

Monteverdi on the Modern Stage

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Abstract

Over the past hundred years, the operas of Claudio Monteverdi have become iconic symbols of the early music movement and have entered the canon of so-called great operas. The conventional explanation for their iconicity is that they are historically important works, the first to fully realise the potential of the operatic genre, and that they speak to us and relate to contemporary concerns. These definitions, though, are contingent on surrounding socio-cultural factors. Rather than trying to explain their immanent and autonomous greatness, this thesis examines how Monteverdi's operas have actually been received and performed on stage, going beyond mere description and providing a deeper analysis of the political, cultural, and social contexts of their performative instances. There is no single explanation for why performers and scholars have so frequently engaged with Monteverdi's operas, but it is clear that Monteverdi opera is now, as it was in the seventeenth century, a fluid entity. In the current stage of what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'liquid modernity' this fluidity and lack of single answers is particularly apparent in operatic performance. But where Bauman sees liquid life as a negative and troubling state, this thesis will show that, at least regarding early opera, not having one answer leads to great invention and thoughtful engagement with the contexts of the past and present.

The thesis consists of five case studies, each examining in detail one particular issue brought up by the early opera revival. First, an examination of Monteverdi's place in the earliest stages of the revival in the first half of the twentieth century challenges the view of the early music movement as primarily antiquarian. The thesis demonstrates the revival's highly politicised underpinnings in France, Germany, and Italy and the varied effect politics had on how and why Monteverdi's operas were performed in those countries. Next, audio and video evidence is used to investigate three aspects of modern Monteverdi performance in more depth, examining how stage directors have placed notions of community on stage in their interpretations of *L'Orfeo*, how stage and music directors have reshaped *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* for widely varying dramaturgical and musical ends, and how singers have interpreted the role of Ottavia in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* vocally and dramatically. Finally, I examine three recent productions of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* from the perspective of a participant observer, focusing on how the opera functions in the real space of an opera house, and how the presence of performance is conveyed in early opera today through the use of directorial attitudes, space, and the staging of gender relations.

This wide-ranging thesis demonstrates that the concept of a 'Monteverdi opera' is fundamentally fluid. This fluidity involves not only the texts themselves (cuts, rearrangements, transpositions, orchestrations, etc.) but also their medium (the stage, film, recording), their ideologies (nationalistic, fascist, communitarian), and their performances (in various singing and playing styles). While a large amount of valuable and rigorous work has been done in studying the early music movement, few of these studies find a significant place for early opera, and few recognise the basic fluidity and cultural contingency of performance and reception. This thesis hopes to correct those omissions, and to show how this fluidity manifests itself in the modern production of Monteverdi's operas.

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Introduction

At the UK stage premiere of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, presented at Oxford University in 1925, the *Musical Times* reviewer was able to say that Monteverdi, 'so vivid a personality in life, has long lain in the valley of dry bones'.¹ He goes on to express delighted surprise that 'the bones can live': thus did the modern Monteverdi revival, which had begun in Paris twenty years earlier, arrive in England. Monteverdi's operas have continued to spread to America and the rest of Europe to the present day, when the most celebrated opera directors, conductors, and singers perform them and audiences become increasingly familiar with them. Over the past hundred years, the operas of Claudio Monteverdi have become iconic symbols of the early-music movement and have entered the canon of so-called great operas. The conventional explanation for their iconicity is that they are historically important works, the first to realise fully the potential of the operatic genre, and that they speak to modern audiences and relate to contemporary concerns. These definitions, though, are contingent on surrounding socio-cultural factors. Rather than trying to explain their immanent greatness, it is more revealing to examine how Monteverdi's operas have been received and performed on stage, going beyond a mere chronicle and providing a deeper analysis of the political, cultural, and social contexts of their performative instances. There is no single explanation for why performers and scholars have so frequently engaged with Monteverdi's operas, but it is clear that Monteverdi opera is now, as it was in the seventeenth century, a fluid entity. In the current stage of what Zygmunt Bauman calls 'liquid modernity' this fluidity and lack of single answers is particularly apparent in operatic performance.² But where Bauman sees liquid life as a negative and troubling state, this thesis will show that, at least regarding early

¹ F.S.H., 'Monteverdi's "Orfeo" at Oxford', *Musical Times* 67:995 (Jan 1, 1926), p. 61.

² c.f. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge, 2000).

opera, not having one answer leads to great invention and thoughtful engagement with the contexts of the past and present.

Most performance histories of Monteverdi's operas to date have taken the form of short chapters within books that deal more with philological source issues or the contexts of their original seventeenth-century performances. A representative example is John Whenham's Cambridge Opera Handbook on *Orfeo*, a chapter in which elucidates trends in performance but which does not seek to explain the reasons behind them.³ In order to do the necessary digging, this project needs to be multifaceted, drawing on various scholarly discourses from historical musicology, theatre studies, literary reception history, semiotics, critical theory, and the social sciences. Though there is a risk of such a heterogeneous approach collapsing into a series of unconnected observations, the wide range of material examined here is best seen from different angles as performance itself is a multifaceted field. Just as there is no single way to perform, there is no single way to study a performance.

This introduction will discuss the various fields upon which this project draws and will give an overview of its goals, outlined above. First, it will set out the historical background of Monteverdi's operas: their creation in the seventeenth century, their rediscovery, and a brief summary of their performance history. A critical review will be given of the wide range of literature scholars have produced in studying Monteverdi's operas, pointing out the lack of socio-cultural studies focusing on modern performance and reception, a lacuna filled by this study.

Next, the methodological foundations of the project will be introduced. Underlying it is a semiotic model based partly on Jean-Jacques Nattiez's and Umberto Eco's work. From Nattiez I adapt the triangulation of the aesthetic and poietic processes and the neutral level, to show how operatic performance creates and conveys meaning. From Eco comes the

³ Cambridge, 1986, especially Nigel Fortune's chapter 'The Rediscovery of Orfeo'.

notion of the open work, as well as theories of interpretation and ‘empirical’ and ‘model’ readership and authorship (much of which carries over into listening and performance).

Though the thesis is not a semiological treatise, semiotics lies underneath my theorisation of how meaning is conveyed and perceived in opera, through both sonic and spatial events, and provides a useful framework for exploring the liquid state described above.

I will also discuss the ontology of performance, as any study of performance must define what a ‘performance’ consists of, and the thesis will present an aesthetics of experience and presence in opera performance, rather than one of ineffability and absence. Current opera studies are often influenced by Carolyn Abbate’s conception of opera as an art form of the ineffable, where that which is sung merely enacts the absence of that which is unsingable.⁴ Abbate’s theory emerges from a Wagnerian aesthetic of opera as philosophical inquiry, the search for knowledge beyond that which can be embodied on the opera stage, and though Abbate discusses Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, her aesthetics of absence does not take into account the way early opera is actually received or performed (nor, as will be seen, how it was received and performed in the seventeenth century). Dramaturgically and musically, early operas like Monteverdi’s focus more on that which is happening on stage in the ‘real’ moment of the characters’ actions and minds, a more psychological approach than the extra-real aesthetics of Wagnerian opera. So while *Orfeo*’s ‘Possente spirto’ might refer to something he is actually incapable of singing on stage, he is still singing something virtuosic and engrossing (though Caronte thinks otherwise, and is merely put to sleep). The audience’s attention, and even more the singer’s attention, must be on the present drastic quality of the performance itself, and not the gnostic quality of what it may be hiding (to use Abbate’s own terms). Operas of Monteverdi’s period would seem almost to be the opposite of Wagner’s: if Wagner’s operas, as T.W. Adorno argues, are a series of empty gestures, signifiers pointing

⁴ elucidated in *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, 2001).

to an unknown and unknowable signified,⁵ Monteverdi's provide a closer correspondence of musical signification with the psyches of his characters. The musical and dramatic gestures of his operas represent knowable experiences of love, jealousy, sorrow, hatred, etc. These aesthetic differences require practitioners to approach the operas of Monteverdi and his contemporaries in a different way from much other repertoire, but they also offer a unique richness. The evidence bears out that practitioners have indeed attempted to come to terms with these differences.

Emerging from this ontological discussion will be a brief exploration of electronic mediation ('mediatisation'). Much of the raw material of this study consists of audiovisual recordings as well as historical descriptions and 'live' performances, and it necessarily engages with recent theorisations in musicology surrounding the use and worth of recordings for historical and interpretative endeavours. Recordings provide indispensable evidence of past performances, and also serve as artefacts in their own right.

I. Monteverdi and His Operas

Because many reliable studies of Monteverdi's life and works are available, I will give only a brief overview here.⁶ Claudio Monteverdi was born in Cremona in 1567 and studied with Marc'Antonio Ingegneri. Around 1592 he moved to Mantua to work for the Gonzaga dukes, and it was there that he composed his first stage work, *Orfeo*, in 1607. Most scholars since Charles Burney in the eighteenth century have asserted that this is the first fully-fledged opera, a richer and more varied work than the operas created in Florence over the previous decade. *Orfeo* was popular enough to be printed in 1609 (and reissued in 1615) in a

⁵ *In Search of Wagner* (London, 1981 [1952]).

⁶ The most recent and most comprehensive is Paolo Fabbri, *Monteverdi* (Torino, 1985). A more concise work is Denis Arnold's *Monteverdi*, 3d ed. revised by Tim Carter (London, 1990).

commemorative edition which gives many important details about the opera's first, and possibly only, set of performances. Due to this edition, of all Monteverdi's operas the most is known about the original performance of *Orfeo*, especially information about orchestration and ornamentation. The rich orchestra of *Orfeo*, though, seems to have been the exception rather than the rule. The next year Monteverdi composed what was in his own time his most famous stage work: *Arianna*, of which only the famous lament has survived to the present. In 1613, after a long job search, Monteverdi departed for Venice to take up the position of *maestro di cappella* at the Basilica of San Marco. He continued to write for the stage in spite of his heavy commitments at the Basilica, but only two of his final large-scale works have survived with music: *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* (1640) and *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (1643).⁷ These two works are important exemplars of the new genre of public opera, which began in 1637 when a group of Roman musicians began to present operas in Venice open to anyone who could afford the ticket. This led to major structural changes in the genre, changes in which Monteverdi participated. Early Venetian opera has become a popular field of research due to its social contexts and rich textual evidence, with Ellen Rosand's two large volumes among the most thorough.⁸

The modern Monteverdi revival began in the late nineteenth century in Europe, contemporaneously with the creation of the discipline of historical musicology. As with other pre-Bach music, Monteverdi's had long been studied but only rarely performed. Though some of his madrigals had been kept alive by madrigal societies, especially in England, the first large-scale Monteverdi performance was a concert version of *Orfeo* edited by Vincent

⁷ There is not yet a musicological consensus on the exact date of either opera, due to incomplete records and the confusing Venetian calendar, in which the new year began in March. The years above are given throughout the *Cambridge Companion to Monteverdi*, ed. John Whenham and Richard Wistreich (Cambridge, 2007), the most recent *summa* of Monteverdi research.

⁸ Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley, 1991) and *Monteverdi's Last Operas: A Venetian Trilogy* (Berkeley, 2007).

d'Indy for the Paris Schola Cantorum in 1904. Until the late nineteenth century *Orfeo*, because it was printed, was the only known extant fully-staged work by Monteverdi. The opinions of early musicologists such as Charles Burney strike modern readers as particularly undervaluing: Burney mentions *Orfeo* mostly to point out faults in its counterpoint, though he does commend the monologue 'Tu sei morta' and is impressed by the large orchestra.⁹ It was not until the 19th century that Monteverdi began to be seen as a benchmark composer, albeit a somewhat troublesome one. Raphael Georg Kiesewetter gives him his own 'epoch' in his 1832 *History of the Modern Music of Western Europe*, but he says that 'what we know of the dramatic works of Monteverde [sic] is not calculated to raise them much higher in our estimation than those of his predecessors: although he is otherwise regarded as an able contrapuntist in the church style, and has proved himself a spirited composer by his very valuable madrigals'.¹⁰ August Wilhelm Ambros, in his *Geschichte der Musik* which first appeared in 1862, also gives Monteverdi his own chapter, along with a detailed summary of *Orfeo*. In works such as these, though, one does not get the sense that this music might be worth performing, as the concern of these early scholars was not with early music as a living art but rather the gathering of source material and data in order to create a linear narrative of musical history.

Hubert Parry was one of the first English musicians to be interested in Monteverdi, and he devoted a chapter to him in his volume on the seventeenth century in the first *Oxford History of Music*. His attitude towards Monteverdi is strikingly ambiguous: 'Men tasted of the tree of knowledge, and the paradise of innocence was thenceforth forbidden them. Monteverde [sic] was the man who first tasted and gave his fellow men to eat of the fruit; and from the accounts given of the effect it produced upon them they ate with avidity and

⁹ Charles Burney, *A General History of Music* [1789], ed. Frank Mercer (London, 1935), p. 517-19.

¹⁰ Raphael Georg Kiesewetter, *History of the Modern Music of Western Europe* [1832], trans. Robert Müller (London, 1848), p. 188.

craved for more'.¹¹ Parry implies that Monteverdi's musical language was a corruption of the previous purer polyphony, a view close to that of art history by the Pre-Raphaelites in the previous generation. Parry wrote a later speech about the 'Significance of Monteverde', and although he admits that Monteverdi is significant in music history he questions why that is so.¹² Like Burney, Parry takes Monteverdi to task for what he sees as faulty part-writing (too many parallel thirds) and says that much of his music simply isn't very good. In Parry's analogy Monteverdi is like Eve, seduced by serpentine 'Baroque' discourses and introducing them to music at large. Later scholars, beginning with Jack Westrup in the late 1920s, would have much higher opinions of Monteverdi because they tended to see him as the 'creator of modern music' rather than as a corrupter, however skilled, of older styles.¹³

Whether they saw Monteverdi at the end of the Renaissance, the beginning of the Baroque, or as the leading figure of his own period, these scholars were all attempting to place Monteverdi within a master narrative of music history. In the past three decades, the age of 'new musicology', this pigeonholing has become somewhat less important as musicologists have looked at composers and their music through different lenses. Monographs such as *Monteverdi's Unruly Women* by Bonnie Gordon and Susan McClary's *Modal Subjectivities* examine socio-cultural aspects of the repertoire and are not historical studies so much as cultural ones, a kind of ethnomusicology at a historical remove.¹⁴

¹¹ *The Music of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1902), p. 46.

¹² *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 42nd Sess. (1915-1916), pp. 51-67.

¹³ Westrup's 'The Originality of Monteverde', *Proceedings of the Musical Association*, 60th Sess. (1933-1934), pp. 1-25, is an explicit answer and 'corrective' to Parry's speech. Leo Schrade's *Monteverdi: Creator of Modern Music* (New York, 1950) is the first comprehensive biography which treats Monteverdi as a 'great composer', more rigorously researched than earlier biographies by Schneider (Paris, 1921), Prunières (Paris, 1926), Malipiero (Milan, 1929), and De'Paoli (Milan, 1945).

¹⁴ Bonnie Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women* (Cambridge, 2002); Susan McClary, *Modal Subjectivities: Self-fashioning in the Italian Madrigal* (Berkeley, 2004). Gary Tomlinson combines an anthropological approach with a historicising one in his *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1987).

Important as the history of Monteverdi scholarship is, my main concern is with performance history, which both the positivist and cultural scholars tend to ignore. Performance practice in the second half of the twentieth century is well-documented by video and audio recordings, while for the first half the main sources are printed editions, critical reviews, and visual evidence like stage designs and photographs, though of course I draw on these for more recent decades as well. What follows is a brief chronology of twentieth-century Monteverdi performance, which will provide the context in which the various themes appear that will be emphasised in case studies. I will elaborate upon these at the end of this introductory chapter, and discussion of them will form the body of the thesis.

The history of Monteverdi on the modern opera stage begins in Paris in 1904.¹⁵ Vincent d'Indy, director of the Schola Cantorum music school, was deeply concerned with studying and performing the music of the past (the socio-political reasons for this will be explored in Chapter One). Monteverdi, already seen as the first great opera composer, was therefore an important figure to rehabilitate in the dawning twentieth century. The next year, d'Indy produced a concert version of *Poppea*, and both operas were performed across the European continent over the next few years, always in adaptations for modern orchestra. The first performance that one could call historically-informed was the *Orfeo* produced at Oxford University in 1925 by the young musicologist Jack Westrup. Westrup, aided by composer and organist William Harris, edited the score for modern instruments but was careful to maintain the dramatic structure of Monteverdi's original, which editors like d'Indy had altered. This production was a major critical success (though not a financial one) which led to the creation of the Oxford Opera Club and the first UK production of *Poppea* by the same group two years later. The United States premiere of *Poppea* was also presented by a

¹⁵ This raw data for this brief performance history are drawn mostly from the chronologies in the *Avant-scène opéra* series: *Orfeo*, No. 207, *Le Retour d'Ulysse*, No. 159, and *Le Couronnement de Poppée*, No. 224.

university, Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, led by the college's director of music Werner Josten in 1926. Also in the mid-twenties was the first modern performance of *Ulisse*, again led by d'Indy in Paris, of which the manuscript had been known since the 1880s but which was usually seen as an inferior work of questionable attribution. Though composer Luigi Dallapiccola made an important stage adaptation in 1942, problems of authorship dogged *Ulisse* until the 1970s, when new scholarly methods gave it a surer attribution to Monteverdi, and it began to be performed as frequently as the other two operas.

Many modernist composers, whose political and social agendas led them to the music of the past, made editions of Monteverdi's operas which were often far-removed from their source material. In addition to Dallapiccola's *Ulisse*, Ernst Krenek made a radically altered edition of *Poppea* in 1937 for an American tour, Carl Orff edited *Orfeo*, the *Ballo delle ingrate*, and the *Lamento d'Arianna*, and Gian Francesco Malipiero transformed *Poppea* into a French opéra-comique. Ironically Malipiero was also the editor of the complete-works edition of Monteverdi for the Vittoriale degli Italiani, Benito Mussolini's personal press, which attempted to be as faithful a representation of the sources as possible.

Malipiero's editions allowed musicians without much musicological background to perform Monteverdi's operas, and therefore led to a much higher number of performances by the middle of the century. At the same time, a new generation of performer-scholars were involved in a concerted effort to produce 'authentic' performances of these operas, and they were eager to record and share their experiments with other practitioners. In the 1960s, though, there was still a mix of 'interventionist' versions, like the Herbert von Karajan-led production of *Poppea* for the Wiener Staatsoper in 1962, alongside 'authenticist' versions, like Rudolf Ewerhart's recording of the same year, the first on historical instruments. Raymond Leppard's version for Glyndebourne, also premiered in 1962, attempted to bridge that gap. This was the first production of a Monteverdi opera that was successful enough to

be repeated in later seasons, and it is therefore at Glyndebourne that we can say Monteverdi truly entered the operatic repertoire. Over the course of the 1970s *Orfeo* and *Ulisse* joined *Poppea* as repertoire-works. *Poppea* was probably more popular than the other two (and arguably still is so) because its plot affords more grist for the mill of a modern audience's sensibilities, and offers more ambiguities for directors to make use of.

From the 1970s to the present, Monteverdi's operas have often appeared at the centre of discourse about the operatic genre. As the early music movement coalesced and became more widely recognised as a 'movement', its various camps often used Monteverdi's operas as prime examples of their varying ideas of what early opera ought to be like. Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Alan Curtis are two leading figures who, though working from similar standpoints about the need to make early music 'speak', led very different performances and recordings of these operas.¹⁶ Monteverdi's operas are also popular with opera directors, for they give ample opportunities for directorial revision. Finally, late modernist composers like Luciano Berio, Hans Werner Henze, Philippe Boesmans, and Alexander Goehr have created radical refashionings of Monteverdi's operas, successfully using them as raw material for their avant-garde compositional ideas. Boesmans is representative when he speaks of 'reappropriating' early opera for the modern age while 'discovering the will of a master' and 'learning how to serve it'.¹⁷ For them, faithfulness and authenticity had much wider meanings than for Harnoncourt or Curtis.

Today, Monteverdi opera is a pluralist field. There is no single answer to what 'authenticity' is with regard to these operas, to how they should be staged, or to how they

¹⁶ Harnoncourt sets out his ideas in *The Musical Dialogue* (London, 1989), Curtis in the introduction to his edition of *Poppea* (London, 1989).

¹⁷ 'Dans mon travail d'orchestration, je pénétrais au cœur du travail d'un géant, Monteverdi. J'étais confronté à la volonté d'un maître, je devais la découvrir de l'intérieur et apprendre à la servir. Il fallait notamment se réapproprier le fameux «recitar cantando» italien'. *Philippe Boesmans: Entretiens et témoignages*, ed. Christian Renard and Robert Wangermée (Sprimont, Belgium, 2005), p. 102.

should be interpreted. One finds a wide variety of opinion and practice in all of these discourses. Though journalists often like to announce that opera is dead, it is clearly a still-developing genre. Early opera is at the centre of these developments, and Monteverdi's operas are central in this growing repertoire.

Some scholars have recently begun to see opera in this way, as a living genre rather than a dead or dying one. Roger Parker deals with many of the issues that also concern me in his Ernest Bloch lectures of 2002, published as *Remaking the Song*.¹⁸ Parker argues against seeing operas as discrete, unchanging works and posits that 'we measure our evolving responses to these canonic works above all through the impact that performers can make in them and on them'.¹⁹ It is the changing properties of operas in performance that make them interesting to us, the listening and viewing public. Parker implies that each performance is almost a new opera, brought about by the relationship between performer and audience, and that many directors seek to defamiliarise the operas they stage in an attempt to make them relevant.

Parker makes the oversight of seeing the defamiliarisation of the standard operatic repertory or of early music as a recent phenomenon (dating roughly from the 1970s): though they were not musicians, Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht had similar goals in theatre between the world wars, and the Russian formalists had theorised the concept of *ostranenie* even before that.²⁰ Also, though he briefly discusses rediscovered works in the same terms, Parker makes it clear that he is focusing on 'the way constituent members of the repertoire alter gradually over time'.²¹ Like Parker, Richard Taruskin tends to conflate 'new'

¹⁸ Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song* (Berkeley, 2006).

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ See Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre' in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett (London, 1964), pp.179-205, and Victor Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique' in *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory*, ed. K.M. Newton (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 22-26.

²¹ Parker, p. 4.

performances of standard works and those of newly rediscovered or previously unheard pieces, hiding some of the potential nuance of his endeavour.²² In truth, though, works like Monteverdi's with long-interrupted performance histories need somewhat different treatment from operas which have never been out of the canon. How can one defamiliarise something that is not familiar, like a Monteverdi opera? Though many audience members have become familiar with these operas, they are still not as well-known as Mozart's or Verdi's to the general public and, importantly, to journalists. We must be wary of the impulse to group 'radical' stagings of *Don Giovanni* or *La Traviata* with radical stagings of early operas. Though the aesthetic theories of the creators of the staging might be similar (and the same directors have worked in both standard and non-standard repertoire) the reception side must be quite different. *Orfeo* in modern dress is not the same as *Rigoletto* in modern dress, as a large part of the audience will be very familiar with *Rigoletto* and will read an updating of costume differently than they would in a less familiar opera. Using one of Susanna's alternate arias in *Le nozze di Figaro* will not have the same effect as choosing the Neapolitan edition of *Poppea* rather than the Venetian one; for one thing, the latter choice would not cause the controversy in the mainstream press to which Parker dedicates a chapter of his Bloch lectures.²³

Parker (drawing from Taruskin's article 'Setting Limits') discusses how the changing of the musical text of operas is normally taboo, while audiences will still accept (though sometimes begrudgingly) the most radical stagings. Parker wants to show how such a taboo has not existed throughout much of opera's history and asks 'why *not* also the music?'²⁴ His project is certainly an admirable and necessary one in regards to the Mozart-to-Puccini

²² In the essays of *Text and Act* (Oxford, 1995), Taruskin treats well-known Bach works much the same way as little-known courtly songs.

²³ At a 1998 performance at the Metropolitan Opera Cecilia Bartoli wanted to replace her arias as Susanna with little-known alternatives, against the wishes of director Jonathan Miller.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 5. Taruskin's article appears in his collection *The Danger of Music* (Berkeley, 2009), pp. 447-465.

canon of frequently-performed operas, but examining the performance history of Monteverdi's and other early operas adds greater complexity to the argument. Looking over the twentieth century, which for Parker and Taruskin is the period of the crystallisation and sacralisation of the musical 'text', and the only century other than the seventeenth in which Monteverdi's operas have been performed, we can see that nearly *every* production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* or *Il ritorno d'Ulisse* has a sometimes substantially different musical text from the others (though *Orfeo*, with its early printed editions, is a somewhat different case). In these operas, the agency to alter the music *does* rest with the conductor and/or director, and audiences rarely make complaints. We must then question Parker's concept of the taboo of musical alteration, as it clearly does not apply in every case. Similarly, early Venetian operas will make us question the prevalence of the 'work concept' as posited by Lydia Goehr: here are operas that have not developed into unchanging 'works' even in the midst of the formation of the work concept.²⁵ Parker also notices this counter-development in mainstream operas, and questioning the application of the work concept to opera is a large part of his project. We can see, therefore, that an examination of Monteverdi on the modern stage will enrich our conception of opera as a whole. What Parker calls a 'surplus of signature' in opera production, entailing directors, conductors, designers, singers, etc., instead of one all-powerful author, is especially apparent in Monteverdi's operas.²⁶

II. Methodology

All of this brings us to an important question, and one which requires an answer before embarking on this project: what is an opera? It might seem obvious: an opera is a musical

²⁵ Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford, 1992).

²⁶ Parker, p. 8.

theatre piece entailing a score, singers, orchestra, a stage, sets, costumes, etc., but probing deeply provides no definitive answer to this question. Confusion over the ontology of opera can easily dog scholarship (a Handel opera for Oskar Hagen is not a Handel opera for Winton Dean), and Roger Parker's work has done much to make musicologists realise its importance. An opera is not a discrete entity, a *thing*, or even an overarching concept consisting of various elements, but it is rather a semiological *process*. An opera is a web of relationships and a multi-layered and dynamic complex of emitted and perceived meanings, not existing in a jar like a preserved biological specimen but constantly alive and changing. Opera shares these properties with all live performance art, which unfolds over time, never standing still. A naively material model cannot do justice to the rich unfolding of opera, and a more malleable semiotic model is needed.

Some of the most important forays into musical semiotics have been made by Jean-Jacques Nattiez, and it is upon his work that my concept of operatic semiosis is based. In his study *Music and Discourse*, Nattiez employs the semiological tripartition, borrowed from Jean Molino and ultimately from C.S. Peirce, of the poietic and esthetic processes and the neutral level (or 'trace').²⁷ The poietic process, from the Greek *poiein*, to make, is the process of creation which results in a trace, concrete material that exists in space and/or time, like a score, a recording, or a performance event. The esthetic process, from the Greek *esthein*, to perceive, is the process of reception by which someone 'reads' the trace. Taking *Poppea* as an example, the traces are the materials left behind by Monteverdi, his librettist Busenello, and their colleagues or, on another temporal level, any documentation surrounding a modern performance. The poietic process is that of creation, how *Poppea* itself, or any production of it, was made. The esthetic process is that of reception, what audiences have made of it. The full picture of 'an opera' cannot be made without taking all

²⁷ trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, 1990).

three parts into account, whether regarding the corpus of all performances of an opera (like the concept of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*) or any single performance (like *Poppea* as performed in Oxford on 6 December 1927).

Of course this is easier said than done, though it represents a rewarding challenge and a useful ideal. Using the Boulez-Chéreau Bayreuth *Ring* as his example, Nattiez provides a flowchart displaying this semiological model of performance.²⁸ He begins with Wagner's creation of the work (poiesis), which comes from his analysis (esthesis) of previous traces (Schopenhauer, mythology, etc.) and which gives rise to the libretto and score (trace). Performers then analyse this trace material (esthesis) to create (poiesis) their performance (another trace). Spectators view this performance (esthesis) and leave behind (poiesis) their responses (yet more traces), also taking into account what they know of Wagner and his own sources, of Pierre Boulez and Patrice Chéreau, of Bayreuth, of the singers, and so on. Any process of making is also a process of reception. We can see that the semiosis of performance is, like semiosis itself, infinite. In Peircean terminology, the chain of interpretants is limitless. Even though it is (fortunately) not possible to write an endless dissertation, the performative tripartition provides a useful ground for organising a project like this, with its aim to discuss how Monteverdi's operas have been made, remade, and received over the twentieth century.

Figure 1, adapted from one that Nattiez provides for the centenary Bayreuth *Ring*, shows the semiotic tripartition in graphic form as it relates to Monteverdi's operas. The diagram demonstrates that these operas emerge and re-emerge from a chain of semiotic relationships: in producing their own traces, actors analyse previous traces and are also influenced by the general context in which they work. They also bring a knowledge of previous actors to their creations, and anticipate the reactions of their potential receivers. The

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 76.

chain could lengthen in all directions as different actors perceive existing traces and create new ones.

Umberto Eco is the other major figure in my semiological background. Nattiez finds many problems with Eco's theories, and his criticisms are not groundless. Still, there is much in Eco's work that I find useful, especially his conception of the 'open work'.²⁹ An open work is a work that requires some input on the part of its reader (or viewer, or listener) to realise or activate it. In music, Eco uses examples of compositions by Pousseur, Boulez, and Stockhausen which leave some aspects of interpretation to the performer, like the order in which to perform a piece's sections. In literature, a work such as Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* is open because it is so dense with metaphor and allusion that the reader must decide for him- or herself what to take away from it. The author does not provide the key to an open work; instead, the reader must fashion his or her own key with which to unlock it. The 'traces' of Monteverdi's operas are, for most of their twentieth-century interpreters, very clearly 'open works' and have until recently been theorised as skeletons requiring completion. As Eco has moved his semiological theorising away from openness, having recognised that this concept was being fetishised and used to explain away facets of art rather than explain them, so have musicians.³⁰ Alan Curtis says in the introduction to his performing version of *Ulisse* that the scores are as complete as we need them to be, that they are not 'skeletons' but were for seventeenth-century musicians fully worked-out.³¹ For Curtis, rather than seeing these works as incomplete, modern performers should put themselves in the mindset of past performers, who did not see them as such. For example, a seventeenth-century musician would not have

²⁹ See especially 'The Poetics of the Open Work' in *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 1-23.

³⁰ Eco writes that 'to say that interpretation (as the basic feature of semiosis) is potentially unlimited does not mean that interpretation has no object and that it "riverruns" merely for its own sake' in 'Interpretation and History', *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 23.

³¹ Claudio Monteverdi, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*, ed. Alan Curtis (London, 2002), p. xvii.

seen a sparsely figured bass line as an invitation to compose freely over it, but rather as a shorthand notation helping the musician to play the score based on highly standardised norms. As Margaret Bent notes, ‘more of what we treat as fixed written text [or even an open text] must be loosened from its moorings and given neutral status, taking on its intended definition from contextual considerations grounded in the musical language shared by the composer and performers’.³² Eco’s theories remain useful, however, in examining how and why musicians in the first three quarters of the twentieth century saw Monteverdi’s works as open, especially in the context of Joyce’s novels or Stockhausen’s and Boulez’s compositions.

The study of literature has a longer history of aesthetics which takes reception as well as creation into account than does musicology, but literary reception history brings one into certain dead ends which a more semiotic approach can avoid. Those dead ends are exemplified by Hans Robert Jauss’s *Rezeptionsaesthetik*, important as one of the first theories to recognise the importance of reception, but which in the end is little different from earlier ‘new critical’ theories.³³ Jauss presents a tautology: he wants to show the history of how readers have conceived of a work as ‘great’, and to use that history to prove the work’s inherent greatness. His key concept of the horizon of expectations, what an audience expects to gain from a work, is unrealistically monolithic. Even a cursory glance at any corpus of critical reviews shows that the judgements of different reviewers vary widely depending on their own intellectual and social backgrounds, and their personal taste. A semiotics of reception examines the way people construct the meaning of a work, rather than allowing the analyst to get away with forcing his own meaning upon it, or having recourse to vague ideas of autonomous ‘greatness’.

³² ‘Editing Early Music: the Dilemma of Translation,’ *Early Music* 22:3 (1994), p. 391.

³³ See Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis, 1982).

The complexity of the semiotic web becomes evident when one tries to study a single operatic production. Relatively few examples of such an investigation exist which try to be truly comprehensive, the lengthiest being Nattiez's study of Patrice Chéreau's Bayreuth *Ring*.³⁴ This study falls somewhat short because Nattiez does not wish to recognise his limits, looking at parts of the production as if they were the whole. Smaller-scale studies can be just as effective, though, if not more so. In a review essay of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's production of Verdi's *La Traviata*, Alessandra Lippucci asserts that a 'revisionist' opera director like Ponnelle relies on the fact that an audience will stage the opera in their minds in 'traditional' fashion while the radical staging is happening in real life: Ponnelle was 'counting on this composite of previous traditionalist productions to serve as the backdrop for his postmodern humanist drama. Indeed, this was essential to his revisionist production because it foregrounded - *isolated the message of* - his new interpretative scheme'.³⁵ Though this two-opera hypothesis might hold for well-known repertory works (but is problematic in that it leaves directors with little agency to alter expectations), with Monteverdi the situation is rather different. Because many, if not most, productions of his operas fit the 'revisionist' style, there is no 'traditional' second production being played in the heads of the audience as the revisionist approach occurs, even if they have seen the operas before. Ponnelle may be able to depend on this dualism with Mozart's or Verdi's operas, but his productions of Monteverdi's must work somehow differently. Lippucci employs J.M. Balkin's concept of nested oppositions, 'oppositions which involve a relation of dependence, similarity or containment between opposed concepts'.³⁶ For Lippucci, Ponnelle's revisionist *Traviata* contains a traditionalist version.

³⁴ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, *Tétralogies, Wagner, Boulez, Chéreau: Essai sur l'infidélité* (Paris, 1983).

³⁵ Alessandra Lippucci, 'Social theorizing on the operatic stage: Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's postmodern humanist production of Verdi's *La Traviata*', *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12:3 (1992), p. 249.

³⁶ see Lippucci, p. 248 n. 12.

One of the many controversial aspects of Ponnelle's production of *La Traviata* was his decision to eliminate Violetta's ringing for her maid in Act Two, blatantly going against Verdi's score. Lippucci asserts that an audience familiar with the opera would notice the absence of the bell and would assume that a director as thorough as Ponnelle must have meant something by it, causing the spectators to think about master/servant relationships in relation to the opera. She provocatively states that 'if he had left the bell in the performance, its *presence* would have been passed over, ignored, taken for granted; if he removed it, the *absence* of the bell was sure to be noticed by vigilant spectators who would wonder why it wasn't there. Paradoxically, the absence of the bell made it more present, so that from this point of view, Ponnelle did not really violate the original text'.³⁷ This statement has major ramifications for what directors can get away with in their staging: would cutting Hamlet's 'to be or not to be' soliloquy make it stand out more in the audience's mind? But again such an attitude depends upon audience familiarity with the work at hand. Anyone unfamiliar with *La Traviata* would not see Ponnelle's point, and even many seasoned operagoers might not note it. Lippucci passes the buck to the audience: 'Who, then, is really responsible for violating the text in this instance? The director who deleted the bell? Or the spectators who failed to notice that it was gone?'³⁸ This contrasts with the earlier Brechtian or Formalist view of stage direction: Brecht would have made the bell 'strange' rather than making it more present by eliminating it. The Barthesian director (after Roland Barthes, the type which Lippucci asserts Ponnelle exemplifies) is logical, relevant, and innovative, and will not imprison the text, leaving the semiotic web open. Some contemporary directors attain this ideal, but most prefer to present a more 'closed' text to the audience. It is questionable how 'open' an audience would really see an opera through which they sit passively for a given

³⁷ Lippucci, p. 260.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 260.

amount of time. A particular performance has a determinacy of space and time, which might contrast with a director's desire to stage indeterminacy. As with other issues in stagecraft, directors of Monteverdi's operas will be seen to fit into both Formalist and Barthesian categories.

III. Ontology of Performance

i. In the Theatre

In her influential essay 'Music—Drastic or Gnostic?' Carolyn Abbate posits that the essence of music lies somewhere other than in the score, and that that 'somewhere' can only be approached, though never actually reached, during the course of performance.³⁹ The first clause of this sentence is unproblematic: few today would equate the score with the music. But the corollary implying the musical work's ineffability, its absence in the presence of performance, is not as convincing. Abbate comes close to permitting a fetishisation of live performance, using it as a way, the only way, to commune with some vague notion of the 'ineffable' where the real essence of the music lies. This idea of ineffability, argued for even more strongly in Abbate's *In Search of Opera* with its emphasis on reaching for the unsingable, comes dangerously close to the metaphysics (a view of music as 'gnostic') against which Abbate claims to argue.⁴⁰ The musical 'work' and its meanings are actually not so difficult to find. The work is not a mysterious separate entity standing in the zone of the metaphysical or ineffable to be approached either through philosophical meditation (the 'gnostic' method) or through the sanctum of performance (the 'drastic' method), but is rather a useful and convenient way to categorise the immense amount of music with which

³⁹ 'It is in the irreversible experience of playing, singing, or listening that any meanings summoned by music come into being.' 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?' *Critical Inquiry* 30:3 (2004), p. 505.

⁴⁰ *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, 2001).

listeners come into contact every day. One could conceive of the work as simply the set of all potential manifestations of a piece of music, rather than as a metaphysical entity.

Aestheticians like Abbate, Gary Tomlinson, or, of an earlier generation, Benedetto Croce posit a Platonist idea of the work of art as something which is more than the sum of its instances (performances), an ideal form to which any performance must aspire.⁴¹

The work concept needs to be brought back down to Earth with an aesthetics of presence rather than an Abbatean/Crocean one of absence. It is questionable whether there is such a thing as the single real essence of *Orfeo*, *Ulisse*, or *Poppea* as autonomous works of art, but in her aesthetics of absence Abbate implies that such an essence exists. She devotes a chapter of *In Search of Opera* to *Orfeo*, seeing Monteverdi's music as expressly inexpressive: Orfeo's music is an attempt to present the unrepresentable, to sing the unsingable, an engagement with the detached Orphic head.⁴² If there is some quality here of the beyond, and individual listeners like Abbate might well experience one, it changes from person to person and across time. The essence that Abbate finds (or doesn't find, as it were) in the course of performance will not be the same as that which I or some other listener finds. Because the work-concept itself is historically contingent,⁴³ the perceived essence of the work must be contingent as well.

⁴¹ Tomlinson's *Metaphysical Song* (Princeton, 1999) reads opera history as a history of attempts to voice the metaphysical. Crocean aesthetics posits intuitive ideals which works of art must express. See M.E. Moss, *Benedetto Croce Reconsidered: Truth and Error in Theories of Art, Literature, and History* (Hanover, 1987). As we shall see in Chapter One, Crocean aesthetics had a strong influence on Italian Monteverdi reception (or the lack of it) at the beginning of the twentieth century, as the Baroque in Croce's view was not worth much attention because it 'blurred the lines of the Renaissance' and did not express ideals. Gary Tomlinson's *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1987) is a seemingly unknowing rehashing of these views applied to Monteverdi. Peter Kivy discusses Platonism in 'Platonism in music: A kind of defense', published in *The Fine Art of Repetition* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 35-58. He attempts to play devil's advocate in favour of Platonism, offering some (usually unconvincing) defences of its various critiques.

⁴² 'Orpheus. One Last Performance,' *In Search of Opera*, pp. 1-54. The notion of the Orphic head refers to the denouement of early Greek versions of the Orpheus myth, in which Orpheus is decapitated by angry Bacchantes and his head is left to sing of its sorrow.

⁴³ c.f. Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford, 1992) and *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?*, ed. Michael Talbot (Liverpool, 2000).

Rather than undertaking a fruitless search for the invisible and unsung absence of Orpheus' head, we should focus on what actually happens on stage or in the recording studio or listening space. What does the real actor portraying Orfeo do, why does he do it, and what do we make of his performance? Ironically, Abbate's foray into the ineffable contradicts her preference for the drastic, falling directly into the gnostic zone of the hidden and mysterious.⁴⁴ Remaining in the drastic realm of *real* performances tells us more about human actions and interactions, providing sociological rather than metaphysical insights. In practice, few performers (not even Abbate) would say that during their performances they are searching for the 'ideal object', the real essence of the musical work. Rather, they are usually more concerned with practical issues of how to manage their voices, bodies, and instruments in the moment of musicking. They and the audience demonstrate 'being in time' rather than timelessness.

Stage directors rarely make overtures to the ineffable in their Monteverdi productions, or indeed in most of the operatic repertoire. Wagner's operas seem to be the exception that prove the rule: this was the very nature of Nietzsche's problem with *Parsifal* and led to his break with Wagner, and Wieland Wagner's Bayreuth productions of the 1950s are explicit invitations to the metaphysical, but this approach has rarely been followed in early opera. As we will see in the discussion of singing practices in Chapter Four, the creators and practitioners of early opera were concerned with the articulated, the sung, and the psychological rather than only with the unsung and the philosophical. Monteverdi, working at the beginning of the development of an explicitly dramatic kind of musical expression,

⁴⁴ Abbate never convincingly defines 'ineffable' and at the end of the essay seems to equate it with simple multivalency: 'music is ineffable in allowing multiple potential meanings and demanding none in particular' (p. 534). Of course music is multivalent, but that is probably not the same as ineffable.

had as his goal the use of music to heighten verbal expression, not to add hidden meanings.⁴⁵ Characters like Penelope, Ottavia, and even Orfeo are almost obsessively loquacious, verbally expressing their every thought in long monologues in more or less ‘real’ time, the stakes of those thoughts raised by the harmonies of the continuo line. Wagner’s long stretches of monologue, on the other hand, engage a temporality based in the past and the future rather than in the present and serve to highlight what the characters are *not* saying, giving opportunities for the orchestra to comment more explicitly. Attempting to force Monteverdi’s operas into a Wagnerian aesthetic robs them of their own expressive power. When Monteverdi’s rediscoverers like Romain Rolland and Gabriele d’Annunzio likened his operas to Wagner’s they were focusing on their structural fluidity more than on their subject matter or metaphysics. The metaphysicalisation of early opera seems to lie more with musicologists like Abbate and Gary Tomlinson than with actual practitioners. Though there was a great deal of ‘renaissance magic’ involving music, Monteverdi’s operas, as exemplars of a less magical seicento aesthetic, do not seem to be the place to look for that magic.⁴⁶ In fact, Orfeo’s one utterance that might be described as magical, ‘Possente spirito’, fails in its goal: rather than charming Caronte into rowing Orfeo across the Styx, it merely puts him to sleep. Orfeo finally convinces Proserpina to plead his case through rhetoric rather than through magic. When Apollo leads Orfeo to the heavens at the end of the opera, their airy ascent is counteracted by the physical presence of their vocal virtuosity. In the Bacchante ending, Orfeo is literally dragged down to earth.

In *Metaphysical Opera*, Gary Tomlinson states that ‘operatic history might be rethought as a set of diverse manifestations, differing at fundamental levels of cultural

⁴⁵ Contemporary theoretical writings by Monteverdi’s brother Giulio Cesare, as well as those by Giulio Caccini make this clear, as does the large body of scholarship on how ‘the music is servant to the words’. Such historical research often seems to be ignored in performance studies.

⁴⁶ Tomlinson, *Music in Renaissance Magic* (Chicago, 1993).

formation, of the older, deeper, and broader impulse to voice an ordering of the world that includes invisible terrains.[...] These differing hidden realms[...] are what is presumed by a particular society to lie beyond the limits of its sensate perception'.⁴⁷ Though Tomlinson shows that many theorists and writers of opera have explicitly tried to use opera as a way to move into supersensible realms, these goals are rarely expressed in the day-to-day life of opera companies and their audiences. Tomlinson uses Michel Poizat's study of opera audiences *The Angel's Cry* as an example of this metaphysicalising, but Poizat's informants seem to want to give themselves up to the 'moment' of extreme expression in a truly drastic sense, rather than seeing their favoured singers as shamans inducing them to supersensible realms.⁴⁸ Abbate writes that 'because instrumental virtuosity or operatic singing, like magic itself, can appear to be the accomplishment of the impossible, performers at that level appear superhuman to their audiences and inspire worship or hysteria'.⁴⁹ It is questionable whether the objects of diva-worship or other forms of extreme fandom are really seen as superhuman. Virtuosity is not quite the same thing as voicing the impossible, but is rather like voicing the near-impossible. The difference is significant: pushing the bounds of possibility is thrilling in a different way to appearing to move beyond the possible, as would a shaman or magician. Usually in musical performance it is the push towards the supposed impossible that generates excitement, rather than the breaking of a boundary. Live performance may signal a move towards the metaphysical, but its very liveness causes it to retain its physical presence.

⁴⁷ Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Opera*, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (Ithaca, 1992).

⁴⁹ 'Music: Drastic or Gnostic?' p. 508.

ii. On Record

The use of the word ‘liveness’ in the previous paragraph can also include the acousmatic (sound whose source is not seen), as many of these insights also apply to recording. A particularly troubling lacuna in Abbate’s study is that she ignores the predominance of recordings in modern musical life. Her argument is simply not complete in the twenty-first century soundscape. She is one of many scholars who write as if recording does not exist; her only nod towards its importance is a parenthesis saying that recording is not performance and therefore does not enter into her argument.⁵⁰ This deafness to the reality of modern listening practices further weakens arguments for listeners’ searches for musical ineffability. It is to the importance of recording as part of an up-to-date aesthetics and ontology of opera that I will now turn, and the thesis as a whole will bear out this importance.

In Jean-Jacques Beineix’s 1981 film *Diva* the famous soprano Cynthia Hawkins refuses to have her voice recorded. Jules, a young Parisian postman in love with the diva from afar, makes a bootleg recording for his own listening pleasure of her singing an aria from Catalani’s *La Wally*, and he is noticed in the theatre by some unscrupulous Taiwanese record producers who attempt to get the tape from him so it can be released commercially. Meanwhile, Jules gets to know Cynthia personally, returning a dress he stole after a recital, and she seems very taken with her young fan. Not knowing the identity of the bootlegger, she is furious when she learns that the Taiwanese plan to release the bootleg unless she records a disc with them legally. After much intrigue (involving a second tape with a spoken recording incriminating a high-ranking police officer which falls into Jules’ hands), Jules eventually plays the bootleg for Cynthia while she rehearses on stage. She admits that she

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 506.

has never heard herself sing, and she and Jules listen to the recording, embracing. Cynthia's initial attitude towards recording is like that of many musicologists: they see music as something that can exist only in the concert hall or opera house, and they assume that recording divests it of enchantment. But at the end of the film Cynthia learns what Jules already knows, that recording does not take away opera's enchantment but allows it to linger. 'Opera' is of course a theatrical art, but it does not exist *only* in the theatre. The dissipation of aura brought about by mechanical reproduction that so troubled Walter Benjamin can be seen in a positive light. David J. Levin likens *Diva* to what he terms 'neo-lyricism',⁵¹ and, though this lyrical material and its discourse of enchantment is not as academically rigorous as opera studies needs to be, it does demonstrate that people experience opera as more than a live theatrical event. They think about what opera does to them rather than just letting it happen, and they let it do things in more places than the theatre. Opera, whether 'live' or mediated, *is* performance, drastic through and through; it does not point to metaphysical gnosis, but it does make people think about their own experience, both in the moment and beyond. People perceive a performance much as they would any other text.

In *Unsettling Opera* Levin makes a strong argument for 'reading' an opera as a text, rather than trying to transform it into a realm of the unreadable and the unsung.⁵² For Levin, an opera production is a 'signifying network', and the task for the scholar of performance studies is to have 'a dialogic, critical engagement with live opera production'.⁵³ Crucially, and in spite of his use of the word 'live', it is partly through recordings that the critical reading in which he engages can be achieved, as a recording not only allows more critical depth in its repeatability, but also gives more readers access to the material discussed. It is a

⁵¹ 'Is There a Text in This Libido? *Diva* and the Rhetoric of Contemporary Opera Criticism,' in *Between Opera and Cinema*, ed. Jeongwon Joe and Rose Theresa (New York, 2002), pp. 121-132.

⁵² *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago, 2007).

⁵³ Levin, 'Response to James Treadwell' *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10:3 (1998), p. 307.

common simplification to see the ways one can experience music as a binary opposition between 'live' and 'recorded'. As with most binaries this ontology hides other important categories between the two key terms. For example, where does a radio broadcast of an opera fit? The music is happening live, in real time, but the listener hears the opera acoustically. Even more firmly within the category of 'recorded' there are many shadings which strongly alter the listening experience. Listening to an LP is not the same as listening to a CD or an MP3. Hearing a CD track broadcast on the radio is different from hearing it as a sample recording on an artist's website. Watching an opera on television is not the same as watching it on DVD or viewing a clip on YouTube. Even within an opera house the listening experience can be vastly different. Someone sitting in the front row of the stalls will have a very different experience from someone high up in a side box, unable to see the stage. All of these contrasting listening and viewing experiences, variously involving different shadings of spatiality, technology, and temporality, come together to form the notion of 'opera'. In *Liveness*, Philip Auslander discusses and deconstructs this binary, discouraging the fetishisation of liveness and emphasising that even experiences we conceive of as 'live' are actually mediated to varying degrees: 'live performance now often incorporates mediatization to the degree that the live event itself is a product of media technologies'.⁵⁴ The supposedly conservative genre of opera is no exception, often broadcast to radio, television, or, especially, the cinema, involving electronic supertitles, and increasingly employing video projection.

It is perhaps not a mere coincidence that the early opera revival began at the same time performances began to be recorded, first by photography, then by sound recording and film. Audiences in the early twentieth century hearing Monteverdi's operas for the first time could already imagine them as mediatised events. The first modern performances of *Orfeo* and

⁵⁴ *Liveness*, revised edition (Abingdon, 2008), p. 25.

Poppea in Paris in 1904 and 1905 were photographed for posterity, giving them a trace conceived of as more ‘authentic’ than drawings or written criticism could be. Though Monteverdi’s music was not recorded at all systematically until Nadia Boulanger’s discs in 1937, early audiences could have easily imagined such recordings as taking place. The mere presence of recording as a possibility altered the way people listened to ‘live’ music, as Walter Benjamin famously theorised in ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’.⁵⁵ For Benjamin, the work’s ‘aura’ was weakened by the profusion of recording, but one could ask if Monteverdi’s music in its modern redactions ever had an aura to be dissipated, not having had the opportunity to build one up over the past pre-recording decades like Beethoven’s or Wagner’s music. Reaching for the aura of the work is rather like reaching for its ineffability: can one have ineffability in the age of mechanical reproduction (if indeed it ever existed at all)? Abbate and other metaphysicists conveniently sideline the question. To ignore recording is to ignore a major part of the modern experience of opera, and various types of recordings should be used as evidence for operatic engagement.

This thesis, in short, sees opera as an earthly experience, but not one which can only take place in the opera house, nor one which needs to be ‘live’. The ineffable aura of a Monteverdi opera may exist for philosophically-minded listeners, but for seventeenth-century listeners and both early and modern practitioners its presence-in-absence is merely a distraction from why they and we engage with opera.

IV. The Thesis

Before moving on to individual themes in the modern history of Monteverdi opera performance, we must briefly look at the century as a whole. Comparing our 2011 attitudes

⁵⁵ collected in *Illuminations* (New York, 1968), pp. 217-252.

towards early opera with those of 1911 could show that a Kuhnian or Foucauldian paradigm-shift has occurred over the century's course: our worldview is surely as different now as Foucault's pre-1600 time of resemblance was to his modern period of representation, but looking diachronically across the twentieth century we can see that there is no single date at which we can convincingly place this change. What we actually have seems to be a multitude of mini-shifts of various themes involved in early opera production and reception, happening at different points throughout the century and producing a domino effect which results in the present *Zeitgeist*, which itself is far from unified. But can this be called a paradigm-shift? How can we know that greater changes are not still to come? Foucault had the benefit of hindsight, with a large corpus of 'artefacts' to analyse from both before and after the posited shift. Lydia Goehr's work-concept presents a similar situation; she can examine both sides of her 1800 fulcrum date and is able to make a statement about when she believes the shift occurred. It is difficult to believe, though, that the twentieth century is so much more continuous than previous periods. These historical paradigm-shifts would have been just as chimerical to people living during them as the current shift is to us. Over the course of this thesis I will discuss some of the themes which have changed and developed in Monteverdi opera performance over time, and I hope to show in the end that changes in attitudes or worldview do not happen simultaneously, but are rather part of a gradual, complex process. I do dare to tell a 'story' in this postmodern age of mistrust of narrative, but my narrative is not one of a single progressive trajectory. Musical performance changes much the way language changes: without a doubt, we speak differently in 2011 than we did in 1911, but it would be impossible to say that we speak 'better' now than we did then, nor would one be able to assert a date upon which 1911 English became 2011 English.

