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Opera and Romanticism

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About This Volume

This volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* includes an editor's introduction by Gillen D'Arcy Wood, essays by Christina Fuhrmann, Diane Long Hoeveler, J. Jennifer Jones, Jessica K. Quillin, and Anne Williams.

Demonstrating the widescale influence of opera upon the cultural field of the Romantic period, the essays collected in "Opera and Romanticism" aim to redress the critical neglect to which this form has been previously subjected. A lush interchange between opera and both literature and drama is examined in the essays of Christina Fuhrmann, Diane Hoeveler, and Anne Williams. Further, in the essays of J. Jennifer Jones and Jessica Quillin, we see that Romantic opera did not leave behind its Italian roots, but rather remained complexly connected to its predecessor in ways that can be seen in some of the most canonical writers of the time. By reclaiming the suppressed history of opera in this period, Gillen D'Arcy Wood's volume illustrates that opera is what he calls "a vital flashpoint of aesthetic and political interests in the long Romantic age."

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About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** is devoted to using computer technologies for the contemporary critical investigation of the languages, cultures, histories, and theories of Romanticism. Tracking the circulation of Romanticism within these interrelated domains of knowledge, **RCPS** recognizes as its conceptual terrain a world where Romanticism has, on the one hand, dissolved as a period and an idea into a plurality of discourses and, on the other, retained a vigorous, recognizable hold on the intellectual and theoretical discussions of today. **RCPS** is committed to mapping out this terrain with the best and most exciting critical writing of contemporary Romanticist scholarship.

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Opera and Romanticism

Introduction

Gillen D'Arcy Wood, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Short essay argues for the centrality of opera, and its controversies, to Georgian culture, and for its neglect by romanticist scholars to be redressed. Then follow brief synopses of the articles in the volume. This essay appears in *Opera and Romanticism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

1. In his Preface to the first number of the *Examiner* (1808), Leigh Hunt singles out its "Operatical Review" as a signature of his editorial progressivism. The *Examiner* opera column, he boasts, "has been the first criticism of the kind worthy the attention of sound readers." Given that Hunt took Italian opera so seriously, and properly assumed the credit for recognizing its importance to London cultural life, he would surely be dismayed to find that, in the two centuries since, literary historians of the late Georgian period have paid it such scant regard.
2. There are, of course, reasons for this neglect. Taste for opera is like no other. A high-minded reader who frequents galleries and has season tickets for the symphony might despise it, while a pragmatic banker will shed tears with Lucia and Mimi at any opportunity. Something in opera's appeal resists the processes of consensus formation that have, over the last two centuries, established canonical taste across the other arts. If the Romantic age invented seriousness and the bourgeois novel, then it is to that age we must also look, Hunt's enthusiasm notwithstanding, for the casting of opera as literature's anathema: as unacceptably *unserious*, a cultural embarrassment, almost a cult. As early as 1707, Addison identified the arrival of Italian opera in England with the decline of native literature: "Our Home-spun Authors must forsake the Field/And Shakespear to the soft Scarlatti yield." Steele called opera "nonsense" (45), the precise term used, at the other end of the eighteenth century, by the indignant Mr. Branghton in Burney's *Cecilia* (1782).
3. Anti-operatic discourse since Addison pits operatic nonsense against literary "sense," namely its realist forms and moral goals. As Herbert Lindenberger puts it, "the term *operatic* . . . implies an opening outwards, a kind of escape from the boundaries of ordinary literary discourse" (70). The Italian opera, at least before Mozart, possessed few stable scores or texts. It was the quintessence of Baroque event-based art, "*histrionic, extravagant, gestural, ceremonial, performative*," and stood ideologically opposed to the emergent Romantic *werk*, to the "*literary, restrained, referential, mimetic*" world of books and reading, art and museum-going (76). This antipathy breaks neatly along class lines, as the stable cultural properties of books and painting in the nineteenth century became more and more identified with middle-class aspiration and identity, and the ephemeral opera with an atavistic, marginalized and disreputably "foreign" aristocratic taste.
4. But history is written by the winners, and this narrative of opera as a marginal social and aesthetic form is a characteristically nativist, middle-class history. It suppresses the importance of opera both as an essential ritual of Georgian court culture and aristocratic self-identification, and an innovative art form whose impact was inevitably felt by its more respectable sisters, literature not the least. The success of the anti-operatic narrative depends also on the lop-sided nature of the archive. Just as Italian opera of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries has left few intact scores, it was the nature of aristocratic life in that period to leave few written records of one's opinions, and to eschew all forms of commentary or debate in newspapers. Such discoursing was left to the middle-class professionals. The

historical reception of Italian opera in England is thus distorted by an overabundance of critique from scribbling clergymen and indignant city-dwelling journalists, with little balancing testimony from the generations of English nobility for whom the King's Theatre in the Haymarket served as an indispensable hub of their social lives.

5. This balance has by no means been redressed even now. While eighteenth-century critics railed against the corrosive social effects of an aristocratic opera house in their periodicals, we, their inheritors in the twenty-first century Anglo-American academy, continue to enforce their anti-operatic prejudice by a collective stopping of the ears. The interdisciplinary crossroads between literature, the spoken-word theater, and the visual arts are well worn, but it is as rare to find a college curriculum that offers courses in literature and opera as it is to open a literary-academic journal to find essays on Rossini or Donizetti (Wagner, with his unique place in German *kultur*, and the over-determined literary apparatus of his works, is perhaps the exception that proves the rule here). In short, some rapprochement between the academic histories of opera and literature is long overdue, and the very production of this special journal issue devoted to the subject implicitly acknowledges that fact.
6. Notwithstanding its neglect at the hands of literary and cultural historians, important groundwork in opera history has been laid by the most recent generation of musicologists. Dr. Charles Burney's long chapter on the Italian opera in London in his *General History of Music* (1789) remains the essential primary text, but little significant research independent of Burney was carried out until the 1970s, when Frederick Petty's archive-rich *Italian Opera in London, 1760-1800* (UMI Research Press, 1972) appeared, as well as Daniel Nalbach's slim history of the King's Theatre (The Society for Theatre Research, 1972). Two decades later, Theodore Fenner, author of a previous volume on opera and the *Examiner* (Kansas, 1972), published a thorough compendium of opera criticism in the romantic period, entitled *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* (Southern Illinois, 1994). Petty and Fenner's labors have been indispensable to the revival (or creation) of period interest in opera, and their efforts have now been joined by the enormous multi-volume research project ongoing from the Clarendon Press: *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London* (1995-), edited by Curtis Price, Judith Milhous, and Robert Hume.
7. While the arcana of opera house management available in these volumes may not be of enduring interest to scholars of Georgian and Romantic literature, the broader reach of opera culture and aesthetics cannot fail to be. Byron and Shelley were aficionados, Byron, Scott and other romantic authors were routinely adapted to the operatic stage, and Hunt and Hazlitt are the two most significant opera critics of the early nineteenth century. From a larger cultural point of view, as the Clarendon editors state in their Preface, even after the withdrawal of Handel in 1741 "Italian opera remained a prominent and controversial part of London's cultural life . . . [as] the most glamorous and exclusive of London's theatres, a satellite of the English court and a magnet for the rich and powerful" (vii). Class was a confused issue in late Georgian Britain, and is confusing to us, but the King's Theatre in the West End remains an almost unique and even reassuring source for specific accounts of class relations, from Frances Burney's novels to the groundbreaking opera columns of the *Examiner*. We might know little of the music Georgian opera-lovers listened to, and care for it less, but the opera house itself, as a public sphere engineered for the performance of class status and cosmopolitan taste, and a forum for increasingly visible class warfare, represents a vital flashpoint of aesthetic and political interests in the long Romantic age.
8. Italian opera also intersects two established fields of Romanticism: Romantic theater and the gothic. One of the principal objections to the Italian opera was its defiance of the consolidating norms of theatrical realism in spoken drama. Women played men, male sopranos impersonated Roman heroes, and performances orbited entirely around the vocal demands of the castrato or diva, who performed their signature arias in glorious disregard of plot or character. And this is to say nothing of the

automatic affront of players representing the natural passions by bursting into song in a foreign language. The King's Theatre, as such, represents the persistence of Baroque stylization and self-conscious theatricality on the London stage in a period conventionally represented as marking the birth of a hegemonic naturalism. In other respects, however, late Georgian opera is entirely a creature of its time, as susceptible to the popular appeal of the gothic as melodrama and the novel. Where eighteenth-century opera was more likely to emphasize the civic virtues, Romantic opera, beginning, let us say, with *Don Giovanni* (1787; first produced in London, 1816), soon became synonymous with Gothic excess: with blood, passion, villainy and supernatural machinery.

9. If the foregoing suggests a form of scholarly moral obligation to study opera, then the essays of this volume make an altogether more attractive case: that with the aid of metaphorical opera glasses, the cross-dressing of operatic spectacle and literary seriousness can appear pleasingly magnified. Two of the contributors, Jennifer Jones and Jessica Quillin, speculate convincingly on the influence of Mozartian *opera buffa* on Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and the notorious figure of the opera castrato on Mary Shelley's creature in *Frankenstein* respectively, while the remaining authors treat the issue of influence in the more material form of adaptation. Christina Fuhrmann, the solitary musicologist in the group, unravels the complex history of an 1825 Paris opera, *La Dame Blanche* (based on Scott's 1815 novel, *Guy Mannering*), whose success on the Continent and failure in London represents a particularly illuminating instance of Scott's double role as exotic native. Diane Hoeveler makes a more broad-ranging argument for the mutual resonances of operatic and literary sentimentality, comparing Paisiello's *Nina* (1789) to the literary offspring of Richardson's *Pamela* (1741). Lastly, Anne Williams takes us directly to the source: her translation of the libretto to Gounod's *La Nonne Sanglante* (1854), adapted from the famous episode in Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), marks its first appearance in English, and her introductory analysis shows the fascinating transference of gothic effects from the English page to the French operatic stage. That it required one hundred and sixty years for such a translation to appear bears out my essential point regarding the larger historical invisibility of operatic literature in the Anglo-American academy, a state of affairs that all five essays of this volume may be considered to challenge.

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Opera and Romanticism

Scott Repatriated?: *La Dame blanche* Crosses the Channel

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Numerous foreign composers wrote operas based on Sir Walter Scott. This article explores the nationalistic, theatrical, and musical tensions that arose when one of these foreign Scott operas--*La Dame Blanche*--was unsuccessfully 'repatriated' in two different versions for London. This essay appears in *Opera and Romanticism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

1. In 1825, Sir Walter Scott found himself beleaguered by fans:

[I begin] to be haunted by too much company of every kind. But especially foreigners. I do not like them . . . they are seldom long of making it evident that they know nothing about what they are talking of excepting having seen [Rossini's] *Lady of the Lake* at the Opera (Scott *Journal* 13).

2. This unsettling personal confrontation played out on a larger scale, for not only foreign opera lovers, but foreign Scott operas themselves crossed the channel. *La Donna del Lago*, *La Dame blanche*, *Ivanhoé*, and *Lucia di Lammermoor* all appeared on British bills.^[4] Significantly, they did not initially penetrate into Scotland itself, but landed in London, where Scott's works had already appeared in a myriad of English dramatizations.^[5] This applied a further layer of translation, as English audiences hovered uneasily between difference and identity with their northern neighbor. Ultimately, they proved as ambivalent to these operatic guests as Scott to his foreign visitors. By enshrining Scott and Scotland as emblems of a romanticized other, these operas uncomfortably reminded the English of their own status as fellow consumers of this idealized picture. In reinterpreting Scott's works for new contexts, and in reducing him to exotic symbol, these operas also jarred Englanders' more serious political and social investment in Scott's portrayal. Closing ranks against foreign assimilation, the English folded Scott into a protected role as "national" author.^[5]
3. Nowhere did these tensions erupt more fiercely than when *La Dame blanche* (1826) came to London. Although our own knowledge of foreign Scott operas has dwindled primarily to one representative—Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*—*La Dame blanche* dominated the operatic landscape during Scott's lifetime. An amalgamation of *Guy Mannering* (1815) and *The Monastery* (1820) by composer Adrien Boieldieu and librettist Eugène Scribe, *La Dame blanche* racked up over a thousand performances in Paris and captivated continental Europe.^[6] Not so in London. Two separate translations, at Drury Lane (1826) and Covent Garden (1827), fizzled. The opera's unexpected failure perfectly illustrates the tensions that arose when foreigners re-appropriated an author so crucial to fledgling British identity.

La Dame blanche

4. The first problem with *La Dame blanche* was its drastic departure from Scott. A master of the *opéra comique* genre, librettist Eugène Scribe had freely distilled Scott's novels into one of his characteristic "well-made" plots.^[7] Gone is the sprawling sweep of Scottish history, the panoply of idiosyncratic Scottish characters. Instead, Scribe focused interest squarely where Scott often faltered: the central love story between Georges Brown, lost heir of *Guy Mannering*, and Anna, an orphan loosely modeled on Mary Avenel from *The Monastery*. Scribe carefully redirected "Scottish flavor" into two conduits. First,

beautiful scenery, happy peasants, and native folk tunes provided the traditional, generalized markers of *couleur locale*.^[8] Second, the essential signifier of Scotland, the supernatural, devolved not on the prophetic gypsy Meg Merrilies from *Guy Mannering*, but on the White Lady from *The Monastery*, a spirit who aids the Avenel family. Blander and more ethereal than Meg, the White Lady could serve double duty: marker of prototypical Scottish superstition on the one hand, clever plot device on the other. For the White Lady did not stay otherworldly for long. Blending supernatural flavor with the well-worn rescue plot, Scribe revealed the White Lady as a disguise for Anna, who masquerades as the spirit to help Georges reclaim his ancestral estate. As was his *forte*, Scribe directed all of these plot elements toward one, culminating *scène à faire*: the auction of the ancient castle. Almost an offstage aside in Scott, this became one of the most striking portions of the opera. Not only did the libretto inexorably lead to this scene, but Boieldieu, in a *tour de force*, set all of the quotidian action to music. Overall, *La Dame blanche* blended Scott's novels and Scottish tunes into a kind of exotic covering for the established framework of *opéra comique*.

5. *La Dame blanche*'s inexorably logical plot, blend of catchy Scottish tunes and novel ensembles, and carefully circumscribed supernaturalism enchanted Parisians at the première on 10 December 1825 and soon swept through continental Europe.^[9] In London, however, the only opera house did not follow suit. The King's Theatre imported most of its casts, operas, and taste directly from Italy, to the extent that it was often called "The Italian Opera House." Exceptional non-Italian operas occasionally broke through this hegemony, but only when considerable effort had been expended to Italianize them.^[10] French operas battled additional barriers. Despite political tensions between the two countries, French imports occupied a well-established realm: the light ballet that rounded out the double bill. At a theater where "opera" meant Italian and "French" meant ballet, *opéra comique* remained a stranger, and *La Dame blanche* did not prompt an exception.
6. *La Dame blanche* did, however, intrigue London's biggest playhouses, Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Ostensibly the bastion of spoken drama, in reality these theaters attempted to amuse their more socially heterogeneous audience with a mix of music and speech. Shakespearian tragedies sported bolstered musical scores, for example, while English operas were essentially plays with songs and choruses.^[11] With its spoken dialogue, an *opéra comique* such as *La Dame blanche* easily transitioned to these conventions, and indeed a large number of French plays and operas regularly immigrated to these playhouses.^[12] An even larger number of operas of all nationalities were destined to arrive, for in 1824 *Der Freischütz* had achieved such astounding success that managers scurried to import any successful foreign opera (Fuhrmann, "Continental Opera"). A piece based on Scott possessed further allure, for popular English dramatizations of his works already proliferated at the playhouses.^[13] French, operatic, successful, and based on Scott, *La Dame blanche* fit seamlessly into established patterns of importation. As music aficionado William Ayrton proclaimed, "no doubts need be entertained" of the opera's success in London (*The Harmonicon*, July 1826, 154).

The White Lady

7. Yet, managers did entertain doubts. In the first London production, *The White Lady* at Drury Lane on 9 October 1826, librettist Samuel Beazley and composer/singer Thomas Cooke deviated drastically from the opera (Beazley, Cooke). Beazley's changes clearly stemmed from a desire to re-translate the opera not only back into its original language, but back into a closer approximation of Scott. For readers more familiar with Scott's exact words, Beazley reverted to original character names, repopulated the plot with additional figures from Scott, and in a few instances even replicated Scott's actual text. Similarly, Beazley tried to reverse Scribe's drastic fusion of *Guy Mannering* and *The Monastery* by instead pairing *The Monastery* with its sequel, *The Abbot*. As Beazley well knew, Londoners had read and re-read *Guy Mannering* with particular delight, and numerous English stage versions had distilled

the novel into a core of key characters and incidents that Scribe's version dangerously lacked. Not as popular, *The Monastery* and *The Abbot* offered ground less densely layered with previous adaptations. [14] In a broader sense, Scribe's melding of the two novels mixed different settings, characters, and eras into a rather indiscriminate mass of Scottish exotica. For those more familiar with Scotland's geography and more invested in Scott's retelling of its history, Beazley tried to disentangle these fused strands.

8. Most strikingly, Beazley radically altered the element most closely associated with Scotland: the supernatural. Where Scribe presented the White Lady as a clever disguise for the heroine, Beazley returned her to her original otherworldly realm. This allowed Beazley to reinstate links between Scotland and the supernatural and to weave his translation back into the original, as his White Lady intones lines verbatim from *The Monastery*. Her appearances also showcased Drury Lane's considerable scenic resources. One can imagine the stage tricks and eerie lighting for directions such as the following: "the figure of the Spirit is seen in the midst of the Waters of the Fountain which gradually subside leaving the White Lady . . . in the centre of the Spring with the moonlight upon her" (Beazley 21v).
9. Yet, as Beazley probably realized, foregrounding *The Monastery* and the White Lady foregrounded some of Scott's most problematic productions. Indeed, English critics overwhelmingly pronounced *The Monastery* a flop and pointed to the White Lady as the primary reason. The problem lay in her supernatural status, which crossed the fine line between superstition as titillating marker of Scottish difference and superstition as disturbingly real possibility. English critics embraced mortal, socially peripheral figures who encapsulated supernatural possibility without requiring belief. Meg Merrilies of *Guy Mannering* epitomized this type of character, and writers praised "the spirit of that indefinable being, tinged with melancholy, clothed with fierce grandeur, and breathing prophecy" (*The London Times*, 13 March 1816). In unflattering contrast, the unabashedly unreal White Lady jarred the realistic historical backdrop and obliged readers to adopt beliefs ascribed to the incredulous and uneducated. *The Monthly Review* scorned "ghosts, and kelpies, and white ladies" as "weeds which will flourish in a coarser soil, and are ill-exchanged for the exquisite creations on which [the author's] fancy has heretofore been occupied" (April 1820, 426). The paranormal, much like Scotland itself, could offer a pleasing, temporary escape from the quotidian. Embracing superstition as reality, however, dangerously erased class lines and overthrew rationality. Too blatantly transgressing the circumscribed purview allowed to both Scotland and the supernatural, the White Lady rankled readers, and Scott all but eliminated her from *The Abbot*.
10. Beazley tried to patch these potential leaks as well. First, he relegated the White Lady to a peripheral plot agent. Her advice to the hero is essentially to follow on his present course, and the materialization of her statue in its rightful place only confirms what legal documents have already proven. Beazley further marginalized supernaturalism by juxtaposing these actual instances with several simulated ones. Unlike Scribe, however, Beazley redirected ghostly disguises away from the virtuous heroine and toward either villainous or comic characters. To evil Julian and his henchman, Christie of the Cluithill, superstition provides a convenient cover-up for crime. They lodge Roland in the White Lady's chamber since, "being reported to be haunted, whatever happens, it will be laid to the Spirit" (Beazley 25v). Christie then enters the chamber, disguised as the White Lady, to murder Roland. They are thwarted, however, by another disguised White Lady, this time of the comic variety. Drawing on the amusing qualities of Father Philip's watery encounter with the White Lady in *The Monastery*, Beazley crafted a comic scene in which village women, dressed as spirits, frighten Father Philip into relinquishing papers that prove Roland's legitimacy.
11. Father Philip's burlesqued downfall points to another problematic area: the portrayal of the Catholic clergy. To move *La Dame blanche* closer to *The Monastery* and *The Abbot*, Beazley could not avoid the

religious strife that lay at the core of these novels. Yet, he had to navigate both strict censorship of religious references onstage—even "for heaven's sake" did not survive the censor's pen—and increasing tension over "the Catholic question," which culminated some two years later in the passage of the Emancipation Bill (Connolly; Stephens, *Censorship*). Beazley tried to diffuse potential concerns by shedding an ambiguous but ultimately lighthearted light on monastic life. Most of the monks are like naughty children, prone to ogling women and colluding with criminals, but ultimately so foolish that they are easily foiled. Yet, to balance this portrayal, the Abbot is a wise, strong leader who rights his subordinates' wrongs and helps the hero. This stance clearly draws on Scott, but trades his harsher critiques and more intense religious battles for a fairly innocuous portrayal.

12. While Beazley labored to realign Scribe to Scott, Thomas Cooke tried to recompose Boieldieu for playhouse listeners. As noted earlier, opera at the playhouses meant a heterogeneous mix of native products and foreign imports, all appearing in a fairly equal blend of song and speech. As an *opéra comique*, *La Dame blanche* already contained spoken dialogue and joined a steady stream of importations from this genre. Yet, as Cooke knew, London audiences could rarely swallow these translations whole. Song and speech did not simply mix on the playhouse stage, they mixed in such a way that dialogue propelled the action, while music provided decoration and reflection. Bravura solos highlighted star singers, touching ballads elicited tears, and catchy choruses swelled the thriving sheet music market. Extended ensembles that melded music and action occupied the bottom rung in this aesthetic. Scott himself voiced the prevalent sentiment: "complicated harmonies seem to me a babble of confused though pleasing sounds. Yet songs and simple melodies especially if connected with words and ideas have as much effect on me as on most people" (Scott, *Journal* 7). Many foreign imports therefore needed significant reworking to fit playhouse proportions, and radical adaptations abounded. At the same time, however, the success of *Der Freischütz* in 1824, coupled with a growing interest in a more work-oriented approach, began to realign attitudes to foreign imports. The late 1820s saw the beginnings of a move from transformation to relatively straight translation (Fuhrmann, "Adapted").
13. Cooke's version of *La Dame blanche* hovered between these two practices. On the one hand, Cooke added virtually nothing to Boieldieu. On the other, he kept only a drastically reduced, reworked portion of the original score. What Cooke discarded or changed pinpoints the fissures that still separated London playhouse from continental opera house. Easiest to retain were Boieldieu's quotes of Scottish tunes. Scottish melodies provided an aural counterpart to Scott's romanticized picture of Scotland, and they proliferated in both sheet music collections and English Scott dramatizations.^[15] More problematic was the score's sheer length and complexity. Cooke excised almost half of the numbers outright and extensively curtailed many others. Ensembles disappeared disproportionately. Cooke preserved virtually all solos, but eliminated over half of the ensembles, and pruned those remaining to their briefest, most melodic moments. The auction scene, with its lengthy combination of everyday action and dramatically responsive music, grated most egregiously against the English operatic aesthetic. The only solution seemed to be to avoid it altogether, and Beazley's plot changes did just that, neatly solving both dramatic and musical dilemmas. Overall, from a lengthy score in which massive musical conglomerates melded with the action, Cooke culled a restrained smattering of appealing solos and tuneful choruses with a hint of Scottish coloring.
14. In only one instance could Cooke not reformat Boieldieu's raw material into the necessary shape. At the point where Beazley deviated most from Scribe—the supernatural White Lady—Cooke too could no longer enlist Boieldieu. In the operatic encounter, Georges seems half to suspect it is Anna, and the touch of the "White Lady" makes him more amorous than awestruck. Boieldieu's duet, consequently, is a rather lighthearted piece full of flexible vocal display. This would not mesh with the spectacular visual effects of the White Lady at Drury Lane, and Cooke supplied a new setting with an eerily monotone vocal line and solemn organ chords.

15. Ultimately, something quite different from all "originals"—opera and novels—appeared at Drury Lane. Trying to serve many masters, Beazley rushed now to satisfy Scott purists, now to preserve the basic outline of *Scribe*, now to offer eye-catching display and comic relief, now to preserve and yet mitigate the *White Lady*'s ghostly status. Cooke's score, meanwhile, reads almost like sheet music excerpts from the opera, carefully enclosing Boieldieu's most marketable tunes in packages easily separated from the action. *The White Lady* shows the strain of crafting an acceptably British amalgam of Scott and his operatic offspring.

The White Maid

16. Covent Garden hoped to rout this conglomerate with their own, more faithful version of the French opera. Delays, however, deferred it to January, some three months after *The White Lady* had already come and gone. Rehearsals had been proceeding in November when the first blow struck: leading lady Mary Ann Paton, a celebrated Scottish soprano, refused to continue. A tangle of accusations and counter-accusations muddy a clear reason for her desertion. Librettist John Howard Payne, in his newspaper *The Opera Glass*, painted her as a shallow prima donna. In his view, Paton had not wished to be compared to the other female star, Eliza Vestris, or had wreaked petty revenge for being refused free tickets (*The Opera Glass*, 4 and 11 December 1826). In a rebuttal in *The Times*, Paton herself blamed the "melodramatic and pantomimic business," as well as having to sing a song as if she were old Meg Merrilies.^[16] Yet, according to *The Opera Glass* and *The Times*, Paton had insisted on appropriating this very song, originally assigned to a lesser character. Telling "anecdotes of her early life in Scotland," and saying that she had "observed the very action in question (something about a spinning-wheel)," Paton declared that she was "the only actress on the stage capable of giving the situation the effect of which it was susceptible" (*The Opera Glass*, 4 December 1826, repr. *The London Times*, 7 December 1826). One wonders whether, amidst political infighting, nationalistic issues may have colored Paton's decision. Paton clearly felt strong ties to her heritage. She "sang with wonderful power and pathos her native Scotch ballads" (Kemble 98) and, as the above reports show, evidently felt her nationality gave her particular insight. Although Paton appeared in several English Scott adaptations, perhaps disagreements over this foreign portrayal played into her refusal.^[17]
17. Whatever the reason, the management had to replace Paton with a lesser singer, Miss Cawse. Just as they cleared this roadblock, another surfaced. This one stemmed from mezzo-soprano Eliza Vestris who, interestingly, played the leading *male* role. Women often played young boys or female characters who assumed male disguise, but few assumed a romantic male lead. Vestris, however, was an unusually shrewd, popular, and charming woman who made something of a specialty of "pants" roles.^[18] Her allure, her considerable singing and acting abilities, and the lack of comparably strong tenors on the roster made her a clear choice for this demanding role.^[19] One wonders whether Paton might have withdrawn because she had to view Vestris as both potential female rival and male stage lover. Critics, however, used to Vestris's mutation into a man, seemed to enjoy the physical display of the substitution and to glide over its gender disturbances. One seemed unconcerned that Vestris "captivat[ed] the hearts of the ladies" (*The Theatrical Observer*, 28 March 1827) in this apparel, for example, while another blithely mixed gendered praises: she "bore the belle" by looking "manly and . . . handsome" (*The Literary Chronicle*, 6 January 1827). Vestris's appearance as a man thus apparently caused little concern, but her health was another matter, for in mid-December she fell ill. The winter weather and tiring performance schedule may have claimed Vestris. Illness, however, was sometimes a theatrical byword for perfect health, as performers used physical ailments to protest financial or political ones.^[20] Perhaps not coincidentally, Paton became unwell soon after Vestris recovered. One wonders whether protestations of poor health masked power struggles between the two women, uneasiness over their roles as romantic leads, or continued conflicts with the management.

