

# Ghosting Agrippina: Genealogies of Performance in Italian Baroque Opera

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**I**t began with a non-beginning. Opera, hailed as a new genre, was born out of a deathly premise, that of reviving the lost tradition of classical tragedy. Since then the nature of operatic performances has been intrinsically haunted by ghosts. Not only was opera developed as the *simulacrum* of an invented past, but already since the time of Claudio Monteverdi, the phantasmatic quality of performance was made evident either by direct attempts at representing shadows and underworlds on stage (from Orpheus to the various *ombre* of dead characters), or by tangential discourses on the uncanny characteristic of operatic singing—the split of staged *personae* made evident by the vocal technique required to interpret and resuscitate a deceased figure.

The historiography of opera still struggles with the genre's supposed origins, highlighting the “alternative” narratives of courtly spectacles (Florence 1600) or the opening of public theaters (Venice 1637).<sup>1</sup> Yet

This article reflects many years of work on seventeenth-century Italian opera as part of my research at the Università degli Studi di Pavia and the University of Pennsylvania, as well as presentations at various international conferences. Although the colleagues and friends who have kindly offered their insights are too numerous to be included here, I wish to acknowledge a few who have helped make this article better: Mauro Calcagno, Bianca de Mario, Maria Murphy, Emilio Sala, Daniel Shapiro, Charles Shrader, and Daniel Villegas Vélez. I also wish to thank the staff of the Music Library of the University of California, Berkeley, and the British Library.

<sup>1</sup> Lorenzo Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, trans. David Bryant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 162. Tim Carter, too, has emphasized how there are

the historiographical quest to uncover opera's origins fails to locate a single, illuminating moment, owing to the haunted and reiterative nature of the operatic spectacle. As an act of revival, opera was born already dead. Baroque opera has no origin and several origins at the same time. Like a ghost, it reappears despite our having missed its original appearance; it ends right where it starts. Although reviving the Greek past was mostly a late-Renaissance project, early opera was (and still is) considered quintessentially "baroque" because it invented and staged that very past.<sup>2</sup> It has even been said that opera's "second death"—the repetition of an original that never existed—was the product of establishing the conditions of possibility for early modern monarchies to exist via the logic of an absolutist theatrical fantasy.<sup>3</sup>

With no origins to locate, historians of baroque opera have focused mostly on the textual genealogies of the works they study, identifying strings of influences in a search for archetypes. As productive as this has been in highlighting the complexity of textual networks behind seventeenth-century operas (e.g., prose theater, *commedia dell'arte*, novels, and popular music), the study of operatic intertextuality has identified itself with Orpheus, as an inescapable look backwards that is destined to fail: if every text is intertextual, then the search for origins amounts to an infinite regress, doomed from its very (non)beginning.

How, then, should one write about intertextuality and the unfolding of operatic subjects? This essay follows some seventeenth- and eighteenth-century operatic representations of Agrippina the Younger

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"several different histories of seventeenth-century opera that might be written" in "Mask and Illusion: Italian Opera after 1637," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Tim Carter and John Butt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 241–82, at 241. See also Lydia Goehr, "The Concept of Opera," in *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*, ed. Helen M. Greenwald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 92–135, at 97–101.

<sup>2</sup> For such use of the term "baroque" as a historiographical category, see José Antonio Maravall, *Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure*, trans. Terry Cochran (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986); Jesús Pérez-Magallón, "The Baroque: The Intellectual and Geopolitical Reasons for a Historiographical Erasure," *Les Dossiers Du Grihl 2* (2012), <http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/5197> (published online 21 June 2012). See also Helen Hills, ed., *Rethinking the Baroque* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Christine Buci-Glucksmann, *Baroque Reason: The Aesthetics of Modernity* (London: Sage, 1994); and eadem, *The Madness of Vision: On Baroque Aesthetics* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> This is the Lacanian point of view as elaborated by Mladen Dolar in Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar, *Opera's Second Death* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1–19. Yet such a psychoanalytical reading overshadows the emphasis placed by contemporaries on the notion of the "musical rebirth" of opera as a historical paradigm. In this regard, I am more inclined to conceive the emergence of the first operas as an attempt to produce mimetically the musical return of the past as the "second birth" of music. This notion of mimesis as the production of a paradigm in the context of early opera's "second origins" is elaborated in Daniel Villegas Vélez, "Mimetologies: Aesthetic Politics in Early Modern Opera" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2016).

as a historiographical exercise in non-linear genealogies. It investigates a constellation of operas on the subject of the Julio-Claudian family: Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, (Venice 1643); Peri's *Nerone fatto Cesare*, Venice 1693; Paolo Magni's *Agrippina*, Milan 1703; and, George Frideric Handel's *L'Agrippina*, Venice 1709. In these operas the haunted status of performances is either made explicit through dramatic means or couched in contemporary poems dedicated to the main singers. Covering several decades of operatic history, the corpus under consideration is only "early" opera in that it carries with it the reverberations of the same haunted quality of the operatic origins, via the choice of a subject—the Julio-Claudian family and its controversial protagonists—that was already conceived as an operatic intervention about the idea of the "return of history."<sup>4</sup> The essay makes use of terminology from both performance studies and the "spectral turn" in the humanities so as to provide a hauntological frame with which to rethink the historiography of Italian baroque opera and its genealogies.

*Introduction to Opera Hauntology: Agrippina's Genealogies of Performance*

A specter haunted Europe throughout the seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries—the specter of *Agrippina ferox*.<sup>5</sup> Over the course of a few decades, Agrippina the Younger (Emperor Nero's mother) appeared on Italian stages several times; her reappearance was often accompanied by a sense of self-awareness about the act of "reviving." As this essay will show, opera producers used the role of Agrippina to make a point about performance itself, always through the use of meta-theatrical devices and spectral metaphors.

A famous example of this kind of spectral narrative appears in the sonnet "Non è Ottavia," dedicated by the composer and musician Benedetto Ferrari to the singer Anna Renzi for the role of Octavia in Giovanni Francesco Busenello and Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mitchell Cohen, *The Politics of Opera: A History from Monteverdi to Mozart* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 124–27.

<sup>5</sup> On the use of the adjective *ferox* in connection to Agrippina the Younger, see Henry W. Traub, "Tacitus' Use of *Ferocia*," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 84 (1953): 250–61, at 259. See also Anthony Barrett, *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Benedetto Ferrari, "Per la signora Anna Renzi romana insigne cantatrice rappresentante Ottavia ripudiata, e comessa all'onde entr'uno schifo," in *Le glorie della Signora Anna Renzi romana* (Venice: Surian, 1644), 28. The translation is taken from Magnus Tensing Schneider, "Seeing the Empress Again: On Doubling in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 24 (2012): 249–91, at 249.

Non è Ottavia, che lagrime diffonde  
 esule, esposta a le spumose arene;  
 è un mostro, che con note alte, e profonde  
 acrescer vâ lo stuol de le Sirene.

It is not Octavia who sheds her tears,  
 exiled, exposed on foamy sands;  
 it is a monster which, with high and low notes,  
 goes to augment the Sirens' flock.

"It is *not* Octavia." By beginning with a negation, Ferrari makes evident not only the obvious split of singer and character, but also the doubleness of representation itself, in which the character exceeds their own role *as* character through performance.<sup>7</sup> This excess, this monstrous quality of acting, allowed baroque opera to be associated with the supernatural.<sup>8</sup> In the contemporary literary imagination, monsters were defined as simultaneously beyond nature and part of earthly transience: real and not real, creatures and metaphors, good and evil.<sup>9</sup> Early modern theater was the realm of monstrosity and hybridity.<sup>10</sup> In seventeenth-century Italian literature, the monster was considered a figure of meta-theatricality, its hybridity (half beast, half human) pointing to the intertextual and heterogeneous nature of baroque theater.<sup>11</sup> Commedia dell'arte in particular—a genre whose narration throughout the seventeenth century was one of decline—strove for an afterlife by playing with its own history and textual imagery in productions that

<sup>7</sup> Schneider summarizes the debate on Renzi's status as a singer interpreting Octavia in light of metaphors about the "monstrous" quality of such representation in "Seeing the Empress Again," 250–54. See also Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creation of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 233; and Wendy Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence: Opera and Women's Voices in Seventeenth-Century Venice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 174–75.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9–33; and Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1–54. See also David J. Buch, *Magic Flutes and Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Musical Theater* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); and Clive McClelland, *Ombra: Supernatural Music in the Eighteenth Century* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> In the earliest edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Giovanni Alberti, 1612), the first Italian dictionary of the modern era, the definition of monster is given as "an animal generated with organs outside the realm of nature" (Animale generato con membra, fuor dell'uso della natura); already in the second edition (1623), there is an addition: "as a metaphor, it denotes singularity" (per metaf. e denota singolarità). In the fourth edition (1729–38), the "singularity" of the monster is characterized as being both "good and bad" (si usa in buona, e in cattiva parte).

<sup>10</sup> Kathryn A. Hoffmann, "Excursions to See 'Monsters': Odd Bodies and Itineraries of Knowledge in the Seventeenth Century," in *Structures of Feeling in Seventeenth-Century Cultural Expression*, ed. Susan McClary (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 296–312; and Keala Jane Jewell, ed., *Monsters in the Italian Literary Imagination* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001). On supernatural and early modern theater in general, see Mark Thornton Burnett, *Constructing "Monsters" in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1–7.

