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Why did Spain Fail to Develop Nationalist Opera?

CLINTON D. YOUNG

It was a common sight in European opera houses during the latter nineteenth century: a chorus portraying peasants, costumed in traditional dress, singing music based on traditional folk music. The operas they were performing would have been based on works enshrined as important pieces of literature in their native countries. Mikhail Glinka's *A Life for the Czar* and Modest Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* defined what Russian music should sound like; Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* and Antonín Dvořák's *Rusalka* demonstrated that the richness of Bohemian music should be part of the case for political independence. Even operas that do not use folk music self-consciously and are not normally associated with the nationalist experience share many of these same characteristics. Jules Massenet's *Manon* was not merely based on a French literary classic; it was a perfect example of the grace and clarity that was supposed to define French music. While Richard Wagner would have rejected the idea that his operas were intrinsically German—he believed that his music was universal and timeless—he used Germanic myths and legends as the basis for *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* and *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. The political activism and anti-clericalism of Giuseppe Verdi made his operas symbols of Italy's *Risorgimento*. “Nationalist opera,” however loosely defined, was a critical part of the musical theatre experience in all the major countries and regions of continental Europe in the nineteenth century.¹

In all major countries, save one; Spain never developed a school of nationalist opera or a nationalist composer whose talent and reputation could be placed on a par with the works and composers listed in the previous paragraph. Not until the early twentieth century would Issac Albéniz, Enrique Granados, and Manuel de Falla finally transmute Spain's musical riches into compositions performed outside the country's borders on a regular basis—but that music would be orchestral or pianistic, not operatic (Fallá's *La vida breve* being the possible exception). But why did Spain never develop its own Mussorgsky or Smetana? Spain had talented composers in the nineteenth century, men like Tomás Bretón and Ruperto Chapí, who created a wealth of concert music and dramatic works. Thanks to institutions like the Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (which has been publishing critical editions

¹ The best attempt to define “national opera” is Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: U of California P, 1989), 217-226; see also Thomas S. Grey, “Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* as National Opera (1868-1945)” in Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), 78-104.

of Spanish musical scores) and the Naxos record label (which has a series of “Spanish Classics” that is dedicated to recording the works of Spanish composers past and present), scholars and audiences are now in a position to rediscover a vast treasure house of forgotten music. In the nineteenth century, major orchestral works and operas by Spanish composers might be heard once; they then disappeared from concert halls and stages and were not recorded during the twentieth century. In this fleeting performance history we can begin to uncover why Spain never managed to develop a nationalist school of opera composition. It had little to do with the genius of individual composers, as the current rediscovery demonstrates. It had everything to do with the institutions that supported Spanish music in the nineteenth century.

Musical scholars who work on nineteenth-century opera tend to focus almost exclusively on the musical content of the works—how folk music or folk-inspired music is used—or on the relationships that composers had with nationalist circles in their native countries. What is often lacking is the institutional history of these nationalist operas: how they came to be produced and how they were received *as nationalist works*, not merely as musical compositions. The institutional history is critical to understanding nationalist music in particular, since nationalism is traditionally fostered by governments through institutional channels as a way of binding the disparate elements of a country into a unified political whole.² This lack of institutional support for Spanish nationalism was not unique to music: government attempts to foster nationalism in Spain tended to be half-hearted or underdeveloped in the nineteenth century, leading towards a more popular understanding of nationalism that relied little upon the Spanish state.³ But music proved to be especially susceptible to the lack of governmental interest in creating a national community in Spain.

Music in Spain had less institutional support than in any other major European country during the nineteenth century. Unlike other European countries, Spain had neither the bourgeois wealth nor the royal patronage that developed symphony orchestras or opera houses necessary for a vibrant musical

² Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); E.J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983); Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1976).

³ José Alvarez Junco, *Mater Dolorosa: La idea de España en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Taurus, 2001); E. Inman Fox, *La invención de España: Nacionalismo liberal e identidad nacional* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998).

life.⁴ Spain lacked the basic infrastructure to foster nationalist music. Spain's first symphony orchestra, crucial to educating the country musically, was the Sociedad de Conciertos de Madrid which began giving concerts in 1866; but, the Sociedad was an *ad hoc*, part-time organization that used most of its concerts to introduce unknown European music to Spanish audiences. The first full-time, professional symphony orchestra in Spain would be the Orquesta Sinfónica de Madrid, founded in 1910. The first opera house in Spain with royal patronage and government support—necessary for creating nationalist art—was the Teatro Real, which only opened in 1850. The attempts by the Teatro Real to foster native art would be half-hearted and lackluster. In the absence of any real institutional support, the idea of what made an opera Spanish would fall into the hands of a few committed partisans who, through press critiques and attempts at writing opera, would try to create a nationalist school without any government support whatsoever.

Spanish nationalist opera also had to overcome the increasing reputation and importance of a German composer: Richard Wagner. Thanks to the premiere of the complete *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Bayreuth in 1876, Wagner's controversial theories on the role of music and the purpose of opera had become the subject of lively debate in European musical circles. Spanish composers, grappling with an influx of new music, began to incorporate Wagnerism into their thinking. The attempt to incorporate Wagner's theories with nationalist tendencies was not unique to Spain; other European cultures also had to incorporate Wagnerian theory into their music.⁵ The Wagnerian ideal of music drama was seductive to artists seeking to create serious art, especially in an atmosphere that was dominated by the model of Italian opera, which was highly commercialized and had little "artistic" credibility. But Spanish composers—most notably Tomás Bretón, the most Wagnerite composer in Spain—attempted to reconcile the contradictions of a new theory that called for art to be universal with the demands of a nationalist message that by its very nature had to be particular. Combined with the lack of institutional support for opera, the embrace of Wagnerism assured the failure of any attempts to create a nationalist school of opera in Spain.

⁴ For an introduction to concert life in nineteenth Europe see William Weber, *Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris, and Vienna between 1830 and 1848*, 2nd ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Celia Applegate, *Bach in Berlin: Nation and Culture in Mendelssohn's Revival of the St. Matthew Passion* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005); James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995); and Dahlhaus, *op. cit.*

⁵ Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999); David C. Large and William Weber, eds., *Wagnerism in European Politics and Culture* (Ithaca & London: Cornell UP, 1988).

