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Introduction

In May 2018, I was in the audience of director Stephen Lawless's production of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* at the Canadian Opera Company. Originally staged at the Met, Lawless's production was simple and effective, and it highlighted the stunning performance of Sondra Radvanovsky as the titular queen. The action takes place while Anna (Anne Boleyn) is married to Enrico (Henry VIII) but preoccupied with the memory of her first love, Riccardo (Henry Percy). In the third scene of Act 1, Riccardo finds Anna in her chambers and tells her he still loves her. Anna tells him to leave and asks that he not come to see her again. At this moment in the libretto, Riccardo draws his sword and attempts to kill himself. But in Lawless's production, after Riccardo sings "Let this be my answer to your oath," he pins Anna to her bed by her wrists and attempts to rape her until her screams alert a page who had been hiding nearby.¹ I was alarmed by this unexpected twist in the production, though there was no noticeable reaction from the audience en masse. I found myself suddenly perceiving Riccardo and his relationship with Anna completely differently. Would Lawless continue to explore this dark side of Riccardo's obsession throughout the rest of the opera? Would Anna's continuing love for Riccardo be represented differently in light of this attack? But there was no clear follow-through of this story line. This moment stood alone. Perhaps, I was left thinking, we were simply meant to excuse the attempted rape as a sign of Riccardo's uncontrollable desire for Anna.

Rape at the Opera is about the phenomenon of staging sexual violence in operas of the canon in the twenty-first century. The casual interpolation of rape into operas where there was no rape before is widespread. Since I began this research, friends and family members have contacted me regularly after attending productions of canonic operas across Europe and North America,

commenting that since speaking to me, they are noticing subtle (and not so subtle) sexual violence everywhere. Contemporary approaches to staging sexual violence in opera are diverse and evaluating the potential for good and for ill in any one representation is necessarily subjective. Yet opera houses are filled with survivors and perpetrators of sexual assault—in the audience, on the stage, and in the wings—and in this context, it is crucial that we think carefully about how to approach depictions of sexual violence ethically. Where some directors explicitly respond to contemporary dialogues about sexual violence, others utilize sexual violence as a sure-fire way to titillate, to shock, and to generate press for a new production. *Rape at the Opera* highlights the dynamism of contemporary opera practice with regard to sexual violence in the canon, asking how opera practitioners represent sexual violence on today's opera stages, what work these representations do in our cultural moment, and how we productively conceive of the responsibilities of opera creators and spectators when it comes to representing sexual violence.

My point of departure for this book is the discomfort I felt sitting in the audience of *Anna Bolena* and so many other opera stagings throughout my experience as a singer, researcher, and lover of the opera canon. Ellie Hisama has suggested the value that can come from approaching music analysis from a place of repulsion as opposed to the more common entry point of enjoyment. Her critical-affective analysis of the music of John Zorn engages her feelings of being objectified, devalued, and disrespected by his representations of Asian women.² My own analytical approach to the staged productions in this book builds outward from my experiences of unease with the way sexual violence is treated (or, in many cases, not treated) in performances of canonic operas. Over the years, I have spoken to many women and gender-queer friends who have shared my feeling of being alienated by productions of and discourse about opera when it comes to sexual violence. I hope that one of the results of sharing my critical perspective on the works in this book is that some readers may see some of their own experiences of discomfort reflected in mine. I invite all readers, and especially those with perspectives that have been historically unrecognized and unaccounted for in opera criticism and production, to reflect on and take seriously their own experiences with this art form.

Opera's Sexual Violence Problem

While this book is about representations of sexual violence onstage, I must acknowledge from the outset that sexual violence is also disturbingly com-

monplace in the opera industry. Longstanding problems with specific powerful men in the industry and with the culture of opera and classical music more generally came to popular attention in a new way in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Tarana Burke began using the phrase “me too” online in 2006 as an activist refrain about the prevalence of sexual violence in our society. In 2017, a number of high-profile allegations of abuse and harassment against the producer Harvey Weinstein spurred an online movement in which survivors of sexual violence shared their stories with #MeToo. This movement brought sexual violence out of the shadows and highlighted the immense scale of our society’s problem with misogynistic violence. As more survivors came forward with their stories, more alleged sexual abusers faced criminal charges or social consequences as a result of public accusations.