18. Vestris did recover, however, and the opera finally opened in early January. Still, circumstances hardly looked propitious. The opera had Vestris, but it did not have Paton, long delay had either heightened or dissipated anticipation, and Christmas pantomime audiences wanted Harlequin's antics, not complex operas.^[21] In the midst of these setbacks, Payne and Covent Garden clung to what they hoped would be their trump card: fidelity. Increasingly, fidelity entered the fierce battlefield of theatrical competition. A growing interest in authorial autonomy and a "work-oriented" aesthetic pervaded theatrical criticism.^[22] Responding to these trends, musically well-equipped theaters such as Covent Garden began to use fidelity to distinguish their versions, especially when, as in this case, tardiness left them little other recourse. Advertisements boasted that "[t]he whole of Boieldieu's music will be introduced exactly as at Paris, for the purpose of giving the British public an opportunity of appreciating the merits of the most celebrated work of one of the greatest masters" (*The Theatrical Observer*, 24 November 1826).
19. Although the music is no longer extant, it seems this was no empty rhetoric. A reconstruction of the probable score shows that, in stark contrast to Cooke's concessions to playhouse taste, composer G. H. Rodwell only minimally mediated Boieldieu's music. Indeed, so closely did *The White Maid* follow the contours of the original score that librettist Payne felt obliged to apologize for the resulting awkwardness of his poetry (*The Morning Chronicle*, 3 January 1827). Significantly, however, even within such a circumscribed context for change, Payne still attempted to reconcile Scribe to Scott. Unable to follow Beazley's drastic leap back to *The Monastery*, Payne inched the text back toward *Guy Mannering*. When he could not reintroduce Scott's actual characters, he slipped in passing references to them. The farmer's wife is now Dandie Dinmont's daughter,^[23] for example, and one scene is reset in Dominie Sampson's old library. Most strikingly, Payne tried to reroute Scottish superstition away from the troublesome White Lady and back to its primary—and much applauded—vehicle in *Guy Mannering*, gypsy Meg Merrilies. Even beyond the grave, Meg's prophecies shape the plot, while her otherworldly aura re-infuses the White Maid with supernatural possibility. It was crossing her advice that led to Brown's kidnapping, her efforts that avoided his murder, her prophecy that heralded his return, her deathbed confession that proves his identity, and even her memory that entwines with the legend of the White Maid. The heroine's old nurse suggests "some think [Meg] the real guardian spirit of the Castle and will have it that she's not dead, but had only put on the gypsey . . . , and . . . has returned into her original form of the white lady" (Payne 169). Bound by Boieldieu's score to retain Scribe's problematically mortal White Lady, Payne clearly tried to compensate by resurrecting a proven conduit of Scottish supernaturalism. These were subtle concessions, though, and overall *The White Maid* did live up to its billing as the "actual" *La Dame blanche*.

Critical Responses

20. Neither drastic grafting nor modest pruning, however, could save these transplants. Copious newspaper reviews provide our primary route to understanding why. At the beginning of virtually every review sits the main bone of contention: the mutation of Scott's novels into foreign operatic form. Critics, often literary and political correspondents first, theatrical reviewers second, bemoaned the necessary slippage between novel and dramatization. Even Daniel Terry's immensely popular staging of *Guy Mannering* in 1816, sanctioned by Scott himself, had not overcome this barrier: "scarcely any degree of skill in the adaptation of [the novel] to the stage, or of genius in the principal actors, could transfer to the play even a faint resemblance to that fervid and ungovernable interest which agitates us through so many pages of the history itself."^[24]
21. *La Dame blanche* hit this sensitive nerve full throttle. Scribe not only transferred novel to stage, he freely combined different novels and time periods into an indiscriminate conglomerate of "otherness." Scott's picture of Scotland was too crucial to burgeoning British identity, and Scott himself too valued as a source of nationalistic literary pride, for reviewers to accept this heterogeneous reworking. Even

Beazley's version, so painstakingly re-infused with Scott, met with virulent dismissal. Edward Sterling insisted on severing the connection to Scott: "from the title we were led to suppose that the piece was founded on one of the tales of the "Great Unknown," but the plot bears no affinity to any of them" (*The London Times* 10 October 1826). Tellingly, the *Literary Gazette* writer incorrectly—and xenophobically—shifted blame to French ignorance: "the resemblance it bears to [*The Monastery*] is so very slight, that it is, in all probability, a close translation of the French opera" (14 October 1826).

22. If Beazley's stew of Scribe and Scott evoked little sympathy, Payne's careful preservation of Scribe drowned in protest. Critics railed at the nonchalant mixture and alteration of works ingrained in British cultural consciousness. Scribe had casually renamed or omitted characters so familiar that they had "acquired a species of historical existence" (*The Examiner*, 7 January 1827). He had blithely mixed distinct historical periods, re-appropriating Britons' reality as a kind of malleable fiction: "this may do very well in France—the names, times, and places, may be there romantic—with us they are more often common-place" (*The Theatrical Observer*, 3 January 1827). Reviewers painstakingly pointed out every departure and anachronism, distancing Scott as far as possible from foreign assimilation. Payne's vaunted fidelity did not assuage the outrage. Indeed, it only exacerbated it, for, as Beazley had only too painfully found, one could not remain faithful to both "originals." John Payne Collier chastised: "to say that the story is taken from Sir Walter Scott, is merely absurd . . . In this respect, and in this country, such a defect might and ought to have been remedied; for if the music were to be sacredly preserved, there is no reason why equal homage should be paid to the ignorance and incongruities of the French writer" (*The Morning Chronicle*, 3 January 1827).
23. Some held out hope of a direct link between fidelity to Scott and success. Thomas Noon Talfourd counseled that "[a] more interesting drama might have been framed with closer adherence to the original [*The Monastery*], which, though unequal and unsatisfactory as a whole, contains passages of great beauty" (*The New Monthly Magazine*, 1 November 1826). Others, however, recognized that fidelity to Scott's "unequal and unsatisfactory" original formed part of the problem. As the *Literary Chronicle* writer admitted, "The *Monastery*, by Sir Walter Scott, is one of his most unpopular works; and . . . we think [Boieldieu's] *White Lady* will be quite as unsuccessful as her predecessor" (14 October 1826).
24. As explored earlier, perhaps the most pressing problem in the *Monastery* was the *White Lady* herself. One critic felt Beazley's version improved Scott's novel. "This supernatural creation, in the romance, sports a something between tragedy and comedy, and has not been deemed a very happy conception; but in the drama it is grave, and altogether devoid of humour, as a spirit of quality ought to be" (*The Examiner*, 15 October 1826). All other critics, however, found the *White Lady* either dissatisfactory or unworthy of comment.
25. William Ayrton pointed to the probable reason: "[t]he superiority of the French over the English story, as a drama, will be readily admitted: the one is satisfied with natural events; the other, for the sake of a little scenic effect, has recourse to supernatural agency . . . and confesses its inherent weakness by thus addressing itself to the tastes of the vulgar" (*The Harmonicon*, November 1826, 230). Although other writers balked at praising the "natural" preferences of the French, virtually every review rehashed the second objection. The supernatural equaled the spectacular, and spectacle raised the most hoary rhetorical specter of early nineteenth-century dramatic criticism: the alleged decline of the drama.^[25] Deeply concerned that Britain's Shakespearian heritage seemed to be dying, critics toiled to understand the causes. Many concluded that the financial need of bigger theaters necessitated flashy, "safe" shows—more often than not already proven popular abroad—that could draw the large, socially heterogeneous crowds necessary for high box office receipts. Typically, such shows fell into the much-maligned genre of melodrama. Most prevalent in the less reputable "minor" theatres and concerned with gesture, performance, and visual show over author and text, melodrama seemed to be choking the

educated basis of Britain's dramatic heritage. Even literature seemed infected. With his penchant for supernatural coloring, his creation of vast, sweeping plots, and his reliance on intense, dramatic *tableaux* at pivotal points, Scott sometimes drew reprimands for a dangerously theatrical, melodramatic vein. By its nature, an operatic version brought these tendencies into full flower. Critics repeatedly pointed to theatrical, performance-based elements as the most striking aspects of the London adaptations. As Edward Holmes quipped, "[t]he scene-painter, as is often now the case, had shown more talents than the scene-writer . . . In time, Old Drury will be called the *Dramorama*" (*The Atlas*, 15 October 1826). This last jab encapsulated the pervasive fear: that Drury Lane and Covent Garden would meld with the largely lower-class pleasures of dioramas and melodramas, erasing any space for national drama.

26. Nobody employed this rhetoric more vigorously than Payne. In his mouthpiece, *The Opera Glass*, he relentlessly discredited the Drury Lane adaptation and carefully primed the audience for his own. He tied Beazley's version to lesser, minor theater productions: it was "more like a *chef-d'œuvre* of the minor stage, than fit for a national theatre." He played into critics' growing preference for fidelity and their disdain for mercenary motives: "[i]n purporting to be the Dame Blanche of Boieldieu, . . . it commits the reputation of a very admirable work and composer, in a way equally disingenuous and sordid. It exposes his talent to be utterly unappreciated for the beggarly advantage of a few paltry pounds" (*The Opera Glass*, 16 October 1826). He deliberately planted worries that his own faithful, non-spectacular version would fail: "Whether John Bull will bear a couple of hours of mere music, without either ghosts, or broad fun, or red fire, or roaring seas, or dancing devils, we shall be able to tell better next week" (*The Opera Glass*, 21 December 1826).
27. Unfortunately for Payne, however, his version endured even harsher criticism than Beazley's. Although William Ayrton, a staunch supporter of the opera, thought the White Maid's disguise showed "more good sense" (*The Harmonicon*, February 1827, 38) on the part of the French, all other reviewers insisted on linking the disguise to the most incomprehensible absurdity. Edward Sterling railed: "*The White Maid*, who performs all sorts of impossible things . . . to not the slightest possible purpose, is no witch, nor "White woman," nor goblin after all; but only a young lady, with six yards square of thin muslin thrown over her head, playing the fool, for what object no human intellect can arrive at" (*The London Times*, 3 January 1827). Critics may not have wanted supernatural beings willfully to alter the course of events, but neither did they want the essential Scottish aura of otherworldly possibility to be stripped bare by mortal disguise. Nor, perhaps, did they wish the supernatural to meld with the sexual, as otherworldly beings turned out to be alluring mortal women in flimsy garments. Music added a final element to this disturbing overexposure. The fleshly nature of the "spirit" simply could not be denied when she sang onstage for long periods or joined with others in ensembles. As the *Examiner* critic spelled out, "[t]he notion of a spirit, or pretended spirit, singing, ten minutes at a time, in the midst of a multitude of people, is ludicrous in the extreme" (7 January 1827).
28. Music played a crucial role in critical appraisals. After all, it was Boieldieu's music that had required a libretto diluted from its literary sources, Boieldieu's music that had lent the piece success despite its variance from Scott, and Boieldieu's music that had helped entice London theater managers to import the work. Yet again, critics embraced neither Cooke's mediated version nor Rodwell's faithful transmission. Cooke's exertions drew praise from most reviewers, but few seemed able to understand the French frenzy over the score. Edward Holmes granted that the music "has been much celebrated in Paris," but did not think it would "hit the English taste" (*The Atlas*, 15 October 1826). Similarly, John Payne Collier condescended "[t]he music certainly does not seem to merit the extravagant praises given to it in some of the French Papers, but a part of it is pretty and appropriate" (*The Morning Chronicle*, 10 October 1826). Neither of these writers elaborated on their opinion, however, and indeed critics seemed at a loss to explain their lukewarm interest in the music.

29. One senses that nationalistic reticence may have informed these guarded appraisals. Underlying resentment at a French takeover of Scottish themes and tunes seems to tinge many reviews. The *Literary Gazette* critic, for example, admitted that the score, "*principally* by Boieldieu," excited French critics, but noted that English audiences did not encore a single piece. S/he then agreed with speculation that the work succeeded in Paris chiefly because of a "spirit of rivalry" with Rossini, and because of the Scottish tune "Robin Adair." [26] In other words, this may be the best the French can oppose to Rossini, but its appeal lay in what was *not* "*principally*" by Boieldieu, and what *was* British property: the borrowed Scottish melody. For French ears, these novel sounds could serve as uncomplicated markers of Scottish identity. For the English, however, the tunes were neither novel nor uncomplicated. Suitably domesticated in numerous sheet music arrangements, the melodies perpetuated a view of Scotland as an aural landscape comfortably similar to England, yet distinguished by a few characteristic rhythms and turns of phrase. A simplistic French connection between Scottish song and Scottish character jolted this nuanced agenda, yet also uncomfortably pointed up the similarly naïve English desire to typify Scotland in song.
30. Critics' guarded praise may also have sprung from the knowledge that they heard only selected bits of Boieldieu, and interest in Covent Garden's full version therefore increased. Perhaps, as Payne so urgently hoped, hearing all of Boieldieu's score would reveal its appeal. In the event, however, only the *Theatrical Observer* writer embraced the music without reservation: "[t]he music is delightful; by its sole power it interested an unmusical audience—it possesses a . . . theatrical art never, perhaps, surpassed. The opening reminded us of the celebrated haram-chorus in [Carl Maria von Weber's] *Oberon* . . . the auction scene almost surpasses praise" (3 January 1827).
31. These exact points elicited the opposite reaction from most critics. Far from "interesting an unmusical audience" or "possessing theatrical art," the score seemed overgrown with exactly what English playhouse audiences least enjoyed: long, complex ensembles intertwined with the action. Such a dense score precluded beloved encores, complicated the extraction of individual numbers for sheet music sale, and befuddled an understanding of the plot. This last proved particularly egregious, since not only were listeners confused, but the connection to Scott further obscured. Tellingly, Edward Sterling tried to use only the dialogue *between* musical numbers to discern the derivation from Scott: "[a]s far as may be guessed from the expression of a few disjointed speeches which are uttered between the dances, and chorusses, rushings on of mobs, &c., . . . either the French author of the piece, or the translator, would seem to have selected a single incident, or character, from every one of the *Waverley* novels" (*The London Times*, 3 January 1827). In yet another strike against it, the "reminder" of Weber, along with the Scottish tunes, weakened the score's originality. As the *Examiner* writer politely waffled, "the music . . . certainly exhibits no small portion of spirit and science. For originality, we cannot say quite so much; a fact which may possibly arise from . . . certain Scottish melodies which are altogether familiar to British ears. There is also a striking imitation of the style of Weber in the chorusses, which are however spirited and effective" (7 January 1827).
32. Finally, few felt that the auction scene "surpassed praise." Indeed, most struggled with this challenge to the usual boundaries for musical subjects. Edward Sterling found the musical auction ludicrous, more suited for burlesque than serious opera, and worried about the precedent it set: "certainly there is that merit no future composer ever can hope to surpass; unless he were to 'set' the Vagrant Act—or a Road Bill—or the Chancery Report—or a Chief Justice's Charge in a case of libel" (*The London Times*, 3 January 1827). Here, Sterling seems concerned not only that a ridiculous sense of realism might puncture theatrical illusion, but that this trend might spiral into a dangerous introduction of political material into the operatic sphere. Defenders of the scene foundered for counterarguments, insisting that comedy had been intended, or that one could not "deem it more absurd than many other subjects which have been musically dramatised" (*The Examiner*, 7 January 1827).

33. Here lay the heart of the matter. As the *Atlas* critic ruminated,

Story, dialogue, and sense, are . . . so wholly secondary to music in an Opera, that we, perhaps, have no business to find fault; the more especially as at Drury Lane they preserved the *White Lady* of the romance, and left out the music—at the other theatre, they have abandoned the story of the novelist, and preserved the work of the musician; and the fact is this, that we were not in the least pleased at the former house—while, on the contrary, at Covent Garden, where sense was sacrificed to sound, we listened with great pleasure. (3 January 1827)

Music possessed an unsettling power to palliate even the most questionable libretto. As such, it seemed part of the decline of drama, another unworthy, sensory aphrodisiac that weaned audiences away from intellectual, literary value. Some tried to split sound from sense, excusing the deviation from Scott as a necessary element of a lesser genre. As Thomas Noon Talfourd instructed, "[t]he . . . poetry of operas is rarely of any value whatever; nor is coherency of plot much more important, if there be situations . . . capable of suggesting the sentiment of the music" (*The New Monthly Magazine*, 1 February 1827, 54-55). Others tried to enshrine Boieldieu's score in a learned sphere, on a par with literary excellence in elevating listeners' taste. Hoping that the English would learn from the foreign model, William Ayrton lectured "[s]ome of the concerted pieces are very long—and (as is the good custom of French operas) carry on the business of the piece, and are not mere excrescences upon it" (*The Harmonicon*, June 1826, 111). Yet, as the *Atlas* critic admitted, opera evaded efforts to separate music from sensory pleasure or to resist this pleasure, even when it beguiled one into enjoying mutated Scott.

Conclusion

34. Ultimately, neither Beazley's sweeping alterations nor Payne's careful reproduction succeeded. The former ran only nine nights, the latter thirteen. Exasperated, Payne exclaimed: "the language of music is universal; the self-same sounds have been heard throughout all Europe with uniform success, . . . and there must be something 'more than natural' in the dogmatism which . . . would reverse [audiences'] decision, and treat them and the rest of the connoisseurs as blunders" (*The Opera Glass*, 13 January 1827). In the same article, Payne laid blame squarely at critics' feet: "[t]he tone adopted in some instances about this production, was too ferocious for its motives to be mistaken by those at all acquainted with the mysteries of the press." Indeed, *The Morning Chronicle* and *The Times*, especially, ran such virulently negative reviews that one suspects some larger power play at work.^[27] Their criticism compounded the aggravations outlined earlier: Paton's desertion; Vestris's illness; and the unfortunate timing of its premiere during Christmas pantomime season. Even at Drury Lane, illness—or, as Payne suggested, insufficient time to learn the piece—delayed the premiere.^[28] Worse, once *The White Lady* had premiered, the manager apparently withdrew it early so that he would not have to pay Beazley any further.^[29]
35. Vindictive critics, capricious performers, tightfisted managers, untutored audiences, uneasiness at French appropriation of Scottish themes—were they responsible for *La Dame blanche*'s relative failure? Some more subtle combination of these surely contributed. Yet, in search of an answer, we might digress to those Italian Scott operas better-known today: Rossini's *La Donna del Lago* (1819) and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835).^[30] Undoubtedly two of the most popular Scott operas, both received a respectable but only moderate response in London. Reading critics' comments, one almost imagines oneself back with *La Dame blanche*. Again, anxiety at the musical mutation of Scott pervaded reviews. Of *La Donna del Lago*, Thomas Massa Alsager complained that "[a] story so familiar to an English audience [was] thus made ridiculous by want of taste or parsimony" (*The London Times*, 19 February 1823), while the *Musical World* writer found *Lucia di Lammermoor* "a sort

of rhythmical assassination . . . of Sir Walter Scott's charming 'Bride of Lammermoor,' . . . scarcely one point, either in the libretto or the score, presenting a recognizable feature of the original" (*The Musical World*, 26 January 1843). Again, the score elicited either grudging praise or outright condemnation: Rossini's music was "flat, stale and unprofitable," Donizetti's "tame, cold, and spiritless" (*The Literary Gazette*, 18 February 1823 and *The Atlas*, 7 April 1838). Thus, rhetoric against foreign musical reworkings of Scott stretched essentially unchanged over at least two decades, pointing to larger reasons for lukewarm showings.

36. Reviewing an English version of *Lucia*, the *Morning Chronicle* critic teased out the concerns that plagued these attempts to re-assimilate foreign Scott opera:

Lucia di Lammermoor, though a vile burlesque of the most exquisitely pathetic of Walter Scott's tales, may be tolerated on the Italian stage, because, when we see a set of Italian actors gesticulating after their own fashion, and hear them declaiming in their own tongue, and tickling our ears with the delicate trickery of their 'most sweet voices,' the whole thing is so exotic, so foreign, that it may be listened to from beginning to end without once putting anybody in mind of Scott or his beautiful story. But the familiarity of an English performance alters the case; the likeness becomes apparent, and the poverty and meanness of the copy are the more perceptible, because contrasted every moment with the richness and beauty of the original. (20 January 1843)

Here, one can see the tangles of exoticism that choked these return visits. Both Scott's novels and foreign operas provided romanticized escapes for English audiences. Scott reshaped Scotland as a mysterious, picturesque, yet unthreatening other, while foreign opera transported listeners away from everyday speech with an enchanting alien tongue and vocal "trickery." A foreign Scott opera translated into English destroyed all of these illusions. Stripped of the protective coating of foreign singing, divergent views of Scott and competing needs for his "exoticized" picture of Scotland collided.

37. Ultimately, any attempt to re-import these operas ran aground fundamental problems of what national identity and national theater should be. An Italian or French opera on Sir Walter Scott in London was something akin to, say, a Russian opera on Mark Twain in New York. So ingrained was Scott in British consciousness, so closely tied to how Britons wished to fashion Scottishness, that foreign attempts to reinterpret him seemed at once misguided and threatening. *La Dame blanche* met with the most resistance because it violated what Britons most cherished in Scott. Scribe melded problematic novels, tossed aside historical accuracy, and recast the supernatural as mortal disguise. Equally disturbing, Boieldieu appropriated national tunes to create a score opposed to the basic values of the national stage. Even the very genre of opera fed into Britons' resistance. Music both necessitated and palliated the condensed libretto, and thus seemed linked to the perceived decline of drama into the realms of sight and sound. Clearly aware of these pitfalls, adapters struggled to fold the opera back into Britons' perceptions of Scott. But, just as Scott recoiled from foreign tourists who claimed to know him through musical mediation, Britons resisted these disturbing operatic portraits of themselves. Ultimately, nationalistic, theatrical, and musical divides made the White Lady one citizen the British could not repatriate.

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Notes

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¹ For Scott's crucial, often conflicted role in creating this image, see especially Davis, *Acts of Union*, Gamer, Glendenning, Gold and Gold, Harvie, and Withers. For links between Scotland, Scott, and the supernatural, see especially Le Tellier and Parsons. As Scott himself rather wryly commented in *The Bride of Lammermoor*, "this would not be a Scottish story, unless it manifested a tinge of Scottish superstition" (Scott, *Bride* 187).

² Technically, at this point in time we should refer to both England and Scotland as "Britain." I deliberately use all three terms, however, to indicate continuing tensions among these identities.

³ Scott's works enjoyed numerous dramatizations and formed the basis for more opera libretti than any other author except Shakespeare. For the immensity of this phenomenon, see, for example, Bolton and Mitchell, *Walter Scott and More Scott*. Although Scott published his novels anonymously until 23 February 1827, his

authorship was widely surmised well before this date. John Payne Collier even wittily referred to him as “the great known” (*The Morning Chronicle*, 10 October 1826). Although newspaper reviews of the time were anonymous, in many cases we do know the probable reviewer. To avoid constant, awkward wording such as “the critic we believe to be x,” I use those critics’ names of which we are reasonably sure. See Fenner 11-53.

⁴ Boieldieu’s *La Dame blanche* (1825) arrived in 1826, Rossini’s *La Donna del Lago* (1819) in 1823, his pastiche *Ivanhoé* (1826) in 1829, and Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) in 1838. See Loewenberg.

⁵ Loewenberg does not list any performances of these operas in Scottish cities. Bolton indicates that a “Scotch pas d’action” from *La Dame blanche* (1825) appeared in Glasgow in 1831, and that an Italian company performed *La Donna del Lago* (1819) in Edinburgh in 1835. Bolton 30, 374.

⁶ Todd and Bowden 455. These two novels form the primary sources for the libretto, although Favre suggests *The Lady of the Lake*, *Le Fantôme blanc*, and an anecdote about vassals protecting their exiled master’s estate as other possible models. Favre 2:115.

⁷ Arguably the most experienced and successful stage writer of early nineteenth-century France, Scribe (1791-1861) wrote or co-authored well over one hundred libretti in the 1810s-60s. See Pendle.

⁸ Boieldieu was one of the only foreign composers to use actual Scottish tunes in his setting of Scott. See Fiske 102-04. Boieldieu himself, however, insisted that he only used “Robin Adair.” See *Rivista Musicale Italiana* (1915): 522, qtd. in Favre 2:125.

⁹ *La Dame blanche* reached its thousandth performance in Paris in 1862. Soon after its premiere, the opera appeared throughout France and the rest of continental Europe. In 1826 alone, for example, it played in Liège, Brussels, Vienna, Berlin, Pressburg, and Copenhagen. See Loewenberg 698-99.

¹⁰ For the repertoire of the King’s Theatre in the early nineteenth century, see Fenner, Hall-Witt, and Loewenberg. To my knowledge, between 1800 and 1830 the only non-Italian language operas to merit translation were Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (1791) and Spontini’s *La Vestale* (1807).

¹¹ For the repertoire of these theatres, see, for example, Fenner and Nicoll.

¹² So prevalent were French imports on the English stage that J. Augustine Wade quipped “[w]henever ... any thing rises to the rank of being accounted a lively and entertaining piece, it is a moral certainty that it is a translation from the French.” *The Athenaeum*, 1828, 13. Often these were plays, but *opéras-comiques* had appeared regularly since the late eighteenth century, usually with substantially new scores. See Armondino. A few of Boieldieu’s works had already made their way to Covent Garden, where *Jean de Paris* (1812) appeared in 1814, *Le petit chaperon rouge* (1818) in 1818.

¹³ For example, *Guy Mannering* appeared in numerous versions starting in 1816, *Rob Roy* in numerous versions starting in 1818, *The Heart of Midlothian* in 1819, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, and *Ivanhoe* in 1820, *The Legend of Montrose* in 1822, *The Fortunes of Nigel* in 1823, and *The Talisman* and *Peveril of the Peak* in 1826. See Biddlecombe and Fiske, Bolton, and Mitchell *Walter Scott and More Scott*.

¹⁴ *Guy Mannering* had appeared in versions at: Covent Garden (1816, still playing in 1826, prepared with Scott’s blessing); The English Opera House (1821, taken from a French version); Sadler’s Wells (1821); and The Cobourg (two versions, 1821 and 1826). On the other hand, there had been only one version each of *The Monastery* and *The Abbot*, in 1820 at Sadler’s Wells and the Tottenham Theatre, respectively.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the role Scottish songs played in negotiations of British identity, see Davis “At ‘sang about.’”

¹⁶ 9 December 1826. She is most likely referring to “Pauvre dame Marguerite.”

¹⁷ In the same season as *The White Lady*, for example, Paton appeared in English versions of *Guy Mannering* and *Peveril of the Peak*. Apparently, however, the latter had also occasioned some reluctance. In his tirade against Paton’s refusal of *The White Maid*, Payne noted “[t]his is not the first time of Miss Paton’s trifling with managers; and the same circumstance of which we now complain would have occurred in the last new opera, *Peveril of the Peak*, had she not more prudently relented.” *The Opera Glass*, 11 December 1826. Sibling rivalry may have added a final layer to the controversy, since Paton’s less celebrated sister, a Miss I. Paton, had played the White Lady at Drury Lane to good reviews.

¹⁸ For theatrical cross-dressing in Britain, and Vestris’s relationship to it, see Straub and Cowgill.

¹⁹ As the *Atlas* critic noted, “[i]t is idle to talk against putting women into male attire—is there a man on the stage whom the house could have put in this long and pleasant part of *George Brown*? We can think of none of them in [Vestris’s place] without horror” (7 January 1827). The main tenor at Covent Garden that season seems to have been Antonio Sapio, whom John Payne Collier criticized as “deficient in expression and variety, and although he sings . . . without any fault which a mere musician can point out, he produces little or no effect upon the mind of the hearer” (*The Morning Chronicle*, 21 February 1827).

²⁰ Doctors’ notes sometimes appeared on playbills, perhaps to assuage audiences’ suspicion. Reports also surfaced of performers being too ill to appear onstage, but not too ill to attend other events. See, for example, Wooddeson 27.

²¹ As the *Theatrical Observer* critic gently rebuked, “We doubt not that we shall find similar beauties in other parts of the composition, when the pantomime-loving galleries will give us leave to hear the whole distinctly” (3 January 1827).

²² For discussions of these issues, see especially Goehr and Weber.

²³ Reintroductions of Scott trip over each other here, since she is re-named Ailie, Dinmont’s wife in Scott.

²⁴ *The London Times* 13 March 1816. This version was still playing when *La Dame blanche* appeared in London.

²⁵ The issue of decline pervaded early nineteenth-century London theater, and is too vast to address here. For further discussion, see Fuhrmann “Adapted” and Moody.

²⁶ *The Literary Gazette*, 14 October 1826. Emphasis mine. Fenner lists Thomas Billington, Thomas Greenwood, or Miss Wilkinson as possible reviewers during this time period, so I have left the gender of the reviewer open (53).

