

Comparative Literature 451
Opera and Cultural Theory

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Fall 2013

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 9:30-11:30 a.m.,
or by appointment



Objectives

The established discussion about opera has traditionally privileged the musical code and disregarded the words; libretti, often unpoetic, have mattered less than the soaring notes. But literary and music scholars as well as philosophers have also read opera – its words and plots – from various theoretical angles, such as psychoanalysis, feminism and postcolonial theory, thereby foregrounding the ties that bind opera and the verbal as well as opera and the real. Beyond academia, stage directors and producers often create new productions that investigate and critique the cultural implications of operatic narratives by means of the visual. Our course will focus on the intersection of opera with various critical, literary and philosophical discourses as well as with narrative fiction, drama, and film. Several questions emerge that concern opera both as a cultural practice and a form of knowledge. What role should the act of reading play in our reception of opera? How does gender function in operatic texts, where female characters often die violently? What are the links between opera and politics, and what kind of historical truth does opera contain? How does one evaluate opera's depictions of non-European cultures, which some have viewed as a form of emasculation? As we examine works by Mozart, Donizetti, Verdi, Wagner, Bizet, Puccini, Adams and other composers we will consider how the question of opera is elucidated, or not, by the interimplication of other discourses; by the same token, we will explore opera's own responses to the various claims of literary and cultural studies.

Texts

Carolyn Abbate and Roger Parker, *A History of Opera*
 Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner* (selections; optional)
 Alain Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner* (selections; optional)
 Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*
 Sigmund Freud, *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*
 David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*
 Prosper Mérimée, *Carmen and Other Stories*
 Friedrich Schiller, *Don Carlos and Mary Stuart*

Requirements

Class Participation	10%
Three short essays (1000-1200 words each)	60%
Term Paper (3500-4000 words)	30%

Schedule of Readings and Viewings

Introduction

"I have no idea to this day what those two Italian ladies were singing about.
 Truth is, I don't want to know. Some things are best left unsaid."
(The Shawshank Redemption)

August 27	Tu	Music and Words: What Comes First? Wolfgang Amadé Mozart, <i>Die Zauberflöte</i> (1791; selections) Giuseppe Verdi, <i>La Traviata</i> (1853; selections) Richard Strauss, <i>Capriccio</i> (1942; selections) Abbate and Parker, <i>A History of Opera</i> , "1. Introduction."
August 27	Th	Words in Monteverdi, Handel and Gluck Claudio Monteverdi, <i>L'Orfeo</i> (1607; selections) George Frideric Handel, <i>Rinaldo</i> (1711; selections) Gluck, <i>Iphigénie en Tauride</i> (1779; selections) Abbate and Parker, "2. Opera's first centennial"
September 3	Tu	Mozart, <i>Le nozze di Figaro</i> (1786) Abbate and Parker, "3. <i>Opera seria</i> " and "4. Discipline"

September 5	Th	Mozart, cont. Abbate and Parker, "5. <i>Opera buffa</i> and Mozart's line of beauty"
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I – Opera and Gender

"In the final act all is left of Lucia is her tomb"
(Catherine Clément, *Opera or the Undoing of Women*)

September 10	Tu	Prosper Mérimée, "Carmen" (1845) Abbate and Parker, "6. Singing and speaking before 1800"
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September 12	Th	Georges Bizet, <i>Carmen</i> (1875) Abbate and Parker, "13. <i>Opéra comique</i> , the crucible" Susan McClary, <i>Georges Bizet: Carmen</i> (selections)
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September 17	Tu	Bizet, cont. Abbate and Parker, "8. Rossini and transition" * Essay # 1 due: On Theodor Adorno's "Opera and the Long-Playing Record"
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September 19	Th	Gaetano Donizetti, <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i> (1839) Abbate and Parker, "9. The tenor comes of age" Catherine Clément, <i>Opera or the Undoing of Women</i> (selections)
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September 24	Tu	Gustave Flaubert, <i>Madame Bovary</i> (1856)
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September 26	Th	Flaubert, cont. Abbate and Parker, "11. Grand Opera"
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October 1	Tu	Flaubert, cont.
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7:30 p.m. – Performance of Bizet's *Carmen* at the Los Angeles Opera

October 3	Th	Flaubert, cont.
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II – Opera and Politics

"Verdi was yesterday's man, Wagner was the model for the future"
Abbate and Parker, *A History of Opera*

October 8	Tu	Friedrich Schiller, <i>Don Carlos</i> (1787) Abbate and Parker, "10. Young Verdi"
October 10	Th	Giuseppe Verdi, <i>Don Carlos</i> (1867) Abbate and Parker, "15. Verdi – older still"
October 15	Tu	Verdi, cont. Sigmund Freud, <i>Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria</i> (1905)
October 17	Th	Verdi, cont. Peter Brooks, "Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera," in <i>Siren Song: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera</i> , ed. Mary Ann Smart
October 22	Tu	Richard Wagner, <i>Das Rheingold</i> (1854; 1869) Abbate and Parker, "7. The German problem" Abbate and Parker, "12. Young Wagner"
October 24	Th	Wagner, cont. Abbate and Parker, "14. Old Wagner" * Essay #2 due: On Franco Zeffirelli's <i>Callas Forever</i>
October 29	Tu	Wagner, cont. Thomas Gray, "Review: Bodies of Evidence," in <i>Cambridge Opera Journal</i> 8.2 (1996): 185-97
October 31	Th	Wagner, cont. Theodor Adorno, <i>In Search of Wagner</i> (selections) Slavoj Žižek, "Foreword: Why Is Wagner Worth Saving?"
November 5	Tu	Wagner, cont. Alain Badiou, <i>Five Lessons on Wagner</i> (selections) Žižek, "Afterword: Wagner, Anti-Semitism, and 'German Ideology'"

III – Opera and Exoticism

"Politics again? Why can't they just hear it as a piece of beautiful music?"
(Hwang, *M. Butterfly*)

November 7	Th	Giacomo Puccini, <i>Madama Butterfly</i> (1904) Abbate and Parker, "16. Realism and clamour"
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November 12	Tu	Puccini, cont. Abbate and Parker, "17. Turning point"
November 14	Th	Puccini, cont. Abbate and Parker, "18. Modern" * Essay #3 due: Topic to be announced
November 19	Tu	David Henry Hwang, <i>M. Butterfly</i> (1988)
November 21	Th	Hwang, cont. Victor Segalen, <i>Essay on Exoticism</i> (selections)
November 26	Tu	Hwang, cont. Abbate and Parker, "19. Speech" Edward Said, <i>Orientalism</i> (selections)
November 28	Th	Thanksgiving
December 3	Tu	John Adams, <i>Nixon in China</i> (1987) Abbate and Parker, "20. We are alone in the forest"
December 5	Th	Adams, cont.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>.