The Metropolitan Opera’s dismissal of conductor and long-time music director James Levine in 2018 and allegations against opera star Plácido Domingo are only the highest-profile examples of a much greater reckoning with sexual abuse and harassment within the operatic community around this time.³ In the opera industry, singers can be particularly vulnerable to predation and abuse by their superiors and mentors given the stark power differential in rehearsal rooms and teachers’ studios. The present study does not engage with the experience of singers negotiating sexual violence onstage and offstage, but this is a vital area for further inquiry. The absence of the performer’s perspective here serves my focus on the cultural work representations of sexual violence do in the world. Yet engagement with the experiences and points of view of more opera practitioners will no doubt enrich continuing work on the politics of operatic production.

On the stage, sexual violence pervades the performance canon. Consider the ten most-performed operas worldwide from the 2018–2019 season: *La Traviata*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *La Bohème*, *Carmen*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Rigoletto*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Le nozze di Figaro*.⁴ Half of these operas blatantly feature sexual violence or the threat of sexual violence in their libretti: *Die Zauberflöte*, *Tosca*, and *Don Giovanni* contain attempted rapes; in *Rigoletto*, the Duke’s “seduction” of Gilda offstage can be readily understood as an act of violence; and the central conflict of *Le nozze di Figaro* is that the Count wants to have sexual intercourse with Susanna against her will. Even in the other half of the list, sexual violence is often implicit: the intimacy between Pinkerton and Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly* can readily be interpreted as nonconsensual given her youth and his dishonesty; the plot of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* centers around the threat of a forced marriage; and *Carmen* ends with an act of intimate partner violence.

The sexual violence in the plots of these operas tends to be downplayed in the way they are taught and staged. I majored in voice performance during my undergraduate degree and was introduced to several of these works in the context of learning the soprano roles. I sang Zerlina, and I remember agreeing with my teachers and peers that the duet this young peasant bride-to-be sings with the aristocratic Don Giovanni works best if she has already decided to have sex with him before telling him “no” over and over. I sang Susanna, and we talked about how much more interesting the drama in *Le nozze di Figaro* is if the young maid Susanna is attracted to the Count who wants to have sex with her on the night of her marriage to another man. Insisting that these men are irresistible and the women around them harbor secret passions for them softens the sharp edges of these stories. As long as these women want it, and as long as we are all sure that they do (practically as a matter of faith), then it’s not rape. I didn’t think these operas were about sexual violence; sure, the women say no, but we know that they don’t mean it. These interpretations, especially of *Don Giovanni*, were so pervasive and so consistent that for years it never occurred to me to interpret these operas or these characters any differently. And beyond that, these interpretations of the story didn’t bother me. I was a politically progressive young woman who proudly identified with feminism, and I still didn’t see the narratives of force and nonconsent at the center of my favorite operas.

It is an act of reparation, then, recognizing the sexual violence that I once ignored, to name this book *Rape at the Opera*. Calling what the Duke does to Gilda a seduction and calling Don Giovanni a womanizer is part of the problem.⁵ “Rape” is a powerful word and a word that I understand is difficult for some readers. But I am troubled by the idea that using the word rape to say, for instance, “The Count plans to rape Susanna on her wedding night,” is more shocking to some opera lovers than the plot point to which it refers. I believe that naming sexual violence and its perpetrators in this context is powerful in part because it highlights this disconnect. Many operatic rapes and attempted rapes happen in the shadows just offstage. My hope is that by using this language and by writing this book, I can spotlight something many fans, scholars, and practitioners of opera might rather not think about at all.