<sup>11</sup> Marco Arnaudo, "Il mostro come figura metariflessiva nel teatro italiano del Seicento," *Forum Italicum: A Journal of Italian Studies* 48 (2014): 22–32.

not only featured actual monsters as characters (Leoni's *La Roselmina*, 1595; Andreini's *La centaura*, 1622; and Briccio's *La Tartarea*, 1624), but also called for the mixing of different genres ("Favola tragicatiricomicca," "Soggetto diviso in commedia, pastorale, e tragedia," "Commedia infernale"). The theatrical monster was an emblem of textual and performative alterity.

Thus, when the first operatic singers lingered between the roles of commedia dell'arte and opera in its earliest years, poets referred to them as "monsters" of virtuosity and excess.<sup>12</sup> A prime example was Renzi, a model of artistic prowess and a destabilizing figure to be lusted after—the very object of the male gaze. The Latin etymology of "mostro" reveals the duplicity of the monster's qualities, being at once a figure of memory (*moneo*: to remember, to predict) and revelation (*monstro*: to show, to exhort). The theatrical monster remembers and makes its viewers remember by appearing and disappearing. Jacques Derrida calls this the "visor effect"—the ability of ghosts to see without being seen and our uncanny feeling of being unable to see who is looking at us.<sup>13</sup>

That opera was developed on these spectral grounds is made evident by the sheer amount of contemporary documentation, by both artists and commentators, testifying to a strong awareness of the ghostly quality of operatic performances. If modern musicology has failed to recognize such premises, theater studies has taken up the mantle in developing a vocabulary and methodology to investigate both historical and contemporary performances. The so-called "spectral turn" in the humanities is traditionally associated with the publication of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, a volume that comments on and critiques the idea of the "end of history" as elaborated right after the fall of the Berlin Wall.<sup>14</sup> In a deliberately contradictory manner, Derrida formulates the notion of "hauntology": an ontology founded not on being and presence, but rather on the untimely recurrence of ghosts, the nostalgia for a future that at the same time exists and does not exist, a beginning by coming back.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> On Commedia dell'arte companies as active participants in the inception of opera, see Lorenzo Bianconi and Thomas Walker, "Dalla *Finta pazza* alla *Veremonda*: storie di Febiarmonici," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 10 (1975): 379–454; and Nino Pirrotta, "Commedia dell'Arte and Opera," *Musical Quarterly* 41 (1955): 305–24. On the role of commedia dell'arte actresses in the development of early opera, see Emily Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera and the Sound of the Commedia dell'Arte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 6.

<sup>14</sup> Derrida's reference is to Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 10–11.

As anti-historicist as Derrida wanted it to be, the concept of hauntology has nonetheless attracted the attention of literary scholars and art historians.<sup>16</sup> Possibly owing to his use of the ghost of Hamlet as a recurrent image, theater studies have been particularly interested in spectral theory. Since the 1990s this hauntological approach to history has been labeled the “spectral turn,” an appropriation of terminology from Derrida’s academic and popular one.<sup>17</sup> From the perspective of performance studies, the ghost as a poststructuralist trope is the “shadowy third” that marks the trace of an absence and loosens the chains of binary thought.<sup>18</sup>

A hauntological investigation must therefore account for the ghosting effect, as well as the unease that afflicts historians who are reticent to address this notion of historiographical representation. For baroque opera, rather than looking for influences on theatrical texts, this quest will concern “genealogies of performance” focusing on the way history records dispersions and deviations rather than direct filiation and teleological narratives.<sup>19</sup> Such an inquiry contests the theatrical categories of origins/originality, authenticity, and archetypal paradigms; these historiographical constructions are at odds with the intrinsic, ever-reproducing quality of performance. With respect to opera libretti, literary and music scholars have used the nebulous seventeenth-century

<sup>16</sup> On uses of hauntology in literary studies see Colin Davis, “Hauntology, Spectres and Phantoms,” *French Studies* 59 (2005): 373–79. The notion of hauntology has not gone without criticism, especially for its deconstructive reading of Marx’s concept of history. In Stephen Greenblatt’s vision, New Historicism and literary criticism are haunted by the reappearance of ghosts: see “What Is the History of Literature?,” *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997): 460–81. For a comparison between Greenblatt’s and Derrida’s writings, and a critique of New Historicism in light of spectral theory and deconstruction, see Peggy Kamuf, *Book of Addresses* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), esp. ch. 12, “The Ghosts of Critique and Deconstruction,” 219–37.

<sup>17</sup> For a recent overview of “spectrality” readings, see “Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities,” in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 1–27. Roger Luckhurst defines the “spectral turn” as “a certain strand of cultural theory in France, Britain and America [that] embraced a language of ghosts and the uncanny—or rather of anachronic spectrality and hauntology” See his “The Contemporary London Gothic and the Limits of the ‘Spectral Turn’,” *Textual Practice* 16 (2002), at 527.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “Introduction: The Spectral Turn,” in *Spectral America: Phantoms and the National Imagination*, ed. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 4. See also Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin, “Introduction: Theatre and Spectrality,” in *Theatre and Ghosts: Materiality, Performance and Modernity*, ed. Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1–23.

<sup>19</sup> “Genealogies of performance . . . attend to ‘counter-memories,’ or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences.” Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press 1996), 26. The reference is to Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139–64. See also the introductory chapter of Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

practice of conflating different sources into a new drama as a point of departure for identifying examples of intertextuality and influence.<sup>20</sup> I would add that libretti of the pre-Metastasian era are *always* informed by other texts. In telling stories either from mythology or history, they are already framed in infinite regress, calling forth other texts as they assert their own. As theatrical texts, they act on the premise of restoring a story already told. Even before they are written down (as a sketch, a preparation for the printer, above the staves of a manuscript score), they already constitute a form of quotation.

Baroque opera takes performance as the remembrance of history, a performance that re-enacts performances of an imagined past. Seventeenth-century operas are thus always already historical: they stage specters as reminders of their doubleness of perception, being here and there at the same time. The term “doubleness of perception” itself is indebted to the theater scholar Marvin Carlson, who theorizes theater as a memory machine through the metaphor of “ghosting,” the practice of recycling and reappearance on stage that lies at the core of any theatrical experience.<sup>21</sup>

The operatic text—score, libretto, or performance—was thus intrinsically intertextual, not only because of the dynamic and heterogeneous process that lies at the core of any opera production (e.g., recycling arias, reusing sets and costumes, and reprinting libretti for different performances), but also because that very process was haunted by instances of recurrence that had little to do with linear influences and more with issues of memory, replacement, and repression.<sup>22</sup> Such a hauntological model of intertextuality engages text, music, and contemporary discourses of baroque operas as non-stemmatic genealogies. Because the genealogies of Agrippina and the staged Julio-Claudian family were already marked by spectral narratives during the time of their theatrical representations, they serve as representative vessels for this hauntological model.

<sup>20</sup> Scholarly literature on the creation of seventeenth-century libretti abounds. For a first overview see Bianconi, *Music in the Seventeenth Century*, 161–219; and Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, chs. 6 and 7.

<sup>21</sup> “[A] simultaneous awareness of something previously experienced and of something being offered in the present that is both the same and different, which can only be fully appreciated by a kind of doubleness of perception in the audience.” Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>22</sup> These categories map onto the threefold theory of genealogies of performances elaborated by Joseph Roach, in which performance is positioned at the intersection of kinaesthetic imagination (“that mental space where imagination and memory converge”), displaced transmission (“the adaptation of historic practices to changing conditions”), and vortices of behavior (“a spatially induced . . . restoration of behavior”). Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 25–31.

*Ghosting the Text: Agrippina from Classical Antiquity to  
Seventeenth-Century Opera*

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Histories of opera usually point to the dichotomy between courtly and public systems of production in the early days of the genre as a move from mythological to historical subjects.<sup>23</sup> Inspired by the allegorical power of the mythological subject used in early Mantuan and Florentine spectacles, the commercially driven Venetian opera houses initially mixed mythological and historical narrations, only to confine deities to prologues and focus their libretti on Greek and Roman histories as imagined progenies of the foundation of Venice.<sup>24</sup> Monteverdi's operatic trajectory incarnates this trend from myth to history and from the court to the city, beginning with *L'Orfeo* (Mantua, 1607) and *L'Arianna* (Mantua, 1608, and Venice, 1640) and moving to *Le nozze d'Enea con Lavinia, Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria*, and finally *L'incoronazione di Poppea* (Venice, 1641–43).<sup>25</sup> Opera was promoted on the lagoon by the Accademia degli Incogniti, a group that included Monteverdi's librettists for *Il ritorno* and *L'incoronazione*, Giacomo Badoaro and Busenello. The academy provided more than an intellectual background for opera plots. The flourishing of the Incogniti's peculiar skeptical philosophy and writings accelerated the shift from myth to history, from Ovid to Tacitus. The presence of Tacitus in seventeenth-century Venice has already been extensively studied.<sup>26</sup> Many Italian translations of Tacitus's *Annales* were printed in Venice throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>27</sup> Yet apart from

<sup>23</sup> For a general discussion of historical subjects in seventeenth-century opera, see Paolo Fabbri, *Il secolo cantante. Per una storia del libretto d'opera nel Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 188–99. On the relationship between myth and history in early opera, see Cohen, *The Politics of Opera*, 55–142; and Jean-François Lattarico, “Lo schermo degli dei: Myth and Derision in the *Dramma per Musica* of the Seventeenth Century,” in *(Dis)embodying Myths in Ancien Régime Opera: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Bruno Forment (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2012), 17–31.

<sup>24</sup> Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*, 125–53.

