

haunted by inner demons every bit as fearsome as those that plague Max; by the end of the film one feels him to be not only a villain but also a victim. One is tempted to say that the film should not be titled *Hunter's Bride* but rather *Der verfluchte Soldat* – the Accursed Soldier, with the understanding that the title refers to Caspar and not to Max.

A shifting sense of the relative importance of different principal roles, of course, is a vital part of the performance history of any opera, and it is my hope that this change, along with all of the other ways in which Norbert's film departs from the original text, will be seen as strengths rather than weaknesses. In visual, dramatic and musical terms, *Hunter's Bride* is a beautiful reimagination of Weber's opera. It is a magnificent addition to the growing body of works exploring the boundaries between opera and film: a work that honours the past in the best way possible, namely, by using it to create something new.

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Verdi on Stage: Notes on Five Recent Productions

Giuseppe Verdi, *Macbeth*

Simon Keenlyside *bar*, Liudmyla Monastyrskya *sop*, Raymond Aceto *bass*
 Royal Opera Chorus, Renato Balsadonna *chorus master*
 Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Antonio Pappano *cond*
 Phyllida Lloyd, *stage dir*
 Opus Arte 1063, 2012 (1 DVD: 170 minutes [opera]
 + 23 minutes [bonus material]), \$25

Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello*

Johan Botha *ten*, Renée Fleming *sop*, Falk Struckmann *bass-bar*
 Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Semyon Bychkov *cond*
 David Kneuss *stage dir*
 Decca 743862, 2012–15 (1 DVD: 157 minutes [opera]
 + 10 minutes [bonus material]), \$22

Giuseppe Verdi, *Otello*

Gregory Kunde *ten*, Carmela Remigio *sop*, Lucio Gallo *bar*
 Teatro La Fenice Chorus and Orchestra, Myung-Whun Chung *cond*
 Francesco Micheli *stage dir*
 C Major 716508, 2014 (1 DVD: 149 minutes), \$30

Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*
 Ambrogio Maestri *bar*, Massimo Cavalletti *bar*, Fiorenza Cedolins *sop*,
 Eleonora Buratto *sop*, Elisabeth Kulman *alto*
 Vienna Philharmonic, Zubin Mehta *cond*
 Damiano Michieletto *stage dir*
 EuroArts 2072718, 2013–14 (1 DVD: 125 minutes), \$30

Giuseppe Verdi, *Falstaff*
 Ambrogio Maestri *bar*, Franco Vassallo *bar*, Angela Meade *sop*,
 Lisette Oropesa *sop*, Stephanie Blythe *alto*
 Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, James Levine *cond*
 Robert Carsen, *stage dir*
 Decca 743891, 2013–15 (1 DVD: 127 minutes [opera]
 + 15 minutes [bonus material]), \$20

In August 2008 opera made the headlines of Italian newspapers. In an interview published in *Il corriere della sera*, conductor Lorin Maazel railed at the Salzburg Festival for its experimental opera productions and criticized Robert Carsen's work during their previous collaboration on the 2004 production of Verdi's *La traviata* at La Fenice in Venice.¹ Within a couple of days another voice joined Maazel's. The ageing director Franco Zeffirelli condemned many of his younger colleagues for their alleged 'disrespect' for Italian *melodramma* and compiled a blacklist that again included Carsen.² Over the following days, Carsen and others replied to these attacks and claimed their artistic freedom to make opera 'speak' with a contemporary expressive language in order to bring it closer to the experience of a present-day audience.³ By 2008 the phenomenon of *Regieoper* – namely, productions that emphasize strong directorial concepts over traditional modes of operatic experience – was hardly new. Yet the exchange in *Il corriere della sera* gave unprecedented public resonance to a debate in which Verdi's output became a matter of contention.⁴

The rise of experimental approaches to opera staging in Germany during the 1970s was part of a broader ideological critique of bourgeois aesthetic values and cultural canons. To paraphrase David Levin, this staging aesthetic 'unsettled' traditional modes of signification by emphasizing what Carolyn Abbate and

¹ The interview was published as 'L'ira di Maazel' in *Il corriere della sera*, 20 August 2008. The 2004 production of *La traviata* marked the reopening of La Fenice after a fire had destroyed the opera house 18 years earlier.

