

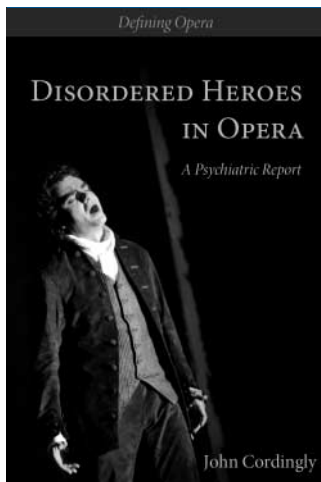
is rather like describing surgery as butchery. Those statements leave out quite a lot of important truth.

What particularly irks Newnes is the reduction of 'helping' to a series of depersonalised techniques, so those of us who qualify as patients become the objects of technical expertise (psychiatric or psychological) rather than being engaged as partners in helping relationships. Here I think he is right, but I am not sure about his remedies. An oath for clinical psychologists? The Hippocratic version has never stopped doctors from misbehaving. An emphasis on the possibility of suing clinical psychologists for the future harm their 'labelling' may cause? I am not sure that the idea of shouldering blame for the actions of others really holds water. More of an emphasis on human rights legislation? Newnes conceives this as mainly a way of reining in psychiatry, but it is certainly something that psychiatrists could engage with more actively, not least because our patients can use such legislation to improve their circumstances.

So, who might profit from this volume? For all of us it is a good example of an anti-psychiatry rhetoric that has rather gone out of fashion. However, in spite of its many flaws, it can spur us to examine more critically what we do and to explore how helping relationships can be nourished rather than crushed by the 'psy' system.

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Disordered Heroes in Opera: A Psychiatric Report

By John Cordingly
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An evening at the opera is a treat and a pleasure. Music provides a relationship between psyche and soma, inner emotions and outer sensations, and opera adds other dimensions. Experience comes to the audience from many directions – narrative, drama, intense

emotion, costumes, colour, music, words, staging, sets and behavioural disturbance. Narratives in opera are of the human, the godly, and the archetype, as well as the lovelorn, the power-hungry and the jealous. They feature extremes of cowardice and heroism, and of poverty and riches. In short, opera is a glorious reflection of society.

This well-written book involves all the above and adds psychiatry. It is wide ranging and extremely well researched. Cordingly considers all aspects of each opera, drawing on the original story, the libretto and the music, as well as biographies of the author, librettist and composer. He covers social and psychiatric history, conceptualisations of suicide and homosexuality, and ideas from psychoanalysis. Of the operas he covers, original authors include William Shakespeare (*Otello*), Georg Büchner (*Wozzeck*), George Crabbe (*Peter Grimes*), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*Faust*, *Werther*), Alexander Pushkin (*Onegin*, *Queen of Spades*) and Thomas Mann (*Death in Venice*). There seems to be great value in having the right librettist as a collaborator, for example Boito with Verdi for *Otello*, E. M. Forster with Britten for *Billy Budd* and Da Ponte with Mozart for *Don Giovanni*.

Cordingly takes twelve male characters who are 'disordered' and pairs them in six chapters by similarities of their personalities, which are operatic representations of personality disorders. Psychiatrists use broad categories of personality and the pairings in the book are clusters A, B or C. All but one of the twelve characters die, and six of those are by suicide. Realism and logic may be sacrificed for entertainment but we do recognise these types as we recognise similar traits in ourselves. The device of pairing protagonists is variably successful; the glamorous Don Giovanni seems unlike the tedious Onegin, there seem to be few similarities between *Otello* and Boris Godunov, and Verdi and Musorgsky's characters are also very different. However, any reservation about the pairings did not detract from the book. Cordingly's affinity is with characters from Tchaikovsky and Britten, who are quintessentially Russian and English, but those preferring other composers would not be disappointed as this book is filled with information. For example, I did not know that Berg, as well as attempting suicide, was treated for asthma by Freud.

Performances from the great opera houses are now being relayed to cinemas, and more people have the opportunity to share the excitement. *Disordered Heroes in Opera* is a readable reference to use before seeing a production. Cordingly may be disappointed by the number of copy-editing mistakes; he has clearly put a lot of work and a lot of himself into this publication. Nevertheless, the effort was worthwhile.

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