

## REVIEWS



## BOOKS

*Eighteenth-Century Music* © Cambridge University Press, 2013  
doi:10.1017/S1478570613000080

BRUNO FORMENT, ED.

(DIS)EMBODYING MYTHS IN ANCIEN RÉGIME OPERA: MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012

pp. 190, ISBN 978 90 5867 900 0

The use of such terms as ‘envoicing’ and ‘embodying’ – with their testing implications – is a feature of opera-studies titles, and this new collection of essays offers both: on the cover (complete with parenthetical reversal) as well as in the heading of one of its articles. Nonetheless, the voices and bodies central to this book’s theme are those of neither flesh-and-blood performers nor historical figures, but instead the gods, goddesses, heroines and heroes of ancient Greece and Rome. Across the six essays, the presence of classical mythology in early opera – in France, Italy, Germany and England – is not only examined in its own terms but also used as a pretext for discussing issues of dramaturgy, aesthetics, reception, adaptation and theatrical spectatorship.

Acknowledging the extent to which early opera drew on ‘the scenic potential of myth’ (11), editor Bruno Forment alerts the reader to the book’s ambitious breadth of concerns, reflecting on the complex legacy that ancient literatures represented for early modern culture. Comparable with the recently published *Ancient Drama in Music for the Modern Stage* (ed. Peter Brown and Suzana Ograjenšek (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)) – with which indeed it shares more than one contributor – (*Dis*)embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera similarly grew out of a research symposium on its topic. (*Dis*)embodying Myths is broader in its scale of reference than the earlier volume, however, assessing the reception of both theatrical and non-theatrical classical literature in early modern theatre, though within a shorter historical timeframe. It is organized into three pairs of loosely matching articles: the first two (by Jean-François Lattarico and Robert C. Ketterer) address interconnections between early opera, myth and literature, the next pair (Geoffrey Burgess and Bruno Forment) discuss the dramaturgy of divinity, while the final two chapters (Reinhard Strohm and Bram van Oostveldt) reflect on the figure of Iphigenia.

In ‘*Lo scherno degli dei: Myth and Derision in the *dramma per musica* of the Seventeenth Century*’ Jean-François Lattarico addresses the drastic shift in tone of mythic representation in Italian opera during the seventeenth century. First seen as exemplary beings, deservedly evoking *meraviglia* in the courtly *favola in musica*, mythical figures were more often depicted comically by the 1640s. Lattarico demonstrates the origins of this transformation in early Roman opera, the carnivalesque *commedia dell’arte* dialogues of Francesco Andreini, Francesco Bracciolini’s poem *Lo scherno degli dei* (1618) – with its mocking depiction of the love-triangle of Vulcan, Mars and Venus – and in the influence of the Accademia degli Incogniti. The expression of this new-found derision of the Olympian gods is nevertheless most forcefully shown in Venetian librettos, and Lattarico finds the continuity between literature and drama especially notable in Francesco Sbarra’s (and Pietro Antonio Cesti’s) *Le disgrazie d’Amore* (1667). Describing the seventeenth century’s obsession with ancient divinities as ‘a poetic strategy that consisted in resuscitation through derision’ (31), Lattarico suggests the possibility of a moral subtext in the representation of the ancient gods, offering a means of projecting theatrical subjects that imputed inconstancy, doubt and fragility.



Robert C. Ketterer's essay 'Helpings from the Great Banquets of Epic: Handel's *Teseo* and *Arianna in Creta*' views the appropriation of classical mythology specifically in relation to two Handelian settings of the Theseus myth. Ketterer pays due attention to the inherent intertextuality of the classical Greek and Latin literary traditions, with Aeschylus' attributed coinage 'helpings from the great banquets' (34) a reference to his debt to Homer, and the chain of adaptation – working between tragedy, epic and lyric poetry – following through to Virgil, Ovid and Catullus. The interplay between versions of the Theseus myth and narrative genres in the two librettos is discussed in terms of both ancient literary traditions and also, in the case of *Teseo* (1713), the dramaturgy of its immediate forebear *Thésée* (1675) by Quinault and Lully. A further mix of literary traditions comes into play with *Arianna in Creta* (1734), a work produced close in time to Handel's three Ariosto-derived operas (*Orlando* (1733), *Ariodante* (1735) and *Alcina* (1735)). In this company, Ketterer notes Theseus' chivalric associations for English audiences, recalling the character's presence in the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare. The resulting demonstration of the richness underpinning these librettos presents a tantalizing glimpse of the interplay of story-telling traditions within early opera.

The voice of divinity itself is the subject of the following two chapters, 'Envoicing the Divine: Oracles in Lyric and Spoken Drama in Seventeenth-Century France', by Geoffrey Burgess, and Bruno Forment's 'Addressing the Divine: The "Numinous" *accompagnato* in *opera seria*'. In both cases, the paradox of presenting an invisible voice of destiny in front of an audience with increasingly sceptical, rationalist tendencies exercises the writers: Burgess finds in it a deep-seated source of dramatic irony, while for Forment it serves as the basis for a growth in 'orchestral phantasmagorias' (116). Burgess examines apparent inconsistencies found in late seventeenth-century French culture, where religion, rationalism and superstition coexisted. Summarizing the dramaturgy of oracular discourse by way of La Fontaine and Racine, Burgess usefully points to the possibility that depictions of prophecy in opera of this period acted as a kind of index of absolutism, becoming less confident as Louis XIV's reign wore on. The 'harmonic halo' (92) of sound associated by Burgess with divine utterance in Lullian opera is itself the prime focus of Forment's essay, which examines the use of sustained accompanied recitative in early Italian opera. The 'numinous *accompagnato*' is found to be a long-standing convention in opera and beyond (108), and Forment cites examples from 1685 to 1752. Noting the influence of the twin forces of church censorship and dramatic criticism in eliminating the figure – and even the voice – of the divine from the operatic stage, Forment notes the degree to which this musical convention came to evoke divinity as an expressive presence.

