UNIVERSIDADE CATÓLICA PORTUGUESA

ANNA NICOLE: AN OPERA (?) BETWEEN TRADITION AND TRANSGRESSION

a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary enquiry into an ambiguous work

Tese apresentada para o grau de mestre em Estudos de Cultura

Por Vera Jerosch Herold da Costa Reis (136311001)

Sob a orientação de Prof. Doutora Alexandra Lopes

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Cursos de Mestrado em Estudos de Cultura, LEA e Tradução

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I will analyse whether the opera ANNA NICOLE by Mark Anthony Turnage (music) and Richard Tomas (libretto) is embedded in the tradition of the operatic canon, or if it just transgresses that legacy. It is based on the true life account of Anna Nicole Smith, a *Playboy* model turned celebrity whose scandalous behaviour was closely followed by the media. I will discuss whether Anna Nicole can be inscribed in the lineage of opera's other fallen and scandalous women, such as Violetta, Manon or Carmen, and how these "real" life women have been translated into the genre. As some critics contend ANNA NICOLE is a musical, I will also discuss how the work could be defined within the history of musical theatre, looking in more detail into the first 200 and the last 100 years of the genre's existence, and within musical modernism and contemporaneity. Finally, I will look into the traditions of opera and its reception from the emotions' viewpoint, especially with regard to the use and effect (or lack thereof) of the lament and the aria, asking whether Anna Nicole humanizes the "real" Anna Nicole Smith, as Violetta may have done with Marie Duplessis. Over the next hundred or so pages, I will examine if this undaunted portray of a celebrity, famous for being loud and vulgar can move us once she faces tragic events, and if her complaint can give us insight into her heart, thus making it possible to have a more clement approach towards her.

Resumo

Na presente dissertação pretendo analisar se a ópera ANNA NICOLE de Mark Anthony Turnage (música) e Richard Thomas (libreto) se insere na tradição do cânone operático, ou se é apenas uma obra transgressora. A obra baseia-se na vida real de Anna Nicole Smith, modelo da *Playboy* que se transformou numa celebridade cujo comportamento escandaloso era seguido de perto pelos media. Irei debater se Anna Nicole se inscreve na linhagem operática de outras mulheres perdidas e escandalosas, como Violetta, Manon ou Carmen, e ainda a forma como estas mulheres "reais" foram traduzidas para ópera. Uma vez que alguma crítica defendeu que ANNA NICOLE seria um musical, irei também investigar como a obra se define dentro da história da ópera, sobretudo no que respeita os seus primeiros 200 e os últimos 100 anos, bem como no modernismo e na contemporaneidade musical. Finalmente, irei estudar as tradições da ópera, bem como da sua receção, no que respeita às emoções, em particular o uso e o efeito (ou a falta destes) do lamento e da ária, para questionar se Anna Nicole humaniza a Anna Nicole Smith «real», da forma que Violetta terá humanizado Marie Duplessis. Ao longo das cerca de 100 páginas que se seguem, irei examinar se este retrato desassombrado de uma celebridade famosa por ser rude e grosseira consegue comover-nos, quando esta defronta acontecimentos trágicos, e se a sua queixa nos permite vislumbrar a sua humanidade, levando-nos a olhá-la com maior clemência.

Thank you

to my parents for their support and example.

to Francisco for his unfaltering love and sense of humour.

to my daughters for their spontaneous support and enthusiasm

and, last but not least, to Prof. Alexandra Lopes, for her infinite patience and generosity

…la veritá di cui non si riesce a parlare, bisogna cantarla, bisogna dirla in musica. E con questo vi saluto.

Luciano Berio (1925-2003)

Opera is when a guy gets stabbed in the back and instead of bleeding, he sings.

Ed Gardner (1901-1963)

It's very expensive to be me. It's terrible the things I have to do to be me.

Anna Nicole Smith (1967-2007)

Contents

Introduction

The opera ANNA NICOLE (Mark Anthony Turnage & Richard Thomas), based on the true life story of the (in)famous Anna Nicole Smith, was premiered in February 2011 at the Royal Opera (RO) in London and the object of both an important media campaign and critical reaction. Reviews of the opera were mixed, and varied between the dismissal as popular, futile and lacking depth, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the defence that the opera's main character, Anna Nicole, was in line with other fallen, scandalous, even murderous women of the operatic tradition, such as Violetta, Carmen, Lulu or the various versions of Manon.

By choosing the life of Anna Nicole Smith as the subject matter for an opera to be premiered in one of the most important opera houses of the world, its authors not only an attempted to fuse high and popular culture, they brought together what may be perceived as incompatible: two extremes of high and low, grand opera and American *white trash*. With its refined social practices, opera is considered the most elitist and aristocratic of the performing arts, whereas everything Anna Nicole Smith did on and off stage is just as often considered one of the most lurid forms of American trash culture. Did Turnage and Thomas succeed in mixing these two worlds, or are Anna Nicole and opera like oil and water? Is Anna Nicole an opera, and if it is, does it conform to previous operatic models, or is it in itself transgressive? Would the opera be successful with the public, the critics and among opera professionals, i.e. programmers, conductors, directors and singers?

Four years later, the question has partly been answered. The first run at the Royal Opera was a public success seldom witnessed in contemporary opera. In 2013, the opera was premiered outside the UK in a new production, with some minor changes to the score and the libretto. Directed by Jens Herzog for Oper Dortmund, it is a different, slightly darker reading than that of Richard Jones for the RO. Finally, the RO's production premiered in America with an almost completely new cast of the New York City Opera at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. In September 2014, the RO reprised the production. All four runs were a public and a mediatic success, receiving altogether more good than bad reviews. More importantly, the

opera is no longer one of the many contemporary works with just one single performance or run.

The life of Anna Nicole Smith (born Vickie Lynn Hogan; 28 November, 1967 in Houston, Texas – 8 February 2007 in Hollywood, Florida) served as the inspiration for the opera. She was a model, actress and TV personality who reached global fame due to her marriage to the 89-year-old Texan oil tycoon J. Howard Marshall II in 1994, when she was 26 years old. Raised in the backwater Mexia, Texas, Anna Nicole Smith dropped out of school in her sophomore year (10th grade) and went to work at Jim's Crispy Fried Chicken in Mexia. There she met Billy Smith whom she married in 1985 – she was 17 and he was 16 years old. Their son Daniel was born nine months later in January, when Anna Nicole was barely 18. According to the website marriage.about.com, she left Billy in 1987, although their divorce seems to have been filed only six years later, in 1993 (http://marriage.about.com/od/entertainmen1/p/annasmith.htm, last accessed on June 23, 2015). She tried for a better life in Houston, where she first worked at Walmart. Later, she decided to try her luck at a strip club, the Rick's Gentleman's Club, where she was not very successful, and, according to the owner, was "rather plump to be working [t]here" (http://www.people.com/people/anna_nicole_smith/, last accessed on August 10, 2015), but her success was furthered once she had breast augmentation surgery. A photographic session for *Playboy* magazine did the rest: Anna Nicole Smith became famous and desirable. She was Playboy cover, centrefold and Playmate of the Year. Later she replaced supermodel Claudia Schiffer as the face and body of the Guess Jeans campaign, appeared on the cover of the German edition of Marie Claire and in several other magazines, advertisements and films.

During those years she met J. Howard Marshall II, a Texan oil tycoon, 63 years her elder, and a regular patron at Gigi's, the strip club where she had moved on to. Marshall had been assistant Dean at Yale Law School, and later became an important oilman, helping shape the American energy policy during the 1960s. With the wedding, on June 27, 1994 at the White Dove Chapel in Houston, the interest of the gossip and celebrity media in Anna Nicole grew, especially when J. Howard Marshall died 13 months later, on August 4, 1995. The fact that he had left no will added to the media's interest in her life, and they closely followed the

legal battles that ensued over a period of over 15 years, going well beyond Anna Nicole's death in 2007. Her partying, and her outrageous body and behaviour added to the media and gossip industry's interest, which Anna Nicole and her lawyer and manager Howard Stern played, while they were battling the Marshall estate in the American courtrooms. During those years, rumours about a more significant affair between them grew, amidst stories of several other affairs with both men and at least one woman, until it eventually became public. In her reality show *The Anna Nicole Show* (2002-2004), she took advantage of the public's interest in seemingly every sordid detail of her life, but the show was not very successful and E! entertainment television decided to cancel it after three seasons. On that show, as well as later on the news and gossip cycle, Anna Nicole Smith's life was playing out like a train wreck. When she gave birth to her daughter on September 6, 2006, the delivery was filmed and broadcast on pay per view. Shortly afterwards tragedy entered her life. Three days after Danielynn's birth, Daniel, who by then was 20 years old, came to visit his mother and new-born stepsister. He slept the night in an armchair of his mother's hospital room, where he died of a drug overdose without anyone noticing. The death was later ruled accidental. Notwithstanding this, the suspicion that either Anna Nicole or Howard Stern had unknowingly or even knowingly provided the drugs, has never been completely dispelled. All the more so, because in the never ending trail of pictures and news her life left on the internet, there are photos that were considered compromising. The most talked about is the "death-fridge" picture, a photograph of the inside of the fridge at Anna Nicole's home, with a bottle of methadone and several vials (http://www.tmz.com/2007/02/11/annas-fridge-after-death-methadone-and-slim-fast/5, last accessed on June 23, 2015). Methadone was one of the substances, among many others stated in Daniel Smith's autopsy report as having caused his premature death (http://www.today.com/id/15036342#.VfyXCd-qpBc last accessed on June 23, 201). The last photographs of Daniel alive in the fatal hospital room were reportedly sold for 650.000$, and Anna Nicole was photographed, or might have deliberately posed for a photograph cradling her dead son (www.liveleak.com/view?i=949_1249141140 last accessed on June 23, 2015). A short three weeks later, on September 28, and one week after the release of a death certificate of her son but before his funeral she and Howard Stern celebrated a small and "private", though widely mediatized commitment ceremony on a yacht off the coast of the Bahamas. The pictures of this "sort of wedding" sold for 1,000,000$ (http://gawker.com/204844/people-pays-1m-for-

pics-of-anna-nicoles-weddingsuffering, last accessed on June 23, 2015). Four months later, after having been very publicly falling apart, Anna Nicole Smith was found dead in a room of the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel in Hollywood, Florida. Her death was ruled an accidental overdose of prescription drugs. It did not, however put an end to the legal battles against the Marshall estate. On the contrary, new legal proceedings started, namely concerning Stern's responsibilities, as well as that of some doctors, in both Daniel's and Anna Nicole's deaths. There were also several proceedings filed in the courts with regard to the paternity of Anna Nicole's baby girl, Danielynn. Apart from Howard Stern, her life partner at the time in question, four other men claimed to be the father, which is not surprising if one bears in mind that Danielynn was now the sole heiress of Anna Nicole's estate, and the potential recipient of a part of the Marshall fortune. DNA tests established that Larry Birkhead, a former bodyguard of Anna Nicole was the actual father. Danielynn Birkhead now lives with him, and will be 9 years old in 2015. She is said to be as photogenic as her mother, and has already posed for a first modelling contract for the children's line of Guess Jeans, the same brand for which her mother modelled. Danielynn has also starred in reality TV programmes and films, always playing herself.[1]

The opera ANNA NICOLE recreates many of the "real" Anna Nicole's life events, but also adds fictional material, namely dialogues and soliloquies created by Turnage and Thomas. The libretto is staggeringly but deliciously improper, while many forms of popular music feed into the musical score. The story is told by using the narrative technique of the flashback, with the already dead Anna Nicole helping the chorus to tell the story of her life. In the Dortmund production this fact becomes very clear, as the first scene is actually set in the morgue, during the wake of the dead Anna Nicole, with her slowly climbing out of her body bag. There is, in fact, a very obvious hint in the libretto, when her mother, Virgie, asks if she had had the intention to say goodbye before she left to go and die. Anna Nicole's early life is told by the choir, with remarks and sketches by the various family members. At the same time, the choir comments on Anna Nicole, her looks, her behaviour and the events in her life. Thomas also uses the *prolepsis* device, making the lawyer Howard Stern appear

[1] Danielynn Birkhead appeared in the episode Anna Nicole, Tragedy on trial in *True Crime with Aphrodite Jones* (2011), in the TV movie *Life after Anna Nicole*, *The Larry & Danielynn Story* (2013) and in *Celebrity Wife Swap* (Larry Birkhead and Helio Castroneves) (2014) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dannielynn_Birkhead, last accessed on June 23, 2015)

more than once, at moments in Anna Nicole's biography, when he had not yet entered her life. She hushes him away, and the choir insults him every time he appears: "Diabolo, Grendel, destroyer of worlds, Svengali, feeder, enabler, Sauron of Mordor, slayer of Bambi, Darth Vader, Yoko Ono" (Turnage & Thomas: 62, 95-96), an ironic comment on the public's perception that Howard Stern controlled and manipulated the "real" Anna Nicole and is the only one to be blamed for her fall.[2]

Act I, which tells the story of Anna Nicole's life up to her wedding to J. Howard Marshall II in Houston's White Dove Chapel, continues with Anna Nicole's ascent: the flight from her family, her life as a waitress and Walmart low-wage employee right to her move to Houston where she tries her luck at a strip club. It recounts the motivations of a poor girl from rural America to try her luck in the big city, where she realizes that with no formal education and a small baby she has to provide for on her own, the big city is no escape from poverty, nor her dysfunctional family either. She decides to use her competitive edge, looks and wit, and is willing "to [take] a deep breath and … [jump]" (Turnage & Thomas, 72-76) from a low wage Walmart job to a strip club as a pole and lap dancer. In the strip club scene Anna Nicole is taught by her colleagues the difference between a legal lap dancer and an illegal prostitute. Everything is legitimate as long as "the scanty panties…are always kept on" (*ibidem*: 84). After a while it also dawns on her that it takes more than committed dancing to get the degree of attention from customers necessary to make a difference in her pay check. Her colleagues spell it out for her: she "need[s] to get some tits!" (*ibidem*, 94). Confronted with the various cup sizes available and the fact that "[her] options like [her] talent are limited" (*ibidem*, 109), she realizes only an extreme makeover will make the difference "if you start small why bother at all" (*ibidem*). She decides to take a leap of faith once again in order to get attention and be successful: "Oh whatever, supersize me!" (*ibidem*). It is at this point that Anna Nicole believes she is living the American Dream. This ticket to the American Dream does, however, carry a price tag of a daily intake of painkillers for the rest of her life. But as it leads her straight into the arms of the Texan oil billionaire J. Howard Marshall II, who is besotted by her crass charm, it does not seem too high a price to pay. Scene 6 of Act I is called *American Dreaming*, and begins with Anna Nicole reflecting

[2] When the opera was premiered, the court proceedings concerning his responsibility in Anna Nicole's death had not yet come to an end. The courts acquitted Howard Stern.

on how you need luck in life, a lyrical and dreamy moment that ends in glory with Howard Marshall's impressive entrance, gliding from the sky in a gigantic wheelchair right into Anna Nicole's arms. The next scene depicts Anna Nicole's new life, with never ending money to spend on clothes and shoes, the joys of being lavished with expensive presents by her new lover, and the freedom to party as she pleases. The act ends with the wedding scene, which I will analyse in more detail in part C, chapter 4, "All together now – the ensemble and the forgiveness of a community".

While Act I is hybristic tale of Anna Nicole's rise to fame and fortune, Act II is sobering and a tragic account of her fall. Her pathetic quest to inherit Marshall's millions, the fateful events that hit her life, and her premature death make for a great contrast with the first act's arrogance. Its first two scenes are seemingly still happy, though they are foreboding, as are many parts of Act I. In these first two scenes, we witness domestic bliss on the million-dollar-ranch, with a Jimmy-Choo-shoes duet, and Anna Nicole's wild partying whenever she was not on the ranch. The scene *Let's Partay!* is a display debauchery with alcohol, sex, drugs and rock n' roll, which is interrupted by a reality check delivered by her always scolding mother, Virgie, with her grandson Daniel tagging along. She accuses Anna Nicole of neglecting him and warns her of the dangers that lie ahead. All through the opera, we see Daniel growing up in his sporadic appearances that are always silent. He is the one who brings his mother a glass of water and the painkillers, "my little pick-me-up" as she calls them. Daniel will only interrupt his silence and have a voice after he is dead, delivering an "aria" that consists of a chilling delivery of the endless list of drugs that killed him. During the party, J. Howard Marshall collapses and dies. The remaining acts mirror some of the most embarrassing and crazy moments of the next ten years of "real" Anna Nicole Smith's life: the legal battle over the inheritance, her uncontrolled weight gain, her CNN interview on the Larry King Show and other public appearances, where she shows up either drunk, drugged, or displaying indecent behaviour, or in any combination of these three. The final acts portray the tragic events of her life and her death, and how the media, embodied by dancers whose mask and headdress are cameras, circle in towards the end of her life. In the final scenes, commentary becomes again important. But, while at the beginning of the opera it is the choir that comments, in these scenes it is her mother who comments, with her interpretation of the fateful events, in monologues and exchanges of accusations with

Howard Stern. After Daniel's death, Anna Nicole sings a compelling lament, wishing it had been her and not her son who died, and asking God to turn back time in order to permit it be her. The opera ends with Anna Nicole talking to her dead son, telling him she is almost there. She slowly climbs into her body bag and zips it up while the crowd of cameras circles in on her. She peeks out one last time and repeats her first utterance of the opera: "I want to blow you all…a kiss, mwah, mwah" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 18, 278). The opera ends with this sentence, sung *a cappella*, and followed by a blackout.

This dissertation asks the question whether Anna Nicole can be considered an opera, and if it can, whether its follows the operatic tradition, or whether it transgresses this legacy. This undertaking requires various analysis of the work, namely of its plotline, the way it translates a "real" life into opera, and how it is embedded in the tradition of opera and that of contemporary music, among others. To that purpose, I will analyse the opera ANNA NICOLE from a variety of angles, and try to establish to what extent the opera's heroine is part of a pantheon of operatic fallen women, who transgress and are punished with death for it, or if the opera transgresses the canon, by portraying the "real" Anna Nicole Smith without idealizing her. 160 years before, Dumas, and a little later Piave and Verdi had idealized Marie Duplessis, the "real" Marguerite Gautier/Violetta. The story of this Parisian courtesan on whom Dumas' novel and play are based, and which the opera uses as basis for the libretto, was quite different from that of the fictional characters she inspired. I will suggest that Anna Nicole has more in common with Marie Duplessis than with the literay and operatic versions of her, Marguerite Gautier and Violetta, and that she also shares a lot with Manon Lescaut and Carmen, whose archetypes of the unapologetic materialist and unrepentant promiscuous other she embodies in this 21st century opera.

Is the rise and fall of this woman, worthy of being portrayed in this new and daring opera? Can the great success and attention the opera earned so far pave its way into the operatic canon? The explicit language of the libretto is surprising for some, shocking for others. Mark Anthony Turnage's music stands accused of being too light, subdued to the libretto, a mishmash of styles that belongs in the West End and not in an opera house. These are claims that I would like to refute, by comparing ANNA NICOLE once more with CARMEN, this time

with regard to its music, which was heavily criticized, and to its tempestuous reception history.

In order to discuss and defend ANNA NICOLE, I will have to develop a methodology that allows me to approach it from various angles, in order to do justice to the multidisciplinary nature of opera in general, and specifically that of ANNA NICOLE. Any given discipline or approach on its own would not allow me to look at all the aspects that need to be taken into account. Therefore, I will try to develop a methodology that is multidisciplinary too, and which resonates with the several disciplines that flow into opera. The hybridism of artistic contemporaneity, especially that of ANNA NICOLE, with its particular blend of the popular and the erudite, asks for agility in its approach, one more reason to carry out an analysis that is multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary at the same time. By resonating with the hybrid nature of this opera, that sometimes is kaleidoscopic and at other times chameleonic, I shall make use of the most efficient methodology for the work at hand. It is necessary to discuss the argument from a multitude of perspectives, as it involves a thorough approach through the history and tradition of the operatic genre, as well as an understanding of the 20th century music. Anna Nicole can only be explained and defined in light of these two traditions, which I approach in Part A and Part B of this dissertation.

In the first section I will look at the roots and the evolution of opera from its very beginnings, especially at the first 200 years of opera. There are obvious similarities in ANNA NICOLE's structure with the 19th century tragic operatic tradition, when heroines[3] began to die, and opera became a grand catastrophe, as Mladen Dolar so eloquently puts it, when he compares it to the previous tradition of clemency in *If Music be the food of Love* (Dolar, 2002). But although Anna Nicole is a catastrophic opera that kills off its heroine, as most operas of the romantic and late romantic tradition do, analysing in depth the first 200 years of the genre, rather than the more obvious 19th century, will be of tantamount importance for a complete reading and a more informed appraisal of this contemporary work. The first decades of the 17th century, i.e. the moment opera stopped being circumscribed to its palatial origins and started to be performed in commercially run theatres, catering to an audience instead of a

[3] In this tradition, opera's heroes, normally sung by a tenor, most often die as well, but the opera heroines, normally a soprano, who have the big final aria that make for their spectacular deaths.

single sovereign, gives us subtler insights into this piece of musical theatre. After the first operatic experiments were performed at the courts in Florence and Mantua, the genre was picked up and exploded in Venice, where many of its foundational traits and conventions that govern opera to this day were established over just a few decades (Rosand, 1991). Understanding why and how the love song, the mad scene, the lament, later the aria were developed, how society recognized itself in operatic plots, sets or the libretti, will unlock valuable clues for the study of any opera, and in particular of ANNA NICOLE. Even the way in which commercial cultural entertainment was established in Europe during that period, still echoes in the different forms of musical theatre of the 20th and 21st century.

From Venice, opera travelled to the various European countries and regions, where it was received and established under different circumstances, according to the each political and economic situation, religious or confessional environment, and the theatrical traditions already in place. The way opera was introduced and received in each region, established its different traditions, determining the way each country creates, performs and finances opera, and helps explain the amount and degree of differences between practices in a relatively small territory as is the case of Central Europe.

The musical traditions and currents of the 20th century discussed in section B are equally important for the analysis of contemporary opera. Even though in this section, we are just looking at the last 100 years, there is a great diversity of traditions and practices, some at the antipodes of one another. As with the differences in the introduction and reception of opera 400 years ago, the ways in which contemporary music developed in each country or region largely depended on each political situation and socio-political environment, with World War II and especially the Cold War playing an important and surprisingly direct role. The politics of twelve-tone-music, of total serialisation and other musical avant-garde composition techniques, those of neo-classicism and the way modernism, especially hard modernism were banned in the Eastern Bloc countries, play an important role in the shaping of the contemporary classical music landscape.

In part C I will analyse the emotional and cognitive role of music, and the way its emotional power is used in operatic plots. Before opera became the grand catastrophe in the 19th

century, distressed operatic characters were able to move another, more powerful character, or a deity that would then change the course of action by showing mercy. Dolar contends that it is thanks to the persuasive power of a beautifully sung lament that operas had a happy ending during the first 200 years of its existence (Dolar, 2002). Thanks to the strong emotions induced by music, especially when combined with a dramatic plot, an elaborate visual and the personality of its performers (Baltes, et al., 2011), the operatic genre won over audiences, but also played a very strong role in causing a positive outcome in its own plot. Ever since Orfeo sang his way into the realm of the dead by enticing Charonte with his lament, opera heroes and heroines sing their way out of trouble by convincingly and emotionally imploring to an Other who has the power to change the course of their fate. After Mozart and Beethoven's FIDELIO, opera's paradigm changed to the grand catastrophe, with opera heroines and heroes being stabbed, immolated, poisoned and entombed alive, dying of exhaustion or consumption, or committing suicide. Similarly, ANNA NICOLE releases very powerful emotions and sentiments, though not necessarily exactly the same as in operas of the past, both at the site of production and reception. Joy and anger, love and hate, envy and profound grief are arguably expressed and elicited in the opera. By also problematizing love or its absence, and adding more shades with moral feelings such as the self-critical negative emotions of guilt and shame, the other-critical emotions of anger, contempt and disgust, ANNA NICOLE draws an equally complex array of emotions from its audience, which may result in other-suffering emotions as empathy and sympathy (Turner & Stets, 2006).

Very soon Orfeo, the lament became an affair of women. Ever since Monteverdi's ARIANNA, the lament started to be sung by women who had lost everything and were willing to die for that loss. The same female lament is found in sacred music embodied by the Mother of Christ or the other women at the cross. The lament became the voice of the distraught women who have lost everything, later the soprano aria, which in its most extreme form, gave voice to the madwoman as well. Anna Nicole too, loses everything and laments her fate towards the end of the opera. Can she join the other grieving, imploring and mad women's loss and distress? Can she become the sinful opera heroine of the 21st century, comparable to Violetta, Manon or Carmen?

In the third part, I will also compare Anna Nicole with Violetta and Carmen, as well as their real life models, Marie Duplessis, who actually existed, and the Carmen of Prosper Merimée's novella, published in *La Revue des Deux Mondes* in October 1845, who did not. I will, however, take the liberty to assume a "real life Carmen", because at the time CARMEN premiered "[i]t is, indeed, entirely possible that few recognized the story as fiction" (Robinson, 1992: 1). As it was published alongside various articles, a news digest and literary reviews, it was probable that many interpreted it as a documental story, rather than a fictional one. According to the author, Mérimée's novella "takes on all the trappings of a *Letter from Abroad*" (*ibidem*) reflecting France's fascination with the exotic as well as its simultaneous assertion as a rational and superior nation. In the comparison to past heroines, the question arises whether the "real" Anna Nicole is worthy of an opera, or if she is too loud and too sleazy. Is there any aspect of her life that makes for a worthy plea? Did she die for love, and if yes, for the love of whom or of what? Is she less worthy than Marie Duplessis, the "real" Carmen or any other operatic transgressive woman?

More than count the tears shed in each performance of ANNA NICOLE – there are accounts of many being shed over times in previous operas and plays, including *La Dame aux Camélias* –, I want to ask in this project if it is possible for audience members to feel sympathy and be merciful towards her, even after we have lost the ability to cry. Her imploration to God is in vain, God no longer works miracles and the dead do not come back. So the question is whether we, the audience, can be merciful towards her and posthumously release her pain. Can we muster the virtues Seneca claims are necessary for the exercise of clemency, and use our wisdom, humaneness and mildness when judging this woman's circumstances and shortcomings? Does the operatic Anna Nicole deserve it, does the "real" one, when she is being translated on to the opera stage without filters, idealization or mollification?

The methodology applied to the analysis of ANNA NICOLE, results in there being no one section or chapter dedicated in its entirety to the opera. A multi and transdisciplinary approach will not allow it, as the light I am trying to shed on the opera is multidirectional, and comes in from several different sources. Due to its nature, opera often eludes us when we analyse it as a whole, avoiding the one-sided analysis of just the music or just the libretto,

the vocal performance or the stage production. Each probe into the work will uncover a new angle, and change the object being analysed. For this reason, references as well as comparisons to ANNA NICOLE appear early in the dissertation, already on the first pages. As I develop my analysis, I will zoom in on ANNA NICOLE and try to answer the question asked in the title: is ANNA NICOLE a transgression or does it follow the tradition of opera?

There is a multitude of underlying questions that have to be asked as well, and, whenever possible, answered. Can an opera do justice to a character like Anna Nicole Smith? Can opera, as cultural artefact, tackle an icon of present-day celebrity culture in a way that is new and/or different from other media? Does the opera humanize the societal archetype represented by Anna Nicole Smith? Can a woman who lived for and through the visual be redeemed through music? Culture Studies offer the means for the multidisciplinary approach I wish to undertake, allowing me to explore the dichotomy high culture and popular culture, and its cultural echoes. Not only does Anna Nicole Smith represent popular culture, she is often thought to embody the worst of American trash culture and raunch. This realm of culture is brought to the operatic stage through the indecently effective libretto penned by Richard Thomas. These are very contemporary forms of otherness and of liminality that are interesting to problematize, as they represent those fringes of society that signal the uncomfortable, seem unimportant, and are therefore often ignored and overlooked, in spite of their loudness and pervasiveness. Opera itself has a liminal quality with its positioning at the crossroads of music, words and the visual, and has been reinvented and revolutionized many times. It is interesting that Turnage and Thomas made an attempt to find beauty and emotion in what is today's trashcan but, simultaneously, the repository of the anonymous' longings, namely the wish for fame, appetite for money and desire for love. They did so without softening and embellishment, as others have done before,in different times and with different codes, namely Kurt Weill and Berthold Brecht.

Until recently opera has been studied mainly by musicologists keeping broader cultural questions and even the libretti at bay. More recently opera studies started to include other disciplines when approaching an operatic score and/or text: psychoanalysis, political sciences, history and also literary studies. Other issues like gender, race and sexuality are included in opera studies, opening up the subject to the culture studies approach. Scholars

and cultural critics such as Catherine Clément, Paul Robinson, Susan McClary, Linda and Michael Hutcheon, Herbert Lindenberger or John Bokina represent different and sometimes contradictory readings of opera that are at the same time new and fresh approaches. Catherine Clément brought a very strong and passionate feminist point of view in her book *L'opéra ou la défaite des femmes* (1979), but she completely ignores the music, while Paul Robinson, on the contrary, contends in *Reading Libretti, Misreading Opera* in *Opera, Sex and other Vital Matters* (2002) that in a pure "house reading" without previous knowledge of the plot, one can understand the opera through a full understanding of the music, and only a vague outline of the libretto. A new group of researchers acknowledges the hybrid nature of opera in their writings, namely Herbert Lindenberger with *Situating Opera* (2010), in which he situates opera in the historical and sociological context of its creation and reception. Susan McClary analyses music, gender and sexuality in opera and 20th century popular music in her book *Feminine Endings* (1991). Linda and Michael Hutcheon, a literary theorist and a physician with a passion for opera wrote *Opera, Desire Disease, Death* (1996) in which they combine text analysis and medical research, shedding light on the many diseases and afflictions of opera heroes and heroines. These are examples that provide encouragement to look at opera, and write about it, from different, often multiple points of view, which I would very much like to emulate in the following hundred or so pages.

1. OPERA – FROM COURTLY LOVE TO THE BROADWAY

1.1 The beginning – Florence or Venice?

Opera has a birth certificate with a place and date of birth. Or at least that is how the generalist music history books normally tell the story: it was born in Florence, at the Palazzo Pitti, the court of the Medici dynasty, in 1600, with EURIDICE, the result of the combined efforts of a poet and a composer, Ottavio Rinuccini and Jacopo Peri. The occasion was the wedding of Maria de Medici to King Henri IV of France. It is generally assumed that it must have been very successful, as it inaugurated a genre that exploded over the next years, later conquering the main European cities and courts, and which now is over 400 years old, performed all over the world, and in apparently very good health. But, similar to any birth, the real story is less neat. The easy to remember date 1600 is not quite right, it was 1597/8[4] as there is an older sibling who disappeared: DAFNE, created by the same librettist/composer pair, but of which unfortunately only the libretto and a few fragments of music have survived. Furthermore we also have to resist the temptation of imagining Maria de Medici and Henri IV sitting in the front row of the room in the Palazzo Pitti witnessing, if not the very first opera ever, at least the first surviving one, because their wedding was celebrated by proxy. But it gets worse, contrary to DAFNE, EURIDICE was not even very successful. It was, however, the fittest, and survived to become the first opera, as told in the mythical version of the account of the genre's birth. 1600, the turning point between the musical Renaissance and Baroque, against the backdrop of an impressive wedding and political act,[5] though not exact, make for a good narrative that is not entirely incorrect. The myth confers opera the necessary power status, as well as the pomp and circumstance that surrounds this ambitious and grandiose genre, as much as it is later reflected in the way some operas themselves created myths out of real-life stories.

Although the music of DAFNE has not survived, it is worth the while to have a closer look at Jacopo Peri, at the musical fragments of the opera that did survive, and at its performance history, as it sheds light on opera's far more convoluted coming into existence. Jacopo Peri, born in 1561, entered the service of the Medici court as a singer "who would have moved to

[4] The year depends on which calendar was being used the recently introduced Gregorian or the previous Julian calendar. Both dates are used by music historians.

5 The wedding was a brilliant move by Ferdinando de Medici to strengthen the Tuscan-Franco alliance.

tears any heart of stone" (Severo Bonini *apud* Carter, 1980: 123). But he was also a keyboardist as well as a composer, and it is difficult to establish to a certainty when exactly Peri started singing his own compositions and composing for other musicians. He slowly earned recognition, and was commissioned to compose and perform during the grand wedding festivities of the new Grand-Duke Ferdinando, a former Cardinal in Rome, to Christine of Lorraine in 1589, for which he created a successful echo-madrigal. It must, however, be taken into account that regardless of this recognition, Peri was one among many other musicians and composers working in Florence at the court and the various churches. His teacher Cristoforo Malvezzi, Jacopo Corsi, Luca Marenzio and Giulio Caccini were some of his colleagues and competitors. The fragments of music of DAFNE that have survived were composed by both Peri and Corsi, clearly indicating that the musical authorship was not exclusively Peri's. Jacopo Corsi, was a composer but also a patron of the arts, and it was he who hosted the first performance of DAFNE, at the Palazzo Corsi, during the 1597/98 Carniva festivitiesl, and again during that of 1599/1600. The opera was also performed between these two occasions, in January 1598/9 at the Palazzo Pitti. When Peri joined the project, Corsi had already put to music most of the Rinuccini libretto, probably the sections in strophic verse. There was, however, a problem that Corsi apparently was not able to solve by himself: as this new work was an attempt to recreate Ancient Greek Drama, in the spirit of the Renaissance movement, the non-strophic sections needed to be sung as well. The belief that Ancient Greek drama was entirely sung, required music for non-strophic words, which had not been done before. This music had to be different and new. The endeavour to go beyond songs and *arie bellissime* was a quest of the Florentine Camerata, also called *Camerata de' Bardi*, after the name of its leader Count Giovanni de' Bardi. As Jacopo Peri joined the project DAFNE at the last stages, and is believed to have composed the music for the non-strophic sections of those parts of the libretto that Corsi had not been able to put to music (Carter, 1980). Thus Peri emerges as the innovator who was able to invent a new way of singing, creating a recitative singing style, which would be the condition *sine qua non* for the composition of this new genre[6]. However, the Florentine musical milieu, and therefore necessarily the creation processes of these politically and culturally very important first

[6] Emilio de Cavalieri claims in 1600, in the preface of his "sacred opera" or staged oratorio *Rappresentazione di anima e di corpo* that he had found the music of the Greeks already in his 1590 pastorals *Il Satiro* and *La disperatione di Fileno*. But other than Cavalieri's bragging, there is no evidence to support this claim (Carter, 1980).

operas in Florence were as ridden with plotting and treason as the political feuds of the Republic. The rivalry between different intellectual groups and between musician-composers was fierce. Composers were hired and fired while backstabbing each other, new works were commissioned and cancelled, or simply not performed.[7] DAFNE must have been quite successful as it was performed over the two subsequent years, whereas EURIDICE, in spite of its seminal importance was unsuccessful, as were the other entertainments of the 1600 Medici wedding. "Peri's new *stile recitativo* was found to be tedious – 'like the chanting of the passion' was one comment – and there was too little of the spectacular to delight the eye" (*ibidem*: 127). Given the plotting and scheming among composers and musicians, especially the dispute between Peri and Caccini whose "political machinations [prevented] his arch-enemy [Peri] from achieving musical distinction" (*ibidem)* it is difficult to say what the real reasons behind EURIDICE's lack of success may have been. However, lack of success was as short-lived as success, and DAFNE was revived twice in 1604. Peri was invited again to compose music for the 1604/5 Carnival, and even EURIDICE was revived in Bologna in 1616 at the request of Cardinal Montalto, who had attended the first performance in 1600.

