

Voyage at the Ends of Remediation in *Il Marchese del Grillo*

Chiara Casarin

Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia

Abstract The chapter examines the theatre scene from Mario Monicelli's *Il Marchese del Grillo* (1981) as a distinctive case study of opera remediation in Italian cinema. It broadens the conceptual boundaries of remediation, reflecting on its object, rationale and modalities as a complex cultural process. A multi-faceted (dramaturgical, cinematic, medial) analysis of this scene reveals also how music serves to evoke a complex system of socio-cultural oppositions that permeate the whole film narrative, while also illustrating Monicelli's vision of early nineteenth-century musical theatre.

Keywords Opera in cinema. Remediation. *Il Marchese del Grillo*. Vocalities. Gender Identities.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 *Il Marchese del Grillo*: Reception and Subject. – 3 Clash of Vocalities and Gender Identities: The Theatre Scene. – 4 (Meta)representing Dychotomies: Gender, Class, Progress on an Imagined Stage. – 5 Conclusion.

1 Introduction

In his autobiography *La musica è pericolosa*, composer Nicola Piovani recounts an anecdote related to the initial reception of the film *Il Marchese del Grillo* (1981) by Mario Monicelli. Following the film's release in French cinemas, the director and the composer were contacted "da diversi musicologi d'oltralpe che volevano sapere dove avessimo scovato quell'operina tardosettecentesca di cui non trovavano il manoscritto da nessuna parte, e soprattutto chi fosse questo Jacques Berain" (by several French musicologists who wanted to know where we had found that late eighteenth-century opera for which they could not locate a manuscript anywhere, and, above all, who this Jacques Berain was). Piovani refers here to the scene where the main character, Marquis Onofrio del Grillo (Alberto Sordi), attends a performance of an opera at the Teatro d'Alibert in Rome, attributed to a Jacques Berain and titled *La cintura di Venere* (*La ceinture de Vénus*). The composer concludes the anecdote by expressing his embarrassment over the questions raised by French scholars, as both the opera and its author were entirely made up by Piovani himself, along with Monicelli and theatre director Angelo Savelli, who contributed to staging the performance (Piovani 2014, 134-8).



The Future Contemporary 3

e-ISSN 2785-0986

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-911-5



Peer review | Open access

Submitted 2024-12-19 | Accepted 2025-06-11 | Published 2025-10-22

© 2025 Casarin | © 4.0

DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-911-5/002

In the years following the film's release, Piovani has recounted this anecdote on several occasions, also showing a certain degree of satisfaction in having created a "opera fantasma" (phantom-opera) so stylistically consistent with the genre of *opéra-comique* as to appear "real".¹ These elements, together with the reactions from the audience (which can be seen in the video of the 2011 conference), seem to suggest a promotional intent on the part of the composer, who, through this anecdote as well, sought to draw attention both to Monicelli's comedy and to his work as a composer. Especially given the variations among different accounts of the anecdote, it is not certain if it recounts facts that actually happened. However, some of its details are at the core of the three reasons that led me to select *Il Marchese del Grillo* as a case study in examining the remediation of opera in Italian cinema of the late twentieth century.

Before presenting the three reasons behind this choice, a methodological explanation is due. I refer to the concept of remediation as discussed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). They define remediation as the "representation of one medium in another" (1999, 54), a complex process that entails the transformation and re-signification of elements, characteristics, and techniques from the two (or more) media involved.² This general definition is built upon a wide range of cases and encompasses multiple variations of this very broad phenomenon. In this paper, I will focus on the phenomenon as a direct reference in a medial product to creative objects, practices, languages, and artistic techniques pertaining to older media.³

In this sense, *Il Marchese del Grillo* represents an emblematic example, primarily because it remediates an 'imaginary' opera, "un falso stilistico, una crosta" (a stylistic forgery, a fake) – to borrow Piovani's own words – which did not exist before the film was made (2014, 137). These elements prompt methodological reflections about the object, reasons and

I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and insights. I am deeply grateful to my research fellowship supervisors at Ca' Foscari, Professors Miriam De Rosa and Vincenzina C. Ottomano, for their advice and encouragement. My special thanks also go to Dr. Giovanni Meriani for his constant support and our stimulating conversations.

1 Piovani recounted this anecdote in 2009 on releasing the deluxe DVD edition of *Il Marchese del Grillo*, edited by Monicelli himself. Among the DVD's extra features is an interview with Piovani, in which, after explaining the reasons behind the creation of a "un'opera-comique fantasma" (phantom *opéra-comique*), the composer states: "la cosa buffa è che, ancora oggi, a me e alla casa discografica, arrivano delle richieste di studiosi francesi che sono alla ricerca di notizie su Jacques Berain e "La cintura di Venere"! Con un certo imbarazzo, ogni volta, sono costretto a spiegarli che si tratta di una "crosta" "(The funny thing is that even today, both I and the record label receive inquiries from French scholars who are looking for information about Jacques Berain and "La cintura di Venere"! With some embarrassment, I am always forced to explain that it is a 'fake'). In 2011, Piovani returned to the subject during a public lecture held on 29 January at the Teatro Petruzzelli in Bari as part of the BIF&ST (Bari International Film & TV Festival). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3d4KrZTcgCU>.

2 In the preface to the Italian translation of Bolter and Grusin's volume, the editor Alberto Marinelli states that: "Elemento costitutivo del concetto di remediation è la presa d'atto che nella nostra cultura un singolo medium non può mai operare in forma isolata poiché 'si appropria di tecniche, forme e significati sociali di altri media'" (A constitutive element of the concept of remediation is the recognition that, in our culture, no single medium can ever operate in isolation, as it 'appropriates the techniques, forms, and social meanings of other media'; Bolter, Grusin 2002, 16).

3 Meaningful inflections of the concept of remediation that show significant points of contact with the one adopted in the present essay can be found in Danieli, *Folk Music* and Targa, *Armonie perturbanti*.

modalities of remediation as a multifaceted artistic and cultural process. If the opera featured in *Il Marchese del Grillo* was composed *ad hoc*, can this be considered a case of remediation? If not, what kind of artistic and cultural process are we witnessing? In other words, what are the purposes and boundaries of remediation?

