachel Cowgill, 'Mozart Productions and the Emergence of *Werktreue* at London's Italian Opera House, 1780–1830', in *Operatic Migrations*, 145–86.

[4] Parker, *Remaking the Song*, 8.

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translation; indeed, the extent to which the musical and dramatic, as well as linguistic, aspects of operas were also 'naturalised', is, as Everist points out, a reminder that during this period 'fidelity to an original in translation was a very different concept from what it is today' (36). Roberta Montemorra Marvin also studies translation: her focus is on the multiple transformations undergone by Verdi arias on their journeys from Italy to London, from stage to parlour, and from high art to low, incorporated into Victorian burlesques, with new, sanitized, texts, to reflect the moral values of their new context. In this particularly fertile exploration of Verdi reception, Marvin elucidates not only the role that such domestic transcriptions played in breaking down class boundaries, but also how, through their dissemination of Verdi's music to a wider audience – and no matter how modified the musical object – they helped to cement the composer's position in the canon. Marvin thus offers further evidence of the need to consider reinterpretations, modifications, translations – call them what you will – as crucial components of a work's history, for these musical black sheep can reveal much about both the qualities of a 'work' and the nature of the different cultures that choose to reshape it. David B. Rosen takes this theme still further in his close reading of Konstantin Stanislavsky's 1927 staging of *La bohème*, a production that made fundamental cuts and changes not only to the text, but to the score. In studying a production that was 'without a glimmer of composer-conferred "authority"', Rosen, like Marvin, makes the case for widening our understanding of what constitutes an opera's history (220).

While Stanislavsky clearly had no qualms about taking scissors to the score, other, even more extreme cuts were not uncommon. In a persuasive essay, Hilary Poriss looks at the 'practice of performing operas piecemeal – of featuring a group of individual acts, and sometimes individual scenes, from different operas over the course of one evening' (111). These multi-work events have previously been understood as products of a nineteenth-century culture that comprehended opera in a fragmentary way, as a series of discrete moments. Poriss, however, turns this idea on its head, suggesting instead that these productions worked so successfully precisely because audiences were already familiar with the 'whole' operas from which the acts derived, 'a process that occurred in conjunction with the gradual formation of an operatic canon' (5). (She also points out that, while piecemeal productions appear to have been very popular, they were not always well received by the critics.) Jeffrey Kallberg's chapter is similarly concerned with the question of how to tap into a seemingly alien mindset. Taking as his starting point the famous tale of the apparently stimulating musical experiments carried out in 1798 on Hanz and Marguerite, the resident elephants of the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, Kallberg explores a wide range of literary sources, including erotic fiction and Stendhal's eyebrow-raising correspondence, to make sense of how, why, and under what circumstances, notions of sex and music – particularly opera – intersected in early nineteenth-century French thought. Kallberg's study provides insights into a rarely discussed aspect of opera reception. But more than this, by carefully teasing out the changing nature of the association between sex and music from one that emphasized the act of *watching* vocal music, to *listening* to instruments, Kallberg offers a new perspective on evolving attitudes to the relationship between the aural and the visual in nineteenth-century France, and the concomitant rise of instrumental music.[5]

[5] On changing attitudes towards seeing and listening in nineteenth-century France, see Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993), 83–209; James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1995); and Jeffrey Cooper, *The Rise of Instrumental Music and Concert Series in Paris, 1828–1871* (Ann Arbor, 1983). Newark also observes that this shift from an emphasis on opera to instrumental music was eventually mirrored in novels; see *Opera and the Novel*, 199.

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Opera reception – and the reception of its reception – is also central to Ralph P. Locke's remarkable essay, '*Aida* and nine readings of empire'. This is not entirely new material: a longer version of this piece previously appeared in *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*.[6] For the purposes of this volume, Locke has abridged, and slightly updated the article, tightening the focus on Verdi's opera at the expense of some valuable observations on methodology and the nature of academic debates. In either version, this is a rich and rewarding read. Focusing on the representation of the opera's two 'exotic' peoples, Locke sifts the opera's complex reception history to identify, add to, and classify, the different readings of *Aida*, on a continuum from the most literal, to the most metaphorical. His admirably nuanced scrutiny of the conflicting responses to the opera, combined with his analyses of the music itself, lay bare the 'internal tensions, ambivalences, [and] multiple sympathies' inherent in the work (169).