In 1607, the earliest opera still regularly performed in our days, Claudio Monteverdi's ORFEO was created at the Palazzo di Mantova, the court of the Gonzagas, another powerful dynasty with close family ties to the Medici court in Florence that ruled Mantua for over four centuries. Opera's cradle is thus undoubtedly aristocratic and the genre has been closely enmeshed with politics and power from its very beginning.

> ...it is striking that the roots of opera were deeply implanted in dynastic, court culture: the earliest recognizable operas grouped around Medici court festivities, were complemented in 1607 by the performance at the court of Mantua of LA FAVOLA D'ORFEO with music by Claudio Monteverdi [...] to a text by the court secretary Alessandro Striggio [...] emphasizing the overlap between the world of politics and culture (Oresko, 1997: 140).

Notwithstanding the genre's palatial origin, 30 years later opera would have become the public performance for a paying audience we know today. This 'rebirth' occurred in 1637 in

[7] It is important to bear in mind that poets and composers were often from noble families and therefore active and interested parts in these continuous political feuds. For example, Giovanni de' Bardi, after whom the *Camerata de' Bardi* was named, was the Count of Vernio, and a composer, a writer, a music theorist as well as a soldier who had fought in several wars. He was furthermore an important patron of the arts.

the San Cassiano theatre in Venice, the first public theatre built for opera performances,[8] with ANDROMEDA (Benedetto Ferrari/Francesco Manelli), the first opera to visit Venice.[9] Within the first decades of the seventeenth-century, opera had taken roots in several cities of what later would later become Italy. But it was in Venice, and with a shift from the courts to an urban environment, that opera became a public performance available to anyone who bought a ticket, and was no longer limited to the aristocratic courts. It was presented in theatres, which were owned by patrician families, and depended on ticket sales (Rosand, 2006).

> During its first forty years [between 1637 and 1678], opera became the paramount contemporary art form in Venice. By 1678, nine theatres10 had been adapted or built for the opera and all of the elements of a flourishing enterprise were in place: competition among opera houses; librettists, composers, singers, and set designers jumping from theatre to theatre; hits and flops; the cult of the diva; extensive publicity campaigns; season-ticket holders; sold-out performances; claques for specific singers; and tourists who came to Venice just to hear operas during the Carnival season (Muir, 2006: 347).

Although opera remained unprofitable due to its immense costs, in Venice it transcended the individual sponsorship of a ruling monarch, and involved the economy of a whole city – with its heterogeneous population of 140.000 inhabitants, and a steady flow of visitors from outside – resulting in the creation of a system of supply and demand for entertainment purposes. Theatres and productions were often financed or bailed out by patrician families, or by the societies and intellectual movements to which the theatres belonged. The Accademia degli Incogniti was one such society and probably the most influential one. Inspired by the views of Cesare Cremonini, a professor of Philosophy at the University of Padua with heterodox views on religion, and who had already been brought before the Inquisition more than once, this society was one of the main organisations linked to Venetian opera. As the name suggests, the Incogniti was a secret society, and it played an important role in the shaping of Venice's political and cultural life. Its members were directly involved in the flourishing of the operatic genre, often as authors of libretti, either in an overt manner

[8] The San Cassiano had existed before as a comedy theatre but burnt down, having been rebuilt for opera.
[9] ANDROMEDA was written by Benedetto Ferrari, set to music by Francesco Manelli, and performed by Benedetto Ferrari's opera company. (Rosand, 1991c)
[10] The nine theatres were the S. Cassiano, SS. Giovanni e Paolo, S. Moise, Novíssimo, S. Apollinare, S. Salvatore, SS. Apostoli, S. Angelo and S. Giovanni Grisostomo.

or under pseudonyms. In 1640 the Incogniti built the Teatro Novissimo, which would become one of the most successful and powerful opera theatres in Venice (Rosand, 1991b).

By 1642, only five years after the premiere of ANDROMEDA at the S. Cassiano, Venetians and its tourists had a choice of seven different operas[11] staged at four different theatres during the Carnival season of that year. During the 41 years that span the opening of the S. Cassiano in 1637, and that of the S. Giovanni Grisostomo built in 1678 (incidentally both owned by the Grimani family) over 150 operas were created in Venice (Rosand, 1991: 3). These operas include Monteverdi's IL RITORNO DI ULISSE IN PATRIA and L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA[12], premiered in 1641 and 1643 respectively. But it was Francesco Cavalli who was the most prolific opera composer of the 17th century, and most of his more than 30 operas composed between 1639 and 1673 were premiered at Venetian theatres (www.baerenreiter.com; Rosand, 2006; Rosand 1991a). Cavalli would also become the most important "exporter" of the genre.

During its Venetian period the genre acquired its constituent characteristics, which were to become those of modern opera: a performance open to a paying audience, the development of features according to public taste and preferences, with more elaborate plots, the use of female singers, a greater emphasis on arias, and with it, the development of the *belcanto* and the importance of the singers' virtuosity. These characteristics made opera attractive for a broad audience, paving the way for its success among other forms of public entertainment. The extraordinary vocal skills developed during this period were one of the main attractions of opera, not very different from, and possibly competing with other physical skills, to be found for example in the first commercial sports events, the forerunners today's commercial spectator sports. These early manifestations of a capitalistic approach to entertainment bear

[11] LA VIRTU DEI STRALI D'AMORE by Faustini/Cavalli, IL NARCISO ED ECCO IMMORTALATI BY Persiani/Marazzoli, GLI AMORI DI GIASONE by Persiani/Marazzoli, L'AMORE INNAMORATO by Fusconi/Cavalli, IL SIDONIO E DORISBE, by Melosi/Fontei, IL BELLEROFONTE by Nolfi/Sacrati and L'ALCATE by Tirabosco/Manelli.

[12] Monteverdi had moved from Mantua to Venice as early as 1613 to become *maestro di cappella* at the San Marco cathedral, thus witnessing and, towards the end of his life, participating in opera's second birth. He composed these two operas at the venerable age of 73 and 75, respectively, as well as a third opera, LE NOZZE D'ENEA CON LAVINIA, of whose premiere in 1641 there are records but no music survived or has been found so far. This 'amazing creative spurt [of] a 75-year-old composer, whose operatic career had long seemed finished' (Rosand, 1991a: 18) goes to show Monteverdi's ability to adapt to the genre's new paradigm.

similarities to today's commercial theatre and musical business, whereas the royal or otherwise personal patronage has its equivalent in publicly financed events.

> The rise of public opera theatres in Venice was one manifestation, among many others, of the European-wide transformation toward the commercialization of entertainment during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. By the seventeenth century, the famous bridge battles of Venice, once a ritualized manifestation of popular culture and working-class rivalries, had come under the management of patrician fight "fans'" who gambled on the outcome and tried to influence it by hiring the best combatants. [Robert C.] Davis, locates in these bridge battles the nascent element of professionalization and commercialization of sport. (Muir, 2006: 351)

This development in public entertainment is not surprising in face of the socio-political characteristics of the Venetian Republic in those decades – its freedom from the Vatican after the *Interdict* 1605-607, resulting in the expulsion of the Jesuits between 1607 and 1657, the return of the theatre companies (the *comici*) and the city's liberal mores, as well as the economy of the city[13]. During that period opera became a popular art form, incorporating political themes and even current affairs, thus defining the genre and laying the foundations of the music theatre industry that echo to our days.

> While burnishing their city's image as a center of free expression, libertinism, and carnival spectacle, the writers and composers who created these conventions in Venice enabled an industry to define itself, setting the pattern for the future of the art. (Rosand, 2006: 415)

In Venice opera had to start catering to the taste of its audience. Notwithstanding the frequent bail-out of operatic productions by patrician families – who were participating actors in the opera business, writing libretti and running theatres –, operas had to be successful and to provide Venetians with a constant flow of new and, at least apparently, innovative works. The result was a regular output of many new operas, competing to please paying audiences. It is therefore hardly surprising that lofty mythological beings like Daphne, Ariadne, Orpheus and Eurydice were soon joined by more earthly and popular characters. The semi-god Amor became a quite regular role in opera, introducing comedic elements in otherwise serious plots. With his love-infected arrows, Amor or Cupid mediates between the world of

[13] According to Edward Muir, the most determinant circumstances were a European-wide inflation between the 1560s and 1640s, and a growth in population after the plague of 1630, mainly through immigrants, creating demand for cheap entertainment. A decrease in the Venetian trade due to the Thirty Years War and the Cretan War, though leaving Venetians less rich, led to a more insular attitude that favoured the establishment of its own economy of public entertainment, whose motor was its Carnival season that ran from December 26 to Shrove Tuesday (Muir, 2006).

gods and the passions of mortals. Later still, servants would provide humour and risqué matters that could not have been voiced by serious, mythological or aristocratic characters. In many operas, servants are often the more realistic, humorous and compassionate characters, as exemplified for instance by Susanna and Figaro in Mozart's LE NOZZE DI FIGARO or the slave Liu in Puccini's TURANDOT. In *opera buffa* (the comic or light version of opera born out of the comic *intermezzi* played between the acts of *opera serie*) the powerless, be they servants, orphans, or merely the young, become the main characters, as exemplified by characters as Marie, the foundling, in LA FILLE DU RÉGIMENT or Tonio, the peasant, in IL ELISIR D'AMORE, both operas by Gaetano Donizetti. The only *intermezzo* still performed today is Pergolesi's 1773 LA SERVA PADRONA that tells the story of Serpina who literally cons her master Uberto into marrying her, making her the Mistress of the house where she had been a servant. *Opera buffa*, is one of the traditions the opera ANNA NICOLE taps into with its tale of rags to riches through marriage that bears similarities but also differences with its baroque model. The feisty Anna Nicole may not have been a former servant in the household of her future billionaire husband, but, as a professional stripper and pole dancer, she was paid by J. Howard Marshall II to lap dance for him. More than 230 years separate Serpina from Anna Nicole, but they share the will to climb the social ladder and the willingness to knowingly seduce an older man into marriage in order to achieve their goals. The difference for a 21st century audience lies in the apparent innocence of LA SERVA PADRONA that seems to lack ANNA NICOLE.

The fact that opera had become a form of public entertainment did not make it less of a *locus* of power than it had been in its courtly surroundings. If in Florentine opera the overlap with politics is clear, Venetian opera maintained a somewhat different, but still close relationship to power, with equally unclear boundaries. In spite of its liberal mores and freedom from the Vatican, the ruling bourgeoisie, a new self-appointed aristocracy, controlled the genre, its form and contents. The patrician intellectuals, who also owned theatres and provided financial backing, often wrote the libretti and dictated rules. One important rule in opera was the recurrent glorification of Venice, its foundational myth, its liberties and its way of life. These self-referential elements were first introduced in the opera LA FINTA PAZZA (1641), which opened the Incogniti-owned Teatro Novíssimo. Its librettist was a member of the Incogniti, Giulio Strozzi, also known for his epic poem *Venetia Edificata* that tells of the

miraculous foundation of Venice on the lagoon by Art, to whom God had given the divine plans for the city[14].

LA FINTA PAZZA also contains several allusions to Venice's present, namely its impressive theatres that are indirectly mentioned in plays within the opera, and, in one case, even in an opera-within-the-opera. These scenes allow for the main characters to step out of their roles, and to comment on the new theatre, its beauty and its impressive machinery. In one such situation in LA FINTA PAZZA, Ulisse and Diomede "react as audience to this play-within-the-play in their honour […] Ulisse exclaims: This is either an earthly theatre made by the gods or else a man-made heaven"[15] (Strozzi, *apud* Rosand 1991d: 113). In yet another scene, a "mad scene" representing an imaginary opera within the opera, mentioning "brand new theatres" (*novíssimi teatri*) and "architecture, raining from the stars, to ornament so many new and illustrious works" is an obvious allusion to the Novissimo (*ibidem*: 114). In these scenes the characters become observers or audience themselves. "[T]hey abandon one illusion to create another, for they appear to share the point of view of the audience, rather than that of their fellow characters" (*ibidem*). These scenes establish various operatic traditions, the introduction of scenes, in which the characters interrupt their action or step out of character, thus justifying song; the subliminal inclusion of current affairs in operatic plots, adding a dimension of social critique; self-referential elements that mirror society on stage.

Several Venetian operas have these more or less obvious allusions to the city's foundational myth, with BELLEROFONTE (1642), also by Strozzi, going as far as to visually stage Venice, realistically depicting the city in the opera's scenery. Venetian society recognized itself with pride in the representations of its city-state on the operatic stage. They were also so familiar with these images as well as with the less obvious metaphors in the operas, they had become

[14] *L'ARTE per riparar tante rouine / Dell'opre di sua mano ilustre, e degna / In cielo ascesa, all'orecchie diuine / Di scoprir'il suo mal saggia s'ingegna: / D'vna cittá che non mai venga a fine, / Iddio l'esempio alla diletta insegna; / Oue si chiuda in picciol sen di Mare / Quant'Ingenio, e Natura e Ciel può fare. (Venetia Edificata)*
Art, in order to mend such great destruction of the works of her illustrious and worthy hand, having ascended into heaven, strives wisely to express her sorrow to the divine ears: God reveals to his beloved the plans of an eternal city, where in a cove of the Sea, will be closed all that Genius, Nature and Heaven can achieve. (Strozzi, *apud* Rosand, 1991e: 131)
[15] *O formano gli Dei / Questi teatri in terra, / o innalzano i mortali / Questi apparati in Cielo*.

able to read between the lines of these self-referential libretti filled with hints and allusions to current political events, the military heroes in the war and even gossip. This tradition resonates in present-day operas that have current affairs, such as politics, celebrities or cultural phenomena as their subject matters. In ANNA NICOLE we find many such references that presuppose tacit previous knowledge of the events, lifestyle and gossip surrounding Anna Nicole Smith, as well as general popular culture and current affairs. Though very little for society to be proud about is to be found in the opera, it results in a similar complicity with the audience's tacit knowledge as did the Venetian tradition. The laughter heard in the Royal Opera performance video in various scenes of Act I, suggests this knowledge existed.

As the opera season in Venice lasted for around two months, and was over on Shrove Tuesday, the companies went on tour the rest of the year, disseminating opera all over the Italian peninsula and across the Alps. In order to survive economically, companies had to, once again, adapt to local taste and customs, making opera a continuously changing and contaminated genre. This may explain the different traditions in France, in England or in German-speaking lands.

1.2 From Venice beyond the Alps

In France, opera was introduced in the mid-1640s thanks to the efforts of the Italian Cardinal Giulio Mazarini, better known under his French name Jules Mazarin, who was responsible for bringing Cavalli's operas to Paris, presenting two of his Venetian operas, EGISTO in 1646 and XERSE in 1660. The latter was staged on the occasion of yet another grand royal wedding, that of Louis XIV to Maria Theresa of Spain. Both operas featured a novelty unique to the versions performed at the French court, and which would later become the trademark of French opera: a ballet was introduced, with music composed by the young Italian composer Giovanni Battista Lulli, born in Florence in 1632. Like Mazarin, he too would become known to posterity by his French name, Jean Baptiste Lully. The inclusion of these ballets in the operas was an insightful move of Lully, who had already worked for Louis IV and knew of the king's love for the ballet and how much he enjoyed dancing. The ballets were of paramount importance to the success of adapting opera to the French taste, and to settling Lully's position as Louis XIV's court composer. The ballets paved the way for the genre's success in France, which otherwise could have failed. In 1662, Cavalli's third

and last opera to be performed in Paris, ERCOLE AMANTE was premiered at last. It is one of his few works not created in a Venetian theatre and had been the opera originally planned for the royal wedding. Its premiere had been postponed due to delays in the construction of the new Théâtre des Machines in the Tuileries. In this opera Lully's elaborate ballets, with the royal couple leading the dance, outshone Cavalli's opera, thus cementing Lully's success, and dictating Cavalli's return to Venice. Lully was then to establish the genre in France, where operas were called *tragédies lyriques* or *ballets lyriques*. Apart from the choice of serious mythical subject matters, the use of French language and the respect for its prosody were further reasons for Lully's immense success, the latter leading to an increased use of recitatives with less and shorter Italian-style arias. Another obligatory element was the Prologue, normally an explicit homage to the king. These operas were lavish productions, using sophisticated stage machinery, stupendous costumes and spectacular sound and light effects, such as wind and thunder, and, most successful of all, fireworks. These "multimedia extravaganzas master-minded by Lully" (Snowman, 2010: 67) reflected French Baroque's splendour and glorified the power of the Sun King. They also mirrored the social environment of a time and place, where royal patronage and royal appreciation were enough to finance opera to such an extent that public success needed not to be taken into account.

In England, the introduction of opera was very different, and spread in a complex and lengthy process with many interruptions. This becomes clear as soon as one tries to establish which work or works can be considered the first English opera(s). One thing is clear: in England opera evolved from, and was always closely enmeshed and even battling with spoken theatre. Its forerunners were the jigs at the end of plays and the masques at the English court. There are several contenders for having created England's first opera and recent research endeavours have been unearthing other possible first operas. Ben Jonson could have composed the first opera. He was the author of numerous masques performed mainly at the royal court. These masques were similar to other Renaissance fetes, namely the French ballets, but were always part of spoken theatre. There is, however, one masque by Ben Jonson, with music by Nicholas Lanier and scenery by Inigo Jones, which bears an indication by Jonson himself that it had been entirely performed in the Italian *stilo recitativo*. It is the masque *Lovers made Men* (1617), *A Masque Presented in the House of the Right Honourable The Lord Haye* (Knowles, no date). This claim is controversial and has been discussed by

musicologists, with some discarding the claim, since no music has survived, and the indication regarding the *stilo recitativo* is not in the original quarto publication of 1617, but can only be found in a later edition (a folio publication of 1641). Others, however, claim that by 1617, Lanier, and also John Dowland, must have been familiar with the Italian *stilo recitativo* because by then they had already travelled to Italy. The fact that this masque was presented in a more private setting and not at the royal court in London may have allowed for the degree of experimentation an entirely sung drama represented in England at that time.

Another claimant for England's first opera is William Davenant's entertainment *The Siege of Rhodes* (1656), but the score, also believed lost, was written by at least two different composers. Due to this fact, as well as the political situation in England at that time, there are grounded suspicions that the music was a mere subterfuge to circumvent the law that forbade plays during the period of the Commonwealth of England (1649-1653) and the Protectorate under Oliver Cromwell (1653-1659) (Abbate & Parker, 2012a: 65).

England had to wait for another three decades to witness its first two through-composed dramatic works, which are generally considered England's first operas. In 1683 John Blow presented the entirely sung work VENUS AND ADONIS. But the Catalan composer Louis Grabu may have beaten him to it. Grabu, who had studied in France, probably with Lully and been appointed to the court of Charles II in 1665, adapted Robert Cambert's opera ARIADNE for a London performance in 1674. The music no longer exists but the libretto mentions Grabu as the composer of the new music (Cummings, 1912: 229). He composed another opera ALBION AND ALBANIUS, which was premiered in 1685, four years before Henry Purcell's first and only all-sung opera DIDO AND AENEAS (1689), of which only the version of the performance at the Josias Priest's girls' school in Chelsea survives, with musicologists and musicians still wondering what the opera really was at its origin and whether it had been premiered before in 1684.[16] Due to Purcell's untimely death, aged only 36, opera had to wait yet again for another 22 years before setting foot in London with Handel's regular output of over 30 Italian style *opere serie*, performed between 1711 (RINALDO) and 1741 (DEIDAMIA). During these 30 years a first operatic performance

[16] Purcell's later dramatic operas (or semi-operas) KING ARTHUR (1691) THE FAIRY QUEEN (1692) and THE INDIAN QUEEN (1695) were no longer through-composed, but musical works for plays in which the main characters spoke.

tradition was established with these Italian language *opere serie*, but it was short-lived as well. England's relationship to opera was very ambiguous. The debates "that have always raged around opera by the fact that opera was so flagrantly a foreign import" (Abbate & Parker, 2012b: 80) were never-ending, as Hogarth's 1724 engraving *The Bad Taste of the Town*, also known as *Masquerades and Operas* so eloquently depicts (Abbate & Parker, 2012b) (see annex A). After 1741, and until 1757, Handel did not create any more operas, composing and performing many oratorios instead, which were extremely successful. Although imported Italian operas continued to be performed in London during that period, no operas were being created by English composers. Thomas Arne (born 1710) was a prolific composer for the stage, with more than 90 dramatic works to his name, who mainly wrote incidental music, afterpieces, masques and pantomimes. Best known for the tune *Rule, Britannia!* an excerpt from the masque *Alfred*, Arne also composed a few operas, of which ANTARXERXES (1762), with a libretto by Metastasio, translated into English by Arne himself, was the best known and most successful.

During the remainder of the 18th, and the 19th centuries, music for the stage consisted mainly of various forms of musical theatre, namely the satirical ballad operas, of which John Gay's THE BEGGAR'S OPERA (1728) is a precursor and the most famous example. It is a social satire that, among other criticisms, pokes fun at the *opera seria*.[17] The political instability during the 17th century was not favourable for the establishment of an operatic tradition. Between 1642 and the end of the century, England experienced the English Civil War (1642-1651), the beheading of Charles I in 1649, followed by the Interregnum between 1649 and 1660, the plague in 1665 and the Great Fire in 1666. The end of the century saw the Glorious Revolution with the invasion of England in 1688 by King William III of Orange Nassau, the Williamite War and the Jacobite rebellion that continued during the first years of the 18th century. The economy of the performing arts in London was very different from that of Central Europe at that time, with theatres and concert societies relying much more and much earlier on a paying audience than in Continental Europe. Thus, there was the need to cater

[17] THE BEGGAR'S OPERA had a rich afterlife, starting with Thomas Arne's 1759 arrangement, adding instruments and new songs to Gay's version, and continuing with numerous adaptations, of which the best known are the bicentenary homage by Kurt Weill and Berthold Brecht DREIGROSCHENOPER (same plot, different music), an adaptation of 1946 by Duke Ellington, for the Broadway, Britten's THE BEGGAR'S OPERA of 1948, a 1953 film version with Laurence Olivier, a non-musical adaptation by Vaclav Havel (1975), and Chico Buarque's ÓPERA DO MALANDRO (1979).

for the audiences' tastes, which seem to have favoured semi-operas, in other words musical theatre that was not sung in its entirety.

This economy was at the same time the backdrop for the success of a new form of English musical theatre that emerged towards the end of the 19th century, the light Victorian opera, of which the Gilbert and Sullivan (G&S) "operas" are the best known and most popular examples. These are often referred to as the Savoy operas, a term that describes comic "operas" in Victorian England and refers to the Savoy Theatre where most of the G&S works were presented, starting with *Patience* in 1881. The theatre had been built by the impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte, the founder of the famous D'Oyly Carte Opera Company that for 100 years staged and toured the immensely popular and successful G&S operas, such as *The Mikado*, *The Pirates of Penzance* or *The Yeomen of the Guard*. However, the Savoy operas too were not operas *strictu sensu* because they all are driven by spoken dialogue, with the "operatic" reduced to an instrumental overture and interspersed songs and choruses. Arthur Sullivan did compose one opera, IVANHOE (1891), which had a highly successful run of 155 performances at the Royal English National Opera, another theatre built by D'Oyly Carte for the production of grand opera. He soon abandoned the project, selling the theatre at a loss.[18] With the exception of Handel's operas, which were Italian style operas, no real tradition of opera creation was to be established in England before the end of the Second World War, more precisely with the premiere of PETER GRIMES, by Benjamin Britten, in June 1945. The history of opera performance and opera creation in England suggests that operas had to compete with other forms of musical theatre and the spoken theatre because of England's earlier capitalistic economy. This competition among operas, semi-operas and the theatre favoured the appearance of various forms of popular musical theatre and made the dividing lines between them less obvious than in other cultures. These circumstances also influenced operas *strictu sensu* (as it did other musical forms and artistic domains). The thriving performing arts' scene did not allow for a degree of experimentation in the creation

[18] Both D'Oyly Carte's theatres still exist and have been home to very successful shows and also some landmark theatrical events. The Savoy premiered works like Oscar Wilde's *Salome* or Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit* and is now home to successful Broadway musicals that come to the West End. The former Royal English Opera House is now the Palace Theatre. After D'Oyly Carte sold it, it housed several entertainments and attractions, namely *tableaux vivants* with nude women and the first film projections in 1897. In the 20th century it presented a short-lived colour film format Kinemacolor, housed a Marx Brothers show in 1920, and was home to many successful musicals, such as Fred Astaire's *Gay Divorce*, *The Sound of Music*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Les Misérables*.

of new operas that would have alienated opera audiences. British contemporary music of the 20th century was generally less radical and always weaved in elements that would please audiences. With its comedic elements and the use of popular musical idioms, ANNA NICOLE also reflects this porosity between the erudite and the popular or commercial music theatre.

In German speaking lands, the first operatic experiment is said to have taken place on April 13th 1627 at yet another ruler's wedding, that of Georg II, Landgrave of Hesse. It was one more DAFNE with music composed by Heinrich Schütz and a German translation by Martin Opitz of Rinuccini's libretto[19]. That has been the theory of older scholarship, which has since been contested by more recent studies, namely that of Bettina Varwig, in her essay *Schütz's* Dafne *and the German Operatic Imagination*, as well as her book *Histories of Heinrich Schütz*. Varwig contends that there is no evidence supporting this claim, which she believes is more of a legend that grew from a guess to a certainty over the 19th and early 20th-century German Music History (Varwig, 2006). Best known for his many sacred works in German language, which are forerunners of Johann Sebastian Bach's cantatas and oratorios, it seems surprising that the father of German Lutheran oratorio, the severe art form of Protestantism, should also be the composer of the first German language opera. Schütz is sometimes referred to as the German Monteverdi, whose work he knew well and who he may have met[20]. But it is only in 1633 that the first reference to the *stilo recitativo* is found in a letter to Friedrich Lebzelter, in which he requests assistance in obtaining leave of absence in order to travel to Denmark:

> I engaged myself in an unusual manner of composition: namely how a comedy with diverse voices can be composed in recitative style and brought to the stage and enacted in song, which things to my knowledge (in this manner that I am thinking) are completely unknown in Germany up to now […] (Schütz, 2013: 86)

According to Varwig, it is this letter and especially its date that indicate that DAFNE could not have been a fully sung opera, as Schütz had not yet been in touch with or worked on the Italian *stilo recitativo.* Schütz travelled to Venice for the first time in 1609, to study with

[19] The opera is lost and there is very little information on it, but the libretto exists, stating it had been performed wih music.

[20] Schütz studied with Gabrieli at St. Mark's cathedral inVenice at a time Monteverdi was still in Florence and in Mantua. It is however likely that Schütz would have met Monteverdi when he returned to the Venetian region a second time in 1628, because by then Monteverdi had been living in Venice for 15 years.

Giovanni Gabrieli at the St. Mark's cathedral and returned in 1613. He may have heard of the operas performed in Florence and Mantua but most probably did not attend any of these performances, as the first opera to visit Venice was performed in 1637. But regardless of what DAFNE actually was when it was performed, and of how much music was composed for it, the experiment must have been an ambitious one, otherwise Opitz would not have translated the text, nor would he have mentioned the performance when he published it (Varwig, 2011). According to Varwig, and Elisabeth Rothmund, the DAFNE experiment was an important step in Heinrich Schütz's endeavours to adapt the Italian musical drama to German cultural circumstances (Rothmund, 2004). During Early Baroque, Schütz and his contemporaries like Michael Praetorius, Samuel Scheidt and Johann Hermann Schein, though best known for their sacred works, were composing secular music as well for the courts that employed their services. However, this music was rarely published, possibly because of its more utilitarian and ephemeral nature. But in 1634 Schütz was employed by the Danish Court for the wedding festivities of Prince Christian IV, for which he asked absence of leave in the above mentioned letter to Lebzelter, going to the trouble of mentioning his interest in this new composition style, which had been hitherto unknown to him and in Germany. These were the grandest festivities Schütz had ever participated in. Rothmund argues that Schütz composed much more music than those works whose surviving texts mention him on the frontispiece. He was too famous and too well paid to be employed just as *Kapellmeister* and to compose a couple of songs. Recent research suggests that Schütz may have composed all the vocal music performed during the festivities, sacred and secular, the latter consisting of the sung parts of the Lauremberger comedies, the songs of the *Singballett Orpheus* and several other songs for a big pageant. These findings go to prove that Schütz seriously endeavoured to develop stage music with German texts, for which he needed to create a German *stilo recitativo* adapted to German prosody, and that the 1627 DAFNE, though most probably a semi-opera, and possibly not very successful, was the beginning of a small but consistent output of German language stage music.

Although Germany readily embraced Italian opera, the establishment of opera in German language was a lengthy and often interrupted process. In the 18th-century Berlin, Frederick the Great favoured Italian style opera, in spite of being a Francophile in all other cultural matters. In Vienna, Habsburg Empress Maria Theresa put the Francophile diplomat Count

Giacomo Durazzo in charge of French style opera, which he slowly Italianized. At the Burgtheater, opera was definitely an Italian genre. These traditions were interrupted with the closing of the Berlin opera house because of the seven-year-war (1754/6-1763), and of the Burgtheater in Vienna because of Emperor Joseph II's preference for German theatre and his patronage of the Nationaltheater in detriment of the Italian style Burgtheater. Thus, in both capitals Italian opera dwindled and gave way to the already existing popular version in vernacular language, the *Singspiel*. Both styles co-existed for decades with Mozart still writing *opere serie* – even revisiting it with LA CLEMENZA DI TITO, composed while he was finishing the *Singspiel* DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, his last two operas still reflecting the Italian *opera seria* and German *Singspiel* dichotomy.

1.3 Infected opera – from medieval passion plays to Freddie Mercury

Schütz, but also Monteverdi and other composers of the early Baroque, wrote both sacred and secular music. Schütz's effort to establish a musical idiom for German music theatre was less successful than Monteverdi's, as very little records and practically no music survived. Considering his output of sacred works, it is hard to believe that Schütz would not have been efficient in writing music for secular texts. The problem may have been the lack of adequate texts in German language (hence the necessity to translate Rinuccini's text for DAFNE). But the main reason may well have been the unfavourable socio-political circumstances in the region. The Thirty Years War that raged through it between 1618 and 1648, affecting especially the German speaking countries, where some states lost over half of their population in combat, sieges and pillages, or to the ensuing consequences, as famine and pestilence. The Republics of Florence and Venice, and other states of the Italian Peninsula were spared and only moderately affected by its global economic consequences (see footnote[13]). Those were certainly not the right circumstances for opera, or any other form of expensive entertainment, to flourish at the German courts. But Schütz composed numerous sacred works during his lifetime, of which over 500 have survived, proving that he was very successful in adapting the *stilo recitativo* in his later sacred works, namely the *Weihnachtshistorie* (1666) and *Die Sieben Worte* (before 1657/8)[21], and that he did find a way to put music to the German language – at least to Lutheran German.

[21] Schütz's three passions are in unaccompanied plain song and chorus, due to the restrictions in place at the Dresden court, for which they were composed, and where instruments were silenced during Holy Week.

Monteverdi studied at the Cremona cathedral, and later worked as string player and *maestro di cappella* at the Mantuan court. His experience in both domains led him to compose sacred and secular works from the outset. The majority of his most important sacred works date from the period, during which he was *maestro di cappella* at St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice (after 1613) with the exception of the *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (*Vespro della Beata Vergine*, published in 1610)[22]. He was highly successful in both musical idioms, moving with ease from one to the other, and even transporting music from the secular to the sacred. In 1610 he borrowed the initial *toccata* (a fanfare played by trumpets) of ORFEO (1607) and used it in his *Vespers*. Much later, in 1640, Monteverdi used the melody of Arianna's lament of the opera ARIANNA) to set *Il Pianto della Madonna* (see p. 108 in "No Clemenza for Anna Nicole" for more on this very interesting use of the lament). In the German case, while German language opera had difficulties to establish itself before the second half of the18th century, baroque Protestant church music was being very efficient and successful in developing the musical vocabulary and syntax of another kind of sung drama. Starting with Heinrich Schütz, and reaching an extraordinary pinnacle with Johann Sebastian Bach's highly dramatic and oftentimes even operatic cantatas, oratorios and passions.

In the Catholic Church, some fifty years earlier the Counter-Reformation tried to put in place a strict separation of sacred and secular music, forbidding the use of secular tunes and texts in church music, in an effort to leave their lasciviousness and profanity at the churches' doorsteps. During the Renaissance, these borrowing techniques were very common and could take the shape of a *cantus firmus* mass, a paraphrase mass, or a parody mass', the latter borrowing previously composed polyphonic material from secular music. Despite those efforts to keep sacred music pure, with the onset of the Baroque's attention to emotions, composers felt increasingly impelled to use the newly discovered means of musical expression, regardless of the nature of the work. Notwithstanding the differing purposes, venues and literary texts, composers resorted to similar, oftentimes identical musical means in secular as well as sacred music. After all, opera and oratorio share common roots of musical story-telling that can be found in the religious musical representations of the Middle

[22] It is not known when and where the Vespers were performed for the first time, nor if Monteverdi composed the work for performance or for his application for the post in St. Mark's.

Ages, such as medieval miracle and passion plays, or liturgical dramas, as well as in the music of the Elizabethan theatre and that of the Spanish Golden Age. At a time when churches were the centre of religious as well as social life, when "the Marian cult […] was often not without an erotic element [and] the adoration of courtly love not without a spiritual transfiguration" (Clemencic, 1999: no page), sacred and secular music mingled in cathedrals. Clerics would sing the difficult, multi-part religious music, and uneducated street players would perform popular Marian songs (accompanied by instruments like the barrel organ, bagpipes and tambourines) in which the beauty of the Mother of God was praised in what seemed courtly love songs. (Clemencic, 1999)

While the first operas undoubtedly profited from the cultural and intellectual movement of the Italian Renaissance's and the *Camerata de' Bardi*'s quest to re-enact Greek Drama, when looking back at the Middle Ages, it becomes clear that these first operas also latched onto earlier forms of musical representation that contained erudite and popular elements. It is therefore hardly surprising that over the ensuing 400 years after the very first operas, the genre evolved, adapted and integrated with great ease. In Venice opera evolved into a public performance and adapted to a new economic and social environment, whereas in France it fitted the mould of the culture and taste at the Sun King's court, integrating the ballet and adapting to the French prosody. Opera engaged with new languages and with theatrical traditions, spreading through Europe – very quickly in France and in a much more stuttering process in England and Germany. It made alliances with pantomimes, masques and plays, and it acquired many different faces after its first century: *Singspiel*, *vaudeville*, Savoy opera, operetta and zarzuela, and finally, the musical and rock opera, to name but a few.