While the sexual violence of the canon is routinely understated and obscured by innuendo and ambiguity, acts of sexual violence are mainstays of contemporary opera performance practice, especially in the school of *Regietheater*. Frequently evoked as a castigation, the terms *Regietheater* and *Regieoper* (director’s theater or director’s opera) refer to the modern practice of granting freedom to the director to alter or disregard stage directions

and indications about *mise-en-scène* in the texts they stage. *Regietheater* productions break with traditional interpretations of a work, frequently in a provocative manner, in the service of speaking to a modern audience and drawing parallels to modern ideas. Axel Englund argues that all *Regietheater* can be understood in terms of perversion because it flagrantly disregards the ideal of fidelity to works of the canon typically treated with reverence.⁶ But although *Regietheater* is characterized by its rejection of norms regarding staging canonic operas, in practice, it has developed its own set of tropes; Englund writes at length about the pervasiveness of iconography of fetishism and BDSM, for example. Sex and violence are mainstays of the *Regietheater* aesthetic, typically represented with onstage nudity and gore.⁷ Popular criticism of *Regietheater* productions typically argues that including sex and violence in canonic operas is inappropriate and a clear violation of the meaning of the operas. This is a limited interpretation. While it is true that many of the onstage representations of sex and violence that *Regietheater* productions may feature are not indicated in the stage directions, these themes are rarely as foreign to the operas as conservative critics make them out to be. As Englund notes, “opera has been scandalizing audiences for centuries through its lack of proper sexual morals.”⁸ I believe that *Regietheater* representations of sex and violence offend so many audiences not because they are foreign to the operas of the canon, but because they reveal something uncomfortable about that canon.

Sexual violence is central to the opera canon, despite its chronic omission from opera history, criticism, and pedagogy. Teachers, critics, scholars, and fans are frequently ignorant to the sexual violence that pervades so many of these stories. Yet at the same time, productions of canonic operas routinely feature acts of sexual violence, some of which are included in the operas’ libretti and many of which are not. In the wider culture of opera in North America and Europe, sexual violence feels somehow invisible and flagrant at the same time. It lies just beneath the surface, and its position there is guarded by opera scholars and practitioners who do not see or will not acknowledge it, and by opera critics who vehemently reject its inclusion in staging and production. Given this curious ambivalence, I am interested in the specific ways sexual violence is staged in modern productions of canonic operas. The operas of the performance canon that make up the core repertory of most opera houses are at least one hundred years old. There are some notable exceptions, to be sure, but most of the opera that a typical opera-goer sees comes from a relatively short period circa 1780 to 1920 (roughly Mozart to Puccini). But when these works are staged today, regardless of their age, they are put into

conversation with the cultures in which they are performed and the individuals who perform and receive them. I conceive of opera production and reception fundamentally as public discourse. Opera directors, designers, and singers are beholden not only to the composers' and librettists' written texts, but also, vitally, to contemporary producers, audiences, and critics. There are often vast social and political discrepancies between the culture in which a canonic opera was written and our own. It is up to opera performers and producers to make the practical decisions about how and whether to address this tension in the way they put these works onstage. When it comes to sexual violence, these negotiations between an opera's content and contemporary ideals become especially consequential.

Opera in Production

When I address the latent (and not so latent) sexual violence and misogyny present in the libretti of many beloved operas, I walk on well-tread ground. There is a rich history of scholarship on violence against women in opera extending back to Catherine Clément's landmark book, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*.⁹ And recent years have seen the expansion of this work specifically in regards to sexual violence in opera.¹⁰ I continue this work here, taking up the project of resistance by critiquing the way operatic sexual violence is staged in the twenty-first century and the influence these representations have on our understandings of canonic operas and of sexual violence in our own culture. Naomi André calls this kind of approach, which is sensitive to the present-day relevance of historical works, an "engaged musicology."¹¹

