

An Operatic Glossary

This is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to opera jargon, only a quick look-up for words and phrases in the novel that may have stopped the eye of, or excited the interest of, a reader.

Entries are in alphabetical order, ignoring only initial ‘the’ and its foreign-language equivalents.

The date given for an opera is the date of first performance. An expression like “2.ix” after the opera’s name indicates “act two, scene nine” of the opera, as most commonly performed.

Arias are mostly referred to by their first few words. I have filled this out to a full sentence, or as much of one as seemed required to give some flavor of the aria’s meaning and dramatic point, where these are not plain in the novel.

My references to “the standard repertory” should not be taken too seriously. To the best of my knowledge, the International Standards Organization does not issue rulings on opera production. “The standard repertory” is merely a shorthand for “the few dozen operas most frequently performed”. It is to some degree a child of fashion. As years go by, operas, composers, and even entire genres enter, exit, or re-enter the standard repertory. Fifty years ago, for example, there was less Italian opera (and *much* less bel canto) than there is today.

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a cappella Sung without any instrumental accompaniment, as “in the chapel”.

Ah, fors’è lui . . . che l’anima solinga ne’ tumulti godea sovente pingere. “Ah, perhaps it’s he that my soul, alone in the tumult of pleasure, has so often pictured.” Aria from Verdi’s *La traviata*, 1.v. Violetta, alone after the party at which Alfredo confessed his love for her, wonders whether, in the midst of her life of frivolity, there can be true love.

Ah! non credea mirarti . . . sì presto estinto, o fiore. “Ah! I didn’t think I’d see you perished so soon, O flower.” An aria in Bellini’s opera *La sonnambula*, 2.ix. Sweet Amina, sleepwalking, takes from her bosom Elvino’s flowers, now withered.

Ah! se non m’ami più . . . perché sì dolce ancor sembra parlar d’amor il tuo sorriso? “Ah! If you no longer love me, why does your smile still seem to speak so sweetly of love?” Aria from Bellini’s opera *La straniera*, 2.vii.

Aida An opera by Verdi, 1871. Aida, daughter of the Ethiopian King, is a slave at the court of Egypt’s Pharaoh. The heart of the plot is the tension between her love for Ramades, the Egyptian general, and for her country, with which Egypt is at war. When Ramades defeats the Ethiopians and brings back prisoners—including Aida’s father, incognito—the Pharaoh in gratitude betroths his daughter Amneris to him, and the jealousy of Amneris helps drive the story to its tragic conclusion.

allargando “Becoming slower.” A musical term.

Amneris See *Aida*.

andantino An *andante* is a moderately slow piece of music. An *andantino* is one just “a little bit andante”, i.e. slightly slower than an *andante*. The

first part of the “Ah, fors’ è lui” cantabile (measures 23 to 116) is an andantino.

appoggiatura A kind of grace note (see “grace notes” below). An appoggiatura note precedes the main note.

aria A song for one voice. In the bel canto period—on which, for the sake of simplicity, I have focused Margaret’s attention—there were set formats for the aria. The most interesting of these was the so-called “grand aria” in two parts, the first slow and thoughtful to show a singer’s powers of expression, the second faster and more “technical”, to show her agility. The second part is called the “cabaletta”. The first part has no fixed name. Some singers call it the “andante” or “adagio”, some—like the metaphorical Mr Mathews in my postscript—the “largo”. Some, to make things really confusing, call it the “cavatina” (see below). I follow Verdi, who called it the “cantabile”.

Because a change of pace is required between the cantabile and the cabaletta, there is often a spell of spoken or sung dialogue in between to allow for the necessary plot development. A messenger appears with dramatic news, a confidante reveals a secret, or something of that sort. Also, the entire grand aria is usually “set up” for the listener by some sung dialog or “cantabile” instrumental music in front. (“Cantabile”, when used as an adjective, means “singable”, i.e. suitable for the voice even if not actually sung as a stop-the-action set piece.) This setting-up is called “scena”.

arioso A short stretch of sung music in the midst of some recitative (see below for “recitative”).

A te, O cara . . . amor talora mi guidò furtivo e in pianto. “To you, O dearest, love formerly guided me secretly and in tears.” Duet from Bellini’s *I puritani*, 1.v. Arturo, entering Valton’s castle, greets Elvira and they sing of their love for each other. Contains some sensational high notes.

The Barber of Seville (Il barbiere di Siviglia.¹) An opera by Rossini, 1816. Beautiful, spirited young Rosina is kept indoors by her elderly guardian, who plans to make her his wife. Dashing and romantic Count Almaviva falls in love with Rosina and steals her from under the old man's nose, assisted by Figaro, the town's barber and general fixer.

baritone The middle of the three common categories of male voice, lying between the tenor and the bass. The usual range is from G at the bottom of the bass staff to F above middle C; though the baritone who plays Tonio in *I pagliacci* needs a strong high G at the end of the prologue.

bass (Pronounced "base".) The lowest of the three common categories of male voice, with a usual range from middle C down to E below the bass staff, though most good basses can go as low as D.

bel canto The style of opera popular in Italy during the first part of the 19th century, and associated most particularly with the composers Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti. Literally "beautiful singing". With roots in Italian Baroque and the castrato tradition of the 18th century, bel canto opera emphasizes exquisite, often ornamented, singing, requiring great vocal agility. There was development across the period, Rossini's exuberant use of ornamentation giving way to the Romanticism of Bellini's beautiful vocal line, then to Donizetti's greater depths of characterization and dramatic development, which in turn inspired the glories of Verdi in the following generation.

The world of Italian opera in the bel canto era was dominated by the singers, the most powerful of whom could dictate their own terms to composers. Operas were written for particular singers, and not infrequently the score was partially rewritten for other singers in later productions (usually in different cities). The relationship of composer to singer in bel canto opera is captured very precisely by a usage of Bellini's. In a letter to a friend he describes the writing of an aria for the tenor Rubini. The verb he uses is *provare*, which is also the Italian word used by tailors to describe the fitting of a suit.

It should not be thought, however, that bel canto was concerned merely and solely with vocal agility. The great practitioners of bel canto—singers, composers and librettists all—knew that the human voice is not just another musical instrument. It can make *words*, and words have *meanings*. They convey events, emotions, and inner states of mind. “To make beautiful sounds is only one objective of bel canto. These sounds must illuminate and underscore the text.”² There you have the true essence of bel canto.

Bella figlia dell'amore . . . schiavo son de' vezzi tuoi. “Sweet daughter of Love, I am a slave to your charms”. Quartet from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, 3.iii (see below). The Duke is chatting up Maddalena at the inn owned by Sparafucile the assassin. Meanwhile, outside the window, Rigoletto tries to comfort the betrayed Gilda.

Bellini, Vincenzo Opera composer, 1801-1835. One of the most beloved of all opera composers for his sublime melodies and long elegant vocal line, Bellini created his operas slowly and painstakingly and died tragically young from amebiasis at age 33. His influence was great and he was much admired both by contemporaries (Donizetti, Chopin) and successors (Tchaikovsky, even Wagner). If you listen to one of the great Bellini arias—“Casta diva” or “Ah! non credea mirarti” for example—and mentally subtract out the human voice, you will find music of striking simplicity. But to criticize Bellini for lack of complexity in his orchestration, as has sometimes been done, is to miss the point of his art. His aim was to support the all-important vocal line, as a Tiffany setting might display a perfect gemstone. As his most conscientious biographer wrote: “His orchestration was meant to fill out harmonies, supply rhythms, and to support and help to project the meaning of the libretto.”³

Bellini's greatest masterpiece, different from anything else he ever composed, is of course *Norma*. Although it was not his last opera, its perfection leaves one fretting in despair at what Bellini might have attained had he lived a normal life span. Inferior to *Norma* only because they fail to attain unblemished perfection are *I puritani* and *La sonnambula*; the former (in this writer's opinion) better musically, the

latter dramatically. Below that stand *Il pirata*, *La straniera* and *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, all with numerous flaws yet still works of genius. Bellini also wrote four other less inspired operas and a scattering of non-operatic pieces.