² 'Zeffirelli: Bravo Maazel, basta orrori', *Il corriere della sera*, 22 August 2008.

³ 'No alla lirica arroccata su se stessa', *Il corriere della sera*, 23 August 2008, and 'Carsen: Chi attacca i registi danneggia l'opera (e se stesso)', *Il corriere della sera*, 24 August 2008.

⁴ The issue had already attracted the attention of a number of Italian academics: see Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'La regia dell'opera: lettura storica o interpretazione attuale?', in *Enciclopedia della Musica*, vol. 4, *Storia della musica europea*, ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Turin: Einaudi, 2004): 951–5; Paolo Gallarati, 'Mimesi e astrazione nella regia del teatro musicale', in *La regia teatrale: Specchio delle mie brame della modernità*, ed. Roberto Alonge (Bari: Edizioni Di Pagina, 2007): 175–88; Paolo Fabbri, "'Di vedere e non vedere": lo spettatore all'opera', *Il sagggiatore musicale* 14/2 (2007): 359–67.

Roger Parker have called opera's 'clash' of semantic systems (verbal, musical, visual).⁵ At the time, however, Italian operas were still viewed as dramatically inconsistent works that provided nothing but a pretext for the display of vocal virtuosity.⁶ Italian opera's emphasis on only one system (musical) at the expense of the others (verbal, visual) thus seemed at odds with this approach to staging. Verdi's works, however, were not easy to categorize. Their intense lyricism offered singers a major vehicle for displaying their skills while captivating audiences from around the world. Yet Verdi also notoriously strove to assert his control over his works and their performance, gradually departing from early nineteenth-century Italian opera conventions and demanding the scrupulous observation of the integrity of his scores and the historical accuracy of sets and costumes. He also endorsed the publication of staging manuals that provided a rather detailed set of instructions regulating the visual aspects of the performance. Although their nature as authoritative 'texts' has been questioned, this powerful mixture of traditional and innovative elements stirred such intellectual ferment that even in Germany Verdi's operas were surrounded by a halo of aesthetic dignity.⁷ Directors interested in deconstructing the ideological scaffolding of late-Romantic operatic staging thus found in Verdi (more than in any other Italian composer of the time) a fertile ground for their undertakings. Meanwhile, scholars have reconsidered Verdi's authorial intentions in light of his flexible attitude towards the pragmatics of the performance of his operas. Recognizing this central aspect of his creative process has expanded the boundaries of what Parker has dubbed the 'no-man's-land [existing] between "the work" and its "interpretation"'.⁸ In this regard, Zeffirelli's own work as an opera director inhabits Parker's 'no-man's-land' just like the work of those included in his blacklist. Yet his advocacy for a naturalistic and historically accurate visual aesthetic, as well as his rebuke of 'disrespectful' staging practices, seems to be less a nod to Verdi's authorial intentions than a defence of a national artistic patrimony against foreign (mis)appropriations.

The five productions under consideration in this review – all focusing on Verdi's three Shakespeare operas and filmed right before or during the celebration of the bicentenary of the composer's birth in 2013 – testify to the variety of approaches with which directors stage his operas today. They range from the highly interpretive to the extremely traditional, but often they lie somewhere between the two extremes, defining a middle ground that is emerging as a new playing field for directors.

Pace Zeffirelli, among these five productions the most uncompromising break from traditional modes of staging comes from an Italian, Damiano Michieletto. His 2013 production of *Falstaff*, premiered at the Salzburg Festival, reimagines the discourse of ageing and decay traditionally associated with Verdi's last opera by resorting to an array of evocative metatheatrical strategies. The action takes place

⁵ David Levin, *Unsettling Opera: Staging Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Zemlinsky* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 2. See also Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, 'Introduction: On Analyzing Opera', in *Analyzing Opera*, ed. Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 23–4.

⁶ Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, 'Introduction', in *Opera Production and Its Resources* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998): xi–xii.

⁷ See Gundula Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans: From Unification to the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.) For a nuanced discussion of the ontological status of the staging manuals, see Roger Parker, 'Reading the *Livrets*, or the Chimera of "Authentic" Staging', in his *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 126–48.

