

“Melodramma,” Market and Modernity:
Opera in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy

By

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INTRODUCTION

This work stems from a desire to understand critically some general stereotypical ideas and perceptions regarding opera today. Despite outreach and educational projects that most opera companies and opera houses organize nowadays, opera maintains an inaccessible, intellectually forbidding and socially exclusive aura. Opera is stereotypically expensive (to produce and to attend) and is seen as long, boring and anachronistic. That every action and gesture is sung makes it a subject of ridicule and too bizarre to engage the spectator. According to the 2013 National Endowment for the Arts report, 18% of American adults have attended at least one musical or play in the year prior to the report's publication, 17% have attended a classical music or jazz concert, and only 2% have attended an opera performance. In 2012, 4.9 million adults attended at least one opera nationwide, while in 2013 8.5 million adults attended a musical or a play only in the Broadway theater district in New York.¹ Some very simple questions and curiosities arise from these considerations. If, as people generally assume, the aesthetics, length and cost of opera play a role in the lack of opera's attractiveness, why then are musicals so popular? *Rent* is only ten minutes shorter than *Bohème* and while prices vary by location and show, the ticket price for a musical is comparable to one for an opera. In

¹ Source: "The Demographics of the Broadway Audience 2013-2014" http://www.broadwayleague.com/index.php?url_identifier=the-demographics-of-the-broadway-audience (accessed March 23rd, 2015); Brian Wise "Report: Opera Attendance Drops, Digital Engagement Rises." *WQXR Blog* September 22, 2013 http://www.wqxr.org/#!/story/report-opera-attendance-drops-digital-engagement-up/?utm_source=sharedUrl&utm_media=metatag&utm_campaign=sharedUrl (accessed March 23rd, 2015); National Endowment for the Arts, Office of Research and Analysis, *How a Nation Engages with Art. Highlights from the 2012 survey of public participation in the arts* (Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2013).

Italy, opera houses have a total of 2.2 million spectators per year,² but going to the opera represents only 6% of the total theater-going activity.³ However, the 14 opera foundations in Italy absorb 48% of the funds destined to all live performances and entertainment (theater, music, circus, dance and cinema).

Opera can reach a wide audience when it “crosses over” into other genres and other contexts: excerpts are frequently part of popular entertainment and commercial products, and operatic products that come from a traditional opera world can become hugely successful commercial and popular phenomena, like The Three Tenors, Andrea Bocelli or Katherine Jenkins in Great Britain. It seems that all examples of commercially successful operas happen beyond the opera house. Why? And why are these examples excluded from the opera house and frowned upon by opera lovers? Despite the high prices and the perceived difficulty of the genre, opera performances in major opera houses are often sold out, especially for the operas that are established in the repertory and most frequently composed. Which brings up the question of why the vast majority of operas produced nowadays were written more than one hundred years ago. While Shakespeare’s or even Sophocles’ texts are still widely performed, theater seasons are rich with new works, at least at numerous less institutionalized venues. Why is this not the case for opera?

The questions of opera’s perceived and stereotypical elitism, snobbery and lack of widespread appreciation become more complicated if one considers the Italian context

² Data referring to 2007; source: Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali January 28th, 2010 http://www.beniculturali.it/mibac/export/MiBAC/sito-MiBAC/Contenuti/Ministero/UfficioStampa/News/visualizza_asset.html_84569120.html (accessed on March 23rd 2015)

³ Versus 30% of prose theater and 42% of cabaret and “varietà” for example. Fabiana Sciarelli and Walter Tortorella. *Il Pubblico del Teatro in Italia* (Napoli: Electa, 2004), 71-72.

and the history of the genre and the institution. Some facts about the traditional consumption of opera may be surprising to a contemporary opera goer: until the second half of the 19th century it was customary to attend the opera every evening, which meant to watch the same performance repeatedly; it was also common to stand, walk around, talk, eat and conduct business during opera performances, which may explain why the theater was always illuminated, even during the performance. Until the early 19th century, opera houses allowed gambling in the foyer. An evening at the opera house was much longer than today, as each bill often included one or two operas combined with one or two ballets.⁴ The centrality of the building, the number of venues, and its role as central to the city's social life all changed dramatically at some point in the history of the institution.⁵ When? Why?

These general questions provided the initial motivation to dig into the institutional and social history of opera in Italy. A study of such history revealed that my questions, or indeed any questions, about Italian opera were complicated and fraught with issues of ideology and construction of a national identity around opera, political divisions of the peninsula until Unification, socio-economic divisions after Unification, the variety of disciplinary approaches to the study of opera, the gaps in the historiography and the peculiarity of the Italian case in comparison with the rest of Europe. Despite these

⁴ This is just a summary of the way opera was consumed in the past with the purpose of underlining the most noteworthy differences with today's ways to experience opera. For a more in depth description of the customary way of opera fruition in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Franco Piperno, "Opera Production to 1780" and John Rosselli, "Opera Production, 1780-1880," in *Opera Production and its Resources*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

⁵ Carlotta Sorba, *I Teatri. L'Italia del melodramma nell'età del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 26, counts 942 theaters in 1868. Considering the diffusion of opera, it is safe to assume that a great percentage would produce operas. Today there are 42 venues for opera in Italy. Of the 14 officially recognized "fondazioni liriche" in Italy today, only 12 consistently produce operas while one, Arena in Verona, has an activity limited to the summer and one, the National Academy of Santa Cecilia, does not actually produce or performs opera but enjoys the same privileges of an opera house. There are then 39 "teatri di tradizioni" that venues for various genres and more or less frequently produce operas.

complications, I found more specific questions that pointed to an institutional and symbolic refashioning of Italian opera theater that became more evident in the final decades on the 19th century.

This dissertation, consequently, is a cultural history of the transformations in the cultural and social status of opera in Italy between the 1870s and the first decade of the twentieth century. I argue that, in this period, not only did the categories of art and entertainment come into existence in regards to opera, but also that the genre and the world of opera attempted to renew and redefine themselves in the light of the social, legislative, and economic changes that occurred in the second half of the 19th century. The redefinition processes developed along two opposing trajectories: on the one hand, the newly acquired commercial potential of a wider popular audience; on the other hand, an elitist redefinition of opera as an artistic and cultural product for the intellectual enjoyment of the cultural urban elites. I argue that it is in the late nineteenth-century, due to the relationship between opera and culture industry, that the world of opera started to acquire a hierarchical differentiation of “high brow” and “low brow” products, venues, communication channels, and types of reception. Using the methodology of cultural studies, this work addresses opera as a complex manifestation of urban musical production in a social, cultural and economic context, rather than as a text. This thesis enriches the rather scarce literature on opera in Italy at the end of the 19th century, with a new perspective on the social and cultural history of the genre and the institution. Its contribution consists in the approach, the methodology used and the focus on cultural distinction categories that help clarify or raise questions about for whom opera was produced and with what purpose.

The key themes, in broad terms, that this work addresses are the question of opera's role in the formation of a national identity and culture, and the application of cultural hierarchies to Italian opera. The two questions are, in my opinion, intimately related and benefit from a mutual clarification and a joint exploration. Accordingly, the overarching and underlying goal of this work is twofold: on the one hand, it attempts to problematize further the question of opera and Italian culture, adding to and conversing with the already rich scholarship on the matter; on the other hand, this work attempts something new -- that is, to approach the history of the institution of Italian opera from a perspective of cultural studies. Obviously, both themes and goals are extremely vast and challenging, so the purpose of this work is to suggest an approach by studying specific cases during a specific period of time. Before speaking to the methods and the approach, it will be necessary to provide an overview of the work that has been done in relation to these themes, and the debates and disciplines that address them.

Many of the debates around the topic have been affected by famously influential statements by Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci. To summarize an otherwise very complex series of observations contained in various books of his *Prisons Notebooks*, Gramsci affirmed that Italian culture lacked a “national-popular literature” and that the success of “melodramma” filled this gap thanks to the non-national character of plots and music, in particular Verdi's operas and the people's fascination for “the melodramatic.”⁶

⁶ “A national-popular literature, narrative and other kinds, has always been lacking in Italy and still is.” Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 368. Gramsci addresses such themes in many years and in several notebooks. In particular, in the second notebook, Gramsci listed the “problems” of Italian culture, among them being the “non esistenza di una letteratura popolare in senso stretto ... e ‘popolarità’ persistente di questo tipo di romanzo tradotto da lingue straniere,” and the popularity of “melodramma italiano ... che in un certo senso è il romanzo popolare musicato.” See Antonio Gramsci, *Letteratura e Vita Nazionale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1950), 58-59. The use of the term “popolare” is often ambiguous as it seems to be used to mean both “widespread

The fact that Gramsci associated the absence of a national popular literature to the popularity of Verdi's opera and its melodramatic character has heavily informed the scholarship on the topic. His observations and their influence underline the importance to tackle jointly the question of opera and national culture and that of opera and "popularity" (or, more appropriately in my opinion, hierarchies of value).

Opera has the potential to perfectly suit the idea of an Italian national culture: it originated in Italy, was written and sung in Italian (not dialect), and performed abroad as an Italian art. The production system was cross-regional well before Italian unification: works, styles, singers, impresarios, scores etc. circulated throughout the peninsula. Opera houses were widespread throughout the whole territory, both in larger urban centers and in provincial towns. After unification, the pedagogical and unifying potential of the theater and its communication power – particularly its oral and musical nature – could have been a way to reach the mass of illiterates. Opera's relevance for Italian national culture and history has been widely discussed by scholars of multiple disciplines. Some works focus on the role of melodrama in preparation for and during the uprisings of 1848 and the independence wars. Other studies explore the role of melodrama after unification in the process of forming a national culture and in relation to the cultural politics of the new state. Scholars' positions on the *actual* role of opera in the formation of a nation and a national culture are, however, often contrasting. Although my work does not directly

among the people" and "famous." The ambiguity of the term "melodrammatico" that could mean both "operatic" or "melodramatic" seems to be affected also by Gramsci's reading of Francesco De Sanctis. De Sanctis, in fact, describes opera as the outcome of Italian literature that became nothing more than "forma cantabile e musicabile," and a popular genre that needs to be enjoyed as the people enjoys it, that is, indulging in "schiettezza delle impressioni." See Francesco De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura* (Milano: Mondadori, 1996), 744, 751. Despite the complexity of Gramsci's views – which in my opinion have often been completely misread and would require longer quotes and analysis than what this location allows – he did indeed associate the concepts of "melodrama" and "national-popular" and this association has affected the views of Italian studies and opera scholars.

address the issue, it engages with it, and the scholarship described here provides an important and necessary background for the present work. As opera historian John Rosselli wrote, “To study the musical life of the nineteenth century means to take a position also on historiographical matters specific to both Risorgimento and liberal Italy, which was born from Risorgimento.”⁷

Whether in agreement or not with the above quotation, Italy historian John Davis summarizes the assumption at the basis of all these varieties of study that explore the role of melodrama in the formation of a national culture. Davis stated that “To argue that opera was important because of its association with nationalism is to get the formula the wrong way around. The reason why the nationalists wanted to harness opera to their cause was because opera mattered.”⁸ The most discussed and influential studies pertain to the connection – or the lack thereof – of opera and Italian independence and unification processes. A ‘patriotic’ view of opera’s important role in Risorgimento is embedded in a common imagery of opera and scholars have often taken it for granted. Furthermore, the history of Italian opera and the history and perception of Risorgimento are characterized by the popular image of composer Giuseppe Verdi as a political composer whose operas not only reflect his political commitment to the cause of Risorgimento, but also functioned and were perceived as patriotic symbols for the generations who fought for

⁷ “Studiare la vita musicale dell’Ottocento significa prendere posizione anche su questioni storiografiche specifiche del Risorgimento e dell’Italia liberale che dal Risorgimento è nata” (my translation). John Rosselli, *Sull’ali dorate: il modo musicale Italiano dell’Ottocento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 8.

⁸ John A. Davis, “Opera and Absolutism in Restoration Italy,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36.4 (2006): 572. The first three pages of this article provide a summary of the issues at stake. Another effective summary is Axel Körner, “Introduction: opera and nation in nineteenth-century Italy: conceptual and methodological approaches,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, 4 (2012): 393-399.

independence.⁹ This popular image has been complemented by scholarly and anecdotal works, which contributed to the persistence of the image of Verdi as “Bard of the Risorgimento” and supported the appropriation of such image for the discourse on national unity and identity. For example, literary critic Alberto Asor Rosa says that Verdi represented the character of a “national soul” and expressed the “true ideals of Risorgimento.” Music historian Gavazzeni considers Verdi a contributor to the *cause* of the events of Risorgimento and states that operatic music was *determinant* in spreading unification ideas among all the social classes.¹⁰ However, scholars from various disciplines have approached documents and evidence in a critical way. Musicologist Mary Ann Smart argues on many different levels for an involvement of Verdi in the Risorgimento.¹¹ Musicologist Philip Gossett shows how Verdi’s choruses carry a political subversive message that refers to Italy’s condition in the years of independence wars.¹² Historian Carlotta Sorba in *Il 1848 e la Melodrammatizzazione della Politica* argues that

⁹ Although the arguments of Verdi’s relevance on Italian political history and that of opera’s relevance are distinct, the implications of the more specific debate on Verdi are very important as they contribute substantially to the studies and the reflections on the role of opera in general in the Risorgimento, they can confirm or undermine one of the ideas at the basis of the discourse on national identity and they can potentially deprive the Italian national popular imaginary of one of its patriotic figures. In particular, a persuasive devaluation of the political meaning of the chorus “Va pensiero,” opposed by Roger Parker, can have an effect on its contemporary use and representation with patriotic meaning.

¹⁰ Gianluca Gavazzeni et al., *O mia patria. Storia musicale del Risorgimento, tra inni, eroi e melodrammi* (Milano: Baldini e Castoldi Dalai, 2011), 53-54 (my emphasis); Alberto Asor Rosa, “Dall’unità ad oggi. La Cultura” in *Storia d’Italia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Corrado Vivanti, vol. 4 book 2 (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 964. Just to make some examples among the works in the category of anecdotal accounts, Pougin, *Giuseppe Verdi. Vita aneddotica* (Milano: Ricordi, 1880) and Bragnolo and Bettazzi, *La vita di Giuseppe Verdi narrata al popolo* (Milano: Ricordi, 1906). More recently Bruno Barilli, *Il paese del melodramma*, ed. L. Viola and L. Avellini (Torino: Einaudi, 1985).

¹¹ Mary Ann Smart, “Liberty on (and off) the Barricades: Verdi’s Risorgimento Fantasies” in *Making and Remaking Italy*, ed. Albert Ascoli and Krystyna Von Henneberg. (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

¹² Gossett addresses the topic first in 1990 in his essay “Becoming a Citizen: the Chorus in Risorgimento Opera,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2.1 (Mar. 1990): 41-64 and then in 2007 in response to Roger Parker’s statements, “‘Edizioni distrutte’ and the significance of operatic choruses during the Risorgimento,” in *Opera and society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu*, ed. Victoria Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2007).

melodrama influences the political discourse of 1848 and its narrative modes.¹³ Historian Alberto Mario Banti attempted to reconstruct the morphology of the Risorgimento and the archeology of the national discourse. According to Banti, melodramatic texts are part of a group of texts, the “Risorgimento canon”, which provided symbols, images and narratives at the basis of the idea of Italian nation.¹⁴ Therefore, not only did opera provide the symbols for a patriotic self representation in 1848, as Sorba states, but also provided the language for the creation of a national image before 1848, as Banti maintains.

Some scholars argue, instead, that the relevance of opera and its composers in this revolutionary time period is nothing more than a construction of the ideology of “making Italians” using the status of opera as a national art. Carlotta Sorba maintains that Verdi as “Risorgimento Bard” is a myth created by the “risorgimentalismo” of the end of the 19th century and was fueled by the lack of historicization of the relationship between opera and society.¹⁵ Similarly, ethnomusicologist Roberto Leydi argues that Verdi has been used as a “tool to make Italy and to make Italian[s]” in a symbolic construction for the building of the nation.¹⁶ Musicologist Roger Parker suggests that Verdi’s role in the Risorgimento is not any more special than that of other composers.¹⁷ Rosselli, although he recognized the close connection between these political events and opera, definitely

¹³ Carlotta Sorba, “Il 1848 e la melodrammatizzazione della politica,” in *Storia d’Italia, Annali del Risorgimento*, ed. Paul Ginsborg (Torino: Einaudi, 2006).

¹⁴ Alberto M. Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000).

¹⁵ Sorba, *Teatri*, 11.

¹⁶ Roberto Leydi, “The Dissemination and Popularization of Opera,” *Opera in Theory and Practice*, ed. Bianconi and Pestelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 293.

¹⁷ Roger Parker, *Arpa d’or dei fatidici vati. The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in 1840s* (Parma: Istituto Nazionale Studi Verdiani, 1997).

questioned Verdi's role in the Risorgimento and devalued the unifying role of opera in general.¹⁸

Most of these scholars claim that the creation of the myth of opera's relevance to national identity took place at the end of the century, and although opera history of this period is, in my opinion, absolutely central for an understanding of the ideological status of opera, it is much less studied than the previous centuries. The most interesting and revealing studies regarding opera at the end of the 19th century are, in the field of musicology, Alexandra Wilson's *The Puccini Problem* and the very recent *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth Century Italy* by Alessandra Campana. Those in the field of history are the volume edited by Carlotta Sorba, *Scene di Fine Ottocento*, Axel Körner's *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*, and Alan Mallach's *The Autumn of Italian Opera*.¹⁹ Among them, the latter is the only publication that provides a bigger picture of the world of opera during the specific time period in question. Its greatest strength is that it encompasses the various figures involved in the production of operas, from composers to publishers to singers, etc., providing a thorough overview of the opera world in its entirety. The other works mentioned are illuminating and fundamental for the present work but more focused on specific cases. Despite the disciplinary difference, what emerges from all of these studies is that the late nineteenth century was also a

¹⁸ John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry from Cimarosa to Verdi. The role of the impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 165.

¹⁹ Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from unification to fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera from Verism to Modernism, 1890-1915* (Boston: Northeastern, 2007); Carlotta Sorba, ed., *Scene di Fine Ottocento* (Roma: Carrocci, 2004); Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

period of economic, artistic, and ideological change or crisis in Italian opera.²⁰ Although the number of theater buildings increased dramatically after unification, and performance spaces spread throughout the peninsula even in provincial towns, as Sorba in *Teatri* and Piazzoni in *Spettacolo* show, theaters and censorship offices were among the first public institutions to be localized.²¹ Some opera houses were forced to close because of increased production costs and competition from other forms of entertainment, such as *café chantant* and prose theater.²² A generally widespread economic crisis caused Italian operatic venues, which traditionally had been central and predominant, to be replaced by venues in North and South America as the most attractive and lucrative centers of operatic production. In part as a consequence of the successful introduction of foreign opera, and in part because of new copyright laws that encouraged a fixed repertory, fewer new operas were being written. The first Italian copyright law was enacted in 1865; it required permission from an author or publisher, as well as compensation to the author or his/her heirs, for every reproduction of any work for eighty years from its creation. Although designed in the 1860s, the law was not enforced until late nineteenth century. Its principles resulted in a shift from one-time commissions from individual impresarios to long-term and controlled use of scores by publishers with regard to opera production.²³

²⁰ See also in particular the effective and insightful summaries of the so-called crisis of Italian opera in Rosselli, *Sull'ali dorate*, 151–69; Marco Santoro, “Imprenditoria culturale,” in *Scene di Fine Ottocento*, ed. Carlotta Sorba, 109–15; Wilson, *The Puccini Problem*, 13–22; and Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition, 1871–1893* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

²¹ In 1867, the property and the responsibility of opera theaters passed from the State to the municipalities. Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo Istituzione e Società nell'Italia postunitaria (1860-1882)* (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2011).

²² Both became more widespread in Italian cities later than in the rest of Europe and were late 19th century phenomena.

²³ On the rights situation before 1865, see Stefano Baia Curioni, *I mercanti dell'opera: storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2011), 62–82; on application of the law, see Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo, istituzioni e società nell'Italia postunitaria*, 224–78; on how the law affected Ricordi in particular, see Baia Curioni, *I mercanti dell'opera*, 82–95.

Immediately after Unification intellectuals and some critics began to lament modern and foreign threats to the Italian operatic tradition; by the end of the century, they expressed it more explicitly. Many commentators came to the conclusion that no composer seemed a worthy successor to Verdi in writing operas worthy of the great Italian tradition. Arrigo Boito wrote regarding “Italian art” that “the thought of its bad state doesn’t allow us relief; ...we preach all day on its miserable state; ... we see our country lazing in a very obscene sin of idleness and ignorance...the blessed fecundity of genius is a rare miracle in Italy.”²⁴ In this context, Richard Wagner stood for everything foreign, different, new, against the Italian tradition, and, in the extreme forms of anti Wagnerism, threatening. For many others, however, Wagner represented an opportunity for a renewal of Italian music.²⁵ Despite the widespread perception of crisis, many Italian operas were successfully composed and produced, some of which had long-lasting effects on the operatic repertory, such as Puccini’s operas (written between 1884 and 1924), Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890), Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci* (1892) just to mention the renowned works.

²⁴ “...non ci da tregua il pensiero della sua mala fortuna; ... andiam predicando tutto giorno il suo miserevole stato; ... vediamo in molto osceno peccato d’ozio e d’ignoranza poltrire questo nostro paese... la benedetta fecondità del genio è raro miracolo in Italia” (my translation). Arrigo Boito, “Cronache Teatrali,” *Il Figaro*, February 25, 1864, quoted in Piero Nardi, ed., *Tutti gli Scritti* (Milano: Mondadori, 2942), 1125.

²⁵ The revolutionary aesthetic innovations of his music and the philosophy expressed in his writing had a strong effect on Italian musical culture of the late nineteenth-century. Wagner had a specific aesthetic and philosophical nationalistic agenda, and a strong position against traditional Italian opera. Wagner also represented an aesthetic and musical alternative to those who felt the need of a reformation of Italian art and a sense of openness, modernity, and internationalization after the disenchantment with the recent unification of Italy. Wagner’s aesthetic and music came to symbolize these various tensions and any controversial current was identified as Wagnerism. Italians found in Wagnerism – or in anti Wagnerism - a way to express their feelings about Italy through the symbolically opposing binaries of Wagner/Verdi, foreignness/national identity, music drama/Italian opera and symphony/bel canto. See Marion S. Miller, “Wagnerism, Wagnerians and Italian Identity,” in *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, David Clay Large et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

As Wilson wrote regarding late nineteenth-century, “there was undoubtedly ... a growing awareness at this time that Italian opera’s predominance in the nation’s cultural life was no longer as secure as it hitherto had been.”²⁶ In fact, the perceived decline of Italian melodrama undermined opera’s ideological status as a national art and Italy’s supremacy in the genre. However, as Körner’s study shows, the aesthetic debates around melodrama, its symbolic qualities and its musical characteristic were still relevant in the cultural politics up to Fascism and are still relevant for a research method with a cultural studies perspective. Along similar lines, Giovanni Morelli argues that opera’s presence even in today’s theaters and imagery shows that melodrama is a means of re-appropriating Italian identity and Italian history.²⁷

The integration of a variety of disciplinary approaches - musicology, history, cultural studies - in both Italian and European scholarship, not only contributed to historicizing and investigating the role of melodrama and its implications for the formation of a national identity, but also raised methodological issues and broader theoretical questions, such as the relation between art and politics, the role of art in the representation or in the formation of collective imaginary, and problems of reception and of connection between sociology and politics of culture. Based on the scholarship on Italian opera – of which only the most relevant examples are mentioned above – it is possible to state that opera had a role - at least a symbolic one - in the unification process as a whole, beyond the political events of the uprisings; if one considers opera as an institution and the opera house as a public building, it is definitely impossible to deny a

²⁶ Alexandra Wilson, “Music, Letters and National Identity: Reading the 1890s’ Italian Music Press, ” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 7, 02 (2010): 101-118.

²⁷ Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture*; Giovanni Morelli, “L’opera” in *I luoghi della memoria*, ed. Mario Isnenghi (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

strong political connotation. However, the extent to which there was an active effort in cultural politics to harness the opera myth, or the extent of the actual diffusion of opera as a genre and opera-going as a practice in the population, are still matters to be explored and questions that the present work attempts to answer.

In order to understand the role of opera in Italian culture and reflect on the influential statement by Gramsci, this work uses the method and categories developed by cultural studies. Such a method (or at least the way I define it) involves approaching opera as a set of symbolic and signifying social and cultural practices through a broad range of documents and materials. Using a cultural studies approach means also, as Forgacs aptly states, “to avoid prior evaluative rankings of high and low.”²⁸ This task is particularly challenging when the object of study is opera, and in particular Italian opera, because there is a strong sense of “evaluative ranking” attached to the genre and the institution, an evaluative ranking that is very often conflicting and lacking historicization. Opera is nowadays generally described as “cultured” genre, a difficult, non-popular form of art. As I have mentioned, Gramsci defined it “popular” and the influential series *Storia d’Italia*, published by Einaudi, defines it as “one of the rare forms of art that is authentically popular and, therefore, universal” comparing it to folk songs and Epinal images.²⁹ For over a century, the aristocracy and the wealthy had almost exclusive access

²⁸ David Forgacs and Robert Lumley, “Introduction: Approaches to Culture in Italy,” in *Italian Cultural Studies. An Introduction*, ed. David Forgacs and Robert Lumley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 1.

²⁹ “Con la canzone, la letteratura di divulgazione e le immagini di Epinal l’opera, ed essenzialmente l’opera italiana... costituisce indubbiamente una delle rare forme d’arte autenticamente popolare, e cioè universale, del suo tempo.” Roberto Paris, “L’Italia fuori d’Italia,” in *Storia d’Italia*, vol. 4, ed. Ruggero Romano and Corrado Vivanti (Torino: Einaudi, 1975), 636.

to opera houses. Theodor Adorno called opera a “specifically bourgeois genre.”³⁰ *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture* contains a chapter on “Italian serious music” that talks about Verdi and opera.³¹ Some sources of the late 19th century report that most famous operatic arias were played in churches, integrated into sacred music, to attract parishioners.³² Composers of the first few years of the 20th century consciously rejected the popularity and entertainment value of opera. Popular, aristocratic, bourgeois; culture, art, entertainment; serious, attractive, difficult: from just a few examples emerges a varied and conflicting picture of opera’s “ranking” throughout history and within each historical period -- and we are not even considering the sub-categories of the individual operas and their locations.

The aim with which this work uses the method of cultural studies is to interrogate the categories of “ranking” applied to opera in a period of time when such categories were relatively new and indistinct. The questions that drive this work are not just by whom and for whom opera is produced, what kind of social classes are involved, and the ideologies embedded in the production system, but also how opera is presented. The hierarchical categories are therefore considered not as intrinsic to the works but as the production of cultural and social dynamics that attribute a status to it and reproduce a certain set of values and beliefs. This approach motivates the point of view of “culture industry” that I will explain later in this introduction.

³⁰ Theodor W. Adorno, “Bourgeois Opera,” in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 29.

³¹ John G. C. Waterhouse, “Since Verdi: Italian serious music 1860-1990,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. Zygmunt G. Baransky and Rebecca West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 311.

³² G. R., in *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, June 6, 1886, 1. “...a poco a poco si venne ad eseguire nelle chiese le cabalette teatrali più in voga, le Marcie trionfali a passo doppio, e perfino I ballabili...la musica noiosa fa scappare I credenti!”

One challenge, or perhaps opportunity, presented by a cultural studies approach to Italian opera is that no work has been done in this direction, at least not in the substantial and effective ways in which it has been done for non-Italian contexts.³³ One exception is Körner's *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy*, which investigates Bologna's cultural history, including its opera history, from a perspective of cultural studies with a specific focus on the construction of a cultural identity at a politics and policy level. The author starts from art and opera to explore their relationship to culture, politics, and society. Körner states that what matters are the "debates, rather than the works of art themselves" and that "the historian's source should consist not of the work of art itself but of the discursive structures informing its use and its reception"³⁴ However, Körner does not engage with the problem of popularity and cultural boundaries as much as he does with the issue of national and cultural ideology. Although not explicitly classified as such, and only partially falling into a possible category of cultural studies, some positive contributions to the Italian context are *Scene di Fine Ottocento*, edited by Carlotta Sorba (2004); Roberto Leydi's "The Dissemination and Popularization of Opera" and Giovanni Morelli's "Opera in Italian National Culture" in *Opera in Theory and Practice, Image and Myth* (2003). The merit of Leydi's work is to bring to light, through a method that can be defined as ethnographic, to the actual presence and relevance of opera among the popular or rural classes and the "folk" cultural products. He talks about a "growing diffusion downward" of opera but underlines that opera did not concern the lower classes

³³ Cultural Studies as discipline started to gain interest in Italy much later than in other countries and only in the past decade there has been a substantial scholarly production in Italian and an attention to the discipline in the university system. The lack of works on opera with a proper cultural studies perspective is probably also due partially to the fact that cultural studies tend to focus on more modern and contemporary cultural expressions, and partially to the fact that opera traditionally has been an object of study of musicology.

³⁴ Körner, *Politics*, 13.

and was not produced and created by the people. His and Morelli's works are particularly relevant to my research because they are the only works that explicitly address the concept of "popular" in relation to opera. Sorba's volume, instead, is significant because it engages with theater culture to investigate the society and the culture that produced and that consumed it. By doing so, it traces a history of taste and the definition of cultural hierarchies. The fact that the volume is not limited to opera but pertains to different genres is valuable because it situates opera in a broader perspective of theater culture and entertainment.

There are, instead, numerous and specifically defined cultural studies works on opera (as well as theater and music) in British and American contexts that demonstrate that the methodology can be used effectively on such topics.³⁵ This scholarship greatly inspired this work and provided concrete examples on how to apply cultural studies

³⁵ Some examples of social and cultural histories of opera and classical music in American, British, and French contexts in particular in the nineteenth or late nineteenth century are: Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: music lovers in the age of Barnum* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011); Paul DiMaggio, "Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The Extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera, and Dance, 1900-1940," in *Cultivating Differences*, ed. M. Lamont and M. Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); John Dizikes, *Opera in America: a cultural history* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); David T. Evans, ed., *Phantasmagoria: A Sociology of Opera* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999); Joseph Horowitz, *Moral Fire. Musical Portraits from America's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); John Lowerson, *Amateur Operatics. A social and cultural history*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); C. Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn of the Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Daniel Snowman, *The Gilded Stage. A Social History of Opera* (London: Atlantic Books, 2009); John Storey, "The social life of opera," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 6.1 (2003): 5-35; William Weber, *Music and the middle class. The social structure of concert life in London, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1975). For a methodological overview of cultural studies applied to music, see Jane Fulcher, "Defining the new cultural history of music, its origins, methodologies, and lines of inquiry," in *The Oxford Handbook of the New Cultural History of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3-14. For more general studies of cultural boundaries see John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975); Joan S. Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Storey, John. *Culture and Power in Cultural Studies. The Politics of Signification* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010); Chris Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Linda Young, *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century. America, Australia and Britain* (London: Palgrave, 2003).

methodologies to opera, and tools on how to investigate cultural boundaries for such a complex genre. This work engages directly in particular with the works by Paul Di Maggio and John Storey, who studied the cultural meanings and the shifting social significance of opera (among other forms of art and culture) in various epochs of British and American history. A comparison of the different cases in the late 19th century (my Milan case, Storey's Manchester and New York and Di Maggio's Boston and various American cities) shows striking similarities and, as my work shows, brings to light new views on Italian opera. According to these scholars, at some point in the 19th century opera was *made* "high culture" and elitist through the involvement of private patrons, administrative changes, the establishment of new ways to experience the shows, and the isolation from the general public.³⁶ This work shows that opera in Italy went through a similar process, although the outcomes might have been different. Di Maggio identifies in the 1930s and 1940s the time when the process of applying the high culture model to opera was completed in America. In Italy the initial developments of the process were the same but, as indicated by Di Maggio, the rise of fascism at this time and its desire to harness opera, among other forms of art, to create a national culture probably altered the process.³⁷

³⁶ Di Maggio, "Cultural Boundaries, 22 explains that in America during the late nineteenth century a change was initiated with institutional changes that involved private patrons from the elites who "established new etiquettes for behavior at exhibitions and performances" and "define canons of art and music, and seal them off from both profane culture and the general public." In chapter 1 I show the similarities with the institutional changes at La Scala and in chapter 4 I trace the new forms of behavior imposed on the audience in Italy. According to Di Maggio "the eagerness of commercial entrepreneurs to attract the largest possible audiences" was the status quo that for some time prevented the formation of the boundaries and, in order to change such status quo, a "distinct institutional system" was necessary.

³⁷ The Italian system of production is still now radically different than the American one and more heavily relying and financed by the public administration.

Each country and each tradition has its own specificity and differences that need to be taken into account. In this case, the political history, the development of a middle class, the extent of the operatic genre's roots in the local culture, the industrial history, and the consequent economic situation were and are substantially different. The use of Anglo-American contexts as models, and working in English on Italian cases and sources, also present linguistic challenges. For example, John Storey writes that the shift between calling opera "work" instead of "opera" or "performance" in nineteenth-century England indicated an "evaluative imperative; an insistence that opera was art, not entertainment".³⁸ A similar explicit signifier could not be found in the Italian language, in which "opera" has the meaning of the English word "work." The use of the adjective "popular" also raises problems. Its first meaning in Italian is similar to "democratic" or belonging or pertaining to all citizens with no distinction. Its second meaning is related to the people intended as lower classes. A third, less frequently used meaning, is synonym of famous or widespread.

Besides the similarities in the specificity of the studies, Di Maggio and Storey's works can function as models and theoretical frameworks. In fact, they show that cultural categories are the products of social history, and they underline that the point is not really whether opera (and which type of opera) *is* in fact "popular" or "high" because, as Storey puts it, "what really matters are the forces and relations which sustain the difference...the relations of power which are constantly punctuating and dividing the domain of culture."³⁹ This view, as typical with that of any work that deals with cultural boundaries and hierarchies of value, is based on theories of cultural hegemony, in this case

³⁸ Storey, *Culture and Power*, 121

³⁹ Ibid.

developed by Antonio Gramsci, and theories of cultural distinction elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. This dissertation often resonates with or refers to these critical and theoretical frameworks. However, it does not engage directly with these theorists' thoughts, in order to focus more closely on the documents and on the specificity of the Italian case and its time frame.

This work considers opera as the product both of an industrial productive system and of a culture, and defines the combination of the two as culture industry. The concept of culture industry was coined by critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer in 1944 to indicate an industrially produced culture fed to the masses to the detriment of “authentic culture” or high art.⁴⁰ To me, to study opera while keeping in mind the concept of culture industry as framework means two things: first, that opera as an object of study is considered as the outcome of a production system that includes the subjects, the strategies, the economy, the desires, the mediators and the relations that made it possible; second, that opera is considered in relation to industrial and capitalist dynamics of production and consumption during a time in which such productive systems just recently came into existence. The most manifest benefit of approaching opera from the big picture of the culture industry is that it allows us to view opera within a productive system that takes into account many of the subjects involved and the multiple steps of this productive system and, most importantly, their reciprocal relations. The approach also permits us to combine the issue of a national culture with issues of cultural hierarchies, since culture industry implies an intersection between production (physical production, distribution and consumption) and ideology. What I hope to achieve with this

⁴⁰ Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

approach is to provide a broad view of what it might mean to make and experience opera in turn-of-the-century Italy and, by so doing, bring to light the peculiarity of how the opera world – with its cluster of memories, tastes, habits, styles and so on – interacted with national culture and the other cultural products and media of the time, with the ideology behind them. Approaching the topic from a culture industry perspective has been key in determining the time frame of this work, and consequently, part of its argument: it is at the beginning of the process of modernization and it is because of the first interaction between industrialized culture and opera that the cultural boundaries emerged and started to shape the status of opera in the modern era.

One of the peculiarities of the world of opera and its productive and ideological system is that opera, since shortly after its origin, was inserted into a complex system of industrial production combined with political patronage. Pre-unification local governors and aristocrats owned the theaters. Impresarios would contract a concession with the owners to run the theater for one or multiple seasons. The impresarios would commission new operas or buy existing ones, hire singers and musicians– as there were no stable or itinerant companies and orchestras – and put together a season. The government and the aristocrats provided an endowment but the impresario was responsible for finding revenues to cover the cost. Opera seasons were most often run at a loss, which meant workers went unpaid and the noblemen who owned the theaters forced to balance the accounts at the end of each season. Although theaters were rented out and managed like businesses, they were tightly controlled by government officials through censorship, police presence and codes of conduct. Music, texts, impresarios, singers and artisans circulated throughout Italy, and their reciprocal relationships were defined by trade,

money and business. Until the 1850s, successful librettos were reused to exploit their commercial value and set to music multiple times by different composers; high productivity was the best quality for a composer and novelty was the keyword that drove every opera season. Composers like Piccinni, Paisiello and Rossini, among many others of that time period, composed on average four operas every year for roughly fifteen years and often had full time jobs at court or in a church. The formal, stylistic and structural conventions allowed for a quick production and the number of theaters and traveling impresarios and singers guaranteed an equally fast and capillary circulation.⁴¹

The connection with the “industrial” aspect of production became more evident in the second half of the nineteenth century. After independence in 1861, the new nation faced enormous political difficulties that partially hindered economic growth. By the 1890s, however, poverty declined, as industrial production, especially in the north of Italy, grew exponentially. The last decades of the century saw the creation of the first Italian industries, as well as technological advancements such as the first electrical plant (1883) and the Gotthard railway tunnel through the Alps, which connected Italy and Switzerland (1882). Technical innovations and industrialization, combined with the consequent urbanization, opportunities for employment, country-to-town population migration, and distribution of wealth, as well as a generalized ideal of national and personal progress, led to increased production and consumption of goods and commodities. Industrialization led to decreased financial inequality among social classes,

⁴¹ This is intended to be just a brief and sketchy summary of the operatic productive system to provide a non expert reader with an idea of the mixture of industrial ways of production and public political patronage or control that characterized Italian opera in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries. For more detailed and complete accounts, see Lorenzo Bianconi, *Il teatro d'opera in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993); John Rosselli, *The opera industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi. The role of the impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, ed., *Opera production and its resources* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

a higher gross domestic product and increased consumer expenditure. One consequence was that more people could afford to go to the opera.⁴² Moreover, traditionally, theatres were owned, supported and attended by the aristocracy and tightly controlled by local governments. Following independence, a lack of patronage or other financial support (for example, by a prince or the state) forced many theatre managements to more broadly consider issues of financing, production costs, ticket sales, and marketing when putting together an opera season.

There are numerous accounts of the history of *opera as industry* that investigate the productive system of the genre within broader social and economic dynamics. Such works are an invaluable source of factual historical reconstructions that are the fundamental basis for any analytical work.⁴³ However, they do not observe *opera in the culture industry*. Few are the studies on opera that do so. One is Stefano Baia Curioni's *Mercanti dell'Opera*, which traces an analytical history of the music publishing company Ricordi that aimed to "reconstruct the institutional creation of art and the ways it gets transformed in the crucial moment of industrial modernity's advent," and looks at the interaction between art and the processes of formation of its economic value.⁴⁴ Another one is the very recent *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy* by Alessandra Campana. Although working from texts (scores, librettos, film, stage manuals etc.), her work constantly engages with institutions, policy, markets and publishing industry to trace instances of the formation of modern spectatorship through the ways opera addresses the audience. The various case studies develop within a context

⁴² Gianni Toniolo, *The Oxford Handbook to Italian Economy since Unification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16–17.

⁴³ Particularly useful references for this work have been the volume edited by Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, *Opera Production and its Resources* and Rosselli, *Opera industry* and *Sull'ali*.

⁴⁴ Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'Opera. Storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2001), 9-10.

of burgeoning culture industry. In particular, the first chapter investigates opera's status as cultural commodity. The works that are most relevant for my approach are not on opera but on culture industry and a variety of cultural products in the era of industrialization: Fausto Colombo's *La Cultura Sottile* and David Forgacs' *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era*. Despite the different topic and time period, their approach has strongly affected the way I tackled Italian opera, and I have aimed to apply their approach, summarized in the following principles. First of all, they consider the cultural product not only as document but also as outcome of a production process composed by the products themselves, the creative subjects, the strategies, and the cultural system than includes them. Secondly, they make distinctions within culture in relation to distinctions within society, the dynamics of the market, and the development of the media. Finally, they recognize a distinction between the advent of modern structures of production and the development of the audience, and between cultural change and political change.

There are two factors that are intimately related to both Italian culture industry and the opera world and, as such, require a more detailed description and definition: music publishers and the city of Milan. They also have an overwhelming presence in this work and played a fundamental role in the opera history of the late nineteenth-century, especially if one approaches it from a cultural studies point of view and within the context of culture industry.

The music publishers were the mediators between the creation of music and its production and use. Ricordi and Sonzogno are the two firms that owned the publishing and performing rights in Italy to all of the operatic music performed in Italian opera houses and to some performed abroad. Both companies also owned and managed music

periodicals and were involved in theatre management at various times and in various cities.⁴⁵ They thus formed a duopoly that had the power to influence the opera seasons of every theatre in Italy. From the beginning, with the commission of operas, through the staging and performances in their theaters, to the reviewing of the operas on their periodicals, and their attempts to exploit the commercial value of operas as long as possible, they were not only actively involved in the life of a work, but also, I argue, were the creators and governors of the material, cultural, political and economic life of the work. Since music publishers had access to the most advanced printing technologies, various forms of print media and the press industry, they were a link between the worlds of opera and of mass communication. The authority of these publishers over theatres and repertory, combined with their involvement in mass communication and publishing more broadly, placed them in a privileged and powerful position from which they could play a role in the ways opera was represented and promoted within Italian culture. These music publishers contributed to the burgeoning process of distinction between elite art and popular entertainment, enhanced the commercial value of operas and promoted the

⁴⁵ Sonzogno founded and owned the daily newspaper *Il secolo* (which in the 1890s had a circulation of 200,000 copies), managed the music journal *Il trovatore* and owned the music periodical *Il teatro illustrato* (later *Il teatro illustrato e la musica popolare* until 1892, when it merged with *Il secolo*). The firm also issued periodicals for the general public and had substantial literary publishing activity. See Silvia Valisa, 'Casa Editrice Sonzogno: Mediazione culturale, circuiti del sapere ed innovazione tecnologica nell'Italia unificata (1861–1900)', *The Printed Media in Fin-de-siècle Italy: Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, ed. Ann Hallamore Caesar, Gabriella Romani and Jennifer Burns (Oxford: Legenda, 2011), 90–106. From the 1870s, Sonzogno also managed opera seasons throughout Italy, and in 1894, he opened his own theatres, the Teatro Lirico Internazionale in Milan and the Teatro Mercadante in Naples. See Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera*, 160. On Ricordi's publications, *The Gazzetta musicale di Milano* was published from 1842–62 and 1866–1902; it was followed by *Musica e musicisti* (1902–05) and *Ars e Labor* (1906–12); other titles included *Rivista minima* (1871–78), *Musica d'oggi* (1919–42) and *Ricordiana* (1951–57); see <http://www.ricordicompany.it/en/page/25>, accessed 28 October 2014. Some scholars have attended to related topics that are essential to reconstructing the relationship between opera and its market in *fin-de-siècle* Italy: on Ricordi's role in the Italian music world, Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera: Storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2011); on the firm's role in the Italian culture industry, Fausto Colombo, *La cultura sottile: Media e industria culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli Anni Novanta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1998), pp. 87–9; on the reception of Puccini's operas, Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

composers that they represented. The all-encompassing structure of their business and their presence at every stage of cultural production make publishers very relevant objects of study in understanding the relationship between opera, cultural industry, and audiences.

Ricordi in particular was a decisive agent in influencing the role of opera in Italian national culture but also in forming the burgeoning culture industry. In fact, for example, Colombo places Ricordi at the center of the newborn Italian cultural industry for the prominent use it made of the art of advertisement and for its contribution to the birth of the image industry. My work draws on and supplements Colombo's claim by suggesting that Ricordi's contribution was, in addition, both influential for the history of Italian music and representative of the new, inevitable intersection between commerce and art that characterized the period. Ricordi's 'image industry' was also indicative of the increasing role that marketing, and consequently commercialization and commodification, played in the system of opera production. However, Ricordi was also involved in the "high" culture of the city, in tight contact with the Milanese intellectual life, and was the founder of one of the first chamber music society of Italy ("la società del quartetto," in 1868) and of the Italian Author and Editor Society, both still existing today.

The choice of focusing on a specific city was necessary to narrow the scope of the study, but Milan is also a particularly prolific context for the aims of my research; the choice is also motivated by the history and the role of this city for the world of opera and cultural industries. Milan is not only the backdrop of all the stories of this dissertation, but it is also a protagonist. Milan had the highest concentration of resources for the opera world, home to one of the major opera theaters in the world, the three major Italian

publishing houses (Ricordi, Sonzogno, and Lucca), many venues dedicated to culture and entertainment, and “eleven agencies, nine theatrical journals, four costume workshops” in 1889.⁴⁶ Milan was also the city where the middle class and industrialization were flourishing and where the first advertisement agencies were born. Critic and journalist Filippo Filippi painted a quite effective portrait of the city’s relevance and perceived image:

Milan has acquired in the past several years a great musical importance thanks to the increased power of the two major publishers, the grandiosity of their plants, and the number of theatrical, chamber and didactic musical works that yearly pop out of their vast factories. One needs to live in Milan – moral and artistic capital; headquarter of all available artists; meeting center for all impresarios; seat to theater agents and journalists – to get an idea of the miserable state of commerce and intrigues in which opera finds itself today.⁴⁷

This description fits the idea of a city dominated by growing culture industry and commodification of culture, consistent with the general perception of Milan up to recent years.

However, the role that Milan played in the cultural history of post Unification Italy has been underplayed by historiography. In fact, as Italian intellectual Alberto Asor Rosa argued, Milan was instead an important bridge with foreign culture, where social tensions created influential ideologies, where both the most “solid progressive bourgeoisie” and “the first socialist groups driven by theoretical conscience” developed

⁴⁶ Fiamma Nicolodi, “Opera Production from Italian Unification to the Present,” in *Opera Production and its Resources*, 170.

⁴⁷ “Bisogna vivere a Milano, capitale morale, artistica, quartiere generale degli artisti disponibili e disposti, convegno degli impresari, sede degli agenti e dei giornalisti teatrali, per formarsi un' idea dello stato miserabile di mercimonio e di intrighi a cui è ridotta oggi giorno l'arte del canto. Milano ha acquistata, in questi ultimi anni, una grandissima importanza musicale, per la accresciuta potenza dei due magni editori, per la grandiosità dei loro stabilimenti e per la molteplicità delle opere teatrali, da camera e didattiche ch' escono, annualmente, dalle loro vaste officine.” Filippo Filippi, “La musica a Milano,” in *Milano 1881* (Milano: Ottino, 1881) <http://www.digitami.it/notizia.do?notiziaId=LO10855213> .

both among educated bourgeoisie and workers. Asor Rosa also pointed out that in Milan the various fields of the arts were interconnected in a unique and self-aware way, also thanks to a cultural system that favored opportunities for this type of encounter in “salotti,” cafes, theaters and artistic associations: in Milan “as in other European metropolises, the evolution of a bourgeois society, while making more and more marginal the function of the artist, caused as a reaction the creation of a proper artists’ society.”⁴⁸ This statement indicates the particular fit of Milan for a study of the tension between cultural/artistic tendencies and a commercial bourgeois world. For all the reasons described in the last two paragraphs, Milan is a particularly appropriate context to analyze the tensions between commercialism and elitism in the world of opera and culture.

The organization of the work reflects the broad perspective demanded by the approach described above. In line with the principles of cultural studies and culture industry, I chose to focus each chapter on different aspects of the opera production process: policy and theater administration; publishing and promotion; press and criticism; and creation and reception. I aim to identify growing, still unresolved tensions between the categories of popular and elitist in each aspect of opera production. In each chapter, I analyze some specific cases that illustrate how various central figures or institutions of the world of opera adjusted to changing dynamics and contributed to the gradual redefinition of the relationship with the audience and the hierarchy of values. In order to detach from established paradigms of Italian historiography of culture, I use an

⁴⁸ “...solidità della borghesia progressista” and “I primi gruppi socialisti animati da una coscienza teorica si sviluppavano fra gli strati avanzati della borghesia colta e fra i nuclei operai” and “come in altre metropoli europee, infatti, l’evoluzione della società Borghese, mentre rendeva sempre più marginale la funzione dell’artista, vi provocava per contraccolpo la creazione di una vera e propria ‘società degli artisti.’” Alberto Asor Rosa, “Dall’unità,” 958.

unconventional mixture of sources, combine an analysis of artistic works and material processes and use a methodologically interdisciplinary approach. All the chapters conceive of opera mostly as a social and cultural experience and institution, tightly embedded in and affected by economic and social dynamics.

The first chapter focuses on what the press of the time called “La Scala case: in 1897 the Milan municipality denied the usual financial support to La Scala theater, which remained closed for that season as a result. The situation stimulated the initiative of a group of wealthy Milanese opera lovers who started a society to reopen the theater under a new management model. By looking at primary sources that documented the negotiations and the agreements between the city and the new management, I deduce how the public administration perceived the opera theater as an institution, and the social significance of this administrative change. My analytical reconstruction of the relationships and negotiations between the municipality and the theater management around the funding of the theater shows not only the decreasing importance of opera as a matter of interest for the politics of nation building, but also the growing attention of the public administration to the social role and the democratic value of its cultural investments. The funding negotiations and the administrative change reveal a rhetoric of social distinction in the cultural politics and demonstrate tensions in regard to the opera theater around the concepts of democracy and public service.

In the second chapter, I investigate Ricordi’s publicity strategies. Ricordi’s advertisement products and the company’s use of the media demonstrate, first, an awareness of the changes happening within the audience and, second, a tension between the commercial and cultural value of operatic products, which led to the need to

differentiate between the types of products and communication strategies to reach different audiences. Although Ricordi, the main music publisher, was one of the first companies in Italy with a specialized department for the printing of visual material and actively worked as an advertisement agent, the history of the opera industry has never been put into dialogue with the history of advertising. This chapter analyzes Ricordi's use of marketing and, in particular, the publicity material prepared for Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème* (1896) and *Tosca* (1900) and for Pietro Mascagni's *Iris* (1898). Ricordi took advantage of opportunities created by modernization, social change, and artistic and economic crises to develop marketing tools that contributed to the success of composers in general and to the mythicization of Puccini in particular.

John Storey, speaking about the relation between intellectual debates, criticism and reality, said that if power “produces reality”, then the descriptions, the articles, the judgments about audiences, operas and aesthetic categories generated a new discourse on opera and the way it was perceived and, as a consequence, generated a “new truth”. He writes: “the reviews are not simply descriptive accounts of performances, they are critical interventions in the cultural politics of opera; they seek to construct a discourse that enables, constraints and constitutes the possible meanings of opera and opera-going.”⁴⁹ In the third chapter, I reconstruct the development of the musical press and the role of the critic. From the 1830s, the number and popularity of periodical publications that included chronicles of musical events increased rapidly, in particular in Milan. The reviews were a mixture of vague theoretical reflections, factual observations, and descriptions of the show and the reaction of the audience. The periodicals were designed to be visually

⁴⁹ Storey, *Culture and Power*, 133-134.

appealing and entertaining. Starting from the 1890s, new publications were created in which the reviews focused on the work rather than on the reaction of the spectators and the function value of entertaining the audience. I argue that in the last three decades of the 19th century, the beginning of a musical criticism based on musicological knowledge and analysis contributed to the diversification of what is perceived as art and what is entertainment. In the 20th century this new criticism became more and more distinct from the previous kinds of musical criticism, not only in its style and forms, but also physically in its media of use. I relate this development in the history of criticism and in the history of the press to the distinction within products and audiences.

In the fourth chapter I interrogate the figures of composer and critic Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) and conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957) to explore the changes in the consumption of operas and the developments in the aesthetics of the definition of art *vis à vis* the market. As Sachs, the major Toscanini's biographer, writes – quoting Gavazzeni - “The public with Toscanini, during that era, was educated to consider the theater not as something for amusement, but as something with a moral and aesthetic function, which enters into the life of a society, into the life of a culture.”⁵⁰ In fact, his innovations in the consumption of operas, his contributions to legitimizing the genius of the composer, and his battles in the name of an artistic quality despite the financial costs provide many examples of the tendency toward the transformation of the opera theater from a social venue to an elitist “Temple of Art”. Arrigo Boito's writings address explicitly the modernist, antagonistic position of artists toward the audience and exemplify the debates regarding the tensions between art and commerce and art and entertainment. On the one

⁵⁰ Harvey Sachs, *Reflections on Toscanini* (New York: Gove Weinfeld, 1991), 173.

hand, both artists contributed to a shift in Italian opera from a functional value of entertainment for the audience toward an autonomous value of the work of art. On the other hand, their involvement in the La Scala administration (in the years described in chapter 1) and with the culture industry embodies the contradictions of an era and of an institution still in the process of defining its social role and cultural status.