To understand the problems with Spain's musical institutions and their inability to develop a nationalist school of opera, one must begin with Madrid's Teatro Real, the leading showcase for opera in Spain. (This was a title that, admittedly, was frequently challenged by the Teatro del Liceu in Barcelona. While today the Liceu is Spain's leading opera house in terms of the star power of its singers and the breadth of its repertory, in the nineteenth century competition between the two houses was fierce.) The Real was originally planned as part of the rebuilding of the Plaza de Oriente in 1817, but construction was not started until the 1840s; the first performance in the theatre was held on 19 November 1850. That performance of Gaetano Donizetti's *La Favorita* was emblematic of things to come. *La Favorita* was selected by the contralto Marietta Alboni. Her contract as the theatre's prima donna included a clause that allowed her to pick the opening night opera; she sang the title role. (At least she chose an opera set in Spain: *La Favorita* is concerned with romantic intrigues at the court of Alfonso X of Castile.) Although the Real was managed by the Spanish government in its first season, there was no effort to encourage the composition or performance of Spanish opera. This situation continued after the end of the first season when management of the theatre was contracted to a private impresario due to enormous financial losses. The Real continued to receive subsidies from the Ministerio de la Gobernación—the only theatre in the country that did so, a point that would become a bone of contention among the activists for Spanish music.⁶

Part of the reason for the Real's refusal to stage Spanish opera was that much of the choice regarding the repertory was left up to the artists. And most of those performers were Italian. The leads in *La Favorita*, who were the core of the singers of that 1850-51 season, were Marietta Alboni, Herminia Frezzolini, Italo Gardoni and Paolo Barroilhet—all well-known Italian singers, and all of whom were paid large salaries. (Alboni's was over 10,000 reales a performance, a remarkable sum for the day.)⁷ Since the singers were Italian, it is not surprising the bulk of the repertory of the Real was Italian opera: the thirteen operas in the first season's repertory featured seven by Donizetti, three by Bellini, two by Rossini, and one by Verdi. The operas were sung in Italian. It was traditional in the nineteenth century for operas to be translated into the national language when they crossed borders. However, the reliance of the Real on Italian singers prevented this. The practice of Italian singing at the Real was further perpetuated by Spain's music conservatories, which trained choristers to sing Italian but not in Spanish. When German or French operas were performed in later seasons, they were performed in an Italian translation.

⁶ Joaquín Turina Gómez, *Historia del Teatro Real* (Madrid: Alianza, 1997), 80-89.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

These factors meant that works by Spanish composers were marginalized in the Real's repertory. The use of Italian singers also meant that Spanish operas had to be translated into Italian for performance as Italian singers were often reluctant to learn new, non-repertory roles. The Real took four seasons before it got around to staging a work by a Spanish composer: *Ildegonda* by Emilio Arrieta in April 1854. The work had been premiered in the private opera house of the Palacio Real in 1849, but this was its first public performance. Audience reaction was cool and the work was performed only twice. Like most Spanish operas in years to come, it was given perfunctory rehearsal time and was staged at the tail end of the season, when the company was exhausted and Madrid society had begun to leave the city for the summer.⁸ Only one other opera by a Spanish composer made an appearance at the Real prior to 1870, Arrieta's *Isabel la Católica* in December 1855. It is not coincidental that Arrieta was also considered the most Italian-influenced Spanish composer of the day; his music seemed at home in that temple to Italianophilia.

Things began to change at the Teatro Real in the 1870s. Italian singing and singers were still the order of the day, but there was an increase in the production of operas by Spanish composers. The turning point was the 1871 production of Arrieta's *Marina*. *Marina* was not originally written as an opera: it had begun life as a zarzuela in the 1850s and was adapted into an operatic form by the composer at the request of tenor Enrique Tamberlick, one of the most celebrated singers of the 1850s and 1860s. The revision of *Marina* only held the boards for a season, but production of Spanish operas became slightly more common at the Real.⁹ Valentín Zubiaurre's *Don Fernando el Emplazado* was staged at the end of the 1873-74 season, and Ruperto Chapí's *Las naves de Cortés* was given one performance as part of a benefit that same season. Chapí's *La hija de Jefe* was given at the Real in 1876, Zubiaurre's *Leida* in 1877, Chapí's *Roger de Flor* in 1878, and Emilio Serrano's *Mitridates* in 1882.

These Spanish operas were not well received by the critics: after the initial performances the works would disappear from the repertory of the Teatro Real, never to be heard again. The libretti of these operas were castigated for their flaws to the point that one must suspect the writers of incompetence. Antonio Peña y Goñi's review of Antonio Arnao's work for Tomás Bretón's *Guzmán el Bueno* (rejected by the Real and first performed at the Teatro Apolo in 1875)

⁸ *ibid*, 92.

⁹ María Cortiza Encino, *Emilio Arrieta: De la ópera a la zarzuela* (Madrid: ICCMU, 1998), 417-430.

faulted the libretto for lacking both action and interest.¹⁰ The critic for *La Epoca* accused Mariano Capdepón's libretto for *Mitridates* of failing to "fulfill the necessary conditions for being set to music."¹¹ Clearly, the most critical problem with Spanish opera was that the texts were simply unworthy of the composers for whom they were constructed.

There was more critical compassion for the problems faced by composers: their failings were chalked up to a lack of opportunity to hear their music performed rather than any real lack of talent. *La Epoca* found the music to *Leida* overfull of a "luxury of modulations in the orchestration," even though it otherwise found much to admire in the work.¹² Although the same critic was less fond of *Mitridates* (finding the work heavy and dark), he acknowledged that its faults were those typical of a composer's first opera. As a general rule, the critics were far more enthusiastic about the operatic outputs of Bretón and Chapí, reflecting the more polished talent of these composers. Whatever its faults or merits, the critics seem to have been willing to give more leeway to Spanish operatic music, giving credit to aspiration over actual achievement. This was a noble stance, albeit one not likely to attract the average opera-goer, as evidenced by the one major effort at a commercial staging of Spanish opera. The troubled early years of Spanish opera culminated in 1881 with an attempt at staging a complete theatrical season of opera by the impresarios of the Teatro Apolo. The failure of the venture illustrated the obstacles of creating a viable Spanish operatic tradition.