<sup>25</sup> This is not the place to discuss the authorship of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*. A recent (but still not definitive) study of these issues is Lorenzo Bianconi, “Indagini sull'Incoronazione,” in *Finché non splende in ciel notturna face. Studi in memoria di Francesco Degrada*, ed. Cesare Fertonani, Emilio Sala, and Claudio Toscani (Milan: LED, 2009), 53–72. The main reference for the sources of *Poppea* is Ellen Rosand, *Monteverdi's Last Operas: A Venetian Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 45–68, even though Monteverdi's authorship is never questioned.

<sup>26</sup> Wendy Heller, “Tacitus Incognito: Opera as History in *L'incoronazione di Poppea*,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52 (1999): 39–96; and eadem, “Poppea's Legacy: The Julio-Claudians on the Venetian Stage,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36 (2006): 379–99. See also Cesare Questa, “Presenze di Tacito nel Seicento veneziano,” in *Musica, scienza e idee nella Serenissima durante il Seicento*, ed. Francesco Passadore and Franco Rossi (Venice: Fondazione Levi, 1996), 317–24; and Questa, *L'aquila a due teste: immagini di Roma e dei romani* (Urbino: Quattro venti, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Venice, Italian translations of classical historiography were widely available. See in particular Tacitus, *Annales* (books XII–XIV;

the political resonances of Tacitian ideology in the context of the Venetian republic, the role of the Roman historian in the creation of early libretti was more than mere political happenstance. Tacitus's prose style allowed for historical investigation to be used as a theatrical subject, for historiography to become a stage.<sup>28</sup> The memory of history literally became performance.

There is reason to believe that sections of the *Annales* dealing with the story of the Julio-Claudians were based on the reading of a play that was popular among Venetian audiences, the *praetexta* attributed (almost certainly erroneously) to Seneca titled *Octavia*.<sup>29</sup> Favored by the stoic orientation of the Accademia degli Incogniti, the corpus of Senecan tragedies was popularized in Venice, especially through translations provided by Lodovico Dolce and Ettore Nini.<sup>30</sup> In this tragedy, Octavia's exile and repudiation pave the road for the marriage of Nero and Poppea, while the character of Seneca tries to stop the emperor from a shameful decision as the chorus comments on Rome's degradation. The shade of Agrippina (*Agrippinae umbra*) appears in the middle of the play to cast a dark shadow over the wedding.

As the earliest theatrical presentation of the Julio-Claudian family, *Octavia* holds a special place in the history of early theater, as the play staged both a troubled view of the Roman past and a reinterpretation of the literature connected to the dynasty. As has already been noted the drama centers on questions of memory and intertextuality in ancient Rome.<sup>31</sup> The *praetexta* itself thus simultaneously marked a beginning and an end: it inaugurated a critical approach to history even as it staged its end. The Julio-Claudian dynasty and literature became both sites of

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trans. *Gli annali di Cornelio Tacito* [...] nuovamente tradotti di latino in lingua toscana da Giorgio Dati fiorentino, Venice: Guerra, 1563); Suetonius, *De vita Caesarum* (book VI; trans. *Le vite de' dodici Cesari di Gaio Svetonio Tranquillo. Tradotte in lingua toscana per M. Paolo del Rosso cittadino fiorentino*, Venice: Calepino, 1550); and Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana* (book LXI; *Epitome della Historia romana di Dione Niceo* [...] tradotto per M. Francesco Baldelli, Venice: de' Ferrari, 1562).

<sup>28</sup> Saúl Martínez Bermejo, *Translating Tacitus: The Reception of Tacitus's Works in the Vernacular Languages of Europe, 16th–17th Centuries* (Pisa: PLUS-Pisa University Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> *Praetextae* were Roman tragedies based on local history events. *Octavia* has been attributed to Seneca since the fourth century AD, when an anonymous compiler put the tragedy together with others actually written by Seneca. Today it is considered spurious on stylistic and historical grounds. See Rolando Ferri, *Octavia: A Play Attributed to Seneca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> *Le tragedie di Seneca, tradotte da m. Lodovico Dolce* (Venezia: Sessa, 1560), where Octavia appears on ff. 252r–283v; and *Le tragedie di Seneca, trasportate in verso sciolto dal sig. Hettore Nini* (Venice: Ginami, 1622).

<sup>31</sup> Lauren Donovan Ginsberg, *Staging Memory, Staging Strife: Empire and Civil War in the Octavia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1.

remembrance and mnemonic objects.<sup>32</sup> Given the play's inherent hybridity and its reliance on memory and recurrence, it is no wonder that it featured a ghost in a prominent role.

Along with Aeschylus's *Eumenides*, where the ghost of Clytemnestra appears, *Octavia* is one of the earliest Western plays featuring a dead character coming back from the underworld to haunt the living.<sup>33</sup> The shade of Agrippina appears in the middle of the drama to herald the wedding of Nero and Poppea:

Bursting through the earth I have made my way from Tartarus, bearing a Stygian torch in my bloody hand to herald this iniquitous wedding. Let Poppea marry my son by the light of these flames, which my hand of vengeance, my anger as a mother, will turn to funeral fires. Even amid the dead the memory of that unnatural murder remains with me always, and burdens my still unavenged shade.<sup>34</sup>

In a burst of light, Agrippina appears to hold "the memory of [her] unnatural murder" and fight for vengeance. The specter's monologue is not just a straightforward tirade against the treacherous lovers. Tormented by its own crimes, the ghost of Agrippina wishes to leave the earth, too, and flee once again to Tartarus.

Agrippina makes her first appearance in the history of theater as a haunting figure. She enters the stage as she is leaving, which is a characteristic of every ghost: the necessity of having a voice be heard one last time before being forgotten. Opera, too, was built on this spectral premise, on an urgency for past voices to be heard once again. This is probably why the group of intellectuals and writers associated with the Accademia degli Incogniti identified in *Octavia* a fruitful source for the revival of Roman history on the Venetian stage: the result was *L'Incoronazione di Poppea*. Yet in his *Argomento* for the new libretto, Busenello does not mention the pseudo-Seneca or any other text; he only references Tacitus as historiographical background from which to depart.<sup>35</sup> Wendy Heller has pointed out that not only was the pseudo-Senecan play a major reason for the prominence Busenello assigned to Octavia, but also that various prose and dramatic renditions of these historical events were

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>33</sup> Luckhurst and Morin, "Introduction: Theatre and Spectrality," 2; and Caterina Barone and Vico Faggi, *Le metamorfosi del fantasma. Lo spettro sulla scena tragica: da Eschilo a Shakespeare* (Palermo: Palumbo, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> *Octavia*, 593–600. English version in [Seneca], *Tragedies*, trans. John G. Fitch, 2 vols., Loeb Classical Library 78 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2:571.

<sup>35</sup> "Così rappresenta Cornelio Tacito. Ma qui si rappresenta il fatto diverso." (This is how Cornelius Tacitus represents it. Here, though, facts are represented differently.) *L'Incoronazione di Poppea di Gio[ovanni] Francesco Busenello. Opera musicale rappresentata nel Teatro Grimano l'anno 1642* (Venice: Andrea Giuliani, 1656), 5.

popular among Venetian readers.<sup>36</sup> Indeed a sonnet celebrating the singer Renzi (who played Octavia) is commensurate with the prominence both the libretto and the Venetian plays give to her character. For all of this, Busenello departed sharply from *Octavia* in failing to accord an important role to Agrippina, Nero's mother.

As is well known, Agrippina is not even mentioned in *L'Incoronazione*. Although she is featured extensively in the Venetian novels, Busenello presented the empress as already dead by the opening of the curtain, stretching the actual chronological order of events. Scholars such as Nino Pirrotta and Iain Fenlon have argued that the audience would have already known what happened in "real" historical antiquity, allowing the story to be *inventata* for the enjoyment of an intellectual crowd titillated at the prospect of filling these historical gaps themselves.<sup>37</sup> In Busenello's libretto, Agrippina features as an absent presence that looms over Nero's and Poppea's heads as they embrace in the last scene.

In 1693, some fifty years after *Poppea*, Venetian audiences were confronted with a drama on the Julio-Claudians that reverted the spectral paradigm of *Incoronazione*. In Matteo Noris's libretto *Nerone fatto Cesare*, Agrippina has a central role, while Octavia is nowhere to be found. Classical historiography as transmitted through the writings of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio mainly depicted Agrippina as an incestuous mother and a political tyrant.<sup>38</sup> *Nerone fatto Cesare*, staged at Teatro S. Salvatore in Venice between 27 December 1692 and 7 February 1693 with music by Giacomo Antonio Perti, was instead a romantic revision of the events that preceded the coronation of sixteen-year-old Nero.<sup>39</sup> Elaborating on and inventing Roman history, Noris's libretto portrays Nero as a fighter against the political eagerness of his mother Agrippina, guilty of being seated on the throne in spite of him. In the libretto's introductory pages, Noris acknowledges that any modification to facts would be pure

<sup>36</sup> Heller, *Emblems of Eloquence*, 139–52. These were Ferrante Pallavicino, *Le due Agrippine* (Venice: Guerigli, 1642, and Turrini, 1654); and Federico Malipiero, *L'imperatrice ambiziosa* (Venice: Surian, 1642).

<sup>37</sup> Nino Pirrotta, "Monteverdi and the Problems of Opera," in *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 254–70; and Iain Fenlon and Peter N. Miller, *The Song of the Soul: Understanding Poppea* (London: Royal Musical Association, 1992).