CHAPTER 1

“LA SCALA CASE” (1897 – 1901) POLITICS, CLASS AND THE OPERA THEATER

The Milanese opera theater La Scala remained closed for the 1897-98 opera season. It was the first time since the establishment of the theater in 1778 that the doors of La Scala remained closed on a December 26th, the day that for over a century inaugurated the city’s opera season. La Scala had survived fires, wars, economic crises, four government turnovers, revolts and a revolution. What prevented one of the most renowned and prestigious opera theaters of the world from opening that December 1897? The press reported that on that day a sign hung on the theater’s door said: “Teatro alla Scala. Closed for the death of artistic sentiment, city’s decency, and common sense.”¹ This chapter explores what the press and the city administration called “la quistione della Scala” – “La Scala case” – to investigate the political, social, and cultural reasons of its closing and to show the events’ relevance for an analysis of the opera institution in turn-of-the-century Italy.

La Scala was founded in 1778 by a group of noblemen and the Austrian court to replace the old Ducal Theater (Teatro Ducale), destroyed by a fire. The contracts between

¹ “Teatro alla Scala. Chiuso per la morte del sentiment dell’arte, del decoro cittadino, del senso comune.” “Teatri e concerti,” *La perseveranza*, December 27, 1897 . Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

the two established a co-ownership and a shared financial responsibility: the aristocrats owned the boxes, the government owned the building, and both participated in the managing expenses. A contracted impresario would manage the season.² The new theater was one of the biggest of Europe, accommodating an audience of roughly 2.800 people – depending on the year and the orchestra seating or standing arrangements. It became immediately one of the most prestigious and renowned theaters in Europe attracting all the novelties and most famous singers. In the first half of the 19th century, it produced more than fifteen different operas each year and just as many ballets.³ Stendhal, avid patron of La Scala, defined it “the best theater in the world.”⁴ Pietro Verri, box-owner, wrote that La Scala was “*necessary* to spend the evening hours.”⁵ La Scala was a source of prestige for the city and absolutely central to aristocratic and bourgeois life providing both entertainment and a space to socialize six nights a week for five seasons (Carnival, Lent, Spring, Summer, and Autumn).

Since unification, La Scala, as the six other theaters in the peninsula that were previously partially owned but the local governments, became a Royal Theater of the new country, partially owned by the Italian central government. As Royal Theater, La Scala received by the government a yearly subsidy, called “dote,” and funds to maintain the

² The same structure and co-ownership system applied to Regio and Carignano in Turin, la Scala and Cannobiana in Milan, Ducale in Parma, San Carlo and Fondo in Naples. See Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri. L'Italia del Melodramma nell'Età del Risorgimento*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001) and Irene Piazzoni, *Spettacolo, Istituzioni, e Società nell'Italia postunitaria*, (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 2001), 54-60.

³ For more detailed histories of the theater, see Giuseppe Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1984), Luigi Lorenzo Secchi, *1778-1978: il Teatro alla Scala: Architettura, Tradizione, Società* (Milan: Electa, 1977), and Carlo Gatti, *Il Teatro alla Scala nella Storia e nell'Arte, 1778-1963* (Milano: Ricordi, 1964).

⁴ Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 (emphasis mine).

building and to pay the chorus, the dance schools, and the orchestras.⁶ In 1868 the Italian parliament decided for an administrative restructuring of the public theaters and assigned the property as well as the responsibility of managing, control, and fund each Royal Theater to the respective municipalities.⁷ Despite the financial constraints due to the administrative and bureaucratic expenses necessary to create a new and democratic local government,⁸ the Milanese municipality continued to subsidize La Scala as the Austrians and the Italian government had done. According to a nine-year agreement undersigned in 1887 by the city of Milan and La Scala's box-owners, the city contributed L. 240.000 to the theater management and its opera season. As the expiration of the nine-year agreement approached, the municipality started an inquiry regarding the fairness of such subsidy, which culminated in the City Council's vote against the subsidy and against any further negotiation with the box-owners in July 1897. La Scala, deprived both of the subsidy and an agreement between the two owners, remained closed for the 1897-98 season, to the outrage of the Milanese opera lovers and the shock of the international theater community. La Scala managed to reopen for the following season, 1898-99, thanks to a group of entrepreneurs and artists, led by Count Guido Visconti di Modrone, that constituted a joint stock company with a public offering subscription called Società Anonima per l'Esercizio del Teatro alla Scala (Anonymous Society for the Management

⁶ For details about the amounts and the breakdown of such funding, see Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri*, 237, and Piazzoni, *Spettacolo*, 54-60. The same funding structure, to various extent, applied to the other six Royal Theaters of the peninsula.

⁷ Piazzoni, *Spettacolo*, 54-60; Irene Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti all'Ente Autonomo* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1995), 2.

⁸ For information on Milan's post-unification economy see Gianni Toniolo, *The Oxford Handbook to Italian Economy since Unification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16-17, Giorgio Rumi et al., *Milano nell'Italia Liberale: 1898 – 1922* (Milan: Cariplo, 1993), Andrea Colli, "Cent'anni di grandi imprese lombarde" in *La Lombardia*, ed. Duccio Bigazzi and Marco Meriggi (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), and Dario Cimorelli and Giovanna Ginex, *Storia della Comunicazione dell'Industria Lombarda, 1881 – 1945* (Milan, Mediocredito Lombardo, 1997).

of La Scala Theater, from now on referred to as Società Esercente). In light of the private contribution and the community's enthusiasm for the initiative, the municipality conceded to the Società Esercente a reduced temporary financial support of L.140.000 for three years (1898 through 1901), then renewed in 1901 for an additional year. In order to finally settle the thorny "Scala case" the City Council did so much as to call the Milanese citizens to vote on it in a special referendum in December 1901. The majority of the constituents voted against the public subsidy to the theater. In order to maintain the theater open, the Società Esercente regrouped with a new public stock offering and managed the theater until 1918 with the financial support of the municipality, despite the referendum's results.

This chapter addresses the political, ideological, and social facets of the so-called "Scala case" to bring to light some issues related to the function and perception of the opera theater as an institution in turn-of-the-century Italy.⁹ In an attempt to tackle the perception and the function of the opera theater in a period of transition and crisis, this chapter focuses on the point of view of the public administration and analyses the municipal documents of the Comune di Milano and the materials pertaining the theater management from the archives of the Visconti di Modrone family and La Scala archive.

⁹ Some Italian scholars have discussed the events concerning La Scala at the end of the 19th century, in particular historian Irene Piazzoni who wrote an exhaustive, although not analytical, account of the events. from the 1890s to 1920s in *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti*. Historians Carlotta Sorba and Fiamma Nicolodi and sociologists Marco Santoro read such events as representative or exemplary of broader dynamics pertaining the social role of theater, thereby being extremely relevant to my work. Sorba, *I Teatri*, Fiamma Nicolodi, "Il Teatro Lirico e il Suo Pubblico," *Fare gli Italiani* (1993), and Fiamma Nicolodi, "Opera Production from Italian Unification to the Present" in *Opera Production and its Resources*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi, Giorgio Pestelli, and Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Marco Santoro, "Imprenditoria Culturale nella Milano di fine Ottocento: Toscanini, La Scala e la Riforma dell'Opera" in *Scene di Fine Ottocento*, ed. Carlotta Sorba (Rome: Carrocci, 2004). However, Sorba and Nicolodi's broad national pictures necessarily overlooks the specificity of the Milanese situation; and Santoro's narrow focus on Toscanini underestimates the political issue.

While narrowing the focus on a specific theater and on the municipal decisions around it cannot address every aspect of the social and cultural function of the opera theater within turn-of-the-century Italy, the public administration's views offers an interesting insight on the ideological and political role attributed to the opera theater and on the ways to handle the necessarily altered relationship between an institution embedded in its aristocratic origins and the growingly democratic society. In this sense, my work's approach is similar to Axel Körner's task concerning Bologna.¹⁰ His work focuses on the opera theater as a political tool for a city's self-representation and underlines Bologna's public administration's heavy ideological investment in the city's opera theater. My work shows that Milan's administration, instead, was less invested in the theater's ideological role and less clear regarding the artistic, social, and cultural function that the opera theater needed to fulfill. In fact, the analysis of the Milan's Municipal assembly meeting minutes from 1897 through 1901 points to a detachment from the ideological meaning and political power that the opera theater had in the past. Instead, they indicate a struggle in redefining the relationship between governance, society, and ideology. Such struggle led to the closing of La Scala and to the need to redefine such relationships as conditions to the theater reopening as a publicly subsidized theater.

The closing of the theater shows that the opera theater did not have the political and ideological relevance associated with the Risorgimento narrative described in the introduction. By problematizing the political role of La Sclaa, this study contributes to broaden the perspective on the relationship between politics, nationalism and opera in

¹⁰ Axel Körner, *Politics of Culture in Liberal Italy: from Unification to Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2009). A closer comparison between Körner's findings about Bologna and Milan's situation would be a topic worth exploring in further work.

Italy addressed by most of the current scholarship in opera studies and the history of Risorgimento.¹¹ In conversation with the illuminating studies regarding opera and national culture such as those by P. Gosset, R. Parker, and A.M. Banti, my work underlines that the appropriation of opera as a political tool to establish an idea of Nation was not as straightforward as some scholars indicate, instead it was often conflicting. This chapter also contributes to the topic of the so-called crisis of Italian opera at the end of the 19th century.¹² Most of the studies on the relationship between opera and ideology in the Italian context belong to the field of musicology therefore focus on the artistic products and aesthetic issues: the complicated reception of Puccini and *verismo*, the influence of foreign music theories, and the aesthetic debates between Wagnerian ideals and Italian traditions. This chapter shifts the focus from opera to opera theater to add a view on the crisis of opera as institution. Finally, this chapter problematizes even more the question of the “popularity” of opera, partially to contend the often cited popular participation to opera and partially to contribute to a discussion of opera’s diffusion among various strata of the population. By doing so, this chapter lays the groundwork and raises issues necessary for the discussion regarding the popularization and commercialization of opera addressed in the next three chapters.

¹¹ As explained in the introduction, many scholars of opera studies and historians of the Risorgimento – Philip Gossett, Roger Parker, Alberto Mario Banti among others – debate the relevance of melodrama for the rhetoric of Italian unification. See the introduction to this work. An extremely effective summary of the issues at stake can be found in John A. Davis, “Opera and Absolutism in Restoration Italy,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36.4 (2006): 569-594 and Axel Körner, “Opera and Nation in Nineteenth-century Italy: Conceptual and Methodological Approaches,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 17, no. 4 (2012).

¹² I refer here to the brief but insightful summaries of the so-called crisis of Italian opera in John Rosselli, *Sull’Ali Dorate: il Mondo Musicale Italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992), 151–69; Santoro, “Imprenditoria Culturale,” 109–15; Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 13–22; Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition, 1871–1893* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980); Alan Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera from Verismo to Modernism, 1890 – 1915* (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 2007).

The principles underlying La Scala's reopening in 1898 were as significant as the ideological issues raised by the theater's administrative crisis of 1897. After La Scala closed, for the first time the government acknowledged the potential of a social role of the theater – intended as useful to society rather than venue to socialize – and understood that the nature of the institution needed to be redefined in order to make sense in the new democratic society. The reopening both demonstrates the peculiarity of Milanese industrial bourgeoisie and marked a change in the way of making and experiencing opera. In fact, the new management not only reflected the prominent political and intellectual role of the bourgeoisie but also updated the institution and the organization model according to new principles of artistic excellence, attempting to turn La Scala from a social venue into a “temple of Art.”

The sign that was hanged on the theater's door on that 26th of December said that La Scala was “closed for the death of artistic sentiment, city's decency, and common sense.” I argue that the theater remained closed because it could not fulfill its traditional *social* function anymore and it was not yet defined in its new *cultural* purpose. The events concerning La Scala during those years marked the moment of the transformation of the opera theater from social venue for the elites to a cultural and artistic institution. This chapter underlines how the vicissitudes of La Scala revealed that an institution built by aristocrats as “noble” theater to entertain the elites, reflect a hierarchical political image for the ruling classes, and symbolize a status, became irreconcilable with the new needs of a democratic public administration. The role of the opera theater needed to be reframed as an artistic and educational institution in order to be accepted as a public, and therefore publicly funded, institution. However, this shift encompasses a contradiction

due to what scholars like Bourdieu and Ortega y Gasset identified as an anti-popular character of high art, which can be considered as part of an ideology that divides classes instead of fostering equality among them, as the Milanese public administration was hoping to achieve.¹³

The chapter is structured in three parts. The first two parts analyze what I maintain are the two main categories of issues related to the City Council's decision to vote against the subsidy to La Scala: issues of ideology and issues of class. These section focus mostly on the meeting minutes from 1897 and investigate the political and social reasons that motivated the City Council's vote. In the first section, I briefly describe the traditional function of the opera theater as tool for political control and as a potential tool for the creation of an Italian culture to underline the changed relationship between governance and opera institution. I then analyze the reasons for such change by looking at the rhetoric of the councilors speeches from which emerges the irreconcilability between the theater's past glory and modern society. In the second section I explore the issue of opera and class as it was addressed by the City Council. What emerges is a concern for La Scala's function as entertainment for the upper classes. I problematize such discussion by providing a brief description of La Scala's hierarchical structure and history in opposition to processes of "popularization" of the audience and Milan's broad and varied entertainment life. The third section describes Visconti's Società Esercente in

¹³ See José Ortega y Gasset, *La Deshumanización del arte: y otros ensayos estéticos* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1925), quoted in Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 31.

further details to investigate the process of refashioning of La Scala as a “democratic” institution of “artistic excellence,” which allowed the City Council to renew the public support to the theater.

1. CLOSING LA SCALA: OPERA THEATER AND POLITICS

The opera theater was traditionally an institution with strong political authoritative connotations. The connections with power were at the basis of the origin of the genre: operas were organized by the court and offered as entertainment to the guests for occasions relevant to the royal family.¹⁴ As Carlotta Sorba and John Davis point out, the opera theater was a political tool to control social interactions. As the only place that provided opportunity for sociability, the opera theater was encouraged and at the same time strictly regulated and controlled. It served also as a symbolic representation of the courts’ power and wealth that were embodied in the elegance of the buildings and the grandiosity of the performances. The Bourbons and the Church until the Restoration had exercised control over theatrical activity by hindering and censoring the theater as place of moral corruption and potential social turmoil. After the Restoration, even the conservative governments supported the increased construction of theaters as a tool to improve an image of civilization and wealth to project abroad and to the rest of the peninsula.¹⁵ During the Restauration theaters reflected the centrality of the court and were

¹⁴ Massimo Mila, *I Costumi della Traviata* (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1984), 135, Lorenzo Bianconi, *Il Seicento*, Vol. 4 of *Storia della Musica* (Torino: EDT, 1982); Franco Piperno, “Opera Production to 1780,” in *Opera Production and its Resources*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

¹⁵ For details on the involvement of the government and the political and social role for the years before and around Unification, see Sorba, *Teatri*, 33-56. For the sepcific case of Naples, see Davis, *Opera and Absolutism*, 572. See also John Rosselli, “Opera Production, 1780-1880,” in *Opera Production and its Resources*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

therefore representations of power wielded through funding, censorship, and police presence. In Milan, the Austrian government forbade gambling in the theater – the main source of revenue for the management – but heavily subsidized La Scala with 200.000 liras.¹⁶ It also applied strict censorship to potential subversive content of operas and used La Scala to control Milanese people's sociability, to project a positive and powerful image of Austria, and to maintain its subjects content and entertained.¹⁷

Once the Italian government replaced the various local courts in the ownership of the major opera theaters, the parliament debated a liberalized management of theaters while, at the same time, maintained local commissions of prefects and appointed officials to report to the central ministry. The government also expected boxes to be reserved free of charge for the royal family, the prefects, and the ministry officials therefore maintaining both the financial protection and the power of control that came with it. The new nation showed a strong continuity with the previous government, which is surprising considering the violent nature of the revolution for the unification of Italy.¹⁸ Opera was based on a national productive system that preceded the nation itself, and as such it could function efficiently in a nation-building discourse during and after the Risorgimento. Many scholars argue that such use of melodrama was actually a construction of the later

¹⁶ Bruno Spaepen, “ ‘Governare per mezzo della Scala,’ L’Austria e il Teatro d’Opera a Milano,” (Contemporanea, Vol. 4, 2003), 590, and Santoro, “Imprenditoria Culturale,” 112.

¹⁷ Massimo D’Azeglio praised “la finezza e l’avvedutezza del governo austriaco. Esso, si può dire, ha governato per trent’anno la Lombardia per mezzo del teatro alla scala. E bisogna dirlo, fino a una certa epoca vi è riuscito bene,” Massimo D’Azeglio, *I Miei Ricordi* (Rome: Cremonese, 1975), 322, quoted in Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 225. In a completely different manner, Napoleon’s government had also used La Scala for political fashioning of his personal and his ruling. During the Regno d’Italia the Marsigliese was played before every show and many personal achievements of the emperor were celebrated with special music pieces. See Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 50.

¹⁸ The new government in fact maintained the subsidy only for the theaters that were already receiving a subsidy from the previous government and refused the subsidy to new theaters requesting it. So in the case of La Scala, the main reason why the subsidy was provided was because the Austrians were subsidizing it. See Sorba, *Teatri*, 231 and 243.

part of the 19th century¹⁹ while others argue for an active role of the genre and the institution during the Risorgimento. In any case, the “Italian musical supremacy” permeated most of the ideological discourse about music and opera at turn of the century and in that period the opera theater had the potential to be a powerful tool to contribute to the cultural unification of Italy. It seems therefore surprising that, after unification, opera’s productive system and political relevance started to decline. The parliament debates and the legislative action reflected or caused such decline. In a spirit of liberalism of culture, equity among the municipalities, and lightening of bureaucracy, in 1867 the parliament voted to suppress the subsidy to the Royal Theaters and renounce their property.²⁰ Although likely motivated by real and unavoidable pressing financial issues, the parliament’s decision implied a surprising lack of interest for the destiny of the major Italian opera theaters. In fact, not only was the item for the support to the theaters completely and swiftly cancelled from the budget, but also no legislative action was taken to assure an adequate future and reorganization of the theaters’ administration.²¹

Although the decision of the parliament was already symptomatic of a shift with significant implications for the cultural policy of the new nation, I here focus on the local setting of Milan to analyze the reasons for the same shift. Despite the perceived crisis of Italian opera described in the introduction, the major Italian opera theaters, including La

¹⁹ Sorba, *Teatri*, 11; Roberto Leydi, “The Dissemination and Popularization of Opera,” in *Opera in Theory and Practice*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 293.

²⁰ See parliament debates and report of the Commission on Theater of 1863-64 quoted in Sorba, *Teatri*, 241 and Piazzoni, *Spettacolo*, 40-60.

²¹ Because of this decision, many theaters had to reduce production, close, or dismantle the orchestras. Regio in Parma could produce only prose theater for the 1868-69 season and had to renounce to the stable orchestra that Paganini had created according to the highest of European standards in 1834. Sorba, *Teatri*, 246, and Nicolodi, “Il Teatro Lirico,” 268.

Scala, played a very important role for the cities where they were located.²² La Scala was a Milanese institution with a strong symbolic value and a substantial concrete influence on the life of the city. Although by the last decades of the 19th century the seasons' length and number were reduced, and the amount and variety of competing entertainment possibility increased, La Scala was still extremely influential on the life of the city and still holding a prominent artistic position in the international opera world.²³ The seasons now reduced to two (Carnival and Lent), started on December 26 and ran through May with roughly 5 to 10 different operas and 3 ballets.²⁴ La Scala staged opera, ballets, and symphonic music, but it was also venue for numerous charity events, parties of professional associations, Carnival balls, fencing tournaments.²⁵ Every composer would want his opera to be performed at La Scala, which maintained its role of international showcase of opera since its opening, despite managements and funding problems. La Scala's problems and achievements were discussed by any political newspaper of the time, in Italy and abroad.²⁶ La Scala even affected urban planning: the piazza in front of the theater was constantly enlarged and improved, and for important premieres the traffic was deviated and special carriage routes were designed to allow the unusual amount of

²² A phenomenon called "campanilismo." See also Körner's description of the political role of Teatro Comunale in Bologna in Körner, *Politics of Culture*, 221-263.

²³ It should be noted that the theater did not enjoy the hegemonic status that, in the previous years, it had shared only with a handful of European theaters, like Opera in Paris and San Carlo in Naples. By the end of the 19th century new theater centered developed: Wagner's theater in Bayreuth was attracting a lot of attention and the theaters of the North and South America were also gaining prestige and relevance, partially thanks to the wealthy endowments.

²⁴ This is a rough average based on the season from 1880 through 1901 as reported by Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778-1906* (Milan: G. Ricordi & Co., 1906), 240-273, and in Gatti, *Il Teatro*, 65-68 and Bianca Maria Antolini, *Milano Musicale, 1861 – 1897* (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1999), 51-59.

²⁵ See Cambiasi, *La Scala*, 240-273. The foyer was also used for conferences. For example, Barigazzi talks about a "Congresso per gli infortuni sul lavoro" held on October 14, 1897, and the meetings of Patriottica Association.

²⁶ On the press role in covering music related facts, see chapter 3 of this work.

people to reach the theater.²⁷ Librettist, journalist and writer Ferdinando Fontana wrote the following colorful description of the relevance of La Scala for the Milanese audience, which is consistent with the accounts of other writers and with the actual presence of news related to La Scala in the press:²⁸

La Scala occupies two thirds – to say the least! – of Milanese people’s life.... As soon as the Carnival and Lent seasons are over, ... they are already talking about the shows...that will be produced next year.... There is a certain class of people, a very numerous class, that, even if the plague arrived to Milan, wouldn’t stop disserting day and night about the new impresarios, as if nothing else was happening. ... it’s impossible to escape Impresarios! Box-owners! Deposit! Engagements! are the words crucial to all the conversations and the kilometric articles of the city’s newspapers. ... Put three Milanese people in the middle of the Sahara desert; one hour later they will be disserting about the *things of La Scala*.²⁹

If the theater was such an important institution for the city, why did it close in 1897? Why did the City Council made a decision that would definitely bear as consequence the closing of one of the symbols of Milan? The property of the theater was transferred from the central government to the city in 1870. At that time, the municipality’s subsidy was not questioned. Since then, the Municipality subsidized the

²⁷ Stefano Baia-Curioni and Marco Cattini, *Il Mondo Nuovo: Milano 1890 – 1915* (Milan: Electa, 2002), 161.

²⁸ This work, *Milano 1881*, collected essays by some of the most renowned writers, critics and journalists of the time to showcase the city to the thousands of tourists who were in town for the Exposition.

²⁹ “*La Scala* occupa per due terzi (e dico poco !) la vita degli ambrosiani.... Non appena la stagione di Carnevale e di Quaresima è finita, non appena il gran baraccone è chiuso, già si parla degli spettacoli più o meno probabili che vi verranno dati l' anno prossimo venturo; e già le menti sono preoccupate circa la scrittura più o meno facile d'un tenore, d' una prima donna o d'un baritono. Se poi l' appalto è scaduto immaginate che grossa quistione! C'è un certo ceto di persone, ceto numerosissimo, il quale, potrebbe venire la pestilenza a star di casa a Milano, non smetterebbe di almanaccare giorno e notte, circa la nuova impresa, come se nulla fosse. E, non c'è caso, non si può sfuggirla.... tanto più che tutti gli organi, sedicenti politici, della stampa meneghina, gareggiano nel farvela stridere alle orecchie. Impresa ! Palchettisti! Deposito! Scrittura! sono le sole parole che servono di perno alle conversazioni e agli articoli chilometrici dei fogli cittadini. ... Mettete tre milanesi - di quelli che m' intendo io - in mezzo al deserto di Sahara ; un' ora dopo eglino almanaccheranno sulle *cose della Scala*.” Ferdinando Fontana, “I Teatri di Milano” in *Milano 1881*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera and Carla Riccardi (Palermo: Sellerio, 1991), <http://www.digitami.it/notizia.do?notiziaId=SBL0471311> .

theater with L. 240.000, and the Box-owners contributed with L. 50.000 at first, later increased to L. 86.000.³⁰ Milan's municipality only after more than twenty years manifested the same lack of interest for a political control on the theater that the Italian parliament had demonstrated in 1867.

The debate was already heated in the pages of all Milanese newspapers when in May 1897 became reason for heated discussions at the Town Hall as well. The debates had, in theory, two factions: the moderates on one side – the majority until the elections of 1899 - and the radicals and the few popular representatives on the other. The arguments revolved around issues of class, economy, art, history, nationalism or *campanilismo*. The most relevant discussion and deliberations occurred in May and July 1897, when the subsidy was finally denied; in the summer of 1898, to discuss the proposal of the private citizens that stepped up to reopen La Scala; and in 1901, when the agreement with the Società Esercente expired. The analysis that follows in this section focuses mostly on the municipal assembly meeting minutes from May and July 1897 and includes some points of view from the press and the theater professionals.³¹

The discussions that took place throughout the 1896-97 season were initiated by a motion of the association of box-owners that expected the city to renew their latest agreement, signed in 1887 for nine years of subsidy. After such request, the municipality

³⁰ This data is deducted from various meeting minutes of Milan Municipality. Piazzoni instead writes that the municipality was contributing L. 240.000 while the box owners L.58.000. Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti*, footnote 2, 6.

³¹ The press is an invaluable source of information. The amount on articles dedicated to La Scala case is actually impressive. However, as I will discuss in chapter 3, the bias and unprofessionalism of the theater journalists make the use of the press as a source of factual information quite difficult. For this reason, I try to limit it. I report here interesting comments as examples of what some people beyond the city council thought. For further indications on the opinions of the press regarding the matter, I refer to Piazzoni's volume *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti all'Ente autonomo: La Scala 1897-1920*.

started investigating the legal grounds of the public support to the theater. The municipality, at the time of moderate majority under the guidance of mayor Giuseppe Vigoni, seemed to be able to argue that the inheritance from the national government involved only the obligation to maintain the building and insure its use as a theater, but not to finance the costs associated with running the theater. In May 1897 the City Council voted to initiate a lawsuit against the box-owners to determine that the city's subsidy to La Scala was optional and not mandatory. The negotiations with the box-owners association and the consequent decisions were usually handled by the *giunta* without the vote of the Council, however in this case "many municipal interests were at stake" and this was an issue to be solved once and for all in order to face the "important problem of La Scala."³² Another matter to vote was whether to find an interim agreement with the box-owners and grant a temporary subsidy for the following season or wait until the legal proceedings were resolved. The planning for the new seasons took place around this time of the year in order to secure the best artists so, at this stage, no subsidy meant the impossibility to find another solution on time. Therefore the choice was whether to agree to temporarily subsidize the running of the theater – although, the city maintained, they were not obligated – or to have the theater closed for the next season. The agenda presented by the *giunta* in July 1897 insisted that in case the municipality lost the lawsuit with the Box-owners, there was a risk to be held liable for the economic losses and the costs of keeping the theater closed. The moderate *giunta* and the mayor were in principle

³² Meeting minutes of the City Council from May 1, 1897 (Atti del Consiglio Comunale, from now on abbreviated ACC. All of the ACC were accessed at the Archivio Storico Civico in Milan). "Giunta" corresponds to what some city government call Board of Aldermen. The "giunta" is composed only by representative of the elected majority and has executive power, as opposed to the City Council, which is composed both of majority members and opposition parties and has consulting and legislative power.

in favor of the subsidy, but they realized the importance of not making it an obligation. Insisting on the liability risk involved in closing the theater, they were hoping to convince the radicals and the republicans to vote in favor of an interim solution that would “guarantee the status quo, preventing the temporary closing of the theater” to the amount of L. 240.000, while the issue was being discussed in court.

Significant to indicate a changed perspective of the public administration on the political role of the opera theater was the very first suggestion that opened the first city council debate dedicated to the Scala case. The first idea, supported to various extents by representatives of both factions, was to put to vote the option to sell or renounce the property of the theater. According to socialist Councilor Majno, it would have solved all the legal issues with the box-owners, freed the city from the doubts about whether the subsidy was optional or mandatory, and saved the city many expenses. In fact, the municipality co-owned the theater’s shared spaces, like the corridors, the lobby, and the foyer – those areas that did not produce any income – while the boxes were owned exclusively by the box-holders, besides the 5th row and the gallery. Majno was supported by some republicans and democrats, but obstructed by the moderate majority that didn’t even allow adding the option to the agenda. The option might have been legally impossible,³³ but the fact that it was brought to the table was significant of the lack of interest in having any control over the theater. The left-wing parties didn’t yet see the potential of theater as a public service, which instead will be a point of the future socialists municipal administrations. The moderates did not express any interest in having

³³ The city officially accepted the property from the national government in 1870 so it seemed complex to look into the possibility of renouncing it. The Councillor also thought it would be impossible to sell the theater because the city had obtained the ownership for free.

a saying on the operations of the theater. The moderates in fact, in particular Councilor Gaetano Negri, did not react negatively to the idea, as long as the future owners would be bound to use the building for theatrical purposes.³⁴ Nobody was opposed to the idea of having La Scala per se, as nobody actively supported its closing: the city council simply could not see the role that the public administration could have in it. Thanks to the veto of the moderate majority, the option of renouncing the theater's property was also not considered.³⁵ The counter proposition to actually expropriate the theater to cease the litigations with the box-owners and gain freedom and control was not accepted. The bipartisan interest in keeping the theater open is demonstrated by the decisions of the following years and by the councilors' participation in Visconti's joint stock company.³⁶ This occasion was the first time that the issue of the property was under discussion. The relationships and the intents were at this point very distant from the harmony of intents and efforts that in 1778 brought the aristocrats and the Austrian government to build La Scala.

The speech of one of the City Councilors, Gerolamo Sala, member of the moderate party who voted in favor of the subsidy, is worth to be reported in almost its entirety as exemplary for the rhetoric of decline and change that I maintain is indicative of the changed status of the opera theater:

³⁴ The moderate majority in 1870 had imposed on Count Dal Verme to build a theater. Dal Verme bought the old wooden theater Ciniselli and the land on which it was built to have it demolished because it was right in front of residence. However, the city bounded that land to theater use.

³⁵ The radical and republican press was in favor of the option of renouncing the ownership. See, for example, "La questione della scala" in *La Lombardia*, April 29, 1897, and "La questione della scala" in *L'Italia del Popolo*, April 30, 1897.

³⁶ Even the most vocal opponent of the subsidy, Councillor De Herra, bought some stocks.

It seems to me that the generation who witnessed La Scala's glorious times, the days when it was with no doubt a point of glory for our city and a source of light in the disconsolate darkness of the foreign domination, it seems to me, I am saying, that such generation cannot leave La Scala without some defense, in the moment in which the blowing of the new times is threatening to crush it. We are, if you will allow a crass comparison, we are too old friends, old worshippers of this old great succumbing lady, and we can't, not with decency, turn our backs to her exactly on the day when some want to declare it bankrupt and auction its furniture. ...During times when...the City's strength is barely enough to satisfy the growing needs ... one can understand why it may seem intolerable that a great sum of money is diverted from the Administration's essential goals for a secondary, voluptuous purpose destined to benefit only a minority.³⁷

The repetition on the word "old", the use of the past tense to describe the theater, the generational opposition, and the contrast with the "new time" revealed a struggle to see La Scala's purpose. Similar comments were voiced by many other representatives. Democrat De Herra, strongly contrary to the subsidy, declared that he was talking "on behalf of the young generations against the artistic ideals of a past time still supported by the elderly.... We feel the new time Leave the young to represent social needs, we will leave to the old the faded artistic ideals."³⁸ The young age of the members of the opposition was noted by the moderates councilors.³⁹ The supporters of the subsidy themselves always underlined the past, while never addressed the future of the theater.

³⁷ "Pare a me che la generazione che ha visto i tempi gloriosi della Scala, i giorni in cui essa rappresentò indubbiamente un lustro per la nostra città e un focolare nelle tenebre desolate della dominazione straniera, pare a me, dico, che codesta generazione non possa lasciare senza qualche difesa la Scala, nel momento in cui il soffio dei nuovi tempi minaccia di travolgerla. Siamo, se mi permettete un paragone pedestre, siamo troppo vecchi amici, vecchi adoratori di questa vecchia gran dama venuta al meno, e non possiamo decentemente volgerle le spalle proprio il giorno in cui si vuol dichiararle il fallimento e metterle i mobili all'asta. ... In tempi nei quali ... le forze del Comune sopperiscono appena ai bisogni crescenti ... si intende come possa parere intollerabile che una grossa somma sia distolta dai fini essenziali dell'Amministrazione, per un intento secondario, voluttuario, destinato a beneficio di una minoranza." Councillor G. Sala, ACC (July 1, 1897), 458.

³⁸ "In nome dei giovani contro le idealità artistiche d'altri tempi, sostenute dai vecchi.... La sciate pure che i giovani rappresentino i bisogni sociali, lasceremo ai vecchi gli ideali artistici tramontati. – Avanti i primi." Councillor De Herra, ACC (July 1, 1897), 462.

³⁹ "Fa appello ai giovani dissenzienti." Councillor Gadda, ACC (May 1, 1897), 393.

The mayor saw in the Visconti's proposition a way to "raise the theater to the height of its fame and tradition"⁴⁰ as if fame was something definitely not present anymore that needed to be recovered or imitated. Ricordi already in 1885 had read a long speech in front of the municipal government in which he underlined the importance of La Scala in particular confuting the accuses of decay and decline.⁴¹ The "old" and "past" glory and traditions were constantly mentioned as a reason to prevent the closing of the theater and recognized by all the factions. In various speeches La Scala was described as "ancient Glory" worth to be saved for the "glory of its past" and as a theater that *had* a long-standing *tradition* word that implies something valuable, yet something belonging to the past. The word "tradition" was often repeated: La Scala's "glorious traditions" and "ancient and glorious tradition" and "the splendor of its traditions."⁴² As councilor Sala said, the traditional, old, and past institution did not seem reconcilable with the "new times" of democracy. The new times of democracy bring about new priorities and a new sense of equity: "New civilization brings also new sensitivity toward justice and equity of distribution."⁴³

The topic of decline of La Scala pervaded the discussion of all the politicians and all the journalists on the press. While it was often addressed explicitly, it can also be traced between the lines of most of the political speeches. Any commentary of the time and modern work on that time period refer to "the crisis of Italian opera." This "crisis"

⁴⁰ "Nella speranza che questo possa rialzare il teatro all'altezza della sua fama e delle sue tradizioni." The mayor, ACC (June, 1898), 376.

⁴¹ Cambiasi, *La Scala*, xxiii-xxvii.

⁴² "antica Gloria" and "l lustro del suo passato" (ACC July 1897), 457, "tradizioni gloriose" (ACC May 1897), 393, "lo splendore delle sue tradizioni" and "antiche e gloriose tradizioni" (ACC June 1898), 871. See also Cambiasi, *La Scala*, xxiii-xxvii.

⁴³ "La nuova civiltà porta anche nuove delicatezze nel sentiment della giustizia distributive." Councillor Nava, ACC (July 1, 1897), 463.

took different meanings and different declinations but it was a constant point in the discourse on turn-of-the-century opera. In the musicological discourse of the time the “crisis” was an aesthetic fact: the negative influence of foreign music, the absence of new music worthy of the Italian tradition, the inability of Italian music to find its own roots or to find a way in the future, depending on the point of view. When applied to La Scala case, what emerges is that the “crisis” was not explained in specific terms but was used to express a vague sense of longing and past. The vagueness points also to a more general idea of decline that went beyond the opposing aesthetic movements or the specific musical products or economic circumstances. I argue that in this context “crisis” indicated an institutional crisis embedded in the changing social circumstances and in the shift of opera theater’s social role: opera theater as a disengaged entertainment for the wealthy did not find a reason to be anymore.

The concern with the irreconciliability of an elitist institution with the necessity to meet the needs of democratic society was only a partial reason for denying the subsidy. The ambiguity of what the theater was and could be in those “new” times and the failure to see its purpose, and therefore justify the funding, was a more subtle and implicit but relevant reason. An article published on *La frusta teatrale* already suggested that the “fogies” (“parrucconi”) of the City Council were unable “to honor the new ideas [new socialist ideas].... ..it’s just that the doubt that they were wasting money to the only goal of purely and simply keeping La Scala, had made its way even inside those high minds”⁴⁴

⁴⁴ “...di far tanto omaggio alle idee nuove [nuove idee socialiste].... ..è che anche in quelle alte zucche era entrato il dubbio che si buttasse via del denaro senz’altro risultato che quello di tenere puramente e semplicemente aperta la scala.” *La Frusta Teatrale*, February 11, 1898.

Underlining the past glory of the opera theater, in conjunction with the nationalistic discourse and comments like “source of light in the disconsolate darkness of the foreign domination” expressed attachment to the symbolic value of the opera theater as it had been experienced by a generation that lived through Risorgimento in Milan and demonstrate an attempt to justify the theater as monument to national art. In fact, both factions acknowledged the nationalistic importance of the opera theater.⁴⁵ The current ruling class’ passion for La Scala was still rooted in a past when the opera theater was so relevant for the ruling classes and center of the ideological discourse of the new nation. The opera theater’s relevance by turn of the century turned into a memory of its glorious past. To insist on nationalistic motive was part of a discourse that related to Risorgimento and was particularly relevant in the context of musical supremacy of European trends and Wagnerian ideals in the end of the century. The ideological point of nationalism and importance of La Scala for the projected image of the city were addressed frequently. Italian opera’s “supremacy was a long and undeniably honored page of our history” and it was “a fact that need to be at the basis of a discussion of the Scala problem.”⁴⁶ Many insisted on opera as “manifestation of Italian genius”, Italy’s own art, and “national art” in order to portray La Scala as a “glorious institution of our country.”⁴⁷ There Giuseppe Verdi, embodiment and symbol of Italian musical art, premiered his last two operas, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). However, the ideological nationalistic argument did

⁴⁵ However, in a self deprecatory way, like “il primato della musica, unico forse che ci rimanga” Gadda, ACC (May 1, 1897), 393.

⁴⁶ “...codesto primato è una pagina non breve e innegabilmente onorevole della nostra storia, è un fatto dal quale non è possibile prescindere quando si discute il problema della Scala” G. Sala, ACC (July 1, 1897), 458.

⁴⁷ “Una istituzione che è la Gloria del nostro Paese,” and “Un’istituzione che fa onore al Paese,” Gadda, ACC (May 1, 1897), 393, and in opposition to other countries where theaters were not publicly subsidized like in the UK and America. See also Cambiasi, *La Scala*, xxiv.

not convince the Council. As did not even the ideological discourse of the industrial bourgeoisie that wanted to portray the idea of a city as “moral capital” of Italy and as symbol of illuminated cultural patronage to accompany a thriving industrial development.

Despite the efforts of the *giunta*, in July 1897 the City Council decided against finding a temporary solution with the box-owners to subsidize La Scala with 31 votes – including some from the *giunta* members – against the 22 that supported the subsidy. The L. 240.000 of the municipal budget usually spent on La Scala were instead allocated to subsidize the city schools’ refectories.⁴⁸ The group of Councilors who also owned a box at La Scala abstained.⁴⁹ The socialists, the Catholics, and the radicals were in principle contrary to the subsidy and the daily press of each orientation – the radical *Il Secolo*, owned by music publisher Sonzogno, *L’Italia del Popolo*, and *Osservatore Cattolico* – reflected the parties’ agenda and approved the decision. All the theatrical periodicals were outraged.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Santoro, “Imprenditoria culturale,” 115.

⁴⁹ The votes regarding La Scala were complicated by a conflict of interest that involved a substantial number of city Councillors: in fact, at least 10 out of 65 Councillors also owned boxes at La Scala, which points to the expected overlapping of the political class with the wealthy. The Councillors box-owners’ abstention from the vote also underlines the sensitivity to such overlapping of interests in light of the democratic purpose of the elected government. The president of the box-owners association, Leopoldo Pullè, as well as many other members of the association, were either current or former City Councillors, and the former ones were now congressmen or senators. Three of them were going to be future mayors of Milan. They were also patrons and presidents of the major charity institutions of the city, like the Board of the Orphanages, Rural Nursery School Association, and the Congregation of Charity. While is not surprising that most of the box owners were involved in politics, the concern expressed for such fact is a novelty.

⁵⁰ “La questione della scala,” *Osservatore Cattolico*, April 26 and 27, 1897 points out that in the electoral program of the catholic party there was specifically the promise to avoid luxury expenses until all the needs of the working class were met. Moderate conservative *La Perseveranza* employed famous music critic and supporter of opera Filippo Filippi, therefore, considering his role in the Milanese musical community, it is not surprising that the newspaper would print opinions against the city’s decision.

2. CLOSING LA SCALA: OPERA THEATER AND CLASS

The City Council's deliberations of 1897 suggest an acknowledgement of La Scala's symbolic and political value and yet a sense that such value had lost its worth and significance in a democratic society, especially during a period of economic crisis. It was not simply a matter of a changed cultural policy or decreased success for the melodramatic genre or impossibility for the opera theater to serve the same purpose of establishing power and control that had had during the *ancienne r gime*. A deeper irreconcilability between the origin, the system, and the values of the institution and the economy, ideology, and structure of modern society caused the public administration to struggle with their own position within such irreconcilability. The issues at stake were political and ideological, as I described in the previous section, but also based on a very real and concrete economic and social situation of class division and hierarchy. Councilor Sala's statement quoted in the previous section brought up an important point regarding class and distinction: according to him subsidizing La Scala was a "secondary, voluptuary purpose destined to the benefit of a minority." Such comment echoed many other pronounced during the City Council meetings of 1897 that indicate the goal and need to establish what function La Scala had within Milanese society, intended as all the citizens of Milan.

The implicit question was whether the opera theater was relevant to the city and its people. The consequent explicit question was whether, in light of this relevance or lack thereof, the city should fund it. The argument of the popular and democratic parties, as well as that of the catholic and socialist press, was that La Scala was a theater for the wealthy: a small percentage of the city's population and one single social class enjoyed it,

therefore the funding of the theater was not only beyond the responsibilities of the city but also in contrast with the duties of the city. The most vocal of the radical councilors, De Herra, said: “it’s a strident oxymoron that the Municipality spends money for one class of citizens: the duties of the Municipality are very different”⁵¹ “...in a city where we want to expand the custom area, where we fight against taxes, it would be enormous to perpetuate a cost for the Municipality, and such a substantial one, in favor of a more and more limited class, like the one of the box-holders.”⁵² When the issue was discussed again in 1900 and 1901, before the referendum, the socialists maintained a strong opposition. The discussions acquired the tones of the socialist ideology and showed increased awareness of the concepts of class and proletariat. The newspaper *Azione Socialista* wrote: “with the money pulled out from the proletarian stomachs...one cannot – although for the love of art – subsidize a theater intended only for the enjoyment of the wealthy.”⁵³

The moderates debated such accusations saying that thinking that “the subsidy serves to entertain the Box-owners” was a “vulgar mistake.”⁵⁴ However, none of the supporters of the subsidy attempted to argue that La Scala was *not elitist*, or that it was

⁵¹ De Herra, ACC (May 1, 1897), 392.

⁵² “In una città dove si pensa di allargare al cinto daziaria, dove si lotta contro le fiscalità tributarie, sarebbe enorme perpetuare un onere al Comune, gravissimo, a favore di una classe sempre più limitata, qual è quella dei Palchettiisti.” De Herra, ACC (July 1, 1897), 462. In those years the city was working on a proposition to move outward from the city center the “cinta daziaria” that is the boarder after which one would have to pay import taxes to bring goods into the city. Moving the boarder outward would have a strong beneficial financial impact of the people living in the outskirts of the city because the less affluent people who lived outside of the city, thanks to this decision, would not have to pay a fee to bring their products and goods for sale inside the city center.

⁵³ “...coi denari cavati dagli stomaci proletari ... non si deve – per quanto amanti dell’arte – sussidiare un teatro destinato, si può dire, soltanto al godimento dei ricchi.” “Il bilancio preventivo del Comune spiegato ai lavoratori. Per chi va alla Scala!” *Azione Socialista*, January 19, 1901; quoted in Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettiisti*, 75

⁵⁴ “L’errore volgare è che la dote serve a far divertire i palchettiisti.” Councillor Rosmini, ACC (July 1, 1897), 457.

not entertainment for the elites. They could simply argue that the subsidy was not intended to support the elite, but instead was meant to support the economic relevance of the theater. The only way to counter the accuses of elitism was for the moderates to shift the point to economic matters and frame La Scala as an industry that employed many people from the lower classes, and therefore a democratic institution.

During the discussions, the economic impact on a number of people either working for the theater or affected by its activity was the main point used to argue in favor of the subsidy. The theater gave work to roughly 1300 people between technicians, musicians, chorus singers, artisans, designers, ushers, security etc. Around the theater there was a business that affected about 1000 people employed by florists, tailors, publishers, hair stylists and so on.⁵⁵ La Scala was also instrumental in fostering the city's musical life and creating a vibrant theatrical industry. In fact, the Royal Conservatory of Milan and the Dance Academy were opened in 1808 and 1820 respectively with the specific purpose to prepare musicians and dancers for La Scala.⁵⁶ In 1808 Giovanni Ricordi opened next to La Scala his music printing activity, whose history will be tied to La Scala, Milan and the history of Italian opera and whose business employed hundreds of workers in the 1890s.⁵⁷ La Scala made Milan a major theatrical center and fostered a

⁵⁵ Data according to Cambiasi who compiled the statistics based on Giulio Ricordi's speech to the Council in 1885 (Cambiasi, *La Scala*, xxxviii). Giulio Ricordi had pronounced a speech in front of the City Council in 1885 when the amount (not the possibility) of the subsidy was under discussion. As a former season manager, he produced specific number of employees and amounts of indirect business revenues produced by La Scala.

⁵⁶ On Conservatory see Gatti, *Il Teatro*, 47-49 and Barigazzi, *La Scala Racconta*, 63. On the Dance academy see Gatti, *Il Teatro*, 67-69.

⁵⁷ Information on employees pertains to those employed in 1894 at the 4,000 square metre Nuovo Opificio Ricordi (New Ricordi Factory) at Viale di Porta Vittoria 21 (Maria Pia Ferraris, "Graphics at Casa Ricordi," in *Music, Musicians, Publishing: 175 Years of Casa Ricordi, 1808-1983*, ed. Francesco Degrada (Milan: Ricordi, 1983), 192-5. According to Claudio Sartori, *Casa Ricordi, 1808-1958: Profilo Storico* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), in 1884 the plant had the potential to produce 2,500,000 (A1-sized, 70 x 100 cm)

foremost theater industry which in the 1890s included 17 theatrical newspapers, 11 artistic agencies,⁵⁸ 65 voice trainers and professional music instructors, 4 theatrical tailoring and dressmaking companies, various piano rental companies,⁵⁹ and two – the only two – music publishers, Ricordi & Co. and Edoardo Sonzogno.⁶⁰ It was also the first theater in continental Europe to have electricity in 1883 and one of the first buildings to have access to electricity for twenty-four hours per day, therefore fostering business for the electrical company and technical workers.⁶¹ The indirect business was estimated between 6 million and 700.000 liras, depending on the political orientation of the speaker, without including the hospitality business.⁶² The importance of La Scala as industry, its very sizable financial turnover, and the impact on other businesses were facts demonstrated by the books of La Scala management in those years, by the frequent protests of local shopkeepers associations, and by the heavy participation of local small business owners in Visconti's public joint stock company.⁶³

music sheets (representing an unknown number of pages of music), 100,000 posters and 2,000,000 other sheets of coated and plain paper (pp. 49–50); by 1910 the production potential had grown to 25,000,000 music sheets and 50,000,000 illustrated postcards, as well as deluxe lithographic works, catalogues and other printed materials (p. 72).

⁵⁸ For a count and details on the musical periodicals, see chapter 3 of this work. See also Nicolodi, "Opera Production," 170.

⁵⁹ See Cambiasi quoting Ricordi in *La Scala*, xxv.

⁶⁰ Until 1888 there was also the publishing company of Francesco and Giovannina Lucca, then bought off by Ricordi. Lucca was also based in Milan.

⁶¹ Milan had the first electrical plant in continental Europe, after England.

⁶² The first figure according to Ricordi's speech in Cambiasi. The second one is according to the mayor in ACC (1898).

⁶³ Regarding the amount of employees, see "Sport," *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, February 18, 1897, that says that the costume making shop worked for three months employing 200 people to make the costumes for the ballet *Sport*, and that the theater props department employed 100 extra workers starting from the beginning of the opera season and the sets required 120 stagehands and set designers. The Association of Shopkeepers of the city center also had presented a petition to the City Council, signed by 400 shopkeepers, which was mentioned and read by Councillor Rosmini, ACC (July 1, 1897), 457. The newspaper *La Sera* (May 1 and 2, 1897) reports on and publishes two lists of signatures, one of all the hotel owners and one of the business related to the theater.

Despite the effective financial impact of the theater, the point was so heavily exploited to become demagogic. In the moderates' populist rhetoric, subsidizing La Scala became "true democracy" and not subsidizing became depriving the working class of food: "...the subsidy takes care of the true interests of the people because it is work, supplied to many workers, and this is what true democracy is...;"⁶⁴ "...lets not forget that thousands of families live around this theater...;"⁶⁵ "...whoever in good faith believes that suppressing the subsidy would mean looking after the interests of the people, should reflect that it is not by eliminating jobs and taking the bread away from so many working class families that one takes care of the poor's need."⁶⁶

The class of spectator that La Scala attracted, the social function of the theater, the value of prestige attributed to it, and the status of the theater among the other numerous theaters in the city are all underlying crucial points to the City Council's debates and to the present discussion. However, they are also points difficult to grasp and analyze as they mostly deal with a symbolic perception of the theater and there is little data on the actual composition of the audience. Nonetheless, it is important to at least attempt to problematize the issue of La Scala's elitism and aspects of history, architecture and

⁶⁴ "La dote provvede ai veri interessi del popolo perchè è il lavoro, procurato a moltissimi operai, e questa è democrazia vera." Gadda, ACC (July 1, 1897), 457.

⁶⁵ "Non dimentichiamo che migliaia di famiglie vivono attorno a questo teatro." Councillor Antongini, ACC (July 1, 1897), 457, and "Noi dobbiamo considerare quante famiglie di operai vivono intorno a questo Teatro e per le industrie necessarie al suo esercizio." Gadda, ACC (May 1, 1897), 393.

⁶⁶ "Coloro che in buona fede credono di provvedere agli interessi del popolo con sopprimere la dote della Scala, dovrebbero riflettere che non è col diminuire il lavoro e col togliere il pane a molte famiglie di operai che si provvede ai bisogni del povero." Gadda, ACC (May 1, 1897), 393. The few democratic congressmen that opposed the transfer of theater properties to the cities in 1867, attempted the same argument, although in a much more balanced way. For example, Mauro Macchi, in a speech at the Parliament on June 17, 1867, had said that "...theaters provide opportunities and necessity for the wealthy to spend money while thousands of poor or less wealthy families live off it..." ["...i teatri porgono ai ricchi occasioni e necessità di spendere, laddove migliaia di famiglie povere o meno abbienti ci vivono intorno."] Quoted in Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti*, footnote 3, 13.

pricing help us by providing a somewhat more rigorous ground to argue that La Scala was indeed an elitist theater in the 1890s.

There had always been a hierarchy of genres and theaters.⁶⁷ In turn-of-the-century Milan, the hierarchy based on genre applied only to the rare cases of theaters dedicated only to operetta, otherwise the hierarchy among theaters was based on theaters' location, elegance of the building, level of the productions (critical reception, fame of the singers), and ticket cost, rather than on the genre of performance produced. Actually, by 1890s many highly respected and attended theaters produced various genres, including symphonic music or prose theater. As one might expect, different types of audience would attend different theaters based on the hierarchical criteria mentioned above. However, the different genres attracted all types of audiences, that is the aristocrats, high bourgeoisie and intellectuals attended also operetta, circus and *varieta*.⁶⁸

As far as the opera theaters were concerned, the structure of the theater hall implied a hierarchizing of the audience and a negotiation between public and private spaces, that is the building and the boxes. The model of the box theater "all'italiana" was chosen as the standard architecture for the theater in the 19th century and became the image itself of Italian theater abroad." Sorba summarizes very effectively the reasons for such structure:

[it combined] an effective economic system such as private ownership of the boxes, with specific needs of social representation, offering an excellent topographical reproduction of social hierarchies, with a definite but not definitively fixed profile that could be

⁶⁷ For example, traditionally "opera seria" was considered more important and prestigious than "opera buffa" and the two genres were often produced in different theaters, each dedicated to a genre.

⁶⁸ Santoro, "Imprenditoria Culturale," 112.

adjusted with time. More than a simple architectonic type, the box structure became quintessential for the organization of theatrical life...⁶⁹

The theater architecture became the place where ideological and sociological debates developed on a material level.

La Scala could accommodate 2.800 people and had 144 boxes. At first, almost the totality of the boxes were owned and occupied by aristocrats. Some aristocratic families had the right to own a box for free, based on their importance and social status. Basically it was a theater provided from the court and the aristocrats to an audience of aristocrats. Around the time of the unification only few of the boxes still were owned by the same aristocratic families and the new wealthy traders and industrials were slowly taking over because owning a box was an indication of status, and therefore highly interesting to the rising power of the Milanese wealthy class. After unification, La Scala underwent a process of “borghesizzazione” that affected the boxes ownership and the architecture of the shared spaces. In fact, in 1862, 35.5% of the boxes were owned by noblemen, 16% by minor nobles, and 43% by the bourgeoisie. In 1886, the bourgeoisie owned 45% of the boxes, the old nobility 25.8%, and the new nobility (former bourgeoisie) 24%.⁷⁰ The market logic, slowly prevailing over the political one, caused for a “borghesizzazione” of the theater and caused a decrease in the old practice of privileges of free tickets and seats for the notable, although there were still many people who could enjoy free access to the theater, including the City Councilors and the *giunta*.