Of the two main works on the opening-night bill at the Apolo, *¡Tierra!* by Antonio Llanos was generally passed over—it had been given previously at the Teatro de la Zarzuela in 1879, where it had received favorable reviews—and the critical focus was on Ruperto Chapí's *La serenata*. The critic for *La Epoca* went so far as to call *La serenata* "anti-musical."¹³ The critic for *El Imparcial* also had harsh words for the libretto, but managed to put the problems into perspective: he noted that the main problem was that as the text was in Spanish, the audience was more likely to pay attention to the words and the inanities of the script than they would have if the piece were sung in Italian.¹⁴ José María Esperanza y Sola of the *Ilustración Española y Americana* set out the basic reason why Spanish opera was of such poor quality. Esperanza y Sola alone made the heretical suggestion that Spanish composers might lack the musical genius to establish a nationalistic

¹⁰ Antonio Peña y Goñi, "Una ópera española," *Ilustración Española y Americana*, 8 Dec. 1876.

¹¹ Goizueta, "Revista musical," *La Epoca*, 19 Jan. 1882.

¹² Goizueta, "Revista musical," *La Epoca*, 30 Apr. 1877.

¹³ Goizueta, "Apertura del Teatro de Apolo," *La Epoca*, 6 Nov. 1881.

¹⁴ "Los estrenos de anoche," *El Imparcial*, 6 Nov. 1881.

school of opera; they lacked the “virtue and abnegation” to abandon the commercial theatre and take up the important project. Only when the review finally turned to the performance of *La serenata* did Esperanza y Sola find hope for Spanish opera in Chapí’s music; the librettist was virtually ignored and his contribution was summed up in one word, “insipid.”¹⁵

The audience had a different reaction: all the reviews acknowledged that Spanish opera was extremely popular with opening-night audiences. The music was not only positively, but rapturously received by the public. *El Imparcial* noted that the audience for *La serenata* could not be restrained from applauding during the first notes of the piece, and this reception continued as the opera progressed. The musical virtues more than made up for the problems of the libretto; as much as he hated the text, the critic for *El Imparcial* enjoyed the music, praising its originality and comic inventiveness, summing up the music as a “conversation in which one instrument answers another and one hears laughter, shouts [*ayes*], voices ... animation and life.” Other critics agreed, one going so far as to equate Chapí’s work with Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville*.¹⁶ The traditional critical pattern was repeated: the music was well-liked but the text was dismissed.

But the Teatro Apolo season revealed the paucity of the Spanish operatic tradition. The opening night was a flimsy foundation for a full season: after *¡Tierra!* and *La serenata* there were only two more one-act operas in reserve. By the end of the month, the endeavor failed financially and the theatre was taken over by a company producing verse dramas.¹⁷ Ruperto Chapí later claimed that season had lasted fifteen or twenty performances—a highly respectable number, given that the standard run of an opera at the Teatro Real was somewhere between four and seven performances in a season—but that the impresario had lost the substantial sum of 75,000 pesetas. To put this figure into perspective, the entire operating budget of the Teatro Real for the 1881-1882 season was just over 1.5 million pesetas; the impresario made a profit of 125,000 pesetas.¹⁸ The failure of the season of Spanish opera at the Teatro Apolo doomed the commercial prospects for the production of native works. Although there was an appreciative audience for Spanish opera, there was simply not enough repertory to sustain more than occasional performances of such works in a commercial setting.

¹⁵ J.M. Esperanza y Sola, “Revista Musical,” *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 15 Nov. 1881.

¹⁶ “Los estrenos de anoche,” *El Imparcial*, 6 Nov. 1881; Goizueta, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ M.S., “Los teatros de Madrid,” *Crónica de la Música*, 30 Nov. 1881, 2-3.

¹⁸ Ruperto Chapí, “Historia de ‘La Serenata,’” *La Epoca*, 17 November 1895 and Turnia Gómez, *op. cit.*, 141.

Music critics evaluated Spanish opera according to its artistic quality. But such quality, if not immaterial, was not the primary concern of the impresarios of the Teatro Apolo who had seats to fill. The season at the Teatro Apolo would be the last time that anybody in Spanish musical circles would try to market operatic “art” on a widespread scale. It had become clear that while Spanish opera was a noble idea, it was not one that could succeed in the commercial theatre. For Spanish opera to develop, it had to develop outside commercial venues. The 1881 season at the Teatro Apolo had doomed the hope that Spanish opera could succeed in the theatrical marketplace. If nationalist opera was to succeed, it would need to succeed at the Teatro Real, where government support would offset the demands of commerce and allow composers to focus on the artistic quality of their work. The next opera by a Spanish composer to be staged at the Real would thus be a decisive moment in the struggle to establish a nationalist school of opera.

Tómas Fernández Grajal and his opera *El Príncipe de Viana* are now almost completely forgotten, but the controversy surrounding the work upon its premiere in 1885 defined the terms of the debate over what a Spanish opera should be. Fernández Grajal was a professor of composition at the Escuela Nacional de Música, whose career had been distinguished only by the first prize for composition from the Conservatorio de Madrid in 1863 and the composition of a cantata in honor of Verdi’s visit to Madrid a few years later. The librettist, Mariano Capdepón, was a former military officer who had a distinguished career in the African and Second Carlist Wars. He had contributed libretti for two other attempts at Spanish opera, Ruperto Chapí’s *Roger de Flor* in 1879 and Emilio Serrano’s *Mitridates* in 1882.¹⁹

As might be expected of an opera that came from the pens of a literary dilettante and an undistinguished music professor, *El Príncipe de Viana* did not arouse great admiration from critics or audiences at its premiere on 2 February 1885. The libretto was dismissed as “languid, without movement, without interest or situations.”²⁰ The music was dismissed as being an inferior copy of Italian opera: the critic for *La Época* pegged Fernández Grajal as being “a disciple of Donizetti, although not one of the better ones.” The critic for *El Imparcial* felt the orchestration and the development of the opera’s main musical themes were well done, but he could not find “a single moment of inspiration” in the opera; it

¹⁹ The biographical data on the authors comes from “El príncipe de Viana,” *El Liberal*, 3 March 1885.