In general, serious consideration of operatic production and staging lags behind score-based studies of opera. Roger Parker has noted that "the musicological establishment has tended to be indifferent or even hostile to the visual aspect of musical drama."¹² But opera is a performed art form and overlooking production and staging results in a necessarily incomplete understanding of how these works convey meaning to their audiences.¹³ The tension that can arise in meaning between an opera's score and its performance is a central issue in studies of operatic production, and it necessitates careful use of language around the operatic text. I will make the distinction throughout this book between an opera's "written text" and its "performance text." Following David Levin, I adopt Roland Barthes's distinction between texts and works, and conceive of operas as the former.¹⁴ Whereas a work is a "fragment of substance," a text "is experienced only in an activity of production."¹⁵ Texts are irreducibly plural, containing multiple meanings, interpre-

tations, and possibilities.¹⁶ Levin distinguishes what he calls the “opera text,” comprising the score, libretto, and stage directions, from the “performance text.”¹⁷ I prefer “written text” to “opera text” because I believe that the category “opera” exists in performance just as much (indeed, more) than it exists on the page.

Feminist Spectatorship

The production analyses in this book center a critical feminist spectator—namely me—who may not be the intended addressee of many of these productions.¹⁸ Mine is an alternative perspective on opera as much because of my feminist political alignment as my gender identity as a woman.¹⁹ While neither of these traits are uncommon among opera scholars or the opera-going public, neither are well accounted for in the ways we discuss, produce, and respond to opera overall. Clément famously shared such a feminist, women-centered perspective by criticizing opera’s reliance on the suffering and death of women.²⁰ Though her book made waves in the opera world, the general tone with which we continue to teach and promote operas about the murder and abuse of women indicates that this perspective is still not accounted for. When I see sexual violence onstage at the opera, more often than not, I feel consciously that I am reacting incorrectly—more specifically, that I do not feel the way the production wants me to feel. In some cases, amid signals that what is happening onstage is funny or romantic, I feel alienated in my sense of revulsion at what I recognize as sexual violence. In other cases, where rape is presented explicitly, what I suspect is meant to trigger somber reflection on the harsh realities of our world instead makes me feel unsafe in my skin.

My positionality as an opera critic engages not only my experiences as a woman but my ethical and political priorities. The analysis and evaluation of the productions in this book are grounded in an ethics of care and draw from trauma studies, legal discourse, and feminist perspectives on sexual violence. I conceive of rape as fundamentally an act of power and domination that is carried out through sex and sexuality. In general, not nearly enough is made of rape’s violence and its political motivations of power and control. Instead, sexual violence is often excused as an excess or misplacement of passion and lust. This is true in public discourse and media responses to real rape cases, but it plays out in the way rape is represented in opera as well. In publicity materials and popular media surrounding productions of *Don Giovanni*, for instance, the titular Don is frequently described as a “ladies’ man,”²¹ but this label (along with “womanizer” or “Lothario”) represents Giovanni’s non-

consensual conquest of the women in the opera as having everything to do with his sexual charisma and downplays or ignores the violence that he relies on throughout the action. Along with the ineradicable violence of rape, my analysis depends on the seriousness of rape and its consequences to victims. I argue that these consequences can extend to fictional representations of rape insofar as they pose risks to survivors of sexual assault and contribute to public discourse about sexual violence. The following case study is an illustrative example of the way operatic production works as public discourse and establishes the stakes of staging sexual violence in the twenty-first century.