⁸ Parker, 'Reading the *Livrets*', 148.

at Casa Verdi, the retirement home for musicians founded and endowed by the composer at the end of his life. One of the residents is a former opera star acclaimed for his Falstaff. His life there, however, is marked by longing for the heyday of his career. Tellingly, the first notes we hear at the beginning of the performance are not the mercurial seven-measure opening of the opera, but instead one of Verdi's most mournful emblems of nostalgia, the melody of 'Addio del passato' from *La traviata*, played by a piano on stage. Our retired singer is napping on a sofa under the effect of wine while the other residents are waiting for their meal. As they finally leave, he keeps sleeping. The walls of Casa Verdi dim and shake, turning into the structures delimiting the protagonist's mental space. We are now entering his dream. Other characters appear on stage and try to awaken him. The music of the opera begins, but it is not until Dr Cajus petulantly cries 'Falstaff!' that our protagonist finally wakes up. As in all dreams, however, the boundaries between consciousness and sleep are not always easy to draw. Therefore, characters come and go seemingly haphazardly, and at times reality and dream are hardly distinguishable. The lovey-dovey exchanges between Nannetta and Fenton, for instance, are reimagined as the projection of the effusiveness of two elderly residents from the retirement house – a touching celebration of genuine feelings. The fluidity of this multilevel narrative generates a sense of wonder: Is our retired singer imagining his participation in one more performance of *Falstaff*? Is he *being* Falstaff rather than simply performing the role? And what does such personification reveal about his subconscious?

The diegetic level of the dream allows Michieletto to exploit the plot of Verdi's opera as part of a *mise-en-abîme* of the protagonist – a strategy consisting of concentric narrative frames in which the inner levels shed light on the meaning of the outer ones. The protagonist's liminal condition between these frames emerges continuously in the first scene of the opera. When the protagonist awakes, he looks lost, and his sense of confusion increases as Dr Cajus and Bardolfo argue with each other. Alice then hands him the score of Verdi's opera, so that he can review his part and thus find himself again. This process of self-rediscovery culminates in the jubilant assertion 'Questo è il mio regno, lo ingrandirò', during which a projection on the backdrop shows the singer in a historical costume taking his curtain call after what appears to be a triumphant performance of *Falstaff*. The rousing orchestra and the two servants' cries of 'Enorme/Immenso Falstaff!' seem a proxy for the stormy applause that the singer appears to receive in the projection. But from this moment on, the protagonist's fantasies start going through a series of highs and lows, with situations and figures from his life at Casa Verdi intruding into his dream. Quickly visits him in the garb of one of the institution's caregivers, while Ford introduces himself as Mastro Fontana in a wheelchair. But during the third act the dream turns into a nightmare. Michieletto astutely turns the scene in Windsor Forest into an exploration of the protagonist's innermost fears, culminating in the vision of his own funeral as the merry wives intone the litany-like passage 'Domine fallo casto'. Here the working of the *mise-en-abîme* is finally revealed: the narrative level of the dream unveils the darkest fears of the elderly protagonist, a victim not only of his nostalgic memories, but also his terror of his own approaching end. In this respect, the conclusion of the opera functions less as a resolution to this tension between past and future than as a philosophical acceptance of the inevitability of one's life course.

Michieletto's sophisticated production owes part of its effectiveness to a committed company of singers under Zubin Mehta's expert baton. The four women, in particular, seem to subordinate their vocal performance to the demands of a

production that turn the characters into a projection of Falstaff's erotic fantasies. To be sure, they all sing professionally, but only Fiorenza Cedolins (Alice) exhibits the lush lyricism normally associated with the role. Elisabeth Kulman's subtly nuanced Quickly, instead, lacks the humorous insolence of a rich contralto voice. Her range and timbre sound remarkably close to those of Stephanie Houtzeel (Meg). But Michieletto exploits these features – as well as Kulman's elegant figure – to his advantage in the Garter Inn scene, where Quickly plays the part of a seducing nurse. Eleonora Buratto portrays a youthful, tender but fragile Nannetta. Javier Camarena (Fenton) adds intensity to their short duos, thanks to his suave and charming light-lyric tenor. Massimo Cavalletti sings a solid, generous and imposing Ford, while the three supporting members of the cast (Luca Casalin as Dr Cajus, Gianluca Sorrentino as Bardolfo, and Davide Fersini as Pistola) combine their histrionics with a native understanding of the text.