²⁰ “Sección de espectáculos,” *El Imparcial*, 3 Feb. 1885. Although the libretto was never published, one can judge its quality from the text of the third act love duet printed in “El Príncipe de Viana,” *La Época*, 31 Jan. 1885.

lacked “a predominant style ... vagueness reigns throughout the work, a colorless tint and identity to the tonality that fatigues the attention and shipwrecks any delicate melody” in the vocal lines. It is perhaps not surprising that the audience (which included the royal family) reacted coolly to the work, applauding only two or three numbers.²¹ *El Príncipe de Viana* received only three performances at the Teatro Real.

The reason why such a remarkably weak work was even performed at all lies in the regulations of the Teatro Real and the conditions under which impresarios could rent the theatre and receive a government subsidy. The sixth clause of the Real’s standard contract required the production of a new opera in at least three acts by a Spanish composer each season. This work was to be selected by a jury of five composers selected jointly by the impresario of the Teatro Real and the Ministerio de Hacienda. *El Príncipe de Viana* was one of two works submitted during the 1883-1884 season for consideration. The selection jury (headed by Emilio Arrieta) credited the work as having an “uncommon artistic intelligence,” although one cannot help but suspect that more practical considerations played a role—Fernández Grajal had already orchestrated his work, while his competitor had only submitted a piano-vocal score. (Given the tepid reception of *El Príncipe de Viana*, one hesitates to imagine what the musical qualities of the losing opera must have been.) In March 1884 the Teatro Real decided to postpone the premiere, citing the problems of staging a new and unknown work. When the performance was postponed again in December, the authors petitioned the jury to intervene and force the impresario to start rehearsals of the work within twenty days; the work had its premiere just over one month later.²² The Madrid critics tied the problems with the work to its status as a contractual obligation: the review in *El Liberal* noted that the majority of the music was greeted with “protectionist manifestations,” while *La Época* argued that a production at the Real “ought to mark the highest level of genius and musical art in our country”—which this production clearly did not.²³ *El Príncipe de Viana* would have died a quiet death had it not been for composer Tomás Bretón.

²¹ Ariel, “Teatro Real: Estreno de «El Príncipe de Viana», *La Época*, 3 Feb. 1885; “Sección de espectáculos,” *El Imparcial*, 3 Feb. 1885; “El príncipe de Viana,” *El Liberal*, 3 Feb. 1885.

²² “Expediente relativo al cumplimiento de la cláusula 6^a del contrato de arrendamiento, en la temporada de 1883 á 84 concerniente á la representación de una opera nueva española,” Archivo General de la Administración (hereafter AGA), 5.31/6903 No. 9.

²³ “El príncipe de Viana,” *El Liberal*, 3 Feb. 1885; “Sección de espectáculos,” *La Época*, 3 Feb. 1885.

In 1885 Bretón was an up-and-coming musician with a solid record of compositions to his name. Born to a Salamanca shoemaker in 1850, Bretón showed an early aptitude for music and began to realize his musical career by a standard nineteenth-century career path: study at a provincial academy, followed by jobs as an orchestral musician in Madrid. His first opera, *Guzmán el Bueno*, was performed at the Teatro Apolo in 1875 (having been rejected by the Real); its prelude became his calling card in Madrid's musical circles. He attracted the attention of the royal family by writing a hymn for the wedding of Alfonso XII in 1878, and in 1881 he was awarded a pension from the Privy Purse for study in Italy. His years abroad, which included extended stays in Italy, Germany and France, opened his eyes to more European musical theory than he otherwise would have encountered in Madrid; it was at this time Bretón encountered Wagner's music and began to develop his own theories about opera. He returned to Madrid in 1884 and had several of his works performed by the Sociedad de Conciertos. He was well received as a composer and conductor.²⁴

In January of 1885 Bretón visited the offices of the daily *El Liberal* with the view of contributing some free-lance music criticism. One of his first assignments was *El Príncipe de Viana*. Bretón ignored the obligation of a critic to review the work at hand: he says nothing about whether he found anything to admire in *El Príncipe de Viana*, having decided after seeing the work's tepid reception to use his review as a wider critique of the state of music in Spain.²⁵ Bretón's response to the negative reception of his opera was not to defend the artistic value of the work; he instead launched an attack on the lack of state support for Spanish opera. Bretón laid the blame for the lack viable operas squarely at the feet of Spain's politicians:

...in other countries there are no such politicians as those who wish to make us happy in Spain; so many mutinies and coups [*pronunciamiento*] those gentlemen give us to demonstrate the goodness of their ideas, so many bullfights consume the wisdom of the Spanish public, lowering our intellectual level in the eyes of the civilized world again and again ... Yes, it is difficult to create national opera!

²⁴ Victor Sánchez, *Tomás Bretón: Un músico de la Restauración* (Madrid: ICCMU, 2002) and Gabriel Hernández Gonzalez (Javier de Montillana), *Bretón* (Salamanca: Talleres Graficos Nuñez, 1952). Those who wish to hear Bretón's music should consult *Tomás Bretón: Andalusian Scenes/In the Alhambra/Opera Preludes*, Orquesta de la Comunidad de Madrid, Miguel Roa, Naxos 8.572076. This compact disc includes the preludes to *Guzmán el Bueno* and *Los amantes de Teruel* (discussed below).

²⁵ Tomás Bretón's *Diario (1881-1888)*, ed. Jacinto Torres Mulas, 2 vols. (Madrid: Acento Editorial, 1995), 2:433.

As a result of the failure of Spanish politicians to fund the arts, painters and composers were driven away to Rome and Paris to study and work; in those places they had a better chance of being recognized as artists and earning money. He compares this nineteenth-century version of “brain-drain” to the exile of the Israelites and concludes that Spain will be the worse for it: “Poor nation, dedicated exclusively to politics and to bulls!”²⁶

Implicit in Bretón’s argument was the idea that Spanish opera needed to be supported as both an artistic and a nationalistic endeavor. State subsidies were what would provide the impetus for an elite cultural genre like opera to become fully nationalistic. Bretón steers clear of any discussion of artistic value at all—not only of *El Príncipe de Viana*, but of Spanish opera in general. According to Bretón’s logic, art must be supported no matter what the quality simply because it is art and therefore of value to the nation. Bretón assumes from the outset that this question of art is a political one. Because it is Spanish art—and therefore national art—Bretón argues that the Spanish state has an inherent interest in supporting the nationalist project. Without this support, both Spanish art and the Spain itself will become much weaker as its best and brightest talents travel abroad to achieve their artistic goals.