In a letter to one of his librettists Bellini described his goal as a composer of operas: *Scolpisci nella tua testa a lettere adamantine: Il dramma per musica deve far piangere, inorridire, morire cantando.*— “Carve into your mind in great stone letters: Opera, through singing, must make one weep, shudder, die.”

The proper formula for the drink is: one part of white peach nectar to two parts of prosecco. It was invented at Harry’s Bar in Venice, *ca.* 1946. Some say it is named after the family of 15th-century Venetian artists; some say its creator was a bartender named Bellini; nobody seems to think it has anything to do with the composer.

Bidú Vinnie is undoubtedly referring to the petite Brazilian soprano Bidú Sayão, 1902-1999, *fl.* 1939-51.

La bohème (Lah baw-EHM.) Opera by Puccini, 1896. “The Bohemians.” The on-and-off love affair of Rodolfo and Mimi in the Bohemian underworld of 1830s Paris. A sub-plot is the on-and-off love affair of Rodolfo’s friend Marcello and his girl Musetta. I have never been able to discern much of a story here, but the music is lovely. Following the researches of Mr George Marek, we now know that these were all real people. The original for Mimi was a girl called Lucile Louvet. She died in a hospital, not a garret, and her body, suitably pickled, was given to medical students for dissection practice.

brava For a male singer it’s *bravo!*; for a female *brava!*; for a male or mixed ensemble, *bravi!*; for an all-female ensemble *brave!*

brindisi Generic term for a drinking song. Unless clearly in some other context, “the brindisi” refers to the one in Verdi’s *La Traviata*, I.ii, which Margaret sings in chapter 52. It begins: *Libiam ne lieti calici, che la*

bellezza infiora—“Let’s drink from these gay cups, all decked with beauty.”

cabaletta See “aria”.

Caballé, Montserrat Caballé, born 1933 in Spain, has one of the most beautiful and expressive voices of our age. Her bel canto recordings are treasured by lovers of the genre. See my note on *La straniera* below.

Callas, Maria Callas, 1923-1977, was an American opera singer of Greek parentage (her original surname was Kalogeropoulou). She did more than any other singer to revive the bel canto repertory, which had endured a long period of neglect. In her prime years—mid-1940s to late-1950s—she was the greatest opera singer in the world, with a remarkable, if somewhat unusual, voice, wonderful musical and dramatic intelligence, a stunning stage presence, and a driven perfectionism towards all aspects of her art.

cantabile See “aria”.

cantilena A short song with melodious, smoothly flowing music. A unison cantilena is a song sung by two or more voices, both (or all) singing precisely the same notes, or the same notes separated by a fixed musical interval.

I Capuleti e i Montecchi (The Capulets and the Montagues.) Opera by Bellini, 1830. The Romeo and Juliet story. “Juliet” is “Giulietta” in Italian.

Carmen A French opera by Bizet, 1875. Bad, dangerous gypsy girl Carmen has captured the heart of José, who ignores the entreaties of his virtuous girlfriend Micaela. Carmen flirts with José, but—like the rest of us—prefers the bullfighter Escamillo. José kills her in a jealous fit.

Caro nome . . . che il mio cor festi primo palpitar. “Beloved name,

which first awoke my heart.” Aria from Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, 1.xiii. The Duke has sneaked into Rigoletto’s house to court his daughter, Gilda. Hearing Rigoletto return, he has to leave; but Gilda makes him tell her his name before he goes. When he’s left, she sings this beautiful aria. The name he gave her is, in fact, false. *Rigoletto* is a very cruel opera.

Casta diva “Chaste goddess”. Aria from Bellini’s opera *Norma*, 1.iv. Norma’s hymn to the moon, sung at the ceremony of cutting the sacred mistletoe. The words are:

Chaste goddess, who silvers
 These sacred ancient trees,
 Turn to us your lovely face
 Unclouded and unveiled.
 Temper, O goddess, temper again these ardent hearts.
 Temper yet our proud zeal.
 Spread over the earth that peace
 Which you cause to reign in heaven.

The cabaletta Mr Mathews refers to follows this song after a brief interlude for dramatic development (see “aria”). It begins “Bello a me ritorna”.

Cavalleria rusticana (Rustic Chivalry.) Opera by Pietro Mascagni, 1890. Passion and death in old Sicily. Turiddu loves Lola; seduces Santuzza; Lola marries Alfio, then resumes her affair with Turiddu; Santuzza snitches to Alfio, who challenges Turiddu to a duel and kills him.

Cavaradossi See *Tosca*.

cavatina I mostly hear this word used nowadays to mean “entrance aria”, i.e. the first aria sung by a particular character in a particular opera (which is more properly called “aria di sortita”). That is the meaning I have given it in the novel. The word is also used in other senses, however, and you have to look at the context to see what a writer means by it. (See

“aria”.) Some commentators deny that the word has any distinct meaning at all nowadays: “A short song of any sort”, says Martin’s *Opera Companion*. “A very short, often dramatic aria”—DiGaetani’s *Invitation to the Opera*. Don’t go to opera lovers for terminological exactitude.

Cav’n’Pag *Cavalleria rusticana* and *I pagliacci*. Because these are both short operas they are frequently performed together on one bill. This set is universally known in the opera world as “Cav and Pag”, and has inspired the following tribute by Mr Stanley Sharpless:

Cav and Pag, Cav and Pag
They go together like zig and zag.
They’ve never been billed as Pag and Cav—
I wonder why they never have?

Celeste Aida . . . forma divina. “Heavenly Aida, shape divine”. A famous romanza from Verdi’s opera *Aida*, 1.i. See below under “romanza”. Ramades sings of his love for Aida, and dreams of returning her to her native land as a queen.

La Cenerentola (Lah Chay-nay-RAYNT-aw-lah.) Opera by Rossini, 1817. The Cinderella story, pre-Grimm.

Che gelida manina . . . se la lasci riscaldar. “What a cold little hand. Let me warm it back to life.” Aria from Puccini’s opera *La bohème*, 1.vi. Rodolfo lives in a garret. Mimi, his neighbor, comes over to get a light for her candle. On her way out she drops her key. While they search for it, both their candles go out, and in the darkness their hands meet. Caruso’s favorite aria.

Cherubini, Luigi Opera composer, 1760-1842. Only his *Médée* (which Margaret sings in its Italian version, *Medea*) is still in the standard repertory, and that just barely. Cherubini was rated by his contemporaries the

rudest man in Europe, and was the butt of many anecdotes on that theme—see, for example, Berlioz's *Memoirs*.

Cherubino Character in Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. Classic operatic portrait of fevered adolescence. See "pants role".

coloratura Most kinds of florid or decorative singing—stretching a vowel out across a range of notes, rapid movement across a range, *tenuto* (see below), *messa di voce* (see below), etc.—come under the heading "coloratura". In the mind of an opera singer, the word denotes not only vocal agility, but the maintenance throughout the vocal display of a high sweetness and purity of timbre, for which reason the term is almost entirely restricted to the efforts of sopranos and mezzos, though theoretically any fach can sing coloratura. A broader, more general term than *fioritura* (see below).

comprimario The secondary characters in an opera—guards, servants, messengers, etc. A skillful composer can use the comprimario roles to great effect, a dazzling instance being the maid's arietta in Rossini's *Barber of Seville*, 2.vi.

contralto The lowest of the three common categories of female voice, with a usual range from F below middle C to F or G below the mezzo's high A.

Coraggio, su coraggio . . . del mare audace figli. "Have courage, rise up and have courage, intrepid sons of the sea". An aria from Verdi's opera *I vespri siciliani*, 1.iii.