Care Ethics

In 2015, the Royal Opera House (ROH) premiered a new production of Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* directed by Damiano Michieletto. Before opening night, a number of industry professionals and friends of the company attended the dress rehearsal and were the first to see Michieletto's staging. During the ballet scene in the third act, a Swiss woman was stripped and sexually assaulted by a group of Austrian soldiers while the audience uncharacteristically shouted and booed. Opera singer Catharine Woodward (Catharine Rogers at the time) was in the audience of the open dress rehearsal, and she submitted a customer service form on the ROH website after the performance. She wrote that she was in "tears of shock" during the ballet scene, which she found to be "the worst kind of gratuitous," and advised that "at the very least . . . the performance should come with a strong warning, as I have many friends I would love to take to the opera, who have been the victims of sexual violence, I would never forgive myself if I subjected them to what I saw on Friday."²² ROH General Director Kasper Holten responded to Woodward directly in an email, which she reproduced on her blog. He also wrote an open letter addressing Woodward and others who were upset, which was published on music journalist and provocateur Norman Lebrecht's classical music gossip blog, *Slipped Disc*. In his response, Holten defends the production for representing "the reality of warfare," but he also apologizes "for [the ROH] not issuing a strong and clear enough warning." He reflects that audience members "should be able to make an informed choice about what they want to see or not, and if an audience member does not want to be exposed to sexual violence, it should be their choice."²³

Woodward focuses her argument on the risks that representations of rape pose to survivors of sexual violence. In her blog post, she cites an article reporting that approximately one in two women in Britain have been physi-

cally or sexually assaulted.²⁴ In his first response to Woodward's letter, Holten writes that given the opera's topic of war and oppression, "it is important that we do not only allow [Rossini's] opera to become harmless entertainment today."²⁵ Holten uses the language of harm in a figurative way here—he wants audiences to be made uncomfortable so that they will think critically about the opera's politics—but Woodward is calling attention to real psychological and physiological harm when she talks about her fear for survivors of sexual assault who will attend this production. Woodward is referring to a kind of retraumatization in which post-traumatic stress reactions can be triggered or exacerbated by stressors that are not necessarily traumatic in and of themselves. These stressors can include reminders of the original traumatic experience like, in this example, a staged representation of a sexual assault. Holten writes in his Slipped Disc letter that although the scene was meant to be upsetting, he had "no intention to disturb people in the way Catharine describes."²⁶

Woodward's and Holten's different uses of language of harm in relation to viewing a representation of sexual violence amount to a misunderstanding about the stakes at play. Holten seems initially reluctant to issue a specific warning about the sexual violence in *Tell* because he believes that the scene should be shocking and should make audience members uncomfortable in service of the director's commentary on the reality of war and war crimes. Woodward, on the other hand, is not advocating for herself in her discomfort but for sexual violence survivors who may be living with PTSD. Her position echoes a foundational idea of modern psychiatry, that "trauma is qualitatively different from stress and results in lasting biological change."²⁷ When Woodward asks Holten to warn audiences about the explicit display of sexual violence in this production, she is not worried about discomfort. Rather, she is trying to make space for survivors of sexual violence to make an informed decision about their capacity to engage with this production in a way that does not threaten their psychological and physiological wellbeing.

Behind these two different understandings of harm, I also recognize two different moral frameworks. In her landmark 1982 book *In a Different Voice*, Carol Gilligan proposes a dichotomy between a conception of morality as justice, concerned with rights and rules, and a conception of morality as care, concerned with responsibility and relationships.²⁸ Gilligan argues that the ethic of justice, which had been characterized by psychologists as the most mature human morality, values masculine qualities of autonomy and rationality.²⁹ She identifies an alternate morality, an ethic of care, which she suggests may be just as mature in other ways. The distinction between an ethic of jus-

tice and an ethic of care is perceptible in Holten and Woodward's exchange. Holten's engagement with the question of what the ROH owes its audience is based on a concept of rights when he offers to include a stronger content warning so that audience members can choose whether they are exposed to sexual violence or not. This measure does not really respond to Woodward's complaint. She says that "at the very least" the production should come with a stronger warning, but her focus is on the effect that the production will have on survivors of sexual violence. She is not asking for justice, but for care. She is asking ROH leadership to take responsibility for her experience and the experiences of the women in her life who stand to be hurt by this production, but she does not suggest it is their obligation to do so.