<sup>38</sup> For the reception of Roman historiography in early modern Italy, see Ronald Mellor, *Tacitus* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Peter Burke, "Tacitism," in *Tacitus*, ed. T.A. Dorey (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969), 149–72; and Benedetto Fontana, "Ancient Roman Historians and Early Modern Political Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Roman Historians*, ed. Andrew Feldherr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 362–79. For Venetian translations of such historians, see note 27.

<sup>39</sup> Libretto: *Nerone fatto Cesare. Drama per musica da rappresentarsi nel famoso Teatro di S. Salvatore l'anno MDCXCIII. Di Matteo Noris* (Venice: Nicolini, 1693). For the exact dates of performances, see Eleanor Selfridge-Field, *A New Chronology of Venetian Opera and Related Genres, 1660–1760* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 204–5.

*fabula*, and that the audience should not be “insulted” by the recapitulation of historical details (in doing so he is already making a point about theatrical self-awareness).<sup>40</sup>

Together with the prose versions of the story by Malipiero and Pallavicino that we know informed Busenello’s libretto, another text should be added to the network of Venetian interpretations of the Julio-Claudian family. In 1657 Pietr’Angelo Zaguri published *Le gelosie politiche & amorose*, a dramatic version of the story of Agrippina’s social climbing and Nero’s unrequited love for the courtesan Atte. What is striking about Zaguri’s drama is the unusual presence of a *tutti* scene before the encomiastic prologue, in which every character speaks in a haunted language:<sup>41</sup>

NARCISO  
Ottavia, tu profani il Tempio delle  
Grazie coll’idolatrare l’ingratitude.  
Non è giusta mercede dar morte a chi ti  
sceglie per sua vita.

NARCISO  
Octavia, you desecrate the Temple of  
Grace by idolizing ingratitude. It’s not  
right to give death to those who choose  
you as their life.

AURETTA  
La brama di veder quest’opera mi fa  
morire! [...]

AURETTA  
I’m “dying” to see this play! [...]

AGRIPPINA  
O notte per me felice!

AGRIPPINA  
O happy night!

NERO  
Care tenebre che m’illustate!

NERO  
Dear darkness that enlightens me!

OCTAVIA  
Astri propizi che mi conducete nel  
porto de’ piaceri! [...]

OCTAVIA  
Favorable stars that lead me to the port of  
pleasures! [...]

NARCISO  
Ombre funeste, che volete per sempre  
rapire l’adorato mio sole!

NARCISO  
Baleful shadows, always wanting to steal  
my beloved sun!

Metaphors of light, darkness, love, and death abound in this scene. The characters remind the audience of their own liminal status between memory and presence. Everyone is there and not there. Yet for all the

<sup>40</sup> “Della storia . . . nulla ti dico, perché il dirti . . . sarebbe una aperta ingiuria alla intiera tua cognitione: il di più è favola” (“I will not tell you about history, for recapitulating it . . . would be an insult to your own knowledge: everything else is fiction”). *Nerone fatto Cesare*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> *Le gelosie politiche & amorose. Opera scenica di Pietr’Angelo Zaguri* (Venice: Giovanni Pietro Pinelli, 1657), 13–15.

similarities between Zaguri's play and Noris's libretto, there is one major difference: Noris's text completely erases the role of Octavia. There is something peculiar about operatic renditions such as *L'Incoronazione di Poppea* and *Nerone fatto Cesare*: the silencing of female characters, Agrippina in Busenello's libretto and Octavia in Noris's.

This is a fundamental aspect of the genealogies of operatic performances: seventeenth-century Italian libretti were assembled not by adding new material to a historical background, but rather by *removing* and *repressing* specific aspects of it. This is a feature of hauntological deployment—the trace is always a mark of absence. Given that the audience would have instinctively replaced such exclusions as an active response to holes in the plot, we can say that memories of missing personalities, haunted by the ghosts of silenced characters, fill the Italian baroque stage. Even though Octavia and Poppea are not literally present in Noris's libretto, they are constantly re-presented in the minds of those who attend a performance of *Nerone fatto Cesare*, just like a spectator at a performance of *L'incoronazione di Poppea* knows that the ghost of Agrippina and its curse depend on Nero and Poppea's final embrace. From *Octavia* to *Nerone fatto Cesare*, Agrippina is portrayed as an always-already haunting figure.

More than merely a character on stage, the ghost becomes a figure of intertextuality. Noris refers to no literary source behind his libretto, not even Tacitus. It seems as if the story of Agrippina is a continuous reworking of an original that does not exist, or at least one that is never mentioned. From the perspective of genealogies of performances, intertextuality is the very foundation of every text's formation: if there is no original text on which to draw, it is because every text is already written.<sup>42</sup> Yet from the perspective of operatic performances, intertextuality stands for the replacement and substitution of other voices, at least in the early stages of opera's historical development. Thus when Busenello has Octavia attempt murder, with the consequence of being condemned to exile by boarding at sea, he is mapping some of Agrippina's biographical characteristics (her attempt to kill her son and her death at sea) onto Octavia's staged presence. To return to "Non è Ottavia," Ferrari's sonnet in honor of Renzi points in the direction of the doubleness of perception: Octavia silencing Agrippina, with the two historical figures revived intertextually in a play of emersion and suppression.<sup>43</sup> Octavia's

<sup>42</sup> This is the main thesis behind Roland Barthes's famous essay "The Death of the Author," in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142–48.

<sup>43</sup> In this respect, Magnus Tassing Schneider's thesis that the role of Octavia in *Incoronazione* is to be understood through the lens of double-casting Anna Renzi as both Octavia and Drusilla does not contradict my own argument for the intertextual doubling;

monologues (“Disprezzata regina” and “Addio Roma”) stage a ghosting of Agrippina’s language by means of vengeance and premonition.

*Ghosting the Music: Agrippina’s Musical Borrowings between Milan and Venice*

With *Incoronazione di Poppea* and *Nerone fatto Cesare* we have seen how texts can be haunted at their very core. But what about the music?

“Hauntological music” is well known to scholars of postmodernism: many post-war composers are often gripped by a haunted nostalgia for a future that never existed and was wrested from them. These postmodern musics inhabit a world beyond the future.<sup>44</sup> In this respect baroque opera shares a certain affinity with postmodernism: at its center lies a nostalgic yearning for a past that never really existed.<sup>45</sup> The paradox of baroque opera is that a “new” genre quickly grew up to become a system of quotations and borrowing practices in which “novelty” stood for the recurrence of past music—culminating, for instance, in Handel’s compositional method. We could solve this paradox by simply saying that all music is intertextual in some way. But then how should we write about it? This section continues the journey into the genealogies of opera performances on the subject of Agrippina, focusing on how such spectacles participate in a culture of musical ghosting where recurrence is the rule, not the exception.

14

Noris’s *Nerone* was a highly successful drama that was staged at least eleven times between 1693 and 1715: in Venice, Rome, Bologna, Naples, Verona, Livorno, Genoa, Lucca, Milan, Florence, and back in Venice again.<sup>46</sup> For the Milanese production (1703) the opera underwent extensive revision under the new title *Agrippina*, including a complete rewriting of the music by the local composer Magni.<sup>47</sup> On 28 February 1703 the Este ambassador Bernardino Gallignani, residing at the time in Milan, reported:

The Carnival just ended last Thursday night with a ball at the palace [Palazzo Ducale] . . . and a performance of *Agrippina*, in which the loudest applause was for [Maria] Landini.<sup>48</sup>

see Tessing Schneider, “Seeing the Empress Again.” Rather, it adds more evidence to the duality of perception that this role has elicited in its various interpretations.

<sup>44</sup> Mark Fisher, “What Is Hauntology?,” *Film Quarterly* 66 (2012): 16–24, at 16.

<sup>45</sup> Marina S. Brownlee, “Postmodernism and the Baroque in María de Zayas,” in *Cultural Authority in Golden Age Spain*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 107–30.

<sup>46</sup> On the many Italian performances, see Carlo Lanfossi, “Il teatro d’opera a Milano nella seconda metà del XVII secolo. Alcuni esempi di drammaturgia musicale tra storiografia e analisi” (Ph.D. diss., Università degli Studi di Pavia, 2011), 319–69.

<sup>47</sup> The score related to the Milanese performances of Magni’s *Agrippina* is housed at the University of California, Berkeley, Music Library, MS 1180.

<sup>48</sup> “[Q]ui s’è terminato il Carnevale con una gran festa da ballo in palazzo la notte di giovedì passato [. . .] e con la recita dell’*Agrippina*, nella quale i maggiori applausi

Although the printed libretto makes no reference to the singers involved in this production, Gallignani's mention of "Landini" confirms that Maria di Chateaufeuf, called "Landini," was the star of the show.<sup>49</sup> In this new version the role of the empress is amplified at the expense of Nero's, culminating in a long and complex mad scene for Agrippina.

In both the Venetian and the Milanese versions, the final appearance of Agrippina on stage occurs near the end of act 3. By now she has completely fallen into disgrace at the court. After an attempt to poison her son, she has no other choice but to hide before it is too late: Nero is about to be declared emperor. In an intense monologue (scene 14) she gradually succumbs to madness. But in the Milanese *Agrippina*, instead of a single aria the protagonist goes deeper into her madness, with visual hallucinations, extreme gestures, and an awareness of being "a shadow" (un'ombra):<sup>50</sup>

Dove son: che farò?  
 Fra le selve  
 con le belve me n'andrò.  
 Ma, che veggio? Spaventevol mostro,  
 ch'al mio passo s'opponne!  
 Chi sei, mostro de' mostri? Ah, sei  
 Nerone!  
 Empio, ti fuggo.  
 Ohimè, qual nuovo incontro?  
 Vieni su gl'occhi una furia . . . e là! Chi sei,  
 o tu, che a l'alma aggiungi affanno e orrore,  
 o furia delle furie? Ah, sei l'Amore!  
 Nel portentoso estremo  
 parto, resto, ardo, gelo, avampo e tremo.  
 Ma da 'l core  
 rio timore olà disgombra . . .  
 Roma, Roma, chi son io?  
 Agrippina io sono . . .  
 O dio!  
 No: non son che un'ombra,  
 un'ombra.