In the role of the protagonist Ambrogio Maestri adds another interpretive layer to Michieletto's *mise-en-abîme*. Despite a somewhat unorthodox technique, for some 15 years Maestri has constructed his international career from his impersonation of Falstaff, combining *physique du rôle*, stage presence and vocal exuberance. So much do these features contribute to Maestri's perception in the role that a recurrent trope among opera buffs posits that Maestri does not interpret Falstaff – he simply *is* Falstaff. Thus, it is hard to imagine any other performer today as the protagonist of a production that melds real and stage identities. The presence of Maestri constitutes a major resource for Michieletto's highly complex and stratified interpretation of the opera and demonstrates how the historical importance of performers in Italian opera need not serve as a limitation but rather as a source of creativity.

The extent to which Maestri's reputation resides on *Falstaff* is further demonstrated by the Decca DVD of the 2013 revival of the opera at the Metropolitan Opera. Obviously, there is some overlap between his contributions to the two productions. But while in Salzburg Maestri adheres to Michieletto's narrative by portraying a melancholic and disenchanting protagonist, at the Met he chooses a more traditionally jovial interpretation, in line with Robert Carsen's effervescent staging. Carsen does not subvert the opera's story line to the same extent as Michieletto. He nonetheless takes some liberties with it, placing *Falstaff* within a larger web of cultural discourses. Carsen reads the opera as a social comedy. Rather than focusing on individual characters, his staging emphasizes the representation of class dynamics and power relationships between a declining aristocracy and a rampant middle class. To this end, Carsen moves the plot from its original setting to the 1950s, a period that represented the final stage in the retreat of British aristocracy from its leading role in society.⁹ Yet, far from ominousness, Carsen's production conveys a message of conciliatory optimism. Taking his cue from the many references to food and drinking in the libretto, Carsen develops this message throughout the opera with celebratory displays of communal feasting. The plots against Falstaff in the second scene of Act 1 take place in a high-scale restaurant where Fenton works as a waiter (he lures Nannetta to the dessert cart in order to flirt with her). Alice and Falstaff dine together in Ford's ultramodern kitchen before he storms in with his servants. Finally, during the Windsor Forest scene, Falstaff is harassed on a huge dining table, and the reconciliation at the end of the opera happens around a sumptuous banquet.

⁹ See David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

The casting for this production follows more conventional criteria, with the quality and 'size' of the performers' voices generally taking precedence over dramatic characterization. Stephanie Blythe's matronly Quickly is the polar opposite of Kulman's (from the Salzburg production). Blythe confines her acting to a set of stock gestures while sounding imposing, despite a hint of fatigue at the top of her range. Likewise, Angela Meade (Alice) displays admirable vocal nonchalance and beauty of tone, but her portrayal produces only an impression of a detached, if pleasant, bonhomie. Lisetta Oropesa offers a delightful Nannetta, while Paolo Fanale brings his handsome figure and a somewhat flawed vocal technique to Fenton. As Ford, Franco Vassallo's combination of authoritative singing and commanding acting is almost on a par with Maestri's Falstaff. Jennifer Johnson Cano (Meg), Keith Jameson (Bardolfo), Christian van Horn (Pistola) and Carlo Bosi (Dr Cajus) perform their respective roles with vocal lustre and comic verve. James Levine establishes the energetic pace of the musical performance through brisk tempi, clear articulation, vivid instrumental colour, and an emphatically dramatic range of dynamics.

Compared to Michieletto's highly interpretive staging, Carsen's staging successfully inhabits a middle ground between inventiveness and tradition. The Met has been exploring this middle ground with increasing frequency over the last few seasons as the company replaced several time-honoured productions. Elijah Moshinsky's 1994 production of *Otello*, which ran until September 2015, is one of them. A commercial video of the 1996 revival starring Plácido Domingo, James Morris and Renée Fleming was already available. Fleming also featured in the 2012 revival, now released on DVD. This recording epitomizes what 'tradition' has meant for Met operagoers: imposing neo-Classical sets (except for the beginning of Act 1, all dominated by a gloomy, movable structure representing the ramparts and docks of Cyprus), luxurious costumes, many supernumeraries on stage and soloists with sumptuous voices whose acting follows more their instincts than a cohesive conception of the drama. To be sure, there is much to enjoy in this performance, especially if one takes pleasure in being overwhelmed by many decorative visual stimuli. Falck Struckmann's rendition of Iago's mischievousness is surely admirable, and so is Fleming's intense portrayal of Desdemona. But in all these cases there is little that points to more than high-class routine, or that provides enlightening insights about the opera, its characters and their interaction. Instead, a sense of anodyne complacency seems to prevail. Moreover, the presence of a tenor of such limited acting skills as Johan Botha in a production originally conceived around Domingo's charismatic stage persona diminishes the overall impression of the *mise-en-scène*.