Secondly, the remediation is emphasized by the scene's setting, which takes place inside the Teatro d'Alibert during the opera's performance, thus further highlighting the embedding of an 'old' medium (opera) within a 'new' one (cinema). The setting and the narrative strategies employed by Monicelli to lead the movie's viewers into the theatre and to 'make them attend' the performance contribute to creating a dialectical tension between the two complementary logics that, according to Bolter and Grusin, underlie remediation: immediacy (or transparency) and hypermediacy. In particular, "the logic of transparent immediacy" aims to preserve a "contact point between the medium and what it represents" and to make the interface of the medium itself to disappear. By contrast, the logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and makes them visible to the viewer (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 21-44). The tension between these components emerges from a multi-perspective analysis - dramaturgical, cinematic, and medial - of the scene and reveals the functions that the musical element assumes within the cinematic narrative.

Finally, if we mean the interpretation of the musical past - including my own interpretation - as a non-neutral account filtered through the historiographical lenses of the interpreter, this study leads us to reconstruct a particular vision of opera at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, the analysis of the theatre scene in *Il Marchese* allows us to focus on which elements of the operatic past Monicelli, Piovani, and Savelli select, present, and refunctionalize for the purposes of the movie narrative. The focus on the cinematic function of this historiographical narration enables us to investigate the dynamics of re-signification and recreation of a given cultural system.

Thus, in the following pages, I reflect on several aspects of the remediation process of an 'imaginary' opera. The first section provides a historical and critical framework of the film, followed by a second section in which I will examine the Teatro d'Alibert scene, analysing its narrative and dramaturgical dynamics. In the chapter's second section, I will focus on the dichotomies that pervade the scene (and the entire film), symbolized and elevated through the on-stage portrayal of contrasting vocalities. Specifically, I will highlight how the remediation of the opera aims to represent gender identity stereotypes, revealing their culturally constructed, recognizable, and recognized characteristics in 1970s and 1980s Italy. Such stereotypes are employed by the authors as a dramaturgical tool within the cinematic narrative and, in particular, in the theatre scene that constitutes a key narrative junction in the construction of filmic meaning. In the third and final section, I will draw methodological and cultural conclusions about remediation, both as an artistic process capable of uncovering valuable insights about the cultural and social context in which it occurred and as a heuristic perspective for potential transdisciplinary exploration, extending the boundaries delineated by musical and film historiography.

2 *Il Marchese del Grillo: Reception and Subject*

Il Marchese del Grillo was released in cinemas on December 22, 1981. The movie enjoyed immediate and widespread commercial success, earning several national and international awards. However, the categories of these awards indicate that critical acclaim was directed primarily toward specific aspects of the movie. In fact, except for a single award for direction (Silberner Bär/Beste Regie, 1982 Berlin Film Festival), all others suggest that the film was mainly appreciated for its portrayal of the historical period and its Romanesque *couleur locale*.⁴ Additionally, some of the critical reception was not very favorable. For example, Callisto Cosulich, writing in *Paese Sera* defined it: “Non un film d’auteur [...] ma una dignitosa messa in scena, che forse avrebbe avuto in qualche frangente bisogno di una forbice più spietata” (Not an auteur movie [...] but a respectable mise-en-scene that perhaps would have benefited, at times, from a more ruthless editing). Similarly, Stefano Della Casa remarked in a monograph on Monicelli that the film “non aggiunge niente ad una filmografia” (adds nothing to a filmography).⁵

This ambivalent reception is also shared in the broader evaluations of Monicelli’s filmography. Although the movie is indeed mentioned in every contribution (monographies, interview collections, catalogues, and the like) about the (extensively studied) Monicelli’s production, it only occupies a ‘peripheral’ position. The movie is often passingly referenced in the contributions and often in relation to other, broader subjects (Italian comedy history, Monicelli’s direction practice and artistic collaboration with important actors, like Sordi, or composers, like Piovani, anecdotic narrative of various kinds) (Delfino 2008, 120; Della Casa 1987, 73).⁶ To sum up, *Il Marchese* has been regarded as a ‘minor’ movie within the production of a ‘major’ director, partly due to the strongly Romanesque character of the subject, which appears ‘non-serious’, unengaged, almost light, and that largely relies on Sordi’s performance.

In fact, *Il Marchese* is a period comedy set in early nineteenth-century Rome that revolves around the elaborate pranks orchestrated by its protagonist, Onofrio, Marquis del Grillo, Duke of Bracciano, Noble Guard, and Papal Chamberlain to Pius VII. He resides in a lavish palace with his pious and conservative mother, his sister Camilla, brother-in-law Rambaldo, nephew Pompeo, cousin Genuflessa, and a host of servants – first and foremost the *factotum* Ricciotto. Onofrio spends his days devising tricks that involve all the characters in the story, from the poor carbon seller Gasperino, to members of the nobility, even to the Pope himself. These pranks drive the narrative, which unfolds as a series of juxtaposed narrative *tableaux*.

4 Three ‘Nastri d’argento’ (screenplay, costumes, best non-starring actor for Paolo Stoppa’s Pius VII); ‘David di Donatello’ for scenography and costumes.

5 The Italian Ministero del turismo e dello spettacolo requested the film’s producers to revise it “per la presenza nel dialogo di numerose espressioni scurrili, controindicate alla particolare sensibilità dei predetti minori [14 anni]” (due to the presence in the dialogue of numerous coarse expressions, unsuitable for the particular sensitivity of the aforementioned minors [under 14 years]) [figs 1-3]. Furthermore, part of the Italian critic also condemned the vulgarity of the protagonist, played by Sordi.

6 In addition to the already mentioned contributions, bibliographical titles that discuss the film, more or less extensively, are: Bosio 2014; Buccheri 2005, 128-36; Mondadori 2005; Monicelli 1986; Piovani 2014, 134-8.