Cumulatively, these essays build a picture of how nebulous a creature opera is – how flexible, how amenable to reinvention, both physical and critical, without, somehow, losing its identity. As Newark puts it in his discussion of *grand opéra*, the works have a 'paradoxical double existence as both enduring tourist attractions and flickering, abstract entities' (65). Instead of forming an unfortunate obfuscation of the genuine 'work', the many different layers of text that operas accrue form a crucial part of their history and identity. Indeed, the ability to continually change and renew whilst remaining recognisable, is arguably one of the key characteristics of the genre, and one that, in the context of performance practice, William Crutchfield describes as exemplifying a 'self-transforming' tradition: 'each generation masters what its elders have done, makes its own innovations and modifications, and passes along to its successors what has been retained and what has been changed' (244).

But while the visual facet of opera has, in recent years, embraced this sense of a dynamic tradition, with stagings adapted to reflect new contexts and cultures, the musical side – particularly vocal performance – has become stuck in a kind of time-warp, a 'caricature tradition', as Crutchfield calls it (242). In large part due to developments in recording technology and distribution, and despite – or perhaps because of – the uncertainty over what constituted a definitive score in *ottocento* opera, previously flexible aspects of musical performance became fixed in the 1950s, adopting the mantle of (false) authenticity. In a bid to get beyond this situation Crutchfield offers what initially seems to be a balanced solution that does not insist on wholesale abandonment of the invented tradition to which audiences have become accustomed, but which nonetheless moves forward, by re-asserting 'a broader role for musicianship and creativity' (258). As this argument unfolds, however, it takes on a perhaps surprisingly conservative tone:

> The best possible antidote to the excesses of *Regietheater* is to present something genuinely challenging and fascinating on the musical side, to make the delivery of the score the natural center of creative focus that it needs to be (258).

The idea that the musical component of opera 'needs to be' the 'natural center of creative focus' is surely as historical a construction as the long high B at the end of 'Nessun Dorma'.[7] It is generally agreed that it was only in the course of the nineteenth century that music came to be thought of as the central element of opera (and only then for certain repertories, or certain audiences); operatic traditions almost always turn out to be

[6] Ralph P. Locke, '*Aida* and nine readings of empire', *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 3 (2006), 45–72.

[7] The practice of treating the high B at the end of 'Nessun Dorma' as a semibreve instead of a semiquaver, is cited by Crutchfield as one example of the 'caricature tradition' (252).

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fictions of a sort. This is not to say, of course, that Crutchfield should not make a case for placing creative focus on the music; nor that future tenors should not pay closer attention to the details of Puccini's score. But whatever path they choose, these decisions should be made on the basis of an informed aesthetic judgment, rather than on some claim to authenticity. Writing about those 'who would wish above all to preserve the opera's musical text as something sacred', Parker has counselled that, 'if nothing else [. . .] some knowledge of the history of this attitude, or at least some inkling of the fact that the attitude has a history, may serve to dampen the religious zeal of the protectors'.[8] And through its exploration of *ottocento* opera's unsettled histories, *Fashions and Legacies* does much to provide just such a corrective to misconceived assumptions about operatic traditions.

Opera Regained

If, as Poriss suggests, the 'enduring works' of Italian opera 'inevitably have many stories to tell' (3), so too do they form an essential part of stories told. In *Opera and the Novel from Balzac to Proust*, Newark demonstrates compellingly how novels can be embraced as a productive – even essential – source for understanding 'how opera was experienced, and how it implanted itself in the general consciousness, in a reception environment almost unapproachably different from our own' (4). The result is a kaleidoscopic vision of the shifting patterns, aesthetics and preoccupations of nineteenth-century French culture. In other words, Newark takes us literally in search of lost time, to recover traces of the ways in which opera was encountered and understood. Combining powers of imagination worthy of many of the authors under consideration with careful historical research and close literary readings, this is a deeply nuanced book that opens up new methodological pathways. At times it reads like a novel itself, with creative prose that is often thrilling to read – though occasionally exhausting too, as sentences begin to spin out of control, attaining Proustian dimensions.

