

OBERTO

Oxford Brookes: Exploring Research Trends in Opera

OPERA AND VIOLENCE



Oxford Brookes University, Oxford

Tuesday 11th September 2018

Programme of the day

9-9.45 Registration

9.45-10 Welcome (Barbara Eichner and Alexandra Wilson)

10-11 SESSION 1: Exoticism - Colonialism

Francesco Bracci (University of Bern): 'The violence of the weak: colonialism, violence and irrationality in 19th-century opera'

Richard Langham Smith (Royal College of Music): 'Hardened criminals, softened violence: bloodshed in *Carmen*'

11-11.30 Tea and coffee

11.30-1 SESSION 2A: Violence in contemporary stage works

George Hagggett (Royal Holloway): "'heart hair mouth nail hand skin blood": hearing the thirteenth-century body in George Benjamin and Martin Crimp's *Written on Skin*'

Nadine Scharfetter (University of Music and Performing Arts Graz): 'Olga Neuwirth's *American Lulu* (2006-2011): Alban Berg's *Lulu* against the backdrop of the civil rights movement'

Annalise Smith (Cornell University): 'Beautiful music for ugly situations: operatic depictions of sexual violence'

11.30-1 SESSION 2B: Abusive relationships

Emma Kavanagh (Linacre College, University of Oxford): "'Non! Non!": *Pelléas et Melisande*, symbolism, and issues of consent'

Robert Rawson (Canterbury Christ Church University): 'Jenůfa and Kat'a's public and private reactions to the violence of the samodurstvo in Janáček's *Jenůfa* and *Kat'a Kabanova*'

Sid Wolters-Tiedge (University of Bayreuth): 'Violently funny? Thoughts about staging violence in Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*'

1-2 Lunch

2-3 SESSION 3A: Dis/ability and violence

Christina Guillaumier (Royal College of Music): 'War in the late operas of Sergei Prokofiev'

Charlotte Armstrong (University of York): '(Re)interpreting impairment: disability and moral degeneracy in Franz Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten* at Komische Oper Berlin (January 2018)'

2-3 SESSION 3B: Reception and (post-)Fascism

Georg Burgstaller (RILM New York): 'No more storm: the reception of Britten's *Peter Grimes* in occupied Austria, 1947'

Nicolò Palazetti (University of Birmingham): "'Gronda il sangue dale più vaghe apparanze": the Italian premiere of Bartók's *Bluebird's Castle* in 1938'

3-3.30 Tea and coffee

3.30-5 SESSION 4: Mozart and violence in contemporary stagings

Margaret Cormier (McGill University): "'Tortures of every kind": staging violence against women in two productions of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*'

Alessandro Talevi (freelance opera director): 'Violence at the end of the pier'

Laura Attridge (freelance opera director): 'Leaning into the discomfort: approaching classic operatic repertoire in 2018'

5pm SESSION 5: Closing session and general discussion (chaired by Mark Berry)

Maria Thomas (University of Hertfordshire): "'I was there": a reflection on Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* at the Royal Opera House'

Charlotte Armstrong (University of York): '(Re)interpreting impairment: disability and moral degeneracy in Franz Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten* at Komische Oper Berlin'

The paper critically examines the colliding narratives of disability and moral degeneracy in Franz Schreker's *Die Gezeichneten*, and their reimagining and reinterpretation in Calixto Bieito's 2018 production at Berlin's Komische Oper. The production saw the amplification of the work's aspects of cultural critique to create a disconcertingly modern drama of child sexual abuse. Drawing upon the insights of disability studies, the paper will illustrate the way in which, in Bieito's production, the protagonist's paedophilic desires align him with conventional disability stereotypes. Conversely, the presentation of Alviano as non-disabled will be unpicked in order to demonstrate that, whilst the physical component of his disability is excluded, its figurative significance is emphasised almost beyond recognition.

The subsequent analysis of the noblemen and their activities on Elysium provides valuable insights into the ways in which Bieito's production upholds those aspects of Schreker's original that constitute a form of cultural commentary. In his comments for the programme, Bieito briefly alluded to the pervasiveness of organised child abuse in both families and larger organisations, and, despite insisting that his production was in no way politicised, the implication of a degenerate society was writ large. In this sense, the production exemplified the way in which, as David Levin has suggested, innovative and imaginative opera productions 'steer [...] works into a kind of brave new aesthetic and representational world, one that (some would argue) is much more likely to expose the works' unanticipated and often unconscious historical, ideological, socio-political or aesthetic resonances' (Levin 1997, 50).