For the Marquis' character and his vocation as a prankster, Monicelli drew inspiration from popular stories probably inspired by a historical figure also named Onofrio del Grillo, who lived in Fabriano between 1714 and 1787. These legends had circulated in the Roman popular tradition since the nineteenth century and were eventually written down (in several forms).⁷ Monicelli transposed the character and his adventures from the early eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century "in modo da inserire il personaggio [Onofrio] in una temperie storica più importante: l'occupazione dei francesi a Roma, l'arresto del Papa – un episodio della Chiesa molto ignorato" (to place [Onofrio] in a more significant historical context: the French occupation of Rome and the Pope's arrest – an often-overlooked episode in history of the Church) (Monicelli 1986, 110). In the film, the theatre scene directly follows the depiction of these historical events. Specifically, Monicelli dramatizes the Napoleonic conquest of Rome through the symbolic transfer of the flag at Castel Sant'Angelo (from the Papal States to the French Empire) accompanied by the *Marseillaise* and the proclamation of the act of annexation of Papal territories into the Empire. The transition's first immediate political and cultural effect unfolds, at least in the film, at the theatre.

3 Clash of Vocalities and Gender Identities: The Theatre Scene

The scene opens with a close-up of a poster affixed to a wall that reads: "Teatro d'Alibert | Via Margutta N°28 | oggi domenica 25 e lunedì 26 | Novembre 1810 | LA CINTURA DI VENERE | LA CEINTURE DE VÉNUS | Autore Jacques Berain | OPÉRA COMIQUE". These informations are followed by references to all the artists involved in the staging, from the orchestra to the singers and their respective roles. Among them, Olimpia Martin's name in the role of Venus stands out for its prominent position at the top. This highly detailed frame focuses on the performance's paratext, providing the film's internal and external audience with all the necessary information about the opera to be staged.

The detailed shot of the poster is accompanied by an off-screen conversation among characters commenting on the woman's presence in the opera's cast. The tonal qualities of their voices suggest – almost imprinting upon the listener – the speakers' identities. The masculine timbre, albeit in *false* *setto*, and the high yet strained pitch point out that the speakers are individuals whose voices defy conventional representations of male or female. The dialogue offers further insight. "Che sanno cantà meglio de noi?... Le femmine non so' voci bianche, solo noi lo semo!" (They can't sing better than us!... Women do not have white voices, only we do): the speakers are the "true white voices", the castrati.⁸

These singers are also characterized by their bitter aversion to the presence of a woman on stage (in this case, Olimpia). This opposition is

⁷ Cf. Giovagnoli 1887. Some considerations on anecdotes from the oral tradition can be found in Rava 1942, 167-70.

⁸ The scholarly literature on the relationship between vocality and gender identity is extensive. Suffice it to reference to: Andrè 2006; Chiriaco 2018, in particular Chapter VI, "I own that voice. Timbro e identità", 101-21; Daolmi, Senici 2000; Eidsheim 2019.

both vehement and seemingly inexplicable, given that neither the off-screen characters nor the singer has yet appeared in the film. This hostility is unleashed at the end of the dialogue when, against the auditory backdrop of a fragment of virtuosic coloratura uttered by one of the singers, they deface the poster by erasing Olimpia's name with a walking stick.

The subsequent shot broadens the frame to show five male figures. Here, the costumes and the heavy use of *maquillage* definitively confirm both the stereotypical gender representation of castrati in the film and the intricate references embedded in this portrayal. The singers are dressed in ostentatious late eighteenth-century pastel-coloured attire, voluminous white cravats, long capes, tricorn hats, and flamboyant wigs with curls. The actors' faces are heavily powdered until almost white, contrasting with the bright red color of their lips. This depiction of men whose self-presentation does not conform to traditional masculine norms suggests the homosexuality of the characters. They are further presented as symbols of an endangered musical tradition – eighteenth-century opera – threatened by the presence of women on stage, just as their social and professional roles are perceived to be under threat. The weight of this struggle underpins their vehement opposition, expressed both in the damage to the poster and in the phrase, “Mo' glielo famo vedere noi” (We will show her now), uttered by one of them.

In this scene, two equivalences are established through a network of actions and symbols: ‘castrato’ equals ‘homosexual’, but also ‘reactionary’. From a dramaturgical perspective, this section serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it sets up the tensions that underpin the following scene, set in the theatre; on the other, it conveys a series of cues that guide the interpretation of the film. The section ends with the castrati walking away from the defaced poster, stating that they are going to get a loge.

The subsequent scene takes us inside the theatre. However, instead of entering from the castrati's perspective, it places us in the upper gallery (*loggione*). The exploration of the theatrical space unfolds through tightly paced shots: the first reveals the stage as seen from the gallery; the second offers a perspective from the stalls or the first tier of loges; and the third shifts to the stage, showing the entire audience in the stalls and loges. The sequence closes with a shot of the gallery from the stage. Through this series of shots, Monicelli not only showcases the interior of the theatre but also illustrates the diverse composition of its audience, as it emerges from a host of background elements.

The gallery is packed with poorly dressed, dialect-speaking working class people, the pit is occupied – but not overcrowded – by people in bourgeois clothing or in French uniforms, the loges are left semi-empty by the French soldiers and more richly dressed people – maybe nobles. The shot that concludes the exploration of the theatre's interior spaces is particularly significant for a further definition of the social classes that inhabit the theatre itself. It lingers on the gallery and the uppermost tier of boxes, creating a striking visual play of “full/empty”. On the one hand, the gallery is overcrowded, forcing its spectators to arrange themselves in multiple rows, standing close together and overlapping parts of their bodies; on the other hand, the loges are occupied by only a handful of isolated figures. In summary, Monicelli appears to construct an exploration of the theatre ‘by audience tiers’, making a historiographical statement about nineteenth-century musical theatre, which is portrayed here as an entertainment venue populated by an audience diverse in social class and

national identity. In the director's vision, thus, nineteenth-century opera was an entertainment "for everyone": nobles in the loges and the working class in the gallery coexisted, more or less peacefully, alongside French conquerors and the conquered Romans.