The rebuttal to Bretón’s defense of Spanish opera came from Antonio Peña y Goñi, who established a different set of criteria for determining the nationalism of a lyric theatre genre—namely, its popularity. Peña y Goñi, a native of San Sebastian, had originally studied composition at the Conservatorio de Madrid; subsequently, he went to work for the musical press in Madrid in 1869. By the mid-1880s he was one of the most eminent music critics in the country, working mainly for the daily *El Imparcial* and the weekly *Ilustración Española y Americana*. (In addition, he was also one of the eminent taurine writers of the day.) He was extremely interested in the history of Spanish music, and was one of the first people to take zarzuela seriously as an art form.²⁷ His view of Spanish music was quite different from Bretón’s—almost diametrically opposed.

Peña y Goñi’s critique of Bretón was based on a claim that artistic value was proved by commercial success, not state subsidy. Peña y Goñi’s polemic, entitled “Contra la ópera española,” first appeared as a series of articles in the

²⁶ Tomás Bretón, “El príncipe de Viana,” *El Liberal*, 7 Feb. 1885.

²⁷ For a basic biographical sketch of Peña y Goñi, see Emilio Casares Rodicio, “La crítica musical en el XIX español. Panorama general,” in Emilio Casares Rodicio and Celsa Alonso González, eds., *La música española en el siglo XIX* (Oviedo: U de Oviedo, 1995), 482-84 and Carlos Gómez Amat, *Historia de la música española: 5. Siglo XIX* (Madrid: Alianza, 1988), 237-38.

weekly *Madrid Cómico* between 15 February and 29 March 1885 and was later published as a pamphlet. His main criticism rested upon the fact that the government could not mandate genius:

The assurance of Sr. Bretón is truly consoling, because it provides for Spanish composers a road in which the impulses of genius and talent need not enter, as has been usual and customary until now; rather, one is carried by the hand of public opinion and the Government. When the people and the administration say “I desire Spanish opera and Spanish opera must be made immediately,” all it will be is a question of form and procedure.²⁸

For Peña y Goñi, art could never be a government matter, for it was genius and not funding that created art—primarily because he feared that government funded art would bequeath to posterity works created by mediocrities. He feared that the Bretón formula would result in operas that would be made like “a pair of boots,” compositions reduced to a question of “mixing ingredients or uniting materials.”²⁹ He almost certainly had the tepid reception of *El Príncipe de Viana* in mind. By arguing for the role of talent and genius, Peña y Goñi was acknowledging the weak role of the state in Spanish society; thus, a truly nationalist genre of theatre would have to succeed commercially without government assistance—which would not be forthcoming in any case.³⁰

Peña y Goñi’s position was enhanced by the poor quality of *El Príncipe de Viana*: it was exactly the sort of official, state-sponsored art that Bretón believed was crucial for a nationalist lyric theatre genre, but it was hardly an example of genius. Commercially, it failed utterly. Fernández Grajal lacked the talent to create an opera that would become a commercial success, inspire the imagination of the Spanish people, and communicate national identity—as Peña y Goñi demanded a nationalistic genre do. But the poor quality of *El Príncipe de Viana* did not automatically mean that elite art forms could not be commercially successful; elsewhere in Europe, elite forms of art became accepted ways of mobilizing the population behind a nationalist message.³¹ Why did this not

²⁸ Peña y Goñi, *Contra la ópera española* (Madrid: Manuel G. Hernández, 1885), 13-14.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 15.

³⁰ The most relevant studies on the weakness of the state under the Restoration include Carolyn Boyd, *Historia Patria: Politics, History, and National Identity in Spain, 1875-1975* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997); José Varela Ortega *Los amigos políticos: Partidos, elecciones y caciquismo en la Restauración (1875-1900)* (Madrid: Alianza, 1977; Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2001); and Robert W. Kern, *Liberals, Reformers and Caciques in Restoration Spain, 1875-1900* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1974).

³¹ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971).

happen in Spain? The commercial failure of Spanish opera forced its advocates to build their arguments around questions of language and the universality of art—which led to a dilution of the nationalist message that Bretón and his compatriots were trying to disseminate.

Bretón's defense of Spanish opera would seem to place him on solid ground in regards to nineteenth-century nationalism; nationalist operas using national languages were being composed across Europe. But Bretón had fallen under the spell of Richard Wagner. One of Wagner's goals was to put an end to the flashy vocalism of Italian opera and create music dramas in which language and music fused into a dramatic whole. Wagnerian opera was meant to recreate mythic stories that would uplift and transform the audience; to do so, opera had to merge language and music into a unified whole. Just as language was crucial to the building of national identity in the nineteenth century, it was central to the new visions of musical art in the same period. It was also a rejection of the commercial tendencies embodied by Italian opera.³²

Adopting Wagnerian principles placed Bretón in an awkward situation. Bretón was emphatically concerned with nationalist opera. Wagner, while a committed German nationalist, was much more concerned that his art achieve some sort of universal quality. Opera was supposed to communicate mythic truths that would apply to all mankind, not just one nation. Wagnerism unhinged Bretón's nationalist arguments: Bretón tried to insist—both in his polemics as well as in his opera *Los amantes de Teruel*—that it was the language of an opera's libretto that could make a universal music drama nationalist. But Wagnerism insisted on the universality, not the nationality of art. Bretón was trying to square the circle, and the end result was only to confirm opera in Spain as a rarified and non-nationalist form of art.

Wagner's theories of opera linked the language of the libretto directly with the music of a work. Whereas traditionally (especially in the Italian tradition) the libretto was written first and then set by the composer almost independently, the universal art that Wagner was proposing had to mesh and meld language and music. Wagner himself summed things up as early as 1851 in his *Opera and Drama*: “Let us not forget, however, that the orchestra's equalizing moments of expression are never to be determined by *the caprice of the musician*, as a random

³² For an introduction to Wagner and his ideas, see Thomas S. Grey, *The Cambridge Companion to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008) or Barry Millington, *The New Grove Guide to Wagner and his Operas* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006). For the influence of commercial concerns on the composition of Italian operas, see Philip Gossett, *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2006).

tricking out of sound, but *only by the poet's aim.*"³³ Wagner believed that composers had to pay much greater attention to the language of the libretto than they traditionally did, since the libretto needed to work closely with the music in order to create a work of musico-dramatic art. Opera, in the Wagnerian view, was the antithesis of Italian vocalization: music and words had to have equal weight.

