Marcia Citron's *When Opera Meets Film* endeavors to prove that film can say something about opera and that opera can say something about film. In her book, Citron moves through rich readings of such films as the *Godfather* series, where the influence of opera resonates in its structure, style, and quality of feeling, especially when there is a diegetic staging of *Cavalleria Rusticana*, imparting a sense of nostalgia and classicism to the film. She draws another example from Don Boyd’s collection of filmed arias, *Aria*, which exhibits the influence of the “assumptions and practices of MTV” on interpretations of opera (Citron 2010, 13). The visual element of Boyd’s pieces are matched to pre-recorded audio, the works presented as unrelated fragments almost in pastiche with sexuality often featured. Elsewhere, Citron shows how the links between the two genres is especially apparent in three opera-films by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle (*Madama Butterfly*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *Rigoletto*), where he stresses subjectivity through camera techniques, doubling, interior singing, and time manipulation. In a similar way, the diegetic televised appearance of *Don Giovanni* in Claude Chabrol’s *La Cérémonie* raises questions of literacy and class differences which stress subjectivity. Citron also explores the effects of isolating the aural from the audio-visual format of televised opera. She also asks how *verismo* and *buffa* opera shape the characters and mapping of desire in Norman Jewison’s *Moonstruck*, before showing how the use of “Soave sia il vento” from Mozart’s *Così fan tutte* in John Schlesinger’s *Sunday, Bloody Sunday* and Mike Nichols’ *Closer* “contributes to the understanding of each film at its deepest level,” mostly by signifying unsatisfied romantic desire, which itself reveals something about the piece (Citron 2010, 213).
When Opera Meets Film is a culmination of Citron’s own research on the relationship between film and opera. Her text indirectly draws from her 2000 monograph Opera on Screen, and previously published essays are reworked to form three chapters: “Operatic Style in Coppola’s Godfather trilogy”, “Subjectivity in the Opera-films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle”, and “‘An Honest Contrivance’: Opera and Desire in Moonstruck.”1 Her essay “‘Soll ich lauschen?’: Love-Death in Humoresque” focuses on the use of “Liebestod” from Wagner's Tristan und Isolde as soundtrack, a similar discussion to that found in the chapter, “‘Liebestod' and 'Nessun dorma' in Aria” in When Opera Meets Film.2

When Opera Meets Film also exhibits an awareness of recent scholarship on the intermedial relationship between film and opera. The scholarship of Jeongwon Joe informs this volume, especially her collection co-edited by Rose Theresa, Between Opera and Film, which deals with themes that permeate Citron's work—themes such as subjectivity, isolation of the aural or visual, and opera as a cue for nostalgia. Aural-visual separation is a theme also much discussed in the work of Michel Chion, Lawrence Kramer, Michel Poizat, and Grover-Friedlander. Citron repeatedly references Werner Wolf's theory of intermediality and its discussion in Bernhard Kuhn's Die Oper im italienischen Film; as well as the concept of diegesis, enhanced by Gorbman's term 'metadiegetic' and Alexis Witt's (a student of Citron's) 'psychodiegetic' (Citron 2010, 5).

Citron points out that interpretative theory is scant in the discussion of opera and film intermediality and accentuates further themes such as class and gender in her own work. Furthermore, Citron's varied repertoire in this study—popular films such as The Godfather, opera-cult pieces like Aria, and art films such as Sunday, Bloody Sunday—show an impressively broad knowledge of the use of opera in film.

In her text, Citron claims to be informed by Jeremy Tambling's Opera, Ideology, and Film, though she overlooks much of Tambling's subject area. Tambling approaches the intersection of opera and film using as a template Walter Benjamin's essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, giving the resultant discussion an acute sensitivity to the “aura” of high art (such as staged opera in opera houses), and that aura's dissolution through the reproduction of operas in film or television.3 While Citron is aware of the social reverence of staged opera and the connotations of such mass media as television and MTV style, she makes no mention of the theories of Benjamin or Adorno in her own work. Additionally, Tambling includes opera that invokes film by discussing pieces by Hindemith, Britten, Martinů, and Milhaud—a very prominent gap in Citron's study. Tambling contextualizes opera with an awareness of

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3 Jeremy Tambling, Opera, Ideology, and Film (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).
the related genre of American musical theatre, also missing from Citron's writing. In these ways, Tambling's volume overpowers that of Citron's.

That said, Citron does include some topics commonly found in film theory. In her 2004 study, *Hollywood Theory, Non-Hollywood Practice*, Annette Davis presents a discussion of desire in Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire* (*Der Himmel über Berlin*) in which the vague "desire" of the protagonist (an angel seeking a mortal life) is interpreted as art film's desire for Hollywood film's "potency." This perception of desire as one medium aspiring to be like another is also found in Citron's discussion of film's aspiration to be like opera-film. Citron discusses the symbiotic intermedial relationship between sound and image in a similar manner to film scholars such as Davis and Kay Dickinson, often considering solely aural or visual moments in film, and with a continual awareness of the diegetic status of sound. Citron is also aware of the mechanism of film, evidenced by her discussion of Ponnelle's camera techniques.

