



MIMOMANIA

MUSIC AND GESTURE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY OPERA



MARY ANN SMART

Mimomania

CALIFORNIA STUDIES IN 19TH-CENTURY MUSIC

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*Music and Gesture in
Nineteenth-Century Opera*

Mary Ann Smart

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This book is much concerned with opera's modes for representing absence and presence, distance and immediacy, and those oppositions are also central to the book's genesis and to the many intellectual and personal debts I have incurred while writing it. We say again and again that writing is a solitary act, but writing *Mimomania* has been a surprisingly social, conversational, dynamic process. This has everything to do with the University of California, Berkeley and the vibrant, intellectually adventurous community that is the Berkeley music department. Lively conversations with colleagues and students within and beyond the confines of musicology helped to shape my thinking in countless ways as I wrote these chapters.

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CHAPTER ONE

In Praise of Overstatement

I don't pretend to be a great actor or a great singer. But this I do know: when music accompanies bodily movements, enlivening and at the same time controlling them, and the manner of delivery and the expression needed are indicated to me by the musical composer, then I am a totally different person from when I have to create these for myself, as I have to in spoken drama, inventing my own tempo, my own manner of speaking, and always liable to be disturbed in this by my fellow actors.

This speech in praise of music's ability to enliven and control the pace of dramatic performance emerges from a surprising context—not the world of early nineteenth-century melodrama, in which stage action was liberally, almost compulsively, accompanied by music, nor the infatuation with fusions and hybrids among the arts of a few decades later. The words are Goethe's, from his 1796 novel of the theater *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, and they are uttered by a minor character named Laertes, a member of the itinerant theater company to which the title character attaches himself as he searches for a profession and a purpose in life.¹ The dramatic vision articulated by Laertes, and seconded by other characters elsewhere in the novel, comes surprisingly close to imagining spoken theater as opera. More than merely suggesting a style of declama-

tion paced by the rhythms of music, Goethe's players imagine a theatrical world in which physical action is measured in musical phrases, music and movement glued together in a synchronized relation that animates rather than flattens out character, utterance, and plot.

This vision should not be mistaken for some anticipation of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, nor of a musical drama that aspires to the condition of opera. At the core of Goethe's novel lies ambivalence about the theater, which is alternately figured as seductive and as shallow distraction from worthy moral pursuits. And in two firm strokes at the novel's conclusion Goethe decisively lays to rest any notion of an infatuation with the melding of music and drama. Riven by internal conflicts and losing its audience, Wilhelm's theater company tries to revive its fortunes by performing opera. This strategy fails rapidly and the company disintegrates, prompting Wilhelm to disavow theatrical life altogether. His rejection of the superficial fascinations of the stage is mirrored by a decisive shift in his romantic *Bildung*: freeing himself from a series of liaisons with egotistical and amoral actresses, Wilhelm encounters the virtuous Natalie, who has dedicated her existence to the education of young children. Their union, brought about by a chain of coincidences so preposterous that it must be seen as foreordained, finally effects—and symbolizes—Wilhelm's withdrawal from the falsity of the theatrical world and his entry into a higher communication with art and belief.

In keeping with this plot turn, one of the novel's climactic scenes plays out in a setting explicitly designed as antioperatic, constructing a relation between visual and aural that is quite alien to the friendly interdependence advocated by Laertes. The setting is the "Hall of the Past," a bizarre tomb cum outdoor theater designed by Natalie's uncle to house his own remains. This architectural folly consists of a long structure with semicircular openings on both sides for choirs of singers; during funerals these vents are to be draped with tapestries so that the singers remain unseen. The uncle preferred to listen to music with his eyes closed, to preserve the "universal" quality of the human voice and

to shield his eyes from the physical labor and strange gestures of the musicians. As Natalie explains,

He could not have lived without music, especially vocal music, but he had the peculiarity of never wishing to see the singers. He would say: "We have been spoilt too much by theaters, where music only serves the eye, accompanying movements, not feelings. In oratorios and concerts the physical presence of the singer is disturbing. Music is only for the ear."²

The Hall of the Past is an ideal, a correction to the mundane theatrical performances of earlier scenes. Ultimately, Goethe—here perhaps melding his persona as intendant of the Weimar theater with his novelistic voice—welcomes the idea of musically accompanied acting if it will curb the excesses and bad habits of performers; but his true enthusiasm is reserved for the universal, disembodied music emanating from the Hall of the Past.³

It is irresistible to associate Goethe's hall, anachronistically, with Richard Wagner's Bayreuth theater and its hidden orchestra, and even more so with Wagner's half-facetious call, late in life, for an invisible theater in which the singers would be concealed from view.⁴ This accidental resonance, from Goethe to Wagner, from one century's end to another, is one reason I begin with *Wilhelm Meister*. The opposing perspectives represented by Goethe's traveling actors and by the invisible music of the Hall of the Past neatly foreshadow the extremes that encompass a century of theatrical activity ahead. Orthodoxy concerning movement on stage evolved over the "long" nineteenth century from an aesthetic that sought substantial synchronization between music and stage movement to the dream of the "invisible theater." Such orthodoxies, recoverable in acting treatises and polemical essays, of course stand at some remove from actual practices of movement and gesture on stage, but the two domains, of practice and of discourse, cross paths in complex ways, some of which I untangle below.

It sometimes seems that the figure of Wagner is capacious enough to

incorporate most notions of any importance to the history of opera in the nineteenth century, and his role in the evolution of gestural music is no exception. The very difficulty of tracing any straight line from Goethe's vision of synchronization between music and movement to a freer, perhaps more "transcendent" role for music in relation to the staged body is underlined by the terms of Nietzsche's famous attack on Wagner. When the former acolyte turned against the composer of *Parsifal*, one of his complaints was that Wagner was an incorrigible "man of the theater," "the most enthusiastic mimomaniac" who ever existed.⁵ With this, Nietzsche was pointing (among other things) to Wagner's continuing attachment to an earlier model of gesture and stage movement, to the composer's affection for extended pantomime scenes and to his frequent reliance on small-scale coordination between music and gesture, both of which betray a hidden debt to the aesthetics of melodrama. I shall take up Nietzsche's complaint in some detail in chapter 6; for now I will say only that it seems to me more than coincidence that the philosopher phrased his complaint prominently through metaphors of dance and movement: listening to Wagner's music, he raged, we are rendered powerless, submerged in waves of sound amid which we can only *swim*, when what we would like to do (and what "Mediterranean" music like that of Bizet's *Carmen* allows) is to *dance*.

Those "waves" of sound have much to do with the notion of an "invisible" theater that gradually came to replace a more concrete type of gestural music as the nineteenth century unfolded. The word "invisible" is of course a misnomer, but a telling one. Far from disappearing in fin de siècle theater, the body was blatantly exhibited and eroticized for the delectation of viewers. On the operatic stage, however, these overtly eroticized bodies at the same time became invisible to music. As the habit of synchronizing stage movement with music slowly went out of style after midcentury, the spectacle created by the visible body and the music that surrounded it altered fundamentally. Under this new aesthetic order, music might encircle the exhibited body, supplying a sensuous haze of sound to suggest erotic power; but its rhythms rarely

traced or echoed the actual movements of a performer or duplicated the meaning of his or her words. Developments in composition abetted this change, as lush textures and greater density of both harmony and orchestration abstracted music from bodily motion: such “decadent” sonorities ideally represented the erotic potential of the staged body, but at the expense of marking its small-scale, real-time movements.

The chapters that follow will explore what was lost in this aesthetic shift, as the operatic body became more idea or aura than physical sequence of gestures. Changes in performance practice will themselves rarely occupy the spotlight but will serve as a framework for a synchronic, theoretical consideration of how various kinds of interaction between movement and music can inflect opera’s meanings. I choose to emphasize the theoretical angle partly because reliable documentation of the gestural aspect of operatic performance is elusive. The engravings and design drawings that proliferated around any nineteenth-century operatic production provide detailed records of sets and costumes but tell us nothing about movement and gesture. Memoirs and reviews are only a little better. Even the two most informative sources, stage directions in scores and the staging manuals prepared for many nineteenth-century Parisian productions and in Italy from about 1860, offer partial documentation at best. Often more concerned with directing traffic in large choral scenes, these production books tend to give little or no guidance for more intimate and more static numbers.

For my purposes the most important source of information on these questions is the music itself, which can often act as an auxiliary, wordless stage direction, with details of rhythm or treatment of recurring themes providing hints about how music and movement might combine. Interpretation of these musical signals necessarily relies in part on educated guesswork, but such “choreographic” music also draws on established codes for movement, codes whose meaning has been largely forgotten. On the most mundane level—a level that, perhaps because of its very mundanity, has received little critical attention—music can provide sheer pace, the kind of virtual directions for choreography sug-

Example 1. Germont's entrance (Verdi, *La traviata*).

VIOLETTA *accenna Giuseppe d'introdurlo*

Sa-rà lui che at - ten - do.

Allegro

GERMONT

Son i - o.

Ma-da-mi-gel-la Va-le - ry?

gested by Goethe's Laertes. In less literal contexts, music can operate on a more delicate level of gestural meaning, pinning itself to a particular character or sequence of movements in order to guide the spectator's attention, sending us signals about where to look or what to feel while looking at a body on stage. This music can swim around performing bodies; it can even seem to sing through them.

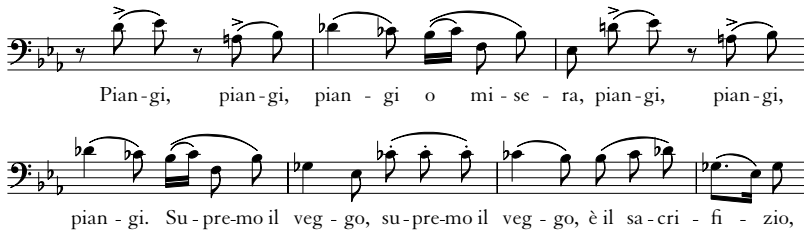
A couple of familiar examples will suggest the expressive possibilities of such bodily resonance. In Act II of *La traviata*, the law-giving father enters to dotted figures for low strings in octaves that unambiguously paint both his heavy tread and his disapproval of Alfredo's liaison with Violetta (Example 1). Such straightforwardly representational entrance music is rare in *La traviata*: significantly, Violetta herself is never

presented is such a forthright way.⁶ Her characteristic idiom is also gestural, but the waltzes that underlie so many of the opera's cardinal moments represent Violetta's body always at one remove from her immediate presence on stage. We never *see* Violetta waltzing (not even in the opening party scene or the Act II finale); the desperate waltz of "Sempre libera" or the self-deceiving one of "Parigi, o cara" instead refer to Violetta's body as an *idea*, her physical presence filtered through a critique of the frenzied social life of the woman-for-sale. In keeping with this presentation of her person as part of a luxurious and even lascivious décor, Violetta makes only two entrances, both of them in Act II and both to very understated musical accompaniment. Otherwise she is always on stage when the curtain rises for an act or a scene: static and available for framing within her sumptuous surroundings, but not given the opportunity to take control of those surroundings musically, to cut through them by making a decisive, gesturally vivid entrance.

Of course Violetta's body shapes the music in another important way, through her illness and the numerous orchestral and vocal figures that paint her weakened body and shortness of breath. The two most famous examples are sighs: the falling eighth notes choked out by the violins in the Act III prelude and the vocal sighs that permeate the death-bed aria "Addio, del passato." But even the gasping figures that run through "Addio, del passato" and the grander loss of breath at the aria's climax, when the voice breaks off, its melody completed by the oboe, remain metaphorical, capturing Violetta's failing powers through *process* more than through mimetic approximation of any sound that might come from her body.⁷ It is all the more strange, then, that the most direct mimesis of Violetta's too-vulnerable flesh should be voiced by her antagonist Germont. Like his imperious entrance music, the accented appoggiatura-figures he sings as he urges her to weep in their duet ("Piangi, piangi") are in a sense redundant, mimicking in highly stylized terms the sobs that he urges her to indulge in (Example 2).

What does it mean that Germont's music lines up in such a rigid way

Example 2. Germont appropriates Violetta's sobs.



with his words and movements, while Violetta's never does? One implication might be that Violetta remains somehow ethereal, despite (or because of?) her history of carnal transgression. Germont, in contrast, is grounded in conventional discourse, his expressive world solidly supported and reinforced by the opera's signifying system—perhaps too much so. This is not to suggest that Germont's discursive solidity is privileged, or that he succeeds in winning our sympathy (although his “Piangi, piangi” comes close, for me); the point is that his authoritarian power within the plot is matched by a power to line up music, words, and gesture in a way that lends force to his utterances. Here that power is aligned along traditional gendered lines, but this is by no means the norm. In fact, as we shall see in chapter 3, the discursive realm of redundancy and literalism is more often associated with the female voice and body.

Opera critics have tended to approach all manner of redundancy nervously. In vocal music of all periods, pictorialism is devalued as “merely” a surface effect. And while one dominant approach to interpretation has long sought correspondence between opera's three “systems,” words, music, and staging, the passages that have attracted scholarly attention and admiration have tended to posit much looser, less overt, more idea-driven relationships between music and staging. On the contrary, music that traces movement too precisely has tended to be ignored or dis-

missed as too blatant, too restricted to mimicry of visible action.⁸ This bias against manifest meanings, and specifically against synchronization of music and movement has recently been cast in forceful terms by Carolyn Abbate. Inspired by feminist film theory and its suspicions of a too-intimate union of voice and body, Abbate has brilliantly uncovered the hidden agenda of narrative music in opera as an extension of the controlling authorial voice.⁹

For Abbate “miming” is not so much something music *does* as a stance adopted by some musicologists, who can be so keen to render music “meaningful” that they restrict its meanings to those literal aspects that can be easily translated into words. Whether the result is Procrustean interpretation of Wagnerian leitmotives or blow-by-blow narrative grafted onto a programmatic work, Abbate argues that the result is distastefully hierarchical and, metaphorically, also patriarchal: the “miming model” silences the multiple, unruly voices that inhabit operatic music, pinning it down instead to an elaboration of some “plot” stemming from the controlling pen of the composer. Much of her work, then, has been concerned with showing how music detaches itself from the literal and the manifest. Writing about Tannhäuser’s Rome narrative in *Unsung Voices*, she shows how a repeating orchestral figure starts out as imitative of Tannhäuser’s steps, advancing toward Rome and toward the pope, but at the number’s culmination becomes detached from its mimetic function to convey subtler, more mysterious meanings. Or she hears the double bass of Richard Strauss’s orchestra at a crucial moment in *Salome* not as conveying leitmotives or depicting some aspect of plot, but as “lip-synching,” sliding us into Salome’s subject position and forcing us to hear the world as she does.¹⁰

It is no accident that these examples are drawn from the German canon. Italian opera is short on voices that could be construed as oracular: its expressive power comes from its materiality, from an almost jesting interplay between composer and diva that is institutionalized within the genre and the performing space. The best works by Bellini or Verdi will appear disappointingly straightforward, blatantly embodied if mea-

sured on the yardstick of the Wagnerian emphasis on the invisible and the unsung.

But competitions between national styles tell only a splinter of this story. Opera in the nineteenth century was the transnational art par excellence, with performers and composers constantly circulating among Milan, Vienna, and Paris in response to the opportunities offered by audiences, economic systems, and political climates in each city. Paris was the center, thanks to government centralization that allowed the Opéra to be funded at an unparalleled level of luxury and—even more important—to a neglected legacy of the Revolution, relative freedom from theatrical censorship. Partly for these economic and political reasons, another thing Paris had to offer to migrant composers was innovation—in opera but especially in the popular theaters of the Boulevard du Temple with their vogue for musically accompanied melodrama. The nature of opera's borrowings from Parisian *mélodrame* will be taken up in chapter 2; for now it is enough to remember that this theatrical genre was very much about what was seen and shown: virtue, nobility, birth; all were represented through codes of visual—and gestural—signification. One of my aims in what follows is not only to track the traces left on opera by *mélodrame*, a debt that extends much further into the century than is usually acknowledged. I also want to imagine an alternative operatic world in which such overt meanings can be celebrated rather than lamented, in which music that reinforces and abets the visible and the manifest throws up its own set of critical questions.

These observations about national styles lead also to a final, theoretical aspect of “unsung voices” and their uses for operatic interpretation. Abbate's quest for oracular voices is, at bottom, much in sympathy with the valorization of the voice as pure cry, anterior to language and social signification: such a rhapsodic approach works well with the texts she privileges. But Italian opera bases its meanings principally on the pleasures of syntax, on organized patterns of sound proceeding from conventional rules. Such music constructs comprehensible signifying systems that work as a loose parallel to verbal language. Why should wordless

vocalise and other species of inarticulate song be the single realm in which voices from outside the text can vanquish the authorial voice? It seems plausible that the hyperarticulate overlay of meaning that occurs at moments of excessive literalism might equally cause an overflow of signification, in which dramatic character or performer momentarily seems to seize expressive control from the composer. For all these reasons, then, it is precisely with the type of musical discourse that Abbate has dismissively dubbed “miming music” that I want to begin listening for the neglected power of redundancy, and, indeed, of miming itself.

1

Needless to say, we never see Germont’s entrance for the duet with Violetta staged so that his footsteps coincide with the strong beats of the orchestral music, and it is unlikely—though not impossible—that the audience for the opera’s 1853 Venice premiere would have been confronted with such small-scale synchronization between music and movement. Such synchronization had been the norm for the generation just before Verdi’s. In 1778, reviews of opera and pantomimic ballet could dictate that the singer or dancer must “always regulate his gestures and his steps to the music,” warning that to abandon oneself to free and unmeasured movement would be to “betray the art” and turn what should be a dignified spectacle into ignoble comedy.¹¹ And as late as 1840 a staging manual prepared in Paris for Donizetti’s opera *La Favorite* still called for the entire chorus to move in lockstep, their movements often keyed to specific chords or rhythmic patterns in the music. At one point the *Favorite* manual instructs the entire cast to take two paces forward on a sudden forte from the orchestra; elsewhere the chorus and corps de ballet are asked to move en masse to the left at a particular word uttered by one of the principal characters.¹²

One explanation of how such planned, patterned mapping of music in movement fell out of favor, to be replaced by the profound suspicion of such effects still current today, would touch centrally on *La traviata*

and on the realism so flamboyantly embraced in the opera's setting. The social realism of Verdi's plot (and of the stage play by Alexandre Dumas *fils* that was its source) was accompanied by a shift in attitudes to acting, in which the quest for the natural and the real dislodged beauty as the supreme aesthetic value. Choreographing an entire chorus to move with the orchestra obviously trampled on such naturalism, as did any effect of staging that suggested that the performers were conscious of the music or that their movements were paced or controlled by it.

Yet the hegemony of realism in the late nineteenth century is only one facet of a complex history. Resistance to the synchronization of gesture with words and music has been a recurrent pattern in the expressive arts, stretching back to the earliest prescriptions for the matching of word and gesture in the oratorical treatises of Cicero and Quintilian. While somewhat reluctantly admitting physical gesture as an essential component of oration, Cicero cautions against gestures that double or mime the spoken words rather than complementing them:

the action of the hand should not be too affected, but should follow the words rather than, as it were, express them by mimicry; the arm should be considerably extended, as one of the weapons of oratory; stamping of the foot should be used only in the most vehement efforts, at the commencement or conclusion. But everything depends on the countenance; and even in that the eyes bear sovereign sway.¹³

Writing about a century later, Quintilian restricts such pictorially mimetic gestures as that of suggesting "a sick man by mimicking the gesture of a doctor feeling the pulse" to the realm of comic acting, urging that the orator should be "as unlike a dancer as possible, and his gesture should be adapted rather to his thought than to his actual words."¹⁴ For both writers, the bias against mimicry seems to derive from a suspicion of the body—a desire to limit its contribution to rhetorical delivery. Cicero's oft-repeated preference for facial expression over bodily gesture as a mode of intensifying verbal delivery stems from his conviction that the face is the seat of the mind, the only part of the body that can

display “as infinite a number of significations and changes as there are emotions in the soul.”¹⁵

Although intended as a cautionary example, Quintilian’s vignette of the pulse-taking gesture as a sign for sickness reminds us why such literalizing mimicry developed at all, and why it persisted despite repeated reprimands from the theorists. An important appeal of such “pantomimic” effects lay in the fact that they were imagined to be universally comprehensible, capable of conveying both emotions and verbal concepts through movement alone, without the aid of language. This idea of gesture as transcending language would flower among the eighteenth-century philosophes, but the ancients had already acknowledged the power of gesture to communicate with the illiterate, foreign nations, and with animals.¹⁶ Such an “anthropological” understanding of gesture constantly returns to the idea that it can speak more directly than language, that it can transcend the social strictures to which words were subject. According to this view, the principal virtue of gestural expression was that it was not dependent, as was speech, on a system of conventions or learned associations between an idea and its verbal sign.

Ironically, though, this faith in gestural communication as a universal language led to a proliferation of redundancy, of duplication between word and gesture. In what Michel Foucault has called “the great age of classification,” a vogue arose for elaborate catalogs and taxonomies of gesture, in which specific emotions and verbal concepts were “translated” into physical representations of those concepts and states of mind. The fashion originated with Cesare Ripa’s *Iconologia* (1593), a catalog of woodcuts personifying emotions such as “Boasting,” “Hypocrisy,” and “Curiosity,” as well as more allegorical figures such as “History,” “Theory,” and “Eternal Rome.”¹⁷ A century later the French painter Charles Le Brun placed the theory of gestural communication on a newly scientific basis. Although similar to Ripa’s in organization, Le Brun’s catalog dispensed with Ripa’s interest in the positioning of the limbs and the symbolism of costumes and props to focus more nar-

rowly on the muscular composition of facial expressions and the painterly means for transferring these observed human expressions to the canvas.¹⁸

Both Ripa's and Le Brun's systems were initially intended for use by painters and by viewers of painting; that is, the gestures they pictured were meant to stand in for words. But their lexicons were soon adapted to theater and opera, where the codified gestures duplicated and reinforced words that conveyed the same emotions and ideas. The first hints of a gestural taxonomy applied to opera appear in the early staging manual *Il corago* (c.1630), which included a guide to appropriate gestures for expressing supplication, prayer, anger, grieving, and combat.¹⁹ The compulsion to catalog and decode gestures peaked in the middle of the eighteenth century, with a proliferation of treatises, the most influential of which were François Riccoboni's *Art du théâtre* (1750) and Johann Jakob Engel's *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1783).²⁰ Riccoboni, on the one hand, took the specification and sheer number of gestural codes to a new level, offering fussy indications for each segment of the hand and the arm. In constructing these compendious surveys, he endorsed the duplication of meaning against which Cicero had cautioned, providing actors with the means to make their bodies into almost literal mirrors of verbal meaning.²¹

Engel, on the other hand, spearheaded an influential challenge to the philosophes' glorification of gesture as a "universal language," by contesting gesture's universal comprehensibility and arguing that pantomime was effective only when the story to be narrated was already familiar. Engel did not rule out the possibility that humans might one day invent a true language of gesture, but he insisted that the vocabulary and conventions of such a language would have to be consciously learned. He viewed gesture as generated by a combination of natural impulse and bodily "metaphor"; his examples of the latter include the association of a firm, unmovable stance with obstinacy and the habit of shaking the head to convey the negative, indicating that "one turns aside from an idea that one rejects."²² Elsewhere he parses the common ges-

ture of pointing to the sky to indicate innocence as an example of synecdoche: it implies calling on the gods who reside there to bear witness to the subject's innocence.

In one sense the philosophes and their descendants treated physical gesture in much the same way as they approached music: as a corrective to the stultified social modes of speech, and as an unmediated, authentic, primitive language that could "say" all that words could not. Peter Brooks has famously traced this conviction into *mélodrame's* "text of muteness," a dramatic aesthetic that uses mute characters and frozen, wordless tableaux of extreme emotion to etch certain words and emotions on the spectator's consciousness, grasping at a mode of communication beyond language.²³ For Brooks the natural extension of such overwrought miming lies in music, and he suggests that what he calls *mélodrame's* "gestural trope of the inarticulate" tends "toward a full realization in opera, where music is charged with the burden of ineffable expression."²⁴

Of course opera can only partake of "ineffable expression" if it is cast as "other," opposed to the word-bound territory of literary studies, just as claims that gesture enjoys universal comprehension depend on its status as the embodied opposite pole to language. And in the case of nineteenth-century French or Italian opera, in particular, the question of the ineffable recedes even further, buried under the wealth of formal and dramatic conventions that facilitated dialogue with contemporary audiences and prevented the genre from approaching anything like a "natural" language of the spirit. As Engel was the first to argue persuasively, if the "language" of gesture is to be understood, it needs to be just as formalized as any verbal language.

Engel's widely disseminated objections notwithstanding, the conviction that gesture could function as a language more immediate than speech maintained wide currency well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, during a period when so many other aspects of classical theatrical practice were being overturned, the published evidence suggests that theo-

ries of movement and gesture remained surprisingly static and attached to established views.²⁵ Almost no new treatises on theatrical gesture or iconography were published after Gilbert Austin's influential *Chironomia* of 1806, and those few guides that did appear repeat the advice of the eighteenth-century sources almost verbatim. Carlo Blasis's dance manual *The Code of Terpsichore* (1828) repeats the verdicts of eighteenth-century authorities that gesture is "the dictionary of simple nature . . . understood even by animals," and teaches an approach to practical pantomime based partly on a learned system of what Blasis called "gestures of convention."²⁶ Similarly, Aristippe's 1826 *Théorie de l'art du comédien* admirably cites the major authorities (including Quintilian and Engel) and reiterates the standard views of gesture as universally comprehensible and of imitative gesture as suitable only for comedy.²⁷ Half a century later, Edward P. Thwing's *Drill Book in Vocal Culture and Gesture* (1876) takes a strikingly similar approach, content to reiterate the same orthodoxies, handed down from the same line of authorities.²⁸ While Blasis's treatise is clearly intended for professionals, the chatty tone suggests that it and a handful of others in the same vein also catered to a new market of amateur actors and singers. This amateur orientation may partly account for the manuals' recycling of familiar concepts, but the paucity of new ideas may also be an indication that the ground of theatrical practice had shifted seismically, and that gestural theory had been brought up short, as yet unequal to the task of systematizing what had changed.

Without a doubt the most important development in nineteenth-century thinking about gesture was the advent of naturalism, most radically embodied in the experiments of André Antoine and his Théâtre-Libre. Antoine urged his actors to stop striking poses and cycling through the familiar gestural lexicon. Instead they were to emulate the furniture and the stage props: Antoine looked forward to an aesthetic in which "a returned pencil or an overturned cup will be as significant and will have as profound an effect on the minds of the audience as the grandiloquent exaggerations of the Romantic theater."²⁹ In such an aus-

tere climate, the production or cataloging of new gestural systems was clearly an impossibility. The notion of gesture as a language in itself, worthy of dictionarylike exegesis, was gradually replaced by research that signaled the awakening of more modern concerns, conceiving gesture as involuntary physiological response or as unconscious manifestation of psychic depth.

Old and new mentalities collide in a fascinating way in what may be the century's last attempt to theorize music and gesture, a strange volume entitled *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste* (1900) by the French parapsychologist Albert Aiglun de Rochas.³⁰ Rochas's study begins with the by-now obligatory jaunt through the authorities, reproducing engravings and commentary from both Le Brun on facial expressions and Johann Kaspar Lavater on physiognomy. Interestingly, however, the appeal of these Enlightenment antecedents lay for Rochas not in their rationality or their completeness, but in their pioneering attempts to place gesture on a scientific basis, to understand it in terms of the involuntary muscular movements that translate emotion and musical sensation into outward expression. In his own idiosyncratic way, Rochas sought to build on the observational foundations of Le Brun and Lavater. In a Montmartre cabaret hired for the purpose, he hypnotized an actress named Lina and asked her to assume poses in response to a wide range of verbal and musical stimuli, the latter including operatic excerpts, the Marseillaise, and folk songs of many nations.³¹ When the hypnotic poses were photographed and compared to Lina's waking behavior in response to the same musical prompts—with results eerily reminiscent of Jean-Martin Charcot's photographs of his hysterical patients—Rochas claimed to have proven that the hypnotic gestures were a kind of uninhibited ballet of the soul, more truly attuned to the music than those made in a conscious state (Figures 1 and 2).

The move from Germont's authoritative tread to Lina's vulnerably exposed body retraces the trajectory I hinted at earlier, from the early nineteenth-century penchant for representing the body as measured out and paced by music to the hyper-realism—and the helplessness—of a



Figure 1. Lina, under hypnosis, listens to Méphistophélès's serenade from Gounod's *Faust*.



Figure 2. "Le vin, le vin est un trésor divin." Lina reacts to the "Air de la coupe," from *Galathée*. Photo: Nadar.

body acted on by music that bears no rhythmic relationship to its pose. Rochas's experiments overstep the bounds of theatrical naturalism by several degrees, for although his subject is an actress, the point of the exercise is precisely that she is "really" doing these things; that is, responding directly to the musical stimulus rather than consciously putting herself on display or polishing a performance for the audience.³²

As with Charcot's clinical studies, it is precisely this voyeuristic intrusion into the intimate space of the female subjects that makes the representations so titillating.³³ Not only is the female form displayed for observers, but we are given the impression of having full access to her interior self: the splayed poses of the visible body, whether of actress or hysterical patient, are taken as convincing representations of the character within. Theatrical performance within the realist tradition worked in the same way, relying for its effect on a similar impression of perfect correspondence between a visible exterior and a psychologized interior.

2

For the present-day reader, distanced from Rochas's project by history and probably by a skeptical attitude to his parapsychology, the photographs of Lina speak not of a "true" response to music, but rather of the twin traps that structure all artistic representations of women. Rochas's images bring the voyeurism and power of the gaze together with a more specific objectification that arises from naturalistic representation, with its illusion of placing the "real woman" before viewers. Feminist critics have traditionally held to the pessimistic belief that neither of these representational modes can be countered: the best "we" (scholars, interpreters, women in general) can do is to draw attention to the violence of objectification and/or call for the development of new forms of performance and representation.³⁴ When the object under study is opera, this means an eternity of uncovering and critiquing the flawed gender politics of the "masterworks." Where feminist scholars of visual art or theater can direct their attention to recent artworks that critique or subvert the dominant modes of gender representation, the notoriously conservative genre of opera offers us few such revisionist texts; even the newest works cling to tradition.

One narrow avenue of escape lies in the fact that where Lina is frozen and framed by the camera the women in opera move and sing, estab-

lishing a very different relation to the mechanics of the gaze. Thus the idea of the frame, the female image frozen within the proprietary gaze, may not be the best model for analyzing the workings of gender representation in opera. Film too encompasses the crucial ingredient of movement, and feminist opera studies have drawn much from theories of sight and sound in film; yet the two media are radically different. For one thing, it is doubtful that opera performs what film theorists call “suture”; that is, the narrative pull that stitches viewers tightly into the momentum of plot and character. Suture has been a foundational concept for gender theory because of its assumption that film narratives have the power to still independent thought: we can become so caught up in the experiences of the fictional characters that there is a temptation to accept all manner of misogyny and exploitation.³⁵ Nietzsche had feared that Wagner’s music (not his plots) had something of this effect on listeners, and when Catherine Clément worries that opera’s beautiful music causes the audience to accept and even desire the death of sopranos, she is imagining a kind of musical suture.³⁶ But surely the history of opera offers us far more examples of resistant (or simply distracted) listening. For most of the nineteenth century, house lights were kept up during performances; and, as we know from contemporary fiction, audience members conversed freely during the recitatives and felt the need to listen with full attention only to those sections that particularly pleased them or that featured a favorite singer. Plot was perhaps the least noticed dimension of the operatic experience, leaving viewers free to relate to the work in a more distanced way and to make an independent judgment about the spectacle they were witnessing.

A second reason to approach analogies between opera and film with caution relates to the highly particular role in which film theory has cast sound and voice. Where those seeking to uncover the gender dynamics of opera have traditionally seen voice and body as engaged in an evenly matched struggle for representational primacy, theories of film routinely consign voice to a supporting role in reinforcing the representational system and the objectifying gaze.³⁷ Kaja Silverman has argued that in

classic Hollywood cinema, the female voice is most often lodged in a visible source on screen, its words clearly understood as emanating from a character within the diegesis.³⁸ Male voices, while also used in this way, have the additional possibility of functioning as voice-over, the body that produces them invisible and often displaced from the internal workings of plot by time and distance.³⁹ Voice-over almost always corresponds to the point of view of the omniscient narrator, explaining the events of the plot. Thus, the male voice-over tends to be experienced as closely linked to an authorial perspective, coinciding with the intelligence who created the film.

These categories, and the power hierarchy that goes with them, have been repeated so often that they can begin to seem self-evident. But it is worth stepping back to ask exactly *why* visible sound sources are perceived as powerless in film, and whether this should also be true in opera. In film, this particular relationship between sound and image has roots in both film history and technology. Film originated as a silent genre, and the addition of sound was experienced as a trauma from which some never quite seem to have recovered. The continuing suspicion of sound and its forced or illusory union with image makes sense in connection with the technical process of filmmaking, which dictates that sound is for the most part recorded *after* image and superimposed on it by a process of dubbing. Moreover, editing enforces a single fixed version of a narrative on all viewers, presenting events from a carefully chosen visual and narrative perspective. The situation in opera is quite the opposite: voice commonly booms forth from visible bodies with a presence and simultaneity that can seem excessive, even disturbing in its own very different way.

Where the two art forms perhaps converge is in their relationship to sound as a sensory medium. Any voice emanating from a visible face or body can be objectified by the viewer, but when the visible source of the sound is rendered unknowable, the viewer's power to organize and decode the viewing experience is drastically limited or constrained. When unpinned from a visible sound source, voice has an unmatched power

to permeate or enter into us as listening subjects, almost tricking us into believing that the voice we hear is echoing within our heads, unmediated by filmic diegesis or by our own critical faculties. In opera, too, ultimate power is often invested in voices whose sources are invisible or ambiguous—the voice from the heavens in the Act III finale of Verdi's *Don Carlos*, for example, or the voices of Titurel and John the Baptist in *Parsifal* and *Salome*, both of which emerge from subterranean depths. Film theory, with its sometimes startling disregard for the words actually spoken in dialogue, often treats all voices and sounds as essentially the same, equally able to seep into the unsuspecting consciousness and make us trust their messages. Musicology, in contrast, possesses refined tools for differentiating voices, for deciding that some music, regardless of its source, is patterned, controlled, or intellectually mediated.

3

My aim in *Mimomania* is to follow such clues, using musical, poetic, and iconographic details to arrive at conclusions about how specific operas represent the body and how they negotiate the impasse of representation. Do operatic texts themselves provide any openings through which the oppressive surveillance effect of representation might be unsettled or destabilized? Despite an overall pessimism about the violence and silencing effects of theatrical representation, the discipline of performance studies offers at least one promising possibility: a loophole not so much in the framing effect of the proscenium or in the fixed power relationships between voice and gaze, but in the very fabric of naturalistic representation. Following the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, theater historian Elin Diamond has constructed an alternative history of drama that emphasizes not the usual steady progression toward realism, but fissures in the mimetic project that open up periodically in all eras of theatrical representation.⁴⁰

Irigaray's starting point is not the problem of artistic representation, nor even of Plato's theory of mimesis, but gender difference as con-

ceived psychoanalytically: the Freudian assumption that a girl child is nothing more than a secondhand, castrated, mirror-image of the properly equipped male. According to her, all acts of mimesis go back to this original, inescapable mimesis of the masculine. Theatrical mimesis is thus tainted, the very act of representing nature in an artistic text inescapably and inherently patriarchal. He (or she) who does the representing is automatically—or by a conventional set of associations—gendered male, while that which is represented (nature, characters, performers) is cast as mirror, fulfilling the traditionally feminine role. The only escape from these conventions is to rupture or overstate the language in which the representation is couched—a process which Irigaray describes as *mimétisme* (or, as Diamond renders it in English, “mimicry”).⁴¹ Even in translation, Irigaray’s florid, incantatory language communicates something of the rupture she has in mind:

if, by the exploits of her hand, woman were to reopen paths into (once again) a/one logos that connotes her as castrated . . . then a certain sense, which still constitutes the sense of history also, will undergo unparalleled interrogation, revolution. But how is this to be done? Given that, once again, the “reasonable” words—to which in any case she has access only through mimicry—are powerless to translate all that pulses, clamors, and hangs hazily in the cryptic passages of hysterical suffering-latency. Then. . . . Turn everything upside-down, inside out, back to front. *Rack it with radical convulsions*, carry back, reimport, those crises that her “body” suffers in her impotence to say what disturbs her. . . . *Overthrow syntax* by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current, breaking the circuits.⁴²

This call for the defeat of syntax and teleology, and their replacement by some more embodied and crisis-ridden discourse, is conventionally taken as the creed of *écriture féminine*, the feminist prose style that eschews logical argument as patriarchal and substitutes a more “feminine” mode of free association and linguistic excess. However, the terms of Irigaray’s manifesto also admit another possibility, if not necessarily one that she herself would welcome. Her “radical convulsions”

and rejection of syntax can also be appropriated by *interpreters* of texts, who may choose to seek out and highlight musical or poetic effects that denaturalize the language of representation, lay bare its conventional underpinnings.

Elin Diamond's alternative history offers some idea of how such interpretive choices might function. The obvious example is the epic theater of Brecht, in which the alienation effect and gestic overstatement challenge the hegemony of realism and draw attention to the means of representation by overstating certain conventional features of the theatrical spectacle. But it is one of the strengths of Diamond's study that she also discovers such challenges to mimesis in earlier periods. She reads Walter Benjamin's famous study of seventeenth-century German tragedy as a celebration of similar distancing or denaturalizing effects, achieved in this case by way of linguistic "emblems" that require active decoding on the part of the spectator: "the baroque emblematiser . . . drags the essence of what is depicted out before the image, in writing as a caption."⁴³ Benjamin's reading of the stylized vocabulary of the *Trauerspiel* becomes for Diamond an aid for interpreting the layered linguistic conventions of Restoration drama, in particular the works of Aphra Behn, in whom she discovers a "rhetoric of sighs, wounds, vows, gazes, love darts, and conquests" that renders language *overconventional*, no longer comprehensible as a natural register of speech but drawing attention to its own linguistic means.⁴⁴

4

Diamond's "rhetoric of sighs" can bring us back to the world of nineteenth-century opera, and especially to the musical and poetic vocabulary of Bellini and Verdi. The chapters that follow will trace the appearance and submergence of such effects of "mimicry" or "overstatement" in operas stretching from what is often considered the first *grand opéra*, Auber's *Muette de Portici* (1828), to the late works of Wagner and Verdi. As I have suggested, such effects gradually faded from operatic

music as the century progressed, replaced by a more psychologized musical discourse; but my trajectory in *Mimomania* instead emphasizes the surprising persistence of melodramatic effects and gestural overstatement in the last decades of the century.

Auber's grand opéra is perhaps the only musical work ever to experiment with what could *literally* be called gestural music. The opera's mute heroine Fenella recounts complicated narratives in elaborate gestural language, accompanied by orchestral music that strives for a similar "legibility." On the surface, the heroine's muteness is a sign for the "natural," but at the same time the composer clearly enjoys composing semiotically transparent music for her, setting himself progressively more difficult imitative tasks as the opera unfolds. Initially the miming music is confined to stock melodramatic sentiments such as "innocence betrayed," but the communicative stakes are soon raised, with complex emotions and even entire phrases of dialogue represented purely in sound. On one level, Auber's music for Fenella is merely another technology of representation; but I think it does more, inventing a musical style whose primary purpose is to convey a sense of physical presence.

La Muette de Portici had no significant imitators, and the Parisian vogue for mute characters that inspired it soon died down. However, the opera's games with language and gesture, as well as its reliance on pantomimic models from contemporary Parisian mélodrame, survived in later works. The approaches to staging and gesture in Bellini's *Puritani* and Meyerbeer's *Huguenots*, premiered in Paris during the next decade and within a year of each other, represent contrasting cosmopolitan responses to this Parisian trend. If French grand opera interprets the gestural on the grandest scale—an entire religious procession could become gesture—Bellini's expressive power lies partly in *negation*, in refusal to grant visual representation to the most important components of his drama. This is not to say that he erases the body: on the contrary, in common with most Italian opera of the period,

Bellini represents it not through elaborate visual effects, but through melodic formulas that imitate bodily spasms like tears or sighs, sounds that may or may not be seconded by the actual presence of the character on stage.

This purely aural relationship to the body underwent a crucial change in Bellini's last opera, *I puritani* (Théâtre-Italien, 1835), prompted by a new awareness of the spatial possibilities of staging inspired by Parisian dramatic models. While *I puritani* can be seen as a classic Italian "mad-scene" opera, with Bellini's remarkable tactic of beginning all three of the mad heroine's arias from offstage forging an uncanny association between madness and disembodied song, the effect of Bellini's infatuation with offstage singing in this opera is anything but uncanny. By using offstage music to extend the boundaries of the stage, he directs spectators' desire toward the space beyond the stage, thus rendering the invisible paradoxically concrete and embodied.

As I have already suggested, it can be misleading to read the representation of gender in opera in terms borrowed from film or painting, since the gazed-upon characters in opera tend to have much greater autonomy and representational power than their counterparts in the visual arts. But within this larger argument Meyerbeer's operas may be the exception that proves the rule. A German whose early operatic style was formed in Italy, Meyerbeer adapted to Paris by embracing French conventions in all their excess, fashioning great expanses of music that became props for extravagant visual effects. *Les Huguenots* (Opéra, 1836) goes far beyond the generic French infatuation with spectacle to construct an entire plot around illicit acts of looking and listening. What is exceptional about Meyerbeer's opera is the role music plays in stoking desire in these scenes, so that both music and stage picture conspire to "gaze at" the heroine, Valentine, and to create desire for her body when she is not on stage. By contrast, Meyerbeer lends heft and authority to the character of the old Protestant servant Marcel by marking his entrances with forthright recurring themes to underline his presence. The

context is more caricaturelike and even more wooden, but the technique of fusing music with stage movement is almost identical to Verdi's treatment of Germont's entrance.

From this excavation of comparatively little known operas, first performed in Paris in the mid 1830s, I turn in the second half of the book to canonical works, tracing the impact of French gestural conventions in operas that remain at the core of the repertory. Chapter 5 takes as its starting point a convergence of music and gesture common to three operas. In *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), *Don Carlos* (1867), and *Aida* (1871), lyric numbers end with the prima donna soprano falling to her knees in a desperate appeal to heaven, accompanied by a slow, transcendent music very different in style from the fiery closing movements with which Verdi often concluded scenes, even at this late stage in his career. The roots of this tableau of supplication can be traced back to mélodrame and the grand-opéra influences of Auber and Meyerbeer, but at the same time the gestural emphasis acts for Verdi as a catalyst to musical innovation rather than as a retreat into past styles. In *Un ballo in maschera*, the tableau of prayer features a heroine who tries to suppress the erotic stirrings of her body; in *Don Carlos* and *Aida*, the kneeling pose is similarly invoked as an antidote against illicit passion or as succor for the anguish caused by that passion. The combined force of the three operas suggests that Verdi had a surprising tendency to route his love scenes into sublimation and disembodiment, a tendency that might help to explain the paucity of "true" love duets in his output generally.

My final chapter, perhaps inevitably, deals with Wagner and his music's physical basis, an angle that has often been foreclosed by an excessive reverence for the composer's own metaphysical bias. The word "gesture" (or *Gebärde*) meant much to Wagner: it echoes through his theoretical writings, employed as an amulet against the excesses of contemporary French and Italian opera, with their "undramatic" indulgence in vocal ornament and melodic pleasure for its own sake. For Wagner the reformer, gesture was the generative kernel from which both melody and speech rhythm should grow, as well as the crucial link

to ancient Greek drama, in which (as some nineteenth-century thinkers imagined) music, word, and gesture had been perfectly fused.

Wagner was less willing to acknowledge the importance of gesture in the musical conception of his own operas. For the most part musicological commentators have obediently followed suit, allowing physical movement an important role only in the early operas, after which the visible is understood to be sublimated into quasi-linguistic leitmotiv systems and mythical allegory. The chapter begins by exhuming some moments in Wagner's oeuvre when gesture and music intersect in an almost melodramatic manner: for example, the scene in *Tannhäuser* when the title character approaches his beloved Elisabeth, his every step "mimed" by the orchestra. This gestural aesthetic perhaps climaxes in the first scene of *Die Walküre* (1856/1870), in which the orchestral music that enfolds the lovers' meaningful glances and unvoiced passion can be heard as generated by the gestures it accompanies, its structure of repetition and contrast patterned after the characters' smallest movements. A comparison between the *Walküre* episode and the scenes in acts 1 and 3 of *Parsifal* in which Kundry fetches water reveals Wagner's progressive distancing from gestural music, culminating in the complete sublimation of the physical dimension advocated in *Parsifal*.

One surprising result of retracing nineteenth-century operatic history in relation to gesture and gestural music is to unsettle the traditional opposition between Verdi and Wagner, and to highlight the debt to French drama and to grand opéra shared by these supposed antipodes of nineteenth-century operatic style. The pantomimic excesses of *Die Walküre* suggest that Wagner may have absorbed some unacknowledged dramaturgical lessons during his miserable sojourn in Paris in the early 1840s, while the ethereal scene-ending music of Verdi's tableaux of supplication hint at a desire to transcend "mere" staging and to reach for a Wagnerian quality of unearthliness.

In gestural music, as in all interesting aspects of existence, opposites co-exist. In this sense *Mimomania* tells two stories at once: one of a histori-

cal progression that saw “miming” go out of style to be replaced by less physically concrete connections between music and staging, and another in which different aesthetics of gesture (if one end of the spectrum is “miming,” can the other be called “transcendence”?) jostle each other within a single work. Goethe acknowledged this when he paired Laertes’s observations about the benefits of musical accompaniment to the actor with the abstracted theatrical fantasy of the Hall of the Past. In a similar way, that master of contradictions Richard Wagner juxtaposes seductive images of the disintegration of the physical world (the conclusions of *Tristan* or *Götterdämmerung*) with demonstrations of his conviction that both musical expression and passion spring from the physical and the gestural (*Tristan*’s potion scene, the first minutes of *Die Walküre*).