Corelli, Franco Great Italian spinto tenor, born 1923, *fl.* 1954-70. Corelli was a martyr to stage fright; but you'd never know it from the recordings.

Così fan tutte (Women Are All Like That.) Beautiful, cynical, deeply politically-incorrect opera by Mozart, 1790. Don Alfonso, an old vet-

eran of Love's wars, persuades Guglielmo and Ferrando to test the devotion of their two girlfriends by each courting the other's girl, after first pretending to sail away to war and sneaking back in heavy disguise. The girls fall for it and the old stager's notions about women are proved correct: "They're all like that."

da capo Instead of just singing an aria once all the way through, the singer is often instructed to go back to the top—"da capo"—or to some point in the score marked by a sign—"dal segno"—and sing the whole or part over again.

Des Grieux See *Manon*.

Di Stefano, Giuseppe Italian lyric tenor, born 1921, *fl.* 1947-61.

Don Carlo Opera by Verdi, 1867. An odd love triangle in the shadow of the Spanish Inquisition. Don Carlo is the son of Philip II of Spain. He loves Elizabeth of Valois, to whom he was betrothed; but her own father, for diplomatic reasons, has married her to Philip instead. Meanwhile Princess Eboli, one of Elizabeth's ladies, loves Carlo (making it a love quadrilateral, I suppose). There is much talk about the suffering people of Flanders, groaning under Spanish oppression, and Carlo and his sworn friend Rodrigo wish to help them; but it all ends in tears.

Donizetti, Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848) was one of the most prolific of the bel canto composers. *Grove* lists 66 operas under his name, not counting rewrites and revised versions. The fifty-ninth was *Adelia*; but to refer to it as I have in the text, as "Donizetti's fifty-ninth pot-boiler" is rather hard on this brilliant and (by all accounts) lovable man. His oeuvre includes charming comedies (*L'elisir d'amore* being merely the best known), fine dramas (the "Three Queens": *Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda*, and *Elizabetta* in *Roberto Devereux*), and the anomalous and wonderful *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which has been called the perfect exemplar of bel canto opera.

Donizetti was an artist in the most pure and original sense of the

word: a master of, and lover of, his craft. He wrote at least two operas just for the fun of it, without having any commission for them. (Neither was performed until modern times.) He was plagued by censors all through his career, simply because he insisted on choosing librettos that appealed to his dramatic sense, with deliberate disregard for the political consequences. Courageous; dogged; fertile; filled with the joy of creation—truly a great artist.

Dorabella One of the deceived women in *Così fan tutte*.

L'elisir d'amore (The Elixir of Love.) Opera by Donizetti, 1832. Poor peasant Nemorino adores middle-class Adina, and buys a love potion from the quack Dulcamara. The potion is only wine, and Adina, piqued by Nemorino's inebriated clumsiness, agrees to marry dashing Sergeant Belcore. Nemorino enlists in the army to get money for more of the potion, which only brings another spell of drunken boorishness. By this time, however, everyone but Nemorino has learned that he has inherited a fortune; and Adina has realized his true worth, and the sincerity of his love for her. She buys him out of the army and all ends well. Dulcamara takes credit, and Belcore laughs off his loss philosophically. One of the happiest of all operas. Written, words and music both, in two weeks from a standing start.⁴

fach Vocal category, according to the German classification, which—being German—is systematic to the furthest degree, the categories laboring under names like *zwischenfachsängerin*. Opera singers use the term very loosely, however, saying things like: “Bel canto’s my fach.”

Fidelio Opera (his only one) by Beethoven, 1805. Florestan is in the dungeons of Pizarro, Governor of Seville. His wife Leonora has disguised herself as a man, taken the name Fidelio, and insinuated herself into the favor of the jailer Rocco, hoping to rescue her husband. She duly does so, assisted by the upright Prime Minister, Don Fernando.

Solid drama, stirring music, and a libretto better than most, this is the favorite opera of nobody I have ever met. Many great instrumental com-

posers sooner or later felt the urge to have a try at opera, but surprisingly few—only Handel and Mozart, really—had much success at it. Schubert, who knew a thing or two about putting music to words, wrote or part-wrote 18 operas, two of which were performed in his own lifetime; but none has survived into the common repertory. Haydn wrote at least 22 operas, but only *Armida* is ever seen in the major houses, and that very rarely. I think Vinnie’s comment in chapter 44 is quite just.

Fifteen Strings of Cash (Shiwu Guan.) A Chinese opera⁵, also called *Dream of the Two Xionsg*. Because of a misunderstanding over fifteen strings of cash (a sum of money), the two brothers Xiong Youlan and Xiong Youhui are wrongly convicted of a crime and imprisoned. An official named Kuang Zhong has a dream about the two brothers, makes his own investigation, and clears them of the crime. Kuang Zhong is the “white-nosed judge” Uncle Fish impersonates in chapter 12, concealing his shrewd intelligence beneath a comic mask.

fioritura Decorative scales, arpeggios (the separate notes that make up a standard chord being sung one after the other) and trills used in coloratura singing. Mostly refers to light, fanciful or bird-like effects. Fioritura is a subset of coloratura—coloratura without the heavy artillery. Fioritura is only ever pleasing; coloratura can make you tremble.

Die Fledermaus (The Bat.) Opera (strictly speaking, an operetta) by Johann Strauss, 1874. The title refers to Dr Falke who once, as the victim of a practical joke played on him by his friend Eisenstein, had to walk through the town wearing a bat costume. The opera tells the story of Falke’s good-natured revenge, which involves luring Eisenstein to a masked ball where he unknowingly flirts with his own wife, who is flirting with a third man, etc etc.

flower song A romanza sung by José in Bizet’s opera *Carmen*, 2.vii, beginning: “La fleur que tu m’aurais jetée, dans ma prison m’était restée.” (The flower you threw me stayed with me in my prison.) José was in

jail for letting Carmen go when the army had her arrested as a trouble-maker.

friendship duet In Bellini's *Norma*, 2.iii. It begins with Adalgisa singing: Mira, O Norma, ai tuoi ginocchi, questi cari tuoi pargoletti. ("See, O Norma, at your knees, these dear children.") Norma had decided to kill herself and entrust her children to Adalgisa. Adalgisa dissuades her, promises to renounce Pollione for Norma's sake, and the two women vow everlasting friendship.

Galli-Curci, Amelita Italian Soprano, 1882-1963. "A great recording artist, but not a great performer" is the conventional verdict, which I am in no position to dispute. On the recorded evidence she certainly had a beautiful voice, with breathtaking and apparently effortless high notes, all the way up to E sharp (possibly F—opinions differ). She must have had *something* in the way of stage presence, though: at her New York debut (November 18, 1916, as Meyerbeer's Dinorah) she took 61 curtain calls. She visited China and met Mei Lanfang (see below). Retired 1936 after a throat operation fatally altered the pure, limpid color of her voice.

Garden, Mary Scottish soprano, 1874-1967. A fine actress as well as a singer. In her performing career (1900-1930) she made a specialty of French roles, especially Debussy's *Mélisande*.

Gianni Schicchi Opera by Puccini, 1918. Schicchi is a cunning peasant whose daughter Lauretta is in love with Rinuccio, who belongs to a wealthy town family. The head of the family dies, leaving all his property to the Church. At Rinuccio's suggestion, the family call in Schicchi to find a way the will can be changed to their advantage.

Gilda See *Rigoletto*.