In taking a thematic approach rather than a strictly chronological one, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of periodisation and teleology. Looking at changing themes will bring out

relationships within and between the ‘periods’ that might imprison a chronological approach. Historical periodisation is one of the many ways in which humans put elements of their experience into categories, and the fact that our species do this cannot be denied. So-called Postmodernists are sometimes seen as attempting to put an end to categorisation, but most of them consciously employ it: even though he critiques grand narratives, Jean-François Lyotard puts certain artworks into a category called ‘postmodern’, and Foucault’s thought rests on the concept of epistemes, categories of types of thought. Their real project is to problematise periodisation and categorisation, not to put an end to it, which they recognise would be impossible. I wish to join the group of scholars who have critiqued musical periodisation, though like most of them I do not pretend that we ought to get rid of it entirely.

Focusing on chronology and periods of performance practice would also force me into one method of categorisation, only one story, but there are actually a multitude of ways to divide up performance history. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography*, John Postlewait offers a list of twenty-two ways in which to divide the history of theatre, most of which could also apply to opera.⁵⁶ A chronological approach would have to choose one or a few of these, while a thematic approach need not necessarily choose, and can even put the categories in dialogue with each other. Also, one person’s preferred categorisation scheme is rarely the same as someone else’s, and there are often cultural differences as well. Jorge Luís Borges gives an extreme example in *Other Inquisitions* of a way to group animals: ‘(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just

⁵⁶ John Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 189. His categories include political empires and dynasties, monarchies, traditional eras, normative attributes, nationalities, pan-nationalism, linguistics, religion, philosophical schools, organisational formations, audience types, kinds of stage spaces, etc.

broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies'.⁵⁷ Though this seems absurd to us, Borges implies that all of our familiar categorisation systems could be just as odd. Though not as extreme as Borges' example, I have sought various ways to discuss Monteverdi's history on the modern stage.

Over the course of the twentieth century, early opera has at times been seen as a site for political activism. Between the world wars, early operas like Monteverdi's were for the first time seen to have elements which could be used by practitioners and critics to make political statements. It has been argued that all art is political, but its political nature is often tacit. In the 1920s and 30s it was made explicit. This politicisation was short-lived, and after the second world war opera was put (again) into aspic. It was not until the 1970s that techniques drawn from modern theatre, usually of a political nature, were again applied in opera production in a systematic way. It is debatable whether opera, especially early opera, in the new century is still, or even has the ability to be, a political force. Though Monteverdi's operas, *Poppea* especially, can be interpreted as political and have increasingly been read as such, few recent productions engage with their politics.⁵⁸ The first chapter of this thesis, 'Politicising Monteverdi Between the Wars', which acts as a sort of prologue, will examine this early period of politicisation in depth, asking why Monteverdi's operas were particularly frequent sites for the staging of politics.

The next three chapters form the bulk of the thesis, presenting three detailed thematic case studies relating to the contemporary performance of Monteverdi's operas. They will explore Monteverdi's place on modern opera stages from the perspectives of the staging of socio-cultural attitudes, directorial re-shaping, and vocal performance practice. Each of the three chapters will focus on one of the three extant operas.

⁵⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *Other Inquisitions*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simmes (New York, 1968), p. 103.

⁵⁸ See John Bokina, *Opera and Politics from Monteverdi to Henze* (New Haven, 1997).

‘Staging Community in *Orfeo*’ discusses the means by which stage directors have placed varying notions of community on stage in Monteverdi’s first opera. Since the 1970s various directors have seen the opera stage as a locus to express their ideas about social interaction, and have brought to it contrasting notions of community. *Orfeo* provides an example through which to follow that concept from the 1970s to the present. By tracing a single concept and its realisation on stage in various productions, my aim is to elucidate the way that the stage conception of early opera has developed over the last few decades. In staging community, directors make audiences reflect upon their own communities, and by using *Orfeo* as a site for their theorising, they give modern audiences the opportunity to connect intelligently with art far removed from their own aesthetic backgrounds. So while many critics have characterised the ‘early music movement’ as a monolithic attempt to regain the past, these directors show how much early music can be re-rooted in the present.

‘Reshaping *Ulisse*’ also looks at stage directors, but questions their decisions, along with those of musical directors, to reshape Monteverdi’s penultimate opera dramatically and musically. Structural models of character function and narrative layout, drawn from semioticians of narrative such as Algirdas Greimas, allow one to compare how different practitioners have conceived of the opera’s dramaturgy. Such models often become dead ends, mere descriptions of works that assume their autonomy, but when used to highlight difference they can be a useful starting point for deeper discussion. I will centre discussion on the character of Penelope, comparing how various directors put her on stage and how they view her relationship with her servant Melanto, moving from a mistress-servant relationship as has been traditionally seen in both the opera and its Homeric source, through to Pierre Audi’s radical rethinking of the relationship, with Melanto in the dominant position. When a director changes character relationships so drastically, in effect altering the opera’s plot, should one ask if it is still the composer’s and librettist’s opera?

‘Singing Ottavia’ explores the sound of the singing voice, examining recorded performances of Ottavia’s monologue ‘Addio Roma’ in the final act of *L’incoronazione di Poppea*. The sound of singing is one of the more evident elements of opera, but few scholars have focused on the changes of physical vocal production in operatic performance over the years.⁵⁹ Monteverdi’s operas serve as a useful site to study the changes in singing technique in early music from the 1950s to today, as the many recordings of his operas demonstrate wide variation. In general, we will see a shift from the ‘bel canto’ style of singing to a more discursive practice, which would seem to have more in common with singing technique as it was prescribed in Monteverdi’s own time. This shift is about more than mere ‘authenticity’, a desire to sing like Monteverdi’s singers would have sung, as its reasons come from wider trends in classical singing as a whole. Early opera’s ramifications on the standard operatic repertoire and on vocal schooling have also been wide.

Though rarely explicitly political, since the 1970s directors have approached opera staging in very diverse ways, and the final chapter, ‘*Poppea* in 2010’, will examine this diversity. David J. Levin presents a taxonomy of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ readings of an opera and ‘traditionalist’ and ‘interventionist’ productions.⁶⁰ A strong reading attempts to account for every aspect of the opera’s text in its staging, while a weak reading presents the stage directions without much thinking through or searching for motivation. A traditionalist production sets the opera when its composer and librettist set it, paying attention to their directions and, as much as they can be inferred, their intentions. An interventionist one employs more directorial agency and reads the opera against the grain. Useful as this taxonomy may be, the reality is rather more nuanced. An examination of three recent

⁵⁹ One of the few is John Potter in *Vocal Authority* (Cambridge, 1998), though opera singing forms only a part of his argument.

⁶⁰ David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera* (Chicago, 2007).

productions of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* through case studies in directorial ideology, theatrical space, and the staging of gender demonstrates that one taxonomy does not fit all.

These case studies come together to present a multifaceted picture of Monteverdi's operas on the modern stage. Though certain traditions of performance are evident, it will be seen to be impossible to speak of only one single overarching trajectory regarding these operas. Monteverdi performance continues to change as directors find new methods for staging, as singers are faced with new modes of vocality, and as audiences become increasingly accustomed to early opera. The twenty-first century will surely hold as much variety as the seventeenth and the twentieth regarding Monteverdi performance.

Chapter One

Politicising Monteverdi Between the Wars

The modern revival of early opera can be divided into two main phases, the first beginning around 1900 and culminating in the period between the two world wars, and the second beginning in the 1960s-70s and lasting to the present.¹ This two-phase arrival of early opera to modern opera stages mostly coincides with the wider early music movement, though the unique features of opera do not always allow a straightforward overlapping. Though this thesis focuses primarily on performances of Monteverdi's operas in Europe since the 1970s, it is important to give an overview of how his operas first arrived on the twentieth-century stage. Though performance practice in Monteverdi's music, and that of early music in general, is very different in the past few decades from that in the years before, the more recent style did not spring forth fully-formed, but rather follows a train of development from earlier styles.

This chapter will discuss the intellectual interrelationships in the first period of the modern Monteverdi revival in the first half of the twentieth century. In France, Germany, and Italy the Monteverdi revivers belonged to different political camps and had contrasting aesthetic aims; comparing them provides an insight into why Monteverdi became popular again after centuries of near-silence. The following account ranges widely through political and aesthetic history and, due to its nature as a single thesis chapter, entails some necessary over-simplifications. A more detailed historical study would address these simplifications and would further nuance this account.

¹ Future scholars might find another significant break in style around the turn of the millennium, especially regarding singing practices, but it is probably too soon to posit such a break. I will return to this notion in Chapter Four, 'Singing Ottavia'.

In France, the Monteverdi revival was led by Vincent d'Indy and his Schola Cantorum, prompted by a desire to re-examine the roots of French music, and with a strong right-wing nationalistic, anti-Semitic bias. In Germany, it was the left-leaning aesthetics of Ferruccio Busoni and the *Neue Sachlichkeit* which prompted the revival of early opera. Monteverdi and Handel were seen as providing alternatives to Wagnerian opera composition, and were a valued element of Weimar-era operatic culture. In Italy, Gabriele d'Annunzio led the initiative for reviving Monteverdi's music, seeing it as both a precursor to Wagner's music and as an expression of *italianità*, easily subsumable into the aesthetic viewpoints of Mussolini's fascism. Britain is where the early opera revival is best documented, but it was not as explicitly political there or in the United States as on the Continent. Based more at universities (most notably Oxford in Britain and Smith College in the US), early opera was more a scholarly pursuit than a political statement, but one about which the press was enthusiastic.² The wide range of reasons for reviving Monteverdi and other composers is often overlooked in studies of the early music revival, which is more often seen as a monolithic project governed by a pan-European desire to reclaim the past in the face of industrialisation and modernisation. The reality shows that more complex socio-cultural underpinnings governed the revival. In the early twentieth century, there was much less international musical communication than we are used to today. It is therefore best to speak of various national micro-revivals rather than a single worldwide movement, which would not take place until after the Second World War with the development of major international record companies. Because Monteverdi's wide cultural currency began in this interwar period, his position makes a comparative political study of the reception of his operas a useful litmus test to examine these nations' varying attitudes towards early music.

² But not so much the general opera-going public: the Oxford Opera Group, which presented Britain's first *Orfeo* and *Poppea* in the 1920s, never made a profit on early opera.

I. The Shadow of Wagner and Fin-de-Siècle France

One of the principal protagonists of this part of my study is Richard Wagner, though not the man himself or his music as much as his influence – the shadow he cast over the musical climate of the West at least until the end of the Second World War. It is little known that Wagner himself had some dealings with early opera, having made a performing edition of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Aulide* in 1847.³ But Wagner's own early-music activities are not connected to the Monteverdi revival as it began to flourish between the world wars. Rather it is the fact that the world's post-Wagner opera composers had to come to terms with Wagner's aesthetic projects, either assimilating them into their own aesthetics, attempting to exceed them, or opposing them. For the most part it is the third option that concerns us here, as pre-Wagnerian music was brought in to the post-Wagnerian battle. Between the world wars early opera was used as a weapon, often a political one, both for and against the forces of post-Wagnerian modernism.

The earliest phase of the Monteverdi revival, from the fin-de-siècle to the First World War, was also in part brought about by post-Wagnerian debates. The main figure here was Vincent d'Indy, a card-carrying Wagnerite who wished to set himself up as the French answer to Wagner. The French defeat in the Franco-Prussian war presented an aesthetic dilemma: how could French composers like d'Indy subsume the important aesthetic innovations of their enemies in Germany without admitting a symbolic intellectual defeat as well as a military one? Wagner himself provided the answer in an open letter, in which he explained that French composers must take back their own music from the 'Judeo-Italian' elements that had 'disfigured' it and use French traditions and mythology as Wagner himself

³ ed. Christa Jost (Mainz, 2010).

had done with the German.⁴ D'Indy's 1897 opera *Fervaal*, a Frenchified *Parsifal* set in Provence during the Crusades, is the most direct example of this.

Musical traditions were also important. The first main attraction in France on this front was Jean-Philippe Rameau, and most of the leading composers of the day participated in a complete-works edition: Saint-Saëns was the general editor, and d'Indy, Debussy, and Dukas all provided individual editions. Other early opera composers were not seen as appropriate for wide-scale revival: Lully was Italian and, worse for the fin-de-siècle republican intellectuals, his operas were inseparable from their absolute-monarchist context, and Gluck was even more dangerous, a German-Italian corruptor of the pure French tradition. Debussy went so far as to proclaim 'à bas Gluck!'⁵ Those who held these ideas were not much concerned with the historical accuracy of their claims, and were more interested in finding figureheads for a national music. Still, it was recognised that Lully, though *persona non grata*, invented a distinctly French opera. A search then began to find Lully's musical and dramatic provenance, by default the origins of French opera, and these researches led to Monteverdi. The polymath Romain Rolland wrote his doctoral dissertation (the Sorbonne's first on a musicological topic) on opera before Lully, and he pleaded Monteverdi's cause as the fount of all modern opera, especially the French.⁶

D'Indy was highly influenced by Rolland's work, and he took it upon himself to rehabilitate Monteverdi for the modern stage. D'Indy's historical record is far from clean: he was a fierce anti-semitic and fervent exclusionary nationalist, and he was an important figure

⁴ in Charles B. Paul, 'Rameau, d'Indy, and French Nationalism,' *The Musical Quarterly* 58:2 (1972), p. 51.

⁵ quoted in Anya Suschitzky, 'Debussy's Rameau: French Music and its Others', *Musical Quarterly* 86:3 (2002), p. 405.

⁶ Romain Rolland, *Histoire de l'opéra avant Lully et Scarlatti* (Paris, 1895).

in political groups like the far-right Ligue de la Patrie Française.⁷ Though it may at first seem odd that d'Indy would occupy himself so heavily with an Italian composer in the context of his French nationalist rhetoric, the music was also needed for his new conservatory, the Schola Cantorum, which was expanding beyond church music (much of it Italian as well) and into other genres. As there was as yet very little work being done in Italy on the music of the past, the French saw that they needed to take care of Italy's traditions themselves (the Germans had the same idea, and it was not until Malipiero's work in the 1920s that the Italians reclaimed their composer). Rolland wrote a rave review of d'Indy's 1904 *Orfeo*, the first modern performance of any Monteverdi opera, and the support of one of France's leading intellectuals did much for Monteverdi's cause.⁸ Sporadic productions of *Orfeo* followed in the next few years in Milan (in Giacomo Orefice's d'Indy-influenced edition), Brussels, Mantua, Venice, Bologna, Monte Carlo, and New York.⁹

D'Indy quickly followed his *Orphée* with *Le couronnement de Poppée* in the next season, first in a concert version and later staged. His *Poppea* edition, like *Orphée* redacted for modern orchestra, was very heavily cut, amounting to a series of selected highlights, just enough for the opera's plot to come across. The published piano score includes a preface in which d'Indy explains the need to 'include only the most beautiful and most interesting parts of the work', implying that much of the rest falls short of the genius at work in *Orfeo*.¹⁰ For

⁷ The most characteristic political event of this period was the Dreyfus Affair, in which soldier Alfred Dreyfus was tried and convicted for spying on the French army for Germany in spite of very little evidence against him. The left-wing intellectual faction, among them novelist Emile Zola, quickly deduced that the real reason for the unfair trial was that Dreyfus was Jewish. The incident erupted in a pamphlet war in which the deep-rooted anti-semitism of supposedly mainstream political groups was exposed (in fact, the Ligue de la Patrie Française was founded as an *antidreyfusard* group). Dreyfus was later exonerated. For a detailed account of the musical effect of the controversy, see Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music: From the Dreyfus Affair to the First World War* (Oxford, 1999).

⁸ The review is anthologised in John Whenham's *Cambridge Opera Handbook on Orfeo* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 119-125.

⁹ Denis Morrier, ed., *Avant-scène opéra: Orfeo* (Paris, 2002). It should be remembered that these were one-off performances, not part of an opera company's season. Monteverdi's operas were not yet seen as performable before the general paying public, and were generally seen as special events.

¹⁰ d'Indy, *Le Couronnement de Poppée* (Paris, 1908), p. 2.

d'Indy, *Poppea* is brought down by its tendencies towards the later Neapolitan style and by the libretto which entails too great a variety of incident. Yet d'Indy does not necessarily value the retention of the classical dramatic unities, as he makes a point of including the scene between Valletto and Damigella because 'its melodic verve presages Mozart', as well as the comic scene between the two soldiers. After the opening sinfonia, d'Indy inserts a brief section of the scene between Poppea and Ottone in order to set the stage for the way their relationship will be carried out. He follows this with the scene for the two soldiers, leading into Poppea and Nerone's first love scene. Seneca's death follows, then the Valletto/Damigella duet. Ottavia's 'Addio Roma' follows directly, then the pre-coronation scene of Poppea and Nerone. D'Indy ends with the chorus of consuls and tribunes. Perhaps the most striking absences, compared to the reception of the opera later in the century, are Ottavia's monologue 'Disprezzata Regina' and the closing duet 'Pur ti miro'. The fact that d'Indy could delete these scenes demonstrates how recently certain portions of the opera have become canonic. D'Indy, working only with his own taste, valued the more overt drama of Seneca's death and the comedy of the soldiers and the page. The score's preface ends with a jibe against Italy, as d'Indy says that his edition will finally make better known this work which is 'ignored everywhere, even, or we should say: above all, in its native land'.¹¹

Importantly, even in this politicised world, the political implications which later scholars and practitioners have so readily found in *Poppea* do not emerge. The emphasis is on the historicity of the work.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 3.

II. Between the Wars

While before the First World War the aesthetic emphasis had been on historicism, real or imagined, as a way to regain national identity, after the war the use of early music became more complex, often shifting between the nationalist right wing and the radical left. Instead of being merely symbols for right-wing nationalism, after the First World War early operas were used as pawns in the game of cultural supremacy among the various artistic factions. Now the epicentre of operatic debates shifted to Germany, though there was important movement outwards to Italy, England, and the United States. In Germany and Italy, early opera played a role in the hypernationalist doctrines of early fascism, though leaning more towards the Left than one might expect as early opera was appropriated as a path to the avant-garde. In France, on the other hand, early opera remained staunchly in the right wing, still holding its strong historicist-nationalist connections.¹² As we shall see, England and America had somewhat less politicised soundscapes than the Continent and early opera in the Anglo-Saxon world belonged primarily to universities and other cultural institutions.

II.i. Monteverdi in Weimar Germany

As in the prewar questioning of operatic aesthetics, Wagner also cast his shadow over the soundscape of postwar Germany. After the German defeat in the First World War, debates raged over the purpose and style of art. Susan Cook has demonstrated that one faction ‘enthusiastically and often idealistically embraced anything seen as modern or republican’,

¹² see Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics and Music*, esp. Ch. 1, ‘The New Cultural “War” and the French Musical World’, pp. 15-63.

and the other ‘gloried in the past and regarded the new republic as symbolic of an embarrassing defeat and national betrayal’.¹³ Wagner was by default the exemplar of the old order of prewar Germany, and Hans Pfitzner and Erich Korngold continued to write through-composed music dramas in the Wagnerian manner, while Kurt Weill, Ernst Krenek, and Paul Hindemith did all they could to write ‘modern’ works. But a key event occurred in 1920, when Handel’s *Rodelinda* was performed in Göttingen, setting off a major Handel revival. While activity with early music may seem at odds with both the Wagnerian and modern factions, seeming to have little to do with either Pfitzner’s idealised romanticism or Hindemith’s abstract modernism, the modernist faction embraced it, these pre-Wagner operas serving as models for how composers could depart from the nineteenth-century German tradition.¹⁴ Even before the war Ferruccio Busoni had theorised an anti-Wagnerian opera using ‘absolute musical forms’ rather than the Leitmotiv principle, which he felt ‘gave music undue abstract, subjective, and emotional connotations’.¹⁵ The Handel productions employed nonrepresentational sets and stylised movement, putting them somehow beyond time or place. Some of the designers were also involved in the Bauhaus movement and carried over their constructivist designs to the stage. They were not presented as works of the eighteenth century, but rather as timeless music theatre pieces, exemplars of musical objectivity.

The composer, pianist, essayist, and adopted German, Busoni, called this movement the *junge Klassizität*, ‘young classicism’, though it is more frequently referred to as the *neue Sachlichkeit*, ‘new objectivity’. By this he meant ‘the mastery, the sifting and the turning to account of all the gains of previous experiments and their inclusion in strong and beautiful

¹³ Susan C. Cook, *Opera for a New Republic* (Ann Arbor, 1988), p. 9.

¹⁴ Pfitzner’s major success was the opera *Palestrina*, which rather than engaging with Palestrina the composer or his music constructed a fictionalised Palestrina as romantic ‘artist’ figure.

¹⁵ Cook, p. 11.

forms'.¹⁶ Busoni wanted 'not profundity, and personal feeling and metaphysics, but Music which is absolute, distilled, and never under a mask of figures and ideas which are borrowed from other spheres'.¹⁷ For Busoni, Bach best fit this description and was the polar opposite of the intensely subjective Wagner. Busoni was instrumental in the Bach revival of the early twentieth century, especially through his very popular piano transcription of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Because Bach was a historically distant figure, it was easier to ignore the ways that his own life may have influenced his music. The absence of a historical context for Bach, all too present with Wagner's intensive theorising about his own art within its period, would allow moderns to construe the music as autonomous and examine it in its own terms. Busoni's followers found that this objectivity could be located in early opera as well, where the da capo aria and other closed forms were exemplars of his 'strong and beautiful forms'. Again, the distance between early composers and their present-day counterparts aided in attaining the idealised objectivity. The *Zeitoper* of Weill, Krenek, and Hindemith searched for objectivity by adding the modern sounds of jazz to discrete forms, looking to express the speed and mechanisation of modern life.

It is worth making a short digression to the Handel movement in 1920s Germany, as these productions were the first that made early opera seem a viable part of the opera house's repertoire. Though today it is clear that Handel and Monteverdi represent two very different aesthetics of opera, in 1920 'early opera' could mean everything from Peri to Gluck, and without the Handel revival Monteverdi would probably not have entered the repertoire in the 1920s. The leading spirit behind the Handel revival was art historian Oskar Hagen. The first opera he edited and produced was *Rodelinda*, in the summer of 1920 in Göttingen. Hagen wrote that 'the men of today must be spellbound by the truth of the plot and strongly held

¹⁶ Ferruccio Busoni, *The Essence of Music* (London, 1957), p. 20.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 22.

until the last act... For this important reason an exact reconstruction of the production as it took place during Handel's life at the London Royal Academy would be simply nonsensical'.¹⁸ Note the stress on 'truth': the goal is to find the universal truth content of the piece, not antiquarian reconstruction. Hagen changed a great deal of the music as presented in Chrysander's scholarly edition of Handel's works, transposing, cutting, rearranging, and freely translating the libretto into German. Most current writing on the early opera movement stresses the affinity of these works to a post-Wagnerian high Romantic aesthetic because of the large orchestration and elision and deletion of da capo arias.¹⁹ While it is tempting for scholars today to see what Hagen was doing as Romantic, if one attempts to enter the mindset of 1920, not knowing how the early music movement would develop in the future, his activities seem rather more radical. Hagen's *Rodelinda* or Carl Orff's *Orfeo* (to be discussed below) are obviously more like Wagner than Alan Curtis's *Rodelinda* or John Eliot Gardiner's *Orfeo*, but they are a great deal less like Wagner than many other operas of the early twentieth century (like Pfitzner's and Korngold's, or even Berg's). Rather than seeing these versions of early operas as corruptions, it is more accurate to view them as their editors saw them, as adaptations. Even though musicologists of the time complained about what musicians like Hagen and Orff were doing, they did not think of the operas as 'Wagnerised'. Though they moved away from 'pure' Baroque musical forms, these versions of Handel still retained the alternations of recitative and aria that distinguished opera seria from through-composed Wagnerian music drama, emphasising the new objectivity's abstract forms.

Carl Orff's Monteverdi realisations, the first made in Germany for performance rather than musicological study, also emerge directly from this context of adaptation. Orff,

¹⁸ 'Der Mensch von heute muß durch die Wahrheit der Handlung gebannt und bis zum letzten Aktschlusse festgehalten werden... Aus diesem obersten Grunde wäre eine exakte Rekonstruktion der Darstellungen wie sie zu Händels Lebzeiten in der Londoner Royal Academy stattfinden, einfach sinnlos', in Ulrich Etscheid, *Händels Rodelinda: Libretto, Komposition, Rezeption* (Kassel, 1998), pp. 262-3.

¹⁹ c.f. *ibid.*, esp. p. 295.

unlike his musicologist contemporaries, was not a historicist. He did not wish to restore Monteverdi's operas only because of their historical importance, and he was little concerned with reproducing original sounds or stagings. Rather, he used the operas as a way to help him develop his own modernist compositional style. Though Monteverdi may have influenced d'Indy and Malipiero subconsciously in their own compositions, looking for inspiration was not the main goal of these composer-editors: their historicist activities were mostly separate from their compositional ones. For Orff such separation of the facets of a musical career was not possible. He writes on first discovering *Orfeo* in Ambros's history that 'the book opened itself before me: there stood the masterly recitatives of Orfeo. From the first I needed none of Ambros's explanatory text; the music told me everything. It was *the* music that I needed... I found music which was so familiar that it was as if I had known it for a long time, as if I had only rediscovered it'.²⁰ He stresses that the music speaks to him through itself, and not because of its historical importance. Orff completed editions of *Orfeo*, the 'Ballo delle ingrate', and the 'Lamento d'Arianna', and he planned editions of the two Venetian operas. He hoped to create a Karlsruhe Monteverdi-Festwoche series along the lines of Hagen's Handel festival in Göttingen, but his conductor colleague Ferdinand Wagner died before the project could come to fruition.

In the 1925 *Orpheus*, the first of his Monteverdi realizations, Orff attempted to use early instruments, but this proved impractical and he revised his edition for modern instruments in 1929. His desire to use early instruments was not merely in order to be authentic, but rather to heighten the epic nature of the production and to defamiliarise the music, forcing the audience to concentrate on it as 'other' in a similar way that his contemporary Krenek inserted jazz into the Viennese *Jonny spielt auf*. This emphasis on

²⁰ 'Das Buch schlug sich mir von selber auf: da standen die großartigen Rezitative aus dem "Orfeo". Fürs erste brauchte ich keinen erläuternden Text von Ambros, die Musik sagte mir alles. Es war *die* Musik, die ich brauchte... Ich fand eine Musik, die mir so vertraut war, als hätte ich sie längst gekannt, als hätte ich sie nur wiedergefunden'. Carl Orff, *Carl Orff und sein Werk: Dokumentation*, v. 2 (Tutzing, 1975), p. 14.

defamiliarisation as a goal for truth is also very much at one with Bertolt Brecht's developments in the theatre over the next decade and with the staging practices of such theatre designers as Caspar Neher, Erwin Piscator, and, for opera, László Moholy-Nagy. *Orpheus* proved rather popular and Orff made further revisions in 1939, in the 1950s collecting his three Monteverdi editions into a full-evening triptych called *Lamenti*. Orff had no qualms about changing the structure of the works, in *Orpheus* replacing Music's prologue with a spoken paraphrase of an Old High German rendering of the Orpheus myth, shifting and cutting material in acts one and two to form ritualistic stage-pictures, and cutting the roles of Pluto and Proserpine as well as all of Act Five. Orff wanted to bring out the 'elemental drama' of Monteverdi's opera. Therefore the characters are seen as archetypes, rather like the soloists in *Carmina Burana*,²¹ and the emphasis is on stage-pictures and movement rather than plot. The libretto was translated by Dorothee Günther, co-founder (with Orff) of the Günther-Schule. The goals of the school mirror Orff's goals in his prewar stage works. Günther wrote: 'When I founded the Günther Schule in 1924, I wanted to discover a method of reviving the natural unity of music and movement, [which was] not to be based on incidental and subjective experience but on their elemental relationship, in that they arise from a single source'.²² Monteverdi's opera, seen as the fount of the genre, was an ideal location for this 'elemental' and objective unity. These rather vague 'elementalist' aesthetics, along with Orff's views of music education expressed in the *Schulwerk*, were adopted by the Nazi party in the following years, and Orff has not yet recovered his reputation from this appropriation. It is debatable how much Orff himself had to do with the

²¹ Andreas Liess, *Carl Orff* (London, 1966), p. 78.

²² *ibid.*, p. 17.

politicisation of his work, and there is not room to go into it here.²³ Suffice it to say that a series of photographs from the various productions of *Orpheus* from 1925 to 1940 shows a gradual move from Weimar-style abstraction in set and costume design to more resolute Arcadian classicism, reflecting contemporary political developments. We can also see this shift in the production design of Handel operas.²⁴

A summary of Orff's version will demonstrate how he transformed the opera into an example of New Objectivity. After the opening toccata and German narration, *Orpheus* begins in an 'Arcadian landscape' with the chorus's 'Vieni imeneo' ('Preist diesen Tag'), which leads directly into 'Lasciate i monti' ('Fliehet uns der nächtigen Wolken Dunkel') and Orfeo's 'Rosa del ciel' ('Strahlendes Licht'). After Euridice's short response, Orff brings forward the 3/2 ritornello from later in the first act and uses it to link to the reprises of 'Lasciate i monti' and 'Vieni imeneo' and the chorus 'Ecco Orfeo' ('Froher Tag, lichter Tag'), ending his first act with the moresca from the end of the opera. By deleting all of the shepherds' and nymphs' soli, Orff creates a choral scene with Orfeo at its centre. Günther's translations are less specific than Striggio's original, being merely about the lovely day rather than the specific occasion of the wedding: Striggio's 'Ecco Orfeo' tells about Orfeo's own sadness turning to mirth, while Günther's 'Froher Tag' is about night becoming day. Orff's second act begins, as in Monteverdi, with Orfeo's solo 'Ecco pur ch'a voi ritorno' ('Nehmt mich auf, ihr stillen Wälder'), but with Orfeo singing from off stage, and cuts to the chorus 'Dunque fa degno Orfeo' ('Die Welt versinkt in deinem Sang'). The solo

²³ Michael H. Kater has dealt with the issue in his books *The Twisted Muse: Musicians and Their Music in the Third Reich* (New York, 1997) and *Composers of the Nazi Era* (New York, 2000). Opposed to Kater, who wishes to problematise 'Nazi' composers, is Richard Taruskin, who suggests leaving Orff in the graveyard of history in 'Can We Give Poor Orff a Pass at Last?' in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley, 2009), pp. 161-167. My own opinion is that there is little use in ignoring an important and popular composer because we may disagree with his politics or because he 'stole' from Stravinsky. Interestingly, the *Schulwerk* does not have the political stigma that Orff's concert/stage works have and, along with the Kodály method, is predominant in American music education.

²⁴ photographs in Orff's *Carl Orff und sein Werk* and in Hellmut Christian Wolff, *Die Händel-Oper auf der modernen Bühne* (Leipzig, 1957).

and chorus are repeated, with Orfeo closer to the stage, and as Orfeo enters he sings all three verses of ‘Vi ricorda o boschi ombrosi’ (‘Gebt mir Antwort, weite Wälder’). The messenger then enters and sings ‘Ahi caso acerbo’ (‘Weh, dunkles Schicksal’) and the scene carries on musically mostly as in Monteverdi, though with the various shepherds’ soli omitted and placing the choral ‘Ahi caso acerbo’ before Orfeo’s ‘Tu sei morta’ (‘Euridike, bist du mir erloschen’). Again, though, Günther’s translation takes away much of Striggio’s specificity and subjectivity, as the messenger’s narrative does not tell how Euridice came to die but rather reflects on sorrow and death generally. This all allows for abstract stage pictures rather than linear plot.

Orff’s third act cuts the role of Speranza and moves directly to Orfeo’s encounter with Caronte, though cut to its bare minimum to get to ‘Possente spirito’ (‘Du dunkler Warner’). Orff keeps this mostly as it appears in Monteverdi, with Orfeo’s ornamented line, solo violins, trumpets (replacing cornetti), and harps, though the final harp ritornello is composed out with more echo effects and a large global crescendo to fortissimo in the full orchestra. From here, Orff makes even stronger decisions, giving a small portion of Plutone’s part to Caronte, who explains the rules of bringing Euridice back to the surface. This significantly alters the plot of the opera, for Orfeo’s elaborate coloratura works to convince Caronte to give back Euridice, rather than putting him to sleep and allowing him to go deeper into the underworld. Next, Euridice and Orfeo sing part of the Apollo/Orfeo duet from Act Five, giving them a chance to sing together, then Orfeo sings ‘Qual honor di te fia degno’ (‘Euridike, meine Sehnsucht folgte immer deiner Spur’) to Euridice instead of to his lyre. Orfeo then looks back and Euridice disappears as in Striggio. The opera ends with the Sinfonia a 7 in a grand orchestral arrangement. Orff has thus transformed the opera into an hour-long pageant which allows for the maximum of chorus and movement, but the minimum of plot, the very opposite of Wagnerian plot-based pageantry.

The Göttingen Handel revivals and Orff's Monteverdi realisations are the mirror-image or flip-side of 1920s *Zeitoper*. Where *Zeitoper* revels in its post- (or anti-)Wagnerian and postwar context, these 'elemental' early opera productions tried to escape from context. We have seen, though, that the intellectual underpinnings of the two movements are very similar. Two leading composers of *Zeitoper*, Ernst Krenek and Paul Hindemith, would go on to make performing editions of Monteverdi operas, which shows how much these works had permeated interwar German musical life. Krenek's 1927 *Jonny spielt auf* was the biggest operatic hit of the decade, and set off the vogue for *Zeitoper*.²⁵ But by the 1930s Krenek had become disillusioned with the jazz-influenced style and had begun to compose with Schoenberg's new 12-tone method. His 1933 opera *Karl V* was the first opera constructed entirely serially. Hindemith, after his 1929 *Zeitoper Neues vom Tage*, also retreated into more hermetic musical realms, though he still wrote within the tonal tradition. A look at Krenek's 1937 *Poppea* and Hindemith's 1943 *Orfeo* (not published and performed until after the war) will show how different Monteverdi realisations could be. Unlike Orff, neither Krenek nor Hindemith could reconcile their styles to the Nazi regime and both moved to the United States.

These two editions demonstrate how composers and, perhaps more, the directors of opera companies were unsure of where to fit Monteverdi's operas. The situation with Monteverdi was different from that of Handel: the massive changes editors brought to the Handel sources notwithstanding, the Göttingen festival provided a place for Handel opera that set it apart from the needs of modern opera houses, and also provided a benchmark for the other houses that produced Handel in the 1920s and 30s. But Monteverdians had no model, and various producers found different ways of making the operas work in their theatres. Krenek and Hindemith provided two opposite solutions. Krenek's version of

²⁵ see Cook, *Opera for a New Republic*.

Poppea was edited in 1937 for the American tour of the Salzburg Opera Group (which had nothing to do with Salzburg, but the impresario figured that American audiences would recognize the name).²⁶ Krenek's *Poppea* turns Monteverdi's *dramma* into a through-composed music theatre work on the lines of Krenek's historical opera *Karl V* or Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*. Krenek added orchestral connecting material inspired by Hindemithian neo-classicism, as well as a lengthy orchestral intermezzo between the two acts based on themes from the opera. Olin Downs in the *New York Times* was enthusiastic, and reports that there was 'not only applause, but also cheering'. Though Downs recognises that this presentation was inauthentic, he gives Krenek the benefit of the doubt and admires the work he has done to allow the opera to be performed.²⁷ The tour's success, along with the fact that the political situation in Germany would make life difficult for serialists, made Krenek decide to settle in the United States, where he held various university posts.²⁸

While Krenek tried to transform *Poppea* into a modern opera, Hindemith provided the opposite solution in his *Orfeo*, edited while at Yale University in 1943.²⁹ His goal was to be as authentic as possible, using the trappings of authenticity, especially exotic early instruments, as a hook for audiences. The interest would come not so much from defamiliarisation, as with Orff's version, but from the desire to recapture an ideal 'objective' past. His edition of *Orfeo* stays as close as possible to the 1609 print, doing little more than modernising clefs and barring, as well as indicating clearly where each instrument is meant to play. Though meant for performance (after the war Hindemith founded Yale's Collegium Musicum to perform this and other early music) this is not an 'orchestration', but rather a

²⁶ see John L. Stewart, *Ernst Krenek: The Man and his Music* (Berkeley, 1991), p. 205.

²⁷ Downs in *New York Times* (10 Nov 1937), p. 28.

²⁸ Krenek's compositional trajectory is very interesting. In his later writings he barely mentions *Jonny spielt auf*, perhaps embarrassed for an orthodox academic 12-tone composer to have had a massive popular success. It gets only half a paragraph in his autobiography *Horizons Circled* (Berkeley, 1974), p. 26.

²⁹ self-published (New Haven, 1953).

‘realisation’. In a speech before a radio broadcast of his edition, he stresses that the early instruments are ‘unemotional’, and sets his version against earlier ones, which had been ‘falsified’.³⁰ Hindemith thus points the way to the more blatantly authenticist editions of the postwar years, when the lack of emotion, a holdover from the new objectivity, was to become a much-debated ideal.

II.ii. Monteverdi in Fascist Italy

Orff, Krenek, and Hindemith were all left-wing figures (at least when they made their Monteverdi redactions). In Italy the situation was somewhat different, and indeed the Monteverdi revival in Italy, which finally began in earnest in the 1920s, was even more sharply politicised than that in Germany. Italy, like Germany, was undergoing an artistic crisis between the wars, and Monteverdi was enlisted as a model *Italian* composer, rather than as a model *objective* composer. Gabriele D’Annunzio was one of the first Italian intellectuals to place Monteverdi on this pedestal. He saw the history of Italian music as a teleological progression from Monteverdi to Verdi, and saw artistic decline in the post-Verdi veristic operas of Puccini and Mascagni. Like Vincent d’Indy in France, D’Annunzio was a Wagnerite, recognising Wagner’s importance but also seeing the need for Italian music to find a genuinely Italian character. The study of earlier Italian music could help to achieve this. D’Annunzio’s novel *Il fuoco* (*The Flame*), written in 1900, concerns a poet, Stelio Effrena (based on D’Annunzio himself), who wants to find a truly Italian voice in poetry, and he draws inspiration from Italian music and from Wagner. At a post-supper conversation about art at the Venice palazzo of Foscarina (an actress based on Eleanora Duse),

³⁰ 3 June, 1954, released as *Paul Hindemiths „Versuch einer Rekonstruktion der ersten Aufführung“ von Monteverdis Orfeo*, Music and Arts CD-1237, 2010.

Monteverdi's Arianna, Wagner's Kundry, and the beautiful Foscarina herself all blend into each other in a nearly unreadable aestheticist fog. A brief extract will suffice to show how D'Annunzio enshrined Monteverdi as a great Italian soul (along with Dante, Michelangelo, and Palestrina). Many of the words are taken directly from Romain Rolland's work on early Italian opera.

‘We must glorify the greatest of innovators, he who passion and death consecrated a Venetian, who is buried in the church of the Frari, worthy of a pilgrimage: the divine Claudio Monteverdi’.

‘Here is a heroic soul, of pure Italian essence!’ confirmed Daniele Glauro with reverence.

‘He carried out his work in the storm, loving, suffering, fighting, only with his faith, with his passion and his genius’, Foscarina said slowly, as if seeing a vision of that sorrowful and courageous life who with his warmest blood fed the creations of his art. ‘Tell us of him, Effrena’.

Stelio quivered as if she had touched him by accident. Once again the expressive power of that prophetic mouth evoked with indefinite profundity an ideal figure who raised up as from a grave before the eyes of the poets, assuming the colour and breath of life. The ancient player of the viol, widowed and sad like the Orpheus of his tale, appeared at the supper table.

He was an apparition of fire as strong as and more dazzling than that which lit up the basin of San Marco: a flaming force of life, flung from the deep womb of nature into the expectant multitudes; a vehement zone of life, erupting from an inner sky to illuminate the darkest regions of human will and desire; an unheard word, emerging from the original silence to express that which is eternal and eternally unsayable in the heart of the world.³¹

Whether the ghost of Monteverdi, and later of the lamenting Arianna, actually appears at the dinner table is beside the point. Their spirits are present, and spur Stelio and his friends onto a discussion of *Parsifal* and Wagner, before whom Stelio feels overwhelmed, then an erotic encounter with another guest who wants to be Kundry to Stelio's Wagner.

The so-called ‘Generazione dell ’80’ would try to bring D'Annunzio's ideas of artistic rebirth through study of the past to fruition (though the '80 composers came to these ideas independently of D'Annunzio). All born around the 1880s, most of the major

³¹ My translation. *Il fuoco* (Milan, 1996 [1900]) pp. 94-95.

composers of the group involved themselves directly with Monteverdi, especially Gian Francesco Malipiero and Ottorino Respighi. Malipiero was the first to examine the Monteverdi materials in Venice's Biblioteca Marciana since the cataloguing of the works.³² Somewhat akin to D'Annunzio in his pro-Italian bias and his emphasis on artistic creation is Benedetto Croce, Italy's leading aesthetician before the First World War. Unlike D'Annunzio, however, Croce placed little value on Baroque art, seeing it as blurring the clear lines of the Renaissance and unclear in its ideals. Croce's influence on Italian intellectual life may have influenced musicians in turning away from the Baroque until much later in the twentieth-century, a stark contrast to the interest in France, England, and, especially, Germany earlier in the century.

The same decade, the 1880s, produced another group of Italian intellectuals who were, on the surface, directly opposed to the *Generazione dell '80*. These were the Futurists, who wanted to radically overhaul the art of the past and start afresh. The Futurists were obsessed with speed, electricity, mechanisation, and urbanisation. The historicist style of D'Annunzio and the *Generazione dell '80* had an unlikely merger with the Futurists' ideas to form the aesthetics and politics of Italian fascism. These two opposing doctrines seem incommensurable, and this perhaps explains the ultimate failure of fascism to produce convincing art (or convincing politics). Mussolini's state wanted to be both past- and future-orientated.

The failure of fascism as both a political and aesthetic doctrine in both Italy and Germany is not surprising, as fascism does not allow the two concepts to be divorced. In any totalitarian regime like fascism everything must come under the single banner of the State. Walter Benjamin wrote that fascism is the aestheticisation of politics, and Mussolini said that 'tutto è il stato' (everything is the state). The futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti glorified

³² see John C.G. Waterhouse, *Gian Francesco Malipiero* (Amsterdam, 1999), p. 9.

war as an aesthetic experience, and D'Annunzio saw his proto-fascist invasion of Fiume in 1919 almost as a work of art.³³ In Germany, Joseph Goebbels wrote that 'the statesman is an artist, too. The people are for him what stone is for the sculptor... Politics are the plastic arts of the state as painting is the plastic art of colour.'³⁴ So operas, even historically distant ones by Monteverdi or Handel, had to play a political role.

In addition to totalitarianism, another leading goal of fascism is palingenesis, or rebirth: the nation will rise 'phoenix-like from the ashes of a morally bankrupt state system and the decadent culture associated with it'.³⁵ This serves as an excellent description of interwar Italy: the decadence of the Puccini generation needed to be pushed aside to make room for the New, to be provided in different ways by the *Generazione dell '80* and the Futurists. Although most of the '80 composers and their followers (especially Luigi Dallapiccola) renounced fascism after the war, they all developed their careers under the regime. Mussolini was not very musical (or at all artistic) but his propagandists recognised the importance of pretending that he was. In *L'arte e il Duce*, contemporary writer Francesco Saponi writes: 'This insatiable and incomparable achiever is determined to reawaken the art of polyphony. In the ethereal tone-world, his favourites are named Palestrina and Monteverdi among vocal composers, Frescobaldi among organ composers, Galuppi and Scarlatti among harpsichord composers, Corelli and Vivaldi among symphonic composers'.³⁶ Conveniently, all of these composers are Italian: no Bach or Handel. Mussolini was especially vehement in his rejection of traditional Italian opera. In an internal memo towards the beginning of his reign Mussolini wrote:

³³ see Ortwin de Graef, Dirk de Geest and Eveline Vanfraussen, 'Fascist politics and literary criticism' in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism IX*, ed. Christina Knellwolf and Christopher Norris (Cambridge, 2001).

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 75.

³⁵ Roger Griffin, *Fascism* (Oxford, 1995), p. 3.

³⁶ in Harvey Sachs, *Music in Fascist Italy* (New York, 1988), p. 15.

I prescribe that from now on, no favour be shown in any way to [Italian] musical initiatives - operas, vocal [recitals], concerts or musical evenings - [and] that they be treated icily. Exceptions will be made for symphony orchestras, whose performances also give an idea of collective group discipline. All the rest must be ignored. It is high time that the world - that is, hundreds of millions of men - get to know a different type of Italian from that of yesterday - the eternal tenor and mandolinist [who exist] for others' diversion. Caruso and the like were or are [representatives of] the old Italy.³⁷

Mussolini went so far as to destroy Rome's major concert hall, the Augusteo, supposedly in order to carry out an archeological excavation for the tomb of the Emperor Augustus. No tomb was found, and the abandoned site remains an eyesore in the centre of Rome.

The height of the Italian reappraisal of Monteverdi was the publication of Malipiero's complete works edition, which appeared between 1926 and 1940. It was published by the *Vittoriale degli Italiani*, the press founded by D'Annunzio which also published Mussolini's writings. Monteverdi therefore practically had *il Duce's* imprimatur. This edition is important not only for its inclusivity, but also because it made Monteverdi's music readily available to scholars and performers. Rather than have to travel to scattered libraries, often inaccessible during the war, would-be editors could work directly from Malipiero's easy-to-read printed edition. Krenek's *Poppea* and Dallapiccola's *Ulisse* were both prepared from Malipiero, Dallapiccola writing explicitly that he could not consult the Vienna manuscript because it was hidden away in case of bombing.³⁸ Today Malipiero is mostly forgotten as an editor (and even more so as a composer) but his edition's importance cannot be underestimated. Without it, Monteverdi would probably not be the canonic composer he is today.

Giacomo Benvenuti was another important figure, publishing editions of *Orfeo* and *Poppea*. Tullio Serafin chose his edition of *Orfeo* to open the Rome Opera's 1934-35 season.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁸ 'Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*: Notes on a Practical Edition (1942),' in *Dallapiccola on Opera* (London, 1987), pp. 215-231.

The *New York Times* correspondent said that the production was an artistic and popular success, and praised the Fascist regime for offering ‘a favorable ground for the revival of Italy’s spiritual values of past centuries and the material support to make such revivals a reality’.³⁹ This is palingenesis in the theatre. Another high-profile performance, though not as successful, was a major outdoor production of Benvenuti’s orchestration of *Poppea* at the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino in 1937. The *Musical Times* review calls the whole occasion an ‘aberration of taste’,⁴⁰ but the *New York Times* dubs it ‘an unforgettable evening’.⁴¹ Everyone complained that the Boboli gardens had a very poor acoustic, but the audiences seemed to enjoy the spectacle. Photographs show a massive performing space filled with Roman consuls and tribunes, not unlike the opera productions that still happen today at the Arena di Verona (which began in the same decade). This production is consistent with the classical/modernist monumental architecture that was so popular in fascist Italy and Germany. Mussolini’s EUR project south of Rome is the most consistent example of this and the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana, the ‘square colosseum’, is its most representative building. This building takes the arches of Rome’s colosseum and makes them into the arcades of a large square edifice of Carrara marble. The arches, the monumental inscription, the statuary, and even the origin of the marble connect the building to the past, but these elements are placed in a hypermodern context. Similarly, the monumental renditions of Handel and Monteverdi refashioned this ‘antique’ music in modern orchestral guise and avant-garde scenic design.

³⁹ Raymond Hall, ‘Rome Opera Opening,’ *New York Times* (Jan 20, 1935), p. X8.

⁴⁰ Harry Beard, *Musical Times* 78:1133 (1937), p. 650.

⁴¹ Raymond Hall, *New York Times* (June 27, 1937), p. 141.

Benvenuti's editions of *Orfeo* and *Poppea* were disliked by other musicologists, but he was prepared to defend them.⁴² On *Poppea* especially he considered himself an expert, as he had prepared a facsimile of the Venice manuscript for publication. He also vehemently rejected Monteverdi's authorship of *Ulisse*, coming into conflict with Luigi Dallapiccola, who thought very highly of the work and prepared a performing edition for the 1942 Maggio Musicale. Dallapiccola wrote an essay about his own editorial process, explaining that the work was so good that even if it wasn't by Monteverdi it was still worth performing.⁴³ Dallapiccola's main goal with his performing edition was to bring out what he called the inherent beauty of the work. Like d'Annunzio had in previous decades, Dallapiccola sees Monteverdi as the major forerunner of Italian opera, and likens *Ulisse* to Verdi's *Falstaff*: both are great late works at the 'wellspring of the Italian musical spirit'.⁴⁴ In Italy, then, Monteverdi was conscripted for nationalist purposes, even by staunch anti-fascists like Dallapiccola. In his essay Dallapiccola also brings up a question which was to become of utmost importance in future decades but which had until then not been a concern: 'Should transcriptions of old works be the province of musicologists or practicing musicians?'⁴⁵ Dallapiccola believes that both parties should make editions, and that both products are valuable, as are 'popular' and 'learned' editions of writers like Homer and Virgil.

The version that Dallapiccola prepared for the Maggio Musicale is of the practical type, and he saw his work as a translation of Monteverdi's continuo-based language into a modern Italian orchestral language. He presents the opera mostly uncut, and the cuts he does make are in order to streamline the drama rather than alter its shape. Most substantial are the

⁴² see Denis Morrier, 'Poppée au XXe siècle: le dédale des versions' in *L'Avant-scène Opéra, Le Couronnement de Poppée* (Paris, 1989), pp. 121-124.

⁴³ Dallapiccola, pp. 215-231.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 223.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 227.

omissions of the scene between Penelope and Melanto and that between Penelope and Telemaco, which in a strict sense add little to the story (unless that story is itself changed, as we shall see in relation to later productions in Chapter Three). A large portion of the last act's convincing-sequence is also omitted, in order to more rapidly attain the dénouement. These Italian editions, unlike the German ones, tend to retain more of the structure of the operas as they appear in the seventeenth-century material. This greater fidelity, however, seemed to have little impact outside Italy, and political factors are probably the reason. During the war, Italy was cut off from the rest of Europe other than Germany, and afterwards it remained even more apart from Europe until the early 1960s. Because of its own civil war and the large amount of destruction, and without nearly as much postwar support from the rest of world as Germany was to gain, Italy was not in a position to be able to export its arts in a large way. France, though, was better positioned to have more international impact in its interwar Monteverdi activities.

II.iii. Back to France

The protagonists of the Monteverdi revival in France between the wars were, still, Vincent d'Indy and his Schola Cantorum. The Schola continued to present early music and attracted many students, but by the 1920s it no longer held its position at the top of the Parisian musical hierarchy.⁴⁶ The French Monteverdi fever before the First World War had abated as Paris became a hotspot for many new styles of art, one of the most prolific of which was the neo-classicism of Stravinsky, Cocteau, and *les Six*. This group was more interested in early music in theory than in practice; rather than borrowing directly from the scores of the past, it was more what they saw as the spirit rather than the letter of those

⁴⁶ see Roger Nichols, *The Harlequin Years* (London, 2002).

pieces that interested them.⁴⁷ Monteverdi was more of a direct influence in Germany and Italy, where composers such as Orff and Dallapiccola engaged specifically with his music.