As must already be clear, the bodies animated and transformed by the kinds of musical effects discussed here do not only belong to women; “mimomania” can confer authority equally on male and female characters. Introductions by nature invite sweeping pronouncements and ambitious claims, and if I have left one of my *most* sweeping for last, it is only because of its importance. The appeal of this inquiry into opera’s bodies for me—and one of my hopes for its execution—has always been tightly entwined with the representation of gender, and with a desire to find places in nineteenth-century opera in which female characters can enjoy a power and charisma that is specifically musical. For some readers this may make *Mimomania* into a sort of apologia: an attempt to rescue some of my favorite operas from the distasteful gender politics that produced and continues to permeate them. I might have chosen instead to add a sequel to the already severe critiques of the gender politics of this repertoire, or to seek models of female power beyond the opera’s fictional interiors, in women’s contributions to operatic culture as singers, patrons, and spectators. If I persist in searching for messages about women (and optimistic ones!) within the operas themselves, it is partly out of a desire not to scant the complexity of interactions be-

tween opera and social reality—after all, a work of imagination can display many more gradations of meaning than just the dominant misogyny of the society that produced it, and conversely, some works of art do not reflect much of the social at all—and partly in a simple hope that these works will be with us for some time, renewing themselves in performance and gathering new meanings as their audiences change.

Wagner's Cancan, Fenella's Leap

La Muette de Portici and Auber's Reality Effect

I begin with an encounter between two of the principal characters in this study, one fictional, the other real. Human, all too human is Richard Wagner, whose diatribes against French grand opéra are as well known as the professional ambition and envy that contributed so much to their tone. His fictional interlocutor is Fenella, the title character of Auber's 1828 opera, *La Muette de Portici*, almost certainly the only operatic heroine who neither speaks nor sings, a distinction that has made her the object of extravagant fantasies about the meaning, precision, and sincerity of her silent discourse.

In part 1 of *Opera and Drama*, Wagner casts Fenella as protagonist of a tiny allegory designed to advance his accusatory history of nineteenth-century opera and, more specifically, to illustrate the dramatic bankruptcy of grand opéra. Starting from a position of self-righteous nationalism, Wagner attacks Auber's eager embrace of Rossini's style and touristic appropriations of Neapolitan folk melody in *La Muette*, finally writing the opera off in a single-sentence paragraph:

This [*Muette*] was the dumb-struck Muse of Drama, who wandered broken-hearted between the singing, raging throngs, and, tired of life,

made away at last with herself and her hopeless sorrow in the artificial fury of a stage volcano!—¹

This is, of course, a declaration of war against the guiding aesthetic of French opera. The “singing, raging throngs” and the “artificial fury” of the volcano represent the despised extremes of mere operatic entertainment, tuneful song and extravagant staging. Silent Fenella, in contrast, appears in Wagner’s scenario as the muse of drama—but of a narrow definition of that word derived from the spoken theater, based above all in words and ideas. As a character who communicates entirely in wordless pantomime, Fenella seems hilariously miscast in this role, ill matched with the orientation of most opera, even Wagner’s own.

Inconsistencies and all, this characterization is typical of the totalizing impulse that drives so much of *Opera and Drama*, the tendency to slot all works of art into a single narrative of the evolution of “music drama.” But *La Muette* stayed in Wagner’s mind, and when he wrote about it again twenty years later, in an 1871 obituary for Auber, he found more generous—and more bizarre—ways of stating his opinions.² Much of the argument is consistent with the earlier critique: Wagner lauds *La Muette* for its musical and dramatic continuity, for the modifications it introduces to the design of “number opera,” and for the importance it grants to the chorus as an autonomous dramatic force. In this second article, however, Fenella-as-allegory has been replaced by a chorus line of cancan dancers. In the midst of a rant against French music (and especially against the *opéras-comiques* that comprised most of Auber’s output) for its excessive reliance on dance rhythms and too-regular phrases, Wagner pauses to make an exception for *La Muette*, whose rhythmic energy, he grants, managed to be so infectious because Auber had seized the essence of the cancan, the only national dance in which “the act of procreation is symbolically consummated.”³ In a similar vein, Wagner concedes that he first grasped the “quintessence” of the *opéra-comique* style and began to understand “the singularly uniform build” of “these curious motives and their alternations” when he

heard—or rather, saw—Auber's music danced as quadrilles at a society ball.⁴

In welcome contrast to the allegory of Fenella as the muse of drama, then, the cancan and quadrille metaphors cohere around the mobile and the visual. Dance is figured as a means of translating into visible form the regularity and rhythmic energy of Auber's musical structures. This shift from “drama” to dance, while hardly representative of a sea change in Wagnerian aesthetics more generally, suggests an expansion of the limits of operatic drama grounded in words to one that admits dance, gesture, and the body—perhaps making good on the mostly abstract musings about gesture in *Opera and Drama*, part 3.⁵

More important, the odd invocation of the cancan and the quadrille places Wagner in dialogue with the familiar diagnosis of grand opéra as primarily a static visual genre, organized around the scenic unit of the tableau, freezing opulently costumed choral masses in sculpted, emotive poses against a painstakingly realistic backdrop. Wagner's metaphors crucially inject the idea of *movement* into this notion of French opera as historical painting, advancing the intriguing idea that the logic of the genre might be as much gestural as scenic, as much concerned with capturing movement in music as with the static mechanisms of scenic spectacle.⁶ Wagner's attitudes to gesture and the visual will be probed more deeply in chapter 6; for the moment his prose writings can serve as an invitation to consider the question of whether grand opéra might thematize bodily movement and how it does so.

1

La Muette de Portici is an obvious starting point for such an inquiry, for reasons that extend far beyond Wagner's eloquent ambivalence. The opera's focus on a mute heroine, a role designed not for a singer but for a ballerina, places it at a unique generic and historical nexus. Bizarre as it seems in the operatic context, the decision to deny the power of speech to a central character was actually quite commonplace within the Pari-

sian theatrical milieu of the late 1820s, which was in the grip of a furious vogue for stage works centering on mute characters.⁷ The fashion had begun in the boulevard theaters, as a more or less natural outgrowth of the government's system of granting "privileges" that strictly dictated the types of works that could be performed in a given venue. Historically, a number of the main boulevard theaters had been permitted to use only music and gesture, without spoken dialogue. Even after these restrictions were lifted, as Peter Brooks has shown, the genre of the *mélodrame* remained centrally focused on silent spectacle and on rendering moments of maximum emotion through silent tableau.⁸ At the same time, *Fenella* and the general fashion for theatrical muteness can be linked to a still-lively philosophical discourse about the relations among music, language, and gesture, extending and revising the debates of the *Encyclopédistes*. Taken together with increasingly sophisticated medical explorations into the world of the deaf-mute, these discussions made the Paris of the 1820s a vibrant and informed context for the aesthetic questions broached by Auber's opera.

Of course, far from operating as some sort of philosophical or clinical tract, *La Muette* approaches its subject above all for entertainment value. In equal measure it exploits the potential for erotic titillation and the expressive challenge of a mute heroine whose scenes call for her to "tell" elaborate stories conveyed only through gesture and orchestral music. Pioneering the formula that would become a defining feature of grand opéra plots over the next two decades, Eugène Scribe's libretto places a conventional love triangle against the background of dramatic political upheaval. *Fenella* comes from a humble family of Neapolitan fishermen, but she loves Alphonse, son of the Spanish viceroy who rules Naples. Before the opera begins Alphonse has abandoned *Fenella* in order to make a politically advantageous marriage with the princess Elvire.

After a first act mostly concerned with *Fenella's* anguish and the private dimension of the plot generally, the opera focuses on the efforts of the Neapolitan fishermen, led by *Fenella's* brother, Masaniello, to throw

off Spanish rule, their rebellious sentiments apparently fueled as much by a desire to avenge Fenella's dishonor as by any larger social injustice. As the rebels gain ground, they begin to doubt Masaniello's leadership, thinking him too weak and too willing to compromise with the ruling powers. This situation is exacerbated when, out of love for Fenella, he agrees to shelter Alphonse and Elvire from the rioting mob. Disgruntled followers conspire to dose Masaniello with a slow poison that will drive him to insanity and death, but he manages to lead a final heroic clash with the French forces before expiring. In the famous closing scene, Fenella receives news that Masaniello has died leading the rebels to victory; despairing, she throws herself into the mouth of a conveniently erupting Vesuvius.

The incendiary features of this plot earned Scribe's libretto particularly stringent scrutiny from the censors. Popular rebellion was itself enough to make the authorities nervous, and the generally positive image of the seventeenth-century rebel leader Masaniello (historically known as Tomaso Aniello) made the material seem all the more threatening to the public mood. In 1827 an opéra-comique on the same subject by Michele Carafa had received six separate censors' evaluations before being accepted for performance, but when the libretto of Auber's opera came before the censors later the same year they expressed an emphatic preference for Scribe's approach to the problem of presenting a revolution on stage.⁹ Their report authorizing *La Muette* for performance at the Opéra contrasts the two texts explicitly, complimenting Scribe's "fine and delicate touch" in toning down an incendiary subject, and rejoicing that

[t]he threat to legitimate authority, the popular tumult, the clamor of rebellion, all is lost and forgotten in — or rather is fused with — the interest inspired by a single character. She is a woman; this woman is mute, and, to put it bluntly, she is all the more interesting for being so. Everything is animated, enlivened by her; her entrances always initiate new plot twists. In the end it is toward her that all glances turn; it is to her that all hearts attach themselves. It is difficult . . . to imagine

a device that would more efficiently redeem this subject, with all its indiscretions.¹⁰

"It is toward her that all glances turn." The phrase is arresting, especially in relation to grand opéra's much vaunted (and much maligned) indulgence in the visual at the expense of opera's other "systems" of communication, and to recent studies of the Paris Opéra as the voyeuristic space par excellence, its architecture and seating plans reflecting the obsession with looking-as-ownership that dominated so many aspects of Parisian life.¹¹ To oversimplify drastically, the success of grand opéra as a genre rested to a considerable extent on the skill with which it offered an array of goods and images for aesthetic consumption on stage that pleasingly reflected the acquisitive desires of spectators offstage, in "real life."¹² A central aspect of this continuity between the everyday acquisitive gaze in life and the workings of spectacle in the opera house concerned the male gaze and fantasies of erotic ownership. Most famously, the members of the jockey club could both possess the sight of the dancers' legs on stage and purchase their sexual favors in the foyer; but in more subtle ways, too, the theatrical space of the Opéra, both on- and offstage, served as a presentational frame for the display of women's bodies.¹³

As if their initial hint of objectification were not enough, the censors of *La Muette* go on to describe Fenella as a "device" to counteract the political dangers of the plot, their rhetoric reminiscent of Wagner's exploitation of the heroine as a stand-in for the "dumb Muse of Drama."¹⁴ As one reads further through the copious documentation that collected around Scribe's libretto, however, it becomes clear that the idea of Fenella as visual and emotive focus of the opera ("it is to her that all hearts attach themselves") is more than just a reflex of objectification, the automatic result of some shadowy connection between the aesthetics of grand opéra and those of pornography. Almost every stage in the composition of the opera and in the tortured evolution of its libretto directed special energy toward the problem of representing Fenella—

as visual focus, as the “heart” of the drama, and as corrective to the plot’s revolutionary dimension. Even as these documents reflect conflicting political interests, administrative functions, and aesthetic perspectives, they cohere around a desire to aestheticize Fenella’s body and gestures.

The report quoted above dates from the final stage of a complicated process of shaping the libretto and gaining official approval for performance. By this point the text had undergone at least four stages of revision stretching from 1825 to 1827. Changes were by no means confined to the recommendations or anticipated objections of the censors. Between the first and second drafts of the libretto authorial credit was shifted from Scribe’s frequent collaborator Germain Delavigne to Scribe himself (although the two seem to have been equally responsible for the final version). It was at this stage that the text grew from three acts to the standard five-act format of classical tragedy, taking on many of the dramaturgical features that would be so influential on the emerging genre of grand opéra.¹⁵

Early changes mostly involved streamlining the action. Between the first and second drafts, Scribe cut the unsympathetic character of Alphonse’s mother, who opposes his son’s love for the penniless Fenella, replacing her with a romantic rival, Elvire. This change introduced the neatly balanced vocal and dramatic tensions inherent in the classic operatic love triangle; but, more important, it created for the first time occasions for lyric singing by a female voice. Remarkably, the mother of the first version had not been allotted an aria, and even the second draft had included nothing more than recitative for any of the female characters. The role of Elvire was expanded with each new draft, becoming increasingly entwined with that of Fenella. In the final libretto, the first encounter between the two women calls for Elvire to “translate” certain of Fenella’s gestures into speech, and in Act IV Elvire explicitly turns her voice into an agent of persuasion, singing an abject aria begging for

shelter from the rampaging mob, and explicitly asking Fenella to yield to the sound of her voice.

One effect of this interdependence is to valorize Fenella's muteness in contrast with Elvire's florid vocal idiom. This strategy allowed Auber both to indulge the desire of his audience for the decorated vocal style that dominates most of Elvire's music and to maintain a distance from that style by associating it with an unsympathetic "other woman." As Anselm Gerhard has pointed out, Fenella's inability to speak is represented as less a physical defect than a sign of her unassailable virtue, connecting her to the pure, broken heroines of contemporary mélodrame.¹⁶ But more than that, Fenella's silence also serves a patriotic purpose, presenting the expressive register of pure gesture as a simpler, more direct, more "homegrown" alternative to the ornate style of Elvire's music, which would immediately have been recognized as Italianate.¹⁷ Although the gimmick of the mute heroine would never be repeated at the Opéra, similar pairings of vocal and (relatively) "voiceless" women would become a staple of grand opéra in the 1830s. As we shall see in chapter 4, Meyerbeer's *Huguenots* (1836) finds a more subtle means of dividing soprano labor, contrasting a reticent (if not literally mute) soprano, the heroine Valentine, who expresses herself most forcefully in recitatives and ensembles, with the vocal pyrotechnics of Marguerite de Valois (a role created, like that of Elvire, by Laure Cinti-Damoreau). If the opposition between Meyerbeer's Valentine and Marguerite works as one between a French emphasis on clearly declaimed *words* and Italian immersion in pure, giddy voice, Fenella and Elvire can be seen to represent the equally fundamental operatic poles of "body" and "voice."

While most of the sweeping changes to the libretto occurred between the first and second drafts, the final revision introduced one crucial change. At this late stage, Scribe significantly abbreviated most of Fenella's mimed narratives, particularly the Act I account of her seduction and abandonment by Alphonse. Early versions of this scene contain en-

tire paragraphs of stage directions, such as this description of Fenella's life before she encountered Alphonse:

Fenella makes a sign that family lives by the sea shore, that they work with nets, that they are fishermen. She was close to them, happy and peaceful, and passed the time with her friends in carefree dances; then all at once, placing a hand on her heart with a sorrowful expression, she explains that she was struck by a torment, that her peaceful heart was troubled and agitated like the waves on the sea, which she points to in the distance.¹⁸

Or this, of her *Madama Butterfly*-like vigil:

Each day she waited all day by the sea for his return. Finally one day she saw a ship appear in the distance. Her joy! her surprise! She ran to it with open arms; her heart pounded with hope, which quickly changed to fear. . . . It was grim and fierce soldiers.¹⁹

The excision of these loquacious occasions for pantomime was almost certainly prompted by the complaint in one of the 1827 censors' reports that Fenella was too often required to express "sentiments . . . impossible to convey without the aid of words."²⁰ But comparison with the final version shows that Scribe not only eliminated details that would be difficult to mime but also restricted the *modes* of communication Fenella commands. The stage directions quoted above draw on both figurative and what might be called iconic language, calling on Fenella to point to the waves distantly visible in the background as a metaphor for the tumult of her bereaved heart and to execute actual dances—to stand for the happy dances with her companions, but also perhaps to paint the emotions of joy and fear she experiences ("sa joie! sa surprise!") as she spies the ship she believes is bringing Alphonse back. In contrast, the stage directions in the final version are restricted to a much more straightforward, one-dimensional relationship between information to be conveyed and the means by which Fenella puts her narratives across. The libretto as published, and as set by Auber, hardly ever gives a hint

of how the ballerina might represent any single idea, largely confining its sentiments to those familiar from the lexicon of contemporary melodrama, for which standard gestural techniques would have existed.

In addition to this final stage of scrutiny from the censors, which was mostly concerned with the religious and political dimensions of the text, the libretto had been subjected to a review in 1825, by a committee called the *Jury littéraire et musical*, entrusted with ensuring literary quality and propriety.²¹ The recommendations returned by this committee have received little attention because they are not primarily political in orientation, but the *Jury littéraire* made several intriguing observations concerning the depiction of Fenella. It complained, for example, that the opera's ending was unacceptably sad because it called for Fenella to commit suicide without anyone on stage noticing—a deficiency Scribe remedied in the final draft by adding a “*cri d'effroi*” for Alphonse and Elvire as they see the heroine disappear into the volcano. The committee also expressed concern about what it saw as a lapse of plot logic surrounding Fenella's affliction:

Fenella is mute; but she is not deaf. Normally, muteness is caused by deafness at birth. Since Fenella is not deaf, she must have become mute through some accident, which is a very rare occurrence. Perhaps it would be a good idea to indicate how she lost the capacity of speech. One might attribute this loss to an upheaval caused by some great sorrow. For example, Fenella could have lost her mother in miserable circumstances, and been struck by such a shock that, since this tragedy, the ability of speech has not returned to her. Two or three lines would suffice to explain this, and the public needs such an explanation, accustomed as it is to always finding muteness and deafness joined.²²

While the idea that Fenella's muteness might be attributed to some past trauma seems more suited to fin-de-siècle Vienna than to 1820s Paris, such proto-psychoanalytic notions had in fact been current since the 1790s, when Philippe Pinel began to regard insanity not as a biological but a “moral” affliction, pioneering treatments designed to uncover the traumatic event at the source of an illness and occasionally even recon-

structing the scene of such a crisis in hope that the patient might relive it with a happier outcome.²³

By construing Fenella's physical symptoms as the visible manifestation of some hidden past, the *Jury littéraire* was in essence expressing a wish that she be presented as a hysteric, her symptom attributed not to any medical defect but to some unresolved psychological pain that "speaks" instead through her body's inability to form audible speech.²⁴ In this context, it is striking that the request to specify a cause for Fenella's muteness was the only one of the committee's three major suggestions not heeded in Scribe's revision of the libretto. Instead the idea of Fenella's traumatic loss remained behind the scenes, mentioned only in the censors' report, but absent from the plot itself.

While the reasons for Scribe's resistance to psychologizing Fenella's muteness may never be known, the effect of his decision is crucial. Where a classic hysteria diagnosis subsumes the patient's physical symptoms into mere clues to some hidden emotional cause, the omission of any such trauma in Fenella's case allows the spectator to take her "symptoms" more seriously, spotlighting her body as a source of meaning in its own right. Where psychoanalysis-influenced readings would interpret Fenella's idiosyncratic dancing and her wordless stories merely as surface signs that point toward the "real," deeper meanings of psychological disturbance, Scribe's refusal to supply her with a buried trauma that might justify her behavior constitutes an invitation to read her gestures on their own terms, as carrying a meaning that is entirely physical and entirely manifest.

2

As Freud used to teach, hysterics tend to have trouble with language, either losing the use of it altogether or rupturing and fragmenting their speech with coughs, tremors, or other bodily intrusions into the skein of words and narrative meaning. But hysterics also possess superior gifts of expression; and rather surprisingly, it was this perspective that dom-

inated early nineteenth-century perceptions of Fenella's relationship to language and storytelling.²⁵ Contemporary observers tended to view Fenella—and other mutes, both on- and offstage—as exceptionally articulate, even as possessing a semantic ability that surpassed normal speech.²⁶ As the theatrical journal *Le Corsaire* wrote in its review of the opera's first performance, Lise Noblet, the ballerina who created Fenella, is “the only one who does not speak in this opera, [but] it is she who makes herself heard the best.”²⁷ A few days later, the same critic marveled at how one “could take accurate dictation from the gestures of Mlle Noblet.”²⁸ This last formulation is something of a trope in the operatic journalism of the period, and it recalls—perhaps deliberately—Diderot's famous habit of stuffing his fingers in his ears when he attended the Comédie-Française, simulating deafness so as better to judge the gestures of the actors.²⁹

Reviews of the premiere say little about how Noblet looked or moved on stage. Many lithographs of scenes from the opera were produced for private sale, but, significantly, most feature the famously detailed costumes or (above all) the eruption of Vesuvius in the final scene. The *livret de mise en scène* (or staging manual) for the opera's first performance, usually a rich source for information about blocking and the positioning of principal characters in tableaux, is completely silent on the subject of Fenella's mime. It tells us only that “for the rôle of Fenella, the pantomime is described in the libretto and score: it is only there that it can be indicated, according to the libretto.”³⁰ The staging manual's abdication of responsibility seems particularly odd because the libretto does not in fact contain any such restriction, nor give much information about Fenella's movements.³¹ And while the stage directions in the score often specify the desired emotional *effects* of Fenella's pantomime, they give few hints of the sequence of gestures she might undertake to produce these effects. The copious performing materials for the opera housed at the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra are equally uninformative.

Directions for a few dances from the opera are included in a *cahier* of individual choreographies added to productions in the 1830s, but these

notate only formal dances involving two or more performers. No such documents exist for the original production, and ballet notation at the time was in any case minimal, consisting of purely verbal descriptions that combined lists of steps to be executed with indications of the emotional content of the scenario. In other words, the bulk of any early-nineteenth-century choreography was lodged in the memories of the dancers, and there alone.³² Finally, although the vocal and orchestral parts give many hints about what went on in rehearsals and performances, there is, of course, no part for Fenella. One has to conclude from this lack of documentation that Fenella's gestures simply did not *need* to be written down. While the staging manual and most other performance materials were used to coordinate large numbers of performers moving together or to ensure consistency in later productions, Fenella's movements could remain subject to the expressive tastes of the single dancer who played her, devised and varied at will.

Any attempt to reconstruct Fenella's gestures, then, must turn back to general principles, as abstracted from stray comments in reviews, staging manuals for other works, and acting treatises. Even the most detailed of these, the dramatic treatises, give at best a fragmentary glimpse of what stage movement and blocking might have looked like circa 1828. Following the classic sources on gesture in painting such as Le Brun's *Méthode pour apprendre à dessiner les passions*, these pedagogical and theoretical texts privilege static poses of a sculptural nature, giving elaborate instructions and illustrations for frozen depictions of individual emotions but not for how to mime objects or entire stories. Even Johann Jakob Engel's detailed gestural treatise, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, contains only a few stray specifications for movement, most of them prompted by annoyance at the too strict guidelines set up in Riccoboni's widely read *Art du théâtre*, which had laid down the law about the exact height to which an arm should be raised in a specific movement and the precise arc of a gesture.³³ A rare exception is Carlo Blasis, who in his *Code of Terpsichore* (1828) describes the means used by the Italian cho-

reographer Gaetano Gioia to “tell” wordlessly of being trampled by a horse. Gioia conveyed his meaning by breaking the event down into three separate gestures: a swift hand motion depicting the action of the horse’s hooves, then pointing to the places on the body that were injured, and finally an imitation of the fall itself.³⁴ This disregard for movement has led Joseph Roach to suggest that eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century acting looked something like a series of “cinematic stop frames,” arresting (and highly conventional) poses strung together by what one writer called “Easy Transitions” between them.³⁵

The iconographic sources that document early performances of *La Muette* support this impression, suggesting that even by 1828 stage movement in opera was governed by an ultra-static aesthetic. Gilbert Austin’s *Chironomia* (1806) includes as an appendix a sheaf of engravings depicting the English actress Mrs. Siddons in a series of characteristic attitudes, each numbered and keyed to an archetypal dramatic situation, a character-type, or a specific role for which Siddons was renowned. Some of these hyperbolic, sculpted poses bear a strong resemblance to the few lithographs made of Lise Noblet in action as Fenella.³⁶ The semaphoric clarity of Siddons’s attitudes for the “Grecian daughter” (no. 117 in Figure 3) and “Imogen” (no. 120) is not far removed from the pose depicted in one of the Opéra’s costume maquettes: Fenella with one hand at her side, the other held out before her with index finger raised, as if she were communicating in sign language (Figure 4). The resemblance makes it tempting to extrapolate from the single image of Fenella, to imagine her adopting some of the other poses that Austin attributes to Siddons. But more than that, the conjunction hints that the dancer who played Fenella had no need to invent a new gestural language in order to perform her elaborate narratives. The causality instead runs the other way, suggesting that semaphoric effects had long been established stage techniques, and that the character of Fenella was created to capitalize on—and to flaunt—the proven linguistic specificity of dance and mime.



Figure 3. A few of Mrs. Siddons's attitudes. Illustrated in Austin, *Chironomia* (1806).



Figure 4. Costume maquette for Fenella. By permission of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

3

In view of this silence from the treatises, perhaps the best clues about Fenella's pantomime are encoded in her music, and especially in the orchestral passages that accompany her scenes of storytelling. Certainly this music tends to trace her movements and the outlines of her narratives closely, drawing on a vocabulary common to musical accompaniments for *mélodrame*.³⁷ At times, Fenella's mime scenes sound like the sonorous equivalent of those eighteenth-century acting manuals: a chain of static musical "signs" for stereotyped emotional states (for piety, disappointed love, heaven, etc.) joined together by "Easy Transitions." But

as we shall see, those transitions cannot be shunted aside as they are in the dramatic treatises; rather, they become central as signs for Fenella's expressive vitality.

The first impression created by Fenella's mime scenes is of fragmentation, even breathlessness: constructed from simple, repeated motives, the music rarely returns to any thematic idea once a figure has served its illustrative purpose and exhausted its initial momentum over one or two eight-measure phrases. But if Fenella's music presents a highly varied surface, it is consistent in that almost all the contrasting effects are imitative—either of abstract ideas or graphic physical gestures. Her extended Act I narrative scene falls into two parts, divided both by the nature of the story it tells and the musical techniques used to convey it. Fenella rushes on stage in the midst of celebrations for the imminent wedding of Alphonse and Elvire. Unaware that she is confronting her rival, Fenella appeals to Elvire for help: she is fleeing from the soldiers who imprisoned her and from whom she has just escaped. Roughly the first half of the scene presents plot background (most of it already familiar to the audience): prompted by Elvire, Fenella recounts in gesture the tale of her courtship and abandonment by Alphonse and confesses that she does not know the identity of her seducer. The stage directions—always carefully positioned in the score to correspond exactly with the musical cues—require Fenella to communicate a sequence of subtly nuanced emotional states, such as that “heaven will attest to her innocence” or “love has invaded her heart and is the root of all her troubles,” while important nuggets of plot are “translated” into recitative, either by Elvire or by the Spanish guard, Selva.³⁸

The G-minor theme that accompanies Fenella's entrance is fairly typical of the opera's gestural music: built on repeating two-note figures, it captures a general sense of rapid motion and emotional agitation rather than painting anything more concrete (Example 3, mm.1–9). This pattern returns briefly (now outlining a diminished seventh) to coincide with Fenella's sign that she is unable to speak, its shrill two-note

cells perhaps now more iconically linked to the idea of her inaudible “cries” for help (mm.21–32). After a vaguely choralelike “appeal to heaven,” dominated by oboe (mm.49–53), Fenella mimes that “love is the source of all her suffering,” a concept Auber depicts by modulating to the remote key of G $\flat$ and spinning an unsettled melody, full of appoggiaturas and emphasis on the flattened sixth scale-degree, over a propulsive accompaniment pattern (mm.54–72). This first section of the scene closes with a rather characterless undulating C-major figure for strings, as Fenella explains that she does not know the identity of her seducer (mm.79–83).

The second half of the scene moves onto another plane of expression, narrating a story from the more immediate past—Fenella’s arrest and escape from the prison she was placed in to keep her out of the way until after Alphonse’s wedding to Elvire. Because the story Fenella tells here is completely extraneous to the plot, one suspects that the passage was designed as a sort of “special effect,” to show off both Auber’s expertise in musical imitation and the ballerina’s pantomimic virtuosity. Indeed, the episode could be seen as a parallel to the famous eruption of Vesuvius, an extravagant demonstration of the Opéra’s powers of representation.

In keeping with such ambitions, recitative “translations” for Elvire are dispensed with, and the orchestra begins to paint each event with a new graphic clarity. The stage directions, too, become more direct: where up to this point, most had begun with the formula “she makes a sign that,” followed by some abstract idea, this vague prescription is now replaced by matter-of-fact directives. Fenella points at Selva, she mimics turning a key in a lock and shooting a bolt into place. The orchestral accompaniment similarly adopts a cartoonlike level of pictorialism: the locking of the cell is mimicked by a pair of rapid descending scales (mm.106–9), Fenella’s escape, slipping down a rope of sheets by a two-octave descending scale (mm.126–30), and the approach of the patrolling sentries by a “real” trumpet call (mm.131–35). Finally, Fenella

Example 3. Fenella's first narration (Auber, *La Muette de Portici*, Scène et Choeur de la Chapelle, Act I).

Allegro vivace

p *cresc.* *f*

6 **ELVIRE**
Dans ces jar-

10 **CORYPHÉE**
dins quel bruit se fait en - ten - dre? C'est u - ne jeu-ne

13
fille el - le fuit des sol - dats. Elle ac-court en ce pa -

16
lais et tend vers vous les bras.

cresc.

Example 3 (continued)

20

25 *Fenella, poursuivie par Selva et par des gardes, entre avec effroi, elle aperçoit la princesse et court se jeter à ses genoux.* ELVIRE
Que vou-lez-vous par-

30 *Elle fait signe qu'elle ne peut parler.*
lez? Je sau-rai te dé - fen - dre quand mon bon-

34
heur est si grand au-jour-d'hui. Pour-rai-je aux mal-heu-reux re - fu - ser mon ap -

37 *à Selva*
pui? Quelle est donc cette in-for-tu - né - e?

(continued)

Example 3 (continued)

41

SELVA

La fil-le d'un pê-cheur. L'or-dre du vi-ce Roi de-puis un mois la

43

tien em-pri-son-né - e, mais ce ma-tin bra-vant u - ne sé-vè-re loi el -

ELVIRE

46

à Fenella

Elle répond qu'elle

le a bri-sé ses fers. Quel peut ê-tre ton cri-me? Andante con moto

51

n'est past coupable, elle en atteste le ciel. à Fenella

Elle fait signe que l'amour

Qui trou-bla ton re-pos? Allegro vivace

s'empara de son coeur et qu'il a causé tous ses maux.

55

Example 3 (continued)

59

63

67

71

ELVIRE

Pau-vre vic - ti-me, je te com-prends. L'a-mour a su tou-cher ton

75

Allegro

Elle fait signe qu'elle l'ignore; mais il

cœur, mais de tes maux qui est l'au-teur?

(continued)

Example 3 (continued)

*jurait qu'il l'aimait, il la pressait contre son coeur. Puis montrant l'écharpe qui
79 l'entoure, elle fait signe qu'elle l'a reçue de lui; mais il partit et ne revint plus.*

ELVIRE

Par cet in -

*84 Elle soupire et fait
signe que oui.*

grat tu fus a-ban-don-né - e? mais dans ces lieux qui t'a donc en-traî-né - e?

Allegro risoluto

Elle désigne Selva: il est venu l'arrêter malgré ses larmes et ses prières.

Example 3 (continued)

101 *Il l'emmena de force*

104 *Faisant le geste de tourner une
clef et de fermer des verroux.*

Elle exprime qu'on la plongea dans un cachot, là elle priaït, triste et pensive, plongée dans la

110 ELVIRE

en pri-son?

douleur quand tout à coup l'idée vint de se soustraire à l'esclavage, montrant la fenêtre elle fait signe

116 *Allegro vivace*

qu'elle a attaché ses draps, qu'elle s'est laissée glisser jusqu'à terre, qu'elle a remercié le ciel mais elle a

127 *entendu le qui vive de la sentinelle; on l'a mise en joue; elle s'est sauvée à travers les jardins, a aperçu*

(continued)

Example 3 (*continued*)

131 *la princesse, et est venue se jeter à ses pieds.*

Musical score for measures 131-136. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The melody in the treble clef consists of quarter notes and rests, with a final measure containing a whole note. The bass line is mostly rests, with a single quarter note in the first measure. The piece ends with a double bar line and repeat signs.

137 *Allegro vivace*

Musical score for measures 137-143. The key signature changes to one flat (Bb). The tempo is marked *Allegro vivace*. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody in the treble clef features eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line consists of chords. A crescendo (*cresc.*) is indicated over measures 140-142, leading to a forte (*f*) dynamic in the final measure.

Musical score for measures 144-149. The melody in the treble clef continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line features chords and eighth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Musical score for measures 150-151. The melody in the treble clef continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line features chords and eighth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Musical score for measures 152-156. The melody in the treble clef continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line features chords and eighth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

Musical score for measures 157-161. The melody in the treble clef continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. The bass line features chords and eighth notes. The piece ends with a double bar line.

describes evading the soldiers and hurrying away to throw herself on the mercy of the princess, to whom she is now telling her story. As this last segment of the narrative merges with the present, describing events the audience has witnessed only a few minutes before, Auber recalls the G-minor music that began the scene (mm.137–60). The breathless two-note fragments that seemed to capture a kinetic sense of Fenella's frightened flight now refer specifically back to the scene's opening moments, but this time they are inflated through repetition and overstated cadences to provide an almost symphonic sense of closure for the entire scene of narration.

It seems obvious that the musical figures for such histrionic utterances as Fenella's "appeal to heaven" or her lament that "love is the root of all her troubles" would draw on the traditions of musical accompaniment for the *mélodrame*, but even the less pictorial sections of Fenella's narrative owe much to the contemporary musical-theatrical vocabulary. The agitated G-minor music that begins and ends the scene, for example, is typical of melodrama's "action music" idiom, and, as Emilio Sala has shown, also more specifically of the idiom conventionally associated in *mélodrame* with the "entrance of persecuted heroine."³⁹ Sala illustrates the persecuted-heroine trope with an example from Scribe and Duveyrier's 1819 melodrama *Les Frères invisibles* (with music by N.-A. Schaffner): the heroine, Camille, enters "very agitated," casting "frightened glances upon everything around her," to music that shares the short-breathed phrases, rapid sigh-figures, and frequent motivic repetitions of the music for Fenella's entrance (Example 4).⁴⁰

Of the complicated sequence of actions that makes up Fenella's escape narration, only one—the prayer of thanks (called for in the stage directions at mm.128–29)—goes unmarked musically. The eight reflective measures Auber originally wrote to depict it are canceled in the autograph, probably a casualty of pre-premiere revisions. This is only one of several substantial cuts to Fenella's pantomimes visible in the orchestral and choral parts; all were clearly effected at a late stage, most likely during rehearsals. One of the earliest parts to be copied, the *par-*

Example 4. Music by Schaffner for Scribe and Duveyrier's mélodrame *Les Frères invisibles*.

Agitato solo

Flute

Clar.

Vns.

Vc.

pp

pp

tie de ballet, shows a cut of twelve measures just after Elvire's question "Qui troubla ton repos?" and just before the modulation to G $\flat$ major (between the present mm.53 and 54).⁴¹ The rejected passage (B $\flat$ major, 6/8 time, Andante con moto) sounds very much like the word painting of a love idyll, perhaps keyed to the blissful phase of Fenella's encounter with Alphonse. And at m.76 (after Elvire's "de tes maux qui est l'auteur?"), five pages of music are canceled, consisting mostly of closed forms that must have been intended to accompany extended solo dances for Fenella. While such adjustments were common during preparation of new works at the Opéra, these cuts are unusual because they conspire to strip Fenella's narrative of almost all melodic repetitions and periodic structures. What is left is a musical discourse of disjointed pictorialisms interspersed with the sighing figures and tremolo effects that work as generic markers of distress in both Parisian mélodrame and Hollywood film.

These cuts may have been motivated partly by a desire to speed up the progress of this odd set piece, or by anxiety about how much narrative complexity could be conveyed in gesture alone. But the targeting of

extended songlike passages for excision also suggests a shift in the conception of Fenella's role, from one that included passages of virtuosic dance to one much more closely confined to mime and storytelling.⁴² Such a reorientation runs counter to the direction in which Parisian ballet was tending around 1830, as choreographers stripped away mime scenes and expanded occasions for showcasing the finely tuned, eroticized female body in virtuoso display. As Marian Smith has shown, ballet criticism beginning around 1830 began to express an ambivalence about pantomime that is at odds with the confident assertions of the universal comprehensibility of gesture so unanimously reiterated in the acting treatises of the period. In his capacity as music critic, Hector Berlioz wrote that "the mimic art is a closed book for me," and a critic for *La Gazette musicale* complained after attending the ballet that "not having studied sign language, I understood nearly nothing."⁴³ Rather than take these opinions as evidence that spectators suddenly failed to comprehend gestural conventions that had, after all, changed little for decades, Smith reads them as code for a general dissatisfaction with the prominence of the word and for a desire to reorient ballet around a less linguistic conception.

The dance scholar Susan Foster similarly describes dance around 1830 as evolving into "the perfect emblem of muteness"—by which she means an increasing embrace of virtuoso dancing by star ballerinas, supplanting the older model of dance as quasi-linguistic, continuous with drama or recitative.⁴⁴ Foster's choice of the word "muteness" to describe the supernatural lyricism of the new "white ballets" such as *La Sylphide* (1832) and *Giselle* (1841) is revealing. Where the works she discusses incline toward a notion of the mute that emphasizes silence and the display of the female body as a channel to the ineffable, Fenella's muteness carries a quite different message. Here muteness is less about silence—or voyeurism, or objectification of the mute figure—than about *speech*, about exploring opera's exceptional expressive resources, and especially about what can happen when music, gesture, and the word coincide.

These opposing ideas of muteness may be irreconcilable. Oriented respectively toward the art forms of ballet and opera, which began to diverge radically around 1830, they are also divided by history, one looking back to arguments over speech and melody as old as the previous century's *querelle des bouffons*, the other facing forward toward static images of disturbed, beautiful, visionary women that perhaps culminate in Charcot's photographed hysterics. Already in Auber's *Fenella*, one can feel the tension between two views of how the body can communicate: approximation of speech versus the abstract beauty of pure dance maps on to an opposition between an understanding of the female body as capable of willed, articulate expression and a preference for the yielding body, a body that allows itself to be spoken *through*. But for *Fenella* there is also a third term, music that resembles neither speech nor dance: those floods of frenetic eighth- and sixteenth-notes that fill in the gaps between the more pictorial episodes of her pantomimes, usually moving so quickly and relentlessly that they could not possibly be danced or mimed.

In a technique now rendered familiar both by certain passages of scenic music in Wagner and by countless Hollywood film scores, these long stretches of agitated music are built on a single short motive repeated or sequenced, often colored by melodic suspensions and underpinned by a motor rhythm. Stylistic models for this perpetual-motion idiom are not difficult to uncover: one obvious antecedent lies in what Sala has called the "rhetoric of repetition" and "open, sequential structure" that govern music for *mélodrame*.⁴⁵ But the roots of the style stretch back further, to Cherubini's hyperactive orchestral accompaniments (for example, for the avalanche scene in *Lodoiska* [1791]) and perhaps even to the language of the program symphony. The cascading scales of the battle scene in Beethoven's *Wellington's Victory* (1814) make another unlikely but revealing cousin to *Fenella's* music. This frenetic style is one of

Auber's stylistic "fingerprints," and not only in *La Muette*; it is almost a topos of transition in his other operas, often appearing as a sort of "filler" material linking the slow and fast sections of an aria or duet, with or without corresponding physical motion. But in Fenella's scenes, such transitional music is elevated to the status of central event, rendered expressive simply by force of will. Hence Auber's music for Fenella is supremely antirhetorical, dispensing with the pauses, quasi-conversational periodic structures, and patterns of melody and repetition that normally make music persuasive. At its most animated (as in the opening phrases of the Act I narration), Fenella's music instead resembles nothing but a flurry of physical energy: conversational and oratorical models are replaced by an approximation of sheer bodily motion.

Such music by nature relies on repetition and tends to stretch over long temporal spans. One conveniently compact example of the way such a pattern of sequencing melodic cells collapses emotional expression and physical energy occurs in the extended "dialogue" for Fenella and Elvire in Act IV. In this case, the sequence is triggered by a single movement: as the first two-measure motive is heard, the directions above the score specify that Fenella "moves away angrily" (Example 5, mm.4–5). But the two sequentially ascending repetitions of the motive that follow no longer mime physical movement, instead painting an outburst of jealousy indicated in the stage directions as "so this is the woman you preferred to me, and you want me to save your life?" (mm.6–7, 8–9). The earthbound energy of the initial motive, reinterpreted to convey an emotional state, works as reverse sublimation, as if to suggest that for Auber—or at least for Fenella—the emotional and the abstract proceed from, and remain rooted in, the bodily, in the imitation of concrete gestures.

In the opera's final scene—as Fenella prepares to throw herself into the mouth of Vesuvius—such agitated chains of eighth- and sixteenth-notes take over, to the exclusion of any other musical style or affect, as

Example 5. Elvire begs Fenella to protect her from the mob; Fenella's jealous reaction (Choeur et Cavatine, Act IV).

Elle jette un regard sur Elvire, court vers elle, entr'ouvre son manteau, lui arrache le voile et couvre son visage.

s'éloigne d'elle avec colère, et semble dire: voilà donc celle que tu m'as préférée, et tu veux

que je t'épargne!

if the “Easy Transitions” that were intended to join up the fixed attitudes in eighteenth-century theatrical practice had run wild, crowding out the frozen, painterly poses. Fenella’s music here abandons the musical and gestural codes of melodrama because she is no longer pausing to strike poses, represent emotions, or, in fact, to signify or narrate in any way at all. She has become pure movement and pure pain. Example 6, drawn from the last few minutes of a long finale constructed around such short-breathed motives, shows the technique in its most

Example 6. Fenella revives from a faint and throws herself into the abyss.

Vns.

5 *Elle aperçoit Alphonse auprès d'Elvire.*

8 *Allegro* *Elle se relève, jette*
f

13 *sur Alphonse un dernier regard de regret et de tendresse, et s'élance rapidement vers l'escalier qui est au*

18 *fond du théâtre.* *Surpris de ce brusque départ, Alphonse et Elvire se retournent*

(continued)

Example 6 (*continued*)

23 *pour lui adresser un dernier adieu. En ce moment le Vésuve commence à jeter des tourbillons de flamme,*

28 *et Fenella, parvenue en haut de la terrasse, lève les yeux au ciel et se précipite dans l'abîme.*

basic form. Having heard the news of her brother's heroic death, Fenella has fainted, bringing the busy-ness of the orchestral surface to a halt, the propulsive motivic cells replaced by apprehensive string tremolos. Uncharacteristically, the stage directions neglect to pinpoint the moment at which Fenella revives from her faint. A line of text (at m.6 in Example 6) specifies that she looks at Alphonse and realizes that her rival, Elvire, has survived the mob's onslaught, but signals from the orchestra function as surrogate stage directions here, making clear that Fenella has regained consciousness a moment earlier, perhaps reanimating gradually in synch with the scales in the first violin (mm.1–7), whose six repetitions, each a tone higher, present the principle of the sequencing melodic cell in its Ur-form.

As the full orchestra unleashes its final burst of agitation at m.10, Fenella rushes to the peak of Vesuvius and, as it begins to erupt, “raises her eyes to heaven and casts herself into the abyss,” her leap unmarked amid the general orchestral melee. The music for this last sequence of actions, like that for the uprising at the beginning of the scene, fills a multitude of illustrative functions, suggesting at once the rioting crowd, the volcano, and Fenella's own frenetic movements. The sequence of fainting

and reviving, however, seems to make explicit that the short, breathless scale patterns, sequenced and repeated to fill out the requisite spans of stage action, stand in some way for Fenella's animate body. In this musical representation of swooning, the music surrounding Fenella is finally, unequivocally, responding to her body and her senses, leaving behind the showy games with language and musical representation of her earlier storytelling scenes.

5

It is tempting to equate the style of this music, and whatever physical action went with it, with what dance theorists have called the “kinaesthetic”—those elements of a choreography that stretch or evade visual framing, defying or commandeering the male gaze.⁴⁶ But it also bears remembering that the visual focus has shifted by this point in the scene, from Fenella's body to the lovingly detailed sets and the unprecedented realism of the painted backdrop. In 1825 the censors had worried that audiences would feel emotionally betrayed if the charming heroine they had been persuaded to identify with disappeared into the volcano without even a cry. The rather perfunctory “cri d’effroi” that Scribe added for Alphonse and Elvire cannot have made much difference, and in the end it didn't matter: Vesuvius stole the show. The spectacular special effect of the eruption guaranteed the opera's immediate and lasting success. Advance publicity in the theatrical papers made much of the fact that the Opéra's set designer, Charles Cicéri, had traveled to Italy to copy the scenes “sur les lieux”—although these public relations squibs go on to admit, with no apparent embarrassment, that Cicéri had in fact copied the sets not from actual examination of Naples and the surroundings, but in Milan, from Alessandro Sanquirico's sets for Pacini's *Ultimo giorno di Pompei*, which had been staged at the Teatro alla Scala the previous year.⁴⁷

With this, we are forced to confront the question of realism, seemingly an inevitable endpoint of all discussions of *La Muette de Portici*

and of grand opéra more generally. The critic who complained after the premiere that the French soldiers marched in time to the music with “artificially symmetrical steps” was seeking a sort of realism, and so was the Opéra’s director, Emile-Timothée Lubbert, when he wrote to the choreographer Jean-Pierre Aumer a few days after the premiere, congratulating Aumer for mixing the corps de ballet in with the central action, an effect he felt lent the opera’s blocking a novel force.⁴⁸ This obsession with realism has only become more prominent in the opera’s recent reception history. Jane Fulcher has singled out *La Muette* as a formative moment in French opera’s shift from an aesthetic of melodrama to one of realism, while Anselm Gerhard has explained the Opéra’s desire for perfect historical accuracy of sets and costumes as an attempt to answer operagoers’ growing insecurity about the reliability of external appearances. In a social world where clothing and other surface accoutrements were no longer dependable indications of social class or moral substance, Gerhard suggests that spectators found reassurance in the fact that sets and costumes were faithful and carefully researched simulations of the place and historical moment represented, that “there was no possible deception.”⁴⁹

But how “real” are sets copied from other opera sets, especially when that fact is advertised in the newspapers? And what does it mean to cultivate “realism” in all the physical details of a staging, when those details are placed within the stylized dramaturgy and stage movement that continued to dominate in *La Muette*? Perhaps what is at work is a mentality better described by Roland Barthes’s term “reality effect,” the cumulative impression created by what he calls “useless details,” which stand for nothing but themselves, their sole purpose to assert: “we are the real.”⁵⁰ Barthes’s explanation of the way the reality effect works on readers of French realist fiction illuminates the reception of Auber’s opera, both past and present, as the sheer amount and obsessive accuracy of physical detail has repeatedly overwhelmed responses to the opera as music or as drama. As Barthes memorably puts it,

for the ideology of our time, obsessive reference to the “concrete” . . . is always brandished as a weapon against meaning, as if there were some indisputable law that what is truly alive could not signify—and vice versa.⁵¹

Barthes demonizes the reality effect as a poor stand-in for a more selective yet truer representation of life, but I would like to twist his concept slightly, recuperating it in relation to opera, where—in sharp distinction to the inert descriptive details Barthes abhorred in the realist novel—so much *is* “truly alive.” We would probably not want to describe Cicéri's plaster Vesuvius, or the richly embroidered costumes for the Spanish nobles, as “truly alive.” That phrase seems better suited to those chains of rapid notes and mechanical sequences that so often mark Fenella's presence on stage: intensely vivid and present, but resisting analysis or understanding. Certainly, Barthes's explanation of the reality effect in the realist novel is remarkably apt for what we have seen of Fenella's music: the “concrete detail” is created by “the *direct* collusion of a referent and a signifier; [a process by which] the signified is expelled from the sign.”⁵² It is difficult to imagine a more fitting description of what happens to the orchestra during Fenella's miming scenes: in the most vividly pictorial moments, such as the narration of her slide down the rope to freedom, the orchestra is reduced to the status of a sound-effect machine. And those agitated scalar sequences played ubiquitously by the orchestra when Fenella is present could be said to “expel the signified” in other senses. Denying the possibilities both of emotional expression and of development in a symphonic sense, they leave only a residue that signifies (if anything) sheer movement, energy, life.