²⁷ John Payne Collier, critic for the *Morning Chronicle*, was a well-known Shakespeare scholar now rather infamous for his fabrications of literary documents. Edward Sterling was another important figure, of Scottish descent but raised in Ireland, who dominated the *Times* during this period. Although we can only guess their motives, Collier’s literary interests and Sterling’s Scottish heritage and strong political views may have contributed to their negative assessments (Stephen and Lee). Paton’s desertion may also have been bound up

with Sterling's vitriol. On 7 December, the *Times* reprinted verbatim an article from the *Opera Glass* that chastised Paton for her refusal. Paton then wrote a letter to the *Times* in protest (9 December 1826). That *The Times* initially supported Payne against Paton, yet then ran the most virulent criticism of Payne's version, may indicate that some alienation over this issue occurred.

²⁸ Tirelessly vaunting his own more faithful version, and hinting at the reason for tardiness, Payne wrote "[t]he novelty advertised for Drury Lane is deferred; the reason assigned is *indisposition*,—but the performers did not, *on dit*, get their musical parts delivered till Tuesday last,—and the extreme difficulty of studying them at so short a notice, may readily account for the sudden illness ... We do not know how much of Boieldieu's music is retained, but we are convinced, it must require more talent than was ever yet found in a theatre to do it justice, if it is all retained, in a week's (we may say, even a month's) rehearsal" (*The Opera Glass*, 9 October 1826).

²⁹ Nelson and Cross, entry for 12 November 1826. Authors tended to be paid an initial sum—Payne reported that Beazley received a hefty £300—and then a fee based on nights performed. *The Opera Glass*, 2 October 1826. See also Stephens *Profession* 25-41.

³⁰ In February 1823, *La Donna del Lago* appeared in full, in Italian, at the King's Theatre, then in English excerpts at the oratorio performances at Covent Garden and Drury Lane. *Lucia di Lammermoor* ran at the King's Theatre in Italian in 1838, in English at the Princess's in 1843, and in French for one night of a benefit performance by a Belgian company at Drury Lane in 1845.

Opera and Romanticism

Talking About Virtue: Paisiello's 'Nina,' Paër's 'Agnese,' and the Sentimental Ethos

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This essay will examine how sentimentality, valorization, and virtue spread through one particular intersection of opera literature. This essay appears in *Opera and Romanticism, Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for the University Maryland.

[Art] should move me, astonish me, break my heart, let me tremble, weep, stare, be enraged.

— Denis Diderot, *qtd. Solomon*, 309

1. Gustav Mahler once observed that listening to his own work performed caused "a burning pain [to] crystallize" in him. He went on to note that he was compelled to write his symphonies at the point where the narrative power of words failed him, "at the point where the dark feelings hold sway, at the door which leads into the 'other world'—the world in which things are no longer separated by space and time" (*qtd Nussbaum* 265). I want to begin with Mahler's comments because they place music--like literature-- in the realm of the emotions, but emotions so deep and dark that they cannot be fully articulated in words. I would assert that music is not essentially ephemeral, it simply attempts — in Mahler's words again — "to get to the bottom of things, to go beyond external appearances" (*qtd Nussbaum* 266). In this essay I hope to suggest that music erupted in new religious, political, social, and cultural ways throughout Europe in the eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. As a number of literary genres increasingly sought to moderate religious and political reform and secularize and nationalize public and private consciousnesses, music was enlisted as a potent ideological and aesthetic force, a manifestation of the residue of a culture that still clung to the power of oral-based methods of communication. And the pain that Mahler speaks about—pain that I would identify as essentially political, social, religious, and economic—was the subtext of the dominant popular discourses during the romantic period. In short, virtue was put on trial during the mid to late eighteenth century throughout Europe, and opera emerged to mediate the pain and dislocation that occurred when a secularized notion of virtue emerged to displace a theologically based system of values and beliefs.[\[1\]](#)
2. It is necessary to begin, however, by defining "virtue" as a concept and briefly tracing its history as a public source of value. As Pocock has noted, virtue has traditionally been synonymous with "nature," "essence," or "essential characteristic," but within the republican vocabulary it took on the additional meanings of "devotion to the public good," or "the relations of equality between citizens engaged in ruling and being ruled." Understood as *virtù* by Machiavelli, the concept also increasingly began to be understood as something like citizenship, "a code of values not necessarily identical with the virtues of a Christian," and expressed instead in the notion of justice or "a devotion to the public good" (41-42). Distinguishing between abstract rights (*politicum* like equality, citizenship) and rights to bear arms and own property (*commercium*), Pocock argues that as "the universe became pervaded by law, the locus of sovereignty [became] extra-civic, and the citizen came to be defined not by his actions and virtues, but by his rights to and in things" (43). By the mid-eighteenth century, "the ideals of virtue and commerce could not be reconciled to one another" as long as virtue was seen as purely civic, and so virtue was redefined with the aid of a concept of "manners":

The effect was to construct a liberalism which made the state's authority guarantee the liberty of the individual's social behavior, but had no intention whatsoever of

impoverishing that behavior by confining it to the rigorous assertion of ego-centered individual rights. On the contrary, down at least to the end of the 1780s, it was the world of ancient politics which could be made to seem rigid and austere, impoverished because underspecialized; and the new world of the social and sentimental, the commercial and cultural, was made to proliferate with alternatives to ancient *virtus* and *libertas* Now, at last, a right to things became a way to the practice of virtue, so long as virtue could be defined as the practice and refinement of manners. (50)

3. The sweeping historical trajectory that Pocock charts here can be glimpsed in miniature by examining the operas of *Nina* and *Agnese*. Both works present the struggle of the heroines' virtue to assert itself against a force of paternal domination that is figured as an antiquated imperial power. In the heroines' struggles to control the possession of goods (family jewels in *Nina* and property in *Agnese*) the operas enact the performance of public virtue as it intersects with private trials and tribulations.
4. Secondly, the term "sentimental" needs to be defined in the context of these operas, although clearly it is beyond the scope of this essay to develop fully all of the permutations of its use in a variety of different national literary traditions.^[2] "Sentimental" in these operas tends to suggest the privileging of the authenticity of the emotions, combined as this action is with tropes of interiority and the use of objects that provoke memories and their association with identity or personal history (Howard 65). As Howard notes, when we use the term "sentimental" we can be understood to be suggesting that the work "uses some established convention to evoke emotion; we mark a moment when the discursive processes that construct emotion become visible" (76). Straddling the divide between the visible and the interior, the social and the natural, sentimental artists tend to construct cultural artifacts that will portray humans as thinking and feeling beings, or rather, individuals who feel and live in their bodies as much as in their psyches. Within the British tradition, Lord Shaftesbury has been seen as the originator of this ideology, but his class prejudices have recently been interrogated, as have those of such erstwhile followers as Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Laurence Sterne, and Addison and Steele. As Markley has noted, literary historians have attempted to understand Shaftesbury's formulation of sentimentality as either a manifestation of latitudinarianism or deism, both vaguely secularized systems of advancing self-sufficient virtue as the means by which manners dominated and controlled behavior in the public realm.
5. For instance, Smith as well as Jean-Jacques Rousseau theorized that human benevolence and morality could only be understood by acknowledging an innate disposition to sympathy or empathy in human nature. For these theorists, emotions lead to manifest acts of virtue or, what Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) defines as the empathetic imagination: "By the imagination we place ourselves in [another man's] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (9). There can be no question that by attending the performances of operas such as *Nina* and *Agnese* audience members were forced into a participatory and empathetically imaginative posture. Given the hyperbole of the theatrical and musical action, the audience is virtually hurled into the emotional maelstrom being enacted on stage and thus participates in the empathetic display of sentiment.
6. Finally, it is also important to recognize that as literary critics we are invested in believing that ideologies primarily spread through cultures by means of print media, and for many centuries we have deceived ourselves that male-authored, canonical poetry, preferably epic or lyrical, spread those ideologies most effectively. But increasingly, literary historians are recognizing that the ideologies that they detect within literature themselves have been reflected, affected, adapted, and transformed through musical genres. This essay will examine how sentimentality and its valorization of virtue spread through one particular intersection of opera and literature; that is, the seduced maiden narrative is

enacted in these operas, once as a comedy of sorts, once as a tragedy. Giovanni Paisiello's *Nina* (1789) was clearly influenced by the works of Samuel Richardson and Laurence Sterne, while Fernando Paër's *Agnese* (1809) is a direct adaptation of Amelia Opie's popular novella *The Father and Daughter* (1801). Furthermore, both of the operas spin in and out of ideological orbit with Richardson's novel *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740-41), which in turn was rewritten by the Venetian playwright Carlo Goldoni in his dramatic adaptation *Le Pamela Nubile* (1753), the Irish playwright Isaac Bickerstaffe as the comic opera *The Maid of the Mill* (1765), and which then was later adapted and transformed by François de Neufchâteau into the opera *Paméla* (1793). And certainly we can detect sentimental familial concerns in Denis Diderot's dramas, particularly *Le Fils Naturel ou les épreuves de la vertu* ("The Natural Son; or, The Trials of Virtue," 1757). What I hope to suggest is that music and literature have collaborated in constructing a few fairly basic cultural scripts (domestic, familial, painful, and cathartic: recall Oedipus or Demeter/Persephone) that are then retold endlessly, continually readjusting the particulars to accommodate changing social and political conditions. Sentimentality as a value system, a potent ideology, almost a secularization of religion was spread throughout eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European culture not simply through novels and dramas, but also by being performed in opera houses from London to Rome and Naples.

7. Sentimental novels and operas most frequently took as their subjects the dysfunctions of the patriarchal family under siege, or the trials and tribulations of the seduced maiden and the alternately tyrannical (*Nina*) or betrayed (*Agnese*) father. They frequently employed, as Markley has noted, talismanic exchanges of money or property in order to reify the bourgeoisie's attempt to assert "the 'timeless' nature of a specific historical and cultural construction of virtue and to suppress his reader's recognition of the social and economic inequalities upon which this discourse of seemingly transcendent virtue is based" (210). Most of these works read now like little more than crude wish fulfillments or fairy tales, but they were extremely popular in their own day and, as such, deserve our critical attention as important ideological markers for their culture. Why and how did the sentimental as a discourse system evolve as one of the most popular public displays of emotion on the stage? The sentimental as a genre, whether manifest in literary fiction or opera, clearly attempts to mediate between members of a family that found themselves at odds over the shape and power structure of the newly evolving bourgeois society.
8. André-Ernest-Modeste Grétry's sentimental opera *Lucile* (1769) is a case in point. Staging a wedding day celebration, the ensemble sings "Where can one feel better than within the bosom of one's family?," while later the characters reply, "The names of spouse, of father, and of son, and of daughter, are delightful." With its heavy use of gnomic sentences and moral tags, *Lucile* reminds us that sentimental opera, like sentimental fiction, enacts Diderot's recommendation to avoid intricacy of plot in order to "allow emotional expansion in the characters and similar responses in the readers or spectators. Such ritual displays of emotion [within the domestic sphere] are often meant to show the power of human benevolence as a driving communal force between people both on and off stage" (Castelvecchio, 141-43). They also place religious sentiments, which were once in evidence in the public church into the private, domestic sphere of the home, thereby transmuting religious practices and beliefs into filial, familial displays. Although this is a matter that clearly requires more space than an essay allows, it could be suggested that as belief in a universal and traditional Christianity was breaking down, opera and literature stepped in to claim displaced religious sentiments for their own. And for this reason we can, I think, see sentimental discourses participating in the larger secularist movement of a post-Enlightenment Europe.

II

Music which has not been heard falls into empty time like an impotent bullet.

9. The works of Giovanni Paisiello (1740 -1816) epitomize the sentimental strain in opera, which may explain the waning of his popularity by the 1820s. Rossini, however, praised Paisiello's operas by stating that "the genius of the simple genre and naïve gracefulness . . . realizes the most astonishing effects with the utmost simplicity of melody, harmony and accompaniment," while Mozart, who knew and admired Paisiello's works, once commented that "for light and pleasurable sensations in music [one] cannot be recommended to anything better" than Paisiello. For all the praise he received in his lifetime, including the patronage of Napoleon who called him "the greatest composer there is," Paisiello's best-known opera *Nina o sia la pazza per amore* (*Nina or the love-distressed Maid*) fell on hard times (Robinson; Hunt). Dent, for instance, has accused it of being "sentimental comedy at its worst . . . Its sentimentality is to modern ears perfectly unbearable, and we cannot understand how the whole of Europe was reduced to tears by these infantile melodies" (Dent, 111). *Nina's* British premier occurred in London on April 27, 1797, although by that date the opera was already close to a decade old and was widely known throughout Europe. We might note that *Nina's* contemporary status is beginning to improve as evidenced by the growing number of modern revivals, including one at the Oxford Playhouse (March 1982), one by the Zurich Opera now available on DVD (July 1998), one at La Scala, Milan (1999), and one by the Bampton Opera Company, Oxfordshire (1999).
10. As a *sentimentale* opera distinct from the other Italian operatic "mixed" genres of *semiserio* and *mezzo carattere*, *Nina* was a highly idealized portrait of how a family achieves happiness after suffering has redeemed all of its members of their excesses (read: sins). In the eighteenth-century Italian operatic tradition the term *sentimentale* did not have the negative connotations that the word assumed in British works fairly early on: excessive, morbid, affected, or indulgent. Instead, within the Italian tradition a concept of *sentimentale* was predicated on portraying people who were ideally sensitive to understanding and feeling the highest emotions in harmony with the physical senses. These people were also capable of feeling compassion for others, or the quality of empathy, which marked them as practitioners of a new, humanized religion of the heart: sensibility.
11. The source for Paisiello's *Nina* was the version of the opera by the same name written by Benoît-Joseph Marsollier and Nicolas Dalayrac, a one-act *opera comique*, which premiered in Paris in 1786. [3] But this opera itself was based, according to Marsollier and Dalayrac, on "an anecdote reported by our newspapers a few years ago, and already employed by M. Bécular d'Arnaud in his *Délassements de l'homme sensible*, under the title *La Nouvelle Clementine* [vol. I, 1783]" (qtd Castelvechi 149). The stories of D'Arnaud were very much in the contemporary French *larmoyants* tradition, sentimental tales that resemble the earlier British works of Eliza Haywood and Samuel Richardson. D'Arnaud's short story, however, is not an accurate version of a newspaper account of a suffering young woman suddenly reunited with her lost lover, but actually is an adaptation of the Clementina episode from Richardson's *History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1753-54). Ironically, the actual historical woman from the newspaper died having never been reunited with her lover, while the episode in Richardson looks toward a happy ending when Clementina accepts the marriage proposal of Count Belvedere in lieu of her original suitor Sir Charles. As d'Arnaud once observed—apparently unaware of the contradiction in the various Clementina stories—"Richardson's immortal writings put the original itself under our very eyes, not its representation" (qtd Castelvechi 163). Once again, we return to the continuously intersecting and overlapping nature of French and British works of sensibility as they recur to a limited number of tropes and concerns.
12. Resoundingly popular throughout Italy and France, *Nina* exploited the motif of a young, beautiful, and virtuous woman suffering unjustly at the hands of a greedy aristocratic and patriarchal tyrant. Such a

theme was particularly popular given the thunderous reception of the translation of Richardson's *Pamela* and its adaptation for the stage by Goldoni in 1753. In fact, Goldoni was in the audience for a performance of *Nina* and observed that "when the opera of *Richard* [Sedaine and Grétry's *Richard Coeur-de-lion*] was withdrawn, it appeared difficult to supply its place with any thing which would be equally successful. This miracle was affected by *Nina, or the Distracted Lover*; and if the success of this piece did not surpass the preceding, it at least equaled it . . . [because of the public's sympathy] for an unfortunate being without crime and without reproach" (*Memoirs* II, 333). By the autumn of 1788, *Nina* was being produced in Italy, thanks to an Italian translation and libretto by Giuseppe Carpani, who staged the first Italian production in Monza. Paisiello set this version to music and first performed his *Nina* on the occasion of Queen Maria Carolina's visit to the new village of San Leucio, near Caserta.

13. Originally commissioned by King Ferdinand, the opera was to be performed at the opening of Ferdinand's "model village," San Leucio, a community of silk manufacturers who were to live in blissful harmony and productivity, a sort of proto-communist haven. As Stefano Castelvechi argues, the success of the opera's premiere had everything to do with the presence of "a powerful female figure, and *Nina*'s role would be sung by celebrated *prime donne* for decades to come" (134). The presence of Queen Maria Carolina, a strong female ruler of an Italian city-state, even one the size of Naples, in conjunction with the persecuted daughter-heroine of the piece, brought together two of the central tenets of sentimentality as a political ethos: that is, the notion of the family as a microcosm of the nation, and of the parent as a deity of the city-state that is finally understood and experienced as a family. Such a *topos* highlights the sentimental political ideology operating at the time: parents know best, and all subjects, like occasionally wayward children, need to obey their strictures and prop up the structure that was the patriarchal family and state.
14. Castelvechi has provided the following summary of the source of Paisiello's *Nina*, the opera of Marsollier and Dalayrac:

Nina and Lindoro [Germeuil in the French version] love each other, and are betrothed with the consent of *Nina*'s father, the Count. Yet, when *Nina*'s hand is requested by a wealthier suitor, the Count favours the latter, thus breaking the pact with Lindoro. A duel between the two suitors ensues; when *Nina* sees her beloved lying in his own blood, and her father asks her to accept as her spouse Lindoro's slayer, she loses her reason. The Count cannot bear the sight of his daughter's sorry state: he leaves *Nina* in his country estate, entrusting her to the benevolent care of the governess Susanna [Elise in the French version.] *Nina*—having lost all memory of the recent, tragic events—spends her days thinking of Lindoro and waiting for his return, surrounded by the affection and compassion of servants and peasants. On one occasion she falls into a delirium, and believes she sees Lindoro. Some time later the Count comes back, stricken with sorrow and remorse; but his daughter does not recognize him. When Lindoro, whom everyone thought dead, returns, the Count welcomes him with open arms, and calls him son. At first, *Nina* does not recognize Lindoro. Father and lover 'cure' *Nina* by showing her that Lindoro is back and still loves her, and that she can marry her beloved with her father's consent. (Castelvechi 138)

15. Somewhat anti-climactically for modern tastes, the opera stages only the events that occur after *Nina*'s mental breakdown, providing a long exposition that prepares us for the appearance of the mad *Nina* in the opera's first scene. As Castelvechi notes, such a structure erases "narrative complexity" and instead puts its entire focus on the "emotions" of the principals, *Nina*, Lindoro, and the Count. This technique, lending itself to hyperbolic displays of madness, grief, confusion, and disorientation, became a staple of most eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century sentimental literature and theater. Such a device in this particular instance suggests that *Nina* needs to be "read" in many ways as *tableaux vivant*, with a

few characters in a series of static almost pantomimic poses, reciting their past actions in highly stylized, hyperbolic scenes. And such a technique reveals how closely sentimental opera remained in touch with its sources in the pantomimes of classical stories and fairy tales of the Boulevard Theatre, which themselves had a fragmentary, abrupt, and incomplete quality (recall Rousseau's *Pygmalion*). As melodrama relies on the mute hero or the wound on the hand to identify the villain, sentimental works rely on the blush, the sigh, the gasp, the interrupted speech, the telling silence. Sensibility as an ideological discourse was predicated on the belief that the body spoke through tears, through blood, through sweat, and that such primitive, physical markers were more reliable than writing or print in conveying the truth of a person or situation.^[4]

16. Further, it is necessary to emphasize that, unlike melodrama, which developed slightly later, there is no active villain in this opera. The Count, having seen the devastation that his greedy motives have had on his daughter's sanity, has already been reformed by the time the action begins on stage. Throughout Nina's interactions with Lindoro, whom she persists in not recognizing after his return, she continues to privilege the sentiments above reason as a means to truth. Lindoro returns to the village disguised as a shepherd and she fails to recognize him, although noting something vaguely familiar about him. She questions him about the dead Lindoro, and is confused that this shepherd knows so many details about the dead Lindoro. It is only when Lindoro shows her a ring that he had given to her as a souvenir of their "passionate embraces" and then kisses her that she is able to remember and then recognize him. But then Lindoro pretends not to recognize Nina, and she must produce a waistcoat that she had embroidered for him before he is able to accept her identity (1790 version of the opera). In both versions of the opera the emphasis is on the physical talismanic object (either ring or waistcoat) that had been exchanged between the two lovers, foregrounding for the audience the importance of the body's purchase of sentimental currency. The doubled and quite extensive recognition scene between the lovers, such a staple of both sentimental and melodramatic literature, occurs literally over the bodies of both the heroine and Lindoro, or rather, over their bodies' remembrance and reenactment of sexual passion and bodily emotion.
17. I cite here the climactic duet performed in Act II during the recognition scene in order to point out its rhetorical investment in a pedagogy of virtue:

Lindoro:

Then, Lindoro took your hand:
He tightly held it to his bosom,
And in this same place,
I pressed on you, O my treasure,
My kiss of fire,
My soul—like this.

Nina:

You!...Heaven . . . ah, what a moment!
That which I feel in my heart,
I would like to explain to you,
Yet I know not how to explain it still.

Ah, it is taking a favorable course, oh God,
She is following the motives of her heart.
Quiet: she speaks in the language of love.

18. Immediately after the reconciliation of the lovers, Nina sings that she is now able to "talk about virtue," and she does so by sitting down to be transformed from the "mad" and suffering woman into the

virtuous, controlled heroine. In order to convey on a performative level the transformation of Nina's character from "mad" to virtuous, the 1998 Zurich performance presents Nina (Cecilia Bartoli), whose hair had been disheveled and unkempt during her "mad" scenes, now sitting calmly while her maids carefully arrange her hair on her head. At exactly the point at which her hair has been brought into control, Nina sings of "virtue." We cannot know exactly how the performances of 1790 staged the same scene, but it is instructive to compare Nina's hair scene with the presentation of Sterne's Maria de Moulines, perhaps one of the most famous "mad" women in literature. In his *Tristram Shandy* (1760-67), Sterne first presents Maria sitting on the bank of a river with "her hair, all but two tresses, drawn up into a silk net, with a few olive-leaves twisted a little fantastically on one side" (529). He revisits Maria in his *A Sentimental Journey* (1768) presents Maria as driven mad by the desertion of her lover as well as her beloved goat: "She was dress'd in white, and much as my friend described her, except that her hair hung loose, which before was twisted within a silk net." As Maria cries for the loss of her father, lover, and goat, all of apparent value to her, the narrator wipes away her tears "with my handkerchief. I then steep'd it in my own—and then in hers—and then in mine—and then I wip'd hers again—and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion. I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary" (Vol. II, ch. 64). This passage is both comic and pathetic, ironic and sentimental in its presentation of the exchange and intermingling of bodily fluids, all the while the narrative voice protests the claims of the material. But it is the emphasis on Maria's hair, its earlier neat style contrasted to its later chaotic appearance, that performs in a very physical way the transition from sanity to madness, or, in Nina's case, from madness to sanity. The audiences of late eighteenth-century Britain and France would certainly have recognized in Nina's performative gestures the similarity of her conduct to that of Maria de Moulines.

19. But what I would call a pedagogy of virtue also is enacted in the opera through the presence of the townspeople throughout the action. The initial scene consists of a chorus of villagers retelling Nina's tragic story, providing a very public explanation for her current, lamentable state, which is also a very public spectacle: "Who can endure such pain? Our heart cannot, and melts into tears" (I. 1). Like a Greek chorus, the townspeople of *Nina* witness and are instructed by the series of sentimental scenes that gradually unfold: the Count's frustrations, his kindness toward Nina, Nina's sufferings and confusions as she continues to dispense the family jewels to a variety of servants, the reappearance of the long-lost Lindoro, and finally the reunions and reconciliations of Nina with her father and lover. Like a morality tale, the opera performs a sort of pedagogy of public virtue for the townspeople, who are accepted by Nina and her father as extended family throughout the action.
20. The erasure of class differences is yet another ideological move that sentimental opera makes, as it argues for the state as an extension of the family, thereby eradicating the appearance of class inequalities (and highlighting the fact that the original premiere of the Italian version of the opera occurred at a totally constructed and artificial classless village of silk workers). An almost feudal notion of the father-Count ruling over his daughter-subjects is perpetuated by the opera, which performs its cultural work by suggesting that servants are just working members of an extended and happy family. As Lawrence Stone has observed:

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the restricted patriarchal nuclear family was modified by the loss of a sense of trusteeship to the lineage, by the decline of kinship and clientage, and by the concurrent rise of the power of the state and the spread of Protestantism. The most important consequence was the substitution of loyalty to state or sect for loyalty to lineage or patron. This weakened the diffuse affective network of kin and neighbours which had surrounded and sustained the loosely bound family structure, and tended to isolate the nuclear core. (653)

By continuing to foreground the chorus of peasants as if they lived within the family and were actually members of the nuclear family, *Nina* functions as a nostalgic discourse, persuading its audience members that a radical social and domestic transformation has not occurred.

21. The issue of marital choice is also emphasized in the opera as Nina, the beleaguered heroine, goes mad, much like the later Lucia di Lammermoor, when she is not allowed to marry the man of her choice. The evolving nature of the increasingly popular companionate marriage, as well as the rights of women, is certainly at issue here. As Stone has noted,

in France in the second half of the eighteenth century there was some intensive propaganda, both in writing and in art, in favour of the affective family type, free marriage choice, marital love, sexual fulfillment within marriage—the alliance of Cupid and Hymen—and close parent-child bondingDespite this, however, there is strong evidence that the practice of marriage arranged by parents for material advantages was reinforced by the legal code of both the *Ancien Régime* and Napoleon's Code Civil. (390)

European families at all class levels were undergoing tremendous changes in attitudes toward love, lust, and the need to procreate, and *Nina* enacts that familial transformation in a highly stylized, ritualistic manner for its audience. The opera also stages the vexed and contentious issue of the treatment of the insane by presenting a series of "mad scenes" in which Nina gives away family jewels to a variety of servants. We can recall here Foucault's discussion of the "disciplinary" society and the increased need during this period to define insanity in order to institutionalize it. But we can also recall that what Markley calls a "theatrics of sentimentality" relies on the actions of upper-class characters who must manifest signs of sentimental distress in order to display their moral worthiness, their right to possess the class status and privileges that they inherited at birth (220). By dispensing the family jewels, Nina in effect is performing her sentimental guilt, her rejection of her father's status, and her heightened awareness of class inequities.

22. But these serious issues dissolve as the Count, motivated by simple and misguided greed, is reformed by witnessing the sufferings of his daughter and subjects. Later we are informed that the bloody duel which had precipitated Nina's mental crisis did not actually result in Lindorno's death, but only his wounding, and the piece ends happily, one might say magically, for all concerned. Given the date of this opera's performance in Italy, 1789, the political implications could not have been lost on a population that itself was agitating for reform. The "happy ending" of this opera occurs not because the audience wanted to believe that they too lived in a nostalgic political-state that functioned as a family, but because the sentimental ethos demands it. In the sentimental universe, virtue became the most highly valued quality or characteristic of the bourgeois, secularized community, because this is clearly a public sphere in which private values must accommodate public sentiments just as public displays of emotions must conform to the reality of private relationships.

III

The transgressive element in music is its nomadic ability to attach itself to, and become part of, social formations, to vary its articulations and rhetoric depending on the occasion as well as the audience, plus the power and the gender situations in which it takes place.