Laura Attridge (freelance opera director): 'Leaning into the discomfort: approaching classic operatic repertoire in 2018'

We are at a moment of great change for opera: its value and relevance are in question; the art form itself is being broken open and critically examined. Many claim opera is in crisis, but we see a new generation of dynamic artists already bringing new energy and new voices to an "old-fashioned" art form still struggling within the constraints of its own history. While much of opera's future lies in the creation of new work which responds directly to the ever-changing world around us, this is not to discount the importance and value of classic works already firmly placed in the repertoire: the best of these have lasted the "test of time" for good reason, but many present difficulties for a director when realised for a 21st-century audience, particularly when we acknowledge the patriarchal biases that have shaped the operatic canon. How are these pieces to be approached in the here and now, and in the future? I will discuss this issue illustrated using my experience of directing productions of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* for audiences in 2018.

Francesco Bracci (University of Bern): 'The violence of the weak: colonialism, violence and irrationality in 19th-century opera'

From Spontini's *Fernand Cortez* (1809) to Delibes's *Lakmé* (1883), 19th-century opera has often dealt with stories of colonial rule and national resistance against it. A similar pattern can be identified in most of these operas: the shortcomings of colonial rule are recognized,

but the reaction of the subjugated people turns out to be wild and uncontrollable. In the end, the advanced nation usually has the upper hand or at least appears as morally superior. The violence of non-Europeans is generally caused by their irrationality and by their primitive, ferocious religions. This view of the colonized as barbarians closely resembles the well-known depiction of the irrationality of the popular masses in grand opéra facing issues of social injustice and revolution, like *La muette de Portici* and *Le prophète*. In both cases, the European upper class (the intended audience of opera) is superficially criticized but ultimately seen as the only holder of rational thinking and therefore the only legitimate holder of power. Within this political frame, the paper will analyse scenes of violence in several “colonial” operas; attention will also be given to lesser known operas like Verdi’s *Alzira*. Literary and philosophical texts like John Stuart Mill’s *A Few Words of Non-Intervention* will be referred to in order to find parallels and elucidation also outside the operatic culture.

Georg Burgstaller (RILM New York): ‘No more storm: the reception of Britten’s *Peter Grimes* in occupied Austria, 1947’

In the course of its triumphant conquest of European stages, Benjamin Britten’s *Peter Grimes* (1945) received its Austrian premiere – to mixed reviews – during the 1947 Grazer Festwochen, a festival organized in cooperation with British occupying forces and borne out of the latter’s policy of political re-education.

Unlike early observers such as Edmund Wilson, who deemed the opera an allegory of ‘bombing, machine-gunning, mining, torpedoing, ambushing humanity’ (1947), reviewers of the Graz performances opted not to mention the war, and their descriptions of the music certainly intimate the country’s wartime isolation from international musical developments. While Hans Keller diagnosed British resistances to Britten’s music as the result of ‘group self-contempt’ in the face of a dominant Austro-German tradition (1950), a reverse spectacle may be observed in Austrian responses to *Peter Grimes* within the attendant social context. The paper will argue that critical resistances were thinly veiled by a distinctly Austrian ethos of the country as an “island of the blessed” (Insel der Seligen) that curbed engagement with the moral questions arising from the work’s violent themes, incidentally mirroring the image of society portrayed in the opera itself, in which the borough’s hatred towards Grimes is obscured – though, again, thinly – by social homogeneity (‘We live and let live, and look / We keep our hands to ourselves’).

A case study in how cultural identity influences aesthetic judgement of opera, the paper fills lacunae in relation to the post-war reception of a key work of the 20th century.

Margaret Cormier (McGill University): “Tortures of every kind’: staging violence against women in two productions of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*’

Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* is among those mainstays of the operatic performance canon whose material has become hard to swallow for modern audiences. While criticism of the opera tends to focus on *alla turca* exoticism and charges of Islamophobia, violence against women in the seraglio is equally pervasive. How do 21st-century directors grapple with the threatened and attempted rape and torture throughout

this text? The paper compares two opposite approaches to the violence in *Die Entführung* taken by Calixto Bieito (Berlin, 2004) and Wajdi Mouawad (Lyon, 2016). While the former has achieved some infamy for its allegedly gratuitous presentations of violence and sex, the latter neutralizes the violence of the opera through an ambitious reconceptualization of its story.

