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The Evaluative Rubric of 19th Century Parisian Operagoers: Annotated Bibliography

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The Evaluative Rubric of 19th Century Parisian Operagoers

Annotated Bibliography

Abstract: My research seeks to identify the rubric used by 19th Parisians to evaluate the quality of a given “Grand Opéra.” The works listed below shed light on that rubric. They particularly emphasize the importance of formal adherence, cultural relevance, totality, and sexual gratification to the Parisian operagoer.

Books/Monographs

1. Abbate, Carolyn and Roger Parker. *A History of Opera*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.
Like Gerhard and Brzoska, Abbate and Parker stress the importance of “sheer cosmopolitan variety” and internationality to Parisian operagoers. The relevant chapters also emphasize the importance of spectacle when considering the operagoers’ rubric. Abbate and Parker, like Lacombe, stress the idea that the visibility of the audience (and thusly their relationship to the action unfolding onstage) was of the utmost importance to the operagoers. This work also accentuates the importance of visual stimulation to the genre (using the development of *livrets de mises en scene* and the frequent deference of music to visuals in *Guillame Tell* as evidence). Abbate is a professor at Harvard University. She is considered one of the most important music historians of the current age. Roger Parker is a professor at Kings College. He is of similar repute.
2. Everist, Mark. *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Aldershot, U.K., Ashcroft Publishing, 2005.
Everist takes issue with prevailing attitudes towards French Grand Opéra. He believes that political interpretations (as embodied by Fulcher’s *The Nations Image*) denigrate the genre and rob it of its inherent aesthetic value. He argues for an aesthetically driven analysis of French Grand Opéra; in so doing, he sheds light on how musical aesthetics informed the rubric I aim to reconstruct. He analyses subscription lists (the same lists analyzed by Huebner) to illustrate that conventional notions of The Opéra as a bourgeoisie stronghold are ultimately difficult to verify. Mark Everist is a professor at the University of Southampton. He has published multiple works on Parisian stage drama during the Bourbon Restoration.
3. Fulcher, Jane F. *The Nation’s Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
Fulcher’s work on The Opéra lies at the epicenter of current discussions. Almost every other author within this bibliography references her work. Fulcher argues that FGO continued a history of the operatic stage being a place for political contest. She stresses the idea that The Opéra was not simply a mouthpiece for the state or the people; it was a place where differing ideologies did battle. Her work suggests that Parisian operagoers did not demand that specific political ideologies be clearly endorsed by The Opéra. Rather, they wished to see the political conflict so familiar to them encapsulated within a given work. Similar ideas are espoused by Huebner and Mondelli. Fulcher is a professor at the University of Michigan.

4. Gerhard, Anselm. *The Urbanization of Opera*. University of Chicago Press, 1998.
Gerhard provides insight into the FGO world, where “innovations” became “traditions” overnight. Gerhard’s insight acts in congruence with Lacombe’s idea of “comparative memory.” Gerhard suggests that, in a short time, The Opéra established a set of formal conventions which closely mirrored formal composition in visual art during the same age of French history. Gerhard asserts that Grand Opéra was a direct result of the cosmopolitan nature of Paris; Abbate, Parker, Everist, and Brzoska echo that sentiment. Gerhard is a professor at the University of Bern. He is an expert on opera of the early 19th century.
5. Lacombe, Hervé. *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*. Translated by Edward Schneider. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001.
The third chapter is of particular importance to my research. Lacombe asserts that public reception of a work was tied heavily to published critiques and reviews. And, since reviewers always made a point of comparing works to one another, works needed to be innovative enough to not appear totally derivative but conventional enough that they still fit neatly within the public’s “comparative memory.” This work, like the Mondelli, also accentuates the importance of public conversation in relationship to a works success. Lacombe highlights the sheer quantity of reviews that would circulate in the French Press and how the witticism and barbed language of those reviews informed public reception. Lacombe is a professor of musicology at the University Rennes 2. He is considered an expert on French music, particularly opera.

Dictionary/Encyclopedia

6. Brzoska, Matthias. “Meyerbeer [Beer], Giacomo [Jakob Liebmann Meyer].” *Grove Music Online*. Edited by Deane Root. Published online: 2001. <https://doi-org.du.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.18554>.
This entry provides insight into Meyerbeer’s life, success, and decline. Meyerbeer’s international education & career are of particular importance to my argument, as his mastery of Italianate forms, German education, and success in Paris accentuate the importance of cosmopolitanism to the Parisian operagoers’ rubric. This entry also stresses just how aesthetically and culturally important Meyerbeer was in his own time: “the style of grand opera developed by Meyerbeer was the recognized international model for music drama for almost a century.” Meyerbeer’s profound success and posthumous descent into relative obscurity highlights that 19th century Parisians were using a fundamentally different rubric than later audiences. The author, Matthias Brzoska, is a musicologist and professor at the Folkwang University of the Arts. He has published multiple works focusing on the relationship between the “Gesamtkunstwerk” and the operas of Paris in the age of the Bourbon Restoration and July Revolution. Grove Music Online is one of the most trusted encyclopedias in music. Its editor, Deane Root, is a professor emeritus of musicology at the University of Pittsburgh.