—Edward Said, 70

23. During the eighteenth century the British stage, like the French, was flooded with works that employed sentimental categories clearly derived from Samuel Richardson's tremendously popular and influential

novels *Clarissa* and *Pamela*. The Irish playwright Issac Bickerstaffe (1733-?1812), for instance, adapted *Pamela* as a light comic opera with music by Samuel Arnold in 1765. With 35 performances at Covent Garden, Bickerstaffe's *Maid of the Mill* had to be "divested of the coarse scenes and indecency of the original" (Kavanaugh, 365), but it was so popular that it was credited with bringing comic opera back into popularity in London after *The Beggar's Opera* fell out of fashion. After the importation and adaptation of Pixerecourt's *Coelina* onto the London stage by Holcroft in 1801, however, sentimental drama veers off to become melodrama, a distinctly hybrid genre, one that splits tragedy and comedy into something that we would recognize today as tragicomedy, an amalgam of "tears and smiles," an uncomfortable mixture of bathos and pathos. [5] The conventions of sentimentality are a curious mixture, then, of musical forms, literary genres, and conservative political and social sympathies all bound up in a strikingly visual manner, suggesting the high-toned, moral origins of the genre. What I am calling the sentimental ethos is an ethical system that seeks to shore up the faltering claims of the *pater-familias*, primarily through exerting control of the family's bloodlines, and reifying the daughter's choice of a husband (in conformity with the father's wishes). In sentimental operas and fictions the dominant threat is the unsuitable secret marriage, the disputed inheritance, or the seduction plot, while in gothic works dynastic, public, political issues figure more prominently.

24. But why did sentimental opera and fiction become so popular before, during, and after the French Revolution, and what does such a cultural phenomenon reveal about the vexed and ambivalent cultural relationship between France and England during this period? In an attempt to answer those two questions I have briefly tried to suggest the cultural fluidity of the sentimental as a genre and pointed to the increasing interaction between librettists, composers and artists of the two countries who "borrowed" ideas, ideologies, acting styles, and even scripts and libretti from each other. Another important constituent of the genre's success was how audience dynamics changed, because after the Revolution the French audience started to resemble the British tradition of a diversified audience. With working citizens increasingly attending the theater, and with Shakespeare's growing popularity in France, spectators' tastes were altered, and this called for a theatrical experience full of emotional appeal and involvement. In opposition to theatrical performances that adhered to the Aristotelian, classical three-unities rule of forbidding actions on stage, this new audience was interested in action-packed scenarios and rapidly developing intrigues rather than the slow building *tableaux* that had been popular earlier. Even though some theater critics considered the new theater to be a blatant pandering to the lowest elements, with its heavy reliance on grotesque prison scenes, dramatic escapes, wild crowd scenes, and the simplistic triumph of the just over the unjust, the public that sought entertainment rather than edification nevertheless expected to witness recognizable personal experiences that could serve as a means to self-knowledge (Kennedy 19-21). Sentimental operas developed, then, within the general categories of *opera semiseria*, or *opéra comique*. *Opera semiseria*, combining comic and horrible events with both aristocratic and lower-class characters, was well suited to the sentimentality of the period. Ironically, in a manner reminiscent of Sade, these operas specialized in juxtaposing the pathetic with the appalling without having to carry through the action to a tragic conclusion. Ferdinando Paër (1771-1839), an Italian who spent most of his productive life in Germany and France, is remembered today as one of the major practitioners of *opera semiseria*.
25. Moving Shakespeare's royal personages out of the palace and into domestic hearth and home was actually the major strategy of Amelia Opie when she rewrote the *Lear* story as *The Father and Daughter*. Coincidentally, Opie shared with David Garrick a distinct fascination with visiting insane asylums. We are told by her biographer that when she was not attending murder trials, she was visiting insane asylums in Norwich and London. [6] An astute student of human passions in extreme situations, her sentimental novella traces the history of the motherless Agnes and her devoted father. Adored by her successful father and worshiped by the community, Agnes falls prey to a seducer, who persuades her to elope with him. Thinking they are on their way to be married in London, Agnes is pregnant before she knows it, and her lover has disappeared in order to marry—at the request of his corrupt

aristocrat father—a woman with a larger estate. Thus far, the plot is a virtual copy of *Nina*, with the heroine Agnes being replaced in the affections of her lover by a wealthier woman, thus doubling the victimization of the damsel in distress. Seduced by a wealthy aristocratic man, Agnes is powerless against his family, reminding us of Julie Ellison's observation, that "as sensibility's social base becomes broader, its subject paradoxically becomes social inequality. Sensibility increasingly is defined by the consciousness of a power difference between the agent and the object of sympathy" (18). Class inequities provoke our sympathy for Agnes, but the father's humiliation stirred the strongest emotions in Opie's readers. The loss of his daughter's virginity as a piece of valuable property that the father himself rightly possessed was what most incensed the contemporary male readers of this text.

26. The climactic recognition scene between father and daughter occurs after Agnes returns with her son Edward to her birthplace, and encounters a chained madman roving around in the woods, claiming that he is there to visit his daughter's grave:

At the name of 'father,' the poor maniac started, and gazed on her earnestly, with savage wildness, while his whole frame became convulsed; and rudely disengaging himself from her embrace, he ran from her a few paces, and then dashed himself on the ground in all the violence of frenzy. He raved, he tore his hair; he screamed and uttered the most dreadful execrations; and with his teeth shut and his hands clenched, he repeated the word father, and said the name was mockery to him (93).

The hyperbole here, the frenzy, the gnashing of teeth and violence of display, all of these actions code emotional excess as dangerous, insane, and unacceptable behaviors in the new bourgeois British citizen. And to cause such extravagance of feeling in another person, and that person being one's father, is an unforgivable sin in the new middle-class emotional economy. Agnes must pay for her error and she does so promptly: as her father gazes on her with "inquiring and mournful looks," Agnes begins to cry, "tears once more found their way, and relieved her bursting brain, while, seizing her father's hand, she pressed it with frantic emotion to her lips" (94). The father is led by Agnes to shelter in an insane asylum that he himself built in his prosperous days, before the ruination of his business which was brought about by his depression over his daughter's disastrous elopement. Here Agnes patiently serves as his attendant, while he spends his days sketching charcoal drawings of her tomb on his wall. His madness consists in telling Agnes that his daughter—standing in front of him—is dead. After seven years of such penance, Agnes is rewarded finally with her father's recognition of her, quickly followed by the father's death and then Agnes'. They are ultimately buried together in the same grave.

27. The climactic pathetic scene, in which father and daughter both recognize each other for the first time since her fall and the last time before both of their deaths, is dramatically framed by Opie with the use of an aria adapted from Handel's oratorio *Deborah*, and transformed into a popular parlor song which the father and daughter sing to each other about paternal love and hope (113). The use of the aria at this particular point in the novella is telling, for what it suggests is that at points of high emotional intensity we turn to staged recitals of our feelings, hence the distancing effect of the Handel piece at the precise moment when the emotional intensity overwhelms both father and daughter.
28. The libretto for the Handel oratorio was written by Samuel Humphreys and was based on the gruesome story of Jael in the Old Testament's Book of Judges, chapter four. The Israelites, who have been under captivity for the past twenty years, have been told by the prophetess Deborah that Sisera, the Canaanite commander, would be assassinated by a woman. After the battle in which the Israelites are victorious, Sisera flees the battlefield and seeks sanctuary in the tent of Jael, wife of Heber. Jael accommodates him, but while Sisera sleeps she nails his head to the ground with a tent peg. The challenge for the librettist was to make this violent murder demonstrate the goodness of God.

29. The passage that is cited by Opie comes in Act 3, scene 2:

Abinoam [the father's] recitative:

My prayers are heard, the blessings of this day
All my past cares and anguish well repay;
The soldiers to each other tell
My Barak has performed his duty well.

Barak [the son]:

My honored father!

Abinoam:

O my son, my son,
Well has thy youth the race of honor run.

Abinoam's air:

Tears, such as tender fathers shed,
Warm from my aged eyes descend,
For joy to think, when I am dead,
My son shall have mankind his friend.

30. In E flat major, the air adds the distinctive color of two solo flutes to soft strings and a pair of organs. This aria is generally considered a welcome moment of humanity in a relentlessly nationalistic, bellicose libretto, and like other such airs written by Handel, an accolade to good sons by loving fathers, beautifully composed, simple, lyrical, a touching rich bass aria considered by Winton Dean to be "as beautiful as anything of its length (18 bars) in Handel's work." Dean points out that it was adapted from an earlier Chandos Anthem, but in this version the Israelite father weeps for joy in the knowledge that his son's future fame is assured because of his success in battle (228). Most significantly, however, *Deborah*, like *Lear*, presents an earlier patriarchal period of masculine warfare and domination that is actually sustained by the presence and power of women. Not seen as daughters or even wives, the women in this biblical narrative are either prophets or assassins.
31. *Deborah* was performed seven times in 1733, and then revived again ten times over the next 15 years. Dean tells us that the oratorio was revived many times in the twenty years after Handel's death (1759-79). We might legitimately ask, however, how would Opie know the aria if the oratorio had not been performed since 1779, at which time she would have been only ten years old? And how would she even have had the opportunity to see one of the revivals if she did not travel to London until she was an adult? Interestingly, Dean claims that "there is no record of favourite songs [from the oratorio] being sung at concerts" (237), which suggests that the air could not have circulated as a publicly-performed concert song during the period. But such airs did not need large forces to perform, so could become parlor songs and therefore had wide popular distribution in private, home performances. I think that we have to assume that the aria would have been familiar enough to Opie and other middle-class Britons to allow her to quote lines from the piece in her 1801 novella. Strongly melodic and very direct in its emotions, the airs were the most popular and accessible music in Handel's oratorios and contributed to the perception that the biblical oratorios were actually sentimental dramas and nationalist panaceas. One could argue, in fact, that Opie's deployment of Handel stands as the crucial mediating moment between a print-based economy and a competing oral-based culture. In the emerging market for printed sheet music to be performed in the home, we can glimpse how print and performance culture began operating in close conjunction with one another.
32. The use of the Handel piece further prepares us for Ferdinando Paër's later adaptation of the novella

into an opera he entitled *Agnese* (1809), an opera that follows in almost virtual detail its source material in Opie, although the action is set in Italy and the opera has a happy ending, with Agnese marrying Ernesto and moving in with her suddenly recovered father. Like *Nina*, *Agnese* centers on insanity caused within the family by the greed or lust of one family member, setting off an illness that metaphorically suggests the interconnectedness of all members within the familial circle. In *Nina* the daughter magically regains her sanity and the opera can conclude happily in marriage, but in Opie's novella the father gains his sanity only long enough to recognize the horror of his daughter's situation, and to die almost immediately as a result. Clearly, Paër did not want to present such a conclusion to his operatic adaptation, so, like Nahum Tate revising Shakespeare's *Lear*, he tidied up the story and presented the happy ending that he knew his audience would demand.

33. Even so, his light touch did not please everyone in the audience. In his *Life of Rossini*, Stendhal recorded his disgusted reaction to seeing a performance of Paër's *Agnese*: "Even the remarkable popularity of the opera cannot shake my conviction that it is profoundly wrong for art to deal with purely horrifying subjects. The madness of Shakespeare's *Lear* is made tolerable by the most touching devotion of his daughter Cordelia; but I personally feel that there is nothing to redeem the ghastly and pitiable condition of the heroine's father in *Agnese*"...[which] has always remained with me as a thoroughly disagreeable memory" (qtd. Commons).
34. *Agnese* is, apart from its conclusion, an almost literal adaptation of the Opie novella, with Luigi Buonavoglia writing the libretto and adding for comic relief the character of the director of the insane asylum, who treats the inmates as laughable and easily cured if they would just stop indulging in their extreme emotional responses to a variety of life's typical events. *Agnese* was the first opera to take its audience literally into a lunatic asylum and to depict in almost clinical detail the behavior of a madman. Was its blatant depiction of insanity a cheap attempt to exploit the sensibility of the era? Certainly visits to observe the inmates of Bedlam had become a sort of sport for people like Garrick and Opie, not to mention the general bourgeois population.
35. Paër, however, transforms the Handel aria, "Tears, such as tender fathers shed," and instead has Agnese play the harp and sing a favorite song so that her father will finally recognize her through her voice. And instead of using the Handel piece, taken as it was from a gruesome Old Testament story, Paër has Agnese sing a decidedly New Testament lament that figures the daughter as a lost lamb seeking for her father, the good shepherd: "If the lost lamb/Finds her good shepherd once more./Grief quickly/Changes to joy;/With her harmonious bleating/She sets the hill ringing;/Nor from her face could you tell/How dismayed she has been./So to her father/Return Agnese." The change in imagery is significant, in that the Old Testament patriarch is replaced in Paër by the father as a forgiving Christ-figure, a shepherd seeking his lost lambs, not a vengeful deity.
36. Although composed in 1809, Paër's *Agnese* was not performed in London until 1817, and was unfortunately competing directly with *Don Giovanni* that particular season. Despite a fine production and enthusiastic reviews, the opera only had five performances before it was suspended "on account of some similitude which was thought to exist between the situation of Hubert [the father's insanity] and that of his majesty [George III]" (qtd in Fenner, 131). But what is most striking about the use of Handel in Opie and later in the popular melodramas written by Marie Therese Kemble in 1815 (*Smiles and Tears; or, The Widow's Stratagem*) and Thomas Moncrieff in 1820 (*The Lear of Private Life, or the father and daughter*), is that the music is used in all of these pieces at what we would recognize as the "moment of desire" in the text. The aria is used to frame what I would identify as the oedipal crisis of the narrative: the moment at which the father struggles to recognize his daughter as a sexual woman, an individual who has defied him and allowed herself to enter into an illicit passion with a seducer who has no intention of making her his wife.

37. The recognition scene is so painful to the father that he distances it by performing its pain in a stylized, almost ritualized manner, couching it in distinctly Old Testament biblical imagery. Such a move emphasizes Opie's emotional pathos in order to suggest that the sexual disgrace of the daughter is equivalent to the warfare between rival Old Testament tribes. To lose one's virginity is tantamount to losing national honor and one's standing as God's chosen people. I am reminded here of Žižek's response to the question, why do we listen to music? His answer is: "in order to avoid the horror of the encounter of the voice qua object. What Rilke said for beauty goes also for music: it is a lure, a screen, the last curtain, which protects us from directly confronting the horror of the (vocal) object....voice does not simply persist at a different level with regard to what we see, it rather points toward a gap in the field of the visible, toward the dimension of what eludes our gaze. In other words, their relationship is mediated by an impossibility: *ultimately, we hear things because we cannot see everything*" (93). Although this is obviously a large topic that needs further development in a larger venue, I would claim that what the music screens from view is the father's fantasized vision of his daughter in the sexual act. The music blocks, in other words, a reversed primal scene so that what cannot be imagined or viewed by the culture at large is the daughter's seduction, the daughter's uncontrolled sexuality.
38. What I am suggesting is that Handel's oratorios were secularized when his arias were sung as popular parlor songs and eventually made their way into the sentimental novels of the day, as emotional touchstones of sorts. But *Lear* and indeed all of Shakespeare's dramas were also domesticated so that the national and dynastic issues that Shakespeare explored became transformed into popular novels and dramas that moved the action from the public to the private realm. The shifts that we see in the secularization and domestication of high cultural artifacts to popular ones says a good deal about the construction of the national as well as the romantic ethos in this period. I think therefore I am seems to have been transformed to I cry therefore I am, or I suffer therefore I am, or I am guilty and in pain therefore I am. Provoking intense suffering and displaying that suffering in stylized, almost ritualized ways became the dominant mode for this culture to define personal and civic virtue, as well as universalized humanity. Citizens of Britain were able to recognize their shared humanity—their shared "Britishness"—only when they could see demonstrated intense guilt about failed filial duty, intense shame about sexual license, and intense grief about causing madness or suffering in one's family members.

IV

Music therefore quite literally fills a social space, and it does so by elaborating the ideas of authority and social hierarchy directly connected to a dominant establishment imagined as actually presiding over the work.

—*Edward Said, 64*

39. What ideological role did sentimental operas and fictions play, then, in the evolution of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century European culture? I would contend that these works, like all cultural discourses, served a bifurcated ideological function, both liberal and conservative causes. To some extent dramas and operas—like their classical Greek sources—enact ancient fertility rituals, complete with symbolic castrations (mutes) and besieged virgins, in order to perform a quasi-religious function in an increasingly secular society. Stories from the Bible, Shakespeare, and Greek or Roman mythology were no longer presented as models to a population that clamored for tales of secular heroism, a populace that was now drawn to psychological dramas rather than depictions of spiritual journeys. The poetic psychomachias of Blake, Byron, Wordsworth and Coleridge found their theatrical equivalents in the dramatic agonies of suffering daughters and guilt-ridden fathers, who in turn were metaphorical equivalents to a British populace ruled by a periodically insane King. As Fredric Jameson notes, the "political unconscious" (*passim*) of a nation is revealed in its symbolic enactments of a social

narrative, and the master narrative of this particular society was repression, long-suffering, and acceptance of a flawed political system that was preferred over the chaos that could result from revolution. Romantic drama spoke to the "political unconscious" of bourgeois Britons because it enacted their own "mixed" and ambiguous feelings toward an insane ruler and a society committed finally to incremental change.

40. So we might ask, what does it mean that both French and British citizens flocked to a number of largely forgotten operas before, during, and after the French Revolution? What was at stake in staging and viewing the performances? As I have suggested, the opera and its mutations/manifestations embodied a public space in which French and British citizens could vicariously experience the threats of violent political, social, and economic revolution. But ultimately the operas were radically nationalistic for each nation, even though, ironically, they used the same tropes and told the same narratives. Each country was trying to use the theater and the opera house to impose a form of nationalism on its emerging bourgeois populace. As Gerald Newman observes, Britain sought to see itself and its citizens in national and secular terms rather than in religious or tribal ones during the mid-eighteenth-century. This shift was made possible, according to Newman, because of cultural rather than political activity (56). Benedict Anderson has also discussed the growth of secularism as allowing for a new sort of "imagined community," a country with a "national imagination" that would replace the religious construction of the medieval and renaissance communities (6; 36). There is no question that the institutionalization of the sentimental, hybridized opera during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a central development in the growth of the new British and to some extent the French "national imagination."

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Notes

¹ Thomas Dixon has traced the evolution of and emphasis on the "psychology of the emotions" to what he calls the "newer and more secular network" of meaning that began to emerge in the early nineteenth century (289). Both Sheriff and Bredvold have analyzed aspects of the the debate over sentimentality's indebtedness to Latitudinarianism, arguing that a tension exists between traditional Christian emphases on a system of active virtue and the sentimental self-absorption in one's own "good nature" as an end in itself.

² Markley reviews the literary and critical controversies surrounding Shaftesbury's role in defining Sentimentality as "the affective spectacle of benign generosity" (211), as well as its contested religious origins in latitudinarianism and Deism. Another useful summary of the major debates about sentimentality as a cultural practice can be found in Howard, although her focus is largely on American literature, while Solomon has traced the European and philosophical roots of the concept. There are a number of major book-length studies of the genre, but those most relevant to the focus of this essay are by Barker-Benfield, Mullan, and Marshall.

³ See Bartlet, who very usefully distinguishes between the *Théâtre-Italien*, the one founded to perform Italian *opera buffa* and *opera semiseria* and directed at one point by Paër, and the earlier *Théâtre-Italien* or *Comédie Italienne* (the name of the *Opéra-Comique* until 1793), whose repertoire included Italian plays in Italian, French plays, and *opéras-comiques*, but not Italian opera (123).

⁴ The basis of Sentimentality's physical appeal has been variously analyzed. Branfman attempts a psychoanalytical analysis of sentimentality as a "magic gesture in reverse," a "wistful observation [in which the audience] passively views" the sufferings and "sadness without pleasure" of the opera's participants (624-25). Ellis reviews the terms *sentimental*, *comedy*, and *sentimental comedy* in a morphological attempt to discern the specific qualities of the genre, while Sherbo defines sentimental drama by examining a number of specific examples.

⁵ I have explored elsewhere and at much greater length the role that Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery*

played in the evolution of British melodrama in relation to his own earlier sentimental comedies (i.e., *The Deserted Daughter*, a work that bears some similarities to the two operas under discussion here).

⁶ See the biographical background provided for the Broadview edition of Opie's *Father and Daughter*. All quotations from the novella will be from this edition, with page numbers in parentheses in the text. This edition also very usefully reprints an excerpt from Paër's *Agnese*, along with contemporary reviews, as well as excerpts from both Kemble's *Smiles and Tears* and Moncrieff's *The Lear of Private Life*.

Opera and Romanticism

Sounds Romantic: The Castrato and English Poetics Around 1800

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The following essay was awarded the Keats-Shelley Association Essay Prize for 2005.

In contrast to the notion that Italian opera has no relation to romantic opera or to romanticism generally, this essay demonstrates that the Italian castrato was a prominent figure in London during the period around 1800. The essay argues that the idea of the romantic castrato makes it possible to revise understandings of the (aggressive) relationship between sight and sound that is so often attributed to literary production of this period, particularly to William Wordsworth. The essay explores the ways that the castratic imagination (ironically) facilitates an analysis of romantic sound imagery that is mindful of materiality, offering in particular a reading of the relation between castrati, sound imagery, and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. This essay appears in *Opera and Romanticism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

 There was a spot,
My favourite station when the winds were up,
Three knots of fir-trees small and circular,
Which with smooth space of open plain between
Stood single, for the delicate eye of Taste
Too formally arranged. Right opposite
The central group I loved to stand and hear
The wind come on and touch these several groves
Each after each, and thence in the dark night
Elicit soft proportions of sweet sounds
As from an instrument. "The strains are passed"
Thus often to myself I said, "the sounds
Even while they are approaching are gone by,
And now they are more distant, more and more.
O listen, listen how they wind away
Still heard they wind away, heard yet and yet . . .

- *William Wordsworth*

He had a voice proportioned to his gigantic stature, extending beyond the ordinary compass near an octave, in notes equally clear and sonorous. At the same time he possessed such a degree of knowledge in the science of music, as he might be supposed to have derived from the instructions of the skilfull Porpora, bestowed on a diligent and favourite pupil: with unexampled agility and freedom did he traverse the paths . . . [of] success, till he became the idol of the Italians, and at length of the harmonic world.

- *Vincenzio Martinelli, 1758*

1. Thinking about the realm of the aural in romantic-era art almost by nature implicates the realm of the

visual in relation to the aural. Particularly where Wordsworth is concerned--who from his earliest topographical poetry imagines sound as an experience that emerges only after darkness has usurped the power of the eye--this relationship is one that seems to posit the realm of the aural as secondary. As John Hollander has written, the visual will always rule over the aural because the latter is less escapable; it cannot fully conform to the notion that faith is the evidence of things unseen. We can close our eyes in ways we simply cannot close our ears--"vision is far more directional than hearing, which is not 'To such a tender ball as th'eye confin'd' . . . [but instead] more 'diffus'd'" (59).^[1] Furthermore, whereas the visual is in constant dialogue with its contrasting term, the *visionary*, the aural is continually referred back to the fact that it has no such contrasting term, no vocabulary of transcendence. Ultimately the kingdom of the visual in Wordsworth's poetry is understood to be predicated on the power of the visual to reject the material world, a rejection that the aural does not, perhaps cannot, match. There is, in other words, an irreducibly sensual component to sound.

2. Because the critical imagination of this power of sight over sound has been so influential in terms of how we receive Wordsworth as well as how Wordsworth has influenced our ideas about romanticism, I choose here to think again about aural representation in both contexts and in relation to one another. Initially, one might be compelled to invoke Wordsworth's late ode concerned with re-mythologizing natural music, "On the Power of Sound," because this work is predicated on a reversal of the balance of power between the eye and the ear. Here audible harmony survives the destruction of the earth, sound survives image: "though Earth be dust / And vanish, though the Heavens dissolve, her stay / Is in the Word, that shall never pass away" (222-224). Wordsworth might be said to be trying to imagine an aural transcendence here, one that is predicated on the very subjection of sight to sound. The unpalatability of this argument, for me, is that it insists on an imagination of aggress, in which one sensual register must overcome the other for transcendence to become possible. Moreover, this is simply a reversal of terms, the recasting of a standard narrative that changes our understandings of sound and image in the context of Wordsworth's poetry little if at all. Is it possible that the representation of sound in Wordsworth's poetry specifically, and in romanticism generally, can open us up to a wider world without either setting sound against sight or relying on the standard rejection of the material for it to do so? My goal here is to think sound alongside rather than in relation to sight, and to do so in a way that confronts rather than concedes the priority of one over the other.
3. One place to begin is with the sheer pleasure Wordsworth associates with sound and to look carefully at precisely how he figures those sounds. In the great Ode, the poet insists, "I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!" (50). The sound that precipitates this exclamation is not that of the birds singing "a joyous song" (19) nor the "tabor's sound" (20) of which the poet also takes note, but rather the cataracts, which "blow their trumpets from the steep" (25). Similarly, as the poet looks out to the chasm opening up on the mist-covered Irish Sea in *The Prelude*, he hears "mounted" the "roar of waters, torrents, streams . . . roaring with one voice" (58-59). So often the sound with the most resonance in Wordsworth's poetry is quite literally high--the *steep* of the cataracts, the *mounting* of the torrents' voice. And yet sheer contrast draws our attention--to the pitch of these sounds, which seems not high but rather low and deep--a blast, a roar.
4. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth thinks carefully about sound. Among the attributes of the poet is his capacity to listen, and then to respond to what he hears by recapitulating it through what he terms the harmonious music of written language, poetry. To describe this principium of poetry Longinus used the word *hypsous*. In what is perhaps an explicit attempt to distance himself from Longinian, or more properly Augustan, poetics, Wordsworth's terms are joy, enjoyment, pleasure. Yet these concepts turn out to be exceptionally unstable in the context of the Preface, and moreover, their instability stems from that about which Longinus is quite explicit: *hypsous*, height. "We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure" (258), Wordsworth writes, affirming the necessity of pleasure as the end game of poetry, which should, in turn, produce "an overbalance of enjoyment"

(258) in readers. But Wordsworth's definition of pleasure is itself bifurcated, making it more difficult both to deploy and to receive than he initially admits. On the one hand there is "dignified" (255) pleasure, which Wordsworth describes as the product of natural utterance. On the other is the "painful and disgusting" (257) version of that passion, which, as the monstrous counterpart to dignified pleasure, is lowly or disgusting precisely because of its height: it is produced by language that finds it necessary to "trick out or elevate nature." Given that joy by definition elevates us, we are left to wonder how we can be at once elevated and low. What is the height and pitch of romantic poetics? What does it *sound like*?