These productions, in their different approaches to the violence of the opera, create different meanings in the operatic text, whose comic light-heartedness seems at times an uneasy match to the seriousness of the issues in our current culture. In Bieito's production, Mozart's music frequently becomes an ironic accompaniment to brutal depictions of violence. Mouawad, on the other hand, takes the light-hearted music in something like Blonde and Osmin's duet at face value, reimagining the scene as playful, affectionate joking, and nullifies the violent language entirely.

These new takes on the violence of *Die Entführung* necessarily intersect with the opera's through-running currents of Islamophobia and misogyny. Violence against women thus becomes a way in to thinking about the political and ethical challenges of staging the operatic canon in the present.

Christina Guillaumier (Royal College of Music): 'War in the late operas of Sergei Prokofiev'

The canvas and iconography of war provided the backdrop for three out of Prokofiev's eight operas. The composer looked at war through the lens of the human being, dwelling on personal grief and individual narratives even if these were set within a broader and staged backdrop dictated by his political context. This humanisation of war enabled him to put his gift for characterization to good use; he painted people and landscapes, attempting to move away from the bigger Soviet issues, in search of a way to mediate this relevant concept to contemporary audiences in purely musical terms.

The paper will focus on Prokofiev's rarely heard last opera, *The Story of a Real Man*, a work that explores the physical and psychological consequences of war and violence. Because of the many challenges the composer faced in setting a Soviet text with journalistic roots, the work enjoyed a rather lukewarm reception; today, the opera is at best considered a contested cultural product, when not a Soviet aberration. The paper seeks to re-evaluate *The Story of a Real Man* and position it within the context of Prokofiev's operatic oeuvre. Although there is no doubt that this work is a product of its time, today's technology and stage developments make this work ripe for a re-envisioning by providing dramaturgical solutions that can be fully integrated with the composer's own theatrical vision. Finally, the paper will analyse the complexities and challenges as well as the opportunities that this work provides for today's opera producers, dramaturgs and audiences.

George Haggitt (Royal Holloway): "heart hair mouth nail hand skin blood": hearing the thirteenth-century body in George Benjamin and Martin Crimp's *Written on Skin*'

There is little in Katie Mitchell's production of George Benjamin and Martin Crimp's 2012 opera *Written on Skin* (*WoS*) that goes unseen: not only does the 13th-century Troubadour plot feature an on-stage orgasm, but also throat-slitting, evisceration, cannibalism and

suicide. Nevertheless, when these lurid events are painted by 'the Boy' (the heroine's illicit lover), the audience can never see them. Instead, performing what Crimp and Benjamin term 'Miniatures', he takes out a page and, singing, describes the illumination that he has painted onto it. In so doing, he turns his pictures into uttered acts of ekphrasis, the rhetorical device through which visual art is described, mediated, and experienced anew.

In asking how this device can function within opera, and unpacking its potency in *Written on Skin*, the paper will not only lift ekphrasis from its specificity to the written word and into the performative realm of the sung act, but also refer outwards from *Written on Skin's* source texts to locate its viscera within thirteenth-century understandings of the body. It will dissect the opera into four sensory organs – eye, ear, skin, and mouth – and ask what it means to watch and listen to a singer as she caresses velum or eats a human heart. Ekphrasis, it will emerge, is more deeply embodied, more erotic, and more violent than it has previously been imagined to be.

Emma Kavanagh (Linacre College, University of Oxford): "Non! Non!": *Pelléas et Mélisande*, symbolism, and issues of consent'

Claude Debussy's 1902 opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, inspired by Maurice Maeterlinck's 1893 Symbolist play of the same name, is a work with a well-established place in the canon. Both play and opera are driven by the themes of love and jealousy, which in turn lead to violence and death. Driven wild by jealousy, Golaud is the opera's most overtly violent character, particularly in Act 4 when he not only drags Mélisande along the floor by her hair, but also kills Pelléas and wounds his wife on discovering their tryst by the fountain.

When we think about *Pelléas*, however, it is important consider it in light of the Symbolist aesthetic; from the outset, questions go unanswered, things go unsaid. Beneath the physical acts we see onstage, lurks further sinister and subversive violence of which Golaud is not the only perpetrator. The paper will explore these subversive acts of violence and their interplay with the opera's themes of innocence and purity. It will also discuss issues of consent in light of Catherine Clément's reading of the opera, and questions of silence and complicity in relation to the Symbolist aesthetic. Finally, the paper will explore *Pelléas et Mélisande* as a story about cyclical violence, and how this can only be ended in death.