From a musical point of view, this performance, solid and often thrilling, is grounded in a well-established trend that regards *Otello* (and in particular the opera's leading male roles) as an outpost of Wagnerian singers in Verdian territory. This trend results from a combination of phenomena both old and new. On the one hand, because *Otello* marked a noticeable break with nineteenth-century Italian opera conventions, it became one of Verdi's most famous (if not necessarily enthusiastically embraced) works in late nineteenth-century Germany, especially during the interregnum between Wagner and Richard Strauss.¹⁰ On the other hand, the bel canto revival of recent decades has led singers specializing in the Italian repertory to turn away from the energetic, declamatory vocal aesthetics of the first half of the twentieth century. As a result, specialists in the heaviest

¹⁰ See Kreuzer, *Verdi and the Germans*, 116–24.

German repertory have taken over such dramatic parts as *Otello* and *Iago* with increasing frequency. Botha and Struckmann belong to this category. Both sing with remarkable assurance yet also with some degree of linguistic and stylistic discomfort. Botha's monolithic singing leaves little room for nuanced phrasing or a rich palette of vocal colours. Struckmann is more imaginative but at times resorts to overtly expressionist effects that sound not only technically idiosyncratic but also, to my taste, out of place. Despite a somewhat affected rendition of the most colloquial passages, Fleming's *Desdemona* is the most accomplished of the three leading roles, combining beauty of tone, sensuous legato, remarkable range and secure top register. This revival is well served by an excellent supporting cast (which includes the vibrant Cassio of Michael Fabiano and the veteran James Morris in a cameo appearance as Ludovico) and by conductor Semyon Bychkov's highly theatrical and dynamic reading of the score.

The 2013 Venice production provides a different approach to the vocal performance of the opera. The major asset of this DVD is the presence of tenor Gregory Kunde in the title role. Now in his early sixties, Kunde had built his international reputation as an accomplished high tenor in both French and Italian repertoires before switching to more dramatic parts in the second phase of his career (Pollione in *Norma*, the Moor in Rossini's *Otello*, *Enée* in *Les troyens*.) While maintaining a busy agenda in the bel canto repertory, Kunde has lately ventured into Verdi's late operas, including *Otello*. I find his casting a refreshing and successful choice. Kunde's full command of the part projects a sense of authority that seems particularly fitting – even more so considering his long and idiosyncratic career and the expectations for such a *prise de rôle*. Kunde approaches the vocal writing of *Otello* without forcing the essentially lyrical nature of his instrument; in the most forceful passages, for instance, he maintains focus and brilliance thanks to his remarkably controlled vocal projection, which allows him to cut through the orchestra effortlessly without forcing the sound. In the lyrical passages, by contrast, he shows off all the resources of his bel canto tool kit, from legato lines to *pianissimo* dynamics. Additionally, his expressive approach to the text contributes to a multifaceted and compelling interpretation. The Venice production also features two artists of equal vocal calibre: Carmela Remigio portrays a delicate *Desdemona*, while Lucio Gallo lends his flexible, medium-sized voice to a mellifluous characterization of *Iago*. Leading the orchestra of the Teatro La Fenice, Myung-Whun Chung supports these lyrical voices effectively, even though at times I wished he could bring some of Bychkov's dramatic tension into his reading.