5. Wordsworth's image of the cataracts blowing their trumpet from the steep hearkens to another trumpet image, one which sounded its notes in a far different context—that of Italian opera—but whose lore would have been almost impossible to avoid in England during the period around 1800. As the story goes, Nicola Porpora (1686-1766) introduced his pupil Carlo Broschi, who would become notorious both in England and throughout Europe under the name Farinelli, to a Roman audience in his opera "Flavio Anicio Olibrio" in 1722, during which the young singer spontaneously initiated a contest between himself and a gifted trumpeter. In 1772, Charles Burney recounted Farinelli's vocal competition with this trumpeter to English readers, making the story infamous:

there was a struggle every night between him [the young Farinelli] and a famous player on the trumpet . . . this, at first, seemed amicable and merely sportive, till the audience began to interest themselves in a contest, and to take different sides: after severally swelling a note, in which each manifested the power of his lungs, and tried to rival the other in brilliancy and force, they had both a swell and shake together, by thirds, which was continued so long, while the audience eagerly awaited the event, that both seemed to be exhausted; and, in fact, the trumpeter, wholly spent gave it up, thinking, however, that his antagonist as much tired as himself, and that it would be a drawn battle; when Farinelli, with a smile on his countenance, shewing he had only been sporting with him all that time, broke out all at once in the same breath, with fresh vigour, and not only swelled and shook the note, but ran the most rapid and difficult divisions, and was at last silenced only by the acclamations of the audience. From this period may be dated that superiority which he ever maintained over all his contemporaries. (Burney 213-214)

Upon hearing this tale, again we are left to wonder. What did this standoff, in which the young singer and the trumpet player at once imitated one another's sounds and yet pushed one another beyond them, sound like? Though we may well meet with another such accomplished trumpeter, we can never hope to meet with a singer whose vocal range, timbre, power, and technique can match that of Farinelli. In the first place, his voice was heralded as unprecedented by those who loved and those who detested Italian opera alike. It exercised such a powerful fascination over its listeners across Europe that in some instances it has been characterized as producing sublimity or transport, and in others pure frenzy.^[2] Reporting the response of London audiences to Farinelli upon his arrival there in 1734, Burney declares, "what an effect his surprising talents had . . . it was extacy! rapture! enchantment!" (216). Late eighteenth-century music historian Sir John Hawkins writes that "few hesitated to pronounce him the greatest singer in the world; this opinion was grounded on the amazing compass of his voice . . . sweet beyond expression . . . pass[ing] all description" (876). Mancini, a singer and contemporary of Farinelli, declares, "His voice was thought a marvel because it was so perfect, so powerful, so sonorous, so rich in its extent . . . its equal has never been heard" (Rogers 417).^[3] If, as Rodolfo Celletti has recently argued, virtuosity must be understood as "the capacity to perform exceptional feats in any field" (11), the capacity to "bring into being something which goes beyond the reality of everyday life and the normal capacities of human beings" (2), then Farinelli, as his standoff with the trumpeter suggests, is a genuine virtuoso. He is, according to Celletti's definition of the term, genuinely *wonderful*, producing "unreal, unworldly sounds . . . the embodiment of a vocal 'poetics of wonder'"

- (8). The sense that romanticism prioritizes image over sound because sound cannot overcome its immanence is unsettled by the voice of Farinelli, which seems to vastly increase the power of sound, his voice having been described by English listeners precisely by drawing on the vocabulary of transcendence.
6. Of course, the reason the sound of Farinelli's sublime voice is not only distinctive but also impossible to reproduce today is that he belonged to a class of singers that would not survive the nineteenth century, referred to variously as *musicisti*, *evirati*, and most commonly in London circles, *castrati*. This essay does not recall the figure of the castrato singer to mourn him, however, but rather to suggest this figure's relevance to the study of romantic poetics, particularly in terms of the opposition so often remarked upon the relationship of sight to sound. This relationship has been persistently elusive, because romantic-era culture defined itself in part through its opposition to the figure, and indeed the sound, of the castrato, which it fantasized as having purged in spite of the fact that castrati continued to enjoy great acclaim in London through the first two decades of the nineteenth century. By attempting to eliminate this figure, the structure of the romantic relationship to the castrato repeats the structure of opposition between sight and sound that is so often understood to organize romantic poetics. Becoming more attuned to the relationship of this figure of the castrato to romantic-era culture not only revises his history in the period, namely that his elimination cannot be associated as a quintessentially *romantic* endeavor, but also allows us to revise our understanding of the relationship between sight and sound on which the fantasy of his elimination is at least in part based.
 7. One instructive example of poetic work to which we can productively turn in this regard is to Wordsworth's meditation on the sound of trees in an Alfoxden journal fragment (commonly referred to by this time as "There was a spot"), in which the "sweet sound" of the wind elicits from the trees "[a]s from an instrument." This piece serves as a substantial conjurer of what we might term the castratic imagination through its vivid representation of the materiality of sound as music, and one that locates this sound visually in a manner that does not oppose it to its evanescence, its temporality. Wordsworth narrator writes specifically of a "spot" where he most likes to listen, and he describes the three fir trees that define this spot as a spectacle perhaps "[t]oo formally arrayed" to please "the delicate eye of taste." Here is a Wordsworthian image that cannot be resolved to the aggressive relationship between visual and aural experience that we have so often associated with Wordsworth. Here the poet-narrator imagines an audio-visual scene of complementarity rather than competitiveness. In what follows I will undertake to study romantic sound through the figure of the castrato singer as an analogue to the image of Wordsworth listening to elm trees. Like these trees, the castrato's material presence became increasingly indelicate to the eye. The "too formal" array of Wordsworth's trees--which are suggestive of a Baroque, and thus backward, aesthetic--serve as an analogy for the spectacle of the castrato singer not only as a voice but also as a body. This notion of embarrassing or insulting the "eye of taste" through form is crucial to the reception of castrati in the period around 1800. Wordsworth insists on drawing the spectacle of the trees into view even as he acknowledges the indelicacy of such a spectacle and the probability that it will be discomforting to his readers. Why is this insistence useful? As the vocabulary of transcendence began to associate itself with the sounds of Italian opera and the castrato singer, this vocabulary became a way to try to escape the uncomfortable corporeality of the singers themselves. Thus, while sound has been, and continues to be, understood as *too* material, not fully able to decouple from the realm of the material, fantasies of a disembodied voice increasingly defined the imagination for the castrato singer on the part of English listeners and readers. As Gillen Wood argues, for example, Francis Burney's representation of the experience of listening to a castrato at the opera in *Evelina* and *Cecilia* is conspicuously disembodied--any and all description of the castrato's corporeality is absent, being transposed into the sound of his sublime voice. Such escape tactics, in which the image of the castrato is wrenched from the sound of his voice in the name of delicacy or comfort is significant both to the study of the castrato specifically and to the study of image/sound relations in romanticism more generally. I hope to show that the castrato in London

during the period around 1800 is a powerful figure precisely because it enables the rethinking of the aggressive relation of vision and sound that is so often attributed to the poetic production of this period, not least of which that of Wordsworth. Moreover, I hope to show that this rethinking is an enterprise to which Wordsworth himself, as well as other romantic-era writers, contributes.

8. Castrati singers emerged in southern Europe during the latter half of the sixteenth century where they found a place in Papal choirs;[\[4\]](#) rose to acclaim in Italy both as church singers and throughout Europe as chamber and opera singers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,[\[5\]](#) with the first castrato making a public appearance in London in 1707;[\[6\]](#) and then fell into relative decline by first quarter of the nineteenth century, the very last castrato reported to perform in London being in 1844.[\[7\]](#) In the twenty-first century, castrati singers are extinct. The cultural practice of privileging a boy's throat over his testicles has become ideologically and morally untenable, the very fact that this practice ever *was* tenable, particularly, as John Rosselli points out, in modern times and at the heart of Western Christianity, having long been an embarrassment. But, then as now, castrati singers have not only aroused fear and distaste, but also "prurient interest" (Rosselli 143), which perhaps explains why the production of music originally written for castrati singers, and thus present-day singers attempting to imitate their voices, has been, in recent years, steadily on the rise.[\[8\]](#)
9. Above all else, castrati singers were valued for their capacity to perform powerful feats of vocal height. A male singer who has, between the approximate age of six and twelve, undergone a surgical procedure to impede the "breaking" of his voice that would normally take place during puberty, the castrato is a male soprano, soprano meaning, literally, *higher*. "Higher," according to Rosselli, was not a notion taken lightly by Italian society, which was at once intensely hierarchically-minded and accustomed to displaying hierarchical order in ways readily perceivable to the senses (148). He admits that vocal height may have been valued for its associations with youth, but argues that it was more likely its association with superiority that made it so valuable and caused its rise in popularity. The practical expression of the supreme value of the high voice was demonstrated by the fees paid to opera singers dating from the beginnings of public opera houses in the 1630s, in which high voices in leading parts (castrati and women) were almost always paid more than tenors or basses. The fees paid to Italian castrati in London throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are also notoriously high. As early as 1713, Johann Mattheson wrote, "He who in the present time wants to make a profit out of music betakes himself to England. The Italians exalt music; the French enliven it; the Germans strive after it; the English pay for it well." Again, visiting London in the early 1770s, J. W. Von Archenholz reported that "the English were paying enormously high sums, the highest in Europe in fact, to Italian singers" (Petty 4).
10. Burney's influential writings on Italian opera during the latter third of the eighteenth century make the argument that the rise of castrati singers is the result of an increasing desire for high voices that could not be met by those who had heretofore filled the role of the soprano: boys and women. The principle liability of boy singers was their unreliability and of course retirement from their careers as soprano singers once they lost their voices, and Papal law banned women from displaying themselves publicly early in the seventeenth century, making it impossible to use them at all, either in choirs or opera. However, musicologists have begun to dispute these claims, arguing instead that the voices of castrati did not rise in order to replace either boys or women, but rather because they were capable of a unique sound, a voice that neither boys nor women could match. According to Michel Poizat, for instance, contrary to the received wisdom of a general prohibition of women from the stage during the period of the rise of the castrato singer in Italy, the prohibition did not extend beyond the Papal States. Everywhere else, and particularly in Naples (where great numbers of castrati were trained), women did have access to the stage:

The castrato was not a substitute woman. Therefore the rise of the castrato must derive

from motivations entirely specific to the voice . . . This phenomenon is a clear indication of the autonomy of the . . . high voice, as an object of *jouissance* detached from its usual functions of signification, communication, and the marking of gender difference.

Ultimately, the principal feature of the castrato voice is not that it is the voice of a woman in the body of a man, but rather its extraordinary, literally *unheard-of* quality. (116)

Nor, according to recent arguments, can one reasonably imagine castrati as merely *replacing* boy singers. Biology itself is such that young boys literally could not live long enough as soprano singers to receive the training that would allow them to compete either physically or technically with castrati, who typically trained between ten and fifteen years before making professional debuts.

11. Indeed, biological manipulation enabled the production of an entirely new class of singer. For, where biology failed the boy singer, it was engineered to great effect in the case of the male castrato, who has to be understood as a "singing machine" (Rosselli 108), created solely by making use of the laws of biology. Normally, the vocal cords of females and males are approximately the same size from birth until the onset of puberty. However, while female vocal cords enlarge only slightly during puberty, male vocal cords enlarge significantly. It is due to this enlargement that boys undergo the "break" of their young voices, which had previously allowed them to sing naturally in the soprano range, subsequently producing the characteristic decrease in pitch in singing as well as speaking in the maturing male. Modern medicine understands the significant enlargement of the male vocal cords during puberty to be the result of the male body's increased production of the androgen hormone in the interstitial cells of Leydig that reside in the male testes. Although the precise hormonal mechanism responsible for the "breaking" of the male voice is not thought to have been understood by medical practitioners of seventeenth-century Italy, according to Richard E. and Enid Rhodes Peschel, enough was understood for practitioners to deduce that castration of males prior to puberty would prevent the characteristic voice change experienced by normal males. Adult soprano singers could thus be 'created' through a process of castration that would short-circuit the normal maturation of the boy singer's throat, subsequently allowing the boy to keep his beautiful high singing voice throughout the course of his adult life. Thus the castrato singer was 'born.'
12. Narratives concerned with the rise of English romanticism very often conceive of the purging of the soprano voice for that of the tenor as the proper or *natural* voice of the male opera hero during the period around 1800 as a transition that is constitutive of romanticism itself. Such narratives understand this transfer of vocal supremacy from the castrato to the male tenor to be brought about by political, ideological, and moral shifts that made the castrato singer untenable to 'modern' society, thus imagining the romantic era to be simultaneously the cause and the effect of his extinction. Napoleon Bonaparte is a case in point. He condemned the production of castrato singers, and, at the request of his brother Joseph (at that time the King of Naples), forbade castrated boys from matriculating at schools or music conservatories as a means of abolishing the practice of castration in Italy, to which the *Monitore Napoletano* of 5 December 1806 testifies: "His Majesty has been unable to consider without indignation the barbarous practice of creating eunuchs in order to produce women's voices in men. As a result he has ordered, by the decree of 27 November, that in future such people shall not be admitted into the schools at all" (Barbier 227). Napoleon flattered himself by believing he had not only contributed to the abolition of the production of castrati singers, which he described as "shameful and horrible," but had in fact ended it: "I abolished this custom in all countries under my rule . . . under penalty of death. . . . it will not appear again," he is reported to have confided to his doctor on St. Helena. "Clearly he could not conceive," writes Barbier, "that the entire nineteenth century would still have eunuch singers" (227), nor that they would continue to be invited to sing in major European cities to much acclaim, including Paris and London.
13. Much as Napoleon wanted to understand his own historical moment (and indeed himself) as

categorically different from the Baroque past through the modern period's development of a distaste for the castrato singer, it is actually the case that the castrato generated tremendous controversy nearly from his birth. Indeed, from the seventeenth century onward this new species of singer generated passionate responses not only by those who welcomed his arrival into the musical world but also by those who spurned it. Castrati were, from the first, both greatly admired and greatly loathed. In England, intense criticism was coexistent with the very emergence of the castrato on the London stage, and it continued through even the periods of Italian opera's great popularity in London. The period between 1780-1830 is actually a significant moment in this regard, though, as Naomi André has noted, there is hardly a case when scholars acknowledge the relationship between romantic opera and castrati singers. These periods of popularity of Italian opera--and particularly of castrati singers performing--in London include the 1720s and 1730s, when Farinelli, Cafarelli, Carestini, Senesino, and Gizziello sang there, when Handel was in residence composing operas specifically designed for the castrato voice; the 1780s, which gave London audiences the remarkable voices of Rubinelli, Pacchierotti, and Marchesi; and finally the first decades of the nineteenth century, during which London hosted the brilliant and internationally-acclaimed singers Crescendi and Velluti, Crescendi spending four years in London, roughly between 1802-1806, and Velluti the years 1825, 1826, and 1828.^[9] Indeed, what we in literary studies understand to be the romantic era could be said to begin and end with castrati performers in London.

14. The attempted erasure of the castrato during the romantic era elides the ways in which this figure underlines key romantic notions of sublimity, originality, and exceptionalism. To be exceptional is to be out of the ordinary course, unusual, special, *extraordinary*. Following romantic aesthetics, particularly the discourse of the sublime, the extraordinary has come to refer to a heightened emotional state, a sense of astonishment, strong admiration (or the contrary), and perhaps such usage is not unhelpful in describing the effects of castrati singers on their listeners. It is to earlier definitions of the term that we might most productively turn, however, including the OED entries of "acting in an unusual manner," "partial," and "outside of or additional to the regular staff; not belonging to the 'ordinary' or fully recognized class of persons; supernumerary."
15. To begin with, the figure of the castrato singer is quite literally unusual, biological engineering having rendered him corporeally abnormal in more ways than one, many immediately visible to the eye. There are as many reports about the particularities of the castrato's physical deviance from the norm of the adult male as there are reports of their sexual proclivities and capabilities, many of them, of course anecdotal and many of them untrustworthy at best. For instance, Heriot claims that the operation "appears . . . to have had surprisingly little effect on the general health and well-being of the subject, any more than on his sexual impulses and intellectual capacities. The hurt was very largely a psychological one, in an age when virility was accounted a sovereign virtue" (63). The Peschels, on the other hand, claim that the medical procedure castrati underwent "had numerous dire medical consequences . . . [that] have often been ignored" (27). In spite of the fact that they seem to think otherwise, it is actually the Peschels who best represent the suspicions and beliefs of the English by the time of period around 1800. Rumors, anecdotes, and satires about the bodies of castrati singers were as widespread as they were diverse and serve as valuable evidence of the cultural anxiety over the abnormality of the castrato's body regardless of their basis in fact.
16. One of the most prevalent rumors was that the castrato singer possessed the body of a woman, including lack of beard growth and usual male distribution of auxiliary hair; distribution of pubic hair in a female pattern (accompanied by an infantile penis); distributions of subcutaneous fat localized at the hip, buttock, and breast areas; and pale skin. Such associations of the castrato body with womanishness are made by Horace Walpole, who wrote, upon recalling his meeting with Senesino in 1740, "We thought it an old fat woman; but it spoke in a shrill little pipe, and proved itself to be Senesino"; similarly, and during the same period, the French traveler Charles de Brosses reported that

Porporino was "as pretty as the prettiest girl" (Gilman 62). In 1762, Casanova made the following report of a castrato: "In a well-made corset, he had the waist of a nymph, and, what was almost incredible, his breast was in no way inferior, either in form or in beauty, to any woman's; and it was above all by this means that the monster made such ravages. Though one knew the negative nature of this unfortunate, curiosity made one glance at his chest, and an inexpressible charm acted upon one, so that you were madly in love before you realized it" (Heriot 54).

17. The other greatly prevalent rumor was that the castrato's body was abnormally large, particularly his arms and legs, though his torso was also purported to be of a much wider girth than is normal as well. The Peschels associate the body of the castrato singer with monstrosity, claiming that he had a distinctly "freakish appearance," to which, once again, myriad reports of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries testify. Alluding to Farinelli, one observer wrote that he was "as tall as a giant and as thin as a shadow, therefore if he had grace, it could be only of a sort to be envied by a penguin or a spider." Burney described Tommaso Guarducci as "tall and aukward [sic] in figure." And de Broses wrote that "Marianini [sic], at six feet tall . . . is the largest princess I'll see in my time" (Peschel & Peschel 28). Finally, a caricature drawing entitled "Farinelli in Gala Dress" attributed to Antonio Maria Zanetti portrays the singer's arms and legs as grotesquely long and his hands as grotesquely large; and another drawing attributed to Hogarth depicts two giant-sized, malformed castrati (thought to be representations of Farinelli and Senesino) towering awkwardly over normal-sized singers.
18. The castrato body tests our understanding of his exception, and of exceptionalism generally, by confronting us with a body that is simultaneously partial *and* supernumerary. A comment Casanova made in 1745 helps us to understand the ways in which castrati singers represented a body peculiarly constituted at once by *lack* and by *excess*:

an abbé with an attractive face walked in [to a café]. At the appearance of his hips, I took him for a girl in disguise, and I said so to the abbé Gama; but the latter told me that it was Bepino della Mamana, a famous castrato. The abbé called him over, and told him, laughingly, that I had taken him for a girl. The impudent creature, looking fixedly at me, told me that if I liked he would prove that I was right, or that I was wrong. (Heriot 54)

Heriot suggests that the import of this remark lies in the castrato's demonstration of his homosexuality, ostensibly through what he takes to be a solicitation. However, it seems more to the point here to take his taunt more literally than that. The castrato dares us to confront his body of evidence, as it were. His remark is calculated to remind us both of the lack (shriveled testes? an infantile penis? or perhaps worse, missing testes and penis?) and the surplus (abnormally large rib cage? abnormally long extremities? unusual height? unusually fat? breasts? something more still?) we might encounter beneath his clothes, both of which govern the cultural imagination of the castrato body and constitute it as exceptional, monstrous.

19. The castrato singer's corporeal supernumerarity, however, was not thus limited. His body was also understood to possess a biological surplus in excess of that imposed by medicine, this time engineered by the art of music itself, through extraordinary effort and arduous training. "A typical daily curriculum," according to Heriot, "was remarkable, not only for the amount of hard work it entailed, but also for the thoroughness and comprehensiveness" (48). Caffarelli's daily schedule, for example, consisted of eight or more hours of formal training and included practicing "passages of difficult execution"; the "study of letters," in which he practiced how to sing words so that their meaning would be brought out rather than obscured; singing in front of the mirror "to practice deportment and gesture, and to guard against ugly grimacing while singing, etc."; theoretical work; counterpoint; improvisation; playing and accompanying the harpsichord; and composition (48). While the abnormal growth of a castrato's arms and legs were the result of the redistribution of various hormones as a result of the

medical procedure to which he was subject (one consequence of which was that their bones remained abnormally 'open,' thus allowing continuous growth of these extremities), the rigorous training rituals to which castrati singers were also subject from early youth through young adulthood was the cause of the abnormal development of their rib-cage and lungs, which became wider and stronger, "giving them vocal power and exceptional breathing capacity, as well as an unusually sound grounding both in vocal technique and in musicianship" (Celletti 8):

Through the effect of the orchiectomy, the castrato singer retained the ring, the freshness, and the carrying power of the boy's voice. Among the secondary manifestations was the appearance . . . of the so-called keel chest, with expansion of the rib-cage, leaving more space for the development of the lungs. Subjected as he was to assiduous and extremely strenuous vocal exercises, the boy castrato acquired an abnormal lung capacity, which had a direct impact on his ability to hold his breath for a long time, and on the power of his tone. This exceptional mastery of breath control and breathing power, combined with his assiduous training, was responsible for the flexibility, the soft edge, the agility, the wide range, the ease of legato, and other qualities which . . . were present . . . in some castrati. (109)

A boy soprano would not choose, or be chosen, to devote himself to the profession for life without possessing extraordinary natural talent. However, talent was not nearly enough, nor was the subjection of himself to the medical procedure that would retard the development of his vocal cords and ensure that he could retain his soprano voice. He had also to be devoted to the rigors of a decades-long training regime in order to further modify the physical properties of his body and thus acquire the technical and vocal capacities with which the castrato singer came to be identified, techniques and capacities, moreover, that these singers pioneered and were alone capable of attaining. Virtuosity as we associate it with the figure of the castrato has been defined as "the outcome . . . and the search for sophisticated technical progress . . . the effort to conceive and bring into being something which goes beyond the reality of everyday life and the normal capacities of human beings" as well as "the mighty effort of imagination and technical skill" (Celletti 2, 5).

20. The exceptional physical properties of the castrato's body--from his enlarged rib cage and unusual height to his uncertain sexuality to the rise and fall of his sublime voice--have long been termed abnormal, freakish, monstrous. Such terms are not necessarily, however, merely synonymous with exceptionality as that which occasions wonder, that which stands out as extraordinary. For example, Paul Youngquist has recently identified the period of English romanticism as a moment of transition in this regard, when the idea of *monstrosity* began to be mean something quite specific, namely, the deviation from a corporeal norm. According to Youngquist, exceptional bodies could no longer be wonderful or sheerly exceptional. They became uniformly monstrous.^[10] Moreover, the cultural responses to exceptional bodies became evacuated of complexity as well. Monstrosity inspired horror--recall, for instance, Victor Frankenstein's horror upon viewing his creature: "its gigantic stature, and deformity of its aspect [was] more hideous than belongs to humanity." What had once been understood, affirmed, and even celebrated as "social exceptionality" and "prodigy" transformed into an individual instance of "physical deformity" and "pathology" that could be measured and studied as such.^[11]
21. The castrato poses a peculiar challenge to the normalizing forces at work on the body in and around the period of English romanticism as imagined by Youngquist. For, the castrato is not *found* but *made* (and self made), made to be extraordinary. The castrato singer gains recognition first not as a monster but as a young boy with a particular talent--an impressive soprano voice and a natural proclivity for the study of music--upon which he is biologically engineered precisely so that he may deviate from the norm, *become* corporeally exceptional. Furthermore, the castrato's body is not only imposed upon him

(by a medical procedure) but also self imposed (through training). His corporeal exceptionalism is the product of nature (biology) and of art (technique) that cannot be reduced to cultural or individual agency but rather indicates a peculiar combination of the two. In many ways, the castrato is the corporeal manifestation of Longinus' theory of the sublime, in which *hypsous* requires a synthesis of nature and art that cannot be reduced either to capacity or to will. Nature in this case refers to innate talents, the ability to conceive great thoughts and for powerful and inspired emotion; art refers to craft [*tekhne*], that which is not innate but rather a matter of training and technique: composition, diction, and use of rhetorical figures.

22. The castrato's exceptionalism might best be referred to the medical and aesthetic impulses of our own era, take for instance the looming prospect of genetic enhancement. We are no longer focused only on curing diseases through genetic research, and perhaps we never really were. Instead, we are reaching *beyond* health altogether. Stronger bodies and greater intelligence are our version of transforming a talented boy singer into an adult soprano virtuoso. We face similar stakes when we contemplate the idea of a genetically-enhanced athlete today (not to mention the bio-engineered athletes with whom we are by this point regularly confronted) as when we contemplate a romantic-era castrato. The operative question: what is the relationship between the (mutilated/supplemented) body and exceptionalism? art? Both examples are capable of reminding us that those forms of corporeal exceptionality sought and employed by athletes and performers, and which are condoned and encouraged by so many, confound the relationship between *natural endowment* and *will*. Ironically, this relationship seems permissible if it is hierarchically ordered--if, in other words, one term is privileged at all times above the other as a matter of form. But the commingling of the two in a non-hierarchical manner such that the two become dynamically intertwined as they do with a steroid-taking athlete or a medically-altered singer--both of whose bodies, incidentally, transform as the dual result of hormonal redistribution *and* sheer effort--is deeply troubling. As one critic puts it, "We want to believe . . . that success . . . is something we earn, not something we inherit. Natural gifts, and the admiration they inspire, embarrass the meritocratic faith; they cast doubt on the conviction that praise and rewards flow from effort alone" (Sandel 56). To stave off such embarrassment, we amplify the significance of will (art) at the expense of giftedness (nature). "No one believes that a mediocre basketball player who works and trains even harder than Michael Jordan deserves greater acclaim or a bigger contract" (56). The fact is, exceptionalism is not, properly speaking, fair.
23. One flaw of this critic's logic is to imagine that biotechnological power is new to the arena of exceptionalism (It wouldn't have been reasonable to cast a screeching falsettist in the leading role of Handel's "Rinaldo" rather than a smooth-voiced castrato merely because the former tries harder), and the other is to imagine that exceptionalism must be boiled down either to will *or* giftedness (in the critic's case, will), and this is precisely what the extreme example of the castrato can serve to remind us. The question is why, and to what extent does the disavowal of their dynamic interconnections allow us to ignore the complexities of exceptionalism? After all, the disappearance of the castrato during the period around 1800 is held up as a victory of cultural progress and continues to be a signifier of liberalism and enlightenment. Is this victory undermined by the fact that it obfuscates the status of excellence, exceptionalism, virtuosity as neither wholly natural nor wholly a matter of individual will?
24. The figure of the castrato can do more than vaguely aggrandize the sense of cultural progress in his absence. Instead this figure might be thought, theoretically, as an instance of corporealized irony: the castrato's corporeality invites us to see how incomplete our understanding of the significance of his body in fact is, even in its anecdotal or satiric forms, which we seem to miss even though we have been maniacally focused on it, and that we can perhaps acknowledge in spite of, or because of, the fact that it no longer exists as such. Once the initial connection is made, irony multiplies. The body of the castrato is exceptional in part because of its lack--it cannot reproduce. And yet it is also a profoundly virile force, an asexual auto-reproductive organism. The castrato's body keeps growing and growing. It

turns itself into more self, exhibiting a biological excess and meaninglessness that is sublime. It becomes excessively large. An adoring fan of Farinelli has written that "he had a voice proportioned to his gigantic stature." Have we been too dismissive of the positive relationship between the castrato and the leveling of hierarchies, of proto-democracy? Could it be instantiated by the image of a body whose exceptionalism is simultaneously, and in equal degrees, both lacking and supernumerary, natural and artificial, biological and artful?

25. One particular "monstrous" body has haunted romanticism for centuries in the form of Frankenstein's Creature, who is, among other things, both 'made' rather than 'born' as well as "gigantic" (Shelley 40). Unlike the figure of the castrato, however, which romanticism generally dissociates except through ideas of his purgation and absence, Frankenstein's creature is a quintessentially romantic form, not merely acknowledged but constitutive of the period. One of the most perplexing things about the Creature has always been his size. This aspect of his monstrosity is continuously contemplated and pointed out, but rarely if ever seriously questioned. Why in the world would Frankenstein decide to make his creature *gigantic*? Even the Creature himself asks the question: "my stature [was] gigantic: what did this mean?" (95). Most often, Frankenstein is taken at his word:

I began the creation of a human being. As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large. After having formed this determination, and having spent some months in successfully collecting and arranging my materials, I began. . . . A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. . . . I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay . . . I collected bones from charnel houses; and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame. . . . my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials. (40-41)

The most obvious question in this regard, however, is *why* Frankenstein would choose, without so much as a second thought, to make his creature monstrously large. For, Frankenstein associates his creation explicitly with the human here, and moreover, he fantasizes about the "happy and excellent *natures*" of this creation and his progeny, and the gratitude these creatures will bestow upon him for granting them form and life. This is not a fantasy of a monstrous creation, in spite of the fact that the question of why it isn't perpetually irritates and perplexes readers. The obvious answer to the question of why he determines to make the creature gigantic is addressed by Frankenstein himself: the "minuteness of the parts" prove a hindrance, so he opts to make a creature "of gigantic stature . . . about eight feet tall." In this regard, Youngquist has persuasively argued that Frankenstein is simply taking cues from anatomists of the period such as John Hunter, who, in order to approach the intense complexity of human parts, studied similar parts in animals, whose structures were more simple and presumably larger: "Frankenstein solves the same problem by making such parts especially huge, relying on their functional equivalence with human anatomy to yield a functionally equivalent human. . . . Frankenstein builds his monster's body in the image of a physiologically functional human being, overlooking its material singularity" (53-54). This application of modern anatomical study to Frankenstein's decision seems plausible. Yet there is a significant difference between the practices of Hunter and Frankenstein. Hunter is comparing anatomical parts of humans with animals to facilitate greater understanding of the former. Frankenstein is using these parts to piece together a human being. When we think about it in these terms, the question of how "equivalent parts" can possibly be substituted for human parts again becomes problematic. Keeping in mind that Frankenstein explicitly refers to his creation as "human," how is it possible that the creature engineered out of the parts of dead

people and slaughter-house carcasses to be eight feet in height? Even supposing their bodies are "functionally equivalent," even Frankenstein could not delude himself into imagining he was creating a human being out of cows or horses, let alone pigs and chickens, particularly an especially large-framed human. The image of such a possibility leads not so much to monstrosity but to the ridiculous.