The examples above show that opera opened itself to popular culture from the outset until our days. Many forms of musical stage works have always existed alongside with opera and were "infected" by it, like the many English forms of semi-opera, the German form of vernacular opera, the *Singspiel*, but also the Viennese operetta, the Spanish Zarzuela or, in the 20th century, the musical and the rock opera. These works sometimes entered (and also exited) the opera canon, according to how they were perceived at a given moment and where they were performed. Mozart's DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, with its spoken dialogue and popular characters, is the most famous German *Singspiel*. It was premiered at the Wiedentheater, a

commercial house dedicated to popular musical theatre run by Emanuel Schikaneder, the librettist of DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, as well as its first Papageno. The performance history of DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE confirms the porosity of the dividing line between high and low in musical theatre. Notwithstanding its "low birth" and immense popularity, namely as a children's or family spectacle, DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE eventually entered the canon and is listed in every opera guide. It is a timeless favourite with audiences and is regularly programmed by opera houses all over the world. In fact, the work's many interpretive layers (for example its freemason symbolism, its strong female roles or its take on clemency) make it attractive for both scholars and stage directors who enjoy revisiting the work.

As far as the 20th-century musical theatre is concerned, high and low is sometimes equally difficult to tell apart. George Gershwin's PORGY AND BESS (1935) made a journey similar to that of Mozart's DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, from the Broadway to the opera theatre, where it is mostly performed nowadays.[23] I will look into this journey of PORGY AND BESS in more detail further ahead when discussing ANNA NICOLE's roots in the jazz tradition and the economical differences between the opera and the musical (see pp. 50-53). Operettas like Johann Strauss's DIE FLEDERMAUS have also found their way into opera theatres, while other works of musical theatre have stayed at their original venues. This does not necessarily mean a lesser quality or complexity if we consider works like the book-musical *Cabaret*, with its musically better integrated serious dramatic plot, or *West Side Story* by Leonard Bernstein who also composed operas. Stephen Sondheim's musically complex and rich *Sweeney Todd* illustrates how blurry and porous the line is that separates the opera and the musical.[24] This phenomena is mainly Anglo-American, though there are works that defy all categories from other cultures. For example Astor Piazzola's MARIA DE BUENOS AIRES, which fuses opera with tango (music as well as dance), requires an operatic tenor for the role of the singer, an

[23] Interestingly PORGY AND BESS has recently found its way back to the Broadway in a new, shorter version as a musical with Audra McDonald and Norm Lewis in the title roles.

[24] The first opera houses to stage *Sweeney Todd* were the Houston Grand Opera and the New York City opera in 1984. From 2000 onwards it has been regularly presented in opera theatres, namely at Opera North (2002) Lyric Opera of Chicago (2002) and the Royal Opera (2003/4) where the main roles were sung by Thomas Allen and Felicity Palmer and the supporting roles included names such as Rosalind Plowright, Robert Tear and Jonathan Veira (http://www.sondheimguide.com/sweeney.html#Royal).

opera or a *payada* singer for the role of Maria[25], a *bandoneon*[26] player and a classical instrumental ensemble. It is usually performed in opera houses or other classical music settings. These examples also show that opera houses with bold programming and commission policies actively redefine this dividing line.

ANNA NICOLE carries similar signs of hybridism, with its jazzy, sometimes rocking, on one occasion even sleazy music styles, and the constant presence of a jazz trio with its drum beat. The fact that it was commissioned and premiered at the Royal Opera with classical singers, defined it as an opera and not a musical. Nevertheless its musical characteristics as well as a perceived lack of gravitas, led some critics to declare it a musical. Others agreed it is an opera because of its dramatic events on the one hand, and the operatic voices required for the four main roles on the other hand (Christiansen, March 03, 2011; Clark, February 18, 2011; Clements, February 18, 2011; Midgette, February 17, 2011; Silverman, February 18, 2011; Swed, February 18, 2011; Tommasini, February 17, 2011).

Conversely, popular culture has been open to the influences of opera, as proven by the above mentioned popular versions of musical theatre that have come to life over the four centuries of opera's existence. However, 20th-century musical styles, such as the blues, gospel, country, folk, later jazz and swing, and especially rock and roll, when it fully emerged in the1950s, do not seem to have been open to operatic influence. The styles of popular and mass music, especially those of the second half of the 20th century, are normally perceived as the exact opposite of opera. Audiences of each genre were normally wary of one another and seemed to only rarely overlap. More than ever, with several generations brought up listening to rock and all the styles that have emerged from it, the divide still exists.

> 'In broadly general terms, fans of rock music typically find opera to be highly contrived, confusing and convoluted, boring, elitist and arcane, while opera fans typically resent the perceived musical simplicity, loudness, commerciality and banality of rock music.' (McLeod, 2001: 189)

[25] At the São Carlos theatre in Lisbon, in 2007, the role of Maria was sung by Fado singer Mísia, establishing a parallel between Tango and Fado, both urban popular music genres, very specifically linked to harbour cities and their nightlife.
[26] A type of concertina used in South America and played by Astor Piazzola.

Moreover, during the 1950s on to the early 1980s, mainstream opera productions seemed to have been retrieved from a time capsule with their anachronistic sets and costumes, as well as the apparently outdated rituals surrounding their performance. This opinion was not solely that of rock fans, but it was also shared by modernists within musical scholarship, especially the avant-garde movement. Adorno's refusal of opera stagings featuring "powdered ladies and gentlemen, with the page and the white rococo salon [that] resemble a praline box" (Adorno, 1990: 65), reflects the aforementioned anachronism of opera. Rock fans most often found that opera fans to be as old-fashioned and bourgeois as opera itself, in their dress code, behaviour and elitism when sitting still through a performance of unremitting operatic singing.

However, there may be more similarities between these two worlds, their content and their codes than one might suspect. The musical styles may be at the antipodes of one another, but fans of each genre follow many similar codes. Despite their fundamental aesthetic differences, the social practices of each group of fans follow are similar, more than a superficial analysis would perhaps suggest. For example, both follow dress and behavioural codes. They are very different from one another but they share the simple fact that they exist, a certain theatricality and exclusiveness. As far as the singing is concerned, urban popular music styles and operatic singing share more than is apparent too. There are sometimes clear operatic influences, and at other times less obvious references to opera to be found in pop, rock, metal, punk and other styles of popular music. These references can be formal, straightforward translations of the opera genre into the idioms of 20th-century popular music, resulting in rock-operas and the musical. But they also can be subtler references of content, when using of non-natural and excessive singing in rock and pop music.[27]

The main translation of the operatic into post-1950 popular culture was the rock opera. As a subgenre of the concept album, it uses the same arguments to distance itself from the musical as opera does towards other forms of musical theatre.

> In essence a rock opera (like a traditional opera) is a story that is told entirely through singing, while musical theater usually has spoken dialog as well as songs. Even in sung-through musicals, the songs are always in service of the plot of the story, while in rock opera, the plot

[27] I use non-natural singing as a contrast to the white voice, whose best example is a child's singing voice.

> could be vague, and (intentionally) open to interpretation. (www.larockopera.com, accessed on May 11, 2015)

The first rock opera concept album was TOMMY by Pete Townshend and The Who, released in 1969. It was followed the year after by the rock album JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR (1970), by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. The two works had different afterlives, with TOMMY remaining well within rock and psychedelic aesthetics, which nevertheless did not prevent its performance at the Metropolitan Opera, New York in 1970[28]. TOMMY was also adapted to a ballet by Les Ballets Canadiens in 1970, it was fully staged in 1971 in a Houston Grand Opera production, and was presented in concert version with the London Symphony Orchestra in 1972. In 1975, Ken Russel directed the psychedelic musical phantasy movie *Tommy* with Roger Daltrey in the title role and stars like Tina Turner, Elton John, Eric Clapton and Jack Nicholson in supporting roles. In 1991, it was adapted as a musical, opening on Broadway in 1993, running for approximately two years.

The concept album JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR was adapted to the stage as a musical, first on Broadway, and, one year later, in the West End in London, where it was very successful and ran for eight years. In 1973 it was adapted to film grossing 10.8 million dollars in USA rentals alone (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0070239/business last accessed on May 22, 2015). Though the three versions put slightly different accents on the plotline, they all tell the story of the last week in the life of Jesus, with special focus on his relationship with Judas and with Mary Magdalene. As a dramatization of the Passion of Christ, from his entry into Jerusalem to the Calvary and Crucifixion, based on the three synoptic gospels and the writings of the then bishop Fulton J. Sheen, JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR could also be read as staged oratorio. If the notion of a staged oratorio with theatricals and dance could sound unusual or even shocking in the conservative circles of the early 1970s, it is now much less contentious, in part due to various successful stagings of sacred works, such as the simultaneously emotional and severe *Matthäuspassion* of J. S. Bach[29]. These readings

[28] Rolling Stone journalist Al Aronowitz was not impressed and called "the booking at the Met […] another gimmick" (Aronowitz, 1970).

[29] The *Matthäuspassion* was choreographed 35 years ago by John Neumeier for the Hamburg Opera, a ballet that slowly grew on audiences, and directed by Peter Sellars in 2010, a joint and already legendary creation with Simon Rattle for the Berlin Philharmonic. In 1964 Pasolini created his film *Vangelo secondo Matteo*. Though not a work of musical theatre, its eclectic soundtrack that goes from Bach to Billie Holiday, including excerpts of the *Matthäuspassion*.

acknowledge the operatic qualities the work undoubtedly possesses, liberating it from the non-visual performance paradigm it was subjected to for more than 250 years, while at the same time tapping into the medieval Passion play tradition. Popular culture critics, however, seemed prepared to embrace the notion of staged and pop oratorio much earlier. Even when the subject matter was not clearly religious, they could see beyond the dividing line between the sacred and the secular. Albert Goldman argued in a 1969 article that TOMMY "recounts the legend of a Messiah" and that "[t]hough labelled an opera, [it] is closer to an 18th-century oratorio or passion" (Goldman, 1969:20).

Rock opera and concept albums were most popular in the late 1960s and 1970s. In 1973 Pete Townshend and The Who released their second successful rock opera album QUADROPHENIA, a work on the disenchanted "mod" boy Jimmy. By then ZIGGY STARDUST (THE RISE AND FALL OF ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE SPIDERS FROM MARS), David Bowie's glam-rock concept album of 1972 had already been released. In it Bowie presents his alter-ego, the androgynous alien rock star Ziggy Stardust. In 1974 Genesis released and then toured the very operatic concept album and visually stunning concert performances, *The Lamb lies down on Broadway*. Even though its texts often defy interpretation, even comprehension, it tells the surreal story of Rael's search for his brother in New York's underground, a descent into the underworld where the main character meets and challenges death (The Supernatural Anaesthetist), discovering the brother he was looking for is after all his other self. In 1979 Frank Zappa releases the triple concept album *Joe's Garage Acts I, II and III* (1979), a satire aimed at religious cults, hypocritical morality and sexual fetishism. That same year, Pink Floyd's rock opera THE WALL, a tale of abandonment, abuse and isolation that made history.

Different bands and musicians tried out the opera format and there are examples of a country opera, RED HEADED STRANGER (1975) by Willie Nelson, and of rap, hip, punk and metal operas, with stories that range from humorous social criticism (TRICKS OF THE SHADE by The Goats, 1992), the life of a navy officer (CONTEMPLATING THE ENGINE ROOM by Mike Watt, 1998), fantasy-literature (THE METAL OPERA and THE METAL OPERA PART II by Avantasia 2001 and 2002) or the life of Jesus of Suburbia (AMERICAN IDIOT by Green Day 2004). Whether rock operas *strictu sensu*, or concept albums with underlying stories of adventure

or crime, about utopias or dystopias, with historical plots or psychedelic visions, popular music produced more operatic projects than a classical musicologist or opera connoisseur would suspect.[30] However and despite the fact that they employ characteristics of the "grand operatic scale and sung dramatic narrative" (McLeod, 2001: 191), aesthetically and vocally these works remain embedded in the rock and pop traditions.

One other way opera has influenced popular music of the last quarter of the 20th century is more subtle. It can be found in the vocality and image of many rock and pop singers. In spite of being in some aspects at opposite ends, rock and opera singers share a fascination for the excessive vocal expression of extreme, often transgressive feelings. In his essay "Bohemian Rhapsody: Operatic Influences on Rock Music" Ken McLeod analyses "various manifestations of opera in rock music with particular concentration on works by Queen, Nina Hagen, Klaus Nomi and Malcolm McLaren" (McLeod, 2001: 189). Freddie Mercury's singing is easily associated with operatic vocality, enhanced by his highly mediatised collaboration with opera singer Montserrat Caballé for the famous song *Barcelona*.[31] Created for the application of that city for the 1992 Olympic Games, this song immediately hit the charts already in 1988, when the city won its bid, and again in 1992, placing opera in the middle of several successful phenomena of contemporary popular culture like rock music, spectator sports and Barcelona, a city already perceived at that time as cool and hip.[32] As surprising or original as Montserrat Caballé's invitation for the music supporting Barcelona's application may have seemed when the song was released in 1987, it is the logical consequence of Mercury's and Queen's previous work. Freddie Mercury's theatricality and vocality, notably his vocal range from F2 – F6, falsetto voice and his ability to sing coloratura must have weighed in, together with his exuberant and transgressive performance style.[33] The band shared a common knowledge of classical music including opera, as Brian May remarked in a 1993 interview (Brian May *apud* McLeod, 2001: 192), and the song *Bohemian Rhapsody,* from the album *A Night at the Opera*, released in 1975,

[30] The platform for crowdsourced rankings *ranker.com* lists a total 166 rock operas.
[31] The song *Barcelona* is part of the album with the same name and seven more songs performed by the two singers. Due to Freddie Mercury's untimely death in 1991, the opening ceremony of Barcelona's OG opted for the recorded song played over a travelogue of Barcelona.
[32] In 1990 the Three Tenors gave their first performance on the eve of the FIFA worldcup Final
[33] "Freddie had admitted on Spanish National Television in August 1986 that his one ambition was to record with opera diva Montserrat Caballé" (Purvis, 2007a: 286).

is like a small rock opera – Freddie Mercury called it a "tongue in cheek" and a "mock opera" (Purvis, 2007b: 408). It starts with an *a capella* choral introduction *Is this the real life?* followed by a solo lament *Mama, just killed a man* that recounts the tragic story of a boy who accidentally murdered a man. *Bohemian Rhapsody* too includes a descent into the underworld, "an operatic otherworld" (McLeod, 2001: 193) and even a pact with the devil. The satirical operatic section *I see a little silhouetto of a man* rises out of a guitar solo and gives way to a hard rock section. In spite of being a song, *Bohemian Rhapsody* incorporates a variety of operatic elements such as "homophonic grand chorus[34], falsetto singing and distorted operatic phraseology" (McLeod, 2001: 194).

Operatic vocality is also present in less obvious examples that do not sound like opera but emulate opera's performance style. Some singers of the new wave and punk/rock movements like Lene Lovitch or Nina Hagen used operatic vocal qualities in their music, which they morphed into screams, wails and howls. Nina Hagen is a trained opera singer from the former GDR who moved to rock music and started to perform with Berlin bands. When she left the country in 1977, she moved to London and dived right into the city's punk scene. She became famous for her mix of punk and her virtuoso operatic technique and voice range, her shrieks and wails, completed by a sexually explicit performance style. Klaus Nomi was also a classically trained counter-tenor who fused the phantasy of opera with techno pop, whereas Malcolm McLaren is best known for his cut-and-paste remixes of famous operas, which he fused with black street music, namely rap. Lakmés *Flower Duet*, of the world famous advertisement for British Airways, is his globally known work, illustrating more than any other the escapism opera represents in these post-rock appropriations, which *Bohemian Rhapsody* pre-cognised in its lyrics "Is this the real life?/Is this just fantasy?/Caught in a landslide/No escape from reality/Open your eyes/Look up to the skies and see" (http://www.queenwords.com/lyrics/songs/sng11_01.shtml last accessed on May 24 2015) (McLeod, 2001).

Other forms of non-natural singing and similarities to opera can also be found in pop music, where high voices are normally favoured, for example Elton John, Michael Jackson or Barry Gibbs' falsetto the trademark of the Bee Gees songs, to name but a few. The same applies to

[34] The chorus of the operatic section is sung by the band and was overdubbed up to 180 times.

female pop singers, and Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, Christina Aguilera and Beyoncé bear witness to this predilection. Kate Bush, who also explored her extremely high soprano voice, added yet another operatic dimension in her main hit, *Wuthering Heights*, which is a romantic rewriting of the monologue of Catherine's ghost of Emily Brontë's homonymous novel. Although in opera the most famous voice from beyond the grave belongs to a man, the Commendatore in Mozart's DON GIOVANNI who will condemn and kill Don Giovanni, this song resonates with opera's famous scenes of not-yet-dead madwomen, sung by high coloratura sopranos, for example Lucia in LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR.

1.4 Anna Nicole Smith, fit for the opera?

The Royal Opera's (RO) explicit wish to avoid heavy or depressing subject matters, and to include comedic elements, combined with the intent to attract a wider audience than usual, framed the commission to Mark Anthony Turnage that resulted in the creation of ANNA NICOLE, by both erudition and the popular from the outset. While the genre, the choice of composer and the sanction of a major opera house define Anna Nicole as an opera pertaining to high culture, the explicit wish for accessibility, humour and glamour, adds popular elements, encompassing various traditions of opera and other forms of musical theatre. The subsequent choice by the composer and librettist to use the story of Anna Nicole Smith as subject matter for this new opera, adds yet another layer of popular culture to the work that is new and unexpected. Mark Anthony Turnage is a well-established and successful English composer, who at that time had already written three full scale operas for two prestigious European opera houses and the Aldeburgh Festival.[35] His orchestral works have been performed at and commissioned by institutions and festivals such as the South Bank Centre, the BBC Proms, the main British orchestras, namely the London Philharmonic Orchestra, where he was composer in residence between 2005 and 2010. For ANNA NICOLE Turnage fused his love for jazz and rock, the qualities that have given him an *enfant terrible* status, with Richard Thomas's provocative writing. Thomas had been a stand-up comedian, and written and composed a one-act opera called TOURETTE'S DIVA, as well as the musical *Jerry Springer – The Opera*, which won four Olivier Awards, including the one for Best Musical. The language of these works more than meets the expectations created by their titles.

[35] GREEK (Munich, 1988), TWICE THROUGH THE HEART (Aldeburgh, 1997) and THE SILVER TASSIE (London, ENO, 2000)

Thomas' raucous and explicit libretti, in which obscenities abound are perceived as either deliciously improper or foul-mouthed. The choice to write an opera based on Anna Nicole Smith's life confirmed and enhanced the public perception of two irreverent artists joining for a very provocative project.

Anna Nicole Smith was the first idea to be on both lists Turnage and Thomas brought to their weekly brainstorming meetings. Both agreed her life had comic and tragic elements, as well as great musical and visual potential. At first the RO was nervous about the subject matter, but the choice was vetted, and the necessary measures taken to enable this contemporary, powerful but sensitive story to be staged. It is important to bear in mind that at the time the opera was being created, up to the day of its premiere, questions such as responsibilities in Anna Nicole Smith's and her son's death, as well as the paternity of Danielynn (Anna Nicole Smith's baby daughter) and the inheritance of the late J. Howard Marshall were still being fought out in the American courts.

In spite of opera's lineage of scandalous, murderous and suicidal women, is loud, vulgar and seedy Anna Nicole a convincing operatic character? Will Anna Nicole eventually join heroines or victims like Violetta, Manon, Carmen and Lulu or does she lack myth and patina? "[F]allen women in previous centuries have much less of an accusing stench about them. Couldn't the RO have just stuck to LA TRAVIATA?" (Rees, February 02, 2011). The headlines and conjectures before opening-night were sometimes as wild and sensationalist as those regarding Anna Nicole Smith herself during her lifetime and the time of her death, but most journalists and critics agreed that ultimately the music would have to speak. Every opera that has entered the canon and withstood the test of time did so on account of the music and the way it succeeds in giving voice to a story and to each character, and not on account of the plot or libretto *per se*. Operas from any period, such as Verdi's LA FORZA DEL DESTINO, Monteverdi's and Gluck's ORFEO or Adams' NIXON IN CHINA owe their lasting success to their music, and its ability to convey meaning and create a subtext to very confusing and implausible plots, or no plot at all, in the case of the latter.[36] In that respect, the fact that a

[36] NIXON IN CHINA John Adams's highly successful opera about Nixon's visit to China consists of the arrival of Air Force One, greetings, state visits, official acts and performances, and the musings of Richard Nixon, Mao Zedong, Henry Kissinger, Chou En-lai, Pat Nixon and Chiang Ch'ing. The absence of plot does not strip the opera of meaning, which, it could be argued, lies not in the events but can be found in the musings of each character, and in the simultaneity of various happenings on stage.

celebrated composer like Mark Anthony Turnage was composing the opera was seen by the press as a good omen. "Turnage's previous operas GREEK and THE SILVER TASSIE are completely different in style and mood and brilliantly responsive to the respective dramas they embody" (Christiansen, January 30, 2011). In his long article in The Guardian Peter Conrad somewhat obsessively reports on and wonders at Anna Nicole Smith's vulgarity, but does admit at the end that "no one should dispute Turnage's choice of subject. The gaudily uninhibited Anna Nicole belongs in opera, where her many predecessors include the man-killing heroine of Alban Berg's LULU" (Conrad, January 02, 2011).

The media buzz around ANNA NICOLE paid off with six sold-out houses and a second run announced in September 2014. Furthermore the opera was the object of a completely new production as soon as April 2013 at the Opernhaus Dortmund in Germany, where under the direction of Jens-Daniel Herzog, it took on a quite different reading from that of the RO. The RO's production was repeated, with a new cast, in New York by the New York City Opera (NYCO) at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). The subsequent runs, and especially the new production, have already made ANNA NICOLE a success story. In spite of the fact that comparatively fewer operas have been created over the last 100 years than in the previous centuries, still quite a few operas are commissioned and premiered nowadays.[37] The biggest challenge for contemporary opera is to have an afterlife, which is already the case with ANNA NICOLE. Whether or not it will enter the repertoire, over a longer period, it is too early to tell.

At NYCO, the opera was performed with an almost all-American new cast, except for Susan Bickley as Virgie, Anna Nicole's mother. The cast at BAM consisted of opera and Broadway singers, further enhancing the mix of the popular and the erudite in ANNA NICOLE. In a public discussion with the composer, librettist, director and choreographer about the making of ANNA NICOLE at the BAM, the choreographer Aletta Collins pointed out the differences of

[37] According to operabase.com there were 300 operas premiered worldwide during the five-year-period between 2008/09 and 2012/13, an average of 60 operas per year. In absolute numbers this is far more than in previous centuries. This increase is in line with a general increase of the world's population, of education and of free time. It also reflects the more recent "exportation" of opera, from Europe to America and to the rest of the world, where it eventually is began to be created too. But the surprisingly high numbers of recent years are the result of an increased interest in opera, which had been declared dead. These figures *per se* do not mean all parts involved in creating and performing opera are in good health, but goes to show that right now and worldwide, opera is definitely not dying.

working with the American and the English cast. The American cast seemed to be more at ease with the dancing and movements the production requires, especially in those scenes that depict the raucous parties and the strip club.

> All the singers in this country are amazing. [...] compared with the singers we have in England, they are so different [...]. The guests at the party, they're extraordinary! Throwing themselves around brilliantly! I remember when we did this with the chorus in London, you know, just getting some of them to lift their arms at the same time was quite an event. [...] I genuinely don't know how we are going to translate it back on the English company next year [...] (BAMOrg, 2013: 36' www.youtube.com/user/BAMorg).

This difference in dealing with the popular elements of the opera is not surprising, due to the mixed nature of the cast and the strong tradition of Broadway musical and jazz singing in America. American opera singers are used to crossing from classical to jazz as they often start their careers in musicals or singing in jazz clubs.[38] ANNA NICOLE blends Broadway and opera, and infects classical music with jazzy elements, heavy-thread rhythms and smouldering blues. A rhythm section (guitar, bass and drums) is heard throughout the opera; on stage for the party in Act II, and in the pit for the whole duration of the opera. In London and New York drummer Peter Erskine drove the jazzy beat of the score. In London Erskine was joined by the Led Zeppelin keyboard player and bassist John Paul Jones on the bass, and British jazz guitarist John Paricelli, making for an all-star trio for the premiere run.

Did the creators of ANNA NICOLE spawn a musical instead of an opera? Do the sleazy blues for the strip club scenes and the beat that drives a large part of the score, the preference of fast paced dialogue and recitative make a musical out of ANNA NICOLE? Some critics implied as much, arguing that the music was too popular and submissive to the libretto. Andrew Clark from the Financial Times was adamant:

> Anna Nicole is not an opera. It's a musical-theatrical hybrid, so simplistic in its construction and vocal scoring, so cheap in its pseudo-sexual thrills and narcotic spills, that it wastes an opera house's resources. A tragedy indeed [...] (Clark, February 18, 2011)

Andrew Clements from The Guardian did not like the overbearance of Richard Thomas' libretto:

[38] Marilyn Horne recorded covers of pop songs and sang on the *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*; Renee Fleming sang with a jazz trio, before moving on to graduate studies at Eastman and Julliard

> [F]ar too much of his [Turnage's] score seems in thrall to the libretto, the work of Richard Thomas[.] [...] some of Anna Nicole has the trappings of opera, but not many. There are very few moments when the drama is driven by the music, when the cartoon-like scenes and the schoolboy humour are given shape and purpose by Turnage's contribution. (Clements, February 18, 2011)

Whereas Mark Swed from the American newspaper *The Los Angeles Times* voiced a more compromising take, as far as the musical/opera dichotomy is concerned:

> Turnage's score has its fine patches. He begins with the opening of Hammered Out[39] and comfortably slips between jazz, pop and pleasantly textured instrumental riffs. Words are set to be understood. An opening chorus reminded me of Leonard Bernstein's musical/opera hybrid Trouble in Tahiti. (Swed, February 18, 2011)[40]

But what exactly is nowadays the difference between a musical and an opera? Without leaving the Anglo-American operatic universe, for some modern or contemporary works the answer seems obvious. Philip Glass's operas have not been questioned as to their genre, nor have those of John Adams, Thomas Adès or the first three operas Turnage composed. Earlier, operas by composers as Britten or Henze did not risk being called anything other than an opera, regardless of the reception of these new works. But composers who created music in the classical as well as in the jazz idiom walked on shiftier ground with their works often defying definition.

One glance at the list of Kurt Weill's works for the stage, for instance, reveals this difficulty. Kurt Weill brought the European tradition with him to America when he fled Nazi Germany, but he had already embraced American culture prior to his emigration to the United States (The Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, 2012 www.kwf.org last accessed on March 3, 2014). In its overall list of works, the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music makes a general division of Weill's works for the stage: opera, musical and operetta. However, when accessing each work individually almost every denomination is different, varying from "biblical drama" to

[39] *Hammered Out* is an orchestral work by Turnage commissioned and premiered by the BBC Proms 2010, which fused other musical worlds, such as jazz, rock and soul, a very strongly percussion driven work.
[40] TROUBLE IN TAHITI (1952) is often performed in opera houses in double bills together with Menotti's THE MEDIUM but also with Puccini's GIANNI SCHICHI and other short operas.

"pageant on rail transportation".[41] For example DER SILBERSEE, EIN WINTERMÄRCHEN, though listed under the opera heading together with AUFSTIEG UND FALL DER STADT MAHAGONY and DER ZAR LÄSST SICH PHOTOGRAPHIEREN, is really a play by Georg Kaiser with music by Kurt Weill, and that is what is clearly stated underneath the title on the frontispiece of the score. Weill's eclecticism also reflects the times and life of the composer whose career encompassed two continents and cultures, and his vocal works are still being performed in both popular and erudite contexts.[42] 17th and early 18th-century opera was also performed in both these contexts, or in a context where the erudite and the popular came together, as the Venetian Carnival or the German *Singspiel* traditions witness. It is important to remember that the variety of denominations for musical theatre has always existed. The many operas composed during the first years in Florence, Rome and Venice were not all immediately called *dramma per musica*, but were labelled simply *tragedia* (ARIANNA), *favola in musica* (ORFEO), *dramma, commedia* or *opera musicale* in Rome and *favola, opera scenica, favola regia, tragedia musicale* and others in Venice (Rosand, 1991b: 35). The denominations reflect opera's many faces and its liminal condition nested between music and theatre, while also engaging with the visual arts. Born from spoken theatre and passion plays, opera was difficult to label from the very outset, only to later be given the most generic name that can mean anything or nothing: opera, which in Italian means "work" (noun). Even when we look just at the canonical works of the central grand repertoire from the 18th and 19th centuries, we find such a variety of works, subject matters and understandings of opera, it is surprising they all belong to the same category or genre.

Some of the few rules that have been established over time to distinguish opera from its neighbouring genres – it should be through-composed and without spoken dialogue, the singing should be performed by trained classical singers, and its main content and emotions should be expressed through music – have not always been observed, making it as difficult

[41] Some of the many other genre denominations for Weill's musical dramatic works are: Singspiel, Play or Comedy with music, Musical play or comedy, Musical tragedy, Broadway operetta, American opera, Vaudeville or folk opera, and opera or opera buffa.

[42] Kurt Weill fled Nazi Germany in 1933, and lived in the United States from 1935 until his death in 1950. He applied for American citizenship, remarried and embraced American culture, composing numerous musicals for the Broadway, music for movies and also folk operas that were performed throughout the country and in schools. Many of his songs, which were first sung by his first wife Lotte Lenya and are now part of the repertoire of singers like Ute Lemper, are also being performed by classical singers and being included in classical song recitals, ever since the Teresa Stratas 1983 recording of Kurt Weill songs. Weill himself made versions of his songs arranged for jazz and salon orchestra.

now as during all its history to draw a clear line between opera on one side, and popular musical theatre on the other. Moreover, ascribing a jazzy or swinging sound automatically to the musical or to light music, as Adorno does in his essay *On Popular Music* (Adorno, 2009b), no longer makes sense, if it ever did, even earlier in the 20th-century. Erudite music had often drawn on popular music of its time before. Popular music has had its roots in blues and jazz for over a century now, and in pop and rock for over half a century, this hardly constitutes a novelty or something strange, thus making Adorno's 1941 claim that jazz is devoid of any artistry difficult to uphold in our day and time. For Adorno, jazz was part of the modern popular music he abhorred because it had a beat one could march or dance to, which he believed to be alienating and manipulating (*ibidem*).

The now canonical opera by George Gershwin PORGY AND BESS embodies the pitfalls of the attempt to define and separate high and low along the classical vs. jazz/blues divide. Gershwin wrote it as an opera for the Metropolitan Opera but he chose to premiere it at the Alvin Theatre on Broadway, on October 10, 1935 (after a preview in Boston, on September 30, followed by several cuts to make the show tighter and ready for the Broadway).[43] The work was applauded in Boston, where critics praised it unanimously and the audience gave a 15-minute-standing ovation. In New York it received mixed reviews and puzzled the critics who did not know how to classify it. The *New York Times* alone sent three critics, the music, the drama and the chief music critic. The latter resumed the different opinions: "the drama critics objected to recitative *per se* and the music critics to *Summertime*, *I Got Plenty o' Nuttin* and other tunes which seemed 'too popular' for opera" (Swain *apud* Standifer, November/December 1997). The most demolishing review came from the American modernist composer and critic Virgil Thomson who wrote in *Modern Music*: "Gershwin does not even know what an opera is" (Thomson *apud* Reich, February 6, 1998), describing the use of blues and jazz elements as "crooked folklore and half-way opera" (Thomson *apud* Horowitz, January 26, 2011), while the critic of the New York Times, Samuel Chotzinoff discarded the work as a mere hybrid (Reich, February 6, 1998).

[43] The opera was not be premiered at the Metropolitan in New York, because the composer decided half way through the composition process, and after having started to audition singers for the main roles, it had to be performed by an all-black cast, and not a black-faced white cast. (Standifer, 1997; *World Opera,* National Public Radio [NPR] on http://www.npr.org/2008/07/04/92147536/the-great-american-opera-porgy-and-bess)

PORGY AND BESS was further cut and adapted for a new Broadway revival in the 1940s, losing recitatives and parts of arias, with whole roles and musicians in the orchestra pit being erased. In 1952 the opera was rescued from oblivion in a production that partially restored it to the form Gershwin had composed it – featuring Leontyne Price (Bess) William Warfield (Porgy) and Cab Calloway (Sportin' Life) – and toured Europe, with a very successful run in London at the Stoll Theatre, performances in Berlin and Vienna[44], returning in 1953 to New York to the Ziegfeld Theatre where it ran for 305 performances (Internet Broadway Database, http://www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=2223, last accessed on March 07, 2014).

The first complete revival of Gershwin's original score had to wait until 1976 when it was performed at the Houston Grand Opera.[45] This is the production that marks the reconciliation of the American public and the critics with PORGY AND BESS. Until then, Gershwin's opera had been perceived by African-Americans as racist and demeaning. In the 1960s African-American sociologist Harold Cruse declared PORGY AND BESS representative of white misinterpretation of black culture: "It portrays the seamiest side of Negro life -- presumably the image of black people that white audiences want to see" (Cruse *apud* Standifer, November/December 1997) For Cruse, "PORGY AND BESS belongs in a museum and no self-respecting African American should want to see it, or be seen in it" (*ibidem*). The 1952 run at the Ziegfeld in New York had already enraged the black press of the time. James Hicks from the *Baltimore Afro-American*, described the production as "the most insulting, the most libelous, the most degrading act that could possibly be perpetrated against colored Americans of modern times" (Hicks, March 24, 1953) .The opera had not yet been taken seriously by critics either who were still debating whether it was a Broadway musical, a Broadway opera, a folk opera or just an opera.

[44] The tour was financed by the US State Department as part of the cultural "reorientation" programme in the case of Berlin and Vienna.

[45] A Metropolitan Opera debut in New York (the house that had commissioned Gershwin, but which he forewent when he started auditioning in the middle of the composition process and decided for an all-black cast) had to wait yet another 9 years. Porgy and Bess was first performed at the Met in 1985 in an, alas not very successful production. Its most complete version was premiered in Glyndebourne in 1986, in a production directed by Trevor Nunn and conducted by Simon Rattle. This production led to the now most famous recording for EMI conducted by Simon Rattle, with Willard White and Cynthia Haymon as Porgy and as Bess.

The 1976 Houston production was witnessed by the critic and producer Eric Salzman[46], and in January 1977, in New York, by musicologist Lawrence Starr, during its run at the Uris Theatre on Broadway, now the George Gerschwin Theatre. Both would become advocates for a re-appraisal of Porgy and Bess. Salzman reviewed the opera in April 1976 for the Stereo Review: "I came across a line (by myself) in which I described *Porgy* as ...'a masterpiece of musical comedy.' Well, I really ought to have known better. *Porgy*... is really a grand *grand* opera which has been consistently and awkwardly cut back to Broadway-musical proportions by the realities of American cultural life" (Salzman, *apud* Starr, 1984: 25). Starr had the "most profound surprise – profound in every sense of the word" (Starr, 1984: 25). He was "expecting to hear a group of splendid show tunes, loosely strung together with unsatisfactory recitative and transition passages...", and found himself confronted with a "carefully crafted larger entity" (*ibidem*).