Once transferred to the operatic context, Barthes's regretful diagnosis of the modern condition—that “what is truly alive cannot signify”—could also be heard as a plea to reexamine the whole category of “miming music,” in which musical surface and dramatic meaning collapse into one another, defeating conventional interpretation. If, as I have suggested, those strings of short, breathless, sequenced motives in some

way bear the imprint of Fenella's body, it is right that they should pose a dilemma for interpretation, since music that is tied closely to the body has always defeated attempts at analysis and explication. And while Fenella's music itself is of limited interest as an object of formal analysis, our inability to describe it is equally worthy of scrutiny. Part of the challenge of understanding this music goes back to the analogy with those eighteenth-century acting treatises, in which theorists named and illustrated poses but struggled to devise a vocabulary to account for everything that came in between, to convey some sense of how motion and transition might also be expressive categories. Where both Auber's musical techniques and musicology's muteness in face of this unusually embodied musical discourse become most important, I would suggest, is in confrontation with later works—by, among others, Meyerbeer, Verdi, and Wagner—ones that appropriate Auber's gestural strategies, sometimes sublimating them, sometimes restricting them to as purely gestural and “nonsignifying” a context as Auber does here.

More than being just a response to a fad, then, the character of Fenella is subversive in a deeper sense than simply through her silence. She stars in an opera but does not sing; she is performed by a ballerina who rarely dances. By refusing to adhere fully to the conventions of either of her art forms, she draws attention to our assumptions about what is expected of an operatic heroine and of the musical discourse that surrounds her. The centrality of her narrations and the repetitive, anti-rhetorical music that accompanies them force listeners to attend in a new way to music usually heard as mere filler, orchestral discourse positioned in more conventional operas as brief, necessary joins for moving characters on- and offstage. At the same time, Fenella's curious existence short-circuits the familiar voice/body opposition of feminist studies of opera. Without a voice to supplement her body and to release it from the frame of gaze, Fenella nevertheless manages to propose an alternative mode of perception—a response to her body as a musicalized, infectious, irresistible force.

CHAPTER THREE

Bellini's Unseen Voices

English, which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear, has no words for the shiver or the headache. . . . The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.

—Virginia Woolf, “On Being Ill”

Fenella's pantomimes, for all their idiosyncratic fragmented discourse and repetition, remind us that nineteenth-century opera possesses a sizable repertory of musical devices for representing the performing and emoting body. Precisely where Woolf finds inadequacy in language, opera can be most eloquent, drawing on a wealth of techniques for expressing pain, both physical and emotional. The Italian opera of the early nineteenth century boasts a particularly developed musical language of pain, based mainly in conventional melodic and rhythmic patterns that mimic actual sounds emitted by the suffering body: sighs, sobs, groans, shudders . . . As with so much else about this repertory, the vocabulary was crystallized by Rossini, even if some of the musical techniques involved—the pairs of descending seconds separated by rests used to evoke sobs in the “Willow Song” from his *Otello* or the fractured vocal lines and block chords often used to depict shudders of shock and

fear in his finales—seem almost universal within the European tradition. Despite their centrality to the styles for Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, these melodic formulas have largely been ignored or treated with slight embarrassment by opera scholars, who have never quite made peace with their combination of generic predictability and overwrought emotion.¹

It is not only their ubiquity that makes these musical signs for the body in pain worthy of scrutiny, but also the fact that they produce their effect through a kind of expressive overload, a duplication of meaning between words and music. Where Fenella's pantomimes relied on a comfortable certainty that gesture could say the same things that language could, Italian opera of the 1820s and 1830s believed in the transparency of *melody*—the conviction that certain well worn melodic figures could conjure a fictional being into vivid presence, and perhaps even create a realm in which characters and spectators would pulse to the same emotive and sensory stimuli. But the sighs and sobs that are the subject of this chapter may actually have more in common with Fenella's frenetic action music than with her articulate pantomimes. Different as they sound, these two registers of physical gesture and melodic convention both rely on the expressive charge and sense of bodily presence created when the operatic text "says" the same thing in two different ways. For Fenella, sequences of repeating scales underline and reinforce the movement of her body, while Rossini or Donizetti set words like "gemito" (groan), "lagrime" (tears), or "pianto" (lament) to onomatopoeic melodic figures.

The most interesting manifestation of this onomatopoeic language, as it connects to staging and embodiment, occurs in the operas of Vincenzo Bellini. Although Bellini's operas are permeated by convention, both in terms of form and vocal style, his music often seems slightly distanced from those conventions, hyperconscious of their possibilities and limitations. This detachment may have something to do with the admiring label frequently attached to Bellini during his lifetime, that of "philosophical" composer, a distinction that seems mainly to have re-

ferred to his exceptional sensitivity to the words he set.² And although Heinrich Heine was responding mainly to Bellini the man, in his late guise as Parisian socialite, when he dismissed the composer as a “sigh in dancing pumps,” his less than charitable characterization also captures something about Bellini’s music. The image draws attention to Bellini’s wispiness and heightened sensitivity, and implicitly casts the composer as a dreamy, elegiac counterpart to the more virile energy of Donizetti or Verdi.

But Heine’s cruel turn of phrase also evokes less canonical associations: the reduction of the man—and his music—to a “sigh” denotes absence, a shortage of flesh and blood, mere puffs of air that substitute for real, manly presence.³ In this sense the word is unintentionally apt. Bellini’s music is set apart from that of his contemporaries by its swerves and absences: the heightened respect for words and poetic nuance means that vocal display and athletic virtuosity are avoided altogether or subordinated to the demands of the drama; the standard double-aria form is loosened or dissolved to reflect poetic content; and (consequently) musical atmosphere becomes far more important than sharply etched conflicts or the momentum of plot. And Bellini’s operas, especially the early works, are saturated with sigh figures: brief, highly conventional melodic patterns used to imitate the sounds of the body in pain or emotional distress.

One such sigh is reproduced in Example 7. In this scene, the heroine of the early opera *Il pirata*, Imogene, tries to bid farewell to her pirate-lover Gualtiero; she had loved him once but was forced to marry another man for reasons of politics and family honor. As the opera begins, Gualtiero has been fortuitously shipwrecked on the shores of Imogene’s Sicilian home. She first becomes aware of his presence when she hears the groan of his weakened body, filtered through the woodwinds of the orchestra, and in the ensuing duet Gualtiero’s groan becomes Imogene’s own sigh of regret, as the woodwinds echo her sorrowful word of farewell. It is significant that this sigh and the many others in the opera’s first act suggest a body both present and absent. The orchestral echo of

Example 7. A sigh from Bellini's *Pirata*.

IMOGENE

Andante mosso

ad - di-o... Se un gior - no fi - a che ti trag-ga de - gli al -

Lento

pp

sempre legato

ta - ri al pie-de il tuo do - lo - re,

Imogene's "Addio" emerges as if from a distance, perhaps as a stirring of sorrow rising from her depths. The sigh or groan renders tangible the absent and the invisible, giving clear and unequivocal expression to emotion, and to memory. At the same time, such patterns appear to collapse musical expression into the verbal meaning of the words or into physical gesture, transgressing against the long-held bias against duplication of meaning that we saw in Cicero's views of oratory and that persisted—often breached in practice but never seriously challenged in theory—throughout the nineteenth century.

Such familiar mimetic formulas fill the stage with a vivid sense of emoting, sounding bodies, but they may also have served a more specific purpose in the opera of the 1820s and 1830s. It seems crucial that these techniques flourished in Italy, not only in relation to those clichés that cast all Italian art as pulsing with a southern immediacy and presence, but because these musicalized bodies bore such a large burden of repre-

sensation on the Italian stage. In sharp contrast to the French (and German) practices of the period, staging was relatively static and undeveloped in Italy until after midcentury, untouched by either the elaborate planning that is so faithfully recorded in the Parisian staging manuals or the lavish special effects used in both France and Germany to bring to life the supernatural scenes that began to proliferate in Romantic opera.⁴ Italian theaters usually left stage direction to the librettist, to a poet on the staff of the opera house, or to the singers themselves, rarely bothering to notate anything. Certainly, the Italian repertoire of the first half of the nineteenth century has almost nothing to compare to the rich documentary material recording details of staging and theories of gesture that exists for French opera. But this documentary void is no mere accident: the fact that directives like the staging manuals were not prepared for Italian theaters also reflects an aesthetic bias away from the body and scenographic detail, in favor of sound and voice. In this sense, Bellini's (or Donizetti's, or Verdi's) sighs and groans substitute for stage movement and special effects, forging a kind of expressive economy in which particularly emphatic or readable music can stand in for actual visual representation.

These two dimensions—the body as heard *à l'italienne* and as shown, *à la française*—collide in a fascinating way in Bellini's last opera, *I puritani*. Where *Il pirata*, premiered at Milan's Teatro alla Scala in 1827, overflows with musical mimesis of bodily states, *I puritani* perhaps blends French and Italian aesthetics. Written for the Théâtre-Italien in Paris eight years after *Il pirata*, *I puritani* represents its bodies as much through innovative use of stage space as through the conventional battery of melodic figures, which are invoked as if at one remove from the standard melodic vocabulary. The opera's ethereal heroine, Elvira, teeters between sanity and madness and between presence and invisibility, singing from offstage at several prominent moments in the opera. Her affinity with ghosts and phantoms perhaps gave Bellini an excuse to step away from a musical style based on close mimesis of the visible, emoting body, to move toward more idiosyncratic connections between move-

ment, emotion, and song. This chapter asks what happened to the operatic body between these two operas: why the sighs and groans of *Il pirata* began to disappear, and what replaced them. If chapter 2 was about excess, as experienced in the multiply coinciding layers of musical, verbal, and gestural signification in Fenella's pantomime scenes, this chapter focuses on privation, on a metaphorical anorexia of the body that overtakes Bellini in his last opera.

1

If any artistic tradition grants greater prominence to the body than bel canto opera, while also representing that body in utterly formulaic terms, it must be the Gothic novel. Characters, both male and female, are always “shivering,” “shuddering,” and suffering from “convulsed limbs.” Furthermore, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has shown in an early monograph, Gothic fiction tends to sketch character by assigning a set of physical and facial attributes drawn from a finite and highly standardized list of possibilities. As Sedgwick writes, faces—and, by extension, personalities—often seem interchangeable in the Gothic novel and can only be differentiated by performing a sort of a multiple-choice quiz:

Face highly colored?—yes or no. Flesh marked by furrows?—yes or no. Eyes fiery? (Fiery eyes go with furrowed flesh, for they are reservoirs of the fury born of mutilation.) Features in motion?—yes or no.⁵

Sedgwick's point is not to make fun of Gothic convention or its narrow repertoire of physiognomic options; rather, she draws attention to the way these “physiognomic codes” manage to create an “insistent *fiction* of a physical presence.” Something very similar happens in Italian opera: although we know perfectly well what the sobs and sighs of *Il pirata* will sound like if we have heard other works by Bellini or Donizetti, the very predictability of this physical vocabulary makes bodily presence all the more forceful.

While characterization through *sounds* emanating from the body

might seem a uniquely operatic strategy, the unusually audible body of *Il pirata*'s hero, Gualtiero, can be traced back to the libretto's Gothic source, Charles Maturin's 1816 drama *Bertram, or the Castle of St. Aldobrand*.⁶ Maturin's moody hero, Bertram, is first seen asleep, uttering "deep muttered groans" (II.i.16); one character notes of him that he "never spoke, did nought but sigh" (II.iii.21). Bertram himself repeatedly resorts to synecdoche to describe the pain he has suffered at the hands of the faithless Imogene, projecting his emotions in turn on to his "bare and bruised" (II.i.16) or "scarred and scathed" limbs, his "wasted frame" (IV.i.45), or the "black hairs torn from a head that hates thee" (IV.i.46). It is as if Bertram possesses no self, no first-person singular, except as his emotions speak through isolated, abused body parts.

In Felice Romani's libretto for *Il pirata*, these figures of speech are mostly discarded; but they, and our sense of the pirate-hero as above all a suffering *body*, creep back into the opera by way of its mimetic figures. Even before the real Gualtiero impinges on Imogene's consciousness through his falling minor-third groan, her dreams have been haunted by his sighs. In the slow movement of her entrance aria, Imogene, wracked by guilt because her dying father forced her to abandon Gualtiero and marry another man, recounts a dream in which she beholds the lifeless corpse of her lover and hears his dying sighs pursuing her across a silent and threatening landscape, carried by the breeze (Example 8). In a striking contravention of the Romantic trope of abandoned lovers who enjoy healing dialogues with nature, here nature is obstinately "deaf," refusing to answer—or even to hear—Imogene's cries.

In the first section of the aria Bellini depicts this vast and unsympathetic empty space through a basic musical contrast. In the bleak, recitativelike opening stanza, the melodic line creates a sense of empty and unresponsive open spaces, remaining inert around the pitch D, underpinned by hollow pizzicato octaves. The inhospitable melodic space is tentatively filled beginning with the aria's refrain, which relaxes into melodic leaps and small melismas (at the words "E mi seguita sui

venti"). In the movement's final section, as Imogene's narrative shifts from the past of the dream to the present of the haunting sigh, the crucial words "quel sospiro io sento ancor!" bring with them a stock sob-figure, rocking between scale degrees $\hat{5}$ and $\hat{6}\flat$ in $E\flat$ major. The chorus sings its own sobbing motive, a third lower, their words referring not to Gualtiero's clamorous body, but to Imogene's own groans, illustrating once again the semiotic fluidity of even the most "legible" of melodic

Example 8. Imogene's *cavatina* (*Il pirata*). The barren landscape is gradually filled by her echoing sighs.

IMOGENE

Lo so - gnai, fe - ri - to, e - san - gue, in de -

4 [52 measures omitted]

ser - - ta, i - gnu - da ri - - va...

a tempo

E mi se - gui - ta sui ven - ti _____ un so - spi - ro di lui che

Example 8 (*continued*)

IMOGENE

muor — quel so - spi - ro io sen-to an - cor —

ADELE

Va - ne lar - ve tu pa - ven - ti. Ti cal - ma, o Dio!

ITULBO

(Qual so - spet - to, qual so - spet - to, io sen-to in cor!)

CHORUS

(El - la ge - me, oh, in - fe - li - ce, ge - me o - gnor,)

(El - la ge - me, oh, in - fe - li - ce, ge - me o - gnor,)

figures. The effect is of a barren landscape suddenly populated with weeping, pulsating bodies, replicating in sound the shift from past solitude to Imogene's present haunting by the sigh. Far more than just a familiar melodic formula in this context, the throbbing semitone sigh figures vividly illustrate the infusion of physical presence into the bleak landscape.

What is exceptional about the scenes from *Il pirata*, then, is not the presence of these melodic figures associated with the body, but the explicitness with which they are invested with meaning as signs of life and presence. Such sighs and groans are as frequent and as formulaically en-

coded in works of the 1820s and 1830s by Donizetti or Mercadante, and the gestures continue well into the 1850s, most memorably embodied in the weeping sopranos of Verdi's *Luisa Miller* and *Rigoletto*.

It is striking that such conventional patterns for depicting the sounds and emotions of the body persisted despite the consistent and aggressive disapproval of theorists and writers on musical aesthetics. Perhaps the most influential view of the subject had originated with Rousseau, who, in his discussion of imitation in the *Dictionnaire de musique*, had represented the “direct” or literal imitation of objects as something of a cheap trick. Rousseau held that such literal imitation—for example, of objects that already emitted sounds themselves—was too easy, too reliant on preexisting formulas, and thus not a true test of a composer’s abilities. Rousseau proposed that the most desirable kind of imitation was not pictorial but emotive, working on listeners by arousing feelings analogous to those they would experience by perceiving the object itself.⁷ And since musical imitation depends fundamentally on the depiction of movement through rhythm, Rousseau famously argued that greatest compositional challenge of all was to imitate objects that lacked movement altogether, such as silence, sleep, or stillness.

Such an aesthetic orientation obviously leaves the sighs, groans, and sobs of 1830s Italian opera with little theoretical justification. It seems a bit surprising, then, that this bias against materiality and literal depiction also managed to seep so thoroughly into contemporary Italian theories of musical imitation. In his entry “Imitation” in his influential *Dizionario della musica* of 1826, Peter Lichtenthal quotes Rousseau at length, adapting the French philosopher’s epigrammatic remarks into a system that distinguished between what Lichtenthal called “objective” and “subjective” imitation. The first of these was to be used sparingly; because it merely copied the sounds or patterns of the object it imitated, it did not sufficiently test a composer’s inventive gifts. Again following Rousseau, Lichtenthal strongly preferred the “subjective” mode of imitation, oriented toward arousing in the listener the same feelings created by the object being imitated.⁸ In a more practical context, the composer

and pedagogue Bonifazio Asioli advanced a similar approach in his 1836 treatise *Il maestro di composizione*, elevating what he called “sentimental” imitation above that of the physical, the visible, or the sensate, all of which he rejected as too “servile.”⁹ Within the category of “physical imitation,” Asioli supplements the predictable musical examples of sunrise, darkness, and chaos (all taken from Haydn’s *Creation*), with an implicit homage to Rousseau in the form of musical examples of what he calls the “*impossible* imitation of silence”: a passage depicting sleep from an opera by Paisiello and one by Cimarosa illustrating the phrase “regni silenzio, muto profondo” (may silence reign, profound muteness).¹⁰

Such evidence must be read in light of the status and function of such reference books and didactic texts. While Lichtenthal’s dictionary presumably reflected current opinion when it was first published in 1826, Asioli’s treatise might be understood either as reflecting existing compositional practice or as attempting to prescribe for the future, most likely some combination of the two. Whatever the case, what is most striking about these two discussions of musical imitation is their remoteness from the contemporary operatic practices. When Lichtenthal and Asioli follow Rousseau in endorsing modes of imitation that do not rely on convention and in preferring imitation of objects that do not make sounds for the same reason, they seem to ignore the huge category of Italian operatic music (even within Rossini’s oeuvre alone) that imitates the sounds emitted by the body such as sobs and sighs.

Asioli’s discussion of “sentimental imitation” even includes examples for such oft-depicted states as “palpitante il cor” (the beating heart), “il pianto” (lament), and “vaneggiamento” (fainting, delirium), with illustrations taken, respectively, from Rossini (*Torvaldo e Dorliška*, for the first) and Paisiello (*Nina*, for the last two).¹¹ Strangely, Asioli’s verbal commentary ignores the fact that all these examples rely on the conventional codes he elsewhere criticizes. Entirely typical is the example for “il pianto,” in which Nina’s lament is depicted through an elaborated and repeated sigh-figure, a rocking motif in parallel thirds (Example 9).

Example 9. “Lament,” as illustrated in Asioli’s treatise *Il maestro di composizione* (1836).

Andante sostenuto

Violini *p*

Viola *p*

Clarinetti in Sib *p*

NINA

Basso *p*

Au - ge - let - ti che al mio pian - to

Il movimento dei violini, il semitono ascendente e discendente ad ogni loro sezione e il Modo minore, producono un flebile accompagnamento, che unito al rinforzo dei due Clarinetti all’8va esprime eccellentemente il pianto.

(The movement of the violins, their ascending and descending semitones, and the minor mode produce a flexible accompaniment that combines with the doubling in the two clarinets at the octave to express the lament very effectively.)

Asioli’s discussion tends toward the circular, or the deliberately blind: he seems to select musical examples he likes, describe their orchestration, and then elevate these techniques into a prescription for the best way to represent each emotional state, as if each example were a unique case of the representation of that emotional state by that musical technique. This standoff between theory and practice suggests that Italian music was struggling to “emancipate” itself from language during this

period, but also that theorists were more receptive to the dominant strands of northern European thought than were composers. Literalism, redundancy between music and word, or music and image, were officially “out,” as were melodic formulas, but opera composers could hardly do without them.

3

If Bellini moved away from the direct imitation of bodily sounds after *Il pirata* to explore new modes of representing the body, he was probably motivated more by new theatrical and operatic surroundings than by any “official” disapproval voiced by critics or theorists. More than anything, the innovations of *I puritani*, premiered just a few months before Bellini's sudden death in 1835, were inspired by Parisian taste. Besides the usual adjustments Italian composers learned to make for the French audience, amounting mainly to freer forms and reduced vocal display, Bellini was pushed in new directions both by the supervision of Rossini, who took a hands-on approach to his job as director of the Théâtre-Italien, and by collaboration with a new and inexperienced librettist, Carlo Pepoli. All these factors conspired to make *I puritani* unique in Bellini's output, a work that distances itself from the Gothic tropes of embodiment we heard in *Il pirata*, setting in their place a new and perhaps more “French” attitude to staging the body.

The opera is structured more as a loose chain of evocative situations than as a teleological arc of conflict and resolution; indeed, the plot consists of not much more than a single event in the first act followed by a series of aftershocks. The action takes place in a Puritan encampment during the English Civil War. When the curtain rises, Elvira's uncle, Giorgio, has just persuaded her father to allow her to marry the man she loves, Arturo. Most of Act I is concerned with celebrations and preparations for their wedding, but the festivities are interrupted by political events. Arturo, a royalist sympathizer, discovers that a female prisoner held in the camp is actually Queen Henrietta, the widow of Charles I. Realizing that she will be executed if her identity is discov-

ered, Arturo spirits the queen away on horseback, disguised beneath his fiancée's wedding veil. Elvira, uncomprehending and abandoned at the altar, slides into madness. Act II is mostly concerned with the delusions of the insane Elvira and with debates about what penalty should be imposed on Arturo for his treason. In Act III, Arturo secretly returns to the vicinity of the encampment, the lovers are reunited, and Elvira restored to sanity.

One thing that did *not* change between *Il pirata* and *I puritani* was the language of the libretto: Pepoli was no less enamored than Felice Romani of sighs and sobs as a shorthand for emotional extremity. Yet the music in which these emotive utterances are clothed departs from the codes of literal imitation so common in *Il pirata*. Stimulated by the Parisian theatrical milieu and perhaps also by specific qualities of *I puritani*'s source play, Bellini approached the libretto's formulas for pain and suffering in a far more abstract way: for example, providing a mere melodic suggestion of a sob while maintaining a distance from any too direct imitation, and often subsuming that sob-figure into a larger pattern of repetition and motivic play.

This softening and loosening of Bellini's mimetic language emerges best at three moments of emotional outpouring in the opera's second act, which centers on the madness that overcomes the heroine, Elvira, after she is abandoned at the altar. In contrast to the examples from *Il pirata*, the three moments are linked more by words than by sound. When Elvira's uncle, Giorgio, sings an aria describing her plight to the chorus, his account of the visual signs of her madness is interwoven with evocations of her *voice*, calling for her lover, singing, sobbing. In the coda (Example 10, beginning at m.8), his response to Elvira's vocal excesses finally overturns the aria's textual and musical symmetries. Its comforting strophic structure and rocking eighth-note patterns give way to a fragmented chromatic line over chromatic chords, as Giorgio repeats the words "geme, piange, s'affanna" (she groans, she weeps, she sorrows). There is no question that Elvira's groans and sobs are major musical events here, but their disruption is felt less through any recog-

Example 10. Aria (Giorgio): "Cinta di fiori" (Bellini, *I puritani*).

GIORGIO

Or sor-ge Ar-tu-ro nell'al-trui sem-bian-te poi del suo in-

gan-no ac-cor-ta e di sua sor-te, ge-me,

pian-ge, s'af-fan-na... e o-gnor più a-man-te in-vo-ca mor-te, mor-

te, pian-ge, s'af-fan-na, pian-ge, s'af-fan-na... e o-gnor più a-

man-te, o-gnor più a-man-te in-vo-ca mor-te, mor-te

Now she believes she sees Arturo in another's face, then, wary of his deceit and of her destiny, she groans, she weeps, she sorrows...and then, ever more in love, cries for death

nizable mimesis than through changes in harmony and declamation—excursions into a style of song verging on recitative.

Elvira's mad scene, similarly, grants a large role to sighs, although now they are cast, in a sort of insane inversion, as "*la gioia dei sospir*"—the bitter joy of her imagined reunion with her beloved. These sigh figures, too, are placed at a remove from their verbal and emotional catalyst. The repeated dyads on C-B $\flat$ and E $\flat$ -D, played by strings with occasional participation from the voice, are joined to the word they depict—"sospir"—only at the very end of the passage (Example 11, mm.8–9). The association between musical motive and bodily source is furthered loosened by the fact that the sighing dyad structures the movement's entire central section and thus works more as a develop-

Example 11. Scena ed aria (Elvira).

ELVIRA

4

7

qui as - sor - ti in - sie - me, ah! mai più — qui as - sor - ti in -

sie - me nel - la gio - ia dei so - spir...

Ah! never again shall we be united in the joy of sighs...

mental building-block than an isolated instance of word-painting. This scene began with Elvira singing from offstage, but even now that she is visible, the referential airiness of these sigh-figures lends her body a distant and ethereal quality.

The most spectral Elvira of all is the figure invoked in the final number of the act, a male-bonding duet for the heroine's uncle and her rejected suitor, Riccardo (Example 12). Attempting to persuade Riccardo to come forward with knowledge that could save Elvira's fiancé from

Example 12. Duetto (Giorgio, Riccardo).

Andante agitato
GIORGIO

Se tra il bu-*io* un fan - ta-sma ve - dra - i bian - co,

6 lie - ve, bian - co, lie - ve... che ge - me e so -

10 spi - ra, sa - rà El - vi - ra che s'ag -

14 gi - ra e ti gri-da: io son mor - ta per te.

pp sempre legato e leggero

rall. un poco

col canto

in tempo

If in the darkness you see a ghost, white, slender... who groans and sighs, it will be Elvira who roams the earth and cries: "I died for you."

the gallows, Giorgio conjures a pair of pale ghosts, the afflicted lovers Elvira and Arturo, emerging from the darkness, moaning and crying, "I died for you!" The terms of Giorgio's description of Elvira here clearly echo those of his earlier aria, as do his direct quotations of her voice. This time, though, Elvira's vocal interventions pass by without creating so much as a ripple on the melodic surface. Bellini has chosen an unusual melodic topos here to begin with: a (mostly) rising line in a slightly off-balance triple-meter that seems ill-suited to telling ghost stories. The tune is ridiculously cheerful for the text it sets (except, perhaps, for its odd word-accent such as "ve-dra-*i*" [m.4] and "mor-*ta*" [m.17]). It is almost cruel in its denial of a pictorial response to both the visual image of the ghost and the groans and sighs it describes. If this music has anything to do with Elvira's body at all, it flows from a very different facet of her physicality: her moans and sobs are obscured by the sprightly dance meter, as if Elvira's ghost finally paired with Arturo in death, dancing a waltz.

4

If Elvira is (momentarily) turned into a shade or a shadow in the duet for the two baritones, this is merely a realization of a tendency she has displayed since the first moments of the opera. Elvira shows a predisposition to insanity early in the opera, but more than that she often seems to be half-present, always on the verge of either appearing or disappearing from the stage, her visible body nearly erased from perception. This shadowy, undecided quality also pervades the opera as a whole: scenes and musical numbers flow disorientingly into one another, and the plot shows little concern for causality or the conventional pacing of rising conflict and dénouement. Elvira goes mad three times, once in each act, and the amorous disappointment that precipitates the whole near-tragedy grows out of a minuscule misunderstanding, wildly out of proportion with its consequences.

Even the opera's scenic frame thematizes the fluidity of the divide be-

tween “inside” and “outside,” the stage directions providing frequent references to what can be glimpsed just beyond the set. The opening scene is set on the ramparts of a Puritan fortress, specifying “in the distance, mountains, composing a beautiful view”—mountains that seem not only gratuitous but geographically implausible in the English setting. When the scene changes to the interior setting of Elvira’s boudoir, the libretto specifies that “the Gothic windows are open”; and the following scene calls for a set open at the back, with “a few glimpses of fortifications” visible between the columns.

The carefully terraced representation of space evident in these detailed stage directions achieves musical realization in the opera’s fixation on offstage music. The opening scene is particularly rich in this respect, stringing together three separate episodes of music performed wholly or partly offstage: a military reveille, a Puritan prayer to welcome the dawn, and a wedding song. The prayer introduces Elvira as an invisible voice. Her soprano soars above the unaccompanied four-voice texture, closing off the hymn with a decidedly *un*-Puritan melisma spanning her range from low F to A above the staff.

This tendency to separate Elvira’s voice from her visual presence almost becomes a stylistic mannerism as the opera unfolds. It lends the heroine an ethereal quality that fits the opera’s tendency to cast its sighs and other musical manifestations of the body in abstract, distanced terms—less vivid or literal than those in *Il pirata*. In each act Elvira is introduced first as an offstage voice and only later as a physical presence. After the initial prayer, she appears again toward the end of the first act, adorned for her wedding, to sing a frankly exhibitionistic wedding song (“Son vergin vezzosa”). Launched with a brief, wordless melisma sung from offstage, as if to duplicate aurally the aria’s visual message, this aria decisively collapses the traditional feminist distinction between voice and gazed-upon body: “Look at me” is reinterpreted as “listen to my voice.” In Act II Elvira is again heard before she is seen, anticipating the closing phrases of her slow movement from offstage before entering for the mad scene. And in the third act, perhaps the most in-

triguing case of all, she engages in a self-consciously musical exchange of songs with Arturo, beckoning to him vocally from offstage but refusing to appear until he sings “their” love song.

As with the extreme audibility of Gualtiero’s body in *Il pirata*, *I puritani*’s obsession with the separation of vision and voice can be traced back to its source play, Ancelot and Saintine’s *Têtes rondes et cavaliers*, first performed at Paris’s Théâtre de Vaudeville in 1833.¹² The play is peppered with military sound effects that waft in from the wings: the arrival of an envoy is announced with the sound of a horn off, and a rifle shot alerts the principals to Clifford’s (or, in the opera, Arturo’s) return to the camp after his sudden flight in the first act.¹³ But by far the most intriguing reference to the offstage realm in *Têtes rondes et cavaliers* comes toward the end of the first act. As the heroine, here called Lucy, prepares for her wedding, she lightheartedly adorns the royal prisoner, Henriette, with her bridal veil, and admires her pretty friend in a song that ends with the words “[On] vous prendrait pour la mariée” (one might mistake you for the bride).¹⁴

The confusion of identity hinted at by that phrase is actualized a few minutes later, in the cataclysmic event that precipitates Lucy/Elvira into madness. At what should have been a climax of the wedding celebrations, Lucy enters searching for her fiancé; she is just in time to watch through one of the set’s many windows as he disappears in the distance with a woman wearing Lucy’s own bridal veil, a woman who appears at a distance indistinguishable from Lucy herself. The stage directions at this point make clear that Lucy suddenly becomes unhinged,¹⁵ and that the catalyst is not so much abandonment as confusion of identity: she runs her hands over her own body as if to verify her own presence and raves, “That woman! is she not me? . . . where am I myself then? . . . it is I who am his wife! . . . There must be two Lucys!”¹⁶ In effect, her madness is unleashed by the shock of seeing *herself* move into that offstage realm from which her voice has so obstinately emanated up to this point.

This scene, transferred to the opera in abbreviated form, hints that

even the visual aspect of staged representation can be untrustworthy. We knew that *voices* could lie, could emanate from hidden places, or deceive about their sources of production, but we tend to assume that what we *see* is equivalent to truth. In a subtle way, Elvira's vision of herself running off with Arturo calls the reliability of this visual dimension into question. Besides the obvious psychological interpretation concerning confusion about body as site of self, this scene hints that stage space too can be illusory, that the "reality" of the enacted drama may lie elsewhere.

5

This idiosyncratic approach to stage space and to music from the wings is perhaps foreshadowed in the single reference to offstage music that occurs in the copious documentation surrounding the genesis of *I puritani*. The first of two scenarios drafted by Bellini and Pepoli, this brief summary of the opera's numbers includes a reference to offstage music as a generic effect, a musical intrusion not in any way tied to plot. In the middle of what would become Elvira's Act II mad scene, Bellini and Pepoli call for a

[g]rand scene in the middle of which an offstage chorus, of sentries, or peasants, according to which seems better in the situation, of a type similar to the voice of the gondolier that Desdemona hears in the moment of her misfortune.¹⁷

The careless phrase "of sentries, or peasants" suggests that Bellini's real concern was to evoke the famous moment of offstage music from Act III of Rossini's *Otello*, and that he was willing to shape his drama accordingly, making room for either a martial or a rustic interlude that might otherwise have been extraneous. Plot was of little concern; what mattered was atmosphere, *tinta*, stringing together a progression of colorful episodes.

But we might also pause to consider what exactly Bellini meant in

drawing a resemblance between a chorus of sentries or peasants and the intrusion of the gondolier in *Otello*, for it would seem that these two types of offstage music fulfill opposite functions. The choral intervention would conventionally work as a catalyst to action, delivering new information or at least providing a jolt of musical color that halts one contemplative moment and provides justification for the next.¹⁸ These intrusions, reminders of action taking place in “real time” beyond the world on stage, are ritualized in one type of the so-called double aria; they motivate the shift from the lyrical contemplation of the slow movement to the vocal virtuosity and fiery resolution required of a cabaletta. The effect of the offstage voice in the *Otello* scene is quite other. Lacking all sense of change or forward motion, the gondolier’s famous quotation of Dante’s melancholy lines about happy memories intruding on a sad present instead immobilizes its surroundings and renders the exterior world irrelevant. The passing boatman is made into a frozen symbol, flattened into a reflection of Desdemona’s emotional state.

The projected intrusion of “sentries or peasants” in Elvira’s mad scene never materialized. The peasants evaporated from the opera entirely, but the offstage sentries survived to play a major role in the third act duet for Elvira and Arturo, prompting a stretch of continuous musical outpouring unique in Bellini’s output. Where martial music from passing soldiers would usually reinforce formal divisions, underlining the move from one lyric movement to another, Bellini uses *his* passing soldiers in a radically different way. Their fifes and drums interrupt Arturo’s *romanza* and the ensuing duet no less than three times, forging an unbroken stretch of music that bridges aria, duet, and finale and that expands to encompass the action offstage.¹⁹

The sentries provide formal continuity, then, but they are far from the most interesting offstage music in the third act. The act begins with an exchange between the lovers that captures more acutely than any other moment in the opera Elvira’s mistrust of the visual dimension. Arturo is alone on stage; he has returned from exile to marry Elvira, still unaware that his abandonment caused her to lose her mind. As he em-

braces his native soil, he hears Elvira singing a fragment of a *romanza* that he identifies as “la mia canzon d’amore” (Example 13), although it is not a love song that we have heard Arturo sing to Elvira before. He addresses Elvira in recitative, but when she fails to respond, decides that he must sing his song, which she has just echoed, back to her. At this point begins a tonal narrative of a kind very rare in Bellini, one in which the struggle between two keys dramatizes the tug-of-war between two characters: Arturo on stage and the invisible Elvira, whom he wishes to draw into the visible realm.

Arturo’s recitative begins by establishing C major but then dallies on E♭ and A♭ (momentarily reinterpreted as V/D♭) before modulating through the first of what will be many German 6ths to arrive again at C major, which he settles on as the key in which he will sing Elvira’s B♭ major *romanza* back to her (see Example 13, mm.5–10). As he takes up the *romanza* (m.25), Arturo departs from Elvira’s simple song. The distinctions between her disembodied voice and his firm, onstage presence are translated into a musical contrast of keys and textures: Elvira’s bardic harp accompaniment is replaced by more conventional flutes in thirds, and Arturo expands and regularizes her melody, also altering the words to reflect his own state of gloomy exile. He seems about to embark on a formal recapitulation of the opening material when he is interrupted by the march of those offstage soldiers. After they have passed harmlessly by, Arturo reemerges from his hiding place and sings another, now complete, statement of the *romanza*.

This time he succeeds in summoning Elvira, and it almost seems possible to pinpoint his successful persuasive strategy to a single phrase of the *romanza*. The passage that makes all the difference is a modulatory phrase that begins by shifting suddenly from the C major tonic to a dominant of E♭ and then moves down by semitones and augmented-sixth pivots to cadence back in C (Example 14). Arturo is forced to trace this modulatory path four times before it achieves the desired effect: we hear part of it during his first, aborted statement of the *romanza*, then, repeated three times in this second attempt. Each time the words focus

Example 13. Arturo summons Elvira with music (*I puritani*, Act III).

ARTURO
(con stento) (con tutta la forza della passione) **pp**

La mia can-zon d'a-mo-re! Oh El-vi-ra, oh El - vi-ra, o-ve t'ag-gi - ri tu?

Recitativo

5 *a tempo*

Nes-sun ri - spon-de, nes-sun.

Andante sostenuto assai (♩ = 58) **p** **pp** **sf** **Più mosso**

10 Recitativo

A te co-sì can-ta - va di que-ste sel - ve tra le den-se

14

fron-de, e tu al-lor e-co fa - ce-vi al can - to mi-o. Deh! se a-scol-

Example 13 (*continued*)

18

ta - sti l'a - mo - ro - so can - to... o - di quel del-l'e - si-glio, o - di quel del-l'e -

f *lento assai*

21

si-glio, o - di il mio pian-to, il mio pian - to.

lunga molto

lento assai

pp *p*

25 Andante sostenuto (♩ = 104)

A u-na

29

fon - te af-flit - to e so - lo s'as-si de-va un tro - va - tor.

pp

My love song! Oh Elvira, where are you? No answer. Once I sang to you from these dense thickets, and now you echo my song back to me. Oh! if you once heard my song of passion, hear now that of the exile, hear my lament.

By a fountain sat a troubadour, sad and solitary...

ARTURO

L'e - si - lia - to al-lor che muo - re ha sol po - sa al suo do -

lor, al suo, al suo do - lor, l'e - si - lia - to al-lor che
appena sensibile

muo - re ha sol po - sa al suo do - lor, al suo do - *a piac.*

12 *resta assorto* *Elvira si mostra appena e porge l'orecchio*

lor.

dolce

Only in death shall the exile find release from his sorrow.

on the dissatisfaction of the exile; the last two repetitions repeat the phrase "l'esiliato allor che muore ha sol posa al suo dolor" (only in death shall the exile find release from his sorrow).

This exceptional phrase is one of those that gives credence to the oft-invoked parallels between Chopin's and Bellini's melodic and harmonic styles.²⁰ Its homeless quality, its inability—or unwillingness—to settle on a tonic, sounds like an emblem of Arturo's exile and wandering. But, more than that, the phrase is also endowed with dramatic agency, its harmonic perambulations powerful enough to draw Elvira from the wings onto the stage, to persuade her to show herself to Arturo and to the audience. It is as if Arturo's performance of the eventful harmonic odyssey from "her" world of B♭ to "his" C major makes it possible for Elvira to perform exactly that same action, now made concrete through stage movement. Something imagined and abstract, existing only in music, has been translated into a physical action that renders the musical process concrete and visible. On entering, Elvira's first words are, typically, a quotation of *another* of Arturo's declarations of love, this time one that the audience recognizes, the famous "A te, o cara" from the first act. Crucially, though, she states this familiar theme—originally heard in D major—in *C major*, as if she has been completely won over into Arturo's "onstage" key of C. We might now rename C major the key of the visible, the concrete, the mundane.²¹

There is, however, another way of looking at this musical negotiation, one less reliant on the controversial notion of large-scale tonal planning. Different meanings arise if we listen not to the modulatory goal of Arturo's meandering phrase, but to its contour: rather than leading purposefully to the new key, this clinching utterance snakes and wanders, continually undermining its provisional tonal centers and conveying an overall sense of sinking or collapse, an impression underlined by the expressive direction "con voce quasi spenta" (the voice almost exhausted). Perhaps what really wins Elvira's trust at this point is Arturo's willingness to perform his own bodily weakness in the form of a huge, long-drawn-out sigh. By capping his song with this particular phrase, Arturo

locates himself in Elvira's affective world—both as a body who sings forth his pain and as a singer who, like Elvira, casts these laments in wispy, dreamlike terms, abstract and far removed from their bodily origins.

With this persuasive modulating phrase and the assertive tones of the C-major duet that follows, Elvira finally emerges fully into the representational world of the stage, her long phase of dissociation from reality resolved. Indeed, the sense of arrival, of fleshing out an absent self, is so strong at this point that it is tempting to hear the entire opera as a sustained attempt to coax Elvira onto the stage, into full presence. As I hinted earlier, the decision to render Elvira quite so elusive and ghostly was in several respects an excuse for musical innovation—prompting Bellini to step away from mimetic, literalist melodic conventions and into a brand of dramatic realism in which the affective worlds of the characters extend beyond the limits of the stage. The famously adventurous theatrical climate of 1830s Paris notwithstanding, it is worth noting that this was an unusual approach for a composer of *opera*. The French operas of the period tended to approach the problem of visual representation with overkill: by filling the stage with as many bodies as possible, by splitting it into separate planes of simultaneous action, and by decorating it as lavishly as possible with lush sets and costumes.

In *I puritani* Bellini embraced French dramatic innovations to a point, but without relinquishing Italian primacy of voice and mistrust of vision and movement. At the same time, Bellini was “being French” in another, more interesting way, by adapting into opera a topos that was all the rage in the ballets of the period. I am thinking of the predilection of early Romantic ballet for plots that focus on supernatural beings who come and go through apertures in the sets via elaborate illusionary mechanisms. The most famous example is Filippo Taglioni's choreography for *La Sylphide*, premiered at the Opéra in 1832.²² The ballet's first act is entirely concerned with traversing the boundary between onstage and off. In the opening scene, a beautiful wood spirit

(or sylph) appears and dances for a sleeping man; when he awakes she disappears up the chimney, leaving him wondering if she was real or imagined. Later the sylph appears through the window to distract him from celebrating his wedding to a very mortal woman; just as the couple are about to exchange rings, the sylph snatches the ring and escapes through the same window, with the bewitched groom in pursuit, leaving his bride at the altar.

Throughout this first act the spectator is made unusually aware of the space that lies just beyond the set, given (together with the male protagonist) numerous opportunities to look longingly toward the offstage space occupied by the sylph. This magical realm is finally revealed in the second act, when the two lovers are briefly reunited there with a tragic outcome. But *La Sylphide* is only the most famous of these magic-obsessed operas: similar themes can be traced through such ballets as *Le Diable boiteux* (1836)—in which a dancer is observed dancing the cachucha through a skylight window—and *Ondine* (1843), in which the water spirit Ondine is represented as constantly teetering on the edges of the space occupied by her human lover (see Figures 5 and 6).²³

Works like *La Sylphide* invest the world offstage with a supernatural importance, thus creating in the spectator a strong desire for access to that space that is fully supported and rationalized by the plot. In other words, desire and the hunger of the gaze never disappear completely in theatrical representation, even when so much crucial action is rendered invisible. And when the desired space offstage is also rendered audible, as in *I puritani*, new paradigms are needed to understand the opposition of body and voice. *Il pirata* had excelled at creating an acute sense of physical presence through its adaptation of Gothic conventions into sound: bodies that are invisible or distant are rendered tangible through the intense literalism of direct imitation, the proliferation of conventionalized sighs, sobs, and groans. Those characters who are visible on stage also gain an extra charge of immediacy or authority through Bellini's conventional language of the body.

In *I puritani* sound substitutes for sight in an even more extreme



Figure 5. “She fell and disappeared into the heart of the shimmering water, gesturing to Mattéo to follow her.” A scene from the ballet *Ondine*, as illustrated in Gautier, *Les Beautés de l’opéra* (1845).

way—by taking the bodies out of the visual field altogether much of the time. *I puritani* shows that opera can be very much about the body without objectifying the body visually: a notion of desire provoked and controlled by the gaze is simply replaced by a desire based on sound, on hints of the unseen. Elvira may be constantly on the verge of slipping right out of her body and becoming pure voice, but the dictates of the-



Figure 6. Mattéo's human fiancée is drawn magnetically to the threshold of the room by the celestial powers of the ondine.

atrical representation ensure that if she escapes the proscenium's frame at all, it is not to cavort in some emancipated space of female utterance, but simply to exist on an alternative plane of desire.