Where am I? What shall I do?  
 Through the woods,  
 I shall go among the beasts.  
 Alas, what do I see? A frightful monster  
 stands in front of me!  
 Who are you, monster of monsters? Alas,  
 you are Nero!  
 Ungodly one, I shall run!  
 Alas, what now?  
 A creature appears . . . hey! Who are you,  
 you who add grief and dread to my soul,  
 oh Fury of Furies? Alas, you are Love!  
 In this extreme attempt  
 I leave, stay, glow, chill, burn, and shiver.  
 Clear out,  
 you fear, from my heart . . .  
 Rome, Rome, who am I? I  
 am Agrippina . . .  
 Oh God!  
 No. I'm nothing but a shadow,  
 a shadow.

sono stati alla Landini." Modena, Archivio di Stato, *Ambasciatori, Italia, Milano*, 130, 28 February 1703.

<sup>49</sup> Maria Landini was active on Italian operatic stages between 1690 and 1721, after which she became "prima donna" of the Vienna Court Theatre together with her husband, the composer Francesco Bartolomeo Conti. Information on her Viennese period can be found in Hermine Weigel Williams, *Francesco Bartolomeo Conti: His Life and Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 42–44.

<sup>50</sup> *L'Agrippina. Drama per musica da recitarsi nel Regio Teatro di Milano* [. . .] (Milan: Carlo Federico Gagliardi, 1703), 71–72.

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EXAMPLE 1. Paolo Magni, *L'Agrippina* (US-BEm, ms. 1180), act 3 scene 15, mm. 1–47, 62–93

16

Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Vla.

4  
Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Vla.

7  
Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Vla.

11  
Ob. I  
Ob. II  
Vla.  
A.  
Do - ve son?

Agrippina's voice resounds in complete silence as the bass line drops in a dance-like G-minor *arietta* in triple meter. Not only are these words typical of a seventeenth-century operatic mad scene, but the music seems to lose its mind as well: formal structure disintegrates in the wake of Agrippina's outburst, reeling through sections of

## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

15

Ob. I

Ob. II

Vla.

A.

Che fa - rò?

18

Ob. I

Ob. II

Vla.

A.

Fra le sel - ve

22

Ob. I

Ob. II

Vla.

A.

con le bel - ve me n'an - drò.

accompanied recitative and what seems like an interrupted *da capo* aria (“Ma dal core”).<sup>51</sup> By identifying herself as an “ombra,” Agrippina

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, how Damira abruptly turns to her husband and Rodope in *Le fortune di Rodope e Damira* (1657): “Chi sei?” “Ciò tu li chiedi? / È una pazza, non vedi?” “Chi son? Non mi conosci?” (“Who are you?” “You ask this? / She’s a madwoman, don’t you see?” “Who am I? Don’t you know me?”). See also Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice*,

## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

26

Ob. I

Ob. II

Vla.

A.

Do - ve son?

30

Ob. I

Ob. II

Vla.

A.

Che fa - rò?

33

Ob. I

Ob. II

Vln. I

Vla.

A.

Bc.

Ma . . . che veg - gio?

346–60. For eighteenth-century opera, an interesting analysis of the mad scene in Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso* (Venice, 1727) through the lens of the baroque concept of *furore* and its relationship to language fragmentation is given in Buci-Glucksmann, *The Madness of Vision*, 56–78.

## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

35

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

Spa - ven - te - vol - mo - stro ch'al mio

37

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

pas - so s'op-po - ne!

39

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

Chi sei, mo-stro de' mo-stri? Ahi! Ahi! Sei Ne-ro-ne!

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## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

42

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

Em - pio, em - pio ti

44

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

fug - go! Ohi - mé, qual - no vo in -

47

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

con - tro?

## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

62

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Bc.

65

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Bc.

68

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

Ma dal co - re, ma dal co - re rio ti -

violently reminds the audience of the ghosting effect: not only does she literally evoke specters from the underworld, but she also points to the meta-theatricality of the entire scene, the constant shifting of musical personae between the character and the singer (“Who, who am I?”).

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## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

73

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
A.  
Bc.

mo - re, rio ti -

Detailed description: This system contains measures 73 through 76. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The vocal line (A.) begins with the lyrics 'mo - re, rio ti -'. The instrumental parts include Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The strings play a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and rests.

77

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
A.  
Bc.

mo - re o là - di - sgom - bra.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 77 through 80. The key signature is one flat. The vocal line (A.) continues with the lyrics 'mo - re o là - di - sgom - bra.'. The instrumental parts continue with similar rhythmic patterns.

81

Vln. I  
Vln. II  
Vla.  
A.  
Bc.

Ro - ma! Ro - ma!

Detailed description: This system contains measures 81 through 84. The key signature is one flat. The vocal line (A.) begins with the lyrics 'Ro - ma! Ro - ma!'. The instrumental parts continue with similar rhythmic patterns.

## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

85

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

Chi... Chi son i-o? A-grip-pi-na io so-no!

88

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

A-grip-pi na io so no! O Di - o! O Di - o!

90

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.

Bc.

No, non son che u - n'om - bra... non son che u - n'om - bra...

## EXAMPLE 1. (Continued)

92

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

A.  
u - n'om-bra.

Bc.

Similar musical renditions are to be found in later depictions of Agrippina, such as Handel's opera *Agrippina*. The libretto was assembled sometime before the fall of 1709, possibly by Vincenzo Grimani.<sup>52</sup> During Handel's Italian tour, he had most likely seen one of the reprises of Petri's *Nerone fatto Cesare* staged in Florence in 1708.<sup>53</sup> He probably did not know the Milanese version, since as far as we know it did not circulate outside Milan. Nonetheless, both *Nerone fatto Cesare* and *Agrippina* (especially the mad scene) haunted Handel's production during his early years in Italy.

Handel had in fact already set to music a scene for the character of Agrippina in his cantata "Dunque sar  pur vero" (*Agrippina condotta a morire*, HWV 110), written around the same time as the opera *Agrippina*.<sup>54</sup> The anonymous text of this secular cantata shares the same instability and psychological depth of all the other renditions of Agrippina. Organized as a long monologue before her assassination, the cantata features aria

<sup>52</sup> On the authorship of the libretto for Handel's *Agrippina*, see Reinhard Strohm, "Venedig, H ndel, Grimani: weitere  berlegungen zum Kontext von *Agrippina*," in *G.F. H ndel. Aufbruch nach Italien*, ed. Helen Geyer and Birgit J. Wertenson (Rome: Viella, 2013), 59–88; and Diana Blichmann, "'Or che regna Neron, moro contenta.' H ndels *Agrippina* (1709/1710) und die Thronfolge des Erzherzogs Karl," *Analecta Musicologica* 44 (2010): 253–75.

<sup>53</sup> Reinhard Strohm, "H ndel in Italia: nuovi contributi," *Rivista italiana di musicologia* 9 (1974): 152–74, at 162; Carlo Vitali and Antonello Furnari, "H ndels Italienreise—neue Dokumente, Hypothesen und Interpretationen," *G ttinger H ndel-Beitr ge* 4 (1991): 41–66; and Lorenzo Bianconi, "L'*Agrippina* moderna alla francese," in George Frideric Handel, *Agrippina*, program notes (Venice, Teatro La Fenice, 1985): 631–56, at 637.

<sup>54</sup> Preface to Georg Frideric Handel, *Kantaten mit Instrumenten, II*, crit. ed. Hans Joachim Marx, Hallische H ndel-Ausgabe, Serie V Bd. 4 (Kassel: B renreiter, 1995), xvi–xxiii.

interruptions, chromaticism, and even the same tonal structure (an oscillation between G minor and B-flat major for the arioso parts) as Perti's *Nerone*, Magni's *Agrippina*, and Handel's own *Agrippina*. In the cantata's first aria, Agrippina calls for darkness ("May the sky grow fearsome and dark, and blaze with frequent lightning").<sup>55</sup> Soon she invokes Jove to help her, then suddenly starts questioning herself (ex. 2) in what is by now a familiar pattern of contrasting affects:

Come, o Dio, bramo la morte a chi vita ebbe da me? Forsennata, che parli? Mora, mora l'indegno che d'empia morte è degno chi si brama godere al mio perilio. [...] "Sì, sì s'uccida lo sdegno," grida. "Sì, sì s'uccida..." e chi? L'amata prole? Ah!	How, oh God, can I desire the death of the one who received life from me? Mad woman, what are you saying? The unworthy man must die, for he who wishes only to rejoice in my destruction is worthy of a cruel death. [...] "Yes, yes he must be killed!" my anger cries out. "Yes, yes, he must be killed..." But who? My beloved offspring? Alas!
---	--

The "Arioso e Recitativo" is constructed musically in such a way that we linger on the brink of an aria, constantly interrupted by sudden lurches into recitative. For Ellen Harris this section functions as an "aria *manqué*," a lost aria that signifies Agrippina's abandonment.<sup>56</sup> Only toward the end does Agrippina regain her senses and envision herself as "a dark shade, a wandering ghost" (*ombra nera e larva errante*).