The exploration of the physical and social spaces of the Teatro d'Alibert unfolds alongside the beginning of the opera. The film stages the opening fragment, composed of three self-contained pieces interspersed with spoken dialogues. The first number, a sort of two-stanza buffo *aria di sortita*, features Bacchus – drunk, reclined on a litter – served by two male attendants dressed in white. The role of Bacchus is played by a fat, bearded middle-aged man, also dressed in white and crowned with golden vine leaves. At the end of the first stanza, the singer and attendants perform a choreographed routine that provokes laughter from both the audience and the castrati. The camera focuses on the castrati at the conclusion of the piece, highlighting their mockery of the performance and their location in the theatre. The castrati – previously left outside the theatre – are now positioned in the prominent left proscenium loge on the first tier, highly visible to the entire audience and very close to the stage.

Following Bacchus' piece, Mercury enters, "descending from above" via a mechanical hoist while the orchestra plays a lively accompaniment. The tenor assigned to this role is thin, with a gaunt face accented by long, drooping mustaches. His red costume includes a caduceus, a winged helmet, and golden sandals. After this entrance *à grand spectacle*, a brief dialogue ensues between Bacchus and Mercury, the only audible line being, "Su, abbandona il vino ubriacone! Dalle onde argentate del mare una nuova dea è nata... *Une nouvelle Déesse est née!*" (Come now, abandon your drunkenness! From the silver waves of the sea, a new goddess is born... A new goddess is born!). Following a musical pause – which allows for a dialogue involving the Marquis, seated in the loges – Mercury begins what appears to be a *cantabile* in compound time. The piece includes sporadic interjections from Bacchus, serving as a *pertichino* to his colleague. During the aria, a technical mishap with the hoist suspends Mercury again mid-performance. Bacchus tries to deal with the error by yanking Mercury down by the ankle, coinciding with the aria's climactic moment: a faint *false* high note leading into the final cadence. The combination of technical blunder and lackluster vocal performance elicits more laughter from the castrati, visible to the entire audience, as confirmed by the Marquis's quip: "Guarda a quei castrati come je girano le palle!" (Look at those castrati, how riled up they are! Literally, look at how those castrati's balls are spinning right now!).

The third number is a quintessential French-style *entrée*. The backdrop changes, and to a full-orchestra accompaniment based on the film's main music theme (*Mia cara Olimpia*), the prima donna, Olimpia, makes her entrance as Venus. The comic effect is immediate: she is accompanied by a not-so-magnificent parade that includes a single attendant dressed as some kind of horse-like creature. Unlike the previous performers, Olimpia is overtly sexualized: the hair is adorned with a tiara, the makeup is heavy, the costume is nearly transparent, revealing much of her silhouette. Her entrance, greeted by the audience's jeers, includes a spoken monologue in French in which she apologizes for the impoliteness of her lateness. Presented implicitly as a "naughty girl" (with many suggestive undertones), her sexualization is immediate and powerful.

As Olimpia begins her *cavatina*, the audience's protests – "vattene via!" and "Hai visto che schifo? Si vedono tutte le zinne!" (Get off the stage! and How gross! You can see all of the breasts!) – partially drown out the aria's opening. One of the castrati, likely the one who defaced Olimpia's name on the poster (he is the only one carrying a cane at the beginning of the theatre scene), interjects by embellishing a cadence and continues intruding during pauses in Olimpia's singing. These interruptions delight the audience, who egg on the castrato to show her "come se canta!" (how it's done).

The vocal duel between Olimpia and the castrato escalates into a full-fledged contest. The castrato boldly moves from his loge to the stage, shoving Mercury aside. Musically, the duel becomes a sequence of escalating repetitions of the same motif towards higher pitches. The castrato overpowers the soprano with his greater vocal volume, an effect obtained by the audio mixing, creating a tense and exciting atmosphere. Despite her efforts to match his sound, Olimpia loses both the vocal battle and the audience's favor, who continue to cheer the castrato. She then shifts the fight to a physical level, slapping the castrato in the face. In response, the other castrati rush onto the stage, sparking an all-out brawl. The orchestra's uninterrupted and unseen performance creates a comically incongruous contrast to the chaotic melee, punctuated by a flurry of vegetables hurled from the gallery.

4 (Meta)representing Dychotomies: Gender, Class, Progress on an Imagined Stage

The analysis of the scene and the description of the characters reveal the presence of a complex network of dichotomies woven by Monicelli through visual and vocal elements. The first opposition is discernible between the three singers of the opera: the men on one side and the woman on the other. The former are portrayed as unattractive adult men dressed in heavily concealing garments adorned with stereotypical attributes (golden vine leaves, tankard, caduceus, winged helmet, and golden sandals), serving to identify their character in the opera. They are subjected to offensive epithets from the audience (including the Marchese), such as "grassone" (fatso) for Bacchus and "zozzone" (filthy man) for Mercury. In other words, the characteristics defining these male characters are all derogatory and tied to their physicality, which, in various ways, deviates from the ideal of virile masculinity. In contrast, Olimpia is depicted as a young, attractive woman who openly displays her body on stage, thereby attracting insults from the audience, much like her male counterparts. However, while the two male singers are seen as "ugly men" both aesthetically and morally – hence not truly "men" but rather "filthy" and "fat" – Olimpia is judged negatively by the audience for the opposite reason: she is entirely a woman, aesthetically pleasing, and unashamed of showing herself on stage.