The juxtaposition of *Il pirata* and *I puritani* also suggests a larger point, one that concerns *all* the characters rather than just the two heroines. On an obvious level, the close affinity between Elvira and those sylphs and spirits of Romantic ballet can be read as a pragmatic move on Bellini's part, one of many innovations aimed to situate *I puritani* as international and cosmopolitan rather than as narrowly Italian. On a less calculating level, the obsessive attention to Elvira's offstage voice and her positioning on the margins of the stage also represents a step into the metaphysical space that had already become the dominant mode for northern European opera. In this connection one immediately thinks of Wagner—of the surprising fact that he occasionally had admiring

words for Bellini and, according to Cosima, could often be heard humming or whistling tunes from his operas (not just *Puritani*).²⁴ That admiration perhaps runs deeper than approval of Bellini's compositional innovations, his rejection of conventional melodic formulas, or his expansions of form. Teetering on the edge of the stage space, and on the brink of madness, Elvira is rendered part visionary, prefiguring a new type of operatic heroine. She is not quite an Elsa or a Senta but perhaps has as much in common with those yearning girls as she does with *Il pirata*'s Imogene or Auber's Fenella—the acutely sensitive woman who both summons and is summoned through song, and who ends the opera not with a robust double aria, but with a sigh of redemption.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Every Word Made Flesh”

Les Huguenots and the Incarnation of the Invisible

If the erupting volcano in the final scene of *La Muette de Portici* copied nature (or at least existing Italian stage designs) with a kind of detail that recalled Roland Barthes’s “reality effect,” the tendency for spectacular visual effects to drown out all other elements of the drama only strengthened as the genre of grand opéra matured. In 1837 Heine complained with characteristic bite about the Opéra’s increasing indulgence in luxury, which he felt overwhelmed any higher artistic purpose:

The name [of the Opéra’s director, Louis] Véron will live forever in the annals of music: he beautified the temple of the goddesses, but threw the goddesses themselves out the door. Nothing exceeds the luxury of the grand opera, and this is now become a paradise for the hard of hearing.¹

The complaint about the tasteless excesses of the Opéra’s décors is familiar enough; the novelty of the remark lies in Heine’s dismay at the increasing materiality of French opera, its divorce from any sense of transcendence, as the theater was transformed from a “temple” into a sumptuous but entirely earthbound locale. “Goddesses” had, of course, been thrown out with the advent of grand opéra, which rejected mythologi-

cal subjects in favor of plots based on historical and political events. But Heine's point is a larger—and sharper—one, probably directed at Giacomo Meyerbeer, who in both *Robert le diable* (1831) and *Les Huguenots* (1836) had treated religious subjects in a resolutely mundane and material vein.

1

Certainly *Les Huguenots* was a shining example of the Opera's commitment to a kind of visual materialism. The subject, religious strife between Catholics and Protestants leading up to the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of 1572, offered copious opportunities for the notation of historical detail for its own sake, including scenes set in locations the operagoing public would have recognized either from experience or from illustrations, such as the Pré-aux-clercs and the palace of Marguerite de Valois at Chenonceaux. The opera is also well endowed with the ceremonial processions, street scuffles, and characteristic dances that lent grand opéra its atmosphere of opulence and historical accuracy. And although Meyerbeer is adventurous in his challenges to the formal confines of "number opera" and in the creation of dramatic momentum through collisions of opposing musical forces, he and his librettist, Eugène Scribe, bypassed one obvious avenue of hyper-realistic staging.² Largely content to confine the opera's dramatic world to what is visible on stage, the collaborators almost completely forego scenes in which invisible voices intrude from offstage to shape the action or to arouse the spectator's curiosity about the theatrical space that lies beyond the visible. The contrast with *I puritani* is striking, all the more so because the two operas were premiered just over a year apart, *Les Huguenots* destined for the Opéra while Bellini's work was written for the more modest setting of the Théâtre-Italien.³

On the rare occasions when offstage music is used in *Les Huguenots*, it tends to function in one of the more conventional modes outlined in the previous chapter: to reassert "real time" after a moment of soloistic

contemplation or to introduce new plot information in a seamless and dramatically efficient manner. In the third act, a martial "rataplan" chorus sung by Protestant men from an offstage tavern serves as a signal to the ambushed Protestants on stage that they can appeal to their nearby co-religionists for help. Later in the same act, a *banda* playing wedding music from a barge on the Seine functions both to convey new information to the hero, Raoul, and to provide an ironic comment on his situation: just as he has been definitively reassured of the virtue of Valentine, the woman he has long loved from afar, the distant wedding music informs him that she has been married to another man. These effective but conventional instances aside, however, the scarcity of such offstage effects in *Les Huguenots* perhaps confirms a favorite cliché of grand-opéra historiography: that Meyerbeer and Scribe aimed above all for maximal visual splendor, leaving the evocation of gauzy, otherworldly realms to the likes of Bellini.

It may seem counterintuitive to insist that Meyerbeer and Scribe, collaborators not only on *Les Huguenots*' bloody drama of spiritual division but also on the ghost-ridden Gothic world of *Robert le diable*, were uninterested in representing what Gary Tomlinson has called "supersensory realms."⁴ Even in these works that foreground supernatural effects or tableaux of religious conversion, however, there is a sense in which Meyerbeer's view of the spiritual dimension remains obstinately, paradoxically mundane—founded in overt manifestation rather than implication. So strong is the imperative of visual desire in *Les Huguenots* that it is tempting to argue that the opera is not about religion at all but rather about voyeurism, its dramaturgy propelled by a poetics of surreptitious looking and listening.

It is symptomatic of the opera's fascination with spying (and its aural counterpart, eavesdropping) that its plot can be recounted almost entirely as a sequence of acts of illicit looking and listening, with a clear progression from vision to hearing as the opera unfolds. It is worth recounting that plot in some detail to show how this process functions. Against the background of events leading up to the Saint Bartholo-

mew's Day massacre, Scribe places the central love interest, a proscribed (and eventually adulterous) romance between the daughter of a prominent Catholic family, Valentine, and Raoul, a Protestant. In one of those implausible coincidences that give early nineteenth-century opera a bad name, Valentine and Raoul fall in love at first sight without knowing each other's identities and later become pawns in Queen Marguerite de Valois's ill-fated plan to engineer an interdenominational marriage as a public example of religious tolerance.

Both of the first two acts center on elaborate scenes of voyeurism. In Act I Raoul introduces himself to a group of Catholic revelers by telling of his first sight of Valentine, when he gazed upon her enthralled and she uttered not a word. Later in the act, the revelers gather by a window to savor the charms of a veiled woman who is later revealed to be Valentine. The second act is mostly concerned with staging the beauty of the other soprano lead, Marguerite, who begins the act by singing an ornate aria praising the attractions of nature and love while gazing at herself in a mirror. This voluptuous sequence also includes the famous bathing scene, in which Marguerite's ladies-in-waiting gambol in the river while her page Urbain (sung by a trousered coloratura soprano) watches from behind some trees. The act culminates with a succession of more plot-driven scopophilic moments: Raoul is led blindfolded into the presence of the queen while her female attendants admire his physical charms; sight restored a moment later, he himself is dazzled by Marguerite's beauty. In the act's final tableau, Valentine is revealed as the woman Marguerite has chosen for Raoul to marry, a betrothal he violently refuses when he recognizes Valentine as both the veiled woman of questionable virtue of the first act and the anonymous object of his earlier romantic enthrallment.

The opera's second half leaves behind all this pleasure in looking—perhaps partly because such scenes inevitably slow down the action—and shifts to a narrative mode in which all important conversations are overheard and reported to the enemy side. In Act III, Valentine (now reluctantly married) accidentally overhears her father's plans to ambush

Raoul and warns Raoul's faithful retainer, Marcel. In Act IV, as Valentine and Raoul steal a clandestine moment together, they are surprised by the entrance of Valentine's father and his Catholic cohorts. They conceal themselves, and from their hiding places overhear plans for the St Bartholomew's Day massacre.⁵

The opera's final act, too, turns on a harrowing moment of knowledge gained through listening. Here offstage singing is finally used to such shocking effect that one suspects that Meyerbeer had been hoarding this particular sonority to use in a moment of special dramatic intensity. In contrast to the earlier scenes of eavesdropping, in which the speakers were visible on stage and the listeners hidden in the wings, here the positions are reversed. The bloody massacre under way, the three principals gather in a cemetery while a congregation of Protestant women take shelter from the rampaging Catholics in an adjacent church. Valentine has come to offer Raoul a way to save his life: if he will abandon his Protestant faith, she will give him the white scarf and the cross that serve as identifying symbols for the Catholics. When he refuses indignantly, she converts to Protestantism on the spot, to prove that her love for him transcends all other loyalties. The religious barrier removed, and news of the death of Valentine's husband in the massacre having conveniently just arrived, Marcel takes the power of the ministry upon himself to unite Valentine and Raoul in matrimony.

As the couple conclude their impromptu vows, a women's chorus is heard from offstage singing the Lutheran chorale "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," a melody that has served as an identifying theme for Marcel throughout the opera. The hymn breaks off abruptly when a band of armed Catholics bursts into the church. As they begin to massacre the women and children, the only access to the conflict is through sound, as the belligerent chorus of assassins alternates with isolated phrases of the Protestant chorale.⁶ Strangely for an offstage utterance, the chorale is virtually shouted, fortissimo, in unharmonized octaves. On stage, the three principals chart the course of events, reporting several times "ils chantent encor" (they are still singing), and then, finally, "ils ne chantent

plus" (they sing no more) as the last of the praying women is murdered. Continuing song serves as evidence of survival; here, quite literally, silence equals death.

The scene is painful to experience, the suggestion of the massacre through gradually annihilated voices perhaps even more traumatic than if the murder had been shown on stage. For Meyerbeer, it seems, even music for invisible voices becomes fleshy, close up, and powerfully evocative of the visual. Perhaps it was something of this sensation that provoked the critic Camille Bellaigue's 1896 characterization of Meyerbeer's style as one in which "every thought is incarnated, and every word made flesh."⁷ No doubt Bellaigue fixed on this metaphor as a way of capturing Meyerbeer's gift for representing movement and action, as well as to throw these talents into relief against what he perceived as the composer's relative compositional naïveté and lack of interest in psychology or spiritual matters. Contrasting Meyerbeer favorably with Wagner, Bellaigue notes that, rather than using an individual character or situation as a basis for philosophizing, Meyerbeer's dramaturgy tends to proceed in reverse, moving from the idea to the individual and personifying emotions as characters. Thus, the element of the fantastic in *Robert le diable* takes on living form in the figure of Bertram, whom Bellaigue sees as more a failed father than as a pure demonic force of Mephistophelian stripe. Similarly, Meyerbeer treats religion not as something sublime and dreamlike in the Wagnerian mode, but as a living, driving principle of action, a conviction for which one might kill or be killed. What is unique to Meyerbeer's style, Bellaigue concludes, is

something concrete and solid, something that reassures us, grounds us, and saves us from menacing abstraction, not through realism, but through reality.⁸

"Menacing abstraction" seems a wonderful phrase for the threat the French felt emanating from Wagner, even if Bellaigue's authoritative elevation of "reality" above "realism" may be more grounded in polemic than in any precise sense of operatic practice. Even more suggestive is

his allusion to the "word made flesh," an expression that carries rich—if probably unintended—resonances with the religious strife depicted in *Les Huguenots*. Although it is well established that neither Meyerbeer nor Scribe had much interest in preaching religion or politics to their audiences, *Les Huguenots* might on the basis of its plot alone be understood to advance a doctrine that emphasizes invisible proofs of faith and, conversely, distrusts the apparent, the visible manifestation of the divine on earth that is central to Catholic theology.⁹ Not only does the opera depict the Catholic faction as dishonest ambushers in Act III and as drunken carousers in Act I, it admires more than it criticizes the jingoistic Huguenot Marcel for his single-minded devotion to his master and his faith. At several points, Protestant characters explicitly reject the Catholic conviction that divine presence can be embodied on earth, through the sacrament of communion, but also through relics, processions, statuary, and other objects of veneration.¹⁰ When Marcel is reprimanded early in Act III for not bowing his head as a procession accompanying the wedding of Valentine passes by, he responds by asking angrily whether God himself is present in the congregation. And, in the last act, when Marcel enacts the Protestant doctrine of the individual's direct access to God by assuming the power of the ministry to marry Raoul and Valentine, he enjoins them to forswear all earthly and concrete pleasures: "Have you rejected all mortal coil, all hope of here-below? Does faith alone survive in your hearts?"¹¹ The vision scene that follows, in which Raoul, Valentine, and Marcel (but not the audience) see the skies open to welcome them and hear celestial fanfares, carries an equally strong suggestion that invisible proofs of faith are what count.¹²

The rejection of earthly pleasures exacted by Marcel and ultimately echoed by the other two principals sounds incongruous, perhaps even insincere, in juxtaposition with the dramaturgical values of *Les Huguenots* as a whole. In a sense, the libretto's words and its scenic dimension are in conflict: while Scribe places unworldly sentiments in the mouths of his most sympathetic characters, the expectations of the Opéra's au-

dience and the imperative to represent historical confrontations in a grand manner dictated that Scribe and Meyerbeer invest an unquestioning faith in the worldly, lodging meaning in presence and in visual representation of the most luxuriant variety. Hence, while Marcel may doubt God's presence in a religious procession, those same processions are metaphorically invested with transcendent power by the governing aesthetic of grand opéra. Finally, however, the only perspective endorsed by Scribe's libretto is not that of one religious denomination or the other, but the path of compromise and personal passion followed by Valentine, who shows herself willing to abandon all abstract principle—her Catholic faith and her father's honor alike—in order to be united with Raoul.

Some might argue that it is as futile to look for a consistent viewpoint on the relative power of presence and absence, vision and sound, in Meyerbeer's operas as it is to seek a clear position on religion or politics. But ever since Wagner, it has become too easy to label Meyerbeer as "eclectic" and stop there.¹³ In this chapter, I want to explore the apparent contradiction between the libretto's intermittent endorsements of absence and invisibility and the insistent "fleshiness" of Meyerbeer's music. My inquiry begins with paired explorations of the musical and visual representation of the two characters at the opera's antipodes, Valentine and Marcel. A final section of the chapter turns to the staging manual for the first production in search of clues to the opera's gestural style and, more generally, to Meyerbeer's views on the interaction of music and stage action.

2

A quest for "embodiment" or the "word made flesh" in Meyerbeer's music might begin with instances of the melodrama-style orchestral music we saw in *La Muette de Portici*, perhaps especially with analogues to those frenetic passages with which Auber underlines the physical

presence of the mute Fenella. For the most part, however, Meyerbeer avoids anything approaching such "miming music." Instead he introduces and accompanies his characters with a more "psychologized" orchestral idiom, one that discourages any precise choreographic relation to the movements on stage. Even the ballet sequences in *Les Huguenots* are surprisingly unphantomimic.

This is not to say that the opera lacks a vivid sense of embodiment or physical movement. Rather, music capturing the movements of any single character is replaced by public, collective gesture: an entire wedding procession or street brawl can become "gesture," with music and stage action yoked together with broad strokes and musical topoi (march, dances). In contrast to Auber's chains of fast-moving scales and sequences, Meyerbeer captures movement through short, sharply etched rhythmic motives whose surface conventionality often serves as a background for adventurous harmonic or timbral effects.

Much of the music Meyerbeer uses to accompany the entrances of his principal characters can also be heard as possessing a loosely gestural quality, a fact that becomes apparent in contrasting the orchestral music associated with Valentine and Marcel. The two characters are opposite in almost every way—Marcel's assertive misogyny versus Valentine's traditional femininity, his staunch Protestantism set against her flexible attitude to religion. Since Valentine's heroism in the last act ultimately proceeds from her very willingness to change her mind, it is perhaps fitting that she of all characters is the least firmly represented musically; her entrances are usually marked by pretty but protean orchestral figures. Conversely, as the most morally rigid among the characters, Marcel is also the most musically "embodied," the music for his entrances coming as close as any in Meyerbeer's lexicon to synchronizing music and gesture. Heinz Becker has argued that Marcel is the opera's true hero, his ascent from the status of a mere servant to that of equal and spiritual father to Raoul and Valentine resonating with the composer's egalitarian politics.¹⁴ We know Meyerbeer took a particular

interest in Marcel: as far back as 1832, when Scribe drew up his first plan for the libretto, Meyerbeer had expressed concern about making the part substantial enough to appeal to the bass Nicolas-Prosper Levasseur, who had proven his Meyerbeerian mettle the year before as the first interpreter of Bertram in *Robert le diable*.¹⁵ Meyerbeer's revisions to Scribe's draft libretto in 1834 also focused to an important extent on expanding the role.¹⁶

It is a sign of this special status that Marcel is alone among the opera's principal characters in possessing not one but two recurring themes. The more musically defined of these is the chorale "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott," the tune that functions as semiotic marker of life and death and substitute for visual knowledge in the last act's offstage massacre scene.¹⁷ Originating as a hymn, and sung in full by Marcel himself at his first appearance, the chorale is inherently linked to voice and song. However, as a recurring theme that has an unusual ability to attach itself to almost any character or situation, the chorale quickly becomes abstracted from any single physical character, action, or event.

If the recurring chorale theme functions to turn Marcel into a sort of allegory, a symbol of Protestant virtue, his other identifying theme moves robustly in the opposite direction, to emphasize his physicality and his style of movement. This series of broken arpeggios in even quarter notes played by solo cello is heard only when Marcel is present on stage and is often used to draw attention to his entrances. The rhythmic pattern of the cello chords vaguely suggests a series of ponderous footfalls, but here too Meyerbeer avoids choreography or synchronization, almost always placing the cello chords just *after* Marcel's entrance rather than synchronized with his movements. On two occasions later in the opera the cello figures are delayed even until after he begins to speak. This second identifying motive, then, resists being pinned down as either body or voice and is perhaps best heard as floating free from either to convey some more nebulous quality such as the authority lent to the old servant's words by his piety.

Even in the absence of a recurring theme synchronized with move-

Example 15. Marcel's first appearance (Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, Act I).

Molto moderato (♩ = 100)

f *lourdement*

Marcel paraît au

7 *fond du théâtre*

TAVANNES

Récit.

Quelle é-tran-ge fi-gure i-ci vois je ap-pa-raî-tre?

f

p

ment, however, there can be little doubt that Meyerbeer associates Marcel, more than any other character, with physicality. His first appearance in the opera is accompanied by a unison figure for cellos and double basses that suggests weighty footsteps in a walking pace, setting the tone both for Marcel's unwieldy style of movement and for his moral seriousness (Example 15, mm. 1–8). Here, too, however, a stage direction specifies that Marcel should appear only during the last two measures of the phrase, so that the “walking” figure must be heard as anticipating rather than as choreographing his movements.

Again in the Act III duet for Marcel and Valentine, Meyerbeer assigns Marcel some of the most literally mimetic and embodied music in the opera. When the old misogynist registers that the person accosting him in the dark is a woman, his vocal line veers momentarily into a style reminiscent of the terror-stricken patter characteristic of Rossini's or Donizetti's *basso buffo* roles, conveying Marcel's shock through a mimetic approximation of trembling (Example 16, esp. mm. 6–7 and

11–12). Later in the same duet, Meyerbeer offers a witty commentary on the servant's brute physicality—and perhaps also on the conventional design of the "Italianate duet"—by sending Marcel offstage in the middle of a set piece. At the beginning of the slow movement ("Ah! l'ingrat"), Marcel exits to deliver a warning to Raoul at his lodgings, thereby granting Valentine a long-deferred moment of solo singing. He returns (presumably out of breath) just in time to launch the traditionally more agitated *B* section of the movement's ternary design and to participate in the reprise of the opening material.

It seems paradoxical that a character who regularly reminds his interlocutors of the ephemeral nature of earthly experience should be given such a robust orchestral and gestural personality. On one level, Marcel is singled out for special treatment within the opera's mimetic economy precisely *because* of the unwavering certainty of his faith: his doctrinal consistency is paralleled musically in the assertive and predictable recurrences of his two themes. But the recurring association between Marcel's presence on stage and the lumbering series of low-voiced broken chords in the second of his recurring themes also carries an element of the bizarre, the grotesque, even perhaps of caricature. The copious commentary devoted to the "characteristic" style Meyerbeer devised to represent his favorite character musically has tended to focus on novel elements such as recurring themes and timbral experiments. Although the extensive use of recurring themes itself is often rightly seen as proto-Wagnerian, the specific types of melodies Meyerbeer associates with Marcel and the ways he uses them ally him with a less forward-looking aesthetic movement, the doubling of music and stage action and the general tendency toward a blatant or overstated mode of discourse characteristic of *mélodrame*.¹⁸ Rather than suggesting an anticipation of the Wagnerian model, the emphasis on musical embodiment and on "miming music" in Meyerbeer's portrait of Marcel suggests a wholly different treatment of recurring themes, one focused on materiality and *un*interested in evoking characters or ideas not visible at that moment.

Meyerbeer's musical treatment of Valentine, too, is all about visibility, and about music as an accoutrement of sight. Indeed, one could plausibly dub Valentine the most looked at, least *heard* heroine in all of opera. She appears prominently in Act I but does not say a word; sings a few lines of recitative and a part in the ensemble finale in Act II while again being looked at, by Raoul and the assembled company, and—as in the first act—being wrongly judged a fallen woman. Her lyric voice is finally heard in duets with Marcel and Raoul in the third and fourth acts, and once she embraces Protestantism she becomes a vocally equal participant in the martyrdom scenes of the last act. Her only aria, a *romance* expressing her enduring love for Raoul at the beginning of Act IV, was usually cut in performance.¹⁹

The opera's unusually long and complicated genetic process seems to have conspired to keep Valentine voiceless. Scribe's 1832 plan for the libretto took a conventional approach to the disposition of numbers, assigning Valentine (or Gabrielle, as she was named at that stage) a *romance* in the first act to explain her intention to break off her engagement, as well as a part in a trio with Marguerite and her page Urbain in the second. He also drafted a scene (not necessarily an aria) at the beginning of Act III in which Gabrielle dresses for her wedding and pleads with her father not to make her marry.²⁰ By 1834, when Meyerbeer undertook thorough modifications to the libretto with the help of the experienced Italian librettist Gaetano Rossi, the *romance* planned for Valentine (now renamed, briefly, Léonore) in the first act was replaced by Marcel's Huguenot song ("Piff, paff"). At the same stage, the opening sequence of the third act was cut, eliminating another scene for Valentine (she would have witnessed an assassination attempt on the Protestant leader Coligny from her window while being dressed for her wedding).²¹ Even the slow movement of the climactic Act IV love duet began life as a perfectly symmetrical number in which each character sang eight lines of text, probably to similar music, only to emerge after

revisions with a design in which the central lyrical section ("Tu l'as dit") is given over mostly to Raoul, becoming almost a mini-aria for him.²²

Anselm Gerhard has read Valentine's shrinking role as a reflection of contemporary ideas of womanhood as "virginal and completely dependent on men," a diagnosis that recalls Catherine Clément's well-known indictment of opera as a realm of women "silenced" by plot, denied power and self-determination, often by male relatives or authority figures.²³ Certainly Valentine fits this description, as a woman who is literally murdered by her father. But usually these plot-oppressed women are correspondingly "gazed at" musically, their voices made sources of aural pleasure and decorative display. The lengths to which Auber went to depict the mute Fenella through elaborate "special effects" of orchestral representation simply reinforce the rarity and difficulty of constructing an opera around a character who is *vocally* silenced.

While the reductions to Valentine's role certainly have the effect of painting her as demure and helpless, the reasons for the changes appear to have been both more pragmatic and more musically significant. On the pragmatic side, Meyerbeer's desire to have the bass Levasseur as his Marcel led him to argue consistently for reducing Valentine's part in favor of Marcel's. But this casting decision also had important musical ramifications: within the generic world of French grand opéra, the prima donna soprano was probably the only principal who by 1836 would be expected (and whose performer would expect) to present herself primarily in pretty, rather static arias, and to participate minimally in the intricately layered action-ensembles that were Meyerbeer's chief interest.²⁴ Therefore, every reduction to Valentine's part also lessened the opera's reliance on conventional musical forms. Conversely, Marcel's increasing centrality meant amplifying those elements of the drama that called for the innovative musical effects on which Meyerbeer placed such a premium.

One effect of Meyerbeer's denial of the usual occasions for vocal display to Valentine may be metaphorically to safeguard her virtue, associating her with the line of reticent, demure heroines extending through

grand opéra from Fenella to Rachel in Halévy's opera *La Juive* (1835), each complemented by a frivolous, florid soprano counterpart. But there are many ways for a character to be "gazed at" musically, and I want to suggest that the erotic pleasure denied by withholding arias from Valentine is reinstated by way of other musical techniques that direct spectatorial desire toward her. To get closer to a sense of how Meyerbeer's music channels this desire, let us turn to the opera's two most frankly voyeuristic scenes: the paired introductions of Valentine in Act I, first as absent object of Raoul's romantic imaginings, then as visible but silent pawn in the game of marriage and religious alliances orchestrated by Marguerite de Valois.

It makes sense to treat the second of these first: the scene of Valentine's silent entrance corresponds so perfectly to definitions of objectification of the female body by the male gaze that it seems a caricature of the opera's voyeuristic obsession. Valentine is introduced when she arrives incognito in the midst of the drunken feast hosted by her fiancé, the comte de Nevers, a party at which Raoul and Marcel are the lone Protestant guests.²⁵ After Nevers is summoned away from the table to receive her, his guests work themselves into a frenzy trying to guess who this veiled woman might be. (Only Marcel and Raoul do not participate in this prurient speculation, having moved off into a tête-à-tête.) When one of the company hits on the idea of spying through a curtained window, all the men cluster around to take their turns, climbing on stools and tables to secure a better view.

As each voyeur in turn comments on Valentine's charms ("Elle est charmante. . . . Attraités divins. . . . Taille élégante"), the music alone never pauses to contemplate her attractions. Instead, the orchestra hurtles forward in a lightly comic tone, with repetitions of a four-bar woodwind phrase providing a carefree backdrop for the exclamations at Valentine's beauty (Example 17). As often in *Les Huguenots*, this repeating phrase is divided into two distinct and contrasting halves: the initial swirling triplet figure captures the activity and excitement of the men's voyeuristic adventure, while the pointed cadence with which each

Example 17. Leering at Valentine (*Les Huguenots*, Act I).

Allegro con moto (♩ = 200)
Il va à la croisée et ouvre le rideau. THORÉ
Ah! par-le donc!

6 TAVANNES COSSÉ
Je l'a-per-çois! Est-el-le bien!

11 TAVANNES
Elle est char-man-te!

DE RETZ *prenant la place*
C'est à mon tour!

statement closes coincides rhythmically with vocal exclamations at Valentine's beauty. The pattern is cheerfully relentless: once established, nothing will derail the regular repetitions of that triplet phrase. It seems noteworthy that Meyerbeer chooses to compose this scene so completely from the spectators' point of view, concentrating on the excitement of the men and resisting the temptation to insert, for example, a rapturous slow section that might displace our attention momentarily away from the game of watching and onto Valentine's beauty, innocence, and isolation.

Like the recurring themes that represent Marcel, the busy orchestral texture surrounding Valentine's closely observed entrance raises questions about how operatic music can create the impression of looking, of fixing on a single site of desire with voyeuristic intensity. We saw in chapter 1 that film makes at best an imperfect analogy for the workings of look and desire in opera; but Meyerbeer and his grands opéras are the exceptions—perhaps proto-filmic in more than just the *luxe* and historical accuracy of their visual settings. A number of details in Margaret Olin's account of the filmic gaze could be transferred without much adjustment to a description of Valentine's position in Act I:

Fetishistic scopophilia silences the woman in order to worship her. She is sequestered from the world of happening or becoming. Her background is invisible, her face rendered hallucinatory by soft mists that play over it, her body parts isolated for loving perusal in closeup. The gaze of the man in the audience and the gaze of the man active within the narrative, with whom the audience identifies, are both fixed on her. Time, the flow of the narrative, stops on the—timeless—image of the woman. Woman is the image; man is the bearer of the look. Power is on his side.²⁶

Most of the conditions for voyeurism set out here are met easily by Valentine's entrance scene. She is silent and literally isolated from the world of action by being placed at the back of the stage, out of earshot.

But what is crucial about Olin's understanding of the gaze is her attention to time: "Time, the flow of the narrative, stops on the—time-

less—image of the woman." While the narrative of plot may be indeed halted by Valentine's entrance in Act I, it is far more important to the scene's impact that *musical* time refuses to stop to contemplate her image. The kind of music we might expect—an idiom that might more fully support the scenic effect of the staring men—is something more like the voluptuous music of the Act II bathing scene, with its rich triadic harmonies for closely spaced female voices, or the stopped-time effect of Raoul's Act I *romance*.²⁷

Raoul's love-struck description of his first sight of the woman who has captured his heart—only later revealed as Valentine—acts as a necessary complement to Valentine's silent entrance scene, supplying all the voluptuous pauses and musical analogies for the gaze that the voyeuristic ensemble lacks. When he is introduced to the Catholic revelers, Raoul is challenged to recount an amorous exploit to the company. His response, the strophic *romance* "Plus blanche que la blanche hermine," reveals him as almost painfully sincere compared to the worldly Catholics.²⁸ In direct contrast to the elaborate staging of the voyeuristic ensemble, in Raoul's aria *nothing* is seen, all is evoked in words and imagination, with the music more than doing its part to conjure an image of static, framed feminine beauty. Paradoxically, Raoul's *romance* and the recitative that precedes it contain some of the most expressive "choreographic music" in the entire opera, as if Meyerbeer has taken the visual absence of the erotic object as the occasion to produce a musical discourse that traces events in faithful and vividly pictorial succession.

The scene begins with a flurry of musical and narrative action that makes the stillness of the *romance* itself all the more striking in contrast. Raoul sets the scene for his tale in recitative: he found himself just outside the city of Amboise when he saw a richly outfitted litter by the side of the road. A group of rowdy students surrounds the coach; their cries and their bold air allowed Raoul to "guess their project"—a project that Scribe leaves alluringly unspecified. Throughout this scene, a simple pattern of harmonic tension and release underlines the peripeteias of Raoul's tiny narrative: as he tells of his confrontation with the students,

the triplet figures that seem to paint a climate of danger and agitation become denser, higher, and louder, repeated over dominant preparation leading to a dominant (Example 18, mm. 12–16). The accumulated harmonic tension dissipates and the dominant resolves to D minor as Raoul tells of chasing away the students ("je m'élançe . . . tout fuit à mon aspect" [I rushed in . . . all fled]). As the orchestral furor clears, we can imagine the threatening men dispersing in synchronization with the evaporation of the busy triplet figures. Then Raoul declaims the final, and most important, line of his recitative unaccompanied, leading to a new dominant: "timide, je m'avance" (shyly, I stepped forward [mm. 20–21]).

That momentous step toward the coach and its still invisible occupant is underlined by the entry of the viola d'amore, which will be the voice's sole accompaniment in the *romance* proper. The rhythmic and harmonic activity of the previous section comes to a halt as Raoul gasps out his wonder at the sight he beholds, his sentence bisected by rapturous arpeggios outlining D major: "Ah! quel spectacle enchanteur vint s'offrir à mes yeux!" (Ah! what a divine sight presented itself to my eyes! [mm. 22–37]). The unusual timbre and the freezing of harmonic and melodic motion at once draw attention to the exclamation and even seem to mimic Raoul's posture, frozen in delight before the coach. As he describes approaching the coach and looking in, the viola d'amore's gradually accelerating flourishes approximate the effect of opening a window or pulling a curtain aside, as if to reveal the scene to the audience. The static, bated-breath quality of this music could not be more different from the busy, chirping motives heard when Valentine finally appears in the flesh later in Act I.

The *romance* itself is in two strophes, each in ternary form. Like the recitative, the set piece is structured around the opposition between static contemplation and action: in the opening section of the first strophe Raoul describes the white skin and purity of the unknown woman, and for a moment the linguistic tropes of Catholicism and those of nineteenth-century opera collide oddly, as the Protestant Raoul

Example 18. Récitatif et romance, “Plus blanche que la blanche hermine.” Raoul describes his first glimpse of Valentine.

Allegro moderato (♩ = 108) RAOUL. Récit.

Non loin des vieil-les

tours et des rem-parts d’Am-boi-se, seul, j’é-ga-rai mes pas, quand j’a-per-çois sou-

7 Tempo I° Récit. D’é-tu-di-ants nom-

10 Récit. Tempo I° breux la trou-pe dis-cour-toi-se l’en-tou-rait; et leurs

a Tempo

p après la parole

p après la parole

fp

(continued)

Example 18 (*continued*)

13

cris, leur air au-da-ci-eux me lais-saient de-vi-ner leur pro-

16 *Pressez* (♩ = 126) *Récit.*

jet. Je m'ë-lan-ce...

ff

19

Tout fuit à mon as-pect; ti-mi-de, je m'a-van-ce...

f *p*

22 *Andante* *Récit.*

(Viole d'amour ou Alto) Ah! quel spec-ta-cle en-chan-teur

ad lib.

Example 18 (*continued*)

28 **Récit.**

vint s'of-frir à __ mes yeux! *pressez un peu*

33

38 **Andante cantabile** (♩ = 126)

Plus blan - che __ que la blan-che her-mi - ne,

p (Viole d'amour) *cresc.*

celebrates his beloved as “un ange, une vierge divine.” In the aria’s contrasting middle section, Raoul bows and then speaks to the ravishing creature, to a repeating motive outlining a fourth that drives forward, propelled by driving sixteenth-notes and scale-patterns in the accompaniment. The closing phrases of the strophe open out into rhapsody, as Raoul quotes the actual words of devotion he addressed to the beautiful vision (“Bel ange, reine des amours”). On the surface, the lyrical expan-

sion of the *romance* could hardly be more different from the tight propulsion of the preceding recitative. However, in both sections the ebb and flow of rhythmic activity is governed by the idea of movement, keyed to each stage in Raoul's halting progress toward his idol.

In this sense, the *romance*'s representational strategy also adumbrates the scene of Valentine's arrival later in the first act. The evaporation of the busy triplets and their replacement by the harmonically static, timbrally rich *viola d'amore* figures create a musical double for the curtain that will be pulled aside to unveil Valentine's body to the curious spectators in the later scene. However, Raoul's *romance* is more successful and more complete as a voyeuristic tableau than the party scene into which Valentine actually enters. Even though—or perhaps because—nothing is *shown* here except the fervor of Raoul's own memories and fantasies, the *romance* satisfies the one condition for a classic definition of voyeurism lacking from Valentine's entrance scene: the freezing of musical and narrative time to contemplate the object of desire.

One might quite reasonably conclude from this juxtaposition simply that imagined erotic pleasures will always be more alluring, more convincing than any actual staging—and even that part of the satisfaction of fantasy lies in the ability to stop time at will. But perhaps we can also generalize from this pair of scenes to draw a further conclusion. Meyerbeer's construction of visual spectacle depends on complementarity between visual specificity and musical specificity. When the stage picture provides large amounts of information, as at Valentine's actual entrance, the music can skitter along without much of a representational impulse. But when all the weight of evoking a scene falls on to words and voice, as in Raoul's *romance*, music rises to the occasion by imitating closely the pace and atmosphere of the scene, mimicking in turn the headlong activity of the encounter with the rowdy students, the frozen awe of Raoul's first sight of his beloved, and his tentative steps toward her. In other words, the various levels of framing and gazing that surround Valentine reveal a predilection for employing opera's constituent components of music, words, and staging out of phase, with one dimension

taking on great representational importance while others retreat to the background.

The exception to this generalization is, of course, Meyerbeer's portrait of Marcel, which we can now understand as deriving its special force from its (perhaps reluctant) embrace of melodrama's traditional aesthetic of doubling and overstatement, its willingness to allow music and staging to proceed more or less in synch. To invoke once again the anachronistic Wagnerian vocabulary so often used to define Meyerbeer's achievements, it seems that, except in special cases, Meyerbeer's particular concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* depends not on congruence between music and movement, but on disjunction and complementarity.

4

On one level, all this merely reinforces what everyone knows about Meyerbeer: that he is an original, a confirmed innovator, even more reluctant than most artists to adopt inherited models wholly or uncritically. A deeper investigation of the role played by such disjunction in Meyerbeer's oeuvre more generally might help to illuminate—and perhaps finally to render obsolete—the old label of “eclecticism” that has persisted as an almost automatic characterization of Meyerbeer's style for both his champions and his critics, ever since Wagner's attacks in *Opera and Drama* and “Das Judenthum in der Musik.” But rather than pursue the implications of this insight for Meyerbeer's individual style or his critical fortunes, I want to turn in conclusion to the larger forces that must have informed his approach to melodrama and to the intersections of music and stage action, as reflected in the staging manual for the first production of *Les Huguenots*.

The *livret de mise en scène* is the ideal site for excavation of such general aesthetic currents, since its authorship is uncertain and thus it can only be taken in a very partial and tentative way to reflect Meyerbeer's own attitudes to staging. Published under the name of the *régis seur* Luigi Palianti, the *livret* actually records decisions arrived at collectively

by Meyerbeer and other members of the Opéra's production team during rehearsals.²⁹ So while the *livret* clearly reflects Meyerbeer's preferences to some degree—or at least is unlikely to include any directions with which he explicitly disagreed—it is impossible to determine which aspects of the staging, if any, may have originated with him.

The *livret* is itself something of a schizophrenic document. Its account of the opera's first three acts is fairly typical of the staging manuals of the period in that it concentrates on describing the arrangement of the sets and spelling out the positioning of characters for ensemble numbers but offers little guidance about how or when individual characters should move or behave at moments of extreme emotion. A typical direction from the blandly prescriptive first half of the *livret*, from Valentine's entrance scene, reads: "On voit Valentine . . . traverser au fond en dehors, suivie d'un valet, et se diriger de la droite vers la gauche du public au fond" (we see Valentine outside crossing the back of the stage, followed by a valet, moving from the right to the left of the audience upstage).³⁰ Beginning in Act IV, however, the *livret* becomes far more personal in tone, veering into rhapsodies about the ecstatic intensity of individual scenes and attempting to penetrate the emotional depths of the adulterous lovers.

These later scenes give the impression of having been blocked or transcribed by a different person. The newly engaged tone reaches a pinnacle in the *livret's* instructions for staging the famous Act IV love duet.³¹ This scene excited the *régisseur* in a way that nothing else in the opera did, eliciting both an unprecedented level of detail in the stage directions and gratuitous bursts of admiration for the music, praise for the scene as "entraînante" (captivating) and "d'une brûlante action" (with fiery action [160, 163]). The disappearance of the coolly prescriptive tone that usually governs the *mise-en-scène* is revealed also in the author's frequent ascriptions of emotion to Raoul and Valentine—and, this being a staging manual, those emotions are often translated into visible bodily signs such as trembling and breathing. At one point Raoul is directed to stand close to Valentine, "his body and limbs trembling," and

the *livret* falls back on the trope of shared breath to signal the intimacy between the lovers: Raoul stands so close to Valentine that he "inhales the breath that animates her" (161, 162). And in the small scene of delirium for Raoul that marks the transition between his love-drunk slow movement and the cabaletta ("Plus d'amour! plus d'ivresse"), the *livret* again figures the intimacy and physical proximity of the lovers in terms of shared breath: "il regarde, ne voit plus Valentine, qui est auprès de lui et l'anime de son souffle" (he looks but no longer sees Valentine, who is beside him and animates him with her breath [163]).

It is probably no accident that this ecstatic immersion in the passion of the drama coincides with the *livret's* shift to an increasingly melodramatic style of staging, in which frozen poses and exaggerated gestures take over from the geometric choral formations that had dominated accounts of earlier scenes. The "retreat" into melodrama seems perfectly appropriate for the love duet, where the libretto calls for such extreme events as for Valentine to fall in a faint and Raoul to leap out a window into the midst of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre (this last detail of staging added to the draft scenario by Meyerbeer himself).³² But the *livret's* melodramatic idiom of static poses and statuesque gestures continues into the last act, even after the music jerks into the accelerated motion that Anselm Gerhard has linked to the sped-up pace of contemporary Parisian life.³³

As if to emphasize the sudden shift of dramatic style, the word "pantomime" begins to occur frequently in directions for the opera's final scenes. During Valentine's and Raoul's impromptu marriage, for example, the *livret* specifies, "La pantomime des trois acteurs se doit bien régler" (the pantomime of the three actors must be very controlled [167]). A "pantomime" in the more formal sense of a sequence of wordless actions performed to music is called for during the orchestral introduction to the wedding trio, where the *livret* directs Raoul and Valentine to kneel, hands clasped, as Raoul places a ring on Valentine's finger, the entire sequence executed "fort lentement et religieusement" (very slowly and religiously).

As in the two scenes introducing Valentine in Act I, the stage action described in the *livret* often seems to function independently of Meyerbeer's music, and sometimes even to be radically in conflict with the composer's own aesthetic of musical continuity and dramatic forward motion. Most strikingly, the directions for the final occurrence of the Protestant chorale, as Valentine, Raoul, and Marcel are accosted by the bloodthirsty Catholic mob, call for the three principals to offer their breasts to the swords of the Catholic murderers, a movement the *livret* insists must be "*bien dessin[é]*" (clearly drawn [168]). A contemporary engraving by Dévéria published in the popular *Album d'opéra* illustrates this moment, the three visionaries standing stiffly erect, eyes raised to Heaven, their piety seeming to halt the pikes and daggers in midair (Figure 7). This histrionic pose accompanies the final iterations of the "Ein feste Burg" chorale, now sung fortissimo in ascending sequence at the top of each character's vocal range, then treated in diminution. The use of the familiar Protestant hymn to accompany a frozen tableau of three martyrs offering their bodies for the slaughter would seem to undermine any possibility for purely visual, static contemplation of this melodramatic visual picture. Not only is the chorale invested with extreme kinetic energy at this point, but its status as a recurring theme that has accumulated such spiritual significance over the course of the opera sets the chorale in conflict with the static pose called for in the *livret*, removing the scene from the domain of generic melodramatic effect and lodging it firmly within a more "modern" representational language.

Again we have come up against disjunction between stage action and music, but this time the collision of the two systems yields a different message. It could be that Meyerbeer and the authors of the *livret* were in conflict, the *régis seur* attempting to push Meyerbeer's shocking final scenes into a more comfortable and familiar dramaturgical space, a style based on heroic poses and regular alternations of static and kinetic episodes.³⁴ But the effect could equally stem from Meyerbeer, another example of his penchant for creating drama and novelty out of disjunctions between music and action. The expressive registers of the scenic



Figure 7. Marcel, Raoul, and Valentine confront the Catholic mob. *Les Huguenots*, Act V. Lithograph: Achille Déveria.

and musical dimensions drift apart here, just as they did in Valentine's entrance scene, and again the music refuses to pause for contemplation. Any catharsis that might be possible while contemplating the scene depicted in Déveria's lithograph is swept away, crowded out by the breathless momentum of Meyerbeer's music. The truth may lie in a combination of the two conjectures, but in any case the intention behind the effect seems less important than its impact: to undermine the voyeuristic impulse.

This in turn raises a much larger question about the relationship between musical activity and visual pleasure in *Les Huguenots*, and about Meyerbeer's particular techniques of embodiment, of making the word "flesh." To turn back to the contrast between Valentine's and Marcel's

entrance music one last time, the different musical styles Meyerbeer assigns to these diametrically opposed characters suggest a surprising conclusion. It is, of course, Valentine that we are repeatedly invited to gaze at. But the music we hear when she is onstage, both orchestral and vocal, tends to be blandly atmospheric and noncommittal whereas Marcel's identifying themes ask us to turn visual attention to his entrances and his style of movement. Or, to put this the other way around, Marcel, the character whose physical presence is most tightly bound to his music, is also the most spiritually pure and the least likely to compel the gaze, while Valentine, whose entrance music floats free of the body to portray vaguer attributes of character and emotional state, is set up by plot and libretto as the object of the gaze par excellence. At least within the world of *Les Huguenots*, it seems that a close fit between musical "gesture" and physical gesture undermines or counteracts the spectator's tendency to freeze that character in a position of voyeuristic contemplation.

Two points might emerge from this diagnosis of Meyerbeer's style, one concerning the poetics of operatic representation in the broadest sense, the other specific to Meyerbeer. In the context of my inquiry into music and gesture as a whole, Meyerbeer's portrait of Marcel is a crucial case, making explicit the links between "miming music" and the charisma of physical presence that I argue for elsewhere. Marcel could be seen as a cousin to Fenella, or even to Imogene from Bellini's *Pirata*: all are characters who gain force through musical doubling of their movements or (in Imogene's case) of other signs of embodiment, such as melodically rendered sighs. But where Fenella and Imogene, both heroines and the central love interests of their respective plots, are also gazed upon in a conventional sense, Marcel completely circumvents the objectifying impulse: it is difficult to imagine a character less likely to serve as a focus of erotic pleasure. In choosing to underline Marcel's entrances with a type of miming music, Meyerbeer perhaps intuited something of the commanding force that flows from such doubling of music and action, even in connection with a more demure personality like Fenella,

and tapped that force to shape his portrait of a morally impassioned eccentric.

Much in the depictions of Marcel and the other principals in *Les Huguenots* also derives from elements unique to Meyerbeer's style, perhaps especially from his understanding that desire is created by absence—or, more precisely, from the combination of visual absence and musical presence. This feature of Meyerbeer's approach returns us to a question with which I began, that of the apparent contradiction between the Protestant preference for invisible proofs of faith expressed at several moments in the opera's libretto and the spectacular, thoroughly embodied style in which most of the opera is realized. In light of the disjunctions at the root of Meyerbeer's style, however, the contradiction all but evaporates: it is Meyerbeer's talent, perhaps, to incarnate most vividly the invisible aspects of his operas.

Uneasy Bodies

Verdi and Sublimation

We should not leave Meyerbeer without noting that the self-conscious innovation and critical stance toward melodramatic conventions seen in *Les Huguenots* is hardly representative of the composer's grand-opéra style as a whole. His previous Parisian success, *Robert le diable* (1831), betrays no suspicion of the melodramatic aesthetic and even embraces the style wholeheartedly. The plot of *Robert* reads almost as a textbook summary of melodrama's Manichean logic: the devil-figure Bertram is a pure villain, and he is countered by not one but two saintly sopranos, Alice and Isabelle.¹ Much of the action concerns the struggle of the title character, offspring of a union between Bertram and a pious human woman, as he vacillates between the paths of good and evil, torn between the two sides of his heritage.