1.5 Let's talk numbers!

The performance history of Gershwin's work shows how the differentiation between opera and musical or other forms of sung theatre can sometimes be a question of semantics, as put by Lehman Engel, in his seminal work *The American Musical Theatre: A Consideration*:

> It has always seemed to me that this annoyance with Porgy is far more the product of semantics than of anything Gershwin put into his score. It is as if just calling Porgy by the name "Opera" serves to assail the sensibilities of those who believe that such a classification is a slur on the dignity of Wagner, Verdi, and Mozart. (Engel apud Standifer, November/December, 1997)

Engel conducted the 1951 recording of Porgy and Bess for the American label Odyssey. Many reinstatements were made of Gershwin's original score that had been cut since the first Broadway run, among them sung recitatives and Porgy's *Buzzard Song*. The fact that Gershwin did not oppose the cuts has puzzled conductors and musicologists. Ira Gershwin explained to the producer of the record Goddard Lieberson[47] that it had been "George who insisted on cutting out fifteen minutes [...] during the Boston try-out, saying: 'You won't

[46] Eric Salzman is an American critic, record producer and broadcaster, also a composer and scholar, known for his work in music theatre. He was Artistic Director and is now composer in residence of the Center for Contemporary Opera in New York. Salzman produced the records of Weill's *Silbersee* and Teresa Stratas' records of Weill's songs.

[47] Goddard Lieberson later became president of Columbia Records and was the father of the American composer Peter Lieberson (1946-2011)

have a Porgy by the time we reach New York. No one can sing that much, eight performances a week!'" (Lieberson, 1951)

The production history of PORGY AND BESS, with its cuts between the Boston preview, the first Broadway run and productions thereafter, and with its later reinstatements when it started to resurface as an opera, demonstrates that one of the main differences between opera and musical resides in the production economy of each genre. As prejudiced as some American critics may have been when they reviewed the first performances of PORGY AND BESS on Broadway, it must be acknowledged that only those who witnessed the Boston preview were privy to the opera as Gershwin had created it. All subsequent versions until the 1950s revival (and that, to some extent, as well) are shorter and lesser versions, having undergone partial or complete cuts in sung recitative, instrumentation, number of singers and quantity of music, resulting in diminished musical continuity, sophistication, complexity and depth. These had all been dropped to fit the Broadway format that lives exclusively off public success and ticket sales. It took 40 years and an opera house as important as the Houston Grand Opera to restore PORGY AND BESS to its original operatic version, as the composer had first intended it to be, and as it was performed in Boston at the preview.

These differences in the production culture and economy also help define the differences between the opera and the musical. In the long run, opera is not a commercially successful genre, certainly not a profitable enterprise, but a display of power and magnificence of sovereigns and aristocracy, later a certain bourgeoisie, to be finally replaced by that of states and cities. Regardless of the structure of power supporting it, opera has always come with a staggering price tag, to be paid by its sponsors and, from the Venetian period onwards, its paying audiences. Not even the operatic economics of the *seicento* Venice or of the Royal English National Opera D'Oyly Carte created for IVANHOE succeeded in making opera profitable over a long period of time. In Venice productions had frequently to be bailed out by the patrician families who owned the theatres, and D'Oyly Carte decided to close down his operatic branch, in spite of the success of IVANHOE, maintaining only the profitable part of the Gilbert & Sullivan business.

Opera production requires enormous human resources for its artistic teams and technical crews on stage, in the pit and backstage, both for its preparation and performance. To be successful with large audiences, it further requires a state-of-the-art equipped theatre, expensive sets, furniture and props, costumes, shoes and wigs. Rehearsal periods last for many weeks and culminate in a limited number of performances that always falls short of the several-year-long runs of musicals. The vocal demands on the leading roles are such that rest days are required between performances, making each repeat performance quite costly, with little or no prospects to make a profit on a production. Furthermore, opera programming and opera creation are driven by artistic and cultural concerns, which require variety of repertoire and novelty of production. Different productions provide a diversity of readings of repertoire opera, adding new approaches and points of view. The investment never pays off.

The production of musicals requires equally large companies and high levels of professionalism in the technical and production staff. However, similar to the differences between Florentine and Venetian opera[48], the size of the artistic team and technical crew is much smaller, especially because the shows get streamlined if they are to be continued beyond a first successful run. The casts normally are composed of multitalented artists with an impressive set of skills that comprise at least singing, acting and dancing. Each skill may be performed with less virtuosity and profoundness than in classical opera, ballet or theatre, but the accomplished and multifaceted talent of the performers is often impressive. This allows for smaller companies, an important factor in the profitable nature of the industry, as are the long runs at 8 performances per week with its continuously rotating casts. Musicals like *Cats, The Phantom of the Opera* or *Les Misérables* have had thousands of performances, playing for years in the West End, with extensive runs on Broadway and profitable tours to many countries all over the world.[49]

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[48] Ellen Rosand compares Monteverdi's orchestration of ORFEO to that of L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA. The first must have featured an impressive amount of instrumentalists, as there are references to five *viole da braccio*, a second cembalo, a small band off-stage, two organs left stage, and for Orfeo's lament *Possente Spirto* alone: several trumpets, violins, *cornetti* and a double harp. L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA, a Venetian opera, has less instrumental movements and no indication as to the instruments (signaling that the opera was probably accompanied by a continuo group, composed of whatever instruments were available - cembalo, or *chitarrone* - and two treble instruments to play the few instrumental melodies) showing the differences of court and urban opera production in the 17th century.

[49] Number of performances: *Cats* had 8,949 in London; 7,485 on Broadway; *Phantom of the Opera* had >11,272 in London (still running); >11,412 on Broadway (still running); *Les Miserables* >11,603 in London (still

As far as numbers are concerned, the Delfont Mackintosh Theatre Group, which runs eight venues with hits such as *Mamma Mia!*, *Les Misérables* or *Miss Saigon*, and Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Group with an even larger portfolio of shows, including *Cats*, *Evita* and *The Phantom of the Opera* were reported to have turnovers of respectively 31.2 and 125.5 Million GBP in 2010, with profits before taxation of 8.8 and 17.9 Million GBP (Quinn, January 10, 2011). According to the Royal Opera House's (ROH) annual review of the 2013/14 season, the ROH received 26 Million GBP for the season, and another 3 Million GBP capital grant, representing together 23% of the ROH's income (http://static.roh.org.uk/about/annual-review/pdfs/Annual-Review-2013-14.pdf accessed on July 18, 2015).[50]

As far as earned income is concerned, a brief internet consultation shopping for tickets at both the West End and the two main opera houses in London shows that tickets for the best stalls at the ROH cost the same as for top musicals in the West End theatres. An equivalent ticket for the English National Opera/Coliseum, the more popular opera house in London, costs approximately the same as for a long running musical.[51] The West End makes a profit out of the enormous number of repeat performances for each successful show, whereas opera houses are regularly coming up with new casts (who have to re-rehearse), new productions and new operas, requiring generous sponsorship from either private or corporate donors, and state or city funding. The West End also relies on other sources of income, mainly merchandising. Both London opera houses offer merchandising as well, although the income it generates is necessarily lower, even in percentage due to the also much lower total numbers of spectators. Nevertheless, in the 2013/14 season, the ROH had a 97% occupancy rate with

running and the longest-running West End musical in history); 6,680 on Broadway (https://www.londontheatredirect.com/news/1326/The-Top-20-Longest-Running-Musicals-In-West-End-History--TopMusicals.aspx and http://www.playbill.com/celebritybuzz/article/long-runs-on-broadway-109864 last accessed online on July 18, 2015)

[50] The other sources of income were box office (average 2013/14 34.5%) fundraising (21.5%) commercial trading and other income (20%) and investment income (1%).

[51] The most expensive tickets for *The Book of Mormon* at the Prince of Wales Theatre for an evening performance on October 2, 2015 costs 191 GBP, an equivalent ticket for *The Phantom of the Opera* costs 121 GBP, whereas a ticket for THE BARBER OF SEVILLE at the ENO/Coliseum costs 125 GBP, and the best seats in the stalls for LE NOZZE DI FIGARO at the ROH 190 GBP. However, a last minute ticket for an evening performance of *The Book of Mormons* or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the two most recent and popular musicals can cost 254 GBP. (www.visitlondon.com, www.eno.org and www.roh.org.uk all accessed on July 18, 2015)

774,000 people attending the Covent Garden theatre, and a global cinema audience of HD broadcast operas of 747,000 people over 40 countries (*ibidem*). However, the figures for one of the most successful musicals ever, *The Phantom of the Opera*, provides the perspective to understand the difference in dimension. The musical premiered in 1986 and has been running non-stop for almost 30 years. It was watched live by over 140 million spectators worldwide, in 151 cities, and been translated into 13 languages. Its box office revenues are higher than those of movies like *Titanic*, *ET* and *Star Wars*. Its total gross revenue is of over 6 billion USD (http://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/the-show/facts-figures last accessed on July 18. 2015). These figures go to show the industrial nature and scale of the musical business, where a successful show becomes a prototype, ready to enter mass production, be re-produced, adapted, translated and recorded. Whereas opera generally only produces prototypes or limited editions.

The definition of opera as custom made and of the musical as an industrial product encapsulates a qualitative judgement. As far as price, access and perceived value are concerned, differences become clear if we compare custom-made opera to *haute couture* and the industrial musical to ready-to-wear. Opera is perceived as highbrow and the musical as middlebrow or lowbrow; opera is elitist and accessed by few, whereas the musical, even if expensive, is open to all (be it during the last weeks of its run when ticket prices drop) and liked by many. Owning or buying tickets to a first tier box for the opera has the same social significance today as it did in 17th-century Venice. However, opera has also always been immensely popular attracting emerging social classes and, in some cases, a popular audience. Nowadays all opera houses make sure opera is available to all by issuing a limited number of cheap day tickets, often with restricted view and offering numerous educational and social outreach programmes. But still, opera and a certain way of going to the opera, appreciating the opera, are still exclusive rituals and social markers. In spite of the popularity of many aspects of opera, the aristocracy surrounding an opera performance at a grand opera house defines it as a marker of class within the economy of cultural goods as defined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 2010).

On the other hand, opera – it should not be forgotten – also arouses strong universal emotions, such as love and hatred, fear and relief, or despair and bliss, which can be

experienced by anyone who is willing to pay attention and listen. The popularity of opera arias and operatic singing suggests as much. These feelings and emotions are also conveyed in musicals, sometimes even more in music because some of the plotlines are as simplistic and silly as those of many operas. Adorno's remarks in *Bourgeois Opera* on the similarities between opera and film, can be applied to the musical industry (Adorno, 1994).[52] Musicals share with opera the combination of music with a dramatic plot, strong visuals and the personality of performers, which elicits strong emotions from the audience (Baltes, et al., 2011). Each ingredient may have a different weight according to whether it is an opera or a musical, as for instance, the personality of the individual performer (conductor and singers) is much more important in the tradition of opera performance than in that of the musical. But the emotions that are performed and induced are very similar: joy, anger, love, hate, envy and grief. The singing voice undoubtedly plays a very important and effective role in any kind of musical theatre.

Singing may well be something primeval and part of our basic human core. In his book *The Singing Neanderthals* (Mithen, 2005), the archaeologist and early prehistory specialist Steven Mithen posits the controversial but compelling theory that the precursor for singing was developed millions of years ago by the Neanderthals, as an emotional communication system that allowed them to survive. According to his research, music is more than a luxury and a superfluous by-product of human evolution, or "auditory cheesecake" (Pinker *apud* Mithen, 2005: 5), it is linked to our primeval changes from hominids to *Homo*. He proposes a single precursor to music and language "Hmmmm-communication, a holistic, multi-modal, manipulative and musical communication system" (Mithen, 2005b: 138). This communication system has enabled the Neanderthals to face challenges that arose with their physiological changes, to work, and to live more cooperatively. In addition, Mithen defends the "sexy singing hypothesis", arguing that "Hmmmm-ing" may have been part of the display of good emotional communication skills necessary for the indication of danger, cooperative behaviour when hunting or at feeding sites, and for parenting – hence necessary for survival (Mithen, 2005).

[52] For more seethe chapter *Sprengt die Opernhäuser in die Luft!* page 75.

Mithen's theory places singing at the core of what it is to be human and of our emotions, linking it to survival, mating and raising offspring. This may explain the very basic, almost primeval reactions singing can elicit, from both singers and listeners, as well as the multitude of purposes the many singing styles serve. On the one hand, any form of musical theatre is something basic, as far as plotlines and emotions are concerned, opera, on the other hand, with its more complex musical development, and extreme and virtuoso singing, adds a multi-layered and complex experience to these basic ingredients, one that can undoubtedly turn it into the exclusive ritual and social marker defined by Bourdieu.

Therefore, a night at the opera can encompass much more than the "facile" pleasure that derives from empathy, sympathy or antipathy felt towards the actions of any given characters, which can be found in any form of musical theatre. To the educated connoisseur who, according to Bourdieu, would belong to the higher strata of the social hierarchy, opera offers additional and more refined pleasures. One of them is the one ingredient that is stronger in opera than in the musical, the personality of each performer that provides various shades and interpretations of the basic emotions on display. The musically educated and discerning patron will therefore take pleasure out of the more complex musical codes of opera, either of the music itself or of the conveyed meaning added through the interpretation of a given singer or conductor who may, for example, take a slightly different tempo, opt for a tighter *ritardando* or choose a certain vocal effect. The social practices of refinement and distinction associated to the grand opera, from dress to behaviour, conversation, drink and food before and after the performance or during the intermissions of the opera, will add to the enjoyment. But much of this enjoyment can be shared by a less "aristocratic" audience who may have different thrills in the opera than the connoisseur, but who can find different meanings in the emotions shared through opera.

2. LISTENING TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*

2.1 How it all started

When Antonio Pappano and Elaine Padmore, the Royal Opera's (RO) music and opera directors, commissioned Mark Anthony Turnage to write a new opera, they were looking for a work that steered away from the mainstream contemporary opera scene. Antonio Pappano, the RO's musical director, and later the conductor of ANNA NICOLE's world premiere, put it quite bluntly in an interview to *The Telegraph* during the build-up to opening night: "We wanted to commission an opera that wasn't the expected atonal fest and anorak type of event. We wanted to have comic elements because the modern opera world is pretty dire in tone most of the time" (Rees, 02 Feb 2011). The wish for elements of comedy may have been dictated, on the one hand, by the two previously commissioned operas for the Main Theatre: Harrison Birtwistle's MINOTAUR (2002) and Nicholas Maw's SOPHIES'S CHOICE (2008), both with heavy and violently charged subject matters, and, on the other hand, by the genuine wish to create an opera with the potential to attract a broader audience than the contemporary opera niche.

Pappano's choice of words may seem exaggerated, but they describe three aspects of contemporary music that, although commonplace, are deeply inscribed in the minds of concert and opera audiences. Contemporary music is atonal, difficult or even impossible to understand, it has penchant for depressing subject matters, and the type of audience this mix tends to attract is neither elegant and very rarely wealthy enough to afford opera tickets in the stalls. This is of course a caricature of a far more complex situation but it helps drawing a sociological picture of the contemporary music scene and how it is perceived. How did contemporary music and opera evolve in the 20th century and why did the RO's directors want to try out something unusual?

During the first decades of the 20th century, Schoenberg, Berg and Webern invented and developed the 12-tone system, also called serialism.[53] In this system the scale is divided into its 12 semitones, which are equally valued, with no one note to be repeated before the other

[53] Serialism is a broader term than 12-tone-music because serialism allows for series of less than 12 tones.

* This is the subtitle of Alex Ross' book The Rest is Noise – Listening to the Twentieth Century, which I borrow as it so well conveys the idea that one is always listening to more than the music.

11 have sounded, thus annulling music's gravitational pull, which consists of notes and chords that sound, or better feel like either suspension points or resting points. This musical hierarchy, tonality, had been omnipresent in European classical music from the late 16th century onwards. Over time, melody, rhythm and harmony became increasingly complex because, very generally and very simplistically speaking, over time the previous common musical knowledge of audiences evolved, pushing the balance between familiar sounds and surprises that avoid either boredom or incomprehension. By the turn of the century, ever more complex melodies, harmonies and rhythms, chromatism and an increasingly saturated sound reached a peak[54]. The 12-tone-system challenged listeners, making tonality disappear altogether, creating total equality among all semitones that make up the scale, and literally blowing one of the foundations on which music had been built so far. Other composers, like for instance Stravinsky, while not adopting the 12-tone-system, confronted and innovated the musical canon with dissonances, wild rhythms and jazz influences.

However, World War II and the dictatorships under Hitler, Horthy, Mussolini, Franco and Stalin put these modernistic and avant-garde impulses on hold for over a decade, at least in Europe. Many composers and musical works were banned in Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. First, the music of all Jewish composers was forbidden in Germany: Schoenberg, Zemlinsky, Schreker, Eisler[55], Ullmann, and even the musically inoffensive and long dead Mendelssohn were silenced. Later the compositions of political opponents, or music that sounded modernist, jazzy or new, were designated as *entartete Musik* (degenerate music) and proscribed.[56] In the Soviet Union, the Bolshevik censorship condemned and censored the same type of music and composers on similar grounds. Both regimes favoured the canonical and more heroic works of classical music together with popular music's simple

[54] Naturally the process is far more complex involving many other social and cultural non-musical factors, technical development, scientific progress, etc. with likewise complex cause and effect relations.

[55] Eisler's case is particularly dramatic as he was persecuted under Nazism, Cold War McCarthyism and Communism. The composer left Germany in 1933 and settled in the United States in 1938, but was expelled 10 years later, after appearing before the House Committee for Un-American Activities in 1947, accused of being a communist. He returned to post-war Germany, to the GDR (Eisler is the composer of the GDRs National Anthem) where, in 1953, he was once again confronted by censorship, with his libretto for the opera JOHANN FAUSTUS being forbidden and its 1952 printed edition withdrawn.

[56] Similar to the 1937 exhibition in Munich *Entartete Kunst* (degenerate art), in 1938 the National-socialist (NS) Party organized the *Reichsmusiktage* in Düsseldorf (a NS propaganda meeting on music). The meeting was accompanied by an exhibition, in which the undesired composers and music were made public, accompanied by a propagandistic booklet by Hans Severus Ziegler *Entartete Musik – Eine Abrechnung*. https://archive.org/stream/EntarteteMusik_758/ZieglerEntarteteMusik#page/n1/mode/2up

melodies and basic harmonies. Hitler and Stalin did appreciate music and visit concerts and the opera but only approved of works that fit their ideologies. In his speeches in the early 1920s about Germany's decline, Hitler decried the ignorance of the great German musical tradition "[o]nly a couple hundred thousand know Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, only some of them know Bruckner..." (Hitler, *apud* Ross, 2012: 342) and disapproved of modernistic composers and their music "little *Neutöner* (new-toners) come and unleash their dissonances" (*ibidem*).

Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union, the Stalinist regime also dictated taste and spread terror among living composers. Shostakovich and Prokofiev are the best known victims, although they both managed balancing acts that allowed them to compose and stay in their country. Others gave up composing in the modernist style, or gave up composing altogether. Despite his ability to stay afloat as a composer, Shostakovich endured persecutions and his creative freedom was constrained, especially after the infamous anonymous *Pravda* editorial of January 28, 1936, *Muddle Instead of Music*, in which his opera LADY MACBETH OF MTSENSK came under attack. Although the opera was enjoying a successful second run with three different production running simultaneously in Moscow, the editorial criticized its morally obscene contents[57] as well as its musical style, both of which the author did not deem befitting of Soviet society. "The power of good music to infect the masses has been sacrificed to a petty-bourgeois, 'formalist' attempt to create originality through cheap clowning. It is a game of clever ingenuity that may end very badly" (anonymous, 1938: no page)[58]. The opera would never be performed again in the Soviet Union during the composer's lifetime, at least not its original version.[59] Shostakovich became a symbol for the constraints and persecution under the Stalinist regime, which stifled everything labelled as formalistic music. He also

[57] The opera's heroine, Katerina Ismailova is an unhappily married and bored country woman who kills her father-in-law and, together with her lover, her husband as well. At the end of the opera she kills herself by jumping off a bridge and takes with her the former lover's new mistress.

[58] This unsigned editorial was published two days after Stalin attended a performance of the opera, and left the performance before the end, visibly displeased. This editorial, as well as others, has been attributed to Stalin himself, who is believed to have written anonymous reviews. This claim, as well as the exact scope of Shostakovich's predicament under the Stalinist and post-Stalinist regimes, is still the object of research, and has so far only reached contradictory conclusions, as most sources are either difficult to access or ideologically burdened. One conclusion emerges however: the opera was picked by the Stalinist regime to provoke a change in cultural policy.

[59] Shostakovich produced a revised version with a different title that was performed in Moscow in 1963 and publicly recanted the original version. He did, however, ask Rostropovich to record the original version, should he ever leave the country, which he did in 1979. After the record was released, the Western theatres returned to the original version, which is the one being performed today.

became a symbol of the Cold War and how the West used the predicaments of persecuted artists to make its point. After WWII a cultural campaign in the Soviet Union continued to hunt down what was by then called "rootless cosmopolitanism", namely by forcing composers to denounce on each other in meetings with party officials (Ross, 2012 & Hagedorn, January 2014).

In occupied post-war Germany, however, the opposite movement took place. The Music Control Instruction No. 1 of OMGUS (Office of Military Government, United States) made it a priority to give "a positive international direction to German musical life" (OMGUS *apud* Ross, 2012: 378) by "encouraging the music we think beneficial and crowding out that which we think dangerous." (*ibidem*) Richard Strauss and Hans Pfitzner were discouraged, and a rule was introduced to restore at least one work of the forbidden repertory to each concert.[60] In an effort to avoid Nazi or Communist affiliation, Music Control tended to favour the ideologically less burdened young progressive composers.

One result of the measures in the effort of the denazification of Germany's musical life was the creation, in 1946, of the International Summer Courses for New Music in the blitzed city of Darmstadt. The main objective was to further the knowledge of modern music banned during the Third Reich, with lectures and concert programmes of the first years featuring composers such as Hindemith, Stravinsky, Mahler, Krenek, Milhaud, Ravel, Bartók or Orff.[61] The focus quickly narrowed down to twelve-tone-composers, Schoenberg, Berg and Webern, and privileged those young composers who embraced dodecaphonism, proposing radically new compositional techniques, which later led to the total serial idioms[62] and other avant-garde compositional techniques.[63]

[60] This rule led to the inclusion of a Mendelssohn overture in practically every symphonic concert in post-war Germany, a habit that lingered for a long time in symphonic programming.
[61] Although Orff had been Goebbels' favourite living composer, and Carmina Burana a favourite among NS officials, the composer underwent Denazification and was cleared by OMGUS very soon after the war. However, as with many other musicians, composers, artists and writers, contradictory evidence and accounts continually changed the perception of Orff's role during that period.
[62] In total serialism, other aspects were serialized as well. Along with the series of tones, composers created series of note lengths, dynamics, tone colour or instrumentation.
[63] This is confirmed through an analysis of the Darmstadt concert and summer school programmes between 1946 and 1966 that reveal a growing tendency towards severe avant-garde idioms, such as total serialism, *musique concrète*, electronic music and aleatory music.

The 1949 course coincided with Schoenberg's 75th birthday and the composer had been invited. However, due to his ill health at the moment of travel he had to cancel and never attended Darmstadt until his death in 1951. In his stead two of the most radical proselytisers of serialism were part of Darmstadt's faculty during those years, René Leibowitz, teaching composition (1948/1949), and Theodor Adorno, as music critic and leading a composition working group in 1950 and 51. Both would return regularly to the summer school and become the two most important theoreticians to frame post-war music. René Leibowitz, a French conductor, music theorist, teacher and composer had published two books on Schoenberg and dodecaphonism that strongly influenced the way 20th century music would be looked upon in France.[64] Both books proclaim the absolute superiority of twelve-tone-music over any other stylistic current of that time, for example neo-classicism (Stravinsky and Hindemith) or renewed romanticism (Honegger and Milhaud) (Goléa, 1977), going as far as to speak of the uncompromising moral strength of atonality (Ross, 2012). Adorno, philosopher, musical analyst, a former student of Alban Berg, was the German theoretical endorser of dodecaphonism and as uncompromising as Leibowitz in his judgement of composers who did not embrace the twelve-tone-technique. His ferocious attacks on Stravinsky, to whom he dedicated a 100-page essay *Stravinsky and Reaction* (see p. 65), or Sibelius of whom "accused […] of fascistic nature worship" in his 1938 *Glosse über Sibelius* (Adorno *apud* Jackson & Murtomäki, 2001: xi).[65] Schoenberg, however, had begun to distance himself from the fanaticism of his proselitysers and their criticism of his return to tonal elements in later works. His reply to Leibowitz's criticism "I do not compose principles, but music", became famous (Schoenberg *apud* Ross, 2012: 389). He also publicly disapproved of Adorno's ferocious and personal attacks on Stravinsky in the above mentioned essay *Stravinsky and Reaction*. "One should not write like that" (*ibidem*). Towards the end of his life Schoenberg seemed to have sensed that his enthronement by the

[64] *Schönberg et son école* (Paris, Janin, 1947) and *Introduction à la musique de douze sons*, (Paris, L'Arche, 1949).

[65] *Glosse über Sibelius* is a 1938 essay by Adorno, which Adorno still cited in 1960s, and in which he wrote, among other attacks: "If Sibelius is good, this invalidates the standards of musical quality that have persisted from Bach to Schoenberg" (Adorno *apud* Jackson & Murtomäki, 2001: xviii). Later René Leibowitz called Sibelius' Fifth "the worst symphony ever written" (Leibowitz *apud* Jackson & Murtomäki, 2001: xi) in a pamphlet against the composer. But, in 1984, Morton Feldman suggested the opposite in a lecture in Darmstad: "The people who you think are radicals, might really be conservatives […] [T]he people who you think are conservatives might really be radical" And he started to hum the Sibelius Fifth. (Ross, 2012: 193) More contemporary composers, such as Wolfgang Rihm, Magnus Lindberg or John Adams admire Sibelius, and even Schoenberg and Berg later distanced themselves from Adorno's statement.

radical avant-garde would hinder the understanding of his music and stylistically imprison the next generation of composers.

One can only conjecture what might have happened to music creation, had Schoenberg been able to travel to Darmstadt, had Berg not died prematurely and had Webern not been shot by an American army cook.[66] Would the second generation of composers have been different had they had the opportunity to get in touch with serialist music through its actual and best creators, and not through the mediation of acolytes and lesser composers, such as Leibowitz and Adorno?

The most famous composers of Darmstadt's second generation were Pierre Boulez and Stockhausen, but also Nono, Pousseur, Maderna, Hans Werner Henze, Ligeti, Xenakis, Berio and Feldman. They all were born in the 1920s and, with the exception of Feldman and Boulez, had suffered during World War II as teenagers or young adults and under the dictatorships, some of which outlived the war for several decades. Stockhausen and Ligeti lived through especially horrific experiences. Stockhausen's lost his mother who was euthanized and his father at the front, himself being drafted as stretcher bearer during the last year of the war. Ligeti, as a Hungarian born Jew suffered particularly under the Horthy regime, Hungary's shifting allegiances and the Nazi occupation. He was sent to a forced labour brigade and his parents and brother to concentration camps. Only his mother survived. After the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1956, he and his wife Vera fled to Vienna.

It is therefore hardly surprising that these young composers enthusiastically embraced Adorno's uncompromising ideas on morality in post-war culture and critique, and his crusade against culture's manipulative potential. Music (and all other arts) should never be what they had been. In the introduction to *Philosophy of New Music*, he states his contempt for the "musical type who, with undaunted pretensions to modernity and seriousness, conforms with calculated idiocy to mass culture" (Adorno, 2006: 9) and makes a plea for radical music "[p]urified as an end in itself" (*ibidem*: 21) in the spirit of the defence of art's

[66] Anton Webern was shot during the arrest of his son-in-law for black market activities by American soldiers stationed in the Austrian village Mittersill. The shooting remains involved in mystery, and it is impossible to determine whether it was accidental. Curiously, Webern's death became the subject of an opera INCIDENT AT MITTERSILL by the American composer Michael Dellaira, premiered at the New York Pocket Opera (2013/14).

"purposefulness without a purpose" against the socially conformed bourgeois art, whose "purposelessness for the purposes declared by the market" he and Horkheimer had so decried a few years earlier (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1992: 158). Published in 1948 *Philosophy of New Music* would become the dialectics of music in the second half of the 20th century. It consists of two chapters, *Schoenberg and Progress* and *Stravinsky and Reaction*. Each one is a very detailed critique of the composers' work and technique, praising Schoenberg's freedom and purity[67] and demolishing Stravinsky's neo-classicism with its inability to sever with music's tradition, as well as his primitivism, which Adorno calls authoritarian. The essay on Schoenberg was written as early as 1940-41, during the first years of the war, with Adorno already exiled in the US. It remained unpublished and was only read by a larger public, other than his closest colleagues at the Institute for Social Research, in 1947 when it was published in Germany to a storm of negative reactions[68]. For Adorno progressive music is characterized by the ability of composers to use the "musical material", in other words the 12 tones of the scale, liberated from any pre-determined tonal hierarchy, the principle of dodecaphonism as theorized and used by Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg (Adorno's composition teacher) and Anton Webern. For the philosopher, genuinely and earnestly engaged in erasing all *pathos*, sentimentality and lacquered finish from music, the twelve tone technique is the only alternative against barbarism, because of the way classicizing and romanticizing music had inserted itself in the social practices of the totalitarian and amoral regimes in Germany and the Stalinist SU. Considered in conjunction with his most famous and most quoted statement that it is barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz, it becomes clear that Adorno rejected any music or poetry that had sounded during Barbary as they could never again be listened to innocently. Schoenberg's (and Berg's and Webern's) compositional technique had successfully made a break with the music composed before Auschwitz that had been too close and intertwined with barbarism and would take music into the abysses it had to explore.[69]

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[67] Adorno is also critical of Schoenberg, accusing him of not having attained complete freedom from the past.
[68] Even Schoenberg was critical of the essays. However *Philosophy of New Music* would become the theoretical cornerstone of contemporary composition.
[69] There are similarities, or parallels, to post-war literature, the *Trümmerliteratur* or *Literatur der Stunde Null*, namely to the literary group Gruppe 47. These movements were born out of similar preoccupations and bore similar results. Literature had to be objective, honest, devoid of *pathos* and propagandistic inclinations, of which the most extreme example was the *Kahlschlagliteratur*. The same serious motivations produced similar conflicts and attacks on individual writers who were perceived to not totally conform to the new ideal, of which the reception of Paul Celan's *Todesfuge* as well as its reading by the author at the 1952 meeting of Gruppe 47 is the cruellest example.

Over the ensuing decades, Darmstadt became the epitome of the most radical musical avant-garde,[70] establishing hegemony for 'serious' music as defined by Adorno when contrasting erudite and popular music (Adorno, 2009). Backed by two of the most important German radio stations, the Northwest German Radio (NDR) and the Southwest Radio (SWR), contemporary music creation operated under the whip of Darmstadt's radical innovations, with new idioms and techniques appearing almost every year, developing the initial dodecaphonism into total serialism, electronic music, aleatory or chance music and collages. In 1952, almost a year after Schoenberg's death, Boulez penned a cold-blooded "obituary" entitled *Schoenberg is dead!*, a posthumous assassination of Schoenberg, the composer. Boulez accuses him of using post-Wagnerian clichés, and of not having serialised rhythm, structure and form or timbre, thus compromising with "the most ostentatious and obsolete romanticism." Boulez exhorts composers to stop "considering Schoenberg as a sort of Moses who died in view of the Promised Land after having brought down the Tables of the Law" (Boulez, 1968*:* 275) .[71]

Some American observers were concerned about Darmstadt's one-sidedness. Colonel Ralph A. Burns, Chief of the Cultural Affairs Branch of the Education and Cultural Relations Division of OMGUS, reported in July 1949 on sharp divisions within Darmstadt's studentship, especially with regard to the concert series *Music for the Younger Generation.*

> The over-emphasis on twelve-tone music was regretted. One critic (Neue Zeitung) described the concerts as "The Triumph of Dilettantism." A regrettable feature of the session was the tension created between the French group and the rest of the school. Led by their teacher Leibowitz, the French students remained aloof from the others and often acted in a snobbish way. At one concert their conduct led to open hostility. Leibowitz [...] represents and admits only the most radical kind of music and is openly disdainful of any other. His attitude is aped by his students. (Burns apud Ross, 2012: 382)

[70] Ross points out the fact that Darmstadt, and Domaines Musicales in Paris, used the rather military term avant-garde for contemporary music, whereas in Los Angeles Cage preferred the term experimental. (Ross, 2012: 396-397),

[71] This kind of behaviour and open hostility was to become Boulez's trademark. He caused incidents and walked out of many concerts. The most famous were violent interruptions of concerts of Stravinsky's *Oedipus* and *Four Norwegian Moods* in Paris, as well as violently turning against his teachers Messiaen and Leibowitz. The latter had pointed out some errors in Boulez's First Piano Sonata, which provoked a violent tantrum and led to Boulez later repeatedly stabbing Leibowitz's name in the score. (Ross, 2012)

Less orthodox compositional languages and attitudes did have a hard time getting through but eventually succeeded alongside the more severe currents, with composers like Luciano Berio or György Ligeti finding ways out of modern music's crisis. Berio brought instrumental and vocal virtuosity to the avant-garde, as far as vocal display is concerned the collaboration of his wife, the singer Cathy Berberian was paramount. Ligeti refused musical totalitarian attitudes altogether and composed according to his own inspiration and rules often including spirituality or wit, his response to the suffering and losses he had endured during the war and later in communist Hungary.