⁶⁹ Sorba, *Teatri*, 59-60.

⁷⁰ Santoro, “Imprenditoria Culturale,” 114; Nicolodi, “Il Teatro Lirico,” 274.

The architectonical structure of the theater themselves posed problems of price and view, therefore concerned issues of access and reception. Going to La Scala was expensive. In the 1890s, the subscription to a season in the orchestra included about 60 performances and at the time each performance included both an opera and a ballet, providing many hours of entertainment. A season subscription was roughly 150 liras, plus the cost of the rental of the seat, which depended on the type of chair. When Puccini was a student in the Milan conservatory complained that he couldn't afford to go to La Scala.⁷¹ A single seat in the simple chair in the orchestra was 15-25 liras depending on the type of chair. According to Fontana, La Scala's audience was composed primarily by "older people" who usually can be seen dining at upscale central restaurants, ladies, and young entitled people who inherited small fortunes. In the last orchestra rows there were journalists, music teachers and unemployed singers, while the "people" seated in the gallery.⁷² In 1891 the fifth row of boxes – the only one owned by the city's administration – was turned into a gallery⁷³ that had quite affordable seats: a seat in the first gallery, in fact, was 5 or 6 liras and a seat in the second gallery (loggione) was 3.50.⁷⁴ The cheapest option was to stand in the "loggione" for 1.5 liras, affordable for students and teachers but equivalent to the daily salary of a factory worker. The

⁷¹ Letter from Giacomo Puccini to his mother, March, 1883, in Eugenio Gara, *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milano: Ricordi, 1954), 4.

⁷² "Gli elementi del pubblico della *Scala* sono composti presso a poco così: Dei vecchioni che fanno colazione al *Martini* o al *Caffè delle Colonne*, i quali, perchè sono stati giovani una volta, non vogliono più che altri lo sia adesso; delle dame...; dei giovinotti, i quali, perchè hanno ereditato delle migliaia di lire Giornalisti....In fondo, verso la porta specialmente, è un assiepamento di maestrucoli, di cantanti a spasso...il popolo in loggione." Fontana, "I Teatri di Milano."

⁷³ Nicolodi, "Il Teatro Lirico," 278.

⁷⁴ Both Boito and Verdi comment positively on this change, declaring that the this way the theater got rid of a portion of the audience "blasé per posa" and pretentious to be replaced by "borghesi" that can really appreciate the music because "si lasciano impressionare". Giuseppe Verdi, Arrigo Boito, and Mario Medici, *Carteggio Verdi – Boito*, vol. 2 of *Carteggio Verdi – Boito* (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1978), 185-186.

transformation of the fifth row of boxes into a gallery occurred the same year as the formalization of the orchestra space. The orchestra used to be for a standing audience or organized with removable chairs and wood benches for people of all backgrounds that could afford an entry ticket. The orchestra was a dynamic area for the lower classes: one could find soldiers, prostitutes, and vendors mixed with bourgeois men. In 1891 the standing seats in the orchestra were abolished, which was such a big change that the fact had to be reminded on each show announcement for the next 10 years. With the more stable seating, it slowly became a more organized decent space for paying public like the bourgeoisie. This transformation points to the “borghesizzazione” of the opera theater but also to a shift away from a theater meant to socialize, do business, find lovers and so on, into a space only meant to observe a performance.

In fact, addition to underlining the hierarchical societal structure, the structure of the theater imposed or encouraged a way of experiencing the performance that made of the theater-going experience a social experience. In fact, the “teatro all’italiana,” that is the box structure, not only reflected the hierarchizing of class but also reflected the original social role of the theater: looking at each other was part of the show and receiving people in a box as if it was a *salotto* was one of the reasons to go to the opera. If it is possible to compare the opera box owned by the aristocrats to a *salotto*, then the common parts of the theater, the main lobby and the foyer can be compared to the *piazza*: an open space where spectators strolled and conversed before the show and during the intermission. This type of sociality was typical of the bourgeoisie, who made of strolling a main leisurely activity. The social activity that always characterized the theater but was mostly relegated to the box –socializing – shifted to a different kind of more bourgeois

space, the foyer. The theater was originally built with bare and simple rooms and corridors to access the boxes and all the decorative and elegant focus was in the hall.⁷⁵ In 1879 the entrance where servants waited was transformed in a very large and elegant lobby⁷⁶ and the hall of the foyer at the first floor, originally semi private for gambling, was opened up, enlarged and made accessible from many parts of the theater. What drove the necessity to change the shared spaces of the theater was the need for social interaction also for people who did not sit in a box. The desire to hide the areas dedicated to the servants might have played a role: while for an aristocratic audience who basically owned the theater it was no important matter; it was important for a bourgeois class that was accessing an exclusive and prestigious place.

While the implications of the social character of the theatre experience will be addressed in the in chapter four, the structural changes are relevant for the question of establishing whether La Scala could be considered an elitist theater and therefore not be funded. The “borghesizzazione” of the boxes and the foyer and the addition of the galleries indicate an increased number of formally organized spaces for the middle classes and petit-bourgeoisie point to a greater diversification of the audience interested and institutionally welcomed to attend the shows. However, the formalization of such structures for the petit-bourgeoisie affected the sense of exclusivity attached to La Scala. A structured theater with seats in the orchestras and two galleries became accessible

⁷⁵ In 1864 the lobby to access the orchestra was redecorated, as well as the area that was used as waiting area for servants. The changes were considered sufficient for the new audiences and the new needs and there were suggestions to transform the corridor to access the boxes into a strolling and meeting area with benches for conversation. See Rosanna Pavoni and Cesare Mozzarelli, *Milano 1848-1898: Ascesa e Trasformazione della Capital Morale* (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), 249 and 251.

⁷⁶ It is possible that the new modern bourgeois theaters in the city influenced this change. In fact Teatro Manzoni and Dal Verme had very large foyers and lobbies.

based on market laws – anybody that could afford a ticket – rather than based on rules of social privilege caused an increase in prices that reinforced the difficulty to access the theater for the lower classes, although at the same time the new structure compromised the prestige value of the theater. In other words, in the 1890s La Scala was an elitist institution that at the same time had partially lost its elitist symbolic value. A comparison with the other Milanese theaters show that the prices at other theaters that provided performances of comparable quality and novelty were lower and that these theaters architectonic structure was more egalitarian as it was not based on the box model of “teatro all’italiana.”⁷⁷

In fact, although La Scala always maintained a special status of fame and artistic excellence, in the last decades of the 19th century it was not the only theater in the city producing opera at a high level. In fact, of the numerous theaters in Milan, there were nine that produced opera more or less regularly.⁷⁸ Also, as opposed to earlier in the

⁷⁷ Examples of theaters with such structure were Manzoni, Lirico, and Dal Verme (they all still exist today). Manzoni (1870) produced all the news plays of the “commedia borghese” with exceptional casts, but starting from the 1890s also staged high quality opera performances. See Paolo Mezzanotte, Renato Simoni, and Raffaele Calzini, *Cronache di un Grande Teatro: il Teatro Manzoni di Milano* (Milan: Edizione per la Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, 1953), Francesca Socrate, “Commedia Borghese e Crisi di Fine Secolo” in *Scene di Fine Ottocento*, ed. Carlotta Sorba (Rome: Carrocci, 2004), 26-36, and Bianca Maria Antolini, “Teatri d’Opera a Milano: 1881-1897,” in *Milano Musicale 1861-1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1999), 32 - 42. Dal Verme (1872), built by Count Dal Verme to comply with a zoning requirement of the land, was dedicated almost exclusively to opera and ballet. See Fontana, “I Teatri di Milano,” and Antolini, “Teatri d’Opera,” 32 – 42. Teatro Lirico (1894), formerly Royal Theater Cannobiana, had been purchased and restored by publisher Edoardo Sonzogno to function as a showcase for the operas and operettas published by Sonzogno’s own company. See Marco Capra, “La Casa Editrice Sonzogno tra Giornalismo e Impresariato,” in *Casa Musicale Sonzogno: Cronologie, Saggi, Testimonianze*, ed. Mario Morini, Nandi Ostali, and Piero Ostali (Milan: Casa musicale Sonzogno, 1995) and Antolini, “Teatri d’Opera,” 32 – 42.

⁷⁸ Of the nine theaters operative with operatic repertoire in the 1890s, Scala, Carcano, Santa Redegonda and Castelli were historically established; Pezzata, Filodrammatici, Fossati, and Lirico Internazionale were old theaters recently restored; and Dal Verme and Manzoni had been built in the 1870s from private initiative. In addition, the new *varieta* theater Eden also occasionally produced classic Italian operas along with acrobatic performances and other types of musical entertainment. For a history and a timeline of Milanese theaters see Antolini, “Teatri d’Opera,” 21-59, Domenico Manzella and Emilio Pozzi, *I Teatri di Milano*

century, La Scala and opera coexisted with many more and far more inclusive entertainment venues. The number of theaters, in fact, had rapidly increased since unification,⁷⁹ which reflected a national trend: despite the financial and administrative issues that theaters on the national territory were facing, and despite the closing of many theaters, especially in provincial towns, the national census of theaters of 1868 recorded 198 new theaters. The trend continued to the end of the century. However, most of the new theaters were big arenas and *politeama* that staged all sorts of shows from opera, to operetta, to circus and horse shows. Such change was indicative of the increased number of people interested in going to the theater (some of these venues would fit almost 3.000 people).⁸⁰ The number and variety of theaters combined to the great variety of types of entertainment and cultural venues in Milan indicate that the people interested and that could access entertainment had increased in number and diversity. Consequently, the venues and the types of entertainment increased and diversified.

Writer and journalist Leone Fortis wrote in 1891 that when there were no other “manifestations of public life” theaters had an “absorbing importance” in the life of big cities. By the last decades of the 19th century, instead, opera theaters competed with new and diverse forms of socialization and entertainment.⁸¹ In fact, the new classes of

(Milan: U. Mursia, 1971), 43-162. The data is provided in various location in Antolini and here condensed in statistics after integration from comparison with what reported on periodicals of the time.

⁷⁹ After Unification there were 8 theaters that would produce opera, either exclusively or among other shows, plus a circus that would also occasionally stage operas. In the 1870s, three of these theaters closed, but six more were built so that there would be a total of 11 venues that would regularly produce opera in addition to other four theaters that would infrequently produce opera, and the circus that closed early in the decade. This adds up to a total of 16 theaters.

⁸⁰ See Sorba, *Teatri*, 251 and Nicolodi “Il Teatro Lirico,” 281-282.

⁸¹ Leone Fortis, speaking of an earlier time: “...allora il teatro aveva nella vita delle grandi città una importanza assorbente, nell’atonia generale di tutte le altre manifestazioni di vita pubblica.” Leone Fortis, *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, 1891, 383.

industrial, professional, and petite bourgeoisie of turn-of-the-century Milan could enjoy numerous *caffè concerto* venues, two major shopping arcades, department stores, thermal baths, the horse racing course in San Siro, a skating arena, the historic City Arena, puppet shows, panoramas, magic illusion and scientific demonstrations.⁸² New light musical genres imported from other European countries such as operetta and café chantant acquired great popularity and attracted numerous audiences from various classes. Sonzogno contributed to dignify operetta through his activity at Teatro Lirico, but operetta was also performed in most of the smaller and neighborhood theaters of the city.⁸³ *Caffè concerto* also attracted a variety of audience to a variety of venues: there were the upscale venues that would offer operatic arias every night like *Biffi* in Galleria, or venues like *Olympia* built in 1899 with one thousand seats, and many others that attracted different classes but targeted the petit bourgeoisie with disengaged shows in small basements.⁸⁴ Many of the theaters mentioned so far were turned into cinematographers when cinema became a major source of entertainment around 1907. Historian Meriggi's work on forms of social interactions in Milan, points out that the social occasions and venues for social interactions also multiplied: in the first half of the century the *salotto* and the opera theater were crucial for social interaction of the elites. In the 1890s their relevance had not been replaced, but the alternatives had multiplied with new forms of social circles, political meetings, and charity institutions.⁸⁵ Also, the easier transportation and the new culture of leisure brought the wealthy to touristy destinations,

⁸² Nicolodi, "Il Teatro Lirico," 284

⁸³ Antolini, "Teatri d'Opera," 21-59, Manzella, *I Teatri di Milano*, 43-162, and Fontana, "I Teatri di Milano."

⁸⁴ Guido Bezzola, "La Milano dei Loisirs," in *Milano nell'Italia Liberale, 1898 - 1922*, ed. Giorgio Rumi and Enrico Decleva (Milan: Cariplo, 1993), 254 and 257. It belongs to a slightly later period the recreation center and bath house Kursaal that contained also a theater and was built in 1907

⁸⁵ Marco Meriggi, *Milano Borghese. Circoli ed élites nell'Ottocento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1992), 187-193.

also thanks to the founding of the Italian Alpine Club and the Touring Club.⁸⁶ The instrumental music activity was also increasing around this time after the isolated experience of the Società del Quartetto, founded in 1868. However, the status of concert and symphonic music raises questions too complex to be explored in this context.⁸⁷

This brief description of the elitism of La Scala and the variety of entertainment and socialization options would suggest that the majority of the Milanese citizens were not affected by the closing of La Scala, and that the minority that counted could find elsewhere what La Scala provided. However, in July 1898 the City Council voted in favor of a subsidy of L.150.000 to support the new enterprise Società Anonima per l'Esercizio del Teatro alla Scala for three years. Out of 54 voters, only 3 voted against: the socialists and the Catholics. The Council voted also in favor of extra special subsidies, for example to produce some specific shows or provide electricity for free for the concerts of the orchestra.⁸⁸ Many of the radicals who voted in favor declared that the increased private contribution was decisive in their changed vote. Even before the Società Esercente was formed, many had advocated for a move by the local wealthy. The argument was that since the theater was for the wealthy, then the private wealthy citizen should provide for it. Newspaper *L'Italia del Popolo* had argued "If the gentlemen box-owners want the shows, the dances, and the dancers then they should pay for them out of their own

⁸⁶ Francesco D'Arcais, *Nuova Antologia* (September 10, 1889), 369.

⁸⁷ There was also a concert hall in the Institute for the Blinds opened in 1892, music in churches and at the conservatory. The activity of the symphony at La Scala has a complicated history, as does the *Società del Quartetto*. In a discussion of instrumental music in the context of opera's and opera houses' popularity should also take into account that much of the symphonic music performed at the time was based on operatic music. Being most of the other symphonic and chamber music repertory composed abroad, to reconstruct the status of instrumental music production would involve dealing with the challenge of nationalistic bias. I hope I will be able to include such consideration in the future developments of this work.

⁸⁸ See vote of ACC N. 234 (April 22, 1899), 332. The extra subsidy was set to a limit of L. 1500.

pockets, and not with money needed to supply bare necessities to the poor.”⁸⁹ Such arguments were echoed by some of the councilors that stated the necessity for “the private initiative” and wondered “why don’t all these industrial who are interested in the good standing of the theater take action?”⁹⁰ Some argued that “Either the Milanese are, as they say, so proud of La Scala and they will not allow for it to close; or they are not and then it’s not worth to keep open.”⁹¹ The idea that an institution for the wealthy should be funded by the wealthy may seem perfectly fair. However, such idea contained a contradiction: to state that a theater for the wealthy should be funded by the wealthy meant to re-affirm that the source of the funding coincided with its destination, which was the traditional basis of the aristocratic opera theater as described in this section.

Although the initiative of the Società Esercente provided a financial and moral incentive for the municipality to support La Scala, such decision can be interpreted as controversial if one keeps in mind the context of the summer of 1898 and the comments raised in 1897 about the financial difficulties of the municipality to meet the most basic needs of the Milanese people. In fact, despite the new improved distribution of wealth and quality of life, the snapshot of vibrant, musical, bourgeois leisurely Milan described above affected and interested a minority of Milanese people. The city’s population was

⁸⁹ “Se i signori Palchettisti vogliono gli spettacoli, i balli e le ballerina, se li paghino del loro denaro, e non con quello che grava sui generi di prima necessità dei poveri.” In *Italia del Popolo*, May 18 and 19, 1897.

⁹⁰ “The interests related to la Scala should be protected, but ...it is not duty of the Municipality, but of the private initiative. ... And why don’t all these industrial who are interested in the good standing of the theater, act on this?” [“Convengo anch’io che si debbano salvaguardare gli interessi che si collegano alla Scala, ma io affermo che questo è compito non del Comune, ma dell’iniziativa private. ... E perchè non si muovono tutti questi industriali, che sono interessati al buon andamento del Teatro?”] Gabba, ACC (July 1, 1897), 458.

⁹¹ “O i milanesi ... sono tanto fieri, come si dice, della Scala e non permetteranno si chiuda; ovvero non lo sono ed allora non val la pena di sussidiarla.” Nava, ACC (July 1, 1897), 463. Ricordi instead had argued that the wealthy already pay for it with the amount that the box owner contribute to the funding: it might entertainment for the wealthy but they abundantly pay for it. Ricordi quoted in Cambiasi, *La Scala*, xxv.

growing exponentially thanks to the fast economic and industrial growth of the region. In 1895, Milan's population was 435.000 people. The number increased to half a million in 1901. The city's industrialization provided work to many but also raised issues of inadequate salaries and unsatisfactory working conditions. Socialist and catholic social movements became more and more influential and contested the predominant profit oriented mentality and politics. Such social tensions characterized the whole country at the end of the 19th century and exploded in revolts throughout Italy. The revolts, that have been called also "the stomach revolts," have been framed by historiography as motivated by the increased price of wheat 1898. The poverty of the Lombardy farmers and the Milan's subaltern class were only part of the reasons of the revolts in Milan, which were also informed by demands of the newly organized working class movements and accompanied by politically aware strikes organized by the socialists. Milan underwent four days of upheavals concluded by the infamous bloody repression ordered by the government and perpetrated by General Bava Beccaris.⁹² The events took place in May 1898 and have been since then considered one of the most regrettable moments in the history of liberal Milan. The decision to allocate L. 140.000 to La Scala in support to the Società Esercente came just one month after the revolts. During the City Council meeting, the mayor and many members of the assembly acknowledged that discussing such matters was indelicate after the recent events. Yet, they did and the council voted in favor of the subsidy to support the Visconti enterprise.

⁹² See Umberto Levra, *Il Colpo di Stato della Borghesia: La Crisi Politica di Fine Secolo in Italia, 1896 – 1900* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1975), Ernesto Ragionieri, "La Crisi di Fine Secolo" in *Storia d'Italia*, ed. Ernesto Ragionieri, Ruggiero Romano, and Corrado Vivanti, vol. 4, book 3 (Turin: Einaudi, 1977) 1843-1846, Alfredo Canavero, *1898: La Grande Paura: Commenti e Testimonianze di Contemporanei* (Milan: Unicopli, 1998).

The 1898 revolts might have played a role in rushing the decision to allocate money for the Società Esercente. The revolts had been an event that significantly undermined the confidence in the hegemony of the Milanese industrial ruling class and the city required a push for a normalization of the atmosphere in the city and a reestablishment of the hierarchical status quo, of which the opera theater was ultimate expression. Concilor De Capitani said explicitly that the decision would “revive trust, cheer up moral, and reactivate the best sources of public prosperity.”⁹³ In other words, the decision to guarantee the reopening of La Scala was a bipartisan political move to reassure the voters and the ruling class itself and reestablish an order that the industrial bourgeoisie felt was undermined by reinforcing the symbol of political and cultural hierarchy – La Scala – the same theater that just a few months before was actually under scrutiny exactly because of its symbolic value for the elites and society’s hierarchy.

3. REOPENING LA SCALA: “HIGH ART” AND “ACCESSIBILITY”

The financial participation of the private citizens in the expenses to run La Scala played a fundamental role in the reopening of the theater and in the City Council’s decision to provide some subsidy. However, the “Scala case” brought to light issues that went beyond the economic aspects: in the “new times” the theater could not simply be reopened as it was but, instead, it needed a more substantial managerial restructuring and, most importantly, a redefined mission that would fit the new democratic goals of the

⁹³ “Ravvivare la fiducia, elevare gli spiriti, e riattivare le sorgenti migliori della pubblica prosperita.” Councillor De Capitani, ACC (June 1898), 874.

public administration. The Società Esercente provided a brand new managerial structure that could be independent from the public administration but at the same time partially controlled by the Town Hall as partial owner of the theater. The Società Esercente's management structure also guaranteed a new mission for the theater: to provide productions of the highest artistic level. Finally, the partial control by the public administration could guarantee a third aspect fundamental to redesign the social function of the opera theater: accessibility.

Before analyzing the principles upon which the redefinition of the opera theater was based, it will be necessary to report how the Società Esercente came about and how it was structured. Soon after the city council's decision to deny the traditional subsidy to La Scala, voted in July 1897, some personalities of the Milanese industrial and cultural community called a city meeting and created the Pro-Scala Committee (Comitato Pro Scala) in charge of guiding the venture to reopen La Scala and negotiate with the box-holders and the municipality. The Committee elected a Commission to study the feasibility of the idea and produce a concrete proposal. Giuseppe Verdi was the symbolic president of the Commission, which was effectively under the leadership of marquis Giovanni Visconti Venosta, former deputy of the Italian parliament and governmental consultant for national foreign affairs. Writer and composer Arrigo Boito was the Commission's artistic consultant. The box-owner association endorsed the initiative, as did the association of the shopkeepers and various musical and charity institutions. By March 1898, the Pro-Scala Committee announced the public share sale for the non-for-profit joint-stock company that would manage La Scala. The goal was set to sell the shares at L. 250 each to raise L. 300.000 as initial capital. A Società with a strong private

capital was key to present the project to both box-owners and the public administration and ask for their financial support. The public sale went better than expected and 1266 shares were sold.

Based on the suggestions of the Artistic Commission, led by Arrigo Boito and Giuseppe Gallignani, director of the Milan conservatory, and those of the Administrative Commission, a Contract (Capitolato) was drafted. The biggest novelties of the administrative and artistic system were the stable orchestra and chorus, a stable conductor that would also be independently and completely in charge of all the artistic matters, and of a stable general manager. The biggest novelty of the juridical and financial structure was the non-for-profit nature of the business, as well as an increased financial participation of the box-owners, and a decreased participation of the city: the municipality contributed L.140.000 liras (100.000 less than in the past) and the box-owners L. 95.000 (roughly 30.000 more than in the past) and the capital of the company consisted of the L. 300.000 raised by the private underwriting. After obtaining a deal from the municipality and the box-owners for three years of financial support according to the breakdown stated above, and after negotiating the financial conditions for the opera rights with the music publishers, on June 26th 1898 the Società Anonima per l'Esercizio del Teatro alla Scala was created, with count Guido Visconti di Modrone as president and executive officer; Giulio Gatti Casazza (an engineer from Ferrara) as general manager; and Arturo Toscanini as conductor and artistic director. The Board of Directors included renowned industrials, lawyers, and artistic personalities, among which Arrigo Boito and Giuseppe Gallignani. The first of the three seasons opened with *Maestri Cantori di*

Norimberga (in Italian), was praised for the artistic quality of the performances, included five shows at popular prices, and closed with a deficit of L. 100.000.

As it was mentioned in the previous section, in 1898 the City Council approved the reduced funding for the first three seasons with a great majority of councilors in favor. The administrative elections of 11 June 1899 brought to power the radicals guided by mayor Giuseppe Mussi. The radicals traditionally opposed the subsidy, which worried the theatrical community. However, their program of “municipalization” raised hopes for an increased financial participation of the city in the theater. When the three-year contract was about to expire in 1901, the Società Esercente attempted to negotiate with the city for a more substantial subsidy, but obtained instead only one extra year of support of a similar amount as the previous three years. To settle once and for all the issue of the subsidy for La Scala before the contract with the Società Esercente expired at the end of the 1901 season, a great majority of councilors (48) voted in favor of the referendum of 1901⁹⁴ to decide whether the municipality should subsidize the theater at the expiration of the new one year agreement with the Società Esercente. The referendum took place on December 15th 1901: 33% of the constituents went to vote and 61% of them voted against the subsidy.⁹⁵ In 1901, the lawsuit with the box-owners was also finally concluded in favor of the municipality: the court established that the public subsidy to run the theater

⁹⁴ See ACC 25/4/1901 quoted in Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti*, 90-91, and ACC (November 18, 1901), 12.

⁹⁵ “Il referendum di ieri” in *Il Secolo*, 16/17 December 1901 reported 56.983 constituents, 18.905 voters, in favor: 7.214, against: 11.460. It was probably a good turn out considering the typical low participation to political life of those years. For example, for the administrative elections of 1880 out of 4.180 constituents, only 592 voted. Giorgio Fiocca and Alberto Monticone, *Borghesi e Imprenditori a Milano dall’Unità alla Prima Guerra Mondiale* (Rome: Laterza, 1984), 92.

was not mandatory.⁹⁶ The theater risked closing again without any support from the city. The box-owners and the Società Esercente requested a contribution of L. 60.000 from the Municipality for 5 years to organize the opera seasons, on top of the expenses due by law from the city to maintain the building. Despite the results of the recent referendum and the opposition of the socialists, who claimed that any sort of financial support would be like a subsidy and therefore against the will of the voters, a new agreement with the Società Esercente was approved with only 4 votes against in May 1902.⁹⁷ At this juncture the box-owners finally agreed to increase their contribution to L.150.000.

The question of whether culture and art are a civic responsibility of the public administration or rather should be entrusted to the private patronage of the wealthy is at the base of different business models to create, support, and manage artistic enterprises. The different models and the balance among the two have been problematic points of discussion for many governments and societies through history, and the way the arts and culture are organized and funded often define the quality, the accessibility, and the freedom of the artistic offering, and consequently contribute to characterize a given society and culture. The Società Esercente was a new model for Italian theater industry and the Società's goals were interpreted and defined as an effort for the common artistic good of the city and it was often attributed patriotic qualities. Visconti was often compared to a Prince from the Renaissance⁹⁸ and received hundred of letters of gratitude

⁹⁶ The city won both the lawsuit and the appeal. At this time the box-owners still had the possibility to bring the lawsuit to the next level of appeal, "cassazione". There was still a risk to lose and that might have played a role in the decision to support financially the theater despite the negative result of the referendum.

⁹⁷ See ACC (May 16, 1902), addenda report n.16 and addendum XIII "convenzione e transazione" proposed by the Box-owners.

⁹⁸ See letters Archive of the Associazione culturale duca Marcello Visconti di Modrone per lo studio della storia dell'industria (Milan), 438.1, G 107 (fasc.1).

from the Milanese audience. The Visconti venture can be inserted in a broader context typical of Milan that contributed to attribute to Milan the name of “moral capital” of Italy. According to many historians, the private initiative and mingling of classes were characteristics of Milan, a city where the economic drive made the differences and potential clashes between aristocracy and bourgeoisie less important. Also, as historian Marco Meriggi points out, “The two worlds – the essentially bourgeois world of commerce, credit, and industry, and the aristocratic one of agriculture – communicated without inhibitions, being both naturally sensitive to profit.”⁹⁹ In Milan, the individualism of the bourgeoisie had to find a counterbalance in association. Milan was traditionally the city of civil activism and of formation of a social civilization, which was already embedded in the formation of the Milanese tradition of the Risorgimento, and which gave to Milan the attribute of “state of Milan” or “repubblica ambrosina” for the frequent dissent with the Crispi’s central government. Meriggi’s words are again helpful in defining the cultural elites and, consequently, finding the class ideology that implicitly motivated the Società Esercente:

the virtuous world of the private citizens was able to effectively emancipate themselves both from the State’s control and from the obstacles and mental inertia of a conservative old class structure, by contributing in a choral way to economic growth and sharing ... a sociability that was generally based more strongly on solidarity and culture, with the goal to create a self-reflecting identity and to form a certain public opinion.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ “I due mondi – quello tendenzialmente Borghese del commercio, del credito, dell’industria, e quella a forte impronta aristocratica caratteristico dell’agricoltura – dialogavano con discreta disinibizione, sensibili naturalmente entrambi alla dimensione del profitto.” Marco Meriggi, “Lo ‘stato di Milano’ nell’Italia unita,” in *Storia d’Italia. Le regioni dall’unità a oggi. La lombardia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), 14.

¹⁰⁰ “Il virtuoso mondo di privati capaci di emanciparsi fattivamente tanto dalla tutela dello Stato, quanto dai freni e delle inerzie mentali del conservatorismo vetero-cetuale, sia contribuendo coralmetne alla crescita dell’economia, sia condividendo ... una socialità di timbro più genericamente sodale e culturale, finalizzato al rispecchiamento identitario e alla formazione di un’opinione pubblica.” Meriggi, “Lo Stato di Milano,” 12-13.

The key point was the “new times” that emerged from councilor Sala speech, as mentioned in the first section: the *giunta* recognized that “the new management structure that is being proposed is the one that best correspond to the new times and needs.”¹⁰¹ The impresario system that had dominated the operatic industry for over a century did not work anymore. It was a function of the aristocratic political regimes and their lavish spectacles and as lavish funding. In fact, the impresario system had started its decline in the 1870s because it was not lucrative.¹⁰² The costs of production were also rising: the competition from abroad increased the salaries of the singers and decreased their availability; copyright law guaranteed income to musicians; the commercial interest of the duopoly of publishers, Ricordi and Sonzogno, increased the rental fees; and the new needs for artistic excellence increased the costs of production design. The impresario system was driven by profit, by public funding and by the political use of the opera theater by the governors. It is in this context that the non-for-profit nature of the Società Esercente was particularly relevant in guaranteeing the citizens’ interest and in contributing to the higher goal of refashioning La Scala as an institution for the public good.

As far as the public administration point of view on the Scala case is concerned, the private initiative offered to the city an opportunity to address the question of the public responsibility to support the theater. However, such question implied a further

¹⁰¹ “L’ordinamento nuovo che viene proposto è quello che meglio corrisponde ai tempi e alle esigenze.” Board of Aldermen report, ACC (June 1898), 867.

¹⁰² See John Rosselli, *L’impresario d’Opera* (Turin: EDT, 1985), 175; Nicolodi, “Il Teatro Lirico,” 291. It was common that at the end of the season the impresarios would flee the city because unable to pay the artists after a non-lucrative season. Sonzogno had managed la Scala for the 1894-95 season, an example of the new role that music publishers started to fulfill instead of impresarios, also thanks to the copyright laws (see introduction to this work).

doubt: besides the broader question of cultural policy, would La Scala in particular constitute object of such civic responsibility? Could such theater be a civic tool of education and enrichment?¹⁰³ These questions were not on the table of the City Council in 1897: the discourse of the time implied that the opera theater was not suitable for consideration as educative cultural place.¹⁰⁴ Even the strongest supporters of the subsidy did not mention any argument in that direction.¹⁰⁵ The only aspects of La Scala's role for Milan that emerged from the City Council discussions in 1897 were entertainment for the wealthy, source of work for the poor, and good for the image of the city.

The first time when the theater was explicitly defined, at least by the supporters, an "institution of public utility" was only after the new Società Esercente presented its proposal in 1898.¹⁰⁶ Their proposal promised concerts "accessible to the less wealthy" in order for the institution to be "of actual utility for the moral and artistic education of the people."¹⁰⁷ The new system involved the creation of a musical network that involved various institutions of the city and that would be used for "popular and seriously musical shows:" popularity and seriousness of intention was what the Municipality wanted in

¹⁰³ The national government after Unification instituted various commissions and study groups to address such questions, in particular in relation to prose theater, music education, and legislation. See Piazzoni, *Spettacolo*, for a detailed account of such discussions at a national level.

¹⁰⁴ "Nessuno degli oppositori nega le tradizioni gloriose della Scala, ma ciò non può essere element di educazione popolare." Nava, ACC (July 1, 1897), 463. "Si tratta di capire a chi spetti questa educazione" "che educazione artistica popolare si ottiene alla Scala!" Councillor Rossi, ACC (July 1, 1897), 462. "Si tratta di vedere fin dove debbano spingersi le tutele del Comune e se il culto dell'arte, caro a tutti, debba essere pagato col denari del popolo."

¹⁰⁵ The only Councillor that vaguely touched upon the topic was Rosmini who said that people tend to get "attached" to theater because "they find it educational." Councillor Rosmini, ACC (May 1, 1897), 392. The issue of usefulness to people's education was, however, often confused with control. For example, Rosmini, in an attempt to support the subsidy made the example of Napoleon as political government that supported the theater for the purpose of educating the people.

¹⁰⁶ Sala, ACC (June 1898), 873.

¹⁰⁷ "Dignità e influenza educative dell'arte" and "interessi morali ed economici di Milano" Cambiasi, *La Scala*, XXIII.

order to subsidize La Scala and what the new times required. The new company provided “the best guarantees for high artistic intentions”¹⁰⁸ and “obligations” to foster a musical community and invest a certain amount in chorus, orchestra, and conservatory, which were the more underprivileged categories, whose members mostly belonging to lower classes and were usually underpaid by impresarios. The Contract and the Statute of the Società Esercente specifically stated the “accessible” and “artistic” nature of the enterprise. These two concepts allowed to refashion the function of the opera theater in light of the “new times” and therefore were key to determine the support of the public administration. Accessibility was a key criterion to determine the “*popular* artistic education” value of the opera theater. Artistic value, of course, would allow framing the opera theater as a cultural and educational institution. In fact, what emerged from the City Council’s concerns was the necessity for the theater to distance itself from that shallow entertainment function that it had always fulfilled for the wealthy. Mayor Vigoni in 1897 still could not elaborate the political educational program of theater as culture, but still in 1897 he had sustained that “it would be more proper if the shows were more serious.”¹⁰⁹ The “seriousness” of La Scala artistic content became more relevant once there was the possibility to frame La Scala as an institution of artistic dignity with Visconti’s proposal. In 1898 the *giunta* reported to the Council that they were supporting the subsidy as long as La Scala was “a true temple of art.”¹¹⁰ Councilors previously against the subsidy changed opinion because now, with the premises of the Società’s contract, “it is not

¹⁰⁸ “le migliori garanzie di elevate intendenimenti artistici.” *Capitolato per la concessione dell’esercizio degli spettacoli nel Teatro alla Scala*, Art. xii, Archive of the Associazione culturale duca Marcello Visconti di Modrone per lo studio della storia dell’industria, 446.1, I 307, fasc.1.

¹⁰⁹ “Convenienza di dare agli spettacolo una carattere di maggiore serietà.” Mayor Vigoni, ACC (July 1, 1897), 465.

¹¹⁰ Board of Aldermen report, June 21, 1898 and July 28, 1898, 867.

entertainment but an eminent artistic institution”¹¹¹ and “...with its new program, La Scala institution can be defined as truly democratic.”¹¹² The opera theater could become worth of subsidy once it was intended as “educational,” and it could fulfill that function only when it was accessible to the lower classes and was “serious” and “artistic” instead of entertainment.

Such ideological discourses laid the basis for the future role of the socialist and left-wing parties in the support for the arts and culture to benefit all social classes. La Scala’s history in relation to left-wing parties is rich of examples of the socialists’ shift toward a support of the theater. While traditionally the socialists were strongly against the subsidy, in occasion of the referendum in 1901 some started expressing the desire of a greater intervention of the Municipality on the running of the theater “in order to make the theater a true institution of high aesthetic education for the less wealthy classes as well,”¹¹³ hoping that “the time will come when the public services will be municipalized and we will have many theaters made for the people and enjoyed by the people.”¹¹⁴ The socialist dream of a popular theater in Milan will be realized in 1910 with the quite unsuccessful experiment of Teatro del Popolo, with 2000 seats. In 1913 socialist mayor Caldara recovered the idea of La Scala as a popular/social institution in the sense of being cultural and accessible to broader audience reconstituting it as an Ente Autonomo. Such

¹¹¹ “Non si tratti di un divertimento ma di una istituzione artistica eminente” Gadda, ACC (June 21, 1898), 873.

¹¹² “Coi nuovi programmi l’istituzione della Scala si può dire che è veramente democratica” Nava, ACC (June 21, 98), 875.

¹¹³ “allo scopo di rendere il teatro un vero organismo di alta educazione estetica anche per le classi meno abbienti” Osvaldo Gnocchi Viani, “Il referendum per la scala,” *Avanti!* (December 16, 1901) quoted in Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti*, 109.

¹¹⁴ “verrà il tempo che i pubblici servizi saranno municipalizzati, che avremo tanti teatri fatti per il popolo e dal popolo goduti.” Claudio Treves, “Per il referendum della scala,” *Italia del Popolo* (December 13 and 14, 1901).

processes were expression of a broader turn-of-the-century political context of crisis of liberalism and growing socialism and municipalization of the institutions.¹¹⁵

The concept of accessibility to the lower classes was, for the city council and the Società Esercente, a way to reframe La Scala as “public service.” However it demonstrated the ideal intention of the democrats of the municipality, that is to make la Scala more democratic, was unattainable and had to be reframed as “accessible.” The main strategies to make La Scala more accessible were to restructure its architecture (as it had been the case with the addition of the gallery) and reduce the prices. In a similar way as the supporter of the subsidy did not argue that La Scala was *not* elitist and insisted on the democratic value of providing jobs, the educational role was framed in terms of the same elitism, simply made accessible with a similar populist rhetoric. As Bourdieu put it “the self-legitimizing imagination of the happy few has no limits.”¹¹⁶ The 1890s were the first years of experimentation with the so-called “popular evenings” when tickets were sold at popular prices.¹¹⁷ Until the Visconti management such practices were up to the impresario with some negotiation with the Municipality. The Municipality inserted the obligation of “serate popolari”¹¹⁸ in the agreement with the new Visconti administration

¹¹⁵ Regarding municipalization see Donatella Celabi, “I servizi tecnici a rete e la questione della municipalizzazione nelle città italiane (1880-1910) in *Le macchine Imperfette: Architettura, Programma, Istituzioni nel XIX Secolo: Dipartimento di Analisi Critica e Storica: Atti del Convegno, Venezia, Ottobre 1977*, ed. Paolo Morachiello and Georges Teyssot (Rome: Officina, 1980); Fiocca, *Borghesi e Imprenditori*.

¹¹⁶ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 31

¹¹⁷ The first and most influential experiment with popular shows in Italy was organized in Turin by Giuseppe Depanis, “I concerti popolari.” See Giuseppe Depanis, *I Concerti Popolari ed il Teatro Regio di Torino* (Turin: Società Tipografico-Editrice Nazionale, 1914).

¹¹⁸ Councillor Nava asks for the proposition to be added to the agenda to be voted that day and the mayor agrees. Nava, ACC (June 21, 1898), 875.

for the first time in 1898.¹¹⁹ The city also obligated the new Società Esercente to have “posti popolari,” that is 250 seats at 5 or 6 liras, cheaper than regular price.¹²⁰ As indicated in the previous section, seats at La Scala could be very pricey but there were also affordable options in the gallery. However, the 1.5 liras to access the gallery corresponded to the daily salary of a factory worker. A polemic between the socialist journal *Avanti!* and the conservative newspaper *Perseveranza* exemplified the demagogic problem of the “serate popolari.” Claudio Treves wrote on *Avanti!* that “who could afford to pay L. 2.50 could also pay L. 3, while the “operai” would not go to La Scala either for 3 or 2.50 liras.”¹²¹ On the same journal, socialist Cesare Levi advocated for opera performances at very popular prices or free. In that case the socialists “would have been the first to agree to the subsidy.”¹²² *Perseveranza* argued: “If the prices were reduced by half ...could our friends at *Avanti!* Feel comfortable with asking an “operaio” to come up with the other half?” The same article on *La Perseveranza* also brought up another inconsistency between the education principles that were allegedly driving the municipality and the Società, and the confirmation of the hegemony of the opera theater and the cultural policy. The article on *la Perseveranza* continued: “To confuse the necessity of an educational popular theater with the issue of maintaining a true temple of

¹¹⁹ See ACC (June 1898) and *Capitolato per la concessione dell'esercizio degli spettacoli nel Teatro alla Scala*, Art. xii, Archive of the Associazione culturale duca Marcello Visconti di Modrone per lo studio della storia dell'industria, 446.1, I 307, fasc.1.

¹²⁰ Because of the problems caused by the scalpers, the popular seats could to be sold at a higher price on the nights of the premieres.

¹²¹ “Chi era disposto a pagare 2.50 lire ne poteva pagare anche 3, mentre gli operai non si sarebbero recati alla scala nè per 3 nè per 2.50.” Claudio Treves, “Intorno alla scala,” in *Avanti!*, March 28, 1901.

¹²² Cesare Levi, “Il socialismo a teatro” in *Avanti!*, January 11, 1901, quoted in Piazzoni, *Dal Teatro dei Palchettisti*, 18.

high art is a confusion that we are happy to leave to the *Avanti!* intellectuals to solve”¹²³

This view was shared by many commentators of La Scala case. Journalist and future director of the daily newspaper *Il Sole*, expressed very clearly the aristocratic populist position that in a way or another all the City Councilor expressed: “we don’t want to give an exaggeratedly democratic character to art: we just believe that it’s necessary to more appropriately expose it to the audience while maintaining its unique, aristocratic integrity.”¹²⁴ Giulio Ricordi in a speech given at the Town Hall in 1885 had said that “La Scala, for its own true nature, will never be able to be a popular theater, as opera theaters in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Dresden, Munich, Madrid will also never be. ... True art resides at a great altitude: to lower its level equals to kill it. One can maybe study a way to make La Scala accessible to a greater variety of social classes: but that would decrease the income and therefore an increased subsidy would be necessary.”¹²⁵ In fact, the Catholics, in occasion of the referendum, stated officially that the shows at La Scala simply could not serve a purpose of moral and artistic improvement of the people.¹²⁶ After the first year of management by the Società Esercente, the municipality also imposed to increase the number of “popular evenings” to 12 and increase the number of cheaper seats. This

¹²³ “Ma se i prezzi fossero stati ridotti alla metà ... potrebbero gli amici dell’Avanti! Sentirsi il coraggio d’invitare l’operaio a prendersi la spesa di quest’altra metà?” and “Confondere la convenienza di una tratto popolare educativo colla quistione del mantenimento di un vero tempo di elevatissima arte è una confusione che amiamo lasciare agli intellettuali dell’Avanti!” “La Scala e I Socialisti” in *Perseveranza*, March 20, 1901.

¹²⁴ “Non è che intendiamo venga dato all’arte ... un carattere esageratamente democratico: è che crediamo occorra, mantenendo ad essa la sua squisita, aristocratica integrità, avvicinarla meglio al pubblico.” Achille Bersellini, “L’arte servizio pubblico” in *Il Mondo Artistico*, July 31, 1897.

¹²⁵ “Il teatro alla Scala per la sua natura istessa, non potrai mai essere un teatro popolare, come non lo sono I teatri dell’Opera di Parigi, di Vienna, di Berlino, Dresda, Monaco, Madrid.... L’arte vera sta ad una grande altezza: abbassarne il livello è ucciderla. Si potrà forse studiare se non si possa rendere la Scala accessibile ad una maggiore gradazione di classi sociali: ma ne verrebbe diminuiti gli introiti e quindi sarebbe necessario un aumento della sovvenzione.” Ricordi’s speech in Cambiasi, *La Scala*, xxv.

¹²⁶ “L’assemblee degli elettori cattolici contro la dote della scala” in *Osservatore Cattolico*, November 16 and 17, 1901.

lowered income was balanced by an increase in the subscription prices, which affected the wealthy. These strategies, besides confirming the hierarchy and hegemony of culture, they also clearly implied what Bourdieu defined “the hidden conditions of the miracle of the unequal class distribution of the capacity for inspired encounters with works of art and high culture in general.”¹²⁷

The public administration’s intentions and the collaboration with the private company to improve the opera theater’s accessibility and quality demonstrate a need for inclusivity, although not equality, and an acknowledgment that the current status of La Scala was inadequate. However, the process described in these pages also brings to light its own contradictions and the problems involved in the attempt to “popularize” an aristocratic/bourgeois institution that produces a form of entertainment that is commercial and widespread among various strata of the population, and attempts to do so by reframing such entertainment as “high art.” The artistic value of the theater was necessary to politically redefine the theater’s social role but, at the same time, encompassed the incommensurability of “high art” and popularizing intents. One of Bourdieu’s observations is helpful in viewing the problems that the public administration was facing in redefining the social function of La Scala: “Except for products designed for a particular use (like ‘slimming bread’) or closely tied to a class by tradition (like tea – in France) or price (like caviar), most products only derive their social value from the social

¹²⁷ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 29.

use that is made of them.”¹²⁸ One of the reasons why the process described in these pages was so complex was that La Scala’s value was defined by its connection to a class both by tradition and by cost, therefore the attempts to turn it into a product that instead would derive its social value from the “social use” made of it, presented a challenge. Many had said that opera was the only truly popular form of art, but while opera might have been, opera theater, and in particular La Scala, was not popular. The administration’s concerns were not directed toward the creation or fostering of a truly popular art form, but as a populist diffusion “downward” of Art, intended as one and only Art to which everybody should have access.

Besides the problems of cultural distinction and hegemony that were embedded in the renegotiation of La Scala’s social function, the theater’s complex turn-of-the-century history reminds of similar issues of public cultural policy that are still at stake today. A cultural policy based on liberalism combined with a market system revealed the ambiguity of the public administration’s role and the delicate balance between cultural policy, politics and economy that characterizes any democratic state and that, in the case of Italy, is still today shifting and complex.¹²⁹ The events described in these pages

¹²⁸ Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 21.

¹²⁹ Issues similar to those described in this chapter are at stake in the current politics, economy and administration of the opera theater in Italy. In fact, issues of public funding to Italian opera theaters are often discussed by politicians and professionals of the field along lines similar to those of the turn of the last century. Modern Italian opera theaters are organized in private foundations with a strong public participation (for example the president of La Scala foundation is always the mayor of Milan). The tensions between the public administration and the private board of directors, and of both bodies with the artistic director, bring to light the same issues of political intervention and artistic mission under discussion for the first time in the 1890s. Also, the Italian opera theaters receive substantial public funding, from both the central government’s Fund for the Performing Arts “F.U.S. Fondo Unico per lo Spettacolo” and the respective cities. The amount of the funding assigned to the performing arts is often as much a point of quarrel and political exploitation as it was during “La Scala case.” In particular, the polemics nowadays regard the fairness of the distribution of the Fund: the fourteen Italian opera theaters (Fondazioni Lirico-

represent the first interaction between opera theater, and by extension operatic genre, and the concepts of popular culture and art as public service.

The acknowledgement of the traditional elitist destination of the opera theater and of its entertainment function that occurred in these years was determinant for the initiation of the refashioning process of the opera theater. Sorba's description of the opera theater in the years before the events described in this chapter will help us making some concluding consideration that set the stage (from an administrative point of view) for the investigation of the phenomenon of popularization, commercialization and elitism of the next chapters. Sorba wrote that the opera theater was based "on the sharing of responsibility between local noble families," that the theaters were "city's spaces dedicated to leisure,"¹³⁰ and theater-going was a "an almost daily *social habit* of the city's nobles."¹³¹ If, as Sorba explains, this was the foundation of the Italian operatic system, this foundation ceased to exist when the new democratic liberal state become one of the factors in the equation of the opera industry. The public administration saw the irreconcilability of the public mission of the municipality with that of the opera theater. In the attempt of correct such irreconcilability the faced a new problem: how to reconcile a costly form of art, managed by a group of wealthy citizens with the ideal of a theater as education for the people. While the political influence on the theater as form of control

sinfoniche) absorb the proportional majority of the fund, around 40% of the total. Prose theater, dance, classical and popular live music, circus and some cinematographic activity share the rest.

¹³⁰ "Sulla condivisione di responsabilità tra famiglie nobili locali ed eventualmente autorità municipali si era fondata l'impresa della costruzione e della gestione dei teatri, come spazi cittadini dedicati allo svago che l'assetto gerarchico della sala all'italiana permetteva di mantenere almeno virtualmente aperti all'intera cittadinanza. Una sorta di esigenza civica, che corrispondeva in realtà ad una palese identificazione del teatro con l'immagine di sé, aveva a lungo collegato i notabili locali a quell'impresa e ad un edificio monumentale a cui si era provveduto inizialmente senza badare troppo a spese." Sorba, *Teatri*, 256-257.

¹³¹ "...consuetudine sociale pressoché quotidiana dei notabili della città." Sorba, *Teatri*, 93 (emphasis mine).

was surpassed, forcing an institution to become democratic was an equally political attempt to confirm the hegemony of the institution, just declining it in cultural terms.

CHAPTER 2

RICORDI'S "PUBLICITY STRINGS" POPULARIZATION, DISTINCTION, AND THE POWER OF ADVERTISEMENT

"Even when one writes a masterpiece, one runs the risk of being either unheard or pitied. The best of all is to wait and see, as a spectator, how this colossal comedy will end, a comedy in which entire nations act like puppets shaken by the strings of réclame"

Alfredo Catalani (1854-1893), opera composer¹

The words of Alfredo Catalani, the formerly renowned composer of *La Wally* and *Loreley* but now almost forgotten, raise a fundamental question for the world of opera in both *fin de siècle* Italy and today: who is actually responsible for the success and the value of a work of art? What is the role of the author? The quote also addresses more broadly some typical concerns of industrialized societies that are on their way to modernism, consumerism, and commodification of culture: the relationship between an ideal aesthetic value of culture and its commercial one; problems of reception; the manipulative power of advertisement; the audience's sense of impotence toward the definition of the cultural products. Catalani's words were actually motivated more by a grudge toward his publisher Ricordi, who seemed to favor composer Giacomo Puccini

¹ Letter from Alfredo Catalani to Giuseppe Depanis, 19 November 1892, in Alfredo Catalani, *Lettere di Alfredo Catalani a Giuseppe Depanis*, ed. Carlo Gatti (Milan: Istituto di Alta Cultura, 1946), 147. "Tanto è inutile. Anche a scrivere un capolavoro si corre il rischio di essere o inascoltati o compatiti. Il meglio di tutto è di stare a vedere, come spettatore, come andrà a finire questa commedia colossale, nella quale nazioni intere fanno la figura di burattini scossi dai fili della réclame." English translation by Richard M. Berrong. Alfredo Catalani and Richard M. Berrong, *The Politics of Opera in Turn-of-the-Century Italy: as seen through the letters of Alfredo Catalani* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 122.

over him, rather than constituting actual reflection on the state of culture. Nonetheless, not only does his comment hit several central points of turn-of-the-century culture, but also his complaints about his publishing company reveal the key role that Ricordi played both in the world of opera and in that of *rèclame*. In fact, the worlds of music publishing, mass media, and advertisement were so interconnected and played such a central role in the broader world of cultural industries of the time that it is no coincidence that an opera composer in particular would be sensitive to the relationship between aesthetic value, spectatorship, and advertisement.

In this chapter I address Catalani's concerns in order to illustrate how the opera industry functioned in a broader context of cultural industries and how it reacted, adjusted, or contributed to the differentiation of cultural products in the changing, urban, industrialized society of *fin de siècle* Milan described in the previous chapter. What did the cultural industries make of opera during the time when there was a market for opera that extended beyond the aristocracy and included new social classes? How did the publishing companies use the tools and the opportunities offered by the new world of commercial communication to market opera? I sustain that precisely because of the booming consumer culture that characterized turn-of-the-century Italy, these years were crucial to, on the one hand, the process of popularization and diffusion of opera and its symbolic value of Italian national art, and on the other hand, the process of redefinition of opera's elitist role. In fact, I argue that it is through democratic means of communication and through popular imagery that opera was redefined as elitist product and experience.

The two music publishing houses of the time - G. Ricordi & Co. Edoardo Sonzogno - were the focal points of the interrelation between the opera industry and cultural-media industries in general. I argue that they played a central role in redefining the role of opera *vis à vis* the new audiences: they made of opera a cultural symbol for the Italian nation that permeated a large section of middle class society; they recovered opera from a time of perceived crisis through marketing; and they contributed to the burgeoning process of distinction between elite art and popular entertainment. In fact, as I elaborate on in the introduction, these companies were extremely influential not only in the opera industry but also in the media industry. The publishing houses not only owned the copyrights to all the operas and influenced opera productions and theater programs, but they also owned numerous printed mass media and, in the case of Ricordi, an advertisement agency. For these reasons in this chapter and Chapter Three I focus in particular on Ricordi and Sonzogno to investigate how these companies used the tools at their disposal both to reach a wider audience from a commercial and profit-driven perspective, and to promote Italian culture and encourage the production and diffusion of high quality art. I contend that this time of widening audiences and market developments allowed for the first time to create a success through marketing and that the publishing company Ricordi took advantage of this opportunity to make success for some composers, in particular Giacomo Puccini. Through an investigation of the connections between advertisement, graphic design, and melodramatic popular iconography I explore how the media contributed to create a popular operatic imaginary and how the industrial world of commodities appropriated operatic imagery for commercial purposes. Consequently, I argue that the advertisement campaigns of Ricordi reached wider

audiences by using popular products and exploiting the presence of operatic themes in popular commodities in order to expose different classes to opera. However, the outcome of the campaigns was not the popularization of opera but the construction of an image of opera that instead reestablished its *élite* character. In this way, Ricordi's marketing approach differed from and prevailed over Sonzogno's more populist one. (The latter will be analyzed more in depth in the next chapter.)