Care as an ethical framework has been dismissed by some critics as too narrow and personal to be taken seriously as a type of moral thinking on a large scale.³⁰ Care is often relegated to private life, the home, and interpersonal relationships, in part due to its association with women. This need not be the case, though. Joan Tronto argues that although Gilligan conceives of the ethic of care almost entirely in terms of personal relationships, individuals also have connections to larger units such as their communities.³¹ By Tronto's account, "caring seems to involve taking the concerns and needs of the other as the basis for action."³² This expanded notion of care reaches beyond private life and relationships into the social and political spheres. It is this larger, political orientation toward care that Catharine Woodward invokes when she objects to Michieletto's *Guillaume Tell*. While she begins with the realm of the private—her friends whom she does not wish to expose to the rape scene—she quickly extends this care framework to her community by citing statistics about the percentage of women in Britain who have been victimized by sexual violence. In her initial message to the ROH, Woodward invites Holten to better understand others by sharing her experience as a woman viewing this production and by exhorting him to imagine, as she has, the needs of women who have survived sexual and physical violence. She is asking him to care insofar as caring, according to Tronto, involves recognizing and attending to the needs of others. Holten accepted this invitation to care by revisiting the staging of the ballet scene. Upon being alerted to the effect this scene had on Woodward (among other audience members who complained), he modified the scene with the needs of the other—specifically women in the ROH audience—in mind.

Throughout *Rape at the Opera*, I propose a model of evaluating operatic performances that holds care for the audience in mind. Theater scholar James Thompson has begun to work toward applying an ethic

of care in the context of community-based and applied forms of theater. While Thompson's primary focus is on relational practices between artists, his conception of an aesthetic of care has wider implications. I am particularly interested in Thompson's brief discussion of the relationship with the audience, where he advocates for a move beyond a suspicious posture to one where the experiences and reactions of the spectator are not assumed.³³ This suspicious posture is seen clearly in the way that the creators of *Regietheater* productions typically engage their audiences. The desire to shock and disrupt an audience into productive discomfort takes for granted many assumptions about the members of that audience. In the example of the ROH *Guillaume Tell*, Michieletto and Holten are concerned with jolting complacent opera fans out of their revery and forcing them to contemplate the horrors of war. But as Woodward points out, this approach ignores all those audience members with an intimate, personal knowledge of violence and sexual assault who might be hurt by this content. Thompson argues that "caring for an audience means thinking hard about their experiences and needs. This is not to say they should witness insipid unchallenging presentations, but an event should model a caring insight into the different conditions of engagement."³⁴ Evaluating the extent to which a production models a caring insight, per Thompson, will obviously be an imprecise practice. I do not wish to get mired in arguments about intentionality. Instead, in the analyses that follow, I am looking for a balance between the shock of representing sexual violence onstage and what those representations accomplish in the narratives of the operas. From time to time, the voices of directors figure into my analysis, especially when they reveal choices made with real or imagined audience reactions in mind. Similarly, I engage the voices of critics and other audience members to take the proverbial temperature of the live reaction to productions (especially those I could not attend in person).

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Rape at the Opera focuses on the performance texts of a number of operatic productions over twenty years of practice that feature representations of sexual violence. I do not judge the productions I study as merely acceptable or unacceptable approaches to challenging material. Rather, I highlight the diversity of approaches to and reception of staged acts of sexual violence in the twenty-first century. My analysis of the representations of sexual violence in this book focuses on the wellbeing of audience members and the health of the social body, foregrounding the experiences of those individuals who are

most likely to be put at risk by careless depictions of sexual violence, especially survivors of sexual assault.