26. One way to solve the mystery of how Frankenstein managed to piece together a gigantic proto-human frame for his creature, and this solution might be approached as a sententious thought experiment, is to imagine a return of the not yet quite repressed: the bones of a castrato singer. Romantic culture, again, liked to imagine the figure of the castrato as a thing of the past, as an absence, but as with Napoleon, the idea that castrati disappeared completely around the period of 1800 is simply wrong. It is not only the case that castrati singers performed in London during the period, but they were also infamous as an *idea*, particularly Farinelli and Caffarelli. Once this speculative light has been turned on, it becomes possible to ask how the figure of the castrato could *not* be significant to the cultural imagination of anatomical exceptionalism, or, as the case may be, monstrosity. Their gigantic, malformed, sexually ambiguous bodies, bereft of fecundity and pleasure, haunt the pages of journals and papers, dramas, poems, and drawings, most often anecdotal and satiric, but nevertheless prolific and present as idea and artifact, not to mention that they were also yet a reality on operatic stages.
27. Frankenstein's creature, pieced together from the gigantic leg, arm, hand, and rib-cage bones of castrati singers . . . Mel Brooks certainly didn't miss the irony of it all in his 1974 film *Young Frankenstein*. There we are precisely confronted with a Creature whose greatest secrets are his voice and his penis. When he finally breaks silence, he sings "Putting on the Ritz" with a highly-civilized, and unmistakably *high*, singing voice. When a woman finally manages to woo and disrobe him after a film-length series of anecdotes about what we may or may not find beneath his clothing when and if we ever arrive at this moment, she responds with a trill of excitement that can only mean one thing: gigantic! Brilliant and astute, Brooks's humor draws a clear association between the castrato singer and Frankenstein's Creature. A lover of Farinelli has written that "he had a voice proportioned to his gigantic stature." Brooks's creature taps into the anxieties, particularly of the period around 1800, that the castrato's voice and corporeality were *not* in proportion. With that silly, high-pitched, falsetto emitting from his gigantic body, Brooks's Creature sounds many things, but vocally exceptional is not one of them. Brooks remind us, despite the fact that his Creature is hardly monstrous looking (save his height—“he makes quite a spectacle towering over Dr. Frankenstein in his dapper tuxedo singing and tap-dancing "When you're blue, and you don't know where to go to . . ."), of the ways in which the castrato's corporeal exceptionalism was as veiled as much as it was conspicuous. The question of whether his genitals were mutilated or not, whether he could reproduce or not, and finally, whether he was capable of engaging in sexual activities with any pleasurable outcome to himself or not, were (and remain) constantly at issue, the body without a capacity for or a desire for sexual pleasure being, perhaps, the most monstrous idea of all for us now. Recall the Creature's mournful utterance, "I was not made for . . . pleasure" (105).
28. Indeed, from a speculative point of view, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* can be said to participate in, comment on, and effectively make *visible* the idea of the castrato singer in and for romanticism. Frankenstein himself does not view his Creature as having delivered the "torrent of light into our dark world" (40) he had hoped for when he made him. However, the fact that the Creature can figure the castrato body for us does deliver light, if not in torrents then at least in rays. Besides reminding us of the castrato's presence, the connection to Frankenstein's Creature reminds us to listen for romanticism as well as to look for it where bodies, and particularly exceptional bodies, are concerned. Once we become attuned to the idea, we become aware that sound and music are essential to Shelley's novel, which, again, is easy to overlook when we are busy looking rather than listening. Frankenstein himself sets a bad example. He looks but he does not listen upon first encountering his animated Creature. He sees his "dull eyes" (42)--"no mortal could support the horror of that countenance" (43); he sees "a

grin wrinkle his cheeks" (43); and he sees the Creature's jaws open to speak. But he doesn't listen to him--"he muttered some inarticulate sounds . . . but I did not hear" (43)--which is ironic given that he spends the rest of the night "listening attentively, catching . . . each sound" (43). While it seems at least possible to excuse Frankenstein for not being willing to hear the Creature because he is inarticulate (which, incidentally, works nicely as a satiric commentary of the language issue regarding English audiences of Italian opera that served, as we have explored, as the grounds for many a critique of the horrors of irrational excess inflicted by castrati and Italian opera generally on English listeners) and thus not meriting the listening to, this is precisely not the case during their next interaction, when Frankenstein once again has a hard time listening. The monster implores Frankenstein to listen to him more than six times during this second interaction: "I entreat you to hear me" (74); "Listen to my tale . . . hear me . . . Listen to me . . . listen to me . . . Hear my tale . . ." (75).

29. The Creature's own capacity to listen, on the other hand, is as strong as is his delight in hearing, particularly song, which is apparent from his earliest experience. Narrating the moment when he first began "to distinguish my sensations from each other," the Creature discovers sound through song, which he seems naturally to love: "I was delighted when I first discovered that a pleasant sound, which often saluted my ears, proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals . . . Sometimes I tried to imitate the pleasant songs" (77). In many ways the Creature's coming-of-age narrative (his transformation from an infant to a man in the two-year period during which he secretly inhabits the de Lacy hut) revolves entirely around his progression from "inarticulate sounds" to exceptional eloquence. In the beginning, upon attempting to imitate bird song, the Creature fails miserably: "I tried . . . but was unable . . . the uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into silence" (77). Yet, by the time Frankenstein agrees to listen to him, the Creature has acquired a striking capacity to communicate. Although in the end sound does not compete with sight here, the responses the Creature elicits from Frankenstein through his eloquent language--his articulate sounds--might even be compared to the sublime rhetoric of which Longinus writes: "I was moved. . . His words had a strange effect on me. I compassionated him, and . . . felt a wish to console him" (108). And again, upon his deathbed, remembering the Creature's sonic power, Frankenstein commands Walton to close his own ears: "He is eloquent and persuasive; and once his words had power over my heart . . . but . . . Hear him not" (154).
30. If he is able to move others through sublime rhetoric, the Creature's own sublime experiences also occur through the medium of music, both in the listening and in the watching its effect on others:

the old man . . . taking up an instrument, began to play, and to produce sounds, sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the nightingale. . . . He played a sweet and mournful air, which I perceived drew tears from the eyes of his amiable companion, of which the old man took no notice, until she sobbed audibly . . . I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature: they were a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced . . . and I withdrew from the window, unable to bear these emotions. (80)

31. When the Creature begins to recognize his corporeal exceptionalism, it is initially (and most frequently) through his size and his voice that he acknowledges it. "My person was hideous . . . my stature gigantic" (95); "my stature far exceeded their's . . . I saw and heard of none like me" (89). When the Creature turns violent, his streak of murders are centered on the throat, to which he had earlier in his life explicitly connected to the singing of birds, and with which he valued greatly ("a pleasant sound . . . proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals"): "The child struggled, and loaded me with epithets which carried despair to my heart: I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he lay dead at my feet" (105). Youngquist has argued that the Creature's first murder was the result of vision, of his seeing the portrait of Frankenstein's beautiful mother around William's neck, reminding him of his aberrance, his monstrosity: "A feminized image of the proper body provokes the

monster to murder little William, an image that deploys a particular ideology of gender to secure the devaluation of defiant flesh. The normative force of the proper lady guarantees the monster's exclusion from domestic affection" (55). The sound of the passage tells another story, however. The murder in fact takes place prior to the Creature's noticing the portrait of Mrs. Frankenstein. It is the Creature's appeal for William to *listen* to him and William's refusal to do so that causes him to become violent: "As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes, and uttered a shrill scream . . . 'Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to hurt you; *listen to me*.' . . . The child still struggled, and loaded with epithets which carried despair to my heart: I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a moment he laid dead at my feet" (105). The Creature has always been known as a strangler. But in this first instance, he grasps the throat of his future victim not to strangle him, but to silence him, one can only guess in an effort, once again, to be heard. It might even be said that this was not even murder but rather a mistake, a case of his great hands around the child's throat being stronger than he imagined or could know. Subsequently, he is not in the first instance a murderer. However, one might read his future stranglings, which are properly speaking murders (intentional killings) as memorializations of this initial traumatic moment with William of not being heard, of attempting to make himself be heard, and of the death of his desired interlocutor being the result of that effort. He proves he does not forget the relationships between sound, sorrow, and death when he exclaims to Frankenstein, upon committing the murder of his best friend, "Think ye that the groans of Clerval were music to my ears?" (162). Finally, the Creature's effect on Frankenstein, after his string of murders have begun, continues to be through the medium of sound, even, one could say, a monstrous form of music. Upon threatening Frankenstein ("I will be with you on your wedding day") after he destroys the Creature's future mate and then quitting him abruptly, Frankenstein exclaims, "All again was silent; but his words rung in my ears" (125).

32. Perhaps it is coincidental that the one passage from Wordsworth quoted in Shelley's novel (an invocation of Henry Clerval's natural goodness by Frankenstein on recollecting his death) is that passage from "Tintern Abbey" which contemplates nature through sound: "The sounding cataracts / Haunted *him* [sic] like a passion" (116). But it is worthwhile to contemplate the fact that Wordsworth's image of the cataracts, meant to convey the excesses of visual pleasure--"An appetite; a feeling, and a love, / That had no need of a remoter charm, / By thought supplied, or any interest / Unborrowed from the eye" (81-84)--is an image of sound. Our greater attention to the sound of romanticism perhaps enables us to read Wordsworth with a fresh sense for his sound. Returning to the great Ode, we recall that other image of a cataracts, "blow[ing] their trumpets from the steep." We recall that Wordsworth's sense of poetically-generated pleasure depends on its being "natural utterance" rather than "tricked out" or "elevated" rhetorical techniques. It is so tempting to interpret this charge as not only an abjuration of figurative language, "the enchanted regions of simile, metaphor, allegory and description" (Baillie 362), but also as an explicit anxiety over the relationship between sound and image. The question finally at hand is, does anxiety in this regard produce, or become synonymous with, monstrosity. We might think in particular about the idea of the monstrous image as we return to the indelicately upright stand of elm trees in relation to the music of the wind through them, or beyond Wordsworth to the spectacle of the castrato in relation to his song, or finally to the figure of the Creature attempting to imitate the sound of a bird. In key moments when sound becomes most pronounced in Wordsworth's imagery, a sonic counter-aesthetic might be said to emerge within the context of his own poetics. When the narrator of the "Ode" exclaims, "I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!," he is responding to a pronouncedly *unnatural* utterance, should we hold it to the tenets of the Preface. What he hears, what he responds to with such joy, is the cataracts, which "blow their trumpets from the steep." Again, we might be tempted to call Wordsworth on this trick and denounce these trumpeting cataracts as a monstrous image, just as anti-operatic discourse conceived of the castrato as a monster at times too horrifying to describe except as disembodied sound, and just as Frankenstein's Creature has become synonymous with monstrosity. But this would be an oversight that the image itself is equipped to address. It seems to me that rather than derogating sound in favor of image because of the former's

inability to transcend the sensual world--its paucity of vocabulary of the transcendent--Wordsworth opens us up to a poetics that relies upon this seeming weakness of the aural realm, turning it into a significant strength. Wordsworth's sense of sound, and coextensively the sense of sound offered by the figure of the romantic-era castrato, engenders rather than suppresses our capacity and our desire to listen to, as well as for, exceptions. With its lingering associations to castrati singers and trumpet players and stands of elm trees, such listening can provoke the idea that exceptions, like exceptionalism, will always be composed of unequal parts of nature and art, but need not be regarded as monstrous. Finally, through their juxtaposition, we might begin to read both the figure of the castrato and Frankenstein's Creature as spokespeople of utopian humanity rather than as degenerate monsters. They sound "higher" because they literally *are* higher--higher here approximating an aesthetic, a version of the sublime even, that is constitutively horizontal rather than vertical, acknowledging art and nature as dynamic rather than ordered elements of virtuosity. Together, trumpets, Wordsworth's trees, the castrato, and the Creature intervene in received notions of the relationship between Augustan and romantic conceptions of exceptionalism. They give us an imagination for the ways in which height (Longinian *hypsous*) is not necessarily the measure of, and in some cases clearly rejects, hierarchy.

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¹ These lines are quoted from John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, lines 94-96.

² In his study entitled *The World of the Castrati* (1996), Patrick Barbier describes this frenzy, arguing that it was particularly rampant in female listeners: "ladies displayed boundless transports of delight: they threw tributes on to the stage, laurel wreaths, couplets or passionate sonnets, and went nowhere without a portrait of their favorite castrato over their hearts" (137). He also recounts a famous incident relating to Farinelli, in which a female audience member spontaneously cried out during a performance, "One God, one Farinelli!" (183).

³ Giovanni-Battista Mancini (1714-1800), a castrato soprano contemporary with Farinelli, was also the founder of a Bolognese singing school based on the precepts of his teacher, Pistocchi. In 1774, Mancini published an influential treatise on vocal training entitled *Pensieri e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato*, which was revised in 1777. (*Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing*. Trans. Pietro Buzzzi. Boston: Gorham, 1912. Compared, trans., and ed. By Edward Foreman. Champaign IL: Pro Musica, 1967.)

⁴ According to Angus Heriot, "one Spanish singer in the papal chapel, Padre Soto, first heard of in 1562, is referred to by Della Valle as one of the earliest of the castrati, but appears in the Vatican records as a falsettist, and another singer, Giacomo Spagnoletto (engaged in 1588), is in a similar position: but the first admitted castrati at Rome were Pietro Paolo Folignato and Girolamo Rossini, who appear in the books for 1599 (not 1601 as Burney has it)" (12). Pope Clement VIII, Heriot continues, was much impressed with these castrati singers; once sanctioned by the highest authority in Christendom, castrati rapidly became more numerous.

⁵ It is often supposed that the rise of castrati in Italy was caused by the rise of opera. According to John Rosselli, however, castrati were not so much caused by opera as coincidental with it, nor did the taste for the castrato's voice immediately dominate the new form. According to Rosselli, "Chronology, if anything, might suggest that the popular taste for the castrato voice reflected in the singers chosen for opera was largely created by church practice. . . . A castrato sang the prologue and two female parts in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* at Mantua in 1607, but the lead part was sung by a tenor. Several decades were to go by before the custom became established of having a castrato singing the protagonist's part" (147).

⁶ Castrati singers were heard in England as early as the last third of the seventeenth century but were confined at that time to private settings and did not seem at first to meet with great enthusiasm. Samuel Pepys, for instance, records having seen two Italian castrati perform at a party given by Lord Bruncker, but without much interest in 1667. He writes, "Nor do I dote on the Eunuchs; they sing endedd pretty high and have a mellow kind of sound . . . their motions, and risings and fallings, though it may be pleasing to an Italian or one that understands the tongue, yet to me it did not . . ." (Barbier 180). Interestingly, Londoner John Evelyn reported to have heard the castrato Siface in 1687 in Pepys's own drawing room, which leaves one to speculate whether Pepys altered his opinion of the singers. It wasn't until 1707 that the first castrato sang in public (Valentino Urbani at Drury Lane Theater), followed closely by the acclaimed Nicolino at the Queen's Theater in 1708, which marks the English acceptance of the castrato.

⁷ According to Christian Gaumy, the last documented performance of a castrato in London was that of Paolo Pergetti in 1844, though according to Angus Heriot, it had been so long since London audiences had seen a castrato by that point (the last had been Velutti in 1829) that "by then he must have been almost a freak, a kind of abominable snowman or woolly mammoth" (21).

⁸ Up until recently, according to James R. Oestreich, the New York City Opera produced only one noted Handel opera ("Guilio Cesare" in 1966). In recent years, it has presented "Agrippina," "Ariodante," "Flavio," "Partenope," "Rinaldo," "Serse," and "Alcina," among others. Moreover, the "Handel boom" extends far beyond New York, including a great number of new recordings of Handel operas. One example among many are the two recent recordings of "Rinaldo," one conducted by Christopher Hogwood (sung by Vivica Genaux, a mezzo-soprano) and the other by René Jacobs (sung by countertenor David Daniels). There have also been a slough of recordings of music written for the castrato singer, including but not limited to Handel, including *Music from the Age of the Castrato*, *Handel Arias for Castrato*, *Castrato Arias and Motets*, *Arias for Farinelli*, *Castrato Voice and the First Divas*, and *Art of the Castrato*, as well as recordings by such countertenors as David Daniels and Daniel Taylor and female sopranists Ewa Podles and Stephanie Blythe. Finally, along with his film about the life of Farinelli (1705-1782), Gerard Corbiau released a sound track (Music Direction by Christophe Roussett) that includes the representation of the standoff between Farinelli and the trumpeter. To approximate the voice of the famous castrato, Corbiau combined the voices of soprano Ewa Mallas-Godlewska and countertenor Derek Lee, digitally remastering recordings of both voices singing the same music to create what Naomi André has termed "a new hybrid voice."

⁹ Useful sources to consider regarding dates and particular castrati performers of Italian opera in London include Frederick C. Petty's *Italian Opera in London 1760-1800* (1972, 1980); Angus Heriot's *The Castrati in Opera* (1975); Naomi André's *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman*; and the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*.

¹⁰ Youngquist's work on monstrosity and romanticism is a recent contribution to a longstanding critical conversation on and interest in the idea of monstrosity, including such as Georges Canguilhem, Felicity Nussbaum, Barbara Johnson, Alan Rauch, Peter Brooks, and others.

¹¹ Two of the "monstrous bodies" Youngquist analyzes are Caroline Crachami, a Sicilian dwarf, and Charles Byrne, an Irish giant, both of whom were haunted during their lifetimes and subsequently "acquired" for anatomical research by the anatomist and physician John Hunter upon their deaths.

Opera and Romanticism

"An assiduous frequenter of the Italian opera": Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and the *opera buffa*

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While critics and reviewers of the past two hundred years have struggled to find a suitable analogy for 'Prometheus Unbound' in literature, the world of music provides a clear parallel to Shelley's lyrical drama form Italian 'opera buffa' that so delighted poet and his friends during London seasons 1817-1818. This essay argues organization discourse specific dramatic arrangement have strong affinities with operas day, particularly works Mozart Rossini. appears *Opera Romanticism*, volume *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University Maryland.

1. By the time he came to add act IV to the original three acts of *Prometheus Unbound* in late 1819, Percy Bysshe Shelley had amassed a diverse set of musical experiences, ranging from the first London performance of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* in March of 1818 to the grand festivities or *funzioni* in Rome during Easter week in 1819.^[1] From manuscript evidence, it is not clear what induced Shelley to add a highly lyrical fourth act as well as several lyric insertions to act II of *Prometheus Unbound*. Nevertheless, it seems probable that studying the dramas of Calderón with Maria Gisborne combined with the highly musical atmosphere of Livorno encouraged Shelley to include further lyrical elements in his drama. In a letter to his friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg on 25 July 1819, Shelley writes:

Let me recommend you who know Spanish to read some plays of their great dramatic genius Calderón. . . . We have a house very near the Gisbornes, and it is from Mrs. Gisborne that I learnt Spanish enough to read these plays. . . . We see her every evening. . . . I have a little room here like Scythrop's tower, at the top of the house, commanding a view of the sea and the Apennines, and the plains between them. The vine-dressers are singing all day *mi rivedrai, ti revedrò*, but by no means in an operatic style. . . (*PSL*, II, 105).

Shelley's reference to peasants singing the refrain of "Di tanti palpiti," arguably the most famous aria from Rossini's *Tancredi*, reveals both the extent of the poet's acquaintance with music at this time as well as the widespread popularity of opera and Rossini in Italy. As the sister-in-law of the composer and pianist Muzio Clementi, Mrs. Gisborne's own musical talents and connections were also considerable. In this regard, it seems unlikely that Shelley could have read Calderón with her without being made aware of the musical nature of many of the Spanish poet's works, several of which are classified as semi-operas, including his version of the Prometheus myth, *La estatua de Prometeo*.^[2]

2. While critics and reviewers of the past two hundred years have struggled to find a suitable analogy for *Prometheus Unbound* in literature, it seems possible that Shelley had non-literary models in mind when he was writing what he described to Thomas Love Peacock as "a lyric & classical drama" (*PSL*, II, 43). Indeed, the world of music provides a clear parallel to Shelley's lyrical drama in the form of the Italian *opera buffa* that so delighted the poet and his friends during the London seasons in 1817 and 1818. Ronald Tetreault remarks that *Prometheus Unbound* is a "lyrical drama whose form derives ultimately from the union of poetry and music in Greek tragedy, but whose closest contemporary equivalent was the opera, especially the musical comedy of Mozart" (145). Taking Tetreault's observation one step further, I would like to argue that the organization of discourse and the specific dramatic arrangement of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* have strong affinities with the Italian operas of his day, particularly

the works of Mozart and Rossini.

II.

3. In contrast to the more through-composed structure of the later nineteenth-century Romantic operas of Verdi and Wagner, yet more continuous in nature than Baroque *opera seria*, the *opera buffa* of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century are composed of numbers (arias, duets, ensembles, etc.), which are linked together by sections of sung dialogue. Loosely based on the configuration of dialogue and chorus in Greek tragedy, the main components of the Italian opera are "Recitative, by which the business of action of the Opera, the principal thing in all dramatic performances, is carried on, and . . . *Airs or Songs*, by which the sentiments and passions of the *Dramatis Personae* are expressed" (Brown, Preface). Although in his *Letters on the Italian Opera* (1789) John Brown lists seven types of aria,^[3] most arias of this period possess the same three-part *da capo* format: first section, second section, first section repeated. While this format is generally non-strophic, the ternary structure of aria makes two or three stanza poems highly suitable for musical adaptation. In Shelley's day, arias provided the main method through which singers demonstrated their talent, and indeed, were often the only parts of an opera to which most of the audience paid attention. During this time, recitative arguably was of far less performative import than aria; but, as the principle method through which action occurred or was related in the Italian opera, recitative nonetheless formed an essential element. Indeed, Leigh Hunt, like Joseph Addison,^[4] finds recitative "more natural, in an Opera, than common speech" because, in accordance with the supposed common origin of speech and song, "it is more natural that [beings in an Opera] should sing always, that that they should burst out into a song occasionally" (Fenner, *Leigh Hunt and Opera Criticism*, 135). In his *Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, A.W. Schlegel writes that the "learned and artificial modulation" of recitative is less "measured" than the declamation of Greek tragedy, to which it is often compared (Schlegel, I, 69-70). Recitative comes in two main forms, *semplice* or *secco*, which comprises most of the dialogue, and *accompagnato* or *obbligato*, which is reserved for passages requiring particular dramatic emphasis, though fully spoken parts (*parlante*), were not uncommon, particularly in Mozart.
4. Similar to the interaction between recitative and aria in Italian opera, the first two acts of *Prometheus Unbound* alternate between straight, unrhymed blank verse passages and rhymed, or at least rhythmical, lyric insertions that are typographically and metrically set apart from the surrounding blank verse. Although many other plays, including Byron's *Manfred* and Goethe's *Faust*, similarly separate sung portions from the surrounding dialogue, few dramas outside of opera so fully—and successfully, one might add—integrate lyrical and discursive language together into a comprehensive formula to the effect that Shelley does in his lyrical drama. The editors of the recent Longman edition of Shelley's poetry note: "[t]his alternation of blank verse with complex lyric passages shadows the dramatic device of an alternation between the relatively static dramatic exchanges, and choric elements, which Shelley adapts from Greek tragic drama" (*TPS*, II, 470). Yet, as Havergal Brian no doubt realized in his now lost setting of acts I and II,^[5] the alternating pattern of discursive and lyrical elements in the first half of Shelley's drama adapts well into operatic form, and indeed corresponds to it in many ways. Acts III and IV, however, prove more difficult, the latter for the profusion of its lyrical forms, the former for the complete absence of them. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, the four acts of *Prometheus Unbound* are structurally coherent: acts I and II consist of a fairly regular alternation between discursive and lyrical language; act III, which is almost fully discursive, balances out act IV, which is almost entirely lyrical. Also, the middle two acts are subdivided into five and four scenes, respectively; whereas, no scene divisions interrupt the dramatic flow of acts I and IV. In this four act organization, Asia's meeting with Demogorgon in the fourth scene of act II stands directly at the structural and ideological center of the work.
5. From the very beginning of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley emphasizes the dramatic force—yet radical

limitations—of language, particularly discursive language, and its representational powers. Realizing the conceptual inadequacy of language to relate emotions and, to some extent, to present the story he is attempting to tell, Shelley utilizes music to deepen characterization, and to control dramatic time through "contrast, repetition, balance, control of pace, and multiple relations among aural elements" (Corse 15). In this way, music in *Prometheus Unbound* has three structural functions: as a stage device, as an internal dramatic catalyst, and as simple emotional expression in the form of song itself.

6. The action of act I revolves around a figuratively de-voiced and thus disempowered Prometheus pitted against his own inability to recall and thereby revoke his curse. Prometheus's opening speech sets the tone for a series of lyric episodes and dramatic exchanges which reverse the traditional dramatic functions of song and dialogue. Dramatically speaking, very little changes in the course of act I, with Prometheus remaining bound to the precipice at the act's end. However, instead of being placed on a stage of physical action, everything occurs on the figurative stage of the mind, specifically that of Prometheus. Appropriate to a scene full of dissonance, for the majority of act I, Shelley's poetic form inverts the operatic functions of recitative and aria: much of the blank verse is static and emotive, whereas most of the lyrical passages narratively and structurally drive the "business of action," which is Prometheus's mental transformation to a fully free and liberated mind, foretelling the end of Jupiter's reign of tyranny. Ronald Tetreault compares the structure of Prometheus's opening speech to "the large-scale ternary design of the traditional aria," observing "sustained monologues are common on the operatic stage, where music encourages and supports the total expression of the inner being" (149). Although critics often cite the sustained monologues of Romantic drama as evidence of its untheatricality, Stuart Curran comments: "the great age of the London theater, from Garrick to Kean, treated such speeches as we do arias in opera" ("Shelleyan Drama" 72). While Prometheus's opening lines demonstrate a strong declamatory impulse, the emotional outpourings of the Titan's blank verse nevertheless function less like its operatic equivalent, recitative, and more like aria. The focus of Prometheus's discourse is primarily mentalistic and emotional, whereas the dialogue of Ione and Panthea, who speak almost exclusively throughout act I in the lyrical language of rhyme, seems to fulfill the function of recitative.
7. The climax of this inversion between the discursive and the lyrical occurs during the episode with Mercury and the antiphonal chorus of Furies. Shelley deliberately seems to place this part immediately after the lyrical passage that includes the Phantasm of Jupiter's repetition of the curse, a speech that, as I will discuss, in a staging would almost necessitate the dramatic emphasis of *recitativo obbligato*. It is important to note that Prometheus's renunciation of the curse occurs in lyrical form, not blank verse. Indeed, his response maintains the stanzaic form of the curse itself, as does the Earth's corresponding lament that his "defence lies fallen and vanquishèd"(I, 311).^[6] Without a break in the lyrical passage, though no longer following the ten-line format of the curse, after two Echoes repeat the last phrase of the Earth's lament, Ione and Panthea speak their last sets of lyrical verse for over three hundred lines when they narrate the arrival of Mercury and the Furies. Panthea's final rhymed^[7] statement that Prometheus "looks as ever, firm, not proud" in the face of these new torments immediately makes way for a jarring switch to blank verse at the voice of the First Fury who proclaims: "Ha! I scent life!"(I, 337). Throughout the subsequent dialogue between Mercury, Prometheus and the Furies, while Ione and Panthea ostensibly maintain their narrative function, the chaotic Furies preempt the Oceanides of their linguistic vehicle: song. Although the Furies' torments are ultimately futile, for a short while discord and dissonance rule the scene. The Furies, in their raucousness, subvert the dynamics of normal choric oration through taunting Prometheus with a revisionist history of perverted and horrifying images from the past, present and future (I, 539-77). Whereas the Furies' verse maintains a regular rhyme scheme and forms a coherent antiphonal structure of response and chorus, the mocking tone of their words moves their chorus away from the emotiveness of aria into the narrative realm of fiction that in the *opera buffa* is largely the domain of recitative.