For Bretón, the issue of words and music in opera was so important that it became the subject of his address to Real Academia de San Fernando de Bellas Artes upon his election to that body in 1896. His argument hinges on what the French considered nationalist opera—an apt subject, since French opera had developed out of the Italian school and many of the most eminent composers of French opera were of non-French origins. Gluck, Piccini, Spontini, and Meyerbeer fell into this category, and Bretón also mentions other non-French composers who wrote operas in the French style, such as Mozart, Rossini, Weber, Donizetti, Verdi, and even Wagner himself. Bretón argued that neither the musical content of a work nor the nationality of the composer have anything to do with the national identity of an opera. What made the works of those composers somehow “French” was the fact that the librettos were in French and they were sung in French. This leads Bretón to an awkward conclusion: “the most materially national opera does not exist anywhere; that which gives the stated meaning to the aspired-to adjective, is the fact that the general repertory is sung in the language of the land.”³⁴ Bretón wanted to use language to create a nationalist form of opera, but he inadvertently ends up arguing that art cannot be nationalist.

Bretón's argument is unfortunate from the Wagnerian point of view: it detaches language from music for the purpose of turning universal art into nationalist art. The interpretation of an art form might be nationally influenced due to language or performance style, but the art itself remains positioned high above these questions of interpretation and utility. In Bretón's argument art triumphs over commercial forms of nationalism: there is no such thing as opera that is somehow organically nationalist, because opera is an art form and not something subjected to popular pressure. If Bretón's alignment of opera with the idea of “art” seems like standard operating procedure from the standpoint of the twenty-first century, it is worth remembering that in the late nineteenth century

³³ Richard Wagner, *Oper und Drama* as reprinted in Albert Goldman and Evert Sprinchorn, eds., *Wagner on Music and Drama: A Compendium of Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans. H. Ashton Ellis (New York: Dutton, 1964; New York: Da Capo, 1988), 222. The italics are Wagner's.

³⁴ Tomás Bretón, *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando en la recepción pública del Ilmo. Sr. D. Tomás Bretón* (Madrid: Hijos de José M. Ducacal, 1896), reprinted in Tomás Bretón, *La Ópera Nacional* (Madrid: Música mundana, 1985), 43.

where opera fell on the commercialism-versus-art spectrum was still very much in flux. Opera before Wagner had been a popular entertainment heavily subject to commercial pressures. Bretón's stress on opera as art, not as a commercial product, placed him squarely in the Wagnerian camp of opera as "music-drama," as does his insistence regarding the universality of such art.

Bretón's attempt to fuse German philosophy into Spanish music has distinct overtones linking it with the Krausist movement, which attempted to use German idealist philosophy to reform the ills of Spanish society in the late 1860s and early 1870s.³⁵ Admittedly, the followers of Karl Friedrich Kraus in Spain were focused on the development of secular and scientific education to fix the problems that religious education had led the country into, which seems like a far cry from theories over the technique of operatic composition. Wagner's development of the *leitmotif* as the core of operatic composition can be seen as a way to regularize and standardize music in the same way that Krausism's focus on scientific understanding was a method for standardizing institutions throughout Spain. Krausism still operated within a religious context, finding secular science as one path to understanding God's creation; Wagner certainly thought of his music as something close to a religious experience, and given his behavior at times might well have mistaken himself for God. Bretón's turn to Wagner was simply following in the footsteps of the Spanish Krausists: Spaniards had turned to a German model for social reform when French models were considered unsuitable due to their Enlightenment and revolutionary heritage. Bretón turned to a German composer when Italian operatic models had proved similarly unsuitable.

Bretón's clearest statement of his adoption of Wagner's principles came with the composition of *Los amantes de Teruel*, based on the 1837 play by Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch. Hartzenbusch's play, a variation on a Romeo-and-Juliet style legend from thirteenth-century Aragón, was one of the pillars of Spanish Romantic drama and thus a good choice for someone trying to create nationalist art. He first became enamored of the play in mid-1883, and in the autumn of 1884 had submitted his composition to the jury that would choose the Spanish work for the Teatro Real for that season. The work would not be staged until February 1889: the vicissitudes of staging operas by Spanish composers were at work once again, this time in a particularly virulent form. The battles that Bretón would have to fight in order to have *Los amantes* staged would demonstrate the need for the urgent reform of another key Spanish institution: the Teatro Real.

³⁵ On Krausism, see Raymond Carr, *Spain, 1808-1975*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1982), 301-304; on its practical application in Spain, see Joshua Goode, *Impurity of Blood: Defining Race in Spain, 1870-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2011), 150-153.

Bretón had begun reading Wagner's *Oper und Drama* in early 1883 while he was still looking for a suitable work on which to base an opera, and *Los amantes de Teruel* would be heavily influenced by Bretón's understanding of Wagner's tome. Musically, Bretón was an imperfect Wagnerite: "Wagner is not the truth, I at least think so, but nevertheless, he fills the world and all, or a large part of composers try to imitate him, closing the door on what is intended to be or should be simple and clear."³⁶ Rather than trying to imitate Wagner, Bretón chose to chart a course between the chromatic harmonics of Wagner and the free-flowing vocalism of the Italian school. Bretón used Wagnerian *leitmotifs* of a sort to compose his work, but incorporated them as themes which crop up at various points in the opera, rather than as musical components that are reiterated and changed across the opera. (The effect is closer to Max Steiner's score for *Gone with the Wind* than to *Götterdämmerung*.) Bretón's vocal lines are often flowing rather than declamatory, as much of Wagner's vocal writing tends to be—but they never overflow in vocalism for vocalism's sake.³⁷ In short, Bretón sought to create a Wagnerian music drama in *Los amantes*, but one based in the German composer's ideas about language rather than music.

Wagner's musical ideas influenced what might otherwise seem to be a curious musical choice by Bretón in composing *Los amantes de Teruel*. Bretón does not use folk melodies or otherwise ostensibly Spanish-sounding music in the score. The only use of local color is the mock-Moorish march that ushers in the first-act finale, one of those pieces of late-nineteenth century *exotica* that were used to denote characters from foreign climes; the purpose and effect is orientalist rather than nationalist.³⁸ Although European composers (Spaniards among them) had a tendency to use "Moorish" music as a way to musically represent Spain, the effect here is to portray the character of Zulima (an Arabian princess whose manipulations of the hero drive much of the plot) as an outsider. There is no question of using Spanish folk music to portray Spaniards in Bretón's musical ethos.