This study of the commercial strategies and publicity campaigns of the opera industry - in the context of the redefinition of the social role of opera and competition from other forms of urban entertainment - reveals the struggle of the cultural industries to propose the genre of opera to new audiences and to define its cultural, social, and symbolic status. For the main stakeholders of opera production – the publishers and the theater managers - opera was both a commercial and a cultural product; it was both a good to sell and an art to create and distribute. Publishers were, as one might expect, interested in selling both the “product” and the “concept” opera to the widest market possible, but they were also fulfilling their role of distributors and promoters of culture and artistic ideology. I propose that the ongoing operatic crisis described in the Introduction and Chapter One contributed to a need and a desire to reestablish opera's relevance and to create and push certain composers. Either way, the publishers were interested in the potential offered by a widening of the target audience and the developments in advertising techniques that came with industrialization and distribution of wealth in the 19th century. At the same time, opera's symbolic and commercial value derived mostly from its connection to an elitist wealthy social milieu. Aware of living in a time of incipient mass culture, the cultural industries succeeded at developing

extremely advanced marketing techniques to appeal to widening audiences. However, they struggled to adapt to the change and to find a balance between their role as promoters of aesthetic and cultural excellence and their position as modern industries.

Because the opera industry was an integrated complex system tightly connected to the mass media world through the publishers, I believe it is necessary to combine the history of opera with the modes of cultural production and the history of cultural industries. For this reason, in this chapter I explore opera advertisement and relate it to the development of graphic design and iconography. Approaching opera through its advertisement has proven particularly fruitful and brings to light the central role of the publishers, the relationship between the markets or the audiences and the opera industry, and the presence of opera imagery in various levels of cultural production. In fact, the way the advertisement is designed not only can communicate much about the ideology and interests of a society, but it also mirrors and amplifies the evolution of custom and lifestyle. A historical research in the field of advertisement of cultural products allows for a view of the cultural world of the time as an integrated system. Advertisements and publicity bring to light the interrelation between the various agents, moments, and processes from the ideation to the distribution and the use, that is, from the author to the audience. Advertisements also document the relationship between the various media of communication and the various cultural levels, creating and reinforcing cultural and aesthetic hierarchies in a global perspective that takes into account the industrial and social developments along the cultural and artistic ones. To study advertisement means to take into consideration mass media, cultural products, the use of language and art, the relation between the audience and the production, and distribution channels.

Although opera was central to Italian cultural industries and economic history, the history of the opera industry has never been put into dialogue with the history of advertisement. While studies on the history and theory of advertisement in an Italian setting are rather numerous, they are not exhaustive and rarely focused on the early years of advertisement. To my knowledge, there is no work on the advertisement of cultural products of turn of the century Italy. Some works offer insight into the main graphic designers of the time and some speak more broadly about concepts such as markets and mass media in relation to the cultural industries.²

² Most scholarship on Italian advertisement consists of either broad historical surveys or on technical treatises on marketing strategies. Some valuable contributions in the first category are Alberto Abruzzese and Fausto Colombo, *Dizionario della Pubblicità: Storia, Tecniche, Personaggi* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1995); Gian Paolo Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità in Italia* (Bari: Laterza, 1988); Gian Luigi Falabrino, *Effimera e Bella: Storia della Pubblicità Italiana* (Turin: Gutenberg, 2000); Antonio Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana: Storia, Protagonisti e Tendenze di Cento Anni di Comunicazione* (Milan: Edizioni del Sole 24 Ore, 1986). However, being comprehensive histories of advertisement they treat the first few years of advertisement in a cursory way. Publications on advertisement histories and theories in a global perspective tend to focus on other countries where the role and innovations of advertisement were more prominent, mostly the United States or, as far as the turn of the century period is concerned, France. Many works have been published on the history and theory of specific advertisement media, in particular the posters. Many of them provide theoretical definition and historical information useful for a history of Italian posters, such as Ervine Metzl, *The Poster: its History and its Art* (New York: Watson-Guptill Publications, 1963); Harold Hutchinson, *The poster: an Illustrated History from 1860* (London: Vista, 1968); Roger Sainton, *Art Nouveau: Posters and Graphics* (New York: Rizzoli, 1977). Those that focus on Italian posters, are generally collections of images or exhibit catalogues with very little analysis. For example, Dario Cimorelli, *Posters. Irony, Imagination and Eroticism in Advertising 1895-1960* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2011); Giorgio Fioravanti, Leonardo Passarelli, and Silvia Sfligiotti, *La Grafica in Italia* (Milan: Leonardo Arte, 1997); Max Gallo, Arturo Carlo Quintavalle, and Charles Flowers, *The Poster in History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001). The same can be said about the volumes that address specific Italian graphic designs of the time, like Leopoldo Metlicovitz et al., *Grandi Cartellonisti Triestini* (Milan: Skira, 2001); Luigi Enrico Caldanzano, Mario De Micheli, and Guido Giubbini, *Luigi Enrico Caldanzano (1880 – 1928): un Artista fra Pittura e Pubblicità* (Savona: M. Sabatelli, 1993); Eugenio Manzato, *Un Pioniere del Manifesto Adolf Hohenstein, 1854 – 1928* (Treviso: Iniziative Unindustria, 2003); Giovanni Granzotto and Marcello Dudovich, *Marcello Dudovich* (Brescia: Giorgio Corbelli, 1999). A useful source of information has been books on economic history, such as Valerio Castronovo, “Cultura e Sviluppo Industriale,” in *Storia d’Italia*, vol. 4, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), 1261-1293; Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*, which provide interesting insights on the financial and economic value of advertisement in relation to the industrial revolution as well as offer a geographically localized perspective that allows in depth analyses and specific examples. Scholarship about the broader topic of cultural industries in Italy – Alberto Abruzzese and Davide Borrelli, *L’Industria Culturale: Tracce e Immagini di un Privilegio* (Rome: Carocci, 2000); David Forgacs, *Italian Culture in the Industrial Era, 1880-1990: Cultural Industries, Politics, and the Public* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Fausto Colombo, *La Cultura*

This chapter portrays how the changes in audience, the crisis of the opera, and the economic and institutional developments – described in the previous chapter - unfolded on the level of marketing. In combination with how these dynamics unfolded on the level of the printed media and criticism, analyzed in the next chapter, and on the level of performance practices, in chapter four, this chapter contributes to an integrated history of the institution opera and the market mechanisms that governed it at the time and to an integrated picture of a cross section Italian cultural history. The purpose of this chapter is not to compile a comprehensive history of opera advertisement or to cover a lack in the scholarship, but to integrate advertisement theories, histories, and techniques with the history of opera production in order to add a different perspective to the social and cultural history of the years that saw the beginning of commodification and industrialization of culture, the rise of mass media, urbanization, and hierarchical divisions of cultural products.

In this chapter, first, I provide a historical background on advertisement and publicity techniques and means available at turn-of-the-century in Italy and I explore the power of visual communication in relations to audiences in an urban setting. This section briefly illustrates how mass communication and consumer culture affected the life of

Sottile: Media e Industria Culturale in Italia dall'Ottocento agli Anni Novanta (Milan: Bompiani, 1998), in particular - is fundamental for this work as I explained in the introduction. It is also a valuable source for an analytical view of advertisement, although it does not address the topic directly if not occasionally. As far as the relationship between advertisement or culture industries in general and opera is concerned, most of the publications mentioned above address Ricordi's advertisement and graphic design activity but not in relation to opera and not in an analytical or critical way. The exception is Colombo (pages 87-9 in particular refer to Ricordi's role in advertisement history), whose text in fact will appear often in this chapter. Some of the scholarship in the field of opera studies or opera history, point to role of Ricordi in opera production and politics, in particular Stefano Baia-Curioni, *Mercanti dell'Opera: Storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2011), but none of them offers an analytical insight on the advertisement of opera.

various social classes in an urban setting. In the second section, I look at the presence of opera themes in advertising products of other companies to reinforce both the value of opera as marketing and branding tool, and the diffusion of operatic imaginary across different social classes. This section also establishes a connection between the world of commodities and that of theater. In the third section, I delve into Ricordi's use of advertisement and popular collectibles to market operas and I analyze in details Ricordi's publicity campaigns. Finally, I examine the significance of these campaigns in creating an elitist image of opera for new bourgeoisie audiences by connecting the advertisement products with Ricordi's publishing policies.

1. SPECTACLE AND CONSUMPTION

The birth and evolution of advertisement was tightly connected and parallel to the industrial revolution. The use of advertisement dramatically increased in the second half of the 19th century, in conjunction with economic and industrial progress and the increase in the production of consumption goods. In the last couple of decades of the 1800s the birth of the first Italian industries³ and technological advancements such as the first electricity plant (1883) and the railway tunnel under the Gottard (1882), created a general enthusiasm for an ideal of progress, celebrated in cultural and economic events such as the National Exposition of Milan in 1881 or the ballet *Ballo Excelsior* also from 1881. Technical innovations and industrialization, combined with the consequent urbanization

³ Some old companies, such as Marzotto, Elvetica and Breda, were established since an earlier time, but in the 1870s new big and important industries were born such as Lanificio Rossi di Schio, Pirelli (1872), Lanificio and Canapificio Nazionale, Cirio (1875), Richard Ginori and in the 1880s heavy industry such as Navigazione Generale Italiana (1881), Acciaierie di Terni (1884).

and employment, and with a generalized ideal of national and individual progress, led to increased industrial production.⁴ The competition that derived from an abundance of goods and an increased number of potential buyers brought along a differentiation of goods and markets and new economic strategies such as industrial design and advertisement. The economic crisis, the rise of union power and cost of labor strengthened the larger enterprises, which had more economic power to lower the costs of production. Both the smaller retailer and the bigger enterprises were always concerned about costs and sales and, as a consequence, started investing in advertisement, retail spaces, brochures, catalogues, store front signs and so on. Some of these processes were aided by technological progress in printing and communication technologies, and by the recent wider diffusion of the printed media such as periodicals, almanacs, and newspapers.⁵

The new economic structure and consumption culture and the consequent increase in advertisement needed to be managed and organized into a system. The focal center of this system and the theater of all the major developments in primordial advertisement was Milan.⁶ Here the first advertisement agency, Manzoni, was born in 1870 in response to

⁴ For industrial and economic history of Lombardy see Andrea Colli, "Cent'Anni di Grandi Imprese" in Bigazzi, *La Lombardia*; Castronovo, "Cultura e Sviluppo Industriale," 1261-93; Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*.

⁵ The lithographic process was invented in Germany in 1798. By the late 1830s it was possible to add color to lithography (chromolithography). These inventions combined with the replacement of stones with zinc and aluminum plates (1855) and the high-speed printing press (early 19th century) allowed for printing good quality colored images, including photographs, very quickly at low costs. These inventions of the early 19th century did not become available in Italy until roughly the 1860s when machinery and technicians were imported from Germany. For a history of the development of the printed media I refer the reader to the bibliography of chapter 3 of this work.

⁶ An exception was Magazzini Mele in Naples which was among the very first companies to commission posters and advertisement campaigns to Ricordi. Soon after Milan, advertisement printing shops were born in Bologna and other cities, but for the presence of Manzoni and Ricordi, and for the prominent industrial

the needs of a mostly regional, locally distributed, and financially unstable press industry.⁷ The agencies offered a centralized service to sell ad spaces in newspapers of the whole peninsula, becoming one of the first Italian national services.⁸ By the 1880s most newspapers printed at least one whole page of ads, the so called “quarta pagina” (fourth page), or more in the case of longer periodical publications. The ads were for the most part richly illustrated but still were very wordy and relied completely on the text.⁹

In 1881 the first bill posting company IGAP was founded,¹⁰ followed in 1886 by the agency Fernand du Chene de Vere, which managed the advertisement spaces inside

and economic role of the city, Milan remained a central point for the development of advertisement industry.

⁷ On the topic of the Italian press I again refer the reader to the references of chapter 3 of this work. Specifically, on the role of the agencies in advertisement distribution in this period see Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 17. By the 1930s the agencies became societies that offered both the location – spaces on newspapers or on walls and billboards – and the designing and printing of advertisements. In the 1870s, 1880s and still in the 1890s, the printed media had a hard time surviving and needed advertisement to generate income. Managing advertisement without an agency would have been too complex and costly for a press industry still financially unstable and disorganized. It is possible to argue that the progress in the periodical press of these years was originated by the evolution of advertisement agencies.

⁸ Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 11, and Falabrino, *Effimera e Bella*, 35. The pharmacist Attilio Manzoni was originally a distributor of pharmaceutical products with a company founded in Milan 1863. From 1870 the same pharmaceutical company started also dealing advertisement. The agency was at first dealer for the printed media advertisement spaces and provided the possibility to purchase advertisement spaces in many “gazette” and papers of Italy from a single source. Manzoni agency was responsible for some of the first publicity launches on a national level for the water Acqua Fiuggi in 1888. Manzoni still exists now as part of the huge media and publishing group, Gruppo Espresso.

⁹ Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 16. “l’annuncio pubblicitario appare con sempre maggiore regolarità nel giornale e il manifesto assume la funzione di veicolo primario della comunicazione di massa” “esprimono con le immagini e il colore il concetto, il simbolo dell’offerta.” See also Falabrino, *Effimera e Bella*, 51 and Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 14. In the second half of the 19th century, companies were already making use of advertisement but they were utilizing almost exclusively two methods: wordy printed notices in publications and direct marketing. Guides of addresses and catalogues were printed for direct marketing, for example *Guida Monaci* of Rome (1870), *Guida Savallo* for Milan (1870) and *Archivio Indirizzi Finetti*. Announcements in the press were printed in Italy since the invention of the press at the end of 17th century. The first ad of which we have notice now is from 1691: 27 lines on the *Protopiornale Veneto Perpetuo* to advertise the special properties of the Queen of Hungary’s water. From the middle of the 18th century, it was possible to print classified ads. For a list of publications from mid 19th century that had classified ads, see Falabrino, *Effimera e Bella*, 36. At this time, Italian newspapers registered a consistent budget voice of income from advertisement, obviously destined to increase with the increase in the production of commodities at the end of the 19th century.

¹⁰ Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità*, 9, Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 21, and Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 3 and 4. IGAP was founded by Antonio Montorfano in Milan in 1881 and it was the most

and on the roofs of streetcars.¹¹ While in France and England posters had covered the walls of the cities since the beginning of the 19th century¹² – at first in black and white and only from 1846 in color, the first organized use of bill posting in Italy for advertisement purposes can be recorded in 1874 - later than other types of ads because it required more specific printing techniques to achieve the right size and also the right spaces to achieve the right visibility.¹³ With urbanization, the street and the public places became a central place for advertisement. Officine Grafiche Ricordi, a pioneer in printing techniques and designs, understood the potential of this form of advertisement already in

important one. Before billposting became competence of the municipalities, private agencies managed public spaces for advertisement of which the most important was IGAP founded in 1881. The first municipal offices for billposting were born around 1907 in Milan, Genoa and Turin. Rome already had one at the end on the 19th century.

¹¹ Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 21, Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità*, 9, and Falabrino, *Effimera e Bella*, 38. The company Fernand du Chene de Vere was founded in 1886 and transferred to Milan in 1888. The agency managed the advertisement on all the streetcars of Italy and it still exists today as IGP. As testimony of the widespread presence of posters and advertisements on streetcars see the painting from 1895 by William Joy *Bayswater Omnibus* at the Museum of London <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/the-bayswater-omnibus-50504>. Also, see the images reproduced in Baia-Curioni, *Il Mondo Nuovo*, 103 and 180: the 1900 photographs of streetcars in Milan at the Historical Archive of Enel in Sesto San Giovanni, as well as the painting by Achille Beltrame, *Barricata in corso Venezia nel 1898*, 1898. See also Alinari photographs of Piazza del Duomo in Milan from 1900 in Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*, 12.

¹² As testimony of the widespread use of the poster in England see the painting *London Street Scene* by John Parry, 1845. The painting depicts a street scene with the brick wall of a building under construction completely covered with colorful, yet not decorated (with the exception of a poster of a show about the destruction of Pompei at King Arthur theater), posters that for the most part announce shows and events but also some that advertise products. See also Metzl, *The Poster*, 24 for the overwhelming presence of bill posting. One of the first posters advertising a commercial product was printed in France in 1715 and advertised an umbrella (see Metzl, *The Poster*, 31). For the use of color on French and British posters see Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità*, 11. Giuseppe Viotto, titolare de La Viable, introduce uomo sandwich in Italia nel 1897 (nato a Londra nel 1850). Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 22.

¹³ For a pre-history of posters see Metzl, *The Poster*, 25-30. According to Metzl, notices and messages were written and later glued on walls since the Roman period as findings in Pompei show. In modern times, they were very widespread and regulated but at first they mostly regarded political messages and public announcements. The oldest advertisement poster was from 1491, printed by a publisher in Germany to advertise a book. For regulations and taxing of billposting in Italy see Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 3.

1889 and created the Department for the Creation and Printing of Posters (Sezione Creazione e Stampa Manifesti), which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.¹⁴

Despite the quick development of this commercial system, marketing departments inside companies did not develop in Italy until the first decade of the 20th century but companies availed themselves of agencies, printing companies, catalogues, and various media to advertise their products. Exceptions are the perfumery Migone, which created its own advertisement office already in 1883, and Ricordi and Sonzogno, which did not have a formal marketing office but managed their advertisement independently relying mostly on their own publications and printing facilities.

The mass media and the advertisement industry originated a new way to perceive consumption goods, where appearance and image played a role equal or superior to functionality. Therefore the visual appeal of the ads (and of the products) became a fundamental part of the good itself. This development went hand in hand with new ways of consumption: department stores, display windows, and illustrated catalogues became the new modality of purchase. It is not a coincidence that the Universal Expositions flourished in these years. Not only is the phenomenon indicative of the desire to share and sell ideas and innovations for the sake of progress and profit, but also of the

¹⁴ For a more extensive list of graphic societies see Falabrino, *Effimera e Bella*, 66. After the medium of the poster became more popular, other companies that designed, printed, and placed posters were born following the initiative and the success of the pioneering Officine Grafiche. Among the most established were Arti Grafiche in Bergamo and Edmond Chappius in Bologna.

spectacularization of products and of national progress, as well as being a massive social event and experience.¹⁵

By the time Italian advertisement became organized, it also pervaded the urban life of major cities. In Milan, as is possible to see from the photographs of the time, the city walls were covered with billboards and posters, each streetcar advertised various kinds of products, and colorful and elaborate shop signs hung on storefronts.¹⁶ The city's middle and upper classes were completely caught up in the process of commodification and spectacularization of goods, wealth, and social status. New symbols of consumption and display characterized the landscape of the city's central neighborhood: one of the first shopping arcades, the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Piazza Duomo, was completed in 1887, a few steps from the shopping center *Grandi Magazzini Alle Città d'Italia*, the future *Rinascente*, opened by the Milanese entrepreneurs Bocconi the same year. It was in this context of spectacular consumption of artistic dignity that the activities of the firm G. Ricordi & Co. took place.

Spectacularization, display, and visual appeal characterized the new urban landscape and the new world of commodities. The power of images, though, is not a discovery of advertisement and does not lie only in the seductive appeal of imagery, but also in their being immediate and "democratic."¹⁷ Access to printing technology

¹⁵ For details about the exposition in Milan, see Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*, 12-18. For expositions in general, see Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 169.

¹⁶ There are many published collections of photographs from turn-of-the-century Milan. See note 11.

¹⁷ In Italy the technological advancements and creativity of design were also used in nationalistic discourse. For example, in the brochure on the Exposition of 1881 it was possible to read "I Treves possono vantarsi d'aver per le illustrazioni liberato il nostro paese dalla schiavitù delle riproduzioni dei vecchi clichés esteri: il che per un paese eminentemente artistico come il nostro non era una piccola vergogna" and in Movimento Librario "where once we only saw foreign stereotypes in Italian magazines, we now very often

combined with an understanding of the democratic impact of images became a very powerful tool to spread ideas and create myths and imaginaries. In advertisement, images are used to communicate and advertise information, ideas, or objects through appealing to the senses, seducing them; but images can also reach, and communicate to, a wide group of viewers. An example, taken from the media of the period, of the democratic and educational or populist use of images is *L'emporio pittoresco*. Composed half by images and half by text, it was the most widespread and one of the cheapest.¹⁸ The immediacy of images, the growing need to spread a message to a wide section of the population, combined with the improving printing technology of mechanical reproduction of images that allowed printing images in bigger sizes, more quickly, in great quantities and at lower costs, made of images a preferred tool for propaganda and advertisements. For example, as John Davis noted, the image of Pope Pio IX was promoted and propagated quickly and pervasively and Italians were familiar with it. The popularization of the papal image was possible because “the Church had acquired a new understanding of the critical importance of the new print technologies.” A similar process was involved in the construction of the myth and iconography of Garibaldi, for example.¹⁹

When talking about the early period of massive advertisement from the 1880s to the first few years of the 20th century, the egalitarian nature of image printing clashed

have the pleasure of seeing Italian illustrations copied by foreign magazines,” both quotes are from Maria Grazia Lolla, “Reader/power : the politics and poetics of reading in post-unification Italy” in *The Print Media in Fin-de-Siècle Italy: Publishers, Writers, and Readers*, ed. Ann Caesar, Gabriella Romani, and Jennifer Burns (London: Legenda, 2011), 24.

¹⁸ Silvia Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno : Mediazione Culturale, Circuiti del Sapere ed Innovazione Tecnologica nell'Italia Unificata (1861-1900)” in Caesar, *The Print Media*, 95. The publication was printed in 60.000 copies and sold at 5 cents each.

¹⁹ John Davis, “Media Markets and Modernity: the Italian case, 1870-1915” in Caesar *The Print Media*, p. 14.

with some issues of audience. Advertisement historian Gian Paolo Ceserani has pointed out that the history of advertisement began with the exclusion of the lower classes: they were excluded from advertisement because they were excluded from consumption.²⁰ In fact, as historian Valerio Castronovo shows, in the last twenty years of the 19th century more than two thirds of the salary of a factory worker were used to buy food, and farm hands would spend almost the entirety of their salary on bare necessities.²¹ The people who could afford the advertised products - as well as entertainment - were very limited in absolute number. However, it should be noted not only that in a city like Milan this number was bigger than in other places and increasing, but also that a product purchased by a small percentage of the population is not necessarily an elitist product. Furthermore, in an urban setting, being unable to afford products and entertainment did not mean being immune to their presence and to the posters, ads, and gadgets that advertised such products to which, as we shall see later, most of the population was exposed.

Such reflections on markets and audiences raise questions of “marketing”²² strategy and hierarchies of value. There would be much to say about the theory of marketing of cultural products, and I discuss categories such as hierarchies of value and social distinction elsewhere in this work, but here I would like to mention three key points related to these issues. First, each commodity has a functional and a symbolic value, usually associated with a certain culture and social status. The symbolic value is

²⁰ “La storia della pubblicità inizia con un’esclusione. La gente comune era esclusa dalla pubblicità perché, almeno fino agli anni Sessanta, era esclusa dal consumo.” Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità*, 5.

²¹ Valerio Castronovo, “La Storia Economica” in *Storia d’Italia*, vol. 4, ed. Corrado Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi, 1981), 186.

²² I say “primordial marketing” here, although I will use the term “marketing” from now on for convenience, because marketing as a theory, a discipline, and a conscious and “scientific” set of strategies, rules, and means is considered to be invented in the 1950s. About the origin of marketing as a discipline, see Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità*, 6.

related to the functional value but mostly *constructed* with additional tools: advertisement, pricing, positioning, media representation and so on. In the case of cultural products, the process is more complicated because the functional value is more difficult to define. In turn-of-the-century Italy the definition of functional value for opera and music shifted back and forth roughly between educational, moral, patriotic, and entertainment. Secondly, among the various publicity tools available to communicate the value of a product, the visual aspect is fundamental. The visual aspect conferred an immediacy, directness, and appeal that could attract very diverse people - and this is especially true for the advertisement in the 19th century, when the literacy rate was not high - with a strong “democratic” power. At the same time, as can be observed in examples that will be analyzed later, the styles of the design of most advertisements were very elaborate and sophisticated. Advertisement historian Piermarco Aroldi notes that *fin de siècle* Italian advertisement was of “elitist and refined taste”²³ denouncing a strong ambiguity in address. Finally, in the context of cultural products specifically, in the second half of the 19th century the role of artists and intellectuals in relation to a widening of audiences became more problematic. The definitions and reception of commercial success, critical recognition, and aesthetic value were shifting and under discussion.

The distinction in status and between aesthetic or functional value of the products extended to advertisement itself. Just as the search for commercial success and sales were considered vulgar and in contrast with cultural value, so was the practice of advertisement, which was - and still is - shifting between applied arts and Art, technique

²³ Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 239. My translation. In this chapter translations will be mine unless otherwise noted.

and profession, deceit and vision. Many expressed strongly negative feelings about the new, powerful, and ubiquitous thing that was *réclame* at the end of the 19th century. A journalist of the time defined it an “aberration;”²⁴ Policarpo Petrocchi’s *Nuovo Dizionario Universale della Lingua Italiana* (Treves, 1900) defined it as “a notice, often quackish, to attract people’s attention to commercial things in order to make a name for oneself;”²⁵ and a critic of *Il teatro illustrato* complained that the practice of putting ads on theater curtains was “horrid.”²⁶ Turn-of-the-century Italian advertisement was still in the process of defining and representing itself and elaborating its own linguistic codes. Intellectuals and advertisers struggled to reconcile their high aesthetic and moral values with the practical purpose of a visual artifact meant for the widest possible audience, and the vulgarity of sales. Slowly advertisement practice acquired the rank of advertisement art, and the collaboration with great artists, the attention to international artistic developments, and the long-lasting branding power of its iconic designs dignified its status.²⁷ I have mentioned the expositions, the arcades, and the shop windows. On the

²⁴ In a professional magazine, *Emporium*, advertisement was still in 1909 defined as an “aberration” that “offend aesthetic principle and wears down patience” quoted in Fioravanti, *La Grafica*, 7.

²⁵ Quoted in Colombo, *La Cultura Sottile*, 84 : “avviso spesso ciarlatanesco per richiamare l’attenzione della gente su cose commerciali, per farsi un nome.”

²⁶ Vincenzo Valle, “I sipari *réclame* dei teatri,” *Il Teatro Illustrato*, July 31, 1883, 110, observed that it was a widespread custom to decorate theatre curtains with advertisements. The practice was especially common at the Milanese Teatro dal Verme. Valle also reported that other periodicals too had complained about such practices and had suggested that audiences rebel against such ‘profit-driven invasions in the temples of the gentle art’, which distract from music and are ‘anti-artistic’.

²⁷ The attention to the development of the graphics art is testified by the exposition of 1894 in Milan (Esposizioni Riunite) that for the first time included a section for graphic design and the Esposizione Artistica di Reclame in Genoa in 1899 (Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 32). For the process of dignifying advertisement as art: Boccioni, Sironi, Depero, Dudovich are some of the famous names belonging to the high art that worked in early advertisement. An indication that advertisement graphics was perceived as a second tier art is the fact that Ricordi at the Milan Exposition in 1894 participated with music printing but, although being the major poster printer of Italy, did not participate if not very marginally to the Advertisement section of the exposition. (See Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*, 47). There are many examples of brands that still today rely on imagery created in that period, like Campari and the operatic world itself. In fact, the images created by Ricordi for the opera posters are still used today for products of La Scala for example, or in relation to Lucca tourism because of their connection with Puccini. A striking

occasion of the Milan exposition of 1881, writer and intellectual Camillo Boito gave a speech about how in modern days beauty can be found in art as well as on a matchbox.²⁸

In order to accept that advertisement and commodification were part of modern life, they needed to be lifted to artistic dignity: they needed to be beautiful and they needed to be spectacular.

2. OPERA, ICONOGRAPHY, AND ADVERTISEMENT

The world of opera and theater is tightly connected with mass communication and advertisement: the very first Italian poster was for an opera; theatrical and musical periodicals preceded the modern newspapers and had a very wide circulation; music publishers owned various media and were pioneers in printing techniques.²⁹ Opera was an object for sale as much as any other good, and for its entanglement with the publishing, media, and print industries it was also the field where the pioneering efforts in advertisement took place. Opera was also a means to sell other products: operatic themes and iconography were common in the advertisements of other commercial products

example of how long lasting the first designs could be, is one of the very first posters printed by Ricordi for Effervescente Brioschi, which became the logo of the company and is still used today for the Brioschi products. Unfortunately there is not information about the designer of the poster.

²⁸ Camillo Boito et. al., *Conferenze sulla Esposizione Nazionale del 1881: Tenute per Incarico di S.E. il Ministro di Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio* (Milan: Banca del Monte di Milano, 1984)

²⁹ The connection between theater and advertisement can be found also elsewhere: the German inventor of the lithographic process was a playwright; the first French posters were inspired by the Japanese huge woodprints to advertise shows (these were so widespread that were used to wrap the goods shipped to Europe from Japan, which is how they became known in France). The first English poster, a black and white wood cut image designed by Walker, was produced to advertise the melodrama *The Woman in White* in 1871. As I shall explain more in depth later, the first artistic experiments with poster designs in France were also related to the world of entertainment (think of Toulouse-Lautrec, for example). Metzl, *The Poster*, and Hutchinson, *The Poster*.

mostly directed to an urban *petite bourgeoisie*. This section explores some examples of advertisement materials of companies of other commercial sectors that employed operatic imagery to advertise their products. The presence of opera in ads shows that operatic imagery was shared enough to have advertisement value, that it was widespread in popular products and in commodities, and also that it was generally associated with ideas of glamour and elegance. In fact, based on my findings so far, opera turned out to be connected mostly with the beauty and hair care sector. It was also a predominant presence in one of the longest running marketing collectibles: the Liebig bouillon cards.

Opera and melodramatic imagery were one of the privileged subjects for the widespread and popular decorative object: the oleographs. While not advertisement, the oleographs indicate the diffusion of operatic imagery in products with a popular address. Progress in printing techniques allowed for printing images at low cost and in great quantities, which allowed for the diffusion of popular decorative products. These often featured operatic iconography, where the appeal of the image is central and indicative of the tastes of the time. The decorative oleographs were very common at the end of the 19th century and featured many opera scenes, along with landscapes, flowers, and scenes from popular legends. They were used widely to decorate taverns and the living rooms of the lower classes.³⁰ The scenes are very colorful – the oleograph allowed for very bright coloring – and, as far as the operatic ones are concerned, they are not accurate representations either of the historical periods or the opera settings. Considering the

³⁰ The Civica Raccolta Bertarelli in Milan collects many oleographs of different subjects. They are printed in Germany and designed by Italian artists. The oleographs depicting opera scenes are reproduced in Giorgio Lise, *L'Opera Lirica nella Iconografia Popolare* (Milan: Arti Grafiche G. Ferrari, 1973).

popular destination of the oleographs, they are important documents that testify to the fame of the operas themselves, including surprising titles such as *Mefistofele* and *Samson and Dalila*. They also indicate that operatic imagery – if not necessarily opera – was diffuse and appreciated among various social classes.

Among the curious objects advertised in the periodicals or on the so called “fourth page” of daily newspapers, there were some popular musical objects advertised for their capability to reproduce operatic music: I found a musical alarm clock, the “latest novelty” that “instead of the bell has a music box that plays music pieces such as dances, popular arias, opera excerpts, a royal march with a hymn to Garibaldi...” on a 1895 *Corriere della Sera*,³¹ and bells tuned for *Cavalleria*, *Pagliacci*, *Cristoforo Colombo*, *Mefistofele* “and other operas” produced by a company in Pistoia and advertised on *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* in 1896.³² The most striking ad is the one for Migone’s “chinina,” a product that prevents hair loss. The ad made use of the famous soprano Rosina Storchio, constituting one of the first examples of the use of an explicit testimonial. The ad included a drawing of the singer’s head and shoulders, a description of her great singing career, and a letter to Mr. Migone signed by the singer where she explains why she chooses to use his quinine water.

The advertisement with Storchio is not the only example of how Migone used opera for advertisement purposes. In fact, in 1900 the Milanese manufacturer of beauty products produced also a perfumed calendar on a musical theme. The calendar, along with another one for Profumerie Venus from 1905, is a very early example of a genre

³¹ *Corriere della Sera*, January 3 and 4, 1895.

³² *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, February 6, 1896.

that, born in the late 1890s, would become widely popular: the small perfumed calendars mostly produced by industrial companies of perfume products, that barbers used to give out to clients around Christmas. This custom was common in particular in Milan until at the least the 1930s, and the protagonist was usually a female figure but many also had operatic subjects.³³ The two examples that follow, though, belong to a prototype of this genre that was most likely not distributed in barbershops but in very central Milanese stores or in pharmacies, salons, and department stores throughout Italy.

The design of the Migone calendar (Fig.1) is extremely elegant in pure floral style. On the cover there are Euterpe, the muse of music, and the title of the calendar and details about the company in elaborate and decorated letters. Inside, pages with the calendar alternate with pages reproducing images. The name of the company appears under each image, and information about some of its products under the calendar. Each of the seven images represents a musical note and depicts an elegant feminine figure framed by a decorative floral motive and accompanied by a text box where the title and a few music lines and lyrics of an opera are printed, with the permission of the publishers. The operas are, in order of appearance, *Gioconda*, *Un Ballo in Maschera*, *Bohème*, *Carmen*, *Bohème* again, *Mignon*, and *Fra Diavolo*. The images are completely unrelated to the operas and while some depict women in somewhat theatrical poses, others depict them

³³ Lise, *L'Opera Lirica*, 43-52. Many calendars had operatic subjects, in particular those printed for Valsecchi e Morosetti, a Milanese company of beauty products, which, with the permission of Ricordi, distributed many operatic calendars mostly from 1911. Some earlier examples include a calendar dedicated to Leoncavallo's *I Medici* from 1898, and an *Almanacco Verdiano* designed by Leopoldo Metlicovitz in 1902. Metlicovitz also designed an *Almanacco Ricordi* in 1927 with illustrations from *Neorne*, *Turandot*, *Falstaff*, and *Francesca da Rimini*. The 1973 exhibit catalogue reproduced some of these more recent calendars and by comparison with the Migone one from 1900, it is possible to notice that the pictorial element becomes more central, taking up two pages for representations of the scenes of the opera in very realistic style.

reading or smelling flowers. The little women are very elegantly dressed in floral clothing and the soft contours combined with the pastel colors create an airy delicate ambiance. The way the figures fit in and interact with the floral frames and the area where the music is printed are very elegant and sophisticated. The elements of the picture overlap and support each other, and the space of the page is used in a plastic three-dimensional manner despite the flatness typical of the decorative style. In some images, the women point to or lean on the text box or distractedly invade it with a part of their body. The elegance, the use of the frame, the dynamic interaction of image and text is strikingly reminiscent of poster design of the time that I will analyze in the next section.

The 1905 calendar of *Profumerie Venus*³⁴ (Fig. 2 and 3) has very similar stylistic features: the elegance of the decoration, the floral style of the frame motives, the pastel colors, the centrality of the pictorial motive and of the female figure. It also alternates calendar pages and image pages and insist on the name of the company and on a variety of products. However, here the images represent famous actresses and singers in more realistic settings and attitudes – for example, at the dressing table, looking out of a window, or at the theater. Also, while the cover is exemplary of the ornamental sophistications of the art nouveau, the small scenes are painted in a rather flat and uninteresting way, and the construction of the image as a whole is not as elaborate as in the Migone calendar, recalling instead the style of the low quality oleographs. Each “jet set” personality is associated with a quote in which they glorify the qualities of a different Venus product, from face powder to toothpaste. The featured artists are the actresses Teresa Mariani-Zampieri and Irma Gramatica, and the singers Rosina Storchio, Fanny

³⁴ Archivio Civica Raccolta Stampe Bertarelli, not in catalogue.

Torosella, Gemma Bellincioni and, exception among the women, Francesco Tamagno. The use of the testimonial is extremely direct. While the Migone calendar subtly associates the company with a symbolic idea of an operatic work of art and the sophistication of the opera theater, Venus advertisement appeal lies in the recognition of the famous theater star. The two calendars seem to be meant for similar kinds of audiences: the bourgeois clientele of the flagship stores in the center of Milan and, very likely, the more diverse clientele of pharmacies and department stores throughout Italy.

Migone and Venus were pioneering companies when it came to advertisement. Migone was the first Italian company to have an internal office dedicated to publicity, and the presence of their products on the media is constant and insistent since the 1870s through the 1930s. Venus collaborated even with intellectuals of the caliber of Matilde Serao to advertise their products. It would be legitimate to assume that their interest in opera is due to their attention to publicity and therefore subjects and themes to help them sell. Advertisement by the turn of the century had acquired a deep awareness not only of its purpose and its power, but also of the different communicative potential of its form, as I have discussed in regards to imagery and visual appeal. Therefore it is safe to assume that the choice of wording, coloring, and subject matter were not casual but strategic. This can be applied to the choice of what, in modern terms, can be called “testimonial.” This choice is both indicative of the commercial value attributed to opera or to singers, and also indicative of the companies’ desire to target a specific market, the same that would be interested in opera. The two are not mutually exclusive, as advertisements can have the purpose to reach a new market or reinforce an existing one. Regardless of the

audience they were programmatically trying to attract, these ads suggest that the two worlds were somehow associated with similar ideas: appearance, beauty, and glamour.

Liebig is another company to have implemented cutting-edge advertisement ideas and to have demonstrated an interest in the marketability of opera. The cards contained in the Liebig bouillon packages have been collected since 1872 by generations of Europeans. The cards did not change much over time: they featured a colorful picture with a title on the frame on one side, and an explanation on the other side, therefore fulfilling the role of both iconographic and didactic objects. There were different series for each country, and the first Italian series is from 1878. The cards served the marketing purpose to create a loyal customer who would keep buying Liebig to collect the cards, and also that of creating a company image that would be associated with something pleasant, pretty, and informative like the cards that they proposed.³⁵

The subjects portrayed on the Liebig cards are the most varied, but opera has a very substantial presence and a seemingly preferential treatment. Of the operatic subjects, Verdi and Wagner are the most featured, with series on the composers and various series dedicated to their single operas. There are a couple of dozens of complete series on single operas of various authors, including some now completely forgotten like Franchetti's *Asrael*, and numerous series on opera composers, opera theaters, scenes from operas and

³⁵ Liebig was the first company to use collectible cards as a marketing tool. In Italy, the industrial bakery Lazzaroni started including a collectible figurine in the cookie packages from 1890. These had various subjects, none of them as far as I know related to opera, but they were more decorative than educational so they mostly featured female and children figures or sceneries. Later they started printing figurines with movie stars. For more about Lazzaroni see Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*. For other companies that later on made extensive use of figurines as a marketing product see Sergio Coradeschi, *Collezionismo Italiano* (Milan: Compagnia Generale Editoriale, 1979), vol. 2.

so on.³⁶ The cards are similar to the oleographs mentioned above: they are very richly colored and depict elaborate sets or extremely detailed drawings of theaters and portraits of composers; however they are not accurate representations, despite the instructional educational purpose of the cards. The design combine melodramatic effects, present in the character poses or in the choice of the scenes, and a decorative rococo motive. Despite their obvious popular destination, the cards positioned themselves as visually beautiful educational objects. The relative predominance of opera is an indication of the popular tastes of the time and of the diffusion of its melodramatic and elaborate iconography.

Many of the objects analyzed in this chapter seem to be appealing to a wide public: the chromolithographs described above and the postcards described in the next section portrayed the most emotional scenes in operas and were printed in series with low artistic quality; and operatic themes are associated to commonly used products, like calendars, hair products, and bouillon. However, the design underlined the elegance and the glamour associated with opera. The Ricordi publicity products for operas described in the next section contained the same ambiguity: the means of the advertisements were intended for all, like the posters, or were widespread and affordable, like the postcards. However, these objects had high artistic value and manufacturing quality, which suggest the desire to associate opera with elegance and artistic value and the attempt to establish an elitist aura around opera.

³⁶ An exception is the series dedicated to the writer Alessandro Manzoni.

3. RICORDI'S "INDUSTRY OF IMAGERY"

Fausto Colombo in his very influential book on Italian cultural industries, *La Cultura Sottile*, places Ricordi at the center of the newborn Italian cultural industry for the prominent use it made of the art of advertisement and for its contribution to the birth of the image industry. The fact that Ricordi for a century was so influential for the history of Italian music, the entrepreneurial and industrial history, the development of the status of the artist, the birth of Italian graphic arts, and a great part of the commercial and cultural life of Milan, made this company crucial for Italian cultural history. For the purpose of this chapter what is particularly significant are Ricordi's key role in shaping and using the relationship between iconography and melodrama and its contributions to the development of the cultural industries or, as Colombo aptly put it, its contribution "to the birth of the imagery industry."³⁷

The Officine Grafiche Ricordi is the plant where the publishing company G. Ricordi & Co. conducted its print and design activity. From 1884 it constituted a separate department from the administrative section of the company, and a separate director managed it.³⁸ Despite the separate management, the Officine were always under the careful and continuous supervision of the general management of the company, that is - for the time period under consideration - Giulio Ricordi and the managing committee.

³⁷ Colombo, *La Cultura Sottile*, 89: "nascita di un'industria dell'immagine".

³⁸ The period under examination was a time of management disruption and, according to the central management, inefficiency for the Officine. The turn over of directors to 1891 was very frequent. In that year the son of Giulio, Tito II, became the director of the Officine and covered that role until 1900 when he was substituted by Pomini. From 1902, the direction of the plant was assigned finally to Emanuele Ricordi, younger brother of Tito II, who managed it for many years. For a more detailed history of the Officine Grafiche see Sartori, *Casa Ricordi*, Baia-Curioni, *Mercanti dell'Opera*, 183-185, and Ferraris, "Graphics," 192-195.

After closing the typography department in 1895, the efforts of Ricordi focused only on musical typography and the lithographs produced at the Officine. The activity of the Officine included the design and print of all the Ricordi products: all the music sheets, the company's periodicals (*Gazzetta Musicale*, then *Musica e Musicisti*, then *Ars et Labor*), the staging sketches, the costumes plates, and the advertisement material. Most of these products were distributed to all the Ricordi shops throughout Europe and to theaters around the world.³⁹ Until 1889 the Officine only occasionally designed and printed products for third parties, such as some book illustrations, reproductions of theater scenes, and "other objects of fine art."⁴⁰ In 1889 the Sezione Creazione e Stampa Manifesti was founded and under the direction of artist, set designer and graphic designer Adolf Hohenstein thrived by producing posters and ads both for Ricordi and, especially from 1896, for other companies, functioning therefore as the precursor of advertisement agency in the modern sense. The Officine plant in Viale Porta Vittoria 21 in Milan was exemplary for its technical advancement and modernity: it was completely served by electricity, it had over 200 employees, and it was equipped with and there were over 500.000 plates and the most modern machinery for all the printing techniques available at the time (chromolithography, which was the main technique used starting from 1891, chromo typography, engraving, tachygraphy, etc.) Every year the Officine produced 2.500.000 sheets of music, 100.000 posters and 2000000 other sheets of paper.⁴¹ These

³⁹ Ricordi owned and managed stores in Milan, Florence, Naples, Rome, Palermo, London, Paris, and later in New York and various locations in South America.

⁴⁰ Ferraris, "Graphics," 192. An example of book illustration are the illustrations for Manzoni's novel *The Betrothed* that Ricordi prepared for an edition but they ended up not being included and therefore Ricordi printed and sold as independent artistic objects.

⁴¹ Information on employees pertains to those employed in 1894 at the 4,000 square metre Nuovo Opificio Ricordi (New Ricordi Factory) at Viale di Porta Vittoria 21 (Ferraris, "Graphics," 192). According to Claudio Sartori in *Casa Ricordi*, in 1884 the plant had the potential to produce 2,500,000 (A1-sized, 70 x

amounts included also advertisement materials of various kinds, which were at first only in relation to opera and music Ricordi products.⁴² From 1896, after the success of an advertisement campaign for *La Bohème*, Ricordi started accepting more and more orders from other companies that entrusted their advertisement to the technical skills, the modern machinery, and the group of graphic designers provided by the Officine.⁴³

The Officine Ricordi trained or employed those that were going to become the most famous designers in Italy. I already mentioned Adolf Hohenstein (1854-1928) whose set and costume designs contributed to create those images that became iconic for Puccini's operas. A prototypical Art Director, he curated the publicity campaigns of the Ricordi products and trained a generation of future poster designers (*cartellonisti*). The first one of his trainees was Leopoldo Metlicovitz (1868-1944) from Trieste, who started at the Officine as a simple engraver and ended up designing outstanding posters that

100 cm) music sheets (representing an unknown number of pages of music), 100,000 posters and 2,000,000 other sheets of coated and plain paper (pp. 49–50); by 1910 the production potential had grown to 25,000,000 music sheets and 50,000,000 illustrated postcards, as well as deluxe lithographic works, catalogues and other printed materials (p. 72).

⁴² Before starting to print the opera posters and prepare the opera campaigns that I will analyze later, Ricordi was printing some publicity material but not as systematically. For example, they printed a sheet with all the costumes and characters from *Rigoletto*, prepared for the first performance of the opera at La Fenice in 1851 (reproduced in Degrada, *Music Musicians Publishing*, page not numbered) probably intended for sale in the Ricordi stores and at the theater before and after the performance. Ricordi also had always valued the visual appeal and decor of its publications, already starting from the 1850s. See for example the cover for the score of *Luisa Miller* or *Rigoletto* reproduced in Degrada, *Music Musicians Publishing*, page not numbered.

⁴³ On ads for other companies see Ferraris, "Graphics," 192: "Il successo riscosso dall'affiche di *La Bohème*, realizzata da Hohenstein, convinse definitivamente Giulio Ricordi ad ampliare la produzione grafica da allora limitata ai cartelloni per le opere liriche, accettando ordinazioni anche da altre ditte che desideravano lanciare sul mercato i loro prodotti" See also Cimorelli, *Storia della Comunicazione*. Ricordi actually started accepting commissions from other companies before 1896 with Mele. In fact, the technical advancement of the Officine and their international network allowed them in 1895 to print for an English client, the Olympia Circus in London – again an entertainment product – two posters that measured 10 meters by 3 meters. They were the products of a collaboration between Hohenstein and Metlicovitz. (See Fioravanti, *La Grafica*, 18, and letter from Tito Ricordi to Giulio Ricordi, 6 October 1894, vol. 6 n. 168, *copialettere* for fiscal year 1894/95, Archivio Storico Ricordi, housed in the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan, (from now on I-Mb, ASR) where Tito wrote that the manager of the Olympia visited the Officine and looked at the sketches and was very satisfied ("pel nuovo affare Olympia").

made him become one of the major interpreters of Art Nouveau in Italy. Metlicovitz then hired and trained another Trieste native, Marcello Dudovich (1878-1962), who embarked on a flourishing long career that lead him to become a leader in the Italian advertisement scene for decades. He is mostly memorable for the posters he designed at Ricordi for famous commercial external clients, such as Campari, Borsalino, Magazzini Mele, and for the campaigns for *La Rinascente*. Franz Laskoff (1869-unknown) contributed to the Officine with distinctive designs of some musical products. Other artists who worked at the Officine Ricordi at its beginnings but obtained their great fame thanks to their graphic work for other companies are: Achille Beltrame, famous illustrator for the magazines *Illustrazione Italiana* and *La Domenica del Corriere*; Leonetto Capiello, designers for iconic ads for a variety of products in Italy and France; Luigi Caldanzano, Aleardo Terzi, Aleardo Villa just to mention a few of the most renown.⁴⁴ For Ricordi, all these giants of the Italian graphic design and advertisement art designed sets, magazine covers, music score title pages, and illustrations for musical products but they were mostly dealing with the most spectacular, widespread, effective, and aesthetically relevant form of advertisement until the TV commercial: the poster (*manifesto*.)

⁴⁴ For a profile of each artist see Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità* at the corresponding entries. For a critical study of their role in the development of graphic design in Italy, see Ceserani, *Effimera e Bella* and Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*. For more complete and in depth studies of the artists more closely connected to Ricordi, see the monographic volumes Metlicovitz, *Grandi Cartellonisti Triestini*, and Manzato, *Un Pionere del Manifesto*.

3.1 Urban Visual Communication: the Posters

For my analysis of the advertisement posters for operas, it will be helpful to start with a definition of the medium itself. Here is historian of graphic design Hutchinson's definition, whose main points are shared by all the other scholars or professionals of graphic arts:⁴⁵

“A poster is a large announcement ... Its purpose is to draw attention and to impress some message on the passer-by. The visual or pictorial element provides the initial attraction – it must be striking enough to catch the eye of the passer-by and to overcome the counter-attractions of the other posters, and it usually needs a supplementary verbal message which follows up and amplifies the pictorial theme”⁴⁶

This definition brings to light the key elements of a poster. It attracts and seduces and, afterward, it communicates a message. The communication needs to happen very quickly because the main audience for a poster is a passer-by in an urban setting where there are many other distractions for the eye. Also, the communication happens primarily through the visual pictorial element, to which the verbal one is ancillary and is relevant only if and after the image managed to attract the viewer.

Poster design is founded on the immediacy of the communication and suggestive value of the visual element. Posters' form is dictated by the way they are viewed: being mostly located on the walls in an urban setting, the viewers' movement does not allow for

⁴⁵ Art historian and professional advertisement artist Ervine Metzl defined the poster as “a message dramatically expressed in terms of the graphic arts” (Metzl, *The Poster*, 18). Valeri wrote “l'annuncio pubblicitario appare con sempre maggiore regolarità nel giornale e il manifesto assume la funzione di veicolo primario della comunicazione di massa” “esprimono con le immagini e il colore il concetto, il simbolo dell'offerta.” Valeri, *Pubblicità Italiana*, 16. See also Gallo, *The Poster in History*, Ceserani, *Storia della Pubblicità*.

⁴⁶ Hutchinson, *The Poster*, 9.

a thorough observation. Therefore, posters need to be very synthetic and efficient, and possibly of large size and placed in strategic locations. Posters are also ephemeral objects, as not only the moment of fruition is not more than fleeting, but also because, being printed on paper and being regulated, their public life is temporary.

Originating from playbills, they were first used to advertise shows, books, artistic exhibits, and cultural activities, and only from mid 19th century, starting in France, did they advertise goods.⁴⁷ They condensed the concept of the playbill with the techniques of the panoramas and dioramas and the efficacy and popular appeal of the caricature. The developments in photography techniques also affected poster design and in particular the way the images were framed. The playbill developed into the form of poster in France around the 1850s thanks to captivating lithographs.⁴⁸ There, it also acquired the dignity of art and the efficacy of advertisement. The genre attracted groups of artists who were interested in new forms of democratic artistic communication, starting with Jules Cheret to better known artists like Toulouse Lautrec and Adolphe Mucha (1860-1939), famous for his association with Sarah Bernhardt. The forms and uses of the French posters, combined with German artistic developments, influenced the later developed Italian posters. The style most widely used for the posters of the period under consideration is the style that

⁴⁷ Playbills are announcements of shows and operas and were widely used since the 17th century. As opposed to the posters, a playbill is directed toward a more selected target because it is usually hanged indoor, in the space already dedicated to the product. Playbills cannot be categorized as posters because of their size, the dense text, and the lack of visual aspects. Their purpose is to illustrate and inform rather than to motivate. Images, if present, were simple and had a purely decorative purpose. An example of an old announcement for a theater performance is in Metzl, *The Poster*, 20 for a tragedy and an opera in 1768 Paris. The “design” was purely decorative contour and the content was very detailed information about the performance.

⁴⁸ To show how earlier graphic designed developed in Frances compared to Italy, see the poster for Verdi’s Macbeth in 1850s Paris in Gallo, *The Poster in History*, 48 and compare it with the first Italian poster from 1863 for Gounod’s *Faust*, reproduced in Gallo, *The Poster in History*, 49.

falls under the denomination of Art Nouveau, or Jugendstil in Germany, or Stile Liberty in Italy.⁴⁹

The poster art produced to advertise operas evolved dramatically in the last ten years of the 19th century. As I have mentioned before, the first poster ever printed in Italy was for Gounod's *Faust* in 1863. The second relevant example of a poster is the one designed at the Officine Ricordi for Puccini's *Edgar* by Hohenstein in 1889. The *Faust* poster is basically an enlarged version of an illustration for a music score cover: the text plays the central role, and the image is just a decoration around the text. While in the poster for *Edgar* it is possible to notice a more incisive choice of image and colors, the poster still relies almost solely on the text that also takes up most of the space. It is the same case with the poster for Catalani's *La Wally*, also by Hohenstein from 1892. With the following two posters both designed by Hohenstein for Verdi's *Falstaff* and Puccini's *La Bohème* (fig. 4) in 1893 and 1895 respectively, the image acquires a more central role, taking more surface space and interacting with the text, which is printed over or all around the image instead of next to it like in the previous examples. The titles of the operas become more elaborate, acquiring a pictorial aspect that compliments the style of the image.