La gioconda (The Cheerful Woman.) Opera by Ponchielli, 1876, on the very Chinese theme of filial piety. The central idea is of a woman, Gioconda, whose love for her mother is so great that when another woman,

Laura, saves her mother's life, Gioconda is willing to do anything for that woman—even when Laura becomes her love rival. The setting is seventeenth-century Venice. Barnaba, a spy for the Inquisition, lusts for Gioconda, a singer, who is secretly engaged to Enzo, a proscribed nobleman returned to Venice incognito, who was previously engaged to Laura, who still loves him (and he her) but is now married to the Duke. Barnaba—who of course knows everybody's secrets—wants revenge against Gioconda for spurning him. His first attempt ends with Laura saving both Enzo and Gioconda's mother, putting Gioconda in Laura's debt. Though she knows Laura is her rival, the selfless Gioconda helps her elope with Enzo, then kills herself just as Barnaba is about to have his filthy way with her. A perennial favorite: fine drama, lots of good songs, the “Dance of the Hours”, and the most unforgettable comprimario exchange in the repertory: *Distant Voice*—“Hey there in the gondola, any news?” *Another distant voice*—“Corpses in the Orfano canal.”

Giordano, Umberto Composer, 1867-1948. Twelve operas, of which only *Andrea Chénier* (1896) and *Fedora* (1898) currently hover on the edge of the standard repertory.

Goddess of the Luo River (Luo Shen.) A Chinese opera, based on a story by the 3rd-century writer Cao Zhi. Resting one night at an inn by the Luo River, Cao dreams of a goddess, and agrees to meet her the next day. He accordingly goes to the river, where water sprites lead him to the goddess, whose name is Mi Fei. They fall in love, but because of their different natures are obliged to part. The lines quoted in chapter 66 are sung by the goddess at parting. A favorite opera of Mei Lanfang's (see below), not much performed since.

grace notes Any of several different musical ornaments used to embellish the main notes of a melody. Subclassified under different headings: appoggiaturas, acciaccaturas, trills, turns, etc.

Grove *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, a standard reference work.

My copy is published by Macmillan's of London, 1992, editor Stanley Sadie.

Gruberova, Edita Slovakian soprano, born 1946. Renowned for her interpretations of Bellini and Richard Strauss. Her Elvira (in Bellini's *I puritani*) is, in this writer's opinion, the best yet recorded.

Heldentenor "Heroic tenor". One of the categories in the German *fach* system (see above). The Heldentenor has sufficient sheer power to sing roles like Tannhäuser, Tristan and Siegfried above Wagner's heavy orchestration.

Isabella A character in Rossini's opera *L'italiana in Algeri*.

Isoletta See *La straniera*.

L'italiana in Algeri (The Italian Girl in Algiers.) Opera by Rossini, 1813. The Bey of Algiers has tired of his wife and decided to marry her off to his Italian slave, Lindoro. He orders his Captain of Pirates to procure an Italian girl for him. Lindoro's girlfriend, Isabella, has come looking for him, but her ship is intercepted by the Bey's pirates, and she is taken off to the court. Isabella, another wily and spirited Rossini woman (see *The Barber of Seville*), soon masters the situation. At last she escapes with Lindoro and all the Bey's Italian slaves, and the Bey himself is reconciled with his wife.

The Jade Hairpin (Bi Yu Zan.) A Chinese opera, originally from the Cantonese repertory. Trouble between newlyweds Li Xiuying (the bride) and Wang Yulin. One of Xiuying's cousins, acting from jealousy, steals her jade hairpin, forges a love note, and bribes a servant to plant the two items in the bridal chamber on the wedding night. When Yulin goes into the chamber and sees these items, he is suspicious of his bride, and will not spend the night with her, sleeping in a chair instead. In a very affective scene, the baffled and hurt Xiuying, fearful her groom will catch cold, three times goes to cover him with a blanket. From love of this scene the

opera is sometimes called *Three Times Covered by a Blanket*. After a spell of estrangement, during which Yulin passes the Imperial examinations, Xiuying's parents dig out the truth and all is made well.

Lady Magnolia (Yu Tang Chun.) A Chinese opera. The story is given in chapter 68. From *The Jade Hairpin* and *Lady Magnolia* it can be seen that Chinese opera, contrary to the impression given by its very mannered forms of singing and presentation, has librettos as worldly and “verismo” as anything in the European repertory.

legato The art of singing a sequence of notes by gliding smoothly from one to the other. Opposite of *staccato*. See also “portamento”.

libretto The words of an opera, as distinct from the music. Literally “little book”—the “big book”, I suppose, being the full orchestra score. For the comparative bulk of different kinds of score, see “score” below.

Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai There is a Chinese opera on this story. A recording, of a performance in the Zhejiang regional idiom, can be got from the Art Tune Company: *Liang Shanbo yu Zhu Yingtai* (“The Butterfly Lovers”), COL 3047 A & B.

the Liebestod “The love-death”. An aria from Wagner's opera *Tristan and Isolde*, 1865, 3.iii. Isolde sings it before sinking on to Tristan's corpse at the end of the opera, mystically united with him in love and death. A great favorite of Hitler's.

loggionisti Fanatical opera-goers, inhabitants of the loge.

Lohengrin Opera by Wagner, 1850. Tenth-century Germany. Telramund and Elsa dispute the crown of Brabant. Mysterious stranger turns up to fight for Elsa, beats (but spares) Telramund, marries Elsa—on condition she will not ask who he is or where he's from. Here there comes the famous Bridal Chorus. Telramund and his wife Ortrud, who turns out to be a witch, prod Elsa to ask the fatal questions. Answer: the stranger is

Lohengrin, a knight of the Holy Grail, and now that his identity is known must return to his comrades. Elsa dies from grief.

Lola See *Cavalleria rusticana*.

Lucia di Lammermoor (Lucy of Lammermoor.) Opera by Donizetti, 1835. A dramatization of Sir Walter Scott's fine gloomy novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*. Lucia is the sister of Enrico, Lord of Lammermoor, who plans to marry her to Arturo. Lucia, however, loves Edgardo; but his family has long had a feud with hers, and Enrico regards him as a sworn enemy. After a secret tryst, Edgardo sails off to France to improve his fortunes. While he's away, Enrico shows Lucia a forged letter saying Edgardo has betrayed her. Edgardo returns too late to stop Lucia's marriage to Arturo, but she goes mad and kills Arturo on their wedding night, then dies. Believing Lucia was unfaithful, Edgardo is wandering among the tombs of his ancestors when Lucia's funeral procession passes. He learns what has happened, realizes Lucia was true to him, and kills himself.

lyric See "spinto".

Macbeth Opera by Verdi, 1865. Shakespeare's story. The patriotic chorus is at the end of 4.ii.

Madame Butterfly (Madama Butterfly.) Opera by Puccini, 1904. The American Pinkerton, visiting Japan, light-heartedly contracts a marriage of convenience with a young Japanese girl, Butterfly. Her family disowns her. Pinkerton, after impregnating her, sails back to the U.S. Butterfly waits patiently for him to return; but when he does, it is with his American wife. Butterfly does the Japanese thing. Everybody's mother's favorite opera. But mothers know stuff: *Butterfly* is a masterpiece.

Pierre Loti's 1887 novel *Madame Chrysanthème* has a lot to answer for: an opera of its own (by Messager, 1893), a short story (by Long, 1898), a play (by Belasco, 1900), a war (Russia vs. Japan, 1904—the Francophile Russian officer class, knowing nothing of Japan but Loti's

disparaging, semi-comic portrait, fatally underestimated their enemy), and Puccini's opera (also 1904). The opera created its own spin-offs: a silent movie (Mary Pickford and Marshall Nielan, 1915), at least one pop song ("Poor Butterfly", words by John Golden to music by Raymond Hubbell, 1916) and the ineffably silly play *M. Butterfly* (by Hwang, 1988), from which an even sillier movie was made. Write a novel, see what you get.

Maddalena See *Rigoletto*.