One of the opera's most popular scenes, depicted in numerous contemporary engravings, captures this confrontation between good and evil in overwrought body language. In the third act, the innocent Alice is waylaid by Bertram in a graveyard and clings desperately to a cross on one of the gravestones as she tries to ward him off (Figure 8). In the duet that emerges out of this encounter, the soprano's vocal line parallels the extreme bodily tension of her pose, overflowing with mimetic melodic

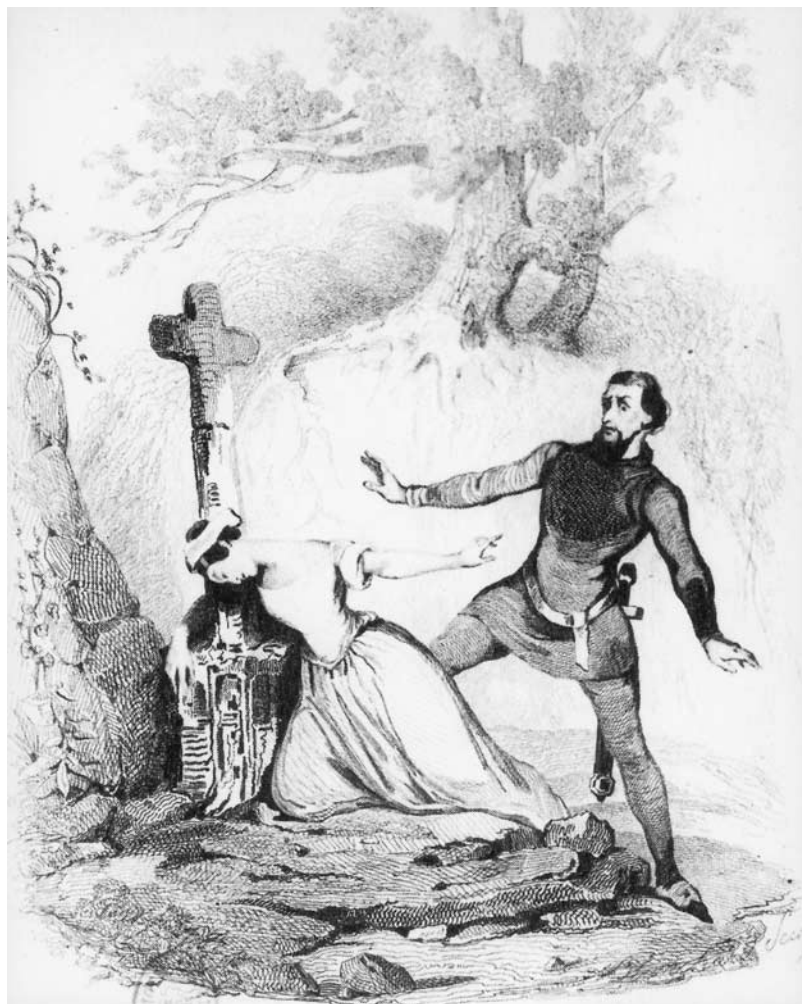


Figure 8. Alice clings to the cross to ward off the demonic Bertram. *Robert le diable*, Act III.

figures (some explicitly marked “sourir”) akin to the sighs and sobs so common in Bellini’s *Pirata* (Example 19).

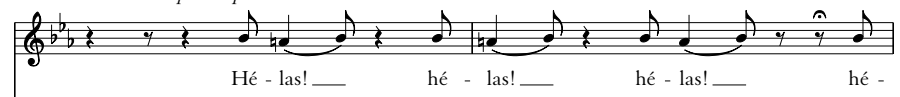
I begin with *Robert le diable* not merely to give a more balanced picture of Meyerbeer’s relationship to melodramatic expression, but because a single aria from that opera exerted a powerful magnetism for Verdi. The aria is exactly the kind of piece so carefully avoided in *Les Huguenots*: a static, melodically repetitive number for the prima donna. Sung in the fourth act by Isabelle, the more virtuosic and well born of the paired sopranos, this *cavatine* is addressed to Robert, Isabelle’s betrothed. Robert has twice abandoned Isabelle without explanation, causing her to contemplate marriage to a more conventional suitor. Determined to win back her love, in Act IV he uses a magic branch to cast a spell over her and her attendants, freezing them into a sudden sleep. When Isabelle awakens, she sinks to her knees and delivers an extended plea for mercy, “Robert, toi que j’aime.”

As James Hepokoski has shown, this *cavatine* was widely imitated, various combinations of its English-horn accompaniment, strophic structure, and F-minor tonality (with refrains in the tonic major) showing up in later arias for desperate, lonely sopranos.² It can be heard as a shaping force behind both Alfredo’s love-struck refrain (“Di quell’amor”) and Violetta’s dying aria, “Addio, del passato” from *La traviata* (1853).³ But probably its closest Verdian counterpart is Amelia’s Act II aria (“Ma dall’arido stelo divulsa”) from *Un ballo in maschera* (1859). There Verdi’s debt to Meyerbeer goes far beyond reliance on a shared topos for expressing loneliness and despair. As we shall see, Amelia’s aria also inherits a formal process from Meyerbeer, and a physical gesture: both sopranos fall to their knees to deliver the climactic phrases of their arias in a posture of supplication.⁴

Of course, the image of an afflicted heroine kneeling in prayer or appeal is a staple of melodramatic theater, and the pose is frequently invoked by Verdi in a variety of contexts. Giovanna d’Arco kneels throughout an entire aria as she experiences a religious vision; Luisa Miller kneels *before* an aria (“Tu puniscimi, o Signore”) to plead for her

Example 19. Alice's sighs (Meyerbeer, *Robert le diable*, Act III).

ALICE
rallentando poco a poco



Hé - las! __ hé - las! __ hé - las! __ hé -

BERTRAM



moi!



colla parte

a tempo
con espressione dolorosa

3



las! __ je __ trem - ble, __ je __ chan - cel - le, hé -



tri-om - phe que j'ai - me!

a tempo
dolcissimo



colla parte

5



las, __ je __ trem - ble, __ je __ chan - cel - le



ta fray-eur ex-trê - me



colla parte

father's freedom; and Lina in *Stiffelio* drags herself up a whole flight of stairs on her knees in that opera's final scene. What is distinctive about Amelia's aria in *Un ballo in maschera* is not the fact of kneeling, but the conjunction between gesture and musical structure. In this aria the attitude of prayer and desperation coincides with, and reinforces, the musical climax.

Rather than follow Hepokoski's path through a crowded tradition of minor-key, strophic pieces with double-reed accompaniment, in the first part of this chapter I assemble a parallel list, pursuing that conjunction between melodic climax and kneeling gesture further into Verdi's career. At first glance, this intersection between musical gesture and bodily gesture is surprising. The fixity and semiotic clarity of the kneeling pose would seem at odds with the agitated and formally fluid music of Verdi's later style. But in fact the interdependence of gesture and form gained importance as Verdi's career progressed, the role of gesture growing as formal conventions loosened. Although their melodic style is quite different, some vestige of Isabelle's abject supplication creeps into the closing moments of both a duet from *Don Carlos* (1867) and an aria from *Aida* (1871), both of which place a distraught prayer-refrain as the culmination of an agitated, multipartite number. Verdi's gloss on Meyerbeer rests on an intriguing clash of styles: an innovatively constructed scene is crowned with one of the most familiar poses in the melodramatic lexicon.

Another context for Verdi's kneeling scenes can be found in Enrico delle Sedie's 1885 treatise on operatic acting, the *Estetica del canto e dell'arte melodrammatica*. As in earlier treatises such as Engel's *Ideen zu einer Mimik* or Austin's *Chironomia*, a crucial component of delle Sedie's argument is entrusted to a series of numbered illustrations depicting a variety of frozen poses, each captioned with the emotion represented: "affliction and weeping," "agitation (leading to vengeance)," or "contempt and menace."⁵ The labels are familiar and so, for the most part,

are the poses. Although acting style had changed enormously during the century between Engel and delle Sedie, treatises had not kept pace—and perhaps *operatic* acting had also clung to an outdated and stylized mode of performance.

One of the most conventional poses in the book is the one labeled “preghiera” (prayer): the plate shows a man on one knee, hands fervently clasped to breast. But the semiotic equation is not quite so simple, for the picture’s caption reads in full: “Prayer: exclamation of anguish making an appeal to God (also: declaration of love).” Put into words, the equation sounds absurdly vague—an anguished appeal to the heavens doing double duty as amorous gesture—but the picture makes perfect sense: the pose is a convincing representation of either state of mind. The blurring of the two states is also an ideal icon for Verdi’s tendency to collapse love into prayer. In Verdian love scenes (themselves a rare commodity), one state is always turning into the other—passionate duets conclude with moments of desperate prayer. Verdian lovers often interact within an atmosphere of the divine, their earthly love eclipsed by anticipations of the afterlife. By considering in turn these three praying sopranos and the musical language of Verdi’s one fiercely *embodied* love duet, for Amelia and Riccardo in *Un ballo in maschera*, we might cast some new light on the oft-noted fact that Verdi wrote relatively few love duets, that he seemed reluctant to let his lovers meet when they were actually most in love.

1

Amelia joins the sisterhood of supplicating sopranos by virtue of a canonic operatic predicament: she is in love with her husband’s best friend. She sings her aria at midnight on a desolate execution ground, sent there by a soothsayer to gather a magic herb that will help her forget her adulterous thoughts. Even this kernel of plot summary should make clear that the scenario is pure melodrama, perhaps the fruit of Verdi’s enthu-

siastic response to French theater in the late 1840s and 1850s.⁶ In *Ballo* the French influence was also more direct, since Antonio Somma's libretto was an adaptation of an existing libretto, Scribe's text for Auber's 1833 grand opéra *Gustave III, ou le bal masqué*.⁷

In a sense, then, Verdi had his choice of "French" models for Amelia's scene, and his choice was decisive. He would not follow Auber's lead in setting the bulk of the scene as an agitated cabaletta of fear and guilt. Instead he pushed Somma to develop an entirely new text for Amelia's soliloquy, combining the melodrama hallmarks of horrible setting and fearful woman with a more rational vein of psychological probing:

Ma dall'arido stelo divulsa
 Come avrò di mia mano quell'erba:
 E che dentro la mente convulsa
 Quell'eterea sembianza morrà,
 Che ti resta, perduto l'amor . . .
 Che ti resta mio povero cor!
 Oh! chi piange, qual forza m'arretra?
 M'attraversa la squallida via?
 Su, coraggio . . . e tu fatti di pietra,
 Non tradirmi, dal pianto ristà;
 O finisci di battere e muor,
 T'annienta, mio povero cor!
 Mezzanotte!—Ah, che veggio? una testa
 Di sotterra si leva . . . e sospira!
 Ha negli occhi il baleno dell'ira
 E m'affisa e terribile sta!
 Deh! mi reggi, m'aita, o Signor,
 Miserere d'un povero cor!

But once I have that herb in my hand, torn from its dry stem, and in my agitated mind the heavenly image fades, what will be left, what will be left for you, my poor heart, once love is lost?

Oh, who is weeping, what force holds me back, bars my way on the loathsome path? Courage . . . and you, turn to stone, do not betray me,

Example 20. Isabelle's *romance*, first strophe (*Robert le diable*, Act IV).

Poco andantino
(Cor anglais)

(Harpe)

ISABELLE 7

Ro - bert, Ro - bert, toi que j'ai - me et qui re - çus, qui re -

13 *crescendo*

çus ma foi: tu vois mon ef-froi, tu vois mon ef-froi!

19 (*doux*)

Grâ - ce, grâ - ce — pour toi-mê - me, pour toi - mê - me,

23

et grâ - ce, et grâ - ce, grâ - ce — pour moi!

refrain from weeping, or else stop beating and die. Annihilate yourself, my poor heart!

Midnight! Oh, what do I see? A head rising from the ground . . . and sighing! It has the glint of wrath in its eyes and it fixes me with a horrible stare!

God! support me, help me, o Lord! Have pity on my miserable heart!

Musically, too, Verdi both invoked and transcended the Meyerbeerian topos of the minor-key, double-reed accompanied aria (Examples 20 and 21). Amelia's aria adopts the timbral world and the broad design of Isabelle's *cavatine*, but, more than that, its unfolding over time is matched step-by-step to the formal process of the earlier aria.

Example 21. Amelia's aria, first strophe (Verdi, *Un ballo in maschera*, Act II).

Andante
(English horn)

p con espress. *allarg.*

AMELIA

Ma dal - l'a - ri - do ste - lo di - vul - sa co - me a - vrò di mia ma - no quel - l'er -

7 ba, e che den - tro la men - te con - vul - sa quel - l'e -

10 *pp smorz.* te - re - a sem - bian - za mor - rà: — che ti re - sta, per - du - to l'a -

con dolore

13 *dim.* mor... che ti re - sta, che ti re - sta, mio po - ve - ro cor!

The similarity between the arias is most pronounced in each third strophe, where both depart from the strophic framework, moving into a more agitated and episodic style. Isabelle repeats and reorders verbal fragments from her first few lines of text against uneasy circling figures for woodwinds; toward the end of the strophe an ascending chromatic line in the voice over stark octaves and nonfunctional minor thirds builds into the final reprise of the refrain (“Grâce, grâce, pour toi-même”), now sung fortissimo (Example 22). Somma supplies a more overt dramatic motivation for Amelia’s formal departure: as the clock strikes midnight, she sees a severed head emerging from the earth. Her fear is captured in a chromatic vocal line and nonfunctional harmonies similar to Isabelle’s (although thicker and more elaborately orchestrated); the discourse becomes so fragmented and overwrought that the

Example 22. Isabelle's *romance*, third strophe (*Robert le diable*, Act IV).

ISABELLE

Un poco più mosso (avec angoisse)

toi! O mon bien, mon bien su-

prê - me! toi que j'ai - me, toi que j'ai - me! tu

poco a poco stringendo cresc. sempre - - - - -

vois mon ef - froy, tu vois mon ef-

crescendo poco a poco

9 - - - - - più - - - - - crescendo

froy, tu vois mon ef - froy, tu vois mon ef-

(continued)

Example 22 (*continued*)

11 *Tempo primo*
ff se jetant aux genoux de Robert

froi, ah! Grâ - ce,

13

grâ - ce — pour toi-mê - me, pour toi - mê - me

passage can hardly be called a strophe at all (Example 23). Where Amelia's first two strophes had ended with a brief arching phrase that moved from F minor to A♭ major and back again—a gesture toward a refrain rather than a full-fledged one—her unsettled third strophe leads into an expansive closing section, finally arriving at F major (at m.32 of Example 23), occupied so solidly by Isabelle in each of her three identical refrains. Amelia's last refrain is a profound transformation of music heard before: while maintaining the steady eighth notes and controlled arch of the first two “quasi-refrains,” it also opens out a new expressive register, placing the familiar melodic fragment in a new harmonic context and extending it beyond its original peak of *a*♭, first to *a*'' then to *c*''' (compare Example 21, mm.11–15 to Example 23, mm.32–41).⁸

The various sources for *Robert le diable* yield only sketchy indications

Example 23. Amelia's aria, third strophe (*Un ballo in maschera*, Act II).

AMELIA
(suona mezzanotte)

Allegro ♩ = 144

Mez-za - not-te!... Ah! che veg-gio! U-na

5 *cresc.* [18 measures omitted]

tes - ta di sot - ter - ra si le - va e so - spi - ra!

27 *sempre dim.*

e m'af - fi - sa e ter - ri - bi - le

32 1° Tempo ♩ = 72 *cade in ginocchio* *con passione*

sta!... Deh! mi reg-gi, m'a - i - ta, o Si-

con espress. *pp*

(continued)

Example 23 (*continued*)

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system begins at measure 36 and includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line features a long melisma with the lyrics "gnor, mi - si - re - re d'un po - ve - ro cor... o Si -". Performance markings include *cresc.* (crescendo), *f* (forte), and *dim.* (diminuendo). The piano accompaniment is characterized by dense, rapid sixteenth-note passages in both hands. The second system begins at measure 40 and includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has the lyrics "gnor, m'a - i - ta, o Si - gnor," and is marked *morendo* (dying away). The piano accompaniment continues with similar rapid passages, marked *pp* (pianissimo) and *ppp* (pianississimo) at the end.

for Isabelle's movements, little more than the recommendation that she kneel at some point during her aria and rise again at the end.⁹ Directions for Amelia's movements are far more detailed, thanks to the *disposizione scenica* for the opera's first performance—and thanks also, perhaps, to the rise of an increasingly realistic, movement-driven style of staging in the 1850s.¹⁰ The *disposizione* calls for Amelia to change position more or less with each stanza, her movements broadly coordinated with the music's rhythmic and formal shifts. During the unsettled second strophe, in which responsibility for melodic continuity is transferred to the orchestra, with the voice overlaying fragments of agitated declamation, Amelia is instructed to move toward the gallows and immediately draw back in terror. After the disarray of the third strophe's gory vision, the final refrain is sung kneeling:

At the distant sound of the church bells tolling midnight [beginning the third strophe], Amelia regains the courage to do what she has come to do, when a horrible vision saps her strength to pursue that path, and she falls on her knees at center stage (*cade sulle ginocchia nel mezzo della scena*).¹¹

Given the kneeling gesture's roots in the lexicon of mélodrame, it is hardly surprising that a very similar pose appears in Verdi's own grand opéra—although the scene for kneeling soprano in *Don Carlos* is far less static and less semiotically transparent than the stock situations of mélodrame.¹² Among the many prayer scenes in *Don Carlos*, the one most closely related to Amelia's moment of extremity comes at the close of the second-act duet for Carlos and Élisabeth, a number perhaps better known for the fainting fit that overcomes the tenor in the duet's central section. As in *Ballo*, the frozen moment of prayer in the duet is reached only after an unusually taut musical and emotional progression. The duet's alternation of lyric and kinetic sections, which can be heard as a condensed and abstracted version of the "solita forma de' duetti," also plays out a confrontation between Carlos's too-sensitive body and Élisabeth's supreme control over both spirit and body.¹³

As the duet opens, Carlos announces his intention to put an end to his hopeless love for Élisabeth by leaving Spain to govern the rebellious Spanish colony of Flanders. When Élisabeth responds with reserved acceptance of this plan, Carlos accuses her of caring nothing for him, begins to gasp and tremble with emotion, and falls into a faint. From this delirious state he introduces what will become the melody of the duet's slow movement ("O bien perdu"), a tune Élisabeth echoes as she tries to revive him. The fire and virtuosity of the traditional closing cabaletta are supplied in miniature by Carlos's final bid to forget everything except his passion ("Que sous mes pieds se déchire la terre!"), expressed in a turbulent phrase that Élisabeth answers with a similar melody, although her sentiments remain entirely opposed. As this truncated cabaletta ends, Carlos flees the stage in distress; Élisabeth, left alone, falls to her knees and intones a single phrase, a rather surprising one in the

Example 24. Duet (Élisabeth, Carlos): “Sur nous le Seigneur a veillé!” (Verdi, *Don Carlos*, Act II).

ELISABETH

Sur _____ nous _____ le Sei - gneur

5 *elle tombe à genoux*
a veil - lé! Sei - gneur! _____ Sei -

10
gneur!

ppp morendo

overwhelmingly tragic context: “Sur nous le Seigneur a veillé!” (The Lord has watched over us!) (Example 24).

Amelia’s and Élisabeth’s prayers, then, share the formal function of the kneeling pose as peroration, as the still culmination within a frenzied multi-partite number. If formal function as peroration and a penchant for static melody and harmony can be taken as defining characteristics, it is tempting to add one more scene to the group—a number that unfolds in a similar way musically but omits the kneeling pose. Four years after *Don Carlos*, when Verdi returned to the idea of concluding a turbulent, multi-sectioned number with a still, isolated prayer for a desperate soprano in *Aida*, he escalated the kneeling pose into an almost complete physical collapse. Both Aida’s aria “Ritorna vincitor!” and her duet with Amneris in Act II close with a few measures of prayer (“Numi, pietà”) that sound strikingly similar to Élisabeth’s peroration (Example 25). Both prayers replace the mostly conjunct and somehow optimistic arc of Amelia’s refrain with an almost opposite contour, a shattered descent through a broken chord (compare Examples 24 and 25). Both begin by climbing to a top note, Élisabeth very rapidly to G above the staff, Aida in a delayed ascent to A^b. And to close, both swoop down to a cadence at the opposite extreme of the soprano range and follow this firm cadence with pale melodic murmurs—falling octaves (for Élisabeth) or fifths (for Aida) over static harmony and tremolo strings. Rather than match this moment of hard-won repose with stasis, however, in *Aida* Verdi grasps at a sort of dramatic realism, avoiding the kneeling pose and instead matching gesture to emotional state, directing the distraught Aida to stagger offstage while singing each of her prayerlike refrains: “on the word, *Pietà*, Aida staggers, anguished and afflicted, toward upstage left, so that on the last word, *soffrir*, she will be in the wings.”¹⁴

In all of these scenes the cumulative effect is of a gesture set in relief against the breathless progress of actions and emotions. And while Aida’s gradual, unsteady exit mirrors the instability and mercurial

Example 25. Duetto (Aida, Amneris): “Numi, pietà!” (Verdi, *Aida*, Act II).

AIDA

Nu - mi, pie - tà del mio mar-tir, spe - me non

6 v'ha, spe-me non v'ha — pel mi - o do - lor... — Nu-mi, pie -

9 tà del mi - o sof-frir, Nu - mi, pie - tà! pie -

13 sull'ultima nota... sarà scomparsa.

tà! pie - tà!

morendo

shifts of her aria as a whole, Verdi's recourse to the old-fashioned kneeling pose, so basic to the melodramatic lexicon, to close off the innovative, emotionally realistic multipartite *musical* forms in *Ballo* and *Don Carlos* seems counterintuitive. But perhaps that collapse into a familiar gestural semiotic is part of the point: more than just closing these scenes with a recognizable image, these prayers provide convincing closure because they offer a coherent, unanimous expressive effect, with words, music, and stage picture all gathering around a single fixed affect or referent. This gestural approach to closure became a habit for Verdi at a time when he was searching for alternative ways of ending numbers—anything to avoid the predictable, by this point almost embarrassingly frontal verve of the cabaletta. That is, the praying gesture functions formally as well as just visually; the tortured extremity of the body's position, whether frozen in prayer or limping offstage, becomes a disturbing substitute for the more straightforward rhythmic physicality of the cabaletta.

This loosely connected cluster of soprano prayers suggests that for Verdi by about 1860 movement began to be entwined with musical effect in a fixed and purposeful way, the intersection between the two modes of communication formalized to the point of becoming a convention. For this phase of Verdi's career—and probably for all phases—we may need to expand our concept of “style” to encompass gesture. While the kneeling gesture itself bespeaks affection for an outdated form of dramaturgy, the details of the soprano's movements also change with each opera, perhaps reflecting an encroaching realist aesthetic. The static pose (probably) maintained by Meyerbeer's Isabelle throughout her aria cedes by the late 1850s to stage directions that require Amelia to shift position with each strophe of her aria, her terror carrying her toward and away from the gallows where the magic herb grows.

A final stage in this process of injecting action and change into the set piece comes with the introduction of continuous stage movement in Aida's “Numi, pietà.” Here the stage directions alone inject physical movement into what had been a completely static stage picture. And partly because of that, the “Numi, pietà” refrain sets up a relation be-

tween music and gesture that is neither about perfect synchronization nor about complete separation of the two dimensions. Aida's movements run in counterpoint to the scene's largest formal outlines, her slow exit cutting across the set piece and contradicting the repeating, periodic phrases of her prayer. But on a more minute scale, the falling two-note motives of Aida's final iterations of the words "Numi . . . , pietà . . ." can be heard as kinetic "sighs," cueing and coinciding with each faltering step as she moves out of sight as if the faltering motion of Aida's body has invaded, obscured, broken up her vocal line.

Like Bellini's compulsive exploitation of offstage effects in *I puritani*, Aida's movements during "Numi, pietà" suggest that dramatic space extends beyond the limits of the stage, into the realm where bodies become invisible but voices can still make themselves heard.¹⁵ But where Bellini placed Elvira offstage to associate her with shades and spirits, to suggest that she might not possess a body at all, in *Aida* the withdrawal of the body from sight at the end of the scene is the ultimate sign of weakness. Without the body, its visible source, the voice is broken, homeless, bereft.

2

The kneeling pose has a double nature in more than one sense. It recalls old-fashioned static dramaturgy but transforms the conventional closing formula of the cabaletta into a condensed and transcendent utterance, its expressive force derived from visual as much as musical substance. In more abstract terms, such a gesture draws attention to the body by treating it as a site of unambiguous meaning while also communicating the subordination of that body to a higher force of spirit. In Act II of *Un ballo in maschera*, this doubleness—the ease with which passion can metamorphose into prayer and visual attention to the body can become negation of the physical—is thematized, elevated to an explicit principle that animates both main characters and ultimately draws them together. Besides being one of those rare moments when Verdi al-

lows his lovers to sing together about their love, both Amelia's aria and the love duet are centrally concerned with the impulses of the body and denial of those impulses. The sublimation of the body enacted in Amelia's prayer-refrain is juxtaposed with the acutely sensual and embodied idiom of the duet, the confrontation expressed as a contrast between the aria's strong visual picture and the *melodic* pictorialism of the duet.

Musical language that suggests the body is strikingly absent from Amelia's aria. When she prays, she appeals not only for protection from the guilty phantoms of the execution ground, but also for deliverance from her own emotions, and from her body. The last lines of her second strophe voice the hope that if she cannot overcome her adulterous love for Riccardo her heart will simply stop beating, will be annihilated altogether: "finisci di battere e muor, t'annienta, mio povero cor!" (stop beating and die. Annihilate yourself, my poor heart!). The first of Amelia's three refrains is similarly framed as an apostrophe to her own heart—asking what will be left once forbidden love has been suppressed—while the final refrain again takes up the "povero cor" motif, begging God to have mercy on that poor heart.¹⁶

Familiarity with the metonymies of nineteenth-century libretto language dictates that "heart" be read automatically as "love"; but new meanings emerge if Amelia's recurrent references to her heart are taken literally—as referring to the heart itself, to the pulses and impulses it harbors. For Verdi's music grants Amelia's wish: the annihilation of her heart is suggested by the sparse, floating quality of the melody, which transcends any definite sense of pulse or movement. Not only is the "poor heart" suppressed by being denied any rhythmic impact on the melodic surface, but the deliberate and speechlike quality of Amelia's verses, and equally the floating "quasi-refrains," erase any trace of movement or physical effort from her prayer.

The tableau formed by Amelia's kneeling body as she sings her final refrain works as a hinge between her virtuous soliloquy and the passionate outpouring of the love duet that immediately follows. The aria

and duet exist in a complex relationship of similarity and opposition, the duet seeming to act at once as copy and as revision of Amelia's aria. For one thing, the detailed stage directions given for the latter in the *disposizione scenica* are answered by almost complete silence concerning the staging of the duet. What guidance the *disposizione* does offer relates almost exclusively to the very beginning and very end:

Riccardo, who has kept himself hidden behind the [gallows] . . . , advances quickly to aid Amelia; but she, surprised, moves away from him with a sudden impulse of modesty, moving towards the right, until she arrives at the center of the proscenium.

Riccardo—Amelia

Near the end of the duet, the moon, which had again been concealed by clouds, is seen again.¹⁷

As David Rosen has argued, the *disposizione*'s reticence should in no way be taken as a prescription that Amelia and Riccardo remain immobile or out of physical contact during the duet.¹⁸ However, the contrast nevertheless points to a sort of "economy" of the body bridging the two numbers: a prayer whose text is concerned above all with the annihilation of the body is carefully choreographed, while the duet that follows revels in representing, giving voice to, and giving *in* to the body, yet brings with it no specific directions for the visual representation of those bodies. Regardless of how the duet might be staged, the mere fact of the directions or their absence is significant; the *disposizione*'s directions already constitute a first level of interpretation of the scene's musical and dramatic substance.

If Amelia's aria was reminiscent of Meyerbeer's *cavatine* for the pious Isabelle, the duet has more in common with the embodied language of emotion we encountered in Bellini's *Pirata*, as Riccardo shapes a melody that betrays every beat of his heart and that aims to persuade through its pictorial transparency. Like Amelia, Riccardo is obsessed with his heart as it stands for both his soul and his body, but his interest is entirely in

yielding to the body, experiencing its sensations fully, an obsession that makes itself felt in his opening statement. Where Verdi seemed to silence Amelia's heart by stilling all musical imitation of the physical during her soaring refrains, Riccardo's music is nearly a negative image, his melody shaped and interrupted at every turn by pictorialisms that evoke the body, the throbbing heart. Riccardo essentially lets the various musical signs for his leaping heart speak for themselves, foregoing almost all melodic and harmonic teleology in favor of a musical idiom that elaborates a few central pitches at leisure—and, eventually, that skillfully mirrors Amelia's own discourse in her aria.¹⁹

Even before Riccardo begins to sing, a cello prepares the ground with a repeated rocking figure, a semitone embellishment of scale-degree $\hat{5}$ that recurs at phrase-ends to restore the governing barcarolle rhythm and to suggest a constant but gently insistent pulse (Example 26, mm. 1–2, 7, and 11). As Riccardo begins by describing his heart (or soul—*anima*), “lacerated” and “torn” by guilt for loving the wife of his best friend, his vocal line performs delicate embellishments of that same fifth degree (C) in steady eighth-note motion. The frequent offbeat accents and the occasional chromatic inflection (for example, the upward leap on “mia” and the accents on B $\flat$, then A $\flat$ at “*di-lacera e rode*”) pierce through this smooth opening gambit to betray the presence of that “lacerated” heart. While the vocal line prolongs scale-degree $\hat{5}$, the viola clings to a tonic pedal, creating a kind of voluptuous tension through its refusal to move and through the absence of any true bass support except when the rocking figures reassert themselves at cadences.²⁰

In his third phrase, Riccardo borrows Amelia's image of the stilled heart but reverses her meaning to construe such cessation of sensation as entirely negative:

Non sai tu che di te resterà,
Se cessasse di battere il cor!

Do you not know that if I stay away from you, my heart will cease to beat!

Example 26. Riccardo's solo statement; love duet (*Un ballo in maschera*, Act II).

Allegretto un poco sostenuto ♩ = 144
RICCARDO *a mezzavoce*

me! Non sai tu che se l'a-ni-ma

5 mi-a il ri-mor-so di-la-ce-ra e ro - de, quel suo gri-do non cu-ra, non

9 o - de, sin che l'em-pie di fre-mi-ti a-mor? Non sai tu che di te re-ste -

13 ri - a, se ces - sas-se di bat-te - re il cor! Quan-te not-ti ho ve-glia-to a-ne -

allarg. *pp* *pp* *dolce*

Example 26 (continued)

17

lan-te! co-me a lun-go in-fe-li-ce lot-ta-i! quan-te vol-te dal cie-lo im-plo-

con espressione *ten.*

21

ra-i la pie-tà che tu chie-di da me! Ma per que-sto ho po-tu-to un i-

ten. *p*

25

Ah! _____

stan-te, in-fe-li-ce, non vi-ver di te?

The new melodic idea and the viola's shift to an ostinato on C initially create the impression of a contrasting phrase, perhaps the "*b*" phrase of a standard "lyric prototype" design.²¹ But it quickly becomes clear that at least the first two measures of the new strain function simply as another means of prolonging that familiar C in the voice, while the new heartbeat-like ostinato gestures toward a new key without actually leaving the tonic. A modulation to V is finally achieved in mm.14–15, setting the stage for a genuinely contrasting *b* phrase—although even here pedal notes and harmonic stasis remain constant, with the viola and cello now throbbing away on a repeated C and the voice embellishing E.

In sum, Riccardo's statement is designed to display the sincerity of his feelings by revealing their effect on his body, a ploy all the more effective since such immediate bodily impulses are alien to Amelia. The mimetic force of Riccardo's statement is enhanced by the quieting of other musical features: harmony, melodic contrast, orchestration are all minimized or calmed into stasis so that Riccardo's heartbeats can be felt more acutely. Even the transcendent eight-measure phrase that forms the climax of Riccardo's appeal (mm.20–27) is born from stasis and repetition: although it initiates a newly passionate tone, melodically the phrase is little more than a variation on each of the preceding phrases. A melodic span that began as an elaboration of C, reaching up to F on weak beats (mm.4–11) became at mm.16–19 a more purposeful exploration of the space *between* C and F, until finally breaking through that ceiling to push first to A (m.20), then to B $\flat$ (m.25) over one of the only driving harmonic progressions in the entire passage.

In addition to its troping of the immediately preceding phrases, this sweeping climax also recalls a more distant antecedent, performing a different kind of variation on the refrain of Amelia's own aria. Riccardo's words echo Amelia's prayer topos, as he asks rhetorically, "Quante volte dal cielo implorai la pietà che tu chiedi da me?" (How many times have I implored heaven for the mercy that you now ask of me?), and tremolo figures in the strings recall the texture of her refrain. What is more, the first six notes of Riccardo's final phrase are identical to the pitches that

began Amelia's refrain, almost raising the suspicion that Riccardo has been eavesdropping on Amelia's private moment, as he did in her Act I interview with the fortune-teller Ulrica.²² However, where each of Amelia's phrases reached its melodic peak on a weak beat within the 6/8 meter, Riccardo's top notes all coincide with strong beats (compare Example 26, mm.20, 22, 25 to Example 23, mm.17 and 19).²³ And where Amelia's refrain dawned as something radically new, a transcendent major-key arc sweeping away both the brooding of her first two strophes and the terror of the vision, Riccardo arrives at his "quotation" of her refrain through a more goal-directed process, as if he has borrowed her rhetorical strategy but strengthened it. Amelia's shrinking from climactic pitches seems entirely appropriate for a character who longs to annihilate her heart, but the intersection of melodic peaks and downbeats in Riccardo's version injects a new quality of assertiveness. From starting points in diametrically opposed realms, bodiless and insistently embodied, Amelia and Riccardo are drawn into a shared space, as if Riccardo has "translated" his eager heartbeats into a language that Amelia can understand and respond to.²⁴

This train of thought could be carried further into the duet, to examine the Zerlina-like tension (in "*Là ci darem la mano*") between yielding and resistance in Amelia's wavering reply, but further examples are perhaps unnecessary. Ultimately Amelia's answering statement mirrors the process Riccardo enacted in his initial appeal: beginning from a remote point (D♭ major to his F) and insistently establishing an independent melodic idiom, Amelia's resistance gradually softens until she not only cadences back in F but does so using a motive thematically related to that with which she will finally admit her love a few moments later.²⁵ Just as Riccardo's adaptation of Amelia's prayer into his own climactic declaration of love transforms repression of the body into embrace of the sensual, Amelia's initial resistance is quickly remade as grateful capitulation. But perhaps we should not be surprised by this turn of events, for a defining feature of the opera as a whole is its tendency to turn things suddenly into their opposites. Comic scenes can turn dark

in an instant, and vice versa; darkness and disguise are suddenly pierced by the light of the moon, and this constant play of opposites receives musical realization through frequent, sudden shifts between major and minor modes.²⁶ Seen from this vantage point, repression and sensuality, prayer and passion, are just one more symbiotic pair—hopelessly, infinitely entangled.

3

This overturning of prayer by passion receives one further twist in the opera's last act. In the public aftermath of the love scene, Amelia insists to her husband that she has never "stained his good name"; on his deathbed Riccardo similarly assures Renato that his wife's virtue is intact. These claims to chastity are perfectly true in plot terms; insistence on Amelia's fidelity corresponds to what we have seen, even if it seems to ignore what we have heard in the duet. But to take the libretto at its word here is to conclude that the lovers themselves must have been deaf to the musical reality of their ecstatic embrace, to allow the bourgeois force of plot to rewrite or downplay the music of the duet.²⁷ With Verdi's lovers in general, hearing matters more than seeing, even when the message is less steamy than it is in the *Ballo* duet.

It is difficult to imagine Riccardo's deathbed testimony to Amelia's purity transplanted into any other Verdi opera—not because other heroines could not use the help, but because so few of them enjoy close enough relationships with their tenor-counterparts for the question even to arise. Even in *La traviata*, where the heroine's compromised chastity is a fundamental plot premise, Verdi saved his most compelling music not for the love scene, but for the duet between Violetta and Germont; the lovers are alone together only to get acquainted and to say farewell at Violetta's deathbed.²⁸ *Don Carlos* and *Aida* avoid the physical dimension of love in a different way, largely ignoring the attraction between the lovers and displacing attention instead onto the obstacles to their union and the possibility of happiness beyond the grave. This ideal

is expressed in a musical idiom more commonly associated with death-bed conversions than with erotic encounters.²⁹ In the final number of *Don Carlos*, Élisabeth and Carlos sum up this worldview of resignation and longing for a better world, with both voices singing the same words for nearly the first time in the opera:

Au revoir dans un monde où la vie est meilleure
Où l'avenir sans fin sonne la première heure;
Et là, nous trouverons dans la paix du Seigneur
Cet éternel absent, qu'on nomme le bonheur.

Farewell till we meet in a world where life is better, where the first
hour of eternity strikes; and there, we will find in the peace of the
Lord, that eternally sought thing called happiness.

The final scene of *Aida* lingers on similar images, although avoiding the Christian tint: as Aida and Radames slowly suffocate in their subterranean tomb, they experience visions of the angel of death and of the heavens opening to welcome them into the “ecstasy of immortal love” (Ivi comincia l'estasi d'un immortal amor).

The most extreme example is *Don Carlos*, where each of the three encounters between the lovers is dominated by references to divine presence, with celestial music to match. The central episode of the Act II duet we looked at above exemplifies this orientation. The opening sections are permeated with vivid signs of the body, but these refer only to Carlos, always represented as wracked with pain and weakness. Once the lovers come closer to sharing sentiments and begin in the slow movement to imagine the love that might have been, a disembodied musical idiom takes over. Carlos becomes inebriated at the sound of Élisabeth's voice, which causes him to “dream of paradise.” Exultation at their imagined union sends him into an ecstatic faint, from which Élisabeth revives him by singing back to him “their” slow-movement tune.

The orchestral texture of this fainting sequence is almost a Verdian topos for love-drunk but disembodied ecstasy. Carlos's initial statement (“O bien perdu”) in the slow movement is doubled by flutes and deco-

rated by harp-like arpeggios in the clarinet. Once Élisabeth takes up the melody, turning Carlos's ardent serenade into a prayer, Verdi creates a halo effect around her simple descending line, supplementing the flute doubling and clarinet arpeggios with *divisi* bowed and *pizzicato* violins. The various groups of violins are layered so as to blur downbeats, with the first violins' harmonics placed on weak beats and the independence of any individual line obscured by complicated interlocking arpeggios. Where Carlos's sobs and spasms earlier in this duet were conveyed by short, mimetic accented figures delineated by rests, this "celestial" texture does away with pulse, erasing a sense of temporal orientation beneath clouds of stratospheric string and woodwind sound. The body is not altogether erased, since Carlos's faint is the occasion for this delirious vision. It is rather that any erotic potential is negated, displaced by the ability of the weakened, fainting body to transport *both* lovers into an altered state of consciousness.

This brings us back to the larger context of Verdi's treatment of the vulnerable body, kneeling or otherwise. For we encounter a very similar layered orchestration and erasure of pulse in the final scene of *Aida*. In terms of plot, the two situations have just enough in common to make the resemblance comprehensible. Like Élisabeth and Carlos, Aida and Radames anticipate being reunited in another world, one more hospitable to their love; and, in the passage that most resembles Carlos's fainting sequence, Aida sees a vision of the angel of death while in a state of near-fainting (*vaneggiando*). Verdi's orchestration borrows much from the earlier scene: doubling by flute (and, here, also clarinet and some violins), broken chords for harp. The violins are again *divisi*, with six or eight of the firsts assigned a high, muted figure that hovers above the vocal line in emaciated arpeggio-patterns, filling in the gaps in the vocal line and blurring its articulation. The complicated web of doublings and near-doublings twines around the voice without fleshing out its line: as in *Don Carlos*, the complexity of the accompaniment obscures any sense of clear attack, as if to associate lack of pulse with transcendence of the body.

It is at moments like these that Verdi comes closest to casting off the melodramatic aesthetic, that system of meaning that has been termed the doctrine of “pantomimic comprehensibility.”³⁰ We the audience see nothing of Aida’s vision, nothing but two bodies dwarfed by monumental architecture and sinister priests arrayed above the tomb. In diametric opposition to the musical mimesis of Riccardo’s heartbeats, this music gives no clues about where to look for the principal characters or how they might be moving. Instead it acts almost like a camera pulling back for a long shot, throwing the focus on the totality of the scene rather than on any single entity within it. The decipherable visual picture of a praying woman “cadendo sulle ginocchia” is replaced by an idiom in which the singers’ bodies are overwhelmed by sheer orchestral sound and scenic grandeur.

My vocabulary is beginning to sound Wagnerian, and this is no accident: ultimately these Verdi duets of the 1860s and 1870s may have more in common with the orchestral language of *Tristan* than they do with the clear structures and sharp musical contrasts of earlier love duets by Donizetti and Bellini. Not that Verdi needed Wagner to discover these textures: for this depiction of fatal ecstasy through static harmonies, his models lay closer at hand, in Berlioz perhaps, or in the final scene of Meyerbeer’s *Africaine*. The affinity with Wagner is not one of musical influence, but rather of a parallel evolution in staging and in ways of treating the orchestra in relation to the voices, the singers’ bodies in relation to the overall stage picture.

Such flights of transcendence notwithstanding, for Verdi in this phase of his career, as for Auber or Bellini, bodily presence and physical passion continued to be conveyed most vividly through a musical style that “does” what it says: directly imitating the bodily states referred to in the text.³¹ But at the same time, such direct imitation had become fiercely unfashionable by midcentury, replaced by more nuanced and larger-scale musical techniques for conveying emotion. The second act of *Ballo* places the two possibilities side by side, with the dramatic context helping to decode the opposing styles. Amelia’s willed suppression

of her body is rendered as a series of agitated physical movements, and then as a static picture: the kneeling pose and the smooth melodic contour, unperturbed by any too-close correspondences between music and text, conspire to remove her body from contemplation as an erotic presence, offering instead the familiar portrait of the pious woman. Riccardo takes an opposed strategy, expressing desire and erotic energy through a melody that closely mirrors the bodily spasms he describes. The opposition is reminiscent of the first act of *Les Huguenots*, where Valentine is either shown as an object of the gaze or described musically in her absence. Yet Verdi shares nothing of Meyerbeer's objectifying impulse: he grants Amelia subjectivity, encouraging us as listeners to share her desire to silence her body, while Meyerbeer in one way or another keeps a distance from his heroine throughout the opera. What the two works have in common is a representational strategy, an implicit hierarchy of eye and ear: seeing is important, but true titillation (for Meyerbeer) or erotic charge (for Verdi) is achieved through music, without elaborate movement or staging.

Verdi's near-erasure of pulse and his emphasis on consummation in the afterlife in both the *Don Carlos* and *Aida* duets leave behind early nineteenth-century aesthetics of sensibility, to move both toward a more "transcendent" musical style and toward a dramatic mode in which the body (and especially the female body) is more symbolic than concrete. When Carlos faints, when Aida hallucinates, the music depicts more than just the disorientation and frailty of an as-yet-unformed young man, an oxygen-starved woman. It also points toward where Verdi wanted to go—stylistically, but also aesthetically, and perhaps even metaphysically: toward a dramatic expression that leaves behind the performing body as primary source of meaning, to cast that body instead as a lone and increasingly vulnerable figure on a much larger expressive canvas.

Mimomania

Allegory and Embodiment in Wagner's Music Dramas

More than anyone, since the beginning of art, Wagner has understood and expressed *movement* of all kinds, from its absence to a state of paroxysm. He even wrote a work, *Lohengrin*, on this very subject. "Lohengrin is a character who comes and goes," said Mallarmé, "and there can be nothing more dramatic. . . ."

Movement in this sense may seem to be a minor matter. But this is not so at all. Movement is life; and movement as it is made to express the passion of Tristan is not less real or wonderful than that of the wooden horses at a roundabout, or movement, as we may imagine it, inhabiting the danseuses at the Opéra as they masturbate in imaginary intercourse with Wotan.

—Pierre Louÿs to Claude Debussy, 29 October 1896

In David Lodge's "academic romance" *Small World*, the young Irish lecturer Persse McGarrigle clinches his standing in the academic world by claiming to have written a master's thesis about T. S. Eliot's influence on Shakespeare, reversing the causality of the topic he actually researched in a desperate attempt to attract attention at a conference. The joke comes to mind here because of a growing apprehension that the previ-

ous four chapters have at times verged on a similarly cavalier treatment of history, occasionally seeming to approach Auber, Bellini, or Meyerbeer as products of an anachronistic Wagnerian aesthetic.

My dance of homage and resistance to Wagner began with Wagner's voice as a critic, harnessing his animosity toward grand opéra in general, and his faint praise of Auber in particular, to illuminate the representation of the mute's body in *La Muette de Portici*. Wagner's dismissive analogy between Auber's rhythmically energetic, regularly repeating phrases and the sexualized music of French popular dances such as the cancan can be read against the grain, as evidence that the absence of conventional rhetorical content (melody, patterns of repetition) in Fennella's music is not just a lack but a way of capturing a sheer bodily force that usually escapes operatic representation. In other chapters Wagner has figured more as idea than as faithfully reported voice. A simplified notion of the leitmotiv is a necessary foil for understanding the more visually grounded, less metaphysical approaches to recurring themes of both Meyerbeer and Verdi. Even Bellini was not immune to Wagner's "influence": his extensions of stage action into ghostly offstage space are implicitly illuminated by association with Wagner's evocations of invisible realms.

While Wagner's own music and words have been held at a safe distance in these earlier chapters, a somewhat essentialized image of his musical achievements has often been necessary to grasp what mattered most about the "body language" of Auber or Meyerbeer or Verdi. That distance, with its reduction of "Wagner" to a few key ideas, is in part a gesture of resistance to Wagner's disproportionate influence on discourse about nineteenth-century opera. Some of the side effects are obvious, such as the general Teutonic preference for harmonic complexity over melodic charm, or for orchestral development over voice. More significant in the present context, Wagner's prestige has inspired what might be called a "cult of the invisible" in opera studies. Wagner himself put his yearning for an invisible opera into words only once, when, late in life, he wished for a theater in which not only the orchestra but

also the singers would be invisible.¹ And while the casual context of this remark would suggest that it could be discounted, Wagner critics have embraced the aesthetic of the invisible with enthusiasm, often at the price of ignoring Wagner's more numerous statements on the importance of the manifest, visible aspects of the theater.