The *La Bohème* poster, although still immature, was a decisive step forward both in poster art and in publicity concept. In fact, not only does it present the buds of modern poster design characteristics, but also it is part of the first more integrated and organized

⁴⁹ On Cheret and more details on European graphic art and Art Nouveau, and their influences, see Metzl, *The Poster*, 37 and Hutchinson, *The Poster*, 14 and 15. Impressionist artist Jules Cheret (1836-1932) founded a print shop in Paris in 1866 and explored to their full extent the new techniques of three-color printing and created posters with great designs with the purpose to sell.

publicity campaign. The *Bohème* poster, which is inspired by the French style of Cheret and Toulouse-Lautrec, is constructed around the visually captivating interplay between text and image. The sketches of characters of the opera emerge from an imaginary space behind the poster, climb over the decorative band, flow or dance in between the article and the word “Bohème” – for the first time the title is printed in non plain fonts – and almost distractedly proceed toward the bottom of the poster, displaying the relationships and the attitudes that define them as characters of the opera. The poster is part of a larger publicity campaign that exploited the imagery themes developed for the staging and made them iconic of the opera. In fact, the characters with their attitudes and their costumes correspond to the costumes designed for the production and recall the themes and the atmosphere of the set designs. The same characters in the same outfit could be seen on the opera stage, on the posters for the foreign markets, on a series of postcards, on a series of envelope seals, and on a set of porcelain plates. I will analyze these materials in detail further on.

The middle of the 1890s was a turning point for poster art. From that point on, more and more companies started using the poster as an advertisement tool, often commissioning the design to the Ricordi artists. Posters multiplied in number and some of the most iconic posters of Italian design history started to be printed around this time. It is also in those same years that poster art acquired more specific and conceptualized form and style. The visual element became central and affected the textual element as

well, and the design changed so that the visual element would have a communicative rather than decorative function.⁵⁰

The first posters that marked this new conception along with awareness of posters' function and style's relationship with fruition, are the posters for Mascagni's *Iris* (fig. 5) and Puccini's *Tosca* (fig. 6) both designed by Hohenstein in 1898 and 1899 respectively. These are examples of the new way in which Hohenstein used the floral style and focused on the suggestive properties of the images. These characteristics are visible also in his other posters of the time⁵¹. The very sizeable (3m x 1m) posters for *Iris* and *Tosca* are both also part of bigger organized publicity campaigns that I will investigate later. The most striking aspects of these posters are the symbolic use of color and dramatic use of spatial effects. The two female figures impose on the viewers – whose point of view is very likely much lower - and seem to be coming out of the poster toward them and into the city streets. There are no elements that recall the staging sets or the costumes, like in *Bohème*; however the two scenes are very theatrical and melodramatic in different ways: in *Tosca* a specific scene is portrayed and the lighting is scenographic; and in *Iris* the central figure advances into a field of flowers with her eyes closed and her breast exposed. The shades of colors, the flowers in the foreground, the

⁵⁰ In terms of its style, Poster Art absorbed and elaborated in an Italian way the artistic European currents and posters became indissolubly associated to the graphic art style fashionable at the time: Art Nouveau. The turning point toward Art Nouveau can be identified in the *Bohème* poster mentioned above. Beforehand, the artistic developments had gone through different styles as one can see in the posters for Franchetti's *Cristoforo Colombo* (designed by Adolfo Feragutti Visconti in 1892) and for Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (designed by Vespasiano Bignami in 1893). In these posters, as opposed to Hohenstein's first examples, the image is strongly predominant over text. However, the realism of the poster for Franchetti's opera does not provide the emotional visual communication that characterized poster art; the scene printed on the *Manon Lescaut* poster, while being strongly emotional, lacks color and the general layout is more that of a cover than of a poster.

⁵¹ For an almost exhaustive series of reprints of Hohenstein's works, operatic and not operatic, see Manzato, *Un Pioniere del Manifesto*.

undefined volume of the figure, and the strong sense of movement present in *Iris* draw the viewer in but do not convey a very specific dramatic idea or reveal something particularly specific about the opera, besides a vague Japanese atmosphere and a sense of suspense. The design direct the eye toward the word “Iris” and its sinuous letters and therefore toward the flowers. The coloring and the lighting also recall the atmospheres of the stage designs, creating a connection with the performance for the viewers who had seen it. In *Tosca*, instead, the poster refers to a very specific dramatic point of the plot and underlines a mysterious and tragic murderous atmosphere thanks to the use of solid colors – red in particular – and by framing Tosca in a triangular shape of light. The naturalism of the drawing of the characters and the candles, combined with the symbolic use of color and the choice of the scene, create an utterly theatrical and dramatic scene whose effect can be further highlighted by the imposing high position of the poster on the wall. The snake provides a final ominous touch. The poster elaborates on the *Tosca* iconography created by the interpretation of Sarah Bernhardt, whose production had toured Italy and might have been familiar to the audience.⁵² Overall, both the *Iris* and *Tosca* posters seems very memorable and effective. To modern viewers they are probably those where Hohenstein achieved his best results. However, the powerful iconography and imagery created for these posters was not – or only partially - reused for the other marketing items of the campaigns, as instead it was the case for *Bohème*. The opera poster design, after these two advertisements, abandoned the dramatic effects for a focus on decorative and elegant elements.

⁵² For a complete comparison of the costumes and the poster with the Bernhardt imagery of *Tosca*, see Manzato, *Un Pionere del Manifesto*, 34.

Franz Laskoff and Leopold Metlicovitz contributed to two developments of poster design at Ricordi. Laskoff, who designed mostly posters for Perosi's oratoria, used geometric shapes and blocks of flat solid colors in the style of Jugendstil. Metlicovitz instead in this period developed to further levels the floral style in pastel colors and focused almost exclusively on the female figure that usually appears at the center of the image surrounded by extremely elaborate frame. For both authors the text does not interact with the image, as it had in *Iris* and *Tosca*, but is relegated to the top or the bottom as in a caption to the image. Both Laskoff's colors and Metlicovitz's ornaments are visually appealing but they do not have a dramatic effect. Instead they suggest an idea of beauty and elegance.

Two striking examples of balance between elegant style and direct dramatic form are the two posters for *Madama Butterfly* designed by Hohenstein 1904. For one he chose the final scene and this poster is highly charged with dramatic and tragic elements (fig.7). As opposed to *Tosca* and *Iris*, the scene is painted in naturalistic style, it is less symbolic, more direct. The focus is on the child and not on the protagonist of the opera, probably to highlight the tragedy and evoke strong feelings. The way the scene is painted suggests that the child is being taken away from the mother, which is not representative of what happens in the plot of the opera. The composition is simpler than Hohenstein's older posters. The use of pale colors and the frame – reminiscent of the floral style but very simple – create the realistic effect of a stage photograph. The other poster is very different, having in common superficially only the flowers (fig.8). On a deeper analysis the two posters though share a similar interpretation of the opera, focusing on the personal intimate drama of Butterfly's solitude and despair. In this poster the character is

giving her back to the viewer and looking out of a window. The poster is very powerful in its simplicity: the unconventional view of the back attracts the viewer whose gaze is drawn in by the rigidity of the square frame to make the viewer participate in Butterfly's wait and wonder at what she is looking. The dramatic charge of these two posters is as intense as those for *Tosca* and *Iris*, but the style is more composed and elegant.

Each of the posters I have investigated advertised one single opera and only new operas. On the level of explicit content, they always provided the title of the work, the names of the authors (both librettists and composers, and sometimes the author of the literary text), and the name of the publisher. No dates, locations, cast, or other announcements were ever provided in any of the Ricordi operatic posters, at odds with most of the posters produced abroad where at least the venue was central to the communication or contrarily to what happened in prose theater, where the poster communicated the company and the main actors.⁵³ Opera posters also differed greatly from posters for commercial products. In the latter the product itself very rarely appeared and instead the focus was on the use of the product or its symbolic role and value in society. As Piermarco Aroldi notes, *fin de siècle* Italian advertisement of commercial products was of "elitist and refined taste that reflected not so much the product but the social class that the ad addressed - that is, the only one able to purchase such product - by

⁵³ Most of the posters from the time include information about specific performances, either the venue, or a date, or the name of performers, or all of the above. Some examples are in Gallo, *The Poster in History*, 110, 112, 116 and 118: a poster for Folie-Bergere in Paris (1900), a show in Berlin (1910), Mucha's posters for Sarah Bernhardt performances (they include her name and the venue), and a show by Compagnia Lillipuziana (1903). Among the various Ricordi posters for operas and films in the Civica Raccolta delle Stampe A. Bertarelli, there is one for a company of comedians with several details regarding the performers and the venues. Obviously, one can see that poster with no specific information, like the Ricordi ones, can be reused in multiple cities and occasions. However, it should be noted that it is a peculiarity of the Ricordi posters that distinguishes them from the common practices for entertainment posters at the time.

staging their lifestyle and consumption patterns, and therefore exposing a substantial cultural homogeneity between target market, language, and to a certain extent the graphic artist himself.”⁵⁴ The opera itself, instead, is the sole subject of the operatic poster. One can conclude that the opera posters did not advertise an event or a performance, did not recommend a way to spend an evening in the city, and did not attempt to sell a musical adaptation. The opera poster advertised the idea that opera was there, that it was part of urban life, that, despite the perceived “crisis” of Italian opera, new operas were still written, that there were still Italian geniuses continuing the artist tradition of the nation, and that Ricordi was responsible for it.

As I mentioned, posters were meant to be - and they were - visible to a great number and a variety of people: they were big and colorful and displayed on city walls, in public buildings, and in streetcars, which at the time were interclass means of transportation.⁵⁵ This reinforced the purpose of these posters as inferred above: to establish a presence and validate the above-mentioned communication to the eyes of all urban people. However, the posters also utilized very specific visual modalities that carried their own message. In the analyses above, I described the types of feelings they

⁵⁴ “Il gusto elitario ed estetizzante riflettesse non tanto il prodotto quanto la classe sociale cui esso si rivolgeva – l’unica economicamente abilitata all’acquisto delle merci pubblicizzate – mettendone in scena stili di vita e tendenze di consumo, e denunciando così una sostanziale omogeneità culturale di target, linguaggio pubblicitario e, per certi versi, artista pubblicitario.” Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 239.

⁵⁵ At least one version of *Tosca* and *Iris* posters were 3 by 2 and 3 by 1 respectively as exposed in the exhibit dedicated to Hohenstein in 2003 in Treviso <http://www.studioesseci.net/mostra.php?IDmostra=62>. I saw some at La Scala of comparable dimensions. However, they were probably printed also in smaller formats. The fact that they were hanged on the city walls is not only intuitive but also confirmed by a letter from Giulio Ricordi to Hohenstein from February 25th, 1904, in which Ricordi expressed his concerns about the horizontal shape of the poster for *Madama Butterfly* (quoted in Manzato, *Un Pioniere del Manifesto*, 13). For the “democracy” of the streetcars see Edmondo De Amicis, *La carrozza di tutti* (Torino: A. Vigiongo e C. editori, 1980) and the painting by Joy Bayswater, *Omnibus*, 1895, <http://collections.museumoflondon.org.uk/Online/object.aspx?objectID=object-102118>

might have evoked in the viewers. Combining the functional communication with the symbolic one of the visual element and the “democratic” exposure, what resulted was an ambiguity and an inconsistency between content, form, and addressees that reveals that the cultural industries were uncertain about the definition of where the appeal of the cultural products themselves laid. In my opinion, it can be said that the posters for *Bohème*, *Iris* and *Tosca* sold stories and sold entertainment: opera could be for everybody because it was passion, melodrama, and it was there huge in front of the viewer because it was part of Italians’ lives and traditions. The later posters instead sold a status, an image: opera was for those who wanted beauty, sophistication, and elegance; for those who wanted to be seduced by and experience the elegant social setting of the opera theater. In my opinion, the posters reveal that while the social status of opera might have been ambiguous, its cultural status was not. In fact, in a time and a place where life was fast paced, when people were bombarded with information, advertisements, progress, innovation, and social turmoil, all typologies of posters in different ways portrayed opera as a potential escape, as entertainment. Either through their stories or through their elegant atmospheres, operas can transport the audiences to fantastic places, which could be interpreted both as the fictional ones of the stories, or as the opera theaters themselves.

The last Ricordi poster with an opera subject of which I know, was from 1914 for an obscure opera by Franco Alfano, *L’ombra di Don Giovanni*.⁵⁶ The exception was the poster for *Turandot* that resumed the style of the old elegant and elaborate posters to create a powerful icon for Puccini’s unfinished opera. However, the Officine continued

⁵⁶ According to what I found in Archivio Storico Teatro alla Scala and Raccolta Civica Stampe A. Bertarelli.

designing and printing posters for other companies, and later they started printing photographic posters for pop rock singers and bands that recorded with the Ricordi music label.⁵⁷ The war and the systematic use of photography contributed to stop the production of operatic posters and to change completely the concept of the preparation and design of posters. However, while at the turn of the century a poster was made for each new opera (and occasionally for the older ones), that was not the case anymore after the first few years of the 20th century, and after WWI operatic posters seemed to disappear. That was the time of posters for the first movies, of which Ricordi printed many successful ones. At that point the differentiation of products was complete: the new operas were not written, produced and advertised for wider audiences, and only the repertoire operas continued to attract popular audiences well into the thirties, as the popular products analyzed later show. The shift in the production of posters indicates that the format of the poster with its power to display a product in front of thousands of people was not the most appropriate form of advertisement for an opera by Pizzetti, or Berio. Ricordi, however, continued to work on graphic design for its products and considering it important but focusing almost exclusively on the covers of the scores, often designed by renowned artists,⁵⁸ moving away from the democratic city walls into the homes of music amateurs and critics and into the concert halls.

3.2 Collectible Memories: the Postcards

Advertisement can take many forms, and the collectible item is one of them and quite an effective one. Postcards, calendars, gadgets, objects, cards serve multiple

⁵⁷ See Ferraris, "Graphics," 194-5

⁵⁸ See Sartori, *Casa Ricordi*, appendix.

purposes: the objects have an intrinsic practical function; if associated with a company or product they can become advertisement; and they primarily come in series which encourages collection. Collection in particular allowed for advertisements to become aesthetically autonomous and acquire a symbolic quality of nostalgia and memory. As collectibles, the advertisements reached the domestic spheres to become part of people's houses, lives, and hobbies. The collection and the independent intrinsic function of the object made the collectibles very popular and allowed for a constant sharing, showing and exchanging of the advertisement, thereby making collectible items into a very powerful advertisement tool.

Illustrated postcards became widely produced and used after the 1870s.⁵⁹ Their wide use, their communication purpose, and the affordable price categorized them as close to the mass-media. The messages they delivered were both the handwritten text and the content, usually of visual type, printed on the front. These contents could vary but in the primordial era of postcards they comprised mostly advertisements or political and socio-cultural themes.⁶⁰ This medium became very relevant soon after its invention. In fact, for example, as part of the third International Art Exposition of Venice in 1899, there was the first International Exposition of Postcards, and the commemorative postcard for the National Postcard Exhibit of 1905 in Como defined postcards as no less than “not frivolous pleasure but civic tools of aesthetic education.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Coradeschi, *Collezionismo*, 1: 4.

⁶⁰ Coradeschi, *Collezionismo*, 1: 6. Advertisement postcards equal in number those about wars and fascist propaganda.

⁶¹ See the announcing postcard published in Coradeschi, *Collezionismo*, 1: 5, published by the committee for the celebrations of the art exposition of Venice in 1905. The first national exposition of postcards took place in 1899 (Coradeschi, *Collezionismo*, 1: 6).

Postcards are collectibles, memorabilia, and artistic⁶² objects with high and delocalized communicative and marketing power thanks to the possibility of sharing them by mailing them. The fact that they often come in series enhances all of these characteristics and their communication value. Postcards with operatic subjects were sold in the theaters on the night of the performance. The sale of postcards was discussed during the meetings of the Boards of Directors of La Scala under the Visconti management: the theater hired a person in charged of the sale and ordered from the printing companies the types and the prints that they thought were more appropriate. The sales hours and the costs were matters to be discussed at important meetings and even the President had a say.⁶³ The Officine Grafiche Ricordi was a pioneer in this field as well. The first Ricordi postcards were reproductions of the posters, but soon the advantages of their format and their functionality caused an increased production of this medium. Ricordi designed and printed numerous types of postcards in enormous quantities,⁶⁴ and they were the first to print postcards in series,⁶⁵ that is, a determined number of postcards on a specific theme.⁶⁶ Two other companies that specialized in the printing of operatic

⁶² Renowned artists such as Dudovich, Boccioni and Sironi designed postcards.

⁶³ Milan, Associazione Culturale Duca Marcello Visconti di Modrone per lo Studio della Storia dell'Industria Archive, Società Anonima, registro 7, La Scala Board of Directors meeting minutes from 9 December 1899: "Il Direttore riferisce poi sulla questione della reclame aggiungendo di aver trovato nel Brizzi dell'Agenzia di Viaggi la persona molto adatta per tale servizio e spera che potremo averne un certo vantaggio ... non saranno che L 1440 per le cartoline più un premio che dovremo dare al Brizzi in fine stagione il quale non supererà le L 500....Presidente: Crede che le cartoline debbano essere vendute esclusivamente al teatro alla sera, e al Camerino durante il giorno...di ogni serie di cartoline ne facciano un certo numero in carta distinta e numerizzate da vendersi ad un prezzo superiore."

⁶⁴ Already at the postcard exposition of 1899, Ricordi participated with about 70 different postcards (Colombo, *La Cultura Sottile*, 88). There are no specific information about the earlier years but the fact that in 1910 alone Ricordi printed 50 million postcards (and 25 million music sheets) gives an idea of the volume of production Coradeschi, *Collezionismo*, 1: 10.

⁶⁵ Ferraris, "Graphics," 194.

⁶⁶ These were obviously objects very appealing to the collectors of the time and the opera fanatics, especially if they were available in limited number. The value of the series and the limited availability was noted also by Visconti (see note 63). The postcards are still very sought after collectible items, especially

postcards soon imitated Ricordi: Alterocca in Terni and A.Pini in Bologna. While Ricordi mostly made use of the chromolithographic technique and, very strategically as we shall see, often used the sketches for the costumes and the sets as a subject, the other two companies specialized in photographic postcards.

On the front side of the Alterocca postcards there is a black and white photograph of a scene with singers/characters with the corresponding melody and lyrics printed over the picture in a mostly free area of the image in handwritten characters (Fig. 9). Also in printed handwritten characters, there is the title of the opera, the number of the act and scene represented, and the signature of the photographer. Some, probably produced later, feature also a set of three or four lines of the libretto in red typographic characters. The series number, the printing company's name, and the notice that they received Ricordi's permission to reproduce the image are printed in red typographic characters in a white space usually at the bottom. This white space served for the sender to write the message, despite being very small. On the back of the card there is the label "postcard" and the space for the address. The Alterocca series are reproduced in some volumes on the history of postcards, but if one has the opportunity to view the actual postcards one will notice some interesting details. First, many were sent to the same addressee without much of a message, which suggests that they were collected and mailed only for that purpose. Second, when the message is more elaborate it usually covers part of the photo itself given the scarcity of white space. This seems to suggest that the postcards, despite being printed in series and being collectors items, they were also purchased and mailed

the Ricordi ones. In fact, as Ferraris noted, the company does not have the original models anymore so they cannot reproduce the series of the 19th century like, instead, they did for the posters (Ferraris, "Graphics," 195).

by people who did not take much interest in them as aesthetic or collectible objects, but simply as means to communicate a message to a friend. Third, these postcards were sent to different destinations from different locations and to different types of people – friends, family, accountants, noblewomen, and young children. Most of the Alterocca postcards I had access to had *La Bohème* as their subject⁶⁷ and were postmarked between 1903 and 1906. The quality of the general design was very low: the singers' poses are awkward, the "handwritten" lyrics and music are often not straight, smeared, unclear, and poorly positioned. This reveals that they were printed at low cost and in massive numbers for a popular market capitalizing more on the success of the opera created by Ricordi and the realism of photography rather than on the postcard itself as artistic or valuable object.

The same can be said about the Pini postcards, although those I observed for *La Bohème* were not photographs but very realistic black and white drawings that clearly aimed at imitating the effect of a photograph, and most likely the very same photographs printed on the Alterocca series.⁶⁸ Instead, the same cannot be said about the Ricordi postcards, which were designed with attention to detail and aiming at producing an artistic but yet commercial object. The postcards served a central role in the massive and innovative publicity campaigns prepared by the publishing company that I announced earlier and that I will now describe by focusing on the ones for *Bohème*, *Iris*, and *Tosca*.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Raccolta Civica Stampe Bercarelli, not in catalogue. I could see and document all of the *Bohème* postcards of the collection (at least according to the staff of the archive), most of them printed by Alterocca, Pini and Ricordi. I accessed also other *Bohème* postcards from other printers and some *Carmen* postcards from the same period and with the same features as described above.

⁶⁸ The Pini series for *Carmen* present the same features as the Pini series for *Bohème*.

⁶⁹ Ricordi very likely prepared similar campaigns for other operas as well. For example, I found in the letters some information that hints at a campaign for Franchetti's *Germania*, and there were postcards done

3.3 Drama, Elegance, and Repetition: the Campaigns

The campaign orchestrated for Puccini's *La Bohème* had no precedents. The publicity was diversified and distributed among six different media: big size posters, playbills, postcards, envelope seals, plates, and the printed media (in particular *La Gazzetta Musicale*). The campaign reiterated the imagery and the themes of the actual cultural products – the performances and the scores – to a point that they can also be considered part of this perfectly integrated strategy to make *Bohème* a memorable success and its author an icon for the rebirth and future of Italian opera. In fact, the iconographic theme of the campaign are Hohenstein's sketches (*figurini*) on which the staging and the costumes for the actual performance were based.

People in cities all over Europe saw them on the poster that I described earlier; audiences in Turin saw them on stage starting February 1st 1896; and starting from February 13th the readers of *La Gazzetta Musicale* could see them, one per week, as proclaimed on the special announcement on page 3: "Starting from today's issue we are going to publish the costume sketches for *Bohème*." The notice mentioned "Adolfo Hohenstein, the eminent artist who designed the costumes and the scenes" and announced also a special treat to the readers: "The readers are definitely going to appreciate the musical novelty that we offer in this issue. It's a piece from triumphing *Bohème* by Puccini, Musetta's waltz (*quando me'n vo soletta per la via...*) from the second act of said opera, a piece already destined to popularity for its graceful and smooth melody of

for *La Figlia di Iorio*, However, these three are the most interesting because of the richness of the material still available and because they bring to light some stimulating information about the status of these operas.

immediate effect.”⁷⁰ The issue contained the piano-vocal adaptation of this piece and the image of Mimi’s costume sketch from act I (Fig. 10). A few pages later, just before the final three pages of ads, there was a three quarter page advertisement for *La Bohème* printed materials: the piano-vocal score (15 francs), the piano score (8 francs), and the libretto (1 franc). The same ad was printed on each issue in the following months.

It is very likely that the theater in Torino and the Ricordi shops also started selling the postcards and the playbill before or on the date of the premiere.⁷¹ The series of postcards reproduced the usual Hohenstein sketches that used half of the postcard, and, for some editions, it featured also the portraits of the authors (Puccini, Giacosa, and Illica). The scenes are printed in color with a print that recalled the watercolors of the actual sketches, so that the postcards look painted (Fig. 11). While the other series of postcards tried to reproduce the reality of the theater scene, the Ricordi postcards with the accurate reproduction of the watercolors and the portraits of the authors attempted to reproduce the artistic process involved in the production of a masterpiece. The choice of sketches for the postcards I believe contributes to reveal the reason for the success of the campaign. As opposed to the photographic series where there is the first meeting between Rodolfo and Mimi or Mimi’s death, in the Ricordi’s series the most melodramatic

⁷⁰ “Cominciamo col numero d’oggi la pubblicazione dei figurini della “Bohème,” “Adolfo Hohenstein, l’egregio artista che ha disegnato i costumi e le scene” and “I lettori ci saranno certamente grati della primizia musicale che loro offriamo in questo numero. E’ un pezzo della trionfante Bohème di Puccini il VALZER DI MUSETTA (quando me’n vo soletta per la via...) nell’atto secondo di detta opera, pezzo già destinato alla popolarità per la sua melodia graziosa, scorrevole e d’effetto immediato” *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, February 13, 1896, 3.

⁷¹ Ricordi sold the publicity materials to the theaters that then sold them to the audiences (see note 63) but also likely directly to the public in its numerous stores. Ricordi also sold them to periodicals and newspapers as a letter from Tornaghi to Vittore Deliliers, director of *Rivista Melodrammatica*, from March 26th, 1897 (vol. 18, n. 98 I-Mb ASR) demonstrates: “Per gli avvisi Bohème bisogna rivolgersi alla nostra Casa: il prezzo varia a seconda della quantità che si desidera acquistare.” The history of Collezione Salce indicates that the materials were also sold directly to collectors, see Manzato, *Un Pioniere del Manifesto*.

moments are avoided. Instead there are Perpignol's toys, "Musetta's waltz" at Café Mamus, the four friends dancing, the landlord requesting rent. Hohenstein's sketches recreated the domestic, simple atmosphere of the opera itself, and Ricordi chose to insist specifically on the sketches that underline the intimate atmosphere of the group of friends and the attic in Paris.⁷²

Another reason for the success of this campaign - which although it is hard to demonstrate probably contributed to the phenomenal success of *Bohème* - definitely lies in the insistence and repetition of the imagery, like for most successful marketing campaigns. The characters in couples, like those on the posters, appeared on the title page or cover of the scores and adaptations. Also, Ricordi developed some envelope seals (fig. 12) with miniature characters⁷³ that were likely sold at the theaters and Ricordi shops, and even a set of plates, made by the renowned Italian ceramic factory Richard Ginori. Although there is not much information about the history of the plates, the plates themselves are still available.⁷⁴ There were three sets of six (plates, small plates, and

⁷² The campaign basically recreated the reasons for the opera's great success. As Alexandra Wilson writes, "Puccini's special appeal to his audience was widely deemed to rest upon his ability to create characters with whom they could empathise. *La bohème* had found favour with middle-class listeners because they saw Mimi, Rodolfo and their friends – Bohemians in little more than name – a romanticized version of themselves, their values and their aspirations." (Wilson, *The Puccini Problem*, 76.)

⁷³ I found only one envelope seal depicting Mimi reproduced in Coradeschi, *Collezionismo*, 259, in Gabriella Ravenni, *Facsimile della Copia di Lavoro del Libretto*, vol. 1 of *Tosca di Victorien Sardou, Giuseppe Giacosa e Luigi Illica. Musica di Giacomo Puccini* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2008-2009), and for sale on ebay. There is no trace of *Bohème* envelope seals with other characters from the opera.

⁷⁴ A search at the Ricordi Archive revealed that most of the document and all the letters from the fiscal year of 1895-96 are missing. Also, the plates were manufactured the year of the fusion between Richard in Milan and Ginori in Tuscany and although they have the brand of both families they were most likely made at the Richard plant in Milan which was destroyed during the war. Almost none of the documents pertaining to Richard had been transferred to Ginori when they moved the production and the administration to the Tuscan firm. The website of the association that curated the exhibit mentioned that "L'unica fonte conosciuta in cui compaiono i piatti è la seconda edizione del volume "Puccini nelle immagini" a cura di Leopoldo Marchetti, pubblicato su commissione di Rita Puccini Dell'Anna, nuora del Maestro, per il Museo di Torre del Lago nel 1968. I piatti, curiosamente, non compaiono nella prima edizione, del 1949, dello stesso volume (Milano, Garzanti)". The website is not active anymore and the

bowls) and they were hand made and hand painted with some of the scenes of the postcards and some of the couples of characters as depicted on the posters. Considering the cost and the prestige of the products manufactured by Richard Ginori, it seems likely that only few sets were produced and for a limited audiences, maybe even at a specific client's request. Ricordi used, repeated, and recycled the *Bohème* iconography for many years on scores and adaptations' covers and in reprints of postcards, sketches, playbills for collectors and amateurs (Fig. 13).⁷⁵

Another organically planned publicity campaign in the very early history of Italian advertisement was organized for the issuing of Mascagni's *Iris*. As opposed to the *Bohème* campaign, this made more subtle use of the power of the repetition of imagery to create familiarity with the iconography by focusing only on the flower that gives the title to the opera. The campaign involved, besides the poster described earlier, a wide distribution of smaller cardstock fliers with exactly the same design as Hohenstein's poster.⁷⁶ In addition, a very elegant score cover that recalled the irises on the poster was prepared by Metlicovitz, who also designed a playbill on a completely different theme in his typical elaborate floral style, while still inserting the irises. Also, an envelope seal

association does not seem to exist anymore. They were displayed at an exhibit in Lucca in 2006 <http://www.loschermo.it/articoli/view/28521> and <http://www.luccaterre.it/it/default/4530/Puccini-s-plates.html> and they are for sale on some website now. They were for sale in a store in Lucca where I had the occasion to see them.

⁷⁵ Ricordi continued to use imagery drawn from Hohenstein's sketches in various ways for music covers until recently. See, for example, 'Riduzione per pianoforte di Carmelo Bizzozero', new ed., pl. no. 100934 (Milan: Ricordi, 1911); reproduced in Sartori, *Casa Ricordi*, appendix Tav. XVII; and the cover for the *Bohème* score in the *Ricordi Vocal Scores Series*, published in the 1980s and currently widely available for purchase in the US. Ricordi's designs for *La bohème*'s advertisements and sets are now reproduced on various types of mementos, such as magnets, bags, notebooks, T-shirts and so on, which can be purchased in Italy at opera house gift shops or at the gift shop of the Puccini museum in Lucca. The designs are also widely available online reproduced on smart phone cases (<http://www.zazzle.com/puccini+electronics>), mugs, bags, pillow cases and so on (<http://www.cafepress.com/+puccini+gifts>). Ricordi recently reprinted the *La bohème* poster, along with those for other Puccini operas.

⁷⁶ Civica Raccolta Stampe Bertarelli, pubblicità p 757. The flier is 29.5 by 16 cm.

with Mascagni's portrait and a series of 12 postcards were produced. Six of the postcards, designed by Hohenstein, featured the title of the opera in oriental style font and watercolors of some salient dramatic scenes printed with very irregular contours on either a white, green or red background. In the other six, designed by Giovanni Mataloni, the image also takes up only part of the space with the rest being left blank, and a similar font for the title is used. The postcards are wonderful examples of the design of the time and of the care that Ricordi put into some of his advertisement products. The layout, the innovative interaction between the blank space and the images, the details of the drawings make of this series a very sophisticated and aesthetically significant object. The same can be said about the score and libretto covers, whose simplicity of the stencil irises on a white background with simply the title, and no other information, are very elegant objects (Fig. 14). Only one of the postcards had the drawing of the usual flower on it, making it stand out from the other eleven, which suggest an interest in the collectible value besides the artistic one.

The care put into this campaign and the sophistication of its content fit with the artistic production of Mascagni and with the relationship between the publisher and the composer. Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the time was phenomenally successful at the box office and considered a groundbreaking opera by most of criticism. Some critics suggested that Mascagni could be the true new champion of Italian opera, and that with his works Italian opera could come out of the crisis. *Cavalleria*, however, had been published by Sonzogno. When Ricordi managed to acquire the exclusive for the rising star's new opera *Iris*, he understandably did everything possible to guarantee its success both to overshadow the competition but also to tie the composer to his publishing house.

It is probably in the attempt to diversify the new product from *Cavalleria*, associated with Sonzogno, that Ricordi focused on the elegance of the campaign. In fact *Cavalleria* was a verismo opera: it takes place among Sicilian peasants and the plot is particularly crude. This was part of the reason why it became so popular also among the lower classes and definitely an aspect on which Sonzogno and his populist policy of promotion of new art, insisted on. The desire to place the new opera in a different market and detach the image of the composer from the popular and gruesome one of *Cavalleria* could have motivated the use of the flower iconography, the abandonment of the dramatic iconography of the poster (that normally otherwise would be recycled in the other materials) and the printing of Metlicovitz's playbill. Using the two female figure iconographies to symbolize the shift, Ricordi moved away from the bare-chested orange woman dramatically progressing toward the viewers, to instead a blurred but gentle female face painted with shades of gold and surrounded by flowers.

It is probably for the same reason of a choice of elegant airiness over melodramatic power that Ricordi decided to move away from the design of the poster for the campaign for *Tosca*. He had Metlicovitz design a new one, as well as a series of 10 postcards.⁷⁷ This campaign was not as extensive as the others described above and standardized the typical publicity of Ricordi from now on into including two different posters, a series of postcards, and various designs for covers. To my knowledge, he used the same pattern for *Madama Butterfly*, *La Germania*, and *La Figlia di Iorio* (for which he produced also some cardboard fliers), while for all the other new operas produced until the war, Ricordi only printed the posters (besides some postcards by commission of

⁷⁷ These postcards were printed with chromolithography technique and are probably from 1903.

La Scala for Ricordi's operas but only referred to the specific performances at that theater.)⁷⁸ Although the unique role of this composer made them completely different "marketing" cases, it should be mentioned that Ricordi coordinated a set of materials also for the first performances of Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*.

4. MARKETS, MUSIC, MEDIA: CREATING MYTHS AND MEMORIES

These campaigns demonstrate that Ricordi was truly aware of the strategic importance of publicity and that he had a long term vision that took into account the opera's new artistic developments and cultural changes. This section provides an analysis of the campaigns in the context of the general publishing politics that the firm at the time applied to music and media printing. A quick digression into the general printing politics emphasizes that the publishing industries were aware that the expansion of audiences and markets involved a necessary differentiation of products. Consequently, the commercial strategies were diversified as well as mostly based on and built around the hierarchies of value themselves. Here I will explore the purposes and the outcome of Ricordi's campaigns described above in light of the company's popularization and differentiation of printed music scores. In the next chapter, I will expand on the topic of differentiation of products and widening of markets in relation to music periodical press and criticism, where the differentiation is even more evident.

⁷⁸ I found some examples of postcards for *Walkiria* and *Sigfried* for La Scala seasons between 1898 and 1901 in Civica Raccolta Stampe Bertarelli.

The most evident purpose of the campaigns described above was to advertise a new product. This goal was achieved either by creating a sense of familiarity between the opera and the viewer, making it therefore more approachable, like in the case of *Bohème*, or by diffusing an aura of alluring sophisticated beauty, like in the case of the *Tosca* and *Iris* postcards and poster makeovers. The first case should be considered in the market context in which Ricordi operated at the time, which was characterized by an increased domestication of music. In fact, in the second half of the 19th century music extended from the opera houses to concert halls, which in Italy were not as established as in other countries, and to private homes. By the second half of the 19th century, more people could afford to have a piano or another musical instrument in their homes, and for some social classes it was a symbol of education and wealth.⁷⁹ This represented a whole new set of opportunities for music publishing.

As the Ricordi catalogue *Catalogo Generale delle Edizioni G. Ricordi & C.* of 1897 shows,⁸⁰ most of the retail activity of the music publishers and stores consisted of piano music, popular songs, and above all opera adaptations for piano and voice. Among the various scores, the opera adaptations and the collections of popular pieces for one instrument are the most advertised in the press, which indicates their retail value and therefore their diffusion. The catalogue and the advertisements in the periodical press

⁷⁹ See Thomas Christensen, "Public Music in Private Spaces: Piano-Vocal Scores and the Domestication of Opera," in *Music and the Cultures of Print*, ed. Kate van Orden (New York: Garland Press, 2000), 67-93; Plantinga, George Bernard Shaw, "Religion of the Pianoforte," in *Words on Music: from Addison to Barzun* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990); William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: the Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1975). Playing an instrument had always been an aristocratic pastime and the commercial advantages of having opera reach the amateurs in their houses through the format of adaptations had been exploited since the early 18th century (Christensen, "Public Music," 74.)

⁸⁰ Matteo Mainardi, "Il *Catalogo Generale delle Edizioni Ricordi & C.* Una prima analisi del gusto musicale di fine Ottocento," in *Scene di Fine Ottocento*, ed. Carlotta Sorba, 226-7 and 232.

indicate both that there was a substantial market for scores for domestic use, and that the market privileged opera adaptations and “popular” songs. They also indicate that Ricordi was well aware of the expanding pool of potential buyers and the consequent development of tastes, and that he used them as a commercial opportunity to increase sales. In fact, Ricordi printed scores with specific popularization intents, such as a collection of *Canzoni Popolari Napoletane*, a series of scores titled *Biblioteca Economica*, and an *Edizione Popolare delle Opere di Wagner* for voice and piano. Ricordi also made sure to obtain the rights for all the works of Francesco Paolo Tosti, the most famous composer of *romanze da salotto*, for domestic amateur performances. For their diffusion and distribution, the opera vocal-piano scores were also devices to echo and expand the success of operas. In this sense, the opera piano-vocal scores functioned as publicity tools for establishing an operatic work both in the theater repertoire and in the sales catalogue. However, they also worked as instruments for a wider diffusion of music culture. Through opera adaptations, opera could reach people in their homes, even those who could not go to the theater, working in similar popularizing ways, although on a much smaller scale, as would the radio broadcast and the phonograph later.

Opera adaptation scores in a context of domestication and diffusion of music across different classes represented a commercial opportunity and an advertisement tool yet with a cultural and educational outcome. This underlines the twofold position typical of the cultural industries, which is both commercial and cultural. How did the publishing industries handle this role? Also, how did they portray the product that they were selling: as a cultural one or a “commercial” one? I argue that Ricordi Company availed itself of strategies that can be placed alongside what Fausto Colombo, in his categorization of

Italian cultural industries, defines as the “mouse strategy” and the “cat strategy”. The “mouse strategy” identifies the continuation of popular entertainment in a national perspective, and the “cat strategy” indicates an industrial serialized production where marketing plays a big role. Ricordi’s campaigns and printing politics encompassed signs of both strategies. Ricordi’s competitor, Edoardo Sonzogno, can also be placed in between the “mouse” and the “cat” strategies. However, Sonzogno partially also implemented a pedagogical and populist strategy, that Colombo would define as the “cricket strategy”. In fact, as I will expand on in the next chapter, Sonzogno insisted more than Ricordi on the printing of “popular” and “economic” collections, both in terms of music scores and as far as Sonzogno’s literature and periodical publications were concerned.⁸¹

The presence of both strategies was affected by the general context of the opera industry and the personal engagement of the owners of the companies. In fact, opera was both generally affected by the new economic and social developments, but it was also facing changes and challenges of its own which contributed to a need for both a “cat” marketing and a “mouse” approach. As I described in the introduction, after Unification, theater managers and publishers had to deal with a generally widespread economic crisis, aggravated by an internationalization of the markets: the main creative centers of music were shifting to France and Germany, as well as the centers of commercial production were shifting to north and south America.⁸² Competition from other forms of entertainment increased; theaters risked closing; fewer new operas were written; and

⁸¹ Ricordi came to be perceived as a music publisher in the music industry (see Colombo, *Cultura Sottile*) while Sonzogno was often called a “patron” of music (see Baia-Curioni, *Il Mondo Nuovo*, 237).

⁸² On the so called crisis of Italian opera, see the introduction to this work.

Giuseppe Verdi, the Italian operatic genius, was getting older and no composer seemed able to step up. It was a time of a perceived “crisis of Italian opera” or “the decline of Italian melodrama.” The situation called for novel music and a push to recreate the enthusiasm for the genre, that is an open-minded approach and rigorous managing strategies. This is what Verdi recommended to Ricordi in a letter from 1887: to be practical and avoid favoritisms and set aside personal preferences and do what is good for the firm.⁸³

The desire or the need to reach a wider audience was accompanied by a need for definition of the diverse audiences and a consequent need for differentiation of products and marketing strategies. A way for Ricordi to implement its strategies was based on a strong sense of differentiation of products and social and cultural hierarchies. Along with the approach that creates a sense of familiarity used for *Bohème*, Ricordi’s campaigns also relied on the appeal of elitism and sophistication to make opera a desirable product for the middle classes. The postcards for *Iris* and *Tosca* and the poster makeovers described in the previous section are examples of this approach and indicate the use of democratic tools to establish an elitist idea of opera. Ricordi made use of a popular medium to make it “artistic.” While popular products wanted to be associated with opera for its glamour as it is particularly evident in the calendars, the opera industry was trying to associate opera to more popular forms like the postcards and the posters, yet to reaffirm the same idea of glamour and sophistication. This approach indicates the

⁸³ Letter from Giuseppe Verdi to Giulio Ricordi from July 9th, 1887 quoted in Franca Cella and Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Giuseppe Verdi, Giulio Ricordi: Corrispondenza e Immagini, 1881-1890* (Milan: Teatro alla Scalla, 1982), 18 and 19.

presence of a differentiation between popular and elitist, or “low” and “high” which can be noted also in the catalogue and the printing retail activity. In fact, it is possible to notice that there was a high level of differentiation between “high” and “low” concerning to the scores for sale, and that the differentiation pertained primarily to the visual aspect of the product. In the correspondence between the administration and the Officine, Giulio and Tito Ricordi reflected constantly on the appearance of covers and therefore the prestige of the editions. Scores and libretti could be printed in “luxury versions,” have only “title pages” or instead have “covers” which could be “plain” or “elegant.”⁸⁴ These features were also mentioned when the scores were advertised in the press along the name of the author, the title of the collection, and the content.⁸⁵ The presence of these concepts was evident but unspoken in the posters – they indicated an *idea* of elitism through visual communication – and it was more explicit in the “economic” and “popular” scores mentioned above and in the different retail positioning of the various level of elegance of the scores. The differentiation provides interesting information regarding the audiences and where the appeal of opera laid. In fact, at the turn of the century the new potentials offered by more affordable printing techniques and by the widespread communication tools led Ricordi and Sonzogno to print “popular” and “economic” collections of scores and to use media that could appeal to new potential audiences. By the end of the first decade of 20th century, the differentiation became more noticeable in the opposite direction, and Ricordi started printing a collection of “rare”

⁸⁴ A score could be “con copertina” or “con frontespizio” and the cover could be “elegante” or not, and the frontispice “liscio” or elaborate. Letter of 6 October 1894, vol. 6, no. 168, *copialettere* for fiscal year 1894/95, I-Mb, ASR). Another letter, from Giulio Ricordi to the Administration of the Graphic Workshop, dated 30 March 1897, vol. 18, no. 148, *copialettere* for fiscal year 1896/97, I-Mb, ASR, mentions luxury editions and elaborate covers for other operas.

⁸⁵ See for example the ad for *la Bohème* vocal scores in *Gazzetta Musical di Milano*, January 13, 1898, 3.

music, and the democratic marketing media like the posters were abandoned. The next chapter will show that the publications instead maintained the popular and commercial approach, but at the same time distanced themselves from an exclusive music content. The populist approach of Sonzogno became unattainable by that time. I will explain this further in the next chapter, but the distinction in the markets at this time was so pronounced that the popular and yet cultural and educational Sonzogno music products did not find their way in the new century. The company struggled and closed some lines of publications. The only way for Sonzogno to continue its work of spreading opera and music to the masses could be continued only through the brief success of its next endeavor: opera film.

Besides advertising operas, Ricordi's campaigns also contributed to create a fixed iconographic repertory for his operas thanks to groundbreaking marketing concepts and innovations in graphic design. As Colombo puts it, the iconographic campaigns "functioned as *programmed* imaginary, with the twofold meaning as 'constructed as a program' but also as 'generating a stereotypical form of vision.'"⁸⁶ Ricordi's ability to construct an imaginary allowed for its campaign to fulfill another goal: the construction of an icon. These observations bring us back to Catalani's complaints about Ricordi's "publicity strings" and his grudge against Ricordi's marketing efforts to favor Giacomo Puccini. Most of the marketing efforts analyzed in this chapter pertain to Puccini, in relation to whom scholars have often talked about a "construction" or "creation" of a genius. Baia Curioni defines it as "the constant work of accompaniment, support,

⁸⁶ "Funzione di immaginario programmato, nel doppio senso di 'costruito come un programma,' ma anche di 'generato da una forma stereotipale di visione.'" Colombo, *La Cultura Sottile*, 88.

stimulus, and guide by Giulio Ricordi to the benefit of Puccini” and Alexandra Wilson calls it more powerfully “inventing an Italian composer” and “making a maestro”, emphasizing “the weight lent to him by his publishing house” and she dedicates an entire book to the “Puccini Problem.”⁸⁷ Catalani complained and feared for his future as a composer in the roster of a publisher that “doesn’t want to hear talk of anyone but Puccini.” He also wrote: “if [Ricordi] helps me somewhat, he does a hundred times that for Puccini.”⁸⁸ While Catalani might have exaggerated the numerical proportions, Ricordi did have the power to stir to his desires the preparation of a season, and Giulio Ricordi himself admitted in a letter to Puccini that pushing *Bohème* constituted for himself “substantial material (as well as moral) sacrifices.”⁸⁹ Ricordi undeniably employed all means of politics, creativity, and technology (and here I’m not referring only to publicity, but also to attention in the staging, selection of the singers and so on) to contribute to make Puccini’s *Bohème* succeed and remain in the repertory over Leoncavallo’s version

⁸⁷ “la costringente opera di accompagnamento, sostegno, stimolo, guida di Giulio Ricordi nei confronti di Puccini” Baia-Curioni, *Mercanti dell’Opera*, 169 and 177, and Wilson, *The Puccini Problem*, 11, 25, and 23, respectively. Recent exhibits were organized around the concept of the creation of a myth, putting together materials that bring to light the processes of communication and marketing around the maestro. See for example <http://www.loschermo.it/articoli/view/28007>. The promotional campaigns are only one aspect of the “creation” of the Puccini myth. In fact, the correspondence shows the attention that Giulio and Tito dedicated to Puccini, from helping finding suitable libretti, to psychological motivation, to staging and production of his operas, of which Tito was detailed curator. For more details about the personal involvement of Ricordi in the professional development and production of Puccini see Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell’opera*, 168-80 and Wilson, *Puccini Problem*, 34-39. Most bibliography on Puccini mentions the close relationship with the Ricordi family but few have analyzed it in the perspective of marketing. Ricordi functioned a modern agent curating also the image of the composer and even organized interviews (see letter from Giulio to Tito Ricordi from June 1st, 1897: “Gli ha molto piaciuta [a Puccini] l’idea di farlo intervistare per ribattere le asserzioni di Leoncavallo,” vol. 28, *copialelettere* of fiscal year 1896/97, I-Mb, ASR).

⁸⁸ Alfredo Catalani, letter of 1 June 1892 to Giuseppe Depanis, in Richard M. Berrong, *The Politics of Opera in Turn-of-the-Century Italy: As Seen through the Letters of Alfredo Catalani* (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 1992), 106.

⁸⁹ ‘Ma ora che, con ingenti sacrifici materiali (e per me anche morali) si è data la spinta alla Bohème, bisogna subirne le conseguenze’, in reference to Puccini’s refusal to go abroad for a staging of *La bohème*; letter from Giulio Ricordi to Puccini, 1 June 1897, vol. 28, no. 22, *copialelettere* of fiscal year 1896/97, I-Mb, ASR.

and to create the perception that Puccini must have been Verdi's successor that the world of opera was expecting. The power and the diffusion of the Puccini icon was built to be so long lasting that despite the initial huge failure of *Madama Butterfly* Puccini is still the last big opera composer to be remembered on a large scale.

The advertisement function of construction and memorization of an icon was particularly powerful in a context of cultural and musical crisis as the one described in the introduction, and it affected the development of the history of Italian opera. Ricordi's designs still have the power to evoke a memory of a glorious and glamorous operatic past or suggest a stereotypical idea of "Italianess" outside of Italy. In turn-of-the-century Milan they exemplified that opera had a commercial value and that attracting and entertaining audiences was a valuable asset. Operas were popular attractions and the presence in the popular iconography demonstrates that opera were shared knowledge for a general public. Ricordi's campaigns also contribute to shed some light on where the power of attraction laid. The analysis of the musical press in the next chapter will confirm that part of the draw consisted in the social glamorous experience of going to the theater and be exposed to sophisticated atmospheres, which was exactly what the second group of Ricordi's posters evoked. Ricordi's publicity campaigns confirm the presence of a wide market base for opera and the need to advertisement, thereby the presence of competing forms of culture and entertainment. At the same time, they reestablish the association of opera and elite that concerned the municipality as described in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER 3
CHRONICLES OF SUCCESS
COMMERCIALIZATION OF THE MUSICAL PRESS BETWEEN “CRONACA” AND
“CRITICA”

“In Italy people go to the theater for many reasons: the last of which is to understand the meaning of a work of art...and the first is to ‘kill’ the evening, make use of binoculars, pay visits, etc.”

(Giovanni Ferrero, 1899)¹

Sentences similar the one quoted above appeared frequently in a certain kind of cultivated press at turn of the century. Such comments were partially motivated by a general snobbish attitude that characterized a new type of musical press that was began the 1890s. However, such comments also reflected quite accurate observations. The citation describes effectively both the social practice of theater-going and the cultural practice that reported it, music criticism. This chapter provides a study of the musical press in the second half of the 19th century aiming to elucidate the meaning of such comment for the operatic institution. The artistic and theatrical periodical press in *fin de siècle* Italy was extremely widespread, substantially influential, and tightly entangled with the opera industry. This chapter deals with the periodical press as a cultural product in its own right and, in particular, the way it related to the opera industry, especially in

¹ Giovanni Ferrero, “Crisi Teatrale” in *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, 1899, p. 620. “Da noi si va a teatro per molte ragioni: l’ultima è quella di penetrare il significato d’un’opera d’arte...la prima è quella di “ammazzar la sera”, lavorar di binocolo, far visite, ecc....” (my translation. Unless otherwise noted, all the forthcoming translations will be mine).

Milan. The chapter also investigates the opera world that the musical press aimed to represent, illustrate, and address.

After having examined the moments of production and publicity in the previous chapters, I will now focus on the moment of critical assessment as well as the way it was presented to the readers of the specialized press. Adding yet another angle to look at the issue of popularization and elitism of opera in turn-of-the-century Italy allows for a more complete picture of the opera institution that takes into consideration the whole production process. In broader terms, this chapter sheds light on the system of integrated cultural industries that dominated the opera institution in Milan and reinforces the effectiveness of a study that takes into account each aspect of this mechanism. In fact, this chapter shows that the press sector (and I mean here not only the musical press but also the political newspapers) was tightly connected to the opera world; the two fields strongly influenced each other and involved some of the same personalities.² One indication of the relationship between the press and opera worlds is that most of the specialized press was owned and printed by agents who managed singers and theaters. Particularly relevant for this chapter are the music publishers Ricordi & Co. and Edoardo Sonzogno, who owned their own musical periodicals and advertised their products in the periodical press. Sonzogno also owned daily newspapers and an entire publishing and media industry.

² Besides other facts that I will mention throughout the chapter, examples of the connection between press in general and the world of opera include Felice Romani, director of newspaper *Gazzetta Piemontese* and librettist for Giuseppe Verdi; music critic Filippo Filippi, director of the political newspaper *La Perseveranza*; Giuseppe Depanis both a music critic and an impresario and theater director; Antonio Ghislanzoni, both editor of music periodical *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* and librettist.

I argue that the specialized periodical press simplified their content and increased the commercial appeal of their format, which indicate interest in attracting a broader-based readership. While the theatrical and musical press at first consisted of reviews for aristocratic readers, I demonstrate that starting roughly around the 1870s both the press and criticism evolved in a more popular way, becoming more visually appealing and more descriptive respectively. I draw connections between such changes and the aesthetic debates regarding opera and its social status. In fact, I will demonstrate that in the press of the later decades of the 19th century it is possible to witness a growing sensitivity to the composition of readership and a deeper reflection on the purpose of the musical press *vis à vis* the opera institution.³ Through an analysis of criticism, I also argue that the value of opera at the time resided in its being a social event and in its commercial success. Starting from the 1890s, new analytical intellectual publications were created as a reaction to the popularization of the musical press. I argue that the phenomenon of increased diffusion and commercial appeal of the specialized periodical press in turn produced a growing distinction of types of readership, audiences and critics, and a consequent diversification of the cultural products. In fact, on the one hand, the press and the critics started to appeal to the readership with captivating and entertaining periodicals; on the other hand, at the same time, some intellectuals and music scholars started advocating for analytical musical criticism, which led to the creation of intellectual and rigorous musical publications. I argue that this development reflected a diversification of

³ Most of the specialized periodical press is now available online at <http://cirpem.lacasadellamusica.it/cirpem-2.htm> thanks to the digitization by the Centro Internazionale di Ricerca sui Periodici Musicali (CIRPeM). When I started my research, only few had already been digitized so some of the issues of *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* were accessed at the Harvard Music Library from microfilm; some periodicals were accessed at the Mediateca of the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan and some other were provided by the Archive of La Scala Museum.

readership and novel negative categorization of the opera industry as a commercial enterprise.

The scholarship on the Italian periodical press and musical criticism generally has either dismissed the reviews of the time as “non criticism,” or it has used them as sources for the reception history of specific operas without contextualizing the periodicals within their aesthetic orientation and economic interests. As Alexandra Wilson points out in one of the rare articles on the topic, the musical press has not been studied as a product in its own right, and criticism before the 1890s has not been addressed.⁴ The justification for the lack of attention to 19th-century Italian criticism is that it is not “criticism” in the modern sense. For example, this is the position taken by Marco Capra, one of the most prominent scholars of musical criticism: “Those who in such papers report on musical and theatrical activities... in general are not classifiable as music critics because their assessment is based on impressions derived from a more or less deep literary culture, and from a consolidated experience as spectators, rather than from a historical, theoretical, technical, and aesthetic knowledge of the matter.”⁵ Other scholars have used the criticism of the time as a historical source to reconstruct the reception history of a given opera without taking into account the critics’ lack of knowledge and the influence of personal impressions that Capra underlines. My study addresses both issues: it both contributes to

⁴ Alexandra Wilson, “Music Letters and National Identity,” *Nineteenth-century Music Review* 7, no. 2 (2010): 112-114. In the same article (p. 109), Wilson also quotes opinions of rigorous critics of the time against their contemporaries: Oscar Chilesotti in *Cronache Musicali Illustrate* of 1900 (p. 28) stated that “music criticism in the periodical press would be truly laughable if it were not such a painful subject” and Michele Virgilio wrote in a pamphlet called *Della decadenza dell’opera in Italia* that “unfortunately music criticism does not exist in Italy.”