There were, however, three important French Monteverdi productions between the wars, one of which, though not an opera, had a major international impact on the field. In 1925 Vincent d'Indy arranged a production of *Ulisse* at the Petite Scène, the first anywhere of that opera, in his own specially-prepared (and heavily cut) edition. The lack of contemporary documentation on this performance implies that it was not very successful with the general public, but a piano-vocal score was published in 1926. Like some more recent productions, d'Indy and the libretto's translator Xavier de Courville omitted the scenes with the gods. Otherwise, the cuts are roughly the same as in Dallapiccola's later edition (Dallapiccola mentions that he was influenced by d'Indy in his preface). Unlike many other editions, though, d'Indy presents a list of all the cuts made, so that the curious listener could cross-reference the score to the manuscript or to Robert Haas's 1922 complete edition in *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich*.

In 1937 one of the strangest of the many Monteverdi versions of this period was performed at the Opéra Comique: *Le couronnement de Poppée*, co-edited by Jacques Rouché (the director of the Opéra and the Opéra Comique, which at that time were run under the same banner) and, surprisingly, Gian Francesco Malipiero. This version transformed the opera into an opéra comique, in French with spoken dialogue alternating with set pieces. This was achieved by speaking the sections of the score that were felt to have less musical interest. *Le couronnement de Poppée* only ran for four performances and was not revived; the audience must not have appreciated the experiment. In *La revue musicale* critic and

⁴⁷ After the war, Stravinsky engaged somewhat more directly with Monteverdi, writing an *Orfeo*-inspired opening fanfare for his opera *The Rake's Progress* and modeling his *Canticum Sacrum* after the 1610 Vespers.

Monteverdi scholar Henry Prunières expressed dismay that the opera had to undergo generic transformation, especially since the performance was well-sung.⁴⁸

The third production, also from 1937, was not an opera, but rather a madrigal recording, the first recording of any music by Monteverdi aside from some earlier novelty records and therefore of great import. The music was led from the piano by Nadia Boulanger, a major figure of Parisian musical life, teacher of many of the next generation of American composers (like Copland and Cage) and trusted member of the Neoclassical coterie. The records did more than perhaps any live production to disseminate Monteverdi; John Steinbeck even mentions them in his novel *Cannery Row*.⁴⁹ In the novel, the marine biologist Doc is a fan of early music (especially Monteverdi, plainsong, and Bach), but his appreciation is far removed from the kind in which D'Annunzio's Stelio Effrena indulges. Significantly, his knowledge of the repertoire comes from phonograph records like Boulanger's, probably the only way early music could get to coastal California in the late 1930s. Doc is very popular within the community due to the respect he gives to all of Monterey's residents, especially the group of vagrants led by Mack. Mack and his friends decide to surprise Doc with a party in his honour while he is away on a research trip, but in their excitement they get drunk and have the party before Doc returns home, leaving his house in shambles. Upon his return, Doc confronts Mack:

Mack lumbered to his feet. His hands were at his sides. Doc hit him again, a cold calculated punishing punch in the mouth. The blood spurted from Mack's lips and ran down his chin. He tried to lick his lips.

'Put up your hands. Fight, you son of a bitch,' Doc cried, and he hit him again and heard the crunch of breaking teeth.

Mack's head jolted but he was braced now so he wouldn't fall. And his hands stayed at his sides. 'Go ahead, Doc,' he said thickly through his broken lips. 'I got it coming.'

⁴⁸ Prunières, *Revue musicale*, 1937.

⁴⁹ Though he does not name Boulanger, her recordings were the only ones available when Steinbeck wrote his novel in 1945. The three pieces mentioned in the novel ('Hor che'l ciel', 'Ardo e scoprir', and the Lamento della ninfa) all appear on the record.

Doc's shoulders sagged with defeat. 'You son of a bitch,' he said bitterly. 'Oh you dirty son of a bitch.' He sat down on the couch and looked at his cut knuckles.

Mack sat down in a chair and looked at him. Mack's eyes were wide and full of pain. He didn't even wipe away the blood that flowed down his chin. In Doc's head the monotonal opening of Monteverdi's *Hor ch'el Ciel e la Terra* began to form, the infinitely sad and resigned mourning of Petrarch for Laura. Doc saw Mack's broken mouth through the music, the music that was in his head and in the air. Mack sat perfectly still, almost as though he could hear the music too. Doc glanced at the place where the Monteverdi album was and then he remembered that the phonograph was broken.⁵⁰

The major difference between D'Annunzio's appropriation of Monteverdi and Steinbeck's is that D'Annunzio's is metaphysical, drawing on the power of Monteverdi as an ideal figure, while Steinbeck's is material, focused on the actual sound of the music and on the phonograph on which it is heard. Though Cannery Row's denizens do not fully understand Doc's love for what they call 'church music', they listen to it with him and it serves as a social leveler (another contrast with D'Annunzio, where art music is only the province of the intellectual class). At a birthday party for Doc which closes the novel, most of the people who live in Cannery Row sit together, from Mack and his friends to the madam Dora and her 'girls'. 'Doc played *Ardo* and *Amor* from an album of Monteverdi. And the guests sat quietly and their eyes were inward. Dora breathed beauty. Two newcomers crept up the stairs and entered quietly. Doc was feeling a golden pleasant sadness. The guests were silent when the music stopped.'⁵¹ Foscarina's guests talk about Monteverdi in very high tones, while Doc's simply listen.⁵² As in the film *Diva*, discussed in the Introduction, the denizens of Cannery Row are enchanted by the recording.

⁵⁰ *Cannery Row* (London, 2000 [1945]), pp. 97-98.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 140.

⁵² A third major novelistic appropriation of Monteverdi is Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*. In the 1947 novel the composer Adrian Leverkühn tries to write a lament based on the lament of Arianna; along with Bach, Monteverdi is his greatest influence.

The difference between the presentation of Monteverdi in *Il fuoco* and *Cannery Row* mirrors the difference between the continental and Anglo-American reception of Monteverdi. While in Italy, Germany, and France (at least in d'Indy's time) Monteverdi's music was an example of greatness to be emulated by modern artists in search of new forms of expression, often of a political nature, and performed more as an intellectual or hermetically aesthetic activity following from these desires, in England and America the revival was more practice-based. Practitioners tended to perform the music as music rather than as a symbol for different artistic styles.

III. England and America

Both the artistic and political situations in the Anglo-Saxon world were rather different from that of the Continent. The 1920s roared in London and New York and, though the literary world focussed on its postwar 'lost generation', England was fairly secure in its musical situation and the United States was in the process of finding its own musical voice, rather than trying to renew a lost tradition as in Italy or to break with the past as in Germany. It is not insignificant that the first major productions of Monteverdi's operas in England and America happened at universities (Oxford with *Orfeo* in 1925 and Smith College with *Poppea* in 1926). Though Oskar Hagen's Handel revivals were linked to the University of Göttingen, they did not take place within the Academy itself.⁵³

The Oxford *Orfeo* of 1925, followed by *Poppea* in 1927, was masterminded by Jack Westrup, who had just graduated from the university. The story of the production is wittily recounted in a short book about the Oxford University Opera Club (*Orfeo* was its first

⁵³ *Orfeo* was actually performed in London in 1924 by a visiting French company at the Institut Français in d'Indy's edition, but all of the reviewers seem to have forgotten it the next year when the opera was given in Oxford.

production).⁵⁴ Westrup and R.L. Stuart, another recent graduate who would translate the libretto into English, wished to present Mozart's *Entführung aus dem Serail*, but the score proved too difficult. Another friend, Arundel del Re, suggested that they try *Orfeo*, which had just been printed in Malipiero's edition. The authors of the Opera Club history make it clear that everything was against these pioneers: they wrote to Edward Dent for advice and he said the opera was unperformable, the Heather Professor of Music Hugh Allen wasn't interested, and the proctors would not allow an opera to distract the students. Stuart went to London to see Dent personally and convinced him that they were serious about the project, and that he would provide the English translation and Westrup would make a new edition from the Bodleian Library's copy of the 1615 printing. Dr William Harris, organist at New College, provided the continuo realization and conducted the performances, which finally began on 7 December in the Old Playhouse. They managed to get positive reviews in the *Times* and the *Musical Times* and were invited to perform in London at the Royal Academy of Music (with the help of Hugh Allen, now converted to the cause). Unfortunately the critical success did not reflect a financial one, but they were spurred on to do *Poppea* two years later (the year between they presented Gluck's *Alceste*).

In a way, early music in the United States of the 1930s could be seen as an aesthetic extension of the German scene, though without the politicisation of art that characterised the Continent. Many of the people involved with music in America were German immigrants who wished to escape that politicisation, to be able to practise their art as they wanted without being branded by one party or another (though of course there are exceptions, like Brecht, who attempted without much success to bring his politics to the United States). At Smith College, a women's liberal arts college in rural Massachusetts, the German professor

⁵⁴ Robert Ponsonby and Richard Kent, *Oxford University Opera Club: A Short History 1925-1950* (Oxford, 1950).

of composition, Werner Josten, was very interested in the operas of Monteverdi and Handel. His productions in the late '20s and early '30s mirrored those of Oxford in the same period and gained equal critical praise.⁵⁵ In 1926 Josten produced *Poppea*, following it in 1929 with *Orfeo*, on a double-bill with Handel's cantata 'Apollo and Daphne'.⁵⁶ The reviews of these and the Oxford performances, more of *Orfeo* than *Poppea*, are not over-laudatory and occasionally there is a sense that the audience enjoyed the works more for their historical than their artistic value. Still the reviewers tend to express surprise that they enjoyed these antique operas as much as they did. The *Poppea* productions were especially popular, as there was much in the work, like its closed-form set pieces, that its arrangers were able to bring out and make seem familiar. This is another contrast to Orff and Hindemith's arrangements, which emphasised the unfamiliar aspects of the operas.

These university productions were much like such productions today, involving a mix of faculty, students, and local talent. The Smith *Poppea* featured Mrs Werner Josten in the title role and a professional tenor from New York City as Nero. Smith, a women's college, obviously had to bring men from outside to sing.⁵⁷ One of the striking things about these productions is the important place given to women, especially in the orchestra. At Smith this was by necessity, but the orchestra lists of the Oxford Opera Club's productions shows that about half were women. Many of the club's officers were women as well. It seems that the Opera Club was one of the few places where the university's women's colleges were able to be on equal standing with the men's.

⁵⁵ *Baroque Opera at Smith College* (New York, 1966).

⁵⁶ Richard Aldrich, "'Orfeo' is Given at Smith College", *New York Times* (12 May 1929), p. 28.

⁵⁷ Smith College Archives, 'Faculty Operas', 7 Jan 2009. <http://smitharchives.wordpress.com>.

The variety and richness of the interconnected natures of the early opera revival on the Continent can be summarised in a schematic chart (Fig. 1). This visualisation allows us to see the people, productions, and groups discussed across the whole chapter in one place. Richard Wagner (his influence rather than the man himself) appears at the centre. Arrows point outward to the people he most strongly influenced, and further arrows lead to their own connections with Monteverdi's operas. A broken arrow refers to an antagonistic relationship.

In 1943 Ernst Krenek wrote that interwar opera had produced nothing of lasting value; composers were still trying to find a voice for contemporary opera.⁵⁸ The same could be said about the revivals of early operas. This chapter has shown that this first period of the Monteverdi revival in Europe was one of politicised experimentation. It was not until after the Second World War that a concentrated early music movement coalesced, with its own goals and political leanings. Hindemith's *Orfeo* edition bridges the gap, as it was made by a composer of highly politicised work who changed his aesthetic philosophy to make authenticity a main goal in early opera performance. A quote from Busoni, a guiding spirit behind the interwar Monteverdi realisations, can sum up the attitudes of the operas' interwar redactors towards the past: he defined tradition as 'a plaster mask taken from life which, in the course of many years, and after passing through the hands of innumerable artisans, leaves its resemblance to the original largely a matter of imagination'.⁵⁹

Unlike those between the wars, practitioners of opera in the present more rarely attempt to make grand political statements in presenting early opera. This is partly to do with institutional changes: opera does not hold the central cultural place it did in the early twentieth century. Even musicians who are intensely political in their mainstream work tend to shy away from politics in their dealing with early opera. A notable example is Hans

⁵⁸ Cook, *Music for a New Republic*, p. 183.

⁵⁹ *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* [1907], in *Three Classics in the Aesthetic of Music* (New York, 1962), p. 77.

Werner Henze, who writes copiously about the importance of leftist philosophies to his musical work, but who wrote very little in such a way about his redaction of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*.⁶⁰ As we shall see in the next chapter, though, recent stage directors have not attempted to divest Monteverdi's operas entirely of their potential political functions. Rather than seeing the operas as wholly unified political statements, they tend to focus on certain aspects which can be drawn out and politicised (such as notions of community in *Orfeo*, war in *Ulisse*, or sexual politics in *Poppea*). This contributes to the ever-increasing fluidity of these texts: they need not be *only* nationalist or *only* radical, but can entail any number of political or aesthetic factors. The next chapters will explore several of these factors.

⁶⁰ In the collection *Music and Politics* (London, 1982) Henze writes about even minor works in political terms, but very little mention is made of *Ulisse*, which he was working on when the book was published. Neither does his autobiography *Bohemian Fifths* (London, 1998) mention *Ulisse* in political terms.

Chapter Two

Staging Community in *Orfeo*

Since the 1970s Claudio Monteverdi's operas have been transformed by the stage directors of their many productions into sites for social commentary, vehicles through which directors can problematise the norms of their contemporary society.¹ As we have seen in the previous chapter, the pre-war phase of Monteverdi opera performance also placed social issues on stage, though not so explicitly: the goal of earlier directors was most often to convey what they saw as a work's intentions, and it was their own social conditioning and the aesthetic atmosphere in which they worked that led to an implicitly politicised performance. Politics was usually *behind* their reimaginings rather than a part of the final staged production, off-stage rather than on. By contrast, the trend in opera production over the last few decades has been to either attempt to ignore politics completely or to stage politics more directly and explicitly. Where earlier stagings emerged from their creators' social contexts without their creators necessarily intending to use specific elements of the opera to make a political point, more recent ones often engage in explicit critical dialogue with those contexts. A comparison of stagings of *Orfeo* from the last thirty years will show how different directors have achieved this critical engagement.

In order to focus this comparison, I shall examine the way in which recent directors have demonstrated changing ideas of community in their methods of staging the choruses and ensemble scenes in *Orfeo*. The notion of community is of great importance in this opera, both in its musical structure and in its staging possibilities. From the very beginning of the

¹ Here I use the word 'director' to refer to the stage director of an opera, who usually coordinates the design and performance elements of the staging. Sometimes in Britain 'producer' is used for this role, but this can create confusion with the more common sense of 'producer', the person who manages the financial and logistical elements of a production. In Monteverdi's own time both roles were covered by the *corago*, who was often also the opera's librettist.

piece, with the direct address of the allegorical figure of la Musica (Music) in the prologue, the theatre audience as a group is implicated in the drama: it is for us, the *incliti eroi* (illustrious heroes), that this opera is being performed, and la Musica asks our indulgence. Directly following the prologue, Act One opens with a second direct address, this time by a shepherd to the onstage audience of nymphs and shepherds, asking them to sing the praises of Orfeo. The actions portrayed onstage are placed within the doubled community of the audience in the theatre and the diegetic one on the stage, allowing the former to see itself in the latter. More obviously, the carefully-planned symmetrical structure of the first two acts of the opera sets Orfeo against the background of nymphs and shepherds, highlighting the individual's relation to the wider community. The alternation of solos and small ensembles with choruses serves to create an imagined harmonious community where the individual is part of a higher-functioning whole, a taxonomy that the Mantuan courtiers at the opera's 1607 performance might have recognised as a reflection of their own social structure.² Alessandro Striggio's libretto and the way Monteverdi set its words shows careful consideration of this taxonomy, showing Orfeo first as part of a community, then as an exceptional individual during his trip to the underworld, and finally as having broken his bond with community, left alone to lament his fate until rescued by his father Apollo or (in the printed libretto) torn to pieces by Bacchantes for his refusal to conform to the social role of eligible bachelor, instead having chosen to renounce all other women. Orfeo's trajectory can therefore be seen as moving from a positive kind of individualism, in which he stands out from the crowd and acts as its figurehead while still conforming to its social mores, to a

² Various scholars have dealt with the Mantuan context of *Orfeo*, among them Tim Carter in *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre* (New Haven, 2002) and Iain Fenlon in 'The Mantuan *Orfeo*' in *Orfeo*, ed. John Whenham (Cambridge, 1986).

negative kind, renouncing his social duties and ignoring his role. Orfeo can therefore be seen as a cautionary example for the model prince.³

The focus here on *Orfeo* is not meant to imply that community does not figure in Monteverdi's other operas, but in this opera community is foregrounded musically and also in the implied stage action more strongly than in *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* or *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. In *Ulisse*, one could argue, Penelope plays a role similar to Orfeo in her rejection of her social duties: she refuses to remarry and prefers to wait for her husband Ulisse's return, thereby threatening the stable *oikos* of Ithaca. But while Orfeo's rejection is condemned (depending on the version he must be rescued from himself by Apollo, or be destroyed by Bacchantes), Penelope's is lauded. She is a paragon of female constancy, so the focus of the opera is naturally on her rather than on the community she rejects.⁴ Also, by the end of *Ulisse* community has ceased to play an important role. As the drama moves forward, supporting characters gradually disappear: the suitors are killed, the gods are appeased, and the confidants leave the stage when their plot-function ends. Penelope and Ulisse are left alone onstage, with no need for a wider community. Had Badoardo and Monteverdi ended their opera with a laudatory chorus as Striggio did with *Orfeo*, the effect would be very different. A discussion of how this gradual dissipation of community is staged in *Ulisse* could be valuable, but *Orfeo* provides the more fertile example because of its emphasis on community, either in its presence or its absence, throughout. *L'incoronazione di Poppea* has relatively little sense of community, and while it ends with a choral scene like *Orfeo*, this chorus of consuls and tribunes is fairly anonymous,

³ My reading, based on Susan McClary's conception of Orfeo's development as a trajectory from strong hero to weak lamenter in 'Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi's Dramatic Music', *Feminine Endings* (Minneapolis, 1991), pp. 34-52, is in disagreement with John Bokina's, who regards Orfeo's association with commoners as his tragic flaw, and sees his apotheosis with Apollo in a positive light in 'Deity, Beast, and Tyrant: Images of the Prince in the Operas of Monteverdi', *International Political Science Review* 12:1 (1991), pp. 48-66.

⁴ see Tim Carter, "'In Love's Harmonious Consort'?: Penelope and the Interpretation of "Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria"', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5:1 (1993), pp. 1-16.

not having played a role in the drama until that point. *Poppea* is more concerned with small-scale interpersonal relationships and their disintegration than with setting those relationships within a wider community. Finally, *Arianna* might show rather interesting aspects of community construction (it is often forgotten that the famous lament, while published as a solo, is interrupted in the libretto by comments from a chorus of fishermen), but the fact that its music is lost and that therefore there is scant stage history (other than various stagings of the lament alone, and Alexander Goehr's recomposition of the whole opera) would make such a study unfeasible.

In order to engage effectively with the music and text of *Orfeo*, directors need to engage with the ideas about community that seem to be encoded in Striggio and Monteverdi's work. Whether or not directors care about the social structures and laws of seventeenth-century Mantua, this emphasis on community and Orfeo's role within it is an inseparable aspect of the opera. While much hermeneutic analysis of *Orfeo* from within musicology focuses on Monteverdi's and Striggio's construction of Orfeo's gendered or politicised subjectivity,⁵ formalist analysis has examined the carefully-planned and often symmetrical harmonic and strophic structures of the opera's music and libretto.⁶ While it would be possible to examine how directors have staged the character of Orfeo himself (against the musicological hermeneutic background) it is easier for directors to convey interpersonal relationships and symmetrical structures on stage, and also easier for audiences to perceive them. Iain Fenlon demonstrates the importance of the Mantuan context to the

⁵ See McClary, 'Constructions of Gender', Bokina, 'Images of the Prince', and Mauro Calcagno, 'Performing the Self', *The Opera Quarterly* 24:3-4 (2009), pp. 247-274.

⁶ See Eric Chafe, 'The Tonal Structure of *Orfeo*', *Monteverdi's Musical Language* (New York, 1992) and John Whenham, 'Five Acts, One Action' in Whenham (1986).

construction of the opera and the way it functions dramaturgically, so such an approach can match one informed by early modern notions of subjectivity.⁷

Orfeo's historical position at the beginning of the development of the operatic genre as well as its musical variety and mythological subject matter has made it an attractive locus for many different types of staging, five of which will be discussed in this chapter. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle was one of the first opera directors to apply the new conventions of a politically engaged 'Regietheater' to Monteverdi's operas, as the 1978 film of his production of *Orfeo* at the Zurich Opera demonstrates.⁸ He gives the opera a doubly historicist Marxist interpretation, setting his production in a late-1970s version of 1607 Mantua and emphasising class relations within the community he places on the stage. Following the example of Ponnelle and other critically engaged directors like Patrice Chéreau, a younger generation has taken *Orfeo* in many different directions, all of which say a great deal not only about their creators but about the societies in which they were working. In a production at the Nederlandse Opera in Amsterdam Pierre Audi emphasizes the mythical and mystical qualities of the Orpheus story, presenting an ideal 'primitive' community as it might have been imagined in 1994 Europe.⁹ Trisha Brown in her 1998 Brussels production abstracts the opera's community to such a degree that it almost ceases to exist, focusing instead on the individual body in space.¹⁰ This could reflect what some commentators in the late 1990s, like Robert Putnam in his influential article and book *Bowling Alone*, saw as a late modern

⁷ see Fenlon, 'The Mantuan Stage Works' in *The New Monteverdi Companion*, ed. Denis Arnold and Nigel Fortune (London, 1985) and his chapter in Whenham (1986).

⁸ Monteverdi, Claudio, *L'Orfeo*, Opernhaus Zürich, dir. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, cond. Nikolaus Harnoncourt (Deutsche Grammophon DVD, 00440 073 4163, 1978/2006).

⁹ Monteverdi, Claudio, *L'Orfeo*, De Nederlandse Opera, dir. Pierre Audi, cond. Stephen Stubbs (Opus Arte DVD, OA 0928 D, 1997/2005).

¹⁰ Monteverdi, Claudio, *L'Orfeo*, Théâtre de la Monnaie, dir. Trisha Brown, cond. René Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi DVD, 9909003.04, 2006).

degradation of community in Western societies.¹¹ In his 2002 Barcelona production Gilbert Deflo attempts an ‘authentic’ reading of *Orfeo*, taking influence from the way the opera might have been staged in 1607.¹² Like Ponnelle and Deflo, Pier Luigi Pizzi in his 2008 Madrid production sets the opera in 1607 Mantua but his approach displays a non-ideological yet self-reflective optimism, very much at one with the concept of community in the European Union of the early twenty-first century.¹³

The staging of early operas like *Orfeo* involves a complex network of authors, performers, and audiences. To help make sense of this network and to theorise what directors are actually doing with Monteverdi and Striggio’s work and how they interact with the audience, Umberto Eco’s theorisation of model authors and readers will provide a useful foundation.¹⁴ Though Eco discusses the reading and writing of fiction, with adjustments his theories can be carried over into other art forms such as theatre. Using the term ‘reading’ in regards to an operatic production is problematic, as an audience does not ‘read’ a production as it reads a book, but it is a pragmatic blanket term that can cover all elements of theatrical experience: seeing, listening, interpreting, as well as literal reading (as with surtitles or a programme book). Eco posits the categories of empirical and model authors and readers. The empirical authors of *Orfeo* would be Monteverdi and Striggio themselves, the real men who lived and worked in Mantua in the early seventeenth century. The empirical reader is you or me as we watch the opera, or the Gonzaga princes as they watched it in 1607. Eco is little concerned with the empirical authors and readers, these being the subjects of documentary

¹¹ New York, 2000.

¹² Monteverdi, Claudio, *L’Orfeo*, Gran Teatre del Liceu, dir. Gilbert Deflo, cond. Jordi Savall (Opus Arte DVD, OA 0842 D, 2002).

¹³ Monteverdi, Claudio, *L’Orfeo*, Teatro Real, dir. Pier Luigi Pizzi, cond. William Christie (Dynamic DVD, 33598, 2009).

¹⁴ His theories are most succinctly put forward in his Charles Eliot Norton lectures, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge, MS, 1994).

study rather than semiotic or hermeneutic analysis. The model reader, on the other hand, is ‘a sort of ideal type whom the text not only foresees as a collaborator but also tries to create’.¹⁵ The model author is rather like Foucault’s ‘author function’: this is not the real author but rather the narrative voice of the story. So the model author of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* demands a linguistic and interpretative competence of its model reader far above what Joyce the empirical author would demand of any individual empirical reader.¹⁶

It is with this model author of *Orfeo* that stage directors must come to terms, either to attempt to be its model readers or to read the text against the grain. With theatre, there is another layer of model readers: the audience, which reads the director as another model author. The model authors (and in this case usually the empirical ones as well) of contemporary opera production are notorious for confounding their empirical audiences by asking them to be model readers they often do not want to be. Conservative opera critics and audiences usually prefer the director to be invisible, and to see the opera as created by its composer and librettist as the primary text to be ‘read’. They see as egotistical the stage directors who place themselves between their desired model author and the audience, usurping the author’s position at the top of the interpretative hierarchy. Empirical audiences often have similar problems with film adaptations of well-known novels: used to being the model reader of the novel’s author, they are nonplussed when the film director asks them to take on different readerly qualities. Eco’s theories are somewhat similar to Hans Robert Jauss’s theory of the fusion of horizons of expectation, but his separation of authors and readers into empirical and model types avoids Jauss’s oversight of the change of readers’ horizons over time. The ecological notion of affordance could also provide a model, asking what *Orfeo* affords to its stagers; though I will return to such a model in the Chapter Five on

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁶ Joyce himself said that he wanted an ‘ideal reader affected by an ideal insomnia’, or a reader with infinite time to think about the novel and its allusions. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 110.

productions of *Poppea*, this chapter's focus on actors rather than the receptive process will find Eco's model to be the more useful background.

Monteverdi and Striggio as model authors present various challenges to the modern stage director, many of which involve notions of community. The first half of *Orfeo* is structurally quite different from the second, as in the first two acts Orfeo is surrounded by nymphs and shepherds and the dramatic focus lies on his interaction with them, while in the second half, entailing his quest to regain Euridice from the underworld, his interactions occur with a series of specific individuals: Speranza, Caronte, Proserpina and Plutone, and finally Apollo. The chorus, still representing a wider community, does not disappear, but their role changes to one more like the ancient Greek chorus, commenting on and moralising about the action. They have transferred from 'coro mobile' to 'coro stabile'.¹⁷ Many directors have more difficulty staging the opera's second half, as it can seem like an oratorio with soloists in short scenes on the forestage and a commenting chorus at the back. Because our modern idea of community is based around the relationship of the individual to the group, it would be tempting to read this structural shift of the role of the chorus from the first to the second part of the opera as a disappearance of community, but actually this simply represents a different idea of community which would have been more easily acceptable to a seventeenth-century audience. In a pre-capitalist society that retained vestiges of a feudal political system, where people still owed allegiance to prince and/or Church, a chorus moralising from 'above' would have more likely been received as a reflection of society's hierarchy, a class structure deeply ingrained within the community. As we shall see, modern directors have a variety of strategies for dealing with this distance between twentieth- and seventeenth-century notions of community, from asserting that there are actually similarities (Ponnelle) to drawing attention away from the distance (Deflo).

¹⁷ c.f. Carter, *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*, p. 34.

Finally, before beginning this comparison of productions, we must determine what exactly a ‘production’ is. How does it relate to the work written by Monteverdi and Striggio and produced in Mantua in 1607? As discussed in the Introduction, a musical or dramatic ‘work’ is really the set of all of its performances, so any given production is a particular actualisation of *Orfeo*, an instance of the work as conveyed to an audience, rather than a reproduction of an ephemeral original. Any of the director-based productions discussed here could be called ‘postmodern’ (really not a very difficult criterion, as that word has been given so many definitions over the years). I employ Jean-François Lyotard’s conception of the postmodern as an aesthetic state where teleological narrative is questioned, where an unstable, liquid concept of truth and value governs artistic and social interactions, and where the past is evoked in dialogue rather than dictated from the present subject-position.¹⁸ In recent years some theorists have posited similarities between the aesthetics of the seventeenth and late-twentieth centuries (which they usually call ‘baroque’ and ‘postmodern’, though forcing entire aesthetic systems into single and, in the case of ‘baroque’, anachronistic terms is an over-simplification). Foremost of these is Umberto Eco, whose novel *The Island of the Day Before* is a profound meditation on this very subject.¹⁹ It might be possible to explain the current popularity of Monteverdi in these terms: because his so-called baroque aesthetic is similar to our postmodern one, it seems natural that we would want to examine this link through the study and performance of his operas. Of the directors discussed, Ponnelle and Pizzi do this explicitly, and it would be easy to uncover in the other productions as well. Whether or not one wishes to describe it as neobaroque or as

¹⁸ Of course three lines cannot do justice to Lyotard’s theories, which he discusses most succinctly in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, 1984), and which are summarised by Simon Malpas in his *Lyotard* (London, 2003).

¹⁹ Eco’s novel (Milan, 1994) is a contemporary re-telling of a ‘found manuscript’, supposedly written by a young Italian soldier, about his adventures in Monferrato involving intrigues with Cardinal Mazarin, leading to his being sent on a sea-voyage, shipwrecked, and stranded on another abandoned ship. See also Omar Calabrese, *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (Princeton, 1992) and Bruce R Burningham, *Tilting Cervantes: Baroque Reflections on Postmodern Culture* (Nashville, 2008).

postmodern, the aesthetics of opera production since the 1970s has often been concerned with ‘remaking’ or ‘unsettling’ texts that were often previously seen as fixed works in need of realisation rather than interpretation.²⁰ Examining directorial constructions of community in *Orfeo* will show how this aesthetic is expressed.

For each of the five productions, I will give an overview of the director’s aesthetic aims and their effects, in each case focusing most closely on a single scene, the sequence of laments in Act Two after the reported death of Euridice. It is in this sequence that community comes to the fore, as it is here that the director must show most clearly how Orfeo relates to the society that surrounds him, how he relates to another individual (Silvia, the messenger, as well as to the absent Euridice), and how the nymphs and shepherds relate to him and his strife, and to Silvia and her news.²¹ In order to show the whole trajectory from light to dark, the sequence to be analysed begins with Orfeo’s ‘Vi ricordo o boschi ombrosi’, in which Orfeo praises the woods and fountains. After this aria, a shepherd announces the arrival of Silvia, who prepares Orfeo for the catastrophic news she must relate. She describes how Euridice was killed by a snake. The first to react to the narrative are two shepherds, then Orfeo sings his lament ‘Tu sei morta’. The choral lament ‘Ahi caso acerbo’ follows, after which Silvia explains that she must hide herself from the communal grief and become a hermit. Two duets alternate with repetitions of ‘Ahi caso acerbo’, and the act ends with a repetition of the ritornello that opened the opera’s prologue.

²⁰ c.f. Roger Parker, *Remaking the Song* (Berkeley, 2006); David J. Levin, *Unsettling Opera* (Chicago, 2007).

²¹ Commentators usually call Silvia simply ‘Messenger’, and she is ‘Messaggiera’ in the score and libretto, but her name is clearly Silvia (a shepherd announces her arrival by name). Her role is greater than that of the classical messenger, for she is presented as a friend of Euridice and she is granted a monologue after her narrative in which she expresses her feelings of guilt about the news she has imparted. For these reasons I prefer to call her by her name.

I. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle and Hierarchy

In the late 1970s Jean-Pierre Ponnelle (1932-1988) directed and designed a cycle of Monteverdi's three surviving operas for the Zurich Opera, in collaboration with conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt. At the end of their performance run in Zurich, Ponnelle directed studio films based on the three productions, which were then broadcast on television throughout Europe and America. His *Orfeo* in 1978 was the first to be disseminated beyond the opera house via television, and also the first directed by a major figure of the new directorial school that emerged in the 1970s. It is therefore a fitting example with which to commence discussion of staging this opera.

Ponnelle first encountered Monteverdi's music in 1958, at the first production of Carl Orff's *Lamenti*, a compilation of revised versions of his earlier reworkings of *Orfeo*, 'Il ballo delle ingrate', and the 'Lamento d'Arianna', for which Ponnelle worked as the stage designer. This, like his other productions, emphasised elaborate scenic beauty, but when Ponnelle turned his hand to directing as well as designing he gradually incorporated more ideological elements into his work, closely reading the works he put on stage and attempting to uncover their sociopolitical layers.²² He was also one of the first stage directors to frequently use television as a medium, adapting his stagings for the small screen. Marcia Citron sees Ponnelle's filmed opera productions as emphasising the characters' subjectivities, featuring subjects who 'inhabit a specific socio-cultural milieu and [who] may

²² See Kristina Bendikas, *The Opera Theatre of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle* (Lewiston, NY, 2004). For an example of the political aspect of his work, see Alessandra Lippucci, 'Social theorizing on the operatic stage: Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's postmodern humanist production of *La Traviata*', *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12:3 (1992), pp. 245-273 and Marcia Citron, 'Subjectivity in the Opera Films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle', *Journal of Musicology* 22:2 (2005), pp. 203-240. For an overview of Ponnelle's career, see *Jean-Pierre Ponnelle, 1932-1988*, ed. Max W. Busch, Stiftung Archiv der Akademie der Künste (Berlin, 2002).

embody elements from the literary source or the era in which the opera was set or composed'.²³ His Monteverdi films are no exception.

Ponnelle, as he did with many of his productions, loosely sets his *Orfeo* in the time and place in which it was first performed, in this case 1607 Mantua. Asked about his relation to director Vsevolod Meyerhold's idea that dramatic works must be viewed through the 'prism of the age in which the work was written', Ponnelle responds that, at least for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera, such a prism 'lets us understand *why* people have these and those attitudes, *why* they behave in such a way to one another, *what* sort of etiquette and gestures govern them. Lots of things like that. And, I'm sorry to say, a great many modern designers and directors have no idea whatsoever about that kind of culture. So the result is a sort of vulgarisation - a comic strip of the work'.²⁴ Ponnelle stresses that the reasons underlying the various interpersonal relationships within the community from which the opera stems must be uncovered and displayed to the modern audience.

Ponnelle's film uses basically the same sets, costumes, and movement as his stage production, set diegetically in a theatre, but it was filmed in a studio without a live audience. This permits different camera angles and close-ups than would be available with cameras placed in a real theatre in front of the proscenium, but the frisson of a performance before a live audience is lost. From the beginning of the film, a sense of community among the performers is achieved as we see the orchestral musicians chatting to the singers informally, out of character, implying a sort of non-diegetic community. When the performance begins, the Duke of Mantua (portrayed by Roland Hermann), who takes the role of Apollo at the end of the opera, and his wife (Trudeliene Schmidt), who sings the part of la Musica and later Speranza, take their places in thrones at the side of the 'stage'. The setting shows a

²³ Citron, p. 204.

²⁴ Frederick and Lise-Lone Marker, 'Rethatricalizing Opera: A Conversation with Jean-Pierre Ponnelle', *Opera Quarterly* 3:2 (1985), p. 30.

fantastical glam-rock Baroque, as does Harmoncourt's elaborate orchestral scoring, which goes even beyond the myriad instruments Monteverdi indicates in the printed score.

Intercutting throughout the film between the singers and the instrumentalists reminds us of the theatricality of the performance event, especially important for Ponnelle in making this studio film, by default removed from the 'live' theatrical experience.

The key to the community Ponnelle puts on stage is the stratification of social classes. The duke and duchess sit on thrones at the side of the stage, overseeing proceedings, but they also participate in singing the roles that are marked as upper-caste or allegorical: Apollo, la Musica, Speranza.²⁵ A group of seventeenth-century courtiers, acting as the chorus, stands in galleries above the main performance space looking down on the characters in the drama. While the courtiers sing, the corps de ballet, dressed as nymphs and shepherds, dances. This separation of choric function sets up a stark class distinction between the courtiers, who remain in their balconies, and their more embodied dancing vassals. Between these two groups stand Orfeo (a semigod, or prince) and Euridice. Their costumes are silver and white, made of rich fabrics, different from the animal skins of the fantastic baroque peasants but not as formal and confining as the garb of the Duke and Duchess and their courtiers.

Ponnelle presents another level of community interaction between the stage and the orchestra. At a few moments in the production, orchestra members are placed on stage: a lutenist joins the Nymph during her solo in Act One, and some of the instrumental soloists during 'Possente spirto' play from the stage. His camera also intercuts between the stage action and the orchestra, reminding the viewers that this is a theatrical event, but also bringing up the question of where the boundary between the diegetic and the non-diegetic

²⁵ One might expect the Duke and Duchess to sing Plutone and Proserpina as well, but because of different vocal ranges this would be impracticable. Also, in the scenic and musical world of *Orfeo*, Apollo is marked as 'higher' than Plutone, both in class (being granted a machine) and in vocal range (being a tenor).

lies. Ponnelle invites a similar disconnection here to the one between the singing vs. dancing choruses, with the orchestra dressed in baroque-influenced concert black with high collars (which costume today seems strongly marked in a late-1970s aesthetic), contrasted with the elaborate fancy-dress costumes of the singers and dancers. He presents *Orfeo* as a performance for a layered audience, the audience watching at home seeing at the very beginning of the film some shots of a modern audience in the studio 'theatre' watching the opera, which includes its own stage audience of courtiers watching Orfeo perform for *his* audience of nymphs and shepherds.

Unlike most previous productions, which set *Orfeo* in a generic Classical landscape, Ponnelle's settings and character direction (*Personenregie*) make specific references to the community of its origin: one of stark class distinctions and idealised representations of rural life. Reaction shots of the courtiers amused and almost embarrassed at the japes of the dancing chorus remind the audience of this class separation. At the beginning of Act Two Orfeo changes from his silver and white garb to a different costume, more like that of the other peasants yet still rich, indicating that he is now closer to them but still in charge (singing 'a voi ritorno', 'I return to you'). All lie on the ground in a circle with Orfeo in the most prominent place downstage at the centre (along with an orchestral lutenist, whose costume makes him seem out of place) in an image reminiscent of hippie culture. This being a studio production, the camera is able to view this tableau from above and further emphasise the spatial form and Orfeo's prominence within it. In his aria 'Vi ricordo, o boschi ombrosi' Orfeo dresses one of the peasants as himself, with his breastplate and a mock lyre made of branches and twigs, and another woman plays Euridice. Although this demonstrates the blurring of class boundaries between the peasants and the more noble Orfeo, it is all enacted on Orfeo's terms: it is he who leads the action, inviting the sung and danced

responses of the nymphs and shepherds, and he remains centre stage and most consistently within the camera's frame.

The centrality of Orfeo himself in the social structure enacted on Ponnelle's stage and screen becomes yet more obvious in the series of laments at the end of Act Two, where there is little sense of real community mourning, probably because Orfeo and Euridice are not in the same class as the would-be mourning proletariat. Orfeo is usually kept at the centre of the cinematic *mise-en-scène*, and even when another character like Silvia or the solo shepherds are in focus, Orfeo is still seen in the background of the shot, always reminding the spectator of his presence. When Silvia enters suddenly from the rear of the stage, the lights quickly fade and a black backdrop is flown in, covering the pastoral scene from the first part of the opera. Though this emphasises Silvia's role in the change of mood, she remains upstage for the first part of her monologue, not moving to centre until Orfeo invites her to do so, asking her who she is. Her relationship to Orfeo, like that of the other shepherds, is not one of friendliness so much as vassal to lord. She does not comfort Orfeo, but rather tells her sad narrative to the nymphs and shepherds. The chorus reacts melodramatically and artificially to the events she describes: in the first choral rendition of 'Ahi caso acerbo' some of the courtiers come down onto the stage and all sing with exaggerated, stylised gesture (physical as well as musical). They move only on each repetition of 'ahi', quickly changing from one pose to another, clearly meeting pre-determined marks. This is self-conscious and choreographed 'stage' mourning, rather than a scenic representation of 'real' mourning. One gets the impression that the peasants are playing the role of mourners in order to please the upper class, rather than out of any genuine grief. The focus during 'Tu sei morta' is only on Orfeo, as the camera pans slowly up Orfeo's body, focusing on the way on the rose he and Euridice had previously held during Act One. There is a sudden camera zoom out to take in the whole stage at the end of the monologue

for the repeat of 'Ahi caso acerbo', reminding the spectator that there is a community here, though the way the camera moves brings attention to the production as film rather than seeming dramatically necessary. This reminder of the surrounding community is pointedly mediatised and made to seem artificial in an almost Brechtian way (with an emphasis on form rather than content): Ponnelle implies that the chorus does not relate on a deep level to Orfeo, but that it is only a structural device, a lower class to be used to do the bidding of the upper class. Orfeo's presence remains important for the rest of Act Two even though he leaves the stage for the final duets. The rope which had bound him and Euridice in marriage in Act One becomes an important prop, as the dancers unwind it and each take hold of it, going from the orchestra pit up to the rear of the stage. This implies that they are literally bound up with Orfeo's fate whether they wish to be or not.

In this and most other productions the portrayal of community changes after the opera's second act. As Orfeo descends to the underworld he loses the support group (or sycophantic social inferiors) of nymphs and shepherds and is faced with Caronte, then Plutone and Proserpina, on his own. A sense of an infernal community is created, though, with the entrance of the moralising chorus in Act Four. In Ponnelle's production, the courtiers in their gallery above again sing the choruses, while a small group of mimes clad in black robes (and a tenor soloist in an unintentionally comic skeleton costume) make menacing gestures. An interactive 'community' is negated here as these spirits move in a mindless machine-like group while the courtiers, as arbiters of behaviour, make imprecations about morals. As discussed above, the difference in the functional role of the chorus as stabile moralists in Act Four from mobile participants in Act Two gives directors difficulty in making an artistic whole. Ponnelle solves the problem by having the two different choruses sung by the same courtiers from the same position above the stage, helping the audience find the similarities between the two. Community disappears entirely at the beginning of Act

Five, as Orfeo is left alone ‘in questi campi di Tracia’ to mourn. The reality of social interaction then invades again at the end of the opera in the final chorus and *moresca*.²⁶ Ponnelle places Orfeo far upstage alone during this chorus, implying that he has left the peasants’ community in order to join the Duke/Apollo in his privileged position at the top of the hierarchy.

In all, Ponnelle’s film is somewhat confused as to what it is trying to say about 1978 theatre and about 1607 society as portrayed in Monteverdi’s opera. Ponnelle’s show (the opera *Orfeo*) within a show (the 1607 production of that opera in Mantua) within a show (a production in Zurich in 1978) within a show (a filmed studio recreation of that production) is so thickly layered that it loses clarity. Ingmar Bergman was rather more successful in his somewhat similar television film of Mozart’s *Magic Flute* (*Trollflöjten*, 1975) as there are not so many layers at work. It is the film of a theatrical production in Drottningholm of *The Magic Flute*, without an added layer of a putative 1791 Viennese society. Unlike Ponnelle, Bergman concentrates in his film on the audience as a community of spectators and, by using backstage shots, on the community of singer-actors. Mozart’s opera becomes more clearly a vehicle for Bergman’s ideas about theatre as a communal art form, in addition to being more open to the opportunities brought by a movie camera. Ponnelle’s Marxist reading, at one with the European intellectual climate of the late 1970s, does not permit true community interaction. The studio film does not allow the audience to be really present, and the few shots which do show an audience have obviously been filmed in two different locations, with the stage action shown as a rear-projection rather than actually being present in the studio. The stage seems artificially distant from the on-screen audience, and is therefore doubly removed from the television audience. By having his singers employ

²⁶ This only refers to the version of the opera that appears in the printed score, not to the libretto and its ending featuring the Bacchantes. Some of the stagings I discuss (most strongly Audi’s, as we shall see) make a nod to this (original?) ending.

exaggerated and artificial gestures and by imposing stark separation of classes, Ponnelle attempts to demonstrate the artificiality of inter-class community in 1607 Mantua and, by extension, 1978 Europe.

II. Pierre Audi and Myth

In 1994 Pierre Audi staged *Orfeo*, in collaboration with Steven Stubbs and his ensemble Tragicommedia, at the Nederlandse Opera as the first part of a Monteverdi cycle to be completed over the next few seasons. The stage design is abstract, featuring a large circular pool, a crumbling fragment of a brick wall, and a teepee-like structure made of wood. While Ponnelle's staging makes references to 1607 Mantua, Audi emphasises the mythical and ritualistic nature of the story, placing it in a non-specific time and place. La Musica, unusually sung by a countertenor, is here a shaman-like figure carrying a crude wooden lyre, accompanied by figures wearing animal masks who enact a silent version of the Orpheus myth while la Musica sings. Theatrically this is somewhat reminiscent of the dumb-show that preceded English Renaissance tragedies (as indicated in *Hamlet*), but Audi's reference seems to be more to Eastern mime practice. During the choruses of the first act, the chorus members move in formation, individuals taking part in a larger societal movement. The various solos are given to singers of different ages, staged as having varied roles within this society: young couples, village elders, etc. The spousal actions of Orfeo and Euridice, and then the mourning of Euridice's death in Act Two, are staged as rituals, with an enforced separation of the bride and groom such as one often sees in non-Western societies (which also makes it convenient for Euridice to leave the stage to be bitten by the snake). The community here is small and rural, in contrast to Ponnelle's larger urban society. Still, Audi's conception of community could also be seen as Marxist in orientation: he presents an

idealised society as it may have been before the arrival of capitalism differentiated it into a rigid class system. It also represents the 'back-to-basics' view of society idealistically removed from modern life, in which everyone has a role to play.²⁷

Audi's staging of the second act centralises integration rather than highlighting separation, as Ponnelle had done. When Orfeo sings 'vi ricordo o boschi ombrosi' he seems almost alarmed by Euridice's absence, especially when he specifically mentions her name, and he searches for her across the stage. The soloist who responds with 'mira, deh mira Orfeo' is cast as an older man who tries to comfort Orfeo. Rather than being the dominant figure on stage, Audi's Orfeo is less sure of himself in his new role as married man, and he looks to his surrounding community for support. In this production the Messenger, Silvia, is highly personalised, almost distracting from the main dramatic thread. Like Ponnelle, Audi keeps her upstage during her first speech, removed from the main action, but it seems here that she remains aside because of the bad news she must impart, rather than out of deference to Orfeo, for when she moves downstage it is of her own volition rather than on his invitation. As she begins her narrative of Euridice's death, Orfeo cradles her in his arms from behind. She breaks from him when she first mentions the serpent, then Orfeo falls to the stage floor when she says that the serpent's bite killed Euridice. At the end she goes to him and cradles him. By allowing Silvia and Orfeo to touch and comfort each other, thereby bringing out a strong relationship between the two, Audi creates a more character-infused drama, and because his characters can interact on a close personal level, unlike Ponnelle's, Audi's vision of community seems more positive. After the monologue, though, the chorus directs 'Ahi caso acerbo' directly at her, as if blaming her for Euridice's death. Silvia's stated intention to become a hermit seems incongruous in many productions, but in Audi's ritual-

²⁷ The Disney film *The Lion King*, released around the same time as Audi's production, presents another view of similar idealism: in the film, complex human society is abstracted and simplified into a manichean representation of good and evil, and in Audi's version of *Orfeo* the society is abstracted into ritual functions. These are both products of a mid-1990s culture emphasising connectedness with nature.

infused world it makes sense that as the witness to such grief she would exile herself, perhaps in obedience to this society's rules of conduct. During her final ritornello she looks to the soloists for comfort but they all recoil from her. She has brought death with her, and has become taboo within Audi's society.

Audi's strongest articulation of the interaction between Orfeo and the wider community closes the act. During the shepherds' duets, Orfeo slowly walks into the pool at the rear of the stage, carrying Euridice in a white winding sheet, where he stands until the final 'caso acerbo' chorus. The chorus walks into the pool as group to join him, as if to partake of and support his grieving. But when the others have all reached the pool at the end of the chorus, Orfeo departs carrying Euridice into a crevasse that has emerged on the stage (the crumbling wall that was previously there having sunk down). This literalises his departure from the wider community, setting the scene for his solitude during the rest of the opera. The act ends with nearly two minutes without music, as the chorus slowly leave the pool and walk off stage, accompanied only by sounds of distant thunder. The first half of the opera also began in silence, as does the second half, another way in which Audi transforms *Orfeo* into ritual theatre. This use of framing silence makes the action on stage seem like a ceremony, with a certain amount of 'paratextual' time before and after to prepare the conditions under which the performance can take place.

Silvia's, then Orfeo's departures at the end of the act also foreshadow the way Audi handles the end of the opera. When the shepherds reappear at the end of Act Five, they do not seem so well disposed towards Orfeo. He seems now to be an outcast, no longer able to participate in their rituals. This is likely a nod to the ending of the opera which is printed in the 1607 libretto, in which a group of Bacchantes ostracise Orfeo (and in the myth tear him to pieces) for being no longer interested in women. Interestingly, the Bacchante scene would have been more like the first two acts in its structure, with solos or ensembles alternating

with a choral refrain. Like the shepherds, they act as a community, though they are antagonists of Orfeo rather than his friends and neighbours. This is structurally a more convincing ending than the Apollo scene as it allows for a greater degree of symmetry in the opera, but since the music has not survived (if indeed Monteverdi ever composed it) it cannot be performed unless a modern composer attempts to arrange it, in which case the symmetry would be compromised anyway by the difference of style. Neither ending is fully convincing dramatically, as both introduce new characters at the very end of the drama, though Apollo fits the trope of the *deus ex machina*. Audi compromises by alluding to both endings, and solves the problem of consistency with the reminiscence of his staging of the end of Act Two. He sees the ending, and the opera overall, as an unhappy one (at least for Orfeo). Because of the grief he has suffered, the protagonist is no longer able to participate in the rituals of his community.

III. Trisha Brown and Motion

Choreographer Trisha Brown's 1998 production of *Orfeo* for Brussels' Théâtre de la Monnaie is a striking contrast to the others I have examined. While many productions of *Orfeo* utilise dance, Brown's, by nature of her background as a choreographer, becomes as much ballet as opera, blurring the line between the two genres. While recent studies have shown that there was likely a great deal of dancing in early opera,²⁸ Brown's emphasis on dance is not historical but instead reflects her personal aesthetic. Brown's work has been in non-narrative modern dance and is focused on the body and its relation to the forces surrounding and acting upon it. Brown did not compromise her own style while working in

²⁸ See, for example, Virginia Christy Lamothe, 'Dancing at a wedding: some thoughts on performance issues in Monteverdi's "Lasciate i monti"' (*Orfeo*, 1607), *Early Music* 36:4, pp. 533-545.

the narrative genre of opera. She brings out certain emotional moments in the music through solo and group movement, rather than creating a danced narrative parallel to the musical one. She says, however, that she ‘tried to make it dramatic. I couldn’t stand the lack of energy on the opera stage, so I began to make forms that informed the audience of the story and the music. My boldness was replaced by innocence, knowing by not knowing. Can a singer do this?... I thought if I got the gestures right I could empower them as performers’.²⁹ Brown had attempted opera in the previous decade with a 1986 *Carmen* in Naples. Brown played a character called ‘La Bruja’, the Sorceress, and danced in parallel to the singers, who were directed by Lina Wertmüller. The production was not a success, as the audience and the critics were confused by Brown’s presence, and there were backstage conflicts between choreographer and director and between Brown and the singers, who did not appreciate what they saw as her distracting presence on stage.³⁰ When she was approached by Brussels’ Théâtre de la Monnaie to stage *Orfeo* she insisted on and was granted a long rehearsal period and was given the role of both director and choreographer. Brown created the dances with her own company, then she and her colleagues taught them to the singers in a two-week workshop, in addition to the standard six weeks of rehearsal.³¹

The non-narrative nature of Brown’s *Orfeo* is a reflection of her conception of the body as an object in space influenced by surrounding physical forces rather than by mental intentions. Guillaume Bernardi writes that Brown ‘created a machine that moved singers and dancers around the stage in a continuous flow’.³² Creating a sense of community is simply not on Brown’s agenda: the bodies on her stage, including those of the opera’s protagonists,

²⁹ Brown on *Orfeo* in *Trisha Brown: Dance and Art in Dialogue*, ed. Hendel Teicher (Andover, MS, 2002), p. 209.

³⁰ Guillaume Bernardi, ‘“The Voice is a Muscle”: Trisha Brown and Opera’, in *ibid.*, pp. 251-255.

³¹ Brown and some of her singers discuss this creative process in an interview on the DVD.