The Magic Flute (*Die Zauberflöte*.) Opera by Mozart, 1791. A fairy tale with mystico-religio-psychologico-political subthemes that have never prevented anyone from enjoying some of Mozart's most sublime melodies. The simple birdcatcher Papageno wanders through a conflict between Sarastro, high priest of the Forces of Good (generally identified with the order of Freemasons, of which Mozart was a member) and the Queen of the Night, accompanied by her three ladies and the base Monostatos. Sarastro has abducted Princess Pamina, daughter of the Queen, and keeps her in his realm to protect her from her mother's influence. The Queen engages young Prince Tamino to rescue her daughter, but Tamino, in company with Papageno, soon discovers the true state of affairs. He becomes eager to join Sarastro's brotherhood; and does so, after undergoing several tests.

"I should like to have heard my *Zauberflöte* one more time", said Mozart on his deathbed. It was his last opera; he died just 66 days after the first performance.

Manon *Manon Lescaut* was a novel by the French writer Prévost, published in 1731. It inspired at least three operas and a ballet. The opera referred to by Colman in chapter 70 is probably the one by the French composer Massenet, 1884. Puccini's opera *Manon Lescaut*, 1893, which has an Italian libretto, is also in the standard repertory. The ballet Baoyu dances in chapter 52 is presumably the one created by Kenneth MacMillan to an arrangement of Massenet's music (taken from everywhere BUT his *Manon!*), 1974.

The essential Manon story, common to all the derivations, is of a decent young man led astray by love for a beautiful girl with a weak character. The girl, Manon Lescaut, elopes at sixteen with Des Grieux, a young divinity student. Manon's worldly brother (in Massenet, cousin) retrieves her and hands her over to an elderly nobleman who is infatuated with her. Des Grieux gets her back, and in revenge the old boy has her arrested and transported to the Louisiana territory as a prostitute. Des Grieux goes with her, or after her, and is at her side when she expires in a swamp (Prévost, MacMillan), a desert (Puccini) or on the road to Le Havre (Massenet).

The Marriage of Figaro (Le nozze di Figaro.) Opera by Mozart, 1786. Further adventures of Rosina, Figaro and the Count. (See *The Barber of Seville*. Though *Barber* was the later of the two operas, the plays on which these operas are based appeared in the reverse order, *Barber* first.) Figaro, now the Count's manservant, wants to marry the maid Susanna, but the Count is pressing his attentions on her. The page boy Cherubino has a crush on the Countess, who is distressed at her husband's wandering affections. Figaro sorts it all out, and everybody ends up with the right person.

This miraculous work holds all prizes for sheer staying power: for over two hundred years—almost the entire lifetime of the United States of America—*The Marriage of Figaro* has never been out of the standard repertory. See Professor Liang's comment in chapter 3.

measure (or "bar") One of the basic units into which a piece of music is divided, made up of a small, constant number of notes or rests. Exactly how many notes there are in a measure depends on the tempo of the music; if it is $3/4$ time, there are three quarter-notes in each measure.

Arias come in all lengths. Of famous arias, Margaret's own "Vissi d'arte" is probably the shortest at 37 measures, and "Ah, fors' è lui" the longest; though if you consider the "spinning aria" and "jewel song" in act 2 of Gounod's *Faust* to be a single aria, as I think singers instinctively do, it weighs in at 306 measures.

The "average" bel canto aria—"Una voce poco fa", perhaps—runs

about 120 measures. In the primo ottocento it was not unusual for a singer, studying a role in an opera, to count the number of measures in the major aria allotted to him. If it was less than had been given to a rival singer, he would refuse the part. This led to a certain degree of “aria inflation” across the period.

Medea Italian version, which did not première until 1909, of Cherubini’s

Médée, 1797. Creon is the king of Corinth and Glauce is his daughter. With Creon’s blessing, Glauce is to marry the adventurer Jason, who has settled in Corinth with his two sons by a previous lover, Medea. Medea herself now turns up and tries to win back Jason. Failing, she takes a terrible revenge.

Mei Lanfang Chinese opera singer, 1894-1961. “The Chinese Caruso.” World-famous in his day: his 1930 U.S. tour drew huge crowds, and he starred in a Broadway performance lasting two weeks, all the tickets for which sold out within three days of the announcement. He was feted in Hollywood by the likes of Charlie Chaplin and Cecil B. de Mille, and the crowds that came to see him arrive at San Francisco railroad station brought all traffic in that city to a halt.

messa di voce “The setting-up of the voice”. The singer’s ability to vary the loudness of her voice while holding a note. Much harder than it sounds, and very hammy if not done well. Not to be confused with . . .

mezza voce “Half voice”. Singing without using full volume—often done at the less important kinds of rehearsals, to save the voice.

mezzo Short for “mezzo-soprano”, second-highest of the common categories of female voice, with a normal range from A below middle C to A above the treble staff—though most first-rank mezzos can cope with B flat across all vowels, and some double as sopranos.

Mimi See *La bohème*.

Mozart Composer, 1756-1791. His best-loved operas are *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte* and *The Magic Flute*. He also wrote 15 other operas, and some non-operatic pieces.

Nabucco (Nebuchadnezzar.) Opera by Verdi, 1842. The composer's third opera, his first masterpiece, set in the events of *2 Kings* 24-25, when Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, conquered the Israelites and dragged them off to slavery. In the opera, Nabucco has two daughters: good Fenena and bad Abigaille. Both love the Israelite prince Ismaele, but he only cares for Fenena. In revenge, Abigaille usurps the throne from her father (temporarily disabled by God for an act of impiety) and sets out to massacre the Israelites and Fenena together. Nabucco comes to his senses, Abigaille takes poison, the Jews are freed, the lovers united.

Nacqui all'affanno . . . al pianto. "I was born to sorrow and tears." Rondò from the last scene of Rossini's opera *La Cenerentola*, 2.ix. Cinderella has found her prince, forgives everyone, and celebrates her good fortune.

Nessun dorma "No-one shall sleep". An aria from Puccini's opera *Turandot*, 3.i. Sung by Calaf as he waits for the dawn. See *Turandot*.

Non più andrai . . . farfallone amoroso. "No more playing around, amorous butterfly." Sung by Figaro to Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro*, 1.viii. The Count has caught Cherubino in the Countess's chambers, and to get rid of him has given him a commission in his regiment. Figaro tells Cherubino what to expect in the military life.

Norma Opera by Bellini, 1831. Norma is high priestess of the Druids of Gaul, at the time when they were coming under Roman rule. She secretly loves Pollione, a Roman centurion, and has born him two children; but he has fallen out of love with her and turned his attention to Adalgisa, one of the young priestesses at the Druids' sacred grove. When Adalgisa

realizes she is taking Pollione away from Norma, she abjures him and vows she will make him return to his first love. But she cannot, and Norma, in rage, rouses her people against the Romans. Just at this point Pollione is arrested in the sacred grove and brought before her. No threat will make him renounce Adalgisa. Seeing the hopelessness of her love, Norma confesses her treason to her people, commits her children to the care of her father, and climbs the funeral pyre with Pollione—who, having now seen Norma’s great courage and integrity, realises that it is she he truly loves.

O mio babbino caro . . . mi piace, è bello bello. “Oh my Daddy dear, he makes me happy, he is so fine.” (Misprinted on a hundred discount CD labels as “O mio *bambino* . . .”.) Aria from Puccini’s one-act opera *Gianni Schicchi*. When Gianni Schicchi turns up at the house of Rinuccio’s family, they mock him as an uncouth peasant, and will not allow Rinuccio to marry Lauretta because she brings no dowry. Angry, Schicchi refuses to help them with the will. Lauretta, her eyes on the prize (i.e. Rinuccio) sings this song to placate and persuade him.