My case studies represent an array of operas from German, Italian, and French traditions from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century. Some of the operas in this book are here because the written texts feature sexual violence in relatively explicit ways that can be amplified or obscured in performance, especially the two Mozart selections, *Don Giovanni* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. The other operas do not necessarily thematize sexual violence in their written texts. In some cases, sexual violence may be implied and made explicit in performance (*Salome*, *Turandot*, *Guillaume Tell*), and in others it is absent from the written texts and embedded in the operas only due to the agency of directors (*Un ballo in maschera*, *La forza del destino*). There are a couple of notable absences that might stand out to readers familiar with this topic: Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. Unlike any of the operas in this book, these two operas are *about* rape. They tell the stories of the violent rapes of innocent young women whose lives are destroyed as a result of their assaults.³⁵ The ways that these rapes are represented on opera stages is certainly important and politically charged. Regardless of the particulars of the stagings, however, the written texts of these two operas take for granted the fact that rape is a serious and violent crime that does lasting damage to its victims. This approach to rape is unusual in the opera canon. Much more common is the burying, obscuring, and glossing over of rape seen in productions of and discourse around operas that include or thematize rape but are not about rape. It is this latter category that I am predominantly interested in for the sake of this book because it encompasses such a large percentage of the operas currently being performed. Sexual violence is particularly insidious in those operas where it lurks just below the surface or where it is added in production. In the *Anna Bolena* production with which I opened this book, the intrusion of sexual violence into the scene between Anna and Riccardo, and the almost offhanded nature of its inclusion, was an unsettling reminder of the omnipresence of sexual violence in our culture. Similarly, in the operas I discuss in this book, I am interested in the way sexual violence emerges from or intrudes into operas that do not set out to comment on it.

The four body chapters of *Rape at the Opera* each focus on the analysis of discrete constellations of operatic performances. Individually, each chapter works as a case study for some of the concerns and challenges of staging sexual violence in the twenty-first century. Together, they model a multifaceted analytical approach that moves between concerns located within the

fictional world of the opera and those located without. Over the course of these chapters, I establish five critical axes for evaluating representations of sexual violence on the opera stage: (1) the agency of the characters who are victims of sexual violence, (2) rape myths and stereotypes, (3) depictions of sexual violence in and as performance, (4) the risks and limits of using sexual violence as a tool of critique, and (5) sexual violence as a metaphor for other atrocities. The analytical approach of my chapter structure is additive; each subsequent chapter introduces one or two new axes of analysis while continuing to apply those established in previous chapters.

I start, in chapter 1, with the opera that begins many conversations about opera and sexual violence: Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. I analyze key moments from six productions of *Don Giovanni* between 2002 and 2019 from the perspective of a viewer versed in twenty-first century feminist politics. I introduce the first two axes of analysis for this book: the agency of the women who are victimized by sexual violence, and the relationship between onstage depictions of sexual violence and twenty-first-century rape myths and stereotypes. Although the opera's plot is propelled by two acts of attempted rape, the precise nature of these acts and what they mean have been interpreted and reinterpreted by critics, scholars, and performers for centuries. I focus on the representation of the three women, Donna Anna, Donna Elvira, and Zerlina, considered through three lenses central to contemporary feminist thought on the topic: consent, trauma, and believing victims. The approaches to *Don Giovanni* taken by these six productions inform the way their audiences understand the characters and story of the opera, but they also contribute to the culture in which they are performed and received. Ultimately, I argue that thinking through how sexual violence is represented in this opera is not just an issue of dramatic and aesthetic quality, but of social responsibility.

In chapter 2, I turn to a trend in recent productions of Strauss's *Salome* that sees directors using stage action during the Dance of the Seven Veils to position Salome as a victim of sexual abuse committed by her stepfather, Herod. I analyze the Salome-as-rape-victim trope and evaluate the ways in which sexual violence in these productions shapes perceptions of Salome's character and complicates the element of erotic spectacle at the center of the opera's plot. This chapter introduces a third axis of analysis through its exploration of the problems with representing sexual violence in the context of performance—both Salome's dance as a performance within the world of the opera and *Salome* itself as a performance for opera-goers. I introduce a collection of fourteen *Salome* productions between 2008 and 2018, all of which use the Dance of the Seven Veils as an opportunity to introduce sexual abuse to

the opera's action or as a vehicle for disclosing a past sexual abuse. Staging a rape in this scene encourages the audience to view Salome's abuse as an erotic spectacle, and representing Salome as a rape victim serves to explain her violent desire for Jochanaan and strips her of much of her power and agency in the story. Some of these interpretations of Salome as a victim can humanize her and encourage an audience to sympathize with her in a new way, but they also qualify and pathologize every choice she makes in the opera. The most successful productions according to my framework are those that find ways to grant new agency to Salome's character in light of the agency she loses when her violence toward Jochanaan is pathologized—specifically, those that stage acts of retribution not included in the opera's written text.