³² Bernardi, p. 254.

are seen as machines without intentionality, as purely formal entities. Bernardi asserts that ‘her approach freed the spectators from the intense, obsessive emotions of opera: it allowed them to see and relate to the singers in new ways’.³³ Brown’s production is therefore radical in its rethinking of what opera is meant to do, applying to opera the discoveries made in modern dance over the previous decades. The conventional wisdom of opera as an ‘extravagant art’ is here called into question, in contrast to the other productions I examine, which in their various ways retain the notion of opera as a narrative art form to which the audience should somehow relate, whether politically or emotionally.³⁴ Brown saw her production of *Orfeo* as a key point in her career. She writes that ‘life has not been the same since I walked into the center of my study to improvise Orfeo’s speech to Caronte in the monumental aria “Possente Spirto.” I had sorted out my identity. I was both Orfeo asking permission to enter Hades and the words he sang. I was primed with music, text, poetry, systems, literature. [...] I knew, at that moment, that the long haul of my apprenticeship in choreography was over’.³⁵ Brown places herself within a postmodern aesthetic of anti-narrativity, though she uses the narrative events of the drama as a springboard for movement. The movement becomes an embodiment of a fight against narrative, insisting on being in the single affective moment brought about by particular events rather than referring to past or future events. By the 1990s this approach had become commonplace in modern dance and experimental film, and by applying it to opera Brown attempts to bring the genre up to date with other art forms.

This anti-narrativity has particularly arresting implications for the second act of *Orfeo*, which in Striggio’s libretto traces Orfeo’s place in society and his character trajectory from

³³ *ibid.*, p. 254.

³⁴ See, for example, Michel Poizat, *The Angel’s Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (Ithaca, 1992). For Poizat, the opera house is a place where audiences can give in to their emotions.

³⁵ Brown, ‘How to Make a Modern Dance When the Sky’s the Limit’ in Teicher (2002), p. 293.

rejoicing spouse to mourner through the use of mood-setting solos, ensembles, and narratives. Where Ponnelle and even Audi focus on the chorus as a group, Brown's choreography features heterogeneity of movement. Each dancer moves differently from the others, until their movement reaches a kind of tipping point and they link arms for a round dance or move across the stage in a line, rather like the emergent composition of schools of fish or bird flight formations. The dancing happens not only during ritornelli, but also during solos and choruses. The soloists often dance themselves, and Orfeo in Brown's conception becomes a dancing role almost as much as a singing one (her Orfeo, Simon Keenlyside, actively collaborated with Brown on his movements). During his solos, especially 'Vincendo', Orfeo stands out from the crowd because he is singing as well as dancing, and because he wears a yellow suit while the rest of the cast wear identical white. While in Audi's production the chorus relates to Orfeo emotionally, in Brown's the relationship is simply spatial. When they touch, it is only to use the gravitational pull and forces of each other's bodies, not to form an emotional connection.

When Silvia enters the change of mood is accomplished through a different kind of movement: both she and the dancers slow down and remain in place, moving only their upper bodies. Orfeo's reaction to her news is shown in his body, while his face remains neutral, staring into the middle distance. In this production no one sings directly to anyone else. Orfeo begins 'Tu sei morta' lying on his stomach and gradually stands as Monteverdi sends him higher in his range and uses higher parts of the musical mode. As with Audi, Brown's messenger becomes an outcast at the end of the scene, but she expresses this through spatial cues rather than emotional beats. She begins to move with the rest of the chorus, but then runs out of the formation and lies on the floor downstage left to sing her final moments. At the end she falls forward directly into the orchestra pit. Because the chorus does not look at the Messenger or show any emotion as she leaves them, her

departure is implicated as more physical than emotional, an alteration to the physical composition of this society. This demonstrates that for Brown, the sign system of music refers not to emotional or narrative tropes, but to bodily movement. Music becomes a spatial, embodied art, very different from Ponnelle and Audi's view of opera as politically- and socially-encoded narrative. The form of this community is more important than its content.

IV. Gilbert Deflo and Authenticity

The Belgian director Gilbert Deflo staged *Orfeo* in 2002 in collaboration with Jordi Savall and his orchestra Le Concert des Nations at the Liceu opera house in Barcelona. Like Ponnelle, Deflo sets *Orfeo* in the place and time of its creation, 1607 Mantua. In a filmed interview Deflo explains that he was inspired by the mirrors of the Sala degli Specchi in the Ducal Palace in Mantua, and he uses a large mirror in place of a show curtain to reflect the audience, helping them to see themselves as the 1607 audience.³⁶ He further attempts this identification by costuming conductor Jordi Savall as Monteverdi (as portrayed in the portrait by Giulio Strozzi) and having him process through the stalls to take his place before the orchestra. During *la Musica's* prologue, a slide of the title page of the 1609 publication is projected on a backdrop behind her, placing an emphasis on the written text. The opera itself, the composer, and the conductor (along with the large band in the raised orchestra pit) are most important for Deflo, and everything else on stage (including community) seems subordinate.

Deflo's sets and costumes reference early seicento European painting, especially the aesthetic of Rubens (who probably knew Monteverdi). The chorus stands to the side of the

³⁶ Deflo is aware that the current Sala degli Specchi is not the same one Monteverdi would have known, but he is not concerned with architectural history.

orchestra, leaving the stage space open for the soloists and dancers. The soloists use stylised gestures reminiscent of the very little we know about early seventeenth-century stage movement and the loose, flowing dances are more faithful to the spirit than to what is known of the letter of early sixteenth-century dance (in fact, they are rather more reminiscent of Twyla Tharp than of the *Nobiltà di Dame*). The singers mostly look at Orfeo from the side of the stage, not engaging with him or each other through anything more than simple eye contact. In spite of the mirror effect of the curtain, these techniques indicate a rather superficial community and make the stage action seem somewhat distant for a modern audience.

This production is a paradigmatic example of what Richard Taruskin labels ‘authenticistic’. This term, which Taruskin discusses in *Text and Act*, was formed through analogy with ‘scientific’ as used by Friedrich von Hayek and Karl Popper, describing a discourse in which the scientific method of experimentation and data analysis is forced uncritically onto the social sciences and the humanities, trying to make them fit into a positivist discourse which is at odds with socially observed phenomena.³⁷ So an authenticistic stance tries to force all aspects of a production into a somewhat misconceived notion of historical authenticity. The result of this approach to *Orfeo* is a surface-level engagement with Monteverdi and his time which probes deeper neither into the socio-cultural conditions under which Monteverdi and Striggio wrote the opera, nor into the potential ways in which a modern audience might interpret it (as Ponnelle attempted), nor indeed into the piece’s operation on a structural level (part of Audi’s project).³⁸

The previous three productions used the lament sequence of Act Two as the crux of the opera in the way that Monteverdi and Striggio imply, and also as the most articulate site for

³⁷ Taruskin, *Text and Act* (Oxford, 1995), p. 99.

³⁸ This kind of opera staging relates to John Butt’s conception and criticism of the unthinking ‘heritage industry’, where the past is fetishised with little thought as to what it means to be involved with ‘heritage’ today. *Playing with History* (Cambridge, 2002), Ch. 6 “‘A reactionary wolf in countercultural sheep’s clothing?’ historical performance, the heritage industry and the politics of revival’.

their particular ideas about community and their overall goals in directing the opera. Deflo stages the act with facile means and does not seem to engage very deeply with the text. Dancing and singing here are entirely separated activities, not only regarding who is doing the singing and dancing, but also when it occurs. While Ponnelle, Audi, and, especially, Brown have dancing and singing happen simultaneously, Delfo limits the dancing to orchestral ritornelli. During Orfeo's 'Vi ricordo' the singer stops moving when he is not singing in order to allow the dancers to dance in a circle around him, then they run to the side when he sings another verse. The choruses are sung from the far sides of the stage, below the auditorium's side boxes, and the chorus is therefore rarely on camera. This part of the scene is also intercut with shots of Savall and the orchestra, resulting in three different sets of people at work (dancers, chorus, and orchestra), each in their own space with little interaction between them. The result is a choppy series of small set pieces, which does indeed appear as such in the score but which does not help the audience recognise the symmetry of the act's musical and dramatic structures. The community presented here is a nonproblematic one in which each group knows its role and sticks to it unquestioningly.

Yet another spatial layer is added with the entrance of Silvia, the Messenger. She walks slowly down the centre aisle of the stalls and sings her first monologue from the front of the auditorium, taking her place on the stage later. As we shall see with Pier Luigi Pizzi's production, movement within the audience space can have deep meaning, but here it only seems like one layer too many. She and the other soloists do not make direct eye contact; while in Brown's production this was a deliberate choice to focus attention away from intentionality and onto the performers' bodies, here it only serves to confuse the directionality of speech- (or sung) acts. Because their words and gestures are not directed at anyone in particular, the characters cannot seem part of a world like the audience's, full of indicational and interpellative units of discourse. Silvia exits in the same way, leaving slowly

through the stalls, followed by the camera in a backward tracking shot. The act finally ends with a ritual movement somewhat similar to Audi's, but in this production such movement is more difficult to interpret because nothing like it has come before. Two dancers carry in a small pyre, upon which two laurel wreaths are burned. With dimmed lights this makes an aesthetically-pleasing stage picture, but the sense of community mourning that Deflo may have wished to infer is undermined by the lack of signs of community earlier in the act.

Deflo's version of community stops at polite groups of singers and dancers performing the music and movements placed before them by conductor and director. Absent is Ponnelle's critical engagement with his own society, Audi's assertion of universal myth, or Brown's radical re-reading of opera's goals. His view of the opera is much more akin to stagings from earlier in the twentieth century, with their focus on singing and musical perfection rather than on critical engagement with the surrounding society of either the opera's origin or of the present. The production, though, was successful at the Liceu and has been revived in other opera houses, an indication that audiences value musical excellence and authenticistic stage pictures as much as they do more critically engaged directorial visions. However, of the seven productions easily available on DVD,³⁹ this is the only one which fits the monicker 'authenticistic', implying that opera houses are engaging increasingly rarely with this type of theatrical discourse.

V. Pier Luigi Pizzi and Ensemble

Pier Luigi Pizzi's 2008 production at the Teatro Real in Madrid, a collaboration with William Christie and Les Arts Florissants, makes reference to the 1607 Mantua premiere as

³⁹ In addition to the five discussed here, these are Jean-Claude Malgoire's 2004 production in Tourcoing (Dynamic DVD 33477, 2005) and Robert Wilson and Rinaldo Alessandrini's 2009 production at La Scala (Opus Arte DVD 1044, 2011).

Ponnelle and Deflo have done, and on the surface some elements of the production look very similar to both of these. Like Ponnelle, Pizzi uses an actor representing the Gonzaga duke (though later becoming Plutone rather than Apollo) and gives him some courtiers, contrasting with Orfeo's nymphs and shepherds. During a tucket played on drums, then the opening fanfare, a set representing a palace's courtyard rises out of the stage floor, revealing a brass ensemble (les Sacqueboutiers de Toulouse). They, along with the orchestra in the pit, the dancers, the singers, and conductor William Christie, wear costumes in the style of 1607, more historically accurate than Ponnelle's fancy-dress creations. Orfeo and the other soloists watch la Musica's prologue from a balcony at the rear of the set. She addresses the audience (both the real Madrid audience and the cast) directly and uses stylised rhetorical gestures, another similarity to Deflo's production, though here the gestures have clearer directionality. But the way the character interactions play out sets Pizzi's production starkly apart from both Ponnelle's and Deflo's. Because Pizzi has taken the decision to raise the orchestra pit and costume the orchestra, they and their instruments become a part of the action in a way that seems much less forced than Ponnelle's merry lutenist, or than Deflo's conductor-led hierarchy. The fact that William Christie plays the lead harpsichord, becoming more a part of the music-making than Harnoncourt or Savall, also contributes to the egalitarianism of Pizzi's view.⁴⁰ Here we have a less stratified society than Ponnelle's. Act One, in spite of its historical setting, feels like a real (modern) wedding celebration, in which actors, dancers, courtiers, and orchestra all participate on an equal level. In Pizzi's version, the nymphs and shepherds are not seen as an homogenous group, but as individuals. The series of verses sung when Orfeo has left the stage is presented as a courting ritual for the single female soloist (Ninfa): she leads all the men on and eventually chooses one. When Orfeo returns for

⁴⁰ Stephen Stubbs also plays the lute in his own orchestra, but the band in Audi's production is less visible and the camera stays almost exclusively on the stage action.

‘Ecco pur ch’a voi ritorno’, Pizzi focuses on homosocial bonds, and the four shepherd soloists pass round Orfeo’s lyre as each sings in turn, displaying their bravura to each other. ‘Vi ricordo o boschi ombrosi’ is a display of Orfeo’s own masculine bravado, following which the entire chorus joins in in celebration. Though the specifics of the staging are not historically-informed, the linkage of historical costumes with modern movement provides a bridge for the audience for an informed listening and viewing experience.

As in the other productions, when Silvia enters she destroys the dionysian mood. But the reaction to the news by the Duke and the courtiers seems natural and dramatically motivated, not as if they were watching a performance by an underclass. Pizzi’s staging of this scene is more emotionally intense than either Ponnelle’s or Deflo’s. The clear class-lines of Ponnelle and the distinctions between chorus, soloists, and dancers of Deflo are blurred, and what is on stage is instead a community trying to come to grips with a crisis. Silvia speaks her monologue directly to the audience, the orchestra, and the stage characters, involving everyone present in the collective grief. Where Deflo’s Messenger breaks the fourth wall only by entering and exiting through the stalls, Pizzi’s actively engages the audience in the onstage mourning through eye contact and physical gesture. In this production, therefore, when the Messenger exits through the stalls it does not seem incongruous to the rest of the action.⁴¹ Both the vocal production of the singers and their actions are freer than Ponnelle’s stylised gestures or Deflo’s cleanly authenticist propriety. The mourning is more emotionally abandoned and, for a modern audience, seems more real because it is closer to what would be their own experience. Orfeo faints at the end of ‘Tu sei morta’, caught by his shepherd friends.

⁴¹ Much could be said about the ‘fourth wall’ in opera (which has been ‘broken’ so many times that its actual existence should be questioned). Pizzi is especially adept at involving the audience in his productions. Similar to the Messenger’s scene is Ottavia’s ‘Addio Roma’ in his 2010 Madrid staging of *Poppea*, where Ottavia exits through the stalls at the end of the monologue. This is a literalisation of exile: as Ottavia must leave Rome, she also must leave the stage space and go out into the wider world. I return to Ottavia in Chapter Four.

The costumes, lighting, and mise-en-scène of the first half of Pizzi's production are reminiscent of the work of Caravaggio, the most popular artist from Monteverdi's time in the twenty-first century. It has been argued that there are similarities in the reception histories of Monteverdi and Caravaggio, and Pizzi intelligently foregrounds the connection.⁴²

Pizzi stages the second half of the opera (Acts Three, Four, and Five) very differently from the first, and here he departs most strongly from previous productions. All of the cast and the orchestra, with the exception of Speranza, have changed out of their seventeenth-century costumes and wear modern concert black. Pizzi puts into relief the nature of the staging of the first half, which veered dangerously, and purposefully, close to the authentic. The audience can no longer be comforted by lush costumes, an elaborate set, or even the feeling of musico-dramatic time travel, and this mirrors Orfeo's abandoning of hope and the comforts of marriage and community interaction. Pizzi sees the transformation as presenting operatic history in microcosm, showing that *Orfeo* both lies at the beginning of the operatic tradition and is strikingly modern: 'The original idea was to keep them [the costumes] like that [historical] during the whole opera, but soon I thought that, once its beginning has been shown, the work undergoes an evolution that situates it in a modernity which is impossible to avoid. [...] Therefore, in the second part, the costumes become atemporal, of more current cloth'.⁴³ Pizzi explains his conception of the set design in a video interview on the DVD of the production, saying that he wanted to evoke the original performance space in a 'theatrical' manner, hence raising the stage at the beginning in a way

⁴² See Helmut Lindenberger, 'Monteverdi, Caravaggio, Donne: Modernity and Early Baroque' in *Opera in History from Monteverdi to Cage* (Stanford, 1998), pp. 11-50. Deflo's production is somewhat more akin to Rubens, another contemporary of Monteverdi but perhaps not so popular today. Audi has likened his own productions to the art of Hans Memling, a late medieval master of stark compositions.

⁴³ Juan Lucas, interview with Pier Luigi Pizzi in programme book, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Teatro Real Madrid, (Madrid, 2010), p. 125 (my translation). 'La idea original era mantenerla así durante toda la ópera, pero luego pensé que, una vez mostrado su nacimiento, la obra conoce una evolución que la sitúa en una modernidad imposible de obviar. [...] Así, en la segunda parte, el vestuario se adaptaba a una idea mas atemporal, de tintes más actuales'.

somewhat reminiscent of Baroque machine-theatre. He also took the decision to raise the orchestra pit, not only for acoustic reasons (the Teatro Real, which will be more fully described in Chapter Five, is a large modern opera house in which Monteverdi's orchestra, as interpreted by William Christie, might not be heard if relegated to a pit) but also to allow for more interaction between the orchestra and singers. Perhaps the pan-European production team (Italian director, French band, Spanish opera company, German Orfeo, etc.) implies a kind of Eurozone in microcosm. At the end of the opera, the singers, dancers, orchestra, and by extension the audience, all join in the celebration. The intensity of what has gone before is not so much weakened as released cathartically, allowing for an explosion of community-based well-being.

This description of five productions of *Orfeo* has shown the variety that directors have found in the stage possibilities of this opera. All of them engage critically with the idea of community and how it can be shown on stage (or in Brown's case, its absence shown) through movement, gaze, and touch, as well as through the spatial disposition of singers and actors. Many studies in performance focus on the individual actor and his or her relationship with the role and with the audience, but I have shown that onstage interaction is important as well, at least for this particular opera in the last few decades. By staging community, directors make audiences reflect upon their own communities, and by using *Orfeo* as a site for their theorising, they give modern audiences the opportunity to connect intelligently with art far removed from their own aesthetic backgrounds. So while many critics have characterised the 'early music movement' as a monolithic attempt to regain the past, these directors show how much early music can be re-rooted in the present. That this can be done in so many different ways is another indication of the fluidity these operas exemplify. Such

fluidity becomes even more apparent in the next chapter, where the text of the opera, *Ulisse* in this case, itself undergoes many different kinds of change.

Chapter Three

Reshaping *Ulisse*

For much of the twentieth century, the ontological authority of opera (or what an opera ‘is’) was usually conceived as lying with an abstract concept of the ineffable ‘work’ itself, as imagined by its composer and librettist, which would be realised by singers, conductors, and stage technicians. Since the 1970s, however, this authority has gradually shifted away from abstract works to individual stage productions of those works and their directors, so that we are now just as prone to speak of Patrice Chéreau’s or Ruth Berghaus’s *Ring of the Nibelung* as of Wagner’s, or of Franco Zeffirelli’s *Tosca* versus Luc Bondy’s instead of simply Puccini’s.¹ This shift and its implications are the subject of David J. Levin’s *Unsettling Opera*.² Though it can be seen across contemporary opera production, it is in early modern opera that this new conception of operatic authority is most evident, as the less finite nature of these operas’ source material and somewhat lower familiarity with respect to the repertoire among the general audience is seen to demand greater directorial intervention. Yet works like Levin’s tend to focus their theorising on operas within the central Mozart-to-Puccini canon, with some excursions into the twentieth century, rarely extending their critiques back to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century operas. One reason for this might be that within academia early opera has mostly been studied by historical musicologists who focus on operas’ original texts and sources and, even when they do examine performance, are more interested in reconstructing ‘how it was’ than examining ‘how it is’.³ The critical

¹ At New York’s Metropolitan Opera this last distinction recently became a flashpoint, as audiences and critics rejected Luc Bondy’s new staging of *Tosca*, inevitably comparing it to Franco Zeffirelli’s from previous seasons. The argument was more about the stage directors’ concepts than the performance of Puccini’s music.

² Chicago, 2007.

³ For example, see Ellen Rosand’s *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley, 1991) and Beth and Jonathan Glixon’s *Inventing the Business of Opera: The Impresario and His World in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Oxford, 2006).

theorists and journalists interested in how opera ‘is’, in many cases without intensive training in historical musicology, naturally tend to focus on the well-known nineteenth-century canon.⁴ Using recent productions of Claudio Monteverdi’s 1640 Venetian opera *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in Patria* and their representations of the leading role of Penelope as examples, I shall examine how this new director-based ontological authority, which lies with individual instances of operatic works rather than abstract conceptions of them, can be seen on stage.

Monteverdi’s operas have often been used as sites for such directorial interventions, ranging from strict historicist reconstructions to radical revisions of their dramatic structures and musical scores, and are therefore useful objects of study in order to come to terms with the contemporary burgeoning of the early operatic repertoire. *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in Patria* has been more prone to musical and dramatic reshaping on a textual level by both conductors and stage directors than have Monteverdi’s other two extant operas, so it is on *Ulisse* that this chapter will focus. The short length and tight structures of *Orfeo* lead to it usually being performed complete or with only small cuts, at least since the 1960s, and in *L’incoronazione di Poppea* cuts are usually made simply to reduce running time, only rarely altering the general shape of the opera. Perhaps the less solid nature of *Ulisse* productions comes about because it is still somewhat less familiar than the other two operas, as source material has been less accessible (until a facsimile was published in 2006⁵) and little textual scholarship

⁴ Tom Sutcliffe’s *Believing in Opera* (London, 1996), a defense of various current directors, focuses on their work in operas of the canon, as does Manuel Brug’s similar (but more critical) *Opernregisseure Heute* (Leipzig, 2006).

⁵ ed. Sergio Vartolo (Florence, 2006).

has been undertaken between Malipiero's work in the 1930s and Alan Curtis's edition in the early 2000s.⁶

Because pre-Mozart operas like Monteverdi's, popular as they have become in the last few decades, are not quite standard repertory works and have short modern stage histories, directors such as Klaus-Michael Grüber, Pier Luigi Pizzi, and Pierre Audi have, with their colleagues in the orchestra pit, felt freer to make radical interventions in the operas' texts and music in order to convey a more 'unsettled' directorial vision than they might do with better-known operas, where the dramatic and, especially, musical text is more frequently treated as an unchangeable whole. So while Wagner's *Ring* or Puccini's *Tosca* will today usually be performed from musical scores as Wagner and Puccini composed or published them whatever may happen on stage, the text of Monteverdi's *Ulisse* and what it is seen to 'mean' has been much more contingent on the ideas that the stage director or musical arranger has about its structure or goals.⁷ Practitioners have taken ownership of early operas like *Ulisse* even more clearly than they have done with operas in the traditional canon.

I offer an attempt at analysing opera as an art form best represented in critical discourse as a theatrical performance art, different in each of its performative instances, rather than merely as a performed transcription of a musical score. This chapter will focus on the relationship between directors and the source material and how the nature of that relationship is made evident on stage. To elucidate this guiding relationship I will closely examine the character of Penelope and her diverse stage constructions, first in her opening monologue and then in her first scene with her servant Melanto. A relational chain will

⁶ Gian Francesco Malipiero's edition was vol. 12 of his collected works (Vienna, 1930), and Curtis's performing edition with critical notes was published by Novello in 2002. One exception to the lack of textual scholarship is Wolfgang Osthoff's *Das dramatische Spätwerk Claudio Monteverdis* (Tutzing, 1960). It was not until Osthoff's work that the opera was convincingly established to be entirely Monteverdi's work.

⁷ Of course there are exceptions in nineteenth-century opera, especially with operas with more than one performance version like Wagner's *Tannhäuser* or Verdi's *Don Carlos*, but still it is usually a matter of choosing a version to perform, or combining well-established elements, rather than refashioning the sources into a new text.

become clear, of the director relating to the opera, Penelope as the opera's protagonist, and Penelope relating to Melanto. Just as the director determines what the audience sees from outside the text, Penelope could be seen as the opera's internal director. She attempts to manage and control the other characters (in spite of interference by the gods) and fashions herself as woman and regent. The way directors have conceived of Penelope as fitting within the opera represents a microcosm of their approaches to the work as a whole, and a close reading allows us to see how their treatment of Penelope serves their overarching aesthetic goals. To demonstrate this I will employ various structuralist models of narrative and character function. Such models, both for the analysis of diachronic narrative and of character ('actantial') function, quickly fell out of fashion in academic discourse because of their frequent use as means to an oversimplified end, implying that practitioners have little volition in what the texts with which they work can mean.⁸ The models, however, are very useful tools when used not to reduce all potential versions of a text to their consistent and unchanging parts, but rather to act as templates upon which to highlight difference, demonstrating how practitioners create diverse models to render different meanings and different character relationships. Through my use of the structures implied in the source material left by Monteverdi and Badoardo as a template against which to examine the altered or problematised relationships in various productions, I will show how it is possible for directors to present radically different narrative and actantial structures for this opera. By commencing with Monteverdi and Badoardo I do not wish to imply that their 'original' version is correct and that all later redactions are misinterpretations (this is all too common in critical journalism). One could as easily start with one of the more recent interpretations and use its structures as the template against which to compare the seventeenth-century

⁸ For example, in *Reading for the Plot* (New York, 1984), Peter Brooks critiques formalist criticism for being reductionist and overly synchronic, and Brooks searches instead for a diachronicity of narrative study: 'to talk of the dynamics of temporality and reading, of the motor forces that drive the text forward, of the desires that connect narrative ends and beginnings, and make the textual middle a highly charged field of force', p. xiv.

version, but for present purposes it is most useful to start with the latter because of the greater familiarity of the ‘original’ in the field.

Four recent European productions of *Ulisse* will be discussed throughout the chapter. A 1994 production staged by Pierre Audi and musically directed by Glen Wilson at the Nederlandse Opera in Amsterdam makes large cuts and narrows the opera’s focus to make an aesthetic experience closer to realist drama than Baroque *meraviglia*. In 2001 Adrian Noble directed the opera for the Aix-en-Provence Festival, collaborating with William Christie in a minimalist yet historically-informed production. Director Klaus-Michael Grüber and conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt presented the opera in Zürich in 2002 in a production which set the opera in early twentieth-century Greece in an orchestration based on Harnoncourt’s late 1970s version. Finally, Pier Luigi Pizzi and William Christie’s 2009 production in Madrid attempted to strike a compromise between modernist theatrical techniques and a restoration of *meraviglia*. These four very different productions each use substantially different musical editions and find diverse dramatic and scenic resonances, presenting widely varying visions of *Ulisse* to contemporary audiences.

I. Narrative Analysis

Before embarking on the narrative analysis of *Ulisse*, it will be useful to clarify the distinction between story and plot (or *fabula* and *syuzhet* in the terms of the Russian formalists who codified them), as it allows us to place more clearly what the directors are doing and where they are doing it, rather than simply saying that they change the overall text. In brief, ‘story’ tells what happens in a narrative and ‘plot’ describes the actual happening in time. The story of Homer’s *Odyssey* relates the wanderings of Ulysses after the Trojan war and his eventual return to his homeland of Ithaca, while its plot famously begins

in medias res, in the middle of his voyage while being held captive on Circe's island. The story of Monteverdi and Badoardo's *Ulisse* is drawn quite faithfully from the second half of Homer's *Odyssey*, but the opera's plot is very different from its source material (aside from the obvious necessary differences between epic poem and opera), functioning the way it does because of mid seventeenth-century stage conventions. As we shall see, opera practitioners have altered both *Ulisse*'s story and its plot, but not always in tandem. Hans Werner Henze's redaction of the score, staged at the Salzburg Festival in 1985 by Michael Hampe, is on the surface one of the most radical versions of the opera due to its scoring for modern orchestra, but Henze and Hampe change neither the opera's plot nor its story. The placement of the scenes and what occurs during them is as it appears in the opera's seventeenth-century source material. Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Klaus-Michael Grüber's production in Zurich changes the plot but not the story by reordering a number of scenes, while Pierre Audi and Glen Wilson's Amsterdam production changes both plot and story through cuts, rearrangements, and changes of dramatic and musical focus.

Though plot and story are two distinct functions, each of which can be altered independently of the other, they are of course closely intertwined. The way the plot unfolds influences the audience's reception of the story: if Monteverdi and Badorado had not made it clear in the opera that *Ulisse* really was who he said he was until Penelope herself discovers it in the final scene, the story would appear very different even though the same events could have occurred. If we were kept guessing with Penelope about *Ulisse*'s true identity, our perception of the story as it were to unfold in the opera house would lead us to make different guesses about how it would end, even though a summary of events conceived after the performance would look much the same. Over the course of any plot, the reader or spectator guesses what might happen next, and with a different plot those guesses about the

potential story would also be different.⁹ The plot/story distinction is closely linked to the much-discussed content/form dichotomy. One of the goals of early twentieth-century Modernist art, still influential in current opera production, was to show that content and form should be synonymous, very similar to the goals of Platonic or Crocean idealism, demanding that a work of art be autonomous and unified. The ease with which content and form, and plot and story, can be separated shows that those Modernist ideas need not always apply, especially to early Venetian opera.

Monteverdi and Badoardo adhere closely to the Homeric story, but as with most mid-seventeenth-century Venetian operas *Ulisse's* narrative structure (plot) is complex. These operas usually begin with successive expositions of various strands of story which meet at a central nodal point, and then stage the consequences of that meeting. This is a strong contrast to earlier court operas like Monteverdi's own *Orfeo*, which generally feature the development of one central plot line, with pastoral or allegorical comments along the way. In the earliest operas like Peri's *Euridice* and Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and *Arianna*, the focus remains fully on a single character, placing him or her within a context which drives character development and which demonstrates the character's place in society. As we saw in the previous chapter, *Orfeo's* story concerns only its title character and the various personages he meets along the way to his eventual apotheosis (or destruction, if we favour the opera's first printed libretto), with scene-setting nymphs and shepherds in the first half and allegorical solos and choruses in the prologue and second half providing community background. In the mid-century, operas' narrative structures became more complex as the genre moved out of the court with its emphasis on allegory and idealism and into a more public space where there was competition for audiences and a resultant need for greater

⁹ My discussion of plot and story draws from Eco's *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Harvard, 1994), in which he applies these terms to Gérard de Nerval's novella *Sylvie*.

complexity, depth, and variety. For Idealist commentators like Benedetto Croce, Joseph Kerman (at least in his early *Opera and Drama*), and Gary Tomlinson, this shift had a detrimental effect on the operatic genre.¹⁰ For them, Monteverdi's later, more 'Baroque', operas are not as successful as the more 'Renaissance' *Orfeo* because their narrative and musical variety makes them a worse fit to the atomistic Modernist concept of aesthetic autonomy. It is dangerous to make such a value judgement, however, as the two kinds of opera were composed for very different contexts, performers, and audiences.

The plot of *Ulisse* has four basic interconnected strands, two major, focusing on Penelope and the suitors and on Ulisse, and two minor, focusing on Melanto and Eurimaco and on the Gods. The narrative introduces each of these strands in turn, after an allegorical prologue which establishes the broad subject matter.¹¹ First Penelope is seen bewailing the absence of her husband. This is followed by a scene demonstrating the contrasting happier emotions of Melanto and Eurimaco, and next the Gods are seen debating the course of action to take concerning Ulisse's wanderings. Finally we meet Ulisse himself as he bewails his inability to return home, not knowing that he has already landed on Ithaca. Following this exposition, the plight of the characters in each strand is further developed, all skilfully interwoven by Badoardo. Everyone comes together in the nodal bow-stringing scene, when Penelope's contract with the suitors comes to a head, Melanto's advice to give into them is (partially) taken, and Ulisse reclaims his position as master of his house with the help of the Gods, especially Minerva. The final act then stages the aftermath of the climax, as all of the

¹⁰ Croce's arguments are spread across his wide corpus of work, but his anti-Baroque sentiment comes across very clearly in *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia: pensiero, poesia e letteratura, vita morale* (Bari, 1929); he goes so far as to call the Baroque 'an aesthetic sin, but also a human one'. Kerman has changed his mind on many of the particulars in *Opera and Drama* (New York, 1956) but that seminal work calls most of the opera between Monteverdi's and Gluck's *Orfeos* 'the dark ages'. Though Tomlinson praises the Venetian operas in *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* (Berkeley, 1987), he sees them as succeeding *in spite of* their Baroque (Marinistic) qualities.

¹¹ It should be mentioned that all of the manuscript librettos of the opera feature a different prologue, for *Il Fato*, *La Prudenza*, and *La Fortezza*, from that in the score, which is for *Humana Fragilità*, *Il Tempo*, *La Fortuna*, and *Amore*. c.f. Rosand, *Monteverdi's Last Operas*, pp. 137-140.

surviving characters react to the slaughter and Penelope is finally convinced that the man who calls himself Ulisse really is her long-lost husband.¹² Figure 1 shows graphically how these four strands interconnect, with narrative time indicated as progressing from top to bottom; the roman numerals come from the list of scene-complexes presented below.

Before examining how individual directors have reshaped *Ulisse* and Penelope's role in it, we need to look more closely at the shape the opera takes in its source material. This is the basic material with which practitioners first engage, so it is important to understand this background and the implications it holds about character function and construction. Unlike the many variants in the *Poppea* material, *Ulisse*'s overall structure is mostly consistent in the score and the various manuscript libretti. As with all early modern spoken and sung drama, *Ulisse* is divided into acts and scenes. Though scholars are not entirely certain how the act-divisions functioned in mid-century Venice, and whether *Ulisse* was meant to be in three or in five acts, there was likely a pause between them. The previous generation would have been accustomed to seeing intermedi with different subject matter between the acts of the main drama, but these had fallen out of favour by the time of the opening of Venice's public opera houses. Ellen Rosand discusses act-structure in her monograph on Venetian opera, pointing out that a three-act structure quickly overtook the five-act structure that had been more popular in previous years.¹³ The manuscript material for *Ulisse* indicates that at some point during its composition and/or performance it was transformed from five acts to

¹² It is notable that *Poppea*'s plot also consists of four strands: Ottone and his conflict between love of Poppea, honour of his empress Ottavia, and promise to Drusilla; Poppea and her bid for the throne beside Nerone; Ottavia and her loneliness; Seneca's stoicism matched by Nerone's pragmatism. They all come together (other than Seneca's, whose strand remains somewhat separate) when Ottone tries to kill Poppea on Ottavia's orders. Unlike *Ulisse*, *Poppea* features some additional interludes that place the main events in a wider context and enrich the main strands: the scene between the two soldiers, the love scene of Valletto and Damigella, the scene between Nerone and Lucano, and Arnalta's solo scene at the end. One might argue that Iro's solo scene in the last act of *Ulisse* serves a similar function, but I see it as the first of a series of 'slaughter-reaction' scenes, being a representative for the dead suitors and what they stood for (perhaps that is a reason, in addition to being 'depressing', that the next scene with the suitors' ghosts was cut before the first performance: Iro had already spoken on behalf of their philosophy). For the ghost scene, see Rosand 2007, p. 341.

¹³ *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 52-53.

three (reshaping is hardly a new pursuit). ‘Scene’ in the context of early opera refers to a dramatic unit, not a musical one as in nineteenth-century opera, and indicates the entrance of a new character on the stage. In a discussion of dramaturgy it is more useful to divide the opera into larger scene-complexes, groups of scenes that have a single dramatic function, separated by a change of location or a complete changeover of characters. The first act of the five-act *Ulisse* consists of seven scenes, but only four scene-complexes. First is Penelope’s monologue (scene i), after which she and Ericlea have an implied departure to make way for Melanto and Eurimaco (scene ii). They leave and the scene changes to the seaside as we see Ulisse brought ashore and the Gods’ discussion of his return to Ithaca (scenes iii, iv, and v). The final scene-complex is Ulisse’s awakening and encounter with Minerva (scenes vi and vii). In all, the opera’s thirty-one scenes (including the prologue) can be divided into seventeen scene-complexes:¹⁴

I. Prologue

II. Penelope laments her fate, with interjections by Ericlea (I.i)

III. Melanto and Eurimaco display their love (I.ii)

IV. The Feaci bring Ulisse ashore and the Gods discuss that event (I.iii-v)

V. Ulisse awakens to encounter Minerva, who disguises him as an old man and urges him to return to his court (I.vi-vii)

VI. Penelope discusses her options with Melanto (I.viii)

VII. After a run-in with Iro, Eumete meets Ulisse (I.ix-xi)

VIII. Telemaco arrives in Ithaca and is reunited with his father, magically transformed from an old man into his more youthful self (II.i-iii)

IX. Melanto and Eurimaco discuss their prospects (II.iv)

X. The suitors attempt to woo the intractable Penelope (II.v-vii)

XI. Ulisse prepares for his return with Eumete and Minerva (II.viii-ix)

XII. Penelope discusses the Trojan War with her son (II.x)

XIII. The disguised Ulisse defeats the suitors in the bow challenge (II.xi-xii)

XIV. Iro laments his fate (III.i)

XV. Eumete and Telemaco try to convince Penelope of Ulisse’s identity (III.ii-iv)

XVI. The Gods discuss the outcome of the slaughter of the suitors (III.v-vi)

XVII. Ulisse’s friends continue to try to convince Penelope, and Ulisse finally succeeds (III.vii-ix)

¹⁴ I use the scene-numbers as they appear in Alan Curtis’s edition, which uses a three-act structure.

Modern directors have overhauled this structure in various ways. The most significant and frequent changes involve conflating scene-complexes. Nikolaus Harnoncourt and Klaus-Michael Grüber in their 2002 production in Zurich conflate the two suitor scenes into one long dramatic unit, and also combine the two sets of convincing-scenes at the end of the opera, among a few other changes and re-orderings. In addition, almost every section has some small cuts (to which I will return in reference to Penelope's opening monologue).

- I. Prologue (linked more closely to the body of the opera by having the same singer perform *Ulisse* and *l'Humana Fragiltà*)
- II. Penelope laments her fate, with interjections from *Ericlea* (same as II above, but with large cuts)
- III. *Melanto* and *Eurimaco* display their love to Penelope and try to convince her to love again (combines III and VI above)
- IV. The *Feaci* bring *Ulisse* ashore and the Gods discuss that event (same as IV above)
- V. *Ulisse* awakens to encounter *Minerva* (same as V above)
- VI. After a run-in with *Iro*, *Eumete* meets *Ulisse* (same as VII above)
- VII. *Telemaco* arrives in *Ithaca* and is reunited with his father (same as VIII above, but without *Ulisse*'s magical transformation)
- VIII. *Melanto* and *Eurimaco* discuss their prospects (same as IX above)
- IX. The suitors attempt to woo the intractable Penelope, then the disguised *Ulisse* defeats them in the bow challenge (combines X and XIII above)
- X. *Iro* laments his fate (same as XIV above)
- XI. The Gods discuss the outcome of the slaughter of the suitors (same as XVI above)
- XII. *Eumete*, *Telemaco*, and *Ericlea* unsuccessfully try to convince Penelope of *Ulisse*'s identity, and *Ulisse* finally succeeds (combines XV and XVII above)

Harnoncourt and Grüber create a more dramatically-unified opera by creating fewer, longer scenes out of the source material. Entirely deleted are sections XI, where *Ulisse* prepares with *Minerva* (though a small section of it is used to link the two suitor scenes) and XII, where Penelope converses with *Telemaco*. These deletions allow the climax of the drama, the bow challenge, to be reached more quickly. Next, by cutting and combining scenes in the last act Harnoncourt and Grüber create a tauter conclusion. Even productions which are mostly uncut often trim the opera's final scenes, as to a modern audience the opera can seem unbalanced with such a long denouement. For a Venetian audience, however, the

lengthy road to the final recognition would have probably enforced the ideology of constancy of which Penelope is an exemplar (to be discussed at greater length below).

A very different streamlining solution is to be found in Pierre Audi and Glen Wilson's 1994 production in Amsterdam. The most significant deletions are the scenes with the gods, and the only god to appear on stage is Minerva. Unlike Harnoncourt and Grüber, Audi and Wilson prefer to cut whole scenes and keep most of the scenes they do leave in complete.

- I. Prologue (same as I above)
- II. Penelope laments her fate (same as II above, but without Ericlea)
- III. Melanto and Eurimaco display their love (same as III above)
- IV. Ulisse awakens in Ithaca to encounter Minerva (same as V above)
- V. Penelope discusses her options with Melanto (same as VI above)
- VI. After a run-in with Iro, Eumete meets Ulisse and then Telemaco, who is reunited with his father (combines VII and VIII above)
- VII. Penelope discusses the Trojan War with her son (same as XII above)
- VIII. Melanto and Eurimaco discuss their prospects (same as IX above)
- IX. The suitors attempt to woo the intractable Penelope (same as X above)
- X. Minerva prepares Ulisse for his return, then he challenges the suitors to the bow challenge and he and Telemaco slaughter them (same as XIII above, with portions of XI; Eurimaco is also killed)
- XI. Iro laments his fate (same as XIV above)
- XII. As the shock of the slaughter wears off, Eumete and Telemaco unsuccessfully try to convince Penelope of Ulisse's identity and Ulisse himself finally succeeds (combines XV and XVII above, without Ericlea; Telemaco kills Melanto)

As will be discussed further below, Audi's production makes two major changes to the source material. First, he adds weight to Melanto's character and darkens the opera considerably, especially in its final scenes. Second, his omission of the gods makes the opera's human characters more responsible for their own actions. Figure 2 shows Audi's order of scenes graphically, in comparison to the source material's ordering as presented in Figure 1. The capital roman numerals match those of the Badoardo/Monteverdi version to make the alterations more evident, while the lower-case numerals refer to the Audi outline. Audi's version places its emphasis on the human characters and their interpersonal

relationships by omitting the influence of the gods on the action. The omission of the gods also results in a more symmetrical narrative structure, as Penelope and Melanto alternate scenes separate and with each other and Ulisse is kept separate from the rest until the climax. This streamlining is also reflected musically, as Wilson uses a small continuo section of only four players (harpsichord, two lutes, and cello), which helps direct the audience's attention to the words and the characters rather than to the sonic variety of the instruments. Most elements of what Venetian audiences would have regarded as necessary spectacle, like gods in machines, a large and varied continuo section, and the comic relief of Ericlea, are absent from this production. Ironically, Audi and Wilson create a tightly-constructed, symmetrical, and serious Modernist work of art by engaging with the opera in a very free non-Modernist manner. The varied dramatic structures of Harnoncourt and Grüber's and Wilson and Audi's productions demonstrate that Monteverdi and Badoardo's work opens a wide field of stage possibilities. Of course not all directors have chosen to alter the structure. Notably, Adrian Noble and Pier Luigi Pizzi, both collaborating with music director William Christie, present near-complete performances, though their final products, as we will see with their stagings of the relationship between Penelope and Melanto, are also very different.

It is also possible to examine the opera's narrative structure synchronically rather than diachronically, and this examination will lead us to a more detailed discussion of Penelope's role in the opera. The mapping of synchronic character functions and interrelationships in fiction has been an important part of structuralist studies of narrative since the work of Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale* and Etienne Souriau in *Les deux cent mille situations dramatiques*.¹⁵ Propp shows that the narratives of Russian folk tales can be reduced to a systematic series of plot events and character functions, and Souriau posits six

¹⁵ Propp (Austin, 1968 [1928]), Souriau (Paris, 1950).

categories of character in drama, relating each to an astrological symbol.¹⁶ Algirdas Greimas, influenced by both, refined their theories into the actantial model, displaying the relationships of various ‘actants’.¹⁷ Greimas’s actantial functions, which he believes apply unchangingly to all narratives at a global level, to all events within that narrative at a more local level, and to all speech-acts at a micro-level, centre around the subject (protagonist) who is invoked by a sender to search for an object in the interests of a receiver, and who is helped or opposed along the way. Each actantial role need not be filled by a single character, or indeed by a personage at all: a concept or idea can fill a role as well. Greimas is not a dramatic theorist, but a linguist, and his interest in the model lies more at the local level of the syntactic functions of speech-acts. Various semioticians of theatre such as Anne Ubersfeld have applied the model’s narrative implications directly to drama.¹⁸ Figure 3 shows an actantial model of the character functions in Homer’s poem, and in the opera libretto. That the model is the same for the source and its adapted form demonstrates that Monteverdi and Badoardo did not change the *Odyssey*’s story, but only its plot. This distribution of roles, or actants, is what has traditionally been found in Homer as well as in Monteverdi and Badoardo. Penelope is placed here at the centre, as the protagonist or ‘subject’ of the drama. One might wish to posit Ulisse as the subject, for he is the title character, but Penelope is more clearly at the centre of the opera. She is the most active character: she makes the decision to allow the suitors to undertake the challenge to string Ulisse’s bow, and the final denouement rests on her own choice to accept Ulisse as her long-lost husband. Ulisse is more passive, acting on Minerva’s initiative rather than his own, and he himself recognises that he is a plaything of fate and the gods. Penelope’s ‘object’, the

¹⁶ see Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (Ithaca, 1993), p. 438.

¹⁷ see Greimas, *Sémantique Structurale* (Paris, 1966).

¹⁸ Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le théâtre* (Paris, 1977).

searched-for person or thing, is of course her lost husband Ulisse. She is sent on the search for her object by her love for Ulisse and by her honour as woman, wife, and queen. The ‘receiver’ of her search, the party that benefits, is the security of both her own position and of her *oikos* (household) in Ithaca, so long without a leader. She is helped on her mission by her maid Ericlea, her son Telemaco, a faithful shepherd Eumete, and her servant Melanto. Her opponents are the three suitors, who wish to marry her before Ulisse has a chance to return in order to usurp his place as husband and as ruler of Ithaca.

II. Penelope

As modern directors have changed Monteverdi and Badoardo’s conception of Penelope, the composer and librettist departed somewhat from Homer’s conception of his heroine, in line with other early-modern interpreters. In Homer, Penelope’s first appearance does not make a strong positive impression. Her first entrance into the plot comes at the end of Book One, when she emerges from her rooms to tell the bard Phemius to stop singing of the heroes’ return from Troy, as it reminds her of her still-absent husband. Penelope here seems to be at her weakest in the whole poem, easily dissolving into tears and passively obeying her son when he (rather unfeelingly) tells her to stop complaining and go back to her room. Telemachus tells her, ‘harden your heart, and listen./ Odysseus was scarcely the only one, you know,/ whose journey home was blotted out at Troy./ Others, so many others, died there too’.¹⁹ He commands her, ‘tend to your own tasks,/ the distaff and the loom, and keep the women/ working hard as well. As for giving orders,/ men will see to that, but I most of all:/ I hold the reins of power in this house’.²⁰ The narrating voice explains that what

¹⁹ Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York, 1996), I.406-409.

²⁰ *ibid.*, I.410-414.

Telemachus says makes ‘clear good sense’. The inherent misogyny of this passage is startling to modern readers, and later in the epic it is sometimes unclear how we are really meant to feel about Penelope. Does she complain too much about her fate, and is her refusal to take another husband disrupting the natural order, or is her fortitude to be admired?²¹ The early-modern and modern reception of Penelope, however, has been overwhelmingly positive, as she has been seen as the archetypal faithful woman. Like their contemporaries, Badoardo and Monteverdi are more consistently sympathetic to Penelope, and they prompt audiences to admire her.²² Her new-found ability to sing embodied, sensual music in triple time at the end of the opera is an occasion for rejoicing, but Tim Carter believes that ‘the message of the opera - if message we need - is that Human Frailty, so belaboured in the prologue and through Penelope in the opera, has one invincible weapon against Time, Fortune, and Love - Constancy’.²³

In *Opera from the Greek*, Michael Ewans discusses the differences between Homer’s Penelope and her rendering in Badoardo and Monteverdi’s work.²⁴ Homer’s Penelope is often described as ‘circumspect’ and ‘prudent’, qualities different from what Tim Carter sees as her predominant constancy. In Homer she toys with the suitors, showing off her beauty and accepting their gifts, seeming to lead them on, but also performing the part of the mourning woman (as at her first entrance). Ewans explains that ‘in Homeric society, an *oikos*

²¹ Recent classical scholarship, especially that influenced by feminism, has reexamined Penelope’s position in the story both narratologically and as a woman. See Richard Heitman, *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope and the Plot of Homer’s Odyssey* (Ann Arbor, 2005), Marilyn A. Katz, *Penelope’s Renown: Meaning and Indeterminacy in the Odyssey* (Princeton, 1991), and Barbara Clayton, *A Penelopean Poetics: Reweaving the Feminine in Homer’s Odyssey* (Lanham, MD, 2004). Margaret Atwood rewrites the story from Penelope’s point of view in *The Penelopiad* (London, 2005), focusing on the maids in an interesting parallel to Audi’s reinforcement of Melanto’s role.

²² Ellen Rosand discusses the sources of Badoardo’s libretto, especially a 1573 translation of Homer by Lodovico Dolce which would have almost certainly been known by the Venetian academies and which is similarly sympathetic to Penelope, in *Monteverdi’s Last Operas*, p. 133.

²³ Tim Carter, ‘In Love’s Harmonious Consort?’ Penelope and the Interpretation of ‘Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5:1 (1993), p. 15. As far as I know the singer performing Penelope has never doubled as Human Frailty, and Carter’s insight points to an interesting potential casting choice.

²⁴ Michael Ewans, *Opera from the Greek: Studies in the Poetics of Appropriation* (Aldershot, 2007).

without an adult male head was leaderless and vulnerable; this is the reason why Penelope feels such intense pressure to remarry. Badoardo rightly decided that this would have been almost impossible to convey to a Renaissance audience, and he replaced it by a very different focus - on Penelope's sexual fidelity'.²⁵ Ewans argues that in the opera Penelope comes very close to being seduced by the suitors (in their guise as modern courtiers), and in the second act reflects their words and music in her own. In Homer, Penelope is sufficiently cunning that her chastity is never in doubt, and one can read any seeming capitulations as ruses to keep her suitors at bay. The often profeminist stance of Venetian academies like the Incogniti notwithstanding, it would have probably been too provocative to show such a clever and controlling woman on stage in 1640. In Venice, Penelope seems almost a combination of Christ and the Virgin Mary, undergoing suffering and temptation, but coming through it all to be revered. Badoardo and Monteverdi transform Penelope into a simpler character than she is in Homer, a troubled woman who must protect her chastity rather than a mistress of manipulation.

The modern cuts and rearrangements of Penelope's opening monologue can be seen as extensions of what Monteverdi himself did with the text given him by Badoardo. Ellen Rosand demonstrates that Monteverdi cut and rearranged Badoardo's text to make it more dramatically viable.²⁶ Monteverdi gives Penelope a clearer character trajectory as she contemplates her fate: 'in the first section Penelope is obsessed with the past; she reviews the history of her solitude, its endless length, its unjust cause, and becomes increasingly furious. Monteverdi's second section is rooted in the present; here Penelope fixates on her own feelings, her hopeless condition. In the third she moves beyond herself to a meditation of the

²⁵ Ewans, p. 19.

²⁶ The provenance of this manuscript libretto, which includes an introductory letter to Monteverdi, is somewhat uncertain, but its text almost certainly predates the opera's premiere in 1640. See *Monteverdi's Last Operas*, pp. 254-268.

laws of nature', then she returns to her own feelings.²⁷ This movement out from, then back to the self is not so clear in Badoardo's original, which is more diffuse. The next analytical step is to examine how modern directors have presented this monologue and what their interventions mean for the character and for the opera as a whole.

II.i. Misreading Penelope

One of the earliest productions to bring *Ulisse* to a wide audience was the 1980 television film of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle and Nikolaus Harnoncourt's version created for the Zurich opera house. The musical and dramatic structure of this production is mostly the same as Harnoncourt's later production with Klaus-Michael Grüber discussed above, though Ponnelle's design and *personenregie* is very different from Grüber's. As mentioned above, Harnoncourt made various cuts in nearly all of the opera's scenes, including Penelope's opening monologue. His most consistent cuts in the monologue and in the opera as a whole are the references to the Trojan war, building on a cut Monteverdi himself made of a longer Trojan section in Penelope's monologue in Badoardo's original libretto. Ellen Rosand argues that these references were an integral part of the opera for seventeenth-century Venetian audiences, who saw their city as a more successful successor to Troy. Her *Monteverdi's Last Operas* centres around this theory, claiming that Monteverdi's three final operas present three stages of the Venetian pre-echo: *Ulisse* as Troy, the lost *Le nozze d'Enea e Lavinia* as the founding of Rome, and *Poppea* as the beginning of Rome's downfall, which led directly to the founding of Venice.²⁸ By removing references to the original Venetian context, Harnoncourt's version of the opera can be re-rooted in other historical times, Ponnelle

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 261.