⁵ “Coloro che in tali testate sono impegnati nel dar conto dell’attività musicale e soprattutto teatrale ... non sono in genere classificabili come critici musicali, poiché il loro giudizio si basa su impressioni che derivano da una più o meno approfondita cultura letteraria e da una consolidata esperienza di spettatori piuttosto che sulla conoscenza storica, teorica, tecnica estetica del materiale.” Marco Capra and Fiamma Nicolodi, *La Critica Musicale in Italia nella Prima Metà del Novecento* (Parma: Casa della Musica, 2001), 14.

a necessary – and so far mostly absent – problematization of the sources, and it underlines the value of 19th-century criticism. In fact, I maintain that specifically because of its lack of rigor concerning theoretical and technical aspects, 19th-century criticism was a reflection of how people at the time considered and received opera. This type of vague criticism can inform us about cultural debates, social practices, and historical facts in a way that criticism that rigorously analyzes music cannot.

In the first section, I will provide a general overview of the status of musical and theatrical press in terms of dissemination, readership, and positioning. Then I will analyze the developments and changes of the existing press toward a new format to appeal to the new audiences at the turn of the century. The analysis of the tendency toward a “popular” format indicates that while the readership was growing in number, it was becoming less sophisticated. This section will be followed by a review of the criticism that demonstrates a general descriptiveness, an attention to the box office success and to opera as a social event. Particular attention will be dedicated to the publisher Sonzogno as exemplary both of a democratic approach to periodical publications and attempts to reconcile this approach with quality criticism and educational purposes. The chapter will conclude with a study of the new forms of “intellectual” criticism and new rigorous publications that developed in the 1890s, as well as an analysis of the implications of this development. From the analyses will emerge a split in the publications about opera that reflects two kinds of consumers: the educated elites and a middle-class audience.

1. MILAN AND THE THEATRICAL PRESS: A BOOMING BUSINESS

Gazettes, prototypical newspapers, and periodical publications had been printed in Italy since the 17th century, but they were mostly short-lived initiatives of groups of intellectuals with limited and local circulation.⁶ It was only in the 19th century that periodical and daily presses acquired dignity, consistency, and longevity, at first in the rest of Europe and slightly later in Italy.⁷ Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* identifies the print media as responsible and strictly related to the idea of nation and therefore political consciousness.⁸ Keeping this in mind, it will not be surprising that after Italian Unification, roughly 450 periodicals were published throughout the Italian peninsula. Around the same time, many daily newspapers were founded. The number of periodicals grew to about 750 at the beginning of the 1870s, and approximately 1454 in the 1880s. An impressive 40% of periodical publications specialized in artistic and literary topics.⁹

Milan was the center of a new and modern print industry – of which we have seen some aspects in the previous chapter – and had a particularly prolific and developed press

⁶ For a list of periodical publications in Italy between the 17th and 18th century see Mario Lombardo and Fabrizio Pignatelli, *La Stampa Periodica in Italia: Mezzo Secolo di Riviste Illustrate* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985), 10-19.

⁷ According to John Davis, “Media, Markets and Modernity: The Italian Case, 1870-1915,” in *The Printed Media*, ed. Ann Hallamore Caesar et al. (London: Legenda, 2011), 10, scholars (Barrington Moore, 1966, and Alexander Gerschenkron, 1962) have referred to a “backwardness of Italy” in terms of press developments and history.

⁸ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991). His influential book also corroborates the importance of the press and media industries analyzed in this and the previous chapter in the formation of nation, nationalism, and national sense of community in particular in relation to capitalism and vernacular language, both phenomena that, as I hope this work demonstrates, were central to the relationship between opera and nation building and national culture.

⁹ See Nicola Bernardini, *Guida alla stampa periodica italiana* (Lecce: Spaccante, 1890).

production.¹⁰ Beginning in the 1830s, the number and popularity of periodical publications that included chronicles of musical and theatrical events increased rapidly.¹¹ Among the many exclusively dedicated to music and theater, those published in Milan in the 1860s for a substantial amount of years¹² were *Il Mondo Artistico* (1867-1914), *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* (1863-1934), *L'Amico degli Artisti* (1847-1896), *La Frusta Teatrale* (1863 – 1912?), *La Gazzetta dei teatri* (at first called *La Moda* 1850 – 1924¹³), *Il Trovatore* (1854-1913), and *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* (1842 – 1902, with short interruptions in the 1850s and 1860s).

During the 1870s and 1880s, the editors and publishers of periodicals were forced to face some quite dramatic changes in society and, therefore, readership, especially in a fast-growing city like Milan. The school reforms of 1859 and 1877, increased literacy, and wider distribution of wealth meant more potential readers and more potential

¹⁰ Sergio Romagnoli, “Un secolo di stampa periodica in Italia (1815-1915)” in *Fare gli Italiani; scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea*, ed. Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993), 305 talks about a “Milanese supremacy” (primato Milanese) for the periodical press.

¹¹ What follows is a list of all the periodicals that included musical news and reviews that were created before or around the Unification, were published in Milan and were active for extended periods of time: *La Fama*, *Il Corriere dei Teatri*, *Il Corriere delle Dame*, *Il Cosmorama Pittorico* (1836-1910), *Il Figaro*, *La Moda*, *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, *Don Marzio*, *La Gazzetta dei Teatri*, *Lo Spirito Folletto*, *Il Caricaturista* (umoristico teatrale founded in 1879, started as “*Garibaldi con agenzia teatrale*.” Sources: CIRPeM and Bernardini, *Guida*, 1890.

¹² Long-lasting periodicals specifically about music/theater/opera published in other cities after the Unification were: *L'arpa* (Bologna), *Boccherini* (Firenze), *La Gazzetta Musicale di Firenze*, *La Gazzetta Musicale di Napoli* (later renamed *Napoli Musicale*), *La Musica* (Napoli). There were also many more in Milan that were published around this time but not through the second half of the century and are therefore excluded from this analysis. For example, *Il Censore* and *L'Italia Musicale* are the most relevant. Some data about publications in Milan: in 1866 in Milan 92 newspapers/periodicals were published, of which 11 political, 14 theatrical, 16 commercial/industrial, 19 scientific, 32 literary/artistic. There was a total of 58.000 subscribers and 84.950 copies were sold. Giuseppe Farinelli, *Storia del Giornalismo Italiano: dalle Origini a Oggi* (Turin: UTET Libreria, 2004), 170. Still according to Farinelli, *Storia del giornalismo*, 171, in 1869 there were 110 periodicals in Milan; in 1872, there were 92 in Milan of which 19 political, 35 literary/artistic, 25 commercial. The second highest number of periodicals was printed in Florence: 79 periodicals, more literary and artistic than political, like in Milan.

¹³ *La Gazzetta dei Teatri* was directed by impresario and librettist Carlo D'Ormeville for some years. Another example of the tight connections between the show business and the press industry. D'Ormeville was also initially involved in the commission to reopen La Scala in 1898.

buyers.¹⁴ Also, changes at the level of cultural industries, such as the rise of advertisement, the emerging industrial mentality of production, marketing, and modern techniques of distribution had a substantial effect on the press world in Milan.¹⁵ Finally, technological improvements allowed periodicals and newspapers to print color images and lower the cost of production.¹⁶ The implementation of images, illustrations, low price, and innovative communication style demonstrate a substantial readership and a specific effort to reach many readers. With these elements, the number of publications grew exponentially. In Milan in the 1880s, 216 periodicals were published and while some of them had a brief life, many were printed for decades with consistent and high numbers of subscribers.¹⁷

The socio-economic changes that led to the widening of potential readership and the technological improvements that lowered the production costs brought about the creation of new periodicals explicitly directed to a wider and more popular audience along with the reconfiguration of existing periodicals in more commercially appealing products. Hundreds of affordable illustrated, popular, and educational publications

¹⁴ While in the 1870s more than half of the Italian population was still illiterate, the percentage was lower in the Northwest, where illiteracy rate dropped below 15% by the turn of the century. Francesca Billiani, "Intellettuali militanti, funzionari e tecnologici, etica ed estetica in tre riviste fiorentine d'inizio secolo : Il Regno, La Voce, e Lacerba (1903-1914)" in Caesar, *The Print Media*, 65. For specifics and further information about literacy in Italy and in Lombardy see Farinelli, *Storia del giornalismo*, 212; Giovanni Vigo, *Istruzione e Sviluppo Economico in Italia nel Secolo XIX* (Turin: ILTE, 1971), 121 and following, and Giovanni Vigo, "Gli Italiani alla conquista dell'alfabeto" in Soldani, *Fare gli Italiani*.

¹⁵ Some technological innovations that affected the press industry were lithography and chromolithography. See Lombardo, *La Stampa Periodica*, 26. Other developments in the structure of the business that contributed to a more efficient spreading of information were the newly created press agencies.

¹⁶ Lombardo, *La Stampa Periodica*, 3 and 4.

¹⁷ Giuseppe Ottino, *La Stampa Periodica* (Milan: G. Brigola, 1875); Orazio Buonavino, *Il Giornalismo Contemporaneo* (Milan: R. Sandron, 1906); Vittorio Capecechi, *La Stampa Quotidiana in Italia* (Milan: Bompiana, 1971); Valerio Castronovo and Nicola Tranfaglia, *Storia della Stampa Italiana* (Rome: Laterza, 1976); Lombardo, *La Stampa Periodica*.

flooded the press market starting from the late 1870s.¹⁸ Once again, Milan's press industry was a focal point in the printing of popular and "universal" publications, particularly concerning entertainment, leisure and sport sectors,¹⁹ and for population groups previously ignored. Many sports periodicals were created in the 1880s and 1890s as well as publications for families, children, and housewives. Press also focused on advertisement, technological progress, and science "for all." Just the mention of a few titles indicates the popular or populist approach, the educational intents, and the importance of illustrations: *Biblioteca Universale* (founded in 1882, priced at 7 liras per year), *Il Commercio Illustrato* (1876, subtitled "announcements for families"- "annunci per le famiglie") *L'illustrazione Universale Italiana* (founded in 1874, it sold 15.000 copies per year the 1890s), *La Moda Illustrata* (1886), *La Scienza per Tutti* (1879), *Lo Sport Illustrato* (1882).²⁰ Many of these new illustrated and popular periodicals were published by Sonzogno and will be analyzed in further detail later in this chapter.

Among the various periodicals and daily newspapers created in Milan after the 1870s, at least seven new periodicals largely dedicated to music and theater were added to the already existing ones mentioned above. The new ones were *Asmodeo* later *Gazzetta teatrale Italiana* (1872-1914), *Guerin Meschino* (1882, humorous periodical largely focused on theatrical life in Milan), *La Lanterna* (1878, defined "humorous theatrical and literary" – "umoristico teatrale letterario"), *Messaggero teatrale* (1887), *Farfarello* (1885), and *Il Teatro Illustrato* (1881). With these additions to those founded in the 1860s and before, roughly fifteen periodicals dedicated for the most part to opera,

¹⁸ An exception was *L'illustrazione popolare* created already in 1864, and that sold 30.000 in 1890. Defined by Bernardini in *Guida alla Stampa*, 518: "migliore e più economico giornale illustrato"

¹⁹ See chapter I for various forms of culture consumption and entertainment in Milan.

²⁰ The source for periodicals' diffusion is Bernardini, *Guida alla Stampa*, 509-532.

and partially to theater and music existed in the last two decades of the 19th century in Milan. Despite the growing competition among the periodicals, some of the existing ones starting from the 1870s even increased their number of pages or started printing more frequently. While up until the 1870s daily newspapers were fewer in number and more limited in scope, addressing mostly political issues and circulating among the political elites, in the 1890s they addressed a much wider audience.²¹ Not only did their circulation quadruple,²² but they also added a cultural artistic page that through the last decade of the 19th century acquired critical relevance while maintaining the short and direct style of the daily newspaper.

Not only did the number of periodicals increase but so did their distribution and circulation. We know from Bernardini that in 1890 *La Gazzetta dei teatri*, *Il Trovatore*, *la Gazzetta Teatrale* and *Il Mondo Artistico* each distributed about 2,000 copies per issue, and that Ricordi's *La Gazzetta Musicale* sold 10,000 copies each week.²³ Looking at

²¹ Most of the milanese newspapers were founded in the late 1850s or in the 1860s. *Il Corriere della Sera*, *Il Pungolo* (directed by Leone Fortis), *La Perseveranza*, and *La Lombardia* in 1859, *L'osservatore Cattolico* and *Il Sole* in 1864 and *Il Secolo* in 1866. For an exhaustive and analytical history of the press and news business in Lombardy, see Adolfo Scotto di Luzio, "L'industria dell'informazione: periodici e quotidiani, giornalisti e imprenditori," in *Storia d'Italia. Le Regioni dall'Unità a Oggi*, vol. *La Lombardia*, ed. Duccio Bigazzi and Marco Meriggi (Turin: Einaudi, 2001).

²² According to Paolo Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), *Il Secolo* and *Il corriere della sera*, the major newspapers of the Milan area, by turn of the century sold 100,000 copies. Bernardini in *Guida alla Stampa*, 513, reports that *Corriere* sold 50,000 in 1890, "superato solo dal Secolo." According to Bernardini, *La Lombardia* printed between 12,000 and 25000 copies and *La Perseveranza* 50,000. According to Farinelli, *Storia del Giornalismo*, 175 in 1872 *Il Secolo* sold 25,000 copies, and 54,000 in 1881. According to Silvia Valisa, "Casa editrice Sonzogno : mediazione culturale, circuiti del sapere ed innovazione tecnologica nell'Italia unificata (1861-1900)" in Caesar, *The Print Media*, 75, *Il Secolo* sold 200,000 copies in the 1890s.

²³ Bernardini, *Guida alla Stampa*, 516. The author also adds that *Guerin Meschino* sold 9,000 copies weekly. We do not have other more specific data about their circulation and readership but their content and the affiliation with agencies indicates that they were read by a circle of professionals of the theater business and potentially by subscribers of the opera seasons. *Il Trovatore*, and in some occasions *Il Mondo Artistico*, had a strongly polemical and witty tone and style, and they contained caricatures that made extensive use of jokes and nick names that only readers extremely familiar with the operatic world would understand. Yet, it is difficult to assess how many people and who would be extremely familiar with such

these numbers, one can safely deduce that the readership increased as well. Their format and content – analyzed in the next section – and the type of advertisements that they contained also indicate that the readership included a variety of social classes. Evidence of the popular address of these periodicals in these years is that the publicity page advertised products of interest mostly to the middle class along with some items for musicians. A clear example is that Ricordi's advertisement in other periodicals of this period focused mostly on the affordable music collections: on *La Gazzetta Teatrale* in the 1890s, one can often find a whole page advertisement for "Ricordi Affordable Editions" ("Edizioni Economiche Ricordi") and "Popular Library" ("Biblioteca Popolare") defined "the most affordable in the whole world" ("Le più a buon mercato di tutto il mondo"). Knowing the accuracy of Ricordi's advertisement strategies from the previous chapter, Ricordi's choice of advertisement presumed an awareness of the readership and, therefore, it is safe to assume that the readership of *Gazzetta Teatrale* was of amateur musicians and the bourgeois, groups most likely interested in the affordable Ricordi publications.²⁴

The musical press and the cultural pages of newspapers were extremely influential throughout the second half of the 19th century. The press was believed to have the power to shape the audience's opinion and determine the success or demise of an opera. Concern, interest, and complaints about the influence and the biased reviews in the press filled the correspondence of composers, impresarios, and publishers. For example, composer Alfredo Catalani wrote that in some opera theaters "the public is led

names and facts. It is possible that they were more part of common knowledge than one today might expect.

²⁴ See as example the last page of *Gazzetta Teatrale* from October 1891 in CIRPeM.

by the press,” or that some publications “made the public believe”²⁵ that certain operas failed or succeeded because of “press intrigues.”²⁶ The debates taking place on the pages of the periodical press – some of which will be analyzed later on – testify to the resonance of certain opinions. Some critics became so renowned that they were made the object of satire by the political press and received the attention of the notables of the city. Filippo Filippi, for example, music critic and journalist for *La Perseveranza*, was said to have unquestioned fame both in Italy and abroad and to have educated and directed Milanese audiences’ tastes for decades.²⁷ Intellectual and critic Leone Fortis in a letter to Giulio Ricordi in 1891 described the relevance of the theatrical reviews (“appendici”) to the readers and their social lives. The “appendici” were described as the main topic of conversation at cafés during the week among readers who needed to occupy their time talking about the “appendici” waiting for the next “appendice” to come out the following weekend.²⁸ Operatic news was so relevant for the history of the press that the first direct foreign correspondence in the history of Italian journalism was organized on the occasion

²⁵ Letter from Alfredo Catalani to Giuseppe Depanis, February 20th, 1892. Berrong, *The Politics of Opera*, 102.

²⁶ Letter from Alfredo Catalani to Giuseppe Depanis from February 17th, 1892. Berrong, *The Politics of Opera*, 101. The publication in question is the Genoa newspaper *Secolo XIX*. The power and the educational importance of criticism in a context of ignorance of the audience will be partially addressed in the next chapter.

²⁷ “Pippo Pippi, la macchietta ambrosiana a cui la matita dei più valenti caricaturisti da Teja a Camillo, da Gonin a Dalsani aveva conferita una notorietà pare a quella dei suoi scritti;” “fama e autorità incontestate non solo in Italia;” “aveva non soltanto diletto, ma istruito il pubblico di Milano...ne aveva formato e indirizzato il gusto artistico.” Girolamo Gasparella, *Un Critico d’Arte e Musicista: Filippo Filippi* (Florence: Ufficio della Rassegna Nazionale, 1901), 3. Gasparella reported that a German newspaper wrote regarding Filippi that he “esercita una grande influenza sulla pubblica opinione della sua patria” (p. 26) and was able to “formare, educare, e dare indirizzo al gusto e alla cultura musicale del suo paese. Filippi, come D’Arcais, come Biagi, come Panzacchi, appartiene all’Italia” (p.36). Gasparella also reports that the mayor of Milan attended his funeral. Filippi collaborated with daily political newspapers and literary periodicals such as *Il Pungolo*, directed by Leone Fortis.

²⁸ “Le appendici...dettavano, a giorno fisso, I loro oracoli sulle opera teatrali...-oracoli che il pubblico aspettava con fede indiscussa... - che centellinava tranquillamente assieme al caffè – che formavano l’argomento delle sue discussion per tutta la settimana d’intervallo tra un’appendice e l’altra.” Leone Fortis, “La critica contemporanea” in *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, June 14, 1891, 382.

of the first performance of *Aida* in Egypt.²⁹ The importance attributed to the specialized press and artistic information reflected opinions on the periodical press in general, which was considered a symbol for the cultural and technological progress of Italy. It was responsible for the advance in education and wealth as well as being a potential tool for reformation and transformation of Italian society. In a 1873 survey of the publishing industry, Giuseppe Ottino wrote: “Nobody would ever doubt the immense role played by the periodical press in the material and moral progress of our nation.”³⁰

2. “ALLETTARE PER FARSI LEGGERE”: APPEALING FORMATS FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In this section, I argue that because of popularization, universalization, and increased distribution during these years, the musical press underwent a general transformation with regard to aims and position. I argue that starting from the 1870s the press industry explicitly implemented strategies of popularization and democratization with the goal of pleasing the audience and selling their products. This section focuses on the changes made in order to appeal to the readers in terms of format. The articles in the periodicals also underwent transformations along the same principle and will be analyzed in the next section.

The process of simplification and commercialization of the periodical press and musical criticism had begun before the 1860s, but became more noticeable in the 1870s

²⁹ Murialdi, *Storia del giornalismo italiano*, 205.

³⁰ Ottino quoted in Maria Grazia Lolla, “Reader/Power: The Politics and Poetics of Reading in Post-Unification Italy,” in *The Printed Media*, 23 “Niuno penserà certamente a mettere in dubbio l’immensa parte avuta dalla stampa periodica nel progresso materiale e morale della nazione.”

and 1880s. As Capra notes, the “pedagogical” and rigorous *Censore Universale dei Teatri*, founded in 1829, had to shut down in 1837 to leave room for “bourgeois” publications like *La Fama* (1836 – 1877) and its “casual accounts,” or *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (1832 – 1848), which advocated for limiting the amount of “technical erudition.”³¹ The history of 1860s *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* is a perfect example of the process.³² Founded in 1842 by Giovanni Ricordi, *La Gazzetta Musicale* had very serious intents: “rigorous application of aesthetic and critical doctrines regarding Music.”³³ After temporarily shutting down because of the war in 1859, the periodical “in order to increase distribution decreased its format,”³⁴ demonstrating a precocious attention to matters of sales and distribution. However, it maintained its high cultural level. Up until 1862, partially under the direction of famous critic Filippo Filippi, *Gazzetta* consisted of four pages of cultural articles, theatrical news, and historical articles, providing insightful and extensive reviews. As per stated purpose, it was “a periodical dedicated only to art’s concerns, a special musical paper that would address all the most vital issues of history, criticism, and science.”³⁵ The exclusive focus and the serious and ambitious approach forced the periodical to close in 1862 because, as the editorial board wrote, “the readership, if it is not the exceptional group of engaged and

³¹ Marco Capra, “Periodici e critica musicale tra Otto e Novecento” in *La critica musicale in Italia nella prima metà del Novecento*, ed. Marco Capra and Fiamma Nicolodi (Parma: Casa della Musica), 14-17.

³² The *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* was published from 1842–62 and 1866–1902; it was followed by *Musica e musicisti* (1902–05) and *Ars e Labor* (1906–12); other titles included *Rivista minima* (1871–78), *Musica d’oggi* (1919–42) and *Ricordiana* (1951–57); see <http://www.ricordicompany.it/en/page/25>, accessed 28 October 2014; Claudio Sartori, *Casa Ricordi*; Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell’Opera*; Degrada, *Music Musicians Publishing*.

³³ “...applicazione severa delle dottrine estetiche e critiche riguardanti la Musica.” Giovanni Ricordi, “Introduzione,” *Gazzetta*, January 2, 1842.

³⁴ “...per aver maggior diffusione diminui il suo format.” “Avvertimento,” *Gazzetta*, December 28, 1862.

³⁵ “...un giornale dedito ai soli interessi dell’arte, un foglio speciale di musica che trattasse tutte le quistioni più vitali della storia, della critica e della scienza.” Giovanni Ricordi, “Introduzione,” *Gazzetta*, January 2, 1842.

available artists, for whom there is an avalanche of obliging papers, the let's say exclusively artistic readers are so rare not to deserve such name."³⁶ The desire of printing an artistic and cultural journal was curbed by necessities of readership. *Gazzetta* reopened in 1866 with a lighter tone and with more advertisements of Ricordi products. On the first issue of the new edition, the editor Antonio Ghislanzoni³⁷ wrote:

A paper consecrated almost exclusively to musical art cannot be exempt from those technical studies that refer to science itself. However, we intend to provide only a small amount of those severe topics...A paper first of all must appeal to be read – and arid theory, as well as doctrinal superciliousness, hardly obtain such purpose. Still offering some bait to the erudite readers, we will attempt to attract to our discussions the interest of both the artist and the profane readers.³⁸

The main means through which periodicals could please and attract new and wider readership were a light and facetious tone and a focus on images and visual appeal over text. Long-running publications, like *Gazzetta*, *Trovatore*, and *Mondo Artistico* changed the graphic design to become more visually appealing, increased or implemented illustrations for the first time, and added entertaining and playful sections. In the 1870s, *Gazzetta Musicale* changed the heading from a simple plain font to a more elaborated and

³⁶ "...il pubblico, se non e' quello eccezionale degli artisti scritturati e disponibili, per cui v'ha una valnga di fogli compiacenti, il pubblico, diciamo, esclusivamente artistico è così scarso da non meritare quasi questo nome." "Avvertimento," *Gazzetta*, December 28, 1862.

³⁷ To underline the tight connections of the operatic, press, and intellectual worlds in turn-of-the-century Milan, Antonio Ghislanzoni besides being the editor of *Gazzetta* was also librettist for Giuseppe Verdi (he wrote the libretto for *Aida*), founded with Arrigo Boito an intellectual publication called *Rivista Minima* and was involved in the intellectual circles of the *scapigliatura* movement, which will be relevant in the next chapter.

³⁸ "Un foglio che si consagra quasi esclusivamente all'arte musicale non può esimersi da quegli studi tecnici che si riferiscono alla scienza propriamente detta. Nulladimeno ci proponiamo di andare molto parchi di quei severi argomenti...Un giornale deve innanzitutto allettare per farsi leggere – e l'arida teoria, come il sussiego dottrinario, difficilmente ottengono questo scopo. Offrendo qualche esca agli eruditi, noi cercheremo di reclamare alle nostre discussion l'interesse del pubblico artista, ed anche del pubblico profane." Antonio Ghislanzoni, *Gazzetta*, April 1, 1866.

decorated one, according to the new graphic arts styles.³⁹ It added decorations to the design and small drawings at the beginning of each section. It also started printing advertisements. Most significantly, it underlined the entertainment aspect of the publication with games (rebuses, charades, puzzles, etc.) and sections called “Amusing Column” (“Rubrica Amena”) and “Variety” (“Varietà”).⁴⁰ In the 1880s, it also started featuring several and varied images and illustrations.⁴¹ In the same period, *Il Trovatore* acquired a more satirical ironic tone and published more and bigger satirical drawings.⁴² *Il Mondo Artistico*, starting from the 1870s, added the subtitle “with illustrations and portraits” (“con illustrazioni e ritratti”). *La Gazzetta dei Teatri*, starting from the 1880s, featured a whole page of jokes called “Varietà.” All of these changes show that the press industry was addressing issues of markets and sales to adjust to new broader readership and, as Ghislanzoni had anticipated in 1866, attract an “uneducated public” (“pubblico profano”).

While the older publications changed their appearance, those founded more recently aimed directly and explicitly at having a visual appeal. As one could notice from the titles mentioned in the previous section, starting from the 1880s it was the illustrated press that dominated among the new periodicals. Illustrations and later photographs constituted the primary tool to make periodicals more attractive to a bigger market. In the sector of the musical press many illustrated periodicals were created: in 1881 *Il Teatro*

³⁹ Any cover page from 1867 in comparison to any from 1871 and any from 1885 would show the graphics development.

⁴⁰ “Varietà” in Italian does not only mean “variety” but also “variety-show” or “vaudeville” therefore in Italian the title of the column, although explicitly meaning a “variety” of topics, probably implied a reference to popular entertainment.

⁴¹ Lithography process started to be used in Italy from 1885. Comparing any random page from any edition of 1885 to one from 1866 the visual difference results striking.

⁴² For example see the “fake advertisements” to comment on the closing of La Scala in *Il Trovatore* August 21, 1897, cover page.

Illustrato, in 1882 *La Musica Popolare*, both published by Sonzogno in Milan, and in 1884 *La Scena Illustrata* (Florence) and in 1893 *Rivista Musicale Illustrata* (Trieste).

Illustrations and images were fundamental for publications directed to the general public because they created a captivating effect and communicated the idea that the publication was both informative and entertaining. As I explained in the previous chapter, visual communication functioned as ‘popular’ communication. Whether they had a functional or expressive role, and whether they were high quality engravings by famous artists or simple and colorful sketches, images produced a distraction and an abstraction that appealed to the senses and therefore constituted an effective form of communication and an effective means to attract buyers/readers.⁴³ Illustrations also served the purpose of distinguishing periodical publications from daily newspapers, which for the most part had no illustrations, although they all had an illustrated weekly insert. As historians of the press Lombardo and Pignatelli wrote: “The advent of images and illustrations to compliment the text as well as the evolving of a language that implemented innovative forms of communication accelerated the process of transformation of papers into mass media.”⁴⁴

The publisher Edoardo Sonzogno understood and exploited both the power of illustrations and the diffusion of the educational press, combining a populist ideology and a strong business vision to create a media empire. The publishing house Sonzogno brought together music and press as much as Ricordi merged music and advertisement.

⁴³ About the relation between visual appeal and commercial value, see Abruzzese, *Dizionario della Pubblicità*, 219.

⁴⁴ “La comparsa dell’immagine e dell’illustrazione a corredo del testo, l’evolversi di un linguaggio che assumeva forme innovative di comunicazione, hanno accelerato la trasformazione dei giornali in mezzi di comunicazione di massa.” Lombardo, *La Stampa Periodica*, 4.

Sonzogno enterprise commissioned music and managed composers, owned and managed theaters,⁴⁵ and ran a singers booking agency. Its activities in the music business were perfectly integrated with the company's music and specialized press publishing. However, its publishing activities also encompassed the most widely circulated newspaper of the time and a massive amount of literary and periodical publications.⁴⁶

Sonzogno scholar Silvia Valisa wrote that “Edoardo Sonzogno distinguished himself for his ability to combine populism and innovation”⁴⁷ and I would like to look at Sonzogno's publishing politics exactly through the keywords “populism” and “innovation.” Sonzogno's populism found expression in the aim to reach each and all sections of identifiable readership. A pioneer in publications for the general public and the illustrated press, Sonzogno started printing popular, accessible, illustrated books and periodicals already in 1864⁴⁸, and increased its popular production from the 1870s. *L'Illustrazione Universale* (1864), *Il Romanziere del Popolo* (1865?), *Giornale Popolare Illustrato* (1879), *Biblioteca Romantica Illustrata* in addition to the *Economica* and the *Tascabile* versions (1866),⁴⁹ *Astronomia Popolare* (1885) are just some of the dozens of book series and periodical publications printed by Sonzogno, but all of the titles stressed

⁴⁵ Sonzogno managed opera seasons throughout Italy: Dal Verme in 1876, Carcano in 1883, Carignano in Turin in 1885, Nuovo Politeama Regina Margherita in Genova, Carcano and Argentina in 1886, Dal Verme in 1887, Costanzi in Rome from 1888 to 1892, Fenice in 1889, Pergola in 1892, Dal Verme, Carcano and Rossetti in Trieste in 1893. Sonzogno also organized a tournee in Austria. For the seasons 1894-96 Sonzogno managed La Scala. In 1894 opened Teatro Lirico Internazionale, former Cannobiana, which will be active until 1907 and then again in 1912. He did the same in Naples with former Teatro del Fondo renamed Mercadante in 1894. Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'Opera*, 160.

⁴⁶ For a history of the publishing house and in particular of its literary products, see Silvia Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno : mediazione culturale, circuiti del sapere ed innovazione tecnologica nell'Italia unificata (1861-1900)” in Caesar, *The Print Media*, 90-106.

⁴⁷ “si contraddistingue per la sua abilità nel combinare populismo e innovazione” Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno, 102.

⁴⁸ Treves followed the example and eventually became more successful with *L'Illustrazione popolare* founded in 1867.

⁴⁹ The *Tascabile* was sold at only 1 lira per book. The same series existed for the *Biblioteca Classica*.

the “popularity”, “universality” and “affordability” of the products.⁵⁰ In 1866, Sonzogno founded the daily newspaper *Il Secolo*, which expressed the same democratic tendencies apparent in the series of publications. *Il Secolo* had a strongly democratic orientation, an accessible and more simple journalistic style, and the widest circulation of any coeval newspaper.⁵¹ The populist and democratic orientation of the business reflected the leftwing political position of the family, which was not directly involved in politics, but very committed to philanthropic and charitable causes in Milan. The “innovation” aspect resided partially in the democratization of culture itself and partially in the connection among the business branches and different media.⁵² In fact, Sonzogno created an integrated system of reciprocal advertisement and financial support throughout the various genres and products. As Ricordi’s integrated system of graphic design and music publishing constituted a strong asset for the commercial success of its operas, Sonzogno’s allowed for a unified cultural policy and for the creation of an all-encompassing cultural

⁵⁰ For a complete list, see Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno,” 95-100. Some other examples are *La Galleria storica universale di ritratti*, *Le arte e i mestieri illustrati*, *Astronomia Popolare*, *Fisica Popolare*, *Chimica Popolare*, all of them printed starting from 1885. Also, *Giornale Illustrato dei viaggi* (defined by Bernardini, *Guida alla Stampa*, 517, “molto diffuso e economico”) *L’emporio pittoresco*, *Il Romanziere Illustrato*, *La Scienza per tutti*, *Biblioteca del popolo*, *Biblioteca Economica*. *L’Emporio Pittoresco* had an extremely wide circulation: in the 1870s sold 24.000 copies.

⁵¹ In the 1870s *Il Secolo* was the most read newspaper in Italy. In the 1890s 200,000 copies were sold (Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno,” 95). The number decreased to 70,000 at the beginning of 1900 (Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno,” 97). According to Farinelli in *Storia del Giornalismo*, 175 in 1872 *Il Secolo* sold 25.000 copies. Castronovo in “Cultura e Sviluppo Industriale,” 9, writes that in 1881 it sold 54.000 copies. Lombardo wrote that *Il Secolo* was “portavoce per eccellenza delle correnti più avanzate..della piccola borghesia e di alcune frazioni operaie cittadine” and that it was so widespread that in Milan it became a synonym of “newspaper.” Its progressive democratic approach was probably the cause of its demise: it was probably not moderate enough to compete with the rising popularity of *Corriere della Sera* and it was sold in 1909.

⁵² Most of Sonzogno’s publications presented also an innovative graphic design, including *Il Secolo*. The innovative character of *Il Secolo* consisted also in its democratic address and, as Farinelli noted, in its placement “as bridge between classes and generations.” Farinelli, *Storia del Giornalismo*, 177. *Corriere della Sera*’s director Eugenio Torelli-Viollier himself commented on *Il Secolo*’s “innovations” and their commercial value in “La Stampa e la Politica” in *Milano 1881*, ed. Raffaello Barbiera and Carla Riccardi (Milan: Ottino, 1881). The most evident trace of the cross genre and cross product integration is the reciprocal advertisement. On the *Almanacco Illustrato del Secolo* of 1896 the first few pages are dedicated to the advertisement of all the other Sonzogno products. Sonzogno in the 1890s also managed *Il Trovatore* in which all of the advertisements were ads for Sonzogno products.

industry that made new cultural products accessible to all, which fostered both education for the people and commercial gain for the company.

Populism, innovation, and integration characterized the music business of the publishing house as well, from the musical press to opera production and theater management. However, as far as the music press in particular was concerned, the business model did not function as well as for the literature and general press. Innovation in music was often associated with Wagner and instrumental music, therefore with foreignness and cerebral qualities, and it was attributed negative and elitist intellectual connotations by the popular criticism. At the same time, innovation in Italian opera was associated with *verismo* which in turned was heavily criticized by groups of intellectuals and more serious critics. Sonzogno's music publishing business started in 1874 along the populist lines of its literature printing, with *Musica per tutti* and *Biblioteca Musicale Economica* that included the collection of piano vocal scores *Il Teatro Musicale Giocoso*.⁵³ Then Sonzogno acquired the rights for most of the popular operettas, most of the foreign opera composers – Thomas, Bizet, Massenet just to mention the most renowned – and some of the emerging young Italian composers, including Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and those who were going to constitute the so-called “giovane scuola.” Sonzogno's music catalogue – mostly dictated by the availability left by competitor Ricordi - placed the company in the ambiguous position of having a populist democratic approach with a repertoire of music that ranged from the very popular operettas to much more sophisticated elitist foreign music that could bank neither on the grandeur of the traditional French operas nor on the nationalistic appeal of Italian opera.

⁵³ Valisa, “Casa Editrice Sonzogno,” 100, and Capra, “La Casa Editrice Sonzogno,” 250.

The tensions between the populist drive, the cultural value of innovation and quality products, and the commercial goals were particularly evident in the musical periodical publications that, I argue, were representative of Sonzogno's politics as well as exemplary of a compromise between democratization and high culture. Along the lines of its other periodicals, Sonzogno founded *Il Teatro Illustrato* in 1881 and *La Musica Popolare* in 1882. In 1886 the two were merged into *Il Teatro Illustrato e la Musica Popolare*. The titles, the formats, and the illustrations seemed to place them among the typically popular publications characteristic of this company. The weekly musical publications featured big elaborate illustrations, most noticeably on the cover and in the central double page. The subtitle of *Il Teatro Illustrato* underlined the richness of the visual aspect: "portraits of famous maestros and artists, set views and sketches, drawings of monumental theaters, theatrical costumes, decorations, etc., etc."⁵⁴ The periodicals included music sheets for the readers to play at home. Featuring so many illustrations and music sheets, the periodicals exploited both the visual appeal of images and the popularity of domestic music performance. These aspects in addition to the heavy presence of advertisements seem to define the periodical as a commercial publication, like the many other musical publications described above. They were also defined, like any other typical Sonzogno publication, as democratic and educational journals. The program printed on the first edition of *La Musica Popolare* stated that the periodical's purpose is to fill a specific gap in the press market: that of the middle classes that perform music at home at amateur level and need affordable music sheets as well as to be informed about artistic life. The target market was made explicitly democratic and the

⁵⁴ "Ritratti di maestri ed artisti celebri, vedute e bozzetti di scena, disegni di teatri monumentali, costume teatrali, ornamentazioni ecc., ecc" was printed on the frontispiece of each issue.

purpose explicitly educational. In fact, the editor wrote, since “rare are the families that do not own [a piano] nowadays...,” the purpose of the periodical was to “offer to families the means to access selected music...at the lowest possible cost” but also to provide “technical articles in popular style, regarding topics that are useful to know also for amateurs” in order to function as “encouragement” “push to better oneself.”⁵⁵ However, the content, the tone, and the collaboration with renowned intellectuals seemed to negate the commercial and populist aspect. Before analyzing these contradictions it will be necessary to move from the placement and format of the publications on to the criticism that they contained.

3. CHRONICLES OF SUCCESS: REVIEWS IN THE POPULAR PRESS

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the musical publications of the time were neither critical nor analytical, as a modern reader would expect from reviews in a cultural publication. They were also not technical or rigorous as in modern specialized journals. So what was criticism of the time? Who wrote the reviews? And for whom? Arrigo Boito wrote that “who says that there is no Art in Italy, maintains a less firm truth than who says that there is no Criticism in Italy.”⁵⁶ Some critics of the time

⁵⁵ “Rare sono le famiglie che oggi non posseggono [un pianoforte]..., offrire alle famiglie il mezzo di potersi fornire di scelta musica...colla minore spesa possibile... articoli tecnici in forma popolare, sopra argomenti utili a conoscere anche dai dilettanti... incoraggiamento... sprone al meglio....” *La Musica Popolare*, Issue 1, April 6, 1882, 1.

⁵⁶ Arrigo Boito, “Cronache Teatrali,” *Figaro*, January 21, 1864, quoted in *Tutti gli Scritti*, ed. Arrigo Boito and Pierro Nardi (Milan: A. Mondadori, 1942), 1103. Considering the general consensus about the status of Italian art as described in the introduction, this is quite a strong statement. “Chi dicesse che in Italia non v’è Arte, affermerebbe forse una men salda verità di chi dicesse che in Italia non v’è Critica.”

complained about the “critics’ incompetence” and ignorance of artistic matters.⁵⁷ Marco Capra, among other scholars, dismissed the “criticism” of this period describing its lack of historical, biographical and technical contextualization as a negative aspect that makes it unworthy of consideration.⁵⁸ However, I believe that it is a very valuable source of information about what was considered important in a performance or opera, and its development is an indication of changing tastes and theater-going experience. It is to this purpose that I here tackle the topic of criticism: to single out main currents in relation to the commercialization of the press and in relation to the moment of reception.⁵⁹ My analysis reveal that what was relevant for the critics of the time and, therefore, relevant to the periodicals and consequently their readers was the commercial success of operas and their power to bring people together and entertain them by provoking emotions.

Until the 1860s, some periodicals featured detailed, although biased, critical reviews. I have already mentioned in the previous section the cases of *Il Censore Universale* and *La Fama*, and I have described the changes that *Gazzetta Musicale* underwent in the 1860s. Until 1862, it published lengthy articles and exhaustive analysis, and because of this approach it was forced to cease publication for a few years to then resume printing with a commercial and captivating format. Similar was the history of *Il*

⁵⁷ *Gazzetta*, April 4, 1886, 103 and Leone Fortis, “La Critica,” *Gazzetta*, June 14, 1891, 382. “Perchè non c’è più la grande critica di quei tempi.”

⁵⁸ “Il periodico si occupa soprattutto di fornire resoconti commentati delle rappresentazioni teatrali, ignorando quasi del tutto le implicazioni storiche, biografiche, estetiche, teoriche e tecniche. La considerazione dell’evento di cronaca e il giudizio su di esso esauriscono la pratica dell’esercizio critic.” Marco Capra, “Periodici e critica musicale tra Otto e Novecento,” in Capra, *La Critica Musicale*, 14.

⁵⁹ The purpose of this work is not to attempt a history of Italian criticism or an analysis of the philosophy and aesthetic of music that informed the criticism of turn of the century. I refer to criticism insofar as it reveals something about the operatic institution and its social role, and about the strategies of the cultural and media industries. For the philosophy and aesthetics that affected the various schools of criticism, see Wilson, “Music, Letters,” 104-112; David Clay Large, William Weber, and Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Wagnerism in European Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Wilson, *The Puccini Problem*; Adriana Guarneri Corazzol and Roger Parker, “Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5, no. 1 (1993): 39-53.

Mondo Artistico, which employed renowned critic Filippo Filippi and published articles that for the time could be considered critical or analytical, but only until 1871 when he then became affiliated with an agency.⁶⁰ The reviews of *La Perseveranza* in the 1860s were also filled with erudite examples and literary quotes, as Arrigo Boito's articles described in the next chapter will show. Up until the 1860s, the critics were addressing a readership of educated aristocrats that regularly attended the opera theater. Starting from the 1860s, as the format became more "commercial" and entertaining – as I have argued in the previous section - the criticism became more descriptive. Most of the articles were in the forms of short news reports from the various theaters, and the focus of the reviews was on providing detailed descriptions of the event and the audience without critical or analytical comments.

Most of the musical and theatrical periodicals of the second half of the 19th century were affiliated with theatrical agencies,⁶¹ which meant that their purpose was mostly to announce available singers and advertise the productions that featured their artists. *La Gazzetta Musicale* and *Il Teatro Illustrato* were not affiliated with an agency but instead were owned and directed by music publishers, so they presented similar problems of bias as the agency periodicals. As I mentioned in the previous chapter the periodical publications printed by the music publishers Ricordi and Sonzogno among many purposes served the one of advertising and supporting their own operas and their own artistic agenda. This purpose was achieved through extremely biased reviews in that

⁶⁰ Filippi collaborated with *Gazzetta* in the 1850s as well, before it was closed and re-conceptualized. In the 1850s he wrote on *Gazzetta* articles about non-operatic music and he was director of *Gazzetta* in 1858.

⁶¹ *Il Trovatore*, *L'Amico degli Artisti*, *La Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* and *Il Mondo Artistico* (starting from 1871). Also *Il caricaturista*, former *Garibaldi* founded in 1879 and *Il palcoscenico* founded in 1897 (existing only until 1901).

often included denigration of the competitor's operas and publications. In general criticism of this time was strongly influenced by ideology, politics, and personal interest so that Leone Fortis commented: "contemporary criticism drives subjective views to the most factious intolerance."⁶²

The focus of all the periodicals was mostly on reporting opera performances in various theaters in Italy and abroad in various degrees of length and exhaustiveness, listing the engagements and availabilities of the singers ("Disponibilità e Scritture"), and reporting short news and reviews from other publications. Sometimes they would print more accurate profiles of singers and composers ("Album" in *Gazzetta Teatrale*, "Rubrica I Grandi Maestri" in *La Scena Illustrata*, "Biografie" in *Il Mondo Artistico*), some commentary on news related to the operatic world, like recent developments in legislation and administration, and reviews from other publications. The typical format included many sections, each of which was brief and superficial. Sections called "Correspondence" ("Corrispondenze") or "Theatrical Review" ("Rassegna teatrale") or "Theatrical Bulletin" ("Bollettino teatrale")⁶³ consisted of bullet-point style lists of all Italian and foreign theater with information about the program, the cast, and a couple of lines about the way the performance was received by the audience. The titles of some of the sections reflected the frivolity of the content. I have already mentioned "Amusing section" and "Variety" ("Rubrica Amena" and "Verietà") when addressing the commercial changes of *Gazzetta*. Other periodicals had sections called "Short News" ("Novellette"), "Various News" ("Notizie Diverse"), "Miscellaneous" ("Miscellanea"),

⁶² *Gazzetta*, June 28, 1891, 413. I will not consider the details and the reasons of such influences. I refer here to Wilson, "Music, Letters."

⁶³ "Corrispondenze" (in *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica*, *Gazzetta dei Teatri*, *Gazzetta Teatrale Italiana*), "Rassegna teatrale" (*Rivista teatrale melodrammatica*), "Bollettino teatrale" (*Il trovatore*).

“Randomly” (“Alla Rinfusa”), and “Scattered News” (“Note Volanti”).⁶⁴ These sets of varied theatrical news were lists of events described in a few lines and in a telegraphic style. For example, in a section “Alla Rinfusa” randomly selected from *Gazzetta* of 1872 one could read the following list of news: “Meastro Mazzuccato turned down the position of Vice-president of the Quartet Society.... Today at 2pm in the Conservatory hall there will be....In Ruhort (Prussia) a circus is going through town at the moment.... Revenues for *Aida*: 14th performance Liras 7652,50...” and so on.⁶⁵

With the exception of the *Rivista Melodrammatica* - which exclusively listed brief information about singers and performances and reported artistic news in a cursory way - the other publications occasionally featured, to different extents and frequencies, lengthy reviews of performances, productions, and operas by renowned journalists, either written for the specific journal, or, like in the case of lesser and shorter periodicals, reported or transcribed in their entirety from other publications. Some of the more lengthy articles focused on news events related to theatrical life, like the death of an artist, or the closing of a theater. Very few of the longer articles dealt with issues of history of music. A substantial part of the few longer articles consisted instead of reviews of new shows. Although their titles and declared intentions were much higher - for example *Rivista Teatrale Melodrammatica* called itself “critical paper for music and announcements” (“giornale critico musicale e d’annunzi”) – the musical periodicals could not be defined as critical publications in the sense we intend today. A telling example of the

⁶⁴ “Novellette” in *Il Mondo Artistico* and *Gazzetta teatrale Italiana*, “alla rinfusa” in *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*.

⁶⁵ “Il maestro Mazzuccato ha rinunciato alla carica di Vice-presidente della Società del Quartetto...” “Oggi alle 2 pom. Nella Sala del Conservatorio avr’luogo...” “A Ruhort (Prussia) si trova in questo momento di passaggio un circo...” “Introiti dell’*Aida*: 14a. rappresentazione L. 7652,50...” *Gazzetta*, March 24, 1872, no. 12, 97.

contradictory and inaccurate use of the word “critica” was the section called “Critical-anecdotal study” (“Studio critico aneddótico”) on *La Scena Illustrata*. As opposed to “critica” like they referred to themselves or like we would intend today, reviews printed on the periodical press of the time can be defined as “cronaca” as they were very descriptive rather than analytical and consisted of a *report of the event*. The importance attributed to the event itself rather than its aesthetic value was underlined also by the various sections of the periodicals, where the word “cronaca” was predominant: “Theatrical Chronicles,” “Small Chronicles or Various Things” and “Milanese Cronicle” (“Cronaca Teatrale,” “Cronachetta o Cose Diverse” and “Cronaca Milanese”).

The treatment of operatic events as “news facts” (“fatti di cronaca”) was evident in the highly descriptive – and not so analytical – style of the reviews. The typical reviews of the time described the plot, the singers, the music, the staging for the most to the extent to which they affected the most important aspect described in each review: the reaction of the audience. I will address the description of the formal aspects first and focus later on the importance attributed to the reaction of the audience. The plot and the singers received substantial attention as partial motivations for the audience’s positive or negative reaction. Usually reviews started with a detailed description of the plot, which only in the case of adaptations from famous plays or novels would touch upon the composition of the libretto, otherwise it was a simple summary of the events but could take up almost half of a review.⁶⁶ The singers’ performances, as one might expect, were

⁶⁶ I will just refer here to the articles or periodicals that I had more readily available because mentioned elsewhere. Even though I do not have statistical data, based on the vast amount of reviews I have come across in my work it is safe to state that the reviews characteristics described here can be applied to the vast majority of the reviews published on the musical and theatrical periodical press. Some specific examples of the presence of plot summary: “Bohème” *Il mondo artistico* 11 febbraio 1896, p. 1-2; “Sansone e Dalila” *Il Teatro Illustrato e la Musica Popolare* 1892 p. 178.

always addressed as a relevant part of the show and especially because they often had the power to stir evident reactions in the audience. However, the singers' performances, as well as the orchestra's execution, were described with vague adjectives. Although the reviewers usually implicitly attributed a success, or lack thereof, mostly to the music, and its power to stir the audience emotions if the music was described at all, it was in vague terms. So the music of a successful opera was usually "beautiful," "graceful," "lively" or "fine" and "elegant" and often attributed a series of adjectives that would underline its power on the audience and its emotional qualities, such as "passionate" or "moving".

Many of the reviews published on *La Gazzetta Musicale* and *Il Teatro Illustrato* presented the same characteristics. However, these publications provided also more insightful, extensive, and detailed reviews that at least addressed the quality of the music and of the libretto and attempted vague intellectual reflections. These reviews had more authoritative voice and pedagogical intents. They were often written by more respected and renowned "critics" like Girolamo Alessandro Biaggi, Oscar Chilesotti, Filippo Filippi, Francesco D'Arcais for *la Gazzetta*,⁶⁷ and Amintore Galli for *Teatro Illustrato*. Despite the serious intent, the personal interests and ideological and artistic orientation of the editors and writers were in these cases stronger than in lesser periodicals.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The renowned collaborators for *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* were numerous before the 1870s, among them Leone Fortis, Ugo Tarchetti, Alberto Mazzuccato, Franco Faccio, Emilio Praga. For all the collaborators from 1889 to 1902 see Sartori, *Casa Ricordi*, 66. It is interesting to note that while up until the change in editorial board and graphic design that happened in 1889 (when the periodical acquired a smaller format but doubled the amount of pages, and started taking interest in other arts besides than music) the famous collaborators were all renowned music critics. Instead, after the change, they were mostly intellectuals and scholars of various backgrounds like Cesare Lombroso, or fiction writers and journalists like Matilde Serao.

⁶⁸ The often polemical and aggressive tones also informed these reviews that were always tainted with strong opinions in particular against opposing factions and publishing houses, or in relation to nationalism, Italian traditions, foreign imports, and Wagnerism. As I mentioned, it is not the focus of this chapter to dwell into the nationalistic, political, and aesthetic orientations of the singles critics or the journals. For the

4. QUESTIONS OF READERSHIP AND THE BIRTH OF RIGOROUS CRITICISM

The changes that occurred in the publishing industry between the 1860s through the 1890s were expression of an attention to the market. The changes implied editorial decisions that involved the assessment of the publications' address and the relationship between critic, work of art, and new readers. The process of change was accompanied by comments and concerns about the role of the critic, the composition of the audience, and the ways to judge the value of a work of art. This section will describe the debates around readership and the emerging need for more serious criticism. It will also mention some related and consequent questions about the audience and the assessment of a work of art that will be addressed in the next chapter. The issues analyzed here are, therefore, a fundamental point of departure and reference for the topic of the next chapter.

Starting from the 1880s, a common topic of debate in the specialized press became the function of the critic *vis à vis* the readers. Questions of readership and address had increasingly preoccupied the general press and the world of literature for some years. In 1889, intellectual and journalist Ruggero Bonghi in regards to daily newspapers wrote:

I...could not now write in a newspaper those long studies of law and history that I used to write. The readers became more impatient: they have less time, and they would rather spend their time otherwise; the readers believe less in journalists' science and journalists have less of it. How could one hope that they would

purpose of the argument it is simply important to note that the "factions" and the polemics were often harsh, and that since the discussions mostly revolved around a national character of music, Wagner's innovation and the potential heir of Verdi, then reviewers affiliated with publisher would be more excessive in these debates because they were more invested. Some examples of the biased approach can be found, for example, in musicians' letters: Catalani wrote in a letter to Depanis from February 20th, 1892 that "*Il secolo XIX* is completely sold-out to Sonzogno" or that journalists are "deaf and blind." Berrong, *The Politics of Opera*, 102. For the specific views of each critic mentioned above see Andrea Della Corte, *La Critica Musicale e I Critici* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1961); Gasparella, *Un Critico*, Capra, "La Casa Editrice Sonzogno," 255 (regarding Amintore Galli). For the ideological debates around Wagnerism, verismo, and nationalism see Wilson, "Music, Letters" and Andrea Estero, "Il dibattito critico e musicologico nella pubblicistica Milanese" in Antolini, *Milano Musicale*.

acquire more science when it is clear that nobody wants it? Therefore the matter gets fragmented in newspapers much more than in the past. It is necessary to have brief articles, or even no articles. One wants fact, and above all small facts. ...[the daily press] provides impressions rather than concepts.⁶⁹

Torelli-Viollier, later director of *Corriere della Sera*, commented that “the journalist is not in control of the readers, but he is their servant, and...must write the newspaper not to serve his own ambition, passions, friendships, and interests, but to educate and entertain the readers.”⁷⁰ Such concerns for the readership of the press industry had already interested the world of literature. Author Carlo Tenca perceived the change in readership already in the 1860s: “while once authors could be sure of a readership traditionally educated to their same ideas and principles, preserved through generations, now instead authors have in front of them an immense multitude of which they need to become interpreters or, we can almost say, prophets.”⁷¹ These reflections on the redefinition of the role of the intellectual were accompanied by concerns for the conflicts between aesthetics, ethics, and markets, and they were also at the center of literary movements and journals’ agenda. The *scapigliatura* movement or the *riviste fiorentine* were examples of

⁶⁹ “io...non potrei scrivere ora in un giornale quei lunghi studii di diritto, di storia che scrivevo prima. Il pubblico è diventato più impaziente; ha meno tempo, o piuttosto vuole spendere altrimenti il suo tempo; crede alla scienza dei giornalisti meno e questi ne hanno meno. Come si potrebbe sperare, che se ne procurassero di più, quando è chiaro che non gliela chiede nessuno? Perciò la materia è sminuzzata nel giornale assai più che prima non si facesse. Occorrono articoli brevi, o anche non en occorrono. Si vogliono fatti, soprattutto fatterelli. ... [La stampa quotidiana] dà più impressioni che concetti.” Ruggero Bonghi, introduction to Bernardini’s *Guida alla Stampa*.