Despite her expertise, Citron presents a monograph with a relatively broad aim. The stated goal of the volume is to prove that "opera can reveal something fundamental about a film, and that film can do the same for an opera" — in other words, that interpretative possibilities exist when a film uses opera (or *vice versa*) (Citron 2010, 1). The cause of this comprehensiveness may stem from the use of the three previously published essays as prototypes for the three self-contained subject areas that divide the work. While the discussion does show that intermedial elements "reveal something fundamental" about a piece, Citron might have argued that the use of swords in literature reveals something fundamental about swords and literature.

Each section and chapter of *When Opera Meets Film* does, however, present a unified focus. The book is cleverly divided into three sections ("Style", "Subjectivity", and "Desire") comprised of two chapters each — the previously mentioned prototype chapters are followed by ones based on close readings using the precedents set by the prototype. Minimal digressions into micro-readings support the argument of each section (the discussion of the use of the finale of *Don Giovanni* in *La Cérémonie*; the detailing of the characters, music, and use of the *La Bohème* cue in *Moonstruck*) or reinforce the general aims of the book (the comparison of the staged intermezzi in *La Cérémonie* and *Godfather III*, the extensive descriptions of each of the works treated). This speaks to the individual success of each prototype chapter, and highlights Citron's skills as an artistic interpreter.

*When Opera Meets Film* expands the definition of "desire" from the romantic longing implied in the word to "the various wishes and obsessions of people, and the attractions and affinities between ideas" (Citron 2010, 174). Citron uses this broader definition mainly to include a section on "the desire for opera-film," justified by a quote from Tambling: "film has shown, historically, a desire to be used by opera" (Citron 2010, 204). Of these two positions, neither is problematic *per se*, they both represent

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distinct, narrowly defined modes of desire. While romantic longing is a human want, “the desire for opera-film” is an aspiration anthropomorphically imposed on a medium. This suggests a wide spectrum of desires—a person’s desire for a better job or opera’s desire for linguistic cosmopolitanism, for example—which are not represented in the discussion. That is to say that one would rather that “the desire for opera-film” stand alone as a discussion without drawing on or adding to the arguments associated with opera's indication of romantic longing. As it stands, the discussion leaves the treatment of some topics to be desired.

What is also conspicuously absent is a discussion of the representation of television and film in opera. Though When Opera Meets Film claims to show the bilateral relationship between the media, it only gives a representation of opera and operaticness on screen, and not vice versa. Perhaps this is an intentional omission of opera written after the early-mid twentieth century (the latest opera mentioned in When Opera Meets Film is Puccini's 1925 Turandot), before which opera could not have included the then non-existent medium. Opera's related disciplines, theatre and musical theatre, are also missing from the discussion. The exclusion of recent opera results in the unfortunate representation of opera as a dated art form, which reinforces the idea that it cues nostalgia.

The language used in When Opera Meets Film is an uncomfortable mix of academic and casual. Colloquial terms (“powerhouse” (23), “sham” (131)) and phrases (“flesh out” (20), “picks up steam and carries us to the end of the film”(38), “but we sense that something is awry” (137)) define Citron’s language. The use of personal pronouns and conjectures can likewise be found throughout the work—Citron discusses “one of [her] favorite” examples (29), uses what she senses to argue a point (“I sense the nondiegetic superimposed quality as the main way this is unfolding” (55)), and later concludes, “I do not see such a pessimistic outcome here” (204). This linguistic colour in an otherwise academic setting creates a tone similar to that of a lecture, a mixed voice that does not clearly imply either an academic or casual audience.

Though Citron's writing style is securely academic, When Opera Meets Film experiences some moments of linguistic weakness. Instances of tense change can be found (“we consider film-music ... we will see how each segment ... at the end I offer observations” (62)), as can awkward phrasings (“The female medical attendants, who are black, were the priestesses of her fantasy.” (74)), and (“And with the image of death comes denial of desire and one's very self.” (119)). The extent of this issue is some uncomfortable reading, however, it does not detract from the point at large.

The book offers several successful and interesting close readings. The chapter “‘Liebestod’ and ‘Nessun dorma’ in Aria” presents an unusual reading of sections from that unique collection (Aria), with attention to its fragmented nature as well as its influence from the popular music marketing tradition. “Subjectivity in the Opera-films of Jean-Pierre Ponnelle” is a well defended exposition of cinematic techniques used to foreground subjectivity, often of certain characters in the film. Citron's attention to Ponnelle's general tendencies and familiarity with his oeurve adds weight to her points,
as does her referral to his own statements and those of critics on his technique. These close readings routinely reaffirm the thematic threads introduced in *Between Opera and Cinema* such as subjectivity, aural or visual isolation, and opera as a cue for nostalgia.

While Citron presents a collection of well informed, interesting close readings in *When Opera Meets Film*, the volume is affected by a lack of a unifying direction and occasional weak writing. Perhaps the book would be better figured (or read) as a collection of essays, for each chapter could stand individually. These faults are surprising considering Citron’s publication resume, and could stand to be overlooked, given the merit of the individual sections of the book.

**Bibliography:**