²⁸ see Rosand (2007), pp. 12-22.

choosing to place it in a fantasy, rococo version of a seventeenth-century court (such as never existed in republican Venice), and Grüber setting the opera in a vaguely early twentieth-century rural Greece. Harnoncourt also omits the scene in the second act between Penelope and Telemaco in which he recounts his experience with Helen of Troy, who, as the cut portion of the opening monologue indicates, Penelope finds largely responsible for Ulisse's absence. Below is Monteverdi's final version of Badoardo's text, with the sections cut by Harnoncourt in italics. Repeats of text (added by Monteverdi and not part of Badoardo's metric scheme) are indented. Badoardo gave Monteverdi 125 lines, which Monteverdi cut and rearranged into 76, and of which Harnoncourt retains 41.

PENELOPE:

Di misera Regina
 non terminati mai dolenti affanni!
 Non terminati, non terminati mai, mai,
 mai dolenti affanni!
 L'aspettato,
 l'aspettato non giunge,
 e pur fuggono gl'anni.
 La serie del penar è lunga, ah! troppo!
 A chi vive in angoscia il Tempo è zoppo.
*Fallacissima speme,
 speranze non più verdi, ma canute;
 a l'invecchiato male
 non promettete più pace e salute.
 Scorsero quattro lustri
 dal memorabil giorno
 in cui con sue rapine
 il superbo Troiano
 chiamò l'alta sua patria a le ruine.
 A ragion arse Troia,
 poichè l'Amor impuro,
 ch'è un delitto di foco,
 si purga con le fiamme.
 Ma ben contra ragion(e), per l'altrui fallo,*

*condannata innocente
 de l'altrui colpa io sono
 l'afflitta, l'afflitta,*

Of an unhappy queen
 the torments never cease!

 The awaited one does not return,
 and the years fly away.
 The time of suffering is too long!
 For those who live in anguish, time is lame.
*Deceptive hope,
 hopes no longer youthful, but old;
 to the aged and wronged
 you no longer promise peace and health.
 Twenty years have passed
 since the memorable day
 in which, with his abduction [of Helen],
 the proud Trojan [Paris]
 brought his exalted homeland to ruin.
 For that reason Troy burned,
 because impure Love,
 from a crime of ardour
 must purge himself with flames.
 But it is against reason that, for another's
 fault,
 innocent as I am,
 I am condemned,*

l'afflitta penitente.

Ulisse,

Ulisse accorto e saggio,
tu che punir gl'adulteri ti vantì,
aguzzi l'armi, e susciti le fiamme,
per vendicar gl'errori
d'una profuga Greca, e in tanto lasci
la tua casta consorte
fra i nemici rivali
in dubbio de l'onor, in forse a morte.
Ogni partenza attende
desiato ritorno,
tu sol del tuo tornar, del tuo tornar,
tu sol del tuo tornar perdesti il giorno.

ERICLEA:

Infelice Ericlea,
nutrice sconsolata,
compiangi il duol della regina amata.

PENELOPE:

*Non è dunque per me varia la sorte?
Cangiò forse Fortuna
la volubile rota in stabil seggio?
E la sua pronta vela,
ch'ogni human caso porta
fra l'incostanza a volo,
sol per me non raccoglie un fiato solo?
Cangian per altri pur aspetto in cielo
le stelle erranti e fisse?*

Torna, torna,

Torna, deh torna, (torna) Ulisse.

Deh torna, Ulisse!

*Penelope t'aspetta,
l'innocente respira,
piange l'offesa, e contro
il tenace offensor né pur s'adira.
A l'anima affannata
porto le sue discolpe, acciò non resti
di credultà macchiato,
ma fabbro de miei danni incolpo il Fato.
Così per tua difesa
col destino, e col cielo
fomento guerre, e stabilisco risse.*

Torna, torna,

Torna, deh torna, (torna) Ulisse.

made an afflicted penitent.

Wise and wary Ulysses,
you who boast of punishing adultery,
sharpen arms, and stoke the flames
of vengeance for the errors
of a displaced Greek, yet you leave
your chaste consort
among rivals and enemies
in peril of her honour and her life.
Every departure brings
a hoped-for return;
you alone have forgot your day of return.

Unhappy Eryclea,
inconsolable nurse,
accompany the pain of your beloved queen.

*Is fate not different for me?
Perhaps Fortune would halt
her revolving wheel?
And does her ready sail,
which changes at the habits
of every man,
find no breeze only for me?
Can the fixed and moving stars
change their heavenly aspect for others?*

Return, return Ulysses.

*Penelope waits for you,
the innocent one sighs,
weeps at the offence, and against
the dogged offender has no anger.
In my troubled soul
I exonerate you, so your credulity
is not tarnished,
but I name Fate as causer of my troubles.
Thus in your defence
against fate and heaven,
I foment war and take risks.*

Return, return Ulysses.

ERICLEA:

Partir senza ritorno
non può Stella influir;
non è partir, non è;
ahi! che non è partir.

To depart without return
cannot be allowed by the stars;
it is not departure,
no, it is not departure.

PENELOPE:

Torna il tranquillo al mare,
torna il zeffiro al prato,
l'aurora, mentre al sol fa dolce invito,
è un ritorno del dì, ch'è pria partito.
Tornan le brine in terra,
tornano al centro i sassi,
e con lubrici passi
torna a l'ocean(o) il rivo.
*L'huomo qua giù, ch'è vivo,
lungi da suoi principi,
porta un'alma celeste, (e) un corpo frale.
Tosto more il mortale,
e torna l'alma in cielo,
e torna il corpo in polve,
dopo breve soggiorno.*

The sea returns to tranquility,
the zephyr returns to the field,
the dawn, sweetly inviting the sun,
is a return of the day, which departed before.
Frost returns to the earth,
stones return to its centre,
and with slow passage
the river returns to the ocean.
*Man, living on earth,
far from his principles,
carries a heavenly soul, and a frail body.
Soon the mortal die,
and the soul returns to heaven,
and the body returns to dust,
after a short sojourn.*

Tu sol del tuo tornar, del tuo tornar,
tu sol del tuo tornar perdesti il giorno.
Torna, che mentre porti empie dimore
al mio fiero dolore,
veggo del mio morir l'hore prefisse,
torna, torna,
torna, deh torna, (torna) Ulisse.

You alone have forgot your day of return.
Return, for while you prolong
my proud sadness,
I foresee the precise hour of my death.
Return, return Ulysses.

Badoardo's allegorical mention of Fortune's wheel is also omitted, perhaps because modern audiences might not understand it. A stranger omission is Penelope's description of the dead body returning to the earth. Perhaps Harmoncourt wanted to retain a feeling of hope within this section of the monologue, but he loses what could be brought out as a valuable character trait, as Penelope's thoughts of mortality at this point could say something subconsciously about her coming to terms with the idea that her husband might in fact be dead. Significantly, Harmoncourt's cuts occur only in recitative sections of the monologue with free rhythm, leaving in all of Penelope's measured, more lyrical singing in the refrains. This shifts the emphasis of the scene and the role away from 'speech' and towards 'song'. To

emphasise this, Harnoncourt also adds upper strings to these lyrical sections. Tim Carter, like many other scholars, sees Penelope as composed by Monteverdi as a woman unable to ‘sing’ until her final acceptance of Ulisse’s identity.²⁹ By transforming Penelope’s monologue into a complex of recitative and arias accompanied by melody instruments (violins and violas), rather than a free-form arioso accompanied only by continuo, Harnoncourt (and Raymond Leppard in his version for Glyndebourne) denies this reading, allowing his Penelope to ‘sing’ from the beginning. This presents a challenge to the stage director and to the singer, who no longer have a ready-made musical character arc for Penelope. Her development must then be shown by visual means through physical acting, something neither of his Penelopes (Trudeliene Schmidt with Ponnelle and Vasilina Kasarova with Grüber) quite achieve. Still, this transformed version was probably easier for modern opera singers to deal with than a version accompanied only by continuo, as it allows them to ‘sing’ more and use the orchestra as an aid to expression. Janet Baker’s through-sung Mozartian Penelope for Raymond Leppard and Peter Hall shows that this can indeed be effective on stage.

Is this version of Penelope as typical singing operatic heroine a misreading of Monteverdi’s text? It is with great trepidation that literary critics and reception theorists have labelled readings of any text as ‘incorrect’ over the past few decades, as the advent of postmodern modes of thought discourages the idea of a single correct interpretation. But surely there are limits to interpretation. Few would suggest that an interpretation of the *Odyssey* saying that it was composed as, for example, a Marxist parable could be correct. Though an interpreter could read the epic through a Marxist filter, Homer clearly had no knowledge of Marxism when he was creating the poem. Similarly, Umberto Eco has written of ‘overinterpretation’ and ‘paranoid interpretation’, when interpreters manipulate their texts

²⁹ Carter, ‘In Love’s Harmonious Consort?’.

in order to find whatever they are looking for.³⁰ A more useful term than ‘misreading’ could be ‘consistent reading’: does any given reading of the text display a consistent logic? In other words, does the resultant reading or performance match the performers’ thought-processes in creating it? We shall see that under this criterion Harnoncourt’s vision of Penelope is not a consistent reading of the character.

Harnoncourt has written extensively about his approach to early music, including specific discussions of Monteverdi in *The Musical Dialogue*.³¹ His approach to the operas is worth quoting at length, as it significantly informs an interpretation of his performance of *Ulisse*.

Monteverdi’s music is so interesting for us because it can never become ‘early music’, but will always remain vital and living. We naturally want to learn of the performance practice, the meaning of Monteverdi’s performance conditions, but we do not want to flee into false purism, into false objectivity, into misconstrued faithfulness to the work. Nor does Monteverdi himself expect this: he is a full-blooded musician and an Italian as well. Thus, please do not fear vibrato, liveliness, subjectivity, hot Mediterranean air, but please be very afraid of coldness, purism, objectivity and empty historicism. We must understand the genuine musical concerns of Monteverdi and understand how those concerns are reflected in living music. We must attempt as musicians to see with new eyes everything that was current for Monteverdi and will remain current for all times, to reanimate it, to render it with our feelings, our 20th-century mentality — for certainly we do not wish to return to the 17th century. It is very important to study performance practice in order to obtain a real understanding. After all, we must be aware of the possibilities in order to select those that are right for us. This means that we must try to understand as much as possible of what it was that Monteverdi intended, in order to discover what it is that we want from him.³²

Harnoncourt’s advice is mostly vague, not explicating what he means by loaded terms like ‘vital’, ‘objective’, ‘faithful’, and ‘genuine’. He conflates specific performance terms (vibrato) and purple concepts (hot Mediterranean air), and he falls back in the end on

³⁰ Umberto Eco et al., *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* (Cambridge, 1992). He explores these ideas through fiction in his novel *Foucault’s Pendulum* (London, 1989).

³¹ Portland, 1989.

³² *ibid.*, p. 26.

the intentional fallacy. He implies that we can and should understand Monteverdi's intentions, even if we retain our twentieth-century mentality. In later, more specific discussion about the performing forces to employ in *Ulisse*, Harnoncourt displays a misinformed and oversimplified understanding of the seventeenth-century sources, seeming not to follow his own advice to 'obtain a real understanding'. He routinely conflates different musical genres, assuming that the same forces and style of performance would apply to opera as to the concerted madrigal or courtly drama. While it is true that Monteverdi often discussed performance in his letters, his indications nearly always refer to semi-staged court productions like the *ballo Tirsi e Clori*, and not to the fully staged public opera of his later years in Venice. Harnoncourt oversimplifies when he writes that 'works notated [with only the bass and vocal lines] could thus be played in a minimalist version with one harpsichord and four strings, but they could also be adapted to meet all requirements and conditions'.³³ He confuses the possibilities in the past with what is possible in the present. Harnoncourt also equates adding continuo instruments to enrich the texture with writing new melodic lines, two very different practices with different results on the gestalt of the opera, as we have seen with his melodicised Penelope.

Harnoncourt's brief discussion of *Ulisse* is problematic in its particulars and again displays a lack of the knowledge he claims to value so highly, even going so far as to say that 'since the educated public of the time was thoroughly familiar with the smallest details of this major work of Greek poetry, Giacomo Badoardo and Monteverdi could dispense with the dramatic development of tension and relaxation'.³⁴ This belief may have contributed to his reasoning to reshape and cut the opera to give it more 'dramatic development', but scholars and practitioners long before Harnoncourt (like Malipiero, Luigi Dallapiccola, and

³³ *ibid.*, p. 32.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 134.

Wolfgang Osthoff) have argued that the opera actually displays a very keen dramatic sense, and recent productions which leave its structure as it appears in the sources have demonstrated this. Most troubling is that Harnoncourt reasons that any instrument Monteverdi ever indicated he used in any context is fair game for use in the opera's orchestra. The historical evidence is very clear on instrumentation in early Venetian opera, and for Harnoncourt to ignore it so blatantly, even if he were then to dismiss it, again goes directly against his own insistence on studying the music's original context. Some of his ideas are more alarmingly unfounded, as when he says that 'it would be impossible for the instruments to begin playing only in these last measures [to lead into ritornelli], which means they must already have been present'.³⁵ Again, Harnoncourt ignores the copious evidence that melody instruments rarely played during singing and anachronistically applies a Handelian idea of accompaniment to Monteverdi (though even Handel's operas have many instances of melody instruments joining in arias only during ritornelli). Even after stating that *Ulisse* represents a very different style of music to *Orfeo* (Renaissance versus Baroque), he asserts that 'Monteverdi himself can and should provide some assistance to us [in orchestrating *Ulisse*], since he left behind directions and models for us, for example in his *L'Orfeo* and in the very operatic *Marian Vespers* [sic]'.³⁶ Harnoncourt again ignores the potential of the singer to give a dramatic performance with continuo alone when he says that 'the differentiation evidently intended by the composer between a continuous recitative and the ariosos must somehow be made audible. It is not audible when the opera is continuously accompanied by a harpsichord — nor is it audible when we use string sound throughout for the accompaniment. But it becomes very audible if we accompany the recitative with the

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 135.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 135.

harpsichord and employ a richer instrumentation for the ariosos'.³⁷ A brief glance at the score shows that the difference can be entirely audible no matter what the accompaniment due to a more consistently moving continuo line and melodically-directed writing in the vocal line. The singer and harpsichordist need have no problem whatsoever in indicating the difference to the audience. One would expect, based on his call to study original contexts, that in recent years as more evidence of these contexts has been made easily available Harnoncourt would have updated his interpretations of Monteverdi's operas. Yet his 2002 production with Klaus-Michael Grüber uses almost exactly the same musical edition he used in 1980.

Finally, Harnoncourt's comments about the end of *Ulisse* and Penelope's character trajectory demonstrate more confusion. His thoughts are valid up to a point (at least according to modern psychology), that 'the true conclusion of *Ulisse*, which underlies the apparently happy ending (*lieto fine*), is desperate: two people who have been separated from each other for 20 years have become estranged. They cannot take up at the point where they were when they were torn from each other; they can never again find their way back to each other'.³⁸ But he then says that the *lieto fine* only happens because Jupiter descends and allows Penelope to recognise her husband. This is demonstrably not true, as it is very clear in the libretto that Penelope finally recognises Ulisse by the test of the bedspread, as in the Homeric source. The gods may have allowed Ulisse to return, but it is purely on his own initiative that he convinces Penelope to finally accept him, and the final decision is Penelope's alone. Tim Carter (in *Monteverdi's Musical Theatre*) and others have seen the scene as truly positive, using the fact that Penelope 'sings' for the first time in the opera when the pair is finally reunited as evidence that this is indeed a *lieto fine*. It is consistent

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 136.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 139.

with Harnoncourt's other views that his interpretation of the ending is not happy, for the fact that Penelope only sings a true aria complete with string accompaniment at the end is absent in his version. Harnoncourt's reshaping of Penelope's role can therefore be labelled as valid by one kind of consistency criterion, as his Penelope remains an archetypal miserable contralto throughout the opera. But his reasoning behind the technical aspects of this reshaping is not consistent with his own values of musical performance, and could therefore also be labelled as a misreading. Whether we call Harnoncourt's version a misreading or not, this ambiguity and confusion of intent serves to destabilise the reading in its performative realisation. By both beginning and ending the drama in operatic sadness, Penelope is deprived of the convincing character arc which is so apparent in Badoardo's libretto and Monteverdi's setting, and the many cuts in the opera, especially in the opening monologue, create a much less nuanced character. As will be seen in the following analysis of Pierre Audi's production, directors usually have more aesthetic success when this arc is retained, even if many elements around it are altered even more radically.

II.ii. Rereading Penelope

Pierre Audi and Glen Wilson retain all of Penelope's monologue, but they cut the two interjections by the maid Ericlea, replacing them with short passages for solo theorbo to cover the transitions to new tonal areas. In fact, Ericlea does not appear at all in this production, and her absence greatly changes the shape of the opera's first scene and its characterisation of Penelope. Though she adds little to the opera's story, merely reiterating Penelope's complaints, Ericlea's absence alters the scene's narratological focalisation. From the beginning, the audience's focus is on Penelope: she is the first character whose voice is heard in the main body of the opera, and her words and music tell a great deal about her

physical and psychological condition since her husband's absence. Though conceived as a tool for analysing fiction, narratologist Mieke Bal's concept of focalisation is also useful in its basic form for analysing dramatic narrative. Bal uses the term as a replacement for 'point-of-view' or 'narrative perspective' because these terms 'do not make a distinction between, on the one hand, the vision through which the elements are presented and, on the other, the identity of the voice that is verbalising that vision'.³⁹ The concept of focalisation elucidates the relationship between 'those who see and those who speak', or in the case of opera those who watch and those who sing.⁴⁰ In fiction, the narrator focalises a character explicitly by using language which points a certain way: 'John saw Mary' is ostensibly a statement about John (he is the focaliser), but Mary is *focalised* because the reader sees her through John's eyes; she is the direct object of both John and the reader. In Ericlea's first interjection, she names herself as 'unhappy Ericlea' and says that she shares in her mistress's grief, and in her second speech she philosophises that departure without return cannot be in 'heaven's decree'. Though Ericlea seems at first to take the audience's focus away from Penelope because the latter stops singing, her first utterance serves instantly to put that focus back on Penelope by referring directly to her and the way she makes Ericlea feel. This would be demonstrated in fiction by a sentence like 'Ercilea saw that Penelope was unhappy'. The nurse therefore stands in for the audience, experiencing the feelings of sympathy that Monteverdi and Badoardo would have expected their audience to have for Penelope. By moving from their protagonist to a new focaliser, the composer and librettist paradoxically make Penelope an even stronger focus.

Before further discussing what the omission of Ericlea means for the scene, it will be useful to examine the monologue's musical structure. This will show that the monologue

³⁹ Mieke Bal, *Narratology*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, 1997), p. 143.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 143.

does not fit neatly into any of the later standards of operatic scene types, and will make clearer the challenge offered to directors by this music. As with the structural analysis of narrative, structural musical analysis has often been used towards an over-reductive end, frequently to demonstrate that the underlying structures of tonal music reduce to a single *Urlinie*. But undertaking a reductive analysis of Penelope's opening monologue ironically shows that it does not reduce in such a neat way. An analytical reduction, Figure 4, can again demonstrate difference if used in a more creative way than such reductions often have been, helping to articulate the dramatic subtlety of Penelope's monologue and, like the narratological analyses, providing a template against which to compare directorial interpretations and elucidating the material with which directors engage. I will focus on the first section of the monologue as its dominant ideas are introduced here, though Figure 4 shows a reduction of the entire monologue. Tonicisations are indicated by a square around the bass note, with an additional rectangle around the bass and the treble if they are on the same pitch (making a stronger cadential point). Beams in the treble line indicate melodic motion, while slurs in the bass line indicate modal/harmonic progressions. Notes in parentheses are important to the line's contour but are not melodically or harmonically structural. Key line-ending and rhyme words are included above the treble staff, and overall subject matter is indicated below.

The monologue is best seen as a linear progression through Penelope's rapidly-changing psychological state. As with so much of his music, Monteverdi's setting of Badoardo's text demonstrates the canny dramatic sensibility that is at the root of so many practitioners' wish to engage with these operas. Though linear in its dramatic flow, as we have seen in the foregoing discussion of Badoardo's words as Monteverdi edited them, this particular monologue falls more towards the modal end of the stylistic spectrum of mid-seventeenth-century composition. The scene moves through various tetrachordal areas with

local-level tonicisations according to the progression of the text's narrative development and its poetic structure, rather than articulating larger-scale harmonic progressions which are more familiar in later operatic writing.⁴¹ Though such scenes could theoretically be read in tonal terms, to do so forces Monteverdi's music into a system which was far from established at the time he was writing.

A characterising feature of the first section of this monologue is a melodic progression on scale degrees 3-2-1, above 4-5-1 in the bass line; as can be seen in the voice-leading graph, this happens seven times in the first part of the monologue, where scale degree 1 (the modal centre) alternates between C, Bb, and D. At various other points in the first part, the F, G, and A regions are also tonicised, but the most frequent tonicisations occur on D. The treble 3-2-1 with bass 4-5-1 is of course not tonal in a Schenkerian sense, as the structural 3 above 4 in the bass (making a 7th chord) would not have a place in common-practice harmony, where 7ths are seen only as non-foundational added notes or as the result of suspensions. Though IV-V-I is a very common harmonic progression and it is arguable that Monteverdi was indeed thinking in harmonic terms at these points, the melodies remain more firmly in the modal-hexachordal sphere. Musicians can also choose to lean in either a more harmonic or a modal direction by playing either major or minor chords above certain bass notes, or by playing sharps or flats that may or may not have been mistakenly left out by the manuscript's copyist. In fact, the two recent editions of the score, by Alan Curtis and Rinaldo Alessandrini, often choose opposite solutions in their editorial figures, especially concerning the choice between major or minor harmonisations. Glen Wilson, with Pierre Audi, nearly always chooses the more minor or 'modal' solution, making the music sound

⁴¹ For comparison, some of Handel's multi-part cantatas, such as *La Lucrezia*, are similar to Monteverdi's dramatic monologues in their wide-ranging and psychologically-astute articulations of extreme emotions. But Handel works solidly within a tonal system; the psychological intensity comes from the characters' movements towards the limits of this well-established system. Monteverdi uses the qualities inherent in the style of modal writing which was familiar to him to demonstrate these emotions.

more antique and unfamiliar to modern audiences, consistent with Audi's production which is set in a nonspecific time and place.

The monologue begins with a repeated C minor chord, but when Penelope begins to sing the bass line moves quickly flatward to F, then Bb. Bb is the first solid tonicisation, as this is the first time Penelope herself cadences on the same note as the bass. This also serves to articulate the first two lines (a *settenario* and an *edecasillabo*) of the poetry, the exposition of the scene's subject ('of a miserable queen the torments never end').⁴² Monteverdi spins out this expositional section by repeating the text, allowing the two simple lines to cover a long flatward progression.

As soon as Bb has been established, a sudden shift in the bass to G demonstrates Penelope's quickly-changing mood as her thoughts shift from herself to her husband ('The awaited one does not return, and the years fly away'). A musical characteristic of Penelope throughout the opera is that she never remains in one tonal area for long. Her spirit is restless and the music reflects this, putting Penelope very much in the line of Monteverdi's previous lamenting operatic heroine, Arianna. This new section leads to a tonicisation of D, first reached from above in a way that could conceivably resolve back to G (especially if Penelope's C in 'fuggOno gl'anni' is rendered as a natural rather than a leading-tone-like sharp), then after the next line of verse ('the time of suffering is too long') in a more solid IV-V-I progression. This is the first tonicisation of what Eric Chafe argues is the monologue's 'home key'.⁴³ But D is destabilised straight away as the next line of poetry ('for those who live in anguish, time is lame') moves back to the C of the beginning of the scene. This D tonicisation is best heard as merely temporary, as it happens on the first line of a rhymed couplet (ending in 'troppo'), leading the listener to anticipate the second line

⁴² As their names indicate, a *settenario* has seven syllables and an *edecasillabo* eleven. This part of the monologue is in *versi sciolti* of changing line lengths, as was typical for non-strophic monologue or dialogue.

⁴³ Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* (New York, 1992), pp. 276-288.

(ending in 'zoppo'). At this point, therefore, C would seem to be the home region because Penelope has both begun and ended the first sub-section of the monologue in it. But yet again the ending was a false one, as Penelope carries on without much pause into the A region to sing her next rhymed couplet ('Deceptive hope, hopes no longer youthful, but old; to the aged and wronged you no longer promise peace and health. '), cadencing again on D with a IV-V-I progression (again with 3-2-1 in the vocal line). This D cadence is the true end of the first subsection.

The first part of the monologue has seen Penelope focusing on her lamentable period of waiting. In the second subsection she looks back on the cause of that waiting, the Trojan War. Where the first part consisted mostly of a series of tonicisations separated by sudden phrase modulations, this second part has more discursive flow. As Penelope's dismay mounts at recalling the war and its causes, Monteverdi heightens the tension by setting the text to faster rhythms, not allowing any harmonic points of respite throughout the long sentences of the poetry ('Twenty years have passed since the memorable day in which, with his abduction [of Helen], the proud Trojan [Paris] brought his exalted homeland to ruin. For that reason Troy burned, because impure Love, from a crime of ardor must purge himself with flames'). The telltale word 'ma' ('but') stops the flow in its path when Penelope's thoughts return to herself, saying 'but it is against reason that, for another's fault, innocent as I am, I am condemned, made an afflicted penitent'. Monteverdi effects this change in focus through the chromatic alteration of the cadential G, holding a G-sharp for three full bars pushing ever more intensely up to a cadence on A. For the first time since the beginning Monteverdi also has Penelope repeat herself, bringing herself back down in pitch and mood with 'l'afflitta, l'afflitta, l'afflitta penitente' to a half cadence on E. A resolving chord on A does indeed follow as Penelope returns to 'Wise and wary Ulisse' who suffers because of the base vanity of Helen. The talk of Troy also causes her to return to faster declamation and less stable

harmonic language. A long stepwise melodic descent of a sixth (Bb to D) leads to another solid tonicisation on D. A short moralising statement ('Every departure brings a hoped-for return') cadencing on Bb leads to the first of two refrains in the monologue, this one featuring a striking chromatic ascent, then a final 3-2-1 cadence back down to D. As we have seen, Harnoncourt's choice to cut much of the Trojan material retains the focus on Penelope but deprives the scene of much of its rhetorical development through the opposition of Penelope and Helen.

The rest of the monologue, after a short interjection by Ericlea (replaced by a passage for solo lute in Wilson and Audi's version), is quite different from much of the first part as it is characterised by elided cadences and less consistently directed melodic movement rather than full stops, phrase modulations, and the 3-2-1 melodic movement. Penelope has now warmed to her subject and her musical language becomes more discursive, less choppy, and frequently governed by easy-to-hear but not always goal-based upward and downward melodic motion. Now that she has introduced the reasons for her grief separately (waiting, suffering, Ulisse, Troy, return, Fate) she can play simultaneously with these various ideas. For example, she states: 'In my troubled soul I exonerate you [Ulisse], so your credulity is not tarnished, but I name Fate as the causer of my troubles. Thus in your defense against fate and heaven, I foment war and take risks'. Here in a single passage Penelope's troubles, her trust of Ulisse, her blaming of Fate, and her fear of war are all invoked, and Monteverdi mirrors this proliferation of ideas by eliding a section cadencing on D into one ending on F, not allowing the singer to pause. Penelope finally ends with a cadence on A, rather than on the C with which it begins or the D which is most frequently tonicised. The scene is therefore not a closed form (either aria or arioso) as Harnoncourt presents it, but a soliloquy which registers a change in character. At the beginning Penelope is in a c-minor rut, introduced by this repeated chord and seemingly in thrall to her endless and unchanging

torments, but as she sings through her troubles she reaches a new kind of resolution: she knows now why she suffers (because of the mistakes of Troy) and she knows that she must continue to wait. This resolution is tested by Melanto in Penelope's next scene.

By deleting Ericlea from this opening scene Audi and Wilson gain the ability to consistently maintain direct focus on Penelope, but they miss the opportunity for a reflected focus. This absence of reflection is consistent in Audi's production. One could argue that in the original libretto the gods, also omitted by Audi and Wilson, serve a similar function to Ericlea, acting as focalisers who focalise Ulisse even though he is absent from the stage during their extensive discussions about him. This is also consistent with Audi's more general anti-Baroque approach, as during the early seventeenth-century such reflections play a very important part in artistic representation (for example, *Don Quixote* reflects upon traditional chivalric narratives, the spectator is reflected as the royal family in Velazquez's painting *Las Meninas*, Giambattista Marino puts a reflexive and reflective mirror to all of nature's complexity in his poetry, and Monteverdi's 'Lamento della ninfa' is anchored by a ground bass but reflected back by a trio of male commentators⁴⁴). Audi's production represents a return to Platonic/Crocean idealism where signs should not be reflective, but should rather stand only for themselves. His characters (including the servant Melanto, as we shall soon see), are entirely responsible for their own focalisation, and are only rarely reflected through other focalisers. One could argue that this production is a misreading because it draws from an aesthetic background at odds with that of its original creators. But the transference of the opera from a Baroque to an Idealist (Modernist) aesthetic should be seen as a translation rather than a betrayal, a rereading rather than a misreading. Like Harnoncourt's productions, this one fits one kind of consistency criterion, but the

⁴⁴ For *Don Quixote* and *Las Meninas*, see Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 2002), pp. 3-18 and 51-55. For Marino, see James V. Mirollo, *The Poet of the Marvelous: Giambattista Marino* (New York, 1963).

destabilising factor of Harnoncourt's confusion of intent is absent here. Penelope's character arc from grief to rejoicing remains intact even though the mechanics of focalisation, and along with them various specificities of Penelope's characterisation, are significantly altered.

Penelope's monologue in this production makes for a very different viewing experience from Harnoncourt's version, or indeed any other which retains Ericlea. A Penelope with no surrounding court is very different from one with a faithful nurse (and sometimes, as in Peter Hall's Glyndebourne production, a whole retinue of female servants). At the beginning of the opera Audi's Penelope is alone against the world, with recourse neither to servants nor to the lush instrumental accompaniment she is often given. Wilson's minimal accompaniment is even starker than that of many other performances which use only continuo instruments in the scene. For the most part, only theorbo accompanies Penelope, with an added harpsichord and cello when Penelope mentions Troy (at 'A ragon arse Troia' and 'Ulisse è accorto e saggo'), with the added arpeggiation hinting at the flames mentioned in both of these lines. At the beginning, after a short opening *passaggio* on c, Penelope does not get a new chord until the f on her first 'dolente'; she is literally alone for the first line of the monologue. In addition, Wilson makes most of the internal cadence points minor, without the *tièrce de Picardie* that is usually added, making the scene seem even starker. The opening of the second part of the monologue ('Non è dunque per me varia la sorte') is sung very quickly in one breath, indicating Penelope's dismay (and perhaps serving as word painting for the end of this subjection, 'sol per me non raccoglie un fiato solo'). The second refrain ('Torna, torna') is accompanied by all three instruments, but they play the chords *marcato*, negating its *arioso* character. This reading seems to be the opposite

from Harnoncourt's, emphasising the recitative character of the scene rather than its more aria-like components.⁴⁵

Many commentators would argue that this blatant and unapologetic unfaithfulness to Monteverdi and Badoardo is indeed a misreading in principle. But the goals of such critics are different from those of the directors, so different in fact that they and the directors find themselves stuck within a Lyotardian *différend*, where the two sides seem to be speaking different languages. Wendy Heller, in a review of the DVD releases of Audi's Monteverdi productions in *The Opera Quarterly*, makes the opinion of the critics' side explicit.⁴⁶ She says that there is an 'underlying discomfort' born of 'unnecessary or careless cuts, poorly translated subtitles, misreadings of music and text, and stage gimmicks that so absorb the attention of our students that they forget to listen'.⁴⁷ That discomfort, rather than being an unfortunate outcome of lack of knowledge, is purposeful. The audience is not supposed to just listen and learn, but should rather engage in critical dialogue with what is happening onstage. Heller's discussion of how Audi's version is at odds with the way the operas would have been performed and received in the seventeenth century is acute (that 'restraint, minimalism, and a focus on a few poignant objects replace the visual splendour that would have been part of daily life in the Mantuan court, as well as of Venetian opera experience'), but she sees the difference as evidence of Audi's misunderstanding of the operas rather than of his intelligent critical engagement with them.⁴⁸ For Heller and many other musicologists, the only correct version of the opera is the one expressly indicated in the sources. Yet the

⁴⁵ For comparison, Rinaldo Alessandrini, William Christie, and Gabriel Garrido all use multiple lutes and harpsichords, in addition to more sustaining instruments: Alessandrini uses the cello much more frequently than Wilson, while Christie favours a lirone and Garrido a chamber organ. None of these have any historical justification for use in mid seventeenth-century Venetian opera.

⁴⁶ 'Venice without the Carnival: Pierre Audi's Monteverdi Cycle on DVD', *The Opera Quarterly* 24:3-4. pp. 293-306.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 296.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 299.

varied nature of the source material itself undermines this argument: the counter-argument would state that because there was no ‘final’ version of the opera in the seventeenth century we need not require such a version today. Audi’s production, as removed as it is from seventeenth-century aesthetics and in spite of its questionable Platonism, is a convincing dramatic experience. Though his Penelope has no Ericlea and has an antagonist in Melanto (as we will see below), she remains a convincing and rounded dramatic character, though more in the modernist vein of the heroine of a Bergman film than as part of the complex theatrical patchwork implied in the seventeenth-century source material.

III. Penelope and Melanto

Turning now to Penelope’s relationship with her servant Melanto, it is important to be familiar with the nature of this character in the *Odyssey* and in Badoardo’s libretto in order to understand how directors have reread Melanto’s role. In the *Odyssey*, Melantho is a disloyal and ungrateful servant to Ulysses and Penelope. She sleeps with the suitors, most frequently with Eurymachus, yet she is one of Penelope’s favourite maids, treated almost like a daughter. When Ulysses kills the suitors, Telemachus hangs her and the other maids. In Badoardo’s libretto, Melanto’s role is somewhat less clear. Her first scene (III in the above schematic of scene-complexes) is with Eurimaco (who, unlike his namesake Eurymachus, seems not to be a suitor), and consists mostly of small closed-form arias and duets setting love poetry typical of the mid-seventeenth century. This is a stark contrast in form and content to Penelope’s preceding monologue, which as we have seen is a lament cast mostly in free recitative. There is a variation between the draft libretto and the opera as Monteverdi sets it that needs to be mentioned: in Badoardo’s draft, there is implied a ban on love for everyone in Ithaca until Penelope either takes another husband or regains Ulisse. Since

Melanto is in love with Eurimaco, it is in her interest to convince Penelope to love again. For unknown reasons the composer chose not to set the lines in this duo scene which indicate this complication, so that in the opera as it appears in the manuscript score Melanto's only explicit motivation is to help her mistress be happy. In either case, Melanto ends the scene with the difficult task of convincing Penelope to love one of the suitors. It is not explicit in the libretto whether Melanto is actually a servant, but the character and her music, much of it in triple time, fit the stock figure of the young servant, so it can be implied that this is who Badoardo and Monteverdi meant her to be. We shall see, though, that the character type has not always been presented in this way on stage. Eurimaco's role is even less clear in the opera. He never says that he is a suitor to Penelope (as he is in Homer), but only that he loves Melanto, though in the opera he does act as a co-conspirator with the suitors against Telemaco and the disguised Ulisse.

We next see Melanto as she tries to convince Penelope to accept a suitor (scene-complex VI), and it is on this scene that I will focus. She says first that Penelope is not being wise to expect love from the dead, and that her beauty is being wasted on a dead man, and she then sings a short seductive triple-time refrain, 'Ama dunque, ché d'Amore dolce amica è la Beltà' ('Love, then, for Beauty is the sweet friend of Love'). Penelope gruffly dismisses Love as frivolous and ever-changing, and Melanto replies that one tempest on a changing sea should not make one give up sailing forever. Penelope has the last word, that her suffering has destroyed her capacity for love.

Melanto has a further scene with Eurimaco, where she tells him that she was unable to convince Penelope (scene-complex IX). They contrast their optimism with Penelope's pessimism, and decide to love each other anyway. Melanto's final scene, with Penelope after Ulisse has killed the suitors but before he has revealed his true identity (part of scene-complex XV), seems less necessary to the overall story of the opera than the others. Because

of this, and its short length, it is often omitted in productions. Yet it provides a somewhat more nuanced view of both characters. Melanto begins the scene asking Penelope who it is that has caused all this trouble by killing the suitors. At first she seems sympathetic to Penelope, upset because the mysterious intruder has made her sorrows worse: now she seems to have lost all hope. Rather than trying to answer Melanto's question, Penelope simply says that she is preparing new tears. Melanto replies that troubles seem to fall harder on royalty than on others. Penelope answers with another non sequitur, saying that the suitors perished even though they asked Heaven for salvation. Melanto then becomes upset with Penelope (perhaps justly, since the queen does not seem to be listening to her) and says that she ought to be angry and punish the murderer. Penelope responds that she is too numb with grief to think of punishment, and the scene ends, as does Melanto's presence in the opera.

I will examine the first scene between Penelope and Melanto, I.viii (scene-complex VI), in three productions, first in a version that agrees with the traditional mistress-servant/helper interpretation of their relationship (directed by Adrian Noble), then in one that alters that interpretation slightly (directed by Pier Luigi Pizzi), and finally in a staging that reads very much against the traditional grain (directed by Pierre Audi, whose interpretation of Penelope we have already seen to be radically different from the seventeenth-century's). Again, in this scene the servant Melanto has taken it upon herself to convince Penelope to accept one of the suitors:

PENELOPE:

Donate un giorno, o Dei,
contento a desir miei.

Grant a day, o gods,
auspicious to my desires.

MELANTO:

Cara amata Regina
avveduta e prudente,

Dear beloved Queen,
cautious and prudent,

prudente per tuo sol danno sei.
 Men saggia io ti vorrei.
 A che sprezza gl'ardori
 de' viventi Amatori
 per attender conforti
 dal cenere de' morti?
 Non fa torto chi gode a chi è sepolto.
 L'ossa del tuo marito,
 estinto, incenerito,
 del tuo dolor non san poco, né molto.
 E chi attende pietà da' morti è stolto.
 La fede e la costanza
 son preclare virtù.
 Le stima Amante vivo e non l'apprezza,
 perch'è de' sensi privo,
 un huom che fu.
 D'una memoria grata
 s'appagano i defunti.
 Stanno i vivi coi vivi in un congiunti.
 Un bel viso fa guerra.
 Il guerriero costume al morto spiace,
 ché non cercan gli estinti altro che pace.
 Languisce sotto i rigori
 de' tuoi sciapiti amori
 la più fiorita età.
 Ma vedova beltà di te si duole,
 ché dentro ai lunghi pianti
 mostri sempre in acquario un sì bel sole.
 Ama dunque, ché d'Amore
 dolce amica è la beltà.
 Del piacer il tuo dolore
 saettato caderà.

PENELOPE:

Amor è un idol vano,
 Amor è un vagabondo nume,
 all'incostanze sue non mancan piume.
 Del suo dolce sereno
 è misura il baleno. Un giorno solo
 cangia il piacer in duolo.
 Sono i casi amorosi
 di Tesei e di Giasoni, ohimè, son pieni
 d'incostanza e rigore,
 pene e morte e dolore.
 Dell'amoroso Ciel splendori fissi
 san cangiar in Giasoni anco gl'Ulissi.

you are prudent to your detriment.
 I would like to see you less sage.
 Why scorn the ardour
 of living lovers
 and await comfort
 from the ashes of the dead?
 He who enjoys does no wrong to the buried.
 The bones of your husband,
 dead, reduced to ashes,
 know neither little nor much of your sorrow.
 Whoever awaits pity from the dead is a fool.
 Faith and constancy
 are noble virtues.
 A living lover appreciates them, and not,
 because he is deprived of his senses,
 a man who is no more.
 Through grateful remembrance
 are the dead appeased.
 The living should be united with the living.
 A lovely face causes war.
 Warlike conduct displeases the dead,
 for they seek nothing but peace.
 Languishes under the rigours
 of your insipid love
 your most blossoming age.
 But widowed beauty mourns for you,
 and behind endless tears
 always shows such a beautiful Acquarian sun.
 Love, then, for Love's
 sweet friend is beauty.
 In pleasure your sorrow
 will fall beneath his arrows.

Love is a vain idol,
 Love is a roaming god,
 whose inconstancy lacks not wings.
 His serene delight
 lasts only a flash. In a single day
 pleasure changes to grief.
 The tales of love
 of Theseus and Jason, alas, are full
 of inconstancy and harshness,
 grief and death and pain.
 The gleaming shafts of the amorous heavens
 can change even a Ulysses into a Jason.

MELANTO:

Perché Aquilone infido
turbi una volta il mar,
distaccarsi dal lido
animoso nocchier non dèe lasciar.
Sempre non guarda in Ciel trova una stella.
Ha calma ogni procella.
Ama dunque...

Just because the faithless north wind
once disturbs the sea,
should the keen sailor
never leave the shore?
There is not always a dark star in the sky.
Every tempest is followed by calm.
Love, then...

PENELOPE:

Non dèe di nuovo amar
chi misera penò,
torna stolta a penar chi prima errò.

He must not love again
who has suffered misery.
Once erring, only a fool returns to suffering.

The first production to be analysed, directed by Adrian Noble for the Aix-en-Provence Festival in 2002 and conducted by William Christie, does not problematise the traditional actantial model of the drama. Noble is best known as a Shakespeare director and he carries Shakespeare's depth of character into Monteverdi's opera; Noble's operatic characters are therefore more akin to Walter Felsenstein's 'singing Menschen' than to mere stock operatic figures.⁴⁹ The director's hand is very much in evidence, as there is much more happening on stage than what has been called the old 'park and bark' style of opera performance where singers stood centre stage and made little attempt to communicate character. This production places the focus squarely on the characters, as the stage set consists only of three walls and a sandy floor, and no props clutter the small stage of the theatre in Aix-en-Provence. Soft stone colours and the sand on the stage imply a Mediterranean setting (see Video 1).⁵⁰

The excerpt to be examined contains the crux of the scene, the second half of Melanto's first speech in the above translation (starting with 'd'una memoria grata'): first Melanto tries making Penelope see the delight of new love. Then she attempts another approach, saying that Penelope should be warlike with love and conquer it, and she finally

⁴⁹ Manuel Brug discusses Felsenstein, who is often credited with inventing *Regietheater*, and his *Personenregie* in *Opernregisseure Heute* (Hamburg, 2006), pp. 39-41.

⁵⁰ Video examples appear on the accompanying DVD.

tries seduction and sings her short aria about love's charms. At the beginning of the excerpt we see Melanto kneeling before Penelope in a position of servitude. Penelope's pained facial expression during Melanto's description of new love implies that Penelope wants to agree with what Melanto is saying, but that she cannot because her faith in Ulisse's return is too great. During the aria, Penelope smiles wistfully, as if enjoying Melanto's simple emotion at the same time as lamenting that she cannot enjoy it herself. Noble and the singers help the audience perceive Melanto and Penelope's servant-mistress relationship through their body language and spatial proximity to each other. Even though Penelope does not sing in this section of the scene, Noble still makes her an active participant in the unfolding of the drama. Her reactions to Melanto's words assure her place in the dramatic unfolding of the scene, and the fact that Melanto directs her words and gestures to Penelope keeps her as the main focus. Though a clearly hierarchical relationship is staged here, in line with the traditional actantial model of the drama (see Figure 3, noting Melanto's presence among the 'helpers'), the two women do seem to care about each other. This makes their interactions more engaging for the audience, and enriches each of the characters' trajectories. Still, in Noble's production Melanto acts as a focaliser for Penelope, rather like Eriolea in the previous scene. Our focus is more on Penelope's grief and steadfastness than on Melanto's plight. Because Melanto is seen to care about Penelope's well-being, the audience cares about her as well.

Unlike Noble, in his 2009 production of the opera for Madrid's Teatro Real Pier Luigi Pizzi rereads the relationship between Penelope and Melanto as one almost more as a friendship of equals than as mistress to servant. Here, Penelope's loom, as well as the shroud which she weaves and unweaves until Ulisse returns, is on stage, and Pizzi uses the props to bring the two characters together by blocking the scene around them. As Melanto begins her convincing-speech, she picks up the shroud and crosses the stage with it, wearing it as a

warrior-like tunic during the *concitato* section of her discourse. Penelope then wraps herself in it and lies on the wooden bed at the other side of the stage. The two wear similar costumes (also designed by Pizzi), each of a solid colour, though Melanto's dress is lower cut, suiting her more flirtatious character. Even though Melanto in this staging is not the servant stock-character, her actantial role remains basically the same as in Noble's production, as a helper to Penelope (Video 2).

To portray the relationship as one of equal friendship rather than hierarchy, Melanto's body language here is not deferential as it was in Noble's production. Though this Melanto also kneels at the beginning of her aria, she takes Penelope's hands as she does so, more a gesture of friendship. In the next verse of the aria, she stands behind Penelope and holds her shoulders, gently caressing her. These gestures of intimacy are strong symbols of a closer relationship between the two characters than that portrayed in Noble's production, yet the focus remains on Penelope. Melanto's gestures are all directed towards her mistress, directing the eye of the audience onto Penelope. The major difference between the two productions is that while Noble's Melanto serves merely to focalise Penelope, Pizzi's Melanto at times acts as a focus herself. She stands centre stage during her solo and sings straight out to the audience, rather than always to Penelope. This Melanto is therefore somewhat problematic in her actantial role. 'Helper' figures often transgress the boundaries of mere helpers to threaten the position of the protagonist during their scenes, even if not for the whole work. For example, Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare's play is clearly a 'helper' for her husband, but she is a strong enough character that she threatens his place as protagonist (and as male leader). There are diegetic dramaturgical reasons for this: the unstable actantial structure mirrors the play's plot structure and its subject of usurpation. Compare Lady Macbeth to Benvolio in *Romeo and Juliet*, a less problematic helper figure who is not so fully drawn, serving only as a focaliser for Romeo. Melanto, as we can see, can be read

alternately as a traditional helper, as in Noble, or as a potentially usurping one, as in Pizzi. Though not as influential to Penelope as Lady Macbeth is to her husband, this Melanto is more convincing because she is a stronger figure, capable of holding the stage on her own and (though briefly) taking Penelope's place. These two productions already show how different directors can make the same text mean very different things, though neither of them alters the text: they stage the words, and the music director (William Christie in both productions) conducts the music mostly as they appear in the 1640 score.⁵¹ But the third production I will examine, directed by Pierre Audi, takes the next step with Melanto, allowing a full usurpation of protagonist status.

As discussed above, Audi and Glen Wilson make many cuts in the opera and also rearrange scenes, tightening the dramaturgical structure by having fewer changes of location, and also putting into relief some scenes which are often lost in the overall production. One such scene is that between Penelope and Melanto. In fact, all four of Melanto's scenes become nodal in Audi's production, to the extent that Melanto becomes a protagonist in her own right, rather than simply a secondary character with the actantial function of focalising 'helper'. Audi restores the idea from Homer that no one in Ithaca can love until Penelope has taken a husband; we can sense this in the frustrated sexuality of Melanto and Eurimaco in their first scene as they claw each other in sexual angst and anger. This gives Melanto a strong motivation in her scene with Penelope: she has to convince her to love again, otherwise Melanto must be miserable. So instead of Melanto being Penelope's helper, in this version with Melanto as protagonist Penelope becomes Melanto's opponent, a hurdle she must overcome to reach her own goal. The opposition is even more apparent because

⁵¹ Both productions do tighten the end of the drama by omitting one scene in the final sequence of convincing Penelope that the supposed Ulysses really is her long-lost husband. In the original libretti and in the musical manuscript, the series of 'convincing-scenes' shows how strong is Penelope's resolve and constancy, the dominant traits which Tim Carter claims seventeenth-century audiences saw in the character. (See Tim Carter, "In Love's Harmonious Consort"? Penelope and the Interpretation of "Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria", p. 15.)

Penelope has no helper-figure in Ericlea. In the first half of the opera, before Eumete and Telemaco have taken the disguised Ulisse to the court, everyone is against Penelope, including Melanto.

A revised actantial model, Figure 5, shows both Penelope and Melanto as subjects. By cutting and rearranging scenes, as well as by staging Melanto's scenes in the way demonstrated here, Audi and Wilson create both a more complex and more centred dramaturgical structure. Figure 2, the schematic of the plot in Audi's production, shows the symmetry of the two characters in the narrative layout of their scenes.

In this production Melanto is sung by a tall singer (Monica Bacelli) who towers over Penelope, dominating her. Throughout the scene she holds Penelope intensely in her gaze, never looking away. She mocks Penelope with her comment about her beauty fading. The other two Melantos touched their Penelopes, Noble's to implore and Pizzi's to comfort, but Audi's Melanto entraps Penelope in her arms. Melanto is all harsh angles, mirrored by the stage set. It might be tempting to see Melanto's intense gaze on Penelope as simply focalising Penelope as in the other productions, but the intensity of the gaze directs the audience's attention to that gaze itself, rather than just to its object. In effect, we gaze at the gaze (Video 3).

William Christie, music director for Noble and Pizzi, chose to realise Melanto's part towards the more tonal side of the spectrum, while Wilson tends towards the modal, as with his treatment of Penelope's monologue. This is most obviously apparent in Melanto's cadence on 'la più fiorita età'. Christie (and the editions of both Curtis and Alessandrini) plays this as a tonal V-I cadence on D, with Melanto's C sharpened to make it a leading tone. Wilson directly follows the manuscript and leaves the C natural, resulting in a more modal cadence v-i (he again avoids the tierce de picardie above the D in the bass). Wilson's Melanto, Monica Bacelli, also slows down into the cadence and sings it softly, making it

seem less happy. The brief use of triple time seems less like a spontaneous outburst of happiness as Melanto thinks about beauty, but rather a like taunt to Penelope for her fading youth.

In the previous two productions, Melanto and Eurimaco are able to share in the general rejoicing at the end of the opera, but with Audi they do not end so well. Consistent with Melanto and Penelope being in opposition, Telemaco, as Penelope's helper, goes so far as to kill Melanto and Eurimaco along with the suitors: they are all opponents of Ulisse and Penelope and therefore get their just desserts. That is actually what happens in Homer as well, but Melanto there is not so fleshed-out a character; rather, she is only a cipher and represents the stock character of the ungrateful servant. So even by taking only what Monteverdi and Badoardo wrote, Audi has created a different character, and in so doing has changed the plot of the opera. While Noble and Pizzi's productions employ the psychologically-astute acting styles that have become de rigueur in contemporary opera production along with high standards of musicianship to show that seventeenth-century music drama can make sense and be engaging to a modern audience, Audi takes an exemplar of 'Baroque' art and transforms it into a Modernist piece with an internal structural and narrative symmetry lacking in the original.

As we have seen above, many critics and musicologists cry foul with this sort of production, saying that modern directors are betraying the intentions of the works' creators. On a purely factual level the point is valid: even though we cannot be sure of Monteverdi's and Badoardo's intentions, Audi is very clearly putting something on stage that neither could have conceived of, something one could have never seen in seventeenth-century Venice. This attitude, which W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley call the 'intentional fallacy', and which Richard Taruskin has popularised in historical musicology, has been problematised to great

extent, but it is striking how strong it has remained in some quarters of musical discourse, especially regarding opera criticism.⁵²

In actuality, all the evidence we have from the seventeenth century points to operatic texts being as fluid then as directors are finding them now. Many of the manuscripts that have come down to us of 17th-century Venetian opera are palimpsests, showing manifold layers of additions, cuts, transpositions, and revisions. In revivals, or perhaps even during performance runs, scenes and act-breaks could be rearranged to fit the needs of whoever was singing the opera, and whatever the audience's expectations might be. For example, while transforming *Ulisse* from a three-act opera into a two-act opera (as all three of these productions do) might at first seem extreme, Monteverdi probably composed it as a five-act opera, which was then altered to three acts during rehearsals in order to fit a developing convention to have only two intervals. When the opera is staged in two acts today, the interval usually comes after what was act two in the five-act structure. It is split in this manner to fit the current context which favours a single interval in opera productions, so the change is not actually as drastic as it first may seem and is carried out for the same reasons that prompted Monteverdi's contemporaries to make their own decisions.