The second opposition – established from the outset of the scene and most evident due to its culmination in a conflict – exists between Olimpia and the castrato, characters embodying two distinct gender models. In constructing both, Monicelli employs a series of "stereotipi riconoscibili che incarnano deviazioni dalla norma" (recognizable stereotypes that represent deviations from the norm). On the one hand, the castrato symbolizes "l'effeminatezza maschile come forma di deviazione da ciò che gli uomini

normali dovrebbero essere" (male effeminacy as a deviation from what normal men are supposed to be). On the other hand, Olimpia embodies the stereotype of a "fallen woman", an emancipated figure who does not conform to the morality – albeit contradictory – of the time (Rigoletto 2020, 33). Her being "out of place" and "wrong" in terms of morality emerges at the theatre, where the audience critiques her not for how she sings but for who she is. The conservative Roman audience – the same that takes to the streets to pray after the Pope's arrest – prefers a homosexual castrato to a heterosexual but nonconformist woman.⁹

This apparent paradox conceals one of the possible interpretations of Monicelli's film: it serves as a scathing critique of a moralistic, plebeian, and backward Rome that opposes the *novità* (novelties) introduced by the French: the "regolazione del Tevere", the "restauro dei monumenti" and "donne che recitano" (regulation of the Tiber, restoration of monuments, women performing on stage), all presented as related in the film.¹⁰ Within this interpretive framework, the oppositions that I sketched above align with and interact within a broader semantic network. Olimpia, nineteenth-century theatre, the French, Paris, and Napoleon symbolize the future, survival, and the potential to challenge the *status quo*. Conversely, the castrati, eighteenth-century theatre, the Roman nobility, Rome, and the Pope represent the *Medioevo* (Middle Ages), a decadent tradition that can no longer endure because it has nothing left to say, as Onofrio asserts at the theatre. These oppositions serve as the dramatic mechanism driving the internal tensions of the film. The Marquis's infatuation with Olimpia leads him to abandon the backward Rome for the modern Paris until, during his journey, he encounters French soldiers returning from Russia. Starving and wounded, they inform him of Napoleon's defeat and the restoration of Louis XVIII's monarchy. This encounter prompts Onofrio's return to Rome, restoring his initial state as though nothing had happened.

The French novelties, so fervently championed by the Marquis throughout much of the narrative, take on a markedly different tone by the film's conclusion. In particular, an analysis of the theatre scene highlights how the sole genuine innovation of *La cintura di Venere* is the presence of a woman in a female role. In other words, the audience was not drawn to Olimpia's vocal abilities, nor to the low staging quality, nor to the opera itself. This last element is characterized by the filmic narration as inherently "new" and French, even if in the movie an example of a "traditional" and Italian opera never appears. The circumstance that, in the 1980s, those considered prominent representatives of the eighteenth-century Italian operatic tradition, *castrati* and lower-class audience, opposed to *La cintura* connotes this opera as a 'progressive' one.

9 We can also interpret the opposition between Olimpia and the castrato in light of issues related to vocal technique and its "technological" implications. In particular, Olimpia's female voice may be read as an innovative technological "medium" in contrast to the "old" medium embodied by the castrato's voice. In this light, the singing contest appears as a reaction of the castrati to the potential existential menace of the 'new' technological mean (the woman's voice). I thank the first anonymous reviewer for this insightful reading, which I intend to explore further in future contributions on the subject. On castrati and issues of vocal style, see Davis 2005; Feldman 2015.

10 These quotations are from the dialogue the Marquis has with three anti-French artists at the theatre.

If *La cintura di Venere* does not represent an example of the progress so heavily promoted by French supporters, what do these novelties indeed entail? More importantly, are such novelties a guarantee of progress over the past? The film's final events seem to answer these questions negatively, suggesting, with a pessimistic undertone, that ultimately nothing ever really changes "perché nulla cambia mai, la rivoluzione finisce sempre in restaurazione e 'morto un papa se ne fa un altro'" (because nothing ever changes; revolutions always end in restoration, and 'when one Pope dies, another one is elected'), as repeatedly echoed by various characters in the film (Buccheri 2005, 134).

5 Conclusion

This stratified analysis is only possible if we consider *Il Marchese* as a case of remediation, albeit a peculiar one. Let us, therefore, attempt to answer the initial questions by supporting this interpretation with two elements. Firstly, although *La cintura* is an 'imaginary' work, it demonstrates a process of appropriation of techniques, forms, conventions and language of *opéra-comique* at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Examples include the baritone and prima donna's arias, the duet between the baritone and the tenor, the alternation between spoken dialogue and sung pieces, and falsetto. This stylistic appropriation lends the piece a deliberately generic character, making it believable as an early nineteenth-century composition, to the extent of deceiving both audiences and (even French) specialists.

In other words, this specific moment of the movie in which *La cintura* appears on stage (and its staging in a full-fashioned theatre appears on screen) exposes some of the basic mechanics of remediation. Namely, the fact that the representation of the concrete performance and attendance of *La cintura* finds its place in the movie is a symptom of the form of medial appropriation between new and old media outlined by Bolter and Grusin, even if we are talking about a single moment of a single movie.¹¹ From a methodological perspective, thus, the framework of remediation represents a privileged point of view for conceptualizing and analysing the case of the *Marchese* (and other analogous cases) for two main reasons. Unlike categories based on the concept of imitation, such as parody and pastiche, remediation allows for a focus on the processes of transformation, shaping, and resemanticization that occur between media, not only between aesthetic objects.¹² Moreover, as formulated by Bolter and Grusin, the concept of remediation lends itself to application in cases of highly diverse nature and historical context. In fact, the two scholars have constructed a concept with porous boundaries that enables them to include both artificial intelligence and a page from an illuminated Book of Hours dating to 1450 within their research horizon (Bolter, Grusin 1999, 12-14).

¹¹ However, it is worth noting that Bolter and Grusin present a number of applications of their theory based on the analysis of individual moments and/or characteristics of individual media products. See, for example, the numerous examples the authors give regarding animated movies in the eighth chapter of the volume. Cf. Bolter, Grusin 1999, 147-50.

¹² On the definition of the term *pastiche*, Richard Dyer writes: "It has two primary senses, referring to a combination of aesthetic elements or to a kind of aesthetic imitation [...]. *pastiche* is a kind of imitation that you are meant to know is an imitation". Cf. Dyer 2007.