Another non-aligned composer was Hans Werner Henze. When he turned his back on the Darmstadt dogma and adopted a tonal language, he was ferociously criticized by the hard-line avant-garde. At the premiere in Berlin of his 1956 opera KÖNIG HIRSCH, "a voluptuously neo-romantic opera" (Ross, 2012: 428), 25-minute applause from an international audience contrasted with constant disruption and whistles from the third tier. The conductor was Herman Scherchen, a regular presence at Darmstadt and the conductor of many world premieres from the 1920s to his death in 1966. He had made ruthless cuts in Henze's four-hour-long score justifying them with the statement: "But my dear, we no longer write arias nowadays" (Hagedorn, October 28, 2012 – my translation las accessed on March 07, 2014). In his memoirs *Böhmische Quinten* (Bohemian Fifths), Henze complains about the Darmstadt dogma:

> Everything had to be stylized and made abstract: music as a glass-bead-game, a fossil of life. [...] As Adorno decreed, the job of a composer was to write music that would repel, shock, and be the vehicle of unmitigated cruelty." (Henze apud Ross, 2012: 427)

Henze would become an important supporter and sponsor of Mark-Anthony Turnage, whom he taught at the Tanglewood Music Centre in 1983, and of whom five years later he would commission a first opera (GREEK) for the Munich Biennale. Henze also influenced and inspired a younger generation of composers in Germany, of which the most famous is Wolfgang Rihm (b. 1952). This new generation emerged over the 1970s, re-introducing subjectivity and advocating a new simplicity, as well as a break from serialism.[72] In other

[72] The names given to these new stylistic compositional tendencies were New Simplicity (Neue Einfachheit) and New Subjectivity (also *Neue Innigkeit*, new inwardness) and reflected a less mathematical and distanced attitude, resulting in music that tended to please audiences. German composer Wolfgang Rihm also contributed

countries, especially in the Anglo-American world, Darmstadt's international influence was not as hegemonic, with composers creating works that were less, or not at all, bound by the parameters of the avant-garde dogma. Such was the case of Great Britain, with composers like Britten, Birtwistle or Maxwell Davies, and of the USA with Copland, Barber, Bernstein, Reich or Glass. These composers and their non-serial music were successful with the public, and eventually accepted by some of their more hard-line peers.[73]

The two world wars and the European dictatorships had caused a wave of emigration among Jewish and politically non-aligned musicians and composers. Rachmaninov had left Russia as early as 1917 in the wake of the revolution, followed some twenty years later by Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Weill, Krenek, Eisler, Hindemith, as well as many European musicians, among them the conductors Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter. They were living in exile in the United States, mainly in Los Angeles and New York, influencing and being influenced by the existing culture. The impact of the émigré artists, creators and intellectuals was especially felt in Los Angeles, at that time a remote location on the West Coast, with implications in the cohabitation between Hollywood and this community. During that period, especially while World War II was destroying Europe, these two American cities became the centres of musical innovation, replacing Vienna, Berlin and Paris, in what may have been the first of many subsequent dislocations of these innovation centres.[74] From that first

with an important music-aesthetic essay *Der geschockte Komponist*, in which he defended the autonomy of the different composing schools and models. Most critics, however, (as well as many fellow composers and intellectuals), thought subjectivity and emotion had no longer a place in music and wrote nasty reviews, labeling this new music *Fäkal-Musik* and *faschistische Musik* (Elster, 2010). Nowadays Rihm is an established and internationally respected composer and professor, whose oeuvre defies all categorization.

[73] In the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries, the circumstances and developments were different, with the communist party dictating official taste. The music had to be understood by the masses, leading to either self-censorship, or persecution or exile. There were two paradigmatic moments, the first and the sixth congress of the Soviet Composer's Union in 1948 and 1979. In the first congress Shostakovich, Prokofiev and Myakovski were denounced, whereas in the second the president of the union, Tikhon Khrennikov denounced a group of seven composers who became known as the Khrennikov Seven. They were accused of unapproved participation in music festivals in the West, writing pointless or irresponsible music. Sofia Gubaidulina is the internationally best known composer targeted by that denunciation. In her case her spiritual approach to music was heavily criticized.

[74] The consequences and mutual influences of this migratory wave had a lasting impact on the musical life of New York and especially of Los Angeles and on Hollywood's film industry. The music in Hollywood was being composed by European émigrés. The most important émigré composing for Hollywood was Franz Waxman, who composed over 150 film scores. Schoenberg never actually composed for the Hollywood film industry, but the famous MGM producer Irving Thalberg invited Schoenberg for a meeting in 1935 asking him to write the music for *The Good Earth*, based on Pearl S Buck's novel. This meeting is recalled in the memoirs of Salka Viertel (*The Kindness of Strangers*), an actress and screen-writer, and also a European émigré, who arranged and witnessed the meeting.

migratory wave onwards, the centres of creation started multiplying, resulting in a constantly growing number of composers and mutual influences with each new generation. Over the last three decades of the 20th century, and the first of the 21st century, erudite contemporary music creation fragmented even further, extending to South America, Asia, Oceania and Africa, putting an end to Eurocentrism in European-style classical music composition. This fragmentation grew exponentially with globalisation, the increasing speed of communication, and the subsequent growth in the exchange of cultures. Composers such as Takemitsu (1930-1996) and Tanaka (1961-) from Japan, Psathas (1966-) from New Zealand, Pärt (1935-) from Estonia or Saariaho (1952-) from Finland, and many others, have their works performed by the world's best and most regarded musicians in major concert halls, theatres or festivals all over the world. Chinese composer Tan Dun (author of the film score of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and the music for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games) premiered his opera THE FIRST EMPEROR at the Metropolitan Opera in New York with Placido Domingo in the title role. These examples are random but go to illustrate the variety of Western style contemporary music being composed and performed. The website *The Living Composers Project* contains, as of 27 June 2015, data about 4,386 composers, from Michel van der Aa (Netherlands) to Samuel Zyman (Mexico), representing 98 countries and altogether more than 300,000 works. (www.composers21.com, last accessed on July 1 2015).

World premieres are taking place in music festivals, in music halls, and in opera houses all over the world. Contemporary music is no longer exclusively presented in the specialized festivals that had become 'ghettos' for contemporary music during the second half of the 20th century.[75] This change in programming has increased and diversified audiences for New Music, because it regularly exposes all classical music audiences to it. This change in programming, together with a bigger variety of contemporary erudite composition styles, has brought about a new enthusiasm for contemporary idioms (Needham, 30 January 2012, last accessed on April 27, 2014).

[75] Until the last decade of the 20th century any music outside the rough time-frame of the 18th and 19th centuries was often programmed in special and separate weeks or seasons. This 'bulk programming' has been gradually abandoned by most concert halls on the grounds that these concerts were narrowing down and not building audiences. This repertoire now tends to be part of the main seasons.

2.2 Who cares if you listen?

By the end of September 1949, OMGUS had been dissolved, ending the American military government of part of Germany.[76] The Russian émigré Nicolas Nabokov, a composer himself, had been on the staff of the Psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force that had been responsible for the "liberation of the German minds" (called "reorientation") teaching Germans to embrace freedom (Ross, 2012: 376). Nabokov went on to play an important role in American Cultural Relations during the Cold War, and in 1951 became secretary general of the anti-communist advocacy group Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), an important player in the cultural branch of the Cold War. Nabokov had been one of the most noticed voices of the disruptions and demonstrations surrounding the notorious Waldorf Conference. This conference called *Cultural and Scientific Conference for World Peace* had been held in New York at the Waldorf Hotel, in March 1949, while the Berlin airlift was in its last months.[77] Nabokov had publicly provoked Shostakovich, who, a year before had been subject to a second denunciation for bourgeois formalism under the Zhdanovian regime. This denunciation had had far worse consequences than the *Pravda* editorial of 1936, as it cost him his positions and the related income at the Moscow and Leningrad Conservatories. Nabokov publicly exposed Shostakovich's predicament, asking the composer questions he could not possibly answer freely in public.[78]

In fact, the Soviet regime favoured a similar type of music as fascist and Nazi regimes, but at the same time accused Western culture to be shallow and banal, thus taking an ideological high ground and with it courting European artists and intellectuals. In order to counter that idea the CCF, by then funded by the CIA, responded by backing and financing European cultural production and its dissemination, mainly music due to Nabokov's background,

[76] The American sector was comprised by Bavaria, the birthplace of the National-Socialist Party, Hesse and part of today's Baden Württemberg, as well as some ports in Northern Germany and the American sector of Berlin. Both 'capitals' of serial music, Darmstadt and Donaueschingen were located in the American sector. The American, British and French Zones of Occupation had merged in May 1949 to become the Federal Republic of Germany.

[77] Contrary to the CIA version and the mainstream media, the Waldorf Conference was not organized by a Communist Front organization but by an American grassroots peace movement. However, these movements in the US had become associated with communism, despite some explicitly excluding Communists. By 1951 the peace movement had been completely linked to communism by the House Un-American Activities Committee, calling it the 'Peace' Offensive (Klefstad, 2012).

[78] The question was whether he approved of the condemnation of composers such as Stravinsky, Schoenberg and Hindemith by Zhdanov, who was in charge of the SU cultural policy. Shostakovich could but answer that he did.

including radical idioms and avant-garde composers (Shreffer, 2005). This music was certainly not banal and it represented artistic and individual freedom, as well as private enterprise, the opposite of the formatted and collectivistic take of the communist regimes.[79]

A clear ideological divide was emerging among composers during the first decades of the Cold War. It is best defined through Adorno's reaction to Eisler's manifesto and their respective statements on artistic freedom. Whereas Eisler, who had been forced to leave the USA in 1948 and was living in East Berlin, declares in *Manifest I* that the task of musicians is to try to point towards a higher form of society without exploitation (Eisler *apud* Keller, 2009), Adorno rejects any societal impositions. In his 1953 article *Die gegängelte Musik*, he declares that after the collapse of individualistic society it is art's task to free man of the ever increasing institutional grasp (Adorno, 1991: 59). If in Marxist countries music had to have a meaning for society, in the West the artwork was autonomous; in the former case freedom is collective and from capitalist exploitation, and in the latter it is individualistic and does not require purpose. But, "[p]aradoxally, much of the music that was produced under the aegis of the new [Western] freedom was anything but free in its construction" (Shreffer, 2005: 222). For Boulez, this contradiction was inherent to a higher level freedom from convention, which demanded control of the musical material (*ibidem*).

The fact that the resulting works were understood and appreciated by only a few (most often the composers' and musicians' entourage) was acceptable, even desired by some composers, conferring distinction to this musical practice that created a new "aristocracy" with its own set of social markers and behavioural codes, as impenetrable as the older and more obvious "aristocracies" by anyone who does not belong (Bourdieu, 2010). Milton Babbitt, an American composer dedicated to total serialism, wrote an article in 1958 in High Fidelity that is highly contentious to this day, mainly because of its provocative title *Who Cares if you Listen?*. In it Babbitt argues that "serious" and "advanced" music of that time is too complex for the general audience to understand and appreciate. Just as advanced physics, mathematics or philosophy had been for some time considered out of reach even for well educated people, advanced music also required special preparation to be listened to. Babbitt

[79] In spite of being anti-Communist, the CCF tried to attack Communism from a position that was not situated on the Right and distanced itself from right-wing politics, namely McCarthyism.

claimed the original title had been *The Composer as Specialist* and that he had not authorized the title under which the magazine ran the article. He does, however, attack American populist culture and does defend a radical withdrawal of the composer from the public, although he precedes the most contentious and most quoted paragraph with a sentence that normally is not quoted. This sentence prepares the reader for what comes next, gives context and is almost apologetic. Nevertheless Babbitt's article makes it clear that only a distinguished few hold the keys for the deciphering of total serialism. The whole paragraph reads:

> I say all this not to present a picture of virtuous music in a sinful world, but to point up the problems of a special music in an alien inapposite world. And so, I dare suggest that the composer would do himself and his music an immediate and eventual service by total, resolute and voluntary withdrawal from this public world to one of private performance and electronic media, with its very real possibility of complete elimination of the public and social aspects of musical composition. By so doing, the separation between the domains would be defined beyond any possibility of confusion of categories, and the composer would be free to pursue a private life of professional achievement, as opposed to a public life of unprofessional compromise and exhibitionism. (Babbitt, February 1958)

"To this day, it [the article] is seized as evidence that he and his ilk are contemptuous of audiences" (Tommasini, October 6, 1996). But Babbitt, and many other composers of that time, thought of serialism and atonality as an irrevocable fact, as a "fall from musical innocence", caused by the multiplication of the musical material, its atomization and total serialization, with "each such 'atomic' event […] located in a five dimensional musical space determined by pitch-class, register, dynamic, duration and timbre" (Babbitt, February 1958). Although American music of the 20th century includes many composers and works that did not embrace atonality or the more radical experimentalism, and despite the absence of an official ban on tonal music from American academe,[80] evidence suggests that during the 1950s and 1960s, serialism was favoured during that period, and that it was the idiom that led to awards, tenure appointments and intellectual acceptance (Tommasini, October 6, 1996). Nevertheless, the USA were also the first country to include popular music, namely jazz, in its universities long before any European country, and the home to composers such as Gershwin, Barber, Copland, Bernstein or Ives.

[80] Milton Babbitt was Stephen Sondheim's composition teacher, on whom he did not impose the twelve-tone idiom, although that was what Sondheim was looking for.

During the last decades of the 20th century, with a less optimistic economic climate and growing shortages of funds for culture and the arts worldwide, the role of an involved and interested audience grew more and more important. The paradigm of *Who cares if you listen* changed to *I care if you listen!,* the name of an actual blog and online magazine dedicated to contemporary music, which makes an effort to create bridges between contemporary non-popular music and a broader public.

In January 2013 the British music promotion organisation *Sound and Music* asked their followers on Twitter how they would increase interest in contemporary music, with its Chief Executive holding an online chat the following day to discuss the results (journalofmusic.com, 22 January 2013). During that same year the Southbank Centre organized a year-long festival of 20th century music, called *The Rest is Noise* and inspired by Alex Ross's book with the same title. According to its artistic director Jude Kelly the festival sets the music into context with the help of "historians, scientists, philosophers, political theorists and musical experts" who mediate the "extraordinary, rich and eclectic repertoire" of the last century, trying to convey it to a broader and new audience (www.therestisnoise.southbankcentre.co.uk).

Composers, although still wary of having to concede to mass audiences or to commercial values, have realized that their music needs audiences to be performed for, and have been more willing to take them into account, without feeling they were abandoning erudition or selling out by doing so. The popularity of new film and new dance, as well as that of abstract contemporary art and contemporary literature, necessarily raises the question why contemporary music creation did not achieve the same degree of public success. Still, film, dance, installation and performance art, as well as world music, have introduced audiences to less familiar and more challenging sounds. Notwithstanding, and due to the abstract nature of music and the predominance of the visual over the aural, erudite contemporary music still does not draw audiences as large as new dance or contemporary art.

But what is really at stake when composers choose or refuse to "compose for an audience"? Is there a clear division between *l'art pour l'art* or the uselessness of art – in this case of music – and a utilitarian, commercial or opportunistic approach? In Continental Europe

composers were historically employed by either a church or a court for which they composed. Differences of opinion between composers and their employers were frequent and very often the trigger for the composer to look for a new employer. Mozart still wore livré but spent the last ten years of his life as a freelance composer, living off commissions and lessons. Beethoven was the first to spend his entire professional life as a freelancer. This condition became the Romantic paradigm of the artist.

The *l'art pour l'art* philosophy of the 19th century, as coined by Théophile Gautier and later cultivated by the French Parnassians, proclaimed the total freedom of art from any moral or utilitarian constraints, aiming to produce autotelic works of art. In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin describes the "doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*" in its refusal to accord any social function to art as a "negative theology" (Benjamin, 1968: 224). The possibility of mechanical reproduction would liberate the work of art from its "parasitical dependence on ritual" which would ultimately end and be consummated in the aesthetic pleasure of war (*ibidem*) Benjamin sees a positive function in mechanical reproduction because of the possibility it gives to the masses to appropriate and give different meanings to the work of art. Socialist realism did not approve of the *l'art pour l'art* principle of moral neutrality, advocating that a work of art should serve a moral and didactic purpose. But the boundaries of the different positions are not always completely clear, and other Marxist theorists had different opinions. In his letter to Benjamin of March 18, 1936, Theodor Adorno reflects on the text and delivers his critique. While endorsing several aspects of the essay, especially the analysis on technology and dialectics, he riposted to other aspects of the study.

> My ardent interest and my complete approval attach to that aspect of your study that appears to me to carry out your original intention – the dialectical construction of the relationship between myth and history – within the intellectual field of the materialistic dialectic: namely, the dialectical self-dissolution of myth, which is here viewed as the disenchantment of art. (Adorno, 2007: 120)

With regard to Benjamin's attack on the aesthetic aura, and the attribution of a "counter-revolutionary function" with the "transfer [of the] concept of magical aura to the 'autonomous work of art'", Adorno finds the concept "disquieting" (*ibidem*: 121). For him, the "centre of the work of art does not itself belong on the side of myth [...] but is inherently

dialectical; within itself it juxtaposes the magical and the mark of freedom" (*ibidem*). He then goes on to trace the parallel to his experience in (twelve-tone) music, pointing out that Benjamin's study is not dialectical as far as the autonomous work of art is concerned, disregarding an elementary experience he was observing in his musical experience.

> [...] that precisely the uttermost consistency in the pursuit of the technical laws of autonomous art changes this art and instead of rendering it into a taboo or fetish, brings it close to a state of freedom, of something that can be consciously produced and made. (ibidem: 122)

For Adorno, "*l'art pour l'art* is just as much in need of a defence, and the united front which exists against it and which to my knowledge extends from Brecht to the Youth Movement, would be encouragement enough to undertake a rescue." (*ibidem*) The author is referring to the use of popular themes mixed with twelve-tone experimentation as practiced and defended namely by Berthold Brecht. Adorno agrees that "the aural element of the work of art is declining […][,] above all because of the fulfilment of its own 'autonomous' formal laws", but accuses Benjamin of an "anarchistic romanticism of blind confidence in the spontaneous power of the proletariat […][,] itself a product of bourgeois society" (*ibidem*: 123).

2.3 *Sprengt die Opernhäuser in die Luft!*

Twenty years after the end of WWII opera houses were very seldom staging contemporary or rare operas, merely performing the mainstream repertoire[81] in very conservative productions that followed the stage directions of the libretti. This lack of contemporaneity and novelty in opera production and creation was commented by Pierre Boulez in a 1967 interview to the German weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*, in which he coined one his most famous iconoclastic remarks:

> The new German opera houses certainly look very modern – from the outside; but inside they have remained extremely old-fashioned. It's nearly impossible to produce a work of contemporary opera in a theatre, in which, predominantly, repertoire pieces are performed. It is really unthinkable. The most expensive solution would be to blow the opera houses up. But

[81] The mainstream repertoire then, and now, consists of some 50/60 operas composed roughly during the 150 years between 1750-1900

> don't you think that would also be the most elegant solution? (Boulez in Der Spiegel, 40/1967, September 25 – translation in Abbate & Parker, 2012e: 526)[82]

One of the problems of opera that Boulez addresses in the interview is one of verisimilitude. With repertoire opera being staged by mainstream directors of that time in museological productions, there was no connection to the lives and experiences of contemporary audiences. When asked if he thought these operas were charming lies, Boulez answer is unequivocal.

> The word charming is already too much. If you have ever seen Rigoletto, you notice yourself what is going on – especially if Zeffirelli is directing. A theatre or film audience would die laughing over such a performance. (Boulez in Der Spiegel, 40/1967, September 25 – my translation)

Boulez decries the absence of "adventurous productions" (*abenteuerliche Regieleistung*) and the increasing anachronism of opera productions. Adorno also points this out in an article, published two years later in the same magazine, *Opera and the Long-Playing Record* "[...] but every staging of FIGARO with powdered ladies and gentlemen, with the page and the white rococo salon, resembles a praline box, not to mention DER ROSENKAVALIER and the silver rose" (Adorno 1990: 64). Adorno did not approve of concert performances either, and even less of television broadcasts of gala opera evenings: "[...] a million praline boxes are actually worse than one single one that still retains something of the childlike joy of blissful moments" (*ibidem*). Nor was he fond of radio operas, a "pale replica of live performances" (*ibidem*). It is noteworthy that he acknowledged the childlike immediacy of opera, to which he does not seem to object. Adorno also had hopes for the long-playing record's potential to redeem opera from the anachronism of their stage productions in the 20th century, as it encouraged concentration on the music, and represented an opportunity "to recreate without disturbance the temporal dimension essential to opera" (*ibidem*: 65) [83] He had analysed and

[82] The original interview was printed in German for *Der Spiegel* "Sprengt die Opernhäuser in die Luft!" and can be found at http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46353389.html "Die neuen deutschen Opernhäuser sehen zwar sehr modern aus -- von außen; innen sind sie äußerst altmodisch geblieben. In einem Theater, in dem vorwiegend Repertoire gespielt wird, da kann man doch nur mit größten Schwierigkeiten moderne Opern bringen -- das ist unglaubwürdig. Die teuerste Lösung wäre, die Opernhäuser in die Luft zu sprengen. Aber glauben Sie nicht auch, daß dies die eleganteste wäre?"

[83] Adorno is referring to the box sets of complete operas, only the LP made possible with 35-30 minutes playing on each side, in contrast to the previous short-playing 78 rpm shellac records that only captured 4-5 minutes.

criticized the medium as a whole before, namely in *Bourgeois Opera*, in 1955/1959,[84] in which he decries the genre's affinities with film, "its body of common knowledge to the masses" (Adorno, 1994: 31, 32) and the "similarity to the modern culture industry" (*ibidem*) against whose unethical implications he and Horkheimer had warned against a decade earlier in their essay *Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* (in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). He sees the conventional, freakish and silly libretti as placeholders for the yet unborn cinema, as mere stimuli for music, just as the scripts are stimuli for moving images (*ibidem*: 34). Adorno cannot imagine opera without the aura of disguise and miming (*ibidem*: 25, 26): "[c]ostume is essential to opera: in contrast to a play, an opera without costume would be a paradox" (*ibidem*), neither does he fathom a way out of opera performance's dilemma. Opera is "governed by the element of appearance (*Schein*), in the sense of Benjamin's aesthetics, which has positioned it in contrast to the elements of play (*Spiel*)." The genre's crisis is due to the fact that it "cannot dispense with its appearance (*Schein*) without surrendering itself" (*ibidem*: 27) running "head on into the aesthetic barrier of reification" and losing its statute as an art form, once it reifies. Adorno gives the example of LOHENGRIN's swan[85] as a symbol of the dilemmatic situation opera found itself in. Read from today's perspective, contrary to Adorno's prediction, opera productions radically changed their visuals as early as a decade later, often using stylized costumes and sets, or none at all.

Less than a decade after these interviews, *Regieoper* addressed the anachronistic situation opera productions found themselves in, and which Adorno and Boulez thought would condemn the whole genre to only exist in the kind of "opera museum", the opera houses would turn into for the purpose saving the genre's masterworks from complete oblivion. As a conductor, Boulez was part of this new approach, conducting two of the most emblematic opera productions by Patrice Chéreau, the 1976 production of DER RING DER NIBELUNGEN and the 1979 first ever complete version of Alban Berg's LULU. Over the last decades of the

[84] The essay *Bourgeois Opera* was originally a lecture – *Theater-Oper-Bürgertum* – given at the *Darmstädter Gespräche* in 1955 and transcribed that same year. In 1959, a slightly revised version with the title *Bürgerliche Oper* was published in *Klangfiguren*.

[85] Every time the swan appears to take Lohengrin at the end of the opera, the scene looks ridiculous. But Adorno thought it would be impossible to stylize the swan by replacing it, for example, with a beam of light because the "presupposition of the whole would be attacked to such an extent that as to be rendered pointless" (Adorno, 1990, 27).

20th-century directors applied to the opera the principles of the German *Regietheater*. This practice allows opera directors to break free from the original stage indications of composers or playwrights, trying to convey the meaning in a more contemporary way. It has often been used to visually update operas, setting them in a different time and place than indicated in the score or libretto, or by trying to break free of the performance tradition. Patrice Chéreau's seminal reading of Wagner's RING DER NIBELUNGEN for Bayreuth's 1976 centennial performance of the complete Tetralogy had a revolutionary musical reading[86] and was set in the time the opera was created, rather than in faraway Germanic mythology. The production draws a parallel with the Industrial Revolution and 19th-century Capitalism, and was labelled the Marxist or Socialist Ring. Its four opening nights were a scandal with audiences booing and protesting, but four years later, before being replaced by a new production, it would receive one-hour-long standing ovations.

Another famous and long-lived example is Jonathan Miller's famous reading of RIGOLETTO, premiered at the English National Opera (ENO) in 1982, which set Verdi's opera in Little Italy, New York, during the 1950s instead of the fictitious court of Mantua[87]. It represents an important British example of present day, or "other day" stagings, which in that country very often include humour. *Regieoper* also allowed letting go of Lohengrin's highly implausible means of transportation, the famous swan that transforms into Elsa's brother, interpreting it as a symbol, and replacing it by theatrically more effective means contemporary audiences understand or at least do not laugh at. As Herbert Lindenberger points out in *Situating Opera: Period, Genre, Reception*: "the swan was banned from any self-respecting LOHENGRIN" (Lindenberger, 2010: 68). But for some opera goers *Regieoper* still is a *bête noire* that desecrates the original text. Its most fierce opponents tend to identify it with its most extreme examples, such as for example Calixto Bieito's recent ENTFÜHRUNG

[86] Boulez revolutionized the musical approach to Wagnerian performance with his lighter and more transparent interpretation of the score, which antagonized orchestra musicians who preferred the traditional readings of the score.

[87] Miller's highly successful *mafioso* take on RIGOLETTO drew from the popularity of the 50s revival, the success of gangster movies, as Coppola's *Godfather*, setting the opera in dark and dangerous streets in Little Italy, and a desolate bar that echoes Edward Hopper's paintings. It staged the famous aria *La Donna é mobile* as a jukebox hit, and when ENO replaced the production with a new one in 2014, many newspapers paid their respects to the famous jukebox, when announcing the new production, premiered in February 2014. "So it's farewell to the fedoras and adieu to the jukebox" (Picard, 2014). "After three decades and a dozen revivals, the Duke's jukebox has been junked" (Maddocks, 2014). "Jonathan Miller's perennially popular *mafioso* RIGOLETTO has finally gone to the great jukebox in the sky…" (Millington, 2014).

AUS DEM SERAIL for the Komische Oper Berlin, that sets the *Singspiel* in a present time brothel with scenes of nudity, all kinds of sexual practices and cutting that shocked and angered important parts of the Berlin public and press. In Europe *Regieoper* has set foot in its many different approaches and degrees of liberty when interpreting the scores and libretti. In the US, even opera houses as the Metropolitan in New York are taking increasing liberties in their new productions, since Peter Gelber has taken over, and in spite of the fact that the fiercest voices and most sweeping statements against *Regieoper* come from that country.

As far as newly composed operas in the 20th century are concerned, the first half witnessed the swansong of the late romantic tradition with most of Puccini's output[88], Debussy's PELLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE (1902) and Richard Strauss's post-SALOME and ELEKTRA operas.[89] At the same time the first atonal operas were heard, like Schoenberg's ERWARTUNG, composed in 1909 but only performed in 1924 at the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Prague, just one year before his student Alban Berg premiered WOZZECK in Berlin. LULU, Berg's second and last opera, was left unfinished at the composer's death in 1935 and would only be premiered in its full three-act version completed by Friedrich Cerha in 1979 in Paris, in the famous production conducted by Pierre Boulez and directed by Patrice Chéreau.[90]

Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker call the period between 1910 and the beginning of WWII opera's "wildest efflorescence" (Abbate & Parker, 2012c: 457). Nevertheless, several "opera crisis" were announced during that period, due to the distance modernists wanted to keep from the genre, to the point of some declaring themselves non-operatic.[91] Opera was thought to be too emotionally obvious and romantically excessive, in a reference to the v*eristic* operas. The emotionally more subdued and cool modernists did not see a way out for the genre, nor did they want to be associated with opera's status quo at that time. Several

[88] TOSCA and MADAMA BUTTERFLY premiered at La Scala in 1900 and 1904, LA FANCIULLA DEL WEST and IL TRITTICO in 1910 and 1918 at the Metropolitan in New York, and his last opera, TURANDOT, left unfinished at his death was finished by Franco Alfani and premiered posthumously in 1926 at La Scala.
[89] SALOME and ELEKTRA (1905 and 1906) are Strauss's most modernist operas, whereas his subsequent nine operas belong to the late-romantic tradition. ARIADNE AUF NAXOS, 1912, DIE FRAU OHNE SCHATTEN, 1919, INTERMEZZO, 1924, DIE AEGYPTISCHE HELENA, 1928, ARABELLA, 1933, DIE SCHWEIGSAME FRAU, 1935, FRIEDENSTAG, 1938, DAPHNE, 1938, CAPRICCIO, 1942, DIE LIEBE DER DANAE, 1944 (the opera was in rehearsal in Munich, but a Nazi edict closed the theatres and it was officially premiered only in 1952).
[90] An incomplete version was created in Zürich in 1937.
[91] One example is the circle around Diaghilev in Paris to which Igor Stravinsky belonged

attempts were made to bring the operatic genre into the 20th century. In Germany, during the Weimar Republic (1919-1933), a very popular subgenre developed, the *Zeitoper*, which consisted of operas written by young composers, about urban, modern everyday life, embracing both technology and the popular. Ernst Krenek's JOHNNY SPIELT AUF (1927) is its most famous example, with its contemporary settings, such as hotels and railway stations, its dance music, and the extremely modern use of film. It was the most performed opera in Germany during the Weimar Republic and was produced over forty times worldwide (Abbate & Parker, 2012b: 494)[92].

Surprisingly, after WWII, new opera restarted just one month after V-Day in England, a country where the creation of opera had never really set foot before. During the last years of WWII European opera theatres had had to close.[93] It must, however, be remembered that the Blitz took place in 1940/41, and that from that time onwards, England was at war but no longer under attack. While it is remarkable that the Sadler's Wells theatre was preparing to reopen while still at war, it is surprising, but also revealing that an all English opera was chosen for the occasion. London witnessed the premiere of Britten's PETER GRIMES at the Sadler's Wells on June 7, 1945. With good reviews, and a remarkable box office revenue that matched and even surpassed that of LA BOHÈME and MADAMA BUTTERFLY, PETER GRIMES contributed to the shaping of an English National Opera (Banks, 2000: xviii). Altogether it remains one of the most successful operas of the 20th century,[94] together with Britten's later operas, which he composed until 1973, that are also regularly performed in the UK and worldwide. According to operabase.com, during the 2013/14 season, Britten was the second most performed UK opera composer worldwide, after Handel, ranking 13th among world composers.

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[92] The opera was forbidden during the Nazi period and the image of the first edition of the score was imitated for the catalogue of *Entartete Musik*.

[93] One of the few opera theatres that were functioning was the one in Lisbon, which profited, along with opera houses overseas, from the fact that opera singers and conductors did not have work in the other European countries. This was an extraordinary period for the S. Carlos theatre that left an indelible mark for a long time, because it had allowed the Lisbon opera to temporarily be at the centre of operatic performance. Audiences had the opportunity to witness some of the world's best opera singers and conductors, who under different circumstance would not have performed at this peripheral theatre. This situation was extended until well after the war, because of the exclusion of some musicians in Germany and Italy, who had been associated to these countries' national-socialist or fascist regimes.

[94] According to operabase.com Peter Grimes ranked 86th worldwide among the most performed operas of the period between 2009/10 and 2013/2014, with 69 runs and 253 performances, after THE TURN OF THE SCREW and a MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, that ranked 72nd and 83rd. NB 2013 was the centenary of Britten's birth (http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?lang=en&is=opera&by=Britten last accessed on August 04, 2015).

Other successful operas after 1945 were Gian-Carlo Menotti's operas[95], Stravinsky's THE RAKE'S PROGRESS, 1951, Samuel Barber's VANESSA, 1958, and ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, 1966, and Leonard Bernstein's operas A QUIET PLACE, 1952.[96] In France Francis Poulenc successfully premiered three operas: LES MAMELLES DE TIRESIAS, 1947, LE DIALOGUE DES CARMELITES, 1957 and LA VOIX HUMAINE, 1959.[97] The English composer Michael Tippett had 4 operas commissioned, or co-commissioned by the Royal Opera House between 1955 and 1977, and his last opera was premiered at the Houston Grand Opera. Alberto Ginastera, Luciano Berio, Luigi Dallapicolla and György Ligeti composed more experimental and innovative operas, which can be described as hard modernist operas, some of them incorporating serialism, although these composers did not exclusively use serialism. Though they mastered the new idioms, they felt free to also introduce simplicity and subjectivity into their works, refusing the frames of post-war music. So did Hans Werner Henze, the most prolific opera composer of this group and simultaneously the most criticized by the purists of serialism.[98] His operas were successful in opening the doors of opera houses who increasingly commissioned him – Henze premiered 14 operas during his lifetime –, but this stylistic freedom also closed doors on him and to a certain extent on the other more individualistic composers as well. Henze's peers fiercely and unjustly criticized him and his music. Boulez ridiculed Henze calling him a "lacquered hairdresser who subscribes to a superficial kind of modernism" (Boulez in *Der Spiegel*, 40/1967, September 25 – my translation), while Luigi Nono is said to have thrown a plate on the floor at a dinner party, in a tantrum at the mere mention of Henze's name and of one of his operas.

As far as present times are concerned, and according to operabase.com, during the five seasons between 2009/10 to 2013/14, out of 2,581 different operas put on stage there were over 300 world premieres, which makes for more than one premiered opera per week over

[95] THE MEDIUM, 1946, THE CONSUL, 1950 and AMAHL AND THE NIGHT VISITORS, 1951

[96] Bernstein's most famous music dramas CANDIDE and WEST SIDE STORY are classified as an operetta and a musical respectively.

[97] For the purpose of this dissertation, I am concentrating on the Anglo-American viewpoint. Therefore the account of 20th century opera only mentions a selection of internationally acclaimed operas and opera composers, and is necessarily incomplete and unbalanced insofar as that it does not include a systematic account of East-European or South-European operas.

[98] Some of his best known operas are: BOULEVARD SOLITUDE (1951), KÖNIG HIRSCH (1956), ELEGY FOR YOUNG LOVERS (1953/56 rev. 1987), DIE BASSARIDEN (1964/65 rev. 1992), DER PRINZ VON HOMBURG (1960), WE COME TO THE RIVER (1976), THE ENGLISH CAT (1983), DAS VERRATENE MEER (1990).

this five year period and for almost 12% of the repertoire. Of the 1,257 different composers whose operas were performed over that period, 630 were living composers (http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?lang=en&splash=t last accessed on July 28, 2015).[99] During those five seasons, the most performed living composer was Philip Glass, ranking 40th with a total of 335 performances distributed over 79 different runs of 17 operas (http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?lang=en&is=opera&by=Glass last accessed on July 28, 2015). According to the statistics on the performance of new and rare operas of the same database, after Philip Glass, the other most performed composers were Peter Maxwell-Davies, Jake Heggie, Jonathan Dove and John Adams, followed by Erik Lund[100], Wolfgang Rihm, Salvatore Sciarrino, Peter Eötvös and Detlev Glanert. The subject matters of the operas of living composers range from Einstein to Walt Disney and politics, from terrorism to students' activism and death row, from a refugee trapped at an airport to a man made of smoke. Nico Muhly composed one opera about plural marriage in Mormon sects and another one about internet crime, while Jake Heggie wrote one about Moby Dick.[101] These data and information suggest that opera's crisis is being fought against with new subject matters and idioms that are proving quite successful, and that these subject matters can indeed be sung.