In Handel's Venetian opera *Agrippina*, these dilemmas mark Agrippina's important aria "Pensieri voi mi tormentate," act 2, scene 13, (ex. 3). Agrippina begins her monologue by stating her sorrow, only to abruptly interrupt her train of thought and recall the story's other characters (e.g., Pallante, Nerone, Tigrane, Claudio) through a shift to recitative.

Pensieri, voi mi tormentate. Ciel, soccorri ai miei disegni! Il mio figlio fa che regni, e voi Numi il secondate! Quel ch'oprai è soggetto a gran periglio. Creduto Claudio estinto, a Narciso, e a Pallante fidai troppo me stessa. Ottone ha merto, ed ha Poppea coraggio, s'è scoperto l'inganno, di riparar l'oltraggio. Ma fra tanti nemici a voi, frodi, or è tempo; deh, non m'abbandonate!	How you torment me, my thoughts! May heaven aid my plans! Let my son reign, and smile upon him, you gods! My designs now are threatened by great peril. Believing Claudius dead, I confided too much in Narcissus and Pallas. If my plot is uncovered, Otho has the virtue and Poppea the courage to undo the damage. But surrounded by so many enemies, now is the moment, my cunning, to summon you up. Ah, you must not forsake me!
--	---

<sup>55</sup> "Orrida, oscura / l'etra si renda / e spesso avvampi / col balenar." The translation is taken from *ibid.*, xxxiv–xxxvii.

<sup>56</sup> Ellen T. Harris, *Handel as Orpheus: Voice and Desire in the Chamber Cantatas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 55.

EXAMPLE 2. George Frideric Handel, *Agrippina condotta a morire*, cantata HWV 110, 3. Arioso e recitativo “Come o Dio bramo la morte” (measures 1–40)

Adagio

(Violini)

Soprano

(Bassi)

Co - me, o Di - o! bra - mo la mor - te a chi vi - ta

4

eb - be da me? co - me, o Di - o! bra - mo la mor - te

7

a - - - - - chi - vi - ta - - - - - eb - - - - - be da me, a chi vi - ta, eb - be da

10

me? co - me, o Di - o! bra - mo - - - - - la mor - te a - - - - - chi - vi -

*p*

## EXAMPLE 2. (Continued)

13

- ta\_\_eb - be da me, a chi vi - ta eb - be da me? For sen-na - ta che

16

par - li? Mo - ra, mo - ra l'in - de - gno, che d'em - pia mor - te è de - gno chi sol bra - ma go -

19

de - re al mio pe - ri - glio. Ho ros - sor d'es - ser ma - dre a chi for - se ha ros - sor d'es - ser mio fi - glio.

23

2 Violin

Sì, sì, s'ur - ci - da, s'uc - ci - da, lo sde - gno gri - da, lo

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for Example 2 (Continued). It consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 13-15) features a vocal line in G minor with lyrics: "- ta\_\_eb - be da me, a chi vi - ta eb - be da me? For sen-na - ta che". The second system (measures 16-18) continues the vocal line with lyrics: "par - li? Mo - ra, mo - ra l'in - de - gno, che d'em - pia mor - te è de - gno chi sol bra - ma go -". The third system (measures 19-22) continues with lyrics: "de - re al mio pe - ri - glio. Ho ros - sor d'es - ser ma - dre a chi for - se ha ros - sor d'es - ser mio fi - glio.". The fourth system (measures 23-25) is for two violins, with lyrics: "Sì, sì, s'ur - ci - da, s'uc - ci - da, lo sde - gno gri - da, lo". The score includes treble and bass staves for the vocal line and two staves for the violin accompaniment.

The silence broken by Agrippina's singing of tonic-chord pitches is almost identical to the way Magni set Agrippina's proper mad scene to music in the 1703 Milanese version, "Dove son? Che farò?" (ex. 1), and similar to the beginning of the cantata's arioso (ex. 2).

The long history of musical depictions of Agrippina has caused the character to transcend her presence on stage: she has become a musical

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## EXAMPLE 2. (Continued)

26

sde-gno gri - da, s'uc - ci - da sì, s'uc - ci - da, s'uc - ci - da, s'uc -

29

ci - da lo sde - gno - gri - da, lo sde - gno - gri - da, sì, sì, s'uc -

32

ci - da... e chi? l'a-ma-ta pro - le? Ah! tol - ga il ciel che chiu - da i

35

lu - mi ai rai del so - le; vi - va ben - ché spie - ta - to, sì vi - va,

4/2 (4/2)

38

e si con - fon - da, con e - sem - pio d'a - mor, un cuo - re in - gra - to.

EXAMPLE 3. George Frideric Handel, *Agrippina*, act 2 scene 13, 34. Aria  
 “Pensieri, voi mi tormentate” (first version; measures  
 10–23)

Musical score for measures 10–13. The score is in G minor (one flat) and 3/4 time. It features four staves: Oboe, Violini, Agrippina (soprano), and Bassi. The Oboe part is mostly rests. The Violini and Bassi parts play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Agrippina part has rests. The dynamic marking *forte forte* is present in the Violini and Bassi parts.

Musical score for measures 14–18. The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. It features four staves: Agrippina (soprano), Violini, Bassi, and Oboe. The Agrippina part has the lyrics: Pen - sie - ri, pen -. The Violini and Bassi parts play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Oboe part has rests. The dynamic marking *pp* is present in the Agrippina part.

Musical score for measures 19–23. The score is in G minor and 3/4 time. It features four staves: Agrippina (soprano), Violini, Bassi, and Oboe. The Agrippina part has the lyrics: sie - ri, voi mi tor - men - ta. The Violini and Bassi parts play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Oboe part has rests. The dynamic marking *pp* is present in the Agrippina part.

topic—an “ombra type”—unto herself. Indeed the affect of the tormented soliloquy (whether as a prison aria, a mad scene, or even a ghostly scene) was often signified by the singer’s stark exploration of a minor

chord.<sup>57</sup> This affective gesture was rendered all the more ghostly in its detached presence, floating over a silent orchestra.

“Pensieri voi mi tormentate” was one of the few arias for which Handel did not literally borrow from previous music.<sup>58</sup> Still, the musical material was far from new. Handel borrowed symbolically from a shared musical perception regarding the depiction on stage of failing female tyrants. One strategy employed by early opera composers was to sonically mark stock characters derived from *commedia dell’arte*, each in a unique way. According to Emily Wilbourne’s taxonomy of female lovers, *commedia dell’arte* plays and baroque operas distinguished (with some degree of flexibility) between the *innamorata ardente* (ardent lover) and the *innamorata adamantante* (adamant lover), not only through language and rhetorical strategies in the libretti, but also through musical materials.<sup>59</sup> Octavia in Monteverdi’s *Incoronazione* incarnates the adamant type through lament-style monologues and breaks in the vocal line. Every depiction of Agrippina was to follow the same musical path.

Even though Handel did not have a copy of Magni’s *L’Agrippina*’s score in front of him, he was unwittingly contributing to the building and appropriation of a musical repertoire whose “archival memory,” to quote Diana Taylor, “works across distance, over time and space.”<sup>60</sup> Ghosting, in this sense, is not limited to textual intention, nor even to reappearances of music borrowed or remembered that intertextually amplify such intentions. “Ombra” as musical topic cannot therefore be said to truly exist: the ghostly shadows of previous music are emblematic of performance, and thus quintessential to baroque music making.<sup>61</sup> Borrowing is the sonification of ghosting.

<sup>57</sup> Angela Romagnoli, “*Fra catene, fra stili, e fra veleni . . .*” *ossia Della scena di prigionie nell’opera italiana (1690–1724)* (Lucca: LIM, 1995), 148–70.

<sup>58</sup> Indeed Handel’s *Agrippina* is haunted by the specter of the composer’s earlier music. It is well known that of the forty-eight total musical numbers, forty-one are either self-borrowings or borrowings from Kaiser and Mattheson. See George J. Buelow, “Handel’s Borrowing Techniques: Some Fundamental Questions Derived from a Study of *Agrippina* (Venice, 1709),” *Göttinger Händel-Beiträge* 2 (1986): 105–28.

<sup>59</sup> Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*, 34–35. Wilbourne, too, argues against the use of the concept of “influence” in discussing musical recurrence in baroque opera, citing as an example “the multitude of [Monteverdi’s] Ariannaesque laments [which] can be understood as variants of type” (52).

<sup>60</sup> Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 19.

<sup>61</sup> This is how topic theory defines the “ombra” type as described in Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9–29; Wye Jamison Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 197–98; V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classical Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 30; Birgitte Moyer, “‘Ombra’ and Fantasia in Late Eighteenth-Century Theory and Practice,” in *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music: Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, ed. Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet M. Levy, and William P. Mahrt (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992), 283–306; and McClelland, *Ombra*, esp. ch. 6.

*Ghosting the Singers: Agrippina's Haunted Poems*

So far we have seen how intertextuality and borrowing pertain to the realm of hauntological discourse. But what about singers? According to Carlson's theory of ghosting, actors and singers, too, participate in the "memory machine" that is theater, as they embody recurring stock characters or recall the performances of previous actors.<sup>62</sup> Ghosting is rooted as much in the text as in the deictic presence of the singer, who reminds her audience of her persona's intrinsic past.

As we have seen in the sonnet dedicated to Renzi, there is something peculiar about how audiences and commentators reacted to operas dealing with the story of the Julio-Claudian family. The words used to praise the singers' performances were mostly inspired by images of monsters, shadows, and ghosts. This will be evident with the aid of two more pieces of poetry related to the Milanese *Agrippina* and Handel's opera.