O patria mia . . . mai più ti rivedrò! “O my native land, I shall never see you again!” A romanza (see below) from Verdi’s opera *Aida*, 3.i. At the end of the previous act, the pharaoh announced his daughter’s wedding to Ramades, and ordered Aida and her father to remain captive in Egypt as hostages. Aida, seeing her hopes for happiness with Ramades and for return to her native land all doomed, sings this, one of the most technically challenging of soprano arias.

pants role A role which requires a female singer to play the part of a man. The most famous pants roles are Cherubino in Mozart’s *Marriage of Figaro* and Octavian in Richard Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*. “Skirt roles” are rare in European opera, though common in the Chinese repertory, where, until the 1920s, there was a prohibition against women appearing on stage.

passagio Try singing scales from the lowest note you can manage to the

highest, maintaining a constant volume. About half-way up you will notice that the *quality* of your voice changes to deal with the higher notes. Professional singers are acutely aware of this break (or breaks—tenors and sopranos generally have two). They call it the *passagio*, and speak of having two or three different “voices”. One of the aims of voice training is to bring these different “voices” into accordance with each other—to make the *passagio* as far as possible undetectable; or, failing that, to make it less jarring; or, failing even that, to direct a singer to a repertoire which will hide her *passagio* problems as well as can be done.

Pelléas et Mélisande Opera (his only one) by Claude Debussy, 1902. Odd, dreamlike, strangely unsettling tale of the love between Prince Pelléas and his sister-in-law Mélisande. Pelléas is ultimately killed by his brother. Mélisande then gives birth and dies from the effects. As Edwardian as an aspidochelone, carried along on structureless, atmospheric music; either leaves you cold or gives you nightmares. In length of time spent on composition, *P&M* is at the opposite extreme from *L'elisir d'amore*: it took Debussy nine years to write. Debussy “preferred cats to people”⁶.

Pensa alla patria, e intrepido il tuo dover adempi “Think of the fatherland and do your duty fearlessly.” Aria from Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*, 2.iv. Isabella has enlisted the Bey's Italian slaves to help her escape, and inspires them by this appeal to their patriotism.

piano score See “score”.

Pietri, Giuseppe Composer, 1886-1946. Best known for operettas (light pieces mixing songs with *unaccompanied* speech, as in a Broadway musical). Of his five true operas, only *Maristella* (1934) is much performed nowadays.

Il pirata (The Pirate.) Opera by Bellini, 1827. Gualtiero loved Imogene, but was exiled by Duke Ernesto and had to become a pirate. The Duke forced Imogene to marry him by threatening her father's life. Gualtiero and his men are shipwrecked in the Dukedom. He tries to get Imogene to

flee with him, but she won't; then Ernesto comes in and the two men fight. Ernesto is killed, Gualtiero proudly surrenders himself and is executed, Imogene goes mad. Bellini's third opera, first big success. Very Sicilian (though the ultimate source of the libretto was Irish).

Ponchielli, *Amilcare* Composer, 1834-1886. Wrote nine operas, but only his *La gioconda* is much performed. He was one of Puccini's teachers at the Milan Conservatory.

Porgi, amor . . . qualche ristoro al mio duolo, a' miei sospir. "Grant, O Love, some comfort for my sorrow, for my sighs." Opens Act 2 of Mozart's opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. Broken-hearted that her husband is fondling the help, the Countess addresses Love, asking Love to bring him back to her, or let her die. One of the three or four most beautiful songs ever written.

portamento "Carrying" the voice smoothly from one note to another, passing through every intermediate gradation on the way. The difference with legato is more of usage than of meaning. Portamento is something singers do between one note and another; legato is something composers INSTRUCT singers to do across a whole section of music. Indeed, singers are frequently instructed that a transition should be sung "legato but not portamento", for example the skip of an octave between the ninth and tenth measures—i.e. from "furtiva" to "quante"—of Margaret's beloved "Vissi d'arte". There are composers especially associated with long and difficult legato passages (Bellini, Verdi); but nobody would think of portamento as associated with any particular composer⁷. It's just a technique singers have to learn.

prima donna "First lady." The female principal of an opera. The male equivalent is *primo uomo*.

primo ottocento The first part of the 19th century, the great age of bel canto. The expressions "primo ottocento" and "bel canto" are yoked

together in the minds of opera lovers, and are—given the necessary grammatical adjustments—interchangeable.

Puccini, Giacomo Opera composer, 1858-1924. His operas were scoffed at by academic musicologists but loved by the opera public. He wrote twelve, of which the masterpieces are *Manon Lescaut*, *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Turandot*.

I puritani (The Puritans.) Opera by Bellini, 1835. English civil war. Puritan Valton has been persuaded to let his daughter Elvira marry Royalist Arturo. On entering Valton's castle, however, Arturo learns that the widow of Charles I is a prisoner there, and will be sent to London for trial. He helps her escape, making himself a wanted man. Elvira goes mad. Arturo secretly returns; Elvira gets her mind back. They are discovered; she loses it again. The war ends and Arturo is amnestied; Elvira regains her reason.

Qual cor tradisti . . . qual cor perdisti. “What a heart you have betrayed, what a heart you have lost.” From the last-act finale of Bellini's *Norma*. The Druids have arrested Pollione in their sacred grove and brought him before Norma. She insists on questioning him alone. At last you are in my hands! she crows when the others have left. Only I can save you! Using every threat she can think of, Norma tries to win him back to her, but Pollione refuses, reaffirms his love for Adalgisa, and asks for death. The furious Norma calls back the others and announces that a priestess has violated her vows and must die. Pollione, and the rest of us, suppose she means Adalgisa; but when the people demand to know the traitress's name, Norma says it is she herself. She turns to Pollione and sings this lovely, passionate aria. Magnificent drama; celestial music; Bellini's powers at full stretch; a brilliant, flawless gem of operatic art, ferociously difficult for singers to do justice to.

recitative Spoken dialogue used to develop the action in between the stand-and-deliver arias. The word “spoken” here should be understood to include a range of recitative styles, from melodious but near-conversa-

tional “dry recitative”, usually with harpsichord accompaniment, to sung dialogue supported by the orchestra.

répétiteur, répétiteuse Resident coach at an opera house, responsible for teaching singers their parts, and for cuing and prompting as required. A key position, though unglamorous; excellent training for an opera conductor.

Rigoletto Opera by Verdi, 1851. Rigoletto, a hunchback, is jester to the cruel, cynical, womanizing Duke of Mantua. Rigoletto cherishes his innocent young daughter, Gilda; but the Duke seduces her. In revenge, Rigoletto hires the assassin Sparafucile to murder the Duke when he is staying at Sparafucile’s inn. However, Sparafucile’s daughter Maddalena has now become enamored of the Duke and persuades her father not to murder him, but instead the first stranger who comes to the inn. Overhearing this, Gilda decides to sacrifice herself for her faithless lover. Rigoletto takes receipt of the victim’s corpse in a sack, and supposes it is the Duke. Opening it, he finds his daughter—who has just sufficient life left in her to sing the finale.

romanza A simple song for one voice, without the structure of a full aria. As the name suggests, it is romantic, in the sense of being concerned with the tender emotions. (“Introspective” says the *Metropolitan Opera Encyclopedia*.) It is also lyrical, meaning light and beautiful, as opposed to grand and dramatic. A *romanza* expresses hope, regret, fancy, disappointment or contented love. It does not express despair, fear, revenge, lust or rage. The best-known of all *romanzas* is Verdi’s “Celeste Aida”.

rondò A type of aria in two parts, simpler than a grand aria, usually performed at the end of an opera. Nowadays thought of mostly in connection with Mozart: “Non mi dir, bell’idol mio” (*Don Giovanni*, II.xiii), “Per pietà, ben mio, perdona” (*Così fan tutte*, II.vii); but see “Nacqui all’affanno” above.

Rossini, Gioacchino Opera composer, 1792-1868. What a strange thing

is reputation. Remembered now as a wit and boulevardier who wrote cheerful, spirited comedies, in fact Rossini was a melancholy hypochondriac, and most of his 38 operas were serious. His melodic genius, however, is not in doubt. A full generation of young composers knew that to make a name for themselves they first had to struggle out from under the shadow of Rossini. His masterpieces are the comedies *Barber of Seville*, *L'italiana in Algeri* and *La Cenerentola*, and the dramas *Semiramide* and *William Tell*.⁸

rubato Singers do not always follow the tempo marked on their sheet music. They have found from experience that they can attain certain dramatic effects by varying their tempo—sometimes faster, sometimes slower. This skill needs to be cultivated with great care and used with great sensitivity to music and role (not to mention conductor). A singer who is careless with rubato may give the impression of having lost the tempo; or worse, may actually lose it.