Richard Langham Smith (Royal College of Music): 'Hardened criminals, softened violence: bloodshed in *Carmen*'

19th-century Northern European Hispanophiles saw Spain as a bloody, violent place and were rather attracted by this aspect. Prosper Mérimée, author of the novella on which Bizet's *Carmen* was based, visited Andalusia in the early 1830s and wrote four essays which (it is often forgotten) Halévy and Meilhac drew upon for in their libretto; all were about violence of one sort or another. Mérimée also learned about bloodshed in the bullfight from his companion Estébanez, an *aficionado* of this activity who kept him informed about its more extreme developments, for instance of tiger-cubs and cats fighting the bulls and supplementing the exploding implements launched at them if they froze in the ring.

Halévy and Meilhac retained multiple weaponry into their libretto which, in detail, can be considered much closer to Mérimée's original than has often been assumed. The smugglers always carry blunderbusses; the gypsy girls have daggers; Carmen wounds a fellow worker with her work-knife; the soldiers have swords, daggers and guns, the Basques carry sharpened iron sticks. Escamillo and José fight with *navajas*: deadly double-sided knives which can range from a few inches in length to the length of a sword.

The librettists also considerably exploit the violence of the fight between the girls in the tobacco factory. Factual evidence of this adds to the reputation of *Carmen* as one of the first operas to import contemporary actuality. The atmosphere of danger is subsumed into the words of the chorus in Act III where 'danger lurks at every step' and in the novella Carmen's husband shoots the wounded Remendado in the face at point blank range, boasting that 'no one will recognise him now' and then nonchalantly plays a game of solitaire. The question of how literary sources are transferred between scenes and characters will be examined.

Musically, the fight between Escamillo and José was also more extended in the first production, and presents interesting musical features, stripping the harmony bare and orchestrating in a novel way. In the more common later vocal score with recitatives, this is considerably shortened and weakened. The 1911 recording of the opera, a key source demonstrating how key scenes were done and how the spoken dialogue was performed, will be introduced. Such undercurrents have perhaps been ignored in recent concept productions (show biz – Kosky – Political topicality – Bieito), but lazy in their interrogation of the violence already implicit in the opera libretto from its sources.

Nicolò Palazetti (University of Birmingham): "Gronda il sangue dale più vaghe apparanze': the Italian premiere of Bartók's *Bluebird's Castle* in 1938'

On 5 May 1938, the Budapest Royal Opera House brought its production of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* to the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino with the support of the fascist regime. This Italian premiere was the sixth performance ever of Bartók's only opera and it long preceded the American (1949), French (1950), Argentinian (1953) and English premieres (1957). The allegorical representation of sexual and psychological violence is a constitutive part of *Bluebeard's Castle* and was emphasised by the staging of Kálmán Nádasdy and Gusztáv Oláh. The Italian critics described the work as 'violent' and 'brutal', 'lugubrious' and 'horrific'. Moreover, the gruesome atmosphere of *Bluebeard's Castle* – the blood motif runs throughout the opera – assumed a political significance in the Italy of the time, a period characterised by the rise of anti-Semitism and the promulgation of Racial Laws (autumn 1938).

This paper explores the subtle violence and the Jewish metaphor that pervades Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* in relation to the political implications of its Florentine staging and the institutional violence promoted by the fascist establishment. It could be argued that the fabulous libretto by Béla Balázs depicts a magnificently ordered cosmos (the Castle) threatened by the Jewish murderous woman Judith (Anderson 2006). From this perspective, the Italian premiere of *Bluebeard's Castle* – which occurred four days before Hitler's official visit to Florence – could be understood as an act of propaganda that paved the way for the institutionalisation of anti-Semitism within the fascist regime. Nonetheless, the ambivalent meanings of the work trouble such a straightforward interpretation: it is worth noting, for

instance, that Balázs was both Jewish and communist and that, on the same day as the Italian premiere of *Bluebeard's Castle*, Bartók joined the signatories of a public declaration of protest against the anti-Jewish laws promulgated by the Hungarian dictatorship. This and other contextual observations foreground a posteriori the potential and implicit value of “resistance” of the Italian Bluebeard, whereby the Castle comes to epitomise a fascist Europe, and Judith a doomed Jew.