Opera in the Novel traces the history of the *soirée à l'Opéra*: the almost ubiquitous scene at the opera that features in French novels throughout the nineteenth century. As Newark explains, the frequency of this setting should come as no surprise, given the prominent social role of the Opéra for the classes that populated many of these novels. Moreover, he argues, opera scenes had added value as a plot device: in offering 'visitations from another, more extravagantly eventful world', they provided a short cut to 'eventfulness' that made them perfect to act as 'structural turning points' (4).[9]

Newark acknowledges that musicologists might be wary of using novels for fear of them being 'historically untrustworthy and critically suspect' (11); but while such scepticism is surely justifiable, it is not automatically a good reason for disregarding them. In an excellent discussion of the synchronised rise of the literary *soirée à l'opéra* and the musical press, Newark dissects the relationships between music criticism and the novel, between critic and author, between fact and fiction. These ostensible binaries are collapsed to reveal a complex matrix of overlapping identities, subjects and audiences: novelists wrote music criticism, music critics wrote novels, and both texts would appear alongside each other in the pages of the press, neither one necessarily more reliable than the other. Indeed, the various prejudices, politics, and inaccuracies of nineteenth-century (perhaps any century's) music criticism are notoriously

[8] Parker, *Remaking the Song*, 8.

[9] This appears to be an expansion of Lindenberger's argument that such scenes functioned in novels in order to create a contrast between the 'higher' narrative of opera, and the 'lower' narrative of the novel; see Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art*, 145–96.

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difficult to navigate; as Katharine Ellis has suggested, 'there are, of course, no simple solutions beyond interpreting material explicitly in terms of its insider character and seeking independent corroboration [...]. Journalistic interest is, quite simply, an occupational hazard'.[10] The novel may present further interpretative complications, but many similar 'hazards' apply. If we can negotiate these difficulties in dealing with music criticism, we can surely do so for the novel; the rewards, if Newark's work is anything to go by, will be very rich indeed.

Certainly, as Newark argues, the persistence of the trope of the *soirée à l'Opéra* 'would seem uniquely important in the exploration of the developing interaction between various critical languages, forms of representation and aesthetic premises across the long operatic nineteenth century' (5). It is to this end that Newark focuses on six case studies, chosen to exemplify the wide range of contexts in which the *soirée à l'Opéra* was employed between roughly 1820 and 1920. Arranged chronologically, the chapters examine in turn Balzac's *Gambara* and Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*; *Guillaume Tell* in Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*; *Lucie de Lammermoor* in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*; the fictional opera *Orlando* in Verne's *Le Château des Carpathes*; Gounod's *Faust* in Leroux's *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra*; and finally *Tristan* in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. But this list only begins to hint at the range of works, themes and historiographical issues that come into play over the course of the book, whose broad stylistic and temporal range results in an illuminating perspective on changes in operatic consumption, especially as influenced by the impact of technological developments. The close relationship between music and science in nineteenth-century France is one that is tracked throughout: starting with the new technologies that created the visual and aural overload of *grand opéra*, Newark explores the increasingly isolated experiences of opera brought on by 'storing and retrieving the traces of live performance' (9). Thus Baron de Gortz brings his favourite soprano 'back to life', through wax cylinders and projections, 'the vitality of opera reception in the theatre [...] replaced by, and contrasted with, the sterility of compulsive private listening' (131). *Le Fantôme* takes as its opening cue the real-life burial of recorded voices (unsealed in 2007); and in the 1920s, Proust listens to *Pelléas* over the *théâtrophone*.[11] In its bid to follow these developments, the *soirée à l'Opéra* is thus gradually displaced from the opera house, until it reaches Proust, at least doubly removed from the original operatic experience, playing *Tristan* at the piano in his dining room, a *matinée au salon*, if you will. It is particularly on these excursions beyond the theatre that novels can offer a perspective on reception that is rarely found in the press.

One of Newark's principal points of entry into his chosen novels is through the many musical mistakes that they make. Reading the text through these errors leads Newark to explore some of the fundamental questions of opera historiography. Take for example, the case of the mutilation of *Guillaume Tell* in *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*. Dumas's failure to get the acts in the right order leads Newark to a detailed discussion of the constant cuts and revisions that Rossini's last opera underwent, and the challenge that this unsettled text poses to the work-concept. How, he asks, 'could a work like *Tell* be such a recognisable institution *and* so unstable at the same time?' (65). A novelist's oversight thus becomes a springboard to explore the very ontology of *grand opéra*.