The second reason for interpreting the theatre scene of the movie *Il Marchese* as a case of remediation relates to analysing how *La cintura* is accessed, aligning with the two logics of remediation: immediacy and hypermediacy. Examples of hypermediacy include the detail of the theatre poster progressively revealing all the information about the performance, the presentation of castrati through a zoom-out that transitions from vocal timbre to aesthetic elements and then to specific singing techniques, and the exploration of the theatre's interior spaces through camera movements. As Emanuele Senici argues, these "atti di rappresentazione multipli" (acts of multiple representation) create a heterogeneous perceptive space in which "la rappresentazione filmica è rivelata come una finestra aperta su un'altra rappresentazione, quella operistica, e quindi su un altro medium, quello musico-teatrale" (the cinematic representation is revealed as an open window onto another representation, that of opera, and thus onto another medium, the musical-theatrical) (Senici 2019, 66). The viewer's desire for immediacy is satisfied once the performance begins, focusing on what occurs on stage, creating an automatic representation process and a unified, privileged space for accessing the *mise-en-scène*, especially after Olimpia's entrance.

The fact that *La cintura* 'does not exist' outside the film does not undermine its definition as a case of remediation. On the contrary, this case allows rethinking of the boundaries of remediation, which are here questioned due to dramaturgical and narrative reasons, as Piovani (2014, 136) himself explains:

Per realizzare l'episodio, serviva un'opera che si prestasse alle necessità narrative. Per quanto cercassi, non c'era verso di trovare un'opera francese del primo Ottocento con un'aria da soprano adatta all'uopo, cioè con delle pause buone per infilarci le frasi cantate dal castrato duellante. E allora con Monicelli decidemmo di farne una finta.

To create the episode, we needed an opera suited to the narrative requirements. No matter how hard I looked, I couldn't find a French opera from the early nineteenth century with a soprano aria appropriate for the purpose, that is, with pauses that could accommodate the castrato duelist's sung lines. So Monicelli and I decided to make a fake one.

In other words, they opted for an opera constructed according to the dramatic needs of the film, producing an object 'born' to be remediated, that is to exist only outside its 'traditional' media context. Negatively, this statement reveals that a 'real' opera could not have been used for this purpose because it lacked the representation of *all* the dichotomous tensions that *La cintura* synthesizes within the film's dramaturgy: woman-man, woman-castrato, tradition-innovation, preservation-revolution.

Indeed, the presence in a film of an opera without an original, absent from any text other than the cinematic one, lacks the fundamental attributes required to be interpreted as a citation or intertextual phenomenon. Moreover, this case study compels us to broaden the boundaries of what we interpret as remediation. To date, opera remediation processes have been studied primarily about the film opera, the biopic, and early sound cinema. Regarding Italian film production of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, scholarly attention has focused on two main points of interest. The first

concerns the canonized nineteenth-century Italian opera: Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Puccini, and above all, Verdi. The second is the filmography of highbrow 'auteur' directors (Gallone, Bertolucci, Visconti, Pasolini, Bellocchio, Vittorio, and Paolo Taviani). This case study confirms that the processes of cinematic remediation of opera extends well beyond these boundaries.¹³ Indeed, they also occur in "unexpected" situations, such as in the case of "nonexistent" musical works within the repertoire. After all, even if possible, who would attend a theatrical performance of *La cintura* and leave satisfied on anything but an 'ironic' level? Yet, when seen at the Teatro D'Alibert, possibly alongside Onofrio del Grillo, it takes on an entirely different meaning.

13 Citron 2010; Giuggioli 2011; 2019; Mantica 2022; Marchelli, Venturelli 2001; Miceli, Capra 2014; Verona 2019; Vincent 2014.

*Prestato
somma
7.12.81
per*

REPUBBLICA ITALIANA

MINISTERO DEL TURISMO E DELLO SPETTACOLO
DIREZIONE GENERALE DELLO SPETTACOLO

17 DIC 1981

77420

Domanda di revisione

Il sottoscritto LUCIANO DE FEO residente a ROMA
Via Lung.re dei Mellini 45 legale rappresentante della Ditta OPERA FILM PRODUZIONE S.r.l.
Tel. 841081 con sede a ROMA domanda, in nome e per conto della Ditta stessa,
la revisione della pellicola dal titolo: " IL MARCHESE DEL GRILLO " (Colore)

di nazionalità: Italiana produzione: OPERA FILM PRODUZIONE S.r.l. Roma
dichiarando che la pellicola stessa viene per la prima volta sottoposta alla revisione.
Lunghezza dichiarata metri 3650 Accertata metri 3640 *Samy*
Roma, li 11-12-81 p. OPERA FILM PRODUZIONE S.r.l.

DESCRIZIONE DEL SOGGETTO

TITOLI TESTA
Renzo Rossellini per GAUMONT - DAC presenta ALBERTO SORDI "IL MARCHESE DEL GRILLO" con la partecipazione di: Carolyne Berg - Riccardo Billi - Flavio Bucci Camillo Milli - Cochi Ponzoni - Marc Porel - Pietro Tordi - Leopoldo Trieste e con Paolo Stoppa nel ruolo di Papa Pio VII - con - Giorgio Gobbi - Isabelle Linnartz - Tommaso Bianco - Marina Confalone - Elena Fiore - Alfredo Cohen - Elena Daskova - Salvatore Iacpno -
Fotografia di Sergio D'Offizi - Scenografia di L. Baraldi - Costumi: G. Gissi
Produttore esecutivo: Marco Tamburella - Direttore Produzione: F. Casati - M. Maurette - G. Auriemma - Collaborazione ai costumi: B. Parmesan - Arredamento: M. Tavazzi - A. Regista: A. Todini - Musiche: Nicola Piovani dirette dall'autore - Montaggio: R. Mastroianni A.m.c. Soggetto: B. Zapponi, elaborato da Leonardo Benvenuti, P. De Bernardi, M. Monicelli, T. Pinelli - Sceneggiatura: Benvenuti, De Bernardi, Monicelli, Pinelli, Sordi - Prodotto da Luciano De Feo per Opera Film Produzione S.r.l. - Roma-GAUMONT S.A. - Parigi - Una co produzione italo-francese - Regia: Mario Monicelli