As usual with Bretón, what was to make *Los amantes de Teruel* nationalist was language. Wagner's obsession with his texts clearly influenced Bretón, as the production history of the opera demonstrates. The jury assembled to assess the

³⁶ Bretón, *Diario*, 22 August 1882, 1:164.

³⁷ For more musical analysis, see Francesc Bonastre's introduction to Tomás Bretón, *Los amantes de Teruel: Drama lírico en cuatro actos y un prologo* (Madrid: ICCMU, 1998), xiv-xv (Spanish) or xxiv-xxv (English).

³⁸ On the uses of orientalism in nineteenth-century music, see Ralph P. Locke, "Constructing the Oriental 'Other': Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3 (1991), 261-302.

opera attempted to deny its production based on the language of Bretón's text rather than on its musical qualities. Bretón submitted the score and libretto of the work to the Teatro Real on 28 October 1884 for consideration as the contractual obligation to produce a new Spanish opera for the 1884-85 season.³⁹ The required jury report was not issued until April 1885, even though the contract called for the premiere the selected opera by 1 March. The most significant request made by the jury was that Bretón was requested to translate the libretto into Italian—not a line-by-line translation, but “an arrangement based on the [libretto] composed by Señor Bretón, with the greatest conditions of scenic sobriety, and always inspired by the ideas of the magnificent drama by the immortal Hartzbusch.” The jury also claimed that the libretto deviated too far from the source material. The work's cool reception may be due in part to Bretón's unpopularity in Madrid musical circles: the jury was headed by Emilio Arrieta, with whom Bretón had quarrelled the previous year over a music prize.⁴⁰

This evaluation of his work provoked a sharp retort from Bretón. In a letter to the Ministerio de Hacienda he claimed that not only had the jury turned in the report late, but it had been structured illegally (having only two composers instead of the required three). Furthermore, the jury made its judgment and subsequent acceptance of the work by the Real on literary terms, when by terms of the contract it was supposed to focus only on the musical qualities of the work—and it had made the literary evaluation a basis for demanding revisions of the work when none of the judges had any literary qualifications. He also pointed out the essential irrelevancy of the charges, especially that of deviating from the source material, asking if artists “cannot borrow some new element that has not been employed by the cited illustrious poet?”⁴¹ Bretón chose not fight on musical grounds, but on strictly literary ones. There is no mention of the musical changes he was asked to make in his complaints; he instead focused on the criticism of the libretto.

Bretón's complaints led to the appointment of a second jury (headed again by Arrieta) to consider the work. Its report, issued in June of 1885, repeated many of the same charges with greater venom. The report reproduced large chunks of the libretto verbatim, noting that the only literary qualification need to see its problems was knowledge of “the rudiments of Castillian grammar.” It also mocked the translation Bretón had commissioned of the libretto, claiming it “is

³⁹ The production history is detailed in the “Expediente relativo al cumplimiento de la cláusula 6^a del contrato de arrendamiento en la temporada de 1884-1885 concerniente á la representación de una ópera nueva española,” AGA 5.31/6909 No. 2.

⁴⁰ See Bretón, *Diario*, 15-23 June 1884, 1:404-06.

⁴¹ Letter from Tomás Bretón to the Ministro de Hacienda, 7 March 1886, AGA 5.31/6909 No. 19.

sure to make all of the Italian singers laugh, from the Prima Donna to the last chorister.” The jury expanded their critique to the opera’s music, claiming that it would be far too difficult for a standard opera house orchestra to perform. This spilled over into criticism of Bretón’s compositional style, claiming “he frequently abuses the chromatic genre”—code for Wagnerian tendencies. The jury accused Bretón of aspiring to the universal musico-dramatic pretensions of Wagner, which they felt he did not have “the elevated literary or musical talents” to achieve. The jury summed up with the harsh conclusion that Bretón was primarily a symphonic composer and that it was not “decorous” that Bretón was “found to be so enamored of the words and music of his opera that he will not admit a priori the suppression of a syllable nor a semiquaver”—and that *Los amantes* was not to be admitted to the repertory of the Teatro Real.⁴²

The situation had reached a stalemate. *Los amantes* was only produced at the Teatro Real after the intervention of Bretón’s patron, the Conde de Morphy (and possibly members of the royal family—a memo exists indicating the interest of Queen Regent María Cristina in the work).⁴³ The premiere, on 12 February 1889, left the critics divided. Morphy, not unnaturally, thought the work was “*the decisive point of departure in the history of nationalist lyric drama*”; Peña y Goñi, also not unnaturally, took the opposite view claiming that the music—in contrast to the often-misquoted adage that music soothes the savage beast—would turn animals into vermin.⁴⁴ The less partisan critics gave mixed reviews: Esperanza y Sola thought highly of the music but agreed with the jury that cuts could be made without damaging the work, which he found overlong. The notice in *El Imparcial* managed to be both enthusiastic and backhanded: it claimed that the work was the best opera written in Spain thus far (given the competition, this was hardly a glowing endorsement) and that Bretón had successfully emulated French and German composers, not what most nationalist composers would hope to hear.⁴⁵

The saga of *Los amantes de Teruel* makes clear just how dependent the question of the nationalism in Spanish opera had become on the language of the text and not its music. Although the jury had criticisms of the music of the opera, the focus of the dispute came to be the libretto. This was probably unavoidable

⁴² Untitled Jury Report, 23 June 1886, AGA 5.31/6909.

⁴³ Unattributed memo to the Conservador del Teatro Real, 24 March 1888, AGA 5.31/6909.

⁴⁴ Guillermo Morphy, “Los amantes de Teruel,” *La Epoca*, 8 March 1889 (the italics are Morphy’s); Antonio Peña y Goñi, “Los amantes de Teruel’ y el Señor Conde de Morphy,” *La Epoca*, 9 March 1889. Peña y Goñi later adapted some of his critical pieces in pamphlet form, published as *Estudio crítico de Los amantes de Teruel de D. Tomás Bretón* (Madrid: José M. Ducazcal, 1889).