Audi's consistently serious approach to the opera puts it more in the aesthetic world of Ingmar Bergman's chamber films than that of the seventeenth-century theatre, though all of the productions examined are self-consciously 'art' in its twentieth-century modernist definition where in the seventeenth century the opera would have been placed more firmly in the field of entertainment. Pizzi's is in fact the only one of the productions discussed in this chapter that employs more than a little humour, emphasising the suitors' pomposity to comical extremes. The humour inherent in other scenes of the opera, especially those of the

⁵² Wimsatt and Beardsley's article, 'The Intentional Fallacy', first appeared in 1946 and was revised in their *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, 1954). Taruskin's most succinct discussion appears in 'The Pastness of the Present and the Presence of the Past,' in *Text and Act*, esp. pp. 97-100.

parasitical Iro, are generally not played for laughs in modern productions, though Pizzi again makes an exception. Audi's Iro is a repulsive and grotesque figure to be pitied, and his solo scene after the slaughter leads to an extremely dark series of scenes in which all hope for Penelope seems lost.⁵³ Even Noble's lighter Iro ends his scene in dejection and misery. Though not consistent with a seventeenth-century aesthetic, the darkness of Audi's final act makes the reconciliation between Penelope and Ulisse extraordinarily powerful, helped by an intensely-felt performance by his Penelope, Graciela Araya, that could fit firmly into the mould of twentieth-century women in modernist drama.

Though Noble and Pizzi do not restructure the text, all three of these productions are brought together by the desire to create scenographic unity via textual fluidity. Even in Noble's and Pizzi's productions, unit sets and a seamless flow from location to location make the opera approach the aesthetics of twentieth-century drama rather than hearkening back to the diffusion of effects that was so necessary in the seventeenth century. These productions are very effective pieces of unified music theatre, but audiences should realise that what they are seeing is very different from what their seventeenth-century counterparts would have experienced, though not always in such an obvious way as Audi's more direct Modernist appropriation. Historical knowledge should enrich performance, not straightjacket it. Clearly, Badoardo and Monteverdi's text, like that of many operas, can hold all of these various and sometimes contradictory meanings. All of the productions I have discussed are compelling to watch because they engage with the text, rather than unproblematically placing it on stage. Nonetheless, there is no doubt in any of these directors' minds that they are presenting *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* by Monteverdi and Badoardo rather than a new collaborative art-work. Authority in performance is not the same as authorship: though the

⁵³ As staged today, the scene nearly always ends with Iro's suicide and this is how most scholars read it, but I have yet to find any indication in the libretto that Iro should kill himself at the end. He does say 'voglio uccider me stesso' at one point, but this need not be taken literally and could simply be comic exaggeration.

directors present these productions with a convincing authority, the authorship of the work is never in question. It is up to these directors to realise the fluid field of potentialities indicated in the source material. The next chapter will turn to singers in Monteverdi's operas, specifically *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and will examine their own place and authority within the current operatic soundscape.

Chapter Four

Singing Ottavia: Between Early Music and Opera

One component of contemporary opera performance that is often overlooked in musicological discourse is the style of singing in which it is performed. Along with other ‘practical’ aspects of opera like stagecraft, design, and acting, the examination of singing has most often been the domain of music critics and pedagogues, rather than musicologists.¹ Listening to real singers sing Monteverdi’s operas (rather than simply telling them how to sing his music) is a necessary endeavour in order to gain the whole picture of Monteverdi’s stage history, and can be used as a background against which to examine the more general cultural undercurrents and developments of both the early music movement and the current practice of operatic performance. After an overview of the history of singing practices within the twentieth-century early music movement and their application to opera, I shall examine in detail a series recordings of Ottavia’s monologue ‘Addio Roma’ from *L’incoronazione di Poppea* as a representative sample of the changes in Monteverdi singing over the last fifty years. In early music singing in general, and in Monteverdi’s operas in particular, we will see an increasing pluralism of influence and a more liquid concept of how Monteverdi’s music ‘ought’ to sound.

Two main currents of performance practice serve as points of departure for a consideration of singing in these operas: opera singing and early music singing. Current performance practice in Monteverdi opera can be seen as a synthesis of these two styles.

Though related, these two types of singing have their own specific histories, and each needs

¹ An exception is research into historical singing treatises, though this is generally confined to technical consideration of performance practices rather than performance history. The goal of such research is usually pedagogic: to inform modern performances of early music rather than to describe them. For example, see the chapters on voice in Howard Meyer Brown and Stanley Sadie’s edited volumes *Performance Practice* (London, 1989), and Martha Elliott’s *Singing in Style: A Guide to Vocal Performance Practices* (New Haven, 2006).

to be described in turn. Singing Monteverdi's operas as 'opera' is influenced by the history and traditions of opera singing, but singing these works as 'early music' is influenced by the history of early music singing, which itself is influenced in very large part by choral singing, especially in Britain. Because solo singing practices in early music have their origins in choral singing, an excursion into that field will also be necessary. These 'operatic' and 'early music' styles, as we shall see, are not always compatible and the differences between them have led to various complications in performance.

Where the two previous chapters focused on the authority of the stage and music directors in forming the staged version of a Monteverdi opera, here the authority of singers and the voice in opera production comes into discussion. One might posit that as directors have assumed greater authority in opera performance, singers have relinquished some of their own authority: the singer is no longer the sole centre of attention, and must share the spotlight with the director (who usually gets the privileged final bow at an opening night). But what is actually happening is more complex. By taking ownership of her character, the singer-actor gains authority over how that character is presented, and whom it represents. Usually this conception comes out of a collaboration with the stage director; it would be as rare today for a singer to simply do exactly as her director says as it would be for her to 'park and bark' (stand centre stage and just sing the notes). The performers and directors have all added their own authorities to that of the abstract notion of the musical text as represented by the deceased composer. 'Monteverdi' (the concept and the text) is still powerful on stage, however, as many audience members will be initially attracted to an opera by its title and composer. Not always reflecting the actual process of staging the opera, the marketing departments of opera companies have a choice in the elements they choose to emphasise in selling the opera to their audiences. While a century ago a star singer alone could draw an audience, today we witness a profusion of marketing tactics: an opera

company might present a lesser-known opera as a star vehicle, or might bring in a well-known cinema or theatre director, or can bank on the popularity of a familiar work.² Though the language of marketing departments may imply otherwise, authority in opera production today is shared openly between text, singer, stage director, and music director, and it has become increasingly difficult to isolate what the singer does from what happens in the rest of the opera house. This fluid poiesis is especially apparent in early opera today because there is no single predominant marketing model for these lesser-known and often niche works. An opera company must draw on whatever marketing opportunities they can find, often using the pull of a ‘modern premiere’ as much as the presence of a star singer, conductor, or director. A study of Ottavia’s modern vocal history will provide a useful case to show how this poietic shift has affected singing itself in early opera.

I. Singing Monteverdi as Opera

At least until the 1970s opera singers, whether singing early opera, the mainstream Classical-Romantic repertoire, or avant-garde works, sang in what is often referred to as the ‘bel canto’ style. Some use this term to apply only to the style of singing in early nineteenth-century Italian opera and insist that it died out with Verdi and Wagner, but evidence from singing treatises shows that it was born earlier and many scholars of singing hold that it lasted later.³ Though Wagnerian singing was demonstrably somewhat different from earlier

² New York’s Metropolitan Opera demonstrates the profusion of these varied types of marketing. In the 2010-2011 season, Richard Strauss’s *Capriccio* is presented as a ‘diva showcase’ for soprano Renée Fleming, Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* is the prestigious Met debut of conductor Simon Rattle, the company’s new *Ring* cycle is presented foremost as the work of theatre director Robert Lepage, and Puccini’s *La Bohème* is trusted to sell itself as ‘the world’s most popular opera’. <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/season/index.aspx>, accessed 31 March 2011.

³ Ellen Harris gives a good overview of these early treatises in ‘Voices’, *Performance Practice: Music after 1600* (London, 1989), pp. 110ff. Modern pedagogical treatises draw heavily on bel canto, like the highly used series by Richard Miller, e.g. *The Art of Singing* (Oxford, 1996), p. 103: ‘The two poles of bel canto are essential to a complete vocal technique’.

practice, the base of good technique remained the legato line and supported breath that were the central tenets of bel canto, as is borne out by the evidence of early recordings.⁴ This legato-based technique is still taught to aspiring opera singers today.⁵

It was not until after the revival of early instruments was well underway that performers and scholars turned their attention to singing techniques in early opera. It is more difficult to know about the history of singing because there is no tangible source of evidence: no ‘instrument’ has survived. But it is obvious that technique has changed. Evidence comes from two places in particular: written texts (the notated vocal music as well as treatises on singing) and the acoustic aspect of performance venues. It would be impossible to sing what Caccini asks for in *Le nuove musiche* using orthodox modern bel canto technique: the emphasis on *trilli* and *groppi* requires a great deal of vocal agility, especially in lower parts of the range, which is not commensurate with the bel canto emphasis on legato and upper-voice clarity. The strongest and loudest part of the range in bel canto must be the top: any Rossini or Verdi aria will place the musical climax on a long-held high note. Earlier dramatic music usually requires agility throughout, as well as the more direct expression of textual meaning rather than the retention of a pure vocal ‘line’. A legato technique is also necessary for vocal projection in modern performance venues, which are much larger than those of the past. The early Venetian theatres had only a few hundred seats and, constructed almost entirely from wood, would have been quite resonant. New York’s Metropolitan Opera House seats almost four thousand, a vast space to fill. We also know that Venetian orchestras were small, with as few as five players. Compare this to the 80-plus Wagner orchestra, also remembering that modern instruments are louder than their ancestors. A singer following

⁴ The study of evidence given by early recordings is a major growth area in musicology. A foundational study was Robert Philip’s *Early Recordings and Musical Style* (Cambridge, 1992) and more recently the AHRC-funded Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM) has led research.

⁵ Any number of modern singing manuals show this, from Richard Miller’s more scholarly ones to *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Singing*, Phillis Fulford and Michael Miller (New York, 2003).

Caccini's instructions at the Met would barely be heard beyond the front row, while a Met soprano singing at the Teatro San Cassiano, the first of Venice's public opera houses, would sound impossibly muddy and overloud. One can glean from close analysis of the treatises of the time that the most striking change in technique, and the one which results in the greatest difference in the sound produced, is that in the seventeenth century the larynx was generally raised when singers sang higher, rather than lowered as it has been in classical singing since approximately the late 18th century (the practice was eventually codified in Manuel García's treatise of 1847).⁶ Early opera singers would have therefore sounded somewhat more like modern folk or musical theatre singers than modern opera singers. This all points to the conclusion that Monteverdian singing was quite different from the bel canto singing of later centuries, presenting a challenge to opera singers trained in bel canto.

Looking at the notes themselves also makes this apparent. The speed at which singers were often required to sing the text is very difficult to maintain while trying to project in a large space and retain the musical line. Monteverdi employed trains of semiquavers in much of his music, from narrative sections of the *Combattimento di Trancredi e Clorinda* to the torturous runs of 'Possente spirto' in *Orfeo*.⁷ More important is the fact that the bel canto style developed when triadic harmony had become the predominant discourse of art-music composition: in bel canto the voice floats over the smoothly changing harmonies. As we saw with Penelope's monologue in the previous chapter, modern harmonic voice leading is sometimes evident in Monteverdi's music, but he was writing mostly within a system of

⁶ Wistreich, Richard. 'Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique' in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge, 2000) p. 180. That a different kind of vocal placement was used is not provable beyond a doubt (due to vague descriptions in the treatises), but the work of Wistreich, Ellen Harris, and others makes a very strong case.

⁷ Early recordings of 'Possente spirto' show how difficult it is to sing this music in bel canto style.

modal, rather than triadic, harmony.⁸ Monteverdi's dramatic music is music of rupture: his characters often move quickly from one idea to another and the harmonic language follows accordingly. Both Penelope's opening monologue and Ottavia's 'Addio Roma', to be discussed in the next section of this chapter, are a prime example of this discursivity. Singing Monteverdi in bel canto style is usually incompatible with this type of musical discourse, as in the bel canto repertoire the vocal line is driven by harmony rather than vice-versa.

Opera impresarios and singers today therefore have a challenge: to find a balance between historically-informed singing and a style that will still carry through a large opera house. For early Monteverdi redactors, the issue was moot. It was *de rigueur* that singers would sing in the bel canto style because they were not taught any alternative way, so it was up to the arrangers of the musical texts to make the rest of the opera fit around that vocal style. Hence the large-orchestra versions of Monteverdi's operas by Ernst Krenek, Carl Orff, and Erich Kraack. By the 1960s and 70s, musical directors like Rudolf Ewerhart and Nikolaus Harnoncourt were making such major changes in the orchestra pit that the orthodox bel canto style no longer seemed to match. With a few exceptions, the most common compromise at this early stage was for the singers to simply undersing. As we shall see, the singing on early 'historically informed' recordings like Rudolf Ewerhart's 1962 *Poppea* and Alan Curtis's from 1964 can sound rather anaemic today.

Compromises must also be made in the style of acting currently used by opera singers when they perform earlier works. Singers today are expected to 'act' instead of 'parking and barking'; acting has become an important part of singers' training and critics frequently look for what is usually called a 'convincing dramatic performance'. This generally implies a naturalistic approach, as the audience is meant to suspend disbelief that the singer is not the

⁸ There is a very large scholarly literature on this topic, including Susan McClary, *Modal Subjectivities* (Berkeley, 2004); Massimo Ossi, *Divining the Oracle* (Chicago, 2003); Silke Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition* (Oxford, 1991); etc.

same as the character. The drive for naturalism is usually taken for granted in current opera criticism, especially in Britain and the major operatic centres of America, and non-naturalistic performances are valued negatively. This valuation comes from acting practices in the twentieth-century dramatic theatre, heavily influenced by Stanislavsky's 'Method' as Americanised by Lee Strasberg, Stella Adler and others in New York's Actors Studio and Group Theatre in the 1930s and 40s.⁹ Though few opera singers could truly be classified as method actors, the Method's emphasis on displaying emotions in a way that convinces the audience that they are real emotions rather than self-consciously acted ones can be carried over into the emotionally-charged realm of opera. Yet for much of opera's history such naturalism has not had a place in the opera house. Until the twentieth century, few spectators seemed to care about 'acting' as we know it today. Nineteenth-century ears were more focused on the beauty of the voice, and only a minimum of skill was required or expected in conveying a character. George Bernard Shaw's famous dictum that the best way to see an opera is to sit at the back of a box, put your feet up on a chair, and close your eyes has mostly been replaced by the desire to see opera as theatre; as director Patrice Chéreau states, 'we want to see this thing that exists nowhere else, the thing you can only find in the theatre: people living on a stage who represent an action and who tell us a story with sentiments and emotion'.¹⁰ Maria Callas, especially in her collaborations with director Luchino Visconti, and other internationally-famous singers of her generation are often credited with bringing naturalistic acting to the opera house.¹¹

Though even less information has survived about acting style in early opera than about singing style, sources such as descriptions of singers indicate that seventeenth-century acting

⁹ David Krasner, 'Method Acting', *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London, 2000), pp. 129-150.

¹⁰ quoted in Joshua Jampol, *Living Opera* (Oxford, 2010), p. 36.

¹¹ I will return to Callas below in my discussion of Anna Renzi's acting.

was more presentational than naturalistic. Rather than demanding a tight connection between actor and character (where a Marlon Brando or a Robert DeNiro *becomes* his character through emotional identification) early modern audiences seemed to revel in the artifice of acting. I will expand upon this notion regarding Ottavia and the reception of the role's creator Anna Renzi later in this chapter, but for now suffice it to say that where today most theatre-, cinema-, and opera-goers want acting to seem to be a unification of actor and role, seventeenth-century spectators enjoyed refraction, seeing both simultaneously but still separately. As we will see in the next chapter, presentational acting styles, especially the Brechtian style, almost the opposite of Stanislavsky's Method, have been applied to Monteverdi's operas, but without much success. On the other hand, when a company uses a 'historically-informed' presentational acting style, as director Benjamin Lazar has attempted in operas by Landi and Lully, the results seem too alien to be a very useful exercise in historically-informed spectatorship.¹² The difference between the conditions under which the operas were written and current conventions of operatic acting present a significant challenge for today's opera singers, engendering the question of whether one can truly give a historically-informed performance concentrating only on vocal production and not the whole characterising apparatus. Ironically, the rich characterisation of Monteverdi's operas particularly invites a non-historically-informed 'Method' style. It is yet another indication of these operas' multivalency that they can fit so many aesthetic goals. Approaching Monteverdi's operas from the 'early music' side, however, entails a different attitude towards the voice. Rather than focussing on inner drama, the focus here is more on the outer qualities of tone quality and intonation.

¹² Lazar's productions of Landi's *Sant' Alessio*, Lully's *Cadmus et Hermione*, and Molière and Lully's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* attempt to be 'total theatre' in a seventeenth-century way, using historically-informed music, singing, acting, costume, makeup, set design, and lighting.

II. Singing Monteverdi as Early Music

Early music singing in Britain from the 1960s and 70s until today has often been led by former Oxbridge choral scholars and lay clerks, and even in solo repertoire these singers have tended to sing in the lighter choral style with choral (therefore non speech-like) RP vowels and the control of vocal tone required for choral blend.¹³ Practitioners of this style cannot strictly be considered a part of the ‘historically-informed performance’ movement because they draw upon a different tradition developed in the twentieth century by the likes of Boris Ord and David Willcocks at King’s College, Cambridge and Bernard Rose at Magdalen College, Oxford. Still, this style is most certainly a part of the ‘early music’ movement as a whole, as its international and cross-repertoire influence cannot be denied and the Anglican choral repertoire often falls under the ‘early music’ banner.¹⁴ Though not all of the well-known soloists in early music had their initial training in choral groups, the *stylistic* influence of choral singing on solo singing in the field is undeniable.

This English style remains dominant in early music performance, perhaps because of the well-oiled machine that is the English singing scene (one starts as a child in a cathedral choir, then one goes to Oxbridge as a choral scholar, and then joins one or many of the post-university groups, using these as a springboard to a solo career). The first early music groups of influential international standing who specialised in vocal music were English (as opposed to the frequent Continental bias for instruments), so the influence of this style has been wide. This certainly does not mean, however, that this English style has remained unchanged since the 1970s. A comparison of recordings by Harry Christophers’ choir The

¹³ c.f. John Potter, *Vocal Authority* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 116

¹⁴ A glance at the Trinity Term 2011 music list at Magdalen College, Oxford shows that about half of the repertoire is pre-Bach. It would be an interesting project to compare music lists from various decades to find how, if, and why proportions have changed.

Sixteen from the beginning of their career in the 1980s and from the past few years reveal major differences of style. In their version of Handel's *Messiah* recorded in 1986 they sound like a different choir from their 2008 recording (Music examples 1 and 2, respectively).¹⁵ The first entries of the chorus 'And he shall purify' allow one to hear each section in turn as well as the whole choir together. Generally the choir's diction is more pointed and precise in the more recent version and the phrases are somewhat more developed, helped by a more flexible approach to the rhythms, especially in the running quavers, and greater dynamic variation. In 1986 the quavers are exactly even, while in 2008 they are freer and less mechanical. The greatest difference in vocal production is in the soprano section, and it is generally sopranos who have most changed the way they sing over the past decades in early music, both in choirs and in solo work. In 1986 Christophers' sopranos constrain their vibrato, aiming for a bright, precise sound like the boys they were increasingly replacing in cathedral and chapel choirs. By 2008, no longer explicitly trained to sound like boys, they sing with freer vibrato, making a more active and interesting sound but losing some incisiveness and precision of tuning. The basses in 1986 sing with a more covered sound than their 2008 counterparts, who sing with a lighter, freer tone. The altos and tenors both sing with more ease in 2008 than in 1986. The general impression of the 1986 recording is of precision, while the 2008 approach is more discursive. The newer version sounds more like an ensemble of individuals than the earlier one, which presents a more blended (and slightly more accurately tuned) choir.

Though the dominant influence, Oxbridge did not have a monopoly on early music singing in England. John Potter claims that David Munrow, not part of the Oxbridge circuit but highly influential within it, advocated an instrumental approach to singing, urging his singers to use little vibrato and breaking the music into woodwind-like phrases with little

¹⁵ Music examples appear on the accompanying DVD. 1986: Hyperion Records 22019. 2008: Coro 16062.

regard for the text.¹⁶ Still, even Munrow did not make strong claims that his singers sang this music the way it was sung when first performed, being as concerned with difference from the twentieth-century norm as with historical accuracy.

For the real beginning of an expressly historically-informed singing practice we must turn to France's revival of French Baroque music, the protagonist of which was William Christie. Christie attempted to re-train his singers to learn to speak the text first, then to sing it retaining much of the experience of speaking.¹⁷ The emphasis in his musicianship is on discursiveness and text rather than on singing as we knew it, based on the bel canto 'line' and a pure choral sound. Where Oxbridge-trained English singers like Emma Kirkby tended to use 'choral' diction, a tighter throat position, and placement far forward in the 'mask' in solo singing, Christie's crop of French singers developed their diction and vocal style from dramatic speaking. While it has been asked whether this style is 'a French school of performance or a Christie one',¹⁸ historical evidence shows that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dramatic actors and opera singers did indeed share many facets of their interpretation of a role. Many of the leading figures in the French early music scene were trained by Christie at the Paris Conservatoire (including keyboardist-conductors and Monteverdi performers Christophe Rousset and Emmanuelle Haïm), but they are far from Christie clones.

Christie carries this style into the other repertoires he conducts, and the contrasts between 'French' and 'English' performances are especially acute in his recordings of early English music like Purcell's. Andrew Parrott's Taverner Consort's recording of Purcell's 'In the midst of life' is a textbook example of the 1980s English style: vibrato is kept to a

¹⁶ Potter, p. 117.

¹⁷ Bernard Sherman's interview with Christie in *Inside Early Music* (Oxford, 1997) goes into detail about this process.

¹⁸ Lindsay Kemp, 'Quarterly Retrospect,' *Gramophone* 71 (1993), p. 33.

minimum, tuning is almost electronically accurate, and rhythms are sung precisely as notated (Example 3).¹⁹ Christie's singers also use little vibrato in order to bring out the piece's many dissonant suspensions, but they tend to allow the sound to blossom with more vibrato at the end of long held notes and phrases (Example 4).²⁰ The Taverner Consort presents the piece as a unified entity in its dynamics, with global crescendi and decrescendi, while Christie's group takes each phrase as its own entity within the wider context of the whole piece. More recent English performances have more in common with Christie than Parrott, especially regarding freer vibrato, as we heard in the Sixteen's 2008 *Messiah* recording. Again, the greatest difference is between the sopranos. Christie's group represents the 'Continental' way of singing which had much more frequently used women on the top lines of choral music, while Parrot's sopranos replace the boys who would have sung in previous decades (and whom some still prefer today).

With modern performances of Monteverdi's vocal music it is difficult to speak of a specifically Italian style, as it was not until recently that Italians began performing his music with any consistency. Instead, the performance history is mostly one of the application of other dominant styles (most often the English or Continental early music styles) to his music.

It was also in France, but much earlier, that the first Monteverdi recording was made: the composer and teacher Nadia Boulanger was strongly committed to early music, especially Monteverdi, and issued a highly successful set of his madrigals in 1937. Though she did not record any excerpts from the operas, Boulanger's style and the voices she chose

¹⁹ Re-released as Virgin Veritas 0724356216426 *Purcell: Music for Pleasure and Devotion*. The solo singing on this disc is mostly in the same style.

²⁰ Virgin Classics 0094639514427 *Purcell: Harmonia Sacra and Divine Anthems*. As with the Parrott recording, the style of solo singing on the disc matches that of the consort singing. I have chosen to use choral examples here because the recordings are more directly comparable, and because they allow one to hear more than one voice type.

to sing this repertoire offers various parallels to later, independent developments. Her hand-picked ensemble was made up mostly of singers with idiosyncratic voices at varying distances from the operatic norm. The soprano Nymph in the 'Lamento della ninfa' is the Comtesse Marie-Blanche de Polignac (née Lanvin), opera singer and later fashion-designer (Example 5).²¹ Her voice is of the thin, bright quality with rapid vibrato that was typical of French sopranos of the time, somewhat like Rosa Ponselle's (though less weighty, and it would probably not have carried through a large auditorium). The trio of men (Hugues Cuenod, Doda Conrad, and Paul Derenne) sing in a similar style, and were among the first recognised specialists in early vocal music. There exists a common stereotype that singers who couldn't make a career as 'real' opera singers could turn instead to early music. Though never really true, this stereotype has been mostly disproved as singers and instrumentalists have shown high levels of excellence in these repertoires. It is true, though, that some singers, like Boulanger's, whose voices do not fit the norm of opera have shown aptitude for early music (though most of her singers found their main careers in art song). Emma Kirkby would not be able to manage Brünhilde or Kundry, and she would probably be the first to admit it.

Ironically, what is often presented as the most successful experiment in recreating early vocal production techniques, the modern revival of the operatic countertenor, has very little historical base. Countertenors as a rule did not sing in opera and were confined to church music before the twentieth century. High male roles were sung by castrati, as were female roles where women were not allowed on stage (as in Rome in the early eighteenth century). When castrati were not available they were usually replaced by women, and there are many examples from Handel's tenure in London of this practice.²² The first operatic part

²¹ Re-released on *Charpentier: Médée (excerpts)*, IDIS 6493 (2006).

²² Ellen T. Harris, 'Vocies,' *Performance Practice: Music after 1600* (London, 1989), pp. 110ff.

written specifically for countertenor was Oberon in Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, as late as 1960. Therefore the use of countertenors in roles such as Nerone and Ottone in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* has no purely historical basis and, though it is debatable how much castrati sounded like countertenors, is not much different in theory from transposing these parts down an octave for a tenor or baritone.²³ Although the only historically-informed way to deal with the current lack of castrati is to cast women in these roles, modern performance history shows that this historical ideal is rarely taken into account, as the performance history is full of all types of voices in castrato parts. The norms of gender representation on stage have tended to outweigh considerations of historically-informed casting, along with the desire for a variety of voice types and the economics of hiring a mixed-gender cast (especially in opera companies with a set roster of singers). I will return to these questions of staging gender in Monteverdi in Chapter Five.

John Potter, an early music singer himself, points out that there would be extra-musical problems if audiences were to demand that early music like Monteverdi's be sung in a fully non-compromising historically-informed style, with 'authentic' vocal production and without countertenors: it would 'put most professional early music singers out of a job and could have very serious implications for the social basis of western art music, which currently depends on a small number of people having access to elite skills'.²⁴ The pop musician Sting's 2006 album of Dowland lute songs, *Songs from the Labyrinth*, shows that this is true: though the album attracted a great deal of attention and was generally well-received, no other major pop stars have followed his route into early music and he has not revisited the

²³ There is a growing scholarly literature on castrati, most recently Roger Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani* (Cambridge, 2009). For the history of the countertenor, see Peter Giles, *The History and Technique of the Counter-Tenor: A Study of the Male High Voice Family* (Aldershot, 1994).

²⁴ Potter, p. 121.

repertoire.²⁵ This also holds for more recent classical music. The pop singer Björk performed Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* with Kent Nagano and by all accounts was very successful, but she refused to have the performance recorded because she saw herself as invading the territory of 'other singers'.²⁶ As with historical staging, the application of more historically-informed vocal production forces modern audiences to make a leap in their listening practice, unless the performance simply be heard as a novelty as Sting's Dowland was. Singers have again needed to find a compromise between the current norms of 'historically-informed' performance (however actually informed it may be by historical sources) and the truly historically-informed.

A final element of singing which has been problematised by performers involved in early music, especially opera, is that of language. Until after the Second World War most operas were performed in the language of the audience. Vincent d'Indy's premieres of all three of Monteverdi's operas with the Schola Cantorum were sung in French; Jack Westrup's performances of *Orfeo* and *Poppea* in Oxford in the 1920s were sung in English; Carl Orff's *Orfeo*, performed in various houses in Germany in the 1930s, was sung in German; Malipiero's *Poppea* for the Opéra Comique in Paris was sung in French. None of the critiques of these productions complain about this fact, or even mention it, other than to praise or find fault in the translation.

Since the Second World War, though, most opera companies have preferred to present operas in their original language. Some large western European companies including the

²⁵ A review from AllMusic.com concisely expresses the stakes of Sting's album, demonstrating the ubiquity of the enforced (and not historically accurate) dichotomy between pop and classical: 'It is the great divide between rock (and other traditions ultimately rooted in Africa) and the European tradition: speaking in generalities, the former prizes "noise" — sound extraneous to the pitch and the intended timbre of an instrument or voice — as a structural element, whereas in the latter it is strenuously eliminated. Sing's voice has plenty of "noise". The listener oriented toward classical music will object to its being there; the rock listener, noting that Sting is singing very quietly, may wonder why there isn't more of it'. (James Manheim, www.allmusic.com/album/songs-from-the-labyrinth-r858430/review.) This 'noise' is related to Barthes' 'grain', and it certainly appears in 'classical' music as well as 'rock', but of a different type.

²⁶ Nicola Dibben, *Björk* (London, 2009), p. 18.

English National Opera and the Komische Oper in Berlin (both of which have performed Monteverdi) are anomalies in their preference for using singing translations into English and German, respectively. This means that singers most frequently sing their roles in a foreign language, unless of course they share their native language with the opera's libretto. Along with naturalistic acting, another aspect of training that has become a standard part of singers' training is language education. These can be seen as two sides of the same coin: singers are expected to understand what they are singing and to be able to convey the meaning to audiences in order to have a more naturalistic result. The near-ubiquitous presence of supertitles in operas houses (even when the opera is in the audience's native language) means that audiences can themselves judge whether or not the singer is succeeding in that task.

This has also partly come about because of the increasing internationalisation of the opera world: it is much easier for singers to learn an opera text only once and then be able to perform it around the world. Since its beginnings in the 1960s the early music movement has taken advantage of this internationalisation as conductors have tended to handpick their performers from a wide international field. Internationalism is not entirely consistent, though. England has always had a relatively open music scene (dating all the way back to Handel), and just as Benelux has been a centre of international governance, the early music practitioners there have a strongly international outlook, but in France and, even more, Italy, the situation has been somewhat different. The French emphasis on French music has resulted in a greater percentage of French performers, though this is more out of convenience than as a result of any pro-French ideology. Most of William Christie's performers in French music have been French because of his convenient teaching position at the Paris Conservatoire, but his approach treats 17th- and 18th-century French as a foreign language

which must be mastered, even for native French-speakers.²⁷ The intonation patterns and pronunciation of Italian have changed less than those of French over the past four hundred years, and many conductors working in Italy have spoken quite strongly about attempting to employ native Italian speakers in their performances of Monteverdi's music. Still, the culture surrounding the texts Monteverdi set was vastly different from Italian culture today, and it is debatable whether one really is singing the same language. In *Inside Early Music*, Bernard Sherman juxtaposes interviews with two Italianists, Rinaldo Alessandrini and Alan Curtis, and one internationalist, Anthony Rooley.²⁸ Curtis, an American, is in a somewhat different position from Alessandrini, an Italian, and he notes that he demands 'from [his] singers better diction than [he] could produce [him]self'.²⁹ Curtis feels that an Italian can bring out connotations of the text that a non-native singer might miss, and that it is the conductor's job to provide an atmosphere conducive to bringing out those connotations, 'to hear subtle relationships (that are present or are added appropriately) even in the accompaniment, because everything should revolve around the text'.³⁰ Curtis's thoughts remain an ideal, and a glance at the personnel list of any of his Monteverdi recordings shows relatively few Italians.

Alessandrini, on the other hand, uses opera casts and madrigal ensembles that are almost entirely Italian. His reason for preferring Italians, though, seems due more to the fact that he was working in Italy at a time when there was little early vocal music and he wished to create an Italian answer to what was happening in England. The effectiveness of his approach (Iain Fenlon called his 1994 recording of the fourth book of madrigals 'the finest

²⁷ With his international training programme *Le jardin des voix*, Christie's approach has remained very much the same. He discusses this in an interview with Joshua Jampol in *Living Opera*, pp. 45-59.

²⁸ 'Singing Like a Native,' in Bernard Sherman, *Inside Early Music*, pp. 133-156.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 139.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 139.

recording of Monteverdi madrigals ever made³¹) is only partly due to his use of Italian singers. Though they clearly understand what they are singing about, it is their extroverted vocal production and their varied and expressive phrasing more than merely their diction that makes these performances unique. The text is of utmost importance to Alessandrini and his singers, and his approach is quite similar to William Christie's in French music. He says that 'before we rehearse the music, we try to identify a certain theatrical rhythm in the text with pronunciation, declamation and so on. After that we add the music'.³² Ironically, it is the non-Italian Curtis who is more concerned about authenticity in his singers' national backgrounds than the Italian Alessandrini, who is more concerned with training and uses Italian singers because of his music-making circumstances. Over the fifteen years since Sherman's interviews, early opera has become an even more international and inclusive field. A closer study of the recorded history of 'Addio Roma' will explore the practical implications of these developments.

III. Addio Roma

A comparison of seven representative recordings of Ottavia's monologue 'Addio, Roma' from *L'incoronazione di Poppea* will demonstrate the ways Monteverdian singing technique has changed over the past five decades, and will illustrate the narratives given above. First, though, a discussion of where and how the monologue fits into the opera and into Monteverdi's oeuvre as a whole will be necessary to situate its modern performances.

In the monologue the Emperor Nerone's wife Ottavia laments that she must go into exile from Rome, where she has lived all her life. Though only a few minutes in length, this

³¹ quoted in *ibid.*, p. 141.

³² *ibid.*, p. 143.

scene has always been seen as one of the highlights of the opera and as a test of the singer's powers of dramatic concentration. This makes it a particularly revealing example through which to examine more closely the changes in performance practice. 'Addio Roma' comes nearly at the end of the opera, being the penultimate or antepenultimate scene depending on the edition used (it follows or, more usually in performance, precedes Poppea's maid Arnalta's comic monologue in which she rejoices in her new status as lady-in-waiting to the new Empress). In all extant libretti, it comes before the maid Arnalta's solo, but in both scores it comes after. Alan Curtis suggests that this may have been a bow to the singer Anna Renzi, who wanted to avoid being upstaged by the comic singer performing Arnalta.³³ Most modern performances, and Curtis's edition, put Ottavia's scene first in accordance with the libretti, as it then comes directly after the scene in which Nerone has decided that Poppea will be his empress that very day.

At the 1643 premiere of the opera in Venice's Teatro Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Ottavia was sung by the soprano Anna Renzi.³⁴ One of the first true stars of opera, Renzi was hugely popular and even inspired a volume of poems written about her and her roles. These poetic accounts emphasise the verisimilitude of the emotions she conjured up in performance, and one mentions 'Addio Roma' specifically: 'Mentre in esilio al mar tu doni il pianto,/ Si ferma l'onda, e si raffrena il vento,/ Per coglier le tue perle, e 'l dolce canto'.³⁵ It is worth quoting Giulio Strozzi's description of her performance from the introduction to this volume at

³³ Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, ed. Alan Curtis (London, 1989), p. 223n.

³⁴ The textual history of *Poppea* is very complex, as none of the libretti or scores which have come down to us seems to relate directly to the first series of performances (with the possible exception of a libretto recently discovered in Udine). The two extant manuscript scores probably relate to a 1651 revival in Naples. Renzi likely sang the role in the revival as well, as evidenced by two extra scenes for Ottavia (probably not by Monteverdi) to lengthen the role to fit the star singer. Ellen Rosand gives a detailed overview of the textual maze in *Monteverdi's Last Operas* (Berkeley, 2007).

³⁵ 'When, exiled to the sea, you deliver your lament, the waves are stilled and the wind takes a breath to collect your pearls [i.e. tears] and your sweet song'. 'Per la Signora Anna Renzi Romana unica cantatrice nel teatro dell'Illustrissimo Signor Giovanni Grimani', signed G.B.V. Quoted in Rosand, *Monteverdi's Last Operas*, p. 241.

length. As we shall see, many of the qualities in Renzi he singles out for praise are similar to those expected of singers today though the overall style of performance is more presentational than naturalistic.

The action that gives soul, spirit, and being to things must be governed by movements of the body, by gestures, by the face, and by the voice, now raising it, now lowering it, becoming angry, then suddenly becoming calm once again; sometimes speaking hurriedly, other times slowly, moving the body now in that, now in this direction, drawing in the arms, then extending them, laughing, then weeping, now with little, now with much agitation of the hands. Our Signora Anna is endowed with such a lifelike expression that her responses and discourses do not seem memorised, but rather born that very moment. In sum, she transforms herself completely into the character she is playing. [. . .] She masters the stage, understands what she proffers and proffers it so clearly that the ears have nothing to desire. She has a fluent tongue, a smooth pronunciation, not affected, not too fast, a full, sonorous voice, not harsh, not hoarse, which does not offend you with excessive subtlety, and which is born of the temperament of the chest and of the throat. [. . .] She has felicitous passages, a lively trill, both double and reinforced. [. . .] She silently observes the actions of others, and when she must then represent them, aided by her sanguinity (of which she has much), and by her bile (which fires her)[. . .] she shows the spirit and valour learned from the observations she has made.³⁶

Perhaps most notable here is that Renzi's voice itself is only a small part of what makes her great to these academics. Her acting is just as important and impressive, if not more so, and the key phrase here is that she 'transforms herself completely into the character she is playing'. This does not mean, however, that the acting style is naturalistic in the Stanislavskian sense. Strozzi emphasises the minute aspects of the procedural *craft* with

³⁶ 'L'azione con la quale si da l'anima, lo spirito, e l'essere alle cose, deve esser governata dal movimento del corpo, dal gesto, dal volto, e dalla voce, hora innalzandola, hora abbassandola, sdegnandosi, e tornando subito a pacificarsi: una volta parlando in fretta, un'altra adagio, movendo il corpo hor a questa, hor a quella parte, raccogliendo le braccia, e distendendole, ridendo, e piangendo, hora con poca, hora con molta agitazione di mani: la nostra Signora Anna è dotata d'una espressione sì viva, che paiono le risposte, e i discorsi non appresi dalla memoria, ma nati all'hora. In somma ella si trasforma tutta nella persona che rappresenta. . . . Padroneggia la Scena, intende quel che proferisce, e lo proferisce sì chiaramente, che non hanno l'orecchie, che desiderare: Ha una lingua sciolta, una pronuncia suave, non affettata, non presta, una voce piena, sonora, non aspra, non roca, né che ti offenda con la soverchia sottigliezza; il che nasce dal temperamento del petto, e della gola. . . . Ella ha il passaggio felice, e 'l trillo gagliardo, doppio, e rinforzato. . . . Ella va tacitamente osservando le azione altrui, e quando poi ha da rapresentarle, aiutata dal sangue, del quale ella è copiosissima, e dalla bile, che se le accende. . . . mosta lo spirito, e valor suo appreso con lo studio delle osservazioni fatte'. Giulio Strozzi, *Le glorie della signora Anna Renzi romana* (Venice: Surian, 1644). My translation, based on Rosand's in *Monteverdi's Last Operas*, p. 242.

which Renzi transforms herself into Ottavia, rather than looking only at the final product of the finished performance. Renzi's body language and vocal inflection follow each tiny change in the emotion, and this technical aspect of self-conscious 'acting' is what Strozzi praises. Compared to this portrait of a whole theatrical creation, the fetishising of the voice in much twentieth-century discourse around both opera and early music singing seems impoverished. The supposedly historically-informed approaches to singing roles like Ottavia, where vocal production is usually the prime focus, look naively uninformed in light of descriptions like this one of Renzi. Also striking (in 1644) is the power that is granted to Renzi as she sings: Strozzi says that she 'masters the stage' and holds the audience in the palm of her hand.

There is a curious mix here of the praising of Anna Renzi as Anna Renzi, and of her portrayal of the role itself. Unlike the twentieth-century cult of personality around singers like Rosa Ponselle or Enrico Caruso, who even while performing brilliantly were always obviously Ponselle or Caruso, Strozzi and the other contributors to the poetic anthology praise Renzi precisely because they can see her lose part of herself in the role. Seventeenth-century audiences were impressed with Renzi's ability to both *become* Ottavia and *perform* Ottavia. They seem enthralled to Renzi as Renzi (note that Strozzi never mentions the character by name), yet the performance is at the same time one by Anna Renzi and one by Ottavia, a sort of explicit double-vision which is difficult for actors trained naturalistically (only to become rather than to perform) to recapture today. Present-day opera singers and actors, as well as audiences, tend to shy away from this doubling, preferring to see the performance as only the character, though of course the fact that the performance is acted by someone who is not the character remains somewhere in the back of the mind. The difference is one of explicitness: Renzi's public brought out the fact that there was a doubling of persona and character, while today the doubling almost seems an open secret.

Maria Callas is in some ways a twentieth-century analogue of Renzi, a singer-actress who inspired passionate reactions both to herself and to her characters, but with Callas the emphasis is on the struggle to bring a character to the stage rather than enjoying the refraction of character and actor. Wayne Koestenbaum likens Callas's difficult Method-based process of creating character to coming out of the closet:

Method acting is a style of the closet and of the closet's collapse: the actor brings private, undisclosable woes to bear on the part. And yet the strain and effort in Method performances — the seething and stammering and stumbling — prove the sturdiness of the walls locking in the not-yet-spoken self. The performer needs to grunt and moan and cry in order to break through the policed border between private and public. Callas makes us sick of camouflage. After hearing Callas, who could tolerate the closet? And yet the evidence of Callas's broken spirit makes us nostalgic for the closet. Maybe, for a moment, we want to step back in.³⁷

There is evidence, however, that like Callas's, Renzi's commitment to her role was not always comfortable for audiences. Though in a different way from Callas's, her becoming of Ottavia was problematic. In the commemorative volume Benedetto Ferrari writes that 'It is not Ottavia shedding her tears,/ Exiled, exposed on foamy shores;/ It is a monster, who with notes high and deep/ Augments the company of the sirens'.³⁸ In addition to drawing on the popular seventeenth-century discourse of the monstrous, Ferrari creates another double, of singer and siren. There is a variety of ways to interpret this: does the monster fit the drama, or is Ferrari implying that Monteverdi, Busenello, and Renzi have actually gone too far in their impassioned portrayal of the character? Is Ottavia the monstrous siren, or is Renzi? This doubling is another case of the period's exploration of refraction and representation: Renzi represents Ottavia, who represents a siren.

³⁷ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat* (London, 1993), p. 150.

³⁸ Quoted in Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley, 2003) p. 174.

The monologue, given in Figure 1 in my transcription from the Venice manuscript,³⁹ begins strikingly, with the repetition of the initial ‘a-’ of the word ‘addio’: Ottavia can barely bring herself to sing. This contrasts starkly with the rest of her music in the opera, throughout which Ottavia repeats her words almost pathologically (her other solo scene begins ‘Disprezzata regina, regina, regina disprezzata, disprezzata regina, del monarca romano afflitta, afflitta, afflitta moglie’). This is also one of the few moments in opera of this, or indeed any, period where the inability to sing, obviously a very problematic state for opera, is staged directly. Wendy Heller hears these ruptured ‘a-’s as ‘choked-back sobs of a woman forbidden emotional display, lyric expression, or sensual pleasure’, and this is firmly at odds with the way the rest of the role is written:⁴⁰ ‘Disprezzata regina’ is a highly emotive monologue, and in her subsequent scene in which she commands Ottone to murder Poppea she certainly does not sing the music of a woman forbidden emotional display. Ottavia does have little opportunity for lyrical expression and sensual pleasure, but not because she is forbidden it as Heller states; lyricism would simply be inappropriate for the character’s present emotional state.⁴¹ The ‘a-’s therefore demonstrate this change in Ottavia’s character. They are not sobs, but rather demonstrate a character too much in shock at the sudden reversal of her fate to sing intelligently, doubly upsetting in a character who was formerly so

³⁹ This being a transcription rather than an edition, I have left the bass unfigured (other than those figures which appear in the manuscript) and I retain the obvious problems with the text underlay in the last few lines. There are various options to fix the incorrect word-stresses (‘intérdici il pianto’ should be ‘interdici il piánton’ and ‘una lacrima póss’io’ should be ‘una lácrima poss’io’), though until the 1970s most performers retained the mistakes (as did Malipiero in his widely-disseminated edition). This is one of the few major mistakes in the manuscript, the first and last acts of which were copied by Maria Cavalli, wife of Francesco, and their presence in the Naples manuscript is one of many indications that the two scores relate to the same prior exemplar.

⁴⁰ Heller, p. 173.

⁴¹ Significantly, though, in the Naples manuscript of the opera *Ottavia* *does* have a lyrical moment: in a solo scene before her one with Ottone, she sings a triple-time lament aria, with melismas, in which she begs to be killed to end her suffering. Curtis put in the appendix of his edition, and he believes it was composed, probably by Francesco Saccati, to lengthen Anna Renzi’s part (p. 278).

loquacious.⁴² From there, the scene flows almost as a stream-of-consciousness monologue, which Renzi was able to help the audience follow through her vocal and physical gestures. It does, however, split into a few sections, each set around a certain modal/harmonic centre. As with Penelope's monologue at the beginning of *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, Monteverdi and his librettist demonstrate the psychological trajectory of their character by setting the words to a reflecting harmonic and melodic trajectory. Ottavia, though, seems to approach a more tonal world than does the more modal Penelope.

The first section is based around A minor, moving to its dominant E, then back to A.

The text here is:

Addio Roma, addio patria, amici addio.	Farewell Rome, farewell homeland, friends farewell.
Innocente da voi partir conviene.	Innocent, I am forced to leave you.
Vado a patir l'esilio in pianti amari,	I go to exile with bitter complaints,
Navigo disperata i sordi mari.	I sail despairingly on the mute seas.

This represents a complete thought, a concise statement of Ottavia's plight, so it is appropriate that it should end in the same tonality in which it began. There is then a shift downwards to G major, modulating to the subdominant C. This is consistent with the text, as

Ottavia develops her thought:

L'aria, che d'ora in ora	Breezes, which from hour to hour
Riceverà i miei fiati,	Will receive my sighs,
Li porterà, per nome del cor mio,	Will bring them, in the name of my heart
A veder, a baciar le patrie mura.	To see, to kiss the walls of my homeland.

⁴² Though it is not provable that these 'a-'s are not sobs, their spelling as 'a' rather than 'ahi', and the fact that they are on a single pitch rather than a downward interval, strongly implies their connection to the following word 'addio'.

When Ottavia directs her thoughts inward to herself (what *she* will do, rather than what the breeze will do to her sighs), she moves into the *mollis* territory of G minor and C minor (cadencing with a tierce de Picardie on a C major triad):

Ed io starò solinga,	And I will remain alone,
Alternando le mosse ai pianti, ai passi,	Alternating sighs with steps,
Insegnando pietade ai tronchi, e ai sassi.	Teaching pity to trees and stones.

In a striking move back to A minor, Ottavia begs to be rowed away from her shores:

Remigate oggi mai perverse genti,	Row today, you cruel people,
Allontanarmi omai dagli amati lidi. ⁴³	Take me away from my beloved shores.

The last section features very quick and unstable modulations as Ottavia moves the top of her range and repeats her words in a style more like that of her previous scenes:

Ahi, sacrilego duolo,	Oh, sacrilegious sorrow,
Tu m'interdici il piano	You forbid me to weep
Mentre lascio la patria.	Whilst I leave my homeland.
Né stillar una lacrima poss'io,	Not a single tear can I shed
Mentre dico ai parenti e a Roma: addio.	While I say to my relations and to Rome, farewell.

Just before she completes her *endecasillabo* and reaches the final 'addio', and as we are led to think there will be a final cadence in E as she rests on the dominant B, the tonality shifts to B minor and she repeats the last two lines in a higher register. She then finally cadences on A minor, ending the scene in the tonality in which it began.

The jolting harmonic course of the scene is similar to that of Ottavia's other music, and of many of Monteverdi's other monologues, especially the *Lamento d'Arianna* and, as we have seen, Penelope's monologue. As his characters rapidly change their trains of thought, the harmony changes likewise and contributes to their dramatic depth and richness. In

⁴³ These two lines are lacking in the libretto sources, which Alan Curtis believes indicates they may have been a later addition not by Busenello, and perhaps therefore not by Monteverdi. In a rare lapse of judgement, Curtis suggests that they be omitted (p. 224n). Whether by Busenello and Monteverdi or not, the unexpected move back to A as well as the change in harmonic rhythm is a splendid demonstration of Ottavia's confused and wandering mental state, and omitting these measures would deprive the scene of much of its dramatic effect.

Monteverdi's work, the dramatic expression comes from a combination of the vocal line, the singer's acting prowess, and the harmonic cursus and the composition of the bass line.

Monteverdi's music follows his characters as their ideas change and develop, and is especially successful in moments of extreme emotion like 'Addio Roma'. In later opera at such extreme moments the psychological confusions are indicated in a very different way, usually either through melodic means (through melodies culturally marked as sentimental), or as harmonic deviations from tonal expectations over which the legato bel canto line may lie. In the mad scene in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* Lucia's madness is conveyed through the conventional operatic cantabile-cabaletta *scena*: her flowing aria with flute (originally glass harmonica) obbligato dramatises her reminiscence of happier days, then after a turbid choral interlude her cabaletta displays her madness through extremely virtuosic coloratura display, usually further embellished by the singer. The dramatic weight lies solely with the singer's ability to convey madness within the formal and technical conventions of the bel canto operatic style, rather than in a triangulation, as in Monteverdi, of vocal expression, psychological acting, and compositional style. The drama of the final scene of *Tristan und Isolde* rests, on the other hand, mostly with Wagner's harmonic language. As he constantly frustrates the audience's expectations with interrupted cadences and harmonic sequences, Wagner wrests expressive power away from the singer, who can only become subservient to the orchestra. One could argue that Lucia's mad scene is not about Lucia, but about the soprano singing the role, and that the Liebestod isn't really about Isolde's personal drama, but about her transfiguration (*Verklärung*) itself. 'Addio Roma' remains very much about Ottavia. In the twentieth century some composers have attempted to use a more integrated Monteverdian approach in opera composition: Schoenberg's *Erwartung* uses both vocal writing and its atonal harmonies to penetrate the soprano's psyche, and also depends on a singer who can convey the character's extreme mental anguish. Hans Werner Henze's

El Cimarrón uses an even wider gamut of speaking and singing styles to convey the terrifying narrative of a Cuban slave. Jule Styne, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents's 1959 Broadway musical *Gypsy* ends with a monologue ('Rose's Turn') in which Rose undergoes a mental breakdown; though unlike Monteverdi's operas this scene uses direct reminiscences of earlier musical moments in addition to harmonic dissonance to convey this, it also requires a singer/actress of extraordinary stamina and dramatic prowess rather like Anna Renzi's. Composer Styne and lyricist Sondheim (who had a significant role in shaping the piece) also employ vocal rupture and an inability to speak or sing in a way strikingly similar to Monteverdi in 'Addio Roma' (Example 15).⁴⁴

I give these examples not to imply that Monteverdi is a better composer than Donizetti or Wagner because his approach is more integrated, but simply to explore how Monteverdi's compositional practice is different and why singers cannot sing his music in the same way as they perform the bel canto repertoire. In addition, the vocal writing of the role of Ottavia, along with most of the others in Monteverdi's operas, does not fit into today's traditional bel canto-based *Fach* system.⁴⁵ The tessitura lies high for many mezzo-sopranos, yet it does not show off much of a soprano's top register.⁴⁶ One most usually hears mezzos with soprano qualities sing the role, but more recently a few singers have trained to fit their tessitura to the

⁴⁴ It is best to listen to this scene after one is familiar with 'Addio Roma', so I have put it on the end of the examples. The role of Rose is known as one of the most difficult in musical theatre, and each aficionado will have his own favourite rendition. I have chosen Angela Lansbury's performance on the 1973 original London cast recording: RCA 60571-2-RG (1990 rerelease), as she best brings out the ruptures that make this so strikingly similar to 'Addio Roma'. The context of the scene is that Rose's daughter has recently found success as the stripper Gypsy Rose Lee, and Rose comes to the realisation that she pushed her daughters to be stars more out of her own feelings of inadequacy than for their well-being. Rose, feeling exiled from her own daughter, tries to bid her 'Addio' and discovers unknown corners of her own psyche in the process. I include this scene as an illustration that the heirs of Monteverdi's style may lie not always in opera but also in musical theatre.