TITOLI CODA
Isabella Bernardi - A. Bevilacqua - A. Campanella - G. Fumelli - E. Geri - J. Herlin - E. Mainardi - B. Rosa - S. Signorini - e con La Compagnia del Teatro di Alibert diretta da A. Savelli con Bacco Renzo Rinaldi - Hermes: Ivan De Paola - Isp. Prod.: V. Signoretti - B. Ricci - Segr. Prod.: Carlo Valerio, Maartin De Wit - Amministrazione: Sergio Bologna - Nestore Baratella - Operatori macchina da presa: G. Berardini, S. Tamborra - Ass. Operatori: E. Maggi V. Benucci - M. Profeta - Ass. Costumista: R. Settimelli - Ass. scenografo: F. Frigeri, G. Pirrotta - Segr. Edizione: D. Maiorca - Ass. Regia: G. Campiotti - Ass. montaggio: G. Marani, R. Landi C. Catalucci - Truccatori: F. Rufini, O. Sisi Parrucchieri: G. De Leonardi, C. Cristofori - Fonico: F. Borni - Microfonista: D. Trani - Scenotecnico: B. Leonardi - Attrezzisti: A. Tempera, L. Tarquini - Sarte: M. Zara, A. Longhi - Csq. Macchinista: S. Serantoni - Csq. elettricista: E. Raimondi - Edizioni musicali: Bixio Cems Gaumont Musique - Cooperativa doppiaggio Massimo Turci - Effetti sonori Studio Sound R. Marinelli, E. Di Liberto - Doppiaggio e sincronizzazione: Cinefonico Palatino - Mixage: A. Doni

Technovision - Colore della Telecolor - Teatri di posa: Cinecittà s.p.a.
Guardaroba forniti dalla "COSTUMI D'ARTE" Roma - Firenze - Parrucche:
ROCCHETTI CARBONI s.r.l. - Gioielli: NINO LEMBO - Roma - Tessuti AGUFI
Si ringrazia l'Archivio di Stato in Roma per la cortese autorizzazione
a riprodurre il bando Napoleonico del 17/5/1809 - Copyright - Opera Film
Produzione - Gaumont 1981

T R A M A

Il Marchese Onofrio del Grillo Duca di Bracciano, guardia nobile e Cameriere segreto di sua Santità Pio VII, è il tipico rappresentante della nobiltà romana dei primi dell'Ottocento. Il Marchese del Grillo vive in una casa da fiaba, circondato da personaggi altrettanto fiabeschi che vivono ognuno in un mondo a se stante e che difficilmente riescono ad inserirsi nella realtà: una madre affezionata: ostile e conservatrice, una parente povera di nome Genuflessa, innamorata segretamente di lui; una sorella sposata e con un figlio. Per fuggire alla noia il Marchese del Grillo si mescola spesso, frequentando bettole ed osterie, ed è proprio al termine di una di queste serate, trova un ubriaco, certo Gasperino carbonaio di professione, che è la sua copia precisa. Spinto dal gusto della beffa, Onofrio, lo raccoglie e lo porta a casa; qui metterà su una geniale farsa tanto da far passare il povero Gasperino per il Marchese del Grillo anche agli occhi dei suoi stessi parenti, che non si accorgono della sostituzione mentre Gasperino si adatta benissimo a questo personaggio. Siamo, comunque, in piena occupazione francese e quando il Papa viene privato del potere temporale, il Marchese del Grillo decide di lasciare Roma, ma durante il viaggio viene a sapere della caduta di Napoleone perciò fa ritorno a Roma. Ma qui Onofrio troverà una sorpresa, il Papa l'ha condannato a morte per diserzione e tradimento avendo abbandonato il suo posto di guardia. Al suo posto viene così arrestato il povero Gasperino che è felice di passare ancora una volta per il Marchese del Grillo e ubriaco fradicio si avvia verso il patibolo. Onofrio, mescolato tra la folla si trova ad assistere alla preparazione di questa esecuzione; non si dà pace all'idea che un innocente debba morire al suo posto, ma proprio quando decide di intervenire in favore del carbonaio, l'esecuzione viene fermata perché il Papa ha concesso la grazia. E' stata quindi la reazione del Papa che ha risposto con uno scherzo, a chi dello scherzo aveva fatto un'arte.

La Commissione, ~~conoscendo~~ ^{in quanto} ~~ha visto~~ ^{ha visto} il film
"del quale alla visione del film" *IL MARCHESE*
DEL GRILLO a, a copiare, opina per la revisione
della commissione del no. di revisione in pellicola con
divieto della visione tra i minori degli anni 14
(quattordici), per la presenza nel dialogo di espressioni
espressioni oscene, contrarie alla pertinenza
perinatale dei pellicoli minori -
Jo Bondi, Ravello, Trivento, Tucci, Portu
di cui ^è ^{il} ^{ministro}
Ministero

Vista la legge 21 aprile 1962, n. 161;
Vista la ricevuta del versamento in conto corrente postale n. 553
dell'Ufficio Roma intestato al Ricevitore del Registro di Roma per il pagamento del-
la tassa di L. 232250

SU CONFORME parere espresso dalla Commissione di revisione cinematografica di 1° grado

DECRETA

NULLA OSTA alla rappresentazione in pubblico del film IL MARCHESE DEL GRILLO

a condizione di non modificare in guisa alcuna il titolo, i sottotitoli e le scritture della pellicola, di non so-
stituire i quadri e le scene relative, di non aggiungerne altre e di non alterarne, in qualsiasi modo, l'ordine
senza autorizzazione del Ministero.

VIETATO AI MINORI DI ANNI 14

Al fini esclusivi della revisione, se ne autorizza anche l'esportazione.
~~Questo film non è soggetto a revisione per l'esportazione~~

Roma, li 19 DIC. 1981

IL MINISTRO
Sen. Avv. Enrico QUARANTA

N.B. — Il presente modulo non è valido se non munito del timbro del Ministero
del Turismo e dello Spettacolo - Direzione Generale dello Spettacolo.