Newark's excavations also bring to the fore issues of canonicity. He notes that, taken as a whole, the *soirées à l'Opéra* contradict the traditional view that French opera became more diverse towards the end of the century; instead, the repertory remained stuck, recycling the same small number of works (10). This fixed repertory has an important role to play

[10] Katharine Ellis, *Interpreting the Musical Past: Early Music in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 2005), xvii.

[11] For the full story behind the buried cylinders, see expositions.bnf.fr/voix/index.htm.

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in the novels that Newark examines. By drawing on works within a well-established canon, authors could rely on a widely understood operatic vocabulary, calling on readers 'to unearth and replay music' from their memories (154), in a way that recalls Poriss's example of piecemeal opera: having a shared lexicon allows shorter excerpts to be performed – or in this case, described in prose – safe in the knowledge that the audience can fill in the missing parts. Yet, as Newark's close – and convincing – reading of *Le Fantôme* suggests, 'the repertory, the institution that makes the Opéra viable as a conduit of meaning across whole social classes and historical periods [...] is also what prevents the genuine works within it from retaining any of their [...] magic' (161–2). The canon becomes a double-edged sword.

Incidentally, just as nineteenth-century novels benefitted from a shared knowledge of the operas to which they referred, prior knowledge of Newark's key novels, whilst not essential, would certainly be helpful. Although he gives synopses of the scenes under discussion, and broad outlines of the general plots, important details are often edged out. Ultimately, though, the novels themselves form only one part of the dizzying array of visual and literary sources that Newark employs to create an intricately textured account of the selected operas' meanings and resonances. Underpinning all the chapters is a sense of the still more vast – and continually accumulating – network of texts that inform operatic works and their reception. Emma Bovary's encounter with *Lucie de Lammermoor*, for example, appears to offer a lesson in interdisciplinarity, demanding engagement with an almost infinite number of textual and musical sources, translations, adaptations and transformations. But it does not stop there. For while *Madame Bovary* may tell us something about *Lucie* and its many texts, it simultaneously writes itself into the opera's history, leaving its trace on future interpretations.

Border Crossings

Such connections between opera and the novel return us to Herbert Lindenberger's *Situating Opera*. And, as with many of the themes, issues, and even works that he addresses in this book, it is territory that he has explored before.[12] Where Newark takes the intersection between opera and the novel as a way to investigate a plethora of social, historical, literary and musicological issues, Lindenberger's approach, in his chapter 'Opera and the novel: antithetical or complementary?', is more narrowly focused. In *Opera: The Extravagant Art*, he investigated the idea that the meeting of these musical and literary genres acts to reinforce their generic identities; this time around, he not only suggests that the relationship between opera and the novel has changed over time, but also explores the shifting (and complementary) ways in which both genres have been perceived by the academy. The resulting essay is a strong demonstration of Lindenberger's wide sphere of reference, and of his skill at bringing diverse fields together, to draw out subtle connections and tease out new ways of thinking about them. It is also evidence of his unflagging drive to engage and re-engage critically with the subject of his inquiry: he may frequently circle around the same materials, but he does so to revise and develop his ideas, building up a multi-faceted picture. Thus, an earlier conclusion that opera and the novel are antithetical is here modified to suggest that, if they are understood as part of a broader, sweeping spectrum, the gap between opera and the novel is not that great after all (83).

[12] See, for example, Chapter 4, 'Opera in Novels', in Lindenberger, *Opera: The Extravagant Art*, 145–96.

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Genre, as the subtitle indicates, is one of the central themes of the book, lying at the heart of some dense theoretical reflections not only about the borders between different art forms, but also within each art. Indeed, Lindenberger notes that he chose to write about opera partly 'because it transcends the usual intellectual categories. Opera extends its tentacles into all manner of territory' (2). One such territory is, once again, *Werktreue*. Like *Fashions and Legacies*, and *Opera in the Novel*, *Situating Opera* builds on existing debates about the problematic notion of the work-concept in relation to opera. Here Lindenberger takes the question in a different direction, asking what opera actually is in the twenty-first century. Across several chapters, and from different angles, he presents the reader with examples that, while very different from traditional (usually nineteenth-century) conceptions of opera, possess enough of the fundamental properties of the genre to be understood, in some sense, as 'opera'. Or do they? Lindenberger, as he makes clear in his introduction, prefers asking questions to answering them (5).