But could an opera based on the real life story of American celebrity Anna Nicole Smith succeed in this new amalgam of operatic subject matters? Famous for her breast implants, her marriage to an 89-year-old millionaire, her widowhood, her weight losses and gains, misbehaviour, stints in rehab, and, finally her lawsuits against the Marshall estate, Anna Nicole was a simultaneously laughable and tragic figure. "Her life– a train wreck meets a

[99] These figures, however, refer to the number of runs, and not performances. When measured in total number of performances, the non-living composers still represent a large majority because the mainstream repertoire has many more repeat performances. The most performed opera during the period under analysis was Verdi's LA TRAVIATA, with 749 different runs and 3561 performances, whereas the most performed opera by Philip Glass THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER from 1987 had 18 runs and 94 performances (http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?lang=en&is=opera&by=Verdi last accessed on August 02, 2015 and http://operabase.com/visual.cgi?lang=en&is=opera&by=Glass last accessed on August 02, 2015)

[100] Erik Lund, a German composer, is the first non-Anglo-American composer on the list and writes children's operas.

[101] The operas are: EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH, Philip Glass (1976, Avignon Festival); THE PERFECT AMERICAN, Philip Glass (2013, Teatro Real, Madrid); THE DEATH OF KLINGHOFFER, John Adams (1991, Théâtre de la Monnaie, Brussels); KOMMILITONEN!, Peter Maxwell-Davies (1991, Roya Academy of Music); DEAD MAN WALKING, Jake Heggie (2000, War Memorial Opera/San Francisco Opera); FLIGHT, Jonathan Dove (1998, Glyndebourne Opera); PERELÀ, UOMO DI FUMO, Pascal Dusapin (2003, Opéra de la Bastille, Paris); DARK SISTERS, Nico Muhly (2012, Kimmel Center for Performing Arts, Philadelphia Opera); TWO BOYS, Nico Muhly (2011, English National Opera, London); MOBY DICK, Jake Heggie (2010, Dallas Opera).

circus – […] was a reality show before they even existed and it played out in tabloid headlines" (http://jezebel.com/20-celebrities-we-cant-believe-are-still-famous-507694105 accessed on August 2, 2015). Anna Nicole would eventually have her reality show, which "made waves for being remarkably exploitative and trashy, even for a medium typically defined as such" (*ibidem*). How would her life, with dancing pole, boobs, wild parties and accordingly explicit language play out on the Royal Opera's stage? How would her operatic voice sound?

3. OPERA NOW – NO *CLEMENZA* FOR ANNA NICOLE

3.1 When God is Listening

Throughout the musically radical and revolutionary 20th century, more conservative and tonal idioms have always been used and listened to alongside hard modernist ones. Apart from the already mentioned composers that were once part of but later distanced themselves from the Darmstadt[102] orthodoxy. There have been two genres within erudite music that have always had to bear in mind its audience, and to therefore combine the new idioms with public taste and approval. One of them is sacred, religious or spiritual music, which never ceased to be composed. Much of this music, similar to Bach's cantatas in the 18th century, was written for or performed at regular church service or mass. In spite of being secular, the 20th century may well have produced a greater amount of religious, spiritual and mystic works than the preceding 19th century. All Christian denominations in the whole world have had to balance over time various factors that weigh in when music is at the same time utilitarian and divine. Music has always been an important element in worship, with Church authorities sometimes encouraging, other times discouraging or prohibiting certain musical idioms or means of expression (suffice to think of the Council of Trent and the way Reformation and Counter-Reformation used and regulated sacred music).[103] But more importantly for the parallel I wish to establish, there has always been one constant underlying idea in sacred music no matter how exalted, contemplative or seductive its nature at any given time, and regardless of the *dicta* of the various denominations, and that is what I would call the additional listener, a third party whom the music has to please. In sacred music God is listening and He has to be pleased, whether the music reflects His presence, speaks of His deeds or invokes His kindness and forgiveness in prayer or lament.

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[102] From this section onward, Darmstadt stands for avant-garde music. It should however be noted that the summer courses, though undoubtedly one of the most important events and places of contemporary music creation (what nowadays would be called a creative hub), it was not the only one. The Donaueschingen Chamber Music Performances for the advancement of contemporary music were created in 1922. During WWII the festival was used by the National-Socialist party but was re-established in 1946 as New Music Donaueschingen and became the Donaueschingen Festival of Contemporary Music in 1950 when it started its collaboration with the orchestra of the SWR (South West German Radio). Another important organization was and still is the ISCM (International Society for Contemporary Music) created in 1923. It too suspended its activities between 1940 and 1945 but was able to maintain relevant activities up to 1940 because the festival takes place in a different city every year.

[103] Practical considerations also play a role and one of them is the need of church choirs, very seldom professional choirs, who have to perform the works that are composed, especially music for religious service or Mass.

Similar to churches, opera houses too need to keep their flocks. The sheer dimension and means involved in opera demand public success. But furthermore opera shares with sacred music a third listener. In its most dramatic and moving moments opera arias often invoke God, the Heavens, some deity or someone invested with the power to dispense pardon and work miracles. From the very moment Orfeo laments his fate and pleads with Charonte and Apollo, opera's music has to please these third listening parties to a point where they are willing to disregard the laws that govern life and death, the underworld or their subjects. Just as Orfeo sang his way into the underworld in order to rescue Euridice, laments, invocations and prayers have been used in opera, with its heroes and heroines imploring for a change in their fate. For this purpose the hearts of those who have the power to change the opera heroes' life have to be moved to feel sympathy, even empathy with those who implore. They have to be merciful and be able to see beyond the fault or crime committed. The gulf between the powerful other and its subject is often enormous. In order to attain that change of fate, this gulf has to be bridged by more than words, with emotional song allowing the powerful Other to look into the heart of his distraught subject. During the first 200 years, opera's heroes and heroines generally pulled off this feat and were granted a happy end. These were the *tragedie da lieto fine*, the basis for operatic plots up to Mozart's operas and Beethoven's FIDELIO. Neither composer killed their operatic heroes, with the exception of Mozart's D. Giovanni. From a given moment on, mercy however starts to be transformed into forgiveness among a community of equals, with mercy no longer being dispensed from above. "Forgiveness is human mercy that no longer requires that the distance be maintained. [It] is secularized mercy, the mercy shown from one human to another" (Dolar, 2002: 39). (see also the chapter "Why sing if you can speak", p. 102 "All together now – the ensemble and the forgiveness of a community", p. 110), only to be discarded once opera loses its happy ending.

3.2 Eros and Thanatos – Violetta, Carmen and Anna Nicole

Love and death have been part of opera ever since Orfeo did not resist and looked back at Euridice, condemning her to remain in the underworld he had tried to rescue her from. But it was only in the 19th century with the *belcanto* tradition that operatic death became opera's constitutive element and grand finale. From Bellini and Donizetti up to Puccini's TURANDOT

(premiered posthumously in 1926) and beyond, women die for love in opera, especially in Italian opera. In the French, German and Russian romantic and late-romantic traditions of the long 19th century, operas kill their heroines (and heroes) with various motivations that range from the political to the sacrificial, from murder to suicide, and from punishment to reward. But opera had definitely become a bloody affair by the 1830s. Donizetti's LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR – probably the bloodiest opera of the 19th century with murderous, blood-stained and mad Lucia emerging from her nuptial room – is not the first opera to kill off its heroine, but the most popular and a striking example of this new link between Eros and Thanatos (Lafave, 2003). At the same time LUCIA features one of the most famous mad scenes. The mad scene *per se* is not a novelty, because it is one of the foundational elements of opera, but it no longer merely justifies song, becoming a vehicle for some of the most transgressive vocal music (McClary: 1991). With its neck breaking coloratura, it is yet another display of operatic vocal bravura. But "dying for love"[104] had come to stay and even today the general public recognizes it as one of the main traits of opera. Verdi's Aida, Gilda and Violetta, Puccini's Tosca, Cio-Cio San, Mimi and Liú, Gounod's Marguerite and Bizet's Carmen, Wagner's Brünnhilde, and Strauss' Salome and Elektra – all die horrible deaths. Even nuns die in opera with Soror Angelica's suicide over the death of her child conceived out of wedlock in Puccini's SOROR ANGELICA, and a whole nunnery gets guillotined in Poulenc's DIALOGUES DES CARMELITES. Further east, Jenufa and Katerina Ismailova also die, and not even Lulu, the heroine of the first serialist opera by Alban Berg, is spared a gory death. Operatic dying for love is so universal even Bugs Bunny knows that opera does not have a happy ending: "Well, what did you expect in an opera? A happy ending?" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJXBZbi2RJc: 6'20'').

Anna Nicole's is one more death in a long and never-ending lineage of operatic bodies. Her death by overdose of prescription drugs was not the main reason for the critics' doubts over her suitability for the opera stage. Though her type of misbehaviour was more difficult to accept, after all courtesans of the past have less of a stench about them than their present-day version. Or, as Woody Allen's film *Midnight in Paris* so eloquently shows, the past is

[104] Dying for love inspired Bogdan Szyber and Carina Reich to create, in collaboration with seven opera singers, a piece called *Dying for Love*, linking operatic death arias with the singers' own life experience. The work was premiered in Lisbon, in 2003, at the last Acarte Festival the Gulbenkian Foundation organized.

always a much simpler, safer and nicer place. But had Anna Nicole loved? Had she made a worthy sacrifice? Did she ever implore? Was there any possibility of redemption?

During her lifetime, Anna Nicole Smith rose from a *white trash* background to global fame thanks to her looks and implants. A high school dropout, single teenage mother and low wage Walmart employee turned stripper who, with a little help from her oversized breast implants, got some extra attention, namely from Playboy Magazine. The affair and marriage to a geriatric millionaire who was 62 years her elder, caught the press's attention, which never diminished. It only increased when she became a widow, even more when tragedy entered her life, peaking with her growingly disturbing and pathetic appearances up to her premature death. Anna Nicole herself and her partner, lawyer and manager Howard Stern worked the news-cycle with great success. She was among the first celebrities to be famous for being famous, a tabloid queen of the late 20th century. In spite of her lack of talent and her vacuity, the persona she constructed had something that attracted many fans and sparked general curiosity. According to the fact tank Pew Research Center, her death was among the top-ten news stories for four consecutive weeks between February 7 (the day Anna Nicole Smith died) and March 2, 2007. During the first quarter of that year, Anna Nicole Smith came third in the news, behind Iraq policy and the presidential race. On daytime cable TV, it was the biggest news story, filling 11% of the news hole during the first quarter of 2007. After having been on display, or putting herself on display during her lifetime, revealing all freakish aspects of her life, the public still kept prying, wanting to know what drugs killed her, who the father of her baby was and what would happen to Howard Marshall's millions (www.journalism.org/2007/05/25/anna-nicole-smith/, last accessed online on May 20, 2015).

Anna Nicole's fame in death is nothing new and is similar to that of another infamous woman that would also become operatic very soon after her death, that of the famous Parisian courtesan Marie Duplessis, which occurred on February 3, 1847. A famous courtesan in Paris during the early 1940s, Marie Duplessis had fascinated the city's most famous and rich. Among her protectors and financers were the old Count Gustav Ernst von Stackelberg, a famous diplomat and ambassador who had represented Russia at the Vienna Congress in 1815, and Nestor Roqueplan, the editor of *Le Figaro*. Her younger and less rich lovers

included the Duke Agénor de Guiche and Count Edouard de Pérregaux who almost went bankrupt because of his expenses with her. Marie Duplessis may well have been one of the first celebrities ever, with her fame rocketing sky-high because of her premature death of tuberculosis aged 23. This at the time incurable disease was also known under the mysterious and romantic name of consumption. As Linda and Michael Hutcheon point out in *Famous last Breaths*, the disease has been associated with romantic love and poetry, especially before Koch proved it was a contagious disease, caused by a virus. Until its cure was discovered in 1946, TB "was a major medical – and cultural – obsession, not unlike AIDS in our present world" (Hutcheon & Hutcheon, 1996: 29), and "a disease of multiple even contradictory connotations, an affliction of the sensual decadent, as much as of the disembodied, spiritualized woman" (*ibidem* 43).[105] Although Marie Duplessis died broke, with all her belongings having to be auctioned to pay her debts, her funeral was attended by hundreds, and all Paris came to stare, turning the funeral into a society event. Even her apartment was visited by Paris' grand dames under the pretext of a bargain at the auction of her luxurious belongings. Charles Dickens was in Paris at that time and witnessed the media frenzy that surrounded her funeral, writing about it in a letter to a friend "For several days all questions political, artistic, commercial have been abandoned by the papers. […] Everything is erased in the face of an incident which is far more important, the romantic death of one of the glories of the demi-monde, the beautiful, the famous Marie Duplessis" (Dickens *apud* Kavanagh, 2014).

She had also been the lover of Alexandre Dumas *fils*'[106], with whom she had a brief liaison, and who wrote an emotional and very personal account of her life immediately after death, the famous novel *La Dame aux Camélias*, as well as a homonymous play. The novel was met with great curiosity, as all Paris knew that Marguerite Gautier was Marie Duplessis, and everybody was able to recognize her suitors too. According to Julie Kavanagh, who wrote a biography of Marie Duplessis in 2013, "his descriptions of her are pure reportage" (Kavanagh. 2014: 4), and Armand, the besotted novel's young hero, a composite of the

[105] The fictional versions of Marie Duplessis, Marguerite Gautier and Violetta will be represented as being simultaneously depraved and self-sacrificing saints.
[106] Alexandre Dumas *fils* was the illegitimate son of the author of Alexandre Dumas, author of *The Three Musqueteers.*

Dumas *fils* himself, and Agénor de Guiche and Edouard de Pérregaux. It was with the latter that Marie left Paris for a while in order to live with him in the idyllic countryside of the health-bestowing outskirts of Paris. While the novel was very popular, the play's success was momentous.[107] After the premiere in 1852 "twenty thousand copies of the play were sold almost overnight" (*idem*: 7) and the 200 performances of its first run were attended by waves of society ladies, as well as of chaperoned young girls, who all wept over Marguerite Gautier's fate. Verdi and Piave attended one such performance and used the play as an inspiration for LA TRAVIATA.

Naturally the public and media attraction of the demi-monde is not a novelty, neither has it diminished in the 21st century. What may have changed is the perception of what can be represented on stage, and censorship. In 1853, only six years after Marie Duplessis' death, LA TRAVIATA was such a scandalous operatic stuff, that La Fenice asked Piave and Verdi to set the opera in the past, in a very safe "ca. 1700". [108] Whereas romanticized courtesans of the past had a tradition, Piave's adaptation of Dumas' revolutionary mix of present day social observations of a prostitute's life and that of her friends and suitors, linked with an invented romantic melodrama, did not have a place on the stage of La Fenice. Only in 1880 did the opera get a present day staging. In the 21st century though, almost 160 years after LA TRAVIATA's premiere, ANNA NICOLE, an unapologetic account of Anna Nicole Smith's life and very recent death, was given a premiere on the stage of one the leading European opera houses. Thomas's realistic and improper libretto does not at all idealize Anna Nicole Smith the way Dumas had idealized Marie Duplessis. In *La Dame aux Camélias*, Marguerite's sacrifice, forsaking the possibility of true love with Armand in order to avoid a scandal in his family, and in order not to compromise his sister's chances of a respectable marriage, is pure invention. Marie Duplessis ended her relationship with Pérregaux, with whom she had spent some time away from it all, because he had gotten himself deeply in debt, with his bills piling up. Both had also started to feel the boredom of life in the countryside, and had travelled a lot during the last weeks in the countryside. Guiche, however, had been banished to London by his family, possibly in order to avoid a scandal. Marie Duplessis continued to

[107] Although it was difficult to find a theatre where to premiere the play. Only Dumas' friendship with Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte's brother, the Duke de Morny, helped cancel a veto over its production at the Vaudeville theatre.
[108] Marie Duplessis had been the mistress to many Parisian notables, and La Fenice did not want contemporary prominence to be depicted on stage in a morally compromising story.

let him call on her, and he is reported to have been accordingly generous (Kavanagh, 2014: 119), though he no longer was an *amant de cœur*. Dumas and Duplessis probably broke up because Dumas could not afford to keep her.[109] It is important to bear in mind that Dumas' idealization had two reasons, self-censorship due to the degree of revelation and scandal acceptable in the 19th century Parisian literary world, even for an emotional and scandalous novel, as well as his own emotional involvement and heartache. The subsequent play, difficult enough to get staged as it were, would not have had the same success.

Due to previous censorship, the scandal surrounding LA TRAVIATA's premiere was containable. Still, there were some very critical voices and even Verdi's friend and admirer Abramo Basevi wrote in his 1859 study on the composer's *oeuvre* that Verdi had been "unable to resist the temptation of setting to music, and so making attractive and acceptable, a filthy and immoral subject, universally loved because the vice it represents is universal" (http://www.operanorth.co.uk/blogs/la-traviata-five-fascinating-facts last accessed on August 09, 2015). With LA TRAVIATA, salons and bedrooms were depicted for the first time on the operatic stage, a novelty that seems to have been as difficult to accept as ANNA NICOLE's introduction to the opera stage of fried chicken joints, Walmart and a strip club.

Not only did Turnage and Thomas depict these places, they added dancing poles, truck drivers, gigantic breast implants, drugs, birth giving and several other unsavoury details. The opera does not add any biographical information or insinuation that cannot be found elsewhere, nor does it embellish the reality of Anna Nicole Smith's life and character. She is depicted as the loud, uneducated and promiscuous woman she probably was in real life, and her debauchery and opportunism are not sugar-coated. The opera also recounts her very visible and audible fall, from the moment she was widowed until her premature death. It is of course debatable if Anna Nicole was ever in a place or in a position where she could fall from, to make her a fallen woman. But, that would have been the case of other operatic fallen women, at least at the time their stories were told through opera: from Violetta to Manon, and from Carmen to Lulu, these are scandalous women from a poor-cum shady background. They all seriously misbehave, and they all die young. Despite her (romanticized) sacrifice,

[109] There is a letter Dumas claims to have sent to Duplessis, in which he writes "I am neither rich enough to love you as I would like, nor poor enough to be loved by you as you would like" (Dumas *apud* Kavanagh, 2014: 171).

Violetta, the operatic Marie Duplessis, still dies of consumption. Manon, a scheming gold-digger and thief is exiled to America. In Abbé François Prévost's novel of the 1730s – which had been deemed scandalous on two occasions, with its copies seized and burned – Manon dies of exhaustion in the Louisiana plains, whereas Massenet's operatic version kills her already in the harbour of Calais. Puccini returns to Prévost's version and has her die in the desert. In Henze's 1954 adaptation of the story, BOULEVARD SOLITUDE, Manon is sent to prison. Carmen, the shameless gipsy is stabbed by the man who wants her all to himself and cannot accept her polygamous nature. And Lulu, a former circus artist who married into the high bourgeoisie, turns into a serial widow, becomes a prostitute and is killed by none less than Jack the Ripper. They were unsavoury women and their fates seem to have been sealed long before they died.

Similar to LA TRAVIATA, CARMEN and LULU's performance histories are surrounded by scandal and moral outrage, though each one for different reasons. LULU, a creation of the modern and cosmopolitan 20th century, had a bumpy beginning, not because the Zurich opera, where it was premiered in 1937 wanted to censor it or because of a reaction against its impropriety, but for moral reasons nevertheless. It was premiered in 1937 in its incomplete version and had to wait over 40 years to be performed in its entirety. This was not only due to the fact that the third act had not been orchestrated by Alban Berg who had died in 1935. His widow, Helene Berg had always opposed the completion of the opera out of what was thought to be loyalty toward her late husband's intentions. It became apparent after her death that the real reason was Alban Berg's brief affair, but long passion for Hanna Fuchs-Robettin, Franz Werfel's sister and Alma Mahler's sister-in-law (Lindenberger, 2010: 256). The knowledge of this affair predisposed Mrs. Berg against the opera's subject matter, of which she did not approve.

Violetta, Carmen and Anna Nicole share more than various shades of polygamy and the impropriety they are thought to embody and glorify. The performance history of the two earlier operas, the way the "real" or supposedly "real" [110] models of the three opera heroines

[110] Carmen is not modelled on a real woman who existed, but Prosper Merimée's novel claims to be the account of real story, supposedly told to him by Don Jose on his travels through Southern Spain. I will use this "anthropological pretence" of the novel to also pretend, for the sole purpose of this analysis, that Carmen too is modelled on a real woman. The "real" Carmen refers to Prosper Merimee's Carmen.

have been idealized or not, their reception, and the way Carmen and Anna Nicole are translated into music help situate ANNA NICOLE in relation to the opera canon.

CARMEN's premiere in 1875 cost one of the Opéra Comique's directors his post and created unprecedented moral outrage in Paris due to its sexually charged atmosphere and unrepentant heroine. The "Castilian licentiousness" and the "Andalusian sun-burned breasts […] found only in the low-class cabarets of Seville and lovely Granada" (Commettant *apud* McClary, 1992: 111), depicted on the stage of the Opéra Comique, violated in more than one way a space frequented by a very conservative audience who favoured rather bland libretti. Carmen represents an archetype of the objectionable woman that is a far more scandalous one than the previous courtesans, such as Violetta or even Manon.[111] The free and rebellious gipsy goes in fact not one but several steps further. She does not try, or even seem to have the wish to enter a monogamous relationship. Therefore she is not redeemed by any sacrifice – she mocks all conventions – nor by true love, which she does not seek. The role of Carmen is, however, mollified in one aspect when compared to the "real" Carmen. It is not her sexual assertiveness, not even her criminal nature that are toned down, but her intelligence that is mostly ignored in the opera. The "real" Carmen, apart from getting into knife fights, smuggling and sleeping around, was a powerful business woman, albeit not a legitimate one, and the mastermind behind the smuggling ring she belonged to. But the sexuality and working class status that got translated into the opera were enough to spark moral outrage, causing a ten year ban on the opera in Paris. Audiences abroad, however, took less offense and loved the opera. When it was restaged ten years later at the Opéra Comique, due to the efforts of Bizet's widow and his publisher, it was a triumphal success. Unfortunately this victory could no longer be witnessed by Bizet himself, who had died three months after the opera's premiere in 1875, but was enjoyed by his widow and by Galli-Marié, the singer cast as Carmen on both occasions.

Back in 1875 critics had taken offense to about everything in the opera, from its moral impropriety to its musical style. It was not only Carmen's immoral behaviour that caused

[111] Though Manon comes across as more scheming and materialistic woman than Violetta that is condemned for her immorality but also for her thieving, contrary to Carmen, there are two details that made her more acceptable. Though she eventually ruins his life, Manon tries real love with des Grieux, and she is a victim, as her brother is her pimp, and the mastermind behind the scheming and the thievery.

outrage. Apart from the gender question, there were class and race issues, due to the fact that she is a gipsy and a factory worker. France had lived through three revolutions in the previous decades (the 1830 July Revolution, the 1848 Revolution, leading to the Second Republic, and the Paris Commune in 1871) and the middle class despised but was also scared of the disenfranchised who they perceived as a rising menace (McClary, 1992). Carmen brought to the operatic stage places and mores that did not fit in the lives of opera goers, at least officially.[112] She represented a combination of otherness, a menace from the underclasses and the *bas fonds* that the bourgeoisie did not want to be reminded of. In 1875 Paris, ridden with poverty and disease, Carmen on the stage of the Opéra Comique must have been perceived as a life-threatening infection to the established middle-class, because she "represents virtually all available categories of alterity: inscrutable 'Oriental', menacing worker, lawless criminal, *femme fatale*" (*ibidem*: 43). Although this description encompasses various categories of alterity, race and ethnicity, gender and class, in that precise moment and place "these categories were lumped together […] in a single bloody tide threatening to overwhelm European social order" (*ibidem*: 42).

After the storm that arose during CARMEN's rehearsal period, which peaked with the resignation of one of the Opéra Comique's directors,[113] critics reviewed the premiere of the opera with hostility. Jean Pierre Oscar Comettant described the opera as "a delirium of castanets, […] of provocative hip swinging, of knife-stabs gallantly distributed among both sexes" unfit for the Opéra Comique's "decent spectators". Carmen is described as "*la terrible espagnole*, who leaps like a tiger cat, writhes like a snake", whose uterine frenzies cannot be musically described (Comettant *apud* McCLary, 1992: 112). Yet another critic, Achilles de Lauzières described the main role as

> a woman, mad over her body, giving herself to the first soldier who comes along, out of caprice, bravado […] A savage, half gipsy, half Andalusian; sensual, mocking, shameless; believing neither in God or in the Devil… she is the veritable prostitute of the gutter and the crossroads (Lauzières apud McClary, 1992: 112).

[112] During the second half of the 19th century, prostitution was blooming in Paris and could not have done so without the consistent patronage of the bourgeoisie and also of artists and intellectuals. The theme is visible in literary and art works of the period by Zola, Balzac, Baudelaire, Manet, Courbet… (McClary, 1992).

[113] Adolphe de Leuven had been associated to the Opéra Comique for over 50 year. He had been responsible for a more conservative turn of the house during the 1840s and 1850s, and "the institution catered self-consciously to betrothed couples and their cautious parents, a group that reliably provided twenty percent of the box-office proceeds" (McClary, 1992: 15-16).

There was, however, at least one positive review by Théodore de Banville who revelled in the uproar CARMEN had caused: "the traditional theatre of kind-hearted brigands, languorous maidens and rose-water loves, has been forced, violated, stormed by a band of unbridled romantics" (Banville *apud* McClary: 113). The attack of the romantics proved irreversible. In 1884, nine years after CARMEN, the first operatic version of *Manon Lescaut*, Massenet's MANON was premiered, also at the Opéra Comique in Paris. In spite of the scandal surrounding the novel 150 years earlier, the opera did no longer cause scandal.

ANNA NICOLE sits well among these heroines. Hers is neither a beautiful nor an uplifting story. She represents the same dangerous, infectious and unpredictable female archetype as her predecessors. The "real" women behind these three heroines, phthisic Marie Duplessis, knife-fighting Carmen and the drug addict and alcoholic Anna Nicole Smith represent depravity, filth, sickness and death. The bourgeoisie loathes what they stand for, and is literally scared to death by them, as they stand for diseases believed to be caused by immoral behaviour. But is at the same time, at least a part of that same bourgeoisie is attracted by the abyss, and the freedom as much as the gaiety this archetype embodies until this day. It is after all the members of middle and upper class families and homes that frequent and finance the *bas fonds*, and it is the bourgeoisie as a whole that consumes and finances the gossip industry. The immense success of the latter, with thousands of magazines, TV shows, blogs and followers in the social media is proof of its irresistible and universal appeal. This attraction for the abyss may well be a key for the understanding of the duplicity and hypocrisy surrounding the reception of these operas. When the public and the press react to the opera ANNA NICOLE, they are not reacting to an alien behaving in a completely alien way. The opera does mirror society's less palatable aspects. Violetta, Carmen and Anna Nicole are from this world and interact with us. We are the witnesses that have read the celebrity columns, heard of the immoral wedding, seen her outrageous body somewhere, grinned at her fight over J. Howard Marshall's millions, and maybe raised an eyebrow when we heard of her messy and pathetic death.

But does her operatic voice humanize her in the eyes of the audience, as it has done over time with her sisters from previous centuries? Does the opera fill in the gaps between the

newsflashes of her life events, portraying her with more shades and in a finer grain, adding emotions and conferring complexity to her character? By giving Anna Nicole an operatic voice, its creators ironically re-expose the details of her life to public scrutiny and ridicule, but also try to imagine and re-create what must have been her musings during private and truly intimate moments. With this exercise they lift her, maybe not above, but out of the freakish persona she created and cultivated. The operatic voice reveals what might have been her thoughts, fears, hopes and disappointments, her happiness and her sorrow. In spite of the fact that ANNA NICOLE has been listened to by only few, compared to the masses who followed the gossip surrounding her life and death, the opera confers her the uniqueness of a human being. Only celebrity combined with tragedy made Anna Nicole Smith eligible as an opera heroine, but the opera may redeem her from that same celebrity status, which, though making her very famous, also made her a commodity, interchangeable for the next celebrity, and therefore to some extent anonymous. Celebrity status is an ephemeral phenomena, even more so when it is based solely on freakish behaviour. Anna Nicole is not the first nor the last opera based on a celebrity,[114] not even the first one that is explicit and has not been sugar-coated. There is at least one previous opera, also from the UK, Thomas Adés' and Philip Hensher's POWDER HER FACE (1995) based on the life of Margaret Campbell, Duchess of Argyll, whose sexual exploits were fodder for the tabloid press and the gossip industry in the 1960s. Known as the "The Dirty Duchess", she was sued for infidelity by the Duke of Argyll on the basis of nude Polaroid pictures of her in the company of other men. One of the picture showed her fellating another men, a scene that is repeated in the opera, earning it the prize for the first operatic *fellatio*, ten years before ANNA NICOLE. POWDER HER FACE was however commissioned and performed by an independent company, the Almeida Opera of the Almeida Theatre, and premiered in Cheltenham, not the Royal Opera in London, though it has since been performed at its Linbury Studios in 2008. ANNA NICOLE remains the first opera of this nature to be commissioned and premiered at one of the world's main opera houses.

Marie Duplessis had been a celebrity too, but the infamous model for *La Dame aux Camélias* and LA TRAVIATA had to be idealized and mollified. She would not have entered literature

[114] The analysis of the opera in the light of celebrity studies is an interesting one, but an undertaking, which would exceed the already quite broad scope of the present work.

and opera had she not. In the opera even the literary version of her had to be hidden for 27 years, as not to shock audiences and society. When she was finally revealed in the first modern dress production, as initially intended by the creators of the opera, Marie Duplessis disappeared again, as Violetta became the archetype of the fallen woman redeemed through self-scarifice, breaking free from Duplessis and taking over. Ironically, Violetta's trademark, her altruistic act and surrender to the dictates of society have been invented and have no correspondence whatsoever with Marie Duplessis' life. At the request of her lover's father, Violetta forsakes the possibility of love so that her lover's sister, a young girl who has abided by society's rules can be conveniently married. This selfless sacrifice is an invention by Alexandre Dumas that travelled into the play and the opera. The "real" Marie Duplessis got tired of the idyllic life in the outskirts of Paris, and did not stay with the almost bankrupt Pérregaux. She moved back to the city and threw herself into her former way of life, dying two years later.

"Psychologically, Marie has less in common with Violetta than with two other operatic heoines: Carmen, the sultry rebel, whose grave danger is that she acts like a man; and the remorselessly materialistic Manon Lescaut" (Kavanagh, 2014: 16) Like Anna Nicole Smith, Marie Duplessis was very realistic about her options to escape poverty, and acted accordingly without any hesitation. She was driven by her wish to become rich and be able to afford a luxurious life, and did what she had to do, even learn how to read and write, play the piano and cultivate herself, making her salon one of the most coveted in Paris, attended by the cultural elite as well. She was a regular patron at the opera climbing her way up from the stalls, where she sat on her own when she was still a *grisette*[115], until she became a *lorette*[116] and later reached true stardom as Marie, and could afford or was invited to the best boxes. Marie climbed her way up from the hungry waif of a Normandy village, who was abused by her father, groomed by a friend of his and still had to sell her body in order to eat. She became a *grisette*, then a *lorette* she reached the status of a famous courtesan. She even

[115] The waifs that came to work in Paris to escape poverty and other forms of misery wore clothes made of the gray fabric *grise-de-serges*. The term *grisette* described any young working girl thought to be of easy virtue, and was a very Parisian type of girl often described in literature (Kavanagh, 2014: 48-49).

[116] The *lorette* was one step upward in the hierarchy and was no longer a laundress or shopgirl, nor the lover of young students in order to have a bed in which to sleep. *Lorettes* "set out to take a lover, not through attraction or affection but for financial gain" (Kavanagh, 2014: 57). This gain was more often indirect but indispensable, as it allowed the *grisettes* to replace their wardrobe, lodgings and furniture with more fashionable items.

became a sort of countess when on February 21, 1846, a short year before her death, she married Count Pérregaux who, in spite of his near bankruptcy and therefore lack of interest for Marie Duplessis, could still offer the title she longed for (Kavanagh, 2014). Anna Nicole climbed the American social ladder of the 20th century, from a Texan backwater, where she was in constant danger of abuse from her father, she did not have to sell her body in order to eat but claims to have been told to steal toilet paper form fast food joints and lived without air condition. She then worked as a waitress, as am employee of Walmart, until she became lap dancer during the day shift, then a model and a celebrity. She married an octogenarian millionaire who could give her financial security and a million-dollar-ranch. Both changed their names on their way up and both died young, at 23 and 39, and abandoned.

Marie Duplessis had a lot in common with the character of Prévost's novel *Manon Lescaut*, a book she possessed, and which the writer and poet Théophile Gautier remarked to be one the "most-thumbed books" in her library, when he examined Duplessis' book collection after her death (Kavanagh, 2014: 100). In fact, Marie Duplessis had an obsession with Manon Lescaut, of whom she thought to be an *alter ego*, which is comparable to that Anna Nicole Smith had with Marilyn Monroe, of whom she claimed to be the daughter in one of her most befuddled moments.

The opera ANNA NICOLE lends itself to comparisons with the other fallen women of the operatic repertoire. But neither the "real" Anna Nicole Smith nor the operatic Anna Nicole seem to have made any sacrifices. Hence Peter Conrad's remark in his pre-premiere article on the upcoming opera in the *The Guardian*: "In opera, however, these wantons all finish redeemed. Violetta the fallen woman is raised up by the sacrifice she makes, and the reformed Thaïs slumps at the foot of the cross. Anna Nicole did not end in a state of grace" (Conrad, January 02, 2011). Interestingly Kavanagh quotes a remark from an email by Conrad after he read her manuscript, in which he regrets that she had demolished Violetta's myth. He sees "true magic grandeur" in her and feels that Marie dwarfs Violetta (Kavanagh, 2014: 16). Other critics, including the singer Helen Field, do not share this opinion and believe Violetta's gesture to be unconvincing. Even Dumas *fils* later acknowledged this lack of credibility in the preface of the 1867 edition: "Young people in their twenties who read it will say to themselves: 'Were there ever girls like that?' And young

women will exclaim: 'What a fool she was!' It is not a play, it is a legend" (Dumas *apud* Kavanagh, 2014: 16). As in real life, and as Marie Duplessis, Anna Nicole pursues her ambitions without hesitations and is willing to do what is necessary to get out of poverty. Her promiscuous behaviour, though, must have struck similar chords to Carmen's in 1875. Censorship and mores may have changed between the late 19th and the early 21st century, but fear and hypocrisy to some extent have not. Though in Europe and the US, the epidemic of AIDS (the contemporary equivalent to the filth and diseases of 19th century brothels) is now more under control and less menacing than in the last decades of the 20th century, the *bas fonds* remain filthy and infectious. Anna Nicole's sexual assertiveness and alterity must have seemed as menacing as Carmen's. She too is a *femme fatale* and, while not being exactly a lawless criminal, a menacing worker or an inscrutable "Oriental", she bears characteristics that make her fall into the contemporary equivalents. Her *white trash* background – that translates into the ultimate *faux pas* of being white and poor – and her stints at a fried chicken joint and Walmart make her definitely working class, while her way out of poverty via striptease and marriage to a geriatric billionaire are deemed in poor taste. Last but not least, her outrageous body, explicit sexuality and gaudy promiscuousness make Anna Nicole maybe not an inscrutable other but an incomprehensible one. However, Anna Nicole, just as the "real" Anna Nicole Smith, conforms to a certain extent to society's norms and expectations. She does not conform to those of a respectable wife and mother, or a professional woman of the late 20th and 21st centuries but to the norms of male phantasies about a promiscuous and polygamous blonde, who is expected to bear certain physical and behavioural attributes. In that regard, Anna Nicole is more similar to Marie Duplessis and even Violetta, than to Carmen who does not want to impress or be kept by any man.