Of course, this critical tunnel vision is encouraged by the works themselves, which tend to culminate in scenes that reject, destroy, or transcend the material world, replacing it with a vision of some higher reality, made irresistible through symphonic apotheosis. One influential consequence of this aesthetic of transcendence is the preference for recurring themes that refer to ideas or absent characters over those that underline or reinforce a visible message. In a related vein, historians have construed Wagner's career as a progression from "outer" to "inner drama," an idea most sensitively elaborated by Carl Dahlhaus. In a study of Wagner's changing attitudes to gesture, Dahlhaus has suggested that Wagner's commitment to the primacy of the visual and to physical gesture faded after about 1870 (with the *Beethoven* essay and new interest in the symphonic ideal), to be replaced by a theatrical aesthetic that privileged "inner drama" above all and lost interest in visible action.² Carolyn Abbate tends to be far less obedient to the terms established by Wagner's own writings, but her account of Wagner's stylistic evolution is ultimately not so different. For Abbate, the period of *Tristan und Isolde* initiated a shift of expressive energy from moments of elaborate visual apotheosis (the final scene of *Der fliegende Holländer*) to the great moments of silent, still communion and metaphysical meaning (the potion scene in *Tristan*), a shift from what she calls "scenic allegory" to "acoustic allegory."³ By "acoustic allegory," Abbate aims to describe those moments in Wagner—especially in *The Ring*—in which the deepest meanings are conveyed by sound and sound alone, isolated from vision. Such "allegory" often involves assigning crucial plot elements or philosophical pronouncements to sibylline voices that emanate from invisible sources, separated from the bodies that produce them.⁴

Such an account of Wagner's career—focusing on his gradual disen-

chantment with “outer” drama—might be seen as a microcosm for one dominant narrative about the development of nineteenth-century opera generally, one that would track the body and its mimetic musical traces gradually disappearing from the operatic stage. At first glance such a chronology might seem exactly backwards, since it was just at this moment, after about 1850 or 1860, that the objectified body took over the stage most flamboyantly. The movements toward naturalism and exoticism brought with them heightened erotic content and more realistic presentations of the body. But this fin-de-siècle explosion of gritty, sexualized plots and realistic staging also meant a new positioning of the body—not necessarily as expressive or legible, but above all as possessing alluring and dangerous secrets. An extreme case is Gustave Courbet’s 1866 canvas *L’Origine du monde*, which represents the female genitals as at once maximally exposed and maximally secretive, harboring the mysteries of existence in their darkness.⁵ The attitude encapsulated in Courbet’s painting can be traced through other arts as well: as the appearance and allure of the body was more openly explored, framed in more exhibitionistic terms, prestige and interest became attached more and more to interior, mental space, thanks in part to the early stirrings of modern psychology. As a consequence, the displayed body became less readable; mimesis was displaced by an aesthetic stance more akin to divination of hidden secrets.⁶

If Wagner’s music dramas represent a pivot between these two modes of representing the body, the later, metaphysical phase has received far more critical attention than the openly mimetic origins of the style. Guided by Wagner’s own words, we have tended to privilege those aspects of the music dramas that negate or critique the visible world, that sweep it away and set up in its place an idealized, transcendent state of perfect love or enlightened society. One price of this focus on the aesthetics of transcendence is neglect of Wagner’s debt to earlier French and Italian operatic styles, and of his continuing interest in the visible, audible body. To do justice to this aspect of Wagner’s works will

entail “embodying” Wagner; beginning to understand the music as itself embodied, turning attention from general aesthetic principles or technical innovations toward specific decisions about staging and musical mimesis.

1

There is no better place to begin than with Pierre Louÿs’s flamboyant remarks quoted in the epigraph to this chapter. Louÿs adored Wagner, and he begins his letter to Debussy with a backhanded apology for a remark made in an earlier conversation: “I merely said that Wagner was the greatest man who had ever existed, and nothing more. I didn’t say he was great God himself, though I was in fact inclined to say something of this sort.”⁷ Louÿs’s appreciation of Wagner’s ability to capture movement in music, then, is clearly intended as the highest possible praise; as he puts it “movement is life,” far from trivial. Indeed, Louÿs comes close to Wagner’s own characterization of Auber’s cancan as “the act of procreation . . . symbolically consummated” when he perceives Wagner’s genius for representing movement of all kinds even in the image of ballerinas backstage at the Opéra rapt “in imaginary intercourse with Wotan.” Wagner’s lofty myth meets the seedy but alluring backstage world we know from Degas’s canvases. The image seems quintessentially French, but also ideally illustrative of the medicalized, quasi-photographic exposure of the body and its functions current at the *fin de siècle*. More prosaically, Louÿs employs this scenario to argue for the primacy of dance as a sign of life (here equated with sex), and thus of aesthetic vitality.

Admiring as he is, Louÿs’s observations paradoxically recall some remarks by Wagner’s most famous antagonist, Friedrich Nietzsche. In his polemical 1888 pamphlet *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, Nietzsche derided Wagner as “essentially a man of the theater and an actor, the most enthusiastic mimomaniac, perhaps, who ever existed.”⁸ Wagner’s notion of drama was empty, merely a facade for “poses”:

if it was Wagner's theory that "the drama is the end, the music is always a mere means," his *practice* was always, from beginning to end, "the pose is the end; the drama, also the music, is always merely its means." Music as a means to clarify, strengthen, and lend inward dimension to the dramatic gesture and the actor's appeal to the senses—and the Wagnerian drama, a mere occasion for many interesting poses!⁹

The epithet "pose" (or *Attitude*, as the original German reads) for Nietzsche meant not statuesque, held positions, but rather all staging that emphasized external appearances at the expense of a true (Dionysian) spontaneity.¹⁰ True, Nietzsche complained that Wagner's music was too static, wavelike, too antagonistic to the dance; but he also criticized its indulgence in constant nervous movement, which he associated with an excessively naturalistic style of acting. Nietzsche's famous preference for "Mediterranean" music, and especially for Bizet's *Carmen*, was partly based on the importance he attached to movement: he complained that the lack of rhythmic definition in Wagner's music made him feel as if he was swimming in deep water when he wanted to be dancing.¹¹ Ultimately Nietzsche worried that Wagner's emphasis on movement and on music yoked to movement was manipulative, disarming audiences through theatrical effect and short-circuiting their autonomous aesthetic responses.

Even in his fiercest moments, however, Nietzsche had an instinct for what mattered most in Wagner, a reluctant but enduring sympathy for the style. Just as Wagner's demeaning remarks about French grand opera offered a key to understanding something fundamental about Auber's style, Nietzsche's criticisms can perhaps be separated from their pejorative context to yield insights into Wagner's relationship to staged gesture, and into the musical techniques that proceed from his gestural obsession.

It was hardly a priority for nineteenth-century writers on Wagner, whether pro or contra, to support their claims with musical detail. Nietzsche offers no illustrations of the "mimomania" with which he

charges Wagner, and Louÿs errs in the opposite direction, reeling off a list of examples so long and wide-ranging as to make us wonder what in Wagner is *not* about movement. The inclusive impulse begins when Louÿs stretches his appreciation to encompass Wagner's facility for expressing "movement of all kinds, *from its absence* to a state of paroxysm." The list of scenes that follows does not help much in understanding what Louÿs meant by *absence* of movement, unless it is perhaps the movement of lights, sets, and props in scenes such as the Magic Fire Music or the Transformation Music in *Parsifal*, Act III, or else the primarily psychological action of Tristan's delirium.¹² I prefer to think that what Louÿs had in mind, without quite saying so outright, were those numerous scenes in which characters stand still and silent, the orchestra bearing the burden of expression, either overshadowing the voices or silencing them altogether, the only "movement" that of glances and feelings. This is one feature that sets Wagner apart from the other composers I have discussed: some of his most intense pantomime scenes are almost completely static. Of course, Wagner also wrote more conventional gestural music throughout his career: the numerous brief passages of choreographic recitative in *Der fliegende Holländer* or *Tannhäuser* evolve into more elaborate and emotionally freighted scenes in the later operas.

Two moments from *Die Meistersinger* can illustrate the range of possibilities. The static "ballet" of glances and emotion is typified by the wordless exchange of the opera's opening scene, as the Lutheran chorale is repeatedly broken off for contrapuntal instrumental interludes that give voice to the dawning love of Walther and Eva. The characters are immobile; the music underlines not movement, but facial expressions and feeling.¹³ At the opposite end of the spectrum—or spanning all possible modes of Wagnerian pantomime—the scene in which Beckmesser raids Hans Sachs's workshop uses the synchronization of music and movement to comic effect, gradually evolving into a more psychologized idiom. At the scene's outset, repeating short-breathed orchestral motives mimic Beckmesser's furtive, limping steps into the workshop

and his pauses as pain brings him to a halt. As he becomes increasingly agitated and begins to imagine he is being chased, the same relentlessly repeating and sequencing orchestral motives become expressive not of physical movement but of his confused mental state. Finally the frenetic orchestral patterns give way to an orchestral fabric based on referential recurring themes (Beckmesser's failed serenade, then the Prize Song) as Beckmesser's eye falls on the manuscript of Walther's Prize Song.

As the Beckmesser scene suggests, attempts at taxonomy are confounded by the fact that Wagner's most interesting gestural music teeters between static and kinetic. The potion scene in the first act of *Tristan* is largely a frozen tableau, but a few particularly charged actions or feelings break through the orchestra's rapt recall of the prelude. The lovers' stunned contemplation of each other and of their fate is interrupted by mimetic effects such as syncopations or little explosions of tremolo chords: Isolde throws down the goblet to a series of tremolos in the cello; the lovers clutch their hearts to an accented outburst for unison winds and strings. Similarly, Elsa's pantomime in the opening scene of *Lohengrin* is largely static, its orchestral accompaniment devoid of mimetic effects. The solemn music that accompanies her advance on to the stage at the beginning of the scene returns to accompany her nods, glances, and hand gestures later in the interrogation; what the orchestral discourse signifies here, more than corresponding to any specific movement, is Elsa's *silence* and the burden of knowledge she carries but cannot express.¹⁴

The two scenes I focus on in this chapter could be conceived as pendants to each other, one early and one late example of a favorite Wagnerian action, the fetching of refreshment by a ministering woman for an exhausted, beleaguered hero. Poised as it is on the divide between the "operas" and the "music dramas" and chronologically close also to the great theoretical exercise of *Opera and Drama*, *Die Walküre's* opening scene casts light both forward and back in time, within Wagner's oeuvre and beyond. The double cycle of fetching water and wine combines frozen moments in which meaningful glances are emphasized by leit-

motives with a more purely gestural music designed to underline (or perhaps to cue) Sieglinde's exits and entrances. When Wagner returned to the scene of water-carrying in *Parsifal*, his gestural logic was quite different. Although the "outer drama" of linked music and gesture is not completely abandoned in *Parsifal*, this last opera also revises the premises of interaction between music and movement operative elsewhere in Wagner. While Wagner's writings famously contradict and obscure his musical practice, those contradictions themselves are rich sources of meaning, pointing to a continuing engagement with gestural music, even as Wagner remained undecided about whether physical gesture was properly the premise or the result of musical expression.

2

A revealing point of entry into Wagner's theories of gesture is offered by an unorthodox document of reception, William Ashton Ellis's index to his 1893 translation of *Oper und Drama* (1851). If *Opera and Drama* has itself acquired a perverse authority—respected, in essence, for its uselessness in understanding the music—Ellis's index, with its mystifying entries for things like "gnawing its own flesh," and "galvanising the corpse of opera," and the marvelously laconic "Frivolous, see Opera," both deflates and enhances the book's polemic: allowing us to approach it as a series of eccentric sound bites; endowing it with—of all things un-Wagnerian—a sense of humor.

But Ellis's index is significant for more than comic relief: its condensed, telegraphic phrases reveal the force of Wagner's metaphorical language—and especially his ingenuity in elaborating the book's dominant image of opera as a body—more clearly than the relentless and often convoluted arguments of the treatise itself. The familiar metaphor of Melody fertilized by the procreative seed of the Word or the characterization of operatic melody under the Rossinian regime as a "corpse" (the occasion for those vaguely necrophiliac index entries quoted above) take on new explanatory power once they are divested of their narra-

tive dimension—and of the grumbling tone that frequently creeps into the book.

However, the index is also typical of a prominent strand of Wagner reception in that the concept of *gesture*, which might have served to anchor the proliferating body metaphors in a more concrete dramatic reality, merits few entries, at least relative to the number of times Wagner uses the word. The word earns only two subheadings: “Gesture and Orchestra” and “the Unspeakable of Gesture,” neither of which turns out to have anything to do with movement of bodies on stage. Both instead refer exclusively to the more metaphysical discussion in part 3 of orchestral melody and gesture’s ability to articulate the unutterable. This relationship between orchestral music and gesture dominates textbook accounts of Wagnerian theory, but its prominence in Ellis’s index eclipses—perhaps by design—two other important guises that gesture takes on in the course of the book.

The first of these is the generative function of gesture in relation to melody. Wagner’s ideal of melody, as described in part 2 of *Opera and Drama*, harks back to a natural state in which bodily gestures were integral to all speech and song. What gestures expressed visibly, melody cast in a more interior, emotive form. Or, to rephrase this in terms of a frequent opposition in Wagner’s writings of the period, what gesture showed to the eye, melody communicated to the ear. More than merely arising simultaneously, melody was also *determined* by gesture, its rhythmic patterns dictated by the movements of the body. However, apart from this tale of origins and primal unity of the arts, Wagner found little to satisfy him in theatrical practice. After the pinnacle of Greek drama, with its imagined perfect integration of recitation and gesture, this graceful interdependence of music and gesture was soon disturbed. Gesture quickly came to take too prominent a role in theater, culminating in a decadent, histrionic practice in which gesture had become exaggerated and artificially divorced from both word and melody.¹⁵

Even before the corruptions of modern dramatic practice, Wagner’s idealized view of music’s growth out of physical gesture already har-

bored a contradiction. In the very midst of explaining how melody arises naturally from gesture, he asks the reader to make allowances for “this *rhythmic melody*, which we should do wrong to set down as of poor effect and beauty.”¹⁶ As he goes on to explain, primitive melody, while it admirably integrated body and voice in a single expression, had access only to a limited emotional gamut, equivalent to the expressive abilities of animals as compared to humans. Wagner’s language becomes more than usually tortured here—tinged with guilt, as if he cannot resist mentioning the aesthetic limitations of such music but feels that he is betraying the pure spirit of reform to raise such doubts (“which we should *do wrong* to set down as . . .”). Thus while he superficially seems to grant gesture paramount importance in the history of musico-dramatic expression, he twice draws back from that position: by maligning the prominence gesture has assumed in contemporary drama and by questioning the fundamental aesthetic value of a music grounded in gesture.¹⁷

A move in the book’s final section, where Wagner outlines his program for a reformed operatic regime, withdraws yet further from the notion of a melody based in and fused with movement. This time Wagner links gesture not to song but to orchestral discourse. Just as the metrical accents of spoken language give rise to vocal melody (or *Wortton-melodie*), physical movements such as brandishing a sword (to choose one of the most famous and most obvious cases from the *Ring*) give shape to orchestral motives and thus become the generative seed of orchestral melody. Once again, while Wagner here seems to grant primacy to gesture in shaping the discourse of music drama, he really enacts a kind of sublimation of the body and its movements, shifting emphasis from actual, visible movements to the more abstract symphonic results of those movements once they are subsumed into the symphonic web of leitmotives.¹⁸ The effect of this sleight of hand is to devalue gesture, reducing it to a precondition for expression rather than an end in itself, important only as it gives shape to a purely symbolic, nonphysical symphonic web.¹⁹ Thus, even while gesture is accorded top

billing in the *genesis* of melody and drama, its nature remains abstract and unpinned from actual movement. Indeed, at each point in the book where gesture threatens to take on a more central function, the possibility triggers anxieties, causing Wagner to back off, contradict himself, to tame gesture into a operatic framework more clearly governed by music.

A single exception to this program of metaphor and abstraction surfaces in the very last chapter of *Opera and Drama*, in an uncharacteristically down-to-earth attack on the widespread German practice of performing French and Italian operas in translation. Taking examples from his own operas (though coyly leaving them unidentified), Wagner illustrates the dangers of staging opera with singers who understand the libretto imperfectly. His first example involves the orchestral postlude of the Elisabeth-Tannhäuser duet, in which Elisabeth watches Tannhäuser as he leaves the stage, waving to him once as he goes. According to Wagner, the emotional significance of this isolated gesture as a loving farewell is conveyed through the orchestra's recall of the melody with which Elisabeth first addressed Tannhäuser in the duet. If the singer fails to understand that the music relates to Elisabeth's initial greeting of Tannhäuser at the beginning of the duet but "remains standing indifferently in the foreground," Wagner suggests that the orchestral figure would be robbed of any meaning and might as well be cut.²⁰

Here, then, Wagner proposes a reciprocal relationship between music and gesture. The orchestral tune in the postlude expresses the emotion behind Elisabeth's gesture, but at the same time the meaning of the melody resides *in* the gesture. Earlier claims about melody and gesture as isomorphic are now apparently forgotten, however, since this melody is in no way mimetic of a waving gesture but is modeled on another type of movement altogether. As Examples 27 and 28 show, the postlude recalls a passage from the duet proper, bringing back both the ardent, leaping vocal melody with which Elisabeth bade Tannhäuser to rise from his posture of supplication and the sinuous cello figure that perhaps imitates his resumption of a standing position. In other words, the

Example 27. Duet (Elisabeth, Tannhäuser) (Wagner, *Tannhäuser*, Act II).

ELISABETH

mich! so ste-het auf!

5 Nicht sol-let hier Ihr knien, denn die - se Hal - le ist

9 Eu - er Kö - nig-reich. O ste - het auf!

notion of an orchestral discourse linked to gesture that Wagner chooses to foreground here is not at all choreographic. Instead gesture is abstracted, disregarding a visible motion in the present moment (Elisabeth's wave) in favor of a past movement (Tannhäuser's rise) that has already acquired the status of an idea, evocative perhaps of Elisabeth's respect for her beloved.

Where the earlier sections of *Opera and Drama* led us to expect a style of melody constructed from a string of tiny units corresponding either

Example 28. Duet (Elisabeth, Tannhäuser), postlude.

Moderato
Elisabeth blickt Tannhäuser vom Balkon aus nach.

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It begins with a **Moderato** tempo marking and the instruction *Elisabeth blickt Tannhäuser vom Balkon aus nach.* The first system shows the initial measures with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system, starting at measure 6, includes markings for *più p* and *ritard.* The score features a mix of melodic lines and harmonic accompaniment, with some measures containing rests for the voice parts.

to cadences of the poetic text or to physical movements, Wagner here advocates a musical style based on isolated orchestral figures allied to sudden outbursts of *feeling*, feeling that sometimes spills over into physical movement. Crucially, to be worthy of comment, these figures must be tied into a system of reminiscence motives, as the music for Elisabeth's wave recalls the earlier moment of greeting, thus gathering meaning from their association with words. Hence *Opera and Drama's* closing foray into concrete illustration implies an ideal of performer as puppet of the orchestra, her limbs moving in response to orchestral "gestures" that encode emotion—a notion of gesture that seems much reduced from that implied by the Rousseauian generative myth. While the insistence on *congruence* between gesture and musical discourse is familiar from the earlier discussion, priority is reversed. Gesture—now apparently conceived on a larger scale—*proceeds* from orchestral melody, underlining and deciphering the semantically coded utterances that emanate from the orchestra. Or, to put this in Wagnerian terms, stage movement should communicate to the eye what the orchestra imparts to the ear—but both should be "conditioned" or governed by the word.

If Wagner backed away from the possibilities (and perhaps also the compositional constraints) of a truly gestural music in this final, practically oriented section of *Opera and Drama*, he took quite a different tack in a yet more practical context around the same time, in the detailed staging notes for an 1852 Zurich production of *Der fliegende Holländer*. The document is remarkable in many respects, but perhaps most of all for the frequency with which the composer calls for detailed synchronization between music and movement.²¹ Wagner restricts himself to some general (if telling) comments about Senta and Erik, mostly designed to discourage “sentimental” or “sickly” portrayals of either role.²² For both Daland and the Dutchman, though, Wagner calls at several points for tight coordination of movement with a specific musical figure. At the Dutchman’s first appearance before Senta in Act II, Wagner flags an agitated, chromatic figure for strings as depicting Daland’s uncomprehending hand gestures as he waits for Senta to greet him; immediately after this Daland is to shake his head on a pizzicato note and step toward Senta with the entry of the basses. Similarly, Wagner directs the Dutchman in his Act I aria to synchronize his steps with specific pitches in the accompaniment:

the first notes of the ritornello in the aria (the deep E-sharp of the basses) accompany the Dutchman’s first step on shore; his rolling gait, which is peculiar to sailors who have spent a long time away at sea, is accompanied by a wave-like figure for the cellos and violas; with the first crotchet of the third bar he takes his second step,—still with folded arms and bowed head; the third and fourth steps coincide with the notes of the eighth and tenth bars.²³

In typically dialectical mode, Dahlhaus has interpreted these directives as at once representative of Wagner’s early interest in “outer drama,” and as anomalous, the high level of control intended as compensation for Wagner’s distance from actual performances of his operas during the years of exile in Zurich.²⁴ What Dahlhaus misses are the distinct dramatic functions of the stage directions in each case. Rather than calling for a blanket approach of synchronization, or specifying the

movements for every number in the opera with an equal level of detail, Wagner prescribes such effects for only two characters, and at only a few key moments. The representation of Daland reminds one of Beckmesser's mechanical movements in his raid on Sachs's workshop, or even of Marcel's lumbering movements and motives in *Les Huguenots*: excessive synchronization between music and movement creates an atmosphere of distance or mockery, painting Daland as a simple, unreflective bourgeois father. Wagner's directions for the Dutchman, in sharp contrast, seem designed not only to yoke movement to music, but to *slow down* and *restrict* those movements, to ensure that he move with a gravity and weight appropriate to his situation. The brief document repeatedly returns to the necessity of "composure" and immobility: "however deep the passion, and however agonised the anguish with which he imbues the vocal line, he must retain the greatest outward composure: a simple arm or hand movement—not too sweeping—will suffice to emphasize the more dramatic moments."²⁵ The reason lies in the Dutchman's imprisonment by the curse:

he reacts and speaks here as from the force of old habit: he has already experienced so many similar encounters and conversations; everything, even the apparently purposeful questions and answers are made only half-consciously; he reacts as if under the constraint of his position, to which he submits mechanically and without interest, like one exhausted.²⁶

Controlled by the curse, the Dutchman is not a free agent, and Wagner's stage directions lend visual emphasis to his lack of autonomy by making him appear at specific moments as controlled by the orchestra.

3

What appeared in the context of *Opera and Drama* as a divide between theory and practice, with gesture allowed greater sway in theory than in actual staging, begins to seem more complicated in light of the *Dutchman* notes. The role of gesture in shaping musical discourse was ac-

knowledge in the former as universal and formative, a marker of dramatic vitality and of the presence of the “purely human” in dramatic conception. When it comes to staging specific scenes, however, Wagner calls for synchronization of music and movement to convey nearly the opposite state, dreamlike phases in which the characters surrender themselves to some greater force. For Wagner the close matching of music to movement conveys not physical vitality or charisma, as in Auber or Verdi, but instead indicates that a character is half-conscious, in a state verging on trance.

A faint echo of this attitude can be discerned in the notes Wagner dictated to the journalist Heinrich Porges during rehearsals for the first production of the *Ring* in 1876. Most of the insights Porges relays are narrowly practical, often concerning tempo or dynamics, and they often have the air of direct quotations from the Master; possibly the most common word in the slim book is “should” (“must” is a close second), as in “the stage action *must* be in keeping with these passionate outbursts.” One of the few sustained discussions of dramatic expression comes in a footnote to the account of the first act of *Die Walküre*.

I must draw attention to a stylistic feature especially prominent in the first two scenes [of *Die Walküre*]: the connection between the instrumental music and the silent stage action. Both are the expression of emotions slumbering, as it were, in the depths of the soul and now on the verge of becoming conscious. Passion, which does not yet govern the desires of the protagonists, is making itself felt not in words, but involuntarily in a look or a glance. Passages of this kind are most convincingly enacted by performers who make a habit of singing the instrumental melody to themselves; every nuance of the intimate psychic process will then be spontaneously reflected in their facial expression.²⁷

Despite the rare first-person pronoun suggesting that Porges has momentarily stepped out of his scribal role, the remark almost retraces the rhetorical progression we followed through *Opera and Drama*. Whether channeling Wagner or speaking for himself, Porges begins by emphasizing the importance of stage action but quickly dismisses any consid-

eration of real movement to take refuge in the metaphysical realm of emotions and glances.

This preference for an abstract and rather static notion of stage action is understandable: mere stage movements, even the elaborately choreographed pantomime that begins *Die Walküre*, would seem not to reward interpretation in the same way as the accompanying “ballet” of glances and feelings. Yet an approach that concentrates on “overt” gesture in this scene not only mediates between the two views of gesture elaborated in *Opera and Drama*—the generative and the leitmotivically governed—but might also invite us to see and hear some of Wagner’s less literal mime scenes as more gesturally motivated. Briefly put, the opening moments of *Die Walküre* work exactly *against* the model proposed at the end of *Opera and Drama*. Rather than making manifest the meaning of the orchestral melody, the sequence of gestures seems to prompt the music, even to dictate something of its structure.

Of the two blocks of motivic raw material that underpin the first part of the scene, only one could be called gesturally conceived. As aptly as the descending scale in the bass (marked “x” in Example 29) captures Siegmund’s exhausted sinking onto the hearth as he enters, its close ties to both the “Spear” motive and the immediately preceding storm music preclude a narrowly gestural interpretation. The miniature triadic arch-figure conventionally associated with Sieglinde (y), in contrast, is not only introduced in synchronization with her action of bending over Siegmund to listen for his breathing, but its contour mimics the movement of her inclining body. From their initial appearance, both motives contain a built-in sequential repetition: both are heard twice in succession, Siegmund’s sequencing down by step, Sieglinde’s up by a third.

This momentary identity between motive and gesture would not be of particular interest except for the fact that this motive’s contour, writ large, is echoed in the orchestral arch that a few seconds later accompanies Sieglinde’s exit and return with the drinking horn (see Example 29, mm.29–44). The ascending portion of the arch is built from four iterations of the motive originally associated with Siegmund (x), sequenced

Example 29. Sieglinde fetches water for Siegmund (Wagner, *Die Walküre*, opening scene).

SIEGLINDE *Noch im Hintergrunde.* *Sie tritt näher.*

Ein frem-der Mann? ihn muss ich fra-gen. Wer kam in's

Mässig *Langsam*

pp *p* *pp*

5 *Da Siegmund sich nicht regt, tritt sie noch etwas näher und betrachtet ihn.*

Haus, und liegt dort am Herd?

Etwas langsamer

p *p*

x

9 Mü - de liegt er von We - ges Müh'n. Schwan-den die

più p *pp*

13 *Sie neigt sich zu ihm herab und lauscht.*

Sin-ne ihm? wä-re er siech?

Etwas belebt y

p *p* *p*

(continued)

Example 29 (*continued*)

17

ritard. *p* *tranquillo* *p*

Noch schwillt ihm der A-them; das Au-ge nur schloss er.

21

Mu - thig dünkt mich der Mann, sank er müd' auch hin.

p

SIEGMUND

25 *fährt jäh' mit dem Haupt in die Höhe.* SIEGLINDE

Ein Quell! ein Quell! Er-quick-ung schaff' ich.

mf *p* *p*

Belebend

29 *Sie nimmt schnell ein Trinkhorn und geht damit aus dem Haus.*

p *p* *mf* *p* *cresc.*

molto espress.

34

poco rall. *f*

sie kommt zurück und reicht das gefüllte

Example 29 (*continued*)

39 *Trinkhorn Siegmund.* *dolce* *Langsamer*

anmuthig dim. *p*

44 SIEGLINDE

La-bung biet' ich dem lech-zen-den Gau-men: Was-ser, wie du ge-wollt!

dolce

48 *Siegmund trinkt, und reicht ihr das Horn zurück. Als er ihr mit dem Haupte Dank zuwinkt, haftet sein*

p *più p* *p*

54 *Blick mit steigender Theilnahme an ihren Mienen.*

p *p*

60

più p *pp*

up a tone each time. As the arch reaches its peak (at the high A and the luminous 6/4 chord, m.37), motive x shifts from cello to first violin, initiating the descent. And as if to insist on a perfect symmetry between the lovers, the descent is based around the motive originally associated with Sieglinde's compassionately inclining body. As at its initial occurrence, the motive's repetitions (mm.39, 41, 43) sequence down by thirds, composing out the third-leaps within the motive itself.

As the stage directions in the earliest published score make clear, the progress of this arch as a whole is correlated with movement, the melodic and harmonic peak coinciding with the moment of Sieglinde's return. But here, too, the gestural is quickly sublimated into the conceptual: given the brevity of the orchestral passage, it may even be impossible to stage according to Wagner's stage directions. (One almost wonders if that word "quickly" in the stage direction at the top of the page, "sie nimmt schnell ein Trinkhorn," is actually meant as an apology to the performers.) Practical realization aside, this "gestural arch" corresponds neatly to the first phase of Wagner's theory where the gestural is seen as generative: the music for Sieglinde's initial small gesture generates the music for the larger movement of departure and return.

It is probably related to the primacy of gesture, and to the intense "presentness" of the lovers' emotional world that the first part of this scene is devoid of important leitmotives. Not that this has discouraged the compilers of inventories, who have eagerly coined symbolic labels even for those themes that are heard for the first time here and whose resonances do not extend much beyond the limits of this scene. Wolzogen led the way in naming the two building blocks as simply "Siegmund" and "Sieglinde's *Mitleid* (or compassion)"; Robert Donington goes a step further, naming the arch accompanying Sieglinde's exit "The drink which unites the destinies of Siegmund and Sieglinde," a tag that, like Wolzogen's labels, propels the sequence of concrete, present gestures into a symbolic realm, leaving behind as unworthy of comment the music's graphic connections with movement.²⁸ Leitmotivistic labeling has been subjected to scathing criticism, especially in recent

years, but most of this has focused on the complaint that naming motives tends to restrict musical meaning, to nail freely expressive themes down too explicitly to verbal functions; in other words, to make the music too concrete. There is much truth in this, but overenthusiastic labeling can also have the opposite effect—of severing a musical phrase from its very concrete gestural origins to elevate the music by association with more grandiose, less physical concepts. It is tempting to see the whole enterprise of “motive-mongering” as part of a Wagnerist conspiracy, designed to make this music seem unphysical and symbolic, and thus to distinguish it as sharply as possible from all other operatic music.

The scene’s first “real” leitmotiv, in the sense that it will recur later in the opera to remind us of this moment, is, of course, the “Love” motive (see Example 29, m. 57). As Siegmund drinks, a new sequence based on his “x” motive unfurls, leaping up through thirds (mm.48–56) until it arrives on a B $\flat$ underpinned by a rare dominant chord, launching a completely new motivic and sequential pattern, the first statement of the Love motive.²⁹ This second arch is clearly modeled on the first, spinning out the same motives and following a similar sequential logic. The urgent, slightly asymmetrical pace of the first sequence is now ironed out into three-bar units, rising, then falling by thirds. And where “his” and “her” motives were melded in the first arch, the intervallic patterns now derive entirely from Siegmund’s motive, even if their pattern of sequencing up by thirds links the process also to Sieglinde’s characteristic figure.

But during this second orchestral arch the two characters stand perfectly still. Inner drama supplants action, then, but not only that: we might also identify this as the moment at which the physical refreshment of water (already imbued with symbolism) is decisively reinterpreted in allegorical terms, as the spiritual renewal of love, an association that will be cemented when the entire cycle of entrances, exits, sips, and glances is repeated with mead replacing water. To press into service the pair of large concepts from the title of this chapter, at this point “embodiment” gives way to “allegory.”

The rigorous separation of gesture and leitmotiv in *Die Walküre*'s paired arches could almost be read as a composing-out of the progression I traced through *Opera and Drama*. In the initial phase, musical material flows from and is shaped by gesture; but in the second arch the primacy of the gestural is subordinated to meanings articulated through reminiscence motives or leitmotives—that is, with the mediation of words.³⁰ The parturition of the Love motive does not quite follow to the letter Wagner's prescriptions in part 3 of *Opera and Drama*. It comes about as the result of elaborately choreographed movement but does not itself imitate or carry the traces of any gesture. Rather, it is as if the shift into leitmotivic discourse—to a new level of referential meaning and emotional intensity—has been *prepared* by the strict choreography of the characters' movements up to this point, and by the parallel confinement of the musical discourse to variations on the two gesturally conceived motives. As in Wagner's notes for the Dutchman's aria, the relationship between music and gesture in this scene may be as much about control as it is about the representation of physical vitality. As Porges suggested, the scene's pantomime element works to stage Siegmund and Sieglinde as only yet half-conscious, submerged in the dream state that must precede the awakening into love, their movements paced and measured by the orchestra. The Love motive, then, is not only brought forth by the preceding, purely gestural arch: its arrival also enacts a liberation from the tight yoking together of music and movement earlier in the scene.³¹

The pattern of gestural arch yielding to a leitmotivic one is replayed in the second half of the scene, as Sieglinde exits to fetch mead and then sips it with Siegmund to the accompaniment of the Love motive. In this second phase, the initial, gestural arch is built from sequenced repetitions of Sieglinde's *Mitleid* motive, and the second, leitmotivic phase from repetitions of the second half of the Love motive itself, its distinctive head-motive saved for the top of the arch, as the lovers gaze at each other. Indeed, the whole process of bodily gesture giving way to, or making possible, consciousness on a new level is played out in the act

as a whole, with the paired episodes of fetching and drinking water and mead functioning as a gestural, nonverbal preparation for the lovers' more overtly emotional—and verbal—recognition of each other as brother and sister. Seen this way, the entire act and the unfolding of Siegmund and Sieglinde's passion are built on a series of symmetries, with “mere” gesture repeatedly giving way to metaphor and leitmotiv. But even with the displacement of physical gesture by metaphysical meaning woven so deeply into the act's structure, the role of gesture is not quite as restricted as *Opera and Drama* would have it. Where *Opera and Drama* construed gesture as a starting point for musical expression that must quickly be left behind, superseded by something deeper, the motivic interdependence of gestural and leitmotivic (physical and metaphysical) arches here suggests something more reciprocal.

There is a coda to this analysis of *Die Walküre*'s opening scene, one that returns us to Nietzsche's critique of Wagner and, in an unlikely pairing, to Auber's *Fenella*. In a rare moment of engagement with musical process, Nietzsche elaborated on his portrait of Wagner as “mimomaniac” in terms that strikingly recall the musical process of the *Walküre* scene. He complained of Wagner's habit of building scenes by sequencing tiny, gesturally conceived motives:

Wagner begins from a hallucination—not of sounds but of gestures. Then he seeks the sign language of sounds for them. If one would admire him, one should watch him at work at this point: how he separates, how he gains small units, how he animates these, severs them, *and makes them visible*. But this exhausts his strength: the rest is no good. How wretched, how embarrassed, how amateurish is his manner of “development,” his attempt to at least interlard what has not grown out of each other.³²

Separates, gains, animates, severs, makes visible. These are hardly technical terms, but a translation can be performed with the help of another of Wagner's articulate foes, Theodor Adorno, who elaborates some of the terms of Nietzsche's critique into a technical analysis.³³ Like Nietz-

sche, Adorno lamented Wagner's excessive love of "mimicry," and he complained long and loud about Wagner's habit of taking gestural motives that should have been merely transitional (he traced their origins to accompanied recitative and incidental music), investing them with an intensity their musical substance was inadequate to sustain, and then spinning out entire forms by repeating and sequencing them. It was against an ideal of the "thematische Arbeit" of Viennese classicism that Adorno found Wagner wanting. Rather than motives conceived so that they could develop symphonically and thus act as autonomous subjects, Adorno heard in Wagner only inert motives derived from gestures.³⁴

It is too easy to dismiss Adorno as a victim of tunnel vision. Certainly, he was puritanically suspicious of the body and of spectacular visual effects, besides being too enamored of middle-period Beethoven and too doctrinaire about the superiority of motivic development as a metaphorical elaboration of the human subject.³⁵ But if we look past its more curmudgeonly aspects, Adorno's critique points to an unexpected affinity between the opening of *Die Walküre* and—of all places—the music to which Fenella moves in *La Muette de Portici*. In both cases, Adorno would argue that true development or rhetorical structuring are impossible: because the motivic material grows out of and refers only to the movements it accompanies, it can be elaborated only through repetition and sequence.

What Nietzsche's and Adorno's critiques inadvertently point out is Wagner's debt to a forebear he himself could never have acknowledged—in that "coquette" grand opéra, in the agitated sequences and eloquent mime of composers like Cherubini and Auber, and even in the emotionally charged mute tableaux of mélodrame. Typically, though, Wagner exerts a strong controlling influence on those models. One could say that he inverts them to transform pantomime and gestural music from a musical means of conveying bodily presence to one for *regulating* the movements of the performers. Still, the lesson behind the rigorous separation of gesture and leitmotiv in those initial paired arches in

Die Walküre might finally be one that takes us beyond the confines of Wagner's mind, to situate his style in a larger operatic mainstream.

4

Wagner's works can be traced back to the French tradition by yet another unexpected route, one that will bring my argument full circle, returning us to questions of bodily speech, muteness, and the power of gesture to communicate more directly than words. The connection lies in *Parsifal*, and specifically in the fact that Wagner's last opera features a mute character: Kundry, who utters only a single line in the last act, "Dienen, dienen," and then falls silent.

Not that the mere refusal (or inability) to speak makes Kundry an automatic cousin of Fenella: muteness can mean many things; 1828 and 1882, Paris and Bayreuth, lie much further apart in dramatic terms than their strictly chronological or geographical distance would suggest. Through exploring these differences I hope both to account for some of my earlier claims about the new meanings and powers ascribed to the body at the fin de siècle, and to pose some more specific questions—about why Wagner has Kundry fall silent in the last act, and why a mute character at the end of the century sounds (and looks) so different from one of fifty years earlier. But these questions make sense only in the broader context of *Parsifal*.

The most famous line in *Parsifal* exposes the unique relationship that this *Bühnenweihfestspiel* establishes to gesture, to the body, and to the scenic dimension of opera generally. In the enchanted land of the Grail knights, Gurnemanz tells Parsifal, time becomes space: "zum Raum wird hier die Zeit." The line has been subjected to endless interpretation, read as "the most profound definition" of myth, as evidence that in *Parsifal* Wagner was representing a kind of postmodernist "end of history," and even as an anticipation of Einsteinian physics.³⁶ What has not been much commented on, so far as I know—and what seems crucial

to understanding exactly *how* time becomes space in the kingdom of Monsalvat—is the exchange between Parsifal and Gurnemanz that leads up to this metaphysical pronouncement. Parsifal, in full “pure fool” mode, asks *who* the Grail is (a personification that, as with many of Parsifal’s early misunderstandings, is not without insight). Gurnemanz’s reply amounts to a negation of Will, and to a negation of *movement* as a manifestation of Will:

PARSIFAL: Wer ist der Graal?

GURNEMANZ: . . . Mich dünkt, dass ich dich recht erkannt;
kein Weg führt zu ihn durch das Land,
und Niemand könnte ihn beschreiten,
den er nicht selber möcht’ geleiten.

PARSIFAL: Ich schreite kaum,
doch wähn’ ich mich schon weit.

GURNEMANZ: Du sieh’st, mein Sohn,
zum Raum wird hier die Zeit.

PARSIFAL: Who is the Grail? GURNEMANZ: . . . I think I understand you; no earthly path leads to it, and none can move towards it whom the Grail itself has not guided. PARSEFAL: I hardly move, yet feel that I have already come far. GURNEMANZ: You see, my son, here time becomes space.

To translate this into more commonsensical terms, no amount of physical effort will lead to the Grail; on the other hand, as Parsifal notes, a pure soul can approach it *without* using the body in any merely physical sense: “Ich schreite kaum, doch wähn’ ich mich schon weit.” (And the choice of that word “schreiten,” which denotes actual pacing or footsteps, is crucial in the context of the opera as a whole.)

This exchange is clearly meant to remind us of the exclusively *meta*-physical basis of the opera, to propose that mere physical movement is ineffectual and illusory. And to drive that message home, Gurnemanz and Parsifal are directed to remain on stage, *appearing* to walk, as the scene changes behind them to the hall of the Grail.³⁷

Why, then, does Wagner set Gurnemanz's pivotal line to music that sounds so much like a march, its foursquare repeating rhythms and incantatory martial figures apparently designed to propel large groups of people into motion and to ensure that they move together in time? The repeating figure, initiated by martial brass and intoned by the strings, will become the unifying motive for the entire Transformation Music, but it is also destined for the procession, to underpin the *actual* movement of the Grail knights as they process in for the sacrament (Example 30). This march that is not quite a march, I would suggest, lies exactly on one of the borders *Parsifal* is concerned with traversing. The use of a march rhythm to accompany an *inner* journey toward the Grail prepares us for the messages to come in acts 2 and 3. For, although time may have become space in *Parsifal*, the opera nevertheless describes a clear progression from ignorance to comprehension, and from outer, physical experience to a realization that the body is a mere shell (and a temptation) to be overcome. In this sense, the distance between attitudes to the body in *Die Walküre* and *Parsifal* might provide a neat microcosm of the sweeping historical changes in body consciousness I outlined at the beginning of this chapter. In *Parsifal* the body is alternately suppressed (in the outer acts) and highly eroticized, titillating, decadent (in Act II); but it is never frankly expressive, never accompanied and abetted by music in a vivid and uncomplicated manner.³⁸

The vicissitudes of this late-Wagnerian body are projected most acutely onto Kundry, whom we see transformed over the course of the opera from a cackling, quivering hag who laments (or boasts) "Ich hilf nie," to a beautiful young enchantress who can also remind Parsifal of his mother, to the silent penitent of the last act. The leitmotiv associated with Kundry is some of the most vividly "gestural" music in the entire opera, and partly for this reason it fades away early in Act III, leaving Kundry purified of its physical overtones but bereft of a musical calling card. The motive's gestural quality becomes particularly clear when it is contrasted with one of the themes most closely associated with Parsifal, often labeled the "Prophecy" motive (Example 31). With

Example 30. Transformation music (Wagner, *Parsifal*, Act I).

GURNEMANZ PARSIFAL

(ge) - lei - ten. Ich schrei-te kaum, doch wähn' ich mich schon

4 GURNEMANZ

weit. Du sieh'st mein Sohn, zum Raum wird hier — die

7 *Allmählich, während Gurnemanz und Parsifal zu schreiten scheinen, hat sich die*

Zeit.

Szene bereits immer merklicher verwandelt; es verschwindet so der Wald und in Felsenwänden öffnet sich ein Thorweg, welcher die Beiden jetzt einschliesst.

10

poco cresc.

Example 31. Prophecy motive.

AMFORTAS

“durch Mit - leid wis - send” war’s nicht so?

GURNEMANZ

Sehr mässig

Uns

5

“der rei - ne Thor.”

sag - test du es so.

its recurring text, “durch Mitleid wissend, der reine Tor,” the Prophecy motive is quintessentially vocal and static: it unfolds slowly, in notes of equal length, and the repetition of the falling interval adds to the impression of incantation and ritual. Kundry’s motive, however (Example 32), arrives as a purely orchestral explosion: initiated by a loud, accented high note in the violins, and falling away from that abruptly achieved peak in a cascade of anxious (and dissonant) sixteenth notes. And while the motive is often heard as denoting Kundry’s laughter, evoking the memory of her mocking of Christ, it also seems designed to draw our attention to Kundry’s body and its movements. Its contour is

Example 32. Kundry's first entrance.

2. RITTER

Da schwingt sich die Wil - de her - ab.

ff

Kundry stürzt hastig, fast taumelnd herein. Wilde Kleidung, hoch geschürzt; Gürtel von Schlangenhäuten herabhängend; schwarzes in losen Zöpfen flatterndes Haar; tief braun-rötliche Gesichtsfarbe; stechende schwarze Augen, zuweilen wild aufblitzend, öfters wie todesstarr und unbeweglich.

ff

KUNDRY

7 *sie eilt auf Gurnemann zu und dringt ihn ein kleines Krystallgefäß auf.*

Hier! Nimm du! Bal-sam...

p *poco cresc.* *dim.* *p*

mimetic of one of her most characteristic movements: rushing across the stage (as at her first entrance), then throwing herself precipitously on the ground.

The elaborate stage directions for Kundry at her first entrance heighten rather than solve the problem of how that entrance should actually be staged. The lengthy text in score and libretto describes Kundry's costume and appearance in great detail; the lines pertaining to movement read: "Kundry rushes in, almost staggering. . . . She hurries to Gurnemanz and presses on him a small crystal phial. . . . She throws herself on the ground."³⁹ The placement of these lines in the score actually stretches the movement over a longer span of time, saving Kundry's collapse until after her motive has ended. Yet that first, screaming high note must announce that Kundry should first become visible at this point, just as the downward scale that follows seems to dictate that the first, impetuous phase of her entrance should be complete by the time it ends. Most directors heed the second part of this advice, but few manage (or try) to synchronize Kundry's physical appearance with the appearance of her leitmotiv. This seems a precious opportunity both to set Kundry apart from the other characters, as physically *driven* by her music, and to capitalize on the associations with her body that emerge in later occurrences of her motive.⁴⁰

Of course, the opera as a whole offers many opportunities to contemplate Kundry's body, so much so that at least one feminist critic has dubbed her a hysteric.⁴¹ Hysteria diagnoses of fictional characters have become common in the critical discourse of the last two decades, but in Kundry's case the connection could be particularly illuminating. She exhibits many of the classic symptoms of the disorder as it was described by Freud: in textbook fashion she speaks little, often stammering, repeating words, or breaking into senseless laughter; and, especially in the first act, she is in constant motion—quivering, trembling, throwing herself in a heap on the ground and then gradually raising herself up again. At various points in the first act, for example, the stage direc-

tions call for Kundry to act out her anguish through the visible, bodily manifestations characteristic of hysteria:

während der Erzählung des Gurnemanz von Amfortas' Schicksal [Kundry] oft in wütender Unruhe heftig sich umgewendet hatte, nun aber, immer in der Waldecke gelagert, den Blick scharf auf Parsifal gerichtet hat, ruft jetzt, da Parsifal schweigt, mit rauher Stimme daher.⁴²

during Gurnemanz's account of the fate of Amfortas, Kundry has been violently writhing in furious agitation; now, still lying in the undergrowth, she eyes Parsifal keenly and, as he is silent, hoarsely calls out.