⁴⁵ *Fach* refers to the general tessitura of a role. Traditionally singers have specialised in a certain *Fach* like 'lyric soprano', 'spinto', 'Heldentenor', etc. These labels apply most specifically to the nineteenth-century canon, but they have also been applied retrospectively to Mozart's work.

⁴⁶ See Alan Curtis, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, introductory remarks, p. xiii.

role (see below on Anne Sofie von Otter and Joyce DiDonato), evidence that due to more comprehensive conservatory training the *Fach* system's days may be numbered.

As noted above, the aphasia of the first bars of 'Addio, Roma' is not commensurate with the bel canto singing tradition. Mid-century singers usually did not know quite what to do with the opening, not being used to employing silence and the rupture of phonation as an expressive device. Margarita Lilowa, singing for Herbert von Karajan at the Vienna State Opera in 1963, gives a disastrous rendering of the monologue (Example 6),⁴⁷ not helped by Erich Kraack's heavy Pucciniesque orchestration and his attempts to force Monteverdi's music into post-Wagnerian harmonies.⁴⁸ Her initial 'a-'s do not make dramatic sense and sound rather like Tosca warming up to sing 'Vissi d'arte'. Though she tries to convey Ottavia's sorrow, Lilowa's vocal gestures come across as affected, in orthodox 'park and bark' style. As the monologue continues, Lilowa gets increasingly lost in the text, made nonsensical in the final part of the scene by Kraack's alterations to its rhythms and the text underlay, building on mistakes in Malipiero's edition. Though perhaps appropriate for *Tosca*, this full-out singing simply sounds hysterical and overdone here, the sounds of a diva (and a conductor) attempting to bring her own operatic sensitivities to music for which she can have no affinity. Still, we ought not be too harsh on Lilowa, a house soprano at the Vienna State Opera, who was singing the role the only way she and most other opera singers of the time could have known. This was Karajan's first and only Monteverdi opera performance, and though well-received by the critics, the experience was apparently quite trying for him. He was a last-minute replacement for Hans Swarowski, and the stage director Günther

⁴⁷ Deutsche Grammophon 457 674-2. Recorded 1963, re-released 1998.

⁴⁸ Some of the Kraak's musical gestures seem taken straight from Puccini: note the diminished chords in the winds at 0'23, the transition at 1'20 to 'l'aria', and the orchestral voice leading at 2'15, 'freddi sassi'.

Rennert and Karajan disagreed about various aspects of the production.⁴⁹ Lilowa's style of Monteverdi singing would soon be seen as grotesque against the burgeoning early music movement, and there is little wonder that this production was not revived in later seasons.

With Eugenia Zareska on Rudolf Ewerhart's 1962 recording, we are a world away from Lilowa and Karajan (Example 7).⁵⁰ Though recorded at the same time as Karajan's, this recording is firmly part of the developing early music movement, and is the first recording of the opera on period instruments. Zareska must sing differently because, where Lilowa had the full Vienna Philharmonic backing her, Zareska has only a lute and a bass viol. Fidelity to the text is paramount here, and Zareska is careful to sing the pitches and the rhythms exactly as notated in the Venice manuscript. She sings a legato line, but the dynamic range is limited from *mp* to *mf*. The drama of the scene takes a back seat to the 'text', and the big moments (like the cries of 'ahi' and the repeated phrases at the end of the monologue), which Kraack brought out in his orchestration, fall somewhat flat in this held-back style. Like Lilowa, Zareska was not a specialist in early opera (no singer was in those days), but she was more willing to make concessions to her bel canto training, singing relatively unfamiliar music in a new way.

Ewerhart's was an experimental recording, branching into unexplored aesthetic territory. By 1974, when Nikolaus Harnoncourt directed his first recording of *Poppea*, the new aesthetic had begun to develop its own language. Cathy Berberian, Harnoncourt's Ottavia, sings that new language and was widely recognised as one of its foremost

⁴⁹ Peter Dusek, 'A Jewel in the Crown of the Karajan Era', Liner notes, DG CD re-issue. It seems anomalous that the reviews of this performance were so positive, as much of the orchestral playing on the recording is astonishingly sloppy for the Vienna Philharmonic. Perhaps unfamiliarity with the work and a feeling that Karajan could do no wrong let the critics have the wool stuffed into their ears. In 1962 most audiences would not have known of alternative ways to perform this music, and the novelty factor was surely a part of the positive reception.

⁵⁰ Vox, 1962.

practitioners at the time (Example 8).⁵¹ The main difference between Zareska's and Berberian's performances is that the latter interprets Ottavia's monologue as a dramatic scene, rather than just singing notes on a page with a stock 'tragic' interpretation. Berberian spoke of the 'new vocality', which she saw as an extension of the 'old vocality' of Monteverdi's time, a modern form of 'recitar cantando'.⁵² She saw contemporary approaches to Monteverdi (like Ewerhart's) as over-reverent and cerebral, the same as approaches to Webern and other contemporary music. Importantly though, and in spite of her own words to the contrary, Berberian's advocacy of Monteverdi remained fundamentally historicist and antiquarian. She programmed his pieces as a way to bring out links to contemporary music, which Berberian saw as the real foundation of her repertoire.⁵³ In an interview with a California radio station she complains that singers lose the thread of the music when they make the audience think 'oh, isn't it antique!' Though Berberian did a great deal to rehabilitate Monteverdi among the musical literati, the technique of her vocal production was little different from that of Zareska for Ewerhart, basically a stripped-down version of traditional bel canto, though Berberian engages more with Busenello's words and it is clear that she knows what she is singing about and who her character is, displaying a Method influence. For example, she makes something new and arresting of Ottavia's first breathless 'a-'s, conveying Ottavia's inability to sing by using a breathy tone that would be strictly forbidden under bel canto rules. Both Lilowa and Zareska made them sound merely like a vocal warm-up. Berberian sometimes makes surprising decisions which show an engagement with the meaning of the piece as a whole: most singers perform the repeat of 'ne stillar una lacrima poss'io' at the end of the monologue more loudly than its first iteration,

⁵¹ Teldec 2292-42547-2. Recorded 1974, re-released 1993.

⁵² 1972 KFPA Berkeley 11/1 interview on RadiOM.org <http://radiom.org/detail.php?omid=OTG.1972.11.01.A>

⁵³ *ibid.*

usually a default response for such a repetition, but Berberian sings it softly and inwardly. Her Ottavia despairs quietly, in a way consistent with her initial inability to sing in this scene and with her general submissive attitude and barely-contained despair throughout the opera.

Still, it often sounds as if Berberian is holding back, and present-day listeners might wish for some of the uninhibited exuberance of her work with Luciano Berio like *Sequenza III*, or even of her parody 'baroque' renditions of Beatles songs. The difference between her singing technique for Monteverdi and that for contemporary music is very clear in her recording of Berio's 1971 *Recital I for Cathy*, an extended mad scene in which Berio draws on Berberian's own recital repertoire to create a dramatisation of an opera singer's descent into madness. The composition begins with Monteverdi's 'Lettera amorosa', one of Berberian's signature pieces and heard almost in full, which the Soprano sings to harpsichord accompaniment while she waits for her tardy pianist. This piece sung in Berberian's 'early music' style is a world away from the Joycean spoken and sung monologue which follows. *Recital* ends with a fragmented setting of the words 'libera nos', an expression of aphasia similar to the beginning of 'Addio Roma' as the Soprano goes mad, but here Berberian seems more dramatically committed (Example 9).⁵⁴ The difference between her vocal style for Monteverdi and for Berio demonstrates that the gap between 'mainstream' and 'early music' singing had continued to spread since Ewerhart's 1962 recording, and that self-conscious 'early music' requires a different approach. Berio and Berberian use the Monteverdi excerpts for their antiquity, even though Berberian complained about the fetishisation of the antique. They serve as a prelude to the vocal substance of *Recital*. Though I nitpick about her willingness to let herself go with Monteverdi the way she does with contemporary music, Berberian's importance to Monteverdi singing cannot be underestimated. She was one of the first to have a real perspective on the character of

⁵⁴ BMG 09026 62540 2. Recorded 1972, re-released 1995.

Ottavia, acting the role rather than just singing it, and therefore served as a role model for future singers taking up the challenge.

Harnoncourt recorded *Poppea* again in 1979 as the soundtrack to Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's film of his production at the Zürich Opera. Though Harnoncourt's orchestral textures and editorial choices remain mostly the same in this recording (other than cutting about half an hour from the opera), the singing is quite different from the 1974 version. Trudeliese Schmidt as Ottavia goes further dramatically than Berberian, in places approaching the no-holds-barred aesthetic of the avant-garde (Example 10).⁵⁵ She allows her initial 'a-'s to stray from the notated pitch, and her final whispered 'addio' is quite moving in its convincing portrayal of sorrow. For most of the monologue, though, we remain in the world of full-bodied bel canto, perhaps even more so than with Berberian, and in this Schmidt's performance is more like Margareta Lilowa's. The expressive devices Schmidt uses are heard against this background of 'beautiful' singing, and her style in Monteverdi is not a great departure from that of the standard mezzo-soprano repertoire as it was being sung in the 1970s.

The foregoing recordings used mostly German and Austrian performers (with the obvious exception of the Armenian-American Berberian), and it was in the 1980s that the differences between English and Continental styles of early music singing emerged in early opera. The stereotypical choral-influenced 'English' style of singing, described above, is represented by Linda Hirst in her 1988 *Ottavia* for Richard Hickox (Example 11).⁵⁶ Compared to what Schmidt and even Berberian were doing dramatically, Hirst seems even more held back and her performance is closest in style to Zareska's of twenty-six years before. It is this style against which Continental performers like Nikolaus Harnoncourt and,

⁵⁵ Teldec 706301002728. Recorded 1978, re-released 1996.

⁵⁶ Virgin Veritas 7243 5 61783 2 8. Recorded 1988, re-released 2000.

later, Rinaldo Alessandrini would react. Alessandrini sums up this performance style well: ‘I have the impression that English performances tend to be anti-Romantic — that they are performing in the opposite style from that used in Brahms or Verdi. If vibrato is right for Verdi, then it must not be for early music’.⁵⁷ Hirst’s is a quintessential ‘early music’ Ottavia, as far from the supposed excesses of opera as possible. This is an Ottavia for the type Adorno called the ‘resentment listener’ in his 1969 *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*.⁵⁸ Resenting the overly emotional and performer-centred state of music in the present, the resentment listener fetishises a time before all of that, and ‘loyalty to the work, which they set against the bourgeois ideal of musical showmanship, becomes an end in itself. [...] If the emotional type tends to corn, the resentment listener tends to a spurious rigour, to mechanical suppression of his own stirrings in the name of shelteredness in the community’.⁵⁹ While Adorno gears his remarks towards German listeners, especially those Bach-devotees against whom he defended the composer, his stance is strikingly similar to Richard Taruskin’s remarks about international performers in *Text and Act*, complaining that in their insistence on authenticity they defeat the spirit of the music they try to perform.⁶⁰ As Taruskin’s theories spread through the early music world, performances like Hirst’s no longer seemed adequate, nor did they seem so to opera audiences who were becoming increasingly familiar with this repertoire.

In her 1992 recording with John Eliot Gardiner, Anne Sofie Von Otter takes the next step from Berberian and Schmidt, and fully dismisses Hirst’s approach: ‘pure’ singing is now

⁵⁷ Sherman, p. 142.

⁵⁸ New York, 1969, pp. 9-12.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁰ Oxford, 1995. Taruskin has frequently insisted that Adorno is not an influence on his own work, but their attitudes towards early music performance are very similar.

the last thing on the singer's mind (Example 12).⁶¹ Accepting that one can compromise beauty of tone for dramatic purposes, it is now the intensity of the drama that comes first.⁶² Von Otter is not afraid to make ugly sounds if they serve the character: this is a very ugly time in Ottavia's life, so the approach is easily justified dramatically. As with Method acting, beauty is only a concern if it fits the drama. Gone are Berberian's historicised view of this music and Schmidt's operatic bel canto view; Von Otter's version of Monteverdi can be just as contemporary and risk-taking as Berio. Von Otter enunciates the text more than does Berberian, helped in that she and Gardiner use an edition that cleans up the mistakes in underlay that have plagued this scene since Malipiero made his over-faithful edition in the 1930s. A singer cannot go much further from here without actually speaking the scene, and we do know that Monteverdi's music was *sung*, not spoken, different as his concept of singing may have been from ours. Von Otter's performance is not definitive (of course no performance is), but it does represent an extreme on a particular spectrum. So where *can* a singer go from here? Is Von Otter's intense portrayal as far as it is safe to push this music without the performance disintegrating into self-indulgent overacting? The only outcome is either to stop changing performance styles (impossible even if singers wanted to preserve them) or find some sort of new compromise. It is towards compromise between historical and present-day drama that current early opera performance tends, accepting a multitude of influences from various styles of performance.

Joyce DiDonato, in her recent recording of the monologue with Emmanuelle Haïm and her band Le Concert d'Astrée, demonstrates this current 'multi-influential' technique in singing early opera (Example 13).⁶³ Her performance is text-based and dramatic in a way

⁶¹ Archiv Produktion 000289 447 0882 0. Recorded 1993, released 1996.

⁶² Gardiner himself could be seen as making a case for the 'English' style in his many recordings of repertoire from Monteverdi to Verdi, taking the best qualities of English style (including technical perfection, clarity of pitch and rhythm, and precise diction) and adding a more acute dramaturgical sense.

⁶³ Virgin Classics 5099951904425. Recorded and released 2008.

Monteverdi's contemporaries might recognise, but it is also 'operatic' in the current sense and would be recognised as such in a large opera house. Her vocal production is based on the conservatory standard, but with extra emphasis on consonants and an acceptance of sacrificing beauty for dramatic intensity. She 'sings' the music more than Von Otter does, but she admits the sacrifices to beautiful tone that Berberian sometimes shied away from.

DiDonato is typical of the most recent generation of opera singers in her adventurousness in choosing challenging, rare, and varied repertoire and adapting her voice accordingly while still retaining her own individual qualities. With DiDonato and her contemporaries (Natalie Dessay, Rolando Villazón, and, slightly older, Cecilia Bartoli come to mind) one is never in doubt about who is singing. Because modern conservatory training attempts to give singers the vocal technique for all kinds of repertoire, singers have a menu of different methods of vocal production from which to draw during a single performance. DiDonato can draw on her 'grand opera' voice in the middle section of 'Addio Roma', giving it a sonic and dramatic intensity of a type that would be difficult for Von Otter's smaller, more discursive voice. One could complain that these young singers do not have a consistent technique and that they are led to sing over-varied repertoire beyond their abilities; some have indeed encountered vocal problems because of these inconsistencies. Natalie Dessay has been very open about her vocal problems, which she believes were caused by overwork and the difficulty of balancing home and professional life.⁶⁴ Rolando Villazón, for a few years the cream of the crop of young tenors because he seemingly could sing everything from Monteverdi to Puccini with great conviction, has effectively ruined his voice by trying to do too much.

Young singers who take on Monteverdi are entering a crowded field with a few decades of ever-present (because recorded) history. It might seem that their forebears were

⁶⁴ see interview in Jampol, *Living Opera*, pp. 79-89.

freer to sing Monteverdi the way they pleased because there was no modern precedent, though we have seen that the conventions of their time still determined the vocal choices they made. The difficulty today's singers have comes perhaps from this lack of convention. A pluralist musical world like the contemporary West means that there is no single 'right' way to sing anything, and certainly not 'early music'. This is another indication of our current cultural landscape of liquid authenticity: there is a vague idea that one ought to be authentic in singing this music, but most agree that there are a multitude of ways of carrying this out.

To close, it is worth mentioning a new current of influence in early music singing, that of pop and jazz. Some successful singers of this repertoire have incorporated elements of pop and jazz into their singing techniques, like pitch-bending, less controlled vibrato, a lighter tone, and migration between chest- and head-voice within the same phrase. Soprano Danielle de Niese has worked with major early music conductors like William Christie and Emmanuelle Haïm, and in her interpretations of Monteverdi's *Poppea* and Handel's *Cleopatra* she freely employs the pitch bending and chestier vocal production of singers like Barbra Streisand, Laura Nyro, or Audra McDonald.⁶⁵ Countertenor Philippe Jaroussky also makes nods to pop singing in early music and more contemporary repertoire.⁶⁶ The Monteverdi album *Teatro d'amore* by lutenist Christina Pluhar and her group *l'Arpeggiata* experiments with turning some of Monteverdi's songs into jazz pieces, and even the 'straight' tracks have a hip 'downtown' sensibility. Soprano Nuria Rial's rendition of the *Lamento della Ninfa* on this disc is a case in point (Example 14).⁶⁷ Her style lies between bel canto and pop, and the continuo section plays rather like a jazz rhythm section. As discussed

⁶⁵ Her performance of *Poppea* in Madrid, discussed in the next chapter, is firmly in lounge-singer mode.

⁶⁶ For example, when singing French *mélodies* many young singers including Jaroussky are pronouncing uvular rather than trilled 'r's, in the last century seen as a mark of cabaret and pop singing.

⁶⁷ Virgin Classics 5099923614024.

above, the vocal production employed by Monteverdi's singers was probably more like modern jazz singing than opera singing, though De Niese, Jaroussky, and Rial are not after authenticity but rather are looking for new ways of performing increasingly familiar repertoire. We can see, therefore, that Monteverdian singing is undergoing constant development.

A traditional positivist ending to this chapter would point out 'how far we have come in early music performance: singers are now presenting fully-realised characters on stage and creating a great deal of musical excitement'. But of course the solutions of the present will not necessarily hold for long, as new modes of performance are discovered and as audiences develop new expectations. What we have seen is not a progression towards convincing dramatic realism, but a rapid shift in the place of Monteverdi's operas within various vocal repertoires. Early recordings demonstrate Monteverdi as an unusual niche-product, then show his music becoming the widely admired centre of a sub-repertoire. In all periods Monteverdi's music has been adapted to fit either the current operatic standard, with its own developments of singing and acting style, or the current 'historically-informed' style of early music performance, which has undergone its own changes over the decades. There is now and always has been tension between these two styles, as singers and music directors make their own case for a certain kind of Monteverdian singing. Some insist on one side to the detriment of the other (Schmidt for opera, Hirst for early music), others seem to ignore both in order to find connections with other kinds of repertoire (Berberian and the avant-garde), and many search for a compromise between these various styles (DiDonato). Singers also keep different degrees of historical distance, from fetishising the past to ignoring it. As directors stage, conductors conduct, and singers sing Monteverdi's operas they embody their own aesthetic attitudes as well as their reading of those of Monteverdi and his contemporaries. Again we have an example of fluidity as practitioners' engagement with this

music flows between the present and the past. The next chapter's concentration on three very different productions of *Poppea* in a short time span (a single opera season) will provide the final demonstration that Monteverdi's texts are far from fixed.

Chapter Five

Poppea in 2010

The preceding chapters of the thesis mostly entail of the analysis of various types of recorded evidence of Monteverdi opera productions. In this final chapter I will engage with Monteverdi opera as a lived theatrical experience in the present. Having seen three major European productions of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* within a few months of each other (Pier Luigi Pizzi and William Christie's production at the Teatro Real in Madrid, Robert Carsen and Jonathan Cohen's at the Glyndebourne Touring Opera [in a revival staging by Bruno Ravella], and Dietrich Hilsdorf and Konrad Junghänel's at the Cologne Opera), I will discuss the place of Monteverdi in the opera world of the early twenty-first century. The key question this chapter will address is, what does the musical object of *Poppea* afford to different directors and audiences? The phrase 'musical object' may set off alarm bells, but by using it I do not wish to imply that the opera is an unchanging ideal object with which practitioners must engage. The 'object' itself is only the vaguest of ontological reckonings, and by discussing *Poppea* as an object I only mean it as the sum of its widely varying instances across its performance history. To imply otherwise, that *Poppea* is a rock upon which directors paint their own interpretations, would be to fall back into the mistakes of Jaussian reception aesthetics which were outlined at the beginning of the thesis. Though it is ever-changing and unfixable, the opera does remain an object in the sense that there is a large (but variable) set of notes and words that make up a thing called *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and it is this thing that an opera house commissions a director to direct, hires singers and instrumentalists to perform, and advertises to an audience. Without at least some reification an opera house could not function, and the extremes of anti-objectivism lead to a

reductio ad absurdum where people could not talk about opera at all because terms could have no agreed-upon meaning.

The ecological concept of affordance can help clarify this problematic objectivism, as it allows us to ask about the object and its receivers at the same time.¹ The Jaussian aesthetic, which sees the work as an ideal object contrasted against the ‘horizon’ of the audience’s expectation, asks only about the work’s receivers in a vacuum and takes the work itself for granted, while a perspective based on affordance sees the object always as part of a world. By asking what *Poppea* affords to those who engage with it either on stage, backstage, or in the auditorium, we need not separate work and receiver. *Poppea*, as a well-known early opera, can afford musicians the chance to make their own attempt at performing a score with an important place in the history books; as a complex musical drama it can afford directors an opportunity to bring the seventeenth century to a modern audience in many ways; as a source of rounded character studies it can afford singer-actors the challenge to convey those characters to an audience, etc.

In studies of reception, a traditional approach of linear information-processing often prevails. Such a position implies that performers and audiences perceive the operatic object ‘from scratch’, to slowly form their response as more information about the object becomes available. Though not a study of reception per se, Carolyn Abbate’s *In Search of Opera* takes such a linear approach: performances ‘conveyed the impression that a work was being created at that moment, “before one’s eyes,” never seeming to invite comparison between what was being heard and some lurking double, some transcendent work to which they had to measure up’.² An ecological perspective recognises that reception is already half done before the opera begins, due to pre-conceived affordances the opera may offer. There is

¹ The term was introduced by James J. Gibson *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ, 1986 [1979]) and applied to music by Eric Clarke in *Ways of Listening* (Oxford, 2005).

² Princeton, 2001. p. xv.

indeed a 'lurking double', though this is not the transcendent work but rather pre-conceived affordances which influence reception *ab initio*. Many extramusical aspects can affect reception before the audience take their seats, from the reputations of director, conductor, or singers to their previous experiences as spectators in a particular opera house. Rather than consisting of a straight trajectory from work to audience, reception is better conceived as the interplay of past and present experiences and expectations, forming the semiotic web discussed in the Introduction. There is a flexible relationship between performers and audience.

This chapter will focus on three dimensions of comparison, each illuminating a particular aspect of opera production. First will be a comparison of directorial approaches to *Poppea*, which can be roughly split into a bottom-up or top-down aesthetic. Does the interpretation come from the director's engagement with the text (from the bottom), or is it more a product of the director's preconceived notions which are then applied to the opera (from the top)? Emerging from the discussion of directorial approaches comes an examination of the buildings in which the three performances took place, specifically the relation of the audience to the stage due to the presence or absence of a proscenium arch. Space is often neglected in opera studies in favour of abstracted sonic aspects, but opera is a multi-sensory experience: audiences see a stage and an auditorium, sit in a chair, and experience an acoustic. Finally, the staging of gender relationships will be discussed. Because of the opera's libretto, vocal ranges, and seventeenth-century origin, in any production of *Poppea* many choices must be made regarding the gender of the characters and of the singers hired to play them. The three productions examined demonstrate the wide variation possible and the different effects they have on stage. Both the use of space and the staging of gender are partly determined by the director and his or her team, but the prior

experiences of an audience also play an important role in conditioning reception: an opera affords something different to its director and its audience members.

I. Directors

Directors' processes when staging an opera are highly complex and vary widely according to the individuals involved. Broadly, though, it is possible to divide approaches to directing opera into bottom-up and top-down categories. Though directors rarely speak so directly about their craft, these evidential categories are useful for a critical understanding of the directorial process. When taking a bottom-up approach, directors begin with the opera's text (or texts), and as they study it they see what can be found in it to express in the resulting production. In an interview with Joshua Jampol, Robert Carsen expresses this sentiment in explaining his process of directing Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*: 'Compared to the music that preceded it, [in Gluck's opera] there's no ornamentation, no decoration, no purely orchestral passages or elaborate dance sequences or cadenzas or anything. It's all completely serving the drama. *So you start with something which is there*' (my italics).³ For Carsen this approach can entail the staging of the director's own process of reception, also allowing the audience to discover aspects of interplay and intertextuality as the performance emerges. He says, 'I never know where that journey is going to take me, until I actually sit down and start to work on [the opera]. I don't think about a production in the abstract, like "It would be nice to do this opera, and how would I do it?" I only start to think in the way I'm describing when I know I'm going to do a particular piece at a particular moment in a particular theatre'.⁴ The bottom-up approach can also lead to a more finite version of the opera: for example, in

³ in Joshua Jampol, *Living Opera* (Oxford, 2010), p. 20.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 25-26.

approaching *Ulisse* one can imagine Pierre Audi asking first what he found in the opera that he wanted to express on stage, but the resulting production was a somewhat more closed work, with clear goals about what the audience was expected to take away from it. Robert Carsen's Glyndebourne production of *Poppea* discussed here takes a more open-ended approach, allowing for more discovery by the audience as the performance progresses, in some ways which will be explored below.

On the other hand, one can conceive of a director who approaches an opera from the top down beginning his process with his own preconceptions or concepts and applying them to the opera to be staged. More politicised forms of theatre tend to take this approach, as the director usually has a specific agenda to put across to the audience. Dietrich Hilsdorf's Cologne *Poppea* takes such a top-down approach, as he begins with Brechtian notions of Marxist critique and alienation to make a point about capitalist power relationships. In staging an older work created under differing conditions and in different contexts from those in the present, a top-down approach can often cause discomfort; to put it strongly, the opera itself becomes a subaltern, colonised by an overarching directorial Concept. Of course the boundary between the two types is porous: Carsen has certain personal stylistic traits and concerns that will affect any opera production he directs, and Hilsdorf is constrained by the basic formal structure of whichever opera he is directing, as well as its story. The difference comes from the basic question asked: the top-down director seems to ask 'how does this opera fit my concept?' and the bottom-up exemplar asks 'what is there in this opera that I want to bring out?' The subjectivity of the director is paramount in both cases, as of course the ultimate product always results from a personal engagement with the material. Pier Luigi Pizzi's Madrid production falls between the two extremes. Pizzi is constrained in part by the fact that he is presenting Monteverdi's three operas as a trilogy, relating the history of the operatic genre by using similar stage layout and design elements across the three. The

productions themselves are very different, however, resulting both from his top-down concept of portraying the genre's history 'from Monteverdi to Monteverdi' and the individual ideas that he finds in each opera upon which to construct each of the three productions.

A bottom-up production like Carsen's for Glyndebourne (seen in a revival staging by Bruno Ravella) emerges from the engagement and dialogue of the director with certain aspects of the opera (which could include the time and context in which it was written, its dramaturgy or musical structure, Monteverdi and Busenello as historical figures, the Roman Empire, etc.), then fashions the production around the fruit of that engagement. In his production Carsen finds as his base the character psychology of Poppea. She is at the centre of Carsen's direction, and the other characters are seen primarily in relation to her. Ottone is her former lover, Nerone her current one, Ottavia her rival, and Arnalta her nurse. For example, before Ottavia sings her final monologue 'Addio Roma' she crosses the stage and sees Poppea and Nerone together in bed, having gone to sleep after their previous duet. It is her sight of Poppea that triggers the aphasia with which she begins her last farewell, rather than a purely personal grief as is evident when the scene is staged 'in one'.⁵ Some productions, like Klaus-Michael Grüber's for the Aix-en-Provence festival, focus on Nerone's immaturity and poor leadership to make a more politically-focused drama, and others like Pier Luigi Pizzi's place greater emphasis on Ottavia's misfortunes for a more melodramatic reading. But in focalising the sensual Poppea, Carsen brings out the sensuality of the opera as a whole. He was aided in this by his original Poppea, Danielle de Niese,

⁵ 'In one' refers to a scene played before the front traveller curtain. Especially in early twentieth-century musical theatre such scenes were employed between scenes involving larger sets, to give the audience something to watch while the scene is changed behind the curtain. Both Ottavia's monologue and Arnalta's following (sometimes preceding) one are often staged in such a way, covering a scene change between Poppea's quarters and the public coronation scene. In the seventeenth century, however, such 'in one' scenes were not needed because scenes could be changed almost instantaneously with the use of alternating flats, and there is evidence that Ottavia may have had a full stage set for her monologue, complete with a water effect (she refers to the rowers who will take her away from Rome). Using the 'in one' system, though anachronistic, is a way for modern directors to translate Monteverdi's operas into more familiar twentieth-century forms.

whose physical attractiveness and sexual stage presence provided an anchor for the performance's staging of gender relationships (to be discussed in the final section of this chapter). Knowing that de Niese would be his Poppea likely affected Carsen's reading of the opera as he was deciding how to stage it, and it seemed a natural course to construct the production around her. Her replacement for the touring version, Christiane Karg, has a similar presence on stage. David McVicar's Glyndebourne production of Handel's *Giulio Cesare* was also built around Danielle de Niese, and the centrality of Cleopatra to that 2005 production mirrors the centrality of Poppea to Carsen's.⁶ In addition to using Poppea's sensuality as a driving force in his staging, Carsen also finds consistency in the opera's servant characters, who move from scene to scene and place the leads within a single household. Beyond character, water becomes another unifying element, the pool in which Seneca dies becoming Drusilla's bathtub (prepared by Valletto and Damigella) and then a bath in which Nerone and his cronies drown Lucano. These examples show that a bottom-up approach can emerge from a wide variety of starting points, in this case the particular singer hired for a role and the continuity of characters and props.

In contrast, Hilsdorf's Cologne *Poppea* stands very much within the controversial tradition of German Regietheater. Hilsdorf's basic interpretation of *Poppea* is that Nerone is a modern business executive, running a company only for profit with no concern for the well-being of the people exploited by the capitalist system he embodies. To convey this broadly Marxist idea on stage he employs Brecht's techniques of *Gestus* and alienation, popular Regie concepts, applying them rather uncritically to Monteverdi's opera. Regie is a difficult concept to define as it covers a very wide range of directors and styles, but the central thread is the goal of questioning both the opera being produced and the audience

⁶ This opens up wider issues of the current attitudes towards opera casting, as many commentators accuse opera companies of hiring singers based more on looks than on voice, and de Niese is often used as an example of the former in these debates.

watching it. Directors in the Regie tradition ask what the opera can say to present-day audiences, and along with this comes an ahistoricism, or even antihistoricism.⁷ Historical pictorialism is anathema to Regie directors because it allows the audience to be complacent, not asking what the opera means to them today. Regie often entails a top-down approach, as in Hilsdorf's production. That need not always be the case, but usually the director starts with a premise ('capitalism is bad' seems to be the most common) and finds ways to fit the opera to it. Still, it would be possible to consider Robert Carsen a Regie director as well, as his stagings are never simply historicist. The Regie phenomena has its roots in the former East Germany, where the work of Bertolt Brecht was extremely influential. The major difference between this inter- and postwar drama and opera production is that Brecht wrote his own plays through which to demonstrate his ideas, while opera directors nearly always work with pre-existing pieces. This is where the major criticism of Regietheater comes from, as some find an ahistorical Regie approach to be irrelevant to material written in previous centuries (c.f. the criticisms of Audi's Monteverdi productions discussed in Chapter Three). Brecht himself questioned whether his ideas could be applied to already-existing operas.⁸

Walter Felsenstein, the Intendant at Berlin's Komische Oper in the 1950s and 60s, is often credited with creating Regietheater, but his productions look strikingly conservative compared to those of his followers. Felsenstein's goal was to put 'singende Menschen' on the stage: flesh-and-blood characters rather than just singers playing a role.⁹ This emphasis on character, and especially the centrality of the director in bringing it to the opera, did become a part of the Regie approach, but it was Felsenstein's successors who brought

⁷ By 'ahistoricism' I imply a stance that ignores the past, while by 'antihistoricism' I mean an approach that denigrates the past.

⁸ 'We have seen that opera is sold as evening entertainment, and that this puts definite bounds to all attempts to transform it. [...] Today we can begin to ask whether opera hasn't come to such a pass that further innovations, instead of leading to the renovation of this whole form, will bring about its destruction', 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett (London, 1964), p. 41.

⁹ Manuel Brug, *Opernregisseure heute* (Leipzig, 2006), p. 40.

Brecht's ideas of epic theatre, *Gestus*, alienation, and questioning the audience to the opera stage. Felsenstein was one of a group of East German directors who shared a desire to bring the antiquated genre of opera up to date by finding its relevance to contemporary audiences, first by using thought-out characterisation, later by more political means. Many of these directors also worked in West Germany, spreading their ideas outward and influencing directors on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Among them were Götz Friedrich (who defected to the West and ran Berlin's Deutsche Oper from 1975 to his death in 2000), Ruth Berghaus (the closest to Brecht in the group, having worked at his Theater am Schiffbauerdam with his wife Helene Weigel, and married to his collaborator composer Paul Dessau), and Harry Kupfer.

It is important to note that Regietheater is not necessarily synonymous with the avant-garde. Regie is an all-encompassing approach to the work, while the monicker 'avant-garde' usually refers to visual style. Avant-garde aesthetics were applied to opera as early as the 1920s, where Berlin's Kroll-Oper, under Otto Klemperer, commissioned strikingly geometric set designs from designers such as the Bauhaus's László Moholy-Nagy, but the approach to acting and mise-en-scène were much as one would have seen in any other opera house at the time.¹⁰

Brecht's conception of *Gestus* is famously difficult to *define*, but he puts it relatively succinctly (yet still rather cryptically) in his essay 'On Gestic Music': "'Gest'" is not supposed to mean gesticulation: it is not a matter of explanatory or emphatic movements of the hands, but of overall attitudes. A language is gestic when it is grounded in a gest and conveys particular attitudes adopted by the speaker towards other men'.¹¹ Each actor finds the movements and actions that make up his character and its relation to other characters. In

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹¹ Brecht, 'On Gestic Music' in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 104.

Hilsdorf's staging Nerone, as a megalomaniacal executive, often pointed downwards with both hands to place emphasis on his intractable ideas, Seneca implored against the immoral atmosphere with both hands raised, and Poppea spent much of the performance lying on the table at the centre of the stage, forcing other characters to move around her. *Gestus* is purely relational, each gest being a sign pointing outwards towards society: Nerone's actions enforce a certain reaction in other characters. Each individual gest is also autonomous: 'each single incident has its basic gest'.¹² Because of this there can be no character development or depth, for a 'character' is simply a summation of the gestic elements of his discourse. This is very much at odds with the psychological drama of Monteverdi and Busenello. Brecht's characters are unchanging archetypes who, through their particular *Gestus*, make the audience feel a certain way about them. The anachronistic application of gestic acting to early opera goes strongly against our current understanding of its seventeenth-century context, but an orthodox Brechtian would say that in viewing this anachronism as all-important we are simply demonstrating that we are in thrall to the 'culinary' operatic tradition. Of course had Brecht himself been involved he would have probably radically reimagined the opera, as he did with various Shakespeare plays (such as *Richard III*, which became *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*) and John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (which became the *Threepenny Opera*), a solution not available to Hilsdorf, hired to direct Monteverdi's *Poppea*. If we look for a Monteverdi production to be an autonomous artwork, as most operagoers do, *Gestus* cannot 'work' because of the dissonance of aesthetic values; yet in a Brechtian dialectic this dissonance is the very essence of the theatre. The point of staging the opera would be to show that the social constructions presented in it do not 'work'. The one exception where *Gestus* was effective in Hilsdorf's production was in Seneca's character. A common modern interpretation of the role is that he is a parody of sophism, an ineffectual

¹² 'A Short Organum for the Theatre' in *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 200.

spouter of old-fashioned nonsense,¹³ and if we see him in this way he does indeed fit the Brechtian mode of unchanging archetype designed to annoy the audience. Ottavia, though, would seem a particularly non-gestic character, evidenced by the strong emotional reactions the audience had to Anna Renzi's portrayal of the role. For Hilsdorf, Ottavia is an incidental character, as without a psychological trajectory she becomes merely the stock-figure of the betrayed woman.

The other important Brechtian concept employed by Hilsdorf is the alienation effect, or *Verfremdung*. This idea entails a variety of practices via which the audience is distanced from the action happening on stage, to prevent them from relating emotionally to the characters and to make them behold them in a purely critical light, assuring that they remain problematic archetypes.¹⁴ Hilsdorf's most evident alienation device is the use of gauze screens separating the stage from the audience. This rather obvious device has the effect of preventing the audience from being drawn into the performance, as the view of everything on stage is rendered hazy by the physical barrier. These screens suddenly collapse before 'Addio Roma', and Ottavia leaves the stage through the now empty frame. This then allows for the audience to finally become part of the drama during the concluding coronation scene, standing in for the adoring *popolo*, though our adoration is negated by the bad behaviour we have seen from the emperor and his new empress as the evening has progressed. Through the foregoing alienation and sudden falling of the screens juxtaposed with seeing the plight of Ottavia, Hilsdorf ensures that we are not seduced by the grandeur of the coronation music. Hilsdorf also made an attempt at environmental ambulatory theatre, staging two scenes in

¹³ see Ellen Rosand, *Monteverdi's Venetian Operas* (Berkeley, 2007), p. 344.

¹⁴ 'The A-effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware, to which one's attention is to be drawn, from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected. [...] Before familiarity can turn into awareness the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object in question needs no explanation'. 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting' in *Brecht on Theatre*, pp. 143-144.

other parts of the building (to be discussed in the next section). This is another form of the alienation effect, which forces the audience to confront the opera out of their seats and away from the auditorium, defamiliarising ‘opera’ from its form as an art to be watched whilst seated and facing the performers. Though not an unworkable idea in principle, there was no apparent dramatic reason why those two particular scenes were removed from the auditorium and, like the screens, the device seemed little more than a gimmick.

Why Hilsdorf’s Brechtian experiment was not a complete success is that the production did not (and perhaps could not) have a clear political agenda: Nerone as he appears in Busenello’s libretto really isn’t like a modern businessman running a firm, so if one does want to bring out politics in the piece it either needs to be historicised (made explicitly about the Roman empire or about seventeenth-century Venice) or highly abstracted rather than being grounded in a specific time (now) and place (Cologne’s Gerling-Quartier). The difference between Brecht’s *Galileo* (which takes place near the time when the opera was written) and *Poppea* is that the former as written by Brecht encodes his ideological ideas as well as allowing for his experimental technique which follows from those ideas. *Poppea*, and other earlier works to which Brechtian aesthetics have been applied, is a product of a different time where the ideology of the creators does not match Brecht’s, and where the techniques therefore do not go hand in hand with the ideological point. Finally, a slavish following of Brecht’s ideas, reifying them into a list of elements to be ticked off, ironically results in a production that perfectly fits Brecht’s notion of ‘culinary’ drama, the very kind of unthinking theatre he hoped to destroy.

There are, however, some significant similarities between the aesthetics of Brecht’s epic theatre and the music drama of Monteverdi’s time, similarities which Hilsdorf did not attempt to bring out. As in Brecht’s ideal form of music theatre, Busenello’s words are very tightly tied to Monteverdi’s music. The goal of that close linkage, however, is different: for

Monteverdi it exists to heighten the psychological portrayal of characters, while for Brecht it helps to meld the political and social ideas, or the content, of a theatre piece with its form. Also like epic theatre, Monteverdi's Venetian operas are not Aristotelian, consisting of a wide range of incident, expressed through different kinds of genres, character types, and tropes. As Brecht's *Galileo* and *Mother Courage* mix historical drama with political agit-prop and musical theatre, Monteverdi and Busenello mix comedy and tragedy and their opera entails a wide variety of character and incident. Also like epic theatre, Venetian opera does not claim to represent reality (though this is true of most opera), and both forms of theatre centre on human beings' subjectivity, that of the characters for Monteverdi and that of the audience for Brecht.

The differences, though, outweigh the similarities. Most importantly, Monteverdi and his librettists did not write their operas to effect social change. Though they do stage political issues, their interest is more in exposure than agitation. Ellen Rosand describes *Poppea* as an intensely political opera which embodies complex Venetian attitudes towards the Roman Empire, though for the most part in service of the state.¹⁵ Brecht also complains about the sensuality of much modern drama and opera, a sensuality which in *Poppea* comes to the fore.¹⁶ The most important difference, though, is the psychological aspect of Monteverdi's opera and its close examination of individual character psychologies, unlike the abstracted types conveyed through Brechtian *Gestus*. Monteverdi's portrayal of Nero is not necessarily more historically accurate than Brecht's of Galileo, but Nero has a fully developed psychological trajectory, while Galileo merely serves as a symbol for all oppressed yet inactive intellectuals. Brecht does not hide the negative opinion he has of Galileo (because of

¹⁵ Rosand, pp. 16-17.

¹⁶ In 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre' Brecht compares various aspects of the 'dramatic' and 'epic' theatres: the dramatic theatre provides the spectator with 'sensations', while the epic theatre 'forces him to take decisions'. *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 37.

his ‘weak’ recantation) and his primary goal is to convey this to the audience. Busenello’s and Monteverdi’s own opinions of their characters do not come through so expressly; rather, their characters seem to speak for themselves. All of these characters are creations, of course, but Monteverdi/Busenello and Brecht are playing different theatrical games with their respective audiences. *Poppea*’s authors are skilled at giving the impression that their characters do indeed speak for themselves, and they implicate the audience in this game by helping them relate emotionally to the characters through careful choice of words and music, as well as by hiring players like Anna Renzi who were skilled at this sort of psychological role playing. Brecht makes his power as rule-maker more apparent, forcing the audience to play along but also making them very aware that they are playing. It results that a production like Hilsdorf’s is somewhat like playing Cluedo with Monopoly pieces: the cognitive dissonance may be interesting at first but the game falls apart rather quickly.

Pizzi’s production falls between the two extremes of top-down and bottom-up direction; his is an approach starting from the material of the opera but tempered by the fact that the production needed to somehow demonstrate a progression to *Poppea* from *Orfeo* and *Ulisse*. The most basic element of this linkage was the use of the same stage layout from each production to the next, with a mostly open stage connected to the orchestra by a stairway, and seamlessly leading out into the auditorium. Pizzi states that the court spectacle of *Orfeo*, evidenced in his production by the raising of a late-Renaissance court set from under the stage, led to the psychological realism of the two Venetian operas, presented with more basic stage technology.¹⁷ *Ulisse* has the simplest set, mostly unchanging throughout, while *Poppea* employs a revolve on which stand three different set pieces representing first a colonnade for Poppea, then one for Ottavia, then Seneca’s library. All three also have a

¹⁷ Pier Luigi Pizzi with Juan Lucas, ‘Entrevista: “Lo que *L’incoronazione* muestra es la fragilidad humana”’, in programme book for *La coronación de Poppea* (Madrid, 2010), pp. 124-129.

balcony at the top for appearances of the gods. Perhaps the greater complexity of the set of *Poppea* is meant to show this opera's musical and dramatic complexity over that of *Ulisse*. Within the constraints of his constructed teleology, Pizzi's production of *Poppea* is not as successful as it might have been otherwise, nor is it as successful as his versions of the other two operas, discussed in previous chapters. As evidenced by the critical reviews, which mostly discuss only the singers and orchestra, the *Personenregie* did not make much effect. Danielle de Niese, who created *Poppea* in Carsen's production, also plays the role here, but due to a more modest costume the emphasis is not so much on her sexuality as on her morally questionable relationship with Nerone, sung here by countertenor Philippe Jaroussky in white makeup and a black feathered robe. A freer play with the affordances offered by *Poppea* might have resulted in a more successful staging, but Pizzi is somewhat straitjacketed by his teleological interpretation of Monteverdi's three extant operas.

The varying approaches of these three directors show that opera direction in the present is not monolithic, with one approach dominating. Whether taking a top-down or bottom-up approach, directors face a significant challenge in helping a modern audience make sense of an early opera. We will see in the next section that the buildings in which the performances take place can have a large impact on the productions and their audiences, as they afford another layer of directorial opportunities and audience preconceptions.

II. Buildings

The three *Poppea* productions examined here use their respective theatrical spaces in very different ways. Both Glyndebourne and Madrid's Teatro Real are proscenium theatres, though the Madrid production attempted to erase the proscenium through the layout of the stage and the orchestra. The Cologne production was held not in a purpose-built theatre but

in the central hall of a former corporate headquarters, the Gerling-Quartier, a proscenium-less space with the audience seated on two sides of a traverse stage. These different layouts had different effects on the performances and on audience response to them, affording different opportunities to the director and different processes of audience engagement.

In *Architecture, Actor, and Audience* Iain Mackintosh demonstrates that since the seventeenth century, the geometry of theatre design has rested on the intersection of two circles, one describing the audience's space (auditorium) and the other the performance space (stage).¹⁸ The consistency of this basic design over the centuries is remarkable, and it is still used in opera house design today. The exact disposition of the space has changed a great deal, though, from the seventeenth-century Venetian theatres (none of which survives) in which Monteverdi's late operas premiered, to the theatres in which they are performed today. In early theatres there was a true area of intersection of audience and performer spaces in the overlap of their respective circles, a space called the *vesica piscis* in sacred geometry. In the seventeenth century that space was shared by the singers and the orchestra, both of whom entered into the audience's circle: approximately half of the resulting lozenge-shaped space was for the orchestra (usually at the same level as the stalls) and the other half was a forestage from which the singers sang. Behind the singers on the stage proper would lie the elaborate stage sets, usually a series of flats giving a forced perspective, and machines for the appearances of gods or fantastic creatures. Over the next two centuries pictorial idealism came into effect as playwrights and scenographers, influenced by Enlightenment and Romantic philosophies of dramatic truth, pushed both performers and sets behind a proscenium arch in order to be able to control the entire stage picture. The orchestra alone occupied the *vesica piscis*. This had important effects on the experience of theatre-going, as singers and actors no longer shared a space with an audience, altering both the psychology of

¹⁸ London, 1993

experience in the theatre and the physical acoustic. Where seventeenth-century singers were able to communicate directly with an audience because of their presence on the forestage, as evidenced by writings about Anna Renzi and other performers, singers of later centuries were removed from the audience behind the imaginary 'fourth wall', needing to act in a more stylised way to be 'read' from further away and to project their voices more strongly to be heard throughout the auditorium (which also grew significantly in size for both artistic and economic reasons).¹⁹

Performing a seventeenth-century opera in a modern opera house (or even an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century one) makes these differences very apparent, and both the stage and music directors face major spatial challenges when they wish to mount an early opera. Earlier in the twentieth century, the solution was to transform operas like Monteverdi's as much as possible into works that would fit in newer theatres. As we have seen in previous chapters, the orchestra was enlarged to reflect the performance space and the current performance practices, and stagings brought such operas more in line with those of the standard repertoire. Today, however, as practitioners attempt to perform these operas musically closer to the way they would have been heard in their first performances, it is more common to alter the stage to serve the music. The most obvious problem is in the size of the orchestra: as Jonathan and Beth Glixon show in *Inventing the Business of Opera*, Venetian orchestras usually consisted only of two harpsichords, one or two theorbos, two to five violins and violas, and a bass instrument – small forces compared even to a Mozartian orchestra of approximately thirty-six.²⁰ Venetian opera houses probably seated only a few

¹⁹ In present-day spoken theatre the balance has tended to shift back towards a shared space, evidenced by the increasingly frequent construction of black box spaces that can be configured in various ways, and by the prevalence of thrust stages. The new Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon is a thrust stage, replacing the former proscenium stage. Much of the press surrounding the new theatre has focused on the fact that it is less like a cinema than the old one, but of course the cinema could not have existed without the previous model of the pictorialising proscenium arch.

²⁰ Oxford, 2006, p. 222.

hundred and the farthest seats were only slightly over fifty feet from the stage (compared to 110 feet at New York's Metropolitan Opera).²¹ Such a small orchestra would have been easily heard in such a space, which was also constructed out of resonant wood. Today's opera houses often seat upwards of 2000 people, so the sound of a small Venetian band in the orchestra pit would be lost in the large volume of the space. An opera house can counter this in various ways, such as electronically amplifying the orchestra (very rare), augmenting it with more instruments, or changing its location. Glyndebourne and the Teatro Real both enlarged the orchestras to about seventeen players and raised the pit to bring the sound into the auditorium. Both houses' orchestra pits are equipped with hydraulic lifts for that very purpose.

The proscenium style of theatre design has lasted until the present, and both the Teatro Real and Glyndebourne have proscenium stages. For most nineteenth- and twentieth-century operas the singers and orchestra must be in constant view of the conductor, and it is only on a proscenium stage that this is feasible (though the use of video monitors has begun to alter this necessity).²² For earlier operas, however, visual communication with a conductor is not always needed because of the much smaller performing forces involved. It is often overlooked that when an opera company produces a Monteverdi opera it must somehow convey a musical work written under very different spatial conditions, in addition to the different sociocultural conditions that are more frequently discussed. The three recent productions of *Poppea* have very different ways of dealing with the presence of the proscenium. In the Teatro Real, Pier Luigi Pizzi attempted to render the proscenium invisible by placing the orchestra on the same level as the stalls and building a stairway up to the stage, which was brought slightly forward. Though the set pieces remain behind the

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 19. The Met has presented Handel operas with varying success but has never ventured further into the past.

²² Michael Barron, *Auditorium Acoustics and Architectural Design* (London, 1993), p. 299.

proscenium arch, the singers often come forward to the forestage or even onto the stairway. This also served to bring the sound directly into the auditorium, rather than allowing it to mix above the stage as would be normal for later operas with larger forces. At Glyndebourne, Carsen employed the proscenium in a traditional way as the singers remained behind it and the orchestra pit (other than in the prologue, as we shall see). In Dietrich Hilsdorf's Cologne production, presented in a found space rather than a purpose-built theatre, a traditional proscenium was absent yet the audience was faced with a gauze screen behind which the action occurred. Ironically, due to these screens this production was the most intensely 'proscenitised' of the three.

The history of each of the three performance spaces has a bearing on the various decisions taken in each one. The history of Madrid's Teatro Real is one of delays, closures, reopenings, and renovations. Construction of the theatre commenced during the post-Napoleonic restoration of the Spanish monarchy with a commission by Ferdinand VII for architect Isidro González Velázquez to re-plan the environs of the Palacio Nacional. Because of a lack of funds the project, and especially the opera house to be its centrepiece, was delayed many times but was finally completed in 1850 under the opera-loving Queen Isabela II. The lozenge-shaped site forced the theatre's various architects to place the auditorium and stage at its very centre, with public and private areas surrounding. This makes the Teatro Real somewhat different from other opera houses of the nineteenth century, like the Opéra Garnier in Paris, where more ground space is given to the grand public foyers and lounges than to the backstage.²³ Soon after it was completed various problems with the building's construction began to be noticed; these were worsened by a fire in 1867 and, in spite of various improvements, by 1925 the theatre was deemed to be in danger of imminent collapse and it was closed. Decades of governmental indecision followed, until the building

²³ Maira Herrero and Francisco Rodríguez de Partearroyo, *El Teatro Real* (Barcelona, 2003), p. 164.

was restored and re-appropriated as a concert hall in 1966. Opera in Madrid was meanwhile performed in the smaller Teatro de la Zarzuela. In 1986 the Ministry of Culture decided that Madrid needed a more prestigious opera house, so the decision was taken to totally renovate the building. After yet more delays, the Teatro Real opened again as an opera house in 1997 (Figure 1).²⁴

The current opera house represents a late twentieth-century rationalisation of nineteenth-century architecture. The goal of the architectural team was to open up the ‘maze of tiny, prosaic cells’ and create a better flow through the building for both audiences and performers.²⁵ The basic shape of the auditorium was retained so as not to alter its acoustic, but sight-lines and the comfort of the seats were improved to match the high standards of twentieth-century audiences. According to the project manager Francisco Rodríguez de Partearroyo, there were three options for undertaking the project: either to superimpose and differentiate the new architecture from the old, to ‘re-invent history’ and try to freeze the building at a particular moment in the past, or to ‘combine the new and existing architectures in a harmonious way, while allowing the new to express itself in its own language’.²⁶ The third approach was taken, so that unlike the near-contemporaneous rebuilding of Venice’s La Fenice, rebuilt ‘as it was, where it was’, or the recent renovation of La Scala in Milan, which has an obviously new tower attached to the ‘old’ opera house, the Teatro Real represents an attempt to comment upon and improve the original. Rodríguez de Partearroyo claims that the dialogue between past and present should be ‘silent’, but the finished opera house belies this claim, as a late twentieth-century hand guided by postmodern architecture is very much in evidence. The design elements are drawn from the mid-nineteenth century, but their layout

²⁴ Illustrations can be found on the accompanying DVD.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 174.