Apart from being sexual predators, Carmen and Anna Nicole share an apparent unselfconsciousness with which they approach and mingle with Seville's and Houston's respectable and well-to-do. These two women do not stay in the gipsy camp or in the trailer park, they go out of their sphere and mingle with their cities' finest. They apparently do so on their terms and without giving up too much who they were. Although this may be debatable, the fact is they do not blend in and are not as chameleonic as Violetta and Marie Duplessis, who became as elegant and cultivated as the Parisian aristocracy and upcoming bourgeoisie they emulated. In this respect, Anna Nicole and Carmen are far more infectious

than Violetta, who succumbs to the bourgeois dream of true love and domesticity. But Marie Duplessis had not succumbed to that dream. She had made an effort during her earlier years as a *lorette* and then as a courtesan to be able to entertain and converse with the men who visited her, thus adapting to the world she was interacting with and emulating, but would never, and may never have entirely wanted to belong to. This, however, can be seen as an opposite sign: Marie Duplessis adapted, by reading and cultivating her taste, in order to be able to meet her suitors eye to eye. Regardless of the interpretation, her attitude is a more docile one than that of Carmen and Anna Nicole, who make no effort to blend in. They already know they will never really belong to the legitimate world they are interacting with, and they seduce their men by being who they are, or the "other woman" the men want them to be, getting out of them what they need – being set free from prison in Carmen's case, or being set free from poverty in Anna Nicole's case. When Anna Nicole gets her millionaire, J. Howard Marshall II, the Texan oil tycoon who has once taught at Yale and had been a government official, and who in the opera flies in from heaven on his wheel chair, she openly contaminates his world and his dynasty. The "real" Anna Nicole – the one of the reality show as well as the one outside the show – also invaded many respectable American households. Her reality show, though more vulgar than the already vulgar shows of the genre, shocked audiences but also exerted a very strong pull. Even those who were not interested in her reality show or her life were regularly confronted with scandal and gossip surrounding her life and brought into their homes via tabloids and entertainment TV, as well as through mainstream media.

It is therefore absolutely legitimate to ask the question that was asked many times before the opera premiered: is she worthy of an opera? Is there any aspect in her loud and glaring life that constitutes a worthy plea? There is one circumstance unique to the "real" and the operatic Anna Nicole to be overlooked, although it is permanently present. Anna Nicole is a mother, a mother of two during the last months of her life.[117] If we look at Anna Nicole through the lens of romantic love, her life will never add up to an opera. She does not love any of her men. Her first husband was a teenage love that got her pregnant, while her second

[117] There is no mention of a child in LA TRAVIATA but Marie Duplessis, when she was still Alphonsine Plessis and 16 years old, became pregnant by her lover, and gave birth to a boy in whom she took no interest. The father arranged for acquaintances of his to raise the child, but it died of pneumonia when it was only a few months old. The child's death only affected Duplessis in so far as it led the father to stop the allowance he was still paying her as well as his son's foster parents. Marie Duplessis had to find a new protector.

marriage was a means to become an heiress – nothing that makes for a heart-breaking aria. Her relationship with other men, even with Howard Stern her lawyer, manager and last partner, is nothing to sing about. She is a silly teenager, turned into a scheming and opportunistic old-digger, turned into a simultaneously mean and promiscuous widow. While the mean widow fights a nasty legal battle with J. Howard Marshall's descendants for the inheritance she thinks she has earned, the promiscuous widow parties, drinks and sleeps around. But, if we look at Anna Nicole as a mother, notwithstanding her far from exemplary mothering skills, we may hold the key to the one ingredient that makes her life translatable into opera. Her son Daniel is the love she dies for. It is a messy and dysfunctional love that is painful to look at. But, as bad and wrong as her life choices may have been, many of them were made with her son's well-being and future in mind. Of course she also wants a lot for herself, especially after she has tasted the joys of being rich. Her initial refusal to be a low wage employee or to stick to the daytime shift at the strip club however is very much motivated by the awareness that she will not be able to make ends meet as a single parent. As she also wants to flee the toxicity of her original family, especially her abusive father, another feature she shares with Marie Duplessis, she is on her own. She does periodically leave Daniel in the care of Virgie, her seriously concerned but constantly disapproving mother, but that does not seem to be what she wants for her son. What she does want is to transcend her fate, and be able to live with Daniel and provide for him properly. It is therefore in the love for her son – a love complicated by loneliness, drugs, and a life that became as toxic as the one she wanted to flee from – that we get a glimpse of Anna Nicole's humanity. The fact that everything goes wrong and ends in tragedy makes the story all the more moving. So, despite her failure as a mother, or maybe because of it, Anna Nicole has a chance of redemption. She fails to protect Daniel from drugs, she may even be co-responsible for his access to prescription drugs, but her love for him is unconditional. The awareness that Anna Nicole will lose her son, no matter what, that this love story is doomed from the very outset is the heart-breaking factor that links love and death in this opera. It is definitely not *Eros* and *Thanatos*, it may not be *Storge* and *Thanatos* either, but it is the type of love Anna Nicole will die for. The moment Anna Nicole loses her son she becomes the undone, distraught and mad woman that the heroines of opera's 19th century tradition are made of.

Still, ANNA NICOLE is as unapologetic as CARMEN. The opera is not a sentimental melodrama, and Anna Nicole's otherness is realistically depicted in the libretto and in Turnage's music. This latter aspect led some critics to deny ANNA NICOLE its operatic status. Bizet's music for CARMEN was criticized for similar reasons. Apart from the main discussions whether Bizet's score was Wagnerian enough or not, most French critics found the score a Spanish "mishmash of unblendable elements" (McClary, 1992: 115) and failed to recognize its real fusion of various styles. Turnage also introduces various musical styles foreign to opera. Alongside the jazz trio that drives the music through the whole opera, and the two saxophones used in the orchestra, the composer introduces several other foreign elements, such as the sleazy blues that accompany the pole-dancing scenes, or the heavy-tread music of the party at the beginning of Act II. As in CARMEN the various elements are used according to the opera's dramaturgy and the developments of its characters, adding up to a true fusion. In ANNA NICOLE, the music changes with the opera's plot over its two acts. The jazzy and only apparently carefree Act I becomes a more dramatic and dense Act II, following Anna Nicole's fall from merry widow and happy heiress-to-be to the outcast widow and broke heiress desperately trying to get back what she thought was her due. Andrew Clark wrote in the *Financial Times* that "Turnage is hostage to the shapelessness of Thomas's wham-bam narrative, which kowtows to the very sexual objectification and superficiality that Anna Nicole Smith took to such extremes in real life" (Clark, February 18, 2011). He concludes that the opera is a tragedy and a waste, and not even Turnage's music saves it: "[…] we leave the theatre wondering why this commercial singsong is being performed in a subsidised opera house rather than a West End theatre" (*ibidem*).

There are several quite obvious reasons why ANNA NICOLE is not a commercial singsong. First, it takes very good opera singers to perform it and it needs a full blown orchestra in the pit, neither of which the musical industry can afford. Second, if performed as a musical, it would be a commercial flop, because the music is not "entertaining" enough. Third, and more importantly, the music drives the opera setting rather than following the path of Anna Nicole's destiny. Even the lighter and jazzier Act I is foreboding from its very first jarred and dissonant chord. More than following and illustrating the course of Anna Nicole's life, the music fills in the gaps, often in contradiction or disconnect with the words or the action on stage, definitely driving the opera. The commercial singsong, as Andrew Clark called it,

is dissonant, complexly orchestrated and full of ironies, foretelling the tragedy that will soon set in, commenting on it and complicating it, sometimes with irony and contradictions. Finally, the opera taps into various foundational elements of opera that have been established over time, which I shall try to demonstrate this in the following two chapters.

3.3 Why sing if you can speak?

Regardless of the merits or faults of ANNA NICOLE, the mere fact that it has been created and performed has given the "real" Anna Nicole Smith a new voice through a new medium. This operatic story sheds new light on her biography, as told by the media and her own reality show. It does not tell a different story but it does reveal something of the human being behind the persona. Has ANNA NICOLE humanized Anna Nicole Smith? Has the opera transcended or redeemed her? What does the opera tell that other media could not?

From the very beginning of opera's existence, the fact that everything is sung has been its attraction but also its paradox. The first Florentine operas, although through-composed and fully sung, were mainly composed in the *stile recitativo,* with the singing voice following and embellishing the natural flow of speech in order to sound more natural. The creators of these first operas were acutely aware of the genre's problem of verisimilitude, and tried to introduce opportunities, in which musically structured song would make sense. Every time it was possible to interrupt the action of the dramatic text and break into song, an *aria*, an *arietta* or a chorus were introduced. In the very first operas, the problem was relatively contained as the characters were mythological creatures dwelling in Arcadia, the Hades and the Olympus; its characters were gods, semi-gods, allegoric figures, nymphs and shepherds for whom the rules of speech that govern mortals did not necessarily apply. Peri's EURIDICE and Monteverdi's ORFEO, whose leading role is a singer, helped justifying song. Orfeo was able to quiet nature with his song, and it would therefore be only natural and perfectly acceptable that he would be able to do the same to the inhabitants and guardians of Hades.

In ORFEO'S, Prologue La Musica introduces the opera. Two of its stanzas read like a programmatic manifesto of what the genre was to be. After greeting the illustrious audience in the first stanza, La Musica sings of the ability of music to elicit emotions, justifying the

genre by explaining its ability to be both the reflex and the cause of human affects and emotions:

> I am Music, who in sweet accents / can calm each troubled heart / now with noble anger, now with love / can inflame the coldest minds.
>
> I, with my golden lyre, singing / am used to charm sometimes mortal ears / and in this way with sounding harmony / of the lyre of heaven I inspire souls. (Striggio in Naxos, April 15, 2015)

By translating Orpheus' myth into music, which is in itself already a manifesto on the power of music, and by writing a fully sung dramatic work about song, Peri and Monteverdi set the defining and justifying cornerstones of the genre, while at the same time circumventing what would become opera's eternal problem of verisimilitude, the very fact that it is sung. They created self-conscious works, enhanced by the circumstance that probably Jacopo Peri himself sang the role of Orfeo in his EURIDICE and Francesco Rasi, also a singer and a composer, sang the title role in Monteverdi's ORFEO.

With the inclusion of the more mortal human beings in operatic texts, as early as 30 years after its inception in Florence and Mantua, followed later by more popular and realistic subject matters, the fact that characters on stage did everything in song was regularly questioned. Until this day the issue of opera's verisimilitude keeps being raised. After all, in real life people do not converse and conduct their business in song. Neither do they stop in the middle of urgent actions, such as life-saving flight, in order to muse on their feelings and break into song. People do not usually soliloquy in song either and they certainly do not comment on current affairs in homophonic or polyphonic choruses, at least not in song. In opera however this is exactly what happens with sung recitatives, arias, and ensembles or choruses.

While taking advantage of the non-verbal expressive means of music, and its combination with words and song, and while trying to make the operatic narrative believable, librettists and composers soon established conventions that have been used over the centuries and can still be found in contemporary works. Serenades, dances and drinking songs invite the interruption of action with song in a quite obvious way. But Venetian librettists and composers soon introduced several other much subtler ways of justifying songs: dreams,

calls for battle, madness scenes, letter-writing, love duets, invocations and the lament. Not only do these scenes invite song, they were thought to be even better expressed through music, allowing audiences "to relax [their] (willing) suspension of disbelief" (Abbate & Parker, 2012:14).[118]

The questions of the verisimilitude in opera led to yet another foundational trait of its plots: never to deal with normality or everyday life. Ever since its inception opera has dealt with love, its distress and bliss, with jealousy and magnanimity, with excess, madness and imminent or actual death. Even when in the late 19th, early 20th century Italy's *verismo* operas[119] created roles that mirrored supposedly ordinary people, their lives were anything but ordinary, with plots still depicting extreme situations and violent emotions. Implausible as the singing may be, it somehow seems to be more credible when associated with madness, murder and suicide than with sensible everyday tasks. As WH Auden is quoted to have said in the last TIME magazine edition of 1961 "No good opera plot can be sensible, for people do not sing when they feel sensible" (http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,827206,00.html last accessed on August 16, 2015).[120]

In spite of a growing number of operas from the 20th century that deal with more subdued and less noisy emotions, they still are about intense and basic emotions, such as fear, anger, happiness, surprise, sadness or disgust. Most operas have love at the core of their plots. What about love? Is it an emotion or a "second-hand emotion" as in Tina Turner's famous song? As far as love is concerned, emotion researchers still debate whether it is a basic emotion or a cultural construct and a mix of different emotions, though "research clearly establishes that people *believe* that love is an emotion, and there are emotional components to love" (Felmlee & Sprecher, 2006: 392). For the purpose of the work at hand, it is not important to

[118] Ellen Rosand analyses in detail these operatic conventions created in Venetian opera, in the middle chapters of her book *Opera in Seventeenth Century Venice – The Creation of a Genre*: *Recitative and Aria / Aria, Drama, and Formal Conventions / Conventions of the* Dramma per Musica.

[119] *Verismo* refers to operas that sought to depict in a realistic way the violent and sometimes sordid lives of the lower classes. The best known composers of this subgenre were of Leoncavallo, Mascagni and Puccini.

[120] It must be mentioned that ironically Auden is quoted to prove him wrong in an article on the occasion of the premiere of Hindemith's opera THE LONG CHRISTMAS DINNER on December 17, 1961. The opera is based on a play by Thornton Wilder, an author who, according to Auden, would not be a good source for a libretto because his plays are about everyday life. This particular play represents a succession of Christmas dinners of one family over 90 years and four generations. Auden wrote the libretti of Stravinsky's THE RAKE'S PROGRESS and Henze's THE BASSARIDS and ELEGY FOR YOUNG LOVERS.

establish or decide whether love is a basic or true emotion. It is sufficient to establish that the idea of love deals with and unleashes powerful, even violent emotions, often wreaking havoc in people's lives.

Another ongoing debate is that regarding the ability of music to express or even to induce emotions. The cognitivist theory states that music merely expresses emotions, claiming music does not have the ability to arouse emotions because it is in itself non-sentient. Emotivists claim music does induce emotions in the audience, making listeners experiencing subjects (Davies, 2010). Recent studies have empirically demonstrated that listeners experience emotions when listening to pure music (music without words or a programmatic concept). These findings have been arrived at through various studies, using different methodologies in order to detect and measure emotions, via self-report (retrospective and real time), neuro-imaging and psychophysiological measures such as skin conductiveness and pilo-erection. According to these studies music does elicit, induce and arouse emotion. They may not be fully fledged emotions like those aroused by other *stimuli*, and they most certainly are culturally informed, but musical thrills exist, have been verified and measured (Zentner & Eerola, 2010; Sloboda & Juslin, 2010; Huron & Margulis; Juslin &Sloboda, 2010).

Stephen Davies posits a theory that stems from the observation that "certain behaviours, comportments and physiognomies are experienced as expressive without giving expression to, or being caused by, occurrent emotions" (Davies, 2010:31). Some examples are weeping willows, perceived as sad because of the downward movement of their branches and leaves, which suggests sadness and tears. In the animal world, there are plenty of examples of animal faces that look happy or downtrodden and sad. In spite of the fact that animals are sentient, they do not necessarily feel the emotions they induce in us. The happy looking dolphin may be unhappy, while the sad-looking basset hound may be wagging its tail in contentment, but still has a sad looking face. These same suggestions of emotions can be found in a melody, a rhythm or a harmony, as well as in the dynamics and agogics of music. Over time many musical-rethoric figures were developed but it was from the 1600s onwards, with the beginning of musical baroque and the birth of opera that the emphasis shifted to expressiveness. During the baroque period, various theoretical treaties on the *Affectenlehre*

(doctrine of affects) were published, of which Thomas Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Kapellmeister* is the best known. Mattheson's treaty is studied to this day by musicians specialising in baroque music. In it he defines many rethoric figures and theorizes different emotions. He describes happiness as expansive, sadness as contractive and love as elevating, seeking to reflect these movements in music. These rethoric figures are effective because of music's processional character made of sound moving forward. The names of some of these figures are self-explanatory, like *exclamatio* or *suspiratio*, expressed respectively by upward and downward moving intervals that emulate speech or sighs. The various types of sadness are typically expressed with a downward movement of the melody and through chromatism (the use of half tones). Ever since Monteverdi, a chromatically descending movement in the bass line became the trademark of the lament, and, ever since Orfeo's imploration to Charonte and Apollo, the lament became an indispensable element of opera.

During the first 200 years of the genre's existence, over the entire baroque and classical era, the lament worked, in the sense that its outcome is positive, and operas have a happy ending, regardless of the conundrums or desperate situations the main characters find themselves in. The libretti were often called *tragedie da lieto fine*, which literally means tragedies with a happy ending. The knots are always untied and the last chorus or ensemble is one of joy, praise and gratitude. The latter sentiments are expressed towards a mighty and forgiving ruler (a deity, a monarch or someone else with power) who dispenses pardon or shows clemency towards his suffering subjects. Suicide, and death by stabbing, poisoning or consumption, burning on a pyre or perishing entombed only became part of opera in the 19th century. Nowadays these tragic endings have become the very definition of opera plots, mainly because with the exception of Mozart, the mainstream repertoire is that of the 19th century and late romantic tradition of the 20th century.

In *Opera's Second Death,* Mladen Dolar[121] reads the first 200 years of opera, from 1600 to 1800, under the sign of the lament and in the light of the spirit of absolutism, with its inherent

[121] *Opera's second Death* is a collaborative work of Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, "an exercise in Lacanian reading" (Žižek & Dolar, 2002: vii) of opera. The book consists of two large sections, dedicated to two key-figures of opera, Mozart and Wagner, and, according to the authors, their common "gesture of entreaty". *If Music be the Food of Love* is the section dedicated to Mozart, and written by Dolar, in which he analyzes opera's "logic of mercy" during its first 200 years of existence, and how it culminates and ends in Mozart's OPERAS AND BEETHOVEN'S FIDELIO.

contradictions between, on the one side, the "[embodiment of] the last flourishing of the feudal world" with its "grand rulers" (Dolar, 2002: 7) and, on the other side, Enlightenment, "characterized by the rise of an autonomous subjectivity along with the unstoppable ascent of the bourgeois order" (*ibidem*: 7-8).

Dolar sees the same contradictions in the operatic genre itself "[f]eudal form and bourgeois content", recognizing a development from the feudal to the bourgeois in the period spanning from Monteverdi's ORFEO to Mozart's COSÍ FAN TUTTE and ZAUBERFLÖTE.[122] Opera is presented as a powerful Lacanian window of fantasy – the stage as frame enhanced by the transcendent qualities of music – through which the still becoming new order of the bourgeoisie can be uplifted (Dolar, 2002: 7). This new bourgeois order fully materializes 200 years later in Mozart's operas, especially in LE NOZZE DI FIGARO, COSÍ FAN TUTTE and DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, and in Beethoven's FIDELIO as well, in which pardon is granted in a community of equals. These happy endings occur thanks to the clemency of a more powerful Other, who finds it in his heart to grant pardon to the suffering and often repentant subjects. Clemency and pardon are elicited through soulful and very emotional singing, the lament, later the aria. With it the suffering subject entreats the higher ranking Other who has the power to either condemn or redeem.

Peri's EURIDICE and Monteverdi's ORFEO already feature this foundational element, thus placing the lament, and its positive results, at the very moment of opera's birth. The words that tell the heart-breaking story of Orfeo's predicament are aided by music's transcendent and ineffable qualities, as La Musica explains in the Prologue. The happy ending is inevitable because of music's power, it is the "structural consequence of the lament" (*ibidem*: 16) and the lament itself "the central structural point of the opera" (*ibidem*: 15). The musically expressed distress and submission to a superior power to the point of abandonment and willingness to die form an imploration, that is at the same time an act of submission to the will of the almighty Other, and one of seduction. The subjects literally sing their way out of trouble.

[122] Dolar attributes the first years of opera exclusively to the aristocracy whom he describes as its addressees as well as declaring that it were the "nobles and monarchs [who] rocked its cradle" after its birth, ignoring the Venetian tradition, which, only 30 years after ORFEO, already established a bourgeois and more general attendance of opera.

The most powerful lament of early opera, and one which would be emulated for decades, is Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* of the lost opera ARIANNA (1608) "Lasciatemi morire". Its effect must have been quite overwhelming as it caused widely cited tears[123] and became so popular it resulted in copies of the manuscript being distributed with the libretto and it being published later in 1623. Severo Bonini[124] claimed that every Italian musical household of the 17th century owned a copy of this lament (Bonini *apud* Carter, 1999: 395). It is now the only surviving music of the opera, of which only the libretto exists. Furthermore, Monteverdi published in 1614 a five-part-madrigal based on the lament's melody, which still is part of the staple repertoire of vocal ensembles and choirs. But the fact that Monteverdi uses the same music in *Pianto della Madonna*, the last piece of the composer's last compilation of sacred music *Selva morale e spirituale* (1640) is even more interesting. Published thirty two years later, it is thought to have been composed immediately after the opera ARIANNA. *Il Pianto della Madonna* gives an account of the Passion seen through the eyes of Christ's Mother. Although there are other sacred *contrafacta* or *travestimenti spirituali* from that period, the *Pianto* sheds new light onto Arianna's lament. On the one hand, the composer deemed the music of Arianna's plea worthy of expressing the pain of the Mother of God at the cross, setting a religious text to the well-known music of the secular lament, only slightly altering the rhythm to fit the new prosody.

On the other hand, and in hindsight, by having been used to musically express and enhance the ultimate pain of the loss of a child, and the religious fervour of the Mother of God, it equalizes all distraught women. The lamenting women have all lost the only thing they ever possessed. Without their beloved, be it their lover or their child, they cease to exist and want to die. The *Pianto* and the *Lamento* share more than the melody. Both women weep the irretrievable loss of a beloved one. Arianna has been abandoned on an island by Teseo, whom she was to wed whereas the Mother of God is prostrated at the cross, apparently abandoned by God, where she weeps the loss of her son Jesus. There are similarities in the structure of the texts: both open with a death wish "Lasciatemi morire" (Let me die) and

[123] Various reports of the opera's premiere comment on the tears shed during Arianna's lament and various scholarly articles have been written about this lament, of which Suzanne Cussick's *There was not one lady who failed to shed a tear – Arianna's lament and the construction of modern womanhood*, is but one example.
[124] Severo Bonini (1582-1663) was a Florentine composer and writer on music. He is the author of an important treatise on opera and monody *Prima parte de' discorsi e regole sovra la musica*.

"Iam moriar, mi Fili" (Let me die, my son); both decry the absence of comfort and the women's forlornness, and both women call out the name of their lost ones to no avail: "O Teseo, Teseo mio" and "O Jesu, mi sponse, mi dilecte, mea spes, mea vita". Both women eventually accept their fate and submit to the will of their gods.[125]

Nonetheless, mercy is bestowed on the Mother of God, and, while not being released from her suffering over the loss of her son, she gets to witness His rising from the dead and Christianity's triumph, and is worshipped until this day. Arianna does not get Teseo back but is given a new lover, Bacchus, whom she weds and whose children she bears. Even Arianna is granted immortality and a crown of stars. Notwithstanding the fundamental differences, and regardless of the sacred nature of *Pianto della Madonna*, both women are prepared to die and meekly submit to an Other, who knows best and, moved by their entreaties and prayers, takes pity.[126]

Anna Nicole too is given a short lament over the death of her son towards the end of the opera. With its chromatic descending melody in the bass line, the triplets that emulate sobs and the word painting with *suspiratio* figures in "let the pain be mine", this lament is one of the most pungent moments of the opera. Anna Nicole's lament uses several conventions of the operatic tradition. The outcome, however, is not that of the *tragedie da lieto fine*. Despite her submission to God and her willingness to die, Anna Nicole's lament does not elicit mercy. She wishes to die "Oh God turn back time and let it be me" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 256-259 ##1098-1141)[127], but God is either not listening or He no longer exists. The

[125] Monteverdi considered Arianna's lament the result of "his arduous search for *la via naturale alla immitatione* (the natural path to imitation)" (Carter, August 1999: 395), giving performers the freedom to sing with the flow of the text and according to the affection, rather than following a strict tempo. The Italian composers of the early baroque period called this way of singing *sprezzatura*, a term coined earlier by Baldassare Castiglione, and first used in relation with singing by the composer Giulio Caccini in 1600. Generally *sprezzatura* means a studied carelessness or non-chalance, still used today to describe the Italian way of life and fashion. Adapted to singing it refers to the freedom of tempo in the pursuit of a natural way of conveying the text. This way of singing would have made it possible to musically differentiate the two laments. It is also important to point out that *Il Pianto della Madonna* would have been performed in a church and therefore sung by a *castrato* and not by a woman.

[126] There are very few exceptions and the only well-known one is Dido in Purcell's DIDO AND AENEAS, one of the very few operas of the 17th century that does not have a happy ending. Dido chooses to die after Aeneas has left. Her lament is not an imploration to be spared but to cause no trouble once she is dead. "Remember me, but ah! forget my fate."

[127] For those passages, in which not only the text of the libretto is analysed, but the music too, I have decided to indicate pages and bar numbers of the score. The bars are indicated by # for one bar and ## for several bars.

heroine is left alone, and not even given an alternative happy ending like Arianna. The new-born baby does not seem to have the strength to pull her out of her sorrow and depression, a fact that adds to her tragedy because first she was unable to protect her teenage son, and now she is not able to stay on living for the sake of her baby daughter. During the following months she will unravel and sleepwalk towards her own death.

With its catastrophic end, Anna Nicole undoubtedly also taps into the 19th century tradition and the format opera is best known for, the grand catastrophe with the main female character dying. This feature has been widely discussed in feminist analysis of opera, namely in Catherine Clément's *L'opéra ou la défaite des femmes*. Clément exclusively analyses the libretti, ignoring the music on purpose. She only sees the endless repetition of dying women, who want to break free from male dominance, normally represented by a patriarch (for example Alfredo's father in LA TRAVIATA). For her opera is an altar on which these women are sacrificed by men and for the enjoyment of men. Clément refuses to acknowledge the fact that operas give these women a voice, especially to those who have somehow transgressed society's norms. Even mad women are given a voice, with the romantic mad scene constituting a very popular feature of opera with the most transgressive music that requires great vocal virtuosity (Clément, 1979; McClary, 1991). In spite of opera's repeated depiction of these undone women, it situates them centre stage with an opportunity to sing their woes, regardless whether they are mad or unhappy, whether they die or live on and whether they have been set to music in the 17th or the 20th century. At some point, the main female role has her moment and the whole audience is listening. This moment has varied over time, but it started with a man: Orfeo's lament, which soon was to be embodied by women, later developed into the full flung soprano aria, later still becoming operatic death, including the mad scene of the 19th century tradition.

3.4 All together now – the ensemble and the forgiveness of a community

Over the first two centuries that stand for opera's clement tradition (as opposed to the second catastrophic half), the notion of mercy evolved, and it is possible to observe this development of the logic of mercy in Mozart's operas. Between DIE ENTFÜHRUNG AUS DEM SERAIL (1782)

The pages and bar numbers refer to the revised edition of August 2012 of which the vocal score (piano reduction) was used. The full score online was used for the verification of instrumentation.

and DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE (1791), the world changed. In the first opera, Pasha Selim holds in his hands the lives of Konstanze and Belmondo, who he discovers to be the son of his arch-enemy and therefore an excellent opportunity for revenge. He chooses to be magnanimous. He is "a true monarch when he is able to overcome his passion for revenge – the passion par excellence – and show regal generosity" (Dolar, 2002: 34). Whereas in DIE ZAUBERFLÖTE, composed after the French Revolution, Pamina and Tamino are initiated and have to prove their worth. In LE NOZZE DI FIGARO (1786) the top-down pardon of the omnipotent god or ruler had become a reciprocal pardon among equals. It is in fact even more radical, because it is really a bottom-up pardon, as it is a woman, the Countess, who takes the first step and says "I forgive", while the Count riles on saying "no" six times in a row. He is not able to make that first step and forgive Figaro, who he thinks has tried to seduce the Countess (but who really is Susanna wearing her lady's clothes), whereas the Countess does take the first step, although she has plenty of reasons to feel aggravated. Disguised as her maid Susanna, her husband had just tried to seduce her and given her a ring, revealing his machinations to secretly make use of the *ius primae noctis* privilege. In LE NOZZE DI FIGARO's last scene all forgive and are forgiven. All have been taught a lesson and are now more humane, accepting "the imperfection and fallibility in human affairs that might be the object of hatred, but might also be embraced with love" (Nussbaum, 2013: 9).

The final ensemble of LE NOZZE DI FIGARO is an utterly Mozartean operatic resource. In the ensemble several characters sing at the same time about their thoughts or feelings. In the libretti, these ensembles sometimes read like a senseless sum of monologues, while the music sounds like a harmonious unity. It is only when listening to the words and the music together, and to each character's line as well as the whole, that the true kaleidoscopic nature and depth of these ensembles is revealed. Each vocal line is a combination of a verbal and a musical discourse, with the ensemble forming a harmonious whole. Mozart introduced this novelty in opera, at which he excelled. His ensembles are the quintessence of this concert of thoughts and feelings that would become one more element of opera and has been used in many since Mozart.

In ANNA NICOLE there is one brief ensemble with a similar harmonious enmeshment of the separate, sometimes contradictory or conflicting musings, of different characters. It is at the

end of Act I, Scene 7 *Marriage in the white dove chapel*. The scene is introduced by a distorted but easily recognizable quote of Mendelssohn's *wedding march*.[128] Turnage adds dissonances to Mendelssohn's initial chords of this universally known piece, giving more than a hint that this story will not have a happy ending and that the wedding is not one full of hope but the first step towards disaster. In Mendelssohn's music the first chords are a unique and enthusiastic progression towards the main tonality of the march, C Major. It reflects a happy, decided and straight movement in the direction of something that is harmonious and simple. In the opening chord of Scene 7, the rhythm is preserved, but the initial chord is more complex and dissonant. It sounds less solid, leaves everything suspended and does not resolve into a harmonic resting point. Again, the music is foreboding, and the march sounds to be moving towards disaster.

In the previous scene, *American dreaming*, we have been introduced to Anna Nicole's life after she had her breast implants, as well as to J. Howard Marshall's appearance in her life. Although this scene has its lyrical and dreamy moments

> You can pray, you can dream, you can wish, you can try, but you need a little luck girls, you need a little luck. You can fight, you can beg, you can bleed, you can cry, but you need a little luck girls, you need a little luck. I saw mine coming and I knew this was my time, I saw my luck coming and I knew he was mine. Mine to have, mine to hold, mine to hug me when I'm cold. Mine all mine (Turnage & Thomas, 118-119).

This is the only introspective and lyrical moment in the otherwise pitiless, almost crude and fast paced first act. In the first version, the one staged by the RO and recorded on DVD, the "aria" ends at this point and is followed by a very contrasting "Hey baby come to Mama!" with which she seems to summon Howard Marshall onto stage and into her life. In the revised edition of August 2012, which was used for the Oper Dortmund production the composer and librettist revised this section, introduced new text and music (approximately 30 bars), doubling the duration of this lyrical moment.

> 'This is my time, my time to dream, my time, my time to fly, everything is alright, everything is fine. Coz the time has come and the time is mine. Come on my ride, want you beside me, come on my ride, want you inside me, hold me baby and don't ever let me go, hold me baby and watch me grow. My time, my time!' (Turnage & Thomas, 119-123)

[128] This wedding march is from Felix Mendelssohn's suite of incidental music for Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (not Richard Wagner's *Bridal chorus* from Lohengrin).

In LA TRAVIATA the main character also has a moment of introspection in an otherwise very upbeat first act. Violetta's long recitative and aria at the end of Act I (*É strano / Ah, fors'é lui / Follia! Delirio vanno é questo!* Followed by *Sempre libera*) that ends a joyful, rather hedonistic first act, and reflects Violetta's contradictory feelings with regard to love versus gaiety, financial security and freedom. Anna Nicole's much shorter soliloquy is a musing on how, with a little luck, her dream had come true. She is successful and making money for both herself and her son, and she is about to accomplish her journey from the trailer to the million-dollar-ranch.

American Dreaming then becomes a frenzied celebration of sex and shopping. Anna Nicole has learned "there is no such thing as a free ranch" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 140) and buys her way into her American dream, the million-dollar ranch, by performing oral sex on her geriatric husband-to-be. She wants to "rape that goddamn American dream" and "tear it open, and lap up the cream" (*ibidem*: 144). The scene ends with the chorus confirming "Rapealacious, delectatious, infectatious, cuntalacious" (*ibidem*: 145) in an increasing and accelerating gallop.

The next scene is the wedding scene and the moment the distorted wedding march introduces Anna Nicole's dysphoric wedding. It begins with an aria by the always sarcastic but always realistic Virgie, Anna Nicole's mother, who is at her angriest during this scene. She feels physical revulsion at the sight of intimate exchanges between her daughter and at the man old enough to be her grandfather. The text is resentful, bitter and violent, meant to be a warning for Anna Nicole and the audience, and deserves to be quoted at length:

> Tongues, tongues, tongues with the old man / gross, so gross! Imagine it was your child / four generations of tongue. / Feel my pain, taste my vomit / Don't go there! Step away from the billionaire! [...]129 Men, men / losers, idiots, cunt-hungry beasts! / Looking for new ways to offload their sacks of love-puke / into us dumb spunk buckets / then kick us out into the road, into the cold. / Hump and dump, spunk and leave / make believe like they give a shit. / Girls, girls, don't believe it / there's lotsa happy husbands hiring hookers / legions of the faithful getting blowjobs in car parks. / I've seen it all, and seen it all again / same old routine, same old song. / In the east the burkah, in the west the thong. / Wake up women, / dumb bitches

[129] The other family members tell her to shut up and reproach her for ruining her daughter's wedding.

> throw off your chains! / Or at least get rid of the pimp! (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 151-155, ##1403-1456; Turnage & Thomas, 2011: 00:53:00-00:55:28)

Here anger is directed at her irresponsible daughter, at everybody present at the wedding who she thinks have been blind sighted, and at men in general who take advantage of women only to drop them afterwards. But it is also very much directed at women who buy into this logic. It is a convincing diatribe that voices Virgie's disgust at this relationship, her spite for the guests and her hatred of men. The aria starts with her physical revulsion because of the age difference between bride and groom, and develops into a feminist discourse, with strong political and cultural references.