CONVIO - Via Marconi, 48

Figures 1-3 Faldone 77420, *Il Marchese del Grillo*, 17/12/1981. Direzione Generale Cinema e Audiovisivi, Roma, Archivio della censura cinematografica

Bibliography

- Andr , N. (2006). *Voicing Gender. Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bolter, J.D.; Grusin, R. (1999). *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.
- Bolter, J.D.; Grusin, R. (2002). *Remediation. Competizione e integrazione tra media vecchi e nuovi*. Prefazione a cura di A. Marinelli. Milano: Guerini Studio.
- Bosio, R. (2014). *“Muoiono solo gli stronzi”. La straordinaria vita di Mario Monicelli*. Torino: Bradipoli Editore.
- Buccheri, V. (2005). *La ‘bottega’ di Monicelli*, in *Storia del cinema italiano*. A cura di V. Zaggarro. Venezia: Marsilio, 128-36.
- Chiriaco, G. (2018). *Voci nere. Storia e antropologia del canto afroamericano*. Milano: Mimesis.
- Citron, M.J. (2010). *When Opera Meets Film*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Danieli, G. (2024). *Folk Music in Italian Post-War Film. The Politics of Remediation, 1945-1975*. Lucca: LIM.
- Daolmi, D., Senici, E., (2000). “‘L’omosessualit    un modo di cantare’. Il contributo queer all’indagine sull’opera in musica”. *Il Saggiatore musicale*, 7(1), 137-78.
- Davis, J.Q. (2005). “‘Veluti in Speculum’: The Twilight of the Castrato”. *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 17(3), 271-301.
- Delfino, I. (2008). *I film di Mario Monicelli*. Roma: Gremese Editore.
- Della Casa, S. (1987). *Mario Monicelli*. Firenze: La nuova Italia.
- Dyer, R. (2007). *Pastiche*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Eidsheim, N.S. (2019). *The Race of Sound. Listening, Timbre and Vocality in African American Music*. Durham; London: Duke University Press.
- Feldman, M. (2015). *The Castrato. Reflections on Natures and Kinds*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Giovagnoli, R. (1887). *Leggende romane. Il Marchese del Grillo. Gaetanino*. Roma: E. Perino.
- Girardi, M. (2015). *Remediation or Opera on Screen? Some Misunderstandings Over Recent Research*, in *Musical Listening in the Age of Technological Reproduction*. Ed. by G. Borio. Farnham: Ashgate, 107-32.
- Giuggioli, M. (2011). “L’eredit   culturale verdiana alle origini del cinema politico di Bernardo Bertolucci”. *Comunicazioni sociali*, 1, 102-12.
- Giuggioli, M. (2019). “Le forme dell’opera nel cinema. Sull’impiego cinematografico del Trovatore tra Gallone e Visconti”. *La musica fra testo, performance e media. Forme e concetti dell’esperienza musicale*. A cura A. Cecchi. Roma: Neoclassica, 339-55.
- Mantica, C.B. (2022). “‘Casta Diva’ sul grande schermo tra manipolazione del tempo e allontanamento dalla realt  ”. *Il teatro di Bellini. Spettacolo, prassi esecutiva, multimedialit  *. A cura M.R. De Luca, G. Seminara. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 93-145.
- Marchelli, M.; Venturelli, R. (2001). *Se quello schermo io fossi. Verdi e il cinema*. Genova: Le Mani.
- Miceli, S., Capra, M. (a cura di) (2014). *Verdi & Wagner nel cinema e nei media*. Parma; Venezia: Istituzione Casa della Musica; Marsilio Editori.
- Mondadori, S. (2005). *La commedia umana. Conversazioni con Mario Monicelli*. Milano: Il Saggiatore.
- Monicelli, M. (1986). *L’arte della commedia*. A cura di L. Codelli. Bari: Dedalo.
- Piovani, N. (2014). *La musica    pericolosa*. Milano: Rizzoli.
- Rava, A. (1942). “Il marchese del Grillo e l’origine della sua leggenda”. *Roma. Rivista di studi e vita romana*, 20, 167-70.
- Rigoletto, S. (2020). *Le norme traviate. Saggi sul genere e sulla sessualit   nel cinema e nella televisione italiana*. Milano: Meltemi.
- Rosselli, J. (1988). “The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon, 1550-1850”. *Acta Musicologica*, 60(2), 143-79.
- Senici, E. (2009). “Il video d’opera ‘dal vivo’: Testualizzazione e ‘liveness’ nell’era digitale”. *Il Saggiatore musicale*, 16(2), 273-312.
- Senici, E. (2019). “Il cinema italiano all’ascolto. I film operistici”. *Quaderni del CSCI. Rivista annuale di cinema italiano*, 15, 61-7.
- Sirmons, J. (2020). “Guarda un po’: Seductive Visuality in Remediated Opera”. *The Opera Quarterly*, 35(4), 297-322.

- Targa, M. (2011). "Armonie perturbanti: un caso di rimediazione di stilemi sinfonici tardo romantici nel cinema fantastico hollywoodiano". Meandri, I.; Valle, A. (a cura di), *Suono/Immagine/Genere*. Torino: Kaplan, 199-215.
- Vincent, D. (2014). *Verdi On Screen*. Lausanne: Editions L'Age d'Homme.
- Verona, F. (2016). *Forme della citazione del melodramma operistico nel cinema italiano: 1960-2015* [tesi di dottorato]. Padova: Università degli Studi di Padova.
- Verona, F. (2019). "'Verdi come il padre?'. Identità italiana e messa in crisi della tradizione verdiana nel cinema degli anni Sessanta". Parigi, S.; Uva, V.; Zagarrio, V. (a cura di), *Cinema e identità italiana*. Roma: Roma Tre Press, 91-9. Spettacolo e comunicazione 4.