²⁶ *ibid.*, 177.

and function have much more to do with current audience practices. All audience members are drawn into the central foyer and all are invited into the various galleries and lounges, erasing the social stratification that is so much in evidence in ‘real’ nineteenth-century theatres, even those which have been extensively renovated like London’s Coliseum (where audience members seated in the upper circles are directed up anonymous and claustrophobic staircases). The opera house’s restaurant (a concept that would be alien to the nineteenth century) provides an example in microcosm of the ‘postmodern’ opera house as a whole: audience members dine together in an oval-shaped room surrounded by a colonnade made of dark wood, with deep red walls, a ceiling painted with stars, a marble floor, and elaborate costumes in display cases. A black marble obelisk stands in the centre (Figure 2). The design is linked to that of the foyer, another oval space surrounded by a dark colonnade.

The space allows the audience to participate in a nineteenth-century fantasy of opera without giving up any twenty-first century comforts. The space is inviting, the seats comfortable, the sightlines good, and the acoustic excellent (Figure 3). A trip to the opera is meant to be a pleasurable, untrying experience, and the productions the company performs are usually technologically-advanced with aesthetically pleasing sets and costumes. Pizzi’s *Poppea* is no exception, using the stage’s modern revolve to accommodate large, heavy set pieces, and using the opera house’s prestige to employ the best singers and instrumentalists available. Like the opera house in which it is staged, the production is comfortable and slick and emphasises flow of set change and character movement, asking fairly little of the audience, qualities emphasised by the critical reviews. The reviews, mostly positive, focus on the good singing and orchestra and say little about the production; *El País* mentions only

the ‘precise lighting’,²⁷ and the only words *Opera News* found for it were ‘illuminating’ and ‘original’.²⁸

Pizzi’s attempt at erasing the proscenium was successful, as one did feel more a part of the performance than is usual in opera. The addition of the forestage made a great difference visually and acoustically, and it allowed the singers to communicate more directly both with the instrumentalists accompanying them and with the audience (Figure 4). *Opera News* praises this in particular and various blogs mention the success of this decision.²⁹ The audience and spectator spaces were most evidently drawn together at the end of Ottavia’s ‘Addio Roma’, when Ottavia, sung by Anna Bonitatibus, departed down the stairs through the orchestra and the stalls to leave by the rear door. Her departure from Rome became a departure from the world of the stage and the opera itself. The opera house itself afforded various opportunities to Pizzi and his collaborators, and they created a production which matches the space very successfully, if also reflecting the comfortable nature of the architecture by offering a mostly uncritical perspective on the opera.

Another proscenium theatre, Glyndebourne has a long history as a place for opera though the current theatre is quite new, dating from 1994. Though its owners would probably disagree, Glyndebourne could be seen as a modern version of a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century court-theatre. Unlike the Teatro Real, in the very centre of Madrid, Glyndebourne’s theatre is attached to a country house in rural Sussex, so a trip to Glyndebourne cannot be just an evening out. Getting there requires advance planning, more than a quick subway journey. The audience at the main festival (though not for Tour performances) is expected to

²⁷ J.Á. Vela del Campo, ‘Poder y seducción’, *El País* (18 May 2010). http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cultura/Poder/seduccion/elpepicul/20100518elpepicul_6/Tes?print=1, accessed 8 October 2010.

²⁸ Roberto Herrscher, ‘L’incoronazione di Poppea’, *Opera News* (28 May 2010). http://209.123.189.218/Opera_News_Magazine/2010/9/Review/MADRID__L__Incoronazine_di_Poppea.html, accessed 8 October 2010.

²⁹ For example, see ‘Monteverdi in Madrid’ (31 May 2010). <http://intermezzo.typepad.com/intermezzo/2010/05/monteverdi-in-madrid.html>, accessed 8 October 2010.

dress in black tie, and the festival tickets are among the most expensive in the UK. A 300-seat opera house was built onto the country house in the early 1930s by its owners John Christie and his wife Audrey Mildmay. Attendance at the summer festival quickly became a requirement both musically and socially, and the auditorium was soon enlarged to seat 433.³⁰ Over the years the balcony was enlarged and the auditorium reconfigured to have a total of 845 seats.³¹ In the late 1980s George Christie, the son of the festival's founder, decided that a new theatre was needed, with better stage machinery and a greater seating capacity, and the current horseshoe-shaped auditorium opened in 1994 (Figure 5). The new theatre, replacing the 1930s rectangular one, is a return to the older-style circular design of opera houses. *Poppea* has an important history at Glyndebourne, as the edition Raymond Leppard made for the 1962 festival was one of the opera's earliest large-scale productions in a mildly authenticist version (though its use of heavy string textures and large cuts make it not appear so today). A new production using the same musical edition, directed by Peter Hall, was staged in the 1980s, and Robert Carsen's production debuted in the 2008 season, for the first time with a period instrument band (the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment) led by Emmanuelle Haïm.³² In addition to its revival as part of the company's tour, the production was also performed semi-staged with its Glyndebourne cast at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall in 2008, and Carsen also directed it at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna.

The Glyndebourne Touring Opera gives a chance for audiences around England to attend opera, allows young singers to gain experience in full-scale opera production, and lets the company reuse its main Festival productions. *Poppea* was restaged by Bruno Ravella,

³⁰ Marcus Binney and Rosy Runciman, *Glyndebourne: Building a Vision* (London, 1994), p. 47.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 157.

³² Interestingly, the fact that Haïm was one of the first woman conductors to be employed by the festival went mostly unremarked in the press. Rather than being an indication of the mainstreaming of women conductors this may be more a function of the marginal place of *Poppea* in relation to the symphonic canon, where the presence or absence of women conductors is more frequently remarked upon, and where the appointment of a woman to a leading post can make front-page news (as with Marin Alsop at the Baltimore Symphony).

Carsen's assistant on the original festival production, and conducted by Jonathan Cohen, a former assistant to William Christie, leading a group of freelance period instrument players. The cast featured some of the same performers from the Festival production in larger roles, most notably Lucia Cirillo graduating from Valletto to Nerone. The autumn 2010 tour, beginning at Glyndebourne itself, went to the New Victoria Theatre in Woking, the Milton Keynes Theatre, the Norwich Theatre Royal, the Theatre Royal Plymouth, and the Regent Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent. Though this chapter focuses on a performance seen at Glyndebourne, because all of the theatres are medium-sized proscenium stages the spatial aspect of this *Poppea* would have been very similar throughout the country. Running with *Poppea* in repertoire were Rossini's *La Cenerentola* in Peter Hall's well-known production and *Don Giovanni* in a production by Jonathan Kent which had premiered the previous summer.

Though Carsen uses the proscenium in a traditional way, he finds a unique solution in attaching the audience- and performer-spaces in his staging of the opera's prologue. The characters Virtù (dressed as a nun) and Fortuna (in a gold ball gown) begin the opera with a spoken argument: Virtù sits in the front row of the stalls as if she were a real audience member, and during the *sinfonia* (overture) Fortuna enters the auditorium as if late, climbing over the patrons seated in the front row. When the music stops an argument ensues, as Fortuna claims that Virtù has taken her seat. Their spoken English argument blends into the sung Italian of the Prologue, and as they sing they move from the stalls to the stage to be joined by Amore, the opera continuing on stage only. Though it quickly becomes obvious that the two are not really part of the audience due to the actorly delivery of their lines and the spotlight on Fortuna, commencing the action in the audience serves to draw attention to the stage, along with Virtù and Fortuna. Continuing the notion of linkage between the spaces, Carson places a large group of actors on stage to witness *Poppea*'s final coronation:

this group mirrors the real audience in the theatre, as they are dressed in black tie and gowns (during the 2008 Festival performances) or in broad mix of styles (during the Tour performances, reflecting the different dress code). Mirroring the audience on stage has become of one Carsen's signature devices, also used effectively in a production of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* for Paris's Opéra Bastille which was set in the opera house itself, and a production of Lully's *Armide* which stages the opera as the dream of a group of modern-day tourists at Versailles. As discussed above, such a device is an example of personal style melded with a bottom-up approach to the opera.

In addition to raising the orchestra pit to be almost level with the stalls, Michael Levine's stage designs for Carsen's production provide another part of the acoustic solution in presenting early opera in much larger spaces than it was conceived for. Other than a few set pieces (a bed, a table, a bathtub) the set consists entirely of dark red curtains, deployed in various formations to indicate changes of scene (Figure 6). The curtains serve to deaden the acoustic of the stage space, allowing most of the resonance to occur at the front of the stage and in the auditorium. This helps the singers project intricacies of the text which would be lost in a larger, more resonant space, and helps keep the orchestra's sound forward. The curtains also serve an aesthetic function, as they hem the characters into the stage space and serve as a metaphor for both imprisonment and, due to their red colour, sensuality and the blood of murders and suicides. The production demonstrates a canny use of the affordances of the opera and of Glyndebourne itself, as its solutions successfully serve both practical and aesthetic ends. As usual, Carsen builds his production around his own engagement with the material and the pre-determined aspects of space and potential audience expectations.

While both the Teatro Real and Glyndebourne were built specifically to house opera, Cologne's massive Gerling-Quartier was built as the corporate headquarters complex for Gerling insurance in the 1950s, and it is now being redeveloped for mixed business and

residential use (Figure 7). Because the Cologne opera house was undergoing extensive renovations, the opera company needed to find alternative spaces and the main hall of the Gerling-Quartier emerged as a possibility for *Poppea*. It was far from apparent that the hall could function as a performance space, but after consultations with acousticians and architects it was decided that with some modifications it could indeed be possible.³³ The room has a rounded shape, but the architectural team erected temporary walls around the audience, seated on risers on two sides of a central stage, to form a smaller irregular rectangle. These walls also helped absorb the sound, which would have been too live for opera with only the outer walls. There is a cupola in the centre of the room, with the main stage directly under it. On either side two runways led offstage, and the orchestra was split into two groups next to each runway. As discussed in the previous section, the stage- and orchestra-space was separated from the audience spaces by large frames filled in with transparent gauze material (Figure 8). The top solid part of the frames also had the practical use as surfaces on which to project German supertitles.

The press focused strongly on the novelty of the space, and the critics were unanimous in finding it a successful re-appropriation. This seems to take the focus away from the production itself, and though the critics praise it they are vague in what exactly about it they found successful. The *Kölnischer Stadtanzeiger* called it a ‘sensational evening’ that demonstrated the opera company at its very best, due to the excellent singing and effective use of the possibilities of the space. It calls the opera itself ‘a shocking modern chamber play about power, force, and love’.³⁴ It also liked the novelty of the divided space, praising the

³³ These discussions are detailed in the programme book of the opera.

³⁴ Like many German opera companies, Cologne compiles a dossier of press reviews and posts it online. Unlike British or American companies, which tend to extract positive tag lines from reviews, German companies post them in full, even if not entirely positive. The three quoted here come from *Pressestimmen: Eine Auswahl*, http://www.operkoeln.com/media/content/veranstaltungen/pdf/Pressespiegel_Poppea_neu.pdf, accessed 20 January, 2011.

stereophonic effect of the split orchestra. *Rundschau* focuses somewhat more on the performance, singling out Sandrine Piau and Franco Fagioli for praise as Poppea and Nerone. Stefan Keim for the Westdeutscher Rundfunk focuses on the Gerling-Quartier, saying that the grandiosity Hilsdorf brought to the opera in this space ‘would never work in a normal opera house’. He also states that this production is ‘the best opera performance for a long time in Cologne’.

Most critics tend not to have specialist knowledge of early opera, and a sense of discomfort can be gleaned from the reviews, which focus on ‘safe’ aspects of criticism, describing the stage and praising the singers. None probes the effect of the space on the performance. First, the split audience means that the spectators can see each other much more clearly than is normal in theatres where all face the stage. This gives the performance a stronger sense of community, though this is offset by the screens blocking the stage. The split audience also presents challenges to stage movement, as action must be played in two directions rather than only one. Hilsdorf was successful in his blocking, as neither side of the audience felt favoured or cheated out of part of the performance (Figure 9), but splitting the orchestra had a more damaging result, as the two halves could not see each other.

Junghänel’s conducting was broadcast via video monitors to the opposite side, which meant that that side’s players were focused more on the monitors than on the stage or on each other. The orchestra here played a role more akin to that in mainstream opera than in the other *Poppea* productions, as a separate accompanying entity rather than as an integral part of the drama as it was in Madrid and Glyndebourne. Because of the separation and resultant lack of focus on the stage, the continuo was not able to be as supple or integrated as one might hope in this repertoire. This contributes to the alienation of the audience (part of Hilsdorf’s project), whose attention must also be split between stage and orchestra. Ironically, the orchestra in the seventeenth-century was very likely split as well, with two small groups of

continuo players, but they shared two halves of the same space as Christie's orchestra did in Madrid, rather than having the stage imposed between them. Junghänel missed the opportunity to experiment with this aspect of period performance by imposing himself over the whole orchestra; by leading his own half and leaving the others to follow the stage and accompany on their own, he could have allowed the orchestra to be more integrated into the staging.

Hilsdorf attempted to integrate the whole of the Gerling-Quartier into the production, extending beyond the performance space of its central hall. Video screens were erected on each side of the stage upon which filmed images of other parts of the Gerling-Quartier were projected, mostly showing the opera's characters walking through the hallways and gardens of the complex. Hilsdorf states that the power inherent in the architecture ('die überhebliche Machtgeste dieser Architektur'³⁵) was the guiding force of his production, so he wanted to bring in as much of the rest of the space as possible.³⁶ Unless one knew what the now-empty rooms of the complex had been used for, however, the effect of the video was lost. For example, seeing Nerone in Hans Gerling's former office could only contribute to his characterisation as a modern business leader if one knew that the empty room had been the founder's office. Otherwise, one simply sees Nerone in an empty room.

These observations make apparent the importance of the programme book to the performance as a whole. Though not related directly to the opera building, a programme can condition response in much the same way. Though many audience members choose not to purchase or read the whole book, the majority at least skim a synopsis. As with most German opera houses, Cologne produces a large programme book that doubles as manifesto and souvenir. A spectator who had read the interviews with Hilsdorf and Junghänel would have

³⁵ Note his use of 'Geste', as in 'Gestus'.

³⁶ Dietrich Hilsdorf, 'Zu unserer Arbeit mit Monteverdi, genannt Il Divino Claudio', Programmheft *Die Krönung der Poppea* (Cologne, 2010), p. 55.

had a better chance of catching on to their directorial choices. The very full Cologne programme book includes photographs from the production, a synopsis, a biographical essay on Monteverdi, a discussion of early Venetian opera, costume sketches, an essay on the libretto and its sources, the interviews with Hilsdorf and Junghänel, a discussion of voice types, and an essay on the opera's morality or lack thereof, in 76 rather flimsy pages of mostly small type. It would be difficult to read all of this material at the performance itself (and a non-German speaking audience member would not be able to read any of it), so it must be assumed that individuals will delve into the areas that will have greater interest for them, or will expand their knowledge at home after the performance. A notable absence from the programme is a cast list (given on an extra insert) or biographical details of any of the singers or other participants. This has the practical use of making the programme reusable for future seasons where the cast might not be the same, but it puts the directors very firmly at the centre of the production, above all other performers. Hilsdorf and Junghänel are presented as the only present-day figures who have any bearing on the performance.

The programme book for the Glyndebourne tour included details for all three productions in the repertoire, with only a cast list, synopsis, and short essay for each. The scant though well-produced programme does not fit the educational goal of the tour, as audiences do not learn nearly as much about the operas as they would in Cologne. The Madrid programme book is the most successful of the three because it is both easy to use and includes a great deal of information. After the cast list, a synopsis is given in both Spanish and English, along with the entire libretto in Italian and Spanish. The presence of the libretto makes the book more than just an ephemeral product connected with a single performance. The book also includes a commentary by the editor of the score, an essay on *Poppea*, an essay on ambition in the opera, another on passion, a small anthology of quotes about the opera, an interview with Pier Luigi Pizzi, a chronology of Monteverdi's life cross-referenced

to world events, a chronicle of Monteverdi opera performances in Madrid, a bibliography and discography, a section for children entailing an easy-to-read essay and synopsis, and biographies of the performers. Where the Cologne programme is daunting in its thin thick-set pages, the larger, glossier Madrid booklet is more inviting and easier to navigate. Perhaps surprisingly, aside from the interviews, programme essays tend to be commissioned from academics who may not know about the productions at hand, so they are generally more about the opera in general than that which is specifically seen on stage. This sometimes results in lacunae or the occasional situation where a scene which has been removed or altered is discussed in an essay.³⁷

Absent from the Cologne programme book was any discussion of the most puzzling aspect of Hilsdorf's production. Hilsdorf chose to present two scenes outside of the main hall, in a gesture towards the increasingly popular genre of ambulatory theatre. At the end of the first act, the audience was asked (in various languages) to go to either the Küche (kitchen) for the love scene between Valletto and Damigella or to the Venezianischer Saal (Venetian Room) for the scene between Nerone and Lucano. They were also split by gender, the men in the kitchen and the women in the Venetian Room. Not all chose to obey, and some people went to the wrong room or rushed to the lobby for a drink. The two scenes were presented simultaneously and though neither contributes much to the opera's story it was unfortunate to have to miss one. The scene in the kitchen was performed to a pre-recorded backing track, while a few continuo musicians travelled to the Venetian Room to accompany Nerone and Lucano. The separation of the audience by gender had no apparent logic, other than reflecting the opposite of the gender of the respective scenes' performers, and the use of environmental theatre seemed to be only a meaningless gimmick. The second half of the

³⁷ I was surprised to learn this fact of publication at a conference where one academic whose work had been featured in a programme book violently decried the very production the essay was supporting.

opera took place back in the main hall, and the ambulatory section of the evening was largely forgotten (none of the reviews mentions it). The opera company evidently saw the experiment of using the Gerling-Quartier as a success, as they used a similarly appointed space, the Staatenhaus in the Rheinpark, in the following season for a production of Stockhausen's *Sonntag aus Licht*.

Though not entirely successful, Hilsdorf's production demonstrates what can be achieved when performing an opera in a space which affords opportunities very different from those of a traditional opera house. The varied use of pre-existing spaces in these three productions further elucidates the notion of affordance, as they show how a pre-existing atmosphere contributes to cognition. Both directors and audiences begin with spatial expectations of what an opera should entail, and the directors then play with these expectations to create a rich and involving evening in the theatre. This discussion demonstrates the importance of the spatial aspect of theatrical production, often ignored in scholarship on opera. This physicality of space exemplifies the aesthetics of presence posited by this thesis.

III. Genders

Poppea affords myriad possibilities for problematising gender on stage, both for the present day and when thinking about how the opera was first performed in the seventeenth century. After a long period in which opera's practitioners and scholars chose not to focus on gender issues in staging, presenting hero and heroine as non-problematic categories, questions of gender and sexuality have now come to the fore both on stage and in academic discourse. Monteverdi's operas have proven particularly popular as sites for the problematising of 'straight' gender categories, and the three productions examined here are

no exception.³⁸ Part of the readiness with which *Poppea* can be used this way is that in seventeenth-century Venice the correlation of the gender of a role to the gender of its singer was different from today's possibilities due to various institutional and social changes. At the time of *Poppea* the castrato was becoming increasingly important in opera, though the voice type had not yet reached its early eighteenth-century apex as the standard voice for the heroic *primo uomo*. In the mid seventeenth-century castrati usually portrayed weak or effeminate characters, while conventionally masculine heroes were normally sung by tenors or basses. In Cavalli's *Didone*, the heroic role of Enea is written for a tenor, and Didone's spurned, ineffective, and eventually mad lover Iarba is scored for a castrato (though he does win her in the *lieto fine*). The title character of Cavalli's *Giasone* is a castrato, emphasising his weak character, in the throes of love rather than the more appropriate (for Venice) war. Monteverdi's *Ulisse* is full of tenors, including the title character, while the only castrato plays the suitor Antinoo, the first to be defeated by Ulisse's bow.³⁹ It should be noted that many of these tenor roles, especially the title character of *Ulisse*, are often sung by baritones today. Because Venetian pitch was probably closer to A465 than today's A440, these parts often lie fairly low for today's tenors, trained more in the top part of their range than the bottom.⁴⁰

Poppea is unusual in that it features two large castrato parts in Nerone and Ottone, both of whom fit the period stereotype of effeminacy (Ottone being ineffectual in his love for *Poppea* and unable to stand up to *Ottavia*, Nerone caring only about his sensuality rather

³⁸ There is a large and growing literature on gender studies in musicology, a significant part of which has focused on Monteverdi. For example, see Bonnie Gordon's *Monteverdi's Unruly Women* and Susan McClary's 'Constructions of Gender in Monteverdi's Dramatic Music', both mentioned in other parts of this study, as well as the further examples below.

³⁹ *L'umana fragilità* in the prologue is often sung by a countertenor but it was more likely sung by a female soprano in 1640.

⁴⁰ Alan Curtis, Preface, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (London, 1989), p. xiii.

than the running of his empire).⁴¹ It could be argued that *Poppea* is an opera without a hero (even if Seneca is seen as a positive figure, his role is not large enough to qualify). Because castrati do not exist today, opera companies must decide how to cast those roles. In previous decades it was common to transpose them down an octave for a baritone, but the growing number of countertenors singing today provides a possibility which allows the retention of both the music as written and the gender of the singer performing the role. Both parts have also often been sung by women, though more frequently Nerone because its high tessitura is a major challenge to most countertenors. As briefly discussed in Chapter Four, the castrato voice would not have sounded like the modern countertenor voice as the mechanics of sound production in the two types is different: the castrato would have used chest voice, while countertenors use head voice. The operation of castration also resulted in other physical deformities including the abnormal growth of the chest area, which allowed the castrato to make an especially loud and resonant noise.⁴² The physical and sonic differences between a female singer, a male singer using falsetto, and a castrato singer clearly have an effect on audiences based on their own enculturation; many people upon first hearing a falsettist express surprise or discomfort, and an operagoer for whom Nerone or Ottone was the first countertenor they had ever seen would have a very different experience from someone more accustomed to hearing men singing in that range.

⁴¹ Much as been written about constructions of gender in the early modern period and its reflections in the music, often with specific reference to Monteverdi. Roger Freitas applies these ideas to the castrato in *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani* (Cambridge, 2009), especially pp. 101-148. Much of his work is drawn from Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MS, 1990). Laqueur convincingly argues that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a one-sex notion of gender was predominant, with women being seen as an inversion of men rather than a separate kind of being. The castrato lies in the middle of this man-woman continuum, a person whose development has been arrested before masculinity has been fully physically asserted. Seeing a castrato on stage in the seventeenth-century was very different from seeing a countertenor today, when 'effeminacy' has different connotations, or indeed from seeing a castrato on the eighteenth-century stage, when a two-sex model had begun to take hold.

⁴² c.f. Ellen T. Harris, 'Vocies,' *Performance Practice: Music after 1600* (London, 1989).

Further contributing to the gender ambiguities is the fact that in the seventeenth century the stock character of the old nurse would have most likely been played by a high tenor in drag. There are two such characters in *Poppea*: Arnalta (Poppea's nurse) and Ottavia's unnamed nurse. Today these parts are sometimes played by tenors, sometimes countertenors, and sometimes women. Finally, some parts may have been played by boy sopranos, most likely Amore and Valletto. Though they could be cast as boys today (as in Harnoncourt's two recordings), it must be remembered that boys' voices changed much later in the seventeenth century than they do now, so they would have been able to attain a higher standard of musicality than is often possible today.

The three productions use various solutions to either resolve or increase gender ambiguity, by having men playing women (Arnalta in Madrid and Cologne, Nutrice in Madrid and Glyndebourne), women playing men (Nerone in Glyndebourne, Nutrice [oddly] in Cologne, Valletto in all three), Amore cast variously as woman playing woman (in Cologne and Madrid) and woman playing man (in Glyndebourne), and countertenors (Nerone in Madrid and Cologne, Ottone in all three).

After its Glyndebourne premiere Carsen's production was also performed in Vienna in 2010 with countertenor Jacek Laszczowski as Nerone. Having a male Nerone seems to have changed the dynamic of his scenes with Poppea, as where a female Nerone was required by anatomy to cover up much of her body lest the illusion be spoiled, a male could be much more scantily-clad to match his Poppea (Figures 10 and 11). It is debatable how much an audience can truly suspend its disbelief when a singer of the 'wrong' gender performs a role. The dynamic of two women performing a love scene is of course different from a man and a woman, even if one of the women is dressed as a man. In any case the presence of a countertenor creates ambiguity, especially for modern audiences who may not be used to such a voice type. The frisson of like-voice duets such as 'Pur ti miro' was a speciality of

Monteverdi and his contemporaries and they often play with their implications of same-sex relationships, problematising gender rather than closing the doors to difference.

Further increasing the potential for a 'queer' reading of *Poppea* is the second-act scene between Nerone and Lucano, a court poet and Seneca's nephew in history whose exact role is not well-defined in Busenello's libretto. In this scene Nerone praises Poppea in the company of Lucano in a duet, then sings a slower aria about her charms. It has a complex textual history, outlined by Ellen Rosand in *Monteverdi's Last Operas*.⁴³ All or part of it seems to have been omitted in the later Naples revival of the opera, indicated by ambiguous markings in the two manuscript scores, which Wendy Heller believes may have been a result of censorship for its political and erotic implications.⁴⁴ In her discussion of the scene, Heller notes that it includes the opera's only musical indication of sexual fulfilment, the eroticism of the scenes between Nerone and Poppea being more languorously sensual, featuring 'no such gradual buildup to a point of arrival suggestive of actual sexual gratification'.⁴⁵ This scene was usually performed in the first part of the Monteverdi revival as a drunken orgy, where the two men indulge in alcohol and praise Poppea, sometimes in the additional company of other courtiers. In recent decades, and in all three of the productions discussed here, it is played as a homosexual love scene, where Poppea only serves as part of what Eve Sedgwick calls an 'erotic triangle', where a homosexual bond between two men emerges from the love of the same woman.⁴⁶

In none of the productions is the love (or lust) between the two men seen in a positive light; it is rather used as another instance of Nerone's all-inclusive sexual appetite and his

⁴³ Rosand, pp. 110-115.

⁴⁴ Wendy Heller, 'Tacitus incognito: Opera as History in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*', *JAMS* 52 (1999), pp. 39-96.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁴⁶ Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), pp. 21-27.

disregard for running his empire. Directors who do stage the scene as homosexual therefore run the risk of seeming homophobic, using homosexuality merely as a titillating and finally condemnable example of Nerone's decadence. It is quite possible that this was the way Venetian audiences would have interpreted the scene, as a warning that effeminacy (a term which did not necessarily connote homosexuality but rather referred to a man acting like a woman, i.e. loving so excessively that he is distracted from his 'manly' duties) could lead to more dangerous pursuits, or that decadence in government could lead to sexual decadence.⁴⁷ The music is of striking sensuality, using gestures typical of the love duet, and is often seen as a highlight of the opera, so a successful staging of it must tread a fine line between pleasing the ears and troubling the mind. In a way the stakes are somewhat lower in a production that casts a woman as Nerone, as does Robert Carsen's, as the scene then retains only a 'stage' homosexual meaning while the actual staging is heterosexual. Carsen goes farthest in this scene, however, combining the idea of drunken orgy and love scene and adding a bathtub drowning. As the scene progresses Lucano is stripped to his underwear by Nerone's courtiers and is placed in the bath, then joined by Nerone at the climax of the duet and drowned during Nerone's ensuing aria (Figure 12). Rather than being specifically about homosexuality the scene also becomes about violence, and the extreme to which Carsen carries it makes it more apparent that he does not wish to imply that homosexuality alone is a signifier of decadence. The nudity adds to both the discomfort and the titillation of the audience at being forced to be voyeurs to this scene of sex and violence.

Pizzi and Hilsdorf both cast countertenors as Nerone in their productions, which makes the scene more obviously homosexual. Hilsdorf marginalised the scene by staging it during the interval in another part of the Gerling-Quartier and asking only women to attend it (Figure 13). It is hardly likely that Hilsdorf was wary of making the men in the audience

⁴⁷ Heller discusses such possibilities at length in 'Tacitus incognito'.

uncomfortable, so the gender split seems to have been arbitrary. By removing the scene from the main course of the opera he makes the implicit homosexuality of Nerone less of an issue for it becomes simply an isolated incident, just another example of Nerone's omnivorous sexuality.

The three productions were in agreement about at least some of the nurse characters, staging them with varying degrees of campness from Hilsdorf's Almodovarian Arnalta (Figure 14) to Carsen's more subdued figure in a frumpy dress (Figure 15). It has become a stage tradition for Arnalta to change into a new dress for her final scene, as she rejoices that she is now nurse to an empress. Hilsdorf chose not to follow that tradition, but Carsen's Arnalta transforms into a figure not unlike the late Queen Mother (Figure 16), and Pizzi's wears a sparkling version of her subdued purple dress (Figure 17). In Carsen's and Pizzi's productions the nurses are not obviously drag acts, and attempt to help the audience to look back on a time when such cross-gender casting was a convention while still bringing out the humour of a man playing an old woman. Though the touring version of Carsen's production cast a woman as Arnalta, it was originally conceived for a high tenor to sing. Carsen's Arnalta, created for a British production, draws on the imagery of the pantomime dame, especially in her transformation into the Queen Mum, and of the three productions his Arnalta got the most laughs. Significantly, though the costume and movement were the same, the female Arnalta in the touring production did not cause as much mirth as is evident in the DVD recording of the original production with a tenor. The British audience was probably drawing from their own experience of pantomime, an experience which German and Spanish audiences do not have and for whom Arnalta is 'just' a drag act. Hilsdorf's Arnalta is a more sinister-looking figure, and more obviously a transvestite. His Nutrice is sung by a woman made up eerily convincingly as an old man, throwing the gender ambiguity back upon itself (Figure 18).

Ottone's effeminacy is highlighted in the opera at the end of the second act, when he disguises himself as Poppea's maid Drusilla in an attempt to attempt to kill Poppea in her sleep on Ottavia's orders. In Carsen's and Pizzi's productions wearing Drusilla's dress suffices, while in Hilsdorf's he also wears a blonde wig, in all cases just enough of a disguise to fool the groggy Poppea into thinking that Drusilla has tried to kill her. Carsen and Hilsdorf both push the transvestism further by having Drusilla wear Ottone's clothes, a move supported in the libretto as Drusilla offers to switch places with Ottone, taking the punishment for his crime. In these two productions Drusilla is very eager to switch clothes with Ottone, making obvious the fact that she is the more decisive, more traditionally 'masculine' figure in their relationship. As with Nerone and Lucano, in staging the relationship between Ottone and Drusilla directors face the challenge of conveying seventeenth-century ideas of gender relationships to modern audiences with very different ideas. In Venice, Drusilla's decisiveness and drive in pursuing Ottone would have been seen as negative qualities, and Ottone would have been blamed for allowing the women in his life to control him to such an extent. Today a strong 'unruly woman' like Drusilla is more likely to be seen as a positive figure, a woman who takes her destiny into her own hands by rescuing her beloved Ottone.⁴⁸ These various problematic embodiments of homosexuality, cross-dressing, and gender construction on stage present significant challenges to stage directors because what voice types and musical engendering afforded to Venetian audiences is significantly different from what they afford to modern audiences. Though the three productions discussed here find different solutions, all three directors are attuned to the differences between the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries and readily play with the staging opportunities. Their success demonstrates that discussion of gender holds a prominent place on today's opera stage.

⁴⁸ c.f. Bonnie Gordon, *Monteverdi's Unruly Women*.

One could easily discuss any number of other dimensions of comparison, as an opera performance is an infinitely complex occasion. A brief comparison of the makeup of the performances' respective orchestras and the approach of their conductors to leading it will demonstrate one of the possibilities for further analysis. The size of orchestra was strikingly consistent across the three productions, approximately seventeen members. It seems that this size has become *de rigueur* for productions of early Venetian opera which take place in larger opera houses. Both William Christie and Jonathan Cohen were participants in their orchestras, playing the lead harpsichord and giving cues from the keyboard much as composers like Monteverdi and Cavalli would have done during their operas' first performances. Junghänel, a lutenist rather than a keyboard player, took a more traditional approach and conducted from the podium throughout. The use of early instruments in the opera house is not yet common enough that audiences are not struck by it, and at all three performances the instruments received much interest, with many audience members approaching the orchestra during the intervals to have a closer look and to try to match the instrument with its name in the programme book, and many commenting on the length of the theorbo necks from their seats. All three productions employed two keyboardists, each with a harpsichord and one doubling on chamber organ, with an additional regal at Glyndebourne. All also used three lutenists, with various doublings on theorbo, lute, and guitar. Completing the continuo section in Madrid and Glyndebourne were cello, gamba, violone, harp, dulcian (an early bassoon), and lirone. In Cologne there was no dulcian or gamba. The presence of the lirone in all three is rather striking, as there are only seven surviving exemplars of this instrument and very few professional players, and little is known about the instrument and its use (Erin Headly played in both Madrid and Glyndebourne; she and harpsichordist Paolo Zanzu were the only overlaps of personnel). The lirone's sound adds a great deal of richness to the continuo section because its flat bridge and re-entrant tuning allows for multiple

pitches to be played simultaneously, so it is not surprising that practitioners have latched onto it so readily.⁴⁹ Christie used a small group of melodic instruments, with two violins, two recorders, and two cornetti. Cohen added a third violin and a viola (to play the five-part ritornelli from the Naples manuscript rather than the three-part Venice ritornelli) and did not use cornetti, and Junghänel used two violins, two violas, two recorders, and two cornetti.

This instrumentation opens up the issue of which musical edition to use and what cuts to make. All three presented very full texts, but while Christie stayed with the Venice version in a new edition by his violone player Jonathan Cable, the other two combined the Venice and Naples versions. Cohen used Alan Curtis's edition with many cuts and pastes from other sources, and though I could not see which edition Junghänel used I believe it was based on Curtis. Each conductor made his own version of the score, increasingly common as specialists in Venetian opera collaborate with directors to adapt the dramaturgy of the sources. Cohen's Glyndebourne version was slightly different from that which Emmanuelle Haïm used at Carsen's production's first outing at the 2008 Glyndebourne festival, choosing more alternates from the Venice manuscript than the Naples one. The most striking change was the replacing of Valletto and Damigella's scene, in the Naples version for Haïm, with its Venice equivalent. The latter is a more conventional love duet, with the two finishing their scene with a duet on a ground bass which anticipates Nerone and Poppea's 'Pur ti miro' at the end of the opera. The Naples version also ends with a duet, but it has a mostly different text and entirely different music. Where the Venice version uses a conventional Marinist text of 'my dear, let us love', the Naples version is about biting: 'I would never tire of such love bites'.

⁴⁹ Erin Headley, 'Lirone', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16750>, accessed 26 January, 2011.

Among other dimensions of comparison could be costume and set design, acting and singing styles, publicity, or reaction in the blogosphere. One could also take a more empirical than hermeneutic approach and employ audience surveys to gauge response. My focus in this chapter has been explicitly and implicitly on stage directors and their decisions and agency in creating an operatic production, but they do not operate in a vacuum. All three studied here use the affordances of the spaces allocated, the audiences to whom they played, and the singers who were cast to devise their productions. This demonstrates that operas afford different things to different practitioners and audiences, and the particular openness of *Poppea*'s text presents a vast field of affordances and potential responses. This chapter, and indeed the whole thesis, has demonstrated that Monteverdi's operas are fields of affordance and meaning, opportunities for infinite variety on stage. As we have already seen with both *Orfeo* and *Ulisse*, in modern opera houses the stage director appears to be the dominant figure in sorting out these decisions. The Conclusion will question whether this is true only of early opera or of the repertoire as a whole.

Conclusion: Monteverdi's Liquefaction

Like any art form, opera is always a part of the various cultures in which it is produced and re-produced. The meanings of an opera are always fluid, depending on the affordances it offers to any given audience. This thesis has provided detailed investigations from varying perspectives of how that fluidity manifests itself in the modern production of Monteverdi's operas. This fluidity involves not only the texts themselves (cuts, rearrangements, transpositions, orchestrations, etc.) but also their medium (the stage, film, recording), their ideologies (nationalistic, fascist, communitarian), and their performances (in various singing and playing styles). The ontology of an opera is not finite, and is always in flux.

Chapter One, 'Politicising Monteverdi Between the Wars', demonstrated that this fluidity was already in place in the earliest stages of the Monteverdi revival. The differing political and aesthetic aims of the scholars, composers, and performers interested in early opera resulted in very different realisations. Vincent d'Indy, the first to perform *Orfeo* and *Poppea* since the seventeenth century, placed Monteverdi at the origin of the French operatic tradition, and his operas were key to the repertoire of his Schola Cantorum, a rival to the more German-influenced Conservatoire. His versions of the opera, though, were brought as up-to-date as possible in their orchestration and dramaturgy within the operatic culture of fin-de-siècle Paris, and were implicated in the nationalistic and anti-Semitic ideology of the Right. Similarly right-wing was Gabriele D'Annunzio's appropriation of Monteverdi as one of the great Italian composers, but the musicological manifestations of his views, in Gian Francesco Malipiero's complete works edition, were more philologically rigorous. Performance editions of the operas, though, were more similar to d'Indy's updatings, again seeing the need to make Monteverdi seem more familiar. In Weimar Germany, on the other

hand, early opera was more an interest of the modernist Left, as operas by Monteverdi and Handel were seen as a counter-influence to Wagnerian opera. Realisations by Carl Orff and Ernst Krenek attempted to defamiliarise the operas by bringing out their similarities to the avant-garde music theatre of the time, the opposite goal of d'Indy-like updatings which attempted to bring them into the operatic mainstream. By contrast, in England and America Monteverdi opera was most frequently the province of academia. The varied reception and practice of Monteverdi during the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates how easily art works can be enlisted into various political and aesthetic ideologies.

Post-war views of Monteverdi's operas tend to look at individual aspects rather than presenting the operas as unified political statements. Chapter Two, 'Staging Community in *Orfeo*', examined the aspect of community as it has been shown in stagings of the opera since the late 1970s. Stage directors have used the notions of community encoded in Monteverdi and Striggio's text to comment on their own communities. The chapter focussed on the second half of Act Two, in which Orfeo learns that Euridice has been bitten by a snake. The five productions examined present very different readings of Orfeo and his relationship to the community of nymphs and shepherds which surrounds him. Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's production is explicitly about class distinction and the resulting lack of a meaningful community, while Pierre Audi emphasises the mythical qualities of the material and presents a ritualistic view of community. Trisha Brown's community is purely spatial and formal, rather than being based on human intention. Gilbert Deflo's 'authentic' staging does not present a community, focussing instead on the outward trappings of historically-informed performance, while Pier Luigi Pizzi's production successfully stages a multivalent community that references both the early seventeenth and early twenty-first centuries. These productions again demonstrate the fluidity of these texts: there is no single correct way to read community in *Orfeo*.

Chapter Three, 'Reshaping *Ulisse*', explored the ontological authority of the operatic text, demonstrating that *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* has undergone many different permutations yet still remained Monteverdi and Badoardo's work. Using narrative analysis, I showed that both the plot and the story of the opera have been altered, not always in tandem, in recent productions and in the seventeenth century, and that such alterations make the audience read the work in very different ways. An exploration of how modern directors and conductors have put the character of Penelope on stage, along with her relationship to the opera as a whole and with her servant Melanto, and how these practitioners have altered her text and music questioned whether a rereading is ever the same as a misreading. There is no clear-cut solution to this potential dilemma, and the answer depends upon what any given spectator wants to gain from the production. An often-positing negative side of this fluidity of meaning is that there is no single answer to any question, but it is more rewarding to explore various answers rather than worrying about being stuck in a potential Lyotardian *différend*.

While the protagonists of the two previous chapters were stage directors and conductors, in Chapter Four, 'Singing Ottavia: Between Early Music and Opera', the focus was placed on singers. After a detailed investigation of the currents which influence singing in early opera, opera singing and early music singing, a close listening of various recorded versions of Ottavia's 'Addio Roma' in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* demonstrated that singing Monteverdi over the past fifty years has moved back and forth between these currents as audience expectations and standards in training have changed. As with staging the operas, there is no single correct answer in how to sing them, and the current performance practice flows between historical reconstruction and influences from diverse singing traditions.

The final chapter, '*Poppea* in 2010', engaged with Monteverdi performance as a 'live' theatrical experience. My own viewing of three very different productions of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* led me to ask what the musical object of *Poppea* affords to

various directors and audiences. Stage directors do not work on their productions from scratch, but rather work within a set of affordances offered by the opera and the situation in which they must direct it. Opera directors can be broadly divided into those who work from the bottom up (beginning with the opera) and those who work from the top down (beginning with their own ideologies). Though directors never purely fit one category, a production by Robert Carsen was seen to be of the former type, and one by Dietrich Hilsdorf of the latter, Pier Luigi Pizzi's production falling between the two extremes. Studies of how these directors used the buildings in which their productions were staged further explored the notion of operatic affordance, as did a description of how they staged gender relationships in this complex opera. The fluid nature of affordance shows that presenting a Monteverdi opera is never a simple matter, and involves decisions by directors, conductors, singers, opera managers, etc., based on the surroundings in which they find themselves. This thesis has shown that Monteverdi operas are not cut off from the rest of the world and that they are constantly fluid.

But is this liquid state applicable only to Monteverdi's operas? Are there other operas with a similar history to Monteverdi's, operas which had very strong links to the time in which they were created but which have been substantially reinvented for their various modern audiences? Perhaps Wagner's *Ring Cycle* is such an opera, famously a site in which directors can stage their own ideologies. But the *Ring* is more a fixed text than Monteverdi's operas, as the cuts, rearrangements, orchestrations, and transpositions that characterise Monteverdi performance do not appear in Wagner. Though the stagings may be radically different, the musical material remains the same.

Francesco Cavalli's operas are similar to Monteverdi's final Venetian operas in their structures, their modes of vocality, and their seventeenth-century Venetian context. Their sources are much like those of *Poppea* and *Ulisse*, with competing manuscripts of often

unknown provenance, many differences between libretti and scores, and a minefield of unanswered questions about their original performances and reception. A Cavalli revival is currently in full flow, and it seems likely that some of his operas will eventually become as well-known as Monteverdi's. The rapidity of Cavalli's rise from very obscure composer to the canon of early opera (if not yet of mainstream opera) mirrors that of Monteverdi, but it has happened much more quickly and looks like the Monteverdi revival in microcosm.

From 1967 to 1977, Raymond Leppard presented three of Cavalli's operas at Glyndebourne, Faber subsequently published their vocal scores, and all were recorded: *Ormindo*, *Calisto*, and *Egisto*. These productions were well-received, especially *Calisto*, which benefited from the talents of Janet Baker in the central role of Diana. Additionally, in 1968 a recording of *Erismena* was released, conducted by Alan Curtis. While Leppard's editorial interventions are even more extreme than those in his *Ulisse* and *Poppea*, audiences responded to Cavalli's music (through its Leppard-print covering). This mini-revival was fairly short-lived, however, as few other opera companies produced his operas. In 1978 the series *Italian Opera: 1640-1770* was begun and issued some of Cavalli's operas in facsimiles made from the Contarini Collection of manuscripts, making them more easily accessible to scholars.¹ Jane Glover also published a biography of Cavalli in the same year.² This first stage is rather like the Monteverdi revival of the very early twentieth century: a few performances in highly altered versions like d'Indy's made critical waves, and scholarly publications like Rolland's introduced the operas into academia.

The next wave in the Cavalli revival came ten years later, when René Jacobs issued recordings of *Giasone*, *Xerse*, and *Calisto*. As with his performances of Monteverdi, Jacobs added instrumental lines and did a great deal of transposing (practically re-writing the title

¹ These facsimiles are *L'Oristeo* (New York, 1982), *Scipione Affricano* (New York, 1978), and *Gli amori d'Apollo e di Dafne* (New York, 1978).

² *Cavalli* (London, 1978).

role of *Giasone*, originally for low alto castrato, for countertenor Michael Chance), but he showed that Cavalli could hold an audience's interest in roughly the form in which it would have been presented in seventeenth-century Venice. This is similar the post-war position of Monteverdi, as performers like Ewerhart and Harmoncourt began to attempt to present the operas in a state more like their seventeenth-century performances while still recognising the need for various compromises.

The current stage of the Cavalli revival began in the new millennium, when performers brought their scholarly credentials up to the level of their Monteverdi performances. *Calisto* and *Ercole Amante*, conducted by Ivor Bolton and directed by David Alden, have been presented with few editorial additions and few cuts or re-orderings. Their *Calisto* has been staged in the major opera houses of Munich and London, and *Ercole Amante* has been released on DVD. Also available on DVD are Jacobs' *Calisto* and Fabio Biondi's *Didone* from La Fenice. There have also been recent recordings of *Apollo e Dafne*, *Statira*, *Ormindo*, and *Artemisia*. A-R Editions have issued two Cavalli operas in excellent scholarly editions: *Calisto* and *Doriclea*.³ *Egisto* also made an appearance in a postgraduate opera scenes programme at the Royal Academy of Music in 2010, showing that he is entering the canon of opera teaching. One can see from this summary that performers have been trying out many of Cavalli's operas, and no single few have yet come to the fore of the repertory. The most obvious candidate would be *Giasone* because of its large amount of source material and its centrality in the annals of Venetian opera, but *Calisto* has had the most large-scale productions (Leppard/Hall, Jacobs/Wernicke, Bolton/Alden, and productions conducted by Christophe Rousset and Andrea Marcon, among others). Perhaps because of its amusing plot

³ *Calisto*, ed. Jennifer Williams Brown (Middleton, Wis., 2007) and *Doriclea*, ed. Christopher J. Mossey (Middleton, Wis., 2004).

and its titillating gender reversals, audiences seem to have responded more positively to this opera than to many of the others.

The major difference between the Monteverdi and Cavalli revivals, other than the latter's rapidity, is the presence of recording. The Monteverdi revival began with print: Rolland's dissertation, Haas's *Ulisse* edition, and, most importantly, Malipiero's complete works edition, among others. But it is recording that is most responsible for the Cavalli revival. Because recordings had by the 1970s become an important part of the operatic soundscape, it was natural that this was the way audiences and potential performers would first come into contact with them. Arguably, though recordings certainly helped to spread Monteverdi's music, the Monteverdi revival could not have begun in earnest until Malipiero published his edition. The Cavalli revival, though, is well underway with only a few of his operas published, and his own complete works edition seems stuck in what Hollywood calls 'development hell', announced a few years ago by Bärenreiter but with no editions having yet appeared.

Aside from Cavalli, the closest analogues for this Monteverdian performative fluidity come not from opera, but from popular musical theatre. We saw in Chapter Four that *Gypsy* shares certain aspects of its vocal writing with Monteverdi's *Poppea*, and this fluidity is a further similarity. Certain musical comedies have been substantially revised for different audiences.⁴ Among the most radically-revised are Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II's *Show Boat* and Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*, which have gone through many different versions since their premieres in 1927 and 1934, respectively.⁵ These two musicals,

⁴ Though the exception rather than the rule, there are also shows which have been revived with even more supposed fidelity than many operas; *West Side Story*'s licensors require that not only the music and libretto remain unchanged, but also that the choreography be retained, and many of its revivals have used copies of the original sets and costumes.

⁵ Both are discussed in Geoffrey Block's *Enchanted Evenings: The Broadway Musical from Show Boat to Sondheim and Lloyd Webber* (Oxford, 2009). For a view which sees Broadway musicals as always fluid, even in their first performances, see Bruce Kirle's *Unfinished Show Business: Broadway Musicals as Works-in-Progress* (Carbondale, IL, 2005).

especially *Show Boat*, have remained in the repertoire since their premieres but have been reinvented around the changing ideologies of audiences and performers. *Show Boat* has changed its genre over the century: it began in 1927 as a serious musical comedy, became a film musical drama in 1936, was revised in 1946 to be a musical play in the new Rodgers and Hammerstein mode, made into another film in 1951 in the flashy MGM style, presented by opera companies in the 1970s and 80s, given a historically-informed ‘reconstruction’ in 1988, and turned into an epic stage pageant in 1994. The attitudes towards race encoded in the show have also undergone change. While the musical’s presentation of African-Americans in its 1927 version was considered to be ground-breakingly progressive, more recent audiences have labelled the show as racist and backward, some equality groups even launching major protests against its performance, and the libretto has been edited to address some of the those criticisms. Though opera productions are rarely protested (an exception was a Berlin *Idomeneo* in which the severed heads of Jesus and Mohammad were seen on stage), changes in audience mores have affected the presentation of Monteverdi’s operas, especially regarding gender, as we saw in Chapter Five.

Unlike *Show Boat*, which has changed its genre and form in a way similar to the changes we saw in Chapter Three in Monteverdi’s *Ulisse*, *Anything Goes* has always remained a frothy musical comedy. As with other such works in the genre its jokes and various aspects of the plot have appeared dated over the years, and songs from other Cole Porter shows have been freely added. Since the 1934 Broadway production, there was a London production the next year in which many specifically American references were removed or revised, two film versions (1936 and 1956), an off-Broadway revival in 1962, a major Broadway production in 1987 (which itself travelled to London), an historically-informed recording recreating the original production in 1988, a production at London’s National Theatre in 2002, and a 2011 Broadway revival of the 1987 revival (!). The humour

in Monteverdi's operas can seem similarly dated, and directors often have difficulty bringing it out; the solution is often to ignore it. For example, the suitors in *Ulisse* would have probably been seen as comic by their original audiences, evidenced by similarities between their music and that of other trios of 'vecchi', comically lascivious older men. Of all the productions analysed here, Pier Luigi Pizzi's is the only one which attempts to make them comic, and the others prefer to reread their roles as entirely serious. Iro, as discussed above, presents similar problems.

There are also important institutional similarities between seventeenth-century opera and twentieth-century musical theatre. Both genres are collaborative, competitive, commercial, and middle-brow, unlike the commonly-perceived notion of opera which by the time of Wagner had become highbrow and which by the twentieth century was usually state-subsidised. Monteverdi would not have been seen in the seventeenth century as the sole or even most important creator of his operas in the way Wagner was, or indeed the way Monteverdi is frequently seen today. He was working in an intensely collaborative atmosphere, in which he was only one creator along with his librettist, producers, stage designers, and singers. In the twentieth-century Broadway musical the composer, even one as dominant as Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, or Jule Styne, was one collaborator among many. *Poppea* was a creation of Monteverdi, Busenello, Anna Renzi and the other singers, and theatrical impresarios, as *Show Boat* was by Jerome Kern, Oscar Hammerstein II, the cast, designer Joseph Urban, and producer Florence Ziegfeld. *Parsifal* had its music and libretto by Wagner, presented in his own theatre with conductors, designers, and singers dominated by him. Though opera production, as we have seen, is today increasingly recognised as collaborative, for much of the twentieth century all were under the thumb of the (usually dead) composer or in service of the abstract work. It is in early opera that collaboration is

often most valued, as the stage and music director must work together with the opera house management and the singers to create their own text out of the varied source material.

These comparisons between Monteverdi and Cavalli and musical theatre demonstrate that the fluidity of Monteverdi's operas in performance is, though rare, not a unique case. In the future opera production in general is likely to become more collaborative and fluid as opera companies are required to attract new audiences and re-imagine their funding models in an era of spending cuts. While the early stages of the early opera revival occurred within the previously-existing structures of mainstream opera, it is likely that early opera will push the rest of the genre into a new, more liquid, state. Monteverdi's operas, though only three, will likely stand at the centre of this shift as they did in the revival's first stage. This thesis has demonstrated their continued centrality in opera production, and has shown that their position is multifaceted and extraordinarily rich.

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