Beginning with two very different modern stagings of Handel's *Rodelinda*, Lindenberger rattles through a list of ever more boundary-stretching case studies, from the Broadway musical based on Green Day's *American Idiot*, to John Cage's *Europeras 1 and 2*, with their mash-ups of canonic hits. Among these examples, he also includes a particularly striking account of a museum show called 'The Faust Project'. This installation develops the legend in myriad ways: video monitors screen competing musical versions of *Faust*; a sixteenth-century printing press produces pages from the book, while articles on cloning are pinned up between paintings of the *Faust* story; amidst the cacophony, an effigy of a scientist in sixteenth-century attire stands with a glowing test tube, containing the outline of an infant. Such an extraordinary event, Lindenberger suggests, provides an extreme example of the 'violation' of artistic borders. But then, it turns out, this event is tailor-made to his argument: [spoiler alert] Lindenberger finally reveals that it was all a fabrication; he 'set up this scenario as a means of showing how opera might participate in a typically contemporary museum project in which all manner of borders are aggressively crossed' (104). Slipped in among so many genuine examples, he appears to have learnt his lesson from nineteenth-century French novels: that mixing fact with fiction can make the latter more believable.[13]

This is an unusual ploy for an academic book, but is by no means the only instance of Lindenberger flexing his creative muscles to make a point. And the point is worth making: where do we draw the generic line? When does opera – such an inherently interdisciplinary creation – begin, and cease, to be opera? 'Through its vigorous pursuit of other means, might opera as we have known it these past four centuries finally lose its identity?' (195) Here Lindenberger directs his thoughts on the nature of opera purely towards the future, assuming a relatively stable historical identity for the genre. Yet as Poriss, Marvin, and Newark make clear, we do not necessarily even have a clear grasp of the multiple identities of opera as it was conceived, and understood, throughout its dynamic and contingent past.

Situating Opera does not stop with debates about generic issues; the very structure of the book is itself an experiment in genre. As well as including fictional accounts, and autobiographical tales, the eleven essays swing in tone between the witty and the densely theoretical, all held together by the elegance and readability of the prose, which bubbles over with enthusiasm: I have rarely read an academic text that radiates such warmth. Along with the mix of writing styles, Lindenberger employs a range of unorthodox essay formats, often dispensing

[13] With its many references to genuine performers and events – including the burial of recordings beneath the Palais Garnier – *Le Fantôme de l'Opéra* is an excellent example of this practice; see Newark, 142–49.

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with formal structures in order to juxtapose shifting perspectives and interrelated snapshots of the operatic world past and present. These include an alphabetized list, a series of vignettes about operatic events throughout history, and a Prologue and Epilogue in the form of an interview between the author and an imaginary interlocutor.

None of this will surprise anyone already familiar with Lindenberger's work, in which the interview and lexicon formats have previously featured.[14] It is hard not to escape the feeling, however, that Lindenberger is being slightly disingenuous in his use of a dialogue at the opening of the book. The Interlocutor takes on the voice of the author's imaginary critics, pointing out the disunity of style, unevenness of tone, and providing Lindenberger with an opportunity to pre-empt some of these obvious criticisms in a slightly jocular way. The author's retort is that 'the three words of my subtitle – period, genre, reception – help shape nearly every essay' (4). This is certainly true. It is true too, of his main title, *Situating Opera*, which Lindenberger uses to explore the presence of opera everywhere from an eighteenth-century opera box to a specific part of the brain, and from parodies of opera to political commissions. In other words, the author embraces opera in its widest possible sense, and situates it everywhere, exploring its meanings and reverberations as much outside of the traditional opera house as within. But both title and subtitle could also easily work for any of the books under consideration in this review, and in truth *Situating Opera* ultimately does amount to a fairly loose collection of essays (six of which have already appeared in print in diverse publications between 2000 and 2010). Nonetheless, these essays do still work in conjunction if treated as a constellation revolving around a set of central themes: the concept of opera, its unstable generic identity, its contexts (social, political, aesthetic), and its reception histories.