And a bit later,

Nach einem dumpfen Schrei verfällt sie in heftiges Zittern; dann läßt sie die Arme matt sinken, neigt das Haupt tief und schwankt matt weiter. . . . Sie sinkt hinter dem Gebüsch zusammen, und bleibt von jetzt an unbemerkt.⁴³

She falls into a violent trembling, then lets her arms and head drop wearily and totters away. . . . She sinks down behind the bushes and is not seen further.

What is most illuminating about the hysteria diagnosis in Kundry's case is the fact that hysterics force us to pay attention to their bodies, which are constantly animated and marked with symptoms that "speak" of submerged, unvoiced trauma. Hysterics are often *verbally* incapacitated, but their bodies speak for them through tremors and spasms—an impression Wagner's music encourages by its tight shadowing of Kundry's movements in the first act. If Kundry exhibits hysterical tendencies in Act I, by Act III she has shed all those twitches and shudders, her nervousness either mastered or simply differently manifested, as loss of speech.⁴⁴ As she casts off her hysterical tremors, loses the power of speech, and prepares to be baptized, Kundry's manner of movement changes drastically: as Gurnemanz says when he finds her half-frozen at the beginning of Act III, "wie anders sie schreitet" (how differently

Example 33. Kundry fetches water for Parsifal (Act I).

Kundry ist sogleich, als sie Parsifals Zustand gewahrte, nach einem Waldquell geeilt, bringt jetzt
Bewegt

Wasser in einem Horne, besprengt damit zunächst Parsifal und reicht ihm dann zu trinken.
Mässig langsam

she moves). The alteration in her body language and in the music that goes with it can be measured quite precisely by contrasting two scenes in which Kundry fetches water—for Parsifal in Act I, and for Gurnemanz early in Act III.

The first drawing of water takes place toward the end of the opera's massive opening scene, when Kundry tells Parsifal of his mother's death. He faints at the news; Kundry runs for water to revive him. As in *Die Walküre*, the simple sequence of gestures is invested with great allegorical significance, but the music could hardly be more different. Kundry's departure and return are complete within a few seconds, her movements accompanied by tense little arches of sound, reiterating the sequentially ascending four-note motive that had also introduced (and created much anticipation for) her first entrance in the opera (Example 33). The sequencing motive fragments, then builds to a peak (m.4), at which point we might imagine Kundry turning and rushing back toward Parsifal; the pivot of this gestural arch is marked by a reiteration of Kundry's motive, hurtling downward and coming to rest as

she reaches her goal. As at her first entrance, then, her motive seems designed to capture and to work with her agitated movements.

Once Kundry falls silent in Act III, after that single broken repetition of the words “Dienen, dienen,” her body is presented in an entirely new way. Far from becoming *more* active and more eloquent to compensate for the loss of vocal communication, Kundry’s body too seems to fall silent. This “mute” body is evident in my second episode of water-carrying, Kundry’s first task after Gurnemanz revives her and she assumes the role of a servant. Even though neither score nor libretto give any verbal instructions about exactly how Kundry should move at this point, the message of the music is easy to interpret. Her leitmotiv is completely absent and the frenetic idiom of the earlier scenes is replaced with a musical style much more at one with the dominant idiom of the other principal characters. The only remaining traces of bodily mimesis are the repeated cello tattoos that punctuate the early part of this scene, suggesting fluttering breath or a weak heartbeat. Once Kundry exits for the water, a gentle rising line is initiated by clarinet and continued by the oboe, and as Gurnemanz comments on Kundry’s transformation, wondering if this is the effect of Good Friday, we hear hints of both the motive of Amfortas’s suffering and the Grail motive, the first time in the opera that Kundry has been associated with any of these crucial musical symbols of meaning and redemption (Example 34). As she returns with the filled jug, the pastoral orchestral accompaniment begins to anticipate the pace and sonority of the Good Friday Music itself.

As important as the fact that Kundry is now finally admitted to the opera’s mainstream of leitmotivic discourse, the rigid synchronization of her music to her movements that we heard in the first act is loosened, if not left behind altogether. The music accompanying her movements here describes no clear arch of departure and return but instead suggests a gentle, calm tread. It draws together ideas *outside* Kundry’s immediate physical surroundings—the Grail, Good Friday, the soothing of pain . . . The effect of such a disconnection between Kundry’s music

Example 34. The mute Kundry fetches water for Gurnemanz (Act III, scene i).

*Kundry hat sich während dem umgesehn, gewahrt die Hütte und geht hinein.
Gurnemanz blickt ihr verwundert nach.*

GURNEMANZ

Thier. Wie an - ders schrei-tet sie als
Etwas langsamer werdend

dolce *p*
schwer

This block contains the first system of the musical score for Gurnemanz, measures 1 through 4. It features a vocal line in bass clef and a piano accompaniment in bass and treble clefs. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The vocal line begins with a whole rest, followed by a half note G2, and then a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The piano accompaniment consists of sustained chords in the bass and a melodic line in the treble. Performance markings include 'Etwas langsamer werdend' (slowing down a bit) and dynamic markings 'dolce' (softly) and 'p' (piano).

5
sonst! Wirk-te dies der hei - li - ge Tag? Oh! Tag der Gna-de oh-ne

sf *p*

This block contains the second system of the musical score, measures 5 through 8. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'sonst! Wirk-te dies der hei - li - ge Tag? Oh! Tag der Gna-de oh-ne'. The piano accompaniment features more active melodic lines. Performance markings include 'sf' (sforzando) and 'p' (piano).

9
Glei-chen: Ge-wiss, zu ihr-em Hei-le durft' ich der Ar-men heut' den

sf *p* *più p*

This block contains the third system of the musical score, measures 9 through 12. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'Glei-chen: Ge-wiss, zu ihr-em Hei-le durft' ich der Ar-men heut' den'. The piano accompaniment includes a section marked 'più p' (even softer). Performance markings include 'sf' (sforzando) and 'p' (piano).

13
To - des-schlaf ver-scheu-chen. Kundry kommt wieder aus der Hütte; sie trägt einen
Ruhig

pp *dolcissimo*

This block contains the fourth system of the musical score, measures 13 through 16. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'To - des-schlaf ver-scheu-chen. Kundry kommt wieder aus der Hütte; sie trägt einen'. The piano accompaniment features a section marked 'pp dolcissimo' (pianissimo, very soft). Performance markings include 'Ruhig' (calmly) and 'pp dolcissimo'.

(continued)

outside the physical and thus fulfills Gurnemanz's Act I prediction: it is impossible to move toward the Grail simply by moving the body.

Within the framework of this ambitious philosophical statement, then, what does it mean for Kundry to lose her voice? In essence, Wagner rewards Kundry by withdrawing both her voice and the attention of the orchestra. It is precisely by silencing Kundry and by failing to register her body musically that Wagner aims to grant her purification and redemption: we are meant to hear the breaking apart of the previously synchronized music and gesture, together with the loss of voice, as ushering her into some new spiritual realm. Reduction to an ethereal being who appears to glide through space—who is, in effect, relieved of her body altogether—is, for Wagner in this late phase, equivalent to redemption.

Given the numerous inconsistencies we have uncovered in both Wagner's theory and practice, it is surprising to realize that this progression corresponds quite precisely to one of the views of gesture articulated thirty years earlier, in *Opera and Drama*. Of the book's many competing perspectives, the dramatic action of *Parsifal* of course acts out the most abstract facet of gesture—the strand of argument that keeps a cautious distance from dance and synchronized movement, arguing that “the farther Gesture departs from the definite basis of dance, the more nuanced and speech-like her expression becomes.”⁴⁵ It is this aspect of Wagner's gestural theory that decrees Kundry's silence in the last act. By presenting a voiceless, derhythmicized Kundry, Wagner distances himself from both the vocal excesses of mainstream nineteenth-century opera and from the choreographic logic of dance. But it is in the nature of Wagner's ambitious theories that fidelity to one tenet may entail betrayal of another. The abstraction of physical gesture that Wagner achieves in the pantomime scenes of *Parsifal* Act III comes, in a sense, at the expense of the body—sacrificing the physical basis for music, as well as the immediate consciousness of the “purely human” element that plays such an important role in Wagner's thought.

How then is the mute Kundry different from Fenella? Or, to ask the more difficult question, are the two characters *alike* in any way? On the level of plot and allegory, the answer is an unexpected “yes.” Both women are powerful icons of abstract ideas: Fenella stands for innocence betrayed in the full-fledged melodramatic tradition, while Kundry is a symbol for humanity’s fall from grace, named by Klingsor as Eve and Herodias but with significance extending even far beyond those representatives of feminine seduction. To lean for a moment on the well worn madonna-whore dichotomy, Fenella is a madonna who has been mistreated, while Kundry inclines more to the whore side of the equation but, crucially, stretches to encompass all possible female archetypal positions. (But her role does not stretch, the feminist listener might complain, *beyond* those archetypes to make her convincing as an ordinary human character—as is Brünnhilde, for example.)

Another way of measuring the distance between the two mutes lies in the stage directions given to each character. As befits a work that is very confident of participating in a shared language and culture, the stage directions in *La Muette de Portici* always specified what emotion or what element of storytelling was to be communicated; what they never did was advise the dancer how to move to achieve this effect. Fenella might be instructed to mime that she was thrown into prison, or that her faithful love for Alphonse has been cruelly betrayed; how such concepts would actually look on stage was determined by a kind of negotiation between the individual performer and established codes of melodramatic gesture. For Kundry, on the contrary, the score and libretto specify movements of the body—twitches, shudders, groans—but give no indication of what emotions these movements are meant to express; indeed, these anguished movements are rarely even positioned as clear responses to dialogue or plot events. Where Fenella’s movements suggested a semaphore for a hidden but ultimately decipherable language

of emotions, Kundry's are a communicative end in themselves, to be taken at face value.

Perhaps finally this is what it means that the librettists for *La Muette*, Scribe and Delavigne, disregarded the censors' request and refused to supply a trauma that would have made Fenella into a true hysteric. Her body "speaks," but of clear linguistic concepts and direct physical energy, not of secrets that strive to turn into voice. Auber and Wagner may make use of similar short motives and similar sequential techniques for representing the body, but the expressive ends for this translation of gesture into music are very different. Where Auber aims to make music visible by yoking it to sheer bodily energy, Wagner renders Kundry's body nearly invisible, investing it with shadowy meanings as elusive and untranslatable as those encoded in a Beethoven symphony. Thus with *Parsifal* Wagner arrives at a modernist view of the body, approaching it as an independent expressive entity that sends messages in a mysterious language.

As suggested earlier, a gestural perspective on Wagner's operas has the benefit of connecting his style more clearly with that of his French and Italian contemporaries, as well as to dominant tastes in spoken theater. But more than that, a focus on gestural music can give us a clearer sense of Wagner's own evolution—which took him progressively away from a pantomimic aesthetic and from traditional approaches to stage movement, to be sure, but not as early or as completely as is generally thought. It is not only *Der fliegende Holländer* or *Tannhäuser* that can valuably be heard in connection with the European theatrical mainstream, but also *Die Walküre*; even the ciphers of *Parsifal* make sense in a new way when seen and heard against the ground of Wagner's debt to a gestural model of music and movement.

How we feel about Kundry's redemption may ultimately depend on how we respond to those European models: whether we prefer to dance, like Nietzsche listening to *Carmen*, or to swim, to immerse ourselves in Wagner's myth-laden rivers. When Kundry is granted redemp-

tion in Act III, her movements come unpinned from her music in a way that simultaneously suggests emancipation and a draining of vitality. In the terms established by Wagner's works, this amounts to a liberation: Kundry is freed in Act III from the status of puppet, no longer constrained to move—like the Dutchman, like Siegmund and Sieglinde—in a dreamlike state in which her limbs are manipulated and her pace dictated by the surges of the orchestral discourse. But the musical content that fills the void left by her absent body leaves no room for independent thought. The musical space previously occupied by mimesis is now filled with leitmotives, referring beyond the present moment to the weightiest ideas of the drama, and beyond her immediate presence to Wagner's omniscient mind.

Such a decoupling of music and movement, then, constitutes a loss—of vitality, of the power to compel the gaze as agent rather than object, the power to stir the orchestra into motion around her. And more than simply for Wagner's fictional creation, Kundry, this shift from gestural music to a skein of leitmotives also constitutes a loss for the audience—we who, in Kundry's stead, become puppets of a relentlessly referential discourse that erodes and interprets the present moment of dramatic experience.

NOTES

CHAPTER 1. IN PRAISE OF OVERSTATEMENT

1. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, ed. and trans. Eric A. Blackall in cooperation with Victor Lange, vol. 9 of *Goethe's Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 74.

2. *Ibid.*, 332. The explanation continues: "A lovely voice is the most universal thing one can think of, and if the limited individual producing it is visible, this disturbs the effect of universality. When I am talking to someone, I need to see him, for he is an individual whose character and figure determine the value of what he says; but when someone is singing, he should be invisible, his appearance should not prejudice me in his favor or distract me. With singing it is a case of one organ addressing another, not one mind speaking to another, not a manifold world to a single pair of eyes, not heaven to a single man."

3. As a theater director, Goethe was famous for his exigence and his commitment to reform. Marvin Carlson has described him as a "puppet master" who reduced his actors to "automata of the ideal and the beautiful" (Carlson, *Goethe and the Weimar Theater* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978], 307).

4. The idea came up in a conversation with Cosima, prompted by Richard's fears about the staging of *Parsifal* (23 September 1878, in *Cosima Wagner's Diaries, 1878–1883*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980], 2:154). For a discussion of this remark in the context of Wagnerian theory, see chapter 6.

5. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (1888; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 665.

6. It is not, however, particularly rare in Verdi's operas generally. See David Rosen, introduction to *Giuseppe Verdi: Un ballo in maschera*, ed. David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi, Collana di disposizioni sceniche ridotta da Francesco Degrada e Mercedes Viale Ferrero (Milan: Ricordi, 2002), 79–81 and 86–88, for a discussion of the prevalence of choreographic entrance music in that opera.

7. On the musical signs for Violetta's illness, see Arthur Groos, "T. B. Sheets: Love and Disease in *La traviata*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7, no. 3 (1995): 233–60; and Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon, M.D., *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

8. A suspicion of word painting is too widespread in the musicological literature to require citations, but one recent case is particularly interesting. In the final chapter of his *Music and Renaissance Magic* ([Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 229–46), Gary Tomlinson approaches Monteverdi's pictorialisms as a phase that the composer would transcend in maturity. For Tomlinson, pictorial effects are impoverished because they merely speak *about* the passions rather than expressing emotion directly, and because they occur in isolation, detached from each other rather than syntactically integrated with the musical discourse.

9. Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

10. Abbate, "Opera, or the Envoicing of Women," in *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 225–58.

11. *Le Mercure de France*, April 1778, quoted in Marian Smith, "Ballet, Opera, and Staging Practices at the Paris Opéra," in *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano*, ed. Pierluigi Petrobelli and Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1996), 279.

12. On the staging manual for *La Favorite*, see Roger Parker, *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 135.

13. Cicero's views on gesture are laid out mainly in his *De oratore* (c.55 B.C.) and are amplified a few years later in his *De partitione oratoria*; here *De oratore*, bk. 3, chap. 59, in *Cicero on Oratory and Orators*, trans. J. S. Watson (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), 258.

14. *De institutio oratoria*, bk. 11, § 88 and 89.

15. Quoted in Macdonald Critchley, *The Language of Gesture* (London: Edward Arnold, 1939), 96–97; translation modified.

16. The classical belief in the universality of gesture was probably articulated most forcefully (and in the most fanciful terms) by Lucian (A.D. 120), who in his dialogue “On Pantomime” argues that dance has existed in all cultures back to the most ancient times; he also tells of a visitor to Nero’s court who saw pantomime performed and asked to take it back to his own country because it would be of such great use in communicating with neighbors who did not speak the same language (H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, trans., *The Works of Lucian of Samosata* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905]; 2:238–63).

17. Translated as *Iconologia, or Moral Emblems* (New York: Garland, 1976); Ripa’s representation of Theory is discussed by Barbara Johnson in *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Michael Baxandall has shown that the principles of Cicero and Quintilian were disseminated before the production of the first actual dictionaries of gesture through advice to priests on how to deliver sermons effectively and in gestural lexicons used by monks who had taken a vow of silence (Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], 61–65).

18. *Conférence de M. Le Brun sur l’expression générale et particulière* (Paris: Piccart, 1698), reprinted in Charles Le Brun, *L’Expression des passions et autres conférences: correspondance* (n.p.: Editions Dédale, Maisonneuve, et Larose, 1994).

19. See Roger Savage and Matteo Sansone, “*Il corago* and the staging of early opera: four chapters from an anonymous treatise circa 1630,” *Early Music* 17, no. 4 (November 1989): 495–511. *Il corago* counsels that all members of the chorus should execute the same gesture at the same time “because it is a very disorderly thing to see someone move a hand upward and another downward, someone finish a gesture before another has started, and so on” (504). For an overview of codified gesture in relation to opera, see Nicholas Solomon, “Signs of the times: a look at late 18th-century gesturing,” *Early Music* 17, no. 4 (November 1989): 551–62. A view of the practical aspects of operatic staging during the period is provided by Antonia Banducci, “Staging a *tragédie en musique*: A 1748 promptbook for Campra’s *Tancredi*,” *Early Music* 21, no. 2 (May 1993): 181–90.

20. Johann Jakob Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik*; translated by H. Jensen as *Idées sur le geste et l’action théâtrale*, 2 vols. (Paris: Barrois l’aîné, 1788–89). Engel’s work also appeared in an English translation by Henry Siddons, as *Practical Illustration of Rhetorical Gesture and Action, adapted to the English drama* (London: Richard Philips, 1807), and in Italian as *Lettere intorno alla mimica*, trans. Giovanni Rasori (Milan: Batelli e Fanfani, 1820). Excerpts from Rasori’s translation appeared in the October 1818 issue of the influential Milanese jour-

nal *Il conciliatore*. On the reception of Engel, see Luciano Bottoni, “L’ombra allo specchio: Diacronia di una ricezione,” in *Il sogno del coreodramma: Salvatore Viganò, poeta muto*, ed. Ezio Raimondi (Reggio Emilia: Mulino, 1984), 126–29. Almost as influential a few decades later was Gilbert Austin’s *Chironomia, or A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (1806), ed. Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonsen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966). These systems of codification are summarized and discussed in Dene Barnett (with the assistance of Jeanette Massy-Westropp), *The Art of Gesture: The Practices and Principles of Eighteenth-Century Acting* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987).

21. François Riccoboni, *L’Art du théâtre* (Paris: C. F. Simon fils, 1750).

22. Engel, *Practical Illustration*, 36 and 74.

23. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, rev. ed. (1976; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 64.

24. *Ibid.*, 75.

25. The theater historian Martine de Rougemont has questioned the “ultra-oriental hieratism” of the complex and mannered gestures called for in the treatises. As she notes, the essence of French tragedy was to lodge emotional force in horrendous events placed off stage rather than in visible effects, and iconographic evidence shows that actors at the Comédie-Française in the revolutionary period would have moved very little, their gestures restricted to graceful movements of the upper body and arms, with the head held almost immobile by a heavy headdress (Rougemont, *La Vie théâtrale en France au XVIII^e siècle* [Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1988], 122).

26. Carlo Blasis, *The Code of Terpsichore: A Practical and Historical Treatise on the Ballet, Dancing, and Pantomime with a complete theory of the art of dancing: intended as well for the instruction of amateurs as the use of professional persons* (1828; reprint, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Dance Horizons, n.d.). Blasis was a dancer at the King’s Theatre in London and brother of Virginie Blasis, a singer at the Théâtre-Italien.

27. (Paris: A. Leroux, 1826).

28. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1876). On the degree to which classical ideas of appropriate gesture and the signification of gesture persisted into the nineteenth century, see Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Susan Rutherford, “‘Unnatural gesticulation’ or ‘un geste sublime’? Dramatic Performance in Opera,” *Arcadia* 36, no. 2 (2001): 2–21.

29. Quoted in Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy, eds., *Actors on Acting:*

The Theories, Techniques and Practices of the Great Actors of all times as told in their own words (New York: Crown, n.d.), 214.

30. Albert Aiglun de Rochas, *Les Sentiments, la musique et le geste* (Grenoble: H. Falque et F. Perrin, 1900).

31. Mel Gordon has suggested to me that Lina may actually have been another alias adopted by the mysterious “sleep dancer” known variously as “Madeleine G.,” “Mia Madeleine,” and “Madame Magdaleine,” who circulated through the theaters of Europe at the turn of the century performing dances in a hypnotic trance. One critic explicitly links Madeleine’s trance technique to more traditional modes of dramatic performance, asking “do you believe watching a great, completely emotional actor that he does anything but sleep? Do you believe that Duse is capable of achieving the loftiest effects, which grip the very seat of the soul, without sleep?” (Alfred Kerr, *Der Tag*, 8 February 1905, quoted in Henry Marx, “Madeleine: Two Reviews,” *The Drama Review* 22, no. 2 [1978]: 27–31).

32. This question of sincerity and emotional engagement, first broached in Denis Diderot’s *Paradoxe sur le comédien* (1773/1830), had become newly controversial around 1870. Among the spate of pamphlets arguing one or the other side, the most influential was William Archer, *Masks or Faces? A Study in the Psychology of Acting* (London: Longmans, Green, 1888).

33. On the voyeuristic impulse in Charcot, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 147–55.

34. The first of these approaches has been argued by Susan McClary (“Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of the Madwoman,” in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, Sexuality* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991], 80–111); the second is the basis of much feminist performance theory, such as the discussions of the “body artists” Karen Finley, Carolee Schneeman, and Angelika Festa by Peggy Phelan and Rebecca Schneider (Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* [London: Routledge, 1993]; and Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* [London: Routledge, 1997]).

35. Laura Mulvey famously accounted for film’s objectification of women as enabled by a combination of suture and the framing power of the camera (“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures* [Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1989], 14–26). The concepts of visual framing and objectification of course go back much further, invented perhaps by John Berger in his *Ways of Seeing* (London: BBC and Penguin Books, 1972).

36. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in

The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner (New York: Random House, 1967), originally published as *Der Fall Wagner* (1888); and Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

37. For a classic example of opera criticism based on the competition between voice and objectified body, see McClary, “Excess and Frame.” For an overview of approaches to the analysis of gender in opera, see my introduction to *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

38. Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

39. This formulation of voice-over owes much to Silverman’s *Acoustic Mirror* (see especially the chap. “Body Talk,” 42–71). The concept has been separately developed by Michel Chion, who dubs these all-powerful voices emanating from unseen sources “acousmètres” (Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman [New York: Columbia University Press, 1994]).

40. Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997).

41. This idea seems to have been developed almost simultaneously by several writers: Diamond’s notion of “mimicry” has much in common with Rebecca Schneider’s “explosive literality” and Peggy Phelan’s preference for “metonymy” over metaphor (see note 34).

42. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 142.

43. Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 79.

44. *Ibid.*, 80.

CHAPTER 2. WAGNER’S CANCAN, FENELLA’S LEAP

1. Richard Wagner, *Opera and Drama* [1851], trans. William Ashton Ellis (1893; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 57.

2. Wagner, “Reminiscences of Auber,” first published in the *Musikalische Wochenblatt*, November 1871, now in *Richard Wagner’s Prose Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 5:37–55. This was the second of two essays in which Wagner pronounced on the achievements and failings of grand opéra. An earlier effort, nominally devoted to the

music of Halévy but also commenting extensively on Auber, offers a very similar verdict but makes its point in far more technical, less vividly metaphorical terms (“Halévy and *La Reine de Chypre*,” in *Wagner’s Prose Works*, 8:175–200).

Cosima Wagner’s diaries indicate that Auber’s opera was on Wagner’s mind surprisingly often. On one occasion she quotes him as noting “how ridiculous it is that, having just been composing his *Parsifal*, he should find such things as the cadenza of Princess Elvira’s first aria in *La Muette de Portici* coming into his mind as he was ‘putting on his trousers and shoes!’” (17 April 1878, in *Cosima Wagner’s Diaries, 1878–1883*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980], 2:63).

3. Wagner, “Reminiscences,” 48.

4. The discussion of opéra-comique and social dance as a whole takes a negative view of both practices. Wagner’s discussion of the quadrilles reads in full: “The singularly uniform build of all this comic-opera music, particularly when the sprightly orchestra has to animate and keep the stage-ensemble together, had long reminded us of the structure of the square dance: if we attended one of our full-dress balls where the real quintessence of an Auberian opera was played as a quadrille, we suddenly found the meaning of these curious motives and their alternation so soon as we heard each movement called aloud by its proper name: ‘Pantalon,’ ‘En avant deux,’ ‘Chaîne anglaise,’ and so forth. But the Quadrille itself was a weariness to us, and for that reason this whole comic-opera music wearied us also; one asked oneself how the lively French could ever find amusement in it?” (“Reminiscences,” 45).

5. See, for example, Wagner, *Opera and Drama*, 317–24 and 363–69. Carl Dahlhaus has pointed out that Wagner’s criticisms of French opera (as embodied in Meyerbeer) were based in a “concept of drama which is by no means universal. Wagner presupposed the dialogue principle—that is, the notion that the substance of a drama resides in a conflict that is carried out in exchanges of words” (Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989], 126).

6. Wagner makes this contrast explicit when he compliments Auber for reproducing every contrast of his subject in *La Muette de Portici*, from the “picturesque” “music-paintings” to “the most admirable theatric Plastique” (“Reminiscences,” 40).

7. For an account of this theatrical craze, see Sarah Hibberd, “Magnetism, Muteness, Magic: *Spectacle* and the Parisian Lyric Stage c.1830” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southampton, 1998).

8. See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James,*

Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess, rev. ed. (1976; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 56–80.

9. The libretto for Carafa's opera was by C. F. J. B. Moreau de Commagny and A. M. Lafortelle; for a survey of official views and reception of the Carafa work, see Jane Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 25–28.

10. “Le danger de l'autorité légitime, le tumulte populaire, les clameurs de la rébellion, tout se perd et s'oublie, ou plutôt se confond dans l'intérêt qu'inspire un seul personnage. C'est une femme, cette femme est muette, et, fait dit sans épigramme, elle n'en est que plus intéressante. Par elle tout s'anime, tout se vivifie, sa personne amène toujours une péripétie nouvelle. Enfin c'est sur elle que se portent tous les regards, c'est à elle que s'attachent tous les coeurs. Il me semble difficile d'inventer un ressort qui sauve avec plus d'adresse les inconvénients du sujet” (14 August 1827; F-Pan AJ XIII 1050, in Herbert Schneider and Nicole Wild, eds., *La Muette de Portici: Kritische Ausgabe des Librettos und Dokumentation der ersten Inszenierung* [Tübingen: Stauffenberg Verlag, 1993], 204). In a report written about a week earlier, the censor notes a similar redemption (or denaturing) of the opera's public meaning thanks to its private intrigue, commenting that Masaniello is less reprehensible here than in the earlier opéra-comique libretto because he is shown to organize the uprising only to avenge his sister's honor (4 August 1827; F-Pan F21 969, in *ibid.*, 202).

11. This formulation of opera as composed of “three systems”—verbal, musical, and visual—is Pierluigi Petrobelli's, from his “Music in the Theater (apropos of *Aida*, Act III),” in *Music in the Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 113–26.

12. For example, Anselm Gerhard begins his influential study of the genre with a discussion of the ways grand opéra reflected urban life and the bourgeois self back to spectators in reassuring ways (Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 1–40).

13. On voyeurism at the Opéra, see Linda Nochlin, *The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991); and Marian Smith, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 69–72. See also Maribeth Clark, “Understanding French grand opéra through Dance” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1998); Lynn Garafola, “The Travesty Dancer in Nineteenth-Century Ballet,” *Dance Research Journal* 17, no. 2 and 18, no. 1 (1985–86): 35–40; and

Felicia McCarren, *Dance Pathologies: Performance, Poetics, Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 49–112.

14. A review of the premiere in the Parisian journal *La Pandore* (3 March 1828) is less enthusiastic about this use of Fenella as a foil to Masaniello and the political plot. The reviewer complains that the work lacks unity because as soon as Masaniello appears, the spectator becomes interested in him and is henceforth required to follow two separate plots at once without being able to concentrate on either, finally feeling just as conflicted as Alphonse himself, unable to choose between Fenella and Elvire.

15. The autograph of the first version of the libretto, submitted to the censors in October 1825, is credited to Delavigne alone and is probably in his hand, but notes among Scribe's working papers show that Scribe too was involved at this stage. Delavigne receives no credit in subsequent versions, which survive either in Scribe's autograph (the second version) or in a copyist's exemplar with annotations by Scribe (the third version); however the staging manual attributes the libretto to Scribe and Delavigne. The third version was submitted to the censors in August 1827, and the final version was printed and distributed at the opera's premiere in February 1828. All four texts are published in Schneider and Wild, *Muette*.

16. Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 145. Fenella's affliction might even be placed in a yet broader cultural arena, as a manifestation of the pattern Barbara Johnson has traced through texts as disparate as Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* ("still unravished bride of quietness") and Jane Campion's 1993 film *The Piano*, in which female muteness is treated as a condition for artistic creation (Johnson, "Muteness Envy," in *Human, All Too Human* [Essays from the English Institute], ed. Diana Fuss [New York and London: Routledge, 1996], 131–48).

17. For an exploration of the national associations of vocal ornament and muteness during this period, see my "Roles, Reputations, Shadows: Singers at the Opéra, 1828–49," in *Cambridge Companion to Grand Opéra*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 108–28.

18. "Fenella fait signe que ses parents habitent le bord de la mer, qu'ils portent des filets, qu'ils sont pêcheurs. Elle était près d'eux, heureuse et tranquille, et se livrait avec ses compagnes à des danses légères; puis tout à coup portant la main sur son cœur avec une expression douloureuse, elle . . . explique [à Elvire] qu'un grand tourment lui est survenu, et ce cœur tranquille a été troublé et agité comme les vagues de la mer qu'elle montre de loin" (F-Pan, AJ XIII 135, in Schneider and Wild, *Muette*, 96).

19. "Elle l'attendait toute la journée aux bords de la mer. Enfin un jour elle

voit paraître une barque. Sa joie! sa surprise! Elle court à lui les bras ouverts; le coeur lui battait d'espoir, bientôt ce fût d'effroi. . . . C'étaient des gardes sombres et farouches" (F-Pan, AJ XIII 135, in *ibid.*, 97).

20. "Il y a dans la passion de ces nuances des sentiments qu'il me semble impossible de rendre sans le secours de la parole" (report of 4 August 1827, signed by Royer; F-Pan, F21 969, in *ibid.*, 202).

21. On the various levels of censorship during the Restoration, see Victor Hallays-Dabot, *Histoire de la censure théâtrale en France* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1862); Odile Krakovitch, *Hugo censuré: la liberté au théâtre au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985); and Fulcher, *Nation's Image*, 28–32.

22. "Fenella est muette; mais elle n'est pas sourde. Ordinairement, le mutisme provient de la surdité de naissance. Puisque Fenella n'est pas sourde, elle est muette par accident, ce qui est un cas fort rare. Peut-être faudrait-il dire comment elle a perdu l'usage de la parole. On pourrait attribuer cette perte à une révolution causée par une grande douleur. Fenella, par exemple [*sic*], pourrait avoir vu périr misérablement sa mère, et en avoir été frappé d'une telle stupeur que, depuis ce malheur, la faculté de parler ne lui soit pas revenue. Deux ou trois vers suffiraient pour cette explication, dont le public a besoin, accoutumé qu'il est à voir toujours réunis le mutisme et la surdité" (report of *Jury littéraire*, 24 October 1825, in F-Pan, Procès verbaux O3 1724 [II], in Schneider and Wild, *Muette*, 195–96).

23. On the theatrical dimension of Pinel's so-called *traitements morales*, see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 64–119.

24. Fenella herself is described as bordering on madness in the final tableau of act 1. The *analyse-programme* (or plot synopsis) prepared for the first production directs that during this scene: "Avant de fuir, la soeur de Masaniello donne des signes de l'égarement, la douleur et le dépit lui ôte la raison; c'est en donnant des signes de folie qu'elle disparaît à travers la colonnade" (*analyse-programme*; F-Po, Dossier de l'oeuvre *La Muette de Portici*). The final version of the libretto also specifies that Fenella should regard Alphonse "avec égarement" at this point.

25. This affirmative view of hysteria within feminist theory originated with Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous, *The Newly-Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). More recent explorations of the eloquence of the hysteric within the specific context of nineteenth-century France include Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hyste-*

ria in *Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Jann Matlock, *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); and Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

26. The explosion of publications launched by the work of the abbé de l'Épée toward the end of the eighteenth century continued unabated in the first half of the nineteenth, as did the debates in France about whether deaf-mutes should be trained in speech or in sign language. For an overview of early-nineteenth-century views on the education of deaf-mutes, see Michel Poizat, *La Voix sourde: la société face à la surdité* (Paris: Métailié, 1996).

27. “Quant à Mlle Noblet, la seule qui ne parle pas dans cet opéra, c’est elle qui se fait le mieux entendre” (*Le Corsaire*, 2 March 1828).

28. “[J]’écrivis bien sous la dictée des gestes de Mlle Noblet” (*Le Corsaire*, 5 March 1828).

29. Denis Diderot, *Lettre sur les sourds et les muets, à l’usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent*, in *Diderot Studies*, ed. Paul Hugo Meyer (Geneva: Droz, 1965), 7:52–53. Diderot’s system was quite elaborate: he insisted on sitting in the third balcony, because he believed that gestural expression showed up better the further he was from the actors. Acquainted in advance with the play, he studied the sequence of gestures primarily for their agreement with what he remembered of the text and would unstop his ears and listen to the dialogue only when he felt himself confused by the gestures. He was particularly proud that, following this system, he would be moved to tears at the most pathetic passages, in concert with the listening spectators. As he liked to sum it up to his perplexed neighbors in the balcony, “chacun avait sa façon d’écouter, et que la mienne était de me boucher les oreilles pour mieux entendre.”

30. “Pour le rôle de Fenella, sa pantomime se trouve réglée dans la partition: ce n’est que là qu’on pouvait l’indiquer, d’après la brochure” (Solomé, “Indications générales et observations pour la mise en scène de *La Muette de Portici*,” in *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, ed. H. Robert Cohen [Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1991], 24).

31. On the reticence of the *livret* regarding Fenella, see Cormac Newark, “Staging Grand Opéra: History and the Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1999).

32. On changes in ballet notation from the demise of Feuillet notation in the late eighteenth century to the primacy of verbal choreographic scenarios,

see Susan Foster, *Choreography and Narrative: Ballet's Staging of Story and Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 10–11.

33. Johann Jakob Engel, *Ideen zu einer Mimik* (1783), trans. Henry Siddons as *Practical Illustration of Rhetorical Gesture and Action, adapted to the English drama* (London: Richard Philips, 1807), 29–30.

34. Carlo Blasis, *The Code of Terpsichore: A Practical and Historical Treatise on the Ballet, Dancing, and Pantomime with a complete theory of the art of dancing: intended as well for the instruction of amateurs as the use of professional persons* (1828; reprint, Brooklyn, N.Y.: Dance Horizons, n.d.), 134. Gioia was active as a dancer and choreographer in Naples, Vienna, and Milan from about 1789 to 1825. As cited by Blasis, Gioia's ideas seem to be based on a kind of "onomatopoeia" or word painting between gesture and idea, a relationship that also underlies Diderot's concept of the "hieroglyph." For Diderot, the hieroglyph was the effect that brought language to life, animated it, endowed with an impression of physical activity, and made it more than just a succession of frozen, conventionalized signs. It is difficult to pin down exactly what the poetic hieroglyph consisted of for Diderot, but he located its force in what he called "suggestive rhythmical patterns," words that mimicked and impersonated ideas and feelings.

35. Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985), 70–75. Similarly, the dance scholar Susan Foster has suggested that the dominant aesthetic of eighteenth-century dance was a succession of static images, strung together to tell a story: "Choreographers were not asked to render the development of feeling into form, but instead to depict one formal image of feeling after another. [. . .] The transitional movements between one feeling and the next were less important than the vividness with which the full-blown passion was portrayed" (Foster, *Choreography and Narrative*, 18).

36. Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia, or A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*, ed. Mary Margaret Robb and Lester Thonsen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966).

37. For a discussion of the surviving scores for mélodrame, see Emilio Sala, *L'opera senza canto: il mélo romantico e l'invenzione della colonna sonora* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995).

38. On several pages in the autograph score Auber even canceled stage directions and recopied them, positioned more accurately above the music to which they correspond (F-Pn, M.S. 2775).

39. See Anne Dhu Shapiro, "Action Music in Pantomime and Melodrama

(1730–1913),” *American Music* 2, no. 4 (1984): 49–72; and Sala, *L’opera senza canto*, 159.

40. Camille is described as “très agitée, et jette des regards effrayés sur tout ce qui l’environne” (quoted in Sala, *L’opera senza canto*, 159).

41. F-Po; Mat.19e *La Muette de Portici*, no. 359 (partie de ballet).

42. The targeting of these closed dance forms for cuts suggests a further pragmatic dimension, the desire to make the role of Fenella accessible to actresses as well as dancers: the staging manual specifies that, although the part was played in large cities by a ballerina, smaller theaters that lacked a ballet company might cast an actress (Solomé, “Indications générales,” 3). The note goes on to advise that “actresses who had played the roles of the mute in *L’Abbé de l’Épée* or of Rose in *Les Deux Mots* [both popular plays featuring mute characters] would be well suited to play Fenella.”

43. Hector Berlioz, *Revue et gazette musicale*, 22 October 1837 and an anonymous writer in *La Gazette musicale de Paris*, 21 September 1834, quoted in Marian Smith, “About the House,” in *Reading Critics Reading: French Opera and Ballet Criticism, 1789–1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 224 and 222. On the other hand, Ivor Guest quotes Berlioz lauding the performance of Fanny Elssler in an 1837 performance as Fenella specifically for the timing of her gestures to the rhythm of the music “in the Italian manner” (*Journal des Débats*, 27 September 1837, quoted in Guest, *The Romantic Ballet in Paris* [London: Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1966], 165).

44. Foster, *Choreography and Narrative*, 218.

45. Sala, *L’opera senza canto*, 147.

46. See Ann Daly, “Dance History and Feminist Theory: Reconsidering Isadora Duncan and the Male Gaze,” in *Gender and Performance: The Presentation of Difference in the Performing Arts*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992), 239–59; and Susan Manning, “The Female Dancer and the Male Gaze: Feminist Critiques of Early Modern Dance,” in *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, ed. Jane C. Desmond (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), 153–66.

47. *Le Corsaire* (2 March 1828) reports that the sets “toutes sans exception, ont été copiées sur les lieux, et . . . ont presque la vérité des toiles du Diorama.” *La Pandore* (1 March 1828) mentions that the modeling was on Sanquirico rather than on nature.

48. *La Pandore* (1 March 1828); and letter of 3 March 1828, quoted in Nicole Wild, *Décors et costumes du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1987).

49. Fulcher, *Nation's Image*, 17. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (1974; New York: Norton, 1992), 174–76, quoted in Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 149.

50. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *French Literary Theory Today*, ed. Tzvetan Todorov, trans. R. Carter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 11–17.

51. *Ibid.*, 14.

52. *Ibid.*, 16.

CHAPTER 3. BELLINI'S UNSEEN VOICES

The chapter's epigraph from Virginia Woolf (“On Being Ill,” in *Collected Essays* [New York: Harcourt, 1967], 4: 194) is quoted in Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

1. For a fuller exploration of conventional melodic figures in this repertoire, see my “In Praise of Convention: Formula and Experiment in Bellini's Self-Borrowings,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 53, no. 1 (2000): 25–68.

2. The word “filosofia” is first mentioned in connection with Bellini in a letter the composer wrote to Francesco Florimo during the rehearsals for the revised version of *Bianca e Fernando* in 1828. Bellini quotes the first violinist of the Genoa orchestra, who complimented his music as “well reasoned, full of philosophy” (letter to Florimo, 2 April 1828, in Carmelo Neri, *Lettere di Vincenzo Bellini [1819–1835]* [Palermo: Publicicula Editrice, 1991], 41 [no. 23]; also published in Luisa Cambi, *Bellini epistolario* [Turin: Mondadori, 1943], 70–72). Another prominent mention of the word came from Rossini, who, in an encounter Bellini never quite forgot, damned *Il pirata* with faint praise, as “full of great feeling, but taken to such a pitch of philosophical reasoning that the music somehow lacked brilliance” (as recounted by Bellini in a letter to Vincenzo Ferlito, 28 Aug 1829, in Neri, *Lettere*, 123 [no. 77], quoted in John Rosselli, *The Life of Bellini* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 131).

3. Heinrich Heine, “Florentinische Nächte,” in *Der Salon* (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung, 1840), 2:36.

4. Marcello Conati has shown that as late as the 1847 premiere of Verdi's *Macbeth* critics and audiences still thought Italian theaters deficient in their techniques for bringing off fantastic effects and believed that the Italian spirit

was inherently unsuited to representing the supernatural (Conati, “Aspects of the Production of *Macbeth*,” in *Verdi’s Macbeth: A Sourcebook*, ed. David Rosen and Andrew Porter [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 231–38).

5. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 158. She continues, “like the characters impressed on them, the faces themselves seem to be halfway toward becoming a language, a code, a limited system of differentials that could cast a broad net of reference and interrelation. Since faces in these novels are said to record history and every social relation, such a language could have a great deal to say. ‘Halfway toward’ becoming a language is exactly the locus of tyranny, however.”

6. R. C. Maturin, *Bertram, or the Castle of St. Aldobrand* (London: John Murray, 1816). Bellini and Romani based their libretto on a French adaptation of Maturin’s play, I. J. S. Taylor’s *Bertram, ou le pirate* (1822). Parenthetical references in the text or notes are to act and scene (or act, scene, and line).

7. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Imitation,” in *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris: Chez la veuve Duchesne, 1768), 250.

8. Peter Lichtenthal, “Pittura musicale,” in *Dictionnaire de musique*, trans. Dominique Mondo (Paris: Troupenas, 1839), 181.

9. Bonifazio Asioli, *Il maestro di composizione, ossia seguito del trattato d’armonia* (Milan: Ricordi, n.d.), vol. 1, art. 6, 42. It is an indication of Asioli’s influence that the young Verdi was schooled on at least one of his composition treatises, *L’allievo al clavicembalo* (Roberta Montemorra Marvin, “Aspects of Tempo in Verdi’s Early and Middle-Period Italian Operas,” in *Verdi’s Middle Period: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 395–96).

10. Asioli, *Il maestro di composizione*, vol. 3, art. 6, 81.

11. In his discussion of the relationships between verse meters and melody (*Il maestro di composizione*, vol. 3, art. 5, 50–51), Asioli cites several examples from *Il pirata*, as well as two passages from Bellini’s *Straniera*. Examples in the treatise as a whole are drawn in large numbers from works by Mozart, Paisiello, Marcello, Rossini, and even Meyerbeer (one); oddly, Donizetti is completely excluded.

12. Jacques-Arsène Ancelot and Joseph-Xavier Boniface Saintine, *Têtes rondes et cavaliers* (Paris: J. N. Barba, 1833).

13. Respectively, I.vi and II.v. Frederick Burwick has pointed out that off-stage sound effects were one of Victor Hugo’s innovations, used to heighten suspense and expand the sphere of action beyond the stage. Burwick also notes that Hugo “teases his audience with [references to] exterior places that cannot

be seen” and that Hugo makes use of the offstage area “actively, not merely referentially”: in *Amy Robsart* a character looks out of a window and comments on the weather, another throws a dagger out the open window. Burwick connects this predilection for references to offstage and for the placement of important events offstage with a desire to exploit a supernatural mental space: “Hugo is especially concerned with dramatizing the opposition of the practical and the imaginary, and his stage settings provide for the context between real and unreal” (Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama* [University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991], 256 and 244).

14. More precisely, “ici quiconque vous verrait, vous prendrait pour la mariée” (I.xi).

15. “Avec égarement, et en promenant ses mains sur elle-même” (I.xiv).

16. “Cette femme! ce n’est donc pas moi? . . . moi, où suis-je donc? . . . c’est moi qui suis son épouse! Pourquoi suis-je près de vous, Mulgrave? Il y a donc deux Lucy! une pour vous, une pour lui!” (I.xiv).

17. The text of this scenario is reproduced in Pierluigi Petrobelli, “Bellini and Paisiello: Further Documents on the Birth of *I puritani*,” in *Music in the Theater: Essays on Verdi and Other Composers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 179; originally published as “Bellini e Paisiello: Altri documenti sulla nascita dei *Puritani*,” in *Il melodramma italiano dell’Ottocento: studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977).

18. Following Jürgen Maehder, Anselm Gerhard links the prevalence of military effects in offstage music to the “perceptual expectations of an age shaken by incessant wars” (Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 202). He asserts that all the earliest examples of such offstage effects concern military marches, as in opéras-comiques by Grétry and Monsigny, Giovanni Simone Mayr’s *Zamori* (1804), and Spontini’s *Fernand Cortez* (1809). See Maehder, “*Banda sul palco*: Variable Beseztungen in der Bühnenmusik der italienischen Opera des 19. Jahrhunderts als Relikte alter Besetzungstraditionen,” in *Alte Musik als ästhetische Gegenwart: Bach, Händel, Schütz*, ed. Dietrich Berke and Dorothee Hanemann (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1987), 2: 293–310.