⁷⁰ “il giornalista non è il padrone del pubblico, ma il suo servitor, e ... deve fare il giornale non per servire la propria ambizione, le proprie passioni, le proprie amicizie, i propri interessi, ma per istruzione e divertimento del pubblico.” Torelli-Viollier, “La Stampa,” in *Milano 1881*. Regarding the theme of the power of the reader, see Lolla, “Reader/Power,” 35: “a writer degraded to the rank of a supplier of raw materials to be refined by the reader; a producer of a commodity to be bought, stored, customized, or disposed of altogether.”

⁷¹ “Se un tempo il letterato era sicuro di un pubblico tradizionalmente educato alle sue stesse idee, agli stessi suoi principi, conservati di generazione in generazione, ora invece egli ha un popolo immense davanti a se, di cui deve farsi interprete, e, quasi diremmo, profeta.” Lolla, “Reader/Power,” 29.

groups of intellectuals particularly concerned with these questions and that often expressed opinions about theater and opera in terms of audience.⁷²

The considerations on the modern readers in the fields of journalism and literature were echoed by debates in the realms of the music periodicals critics and readers. Regardless of the of the critics' goals— to educate, inform, or represent the readers —the “popular” press and the daily newspapers addressed an unspecialized readership. The simple content and descriptive tone of the criticism itself show that the critics were consciously writing for a general public – besides possibly avoiding technicalities to mask a certain ignorance of music. The debates around readership that interested the musical press were often motivated by a reaction to the commercialization of the periodicals and the increasing influence of music criticism printed on daily newspapers, which had to be brief, accessible, and written quickly. As Leone Fortis put it: “Nowadays the audience doesn't ask for the critical judgment, that the busy, hurried, annoyed audience does not have either the time or the interest to read anymore. Instead the audience requests information.” The discussion that developed in the last decades of the 19th century regarded the changing audiences and the reading practices as well as addressed a general inadequacy of the critics. Fortis again wondered whether there was not a good criticism because there was no readership for it, or if the lack of good critics had caused indifference and superficiality in the readers.⁷³ As an example of the discussion on the already mentioned “ignorance” of the critics, an article published on *Gazzetta* wrote: “a plague that for some time has grieved us: the truly phenomenal

⁷² See Francesca Billiani, “Intelletuali militanti, funzionari e tecnologici, etica ed estetica in tre riviste fiorentine di inizio secolo: Il Regno, La voce e Lacerba (1903-1914)” in Caesar, *The Print Media*, 63-76.

⁷³ “adesso il pubblico...non chiede tanto il giudizio critic, che il pubblico affaccendato, affrettato, seccato non ha più nè tempo nè voglia di leggere, quanto la informazione di cronaca.” *Gazzetta* June 14, 1891.

ineptitude of some critics who make rash judgment...in papers that have the reputation of being respected. ...to write criticism, especially regarding music, is considered the easiest of professions!”⁷⁴

The increased descriptiveness of this type of criticism motivated some intellectuals and journalist to advocate for a more substantial and rigorous criticism and to debate the role of the music critic. In 1895 to a polemical letter to *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* that advocates for a criticism knowledgeable of music, techniques, and music history, the critic and editor Carlo Arner responded that although audiences were more educated than in the past, they still would not want to read an in-depth critique, and either way the critics do not have an influence on the taste and on the education of the audience. He claimed that it was necessary to remember that critics are writing for the audiences, which were “quite the opposite of knowledgeable and cultured” and that therefore erudite critics would be out of place working for periodicals or newspapers.⁷⁵ Polemicist Dottor Libertà in a letter to *Gazzetta* complained that artistic reviews were a nonsense compilation of sentences stolen from other newspapers combined with cheap rhetoric, while instead at least some knowledge should be required of the critics, especially in a time in which it was difficult for readers to have access to

⁷⁴ “una piaga che da qualche tempo ci affligge in modo assai grave: la inettitudine davvero fenomenale di certi critici che trinciano sentenze all’impazzata...nelle colonne di giornali che passano per autorevoli. ...Fare la critica, specialmente in fatto di musica, è tenuto per il più facile dei mestieri!” Dottor Schiettezza, “Una certa critica in Italia,” *Gazzetta*, April 4, 1886, 103.

⁷⁵ *Gazzetta Musicale*, no. 52, December 30, 1894, 823-834. Carlo Arner’s answer is in *Gazzetta*, January 20, 1895: “il pubblico dei giornali politici quotidiani non esige dai critici musicali un soverchio sfoggio di erudizione, né una esuberanza inutile e oziosa di tecnicismo, né, infine, un esame, uno studio profondo tanto da finire col perdersi il filo delle idee. Certo, il pubblico oggi, più colto e più esigente, vuole le cose fatte con coscienza e con intelligenza, ma più che una vera e profonda critica, domanda la traccia, le linee principali di una critica alla quale poi possa poi più o meno adattare le proprie impressioni.” And later on, in the same article, Arner wrote: “Il Signor Locati ... attribuisce a questa critica ... una importanza ed una influenza sul gusto e sulle educazione musicale del pubblico; che in realtà, nella pratica, non ha e non può avere.... Non bisogna dimenticare che si scrive per il pubblico, il quale è tutt’altro che compreso di eruditissimi.”

the new types of music and systems in the context of disputes of the various schools.⁷⁶ In reaction to D'Arcais who thought that Art cannot be suddenly made accessible to the people, Filippo Filippi responded that the audiences could be educated so that they could find pleasure in music that is beautiful but requires knowledge to be appreciated.⁷⁷ Filippi also took strong stands “against the Italian audience’s judgment, misled by an indifferent, epicurean, and above all ignorant criticism.”⁷⁸ Journalist Vittorio Bersezio on *Il teatro Illustrato* of July 1882, maintained that the audience opinion was influenced and controlled by groups of critics who “impose their law both on the theater audience and in the papers’ reviews.” These critics “constitute a clique who decides – and manages to do so – to grant fame to authors, success to operas, and triumph to systems” and take advantage of the complete “inertia” of the audience, who formed opinions based on the principle “That person stated it, and then it must be so.”⁷⁹

The increasing discussion of this topic shows that critics and editors were aware of the composition of opera audience, the broadening of the base for periodicals’ readership, and the power attributed to audiences by the market laws. All of these comments implied different positions regarding the role and the power of the critics. In the course of the second half of the 19th century, the role of the music critic in relation to the audience and to the type of publication needed to be redefined in the light of the new

⁷⁶ Dottor Libertà, “La critica odierna,” in *Gazzetta*, March 7, 1886, 71-72.

⁷⁷ Gasparella, *Un Critico*, 19, quoting Filippi: “Certe musiche, eminentemente ideali, complicate, astruse...fanno andare in estasi i pochi, e cascare dal sonno i molti. – I molti dicono recisamente: *Non comprendiamo questa musica, dunque è brutta*; stupido sillogismo a tutto profitto dell’inerzia e dell’ignoranza. ...L’aristocrazia potrebbe cangiarsi in democrazia se tutti studiassero.”

⁷⁸ “contro i giudizi del pubblico italiano cullato da una critica indifferente epicurea e soprattutto ignorante.” Gasparella, *Un Critico*, 19.

⁷⁹ “dettano legge nelle platee e nelle appendici dei giornali” “costituiscono una consorte che si arbitra – e ci riesce – di concedere la fama agli autori, il successo alle opere, il trionfo ai sistemi” “L’ha affermato il tale, e dunque è così.” “Il gusto del pubblico,” *Il Teatro Illustrato*, July 19, 1882, 3.

bourgeois approach of the periodicals, the expanding readership, and the artistic developments. This latter aspect will be addressed in the next chapter where I will also analyze how the debates just reported concerned a changing opinion about the relationship between the critic, the audience, and the work of art. The debates around criticism and readership described above also signified an attempt to demand insightful criticism from the commercial periodicals of the time. An attempt that had to remain unfulfilled because such type of criticism and the address of the periodicals were irreconcilable. Instead, such demands for an insightful criticism found an outlet in a new type of publication.

In opposition to the brevity of the newspaper reviews, the lack of analysis in periodical criticism, and the power attributed to the ability to “please the audience,” and in the wake of the debates just described, in the 1890s some critics created new completely different “intellectual” publications that featured in-depth musical analysis and addressed educated professionals and intellectual elites. These publications were *Rivista Musicale Italiana* (Turin 1894-1955), *La Cronaca Musicale* (Pesaro, 1896-1917), *La Nuova Musica* (Florence, 1896-1919), *Il Nuovo Palestrina* (Florence, 1896-1902 completely dedicated to sacred music), and *Rivista Teatrale Italiana* (Naples and Florence, 1901-1915).⁸⁰ These publications were the very first examples of specialist musical publications. Written by a new generation of knowledgeable music and theater critics, they focused on one specific discipline (music or prose theater.) The main innovation in terms of content, as far as the musical ones are concerned, was the

⁸⁰ *La Nuova Antologia* can be counted among these publications. Although it was definitely not a musical or artistic periodical but rather a literary and political one, it contained substantial critical articles on music in a number that increased exactly around the last decade of the 19th century.

increased attention to genres overlooked by the commercial periodicals: sacred, instrumental, foreign, and ancient music. As Wilson points out, these music critics, together with other intellectuals, were actively trying to “reinvent received Italian music history by calling for a revival of older, instrumental works”⁸¹ which explain the frequent articles on Palestrina. The letter to the readers by editor and musicologist Luigi Torchi⁸² on the first issue of *Rivista Musicale Italiana* announced a publication that, in opposition to the “superficiality of the reckless subjectivity” of musical criticism of the time, it would provide a scientific, analytical, and impartial criticism, a “High-level and impartial criticism” and “broad discussion, thorough and in-depth study.” These studies addressed the “history, aesthetics, philosophy ... techniques, [and] forms” of the musical production, drawing methods from a variety of disciplines including physiology, psychology, and acoustics.⁸³ The program announced the exclusion of “the so called popularization works that would not fit the approach of the journal.”⁸⁴ The new critics actively ignored and distanced themselves from opera, in particular the “popular” operas of the Italian tradition and the *verismo* opera. Instead, they emphasized the study of Wagner’s music and theories and the progressive instrumental works from foreign countries, along with music of the distant past. Some of the most renowned critics of this group were Fausto Torrefranca, Bastianelli and Ildebrando Pizzetti. They collaborated also with *La Voce*, the first literary publication to open to other arts. Even within their

⁸¹ Wilson, “Music, Letters,” 107.

⁸² For details on Luigi Torchi see Luigi Torchi (Mordano, 7 novembre 1858 – Bologna, 19 settembre 1920) Caterina Criscione, *Luigi Torchi: un Musicologo Italiano tra Otto e Novecento* (Imola: La Mandragora, 1997).

⁸³ “critica elevata e imparziale”, “trattazione ampia, uno studio meditato e profondo.” Luigi Torchi, “Ai Lettori,” *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, 1894, 2

⁸⁴ “Volemmo esclusi I lavori così detti di volgarizzazione che mal si acconcerebbero all’indole della rivista.” Torchi, “Ai Lettori,” 3.

serious and positivistic approach, most of these publications maintained some of the aspects of the popular periodicals: a news section, reviews of the shows, reports of news published on other periodicals, and music excerpts. The “news” sections, as opposed to the more “popular” periodicals did not focus only on theaters, but also on news from conservatories, music schools, concert halls both in Italy and abroad. Their format as well was also very different from the other “popular” periodicals: no images, no illustrations, and no captivating section titles. These journals were a clear indication of the diversification of audiences and demands. It is worth noting that, while most of the popular musical periodicals were based in Milan - which as I showed in the previous chapters was the center of commercial, economic, and industrial life - all of these publications were founded in other cities.

The number and the difference of format and address of musical publications in the first decade of the 20th century indicates that the readership broadening caused a differentiation in the needs and demands of the readers and a consequent differentiation of the cultural products. On the one hand, there was the press affiliated with agencies. These periodicals in the passage to the new century maintained the same format and the same purpose to inform singers, musicians, and professionals of the opera industry about performances, artists’ availability, and opera seasons. On the other hand, there are the new serious publications. As Wilson noted regarding *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, the length and technical level of the articles, the distance from anything “popular”, the inclusion of articles in foreign languages, indicate that these new publications “primarily sought to engage ... an elite.”⁸⁵ Their agenda and their tone were also often explicitly

⁸⁵ Wilson “Music, Letters,” 112.

anti-democratic. Instead, the cultural pages of the newspapers were addressing a great variety of readers. The articles were brief, informative, insightful but not technical, and written by renowned cultured journalists and critics, like Giuseppe Depanis for *La Stampa* in Turin, Filippo Filippi for *La Perseveranza*, Amintore Galli for *Il Secolo*. Finally, there were the periodicals that aimed to reach wider audience with either commercial or populist goals, but that never gave up on at least an attempt to provide criticism and commentary of a certain level did not have a place anymore in the differentiation of products. In fact, both *Il Teatro Illustrato* and *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, clear example of this sort of middle-ground publications, closed down in 1892 and 1902 respectively.⁸⁶

In my opinion, the reason for the termination of *Gazzetta Musicale* and *Il Teatro Illustrato* is that they were not addressing a specific reader and that the reconciliation of high cultural content with popular address was not feasible in the current market conditions. *Il Teatro Illustrato* as I explained in the previous section, had populist and commercial goal and format. However, its curator and music critic Amintore Galli, also artistic director of the musical publications, wrote thorough criticism and long articles that were neither the short reviews of the newspapers, nor the entertaining biased comments of other periodicals, nor the technical erudite criticism of the new publications. The critical articles often frowned upon in a snobbish way the commercialization and the rise of advertisement that characterized the world of opera at the time, for example the

⁸⁶ Instead, popular, illustrated and non-critical literature publications remain widespread into the new century. For example, *Il Secolo XX* published by Treves, which prints biographical articles on writers without addressing the works themselves. Fiorenza Weinapple, “Abbiamo fatto l'Italia : adesso si tratta di fare gli Italiani : il programma di educazione nazionale del Secolo XX” in Caesar, *The Print Media*, 153.

practice of placing ads on theater curtains was considered a tacky disgrace.⁸⁷ The images attracted popular readership but, as we have seen for Ricordi's advertisements, portrayed the glamour and the sophistication of the opera theater. The same contradictions could be noted in Sonzogno-owned Teatro Lirico Internazionale, which had democratic intents but even after the renovations maintained a partial box structure.⁸⁸

Sonzogno himself defined *Il Teatro Illustrato* "a voluminous literary-musical work" unable to reach the masses of readers, when it closed down in 1892. In the printed announcement Sonzogno admitted defeat against the changing audience and announced that the cultural page of *Il Secolo* was going to replace the periodical because of its "quicker means of communication – as expected by the quick pace of nowadays communication – more agile and more suitable to penetrate the mass of the readers."⁸⁹ The changing audience was definitely a factor in the 1890s that could lead to this decision. However, Sonzogno's justification should be extended to changes in the opera audiences and institution and not limited to the journalistic style in fashion at the time. *Il Teatro Illustrato* was a hybrid product that by attempting to reconcile a popular approach with critical and cultural value failed to find a role within the new separation between popular publications and intellectual journals. Sonzogno's media empire's decline has been attributed to the economic crisis of the 1890s and the decreased

⁸⁷ Vincenzo Valle, 'I sipari réclame dei teatri', *Il Teatro Illustrato*, 31 July 1883, 110, observed that it was a widespread custom to decorate theatre curtains with advertisements. The practice was especially common at the Milanese Teatro dal Verme. Valle also reported that other periodicals too had complained about such practices and had suggested that audiences rebel against such 'profit-driven invasions in the temples of the gentle art', which distract from music and are 'anti-artistic'.

⁸⁸ On the cover of *Il Teatro Illustrato* of September 22, 1894 there is a drawing of the elegant lobby of the newly renovated Teatro Lirico Internazionale that portrays a vibrant and glamorous scene with an elegant group of people.

⁸⁹ "mezzi piu spediti – come vuole la rapidità della comunicazione dei nostril giorni – più agevoli e più idonei a penetrare nella massa del pubblico, di quello che non potesse un organo letterario –musicale voluminoso come il presente: è nelle colonne del Secolo Illustrato che il nostro giornale si fonda e compenetra." *Il Teatro Illustrato*, December 27, 1892, 144.

involvement of Edoardo Sonzogno and his strong vision combined with inheritance problems.⁹⁰ The decreased success of Sonzogno's press products indicates also the failure of a populist approach in relation to opera. Sonzogno's desire to educate the general public was not effective in an opera industry that was moving toward a separation of commercial popular value and aesthetic value. Instead, Sonzogno's popular activity found an outlet in the movie industry

Similar comments can be made about *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*. As I have described above it had a commercial and popular format but still featured some longer and serious articles. Even the founder of *Rivista Musicale Italiana* Luigi Torchi wrote for *Gazzetta* from 1884 al 1889. As suggested in the previous chapter, Ricordi's powered through the crisis of Italian opera with a strong marketing strategy that reinforced the association between opera and the elegant experience of the opera theater. In a similar way the company reacted to the changes of the market in a productive way. With its usual eye for the market, Ricordi replaced the commercial but still ambitious *Gazzetta* with multi topic publications for the general bourgeois public: *Musica e Musicisti* and *Ars et Labor*. They focused less on musical commentary and more on their value as "pleasant showcase and mere pastime for the readers"⁹¹ to say it with Marco Capra's words.

Monthly *Ars et Labor* is an example of a successful development of a musical/theatrical periodical into a more modern type of publication intended for a mass audience. Its editorial program was exactly the opposite as that of *Rivista Musicale*, mentioned above. In fact, on the first issue of *Ars et Labor* it was stated that while the

⁹⁰ Valisa, "Casa Editrice Sonzagno," 104.

⁹¹ "Piacevole vetrina e mero passatempo per i lettori." Capra, "La Casa Editrice Sonzagno, 248.

periodical aimed at “maintaining the character of *Gazzetta Musicale*”, it “aspires to conquer of all the classes of readers, including those that even if lacking special and technical knowledge, feel art, appreciate beauty and find enjoyment in reading things and facts that are, in every aspect, educational, useful, interesting, and entertaining.” The way the program was phrased implied that a strong focus on music would be in opposition to the goal of attracting “all classes of readers.” In fact, the theatrical news were relegated mostly to the section “In Platea,” a one page list of Italian and international theaters with very brief information about their program. This section was styled like the reviews of the previous popular periodicals focusing on the way the operas were received, the amount of applause, and the singers.⁹² The editor also announces that the journal will provide “news” of “all the important artistic, literary, scientific, and political movements” and that this will make the publication “even more attractive” than in the past.⁹³

Leone Fortis, as always acutely writing on *Gazzetta Musicale*, noted that there used to be a time when theater life was the most important aspect of social life. There was

⁹² “Ad Atene un grande successo *La traviata* – la rappresentazione passa tra una serie non interrotta di applausi” or “A Spezia applauditi nella *Sonnambula* la signora Wernez e il tenore Colombini.” Some examples from “In platea,” *Ars et Labor*, no. 5, 1906.

⁹³ “Ora è nostro intendimento di mantenere il carattere di *Gazzetta Musicale*, ma in pari tempo la nostra rivista aspira alla conquista di tutte le classi di lettori e così anche quelli che, pur non avendo speciali o tecniche cognizioni, sentono l’arte, apprezzano il bello e trovano diletto nella lettura di cose, di fatti che siano, sotto ogni aspetto, educative, utili, interessanti, dilettevoli.” “sarà uno dei notiziari più complete che si pubblichino oggidì. Il lettore avrà per tal modo notizia in ogni fascicolo mensile, di tutto l’importante moviemnto artistico, letterario, scientifico e politico....tale programma vuole e saprà rendere più attraente ancora...” Ricordi, *Ars et Labor*, January, 1906. The previous *Musica e Musicisti*, development of *Gazzetta* and of which *Ars et Labor* was a development, was already projected toward a purely popular publication where profiles and portraits of the singer would run in front of the reader “like at the cinematographer” (“Presentazione,” *Musica e Musicisti*, January 15, 1902). However, it was more focused on music than *Ars et Labor*.

also a time when, because of censorship, there was nothing else to read in newspapers.⁹⁴ By the turn of the century, opera theater lost importance in the midst of the many other varied stimuli and interests of the readers. The amount and variety of non-artistic publications mentioned earlier is an indication of that in addition to the new successful format of *Ars et Labor*. Not only had the interests of the readers changed but the composition of the readership had also changed: more readers, more subgroups of readers, on average less educated than in the past, and used to the short delivery of brief news by the increasing diffusion of the daily newspapers.

The creation in the 1890s of new types of “intellectual” musical publications implied an obvious diversification of the types of readers and critics. The new musicological publications growing along the more entertaining and visually rich periodicals show that at the turn of the century music was also diversified: it was both a form of high art and culture that required informed reviews by specialized critics and also entertainment for the bourgeoisie who took pleasure in reading how many rounds of applause a show received and looking at portraits of famous singers. The differentiation most importantly implied a separation of the media types that provided “cronaca” from those that provided “critica.” The distinction among media and among levels of criticism indicated a distinction between the “event” aspect of the performance and the “cultural” and “artistic” one. In the second half of the 19th century, entertainment potential, social values, and commercial outcomes were the criteria with which to judge an opera. It is in reaction to these commercial values that new aesthetic criteria arose in relation to the

⁹⁴ “E’ ben vero che allora il teatro aveva nella vita delle grandi città una importanza assorbente, nell’atonia generale di tutte le altre manifestazioni di vita pubblica. E’ ben vero che allora nei giornali, schiacciati sotto la pressione della censura, non c’era nient’altro da leggere...” Leone Fortis, *Gazzetta*, June 14, 1891.

music industry. In other words, there was a growing separation between music as an occasion for social events and music as culture. Commercial success was not the only means of judging an opera. The next chapter will analyze the implications of the changes described here and the way they concerned the moment of the encounter between the audience, the work of art and the artist. This encounter took place in the theaters but also among the pages of the periodical press. This chapter shows another instance of popularization and distinction, demonstrates the entertainment value of opera, and it also provides some necessary background for the discussions of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

THE CONFLICT OF ART AND MARKET: ARTISTS, AUDIENCES, AND CONDUCTORS

*“The genius’ fight with the audience is truth’s fight with strength,
right’s fight with quantity, novelty’s fight with the old: a grandiose,
necessary, unavoidable fight”
(Arrigo Boito) ¹*

In the previous chapters, I have addressed instances of creating an implicit distinction between what is popular, or commercial, and what is Art in relation to opera house administration, commercialization strategies, and press and criticism. We have seen a major opera house, La Scala under political pressure for being more inclusive; a vibrant opera industry pioneering advertising techniques to commercialize operas to a wider audience; and an increasingly commercially appealing periodical press as well as a criticism that validated the entertainment value of opera. These seemingly popularizing and commercializing paths taken by the opera industry and administration would seem to favor the market and create a show that is written, advertised and produced for the spectators’ enjoyment. However, the purpose of La Scala’s administrative restructuring was to be both inclusive and also a high art institution. One of opera’s selling points was its elitist status; and a new type of criticism was born in reaction to the popularization of

¹ “La lotta del genio col pubblico è la lotta del vero col forte, del diritto col numero, del nuovo col vecchio, grandiosa, necessaria, inevitabile lotta.” Arrigo Boito, “Cronaca Musicale Parigina,” *La Perseveranza*. March 2, 1862, in Arrigo Boito and Piero Nardi, *Tutti gli scritti* (Milano: Mondadori, 1942), 1078.

the press. After discussing the implicit creation of opposing hierarchical categories in relation to administration, publicity, and criticism, this chapter deals with these categories more explicitly and in relation to the encounter between the artistic product and the audience. This chapter approaches the moment of reception from the point of view of the critical debates and the institutional changes to explore the changes in perception and experience of opera. In other words, once the social categories of popular and elitist, and the aesthetic categories of commercial, cultural, entertaining and so on were created and systematized in a hierarchical system, where did opera belong and why? Paul Di Maggio relates the hierarchy of distinction to the application of the “high culture model” to opera, and identifies the ideology of “present[ing] art in a manner distinct from that of commercial entrepreneurs”² as the origin of the phenomenon. This chapter explores the connotation of the concept “commercial” and new ideas and “manners” that found expression in an explicit opposition to “commercial” although in the context of increasing commercial value of opera that emerged from the previous chapters. This chapter does so by investigating the relationship between artists, critics and audience, and the corresponding broader dynamics: criticism, authorship or creation, and reception. The analysis suggests that in the late Nineteenth-century, Italian critics and intellectuals rejected opera’s commercial value and endorsed the composer’s and the conductor’s authority. This caused a distancing between artists and audiences which affected the ways to experience opera.

² Paul di Maggio, “Cultural Boundaries and Structural Change: The extension of the High Culture Model to Theater, Opera and Dance, 1900-1940,” in *Cultivating Differences*, ed. M. Lamont and M. Fournier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 22.

Two prominent figures in the Milanese opera world of the time were author and composer Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) and conductor Arturo Toscanini (1867-1957). They will function as examples to unpack the principles underlying the conflict between art and commerce, and art and entertainment. The two figures emerge from the same world of Milan's culture industry and at the same time belong to the history of high art. For these reasons, they are exemplary to study the relationship between, on the one hand, inclusivity, commercial success and the audience, and, on the other hand, aesthetic value, the author and the work of art. From a biographical and artistic perspective, Arrigo Boito and Arturo Toscanini were different and they are not commonly placed together. They belonged to two different generations; however their lives intersected at a crucial moment of Milanese opera history around the new administration of La Scala, as described in chapter I. Boito was involved in the enterprise for the re-opening of La Scala in 1897 as artistic commissioner for the Visconti di Modrone management. In this capacity, he suggested and insisted that the new company should hire Arturo Toscanini as principal conductor and artistic director. Besides sharing a prominent role in the history of La Scala, they also shared a concern for the artistic status of opera and an interest in the relationship between the work of art and the audience. They both in different ways are representative of the efforts to elevate the status of opera, Boito by advocating for a contrast with the audience in the name of the advancement of art and by voicing a strong antagonism toward the commercial value of music; Toscanini by introducing reforms that turned the listening experience to a quasi-religious one and the opera house from a place of social entertainment into a temple of Art.

Considering again Di Maggio's studies, in order to change opera's status one needs first an institutional change and then a new way to present opera.³ Boito and Toscanini participated both in the institutional change through their experience at La Scala, and in the reform of the ways by which to present opera. In this sense, they both contributed to the application of the 'high culture model' to an operatic institution. Both Boito and Toscanini operated in a context of "mainstream" culture industries that were trying to attract new audiences and create a market for the new social classes, as I described in the first three chapters. Because of their role in shaping the opera world in turn-of-the-century Milan toward high culture operating from within the industry, not opposed to it, they are exemplary of the changes of distinction between culture and entertainment. For the same reason, they also embody the paradoxes implicit in the culture industry and in the definition of opera's specifically complex relation between dissemination, popularization, commercialization, costs, and prestige.

Both Toscanini and Boito were multifaceted artists involved in a variety of artistic media and genres over the span of many years. Boito wrote poetry, fiction, libretti for Verdi, Ponchielli, Faccio and other now less known composers,⁴ and a play with Emilio Praga, *Le Madri Galanti*. He translated Shakespeare and Wagner, and regularly contributed to the press. He was knowledgeable of international cultural trends, participated in the *scapigliatura* movement, and was involved in politics. Boito was very well connected in the social and intellectual life of Milan: he was a regular at Countess

³ Di Maggio, "Cultural Boundaries," 22

⁴ Beside the famous libretti for Giuseppe Verdi's *Otello* and *Falstaff*, he wrote *Ero e Leandro* for himself but then gave it to Giovanni Bottesini first and later to Luigi Mancinelli for the music composition. He also wrote *Amleto* for Franco Faccio, *Un tramonto* for Gaetano Coronaro, *La falce* for Alfredo Catalani, *La Gioconda* for Amilcare Ponchielli, *Semira* for Luigi San Germano, *Pier Luigi Farnese* for Costantino Palumbo, and *Iràm* for Cesare Dominiceti.

Maffei's salon and a close friend of Giulio Ricordi, Emilio Praga, Giuseppe Verdi, Franco Faccio, Giuseppe Giacosa, and intellectuals abroad.⁵ He was also involved in a long-term relationship with the famous actress Eleonora Duse. Arturo Toscanini's long career brought him to conduct in various continents, to direct the Metropolitan Opera in its age of glory (1908-15) and La Scala again in a time of institutional reform and political turmoil (1921-29). He is one of the few examples of artists that belonged to 'high-art' to reach stardom mostly thanks the radio broadcastings and recordings with NBC radio in New York (1937-54). What will be produced here is limited by necessity and scope to their capacity of affecting experience and debates on opera in Italy up to the end of the century. In particular, the chapter will address Arrigo Boito's critical writings and Arturo Toscanini's reforms at La Scala from 1897 to 1901. In addition, the production and reception history of the opera *Mefistofele*, written and composed by Arrigo Boito, will provide a stimulating example of the interaction between critical reception, commercial success, and aesthetics. The opera's production history covers a long period of time and brings to the stage exactly the problem of the culture industry: it thematizes the surfacing of a relationship between the work of art and the audience, in which the work of art acquires conscience of itself *vis à vis* the audience.

This chapter will open with a follow-up to the conclusions of the previous chapter and segue into considerations about the negative perception of commercial success, market, and audience. Boito's strong positions on the topic will be paired with the general critical and intellectual debates and with the reception history of his *Mefistofele* in order

⁵ He also frequented other Italian influential authors, for example Edmondo De Amici. See Boito's letter to Giuseppe Verdi in Giuseppe Verdi, Arrigo Boito, Mario Medici, *Carteggio Verdi – Boito*. Vol. 2 of *Carteggio Verdi – Boito* (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1978), 67. ["Jeri sono stato con Edmondo De Amicis tutta sera e abbiamo fatto un gran parlare di Lei e della Signora Giuseppina..."].

to explore the changing perception of commercial success and the consequent discussed role of the artists in relation to the audience. The last section will analyze how Toscanini's reforms caused a shift of focus from a function of the operatic performance to its aesthetic qualities. The problem of the relation between art and market is fraught with philosophical and aesthetic questions that would require more time and consideration than what can possibly be provided by the scope of this work. Although I do not engage with such question, I chose to mention them to generalize what emerged from this study and to suggest some reflections for future elaboration.

1. OPERA IN THE COMMERCIAL WORLD

In the previous chapter, I have described the popularizing attitude of the press and the entertainment value of opera. The changes that occurred in the publishing industry between the 1860s through the 1890s were expressions of an attention to the market; the attention to the market in the press corresponded to an attention to the audience and its reaction as a way to assess the value of an opera. In Chapter Three, I also described the creation in the 1890s of new types of "serious" publications. The differentiation implied a separation of the media types that provided "cronaca" from those that provided "critica." The separation of the media and criticism involved in turn a distinction between the *social event* aspect of the performance and the *cultural/artistic* one. In other words, there was a growing separation between music that was an occasion for a social event and music that was culture. Musicologist Jim Samson indicates that a growth in music criticism is "a direct and immediate response to the replacement of *functional* by *aesthetic* judgments" which resulted in "a growing composer-centeredness and an

increasing focus on the musical work.”⁶ A stepping away from the *function* of opera to the *aesthetic* value of music, based on our findings from the previous chapter, involved a distancing from the entertainment function and from the audience as addressee of the function, toward the work of art and by extension the composer. In fact, the shift of focus from the audience’s reaction toward the work of art characterized the new type of musical criticism. For example, a critic in *La Cronaca Musicale* wrote “we simply make judgments on art and the audience simply makes useless waste of booing and applause.”⁷ The critics of *Rivista Musicale* advocated for a need to assess a work of art independently from its success: “The work of art, of any kind, will always be studied independently from the variable circumstances that may accompany it, and independently from its success, its conditions, and the name and fame of the author...”⁸

The new critical trends, however, did not simply involve an increased focus on the work of art, but went as far as to see the *function* that traditionally opera had – in other words the commercial value of the work and its potential to please the audience – as detrimental to the aesthetic qualities of the work. Popularity and commercial value were attributed a meaning of unworthiness of critical consideration and negation of cultural and aesthetic value. Consequently, since the main criterion to assess the *function* value of opera was the reaction of the audience, the audience was berated, and pleasing the audience became identified with seeking vulgar commercial success. Well before

⁶ Jim Samson, “The musical work and nineteenth-century history,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 12 (my emphasis).

⁷ “Noi...facciamo semplicemente dei giudizi d’arte e ...il pubblico ...fa semplicemente sciupio inutile di fischi e applausi.” *La cronaca Musicale* (Pesaro), n. 8-9, 1901.

⁸ “L’opera d’arte, qualunque essa sia, vi sarà studiata sempre astrazione fatta dalle circostanze mutevoli onde può presentarsi accompagnata, dal successo, dalle condizioni e dal nome e dalla fortuna dell’autore...” Luigi Torchi, “Ai Lettori,” *Rivista Musicale Italiana* 1, 1894: 4-5.

Theodor Adorno theorized the ills of mass culture and cultural commodification, intellectuals and critics of the 19th century thought that profits, commerce and commodification diverted culture from independence and autonomy which are the characteristics that should belong to art. Consequently, in an era dominated by market value, sales and larger numbers of consumers – as the previous chapters have showed – cultural products became commodities; therefore, only the art that escaped market dynamics was true art. In such context, opera's success with wide audience in the second half of the 19th century made particularly difficult for intellectuals to acknowledge the genre artistic value. In fact, Italian opera, regardless of its source of funding, had been an industrial system almost since its origins; generating revenues was an important aspect of its mode of operating and attracting large numbers of spectators was its primary goal, whether for financial or political reasons (which depended on the time period and on the political situation). In fact, Roger Parker stated that opera underwent a difficult artistic legitimization and that such difficulty derives from the “industrial” characteristic of opera's mode of production.⁹

Concerns of conflict between commerce and art increased exactly when the music and culture industry grew, when opera's commercial outcome was more necessary, more organized and more evident, when opera houses were not financed by a patron, but by a commercial enterprise, meaning that anybody with a ticket was welcome and more and more people could afford a ticket. In fact, in the 1880s and 1890s, when industrialization, commercialization and popularization of the opera institution became more apparent, many were the complaints against the market (“il commercio”) as a cause of the many

⁹ Roger Parker, “The opera industry,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson, 87.

problems of musical life in Italy. The new types of serious publications such as *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, made a point of distancing themselves from commercial phenomena and focused on older Italian music and orchestral and choral music. According to music and literature critic Francesco D'Arcais, it was impossible to train singers appropriately because "art is, so to speak, subordinate to the needs of theater market and voice trainers...are concerned only with training artists that meet the needs of the most vulgar industry."¹⁰ According to *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* critic and intellectual Leone Fortis, advertisement and "commercio" were the main causes of the decline of criticism and critical thought because they created expectations and conditioned the reception of the performance.¹¹ According to Ippolito Valetta, writer for *La Nuova Antologia*, they were also the "aberrant" causes of a general decline in musical quality.¹² Giovanni Ferrero in *Rivista Musicale* decried the practices of advertising and seeking audience approval. He insisted that music publishers, through base marketing means, actually "imposed" a repertory on the audience according to a "recipe for success" and not according to artistic principles. In this way the publishers turned opera theater into a "commercial" enterprise.¹³ In the Milanese theater world, after the institutional changes at La Scala, the idea that the sole purpose of a theater was public service spread, and the distancing from the speculations of the impresario system were seen as a model. Toscanini wrote in a letter to Uberto, son of Guido Visconti di Modrone, that commercial

¹⁰ "L'arte è per così dire subordinata alle esigenze del commercio teatrale e i maestri di canto...si preoccupano solamente di somministrare artisti i quali rispondano ai bisogni della più volgare industria." Francesco D'Arcais, "Rassegna Musicale," *La Nuova Antologia*, July 1, 1886, 156.

¹¹ Leone Fortis, "La Critica e i Critici," *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, June 24, 1891, 383.

¹² Ippolito Valetta, "La musica nel Novantaquattro," *La Nuova Antologia*, December 15, 1894, 730-759.

¹³ Giovanni Ferrero, "Crisi Teatrale," *Rivista Musicale Italiana* 4, 1899: 608 (emphasis in the original).

speculation is an offense to people who dedicate their lives to Art.¹⁴ *La bohème*'s success in 1896 provides a particularly telling example of the negative reception of commercial success, and its implications. In fact, the opera received accusations of vulgarity and crowd-pleasing that remain partially attached to Puccini's commercial success to this day. Although Ricordi's campaign described in Chapter Two most likely contributed to *La bohème*'s long-lasting commercial success and popularity, it may also have contributed to intellectuals' negative reception of Puccini.¹⁵ As Wilson points out in *The Puccini Problem*, "contemporary intellectuals opposed Puccini's music as the embodiment of the vulgar, 'feminized' bourgeois culture" represented by Giolitti, and Puccini's operas as "mass produced commodities."¹⁶

As Parker wrote, opera's industrial productive system "is often used as a means to devaluing the repertory, questioning its seriousness of purpose as 'art.'"¹⁷ However, such questioning was also based on common performance practices and on the nature of the genre. While in the area of instrumental music a canon of authoritative and authorial pieces had slowly been established in Europe during the 19th century with Beethoven at the center, opera, says musicologist Ellis, "as a genre, like ballet, whose music was routinely cut to shape to meet the needs of people other than the composer, lacked the authorial integrity of instrumental music."¹⁸ Di Maggio, along similar lines, states that

¹⁴ Arturo Toscanini's letter to Uberto Visconti di Modrone, 1916, quoted in Harvey Sachs, *Reflections on Toscanini* (New York: Grove Weinfeld, 1991), 54-58.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the negative reception of advertisement practices, see the first section of Chapter Two.

¹⁶ Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4 and 108, respectively.

¹⁷ Parker, "The opera industry," 87.

¹⁸ Katherine Ellis, "The structures of musical life," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, 351. Italy was a peculiar case as far as instrumental music went. In fact, Ellis writes that "it was only in the years immediately preceding the First world war that instrumental repertories had gained anything

“theater did not lend itself to the transcendent ... discourse employed to sacralize classical music or the visual arts” because of its concrete thematic content.¹⁹ Joseph Horowitz argues that in the United States opera was not a morally uplifting art like music, until Wagner’s reforms.²⁰ Focus on the work was important to detach opera from the idea of *event* and its *functional* value. Rigor, quality, unity, originality (in the sense of adherence to an original intention) and completeness (the performance of operas in their entirety), were fundamental principles and practices for the aesthetic integrity of the work in itself.²¹ Carl Dalhaus was a particular resilient advocate of opera’s negative evaluative connotation and his statement underlines that lack of legitimization derives from the distinction between the *eventual* or *functional* aspects of the performance, and the relevance of the work itself. Taking as example Rossini’s operas and Beethoven symphonies, Dalhaus says that “Rossini’s musical thought hinges on the performance as an event, not on the work as text.”²² I will return to the idea of focus on the work of art and authorial integrity of the text in the third section of this chapter.

Arrigo Boito was a forerunner of the negative view of markets, and his critical writings bring to light the connection between commercialization, broadening of the audience, and new aesthetic paradigms. Boito published few but very extensive and in depth musical and theatrical analyses starting from 1862 in the Milanese daily newspaper

approaching the supreme status they had enjoyed in France, Austro-Germany and England for around seventy-years” (352). See also John Rosselli, *Music and Musicians in Nineteenth century Italy* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1991), 122.

¹⁹ DiMaggio, “Cultural Boundaries,” 23.

²⁰ Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 8.

²¹ John Storey demonstrates that this is true regarding opera in Manchester in the second half of the nineteenth-century (John Storey, *Culture and Power in Cultural Studies. The Politics of Signification*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 120-122.

²² Carl Dalhaus, *Nineteenth-century music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1889), 9.

La Perseveranza. Most of his critical work was published in *Figaro*, a literary weekly publication that Boito founded and directed with his friend, playwright and poet Emilio Praga in 1864. *Figaro* had a brief life and when it closed, Boito collaborated with *Giornale della Società del Quartetto* and later with Ricordi's *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*.²³ His comments heralded those debates about the audience that characterized the turn of the century. Given his focus on this topic, his articles are instrumental to an analysis of the views of the “new” intellectuals in times of the democratization and commercialization of art. Arrigo Boito's critical writings and journalistic endeavors are particularly relevant to explore the relationship between the intellectual critic and the audience, and the related conflict between commercial success and aesthetic quality.

Boito's critical writings were formally “cronache teatrali”²⁴ and included comments on singers and on the reaction of the audience. However, they can be classified as criticism rather than reports. Although they included many observations on the audience, these were deeper reflections on its relationship with Art rather than descriptive observations. His style was to start the articles with a critical analysis of the libretto and then to relegate the judgment on singers to the very end of the review, setting therefore the tone and indicating the hierarchy of priorities regarding what constituted a proper review.²⁵ Boito's articles were filled with erudite references to ancient mythology, Dante, literature and music history. They also contained passages in Latin, French, and German. Although some of them were published in the daily newspaper, *La Perseveranza*, they

²³ All Boito's published critical articles on opera, music, theater and art are collected in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1069-1319.

²⁴ This term was used and defined in the previous chapter. In this case, it was the title given to the columns that Boito wrote.

²⁵ See the review published on *La Perseveranza*, September 13, 1863 (“inizio subito dalla “magagna” del libretto”).

addressed an extremely cultured readership. The journal *Figaro* was an explicitly intellectual literary publication that addressed the circle of Milanese intellectual involved in the *scapigliatura* movement and friends of the two editors Boito and Praga. Boito wrote in the 1860s, at a time when, as I argued in the previous chapter, there was still an audience for this sort of criticism, before the specialized press turned into a more explicitly commercial enterprise.

Throughout his articles, Boito maintained an antidemocratic view of music and theater. He associated the words “popularization” necessarily to “commercialization” in the sense of financial speculation at the cost of Art. He openly criticized the attempts to popularize music as purely financially driven, and already in 1864 – almost three decades before the general views described above – wrote that “il commercio” was “the worst enemy” of art.²⁶

Boito had very specific and firm opinions about the relationship between the widening of the audience, artistic developments, and the status of theater and music. In his critical writing his reflections on the topic revolved around the idea of “size” and the equation that large size – of audience, of theaters – equaled low quality. He claimed that the fault for a lack of critical sense resided in the fact that “art became ... large and vulgar.”²⁷ Boito sustained that there is “a natural law” according to which “as much things on earth increase in size, as much they loose physiognomy and character.”²⁸ This applied both to audiences and to theaters, as the smaller theaters attracted a “select”

²⁶ Arrigo Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, February 18, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1121.

²⁷ Arrigo Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, January 21, 1864 in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1103.

²⁸ Arrigo Boito, “Cronaca Musicale Parigina,” *La Perseveranza*, March 2, 1862, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1069.

audience rather than the “crowds” of the bigger theaters.²⁹ According to Boito, the widening of the audience, the commercialization and the consequent “large and vulgar”³⁰ art, brought about a decreased “character”³¹ in the audience itself, a lack of criticism and moderation in the critics,³² and the “marriage of Art with its worst enemy: the market.”³³

Boito underlined that commercialization did not simply mean to seek revenues at the cost of art, but it also meant addressing and reaching a wide audience. Financial gain and popularization were put on the same level and both considered equally detrimental to Art. If the reaction of the audience was central to critical assessment – as showed in chapter three, then considerations about the audience and its ability to judge, enjoy, and understand an opera become fundamental. Also, shifting away from the performance’s *function* necessarily meant a shifting away from the audience’s reception, because the audience’s reception was what determined and made evident the function.

2. ARTISTS AND AUDIENCES IN A COMMERCIAL WORLD

As I described in the previous section and in the last chapter, reviews in the popular press focused on the “box office” and “successo di pubblico” to assess operas. Many publications recognized this power given to audiences: not only did they have the right to express their judgment through applause and booing, but also it was considered fair for the success of an opera to be determined by the audience, and the audience only.

²⁹ Arrigo Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, February 25, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1131.

³⁰ Arrigo Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, January 21, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1104.

³¹ “...ella sia una legge naturale che le cose di questa terra, quanto più acquistano in ampiezza, tanto maggiormente perdano di fisionomia e carattere.” Arrigo Boito, “Cronaca Musicale Parigina,” *La Perseveranza*, March 2, 1862, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1070

³² Arrigo Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, January 21, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1104.

³³ Arrigo Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, February 18, 1864 in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1121.

This approach to opera performances' assessment raised questions among the critics of the specialized press about theater audiences, such as who is the audience? What do they want? In fact, starting from the 1880s, a common topic of debate in the specialized press became the function of the critic *vis à vis* readers and audiences.³⁴ Should the reaction of the audience be a measure for the quality of performances or of operas? Is an intellectual understanding necessary to express a judgment, or is simple enjoyment enough? Verdi himself maintained that "the audience shouldn't be concerned with the artist's tool...If it's good, the audience should applaud. If it's bad, they should boo. I would like for the audience to judge not through the petty views of journalists, maestros and piano players, but based on their own impressions!!"³⁵ In a review of Weber's *Freischütz*, the critic denied the right to criticize an audience that expresses an opinion because "the audience [is] an authoritative judge" and "the audience [is] a collective being who, even if they have their own physiognomy, when they are bored and when they are having fun, they do not cease to be a group of several hundred people being bored or having fun."³⁶

While most journalists and critics that addressed the topic of the audience acknowledged that the audience was powerful in determining a performance's value, many regretted such power and criticized a general audience ignorance that, in turn,

³⁴ See also Alessandra Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship in Late Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 8-10; and Alexandra Wilson, "Music, Letters and National Identity: Reading the 1890s' Italian Music Press," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 7 (2010): 107-111.

³⁵ "Il pubblico non s'occupi dei mezzi di che l'artista se serve...Se è *bello* applauda. Se *brutto*, fischi...Io vorrei che il pubblico giudicasse altamente, non colle miserabili viste dei Giornalisti, Maestri, e Suonatori di Piano-forte, ma delle sue impressioni!!" Letter from Giuseppe Verdi to Cesare De Sanctis, April 17, 1872 in *Carteggi verdiani*, ed. Alessandro Luzio (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1947), quoted in Wilson, "Music, Letters and National Identity," 110.

³⁶ "Il pubblico [è] un giudice autorevole" and "il pubblico [è] un ente collettivo, che se anche ha una fisionomia propria, quando si annoia e quando si diverte, non cessa d'essere un complesso di parecchie centinaia di persone che si annoiano o si divertono." Farina, *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, March 24, 1872, 96.

affected the perception of “success” and “quality.” For example, Bersezio in *Il Teatro Illustrato* described the audience as a “inert mass³⁷...: pulled one way and pushed the other by the bravery of the few who don’t understand any of it...but have will power and initiative” and “a moving unanimity of little heads, curled and flowered by the stylists, and beards, groomed by the barber, who proclaim that something is good and something else is bad.”³⁸ Various were the reviews and articles that appeared in *Gazzetta Musicale*. The tone of the comments can be represented by the following examples: “The mass of spectators, who cares about music only to the extent that a sublime amateur would deserve and who knows and believes to exist only music’s most vulgar expression, opera, absorbs unwholesome judgments and raises clay-footed idols just to destroy them later, while instead it denies praise to true merit to which later it will have to pay tribute.”³⁹ According to another critic, “the audience is always available to function as a sponge and drinks a lot.”⁴⁰ Another article denounced the depraved taste of the audience as a cause for unworthy works and ignorant criticism.⁴¹ For example, Boito already in 1863 had

³⁷ The translation from Italian may cause confusion. Here and in other occasions during this discussion, the words “mass” or “masses” do not have a social connotation but indicate a large and unidentified group of people.

³⁸ “...massa inerte...: tirata in qua, lanciata in là dall’audacia di quei pochi che non ne sanno...ma hanno ... volontà e iniziativa” and “una commovente unanimità delle testoline arricciate e infiorate dalla pettinatrice e delle barbe lisciate dal parucchiere [che] proclama che questo è bello, che quello è brutto.” “Il gusto del pubblico,” *Il teatro Illustrato* 19, July, 1882, 3.

³⁹ “La massa del pubblico, che della musica si occupa soltanto per quel che può meritare una sublime dilettante, e che della medesima conosce e crede esistere solo una, la più volgare delle manifestazioni sue, quella cioè del teatro, assorbe i malsani giudizi, innalza I suoi idoli dai piedi di creta, per demolirli più tardi, e nega corone al vero merito, cui in tempo posterior dovrà tributare.” Dottor Libertà, “La critica odierna,” *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, March 7, 1886, 71.

⁴⁰ “...il pubblico sempre disposto a funzionare da spugna, beve grosso.” Dottor Schiettezza, *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, April 4, 1886. A closely related question is whether the critics or the artists can or should educate the audience to appreciate Art. Composer Hector Berlioz took upon himself the educational task to lead the ignorant audience toward high art but ended up mostly complaining about the “unworthiness of the Parisian public” quoted in Ellis, “The structures,” 356. The issue of the possibility or duty to educate the public recalls Chapter One and the ideals of inclusiveness.

⁴¹ Dottor Libertà, “La critica odierna,” *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, March 7, 1886, 71.

defined the audience as a “dumb,” “dog” and, with a slightly less negative connotation, “woman.”⁴²

The critics that berated the ignorance of the audience often associated the audience's ignorance with its Italianness, and crowd-pleasing characteristics with Italian opera. Melody, *bel canto* and close forms constituted the traditional substance of Italian opera and were also the aspects that pleased the audiences and triggered operas' success. The “popularity” of Italian opera and its consequent “national” art potential relied mostly on the regularity and memorability of its form and on the melodramatic emotional character of its plots. Grand opera could be experienced and enjoyed for its grandiose effects, variety of scene compositions, surprises, choruses, dances, exoticism, which explained its great success. What the audience appreciates undergoes historical evolutions depending on aesthetic currents and social dynamics. Derek Scott explains that a shift that occurred during the 19th century: “Aristocratic taste in the eighteenth century was for ceremony and formality; the bourgeoisie reacted against that by prizing individual character and feelings. ... A ‘natural’ music was preferred that did not rely on previous informed knowledge.”⁴³ *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* put it in a paternalistic tone: “the audience in an opera does not seek anything more than sweet melodies that can entertain and move.”⁴⁴ The moving, pleasing, melodic aspects became synonyms for an old style of music and for the simplistic attitudes of Italian audiences. An article on *Lucia*

⁴² “Donna,” in *La Perseveranza*, September 13, 1863; and “citrullo” and “cane” in *Figaro*, January 7, 1864.

⁴³ Derek B. Scott, “Music and social class,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, 549.

⁴⁴ “il buon pubblico il quale in un'opera in musica non ricerca altro che delle soavi melodie che lo divertano e lo commuovano.” Anon, *La tribuna*, reported in *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, February 6, 1896, regarding *La bohème*. Along similar lines, a writer on *Il Mondo Artistico*, February 11, 1896 wrote “quando un'opera come questa diverte – e commuove – perchè questa ha molto divertito e molto commosso – è un'opera riuscita.”

di Lammermoor titled appropriately “Old Music” speaks to this point, and despite the bias of the publication, it reveals the general attitude toward traditional Italian works:

What is so special about this music that makes the audience flock to the theater; what fascination does it exercise on the spectator to make him leave the opera house satisfied and bearing a mysterious feeling in his heart? Yet, this is the music made of those despised *cabalette*, cadences and forms...This is the music that is so easily called conventional, but still has the power to move, glorify the soul and instill itself in the listeners’ hearts...We Italians are *feelings* people...A very strange phenomenon occurred lately in Italy; while the audience rebelled against the invasion of certain exoteric operas and theories, Italian composers, instead, dedicated themselves body and soul to those ideas that the Italian people condemned.⁴⁵

According to music critic Filippo Filippi, melody, cadences and so on were the aspects that spoke to the heart, pleased the ears and provided entertainment; they were “pleasurable melodic memories” by which music “prostitute[d] itself to the pleasure of the audience.”⁴⁶ Such comment recalls *Rivista Musicale Italiana*’s explicit intents to exclude from the new journal any work of a “popularizing” nature, that is, opera.⁴⁷ What

⁴⁵ “Cos’ha di special questa musica che fa accorrere il pubblico; quale fascino esercita sullo spettatore da farlo uscire da teatro soddisfatto e con una arcana sensazione nel cuore? Eppure questa è la musica delle cabalette, delle cadenze, delle forme tanto odiate...Questa è la musica che si battezza tanto facilmente per convenzionale, ha tuttora il potere d’intenerire, di esaltare gli animi e d’insinuarsi nel cuore degli uditori...Noi italiani siamo esseri di *sensazioni*...Un fenomeno strano strano è avvenuto da noi ultimamente in proposito; mentre il pubblico ribellavasi alla invasion di certe opere e teorie esoteriche, per lo contrario avveniva che i maestri italiani si davano anima e corpo a quelle idee che il popolo italiano condannava.” Marcello Mazzoldi, “Musica Vecchia,” *La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*, January 20, 1895, 41. What this critic wrote did not apply only to the “old music.” The complicated reception of the more recent *verismo* opera seems to indicate that the issue goes beyond the close forms and the cadences. Loved by the audience for its simple and everyday life characters recalling prose theater and for the exotic atmospheres of different social classes, these operas were received negatively by the ‘intellectual’ class of critics because of they actively attempted to engage and fascinate the audience.⁴⁵ Also, the last commercially successful operas, like *Falstaff*, *Otello*, and operas by Puccini, already had a progressive and experimental musical structure and did not rely anymore on the traditional forms of Italian opera.