All these, and more, are present in the opening chapter, 'Anatomy of a warhorse: *Il trovatore* from A to Z'. Using Verdi's crowd-pleaser as a case study, Lindenberger fires off in multiple directions, some theoretical, some very personal, some highly speculative. An opera is, he reminds us, an object that we can think about intellectually, be it from the point of view of performance practice, authenticity, source studies, scores, literary origins. But it can also be a reminder of the night spent working instead of going to hear Jussi Bjoerling, or the origins of the tune (in this case the *Miserere*) that you just cannot get out of your head. Lindenberger proposes that 'the only way to cover this heterogeneous material [...] is to find what you call a gimmick that will hold it all together in a rational way. The order of the alphabet provides this rational cover' (7). I sympathise with the dilemma, and the resulting chapter successfully allows Lindenberger to elaborate upon the ways in which opera has meaning. That said, the imposed structure can feel a little contrived – the 'X-rated' entry is a real stretch. And the condescending tone of the section on 'Ladies' disappoints: a clichéd and unflattering portrait of the female patrons at whose feet he lays much of the blame for the conservative state of opera in America.

If Lindenberger's interest in reception fades in and out of this chapter, it becomes (ostensibly) the sole focus for his final chapter, 'A brief consumers' history of opera' (the longest essay in the book). Self-evidently, this takes on the idea that instead of a history of musical texts, or performers, it would be possible to write 'a history of how members of the audience engaged, or may have engaged, with what they heard and saw' (219). This is a fine premise for an essay, if not entirely as novel as he makes it sound – there is no mention, for example, of studies such as James H. Johnson's *Listening in Paris*, which

[14] See 'Epilogue: In the Form of an Interview', in *The History in Literature: On Value, Genre, Institutions* (New York, 1990), 211–20; and '*Moses und Aron*, *Mahagonny*, and Germany in 1930: Seventeen Entries', in *Opera in History: From Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford, 1998), 191–239.

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have placed audiences at the centre of their work. Lindenberger takes a series of nine operatic events from 1607 to 2008, to explore opera from the perspective of audience engagement. This, at least, is the theory. Yet, somewhat bafflingly, the first two examples (Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, and Cavalli's *La Calisto*), concentrate on matters of performers and performance practice, with almost no mention of the audiences. Meanwhile, as Lindenberger's essay progresses, it slowly morphs into the author's own history as a consumer of opera. In many ways it seems a shame he did not shape the entire essay this way, for it is these moments of private recollection that are most revealing about the deeply personal nature of operatic reception, and the many facets that can affect our individual engagement with a work. In this sense, Lindenberger offers readers something akin to that which Newark uncovers in nineteenth-century novels: the communication of the 'special depth [of] the private connection between individual audience-members and legendary singers' (Newark, 11). Here, however, it is more than just legendary singers who influence Lindenberger. In one particularly telling anecdote, he recalls attending a performance of *Wozzeck* in 1953, at which Berg's widow was present: 'my experience of the music was now coloured by the presence of this dignified, aging lady, long known for the devotion she had shown to her distinguished husband' (255). Some 25 years later, it was revealed that the Bergs' marriage was far from a happy one. Such is our susceptibility to external factors in our reception of opera, factors that contribute to our constantly shifting reception of established works.

The final entry in Lindenberger's consumer history once again focuses on his own history – this time attending a legendary performance of *Tristan* at the Met. The house had secured two leading Wagnerians – Deborah Voigt and Ben Heppner – to perform together in this opera for the first time. A series of catastrophically timed illnesses meant that the two stars only reached the stage, finally, and miraculously, on the last night; as serendipity would have it, this was, of course, the night for which Lindenberger had a ticket. He writes with particular insight about the way in which his experience of the performance – one which he found as thrilling as the newspapers had led him to believe it would be – was surely 'mediated by the knowledge that this was to be seen as a memorable event' (259).[15] But this passage also highlights the importance of the performer for opera reception. As Carolyn Abbate has observed, 'the experience of listening to a live performance solicits attention more for the performers and the event and far less for the work than is perhaps generally admitted.'[16] Indeed, Lindenberger notes, 'seeking out, remembering, and boasting of having caught great singers at their height [...] is something that goes back to near the beginnings of opera' (261).

As will now be evident, much of the book bears the imprint of Lindenberger the opera fan: by its conclusion we have a fairly good idea of what an extraordinary opera-going

[15] This crisis-riddled production opened up a number of other fissures through which to explore the nature of operatic experience. For Alex Ross, the last-minute replacement of Heppner by Gary Lehman – singing *Tristan* for the first time – and the mid-performance substitution of Janice Beard for a suddenly indisposed Voigt, led to the 'primitive thrill of the unexpected', so often absent from opera today. See Ross, 'Tristan and Two Isoldes: A Wild Night at the Met', *The New Yorker*, 31 March 2008, 130–1.