8. In contrast to the chorus of the Furies, the remaining lyrical passages of act I, which comprise the sextet of "subtle and fair" Spirits who come to comfort Prometheus, seem to restore the normal dynamics of narrative and song to the drama. After the Furies disappear, Prometheus speaks of the mental anguish of the Furies' tortures, and warns the Oceanides of the potential misleadingness of language and the visual imagination, observing, "[t]here are two woes:/ To speak, and to behold"(I, 656-7). With the representational powers of language under question, it seems logical that the Earth should choose music as the vehicle to comfort Prometheus. Structurally and symbolically, the combination of the Furies' songs immediately followed by the sweet but sad sextet of Spirits provides balance and resolution to the end of act I. That is, to take Shelley's comments on John Taylor Coleridge's review of *The Revolt of Islam* out of context, the congregation of voices at the end of act I, as a precursor to the universal symphony of act IV, functions like a smaller version of a concerted finale in an *opera buffa* "when that tremendous concordant discord sets up from the orchestra, and everybody talks and sings at once" (Letter to Charles Ollier, PSL, II, 128). Although this device was a dying tradition by the early nineteenth century, Shelley was exposed to the concerted finale through Mozart, who made extensive use of it, especially at the end of acts II and IV of *Le nozze di Figaro* and the end of act I of *Don Giovanni*.^[8] Although in Mozart's operas, this type of mechanism involves a rapid succession of voices interspersed with choric elements, the segmental structure of the concerted finale makes the distinction between individual voices readily apparent to the audience (Robinson 10-11). Shelley's structuring of the Furies' lyrical interlude and the songs of the Spirits seems to reflect this type of organization through the mixture of individually sung verses and alternating chorus. Returning the function of describing emotions to the aria, the combination of harmonious voices in the Spirits' chorus and their individual verses neatly sum up the main themes of act I while prefiguring the music of act II that draws Asia and Panthea towards the cave of Demogorgon. Reminiscent of the supernatural beings under the control of Manfred in Byron's play of that name, Shelley's "sweet but sad" Spirits sing—in turn and then in chorus—of the same evil in the world that the Furies celebrate, yet the Spirits mourn it.^[9] Through this acknowledgment, the Spirits move the drama forward with their hopeful visions of the future. All of act I, then, concerns the cyclicity of time through the acts of recalling, revoicing, and retelling. Thus, while act I superficially seems the most like Greek tragedy with its alternating choruses and dialogue, its emphasis on mental action and its unique lyrical structure more closely resemble the means and composition of late eighteenth century *opera buffa*.
9. In act II, Shelley continues—and indeed amplifies—this operatic alternation between dialogue and lyric that dominates act I. Although subdivided into scenes like act III, act II parallels the dramatic format of act I, beginning with Asia's opening speech through her dialogue with Demogorgon to end with her highly operatic lyrical exchange with Prometheus in the guise of a "Voice (in the air, singing)." Yet, while the process of Asia's mental transformation mirrors that of Prometheus, there is a relatively significant amount of dramatic action during the course of the second act, a fact which reveals that the process of Prometheus' liberation has been set into motion, even though his unbinding does not occur until act III. As a result, Shelley turns to actual music in act II in order to not only set the scene, but also to explain the meaning of the text and thus to establish dramatic action. Here, the unique relationship between words and music in opera provides useful dramatic comparison because "[p]erhaps the single most powerful resource of opera as a dramatic form is its capacity to use musical means not only to advance the action in time, but to deepen it" (Williams). For example, in the fifth scene of act II, Shelley utilizes the expressiveness of music to counterbalance and emphasize the narrative weight of Asia's pivotal encounter with Demogorgon in scene four. Although Asia, like Prometheus, speaks mainly in blank verse, Shelley's consistent connection of Asia with images of music, and in turn, with love, prepares the reader for her aria-like lyrical discourse with the spirit of Prometheus at the end of the fifth scene. Suspending the action at its highest point of dramatic tension, Asia's love song becomes a form of music itself as it depicts the sensual immediacy of her love and spiritual blending with Prometheus. In their duet, the songs of Asia and Prometheus in combination symbolize their status as a spiritual whole, a lyrical microcosm of the universal symphony of act IV.

Stuart Curran observes: "The entire act is epitomized by Asia's song about singing, a lyrical contemplation of the nature of lyricism, endlessly creative, spontaneous, timeless, the type of paradise. . ." ("Poetic Form" 201). Through this, Shelley seems to borrow from *opera buffa* the function of aria to convey emotions, utilizing music as pure emotional effusion but also as a more effective means through which to express his metaphysical ideas of time and the universe. Perceiving the representational limits of language, Shelley makes use of music as a structural tool to expand the expressive capacity of language in poetry. Joseph Kerman writes: "in spite of all the flexibility and clarity of poetry, even the most passionate of speeches exists on a level of emotional reserve that music automatically passes. Music can be immediate and simple in the presentation of emotional status or shades. In an opera, people can give themselves over to sensibility; in a play nobody ever quite stops thinking. . ." (Kerman 6).

10. Throughout acts I and II, Shelley's use of lyrical and discursive elements thus exposes the tenuous balance between dialogue and song within *Prometheus Unbound*, revealing a fundamental tension between words and music that his drama shares with the Italian opera of his time (Conrad 4). Lyrical parts provide Shelley with a unique, almost modernist, method through which to play with narrative perspective and control dramatic timing. Shelley's careful organization of lyrical insertions in these first two acts among elements of blank verse emphasizes music's intimate relation to language and poetry, and, in the realm of his play, music's potential power to affect and indeed direct the soul towards its destiny.

III.

11. More explicit operatic elements come into play in the later acts of *Prometheus Unbound*. By act III of Shelley's mental drama, music moves out of the realm of the drama, and indeed of the theater itself, into the larger external world. In act III, music shifts from being a mere dramatic catalyst or atmospheric ornament to be the literal mode through which change and action occurs. To call attention to the universal transformation at work, Shelley keeps the language of this act entirely discursive. In keeping with this alteration in the depiction of music, I will move my analysis up a level to consider thematic and stylistic correspondences between the *opera buffa* and elements of act III and of Shelley's lyrical drama as a whole. Despite the contention of an entry in a recent edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* that the utilization of music in Romantic poetry has little or nothing in common with the "logical, witty" music being written by the composers of their day, such as Mozart, Haydn and Rossini, I argue that the aesthetics and structure of Romantic drama are more closely related to the works of their musical contemporaries than critics generally allow (Winn 805). Although choice of subject matter and mode of dramatization greatly differs from work to work, dramas like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, Byron's *Don Juan* and the *opera buffa* of Mozart, particularly *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, share a similar aesthetic through their methods of characterization, their ironic presentation of the oppressiveness of tyrannical social systems, and their use of multiple genres to add narrative complexity.
12. At the height of its popularity in England in 1817 to 1818, the Italian *opera buffa* offered audiences a different kind of dramatic experience than anything else found in the London theaters, adding stress to crisis for both legitimate and non-legitimate playhouses. The lack of successful native-born British playwrights, especially after the death of Sheridan in July of 1817, had already forced managers to reintroduce old favorites instead of new plays. These often included Shakespeare, a straightforward Sheridanian comedy of manners like *School for Scandal* (1777), which Shelley disliked (Peacock 45), or one of the gothic German tragedies, like Schiller's *Die Räuber* (1781), which Coleridge reviled and Wordsworth called "sickly and stupid" (249). In the rare case of a new hit, a theater would stage repeat performances of the same play for many nights running. It was the age of the great actors, like Kean, Garrick and Siddons, and for the operatic stage, of Catalani, Ambrogetti, Naldi and Fodor. Of the few

British writers whose plays made it to the stage, the works of Byron, Coleridge and Maturin enjoyed some degree of success, though reviews were mixed concerning their dramatic merits. Calling Coleridge and Maturin "the most ambitious writers of the modern romantic drama," William Hazlitt comments that in *Remorse*, "Coleridge's metaphysics are lost in moonshine," while in Maturin's *Bertram* and *Don Manuel*, "the genius of poetry crowned with faded flowers, and seated on the top of some high Gothic battlement, in vain breathes its votive accents amidst the sighing of the forest gale and the vespers of midnight monks" ("The Conquest of Taranto," *CWWH*). Although he deplores the atmosphere of the opera as fake and elitist and considers it linguistically and musically inaccessible to the average listener, Hazlitt celebrates the beauties of Mozart's operas, remarking, "[his] music should seem to come from the air, and return to it" ("The Italian Opera," *CWWH*). However, for Hunt, Peacock and Shelley, like Augustus Schlegel before them, it is the very refinement and artificiality of the Italian opera that makes it such an attractive spectacle. Schlegel writes:

The fantastic magic of the opera consists altogether in the luxurious competition of the different means, and in the perplexity of an overpowering superfluity. . . . This fairy world is not peopled by real men, but by a singular kind of singing creatures. Neither is it any disadvantage to us that the opera is conveyed in a language which is not generally understood; the text is altogether lost in the music, and the language the most harmonious and musical. . . (I, 69-79).

The fact that only a select part of the audience held this view of the opera did nothing to destroy its popularity, and indeed, served to bolster its reputation amongst the aristocracy. Theodore Fenner notes that between 1816 and 1818, performances of Mozart made up well over fifty-percent of all performances at the King's Theatre ("Opera in London," 140). In the early nineteenth century, to watch an Italian opera thus "was to be immersed in a world of artifice, a town pleasure as opposed to a country pursuit. On the operatic stage, painting, music, and poetry came together with architecture, sculpture, and the dance in a sublime interfusion of the abstract and plastic arts" (Tetreault 146).

13. In this world of artifice, the comic operas of Mozart and Rossini play upon the simple human divisions of class and gender, presenting a highly stylized atmosphere wherein wit and intelligence rule and the good always win. Less straightforward than the comedy of manners in which characters generally can be classified as either good or evil, the *opera buffa* or *dramma giocoso* contains three types of characters of varying moral tendencies: *parti serie* or "serious" characters, usually of the upper class, who display "qualities like earnestness, courage, steadfastness, sensitive and passionate feelings concerning love and honour[;]" *parti buffe* or "comic" characters, often from the lower class, who demonstrate "inconstancy, cowardice, coarse feelings, deviousness and/or servility[;]" and one or two *mezzi caratteri*, or "middle" characters, who possess "either no facets of personality that identified them as serious or comic or else facets of both" (Robinson 9). While these divisions of character can be found in literature, in opera the music adds dimension and depth to language, establishing a method of characterization that is more stylistically complex than spoken drama. In *opera buffa*, perhaps not surprisingly, it is the *mezzi caratteri* whom audiences and critics find intriguing, the most famous example being *il dissoluto*, Mozart's Don Giovanni. A character whom critics have likened to figures ranging from Milton's Satan to Hamlet, the aristocratic, dissipated Don Giovanni is morally ambiguous and chameleon-like, able to mingle equally with upper and lower classes, altering his attitude depending upon the company he is with. As Leporello tells Elvira in his aria "Madamina, il catalogo e questo," Giovanni is a true democrat, wooing and seducing women of all classes, shapes and sizes. While Byron's poem *Don Juan* presents a youthful, merry Juan at the height of his profligacy, Da Ponte's story to Mozart's music details the events leading up to Giovanni's death, as he willingly goes to hell, refusing to repent for his crimes, including his seductions and the murder of the Commendatore. Despite his licentiousness, Don Giovanni is a well-educated man of the Enlightenment, an egotistical hedonist yet a skeptic, who fervently believes things are as he can

perceive within the reach of his senses, a trait that fuels his lack of remorse towards any of his evil deeds.

14. Many critics have compared the character of Don Giovanni to Prometheus, who also suffers because he refuses to give into a higher power. As Stuart Curran has argued, the Titan Prometheus, depicted in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Vincetus*, is a particularly pervasive political icon for the Romantic period, representing the ultimate triumph of liberty through steadfastness and courage against the evils of a tyrannical regime (Curran, "The Political Prometheus," 260-284). Goethe, Byron, Shelley, and other artists such as Salvatore Viganò and Beethoven all wrote or composed significant works on the subject. In a letter to Murray in 1816, Byron notes the significant impact of the Titan upon *Manfred* and his other works: "The Prometheus if not exactly in my plan has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive its influence over all or anything that I have written" (Letter to John Murray, *BLJ*, IV, 174, n.1). While seemingly a large conceptual jump, Coleridge points out in chapter 23 of *Biographia Literaria* that the figure of Prometheus in chains and the unruelful Don Giovanni are similarly unyielding and noble in the face of torment. Commenting on the final scene of Shadwell's Jacobean drama *The Libertine* (1676), Coleridge writes: "[w]ho also can deny a portion of sublimity to the tremendous consistency with which he stands out the last fearful trial, like a second Prometheus?" (II, 219) Although Coleridge is speaking of Aeschylus's drama, it is nearly impossible to read excerpts from Shadwell's play of Don John (Giovanni), which is based upon the same sources in Tirso and Molière as Da Ponte's libretto, and not think of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. Like other dramas of the seventeenth century, Shadwell's drama bears much resemblance to the masques of Ben Jonson, and in this capacity contains many musical elements, including a dancing chorus of devils who sing in a verse structure similar to that of Shelley's *Furies*: "Let 'em come, let 'em come./ To an eternal dreadful doom./ Let 'em come, let 'em come."
15. Yet, it is Mozart's operatic treatment of the character of Don Giovanni which more closely registers with Shelley's Prometheus and, also, his mirror opposite, Jupiter, especially in the latter's descent into Hell at the beginning of act III. Like Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* includes characters of differing depth and moral inclination that fit well into the comic formula of the *opera buffa*. Asia, Panthea, Ione, and the unearthly Spirits and Hours strewn throughout the drama clearly are "serious" characters representing the affirmative forces of love and hope, whereas the Furies, as the representatives of evil and tyranny, are "comic" figures. However, the characters of Prometheus, Jupiter, and Demogorgon are more dramatically complex and ambiguous: in their doubling of each other, they qualify more definitively as *mezzi caratteri* like Don Giovanni than any of the more serious or comic characters that surround them. For instance, Jupiter's final speech in act III, scene i, which relates his descent into the abyss with Demogorgon, mimics the progression of Prometheus' dialogue throughout act I. With his cries "Ai! Ai!/ . . . I sink . . . /Dizzily down—ever, forever, down," a disempowered Jupiter is cast down from his throne, the subject rather than the tyrant of fate embodied in the figure of Demogorgon or "Eternity" (III, i, 79-83;52). Throughout Jupiter's dialogue, Shelley continues to make use of the volcanic imagery associated throughout act II with Demogorgon and revolutionary change. Although the scene is serious, Shelley's presentation of Jupiter's descent is ironic, further revealing Prometheus and Jupiter as essentially opposite versions of the same character. Stuart Curran calls Jupiter's dialogue "the stuff of grand heroic drama, full of pomp and posture, whose false style betrays the true nature of the despot. . . . It is the fall of tragedy itself" (Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, 201). Indeed, in the face of his punishment, Jupiter, the tyrant, suddenly becomes a slave, appealing for mercy from Prometheus, who, at this point, still remains enchained in the Caucasus. Once he realizes that mercy is impossible, Jupiter, like Prometheus, is ultimately noble, resolving himself to his fate, even as he is slowly swallowed up by flame and smoke.
16. Both the tone and the imagery of Shelley's depiction of Jupiter's fall from power are reminiscent of Don Giovanni's descent into Hell in the penultimate scene of Mozart's opera. In this scene, Don

Giovanni, refusing to repent for his crimes, willingly accompanies the Ghost-Statue of the Commendatore to Hell:

(Scene 17. *Don Giovanni, Leporello and the statue of the Commendatore; then off-stage chorus. Don Giovanni returns followed by the Commendatore.*)

Commendatore

. . . So answer me—will you dine
With me, in your turn?

. . . Rispondimi: verrai.
Tu a cenar meco?

Leporello

(from a distance, trembling, to the Commendatore)

Oh no!

Oibó!

Too busy – please excuse him.

Tempo no ha. . . scusate.

Don Giovanni

And why should I refuse him?
For fear I do not know.

A torto di viltate
Tacciato mai saró!

. . .

No man shall call me coward,
I have resolved: I'll go!

Ho fermo il core in petto,
No[n] ho timor: verró!

. . .

...I despise repentance.
Off with you! Leave my sight!

No, no, ch'io non mi pento:
Vanne lontan da me!

. . .

Commendatore

Now dawns your endless night!

Ah, tempo più non v'è!

(Fire and earthquake all around. The Commendatore disappears.)

. . .

Don Giovanni

Who rends my soul with suffering?
Who turns my blood to bitterness?
Must madness, pain, and terror
Possess me evermore?

Chi l'anima mi lacera! . . .
Chi m'agita le viscere! . . .
Che strazio! ohimé! che smania!
Che inferno! . . . che terror! . . .

. . .

Invisible Chorus

Take the reward of evil.
Worse yet remains in store!

Tutto a tue colpe è poco.
Vieni: c'è un mal peggior!

When staged, the effect of Don Giovanni being engulfed by the flames of Hell is dramatically formidable, as the D-minor chords of the orchestra reinforce the happenings on the stage with a powerful crescendo of blaring brass. It is worth noting that in the scene of Mozart's opera previous to Don Giovanni's fall, a similar ominous clamor of D-minor chords accompanies the voice of the Ghost-Statue of the Commendatore, whose entrance and dramatic recitative are analogous to the arrival and speech of the Phantasm of Jupiter in act I of Shelley's lyrical drama. Although Peacock lists *Figaro* as Shelley's favorite opera, Shelley saw *Don Giovanni* at least six times between 1817 and 1818. Seated in a box at the King's Theatre in 1817, it would have been difficult for Shelley to ignore this impressive ending. The parallels between Giovanni's descent and Jupiter's fall are striking. While no scene directions accompany Jupiter's descent in act III, Shelley's imagery suggests the eruption of earthquake and fire. Also, while *Prometheus Unbound* contains few, if any, sexual overtones, the dissolute Don Giovanni, like Jupiter, represents a kind of tyranny—in his case, an excess of the appetites of the senses over reason. Through the moral of Mozart's opera—"Questo è il fin di chi fa mal" ("Sinners end as they begin") (106) found in the final chorus of act II, "[t]he enlightenment is making its point that seduction leads inevitably to more violently anti-social consequences. . ." (Brophy 84). Although Prometheus is the hero of suffering and strength for the Romantics, Shelley's addition of the anti-hero Jupiter to the equation of the drama makes a sharply skeptical warning of its own. As many critics have noted, through the doubling of the human qualities of Prometheus and Jupiter, Shelley subtly emphasizes the lack of distance between the tyrant and the slave, and also the cyclical nature of time through periods of liberty and tyranny.

17. When he first saw *Don Giovanni* at the King's Theatre with Peacock in 1817, Shelley, like many opera-goers of the past two centuries, found the opera's designation as a "*dramma giocoso*" slightly misleading, though Peacock informed him that the opera "was composite, more comedy than tragedy" (Peacock 45-6). Reporting on what was probably Shelley's first attendance at one of Mozart's operas, Peacock writes: "[a]fter the killing of the Commendatore, [Shelley] said, 'Do you call this comedy?' By degrees, he became absorbed in the music and action. . ." (45-6). Although critics, like Peacock, tend to discuss *Don Giovanni* as a "tragi-comic" opera, Michael Robinson observes that the opera possesses all the elements of a comic opera, "according to the 18th-century understanding of the term, and Mozart and da Ponte might have been puzzled had they had any premonition of the future debates that were to take place over whether they thought their opera was comic or tragic" (Robinson 9). Nevertheless, as Robinson points out, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, relies on a blending of genres, making use of tragedy, comedy, pastoral and romance to tell a story through words, music and drama. In the hands of Mozart, this blending of genres creates a powerful aesthetic effect through the means of music that makes an often ironic commentary on the tyrannies and inequalities of human society. For instance, the mocking tone of Figaro's rebellious aria "Se vuol ballare, signor Contino" ("If you want to dance, sir Count") in act I of *Le nozze di Figaro* immediately sets the barber Figaro apart as a sympathetic character against the adulterous, authoritarian Count Almaviva even before the latter enters the stage:

[Figaro's aria] is a direct expression of the will to revolt. Even so, it is not the substance of what he says but the form in which he says it that is of prime importance. In the course of the opera, it is not the revolt of servants against master that brings about the comic resolution, but the very convention of comedy itself that love conquers all. . . . Mozart's aesthetic form has this advantage over that of Beaumarchais: Mozart makes social change appear not only desirable but harmonious by disarming his audience with music that penetrates their very being. (Tetreault 157)

In this way, music, contributing "pacing, control, point of view, and ironic commentary," allows Mozart

to create new dimension and "mold new meanings for the opera" from the original play by Beaumarchais (Corse 18).

18. Similarly, Shelley's manipulation of genres throughout *Prometheus Unbound* creates a controlled sense of expectation and contrast that permits him to expand the area of his drama progressively towards his vision of universal harmony in act IV. Shelley's lyrical drama "begins on the stage of high tragedy" in act I, then moves on, in and out of the pastoral and the epic in acts II and III, before erupting into the lyrical profusion of act IV. Yet, like Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Prometheus Unbound* poises between the tragic and the comic, making use of tragic elements at different moments for serious or ironic effect. With the fall of Jupiter and Prometheus' official reunification with Asia, by the end of act III Shelley's lyric drama moves towards the comic as it embraces the resolution of a happy ending. After the music of the "curved shell" generates the reformation of the human world, Shelley turns to the tropes of pastoral drama to illustrate the idyllic bower-like cave to which Prometheus, Asia, Ione and Panthea retire. Proclaiming the end of the masque that marked Jupiter's reign and the beginning of a new pastoral age of liberty for humanity, the Spirit of the Hour declares: "The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains/ Equal, unclassed, tribeless and nationless. . ." (III, iv, 193-5). Yet, like his ultimate vision of harmony in act IV, a register of skepticism marks the otherwise positive ending of act III. Despite identifying humanity's potential to "oversoar/ The loftiest star of unascended Heaven" if it were not for "chance, and death, and mutability," the Spirit of the Hour also warns that human beings, though "yet free from guilt or pain," are not "[p]assionless[,]" suggesting that they still can succumb to the will for power and deceit that leads to tyranny (III, iv, 198-204).

IV.

19. While in aim a closet drama, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* does not signify the poet's retreat either from the theater or the theatrical. Mixing genres and blending the lyrical with the discursive, Shelley creates a narrative structure that is at once internalized and theatrical as it paradoxically performs itself inside the mind of the reader. Jeffrey Cox argues that Shelley's lyrical drama, like Hunt's masque, *The Descent of Liberty*, "draws upon a strong theatrical tradition to imagine a stage beyond the theater. . . where [there can be] a proper balance between word and stage effect" (127). For Shelley, the Italian opera offered a decisive method through which to visualize a new way in which poetry could come together with music, drama and stagecraft to form a more mentalistic, imaginative kind of dramatic experience. In *Prometheus Unbound*, the most fervent realization of this type of internalized staging occurs in the final act, a jubilatory anti-masque that illustrates the literal de-masking of an *ancien régime* and the introduction of a new world order. Although Peter Conrad notes that act IV "defies the stage and abstracts itself into music . . . render[ing] the drama lyrical" through a "symphon[y] of science[,]" the fourth act of Shelley's lyrical drama nonetheless derives many of its elements and devices from musical and gestural drama, particularly the *ballet d'action*, oratorio and masque, and thus is fundamentally performative (Conrad 72). Indeed, as Stuart Curran and Ronald Tetreault have explored at length,^[10] both the thematic conception and dramaturgical arrangement of act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* have strong affinities with the tradition of *ballet d'action* found in the works of Jean-Georges Noverre and also its Italian cousin in the *coreodramme* of Salvatore Viganò, whose choreography the Shelleys and Claire admired in *Otello, ossia Il Moro di Venezia* in Milan at La Scala in 1818.^[11]
20. In act IV, the profusion of lyric forms gives the impression that time itself has been suspended while the Spirits and Hours sing. Yet, the "dark Forms and Shadows" who dance "by confusedly, singing" do not symbolize the ending of time itself, but rather the end of Jupiter's reign, and the commencement of a new time in "Shelley's post-revolutionary vision [in which] humanity can bring time under a measure of control."^[12] A larger-scale version of the sextet of spirits which closes act I, act IV moves with the quickness and confusedness of a full Mozartian concerted finale. The variety of lyrical forms contained

with the act reveals its function as an immense bridal song to Asia and Prometheus, beginning with the complex choreography of Hours and Spirits to the love duet between the Earth and Moon to Demogorgon's final epilogic blessing. The lyrical harmonization of the universe pervades all levels of the drama, uniting the mental drama of Prometheus with the external drama of a transformed world, signaling the affirmative revolutionary edict of a new age for humanity. Evocative of Beethoven's majestic choral setting of Schiller's "O Freunde, nicht diese Töne" in the final movement (Presto) of his ninth symphony, the assemblage of voices in act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* achieves a vivid effect through the combination of music, poetry and dance, enticing the reader to imagine a cosmological stage upon which Shelley places his drama of universal harmony.

21. Ultimately, the poetic form of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* demonstrates the poet's ability to combine music and poetry to create a mental drama that is nonetheless radically performative. Utilizing music as a dramatic tool, Shelley's operatic employment of discursive and lyrical language and his opera-like methods of characterization all coalesce in a project that strains the limits of poetic form into the realm of musical drama. Yet, Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* thrives upon the same "unremitting, invigorating tension" that Peter Conrad identifies as the driving force of opera between the "basic incompatibilities of nonverbal imagery of music and the tendency of words to try to pin down meaning" (Qtd. in Corse 13). That is, in his lyrical drama, Shelley turns to music and musical themes when language is no longer an effective mode of aesthetic mediation to communicate the desired dramatic spectacle and revolutionary ideals to the reader's imagination. The lyrical drama in its various forms, whether the opera, ballet or oratorio, provides Shelley with a design through which to establish the revolutionary ethos of a transformed world. Despite its seeming anti-theatricality, Jeffrey Cox points out that *Prometheus Unbound* and the other "mythological plays of the Hunt circle are not a rejection of the stage but an attempt to remake it" through imagining a different kind of dramatic experience in which music, poetry, and the other sister arts can be combined (Cox 127). In this way, the expressive capacity of music and its links to both language and thought provides Shelley with a unique method through which to imagine poetry's power to effect change. As a result, through Shelley's use of a characterization and mode akin to opera and other forms of musical drama, the poetic form of *Prometheus Unbound* defines and determines the dramatic action, making the reader complicit in a closet drama that is nonetheless theatrical in origin, treading the borders between the tragic and the comic.

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Notes

¹ Shelley writes to Peacock on 6 April 1819, "This is the holy week, & Rome is quite full. . . . Great feasts & funzioni here, for which we can get no tickets; there are 5000 strangers & only room for 500 at the celebration of the famous Miserere [by Allegri] in the Sixtine Chapel" (*PSL* II, 93).

² "The elaborate dramatic mythological plays [Calderón] wrote for the court, including *La fiera, el rayo y la piedra* (1652), *Fortunas de Andrómeda y Perseo* (1653), *La estatua de Prometeo* (c1670) and *Fieras afemina amor* (1670 or 1672), can be classified as semi-operas, in that they include fully-sung scenes with sung dialogue (and recitative) for the gods and goddesses of antiquity." See "Calderón de la Barca, Pedro." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. Vol. I. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1992. 687.

³ The seven types of aria are: *Aria Cantabile*; *Aria di portamento*; *Aria di mezzo carattere*; *Aria parlante*; *Aria di bravura*; *Aria di agilita*; *Rondo*; and *Cavatina*. See Brown, 35-40.

⁴ Despite his general suspicion of Italian opera, Addison approved of the innovation of sung dialogue in recitative, remarking that "[t]he Transition from an Air to Recitative Musick being more natural than the passing from a Song to plain and ordinary Speaking." (Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, Tuesday, April 3, 1711).