The first is an anonymous sonnet printed in 1703 that celebrates the performance of Landini in the role of Agrippina in the eponymous Milanese opera.<sup>63</sup> The poem is dedicated "to the shadow of Agrippina, whose character is represented by Mrs. Maria Landini with universal applause" (All'ombra d'Agrippina il di cui personaggio viene con applauso universale rappresentato dalla signora Maria Landini):

Ritorna a noi dall'Acheronteo lago,  
o dell'empia Agrippina ombra funesta;  
e mira ciò che il mondo in te detesta,  
reso dall'arte altrui sublime e vago.

Donna grande t'imita: e se non resta  
delle tue glorie enormi il genio pago,  
vantandoti per rea vedrai che questa  
è delle colpe tue fulgida imago.

O se un mostro tu sei, tra mostri e fiere,  
colà il tuo nome il suo valor conduce,  
ove de' mostri ancor splendon le sfere.

Così questo portentoso ella produce,  
che sciolta l'ombra tua dall'ombre nere,  
alle stelle n'andrai mostro di luce.

Return to us from Acheron,  
baleful shadow of evil Agrippina;  
and look at what the world despises in you,  
made sublime and beautiful by someone else's art.

A great woman imitates you: and if art is not  
satisfied by your enormous glory,  
you, pleading guiltiness, will see  
that it is a shining image of your faults.

Or if you are a monster, among monsters and beasts  
your name is guided by her virtue,  
where monsters' stars are still shining.

This is how she creates this wonder,  
so that releasing your shadow from dark shades,  
you will point to the stars as a monster of light.

<sup>62</sup> Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*, 52–95.

<sup>63</sup> The flyleaf is bound with a large selection of mid-seventeenth and early eighteenth-century occasional sonnets and celebratory poems, dedicated by mostly anonymous local Milanese poets and intellectuals to Milanese opera singers and performers. Milan, Biblioteca Braidense XX.13.0038/32.

As a “monster of light” returning from Acheron, the shadow of Agrippina is here given a second chance at historical rehabilitation. The choice of celebrating a shadow over a singer is rather peculiar, and points in the direction of a characteristic anxiety about the hybrid status of performance and representation in baroque theater—specifically, the difficulty of discerning the agency of staged *personae*.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, at the bottom of the page on which the sonnet is printed we find a *disticon*, two Latin verses that can be roughly translated as: “The fierce Agrippina died; soon she happily returned to life. Thus, with her crime she was able to please” (*Agrippina ferox perit; mox grata revixit / crimine cum potuit sic placuisse suo*). Although these lines hold no particular poetic relevance, the sentence construction and the exclusive use of active verbs (*perit*, *revixit*, *potuit*, and *placuisse*) lend agency to the subject of this short poem. Having disappeared, Agrippina revives to please us; her return and reappearance are happy and productive. But who or what is being referred to as “Agrippina?” And what, if any, agency can a ghost possess?

In this sonnet Agrippina is asked to “return” and “look” at the singer’s performance, which makes her evil qualities “sublime and beautiful.” “This is how she creates this wonder,” says the anonymous poet, referring to the performance itself, *hic et nunc*. As a matter of fact, the sonnet completes Landini’s performance, describing its aftermath but also posing the conditions necessary for it to take place. In the Milanese opera, Agrippina’s final words are: “I am nothing but a shadow.” When Landini sang “Agrippina io sono” (I am Agrippina), she pointed to herself as a haunted character on stage and to the audience’s gaze. Landini herself must claim to be Agrippina, as her body on stage projects “dark shadows” (*ombre nere*). Indeed in early modern Italian the word *ombra* means both ghost and shadow.<sup>65</sup>

In an example of a hauntological narrative, the author dedicates the poem to a shadow, blurring the boundaries between presence and absence, history and performance, past and future. If it is true that all seventeenth- and eighteenth-century celebratory sonnets were somehow inherently ghosted (written to celebrate performances that were yet to happen, usually distributed during the premiere), this one goes further in highlighting the doubleness of perception as a metaphor for performance itself.

Landini was accustomed to sonnets celebrating her artful renderings of strong female characters. In 1690 in Rome, she played Mitilene, queen of the Amazon warriors, at the request of the Spanish ambassador.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> On the relationship between agency and identity in musical performance, see Philip Auslander, “Musical Personae,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 50 (2006): 100–119.

<sup>65</sup> See the entry “Ombra” in the *Vocabolario degli accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Giovanni Alberti, 1612). On the shadow as a metaphor for representation in Western art, see Victor I. Stoichita, *A Short History of the Shadow* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

<sup>66</sup> The opera was *La caduta del regno dell’Amazzoni* (Rome: Gio. Francesco Buagni, 1690), to a libretto by Domenico De Totis and with music by Bernardo Pasquini.

The anonymous poet marked Mitilene the “enemy of Love” while insisting on Landini’s skill in playing this role.<sup>67</sup> Still, the more these sonnets highlighted the ability of singers to mask the evil qualities of female historical figures, the more misogynistic narratives about operas seemed to emerge. This was a trend already present in Italian literature: as Virginia Cox has noticed in her account of the resurgence of misogyny throughout the seventeenth century, both Venice and the Spanish dominions (such as Milan) were embarking, albeit from different ideological positions, on a mission to exclude women from political power and literary success.<sup>68</sup>

In this context the celebration of female singers and tyrants onstage only reinforced the silencing of women by male-dominated elites. The Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti was such a misogynistic enclave; its members were particularly insistent on the representation of women as either powerful or sexually corrupt. In the writings of Incogniti affiliates such as Loredano and Pona, figures such as Semiramis, Messalina, and Agrippina were repeatedly associated with tropes of unnatural divine law.<sup>69</sup> The spectral language used to depict the art of Renzi, Landini, and other seventeenth-century singers was there to remind readers of the “monstrous” (i.e., unnatural) quality of operatic voices that are in competition with patriarchal fantasies, such as the foundational myths and progenies related to the Julio-Claudians. This dynasty was thus chosen as a scapegoat to stage the invented purity of opera in its first century of (after)life, thereby fulfilling the fantasy of Italian elites like the Incogniti. Renzi and Landini were musically identified with roles of unruly women depicted in mad scenes and “celebratory” sonnets. These women were condemned to a spectral recognition: being seen as a mere repetition, as the operatic *revenant* who reminds the audience of the performance’s meta-theatrical quality and the consequent absolution from any charge of misogyny.<sup>70</sup>

In the case of Handel’s *Agrippina* of 1709, the role of the protagonist was given to Margherita Durastanti. A strict collaborator of Handel since his residency at the Ruspoli house in Rome, Durastanti was in Venice at this time (she lived there from 1709 to 1713).<sup>71</sup> The casting of Durastanti in the

<sup>67</sup> The four sonnets are quoted in Andrea Garavaglia, *Il mito delle amazzoni nell’opera barocca italiana* (Milan: LED, 2015), 190.

<sup>68</sup> Virginia Cox, *Women’s Writing in Italy, 1400–1650* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 166–227.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 167–68. See also “Agrippina calunniata,” in Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *Scherzi geniali* (Venice: Sarzina, 1632); and the mention of Agrippina in Francesco Pona, *La Messalina [. . .] Edizion seconda accresciuta* (Venice: Sarzina, 1633), 20.

<sup>70</sup> On the inherent misogynist quality of operatic subjects, see the seminal book by Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> Carlo Vitali, “Durastanti, Margherita,” in *The Cambridge Handel Encyclopedia*, ed. Annette Landgraf and David Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 201–3.

role of Agrippina meant that Handel was working with a soprano whom he knew well and with whom he had already collaborated on the Roman oratorio *La Resurrezione* (1708). Durastanti had interpreted the role of Mary Magdalene in a scandalous premiere that prompted the papal court to admonish Ruspoli for letting a woman sing religious music on a public stage.<sup>72</sup> One of the oratorio's most famous arias, "Ho un non so che nel cor," was famously taken over exactly (text and music) into *Agrippina*.<sup>73</sup>

Ho un non so che nel cor  
che in vece di dolor gioia mi chiede.  
Ma il core, uso a temer  
le voci del piacer,  
o non intende ancor,  
o inganno di pensier forse le crede.

There is something in my heart  
inviting my grief to be gone and me to rejoice.  
But my heart, used to being suspicious  
of pleasure's voices,  
either does not understand,  
or believes them to be a fallacy of thought.

As Rosand has noted, the aria seems more apt for the role of the Roman empress than for the austere Mary Magdalene.<sup>74</sup> The usual translation "There is something in my heart" does not convey the peculiarity of the Italian verse, which should read as "I have an 'I-do-not-know-what' in my heart." Although never explained, the *non so che* marks the presence of "something" from the outside. In this sense the *je ne sais quoi* (non so che) is a marker of ghosting, a voice from the past ventriloquized by the singer onstage. The singer becomes the ghost of a ghost; the past is wrenched into the present. The inability for us, as historians, to make sense of this recurrence calls for a different model of historiographical investigation: in *Agrippina*, "Ho un non so che nel cor" is not just the practical result of Handel borrowing his own music; it is a marker of ghosting in a genealogy of performance that brings Agrippina and Mary Magdalene together through the bodies of Durastanti, Landini and Renzi.<sup>75</sup> The singer's body becomes an archive for collectivity, where we

<sup>72</sup> Ursula Kirkendale, "The Ruspoli Documents on Handel"; and eadem, "Handel with Ruspoli: New Documents from the Archivio Segreto Vaticano, 1706–1708," in Warren and Ursula Kirkendale, *Music and Meaning: Studies in Music History and the Neighbouring Disciplines* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2007), 287–349, 361–415.