Immediately after the insult the chorus begins singing "Go Anna, go girl" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 155) and Anna asks her mother to let go just for one day: "Hey mom, what do you say, just for a day, lighten up" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 64). Daniel brings Anna her painkillers for which she thanks with a solo phrase "Thank you little pumpkin, just mama's little pick me up" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 156), followed by the words "ease the pain, block the shame, down the hatch, woo" (*ibidem*). In this short utterance, Anna Nicole's various thoughts become clear. The drugs are already more than a need and an addiction to painkillers. They help endure life and forget her shame. With them she can pretend to be the light and flimsy version of herself that gets into this marriage without being seemingly aware of its dangers.

After this line the ensemble begins. The chorus continues singing "Go Anna" and one after the other the family members join in with their preoccupations and musings. First each at a time, and later all together. Cousin Shelley voices her only worry in life, getting her teeth fixed, her way out of the *white trash* environment: "Take all the money, suck him dry, then fix my teeth" (*ibidem*: 157-158). Virgie still thinks this wedding is wrong, Stern tells Anna she will need a lawyer, while Billy, her former husband, denies having ever hit her. Anna Nicole joins the quartet in rapture over her Danny and her Marshall and a few bars later, Daddy Hogan's ranting bass makes a sextet out of the quintet, "they robbed my trailer, you failure" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 161), with Aunt Kay joining in at the end. The chorus sings a homophonous hymn that reminds of Hollywood choruses "Go Anna, Go girl". The

last phrase we hear over the chorus is Anna Nicole's reprise of "Ease the pain, block the shame, woo" (Turnage & Thomas, 2012: 163).

The lines that make up this ensemble are the following:
Chorus: Go Anna, Go girl, Laudamus baby, Carpe diem baby.
Shelley: Take all the money, suck him dry, then fix my teeth.
Anna Nicole: Ease the pain, block the shame, woo. My Danny, my Marshall.
Stern: You gonna need a lawyer.
Billy: I never hit you, just pushed you out of bed one time.
Virgie: This ain't right, this so ain't right, my flesh, my blood my embarrassment.
Daddy Hogan: Rob, they robbed me, my trailer you failure, they robbed me you failure.
Aunt Kay: You don't need them, Anna, you got your own brains, don't play their games.

In its size, the ensemble is not more than a sketch and lasts for only 20 bars. However, it carries the main feature of the operatic ensembles introduced by Mozart, namely the already mentioned harmonic enmeshment of separate discourses that form a whole. If the opera would have ended here, the effect would be slightly more Mozartean, with a happy end of a sorts. Instead of an act of forgiveness among equals as in the closing sextet of LE NOZZE DI FIGARO, the first transformation of opera's initial hierarchical act of mercy, this ensemble would build a bridge over the catastrophic tradition of opera to something new, pertaining to the 21st century. It is not forgiving, much less celebratory, but it also is not, at least yet, catastrophic. There is no act of forgiveness, nor reconciliation that ends in agreement and harmony. There is no illusion of better times to come or of a better, improved humanity. Here, we have a disillusioned ensemble, in which everyone speaks about their obsessions, their guilt, and of what haunts them. Apparently blissful, Anna Nicole seems to have forgotten her reckless discourse of the previous scene. At the same time she admits her shame and the use of painkillers against more than chronic back pain. Virgie has calmed down because she has given up on her daughter. Daddy Hogan's rant, only superficially seems to be what so many fathers do at their daughters' weddings. He is speaking to himself and his shotgun, with the shadow of the suspicions of child abuse lingering on. Billy tries to explain that he had not been violent towards Anna Nicole, whereas Cousin Shelley and Aunt Kay,

who in the opera are depicted as half-wits, insist on their fixations: Shelley's new teeth and Aunt Kay's firm belief that Anna is capable to stand on her own feet.

Could it be, that in a time all innocence seems to have been lost, the only singing and forgiving community we can come up with is this dysphoric ensemble? We now all know of course that there never are happy endings. Not even Mozart's final ensemble were "The End", only the end of an episode. A few years after the sextet that ends LE NOZZE DI FIGARO, the no longer boy, but not yet man Cherubino will have grown up. He will no longer be the charming boy, allowed in the ladies' boudoir where he lived and could take some liberties on account of his youth. The young page will have lost his harmless spontaneity and no longer be half-platonically besotted with every woman and girl he encounters. Instead he will become the Count, and try to seduce, convince or even force the women he is attracted to. Mladen Dolar even sees an evolution from the Count to Don Giovanni, who he describes as the Count gone bad: "Don Giovanni is everything the count wants to be but is too scared to be – he is the realized count" (Dolar, 2002: 46). These conclusions are the result of our 21st century's disenchanted outlook and analysis. But Mozart already gives us a glimpse of lost innocence in COSÍ FAN TUTTE, an only apparently light opera, in which everybody seriously deceives and manipulates everybody else. In this opera of multiple deceptions and serious breaches of confidence, mainly from the manipulative philosopher who started it all, forgiveness is already tinted with a kind of resignation. It necessarily is the result of a deeper but also disillusioned psychological knowledge and insight from which, together with the absence of God, our present day disenchantment stems.

ANNA NICOLE, a tale of a disenthralled 21st century, could never have a happy ending – not even a provisional one at the end of Act I. Nor can it be thoroughly tragic for that matter, because it is impossible to "unsee" during Act II everything that went on in Act I. There is no chance of *clemenza* for Anna Nicole because neither the hierarchy, nor the community Mozart constructed in his ensembles (Dolar, 2002) that would permit an act of mercy or forgiveness exist anymore. Only the dysfunctional, "sort of happy" ending of one part of the heoine's life is possible. At the end of Act I, we could imagine Anna Nicole forever shopping and cheating on her husband, inheriting part of J. Howard Marshall's fortune, had there been a will, and fighting her addiction or other health and cosmetic issues in a celebrity rehab

clinic. Shelley would get her new teeth, and Aunt Kay, who never asked for anything, might be given a complete makeover, probable in a reality show. Billy could take advantage of temporary global fame, and open his own Burger joint, and Stern would be fighting the media on Anna Nicole's behalf, while having an affair with her. Daddy Hogan would remain the abusing brute he had always been. To paraphrase Martha Nussbaum in the previously cited programme notes she wrote for the 2013 production of LA CLEMENZA DI TITO at La Monnaie (*"If you could see this heart", Mozart's mercy*): the acceptance of the imperfection and infallibility that might be embraced with tolerant love, is now met with resigned indifference. The sceptic and bitter Virgie, however, would not be able to adapt to this happy ending of a sorts. She was right all along, as the tragic end of Act II and Anna Nicole's life go to prove.

As stated above, because of our disenchantment, ANNA NICOLE cannot be pure tragedy either. She is not the innocent victim of an authoritarian man. Everything is much more diffuse and complicated. The opera finds itself at a crossroads where there no longer is the possibility of mercy, or of pure tragedy and comedy. Though Act I of ANNA NICOLE may seem like an *opera buffa* it is more of a goofy story that just gets out of control and tips over. Because of the rags-to-riches story and the inversion of the social positions of the characters, of the first part, we are reminded of Pergolesi's LA SERVA PADRONA, the best known early *opera buffa*. In that short opera, the maid becomes the mistress, Serpina tricks her master Uberto into marrying her – which, in the end, he is only too happy to do. *Opera buffa* is the other tradition of the 18th century. It began as a distraction during the *opera seria*[130] and is the direct offspring of the *commedia dell'arte* whose archetypes it maintains: the maid who wants to marry (Columbina) and the old aristocrat who gets in the way by either being paternalistic or wanting the girl for himself (*vecchio*). The common denominator is less the outcome of the love triangle, than the fact that the servants outwit their masters, making this subgenre "a democratic genre that strives for social promotion, equality of social standing" and that "[overcomes] class differences" (Dolar, 2002:25).

Opera buffa's plots have all the ingredients of the future catastrophic operas. The difference is that the potential for tragedy is defused with comedy. The young woman and the young

[130] LA SERVA PADRONA lasts 45 minutes.

man who love each other, but are kept from fulfilling that love by a jealous old man, survive because the jealous old man is outwitted, and his jealousy and bad intent can no longer fester. Anna Nicole is a contemporary Columbina during the first part of the opera: the Burger joint and Walmart employee who marries the old millionaire and gets celebrity status, which can be seen as today's equivalent of aristocracy. She is funny and clever, and her shrewdness helps her reach her objectives, whereas Howard Marshall, the "aristocratic" oil tycoon, is silly, even senile, but smitten with his sassy stripper. The social climb is the same as in the *opera buffa*, but blame is no longer limited to one or even several "baddies", and Anna Nicole's life played out tragically different.

What is there left if we have lost mercy, and comedy, and tragedy? Can we bestow mercy on suffering subjects simply by telling their story, setting music to it, performing it and listening to it? Is mercy possible, when we can see through ridicule? Is it possible when we are no longer able to shed tears? With the help of Seneca's essay on mercy, *On Clemency*, the first surviving definition of *clementia*, I will try to show that it is possible. In it Seneca gives various examples and definitions of this virtue. "Clemency is 'the mind's moderation when it has the power to take revenge' or 'mildness of a superior towards an inferior in determining punishment'", but it "can also be termed 'the mind's inclination toward mildness in exacting punishment'" (Seneca, 2010: 171-172). However, the definition that "most closely approximates the truth, to wit [is] 'moderation that diminishes a due and deserved punishment to some degree'" (*ibidem*). For this Roman stoic, clemency always requires virtues such as wisdom, humaneness and mildness, only to be found in great spirits. Penned as advice for young Nero, the essay distinguishes mercy from pity, defining it as the opposite of the vice cruelty and an alternative to the virtue strictness. "[B]oth vices, pity and cruelty, are close to clemency and strictness, and we must avoid them: <we lapse into cruelty because it looks like strictness, while we lapse into pity because it looks like clemency>" (*ibidem*: 172-173). With regard to the alternative virtue, it is worth the while to quote the philosopher at length because it becomes clear that he does not see clemency as a random or capricious act, but as a choice at the disposal of any dispassionate and calm human being.

> I have strictness in reserve but keep clemency at the ready; I hold a watch over myself as though I might be obliged to render an account to the laws, which I have summoned forth into the light from gloomy neglect. I have been moved because one man is just starting life, another coming to its end. I spared one man for the sake of his high standing, another because he is

> lowly. Wherever I found reason for pity, I am clement for my own sake. Should the immortal gods call me to account today, I am prepared to give a reckoning of all humankind (ibidem: 146-147).

The last sentence hints towards a sense of shared humanity as a justification for clemency. While it is normally granted by a superior to an inferior, the fact that Seneca sees it as a result of a mind cleared of all passions, especially the absence of anger, makes it a universally humane virtue. Statements such as "[a]mong all the virtues none better suits a human being because none is more humane" (Seneca, 2010: 149), and "[c]lemency will make any household it reaches happy and calm" (*ibidem*: 151), are indicative of the idea that a *clemens* disposition of the mind is "appropriate to all human beings" (Kaster, 2010: 140), and that the differences of status associated to the act of clemency are "contingent on the circumstances, and not essential to the virtue itself" (*ibidem*).

Mozart observed human nature through the eye of humour, maintaining the tradition of clemency. On the threshold of the French Revolution and the 19th century, his unique fusion of preoccupied magnanimity and carefree laughter represent a turning point in opera's paradigm, which would soon become that of operatic death and punishment. The operatic subjects gained freedom and with it responsibility for their fate. There were no absolute sovereign and no Mozartean community that could have saved Violetta, Carmen, Tosca or Cio-Cio San, much less Brünhilde. They can only be mourned by those who love them, and pitied them through the tears of the millions who have been attending these operas worldwide. In the 20th century, ravaged by two world wars and their consequences, composers began having difficulties with a genre that carried too much emotion, sentimentality and pathos. Though some exceptional operas and works of musical theatre have been composed over the decades, it was only during the last quarter of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries that composers returned wholeheartedly to the genre, finding a great variety of subjects to set to music at a time the different musical and theatrical traditions had flown together, mingled and fused.

ANNA NICOLE is an example of contemporaneity's hybridism and contamination, after more than thirty years of mingling and fusing. Its multiple influences and traditions build on and at the same time deconstruct opera's purity, erudition and tradition, resulting in a new and

original construct that is made of all these elements but results in something new. By fusing the early tradition and 19th century tradition, *opera buffa* with catastrophic opera, sparkling raunch with opera, operatic singing with traditions from the musical, wild parties and coke with a woeful lament and imploration to God to a accept the sacrifice of less worthy life for another full of hope that has died, Turnage and Thomas created a truly contemporary opera. It makes us laugh, one might argue it is a nervous kind of laughter, and it calls on our sympathy. Aware of Anna Nicole's shortcomings and flaws, we are moved by her repentance and the harshness of her punishment. As the train wreck of her life plays out in front of our eyes, the thoughts that come to our mind and our emotions go from amusement in the face of her boldness and ingenuity to sympathy over her fate. We come out of Act I smiling, probably more smirking, and out of Act II sad, because we actually end up feeling for this fallen woman, but we shed no tears.[131] We walk out of Turnage and Thomas' tale with no filters of this contemporary fallen woman with a knot in our stomach but no tears rolling down our cheeks. By bringing to the opera all the messiness of the "real" Anna Nicole Smith's life, there is no possibility of a *lieto fine* a true comedy or pure tragedy, not even of a comedy followed by a tragedy. It is a true hybrid, a *tragedia da lieto fine* turned backwards and inside out, which I would cautiously call a *commedia da fine tragico* (a comedy with a tragic ending).

Turnage said during the preparation of the opera's New York premiere that he was having second thoughts and was feeling more uncomfortable with the opera, because without the intention of being cruel "it is mocking someone's real life" (Davidson, http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/anna-nicole-smith-opera.html# August 25, 2013, last accessed on August 03, 2015). I am convinced of the opposite. By not refusing to display Anna Nicole's shortcomings, and by honestly, maybe even cruelly pointing them out for their ridicule and immorality, but by also acknowledging the true tragedy that hit her life and killed her, as well as the unproportional harshness and sadness of her punishment, the opera truly lifts her out of her condition. After having listened to and watched the opera, we can see her for what she is and still remember her and not forget her fate. We may not respect or like her, but we respect her suffering and feel compassion. We do not pity her, but we feel

[131] During the first run in 1852 of Dumas' play *La Dame aux Camélias* at the Vaudeville, however, the number of sobs were recounted. Henry James remembered walking past the theatre when he was a boy, remarking it must have been the first time handkerchiefs were sold at the entrance of a play (Kavanagh, 2014: 7).

sympathy due to a profound sense of shared humanity that the musical means of the opera convey. Turnage and Thomas achieved this without any of the sentimentality sometimes associated with romantic and late-romantic opera. Anna Nicole's regrets over her life choices are a "complaint worthy of humanity" (Adorno, 1994: 43) and therefore worthy of an opera.

Final Remarks

The questions I have wanted to answer in this dissertation were whether Anna Nicole can be considered an opera at all, and, if it can, whether this opera is embedded in the operatic tradition of over 400 years, or whether it just transgresses that legacy.

ANNA NICOLE bears many of the operatic trademarks, as I have pointed out over the preceding pages. Its libretto and content tap into the tradition of the *opera buffa*, and at the same time into that of the tragic and catastrophic opera of the 19th century. Act I is comedic, whereas Act II has all the trappings of the romantic and late-romantic opera, with its tragic turn of events and Anna Nicole's premature and lonely death. It also uses some of the foundational elements of opera developed in Venice, over a lapse of forty years between 1637 and 1678, during which opera became a more commercial undertaking and no longer an art form in need of the patronage of a sovereign. These foundational elements made opera more attractive for audiences, and included self-referentiality, so that society would recognize itself on stage, mad scenes, drinking songs and laments, in order to justify song, and the inclusion of more earthly characters, to whose actions and feelings audiences could more easily relate. ANNA NICOLE includes these elements, with its very physical and not at all mythical heroine, in scenes like *Let's Partay!*, *Backstage at the Larry King Show*, and Anna Nicole's final lament over her son's death.

With regard to the English operatic tradition, Mark Anthony Turnage and Richard Thomas created a work that follows this country's more recent but important legacy. In England, the creation of operas was an intermittent process until Benjamin Britten started, from 1945 onwards, a more regular output of operas composed in the country.[132] Over the approximately 250 years, between the premiere of DIDO AND AENEAS in 1689, and that of PETER GRIMES in 1945, there had been large periods of time, during which no operas were composed in England. When they were, they were but a few, with the exception of the period, during which Handel regularly created operas for the London theatres. Other forms of musical theatre, however, as the satirical ballad operas or the Savoy operas, have a deep-rooted tradition that goes back to the masques, the first works composed in the 17th century in the then new *stilo recitativo* but that were not operas *strictu sensu*. England's strong

[132] Benjamin Britten had composed an operetta in 1941, which was premiered in New York.

theatrical tradition made it more difficult for entirely sung works to establish themselves. Semi-operas that mixed theatre and opera were more successful. Furthermore, England's early capitalism made theatrical performance more dependent on the box-office revenue than in those region where royal or aristocratic patronage were enough to finance a production. Finally, the fact that ANNA NICOLE is a composite and inter-textual work, also situates it in line with the main contemporary movements in art and performance, making it a truly contemporary piece.

Regardless of whether we approve of Anna Nicole Smith as an inspiration for an operatic heroine, or of Turnage's and Thomas' work, Anna Nicole is undeniably a woman gone astray, a *traviata* of the late 20th and 21st centuries. Because she is a fallen woman of our own time, she is less attractive than those from over a century ago, a time that in hindsight seems easier to understand, less dangerous and less infectious. The tragedies of past eras move us to tears without having to get too close or being directly affected by them. LA TRAVIATA's performance history proves this point rather well. For its premiere – only six years after the death of the Parisian courtesan Marie Duplessis, the woman who inspired first Dumas, then Piave and Verdi – the management of the La Fenice in Venice forced the creators of the opera to set it in a safe and distant past, ca. 1700, in order to avoid that contemporary Parisian notables were depicted on stage frequenting the *salon* and *boudoir* of a courtesan. The very fact that a *boudoir* was depicted on stage caused outrage, even among Verdi's friends.

This measure by the La Fenice management was deemed necessary, although Violetta, like Marguerite Gautier in Dumas' novel, was an already idealized and ultimately self-censored version of Marie Duplessis. Not only did Dumas, the author of the novel invent a sacrifice that never existed – and, furthermore, is not very credible –, her materialism, opportunism and shrewdness do not transpire into the novel or the opera. These traits were, and to certain extent still are deemed inappropriate in women. They do not fit in the ideal of women who are compliant, resign themselves to their fate or life circumstances, who cry and lament, but does not act to counter the events that provoke these situations. Even the operatic Manon – the literary counterpart had been a favourite of Marie Duplessis who saw in her an *alter*

ego[133] –, who is portrayed as the thief and overt materialist she is, is tempered by the fact that she is explored by a pimp, her brother or cousin, depending on the versions of the story. Another factor that mollifies Manon, and therefore makes her acceptable, is her love for Des Grieux, and his love for her, accompanying her in her rise and fall, from poverty to the *boudoir*, to prison and ultimately a premature death.

The "real" Anna Nicole Smith, however, on whom the opera is based, is conveyed to us with practically no filters, as if it were her reality show, which may be seen as a response to the *stimuli* of our contemporary environment. The audience of ANNA NICOLE is given a much more realistic and explicit glimpse into the life of its heroine. Anna Nicole is portrayed as the loud, ignorant and vulgar woman she was. We witness her sordid background, where accusations of a loveless mother – who, however, protected her from an abusing father – and of a violent teenage first husband linger in the air. We accompany her in her hopes for a better life, with more fun and more money for her and her baby son, and realize together with her that she will never attain her goal, to leave poverty, working at fast food joints or at Walmart. We then partake in her life choices that more than take her out of poverty, rocket her sky high into a life of global fame and money. We rise with her, and then we watch her fall back to rock bottom from the height of an edifice constructed as much by her as by society.

It does of course make a difference that we only imagine, should we choose to do so, how Violetta got to where she is when the opera begins, and that we actually witness Anna Nicole grab all the unsavoury chances that present themselves in order to get to the life situation depicted at the beginning of Act II, a comfortable, safe and carefree life. But as a no longer innocent public we do know what happens in the years before the curtain rises on LA TRAVIATA, or outside the micro-cosmos portrayed in the opera, even if the opera does not show it to us. Before Act I there is poverty, abuse and abandonment in childhood. None of these circumstances changes once she goes to work in the big city during her teenage years, and they only stop when she starts to exchange sexual favours, first for food and a place to sleep, later for jewels, an apartment, jewels and a lavish lifestyle. And behind the stage, in

[133] Marie Duplessis could not have known Massenet's opera, as it was premiered in 1884 at the Opéra Comique, incidentally almost 10 years after CARMEN had so dramatically paved the way for scandalous operatic subject matters.

the streets of Paris, there is promiscuity, disease and a lot of hypocrisy on the part of the bourgeoisie that more often than not led double-lives.

In ANNA NICOLE, however, we witness everything in all its luridness and crassness. No embellishments. No sugar-coating. But no easy way out either. We are presented with the complete biography of Anna Nicole, her social environment and, to some degree, probable causes of the way her life played out. But we come to face with her faults and shortcomings with exactly the same brutal sincerity. What is even more difficult to accept is that there are no obvious culprits in Act I either, not even her father, just a dysfunctional generally loveless community we would want to get away from as much as Anna Nicole does. In the middle of all that, she may come across as the only person who is sane, funny and has a purpose. ANNA NICOLE is not a black and white opera, it does not point an accusing finger to anyone in particular. This may well be one reason for the difficulties some felt in embracing this opera. The differences between what is right and wrong are not always very clear in ANNA NICOLE.

One other problem perceived in the opera is that it stages a loveless world. There is no romantic love story, and apparently no one dies for love in this opera. Love is indeed an essential ingredient for the genre, in which everything conspires to elicit strong emotions from the audience through the combination of music with a dramatic plot, strong visuals and the personality of performers present in opera (Baltes, et al., 2011). If singing, or at least the predecessor of singing, is linked to emotions, our cooperative abilities, and to mate-choice, from the moment hominids started to walk upright, as Steven Mithen posits in his sexy singing theory (Mithen, 2002), it is not surprising that love is present in practically all operas. Most operas until the end of the romantic and post-romantic tradition include a love story, either as its sole plot or part of the central plot, as the cause of everything (most often problems or tragic events) or as something to strive for. In modernist and contemporary operas, love is often absent, or at least not at the core of the plotline, and has given its place to the more complex and composite sentiments that have prevailed in the 20th century, such as fear, forlornness, unease and *angst*.

Love in ANNA NICOLE, as I have argued does exist: not as romantic love but as Anna Nicole's motherly love for her son Daniel. He is the love of her life, and the one she realizes, tragically

too late, she is willing to die for. In spite of her debatable parenting skills, and of having neglected her son during his lifetime, she truly and honestly loves him to death. There are no star-crossed lovers in this opera, no lovers impeded by an authoritarian and conspiring competitor or father-figure to join their love for one another. Anna Nicole does not love any of her men, she only has this dysfunctional and incompetent but very strong love for her son. Similarly, Anna Nicole is only really loved by her mother. It may be equally dysfunctional because she cannot stop being hypercritical, but it is love, as we find out in the way she later mourns her daughter. The absence of romantic frustrates the audiences' expectation of melodrama.

As far as the music is concerned, there are ambiguities as well. ANNA NICOLE's main roles can undoubtedly only be sung by opera singers, due to their technical difficulty, and the opera has to be played by a full orchestra in the pit, something the musical industry would never be able to afford. Mark Anthony Turnage (born 1960) is one of the most successful composers of erudite music in the United Kingdom. His works are commissioned and premiered by the leading orchestras, musicians and ensembles. He had been commissioned by the Proms and other prestigious organizations, and had already composed two successful full length operas before the Royal Opera asked him to compose an opera. He is known for his love and use of rock and jazz elements in his music, of which he used in this opera more than ever before.

Turnage is a composer of his generation that has overcome the musical hegemonies that framed post-war music between roughly the 1950s and the 1970s. The need and philosophically justified will to break from the previous heritage, namely music's pathos and sentimentality, because it had been so tainted by the barbarity of National-socialism and Stalinism, had ironically created a "dictatorship" of its own. The return to the twelve-tone system that had been created by Schoenberg and had been used by the hard-line modernist composers before World War II was an obvious choice, because it had been forbidden and diabolized under the national-socialist regime. From the twelve-tone-technique, the serialisation of all other parameters was developed, leading to a musical style called total serialism that tended to become more mathematical and less intuitive or emotional. These features, in turn, alienated audiences who felt they were no longer able to understand and

relate to the new music. Slowly dissenting composers and styles were taken more seriously and given more opportunities, leading to a return to a more subjective style. Most of today's composers have a more relaxed attitude towards composition, using the novelties discovered during the more experimental decades, while not completely forsaking subjectivity, emotions and even tonality.

ANNA NICOLE brings together classical contemporary music with popular idioms, such as jazz and rock, dear to its composer. The constant presence of a jazz trio (electrical guitar, double-bass and drums) on stage or in the pit, driving the entirety of the score, and the venture into rock, smouldering blues or sleazy striptease music led to both praise and criticism in the opera's reviews. Much like Bizet, who incorporated Spanish music in his opera CARMEN, Turnage's option to include popular music styles was not immediately accepted by all. Some critics voiced similar concerns as those we find in the review of CARMEN's premiere.

The premiere of CARMEN was met with heavy criticism. At the time, the opera was a scandal. Its unrepentant polygamous heroine, who infected and destroyed decent and upright citizens, like Don José, the policeman she corrupts, was unacceptable for Parisian society and the very bourgeois public of the Opéra Comique. For them, Carmen combined so many features of otherness, she was perceived as a menace to the mores of that time: she was gipsy, working class, aggressive, polygamous and remorseless. In some aspects Anna Nicole resembles Carmen too, with similar marks of dangerous alterity, but less free, conforming to an image and behaviour that, while being outrageous, reflects what is expected of her kind of woman.

In 2011, ANNA NICOLE did not cause the same degree of outrage, or, better, the same volume of outrage as CARMEN in 1875. The director of the Royal opera did not feel forced to resign, on the contrary the house stood behind ANNA NICOLE. Some critics, however, do remind us of those who fiercely criticized CARMEN. In addition, in New York, the opera ironically dictated the end of the already dying New York City Opera. In spite of an excellent box office, it ruined NYCO's last chance to be saved from ruin. The donor David H. Koch pulled out because J. Howard Marshall, later the family, owned 16% of his family company Koch

Industries. Allegedly Mr. Koch explained that the Marshall family might not approve of his donation (Cooper&Pogrebin, October 4, 2013).

In spite of some shocked patrons and critics, because of a heroine that partly resembles Violetta and Manon, partly Carmen, ANNA NICOLE is embedded in the tradition of the operatic fallen woman. Its vocality is clearly operatic, as its orchestration is erudite. The fact that it includes popular music styles, and the presence of a jazz trio throughout, constitute a first transgressive element, although it had been used before, and heavily criticized as well, for example in CARMEN and in Gershwin's PORGY AND BESS. Critics who say that for this reason ANNA NICOLE belongs to the West End are wrong. The opera could never be performed by musicians and singers from the musical industry. It would be a tremendous flop in the West End, or on Broadway, as the music is not "entertaining" enough: the music is too complex, the melodic lines are too long, the rhythm too complicated and the orchestration too dense, for an audience to relax. Furthermore, it is often in contradiction with the text and the action, asking for a deeper and multi-layered reading.

I am convinced that what some critics are uncomfortable with is a sense of lost elegance and lost illusion. The argument could be something along the lines of "we know what happens before and behind the stage in LA TRAVIATA, but we don't want to see it or be reminded of it" or "the opera didn't have to glorify her life style, making it almost OK". To me, this does not mirror a problem of the opera, but a disconnection of these critical voices with our times, just as the critics of LA TRAVIATA, CARMEN, and also PORGY AND BESS could not stand being faced with contemporary society.

The refusal to recognize that Anna Nicole does more or less the same as Violetta, certainly the same as Marie Duplessis, and Carmen and Manon, or forgetting that Bess is a drug addict too, is pure denial. What displeases, as it always did before is that it is done openly and in modern dress. In ANNA NICOLE's case, the fact that the libretto is sometimes irresistibly funny can add to the sense of outrage. But *Let's Partay!* does not glorify hedonism any more than the drinking song *Libiamo ne' lieti calici!* in LA TRAVIATA. The only difference is that Violetta is phthisic and wears ruffling skirts, while Anna Nicole has breast implants and wears a shocking pink night gown whose décolleté leaves very little to the imagination.

Marie Duplessis became a cultivated woman in order to be more successful and attract richer and more refined protectors and lovers. Anna Nicole did not. She did not have to, because nowadays the kind and amount of money that can keep a woman the way Marie Duplessis and Anna Nicole were kept is not necessarily in the hands of refined and cultivated men. In fact, being dumb and inappropriate seems to be part of the attraction. Like Marie Duplessis, Anna Nicole was very realistic about her situation and her options. Both climbed the ladder from country waif/rural *white trash* to countess/widow of an oil tycoon. To achieve that, they were shrewd and unrepentant. They did not allow themselves to be weak or to second guess their choices. Having known utter poverty, they had become greedy. As Anna Nicole sings: "Oh daddyo, daddyo, just need some security" before asking for a million-dollar-ranch. When she gets jewellery instead, which she loves but gives her no security and has to ask again for the ranch, she does what needs to be done, and fellates octogenarian J. Howard Marshall. We all know too well the kind of price Marie Duplessis paid to earn her jewels and clothes, her horses and her Paris apartment.

Therefore, when Anna Nicole, after having lost the lifestyle Marshall's money bought her, then loses the only person she loves in this world, she finds herself face to face with her life choices and regrets. She becomes a distraught and sorrowful woman who lost everything and laments her fate. The most dramatic and sad moment in the opera is Daniel's death, not her own. Anna Nicole's death is a logical consequence to her life, and was, after all, her wish. We, the audience, probably mourn Daniel more than we do her, if we are completely honest. To us, he seems more innocent, although he was 20 and on drugs. He seems more of a victim, because we did not notice him before he died.

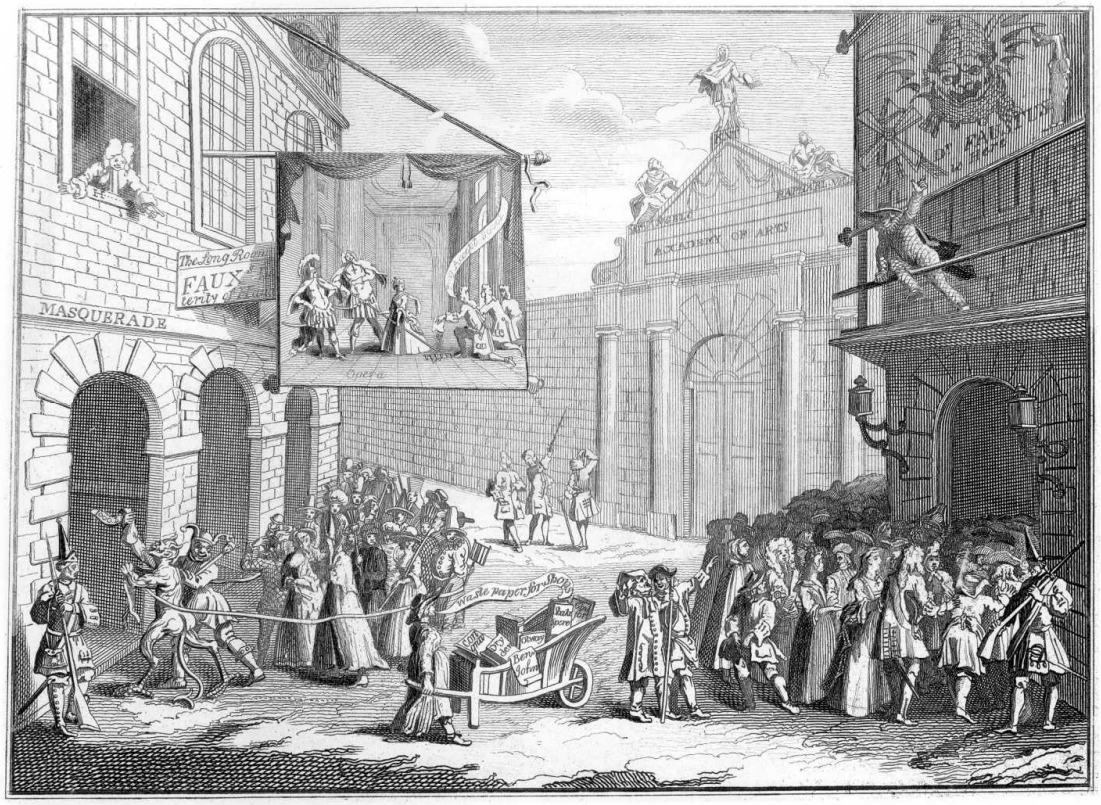
ANNA NICOLE brilliantly sums up all these contradictions and ambiguities: our voyeuristic fascination with Anna Nicole's life style and our rejection of her life choices; our acknowledgement of her sordid background and our simultaneous wish of denial that makes us love LA TRAVIATA; our laughter at her silly puns and our disgust at her recklessness. Ultimately ANNA NICOLE confronts our sympathy with our hypocrisy. These aspects can make it difficult to accept and embrace the opera. It is, however, my opinion that all levels of Anna Nicole's hybridism and ambiguity mirror our times. The confrontation between the

different contradictions, be they musical, sociological, political or moral reflect the contradictions of our times. The fusion of trash with opera, reflected in the musical fusion, bears witness to our global world that not only annuls geographical but also societal distances – we nowadays see, hear, taste and know of things that can be very distant from our geographical and societal place in the world. Some of these characteristics caused aesthetic and moral discomfort with the opera, as it seemingly glorifies Anna Nicole Smith's lifestyle and that of her kind.

Therefore, the question whether Anna Nicole follows a tradition or transgresses it, can only be answered by another contradiction: it both follows the tradition and transgresses it, which again reflects the contradictions of our times. ANNA NICOLE does follow the tradition of opera with its subject matter of the fallen woman, various conventions that rule the operatic discourse, some traits of *opera buffa* with its comedic elements and social equalization, and the catastrophic tradition as well. In its hybridism ANNA NICOLE conflates all these traditions. But at the same time the opera is transgressive, mainly due to its musical fusion and to its reality show approach, which makes it very contemporary, regardless of how we feel about it.

But ultimately, as critics generally agreed in their pre-premiere articles, we have to let the music speak and listen to how it relates to the plot, the visual and the performers. With singing at the core of our humanity, our emotional and communicative skills (Mithen, 2002), I would argue that it is also necessary to observe whether the concert of all these elements has the ability to move us, to enable us to see Anna Nicole's heart with its sorrows and regrets. The success the opera has had during these first four years with both the critics and the public, makes me think that I may be right in my assertion that ANNA NICOLE is a powerful grand opera of our times. I am convinced that it too, makes us see and understand "the imperfection and fallibility in human affairs that might be the object of hatred, but might also be embraced with love" (Nussbaum, 2013: 9).

A - *The Bad Taste of the Town*, also known as *Masquerades and Operas*



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