Surprisingly, this recalibration of the vocal weight of the opera's main roles does not take place in an intimate, historical opera house but in a large open-air space: the main courtyard of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. While it is hard to tell from a recording the extent to which the location's acoustic affected the musical performance, such an imposing space posed some challenges to the stage director, Francesco Micheli. Although purists of historical accuracy might object that the location jars with Verdi's and Boito's decision to remove the Venetian act of Shakespeare's drama from their opera, the majestic palace makes for an impressive set. Micheli conceived an unobtrusive abstract staging that does not distract the spectator from enjoying these stunning architectural structures. Lighting and symbolic projections (designed by Fabio Baretton and Sergio Metalli respectively) mark changes of affects, atmospheres or situations. Set features are few and mostly consist of a series of gangways used to highlight different levels of the dramatic structure of the opera (for instance, during the opening scene or the

Act 3 finale.) These visual elements create a web of allegorical meanings that Micheli amplifies throughout the course of the opera. Iago, for instance, is haunted by demonic ghosts during his 'Credo', and later they turn into an incarnation of Otello's jealousy – his own inner demon. In the fourth act, Desdemona performs her 'Willow song' as if haunted by hallucinations; after Otello kills her, she in turn becomes the Moor's own vision, passing him the dagger with which he stabs himself. His death is transformed into the gateway for their ultimate reunion – as the music fades away they climb the grand staircase of the Palazzo Ducale hand in hand, just like they had at the end of their love duet in Act 1. Micheli's production testifies to the extent to which unconventional spaces of representation can inform interpretive directorial choices. Despite some discontinuities in the unfolding of the opera, the director successfully came up with a set of visual solutions, which, unlike more traditional modes of representation, did not get lost in such a big space.

Of Verdi's three Shakespearean operas, *Macbeth* is the first one that persuaded the composer to pay unprecedented attention to the aspects of the *mise-en-scène*. In preparation for the premiere of the opera in 1847, not only did he repeatedly express his concern with the historical accuracy of sets and costumes (as was typical at the time), he also recommended the greatest care for stage machinery, revealing his fascination with the technological possibilities of the operatic *stile fantastico*.¹¹ The DVD under consideration captures the 2012 London revival of Phyllida Lloyd's production, originally premiered in Paris in 1998. The excellent musical performance is a major reason for the release of the recording, featuring a superb pair of principals (baritone Simon Keenlyside and soprano Liudmyla Monastyrska) under Antonio Pappano's electrifying baton. Lloyd's take on the opera resorts to a mixture of claustrophobic atemporality and austere symbolism. Power takes the form of a gilded cage, while the Macbeths conspire amidst towering wooden panels. Crude realistic details punctuate the opera. The former Thane of Cawdor is executed on stage while Macbeth is told that the title has been bestowed upon him. The witches themselves are not the incarnation of supernatural or psychological forces, but rather the historical agents of the rise and fall of the two protagonists. They carry Macbeth's letter to his wife, accompany Duncan to Macbeth's castle, and ensure Fleance's escape from the killers. Yet all these interventions seem to involve only the surface of Verdi's work. Underneath this patina Lloyd's interpretation does not seem to move beyond mere storytelling. From this perspective, her approach to opera staging is closer to Moshinsky's *Otello* than to Michieletto's *Falstaff*. In her production, the creation of a visual web of references seems a somewhat decorative act that does not transcend the textual components of the libretto and score. While this solution helps shed light on the unfolding of the action and the development of the characters, it seems to open up little space for reflecting critically on how opera contributes to reading the present and how the present contributes to reading opera.

This is not to say, of course, that an opera production today *must* fulfil this function. Traditional and 'revisionist' *aises-en-scène* legitimately coexist and enrich our experience of a work. Yet productions like Lloyd's also demonstrate the extent to which the middle ground between these two positions can become

¹¹ See Verdi's letters to the impresario Alessandro Lanari collected in *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook*, ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), particularly those dated 15 October 1846 (p. 11), 22 December 1846 (p. 27), and 21 January 1847 (pp. 33–4).

somewhat slippery. Embracing the visual practices of *Regieoper* without confronting (or, worse, deliberately rejecting) its larger aesthetic and ideological assumptions seems to me a dangerous path – one that privileges trendy cosmetics over intellectual commitment. Advocating for the cultural viability of opera today, instead, inevitably leads us to acknowledge the existence of a gulf between past and present, look deep into it, and interrogate whether and how this gulf can be bridged. And interrogate we must, if we wish to account for that ever-changing present condition that is opera's performance on stage.

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