⁵ Havergal Brian wrote his opera based on acts I and II of *P.U.* from 1937-1944. Brian also wrote operas for PBS's *The Cenci* and Goethe's *Faust*. For more, see the Havergal Brian Society <<<http://www.musicweb.uk.net/brian>>>. Similarly, Sir Hubert Parry probably quickly realized the intrinsic challenges of Shelley's language in composing his oratorio "Scenes from *Prometheus Unbound*" (1880).

⁶ All references to *Prometheus Unbound* are from the 2000 Longman edition previously cited, *TPS*, II, 471-649.

⁷ As Ione and Panthea are mirrors of each other, line 336 corresponds to Ione's rhyme of "cloud" in line 333.

⁸ Shelley also was exposed to this tradition through Rossini, who perfected this technique, as is demonstrated in the finale to act I of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1810).

⁹ See George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Manfred* (1816) in *Lord Byron, The Complete Poetical Works*, 7 vols, edd. Jerome McGann et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980-1993) IV.

¹⁰ See Tetreault, 161-6; and Stuart Curran, "The Political Prometheus," *SIR* 70 (1986): 273-281. See also Carlo Ritorni, *Commentarii della vita e delle opere coreodrammatiche di Salvatore Viganò e della coreografia e de'corepei* (Milan, 1838).

¹¹ Shelley called *Otello* "the most splendid spectacle I ever saw[;]" while Claire Clairmont pronounced it a "most magnificent Ballet Pantomime" [Shelley, Letter to Peacock, 6 April 1818, *PSL*, II, 4; Claire Clairmont, 8 April 1818, *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. Press, 1968) 87].

¹² See Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, footnote to *Prometheus Unbound*, IV (*TPS*, II, 612-3).

Opera and Romanticism

Lewis/Gounod's *Bleeding Nonne*: An Introduction and Translation of the Scribe/Delavigne Libretto

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Charles Gounod's Opera *La Nonne sanglante* based on M.G. Lewis's *The Monk*, had eleven performances in 1854 and has never been revived. This first English translation of the libretto is accompanied by an introduction providing the context of these performances and speculating about the practical and aesthetic reasons for the opera's failure. This essay appears in *Opera and Romanticism*, a volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series*, prepared exclusively for Romantic Circles (<http://www.rc.umd.edu/>), University of Maryland.

1. In 1706 the English critic John Dennis published an essay, "Upon the Opera's after the Italian Manner, Which Are About to be Establish'd on the English Stage: With Some Reflections on the Damage They May Bring to the Public" (Hooker 382-93). Dennis argued that the Italian operas' privileging of sound over sense was a slippery slope leading to cultural decline. He believed that opera threatened the implicitly masculine tradition of British drama, and that music was "effeminate" and hence threatening to cultural order, especially to the hierarchies of social class and gender. In fact, he concluded, "Nothing is so Gothick as an Opera" (391-92). Dennis was using "Gothick" in its sense of "barbarous." Certainly by its very nature opera subverts the rational precepts that ordinarily organize our conscious sense of reality. Opera invites us into a world where everyone sings rather than speaking, and (in eighteenth-century *opera seria*) repeatedly tells us tales of gods and heroes derived from Classical mythology and Italian Renaissance romances. From Dennis's perspective, the London invasion of this Italian art form was equivalent to the Goths at the gates of Rome.
2. The "Gothic" style of literature emerging in English less than a century later seemed equally deleterious to those wishing to maintain standards. Very little has been written about a possible link between opera and Horace Walpole's extravagant and peculiar *Castle of Otranto*, but the index to the *Yale Walpole Correspondence* includes almost six hundred references to opera. Furthermore from their creators' perspectives, both opera and the literary Gothic were designed or defended as genres intended to repair a perceived cultural loss. In 1590's Florence, a group of intellectuals who called themselves "The Camerata" sought to restore that unity of words and music once exemplified, they believed, by the performance practices of ancient Greek tragedy. In the second preface to *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole asserted that "the great resources of fancy have been dammed up by a strict adherence to common life," a dam that presumably might be breached by "Gothic Story" (7). And as Herbert Lindenberger has observed, opera and the Gothic are the two modes of art that have maintained what he calls "the high style" throughout the last two centuries (167). If opera is inherently "Gothick," then the writing we call "Gothic" is also distinctly "operatic": not only "extravagant," but "flagrantly artificial," "flamboyant," "passionate," "irrational," and "exotic."
3. I have argued elsewhere that Horace Walpole's *Strawberry Hill* and the novel it inspired are indebted to the aesthetics of eighteenth-century Italian *opera seria* (Williams 104-118). I would further argue that by means of *Otranto* "the operatic" migrated into English literature, influencing works we now call "Romantic." But as the literary Gothic influenced Romanticism and opera itself became "Romantic" at the dawn of the nineteenth century, the relationship between them became increasingly complicated. Many librettos were based on literary sources that had at least some Gothic elements.^[1] But the degree of such influence depends on how broadly one defines "Gothic." If we think of "Gothic" as primarily

"medieval," then Wagner's appropriation of history, legend, and folklore in *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Tristan und Isolde* might qualify as "Gothic operas." Sometimes influence works in the other direction; operas can become more "Gothic" for operatic, not literary, reasons. Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) is arguably the only Gothic opera firmly in the canon; it has a haunted fountain, a tragic family conflict, and a heroine driven to murder and madness. Ironically, however, *Lucia's* most "Gothic" episode, the heroine's mad scene, does not occur in Scott's novel. The librettist Cammarano gave Lucia a mad scene because by the early nineteenth century, it had already become conventional in Italian opera as a show-piece for the soprano. Ironically, when Scott's inarticulate Lucy becomes "Lucia," she is most memorable in her inarticulate madness. There are also a handful of surviving works drawn from unquestionably Gothic texts, such as Heinrich Marschner's *Der Vampyr* (1828) based on Polidori's "The Vampyre" (1819).^[2]

4. But Italian *bel canto* and late eighteenth-century Gothic fiction have one important quality in common; each transposes "operatic" extremes of artificiality and emotional intensity into the world of bourgeois family romance. The passions and situations are extreme, but they are played out within the structure and constraints of the patriarchal family. The plots concern anxieties about the rightful heir, the proper inheritance, and the compulsion to enlarge family fortunes through advantageous marriages, no matter how the parties directly involved might feel. The most explicitly "Gothic" opera composed in the nineteenth century was, however, a failure. Gounod and Scribe/Delavigne's *La Nonne sanglante* was based on the "Bleeding Nun" episode in M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796). It closed after eleven performances in 1854 and has never been revived.^[3] As we shall see, the production was fraught with practical problems. I also want to consider, however, whether this failure is also rooted in its fundamentally Gothic source. Was the flagrantly Gothic text fundamentally unsuited to the (unconscious) needs of a mid-nineteenth-century libretto?
5. M.G. Lewis's episode of the Bleeding Nun serves as a counterpoint to his master narrative involving the seduction and betrayal of the virtuous monk Ambrosio. It concerns a woman who also betrays her religious vows and murders the lover for whom she has broken them. Her guilt is signified by her blood-stained habit. In this tale, Don Raymond makes a terrible mistake. A rationalist who does not believe in ghosts, he devises a scheme whereby he may elope with his beloved Agnes, whose cruel and greedy aunt Rodolpha has forbidden their marriage. According to local superstition, every five years on May 5 at one hour after midnight, the specter of "The Bleeding Nun" descends from the tower and leaves the castle, carrying a dagger and a lamp. That night the servants leave the gates of the castle open to facilitate her passage. Raymond suggests that Agnes disguise herself as the Nun so that the two of them can elope.
6. In the dead of night on May 5, Raymond watches as the nun appears. He thinks to himself that her disguise seems remarkably authentic. They get into his carriage and drive away, exchanging vows of eternal fidelity:

In my veins while blood shall roll,
Thou art mine!
I am thine!
Thine my body! thine my soul! (Lewis 156).

Suddenly a storm comes up and the carriage is wrecked. When Raymond regains consciousness, his "bride" has vanished. To his horror, he realizes that he has accidentally exchanged vows with the ghost herself. She visits him every midnight, to the considerable detriment of his health and happiness. Eventually, the Wandering Jew intervenes. He is able to speak with her and learns that the Nun was Raymond's distant relation, Beatrice de las Cisternas, who had lived a hundred years ago. She wants a proper grave for her unburied bones, and Raymond, being a member of the family, is the person to bury

them. Thus he frees himself from the haunting apparition. Meanwhile the unfortunate Agnes is left behind and forced to take the veil. Like Beatrice, however, she too breaks her vows, meeting Raymond secretly and becoming pregnant. When this sin is discovered, she is imprisoned in a vault of her convent by the cruel and vindictive abbess. Agnes gives birth to an infant, who soon dies. She goes mad, but is eventually rescued. She recovers her sanity and marries Raymond.

7. Lewis's novel was translated into French a year after it was published in England, and translated again in the 1840's. Curiously, a popular play called *La Nonne sanglante* by Anicet Bourgeois and Jacques Maillan also enjoyed considerable success in France during the 1830's. The play shares virtually nothing with Lewis's episode except its evocative title.^[4] It would, however, inspire Cammarano's *Maria de Rudenz*, composed by Donizetti and premiered at La Fenice in 1838.^[5] The Gounod libretto, written by Eugène Scribe and Germain Delavigne is, however, directly based on Lewis's novel.
8. Scribe and Delavigne changed Lewis's narrative substantially. They moved the action from eighteenth-century Germany to eleventh-century Bohemia, and the *deus ex machina* is no longer the supernatural Wandering Jew but a historical figure, Peter the Hermit. The opera opens on a scene of civil war. Baron Luddorf and Count Moldaw are fighting each other. Castle Moldaw is in flames, and Peter the Hermit exhorts the warring parties to leave aside their strife to unite in a crusade against the infidels. When the two families agree to a truce, Peter demands that it be affirmed by the marriage of Agnès, daughter of Baron Moldaw, to Count Luddorf's older son. He does not know that she is already in love with the younger son Rodolphe, and when he discovers the young man's feelings, he unsympathetically advises him that "One can be strong in suffering if he suffers for his country" (Act 1, scene 2). Thus the couple plan to elope, with consequences like those in Lewis's novel.
9. Having sworn his unfortunate vow during the misdirected elopement, Rodolphe, like Lewis's Raymond, is visited every midnight by the Nun, who reminds him that he has sworn eternal devotion to her. She tells him that twenty years previously she had been in love, but her lover had gone to war. Told that he had been killed in battle, she takes the veil in despair, only to learn that her beloved is not only still alive, but intending to marry someone else. She reminds him of their love and his vows to her. In order to spare himself "these complaints" (her words), he murders her.
10. The Bleeding Nun tells Rodolphe that the death of her murderer is the price of his freedom. He promises to avenge her. Meanwhile, Rodolphe is told that he may marry Agnes because his older brother Theodore has been killed in battle. At the ceremony, however, the Nun appears (visible to him alone) and identifies his own father as the murderer. Horrified, Rodolphe realizes that now he again cannot marry his beloved. The families are furious at this apparent betrayal and intend to kill him. At the Nun's tomb (in a *site sauvage* near Peter's hermitage), Luddorf overhears his son's conversation with Agnès, learning that he knows his guilty secret. Seized by remorse, he impulsively decides take his son's place, mortally wounded by the soldiers pursuing Rodolphe. Dying, he begs forgiveness at the Nun's tomb. Her ghost appears, forgiving him and declaring that God will pardon them and reunite them in death. The two ascend to heaven, accompanied by a chorus praising divine mercy:

O clémence ineffable!

Daigne les accueillir. . .

La vertu du coupable

Est dans le repentir.

Oh ineffable mercy!

May you welcome them. . .

The grace of the guilty

Is in repentance.

(Act V, scene 4)

11. Gounod himself had virtually nothing to say about this early effort in his *Memoirs d'un artiste*. Kerry Murphy, editor of *Charles Gounod: La Nonne sanglante. Dossier de presse parisienne*, writes that in financial terms the opera was doing well. Several critics wrote approvingly of the theatrical spectacle offered by *La Nonne*, and commented with equal favor about Gounod's music. None of the contemporary reviewers seem to have suspected that the opera was about to close forever. But several different practical problems may have damaged the opera. Only one member of the cast was particularly distinguished, at least important enough to have an entry in *The New Grove*: that is the tenor Louis Guéymard, who created the role of Rodolphe.^[6] From the singer's perspective the opera was also unsatisfying. The role of Rodolphe is long and taxing; Peter the Hermit virtually disappears after Act 1. The soubrette Agnès has no aria, while Urbain the page gets two. Furthermore the Opéra management was changed in the midst of the of the performances. Steven Hubner writes that the new manager may have cancelled *La Nonne* "in order to demonstrate a radical change of course at the beginning of his tenure" (41-42).
12. The most comprehensive discussion of *La Nonne* in English is Andrew Gann's essay, "Théophile Gautier, Charles Gounod and the Massacre of *La Nonne sanglante*." He also speculates that there may be another element in the mix of unfortunate circumstances: prima donna politics. In the months leading up to the premiere, Gautier had been consistently praising in the popular press the woman cast to sing Agnès the Nun. Her name was Palmyre Wertheimber, a young soprano who had recently begun to have some success on the opera stage, having won some prizes and created a role at the Opéra Comique.^[7] She is reported to have had a Callas-like ability to act that equaled her voice. Gautier wrote:

La nonne sanglante de M. Gounod, fournira bientôt à Mlle. Wertheimber l'occasion de se montrer dans un rôle créé pour elle et avec sa propre originalité

[M. Gounod's *La nonne sanglante* will soon furnish Mlle. Wertheimber an opportunity to appear in a role created for her and with its own originality.] (Gann, 58)

Later he remarked:

La première représentation de *La Nonne sanglante* de M. Charles Gounod, aura lieu très prochainement; Nous regrettons bien sincèrement que le rôle confié à Mlle Wertheimber ne soit pas à la hauteur du talent si correct et si distingué de cette jeune artiste.

[The first performance of M. Charles Gounod's *La Nonne sanglante* will take place soon. We sincerely regret that the role assigned to Mlle. Wertheimber will not be worthy of this young artist's disciplined and distinguished talent.] (Gann 52)

According to Gann, Gautier's interest in Mlle. Wertheimber may have been more than merely musical. In any event her debut at the Opéra was not to be a fortunate one. For it appears that there was another avatar of Callas already there. Her name was Sophie Cruvelli, who despite her Italian name was in fact a German who sang the French repertoire. She had been offered the role of the Nun in January of 1854 and turned it down. She left Paris until after *La Nonne* closed. She returned and resumed singing leading roles at the Opéra. Agnès the Bleeding Nun marked the virtual end of Palmyre Wertheimber's Paris career. She did not return until many years later, when her voice was already in decline.

13. Scribe and Delavigne probably chose Lewis's story as the basis for a Grand Opera because it seemed to offer promising material for this genre so dominant in mid-century France. This type evolved during the 1830's and 1840's. The most successful examples, with all of which Scribe was involved, include Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831) *Les Huguenots* (1836), and Halévy's *La Juive* (1835). Audiences expected five acts, at least one ballet, and numerous theatrical spectacles. Productions gave ample opportunities to show off the advanced technical capacities of the Paris Opéra stage. The plots of Grand Opera, rather than evoking the Classical myths and Italian romances favored by Baroque librettists, were usually set in the distant but historical past, frequently the middle ages, and sometimes incorporated the supernatural. Thus Gothic fictions and librettos for Grand Opera sometimes treated the same kind of material. Furthermore, like the Gothic, Grand Opera had a political inflection.
14. This operatic genre played a complex role in French public life in the middle of the nineteenth century. [8] Until the Revolution, opera in France had been a spectacle closely associated with the royal court, a means of displaying the monarch's wealth and power. But the institution of a new republic after Napoleon's fall made the public function of opera more ambiguous. As Jane Fulcher shows in her book, *The Nation's Image: French grand opera as politics and politicized art*, the development of Grand Opera effected a compromise between the power of public spectacles and the dangers of displaying events too overtly political. Since early Gothic fiction also quite frequently had a political sub-text, the theme of patriotic nationalism that Scribe and Delavigne superimposed on Lewis's Gothic horror story is certainly not unexpected and not necessarily inappropriate to the Gothic itself. (As James Watt suggests, late eighteenth-century Gothics that emphasized a supposed history rather than the fantastic horror story also had a political purpose: "the loyalist Gothic romance" implicitly extols "traditional" British virtues and values, those of the conservative establishment.) (Watt 42-69).
15. Just as Gothic fiction tended toward sensational episodes designed to harry the reader's sensibilities, Grand Opera relished the spectacular scene. In writing *La Nonne*, Scribe and Delavigne found ready excuses for new Gothic spectacles in their libretto. Act 2, scene 6 must have been sensationally effective. It begins with an encounter between Rodolphe and the Bleeding Nun, in which she reminds him of his vow, "*Toujours à moi!*" She takes him by the hand. ("How cold your hand is," he exclaims, unconsciously foreshadowing another and more familiar Rudolpho). Then, to quote the stage directions: "Lightening flashes, the thunder rolls, and one hears the "*mugissements*" of hell. "*Mugissements*" may describe the sounds made by bulls, the wind, horns, sirens. (I chose "Infernal howlings.") The Nun drags Rodolphe off, stage right. Then the stage directions continue:

The stage is covered with clouds. Infernal music is heard. Then the scene changes, presenting the ruins of a Gothic castle, a great hall, in which the doors and Gothic windows are half destroyed. In the middle of the stage is a vast table of stone, and stone seats that are covered with ivy and wild plants. The moonlight reveals, at the back of the stage, a hermitage on the top of a rocky cliff.

Rodolphe and his page Urbain enter. The latter, seeing the hermitage, decides to seek Peter the Hermit, leaving Rodolphe alone. He muses that here in this ruined castle his ancestor, also named Rodolphe, had once lived. Then another transformation occurs:

The moon disappears. The doors and windows in the ruin regain their form and their elegance. The ruined stone table changes into a vast one covered with elaborate dishes and surrounded by many chairs. The torches around the table are suddenly illuminated, as are the candelabras which decorate the room; the darkness turns to light and the gilded objects and arms displayed on the walls glitter in the brightness; but this change is made in complete silence.

Rodolphe exclaims that here is the place that he had known in childhood. And then,

Subterranean singing, both somber and mysterious, is heard. Richly dressed lords and ladies appear in the doorways, extremely pale, and hardly moving. They glide slowly forward.

They are, of course, dead—ghosts—who sing a chorus about returning to remember their *beaux jours*, their lost loves and their lost lives. Urbain enters with Peter the Hermit, who exorcizes the phantoms by raising his cross before them, telling them to go back to the nothingness (*le néant*) from whence they came. Rodolphe faints in Urbain's arms and the scene ends.

* * *

16. And yet, though reviewers praised the music and the spectacle, one theme runs through a number of commentaries. Several critics remark on the inadequacies of the libretto. For instance, *La France musicale* declared on October 22, 1854:

Le sujet, il faut bien le dire, ne présente nulle part les éléments organiques d'un drame musical bien constitué; la vie est nulle part.

[One must say that the subject does not anywhere offer the elements organic in a well-constructed musical drama; there is no life in it.] (Gann 56)

17. Théophile Gautier was also clearly inclined to blame it:

Le poème, combiné avec une maladresse et une négligence qui étonne chez un homme d'une habilité aussi proverbiale que M. Scribe, contenait cependant deux ou trois situations de nature à tenter un musicien, et dont M. Gounod a tiré le plus grand parti. . . .

[The poem, a combination of awkwardness and carelessness astonishing for someone of M. Scribe's proverbial cleverness, nevertheless contains two or three situations that might tempt a musician, and M. Gounod has used most of them.] (Gann 58)

18. And an anonymous parody of the overwrought Scribe/Delavigne style appeared in *Le Mousquetaire* on October 19:

Eh bein! repentez-vous, ô Delavigne, ô Scribe!
Ou bien craignez Dieu la vengeance terrible.
Et si vous faites des opéras
Ne les faites plus comme ça.

[Delavigne and Scribe, repent!, or else fear the wrath of God. If you're going to make operas, don't make them like this.] (Gann 65)

19. One could translate the critic's damning conclusion, "La vie est nulle part" as "There's nothing true to life here," or simply, "It's unrealistic." Certainly Scribe had had difficulties in placing this libretto with a composer.^[9] I would speculate that the librettists felt that transforming Lewis's family secret (a century or five generations old) into one both immediate and horribly personal would intensify the dramatic effect, would make Rodolphe's conflict more psychologically realistic. Scribe and Delavigne's changes in the story that might also at first glance make it seem more "Gothic" than Lewis's. By condensing the drama into the space of twenty years and making Rodolphe's own father the murderer, they intensified the Freudian family romance so fundamental to Gothic narrative. By calling

Rodolphe's beloved and the Bleeding Nun by the same name, Agnès, they strengthened the two characters' identities as doubles. Indeed, the plot as it emerged from the hands of the librettists dramatizes a distorted version of the Oedipal crisis and the incest taboo. Luddorf kills the woman who should have been Rodolphe's mother and is trying to see to it that his son will not marry the woman he loves, who is her double and shares his "mother's" name.^[10] But these changes serve to confuse rather than to intensify the melodrama.

20. The libretto's principal failure of realism lies in Count Luddorf's necessary but completely unmotivated change of heart in the last scenes, when he suddenly decides to sacrifice himself for his son. The move toward psychological realism backed the librettists into a corner. Only a *deus ex machina* could rescue Rodolphe from the warring families' murderous pursuit and restore him to his beloved. Such a device was comfortably accommodated in many a Baroque opera, and would reappear in somewhat different form in Wagner. But in *The Flying Dutchman*, for example, from Senta's first appearance we know of her rather neurotic obsession with the Dutchman's legend, so that we are not entirely surprised when she flings herself into the ocean. In *La Nonne*, however, Scribe and Delavigne have Luddorf simply act on his sudden change of heart, which leads him to die in his son's place. Yet until this moment we have seen (or heard) not a glimmer of this character's inner self. Then the writers add a *second* psychological intervention—the Nonne's sudden abandonment of her desire for revenge. And these two conversions are rewarded by yet another mode of rescue: the two ascend to heaven accompanied by a chorus singing of God's mercy.
21. In *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* Gary Tomlinson argues that changing operatic conventions reflect changing cultural ideas about subjectivity and the relationship of the self to the invisible. Certainly by 1854 the cultural moment that gave birth to *The Monk* had passed. Lewis's novel reflects, sometimes quite directly, the turmoil of the French Revolution, as when, for instance, his mob's murder of the cruel Abbess echoes the death of the Princesse de Lamballe in 1792. The horrors of the Revolution were, however, significantly internal, within the French body politic. The Gothic fiction of the 1790s expresses most powerfully the revolt fomented from within by the unruly fears and desires of the individual unconscious. Early Gothic fiction was perhaps most effective in making such private, unconscious passions public, accessible to the reader. In revising Lewis's narrative for the operatic stage, however, Scribe and Delavigne tried to make the private public by mapping a patriotic tale onto a domain of family secrets and hidden conflicts. One could imagine, I think, a *verismo* version of Lewis's tale in which Luddorf is haunted from first to last by his guilty secret, or perhaps an expressionist opera, like Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* or Schoenberg's *Ewartung*, in which the borders between the hero's tormented psyche and his world are not distinct or entirely discernable. But Lewis's tale of the Bleeding Nun was not a historical romance that could be authentically rendered as a patriotic fable in five acts and a ballet.

* * *

A Note on the Translation

22. I have tried to render Scribe and Delavigne's often melodramatic French into idiomatic English, not attempting to preserve the meter and rhyme nor to produce a text suitable for singing. Since modern English does not make a distinction between familiar and formal address, I have ignored this difference in French except in one instance. In translating the exchanges between Rodolphe and the Bleeding Nun, I used the archaic English forms of the familiar as appropriate to the uncanny conversation between ghost and mortal. (I have also wondered whether the mortal's inadvertently addressing the Nonne in the familiar may not have facilitated her power over him.) I gratefully acknowledge the advice and encouragement of my colleague Marlyse Baptista in making this translation. A native speaker of French, she was generous in helping me not only to avoid outright errors, but also to discern

the endlessly fascinating nuances and subtleties of translating French into English. I also wish to thank my research assistant, Lance J. Wilder, who learned Pagemaker in order to give my libretto a professional appearance and who has been endlessly patient in making the numerous changes I requested.

Translation of the Scribe/Delavigne Libretto (.pdf)

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Notes

¹ Consider, for instance the vast number of operas based on Sir Walter Scott's work. For a survey see Jerome Mitchell's two volumes, *The Walter Scott Operas*, and *More Scott Operas*. Sometimes librettists also omitted

"Gothic" elements in their literary sources. Rossini's *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra* (1815) was based on Sophia Lee's *The Recess* (1786). But it focuses on the historical romance rather than its family secrets and threats of incest.

² Though marginal, this opera remains on the fringes of the repertoire. Two recordings of the complete work are currently available on CD.

³ Though *La Nonne sanglante* closed after eleven performances, it nevertheless leads a shadowy afterlife as a printed libretto, a manuscript score in the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, and Bizet's reduction of the score for voice and piano. It has attracted some scholarly interest. In 1998 Bizet's score was reprinted by Music-Edition Lucie Galland (Heilbronn, Germany), and in 1999 a volume called *Charles Gounod: La Nonne sanglante. Dossier de presse parisienne (1854)* was published by the same company. The latter makes contemporary reviews readily available. I am aware of one recording of one aria from the opera, a 1994 CD (now out of print) called *Mémoires de Gounod* (Ligia Digital). French Amazon.com lists it but describes it as "unavailable." It contains one aria, "Le calme," which, I would guess, is Rodolphe's aria from Act 3 scene 4, beginning "*Un air plus pur. . .*"

⁴ Lewis's use of the word "bleeding" is interesting, since the ghost merely wears a blood-stained habit. But he probably could not have called her "the bloody nun," given the taboo on that word in English. The hints of physicality and process suggested by the present participle may be a Kristevan example of "poetic language," in which this word "bleeding" implies the horrifying disruptiveness of "female" materiality. Certainly the nun, who has sworn to renounce sexuality and motherhood, does, in breaking her vows and murdering her lover, embody such a horror of the dangerous female.

⁵ *Maria* has had at least seventy-five revivals, as recently as 1982. The Bleeding Nun of this story is not a phantom, but a woman, another unfaithful nun, who bleeds to death on stage, singing to her lover Corrado, "Now there awaits me a tomb of evil fame/ Without prayers . . . without tears . . . already I am falling, the icy hand of Death/ Falls heavy upon my breast!/ You deprived me of life . . . and heaven!" Corrado responds, "Ah forgive me!" She responds, "I forgive you, I love you still. . . ." And falls dead at his feet. A complete recording is available from Opera Rara (1998), and many individual arias have been recorded.

⁶ Gueymard made his debut in the title role of *Robert le diable* and also sang at the five-hundredth performance in 1867. He created Jonas in *Le Prophète*, Henri in *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (1855) and Adoniram in Gounod's *La Reine de Saba* (1862). He sang at Covent Garden as well as in Paris and with the French Opera Company in New Orleans (*The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. II, 564.)

⁷ The printed libretto spells the name of the woman performing "La Nonne" as "Weirtemberger." All contemporary reviews, however, including Gautier's, who was acquainted with her, spell the name "Wertheimber."

⁸ For a definition of the genre, see M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, "Grand Opera," *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol.10, pp. 289-294.

⁹ Scribe and Delavigne offered the libretto to Berlioz, who composed a scene and then abandoned the project, and to Donizetti who was not interested in this work. According to Gustave Chaduil, writing in *Le Siècle* for November 21, 1854, the libretto was also offered to Auber, Meyerbeer, Félicien David, Halévy, and Verdi, seemingly to most opera composers of the day. (Murphy, Kerry ed. *Charles Gounod: La Nonne sanglante. Dossier de presse parisienne (1854)*. Heilbron, Germany: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 1999.) See also Jacques Joly.

[10](#) For a discussion of Gothic conventions as manifesting anxieties about the structure of the patriarchal family, see Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic*.