19. The autograph score shows that Bellini in fact conceived the third act as just two numbers, entitled “Scena d’Arturo” and “Finale del Atto Terzo.” The engravers of the vocal score interpolated the heading “Recitativo e Duetto Arturo ed Elvira” between the two. See the facsimile of the autograph, ed. Philip Gossett (New York: Garland, 1983).

20. See, for example, Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 347–48, 405–8, and *passim*.

21. One could actually go further with this “tonal narrative,” to draw in the flat keys associated with Elvira’s madness throughout the second act: for example, Giorgio’s aria in A $\flat$, the slow movement of the mad scene in E $\flat$, with a cabaletta in A $\flat$, and both the opening and closing movements of the duet for Riccardo and Giorgio in A $\flat$. The sense of a large-scale shift in tonal focus, or perhaps only in Elvira’s tonal orientation, is reinforced by the fact that once she appears in Act III, conceding to Arturo’s musical plea, the reconciliation duet that follows casts both of its lyric movements in C major. While such a level of tonal planning may seem unlikely in the supremely pragmatic world of early-nineteenth-century Italian opera, the conclusion seems less forced once we take into account the fact that the opera not only ends in the key in which it began (quite rare in this repertoire) but actually closes with a quotation of the same lively choral music we heard in the overture and the opening chorus.

22. Libretto by Adolphe Nourrit; music by Jean-Madeleine Schneitzhoffer.

23. Théophile Gautier, *Les Beautés de l’opéra* (Paris: Soulié, 1845).

24. See especially Wagner’s early review “Bellini: Ein Wort zu seiner Zeit,” originally published in the *Riga Zuschauer* in 1837, reprinted in Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, eds., *Vincenzo Bellini*, Musik-Konzepte no. 46 (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1985), 5–6.

CHAPTER 4. “EVERY WORD MADE FLESH”

1. “Der Name Véron wird ewig leben in den Annalen der Musik: er hat den Tempel der Göttin verschönert, aber sie selbst zur Tür hinausgeschmissen. Nichts übertrifft den Luxus, der in der grossen Oper überhand genommen, und diese ist jetzt das Paradies der Harthörigen” (Heinrich Heine, “Über die französische Bühne,” *Vertraute Briefe an August Lewald* [1837], quoted in Jürgen Maehder, “Historienmalerei und Grand opéra: Zur Raumvorstellung in den Bildern Géricaults und Delacroix’ und auf der Bühne der Académie Royale de Musique,” in *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. Sieghart Döhring and Arnold Jacobshagen [Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1998], 258).

2. In fact, the libretto was a collaboration between Scribe and Emile Deschamps, the latter contributing mainly to revisions during autumn 1834 when Scribe was too busy to give them his full attention (Steven Huebner, “*Les Huguenots*,” *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie [London: Macmillan, 1992], 2:765).

3. *I puritani* was first performed on 24 January 1835; *Les Huguenots* received its premiere on 29 February 1836.

4. In his *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Gary Tomlinson argues that opera has always been a privileged site for the exploration of human relations with the divine and the supernatural. However, when Tomlinson's ambitious rewriting of operatic history arrives at the nineteenth century, he prefers to focus on manifestations of psychic disruption such as mad scenes and the sleepwalking scene in Verdi's *Macbeth*, passing over more literal representations of the supernatural with little comment, perhaps because depictions of *interior* flight into an alternate reality fit better with his account of shifts in philosophical understanding of the relationship between the human and the divine.

5. It is tempting to wonder whether this gradual shift from a dramaturgy based on vision to one based on information conveyed by voices has anything to do with the fact that the opera's last two acts were universally received as masterworks by contemporary critics, while the first three were criticized as too long and uneventful. For a brief overview of this critical bias, see Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 186.

6. The stage directions in the vocal score specify that nothing is visible except the light of torches and the flash of arms: "On voit briller les torches et les fers des lances. Les meurtriers viennent de pénétrer dans l'église, dont ils ont achevé de briser les vitraux" (Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots* [Paris: Benoit aîné, n.d.], 432).

The *livret de mise en scène* directs that "the hymns of the Protestant virgins being massacred are heard in the distance, off-stage" (Luigi Plianti, "Quelques Indications / Sur/ La mise en scène / Les Huguenots / Grand Opéra en cinq actes / Paroles de Mr. Scribe / Musique de Mr. Meyerbeer," in *The Original Staging Manuals for Ten Parisian Operatic Premières, 1824–1843*, ed. H. Robert Cohen [Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1998], 167). The scenic setting given in the *livret* for the beginning of Act V calls for a layered set of flats to facilitate this offstage effect: "Sumptuous palace, divided into two levels and half-lit in the middleground. . . . When the *Seigneurs* rush in crying for vengeance, a backdrop is lowered between the first and second flats; it shows the interior of a Protestant church at night; this is for the scene of the grand trio" (165). The title page of this manuscript version of the *livret*, preserved in the collections of the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, announces that the manuscript

is a copy of the version of the *livret de mise en scène* that was published by the firm of Duverger in 1836.

However, Matthias Brzoska suggests that the massacre is not totally invisible but can be glimpsed at the back of the stage throughout the scene, with the effect that the audience feels the massacre advancing on them, culminating in the final scene of the act, where we, along with Valentine and Raoul, are under direct attack by the raging Catholics (the set design reproduced by Gerhard seems to support this). Following Brzoska, Gerhard also approaches this scene in primarily visual terms, pointing out its reliance on “dissolves” and “montage” and “dubbing” effects to illustrate the acceleration of operatic pace and increasing reliance on musical and scenic techniques that convey a sense of simultaneous action on several levels, a frenzied pace that Gerhard sees as reflecting the increased urgency of Parisian life in the mid nineteenth century (Matthias Brzoska, “Historisches Bewusstsein und musikalische Zeitgestaltung,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 45, no. 1 [1988]: 60–63; and Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 198–99).

7. “[S]’incarne toute pensée, et tout verbe se fait chair” (Camille Bellai-gue, *Portraits et silhouettes de musiciens* [Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1896], 317).

8. “[Q]uelque chose de concret et de solide, quelque chose qui nous rassure, nous raffermisse, et nous sauve d’abstraction menaçante, non par le réalisme, mais par la réalité” (ibid., 319).

9. Both Meyerbeer and Scribe were pragmatic and politically unengaged, holding few convictions of any kind—and none that could not be silenced in order to assure positive reception for their works among all sectors of the public. Scribe, particularly, was notoriously unpolitical, going to great lengths to ensure that his works remained comfortably in the domain of the “juste milieu.” Karin Pendle has described Scribe’s attitude to revolutions with the phrase a “plague on both your houses”: she suggests that his position was completely devoid of idealism; primarily he hated fanatics. Elsewhere, she writes that “[Scribe’s] social awareness is a product of deliberate calculation, and this attitude caused him to change with the time and the regime and in turn caused his enemies to accuse him of having no principles at all” (Pendle, *Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century* [Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979], 397 and 5). Gerhard supports this view by quoting an entry in the margins of Scribe’s personal ledgers for 1830, “There has been a great revolution. I neither deplore nor approve its causes. I have never concerned myself with pol-

itics but only with literature, and it is from that standpoint alone that I shall examine the consequences of a change which may do me more harm than good" (F-Pn, n.a.f. 22573, fol.53, quoted in Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 126).

10. Michael Walter elucidates the opera's topical resonances, which he suggests resided primarily in an association between the strongly pro-clerical policies instituted in the late 1820s by Charles X, resistance to which provoked the July Revolution, and the equally great power granted to clerics under Charles IX in the sixteenth century, leading up to the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre. By 1836, under the regime of Louis-Philippe, Walter argues, the Opéra would have felt safe and justified in criticizing fervent Catholicism, with the understanding that Catholicism would be read not simply as a religious confession, but as a cipher for the strong state power of the Jesuits and the collapse of state and religion into a single entity. Walter also notes that, beginning with Madame de Staël's *Considérations sur les principaux événements de la Révolution française* (1818), it became common to associate the Huguenots' battle for religious freedom in the sixteenth century (which was also a popular uprising, in a way) with the Revolution's struggle for political freedom (Walter, *Huguenotten-Studien* [Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1987], 47–60 and 25).

11. "Avez-vous rejeté toute chaîne mortelle, tout espoir d'ici-bas? Et la foi seulement dans vos coeurs survit-elle?" (Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, 429–32).

12. After reading Scribe's first prose draft for the work in 1832, Meyerbeer wrote to his librettist begging him "not to forget that this work is, after all, to be performed in a Catholic country" (F-Pn, n.a.f. 22502, fol.65v, quoted in Jean Mongrédien, "Aux sources du livret des *Huguenots*: la collaboration entre Scribe et Meyerbeer," in *Giacomo Meyerbeer—Musik als Welterfahrung: Heinz Becker zum 70.Geburtstag*, ed. Sieghart Döhring and Jürgen Schläder [Munich: Ricordi, 1995], 161). In fact, the opera was banned by the censors in Berlin on religious grounds, and in several other German cities its libretto had to be rewritten, appearing as *Anglikaner und Puritaner* in Munich and as *Die Ghibellinen vor Pisa* in Kassel (Huebner, "Les Huguenots," 2:765; and Heinz and Gudrun Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: A Life in Letters* [Portland, Or.: Amadeus Press, 1989], 12).

Meyerbeer himself was sensitive to another aspect of the opera's religious content. In 1837 he wrote to Gottfried Weber, the editor of the journal *Cäcilia*, defending himself against charges of blasphemy for using a Lutheran chorale in a stage work. He asserted, "the chorale is always treated in a severe and ecclesiastical style, as a contrast to the secular music; it is always heard as an emanation from a better world, as a symbol of faith and hope, and always as a ral-

lying call at times of danger or in moments of the highest exaltation. . . . When a hymn is treated like that, it is my belief that it deserves to be called a consecration rather than desecration” (letter of 20 October 1837; *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, ed. Heinz and Gudrun Becker [Berlin: De Gruyter, 1960–85], 3:72, quoted in Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 209).

13. In *Opera and Drama* Wagner maligns Meyerbeer for demanding from Scribe librettos that are “a monstrous piebald, historico-romantic, diabolico-religious, fanatico-libidinous, sacro-frivolous, mysterio-criminal, autolyco-sentimental dramatic hotch-potch, therein to find material for a curious chimeric music” (*Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995], 94).

14. Becker calls the role “a burning example of a politically engaged music” (“. . . der Marcel von Meyerbeer’: Anmerkungen zur Entstehungsgeschichte der *Huguenotten*,” in *Jahrbuch des Staatlichen Instituts für Musikforschung Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, 1979–80 [Berlin: Merseburger, 1981], 100). One dissenting opinion comes from Gerhard (*Urbanization of Opera*, 173), who argues that Marcel exists only in relation to Raoul, as a mouthpiece for Raoul’s Protestant upbringing.

15. A copy of the plan with detailed marginal comments from Meyerbeer is preserved in the Scribe papers at the Bibliothèque nationale; Mongrédien transcribes Meyerbeer’s comments in full in “Aux sources du livret.” In the course of the 1834 revisions Meyerbeer added a monologue for Marcel in Act III that had to be cut just before the first performance because of the excessive length of the act. The discarded monologue is discussed in Sieghart Döhring, “Der andere Choral: Zur Dramaturgie von Marcells Monolog aus *Les Huguenots*,” in *Giacomo Meyerbeer—Musik als Welterfahrung*, 39–61.

16. Meyerbeer wrote to his wife a few months before the opera’s premiere that “Marcel’s role is worth more than all the other music I have written in my life, including Robert [le diable]. Whether he will be understood, I am not sure. I fear that at first probably not” (letter of 15 September 1835; *Briefwechsel*, 2:480, quoted in Becker, “Marcel von Meyerbeer,” 80). Much of Meyerbeer’s dissatisfaction with Scribe’s first version of the libretto focused on the depiction of Marcel. As Becker has shown, Meyerbeer took the libretto with him to Italy, where he enlisted his former collaborator Gaetano Rossi to help with revisions, while apparently trying to keep Rossi’s intervention a secret from Scribe. During this period he wrote to Scribe complaining that the conception of Marcel did not correspond to the idea of the character as he had imagined it, and warning Scribe that he had rewritten the part substantially according to his musical

needs (letter of 2 July 1834; *Briefwechsel*, 2: 376–77, quoted in Becker, “Marcel von Meyerbeer,” 82 and 84).

17. The chorale is often lauded both for the continuity it provides between widely separated musical numbers and for its invocation of a “characteristic” style that resonates with Victor Hugo’s contemporary appeals for the introduction of *couleur locale* into drama. For a sustained discussion of the opera’s characteristic elements in light of Victor Hugo’s Romantic aesthetics, see Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 162–70.

18. Meyerbeer was sympathetic to the melodramatic aesthetic at least in principle—he counted the playwright René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt among his friends and attended the theater regularly in Paris, often writing approvingly of the melodramas he saw in letters and in his diary. In 1827 Meyerbeer was active in advocating Pixérécourt as director of the Théâtre Feydeau and around 1834 corresponded with him about the possibility of setting his play *La Fille de l’exilé* to music (it was later set by Donizetti) (letter from Pixérécourt of 6 August 1834, *Briefwechsel*, 2: 382–83). In a diary entry for 5 February 1831 (*ibid.*, 2: 130), Meyerbeer describes at length the successful effect of the liberation of an imprisoned character in the vaudeville *Madame Lavalette* by Barthélémy, Chéric, and Brunswick. This account is especially interesting because the relevant scene revolves around the performance of a familiar song on a barrel organ as a sign of the husband’s freedom and concludes with a scene of delirium—both standard melodramatic effects and not ones that it is easy to imagine Meyerbeer himself setting to music.

19. The Act IV *romance* was probably cut at a very late stage but appears as an appendix piece in some vocal scores.

20. Mongrédien, “Aux sources du livret,” 159.

21. Becker, “Marcel von Meyerbeer,” 88 and 90.

22. Steven Huebner, “Italianate Duets in Meyerbeer’s Grand Operas,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 8 (1989): 229–34.

23. Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 177. Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). Gerhard sees Raoul as similarly passive, grouping him among the irresolute and indecisive tenor heroes new to grand opéra from Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* on. While there may some truth in this, Raoul does sing two full-scale arias compared to (usually) none for Valentine.

24. It is interesting in this context that the opera’s second act alone, with its ornate aria for Marguerite, was allowed to remain in a conventional mold. One effect of this decision is to present Marguerite’s pleasure-loving court at Che-

nonceaux as a foil for the “real” world of Paris, the setting for the last three acts, where honorable duels could turn into ambushes and bloody massacres could be plotted with the participation of the clergy (as in the “Bénédiction des poignards” in Act IV).

25. According to the *livret de mise en scène*, Valentine is also clearly visible (but veiled) for an extended period in the previous scene (scene iii) (Paliani, “Quelques Indications,” 137).

26. Margaret Olin, “Gaze,” in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 212.

27. Moving beyond *Les Huguenots* itself, the opening scene of Verdi’s *La traviata* suggests another way that Meyerbeer could have given the scene a double focus, split between the energy of the party scene and a more intimate glimpse of Valentine, parallel to the brief duet for Violetta and Alfredo that Verdi inserts into his party scene.

28. This situation is common enough in French opera that James Hepokoski has given this type of aria the label of the “first glimpse” *romance*. Later examples occur in Donizetti’s *La Favorite* (“Un ange, une femme inconnue”), Verdi’s *Don Carlos* (“Je l’ai vue, et dans son sourire”) and *Luisa Miller* (“Lo vidi, e’l primo palpito”), and Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* (“Donna non vidi mai”) (Hepokoski, “*Ottocento Opera as Cultural Drama*,” in *Verdi’s Middle Period, 1849–1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 180–81).

29. The *livret* for *Les Huguenots*, like most of the *livrets de mise en scène* published in Paris in the 1830s and 1840s, appears under the name of Luigi Paliani. However, as H. Robert Cohen has shown, Paliani should probably be thought of more as a collaborator on a staging prepared by a whole team at the Opéra than as sole author. As Cohen puts it, “it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to identify the ‘author’ of a given *mise en scène*, for this responsibility appears to have varied from theatre to theatre. In one opera house, the theatre director may have been responsible, in another, a *régisseur*, and in yet another, an actor” (Cohen, ed., *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières* [Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1991], xix).

30. Paliani, “Quelques Indications,” 137. Parenthetical page citations are to this staging manual.

31. The difference may result simply from the fact that many scenes in the last two acts are simpler and more intimate, and so require less in the way of traffic direction.

32. I am grateful to John Roberts for this information about the scenario.

33. Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 184–93.

34. Roger Parker has suggested something similar about disagreements between Verdi and the authors of the staging manuals for his middle-period operas. The author of the *livret* for *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, for example, often appears to be more conservative than Verdi, struggling to carve out static set pieces in the midst of numbers that deliberately resist patterned, predictable alternations of “static” and “kinetic” (Parker, “Reading the *livrets*, or the Chimera of ‘Authentic’ Staging,” in *Leonora’s Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997], 134–35).

CHAPTER 5. UNEASY BODIES

1. The opera was originally commissioned by the playwright often considered the inventor of the classic mélodrame, René-Guillbert de Pixérécourt, in his position as director of the Opéra-Comique. After various delays, the project was transferred to the Opéra and revised substantially (principally by the reduction of the comic role of Raimbaut and the addition of a ballet) before being premiered there in 1831.

2. Hepokoski points to connections with Anna’s “Al dolce guidami” from Donizetti’s *Anna Bolena* (actually completed before *Robert*, in 1830) and Marie’s “Il faut partir” from his *Fille du régiment* (1840) (Hepokoski, “Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: ‘Addio, del passato’ [*La traviata*, Act III],” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 3 [1989]: 260–61).

3. Verdians have perceived echoes of Isabelle’s refrain in almost every number from *La traviata*. Already in 1859, Abramo Basevi traced a line of influence between the fortissimo declamation of the third refrain in Isabelle’s *cavatine* and Violetta’s Act II outburst “Amami, Alfredo.” More recently, Julian Budden has adduced Isabelle’s *cavatine* as a model for the slow movement of Violetta’s Act I aria (“Ah! fors’è lui”), pointing especially to the way both arias sustain a pregnant E natural for a full measure before releasing into the F that begins the refrain (Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* [Florence: Tofani, 1859], 236, quoted in Hepokoski, “Genre and Content,” 260; and Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* [London: Cassel, 1978], 2:134).

4. Verdi probably knew *Robert le diable* well already by 1834, when he was involved with a performance at Milan’s Teatro dei Filodrammatici. Although he later complained about Meyerbeer’s habit of bribing the Parisian press to write favorably about his works and to criticize those of his rivals, Verdi also

expressed admiration for Meyerbeer's theatrical gifts, especially for his ability to capture dramatic "truth." In an 1852 letter to Scribe, Verdi specifically praised the coronation scene from *Le Prophète* (27 July 1852, quoted in Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 2: 172); the remarks about theatrical "truth" are from Italo Pizzi's *Ricordi verdiani inediti* (Turin: Roux e Viarengo, 1901), excerpted in Marcello Conati, ed., *Encounters with Verdi*, trans. Richard Stokes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 344.

5. Several of Enrico delle Sedie's plates are reproduced in James Hepokoski, "La disposizione scenica per l'*Otello* di Verdi: studio critico," in *Otello di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. James Hepokoski and Mercedes Viale Ferrero, Collana di disposizioni sceniche ridotta da Francesco Degrada e Mercedes Viale Ferrero (Milan: Ricordi, 1990), 85–87.

6. Among other techniques Verdi may have learned from the boulevard theater, Emilio Sala has listed the use of a split stage (in *Rigoletto*, Act III and the final scene of *Aida*), the effect of reading a letter aloud in speech (rather than song) over orchestral accompaniment, and the rousing rhythms of revolutionary songs (in the chorus "Viva Italia! Sacro un patto" from *La battaglia di Legnano*) (Sala, "Verdi and the Parisian Boulevard Theatre, 1847–49," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7, no. 3 [1995]: 185–205). On the role played by French theatrical styles in the shift in Verdi's style around 1850, see also Marcello Conati, "E quasi si direbbe prosa strumentale': L'aria 'a due' nello *Stiffelio*," in *Tornando a Stiffelio: popolarità, rifacimento, messinscena, effettismo e altre 'cure' nella drammaturgia del Verdi romantico*, ed. Giovanni Morelli (Florence: Olschki, 1987), 253.

7. On the collaboration with Somma, see Alessandro Pascolato, '*Re Lear*' e '*Ballo in maschera*': lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1913); Peter Ross, "Amelia's Auftrittsarie im *Maskenball*," *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 40 (1983): 126–46; and Harold S. Powers, "'La dama velata': Act II of *Un ballo in maschera*," in *Verdi's Middle Period, 1849–1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 273–336.

8. I borrow the term "quasi-refrain" from Powers, "La dama velata," 294.

9. Neither the libretto nor the *livret de mise en scène* gives any indication of Isabelle's position during her *cavatine*, but several early scores include directions for her to kneel during the second strophe (at the lines "Je suis à tes genoux") or (in the first printed orchestral score) simply to rise at the end of the aria. The *livret* is published in H. Robert Cohen, ed., *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières* (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1991), 183–210.

10. The *disposizione scenica* for *Ballo* was compiled by Giuseppe Cencetti and published by Ricordi in 1859; see David Rosen and Marinella Pigozzi, eds., *Giuseppe Verdi: Un ballo in maschera*, Collana di disposizioni sceniche ridotta da Francesco Degrada e Mercedes Viale Ferrer (Milan: Ricordi, 2002).

11. “Al lontano suono della campana, che batte mezzanotte, riprende animo per eseguire ciò che si è proposta, quando una orribile visione le toglie la forza di proseguire il cammino, e cade sulle ginocchia nel mezzo della scena” (Cencetti, *Disposizione scenica*, 18). As Powers (“La dama velata,” 292) points out, Verdi’s autograph score had already included the instruction “cadendo sulle ginocchie [*sic*].”

12. The material in the next five paragraphs, as well as parts of section 3 of this chapter, appear in a slightly different form in my article “Cadere in ginocchio: Melodrama and Transcendence in Middle-Period Verdi,” in *Verdi 2001: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin, and Marco Marica (Florence: Olschki, 2003).

13. The phrase “solita forma” is Basevi’s, from his *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (see note 3).

14. “Production Book by Giulio Ricordi,” translated in *Verdi’s ‘Aida’: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans Busch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 565. The unconventionality of this stage direction is underlined by the fact that none of the productions I have seen execute it—probably because sopranos simply do not want to be invisible when they end their arias. I discuss this unusual conjunction of music and staging further in “Ulterior Motives: Verdi’s Use of Recurring Themes,” in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 135–59.

15. Markus Engelhardt sees this expansion into the offstage space as one of the *disposizione*’s many anticipations of filmic technique; see his “Verdi regista di *Aida*,” in *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano*, ed. Pierluigi Petrobelli and Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1996), 58–71.

16. Powers (“La dama velata,” 286–93) shows that the repetition of the phrase “povero cor” to end each strophe was a feature of Somma’s earliest drafts for the aria, retained through several phases of revision.

17. “Riccardo, che tenevasi celato dietro le colonne n.7, si avanza rapidamente per soccorrere Amelia; ma questa, sorpresa, per subitaneo impulso di pudore si slontana da lui, avanzandosi a destra, finchè giunge nel mezzo del

proscenio [Riccardo—Amelia] Presso la fine del duetto, la luna, ch'erasi di nuovo celata nelle nubi, torna a mostrarsi" (Cencetti, *Disposizione scenica*, 19).

18. It is worth quoting Rosen's good sense at length: "The silence of the *disposizione* about the duet is perhaps disappointing, but it is not especially puzzling: despite the exceptionally detailed discussion of Amelia's scena ed aria, in general the *disposizione* gives little instruction for static set pieces. . . . It may be tempting to suggest that the power of Verdi's music, especially at the moment of Amelia's (momentary) surrender has rendered unnecessary—because 'redundant,' 'overdetermined'—a corresponding simultaneous visual narrative. However, I think that that temptation should be resisted. Although the possibility that the various systems constituting opera may be in tension rather than march in lockstep has been widely accepted in the past decade, choosing a bland, asexual staging of this scene precisely on the grounds that the libretto and score have already conveyed the sexual tension would be ridiculous" (Rosen, introduction to *Un ballo*, 76).

19. Gilles de Van has aptly characterized Riccardo's statement as "totally lacking in that willful tension native to the Verdian tenor . . . in fact more murmur than song, a confession of desperation rather than a declaration of love" (de Van, *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama Through Music*, trans. Gilda Roberts [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 230).

20. Roger Parker and Matthew Brown have identified the use of dominant harmony over tonic pedals as an important characteristic of the opera's opening scene, one they propose might be a "Gallic" element, since Auber's *Gustave III* also makes extensive use of the device (Parker and Brown, "Motivic and Tonal Interaction in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36 [1983]: 253).

21. This refers to a four-strain structure ($a + a' + b + a''$ or c) that distributes two quatrains of poetry across four (usually) four-bar phrases: the first two lines of text are set as a four-bar phrase, the next two as a modified repetition ($a a'$); the music for lines 5 and 6 introduces a contrasting motive and moves away from the tonic (b), and the last two lines return to the tonic, either with a version of the opening motive or a new theme (a'' or c).

22. The eavesdropping theory has been proposed by David Rosen in his introduction to the *disposizione scenica*, and by Heather Hadlock in a paper delivered at Cornell University in 1991 entitled "The Interrupting Tenor in Three Verdian Seduction Duets." Two staging manuals for productions of the opera at Paris's Théâtre Lyrique in 1860 and 1861 make the possibility of eaves-

dropping more explicit, specifying at the beginning of the act that “Richard is on stage behind the first pillar and entirely concealed by it” (F-Po B.398 [I] and F-Po C.4909 [II]). Thanks to David Rosen for making these documents available to me and for sharing his wise insights into these questions.

23. Powers (“La dama velata,” 316–18) notes this melodic resemblance, but his comments are restricted to observing how the thematic link contributes to what he sees as the coherence of Act II as a whole.

24. For an elaboration of the idea that Riccardo’s musical language is strategically modeled on Amelia’s, see Emanuele Senici, “‘Teco io sto’: Strategies of Seduction in *Un ballo in maschera*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, nos. 1–2 (2002): 79–92.

25. In the 1970s and 1980s, many words were devoted to large-scale tonal relationships and links between tonality and drama in *Un ballo in maschera*. The leading proponent of such interpretations, Siegmund Levarie, argued that the key of E major was associated with Amelia, and that the whole opera could be heard as “in” the key of B $\flat$ major/minor. But, with the exception of Parker and Brown, surprisingly little attention has been devoted by either Levarie or his critics to smaller-scale relationships between motives, keys, and dramatic ideas. See Siegmund Levarie, “Key Relations in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*,” *19th-Century Music* 2 (1978–79): 143–47; and the responses by Joseph Kerman, Guy A. Marco, and Levarie again, *19th-Century Music* 2 (1978–79): 186–91, and 3 (1979–80): 83–89; see also Levarie, “A Pitch Cell in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 3 (1981): 399–406.

26. On the interplay of comic and tragic in *Ballo*, see Parker and Brown, “Motivic and Tonal Interaction”; and Piero Weiss, “Verdi and the Fusion of Genres,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35 (1982): 138–56. As Elizabeth Hudson points out, the “light/shade” metaphor has enjoyed almost unchallenged primacy in interpretations of *Ballo* partly because it was lent legitimacy by a letter in which Verdi complained that proposed changes to the opera’s plot and setting would eliminate “the aura of gaiety that pervaded the whole action, and which made a fine contrast and was like a light in the darkness surrounding the tragic moments” (letter to Achille Torelli, 14 February 1858, quoted in Hudson, “Masking Music: Light and Shade in *Un ballo in maschera*,” in *Verdi’s Middle Period*, 258).

27. For a view of this question that gives more weight to plot, see Hudson, “Masking Music,” 268–69.

28. The uniqueness of *Ballo*’s focus on physical love has been noted by many critics, including Gabriele Baldini (*The Story of Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Fe-

dele d'Amico, trans. Roger Parker [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 251) and Parker and Brown ("Motivic and Tonal Interaction," 245).

29. The deathbed scenes I am thinking of are those for Abigaille in *Nabucco* (1842) and for the title character in *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845). Of course, it is a *sine qua non* of Romantic opera that the lovers die or at least be kept apart in the earthly world. The plot type is far from specific to Verdi; what *is* unusual is the denial of any other kind of more embodied music or interaction to the lovers before their immersion in death and transcendence.

30. The phrase originates with Louis Véron, director of the Paris Opéra from 1831 to 1835. In his memoirs, he calls for an operatic style in which "the dramatic action can be completely understood by the eyes alone, as can the action of a ballet" (Louis-Désiré Véron, *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris* [Paris: Gonnet, 1854], 3:252, quoted in Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 147).

31. A similar argument could be made about Verdi's frequent use during this period of melodic figures mimetic of tears. The connection between musical sobbing figures and bodily presence is perhaps most obvious in the *Rigoletto* quartet, in which melodic figures for Gilda's sobs take the place of the heroine's much more forthright references to the sensations of her own body in the source play, Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse*. Similarly, the prominent weeping figures in the final scene of *Luisa Miller* ("Piangi, piangi") constitute one of the only traces of Verdi's Luisa as embodied.

CHAPTER 6. MIMOMANIA

The chapter's epigraph is quoted in Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind, 1862–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), 1:164.

1. Wagner mentioned the "invisible theater" in a conversation with Cosima during the composition of *Parsifal*. As Cosima reports it in her diaries, Richard's tone was somewhat flippant: "'Oh, I hate the thought of all those costumes and grease paint! When I think that characters like Kundry will now have to be dressed up, those dreadful artists' balls immediately spring to my mind. Having created the invisible orchestra, I now feel like inventing the invisible theater! And the inaudible orchestra,' he adds, concluding his dismal reflections in a humorous vein" (*Cosima Wagner's Diaries, 1878–1883*, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980], 23 September 1878; 2:154). Several other comments recorded by Cosima suggest that Wagner's apprehension about the

staging of *Parsifal* should be taken seriously (see, for example, entries for 8 August and 16 September 1878). But these concerns were specific to the demands of *Parsifal* and to this disaffected time in Wagner's life and should not be seen as representative of a broader distrust of all staging.

2. Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Bedeutung des Gestischen in Wagners Musikdramen* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1970).

3. Carolyn Abbate, "Immortal Voices, Mortal Forms," in *Analytical Strategies and Musical Interpretation: Essays on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Music*, ed. Craig Ayrey and Mark Everist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 293.

4. Abbate sketches this idea most fully in the last chapter of *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 214, where she perceives Brünnhilde as a "sibyl" whose speech is "sounding board for speech that originates elsewhere . . . the sound of an aeolian harp played by an unseen presence, or even the speech of a ventriloquist's doll." As Abbate puts it, such discourse "seems to have complete authority since we sense an ultimate speaker (the speaker whom we assume to speak through the sibyl) who is mysterious and omniscient."

In "Immortal Voices" (289), Abbate carries this much further, characterizing the entire orchestra as heard in the Bayreuth Festspielhaus as an anticipation of the phonograph, hidden from view and seeming to emanate from behind the wooden cabinet of the proscenium, endowed with the same uncanny power as were early mechanical reproductions of sound. More specifically, she explores orchestral "mirror effects," in which the orchestra "sings" back a melody that has been heard in vocal form, almost convincing us (again to uncanny effect) that the inanimate, nondramatized body of the orchestra has somehow acquired an independent subjectivity (293–94). Recently Abbate has carried her fascination with voices emanating from unseen sources into music of the turn of the century; see her "Debussy's Phantom Sounds," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 10, no. 1 (1998): 67–96; and "Outside Ravel's Tomb," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52, no. 3 (1999): 465–530; both subsequently collected in *In Search of Opera*, 145–246.

5. The idea of the female body as possessing secrets and opening the way to knowledge is indebted to Peter Brooks; see his *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

6. Such an argument is obviously reliant on a much larger sociological and historical understanding of the decline of outward appearance as a transparent sign of character. Richard Sennett has tracked the growing insecurity of the

bourgeois subject as appearance could no longer be relied upon to correspond to some fundamental social truth, and Alain Corbin has documented one small symptom of this change, the social anxieties that emerged when French prostitutes could no longer be reliably identified by their clothing (Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* [1974; New York: Norton, 1992]; and Corbin, *Women for Hire*, trans. Alan Sheridan [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990]).

7. Quoted in Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 164.

8. *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans and ed. Walter Kaufmann (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 665.

9. Ibid., 665. The entire passage reads: “Aber Wagner war umgekehrt, neben dem Wagner, der die einsamste Musik gemacht hat, die es gibt, wesentlich noch Theatermensch und Schauspieler, der begeisterte Mimomane, den es vielleicht gegeben hat, auch noch als Musiker. . . . Und, beiläufig gesagt, wenn es Wagners Theorie gewesen ist ‘das Drama ist der Zweck, die Musik ist immer nur das Mittel’—, seine Praxis dagegen war, von Anfang bis zu Ende, ‘die Attitude ist der Zweck, das Drama, auch die Musik, ist immer nur ihr Mittel.’ Die Musik als Mittel zur Verdeutlichung, Verstärkung, Verinnerlichung der dramatischen Gebärde und Schauspieler-Sinnenfälligkeit; und das Wagnerische Drama nur eine Gelegenheit zu vielen interessanten Attituden!” (*Der Fall Wagner; Nietzsche Contra Wagner* [1888; Leipzig: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1908], 66).

Nietzsche expressed similar sentiments in the more coherent attack of *Der Fall Wagner*, completed just before his total nervous collapse in 1888. There he derides Wagner in very similar terms as “an incomparable *histrion*, the greatest mime, the most amazing genius of the theater ever among Germans, our *scenic artist par excellence*. . . . Wagner was *not* a musician by instinct. He showed this by abandoning all lawfulness and, more precisely, all style in music in order to turn it into what he required, theatrical rhetoric, a means of expression, of underscoring gestures, of suggestion, of the psychologically picturesque” (Nietzsche, *The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, in *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner* [New York: Random House, 1967], 172–73).

10. Gary Tomlinson has advanced the argument that Nietzsche’s disenchantment with Wagner developed as part of a larger shift in his late writings, towards integrating soul and body, and towards experiencing art and achieving intersubjectivity through movement and bodily sensation, a position Tomlinson glosses as “aesthesis in the guise of kinesis” (*Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999], 117).

11. See *Nietzsche Contra Wagner*, 666.

12. The full list reads, “The Venusberg Music (even before the ballet of 1861), the arrival of Lohengrin, the Rhine-Maidens’ Scene, the flight of Sieglinde and Siegmund, the Ride of the Valkyries and the arrival of Wotan—these are things which had never before been conceived, written, painted, nor played. And when we come to the great episodes: the departure of Siegfried after Scene i of *Siegfried*; the scene of the Anvil and the Fire Music; the delirium of Tristan; the arrival of Isolde and the death of Tristan; the third act of *Götterdämmerung*, from the shattering of the spear; Act II, Scene i and Act III, Scene i of *Parsifal*, including the Prelude and the second transformation scene—here I believe that no one will ever compare with Wagner” (quoted and translated in Lockspeiser, *Debussy*, 164).

13. Heinz Becker specifically contrasts the musical weight assigned to glances in Wagner with the lack of musical emphasis given to the voyeuristic scene of Valentine’s entrance in the first act of *Les Huguenots* (“‘. . . wonnig weidet mein Blick’: Blick und Augensprache bei Richard Wagner,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 150, no. 10 [1989]: 4). As Jacob Hosler has reminded me, the characters in this scene are usually far from immobile in modern productions: typically, Walther paces the stage nervously while Eva cranes her neck from a pew.

14. As Abbate has pointed out, the scene is characteristic of Wagner’s tendency to “use orchestral-vocal effects to replace characters’ voices that have been temporarily silenced by an emotional overload” (“Immortal Voices,” 294).

15. The eye/ear opposition is again pressed into service to tell this story. Wagner characterizes the “Folk-stage” of the drama that preceded Shakespeare as peopled by “mummers” who “addressed themselves *to the eye*, and intentionally, almost solely to the eye. . . . Their performances, being given in open places before a wide-stretched throng, could produce effect by almost nothing but gesture; and by gesture only actions can be rendered *plainly*, but not—if speech is lacking—the inner motives of such actions.” Later he complains that by the nineteenth century “the Musical drama became in truth a *peep-show* (*Schauspiel*), whereas the *Play* (*Schauspiel*) remained a *hear-play* (*Hörspiel*)” (*Opera and Drama*, trans. William Ashton Ellis [1893; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995], 127 and 135).

16. *Opera and Drama*, 225.

17. The mixed signals proliferate when, almost in the same breath as he celebrates this idea of gestural melody, a bizarre footnote informs us that the woodbird—soon to become the voice of Nature in *Siegfried*—“expresses its emotion most melodiously, [yet] lacks all power of accompanying its song by

gestures.” In *Siegfried* the woodbird is wordless and clairvoyant, the epitome of pure voice divorced from either word or gesture, but in the context of *Opera and Drama* she seems to stand for the expressive limits of instrumental music. The woodbird may sing beautifully, but, deprived of the ability to accompany her song with gestures, she will never approach the integrated, profound expression of the “purely human” realm that Wagner lauds (*Opera and Drama*, 225).

18. As Dahlhaus has pointed out, however, in practice the gestural origin of leitmotives is often debatable. Probably the clearest example is the Sword motive in the *Ring*. The purposeful trumpet arpeggio can be heard as descriptive of Siegmund’s gesture of grasping the sword and releasing it from the ash tree at the end of the first act of *Die Walküre*, but the motive is heard twice before this, both times severed from any physical basis: once as an idea in Wotan’s mind near the end of *Das Rheingold*, and again in *Die Walküre* Act I scene ii when Siegmund first catches sight of the sword (Dahlhaus, *Die Bedeutung des Gestischen*, 23).

19. This contradiction in Wagner’s theory is a major focus of Dahlhaus’s article. He astutely points out that the sublimation of gesture into the symphonic web both shifts the burden of expression from visible movement to the symbolic meanings evoked by leitmotives and eclipses the immediate present moment of gesture in an illusory timelessness of a musical discourse that stretches across the entire opera to link moments from widely separated time frames. Dahlhaus takes this analysis as a starting point for his own defense of the later music dramas as transcending the gestural basis of the earlier operas, instead discovering both their ideas and their musical style in more metaphysical sources. His discussion of the “art of transition” in *Tristan*, for example, focuses on a motive in Act I scene v that imitates Isolde’s determined step (the *Schreiten* motive) but quickly argues that the gestural basis of the motive evaporates after the first few measures. While this interpretation is convincing, one wonders why he elevates it over numerous more physically grounded examples he might have discussed in this context. See Dahlhaus, *Die Bedeutung des Gestischen*, esp. 9–25; the analysis of *Tristan* Act I scene v is reworked and expanded in *Richard Wagner’s Music Dramas*, trans. Mary Whittall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 57–61.

20. *Opera and Drama*, 367–68. Wagner said something very similar in 1879, when he wrote that the “remote harmonic progressions” of the opening scene of *Lohengrin* were made intelligible by the scenic action of Elsa’s pantomime (“Über die Anwendung der Musik auf das Drama,” *Bayreuther Blätter* 2 (1879), 313–25, reprinted as “On the Application of Music to the Drama,” in *Richard*

Wagner's Prose Works, trans. William Ashton Ellis [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995], 6:173–92). Berthold Hoeckner has examined this statement and the music in question in his “Elsa Screams, or The Birth of Music Drama,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9, no. 2 (1997): 97–132.

21. There is evidence that the Bayreuth style called for such effects frequently. The conductor Felix Mottl's annotations to the score of *Tristan* supply many additional directions for synchronization of music and movement, based on his experience conducting the opera's Bayreuth premiere in 1886. Mottl's directions are reproduced in the current Dover full score of the opera (New York: Dover, 1973).

22. Richard Wagner, “Remarks on Performing the Opera ‘The Flying Dutchman,’” in *Der fliegende Holländer*, trans. Melanie Karpinski (English National Opera Guide) (London: John Calder and Riverrun Press, 1982), 37–42.

23. *Ibid.*, 37.

24. Dahlhaus, *Die Bedeutung des Gestischen*, 9–16; see also Alfred Heuss, “Zum Thema: Musik und Szene bei Wagner. Im Anschluss an Wagners Aufsatz: Bemerkungen zur Aufführung der Oper ‘Der fliegende Holländer,’” *Die Musik* 10, no. 1 (1911): 3–14 and 10, no. 2 (1911): 81–95.

25. Wagner, “Remarks,” 38.

26. *Ibid.*, 39.

27. Heinrich Porges, *Wagner Rehearsing the ‘Ring’: An Eyewitness Account of the Stage Rehearsals of the First Bayreuth Festival*, trans. Robert L. Jacobs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 43.

28. Hans von Wolzogen, *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik von R. Wagners Festspiel ‘Der Ring des Nibelungen’* (Leipzig: E. Schloemp, 1876), 45–46; Robert Donington, *Wagner's ‘Ring’ and Its Symbols* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 291.

29. While the Love motive is heard for the first time in this scene, some critics hear it as a drastically slowed-down version of the motive for Freia's flight from the giants in *Das Rheingold* (Donington, *Wagner's ‘Ring,’* 88; and Deryck Cooke, *I Saw the World End* [London: Oxford University Press, 1979], 48–56).

30. For a far-reaching attempt to reconcile Wagner's theory with his practice in terms similar to these, see Thomas S. Grey, *Wagner's Musical Prose: Texts and Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. chap. 3.

31. One might hear the orchestra in Wagner's pantomime scenes not only as cueing a dreamlike style of movement for the characters, but also as controlling the gestures of the performers. In his diary of the rehearsals for the first performance of the *Ring*, the ballet master and movement coach Richard

Fricke repeatedly mentions correcting the unnatural, unnecessary, and meaningless gestures that the singers habitually introduce into their performances. At one point he writes of “the conventional gestures that pass from one generation to the next like a hereditary disease,” and much of his work at Bayreuth seems to have consisted of training the singers in his rigid system of movement, derived from gymnastics, a system he regrettably never describes (Fricke, *Wagner in Rehearsal, 1875–1876: The Diaries of Richard Fricke*, ed. James Deaville with Evan Baker [Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1998], esp. 107, 46, 70–71).

32. Nietzsche, *Case of Wagner*, section 7, 170; my emphasis.

33. Indeed, just as Adorno borrows from Nietzsche and translates his critique into more technical terms, it could be argued that Dahlhaus in turn borrows the terms of his approach to gesture from Adorno, rendering the language yet more technical and domesticating some of Adorno’s criticisms into more positive judgments.

34. Theodor Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingston (London: Verso, 1985), 34–37.

35. The suspicion of opera’s visual (indeed, many of its most pleasurable) aspects comes through most clearly in Adorno’s essay “Bourgeois Opera,” in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. and trans. David J. Levin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 25–43.

36. The first formulation comes from Claude Lévi-Strauss, the second from Michael Steinberg (Lévi-Strauss, “From Chrétien de Troyes to Richard Wagner,” in *The View from Afar* [New York: Basic, 1985], 219, quoted in Steinberg, “Music Drama and the End of History,” *New German Critique* 69 [1996], 163–80).

37. “Allmählich, während Gurnemann und Parsifal zu schreiten scheinen, hat sich die Szene bereits immer merklicher verwandelt; es verschwindet so der Wald, und in Felsedänden öffnet sich ein Torweg, welcher die Beiden jetzt einschliesst” (Gradually, while Gurnemann and Parsifal appear to walk, the set has already become more and more noticeably transformed; thus the forest disappears, and a doorway opens in the cliff walls, which now surround the two) (Richard Wagner, *Parsifal: Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel in drei Aufzügen* [Stuttgart: Reclam, 1983], 24).

38. Despite the apprehensive remark cited at the beginning of this chapter about the invention of an “invisible theater” perhaps being the only solution to the problems of staging *Parsifal*, in other contexts Wagner appeared to embrace the visible aspects of his last opera. He sent Richard Fricke, the ballet master who had helped with the choreography of the *Ring*, a copy of the *Parsifal* li-

bretto inscribed “Ganz besonders gedichtet, componirt und mit scheinbarem Ballet versehen” (Especially composed, set to music, and with “visible ballet” plotted out) (Fricke, *Wagner in Rehearsal*, 105).

39. “Kundry stürzt hastig, fast taumelnd herein. . . . Sie eilt auf Gurnemanz zu und dringt ihm ein kleines Krystallgefäß auf. . . . Sie wirft sich auf den Boden” (Wagner, *Parsifal*, 9).

40. Of the two widely available videos of *Parsifal*, neither listens to the clues I hear encoded in Kundry’s leitmotiv. The 1991 Bayreuth production, directed by Wolfgang Wagner and conducted by Horst Stein, is extremely faithful to the stage directions printed in the orchestral score, but in this case, where the score gives only a *musical* clue to staging (that Kundry should become visible when her motive is played), the video misses its cue and focuses on Gurnemanz rather than Kundry as her motive begins. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s notorious film of the opera does a bit better: in Syberberg’s fanciful staging, the explosive first note of the leitmotiv is coordinated with a cut from a shot showing a puppet version of Kundry flying through the air like a witch to a view of the real woman, immersed in the spring. The only staging I have seen that captures the connection between motive and physical action is Nikolaus Lehnhoff’s production at the San Francisco Opera (2000; English National Opera, 1999), a staging that was remarkably sensitive to potential links between music and movement. In Lehnhoff’s production, the entire decrepit forest of Monsalvat began to tremble and disintegrate as the orchestral intensity built before Kundry’s entrance; at the first note of her leitmotiv, she hurtled in from stage left, prostrating herself immediately before Gurnemanz.

41. Elisabeth Bronfen connects Kundry’s hysterical symptoms with Nietzsche’s attacks on Wagner as decadent and as a neurotic (“Kundry’s Laughter,” *New German Critique* 69 [1996]: 147–61).

42. Wagner, *Parsifal*, 21.

43. *Ibid.*, 23.

44. It may seem perverse to skip over Act II entirely, since this is the act in which Kundry sings the most and exerts the greatest effect on the plot. But in terms of gesture and bodily representation, Act II mostly duplicates what we have seen in Act I. In its first half, as Kundry is ordered around by Klingsor, we see more of the same hysterical movements and agitated iterations of her leitmotiv; in the scene with Parsifal, she becomes almost a different character, masquerading as both femme fatale and mother figure, regressing to fuse with her previous incarnations as Eve and Herodias.

45. *Opera and Drama*, 320.

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