Robert Rawson (Canterbury Christ Church University): ‘Jenůfa and Kat’a’s public and private reactions to the violence of the samodurstvo in Janáček’s *Jenůfa* and *Kat’a Kabanova*’

Janáček’s *Jenůfa* is remarkable for its time, not only for being the first opera in prose, but also for its rarity as an operatic setting of an entirely new play – *Její pastorkyňa*, by the feminist playwright Gabriela Preissová. At the heart of Preissova’s play is the idea of the oppressive and petty tyranny localised within a small community and family – frequently known by the term borrowed from Russian literature samodurstvo [самодурство]. Jenůfa’s own experience of this petty tyranny is through her domineering step-mother (Kostelnička) and Laca, the jealous brother of her fiancé. The former murders Jenůfa’s baby born out of wedlock to protect the family honour, the latter slashes Jenůfa’s cheek to punish his brother, whom he suspects of loving only her appearance. The Kostelnička publicly confesses to killing the baby and is led away to face trial and ultimately Jenůfa takes control of her own future.

In terms of dealing with the samodurstvo, there are parallels with *Kat’a Kabanová*. Here, Kat’a too breaks the taboos of the petty tyranny (in the person of her brutal mother-in-law, Kabanicha). Kat’a confesses privately that her husband beats her, but the public confession (of adultery) in this case is made by Kat’a (who, unlike the Kostelnička, has not committed any acts of violence), whose onstage suicide concludes *Kat’a Kabanová*. It is argued here that *Jenůfa* more rigorously confronts the dilemmas of modernity by offering non-violent alternative reactions (alternative to those found Ostrovsky’s novel, for example) to the violent and suffocating samodurstvo.

Nadine Scharfetter (University of Music and Performing Arts Graz): ‘Olga Neuwirth’s *American Lulu* (2006-2011): Alban Berg’s *Lulu* against the backdrop of the civil rights movement’

Death, murder, suicide, psychological violence – Alban Berg’s unfinished opera *Lulu* (1927-1935) covers all of these issues. Consequently, these issues can also be found in Olga Neuwirth’s reinterpretation of Berg’s opera. In *American Lulu* (2006-2011), however, Neuwirth transfers Berg’s *Lulu* to the USA in the 1950s and 1970s, putting the plot of the opera in the context of the civil rights and various liberation movements. This social backdrop is reinforced by recasting *Lulu* and other characters as African Americans.

The paper will address the issue of how this social backdrop affects the representation of psychological and physical violence in Olga Neuwirth’s *American Lulu* in comparison with Alban Berg’s *Lulu*. In this context, the following questions will be dealt with: how is this social backdrop represented? What kind of problems arise of this social backdrop regarding

violence? Is there a difference regarding the portrayal of violence in Neuwirth's *American Lulu* and Berg's *Lulu*?

Annalise Smith (Cornell University): 'Beautiful music for ugly situations: operatic depictions of sexual violence'

Opera houses regularly program works that contain scenes of sexual violence. In the 2015/2016 season, for example, *Don Giovanni*, *Carmen*, and *Rigoletto* ranked among the top-ten most performed operas in the world. The enduring popularity of such works demonstrates the tendency to prioritize music over any discomfort with the sexual violence it contains. Our appreciation for beautiful music can hinder our recognition of operatic sexual violence and even cause some to question whether it occurred at all. In the wake of the #MeToo movement, many opera goers—especially those of younger generations—are growing more sensitive to the disconnect between violence in the plot and uncritical stagings. Reconciling the beauty of music with depictions of pervasive sexual violence can be difficult and even impossible, particularly when operatic violence seems to have few consequences.

In her 2014 post-minimalist opera *Thumbprint*, composer Kamala Sankaram escapes the problematic allure of beautiful music by setting the work's rape scene through a series of unpitched sound effects, harsh, breathy exclamations and percussive noises. This choice not only musically distinguishes the rape from the rest of the opera, but it also makes the rape dramatically and audibly explicit to the audience. Denying the audience a musical panacea, *Thumbprint* brings sexual violence to the foreground, focusing on the impact the rape has on the victim and her community. *Thumbprint* demonstrates that opera can do more than replicate rape culture; it can also critique the social structures that perpetuate it.