[16] Carolyn Abbate, 'Music – Drastic or Gnostic?', *Critical Inquiry*, 30 (2004), 505–36, here 512. Scholarship is catching up, and research into the role of singers in operatic productions is gathering pace. See, for example, Steven Huebner, 'La princesse paysanne du Midi', in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, 361–78; *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*; Karen Henson, 'Verdi, Victor Maurel and fin-de-siècle operatic performance', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 19 (2007), 59–84.

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career he has had, and of all the great performances he has heard (or failed to hear) over more than half a century. But many of these often-throwaway reminiscences begin to take on a greater significance as they accrue throughout the book, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the central role that performers play in reception. Take for example the passing comment that he still hears 'that heroic voice [Franco Corelli's in 1963] in my mind when I attend performances of other, invariably lesser, Manricos' (18). Unlike Verne's Baron de Gotz, Lindenberger needs no phonograph to reanimate this past performance: like the buried urns under the Opéra, the contents do not need to be physically replayed; just the prompted memory of Corelli is enough to stir Lindenberger's imagination, and to bring the heroic voice back to life. There are many such moments that raise enticing questions about the way we listen to opera, but which are never followed through. Consequently, the text can seem exhausting, occasionally irritating, but frequently inspiring.

The possibilities of opera reception are further developed in two of the most ambitious essays of the collection: 'Opera and/as lyric', and 'On opera and society (assuming a relationship)'. In the former, Lindenberger takes into account recent research on how the brain processes music, in order to 'better understand both why opera seeks to maintain a high degree of emotional tension and also the ways that different operatic styles have found their own ways of doing this' (3). In the latter essay, he interrogates the multitude of ways in which we can understand the terms 'opera' and 'society' in relation to each other, through the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu, hitherto largely underused by musicologists.[17] As a vocal advocate for interdisciplinary studies, here Lindenberger pushes the boundaries of his own scholarship even further, offering lessons in how one might go about transferring methodological approaches to new contexts. I have not come across any other opera scholar who has engaged so enthusiastically with recent developments in music and science. By publishing an essay on what neuroscience can contribute to musicology, in the context of a book on opera, Lindenberger takes an important step forward. One of the many problems of interdisciplinary studies is always going to be the audience: in this instance, Lindenberger attempts to do more than preach to the converted. He also successfully negotiates the tricky path between overly facile, and overcomplicated, readings from multiple disciplines in order to communicate them to a wider audience. As such, 'Opera and/as lyric' stands as a vital model, opening up paths for further collaborative research in this area, and prompting intriguing questions about how increased knowledge of the brain and music perception might in turn influence composers and operatic productions. As Balzac reminds us, 'music is at the same time both a science and an art'.[18]

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In its catholic approach, Lindenberger's chapter on music and science exemplifies a central concern of all three books reviewed here: dissolving boundaries in order to understand musical objects and their reception in more fluid, multi-perspectival contexts. But while these books are proof of the progress that has been made, they also serve to remind us how much more could be done. In every direction there are artificially constructed

[17] This is gradually starting to change: for example, in *Fashions and Legacies* both Marvin and Locke draw on Bourdieu's theories to flesh out their arguments; see Marvin, 'Verdian Opera in the Victorian Parlour', 73 and 75; and Locke, '*Aida* and nine readings of empire', 158. See also *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson, Jane F. Fulcher, and Thomas Ertman (Cambridge, 2007), in which Lindenberger's chapter 'On opera and society (assuming a relationship)', first appeared (294–311).

[18] Balzac, *Gambara*; quoted and translated in Newark, 36.

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barriers to overcome: between scholars and their audiences, and between scholars and practitioners; between disciplines; even between scholars within a single discipline (musicology, for example, is far from the monolithic entity Lindenberger implies). These walls are difficult to broach: far easier to keep audiences happy with the traditional fare they expect (and often subsidise), and to keep academic projects neatly circumscribed with clearly identifiable outcomes. But we surely have to continue to make intellectual explorations across these manifold boundaries. Only by knocking down the walls can we find new ways to uncover the stories that opera has to tell, and to create the space for them to be heard.

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