Essays in Collections

7. Lacombe, Hervé. “The ‘Machine’ and the State.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, edited by David Charlton, 21-42. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
This essay establishes cultural relevance as an important rubric element. Lacombe stresses that French Grand Opéra consistently reflected the French public’s desire to

“accomplish great things together.” His mention of the hundreds of mirrors within The Opéra, and the practice of keeping the hall brightly lit during performance, furthers his claims. The mirrors and lights, and the public outrage when their removal was suggested, imply that operagoers wished to see themselves reflected in the works they consumed. Lacombe is one of many authors herein who stresses the importance of historical accuracy to Parisian operagoers (Mondelli, Abbate, and Williams being the others). Lacombe is a professor of musicology at the University Rennes 2. He is considered an expert on French music, particularly opera.

8. Williams, Simon. “The Spectacle of the Past in Grand Opera.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, edited by David Charlton, 58-75. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Williams, like Mondelli, stresses that a great deal of historical research went into The Opéra’s productions. Likewise, he suggests that the anachronisms included formed a link between an idealized historical event and the people of 19th century France. Like Abbate and Parker, he also demonstrates that operagoers held the dramaturgical elements of opera in equal regard, and that they did not appreciate works which established any one element as supreme (the *Tanhaouser* scandal is mentioned as evidence). Like Lacombe, Williams suggests that the Parisian operagoers wished to see crowds accomplish things together. Williams argument again highlights the importance of cultural relevance to the operagoers’ rubric. Williams is a professor of Dramatic Art at the University of California. He has published numerous works on drama and music-drama of the 19th century.

Journal Articles

9. Garafola, Lynn. “The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet,” *Dance Research Journal* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 1985): 35-40.

Garafola’s work points to the grim reality that a production’s ability to sexually gratify its male audience would inform its reception. Garafola traces the elimination of males from the ballets at The Opéra and demonstrates that their elimination was a product of men who wished only to consume the female form during interjectory ballet. Patrons wealthy enough to earn the privilege would then hire the ballerinas as prostitutes. Like Mondelli, Garafola’s work indicates that operagoers desired totality from The Opéra. They wanted productions to spill out of the opera house and into their bookshelves, music libraries, and bedrooms. Garafola is a Professor of Dance at Barnard College. She specializes in 19th century ballet.

10. Huebner, Steven. “Opera Audiences in Paris, 1830-1870.” *Music & Letters* 70, no. 2 (May 1989): 206-225. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ml/70.2.206>.

Huebner analyzes the same subscription lists mentioned in the Everist entry. He similarly asserts that The Opéra’s audience is not easy to pigeon-hole. The audience was certainly wealthy, but their opinion towards the royal household and bourgeoisie class was mixed and ambiguous. This suggests that The Opéra was not merely a mouthpiece for the state, and that exaltation of the royal house or the bourgeoisie was not as important as certain works have suggested. Rather, general relevance was more important than a specific ideology. Huebner also speaks of the presence of courtesans at The Opéra. This subsection of The Opéra’s audience strengthens Garafola’s claim that sexual gratification

informed how a work was received. Huebner is a professor of Musicology at McGill University. He is a French music specialist.

11. Mondelli, Peter. "The Sociability of History in French Grand Opera: A Historical Materialist Perspective." *19th century music* 37, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 37–55.

Mondelli uses the idea of "historical materialism" to establish the importance of history to the genre of FGO. Mondelli demonstrates that notable productions of French Grand Opéra mirrored the historical novels of the same age which were made available to a wider public due to advances in printing. Mondelli's work is principally of interest because it demonstrates that The Opéra sank a great deal of research into historical accuracy, but it would include notable anachronisms in its end-product. Mondelli argues that the anachronisms made the operas more relatable to their audiences. Mondelli's works strengthens the idea that relevance was an important element of the Parisian operagoers' rubric (an idea echoed by Huebner, Lacombe, Abbate and Parker). This particular reading also indicates that a works totality, or its ability to pervade its audience's life outside of the opera house, informed public reception. Mondelli is a professor of musicology at the University of North Texas.

Scores

12. Rossini, Gioacchino, Victor-Joseph Étienne de Jouy, and L. F. Bis. *Guillaume Tell: an Opera in Four Acts*. London: Boosey & Hawkes, n.d.

This score, and the libretto it sets, provide important musical evidence of cosmopolitanism in productions of Grand Opéra. Multiple arias appear in a traditional Italianate style, while other musical moments flow cinematically without employing formal numbers. Such collisions of style embody the genre. Additionally, the politically relevant yet ideologically ambiguous libretto gives credence to the idea that cultural relevance, but not overt politicism, informed the operagoers' rubric (an idea espoused by Lacombe, Huebner, and Mondelli among others). The musical inactivity as Tell aims his crossbow lends credence to Abbate and Parker's assertion that the operagoers held all the dramaturgical elements of a production in equal regard and did not advocate for the supremacy of instrumental music, vocal music, or visual effects. Rossini was an immensely successful composer in Paris during the age in question.