A good confident rubato, sensitive and expressive, is one of the distinguishing marks of a first-class singer. “Rubato” means “robbed”: having dragged out the time on one note, the singer must “rob” it back from another to keep overall tempo.

Scarpia See *Tosca*.

scena See “aria”.

score Sheet music. The *full score* (a.k.a. *orchestra score*) for an opera sets out the music for the voices and all the instruments in the orchestra. The *vocal score* condenses the entire orchestra down to a piano keyboard, and sets out music for the voice and piano. Strictly speaking a *piano score* is the score for the piano accompaniment alone; but in practice singers seem to use “piano score” to mean “vocal score”.

For a grasp of the quantities of paper involved here: my Schirmer libretto for Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is 44 pages of German text. The vocal score (also published by Schirmer) is 569 pages.

The full orchestra score (Dover edition of the Peters score) is 823 pages, in a font half the size. We don't applaud the conductor for nothing.

the Scottish play *Macbeth*, considered by actors to be an ill-starred play, to the degree that many of them will not mention its name. This superstition seems not to be shared by opera singers, who speak of Verdi's opera quite freely. The nearest operatic equivalent to "the Scottish play" is *Tosca*, which seems to be especially prone to mishaps and disasters; but I do not believe there is any taboo on the name.

Scotto, Renata Italian soprano, born 1934. One of the great Butterflies.

La sonnambula (The [Female] Sleepwalker.) Opera by Bellini, 1831. The sleepwalker is Amina, engaged to Elvino. She sleepwalks in on Count Rodolfo, who is staying at the village inn. The mistress of the inn, Lisa, who had hoped to marry Elvino herself, sees this, misinterprets it, and tells Elvino. Elvino breaks off the engagement and decides to marry Lisa. Amina is broken-hearted. The Count is the only one who understands Amina's condition. He tries to explain it, but nobody believes him until they see Amina sleepwalk across an impossibly precarious bridge over the mill race. Convinced now of her innocence, Elvino gently wakes her and asks forgiveness, and all ends happily.

soprano The highest of the three categories of female voice, with a normal range from middle C to C above the treble staff. Sopranos of the first rank can usually, like Margaret, deliver a good-quality E flat on most vowels.

spinto Soprano and tenor roles, and the singers suited to them, are divided into the lighter "lyric" roles (Susanna in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*) and the heavier "dramatic" ones (Verdi's Lady Macbeth, or his *Otello*). Opera professionals further subdivide these categories, not always consistently. A spinto role (or singer) is one at the heavier end of the lyric range, i.e. lyric-bordering-

on-dramatic. Note that “range” here refers not to vocal range but to the entire dramatic and vocal “color” of a role.

La straniera (The [Female] Stranger.) Opera by Bellini, 1829. The beautiful Alaide won the heart of the King of France, who threw over his first wife for her, claiming that the marriage was unconsummated. The Church, however, forces him to take his first wife back and banish Alaide to a lakeside hut in the woods near Montolino, Brittany, where she is watched over by her brother Valdeburgo. The people of Montolino, who know nothing of this background, call her “the stranger”, and suspect she is a witch. The Lord of Montolino’s daughter, Isoletta, is to marry Count Arturo; but he is smitten by Alaide, and thinks Valdeburgo is her lover. The opera centers on Arturo’s love for Alaide, and her inability either to requite his love or to explain why she cannot requite it.

For the purpose of my plot I have exaggerated the obscurity of this work. In fact, in any given year there can usually be found a professionally-performed *Straniera* somewhere in the world. There are several recordings, of which the best is the 1969 New York performance, with Montserrat Caballé as the stranger. Listen to Caballé’s pianissimo entrance into the trio “No, non ti son rivale” in 1.x; then tell me, if you can, that bel canto is not a gift from the Gods. Unfortunately neither this recording nor any other I have heard has an Isoletta capable of meeting Bellini’s terribly high standards.

the street song An aria in the Chinese opera *Lady Magnolia*.

Suicidio! . . . In questi fieri momenti tu sol me resti, e il cor mi tenti. “Suicide! In this fierce moment you are all that is left to me, and you tempt my heart.” Aria from Ponchielli’s *La gioconda*, 4.i. Grieved by Enzo’s betrayal, in despair at the fate of her mother (who has gone missing), and considering that she has paid her terrible debt to Laura, Gioconda contemplates suicide.

Tebaldi, Renata Italian soprano, born 1922, fl. 1950s and 60s. Contemporary of, and great rival to (at any rate in the minds of their fans), Maria

Callas. “If Maria could sing like Renata; or Renata act like Maria.” A big, beautiful spinto voice, perfectly suited to Verdi.

tenor The highest of the three common categories of male voice, with a usual range from C below middle C to A or B above. Real stars can go to C above; and Bellini scored for F above (e.g. in *I puritani*, 3.iii), though in those days these very high notes were sung falsetto, not full chest. Impresarios have been groaning about the shortage of good tenors for at least two hundred years. A good tenor voice is much rarer among males than a good soprano is among females.

tenuto Holding a note.

tessitura A key term in the vocabulary of working singers. It refers to the part of a singer’s range that will bear most of the burden of a role. In range of voice, there is really very little difference between one soprano (or mezzo, or tenor) and another. Any soprano should be able to deliver a note-perfect rendering of “Un bel di”. However, not every soprano would want to sing the entire role of Butterfly. This role has a mid-to-low tessitura as normally performed, and a singer may feel that two hours of singing the role, for several nights, may at least not show her voice off to its best advantage, at worst may actually harm it.

Tosca Opera by Puccini, 1900. One of the most popular of all operas, with a remarkably high proportion of lovely songs, including the “Vissi d’arte” sung by Margaret in Beijing, Tibet and Central Park. Floria Tosca is an opera singer; her lover Mario Cavaradossi is a painter. They live in Rome in 1800, under the reactionary clericalism of the Papal States, when it was still possible to think of Napoleon as a liberating force. Tosca is lusted after by Scarpia, the chief of police, and Cavaradossi is mixed up in revolutionary politics. To get his hands on Tosca, Scarpia arrests and tortures Cavaradossi. Tosca agrees to yield in return for a safe pass for herself and her lover; but as soon as Scarpia has signed it she stabs him. Scarpia has double-crossed her, however, and has secretly

ordered Cavarodossi shot, which he duly is. Tosca throws herself off the battlements.

Trionfal . . . di nuova speme. “Triumph of new hope”. A duet (strictly speaking, part of a duet) from Puccini’s opera *Tosca*, act 3. Before she killed Scarpia, Tosca was given to understand that Cavarodossi would be given a mock execution, then released. She goes to the execution place, on the roof of the castle, and tells Cavarodossi about this. They sing of the happy life they will have together when they are free.

La traviata (The Fallen Woman.) Opera by Verdi, 1853. Violetta is a high-class courtesan, living a life of pleasure in 1840s Paris. Alfredo, a young gentleman from the provinces, wins her heart and she goes to live with him. Alfredo’s father persuades her that Alfredo’s connection with her is ruining his family’s reputation, and spoiling his daughter’s chances of getting a decent husband. (The 1840s seem like an awfully long time ago here.) Sacrificing her love, Violetta goes back to her life of pleasure and dies of TB, though not before a deathbed reconciliation with Alfredo.