The numerous adaptations of the Iphigenia myth in this period serve as a springboard for a discussion of the interrelationship of theatrical genres and classical myth in Reinhard Strohm's essay 'Iphigenia's Curious *ménage à trois* in Myth, Drama and Opera'. Strohm's survey of Iphigenia adaptations includes some nineteen works (nine plays and ten operas) staged between 1640 and 1737, across four languages. For all the differences of approach towards the mythic narrative between these works, what is revealed most acutely is a surprising degree of transference between national traditions.

The final essay, Bram van Oostveldt's 'Spectatorship and Involvement in Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*', uses Gluck's 1779 work to cross the fourth wall and discuss changing perceptions of audience involvement during the Enlightenment. Van Oostveldt explains the appeal of *Iphigénie* at this time in terms of her perceived role as an 'involved spectator' in the drama. Divine powers in Gluck's drama are almost completely subsumed by human agency, reflecting the secularization of character inscribed by Racine in his *Iphigénie* (1674). As van Oostveldt argues, the emphasis on *Iphigénie*'s subjective sensitivity made this character attractive to those attempting to reform opera 'into an all-round, deeply affecting drama' (142). He draws on the connection between the mid-eighteenth-century debate on theatrical reform – centred on the problem of spectatorship – and the work of such painters as Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin and Jean-Baptiste Greuze as discussed by art historian Michael Fried (*Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)). The self-contained artwork – which, far from excluding, instead deepened the spectator's involvement with the human figures in the work – reflected the theatre theory of Denis Diderot, who imagined an audience member capable of



disengaging with the world in favour of a complete absorption in the action on stage. As van Oostveldt, paraphrasing Diderot, summarizes: ‘the good and bad shed their tears together and made them less inclined to do evil in society’ (151). Making an ironic contrast to the ‘society of consumers’ of our own time, van Oostveldt suggests that the drama of human autonomy rehearsed in Gluck’s opera conceivably anticipated such a compassionate community of spectators, and through it the realization of heavenly benevolence in civil society.

*(Dis)embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera* is an attractive volume that offers useful critical perspectives on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century opera, and is a welcome and stimulating addition to early opera studies. For those already engaged in such work, nevertheless, its leanness also serves as a reminder of how much progress is still to be made in this area.

MICHAEL LEE  
<mlee17@qub.ac.uk>



*Eighteenth-Century Music* © Cambridge University Press, 2013  
doi:10.1017/S1478570613000092

ÉLISABETH GALLAT-MORIN  
*L'ORGUE DE 1753 RENAÎT DE SES CENDRES*  
Quebec: Musée de la civilisation, 2012  
pp. viii + 87, ISBN 978 2 551 25342 5

In 1759 the Richard organ of the Catholic cathedral of Quebec City was lost when the building caught fire during the Siege of Quebec, a battle which proved to be the crucial turning-point of the Seven Years War (1756–1763). In *L'orgue de 1753 renaît de ses cendres*, Canadian musicologist Élisabeth Gallat-Morin tells, on the one hand, the story of the organs – particularly the one made by Robert Richard in 1753 – and the musical life of Quebec City during the era of New France (1608–1763) and, on the other, the story of the 2009 reconstruction of the 1753 organ. The book itself is a work of art: beyond the content, which shows Gallat-Morin’s meticulous research, the quality of the graphic design surpasses the standard for such a publication. This particular care for the visual presentation of the book reflects the fact that it has been issued by a museum (the museological complex of the Musée de la civilisation de Québec) as opposed to a traditional publisher of scholarly works.

The book begins with a brief history of the first church in Quebec City, built in 1633 and destroyed by fire in 1640. Ten years later a mass was celebrated in the new church on the exact site of the future cathedral. In 1657 the first organ heard in New France (paid for in cash and beavers!) was installed in this church, named Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix. (In comparison, the first organ in New England was installed in Boston forty years later.) A second organ was brought from France in 1663 by the Most Reverend François de Laval, Bishop of Quebec. In 1674 the church became a cathedral, and ten years later a chapter was founded. Because the population had increased, a new cathedral became necessary, and its construction was completed in 1697. The French organ brought by Bishop de Laval was, however, not powerful enough for the proportions of the new building, so in 1723 the chapter ordered a seven-stop organ from Paul Jourdain, an organ builder from Montreal. By the 1740s the population had reached nearly five thousand inhabitants and the cathedral needed major repairs, so it was decided in 1744 that a new cathedral, twice the size, would be built on the same location.

For the new cathedral, Bishop Henri-Marie Dubreil de Pontbriand wanted to replace the Jourdain organ. In spite of opposition from the canons, who had paid for this instrument, it was eventually decided that a replacement would be installed. Jean-Marie de La Corne de Chaptés, a canon who had little knowledge