⁴⁵ J.M. Esperanza y Sola, “Revista Musical,” *La Ilustración Española y Americana*, 8 March 1889; “Sección de espectáculos,” *El Imparcial*, 3 March 1889.

given the conjunction of the standard critical focus on the quality of the libretti of Spanish operas and the long-standing bone of contention over the language sung at the Teatro Real. Public attention had come to focus on language forms as crucial to defining the viability of nationalist opera. Bretón had musically and artistically identified Spanish opera as implicitly Wagnerian; thus, Bretón had to fight for his libretto because language was as important to a work of art as the music was. Ironically, the music became of vastly lesser importance—which was a rather necessary argument, since all of the nationalist composers other than Bretón and Chapí seem to have been amateurish at best. Better, then, to focus on the fact that Spanish composers were creating works of art, not commercial pieces of music that would have to succeed with the public in order to spread their message of nationalism.

What are scholars interested in nationalism to make of Bretón's stance on the question of Spanish opera? Both in his compositional practices and his academic discourses, Bretón rejected the idea that art can somehow be linked to nationality even as he tried to defend Spanish opera. His life was dedicated to promoting the universality of art, as he once admitted to the Ateneo of Madrid: "He who argues for *the universality of art* cannot be faulted, that the limitations and borders that oppose it are chimerical and trivial, that the great personalities who illustrate the principle fill the world, not this nor that country [*pueblo*], etc., etc., etc."⁴⁶ Art is not about individual vision, but about something larger that will inspire all of mankind. Thus art could not be nationalist, for that would limit its scope and its very right to be called art. Nationalism would undermine the universal validity of a work of art; a nationalist opera would, in this sense, cease to be art.

It was one thing for Richard Wagner to make this argument. In Germany there was a long cultural tradition that music itself was intrinsically German. Thus, there was actually no contradiction in German composer arguing that music could appeal both as universal art and as a nationalist phenomenon at the same time.⁴⁷ Bretón attempted a similar argument, but ran into problems caused by the very different cultural traditions in Spanish music. In Spain, dramatic music had always been expected to prove it worth by attracting a paying audience; the subsidized court operas of central Europe had no real equivalent on the Iberian

⁴⁶ Tomás Bretón, *Conferencias musicales leídas en el Ateneo de Madrid* (Madrid: Ciudad Lineal, n.d.) reprinted in Tomás Bretón, *La Ópera Nacional* (Madrid: Música mundana, 1985), 70.

⁴⁷ Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, "Germans as the 'People of Music': Genealogy of an Identity" in Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter, eds., *Music and German National Identity* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002), 1-35 and Hans Rudolf Vaaget, "National and Universal: Thomas Mann and the Paradox of German Music" in Applegate and Potter, eds., 155-177.

Peninsula. Lyric theatre in Spain had to sell tickets and could only be universal insofar as this did not diminish the returns at the box office. Bretón had boxed Spanish opera into a corner by stressing its artistic credentials. Opera might be artistically respectable, but its commercial prospects were dim in a country where the main institutions for staging opera were dominated by Italian composers and singers. It was a lesson that Bretón would learn from: when Bretón made another attempt at writing a Spanish opera in 1895, the resulting *La Dolores* would be staged not at the Teatro Real, but at the Teatro de la Zarzuela—Madrid's main venue for commercial musical theatre.

Spain would create a nationalist school of lyric theatre in the late nineteenth century, but nationalist musical theatre in Spain would not be operatic. Instead zarzuela would become the vehicle of musical aspiration towards a national identity. Whereas the institutions supporting art music in Spain were weak in the nineteenth century, the commercial theatre was vibrant—so vibrant that the best known musical works of Bretón and Chapí are their zarzuelas and not their operas. Spain's lack of institutional support for music is hardly surprising: the country lacked many of the standard institutions for the dissemination of a nationalist project, such as a strong state-run school system that could teach nationalist narratives and ideas to children. Instead, education was left in the hands of the Catholic Church, which had different agendas to promulgate. The Restoration government had no desire to inculcate a sense of nationalism in its population, as a mobilized population might begin to challenge the governmental corruption and lack of political representation that characterized the system. The lack of nationalist opera in Spain was less an aberration than part of the wider trend towards political quietism under the Restoration.

Where the Spanish state did support art and culture during the Restoration, it did not support the popular commercial theatre. The only state support for music was the subvention given each season to the Teatro Real, which catered to the aristocracy and the wealthy cream of Madrid society. And this state support did not support Spanish opera; instead it supported Italian opera, sung in Italian by Italians for an audience that was too cosmopolitan to be bothered by this foreign intrusion—or that was too indolent to care. It is not unnatural that Spanish composers succumbed to the lure of Wagnerism given the situation at the Teatro Real: Wagner explicitly rejected the Italian ethos of commercial opera and created a criterion whereby the worth of music was gauged by its artistic pretensions and not how many people came to the theatre. But Wagner lived in a society where the creation of music could be both a nationalistic endeavor and a universal art form at the same time; since music composition was not a Spanish characteristic, composers like Bretón had to square the circle and make

Wagnerism work in a solely nationalist context. Had *Los amantes de Teruel* succeeded, Bretón might have been able to make such a case. Its failure ensured that the Wagnerian approach to Spanish opera would remain a cultural dead end.

Does the failure of nationalist opera in Spain matter? It did not hinder the ultimate vibrancy of Spanish musical culture any more than the failure of American composers to create a nationalist school of American opera dimmed the vibrancy of musical culture across the Atlantic. In Spain, nationalist ideals came to reside in zarzuela and folk forms like flamenco just as American nationalist ideals are to be found in musical comedy and jazz. If anything, one could make the case that popular musical cultures like those of the United States and Spain embody the idea of nationalism better than operatic cultures like Germany or France. Certainly, the failure to develop a nationalist strain of opera was part of the wider failure of the nationalist project that would prove so disastrous for Spain in the twentieth century. But it may also have doomed the reception of Spanish music outside Spain. Opera and serious music were part of the shared European musical culture of the nineteenth century; popular musical forms rarely traveled effectively across national borders. Spain would become marginalized in the history of European music because of its failure to develop composers of operas and symphonies. Ironically, Tomás Bretón was right: by creating a nationalist school of music, Spanish music could have been more widely performed throughout Europe—and then it would have been universal.