<sup>73</sup> For an interpretation of the peculiar reuse of *La Resurrezione*'s musical pieces in Handel's *Agrippina*, see Stefano La Via, "'Ha l'inganno il suo diletto.' Gl'intrighi di Agrippina, il trionfo d'Amore, la rivincita veneziana di Händel," in George Frideric Handel, *Agrippina*, program notes (Venice, Teatro La Fenice, 2009), 13–56.

<sup>74</sup> Ellen Rosand, "Handel Paints the Resurrection," in *Festa Musicologica: Essays in Honor of George J. Buelow*, ed. Thomas J. Mathiesen and Benito V. Rivera (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1995), 7–52, at 19.

<sup>75</sup> It seems relevant to note that in his *Galeria delle donne celebri* (Verona: Merlo, 1633), the Incognito affiliate Francesco Pona mentions both Agrippina and Mary Magdalene among three sets of "famous women": four "lascive" (lascivious), including Leda, Helen of Troy, Derceto (Atargatis), and Semiramis (Pona compares the son/mother incestuous relationships of Semiramis/Ninus and Agrippina/Nero on p. 65); four "caste" (chaste), Lucretia, Penelope, Artemisia, and Hysicratea; and four "sante" (saintly), Saint Barbara,

understand performance, in the words of Rebecca Schneider, “not as that which disappears (as the archive expects), but as both the *act* of remaining and a means of re-appearance and ‘reparticipation.’”<sup>76</sup>

The haunted story of “Ho un non so che nel cor” does not end in Venice. The song was one of Handel’s first arias to be sung on a London stage, near the time of his arrival in December 1710.<sup>77</sup> It was included in performances of a pasticcio version of Alessandro Scarlatti’s *Il Pirro e Demetrio* that premiered on 6 December 1710 at the Queen’s Theatre.<sup>78</sup> The aria was sung by Francesca Vanini, who played the character of Mario and was probably responsible for bringing the song to English soil. Vanini and her husband, Giuseppe Maria Boschi, were in fact cast in the Venetian performances of Handel’s *Agrippina* as Ottone and Pallante, respectively, and thus could have travelled to England with Handel’s score. We know about the insertion of the “Ho un non so che” not because it was printed in the libretto for the Scarlatti pasticcio, but because it was referenced in a printed collection of songs.<sup>79</sup> In the May 1711 issue of *The Monthly Mask of Vocal Musick*, the song was reproduced with Handel’s music, but with new words (fig. 1).

The aria is a “mock song” in which the anonymous poet makes fun of the singer Nicolini, who participated in recent performances of Handel’s *Rinaldo*.<sup>80</sup> What stands out, though, is the text’s spectral narrative: the song is claimed to be by “some prevailing Ghost,” at least according to the “Italians.” Moreover, the singer [Nicolini]’s voice “came from Hell” to awaken the English people. Playing with readers’ expectations, the mock song purposely creates confusion about who is the composer and who is the singer. Not only does it not name Handel, but it is also unclear as to whether the “ghost” is the composer or the singer *as* composer. To this overlapping of *personae* must be added the singer Vanini, who is referenced in the mock song’s title, thus letting

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Saint Monica, Saint Elisabeth, and Mary Magdalene. A similar sacred/profane ghosting effect involved Virginia Andreini appearing in both Monteverdi’s *Arianna* and Giovanni Battista Andreini’s *La Maddalena* as Mary Magdalene, and the spiritual parody of her “Lamento d’Arianna” as “Pianto della Madonna” and as anonymous Italian *contrafacta* “Lamento della Maddalena” (Wilbourne, *Seventeenth-Century Opera*, 86–87).

<sup>76</sup> Rebecca Schneider, *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 101.

<sup>77</sup> William C. Smith, “Handel’s First Song on the London Stage,” *Music & Letters* 16 (1935): 286–92.

<sup>78</sup> George Frideric Handel, *Collected Documents. Volume 1: 1609–1725*, ed. Donald Burrows et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 193.

<sup>79</sup> *The Monthly Mask of Vocal Music or the Newest Songs Made for the Theatre’s & other Occasions publish’d for May [1711]* (London: J. Walsh and J. Hare, [1711]), [2]. Copy in GB-Lbl, Music K.7.e.4. Facsimile in Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson, eds., *The Monthly Mask of Vocal Music, 1702–1711: A Facsimile Edition* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 352.

<sup>80</sup> Handel, *Collected Documents*, 219–20.

FIGURE 1. *Monthly Mask of Musick*, May 1711, The Mock Song "Ho un non so che nel cor." © British Library Board, Music K.7.e.4

(9)

The Famous mock Song, to Houn nonso chanel cor, Sung by Sign<sup>ra</sup>  
Boſchi, in the Opera of Pyrrhus, Correctly Engrav'd.

Good folks come here, I'll sing a Song of th' Opera King, which is so much admir'd, let not your ears be tir'd,

Good folks come here, I'll sing a Song of th' Opera King, which is so much admir'd, let not your ears be tir'd th' Italians boast, this Song's Compos'd, by some prevailing Ghost, theinger bears a name, of most surprizing Fame, no Master yet can tell, if this voice came from Hell, it is suppos'd, th' infernal host, sent here this cunning Ghost the Britains to awake, for some mischievous sake,

His shape was like a man, the voice Just like mad Grann, not any graces tawny, ugly, brown, yet not withstanding non'drous pleas'd the Town, and sung so brazen fac'd, that Monsters were amaz'd, to hear a Porcupine, cou'd charm great wits so fine.

DC

<p>Another King most stout, Turn'd English Op'ras out, Which Britains first admired, But now alas are tired. S: Repeat It was suppos'd They were compos'd By some poor harmless Ghost, Rinaldo had the name, Of most surprizing Fame, He and some other Spark, Deceive all in the Dark,</p>	<p>Home Hide the Carr, Swing Slanderer, Cheat Bite Trick ev'ry where, Say Op'ras have no need, Of silly English Breed, They cry th' Italian men, Will show you what they can, Come see this Hero big and Famous here, Whose name is valiant Sign<sup>ra</sup> Cavalier, He kill'd so Brazen faced, A Lion which amazed The mob for whom, twas fit, And fear'd them from their wit, DC</p>
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for the  
FLUTE

DC

the reader imagine the voice of the Italian contralto as she sings a song mocking her own aria.

Whether intended as a joke about Handel's fame preceding him in London or a mockery of Nicolini's *Rinaldo*, the arrival in London of an already haunted aria such as "Ho un non so che nel cor" was a ghosting exercise. In this parody of the ironic opera *Agrippina*, the genealogy of performances collapses to reveal the debris of every opera on Agrippina that history had brought with it. Nicolini, Vanini, and Durastanti are all called on to summon the meta-theatricality of "Ho un non so che nel cor," of the opera's intrinsic *je ne sais qui*. And Handel is depicted as a dead composer even before the start of his English career, as a ghost who returns to make his own debut. "Time is out of joint."<sup>81</sup>

The case of *Agrippina* calls for a reconsideration of traditional historiographical models. Moving beyond a search for compositional influences, which in any case is often hindered by a lack of evidence, a hauntological approach embraces intertextuality, musical borrowing, and spectral narratives as markers of performance. Hauntology invites the historian to consider the development of baroque opera as the aural unveiling of both a recurrent theory of history and the history of a theory of haunted recurrence. The case of *Agrippina* is particularly suited to this type of analysis, owing to the self-consciousness of its ghosting process. But this does not mean that spectral narratives apply exclusively to the Julio-Claudian family. There are many other ghost scenes in baroque opera; and in the Romantic era, one finds a renewal and rethinking of such haunted premises in the Italian opera heroines of Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, and Giuseppe Verdi.<sup>82</sup> Modernity has attempted to rid itself of these ghosts, but in vain, for technology multiplies phantoms. After all, just like the baroque era, and much like music history itself, modernity's genealogies of performance and the performance of its genealogy are inhabited by ghosts.

## ABSTRACT

Baroque opera was invented on a deathly premise: reviving a tradition of sung ancient tragedy that had in fact never existed. Modern

<sup>81</sup> The reference is to Hamlet's famous words after the dialogue with the ghost of his father (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 1, scene 5).

<sup>82</sup> For a study of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* in light of spectral theory, see Jessie Fillerup, "Lucia's Ghosts: Sonic, Gothic and Postmodern," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 28 (2016): 313–45.

historiography has struggled with the notion of origins, focusing on relationships among the surviving textual sources to make sense of the proliferation of theatrical subjects. These relationships remain important—but there is also reason to delve deeper into the “haunted” status of early opera. With respect to three central works on the subject of Agrippina and her son Nero (*Nerone fatto Cesare*, Noris-Perti, Venice 1693; *Agrippina*, Noris-Magni, Milan 1703; and *L’Agrippina*, Handel-[Grimani], Venice 1709), the haunted status of performances was made explicit, both in the drama and in contemporary poems dedicated to the main singers.

Using terminology associated with the “spectral turn” in the humanities, this essay argues for rethinking operatic genealogies through the lens of hauntological intertextualities. In contrast to traditional theories of compositional influence, this study adopts a non-linear historiographical approach to performance genealogies, embracing text, music, and discourse about opera itself. Contesting the use of the concept of “origins” with respect to both the birth and subject matter of baroque opera, I argue that the genre developed as an already haunted narration.

Keywords: George Frederick Handel, *Agrippina*, opera, hauntology, genealogy, intertextuality, ghosting