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 ***Bodily Charm: Living Opera* by Linda Hutcheon, Michael
Hutcheon (review)**

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

HUMANITIES 297 the summer game B usually possess some surplus value, beyond their utility to the political agenda of the moment. There is much that is useful in *Imagining Baseball*, but it is not a book particularly interested in surplus value. (T.H. ADAMOWSKI) Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon. *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* University of Nebraska Press. xxii, 348. US \$39.95 Musicologists have watched with pleasure recently as opera has become a favourite topic among literary scholars. The annual conference of the Modern Language Association now regularly features sessions devoted to the genre, and new books appear each year that view opera through a literary lens. These studies often approach music as an escape from the confines of the home discipline, taking refuge in anecdote and personal confession, but their unfettered passion has much to teach musicology about its objects of study. Written by a professor of literature and a medical doctor, *Bodily Charm: Living Opera* represents the best of this trend, providing all of the passion

with not a hint of self-indulgence. Lamenting that traditional musicology too long dwelt safely in an >Apollonian= world of non-contextual formal analysis, Linda and Michael Hutcheon aim to breach this cool distance by directing attention to the >Dionysian= excesses of the operatic body and by reading the meanings of those bodies through the rich contexts of feminist theory, disability studies, and the history of medicine. One of *Bodily Charm*'s strengths is its ambitious structure, which encompasses not only the relatively familiar topic of how the body is represented in the words and music of individual operas, but also bodily experience as recorded in less fixed ways by the physical challenges faced by singers and the sensations of the opera-goer. By focusing on the messy realities of live performance and on the neglected areas of dance and movement, the authors try to characterize the ungovernable >Dionysian= element so central to operatic experience but so difficult to capture in words. The Apollo/Dionysus opposition is mined for both its classical and Nietzschean resonances, although the mythological context is explored more deeply. In the first two long chapters (the book's >Act I=), the authors show how the Classical notion that a good and moral soul was naturally housed in a beautiful body dominated opera's early history and how this ideal was shattered or rendered obsolete by the Romantic convictions that appearances were deceptive, that goodness was thus more likely to reside in grotesque bodies. It is to the ugly, disturbing, unruly bodies of post-Romantic opera that the Hutcheons devote most of their interpretive energy. Chapter 2 concentrates on a single scene, excavating the cultural contexts for Salome's scandalous Dance of the Seven Veils in Richard Strauss's 1905 opera. This chapter poses a challenge to feminist orthodoxy, suggesting that when Salome invites the male gaze during her erotic dance she gains rather than loses power. Chapter 1, a dizzying survey of operas from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* to Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* to Harry Somers's *Mario and the Magician*, focuses on operatic portraits of deformity read through the filter of disability studies. Characters such as Verdi's *Rigoletto* or Alberich in Wagner's *Ring* cycle, the authors suggest, demonstrate a new understanding of deformity, not as a mark of inherent evil but as a manifestation of a diseased social order. >Act II= of *Bodily Charm* turns from operatic characters to real bodies, those of performers and spectators in turn. The medico-literary collaboration is at its best in the chapter devoted to singers. The fascinating discussion of the science of vocal production must be indebted to Michael Hutcheon's medical expertise, but what sparkles most is not the information itself (much of which is available elsewhere, if in less accessible forms) but the virtuosic dialogue between the history of vocal pedagogy and the intelligent interpretation of anecdotes about singers' relationships to their bodies. And while the bodies and voices of performers have long been a subject of opera journalism, the bodily experience of the audience has been approached only rarely and solipistically, in some recent books that ask: >What do I...

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