Alessandro Talevi (freelance opera director): 'Violence at the end of the pier'

Despite being titled a '*dramma giocoso*', modern productions of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* often amplify a realist, literal, reading of the explicit and implicit violence which is intrinsic to Da Ponte and Mozart's adaptation of the Don Juan myth, which includes murder, rape, abduction, battery and psychological torture. In such interpretations, the comedic layer of the dramaturgy is downplayed, resulting in a 'noir-ish' but emotionally cold staging typical of 'operatic violence' or in unconvincing examples of stage fighting. Opera North's 2012 production (revived 2018), directed by Alessandro Talevi, embraced the challenge of the comedy inherent in the libretto and scored to sharpen the effect of the violence. It used techniques including puppetry drawn from the 'Punch and Judy' tradition, hence drawing on the *commedia dell'arte*, as well as on a closer attention to the comedic potential of the text. The production suggests how ironic or farcical dramatisations of violence offers one mode in which modern opera audiences can read operatic violence from earlier periods consistently or in contradistinction with contemporary mores. The paper will highlight key episodes in the opera using video extracts from the Opera North DVD, contrasted with other depictions of operatic violence including melodrama and contemporary opera.

Maria Thomas (University of Hertfordshire): 'I was there: a reflection on Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell* at the Royal Opera House'

On 29 June 2015, Michieletto's new production of *Guillaume Tell* opened at the Royal Opera House. The production mixed picture book illustrations with upsetting scenes which led to a debate about violence in opera productions. I attended the first night of this production, sat in the Amphitheatre and therefore experienced the 'near-riot of protest in the Gods' (Christiansen, 2015). Despite having been an opera attendee from a very young age, this was something I had never experienced: not the uncomfortable feeling I experienced, nor the response from those around me. Reading the media response over the following days, I reflected on what caused the uproar. Many articles refer to the 'gang rape', but for me, the uncomfortable feeling began earlier in the scene and the fact that I can still (three years on) vividly remember the scene demonstrates the skill of the actress.

The production was recently revived in Palermo's Teatro Massimo. James Imam's (2018) review for Bachtrack states: 'They say that time is a healer. Certainly, the imbroglio that accompanied Michieletto's ROH debut three years ago now feels like a thing of the distant past.' This production has led to a number of changes at the ROH including notifying audience members of violence and upsetting scenes and, I am sure, for many of us who saw the performance, the uncomfortable feeling will stay for a long time.

The paper will explore my personal experience of the performance, the response of the ROH and the media.

Sid Wolters-Tiedge (University of Bayreuth): 'Violently funny? Thoughts about staging violence in Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*'

Traditional Punch-and-Judy plays are known for their violence, for which the public either loves them or criticises them severely. It is therefore no surprise that Harrison Birtwistle's opera version *Punch and Judy* of 1968 is infused with violence, both in libretto and music. The paper will argue that, while the unmotivated and excessive display of violence is generally perceived as funny in the plays, in Birtwistle's opera violence is presented in a rather bleak and uncompromising way. Although parody is widely regarded as an important feature of Pruslin's text and Birtwistle's music, the murders – acts far more serious than hitting someone with a slapstick – are not framed as laughable or comical.

This lack of relieving humour points out the grotesque of Punch's actions more clearly. Whereas the distance to the humour of the underlying model may be seen as an instrument of reflection about the violence incorporated in the piece, the final decision about how violence is presented and understood depends on the scenic realisation.

By analysing scenes from two recent productions of *Punch and Judy* from Berlin and Vienna, it will be shown how different aspects of violence inherent in the opera can be used and presented on stage, representing different scholarly interpretations of the meaning of violence in *Punch and Judy*.



OBERTO – named after Giuseppe Verdi’s first opera – is the opera research unit at Oxford Brookes University and provides a forum for the investigation of opera in all of its interdisciplinary richness.

STUDY WITH US

At Oxford Brookes University we offer opportunities for the study of opera at all levels, but particularly at master’s and doctoral level. Our postgraduate students automatically become members of OBERTO and have the opportunity to attend a wide variety of extra-curricular activities that complement their studies.

MASTER’S LEVEL STUDY

The MA in Music at Oxford Brookes allows students to specialise in opera in two ways. Students can either study opera within the context of a broader examination of 19th-century music and its role in society or explore correlations between opera and film music. The course also offers the opportunity to build networks with industry contacts through a professional experience module.

PHD LEVEL STUDY

OBERTO staff welcome enquiries from applicants interested in studying for a PhD. Doctoral supervision is available in areas including:

- Opera and operatic culture of the 19th and early 20th centuries
- Verdi, Puccini, Wagner, Strauss, fin-de-siècle ‘redemption operas’
- Music and national identities
- Opera and gender
- Religion and the church on the operatic stage
- Opera and politics
- Opera in popular culture (especially opera in film)
- The staging of opera
- Reception studies, canon formation and opera historiography
- Singers, recordings and constructions of celebrity
- Operatic stereotypes