⁴⁶ “...allettare con grate rimembranze melodiche” and “prostituire ai diletti del pubblico.” Filippo Filippi, quoted in Girolamo Gasparella, *Un critic d’arte e musicista: Filippo Filippi* (Firenze: Ufficio della Rassegna Nazionale, 1901), 10.

⁴⁷ Luigi Torchi, “Ai Lettori,” *Rivista Musicale Italiana* 1 (1894): 3. More on the journal’s positions in Chapter Three and in Wilson, “Music, Letters and National Identity,” 108-110.

emerged from the analysis of the press in the late Nineteenth-century and of Boito's writings, was a distinction between operas that were crowd-pleasers and those that were aesthetically valuable; and consequently a distinction between the audiences that seek emotions and those that seek intellectual and aesthetic engagement. All of Boito's critical writings suggest a hierarchical aesthetic distinction of the sort. Boito said that one of the goals of the artist was to reveal to the audience "the existence of a more serious, more congenial and more true art," in which the comparative implies the existence of "less serious" forms of art.⁴⁸ Boito also related the widening of the audience to what he called "artistic polytheism." He used this term throughout his criticism to mean the inability of the audience to distinguish between different artistic products, and therefore "worship beatified idols confusing them with other gods of higher sainthood and more solid miracles." He said that this condition applied in particular to music, which more than any other art, presented a confusion and a competition among the "beatified" and the "saint" composers. These observations imply a sense of differentiation between different levels of "holiness" among music composers. For Boito, "artistic polytheism" was caused either by the audience's "indifference" or its "ignorance" of "serious and classic art."⁴⁹ D'Arcais in *Nuova Antologia* contrasted operas that "contribute to the progress of art" and those that "satisfy the fleeting taste of the audience" as if the two aspects couldn't coexist in the same opera.⁵⁰ Filippi attributed the variety of reactions to the first productions of Wagner's music dramas in Italy not to the works themselves, but to the

⁴⁸ "...l'esistenza di un'arte più seria, più compita, più vera." Boito, "Cronache dei Teatri," *Figaro*, January 7, 1864 in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1094.

⁴⁹ "...adorare i beati Ermolai e immischiarli cogli altri di maggiore santità, e di più sodi miracoli." Boito, "Cronache dei Teatri," *Figaro*, January 28, 1864. Boito mentioned the idea of "politeismo artistico" here, in his first article on *La Perseveranza*, and in *Figaro*, February 18, 1864.

⁵⁰ D'Arcais, "Rassegna Musicale," *La Nuova Antologia*, July 1, 1886, 158.

distinction between a vulgar audience seeking immediate and easy emotions and an educated minority that could appreciate true drama.⁵¹ Critics attributed *Mefistofele*'s cold reception in 1868 to its inaccessibility and musicologist Kimbell recently described the opera as "more interesting, than beautiful, more curious than expressive or powerful."⁵² The contrasting series of adjectives opposes the ability to stimulate interest and curiosity, a cerebral reaction, to beauty and emotional qualities, like expressiveness and power. As William Weber has argued, it was not before the turn of the century that European music had a diversified status; before that "composers had written...with little sense that they wrote a 'high' form for which their listeners needed some special training."⁵³ Carlotta Sorba points out that composers used to write for their audiences.⁵⁴ In her essay *To Please the Public*, she identifies some recurring and typical attitudes of composers up to Verdi who were very concerned with the "effect" or the "success" of an opera. For example, Donizetti demonstrated "a constant readiness to take account of public reaction by modifying, cutting and revising his operas;" and Bellini wrote: "in opera the public is the supreme judge."⁵⁵ Ponchielli wanted to "be understood by the audience, including the watchmaker, the charcoal maker and the sealing wax vendor."⁵⁶ Verdi, writing about *I Lombardi*, had a middle ground position that was already innovative for the time: "one

⁵¹ Filippo Filippi, *La Perseveranza*, August 18, 1876, quoted in Andrea Estero, "Il dibattito critico e musicologico nella pubblicistica Milanese," in *Milano Musicale, 1861 - 1897*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1999), 337. Giuseppe Verdi said that it was a "bad sign when the public is accused of not having understood," quoted in Carlotta Sorba "To Please the Public: Composers and Audiences in Nineteenth-Century Italy," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36 (2006): 610.

⁵² David R. B. Kimbell, *Italian opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 575.

⁵³ William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: the Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1975), 19.

⁵⁴ Carlotta Sorba, "To Please the Public," 612.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 604

⁵⁶ "...farsi capire dal pubblico tutto, compreso l'orologiaio, il carbonaio e il venditore di ceralacca." Quoted in Fiamma Nicolodi, "Il Teatro Lirico e il Suo Pubblico," in *Fare gli Italiani: Scuola e Cultura nell'Italia Contemporanea*, ed. Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 300.

need to be sly, and keep one eye on the audience and one on art.”⁵⁷ Sorba points out that the relationship between the composer and the audience was a close and direct one, in the sense that the audience would affect the way the composer composed and adjusted the operas after seeing the outcome of a performance.⁵⁸

2.1 Boito’s struggles: audience and critics

In the late Nineteenth-century, financial factors, widely distributed music periodicals, the publishers and advertisement were added to the system and mediated or corrupted the once direct relationship between the composers and their audiences described by Sorba. Verdi, for example, toward the end of his career complained about the increasing role of publicity, which created an intermediary between the opera and the audience without adding any value.⁵⁹ According to Richard Leppert, the artist’s increasing dependence on a market and on capitalist production caused an “implicit antagonism in the ideological foundation of much nineteenth-century aesthetics” between artists and market.⁶⁰ Arrigo Boito embodies such antagonism in a way that reveals a paradox between his professed position and his practice as artist. As an intellectual, he played out this relationship in favor of art. He was a prototype of the modern (and

⁵⁷ “bisogna guardar losco, e dare un occhio al pubblico e un occhio all’arte.”Quoted in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1095.

⁵⁸ Sorba, “To Please the Public,” 601. Sorba (614) also relates the direct interaction between audience and composer to opera’s power on the audience and to opera houses’ relevance during the years of political turmoil: “The public was accustomed to direct interaction with the spectacle and with the cast, ready to intervene by modifying the words of the text or by commenting on the performance. The physical theater that emerged during the nineteenth century was unquestionably the principal site for the sentimental education of Italians. All of these elements, working together, contributed to opera’s political impact during the middle decades of the century.”

⁵⁹ Ibid. 601.

⁶⁰ Richard D. Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the history of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 207.

modernist) intellectual who did not write to please the audience, who despised commercial success as an indication of lack of quality. However, he sought involvement with the industry aspect of opera through his connections to Ricordi and La Scala. It can be argued that Boito redefined the role of the composer according to such antagonism of the artist with the market. In fact, he thought that the path toward artistic innovation necessarily went through a “grandiose, necessary, unavoidable fight” with the audience. It is worth repeating the quote that opened this section as representative of Boito’s view of the relationship between author and audience:

I love the struggle of the audience with the artist, whenever it is determined by the high question of the beautiful, whenever it has to do with the progress and future of an art form. Then genius, even in the midst of shouting and laughing, has a sublime task, because the struggle of genius with the audience is the struggle of truth against strength, of right against number, of the new against the old – grand, necessary, inevitable struggle.⁶¹

Artistic advancement can happen only because of a clash with the audience. The struggle with the audience, according to Boito, is necessary and unavoidable; therefore the reaction of the audience was for him as relevant as his contemporary critics made it in their reviews in the press. He wrote that “Sacred and solemn is the crowd’s disapproval, as is its applause; even if motivated by a mistake (as it often happens), they are completely rightful.”⁶² On the one hand, this struggle presupposes the audience’s inability to enjoy or understand innovation, which is yet another indication of the fact that

⁶¹ “Amo la lotta del pubblico con l’artista quando è l’alta questione del bello che la muove, quando c’è di mezzo il progresso e l’avvenire di un’arte. Allora, il genio, anche fra gli urli e le risa, ha una sublime parte da compiere, perchè la lotta del genio col pubblico è la lotta del vero col forte, del diritto col numero, del nuovo col vecchio, grandiosa, necessaria, inevitabile lotta.” Boito, “Cronaca Musicale Parigina,” *La Perseveranza*. March 2, 1862, in Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 1078.

⁶² “Sacro e solenne è il fischio della folla, come l’applauso, e s’anco sorto da errore (come non di rado accade) è pienissimo diritto.” Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” in *Figaro*, February 4, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1113.

Boito, as other intellectuals, thought that popularity and artistic relevance were irreconcilable. Boito argued for the impossibility of popularizing Art elsewhere as well. In some comments on the popular music series of Paris, he stated that the adjective “popular” and “classical” could not be paired, and he declared himself extremely disturbed by the thought that “thick and material people could one day come to unveil the sublime mysteries of Beethoven’s late symphonies.”⁶³ Boito was the first composer and critic actively to observe, assess, and appreciate the phenomenon of social change. Also, as opposed to the critics who debated the issue at the end of the 1890s, he underlined the relation between social and artistic causes and effects, and combined observations about audiences, works of art and critics, in order to understand how this relationship played itself out between audiences and authors or - as Boito described the latter - “genius.”

On the other hand, in Boito’s view, the struggle was a necessary and therefore productive relationship. The productive struggle, however, saw the audience in the weakest role. He described the audience as “wheezing, shy, doubtful, who follows like a dog the genius’ kicks and luminous contradictions.”⁶⁴ Boito wrote that the audience’s only positive receptive states in front of the work of art are “love, submission, and modesty.” Only in this state can the audience receive “beauty” and “the words of the genius” “with humility.” He implied therefore the superiority of the artist, whom he called “il genio.” However, with his words, he also hinted at the responsibility of the artist and the relevance of the encounter between audience and work of art. In fact, art’s

⁶³ “Ma che un popolo grosso e material debba un giorno giungere a scuoprire I sublimi misterid elle ultime opera di Beethoven, è tale un’idea da non mi dar pace nè tregua.” Boito, “Cronaca Musicale Parigina,” *La Perseveranza*, March 2, 1862, in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1071

⁶⁴ “Ansimante, timido, dubbioso, che segue come un cane le pedate del genio e le luminose sue contraddizioni.” Boito, *Figaro*, January 7, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1095.

advancement depended as much on the audience's ability to receive with humility and good disposition, as on the artist to educate the audience. When "[the artist] greedy for success and vane glory corrupts [the audience] with the deviance of awkwardness and falsity, the latter, covetous of entertainment and laughter, yields and corrupts as well." In a vicious circle, some artists in order to be successful, fed into the audience's desire for entertainment and thereby produced unworthy art. In other words, these comments confirm the position that popularity was opposed to quality, but at the same time they admit the possibility for "good" art to be received by the audience – if one was fortunate enough to find it in "a good day."⁶⁵ He also expressed seemingly democratic views when, in a letter to Verdi in 1891 on the occasion of changing the fifth row of boxes into a gallery at La Scala, he advocated for a more democratic theater outfitted with galleries instead of boxes.⁶⁶

Boito took a very aggressive stand also against the critics that published at the time on daily press and periodicals. Although writing in the 1860s, he lamented in the criticism of his time the same lack of seriousness that led to the debates of the 1890s and to the creation of new intellectual publications. He criticized those critics who filled two columns with plot summary, with useless rhetorical flourishes, useless because the readers who attended the show wouldn't need plot summary, and those who did not attend it, would not read that section of the publication.⁶⁷ He more specifically complained of a lack of "critica" in the sense of "critical thinking." In his opinion, the

⁶⁵ Boito, "Cronaca Musicale," *La Perseveranza*, October 13, 1863, in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1085.

⁶⁶ Nicolodi, "Il Teatro Lirico," 189.

⁶⁷ "...non ne racconteremo per esteso l'intrigo: ci pare superfluo e uggioso mezzuccio del critico, questo gonfiare con due colonne di comoda narrazione la vanità del suo dire; eppoi i lettori che vanno a teatro se lo sanno meglio di noi, e quelli che non vanno, non leggono per fermo queste nostre cronache." Boito, "Cronache dei Teatri," *Figaro*, February 25, 1864.

lack of ability to think critically both among audiences and critics was the cause of “apathetic suffering of every evening among the seats of our theaters” and of “daily vacuous chatting in the theater sections of our newspapers.” He condemned the practices of criticism that were simply a collection of trivial and banal comments and that focused only on the things that were “more approachable for common people’s callous hands: acting, sets, plot.”⁶⁸ He compared the contemporary critic to a “facchino”: similar to the porter who picks up from the ground the cigars butts thrown out by gentlemen, the critics collected “some common and plebeian truths.” As any “orchestra or box seats idiot,” “the so-called writers of theater periodicals” were able to enumerate only the most evident and superficial flaws of a work, and were incapable of appreciating more fundamental beauties or questions raised by the work.⁶⁹

Some of Boito’s positions about these topics resonated with the artistic agenda of the literary *scapigliatura* movement. The intellectuals belonging to the group advocated the autonomy of art from moral and educational values, the celebration of progress, and an art that should represent reality and yet infuse that reality with aesthetic values.⁷⁰ The *scapigliatura* movement was multifaceted and changed over time, so that it cannot be given a single, univalent definition. This is especially the case because in the movement was embedded an unresolved tension between democratization and elitism, its

⁶⁸ “...apata sofferenza di tutte le sere nelle plate dei nostri teatri” and “il vacuo cicalio di tutti i giorni nelle appendici delle nostre gazzette.” più palpabile alle callose mani del vulgo: la *condotta*, la *tela*, l’*intrigo*.” Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, February 25, 1864.

⁶⁹ certe verità frequentissime e plebee.” citrullo da plateo o da palchetto,” gli scrittorelli da gazzetta teatrale” Boito, “Cronache dei Teatri,” *Figaro*, February 25, 1864, in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1126.

⁷⁰ Some of the *scapigliatura* movement most influential ideals were explained in Boito, “Dualismo,” *Figaro*, February, 1864, and “Polemica Letteraria,” *Figaro*, February 4, 1864.

unanswered question of how to create a popular art.⁷¹ These are the *scapigliatura* themes that concerned Boito as well but that, as we have seen in his description of the impossibility of a popular art, he chose to deem impossible and therefore not resolve.

Arrigo Boito belonged to the Milanese cultural elite. Despite coming from an artistic family, the son of a painter and a Polish countess, and having studied at the Conservatory thanks to scholarships and loans like most other opera composers of his time, he came to be perceived as from a quite different social and cultural milieu when compared to the typical composers of his time.⁷² Boito was closely involved both in the culture industry and in the intellectual life of Milan. I have mentioned his intellectual relations in the introduction to this chapter. Besides his social and intellectual connections, his engagement with the artistic and cultural context as described above, is out of the ordinary for a composer. His experience at La Scala and the fact that in 1862, after graduating from the conservatory, he founded the *Società del Quartetto* with Franco Faccio and Giulio Ricordi, are testimony to that. Consequently, his artistic products seemed to reflect that he was a man of immense culture and knowledge. Opera composers at the time, Verdi and Puccini included, were professionals of music and not

⁷¹ According to Guido Salvetti, “La Scapigliatura Milanese e il teatro d’opera,” in *Il melodramma italiano dell’Ottocento: studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila*, ed. Massimo Mila (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), 569, the use of corresponding senses and arts in particular music is the only point in common of all the “scapigliati.” In fact, the affinity of all arts was one of the ideas of scapigliatura. The connection with music emerges in many instances but although there are plenty of musical references in the literature production, and more specifically in *I Cento Anni* by Giuseppe Rovani, such references were, again according to Salvetti (569), mostly suggestive imagery and repertoire images to depict more efficiently certain feelings.

⁷² I am referring here to composers such as Puccini, Catalani, Mascagni etc. whose background is typically similar: they come from lower class families involved in the musical world, they struggle through life in conservatory and at the beginning of their career hoped to find a publisher and to write a “successful” hit that would bring them financial stability and the opportunity to compose what they like without having to give music lessons or take administrative jobs. I do not claim that they were not cultured and sensitive to new artistic development and cultural values, but they were more in line with the figure of the composer “artisan” of the 18th and 19th century tradition rather than with the idea of the modernist elitist intellectual composer, like one may consider Ildebrando Pizzetti for example.

intellectuals. Boito was the first of a generation of Italian operatic and musical men of culture. He positioned himself as an elitist intellectual and he was perceived as such. As Piero Nardi writes: “Boito wanted to display that he was cultivated, or better erudite.”⁷³ His role in the city’s cultural life, his writings and his operas pointed to the fact that he projected himself as an intellectual, in opposition to what he called “opera-makers...who do not care about art.”⁷⁴ Traditionally, the opera composer was more an artisan than an artist. Boito advocated for the role of the artist-musician. His situation can be seen as different to that of Puccini, who, according to Alexandra Wilson, was considered by his contemporary intellectuals and critics a “commercial” composer. Once again these observations underline that commercial and artistic were in opposition and that such a distinction between “intellectual” and “commercial” composers was in existence at the *fin-de-siècle* Italy. The differences in the production and reception histories of Puccini’s great commercial success, as hinted at in Chapter II, and Boito’s troubled *Mefistofele* and posthumous, rarely performed *Nerone* are indicative of the differently perceived roles of the two composers.

Arrigo Boito is mostly known today as the librettist of Verdi’s last operas *Otello* and *Falstaff*. He is less known as an opera composer: he wrote the music and the libretto of two operas, *Mefistofele*, first performed in 1868, then revised and performed again from 1875; and *Nerone*, performed for the first time only in 1924 after the author’s death. An analysis of Boito’s positions on music in his letters and his criticism, combined with his *Mefistofele*, shows that not only was he exemplary of the new type of musician and

⁷³ “Boito ci teneva a rivelarsi uomo di cultura, anzi d’erudizione.” Piero Nardi, “Introduzione,” in *Tutti gli Scritti*, XXIV.

⁷⁴ “...facitori di melodrama...che non si curano punto dell’arte.” Boito, *La Perseveranza*, September 13, 1863, in Boito, *Tutti gli Scritti*, 1080.

intellectual who does not aim at pleasing the audience, but also that he embodied the contradictions and tensions between the modernist categories of “high brow” and “low brow” in the operatic world of fin de siècle Italy. He participated in the political and commercial aspects of the opera world and yet, at the same time, he distanced himself from them. He was exemplary of the contradictions and tensions between democratization and elitism, as described above.

In the 1868 edition of *Mefistofele*’s libretto, Boito inserted a “Prologo in Teatro” (Prologue in the theater) before the actual operatic prologue, “Prologo in Cielo” (Prologue in Heaven). In the fictional dramatized dialogue of a few pages, a Theater Critic, a Spectator, and the Author discuss the opera that is about to be performed. The Critic and the Author engage in a conversation about the validity of yet another version of the story of Faust, when they are interrupted by the Spectator who kindly advises them to keep such conversations to themselves, as the audience is not interested in theories and comments, but only in being entertained by the opera. The Author responds to this piece of advice with a request to the Audience out of “respect for Art”: careful attention and abstention from judging the work either positively or negatively. The dialogue ends with the characters parting ways to get ready for the show, but not before the Spectator expresses his concern for the voluminous libretto and inquires about the estimated ending time for the show.⁷⁵ In his prologue Boito illustrates the conflict and at the same time complicity among the three characters, which were going to grow in intensity in the years to come.

⁷⁵ Boito, *Tutti gli scritti*, 97-102.

The prologue is an effective and concise illustration of some of the debates and concerns that characterized the world of opera in Italy in the second half of the 19th century and that were brought up earlier in this chapter. *Mefistofele* became immediately a case, a phenomenon. Intellectuals, journalists, critics, publishers and audiences awaited and discussed the opera with interest and anticipation. It was performed in Milan at La Scala in 1868 and it was not well received by critics and audiences. The opera was then mildly successfully performed again in 1875 in Bologna after some adjustments, and finally received as a success at La Scala in 1881. Many scholars have analyzed the opera as an expression of its critical reception: something too innovative to be understood and therefore subsequently adjusted to please the audience and be successful.⁷⁶ For example, Corrado Ricci in 1919 wrote that Boito reworked the opera “making changes that the performance revealed as necessary. And he...removed some long-winded parts...retouched the instrumentation, added new parts whose gentleness aimed at moving the audience, like the sweet andante *Spunta l’aurora* and the duet...” Ricci also underlined the usual relevance of the reaction of the audience and the fact that this opera contained elements that needed to be *understood* in order to be enjoyed. “Its [the opera’s] success increased during the following evenings thanks to fact that the audience achieved a better understanding of all the beauty.”⁷⁷ Some contemporaries appreciated the opera for its artistic qualities, which can be translated into a sense that it was too

⁷⁶ See Campana, *Modern Spectatorship*, 16, footnote 4.

⁷⁷ “...portandovi modificazioni e misure rivelatasi nell’esecuzione necessarie. Ed egli...levò certe prolissità...ritoccò l’instrumentale, aggiunse nuovi brani, la cui soavità doveva toccare il pubblico, come il dolcissimo andante *Spunta l’aurora* e il duettino...” and “La sua fortuna crebbe poi nelle sere seguenti per la migliore comprensione d’ogni bellezza da parte del pubblico.” Corrado Ricci, *Arrigo Boito* (Milano: Fratelli Treves, 1919), 18-19.

difficult for its audience. For example, Camille Saint-Saëns said that the prologue was “for its originality, courage and inspiration a miracle of modern music.”⁷⁸

Boito was both a cultural phenomenon and an artistic innovator. The popular and commercial potential represented by this phenomenon, combined with its intellectual and elitist aura that he purposefully emanated, bring to light the contradictions and tensions of turn of the century opera, as they unfolded as the fraught relationship between art, audience and critic. Similar tensions are embedded in the opera *Mefistofele* itself that, as Campana wrote, “confronted [the public] in its aesthetic assumptions but also entertained and mesmerized [it] by spectacular special effects.”⁷⁹

3. ARTURO TOSCANINI: ART AND AUTHORITY

What emerges from the chronicles and the political debates of the time, the purpose of opera theater was primarily social and leisurely rather than cultural or educational. I have insisted on the entertainment value in the previous chapter, but the social aspect was also relevant for the operatic experience. Fiamma Nicolodi has observed that “Before Unification, the most important theaters were prestigious places especially for the wealthy classes to attend, not necessarily to listen to music...but often for sociability reasons, for social status purposes, political meetings and, during the

⁷⁸ “...per originalità, audacia e ispirazione un miracolo della musica moderna.” Quoted in Ricci, *Arrigo Boito*, 22. The commercial potential of the opera was recognized by Verdi who, speaking of La Scala wrote: “Vi sarebbe l’opera che sveglierebbe un grand’interesse nel pubblico e non capisco perché autore e editore si ostinino a rifiutarla. Parlo del *Mefistofele*.” Lettera from Giuseppe Verdi to Arrigo Boito, 1880, *Carteggi Verdi-Boito* (Parma: Istituto di studi verdiani, 1978), 13.

⁷⁹ Campana, *Opera and Modern Spectatorship*, xiii.

Risorgimento, for revolutionary assemblies.”⁸⁰ Giovanni Ferrero in a 1899 edition of *Rivista Musicale* commented that “In Italy people go to the theater for many reasons: the last of which is to understand the meaning of a work of art...and the first is to ‘kill’ the evening, make use of binoculars, pay visits, etc.”⁸¹ The architecture of the *teatro all’italiana*, with its box structure, fostered such practices because the audience could easily see and be seen.⁸² Theater sociologist Marco Santoro explains that in the “teatro all’italiana ... the theater show is conceived much less as for its own sake rather than as an occasion for social life,” and he defines La Scala as “sociability venue for the Milanese elites.”⁸³ Sorba says that before Unification “going to the opera...was mostly an almost daily social habit that identified and grouped together the local notables to the extent that was one of the main manifestation of being part of the city and its social world.”⁸⁴ Besides the potential of the opera house as a venue for sociability and for personal display, the tradition and nature of the genre itself motivated a certain style of viewing. As Massimo Mila has pointed out: “Opera was born under the social category of festivity,” a festival that was organized by the court and that involved entertainment.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ “I teatri di prim’ordine erano stati prima dell’Unità luoghi di lustro soprattutto per le classi facoltose, che vi si recavano non necessariamente allo scopo di ascoltare musica...ma spesso per motivi mondani, di status sociale, per convegni politici e, negli anni rsorgimentali, per incontri rivoluzionari.” Nicolodi, “Il teatro lirico e il suo pubblico,” 259.

⁸¹ “Da noi si va a teatro per molte ragioni: l’ultima è quella di penetrare il significato d’un’opera d’arte.” Giovanni Ferrero, “Crisi Teatrale,” *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, (1899): 620.

⁸² Other practical and symbolic implications of the box structure were addressed in chapter one.

⁸³ “Nel teatro all’italiana...lo spettacolo teatrale è concepito assai meno come un fine in sè che come un’occasione per la vita sociale;” “luogo di sociabilità per l’elite Milanese.” Marco Santoro, “Imprenditoria Culturale nella Milano di fine Ottocento: Toscanini, La Scala e la riforma dell’opera,” in *Scene di fine Ottocento*, edited by Carlotta Sorba. Rome: Carrocci, 2004), 101.

⁸⁴ “Andare all’opera....corrispondesse piuttosto ad una consuetudine sociale pressochè quotidiana che identificava e accumulava i notabili cittadini, divenendo una delle principali manifestazioni del far parte della città e del suo universo sociale.” Carlotta Sorba, *Teatri: l’Italia del melodramma nell’età del Risorgimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 93.

⁸⁵ “Il medromma nasce sotto la categoria sociale della festa.” Massimo Mila, *I Costumi della Traviata* (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1984) quoted in Sorba, *Teatri*, 93.

Earlier in the 19th century the opera theater was even a place where to gamble, where the servants cooked in the boxes' back rooms, where one could eat and drink, where prostitutes offered their services and where vendors in the orchestra sold their goods.⁸⁶ Although by the end of the 19th century, a good portion of the audience was actually interested in listening to the opera,⁸⁷ what is described above was the cultural foundation of theater-going in the major Italian theaters.

The traditional focus on the theater as social venue rather than on the work of art went along with some performance practices that distanced even more the experience of the opera theater of the 19th century from that of a modern listener. Performance practices usually involved few rehearsals and understaffed orchestras. They also involved cuts, repetitions, and simplification in the scores, according to the commercial principle of pleasing audiences. Ricordi often succeeded in guaranteeing staging and performance quality on behalf of the author. However, the task was arduous even for a powerful publisher like Ricordi because attention to quality, details and authorial intentions was not common practice and the theaters' physical conditions or the ability of the orchestra members were beyond the publisher's control. Until the 1870s, a concertmaster prepared the artists during the few rehearsals and the composer would conduct the orchestra and the cast during the performance. Opera "often resulted in low performance standards due to a lack of rehearsals ..., and the absence of a single authoritative figure to guide

⁸⁶ Santoro, "Imprenditoria Culturale," 101, John Rosselli, "Opera Production, 1780-1880," in *Opera Production and its Resources*, ed. Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998).

⁸⁷ In particular, those spectators sitting in the galleries were known for their passionate interest, and informed understanding of the performances. See Chapter One.

participants toward a share understanding of the work.”⁸⁸ By 1870 and regularized during the 1880s and 90s, the figure of the conductor acquired professional definition, cultural dignity, and even social relevance.⁸⁹

In Chapter One we observed the process of what I argued was the transformation of La Scala from an entertainment venue into a cultural institution, and I mentioned the role of the administration in refashioning the opera-going experience and the status of opera as genre. In his study of social and cultural status of opera houses, Di Maggio identifies two specific steps that led to the legitimation of opera as high culture. The first step was institutional reform, of which I have found parallels in the Scala case in Chapter One. The second step identified by Di Maggio was what he calls “framing” and which he defines as “the development of a new etiquette of appropriation, a new relationship between the audience and the work of art.”⁹⁰ Bruce A. McConachie states, also studying opera institutions in the United States, that to separate opera from popular culture one needed to “sharpen and objectify the code of behavior, including a dress code.”⁹¹ As Nicholas Cook sustains: “what matters ... is not simply what people heard, but what they heard it *as*.”⁹² In the case of La Scala, institutional changes were accompanied by a radical redefinition of the means by which to organize and produce operas and of the way the audience could experience it. Such changes were necessary in order to “reframe” the

⁸⁸ Ellis, “The structures,” 353.

⁸⁹ On the history of orchestral conducting, see for example Elliot W. Galkin, *A history of orchestral conducting*. New York: Pendragon, 1988; Daniel J. Koury, *Orchestral Performance practices in the nineteenth century*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1986; Roberto Illiano and Michela Niccolai, *Orchestral Conducting in the Nineteenth-century*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014.

⁹⁰ Di Maggio, “Cultural Boundaries,” 22.

⁹¹ Bruce A. McConachie, “New York Operagoing, 1825-50: Creating an Elite Social Ritual,” *American Music* 6 (1988): 182.

⁹² Nicholas Cook, “Introduction,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 12.

institution as an artistic one. The studies mentioned above highlighted that the intent was specifically to make opera into an elitist art form, to eradicate the popular elements of musical theater from the institution by distancing it from the popular audience. Different from the American cases, however, the restructuring and reframing of La Scala served the declared purpose of making the opera house more inclusive and accessible. Nevertheless, the repositioning that the administration wanted for La Scala, required the same kind of changes, the same kind of “new manner” to define the blurred boundaries between entertainment and culture and to distance the institution from entertainment and values.⁹³ The ‘new manner’ was made possible thanks to administrative restructuring and the role played by the figure of Arturo Toscanini, conductor and artistic director of La Scala. With Toscanini the role of the stable artistic director in the modern sense was inaugurated, and the role of the conductor gained the predominance it has today.

Son of a tailor and former volunteer soldier in the Italian Wars of Independence under Giuseppe Garibaldi, Arturo Toscanini was born in Parma in 1867. While his family moved to Genoa, he was left in Parma in the care of his grandparents and there he studied cello at the Conservatory. He began his conducting career in 1886 at the Teatro Carignano in Turin, where he was invited to conduct the premiere of the revised version of Alfredo Catalani’s *Edemea*, an event that marked the beginnings of a close friendship between the composer and the conductor. After the experience at the Carignano, Toscanini for several years maintained both his careers as cellist and conductor, until in 1895 he was appointed principal conductor of the Turin opera at the Teatro Regio, the most prominent musical institution in Turin. There he conducted important opera

⁹³ The difference lays mostly in the fact that, according to Storey, Di Maggio, Horowitz and others, opera was popular (in every sense of the word) and an inclusive to begin with.

premieres, for example *La Bohème* in 1896 and several Italian premieres of Richard Wagner's works, as well as a vast repertory of symphonic music.

As criticism was moving in the direction of defining art as an autonomous practice that required refinement of ear and understanding, as debates were taking place about the education of audiences and ways to stop the degradation of opera, Toscanini was instrumental in changing performance practices and the relationship between the audience and the work of art. The change consisted of a manifold process that involved both the personal initiative of the young conductor and the support of the administrative structure. The process concerned, first and foremost, guaranteeing the highest possible quality of the performances; changes in habits of theater going that fostered a focus on the work of art instead of on the audience, and the autonomy of art and therefore, on the one hand, the rigor of the intention of the composer and, on the other hand, the authority of artistic intents over other aspects of theater management.

Toscanini proposed a great number of innovations as soon as he was appointed conductor and artistic director at La Scala, so many that it became almost a joke at the Scala's board meetings, where often his wishes were challenged.⁹⁴ Toscanini asked for and obtained an increase in the number of the orchestra musicians; the abolition of the separation between orchestra space and seating area⁹⁵; the exclusion of spectators from dress rehearsals;⁹⁶ a new stage curtain that would open horizontally instead of being

⁹⁴ Archive of the Associazione culturale duca Marcello Visconti di Modrone per lo studio della storia dell'industria, Milan (from now on abbreviate AVM), Società Anonima La Scala Board of Directors meeting minutes (from now on abbreviated SA-CdA) 7, December 8, 1898.

⁹⁵ Instead of a fence a rope was installed (AVM, SA-CdA 7, November 17, 1898).

⁹⁶ AVM, SA-CdA 7, December 22, 1898.

raised from the bottom up in order to highlight the stage;⁹⁷ the lowering of the orchestra level (in other words the creation of the orchestra pit);⁹⁸ a new electrical system;⁹⁹ the removal of ballet after long operas;¹⁰⁰ darkness during the performances; and limitations on the possibility of spectators to obstruct the view. Some of these innovations distressed the management either because of their cost (as in the case of the new curtain), or because of their political and diplomatic impact (for instance, the exclusion of the audience from dress rehearsals, to which the shareholders traditionally needed to be invited).¹⁰¹

Many of the reforms introduced by Toscanini affected the habits, the expectations and the behaviors of the audience during the performance, some directly and some indirectly. The regulation of behavior in the theater had always seemed to privilege viewing over hearing, and viewing the rest of the audience rather than the stage. Silence was not the norm in Italian theaters, especially at the beginning of the 19th century when there were no seats in the stalls, when there was gambling in the foyer and eating and chattering in the boxes.¹⁰² Silence had become more common in the second half of the 19th century, even though vigorous cheering and booing at any point of the performance

⁹⁷ The new “velario” according to Boito who was reporting Toscanini’s opinion at the Board of Directors meeting, “darebbe maggiore risalto alla scena” than the current “sipario”(AVM, SA-CdA 7, November 10, 1898).

⁹⁸ AVM, SA-CdA 7, June 8, 1899.

⁹⁹ This occurred in 1901 (Sachs, *Reflections on Toscanini* (New York: Gove Weinfield, 1991), 75-76.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 76.

¹⁰¹ Regarding the curtain, the administration refused at first because costly and because “si pensa che non stia bene, che blocchi la vista e i palchettisti si lamentino” (AVM, SA-CdA 7, November 24, 1898) but decision was revised because of Toscanini’s “desiderio vivissimo” and despite the strong opposition of many and the cost of L. 1800 per year. Boito reports to the Board that he approves of it (December 1, 1898) and the “velario” is tried and approved officially during the following meeting (December 8). Regarding the rehearsals, in order to limit the access, the shareholders were going to be requested not to bring members of their families. Closing the dress rehearsals was defined “a very delicate matter” (December 22, 1898).

¹⁰² See Sorba, *Teatri*, 145-6.

was a right the spectators often exercised, and even though noise in the boxes was still a source of complaint for many commentators and journalists. Enforcing silence in the theater was a challenging task, but shifting the focus toward the performance slowly changed behavior. Following Toscanini's suggestions, from 1898 the theater was kept dark during the first and the last acts, and later during the entire performance. In addition, to foster a reception experience centered on the performance and on what happened on the stage rather than within the audience, women were forbidden to wear hats with big plumage and to have hairstyles that would obstruct the view of other spectators.¹⁰³

Artistic quality was the keyword of La Scala's new administration, and unification and coherence of vision and intents in the figure of the artistic director was the way they sought to achieve it. This system invested the artistic director with great authority and power. Toscanini decided on the operas to be produced each season, reviewed the scores for each new opera before the board could start negotiations regarding costs and copyrights,¹⁰⁴ conducted all the performances (even in those instances when the composer would have preferred to do so himself),¹⁰⁵ had the power to fire singers and musicians when in his opinion they were lacking discipline – thereby often leaving the board to deal with lawsuits,¹⁰⁶ demanded and expected that the city provide new state of the art light machinery and repair the existing ones.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ See the announcement on the playbill for Mascagni's *Iris* in 1898, in Pompeo Cambiasi, *La Scala 1778-1906* (Milan: G. Ricordi & Co., 1906), 265.

¹⁰⁴ See AVM, SA-CdA 7, January 19, 1899 regarding *Anton* by Cesare Galeotti.

¹⁰⁵ Franchetti wanted to conduct *Germania* but the administration was concerned about offending Toscanini (AVM, SA-CdA 7, January 19, 1899).

¹⁰⁶ See AVM, SA-CdA 7, December 22, 1898 about the issues with tenor Brogi.

¹⁰⁷ Regarding the light system, see AVM, SA-CdA 7, November 10, 1898. A famous anecdote, demonstrating Toscanini's zealous attention to quality and power over artistic matters, regarded the production of Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* in December 1898. Since the dress rehearsal was not of a satisfactory level for Toscanini, he refused to conduct the performance planned for the following day.

The system was designed to give full responsibility to the artistic director, and the general director and the administration were to be supportive of the artistic centrality of Toscanini. Arrigo Boito in his capacity as member of the board of directors assured that the high artistic standards and Toscanini's requests were met by the administration. However, Toscanini's demanding and authoritarian attitude was often a source of tensions between the artistic director and the board of administrators, and Boito was often assigned the role of moderator between the two parties.¹⁰⁸

Administrative artistic authority was accompanied by an increasing sense of aesthetic authority and authorship of the work of art. In the second half of the 19th century many processes contributed to the increased attention to authority and authorship that reinforced the shift from functional value to the aesthetic value of the work of art. The new copyright laws gave composers new rights over their own works and, therefore, symbolically legitimized composers' creative work.¹⁰⁹ The staging books published by Ricordi reinforced authorship and the original creative process.¹¹⁰ The power of the music publishers and the copyright laws encouraged a fixed repertory. And conductors became the ambassadors of authorship through their authority over the orchestra and the

Cancelling a performance with such short notice at the beginning of the season would have had a greatly negative impact on the finance and image of the managing company. However, the board accommodated Toscanini and did not ask the second conductor to substitute Toscanini, partially because they feared that the audience would suspect a disagreement with Toscanini if they were going to use a substitute. (AVM, SA-CdA 7, December 29, 1898).

¹⁰⁸ For example, after Boito's insistence and approval of Toscanini's requests, the Board approved hiring Tamagno for *Anton*. The Board addressed during the meeting the financial impact of this request but nonetheless decided it was the best decision. However, as an example of the tensions caused by Toscanini's demands and difficult personality, President Visconti threatened to resign and break the society and stated that Toscanini should "dimettersi o sottomettersi." Boito interceded for a reconciliation saying that Toscanini was the best conductor in Italy but the President insisted that Toscanini created too many difficulties.

¹⁰⁹ See page 11 of this work.

¹¹⁰ Alessandra Campana discusses the value of Ricordi's staging manual as reinforcing the authorship of the artists and at the same time as commercial commodification of operas. *Modern Spectatorship*, 4.

production, as well as the interpreters of authorial intentions and originality. As musicologist Nicholas Cook explains, “new constructions of authenticity” and “new patterns of listening” are related and are key to understanding twentieth century music.¹¹¹ Toscanini was central in developing these two points in the Italian operatic world. Conductors were interpreted as “guardians of art’s rights and reasons” as D’Arcais wrote,¹¹² and Toscanini became famous for taking up this task literally. As Lebrecht states, the conductor “had propounded a doctrine of literalism that promised a precise account of what the composer had written.”¹¹³ In fact, Toscanini thought that to recover the intentions of the composer was fundamental to assure artistic quality. Harvey Sachs, Toscanini’s main biographer, indicates that Toscanini was open to flexible interpretations, cuts and adjustments, but that the search for an organic originality was nonetheless present. The fact that many contemporary critics and historians insisted on this aspect of Toscanini’s practice testifies to the novelty of his approach and to the need for an authorial figure as the guarantor of art.¹¹⁴ Conductors acquired control over the work by composers for the time of the performance and maintained such control in particular after their death. Conductors become therefore the depository of an aura and the authority on the music itself, which contributed to the spiritual, almost religious approach to listening and to the god-like stature of conductors. Toscanini’s authoritative approach to music performance, combined with the cultural authority of his figure and

¹¹¹ Cook, “Introduction,” 12.

¹¹² “...tutori dei diritti e delle ragioni dell’arte.” D’Arcais, *La Nuova Antologia*, July 1, 1886, 154.

¹¹³ Norman Lebrecht, *The Maestro Myth: great conductors in pursuit of power* (Seacucus: Carol Pub. Group., 1991), 73. Lebrecht also observes that in the case of Toscanini his practice of conducting from memory contributed to communicating the sense that the conductor participated in the process of creation and had a special connection with the composer (74).

¹¹⁴ As an example from the Scala years, Toscanini insisted that Gatti Casazza should go to Bayreuth to study exactly the Wagnerian ideal of stage and set design “onde formarsi un concetto esatto della messa in scena secondo la tradizione wagneriana.” AVM, SA-CdA 7, October 13, 1898.

the authority given to him by the administration, made him an interpreter and guarantor of authorship. By enforcing an original, fixed authorial version of the performance, the conductor also contributed to its reproducibility and, in a sense, commodification. In a way, the conductor's role was similar to that of the publisher, and in particular Ricordi, as described by Campana: "The publisher was the one to take responsibility for the notation, transmission, and dissemination of the authorial project, shaping the cultural and commercial enterprise in terms of originality of poetic version."¹¹⁵ Conductors of Toscanini's status and publishers also had something else in common: they were intermediaries between the authors and the audience, enhancing the sense of distance between the two parties that emerged also from the intellectual debates described above and that changed the ways of going to the opera.

Toscanini, aided by the innovative administrative structure of La Scala, initiated the reform of the listening experience and raised the quality of musical performances, which consequently contributed to a redefinition of opera's status. What is particularly interesting is that changes toward a more aesthetic and less "commercial" experience of opera happened through a figure who was thoroughly embedded in the culture industry, who acquired his authority over the theater because of his "commercial" fame and who became an advocate for the popularization of "high music" and a symbol of its marketability.¹¹⁶ As Norman Lebrecht argues in his book *The Maestro Myth*, the conductor in the modern sense is a "construction" motivated by and based on social and

¹¹⁵ Campana, *Modern Spectatorship*, 4 and 7.

¹¹⁶ In 1938, Theodor W. Adorno uses Toscanini as an example of fetishism in music. Adorno argues that the conductor's rigid control over the performance makes the performance "sound like its own record." According to Adorno, the fetish character of music that Toscanini contributed to create, caused a regression of listening that prevents listener to perceive the whole. Adorno also described Toscanini's ways of conducting "technocratic" and therefore non-spiritual. Theodor W. Adorno and Richard Leppert, *Essays on Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 246 and 293.

commercial points, rather than artistic or aesthetic ones. I sustain that Toscanini's early career at La Scala reveals the social and institutional origin of the role, and his subsequent career confirms the connection between the "great conductor" figure and the commercial and media world. The fact that a great conductor can be considered a "construction", or an "invention" as famous conductor Baremboin said, is revealed by and reveals, in Toscanini's case, the institutionalization and ideology behind the cultural reformation of La Scala. A strong artistic leader with authority and substantial "commercial" fame was a cultural and social necessity in order to impose reform. In fact, it is around the idea of authority that most of the innovation took place and that the ideology of the temple of art was realized.

CONCLUSIONS

John Storey wrote: “it is not the ‘content’ of opera that makes it ‘high culture’ but how and by whom it is consumed.”¹ The findings of Chapter One and Chapter Four addressed the institutional and practical changes to be put into practice to advance the ideological reframing of opera. These changes, in fact, focused on “how” and “by whom” opera should be consumed. However, from the critical debates on the specialized press of the second half of the Nineteenth century, emerges a distinction between operas that speak to the heart and entertain the audiences, and operas that require intellectual understanding to be appreciated. The modernist fracture of the relationship author-audience had its origin in the popularization of the genre and in the reactions of intellectuals like Boito. This fracture was then substantialized by changes in the practices, in the media and in the mission of the institutions. However, as Chapter Two and Three explain, plenty of subjects and initiatives worked to make opera more accessible, more interesting, more desirable for the audiences. If this work does not provide definite answers about the status of opera as popular and national culture, at least it shows that these categories, as well as those of “high” and “low” are complex and not clear-cut. What this work does is to provide a context and reflections on the origin of some of today’s perception of opera, culture, theater-going and music in Italy. Our contemporary listening experience and view of musical culture is not only the outcome of technological

¹ John Storey, *Culture and power in cultural studies: the politics of signification* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 101.

reproducibility and mass culture. Modernization started earlier, when audiences were growing in number and education and opera started to be marketed. What this work hoped to achieve is to illustrate the complexity of the shift toward modernity of music culture and reveal a burgeoning process of *distinction*, intended partially as Bourdieu would, and partially as differentiation, variety of purposes and offers. In this sense, this work's argues, following Leon Boetstein and Daniel Cavicchi among others, that the detachment (or distinction) of the listening/watching experience from all the other experiences involved in going to the opera (political reasons, sociability, prestige, social gathering and so on) determined the creation of a modern musical life.² It also argues that *distinguishing* the listening/watching (or aesthetic, autonomous) experience from the social/sociability (or functional) one, is related to a *distinction* among venues (prestigious or less), audiences (seeking amusement or intellectually engaged), products (crowd-pleasing operas or artistically significant), goals (entertainment or culture or education).

Such distinctions emerged before the turn of the century and were defined in a more clear-cut and definite manner during the Twentieth-century. The popular success of the cinematographer will underline the difference between art and entertainment and will bring new elements to the redefinition of the concept of "popular". Besides the complex interferences and connections between melodrama and cinema, which hopefully I will develop in a future project, the process of distinction that I describe in my thesis is fully developed in the 1920s: the rise of the recording industry and the clash between the tradition of opera and the musical modernism of "Generazione dell'Ottanta" made the distinction more evident. In 1924, for example, music critic Giannotto Bastianelli wrote

² Cavicchi argues that a "growing separation of performers and audiences" constitutes modern musical life characterized by the act of listening as "distinct behavior." Daniel Cavicchi, *Listening and Longing: music lovers in the age of Barnum* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 5-6.

on *Musica e Scena* regarding Pizzetti's *Debora*: “[il] maestro non ha avuto l’intelligenza di rassegnarsi a quell che ho detto ci voleva per lui: i teatri poccoli, antidemocratici, magari un po’ snobistici.”³ This is just an example that shows awareness of a completed separation between “musica di consumo” and “musica d’elite”. Another example of particular interest because it regards Milan and La Scala can also be found in *Musica e Scena*. The journalist suggested in 1924 a division of functions among the Milanese theaters based on the likelihood of success of the operas presented: bigger theaters, like La Scala, should produce repertory operas which were likely to succeed, while smaller theaters, like Dal Verme and Lirico, should perform novelties because they attracted smaller audiences and the success was not guaranteed.⁴ Such distinction does not surprise a contemporary spectator, accustomed to this type of differentiations. However, at the time it was it was a fairly new idea; an idea that shows the already developed distinction between repertory operas and new operas. While until mid-nineteenth century there was one opera, hopefully a new one, that was playing at the local theater, by the turn of the century there were operas that entertained and operas that needed to be understood and appreciated intellectually, there was a Giacomo Puccini and there was an Arrigo Boito. In the twentieth century the distinction remains, but the new music is only “high” art and the popular opera is only repertory opera. There is general consensus on the fact that the avant-gardes, in any field of the arts, positioned themselves in opposition to history, traditions and bourgeois culture. However, as Leon Botstein and Christopher Butler point out, most of them negotiated with an idea of “acceptability” by the institutions and, as far as the visual arts and literature go, “modernist innovations were subsumed into the larger

³ Giannotto Bastianelli, *Musica e Scena* 5 (1924): 5.

⁴ Bastianelli, *Musica e Scena* 6 (1924): 4-5.

culture.” Instead, in the world of what is now called “classical music” there is still a strong and definite divide between “museum culture” music and new music.⁵

Hopefully this work helped elucidate some of the reasons for such distinctions and showed that these conflicts were inherent to opera culture in Italy and started to be expressed before modernism.

Another goal that this work was hoping to achieve was to show the value of a comprehensive approach and a focus on social contexts from which opera originated. By looking at production, publicity, criticism and reception, this work underlines the intricacies of the shift toward modernity and the contradictions embedded in the process because each aspect shows the different roles played by all the diverse subjects involved. The approach also allows identifying similarities and patterns, in this case the emerging idea of distinction and the tight connection between an increased commercial potential and the attempts to distance opera from it. Toscanini, on whom the thesis ended, can help me show how the various aspects of opera production are connected and how the worlds of culture industry and arts interacted and developed. Most evidently, without the institutional reform of La Scala, Toscanini could have not implemented his cultural reform. Toscanini became the depositary of late Italian operatic production, both the “commercial” one and the “intellectual” one: he conducted the posthumous world premieres of both Boito’s *Nerone* (1924) and Puccini’s *Turandot* (1926), both at La Scala. Toscanini’s life not only glues together some of the protagonists of this work – La Scala, Boito and Puccini – but also shows some interesting relations with the world of

⁵ Leon Botstein, “Music of a century: museum culture and the politics of subsidy,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 54; and Christopher Butler, “Innovation and the avant-garde, 1900-20,” in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 82-84.

culture industry and advertisement that in this work is represented by Ricordi. Lebrecht says: “High in the broadcasting tower of Avenue of the Americas where Toscanini’s image was molded, music was deemed to need a god-like intermediary if it was to reach a mass-market.”⁶ This statement recalls Ricordi’s efforts with Puccini and the construction of his myth.

Although this work attempts to provide a broad picture and include diverse aspects of the operatic production system, it does not have the ambition or the expectation either to be a complete account of late nineteenth-century opera in Milan or to provide definitive answers about the social status of opera and the categories by which it was defined at the time. For example, this thesis is missing the perspective of performers world, which is probably rich of examples of tensions between art and market, especially considering the celebrity status of the most famous singers. A comparison with the status of chamber and symphonic music and other forms of theater would also be an interesting contribution to the picture and a useful tool to elucidate the status of opera in a comparative perspective. It is also interesting to think about what comes after these years. As I mentioned, I hope to continue this line of research to include early cinema and its interaction with opera keeping with the goal of elucidating the cultural and social status of opera. With this goal in mind, this thesis lays the necessary basis for further chronological and geographical inquiry and for more in-depth theoretical argumentations and aesthetics considerations. Despite its incompleteness, I hope that the reader can see its potential and enjoy observing this slice of Milanese operatic life.

⁶ Norman Lebrecht, *The maestro myth* (Seacacus: Carol Publishing Group, 1991), 66-67.

APPENDIX



Figure 1: Page of Migone calendar (1900). Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.



Figure 2: Cover of Venus calendar (1905). Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.



Figure 3: Venus calendar. Central page. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.



Figure 4: Poster for Puccini's *Bohème*. Adolf Hohenstein, 1896. Ricordi. 102x67cm. Collezione Salce. Treviso.



Figure 5: Poster for Mascagni's *Iris*. Adolf Hohenstein, 1898. Ricordi. 276x97cm. Collezione Salce. Treviso.



Figure 6: Poster for Puccini's *Tosca*. Adolf Hohenstein, 1900. Ricordi. 300x145cm. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.



Figure 7: Poster for Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Adolf Hohenstein, 1904. Ricordi. 145x200cm. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

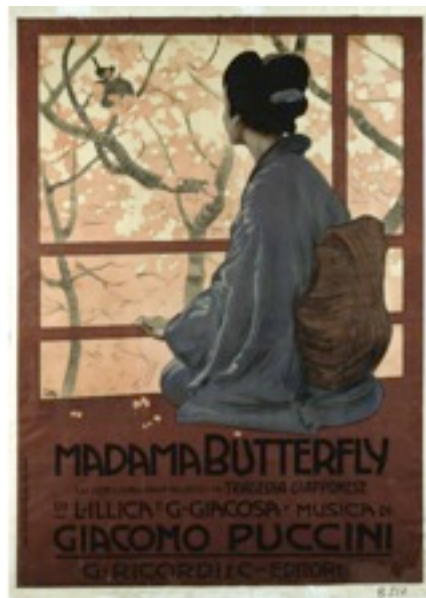


Figure 8: Poster for Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. Adolf Hohenstein, 1904. Ricordi. 145x104cm. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.



Figure 11: one of the postcards for *La Bohème*. Adolf Hohenstein in 1896. Ricordi. Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.



Figure 12: Envelope seal for *Bohème* with Mimi costume sketch by Adolf Hohenstein. Ricordi.



Figure 13: Cover for *La Bohème* di G. Puccini - *Impressioni* di C. Graziani Walter, op. 250^{ra} for two mandolins, mandola and guitar, pl. no. 100026, Milan: G. Ricordi & Co., 1911 (Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milan)



Figure 14: Cover of the libretto for *Iris*. Ricordi. 9.6x29.5cm (open). Civica Raccolta delle Stampe Achille Bertarelli, Castello Sforzesco, Milano.

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