Il trovatore (The Troubador.) Opera by Verdi, 1853. A feast of wonderful songs, built around the kind of plot that gives opera plots a bad name. 15th century Spain: the troubador is Manrico, kidnapped as a baby by the gypsy Azucena. In fact he is the son of the old Count di Luna, who had Azucena’s mother burned for witchcraft. The old Count’s other son is the current Count, who loves the fair Leonora, who—of course!—loves Manrico. Azucena is captured by the young Count; Manrico is captured trying to free her; Leonora offers herself to the Count if he will free Manrico. The Count agrees; Leonora takes poison; the Count executes Manrico; Azucena then tells him Manrico was his brother.

Turandot Opera by Puccini, 1926. Suitors come from far and wide to woo the beautiful man-hating Chinese princess Turandot; but before she will marry anyone he must answer three riddles. Those who fail are executed. A handsome stranger passes the test, but when he sees Turandot’s distress at the thought of marriage, he gives her another chance: if she

can discover his name before sunrise the next day, he will submit to execution. His name is Calaf; but the punch line of the opera occurs when he deliberately tells Turandot this just before dawn, thus handing her the victory. She runs off to her father, the Emperor of China, and cries out: “I know the stranger’s name! His name is . . . love!” Well, you have to be there. Puccini died before finishing the opera. The last half of the last act was scored by Franco Alfano. This explains the Heir’s comment in chapter 41.

Una furtiva lagrima . . . negl’occhi suoi spuntò. “A furtive tear welled up in her eye.” Lovely aria from Donizetti’s opera *L’elisir d’amore*, 2.viii. Topsy from “elixir” and flattered by the attentions of all the women, who know about his sudden inheritance, Nemorino is playing hard to get with Adina. However, he has spotted her true affections (in the shape of that tear) and is filled with joy at the thought that she loves him.

A favorite with voice teachers for the phrase: *m’ama, sì, m’ama*—”she loves me, yes, she loves me”. To a non-Italian ear this sounds like *Mamma, sì, Mamma* and we wonder what Nemorino’s mother (who has no role in the opera) is doing in this aria. The point is that in the Italian language double letters must be pronounced and sung as DOUBLED, so that while *m’ama* is sung as “ma-ma”, *Mamma* would be “mam-ma”. Of a hundred thousand such tiny fragments is the singer’s art assembled, in agony and sweat.

Una voce poco fa . . . qui nel cor mi risuonò. “A voice [I heard] just now echoes in my heart.” An aria from Rossini’s opera *The Barber of Seville*, 1.v. Rosina, a prisoner in her guardian’s house, has been serenaded from the street by Count Almaviva, who is incognito. Enchanted, she vows to outwit the old boy and win herself the romantic stranger.

Un bel di . . . vedremo levarsi un fil di fumo sull’estremo confin del mare. “One fine day we shall see a thread of smoke rising on the horizon.” Aria from Puccini’s *Madame Butterfly*, act 2. It is now three years since Pinkerton deserted Butterfly, and the money he left her is almost gone. Still she keeps faith and believes he will return. Her family has

disowned her. Her only companions are her maid, Suzuki, and her infant, presumably two and a half years old. Suzuki doubts Pinkerton will return. “I have never yet heard of a foreign husband who returned,” she says. Butterfly replies angrily. Suzuki begins to weep. Butterfly, her face shining with hope, sings this wonderful, heartbreaking aria.

Butterfly is, as Margaret herself points out in chapter 50, a demanding role usually taken on only by mature singers; yet “Un bel di” is a favorite of voice teachers, especially in the Orient, and it is not surprising that Margaret already has it in her repertoire when she is exiled to Tibet.

Verdi, Giuseppe Opera composer, 1813-1901. The greatest of them all. Twenty-eight operas, of which *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore*, *La traviata*, *Don Carlo*, *Aida* and *Otello* are only the glittering snow-capped summits.

Verranno a te sull'aure . . . i miei sospiri ardenti. “They will come to you on the breezes, my ardent sighs.” A love duet from Donizetti’s opera *Lucia di Lammermoor*; 1.ii. Meeting Lucia in her garden, Edgardo tells her he is off to France. At parting, they sing these words to each other. It is their last moment of happiness together.

Ivespri siciliani (The Sicilian Vespers.) Italian version of Verdi’s French opera *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, 1855. Sicily under French occupation, 1282 A.D. Montforte, the French governor, is surprisingly tolerant of the young Sicilian patriot Arrigo. Arrigo loves Elena, another patriot. A third patriot, the guerrilla leader Procida, secretly returns from exile to incite an uprising, which he will begin by having Montforte killed at a ball. Arrigo learns Montforte is his father, and saves him from the assassination attempt. The other conspirators are all jailed; but Arrigo intercedes to get an amnesty, and Montforte agrees to his marriage with Elena. The fanatical Procida, however, uses the sound of the wedding bells as signal for a massacre of the French—a historical event, the so-called “Sicilian vespers”. [“Vespers” is the sixth of the seven hours in the medieval church day, when bells summon Christians to prayer. The full seven are: matins, prime, terce, sext, nones, vespers, compline.]

Vesti la giubba . . . e la faccia infarina. “On with the [clown’s] costume and the whitened [literally ‘enfoured’] face.” Sung by the clown Canio as he is putting on his stage make-up in Leoncavallo’s opera *I pagliacci* (The Clowns), just after discovering that his sweetheart has betrayed him. If you possess only one operatic aria, it’s this one. The part everyone knows begins: *Ridi, pagliaccio, sul tuo amore infranto . . .* (“Laugh, clown, over your shattered love.” Translated into English by Sam Lewis and Joe Young, and set to an entirely different tune by Ted Fiorito, it became the 1928 pop song “Laugh, Clown, Laugh”.)

“Vesti la giubba, your mother plays the tuba . . .” vamped Sid Caesar on prime-time TV, in the days when this stuff was common coin.

Violetta See *La Traviata*.

Vissi d’arte . . . vissi d’amore, non feci mai male ad anima viva. “I have lived for art, I have lived for love, nor ever did harm to any living thing.” Aria from Puccini’s *Tosca*, act 2. Known in Italy as “La preghiera di Tosca”—Tosca’s prayer. Tosca is in the apartments of Scarpia, the chief of police. Her lover, Cavarodossi, is under arrest, and Scarpia tells Tosca the only way she can save him is to let him, Scarpia, make love to her. Tosca shrinks back in horror, when the sound of drums comes through the open window. It is soldiers, Scarpia tells her, guarding the gallows that are being built for Cavarodossi’s execution. Tosca, in despair, sings this heavenly prayer. The A flat Rocco refers to in chapter 42 is on the second syllable of “Signor” in the last sentence.

vocal score See “score”.

FOOTNOTES

¹The Italian language does not require that every word in an opera’s name have its initial letter capitalized. After the first word, only proper nouns get a capital letter.

² Kenneth Stern, review of Rodolfo Celletti's *A History of Bel Canto*; in *Opera Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (November 1994), p. 114.

³ Herbert Weinstock, *Vincenzo Bellini—His Life and His Operas*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1971, p. 340.

⁴ According to tradition. Scholars have pointed out that we do not know this for sure. See, for example, William Ashbrook's *Donizetti and his Operas*, Cambridge University Press, 1982; page 72. The principal grounds for doubt concern the librettist, Romani, who was a world-class procrastinator.

⁵ "Authorship in Chinese music is mostly anonymous." (Liang Mingyue, *Music of the Billion*, Heinrichshofen 1985.) Nor can any first-performance date be given. Chinese operas are really a species of folk art, though the stories have very respectable literary or historical antecedents.

⁶ Harold C. Schonberg, *The Lives of the Great Composers*, W.W. Norton & Co., 1980. p. 475.

⁷ Though some composers' music—notably Mozart's—is, by general agreement, unsuited to it.

⁸ Whether Francis Toye's biography (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1934) is the best, I do not know, not having read any of the others; but it is surely the most ironical. The book's first sentence reads: "To the best of my belief there is no demand whatever for a life of Rossini in English."