In chapter 3, I introduce my fourth critical axis for analysis that considers the limits and risks of criticizing problematic elements of canonic operas through production. I contrast the different approaches to the violence in the written text in two productions of Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*: Calixto Bieito's infamous 2004 production for the Komische Oper Berlin and Wajdi Mouawad's 2016 production co-commissioned by Opéra Lyon and the Canadian Opera Company. Bieito's *Entführung* takes seriously and amplifies the threats of violence and torture that litter the opera's libretto. The resulting production stages multiple rapes and murders of sex workers. Mouawad takes a different approach to the themes of violence and non-consent in *Entführung*, attempting to neutralize them almost entirely by means of an ambitious reconceptualization of the narrative aimed at a reparative representation of the Turkish characters. These productions both offer pointed critiques of some element of *Die Entführung*'s content, but both have only limited success. Bieito's production uses its excruciating depictions of graphic violence to highlight the violence already pervasive in the opera, but he perpetuates some of the harm of the opera even as he critiques it by objectifying women's bodies in his staging. Mouawad humanizes the Turkish men in the opera, but in so doing, he asks us to ignore or to forgive their threats of violence including specific references to torture and rape. Through comparison of these productions, I demonstrate—perhaps counterintuitively—that the choice *not* to represent sexual violence onstage is not necessarily preferable from a feminist ethical standpoint.

Chapter 4 draws together all the axes of analysis introduced in the previous chapters and adds one more that considers the hazards of employing sexual violence as a metaphor for other forms of violence. I analyze four productions of four different operas which are all set by their directors at wartime and feature explicit representations of sexual violence not included

in the operas' libretti. Damiano Michieletto's 2015 *Guillaume Tell* for the Royal Opera House is set in a twentieth-century war zone inspired by a number of real-world conflicts including the Balkan crisis; Tobias Kratzer's 2019 production of Verdi's *La forza del destino* for Oper Frankfurt sets the third act during the War in Vietnam; Tilman Knabe's 2007 production of Puccini's *Turandot* for the Aalto Theater Essen takes place in a contemporary authoritarian state; and Calixto Bieito's 2000 production of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* for the Gran Teatre del Liceu is set in a contemporary police state. These wartime opera productions survey some of the most prominent ways in which the metaphorical weight of wartime rape can be harnessed to raise the stakes of stories about political strife. However, employing rape as a stand in for other kinds of violence dilutes the interpersonal meanings of rape for individual victims.

Together, my production analyses sketch a picture of the complexity and plurality of the creative undertaking and spectatorial response associated with opera and sexual violence today. They also reveal central problems inherent to representing sexual violence onstage. My conclusion reflects on the potential of production to change the way we interact with the opera canon and the stories we tell when we perform these works. *Regietheater* can be a powerful tool in the service of creating opera in a way that is responsive and responsible to its public, provided it can mitigate the risks of representing sexual violence and other charged themes. I close this book with recommendations for the improvement of this powerful resource: first, by making space for more diverse voices in direction and production, and second, by centering both care for audiences and care for performers through practices of intimacy direction.

Rape at the Opera reframes the primary responsibility of opera critics and creators as being not to opera composers and librettists (many of whom are long dead) but to the public. In the best cases, staging sexual violence can allow for nuanced commentary on the subject in our cultural moment and can open up space for new understandings of familiar stories and characters. But the risks of staging sexual violence are ever present. Ultimately, through my analysis of sexual violence, I want to open up a new chapter of opera criticism that takes the ethical and the political as central and not peripheral to the enterprise of staging and production.